Édouard Manet's "Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe" as a Veiled Allegory of Painting
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Édouard Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* as a Veiled Allegory of Painting

“It is a rebus of exaggerated dimensions, and it will never be understood”; “I search in vain for the meaning of this hardly decent riddle”, and “I cannot imagine what can have made an intelligent and distinguished artist choose so absurd a composition”.¹

Views like these were typical of the critical reception of Édouard Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* [Fig. 1] when it was first exhibited (as *Le Bain*) at the Salon des Refusés in 1863. And ever since, the painting has continued to haunt and baffle its commentators, so that an expansive literature has accumulated as to its possible meanings or to the meanings of its possible lack of meaning.

It is possible that the painting, as Pelloquet stated, “will never be understood”, and that its enigma is part of its intended nature. To be sure, such slightly earlier paintings as Manet’s *Le Vieux Musicien* [Fig. 10], *La Pêche* [Fig. 9], and even the seemingly forthright *Nymphé Surprise* [Fig. 24] are all “strange” in one way or another, as is, of course, *Olympia* [Fig. 20], painted roughly at the same time or slightly after *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. I needn’t go into the oddities of these works here, but merely mention them to signal that Manet seems, almost from the outset, to have clothed or veiled the meanings of his compositions in a way that no other artist of the time is known to have done; enigma was part of his game, it seems, in these early break-through years. Possibly, the enigmatic structures of these paintings and of others as regards their meaning or intelligibility were motivated by a wish to engage their viewers more prolongedly in what was there to be seen and thought about—in any case, this has certainly been their effect.

What most baffled contemporary commentators about *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* was, as it is well known, the “absurdity” as in Thore’s remark, of the nude in the company of dressed males in an outdoor setting, a highly improper event even if, in the realm of painting, Titian’s (then believed to be Giorgione’s) *Concert Champêtre* in the Louvre, was soon recognized to be an important source and precedent for this.

But there were other “absurdities” in Manet’s painting, and, among these, one which I believe should be taken more seriously than before. Thus, in his review of *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* at the Salon des Refusés, Thoré made the significant remark that the man to the right, the pointing man, “didn’t even have the idea of removing, while out of doors, his horrible padded hat”.² This has been quoted often before, but commentators have not so far stopped to think further about the implications of this remark. Obviously, however, Thoré here, as a man of his time, pointed to the fact that a hat like that was not used in open air, but was of a type designed for use at...
home or at any rate indoors as, in fact, we see in many contemporaneous portraits such as Alphonse Legros’ Portrait of the Artist's Father, 1856, or in Manet’s own Portrait of the Artist’s Parents, 1860, and in his Self-Portrait with a Scull-Cap, 1878-79 [Fig. 2]. There can be no doubt that Manet, belonging to the bourgeoisie as he did, was aware of this, and we need only look to Henri Fantin-Latour’s Portrait of Édouard Manet, 1867 [Fig. 3], in order to see that Manet was highly conscious of decorum—e.g., of which kind of hat to wear in public, as he is seen here, ready for the street, or anywhere out doors. In this connection, we may also read Antonin Proust’s account of Manet’s dress code, here incidentally con-
connected to the very day on which Manet (according to Proust’s probably somewhat fictive recollection) first spoke of painting *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. Manet and Proust were lying on the banks of the Seine at Argenteuil and spotted a woman bathing in the river. This, Proust says, led Manet to state,

> When we were in [Thomas Couture’s] studio, I copied Giorgione’s women, the women with musicians. It’s black that painting. The ground has come through. I want to redo it and to do it with a transparent atmosphere with people like those we see over there. I know it’s going to be attacked, but they can say what they like. […] Upon these reflexions, Manet got to his feet after having brushed and remitted his high hat. Because, whether in the country or in the city, he was invariably dressed in a jacket or a coat tied around the waist, trousers of a light colour, and wear-
ing a very high hat with a flat brim. Wearing good shoes and armed with a light walking stick [...]4.

In other words, that “horrible padded hat” must be understood as a sign that questions the whole ambience of *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* as an ostensibly outdoor “luncheon on the grass”, and a sign which, partly at least, tends to locate the scene indoors. But then again, only partly, since, for instance, the same pointing man’s light walking stick, held in his left hand, seems to contradict such an understanding, and, of course, the scene as a whole, with grass, trees, bushes, a stream and so on, at face value obviously represents a glade in some forest.

Nevertheless, a number of scholars have sensed a certain indoor or even studio quality to the scene; Niels Gösta Sandblad, for one, intuited that “It cannot be denied that in *Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe* something can be traced of the conflict between the two realities which lay at [Manet’s] disposal. He does not make it quite clear to us whether it is a part of Saint-Ouen or a part of the studio in Paris which he wishes to present”.5 And, somewhat along the same lines as Sandblad, Carol Armstrong more recently speculated on the contrast between the facture of the two women in the painting,

— one hard, frontal, outward, and still life associated, the other soft, recessive, and inward, and associated more with the process of painting than with its products. The *Luncheon on the Grass* is, I believe, a not-very-veiled evocation of the painter’s world of the studio, replete with the model and her discarded clothes, a still life arrangement, accoutrements and sets, and family visitors, together with a demonstration of painterly quotations and manners, and of the workings of illusionism.6

But Armstrong’s observation, like Sandblad’s, is made in passing, and neither of them makes much of it. Neither does Anne McCauley who observes that “[...] Manet in the *Déjeuner* leaves only two interpretations for his nude: that she is a shameless harlot or that she is an artist’s model posing in an environment in which sexual desire is presumably left at the studio door”.7 But the demeanour of the seated nude, unsoliciting, totally at ease, and with a level gaze, is hardly that of a “shameless harlot”, so that, within this duality, we are almost forced to think of her more as an artist’s model in the desexualized environment of a studio, which, again, tallies with the notion of an indoor scene, hinted at by the pointing man’s indoor hat.

There is a further element of the painting that speaks about this quality. As quoted above, Carol Armstrong noted the difference of facture between the two women in *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, but others, before her, had commented on this as well. Thus, the following is a passage from Émile Zola’s novel, *L’Oeuvre*, 1886, an indirect and only slightly veiled description of Manet’s painting as it appears to the fictive painter Claude Lantier in his confrontation at the Salon des Refusés with his own work, *Plein air*, obviously modelled on Manet’s painting but with slight variations:

Certainly, the gentleman with the velveteen jacket did not work well, too fat, and badly seated; only the hand was beautiful. In the background, the two small wrestling women, the blonde and the brunette, not developed sufficiently from a sketchy stage [à l’état d’ébauche], lacked solidity, and were amusing only to the eyes of the artist. But he was satisfied with the trees, with the sunlit clearing, and the nude woman, the woman lying on the grass seemed to him superior to his own talent, as if someone else had painted her, and as if he had never seen her before, in such resplendence of life.8

Zola, in other words, clearly saw that certain parts of Manet’s painting were rendered with a different facture (that of the ébauche or sketch) from the comparatively high degree of finish especially in “the trees” and in “the nude woman”. Indeed, if one looks at the painting, it becomes clear that the differences of facture not only pertain to the two women in it (the seated nude and the bather), as Carol Armstrong described it, but that the whole area of the painting, which the bather occupies, is different from the foreground and the glade to the left. It is more loosely painted—painterly as opposed to linear—more “sketchy” as Zola saw, than the rest.9 But it is also different in other respects: the horizon is considerably higher up than in the forest to the left, the bathing woman is much too large (as it has often been noted) in view of her distance behind the foreground group of three, and the stream in which she is wading does not seem to continue to the left of the tree or bush behind and above the seated nude. All this, together with the different facture of that whole area in which the bather is seen, suggests, to put it cautiously, that this area is to be understood as a kind of painting-within-the-painting.

It is instructive to compare this painterly area in *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* with the painting-within-the-painting in Manet’s *Woman with a Jug. Portrait of Madame Manet Holding a Ewer*, 1858-1860 [Fig. 4]. For even though this work is unfinished in part, it is clear that the foreground image of Suzanne Leenhoff is already tightly finished, and contrasts sharply with the framed landscape painting to the right, on the wall behind
Edouard Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe as a Veiled Allegory of Painting


her (or is it a window?).10 This landscape, in turn, is rendered loosely and painterly, very much like the area containing the bather in Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, the area which I shall go on to consider as a painting-within-the-painting.

The edges or the “frame” of this “painting-within-the-painting” in Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe are somewhat blurred but present nevertheless. The painterly area is terminated to the left by the foliage behind and above the nude and the man seated next to her, as we have already seen, since the forest to the left of this line partakes in the same density of finish with which the foreground and its figures are rendered, and has a lower horizon line as also noted above. But there is also a somewhat more sharp right-hand and bottom “frame” to the “painting-within-the-painting”, which seems to have gone unnoticed in the literature about Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe. To the right of the painting there is a tree, painted with the same density as the rest of the foreground and the forest at left. This tree is closely aligned with the actual border of the painting, and runs down to the immediate foreground of the canvas per se, creating a rather sharp line of demarcation between itself and the painterly area with the bather (what I tentatively call the “painting-within-the-painting”). Around the base of this tree there is a shadowy area, somewhat shaped like a blurred lozenge, the apex of which coincides exactly with the tip of the reclining man’s walking stick. Further, the upper right-hand border of that lozenge-shaped shadow is a diagonal line which is continued by the slant of the walking stick, passes on through the groin of the reclining man only to be picked up again by the sleeve on the jacket of the centrally positioned man’s left arm, terminating in his face and thus bringing us back to the bush or tree above the nude, which, as I said, functions as the left hand “frame” of the painterly area with the bather in the stream. In other words, we are faced with a composition such as the one I have drawn in Fig. 5, in which the area b corresponds to the suggestion of a painting within-the-painting, and area a corresponds to the rest of the painting.11

In a way, this is quite simple, but then again it is not, since the notion of area b as a painting-within-the-painting seems contradicted by the fact that the pointer with his “horrible padded hat” clearly leans into that area, while his legs belong...
to area a. In other words, he bridges the two “realities” of the painting as a whole, and therefore vastly complicates the whole issue.

