

THE CONCEPT OF URBAN SPECTATORSHIP IN HONORÉ DAUMIER'S CARICATURES

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I. The Spectator and the City

Honoré Daumier dedicated numerous caricatures to depicting spectators in various urban settings – looking at shopping windows, watching the demolition of buildings around the city, or simply sauntering down the *grands boulevards*, observing each other in curiosity. For Daumier, as we shall see, life in the modern city entailed adopting a visual *modus operandi*, and therefore being modern also meant being a spectator. The image of the spectator first emerged in the artist's oeuvre in the eighteen thirties and quickly became a frequent subject that appeared in hundreds of caricatures. Yet, these caricatures have received only scant academic attention. One of the few studies that does recognize Daumier's interest in spectatorship is Judith Wechsler's *A Human Comedy* (1982).¹ Wechsler sees the spectator as the most developed and expressive of the artist's social types, and groups images of spectators into categories, relating them to historical and biographical events. Other studies employ the presence of spectators to illustrate specific thematic arguments, such as the perception of "the Exotic" as spectacle in Elizabeth Child's *Daumier's Exoticism* (2004),² or the construction of the

1 Wechsler, Judith, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in 19th Century Paris*, London, The University of Chicago Press, Thames and Hudson, 1982, pp. 162–165.

2 Childs, Elizabeth, *Daumier and Exoticism: Satirizing the French and the Foreign*, New York, Peter Lang, 2004.

theater audience in Martin Meisel's study (2002).³ In each of these studies, representations of spectators are analyzed as independent examples within a specific context. Building on previous scholarship, the current study analyzes images of spectators as a distinct body of work, and theorizes them within the context of nineteenth-century visual culture and the discourse of the spectacle, attempting to unravel and reflect upon the role of the spectator in Daumier's oeuvre.

Daumier's spectators express a modern way of experiencing life, by observing it from a distance, as if it were a sort of a spectacle. Indeed, modern cities such as Paris were prone to the spectacularization of reality, as technological and industrial novelty, urban transformations, and the commodification of life attracted the city-dwellers' gaze.⁴ Nineteenth-century Paris expanded the definition of the spectacle, expropriating it from specific institutions, such as the theater, and nurturing it as a street-based practice. The *grands boulevards*, constructed in the eighteen fifties and sixties under the direction of Baron Haussmann, became sites for daily spectacles – they served the crowd and at the same time created it, enhancing the theatricality of everyday life. The emergence of the depiction of spectators at various urban sites in Daumier's caricatures reflects the ubiquitous nature of the spectacle and reveals the way in which it multiplied itself and came to dominate bourgeois society.

Developments in image production technologies such as wood engraving techniques, lithography, and, later, photography further facilitated the spectacle's invasion of the public sphere. On the one hand, illustrated posters and billboards appeared in various places around the city, creating more spectacles to look at, and on the other, the illustrated press found its subjects on the streets of Paris and circulated their visual representations back to its

³ Meisel, Martin, «The Eye and the Beholder: Daumier's Le Drame and the Making of Audiences,» *European Theatre Iconography: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Network*, eds: Christopher Balme et al. Bulzoni Editore, Rome, 2002, pp. 275–305. See also Loyrette, Henry, «Situating Daumier,» in: Le Men, Ségolène., Loyrette, Henry, Meulot Michel., Pantazzi, Michael., Papet, Edouard., *Daumier 1808–1879*, Exhibition Catalogue, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999, pp. 91–95.

⁴ Schwartz, Vanessa, analyzes the visual pleasures offered by nineteenth-century Paris and examines how they affected the formation of mass society and consumer culture. Schwartz, Vanessa, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

readers.⁵ The proliferation of images in and of the city cultivated a new way of moving within the urban space that involved being distracted by images and continuously aspiring to decipher them. As both the illustrated poster and the illustrated press were characterized by the juxtaposition of word and image in a way that prioritized the image over the word, visual communication became a prominent method of reading urban life.

