

© Malcolm Park – Excerpt from 2001 PhD Dissertation:
Ambiguity, and the engagement of spatial illusion within the surface of Manet's paintings

5E. MASKED BALL AT THE OPERA: Text

Manet's *Masked Ball at the Opera* remains at a problematic intersection of many aspects and issues of life in Paris in Manet's time, in terms not only of actual events and circumstances but also of their subsequent interpretation by scholars. It has always been known that the site of the work had been the first floor corridor and an overlooking balcony, behind the loges and adjacent to the main foyer, in the Opéra rue le Peletier in Paris (Figs.E8, E9, E10, and E11),¹ and that the depicted gathering was on the occasion of one of the famous masked balls held at the Opéra. What is less clear is the reason for Manet painting the work, when it was painted, and what influenced or determined its form.

Notwithstanding the many contemporaneous events that have been raised by scholars as important influences on, and reasons for, *Masked Ball at the Opera*, the proposal made here clearly sets the painting within Manet's program of spatial ambiguity. In fact, the directness of the translation of the image from the proposed source suggests that its potential for spatial interplay may have been the initial reason for the use of the image, and provides further evidence of Manet's ongoing concern with the potential and implications of spatial manipulation. *Masked Ball at the Opera* presents and represents a very different slice of Parisian life to that of *The Railway*, a work painted at the same time, and it has generated scholarly concerns very different to those of site identification. Its representation has been seen in much more declarative terms as a commentary on political, social and gender issues of the time, and in the context of Manet's use of sources it has also been seen to derive from a number of external images. It can be shown, however, that the use of the offset viewpoint was similarly used in *Masked Ball at the Opera* for spatial ambiguity, albeit in a subtly different way.

Background

Although *Masked Ball at the Opera* had been submitted to the 1874 Paris Salon, and rejected, it is not known when Manet commenced the painting, and the possible influences on the genesis of the work suggest very different times. The earliest public commentary on the work was written by Fervacques in *Le Figaro* on 27 December, 1873, as part of a chronicle of his visit to Manet's studio.² Replete with descriptive flourishes, the writing nonetheless captures the undertones and overtones implicit in the work. For a work which is shown to be underlaid with subtle spatial ambiguities, such responses seem fitting. Certainly all the visible aspects were not described and the work was placed in no other context than that of human intercourse. But as an evocation of the locale and its social activity the passage has not been matched. In his observation of the setting in the corridor and its female participants, Fervacques wrote:

Cette toile, qui est destinée à Faure, représente le couloir de l'Opéra une nuit de bal masqué. Voilà bien le tableau exact. Entre les colonnes épaisses, le mur des loges où les gommeux sont collés en espaliers, et les entrées du foyer séparées par les légendaires tablettes de velours rouge, un flot d'habits noirs taché çà et là d'une pierrette et d'une débardeuse, ondule sans avancer. Des dominos discrets, à la figure masquée par la quadruple barbe de dentelle, circulent au milieu de cet océan humain, pressés, bousculés, serrés de près, auscultés par cent mains indescrètes. Les pauvrettes, passant la douane de ce cap périlleux, laissent ici un fragment de dentelle, là une branche de lilas blanc de leur bouquet, qui jaunit sous les exhalaisons délétères du gaz et sous l'âcre odeur humaine qui s'épand en effluves lourdes et pesantes.³

and then of the men in the gathering:

Ils sont là en tas, l'œil allumé par les truffes et le Corton du dîner, la lèvre humide, l'œil sensuel, avec des chaînes d'or épaisses au gilet et des bagues aux doigts. Le chapeau est incliné en arrière d'un air vainqueur; ils sont riches, cela se voit: ils ont des louis plein leurs poches et ils sont venus pour s'amuser. Et ils s'amuse. Ils tutoieraient leur sœur si elle passait par là.⁴

Fervacques wondered if "Peut-être n'y a-t-il pas tout cela dans ce tableau, peut-être aussi y a-t-il autre chose encore?"⁵ and concluded that "En tout cas, c'est une œuvre de haut mérite, vécue, pensée et admirablement rendue. Nous verrons, au prochain Salon si le public est de mon avis".⁶

With the painting rejected by the jury for the Salon of 1874, the public did not receive an opportunity to assess it, but the jury's decision was taken to task by Stéphane

Mallarmé in an article, 'Le Jury de Peinture pour 1874 et M. Manet'.⁷ In the midst of his argument that the public should be allowed to see all of the submitted works and make up its own mind, Mallarmé saw *Masked Ball at the Opera* as "capital dans l'œuvre du peintre et y marquant comme un point culminant d'où l'on résume mainte tentative ancienne"⁸ and as "une vision du monde contemporain".⁹

The masked balls at the Opéra rue Le Peletier were part of that contemporary milieu, but they were also part of a well-loved tradition of Paris. Opened in 1821, the Opéra building had been one of the venues in Paris used for the costume balls held each year from December to March during the Carnival period, and had become famous for the masked balls held at the time of Mi-Carême in March from 1837.¹⁰ The colour, clamour and frenzy of the balls inspired many written pieces, of which Victor Poupin's in 1865 was typical:

Qui n'a pas été au bal de l'Opéra?
 Qui n'a pas admiré, une fois dans sa vie, l'indescriptible féerie de ce coup d'œil? Qui n'a pas été ébloui de ces milliers de lumières réfléchées par des milliers de cristaux? Qui ne s'y est pas senti étourdi par les cris, par les rires, décontenancé par les quolibets, enivré par les fleurs? Qui n'a pas été tenté, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, de se laisser entraîner par cette folie communicative du bacchanal que provoque l'orchestre irrésistible!¹¹

Away from the physical exuberance of the balls themselves, the foyer areas became the domains of flirtation and intrigue, as further described by Poupin, "dans un coin du foyer, un jeune homme retenait, par de joyeuses folies, un élégant domino toujours prêt à s'échapper et toujours retardé par le plaisir de la réplique".¹²

As the very subject of Manet's painting, the gatherings in the corridor behind the loges obviously were catalysts of some kind, be they direct or indirect, in the creation of the work, but the extent to which he worked directly at the site in the Opéra is not known. In 1931 Tabarant wrote that the work had been painted "d'après des notes prises au foyer de l'Opéra",¹³ but in 1947 he was much more explicit, describing, without evidence, that

En cette fin de mars 1873,... Dans la nuit de la Mi-Carême, le jeudi 20, le bal paré, masqué et travesti de l'Opéra... put voir Manet, calepin de croquis en mains, prenant notes sur notes. Il le revit dans la nuit du 30 au 31, au Bal des Artistes...[and] De minuit à six heures, Manet ne se lassa pas de crayonner des pages.¹⁴

Tabarant's claim that the painting had been developed from April to November¹⁵ of that year was accepted by many later scholars. Of two preparatory oil sketches,¹⁶ one (Fig.E2) seemingly depicts the same corridor outside the loges as in the painting, but both could be seen as studio studies as much as site sketches. And an uncertain ink wash drawing¹⁷ relates to those occasions described by Théodore Duret when Manet had invited his friends "par groupes de deux ou trois ou isolément, en habit noir et en cravate blanche, poser dans son atelier".¹⁸

There were, however, other historical events which also provide connections between the painting and the locale. The production of a play *Henriette Maréchal* in 1865 provided such a connection with the painting of some eight years later. Written by the de Goncourt brothers, Edmond and Jules, the play opened on 5 December, 1865, at the Théâtre français to great outcry and disturbance and was closed before the end of the month after only six performances.¹⁹ The reasons for the opposition to the play seem to have been very complex, partly involving preferential treatment afforded the de Goncourts because of their friendships within the circle of Princess Mathilde, the cousin of Napoleon III, but subsequent events involving the leader of the protests suggest that the reason was more directly political and very much a republican issue. The play's first act, titled *Le Bal de l'Opéra*, had been set in the first-floor corridor of the Opéra, and two contemporary illustrations of the set (Figs.E6, and E7) show somewhat different configurations of columns and balcony balustrade to each other, but with the Bertall conveying something of the depiction in the painting. How these illustrations related to what actually existed in the corridor is uncertain but they confirm that the corridor in question would have been a well-known locale to most Parisians. The similarity between the actual set and the painting had also been noted by Edmond de Goncourt himself in 1873 when, after visiting Manet in his studio in Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, he noted in his journal on 20 November that "Aujourd'hui, j'étais dans l'atelier de Manet, regardant son tableau du BAL DE L'OPÉRA, qui est pour ainsi dire la mise en scène du premier acte d'HENRIETTE MARÉCHAL".²⁰ John Hutton has suggested, however, that Edmond de Goncourt's claim had been a self-serving one, even if it "has found a ready echo in art-

historical literature",²¹ and that "the circumstances of the scandal regarding the Goncourt play... make it exceedingly improbable as inspiration for Manet's painting on any level, particularly in the tumultuous climate of late 1873".²² Nonetheless, and as described below, the artist whose work is proposed as the source for Manet's painting was a close friend of the de Goncourts and one of the intimate circle around Princess Mathilde. The "borrowing" of an image from an artist who not only knew the playwrights of *Henriette Maréchal* but whose political position was also obviously very different to Manet's adds an intriguing dimension to the possible reasons for Manet's painting.

If Manet had been influenced in using the locale of the corridor because of the nature of the gatherings there during masked balls, or that it had been used for the setting of a particular play in 1865, then any such considerations would have been seen in a new light with an occurrence in October 1873. On the night of 28–29 October, the Opéra rue Le Peletier was destroyed by fire,²³ and although Garnier's new Opéra building had been in the process of being built at the time, the destruction of the much-loved venue was seen as a great loss to the city. Whether the fire was a catalyst for Manet's painting or was an influence on its development from an earlier commencement is not known, but within a month of the fire, on 18 November, the baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure had bought the painting directly from Manet,²⁴ "tout frais peint".²⁵ Eric Darragon has not only seen that for Manet "l'incendie joue un rôle de révélateur"²⁶ but has also suggested that, with *Henriette Maréchal*, "il est assez probable que le souvenir de la mise en scène du Théâtre-Français donnait au tableau, dans l'esprit même de Manet, une perspective et une mémoire intéressante"²⁷ and "qu'à la fin octobre 1873, Manet ait songé à la mise en scène des Goncourt pour son efficacité propre".²⁸

