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INTRODUCTION

Crying babies, downcast faces, knitted brows, and crinkled foreheads—a tight cluster of expressions variously anxious, angry, sad, and struck dumb. *The Paris Crowd*, a woodcut made in 1892, was the first of many prints and drawings by the Franco-Swiss artist Félix Vallotton depicting the relationship between Parisians and the police (fig. I.1). A crush of people—men and women, young and old, proletarian and bourgeois—press into the street, contained within the perpendicular boundaries of a policeman’s arms. Vallotton often drew his crowds against a linear barrier, a metaphor for his manipulation of their shape within art’s two-dimensional frame. Here, that frame is embodied by the policeman, a force of social and pictorial order. This force is not violent, at least not yet—police violence explodes elsewhere in Vallotton’s work—but it is coercive, shaping the crowd and directing the viewer’s attention.

The craggy faces in *The Paris Crowd* are formed by a few concisely carved lines. A critic in 1892 said they looked “cut with a billhook.”¹ They elicit our empathy, but the print is not overtly political, concealing why the crowd is gathered and why the policeman must hold it back. What are these people straining to see? That question is Vallotton’s subject, the way a gathering in the street attracts curiosity, and the way the policeman, like the artist, tries to keep the gathering in line. A lone pair of feet points toward the crowd from the other side of the street, heel-to-heel in a right angle that echoes the policeman’s arms. (The buckled shoes and what may be the bottom of a cassock suggest this lone bystander could be a member of the clergy, a figure of renewed authority in the French Catholic revival of the 1890s, especially in the context of demonstrations and parades.²) The figure’s separation from and apparent elevation above the crowd mirrors our position viewing the picture from outside its bounds. With whom are we meant to identify? With the crowd of people, cordoned off and contained? With the policeman, the force of containment? Or with the solitary bystander watching at a safe distance from both?

The variety of people who make up the crowd is in tension with a pattern of doubling. The man with the large nose and mustache nearest the policeman reappears in profile an inch away from the policeman’s right hand; a mother and child anchoring the crowd’s center appear again just to the right; and the downcast eyes of the young woman in the lower right corner is doubled by the man to her right, whose cap echoes the vertical striations carved in her scarf. These doublings counter the group’s multiplicity and variety. Individuality is in tension with typology and the contagious curiosity of the group. *The Paris Crowd* is a



FIG. I. I. Félix Vallotton, *The Paris Crowd* (*La Foule de Paris*), 1892. Woodcut on cream wove paper, 13.8 × 19.5 cm (block). Princeton University Art Museum.

pictorial expression of crowd psychology, visualizing how people clash, blend, and multiply when pressed together.

Vallotton does not give this phenomenon an overtly positive or negative charge.³ Although we have no written record of his political views, scholars have often assumed he had anarchist leanings. He contributed to a number of anarchist/socialist publications and his intellectual circle was, for the most part, far left.⁴ But the politics of his art is often elusive, if not maddeningly ambivalent. By leaving these questions open, Vallotton directs our attention somewhere else: to the curious viewers on the margins of culture and current events. His print medium underscores the metaphorical extension of *The Paris Crowd* to an audience of viewers not physically gathered but collectively exposed to this reproducible image.

Vallotton's art in the 1890s teems with gawkers of every age, class, and gender, staring at spectacles that range from tragic to comic and variations between. *Badauds* (pronounced "bah-doh")—the French term for gawkers or curious onlookers—find their most trenchant articulation in Vallotton's early oeuvre.⁵ *The Paris Crowd* forecasts the complexity of the subject in his work: it makes gawking alone its subject, with the focus of the crowd's attention cropped by the frame; it points to gawking's proliferation through the presence

of the mystery figure across the street; the faces in the crowd exhibit a range of psychological responses, from empathy to impassivity to anger; and it folds the artist and viewer into its structure of captivation. More than any other artist, Vallotton seized on badauds as a subject of deep significance to late nineteenth-century urban culture. The social intelligence and graphic force of his work unlock the badaud's importance to the art world of his time.

The term “badaud” can be traced back to François Rabelais's *Gargantua* (1534) in a description insulting Parisians as “so stupid, so gawking, and so inherently inept” (*tant sot, tant badaud et tant inepte de nature*), but usage of the word increased exponentially in the nineteenth century.⁶ By then, it described a person who consumed the spontaneous happenings of the street as a form of theater, with “badauderie” denoting the pastime itself. Larousse defined the badaud in 1867 as primarily “curious”: “he [or she] is astonished by everything he sees, believes everything he hears, and shows his contentment or surprise by his open, gaping mouth.”⁷ (The most common synonym for *les badauds* in nineteenth-century French is *les curieux*.) Critic and historian Victor Fournel characterizes the badaud of 1858 as an “impersonal being,” adding, “He is no longer a man—he is the public; he is the crowd.” But Fournel also calls him an “artist by instinct and temperament,” an “ardent and naïve soul . . . with none of the disdainful skepticism or pathological pride that are the two great plagues on our epoch.”⁸ This sensitive, emotive, and anonymous creature was important to artistic production in fin-de-siècle France, both as a motif in works of art and as a rising model of art's modern viewer. Because badauds are identifiable “by the way in which they look at things,” by how they look when they look, they lend themselves to depiction in visual art.⁹ Their appearance in art of the late nineteenth century is the subject of this book.

Gawking in Print

The Paris Crowd reappears as an illustration in *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue* (1896), an anthology of essays and narrative vignettes about Parisian life edited by bibliophile publisher Octave Uzanne (figs. I.2–I.4). A loose translation of the title, *Episodes of Parisian Gawking. Gatherings. Physiologies of the Street*, captures its meaning, but I will preserve the French title's specificity and refer to it as *Badauderies parisiennes*. The book reimagines the nineteenth-century genre of *physiologies*: texts, often illustrated, that describe the inhabitants of a city—the flâneur, the gamin, the itinerant musician, the beggar, the artist—by classifying them according to appearance, behavior, and social role.¹⁰ Uzanne's authors, by contrast, catalogue groups gathering in the street, sketching the range of spectacles, large and small, that attracted gawkers in Paris.

