Viewing · Positions

The Painting's Other Side in Art

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One of the extreme problems of paintings as objects is the other side—the back. It can't be solved; it's in the nature of the work.

Jasper Johns, cited in Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns* (1977), revised and expanded edition (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994), p. 34.

I destroy the fixed plane which has a reverse side, and I rebuild it loose in the space without a support or reverse side. With this game one shows the precariousness of the concept of the fixed plane and of the sculpture with a base (reverse side).

Lygia Clark, "On the Ritual" (1960), in *Lygia Clark*, exh. cat. Fundació Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997), pp. 122–23, esp. p. 123.

Every object is a victim of its own nature, even in a transparent painting the color hides the canvas, and the moulding, the frame.

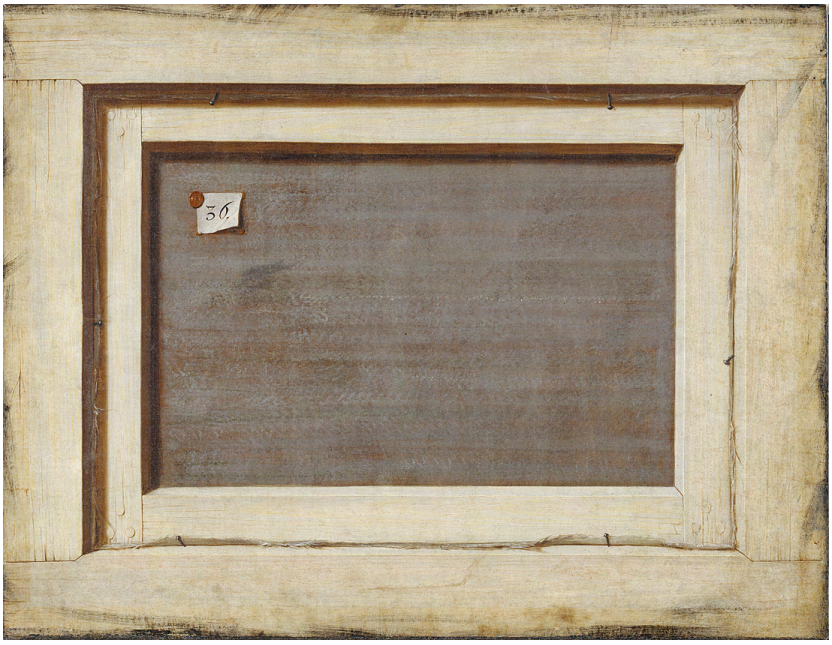
Marcel Broodthaers, "Theorems, 3.," in *Marcel Broodthaers – Moules Œufs Frites Pots Carbon*, exh. cat. Wide White Space Gallery (Antwerp: Wide White Space Gallery, 1966); reprinted in Gloria Moure, ed., *Marcel Broodthaers: Collected Writings* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2012), p. 159.

The history of art (of forms) is the history of "rectos." The history of "versos" (reality), the same plus the same plus the same . . . , remains to be made.

Daniel Buren, "Critical Limits," trans. Laurent Sauerwein, in *Five Texts* (New York: John Weber Gallery; London: Jack Wendler Gallery, 1973), pp. 43–57, esp. p. 48.

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[1]

Introduction

For the longest time, it seemed self-evident that a painting is an object whose back is to be excluded from its presentation. When Clement Greenberg was trying to define constitutive conventions of painting, he included "flatness and the delimitation of flatness" but did not exclude presenting the back of the painting.[1] That can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, under the assumption that it is not a convention but rather a premise under which only the conventions named can be constitutive or, on the other hand, under the opposite premise that there is not the least reason to exclude presenting the back of the painting. A painting intended to present this situation of deciding and the problems associated with it would have to be able to establish a rapport with its own reverse. Such an interest can only be manifested in a creation of situations that make it possible to see that they emerged from reflection on these problems or admit of a corresponding interpretation. Creating such situations is more easily connected to the concept of the avant-garde than to that of modernism, which Greenberg (and others) linked with the suggestion that "flatness" in painting has no other side.

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *The Reverse of a Framed Painting*, 1670
Oil on canvas, 66.4 × 87 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

The easel painting had already indicated the exclusion of the back of the painting from its presentation as such, not as a painting but as an object. A painted canvas can be rolled up in order to be stretched elsewhere on a different frame. The very establishment of painting on canvas therefore manifested an awareness that the back of the painting can be changed without changing the painting and made it seem that the back did not belong to the painting itself. As logical as it must therefore seem to exclude it from the presentation, it appears at the same time to be the painting's task to insist that it is in fact a dichotomous object. The painting is an object which, like other objects, is handled, packed, and shipped; however, unlike other objects, the idea is to make people forget that in its presentation. No matter whether one calls that its sacred and its secular side or speaks of medium and support, there are questions associated with both that can no longer be answered by conventions if a culture does not *provide* art with orientation in the form of conventions, instead expecting—aesthetic, cultural, historical—orientation from art. This then raises the question

1 Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism" (1962), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 121–34, esp. p. 131.

of whether or how a painting can manifest a real relationship to its own existence as an object and convey to possible viewers an understanding of their relationship to their own existence. If questions like these can be asked in the first place, then murals, winged altarpieces, and stained-glass windows seem like answers to a problem that did not yet exist when these forms were developed, or at least not in a form that would have required different answers. The founding of the Bauhaus in 1919 with a name referring to medieval masons' guilds is eloquent testimony to the enduring attraction of these answers. There can, however, be no doubt that their attractiveness is thanks to reflection on modern conditions. In the case of a winged altarpiece, the back of every painting has another painting, with the exception of the central one. All of the parts are embedded in a narrative of salvation, and the central painting, whose verso is excluded from the presentation, evokes all the more so the idea that what is illustrated visually is tied to metaphysical guarantees. Since the Enlightenment, however, this idea can no longer be conveyed unquestioned.

The understanding of painting originally associated with the panel painting could therefore come under pressure in a way that made the exclusion of the verso no longer seem obvious. The emergence and spread of the painting-object left no doubt that paintings as objects have a double character. How does the exclusion of the back of the painting from its presentation belong to a possible self-definition of painting? What does this exclusion say about painting's place in society?

If only the back of a painting can be seen, then that raises the question of its front, but this has already shifted the question of the back to the realm of the irrelevant, since, as a display side of the painting, it does not seem to have *its* "other side" in the back of the painting as an object so much as in its perception by viewers. The crucial correlation to the external fastening of the painting to the wall on its back is the internal fastening in the perception and imagination of the viewers. The paradigm of the painting as window is likely to make one forget that it was fastened to the wall. It is no different with other metaphors for the painting. Because of their interplay of pictorial means (perspectival effect of space, the mood and harmony of colors, figural representation, narrative content, chiaroscuro, compositional balance, symbolism, etc.), traditional premodern paintings could be seen as fasteners for their imagined unfolding in the perception of the viewers. At the same time, they referred to external fasteners, an accompanying frame, and a decorous architectural integration into a church or court framework. What can be called external here, however, is not the fastening of the painting to a wall but what was offered to make us forget such externality.

