

The Spectatorship of the *Affiche Illustrée* and the Modern City of Paris, 1880–1900

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As a response to Susan Sontag's classic writing on the poster, this essay analyses the phenomenon of the French 'pictorial' publicity poster, which developed in concert with a specific type of spectatorship delineated in contemporary poster criticism as linked to the city of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. By comparing the collective reading of political placards and announcements in the early modern period to the hurried viewing of illustrated publicity posters at the dawn of the consumer economy, this essay contextualizes the poster's spectatorship as dependent upon its conditions of public display in Paris after the city's renovation and rationalization under Haussmannization.

Keywords: criticism—France—lithography—Paris—poster design—public

'A poster aims to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal'.

Susan Sontag, 1970¹

Forty years ago Susan Sontag critically defined the poster as a promotional tool whose visual form had been determined under capitalism even when it was utilized by twentieth-century political movements. Although her essay introduced a collection of political posters produced in post-revolution Communist Cuba in 1961, she described them as possessing an accentuated visual language that resulted from the poster's role as commercial advertising.² Sontag's now-classic essay registered the most important features of graphic design history from 1880 to 1970, when the poster's 'visually aggressive' attitude evolved to attract the attention of 'members of society [who] are defined primarily as spectators and consumers'.³ This function of the poster to persuade viewers and influence behaviours developed with particular force in France in the late nineteenth century, a pivotal period for the industrialization of visual imagery and its broader dissemination.⁴ The period is also known as a 'golden age' of the lithographed poster when artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) and Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) created groundbreaking works and designer Jules Chéret (1836–1932) achieved unprecedented celebrity as the 'king' of the poster.⁵ Echoing Sontag's argument, Dawn Ades maintained: 'The poster belongs to a specific phase in the age of mechanical reproduction: for seventy or eighty years it was the most conspicuous, accessible and familiar form of pictorial production'.⁶ The accentuation of form and colour in poster imagery, therefore, has been linked to its emerging function of advertising goods and entertainment in the burgeoning consumer economy of the Belle Époque.

This essay aims to analyse in more depth one of the main points outlined by Sontag in her essay—that the poster become 'visually aggressive' in response to the demands of capital (and urbanization) at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ As I will argue, the 'pictorial' form of the lithographic poster developed in France not only because of changes in printing technology and the liberalization of poster distribution (*affichage*) but also in response to the competing distractions of the modern city of Paris at the end

of the nineteenth century.⁸ In other words, this essay will conceptualize the shift in spectatorship enacted in late nineteenth-century France that accompanied the transformation of the ‘public notice’, which existed merely to instruct and inform, to the ‘poster’, which, as Sontag claims, was designed ‘to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal’.⁹ These modes of poster viewership before and after the advent of consumer capitalism will be analysed both through historical consideration of the poster’s role in French society and examination of primary source material that documented new mobile forms of poster viewership and testified to the psychic effects brought on by the increased dissemination of colour imagery through the poster.¹⁰

In the 1880s and 1890s, the illustrated poster was discussed in art criticism and journalistic commentary as ushering in a type of poster ‘viewing’ (or ‘poster gazing’) that initially coexisted with, but eventually replaced, the collective reading and mass discussions around announcements that characterized poster consumption before the late nineteenth century. The growing predominance of the illustrated publicity poster in the last decades of the nineteenth century in France, then, and its corresponding mode of mobile spectatorship of images, marked the beginning of the end of public reading in favour of a type of viewing in which the individual—rather than an audience, group or crowd—was the expected consumer. Ultimately, this shift in poster spectatorship from collective audience to individual viewer—and accompanying external discussion—to internalized apperception paralleled a disengagement from public life and a larger atomization of the individual in the modern period.¹¹ Commentary published on advertising during this period remarked on the decline of the political force of the poster as well as the psychic effects of unbounded spectacle displayed in the modern city following this transformation.¹²

The poster in modern Paris

The development of the illustrated poster at the dawn of the consumer age coincided with a particular type of spectatorship imagined within the newly renovated city of Paris. Although the poster (*affiche*) enjoyed a long history, its emergence as a pictorial form with illustrations dominating its composition developed in the late nineteenth century under a specific set of historical and cultural conditions that were particularly exacerbated after the city’s modernization (and rationalization) as enacted under Emperor Napoleon III (1808–1873) and Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891).¹³ Many of Haussmann’s harshest critics maintained that the city had been constructed with the bourgeoisie rather than working-class citizens in mind and therefore served, in the opinion of scholar David Harvey, to facilitate the circulation of capital.¹⁴

Estimates cited by journalists put the number of posters pasted up in Paris alone in the millions per year, with one writer claiming that, during the 1889 elections, the number of electoral posters exceeded 600,000,000.¹⁵ The renovations of Paris during the Second Empire (1852–1870) and Third Republic (1871–1914) contributed to the expansion of new locales for the display of posters in the streets both in the installations of kiosks along the new boulevards and in the creation of new wall surfaces and scaffolding that were the result of the destruction accompanying the city’s renovation.¹⁶ Posters had traditionally been intended for public spaces such as public thoroughfares (*voie publique*), city corners (*carrefours*) and hoardings (*panneaux d’affichage*) within the physical spaces of the city that were experienced as a pedestrian.

Within the new areas of the city devoted mostly to bourgeois residences, advertising could be displayed on newly placed kiosks (*colonne Morris*, *kiosques*), urinals (*urinoirs*,

vespasiennes) and assorted ‘street furniture’ punctuating the broad boulevards in ‘new’ Paris that had been added during the renovations [1].¹⁷ For example, in an 1889 view from *Paris Album*, a collection of photographs, we see the relatively new boulevard Rochechouart, the boundary that demarcated the beginning of Montmartre and the border between the eleventh and the eighteenth *arrondissements*, with its wide expanse of boulevard; on the right is a public toilet (*chalet de nécessité*) with small posters in frames, and to the left, tucked under trees, a bookstall (*kiosque à journaux*) with announcements. These elements of street furniture were a relatively new addition to neighbourhoods in the western part of Paris and were intended to prevent posters from littering the sides of buildings.¹⁸

In the older, central areas of the city, kiosks also lined the boulevards but were accompanied by large poster hoardings around commercial districts, such as the central market of Les Halles and the Bourse (stock exchange) [2], construction sites surrounded with wooden palisades, and rough exterior walls that remained after buildings were cleared away for the widening of streets.¹⁹ Large hoardings were also located in older, eastern *arrondissements* that were associated with working-class populations.²⁰ Within these enclaves of older *quartiers* in the centre of the city, which had just begun to be submitted to administrative regularity, whole walls of poster displays—printed posters glued to walls or placed within frames (*cadres*) owned by poster distribution companies—predominated along with ‘painted posters’ (*affiches peintes*) on walls that were leased by the city.²¹ Displayed within the new, modern spaces of the city in addition to the older, more neglected districts, the poster was required to be emphatically visible in order to compete for the attention of the passerby and to be legible across the expansive boulevards and crowded streets of late nineteenth-century Paris.²²

Reading and viewing the *affiche*

In *The Fall of Public Man* Richard Sennett (1974) describes a shift away from collective, public action to private, individual introspection that previously characterized the arts



Fig 1. H. Blanchard, Boulevard de Rochechouart, un chalet, c. 1889. *Vues de Paris*, vol. 17, p. 111, fig. 542, Cl. 1121 (*Paris Album 4 17*). Collection of the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. Photograph taken by the author. Reproduced with permission from the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris

as a whole.²³ This general description of the psychic structures that predominate the experience of living in urban centres in the modern period can be applied to modes of spectatorship of any posted material in communal spaces—and not just in a theoretical sense, but charted through the close examination of contemporaneous critical writing devoted to the phenomenon of poster gazing in fin-de-siècle Paris. In the critics' comments examined in this essay, the audience for the poster was overwhelmingly described as the individual viewer, the passerby (*passant*) who is distracted or whose attention is drawn to the hypnotic appeal of the poster's image and whose consumption of images was described as largely internalized, as described below.²⁴

The theoretical basis used here for discussing the reception and spectatorship of the modern poster has been influenced by the work of Robert Darnton, whose essay 'First Steps Toward a History of Reading' demarcates several methods scholars may use in service of exploring everyday reading practices of the long term (*longue durée*).²⁵ At first glance, this use of reading practices as a model for poster viewing may seem an odd choice, but Darnton's model may be extended to various forms of historical material, in this case, posters, in order to analyse their reception within a specific historical context. Posters in the early modern period—for example in the old order (*ancien régime*) and during the French Revolution—consisted predominantly of texts that were read (*lu*) rather than images that were viewed (*vu*), although this dynamic changed nearly a century later.²⁶ Indeed, posters were one of myriad forms of texts that were read in public as a 'social activity' for the 'common people'.²⁷ As Darnton notes, this reading of books (and by extension posters) in the *ancien régime* was performed in front of collective audiences, rather than by individual silent readers, and also included the poster—as public announcement, political placard and rallying point for the populous—which was superseded by poster *viewing* in the modern city that is the subject of this essay.²⁸