Badauderies parisiennes is a luxury book, printed on handmade Japanese paper with silk brocade and gold end-leaves. At its heart are thirty illustrations

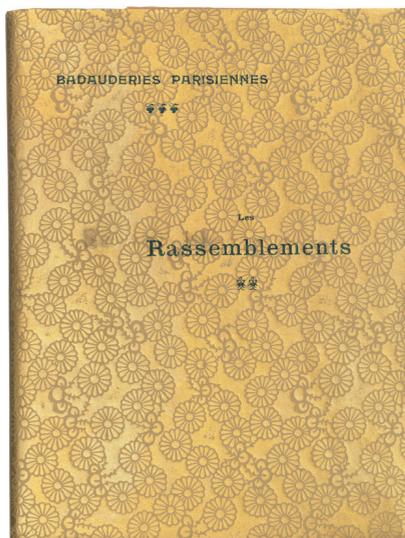
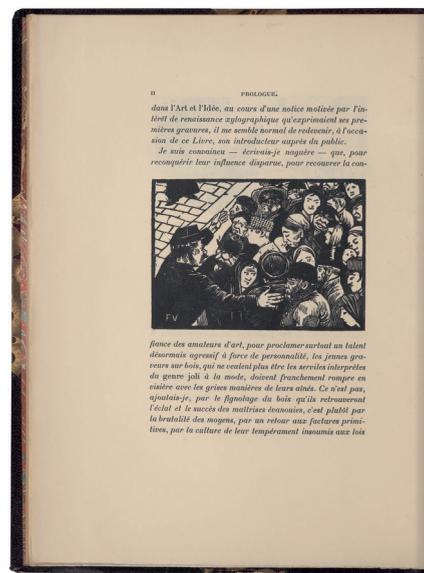
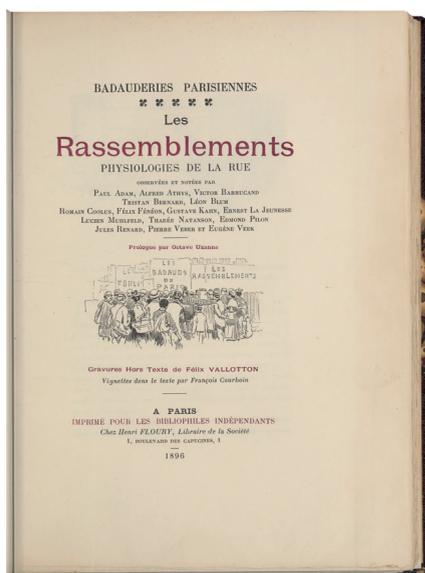


FIG. I.2. *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue*, ed. Octave Uzanne (Paris: H. Floury, 1896). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

FIG. I.3. Title page of *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue*, 1896. Photomechanical relief on paper, 23.4 × 17 cm (page). Princeton University Library.

FIG. I.4. Vallotton, *The Paris Crowd (La Foule de Paris)*, 1892, in *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue*, 1896. Photomechanical relief print on paper, 23.4 × 17 cm (page). Princeton University Library.



by Vallotton printed as full-page plates.¹¹ Uzanne was an admirer of Vallotton’s “rigorously synthetic” woodcuts with their “intense, impenetrable, intransigent blacks,” so he asked the artist to provide him with “a series of brutalist prints on Parisian badauderie.” Uzanne then distributed copies as assigned prompts to “a group of poets, critics, humorists, and essayists,” including Paul Adam, Tristan Bernard, Léon Blum, Romain Coolus, Gustave Kahn, Félix Fénéon, Jules Renard, and Thadée Natanson. All of these writers were associated with the avant-garde literary journal *La Revue blanche*, where Vallotton was illustrator-in-chief. The result was a collection of modern narrative ekphrases, with writers riffing on late nineteenth-century urban experience through the lens of Vallotton’s pictures of badauds.¹²

Uzanne refers repeatedly to the “brutality” and “brutalism” of Vallotton’s woodcuts, calling them “barbarous” in their “primitive” style; but there is brutality in their subject matter, too, and not just that of the police. The latter is only the most politicized strand of the broader theme of social brutality in Vallotton’s early oeuvre, one that he explores in depictions of extraordinary accidents and everyday events. Uzanne describes the artist as part of a group of “aesthetic Anarchists” trying to reinvigorate art with forms that are deliberately “fresh” and “naïve”:

Félix Vallotton has always seemed to take pleasure in expressing, by vaguely ironizing, the movement of the street and the flâneur’s life [*la vie flâneuse de Paris*]. It is with this interest dominating his oeuvre in mind that I had the idea to ask him for a series of brutalist prints of Parisian badauderie, so amusing to observe in the endless avatars of a bulimic curiosity for unexpected events. . . . In Paris, every pedestrian seems to be just looking for an excuse, however futile, to stop, slow down, ask questions, and gossip about the least incident on the street. A burial, a wedding, a traffic jam, a tree being transplanted, a passing regiment, a fallen horse, a fire engine that bolts through the smoke and the husky, panting sound of its steam-powered pump, a street vendor spewing his sales pitch, and voilà, everyone gathers eagerly around, attracts each other, elbow to elbow, and enjoys the spontaneous gathering.

My intention was to write this book in which, chapter by chapter, I would have tried to bring out the strange, beatific, and insignificant physiognomies of these sudden agglomerations. I would have liked to show the curiosity and gawking of the street in its various facets, its variable expressions, its candor, its swell, its whims or savage instinct, as well as its dialogues in their synthetic slang.¹³

This mission statement is notable in its openness to gawking as a positive phenomenon—amusing, enjoyable, and full of “candor”—as well as a disturbing one sometimes driven by “savage instinct.” Uzanne initially planned to write the book himself, but decided that the range he desired could only be achieved in an anthology. It was an approach akin in its collectivity and unpredictability to the spontaneous gatherings the authors were asked to describe.¹⁴

Several aspects of Uzanne’s vision for his book are foundational for mine. First, note how he slides from “the flâneur’s life” to “Parisian badauderie” in the first two sentences of the passage above: that is, from the pleasure-seeking wandering and observing embodied by the flâneur to the spontaneous gatherings of spectators as another category of observation: badauderie. Uzanne describes the latter behavior as a “bulimic curiosity,” a phrase that abandons the dandified elegance and self-possession of the typical flâneur, and he takes care to note its “variable expressions, . . . its whims or savage instinct.” The difference

between whims and savage instincts is not small. We all have curious impulses, but when that curiosity turns “bulimic,” cruelty may follow. “Beatific” faces belie the darkness of the impulse to stop and stare. Second, Uzanne writes that he asked Vallotton for “a series of brutalist prints” on the subject of badauderie. The tension between the perceived brutalism of the artist’s approach and the pleasure-seeking nature of his subject is important, a tension also evident in the range of happenings that trigger gawking in Uzanne’s explanation: weddings and funerals, street vendors and military regiments, which is to say joy and death, petty commerce and the politics of war. Uzanne’s assertion that Vallotton “seems to take pleasure” in these varied subjects places his artistic motivation at the heart of the conflict. Third, he makes clear that badauds can be anyone. “Every pedestrian” is looking for an opportunity to gawk and gossip, and when such an opportunity presents itself, “everyone gathers eagerly around.” But Uzanne’s book was not aimed at everyone. Its expensive production and small print run were for a rarefied audience of bibliophiles.¹⁵ Vallotton and his colleagues addressed this conflict between high form and low content, elite audience and common theme, in works that explore the relationships among badauds, artists, and viewers of art.

