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## Comics at the service of information

The case of Rodolphe Töpffer

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# Comics at the service of information

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- 1 Among the possible means of communication, pictorial representation has accumulated a momentum that none of its counterparts, including language, can credit itself with. Today, more than ever in the history of mankind, pictures have become the main means of transferring information, in education, in molding public opinion, in advertising etc., not to mention their traditional role in visual arts.
- 2 In order to illustrate this unique role, when Pioneer F was set to the Mars in 1972, it carried among other strange things several sketches of the human body, the assumption being that the Martians would be curious to have a visual understanding of the invaders (!). The centrality of pictorial representation is no less demonstrated in modern technology itself, which is credited for the development of the simple plate of photography in the very first years of the 19th century, up to present satellites, which transmit simultaneously an incredible number of pictures onto our television sets, computers and I-pods.
- 3 With the penetration of photography to the arena of representation the rules of rendering have been changed, and with it the scope of images which for ages were exclusively in the hands of painters. Though it seems odd at the beginning of the third millennium to be still justifying the act of photography, it is nevertheless true to say that the history of modern times is *ipso facto* the history of the camera. Modern life has flirted with the camera, has worshiped it, and to a certain extent modern times would not have been possible without the camera.
- 4 Now, it is true that in contrast to the hand-made, one-off, traditional craft of representation by painting, photography is an easy, straight forward, technological, mass medium, that each and everyone of us can handle. Photography does not need much learning or skill to produce, especially nowadays in the digital era, in which the camera is part and parcel of our cellular phones. And yet, the easiness to produce photographs and their proliferation do not entail that they are the only suitable vehicles for transmitting information. When it comes to evaluate which of the two media – photography or the pictographic means of representation, i.e.: paintings,

caricatures, comics and the like – eloquently conveys a story, one would no doubt hesitate to point at photography as the ultimate sole vehicle.

- 5 The purpose of my paper is to shed light on comics, as vehicles of visual information which are no less suitable, and sometimes even much more efficient than photography in conveying ideas, thoughts, events and personal memories. By suggesting that pictographic means are no less efficient in conveying information, I do not intend to challenge photography's position. On the contrary – photography has built our consciousness as to the power of images, and yet photography has not evolved in a vacuum and alongside its development one should be aware of many other vehicles of visual representation, which are no less efficient. Without underestimating photography's position, painting, etching, caricature, comics, have after all a longer history than photography, serving for centuries as the sole means of visual information.
- 6 To accomplish my aim, i.e.: pointing at the role of the pictographic image in historical contexts, I intend to focus on Rodolphe Töpffer contribution in comics with the hope to convince the reader that comics are endowed with the power not only to display historical facts,<sup>1</sup> but are able to move us emotionally and create an immediate empathy towards the scenes exhibited.
- 7 Let me start with an example incorporating a painting and a photograph both portraying a traumatic atrocity, and evaluate which of the two – the painting or the photograph – successfully describes the story and which of the two may serve as means in teaching us a lesson as to the role atrocities play in our culture.
- 8 The two images I chose to begin with are a painting done by Francisco Goya *The third of May 1808*, which depicts the execution of the Spanish rebels during the uprising against French soldiers in Spain, and a photograph of a similar scene by Eddie Adams *A Street Execution of a Vietcong prisoner* taken in 1968.

Figure 1



Goya, *The third of May 1808*, (1815-16).

Figure 2



Eddie Adams, An execution of a Vietcong prisoner 1968.

- 9 It is true that both pictures depict horrible and horrifying scenes. But if we analyze these two pictures, and disregard for a moment aesthetic values and artistic excellence of the painting, concentrating only on the information retrieved from the two depictions, and reflecting on the epistemological point of view each one of them demands from the viewer, you will have to agree with me that a photograph is a spectacle, a hyper-reality representation, as it supposedly complies with truth and objectivity. The traumatic execution reflected by the photo was indeed a fact one can not dispute "...there can be no suspicion about the authenticity of what is being shown in the picture taken by Eddie Adams in February 1968 of the chief of the South Vietnamese national police, Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, shooting a Vietcong suspect in the street in Saigon. Nevertheless, it was staged – by General Loan, who had led the prisoner, hands tied behind his back, out to the street where journalists had gathered; he would not have carried out the summary execution there had they not been available to witness it".<sup>2</sup>
- 10 In other words, this very photograph, and supposedly many others<sup>3</sup>, though authentic and true to the events depicted, might be staged, much the same as painters do with their models. It seems, therefore, correct to say that shooting photos resemble in a roundabout way practices taken by painters, caricature drawers and comics artists whose aim is to create a statement as well as an emotional impression and self reflection to be seen by the viewer.
- 11 Moreover, photography, and especially photographs with an historical merit, like the one mentioned above is what may be labeled as a 'vernacular photograph', i.e.: a photograph representing state of affairs which have been shot in a certain country, at a certain period of time, which do not transcend beyond their actual reference. Eddie Adam's photo portrays an action, a horrible action, which took place in Vietnam and as such it is bound to its reference, and can hardly denote atrocities at large. We tend to identify and be emotionally involved towards photos which narrate our own story, be it a private or a public story, whereas photos which refer to events we can hardly identify