Under such circumstances, how can a painting deal with having a back? Two very different, now famous paintings from the seventeenth century seem to have both raised and answered this

question. They both depict the reverse of a painting. In 1670, Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts painted the back of a painting with trompe l'oeil manner and intent, including the catalogue number applied to it. It was shown standing on the floor and leaning against a wall at the entrance to the art gallery of the Danish king. It was a technical and above all intellectual feat. Those entering are supposed to—indeed even have to—think that the painting is waiting to be hung on the wall.[2] The painting, which is known as *The Reverse of a Framed Painting*, has been reproduced countless times, but apparently the initial bluff is still effective today, because it is spoken of as if it *were* the back of a painting and did not have one itself; one searches in vain for illustrations of *its* reverse.

The other painting is *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) by Diego Velázquez. It was painted in 1656 and depicts (to mention only what is most necessary for our present concerns) the painter at work surrounded by other people in front of a large canvas standing on the floor, of which only the verso can be seen. For the longest time, the painting was in the private chambers of the Spanish king, very probably standing on the floor.[3] As with Gijsbrechts, albeit in a different way, the positioning on the floor benefited the illusionistic effect because it speaks to the viewers' eye and physical sensations at once. Both paintings were related to a situation and produced a situation. The play with illusion was a means, not an end. It opened up associations that include the question of the relationship between the front and back of a painting, and in connection with that of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. Ongoing art historical discussions have led to the conclusion that Velázquez's painting does not permit an unequivocal interpretation of its meaning. One of the various readings that have been proposed is that the back of the painting depicted in it is the back of the painting that viewers can see in the Prado today.[4] However, a thematic relation of a painting to its own reverse is clearly inconceivable except as imaginative, speculative, and rhetorical.

Michel Foucault dedicated a detailed study to Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, in which he tried to substantiate his thesis that in it Velázquez had represented classical representation as such; the painting is said to assign to the viewers the space of the royal couple visible in the painted mirror.[5] That did not go unquestioned, which contributed considerably to the insight into the painting's constitutive ambiguity. Foucault continued to pursue the questions raised in his study on *Las Meninas* in his writing on the painting of Édouard Manet. He included questions of how the gazes depicted in the painting relate to one another and to the viewers and, directly connected to that, questions about what escapes whose gaze. Foucault argued that Manet had found in the demonstrative display of gazes in opposing directions a means to announce the two-sidedness of the painting as object. The differentiation between the *tableau-objet* (picture-object) and the *peinture-objet*

2 On this, see Ulrich Pfisterer, "Das Werkzeug in der Sammlung; oder, Der König vor Cornelis Gijsbrechts' Staffelei," in *Werkzeuge und Instrumente*, ed. Philipp Cordez and Matthias Krüger, Hamburger Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte 8 (Berlin: Akademie, 2012), pp. 67–92.

3 See Victor I. Stoichita, "Imago Regis: Kunsttheorie und königliches Portrait in den *Meninas* von Velázquez," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 49, no. 2 (1986): pp. 165–89; reprinted in Thierry Greub, ed., *Las Meninas im Spiegel der Deutungen: Eine Einführung in die Methoden der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: Reimer, 2001), pp. 208–34, https://folia.unifr.ch/global/documents/304009. Stoichita's article should be seen in the context of "mirrors of interpretation."

4 See John R. Searle, "*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1980): pp. 477–88, esp. p. 485.

5 Stoichita demonstrated that the royal couple depicted in the mirror was read in the contemporaneous context as a mirroring of the royal couple painted by Velázquez (see note 3).



(painting-object) is constitutive of his argument. What makes two-sidedness evident on the level of the pictorial has at the same time implications for an understanding of the painting as object. Because, in consensus with other theorists on art, he places Manet at the beginning of the evolution of (not modern but) modernist art up to the present, this also raises questions about the further evolution of art and especially of nonrepresentational art.

One cannot, however, therefore claim that Foucault answered these questions satisfactorily; and that does not change substantially if one discusses his remarks on Manet in connection with those of other Manet scholars such as Michael Fried and T. J. Clark, though this does not of course detract from the relevance of such discussion. Manet's painting of modern life contains many expressions, some of them extreme, which can no longer be found even in the generation of painters who immediately followed him. And because a pictorial recourse to the two-sidedness of the painting as object is only conceivable as an extreme measure, this means that Manet's successors, the Impressionists, were more interested in a sensualist presentation of the problems of the painting as object as having been resolved, than in making them comprehensible. T. J. Clark's Marxist perspective was perhaps most likely to recognize a problem in this.

It was indeed the Cubist revolution of pictorial language, following on Paul Cézanne's Post-Impressionism and the ensuing question of the consequences to be drawn from it, that was again able to raise the question of a possible artistic approach to the two-sidedness of the painting as object. The Cubist reflection on and articulation of the multiple perspectives of the objects to be depicted and the development of the collage made it seem only logical to ask whether or how such reflection and articulation in a painting can be related to it itself as an object. This question fostered radical reorientations in the Russian Constructivism of both Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko, and in the work of Marcel Duchamp. In any case, one can observe a radical impulse to solve the problem, and this went hand in hand with a reorientation of how the problem was posed.

Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656
Oil on canvas, 320.3 × 279.1 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

Both Manet and Cubism stand in the background of the present study, which is primarily concerned with developments in art after World War II. The course of history is, however, important in order to understand the genealogy of the formulations of the problem. This is all the more true since such genealogy cannot be thought of as continuous evolution. Often it was not the works themselves but the exhibition situations created by artists and avant-garde architects that testified to the persistence of awareness of the problem. The evolution of abstract painting did not seem to allow the question of the back of the painting at first, but in Brazilian Neo-Concretism the European role models were confronted with that very question in the 1950s, and Jasper Johns observed during the same period: "One of the extreme problems of paintings as

objects is the other side—the back; it can't be solved; it's in the nature of the work."[6] The efforts of Minimal Art to present a solution anyway directly had critical consequences for the formulation of the problem. Not only the historical and cultural contexts in which the works were made, which can be defined or interpreted as addressing one's own "other side," vary widely; nor do the works represent a small group with clearly recognizable features. It is all the more important to determine a common point of departure in investigating the development of historically and culturally specific formulations of the problem and proposals for solutions. I will attempt here to start out from painting to gain a perspective on a set of problems inherent in the painting-object, one that is so rooted in the related cultural approach that it should be assumed independently of painting as well. We are indebted for what we know about these problems above all to artistic approaches to them. They point to various historical stages in different directions and reveal approaches to solutions under different assumptions, so that one might ask whether one can rightly speak of *one* set of problems. Rather than keeping an eye out for theoretical formulations that could answer this question abstractly, but at the price of being completely unspecific historically and aesthetically, the present study and account is based on the option of using the "other side" as a topos that makes it possible to sound out different contexts. The back of a painting is a "place" that has no place in the painting and its reception; it is a nonplace in the literal meaning of *atopos*. In ancient Greek, *atopos* means "out of place" or "unnatural"; and by traditional measures it would indeed seem that way if the backs of paintings were presented in a collection. In the metaphorical sense, however, the term *atopos* refers to that which cannot be grapsed by common concepts, is rarely experienced, and is distinguished by true originality. Roland Barthes, in his book *Le plaisir du texte* from 1973 (published in English as *The Pleasure of the Text*), focused on this meaning not in order to distinguish specific texts accordingly but rather to characterize experiences of reading.[7] Yet this cannot obscure the fact that the tradition of art—especially since Romanticism—is dominated by striving for originality. The display side of the painting should therefore be distinguished by great originality; it was understood as a place where the metaphorical meaning of *atopos* could and should come true. It was therefore able to displace the literal meaning, making it placeless in practice. The back of the painting is the site of this coming true. Centuries of stereotypical exclusion of the back of the painting from its presentation made it possible in principle for an artistic objection to this exclusion to seem "rarely experienced," "incomparable," or "demonstrating great originality."[8] The topos of the "other side" thus stands for the possibility of assigning a place in art to the atopical, and thus also for the possibility that artistic explorations of this possibility took different directions and went through different developments. Such explorations were

6 Quoted in Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, exh. cat. Whitney Museum of American Art, rev. ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), p. 34.

