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Painting Parisian Identity:
Place and Subjectivity in Fin-de-Siècle Art

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

In this thesis I provide analysis of several nineteenth-century artworks in order to elucidate the connections between place and identity as expressed in visual representations of Paris. I utilize Bakhtin's idea of the dialogical as a means of identifying multiple subject positions that might be accessed by particular individuals who live in socially constructed spaces specific to fin-de-siècle Paris. I discuss the construction of three performed identities unique to nineteenth-century Paris: the Flâneur, the bohemian, and the primitivist. In each chapter I will parse out the social construction of the spaces where these identities existed and were performed, and link those identities to their discursive functions as particular models of Parisian life. I will discuss the relationship of each representation of identity to Henri Lefebvre's concept of socially-produced space through analysis of the stylistic and compositional choices made by the artist. The visual artworks I discuss include Edouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, Vincent van Gogh's *The Outskirts of Paris*, *Night Café*, and *Café Terrace at Night*, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *Jane Avril* and *Divan Japonais*.

Introduction

Nineteenth-century Paris was a city literally and figuratively under construction. The physical restructuring of the city by Baron Haussmann corresponded to a precise moment in history when the rigid and unchanging hierarchical structure that dictated social standing in fin-de-siècle France was undermined. Recent economic prosperity created superficial shifts of title from, for example, “wage earner to small master or shop keeper” as new social classes such as the petite bourgeois emerged.¹ If the bourgeoisie were middle class striving upwards on the social ladder by controlling the means of production, the petite bourgeoisie navigated the marginal space between a fully middle-class identity and that of the lower working classes. This prosperity offered leisure time and some surplus income to individuals in the middle strata of the social hierarchy. By the mid-nineteenth century, clear social distinctions of bourgeois and peasant no longer existed in a simple and clearly marked form; furthermore, the outward marking of the identities was no longer clearly readable. This resulted in identity types that thrived on misleading exterior manifestations of social-class such as the *flâneur/flâneuse*, the bohemian, and the primitivist. These identities each flaunted the outward appearances of a class to which they did not belong; their ambiguity was made possible only in modernity where the emergence of the “mass” or “crowd” makes many of the social encounters of city life impersonal. If we consider Baudelaire’s depiction in *Paris Spleen*

¹ Geoffrey Crossick, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe, 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family, and Independence* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 78.

of the city as a giant theatre, the performance of these identities are more convincing as just that: performances.

Historically, social class was manifested outwardly; however, in fin-de-siècle France these outward distinctions of class were blurred. The

details that helped maintain the difference between social orders were being whittled down: literacy no longer set the fortunate few apart; like dress speech and manners grew (slowly) more similar; and patters of consumption moved a little closer. Social homogeneity was very far away...though some were already denouncing it as an alarming reality.²

Appearance was no longer indicative of social class; while remnants of the social hierarchy remained in place, the guise of mobility undermined the stability of the system. This created the opportunity for people to perform roles outside their social class with greater ease. The anxiety that this identity performance generates is a component of the spectacle as a product of the decadence of this era.

The reorganization of the city also created social spaces that reflected this new Parisian social makeup. These places were products of the “make-believe and uncertainty in modern life, especially in matters of social class”³ as it was linked to the idea of the spectacle. T.J. Clark, author of *The painting of modern life: Paris in the art of Manet and*

² Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1986), 5.

³ T.J. Clark, *The painting of modern life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 206

his followers notes that it is difficult to identify whether or not “Paris was any fuller than usual of people pretending to be better or worse off than their incomes allowed. But the business of their doing so was visible and glittering in a new way.”⁴ To understand these individuals who transgress their own social groups, it is necessary to look at the spaces that they occupied. Social position is tied to notions of place as it inherently includes and excludes people from certain places; therefore, the unique spaces frequented by individuals in nineteenth-century Paris become an important aspect of the construction of identities unique to the socio-cultural climate in the *fin de siècle*. Building upon the concept of anthropomorphized space as indicative of social relations, these performed identities embody the duality that German sociologist Georg Simmel described as inherent to his modern figure of the stranger. In his essay “The Stranger” (from *Soziologie*) Simmel writes

If wandering, considered as a state of detachment from every given point in space, is the conceptual opposite of attachment to any point, then the sociological form of “the stranger” presents the synthesis, as it were, of both these properties. (This is another indication that spatial relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men, but are also symbolic of those relationships.)⁵

The Flâneur/Flâneuse, the bohemian, and the primitivist are all strangers in the Simmelian sense. They are not an organic part of the social makeup of the spaces they

⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵ Georg Simmel, “The Stranger” in *Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, trans. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

inhabit and yet they shape and are shaped by the social practices in which they participate while occupying those spaces.

The subject of fin-de-siècle Paris and the emergence of modernist tendencies in art has been widely explored within the discourses of art history and cultural studies; however, the importance of painting, when linked to space-oriented social theory, in making certain subject positions accessible and understandable has been largely ignored. Even Walter Benjamin fails to identify painting as a “*primary* element in the reshaping of perception in the nineteenth century”⁶ in his extensive inventory of nineteenth-century Parisian life entitled *The Arcades Project*, written between 1927 and 1940. Benjamin notes, “With the increasing scope of communications systems, the significance of painting in imparting information is reduced.”⁷ I argue conversely that painting, freed from the constraints of realism by the invention of photography (one of the new systems of communicating visual imagery), offered viewers a means of identifying and decoding different notions of subjectivity while simultaneously communicating the way in which social relationships were inherently tied to modern spaces. Furthermore, recent scholarship mentions but does not fully elaborate upon the existence of performed identities (Flâneur/flâneuse, bohemian, and primitive) in nineteenth-century painting. Although scholars recognize that these identities were acknowledged by nineteenth-century intellectuals as inherent parts of the development of a modern city, they fail to provide evidence of how these subject positions were accessed by individuals in the fin de siècle. This research explores in greater detail the interrelationship between these

⁶ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 20.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 151.

constructions of identity and the shaping of a modern Parisian identity through analysis of the connection between artist, identity, and representations of place in visual art.

The intent of this research is to locate specific instances where identities unique to the nineteenth-century Parisian social fabric are manifested in socially-produced spaces through analysis of several paintings. The performed identities that this research engages with are the Flâneur/flâneuse, the bohemian, and the primitivist. Each identity is discussed with reference to a primary text or texts, all pieces of nineteenth-century artwork, and the way that the discourses surrounding identity are mobilized within the narrative that each image or set of images presents. These artworks all elucidate the connections between performed identities, social spaces, and visual representations unique to fin-de-siècle Paris.

In order to understand how the discourses of modern identity are mobilized and subject positions are made available to contemporary viewers, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia (which he identifies within the structure of the literary novel) will be extrapolated and applied to visual art. Heteroglossia is defined as

a fundamental concept most clearly defined in Bakhtin's 'Discourse in the Novel' (written 1934-5). The term refers to "the basic condition governing the production of meaning in all discourse. It asserts the way in which *context* defines the meaning of utterances which are heteroglot in so far as they put in play a multiplicity of social voices and their individual expressions. A single

voice may give the impression of unity and closure, but the utterance is constantly (and to some extent unconsciously) producing a plentitude of meanings, which stem from the social interaction (dialogue).”⁸

Bakhtinian linguistics can only be applied to the visual arts when the overall construction of the viewing subject is taken into consideration.

French sociologist Henri Lefebvre’s concept of social space, as discussed in his book *The Production of Space*, is employed as a theoretical model for understanding how these identities both inform and are informed by socially-produced spaces of Paris and the Parisian periphery. Lefebvre contends that space is a social product that perpetuates hegemony, i.e., power, dominance, control:

The more so in view of the further claim that the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those would make use of it.⁹

The places in fin-de-siècle Paris addressed in this research are all demonstrative of the way in which authoritative powers create spaces with a specific intentionality, to perpetuate hegemonic ideology, but ultimately “fail to master it completely.”¹⁰ As

⁸ Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 40.

⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

Lefebvre states, “the very agency that has forced spatial reality towards a sort of uncontrollable autonomy now strives to run it into the ground, then shackle and enslave it.”¹¹

One of Lefebvre’s contentions in *The Production of Space* is that urban planning fails to manifest new space. Instead, the construction and organization of new space is typically built on older pre-existing plans that are manifestations of outdated ideological practices. So while the language and ideology change in new urban existences, new spaces are not manifested. In the case of nineteenth-century Paris, Haussmann physically restructures the underlying geographic model of the city and thereby new physical space is manifested. These new places of fin-de-siècle Parisian existence are the product of modern and largely urban ideologies that accompany Haussmann’s physical restructuring and reorganization of Paris and the expansion of the city into the zones previously on the periphery.

Lefebvre states that “representational spaces” are “passively experienced” as a “space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.”¹² Representational spaces are therefore mapped over physical space and thereby make “symbolic use of its objects.”¹³ The artworks used for analysis in this research all attempt to depict the representational spaces of nineteenth-century Paris as a space lived through images and symbols which ultimately reveal various notions of subjectivity. For example, it is only with the creation of public spaces where the spectacle and the “mass” could emerge that an identity like the Flâneur could exist. Likewise, only when Paris has physically pushed

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹² Ibid., 39.

¹³ Ibid., 39.

its boundaries outward can marginal identities such as the bohemian be situated in the physical margins of the city tethered to Paris and somehow separate from it. And finally, it is only when a new conceptualization of the city, one that derives its ideological construction from a diametrical opposition to the country, emerges through Haussmann's new urban design that the liminal state of primitivism can be located as the Other which exists within France but outside the boundaries of the city.

The mapping of socially-produced spaces onto actual geographic locations follows a form of core-periphery relations where the "core" is equated with the bourgeois hegemony established by Haussmann inside the city proper and the "periphery" is at first the marginal spaces on the edge of the city and later pushed to the southernmost areas of France. The restructuring of the city created the opportunity to perpetuate a type of bourgeois hegemony that utilized ideological constructs of the social-class system to create spaces in the city proper whose discursive function is to maintain hegemonic control. Even within these spaces where finances and appearance dictate a sense of belonging, the spaces themselves manifest bourgeois anxiety through their ability to produce the "mass" and "spectacle." This bourgeois hegemonic control is denied and reaffirmed in places on the edges of the city in the social spaces of Montmartre. Finally the ideological constructs of modern urban existence are called into question when the former margins become enveloped into Paris and the concept of the uncivilized periphery is pushed to the southern borders of France.

Lefebvre clearly states that “an already produced space can be decoded, can be read. Such a space implies a process of signification.”¹⁴ He further contends that space is a social construction whose discursive function both creates and is created by the social practices that take place within it. Subjectivity is thereby informed by space in so much that “interested ‘subjects’, as members of a particular society, would have acceded by this means at once to *their* space and to their status as ‘subjects’, acting within that space and (in the broadest sense of the word) comprehending it.”¹⁵ This highlights a type of place-informed subjectivity that can be uncovered through analysis of these socially produced spaces. Furthermore, Lefebvre notes that each society produces “special places” where “self-presentation” and “self representation” are made possible.¹⁶ Rather than the consecrated sites that Lefebvre categorizes as strictly religious or political, “special places” in nineteenth-century Paris were the cafés, cabarets, and music halls which emerge as unique manifestations of modern Parisian existence.

Each chapter of this research explores a particular identity “type” relatively unique to nineteenth-century Parisian society and links those identities to an equally unique Parisian place where that identity is informed and performed. In each case the artists chosen also embody these identities to some degree in their own lives, making the works they created a product of their own subjectivity as well. Chapter One focuses on Edouard Manet and the construction of the Flâneur/flâneuse; Chapter Two focuses on Toulouse-Lautrec and the self-conscious construction of an anti-bourgeois bohemian identity; and Chapter Three situates Vincent van Gogh as an artist torn between the

¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

dichotomy of country and city, ultimately performing as a primitivist and escaping to southern France.

The first chapter explores identity construction and performance that transgresses the boundaries of social class and gender through the figure of the Flâneur (feminine flâneuse). In this chapter a close reading of Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* reveals the heteroglossia of the scene which is made possible not only by Manet's stylistic handling of the image, but also, and more importantly, by his representation of space. Connected to this analysis is the actual social space of the Folies-Bergère and the way in which the physical construction of the space allows for Manet's heteroglossic scene to visually unfold. The act of Flânerie is situated as the central component of this painting; however, the question of who can perform Flânerie is considered with regard to the gendered politics of the era.