The seeming existence of two different fields of “reality” in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe (areas a and b) may stem from the most important formal source for the painting, Marcantonio Raimondi’s engraving after Raphael’s lost drawing The Judgment of Paris [Fig. 6], showing two river gods and a nymph seated in the same poses to the lower right of that print. This citation is well known and has been much discussed, even as to whether Manet’s painting may be thought to be, in some oblique way, a modernized version of Raphael’s subject. I don’t think that Manet’s painting functions allegorically in this synecdochic sense in relation to the whole of The Judgment of Paris, neither as it appears in the printed image nor in the mythological narrative. There are, however, still some further references, beside the often mentioned formal analogies of the foreground trio in Manet’s painting to the gods and nymph in the Raphael/Raimondi print to be considered. Thus, the print also contains two registers of representation: all the figures in the foreground, including the group which Manet quoted, are juxtaposed with the cloud-like shape

in which we see the celestial figures hovering above the earth-bound figures below. This cloud, in fact, in its shape and in its difference from the main scene, is analogous, to a degree at least, to the shape and the otherness of area b in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe. Furthermore, in the print a winged Victory reaches out from the celestial sphere in the cloud, holding a laurel crown over the head of Venus to whom Paris awards the golden apple. In Manet’s painting, the bather in area b also reaches downward in the direction of area a, while her left hand holds her shift at the position of her sex, similar to the position of Victory’s left hand in the print. Both of these figures, then, perform movements that tend to bridge the different zones of the image. A final similarity is the position of the trio close to a stream or river. In The Judgment of Paris, the nude who gazes outward is in all likelihood to be understood as the nymph Oenone, Paris’ wife (this is before he will elope with Helen of Troy as his prize in the contest), whose position with her back in three quarter’s view (like the Belvedere torso) echoes that of her husband to the left of the composition. The half reclining man who holds a reed and an oar in his right hand (the model for Manet’s pointer) is probably her father, the river-god Kebren. But it would be far fetched to think of these identities, Victory, Oenone and Kebren, as present in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, in which the mythological garb has been shed in keeping with Manet’s fundamental Realism. This doesn’t mean, however, that the identity of the figures in Manet’s painting is devoid of meaning.

It is well known that the models Manet used for these figures in his painting were Victorine Meurent for the seated nude, his soon to be brother in law, Ferdinand Leenhoff, for the man next to her, and his brothers Gustave and Eugène Manet for the man to the right. This doesn’t make it a “family portrait” but it may still be significant that he chose his brothers as sitters for the pointing man who is clearly the most important (male) protagonist of the scene, and its only active agent with his pointing gesture, whatever it may signify (I will return to this). In choosing his brothers as sitters for this figure, Manet, it might be said, established a close family bond, and a marked likeness between himself and this “agent”, as it
is clear, I think, if we compare this figure with photographs of the painter such as Fig. 7. In at least two ways, then—by family name and physical likeness—it may be thought that Manet here inscribed himself into that figure, which bridges areas a and b of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe.¹³

A piece of circumstantial evidence for this sense of identity is provided by Paul Cézanne’s strange and dreamlike paraphrase of Manet’s painting, Cézanne’s own Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe of about 1870 [Fig. 8]. Here, Cézanne himself appears as the seated pointer in the composition, i.e. as a figure for the painter of the painting as if he may have intuited that this was also the real identity of the corresponding figure in Manet’s canvas: the painter himself, inscribed into his painting.¹⁴ The possibility arises here, too, that Cézanne’s gesture of pointing is a kind of cipher for the act of painting, since what he points to is a white cloth with two apples or oranges, a cézannesque still life, that is, on an only partially filled in “canvas”.

Looking to Manet’s own paintings, again, there are a number of examples in which a pointing gesture may be partly understood along similar or at least related lines. In La Pêche [Fig. 9], for instance, based upon two paintings by Rubens, Manet casts himself as a Rubens-character to the lower right of the composition (a “Manet/Rubens” painter in a “Manet/Rubens” painting), and points leftward to the rest of the scene while above, still to the right, a distant glade seems to contain a nude similar to the one in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe.¹⁵ Like the reclining pointer (my
EDOUARD MANET’S _LE DÉJEUNER SUR L’HERBE_ AS A VEILED ALLEGORY OF PAINTING

10) Édouard Manet, « _Le Vieux Musicien_ », 1862, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

"Manet") in _Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe_, “Manet/Rubens” in _La Pêche_ also holds a walking stick in his left hand.

In the highly ambiguous and in a way non-illusionistic _Le Vieux Musicien_, 1862 [Fig. 10], the old violinist isn’t pointing with his index finger, but with the bow of his instrument towards the two boys standing to his right (our left). It has been shown that the figure of the old musician derives from the antique Greek figure called "Chrysippos" in the Louvre, a sculpture that Manet had drawn in about 1860 [Fig. 11].

"Chrysippos" sits with his right hand extended as if counting or pointing, and Manet, in his drawing, focused especially on this gesturing hand, in fact rendering it with a black pencil in contrast to the paler sanguine which he used for the rest of the figure. As George Mauner says, "The fingers [of ‘Chrysippos’], extended in an expression of counting, appear to make a double indication, and a new look at the violinist at this point reveals that the bow, which replaces the two pointing fingers, is itself a pointer with which the artist-philosopher directs our attention to the two boys [...]". Further, Mauner may be right, and this is certainly in line with the drift of my argument, when he notes a resemblance between the old musician with his violin and Manet himself: "Beneath the disguise of venerable age, we discover the curly hair, the fallen forelock, the curve of the nose, and set of the mouth of Nadar’s famous photograph".


In Manet’s _Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier_, 1868 [Fig. 12], we also find a kind of agent in the otherwise stifled and prolonged moment of unreadable quiet: to the right (once again) sits a bearded man (modelled on Manet’s friend, the painter Auguste Rousselín, but again, and significantly, I believe, not unlike Manet himself) wearing a top hat—indoors, just as the young man standing at the table also wears an out-of-place hat as a commentator noted at the time: "[...] a young man, very badly brought up, who keeps his straw hat on his head and who sits down in a plate of oysters". In other words, this is a reversal of the situation in _Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe_ in which
Indoor hats figured in an ostensibly outdoor setting as Thore complained. Indeed, this wronghattedness in the later painting might be seen as a conscious quip on Manet’s part against Thore’s complaint, but it must also be more than that in view of the clearly ambitious if nonetheless ambiguous nature of *Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier*. As in the earlier painting, the effect of these “wrong signs” is to cast doubt on what we are seeing, and to create a sort of imploding of meaning, pointing back at and into the painting itself, including notions of its production along the lines of Cézanne’s paraphrase. And, as noted above, the seated painter, who resembles Manet, is an “agent” in that he gestures with his left hand towards the rest of the scene, holding a cigar in that hand and blowing smoke in the same direction as his “pointing”. In other words, he performs a similar action as does Manet in *La Pêche* and “Manet” in *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. Might we be so bold, therefore, as to understand this man as, once again, a figure for the painter, his pointing as a cipher for the act of painting, and his blowing smoke as a figure, a metaphor, for the “breath of life” and for painting as such—Manet inscribed in his work, while performing that work!? A master of puppets, discretely directing his marionettes.

In other respects as well, *Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier* has compositional and structural affinities with *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. As already noted, there is the position of a Manet-like figure to the right, wearing a hat and “pointing”. To the left of *Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier* is a still life of swords and other weaponry as a martial and male counterpart to the feminine still life of discarded clothes, basket of fruit, a bonnet etc. to the lower left of the earlier painting. Above the still life of arms in *Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier* is a plant which corresponds to the foliage of the trees to the left of *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*; at centre stage two figures, one male and one female, are oriented frontally in both paintings, the young man in *Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier* projecting almost as if in relief towards the viewer, thus bodily reiterating the engaging frontality of the seated nude’s face (whose gaze is now given to the servant woman to the left). Finally, to the right of *Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier*, we see a painting (or perhaps a framed map, but in either case an “image”) hanging on the wall behind the smoking man, i.e. in roughly the same position in the overall composition as that “area b” which I describe as a painting-within-the-painting of *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. It is also noteworthy that the knife on the table to the right of the later painting (a traditional still life device, often used by Manet) performs a similar intruding diagonal into the picture’s space as does the walking stick held by “Manet” in *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. In this view, the later painting reads more or less as a comment on the earlier
EDOUARD MANET’S LE DÉJEUNER SUR L’HERBE AS A VEILED ALLEGORY OF PAINTING

14) Michelangelo, “Creation of Adam” (detail), Sistine Chapel, Rome.

one, now explicitly set indoors, and perhaps in a studio, an atelier as its title has it.

