How to Teach Manet's *Olympia* after Transgender Studies

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'How to teach Manet's *Olympia* after Transgender Studies?' This is a question that I have continued to ask myself over the last few years. Manet's painting is often understood to be both a culmination and an inauguration of a narrative of art history that takes the nude as a central theme (*plate 1*). It is one of the most commonly taught works in the history of art, and it is an example that is expected to be known beyond the subfield of nineteenth-century painting histories. It seems that most art historians have had to teach Manet's *Olympia* to students at some point, even if just in the context of a survey lecture. I address this essay to those teaching art history, and I will rely on *Olympia*'s exemplarity to question the ways in which many of us have conventionally explained this painting and, more broadly, the genre of the nude that takes it as an anchor. Both look different when we account for gender's multiplicity and transformability.

As is recounted in those survey lectures, this work became notorious because of the scandal that erupted around its exhibition in 1865, two years after it was painted. Critics attacked the two-figure composition, layering insults on both of the women represented in it. At issue were its contradictory messages, and its remixing of the codes from art-historical tradition. Since its exhibition, this painting has come to be written about in many ways, and it has been seen to have raised anxieties about class, sexuality, race, women's economic disenfranchisement, colonialist fantasies, racist nationalisms, masculine insecurities, and on and on. Both in 1865 and in the vast amount of writing on Manet's *Olympia* since, the work's strategic ambivalences and collapsing dualisms have fuelled and maintained this critical outpouring.[1]

My primary interest is not really in this painting at all. Rather, its starring historiographical role is an opportunity to discuss the ways that art history has been taught and understood. I am a tourist in the field of Manet studies, and I write as a teacher – like many others among the readers of this journal – who has had to account for this painting, the genre of the nude, and their centrality to the history of European art. As teachers and researchers of art history, we all have to talk about the nude at some point, and my overall concern is with how we characterize its historical complexities, its opacities, and its interpretative capacities. To address these questions, I will first discuss why the nude is a problem (and an opportunity) for art history, and I will recount my own priorities and trajectory as a means to introduce my approach to this painting and its stakes. Second, I will go into some detail about Manet's infamous nude, the critical response, and some canonical art-historical texts about it. I will do this to offer an example of how we might give voice to the complexities and diversities of genders in the narratives of art history.

Detail from Édouard Manet, *Reclining Young Woman in Spanish Costume*, 1862–63 (*plate 8*).

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DOI:
10.1111/1467-8365.12647
Art History | ISSN 0141-6790
45 | 2 | April 2022 | pages
342-369

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1 Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 130.5 cm × 190 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay.

In recent years, I have increasingly found it difficult to find the right words to talk about the nude, and I have heard from many colleagues who have also faced a mounting uncertainty. In the classroom every day, conventional ways of talking about art history confront present-day conversations. These conversations about how histories of art can energize and inform today's debates are some of the best things, for me, about teaching. But, we must also ask how current concerns compel us to ask different questions of the past. In particular, how do we talk about bodies and genders? This is one of the most urgent and contentious topics in contemporary culture, and it bears directly on those of us who talk about figuration and representation on a daily basis in the art history classroom.[2]

Over the last decade, there has been an explosion of public attention to the long-standing reality that genders are multiple and mutable, that personhood is successive, and that bodies are not simply dimorphic. It is increasingly clear that it is (and always has been) inadequate to discuss gender as exclusively binary or static. These are not new developments. The only thing that is new is the public media attention to transgender lives and communities that has been sparked by the more visible transgender activism of the last few decades.[3] This is not the first time that transgender people and politics have made themselves visible in media, art, or popular culture; it has been happening for centuries.

As well, the presence of trans students in the classroom is neither new nor problematic. The issue lies in the casual certainty with which art history discusses and relies upon the imagery of the nude. When we project an image of an unclothed body onto a screen in a classroom, we tend to rush to classify it as either – and only – male or female. Our instantaneous assignment of 'female nude' or 'male nude' to that body

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proclaims (and urges) consensus at the outset. This speech act is a performative: it imposes a binary gender anew with the heedless ascription of 'female' or 'male' to that image of a body. A central concern of art history has been the analysis of the complex, contextual, and imbricated meanings of visual signs (from Renaissance iconographies to cubist *papiers collés*), yet we arrogantly treat the nude body as a self-evident, stable, transparent, and timeless sign for gender. This has been common, and I see how I have done this myself in my earlier writings. As teachers of images of persons and bodies, we must challenge the deep-seated presumption that the unclothed body easily and directly signifies a binary gender.

Not all of our students, the readers of our articles, our colleagues – or we ourselves – will be so quick to categorize. Our trans students and peers, our non-binary students and peers, our intersex students and peers, and their allies all regard the body more complexly than the shorthand of art history's one-to-one mapping of gender onto phenotypic sex. There are many who are sceptical of such an equation of seeing and knowing. They may share that external organization of bodily traits with the image on the screen but – for themselves and their bodies – reject the classification of those traits as singly and self-evidently male or female. How then do we teach art history and the nude without foreclosing that student's or that reader's own sense of self?[4] I am not interested in responding to counter-questions that ask how many or what percentage of students see their own and others' bodies in a way that does not assume that gender is written on them for all to see. It does not matter. One is enough, but surely there are many more.

Art history traffics in nudes; they are central to the field's self-definition. More so than perhaps in any other discipline in the humanities, art historians talk a lot about naked bodies. Because of this, we must constantly refine the ways in which we – as teachers and purveyors of the nude – account for those representations. Teaching and writing about the nude is an opportunity to introduce questions about the representation of transgender, non-binary, intersex, and other forms of gender and bodily particularity. The recognition of the long-standing reality of the complexities and mutabilities of genders is not just an ethical and practical imperative for the classroom. It is also a methodological issue with which the discipline of art history must grapple, for it changes the ways we look at art, its histories, and its archives.

We must secure a new set of assumptions about how we interpret the complex and layered image that is the human form. Take as axiomatic that seeing someone's body – even in a state of exposure and scrutiny – does not tell us who they are or what gender they know themselves to be. We must adopt this axiom as an ethical stance in order to interrogate the ways in which we talk about people, bodies, and their images.

My own questioning of how I teach art history and the nude has been informed by my participation in the interdisciplinary field of transgender studies, and it is the epistemological shift demanded by that field that underwrites my suggestions in this essay.[5] Even though this field is, by now, well established with its own journals, anthologies, and graduate programmes, there have been few inroads into art history. Literature and film studies – to say nothing of the social sciences – have been energized by the biopolitical questions and critiques that transgender studies poses. By contrast, art history has – until very recently – largely ignored the robust intellectual conversations happening in and through transgender studies.[6]

One explanation for this avoidance is the unwarranted belief that transgender, non-binary, and intersex possibilities are limited to contemporary phenomena. Current questions about gender's complexity are sometimes taken to be synchronically limited to a present perspective, rather than diachronically pursuable. Such charges

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of anachronism or presentism are often not directly stated (e.g. in the form of a book review or response). Rather, resistance is frequently encountered in initial conversations about proposed research questions or teaching topics, and it is part and parcel of the negotiations necessary to see (and defend) that work onward into its later stages of development and exploration. Claims of historical inappropriateness are an all-too-familiar response to anyone who raises the question about longer histories of genders' multiplicities and mutabilities.

Especially in art-historical narratives of the European tradition, we tend to focus on exemplary individual artists as the agents of those narratives. Consequently, the lack of visibly transgender artists in history is frequently mistaken to be evidence for the belief that these are not appropriate questions for the past. But, we need only think about the similar claims that have been made, for instance, about why there had been no great women artists, or why the narrative of art history has been predominantly white. Those ways of looking at the past have been overturned (as well as a wealth of counter-narratives unearthed), and the time has come to think differently about how transgender capacities are evident in and catalytic of art's longer histories.

I think that the history of art has a great deal to contribute to transgender studies. Art history has developed nuanced and complex vocabularies for talking about figurative and other visual images and their proliferation of meanings and receptions. Much more so than literature or film, art history grapples directly with the role of materiality (and its relationship to representation), allowing for complex ways to think about embodiment and materialization.[7] Further, the history of art and architecture asks how bodies and spaces dynamically inflect each other.[8] The history of art history has been tied up with the analysis of form's meanings and relations, and it has attended to the ways that non-resemblance, non-mimesis, and non-representation operate in relation to (and beyond) imagery. In 2015, I ventured one preliminary juncture between art history and transgender studies with my book on American abstract sculpture of the 1960s, which discussed form's investments, transformations, and capacities.[9] In it, I asked how the dominant rhetoric of abstraction claimed to have purged references to the human figure but was, concurrently, being defended in terms of its bodily evocations and engagements. In between non-figuration and bodily metaphor, new possibilities for seeing gender's multiplicity and transformability were proposed within the discourse of abstraction itself. Sometimes, artists recoiled from the unruly capacities that their works addressed to others, and other artists embraced the collapse of dualisms. That book was about non-trans artists and the ways that their commitments to abstraction produced inadvertent instabilities in gender assignments, and my central concern was to demonstrate how we might gain a more complex account of our archives once we set aside the presumptions that all genders are binary and static, and that all bodies are absolutely dimorphic. If we assume, instead, complexity and multiplicity, then new ways of viewing the archive emerge – and, I would argue, more accurate ones at that.

