Édouard Manet (1832–83) gazes calmly at the spectator in Henri Fantin-Latour’s 1867 portrait of him (see Fig. I.1). Self-possessed, immaculately groomed, looking ever so much like the comfortable bourgeois out for a leisurely stroll, the serene Manet shows no hint of the turbulence caused by the images he exhibited at the Salons in the 1860s and at his private exhibition at the Pont de l’Alma the year Fantin exhibited his canvas at the annual Salon. The works of this taciturn painter, who left only a few letters as a written record, have generated a body of criticism whose interpretation remains as contentious and lively today as it was partisan and controversial in his own time. According to Auguste Renoir, Manet was as important to the Impressionists as Cimabue and Giotto had been to the Italian Renaissance. To another contemporary, Albert Wolff of the prominent newspaper *Le Figaro*, Manet’s transgressive works foretold the decline of civilization. These critical dichotomies mirror Manet’s own artistic temperament. From the time of his artistic training in the studio of Thomas Couture, Manet displayed a streak of artistic rebellion that characterized his work and reputation up to the present day. His friend Antonin Proust related that Manet copied the heads of fellow art students rather than the helmeted heads of models posed in an academic manner to reflect the ancients. Proust’s anecdote provides a telling glimpse of a young painter with a commitment to recording the content of modern life, and an artist undaunted by the authority of officialdom, an individual who from the beginning effectively combined rebellion and creativity. Manet’s subject matter embraced the full range of the academic hierarchy of subject matter from history and religious painting, to portraiture, cityscape, landscape, and still life. With each artistic genre he undertook he profoundly transformed its meaning and challenged its conventions so thoroughly that in 1867
he defensively proclaimed it was only the “sincerity” of his works which
gave them their “character of protest.” The artist, judged in his own day
to be headstrong and elusive, socially engaging, and artistically rebellious,
continues to evoke strong responses ranging from fierce admiration for his
boldness and originality, to entrenched hostility for what some see even
today as an inept artistic clumsiness and a seeking after official recognition.

Manet’s public exhibition career spanned the last 11 years of the Second
Empire, from his failed attempt to exhibit The Absinthe Drinker in 1859,
through the first 13 years of the Third Republic, until in his death in 1883.
During this period his art attracted the attention of many of the foremost
literary artists of the time: the Romantic poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire,
the Naturalist novelist Emile Zola, the Symbolist writer Stéphane Mallarmé,
to name a few. While we rely on the insights of these contemporaries, we
cannot totally trust their characterizations of his art to mirror what Manet
himself intended to say in his art or believe that his silence over their articles
indicated consent. Manet fits uneasily into the category of Realist painter,
the label that Gustave Courbet insisted was “thrust” upon him; Manet’s
work shares features of Naturalism but also on many occasions contradicts
the term; nor does he conform to the Impressionist aesthetic as defined and
practiced by Monet and Renoir. In 1874 Manet complained to Jacques de
Biez that few critics had a clear view of his underlying intentions. Less than
a year before his death this situation had not changed: the artist wrote to
Albert Wolff in May 1882 that he had not given up hope that the critic would
write the article he had so long hoped for, chiding him that he would prefer
it to appear in print while he was still alive to read it. Yet Manet did little
during his career to clarify his intentions or respond publicly to the critical
ferment his work engendered. This has allowed interpreters from his own
time to the present to submit his work to a variety of conflicting readings for
which there is no overriding consensus. It is a testimony to the authority of
Manet’s creative enterprise that his art continues to invite speculation and
investigation.