If, as Darnton claims, a book's meaning is construed by its readers, then the meaning of the 'poster' as an individual object and social phenomenon—with its attendant practices—was 'construed' by its viewers, and this is precisely the experience that critics documented for us. Perhaps more perceptive than the common man in the streets, critics writing in 1880s and 1890s Paris point to the consideration of an entire generation viewing colour images in the streets.²⁹ The mode of reception of poster imagery developed precisely at the cusp of the consumer economy in post-Commune Paris when the political force of the poster declines and simultaneously the amount of commercial publicity increases exponentially due in part to the poster's deregulation by the 1881 Press Law.³⁰

According to Darnton, in the history of reading, there are *intensive* practices—in which readers concentrate their attention on a few books—and *extensive* practices—in which, through greater access to printed material, readers consume a wide variety of books at various levels of concentration.³¹ If we apply this reading/viewing dichotomy to the subject at hand, the characterization also suggests a shift in the spectatorship of posters. The period before the late nineteenth century was marked by *intensive*



Fig 2. Union Photographique française (UPF), 1 rue des Petits Pères (2nd arrondissement), Paris, France, 1899. Collection of the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, G.P. VI, 22, UPF 3402. Photograph taken by the author. Reproduced with permission from the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris

spectatorship in which only a few posters were displayed in the city, but likely noted by most citizens if not read from beginning to end. By contrast, poster viewing in the period after 1881—when freedom of posting (*liberté de l'affichage*) was instituted by the Press Law under the Third Republic—was *extensive* and characterized by an inundation of printed material in the streets of Paris. Newspapers, flyers, journals, single-sheet prints and posters, in addition to pamphlets distributed on the streets and window displays by a multitude of stores ranging from small shops to *grands magasins*, were included. The resulting overstimulation from a wealth of material presented the outer limits of extensive reading in which the urban spectator of the poster, the pedestrian on foot, would have had his attention drawn to so many visual elements that eventually he would have stopped paying attention altogether.³² Rather than having the time to read all posters on view, he was described as practicing extensive viewing in that he was imagined to barely glimpse the poster's image and could nonetheless often unwittingly consume its content.³³

As Darnton noted, books and posters of the Enlightenment and decades later, had 'audiences' rather than readers. The type of spectatorship associated with textual posters was the collective reading that was expected of even administrative announcements, but was especially associated with political tracts. Although political posters were prohibited for most of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in periods of popular uprisings and rebellions (Sontag calls them moments of 'crisis'), such as the French Revolution, the Revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune (1871), freedom of posting (*liberté de l'affichage*) was established and the censorship that kept political placards off the walls of French cities was eliminated, however briefly.³⁴

Although in the pre-modern era, the majority of posters distributed were administrative or religious in content and served as a means of informing the public of recent edicts and ordinances, *placards* and *canards*—the precursors of modern political posters—were linked with 'popular' political opinion and were often critical of local or national figures. Considered a 'spontaneous form of expression', these *placards*—both printed and handwritten—often appeared during periods of economic crisis or rebellion.³⁵

For much of the eighteenth century, this view of the poster as potentially subversive and representative of lower class, urban culture continued to persist and culminated with the French Revolution. Daniel Roche in *The People of Paris* characterizes the poster as 'a book for all to read'.³⁶ Although the majority was mostly bureaucratic in content, eighteenth-century posters were equally perceived, Roche states, as exemplifying the only medium 'that enabled the popular classes to express their opinion of political life'.³⁷ In addition to its reputation as possibly seditious, the poster offered all classes of the city an opportunity to keep informed of the latest news free of charge.³⁸ If spectators could not grasp the content of the poster from its capitalized letters and images, they could glean its meaning from other citizens who gathered around it and read aloud.³⁹ This communal consumption of political posters was vital during the Revolution as a way to inform the urban public and to disseminate political information; posters acted as a physical site around which citizens could congregate and freely discuss political issues. Although other public institutions, especially public reading rooms, existed for the collective reading of newspapers and books before the nineteenth century, none matched the accessibility of the poster.⁴⁰

By the late nineteenth century, this connection between the poster and the working classes was a common conception. During the early years of the Third Republic, political posters were regarded as so seemingly threatening that their dissemination was banned

altogether. The wariness with which the authorities approached posters during the so-called Moral Order (1871–1879) reflected a fear of the imagined consequences that might follow the posting of political material.⁴¹ The spectre of crowds gathered around posters discussing their political content proved so threatening as to warrant their restriction especially in the years immediately following the Paris Commune of 1871.⁴²

Although both political and publicity posters depended on urban spaces for their display, the kind of collective reading associated with possible political action declined in the years following the Press Law of 1881. The rise in literacy rates at the end of the nineteenth century following the establishment of free, compulsory education made collective reading less pressing for the acquisition of knowledge. The enactment of the Press Law itself established the right of individuals to post material but contradictorily required a tax stamp. While this tax was levied based on the size of the page posted and was relatively cheaper than the cost of printing posters, it was still too expensive for many individuals and groups.⁴³ As a result, posters for the purposes of publicity flourished in the decades following the Press Law. A near fatal blow to political posters came in the early 1890s when the so-called intolerable laws (*lois scélérates*) were enacted to curb anarchist propaganda and, consequently, many posters representing views of the radical left were also targeted.⁴⁴ A plethora of advertising posters then came to the fore as the dominant kind of *affiche* seen in the city, and their presence there required a new mode of spectatorship that replaced the collective reading and discussion once expected of audiences of the poster.

Viewing the illustrated poster in the city

‘Today the poster reigns supreme on all the walls of Paris, even on public monuments; here it is sprawled out, glaring, dazzling, gaudy, and tugging at the eye of the passerby (*tirant l’oeil du passant*) to whom it promises mountains and marvels’.

Gustave Fustier, 1884⁴⁵

‘But apart from technical facility, it is difficult to make a poster [with an] overall memorable design and series of rhythmic and complicated colourings [that has been] carried out in an orderly fashion to harpoon the eye (*pour harponner l’oeil*)’.

Emile Straus, 1895⁴⁶

This sense of flux in the modes of spectatorship and public culture were registered within the discourses devoted to assessing the integration of publicity posters into the renovated city of Paris. The city boasted editors, publishers, art critics and intellectuals who wrote about posters in small independent journals and major newspapers.⁴⁷ Some early commentators on the poster were often associated with the printing and publishing industry and, while most celebrated the poster as an aid for the businessman, they were keenly aware of the pressing changes in literary production and the current fear of the withering of literature in the face of mass journalism and commercial spectacle. Other commentators who published articles on the poster and its presence in Paris were men of letters (described as *littérateurs*) who wrote about the modern city from the vantage point of the ‘poet as art critic’, a paradigm cultivated by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), and they looked to the publicity poster for its evidence of creativity and potential aesthetic experience.⁴⁸ Much of the commentary on posters examined here, therefore, was not necessarily written by practitioners or printers, but often by writers who sought to discuss posters as observers or participants in its reception.⁴⁹ While

some literary figures of the time, such as French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), attempted to harness the motifs of media culture for their literary enterprises, many contemporaries were not so flexible and accepting of the new mass media and its accentuation of visuality—that has since been attributed to the rise of spectacle in the nineteenth-century city—and instead mourned the loss of reading as a collaborative activity that was associated with a bygone era.⁵⁰

In the late nineteenth century, the need for the poster to distinguish itself from other distractions in the streets meant that it had to accentuate its form, as critics often noted. In contrast to the activity of reading, terms such as ‘viewing’, ‘glancing’, ‘gazing’ and ‘absorbing images’ were used by critics. Many critics remarked that the criterion for appreciating an illustrated poster was gauged against the book; it was supposed to be viewed, not read (*vu non lu*).⁵¹ Critics frequently used metaphors of hypnosis and unconscious suggestion to indicate how passersby still somehow perceived posters in a glance and claimed that this printed material was physically ‘absorbed’ into the mind and body through an osmosis-like process.⁵² Commentary devoted to analysing the poster’s design discussed the immediacy with which a poster had to be appreciated in the venue of the streets. Many critics shared the interpretation of the poster as an object that had been born of Parisian thoroughfares and postulated that the poster’s image had to be comprehended within the length of time of a casual glance, thereby emphasizing the extensive viewing practices associated with the modern poster.⁵³ Designers presumably responded to this special set of circumstances by simplifying their designs, a trend that was eventually interpreted as a defining characteristic of all posters.⁵⁴ Critics also speculated that bright colours had to be used as the poster was expected to grab the attention of the average passerby, who was often characterized in written commentary as moving through the streets at a reasonable pace and having a so-called distracted mental state.⁵⁵