with, we tend to ignore or at least treat them with an anthropological eye. Paintings, on the other hand, are universal, as in the case of Goya's painting which transcends the event it depicts and represents horrible atrocities as such.

## The birth pangs of comics

- 12 Let us turn now to comics. Unlike other visual media, such as painting, drawing, sculpture and even caricatures, comics have a short history. Nevertheless, their biography is fraught with vicissitudes and paradoxical events. Comics as we know them today were born simultaneously with photography in the first half of the 19th century. The latter, which has changed visual culture, challenged autographic skills<sup>4</sup> (painting, drawing, caricature and, of course, comics) with an insurmountable barrier, forcing them to find new, uncommon expressive channels.<sup>5</sup> That is, the immediate difficulty artists faced those years was the need to cope with the new mimetic conception introduced by photography. For, until the late 18th century painters earned their living partly by painting portraits and landscapes but also religious subjects; yet with the advent of photography they lost the small income they could count on. Visual culture therefore looked for something new – an Archimedean fulcrum that would compete with photography and highlight the power and virtuosity inherent in autographic skills. One response to this rift was the artistic *avant-garde*, which offered an alternative to the frozen moment touted by early photographers. Indeed, toward the middle of the 19th and throughout the 20th century Western art experienced a new, extraordinary creative burst that transformed the then prevalent artistic view on the artist's position and, even more so, the value of an art work. All the arts – plastic arts, theater, architecture, design, music and dance – sloughed off the traditional artistic model in favor of an approach that stressed both the artist's subjective, personal, biographical expression and his social and political environment. Photographers, on the other hand, claimed to create a realistic experience by capturing through the camera the crucial moment that would constitute private and collective memory. Comics were thus born into this melting pot that produced modern art, which, from its earliest stages, blurred the boundaries between painting and sculpture, dance and music, theater and performance, generating hybrid arts and, thereby, new, surprising visual and narrative experiences. Comics didn't lag behind and, like other arts that joined forces for the sake of new expressive channels, created an artistic genre running along two parallel tracks: the written word and the picture or, more precisely: the written story and the visual illustration, though without privileging either as the story's driving force.
- 13 However, since comics, unlike other artistic media, could not boast an artistic tradition and history, their legitimacy as a proper, respectable artistic expression was far from self-evident, despite the fast growing number of comics artists since Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846), still considered the father of modern comics. The art of comics has long suffered from a low reputation and was often even viewed as children's art aimed exclusively at a young public not graced with high cultural values. This image was based not only on ignorance and lack of openness in academic research, which dismissed comics, at least when they first emerged, but also on the difficulty comics had in defining themselves as an artistic genre. As a medium without an "ID" they fell between two stools, as opposed to most arts, which enjoyed in the 19th century

recognition and resonance among the public at large and certainly in the academic community.