Vallotton’s design for the book jacket of *Badauderies parisiennes* shows a canny self-awareness of how his work contributed to contemporary views of Parisian life (fig. I.5). At lower left is a self-portrait in striped trousers and top hat striding into a crowd of people near the edge of the Seine. Posters promoting cabarets, toys, and *La Revue blanche* hint at the commercial side of Vallotton’s work, and show the central place of advertising in fin-de-siècle French culture and urban life, even in the rarefied realm of luxury books. Vallotton positions himself hustling his way in this world. Our viewpoint onto the busy scene is elevated above the street, looking down on the quai from the perspective of a first-story window. Nonetheless, the image includes us, not only because the sign advertising the book is clearly meant for our eyes, but also because select members of the scene stare back, as if aware of our gaze. The young woman with the floral hat at left looks out at us with a pleasant smile. The man in the center background—he has the open, gaping mouth of a badaud—turns away from his view of the Seine to look back at something that has caught his eye. It is the ad-board that occupies his attention, the other side of the one we see. We mirror the badaud.

Badauderies parisiennes represents scenes of gawking in a variety of places, including bus stops, bridges, construction sites, street performances, car accidents, crime scenes, theaters, and cafés. The essays vary widely in their attitudes toward badauds, from mocking to sympathetic to cynically admiring, but almost all of them use Vallotton’s work as a springboard for meditations on the pleasures and dangers of modern urban life. His prints and their accompanying texts stage the levels of unease surrounding the viewing of trivial entertainments (e.g., “The Balloon,” a hot-air balloon flying over the city and inviting reckless speculation) and everyday tragedies (e.g., “The Drowned Man,”



FIG. I.5. Félix Vallotton, Fold-out book jacket for *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue*, 1896. Photomechanical relief print on paper, 23.4 × 38 cm. Princeton University Library.

whose subject, pulled out of the Seine, is surrounded by people gossiping about what did him in).¹⁶ Paul Adam's essay "The Drunk" represents "the plebs" as persecutors of society's most vulnerable members. Inspired by Vallotton's print of a mob of children tormenting a drunken man while three adults stand by (fig. I.6), Adam's narrative accosts the crowd for its "idiocy," "baseness," and "cruelty." Image and text call upon the reader to stop this "murder of the weak."¹⁷

One of the book's most disturbing chapters is a scathing essay on urban fires written by anarchist critic Félix Fénéon, another writer who uses Vallotton's work as a weapon of biting social critique.¹⁸ Inspired by the image of a crowd watching an apartment building go up in flames (fig. I.7), the narrative condemns not only badauds but also victims and firefighters for turning tragedy into theater. People watch the fire from a distance as if it were transpiring on a stage, and even those unfortunate enough to be caught in the building play up the drama with histrionic gestures. Women brandish their babies at the window. Firemen play the hero while stuffing valuables in their pockets. This mockery must have raised eyebrows, especially because it came from a man recently charged with planting bombs around Paris.¹⁹ Vallotton's picture does not go as far as Fénéon's text, but its juxtaposition of the static passivity of the



FIG. I.6. Félix Vallotton, *The Drunk (L'Ivrogne)*, 1896, in *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue*, 1896. Photomechanical relief print on paper, 23.4 × 17 cm (page). Princeton University Library.



FIG. I.7. Félix Vallotton, *The Fire (L'Incendie)*, 1896, in *Badauderies parisiennes. Les Rassemblements. Physiologies de la rue*, 1896. Photomechanical relief print on paper, 23.4 × 17 cm (page). Princeton University Library.

badauds with the whipping movement of the fire does seem to pass judgment. He places the viewer in a similar position to the badaud at lower right, straining to look over a mass of heads and hats in order to see. Both text and image relay the power of this morbid drama to mesmerize the crowd. Vallotton stages the onlookers' fascination with the tragedy as it unfolds, offering the viewer of the print a vicarious experience of their inability to look away.

Badaud / Flâneur

In 1839 Honoré Daumier published a caricature of badauds in the popular humor magazine *Le Charivari* (fig. I.8). A cluster of men and a small child populate the foreground of the print, while in the distance a large crowd gathers on the Pont Neuf to peer down on the Seine. The caption reads: "It's impossible to believe that this poor fisherman perched on a boat is the only reason for this gathering. Surely these Parisians, this intelligent and energetic caste, are rooted to the spot by a serious incident, a milliner, a peer of France, a chestnut vendor, a candidate for the Academy, a victim of love or ambition! . . . Actually no, it's just a gudgeon that you can't see and that they can't see either." A gudgeon (*goujon*) is a small fish used for bait, as well as an archaic term for a gullible person. The caption's sarcasm pokes fun at the badauds and at us, who have been similarly seduced by the empty promise of fascination. It was likely written by Louis Huart, who wrote most of Daumier's captions for *Le Charivari* and who included a chapter on tourist badauds in his *Physiology of the Flâneur*, published two years later. But unlike Huart, Daumier does not represent badauds as foreign, unsophisticated, or dumb.²⁰ The bourgeois men in the foreground challenge that stereotype, exhibiting the same idle curiosity as the gamin. Daumier's print, like Vallotton's *The Paris Crowd*, is relatively neutral, representing badauderie as an inevitable temptation for all.