Although colour printing was used before the late nineteenth century, the multicoloured arrangements used in lithographed posters had not been seen on such a large scale in Paris until the 1870s. According to critics, not all Parisians had access to paintings in museums and although some journals, such as *Paris illustrée*, had begun to include colour illustrations, the cost of these publications was prohibitive for many people. Therefore, the awe and wonder that critics registered in their articles were due in part to the novelty of multicoloured posters.⁵⁶ Rather than the exquisite detail of a woodcut or engraving, the subtle tonalities of an aquatint or the feathery lines of an etching, the poster is characterized by its bold designs, usually consisting of flat blocks of vibrant colour. Although at the end of the nineteenth century, many professional lithographers included spatter (*crachis*), scratchings and variegated textures that bore witness to their artisanal skill, these flourishes were usually not included for the pedestrian who merely glimpsed them in passing, but added instead for the poster lover who sought out well-crafted examples in the streets or *amateurs* who had recently started to collect posters despite their fragility and large size.⁵⁷

The poster was often referred to as a *tire-l’oeil*, a term that designated the *affiche* as the focus of a directed gaze, in part because of its arresting colours.⁵⁸ Many critics used the metaphor of loud and dissonant sounds to describe the often-glaring visual effects of posters, and they noticed as well that poster designers deliberately manipulated colour in order to ‘call out’ to the passerby. The complementary colours of Jules Chéret’s early posters provide examples of clashing tonalities that were rarely used in paintings and prints of the time [3]. Posters were described as rowdy (*tapageuse*), uproarious (*tintamarresque*) and loud (*criard*), all terms that carried associations with gaudy



Fig 3. Jules Chéret, *Folies-Bergère / do mi sol do / Les Hanlon-Lees*, 1878. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes. BNF: DC-329 (2)-FOL, MFILM G39015. Cliché courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

colours.⁵⁹ Thus, critics used language that alluded to the aural as well as the visual experience of viewing posters in order to suggest the eye-catching, clashing tones of posters that not only arrested vision but also mimicked the loud clamour of activity in city streets. Some writers even remarked that the colourful tones of posters were 'explosive' or had the visual effect of firecrackers. The anarchist writer and art critic Félix Fénéon (1861–1944) went so far as to describe the colours of posters as more potent than 'dynamite', a deliberate reference to the recent bombings in Paris, which he used to evoke the politically-charged role that he envisioned for the poster.⁶⁰ The *littérateur* Camille Lemonnier (1844–1913) continued this analogy by claiming that

posters, ‘the symbol of our fin-de-siècle life’, were ‘made-up, ostentatious, eye-catching “cons”’ (*attrape-nigauds*) that ‘lit up and set ablaze’ the street and presented the *passant* with an ‘illusion and divine deceit’ that entered ‘the soul through the eyes’.⁶¹

The ubiquity and exaggerated visuality of the poster was noted as early as the 1850s. The author Victor Fournel (1829–1894) devoted an entire section to posters in his *Ce qu’on voit dans les rues de Paris*, a book intended as a guide for the dandy (or *flâneur*).⁶² Like other critics, Fournel noticed the ‘dazzling tints’ and designs that could ‘stop you in a thoroughfare in the driving rain’. According to Fournel, it was impossible to pass ‘indifferently before these little squares of red paper and immense parallelograms of yellow, that call out to you all at once, at the bend of the street: YOU THERE!’⁶³ In this characterization Fournel gave the poster itself a voice with which to beckon to and appellate the passerby. According to Fournel the poster’s ability to enrapture the city dweller was not simply due to its eye-catching colours, but to its pervasive, even aggressive, presence in the city. He wrote:

Nowadays, Paris is nothing more than an immense wall of posters, studded from chimney to pavement with squares of paper of all colours and sizes . . . a gigantic bazaar where advertising lies in wait for you on all the sidewalks, stops you, besieges you, hunts you down, snatches you by the eyes and ears, sneaks in your pocket, sits down in your theatre box, follows you home [. . .] sometimes comes out of the ground like a jack-in-the-box, and doesn’t even leave you alone in the water closet.⁶⁴

His account captured the perception of the poster as an object that epitomized a particularly pernicious, even insatiable, form of commercial culture that explicitly called attention to itself and went so far as to stalk the hapless passerby who was seen as its unwitting prey.⁶⁵

Many posters make this direct appeal to the gaze of the *passant* by representing a figure that directly confronts the imagined viewer; many even depict figures that seem to lunge out of the composition into the space of the viewer, as does a poster announcing the publication of *Le Titi*, a satirical journal (1878) [4].⁶⁶ An early woodcut poster by Jean-Alexis Rouchon (1794–1878), *A L’OEIL* (1864) [5], depicts simply a disembodied eye that stares directly out at the viewer with text printed above and below the image pointing out the prices for men’s clothing.⁶⁷ This type of poster was constructed to appeal to the mobile glance of the passerby, as designers knew that the attention of the potential consumer had to be captured within a passing instant.

One of the first sustained studies published in France on the effectiveness of advertising and its anticipated effect on spectators was published by Emile Mermet (1831–1904).⁶⁸ Writing in his 1878 practical guide to effective publicity, *La Publicité en France*, Mermet advised businessmen to harness this new publicity medium when the illustrated colour advertising poster was still in its infancy and explained the criteria for creating a successful poster: ‘The poster should first of all lure the eye, then fix (*attacher*) the gaze and finally fascinate the passerby in such a way as to completely engross his attention and divert his thoughts from everything else surrounding [him].’⁶⁹ Mermet equally claimed that the poster, more than any other kind of publicity, had the ability to enrapture viewers because, as he claimed, it knew how ‘to hit you in the eyes and attract the gazes of all passersby without exception’.⁷⁰ According to Mermet, who is writing from the point of view of someone analysing the profit-making potential of advertising posters, the sole purpose of the *affiche* is to halt the potential viewer and focus attention



Fig 4. *Le Titi*, Journal Hebdomadaire Politique Satirique Illustré, c. 1878, Imp Émile Lévy. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, ENT DN-1 (LÉVY, Émile) FT 6, MFILM COUL W-2565. Cliché courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

on its promotional message. The ideal viewer for these colourful and boldly-designed posters, at least according to this business manual, was an almost unwitting passerby who would be vulnerable to the poster's appeal of visual culture and predictable in his response to simple visual stimuli. Thus, the purpose of design and colour was to help the poster fulfil its promotional role, which, in Mermet's estimation, was to manipulate the vision of the viewer and to cause an image of the commodity to be insinuated into his or her memory.

By the dawn of the 'golden age' of the poster, its means of attracting attention had become well known. Although *littérateurs* and art critics noted the artistic appeal of the poster, their descriptions of the viewing experience engendered by posters clearly echoed the ideas of Mermet, the editor and publisher, written more than a

Fig 5. Jean-Alexis Rouchon, *A L'OEIL*, 8 Rue de Rivoli, Rue Malher, 1 et roi du Sicile. 1 [. . .] *On donne à l'oeil* [. . .] *A L'OEIL* 1864. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, ENT-DN 1 (Rouchon, Jean Alexis/ 11)-Roul. Cliché courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France



decade earlier. In 1889 Victor Champier (1851–1929), a fine arts critic and advocate for the decorative arts, maintained that in order for the poster to ‘obtain the effects of frankness, movement, and energy that comprise this type of print’, it had to ‘transform itself according to the demands of its environment’.⁷¹ According to Champier, the poster’s use of loud colours and generally ostentatious appearance were the very qualities that separated it from other genres of the print. Likewise, he credited designer Jules Chéret with having been the first to discover the rules of designing posters that had little detail but still conveyed movement and gestures with simple lines, as one would construct theatre backdrops.⁷² He wrote:

[. . .] in becoming the ‘poster’, [the print] transforms itself even more, increases its colour, puts on rouge like actors who must be seen from far away [. . .] [The poster]

should above all be sharply intelligible, arouse the nerves (*secouer les nerfs*) and violate the gaze (*violenter le regard*) with the very simple resources of lines and colours.⁷³

In Champier's estimation, the poster was a special type of print that expertly used its resources to fulfil its function within the urban thoroughfares by eschewing minute details and refined modelling that would appear busy and overly complicated when enlarged on a grand scale.