The second chapter will investigate the connection between bourgeois and bohemian identities through analysis of Toulouse-Lautrec's lithograph posters that advertised performers at two different venues. These posters illustrate the way that Lautrec navigates the interconnectivity between bourgeois and bohemian through a careful construction of varying subjectivities for the bohemian performer. Each poster utilizes different compositional techniques in order to disseminate ideas about the relationship between bourgeois and bohemian according to the location of the venue in the city or on the city's periphery.

The third and final chapter explores Vincent van Gogh's adaptation of primitivism in the final years of his life and the way in which Paris infiltrated even those

provinces considered pure and untouched. The relational view of primitivism that relies on a binary opposition to the civilized is a model widely used in critical analysis of primitivist works. In this example Paris offers a model of civilized society with its opposite Other defined outside the boundaries of the city. It seems that the desire to leave Paris and embrace a primitive identity is the ultimate paradox of modern Parisian identity: one must leave Paris to be truly Parisian. This necessity highlights the need for modern artists to construct the Other, be it civilized or primitive, against which their own identity might be constituted. Van Gogh provides an interesting example of an artist who navigated the flux between the binary opposition of civilized and primitive cultures. A close reading of van Gogh's *The Outskirts of Paris*, painted in the fall of 1886, illustrates the marginal space of the *banlieue* as a site of a particular type of urban peasantry. This sharply contrasts van Gogh's Arlesian depictions of cafés in *Night Café* and *Café Terrace at Night* where van Gogh situates scenes of urban decadence and potential sites of urban spectacle within the supposedly primitive. Through a close examination of these works the binary contradiction central to the construction of a primitivist identity is revealed: there are moments when the polarity of country and city collapse and the two become indistinguishable. It is within these paintings, which reveal the intermingling of city and country, that van Gogh's own subjectivity as a product of two contradictory impulses is uncovered. It is through van Gogh's exploration of place, specifically the café, that this duality surfaces.

My overarching goal is to locate the way in which visual art negotiates and makes available identities which are unique to fin-de-siècle Paris and to illustrate the way those identities inform and are informed by the spaces they occupy. The restructuring of the

city created spaces that were largely socially constructed and those spaces allow for unique identities that in previous spatial constructions could not exist. Furthermore, these identities are informed by the spaces they occupy and also become an integral part of the unique socio-cultural makeup of modern Paris, thereby also participating in the construction and representation of the same spaces that enable their existence. Rather than reiterating previous notions of subjectivity in painting, my research engages with the interconnectivity between place-oriented social theory, Bakhtinian linguistics, the artists' own lived experiences, and the artworks they produce, situating the artist as both observer and participant in the scenes that they created.

Chapter One: Notions of Subjectivity in Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*

The Haussmanization of Paris created a myriad of new modern establishments such as dance halls and cafés-concerts where the ambiguous identities of modernity might be practiced, performed, and made visible. Of particular importance to the city is the identity of the flâneur, which relies on the crowded streets and venues unique to modern urban settings for both observation and incognito. It is within these places, with their atmosphere of spectacle and ambiguity, that the flâneur finds his home. Baudelaire discusses the identity of the nineteenth-century flâneur in his 1863 essay *The Painter of Modern Life*. In this essay, Baudelaire described the artist as a particular type of flâneur who goes beyond the role of passive observation. Flânerie, the act of being a flâneur, was in Baudelaire's conception an art itself— and the artist a particular type of flâneur who was able to meld flânerie with his craft, be it poetry or visual art. Baudelaire defines the flâneur as a voyeur:

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to

feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.¹⁷

From this description the importance of modern places as the flâneur's object for observation is made evident. The places where crowds might be observed were plentiful in nineteenth-century Paris. A census completed in the late 1880s confirmed 30,000 cafés in Paris alone.¹⁸ Cafés, cabarets, dance halls, and even the crowded avenues were popular places of Parisian leisure activity where the "passionate spectator" might practice the art of observation. Baudelaire's own description highlights the importance of place in informing this identity. Baudelaire also made careful note of how the flâneur should remain at the center of activity while also maintaining an ambiguous invisibility. The flâneur must be a man "at the center of the world" and yet hidden from it. He goes on to emphasize the importance of this invisibility, stating that the flâneur "everywhere rejoices in his *incognito*."¹⁹ Therefore, the choice of place becomes an important part of maintaining the invisibility of one's identity as a flâneur. It is only in the crowd amongst the spectacle of modern Paris that the flâneur can practice his art.

Also important to the flâneur's identity is the ambiguity of his class. Baudelaire describes him as a gentleman, which immediately places the flâneur within a particular social class in fin-de-siècle Paris; however, Baudelaire also alludes to the fact that

¹⁷ Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life*. Edited by Jonathan Mayne. Translated by Jonathan Mayne. (Greenwich, Connecticut: Phaidon Publishers Inc, 1964), 9.

¹⁸ Hine, Scott W. "The World of the Paris Café. Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914." (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

¹⁹ Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life*. Edited by Jonathan Mayne. Translated by Jonathan Mayne. (Greenwich, Connecticut: Phaidon Publishers Inc, 1964), 9. Emphasis added.

finances are of little concern to the true flâneur. The potential possibility of performing a “gentleman’s” status and acting outside one’s class is a source of bourgeois anxiety. While the “true flâneur” by Baudelaire’s definition has no need to concern himself with finances, the act of Flânerie could be performed by anyone with a modest income and the ability to dress and act like a bourgeois gentleman. Ultimately this raises the possibility that the social class of the flâneur was not fixed; instead, the identity of the flâneur was potentially déclassé. He dressed as a bourgeois gentleman but the true status of his social class was unknown. Manet provides an interesting example of an artist who fits Baudelaire’s definition of a flâneur. In his 1882 painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (see appendix A) Manet’s own subjectivity as a flâneur-artist is revealed. I argue that Eduard Manet’s last painting, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882), addresses the ambiguity of identity in the fin de siècle and provides visual representation of Manet’s efforts to constitute his own subjectivity as a flâneur. Furthermore, in constituting this identity for himself, he simultaneously makes Baudelaire’s description of the flâneur an identity through which modern Parisians might understand and constitute their own subjectivity. I will also provide an alternate reading on this painting, one that goes against the grain of feminist writing to identify the presence of a female flâneur, the flâneuse in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, thereby positing the possibility that this subject position was not exclusively male as feminist scholars Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock contend.

The subjectivity of the flâneur relies heavily on the concepts of place and spectacle for its definition.²⁰ There are various ways in which the concept of place and

²⁰ It is important to note that while there are circles of thought that generate significant differences between spaces and places, I have used the terms interchangeably here and do not draw on the significant differences except that a place is a space given meaning.

space might be defined. For the purposes of understanding how social spaces/places like the Folies-Bergère operate within nineteenth-century Parisian society, I find a phenomenological definition of the concept of place is most useful.²¹ Phenomenology provides a definition of place based on experience as interpreted through cultural texts, such as Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. If the most common definition of place is a "meaningful location,"²² phenomenology describes the means by which this meaning is constructed. In using phenomenology, I do not intend to deny the geographic definition of place as a particular location but rather to reassert that the geographic position is a marker of a particular sensory and cultural experience unique to the subjectivity of its inhabitants. This is of particular importance in understanding the way in which places like the Folies-Bergère enable the development of ambiguous identities such as the flâneur. I also draw upon Henri Lefebvre's concept of social space. Lefebvre characterizes urban space as a social product that serves to perpetuate hegemonic ideology but can also "fail to master it completely."²³ The Folies-Bergère is a prime example of a social space that fails to perpetuate the hegemonic order adequately.

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère provides a visual representation of one of the many Parisian places where the crowd as spectacle would be found. Manet makes this crowd plainly visible in the reflection of the mirror behind the barmaid. The very name of the

²¹ Cresswell, Tim. *Place, A Short Introduction*. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 22. Tim Cresswell defines phenomenology as such: "The philosophy of phenomenology was developed by Frans Brentano and Edmund Husserl in the nineteenth century and its central concern is with what philosophers call 'intentionality.' The word intentionality refers to the 'aboutness' of human consciousness. That is to say we cannot (the phenomenologist would argue) be conscious without being *conscious of something*. Consciousness constructs a relation between the self and the world."

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

establishment, the *Folies-Bergère*, identifies in its definition the role the crowd will play in the development of its meaning as a place. The word *folie* was an eighteenth-century term used to describe “an open-air place where Parisians could drink or dance while being entertained.”²⁴ While the Folies-Bergère originated as a department store with a *salle des spectacles* in the back, in less than ten years the presence of the crowd essentially transformed the store into what might best be described as a dance hall and theatre.²⁵ Use of the word *folie* as referenced by its eighteenth-century definition was undoubtedly meant to convey the idea of a bourgeois establishment: one where identity was not questionable and the social-class hierarchy was firmly fixed. This is further supported by the physical location of the Folies-Bergère just above the “grands boulevards” in the city proper rather than on periphery of the city where many of the seedier establishments such as the Moulin Rouge were located.

In its original state as a department store, the Folies-Bergère was a representation of developing Parisian commerce and a testament to Haussmann’s reorganization of the city. Clark attributes the development of similar entertainment venues, *cafés-concerts*, to the Haussmannization of Paris; however Haussmann seems to have grossly misidentified the clientele who would frequent these places.²⁶ It is in this initial construction and organization of the Folies-Bergère that Lefebvre’s concept of social space as a device that perpetuates and maintains hegemonic ideology is conceptualized. The Folies-Bergère

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶ T.J. Clark notes that the *cafés-concert* is a product of Haussmann’s restructuring of the city, but was largely meant to be a place where the working classes enjoyed leisure separate from the upper classes. The Folies-Bergère is not exactly a *cafés-concert*, but the definitions of these places are somewhat fluid and overlap quite frequently. I assert here that in the same way the government gradually lost regulation over the *cafés-concerts*, regulation over spaces of commerce was also lost, and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque results as a desire for the spectacle.

imposed a minimum two-franc cover charge hoping to ensure the lower classes were excluded from a place of supposed bourgeois entertainment. But shifting markers of identity combined with the emergence of the petit-bourgeoisie made identifying patrons of true bourgeois status more difficult than anticipated. Robert Herbert acknowledges that “it is true that a student, sales clerk, or prostitute could come to the Folies-Bergère, but only by *dressing up* and squandering a small fortune.”²⁷ A petit-bourgeois existence made small fortunes more accessible and the addition of ambiguous imposter identities like the flâneur made the outward signifiers of social class fallible. Ultimately the Folies-Bergère fails to “master completely”²⁸ the hegemonic ideology upon which it was organized.

The popularity of the Folies-Bergère and the inevitable mixing of social classes due to the possibility of ‘imposter identities’ create a venue that exhibits Bakhtin’s ideas of the carnivalesque. For Bakhtin the carnival celebrates the grotesque, and implies the elimination or inversion of the social order, making “familiar relations strange.”²⁹ Important to the formation of the mass public, the carnivalesque denies the concept of “closed-off bodies” and “isolated psyches in bourgeois individualism.”³⁰ The carnival is “not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it”³¹ In the mid-nineteenth century this statement could be applied to Parisian society as a whole. Their insatiable hunger for the

²⁷ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 80. Emphasis added

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

²⁹ Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 89.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

³¹ Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Rabelais and His World." In *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, by Pam Morris, 194-244. (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1994), 198.

spectacle takes over as a dominating type of consumerism where the mass public becomes its own spectacle.

In scenes like Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, the crowd is the spectacle as seen by the flâneur. The Folies-Bergère was transformed by the Parisian love of the spectacle into a lively and renowned entertainment venue. Regulation of spaces like the Folies-Bergère proved a largely impossible task, even with high-priced cover charges and over priced drinks. This was exacerbated in the case of the Folies-Bergère when the fixed theatre seating was reorganized by new owner Léon Sarti in 1871. His addition of promenades, open café-style seating, and bars on multiple levels of the venue increased the mobility and intermingling of the patrons and by extension social classes, creating the crowd as a mass spectacle as reflected in the mirror in Manet's painting.³²

The ambiguity of identities such as the flâneur, who dressed as a bourgeois gentleman but whose true class status was unknown, found a perfect home amongst the mobility of this crowd. It is within this mobility and intermingling that the flâneur can maintain his incognito; he blends in seamlessly, but as Baudelaire made clear he is most certainly more than just another figure in the crowd; his invisibility and the possessive quality of his gaze afford him a certain sense of power and status. It is this moment of intermingling and mobility that Manet takes as his setting in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. His own identity as flâneur is carefully defined and described within the heteroglossia of his scene. The Bakhtinian idea of the dialogical provides a useful theoretical model for identifying the various "voices" made apparent in Manet's painting and the way that

³² Ibid., 80.

