

NONSITE

Bonnard's Sidewalk Theater

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It is the foreground that gives us our concept of the world as seen through human eyes.

–Pierre Bonnard

Digression is secular revelation.

–Adam Phillips

Every morning before breakfast, sketchpad in hand, Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) went for a walk to observe and absorb his surroundings. This lifelong practice began early, when the artist launched his career in Paris in the tumultuous fin-de-siècle period, long before he left the urban sidewalks for the greener paths of Vernon and Le Cannet.¹ These daily walks were his way of immersing himself, both visually and bodily, in the life of the city and – along with the radical perspectives and bold linear patterns of Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints² – inspired many of his early works. Bonnard produced over one hundred paintings and prints in the 1890s that capture the bustling pace and brisk energy of Paris. He later referred to this subject as “the theater of the everyday,”³ and it is his particular vision of this sidewalk theater, and the viewer's involvement in it, that I will investigate here, with particular attention to how his engagement with new media mattered to developing this vision. In particular, Bonnard's use of color and his plays with space and figure-ground relations take advantage of the limits and potentials of printmaking as a medium, a medium that was more immediate and accessible yet less flexible than the painting for which he would become known. Playing off the chromatic constraints of lithography, Bonnard shuttles the viewer between foreground and background, intimate proximity and distance. In so doing he explores the duality of the street as a disorienting amalgam of schematic backdrops and looming intrusions into our personal space, both seemingly captured at the limits of our visual field. I will also suggest that early cinema offers an illuminating framework for understanding Bonnard's urban scenes, not only because it presented new pictorial

possibilities for the representation of light, shadow, and (above all) movement, but also, and more importantly, because it enacted the kinds of spontaneous interactions on the street that drove the young Bonnard's visual imagination.



Fig. 1. Pierre Bonnard, *Le cheval de fiacre* (The Cab Horse), ca. 1895, Oil on wood, 29.7 x 40 cm (The National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection, 1970.17.4)

Taken as a whole, paintings and prints, Bonnard's street scenes of the 1890s model a new kind of vision that takes its cues from the constant optical interference of urban life: a vision acutely receptive to the peripheral glimpses and chance encounters of life in a city. His immersive approach to the depiction of street life – representing passersby at their own level, obliquely, and at very close range – had no artistic precedent,⁴ and is all the more remarkable in that he worked from memory, re-imagining these moments of perceptual *frisson* with strangers after returning to the studio. In the paintings, which are notably small in format – often similar in size or even smaller than his prints – Bonnard focuses on the exchange of gazes between individuals and crowds. In *The Cab Horse*, ca. 1895, the foreground silhouettes of a woman and a horse cast glances across the street, inviting the viewer to gaze with them at the distant stream of people – rendered as a conglomeration of colorful dabs – filling the café terraces and market stalls (Fig. 1). In *Passerby*, 1894, a fragmented view of a passing woman is embedded in a patchwork of figure-like shapes that imply her embeddedness in a crowded street, as she pushes past our line of vision to continue on her way (Fig. 2). In *Two Elegant Women, Place de Clichy*, 1905, a similarly confrontational woman in an elaborate pink hat stares straight ahead, about to slip past the viewer across the lower-left

foreground of the frame, causing a ripple effect of turns and gazes as she walks through a crowded square (Fig. 3). In *Café Terrace*, 1898, a man and a young girl seated together at a sidewalk café stare in opposite directions, pulled away from the personal space of their table by the surrounding crowd (Fig. 4). In *The Street in Winter*, 1894, bourgeois men negotiate acts of sexual commerce at strikingly close range, and even little dogs (a Bonnard favorite) have serendipitous meetings, fleeting moments of interpersonal tension, excitement, and exchange (Fig. 5). The diminutive scale of these works serves to underscore their focus on proximate space – the minimal and often invaded margin of air surrounding the self when one moves through a crowd. Bonnard swings between this intimate space and a more remote scenery space throughout his sidewalk pictures. This back-and-forth, and the model of viewing it enacts for the viewer, is fundamental to the works' aesthetic and psychological force, and emerged, I believe, through his work with other media, most principally color lithography.⁵ Although a standard line in the literature on Bonnard and his fellow Nabis is that their painterly aesthetic lent itself to printmaking, given the number and importance of Bonnard's print commissions in the 1890s and his obvious gifts for working in the medium, it seems just as likely that his graphic work shaped his early approach to painting as the other way around.⁶ Either way, the dialogue between his early paintings and prints begs closer examination.

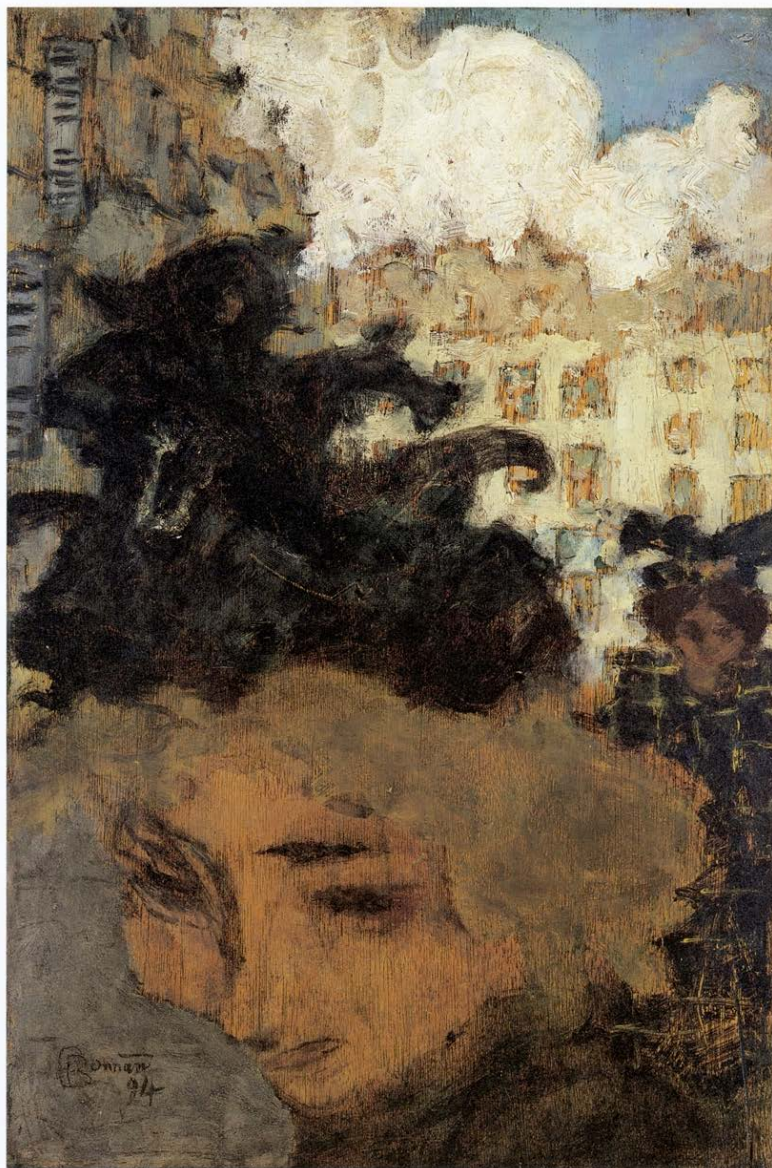


Fig. 2. Pierre Bonnard, *La passante* (Passerby), 1894, Oil on wood, 36 x 25 cm (Private collection)



Fig. 3. Pierre Bonnard, Deux élégantes, Place de Clichy (Two Elegant Women, Place de Clichy), 1905, Oil on wood, 73 x 62 cm (Private collection)



Fig. 4. Pierre Bonnard, Café Terrace, 1898, Oil on wood, 47 x 64.1 cm (The Cleveland Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1976.148)



Fig. 5. Pierre Bonnard, *La rue en hiver* (The Street in Winter), 1895, Oil on wood, 26.5 x 35 cm (Dallas Museum of Art, The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection, 1985.R.5)

In his remarkable series of twelve color lithographs, *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (*Some Aspects of Parisian Life*), 1895-99, we can see how Bonnard's printmaking practice generated formal and figurative strategies for picturing the everyday life of Paris's streets. Created over the course of several years, the series was published in 1899 by the leading dealer Ambroise Vollard as a luxury album produced in an edition of one hundred on fine wove paper. The Vollard album features a broad variety of compositions, from narrow, compressed views of a street or a square to more sweeping urban vistas of a boulevard, a park, or a bridge. As a whole, the album demonstrates Bonnard's idiosyncratic image of Paris as a continual shifting between close, crowded encounters on the sidewalk and more distant, detached views of elevated cuts of space, with color used sparingly for strategic highlights and tonal variation. The most compelling prints in the album show this shifting between perceptual modes within a single image.