By the end of the century, commentary on the poster acknowledged not only the *extensive* nature of poster spectatorship but speculated that poster gazing invited new and mobile modes of perception, created and affected new audiences and stimulated unpredictable behaviours. Jean Finot (1858–1922), writing in *La Revue des Revues*, the periodical he edited, maintained that the poster grabbed the attention of the passerby and instigated a highly emotional state in its viewers. According to the author, a Chéret poster possessed the 'harmony' of 'brilliant and vibrant colours' in a design that 'stops the passerby, entrances him and enraptures him'. These designs, Finot stated, could spark 'a flash of lightning' in the eyes of the viewer and could be so difficult to resist that the viewer would literally be overcome and 'immobilize[d] for a few moments'.⁷⁴ Thus, Finot tried to recover a type of intensive viewing that would have countered extensive poster spectatorship.

The comments of these late nineteenth-century critics and their conception of the powerfully seductive poster image intersected with theories that were being developed contemporaneously in the field of French psychology regarding the subject of attention.⁷⁵ According to one of the leading theorists on the subject, French psychologist Théodule Ribot (1839–1916), attention was a 'fixed state' of mind especially marked by intensity, duration and a 'unity of consciousness'.⁷⁶ Attention, therefore, was a specific intellectual state that was focused on a particular object. Ribot's descriptions of 'spontaneous attention'—a rudimentary mental state—resonated with critical commentary devoted to poster spectatorship. According to Ribot, 'In cases of spontaneous attention the whole body converges—the eyes, the ears, sometimes the arms—toward its object; all movements are stayed. The personality is held fast, that is to say, all the individual's tendencies, all his disposable energy are directed upon the same point'.⁷⁷ The poster, according to many critics, could be created to serve as the object of intensely focused attention and to make a powerful impression on the mind of the beholder rather than simply be glimpsed when passing.⁷⁸

In his book *Suspensions of Perception* (1999), Jonathan Crary discusses the ways in which the nineteenth century witnessed a change in the conception of mental activity, and he examines in particular the problem of normative subjectivity and attention.⁷⁹ Crary says that 'ideas about perception and attention were transformed in the late nineteenth century alongside the emergence of new technological forms of spectacle, display, protection, attraction, and recording'.⁸⁰ In Crary's opinion, the contemporary concern over the relative inattentiveness of imagined nineteenth-century subjects was a direct result of modernization. He explains:

In attention, especially within the context of new forms of large-scale industrialized production, began to be treated as a danger and a serious problem, even though it was often the very modernized arrangements of labour that produced inattention. It is possible to see one crucial aspect of modernity as an ongoing crisis of attentiveness, in which the changing configurations of capitalism continually push attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an endless sequence of new products, sources of stimulation, and streams of information, and then respond with new methods of managing and regulating perception.⁸¹

Therefore, the constant shifting back and forth between focused attention and oblivious distraction was a historically determined type of subjectivity. In a capitalist system, the late nineteenth-century viewing subject's attention was constantly being attracted by new stimulations and yet expected to remain focused during the most grindingly repetitive factory work. As Crary states, 'Part of the logic of capitalism demands that we accept as *natural* switching our attention rapidly from one thing to another'.⁸²

Commentators writing about mass-produced posters seem to have been keenly aware of the late nineteenth-century 'crisis of attention' and were ever mindful of the manner in which posters were designed to disrupt a distracted state of mind and to cause a spectator to focus his attention on the image. Many critics credited posters with possessing an aesthetic that could arrest, stimulate and shock a viewer into a heightened, more focused mental state. The mode of spectatorship elicited by posters presupposed as its viewing subject a city resident who was forever asked to shift his attention to yet another visually striking poster that left him immobilized and completely engaged—an experience that parallels Crary's description of the modern subject. Few writers spoke to the negative effects of this mode of spectatorship although many wrote about the potential moral consequences of viewing sexualized images contained in posters.⁸³

Conclusion

In the end, the appeal to the emotions of the viewer and potentially manipulative force of the poster were seemingly the qualities that Sontag found to dismiss it as a degraded industrial object. With its origins traced to the common and contemporary streets, its textual manifestos linked to revolution and civil unrest, its illustrated form based in commerce and its spectatorship allied to the popular crowd and the uninformed, often gullible individual, the poster has often been relegated to the status of marginalized stepchild of the print.⁸⁴ Printed on cheap paper and meant to be viewed for a few days until sun, wind and rain would fade its colours and leave only remnants, the illustrated poster could never satisfy the demands of careful study and intimate contemplation (intensive practices) that characterized deluxe print connoisseurship or reading of literature.

By the time Sontag wrote about the poster in the 1970s, it was possible to dismiss the poster as a retrograde, degenerate, 'parasitic', hackneyed form tainted by commodification.⁸⁵ In Sontag's view, the poster, under the totalizing presence of capitalism, was not the suitable medium to enact revolutionary change. These excursions into freedom of expression and the pasting of printed material in the public square seem today simply not the most relevant means of expression in the digital age where smart phones and social networking take precedent in political movements. The political poster had its moments of resurgence in the twentieth century during the two World Wars, the international student movement in the 1960s and the Solidarity movement in 1980s Poland. However, without a sense of public life and physical spaces in the city in which to distribute printed material, the poster's mode of consumption and viewership, which had defined its role in the modern period, appears to be in a state of decline in current Western European and North American societies. While there are still posters made for design competitions, print magazines and websites, the consumption of the poster no longer includes acting as a rallying point for mass audiences in the public square. The billboards along the sides of American highways transform the poster into a large scale, industrially produced 'print'—in the broad sense of the term as meaning an object made of ink on paper—but its spectatorship, conducted within individual automobiles and at speeds of sixty miles per hour or more, exaggerates the mobility of the viewer's gaze and allows them to be easily ignored beyond even the

most extensive reading practices of the pedestrian. Therefore, the possibility of the designed poster to enact social change on a large scale seems, as Sontag suggested, open to serious question in the post-modern global world.

Pedestrian, reader, viewer, urban dweller, neighbour—ultimately, these are designations with modern identifications and physical manifestations anchored in time and place that have been eclipsed by today's newer, dematerialized technologies and decentred identities. As I have argued, the Parisian streets of the 1880s and 1890s witnessed a crucial turning point in the history of the public space and the aesthetics of posters, namely, the transition of the experience of poster spectatorship from an intensive to an extensive activity, with the ordinary passerby literally inundated by visual stimuli. The *fin de siècle*, thus, in the midst of an explosion of publicity, witnessed the very beginnings of the decline of the poster as a political text for the crowd to read and the emerging dominance of the poster image for commerce.

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Notes

- 1 S. Sontag, 'Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity', in *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, M. Bierut, J. Helfand, S. Heller & R. Poynor (eds.), Allworth Press, New York, 1999. Orig. pub. in D. Stermer, *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Cuba*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1970, p. 196.
- 2 Sontag's essay focused on a general trend in modern poster design and commented on the connections between the poster's role as political propaganda (for example, when used by the Constructivists) and publicity. 'The advent of political posters may seem like a sharp break with the

original function of posters (promoting consumership). But the historical conditions which produced posters first as commercial advertising and later as political propaganda are intertwined'. Sontag, p. 202.

3 Sontag, p. 196.

4 For histories of the poster, see J. Barnicoat, *A Concise History of Poster, 1870–1970*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1972; P. D. Cate & S. Hitchings, *Color Revolution: Color Lithography in France 1890–1900*, Rutgers University Art Gallery, Brunswick, N. J., 1978; Cate, *The Graphic Arts and French Society 1871–1914*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N. J., 1988 and 'The French Poster, 1868–1900',