Manet utilizes these voices to distinguish his own subject position as flâneur.

Heteroglossia in the Bakhtinian sense is best defined as

the basic condition governing the production of meaning in all discourse. It asserts the way in which *context* defines the meaning of utterances which are heteroglot in so far as they put in play a multiplicity of social voices and their individual expressions. A single voice may give the impression of unity and closure, but the utterance is constantly (and to some extent unconsciously) producing a plenitude of meanings, which stem from the social interaction (dialogue).³³

Manet makes evident three main subject positions in this painting: the crowd, the barmaid, and the reflected couple in the mirror.³⁴

The mirror is perhaps the most debated element in Manet's painting and it plays a pivotal role in identifying and defining the various subject positions within the painting. A critique of the painting published in an 1881 edition of *L'Illustration* places a great deal of emphasis on the mirror and its importance to the understanding, and misunderstanding, of the painting:

But what strikes us first of all is that this famous mirror, indispensable to an understanding of all these reflections and perspectives does not exist: did Monsieur Manet not know how to

³³ Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 40.

³⁴ In extrapolating Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic from literature to an application in the visual arts I will refrain from identifying voices and refer to the people and/or objects as subject positions, each of which possess a particular voice but are not voices in themselves.

do it, or did he find an *impression* of it to be enough? We shall refrain from answering this question; but let us simply note this fact, that all of the picture takes place in a mirror, and there is no mirror. As to the incorrectness of the drawing, as to the absolute inadequacy of the form of the woman, who is, after all the only person shown, as to *the lack of correspondence between the reflected objects and their images*, we shall not insist on these things.³⁵

To some extent this critic is correct. Much of the painting's meaning is created in and through the presence of this mirror; however, this critic fails to address what I believe is the real importance of the mirror as a method of decoding the painting's meaning by making visible the heteroglossia of Manet's composition. Instead the critic insists that the woman is not only the subject of the painting, but "the only person shown," implying a monoglossic reading of the painting, which seems to have pervaded even into contemporary analysis. The critic quoted above focused on Manet's painterly handling of the reflective surface of the mirror, which from a technical standpoint can be reduced to the bluish white smudges over certain areas of the reflected image and the improper angle of the reflection. When he says "there is no mirror," it is Manet's handling of this reflection and its position that disallows the mirror from its true mimetic function. The reflective surface of the mirror is not rendered naturalistically and the objects it reflects are inaccurate. Nevertheless, the very presence of objects on the bar in the mirror's

³⁵ Clark, T.J. *The painting of modern life. Paris in the art of Manet and his followers*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 240. Quoted from Clark's translation. Emphasis added.

reflection makes it impossible to deny the actual physical presence of the mirror; thus, what Manet created was indeed a reflection, albeit flattened and not entirely accurate in the naturalistic sense. Manet was a skilled painter capable of the highest forms of imitative art; therefore, one must assume he created the reflection in this manner intentionally.

The mirror in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is an essential compositional element for identifying and characterizing the crowd and its relationship to the artist's identity as flâneur. The mirror aides in solidifying the place identification of the Folies-Bergère as a gathering place of large masses of people appropriate for flânerie; it performs this function as any mirror would by guaranteeing the presence of its referent—in this case the crowd. It is within this function that Manet is able to first reduce the crowd into a singular object fit for the flâneur's observation. The people in their *actual* existence are reduced by the reflective surface of the mirror into one visual plane, one singular subjective position: the mass, and are thereby presented as the object of the flâneur's gaze. The same effect could not have been achieved by simply painting a crowd—the mirror is the object which transforms the individuals into one object. Manet furthers this effect by painting the reflected crowd as an almost horror vacui, a confused and disorganized sea of top hats represented by repeated black rectangular brush strokes that loosen into smudges. This places emphasis on the size and potential mobility of the crowd, elevating it to the status of modern spectacle.

The actual spectacle, the entertainment on stage at the Folies-Bergère, Manet reduces to the two dangling legs of the trapeze artist pictured in the upper left hand corner. Manet strengthens the association of the crowd as spectacle by placing the trapeze

artist on the same visual plane as the crowd, flattening and compressing the depth of the actual space into the shallow reflection in the mirror. This draws upon Bakhtin's idea of the carnival as spectacle, where the distinction between actors and spectators does not exist: the carnival is "not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it."³⁶ To further the visual compression of space, Manet, at times, disregards figure ground relationships and the rules of linear perspective entirely. This is most noticeable in the upper left corner where the white light that should be a reflection on the mirror's surface is tucked behind the pillar of the reflected image. Manet handles all the figures loosely, creating soft edges with a multitude of brush marks that blend together easily. There is very little contrast in color, making individuals within the crowd difficult to distinguish beyond the first row of the balcony. The bright circular lights along the back wall do not create any suggestions of shadow, flattening them into the pillars upon which they are hung. The lack of shadows prevents further differentiation in the figures of the crowd, a visual characterization of the impersonal interactions that exemplify the modern urban experience.

The entire background is, as the critic proclaimed, "an *impression*."³⁷ It is rendered to capture a view of the crowd as one mass, not as a realistic grouping of separate individuals. The apparent lack of physical space between the figures coupled with the lack of adequate negative space in the mirror's portion of the composition further aid in the compression of the visual plane into one subject position and prevent the individuation of the figures. This artistic rendering of this reflection allows the

³⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Rabelais and His World." In *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, by Pam Morris, 194-244. (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1994), 198.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

subjectivity of the flâneur to be read as the dominant gaze of the artist who creates the composition as an aloof but engaged observer. Manet's handling of depth within the reflection is a key factor in understanding his subjectivity as flâneur and his subsequent relationship to the crowd. The objectification and compression of the crowd into a reflection operate as a way of separating oneself from the crowd, yet the presence of the crowd as a reflection immediately implies a position within it. This is a clear visual allusion to Baudelaire's description of the flâneur as a figure "at the center of the world,"³⁸ yet distinctly separate as an observer of the spectacle it provides.

Most critical interpretations of the painting address the barmaid and the woman reflected in the mirror as one figure according to the discourses that governed nineteenth-century gender roles. Women who enter the public sphere, especially those unaccompanied by a bourgeois male chaperone figure, were largely labeled as disreputable. The barmaid's chosen vocation within the public sphere raises the question of her potential identity as a prostitute. It is true that the Folies-Bergère was one of many places in Paris where the female body was commodified under the guise of food and drink; however, I believe that Manet offers the viewer signs that clearly eliminate this barmaid from the potential role as prostitute and disassociate her from the reflection in the mirror. Furthermore, I assert that close analysis shows that this woman is a flâneuse. A surface reading of the painting confirms that the barmaid, separate from her assumed reflection in the mirror, offers no overt symbols of her sexuality as a commodity. Her modest yet fashionable dress does not betray the status of a lowly prostitute; likewise that

³⁸ Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life*. Edited by Jonathan Mayne. Translated by Jonathan Mayne. (Greenwich, Connecticut: Phaidon Publishers Inc, 1964), 9.

same modesty reveals the impossibility of her dressing in the fashion of a courtesan. In *The Painting of Modern Life* T.J. Clark offers this description of the barmaid:

It is the face of fashion, first of all, made up to agree with others quite like it, the hair just hiding the eyebrows and leaving the ears free, the cheeks pale with powder, the lips not overdone this season, the pearls just the right size. Fashion is a good and necessary disguise: it is hard to be sure of anything else about the barmaid, in particular what class she might belong to. She does not seem, as the critics hinted in the choice of language in 1882, to be firmly part of the bourgeoisie; and that fact is the key to her modernity.³⁹

This description highlights her fashionable appearance and the impossibility of determining her social class based on that appearance.

Historians and critics who have attempted to confirm her identity as a prostitute consider the woman in the mirror as a reflection of the barmaid despite the visual inaccuracies in their relative positions. They argue that this supposed reflection, a sort of alter ego, takes on a flirtatious and inviting stance indicated by her body leaning into the conversation with the gentleman at the counter. However, the actual barmaid, unlike her reflection, which also cannot truly be *her* reflection due to its placement, maintains distance. Her stance is upright and fully contained within the narrow space between the mirror and the bar. She does not

³⁹ Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the art of Manet and his followers.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 253.

offer signs of flirtation in her expression. Art historian Robert Herbert suggests that barmaids like the one Manet painted “lived less conventional lives than a proper bourgeoisie,” which may have included affairs and trysts, but “between this and prostitution there is an enormous gap.”⁴⁰

In order to consider other potential interpretations of the barmaid’s position, besides those that strictly commodify her body, it is important to consider ways that women might access the public sphere as autonomous figures capable of Flânerie. In his article “Women in public: the display of femininity in the parks of Paris” Greg Thomas notes the obvious flâneuristic viewpoint of Manet’s Painting *Concert in the Tuileries* (see appendix A) and argues that in addition to the painted references to male flâneurs in the audience the women pictured are likened to Manet’s own figure in the painting as they

return the viewer’s gaze with inscrutable self possession; like Manet, they consume the spectacle around them, including the concert that we assume is taking place behind the viewer; and their similar dresses, bonnets, and poses suggest something of a feminine equivalent to the men’s *habit noir* – the replication of a standardized bourgeois type of fashionable costume and comportment.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 80.

⁴¹ Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, public space, and visual culture in nineteenth-century Paris*. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 39.

Thomas argues that “point for point, the women act as feminine equivalents to the flâneur.”⁴² Thomas’ interpretation of the women in this painting posits the possibility that Manet, as a flâneur himself, also recognized the potential of his own feminine equivalent, the flâneuse. Feminist scholar Janet Wolff in “Gender and the haunting of cities” argues that “The *flâneur*, however is necessarily male. The privilege of passing unnoticed in the city...was not accorded to women, whose presence on the streets would certainly be noticed.”⁴³ Yet, as Thomas has shown, not only could women access public spaces, but also that the dominant gaze of the flâneur was attainable by women in fin-de-siècle Paris.⁴⁴ There is truth in Wolff’s contentions. It was decidedly difficult for a woman to navigate the streets of Paris alone and therefore a direct female equivalent of the male flâneur is often difficult to locate in visual arts or literature; however, as Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough have pointed out in *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, “there were indeed women active in the public realm.”⁴⁵

Important to Manet’s representation in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is the woman’s position behind the bar. The woman in Manet’s painting is able to access the public realm through her position as a barmaid. It is imperative that the viewer notes Manet’s distinction between the barmaid and her reflection. It is in the subtle differences he renders that a reading of this woman as something other than a prostitute occurs.

⁴² Ibid., 39.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ Greg M. Thomas argues this point in his essay “Women in public: the display of femininity in the parks of Paris.” Aruna D’Souza also discusses the prevalence of Impressionist paintings that picture women in department stores in fin-de-siècle France in her essay “Impressionism and the Department Store.” Both essays highlight the fact that there were certainly public spaces where women had access and even power because of their gender, not in spite of it.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

Asserting the idea of artistic intentionality, it appears obvious that while capable of painting a mirrored reflection accurately, Manet has made a *choice* to create the reflection in this manner. The reflected figure is not only positioned incorrectly, she is slightly more plump, her hair a bit disheveled, and her body language flirtatious. These differences operate to distance and disassociate the actual barmaid from the reflection and from the potential status that reflection might imply.

This barmaid seems to hold an entirely different position for Manet. He paints her figure with the greatest amount of control and clarity of any subject in the painting. The edges of her black dress are delineated with some care to make her stand apart from the reflection in the mirror. Her face is given a great deal of detail compared to other objects in the painting such as the blotchy suggestion of a flower corsage. It is in her “impassive gaze”⁴⁶ so carefully painted that Manet allows her to embody the presence of the flâneuse. Her emotional disengagement is made visible by Manet’s careful rendering. Clark describes her gaze as “a special one: public, outward, ‘blasé’ in Simmel’s sense, impassive, not bored, not tired, not disdainful . . . Expression is its enemy.”⁴⁷ Clark states that any expression would reveal her true class identity; I posit the idea that, additionally, this lack of expression is the viewer’s key to decoding her ambiguous identity as a flâneuse.

Considering again Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogical, the barmaid appears to be the subject closest to the artist’s own voice. Manet carefully composes her stature to make

⁴⁶ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 80.