Fig. 6. Pierre Bonnard, *Place le soir* (The Square at Evening), from *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life), ca. 1897–98, Lithograph in five colors on cream wove paper, final state, sheet: 38.1 x 53.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[4])

In *The Square at Evening*, ca. 1897–98 (Fig. 6), carefully spaced spots of searing red serve as sinister marks of the feminine in urban life: the flowers on the central woman's hat, the bouquet offered by a man in top hat at left, and the four red windows in the right distance, probably marking the lurid lights of a brothel. The square in question is likely Place Pigalle, a lively area of artist's studios, literary cafés, and shops that was also a hub of nightlife and prostitution. Gathered under the four red windows is a loosely rendered crowd of figures who seem to be attracted by some wider windows below, peering into their yellow light at an indeterminate spectacle, perhaps a commercial display. Like the crowd of men and women in the foreground, compressed into the *leftmost* half of the composition, this distant clump of figures at right is framed by glowing windows at the back and the solitary figure of a woman in front, hunched over in profile as she steps gingerly across the square. Because of Bonnard's dramatic compression of this wide open area into a frieze-like arrangement of figures and his limited range of inks dominated by large, intersecting areas of black, both of which collapse and weld together layers of space, the wheel of a distant carriage appears to press down on the woman's back, and her umbrella, clutched to her side, appears to slice through her pelvis.⁷ Her walk is the opposite of an easy, *flâneur*-esque stroll; she seems loath to look up until she gets where she needs to go. The solitary woman in the foreground is another figure given a sense of

separateness within the crowd, stepping into the throng as if from our viewing position. Seen from behind, her cloaked torso and fashionable hat with tentacular plumage serves as our entry point into the picture: her body blocks half of the scene, and her point of view guides our gaze to the other half, toward the hunched-over woman illuminated by a garish splash of electric light.⁸ Between the two of them is another key figure dominating the center of the print: the outsize profile of a man whose rigid posture marks the lithograph's central axis (Fig. 7). His ominous appearance and sallow skin recall Edgar Allan Poe's wandering "Man of the Crowd" (1840) or the suspicious "gamblers" Poe's *flâneur* describes as "distinguished by a certain sodden swarthy complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip."⁹ His features are summarily sketched, but his razor-sharp cheekbone and villainous moustache underscore the work's theme of anonymous encounter and interpersonal risk – the spontaneous and sometimes mysterious interactions between men and women that drift in and out of our view when navigating busy streets. The woman in the foreground is our surrogate for this sidewalk spectacle, and the wide-open, black, almond eye on the edge of her lost profile is positioned to suggest that although she faces the scene in front of us, she is also looking back, as if aware of being watched and perhaps, followed, too. By both facing ahead and glancing behind, she folds us into the scene.



Fig. 7. Detail of Bonnard, *Place le soir* (The Square at Evening)



Fig. 8. Pierre Bonnard, *Arc de Triomphe*, from *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life), ca. 1898, Lithograph in five colors on cream wove paper, sheet: 40.5 x 53.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[12])

Bonnard's printer was Auguste Clot, the leading fine-art printer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France, known especially for his skills with multi-color lithography.¹⁰ Despite Clot's authority, Bonnard was a demanding client with an insistent vision: in 1893, at the age of twenty-six, he complained to Vuillard, "I'm again turning my hair white in trying to obtain the impossible from the printer."¹¹ Like his Nabis colleagues, he was interested in the bold chromatic contrasts of Japanese prints, and he was particularly deft at combining a limited range of colors for a variety of compositional and expressive effects.¹² This is hardly surprising; Bonnard is renowned as a great colorist, largely on the basis of his twentieth-century landscapes and nudes. Yet for this same reason the relative chromatic restraint of his early work has made it difficult to reconcile with the rest of his oeuvre.¹³ In fact, his intuitions as a colorist are just as remarkable in the fin-de-siècle prints as in the luminous canvases of the 1920s, '30s and '40s, only in a much more subtle way, a way befitting these works' smaller size and casual, merely glimpsed subjects. See, for example, the vibrant touches of bottle green and blood red in *Arc de Triomphe*, ca. 1898 (Fig. 8). These floating patches of rich color do not, for the most part, delineate recognizable motifs but rather key our eyes to areas of figuration, marking off passages of people and horses from the tangle of trees and buildings that set the stage. They tell us where to look to find the action and bring out the more subtle distinctions

between sanguine and gray – resonating with the red and green like faded echoes – throughout the rest of the print. The sunset tonalities of *Avenue du Bois de Boulogne*, ca. 1898, are created by an over-layer of honeyed beige that washes the reds, yellows, violets, and blacks with a luminous warmth, softening tonal contrasts and uniting spatial layers of ground, trees, and sky (Fig. 9). Bonnard achieves an especially remarkable degree of subtlety in *House in the Courtyard*, 1895-96, a print whose effect of variable atmosphere hinges on the delicate interplay of slightly different shades of white. Bonnard realizes this slight tonal variation not with actual pigment variation, but by framing these uncolored sections with other colors. That is, the whites are not differently inked, but are the same local off-white of the page, yet the darkest black of the windows on the building make the white of the façade appear brighter, while the white of the sky appears softer, dingier, and faintly warmer, because of the gray roof outlined in taupe topped by four vermilion chimneys leading our eye up to its overcast expanse (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9. Pierre Bonnard, *Avenue du Bois de Boulogne* (*Avenue in the Bois de Boulogne*), from *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (*Some Aspects of Parisian Life*), ca. 1898, Lithograph in five colors on cream wove paper, sheet: 40 x 53 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[2])

