

VISUAL INFORMATION: THE USES OF THE IMAGE

July 22, 2009

History of Information – Lecture 8 – Dan Perkel



Photography and comics in “mass society”

The rise of two mass cultural forms in the 19th
Century

Low art, high art, commercial art?

- “Why comics have not been invited to enter the cosy world conjured by that term [Art] is not difficult to explain. Throughout their history they have been perceived as intrinsically ‘commercial’, mass-produced for the lowest-common-denominator audience, and therefore automatically outside notions of artistic credibility... This is why comics have been relegated by the hip art world to the status of ‘found objects’ and ‘trash icons’. It is also why comics creators have never been respected as ‘artists’ and have historically been left open to exploitation...”

- Sabin. 1996. p8

- Is it this easy to explain?

Earlier: Printed and engraved illustrations, some narrative, some not, different relationships with text, different genres, different uses, and the development of something called “news” and something called a “newspaper”...

Comics (continued?)



The origins of photography

The origins of the modern comic



Photography and photojournalism

Earlier: Printed and engraved illustrations, some narrative, some not, different relationships with text, different genres, different uses, and the development of something called “news” and something called a “newspaper”...

Comics (continued?)



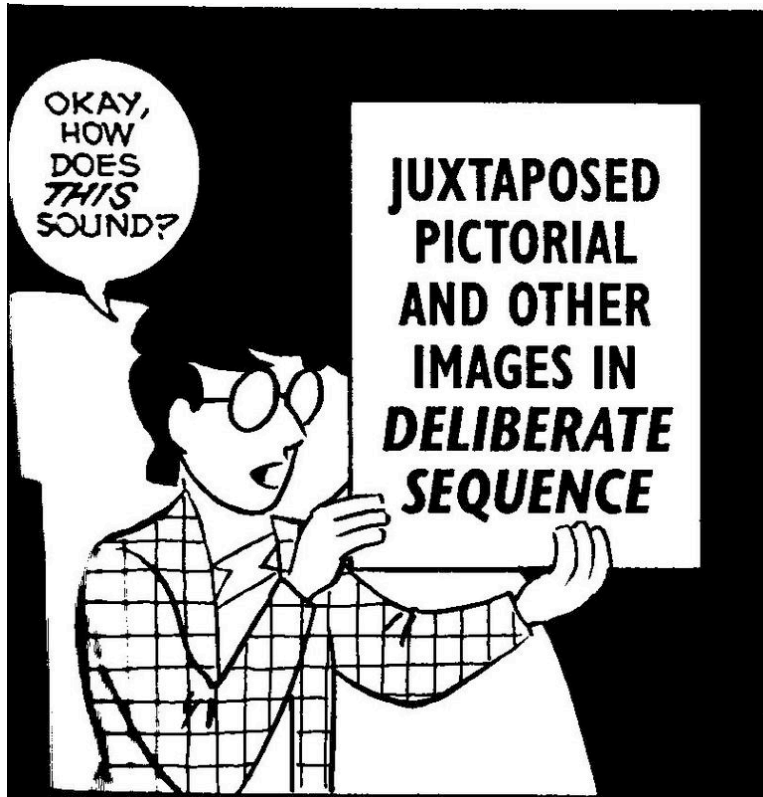
The origins of photography

The origins of the modern comic



Photography and photojournalism

What *are* comics anyway?



Src: McCloud. Understanding Comics.

Or perhaps we should start with the circulation of printed images?

- Implies the definition of the medium is not just “in” the medium...

Terrain already covered...

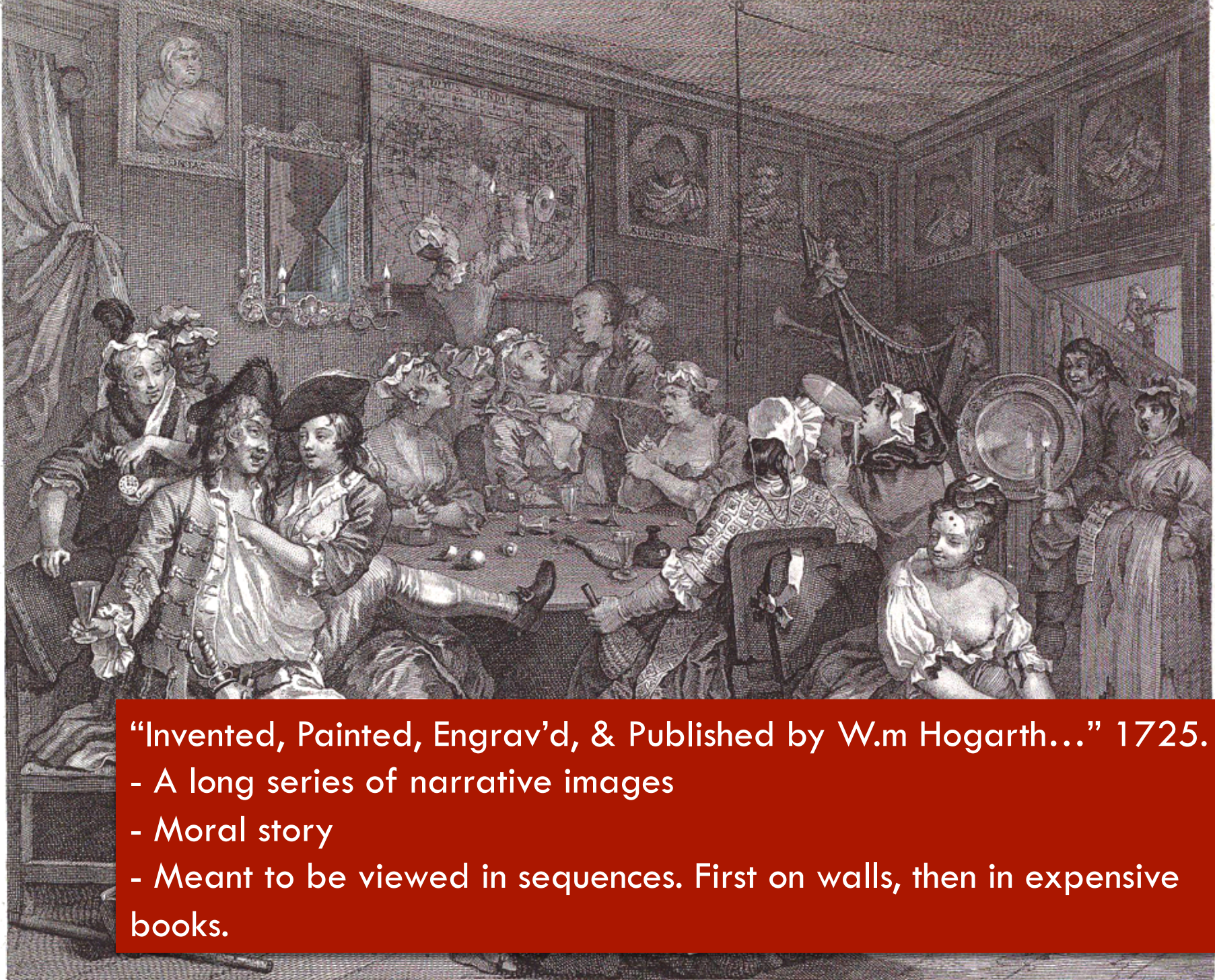


And the enjoyment of others' vices...