Badauds abound in late nineteenth-century art and literature, yet they have received only a minute fraction of the attention devoted to the flâneur.²¹ In a massive and still accumulating literature, writers have constructed and deconstructed the flâneur as a social type and a model of modern subjectivity, intellectual freedom, and artistic genius.²² The badaud has been largely ignored. There are several reasons for this, but the crucial one is this: badauds' passivity and collectivity run fundamentally counter to the pervasive model of modern identity exemplified by the flâneur, a free and active agent with a bounded, cultivated sense of self. Whereas the flâneur is an individual figure of cool detachment and intellectual control, always the choreographer and interpreter of his urban strolling, the badaud is emotional, highly impressionable, and distractible, a cipher of a person both generated and fascinated by crowds. The flâneur is a connoisseur of the street driven by "an investigative gaze," self-directed, self-possessed, self-interested, and given to incisive commentary on the scene he (always he) surveys.²³ According to Larousse, "one is born a



FIG. 1.8. Honoré Daumier, *Gawkers* (*Les Badauds*), 1839. Lithograph published in *Le Charivari* 5 Dec. 1839. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

flâneur . . . one does not become one.” He is “an artist, poet, philosopher,” even a “man of genius.”²⁴ Flânerie is a pastime for those affluent enough to wander the city aimlessly at their leisure, and with the freedom—in the nineteenth century generally available only to men—to do so alone.²⁵ Badauderie, by contrast, is more spontaneous and available to anyone. It does not denote a type or an identity, but a behavior with identifiable signs. Anyone who can see can be a badaud at any given time.

In 1863, an article on the front page of the popular Parisian newspaper *Le Petit Journal* tried to distinguish the badaud from the observer (*observateur*) and the flâneur. While the observer “examines attentively . . . describes, compares, analyzes, reasons” like a scientist, the flâneur and the badaud are less objective, “but one must not confuse [them].” Whereas the flâneur exhibits a combination of “idleness and refined sensual pleasure, sprinkled with wit,” the badaud is “a very busy

imbecile, for whom every ordinary place is a surprise.” While the flâneur filters his experiences through the mind, the badaud looks at everything “with a material stupidity.” By way of example, the journalist describes a scenario in which someone sees a fallen horse trapped under a heavy carriage in the street. With crinkled forehead, the badaud watches instinctively and “imagines himself in the beast’s place,” as if *he* were straining under the driver’s whip to push off the weight, “but he doesn’t move.” The flâneur does not help either, but he does step in to offer advice.²⁶ Both are insufficiently humane, but in different ways: the badaud experiences a gut-level emotional connection to the victim, yet remains stationary and self-involved, while the flâneur is relatively unmoved, viewing the disaster as a problem to be solved, preferably by someone else. The flâneur and the badaud are also different in their approaches to looking at art: “The flâneur has already looked at all two hundred engravings in a shop window while the badaud has not even verified the one that seems to root him to the spot.” The insults accumulate—badauds are humorless, stupid, and naïve—but the article’s ultimate verdict is a surprise: “the badaud is more human than the flâneur.”²⁷ Vallotton’s ambivalence about gawkers and crowds—about their humanity and their sensitivity to art—is a feature of the period discourse describing them.

Compared to the flâneur, badauds are less refined onlookers, highly susceptible to those around them, an openness underscored by the children often featured in their midst. While flâneurs resist the seductions of women, commodities, and rumors, badauds succumb to them.²⁸ As reactive members of a small gathering or crowd, any individual perceptions they may have are opaque. Their faces may register astonishment, puzzlement, or the indignity of open-mouthed gaping, but one does not look to them to *interpret* the scene on view. They can be anodyne or repellant, embodying our guilt when seeking entertainment in others' misfortunes, but joining their cluster and following their stare is hard to resist. We may admire the elegantly expressed curiosity of the flâneur, but we more easily (if not more willingly) identify with the compulsions of the badaud.

In fact, the badaud has always been the flâneur's other side. The cover of *Physiology of the Flâneur* (1841) features badauds gathered around the shop windows of the publisher Aubert (fig. I.9). Huart's text and interior illustrations emphasize the rarity, singularity, and sophistication of the flâneur, in contrast to "faux-flâneurs" like the spaced-out idler (*musard*), the pavement pounder (*batteur de pavé*), and the "simple" or "foreign" badaud.²⁹ Fournel's *What One Sees in the Streets of Paris* (1858) includes a chapter titled "The Art of Flânerie—Definition of the Badaud," which presents the concepts as codependent while still insisting on their difference.³⁰ This distinction is lost in the most cited text on the flâneur, the section of Charles Baudelaire's essay "The Painter of Modern

Life" (1863) titled "The Artist, Man of the World, Man of the Crowd and Child." Baudelaire does not mention badauds at all, but he folds several of their distinguishing features into his characterization of the artist as "the perfect flâneur." That is, the flâneur's leading theorist combined qualities of the badaud and the flâneur in order to characterize the artist. Given the tremendous influence of Baudelaire's text, this elision is another likely

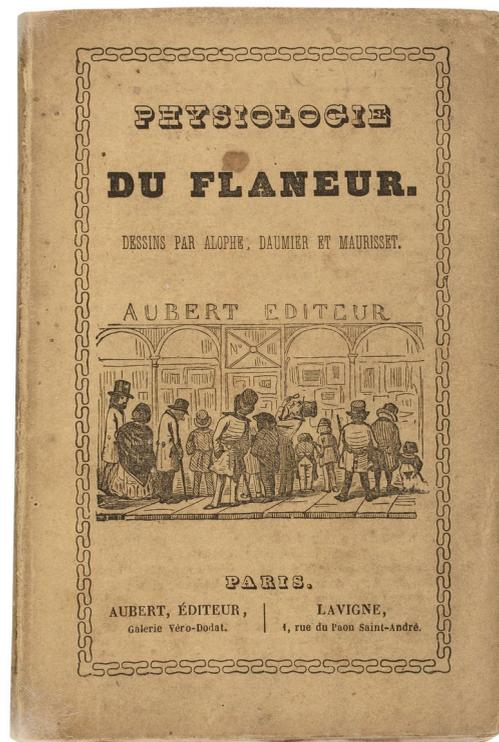


FIG. I.9. Louis Huart, *Physiologie du flâneur* (Paris: Aubert, 1841). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

reason for the badaud's minimal presence in later scholarship and criticism on nineteenth-century culture.

Baudelaire describes his subject, the artist Constantin Guys, as an insatiable observer whose "genius is *curiosity*." He then invokes Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), about a "convalescent" who immerses himself in the multitude, compelled by a curiosity that becomes an obsessional drive. Although there are flickering indications of the flâneur's detachment, intellect, and bourgeois status in Poe's mysterious protagonist, he is not at all an obvious flâneur. His compulsion and loss of self as the narrative unfolds suggest a shape-shifting criminal or badaud.³¹ The impressionable, childlike nature of the latter is key to Baudelaire's conception of the ideal artist. He follows his discussion of Poe with a long paragraph on children who experience visual delight as a kind of intoxication. Artists are the rare breed who can tap into this state of stupefied wonder "at will," a clever conflation of the flâneur's mental self-possession and the badaud's self-abandonment to visual stimuli. Unlike the dandy, the Baudelairean aesthete with whom the flâneur is often confused—characterized by self-conscious sophistication, vanity, and "an unshakeable determination not to be moved"—the artist feels things deeply and has "a horror of blasé people."³² Baudelaire's painter of modern life may have the flâneur's "independent, passionate, impartial nature," but the ease with which he can be captivated, both visually and emotionally, evokes the badaud.