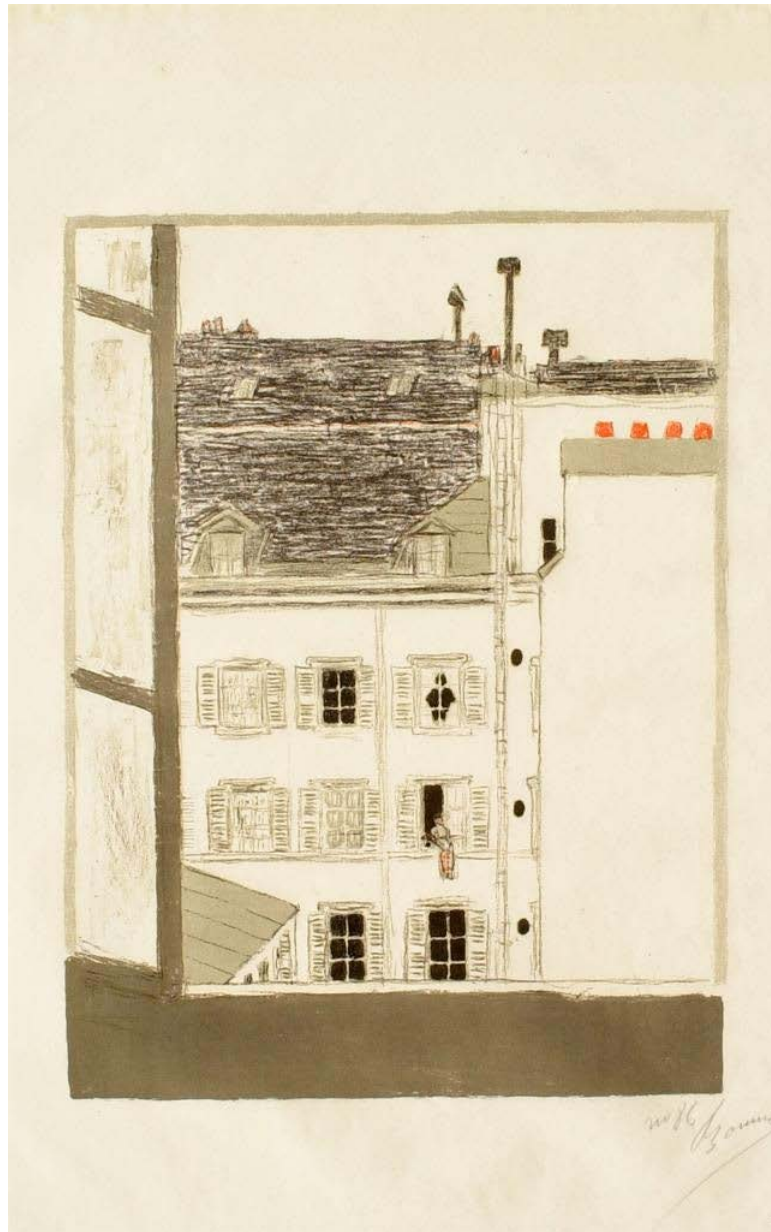


Fig. 10. Pierre Bonnard, *Maison dans la cour* (House in the Courtyard), from *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life), 1895–96, Lithograph in four colors on cream wove paper, sheet: 53 x 39.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[4])

Because Bonnard was limited in his range of colors when conceptualizing and designing his prints – each additional pigment complicated the process considerably – he discovered more subtle ways of differentiating forms and spaces, and he embraced, rather than resisted, the spatial compression and confusion that was an inevitable result. Indeed, in certain key prints of the Vollard suite he made this spatial compression and confusion central to the urban phenomena depicted, using it in the more populated prints to develop the theme of pedestrians spontaneously colliding or

crossing each other's intimate perceptual space.

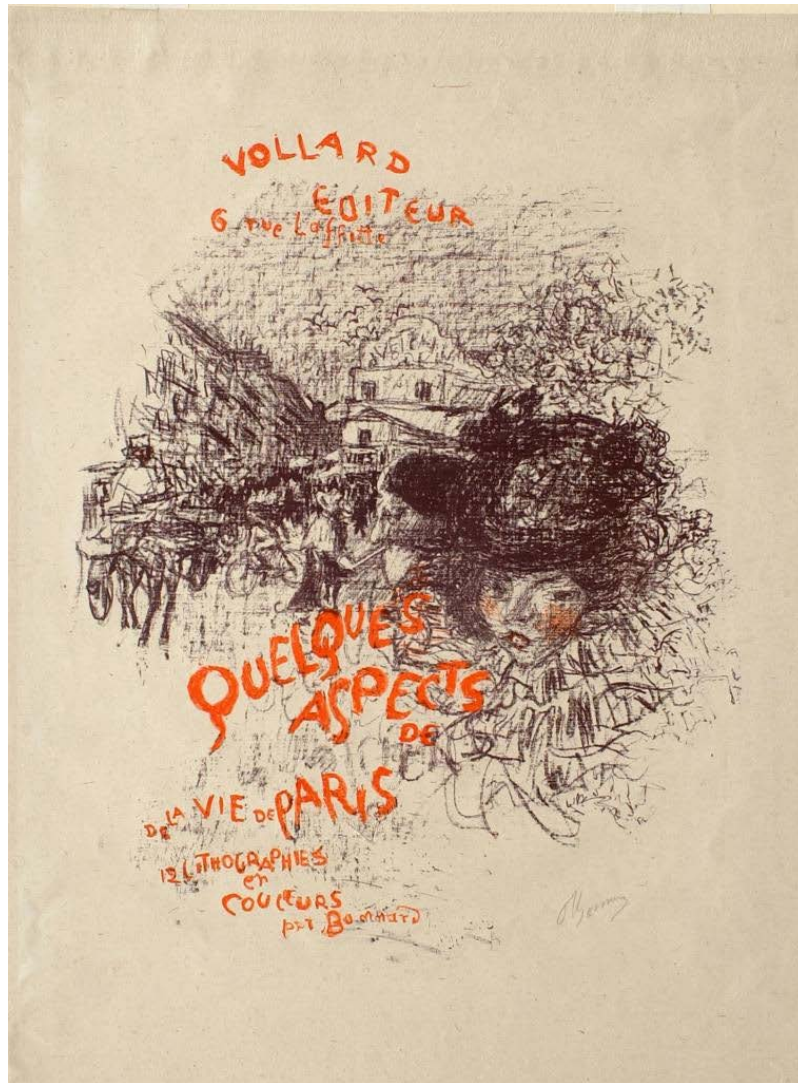


Fig. 11. Pierre Bonnard, Cover of the album *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life), ca. 1898, Lithograph in two colors on China paper, sheet: 53 x 40.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[1])

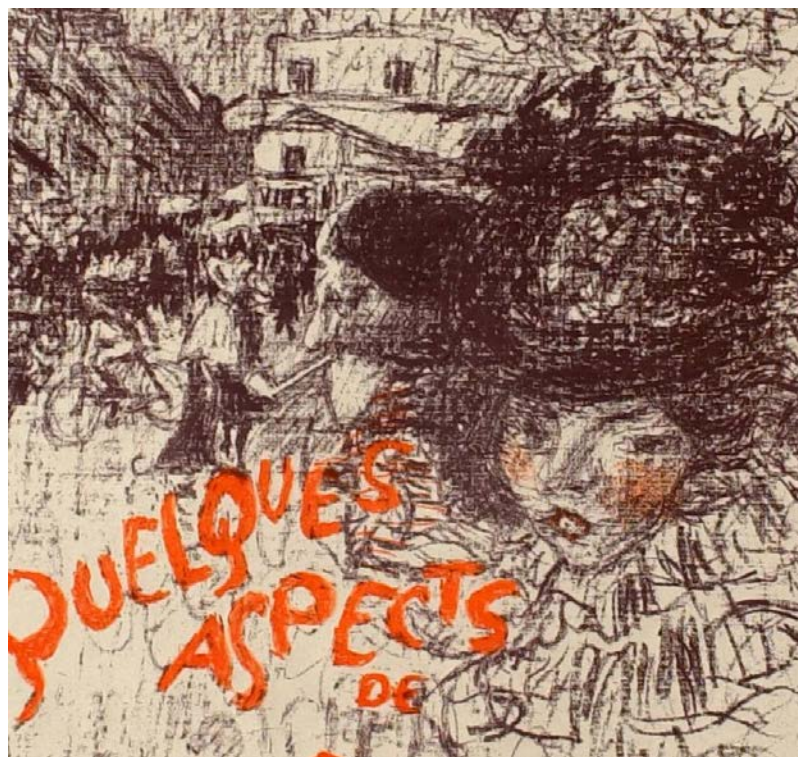


Fig. 12. Detail from Bonnard, Cover of the album *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life)

The album's title page, ca. 1898, for example, centers on the peripheral glimpse of the *parisienne*, the protagonist of the album and indeed of much of Bonnard's early work (Fig. 11). She seems to be speaking the title, echoing it with her orange rouge, while right behind her head and to the left is the profile of a bespectacled old man smoking a pipe. The Janus-like juxtaposition of his head with hers is a clever pictorial conceit for the alternately delightful and disturbing encounters with strangers that we experience in urban streets. A coil of white then black smoke curling out of his pipe seems to waft directly into the woman's face, collapsing their otherwise distinct lateral sections of space (she is clearly closer to us, given her size) (Fig. 12). The way Bonnard arranges the title – with the letters undulating upward toward the woman's open mouth in the same curving left-to-right diagonal as the drifting smoke – further emphasizes this idea of the inevitable and sometimes uncomfortable, even noxious intrusions of others into our consciousness and personal space. Beyond the lettering and the woman's cheeks, the only touches of orange float beneath this barely perceptible coil of smoke, highlighting the man's collar and coat, thereby linking the two figures in color as well as contiguous form.



