

Introduction

Zwar wird für manche jener mit einigen „Seitenblicken“ zufriedenzustellenden Zeitgenossen diese Ausstellung – um einst berühmtes hohes Politikerwort zu zitieren – „eine zu barocke Idee“ sein. Aber es gibt noch genügend Kunstfreunde, die eine Forderung des grossen Architekten Frank Lloyd Wright an seine Kollegen analog auch für den Bereich der Kunstmuseen für richtig halten, nämlich seinem Publikum nicht das zu geben, was es haben will, sondern das, was es haben sollte.

Franz Wagner,
*Thesenblätter Österreichischer
Universitäten* (1996)

For some contemporaries, who are content with a few “cursory glances,” this exhibition, to quote from a famous politician, might seem a “too baroque idea.” There still are, however, enough friends of art who agree, in the field of museums of art, with the requirement of the great architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who required of his colleagues, that is that the public should not be given what it wants, but what it should be given.

While frequently referring to the great tradition that links *poesis* to *pittura*, this study concentrates on their simultaneous presence on a printed page, with different sorts of fusions and combinations of image and text, in American popular culture between 1864 and 1914, with several forays into

the preceding and following decades. The chronological span is determined by technological developments: new printing techniques made illustrated material cheap after the Civil War, and television undermined the position of printed word after the Second World War. It is no discovery that popular culture, in America or elsewhere, then as now, is dominated by iconography; it is and has been increasingly visual. This particular study, like many critical works, is about how visual and linguistic expression combines. The phenomena discussed here are termed *text-image complexes*. The life, continuity, and similarity of these complexes can be explained in terms of a general expressive faculty, which is neither visual nor linguistic, but provides fundamental structures for images and texts. The complexes show remarkable invariability and persistency in popular culture.

The following inventory of text-image complexes anticipates the themes discussed in subsequent chapters, as well as critical methodology of discussion. Not all of the examples are obvious, i.e. some of them do not refer directly to combinations of printed text and image, but they refer to situations where text-image complexes are very likely to be created; suffice it to say, texts without illustrations are not discussed anywhere in this work, although far too few illustrations are actually included, which is of course due to practical and legal difficulties.

To begin with, an image (potential cover illustration) can become the opening or central element of plot, so that its reminder explains or otherwise refers to it. Many plots, and even general formulas of popular fiction, can be discussed in this way; it is as if plots and formulas conformed to potential illustrations and visual designs of book series and magazines. This was a dynamic creative process which led to seemingly contradictory, but successful formulas of dime fiction, crystalized in the 1860s and 1870s, as well as their descendants in the first half of the 20th century. Today, anticipation of images, movies, and computer games seems to be a standard procedure in popular fiction, where the plot of a book conforms to the requirements of a potential, more general media project.

Another example is the use of visual devices in typesetting and layout of narrative texts, and conversely, visual compositions with elements of a text. An illustrated book is not a good example of text-image complex, when illustrations are separated from texts, but illustrations with captions are already a move in the direction of an illuminated text, an expressive complex which is both visual and linguistic. Illustration provides only a lustre to the text, whereas illumination intersects it, projects its shape onto

a new plane, demonstrating the potential of expressive faculty in its hypostatic form. These metaphors are not used accidentally. Historically, the techniques of illuminated manuscripts were used persistently in popular culture. It can be demonstrated that American materials from the 19th and 20th centuries do not differ much from their baroque equivalents. Since baroque there have been few new aesthetic developments in comic strips, visual novels, poster art, and illustrated magazines.

Perhaps the most important group of examples consists of situations when a picture (painting), art technique, letter, type, or printed word becomes an active agent or otherwise significant element of the plot, e.g. as setting, character, *mise en abyme*, or allegorical emblem. This is the most general category of text-image complexes, and the previously mentioned examples could be incorporated in it. At their most general, visual agents in plots can become self-referential emblems of expression and representation. With another reference to baroque, it will be demonstrated how science fiction is typified by one of its most important prop, the blaster, and how popular fiction could experiment with language in that will be discussed as modernist manners, anticipating the supposedly radical experiments of high literature, while never departing from methods known in the 17th century.

Text-image complexes can be observed on different planes of the literary work of art. On the plane of visual image and type, they are visual typesetting devices or different combinations of typesetting with illustration. On the plane of phraseology, different voices of a polyphonic narrative can be identified or arranged visually, either in typesetting, or in the composition of an imaginary setting, or in the visually structured plot. On the plane of imagery, text-image complexes are the devices that purposefully and closely combine the two forms of expression, e.g. letters and words as symbols, or emblems and allegories with textual elements. On the plane of plot, there are visually structured plots, or images that are important elements of plots. Finally, on the emotional and ideological plane, it is possible to demonstrate visual composition of emotions and ideas in narratives, which is sometimes accompanied by similarly composed illustrations. This systematic survey, devised by Boris Uspenski, is a fundamental element of the methodological framework of this book, and it will be discussed in more detail.

The methodology of this study is mostly drawn from theoretical chapters in works of Walter Benjamin, Boris Uspenski, and Mieke Bal. All the

three critics created comprehensive frameworks for the study of text-image complexes, and their work will be constantly referred to. A more general survey of critical perspectives on iconography, iconicity, imagination, and visual structuralization of texts, will include various discussions, from Plato's *Cratylus* to Joseph Frank's articles on the spatial form. The general tendency of these critical perspectives is to contemplate transformations between different modes of representation and expression. Following some of these critics, it is possible to come to the conclusion that there are structural correspondences between visual and linguistic forms of representation and expression, with an underlying single faculty beneath all forms.

Selection of texts will purposefully avoid some obviously important examples of text-image complexes, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The scarlet letter* or Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Not only do these texts fall outside of the chronological span, but they also cannot be unequivocally described as works of popular culture. Moreover, they were discussed in terms of baroque, symbol, emblem, and hieroglyph by John T. Irwin, who was interested in the most esoteric and arcane combinations of image and text, while disregarding their more primitive and entertaining varieties. References to canonical texts, however, cannot and will not be avoided, since it is assumed here that works of high literature in general, and canonical text-image complexes in particular, stem from popular culture and could not have been written without it. Thus, the discussion will sometimes shift, as it were, from A to Z, between Hester Prynne's scarlet letter and the bloody mark of Zorro, while adhering to the latter. It is also assumed that these devices were frequently used in all art designed for illiterate or semiliterate audiences, especially and most impressively in baroque, and that little has changed, even in America, in the aesthetic developed by baroque artists. With many striking similarities and examples, it is possible to arrive at a general and hopefully convincing conclusion that use of text-image complexes is a continuing phenomenon in American popular culture, a sort of never ending baroque. Thus, the present study distinguishes between the historical baroque of the 17th century, and the idea of baroque as an ahistorical mode of representation. This is in line with the contemporary research on Neo-Baroque and New World Baroque, as represented by Lois Parkinson Zamora (2006), Monika Kaup (2005) and William Egginton (2010).