In many ways the painting has been understood by scholars in terms less directly related to the locale or the occasion of its imagery and more in terms of the contemporary political and social issues. John Hutton has claimed, for example, that "the painting is incomprehensible apart from the events of its immediate period, particularly the controversy over the collapse of the royalist political fortunes in late October and early November 1873"²⁹ and has seen it as a "sardonic and biting salute to the death of the

monarchist thrust for power".³⁰ Whereas Melissa Hall has pointed out that in the nineteenth century the Polichinelle figure represented the triumph of a morally righteous order, and that the figure of Polichinelle in the painting intensified "the issue of morality... as a central theme",³¹ Marilyn R. Brown has suggested that "Manet may well have intended his *Polichinelle*, traditional and popular in its form, as an emblem of what he hoped would be a resurgence of the French modern tradition of art and life under the supposedly democratic auspices of the Third Republic".³² And Linda Nochlin and Alan Krell have addressed the work in terms of class and sexual commodity, with Nochlin suggesting that the "detached parts of female bodies constitute a witty rhetorical reference, a substitution of part for whole, to the sexual availability of lower-class and marginal women for the pleasure of upper-class men",³³ and Krell noting that the painting "takes us into the world of the demimonde and sexual barter, a favoured theme of Manet".³⁴

Although such readings see the physical surrounds and space of the corridor only as a setting in which the players act out their perceived roles or functions, the configuration of the painting's frontal space, established by the balcony and its railing set parallel to the picture plane, and its articulation by the two round columns, cannot be seen as incidental or arbitrary. At least in compositional, if not spatial, terms, the question as has been asked by Linda Nochlin, remains – "Where did Manet get the idea for this rigorously horizontal two-story composition?"³⁵ The popular imagery of the masked ball at the Opera had been established by Gavarni from 1839 and had continued in the illustrated press each year during the ball season.³⁶ Joel Isaacson has suggested "Manet's conception... hardly seems divorced from – and was very likely conditioned by – the repeated designs of the illustrators" in which a "crowd is depicted... in a compressed relief grouping".³⁷ Similarly, it has been suggested by Eric Darragon that "un grand nombre de ces illustrations paraissant à l'époque du carnaval qui attestent la formule d'un groupement compact de la foule, en frise",³⁸ and by John Hutton that Manet's painting "derives directly from the standardised image of the theme".³⁹ A more specific borrowing from El Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz* has been proposed by Alain de Leiris,⁴⁰ and Linda

Nochlin has conjectured that "Manet may have based the *Ball at the Opera* on the rigorously horizontal, two-tiered composition of Jean-François Bosio's *The Ball at the Opera* (1804)".⁴¹

A work which is here proposed to have been used as a direct source by Manet is a contemporary painting by Pierre-François-Eugène Giraud (1806–1881), *Le bal de l'Opéra* (1866). The painting was first shown in the Paris Salon of 1867,⁴² photographed by the photographer Robert Bingham (Fig.E3),⁴³ and illustrated as a wood engraving in *L'Univers Illustré* on 28 December, 1867 (Fig.E4). In his review of the Salon, Théophile Gautier *fils* wrote of Giraud's painting:

Il faut être essentiellement Parisien pour goûter toute la saveur du tableau de M. EUGENE GIRAUD, '*Le Bal de l'Opéra*', et il faut être homme de beaucoup d'esprit et de talent pour l'avoir peint comme l'a fait M. Giraud. Avec une exactitude mêlée de finesse qui sait trouver le côté comique des choses sans tomber dans la caricature, il a représenté le turbulent et périlleux défilé situé entre les colonnes du rez-de-chaussée, devant le foyer, ce passage où les vertus assez hardies pour s'y aventurer, risque d'être ballotées d'un Charybde en habit noir à un Scylla en gants blancs. Quel mouvement, quelle cohue de gens et de mots, que de chatteries chuchotées à l'oreille, que d'injures hurlées par des voix avinées! Tout cela grouille, crie et rit, s'emmêle et se démêle de la façon la plus gaie et la plus française.⁴⁴

And in similar vein, a short article by M. Vernoy which explained the publication of the engraving in *L'Univers Illustré* also provided a cogent description of the activities in the corridor, reading in part:

Pour célébrer l'inauguration du Carnaval parisien, avec tous les égards que mérite ce *grand* événement, nous avons eu l'idée de faire graver le tableau de M. E. Giraud, intitulé *le Bal de l'Opéra*, qui a obtenu un succès aussi complet que mérité au dernier Salon. Cette composition si vraie et à la fois si spirituelle vous transporte, chers lecteurs, au milieu de l'enfer du corridor des premières loges, en face de l'entrée du foyer. C'est là que l'on rit, que l'on échange à foison des plaisanteries plus ou moins légères; c'est là aussi que se sont réfugiées les dernières miettes de "l'intrigue," qui jadis faisait florès à l'Opéra; c'est enfin le coin le plus célèbre de tout le bal, et par son originalité il justifie entièrement sa réputation.⁴⁵

Interestingly, Gautier confused the levels stating the locale to be on the ground floor but correctly placed it in front of the foyer, while Vernoy correctly described it at the level of the first floor loges.