In *The Fly-Catcher* (*Le Gobe-Mouche* Fig. 1) Daumier depicted a person standing in front of a poster.⁶ The term “fly-catcher” evokes a variety of associations. On the one hand, “fly-catcher” is slang for an open-mouthed, gaping, credulous person, who stands still for long enough time for flies to get into his mouth. On the other, in the world of nature the term refers to a type of carnivorous plant and to passerine birds that feed on flying insects, hence connecting fly-catching with an intentional and skillful hunting of prey. While the way Daumier depicted the fly-catcher, in a static position and with an open mouth, links him to the gaping type, the accompanying text of the caricature presents him as an animal species that is now thriving and spreading in urban environments, therefore suggesting a more intentional activity of “hunting” for posters:

He can be found everywhere, but mainly in Paris, where his species has been growing and multiplying out of proportion these last years. He frequents passages, boulevards, quays, and squares, and he can be seen flying about poster boards trying to find some food. There he stands gaping with an insatiable gluttony at various flies called: job offers; life insurance against falling tiles; young widow with 50'00 Fr. rent looking for a husband; corn removal; creams, syrups, pills, etc., etc. This nourishment does not fatten him. He needs large quantities, and after having dreamt all his life of magnificent castles, the fly-catcher goes to the hospital and dies.

⁵ See Iskin, Ruth, *The Poster: Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s–1900s*, New Hampshire, Dartmouth College Press, 2014, for a discussion of the development of the illustrated poster and its role in nineteenth-century visual culture. See also Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, chapter 1, for an analysis of the visuality of modern urban culture and the way it was represented in the press, and Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-century France*, Cornell University Press, 1989, for an examination of the satirical newspaper as a form of counter-discourse to the official newspaper. Finally, see Bridget Alsdorf’s discussion of the voyeuristic pleasure found in the *fait divers*: Alsdorf Bridget «Félix Vallotton’s Murderous Life.» *The Art Bulletin*, 97:2, 2015, pp. 210–228.

⁶ The figure of the fly-catcher was discussed in various contemporary texts as a “news eater” who believed everything he saw or heard. See, for example: Huart, Louis, *Muséum Parisien: Histoire Physiologique, Pittoresque et Grottesque de toutes les Bêtes Curieuses de Paris et de la Banlieue*, Paris, Typographie Lacrampe et Comp., 1841, pp. 305–315.



Fig. 1

Le Charivari 11.12.1837

Lithography, 188 mm x 217 mm, DR 0527_1

Noack Collection, Ascona, Switzerland,

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« The Fly-Catcher »

The origin of this animal goes back to the beginning of times. As soon as there were two beings on earth, one of them was a fly-catcher. His appearance is not seducing. He can be found everywhere, but mainly in Paris where his species has been growing and multiplying out of proportion in these last years. He frequents passages, boulevards, quays, squares and he can be seen flying about

poster boards trying to find some food. There he stands gaping with an insatiable gluttony at various flies by names of: job offers; life insurance against falling tiles; young widow with 50'00 Fr. rent looking for a husband; company for the extirpation of corns; creams, syrups, pills, etc. etc. This nourishment is not making him fat, he needs big quantities, and after having dreamt all life long of magnificent castles, the fly-catcher goes to the hospital and dies.
(Buffon, Natural history)

« Le Gobe-Mouchec »

L'origine de cet animal se perd dans la nuit des temps. Dès qu'il y a eu deux êtres, créés sur la terre l'un des deux a été un gobe mouches. Son aspect n'a rien de séduisant. On le rencontre en tous lieux, mais surtout à Paris où son espèce a singulièrement crû et multiplié dans ces dernières années. Il fréquente particulièrement les passages, les boulevards, les quais, les places, et on le voit voltiger délicieusement le long des murailles affiches, pour y chercher pâture. C'est là qu'il gobe, avec une insatiable glotonnerie, les diverses mouches connues sous le nom de: Demandes de gens à placer; - Assurances sur la vie contre les tuiles qui tombent; - Jeune Veuve de 50,000 f. de rentes à marier; - Société pour l'extirpation des cors, avec primes et frimes; - pâtes, sirops, pillules, etc, etc. Cette nourriture l'engraisse peu, tant s'en faut, et d'ordinaire après avoir rêvé toute sa vie de magnifiques châteaux, le Gobe-mouches s'en va mourir à l'hôpital. – (Buffon, Histoire naturelle).