Finally, Manet in his magnificent Dans la Serre (In the Conservatory), 1879 [Fig. 13], reiterated the theme of pointing (and smoking) in a centrally positioned conjunction of hands, one male, active, pointing, holding a cigar, the other female, languid, as if receiving—recalling the roles of pointer and nude in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe. And here, once again, as it was noted at the time by a critic who knew Manet well, the male agent in Dans la Serre, although ostensibly a portrait of Manet’s friend M. Guillemet seen in the company of his wife, “resembles the painter himself”.21 Obviously, as I have argued and discussed elsewhere, the conjunction of these hands makes one think of Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel [Fig. 14], so that a subtle subtext for all of these pointing “Manet”-fingers is not only a notion of “pointing-as-painting” but of “pointing/painting as creating—‘life’” and consequently a notion of “the artist as God”.22

I don’t wish to pursue this much further here; it’s a kind of treacherous ground which invites potentially unhealthy, metaphysical speculations, and ultimately perhaps even madness. Yet, there is the point to be made here, that this was exactly the kind of danger which Zola perceived as an inherent risk in “the new painting” as he made it abundantly clear in his novel L’Oeuvre (1886), in which Claude Lantier, as we have already seen (and as it’s well known), is modelled on Manet, at least partly and especially in the novel’s early chapters. Zola who had defended Manet’s work in the 1860’s, later, after the artist’s death, admitted: “I was young then, I was looking everywhere for weapons to defend the doctrine on which I based my books. Manet, by his care in choosing modern subjects and his search for realism, seemed worth supporting. But to tell the truth, his painting has always disconcerted me a little”.23 Zola’s disconcertation led to his indictment in L’Oeuvre of Lantier/Manet (and with them also of the emerging Symbolist generation, since Lantier’s madness makes him “a victim of an epoch”), and is a warning against “Pygmalion’s power”, the artist’s desire to invest his work with a life that it cannot objectively possess, and hence “to become God”. This is made absolutely clear in the alternative titles which Zola considered for his novel, before settling on the more neutral L’Oeuvre; thus the book might also have been called: Faire de la vie, L’oeuvre de chair, L’oeuvre vivante, Le sang de l’oeuvre and even simply Etre Dieu,24 all of which are pertinent to the theme of the novel. Zola, then, who had been a friend of Manet’s as well as his supporter, gave vent here to a notion of the painter’s work as being uncannily overcharged, and of producing effects that were felt to be too real.

Much more could be said about this, but I want to focus my attention on Manet’s painting and return to observables. It is true that “Manet’s” pose in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is obviously based on the reclining river god in Marcantino Raimondi’s engraving after Raphael [Fig. 6], as is the rest of the foreground group in Manet’s painting. The reclining river god in the print holds out his right hand grasping an oar while his left hand grasps a palm leaf, the latter corresponding to “Manet’s” walking stick. The other river god also holds a palm leaf, the diagonal of which corresponds to that of the other god’s oar, and this diagonal is roughly continued in this god’s palm leaf, not unlike, then, the way in which the sharp diagonal to the lower right of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is carried on through shadow, walking stick and sleeve as seen earlier. The reclining river god’s right hand with the oar does perform a kind of pointing gesture which is echoed by “Manet” in his canvas, except for the oar and the position of the thumb. But as an addendum to these similarities, I think that we may identify another possible, indeed likely, source for the pointing hand and its implications.

In fact, in several ways, the reclining man to the right in Manet’s canvas recalls another seated painter’s pose, namely Courbet’s as he represented himself—in the company of a nude model who isn’t modelling at present—in the centre of the enormous The Painter’s Studio, Real Allegory Determining a Phase of Seven Years in my Artistic Life, 1854-55 [Fig. 15].25 Leaning uncomfortably backwards in his chair, his head slightly raised, he holds his right arm out in front of him, while his
“pointing” hand, in which he wields his brush, is in the act of painting.26 The brushes Courbet holds in his left hand perform the same diagonal as the walking stick held by “Manet” in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe. Courbet is seen painting a landscape with rocks, trees and a waterfall that seems to issue its cascades outward, and it should be noted here that a waterfall also features in what I have called “the-painting-within-the-painting” in Le Déjeuner l’herbe, here as the source of the stream which flows forward and leftward, and in which the bathing woman is seen. There is a small possibility that Courbet’s position in The Studio itself derives obliquely from the reclining river god to the lower right of Marcantonio’s engraving, since it seems that Courbet had appropriated aspects of that image before—namely the three contestants for Paris’s apple for the three figures in Young Ladies of the Village of 1852.27 and “the figure of Athena (who has her back turned to us in the print) for the foreground woman in The Bathers of 1853”.28 If Courbet’s figure in The Studio does relate to that source, then it seems that he has translated the oar held by the river god’s right hand into his own brush, whereas Manet has edited out both the oar and the brush.

Michael Fried has shown with great force and beauty that Courbet’s relationship to the painting that he is working on in The Studio is one of virtually merging with that canvas:

[Courbet] has been represented seated in such close proximity to the canvas on which he is working that he scarcely seems to have room for his legs. His right leg especially seems to have nowhere to go except into the canvas, and it comes as a shock to realize that his right lower leg and foot are angled back under his chair (an impossible arrangement, as anyone who tries it quickly discovers). The impression that results [is] of an obscure merging of the painter’s lower body with the dark bottom portion of the picture on his easel […].29

Fried soon after goes on to say that the river landscape on the easel in Courbet’s The Studio reciprocates Courbet’s merging with his landscape in “an outward flow of water [which] doesn’t cease when it reaches the painter”, but metaphorically spills out into the studio itself in “the seething pinkish whirlpool described by [the nude model’s] discarded dress, and […] the minor rapid or cascade suggested by the white cat […]”.30

To me, this is related to what I see in Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, even if I have to partly ignore my embarrassment of applying, to a degree, Fried’s reading of Courbet to Manet, since Fried has also dealt extensively with the latter, and has devoted much attention to Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, but with very different results from mine.31 But I do think that something similar to Fried’s reading of the central group in Courbet’s Studio takes place in Manet’s canvas. Here, the waterfall to the upper right (in area b of [Fig. 5]) issues into the stream which flows leftward, past the rowboat (which refers to a similar vessel in Courbet’s Young Women on the Bank of the Seine, 1856-57),32 contains the bathing woman but then seemingly stops as noted before. Yet the movement of this stream is picked up, I think, by the curved back of the seated nude and culminates in the cornucopious still life to the lower left, the
overturned basket of which has the effect of almost spilling its contents out into the space in front of the canvas. This reiterates the effect that Manet achieved in his Boy with Cherries of 1858 [Fig. 16] in which the boy drops a few of the cherries down in front of the stone wall or ledge on which he is leaning, and which in itself is made congruent with the painting’s surface, both compositionally and as a consequence of Manet’s signature which is painted as if carefully chiselled into that wall/surface. This is probably an allusion to Titian’s Portrait of a Man, 1508-10 [Fig. 17], in which the signature “T V” (for Tiziano Vecelli) is similarly chiselled into the stone ledge, and whose sleeve projects into real space in a similar way as does the boy’s sleeve and his dropped cherries in Manet’s picture. The cornucopious still life in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is a major focal point in the painting (equivalent to the marvelous bouquet of flowers in Olympia), only second to the nude, but certainly connected with her, almost as a kind of attribute to her (again similar to the role of the flowers vis à vis the nude in Olympia).

Compositionally, I think that we can identify a great sweeping movement in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, beginning with the waterfall in the “painting-within-the-painting” (area b)
18) From the waterfall, \(a^*\) (inside area \(b\), corresponding to Fig. 5 as the “painting-within-the-painting”), through the pointer’s hand at \(b^*\), to \(c^*\), the cornucopious still life in area \(a\), and ending almost “out here”, in the still life in area \(a\). An overflow, in other words, of pictorial forces, pressures, and energy streams, which issue out of “the painting-within-the-painting”, out into area \(a\), which might be called “the studio”, and further out into real space at the lower left. In fact, this diagonal movement or energy stream from upper right to lower left (and simultaneously from background to foreground to relief) is “held”, as it were, by the pointing hand of “the painter”, which performs a similar, but condensed, movement, aligned with the stream flowing left, his index finger slightly flexed in our direction as if directing the general movement of the painting, ever closer to the surface as it moves left. In fact, the pointing hand itself is echoed first by the hand in which the nude rests her chin (fingers flexed into the palm, a detail not seen in Marcantonio’s print), and second by the hand of the man in the middle, which is seen behind the lower back of the nude, “pointing” to the still life. Finally, this flow of directions through hands and fingers, one picking up energy from another and passing it on, all starts in the hand with which the bathing woman reaches down into the stream, and which is seen in such close communion with the pointer’s hand, especially his upturned thumb. (One might also draw attention to the bather’s other hand with which she seems to be holding up her shift from the water, and the fingers of which all point downward towards the left, following and emphasizing the same diagonal flow of energy from upper right to lower left that I am describing).

All this may be illustrated by the following diagram [Fig. 18], in which \(a^*\) corresponds to the waterfall, \(b^*\) to the hand of the pointer, and \(c^*\) to the cornucopious still life and its orientation. Inscribed in the diagram is still the area \(b\) (as in [Fig. 5]), representing the diagonal, slanting position of the “painting-within-the-painting”. A dominant movement, then, passes from \(a^*\) in area \(b\) down to \(c^*\) in area \(a\), and further on, as it may be illustrated by another diagram, Fig. 19, which is now spatially conceived. Here, \(b\) is the still life, and the arrow below it demarcates its direction outward, toward the viewer, \(V\), whose position in front of the painting is determined by the gaze of the nude, \(N\).