That book was published seven years ago, but I first started writing it around 2006. In the past fifteen odd years since I started that research, the historical and theoretical literature on transgender studies has grown exponentially. Today, some of the most exciting work in transgender studies in the humanities has focused on history and historical methodology.[10] In particular, a wealth of new research on the nineteenth century has emerged, further refuting any misconception that trans must be limited to a contemporary frame. The nineteenth century has been the focus of recent books such as Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides*, Rachel Mesch's *Before Trans*, Jen Manion's *Female Husbands*, and – in intersex studies – Hil Malatino's *Queer Embodiment*.[11] They are exemplary of the new literature on the nineteenth century in Europe and America, and

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I take these books as a foundation for my questions regarding Manet's *Olympia*. We need not, however, rely solely on these recent books. There are plenty of nineteenth-century discussions of gender transformation and nondimorphic bodies, including Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1831), Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite* (*c.* 1846), the memoir of Herculine Barbin (1860s/74), and Rachilde's *Monsieur Venus* (1884), to name just a few. While the term 'transgender' may be relatively recent, the complexity that it describes is not new.[12] We can quibble about the use of that word, but doing so does not change the fact that there is long historical evidence that people have lived in genders not ascribed to them, that not all bodies are absolutely dimorphic, and that one's personhood is successive across life's multiple stages. I am not going to repeat here the extensive proofs offered by authors such as Snorton or Mesch about the nineteenth century. Rather, I will simply assert another axiom: the idea that gender can be changed was discussed and even sometimes accepted in the nineteenth century. It was also the lived experience of some people in the nineteenth century – and before.

These recent books have brought to light the histories of trans and intersex subjects in the nineteenth century, but that is not the only task of transgender studies or intersex studies.[13] We must also ask how the doctrine of binary, static genders operates on all subjects, when it breaks down, and when it is used to reinforce other forms of discrimination. Again, this is both an ethical and a historical task.

I write as a non-trans person about transgender studies; this inflects and delimits how I engage with the field and its questions. For instance, my book on abstraction reinterpreted the work of canonical artists who were also not trans but whose archives, I argue, contain accounts of gender's multiplicity and mutability. I write with transgender studies about ostensibly non-trans artists and topics as a means to interrogate the limits of a binary view of genders and bodies. This involves critical analyses of episodes in which gender's complexity is transphobically foreclosed, as well as accounts of transgender capacities erupting at unexpected sites. I do not presume to speak from trans experience, and there will always be things that will be opaque or inaccessible for me to write about ethically. Rather than speak for trans persons in history, I have instead chosen to put pressure on dominant narratives that have been built around non-trans artists. I do this to show that, within them, there is nevertheless widespread evidence and capacity for more open and mutable accounts of gender – even if inadvertently proposed.[14]

The discussion of Manet's *Olympia* that follows is an extension of this mode. Here, again, I review a canonical episode in the history of art to demonstrate how its archive can be mined for accounts of gender's multiplicity and mutability. I proceed through a brief overview of the *Olympia* episode, the contemporary critical reception, and Manet's related paintings. My attention will be on how these contexts have been narrated, and I will lean on two exemplars of the art-historical writing about this episode, by T. J. Clark and Carol Armstrong, to discuss the opportunities for recasting the account of gender in these narratives. I point to the moments of breakdown of the presumption of binary genders, and I discuss the ways in which gender's transformability and multiplicity circulated in these contexts (whether as Manet's subversive play or his critics' aversive reactions). In short, I hope to establish that, when we teach Manet's *Olympia*, we have an opportunity to teach about genders and bodies in a way that addresses transgender histories and concerns. This, in turn, offers lessons for how we account for the nude, more broadly. My purpose here is not to capture the full complexity or internal debates of the Manet literature. I will stick to well-discussed issues and commonly read art-historical texts. Indeed, my point is not that accounts of genders' mutabilities and

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multiplicities are buried in the archive; they are, by contrast, right in front of us in the major and mainstream accounts that we first turn to in order to understand (and teach) Manet's notorious painting.

A consistent line of questioning in the writing on Manet's *Olympia*, from 1865 onwards, has centred on its troubling of gendered expectations and iconographies. As T. J. Clark thoroughly argued in his foundational analysis of the painting, Manet disarranged the protocols for looking at the nude. The painting compelled viewers to struggle with assigning conventional codes to its represented bodies. While I am indebted to Clark's careful reading of the criticism of this work, I also contend that there is an internal debate within his argument: the thorough unpacking of the painting's productive instabilities butts against the certainty proclaimed about what kind of evidence the naked body provides. For instance, at one point in his analysis Clark summarized the scene of confrontation between *Olympia* and its critics in 1865:

> What writers saw instead was some kind of indeterminacy in the image: a body on a bed, evidently sexed and sexual, but whose appearance was hard to make out in any steady way, and harder still to write about.[15]

As Clark so forcefully established, *Olympia* produced multiple disruptions of expected conventions and dualisms. He also remarked: 'It is as if the painter welcomes disparity and makes a system of it.'[16] Despite his careful attention to the painting's generative ambiguities, Clark also asserted that Olympia's body offered something supposedly incontrovertible and above questioning. It was 'evidently sexed'. In other words, the naked body was submitted as evidence that could be used to indict (or at least invalidate) Manet's critics.

The critics, by contrast, accepted no such evidence. They took Manet's tactical ambiguities and transversal citations not as a system of disparity but as evidence of rudderless contrarianism.[17] One recurring rebuke was to challenge the humanity of Olympia, and she (and the attendant who shares the composition with her) were compared to animals and objects. This assault also took the form of a questioning of the femininity of the two women in the picture, and critics' censure often went hand in hand with claims about their transgressions of appropriate gender. In his essay, Clark's focus was exclusively on Olympia, and he defended that figure against attacks by marshalling the evidence that he saw the nude as providing:

> It is sometimes said – it was said already in 1865 – that Olympia is not female at all, or only partly so. She is masculine or 'masculinized'; she is 'boyish', aggressive, or androgynous. None of these words strikes me as the right one, but they all indicate quite well why the viewer is uncertain. It is because he cannot easily make Olympia a Woman that he wants to make her a man; she has to be something less or more or otherwise aberrant. This seems to me wrongheaded: surely Olympia's sexual identity is not in doubt; it is how it belongs to her that is the problem.[18]

This is a telling paragraph, and one that can be productively recast through transgender studies. The truth of Olympia's gender and sex, these lines assert, is evident in and as the exposed body, and any other possibilities are cast as nonsense within the binary schema of two mutually exclusive options. This belief's limitations are in contradiction with the essay's otherwise compelling account of the disparity,

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disputation, and self-reflexivity promoted by Manet's painting. My aim here is not to critique Clark's ultimate conclusions about the painting. Rather, I question the apodictic conviction of a binary gender in his account, one which I see as a hindrance to recognizing other forms of complexity – both voiced by the critics of 1865 and exhibited by the painting itself.

However shrill and vicious they were, were the critics simply 'wrongheaded'? Since Olympia is 'evidently sexed' in Clark's view, the critics could only be regarded as creating mere fabulations and projections that he saw as not being borne out by the visual evidence of Olympia's nude body – about which her 'sexual identity is not in doubt'. I am not interested in defending the critics of 1865, but I do think it is important to challenge the assumption that it is *self-evidently and irrefutably counterfactual, invalid, and incorrect* for them to see masculinity as something being performed by Olympia. Why is the gender uncertainty produced by Manet's painting not, itself, part of the analysis, rather than being anchored to an assumption about what nude bodies *must* mean? Are we also compelled to assume that this unclothed body is unquestionably female, and, as a consequence, are we then enabled to use this evidence, prima facie, to dismiss the critics of the past as being unable to see? Even though it is an assumption that many have made, does that make it true or absolute? Operative here is a case of *argumentum ad populum*, in which a common assumption is asserted as an incontrovertible truth about the meanings of bodies.

If this assumption is adhered to, then any question of the potential masculinity of Olympia (even if marshalled as part of a cheap dig at the painting) can only be dismissed as nonsensical because of the perceived contradiction with visual evidence that is presumed to be provided by the nude. The assumption, recast as evidence, is used to adjudicate a case in which the critics' divergent accounts contradict what is asserted to be plain for all to see. The surface of the naked body, in this belief system, is taken to be an unambiguous (as well as timeless and universal) sign for binary gender. This is, of course, also an operative dogma in much of art history's narration of the nude. The assignment of gender is swift and predicate to seeing the image of the naked body as a person, a portrait, a character, or an erotic (or even sympathetic) object.[19] Whereas art historians bank on their scepticism about such things as the contingent meanings of visual signs and the dynamic transformations of iconographies, the naked body (or its image) is, by contrast, most often proclaimed to be exempt from such questioning, contextualization, and polyvalence. This dogma is reinforced by forswearing the naked body as a *conventional sign*. Instead, it is performatively avowed to be a universally accepted, transhistorical *natural sign* (in Augustine's sense: if there is smoke, there is fire).