Fig. 13. Detail from Bonnard, *La rue en hiver* (The Street in Winter)



Fig. 14. Detail from Bonnard, *La rue en hiver* (The Street in Winter)

Bonnard frequently used color and perspectival compression to materialize impromptu connections between strangers on the street, across divisions not only of space but also of class, gender,

age, and other social divides. In *The Street in Winter*, 1894, Bonnard explores the spontaneous social dynamics of strangers by layering several encounters in a narrow slice of urban space (Fig. 5). In the right foreground, two little dogs approach one another with flirtatious energy, the white dog turning his head to meet his eager, scampering mate (Fig. 13). Like all of the encounters depicted, the dogs are positioned so as to suggest the sudden shift of perspective that happens when we catch a glimpse of someone or something in our peripheral vision. Bonnard was fascinated by the various kinds of social exchanges that can result from these micro-movements of the eye that redirect our attention. Behind the dogs is a wisp of a schoolboy plodding down the sidewalk, his tiny body almost disappearing beneath the weight of his winter clothes and bag. He is about to bump into an older woman, her hands tucked in a fur muff. The placement of the muff, and the woman's slight crouch, create a defined negative space between her and the boy – the shape of a sudden detour, akin to the one both may momentarily take, built up in thick, creamy strokes of yellow and beige (Fig. 14). A couple walking behind the woman observes this meeting over her shoulder, mirroring our view of the scene over the shoulder of the broad-backed man in the foreground. Our eyes gravitate to these charming chance meetings, sliding past the flat barrier of black coats that dominates half of the work. Right behind that barrier is another kind of encounter altogether, of which we only catch a provocative glimpse: an exchange between two bourgeois men and two women. Only one of these four figures shows us her face, cropped at the cheek, but its colorfully painted surface offers a hint to her profession, suggesting this meeting may be the opposite of the innocent ones happening in the rest of the scene (Fig. 15).¹⁴



Fig. 15. Detail from Bonnard, *La rue en hiver* (The Street in Winter)

The division of the painting into sharp contrasts of black and beige is typical of Bonnard's Nabi style, when he worked with a restrained palette of colors to capture the grit of the city and emphasize the graphic punch of dark and light shapes. The strong vertical of the central figure's sleeve leads us straight to the older woman and her exchange with the boy, and Bonnard signs the picture right across this dividing line, linking the faceless men cruising in the street to the charm of children and frolicking dogs. The line marks a sharp tonal shift in both senses of the term, from mysterious, morally ambiguous and dark to charming, broadly comical and light, while also making a sharp graphic distinction between the viewer's proximate and distant visual fields. Similar to the relationship in *The Square at Evening* between the immediate foreground (featuring the woman with the elaborately feathered hat and the sinister male profile abutting hers), the right middle-distance (featuring the hunched-over woman with an umbrella), and the background (featuring the crowd beneath the red windows), this structure allows Bonnard to collage together various vignettes, with the middle- and back-ground figures serving as dramatic foils to the dominant yet less legible figures in the foreground. Like a magician distracting his audience's attention, Bonnard uses lighter tones and striking caricatural silhouettes to divert our gaze from center stage, highlighting peripheral episodes of more easily graspable psychological content. In *The Street in Winter*, these peripheral

events are the lyrical play of the light-colored dogs and the amusingly awkward crouch of the schoolboy, trapped in front of the woman bending down to engage him in a kind yet probably patronizing intergenerational exchange; while in *Square at Evening*, they are the harried walk of the woman framed by a splash of yellow light, set off by a rolling carriage and a crowd of people gathered in front of a series of windows, a crowd that echoes the one in the more proximate and obscure left foreground of the composition. In *The Street in Winter*, the lighthearted libidinousness of the dogs and the harmless ensnarement of the little boy ease the viewer, empathetically, into understanding the more obscure dynamics of flirtation between the men and women at the forefront of our view. In *Square at Evening*, the distant spectacle of the brothel and the hunted posture of the walking woman likewise inform – with the same impish, although in this case blacker, humor – our understanding of the foreground woman, who glances back at us as she steps forward between a man proffering a red bouquet and the threatening Man of the Crowd. Contrast becomes analogy; the sideshow unlocks the main event; theater and personal experience merge.



Fig. 16. Henri Cartier-Bresson, Quai de Montebello, Paris, 1955, Gelatin silver print

And yet the ultimate discovery of both *Square at Evening* and *The Street in Winter* lies in their immediate foregrounds, which may initially appear spatially disorienting and formally obscure, but ultimately resolve, with the help of the diverting episodes, into something more visually and psychologically readable. This perspectival and psychological diversion later became a vital technique of twentieth-century street photographers like André Kertész and Henri Cartier-Bresson (Fig. 16), but Bonnard was careful to distinguish his approach from photography, saying in 1927:

The [camera] lens records unnecessary lights and shadows, but the artist's eyes add human values to objects and reproduce them as seen through human eyes. And this vision is mobile. And this vision is variable. I am standing in a corner of the room near a table bathed in sunlight. Distant masses look almost linear, without volume or depth. Close objects, however, rise up toward my eyes. The sides run straight. This vanishing is sometimes linear (in the distance) and sometimes curved (in the foreground). The distance looks flat. It is the foreground that gives us our concept of the world as seen through human eyes, of a world of undulations, or of convexities or concavities.¹⁵

When Bonnard states that "it is the foreground that gives us our concept of the world as seen through human eyes," he clarifies a key organizing principle of his early work: the idea that the only way for the artist to humanely experience the city and engage with its crowds is to immerse himself in them, fold himself into their movements and glances, while simultaneously stepping back and attending to the "linear," "distant masses" that frame this foreground vision like a theatrical scrim. Unlike the camera, which records "unnecessary" detail, the artist's eyes "add human values to objects," and the resultant image is both "mobile" and "variable," shifting between proximate and distant visual fields.

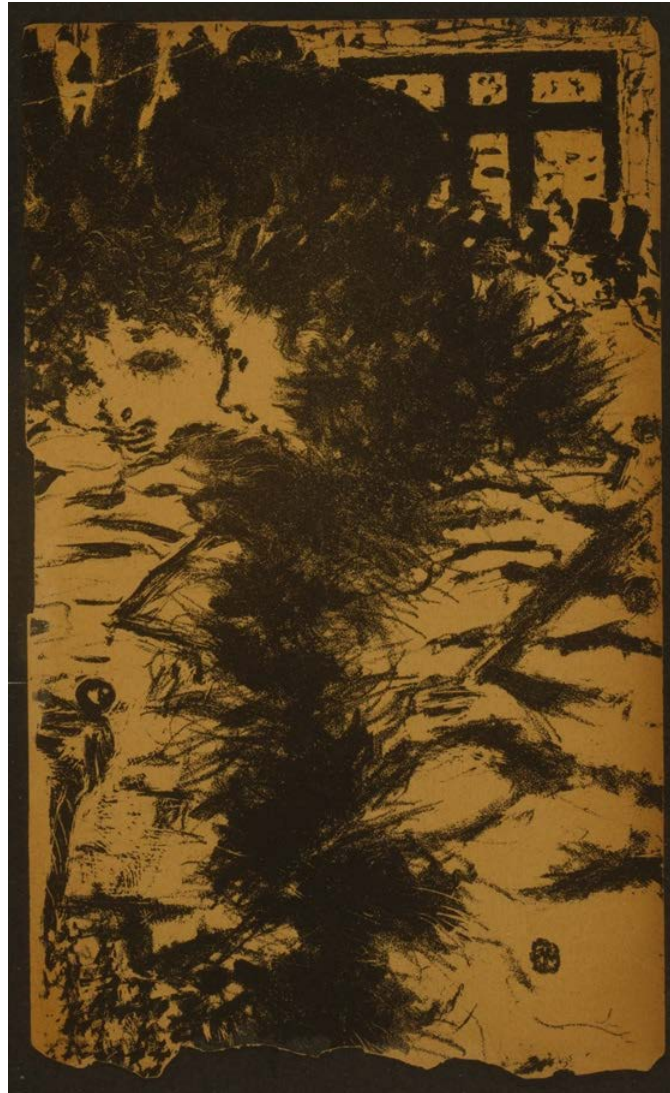


Fig. 17. Pierre Bonnard, *Les parisiennes* (Parisians), 1893, Lithograph on cream wove paper, 21.6 x 13.7 cm (Library of Congress, Washington)