⁴⁷ Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the art of Manet and his followers*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 253.

evident her intentions of distancing herself from the crowd and potential clientele at the bar. The painted marble slab of the bar reinforces that distance through its physical presence as the bottommost border of Manet's image. Manet constructs the reality of the scene at a direct perpendicular to the viewer; thus, by encompassing the entire bottom edge of the painting with a thick grey horizontal rectangle, the counter acts as a physical and visual blockage preventing the viewer and patrons from encroaching on the narrow space that the barmaid occupies. Her placement behind the bar is also essential because women did not have the same access as men to Parisian public spaces, limiting the potential existence of the flâneuse⁴⁸. However, flânerie from her position behind the bar affords her the power of observation from the relative invisibility of her occupation. The role of barmaid is one route of access into the public sphere for nineteenth-century women and one of the only ways Manet could identify her as flâneuse without condemning her to the ranks of a fallen woman. The inclusion of the counter at this position makes it one of the objects in the painting that enables her flânerie by affording her a position of aloofness amidst the crowd. The mirror is the other object which Manet includes as evidence of her true identity. It is of central importance to decoding her role as flâneuse and the relationship of her figure to the artist's own subjectivity. The mirror must be positioned behind her because the reflection of the crowd in the mirror offers

⁴⁸ A great deal of speculation exists surrounding the potential presence of the flâneuse given the gendered discourse of public and private spaces in the nineteenth century, which provided a public/male and private/female sphere. Postmodern feminist critics like Janet Wolff claimed that the flâneur must be gendered male because anonymous streetwalking was an activity inaccessible to women. This maintains the gendered division of public and private as well as Baudelaire's initial description of the flâneur as male. The plausibility of her position as a flâneuse is supported by more recent critical inquiries which disagree with theories of inaccessibility based on public versus private spheres. Elizabeth Wilson writes against this divisionist thinking in her book *The Sphinx in the City*, maintaining that women "survived and flourished in the interstices of the city" by "negotiating the contradictions of the city in their own particular way."

clues to the direction of the barmaid's gaze. Her eyes do not meet that of the viewer's; instead, it is the crowd that she appears to be watching. The mirror hints at her position as an observer, making the object of her gaze apparent in its reflection while simultaneously acting as a subtle clue to her true identity as a flâneuse.

The mirror also offers the reflected version of *a* woman in conversation with a patron at the bar.⁴⁹ Compared to the figure of the barmaid these figures are painted without much detail. The intricate lace of the barmaid's collar and sleeve cuffs is noticeably absent from the white square that represents the lace cuff of her sleeve in the reflection. Manet's handling of the man's face provides a sharp contrast to the level of detail present in the barmaid's face, which allows interpretation of the quality and directionality of her gaze. The treatment of details in these two figures, in light of this contrast, suggests what Bakhtin referred to as the "parodic and ironic accents of the author."⁵⁰ Applying the Bakhtinian dialogical model, these figures provide a voice distanced from the artist's own but whose poor imitation serves to highlight that distance and thus reassert the artist's subjectivity. The man Manet paints in the reflection is clearly interacting with certain aspects of modernity, particularly the commodification of the female body, which Manet makes evident in the contrastingly coy pose of the reflected woman in the mirror. This man in the reflection is decidedly not the detached observer Baudelaire describes as the flâneur. His penetrating gaze is represented by Manet as two dark black smudges that clearly reveal his intentions and forces the viewer to consider the

⁴⁹ I use "a" woman as I am drawing a separation between the actual barmaid and her assumed reflection as different voices in Manet's heteroglossic scene.

⁵⁰ Lodge, David. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. (New York: Longman, 1988), 127.

reflected woman's position as a potential commodity herself.⁵¹ Her position in this reflected interaction is sharply contrasted by Manet in his depiction of the actual barmaid who, through her positioning and the absence of any sign of this male in the foreground, is able to maintain her autonomy.

The interaction between these two figures is the great mystery of this painting because it is the most obvious referent of the misplaced angle Manet chose for the mirror. The gold frame seen behind the barmaid is painted as a straight horizontal line which implies the same perpendicular positioning to the viewer as the bar counter. In order to make the reflected image plausible, the entire scene would require shifting. In other words, the mirror's reflection is painted at a completely different angle than the actual objects inhabiting the foreground of the painting. This draws attention to the reflection as more than a mere reflection and allows for a reading of the figural group at the far right as symbolic rather than imitative. It first offers the viewer a visual contrast of the role assumed by the barmaid as the main subject of the image and the voice that manifests as the artist's. On another level this positioning of the mirror forces the viewer to evaluate his or her role according to the compositional irregularities and impossible reality the painting presents. Herbert suggests that the man reflected in the mirror becomes "our second self" and that "his disembodied image seems to stand for a male client's hidden thoughts when facing such an attractive woman."⁵² I believe that Manet offers the mirror at this position to distance himself and the viewer from the type of interaction the mirror implies. If we assume the mimetic properties of the mirror's reflective surface, it places

⁵¹ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 80.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 81.

the viewer at once in front of the barmaid as the man in the reflection, a position which is as impossible as the reflection itself. The irreconcilable reflection then serves as a distancing device; it simultaneously forces the viewer to a point of detachment by emphatically denying him/her access to any active role in the image. It secures the autonomy and detachment of the barmaid as well. Ultimately the positioning of the mirror leaves no other gaze than that of the artist, for this view could only be constructed through the view of a flâneur himself.

In many ways the 1881 criticism on Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* was correct: all of the picture does take place "in the mirror" if you consider that the mirror is the most important element in deciphering the potential meaning and notions of subjectivity in Manet's painting. The mirror captures the experience of this place, a bar at the Folies-Bergère, through the eyes of the flâneur-artist. Manet uses the mirror to construct the heteroglossia within the image. The mirror immediately identifies and contains the crowd as an object worthy of observation by the flâneur. It solidifies the potential of the barmaid as a flâneuse by supplying the viewer with the object of her indirect gaze. In distinguishing the barmaid from the mirror's reflection and differentiating her from what should be her reflection Manet offers the possibility of a different reading that affords the woman access to the city from a position of service and confirms the ambiguity of outward manifestations of social-class identity in the nineteenth century. The anxiety generated by the ambiguity of true class status is compounded by the potential transgression of gendered discourses of public and private spheres that attempt to keep women in fin-de-siècle France contained in private domestic dwellings.

Manet most clearly defines his own subjectivity as bearer of the flâneuristic gaze through the combined reading of the heteroglossic voices present in his image. In this reading of the painting, the mirror's inaccurate reflection is assumed as the intention of the artist because it functions as the surface upon and against which the dialogue of the painting unfolds, offering the potential to identify multiple "voices" that the artist likens or distances himself from according to his own subject position. Analysis of the painting and compositional techniques employed by Manet reveal that the barmaid provides the closest voice to the artist's own; therefore, he presents her here as a flâneuse. Manet's careful construction offers the viewer the potential role as flâneur/flâneuse by positioning himself or herself as bearer of the artist's own gaze, one which combines and identifies the other voices in the scene to bring the viewer into the act of flânerie while simultaneously making the male-female commerce as pictured in the mirror a logistic impossibility. In doing this Manet asserts his own identity as flâneur-artist and makes the identity of flâneur/flâneuse through the act of flânerie an accessible and assumable identity for his nineteenth-century audience.

The act of Flânerie is bound to the city itself. It is a product of the discourses of urban planning, which ultimately generate social spaces meant to reinforce dominant ideologies and maintain hegemonic control. Flânerie requires the modern and urban as its setting. The incognito of the flâneur is dependent upon the "mass" and "spectacle" that only a modern city like Paris can provide. The flâneur is one potential subject position for a true bourgeois gentleman; however it is important to note that the aspects of modernity that make this subject position available also generate anxieties that require other means of constituting an exclusively bourgeois identity. The nightclubs and dance halls located

outside the borders of the city become the sites that bourgeois men use to construct and reinforce their upper class existence through the exoticizing and otherizing of supposedly lower-class inhabitants of these marginal areas.

Chapter Two: *La Vie Bohème*: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and the Anti-bourgeois

Aesthetic

In the nineteenth-century, Parisian bourgeois identity was constantly being defined and redefined in social spaces within the borders of the city. The closer to the center of the city, according to Haussmann's plan, the more bourgeois an establishment was, or at least the more bourgeois it seemed. The places close in proximity to the center of Paris were manifestations of modern bourgeois ideology that attempted to maintain hegemonic control through exclusionary acts, such as high cover charges and overpriced drinks, which attempted to isolate true bourgeois gentlemen from their lower-class counterparts by financial means. In constructing the actual physical spaces and places that attempted to perpetuate these bourgeois ideologies, all other identities whose ideological practices might manifest pockets of non-bourgeois social space were forced out of the center and into the peripheral areas of the city. Following a trajectory out of the city proper to the places and spaces that occupy the marginal areas on the city's edge, the rigid rules that attempt to maintain bourgeois hegemony gradually loosen. The pushing outward to the outskirts of the city corresponds to a similar movement away from bourgeois identity. The margins of the city became occupied with those identities marginalized by bourgeois existence.

The construction of this modern bourgeois identity in Paris began with the French Revolution in 1789. Prior to this point in history, social class was a rigid and immovable

structure that defined the upper-class aristocracy according to property and wealth. A person's role in society was largely predetermined by their social status and the level of privilege provided by their particular station.⁵³ This sense of tradition also imposed boundaries on artistic production as a product of the academy and subject to patronage through the salon system. In fact "nineteenth-century France exhibited the most widespread, comprehensive government involvement with art of any state."⁵⁴ The French Revolution brought to light a new sense of individuality and made possible identity performances that did not adhere to the former social structure. After 1789 "privileges and restrictions of all kinds were abolished"; this created new ways of thinking that restructured society "around individuals, not intermediate groups" and "all activities were, in principle, open to all citizens."⁵⁵ The same air of individualism and the loosening of these traditional boundaries also began to erode the tradition and security of the patronage that governed artistic production. That system eventually gave to the dealer-critic system where "artists, not the paintings... were the focus," highlighting a new emphasis on the individual subject.⁵⁶ It is within this tumultuous moment in history that the bourgeoisie actively sought to define themselves in this new and evolving social framework.

One of the main ways that the bourgeoisie defined themselves was through the identification of certain social groups that are clearly *not* bourgeois. Ultimately *la vie*

⁵³ Seigel, Jerrold. *Bohemian Paris, Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9.

⁵⁴ Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 24.

⁵⁵ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris, Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9.

⁵⁶ Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers; Institutional Change in the French Painting World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 96.

Bohème, the Bohemian lifestyle, provides the clearest antithesis to bourgeois life. However, the relationship between Bohemian and bourgeois is not a case of simple diametric opposition. Jerrold Seigel explains in *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1910* that often adopting a Bohemian lifestyle “was the appropriation of marginal life-styles by young and not so young bourgeois, for the dramatization of ambivalence toward their own social identities and destinies.”⁵⁷ This highlights the performative aspect of the Bohemian identity and links that performance to one of the many possible facets of bourgeois identity. Seigel notes that the same ambivalence was felt by other individuals in other social circles but it is the “acting out of the conflicts inherent in the bourgeois character,” and the way in which the Bohemians devoted their lives to this performance that sets them apart. Bohemia is characterized by its inhabitants, “artists, the young, shady but inventive characters,”⁵⁸ all of whom participate in the construction of the modernist myth of a modernist version of Bohemia based loosely on Murger’s presentation in *Scenes de la Vie Bohème*. Murger’s emphasis on the integral position of the artist in his version of Bohemia persists into fin de siècle conceptualization of Bohemian identity. Representations of Bohemian culture are thereby indicative of the artist’s own subjectivity living in this liminal state; however, these cultural texts also serve a discursive function: to provide varying forms of otherness against which a bourgeois existence might be constituted. Furthermore, they either confirm or deny aspects of the myth of popular Bohemia while simultaneously formulating through opposition bourgeois subjectivity. In her study of Bohemian culture, Mary Gluck explores the construction of the Bohemian myth based on shifts in the

⁵⁷ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris, Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

formulation of this Other that occur chronologically. I contend that spatial practices in the fin de siècle also inform the artistic choices made in representations of Bohemian culture.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that “new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa.”⁵⁹ The construction of a place and space for this Bohemian identity is a necessary component of its existence. This raises the question of how the socially constructed space of Bohemia was defined by its nineteenth-century inhabitants, and furthermore how this space manifested itself physically. Jerrold Seigel suggests this definition:

Its [Bohemia] borders were poverty and hope, art and illusion, love and shame, work, gaiety, courage, slander, necessity and the hospital. For its nineteenth-century discoverers and explorers, Bohemia was an identifiable country with visible inhabitants, but one not marked on any map. To trace its frontiers was to cross constantly back and forth between reality and fantasy Explorers recognized Bohemia by signs: art, youth, the underworld, the gypsy life-style.⁶⁰

His description highlights the way in which Bohemia was both real and imagined by its inhabitants. It occupied a particular physical space, the areas on the periphery near Montmartre, and the Bohemian lifestyle manifested itself in the social spaces of this

⁵⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 59.