However, it is a historical fact that gender is and has been complex, multiple, and mutable – and that people have lived and do live in ways other than the binary genders ascribed to their bodies at birth. To recognize this is to contradict the creed that seeing a naked body authorizes the viewer to ascribe a gender binary onto it. In order to prop up the belief that the body is a natural sign for a gender binary, the reality of the lived experiences of non-ascribed genders (both in the nineteenth century and today) can only be disavowed, ignored, repudiated, or excluded. When we teach this painting and its criticism, we must not disregard such complexity and possibility. At the very least, this same issue of the critics' attempts to malign Olympia through misgendering should be characterized not as impossible or nonsensical but, rather, as a fervent and defensive attempt to police the appropriateness of gender assignments.

Again, consider the scene of the classroom in which we read these words: 'Olympia's sexual identity is not in doubt'. What does the student or reader who was

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assigned female at birth – but knows themselves to be other than that assignment – think? What of the dissonance between the assertion of certainty and the lived experience of complexity? These are ethical questions for us as teachers as well as methodological questions for us as historians. I will return to them later in this essay, as there is more to say about Manet and *Olympia*. Indeed, the complexity of this painting's production and reception prompts us to ask such sceptical questions about what the image of the nude means, and for whom.

I have started with Clark's essay because many of us do. It is the text that I was told to turn to when I started to learn about Manet, art history, and how to teach this painting. Again, my purpose here is not to undermine it, but rather to draw out its internal debate: on one hand, there is a performative assertion of universal and incontrovertible legibility of certain of Olympia's bodily traits; and, on the other, there is an argument about Manet's relentless collapsing of dualities, jamming of representational protocols, and cultivation of irresolution. At times, the text's narration comes close to unveiling these cross-purposed beliefs. Later in the essay, there is a discussion of the tactical inconsistencies produced by Olympia's barely visible red hair that at times seems to become equivalent to the brown background of the Japanese screen behind it. For Clark, recognizing that Olympia had such ample hair (which most critics of the time did not) changes the character of the face, in effect splitting it into two aspects. This divergent doubling, he argues, is reiterated in the tension between the hard outlines (so maligned by critics) of Olympia's face and body, which fail to accord with Manet's modelling that avoided traditional volumetric representation (using half-tones, for instance). 'There are *two* faces', Clark said.[20] This Janus-like visual dynamic is cast as a synecdoche for the painting as a whole, becoming a keystone for Clark's case for Manet's production of inconsistency and the critics' mishaps in attempting to account for it. However, despite these arguments about the image of Olympia unfolding into multiplicity and being irreducible to a simple or unitary visual categorization, the argument invokes, again, gender as an absolute binary for which the unclothed body is (and should be) the privileged sign. A series of binarisms is enlisted as a means to outline the proper signification of the nude – which Manet deftly and strategically disrupted:

> the face and the hair cannot be made into one thing because they fail to obey the usual set of equations for sexual consistency – equations which tell us what bodies are like and how the world is divided, into male and female, hairy and smooth, resistant and yielding, closed and open, phallus and lack, aggressive and vulnerable, repressed and libidinous. These are equations the nude ought to provide.[21]

This sensitive appreciation for Manet's strategic collapsing of dualisms and cultivation of productive ambiguities compels the reader of Clark's text to be self-conscious and precise in their discernment of the painting. But, simultaneously, the certainty of the nude (in which 'her sexual identity is not in doubt') is avowed as a universal, apodictic standard. That is, even though Clark provided this chain of hierarchical binaries as a foil for Manet's innovations and transgressions, the text nevertheless asserts universal consensus as it re-performs the 'common sense' *argumentum ad populum* claim that the nude 'ought to' provide such clear binaries in the first place.

Manet's disruption of what the naked body 'ought' to provide is, I argue, an opportunity to introduce the historical and conceptual questions of transgender studies. Clark's argument about Manet's production of inconsistencies might

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additionally be taken as a basis from which to challenge the belief that seeing a body is knowing a person. That is, by refusing to foreclose, a priori, gender's multiplicities, one could extend Clark's claim that:

> The signifiers of sex are there in plenty, on the body and its companions, but they are drawn up in contradictory order; one that is unfinished, or, rather, more than one; orders interfering with one another, signs which indicate quite different places of Olympia in the taxonomy of woman – and none of which she occupies.[22]

The disputative scene that Manet's painting promoted about the conventions of the nude and appropriateness of gender demands a more critical account of how power is wielded through describing others' bodies (and ascribing genders to them).

Critics in 1865 did recognize how Manet's painting attempted to disrupt the genre of the nude and its certainties, even if they flailed for precision or displaced their anxieties. Clark's essay laid the groundwork for future analyses through his thorough recounting and analysis of the flood of negative criticisms heaped on the painting in 1865, in which the questioning of appropriate gender or the naturalness of bodies were avenues of attack. Perhaps the critics' assignments of masculinity to Olympia were not simply wrongheaded and misguided so much as they were strategic. They seized upon the phobic theme of gender transgression, and they disparaged Olympia through conjuring – off stage – gender nonconformity and the negative stereotype of monstrosity. For instance, Olympia was called a 'grotesque' made from white rubber – that is, she was called an inauthentic imitation of a woman.[23] She was compared to a 'gorilla', in a move that allowed critics to invoke racist fears of animality, miscegenation, and degeneration.[24] Throughout the competition among critics to say critical, sardonic, leading, or scandal-mongering things about Manet's painting in 1865, a recurring theme was the concerted and frantic management of appropriate gender (as when critics implied that Olympia was boyish, androgynous, or formless). The sexism of these comments deployed a hierarchical gender binary as standard in their attempts to make the painting a joke. More directly, a negative and phobic stereotype of gender nonconformity was implied as the key to this painting's unconventionality. This is clearest in a comment by one of the painting's critics in 1865, Olivier Merson, who snidely called Manet 'original' for painting 'the sign of the bearded lady'.[25]

The bearded lady was one of the most visible (and derided) images of gender nonconformity in the nineteenth century. Made into a spectacle to be mocked in circuses and sideshows, the bearded lady inspired lurid fascination because of the visible breakdown and imbrication of the binary of traits assumed to be male or female. Merson's 'bearded lady' comment was echoed by other critics who implied that Olympia's context was a sideshow carnival, a zoo, or a freakshow – with the painting as a shop sign advertising curiosity and oddity.[26] Clark's discussion of Merson's comment is brief, but again he appealed to visual evidence to make his case against it, asking: 'Where precisely is the lady's beard located?' This is, of course, too literal a reading of this insult, and falls back on the conviction of the visual evidence of the body. However, Merson was not describing the image of the body that he saw but rather conjuring an image of gender nonconformity and the stereotype of monstrosity that his readers would understand. (Similarly, antagonistic critics also conjured negative racial and class stereotypes that had no visual evidence in the exposed body of Olympia.) Merson's crude comment implied the non-femininity and gender

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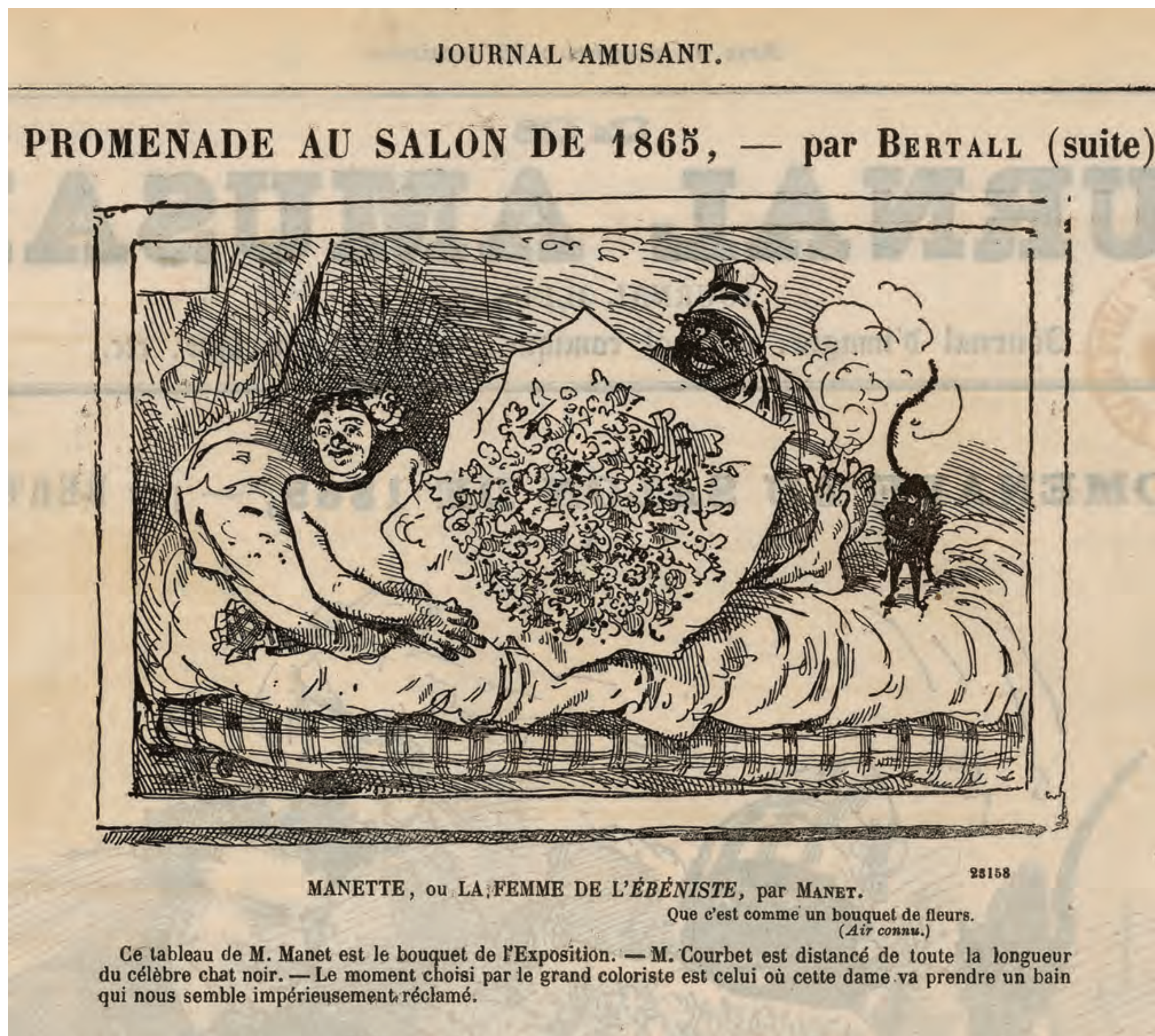
unconventionality of Olympia, and it did not (as Clark did) point to her naked body as prima facie evidence of her gender.