One of Bonnard's earliest lithographs, *Les Parisiennes*, 1893, establishes this approach, depicting two elegant women and their voluminous fashions – in particular, a curve of thick black fur lining the central woman's coat – 'rising up' toward our eyes in 'convex undulations,' while a distant man in profile looks flatter, more linear, an effect emblemized by the way the frame of the shopfront window behind him plunges, sword-like, into the highlight of his top hat (Fig.17). This stunning flip from black to white, positive to negative, solid to light, back to front, encapsulates perhaps better than any other detail Bonnard's canny facility with the lithographic medium. The solitude of this remote male figure, echoed by schematic indications of a surrounding crowd, sets off the intimacy of the chatting *parisiennes*, and the conjunction of the two visual and psychological registers within the limits of a small, tightly composed black-and-white print pitches the viewer into the layered

visual experience of the sidewalk spectator.



Fig. 18. Pierre Bonnard, *Le pont* (The Bridge), from *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life), ca. 1896–97, Lithograph in four colors on cream wove paper, sheet: 38.1 x 53.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[9])

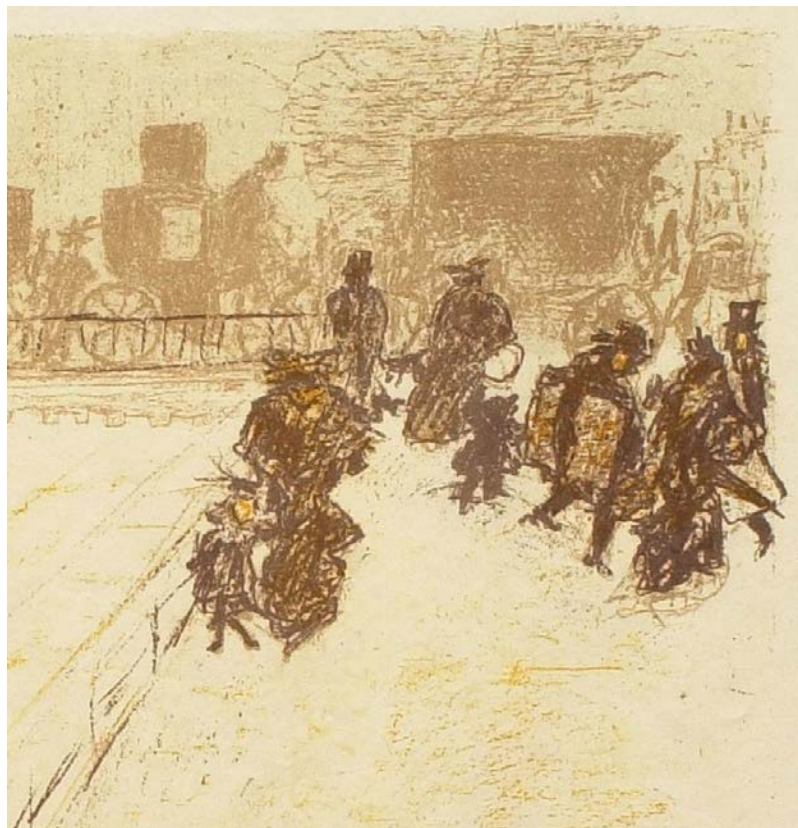


Fig. 19. Detail from Bonnard, *Le pont* (The Bridge)

A similar structure is apparent even in some of Bonnard's more open and airy urban views. In *The Bridge*, ca. 1896–97, from the

Vollard album, he employs a virtually monochrome palette – beiges and browns with occasional touches of yellow – so as to focus our attention on composition and the tonal variation between two layers of figures: darker on the right, on the quai, which leads directly toward our spectatorial space, and lighter in the back, on the bridge, where a tightly packed frieze of carriages, buses, and figures moves in both directions across the semi-distant horizon (Fig. 18). The composition creates a split sense of our optical relationship to the city: the frieze of lighter figures are staged in a highly theatrical way, like a shadow puppet performance that we view from a comfortable distance, behind a theatrical barrier, and the light tonality encourages this separation, serving as a veil between us and them.¹⁶ But the nearer figures on the quai, the darker and more animated silhouettes of men and women walking with children, suggest a hustle and bustle that we can more easily envision ourselves entering (here there is a clear, unblocked path between us and them). This more accessible relationship is underscored by the figure of the artist holding a large portfolio of prints under his arm (Fig. 19). Bonnard inserts someone like himself into this crowd, while the frieze of lighter figures behind on the bridge is to be watched, stood apart from. The bridge viewed from the quai is a clever compositional device for creating this spatial and spectatorial distinction between the two areas of figures, setting the stage for the viewer's reflection on different modes of visual engagement with the city: passively distant and disconnected or more experientially embodied and implicated. And on this note, it seems significant that the background frieze is considerably less rewarding to view. Less activated with movement and virtually void of tonal variation or color, this area does not pop or engage the viewer in the same way. Like the woman in the foreground of *The Square at Evening*, the print thus encourages us to engage in a more participatory, projective mode of viewing the city and its scattered sociality, rather than the more passive mode of viewing a detached stage.

In the preceding descriptions I have used the term "stage" several times to describe how Bonnard establishes spatial and figure-ground relationships in his prints via composition and color. Colta Ives has aptly described how Bonnard's graphic art treats the picture plane as a tightly structured proscenium, with figures and carriages skillfully packed into narrow street-corners or spread across a series of shop-fronts like a classical frieze.¹⁷ His involvement with theater throughout the 1890s, including the production of backdrops, theater programs, even puppets and

costume designs, can be seen in his prints' biting humor and economy of means, as well as his fascination with spectatorship as a visual mode of modern life. *At the Theater*, ca. 1897-98, is the only print in the Vollard album that depicts the world of theater directly, but its focus on the audience rather than the performance is echoed in much of the rest of the series, where sidewalk spectators abound (Fig. 20).¹⁸ Judging by the slumping and somnolent character of this audience relatively void of interaction, compared to the quivering energy and crossing paths of Bonnard's pedestrians, the theater of the street seems much more lively than the theater of the stage. What Bonnard seems to be trying to capture is his and the viewer's involvement or at least implication in this sidewalk theater. His approach to representing this spectatorial position was likely informed by his work on theatrical backdrops, in particular, and their way of framing yet detaching from the three-dimensional actors that perform in front of them¹⁹; but it was the new medium of cinema that mirrored Bonnard's interest in viscerally incorporating the viewer into his scenes of urban streets.



