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Of Gutters and Guttersnipes *Hogarth's Legacy*

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I have been lately allarm'd with some Encroachments of my Belly upon
the Line of Grace & Beauty, in short I am growing very fat.

— David Garrick, 1746.

Although we often think of comics as being endowed with an essential contemporaneity, informed fans know that the medium has a long history, spanning many centuries, and including forms that predate anything that Comic Book Guy might sell. In this essay I will focus on a precursor of the contemporary comics medium that arrived on the scene long after cave paintings and medieval tapestries, but which constitutes, nonetheless, a venerable progenitor of the medium. My focus is the work of 18th-century English artist William Hogarth (1697–1764), whom Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics*, mentions as a significant innovator in the history of comics.¹ I will also discuss, through the work of Hogarth, a number of aspects of modernity that were gathering steam in his time, and which are now endemic to the comics medium — all of which have had a profound effect on the development of comics as a medium; on the look of comics; and on how they communicate with readers and viewers.

In his prolific career, Hogarth painted and printed many “progresses,” or visual narratives composed of elaborate comic panels that sequentially related tales of social climbing and financial crisis. As McCloud remarks, “despite the low ‘*panel count*,’” Hogarth’s 18th-century graphic progresses were “rich in detail and motivated by strong social concerns,” such as the

plight of prostitutes and the snares of modern urban living. This said, however, McCloud's principle interest in Hogarth's panels is the way they "were designed to be viewed *side-by-side — in sequence!*" (1994, 16–17). So although *Marriage à la Mode*, *The Rake's Progress*, and *The Harlot's Progress* contain only six to eight panels, they tell comedic rags-to-riches-to-rags stories of aristocrats and women of questionable virtue in baroque intricacy, and are among the first graphic tales to attempt such narrative depth both within and across panels.

Hogarth's own precursor, following McCloud's genealogy of comics, is Egyptian painting, which also functioned as a form of sequential pictorial narrative.² To illustrate his point, McCloud reproduces, in considerable detail, an Egyptian mural that relates the story of farmers who neglect to pay taxes on their harvest, and are subsequently beaten by tax collectors (McCloud 1994, 14–15). While this is certainly a dynamic sequential narrative, Egyptian painting is separated from Hogarth's progresses by a considerable expanse of time and, as I will argue, the advent of modernity; hence McCloud makes no specific attempt to connect the two apart from formal considerations. Yet there is an important, if somewhat obscure, link to be made between Egyptian sequential art and Hogarth's 18th-century prints, through the former artist's bizarre, hybrid jumble of Freemasonic iconography, which I would like to explore briefly.

As is commonly known, the Masons claim to borrow a good deal of their doctrine and their iconography from the ancient Egyptians. Hence, along with the trowels, compasses and aprons that function as signifiers of the original Freemasonic Craft, they adapt the "great doctrine of the inner light" from ancient Egyptian mythology, as well as a panoply of icons, including the all-seeing eye pyramid, which has graced American paper money since the 18th century (Jeffers, 6).³ Hogarth was himself "an observing member [of the Freemasons] at least into the mid-1730s," and was made a Grand Steward of the Craft in 1735 (Paulson, qtd. in Hogarth, xxxv).⁴ Throughout his career, Hogarth painted and caricatured influential Masons like his father-in-law James Thornhill and politician John Wilkes, while incorporating many Masonic icons and emblems into his work. So when Hogarth published *The Analysis of Beauty*, a treatise on his own somewhat controversial aesthetics, he designed the frontispiece around a serpent of Isis contained within a transparent pyramid.

The artist chose this image because, in his own aesthetic program, the source of all beauty coalesces in Lines of Beauty, represented in their purest and most ancient forms by serpentine lines and pyramid shapes.⁵ *The Analysis of Beauty* (Fig. 1) is then announced by a semiotically dense compilation of Egyptian and Freemasonic iconography, which, according to Hogarth, had