- 14 One of the hurdles comics faced was their name. Since the 1950s the term comics has become entrenched, though not for too long, as Art Spiegelman, whose work we will discuss later, proposed the term *comix* for this hybrid (mixed) art of words and pictures, which would remove the comic meaning associated with this genre. Before comics became the established term, the genre was known in French<sup>6</sup> – the official artistic language in the 18th and 19th centuries – under a motley range of names. It was Töpffer who suggested the first term – *histoires en estampes* (stories in etchings) – as a reference to the technique he used (etching) and to compete with the word 'printed,' which was already taken up by printed literature. Later terms referred to the property of comics as a visual medium: *histoires en images* (picture stories), *récits illustrés* (illustrated stories), *films dessinés* (drawn films), *bandes dessinées* (comic strips, literally: drawn strips) and, of course, comics, the best known term of the genre.
- 15 But not only the identity tags of comics have changed extensively; their target readership has also undergone several dramatic shifts. Comics were first conceived as an artistic medium for an adult readership, but only in the early 20th century did they begin to appear in children's and young adults' magazines. Later, around 1960, the trend reverted to an adult readership, giving birth to the graphic novella. The various audiences somewhat affected the genre's format. For example, the works of Rodolphe Töpffer and Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908) were published in book format. But once comics were addressed to children and young adults, the format changed into popular mass produced brochures printed on plain paper and sold at newspaper stands. When comics once again sought adult readers, the graphic novellas were printed on quality paper with masterful color separation, and the final product was published in hard cover. These changes explain the objective difficulty of including comics among regular artistic genres. As a result, the academic establishment entirely dismissed comics as a subject worthy of research until the late 1960s. Since Töpffer had written the first academic article on comics<sup>7</sup> 100 years went by before Bartholomeo Amengual<sup>8</sup> published a similarly comprehensive book in 1955, where he analyzes, in Töpffer's vein, several elements of French comics.

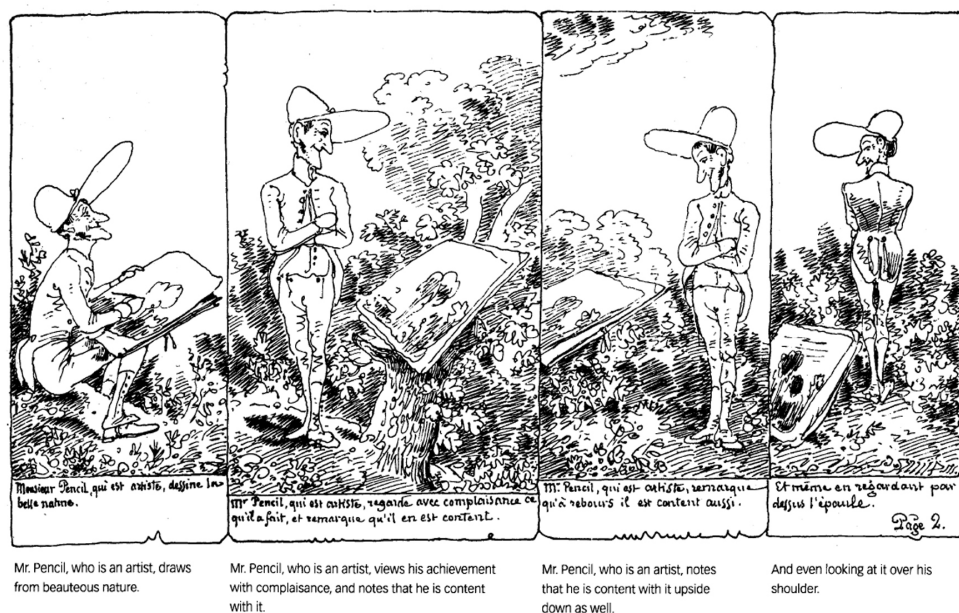
## Rodolphe Töpffer: the father of comics

- 16 Rodolphe Töpffer is rightly considered the founding father of comics. There is no solid information that explains what attracted him precisely to the genre of pictures illuminated with words or, in his definition, 'etched stories'. For example, David Kunzle, who wrote several articles about him and edited, annotated and translated into English all of Töpffer's comics books, conjectured that Töpffer's vision was severely impaired. Although he wished to be a painter like his father, the young Rodolphe had difficulties painting in large formats and therefore chose to draw small, fast sketches to which he appended stories that expressed his thoughts and ideas.<sup>9</sup> His defective vision prompted him to draw on medium-size paper strips of small drawings that constitute a series (panel), which are the very foundation of comics' works. Töpffer wrote eight comics books and several sections he did not complete into books. None of these were meant to entertain or distract from daily life. On the contrary: under the guise of apparently naive stories, Töpffer thrust thin, sharp needles into the frivolous values of