Broadsheet: "Execution Broadsheet." 1623.

Src: Sabin, Roger. 1996. Pioneers. Comic, Comix & Graphic Novels. London, UK: Phaidon Press Limited



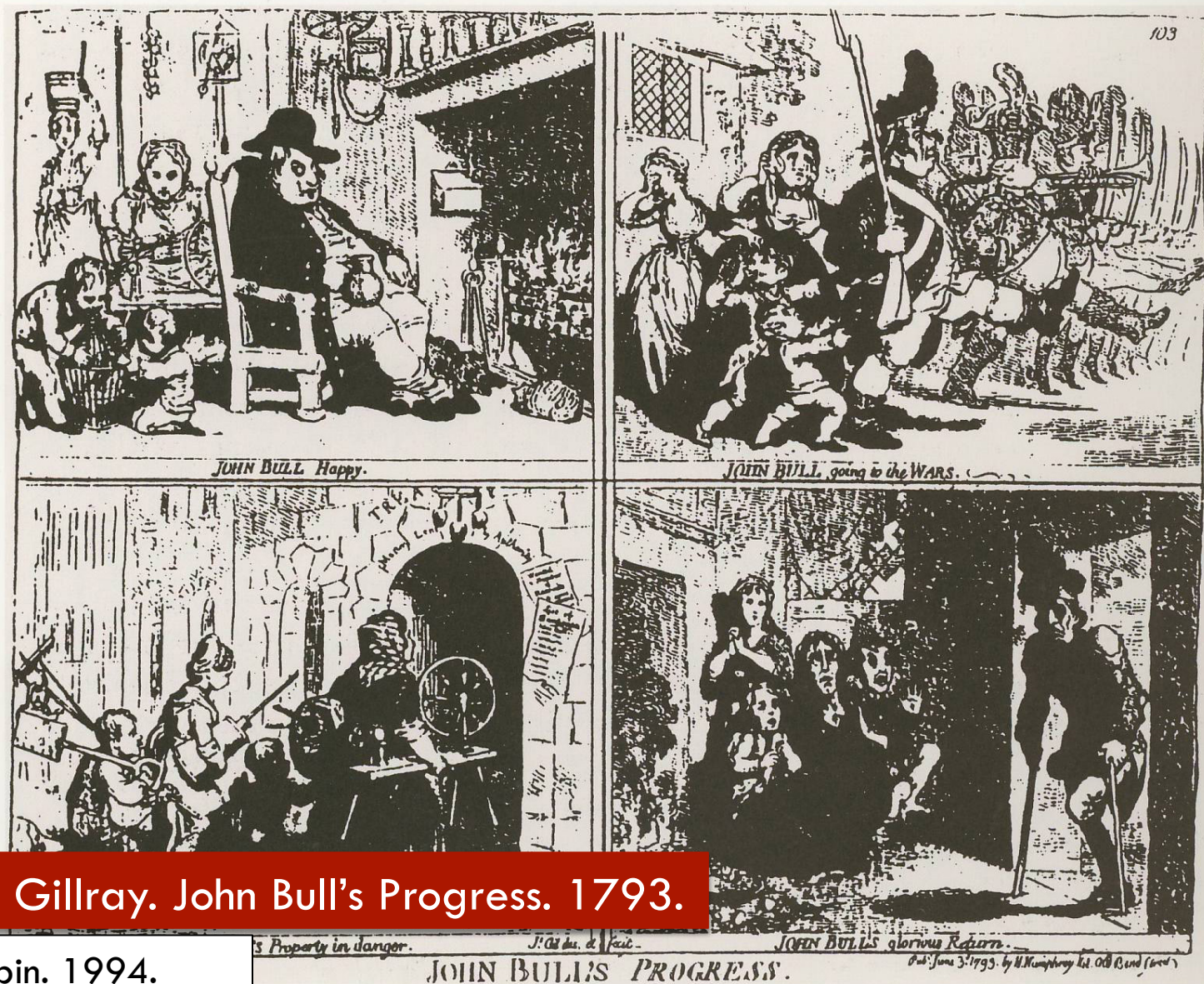
“Invented, Painted, Engrav’d, & Published by W.m Hogarth...” 1725.

- A long series of narrative images
- Moral story
- Meant to be viewed in sequences. First on walls, then in expensive books.

*O, Vanity of youthfull Blood,
So by Misuse to poison good:
Woman, formid for Social Love,
Fairest gift of Powers above:*
*Source of every Household Blessing,
All Charms in Innocence possessing:
But turn'd to Vice, all Plagues above,
Foe to thy Being, Foe to Love:*
*Gift Divine to outward Kieing,
Ablest Mould of Ruins:
And Thou, no less of gift divine,
Sweet Poison of Misused Wine:*
*With Freedom led to every
And secret Chamber of Vice,
Dost Thou thy friendly Hope
And show thy riotous gang of way,
And revel there with wild Excess?*
Invented, Painted, Engrav'd, & Publish'd by W.^m Hogarth June 27. 1735. according to Act of Parliament.

Src: Sabin. 1994.

18th Century (visual) anti-war narrative



James Gillray. John Bull's Progress. 1793.

Src: Sabin. 1994.