7 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

8 In an essay in 1971, Robert Smithson inseparably connected the various meanings of "atopia": see Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," *Artforum* (September 1971): pp. 53–55.

often most explicitly related to this set of problems at the beginning of the evolution of an artistic approach.

This concept of the topos should be distinguished from how it is understood in literature and philosophy. Literary topoi are tropes, verbal images (e.g., "life journey"); as commonplaces, they are worn out but offer an emotional charge in their use. The stereotypical turn of phrase "on the one side, on the other side" is too trite for that. The rhetorical and philosophical concept of the topos is even less suitable. In philosophy, topoi are rules (as places to be sought out) for finding arguments in a debate. Arguments have to counter opposing arguments in such a way that they reach a stronger position on the issue in question. With regard to art, however, the question arises as to how this works if we are dealing not with a debate over a thing, but with the presentation of a thing; and if the presented thing has two sides, one of which is excluded from its presentation. Paintings can raise the question of what can be considered adequate to the thing here. They certainly imply an approach to the question of how to approach their other side, because the presentation of the recto of a painting while excluding the verso is itself such an approach. Although that may also be considered the normal case, it did not go unquestioned. Artists saw thematic shifts and transpositions as occasions to develop other ways of making art. This applies to both literal and metaphorical responses to the question of acknowledging the "other side." But not all art is urgently concerned with this question. The present study is dedicated to works and evolutions of works that do indeed testify to a conscious consideration of this question.

The topos of the "other side" permits a confrontation and correlation with different definitions of the problem and perspectives on solving it and therefore helps to avoid semantic downplaying and oversimplification. Such an approach assumes an art historical treatment of the cases mentioned following the usual categorial orientations—art movements, phases of development, factors of influence, geographical and cultural categorizations, et cetera—but cannot be limited to viewing them decisively from these viewpoints. In fact, the specific approach to the problem of the other side in every single case can (especially considering the usually immense literature on the individual artists) only make the focus in a vignette-like way in order to both address and stimulate observations of cross-connections between different approaches. The subject of the present study does not permit systematic treatment, neither theoretically nor historically. The phenomena to be examined here lie too far apart for that. Although I have already used the terms "investigation" and "study" to characterize my project, they do not seem entirely suitable. From a *study* one would expect an area of study that is restricted from the start, leaving no doubt as to what belongs to it and what does not, and from an *investigation* a systematic exploration of larger contexts. By contrast, the topos of the "other side" admits only of an exploring and probing

approach. One could speak of an "essay," which would suggest possibilities of linking themes and facts flexibly, but in view of the concrete project the term remains awkwardly unspecific. That can be countered by noting that the text presented here can be attested to have the *character of an exhibition*. Its impetus lies in the modality of a correlative visualization. Yet this text is not intended to be a preparation for (or catalogue of) an exhibition or as a substitute for one; rather, in its selection of works of art and its correlation of artists, it lays claim to a modality of exhibiting.

Although very few of the artists discussed here saw themselves as painters, the painting as object is the crux of the investigation. Many artists started out from painting and reached a point at which they perceived their possibilities with regard to contemporaneous challenges as limited. But works by artists who did not start out from painting can also be related to painting. That is because the sociocultural reality contains limitations on the possibilities of examining and gaining an understanding, limitations that have been or can be correlated to the problem of the "other side" in painting. Forms of the artistic approach to the institutional and sociocultural context of imparting art have clearly proven this. This investigation focuses on the fact that an art that reveals itself to be an approach to the other side, and hence announces a problem, initiates two perspectives for understanding at the same time: it must include an effort to solve the problem that is, however, apt to make it possible to understand the problem in all its complexity in the first place. The conceivable solution to the problem cannot therefore be separated from the clinging to it. What is in question is the artistic approach to *this* set of problems and the assumptions under which proposed approaches lead to extensions and shifts of the horizon of the problem. An art that deals with its "other side" (or can be interpreted as doing so) does not in any case remain in an "as-if" mode that should be interpreted (if not denounced) as creating an illusion; rather, it lends reality the character of an as-if in order to confront with it at the same time.

The investigation is arranged chronologically, but many developments ran parallel. A familiar chronology can therefore only serve as a backdrop against which the heterogeneity of the cases presented that enrich the familiar with an unfamiliar question stands out. Whereas one would assume a teleology that strives asymptotically for an undetermined goal, one cannot speak of that in the case of painting and its "other side" in art. It does, however, raise the question as to where the investigation and account should begin and where they can end.

Beginning the account with Manet seems to make sense even if one does not wish to accept unreservedly Foucault's theory that Manet had thematized the painting as an object that has a verso and a recto. Manet's painting is considered the *beginning* of the modernist evolution of art, but Manet not its *founder*. Modernism is thus seen as something that Manet could not help but vouching

for in his painting. His painting's vouching for the factual conditions of painting (flatness, materiality of paint, objecthood) stands in rapport with an attestation of conditions of modern life (capitalist living conditions, contingency, transience). Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude the investigation with an art that entails the possibility of having recourse to these conditions and their attestation in Manet. Two possibilities of historical reference seem equally relevant here. First, pursuing the possibility of gradual historical developments in acknowledging that painting has an "other side" in art. This is possible by starting out from Cubism. Second, setting apart the possibility of the persistence of structural conditions of modern life and then relating to one another works of art that lent particular significance to this persistence. The historical account can therefore be concluded with a case study in which both possibilities of reference coincide. One such example is Dan Graham's *Public Space / Two Audiences* (1976). The connections to earlier Minimal Art are just as obvious as the connections between his art and Manet's painting that the literature on Graham has pointed out. At the same time, however, the work is tied to a theoretical challenge because there is no possibility to document adequately how this installation functioned and its psychological effectiveness. That leaves only the possibility of theoretical approaches to it, which does not, of course, justify the assumption that some theory could suffice to explain how the work functioned. A demonstration that makes the failure of this assumption obvious is most likely to lead to the goal. An essay at the end of the investigation is devoted to this, stepping out of the historical account and nevertheless leaning back on a basic assumption of the choice of theme and the investigation.

The book's title—*Viewing · Positions*—is intended to make this clear. Reflecting on the fact that visible reality can only be seen from different standpoints is usually egologically predisposed—as a question about the optimal and privileged "viewing positions" that one could adopt or that someone adopted. But within the field of vision, positions of objects and of people become evident whose relationships to one another do not depend on a specific viewing position. Under certain circumstances, a seeing of positions—viewing *positions*—can claim the same if not even greater relevance than determining *viewing* positions. Visually grasping positions of objects in space permits the insight that the other side of an object is not visible from several "viewing positions," and thus also the insight that the back of the painting on the wall is not visible from *all* "viewing positions." If one wished to ask about "*viewing* positions," the question of the back of the painting would never come up; "viewing *positions*," by contrast, makes it possible to question the positions of objects in relation to "*viewing* positions."