To the knowledge of this writer, Bingham's photograph of the painting has not been previously published and the wood engraving has only been published twice since 1867.

It was included, with no reference to Manet or the journal and with a dating of 1861, in Albert Boime's 1980 book, *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision*,⁴⁶ to illustrate a description by Boime of the masked balls. With no reference to the journal and with the same dating of 1861, it also appeared in Kathleen Adler's 1986 monograph *Manet*, with Adler making specific reference to Manet, noting Giraud's work as "One of the many illustrations of the masked balls to be found in popular magazines and newspapers, this example has a close compositional affinity to Manet's painting".⁴⁷ Eric Darragon cited the reproduction in Boime's book in his article of 1983,⁴⁸ but it seems that since 1986 no further reference to it has been made. Not only is there a "close compositional affinity with Manet's painting" as Kathleen Adler has suggested, but it is proposed that Giraud's image, whether in the form of the painting in the Salon, the photograph of Bingham, or the published engraving in the journal, was the primary influence and source for Manet's work.

Eugène Giraud had been a well-known artist of history paintings, exotic scenes from Italy, Spain, and Africa, portraits, and caricatures,⁴⁹ with many submissions to the Paris Salons between 1831 and 1880.⁵⁰ Of interest in this consideration of Manet's painting is Giraud's established and intimate position within the circle around Princess Mathilde, cousin of Napoleon III, his friendship with Nieuwerkerke, *directeur général des Musées Impériaux*, and his contact and friendship with the Goncourt brothers, the writers of *Henriette Maréchal*.⁵¹ If a proposal that Manet used Giraud's image as source is a valid one, then a new chronological framework for the development of Manet's painting is introduced, and the implications of Giraud's social and political world may be seen to have been an influence. The direct borrowing of Giraud's subject matter, locale, and composition could be seen, on the one hand, as a specific point of reference or, on the other, simply as a means to a pictorial end. Certainly the appearance of Giraud's image around 1867 suggests that Manet took note of it, most probably as a retained reproduction, at that time. The possibility therefore exists that *Masked Ball at the Opera* was either in gestation or had actually been commenced by Manet from early 1868, with

subsequent events, both public and private, influencing its development through to Faure's purchase on 18 November, 1873.

In her 1972 essay, 'Popular imagery and the work of Édouard Manet',⁵² Anne Coffin Hanson suggested that "A continued search for sources may yield little more than a longer list of names, but it still seems profitable to ask what kinds of sources Manet used and why".⁵³ But she also cogently argued that Manet had "practised a kind of image-collecting",⁵⁴ and because of that "it is usually futile to search for the one 'correct' source for a given motif".⁵⁵ Such concerns have been more recently augmented by those methodologies which consider visual identifications separate from broader contextualisations to be irrelevant. The identification of this borrowing from Giraud not only raises, however, new spatial aspects in *Masked Ball at the Opera* but also provides further evidence of, and insights into, Manet's program of spatial manipulation. The analysis presented here suggests that Manet transformed the obvious angled spatial arrangement of the source image to be an ambiguous underlay in his own work.

Analysis and Proposal

A comparative analysis of the Giraud and Manet images shows that, in terms of the overall disposition of the figures, the lower section of Giraud's, as shown with the cropped image in Fig.E5, is very similar to the complete image of Manet's, with the landscape of top-hats above the men in evening dress, the women in dominoes or costumed, the detailed extent of the visible floor surface in the foreground shaped by the feet, legs, and dresses of the participants, and the overhanging leg of a young woman on the balcony. The area of lighter tone at the left and the darker area at the right with the masked women in dominoes, are also similarly positioned. Notwithstanding a prevailing "suspicion of the attribution of sources based entirely on compositional analogies",⁵⁶ Giraud's image provides a compelling compositional source for Manet's painting.

But typically Manet has 're-framed' the visual source to create his complex and enigmatic work. Giraud's view is clearly an angled two-point perspective whereas Manet's is a frontal one-point perspective, and in the transformation from Giraud's space

to Manet's space, a number of other aspects have been altered. The cropping of Giraud's image changed the vertical format to a horizontal one and in the process reduced the throng of merrymakers on Giraud's balcony to disembodied legs, with the one overhanging the railing retained, but repositioned. Although the backdrop of columns and balcony is re-orientated from its angled perspective in the Giraud to the frontal one in the Manet, the foreground group of revellers in the Giraud was, interestingly, already aligned with the picture plane. And with that re-orientation of the space, the three panels from the Giraud balcony railing had been retained but seemingly stretched to the wider spacing between the columns in the Manet. The group of 'dark' figures to the centre front was reformed, with the elimination of the white-wigged reveller and the figure gesturing a greeting to those above in the balcony, a more defined group was formed at the right, and both of the couples to the left in the Giraud were turned to be in profile in the Manet. And the lascivious stance of the top-hatted rake of Giraud's flirting couple, with the woman *en débardeuse*, was much more suggestive than that of Manet's gentleman, and similarly, the dynamic mood of Giraud's crowd was reduced to a restrained demeanour within Manet's groupings. In addition, the area of highlight at the left is retained, but its focus on a male *Pierrot* figure in the Giraud is changed to the woman in a *bébé* costume in the Manet, with the outward-looking *Pierrot* extracted from the crowd to become an inward-looking *Polichinelle*. Notwithstanding these adjustments, it becomes apparent not only that the Giraud work was used as the basis, both in content and composition, for *Masked Ball at the Opera* but that Manet had made his own variations on the theme of the gathering in the corridor of the Opéra.