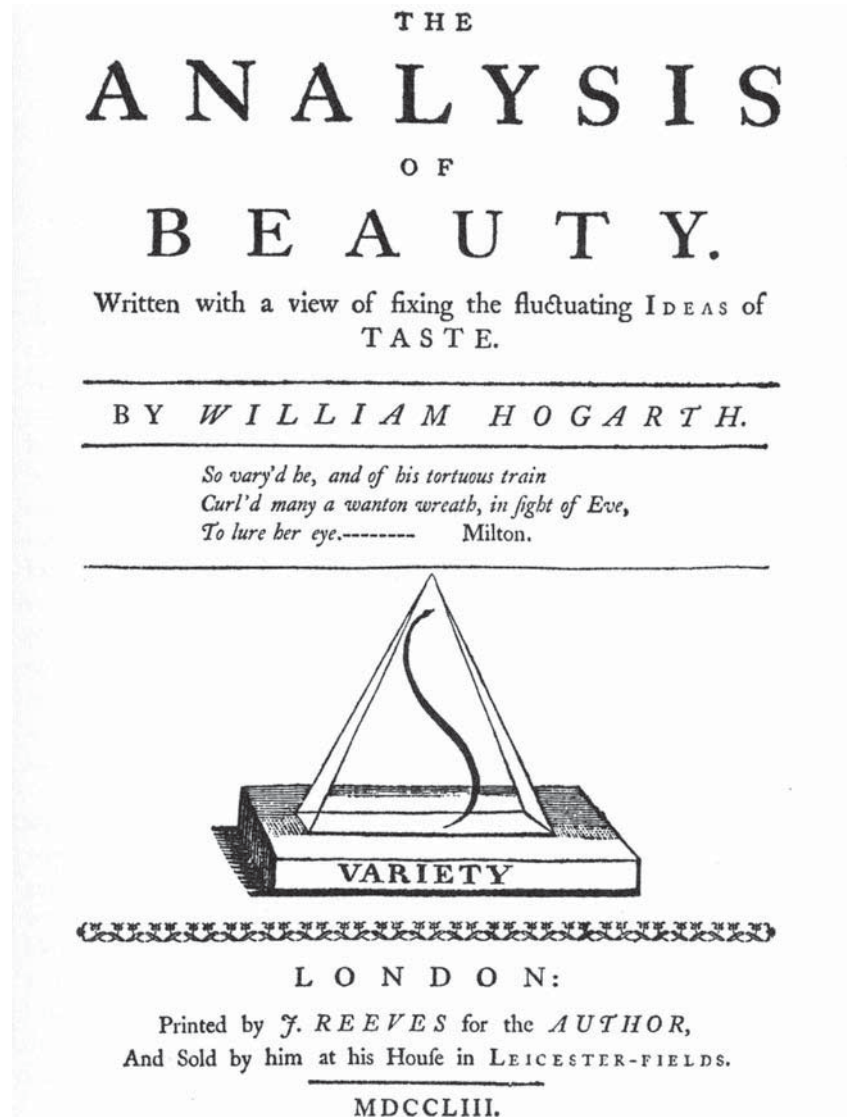


Fig. 1, Hogarth's frontispiece for *The Analysis of Beauty*

precisely the desired effect. As he explained in the preface to the 1753 edition of *The Analysis of Beauty*:

The bait soon took; and no Egyptian heiroglyphic [*sic*] ever amused more than it did [...] painters and sculptors came to me to know the meaning of it, being as much puzzled [...] as other people, till it came to have some explanation [...] [6].

By the time the 1753 edition was published, the “bait,” a wriggling serpent dubbed “the Line of Beauty,” had entered common parlance. Indeed, as the epigraph to this essay makes clear, by mid-century London celebrities like actor David Garrick were euphemistically using Hogarth’s Line of Beauty to describe their own corpulence.⁶ But what was it that so attracted Hogarth and his readers to the gentle curve of the serpent and the abrupt shape of the pyramid? As he wrote, “the triangular form [...] and the serpentine line itself, are the two most expressive figures that can be thought of to signify not only beauty and grace, but the whole *order of form*” (Hogarth, 11).⁷ More specifically, the “sharpe pointe wherewith [the pyramid] seemeth to divide the aire” and “serpent-like” lines have “motion in them” (Hogarth, 3). It was this *illusion of motion* that Hogarth called “the greatest grace and life that a picture can have [...] which the painters call the *spirite* of a picture” because it “expresses *Motion*,” through curved lines and triangular shapes (ibid).

... to lead *the eye* a kind of chace...⁸

While it is tempting to understand the movement of triangles and Lines of Beauty as a metaphor, because they have “*seeming* motion in them, which very much *resembles* the activity of the flame and of the serpent,” one might do well to take Hogarth more literally for a variety of reasons (3, my italics). The most immediate of these is the motion involved in the creation of a line drawing, “insomuch [as] the hand takes a lively movement in making it with pen or pencil” (Hogarth, 42). In other words, the movement that went into making a drawing inheres in the lines of which it is composed, and is then communicated directly to the viewer. As Hogarth muses, this knowledge is so innate that the movement that gives rise to Lines of Beauty in any act of creation is not lost, even on the “day-labourer who constantly uses the leaver, [that gives the] machine [...] a mechanical power” (Hogarth, 6).

While the motion that goes into creating images is a source of pleasure, the movement of the eye is of capital importance, as the eye “is peculiarly entertained and relieved in the pursuit of [...] serpentine lines, as their twistings their concavities and convexities are alternately offer’d to its view” (Hogarth, 52).⁹ So for Hogarth, in his comic progresses, and indeed in all that is aesthetically pleasing, the viewer derives enjoyment from the movement of the eye as it “must course [...] to and fro with great celerity [...] yet amazing ease and swiftness,” because ocular pleasure “is still more lively when [the eye] is *in motion*” (Hogarth, 33). Or, as Hogarth scholar Frédéric Ogée has

explained so succinctly, “the beholder’s pleasure comes from his/her gradual and free pursuit of the windings of the pictures’ lines [...] by cause-and-effect, left-to-right movement” (Ogée, 72). In short, for Hogarth, visual aesthetic pleasure is derived from the kinetic activity of the eye.