⁶⁰ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris, Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3.

region, in places like the Moulin Rouge and the Chat Noir. Entertainment was a hallmark of late nineteenth-century life in Paris.

In the period between 1893 and 1913 the gross amount spent on entertainment rose from 32,599,084 francs to 68,452,394 francs, and the population of Paris grew by thirty-two percent. Both money and leisure were in more abundant supply than they ever had been before.⁶¹

With approximately 30,000 registered cafés in Paris by the end of the 1880s, places to enjoy leisure time were not in short supply.⁶² Popular entertainment venues were classified by their physical location and its relationship to social class. If the establishments closest to the center of the Paris, such as the Folies-Bergère, marked a particular type of bourgeois existence that at the very least *appeared* to require the money and privilege that was once linked to the landed aristocracy, Bohemia (the spaces and places that through social practice define the Bohemian identity) could not occupy the same space. To understand the construction of the modernist myth of Bohemia, a close examination of representations that reveal the interconnectivity between artist, subjectivity, and the social construction of both bourgeois and Bohemian spaces is necessary.

Arguably, the individual who most exemplified the performative aspects of the Bohemian subject position, while navigating its tenuous connection to bourgeois existence, was Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Toulouse-Lautrec provides an interesting

⁶¹ Bernard Denvir, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1991), 71.

⁶² Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 4.

example of the inversion of upward mobility as he self-consciously denies his upper-class status. A blueblood of aristocratic lineage, Lautrec purposefully denied his familial connection through his association and adoption of the Bohemian lifestyle. As a young bedridden boy, Lautrec began his artistic career painting subject matter that epitomized the aristocratic lifestyle from which his illness kept him isolated. His earliest subjects were “horses, hunts, and other equestrian themes,” all definitive markers of the leisure and privilege of his upper-class heritage; furthermore, this type of painting was a widely cultivated hobby that allowed aristocratic men a means of “preventing boredom and idleness.”⁶³ These early exemplars in Lautrec’s oeuvre demonstrate his attempt at engaging with the social practices of aristocratic life. The radical shift in Lautrec’s production occurs when he changes his physical surroundings, leaving the tradition and privilege of his birth to reinvent himself amongst the cabarets and dance halls of Montmartre as a Bohemian. In her biography *Toulouse-Lautrec, A Life*, Julia Frey notes the importance for Lautrec of Montmartre being outside of Paris. When Lautrec’s mother moved to Paris in 1898 to live in an apartment “at the extreme limit of a neighbourhood where she could decently live,” Lautrec found “freedom...just across this border. In Montmartre, he had found his own territory, a land his mother didn’t like to enter.”⁶⁴ This highlights the social construction of spaces and the importance that being *in* the city held for Lautrec’s mother and by extension the upper classes. Frey’s description, “across this border,” places emphasis on the construction of Montmartre in the margins on the edge of

⁶³ Reinhold Heller, *Toulouse-Lautrec, The Soul of Montmartre*, (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 9.

⁶⁴ Julia Frey, *Toulouse-Lautrec, A Life*, (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1994), 4.

the city. To go there was a transgression for an aristocrat like Lautrec, and yet it is in that very place he seems to have found “his own territory.”⁶⁵

Contemporary scholarship highlights the way in which Toulouse-Lautrec’s posters personify and bring to life the decadence and excitement of the myth of Bohemia. I am not denying that as one of their discursive functions; however, what I find absent from this analysis is the linking of subtle shifts in Lautrec’s compositions that might reveal his own subjectivity as a figure who lived the tensions and stresses inherent in the interconnectivity of bourgeois and Bohemian co-dependency. Furthermore, scholarship seems to ignore the way in which the tenuous connections between bourgeois and Bohemian are linked to socially-constructed places in Paris. Lautrec’s posters offer an interesting glimpse into these tensions because they are produced with the intent to be displayed in certain social spaces to a particular set of viewers, but they are also about particular places and therefore must also embody the social constructs of those places as well. A close reading of *two* of Lautrec’s posters of famous cabaret performer Jane Avril elucidate the extent to which Lautrec constructed views of the Bohemian woman with the bourgeois audience in mind. The compositional choices made by Lautrec in these posters reveal the importance of place as a means of coding and decoding the bourgeois/Bohemian interconnectivity.

Lautrec is most widely recognized for his successful advertisements and posters. These lithographs are purposefully created by Lautrec as representations of the most renowned places, figures, and actions of the Montmartre scene. These lithographs offer a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

“dangerous but simultaneously picturesque and engaging” view of life in Montmartre.⁶⁶ Lautrec is aware of the function of these posters as advertisements meant to entice bourgeois gentlemen to different entertainment venues. He clearly “understood the theatrical atmosphere that could create excitement for those who filled the streets of Paris, offering to drabber lives a bit of magic.”⁶⁷ Lautrec makes clear choices concerning the location of the venue and the mode of his pictorial representation. The linking of the bourgeois gentleman to the city and the Bohemian identity to the margins on the city’s periphery is evidenced in Lautrec’s representations of the cabaret performers at different venues. The Bohemian identity when transplanted from the periphery into the city is carefully constructed by Lautrec as the exotic Other, easily contained by the subordinating discourse of bourgeois superiority and control. In contrast to his previous representational choices that reaffirm assumed notions of bourgeois hegemony, Lautrec exploits the carnivalesque perversion of the social order and the potential performative aspects of identity when he creates posters for Montmartre venues. This shift in Lautrec’s mode of representation highlights the social construction of space and the way in which place associations alter and inform the interconnectivity between bourgeois and Bohemian. Close analysis of two works which Lautrec created of famed dancer Jane Avril reveal the level of preoccupation Lautrec had with constructing images of Bohemian people and spaces specifically for bourgeois consumption. In each image Lautrec makes compositional choices according to the location of the entertainment venue, either inside the city or on the city’s periphery. In both cases, the intended viewer-

⁶⁶ Reinhold Heller, *Toulouse-Lautrec, The Soul of Montmartre*, (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 31.

⁶⁷ Riva Castleman and Wolfgang Wittrock, *Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Images of the 1890s*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985), 20.

consumer is the bourgeois gentleman. What Lautrec offers in each composition is a construction of Bohemia created with a particular place association in mind.

The first image, a color lithograph poster entitled *Jane Avril* (1893) (See Appendix A), was commissioned by the popular dancer Jane Avril to advertise her performances at the Jardin de Paris, a cafés-concert located in the city proper on the Champs-Elysees.⁶⁸ Avril's figure is the only color Lautrec includes in the composition. The sharp contrast of her orange and yellow clothing against the monochromatic grey background immediately identifies her as the main attraction at the Jardin de Paris and the main emphasis of Lautrec's composition. Lautrec carefully constructs Avril as the exotic Other who is carefully contained in the separate space of the stage. In other post-impressionist works, bright colors signify the primitive and exotic and in this composition they serve a similar function of exoticizing her as a marker of the Bohemian Other. Lautrec furthered her separation and containment by closing off the space of the stage within the composition with the black border. The image of Avril and the stage is framed in by a grey-black asymmetrical border that features the hand and partial face of a man playing the double bass in the lower right corner of the poster. Lautrec's stylized rendering of the man's face appears mask-like and functions to prevent any individuation of the figure and keep the focus of the image on Avril. The man's hand and the neck of the double bass cut the composition at a diagonal, creating a sense of movement and excitement that is echoed in the diagonal sweeping lines of the floor and walls; however, this is all contained within the border and marked as decidedly separate from the space the viewer is occupying. This framing device places the viewer-consumer outside the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 81.

action in the scene. It implies passive observation without any active engagement in the dance Avril performs. Furthermore, the border serves as a containment device that keeps any potential sexuality implied by Avril's dance pose at a safe distance. She exists in this depiction in a space completely separate and closed off and any anxiety that her sexuality implies is thereby contained within this detached space and subjected to the male-bourgeois gaze. Her containment creates a sense of safety for her bourgeois audience; like viewing a caged animal, the eminent dangers of her potential sexual allure are part of a separate and exotic fantasy which they can observe but are ultimately protected from.

Lautrec continues to construct the Bohemian Other while providing the bourgeois gentleman with a detached engagement through his handling of her facial features and figure. Her face is "marked by boredom."⁶⁹ This rendering of her face suggests a blasé attitude which at once makes her actions seem routine and rehearsed rather than impulsive and wild. She is represented by Lautrec as a performer. As such her performed sexuality is further distanced from the actual threat of feminine seduction that these carnivalesque settings might imply. Lautrec draws her eyes as empty ellipses that stare out blankly. Lautrec does not give her pupils and therefore any kind of engaging eye contact is impossible. She is once again the object of the gaze, a gaze which she is physically incapable of returning. Even her red lips, which sharply contrast the stark white of her skin, show no expression. Her pose, leg raised toward the audience, is a clear marker of the sexualized dance she is performing. Yet unlike other images of Lautrec's, where dancers freely kick their legs and show their petticoats, the "suggestive pirouetted display of lace and linen underwear" found in images like *Le quadrille de la chaise Louis*

⁶⁹ Ibid., 81.

XIII a l'elysee Montmartre is noticeably absent from the Jardin de Paris poster. Lautrec renders Avril's figure in profile, her leg bent, and her arms clasping the ruffles and lace of her skirt tucked under her knee. The black line of her glove clearly closes off the orange and yellow ruffles of her dress at the knee. The choice of rendering her figure in profile allows the viewer to perceive the implied sexuality of her raised leg as a component of the can-can, a clearly lower-class non-bourgeois dance, without being confronted with the overt and frenzied sexuality that a frontal pose would imply.

Although Lautrec succeeds in creating some sort of safe distance for the bourgeois viewer, Avril is clearly presented in this poster as the Other against which a bourgeois existence might be constituted. Her bright clothing is one potential marker of her true identity and character. The striking contrast created between her clothing and the background draws attention to these colors as a marker of her lack of elegance. Her posture is accentuated by the curvilinear lines of Lautrec's illustrative style. She appears almost fluid, lacking the upright stiffness and decorum of a bourgeois lady. In this image Lautrec has created a version of Jane Avril that appeals to the bourgeois obsession with the exotic while simultaneously keeping the dangers of that exoticism at a safe distance.

I believe the location of the cafés-concert, within the city proper on the popular Champs-Élysées, plays an important role in decoding Lautrec's representational choices. The Jardin de Paris, and other upper-middle class establishments within the city's borders, attempted to offer public spaces where bourgeois entertainment could be subjected to hegemonic control. As an advertisement this poster needed to present Avril's performance as alluring, but due to the location of the cafés-concert a certain sense of bourgeois detachment and decorum was also necessary. Lautrec does this by exoticizing

and otherizing Avril, meanwhile creating the potential for detached spectatorship of the carnivalesque performance. Lautrec's own subjectivity allows him a unique perspective which few other contemporary artists shared. He understood the limits and restrictions of bourgeois ideology and was able to create representations of the Bohemian lifestyle that presented a particular version of Bohemia as a safe and distanced Other available for detached spectatorship. Lautrec's understanding of bourgeois discourse underlies his representational choices. This clear and purposeful mode of representation is one way in which Lautrec navigates the connection between bourgeois and Bohemian. One cannot exist without the other; they rely upon one another as their antithesis. Lautrec understands this connection, he lives it, and here he clearly marks Avril as belonging to the realm of Bohemia while simultaneously offering her image as the Other against which an upper-class existence might be defined. Ultimately Lautrec's representation of Avril for the Jardin de Paris was successful. Avril noted that this particular poster "made her famous," a testament to Lautrec's ability to navigate the tensions between her marginal position as a Bohemian performer and the bourgeois clientele on whom she relied for success and fame.⁷⁰

The construction of the Bohemian Other takes on a different form when the location of the entertainment venue moves outside the city limits. The social construction of places within the city proper requires a particular type of presentation of the Bohemian identity as a safe and distanced Other. In the late nineteenth-century, Montmartre, situated on the periphery of Paris, was already clearly labeled as the home of marginal lower-class individuals such as artists, anarchists, and Bohemians. The majority of the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82.

clientele in the Montmartre cabarets were lower class; however, the “class identity of the dance hall public was fluid,” and many bourgeois gentlemen frequented these locations.⁷¹ While the restructuring of the city forced the working classes out into the periphery, the upper classes circulated the city freely.