Other critics also engaged in vicious misgendering as a means of attacking the painting, and this tactic was also extended to Manet himself. In a well-known caricature by Bertall, Olympia's name was replaced with a feminized version of Manet's – Manette (*plate* 2).[27] Bertall's attack was triangulated between three targets, upon all of whom he cast aspersions about their genders: in addition to feminizing Manet's name, he also depicted the figures of Olympia and the attendant as ungendered and abstracted.

Before discussing Bertall's caricature, it is crucial to examine how the racial differentiation of the painting's two figures has operated in *Olympia*'s reception. The critics of 1865 frequently characterized the painting through racist analogies for the two women represented together in it. In recent years, this context and the racial dynamics of this two-figure painting have been addressed in many of the most exciting and bracing of the painting's new art-historical studies – which take as their starting point Clark's exclusive focus on only one of the two figures in the painting.[28] In these new accounts, Manet's depiction of a Black servant is situated within legacies of slavery


JOURNAL AMUSANT.

PROMENADE AU SALON DE 1865, — par BERTALL (suite)

25158

MANETTE, ou LA FEMME DE L'*ÉBÉNISTE*, par MANET.

Que c'est comme un bouquet de fleurs.
(*Air connu.*)

Ce tableau de M. Manet est le bouquet de l'Exposition. — M. Courbet est distancé de toute la longueur du célèbre chat noir. — Le moment choisi par le grand coloriste est celui où cette dame va prendre un bain qui nous semble impérieusement réclamé.

2 Bertall, 'Manette, ou la femme de l'ébéniste, par Manet', *Le Journal amusant*, 27 May 1865, page 2.

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and racial prejudice. Here, I am thinking in particular of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's and Denise Murrell's recent works, which build upon formative earlier discussions of race by Lorraine O'Grady, Griselda Pollock, and Jennifer DeVere Brody.[29] These authors clearly identify how the painting's critics questioned the femininities ascribed to the two women in the picture, and their censure often went hand in hand with claims about transgressions of appropriate gender (that in their eyes neither the attendant nor Olympia embodied). That is, the presence of the attendant prompted the critics to compare, contrast, and otherwise relate these two bodies along the axes of their differences that Manet strategically staged – standing versus reclining, clothed versus naked, Black versus white. The painting's challenge to the conventions of the nude was reliant on this differentiation as a means of producing contestations, questions, and self-consciousness about figural codes.

The presence of the two figures in Manet's painting, as Grigsby and Murrell have each compellingly argued, registers the legacies of slavery in the French context both indirectly and directly (in the form of Zacharie Astruc's poem about them both, 'The girl of the islands' ['La fille des îles'] which was printed in the Salon catalogue as an accompaniment to Manet's painting).[30] Here, we can find guidance from a text that has been foundational for current conversations in transgender studies: Hortense Spillers's 1987 essay 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book'.[31] One component of Spillers's multi-pronged argument about the effects of the violence of the Middle Passage was its compelling account of how chattel slavery relied upon both a forcible de-gendering of persons into fungible 'flesh' and, with it, a proliferation of hierarchized genders and gendered relations defined through racial differentiation and subjugation. Slavery imposed a cruel conjugation of genders that were parsed primarily through race and nonconsensual relations of property and ownership, and Spillers further argued that the legacies of slavery underwrote subsequent accounts of normative gender. When the critics and caricaturists attacked Manet's painting, they made evident the ways in which racially determined genders were ascribed differently to the two figures – neither of which were seen as presenting, for them, an appropriate form of the singular white female gender that they upheld as the norm.

To return to Bertall's caricature, its attack relies on both an equation of and a differentiation between Olympia and the attendant. The rest of the caricature's title translates to 'wife of the ebony worker' or 'wife of the cabinet-maker'. This economical insult conflated a racist sneer at the Blackness of the attendant with the assignment of class to Olympia.[32] Bertall's redrawing altered the two figures in a move that both contrasted them to conventional bodies and distinguished them from each other. He covered the nakedness of Olympia with the bouquet of flowers, and he all but eclipsed the attendant in the process. Neither of the two figures have conventional signs for gender as they are both reduced to amorphous shapes and lines. The attendant's body has become absurdly circular; Olympia's body has been rendered as blank and without breasts (or even conventional anatomy other than the oversized and dirty hands and feet). In Bertall's re-imaging of the painting's gender instability, he drew the figures as vague inhuman shapes – one white and one black – that each in their own way lacks the bodily markers that viewers had come to expect as signs for 'female'. If we had never seen Manet's painting – and certainly some of Bertall's audience never did – we might not even know that either figure represented in his drawing was intended to represent a woman at all. That was his point, and his feminization of Manet's name as 'Manette' for the reclining figure indicates how his ridicule was grounded in (and visualized as) the masculinity – or at least non-femininity – of Olympia coupled with the further dehumanization and de-gendering of the attendant. When

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we teach Manet's *Olympia* we have an opportunity to talk about how caricatures and stereotypes registered (albeit negatively and problematically) the possibility of gender nonconformity. This is an opportunity, as well, to examine critically the narrative of appropriate binary gender (and its whiteness) that caricaturists built up as the standard against which such deviations were measured and mocked.

Caricatures that misgendered their targets were common in the nineteenth century, and *Olympia* is not alone in having received this attack. What is important here is that, as with the vague enlisting of the bearded lady, there is an anxiety about the proper representations of bodies and genders that becomes a cheap and easy route to ridicule or criticism. Such an invocation of monstrosity is also tied up with racism and eugenics, in which the ideal bodies and genders (and the personhood for which they are trafficked as signs) are asserted as white – with differences from them derided as inferior, animal, and primitive.[33] Figures (or people) who failed or refused to conform to binary morphologies or codes were repudiated as inhuman.[34] This is laid bare brutally in another caricature targeting Manet's painting, but this time from the year before *Olympia*: his 1862 portrait of the dancer *Lola de Valence* (*plate* 3). Randon, the caricaturist, altered the facial features of Manet's painting to imply masculinity, but did not leave it at that. His caption reads: 'Neither man, nor woman; but what can it be? I wonder.'[35]

This caricature is a further indication that the writing about Manet's work – including and beyond *Olympia* – was rife with warnings of the collapse of appropriate binary gender. Even the painter's advocates registered ways of seeing Olympia that exceeded a singular reading of her gender, as when Émile Zola wrote about the painting as a figuration for Manet himself. In Zola's view, Olympia was the 'flesh and blood of the painter. She is the complete expression of his temperament; she contains the whole of him, and contains nothing but him.'[36] This sympathetic reading attributed more to Olympia than just the 'evidently sexed' naked body. As with the maligning critical assaults, such responses to Manet's work were not just external or arbitrary fabrications. Questions of the transgression of conventional and appropriate representation of gender and the body are also internal to Manet's experimentation in these years. The intense period of the early to mid-1860s saw the painter's concerted attempt – across a series of interrelated works – to exceed a singular or stable reading of the bodily image. That is, Manet's own production in these years facilitated questions (both negative and positive) about assigned and appropriate genders.