This pleasant ocular activity is, moreover, rooted in a more deeply meditative “movement” that aesthetic objects, like Hogarth’s drawings and panels, set in motion. Ronald Paulson has referred to this kind of movement as synecdochal, because it assumes that a part can stand in “for the whole that embodie[s] the formal essence of a person” (Paulson, qtd. in Hogarth, xxxvi). This is perhaps best illustrated by the section on proportion in the *Analysis*, wherein Hogarth shows how two crossed lines can suggest a human figure in various attitudes.¹⁰ This operation produces cognitive engagement in the viewer as s/he reads *between* the lines, fleshing out that which has been suggested, rather than completely “filled in.” Hogarth was acutely aware that he could “inclose any substance” while leading the eye “a merry chase” over undulating lines, by inviting the viewer to project substance into the space created by his “undulating” lines (Hogarth, 61). In the process, he could enlist the viewer’s imagination to “perform *motion*, *purchase*, *stedfastness*,” and to produce the “*joint-sensations* of bulk and *motion*” (ibid.).

... *the face is the index of the mind*...¹¹

To illustrate the various elements examined in *The Analysis of Beauty*, Hogarth included two pullout panels, each containing a central compound image, framed by upwards forty smaller panels. Many of these panels show gradients in the curvature of the Line of Beauty for varying effects, such as fat and thin. Similarly, the panels that contain Hogarth’s illustrations of how to draw faces (Fig. 2, plate 1, panels 97–105, bottom, right) cover a gradient from “the features of a face of the highest taste (panel 97) [...] taken from an antique head [copied by] Raphael Urbin, and other great painters and sculptors,” to a face (panel 105) “composed merely of such plane lines as children make” (Hogarth, 94–95). In other words, the panels illustrate how to draw a face in decreasing order of detail and realism, ending with a collection of circles and straight lines that merely suggest physiognomy. Likewise, Fig. 3, plate 2, panels 110–118 (bottom, left) begin with a baby’s head composed of four circles, to which details and shading are progressively added to produce a “realistic” portrait of an old woman (panel 118).¹²

Writing more than 200 hundred years after Hogarth designed these panels to explain how comic artworks, Scott McCloud ventured his own theory

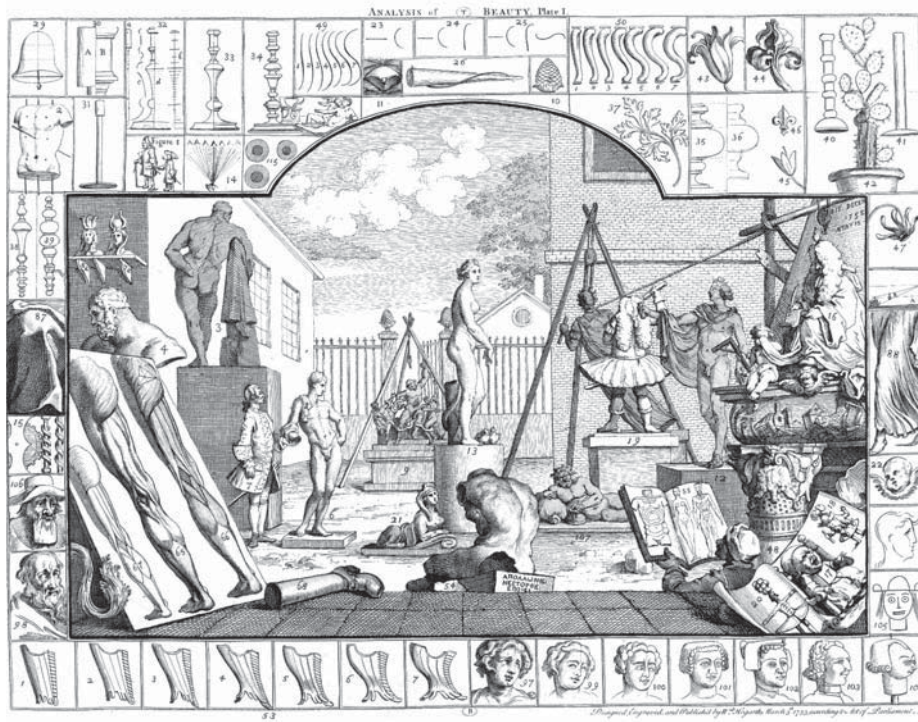


Fig. 2. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, Plate 1, 1753.

of comics with a chapter on viewer identification that echoes Hogarth with uncanny resonance.¹³ McCloud's theory is laid out by means of illustrations of a man's face, progressing from photographic realism to examples that decrease in degree of realistic detail, culminating in a face composed of dots and lines.¹⁴ McCloud wants us to notice that the last figure communicates "face," and prompts an emotive response, by engaging us with the simplest of lines. As he explains:

When you enter the world of the cartoon you see yourself [...] the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled. An empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon, we *become* it [McCloud 1994, 36].

Spectators project or "extend" identity into scant line drawings because such cartoons invite us to think ourselves into the frame emotively, to "fill in" the characters with our own sense of identification: we give comics "life by reading [them] and by 'filling up' this very iconic form" (McCloud 1994, 39). One could also see comics images as a "vacuum" that pulls, or sucks, the



Fig. 3. Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, Plate 2, 1753.

viewer in, creating a powerful emotive suturing of the observer onto the observed, resulting in the kind of “sensual, haptic pleasure” often attributed to Hogarth (Fort and Rosenthal, 6). In other words, comics art works engage readers’ imaginations and thought processes to connect with simple images like those above, and to read “the face as the index of the mind” (Hogarth, 95). Or, as McCloud has explained, the simple, iconic images of the comics engage and suture readers into the medium because “[i]cons demand our participation to make them work” (McCloud 1994, 59).