This relatively early image of an urban spectator already links the act of spectatorship and the newly formed conditions of modern life by explicitly stating that visual content (the poster) is nourishment, something that is necessary for the fly-catcher's survival. The poster serves as bait that lures the fly-catcher to approach and observe it. The figure's open mouth extends the humorous target from the gaze to include the mouth, suggesting that the real purpose of this act of observation is actually eating; the image itself can be consumed instead of reality, as it provides entertainment, distraction, and a reference to reality. The caricature thus depicts the new relationships between reality and its image, a spectacular relationship that blurs the lines between the real and the imaginary, and may confuse the viewer, who is no longer sure what needs to be consumed – reality or its representation.⁷ The experience of walking in the modern city therefore relies on vision, as it appears to involve hunting for visual food and at the same time being lured by eye-catching posters.

⁷ The spectacular relationships between reality and its image are further discussed in Guy Debord's 1967 *The Society of the Spectacle*, in which he argued that in modern times, life presents itself as a sequence of spectacles. The spectacle is not only the outcome of reality, but also acts as its goal. It not only copies and mimics reality, but is also a substitute for it. Representations of reality are constantly consumed by society and at the same time recreated by it. Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans: Nicholson-Smith, D., New York, Zone Books, 1994.

The fly-catcher was shaped by Daumier as the ultimate spectator, a figure whose whole existence is given to the act of observation. He is a social construct that represents developing capitalist modernity, which had made the spectator's presence essential. In other words, the spectator is bound to the presence of a spectacle, which he himself reciprocally defines by the very act of observation. The act of spectatorship was not, however, limited to the spectator looking at the poster. As the spectator was being observed by Daumier, he himself became an integral part of an ongoing chain of gazes, and was transformed into a spectacle for the artist, as the latter took his place as spectator. Finally, as the product of Daumier's observation was a caricature that was published in a satirical newspaper, it also became a spectacle in itself, to be consumed by its readers like any other spectacular commodity. By observing the caricature, readers brought the circulation of the image to completion. This course of action (of an image that turns into commodity, which is itself an image) demonstrates the essentially tautological character of the spectacle; its means and ends are identical.

The solitary spectator looking at the poster brings to mind the emblematic figure of the *flâneur*. An indefatigable urban stroller, the *flâneur* has been perceived in research as the archetypal observer, whose natural habitat is the bustling streets of the modern city.⁸ Daumier's fly-catcher, with his perpetual roaming in the city and his scanning gaze, may be viewed as referring to the *flâneur*. Like the *flâneur*, the fly-catcher is constantly looking forward to discovering the contents of the city. Drifting from one poster to another,

⁸ The subject of a vast body of scholarship, the *flâneur* has appeared in various literary, historical, and theoretical texts. Definitions of the figure appear, for example, in Huart, *Physiologie du flâneur*, Paris, Aubert, 1841; Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle: Français, Historique, Géographique, Mythologique, Bibliographique*, Paris, Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1866–1877; and Fournel, *Ce qu'on Voit dans les Rues de Paris*, Paris, E. Dentu, 1867. Charles Baudelaire and, later, Walter Benjamin, established the idea of flânerie as a state of being for the poet and artist of the modern city: Baudelaire, Charles, «The Painter of Modern Life», in: *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, Penguin Books, 1972 and Benjamin, Walter, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Howard Eiland et al. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2006. Some recent studies examine previous scholarship on the *flâneur* from a more critical perspective, reconsidering his explanatory role in various aspects of modern life in the city. See, for example, Schwartz, Vanessa, «Walter Benjamin for Historians,» *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 5 (Dec., 2001), pp. 1721–1743; Shaya, Gregory, «The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860–1910,» *American Historical Review* 109, 2004, pp. 41-77; Wrigley, Richard, «Unreliable Witness: The *Flâneur* as Artist and Spectator of Art in 19th-Century Paris,» *Oxford Art Journal*, 39 (2), 2016, pp. 267-284. Finally, for a discussion of the figure of the flâneuse, see Wolff, Janet, «The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,» *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2(3), 1985, pp. 37-48, and Elkin, Lauren, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, London, Chatto & Windus 2016.