Carol Armstrong explored these questions in her book *Manet Manette* (the title of which drew from, among other sources, Bertall's caricature). In particular, she argued that Manet's use of Victorine Meurent as a model for *Olympia* and other paintings pursued the variability of meanings that one model could convey.[37] Manet dressed her up, and made it clear that he was doing so in many paintings. In particular, the transformations of Meurent are central to the investigations that Manet made into costume in the years just preceding *Olympia* – especially with female-identified sitters wearing clothing normally assigned to men. A central example of this is the 1862 *Mademoiselle V. . . in the Costume of an Espada*, which features Meurent dressed as a Spanish matador (*plate* 4). As Armstrong noted about this painting:

> What begins to become clear about this painting, then, is the close association between the play with pigment and the exploration of the ambiguities of identity; between the changeability of colors and the instability of a model's personality and physicality; between the declared literalness of paint and the enactedness of gender, professional role, and self-presentation, of personhood in short.[38]

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3 Caricature of Manet's *Lola de Valence* from G. Randon, 'L'Exposition d'Edouard Manet', *Le Journal amusant*, 29 June 1867, page 6. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

I am reliant on Armstrong's deft analysis of the interrelations between Manet's paintings of this crucial period of the early 1860s and her attention to gender's complexity in them. Armstrong's book grappled with Manet's reputation for inconsistency, arguing that the painter offered, by contrast, a sophisticated and hard-won resistance to the

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4 Édouard Manet, *Mademoiselle V… in the Costume of an Espada*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 165.1 × 127.6 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

'bourgeois sense of the masculine self' and the autonomy claimed for it.[39] Armstrong offered a feminist reading of Manet's identifications with women in his circle and explored how he deployed elements understood to be feminine (such as fashion, cosmetics, and colour) against the masculinist and limiting presumptions of a unitary self. As she remarked, her claims for Manet's practice of painting are that 'it defies and undermines such a structure from within'.[40] It would seem that Armstrong's position is echoed by my own in this essay; both complicate an account of the binary division of genders and Manet's transgressions of them. Indeed, *Manet Manette* is fundamental to my thinking about the painter and his paintings, but I also believe there is an opportunity to extend the logic of Armstrong's book once we centre the understanding that genders and bodies are manifold and transformable. That is, Armstrong's compelling arguments about how Manet looked across a gender binary can also be seen as the basis for questioning the absoluteness of that binary itself – and for challenging the belief in the body as a natural (rather than conventional) sign for gender.[41]

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Central concerns for Armstrong were with how clothing signifies gender and how Manet used it to call attention to the arbitrariness of such significations. She noted: 'The [paintings of Meurent] seem to call into question what kind of knowledge painting provides about a person – about either its author or its referent.'[42] Looking at the paintings of the early 1860s made alongside and in dialogue with *Olympia*, Armstrong took their proximity in the studio as a basis for understanding the accruing system that Manet developed for questioning painting's received traditions of techniques and citations. Manet's project complicates assumptions about how we identify and view people in paintings, and his play with cross-dressing was a key tactic in that disruptive aim.

Manet pointedly staged such complexities in 1863 by compelling viewers to look at the same sitters differently across the three paintings that he unsuccessfully submitted to the Salon of 1863 (but that were notoriously shown at the Salon des Refusés that year). Alongside *Mlle V... in the Costume of an Espada* were his mockery of the gendered conventions of nudity in art history (the 1863 *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, featuring Meurent) and the 1863 *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* depicting Manet's brother Gustave wearing the same (male attributed) jacket and trousers that Meurent wore in *Mlle V...* (see *plate* 6). In this intertextual suite of paintings, the malleability of the sitter was explored as a means to prompt viewers to be self-reflexive about the conventions and assumed meanings of the nude and the clothed figure. Cumulatively, the paintings question the stability of how we might interpret and recognize the same person across their different performances and stylings. Manet showed that people in paintings might be different from how they appear at first blush.

In her discussion of the clothing swaps in these and other paintings, Armstrong compellingly argues that Manet redistributed conventional signs and expectations for gendered figures in his works. However, Armstrong's analysis – albeit in a lesser degree than Clark's – relies on a conviction that bodies must be seen as either (and unquestionably) female or male. Despite her attention to Manet's complication of the ways that gender is assumed and mobilized through contingent signs such as clothing, she nevertheless avowed that the body obscured beneath that clothing is necessarily and self-evidently sexed. For instance, writing about *Mlle V...*, she argued that Meurent is 'revealed (as feminine) by her (masculine) attire', pointing to the discrepancy caused by the gender assumed of the matador's costume.[43] She contrasted this painting to another of Meurent: Manet's *Street Singer* (1862) in which a long and voluminous garment covers the body. Employing a binary logic of contrasts including 'male/female', 'slim/plump', and 'concealed/revealed', Armstrong argued that the body in *Mlle V...* is 'more ample and female than it seems to be in *The Streetsinger*'s body-concealing dress, and its theatrical presentation in male drag emphasizes that'.[44] This assertion seems to me to miss some of the play and tactical ambiguity that Manet extended to the rendering of the body in *Mlle V...* (and, as we will see, in his painting of Gustave in the same costume). In *Mlle V...*, I counter that the painted body is not unequivocally sexed, since much of the visual access to it is obscured by the profile view and Meurent's extended left arm. Manet chose not to indicate Meurent's breasts, instead using that arm to cover where they might be. As well, the side view of the body flattens the midsection's curves. Armstrong disagrees, writing that the figure reveals 'a female line of her belly and the slope of her buttock, and the plump, unmuscled curve of her thighs' as well as a 'plumpness of her calves'.[45] Is a very slightly protruding midsection a 'female line'? There are a lot of bodies with bellies, 'plump' calves or thighs (both unmuscled and muscled), and flat asses. Consider, for instance, Zola's thighs in Manet's 1868 portrait of him (*plate* 5). Especially if we compare

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Meurent's figure in *Mlle V…* to the painting it hung near at the Salon des Refusés – the infamous *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* featuring a naked Meurent – can we really say that the body in *Mlle V…* is 'revealed as feminine'? There is a contradiction in Armstrong's otherwise convincing case for how Manet played with the signification of gender, and it arises from the assertion that *Mlle V…*'s body unmistakably makes itself evident as female underneath its male-signifying clothing. Not only do I doubt the reading of this figure; I doubt the need to assert the truth of that figure as singly and unequivocally sexed and gendered.

We could connect Manet's calculated imprecision of the body in *Mlle V…* to the way that he painted his bearded brother Gustave in the painting shown alongside it (*plate* 6). The figure's delicate crossed-leg contrapposto widens the appearance of the hips (on which one hand coyishly rests). From the neck down, Manet produced ambiguities in the proportions and bodily characteristics used to assign sex and gender to painted figures. In consort with how he explored the arbitrariness of clothing as

5 Édouard Manet, *Emile Zola*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 146.5 × 114 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay.

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6 Édouard Manet, *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 188 × 124.8 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

a signifier for gender in these paintings, he also extended that questioning to bodies underneath it by suppressing or exaggerating bodily traits (breasts, hips, etc.) taken to be gendered signs.[46] Manet's remixing of proportions in these two portraits is not entirely unlike the tactic of Bertall's caricature, but Manet's aim was neither mockery nor dehumanization. Rather, Manet seems, in my view, to have rendered both Meurent's and Gustave's figures in such a way that they suggest, in their proportions and poses, a shuffling of the figural codes through which gender was conventionally assigned to figures. That is, it is not just the gender of the clothing that is transgressed

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in *Mlle V. . .*; Manet also subtly subverted the conventions for rendering the figure as definitively sexed.

To return to Armstrong's comment about *Mlle V. . .*, it is Manet's gendering in the title (not the painting) that reveals this figure as 'feminine' (and identifies the clothing as 'masculine'). The painted figure is, in contrast to the title, more open-ended in its possible readings, and it is by recognizing – or at least debating – the figural ambiguities Manet produced that we can build on Armstrong's analysis. My extension of Armstrong's argument about the painting is this: rather than just accept that this work presents a temporary crossing of an absolute binary of masculine and feminine, Manet's painting can be understood to perform a more thorough-going pictorial disarrangement of the conventional signs for gendering figures. As such, Manet's works offer a way to stage a discussion about the arbitrariness of gender assignments to painted figures – and bodies.

Armstrong's account of Manet's identifications with women offered a feminist analysis of the painter that attended to the ways in which he and his work were reliant on those identifications. But, it can also be taken as the foundation to move beyond a conviction that genders and bodies are limited to two static, mutually exclusive options. Indeed, it is worth asserting here that I do not believe – and indeed would stridently reject – the notion that a transgender studies perspective supplants or replaces a feminist one; quite the opposite. An account of transgender history allows us to see the workings of misogyny and sexism in a new light. For instance, the vicious language used by critics to attack *Olympia* shows how much a narrow view of femininity and women was at issue, with deviations from those norms being derided as monstrous, animal, or inhuman. Any response to these attacks necessarily involves resistance both to their imperious adjudications of proper gender and to their patriarchal attempts to control others' genders and bodies.

What has always been productive about Manet's strategies are their ambiguities and collapsing of dualisms. Turning to another painting of Meurent in supposedly masculine attire, this time a few years later, we might see further how much a simply binary view can limit our understanding – and how the paintings propose more expanded interpretations. The 1866 *Fifer*, painted three years after *Olympia* and one year after its scandalous Salon appearance, blends the facial characteristics of Meurent with those of Léon Leenhoff, the son of Manet's wife (*plate 7*). There are some in the literature addressing this painting who doubt the evidence or the relevance of the composite facial features of Meurent and Leenhoff in the *Fifer*. I will leave the parsing of that to the Manet specialists, but for my purposes here it is significant that there could be debate about just whose face sits under the *Fifer*'s cap. The conversation about whether it is a face of a boy, of a woman, or both, is significant. It involves not just the polyvalence of this face, but also how the attempt to discern the *Fifer* compels us to look outward to other paintings from these years. Any discussion of who the sitter of the *Fifer* is must grapple with its partial resemblances to, and agreements with, other of Manet's paintings in which Meurent or Leenhoff appear in ways that might seem, at first, self-evidently gendered – as with the nakedness of *Olympia*. That is, the ascription of the gender to the figure of the Fifer is both complicated and enriched when we see those same features in other paintings of figures with divergent assignments of gender.