Closure and the “the assistance of the imagination”¹⁵

Along with the elements of comics art just discussed — the movement of the artist’s hand, followed by the movement of the eye of the spectator; the interpellation of the spectator who must flesh out and read between simple

lines — narrative has yet to enter the fray. Although in Hogarth, image and text are separated with few exceptions (signposts, calling cards, epigrams or epitaphs in images, for example), Paulson has claimed that Hogarth's progresses "dramatized in a uniquely powerful way — *because* in graphic images, but in images *deeply dependent on verbalization*" and narrative (my emphasis, Paulson 1996, 36).

Whatever the case may be, *The Analysis* suggests that Hogarth was conscious of the interplay of his panels with language and narrative at both micro and macro levels:

It is a pleasing labour of the mind to solve the most difficult problems: allegories and riddles, trifling as they are, afford the mind amusement: and with what delight does it follow the well-connected thread of a play, or novel, which ever increases as the plot thickens, and ends most pleas'd, when that is most distinctly unravell'd? [33].

At the micro-level then, any number of elements in each panel of Hogarth's work initiates a sort of hermeneutic play wherein the spectator is prompted to do something analogous to solving an allegory or riddle, while projecting personality into simple line drawings. At this level, observers must pick their way "through a complex iconographic orchestration [of] interlacing references and meaningful juxtapositions [that] make sense within a system of differences [...] through complex visual markings that work with and against one another, producing significance" (Fort and Rosenthal, 3). At the macro level however, viewers cognitively extract another narrative that runs from one panel to the next; moving the narrative across time as well as space, and building "the narrative thrust of the image [that] draws it toward history" and, therefore, toward story (De Bolla, 66).¹⁶

Like McCloud, Ogée has also suggested that Hogarth's boldest innovations were his use of the serial format and of graphic proliferation, "de-scriptions of the causes and effects of the passing of time [...] and the] representation of several forms of disorder [as ...] they invite the beholder into a visually tactile and 'moving' apprehension" (Ogée, 71). What I take to be the most significant factor here is the involvement of viewers in structuring a chronological narrative by means of panels — viewers who, as Hogarth confessed, would not be able to make sense of his progresses "without the assistance of the imagination" (Hogarth, 42). Hence, as scholars who write about Hogarth so often remark, beauty is experienced "by the beholder whose eye travels and creates lines from one character to the other, one plate to the next, and who thus experiences Hogarth's artistic 'process' as in flux rather than residing in the final product" (Fort and Rosenthal, 6).

This dynamic mental connecting of events in one panel sequentially to the events in the following panels, across the “gutter” that separates them, is what McCloud calls “closure.” With this term, McCloud refers to a process of logical extrapolation whereby if we were to see a man with an axe threatening a Hogarthian guttersnipe in one panel, and the guttersnipe dead of head wounds in the next, we would (il)logically assume that the man with the axe from the first panel had killed her. By connecting two panels in this way, either temporally or thematically, we are performing the kind of cognitive operation on which meaning in comics art depends.¹⁷ As McCloud wrote, “[t]his phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name. It’s called *closure*” (McCloud 1994, 63). Or, in Ronald Paulson’s terms once again, “synecdochal” logic (Paulson 1996, 63).

Before leaving this topic, I would like to argue that this method of guiding readers/viewers is no trivial development in the history of narrative media production. This technique, and particularly the way in which Hogarth practiced it, had a deep impact on other modes of storytelling, and Ronald Paulson goes so far as to claim that the panel composition of Hogarth’s sequential, image-based narratives was actually borrowed by Richardson for the structuring of *Pamela* (1740) into “divisions, demarcations, ‘scenes,’ and closures (in Fielding, chapters)” (Paulson 1996, 38). Whereas Defoe’s writing earlier in the century “simply ran on and on without stopping to form (or at least develop, shape, and *close*) scenes,” rambling on “without division or *closure*,” writers in Hogarth’s circle “hooked” readers, inviting them to connect and close episodes across the narrative (Paulson 1996, 38). Hence, if Paulson’s theory holds water, Hogarth’s pictorial, sequential narratives, and the ways in which they suture viewers in and invite them to actively perform closure, gave rise to the sequential structure of the 18th-century, serialized novel of the type published by Richardson and Sterne, and for which Hogarth also contributed illustrations.¹⁸

Motion and Modernity

Action is a sort of language which perhaps one time or other may come to be taught by a kind of grammar-rules.

— Hogarth

It should by now be clear that Hogarth was obsessed with communicating a sense of movement in his work, and virtually all of Hogarth’s artistic output is invested with a dual movement across space and through time. On the one

hand “[t]he heterogeneous display [in each panel] presents itself performatively, since the objects on display appear animated and enter into a dialogue” (Fort and Rosenthal, 13). And while at the micro level of each panel, the spectator is guided in following lines of beauty and interpreting the various intrigues incorporated in each panel, at the macro level readers are encouraged to move exegetically across panels. Given that Hogarth himself explained that the noble “dimensions which appear to have given [his art] so much dignity, are the same that are best fitted to produce the utmost speed,” it is little wonder that his progresses communicate rapidity as well as movement, and hence modernity (Hogarth, 73).