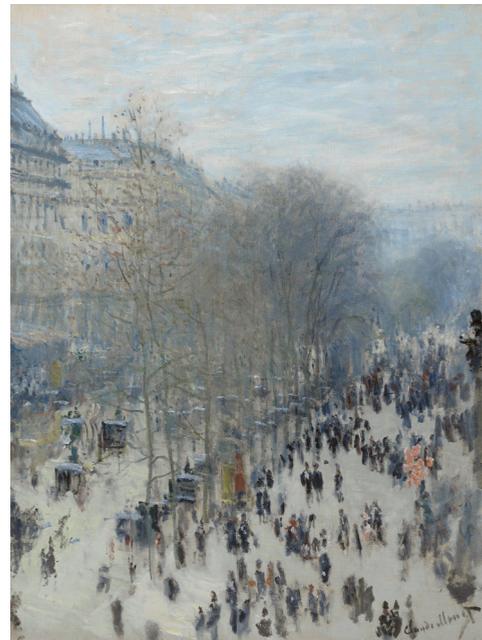
Although the flâneur is ubiquitous in the literature of and about nineteenth-century Paris, he is not a frequent feature of the period's visual art. This is why art historians illustrate their flâneur references with the same two or three paintings by Caillebotte and Degas.³³ Badauds were seen to be mindless, emotional, and driven by spectacles or the sight of other people presumably in thrall to a remarkable scene. In *The French Painted by Themselves: A Moral Encyclopedia of the Nineteenth Century* (1841), Auguste de Lacroix defines the badaud as someone who "does not think; he only perceives things externally." In short, the badaud's behavior is more visually than mentally derived.³⁴ While the flâneur is a literary paradigm with limited relevance to visual art, the badaud is the spectator *as spectacle*, a phenomenon that lends itself to visual depiction.³⁵ It also lends itself to a broader range of social analyses, inviting viewers of all kinds to identify with its pleasures and qualms.

T. J. Clark and Bertrand Tillier have characterized impressionist paintings of Parisian boulevards as part of a broad depoliticization and colonization of the street by the bourgeoisie in the years after the Paris Commune (1871) and the bloody civil war it brought on (fig. I.10). For Tillier, the flâneur plays a key role in this process as a consecrated figure of bourgeois individualism and aesthetic pleasure. In impressionism the crowd only ever appears from a distance, deactivated and homogeneous, as in aerial street scenes by Pissarro and Monet (fig. I.11). The street in these works is a space of bourgeois decorum, mastered and controlled, and the flâneur is usually *behind* the picture as the coolly observing artist rather than represented within it. This coincides with the



FIG. I.10. Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (*Rue de Paris, temps de pluie*), 1877. Oil on canvas, 212.2 × 276.2 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection.

FIG. I.11. Claude Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines* (*Les Grands Boulevards*), 1873–1874. Oil on canvas, 80.3 × 60.3 cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City.



development of extremely negative theories of crowds. In the 1880s and 1890s, severe inequality led to an uptick in protests and anarchist violence, making the street once again a place of political and physical danger. Crowd psychology developed in part to manage and suppress this threat.³⁶

Badauds were understood as a broad cultural phenomenon, but they were also perceived (like the *flâneur*) as especially Parisian. While some Parisians were free to dedicate themselves to *flânerie*, Paris, with its crowds and attractions, *made* people into badauds. Many French writers saw badauds as uniquely pervasive in the capital: “badauds de Paris.”³⁷ Their characterizations

are predominantly negative, not unlike the connotations of “gawker” in English. Voltaire wrote in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (1770): “If the people of Paris are most readily described as badauds, it is only because there are more people in Paris than elsewhere, and consequently more useless people who gather at the first unfamiliar sight, to contemplate a charlatan, or two women of the people insulting each other, or a driver whose cart has overturned and that they will not stand back up. There are badauds everywhere, but the ones in Paris take the cake.”³⁸ Other critics attributed the behavior to provincial tourists gaping at the spectacles and sophisticated manners of the city. Gustave Flaubert mocked “the badaud from the provinces [who] goes into ecstasies over the elegant manners of Paris while having his watch stolen.” His satirical *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, compiled in the 1870s, includes an entry on badauds: “All Parisians are badauds even though nine out of ten of them are provincials. No one works in Paris.”³⁹ Urban and provincial, local and tourist, rich and poor, Paris was a city of badauds.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers across the political spectrum pointed to badauds when complaining about the state of French culture. Conservative polemicist Léon Daudet uses the term repeatedly throughout *The Stupid Nineteenth Century: Exposé of the Murderous Insanities That Have Befallen France for the Past 130 Years, 1789–1919* (1922), his screed against modern democracy, science, literature, and art: “The enormous and scandalous impact of romanticism, and of the naturalism that followed it, resulted in an assembly of badauds (the same of the mass-circulation newspapers) and total incompetence. The approval of the crowd, submissive to all forms of publicity, has replaced that of connoisseurs.”⁴⁰ On the left, Stéphane Mallarmé used the word in multiple essays published throughout the 1890s to express his skepticism about his own motives as a writer and about Parisian audiences as consumers of literature, art, theater, and everyday life. “It’s an affectation to surprise the gawking crowd with an utterance,” he writes in “The Book, Spiritual Instrument” (1895), an essay that sanctifies the book in comparison to the shallow pandering of the newspaper.⁴¹ In “Sacred Pleasure” (1891), he admits to going to the symphony not out of genuine interest in music but “out of badauderie, trying to sniff out the occasion.”⁴² His work as a theater critic in the late 1880s, including twelve pieces republished in 1897 as “Sketched in the Theater,” demonstrates this approach, focusing far more on the audiences around him than on the performances on stage. In a related text on sensationalist news items (“Grands Faits-divers,” 1897), anarchist bombs “pitifully disfigure the badauds” in their vicinity, and courts of law are just another spectacle, “a fairground satisfaction sought in the public sideshow rarely lacking in badauderie.”⁴³

Architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc rails against badauderie in his *Discourses on Architecture* (1872), diagnosing it as a French problem with dangerous implications for art:

There is no country in which boasting on every occasion, pronouncing judgments at random, talking incessantly of oneself, one's achievements and alleged merits, succeeds so well as it does in France among the numerous brotherhood of badauds. But the thirty-eight million who compose the French nation are certainly not all members of that fraternity. There is a substratum of good sense and right feeling—I was going to say of honesty—in our country, which revolts against playing the part of either the dupers or the duped. The great body of the public pass the mountebank stage of the former and the gaping wonderment of the latter with utter indifference. They simply shrug their shoulders. But this is not enough: to keep aloof and withdraw into the background in presence of what is evil, impertinent, or foolish, is to make ourselves its accomplices, and must incur the penalties which wickedness, folly, and impertinence bring with them. We are only too keenly experiencing the results of this complicity just at this moment. Indifferent to what has been going on, or really duped by it, we have to pay for the follies we have allowed to be committed without protesting against them, or which through ignorance or badauderie we have approved. If this is always to be the case, we must despair of the future of our country, and the small minority of those who protest against such a state of things will have no resource but exile, that they may be no longer the accomplices or the witnesses of this moral decadence.⁴⁴

Viollet-Le-Duc pairs badauderie with “ignorance” to describe the dangers of lazy viewing, an abandonment of critical judgment that can lead not only to the proliferation of “frivolous” architecture, but also, and more urgently, to “moral decadence.” He published the second volume of his *Discourses* shortly after the national humiliations of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, events that he believed left France unable to claim superiority in any domain but one: artistic production. France, he writes, had been reduced to little more than “the *amusers* of the civilized world,” and would lose even that claim to fame if French people did not give art thoughtful attention and critique.⁴⁵

The fear of public opinion as expressed in published art criticism and more intangible forms, stoked by the growing power of the public over the markets for art, was a problem long before the late nineteenth century. Thomas Crow's authoritative study of the emergence of a modern public for art in eighteenth-century Paris describes the anxieties this public sphere generated in artists and establishment elites. One such fear, articulated in 1777, was that artists would have to cater to “cold and distracted spectators . . . fond only of novelty, whose restless curiosity has earned the epithets *burlesque* and *badaud*.”⁴⁶ A related fear was that these restless spectators would pay attention to the wrong things, and that their very indifference would become a damning form of critique.⁴⁷

The chapters that follow center on these restless viewers as they were

represented by artists and writers grappling with the problem of art's audience a century later, after an unprecedented explosion in the population of Paris and other cities around the world.⁴⁸ The sense of the city as a torrent of humanity, along with new technologies of printmaking, photographic reproduction, and the rapid expansion of illustrated and other journalism after the Law of July 29, 1881 on the Freedom of the Press, had a profound impact on how artists conceived and disseminated their work.⁴⁹

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, pictorial media proliferated and cross-pollinated as never before. New media—including various forms of graphic art, photography, and film—were redefining old media such as painting, sculpture, and drawing. It is no coincidence that most of the protagonists of this book worked in a range of media: Vallotton, Pierre Bonnard, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Daumier all saw themselves first and foremost as painters but turned to printmaking, poster design, journalistic caricature, theatrical set design, and illustration. They did so not just to advance their careers, but also to explore the expressive possibilities of each medium in a period of increasing competition for people's attention. Filmmakers Auguste and Louis Lumière were the sons of a prominent painter but rejected his medium to build their cinema empire out of an extensive knowledge of still photography.

Martha Ward has shown how the fin-de-siècle crisis of painting and the broader problem of “art's challenged status” in this period were tied to a loss of faith in the integrity of the individual viewer, and to artists' awareness that they could become pawns of market forces and public taste. Navigating this “specific historical crisis over the authority of art” required a difficult balancing act: artists who had to earn their living (and even those who did not, but valued public attention) understood they had to address their work to the markets and audiences that threatened them most. Some of them tried to circumvent the rise of the “dealer–critic system” by showing their work in alternative venues and private exhibitions, a tactic highlighted by Ward. Others, including the artists in this book, opted to work within the system and explore more popular platforms, making artworks in a range of media that captured and commented on the crisis in visual terms.⁵⁰ These artists seized upon badauderie as an analogue to their work, and represented badauds as a mirror of their anxiety and their sense of possibility about the audiences for art.

By the late nineteenth century, artists imagined their audience as an amorphous mass of people whose attention was pulled every which way, a problem newly studied by psychologists and social theorists. In *The Psychology of Attention* (1889), Théodule Ribot theorized two distinct forms of attention: spontaneous and natural on the one hand, voluntary and artificial on the other. The gawker in the street stood for the former, more “primitive” state of attention—“precarious and vacillating by nature,” a mental scattering of cognitive associations governed by affective impulses and desires. Caught up in something visually intriguing, the badaud's reactive, captivated attention was the opposite of “the blasé attitude” theorized by the German sociologist Georg

Simmel in 1903 as an adaptive trait of the modern city dweller.⁵¹ The challenge for artists was to seize this spontaneous attention and convert it into a more intense and unnatural state of extended focus on one thing (“intellectual monoideism”)—an exceptional mental and in many cases *physical* stasis that allowed for the intelligent appreciation and interpretation of art.⁵² In essence, artists had to stop people in their tracks and make them look with unnatural concentration. When crowds and gawkers appear in works by Vallotton, Daumier, Bonnard, the Lumière brothers, Toulouse-Lautrec, and others, they are more than actors in a scene. They also gesture—in complimentary and critical ways—to the works’ target audiences.

Gawkers discusses a range of artists and media—paintings, prints, posters, early cinema—but Vallotton appears again and again. He was the fin-de-siècle artist most fascinated by badauds as a social phenomenon with deep relevance to art. Although he considered himself first and foremost a painter and was a member of the secretive avant-garde group the Nabis, he earned mainstream fame from his prints, especially his woodcuts, a medium he revitalized with his bold, graphic style. He also wrote art criticism, novels, and plays, and collaborated with various writers and editors as an illustrator.⁵³ While he appears in every chapter of this book, he is not its subject so much as its star, a hub around whom other artists interested in badauds come into view. Two of these are Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec, who knew Vallotton well. The careers of these three artists intertwined in various ways. All were closely involved with *La Revue blanche*, a leading literary and artistic journal published between 1891 and 1903, in which many of the debates surrounding art and mass culture appeared in image and text. All produced commercial work as well as fine art, building their reputations through both. And all shared a fascination with the social intricacies of urban crowds. Their work explores the tangled relationship between art’s aesthetic and philosophical goals, its new channels of presentation and distribution, and the culture of spectacle and commercial display confronting its viewers.