And when the rich grew tired of their own games, by ironic reversal, it was they who would invade the working-class neighborhoods, slumming with the seamstresses and apaches in the cabarets and dance halls. The cafés concerts and other night spots became melting pots of the least and the most fashionable, elbow to elbow.⁷²

This upper-class mobility and the intermingling of the classes are indicative of another way in which bourgeois existence is tied to the myth of Bohemia. While the discursive function of this myth is to provide a model of otherness for the bourgeois gentleman, certain representations of Bohemia construct it as the unattainable but desirable Other.

Lautrec’s depiction of Jane Avril’s identity in his color lithograph print *Divan Japonais* (1892) (See Appendix A) offers a different reading of the relationship between bourgeois and Bohemian that is influenced by the marginal location and the presence of an audience of mixed social class. The Divan Japonais was located at 75 rue des Martyrs in the Montmartre district and was a notably seedy dance hall that underwent a series of

⁷¹ Ibid., 28.

⁷² Riva Castleman and Wolfgang Wittrock, *Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Images of the 1890s*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985), 20.

forced closings and management changes before closing for good in February of 1893.⁷³

There are many notable differences in Lautrec's representation of Jane Avril in the *Divan Japonais* poster. In his book *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Soul of Montmartre*, Reinhold Heller provides one potential reading of this poster:

Jane Avril appears here in the first row of the audience, immediately next to the orchestra pit from which the shadowed forms of the conductor's arms and the necks of the contrabasses rise. Placed near her in the audience, we look up at her elegantly clothed, black, silhouetted, slender form, at her ornate English hat, at the precise profile of her face and muted orange of her hair, the focusing spot of color amid the dark tones of the poster. Her detached, focused elegance renders the comical the foppish, blond bearded man nearby – the literary and music critic Edouard Dujardin, cast as a lecherous, wealthy bourgeois type – who squints through his monocle at her.⁷⁴

The elegance, noted by Heller, with which Lautrec depicts Avril in *Divan Japonais* is noticeably absent from the *Jardin de Paris* poster where she is exoticized. The brightly colored dresses in the latter have been replaced in *Divan Japonais* with a simple black dress. None of the frills and lace, markers of the overt sexuality of her performances, are seen in this image. Lautrec again chooses a full body profile view of Avril; however, in

⁷³ Ibid., 82.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 81.

this image Avril's face does not turn even slightly toward the viewer. Lautrec does not allow her to have eye contact with the viewer, but she is not rendered as unable to make eye contact; instead, she appears to ignore the viewer with cool detachment. She is clearly the focal point of the image, but she denies the subordinating control of the gaze through her pose and posture.

In sharp contrast to the Jardin de Paris image, the focus of this composition is not the onstage performance. In fact, the performer on stage receives almost no attention from Lautrec. The headless figure, the Divan Japonais's star performer Yvette Guilbert, is reduced to a colorless silhouette identified only "by her trademark long black gloves."⁷⁵ The viewer is aware of the space of the stage and of Guilbert's performance only through the positioning of a diagonal line of contra basso necks and the conductor's arms, which separate the small stage area from the large foreground of Lautrec's image. The true performance is the "lecherous" and clearly sexually driven stares of the man next to Avril. The frame that held the viewer at a comfortable distance and allowed for a level of disengagement with the performance on stage in the Jardin de Paris poster is not employed in this image. In *Divan Japonais* Lautrec has identified the crowd as the site of the spectacle. Identity performance and commodity exchange occur in the chaotic space of the crowd. The compositional technique employed by Lautrec in *Divan Japonais* places the viewer in the crowd, behind the orchestra, with Avril. Her long dress and the legs of her chair are cut off abruptly by the bottom edge of the composition. The imagined presence of these items enters into the viewer's space and further cements the viewer's position as an active part of the crowd. The intended viewer, presumably a

⁷⁵Gisele Atterberry, *Toulouse-Lautrec, Artist of Montmartre*, (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001), 40.

bourgeois gentleman like the one pictured, is immediately implicated in the exchange illustrated by Lautrec. Avril remains disengaged. She doesn't appear to notice the lecherous stares from the gentleman behind her. Avril's elegant appearance coupled with her position with her back towards the male figure is a complete inversion of the image of Avril in the Jardin de Paris poster. Her composure and elegance in *Divan Japonais* is reinforced by her rigid posture that forms one of the only vertical lines in Lautrec's composition and which contrasts sharply with the fluid, flirtatious, and curvilinear version of Avril in the Jardin de Paris image.

The presence of the bourgeois gentleman played by Dujardin is evidence of the tendency of "upper class and bourgeoisie to vicariously participate in the risqué Bohemian life."⁷⁶ The depicted social interaction between Avril and the man behind her draws attention to this vicarious participation in its carnivalesque form. Bakhtin describes carnivalized literature as that which "takes from medieval carnival the inversion of power structures, the parodic debunking of all that a particular society takes seriously (including and in particular all that which it fears)."⁷⁷ By extrapolating Bakhtin's concept from literature and applying it to the visual representation provided by Lautrec, it is obvious that the power structures here are clearly inverted. The subordinating ideologies of bourgeois hegemony cease to function in the spaces of Bohemia. Instead the ideological construct of the proper bourgeois gentlemen is depicted here in parodic form, gawking at Avril and smacking his lips, his cane an obvious signifier of his uncontrolled sexual

⁷⁶ Riva Castleman and Wolfgang Wittrock, *Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Images of the 1890s*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985), 78.

⁷⁷ Pam Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 250. This definition is taken from the glossary section of *The Bakhtin Reader* edited by Pam Morris. The Glossary section was compiled by Graham Roberts.

desires. All the insecurities and anxieties that a decadent Bohemian existence present to the upper-class male are played out in an exaggerated form. This poster functions as the ultimate inversion of *Jardin de Paris* where Avril is contained, otherized, and subjected to the dominating bourgeois gaze as a means of defining the limits of proper upper-class existence. Instead in *Divan Japonais* the decadence of the Bohemian lifestyle is presented as an unattainable but somehow desirable opposite that can be lived vicariously only within the marginalized spaces of Montmartre.

These posters offer two different potential bourgeois interpretations of *la vie bohème*. I contend that, given the format of these posters as advertisements, they offer a constructed view of the Bohemian lifestyle, each attempting to navigate a particular aspect of the bourgeois/Bohemian interconnectivity as it is linked to the socially-constructed places where these performances were held. They function as two separate ways of defining Bohemia through its relationship with bourgeois ideology. Each poster offers a different view of the “borders of bourgeois existence,” which Jerrold Seigel describes as “murky and uncertain.”⁷⁸ Lautrec visualizes the space where “social margins and frontiers were probed and tested” by bourgeois and Bohemian alike. If the construction of a Bohemian myth is driven by the need for differentiation from bourgeois society, representations of *la vie bohème*, such as these two posters by Toulouse-Lautrec, offer the viewer two potential ways in which that differentiation might be possible within specifically coded social spaces.

⁷⁸ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris, Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 11.

Chapter Three: Vincent van Gogh: Finding the Primitive

Notions of the primitive are culturally and historically informed. There is no definitive marker that signifies an image, person, or region as primitive. Instead primitivism is, as Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton point out in their essay “Primitive,” a relative term implying “a relationship . . . of contrast, of binary opposition to the ‘civilized’.”⁷⁹ This provides a view of primitivism that is relational. That which is signified as civilized sets the standard against which other comparisons will be made. In the case of nineteenth-century France, Paris offers the civilized example, its opposite Other defined first within the European periphery and later against the subaltern colonial Other. It is within the earlier binary opposition that avant-garde artists in fin-de-siècle France first attempt to actively constitute a unique subject position as being themselves somehow primitive—the forebearers of a modernized style that embraced the naïveté and intuition of rural peasantry. The rapidly modernizing Parisian city left artists feeling alienated and “in need of rejuvenation through contact with societies in an earlier stage of development.”⁸⁰ This desire to leave Paris and the desire to embrace a primitive style is the ultimate paradox of modern Parisian identity: one must leave Paris to be Parisian. This necessity highlights the need for modern artists to construct, embrace, and mythologize the Other against which their own identity might be constituted.

⁷⁹ Mark, Antliff and Patricia Leighton. "Primitive." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, by Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff, 170-183. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

Vincent van Gogh provides an interesting example of this primitivist impulse. Van Gogh moves to Paris in 1886, aware of the cultural and artistic heritage of the city. In Paris van Gogh hoped to organize a community of artists that he eventually termed the *petit boulevard*. The extent of his stay was limited to a roughly two-year period ending in early fall of 1888 when he moved to a small apartment in Arles, located in the South of France. Scholarship regarding Vincent van Gogh's interest in the primitive and exotic has largely centered on these post-Parisian years, where his use of expressive color visually embodies pre-existing notions of the unique quality of light found in exotic locations and his treatment of rural peasantry and landscape conform to notions of the primitive. My intent is not to argue against this vein of scholarship, but rather to examine the rare instances in van Gogh's voluminous productivity where he identifies notions of the primitive within Paris, and later seeks out the Parisian while in Arles, as emblematic of the way in which modern artists defined and constituted their own subjectivity as in flux between the binary opposition of civilized and primitive cultures. Art historian Robert Herbert states in his article "City vs. Country" that "city cannot be divorced from country."⁸¹ The paintings van Gogh creates in Paris and Arles visually depict the interconnectivity present in this binary opposition and the artist's position within that interconnectivity.

The modernization of Paris under Napoleon III and Barron Haussmann reorganized the city, "evicting the working class from the centre of the city,"⁸² forcing

⁸¹ Robert Herbert. "City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin." In *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History*, by Robert Herbert, 23-48.(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 24.

⁸² Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the art of Manet and his followers*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23.

these working-class Parisians to populate the suburbs. These suburbs are given their own nomenclature, *banlieue*, and their own mythology as one aspect of otherness against which a bourgeois existence might be defined.⁸³ Victor Hugo characterizes these areas in the 1861 reprint of *Les Misérables* as a “kind of *bastard countryside*, somewhat ugly but bizarre, made up of two different natures.”⁸⁴ The addition of the *banlieue* to Hugo’s text marks the cultural relevance of these periphery areas and their unique makeup of displaced workers in the rural outskirts of the city. In the notes of his book, *The painting of modern life, Paris in the art of Manet and his followers*, T.J. Clark states that van Gogh read Hugo’s *Les Misérables* initially in the 1870s and again in 1883.⁸⁵ This note about van Gogh’s reading suggests that he was aware of the preconceived notions of periphery spaces in Paris. His choice to live in Montmartre, the region to the north of the Parisian city center on the outskirts of the city, provided van Gogh with submersion in a unique intersection of Parisian culture: the peripheral suburbs. Van Gogh painted from his surroundings, relying on the power of observation rather than painting subjects from his imagination; thus, van Gogh’s paintings created while in Paris constitute an “inventory of the edge of Paris”⁸⁶ and a vision of the *bastard countryside* lived by those in the peripheral geography of the city and the marginal space between the imposing forces of modernization and the rural nostalgic past. Modern artists in the fin de siècle were caught in the oscillation between city and country. For these artists, a move toward the primitive and away from Paris could never mean severing ties with the city all

⁸³ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 26. emphasis added

⁸⁵ Ibid., 273.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 28.

together; therefore, their position was one of flux between the desired simplicity of the primitive and the opposing forces of modernism that fueled this desire.

It is the natural tendency to believe that a move to a city like Paris would inspire van Gogh to create scenes of the city in which the peasant subject and notions of the primitive would not be present.⁸⁷ However, given van Gogh's Protestant upbringing and his "preoccupation with the peasant as victim of social change,"⁸⁸ I offer the argument that the outskirts of the city provide van Gogh with a location ripe for depiction of these very notions that are made visible through their opposition to nearby urbanity. Van Gogh's works from his two years in Paris address this opposition through his painting of the suburbs and outskirts of Paris: the marginal space of rural-urban hybridity that exists at the Parisian periphery. While these paintings do not overtly depict the subject of peasantry, as in van Gogh's earlier painting *The Potato Eaters* (1885), they engage with the idea of primitive peasantry in a more subtle way, in depictions of the hybrid spaces of the suburban periphery where the binary opposition of country and city was not always entirely clear.