The triangle \(V-P-N\) (viewer, pointer, nude), and back to \(V\), represents a structure of viewing that is found in several major paintings by Manet, some of which I have discussed already in relation to Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe. It is particularly clear in Olympia, 1863 [Fig. 20], in which the viewer is stationed (“ordered to stand erect”, so to speak) directly in front of the nude’s head, i.e., somewhat to the left of the vertical centre of the canvas. This viewer, as it is often been discussed, is simultaneously “me”, as viewer of the painting, and Olympia’s visitor who has handed over his (“my”) bouquet of flowers to Olympia’s servant, seen to the right. In this sense the servant acts as a representative of “me” (as visitor/viewer, and in the first place of Manet as painter-beholder), holding as she does “my” flowers, and offering them to her mistress (who is also “my” mistress, but in a different sense). The triangle: viewer, servant, Olympia (and back to viewer qva the latter’s gaze) corresponds point by point to the triangle \(V-P-N\) in Fig. 19. It reappears in Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier [Fig. 12] in the triangle of viewer, smoker (painter) and servant (and back to viewer qva the servant’s gaze, here taking the role of the nudes in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe and in Olympia). A similar triangular structure is operative in The Execution of Maximilian, 1867-68, in which the halo-like form of the Emperor’s sombrero (in the Mannheim version, 1868) may be said to act as the “gaze” or punctum (in Roland Barthes’s sense), and the firing squad dramatically (re)enacts the function of the pointer in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, the servant in Olympia and so on. The two brilliant paintings, Reading/Mme Manet and Léon, ca. 1866-73 (?), and In the garden, 1870, both contain a stand-in viewer to the right, looking at or in the direction of the main figure, in both cases a beautiful woman who gazes back out at the viewer. Le Chemin de Fer, 1873, is related to this structure.
This diagram is spatially organized. A–B corresponds here to the surface of the picture plane, seen from above. a \^ is roughly the position of the waterfall, c \^ is the pointing hand, b \^ is the still life, and the arrow below it roughly demarcates the spilling out of the still life, into real space, in front of the painting. a \^ to b \^, then, corresponds to the sinewy surface line a\* to b\* in 18) V roughly indicates the position of the viewer whose station in front of the canvas is determined mainly by the gaze of the nude, N, somewhat to the left of the central vertical axis of the painting. The line c to d represents the surface, as far as there is such a surface, of the “painting-within-the-painting”. Finally, the line V to P represents a sensation on the part of the viewer (V), who is "me", that I am swirled into the figure of the “pointer-painter” (P).

too, as is On the Beach, 1873, Argenteuil, 1874, Nana, 1877, Dans la Serre, 1879 [Fig. 13], and, most famously of all, A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1881-82 [Fig. 21].

The line V–P (from the viewer to the pointer) in Fig. 19 represents a strong sensation I have had while lecturing in front of the actual painting, the size and scale of which, of course, contribute strongly to its overall effect, much of which is virtually lost in reproduction. It is as if the swirling motion performed by the sinewy line a* to c* in Fig. 18, and which continues out into “real space”, creates a dynamic force, a kind of suction into the right hand part of the canvas, into the body of the reclining pointer, and possibly further, into the space with the waterfall.

But of course, the main force of the picture is the beautiful nude woman, whose clear and friendly eyes engage the viewer in a tantalizing exchange of mirrored looking with powerfully erotic yet not quite sexual charges. Within the kind of explanation of the painting that I am attempting here, she is the artist’s—the pointer’s, “Manet’s”—model, as was, in real life, Victorine Meurent, who modelled for the nude, just as she would model for the nude Olympia. As it has already been discussed earlier, the way this nude is represented in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, unabashed, totally at ease with herself and her surroundings, invests her with the air of a model in a studio. But if the pointer’s gesture is a metaphor for the act of painting, then the nude is “logically” the one he paints, i.e., what he paints, since she is the one he’s pointing at. To a degree, this reverses the implications of the scene, since the role of a painted figure within the painting was earlier mainly ascribed to the bathing woman in “the-painting-within-the-painting”. But although the nude is the most striking focal point of the entire scene, and may strike us, as it did Zola, as having “such resplendency of life”, there is also a kind of artificial quality to this figure. Fried makes a passing comment on one of the reasons for this quality when he writes, “Look, in parting, at the folds of flesh at the back of Victorine’s neck: is there even today a point of view that can reconcile those with the demands of painterly ‘effectiveness’?” And they are indeed strange, even disturbingly so, once they are seen. The effect makes one think of Robert Rey’s response to Olympia, as when he wrote, “I remember my own first meeting—more than sixteen years ago—with Olympia, and the oddly painful shock which the picture gave me. I was afraid when I saw this pallid form, this face where the skin seemed stretched over a piece of wood. Olympia frightened me like a corpse—but I felt weighing upon me the malificence of that terribly human regard”. A similar, if less uncanny, note was struck by the critic Ernest Chesneau, reviewing the Salon des Refusés in 1863: “Manet’s figures make one think involuntarily of the marionettes on the Champs-Elysées: a solid head and slack clothing”.

But it is noteworthy that such criticism was also frequently directed at the paintings of Ingres, whose mastery Portrait of


Madame Leblanc, 1823 [Fig. 22], for instance, was commented on as follows by a critic in 1833, "I cannot believe that this monster, lacking the upper part of her head, with orbicular eyes and sausage-like fingers, is not the distorted perspective of a doll, seen too close and reflected on the canvas by several curved mirrors, with no sense of the whole in each of its details". In their paintings of the human figure Manet and Ingres shared a quality, which is not the same in each of them, but nonetheless similar, of something simultaneously artificial and object-like on the one hand, and uncannily and powerfully real on the other hand.

According to Antonin Proust, Manet greatly admired Ingres, and had said words to the effect that "in our century Ingres had been the master of masters", and one might say that by quoting Raphael (via Raimondi’s print) Manet almost automatically positioned himself close to Ingres, probably the most Raphaelesque painter of the 19th century, at least in France. Here, it is noteworthy that there is a figure in a painting by Ingres with similar unnatural folds of flesh around her neck as those of the nude in Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe. This is the Baigneuse, 1807 [Fig. 23], a nympe surprise, which perhaps anticipates Manet’s own painting from 1861 of that theme [Fig. 24], which latter painting, finally, has much to do with the seated nude in Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe.

The object-like quality of the seated nude is marked not only by those folds of flesh around her neck but also by the
curious fact that there is no nipple to be seen on her breast, again (perhaps) a kind of desexualization and objectification of the figure, at odds with her otherwise marvellous but for this reason also uncanny “resplendency of life”. To be sure, there are Ingresque qualities to Manet’s nude in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, also in her tight academic finish (although not quite as slick as in Ingres’s style), but her round full body certainly also recalls the ample forms of the standing nude in Courbet’s Studio, which returns me to considering this picture as a source for Manet’s (the “Courbet” quality of the seated nude may be further gauged by comparing this figure with that of Olympia’s slender and seemingly younger body, though based on the same model, and at roughly the same time. If the seated nude in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe combines, as I think, aspects of Ingres and Courbet, then Olympia is given more exclusively to Ingres and alludes at this level to such paintings by this master as, e.g., the Grande Odalisque of 1814).

In every sense, Courbet’s The Studio was the major painting about painting of the epoch; it was “a real allegory” according to its full title, and painted on a scale which was reserved for academic history paintings. So was Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe.

Manet, I think, pitted himself against Courbet’s wide screen allegory, at the same time reducing its scale and augmenting its enigma, its none too clear allegory, which in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is even more opaque than in The Studio. But in view of what I have argued so far: 1) the model-quality of the relaxed nude, 2) the often noted studio-atmosphere, 3) the indoor hat, 4) the likeness of the reclining pointer to Manet, and 5) the quality or notion of a painting-within-the-painting to the right, Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe seems to take the enigma of Courbet’s Studio one or more steps further. Manet, in effect, did not present himself as if merging with his painting, as Courbet had done, but took the further step of putting himself in his painting, and of inviting the viewer to join him.

But it is more complicated than that, since it has been seen that in a sense there are “two paintings” in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, or even, in a way three—the physical painting per se, the foreground group and its surroundings, including the still life and the trees and glade to the left, and finally the “painting-within-the-painting” to the right as outlined in Fig. 5. Leaving aside the complicating factor of the painting per se (which self-evidently is what it’s all about), the point is that the figure of “Manet” leans into the “painting-within-the-painting” and thus makes it analogous to a second space in the painting as a whole, yet still framed and rendered with a different feature as seen above. Again, there are certain parallels to this in Courbet’s The Studio, beyond the notion that Courbet merges with the canvas he is seen at work on. That canvas is also seen at an angle, from the left whereas the painterly field in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is seen from the right. In The Studio, the landscape being painted is in a different painterly key from the rest of the scene, mainly because of its expanse of light blue sky which explains why Delacroix commented in his Journal that he found it “ambiguous” since, “it has an air of a real sky in the midst of the painting”, and it has also been said that the landscape “makes a hole in that scene”. This ambiguity is enhanced by the fact that there are other paintings-within-the-painting in The Studio, namely one or more enormous but shady, sketchy and almost fantasmatic landscapes hung on the wall in the background, and in the same tinted brownish hue that permeates the rest of the
scene, except for the landscape on the easel. In other words, The Studio contains a comparable duality of painterly styles to those seen in Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe and its clash between the densely painted foreground and the area which the bather occupies. One might also put it this way: in Manet's painting, especially the seated nude, and the equally tightly finished still life, could not be placed in the same space as the bather.

Though more could be said, I shall leave it at this but must, finally, draw attention to a third painting that relates to, and in a sense frames Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe at the level I speak of here. Manet's canvas, as we have seen, relates to Courbet's Studio, which I think is an important source for it; Cézanne's paraphrase of Manet's painting also helps to suggest its implications at this level, as we have seen. But it is also important, I think, to consider Georges Seurat's large Poseuses, 1886-88 [Fig. 25], as a comment on Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, especially within the context of my discussion of that painting.51

Seurat undoubtedly studied Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe at Manet's memorial, retrospective exhibition in January 1884, and probably made a reference to it in the group of three seated people to the lower left of his Sunday at la Grande Jatte, 1884-86, which he began later that year.52 Now, La Grande Jatte later reappeared as a painting-within-the-painting in the Poseuses, in which it occupies the studio wall to the left, and is seen in perspective as defining half the background of the room in which the models are placed.

In other words, the representation of part of La Grande Jatte in Poseuses corresponds almost exactly in its size and angle to that "painting-within-the-painting" (area b), which I claim to be subtly incorporated into the right hand side of Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, but is, in Seurat's painting, placed at the left side of the composition [Fig. 26].

To be sure, there are other visual rhymes as well between Manet's painting and Seurat's Poseuses; they share the exact same height (208 cm), whereas Seurat's canvas is somewhat broader (308 cm) than Manet's (265 cm); the two seated nudes in Poseuses may both be seen as echoes of the nude in Manet's canvas; the parasol to the lower left of Seurat's picture recalls the walking stick of the man in Manet's; and the
basket below La Grande Jatte in Poseuses rhymes with the overturned cornucopious basket to the lower left of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe.