his time, thus expressing, in amusing, paradoxical, incisive, at times even scathing stories, his opposition to monarchy, militarism, excessive decorum, social iniquities and many other issues he found reprehensible. As I cannot present the gamut of his comics stories, I will only show that they were not merely fantastic and removed from reality. Here is, then, the summary of one story he wrote in the 1830s, which was published with slight changes around 1840. Titled *Mr. Pencil*, it features in the background the revolution sweeping Paris at the time<sup>10</sup>, which echoed in all the neighboring countries of France. As a liberal, Töpffer did not participate in these revolutions, some of which even reached the outskirts of Geneva, his city, but, as this work indicates, he did not remain indifferent either. The story opens with a painter, Mr. Pencil, who sees a playful naughty wind blow away from his easel the paper on which he was planning to paint the surrounding landscape. Later the wind assaults a couple leisurely rowing on the river, and then reaches the scientist of an unnamed city who was studying the underground currents of the four winds. As the story unfolds we discover how the wind's force drives the masses to rebel against the regime and how the latter attempts to quell the rebellion. *Mr. Pencil*, a satirical story about scientific pretentiousness and illusions<sup>11</sup>, was probably inspired by the disenchantment from 19th-century rigid political structures and as a warning against reactionary forces opposed to social change.

Figure 3



Rodolphe Töpffer, *Mr. Pencil*, 1840.

## Facial expressions: a comics innovation

- 17 Töpffer is considered the father of comics not only because he was a pioneer in the medium but also because he addressed the theory of comics. As already mentioned, he wrote a groundbreaking article, the first of its kind to suggest certain basic assumptions. Ernst Hans Gombrich (1909-2001) was probably among the first to mention Töpffer in many articles, and in the chapter on caricatures (nr. 10 in his book

*Art and Illusion*) he discusses him at length and presents the gist of his innovations. With his simplistic, grotesque, direct drawings devoid of superfluous intricacies, Töpffer was able to create a 'life-like illusion.' He wrote explicitly: "There are two ways of writing stories, one in chapters, lines, and words, and that we call 'literature', or alternatively by succession of illustrations, and that we call 'the picture story'."<sup>12</sup> Töpffer further claims that the advantage of a story's sequence in pictures lies in a greater terseness and relatively greater clarity as it presents itself more vividly to many more people, and also because in any competition, whoever is able to use such a direct method will precede those who speak in chapters; a storyteller in pictures needs one thing: knowledge of human facial expressions.<sup>13</sup> To represent the characters' feelings, experiences and character traits in pictures and to elicit in the reader identification or repulsion, the picture must, so he believed, distort the person's face and surroundings, a move entirely contrary to the naturalistic painting prevalent during his time, which represented nature and humans as they appeared, without any reference to their personality and inner world.

- 18 Pictures must therefore study facial expressions, which Töpffer divided into two categories: permanent traits, which indicate character (arrogance, pride, suspicion, stinginess, etc.) and varying traits, which indicate feelings (joy, sadness, pain, etc.). The classification of facial traits and their interrelations, such as laughing eyes and a crying mouth, a high brow as opposed to close eyebrows and many similar observations, is not merely an artistic technique or trick. The catalogue of facial expressions is the raw material of the illustrated story, which not only offers a visual depiction of the characters but also claims to offer a glimpse into their soul and unravel their hidden intentions. Here it should be noted that 19th-century scientific methodology was based on sorting and classification. Töpffer, who sorted and classified human facial expressions, is understandably no exception among Franz Josef Gall (phrenology – the pseudoscience of human skull structure), Charles Darwin (*The Origin of the Species*), Dmitri Mendeleev (the periodic table), Gregor Mendel (genetics) and Sigmund Freud (psychoanalysis) – to mention just a few.
- 19 Töpffer's intuition to see in facial contortions an important parameter through which the comics artist conveys his ideas was empirically confirmed in an article by Ofer Fein and Assa Kasher.<sup>14</sup> To analyze facial expressions in comics the authors use the concept of pragmatics<sup>15</sup> elaborated in linguistics and the philosophy of language, specifically in the language theory of Austin, Searle and others, who postulated that natural language does not only denote, describe and argue about reality, as many linguists and philosophers had previously claimed, but is also a working tool whose very use is a "speech act" rather than mere speech devoid of practical effects.
- 20 Fein and Kasher apply this idea to facial expressions in comics. They argue that the facial contortion in comics does not only passively reflect the character's feelings but is charged with intention and could thus be viewed as an act meant to express feelings and, therefore, to affect the unfolding plot. The gesture acts in comics are intended to frighten, humiliate, threaten, greet and to express feelings and thoughts. As such they can change attitudes, they can embarrass, threaten, elicit feelings of guilt and laughter in both us, the readers, and the comics characters.
- 21 Like caricature, facial expressions are a comics technique that endows them with the appearance of an active medium capable of 'doing things.' The special combination of picture and text and the presence of words and even sentences within the drawings



were not new to Töpffer. In many works of art, especially those with religious contexts, texts probably added an indispensable informative dimension. Still, these texts were always ancillary to the picture and never enjoyed the same status as the work's visual content. Comics innovated therefore precisely here by conferring on the text a status equal to the picture's, thus creating two parallel tracts – reading and viewing – that the reader must follow with equal attention.