Moreover, just as the kinesis of the artist’s brushstrokes was to inhere in the final product, drawing the spectator’s eye into an amusing joy-ride in and across panels, Hogarth’s techniques of observation and execution grew directly out of his life as a devotee of London and big-city life in industrial modernity.¹⁹ The pleasure that the viewer’s eye takes in Hogarth’s serpentine lines was supposedly a direct translation of the enjoyment that the artist took in “winding walks,” retaining images “as he strolled the streets, reducing scenes to mental diagrams” out of which “he presumably abstracted the Line of Beauty” (Paulson, qtd. in Hogarth, xxxvi). His self-taught method was “to draw by memory [...] lineally such objects as fitted any purpose best,” and to keep “images in [his] mind’s Eye without drawing upon the spot” so his tableaux were produced quite literally from a state of flux (*ibid.*).

While his focus on speed and mobility distinguishes Hogarth as particularly modern, it has also been remarked that his modernity is manifest in the objects he chose to represent, such as industrial drill bits (plate 1, panel 15) and candlesticks (plate 1, panels 12, 33, 34).²⁰ It is possible that at least some of these objects encountered on his walks belonged to the art of the “common sign-painter,” who “instantly becomes [...] a Rubens, a Titian, or a Corregio” if “he lays his colours smooth” (Hogarth, 93). Long Lane, a street that Hogarth often visited and admired, housed many establishments with impressive signs (The Anchor, Golden Ball, Black Boy, Indian Queen, Golden Key) that he supposedly “enjoyed as others did trees and gardens” (Paulson 1971, 232). Indeed, when Hogarth, a man keenly aware of his times, was roaming the streets of London on image-gathering missions, the notion of “seeing sights” in commercial centers was on the rise (Burney, 29). As novelist, and Hogarth contemporary, Frances Burney so vividly described in her fiction, the practice of meandering through “auctions, curious shops and so forth” — in short, the pleasures of going “a-shopping” — was just being discovered (Burney, 41).²¹ One is reminded of Benjamin’s later essays on the flâneur — the quintessential figure of city life — for whom “the shiny enameled signs of busi-

nesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon” (Benjamin 1997, 37). Like Hogarth, Benjamin’s flâneur takes in the dominant aesthetic of commodity culture, expressed in an endless commercial collage of signs, posters, handbills and merchandise, to be imbibed as one strolls.

Similarly, Benjamin scholar Anne Friedberg has pointed out that, “by the middle of the 18th century, shopkeepers began to realize that the window might be a prime proscenium for commodity display” (Friedberg, 65). This moment marked an early juncture in the history of the mobilized shopper’s gaze that knows how to “read the social hieroglyphs of the commodit[ies] on display” (ibid., 57). For Friedberg, the visual pleasure of commodity culture is predicated on the theatricality of the shop window as “the site of seduction for consumer desire,” and as a place to watch the endless parade of goods which would later develop into the continuous visual pleasure of film (ibid., 65). The excitement of moving images would, a century and a half after Hogarth, become a prime means of presenting the mobilized pedestrian gaze in modern culture.

In this light, it is not difficult to see how Hogarth’s comics art, in which he strove to render motion and invite the beholder into a visually tactile and “moving apprehension,” is part of a continuum that includes the moving-image entertainment (TV, film, computer games) that is such an essential part of commodity culture. As suggested above, the movement and thrust of this kind of democratized commercial aesthetics, was supposedly obvious to Hogarth’s industrial laborer who “constantly uses the lever” and powers the modern machine that mass-produced consumable goods like comic prints (Hogarth, 6). It was also apparent to producers of many products in the 18th century, including those of women’s fans, which were marketed in the 18th century as an essential semiotic accoutrement of social interaction. Such fans were often decorated with illustrations including Hogarth’s processes, which unfolded like a short film across the face of the modern coquette.²²

... the art of seeing...

The more prevailing the notion may be, that painters and connoisseurs are the only competent judges of things of this sort; the more it becomes necessary to clear up and confirm [...] that no one may be deterr’d [...] from entering into this enquiry.

— Hogarth

In their introduction to *The Other Hogarth*, Fort and Rosenthal cite among the most salient features of the artist’s oeuvre “[c]onsumption and

commercialization in an expanding global market" (5). Hogarth was, as I have hinted, a savvy businessman who was not opposed to applying his trade to the purpose of advertising. He produced business cards for his sisters' millinery that "showed the actual interior of a shop with bolts of material, clerks and customers," captioned "Wholesale or Retale, at Reasonable Rates" (Paulson 1971, 233). He was no less shrewd where his own livelihood was concerned, and placed an early announcement for the publication of *The Analysis of Beauty* in Henry Fielding's *Covent-Garden Journal* March 24, 1752, in the hope of securing advanced sales. The announcement featured the "bait" in the form of the Freemasonic pyramid and curving serpent, and advertised publication in four installments including "Two Explanatory Prints, serious and comical engraved on large Copper-Plates, fit to frame for Furniture" (Paulson, xvii). Early subscribers could pre-purchase the first installment for the special rate of 5 shillings until November, and then opt to pay another 5 shillings upon delivery of the next installments and prints. Late subscribers paid 15 shillings for the complete *Analysis* as well as the accompanying "ready to frame" prints, which themselves enjoyed further editions in their own right, and which out-sold the book.