Further, the basket in Poseuses has no counterpart in La Grande Jatte, neither as this is represented in Poseuses nor in the La Grande Jatte per se, while other items in the studio are clearly echoes of objects within the latter, such as the bonnet at lower right which “belongs” to the young seated girl with a small bouquet of flowers near the foreground in La Grande Jatte. On these and other visual rhymes between objects represented in the studio of the Poseuses and in the painting represented in that painting, Françoise Cachin notes that “Every item of dress in the studio finds an echo among those in the picture, as if to give the impression that these women had descended from the canvas and undressed”. And she further observes, that “the formal analogies are more striking than the divergences between the draped and the nude figures [in areas a and b of Poseuses, respectively]; it is as if the central model, no less erect than the woman walking, has stepped down from her picture, disrobed, and turned toward us, coolly sizing us up”.

In other words, Poseuses, which is obviously and overtly a painting about painting, is also a more subtle evocation of the existential links between levels of reality, i.e., between the physical painting itself, in the Barnes collection, its representation of nude models in a studio interior, and the relationship of these to the painting-within-the-painting (which also, to a degree, reads or functions as a “window” or opening onto an exterior, a landscape with figures as in area b of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe).

As Cachin sees it, beautifully, the relationship of the figures in the-painting-in-the-painting to the models in the foreground is one in which the figures in the former “step out” and virtually into our space, most powerfully incarnated in the standing, frontal nude at centre who is “coolly sizing us up”, as an erect version, I will add, of the seated nude in Manet’s Déjeuner sur l’herbe, and comparatively close to the viewer.

It appears, then, that Seurat, not unlike Cézanne before him, saw that Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, was a painting about painting, a painting, that is, which thematizes its own production and ontology. But Manet’s canvas does this in a way which is so subtle that it makes it understandable that this has gone largely unnoticed. It is a kind of “rebus”, as I quoted Pelloquet at the beginning of this essay, and despite what I have argued here, he may still have been right in saying that “it will never be understood”, if by “understanding” we mean an absolute certainty of its “ultimate meaning” which it may not even possess. Rather, Manet’s famous painting oscillates between levels of reality, and these levels, themselves, oscillate in a never ending circuit between—for short—“areas a and b” in the composition; art, artefact, and reality in a still baffling tableau vivant from which, wonderfully, a bird (a bullfinch) flies this way, reciprocating our entry into the painting’s spaces that are anything but flat.

It’s an engulfing painting. Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is a programmatic painting, and paradigmatic of the ways in which Manet engaged the viewer in his works through gazes, spillings, reliefs, enigmas and so on. Here, it isn’t only the gaze of the seated nude that engages the viewer, and implicates him in the scene. The very fact that the three main protagonists exude an air, and different signs of, indoor and studio “behaviour” (such as a hat and unabashed nudity) puts them on a par with the painting’s beholder, who—naturally—also finds him—or herself in an interior, and an artistic interior at that (a museum, as it is, or a private collection, as it might have been), echoing the studio atmosphere of the group of three. In this way, we enter the painting, and become part of it ourselves. Inside the painting, the “painter-pointer” bridges the spaces of the “painting-within-the-painting” and the primary scene; this latter, in turn, provides bridges between its own space and that of the beholder, most famously, of course, in the direct gaze of the nude, but almost just as poignantly in the cornucopious still life with delicious fruit, ready for the taking.
1 Théodore Peloquet, L’Exposition: Journal du Salon de 1863, no. 22 (July 23, 1863): “c’est un rébus d’une dimension exagérée et qu’on ne devinera jamais”; Louis Etienne, Le Jury et les exposants: Salon des Refusés, Paris, 1863, p. 30: “je cherche en vain ce que peut signifier ce logogriphe peu sain”; William Bürger (Théophile Thoré), Salon de 1863, in Salons de W. Bürger: “Je ne devin pour ce pas que ce qui a pu faire choisir à un artiste intelligent et distingué une composition si absurde [...]”; Thöré quoted from Michael Fried, Manet’s Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s, Chicago and London, 1996, pp. 297 and 570, n. 83. For Peloquet’s and Etienne’s statements see Fried, ibidem, p. 560, n. 20, and p. 570, n. 82, respectively. My translation of Peloquet’s statement differs slightly from Fried’s. For many other similar examples of contemporary criticism of Manet’s picture, see Éric Darragon, Manet, Paris, 1991, especially pp. 115-129.

2 See, e.g. George Heard Hamilton, Manet and his Critics, New Haven, 1954, p. 50, and Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., p. 297 and 570, n. 87: “qui n’a pas même eu l’idée d’ôter, en plein air, son horrible chapeau au bourrelet”.

3 For Legros’ Portrait of the Artist’s Father see Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., fig. 88. Françoise Cachin, in her entry on Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe in Cachin, Charles S. Moffett et al., Manet 1832-1883, exh. cat. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1983, p. 169, identifies the hat of the reclining pointer as “the faluche worn by students”. While it is true that a tasselled cap called a faluche is worn by many French students, and is often decorated with various symbolic emblems, signifying the owner’s line of study, personal interests and so on, the tradition of this faluche was instigated only in June 1888 (and celebrated annually ever since), according to numerous web pages on the internet (searchword: faluche). Cf. also Nan Stalnaker, “Manet’s realism in Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, Word & Image, vol. 15, no. 3 (July-September 1999), pp. 243-261, who also (p. 260) refers to this hat as a “faluche, the hat of a bohemian student”. Finally, Hubert Damisch, in his chapter on Manet’s painting in The Judgment of Paris, transl. by John Goodman, Chicago and London, 1996, p. 66, also makes a mention of this hat as a “student faluche or tasseled cap”, but points out that “the presence of [this cap] can’t be justified by this figure’s being a student—he is too old”. (It should be noted here that although it contains a chapter on Le Dejeuner sur l’herbe, Damisch’s book is entirely something else than just a study of Manet. Basically, his rich book is a philosophical and psychoanalytical investigation of the nature of beauty. Nevertheless, it also holds insights that are relevant to the present study’s different line of thinking.) I think that Thöré got it right: it’s an indoor hat, and not a faluche. In any case, the second man also wears a cap which has no similarity with a faluche, and is clearly an indoor head garment as the one seen in, e.g., Manet’s Self-Portrait with a Scull-Cap.

4 My translation after Antonin Proust, Édouard Manet. Souvenirs, Paris, 1913, pp. 43-44: “Quand nous étions à l’atelier, j’ai copié les femmes de Giorgione, les femmes avec les musiciens. Il est noir, ce tableau. Les fonds ont repoussé. Je veux refaire cela et le faire dans la transparence de l’atmosphère, avec des personnes comme celles que nous voyons là-bas. On m’interroge. On dira ce qu’on voudra. [...] Sur ces réflexions, Manet se leva, après avoir brossé et remis sur sa tête son chapeau haut-de-forme. Car, à la campagne comme à la ville, il était invariablement vêtu d’un veston ou d’une jaquette serrée à la taille, d’un pantalon de couleur claire, et il se coiffait d’un chapeau très élevé à bords plats. Bien chaussé, armé d’une canne légère [...].” This is also very much how Manet represented himself to the far left of his La Musique aux Tuileries, 1862.


7 Anne McCauley, Sex and the Salon. Defining Art and Immorality in 1863, in Paul Hayes Tucker, ed., Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe, op. cit., p. 61. Cf. Cachin’s entry on Le déjeuner sur l’herbe in Manet 1832-1883, op. cit., p. 167, bluntly stating, “The landscape [...] is treated in a very casual way, sketched with the brush like a stage set behind the models, who quite obviously are posing in the studio”. But this is too bluntly put: it is not, and never has been, that obvious to the painting’s commentators and critics that this is what we are seeing, and Cachin herself goes on (p. 169) to describe the scene as “a picnic outing”. However, with the amendment of the word “obviously”, I do agree with the notion, but in a less specific and obvious way. A further small objection to Cachin’s entry as quoted above, is that not all of the landscape setting in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is “treated in a casual way, sketched with the brush...”, as I will go on to discuss.

8 Emile Zola, L’Oeuvre, Paris, 1974 (1886), p. 183: “Décidément, le monsieur au veston de velours ne valais rien, empâté, mal assis; la main seule était belle. Au fond, les deux petites lutteuses, la blonde, la brune, restées trop à l’état d’ébauche, manquaient de solidité, amusantes uniquement pour des yeux d’artiste. Mais il était content des deux, de la clairière ensoleillée, et de la femme nue, la femme couché sur l’herbe, lui apparaissait supérieure à son talent même, comme si un autre l’avait peinte et qu’il ne l’eût pas connue encore, dans ce resplendissement de vie”. Of course, there are no small lutteuses (wrestling women) in Manet’s painting. The notion of lutte, or wrestling match, in Zola’s novel, connects to Claude Lantier’s “mad” ambition with his painting as in the following passage (p. 303): “Ah! cet effort de création dans l’œuvre d’art, cet effort de sang et de larmes dont il agonisait, pour créer de la chair, souffler de la vie! Toujours en bataille avec le réel, et toujours vaincu, la lutte contre l’ange”. In fact, Zola considered that the title of his novel might have been La lutte contre l’ange. Cf. ibidem., pp. 425-426 with the full list of titles in Zola’s Ébauche de L’Oeuvre [recherche du titre de roman].

9 Differences of facture are also notable within other important early paintings by Manet such as The Absinthe Drinker, 1859, the Nymphéa Surprise, 1861, and the Portrait of Madame Brunet, 1862. Especially in the latter, the figure may be read as standing not as much before a landscape as in front of a landscape painting. Yet hardly so in a quite literal sense. But the impression’s enigma in this sense is what counts as the poetics of the image, and hence of Manet’s probable intention. On this aspect of the Nymphéa Surprise, see Rosalind Krauss, “Manet’s Nymph Surprised”, Burlington Magazine, 109 (November 1967), pp. 622-627, especially p. 623 with the observation that the nymph’s “flat, unmodelled body undermines illusionistic conviction and emphasizes the artificial nature of the work of art. Further, Manet’s nude seems to sit in front of a studio back-drop that is discontinuous from her [...]” (my italics). This also holds true for the Portrait of Madame Brunet, for aspects of Le Vieux Musicien and others. Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, however, is different and more complicated in this respect, as it will be seen.