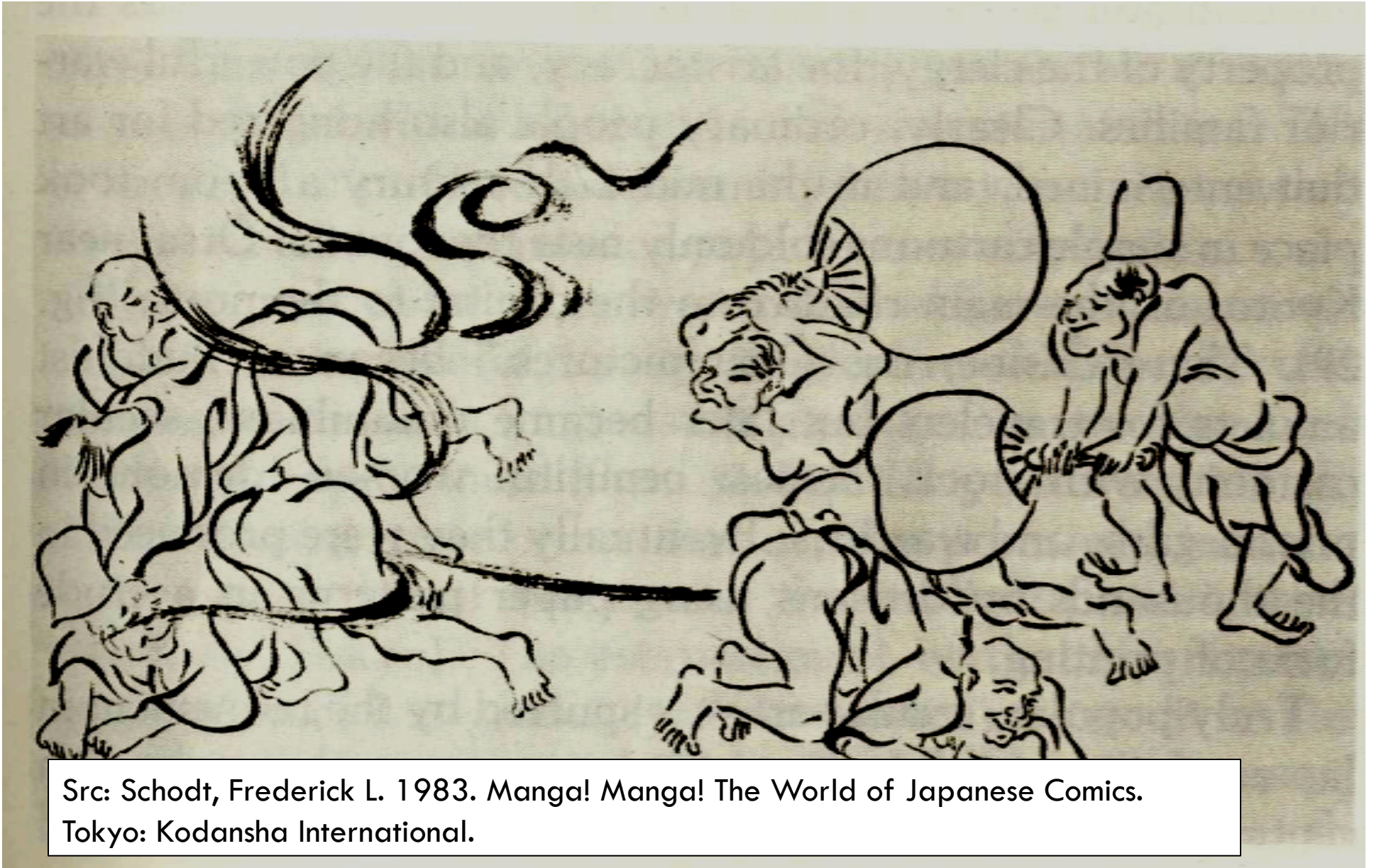
11th and 12th C. Japanese Scrolls

Chōjū-giga, “humorous pictures of birds and animals”? “frolicking animals”? (“The Animal Scrolls”)



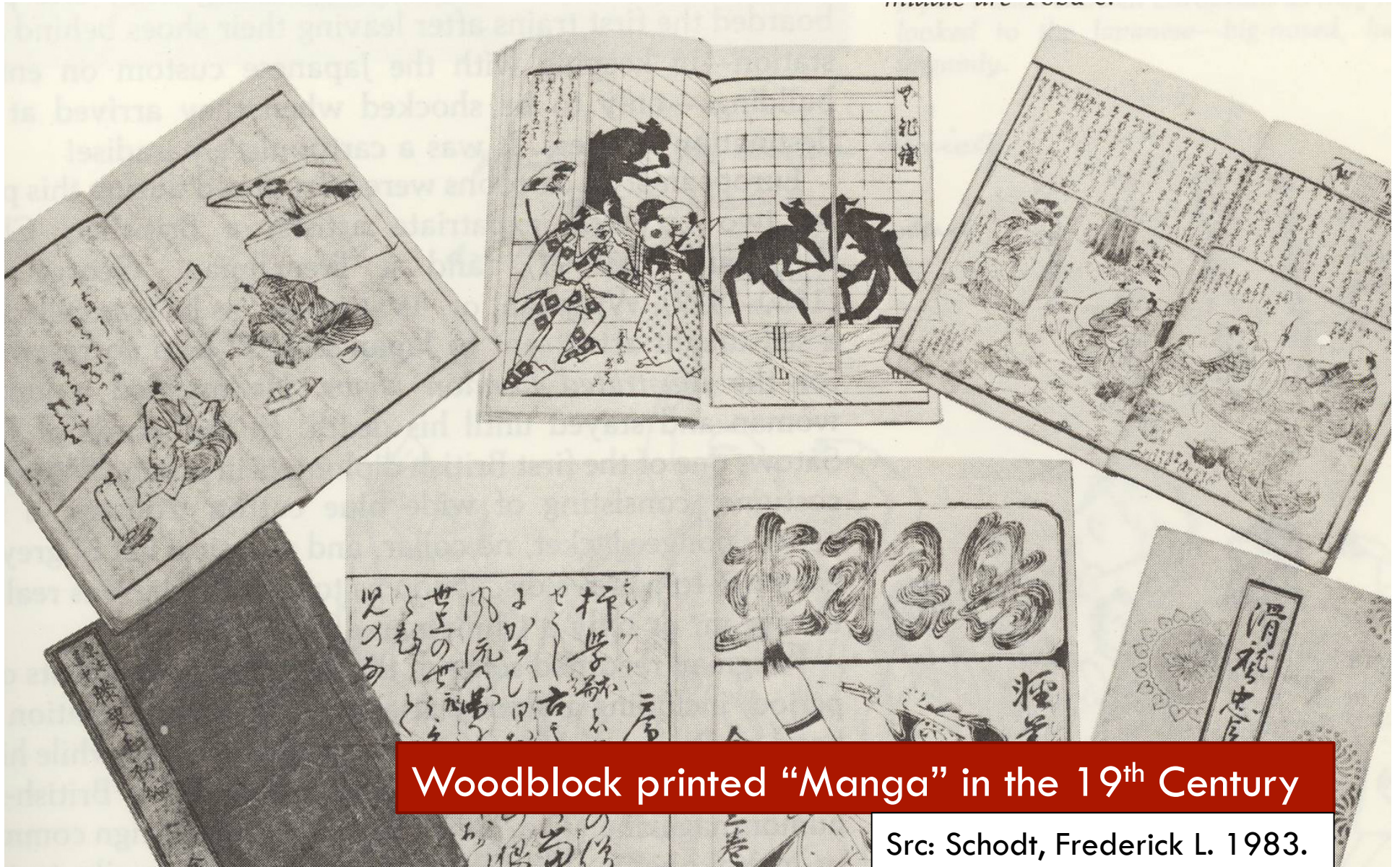
Src: Schodt, Frederick L. 1983. Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

17th and 18th C. Japanese scrolls



Src: Schodt, Frederick L. 1983. Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics.
Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Manga?



Woodblock printed “Manga” in the 19th Century

Src: Schodt, Frederick L. 1983.