The initial spatial analysis was undertaken on the premise that Manet had typically flattened the perspective to produce a frontal view, but with the different proportional relationship between the columns and the balcony, together with the number of panels to the balcony railing, requiring examination. The application of the research considerations of offset viewpoints changed these perceptions, complicated the analysis, and left it with some unresolved aspects. In the context of the overall approach taken in this dissertation, even these established results are of importance. It is proposed that the space of the

Giraud was seen by Manet to incorporate those two elements with which he had been experimenting, that is, the space set parallel to the picture plane with the foreground group of revellers, and an angled space with the structure of the balcony. But this dual shaping of Giraud's was obvious, without ambiguity. Manet retained the alignment of the foreground group, re-aligned the balcony structure to be the same, and produced an apparently frontal view with the position of the viewpoint assessed, as determined from the slightly off-centre view of the clusters of lamps on the columns, to be slightly to the left of a central position. But that insistently frontal view was underlaid by Manet with the ambiguous implications of angled views from offset viewpoints to both the left and to the right. With the site not allowing the offset viewpoints to actually see the complete motif as was possible from the more central viewpoint, the angled shaping could only have been developed by Manet directly within the surface of the work, and not established with a *chambre photographique* as is proposed for *The Railway* or *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.

The concept for Manet's painting can therefore be seen to have evolved from the borrowing of a coherent part of another work, rather than one conceived as a composite of parts, and it is also clear that such a direct borrowing had not been seen by Manet as a hindrance or limitation in achieving his own vision in paint. At one level, the extent of pictorial contrivance is therefore surprisingly limited, but in terms of spatial shaping, it can be seen that the spatial implications in the Giraud were seen by Manet as an existing situation full of potential for experimental re-shaping. Analysis of the re-shaping was undertaken with the computer-modelled reconstruction of the corridor site in the Opéra rue Le Peletier, using dimensional information gathered from archival documents (e.g. Figs.E8 and E9), photographs and illustrations. Inconsistencies between all the examined documents meant, however, that the modelling, as shown in the plan, elevation, and cross-section (Fig.E12) and the isometric view (Fig.E13), could not be constructed with complete accuracy. Nevertheless, when used to assess and check the perspective in the Giraud painting, the modelling was able to show it to be a two-point angled view from a viewpoint SP1 within the foyer and in the direction as shown in Fig.E12, looking across

the corridor. The reasonable accuracy of the computer-generated view (Fig.E16) from this viewpoint when confirmed with the overlay line drawing made from the painting (Fig.E17), not only demonstrated that the processed dimensional information was reasonably accurate but also that Giraud had obviously used the principles of perspective in a constructed view, or taken the geometry directly from a photograph.

Because of the number of balcony railing panels depicted, the proportions of the columns and the implications of the spatial shaping, Manet's painting presents a somewhat contradictory representation of the space of the corridor and balcony. At first it seems evident that the columns in the Manet have been set further apart than in the Giraud and that the three-panel balcony railing set between the columns has been stretched accordingly, but with the central panel made wider than the two side panels. And the columns in the Manet also seem to have been made wider than in the Giraud. The reconstruction of the corridor established, however, that with the same spacing of the three railing panels as seen between columns *C3* and *C4* in the Giraud, seven panels fitted exactly between the central columns *C2* and *C3*. And when this reconstruction was compared with Manet's work it was seen that the proportion of height to width of that central bay, using the centre line of the columns *C2* and *C3* for the width, was exactly as depicted in the painting. A surprising accord, probably not accidental, was also seen to exist in the depth of the edge beam to the balcony floor. And when the seven railing panels in the central bay was seen as a combined sequence of two, three, and two panels rather than seven separate panels, the combined proportions matched those in the painting more closely than three panels of equal width.

Thus, in the re-alignment by Manet of the columns and balcony in the Giraud to be parallel to the picture plane he transposed the view to be between the central columns rather than between those used by Giraud. Although the one-point frontal perspective view evident in *Masked Ball at the Opera* could have been easily developed by Manet from an understanding of an elevation of the elements, without recourse to recording the view from a particular position on site, the underlying spatial ambiguities in the work suggest that the apparently straightforward frontal view of the painting is more complex

than it seems. A one-point frontal perspective view from Manet's viewpoint SP2 in the foyer space (Fig.E18), with the centre of vision slightly to the left of the image's centre, confirms, when overlaid with the line drawing made from the painting (Fig.E19), the painting's depiction of the balcony between the central columns in the corridor. The accuracy of the correlation suggests that Manet's adaptation of Giraud's image may have incorporated information about the site that had been neither directly evident in Giraud's perspective view nor obviously available for examination after the Opéra fire, and consequently, that *Masked Ball at the Opera* had existed in some form, or at least been in gestation, before the fire.