10 For a technical examination and discussion of this painting, see Juliet Wilson Barea and Henrik Bjerre, Transformations of an
early Manet painting. The Ordrupgaard ‘Woman with a Jug’ examined, in Mikael Wiig et al., Manet, exh. cat., Copenhagen, 1989, pp. 168-171. Wilson Bregar and Bjerre see the figure of Suzanne Leenhoff as “Set against a plain, green background on the left, with a distant landscape view through a window (or perhaps into a painting within the painting) [...]”. So, what I just called a painting-within-the-painting in Woman with a Jug, may also seem, to them, to be “a window”, at least as their first option. My first option is still the painting-within-the-painting, partly because its frame doesn’t look much like a window sill, partly because of its different facture from the foreground scene. On the other hand, the curious vertical green band which borders the landscape to its left (but not at its bottom) could be seen in perspective, which would signal a window opening. In the end, these similarities stem from Manet’s painting, and are germane to the uncertainty in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe as well as in other major paintings such as the Portrait of Zacharie Astruc, 1866, in which the light painterly area to the left has been construed by various commentators as either a view into another room, a mirror, or a painting on the wall (cf. Françoise Cachin on this painting in Manet 1832-1883, op. cit., p. 251). Cachin opts for the latter reading, and goes on (ibidem) to compare the painting to Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe: “For as in Le déjeuner sur l’herbe, there is a great difference between the treatment of the center of interest—there, the threesome with still life; here, Astruc’s face—and that of the rest of the painting”.

11 Joanna Szczepińska-Tramer, “Manet et Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, Artibus et Historiae, 38 (1998), pp. 179-190, discusses, among other things, a vignette made by Aimé de Lemud, Ma Nacelle, ca. 1847, as a possible source for Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe. I think that she exaggerates the similarities somewhat, but it is interesting nonetheless to see the double image in de Lemud’s vignette as suggestive to the relationship between the two fields or spaces of Manet’s painting, areas a and b in my Fig. 5. In both cases the image within the image is framed by foliage, and in both of them, a figure in the foreground projects into the space of the image in the “background” (cf. Szczepińska-Tramer, p. 188, n. 21). But however seductive the similarities may be—clothed males and nude females, a still life in the immediate foreground, a boat in the background image, framed by foliage—I think that these similarities may well be fortuitous or at best unconscious, a possibility also mentioned by Szczepińska-Tramer (p. 182): “[…] peut-être même sans le savoir, Manet aurait en quelque sorte suivi les inventions de [Lemud]”. (In which latter case, Manet may have seen at one time the vignette, have been intrigued by it, and have stored it in his unconscious memory bank of images. We might, then, think of Manet’s process of quoting and citing from various sources in relation to T. S. Eliot’s definition of the poet’s mind as “a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases and images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are there together.” Quoted from Eliot, Tradition and the Individual Talent in Selected Essays 1917-1932, New York, 1932, p. 8). But finally, despite the noted similarities, the two images, de Lemud’s and Manet’s, are vastly different in every other respect, such as their size, technique, level of ambition, and sheer power, the latter linked (not only but certainly also) to the gaze of the nude which in Manet’s painting pierces or rather annihilates the “screen” of the surface.


13 On the possible metaphorical identity of the pointing figure and Manet cf. George Mauner, Manet. Peintre-Philosophe. A Study of the Painter’s Themes, University Park and London, 1975, p. 78: “In the Déjeuner sur l’herbe the figure of the dandy as philosopher [Mauner’s general theme which despite its detailed and interesting elaboration is unconvincing] was posed by Manet’s brother [Gustave] and may, of course, be interpreted as symbolizing the artist, since it is his gesture that indicates the [philosophical] theme to the viewer”. Nan Stalnaker, “Manet’s realism in Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, op. cit., p. 260, also seems to intuit such an understanding of the reclining pointer, albeit in a rather banal sense: “It was Edouard Manet who, extroverted and opinionated, would generate, wherever he went, talk about art, and who had, in the words of Proust, fixed convictions that would not even admit of ‘contradiction or even discussion’. Perhaps Manet was explaining why he rejects sculpture as a model for painting; but Manet’s sculptor brother-in-law Rudolph [sic] Leenhoff, who has heard it all before, scarcely bothers to listen”. Stalnaker goes on to say (p. 260) that “This account of the banal meaning of the image leaves out, however, what makes this painting unforgettable—the vivid psychological reality of Victorine’s look”. It is this “look” of “Victorine”, the seated nude in Manet’s painting, that Stalnaker mainly addresses, and to which I shall also return.

14 As also noted by Hubert Damisch, The Judgment of Paris, op. cit., p. 290, some of Picasso’s many variations on Manet’s Le Déjeuner, dating from the years around 1960, also cast the pointer in Manet’s canvas as Picasso himself.

15 Mauner, Manet. Peintre-Philosophe, op. cit., pp. 24-25. Cf. Joanna Szczepińska-Tramer, “Manet et Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, op. cit., pp. 179-190, who discusses further similarities between La Peche and Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, viewing them essentially as pendants (“une paire”, p. 186), and as related, although in different ways, to Manet’s personal life at the time, mainly his imminent marriage, Szczepińska-Tramer, however, concedes that Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is “infinitely more complex” than La Pêche, and is also a kind of “allégorie de l’art” (ibidem), but in a different way from what I am trying to show. — Alain de Leiris, “Manet, Guérault and Chrysippus”, Art Bulletin, 46 (1964), pp. 401-404.

16 Mauner, Manet. Peintre-Philosophe, op. cit., p. 51.

17 ibidem, p. 78, n. 171.


20 Quoted from Nancy Locke, ibidem, p. 130. “The poses of the three figures in Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier are reminiscent of the foreground trio in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe: the bearded man at right looks left but at no particular person, the woman looks out at the viewer, and the Leenhoff in the center looks blankly out of the picture space. The triangle here is reversed, with Léon Leenhoff in front of the others, whereas in the earlier picture, Ferdinand Leenhoff had posed behind Victorine and Eugène. The parallels between the two Déjeuners, and their implications, are not to be ignored. Just as the viewer of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe remains baffled by what is going on and what is being shared by the figures, especially the status of the vividly depicted nude and the bathing woman in the background, the viewer of Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier is kept guessing as to the relationships of the persons depicted”. Locke, interestingly, goes on to refer to a lecture by Timothy J. Clark in which “Clark proposes that the studied indifference of the artist [i.e. the man to the right of Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier] could be seen as part of a narrative in which the painter waits to hear the reaction of Léon to a picture he has just unveiled. Part of Clark’s argument involves a complex tracing of the allégorie of painting as it might occur in Le Déjeuner [dans l’atelier], and he reads the look of Léon as reminis-
The pointing gesture may well be understood as signifying speech, 20th Century Art, New York, 1984, p. 268. Of course, these quotes don’t prove anything, but I bring them as a foil, merely, to my own argument. Published with Zola’s Le Dejeuner sur l’Herbe as a veiled allegory of painting.

21 Jules Castagnary in Le Siècle, June 28, 1879, quoted from George Heard Hamilton, Manet and his Critics, op. cit., p. 215. Cf. also Richard Wollheim, Painting as an Art, London, 1987, p. 156 on Dans la Serrre, “Manet has chosen as the model for the male figure someone whose features, as was noted at the time, remarkably resembled his own: he has stepped into his father’s shoes.” (The notion of “his father’s shoes” has to do with Wollheim’s discussion of Dans la Serrre in relation to Manet’s Portrait of the Artist’s Parents, 1860). Regarding my discussion of stand-ins for Manet in the paintings just mentioned, beginning with Le Dejeuner sur l’herbe, see also James H. Rubin’s interesting thought about Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1881-82) that “the client reflected in the mirror of the bar is a self-portrait of sorts; though not resembling Manet, or anyone else in particular, the question (or uncertainty) of this customer’s identity is crucial to the painting’s effect”. Quoted from James H. Rubin, Manet’s Silence and the Poetics of Bouquets, London, 1994, p. 86. Obviously, this is in line with my argument that Manet is metaphorically present in the paintings discussed.

22 Rolf Laesoe, Billedets Liv. Søv kapitel om det moderne ikon. Fra Ingres til Bacon, Copenhagen, 2000. In English, the title of this book would be (roughly) “The Life of the Image. Seven Chapters on the Modern Icon. From Ingres to Bacon”. The reference is to my Chapter II, “Manet”, pp. 51-52. A similar idea regarding one of Picasso’s “sleep-watcher” drawings, Young Man and Sleeping Girl, 1931, is expressed by Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art, London, Oxford, and New York, 1972, p. 72, noting that “[...] the conjuncture of their right hands signals an imminent critical contact, recalling a more famous creation of man”. Also, Michael Fried, Courbet’s Realism, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 195-196, comments on Courbet’s Young Women on the Bank of the Seine, in which a small branch brushes the sleeping woman’s hand as “[...] implying that the branch is in the process of animating the woman through near-contact with her hands.[...] An art-historical analog for such a feat of animation is the Creation of Adam in the Sistine ceiling [...]”. See also William Rubin’s comments on a sheet of studies by Picasso, dating from 1907 containing several depictions of Picasso’s own left hand: “[...] the presence of Picasso’s hand, which rises from the bottom of the sheet as if magically commanding the activities of the figures, is an important link to the Primitive tradition. Picasso had already developed a sense of the artist’s hand as a kind of thaumaturgic wand. In Boy Leading a Horse of 1906, the unbridled animal seems to follow the boy as if mesmerized by the power of his gesture. [...] the notion of art-making and of religion became fused in the consciousness of the force of the artist-shaman’s hand. [...] the emanating lines of force suggest that the hand magically ‘commands’ the movement of the figures, thus paralleling metaphorically the reality of Picasso’s hand as the agent of their creation. The representation of the artist’s hand in isolation—found from the cave painters to Pollock—is always an allusion to the notion of image-making as a supernatural, ritual power [...]”. W. Rubin, “Picasso”, in W. Rubin, ed., Primitivism in 20th Century Art, New York, 1984, p. 268. Of course, these quotes don’t prove anything, but I bring them as a foil, merely, to my own argument. The pointing gesture may well be understood as signifying speech, which is also an act of creation, and also has biblical overtones: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God” (John 1:1). However, the most likely word to be uttered by the seated pointer’s gesture in Manet’s painting would be regarder! (“Look!”). The unspoken word, that is, of any painter and his painting, which brings us back into Manet’s canvas as a self-reflexive allegory of the art of painting.