The “Golden Age of British caricature” (1780-1820)

caricature, *n.*:

... A portrait or other artistic representation, in which the characteristic features of the original are exaggerated with ludicrous effect

... An exaggerated or debased likeness, imitation, or copy, naturally or unintentionally ludicrous

- Precursors to the modern day “political cartoon”
- Inspired by Hogarth
- Subversive, satirical, mocking, often crude
- The rise of a “satire industry” in Britain; later would inspire 19th Century European and American artists

The “picture novel” emerges from Switzerland

- Rudolphe Töpffer – Swiss school teacher
- “I send you, with thanks, the strange, small books. [...] In the caricatured novels, one can only admire the multitude of motifs that he [the author] draws from such a small number of characters; he shames the most fertile inventor of combinations, and one must commend him for his innate, clear, and ever-ready talent.

“It really is too crazy and strange, but it really sparkles with talent and wit; artistically, one remarks how the draftsmanship, the sketched work, exhibits how much M. Töpffer could achieve, if he realized his full potential.”

- Goethe, as reported by Soret to Töpffer



Self potrait. Src: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolphe_T%C3%B6pffer

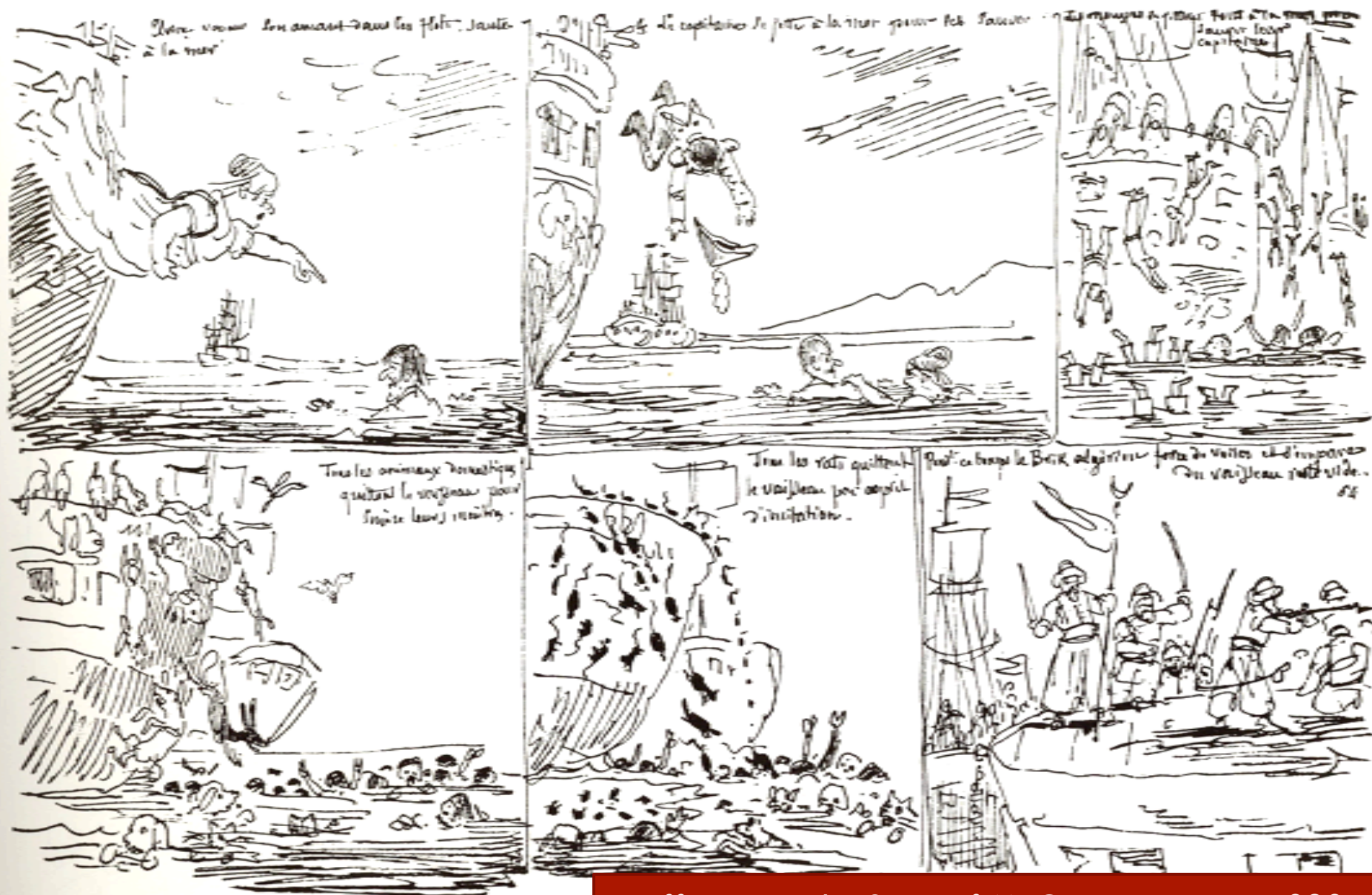


FIG. 2.2. *The Story of M. Cryptogramme* (MS 1830).

"[49] Seeing her lover in the waves, Elvire jumps into the sea. [50] The captain throws himself into the sea to save them. [51] The cabin boys all throw themselves into the sea to save their captain. [52] All the domestic animals leave the ship to follow their masters. [53] All the rats leave the ship in imitation. [54] Meanwhile, the Algerian brig makes full speed and seizes the empty vessel."

Töpffer. From *The Story of M. Cryptogramme*, 1830
 Src: Kunzle, David. 1990. *The History of the Comic Strip Volume 2 – The Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: UC Press.