Fig. 20. Pierre Bonnard, *Au théâtre* (At the Theater), from *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* (Some Aspects of Parisian Life), ca. 1897-98, Lithograph in four colors on cream wove paper, sheet: 38.2 x 52.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.50.4[10])

We know very little about Bonnard's interest in cinema during these early years, but he was evidently eager to experiment with new media. He became an avid amateur photographer for several years in the late 1890s, taking snapshots of family and friends, approximately two hundred of which have survived.²⁰ Save for a few pictures of his artist friends in Venice, Bonnard's photographs include no street views, despite the capability of his Pocket Kodak to capture such spontaneous scenes. He took most of his photographs during visits to the countryside, framing his friends and

loved ones in more bucolic natural settings and interiors. Curiously, he only used his camera in Paris to photograph a few nudes and family groups indoors.²¹ Although snapshot photography would seem like the perfect tool, if not substitute, for his sidewalk pictures, the artist evidently preferred his ritual method of walking, sketching, remembering, and then making, remaining committed to the "human values" of the artist's eyes and the psychological filter of memory.²²

Given Bonnard's interest in theater, photography, and other new image technologies like chromolithography and the printing of large-scale posters, it is hard to imagine that he was not well aware of cinema and its revolutionary capacity to capture the movement and spontaneity of the street. The young artist was introduced to the first film-makers in France, Louis and Auguste Lumière, via his brother-in-law, the composer Claude Terrasse. In fact, the Lumière brothers were regular guests at the family property in Le Grand-Lemps where Bonnard spent considerable time.²³ Like Bonnard, much of their early work was focused on capturing the everyday life of urban streets. A large proportion of their first films are set in major cities, tracking the hustle and bustle of metropolitan traffic and pedestrians. Screened in penny arcades and cafés on major thoroughfares in the latter half of the 1890s, they first appeared to the public in the precise period when Bonnard was working on the Vollard album and wandering Paris's boulevards every day. These "actualities" (*actualités*), as they were known, were just 30-60 seconds in length, and were, as the name suggests, entirely non-fictional – mini-documentaries that often focused on the crowded life of the street. Sometimes they feature semi-dramatic events like a parade or the arrival of a prominent politician, but more often than not their primary subject is the everyday activity of lively urban spots.²⁴

Key to the fascination of the Lumière brothers' urban films – both then and now – is their spontaneity, especially their inevitable involvement of passersby who often seem to realize only in the captured moment that they are being filmed. This realization generally either delights or disturbs these impromptu extras, but it virtually always enthralls them. Their performative self-consciousness and gawking at the camera then becomes the central drama of the reel. As Tom Gunning has shown, early cinema was an art of attraction and "exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption" in narrative, "willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator."²⁵ In the Lumière brothers' *actualités* this rupture happens spontaneously, with people stopping to look into the

camera rather than continuing on their way. Indeed, these gawking bystanders are all the more affecting in that their involvement appears accidental, unintended by the people making the film. While Bonnard was striving to capture the perceptual and psychological complexity of his encounters with pedestrians in paintings and prints, the Lumière brothers were making films that showed moments of encounter between the directors and pedestrians in a more spontaneous, haphazard way.



Fig. 21. *La Foule* (The Crowd), Black-and-white silent film, 48 seconds, Directed by Marius Sestier, Produced by Auguste and Louis Lumière (3 Nov. 1896, Melbourne) (Centre Nationale du Cinéma, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Catalogue Lumière no 418)

Film-makers and their equipment were a novel spectacle for fin-de-siècle pedestrians, far more mysterious and intriguing to the average urban dweller than the everyday life of the street that the film-makers were trying to capture. It is no wonder that many of those caught by the camera became gawkers gaping into the lens, approaching the viewer as if hypnotized or passing by hurriedly with a furtive glance. For example, in *The Crowd*, 1896, a crowd gathered for horse races at the Melbourne hippodrome includes various figures who stop in their tracks to look into the camera. Amazed by the spectacle of the cinematic production, they give the audience of the eventual film the sensation of being ogled by the people within (Fig. 21).²⁶ In *Street Dancers*, 1896, a group of working-class and bourgeois men stop to stare at three young women dancing joyfully in a London street.²⁷ Here, the men seem to be relaying cues from the director, telling the dancers to come closer together when their dancing makes them drift off-frame. This leads viewers

of the film to wonder whether the scene is entirely staged, with the men both posing as gawkers and directing the action upon which they gaze, a fascinating conflation of active and passive models of viewing that makes the audience aware of the film's construction, and their own gawking role (Fig. 22).



Fig. 22. Danseuses des rues, Londres (Street Dancers, London), Black-and-white silent film, 46 seconds, Director unknown, Produced by Auguste and Louis Lumière (20 Feb. 1896) (Centre Nationale du Cinéma, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Catalogue Lumière no. 249)



Fig. 23. Cologne: Sortie de la cathédrale (Cologne: Exiting the Cathedral), Black-and-white silent film, 53 seconds, Directed by Charles Moisson, Produced by Auguste and Louis Lumière (3 May 1896, Cologne) (Centre Nationale du Cinéma, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Catalogue Lumière no. 225).

Jan Olsson has described how early narrative filmmakers in America handled gawking bystanders, thronging crowds, and "Buttinskis" who invaded outdoor film shootings, and the way in which these interlopers confused the relationship between fiction and reality, acting and "posing."²⁸ Because the Lumière brothers' urban films were primarily non-narrative and documentary, distinctions between actor, extra, and bystander did not exist. In fact, crowds and bystanders are often the protagonists of these *actualités*. This does not mean that they posed no problems for the cameraman, however. In several remarkable instances, such as *Exiting the Cathedral*, 1896, showing a crowd milling around the cathedral in Cologne, we see the hands of the director waving at these captivated onlookers from behind the camera, shoosing them off-frame once they have lingered a second too long (Fig. 23).²⁹ At three different moments in this very short film, a cane – sometimes two – flutters in from the left, the first time with a visible hand, directing people right or left to open up the frame to the crowd scene desired. The gestures of at least two operators are visible physically herding the crowd, and we see the people responding to these directions on screen, halting their movement, shuttling off to the side, stopping in their tracks or changing direction. By the end of the 53-second reel a small sub-crowd has gathered off to the left, stopping to watch the production of the film. They have been waved away yet are still in-frame, watching the film from within both as internal spectators of the crowd and as (former) participants in its bustling movement.

According to Paul Willemsen, this is the central paradox of the extra as a cinematic figure: "they see the film from outside while being in the middle of it."³⁰ Willemsen has theorized the extra as a revelatory figure in the historical development of cinema, marking major shifts in conceptions of cinematic narrative, action, and "authenticity" from the classic period of early Hollywood studio films, to modern "auteur" films of the post-war era, to postmodern films characterized by self-referential irony and pastiche.³¹ In general terms, extras are a kind of "human scenery," the "undirected, uncontrollable broader context" of a film's narrative action. They are, by definition, extraneous to the main sequence of events, and they are typically multiple, the cinematic equivalent of the masses in real history.³² Willemsen's characterization of the extra's role in film history is fascinating, but crucially skips the earliest phase of the medium's development with which I am concerned. If classical narrative cinema is defined by transparency, or "seamless editing and a camera presence which may not be sensed by the viewer," and modern cinema "radically distances itself from this approach...

by permitting jump cuts and individualizing the camera presence and camera work,"³³ then the Lumières' city films are neither. The camera's presence is sensed very much by the viewer, but this is primarily due to the reactions of filmed bystanders, not stylized camera work. Their films are pre-classic: first, because in most cases they are fundamentally non-narrative; and second, because their primary "actors" are unpaid, largely undirected and uninformed passersby who just happen to enter or exit the scene. (*Street Dancers* is a partial exception to this rule, as the gawking bystanders do appear to be involved in the staging of the scene to some degree.) The Hollywood model of strict control over extras had not yet taken root, and there was no division between them as background figures and the main actors in the foreground of each scene. There *were* no actors other than them, and their awkward collision with the new medium mirrored the awestruck curiosity of the audience on the other side of the screen. By revealing how the gawking crowd was being directed from behind the camera, these films show both the spontaneity and artificiality of the construction of spectatorship that is literally on view, and that is simultaneously being experienced by the viewers in the theater, who necessarily find themselves in a crowd.³⁴ These bystanders wandering into and out of the scene from all sides, including the area behind the camera, create a highly porous and liminal frame that significantly enhances the film's immediacy for its viewers, who feel thereby looped into the action by these surrogate onlookers whose bodies drift into and around the scene in a way that embodies the exploratory movement of our eyes.