25 In French: L’Atelier du peintre, Allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique.

26 Mauner, Manet, Peintre-Philosophe, op. cit., p. 78, interestingly in this connection, speculates that “The philosopher [i.e. the old violinist] in Le Vieux Musicien, who makes a similar silent observation [as the pointer in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe], represents Manet himself with even greater certainty, in view of the fact that he occupies a position analogous to that of Courbet’s self-portrait in L’Atelier”. Mauner, pp. 70-76, makes further observations on the analogies between Courbet’s Studio and Manet’s Le Vieux Musicien, to my mind overstating their similarities, while he doesn’t connect Courbet’s painting with Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, which to me seems much more plausible.

27 Theodore Reff, “Courbet and Manet”, Arts Magazine, 54 (March 1980), pp. 98-103. The identification is made on p. 100, and Reff provided a further piece of possible evidence for this connection by pointing to and reproducing (p. 102, Fig. 11) the painting Judgement of Paris (c. 1660) attributed to Jan Miell, which is obviously a close paraphrase of the Raphael-Marcantonio image but which introduces two cows corresponding very closely to those in Courbet’s Young Ladies of the Village. Reff also (pp. 99-100) identifies the still life with guitar and hat in Courbet’s Studio as a source for a similar arrangement in Manet’s somewhat programmatic first Frontispiece etching, 1862. In other words, Courbet’s Studio had already been quarried by Manet before he set to work on Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe.


29 Fried, Courbet’s Realism, op. cit., p. 159.


31 Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit.

32 Ibidem, p. 68-69. Cachin, Manet 1832-1883, op. cit., p. 168-169, considers Courbet’s Young Women on the Bank of the Seine to be Manet’s primary source as far as Courbet is concerned, and does not take The Studio into account.

33 In Manet’s Woman with a Jug. Portrait of Madame Manet Holding a Ewer, 1858-1860, mentioned earlier (Fig. 4, cf. above, n. 10), a stream also trickles through the landscape in the painting-within-the-painting, downward, as it were, in the direction of the jug with which Suzanne Leenhoff pours water into the basin she holds, like a modern...
Hebe. Here too, then, there is an overflow from the secondary scene (the landscape painting on the wall) into the primary scene. Perhaps, even, the unfinished state of the basin and of the sitter’s right hand is a sign of Manet’s difficulty, his undecidability with this closure, which, if brought to completion, would effectively block a sense of further movement of the water in the stream through the jug, and out into real space, as it were. In Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, the latter is effected mainly by the cornucopious still life, but also, in different register, by the gaze of the nude, and, in yet another different register, by the small bird which flies out of the canvas, in the viewer’s direction, at the top center of the painting.

34 Possibly, Manet alluded also, both in the Bay with Cherries and in the still life of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, which also contains cherries, to Titian’s Madonna of the Cherries, 1516-18, in the Art History Museum of Vienna. Other sources for this still life will be considered in note 35, below.

35 A source for the effect and orientation of the still life in Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is probably to be found in Thomas Couture’s (Manet’s teacher in the 1850s) Romans of the Decadence, 1847 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris), in which a similarly oriented still life features prominently in the middle foreground, creating a bridge between our space and that of the figures in the picture. Couture’s still life with an amphora, overturned in our direction, also contains a piece of white cloth with fruit—apples and grapes, corresponding to the figs and cherries in Manet’s canvas. But then, the languishing, indolent, reclining woman at the center of Couture’s vast composition, with her gaze at the viewer, should also be considered as a source for Olympia, the latter’s well-known relation to Titian’s Venus of Urbino notwithstanding. Cf. Cachin in Manet 1832-1883, op. cit., p. 178 for the Olympia—Romans of the Decadence comparison. However, it should also be noted that Manet’s still life in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe as well as Couture’s in The Romans of the Decadence, are affiliated with a motif seen in several versions of the theme of The Judgment of Paris. Thus, for example, Rubens’ version of 1600 (National Gallery, London) shows the river-god Kebren to the right, leaning on an overturned amphora which issues, “spills”, its contents of water forward, and a similar motif is seen in Michel Corneille’s version of the subject, c. 1685, (overtly based on the Raphael—Marcantonio print, in which latter, however, the amphora held by Oenone is standing upright). Rubens’ and Corneille’s versions are published in Damisch, The Judgment of Paris, op. cit., Figs 90 and 85, respectively. Damisch also, among many other examples of the motif, illustrates, Fig. 116, Anthonie Blocklandt’s grisaille, The Judgment of Paris, 1570-80 (Louvre), showing the overturned amphora spilling its contents out of the picture space, so to speak, to the left, i.e. in the same position as Manet’s cornucopious still life in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe.

36 On the concept of “painter-beholder” see Michael Fried, Courbet’s Realism, op. cit., passim, and idem, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., passim. On Olympia’s relation to the viewer see also Kathleen Adler, Manet, Oxford, 1986, p. 61: “Today, still, the direct gaze of the figure and the arched-back aggressive kitten at the end of the bed produce an immediacy in the relationship between the figure and the spectator that retains its power to disconcert. The implication of the kitten’s response is that the viewer, who becomes at once Olympia’s male visitor and separate from the fictional spectator, is in the room with her”.

37 Roland Barthes, La Chambre Claire. Note sur la Photographie, Paris, 1980. Barthes uses the word punctum in opposition to the word studium. Punctum is that often unforeseen element in a photograph that pierces, wounds or even tortures the viewer, and which disturbs and interrupts studium. Studium, on the other hand, denotes “interest” on the part of the viewer (but is generated by the mode of the image, or parts of the image), it is “cultural” and “always coded, which punctum is not”. (Barthes, Chapter 22). Extrapolating from this, one could say that the gaze of the nude in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is the punctum that pierces and halts the studium of the rest of the scene with its “cultural” references to Raphael and Titian, which only “study” and “cultural interest” will reveal. It is relevant to see Nan Stalnaker’s article “Manet’s realism in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, op. cit., in this light, since she focuses so exclusively on the “causal realism” of the nude. Barthes’s binary opposition of studium versus punctum does seem relevant to the coexistence of two pictorial modes in Manet’s painting, and in modern painting in a larger field. Studium versus punctum is thus related to the concepts narrative versus iconic in the sense of


38 On the Mannheim version of The Execution of Maximillian as a kind of allegory of Manet’s enterprise as a painter see Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., pp. 356-360. Fried here, p. 358, sees the figure of the soldier to the far right of the composition (preparing for the coup de grace), as possibly associated with Manet, since this soldier is a figure “who by virtue of his stance and action might almost be an image of a painter standing back and partly turned away from his painting while he mixes colours on his palette”. Cf. my discussion, earlier in the present essay, of stand-ins for Manet in the right hand sides of La Pêche, Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, Le Déjeuner dans l’atelier, and Dans La Serre as well as James H. Rubin’s intuition that the man in the mirror to the right of Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère metaphorically represents Manet (as quoted above, n. 21).

39 Joanna Szczepińska-Tramer, “Manet et Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, op. cit., p. 187, also touches upon this quality in saying that “Des trois intrus, elle est la plus génante, parce que totalement artificielle: moitié encore Déesse et moitié déjà Modele dans ce groupe artistif[...].” I cannot, however, think of the nude here as a “Goddess”.

40 Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., p. 401.

41 Robert Rey, Manet, Milan, n.d. (originally published in 1938), p. 63. Rey’s response invites a note about the frontal gaze in Olympia as well as in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe (and in other Manet paintings too) in relation to the face of Medusa, the ancient Greek Gorgo’s petrifying stare, which has been much discussed in recent decades of art theory, e.g. (and almost foundingly) in Louis Marin, Détruire la peinture, Paris, 1977 (To Destroy Painting, transl. by Mette Hjort, Chicago and London, 1995). Marin’s thoughts on Medusa are summarized in the following passage by Yves-Alain Bois, regarding Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon, which has a bearing on Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe as well: Yves-Alain Bois, “Painting as Trauma”, Art in America, 36, no. 6 (1988), pp. 130-140, 172-173; p. 138: “The Medusa (castration) metaphor is, in fact, the one that, in the evolution of the
EDOUARD MANET’S LE DÉJEUNER SUR L’HERBE AS A VEILED ALLEGORY OF PAINTING