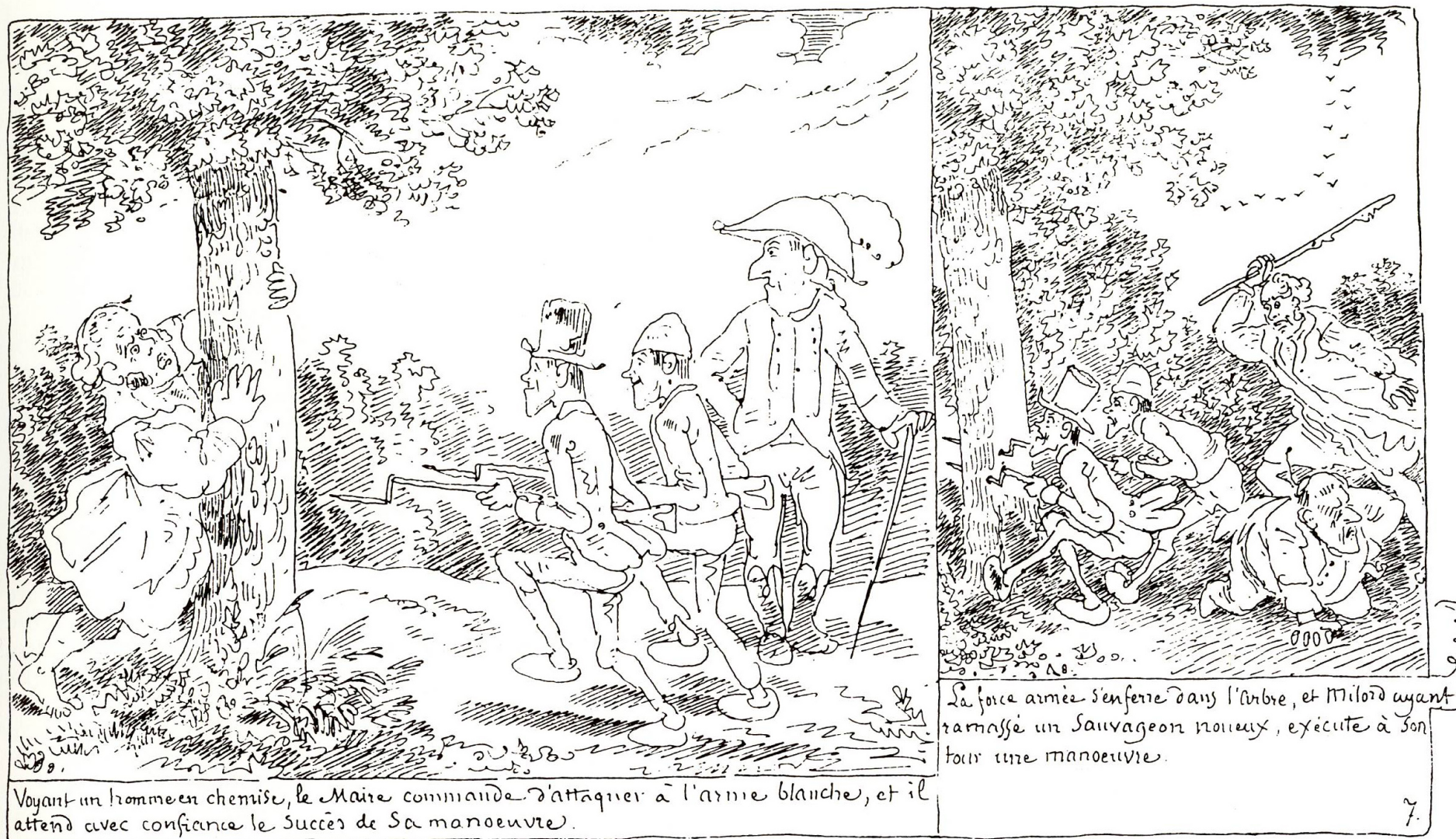


FIG. 2.6. *Dr. Festus* (1840).

"Seeing a man in his shirtsleeves, the Mayor gives the order to attack with naked bayonet, and confidently awaits the success of his maneuver. The armed forces get stuck in the tree, and Milord, seizing a knobby stick, executes *his* maneuver."

Töpffer. From *Dr. Festus*, 1840

Src: Kunzle, David. 1990. *The History of the Comic Strip Volume 2 – The Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: UC Press.

Difficult position for an “impure genre”

- High praise in Paris from critic Sainte-Beuve, but this focused on his writing, not his caricature/comic albums.
- Balancing literature (high) and caricature (low) and at the same time, “appealing to other artists to stake out some sort of middle ground between his own sophisticated comic fantasies, published in relatively expensive albums and destined for a restricted, rather upper-class audience, and, on the other, crudely moralistic imagery for the uneducated...”

-Kenzle, D. The History of the Comic Strip Vol 2... p 51

Meanwhile...

Comics (continued?)



The origins of photography

The origins of the modern comic



Photography and photojournalism

What *is* photography anyway?

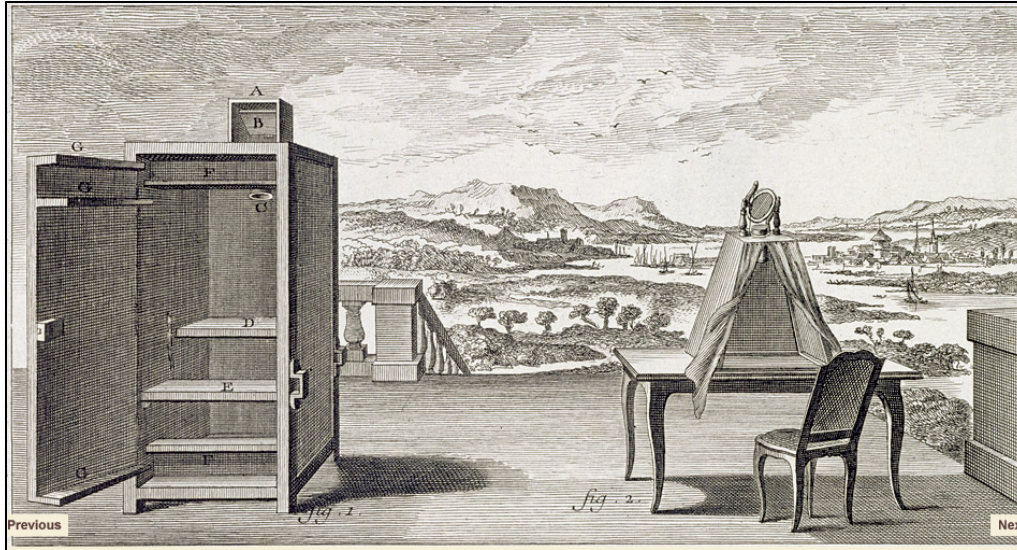


- “An” invention?
- A set of inventions?
- A set of techniques and processes?
- A set of applications of particular inventions, techniques, or processes?

Terrain already covered...

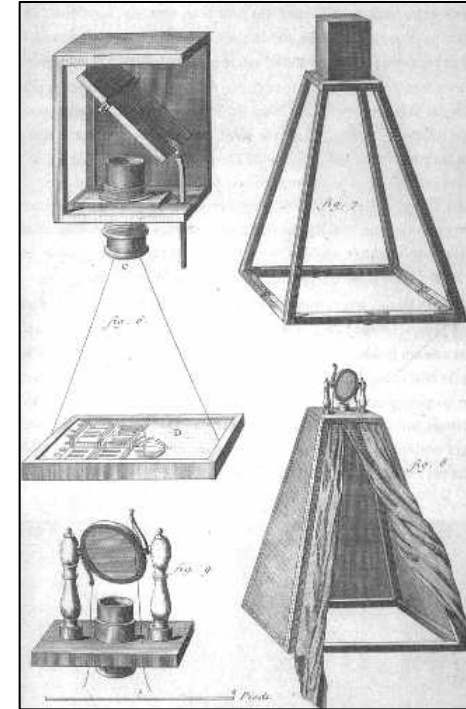


The camera obscura



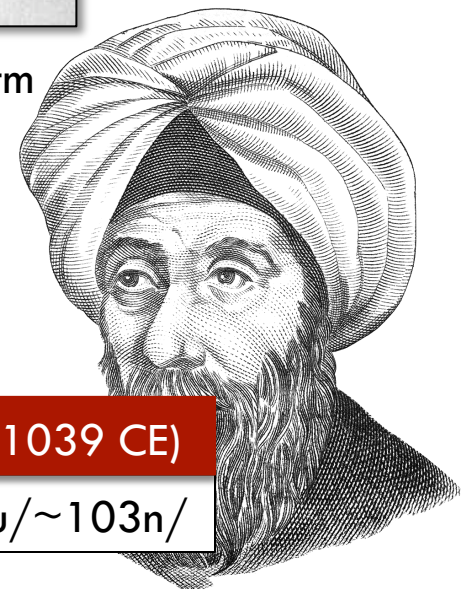
(A later Italian version?) Src: http://www.grouporigin.com/clients/qatarfoundation/chapter2_4.htm