While Hogarth was well aware of the market in which his prints circulated and the profits they could generate, it is important to consider how the greater context enters into the picture. As De Bolla has pointed out, the mid-point of the 18th century saw a "growth in the audience for culture [that was] stimulated by greater capacities for reproducing and disseminating" aesthetic objects of varying "quality" (DeBolla, 6). Similarly, Friedberg has argued that a major cultural shift resulted from this moment, which saw the "organization of the look in the service of consumption, and the gradual incorporation of the commodified experience into everyday life" through popular culture (DeBolla, 3). And, as authors including De Bolla, Ogée, McCloud, and Hogarth himself have reasoned, the commercial, mass-produced art that came to the fore in the 18th century elicited an active, sensuous, emotive — in short, sentimental — spectatorial identification:

The *sentimental* look operates via a fully somatic insertion into the visual field. It makes the body present to sight, folding it into a set of gestures or attitudes that enable the viewer to feel his or her presence in the visual sphere, feel the self in sight, and in so doing it stimulates the cognitive process of affective response [...] the sentimental look presents the viewer to the object and to vision, allows the viewer both to recognize itself in the place of the seen and to identify with the process of seeing [De Bolla, 11, my italics].

The sentimental look and its capacity to draw spectators in and *hold* them, while making them feel part of the spectacle or image is, as I have been

arguing, precisely what makes Hogarth's progresses, and the comics medium in general, so very engaging. This was part and parcel of "a culture that was increasingly comfortable with the notion of being-in-the-picture, in the plane of representation," not just as a function of the projection of the self into images, but also where the circulation of spectators in new public spaces such as museums and shopping streets was concerned (De Bolla, 60). Hence, while the canvas or image itself is an eye-catcher within the spacings of the exhibition room, it also structures the exchange of glances that may take place in public places at a time when more and more of the "middling sort" began to figure more forcibly in the public sphere" (ibid., 23). And this, of course, threatened social order by opening a *porte d'entrée* for both artists and admirers of the "inferior sphere" of "mechanical arts" into the culture of the cognoscenti.

Herein lay the crux of a number of issues for people in the 18th century, which persist largely unresolved today. Faced with an ever-increasing body of commercial, sentimental art and a "very vivacious production [from] popular imagery and sign painting," the upper classes lamented "those Objects, that everywhere [were] thrusting themselves out to the Eye, and endeavouring to become visible" (Georgel, 97, 99). This gave rise to a voluble public debate on the notion of the "connoisseur," those socially superior persons who distinguished themselves from every Sally Housecoat and Johnny Lunchbucket now participating in culture by virtue of their superior liberal appreciation of high art, and their disdain for mechanical or mass-produced art.²³ At the same time, however, artists, like everyone else, were becoming increasingly dependant on the market for their income. So whereas artists previously relied on the patronage of "persons of quality," they were now often obliged to finance themselves publicly, while treading a fine line between appealing to the trained eye of the connoisseur and diminishing their potential market in sales to the uninformed masses.

Hogarth's involvement in this debate was poorly received, and cartoons of the artist with his Line of Beauty began circulating directly following the publication *The Analysis*.²⁴ This reception is unfortunate, given that his "intervention represents the most ambitious counterargument to the academic view concerning the need for 'book learning' in the appreciation of the visual arts" in 18th-century debates on aesthetics (De Bolla, 25). What makes Hogarth's argument so radical is his isolation of the Line of Beauty, which disrupts the "more prevailing notion" that "painters and connoisseurs are the only competent judges of things of this sort," and considerably democratizes the "art of seeing" because such lines are familiar to all (ibid., 18).²⁵

This point is perhaps best illustrated by the collection of art objects at the centre of plate 1 of *The Analysis*, which represented Henry Cheere's statuary

yard at Hyde Park Corner. Cheere's enterprise was one in a row of such yards that specialized in mass-produced, cheap lead copies of classical sculptures, whose execution was "so monstrously wretched, that one [could] hardly guess at their Originals" (James Ralph, quoted in Paulson 1993, 101). By including a drawing of his friend's statue yard, and suggesting that people learn about aesthetics from it, Hogarth was providing advertising for Cheere, while directly flying in the face of academicians who favored instructing artists by having them copy more accurate casts of canonical sculptures from antiquity.²⁶ While Hogarth effectively falls in with the "Ignorance and Folly of the Buyers [...] resolv'd to [...] purchase their Follies as cheap as possible" and "Workmen in a wrong Taste of Designing" who are "hasty and rude in Finishing," he is also suggesting that beauty and aesthetic value have more to do with basic Lines of Beauty than with a culturally constructed, class-driven canon (ibid.). In other words, Hogarth's line holds out the means with which to by-pass the high/low art distinction that was being so rigorously policed by the mid-18th century, and which continues to keep comics art in the proverbial gutter.