For some interpreters, Manet is the last of the Old Masters; for others, he
is the first modernist. His combination of disparate art historical references
and sources in his work, along with his deconstruction of the academic
tradition, has caused him to be called a forerunner of postmodernism, while
others trace the very origins of modernism to his summary brushwork,
flattened spaces, and anti-narrative figure groupings. He has been portrayed
alternately as a pure painter as well as a creator of allegories subtle and
complex enough to rival the Renaissance masters whose works often
provided visual models on which he based his own. Manet’s art argued for
creative freedom in an artistically atrophied age, one in which Baudelaire
felt the lack of any pictorial realization of the heroism of modern life. Manet
set aside the conventions and authority of the academic art of his times to
make way for a new kind of modern art that changed forever the course of painting. Manet embraced the challenge of creating contemporary subjects and inventing a new artistic language in which to express them. He disrupted the art world of his time, showing himself recalcitrant throughout his career to accepting the codified visual practices of his day from the time of his *Spanish Singer* (1860)—his first accepted work at the Salon of 1861, with its left-handed guitarist playing a guitar strung for the right hand—up to his last monumental work, the 1881–82 *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, with its mirror refusing to reflect correct perspectives. If notoriety came quickly to Manet in his career success did not, and even today there is far less consensus about the meaning of Manet’s works and his place within the Realist and Impressionist movements to which his name has been attached. The chapters in this volume do not set out to smooth over any of the ideological and aesthetic complexities that Manet’s art continues to provoke. They view a variety of aspects of his work and pose new questions as they take into account the aesthetic, literary, social, and political ambiance of the period in nineteenth-century French culture. The liveliness and variety of questions that circulate around the core of Manet’s art have continued to stimulate a diversity of approaches to the meaning of his artistic output.

In the first chapter in this volume, Nancy Locke addresses the notion of the ethics of Realism in Manet’s art, which she clearly distinguishes from any moralizing subject matter such as could be found in the many Salon paintings of Manet’s time. She adapts Michel Foucault’s distinction between a moral code imposed on someone and the *rapport à soi* that determines how an individual constitutes him- or herself as a moral subject of his or her own actions. The frequent indecipherability of the social status of Manet’s figures, so often central to conflicting interpretations of Manet’s paintings, prompts Locke to probe how ethics figures in Manet’s pluralistic universe and the manner in which Manet’s figures engage in social practice in relation to the imperatives of what Hippolyte Taine would call “race, milieu, and moment.” Locke’s chapter takes into account both early and late works by Manet, interrogating where different and opposed norms come into conflict in the artist’s work as it engages contemporary Parisian life.

Susan Sidlauskas closely studies Manet’s vibrantly colored but psychologically resistant portrait of Victorine Meurent painted in 1862. Instead of mining the past for precedents, however, she casts it against the contemporary photography of Thomas Ruff and Rineke Dijkstra, the watercolors of Till Freiwald, and the paintings of Marlene Dumas, gathering a constellation of theoretical frameworks and intriguing questions around issues of resemblance, resistance and recognition in theories of portraiture. Her study demonstrates how the artworks of the past continue to inflect the present while the present richly enhances our understanding of the past. In using Manet’s painting of Meurent as her focus for an intense formal
reading that shows it to be an historical marker of modernism, Sidlauskas ranges widely over Manet’s images of women while invoking contemporary examples that employ similar pictorial strategies that pitch “self” and “other” in an aesthetic tug-of-war over interpretive tactics of projection and introspection in the genre of portraiture. This chapter has its reader in the end ask, “What is truth?” about identity, depiction, and similitude when confronted with a face in a work of art. Through the lens of contemporary art we see Manet’s past more clearly.

Suzanne Singletary investigates the relationship between Manet’s art and that of the American expatriate James McNeill Whistler. Friends since 1861, both artists exhibited at the Salon des Refusés in 1863, drawing scorn for their bold stylistic departures from academic standards. Both were also profoundly influenced by the writings of the poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire. By linking together a group of paintings with similar themes executed by the two painters, Singletary reads them in correlation with Baudelaire’s poetry, demonstrating how Manet and Whistler found aesthetic strength and inspiration from the poet’s invitation to voyage through memory, metaphor, and synesthetic correspondances to the realm of imagination, the queen of faculties. Moving beyond Baudelaire’s well-known influence on the painters’ depiction of modern life subjects, Singletary delves into how Manet’s and Whistler’s artistic imaginations were prompted by their absorption of Baudelaire’s poetic and artistic principles.