The fact that external circumstances can offer an occasion to view objects from perspectives other than the common ones or put

viewers in different spatial positions is trivial. Art objects are no different from other objects in that respect. If, however, an impetus to question viewing positions and spatial positions is structurally and materially inherent in a work of art—that is to say, if the work is *thematerialized*—then it reveals in its reception a constitutive instability that is not a shortcoming but rather a precondition of its functioning. This instability concerns at the same time the categories under which theoreticians and historians try to grasp works of art.

Current debates in interdisciplinary discourses in which the field of art history is engaged have already for several decades now been under the impression of the proclamation of a pictorial turn (1992), which rhetorically suggests that the linguistic turn announced in the 1960s has played out.[9] In such a context and under such a premise, asking about art's approach to the back of the painting and about an awareness of the problem manifested in it implies a contrarian gambling. It focuses on a picture being considered *something that can be turned*, although a *turn* related to the *picture* cannot be declared *pictorial*.

Roughly a decade before W. J. T. Mitchell coined the term "pictorial turn," on the occasion of the 1981 exhibition *Westkunst: Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1939* (West Art: Contemporary Art since 1939) in Cologne, László Glózer observed an "exit from the picture" (*Ausstieg aus dem Bild*) in the art practices of the 1960s, which was recapitulated in 2005 in the exhibition *Exit: Stepping Out of the Picture* at the ZKM | Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe. The turn toward the picture corresponds in a contrary way to the turn away from the picture. Because the shared point of reference of both orientations is the "picture," however, it became decisive. This also seemed to be assured both because the topos "exit from the picture" proclaimed a reality outside of the picture without associating it with any specific qualifications, and because talk of a pictorial turn in relation to the linguistic turn insinuates a speechlessness that lays the groundwork for a supposed authority of the visual. That led to efforts to bring together under the art historical and art theoretical concept of the picture that which could no longer be subsumed under it according to the topos of the exit from the picture.[10] Exhibitions and publications with titles such as *The Picture after the Last Picture* also eloquently expressed the idea that pictures had an inherent talent for resurrection.[11] In the wake of controversial distinctions between "art history," "visual culture studies," and "image studies" (*Bildwissenschaft*), driven by the formations of clusters in scholarship, the concept of the "picture" took on an almost mythological charge.[12] Art historians conceived a superposition for the concept of the picture that was intended to enable it to do justice to all manifestations of the pictorial, and also to art from its beginnings to the practices of the avant-gardes that are no longer oriented around the production of pictures as they

9 With various emphases, there was also talk later of an "iconic turn," a "visual turn," and a "visualistic turn." Moreover, heated discussions have arisen about whether there has been a "pictorial turn" and how it should be understood at all, and also about whether pictures are not in fact a language. On this, see Klaus Sachs-Hombach, "Einleitung," in *Bildtheorien: Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn*, ed. Klaus Sachs-Hombach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), pp. 7–14.

10 In "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder," in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. Gottfried Böhm (Munich: Fink, 1994), pp. 11–28, Gottfried Böhm argued that the linguistic turn had itself transitioned into the iconic turn because it was "the question of language that provided impetus to the visual potential inherent in it (ibid., p. 14); the metaphor could "open up insights into how 'images' function, no matter whether they are painted, sculpted, built, arranged, or danced" (ibid., p. 26).
Michael Lüthy made "Das Bild nach dem 'Ausstieg aus dem Bild'/ The image after the 'exit from the image'" his theme in Sonderforschungsbereich 626 "Ästhetische Erfahrung im Zeichen der Entgrenzung der Künste" / Collaborative Research Center 626 "Aesthetic Experience and the Dissolution of Artistic Limits," Freie Universität Berlin, 2003–15. German art historians are regularly confronted with the question of whether *Bild* should be translated into English as "picture" or "image." That also applies to talk of the "exit from the image." Mitchell offered the aperçu "You can hang a picture, but not an image"; following this distinction, it is possible to imagine both an "exit from the picture" that retains an image and conversely an "exit from the image" that retains a picture. An impetus to expand the concept of the image virtually infinitely corresponds at the same time to the tendency to split it up so that the discussion can revolve around it all the more easily.

11 *Das Bild nach dem letzten Bild / The Picture after the Last Picture*, exh. cat. Galerie Metropol, Vienna (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1991), with texts in German and English by Jean-Christophe Ammann, Kasper König, Peter Weibel, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, among others.

12 On this, see Susanne von Falkenhausen, "Verzwickte Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse: Kunstgeschichte, Visual Culture, Bildwissenschaft," in *Bild-Geschichte: Festschrift für Horst Bredekamp*, ed. Philine Helas et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 3–13.

are commonly understood.[13] This expressed a discomfort with the formal concept of art (along the lines of "art is whatever an art institution has declared to be art") and also an effort to regain interpretive authority in art history. If the pictorial is considered from the perspective of anthropology to be the condition for and raison d'être of art, then there can be no "exit from the picture" in art. That makes it necessary to reflect on how the study and account proposed here relates to it.

As artifacts, paintings belong to a world of material objects, but as pictures they invite the viewers' perception to unite with them. They need a framework which leads from the painted picture to the world of ordinary objects and which, in precisely that way, prevents the painting itself from appearing to be an ordinary object. Even a painting hung on a wall without a frame is framed by the surrounding wall and its visible edges. This blocks out the back of the painting. Theorists of the image have pointed out (with various justifications and assessments) that images (can) evoke both the idea that something belonging to the ordinary perception of the world has been removed from them and the idea that these images possess an excessive significance and an aesthetic surplus value.[14] But the relationship of removal and excess concerns not only the experience of the painting as picture but also the inherent blocking of experiencing it as an object. If the back of the painting has been removed from the gaze, the image side of the painting can evoke all the more freely the impression of an aesthetic excess. How would it be possible to make evident both the removal as removal in and on the object and the excess as something that presumes a removal? It is a matter of art history to show that this is a question that artists have asked in different ways in various historical contexts. The fact that it has been asked testifies to an awareness of the problem on the part of artists whose genealogy must be examined. This is all the more true because in the twentieth century addressing the problems pointed out here was no longer sought primarily in the métier of painting. The present study and account is therefore oriented not around the science of the image but rather around the history of art. A concept of the "picture" that is confounded with the concept of art and hence suppresses the possibilities to gain perspective cannot come to grips with the aforementioned developments. The present volume's subtitle—*The Painting's Other Side in Art*—expresses this. It requires art to address artfully questions that concern the relationship of the recto and verso of paintings. Indeed, this neither precludes *pictures* playing a role in such an approach nor painting being an *art*. The genealogy of the problem reveals both the separation from the specific conditions of a painting and the fact that an approach to the pictorial can have a nonpictorial meaning.[15]

13 When W. J. T. Mitchell published his essay "What Is an Image?" in 1984, the question served as a title in order to make it show in the text all the more effectively that he considered the search for an essential definition of "image" to be misguided. See Mitchell, "What Is an Image?," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1984): pp. 503–37. He appealed to Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of the language game and his talk of family resemblances. Wittgenstein had explained the latter using the model of a thread formed by a number of interwoven fibers. In the German-speaking world ten years later, by contrast, the question "What is an image" was raised in a way that makes the search for an essential definition seem unavoidable. See Böhm, *Was ist ein Bild?* (see note 10). How this theoretical claim relates to Wittgenstein's thread model was left unexplained, however.