The Outskirts of Paris, (See Appendix A) painted by van Gogh in fall of 1886, addresses the existence of this binary opposition in the *banlieue*. Jan Hulsker, in a revised version of van Gogh's catalogue Raisonné entitled *The New Complete Van Gogh*,

⁸⁷ Herbert, Robert. "City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin." In *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History*, by Robert Herbert, 23-48. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 44

points out the uniqueness of the subject matter depicted in this image.⁸⁹ This overt and clear description of the emptiness found at the furthest edges of the city is unique to van Gogh's Parisian oeuvre. The image plays upon previous notions of agricultural societies, where expansive landscapes are typically populated with peasants working the land during the harvest. There is no denying that what van Gogh painted in *The Outskirts of Paris* is a striking visual image of the *banlieue* that was widely understood in the nineteenth century, as it is today, as a space that existed as a result of urban sprawl. It is these contradictory associations, one with urban modernization and the other with agricultural simplicity, that make this image interesting and unique.

Van Gogh's compositional choices in *The Outskirts of Paris* define the *banlieue* as the place where the city and country lose distinction. This painting is one of the only images of Paris in which van Gogh does not clearly identify the depicted location through the use of landmarks; this increases the feeling of ambiguity within the painting. A close reading of the image provides the viewer with an understanding of how the people depicted are both tied to and distanced from Paris. In this painting the crowded buildings of the Parisian skyline are distanced and reduced to geometric silhouettes of muted color that nearly melt into the empty landscape beneath the horizon line. The geometric quality of the buildings against the more organically rendered landscape and murky paths of the foreground and middle ground provides a subtle marker of the division between the city and the periphery, and a sign that the place depicted in the foreground of this image is *not* the city. The people who populate this landscape are also clearly separated by physical

⁸⁹ Jan Hulsker. *The New Complete Van Gogh: Paintings, Drawings, Sketches: Revised and enlarged edition of the catalogue raisonné of the works of Vincent van Gogh*, (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 1996), 245.

distance from the city. The landscape alludes to the countryside except for an odd marker of urban existence, the centrally positioned lamppost. Nowhere else in the landscape, despite the suggestion of other potential paths where people are walking, does van Gogh paint any other lampposts. This singular lamppost, therefore, provides a striking point of contrast in the image, supported by its central placement in the composition. It is distinguished from the loosely painted background as a controlled symbol of urban sprawl; the juxtaposition of this lamppost against the open landscape suggests the ambiguity of this place as neither city nor country.

The placement of the lamppost in relationship to the man in the foreground provides the viewer with clues to the relationship between the city in the distance and the people pictured in the painting. The man depicted most closely mirrors the construction of the lamppost: his body echoes the black vertical of the post and his face, left as an empty grey oval by van Gogh, recalls the glass lantern that does not show any signs of a flickering flame. Both the vertical construction and the dark color of the lamppost are echoed more subtly in the other figures. All of this suggests that the initial reading of these people as somehow separate from the city is not entirely true; while they are distanced from the city they are also somehow reflections of it. If they are supposed to be from the country they do not wear the clothes of peasants, and instead of working the land they are clearly treading paths through it. This makes it clear that they are *not* peasants in the traditional sense and the place they occupy is *not* the country. The path most clearly delineated by van Gogh offers a direct route to the city through the use of one point perspective. The man in the foreground appears to have traveled this path out of the city while the women and children in the middle ground use the path to head into the

city. Van Gogh clearly makes visible the disconnected relationship these people have to both the land and city; they are alienated from their agricultural roots and from the urban metropolis.

In this image van Gogh also draws upon previous pictorial notions of the picturesque countryside as expansive and untouched by modern civilization. The muted grey tones of his palette mark a clear division from his earlier depictions of the Dutch primitive countryside such as *Women Mending Nets in the Dunes* (1882). Most of van Gogh's pre-Arles works exemplify Nina Lübbren's idea of the "grey paradigm."⁹⁰ Lübbren notes a particular shift in palette between paintings done by painters in the North versus those done in the South. She describes the way grey light was preferred by plein air painters at the end of the nineteenth century:

During the 1870's and 1880's, most artists in Europe did not like painting out of doors during Sunny weather. Isobel Field, sometime artist and wife-to-be of Robert Louis Stevensen, remembered that the painters in Grez (Franche) in the summer of 1877 "scorned sunlight, and endless time was wasted waiting for a grey day."⁹¹

The environment in Paris, which was further south compared to his initial location in the Netherlands, only seems to have maintained if not augmented his use of grey. Lübbren

⁹⁰ Lübbren, "North to South: Paradigm Shifts in European Art and Tourism, 1880-1920", 5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

notes that the artists of the Hague School “praised grey” and “strove to assimilate every conceivable colour to this tone.”⁹²

A comparison of *A Suburb of Paris* with van Gogh’s earlier works such as *Women Mending Nets* reveals that his Parisian works tend to have less pure color than his Dutch paintings. However, van Gogh’s *The Outskirts of Paris* is far from being purely grey. Van Gogh chooses a muted green, a prime example of the way in which grey might become a “coloured-grey.”⁹³ This green suggests the open area in this image contains growing grass and vegetation. Close to the man in the foreground of the painting there are more clearly delineated tufts of grass that form the edge of the road, further supporting the presence of grassy fields. At the very least this hint of green provides a clue to the nature that once existed before urbanization redeveloped the landscape. The fence, another series of dark vertical lines, has in places lost its verticality, which gives it the look of a fence fashioned by hand rather than mechanically made. The linear bars of the fence are twig-like and visually reference the fences in van Gogh’s earlier paintings of picturesque peasant cottages in the Dutch countryside. In this landscape van Gogh creates a visual representation of what Hugo termed the “bastard *countryside*,”⁹⁴ for it is indeed a type of country, and most clearly not the city off in the distance that is comprised of rigid verticals and geometry.

The people depicted by van Gogh in *The Outskirts of Paris* also oscillate between their association as members of the city and their current location in the hybrid periphery.

⁹² Ibid., 5.

⁹³ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁴ Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the art of Manet and his followers*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23.

In *Peasants and "Primitivism"* Robert Herbert claims that "cities had long been treated as the sites of temptation, complexity and change, where country folk risked the loss of their innocence."⁹⁵ In fact, many of the people pushed into the suburbs during Haussmann's restructuring of the city were once rural peasants who in recent years moved to Paris to work in industrial labor.⁹⁶ Van Gogh's choice of dark colors and the striking facelessness of the man in the foreground imply that while these people appear to stand outside the city, the loss of their innocence has already occurred. Modernization has refashioned them as faceless, colorless, and grey, just like the land.

The peasant as a marker of "social change"⁹⁷ is therefore not absent from van Gogh's work while in Paris; instead, van Gogh offers a visual representation of a modified form of peasantry, an urban peasant, the identity symbolic of the periphery as a location where modernity intermingles and encroaches one lamppost at a time into the countryside. The people in this image are markers of a different kind of social change, the kind that alienates people from the land and separates the means of production from the actual product. The faceless figure in *The Outskirts of Paris* is a poignant representation of the feeling of alienation that modern industry brought to the city. The people in van Gogh's painting are disconnected from the land, from the city, and largely from one another as they all head in different directions down different paths. This alienation deeply affected artists like van Gogh, who idealized the rural simplicity found in places untouched by the city. Just as the idea of peasantry in its typical everyday structure came

⁹⁵ Robert Herbert. *Peasants and "Primitivism" French Prints from Millet to Gauguin*. South Hadley, (Massachusetts: The Trustees of Mount Holyoke College, 1995), 12.

⁹⁶ Robert Herbert. "City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin." In *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History*, by Robert Herbert, 23-48. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 44.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

to mark otherness against the civility of city living, the workers in this image are also representative of a type of otherness against which the Bourgeoisie define their existence; they are the underbelly of urban society, marginalized and pushed to the outer edges of the city. The type of primitive seen here is produced by the complexities of urban existence.

The urban peasant is the “neglected Other”⁹⁸ and the artist’s own often self-imposed alienation from bourgeois society is symbolically tied to the representation of these marginalized figures. As previously noted, the ideological construct of the city cannot exist without its binary opposition: the country. When these place distinctions become less clear, in areas like the *banlieue*, artists search for places where primitivism and peasantry might exist in their unmediated forms. Herbert notes:

Alienation sometimes meant literal departure from the city, so painters gathered in rural surroundings, in Barbizon, Pont-Aven, Worpswede, and other artists’ colonies. Their distance from the city was illusory, for just as the word “leisure” has no meaning unless we posit work, so “alienation” cannot stand alone; one must be alienated from something.⁹⁹

Van Gogh was already aware of the pre-conceived notions of the South as a place of potential rejuvenation. His reading of Daudet further informed these notions. Daudet confirms the loss of innocence and inherent decadence of city life in Paris compared

⁹⁸ Robert Herbert. *Peasants and "Primitivism": French Prints from Millet to Gauguin*. South Hadley, (Massachusetts: The Trustees of Mount Holyoke College, 1995), 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

against the “effervescing South,”¹⁰⁰ a place of renewal, regeneration and the unmediated countryside. Van Gogh makes these distinctions clear in a letter to his brother Theo written in September 1888. Van Gogh writes, “one must be quietly settled, like steady people, and not like decadents.”¹⁰¹ He goes on to state that he envisions his work in Arles as “living close to nature like a petty tradesman.”¹⁰² Van Gogh clearly links Parisian life to decadence and sees a move to the South as a way of recovering a connection to simplicity and nature; his images in Arles work to further define and construct the myth of the primitive Other.

Most of the paintings created in Arles are considered prime examples of van Gogh’s fully realized style. Arles provides van Gogh with areas of open and expansive landscape that fully embody many of the categories of primitivism outlined by Herbert, among them timelessness, instinct and freedom, and virtuous work—all elements that the modernization of Paris had erased and replaced with ambiguity, alienation, and decadence. The myth of exotic Southern light is evidenced in van Gogh’s brightened and all together dazzling color palette in his images of Arles. In his letters to Theo he states, “these colors about me are all new to me, and give me an extraordinary exaltation.”¹⁰³ Van Gogh also boasts having “no thought of fatigue,”¹⁰⁴ evidence that the rejuvenation

¹⁰⁰ Druick, Douglas W., and Peter Kort Zegers. (*Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*. Chicago: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 97.

¹⁰¹ Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, Vol. 3, 47.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*,⁴⁷

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*,⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,⁴⁷

through “contact with societies in an earlier stage of development,”¹⁰⁵ however mythic in its existence, was believed true by van Gogh.

It is in places like Arles in the Southern periphery, distanced geographically from Paris, where many nineteenth-century artists find a distinct Other against which their Parisian roots can be contrasted. Despite a radical embracing of the Other by artists such as Gauguin, it was impossible for most if not all of these artists to sever ties with Paris altogether. The interdependence of these artists upon Paris is evidenced in a myriad of ways. On the most basic level Paris was a source of materials and supplies. Vincent writes repeatedly to Theo with requests for tubes of paint and brushes. On a deeper level Paris shapes the art market, and despite their alienation, artists like van Gogh relied heavily on modernist trends in the art world to inform their stylistic choices. The primitive and exotic that modern artists like van Gogh sought outside Paris required the decadence of Parisian society and the alienation of modernism as their foil.

Even in the Southern periphery moments of intermingling between the Parisian North and the supposed rustic simplicity of the South are evident. Again I focus on two paintings that are rare examples of van Gogh’s paintings of Arles, but which point to the way in which the modern artist constituted his position of Other by leaving Paris. These two paintings also illustrate the way in which the artist, once outside Paris, could not in fact completely disassociate from the aspects of modernity that pervaded, even in those places that were deemed peripheral in comparison to the Parisian metropolis. The two paintings I take as examples are van Gogh’s *Café Terrace at Night* (1888) and *Night Café*

¹⁰⁵ Mark, Antiff and Patricia Leighton. "Primitive." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, by Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff, 170-183. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996),170.

(1888) (See Appendix A). These two café scenes illuminate the degree to which the primitive Other was a modernist construction informed by place-myths of the South as a location untouched by the urbanizing forces of the North.

The subject of a café instantly alludes to the establishments in Paris that were frequented by van Gogh and other modernist artists; the café itself a “quintessentially *vie moderne* subject.”¹⁰⁶ Van Gogh’s depiction of the Café du Forum (pictured in *Café Terrace at Night*) bears a strong resemblance to a painting with a similar subject, Louis Anquetin’s *Avenue de Clichy: Five O’clock in the Evening* (1887). The café was a place tied to the very essence of Parisian identity; for that reason van Gogh’s choice to paint this café in Arles is intriguing. Why does van Gogh feel compelled to paint such a modern and Parisian subject only when he is outside of Paris? Certainly van Gogh had access to spaces and places like the one Anquetin depicts during his two years in Paris and yet not once does van Gogh choose the exterior of a café on the avenue as his Parisian subject. The presence of the café as a subject in the paintings van Gogh created while in Arles identifies the extent to which Paris seemed to impose its character onto the places in the periphery. Tourism in other areas of Southern France brought aspects of the Parisian city to the primitive seaside villages rapidly lining the coasts with resorts and casinos.¹⁰⁷ In van Gogh’s paintings Arles does not appear to have fully escaped the modernizing force of the city, and while it is not yet a popular tourist destination, van Gogh identifies the extent to which Arles has the making of a city, albeit on a smaller scale.