Whether or not Bonnard was directly inspired by such films we can only wonder, but he certainly exploits similar compositional techniques of looping the viewer into the lively human traffic of his early paintings and prints. This experience of spontaneous encounter, of the visual and sometimes almost physical collision with others we experience on the sidewalk and the attendant phenomenological and psychological *frisson*, was one of the central "aspects of Parisian life" that defined his approach to the street. Many of his prints and paintings from the mid-late 1890s feature people confronting each other as onlookers or furtively glancing passersby, often folding the viewer into their pictorial space via foreground figures who destabilize the boundary between the external space of the beholder and the internal space of the scene. While the Lumières' films are remarkable in allowing these crossings and confrontations to happen, perhaps even welcoming this spontaneous interaction between directors and subjects to a certain degree, Bonnard made these encounters his pictures' *raison*

d'être. The waving canes in *Cologne: Exiting the Cathedral* suggest that the involvement of gawking bystanders was not intended as the film's central subject, even though this is undeniably its most fascinating feature. Bonnard, for his part, seized on these unexpected and often awkward interactions, recreating their visual and psychic charge through the strategic use of color, oblique perspective, and spatial compression. His carefully constructed compositions impart a range of "human values" to his sidewalk scenes, from intimacy to menace, amusement to satire, empathy to critique.

In 1896 the critic Gustave Geffroy called Bonnard's scenes of Paris "charmingly malicious," with "a touch of impudent gaiety,"³⁵ while the artist's friend and one-time studio-mate, the actor Lugné-Poë, said "a satirical element was always implanted in the decorative" in Bonnard's early work.³⁶ Humor is an important element of these city views, and of the Lumières' early cinema as well. Both reveal the street as a modern form of entertainment. But they also show it to be a place where the enforced closeness, anonymity, and awkwardness of modern urban sociality appears powerfully in microcosm, if we stop to look.

Bonnard's central interest as an artist of the street in the 1890s was the way in which Parisians approached the life of their city as a free, open-air theater – an ever-changing spectacle for passersby to watch. And it was the limits and possibilities of new media, namely lithography and cinema, that throw his achievements as an artist of this everyday theater into relief. One of the most remarkable features of *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris* is the way it shows the artist thinking about the exigencies of the lithographic medium as existing somehow hand-in-hand with the pressures and proximities of the urban street. He later described how the challenges of printmaking pushed him in these early years to find new and subtle ways to pictorialize everyday life: "When one must study the relationship among tones while playing with only four or five colors which one either superimposes or puts side by side, one discovers many things."³⁷ Recalling a breakthrough he had around 1895, he wrote: "[C]olor, harmony, the relation between line and tone, balance – lost their abstract significance and became very concrete. I had understood what I was seeking and how I would try to obtain it. What came after? The point of departure had been given to me; the rest was just daily life."³⁸ For Bonnard, the challenges of multi-color printing made the problem of balance between line and tone, abstract form and content, newly urgent and "concrete," pushing him to paint with a similarly limited palette and graphic sensibility to keep the two forces in check. As a result,

his sidewalk scenes are a subtle investigation of passive vision: Bonnard tries to translate into lithography and paint a kind of openness – both optical and social – to “just daily life,” to the spontaneous encounters that pop up at the edge of our visual field as we move through the street. This passive vision can lead to lively interactions and flirtations, as well as to moral deviation and social competition, and was an openness the artist tried to practice himself when he strolled and sketched. By giving us the perspective of a proximate bystander and/or distant witness, he imposes this openness, immediacy, and capacity for reflection on his viewers, challenging us to enter and explore his sidewalk theater as individuals, rather than remaining detached in the crowd.³⁹

Notes

I wish to thank, first and foremost, the artist Adrian Nivola, who has spent many productive hours with me trading ideas and observations about Bonnard. His keen insights and infectious enthusiasm for the artist shaped many aspects of this essay. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Zanis, Department of Drawings and Prints, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for her generous welcome on multiple occasions; to the organizers and participants at the recent conference “Beyond Connoisseurship: Rethinking Prints from the *Belle Épreuve* to the Present,” The Graduate Center, CUNY, 7 Nov. 2014, for their generous feedback on this material; to William Straw, for his kind help with my research on gawkers and extras in early cinema; and to Todd Cronan who, as always, offered incisive suggestions for improving the text.

1. The artist's great-nephew, Michel Terrasse, describes this “fixed ritual” in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, ed., *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late* (Washington: The Phillips Collection, 2002), 12.

2. Bonnard was known by his friends as “the very Japanese Nabi” (*le Nabi très japonard*). On the impact of Japanese prints on Bonnard's work see Ursula Perucchi-Petri, *Die Nabis und Japan: Das Frühwerk von Bonnard, Vuillard und Denis* (Munich, 1976), 29-96; Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, *Le Japonisme* (Paris, 1988), 40-41, 205, 210-11; Gabriel P. Weisberg et al., *Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art, 1854-1910* (Cleveland, OH, 1975), 53-156; Colta Ives, *The Great Wave: The Influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints* (New York, 1974), 56-79; and Siegfried Wichmann and Chisaburoh F. Yamada in Haus der Kunst, *World Cultures and Modern Art* (Munich,

1974), 91-148. Because this topic is well covered in the literature, I will not be revisiting it here.

3. Looking back on his early work in 1937, Bonnard aligned himself with "those artists who have a taste for the theater of the everyday, the faculty of distilling emotion from the most modest acts of life." Quoted in Timothy Hyman, *Bonnard* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 50.

4. This point is made by Helen Giambruni in "Early Bonnard, 1885-1900" (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 1983), 173.

5. For a concise history of chromolithography in nineteenth-century France, from its reproductive uses in the 1830s to the "color revolution" of original art prints in the fin-de-siècle period, see Laura Anne Kalba, "Color in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Chromolithography in Nineteenth-Century France," in Chelsea Foxwell, Anne Leonard, et al, *Awash in Color: French and Japanese Prints* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, 2012), 133-46.

6. The claim that the Nabis' painting style lent itself to printmaking appears throughout the literature on Bonnard and the Nabis, even in an essay entirely devoted to their favored printer: Pat Gilmour, "Cher Monsieur Clot...Auguste Clot and His Role as a Colour Lithographer," in Pat Gilmour, ed., *Lasting Impressions: Lithography as Art* (Philadelphia, 1988), 144. A recent challenge to this view is Katherine M. Kuenzli, "Decorating the Street, Decorating the Home: Bonnard's *Women in the Garden* and the Poster," in *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-siècle* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 33-67, which argues that Bonnard's early poster design, *France-Champagne*, 1891, was foundational to his *intimiste* painting. For an outline of Bonnard's many print commissions throughout the 1890s see Colta Ives, "Chronology of Bonnard's Graphic Work," in Colta Ives, Helen Giambruni, and Sasha M. Newman, *Pierre Bonnard: The Graphic Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 236-39.

7. Bonnard may have borrowed this striking motif from Edgar Degas, whose *Place de la Concorde*, 1875, features a male figure (Vicomte Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic) on the same side of the composition whose body appears similarly punctured by an umbrella while traversing an open square. Robert Herbert has described Degas's painting in terms of the dynamics of the gaze between the onlooker

at left and the Vicomte and his daughters on the right, calling the leftmost figure a "*badaud*, an onlooker who is easily distracted by what comes within his notice." Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 35.

8. Hollis Clayson included this print in her exhibition *Electric Paris* at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA (17 Feb. – 21 April 2013) as an example of an artwork representing the visual effects of the new electric lighting springing up around Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, changing Parisians' nighttime experience of their city. Clayson's book on this topic is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.

9. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), in *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales & Sketches, 1831-1842*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1978), 509. Poe's story was translated into French by Charles Baudelaire as early as 1857 in *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (Paris: M. Lévy frères, 1857).

10. See Gilmour, "Cher Monsieur Clot," 129-82.

11. Pierre Bonnard to Edouard Vuillard, 15 Oct. 1893, in Antoine Terrasse, *Correspondance: Bonnard, Vuillard* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 30, quoted and translated in Hutton, ed., *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late*, 30.