the fly-catcher, like the *flâneur*, habituates himself to the streets of Paris. His detachment sets him apart from the sights, allowing him to psychologically gain control over them, as he becomes the reader of the urban text: “the city revolves around the spectator, who copes with urban diversity by reducing it to a marvelous show. The *flâneur*’s ability to celebrate the unanticipated lies in his evident superiority to whatever challenges he may encounter.”⁹ Yet, while the *flâneur* records city sights for later selection and processing, the fly-catcher glances at the information without accumulating, interpreting or relating to it; the very act of scanning is the objective and essence of his existence.

The figure depicted in *The Fly-Catcher* is looking at a poster – a designated urban spectacle that was intended to attract the city-dwellers’ gaze. In the following caricature, however, Daumier not only documented existing spectacles, but created some of his own. In *The Crinoline in Snow Time* (*La Crinoline en Temps de Neige*, Fig. 2), the woman on the right looks at the woman on the left, whose crinoline is covered with snow, and asks: “Madame, shall I sweep you off?” This is one of the numerous caricatures dedicated to the crinoline, the new fashionable garment that became popular in the mid-nineteenth century. In most of these caricatures, Daumier exposed the ridiculousness of the crinoline, emphasizing the clumsiness caused by wearing it. *The Crinoline in Snow Time*, however, represents a different approach to the phenomenon. Here, Daumier not only described the absurd state of the woman, but also inserted a spectator who is looking at the woman wearing the crinoline. By doing so, he moved from direct documentation of the phenomenon to a critical reflection on it, pointing to the satirical component in the relationship between classes and the ways in which social codes are interpreted. The presence of a spectator in the scene frames the situation as a spectacle, indicating that it is worth pausing to closely observe it. The gaze of the spectator facilitates the gaze of the reader of the caricature, directing it farther and serving as a tool that outlines the object of observation.

⁹ Purkhurst-Ferguson, Pricilla, «The *Flâneur* on and off the Streets of Paris», in: Tester K. (ed.), *The Flâneur*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 31.



Fig. 2

Croquis d'hiver

Le Charivari, 13.11.1858

Lithography, 261 mm x 221 mm, LD 3089

Benjamin A. and Julia M. Trustman Collection of Honoré Daumier Lithographs

Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA (USA)

« The Crinoline in Snow Time »
- Madame, shall I sweep you off?

« La Crinoline en temps de neige »
- Ma belle dame..... faut - y vous donner un coup d'balai... ?

II. Challenging Spectatorship: Omitting the Object of the Gaze

Daumier's interest in spectators led him to increasingly omit the object of their gaze and focus only on the observers themselves, as can be seen in the caricature *The Streets of Paris are Beginning to Look like This Every Night* (*Aspect que commencent déjà à avoir chaque soir les rues de Paris*, Fig. 3). Here, Daumier did not show what the people are looking at, but instead focused on the spectators' facial expressions, which reflect their physical and emotional reaction to the spectacle; they are all leaning forward, raising their heads, their eyes and mouths wide open in an expression that could convey astonishment or bewilderment. Daumier exploited the ability of the spectacle to unite individuals toward a single goal by directing their attention to one place. Similarly to the fly-catcher, the observers here are all attracted to an urban spectacle that appears on the street and gape at it open-mouthed. Although each one of the observers in the caricature is situated in his own private balcony, they are all gathered under the influence of the spectacle to create a new collective entity – an audience. Daumier further emphasized the tension between the individuals and their collective form. He individuated the people in the lower right corner, and as he progressed to the upper left corner, he gradually eliminated facial features, multiplying general shapes and positions, eventually refining the whole situation into an autonomous condition of spectatorship. The uniform, mechanical reaction of the people and the identical balconies that frame them contribute to the rhythmic retreat into the depth of the caricature. As a result, we not only see an audience here, but also witness the process of its formation; the street becomes a theatre for an occasional show, with the residents as its audience.