¹⁰⁶ Ives, et al., *Vincent Van Gogh: The Drawings*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 278.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Herbert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 270.

On the surface the café van Gogh depicts does not seem to be primitive or even all together different from a café in Montmartre or Paris, but if one uses Anquetin's café scene as a comparison, van Gogh's image provides some significant contrasts that point to a construction of the primitive as embodying simplicity as compared to the decadence and chaos van Gogh found in Paris. Van Gogh's compositional choices create a vision of the café in Arles that is different from Anquetin's, and it is in these differences that van Gogh's constructs a version of Arles as a space touched by modernity but still distinctly Other and somehow primitive by comparison because of its apparent simplicity. Anquetin's scene shows a crowded street where nearly every bit of the foreground and middle ground are filled with people in typical Parisian dress. His image embodies Raymond Williams's conception of the city as having an "identifiable and moving quality: the centre, the activity, the light."¹⁰⁸ The Avenue Clichy in Anquetin's image appears to be swarming with activity.

In contrast, van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night* feels calm and relaxed. Much of this relaxed feeling is created by van Gogh's chosen angle, which creates the wide road extending into the right foreground space. Van Gogh paints several people walking in the street, offering a sense of the simplicity of life here in comparison to the chaos of their Parisian counterparts. The café in van Gogh's image is not crowded; in fact the first two rows of tables and all the tables that line the street are empty. The café patrons sit in static positions emphasized by their contrast against the bright background. The café façade is bathed in the yellow glow from the gaslight that blends into the terrace awning almost entirely. The yellow van Gogh uses to render the café creates an obvious point of

¹⁰⁸ Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 5.

emphasis. The contrasting scheme of dark figures on a bright ground is essentially reversed when van Gogh paints the sky with glowing white orbs around yellow dabs of paint to create glowing stars in the deep blue sky. In his letters, van Gogh identifies this painting as a study in depicting the unique lighting of the night sky from underneath the glow of a gaslight. While this seems on the surface to be a painting about a café scene, the viewer's attention constantly oscillates between the glowing yellow of the café and the striking contrast of the night sky, making the true focus of the painting more difficult to identify. As a modern artist exploring his own relationship to Paris and the peripheral Other, van Gogh renders a café scene, a symbol of Parisian modernity, against the backdrop of a starlit night sky which reminds the viewer of the simplicity and closeness to nature that the peripheral Other embodies.

Van Gogh's other Arlésienne café scene, *Night Café* (1888), further intertwines the ideological constructs of country and city by exploring the associations of the Parisian café—decadence and degradation—as they exist in Arles. It is van Gogh's own commentary on this piece contained in a letter to Theo that reveals his true feelings about the places of the city even as they existed in the supposed countryside of Arles. Van Gogh wrote:

In my picture of the "Night Café" I have tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime. So I have tried to express as it were, the powers of darkness in a low public house, by soft Louis XV green and malachite, contrasting with yellow-

green and harsh blue-greens, and all this in an atmosphere like a devil's furnace, of pale sulphur.¹⁰⁹

Van Gogh clearly links the place association of the café to the decadence he noted as a major aspect of the city. The interior of the café bathed in the yellow glow from the lights overhead offers an image of chaos, or at least the aftermath of chaos. The chairs are moved away from the tables. The tables without patrons offer a collection of partially consumed beverages. Both the arrangement of the chairs and the presence of these drinks suggest the random departure of several patrons from the bar. The interior space feels recently vacated. The patrons who remain are slumped over in their seats, which seems to be a deliberate comment on alcoholism as it relates to the characteristic behavior of café goers. The clock on the wall reads quarter past twelve; we can only assume it is implying that it is past midnight and these men have imbibed too heavily. The gentleman in the corner appears to be seated with a woman, perhaps a prostitute, another symbol of the degradation and decadence of the café and the city alike. This scene is one of emptiness; the physical space is disheveled and largely vacant and the people who remain here embody the same kind of emptiness. The lone vertical figure stares out at the viewer and, unlike the man in *The Outskirts of Paris*, his face is defined rather harshly. He certainly does not embody notions of the ideal peasant or a return to a more simple state. The lines of perspective in this image direct the viewer's eye to the doorway along the back wall of the room. The large billiard table draws strong orthogonals that further the visual attention given to the doorway. This doorway appears to lead outside, and the attention given to its presence identifies it as path out of the café.

¹⁰⁹ Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, Vol. 3, 31.

Van Gogh offers a case study of one way in which the primitive Other is constructed and defined by the Parisian avant garde. The binary opposition of country and city was in fact one way in which modern artists sought to define the primitive Other. The artist in fin-de-siècle Paris sat between these two oppositions, unable to fully embrace nor deny either extreme. This exemplifies Homi Bhabha's concept of liminal space. In images like those discussed in this chapter "liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference," between self and Other, between primitive and urban, between city and country. This liminal space offers artists like van Gogh the opportunity to

think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.¹¹⁰

These artists were thus confronted with the task of constructing the Other and embracing primitivism through this construction of otherness. Van Gogh offers glimpses of the moments where these distinctions become unclear; where what is supposedly civilized is somehow primitive and the places that should be close to nature are more urbanized than

¹¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha. *The location of culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

one might expect. It is in these moments that I believe the artist's true subject position in relation to the primitive is revealed. The artist is engaged in a quest for modernity that leads him backward to an embracing of the primitive in varying degrees. The artist is tasked with navigating the liminal spaces of modernity, of understanding the margins between modernity and the primitive, between the binary opposites of civilized city existence and the idealized and mythologized primitive life they desire.

Many nineteenth-century images highlight the extent to which the city and the country are constructed as opposite poles of existence. A surface reading of van Gogh's work might appear to reveal this polarity, for there is a striking contrast between his scenes of Paris and the idealized Arlésienne types he creates in Provence. However, a close examination of rare subject matter painted by van Gogh reveals that there are moments when this polarity collapses and becomes indistinguishable. While the discourse surrounding bourgeois existence requires some sort of differentiation and creation of the Other through primitivism, the sheer impossibility of drawing such clear cut binaries is evidenced in works like those discussed in this chapter. It is within these paintings, which reveal the intermingling of city and country, that the collapsing of this polarity is revealed. To uncover the true subjectivity of the primitivist, this liminal status must be understood as an inherent part of the artist's lived experience. The binary opposition is therefore revealed as a discursive construction meant to delineate and further ideological divides between urban bourgeois existence and one in the pastoral countryside.

Conclusion:

During the nineteenth century, new techniques in painting and the exploration of artistic individualism flourished. This emphasis on individual style and artistic innovation, unheard of in prior centuries, is due in part to the loosening of formal training, which sought to perpetuate the tenants of neoclassicism into the modern era. The flow of students into schools of formal academic painting, such as the *École des Beaux Arts*, increased in the nineteenth century, which meant less individual attention for students and a slackening of the supervision necessary to perpetuate and reinforce the official approved style of painting.¹¹¹ The “results were half-trained artists and undamped sparks of novelty in the better students”; however, as “official supervision became more and more cursory for the bulk of the students . . . alternatives to official training appeared.”¹¹² The movement away from the formalities of academic painting challenged a hegemony that for centuries meant government involvement, patronage, and control of the arts in France.

At the close of the nineteenth century, Paris is also being physically restructured to appear more modern. Baron Haussmann’s redesign of the city is another attempt at reasserting this hegemonic control through the discourses of urban planning. I posit that while this restructuring was conceived as a means of strengthening and perpetuating a

¹¹¹ Harrison C. White, and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers; Institutional Change in the French Painting World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 26.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 26

bourgeois hegemony, in reality this reorganization creates the spaces and places unique to Parisian life where the spectacle can be observed and participated in by anyone, bourgeois or otherwise. This not only allows for a diversity of unique individuality “types” to emerge, but also generates an anxiety about the performance of these subjectivities and the transgression of boundaries that maintain hegemonic control. David Harvey describes modernity as a “myth” which functions on its capability for “creative destruction.”¹¹³ In the case of Paris, it is the interconnective destruction of the Academy’s stronghold on artistic production and the destruction of old urban design that creates the new and uniquely modern subject positions of flâneur/flâneuse, bohemian, and primitivist; furthermore, this interconnectivity is experienced and depicted by the popular anti-academic painters of the fin de siècle.

Scholarship on modernist painting has explored many avenues of this prolific shift in artistic production and the potential array of meanings that these paintings might have offered to contemporary viewers. My research does not simply reiterate those points made by scholars in the past, but rather builds upon them to explore the way in which the physical spaces of Paris create a unique set of subjectivities that explicate different aspects of what it means to be Parisian in the nineteenth century. The geography of the city is represented not only in paintings of particular places such as *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*; it is also evidenced in artwork created for specific places like Lautrec’s *Jane Avril*. Close analysis of the cultural products of the era, in this case visual artworks, reveals the discursive underpinnings that Lefebvre describes in *The Production of Space*. The discourses of class-based ideology and urban design that create an arena for the

¹¹³ David Harvey. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

spectacle and, through their ability to undermine bourgeois security, also generate anxiety, are the means by which socially-produced space fails to perpetuate hegemonic control.

A great deal has been written exploring different aspects of Parisian identity and culture in the fin de siècle; however none of this research pinpoints the discursive underpinnings which tie the modernization of Paris to the place-specific construction of increasingly marginalized identities that foil bourgeois existence. The connection between artist, image, and place made in my research illustrates the symbiotic relationship between lived experiences in a particular space and the manifestations of that experience in paintings of that place. My research illuminates one path of potential identity performance as it is linked to the construction of socially-informed physical spaces unique to Parisian identity in the nineteenth century. The particular path I trace radiates from the center of the city outward, mirroring the “aggregate forces of modernity” that “diffuse outward to engulf the rest of the world.”¹¹⁴ These forces of modernity bring sweeping changes to the physical geography; for example, transforming the countryside into spaces of uncertainty like the *banlieue*, while simultaneously exacerbating the need for clearer divisions of self and Other as a means of reaffirming socio-economic status. While this research focuses specifically on Manet, van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec, there are undoubtedly other artists and thinkers, whom I have neglected in this research, whose work illustrates the same place-specific identity constructions that I have discussed here.¹¹⁵ Although their mediums and stylistic choices

¹¹⁴ David Harvey. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

¹¹⁵ In *Bohemian Paris*, Jerrold Seigel discusses the construction of the Bohemian identity through analysis of playwrights, musicians, and poets of nineteenth-century Paris. Likewise, David

might differ, I speculate that these artists also utilized place associations as a means of decoding particular notions of subjectivity uniquely linked to their own lived experiences as modern Parisians.

If we look conscientiously at different cultural texts from the nineteenth century onward in a variety of geographic regions, it is possible to identify many paintings, films, and songs that tie place specificity to identity construction through the handling of stylistic elements unique to their medium. For example, Zola's 1880 novel *Nana* reveals different regions of Paris as indicative of Nana's success as a cocotte. Similarly, the divide between self and other, as it is linked to place specificity and identity performance, is illuminated in Jean-Luc Godard's 1960 film *Breathless*, where Michel emulates American film star Humphrey Bogart, typecast as a gangster in many films, in an attempt to become a more successful criminal. In Michel's case, his demise is caused by the "out of place" performed American identity (which Godard sharply contrasts against unscripted footage of the Paris streets) and his inherent tendency toward particularly French notions of love and romance. Even particularly iconic American identities, like the cowboy, rely heavily on socially-produced spaces and their manifestations in popular song and film for their ideological construction. My point is simply that the socially-produced spaces unique to a particular geographic region or culture can be informed by and informative of identities that transgress the boundaries of everyday life. A close reading of any cultural text that uses place as its foundation may reveal clues to the creator's own subjectivity, as Bakhtin suggests, but also a clue to the nuanced notions of subjectivity inherent in everyday life at any given moment. Additionally, even

Harvey employs Baudelaire's writing as a means of decoding Parisian identity and the anthropomorphized space of the city in his book *Paris, Capital of Modernity*.

contemporary viewers are invited into representational places of literature, art, music, and film, where they are also affected, informed, and shaped by the act of viewing.

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