## Seeing words, reading pictures

- 22 At the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice complains that her sister is reading a book without pictures: "...once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'"<sup>16</sup> This sentence has garnered many interpretations that are beyond the scope of this article, yet I should note that Lewis Carroll (1832-1898) opens his book with a sort of critique on the artificial separation between text and picture. We do not know whether Carroll was familiar with Töpffer's work, which had been published some 20 years before *Alice in Wonderland*.<sup>17</sup> Still, Carroll's intuitions resemble Töpffer's, according to which pictures and words are to be seen as cooperating limbs. Indeed, Carroll himself made sure to illustrate *Alice in Wonderland* and only after the first edition was published did he delegate the task of illustration to John Tenniel, one of the period's best known illustrators. Since Carroll and Töpffer, thousands of children's and adults' books have been written where the picture is an inseparable component of the story's presentation.
- 23 The relation between word and picture was addressed by Scott McCloud in chapter six of his book<sup>18</sup> on the history of their ambivalent relationship in general and the place of both in shaping the comics genre in particular. McCloud believes that where as Western art deliberately separated between words and pictures, but when they were nevertheless connected, the result was seen as a harmful alliance with propagandistic or commercial intentions: "traditional thinking has long held that truly great works of art and literature are only possible when the two are kept at arm's length... Words and pictures together are considered at best, a diversion for the masses, at worse a product of crass commercialism"<sup>19</sup> Only when Töpffer's works appeared (mentioned also by McCloud), and when *avant-garde* movements, such as Dada and Surrealism emerged, the connection between the verbal and the visual representation has become common and even acceptable. McCloud goes on to list the many advantages of this alliance in conveying information and as an important means of building the story in comics. Töpffer, it should be recalled, argued that the combination of words and pictures trims and clarifies the story, allowing the reader / viewer to better understand it. McCloud, who continues this line of thought, outlines further possibilities available to the comics artist, from placing the text at the bottom of the picture panel to the bubble method, introduced after Töpffer.
- 24 Indeed, in the early 20th century (1906), comics artists like Winsor McCay (1867-1934) considered setting text below a picture "an irrelevant gloss on the action"<sup>20</sup> that misses the intention of the visual scene. Thus, by transferring the text from the bottom of the picture to bubbles within its space McCay was able to entwine the written word with the pictured event. His work *Little Nemo* is among the first comics to combine words and pictures within the same frame, as opposed to the separation common thus far. This

was no doubt a groundbreaking revolution in the definition of the concept 'narrative' and in the transmission of abstract information on ideas, thoughts and feelings through the combination between visual and verbal representations. It is not fortuitous that one of Wittgenstein's well-known claims resonates here,<sup>21</sup> namely, that there is a common logical relation between the structure of language and the structure of the picture.