14 On this, see Dieter Mersch, "Blick und Entzug: Zur 'Logik' ikonischer Strukturen," in *Figur und Figuration: Studien zu Wahrnehmung und Wissen*, ed. Gottfried Boehm, Achatz von Müller, and Gabriele Brandstetter with Maja Naef (Munich: Fink, 2007), pp. 55–70.

15 Helmut Draxler—in his study *Die Wahrheit der Niederländischen Malerei: Eine Archäologie der Gegenwartskunst* (The Truth of Dutch Painting: An Archaeology of Contemporary Art), published in 2021 by Brill Fink, Paderborn—argues that the decisive historical shift leading to the establishment of the concept of art relevant to the present day took place in seventeenth-century Dutch painting: "Until the early twentieth century, the image is the necessary condition of painting; abstraction and conceptualism, however, by no means indicate an overcoming of painting or its end; rather, it only becomes visible here that it was even able to detach itself from images and, in this detachment, to triumph as art over its own origin in the image" (p. 55). While Draxler thus distances himself from a certain preoccupation with images in recent art historical discourse, he does so at the cost of, at least in its contemporary context, a simplistic conflation of "art" and "painting." The present study takes a different approach. It does not start from "painting" itself, but from the fact that questions could be developed in relation to the painting as an object, which have become relevant for an understanding of art.



20 Édouard Manet,
The Railway, 1873
Oil on canvas,
93 × 112 cm,
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, DC

[2]

Foucault's *Manet* in Relation to Michael Fried and T. J. Clark

In an untitled afterword to a German translation of Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, Michel Foucault had declared: "Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum. They both produced works in a self-conscious relationship to earlier paintings or texts—or rather to the aspect in painting or writing that remains indefinitely open. They erect their art within the archive."[1] When Foucault's text became accessible to an English-language readership under the title "Fantasia of the Library" in 1977, it met with a strong and lasting response in the United States, especially in the theory journal *October*, which had been founded in 1976, and, in a very different way, in the work of Michael Fried.[2] The situation was different with a lecture Foucault gave on Manet on various occasions between 1967 and 1971. A transcription of a tape recording that was missing the conclusion of the lecture was published in *Les cahiers de Tunisie* in 1989. Foucault explained in it that Manet played with a painting being "a surface with two faces, a *verso* and a *recto*."[3] No one had ever made that argument before, nor were such formulations used, or related arguments made, in the long period between Foucault's lecture and its posthumous publication. In 2001, a revised edition of the text version of the lecture was published in Tunis,[4] and, after a complete recording of the first lecture had been found, the full text of the lecture was likewise published,[5] followed by a translation into English in 2009.[6] Most commentators on Foucault's lectures have avoided specifically addressing his explanation that Manet had illustrated that a painting possesses a front and a back.[7] They tended to see their task as pointing out the connections between Foucault's lecture and his philosophical interests and theses; not least because Foucault's argumentation with regard to Manet can be by no means considered fully developed. Foucault did, however, want to write a book about Manet, and it is reasonable to assume that he imagined it as something other than a derivation from or illustration of his philosophical writings.[8] Other than his lecture, however, little is known that could offer more detailed information about the book project. What follows here is an attempt to confront and correlate Foucault's declared and related argumentation with art historical analyses and accounts to gain insights that seem

1 Gustave Flaubert, *Die Versuchung des heiligen Antonius*, trans. Barbara and Robert Picht (Frankfurt: Insel, 1966), pp. 215–51. English translation from Michel Foucault, "Fantasia of the Library," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 87–109, esp. p. 92.

2 Foucault, "Fantasia of the Library" (see note 1). On the history of its reception, see Alexander Kauffman, "Manet, Museum, Modernism: Michel Foucault and Modernist Art History," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 22 (June 2020): pp. 1–21.

3 Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, trans. Matthew Barr (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), p. 49 (cited in the present volume as MOP).

4 Michel Foucault, *La peinture de Manet* (Paris: Société française d'esthétique, 2001).

5 Michel Foucault, *La peinture de Manet*, ed. Maryvonne Saison (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004). This edition includes several essays that derived from a symposium titled "Michel Foucault, un regard."

6 Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting* (see note 3).

7 See Joseph J. Tanke, "The Specter of Manet: A Contribution to the Archeology of Painting," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no. 4 (Fall 2008): pp. 381–92; Catherine M. Soussloff, *Foucault on Painting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) (cited in the present volume as FoP); Nicolas Bourriaud, "Michel Foucault: Manet and the Birth of the Viewer," in Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting* (see note 3), pp. 7–19. It is also true of most of the lectures at the symposium "Michel Foucault, un regard," with the exception of David Marie, "Recto/Verso; ou, Le spectateur en mouvement," in Foucault, *La peinture de Manet* (see note 5), pp. 81–94.

8 In 1967, he had signed a corresponding author's contract and proposed as working title *Le noir et la couleur* (Black and Color) or *Le noir et*

relevant to an understanding of later art historical developments and related discussions of the problem of the "other side."

Foucault's lecture has the form of a commentary on thirteen chronologically arranged slides of Manet paintings. The commentaries relate to a thesis that Foucault explains by way of introduction, with an eye to subsequent and earlier developments in painting. With regard to the past, he declares: "Manet in effect is one who for the first time, it seems to me, in western art, at least since the Renaissance, at least since the quattrocento, allows himself to use and in a way to play with, at the very interior of his paintings, even at the interior of what they represent, the material *properties* of the space on which he paints" (MOP, p. 29). By contrast, in relation to the future he states: "It seems to me that, beyond even Impressionism, what Manet made possible was all painting *after* Impressionism, is all the painting of the twentieth century, is all the painting from which, in fact, contemporary art developed" (MOP, p. 28). His explanations are Janus-faced. Looking at both the more distant future and the more distant past—that is, by suspending the idea of a logic of development progressing chronologically—he presents Manet's painting as a chronotope and that in turn as a rupture.[9] But only by assuming a chronological arrangement can he point out that Manet conducted operations in the field of painting that caused a rupture in a continuous development because they concerned the Western concept of art in general as it applies to painting.

Foucault divides the paintings on which he commented into three categories. First, he focuses on the ways in which Manet represented the material and spatial conditions of a painting: the fact that it is a planar, rectangular object both presented and represented aesthetically by means of representational painting. Next, he emphasizes that Manet does not represent light, or only secondarily so (as is common in the tradition), in a way that points to a fictive light source belonging to the sphere of the depicted object in the painting or in a way that depicts it itself; rather, he makes evident in his aesthetic decisions that his paintings are *related* to an external light source (and not just, like every painting, *dependent* on an external light source to be viewed). And, finally, he explains that and how Manet in his paintings (in some more than others) makes the viewers realize that the painting does not assign them any place from which the context of the painting could be revealed. This list does not explicitly speak of dealing with the fact that the painting has a recto and a verso. It is a fact about which one *can* speak in a painting only *indirectly*, and that therefore forms a virtual shade vanishing point of all three of the perspectives of analysis that Foucault identifies. Just as a perspectival vanishing *point* can be calculated and constructed mathematically but does not include the calculation of what makes it a *vanishing* point, the back of a painting is a visually and haptically tangible object, but one that does not determine what its exclusion from the presentation means.

la surface (Black and the Surface); see Soussloff, *Foucault on Painting* (see note 7), pp. 29 and 134, note 30. In her review of the English translation of Foucault's lecture, Suzanne Verderber expounded the idea that, after publishing *Les mots et les choses* in 1966 (released in English as *The Order of Things* in 1970), Foucault had noticed a structural void in its structure. He had cited Velázquez's *Las Meninas* as the visual exhibit of the classical episteme but had not identified any work of art of comparable relevance for modernism. See *Foucault Studies*, no. 19 (June 2015): pp. 266–72.