Separating the spectators from the object of their gaze undermines the logic of conventional spectatorship. The continuity of the gaze, which is essential for creating the meaning of the object, is disrupted here, leaving the reader of the caricature to continue to seek it. Indeed, the title of the series, *La Comète de 1857*, sheds some light on the scene, as the reader understands that the spectators are looking at the sky in search of a comet.¹⁰ Yet, this unconventional setting, in which the object of observation is absent, affirms the randomness of the spectacle, which could be anything as long as there

¹⁰ Daumier dedicated several caricatures to depicting the French people's anticipation of the return of the comet Charles-Quint, mainly representing the people's agitated emotional state following predictions that the comet would collide with Earth on June 13, 1857 and end all life.

is someone looking at it. Shifting the focus of the caricature from the spectacle to the spectator (and more specifically, to the spectator's reaction to the spectacle), reveals the centrality of the condition of spectatorship in modern times. The presence of the spectacle manages the behavior of the people in close proximity to it as it attracts their attention, forcing them to become its spectators, and dictating their response.



Fig. 3

La Comète de 1857

Le Charivari, 21.3.1857

Lithography, 256 mm x 188 mm, DR 2931

Noack Collection, Ascona, Switzerland,

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« The Streets of Paris are Beginning to Look Like this every Night »

« Aspect que commencent déjà à avoir chaque soir les rues de Paris »

III. Challenging Spectatorship: Emptying the Gaze

While in *The Streets of Paris* the spectacle is invisible, in the next caricature under discussion, Daumier did depict a spectacle, but this time the gaze that the spectators are directing at it is a futile one – it cannot extract any meaning from the observed scene and remains idle, worthless, an empty tool that only gathers people for an unknown reason. *Bystanders* (*Les Badauds*, Fig. 4) shows a random audience of passersby along the river. The title *Bystanders* focuses the reader's attention on the spectators who are looking at the fisherman, defining them as the subject of the caricature. The French term *badaud* refers to yet another urban type that emerged in nineteenth-century Paris – the bystander or the gawker. Similarly to the *flâneur*, the figure of the *badaud* has been adopted in research to explain various aspects of modern experience.¹¹ Like the *flâneur*, the *badaud* was characterized by a visual faculty, but his gaze was different than that of the *flâneur*. It was a distracted gaze that was associated with “idle curiosity, gullibility, simpleminded foolishness and gaping ignorance.”¹² If the *flâneur* was the man of the crowd, the *badaud* would be the man in the crowd; the *badaud* was part of the crowd through which the *flâneur* passed. Daumier depicts a crowd of *bystanders* who were attracted to a peculiar sight. However, what is amusing here is that the audience has no idea what they are looking at:

You can hardly believe, actually it's impossible to believe that this poor fisherman perched on a boat is the only reason for this gathering ... Ah well no, it's really a gudgeon that you aren't seeing and that they aren't seeing either...

Here, the text plays a crucial role in the functionality of the caricature by revealing the spectators' awkwardness as their gaze is proven to be an empty

¹¹ Recent scholarship that centers on the image of the *badaud* sees this figure as an important element in the making of the urban mass. The *badaud*'s passive absorption leads to his transformation from an individual spectator into part of an observing collective. See, for example, Shaya, «The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public» and Alsdorf, «Félix Vallotton's Murderous Life».

¹² Shaya, «The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public», p. 49. Victor Fournel explained the differences between the *flâneur* and the *badaud* in his 1867 book *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris*: “The *flâneur* must not be confused with the *badaud*; a nuance should be observed here. The simple *flâneur* observes and reflects [...] He is always in full possession of his individuality. By contrast, the individuality of the *badaud* disappears, absorbed by the outside world, which ravishes him, which moves him to drunkenness and ecstasy. Under the influence of the spectacle that presents itself to him, the *badaud* becomes an impersonal creature; he is no longer a man, he is the public, he is the crowd.” Fournel, *Ce qu'on Voit dans les Rues de Paris*, p. 270, as quoted in a footnote in Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire*, note 189, p. 249.

one that cannot decipher the sight. It is the text that subverts the logic of the gaze, and, as a result, undermines any pictorial reasoning that the reader attempts to construct.