Src: <http://www.solarnavigator.net/cameras.htm>



Ali al-Hasan ibn Al-Hasam ibn Al-Hayatham, or “Alhazan” (965 – 1039 CE)

Src: <http://www.ph.utexas.edu/~103n/>



A preview of things to come...



“The prettiest Landskip I ever saw was one drawn on the Walls of a dark Room, which stood opposite on one side to a navigable River.... Here you might discover the Waves and Fluctuations of the Water in strong and proper Colours, with a Picture of a Ship entering at one end and sailing by Degrees through the whole Piece. I must confess, the Novelty of such a Sight may be one occasion of its Pleasantness to the Imagination, but certainly the chief reason is its near resemblance to Nature.”

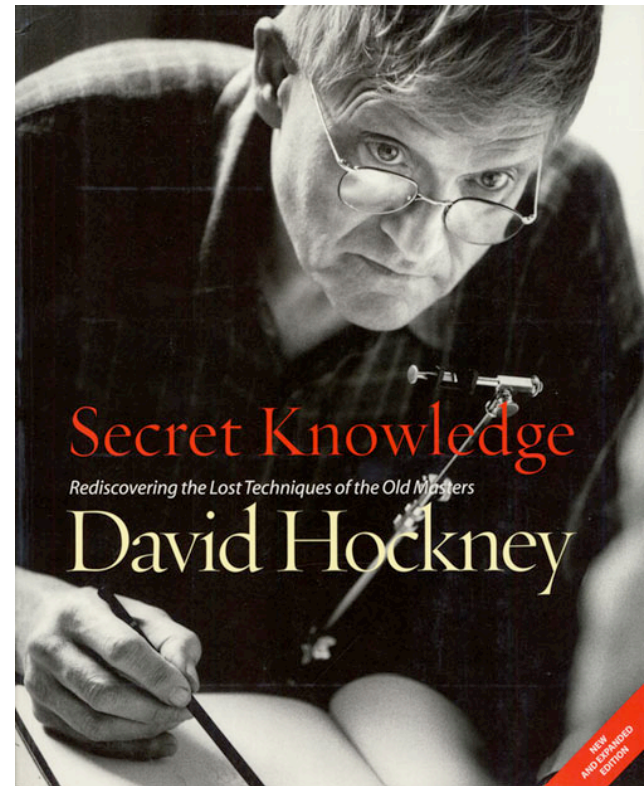
- Joseph Addison, in the Spectator, 1712

Writing about on the camera obscura at Greenwich

The Camera Lucida



Src: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camera_lucida



Secret Knowledge? Cheating?

It's back!

<http://www.cameralucida.org.uk>

The Camera**Lucida** Company

    Now Shipping Worldwide!

Now it's your turn to take a look...

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[Uses](#)

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IT'S BACK!

The 19th century Camera Lucida
now re-designed for the 21st century
to enable *Optically Accurate* drawing.



But how to “capture” light permanently?

- 1725: Johann Heinrich Schulze demonstrates that silver compounds are visibly changed by the action of light; makes stencil impressions on glass, but does not try to capture images from nature.
- 1800: Thomas Wedgewood makes images on leather impregnated with silver nitrate, but is unable to prevent progressive darkening
- 1819: Sir John Herschel discovers that sodium hyposulfite ("hypo") will dissolve silver halides, can be used to "fix" photographic prints. Later invents the words "negative" and "positive" and "photography"!

“The first photograph” (?)

- 1826: Niépce’s “Heliographic” images (inspired by lithography) (The Royal Society not so interested)



Src: <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/wfp/>



Rapid developments



- 1837: Daguerre announces his Daguerrotype
- 1839: Talbot's "photogenic drawing" (use of "negatives")
 - ▣ Faster development, less sharp, "art" (?)
- 1851: Collodion process – sharp printing on paper
 - ▣ Eventually comes to dominate

Portraiture for the masses



- Record of personal existence, family continuity
- An instrument of fame for some

Src: Drucker and McVarish. 2009.

Photographic truth?

- Daguerre in 1837: “a new "chemical and physical process" which "is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; it gives her the ability to reproduce herself.”
- Edgar Allen Poe in 1839: “In truth, the Daguerreotyped plate is infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will dissappear -- but the closest scrutiny of the photographic drawing discloses only a more accurate truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented.”

Photographic truth?

- “While we give [sunlight] credit only for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even if he could detect it.”
 - The Daguerrotypist Holgrave, in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s
The House of Seven Gables, 1851

- “What he [the camera] saw was faithfully reported, exact, and without blemish.”
 - American photographer James F. Ryder in 1902,
recalling his first camera from the 1850’s

- “[A photograph] cannot be disputed—it carries with it evidence which God himself gives through the unerring light of the world's greatest luminary. . . . it will tell its own story, and the sun to testify to its truth. . . .”
 - A California newspaper, 1851

In the meantime we have forms of mass publication other than “newspapers”



With help from the development of **photographic processes (b&w halftone printing)** there are also:

1. Documentary, illustrated magazines
2. The “Penny Dreadful” magazines
3. Satirical magazines

Src: Sabin, Roger. 1996. Comics, Comix, and Graphic Novels.

The Illustrated Papers

- Documented wars and other events of the day (like sensationalist crime stories in *The Illustrated Police News*), perhaps 24 or so in the UK and the U.S.