If we presume a binary reading of gender for these painted figures, we miss the productive conversation – in the classroom and in our research – about how non-ascribed and non-conforming genders are also part of art's histories. The *Fifer* can be understood – through its visual agreements with other works – to problematize the reading of gender based on surface appearance and to show just how contextual the

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assignment of gender can be in relation to other painted signs.[47] The body of the *Fifer* is not self-evidently gendered nor is the face. It is only the clothing that leads us, however tentatively, to assign gender to this figure. Manet cultivated such self-reflexivity and scepticism in the reading of pictorial signs and iconographies. While these works

7 Édouard Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 160.5 × 97 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

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might not have been intended to depict a trans subject, they nevertheless raise the possibility of how transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary subjects might be represented (or might resist conventional protocols of representational evidence).

Another painting by Manet from these years, made just before and in relation to *Olympia*, also presents a female-identified model (we are told by the title) wearing a supposedly male costume.[48] *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume* (1862–63) has sometimes been considered a prefiguration of *Olympia* (*plate* 8).[49] Its reclining figure, here clothed in Spanish garb generally attributed as male, mirrors *Olympia*'s composition, as does the presence of the cat at the right of the picture. This painting, like *Olympia*, is also a rumination on the status of the nude. Rather than looking back to Titian (as he would with *Olympia*), Manet based this work on Francisco de Goya's *Clothed Maja* (1800–5), one of an infamous pair of works created by the Spanish painter – one clothed, one nude. This citation implies a self-consciousness about the genre of the nude and the effects of clothing. Manet's painting was begun in 1862 but likely not completed until the spring of 1863, bringing it in close proximity to his work on *Olympia*. Importantly, the choice of clothing for his painting departs from Goya's, since Manet places his sitter in masculine attire; as with *Mlle V.*.. many of the conventional bodily signs of phenotypic sex (notably, the breasts) are suppressed. Compare Armstrong's account of the body as 'denatured' by clothing:

8 Édouard Manet, *Reclining Young Woman in Spanish Costume*, 1862–63. Oil on canvas, 94.7 × 113.7 cm. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery.

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> The clothing that Manet chooses for his young woman is simultaneously masculine and body-revealing, so that the indeterminacy of gender and the confusion between categories of dressed and undressed in the painting's use of Goya underline the denaturing function of costuming and the reference to Spanish art history.[50]

Rather, this painting in proximity to *Olympia* complicates a swift assignment of gender by producing bodily ambiguities, transgressing gendered conventions, and creating a complication of immediate or singular legibility of the person being depicted in the painting.

The above-mentioned paintings deploy clothing as a means to redirect the reading of gender, but (as with Goya's *Maja* paintings) the counterpoint of the nude is also implicated and conjured. That is, we must ask the same questions of the nude body in *Olympia* that we do of the arbitrariness of gendered clothing in *Mlle V…*, the *Fifer*, or *Young Woman in a Spanish Costume*. The nude is not exempt from such inquiries. When we look at the paintings that are linked to *Olympia*, whether through Meurent as model, or through the compositional reference to the nude's traditions, we can see that *Olympia* is interwoven with Manet's experiments with how gender was signified and the reading of personhood complicated. *Olympia*'s difficulty is, in part, the product of Manet's attempts to make viewers self-reflexive about the nude, the face, the figure, and about what clothes mean. Much of what I have summarized here will not be news to Manet scholars, and this web of cross-dressed and fused references is well understood. My claim, in short, is that we should see the complex discourse of legible personhood and the conventionality of figurative signs surrounding Manet's painting as an opportunity to discuss gender in a way that proposes transformational and non-binary options. This opportunity is in the criticism of the painting, in the art-historical literature on the painting, and in Manet's intertextual associations between paintings in the studio. To be clear: I am not proposing that we read the figure of Olympia as trans or non-binary. Rather, I am arguing that the archive of this painting has been in part determined by accounts of gender's multiplicity, mobility, non-binarism, contingent visibility, and transformability. A transgender capacity is proposed through Manet's interrogation of the nude's status as sign.[51]

I imagine that there are some who might think such a reading is anachronistic, and that I am projecting contemporary ideas onto past archives. But, I want to stress again, debates about the complexity of genders and bodies are not new phenomena. They are part of the cultural discourse of the nineteenth century. Indeed, such contexts are more proximate to Manet's *Olympia* than have previously been recognized.

The sitter of the *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume* is believed to be the mistress of Manet's friend Nadar, the photographer and artist.[52] At one point Manet dedicated the painting to him.[53] Like Manet, Nadar was interested in what the surface revealed about people; this drove his work in photographic portraiture. (He took Manet's portrait a number of times.) However, Nadar did not just take portraits. Because of his expertise in photography, he was also called upon to witness (and document) gender and bodily ambiguity. This was the case when Nadar took his first and only medical photographs in 1860 and 1861 – that is, the years just prior to Manet's paintings of Nadar's mistress in male-assigned clothing (as well as *Olympia*).

Nadar had a brief foray studying medicine before becoming a pioneer of photographic technology. Through existing contacts with the medical establishment in late 1860, he was commissioned to take some of the first medical photographs in history. These were no ordinary portraits, however. On the request of Dr Armand

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9 Nadar, portrait of an intersex person (detail), 1860. Albumen print. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Trousseau of the Hôtel Dieu medical clinic, Nadar took a series of nine photographs of an intersex person (*plate 9*). Taken in Nadar's studio, these are believed to be not only some of the very first medical photographs but also the first photographs of an intersex person to be taken.[54] The coincidence of these two 'firsts' is, itself, a reminder of how much our histories of medicine, photography, sex, and gender have taken as their foundation the study of people who do not fit into a restrictive binary doctrine of bodies and genders. By 7 January 1861 Nadar had made the decision to copyright these photographs – the only time that he did this in his career – presumably with the intention that Dr Trousseau (or Nadar himself) might publish them as a scientific contribution. As Sylvie Aubenas has suggested, Nadar's uncharacteristic pursuit of copyright may have been an attempt to protect against any future legal action or censorship.[55] However, the copyright was only obtained on the condition that the photographs were for 'purely scientific use' and not to be exhibited publicly. (Consequently, the photographs were neither exhibited nor published in Nadar's lifetime.) That Nadar agreed to this condition can be taken as an acknowledgement of the impact these images could make – on him and on others.[56] Nevertheless, the encounter sparked an interest in the topic of 'hermaphroditism' that Nadar maintained for the rest of his life, as is indicated by the books and articles included in his library.[57]

I will not reproduce the complete photographs Nadar took in 1860, since they partake in a lurid and intrusive scrutiny of the sitter's body. Taking on the veneer of the objective or the scientific, these photographs focus on the genitals of this person (*plate 10*). Nadar's photographs are the first in a long line of injurious and objectifying images of intersex people that treat them as objects of curiosity or diagnosis. The visual representation of intersex and trans lives up to the end of the twentieth century was dominated not by intersex or trans subjects' self-representations, but rather by the voyeuristic and diagnostic gaze of medical photography. These photographs – along with the science of sexology and gender that emerged around the study of intersex people – form the basis of our contemporary understandings of gender and personhood, as has been thoroughly discussed by scholars such as Elizabeth Reis, Katrina Karkhazis, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Alice Domurat Dreger, and Hil Malatino.[58] Nadar's photographs are the ignominious beginnings of this voyeuristic visual tradition.

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In the 1860s, the complexity of bodies, the confusion of genders, and the collapsing of binaries were not just the province of Manet's pictorial gambits. They were also the catalysing conversations that would spawn modern sexology and the biopolitical management of gender. In the 1860s, gender was not as settled or as binary as we might assume. Yes, my comparison of Nadar's photographs of 1860 to his friend Manet's paintings of 1862 and 1863 is circumstantial, and I have no direct link to argue for the influence of one on the other. Nevertheless, I cannot see their social and temporal proximity as inconsequential. At the very least, it is evidence that there is a rich nineteenth-century archive of gender's multiplicity and the non-dimorphism of human bodies – an archive which is coextensive with the history of nineteenth-century art. Both Nadar and Manet, in their works of the 1860s, confronted gender's complexity and produced images that imploded narrow binary and dimorphic assumptions.

Manet's *Olympia* is surrounded by gender trouble. The play with gender in the painting and its critical record, the tactical confusion of the assignment of gender to bodies and clothing, the fusions of male and female physiognomies in the *Fifer*, and the transphobic caricatures of Olympia and of Manet all gain new legibility when we see them in relation to transgender and intersex histories and experience. This most famous nude, in other words, offers itself as an occasion to talk about the complexities of the ways in which we rush to assign binary genders to bodies. It challenges us to be precise about our assumptions, and to criticize the conventionality of signs.