- American Posters of the 1890s in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1987; M. Constantine & A. Fern, *Word and Image: Posters from the Museum of Modern Art*, MoMA, New York, 1968; M. Gallo, *The Poster in History*, A. & B. Maylor (trans.), American Heritage Pub. Co., New York, 1974; H. Hutchison, *The Poster, an Illustrated History from 1860*, Viking Press, New York, 1968 (a source Sontag quotes extensively); A. Weill, *The Poster: A Worldwide Survey and History*, G. K. Hall, Boston, 1984; and S. Wrede, *The Modern Poster*, Museum of Modern Art, distributed by New York Graphic Society Books and Little, Brown and Co., New York and Boston, 1988. Although not a history of the poster per se, P. Meggs and A. Purvis, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, 4th edn, John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, N. J., 2006, surveys important contributions to poster design throughout history. For histories of the French poster that were written during the *fin de siècle*, see A. Alexandre, M. H. Spielmann, H. C. Bunner & A. Jaccaci, *The Modern Poster*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1895; and especially E. Maindron, 'Les Affiches illustrées', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 2nd ser., vol. 30, Nov. 1884, pp. 419–33 and Dec. 1884, pp. 535–47; Maindron, *Les Affiches illustrées*, H. Launette & Cie., Paris, 1886 and *Les Affiches illustrées 1886-1895*, Boudet, Paris, 1896.
- 5 The literature on Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec is too extensive to summarize here except for a few key sources: C. Ives, *Pierre Bonnard, The Graphic Art*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1989 and R. Thomson, P. D. Cate & M. W. Chapin, *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., 2005. For information about Jules Chéret, see especially B. Collins, *Jules Chéret and the Nineteenth-Century French Poster*, UMI Press, Ann Arbor, 1980 (PhD diss., Yale University) and 'The Poster as Art: Jules Chéret and the Struggle for the Equality of the Arts in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *Design Issues*, vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1985, pp. 41–50, reprinted in *Design History: An Anthology*, D. Doordan (ed.), MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995. A new *catalogue raisonné* of Chéret's posters and decorative murals has greatly supplemented the scholarly material on this important poster designer: R. Bargiel & S. Le Men, *La Belle Époque de Jules Chéret, De l'affiche au décor*, Les Arts Décoratifs et Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, 2010.
 - 6 D. Ades, *Posters: The 20th Century Poster—Design of the Avant-Garde*, D. Ades (ed.), Abbeville Press, New York, 1984, p. 25.
 - 7 The focus on the spectatorship and reception of posters in this article does not negate but, rather, augments the research conducted on the technological factors that influenced the rise of the colour poster.
 - 8 Only a few sources on the printing technology used for *fin de siècle* posters will be listed here. For histories in English about lithographic printing in the nineteenth century, see, for example, D. Porzio (ed.), *Lithography: 200 Years of Art, History, and Technique*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1983; P. Marzio, *The Democratic Art, Pictures for a 19th-Century America: Chromolithography, 1840-1900*, David R. Godine, Boston & Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, TX, 1979; J. T. Last, *The Color Explosion: Nineteenth-Century American Lithography*, Hillcrest Press, Santa Ana, CA, 2005. For a thorough guide of photomechanical printing in the same era, see E. Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century*, R. R. Bowker, New York, 1974. For information about the creation and printing of colour lithographs, see the now classic guide G. Antreasian with C. Adams, *The Tamarind Book of Lithography: Art and Techniques*, Tamarind Workshops Inc., Los Angeles and Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1971 and the updated version by M. Devon, *Tamarind Techniques for Fine Art Lithography*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2009. For a summary of the 1881 Press Law (including *liberté de l'affichage*) and its subsequent revisions until 1900, see C. Bellanger & J. Godechot (eds.), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol. 3: 1871-1940, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1972, pp. 7–26.
 - 9 Sontag, p. 196. Although Sontag makes the distinction between the public announcement—used simply for information—and the poster—utilized for commercial persuasion, most French historians of the poster do not make this distinction. If anything, the French term for the poster—*l'affiche*—has broader connotations and may be used to designate a wider variety of objects and media than its English equivalent. The *affiche* was defined in the nineteenth century as 'a hand written or printed sheet [of paper] displayed in a public place, usually on walls, for making an event known to the public'. *La Grande encyclopédie*, H. Lamirault, Paris, n.d. [1886–1902], p. 685. This definition extends back to the seventeenth century: 'Affiche: Placard, Feuille écrite ou imprimée, que l'on affiche', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1st edn (1694), cited in ARTFL, Dictionnaires d'autrefois <<http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/>>. The French term, then, can be used to designate *affiches de papier*, posters printed on paper; *petites affiches*, announcements published in the press; *affiches peintes*, large advertisements painted on the sides of buildings or on gabled rooftops (*murs pignons*); and *affiches lunimeuses*, billboards illuminated by electric bulbs or signs with flashing neon lights. In France, the poster could serve as an announcement issued by the government, advertising posted by individuals and companies and, starting in the nineteenth century, electoral notices that were distributed prior to elections. Therefore, the French poster had a history as a hybrid form without any prescribed physical qualities that defined it as an object except for its *public display*.
 - 10 While this spectatorship of posters no doubt had parallels in cities in North America and across Europe and could equally

- be extended to a variety of cultural forms such as window displays, printed pamphlets and newspaper illustrations, the focus of this essay is the reception (not production or printing) of the poster in the city of Paris in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Nor is this essay intended to survey an encyclopaedic history of the poster. For a recent examination of publicity in similar contexts, see C. Wischermann and E. Shore, *Advertising and the European City: Historical Perspectives* (Historical Urban Studies series) Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000. See also, H. Hahn, 'Boulevard Culture and Advertising as Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century Paris', in *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture Since 1500*, A. Cowan & J. Seward (eds.), Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007, pp. 156–75. For a general overview of publicity in nineteenth-century Paris, see Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009. For an examination of the culture of consumption in the same era, see L. Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001.
- 11 Critical historians have analysed this atomization of the individual. See R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1974. Walter Benjamin's essays on Charles Baudelaire, for example, explore this acutely modern awareness of the withering of public space as a consequence of the commercialization of the city. Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 2006. Sontag's reappraisal of Benjamin's theories of photography have been documented elsewhere. For a recent appraisal, see G. F. Mitrano, 'The Photographic Imagination: Sontag and Benjamin', *Post Script*, vol. 26, no. 2, Winter–Spring 2007, pp. 117–136. Clearly Sontag's engagement with Benjamin's concept of the reception and circulation of images under capital extended far beyond the media of photography and cinema.
 - 12 See G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, The University of Chicago Press, 1971.
 - 13 According to Maindron, printed posters were used in France for public announcements after 1539 following the medieval period when *criage* (the chanting or shouting of public announcements or commercial solicitations) predominated for the dissemination of information. E. Maindron, *Les Affiches illustrées*, H. Launette, Paris, 1886, pp. 7, 11. For a history of *colportage* and *criage* in France, see Massin [aka Claude Menuet], *Les cris de la ville: Commerces ambulants et petits métiers de la rue*, Albert Michel, Paris, 1985. For a recent exhibition that explores the sale of popular printed images and broadsides by itinerant vendors in the nineteenth century, see Musée de l'image, Ville d'Épinal, *Sur les routes*, Épinal, France, 2010. Thomas Cragin's scholarship documents the practice of *colportage* in regards to broadsides in the nineteenth century; see his 'The Failings of Popular News Censorship in Nineteenth-Century France', *Book History*, vol. 4, 2001, pp. 49–80 and *Murder in Parisian Streets: Manufacturing Crime and Justice in the Popular Press, 1830-1900*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, PA, 2006. According to S. Le Men, the imagery of French publicity posters can be traced to painted backdrops displayed at popular fairs (*foires*). See S. Le Men, *Seurat et Chéret: Le peintre, le cirque et l'affiche*, CNRS, Paris, 1994. For an examination of small bookstore posters of the mid nineteenth-century, see R. Bargiel & S. Le Men, *L'affiche de librairie au XIX^e siècle, Les Dossier du Musée d'Orsay*, vol. 13, Editions des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1987.
 - 14 D. Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, Routledge, New York and London, 2003. For information on so-called street furniture (*mobilier urbain*), see especially M. de Thézy, *Paris, la rue: Le mobilier urbain du second Empire à nos jours*, Société des Amis de la Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Paris, 1976.
 - 15 L. Mogues, 'Le Mur et l'affiche', *L'Événement*, 22 Sept. 1889, p. 2. While difficult to quantify the exact number of posters distributed annually, the *Annuaire statistique de la France* in 1895 documented that over twelve and a half million poster stamps for *affiches imprimées* (not *affiches peintes*) were sold in the year 1892, *Annuaire statistique de la France*, vol. 6, 1895–1896, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, p. 494.
 - 16 Victor Fournel provides a cogent expression of the heightened visibility of posters in the midst of Haussmannization, as discussed later in this paper. For information on Haussmannization and its effect on the cultural life of Paris, see D. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann*, University of Chicago Press, 1995; N. Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878-1978*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979; T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Princeton University Press, 1984; P. Lavedan, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris: Histoire de l'urbanisme à Paris*, Hachette, Paris, 1975; F. Loyer, *Paris XIX^e siècle, L'immeuble et la rue*, Hazan, Paris, 1987, translated as *Paris Nineteenth Century: Architecture and Urbanism*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1988; P. de Moncan & C. Heurteux, *Le Paris d'Haussmann*, Editions du Mécène, Paris, 2002; and D. van Zanten, *Architectural Institutions and the Transformation of the French Capital, 1830-1870*, Cambridge University Press, 1994. For the renovation of Paris after the Second Empire, see J. des Cars & P. Pinon, *Paris-Haussmann, 'Le Pari d'Haussmann'*, Edition du Pavillon de l'Arsenal, Paris, 1991; D. Jordan, 'Haussmann and Haussmannisation: The Legacy for Paris', *French Historical Studies*, Winter 2004, pp. 87–113; and S. Texier (ed.), *Voies publiques: Histoires et pratiques de l'espace public à Paris*, Editions du Pavillon de l'Arsenal, Paris, 2006.
 - 17 De Thézy documents that *urinoirs* with poster kiosks were present in Paris as early as 1839, *Paris, la rue*, op. cit., p. 63. The placement, however, of kiosks and urinals with publi-