12. Bonnard made very few corrections or adjustments to his proofs relative to the other Nabis (Edouard Vuillard, Ker-Xavier Roussel, and Maurice Denis) who worked closely with Clot, demonstrating a natural gift for translating his ideas into the pictorial language of lithography. Gilmour, "Cher Monsieur Clot," 144-45.

13. On the difficulty of articulating the relationship between Bonnard's early and late work see Colta Ives, et al, *Pierre Bonnard: The Graphic Art*, 3, and Hutton, ed., *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late*.

14. On this painting and its unique provenance in the collections of Thadée Natanson and Félix Fénéon see Richard R. Brettell, *Impressionist Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture from the Wendy and Emery Reves Collection* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1995), 111.

15. Recorded in Charles Terrasse, *Bonnard* (Paris: Floury, 1927), 162, and cited in Turner, ed., *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late*, 53.

16. On the new importance of shadow as an independent pictorial element for the late nineteenth-century Parisian avant-garde and its relationship to concurrent developments in theater and popular entertainment, see Nancy Forgione, "The Shadow Only: Shadow and Silhouette in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *The Art Bulletin* 81:3 (Sept. 1999): 490-512. On the relationship between Bonnard's early work and contemporary shadow puppet theater see Patricia Eckert Boyer, ed., *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 53-75.

17. Colta Ives, "City Life," in Ives, et al, *Pierre Bonnard: The Graphic Art*, 122.

18. See also the closely related *A Lady and a Man in the Loge of a Theater*, 1898, a four-color lithograph made as the frontispiece for André Mellériot's book *La Lithographie originale en couleurs* (Paris: Publication de l'Estampe et l'Affiche, 1898). Other prints in the Vollard album that represent sidewalk spectators, which I do not have space to address here, include *Boulevard*, ca. 1896; *Street Corner (Coin de rue)*, ca. 1897; *Street Corner Viewed from Above (Coin de rue vue d'en haut)*, 1896-97; and *Street on a Rainy Evening (Rue le soir sous la pluie)*, 1899. *Street on a Rainy Evening*, in particular, shares the layered visuality of *Square at Evening* with a figure in the foreground cropped by the lower edge of the frame situated in front of a more distant frieze of figures in the background.

19. Sadly, none of these set designs seem to have survived. See Merel van Tilburg, *Staging the Symbol: The Nabis, Theatre Decoration, and the Total Work of Art* (PhD diss., Université de Genève, 2013).

20. See Françoise Heilbrun and Philippe Néagu, *Bonnard: photographe* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1987), and Françoise Heilbrun, "Pierre Bonnard's Amateur Photographs: A Poetic, Dancing World," in Elizabeth W. Easton, ed., *Snapshot: Painters and Photography from Bonnard to Vuillard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 61-81.

21. Heilbrun, "Pierre Bonnard's Amateur Photographs," 62.

22. See note 15.

23. Heilbrun and Néagu, *Bonnard: photographe*, 8. For a different approach to Bonnard's possible engagement with early cinema see Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Imaginary Cinema of Pierre Bonnard,"

in Turner, ed., *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late*, 52-73. Turner focuses on early cinema's photographic translation of light and movement as relevant to Bonnard's "fantasy of painting with light" (52), as well as to his interest in photography.

24. On the history of early cinema see Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma. L'Invention du cinéma 1832-1897* (Paris: Denoël, 1946), and *Histoire générale du cinéma. Les Pionniers du cinéma 1897-1909* (Paris: Denoël, 1947).

25. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" (1986), re-printed in Wanda Strauven, ed., *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 382, 384.

26. *La Foule (The Crowd)*, Black-and-white silent film, 48 seconds, Directed by Marius Sestier, Produced by Auguste and Louis Lumière (3 Nov. 1896, Melbourne), Lumière no. 418, catalogued in Michelle Aubert and Jean-Claude Seguin, *La Production cinématographique des Frères Lumière* (Paris: Bibliothèque du Film, 1996), 56.

27. *Danseuses des rues (Street Dancers)*, Black-and-white silent film, 46 seconds, Director unknown, Produced by Auguste and Louis Lumière (20 Feb. 1896, London), Lumière no. 249, catalogued in Aubert and Seguin, *La production cinématographique des Frères Lumière*, 288.

28. Jan Olsson, "Screen Bodies and Busybodies: Corporeal Constellations in the Era of Anonymity," *Film History* 25:1-2 (2013): 188-204. Among Olsson's references are the newspaper article "Spoiled His Tableaux: Moving Picture Man's Experiences with Buttinskis," *Washington Post* (October 22, 1905): V:12.

29. *Cologne: Sortie de la cathédrale*, black-and-white silent film, Directed by Charles Moisson, Produced by Auguste and Louis Lumière (3 May 1896, Cologne), Lumière no. 225, catalogued in Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique des Frères Lumière*, 44-45. Acquiring stills of the precise moments when the canes wave into the frame has so far proved impossible.

30. Paul Willemssen, "Figures of the Extra," trans. Gregory Ball, *Cinéma & Cie* 9:13 (Fall 2009): 94.

31. Ibid., 85-106.

32. Ibid., 85.

33. Ibid., 87.

34. On the importance of the crowd to the construction of cinema as a medium, both in terms of its subject matter and address to mass audiences, see Lesley Brill, *Crowds, Power, and Transformation in Cinema* (Wayne State University Press, 2006). Brill's study does not address the earliest period of cinema, however, focusing on narrative film. Vanessa Schwartz's *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 177-99, contextualizes early cinema as part of a "broader cultural climate that demanded 'the real' as spectacle," including the mass press, the morgue, panoramas, dioramas and wax museums, arguing that the cinematic spectator was constructed from the beginning as necessarily part of a crowd.
35. Gustave Geffroy, Review of 1896 exhibition at Durand-Ruel, quoted in Hyman, *Bonnard*, 39.
36. Quoted in Hyman, *Bonnard*, 29.
37. Bonnard to André Suarès, quoted in Turner, ed., *Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late*, 31, 278.
38. Quoted in Antoine Terrasse, *Bonnard: Shimmering Color* (New York: Abrams, 2000), 126-27.
39. Yve-Alain Bois has characterized "Bonnard's passivity" as "a refusal to choose, or to heed the injunctions of his conscious mind." Bois, "Bonnard's Passivity," 62. (Bois also discusses Bonnard's work in terms of proximity and distance that resonate with my analysis here, although his focus is the way in which Bonnard's paintings invite the viewer to experience them up close and from a distance.) He draws upon the important scholarship of John Rewald, Jean Clair, and Timothy Hyman, all of whom have described the distinct form of vision and attention articulated in Bonnard's art – his refusal of the singular viewpoint in favor of multiple "jostling" ones, his interest in peripheral vision and wide-angle views. See John Rewald, *Pierre Bonnard* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1948); Jean Clair, "The Adventures of the Optic Nerve," in *Bonnard: The Late Paintings* (Washington, DC: The Phillips Collection, 1984), 29-50; and Timothy Hyman, *Bonnard*, 1998. Overall, Bois argues that Bonnard "turns passivity into a virtue" (62) in his painting, a brave risk in both formal and phenomenological terms. For him, what was revolutionary about Bonnard as a painter was his willingness to passively accept the complexity and confusion of the world as it struck him, without

forcing it into structural clarity. I would agree, but I also think we must consider the social implications of this mode of vision in fin-de-siècle France – a period when crowd behavior was a topic of tremendous interest to philosophers, social scientists, and men of law, not to mention to other artists like Félix Vallotton, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Théodore Steinlen – all of whom Bonnard knew well. I believe that Bonnard had these social implications in mind, and that all of these artists pose a significant challenge to the narrow, pessimistic understanding of crowd psychology that has survived into the 20th and 21st centuries. I am currently exploring the work of these artists, and this line of thinking, in my current book project: *Theaters of the Crowd: The Art of Gawking in Fin-de-siècle France*, under contract with Princeton University Press.