The spatial shaping of the painting in the one-point frontal view, as seen with the overlay lines set to the floor surface in Fig.E20a provides an interesting comparison with the implications of offset viewpoints to the left and the right as shown with overlay lines in Fig.E20b and Fig.E20c, respectively. As discussed in Appendix 1 and Chapter 4, the ambiguous existence of an alternative spatial shaping only exists within a work's artifice, even if the implied alternative viewpoint could be used. For these alternative offset views in *Masked Ball at the Opera*, this is reinforced by the fact that, because of the walls between the foyer and the corridor, the theoretical views could not be seen from the either of the offset viewpoints. The alternative spatial shapings underlying the work had been conceptualised by Manet at the surface of the canvas.

With the offset viewpoint to the left, and the resultant angled shaping as seen in Fig.E20b, the figures in the crowd align with this shaping possibly even more than with the frontal shaping. This can be particularly seen with the angled alignment of the couple in profile at left-centre. When seen in this shaping it is realised that, with their parallel alignment to the picture plane, it is impossible to see the back of the woman *en débardeuse* and the front of the man from a central viewpoint unless they, as a couple, were set at more of an angle to the picture plane. As depicted, they fit perfectly into the offset shaping. Similarly, although physically set parallel to the picture plane, the direction in which the central group with the women in dominoes is facing, angled to their left, underscores this angled shaping.

The whole sense of the painting changes drastically, however, when the implied angled shaping from the offset viewpoint to the right is applied, as seen in Fig.E20c. For comparison, the vanishing point for this right-side shaping was positioned to provide the same, but opposite, angling as that for the left-side, and coincidentally was found to exist at the figure which has been identified by many other scholars as Manet's self-portrait. Although such an identification is, for this writer, an unconvincing one, the transformation of some aspects of the work when seen in the shaping from a vanishing point in such a position possibly enhances such a claim. Many of the figures in the crowd can be seen to individually not fit the shaping, but the relationship of the figure of Polichinelle to the group is transformed. From being an enigmatic, peripheral figure in both the frontal and offset viewpoint to the left, cut at the painting's left edge, the Polichinelle in this shaping is seen in a position which centrally faces the space between the columns and in which he has become the focus of the gathering – still isolated, different in appearance, and ignored by the revellers as before, but nonetheless the focus of the space. In such a position his stance, with legs apart and his arm raised, remains somewhat declamatory although of unspecified function, but it takes on the sense of admonition rather than salutation, and in doing so changes the tone of the painting completely. To have such a function covertly and ambiguously set within the fabric of the painting's somewhat straightforward spatial appearance gives evidence of the potential of Manet's strategy of implied concurrent spatial shapings. The relationship of the Polichinelle to the group, indeed his function in the painting, has always been seen as problematic, somewhat unsettling. The explanation of the perceived relationship within such a spatial shaping does not change that reading. The alternative, but concurrent, perception is always there as a latent ambiguous layer of the work, as one which can be neither dropped into or out of as the spatial shaping is re-assessed, nor developed and isolated to make the work something different to what it actually is.

At a practical level of technique, and as discussed in Appendix 1, the possibility of a sensed simultaneous angled shaping is enhanced with Manet's use of rounded forms, such as with the columns, and the visually flexible figures of the revellers. Not only would rectilinear columns have made a centre-point perspective inflexible and unable to be read in any other way, but the distortion would be very evident. Indeed, the existence of the square capitals at the top of the columns in the Giraud image may have been one of the reasons why they had been cropped by Manet. The implications of a comparison between round and rectilinear forms are also an important analytical aspect of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* in Chapter 5(F) below.

Masked Ball at the Opera is not only seen as an important step in Manet's development of spatial ambiguity but, by the very fact that it involved another image as pictorial source and intermediary, it also provides some understanding of his continued spatial experimentation. Although, as suggested above, the connection with Eugène Giraud's *Le bal de l'Opéra* raises broader implications, such as political, for Manet's reasons in creating his painting, in the context of this study the use of the Giraud image importantly introduces new possibilities in the dating of *Masked Ball at the Opera* and demonstrates how Manet transformed the obvious spatial shaping in the Giraud into the ambiguously nuanced space of his own canvas.