9 On Foucault's archaeological method and his concept of the "rupture," see Tanke, "The Specter of Manet" (see note 7).

Foucault was certainly not the first to emphasize that Manet, like no other painter in the Western tradition since the Renaissance, made obvious the actual flatness of the painting, of its material support, and of the application of paint. But Foucault draws a different conclusion from this than, say, Clement Greenberg. For Foucault, the thematic vanishing point of his perspective of analysis can only be the painting as object, the object that presents itself as painting *and* as object, and not, as for Greenberg, a teleology in which painting strives for an eternally unfulfilled revelation of its "essence." But neither for Greenberg nor for Foucault can the thematic vanishing point be grasped in a straightforward way.

Foucault felt bound by Manet's painting to develop a new terminology more appropriate to this painting (as he understood it). He redefined the common distinction between *tableau* and *peinture* as *tableau-objet* and *peinture-objet*. In her study of Foucault's discussion of painting, Catherine M. Soussloff points out that these terms can scarcely be translated accurately into English, and that the present English translation as "picture-object" and "painting-object" is therefore problematic. *Tableau* and "picture" do not have the same spectrum of meanings, and the meaning of *peinture* differs from that of "painting." Soussloff's proposal to translate both French terms with the same term "object painting" is understandable against that backdrop but is at best a reason to ask what experience or set of problems motivated Foucault's terminological efforts. Soussloff remarks on this: "Foucault took great pains to distinguish with exactitude how *painting about painting itself* might be constituted by and revealed in the painting object" (FoP, p. 54), and she continues by noting "that the truth of painting for Foucault lay in the proposition of its 'objectness,' a state not to be confused with either its traditional materiality or its predominate representability, both of which, however, redound to and at times appear to conflate with it" (FoP, p. 55). As she makes clear herself, however, it may seem possible to grasp "objectness" on an intellectual level, and specifically in the sense that Foucault codified in his philosophy, yet the experience makes fusing with the material of the painting inevitable, precisely when one follows Foucault's own diction: "And Manet reinvents (or perhaps he invents) the picture-object [*tableau-objet*], the picture as materiality, the picture as something coloured which clarifies an external light and in front of which, or about which, the viewer revolves. This invention of the picture-object [*tableau-objet*], this reinsertion of the materiality of the canvas in that which is represented, this I believe is at the heart of the great change wrought by Manet to painting" (MOP, p. 31).

It is therefore one thing to argue on the definitional level of Foucault's philosophy and another to cling to experiences that Foucault himself articulated. For Foucault, seen philosophically, "objects" exist only in discourses as practices that develop rules, which in turn make it possible both to form objects—as opposed to mere things—in the first place and then to view them as such.

If painting as painting about painting should (and can) be constituted by and revealed in the painting-object, it has to develop rules and follow them almost systematically, rules that constitute this object and make it possible to perceive it as an object; and these rules must not simply form the *tableau* as object but at the same time determine the practices of the painting-object in its materiality. That means that painting must self-referentially be both object language and metalanguage in a reflexive (over)determination and at the same time bring about and make apparent a corresponding thematic shift and rearrangement in a kind of chiasmus in itself. Playing with the fact that a painting is "a surface with two faces, a *verso* and a *recto*," is possible only in such a shift. As a material object (in the usual understanding), a painting does not speak of itself except in a metalanguage that constitutes an object language *as* object language by practicing its translation into the latter.[10] That is possible in a painting only in a re-presentation of the material qualities of the painting as object in which painted signs, including the painting itself as a painted sign, reveal these conditions. Foucault regards precisely the emphatic flatness of Manet's painting—the liberation of superficiality that reveals any suggestion of special depth to be mere symbolism and thus withholds the illusion from perception—as proof of a depth (*profondeur*) from an intellectual perspective. Although the chiasmus of object language and metalanguage may appear as a blurring of painted signs on the surface, a categorical rupture lies in it. For what makes a painting a painting is not its actual objectness. Traditional painting had no problem with making the painting's status as object seem dubious. Its interest lay in the relationships of the material surface and the painted subject, presentation and representation, not in what it itself excludes from the presentation. Nor were the definitions *peinture* and *tableau* conceived to define objectness into them. A painting in the Western tradition could and should make one forget its objectness, which seemed to be at best an adjunct definition and condition that, if it were to force itself, could destroy the deeper meaning. With regard to Manet's painting, Foucault was able to take that fact as an occasion to lend literal significance to adjoining in the terms *peinture-objet* and *tableau-objet* that he had coined.

One has to ask, however, whether painters long before Manet had not played with the fact that a painting has a front and a back side. This is all the more true given that Foucault himself had called the canvas depicted from behind in Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* "ironic."[11] One should also think of Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrecht's trompe l'oeil back of a painting in the art collection of the Danish king. What interested Foucault about Manet was *not*, however, the fact that in a painting a painting can be depicted as an object and how an intellectual game can be played with that; rather, he was interested in Manet's ability and willingness to lend painting an inherent reference to the fact that the latter is tied to a

10 In *Foucault on Painting* (see note 7), p. 56, Soussloff points out that Foucault referred to Alfred Tarski's logical analysis of language and the distinction between object language and metalanguage. The fact that "object language" is *langage-objet* in French presumably inspired him to speak of *peinture-objet* and *tableau-objet*. It cannot be said, however, that the two terms relate to each other like object language and metalanguage. It seems all the more important in this context to refer to the fact that ordinary colloquial language is its own metalanguage and also that Kurt Gödel developed a method to translate the logical metalanguage into the logical object language.

11 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), p. 7.

recto/verso disposition that concerns the relationship of visibility and invisibility. Painted depictions of paintings as objects as can be found in the seventeenth century are no longer needed in Manet.

Foucault focused on the fact that several paintings by Manet depict two people, one of whom is looking out of the picture and apparently observing a spectacle that the viewers of the painting can neither see nor infer from the painting's context, while the other is looking into the pictorial space and also watching a spectacle that the viewers of the painting can neither see nor infer from the painting's context because the pictorial space is treated in a way that prevents them from doing so. Because of the position of the bodies as depicted, neither person can take notice of the other. The two paintings to which Foucault refers in these contexts—*La Serveuse de bocks* (*The Waitress*) and *La Gare Saint-Lazare* (*The Railway*)—have something else in common: whereas the person looking into the picture is observing a spectacle that takes place continuously before her or his eyes, the other perhaps seems to be only momentarily distracted from the activity with which she was or is preoccupied. In *The Railway*, the governess sitting on the wall is looking up from reading the book she is holding in her hands; and in *The Waitress*, the waitress continues her activity of putting down a glass of beer but her surprised gaze is unrelated to it. One difference between the two paintings should also be mentioned. In *The Railway*, the bars of fence that run and cross through the entire painting in parallel with the picture plane reveal a quasi-picture plane within the painting that is transparent and yet insists on its own materiality and is in rapport with the painting itself. Nothing in *The Waitress* corresponds to it. Manet clearly developed the idea for the painting in steps. In an earlier version of *The Waitress*, one can still see the stage that attracts the gaze of the man who is looking in the opposite direction of the waitress. Not until *The Railway* does Manet establish a rapport between gazes in opposite directions and the picture plane.