The Financial Revolution and Comic Art

There is one common, if perhaps not immediately obvious, thread that runs through my argument, just as the Line of Beauty runs through Hogarth's *Analysis*. I would argue that this thread is the direct or indirect source of all the forms of mid 18th-century movement and dynamism to which I have referred thus far. While the industrial revolution quite obviously facilitated mobility and sped production, it was the financial revolution, which occurred roughly from 1688 to 1776, that radically altered the class system by creating surplus wealth which permitted social mobility.²⁷ At the same time, the notion of credit at the center of this revolution created new ways of obtaining and producing wealth, while necessitating the forward projection of profits and interest, thereby shifting attention to the future.

It was, moreover, a highly volatile market that came to occupy such a central role in all aspects of daily life beginning in the 18th century. Fueled by intense dissatisfaction with the royal mishandling of debt, and spurred on by the excitement of a credit-based economy, managed by new public institutions like banks, the market picked up a dizzying head of speed. And while the giddy force of the market made it possible for everyone to buy shares, profit, and enjoy new commodities, the economy it drove was also new, naïve, and open to wild experimentation. For example, the South Sea Bubble, known

as the first episode in a now familiar cycle of booms and crashes, was the demise of hundreds of small enterprises licensed almost purely for the purposes of creating public stock for trade and speculation. When a rush on shares caused a colossal crisis in 1720, Hogarth immediately commemorated the event in a popular comic print that sold for 1 shilling.²⁸ As scholars have suggested, “the creation of various types of memorabilia” around the South Sea Bubble “depended upon pleasing the public rather than upon” accurately representing the events of 1720.²⁹ Hence, The South Sea Bubble became a popular motif for artists because this rapid upset was dramatic and exciting, yet it also provided an arena for satire and moralizing about greed and mob madness.

If Hogarth’s South Sea Bubble print is merely a popularization of commonly held (mis)apprehensions of this first market crash, Hogarth’s *Marriage à la Mode* (Fig. 4) reveals a keen understanding of the economy and its new drivers. In this progress, commonly thought of as “attacking the ‘property marriage’” and the financialization of that aspect of daily life in the 18th century, I would also argue that it fully articulates the dynamic of the market which animates Hogarth’s own commercial art (Paulson 1996, 43). Here, I want to focus briefly on the first panel, depicting the negotiation of a marriage between Earl Squander’s son and the daughter of a wealthy city merchant, in a six-panel progress that ends in death and disaster. The negotiation takes place in Earl Squander’s mansion, which provides a perfect setting for the vibrant interchange of Hogarthian Lines of Beauty in details such as the back wall, displaying eight detailed paintings arranged to suggest a parallel sequential narrative. Likewise, in characteristic fashion, Hogarth suggests the passage of time through his horizontal arrangement of character clusters arrested in “suspended action,” with “every person at one instant of time” of the narrative tableau (Hogarth, 103).

But the action at the center of the panel is where movement converges, and where marriage is focused through markers of the new, volatile financial market. Hogarth illustrates exchange in this market through an element of still life, depicting a pile of coins and a number of documents on a table between Earl Squander and the merchant. This segment recalls Foucault’s analysis of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656), in which he describes the painting as “present[ing] us with the entire cycle of representation” in the 17th century, including mirrors, an artist’s canvas, palette, and brush (“the material tools of representation”), all contained in another representation, which dissolves and returns as the viewer moves in and out of the illusion (Foucault 1994, 11). In a similar gesture, Hogarth renders the entire of cycle of the representation of money during a paradigmatic shift in economic thought and practice, as money was becoming ever more abstract and virtual. Hence, set off against coin and



Fig. 4. Hogarth, *Marriage à la Mode*, panel 1, "The Marriage Settlement," 1720.

a title, the old "material tools of representation" are instruments of credit, like the mortgages, paper money, and shares proffered by the merchant. These financial instruments are also set off against the *real* estate visible through a window directly behind the Earl. Here, that least liquid form of wealth includes a building project that the Earl is unable to finance. In other words, the *landed* gentry represented by Earl Squander is giving way to a growing merchant class that moves wealth quickly by projecting credit and interest into the future and conducting trade through the abstract medium of paper.

In choosing such a transaction as the central theme for a progress that Hogarth both painted and printed to be sold as an inexpensive sequential narrative or comic to an expanding middle class, he was challenging and critiquing notions of class and of what constitutes art for the privileged few. The artist was also acknowledging, however implicitly, that his progresses and panels were a new kind of aesthetic production that delivered a fast-paced, haptic form of narrative for the entertainment of a specialized, emergent reader, namely the modern economic subject.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have advanced the notion that Hogarth's art, and consciously commercial art more generally, grew up in the 18th century alongside a booming and fast-moving market economy, heavily invested in the new finance.³⁰ *The Analysis of Beauty*, published as it was in quick succession to any number of treatises on the Beautiful and aesthetic pleasure, made visible the complicity of art with the (art)market, and destabilized theories of the beautiful that sought to establish and justify a canon. *The Analysis* explicitly welcomed the "mechanik" arts so that "no one should be deterr'd from discussing" questions of beauty because, for Hogarth, taste was not limited to the upper classes and their "connoisseurs" (18). If the aesthetic pleasure that emanates from the Line of Beauty consists in ocular kinesis (the movement of the eye), haptic sensual involvement (the thrills and chills), and the illusion of movement, then beauty is to be found in the mass-produced candlesticks and corkscrews with which Hogarth demonstrated his theory, as much as in Caravaggios.