Demoiselles, best accounts for the suppression of allegory, on the one hand, and, on the other, the apotropaic brutality of the finished picture. As already established by Louis Marin, in his remarkable analysis of Caravaggio’s Medusa in the Uffizi, the Medusa is the prime representation of anti-history. According to Marin, Poussin, whose pictures participate in the repression of the act of enunciating proper to any historic discourse, ‘could not abide Caravaggio and said that he had been born to destroy painting’ (Félibien). Caravaggio’s inability to compose ‘a real story’ (Baglione), along with his rejection of perspective, led him to realism (understood as an attempt to address the spectator ‘directly’; to go from the ‘once-upon-a-time’ aspect of Poussin’s pictures to ‘See, I’m watching you’). The same reproach (realism as a consequence of the incapacity to narrate) would later be used by contemporary critics of Courbet and, to a lesser extent, Manet. This passage from ‘historical’ énoncé (the impersonal statement of fact) to ‘realist’ énonciation (the act of stating, which presupposes a subject) is the same shift that [Leo] Steinberg is describing when he speaks of a 90-degree rotation of the plane of action and what [William] Rubin means when he analyzes the structural transformation from ‘narrative’ to ‘iconic’. Thus, the Medusa myth (as set forth in Caravaggio’s painting in the Uffizi) functions as a ‘return of the repressed’. It thematizes the spectator’s petrification (the theoretical basis of Renaissance monocular perspective), and it makes the female sex organ (the Medusa’s head) the essential interrupter of narrative, the icon that challenges the (male) spectator by signifying to him that his comfortable position, outside the narrative scene, is not as secure as he might think”. If transplanted into a discussion of Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, the friendly gaze of the seated nude here takes on the role of Medusa’s petrifying ‘See, I’m watching you’. At the same time this nude, although not displaying her sex to us, the viewers (which would be outrageous, of course) does so to the point-er, “Manet”, in the picture (how does he see her?), which is, in fact, a “scandalous” element inherent in the picture, and one that Picasso, true to temperament, stressed in some of his variations on Manet’s painting (cf. Damisch, The Judgement of Paris, op. cit., pp. 288-289, with relevant illustrations). Cf. also J. H. Rubin, Manet’s Silence, op. cit., p. 50, who speaks of the nude in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe as “‘Vicotorine-Medusa”—in the sense that her gaze deprives its object of independent life and immobilizes it as a fixed image [...]”.

42 Quoted from Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., pp. 282-284. This, in turn, is also the gist of Adrien Paul’s commentary at the same time to the effect that “Manet treated living beings and inanimate things exactly the same”. (quoted from ibidem, p. 284). Fried’s book has much more to say about the connections between Manet’s paintings in the early 1860s and a growing interest in the marionette theatre at the same time. In my book Billettes Liv, op. cit., I discuss this at length, with reference to, inter al., Charles Magnin, Histoire des Marionettes en Europe depuis l’Antiquité jusqu’à nos jours, Paris, 1852, and Maurice Sand, Masques et Buffons, 1-I, Paris, 1860, 2 vols with an introduction by George Sand with main text and coloured illustrations by her son Maurice; the Sands’ book relates to their own puppet theatre at their country estate at Nohant (on this and many other insights relating to this topic, see also Harold B. Segel, Pinocchio’s Progeny. Puppets, Marionettes, Automatons, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama, Baltimore, 1995). See also Charles Baudelaire’s essay from 1853, “Morale de Jou-jou” (transl. as “The Philosophy of Toys” in Charles Baudelaire, The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays, transl. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne, London, 1995, pp. 198-204) in which Baudelaire defines children’s toys, and especially marionette theatres, as a child’s ideal introduction to art. Charles Magnin’s book makes an explicit and extended reference (pp. 266-267) to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s famous story “Der Sandmann” (later to be analyzed by Sigmund Freud in “Das Unheimliche”, 1919, transl. as “The Uncanny”, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud, London, vol. XVII, pp. 218-256). Hoffmann’s story revolves around the female automaton called Olympia, possibly providing an intriguing source for Manet’s painting as also pointed out by Theodore Reff, Manet, Olympia, op. cit., p. 113: “[Manet] was certainly familiar, like Dumas fills before him, with the Olympia who plays such a remarkable role in Hoffmann’s story ‘Der Sandmann’”. Baudelaire was much interested in Hoffmann and may have relayed this interest to his friend Manet, the painter (on Baudelaire and Hoffmann see, e.g., Rosemary Lloyd, Baudelaire et Hoffmann. Affinités et Influences, London etc., 1979), Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., pp. 339-340, also notes Olympia’s “perversive allure, its uncanny and disturbing power, above all in its complex relation to the viewer.” With regard to the nude in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, Stalnaker, “Manet’s realism in Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, op. cit., p. 259, writes of “Victorine’s uncannily convincing look”, discussing it extensively as a product of “causal realism” in the following sense (p. 247): “[...] merely from inspecting the image of Victorine’s face, we are inclined to assign it a certain causal history, one which originates with Manet’s physical encounter with an actual model!”

43 Quoted from Portraits by Ingres. Image of an Epoch, ed. by Gary Tinterow and Philip Conisbee, New York, 1999, p. 504. Cf. also Baudelaire’s remark on Ingres’s portraits in 1855 as “a population of automatons that disturbs our senses by its all too visible and palpable strangeness” (ibidem, p. 512). Interestingly, in this connection, Timothy J. Clark quotes this passage from Baudelaire on Ingres, and uses it to say that this is “the best description of Manet’s illusionism that I know” (T. J. Clark, The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers, London, 1985, p. 100). In Billettes Liv, op. cit., I have discussed at length the zone of Freudian uncanniness engendered by the doll- or marionette-like objecthood of both Manet’s and Ingres’s figures, and also in much later works by, among others, Seurat, Picasso, Matisse, De Chirico, Klee, Beilmer, and Tony Oursler.

44 On the object-like appearance of many of Manet’s figures, cf. Fried, Manet’s Modernism, op. cit., p. 340: “Manet’s models have been represented not simply as posing before the painter but as somehow frozen or immobilized—we might say petrified, if it were not that the suggestion of stoniness seems out of place”. Later (p. 405), Fried alludes in passing to what he calls Manets “distancing and freezing, one might almost say medusizing, devices.” Cf. my note 41 above for more on Medusa, as well as Jean Clair, Méduse. Contribution à une Anthropologie des Arts du Visuel, Paris, 1989, p. 11: “Emblème des puissances de la vue, elle pourrait être, dans une autre religion que la nôtre, la sainte patronne des artistes. Car l’artiste, le peintre, le sculpteur, est celui qui, comme Méduse, a le pouvoir singulier de jeter son regard sur le monde, d’en immobiliser les aspects et d’en détacher un fragment”.


46 The primary source for Manet’s Nymph Surprise is an engraving by Johannes Vosterman after Rubens’ lost painting Susannah and the Elders (as first pointed out by Charles Sterling, “Manet et Rubens”, L’Acur de l’Art (Sept-Oct. 1932) 13, p. 290); cf., e.g., Rosalind Krauss, “Manet’s Nymph Surprised”, op. cit., p. 623). But this doesn’t necessarily rule out a simultaneous reference to Ingres’s Bathing Woman—cf. Nancy Locke, Manet and the Family
Romance, op. cit., p. 83, who compares Manet's Nymphé Surprise to Ingres’s Valpinçon Bather even if, as Locke observes, “Manet has painted his model to appear ample in figure, with a more Rubensian fleshiness”. In a different essay from the one at hand, one might work on the coexistence of “rubeniste” and “poussiniste” traits in paintings by Manet, which would obviously have to be linked to the topic of “ingriste” academic finish and linearity on one hand versus the painterliness of Delacroix on the other hand; thus areas a and b, respectively, in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, might be said to be, respectively, “Poussin/Ingres” (area a) versus “Rubens/Delacroix” (area b). A similar dichotomy is observable in Manet’s Portrait of Mme Brunet as well as in the Nymphé Surprise (cf. n. 9, above), and it is interesting to speculate on this as a possible, reconciliatory move on Manet’s part between conservative academism and utopian painterliness, not least since Manet belonged to both fractions, socially as well as in his art. George Mauner, Manet. Peintre-Philosophe, op. cit., pp. 43-44, touches upon this when he says, “There is a final dual aspect [apart from Mauner’s “spirit-matter” dichotomy] to the Déjeuner sur l’herbe, and that is Manet’s double inspiration for the work, Raphael and Giorgione. In his attempt to fuse the soft, painterly, and mysterious qualities of the Venetian school with the crisper, linear, and more discursively clear expression of the Florentine, does he not refer to the age-old dichotomy of ‘colore-disegno’ revived in the seventeenth century in the dispute between Rubenistes and Poussinistes, and in his own time in the Ingres-Delacroix controversy, as a fundamental problem of opposing but complementary temperaments?” On Ingres’s Bathing Woman and her relation to the viewer—which I claim to anticipate the nudes in Manet’s Nymphé Surprise and in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, see Robert Rosenblum, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, London: Thames and Hudson, 1967, p. 70: “Here, rather than enjoying an overt display of the female nude, the spectator is put into the disquieting position of a voyer. Seen from behind […], the bather looks anxiously over her shoulder and conceals her body with crossed arms, as if suddenly aware of an intruder”. Obviously, this is parallel up to a point with the situation of the nude and spectator in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, except for the complete lack of anxiety in Manet’s nude, and her frontal rather than dorsal orientation.


48 Cf. Niels Gösta Sandblad, Manet. Three Studies in Artistic Conception, op. cit., p. 93 for a related observation: “The bathing woman in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe occupies, with her sweeping movement, a volume, a ‘cube’ of space, in much the same way that she would have done in a painting in the old style of perspectives and gradations. In the famous nature morte of the foreground with its clothes and dining implements, the artist is still displaying an academic skill in the reproduction of textures”.


51 Cf. Robert L. Herbert, Françoise Cachin, Anne Distel, Susan Alyson Stein, and Gary Tinterow, Georges Seurat 1859-1891, New York, 1991. In her entry to Poseuses, Cachin (pp. 276-277) here makes a similar comparison between Seurat’s painting and those of Courbet and Manet, “The depicting of nude models together with their clothing had, of course, been anticipated in Courbet’s L’Atelier and Manet’s Déjeuner sur l’herbe”.

52 Ibidem, p. 178.

53 Ibidem, p. 278.

54 Ibidem.

55 Flatness has become a cliché in art historical writing on Manet. Witness, for example, his watercolour of the Races at Longchamps, 1864, painted only a year after Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe: to the right, horses and riders thundering toward us; to the left, a carriage with passengers virtually delving into the picture space. Any one may add further examples, but surely Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe is one.