The question as to how it is possible for a painting to play with the recto/verso relationship of a painting as object was answered by Manet, according to Foucault, with a recto/verso relationship of the invisible. Foucault's teacher Maurice Merleau-Ponty left behind an unfinished book titled *Le visible et l'invisible* (published in 1964 and translated as *The Visible and the Invisible*).[12] It is reasonable to assume that Foucault's comments on the invisible in Manet's paintings point to the influence of Merleau-Ponty. For the latter, the invisible is not the other of the visible, but rather it belongs to the visible. What another person sees is visible even when it is invisible to me. The back side of a spatial object is not part of my field of vision, not visible in it, but it belongs to the visible world. A painting seems destined to be visible as a whole, but the Foucauldian terms *peinture-objet* and *tableau-objet* stand for raising the question of in/visibility that it provokes as object and as picture. Both the woman looking out of the painting and the

12 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

girl looking in the opposite direction in *The Railway* are observing things that are invisible to the viewer, while at the same time it is also invisible to the woman what seizes the girl's attention and vice versa. A dramaturgy of in/visibility unfolds that concerns the painting-object as such. The painting makes visible that it is making or keeping something invisible that would be necessary to understand what it depicts, and therefore it awakens the desire "to turn the canvas around, to change position in order finally to see what one senses must be seen, but all the same is not given in the picture" (MOP, p. 54). What the painting shows does not produce a meaning within the painting. Because it relates meaning to visibility, it makes itself invisible. "It is the first time," Foucault declares, "that painting has presented itself as something invisible that we watch" (MOP, p. 55). In the reflected opposite direction of the gazes, the thematic inversion of the expectation of meaning generated within the painting, and that determination of meaning outside the painting that it addresses, makes us think of it as a visible invisibility.

In his discussion of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, Foucault had called the back of a canvas depicted in the painting "the other side of a psyche"[13] as well as "the double that until now has been denied us."[14] These remarks remain enigmatic. They reveal the effort to attribute to the back of the painting a role within the anthropomorphism of traditional painting; and because the back of the canvas is excluded from its presentation, it seemed possible if not imperative to Foucault, against the backdrop of the pictorial tradition, to associate the back with the unconscious and to assign it the ambiguous role of a doppelgänger. But that left the question open as to how the unconscious can be made perceptible—or, under the assumption of the analogy, can be made perceptible at all—as well as the question of what interpretation of Velázquez's painting should be derived from that. Foucault never revisited the analogy of the back and the unconscious in connection with Manet. Instead, he spoke of a desire, the desire to see the spectacles that the people depicted in the painting observe either with temporary distraction or fascinated devotion. And because it was supposed to be both spectacles, Foucault saw the viewers as being caught up in an imaginary game of placement around the painting-object without it being possible or necessary to identify its back with the unconscious. It is tempting to think that by speaking of a desire awakened in the viewers by the painting Foucault was seeking connection to Jacques Lacan in the sense that the viewers sought to establish contact to the desire that connects the people depicted in the painting to the spectacles they are observing. But Foucault did not go that far, at least not explicitly. In that sense, his commentaries are closer to Merleau-Ponty than to Lacan. But his examination of the relationship of the visible and the invisible also recedes into the background entirely at the end of his lecture, because it appears that it can only play a role for Foucault as long as

13 Foucault, *The Order of Things* (see note 11), p. 6. On this, see Soussloff, *Foucault on Painting* (see note 7), p. 28.
14 Foucault, *The Order of Things* (see note 11), p. 7.

the painting is objective (representational). His thesis is ultimately that Manet paved the way to nonobjective painting by playing with the fundamental material conditions of a painting: "this no doubt was the fundamental condition so that finally one day we can get rid of representation itself and allow space to play with its pure and simple properties, its material properties."[15] One could speak of an exalted positivism here. At the same time, however, it offers an occasion to recall the era of Foucault's lecture. Although it is not clear how much Foucault knew about the developments of art in the 1960s, it can be assumed, given his insistence on materiality and objecthood, that he was trying to connect the immediately preceding developments in art to the lecture, especially Minimal Art, and particularly since it claimed to solve the problem of the "other side—the back" of the painting as object that Jasper Johns had raised again with all acuity.

Michael Fried, who had published "Art and Objecthood," his invective against Minimal Art, in *Artforum* in 1967, also published his long essay "Manet's Sources: Aspects of His Art, 1859–1865" there in 1969. In contrast to Foucault, who started out from Manet and then looked at contemporaneous art in general, Fried started out from contemporaneous art to look assiduously at Manet and his sources. In his 1996 book *Manet's Modernism; or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Fried republished the essay from 1969 in order to comment on details looking back historically, and to supplement it with three additional chapters and a coda.[16] In *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, he had accused Minimal Art of "theatricality" and pilloried it as a "negation of art,"[17] so he now felt obliged to attest to a form of "theatricality" in Manet's painting with positive connotations.[18] Fried's book on Manet is the last in a trilogy. It began with *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1976) and continued with *Courbet's Realism* (1990). The first book focused on paintings whose subjects are typically depicted in an absorptive state in which, rendered as real people, they take no notice of the viewers, which conveys the credible impression that they are not posing. Fried spoke of the "supreme fiction" that there is no viewer. In this context, by contrast, the term "theatricality" stood for painting that turned to a viewer ostentatiously and therefore in a mannered and appeal-like way.[19] In his Courbet book, by contrast, he focused on the opposite, yet equally antitheatrical artistic strategy of integrating the viewers into the action depicted.

But Manet's painting, according to Fried, illustrated a form of "theatricality" based on a rejection of this alternative. In his view, however, there is no *single* term for understanding Manet's form of manifesting "theatricality"; instead, Fried offered a whole series of them: "intensity, instantaneousness, facingness, and strikingness (*the* key term throughout this book)."[20] Unlike Foucault, who in his Manet lecture focused on self-thematization of representational painting related to the painting-object, Fried

15 Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting* (see note 3), p. 79.
16 Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism; or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
17 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148–72, esp. p. 153.
18 Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (see note 16), p. 406.
19 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
20 Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (see note 16), p. 405.