The contexts that I have brought to bear on this painting are no great archival finds, nor (with the exception of the discussion of Nadar's photographs) are they even very deeply buried in the literature. I have relied upon and redescribed some of the most sophisticated and useful accounts of Manet's painting (by Clark and Armstrong) not to criticize them, but rather to show that there is an opportunity to address the nude in a more nuanced and open way when we do not foreclose at the outset the

10 Nadar, photograph of an intersex person's genitals (detail), 1860. Albumen silver print from glass negative, 23.9 × 19.2 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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possibility of gender's multiplicities and mutabilities. While, for both those authors, I have questioned (in different degrees) their presumptions about how bodies signify an absolute gender binary, I have also proposed that the terms of their analyses can be extended (and indeed are more logically consistent) by rejecting any such presumptions. *Olympia*, that is, provides an exemplary case for teaching a scepticism about the image of the unclothed body as evidence – and for offering a more open discussion of how gender can be represented, inhabited, and multiplied. We need such an openness because some of us – including our students and colleagues – will not rush to assume that a body like Olympia's is always that of a woman. Our teaching must do justice to that diversity of perspectives in the classroom, and that can be done by being more embracing of the already-existing complexity of genders and their representations in the archive of art history – and in its canonical touchstones such as *Olympia*. I should also note that this potential in Manet's painting and its reception has long been registered by contemporary artists, who have appropriated it as a means to scramble codes of gender, race, and sexuality. Some key examples are: Morimura Yasumasa's *Portrait (Futago)* of 1988 (*plate 11*); Deborah Bright's *The Management of Desire (an Unmodified Radical Response)* of 1994; Niki Grangruth's and James Kinser's *Olympia (after Manet)* of 2009; and Ishmael Houston-Jones's ongoing *Looking for Laure*, begun in 2017.[59]

The methodological question that I have posed in this essay does not rest with Manet or *Olympia*. This is just one example, however canonical. As we retell the history of the nude or the story of painting, can we find opportunities to give voice to the reality of transgender and non-binary lives in their archives and in our audiences? I have attempted to provide some possible avenues for teaching this painting in ways

11 Yasumasa Morimura, *Portrait (Futago)*, 1988. Chromagenic print with acrylic paint and gel medium, 210.19 × 299.72 cm. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. © Yasumasa Morimura. Photo: Yasumasa Morimura/ Luhring Augustine, New York.

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that allow space in the classroom for conversations about transgender, non-binary, and intersex topics. We must have these discussions, since the simplistic shorthand of the terminology of the 'female nude' or 'male nude' as absolute or immediately apparent categories is ill-fitting and inadequate to both the lived experiences in the classroom and to the archive.

This is how I have begun to answer for myself the question about how to teach Manet's *Olympia* after transgender studies, and it is how I believe we might allow more of our students, our peers, ourselves, and our readers to be able to see themselves in art history.

Notes

This essay originated as a keynote lecture for the 2021 Association for Art History conference, and I am grateful to Claire Davies, Claire Jones, and Cheryl Platt for their support of it. I am also indebted to the many responses to the talk, which have contributed to its final form, to the advice of Sarah Betzer, and to the helpful comments by anonymous readers. I am grateful to Emerson Bowyer for his help with a key image.

1 For accounts of the many uses to which Manet's painting has been put in art history, see David Carrier, 'Manet and His Interpreters', *Art History*, 8: 2, September 1985, 320–335; and Charles Bernheimer, 'Manet's *Olympia*: The Figuration of Scandal', *Poetics Today*, 10: 2, Summer 1989, 255–277.

2 An excellent overview can be found in Genny Beemyn and Susan R. Rankin, 'Creating a Gender-Inclusive Campus', in *Trans Studies: The Challenge to Hetero/Homo Normativities*, ed. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Sarah Tobias, New Brunswick, 2016, 21–32.

3 For useful commentary on the recent re-emergence of trans visibility (and on its limitations), see Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, 2nd edition, Berkeley, 2017; and Tourmaline, Eric Stanley, and Johanna Burton, eds, *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, Cambridge, MA, 2017.

4 On the importance and potential of such pedagogical moments, see Adam J. Greteman, 'Assembling Transgender Moments', *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 14: 1, 2017, 39–55.

5 A primer and synthesis of the field (that attends to the interpretation of cultural production) is Cáel M. Keegan, 'Transgender Studies, or How to Do Things with Trans*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, ed. Siobhan B. Somerville, Cambridge, 2020, 66–78. See also the special issue 'Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Transgender Studies', edited by Paisely Currah and Susan Stryker, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1: 1–2, 2014.

6 Happily, this is now changing, as is indicated by recent special issues of journals: 'New Work in Transgender Art and Visual Culture Studies', ed. Cyle Metzger and Kirstin Ringelberg, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 19: 2, 2020; 'trans | femme | aesthetics', ed. McKenzie Wark, *e-flux*, 117, April 2021; 'Trans Visual Culture Project', ed. Ace Lehner, *Art Journal*, 80: 4, Winter 2021; 'Black Queer and Trans* Aesthetics', ed. Shanté Paradigm Smalls and Elliott H. Powell, *The Black Scholar*, 49: 1, Spring 2019; and 'Trans-ing Performance', ed. Amelia Jones, *Performance Research*, 21: 5, 2016. For a more extensive bibliography of recent developments that bridge art history and transgender studies, see David J. Getsy and Che Gossett, 'A Syllabus on Transgender and Nonbinary Methods for Art and Art History', *Art Journal*, 80: 4, Winter 2021, 100–115.

7 The potential of such interdisciplinary synergies was first demonstrated in two groundbreaking essays by Jeanne Vaccaro: 'Felt Matters', *Women & Performance*, 20: 3, November 2010, 253–266; and 'Feelings and Fractals: Wooly Ecologies of Transgender Matter', *GLQ*, 21: 2–3, June 2015, 273–293. See also Lucas Crawford, 'The Crumple and the Scrape: Two Archi-Textures in the Mode of Queer Gender', *Places Journal*, March 2020, online at https://doi.org/10.22269/200305; and Nicole Archer, 'Dynamic Static', in Tourmaline, Stanley, and Burton, *Trap Door*, 293–319.

8 For instance, see the transgender studies engagements with architecture and urban space in Eva Hayward, 'Spider City Sex', *Women & Performance*, 20: 3, 2010, 225–251; Lucas Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics*, London, 2015; Lucas Crawford, 'The Transgender Poetics of the High Line Park', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1: 4, 2014, 482–500; and Jack Halberstam, 'Unbuilding Gender: Trans* Anarchitecture In and Beyond the Work of Gordon Matta-Clark', *Places Journal*, October 2018, online at https://doi.org/10.22269/181003.

9 David J. Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender*, New Haven and London, 2015.

10 A lucid introduction to these issues is Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici, 'Trans, Time, and History', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 5: 4, November 2018, 518–539. I would also like to mention two recent books that compellingly extend the range of transgender art-historical studies: Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*, New York, 2021; and Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, 2020.

11 C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, Minneapolis, 2019; Rachel Mesch, *Before Trans: Three Gender Stories from Nineteenth-Century France*, Stanford, 2020; Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History*, Cambridge, 2020; and, in intersex studies, Hil Malatino, *Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience*, Lincoln, NB, 2019.

12 On the adoption of the terminology of 'transgender', see David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, Durham, NC, 2007. See also Jack Halberstam, 'Trans*: What's in a Name?', in *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, Berkeley, 2018, 1–21.

13 Intersex studies is a distinct field from transgender studies, but the two are often interwoven and mutually reinforcing. While I recognize the distinction between these two fields, I will rely on their alliance in the course of this essay.

14 I discuss the methodological tool 'transgender capacity' in David J. Getsy, 'Capacity', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1: 1–2, May 2014, 47–49; and, in slightly revised form, in Getsy, *Abstract Bodies*, 34–36.

15 T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, revised edition, Princeton, 1984/1999, 96.

16 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 135.

17 Indeed, a central feature of Clark's argument – and the Manet literature as a whole – is the belief or wish that Manet's inconsistencies were strategic and exemplary (that is, strategically avant-garde). This feature – and Clark's method for arguing it by claiming that Olympia 'refuses to signify' – was the focus of a critical assessment of Clark's account by members of the Art & Language group: Charles Harrison, Michael Baldwin, and Mel Ramsden, 'Manet's "Olympia" and Contradiction', *BLOCK*, 5, 1981, 34–43. This text addresses the initial version of Clark's argument (in which the phrase 'refuses to signify' appears on page 39 but disappears from later versions): T. J. Clark, 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of "Olympia" in 1865', *Screen*, 21: 1, Spring 1980, 18–41, which is essential to understanding the belief system manifesting in the later form of the argument in *The Painting of Modern Life*. Clark's 1980 article also spurred a highly critical response by Peter Wollen, 'Manet: Modernism and Avant-Garde', *Screen*, 21: 2, Summer 1980, 15–26; and a subsequent riposte by Clark, 'A Note in Reply to Peter Wollen', *Screen*, 21: 3, Autumn 1980, 97–100;

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and 'Errata'; *Screen*, 21: 4, Winter 1980, 106. The terms of the exchange between Clark and Wollen are the target of Harrison, Baldwin, and Ramsden's critical discussion of methodological priorities and assumptions.