Manet’s art has been subsumed under the labels of Realism and Impressionism. Jane Mayo Roos takes a closer look at the meaning of these labels, drawing from Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* and from Stéphane Mallarmé’s “The Impressionists and M. Manet.” Beginning with an analysis of *The Spanish Singer*, Roos demonstrates how Manet’s improvisational approach to composition resulted in paintings that elude the Realist designation. That his works look realistic tempts the viewer to interpret them as if they comprised a scene that actually passed across the artist’s retina via the kind of split-second effect seen in the paintings of the 1860s. Roos then moves on to consider the influence of Impressionism on Manet’s later canvases. *The Railway* of 1873 serves as an example of how Manet troped Impressionism (as he had earlier troped the old masters), and thus differentiated his works from those of the canonical Impressionists. Roos’s chapter offers insightful reflections on Manet’s originality and on the strategies that guided both his earlier and his later works.

Émile Zola’s relationship with Manet comes under renewed scrutiny in Robert Lethbridge’s chapter where Manet’s portrait of the novelist and art critic and its placement in Zola’s house are reconsidered. Zola photographed Manet’s portrait of himself in 1900 and Lethbridge reads this photograph through analogical and metaphorical substitutions, mirroring in his own study Zola’s rhetorical strategies of art criticism. This chapter counters
the claims made previously about Zola’s lack of appreciation for his 1868 portrait by considering how Zola placed the portrait and surrounded it with other images and objects. Lethbridge’s investigation of the Manet–Zola relationship with its strains of mutuality and competitiveness sheds new light on the often contradictory nature of Zola’s involvement with Manet and his work. By considering Zola’s transpositions of Manet’s paintings into novels such as Thérèse Raquin, Nana, and L’Œuvre, Lethbridge highlights the stylistic changes rather than the similarities to Manet’s work that are ultimately reflected in Zola’s privileging of his own name in the photograph of his portrait by Manet.

Manet’s art continues to challenge scholars and yield insights into the artistic motivations of his imagery. Several sources have been suggested for the recumbent central figure in Manet’s 1871 lithograph Civil War, most notably the works of Jean-Léon Gérôme and Honoré Daumier. James Rubin takes a fresh look at this print and considers the impact that Eugène Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People had on Daumier’s Rue Transnonain and consequently on Manet’s understanding of that relationship when creating his own image of civic unrest. Deftly linking Delacroix, Daumier, and Manet in a triadic political and artistic conversation, Rubin demonstrates the relevance in 1871 at the time of profound turmoil of images created in 1830 and 1834 in response to regimes that oppressed the lower classes. These juxtapositions resonate pictorially and politically to enrich our understanding of Manet’s print, his continued use of sources to deepen his art, and his empathetic reaction to the vexed conditions that ushered in the Third Republic.

Therese Dolan’s chapter considers a late pastel by Manet of the eccentric composer Ernest Cabaner, who promoted a theory of colored hearing at a time when the inter-sense phenomenon of synesthesia came under intensified scrutiny by Symbolist writers and critics. Those who claim to have colored hearing report experiencing a particular color when they hear a specific musical note or passage. These are called photisms, or colored patches, and synesthetes see them as floating in their field of vision. Dolan’s chapter connects elements in Manet’s pastel to musical notes and she reads the pastel in connection with ideas on the transitivity of music and the idea of improvisation and performativity in art. She allies Manet’s pastel to Baudelairean correspondance and the debates over the value of the composer Richard Wagner’s work which became a key issue for the Symbolist movement.