in his art historical studies sets out from the work-viewer relationship, from how the viewers as "beholders" are affected. The perspectives of their analyses are poled differently. What Foucault says, or intends to say, about the work-viewer relationship (as he understands it) is simply that which the painting-object says about itself; specifically, in the way it enables the viewers to see (for example, through the relationship of visible and invisible) what role the painting-object assigns to them and what function this assignment has for the self-thematization of painting. What Fried says about the painting is a terminological understanding of a phenomenal modality of experience that the painting causes and makes possible. Foucault's approach and thematic focus of analysis includes the possibility that a painting-object announces that it has a recto and a verso. Fried's approach and thematic focus of analysis rules this out. Foucault's approach, by contrast, precludes the possibility that the back of the painting-object represents a (possible) *problem*. In the end, all that is problematic for him is painting's traditional dependence on representation. By learning to play with the painting-object, representational painting can distance itself from the mode of representational depiction. For Foucault, that results in the future perspective of painting playing with itself in a nonrepresentational manner with its own purely spatial properties. Fried, by contrast, includes the possibility that through the liberation from what was the support in painting, the abandonment of its support *function* claimed by Minimal Art, modalities of experience occur that should be seen as problematic.[21] But both Foucault and Fried are thus assessing as unproblematic the fact that the painting-object excludes its back from the presentation. For Foucault, this is merely an occasion for a game; for Fried, it is the guarantee that the painting-object does not mutate into theatrical "objecthood." The structural void that emerges when comparing the two analytical perspectives on the painting-object is therefore—on the side of experience—the impossibility of experiencing the fact of the exclusion of the back from the presentation as problematic (Fried) and—on the side of the painting-object—the impossibility of completely exposing in a painting its own actual support (Foucault). It remains all the more remarkable that both assume that in the evolution of modern or modernist art it tends to liberate determinations that were long connected to painting, whether positively in a play of purely spatial qualities (Foucault) or negatively in theatrical objecthood (Fried). One can thus infer not only that a corresponding pressure from a problem made itself felt, but also that rejecting painting as an art form cannot necessarily be considered the solution to the problem. It is thus conceivable that it cannot be primarily about getting rid of a problem, even though that is surely the most obvious impulse, but is also about presenting it as a problem in the "right" way, though this is possible only if it becomes evident that the way of presenting the problem is or can be affected as well.

21 In his essay "Art and Objecthood," Fried wrote in a note: "One way of describing this view might be to say that it draws something like a false inference from the fact that the increasingly explicit acknowledgement of the literal character of the support has been central to the development of modernist painting: namely, that literalness as such is an artistic value of supreme importance." Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (see note 17), p. 170, note 16.

The "right" way to present it therefore remains undetermined in a precarious way.

The relationship of Foucault's and Fried's different analytical perspectives is revealing in this respect. Fried developed his analyses against the backdrop of contemporaneous art criticism. With regard to *The Railway*, a critic asked the rhetorical question of whether it is a *tableau* or a double portrait, only to remark ironically that in the latter case, as far as the girl is concerned, it is a "portrait seen from the back." Fried explains: "[Ernest] Duvergier de Hauranne was being ironic, but in the context of the argument I have been developing the notion that the young girl's back *faces* the beholder is far from absurd."[22] Manet repeatedly produced compositions in which people look out of the picture in a way that inevitably conveys the impression that "they face the beholder," but for Fried that is merely an indication of a behavior of the painting, especially since this behavior is also evident when no one is looking out of the painting. The subtitle of his book—*The Face of Painting in the 1860s*—makes this obvious, but that cannot deny that "facingness" identifies a modality of experience whose name is derived from the people facing the viewers. That is all the more so because Fried felt obliged to place other terms alongside "facingness," especially "strikingness," which could also be used to characterize precisely such paintings by Manet in which no one is looking out of the picture; one thinks of *L'exécution de l'empereur Maximilien* (*The Execution of Emperor Maximilian*)—a painting that raises the question of what "strikingness" has to do with "facing death."

For Foucault, a painting is "a surface with two faces, a *verso* and a *recto*"; for Fried, merely "a surface with *one* face." Foucault could double *face* to *recto* and *verso*, yet not in the sense of a naive transfer of spatial positions from the people depicted in the painting to the painting-object, but rather as a metalinguistic operation manifest in the painting that legitimizes such a transfer qua retransfer under the assumption of a thematic shift from "face" to "facingness" and vice versa. For Fried, by contrast, the painting qua "face of painting" is granted a primacy that justifies the assertion that "the notion that the young girl's back *faces* the beholder is far from absurd."

In his discussion of Manet's painting *La Nymphe surprise* (*The Surprised Nymph*) (1861) in 1969, however, Fried himself came close to the view that the position of people in the painting has a rapport with the two-sided painting-object; it is even reasonable to assume that Foucault would have seen it as affirming his own observations and conclusions. Fried writes: "Despite her gaze, which is trained directly at the beholder, the fact that she is in profile, together with other facts—that there is no other figure in the final version of the painting . . . , that the *background too* is shown in profile as it were, that the Nymph herself seems to turn away from the beholder in an attempt to conceal her nakedness (even

22 Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (see note 16), p. 301.

her crossed leg matters here)—keep the painting as a whole from turning toward or facing us . . . . It is almost as though the *Surprised Nymph* turns its *side* to us."[23] Fried observes that Manet placed a pictorial motif and extant artifact in a rapport that enables the painting as object to adopt virtually the position of the motif. But Fried does not consider the possibility that there could be a reason to show the back of a painting. This is due to the "primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld" to which he refers.[24] In his eyes, Manet had "done all he could to underscore, in a sense to dramatize," this convention, yet without calling it into question. The gallery visitor is, for Fried, no "viewer," no "spectator," no "voyeur" but rather a "beholder."

Surprised Nymph is the first painting in which Manet developed an old master motif into an artistic statement of his own. Because this had far-reaching implications, art historians showed a particular interest in it. In 1967, Rosalind Krauss published an essay in which she emphasized that Manet distinguished himself from the tradition by ruling out any narrative embedding of the naked female figure (gradually, because this was not yet the case when the work was begun). As she explains, this has the effect of the painting assigning the role of an intruder to the viewer. Without having to state it explicitly, she thus saw it as calling into question the role of the viewer as "observer."[25] For if it is also clear that it is about operations in the field of the as-if, the painting does not affirm the presumption of innocence that the term "beholder" demands. Fried does not go into this, merely referring to Krauss's essay as "another view,"[26] and focuses his analysis of the as-if on the rapport of motif and painting-object. Precisely because he ignores the work-viewer relationship and avoids going into it, he comes close to Foucault's analytical approach here. Yet the rapport of motif and painting-object is conceivable only if the pictorial motif that forecloses the presumption of innocence of the "beholder," and the painter, in order to make evident that this announcement pertains to the painting-object itself, produces the rapport with the latter. But for Fried the "primordial convention," however it is dramatized, is clearly the guarantee that one cannot meaningfully ask about the guilt or innocence of the holder even in the field of the as-if; and for Foucault, the question of guilt or innocence plays such a minor role that the as-if becomes free to address playfully the material properties of the painting-object and the fact of the back not being presented.

Yet in the coda of his book, Fried goes a step further. Starting out from the observation that terms used by him (intensity, instantaneousness, facingness, and strikingness) apply not only to Manet's painting but also to that of his "cogenerationists" Henri Fantin-Latour, James McNeill Whistler, and Alphonse Legros, he explains: "Manet's response to the crisis, however, was more extreme than theirs. Not only did he systematically avoid or subvert absorptive or potentially absorptive motifs; he also deliberately

Édouard Manet, *The Surprised Nymph*, 1861
Oil on canvas, 144.5 × 112.5 cm, Museu Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires

23 Ibid., p. 480, note 96.
24 Ibid., p. 405.
25 Rosalind E. Krauss, "Manet's Nymph Surprised," *Burlington Magazine* 109, no. 776 (November 1967): pp. 622–27.
26 Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (see note 16), p. 480, note 96.