- 25 Will Eisner (1917-2005), rightly considered the high priest of contemporary comics culture, drew parallel lines between reality and comics as a pretext for using words in bubbles within the picture frame. In his book<sup>22</sup> he offers an eloquent example of the bubble's logic, arguing that if we see steam coming out of the mouth on a cold day, why shouldn't we draw such bubbles in comics to represent the characters' words?
- 26 David Carrier<sup>23</sup> picks up this idea, making an analogy between the Italian term for comics, *fumetto* (literally: smoke exhalation), and the text bubble as an inseparable component of the picture. Therefore, he argues, we cannot posit the word-picture duality as two contrary media, commonly conceived as such in Western thought, since neither is within nor without the pictorial space. Though the bubble has an independent status that resonates with the pictured figure, it is nonetheless an element with visual properties that enhance the experience of reading comics. Since bubbles were first used in comics by McCay, they have been increasingly refined and finally became a regular component of the genre.
- 27 The words in the bubble are neither inside nor outside the picture<sup>24</sup>, but at times emerge from places 'in our heads' without any real location in space. Descartes taught us that we cannot directly access the other's words; we can deduce his thoughts and intentions from his visible behavior. Here is, then, a special technique by which the artist can reveal and illustrate the character's hidden world of intentions and desires, though not to him or to the characters next to him but only to the reader. When one reads the bubble's content one obviously pays attention to the text's verbal meanings, but the bubble's design, too, contributes significantly to the text's meaning and intention. The bubble can contain a variety of texts (question, order, hesitation, etc.) but it can also remain empty, thus reflecting the character's sense of emptiness and helplessness.
- 28 The bubbles allow, furthermore, typographical variations, and the transitions from bold or italic style to handwritten script or to an especially large font size or even to inverted text reflect the bubble's highly active role in transmitting the scene's content. The bubble also defines the narrator's place, especially in comics based entirely on bubbles. The narrator, usually conceived of as the figure that directs the story, is sidelined by the bubbles, as in a novel based on dialogues without the narrator's connective and clarifying text. Such comics, of which there are many examples, require the reader's utmost attention. Here the author's only involvement may be expressed with an explosive sound (boom!) or noise between dialogues in order to provide the plot's environment with a dimension that defies expression in dialogue bubbles.
- 29 Hendrik Willem van Loon (1882-1944) opens *The Story of Mankind*<sup>25</sup>, his by now legendary history book first published in 1921, with the motto from *Alice in Wonderland* mentioned earlier: "And what is the use of a book... without pictures?" His choice of this motto was not fortuitous, as throughout his text he inserted his own illustrations to match the historical context. Before him, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga used to draw on the blackboard in class historical events to enhance the students' learning experience. In recent years, history has been impressively represented in film, and the

combination between normative historiography and film has even generated a new concept: *historiophoty*<sup>26</sup>, which suggests that one can represent historical events in photography, film and, I should add, comics, no less than in a written chronicle. Comics are, therefore, on a sound footing in the description of historical events such as the Shoa, 9/11 or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This phenomenon is not accidental but derives from the very nature of comics, that is, the blend of pictures and narrative, on the one hand, with the temporal dimension, on the other.

- 30 Offering examples on how the temporal dimension is embedded in the story and the picture, Will Eisner argues that “the phenomenon of duration and its experience – commonly referred to as ‘time’ – is a dimension integral to sequential art”.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the real event or its representation in film, comics are based on a principle Eisner calls ‘timing,’ that is, the pace by which events are displayed in the story’s panels. Most comics that deal with history or traumatic events, such as the Shoa, invented special temporal concepts<sup>28</sup> of past, present and future concurrence, at times even within the same panel.
- 31 Comics artists had two options: one, to present a fictitious reality in which time plays no role whatsoever. For example, Coleman<sup>29</sup> reads comics as a reconstruction, in surrealistic, at times even abstract, language, of values and events unrelated to reality. The other option argues that even if the comics narrative is fictitious, it is actually a subversive point of view that disassembles reality into its components. This approach was proposed by Schmitt<sup>30</sup>, who presents comics as a ‘meta-text’ or ‘meta-story’ that transforms its historical subject into a story, since serial historical facts are converted into serial illustrated events. The words accompanying the pictures enhance the dry factual chronicle with a visual interpretation that allows the reader / viewer to see and experience history as though it were an element of his personal biography.
- 32 To sum up, comics are, then, a visual medium that does not reject the verbal medium, and the combination of these two channels, once considered contrary and contradictory, assigns to the genre an important role in structuring the story’s narrative consciousness.

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## NOTES

1. Carrier, D., *The aesthetics of comics*, 2000, Pennsylvania State U. press, see especially part 3: “The place of comics in relation to art history”. See also Sabin, R., *Adult comics: an introduction*, 1993, Routledge, see especially section 18: “The graphic novel in context”. And also Witek, J., *Comic books as History*, 1989, U. press of Mississippi, see especially chapter 4: “History and talking animals: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*”.

2. Sontag, S., *Regarding the Pain of others*, 2003, Farrar, p. 59.

3. The case of Robert Capa’s photo depicting the moment of death of a loyalist soldier in the Spain War in 1936, is another example of a staged photograph.

4. Nelson Goodman distinguishes between autographic representations that cannot be reproduced and copied – among which he would no doubt include comics, painting, drawing and caricature – and allographic representations, such as printed text or photography, which easily

lend themselves to reproduction without any detriment to the information they contain. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), pp. 113, 121.

