



667.3

Oeil Sociologique: A Case Study on Manet's Chemin De Fer

Friday, 20 July 2018: 11:00

Location: 206E (MTCC NORTH BUILDING)

Oral Presentation

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This paper uses Edouard Manet's work *Chemin de fer*, also known as *Gare Saint Lazare*, to discuss the concept of *oeil sociologique* (sociological eye). *Chemin de fer* was finished in 1872, when Manet was 40 years old, just two years after his time in the Franco-Prussian War. Although selected for and displayed in the Salon of 1873, *Chemin de fer* was very different, in subject, style and even size, from other paintings displayed in the Salon, such as that of Gérôme's *Éminence grise*.

Manet has been a popular research subject for social scientists such as Bataille, Foucault and Bourdieu. However, Manet's vision of the world was rarely studied in comparison with sociological knowledge. With an *oeil sociologique*, Manet saw, unconsciously and spontaneously, 'problematic' dimensions in ordinary scenes, for example, two symbolically contrasting females, without any interaction, standing in front of a train station. The picture prepares a good starting point for sociological research on the railway's impact on modern life. As Manet said, "I paint what I see," and we can find in *Chemin de fer* an extraordinary arrangement of symbolic elements that come from Manet's *oeil sociologique*.

The idea of *oeil sociologique* is neither the 'period eye' of Baxandall nor 'sociological imagination' of C. Wright Mills. *Oeil sociologique* is available only when sociological thinking emerges in a pre-sociological stage before the consolidation of a discipline called sociology or the initiation of a sociological study. By analyzing *Chemin de fer*, alongside Manet's career, I propose that personal characteristics, social origin and historical contingency are potential contributors to the *oeil sociologique*. Manet's case was a non-reproducible historical experiment that occurred in an age when sociology was about to emerge. However, the conditions and situations that contribute to Manet's *oeil sociologique* are heuristic for us in this age of sociology in crisis.

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