- city along boulevards intensified in the late nineteenth century due to the renovations.
- 18 Van Zanten states that under Haussmannization the new spaces of Paris—the widened gaps in the cityscape created by the ‘piercing’ of boulevards and razing of older property—were interspersed with trees, benches, urinals and kiosks for posters, ‘which otherwise would have found their way to building walls’, *Architectural Institutions*, op. cit., p. 216.
 - 19 De Thézy, p. 38. For more information about the Union photographique française, see Archives de Paris, *Paris la rue, un autre 1900*, Direction des affaires culturelles, Archives de Paris, 2000.
 - 20 An analysis of the display of publicity posters in working class neighbourhoods will be forthcoming in K. L. Carter, *The Poor Man’s Art Gallery: Posters, Politics and the Boundaries of Art in Paris, 1880-1900*.
 - 21 According to Ernest Maindron, the city of Paris began leasing *murs pignons* for publicity in 1884, Maindron, Paris, 1886.
 - 22 With the introduction of public transportation, some of these expectations changed as posters were displayed in omnibuses and trains as well as bus stops and subway stations (after 1900). Posters were also exhibited in private spaces—such as theatres—but the commentary found for the period 1880 to 1900 referred overwhelmingly to the experience of viewing posters in the streets of Paris.
 - 23 Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, op. cit., pp. 36–8.
 - 24 For example, E. Mermet (discussed below) claimed: ‘A well-made poster that knows how to stop the passerby will make the product that it advertises immediately popular’, *La Publicité en France: guide pratique annuaire pour 1878*, A. Chaix et Cie, Paris, 1878, ‘Chapter III, Affiches et prospectus’, p. 64. The *passant*, or passerby, was a fairly banal and unremarkable figure who nonetheless was representative of society at large and firmly rooted in the urban locale. For an early characterization of the *passant*, see P. J. Stahl (aka Pierre Jules Hetzel, 1814-1886), ‘Les Passants à Paris, Ce que c’est qu’un passant’, in *Le Diable à Paris, Paris et les Parisiens*, Michael Levy frères, Paris, 1857, pp. 45–9: ‘Un passant est quelqu’un qui ressemble à tout le monde et qui ne se peut distinguer de personne . . . Il n’y a de passants qu’à Paris’.
 - 25 R. Darnton, ‘First Steps Toward a History of Reading’, in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, J. Machor & P. Goldstein (eds.), Routledge, New York, 2001, orig. pub. in *Australian Journal of French Studies*, no. 23, 1986, pp. 5–30. The reception of reading has been undoubtedly influenced by Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image-Music-Text*, S. Heath (trans.), Fontana, London, 1977.
 - 26 For late eighteenth-century political posters with images, see A. Gesgon, *Sur les Murs de France: Deux Siècles d’affiches politiques*, Editions du Sorbier, Paris, 1979; A. Gesgon, *La Mémoire murale politique des français de la Renaissance à nos jours*, Paris, 1984; and L. Gervereau, *La Propagande par l’affiche*, Syros-Alternatives, Paris, 1991.
 - 27 Darnton, ‘First Steps’, op. cit., p. 167.
 - 28 For an depiction of crowds reading posters in the streets, see F. Meaulle, *Le Manifest du Prince Napoléon: La lecture des affiches, le 15 janvier, sur les murs de Paris*. Cover of *L’Illustration* (January 27, 1883).
 - 29 Certainly other types of images in colour had been available before but neither printed in the same large scale nor in such large quantities. For information about smaller bookstore posters (printed in a more limited range of colours) displayed in shop windows of 1830s and 1840s France, see R. Bargiel & S. Le Men, *L’affiche de librairie au XIX^e siècle, Les Dossier du Musée d’Orsay*, vol. 13, Editions des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1987.
 - 30 Gervereau, *La Propagande*, op. cit., p. 49.
 - 31 Darnton, ‘First Steps’, op. cit., p. 166.
 - 32 This observation assumes the same effects described by Simmel in 1903. I have elected to use the male pronoun here because the critical discourse on posters, written predominantly by men, tended to portray the *passant* as masculine and rarely acknowledged the female spectator of posters except in extreme circumstances, such as the censorship of posters.
 - 33 E. Straus, ‘Psychie des Affiches’, *La Critique*, 5 Dec. 1895, pp. 145–7 and ‘Des Affiches’, *La Critique*, 20 Aug. 1896, pp. 124–8.
 - 34 Indeed, the Revolution marked the first time in French history that posters could be distributed without prior consent as three successive laws—dating from 1789, 1790 and 1791—permitted the posting of newspaper pages and political *placards* on public walls. These revolutionary governments were able to establish freedom of the press for short durations.
 - 35 C. Jouhard, ‘Readability and Persuasion: Political Handbills’, in R. Chartier (ed.), *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, L. Cochrane (trans.), Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 235.
 - 36 D. Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, Berg, New York, 1987, p. 229.
 - 37 Roche, p. 230. According to Roche, the majority of announcements posted were proclamations distributed by the Crown, the Church or the local police. Wedding and death announcements would have been interspersed with these official *placards* on the walls of Paris.
 - 38 According to Roche, the police also searched walls for seditious material in the eighteenth century, Roche, p. 230.

- 39 Roche, p. 228. Roche claims that the proliferation of political posters in the pre-revolutionary period was somewhat limited; however, two key episodes occurred in the years 1725–30, during the ‘Jansenist troubles’, and 1768–75, during a period of economic and political crisis, p. 230.
- 40 Although collective reading, was the rule rather than the exception in eighteenth-century France, no other reading environment offered the same experience as did the reading of posters in the streets. Public libraries offered the lending of books and spaces to read, but rarely possessed the same types of daily and weekly newspapers that were posted on walls. See R. Chartier, ‘Urban Reading and Practices, 1660–1780’, in *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 183–239. For information about the consumption of periodicals in Revolutionary France, see J. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789–1799*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1990.
- 41 For an examination of the conservative policies at the beginning of the Third Republic, see J-M. Mayeur & M. Rebérioux, *The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, 1871–1914*, J. R. Foster (trans.), Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- 42 For an examination of the role of the Parisian police in suppressing political posters and the crowds that gathered around them, see K. L. Carter, ‘The Spectre of Working-Class Crowds’.
- 43 Gervereau, *La Propagande*, op. cit., p. 49.
- 44 The *lois scélérates* were three separate laws passed in 1893 and 1894 in the wake of several recent bombings and the assassination of President Carnot. Designed to crack down on anarchist activity, the first law forbade the incitement of criminal acts, the second proscribed association with those intending to do harm and the third law—especially pertinent for the distribution of political posters—‘prohibited anarchist propaganda “by any means whatever”’. J. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988, p. 271.
- 45 G. Fustier, ‘La Littérature murale: Essai sur les affiches littéraires en France’, *Le Livre*, 10 Nov. 10 1884, p. 337. ‘L’affiche, aujourd’hui, règne en maîtresse sur tous les murs, sur les monuments publics eux-mêmes, la voici s’étalant, éclatante, bariolée, tirant l’oeil du passant auquel elle promet monts et merveilles’.
- 46 Straus, ‘Psychie’, op. cit., p. 145. ‘Mais en dehors de la facilité technique, il est ardu de faire l’affiche, conception intégrale et retenante, séries de rythmes et colorations savantes, exécutées logiquement pour harponner l’oeil’.
- 47 French practitioners in the various industries related to advertising did not seem to have the same degree of professional identity as that of their American counterparts. According to historian Marc Martin, publicity in France lagged behind America and England and there was a larger cultural hostility to publicity in general. See M. Martin, *Trois siècles de publicité en France*, Editions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1992, p. 122+. According to Martin, the first publications devoted to the ‘profession’ of advertising—rather than a history of publicity (i.e., P. Datz, *Histoire de la publicité depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à nos jours*, J. Rothschild, Paris, 1894) or a summary of advertising techniques included in a printing manual (i.e., Mermet)—and the systematic study of the most effective techniques did not appear until the early years of the twentieth century; the journal *La Publicité moderne*, (Paris, 1905–1909), the first treatise on publicity published in France, J. Arren, *La Publicité lucrative et raisonnée*, Bibl. des ouvrages pratiques, Paris, 1909 (Martin, pp. 151–2) and the only full-length study of publicity in the French press published before 1914, H. Vathelet, *La Publicité dans le journalisme*, A. Michel, Paris, n.d. [1911] (Martin, p. 151). Given this cultural prejudice towards publicity in France, the commentary on posters, most of it positive in tone, presents us with a remarkable collection of insights.
- 48 For an analysis of the poet as art critic, see D. Scott, *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- 49 The emphasis in this essay on the reception, rather than the production, of graphic design is a response to Victor Margolin’s demand for design studies to conceptualize design as a ‘creative act’ in which the reactions of participants are taken into account: ‘Reader-response theory can also play an important role in understanding the way consumers or users of design establish a relation to objects in ways other than the ones marketing studies reveal’. V. Margolin, ‘Introduction’, *Design Discourse: History/Theory/Criticism*, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 9. The responses of late nineteenth-century writers documented here, which predate the professionalism of design in France, are evidence of both the wonder of looking at large-scale colour images in the streets and fear among writers of the decline in taste for literature.
- 50 For the uses of the newspaper and poster as a model for Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dès*, see A. Arnar, ‘“A Modern Popular Poem”: Stéphane Mallarmé on the Visual, Rhetorical and Democratic Potentials of the Fin-de-Siècle Newspaper’, *Word and Image*, vol. 22, no. 4, Oct.–Dec. 2006, pp. 304–26. For a thorough analysis of the responses of writers and intellectuals to the new mass media, see W. Adamson, *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism’s Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007.
- 51 This contrast of reading texts and viewing images was used in particular in reference to posters that had been accused of spreading immorality through images. See G. Geffroy, ‘Chronique: Censure ministérielle’, *La Justice*, 28 September 1888.