Plenty of nineteenth-century artworks representing badauds, not to mention countless journalistic descriptions, do not appear in this book. The ones that do were chosen because they do more than simply show us badauds. They show us how artists thought about badauds as a social force that intersected with their audiences in a changing landscape for the appreciation of art. Although much of the writing on badauds is pejorative, Fournel argued that “an intelligent and conscientious badaud who scrupulously fulfills his duty . . . can play a leading role in the republic of art.” While the flâneur “observes and reflects,” retaining “full possession of his individuality,” badauds give their individuality over to “intoxication and ecstasy” and are “absorbed by the exterior world.” Because of their passionate nature, they are “worthy of admiration by all right and sincere hearts.”⁵⁴ Vallotton and several of his contemporaries made this expansive redefinition vivid, exploring in visual form gawking’s social and philosophical stakes.

Crowds

One year after creating *The Paris Crowd*, Vallotton made another woodcut showing a confrontation between the Parisian people and the police (fig. I.12). In *The Charge* (1893), a black swarm of a dozen gendarmes waving swords and fists at cowering civilians abuts a field of flattened victims in the open space behind. Which is the volatile crowd in this picture—the people or the police? The people are beaten and scattered, while the black uniforms of the police merge into a solid mass. In the foreground, a policeman yanks so hard on a young man's hair that his nostrils lift and his eyebrows rise toward the crown of his head. Other victims of the violence are invisible, fallen between the layers of black, merely inferred by belligerent gestures. There is little question in this case whose side Vallotton is on: the civilians are rendered as helpless, faceless, or with panicked expressions, while the sharply angled brows and exaggerated jaws of the officers convey a boorish cruelty. And yet there is one officer who looks uncertain, standing frozen behind the pack. The only policeman not actively taking part in the brawl, he maintains his distance from the violence with a look of helpless astonishment, echoing that of the young man pulled by the hair. Looking out at the viewer of the print as if caught in a moment of ethical paralysis, he seems to ask, "What kind of person am I? What kind of person are you?"

Any book about badauds is also, necessarily, a book about crowds. The crowd that is absent from these chapters is the political one—the revolutionary crowd, the protesting crowd—because badauds are by definition passive, not activated by a directed intent. While badauds are part of a broad sphere of the political in the sense of social relations and structures of power, they are not an effective instrument of politics in the sense of attempts to produce specific results. Badauds are difficult to mobilize because they have no lasting group identity rooted in shared desires or beliefs, and because their attention is fickle, accidental. People can (and do) seek out a spectacle with the intent to gawk, but this intention is generated by others, by reports in the press or by word of mouth. Accidental vision is almost always how gawking and its proliferation begins. Reactive to their surroundings, badauds focus their attention on something in their visual field. This is key to their fascination for artists: they home in on something visually intriguing, stand still, forget themselves, and stare.

In 1882 Guy de Maupassant called the crowd a "mystery" studied only by "half-crazy psychologists," "subtle yet crackpot philosophers," and a few writers like E. T. A. Hoffmann and Poe.⁵⁵ Little did he know that these writers would be joined by many others in the years to come—historians, novelists, and social theorists who would make crowd psychology central to interpretations of recent history, human behavior, and modern life. The collaboration between Vallotton and Uzanne on *Badauderies parisiennes* happened after an explosion of intellectual interest in crowds. Crowd theory, an offspring of sociology, emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in France and Italy, with a flurry of publications appearing in the early-to-mid-1890s.



FIG. I.12. Félix Vallotton, *The Charge (La Charge)*, 1893. Woodcut on cream wove paper, 20 × 26 cm (block). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Writers of the time characterized crowds in negative, often pathological terms, as hyperemotional, hysterical, and void of reason or responsibility, qualities they characterized as feminine, childlike, and bestial.⁵⁶ Between 1876 and 1894, Hippolyte Taine published *The Origins of Contemporary France*, a six-volume account of French history since the 1789 Revolution. Taine's history is laced with hostility toward—and sensational descriptions of—the unruly crowds that propelled this period of radical change. With the memory of the Paris Commune still fresh, Taine describes the crowd as “a primitive animal” and a thoughtless force of destructive anarchy, a characterization that was further developed in the novels of Émile Zola.⁵⁷ Drawing on Taine, sociologists Alfred Espinas, Scipio Sighele, Henry Fournial, and Gabriel Tarde made crowd psychology a new branch of scientific inquiry. Tarde saw society as an aggregate of individuals, each of whom bore the potential for sympathy and innovation as well as conformity and violence. Crowds brought out their worst.⁵⁸ Gustave Le

Bon, who popularized his predecessors' ideas, doubled down on this negative view. His notorious best-seller *The Psychology of Crowds* (1895) describes the crowd as unintelligent and dangerous but easily manipulated by a charismatic leader, especially if that leader wields power in the form of images. Rational individuals are transformed through collective contagion, mutually intoxicated by "impulsivity, irritability, the incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and a critical mind, [and] the exaggeration of the sentiments."⁵⁹ Although Le Bon emphasizes physical crowds, he also argues that their irrational behavior can manifest in a more strictly psychological sense, in "thousands of isolated individuals" or even a mere "half a dozen men." Above all, the crowd's danger and potential are cognitive.

Historians have given the writings of these social theorists a great deal of attention, treating their politically conservative, sometimes paranoid perspective as a harbinger of twentieth-century fascism and the dangers of "mass culture."⁶⁰ Indeed, these fin-de-siècle arguments have framed discussions of crowd psychology ever since, even in art history.⁶¹ Le Bon looms large in Richard Thomson's *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889–1900* (2004), which positions him as the leading crowd theorist of the period and presents pictures of crowds from that time as a "visualization" of the cynical theories he spread far and wide. Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception* (1999), however much it differs from Thomson's study in its theoretical apparatus and artistic examples, likewise privileges Le Bon and Tarde (along with other theorists such as Émile Durkheim) as crucial late nineteenth-century interpreters of crowd behavior and experience, with artworks by Édouard Manet, Georges Seurat, and Paul Cézanne visualizing the terms of the debate that their writings discursively staged.