5. After Louis Daguerre's invention of photography, made public in June 1839, a saying attributed to the French academy painter Hyppolite-Paul Delaroche (1797-1856) began to circulate: "From now on painting is dead."

6. Thierry Groensteen, "Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?," in *Comics Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*, eds. Anne Magnussen and Hans-Christian Christiansen (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press, 2000), p. 30.

7. Rodolphe Töpffer, *Essai de Physiognomonie* (Geneva, 1845), in *Enter: The Comics*, ed. and trans. Ellen Wiese (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 2-36.

8. Barthélémy Amengual, B., *Le Petit Monde de Pif le Chien: Essai sur un "comic" français*, (Alger: éditions Travail et Culture, 1955).

9. David Kunzle, *Father of the Comic Strip: Rodolphe Töpffer* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 3.

10. The July Revolution of 1830, commemorated in Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People*, toppled Charles X of France, forcing him to flee to England. On Lafayette's advice, he was replaced by Louis-Philippe.

11. There is no definite information in this regard. One should note, though, the nature of early-19th-century science – for example, in his book *Natural Theology* (1802) William Paley argued that the social structure of both the animal and the human world were designed by God. That is, whoever is born a worker was meant to be one by divine decree. Charles Darwin challenged Paley's theory with the concept of natural selection.

12. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Chapter 10, "The Experiment of Caricature" (London: Phaidon Press, 1950), p.337.

13. See Gombrich's reference to facial expressions in his "The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and Art," in *Art, Perception and Reality*, eds. E. H. Gombrich, Julian Hochberg and Max Black (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972 ), pp. 24-25.

14. Ofer Fein and Assa Kasher, "How to Do Things with Words and Gestures in Comics," *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26 (1966): 793-808. David Novitz, "Pictorial Illocutionary Acts," in David Novitz, *Pictures and Their Use in Communication* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), pp. 67-84.

15. Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that examines how we understand language (phrases) in our regular conversations with people. Language was thought to mirror reality, but since the emergence of pragmatics the philosophy of language has considered language a working tool with which we do things in the world. Pragmatics distinguishes two intentions in the use of language: 1. informative, that is, language transmits information, and without understanding the words' meaning or intention we would have trouble understanding the message; 2. intentional, that is, does the speaker's statement intend to warn, humiliate, promise, etc.? Thus, pragmatics views linguistic expressions not only as a means to utter statements but also as a speech act.

16. Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Bramhall House, 1960).

17. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was first published in 1865, whereas some of Töpffer's books appeared around 1840.

18. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 140

20. M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), p. 33.

21. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Frank P. Ramsey and C. K. Ogden (London: Paul Kegan, 1922), statements 1.2-3.

22. Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1985), p. 25.

23. David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics*, (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2000), p. 29.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  25. Hendrik Willem van Loon, *The Story of Mankind*, (first published 1921. New York: Pocket Books, 1973).
  26. White, H., "Historiography and Historiophoty", *American Historical Review*, vol. 93, n° 5 (Dec. 1988), pp. 1193-1199. See also: Maly, I., "Is History Photogenic? The Historical Film in the Post-modern Era," *Zmanim* 39-41 (1991): 74. (Hebrew)
  27. Eisner, *Comics & Sequential art*, p. 23.
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## ABSTRACTS

This article sheds light on comics, as vehicles of visual information which are no less suitable, and sometimes even much more efficient than photography in conveying ideas, thoughts, events and personal memories. Pointing at the role of the pictographic image in historical contexts, it focuses on Rodolphe Töpffer, the Swiss graphic novelist, writing in French, who printed in the first half of the 19th century eight imaginary graphic novels depicting the follies of the middle class, politicians, public servants, etc.

Cet article appréhende la bande dessinée comme un moyen d'information visuelle non moins capable, et parfois même plus efficace que la photographie, pour véhiculer idées, pensées, événements et souvenirs personnels. Relevant le rôle de l'image pictographique en contexte historique, l'article se concentre sur Rodolphe Töpffer, helvétique de langue française et auteur de bandes dessinées de la première moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il publia huit romans graphiques qui décrivent les comportements absurdes de la classe moyenne, des politiciens, des fonctionnaires, etc.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Bande dessinée, Töpffer (Rodolphe), image pictographique, expressions faciales, innovations

**Keywords:** Comics, Töpffer (Rodolphe), pictographic image, facial expressions, innovations

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