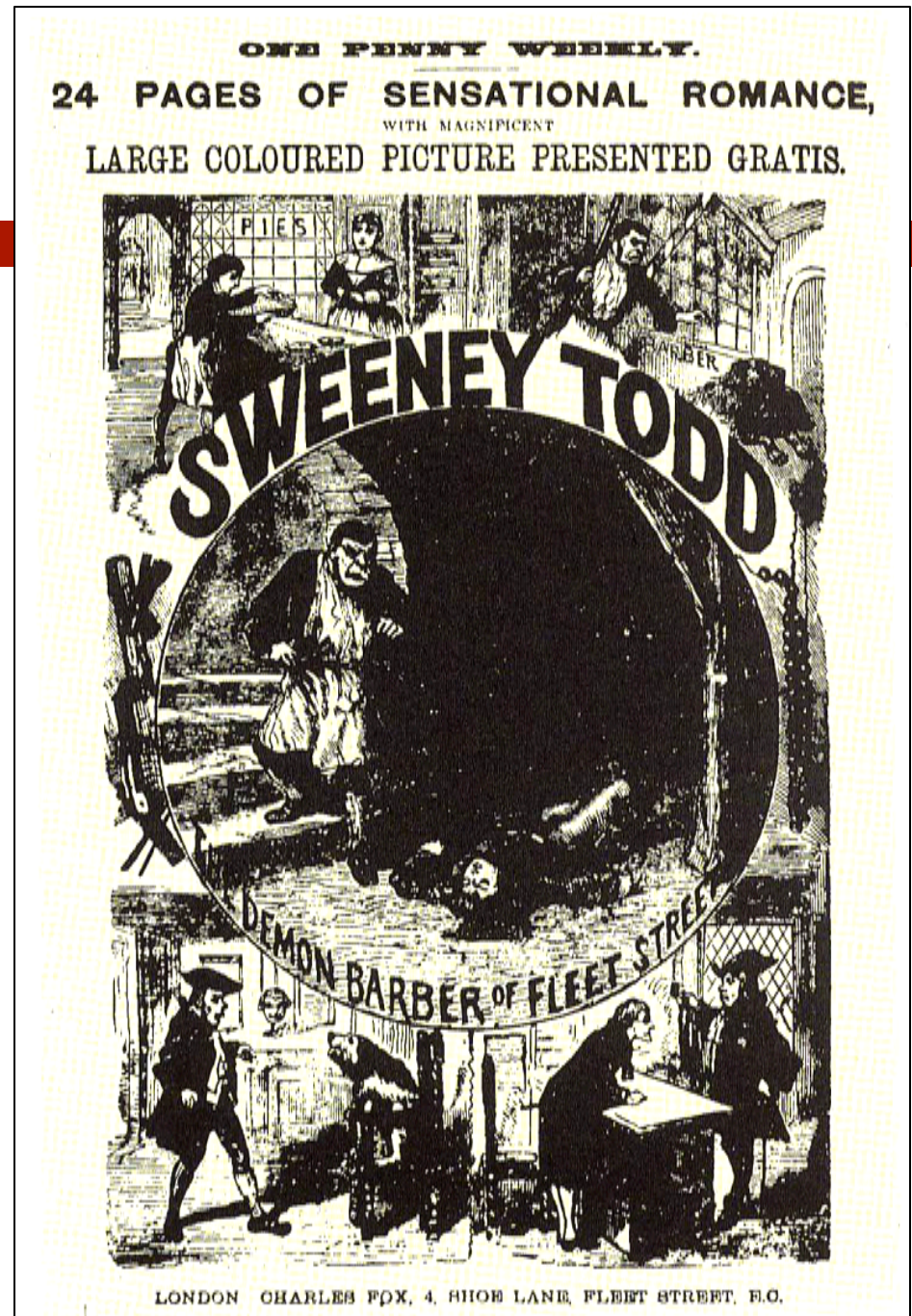
Discourse was deemed Man's noblest attitude,
And written words the glory of his hand. . . .
Now prose and verse sunk into disrepute.
Must laquey a dumb Art that best can suit
The taste of this once-intellectual Land.
A backward movement surely have we here.
From manhood,—back to childhood. . . .
Avaunt this vile abuse of picture page!
Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear
Nothing? Heaven keep us from a lower stage!

- Wordsworth, cited in Keller, 1999.

The Penny Dreadful

- Designed for working class readers
- But gave rise to “wholesome” alternatives
- Ancestor of the modern video game battles?

Src: Sabin, 1996.



The Satirical, illustrated magazine

- Revival of the caricature in the UK, France, Germany, eventually the U.S. (but now in magazine form)
- Key publications:
 - ▣ *Punch*
 - ▣ *Judy*
 - ▣ *Funny Folks*
- Piracy of American and German material as well
- Japan, following “arrival” of the West had similar publications

Which brings us back to...

Comics (continued?)



The origins of photography

The origins of the modern comic



Photography and photojournalism

- Weekly tabloid
- Sold for a penny
- “Railway literature”
- Working class protagonist in middle class society
- Not really “radical”
- “Innovative” marketing



The Yellow Kid

- Halftone printing and full color pages
- Marketed towards urban inner-city immigrants on Sundays



Src: Sabin, 1996.

THE FINE LINE

1. THE FAT GUY: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

2. THE KID: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

3. THE FAT GUY: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

4. THE KID: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

5. THE FAT GUY: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

6. THE KID: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

7. THE FAT GUY: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

8. THE KID: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

9. THE FAT GUY: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

10. THE KID: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

11. THE FAT GUY: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

12. THE KID: "I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!"

LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND

1. GET OVER NEMO! DO YOU WANT TO GO TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR?

2. HOW ARE YOU HERE? HOW DID YOU GET HERE?

3. COURSE, I AM! YOU KNOW I'VE BEEN HERE FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

4. I THINK I'VE FOUND A PLACE FOR YOU HERE!

5. WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER TWO?

6. LET IT BE! LET IT BE! LET IT BE! LET IT BE!

7. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

8. IT'S FEELING GOOD!

9. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

10. A BED WANTS TO GET OUT OF HERE! A BED WANTS TO GET OUT OF HERE!

11. TELL YOU THIS! I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

12. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

13. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

14. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

15. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

16. I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR FOR YEARS! I WANT ROOM!

The Kin-der-Kids and Little Nemo in Slumberland...part of the “Sunday Funnies” at the turn of the 20th Century. Src: Sabin 1996.

A childish genre? A middle class genre?



Advertisement in France for
Philipon Papier's Print
Comique Wallpaper, 1860s.
Src: Kunzle, 1990.

19th C. patterns in comics

- Overlap between younger and older audiences, yet comics gradually came to be seen as “childish”
- Publishers pushed their development, sometimes with artists grudgingly following along
- From intense social commentary, to lighter humor... the separation of “politics and farce”
- Targeted at working classes
 - Yet reading of comics was public and in common public spaces of middle and working classes

Src: Kunzle, 1990.

19th C. patterns

- From “street hawker” to “subscription and home delivery” and kiosks
- Growth coincides with the dominance of transportation by rail
- Treated more and more as ephemera
- Price and format “presuppose a different frame of mind, a different availability of time for reading and of money for spending. The readers are no longer primarily men and women of leisure but busy people able to devote limited and decreasing amounts of continuous attention to intellectual recreations.”

- Kunzle, 1990.

And finally...

Comics (continued?)