- 52 Roger Marx claimed in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue that accompanied Chéret's first retrospective in 1889 that the viewing of his posters in the streets would contribute to the 'subconscious education of public taste' (*l'éducation inconsciente du goût public*). R. Marx, *Exposition de pastels, lithographies, dessins, affiches illustrées de Jules Chéret*, Galeries du Théâtre d'Application, Paris, 1889, p. 11.
- 53 A writer identified as D'Arnach wrote that publicity utilized different methods 'of attracting the gaze of the passerby, of making something memorable by surprising his eyes, of persuading the buyer'. D'Arnach, 'Annonce-réclame et publicité', *Revue universelle des inventions nouvelles*, 20 Nov. 1894, p. 433. 'Mais les manières d'attirer l'oeil du passant, de fixer sa mémoire en frappant ses yeux, de persuader l'acheteur, de lui faire connaître l'endroit où il trouvera le produit qu'il cherche, meilleur, plus sain, moins cher et plus élégant que partout ailleurs sont nombreuses et variées' (italics are in the original). The second half of the article was published in the 5 Dec. 1894 issue on pp. 481–85.
- 54 The connections (or rather, causal link) between the work of poster designers in *fin de siècle* France and the poster criticism published at the time is a subject that still needs to be explored.
- 55 Many writers at the time discussed the psychic effects of viewing poster imagery in the streets. For particularly vivid descriptions of the ability of the poster to break through the malaise of the viewer, see D'Arnach; 'F.' [Jean Finckelhaus Finot], 'Les Maîtres de l'affiches en France,' *La Revue des Revues*, 1 Feb. 1896, p. 234; É. Mermet, *La Publicité en France; guide pratique annuel pour 1878*, A Chaix et Cie, Paris, 1878, 'Chapter III, Affiches et prospectus', p. 66 and V. Champier, 'L'Exposition des affiches illustrées de M. Jules Chéret', *Revue des arts décoratifs*, 1889–1890, p. 255 (the last three are discussed below).
- 56 For more information about colour printing technology at the end of the nineteenth century, see P. D. Cate, *The Color Revolution*, Rutgers University Art Gallery, New Brunswick, NJ, 1978; E. Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts*, R. R. Bowker, New York, 1974 and Meggs & Purvis, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, op. cit.
- 57 There were, nevertheless, many poster collectors during this period and specialized literature devoted to the subject—*L'Estampe et l'affiche*, *The Poster* (London), *The Poster and Postcard Collector*. For an examination of poster collecting and exhibition, see K. L. Carter, *L'Age de l'affiche: The Reception, Display and Collection of Posters in Fin-de-siècle Paris*, UMI Press, Ann Arbor (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001).
- 58 The architect Charles Garnier (1825–1898), in a written rant about posters spoiling the architecture of Paris called them 'barbaric *tire l'oeil[s]* that immediately destroy the uniformity of the proportions that have been imposed with the utmost rigor'. C. Garnier, 'Les Affiches agaçantes', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 4, Dec. 1871, p. 492.
- 59 For example, Emile Leclerc described posters exhibited in the streets as 'fanfare éclatante', an exclamation that suggested both the garishness of colour in posters as well as the clatter of noise, E. Leclerc, 'Affiches Parisiennes', *Le Parisien de Paris*, 15 August 1897, p. 501.
- 60 F. Fénéon, 'Chez les barbouilleurs: Les affiches en couleurs', *Le Père peinarde*, 30 April 1893, reprinted in J. Halperin (ed.), *Félix Fénéon, Oeuvres plus que complètes*, Droz, Geneva, 1970, p. 230.
- 61 C. Lemonnier, 'Quelques opinions sur les affiches illustrées,' *La Plume*, 15 Nov. 15 1893, p. 497. '[. . .] le symbole de notre vie fin-de-siècle, maquillée, clinquant, tape-à-l'oeil, attrape-nigauds; c'est non seulement la Rue qui s'allume et flambe et grouille comme un cinquième acte de féerie [. . .] C'est encore l'illusion pour tous et pour rien, un peu de songe et de divin mensonge entré par les yeux jusqu'à l'âme, le Louvre, à l'art des Solitaires et des Mandarins ce que le gros numéro est à l'amour'. The author would like to thank Anna Arnar for pointing out this reference.
- 62 V. Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris*, E. Dentu, Paris, 1867; orig. pub. 1858.
- 63 Fournel, op. cit., pp. 302–3. 'Tout cela ne vaut pas encore les affiches: c'est dans cette partie flottante et mobile, qui se renouvelle sans cesse, que triomphe la génie de l'industrialisme . . . Jusqu'on n'y a-t-on pas poussé l'éloquence typographique, les séductions de la vignette, les fascinations de la couleur, usant des teintes les plus variées et les plus éclatantes pour prêter un appui perfide aux ruses de la rédaction! Combien de chefs-d'oeuvre d'artificieuse éloquence, combinés par l'esprit sagace d'un commerçant aux abois, le colleur placarde tous les matins et le chiffonnier enlève tous les soirs! N'avez-vous jamais rencontré de ces affiches intelligentes et animées, vrais tableaux de genre, qui vous arrêtent au passage par une pluie battante, au milieu de la boue et des passant, fussiez-vous en retard de vingt minute sur l'heure du dîner? Le moyen de passer indifférent devant de petits carrés de papier rouge ou d'immense parallélogrammes de papier jaune, qui vous crient tout à coup, au détour d'une rue: HALTE-LA!'
- 64 Fournel, op. cit., p. 315. 'Paris n'est plus guère aujourd'hui qu'un immense mur à affiches, constellé, depuis les cheminées jusqu'aux trottoirs, de carrés de papier de toute couleur et de tout format, sans parler des simples inscriptions, qui néanmoins ont souvent leur mérite; un gigantesque bazar, où la réclame vous guette sur tous les trottoirs, vous arrête, vous assiège, vous traque et vous happe par les yeux ou par les oreilles, se faufile dans votre poche, s'assied dans votre stalle au théâtre, vous poursuit chez vous, se déguise en pierrot ou en débardeur pour mieux attraper, se met au besoin en musique, sort partout de dessous terre comme un