5E. MASKED BALL AT THE OPERA: Notes

DISSERTATION: Volume 2, pp.27–29

[2013 Note](#)

At the time of writing the dissertation, the location of Eugène Giraud's painting *Le bal de l'Opéra* was not known and only Robert Bingham's photograph and the wood engraving after the photograph provided images of the original work. The painting surfaced in 2004 and is now held in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris. (for a reproduction, see: URL: <http://a80musees.apps.paris.fr/Portail/Site/Typo3.asp?lang=FR&id=accueil>)

NOTES

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- As noted by Fervacques after a visit to Manet's studio: "Cette toile... représente le couloir de l'Opéra une nuit de bal masqué" (Fervacques (pseud. for Léon Duchemin), 'L'Hiver à Paris: Jeudi 25, décembre', *Le Figaro*, 27 December, 1873, p.1); as remembered from an undated visit to Manet's studio by Jules-Camille de Polignac in his memoirs of 5 May, 1883: "La première fois que je suis entré dans l'atelier de Manet, il travaillait à un tableau qui appartient, je crois, à Faure et qui représente le couloir de l'ancien opéra un soir de bal masqué." (Quoted from Éric Darragon, 'Manet, Le Bal masqué à l'Opéra', *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art français*, 1985, pp.166, 173-n.20; cited in Pierre Courthion, and Pierre Cailler, eds., *Manet Raconté par Lui-Même et par Ses Amis*, Pierre Cailler, Geneva, 1953, v.1, p.229.); and, as described by Théodore Duret: "A proprement parler, ce n'est pas le bal de l'Opéra qui est montré, puisque la scène ne se passe pas dans la salle, lieu de la danse, mais dans le pourtour derrière les loges." (Théodore Duret, *Histoire de Edouard Manet et de son œuvre. Avec un catalogue des Peintures et des Pastels*, H. Floury, Paris, 1902, p.88).
- Fervacques 1873 (as in n.1), p.1. Apart from Marilyn Brown in 1985 and Éric Darragon in 1987, references to the article have mistaken the quoting of the dateline of Fervacques' article at 25 December by Étienne Moreau-Nélaton (*Manet raconté par lui-même*, 2 vols., Henri Laurens, Paris, 1926, v.2, p.9) as the date of *Le Figaro* in which the article appeared. The article, with its lead-in of "Visité l'atelier de Manet" was part of a diary piece, under the title 'L'Hiver à Paris', which appeared 2–3 times a week. The much-quoted transcription of the Fervacques article by Moreau-Nélaton contains numerous editing changes from the original, including (ibid., v.2, with paragraphs of quoted article noted): p.8, para.1, "tourbillonnent" in place of "tourbillonne"; p.9, para.5, "passant" in place of "passent", and "laissant" in place of "laissent"; p.10, para.6, "coiffée d'un bonnet" in

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place of "coiffée crânement d'un bonnet", and "Ils sont là tous" in place of "Ils sont là en tas"; p.10, para.7, "*Contes de Fées*" in place of "*Contes des Fées*", and "et de la politique" in place of "ou de la politique". Many changes in punctuation are also apparent.

3. Fervacques 1873, p.1.
4. id.
5. id.
6. id.
7. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Le Jury de Peinture pour 1874 et M. Manet', La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, 12 April 1874, pp.155–57.
8. ibid., p.156.
9. id.
10. For a description of the relationship between the masked balls and society, see: Robert L. Herbert, Impressionism: Art, Leisure & Parisian Society, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988, pp.130–32; Melissa Hall, 'Manet's *Ball at the Opera*: a Matter of Response', Rutgers Art Review, Spring, 1984, pp.29–45; and John Hutton, 'The Clown at the Ball: Manet's Masked Ball of the Opera and the Collapse of Monarchism in the Early Third Republic', The Oxford Art Journal, v.10, no.2, 1987, *passim*.
11. Victor Poupin, Un Bal à l'Opéra, Paris, Librairie Achille Faure, Paris, 1867, part VII-pt.II, p.15 (originally published as 'Un bal à l'Opéra', L'Art, 30 November, 1865).
12. ibid., p.16.
13. Adolphe Tabarant, Manet: Histoire catalographique, Éditions Montaigne, Paris, 1931, p.251.
14. Adolphe Tabarant, Manet et ses œuvres, Gallimard, Paris, 1947, p.204.
15. id.
16. Listed as No.214 (étude préparatoire) and No.215 (esquisse), in Denis Rouart, and Daniel Wildenstein, Edouard Manet: Catalogue raisonné, v.1, La Bibliothèque des Arts, Lausanne and Paris, 1975).
17. Listed as No.503 (Lavis à l'encre de Chine), Rouart and Wildenstein 1975 (as in n.16).
18. Duret 1902 (as in n.1), p.89.
19. For a personalised record of the trials and tribulations in mounting and presenting the production of *Henriette Maréchal*, of the reception the play received, and the reasons for the early closing of the play, see Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire, Fasquelle et Flammarion, Paris, 1956, *années* 1864 and 1865, *passim*. The first reference occurs in the entry for Friday, 29 January, 1864: "Nous allons voir le directeur de Beaufort pour notre pièce, HENRIETTE, présentée au Vaudeville." (ibid., v.2, p.16).
For a detailed description of the political circumstances and the climate of censorship encountered by the de Goncourts in preparing for the play, and the protests led by Georges Cavalié (pseud. Pipe-en-bois), see: Michel Caffier, Les Frères Goncourt: "un déshabillé de l'âme", Presses Universitaires de Nancy, Nancy, 1994, pp.141–52; and, Éric Darragon, 'Manet, Le Bal masqué à l'Opéra', Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art français, 1985, pp.161–74.
20. Goncourt 1956 (as in n.19), v.2, p.951.
21. John Hutton 1987 (as in n.10), p.77. Hutton made specific reference to the article of Éric Darragon (Darragon 1985).
22. id.
23. For contemporary reports of the fire, see: Incendie de l'Opéra, 28 Octobre 1873, news-sheet with text and illustrations, Imp. moderne, Paris, 1873; 'Incendie de l'Opéra', L'Illustration, Journal Universel, no.1603, 15 Novembre, 1873, p.307; 'L'Incendie du Grand Opéra', Le Monde Illustré, no.865, 8 November, 1873, p.294. For more historical details of the fire, see: Albert de La Salle, 'Salle de la rue le Peletier (1821)', in Les Treize Salles de l'Opéra, Librairie Sartorius, Paris, 1875, pp. pp.271–79.
24. One of five paintings sold to Faure on that day: "Vendu à Faure. *Bal masqué à l'Opéra*...6 000 fr.". Carnet de Manet, 18 November, 1873. Cited in Moreau-Nélaton, v.2, 1926, pp.10–11. Referenced from Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet

- des Estampes, Yb³2401 8⁰, don. Moreau-Nélaton, 1910, by Anthea Callen, in 'Faure and Manet', Gazette des Beaux-Arts, s.6, v.83, March, 1974, p.176-n.31.
25. Tabarant 1931 (as in n.13), p.250.
 26. Darragon 1985 (as in n.1), p.164.
 27. *ibid.*, p.169.
 28. *ibid.*, p.170.
 29. John Hutton 1987, p.77.
 30. *id.*
 31. Melissa Hall 1984 (as in n.10), p.38.
 32. Marilyn R. Brown, 'Manet, Nodier, and *Polichinelle*', Art Journal, v.44, no.1, Spring, 1985, p.46.
 33. Linda Nochlin, 'Women, Art, and Power', in Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation, eds. Norman Bryson, et al., Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p.23.
 34. Alan Krell, Manet, and the Painters of Contemporary Life, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996, p.123.
 35. Linda Nochlin, 'A Thoroughly Modern Masked Ball', Art in America, November, 1983, p.196.

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36. Joel Isaacson, 'Impressionism and Journalistic Illustration', Arts Magazine, v.56, June, 1982, p.105.
37. *id.*
38. Darragon 1985, p.169. See also, referenced Illustration no.10, p.170: an engraved illustration titled *Au Bal de l'Opéra*, after a drawing by Hadol, which appeared in La Vie Parisienne, 25 February, 1865, pp.104–05.
39. Hutton 1987, p.81.
40. Alain de Leiris, 'Manet and El Greco: *The Opera Ball*', Arts Magazine, v.55, September, 1980, pp.95–99.
41. Nochlin 1983 (as in n.35), caption to illustration, p.197.
42. No.664 – *Le bal de l'Opéra*
43. The original painting is seen in the photograph to be signed and dated: "E. Giraud 1866".
44. Théophile Gautier *fils*, 'Salon de 1867', L'Illustration, 11 May 1867, p.298.
45. H. Vernoy, 'Le Bal de l'Opéra', L'Univers Illustré, no.676, 28 December, 1867, p.811 (illustration, p.809).
46. Albert Boime, Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1980, illus.IX.11, p.305.
47. Kathleen Adler, Manet, Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1986, Figure 146, p.160, with quoted description part of the illustration's caption.
48. Darragon 1985, p.173-n.10.
49. Three watercolour caricatures by Giraud of Alexandre Cabanel, Jean-Léon Gérôme, and Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier are illustrated in, Patricia Mainardi, Art and Politics of the Second Empire. The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1987, illus.120, 121, 122, respectively, p.186.
50. For a concise history of Giraud's life and works, see: Isabelle Julia, 'Pierre-François-Eugène Giraud', in Isabelle Julia, and Jean Lacambre, Les années romantiques, exh. cat., Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1995.
51. Goncourt 1956, *années* 1863, 1864, 1865, v.2, *passim*.
 Entries in the *Journal* bring the members, including Giraud, of Princess Mathilde's circle together, recording soirées at Nieuwerkerke's apartment at the Louvre (20 *mars*, 1863), or visits to Princess Mathilde's chateau at Saint-Gratien (*Dimanche* 13 *août*, 1865). It is noted in the entry of 15 December, 1865, that after a successful presentation of the play *Henriette Maréchal*, "Eugène Giraud nous dit ce soir, dans les coulisses, que la Princesse a reçu des lettres anonymes affreuses à

propos de notre pièce, lui promettant que la première torche serait pour son hôtel et qu'on pendrait 'tous ses amants!' " (ibid., p.229).

52. Anne Coffin Hanson, 'Popular Imagery and the Work of Edouard Manet', in French 19th Century painting and literature, ed. Ulrich Finke, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1972, pp.133–63.
 53. ibid., p.133.
 54. ibid., p.134.
 55. id.
 56. Hutton 1987, p.78.
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