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Photography and photojournalism

The rise of daily mass images

- Prior to 1873: No daily newspaper carried images regularly (recall that the illustrated weeklies came out less frequently and there were not that many of them)
 - ▣ Perhaps public exposed to 100 pictures per week
- By 1910: 100s of dailies and weeklies able to run pictures on a regular basis.
 - ▣ Perhaps 903 pictures per week

Keller, Ulrich. 1999. Early Photojournalism. In Crowley and Heyer (Eds) *Communication in History*

Developments in the emergence of “photojournalism”



1. The development of halftone printing (new technology)
2. The rise of professional press photographers (new occupational group)
3. The creation of photo agencies (new organizational form)

After Keller, Ulrich. 1999. Early Photojournalism. In Crowley and Heyer (Eds) *Communication in History*.

Halftone printing



- In weekly magazines since 1867
- Used in some daily newspapers since 1880
- Able to be used by mass circulation papers on a regular basis by the 1890
- Realism in imagery helps reinforce the emergence of journalistic objectivity
- Contrived, constructed, scenes supported by apparent authenticity of the halftone image (Keller, 1999, p181)

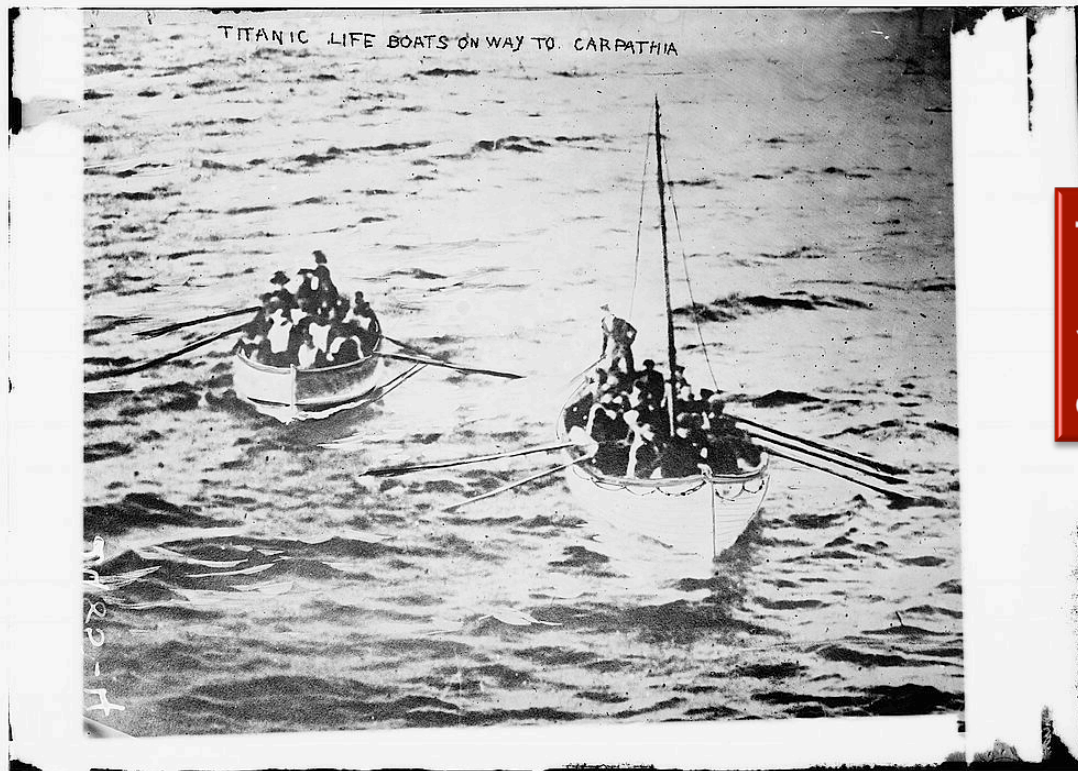
Press photographers



- Development in camera and film processing technology made photographs of everyday scenes feasible
- Illustrators lost their jobs to photographers
- From the Crimean War (1853-56) to the American Civil (1861-65) War to the Russo Japanese War (1904-05) we see a complete shift in the media used to represent the war
- A few celebrity photographers emerge

Photo Agencies

- New organizations to connect photographs and photographers to newspapers



The Bain News Picture Service purchases a shot of the Titanic's lifeboats

Src: http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/2515742163/

Developments in the emergence of “photojournalism”

- Is there something missing from this account?

Developments in the emergence of “photojournalism”



- Is there something missing?
- Perhaps - 4. The Rise of an Ideology of Objectivity

Progressive and distancing from PR (recap)

- “The newly articulated fairness doctrine was related to the sheer growth in news gathering.... Objectivity seemed a natural and progressive ideology for an aspiring occupational group at a moment when science was God, efficiency was cherished, and increasingly prominent elites judged partisanship a vestige of the tribal nineteenth century.... Journalists also sought to disaffiliate themselves from the public-relations specialists and propagandists who suddenly surrounded them”

▣ Shudson

Untainted facts (recap)

- “Corporate advertisers – concerned about the impact controversy might have on sales- would also prove more comfortable associating themselves with newspapers that maintained what the journalism critic Ben Bagdikian terms this ‘appearance of neutrality.’... [journalists] had developed a ‘set of professional norms’ headed by the need for impartiality (untainted facts).”

▣ *A History of News*. Stephens. 1988

Nonpartisanship = profit (recap)

- “The distinguishing characteristic of the professional – as opposed to the writer, novelist, scholar and others who produce messages – is that the message he produces has no necessary relation to his own thoughts and perceptions’...Bennet can be seen as a ‘professional communicator’ because his editorial policy often seems motivated less by his ‘thoughts and perceptions’ than by his profit motive”

▣ *Mindich, Nonpartisanship*

Comics and photography at the turn of the 20th Century

- In the early 20th Century, comics and photographs are on widely different trajectories as “media”
 - ▣ And illustration for other uses still thrives
- Photography struggles to gain acceptance as “art” but succeeds both as “respectable” and as “art”... and a carrier of “objective truth”
- Comics are definitely seen as low art in the U.S. (though not as clear in France or Japan)
- All at the same time as comics becoming less and less overtly about pointing out some other kind of “truth” and more about helping to sell newspapers.
 - ▣ And again, the uses of illustration shift
- Definitions of “media” or “artforms” are hard to disentangle from social, cultural, and political definitions

Low art, high art, commercial art?

- “Why comics have not been invited to enter the cosy world conjured by that term [Art] is not difficult to explain. Throughout their history they have been perceived as intrinsically ‘commercial’, mass-produced for the lowest-common-denominator audience, and therefore automatically outside notions of artistic credibility... This is why comics have been relegated by the hip art world to the status of ‘found objects’ and ‘trash icons’. It is also why comics creators have never been respected as ‘artists’ and have historically been left open to exploitation...”

- Sabin. 1996. p8

- Is it this easy to explain?