Manet’s 1882 painting A Bar at the Folies-Bergère has served as a lightning rod for a variety of methodological readings that have considerably deepened our knowledge of this fascinating work. Marilyn Brown’s chapter adds to this literature by reading the painting in relation to Edmond Duranty’s 1869 novella La Double Vie de Louis Seguin, where she uncovers intriguing social and psychological relationships between the two works.
whose central character is an attractive working girl at a counter. Brown’s chapter becomes almost mirror-like as her richly multiple references refract the literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic sources she marshals to support her reading of doubleness in the Durandy tale and Manet’s painting. Demonstrating how the *vue* and *vie* coincide in both the literary and artistic work, Brown supplies another source for what is acknowledged to be Manet’s final masterpiece. Her use of a Lacanian perspective complements the social analyses of the painting with its constructions of gender.

In the final chapter, Steven Levine examines two seminal works of contemporary Manet scholarship, T.J. Clark’s *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (1984) and Michael Fried’s *Manet’s Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (1996). His aim in the review of Clark’s strategy of formal analysis and ideological analogy and Fried’s phenomenological account of beholding is to uncover how each author construes artistic modernism and how their construction speaks to different modes of art-historical writing today. Levine’s subtle and close reading of the notion of edges in Clark’s work and his explication of Fried’s concept of “facingness” involves each author’s distinctive response to Clement Greenberg’s writings on Manet and modernism. Levine does not seek to reconcile the rival accounts of the meaning of Manet’s painting by Clark and Fried, but uses these writings as a demonstration of historical discourse as it has been shaped by two important thinkers on Manet, showing how their writings contributed to the formation of critical concepts of the meaning of Manet’s art.

The chapters in this volume demonstrate how Manet’s career evidenced growth and purpose, how he was a critical mind at work, not just a fleet pair of hands. The authors investigate how Manet’s art challenged the norms of art in his own day and show that what he created continues to provoke disparate reactions today. In his thoughts on Manet gathered together posthumously and published in 2009 under the title *Manet and the Object of Painting*, Michel Foucault characterizes the artist as a figure of rupture and articulates the difficulty of explicating the effects of his art solely in terms of the innovative brushwork of Impressionism. Pierre Bourdieu claims that Manet “wrecks the social foundation of the fixed and absolute point of view of artistic absolutism … he establishes the plurality of points of view, which is inscribed in the very existence of a field.” In this spirit, I have not tried to set out a representative sampling of the various methodologies in this volume, aiming instead to allow the authors to be critical in the sense that Baudelaire articulated in his Salon of 1846—that is, to be partial, passionate, and political, adopting an individual point of view that opens up the widest horizons. The diversity and scope of the approaches represented in this collection have been shaped by the responses of the authors to Manet’s art so that some chapters deal with a wide view of Manet’s artistic enterprise
while others focus on a single work as exemplary of the artist’s mind at work at a specific moment in his career. I thus take the notion of “perspective” in the title of this collection of studies to represent a range, a command, a panorama and a vantage point from which to consider the artistic activity of a painter who challenged his own age and continues to stimulate creative discourse in the present. Perspective also means a point of view and a way of looking at things from an individual stance. I have sought neither consensus about the meaning of Manet’s art nor have I sought to have him fit any theoretically totalizing viewpoint from any one perspective. Henri Matisse wrote that a “great painter is one who finds personal and lasting signs to express in a plastic way the objects of his visions. Manet found his own signs.” Each of the contributors to this volume has expressed a personal interpretation of Manet and his art in an effort to enlarge the vitality of the discourse that continues to center around one of the more fascinating and complex figures of nineteenth-century French painting.

I am grateful to the authors who have contributed their chapters to this volume. They have been a pleasure to work with at every stage. My graduate assistants Catherine Hahn and Whitney Kruckenberg have been vigilant in seeing this project to completion and have been invaluable assets. The staff at Ashgate Publishing, especially Meredith Norwich and Jacqui Cornish, deserve high praise for carefully navigating this book to its final publication. I also thank Temple University for the study leave that allowed me to make progress on this volume.

Notes