18 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 132.

19 See Getsy, *Abstract Bodies*, xiv–xv, and 87–95.

20 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 137 (emphases original).

21 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 137.

22 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 137.

23 On the meaning and shifting interpretation of the kind of rubber implied by the comment, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, 'Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid', *Art Bulletin*, 97: 4, December 2015, 438.

24 As Anne McCauley recently noted: 'The word *Górilla* originally referred to an exotic tribe of hairy women described in a purportedly fifth century BCE Greek travel account. Surprisingly, it was not applied to a living animal until 1847.' Anne McCauley, 'Beauty or Beast? Manet's *Olympia* in the Age of Comparative Anatomy', *Art History*, 43: 4, September 2020, 745.

25 'M. Manet, qui a peint l'enseigne de la *Femme à barbe*, est original.' Olivier Merson, 'Salon de 1865 (1)', *L'Opinion nationale*, 29 May 1865. Noted by Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 98.

26 See McCauley 'Beauty or Beast?', 754–756; and, more generally with regard to the criticism of Manet as a sign-painter, Bertrand Tillier, 'La 'Peinture d'enseigne', catégorie critique et lieu commun de la modernité', *Romantisme*, 155, 2012, 11–24.

27 Bertall, 'Manette, ou la femme de l'*ébéniste*, par Manet', *Le Journal Amusant*, 27 May 1865.

28 In a preface to a later edition of *The Painting of Modern Life*, he called his oversight 'rueful', saying that 'the snake of ideology always circles back and strikes at the mind trying to outflank it. It always has a deeper blindness in reserve [...]'; Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, xxvii.

29 Lorraine O'Grady, 'Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity', in *New Feminist Criticism: Art/Identity/Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra Langer, and Arlene Raven, New York, 1994, 152–170; Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, London, 1999, 246–315; Jennifer DeVere Brody, 'Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's *Olympia*', *Theatre Journal*, 53: 1, March 2001, 95–118; Grigsby, 'Still Thinking', 430–451; and Denise Murrell, *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*, New Haven and London, 2019.

30 See especially Grigsby, 'Still Thinking', 436. For more on the poem as printed in the catalogue, see E. D. Lilley, 'Two Notes on Manet', *Burlington Magazine*, 132: 1045, April 1990, 266–269.

31 Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics*, 17: 2, Summer 1987, 65–81. Within transgender studies, Riley Snorton has extended Spillers's powerful analysis to examine how narratives of gender, transgender, and personhood in the nineteenth century were defined by race, and Diane Detournay has further argued that the sex/gender distinction is grounded first in race as a criterion for the sovereign subject. See Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*; and Diane Detournay, 'The Racial Life of "Cisgender": Reflections on Sex, Gender and the Body', *parallax*, 25: 1, 2019, 58–74. For further sources in transgender studies relating to Spillers, see the suggestions in the section 'Flesh' in Getsy and Gossett, 'A Syllabus', 105.

32 As Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby notes, 'Pertinent here is the disturbing fact that ebony was a euphemism for the human cargo on slave ships'; Grigsby, 'Still Thinking', 438.

33 In her discussion of comparative anatomy and the insult 'gorilla' used against the figures in Manet's painting, Anne McCauley has discussed the comparison of the painting to a P. T. Barnum sideshow, noting that the freakshow provided a counternarrative to the Salon nude's imaging of supposed ideality. She briefly discusses the case of 'Julia Pastrana (1834–60), the so-called bear or ape woman who was first exhibited in New York in 1854 and then toured Western Europe with her impresario husband, was tellingly dubbed after her death as the "embalmed nondescript" because of the claims that she was a new species'; McCauley, 'Beauty or Beast?', 754–755. On the racism inhering in (and definitional to) attempts to distinguish between human and animal, see Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, New York, 2020.

34 'Gender figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity'; Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York, 2004, 11.

35 G. Randon, 'L'Exposition d'Édouard Manet', *Le Journal amusant*, 29 June 1867, 6.

36 'Je prétends que cette toile est véritablement la chair et le sang du peintre [...] Elle est l'expression complète de son tempérament; elle le contient tout entier et ne contient que lui'; Emile Zola, 'Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Edouard Manet', *Revue du dix-neuvième siècle*, 1 January 1867, reprinted in Zola, *Salons*, ed. F. W. J. Hemmings and Robert J. Niess, Geneva, 1959, 97. For a rich analysis of Zola's writing about and projections onto Manet, see chapter two of Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, New Haven and London, 2002, from which this translation is taken.

37 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*.

38 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 148.

39 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 317.

40 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 322, n. 27.

41 In other writings, Armstrong has also made ambitious arguments about the instability of static gender for viewers, and about how Manet's practice imbricates binary positions; see Carol Armstrong, 'Counter, Mirror, Maid: Some Infra-Thin Notes on a *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*', in *Twelve Views of Manet's Bar*, ed. Bradford R. Collins, Princeton, 1996, 25–46.

42 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 135. In keeping with this observation, I should also note that Eunice Lipton speculated (based on records of living arrangements in the subsequent decades of her life) that Meurent had same-gender, long-term relationships. This possibility further complicates the categorizations assumed of images of Meurent. See Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire*, New York, 1992.

43 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 149.

44 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 149 and 148.

45 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 148.

46 On the complexity and lability of hips as a sign for gender, see Erica Rand, *The Small Book of Hip Checks: On Queer Gender, Race, and Writing*, Durham, NC, 2021.

47 For a discussion of how viewers' assignments of gender to represented figures often rely on perceived visual agreements among them (however shifting, ad hoc, or contingent), see Whitney Davis, 'Gender', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, Chicago, 1996, 220–233.

48 There has been much speculation on the clothing, with references to contemporary *amazones* as well the flouting of gendered conventions among the *demi-mondaine* of the time; see Germain Bazin, 'Manet et la Tradition', *L'Amour de l'art*, 13, 1932, 153–165.

49 The linkage between the two paintings was argued early in the art-historical literature on the painting; see Paul Jamot, 'Manet and the Olympia', *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 50: 286, January 1927, 27–29. The two paintings are of different sizes, leading some to question the connection; see Françoise Cachin, Charles S. Moffett, and Juliet Wilson-Bareau, *Manet: 1832–1883*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1983, 99. Even if they are not pendants, they are nevertheless in proximity and both related to Manet's interrogation of the conventions of the nude in 1862 and 1863.

50 Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 104.

51 See above, note 14.

52 While it is widely accepted, there has also been a question about this attribution; see Cachin *et al.*, *Manet 1832–1883*, 99 and 102.

53 Charles Baudelaire urged Nadar, to whom this painting is dedicated, to photograph (and consider purchasing) two small copies of Goya's *Nude Maja* and *Clothed Maja* in 1859. For speculation on the meaning of this incident for the painting, see Anne Coffin Hanson, *Édouard Manet: 1832–1883*, exh. cat., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1966, 72–73.

54 On the medical context, see Dirk Schultheiss, Thomas R. W. Hermann, and Udo Jonas, 'Early Photo-Illustration of a Hermaphrodite by the French Photographer and Artist Nadar in 1860', *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 3: 2, 2006, 355–360.

55 Sylvie Aubenas, 'Beyond the Portrait, Beyond the Artist', in Maria Morris Hambourg, Françoise Heilbrun, Philippe Néagu, *et al.*, *Nadar*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1995, 96–98. As

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Trousseau explained in an 1860 letter to Nadar, he was hurriedly commissioning the photographs to document his patient before 'treatment' began (96–97). Aubenas further speculated that a reason that the photographs were never made use of by Trousseau or Nadar may be that the doctor's planned surgical interventions failed (possibly, she suggests, resulting in death).

56 For an artist whose central concern was how photography contributed to (and, indeed, influenced) history, Nadar's agreement to the restrictive copyrighting of these images stands out. On the historical agency attributed to photography by Nadar, see Stephen Bann, '"When I Was a Photographer": Nadar and History', *History and Theory*, 48: 4, December 2009, 95–111; and Eduardo Cadava, 'Nadar's Photographopolis', *Grey Room*, 48, Summer 2012, 56–77.

57 There were at least four books on the subject in Nadar's library, attesting to his ongoing interest after 1860. These included the second edition (1874) of Ambroise Tardieu's *Question médico-légale de l'identité dans ses rapport avec les vices de conformation des organes sexuels*, in which the full text of the handwritten memoirs of Herculin Barbin was first published. Late in life, Nadar also kept clippings of 1905 and 1907 articles about Saint Wilgeforte, who miraculously grew a beard to protect her virginity and avoid an unwanted arranged marriage. See Aubenas, 'Beyond the Portrait', 105, notes 24–25.

58 Malatino, *Queer Embodiment*; Elisabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex*, Baltimore, 2009; Katrina Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience*, Durham, NC, 2008; Ann Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, New York, 2000; and Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*, Harvard, 2000.

59 Ishmael Houston-Jones, 'Reading *Olympia* While Looking for Laure', in *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value*, ed. C. Riley Snorton and Hentyle Yapp, Cambridge, MA, 2020, 133–140. For discussions of further artistic citations of *Olympia*, see: Brody, 'Black Cat Fever'; and Murrell, *Posing Modernity*.

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