Like the writings on crowds, much of the nineteenth-century literature on badauds shows contempt for its subjects, assuming an intellectual or moral distance between the writer and reader on one side and badauds on the other. This posture has made its way into the secondary literature on nineteenth-century viewers. In *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) and again in *Suspensions of Perception*, Crary discusses attention as a central focus of late nineteenth-century psychology, sociology, philosophy, and scientific research. Drawing on theorists such as Ribot, Crary emphasizes the construction of "attentiveness" as a continuum of concentration and distraction, with one easily shifting into the other and with the spectacles of modern industrial culture paradoxically inciting both. Focusing on the fin-de-siècle, he argues that a "disciplinary regime of attentiveness" structured urban life, shaping modern subjectivity according to systems of cognitive manipulation and control. This irredeemably top-down view of subject formation serves as a prehistory to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), and maintains the dichotomy of leaders and crowds theorized by Le Bon.⁶² For Crary, the observers thus formed were "products" of capitalist modernity, and only select theorists could see through the fog, for good or for ill.⁶³

This book emerges from the conviction that nineteenth-century artists, writers, and their audiences were perfectly capable of critical reflection on the spectacular modernity in which they lived. Vivid proof are the artworks and writings that developed the concept of badauderie by describing it, giving it theoretical nuance, and worrying over its social and cultural implications. When we privilege artists as theorists, we gain a different view of crowd psychology in the period of its emergence. Compared to most nineteenth-century crowd theorists and many writers on badauds, artists offer a more multilayered view, if sometimes a conflicted one. That view is full of irony, acerbic wit, and humor ranging from dark and disdainful to lighthearted and sympathetic to absurd. It calls on viewers to be self-critical, to turn their gawking gaze back on themselves. Because artists are such visual creatures, they identify with the behavior of badauds. They show their own susceptibility to this behavior, its dangers and potentials, and they make us see our own. Gawking is deeply human, a manifestation of the power others have to direct our attention, our minds, and our hearts. Contrary to the damning or dismissive views expressed by so many writers, the artworks in this book reveal badauds to be central—in positive and negative terms—to the survival of social bonds in modernity. They show the extent to which other people determine where we look, how we see, and what we do.

Chapter 1, “Accident,” centers on scenes of accidents, injury, and death where gawking is obvious and ethically fraught. The ethics of street life fascinated Parisians at the fin-de-siècle, including artists as different as Vallotton, the academic stalwart Jean-Léon Gérôme, and the neo-impressionist Charles Angrand. Many of the sights that attracted gawkers—vehicular collisions, crime scenes, suicides, executions—were fraught with ethical dilemmas. Should passersby keep moving, stop and watch, or intervene? What effect do badauds have on others and their impulse to look? When vision itself is accidental, how much social responsibility can it bear?⁶⁴ Visual art can probe these questions in ways that literature, social psychology, and philosophy cannot. As such, some of the period’s best interpreters of urban behavior were artists, who understood that badauds’ visual appetites and dubious ethics had implications for art. They pictured street life and its tragedies as a form of theater, creating visual analogues to and critical commentaries on the popular newspaper rubric of *faits divers*.

Chapter 2, “Audience,” turns to the trope of the theater audience in nineteenth-century French paintings and prints, treating these works as models for artists who took up the badaud theme. Although most of this book focuses on the fin-de-siècle, representations of badauds and urban spectators more generally draw upon a broader history of the theater audience in art. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, Boilly and Daumier represented the theater as a microcosm of society and linked the theater audience to crowds in the street. They used similar motifs and compositions in their depictions of people looking at art. Paintings and prints exploring these connections

proliferated in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, the period of crowd psychology's birth. Degas, Vallotton, and Carrière, along with writers such as Maupassant and Mallarmé, made the theater a metaphor for their publics, pointing to the audience's apathy, volatility, or sincerity to stake claims about the autonomy or subordination of art. Such claims evoke Michael Fried's work on theatricality in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French painting, by which he means the way some artworks address their viewer(s), calling attention to art's most basic convention, to be beheld.⁶⁵ Some artists exploited this purpose by soliciting the audience's response, while others sought to neutralize it by pursuing compositions and techniques that deny the audience's presence. This chapter shifts the frame for this problem, focusing on artists who saw theatricality as an inescapable feature of everyday urban life. Their work responded to art's increasingly theatrical condition in the public sphere, and to the pressures that market forces, public opinion, and the press exerted on artists' creativity and careers. As David Marshall wrote of George Eliot, they "teach us to negotiate the theatrical relations in which the world casts us."⁶⁶

Chapter 3, "Street Theater," returns to the street, examining paintings, prints, and films that extend the concept of everyday life as a theater of actors and badauds. Featuring Bonnard's early paintings and prints capturing moments from his morning walks around Paris—a relatively understudied area of his oeuvre—this chapter explores a less obvious, more personal and surreptitious kind of instinctive looking: the way one's attention can be seized and held by something, or more often *someone*, coming suddenly into view. Bonnard's work foregrounds the contingency of vision and its redirection by others, and gives these dynamic encounters a libidinal charge. In blurring the boundary between flâneur and badaud, he gives movement to his urban scenes and finds innovative ways to visualize the tracking function of his roving eye. These works coincided with the development and display of early cinema, and are best understood in dialogue with the Lumière brothers' nonfiction views of urban life. The Lumières capitalized on their technology as a street spectacle in its own right, tempting curious passersby to approach and stare into the lens. A number of their films are taken over by badauds, who mirror the captivated audiences the films were made to entertain. Vallotton's depictions of people in thrall to street performers and hucksters question these audiences' intelligence. In so doing, they question the intelligence and integrity of art, especially art made to attract the audiences of commercialized entertainment.

Chapter 4, "Attraction," develops these concerns by examining how they appear in paintings and prints of audiences confronting advertisements. Modern publicity was a popular application of crowd psychology, drawing on its theories for commercial ends.⁶⁷ Works by Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Vallotton represent people encountering posters, fairground tents, shop windows, and department-store displays, raising critical questions about how a viewer's experience of advertising compares to the viewing of art. In these

works, badauds are consumers of commodities and culture embedded in a capitalist economy that competes for their attention. Lautrec's paintings and posters of popular entertainers also link badauds to the marketing of celebrities and artistic talent, including a nascent culture of scandal and armchair gawking fueled by the press. The trials of Oscar Wilde (1895) and Alfred Dreyfus (1894–1899) played out in caricatures and headlines as much as in the courts. Lautrec and Vallotton participated in the partisan storms surrounding these events, with works that explore gawker psychology as a driving force of spectacular politics in their time.

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