- diable d'une boîte à surprise, et ne lâche même pas prise dans les *water closet*'.
- 65 Other essays testify to the poster's invasiveness and aggressiveness. F. Champsaur, 'Jules Chéret', *L'Événement*, 19 Sept. 1889; L. Mogues, 'Le Mur et l'affiche', *L'Événement*, 22 Sept. 1889, p. 2; H. Béraldi, *Les graveurs du XIXe siècle: guide de l'amateur d'estampes*, Lame, Nogent-le-Roi, 1981 [orig. 1885–92], vol. 3, pp. 18–19; G. d'Avenel, 'La Publicité: Les Affiches', *Le Mécanisme de la vie moderne*, vol. 4, Librairie Armand Colin, Paris, 1902, pp. 177–78, orig. pub. in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 Feb. 1901.
- 66 *Le Titi, Journal Hebdomadaire Politique Satirique Illustrée*, c. 1878, Imp. Émile Lévy. Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, affiches entoilées, séries AA, auteurs W002565.
- 67 J.-A. Rouchon, *A L'OEIL, 8 Rue de Rivoli, Rue Malher, 1 et roi du Sicile. 1 [. . .] On donne à l'oeil [. . .] A L'OEIL*, 1864. Rouchon is usually credited with enlarging the dimensions of the exterior poster and using vibrant colours throughout the design, but he can equally be acclaimed as the innovator who used images in posters to sell products instead of simply describing them in text-based *placards*. His posters are produced by the same colour relief printing that was also used to manufacture wall paper (*papier peint*).
- 68 From 1880 to 1891 Mermet served as the editor of *L'Annuaire de la presse française*, a publication that documented the editorial staff and specific information, including political affiliation, of each newspaper or journal published in France for the year given.
- 69 E. Mermet, *La Publicité en France: guide pratique annuaire pour 1878*, A Chaix et Cie, Paris, 1878, 'Chapter III, Affiches et prospectus', p. 63. 'L'Affiche forme avec l'Annonce et le Prospectus le complément indispensable de toute publicité faite avec intelligence. Si l'annonce s'adresse à un très-grand nombre de lecteurs, ce nombre est néanmoins limité, tandis que l'affiche de bien comprise saute aux yeux et attire les regards de tous les passants sans exception'. On the next page, Mermet states, 'A well-made poster that knows how to stop the passerby will make the product that it advertises immediately popular'. Mermet, op. cit., p. 64. 'Une affiche bien faite, originale, qui sait arrêter le passant, rend immédiatement populaire le produit qu'elle annonce'. Mermet used Honoré Daumier's *Charbon d'Ivry* poster as an example of successful advertising. Mermet published publicity manuals in 1879 and 1880. See also, his *La Presse, l'affichage et le colportage, histoire et jurisprudence, comprenant la nouvelle loi sur la presse du 21 juillet 1881*, Paris, C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1882. Mermet's research on the French press was continued by his successor as editor of *L'Annuaire de la presse française*.
- 70 Mermet, *La Publicité en France*, op. cit., p. 66. 'L'affiche doit d'abord attirer l'oeil, puis ensuite l'attacher, et enfin fasciner le passant de façon à absorber complètement son attention, et à détourner sa pensée de tous les objets environnants'.
- 71 V. Champier, 'L'Exposition des affiches illustrées de M. Jules Chéret', *Revue des arts décoratifs*, 1889-1890, p. 256. 'Pour peu l'on réfléchisse aux conditions matérielles dans lesquelles sont vues les affiches illustrées, et quelles fonctions elles remplissent, on s'explique à quelles lois d'optiques elles se trouvent soumises, et l'on devine qu'il a fallu chercher une forme particulière de dessin pour obtenir les effets de vérité, de mouvement, d'énergie que comporte ce genre d'estampe'. See, for example, R. Marx, *Exposition de [. . .] Chéret and 'L'Affiche et des Arts du Décor', L'Estampe et l'affiche*, 15 Nov. 1897, pp. 222–23. For a recent study of the criticism of Roger Marx, including his writing on the poster, see Musée des Beaux Arts, Nancy and Musée de l'École de Nancy, *Roger Marx, un critique aux côtés de Gallé, Monet, Rodin, Gauguin . . .*, Ville de Nancy et Editions Artlys, 2006.
- 72 Champier, op. cit., p. 257. ' . . . [l'affiche de Chéret] d'une dessin emporté et sommaire, néglige les détails, s'attache à un geste, à un mouvement, à une expression, et l'indique d'un trait juste et vigoureux. La première est une estampe banale, exécutée avec soin et exactement comme une image d'un livre. La seconde est comprise et traitée comme un décor de théâtre, en vue de l'effet à produire dans les conditions déterminées où elle est placée'.
- 73 Champier, op. cit., p. 256. 'Enfin, en devenant "affiche" elle se modifie encore, hausse le ton, se mets du rouge comme les auteurs pour être vus de loin, épice son langage, et fait vibrer sur les murailles, dans le tapage ahurissant des villes, au milieu des carrefours, ses boniments iconographiques, qui, s'adressant aux foules, doivent avant tout être nettement intelligibles, secouer les nerfs, et violenter le regard, avec les ressources très simples de lignes ou de couleurs'.
- 74 'F.' [Jean Finckelhaus Finot], 'Les Maîtres de l'affiches en France,' *La Revue des Revues*, 1 Feb. 1896, p. 234. 'Commençons par Jules Chéret, le créateur de l'affiche idéale qui, par son harmonie de couleurs vibrantes et éclatantes, par son dessin impeccable et plein d'entrain et d'un brio diabolique, arrête le passant, le fascine et l'enthousiasme. Essayez de résister à la joie de ces visages pleins d'une gaieté qui déborde, de cette gaieté contagieuse qui gagne les passants, allume des éclairs dans leurs yeux et les immobilise pendant quelques instants! Et cependant, c'est une joie plutôt philosophique, une joie étrange, qui, après m. Huysmans, ce triste parmi les tristes, tient de la pantomime, "de la joie que son excès même exhausse, en la rapprochant presque de la douleur"'. The article lists the author as 'F.' but, Roger Braun identified the author as Jean Finot. See R. Braun, *Bibliographie et Iconographie de l'Affiche illustrée*, Imprimerie Lefebvre-Ducrocq, Lille, 1908, p. 7. The entire bibliography is

- reprinted in *L’Affichomanie: Collectionneurs d’affiches, Affiches de collection, 1880–1900*, Musée de l’affiche, Paris, n.d. [1980].
- 75 For an examination of *fin de siècle* culture and French psychology, see D. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989. For the importance of French psychology to the professional ad men in France, see also M. Beale, *The Modernist Enterprise: French Elites and the Threat of Modernity, 1900–1940*, Stanford University Press, 1999. Many of the themes and concepts (such as the hypnotic power of the poster’s image) identified in this article became, according to Beale, entrenched in French publicity theory in the early twentieth century, Beale, op. cit., pp. 17–18. As she states: ‘Unlike their American counterparts, French ad men drew on philosophy [H. Bergson], often-antiquated theories from academic psychology [H. Bernheim], and other cultural sources to develop a home-grown science of persuasion’, Beale, op. cit., p. 7.
- 76 T. Ribot, *The Psychology of Attention*, J. Fitzgerald (trans.), The Humboldt Publishing Co., New York, 1889, pp. 1–3.
- 77 Ribot, op. cit., p. 3.
- 78 D’Arnach, Finot & Mermet, op. cit. See also H. Durand-Tahier, ‘Exposition des oeuvres de M. Jules Chéret’, *La Plume*, 1 January 1890: ‘Often without knowing the artist, everyone admires these invincibly attractive coloured advertisements, whose brilliance stops him gaping at street corners and crossroads, the pious pedestrian in ecstasy in front of an unpainted wall, a section of *hâtisse* or some enclosure of palisades . . .’ [Personne qui n’ait admiré (souvent sans en connaître l’auteur!) ces annonces colorées invinciblement attirantes, dont, léclat arrête béant aux coins de rues, aux carrefours, le passant piété en extase devant un mur nu, un pan de hâtisse ou quelque enclos de palissades . . .]
- 79 J. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999. See also G. Shaya, ‘The Flâneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860–1910’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 109, 1 Feb. 2004, pp. 41–77.
- 80 Crary, op. cit., p. 2.
- 81 Crary, op. cit., pp. 13–14.
- 82 Crary, op. cit., pp. 29–30.
- 83 K. L. Carter, ‘L’Age de l’affiche: Critics, Collectors and Urban Contexts’, in *Toulouse-Lautrec and the French Imprint: Sources and Legacies of Fin-de-Siècle Posters, Paris—Brussels—Barcelona*, P. D. Cate (cur. and ed.), Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Museum of Art, New Brunswick, NJ, 2005 and K. L. Carter, ‘Unfit for Public Display: Female Sexuality and the Censorship of Fin-de-Siècle Publicity Posters’, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, vol. 8, no. 2, June 2010. See also J. Clapp, *Art Censorship: A Chronology of Proscribed and Prescribed Art*, The Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ, 1972 and M. Rickards (ed.), *Banned Posters*, Adams and McKay, London, 1969.
- 84 According to Maurice Rickards, the marginal status of the poster was presumably the source of its fascination and subversive potential. Although a fan of the poster and an important advocate for the appreciation of ephemera, Maurice Rickards stated that the poster ‘remains by birth a guttersnipe. It is the Eliza Doolittle of the graphic arts’. Rickards, op. cit., p. 6.
- 85 Sontag, op. cit., p. 207.