Once Daumier had emptied and disabled the gaze, the randomness of the spectacle again became apparent. Daumier demonstrated how anything could turn into a spectacle as long as there was a spectator willing to look at it. Moreover, he showed how the modern phenomenon of the spectacle had become a key concept around which society was formed. *Bystanders* illustrates how people follow other people's gazes and even join them physically in front of a spectacle as part of their existential quest for meaning, and reveals their eagerness to decipher the urban sights they continuously encounter. Finally, the shared experience of witnessing a spectacle in and with the public created a sense of belonging to a common urban culture and eventually led to the formation of the modern urban mass.



Fig. 4
Les Parisiens, *Le Charivari*, 5 December 1839
 Lithography, 190 mm x 250 mm DR 755
 Noack Collection, Ascona (Switzerland), DR 0755_1,
 © www.daumier.org

« Bystanders »

You can hardly believe, actually it's impossible to believe that this poor fisherman perched on a boat is the only reason for this gathering. With a sure instinct, the Parisians, this intelligent and energetic cast, are nailed to the ground by a serious incident, a milliner, a peer of France, a chestnut vendor, a candidate for the Academy, a victim of love or ambition!.... Ah well no, it's really a gudgeon that you aren't seeing and that they aren't seeing either..."

« Les badauds »

On ne veut pas croire, il est impossible de croire que ce pauvre pêcheur perché sur un bateau soit le motif de ce rassemblement. A coup sûr, les parisiens, cette caste intelligente et active, est clouée là par un évènement grave, une modiste, un pair de France, un Md. de marrons, un candidat à l'Académie, victime de l'amour ou de l'ambition!... Eh bien non, c'est réellement un goujon que vous ne voyez pas et qu'ils ne voient pas non plus.

Bystanders reveals, again, how the mechanism of the spectacle affects society. Yet the caricature raises another issue, that of modern vision. By depicting a situation in which one is looking at something but cannot wrest meaning from it, the caricature undermines the status of vision as a sense that can provide knowledge about the world. In this regard, the caricature is compatible with a modern model of vision, according to which vision is subjective. As scholars such as Jonathan Crary have argued, “subjective vision” is more affected by the body and the mind of the observer than by the external world.¹³ Indeed, scientific studies conducted in the early nineteenth century experimented with and stimulated vision and showed how different spectators reacted differently to the same external stimulus in accordance with their physical condition. Once modernized vision came to be perceived as arbitrary and prone to manipulation, the secure position of the observer was undermined. In an era that had raised epistemological ambiguities, modernized vision only created more confusion and uncertainty, as it no longer guaranteed access to reality.¹⁴

¹³ For Crary, the observing subject is “both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification” (*Suspensions and Perception*, p. 5). It is worth mentioning, though, that some reservations have been expressed regarding Crary’s adherence to Foucault’s analysis of modernity and what has been seen as overgeneralization and a selective use of historical evidence to support his model of embodied vision. See Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge MA, October Book, MIT Press, 1990, and Crary, Jonathan, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, Cambridge MA, October Book, MIT Press, 1999. For some critiques of his model see Mitchell, W. J. T., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, The University Press of Chicago, Chicago, 1994, pp 19–24; Batchen Geoffrey, «Enslaved Sovereign, Observed Spectator: On Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer*.» *Continuum* 6.2 (1993), 80–94.

¹⁴ See Martin Jay’s examination of the changes in the centrality of the discourse of vision in Western intellectual thought and the way in which these shifts affected the experience, conception, and articulation of reality. Jay, Martin, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley, London, Los Angeles, 1993.

IV. Challenging Spectatorship: Reversing the Gaze

In *The Streets of Paris* and *Bystanders*, Daumier interrupted the course of spectatorship and, as a result, subverted the ability of both the depicted figures and the readers of the caricatures to construct a full picture of the scene. In addition to creating difficulties in deciphering situations, the strategies Daumier used to manipulate components of spectatorship enabled him to challenge norms of social conduct, as he granted the gaze a dimension of social power and control. Once the question of who is looking at whom began to be tested, new insights regarding social order and class emerged.

The reversal of the direction of the gaze is yet another type of manipulation of spectatorship used by Daumier. In *Who are the Real Chinese? (Quels sont les plus Chinois?* Fig. 5) Daumier depicted a scene at the Universal Exposition in which a couple of Chinese figures is looking at a couple of French figures. Daumier depicts the French woman as wearing Chinese-inspired items, and by doing so, locates the comic element in the comparison between the “imitation Chinese people” and the real ones. Readers would probably have expected the French couple, who represent the domestic and familiar, to look at the foreign tourists, viewing them as an exotic spectacle. Surprisingly, the opposite occurs, and, as Childs claims, “the European *regard exotique* [is] reversed.”¹⁵ The reversal of the direction of the gaze serves as a powerful tool for delivering critical messages, as it also implies a reversal in the balance of power between the observed and the observers. The reversal of the direction of the gaze means that the French couple, the representative of Western culture, no longer dominates the Chinese couple, the representative of the Other. The text adds to the reversal, as the word “real” in relation to “Chinese” turns “Chinese” into something arbitrary and fluid, not a fixed, defining characteristic of one’s identity. The word “real” turns “Chinese” into a synonym of “strange,” “weird,” “funny,” or, in other words, a “spectacle,” as if to ask “who is the real spectacle?”

¹⁵ Elizabeth Childs, op. cit. p. 95.



Fig. 5

Le Monde Illustré, 12 October 1867

Wood engraving, 15.1 cm x 22.5 cm, DR 6027

Noack Collection, Ascona (Switzerland), DR6027_1,

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« At the Universal Exhibition »
Who are the real Chinese?

« A l'exposition universelle »
- Quels sont les plus Chinois?

V. Conclusion: Reconfiguring the Urban Space as Spectacle

Through his visual acknowledgment and by means of the objectification of the gaze, Daumier repeatedly explored settings of spectatorship, thus recognizing the critical potentiality embedded in the condition of modern spectatorship. Daumier's mapping of the category of the spectator participated in reconfiguring the concept of modern city life in terms of spectator-spectacle-spectatorship relations. His spectators indicated the presence of spectacles around the city of Paris and attested to their significance as a practice that formulated and structured modern life. Modernity was therefore inextricably bound to spectatorship, and consequently, being a modern person in the city inevitably involved becoming a spectator, both a cultural product and an agent that captured the experience of the modern city by observing it and by reading and commanding the urban spectacle.

Daumier constructed his caricatures carefully, isolating each of the components of spectatorship – the event, the observer, and the act of viewing – and examining the relationships between the spectator, the spectacle, and spectatorship. Part of this critical mechanism involved Daumier occasionally fracturing the relationships between these components and interrupting the functionality of the gaze. These manipulations of spectatorship serve as rhetorical devices that exploit readers' expectations and norms of spectatorship and lead them to consider specific interpretations of given scenes. At the same time, his works function as satire that evoked laughter in their viewers and enabled Daumier to convey critical messages about bourgeois society, its values, morals, and everyday life on the street. Lastly, by manipulating spectatorship, Daumier unveiled the nature of the spectacle, revealing its randomness and its invisible power over its audience.

Daumier not only documented existing spectacles and spectators, but actively contributed to the spectacularization of modern life by creating and defining spectacles himself. As he placed spectators in the streets of Paris, Daumier framed daily events as spectacles. But Daumier's contribution to the spectacularization of reality includes yet another dimension: his caricatures were published in satirical newspapers, and served as visual representations of life in the city, a code that was decipherable to the people of Paris. As they were consumed and replaced by new ones on a daily basis, they participated in the endless succession of images that shaped modernity and made it spectacular. In other words, Daumier not only deployed

humor to decipher and reconfigure the urban code of spectatorship, but also positioned his caricatures as part of the visual urban matrix that operated spectatorship.

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