Moreover, because Hogarth's Line of Beauty permeates high and low art alike, it resolves the issue of commerciality, with which Scott McCloud struggles at length in the seventh chapter of *Understanding Comics*. The argument he presents consists in fine-tuning the relationship of comics to the market by offering a comics gradient from less commercial, more artist-driven, to more commercial comics created with little or no aesthetic morality or sense of purpose other than making money. This gesture effectively establishes yet another canon (a highly questionable concept in and of itself) in the world of "mechanic" art where it does not belong. I would like to close by advancing the polemical notion that it is precisely comics art's constant involvement with the market that gives it the dynamic look, speed and feel that readers so enjoy. And Hogarth's Line of Beauty, as simple a concept as it may be, helps us to recognize the aesthetic merit of those arts that continue to remain, in McCloud's idiom, "invisible."

Notes

1. For more on "forerunners" of comics, see Shesgreen, 577.
2. Although one might intuit that hieroglyphs fall under McCloud's definition of the comics medium as "juxtaposed, pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information, and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer," the author insists that hieroglyphics are related to "the written word and not comics" (9, 13).
3. The Masonic pyramid first appeared on the American fifty-dollar bill, issued September 26, 1778. The all-seeing eye pyramid, also of Masonic origin, has been printed on the back of American one-dollar bills since 1935. On this point see Standish, 121. Cf. Jeffers, 165.
4. See W. Bro. Yasha Beresiner, "William Hogarth: The Man, the Artist and his Masonic Circle," *Masonic Papers*, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/beresiner11.html>. For more on Hogarth's specific contributions to Masonry, see Ridley 257, 277.

5. Note that the Line of Beauty and the pyramid are subtended by variety, which is an obvious and important aspect of Hogarth's output. See Chapter II, "Of Variety," in *The Analysis*.

6. Although he had not yet published his work on the Line of Beauty when Garrick famously quoted him, Hogarth frequently discussed his philosophy within his circle of famous friends so that the Line of Beauty had considerable currency even before *The Analysis* was published. Cf. Paulson's introduction to Hogarth, xx.

7. All italics are in Hogarth's original text unless otherwise indicated.

8. Hogarth, 34.

9. The pyramid is supposedly equally dynamic because: "There is no object composed of straight lines, that has so much variety, with so few parts, as the pyramid; and it is its constantly varying from its base gradually upwards in every situation of the eye, (without giving the idea of sameness, as the eye moves round it) that has made it esteem'd in all ages" (Hogarth, 30). On Balzac's later use of the pyramid in *La Peau de Chagrin* (1831) to create the illusion of movement and to express the instability of the fictional world of his novel, see Bell 190 and Weber 44–50.

10. "It is easy to conceive that the attitude of a person upon the cross, may be fully signified by the two straight lines of the cross" (102). See also Fig. 3, plate 2, middle right, panels 69 and 70.

11. Hogarth, 95.

12. The baby's face composed of four circles is panel 116, followed by panels 110–114, and then 117 and 118. This is a prime example of Hogarth's erratic numbering system, which was ridiculed by his detractors. See Paulson 1991, 134–141.

13. See chapter 2, "The Vocabulary of Comics." It is worth noting that, although McCloud's work bears a remarkable resemblance to Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, it is unlikely that the author of *Understanding Comics* was directly influenced by the 18th-century artist — the simplest reason being that the *Analysis of Beauty* was a rather obscure work with limited circulation until 1997 when Hogarth's *Analysis* was edited and re-published, some three years after the publication of McCloud's work.

14. See McCloud 29.

15. Hogarth, 42.

16. Both Hogarth and McCloud devote a considerable portion of their argument to discussing single panels in which time can be read as moving across the panel. For Hogarth, this is the case in his composite ballroom scene at the center of panel 2, which he proposes reading as moving across time chronologically from left to right (Hogarth, 33). Compare this with McCloud's chapter 4, "Time Frames on individual panels that contain time sequences and the temporal structure of comics in general" (McCloud, 96–97).

17. These are just some of the kinds of sense that readers make across gutters and, of course, there are many different kinds of gutters. For more on this topic, see McCloud chapter 3, "Blood in the Gutter," 60–93.

18. Cf. Riehl 38–41 and Lamb, 183. Paulson also argues that Richardson borrows "from Hogarth's progresses the particular Hogarthian graphic version of play, with big scenes, symbolic gestures and objects" (Paulson 1996, 39). Elsewhere, Paulson has written that, along with Hogarth's images in *Tristram Shandy*, "the Shandean inheritance from Hogarth's *Analysis* [includes the] Shandean reading structure (serpentine, not straight lines; avoid all rules; digressive is progressive)," based "on the practice of reading a Hogarth print" (Paulson, "Introduction" to *The Analysis of Beauty*, 1). While this claim is perhaps subject to criticism, the appeal and bravado of advancing the notion that visual sequential narrative shaped the traditional 18th-century English novel is tremendously evocative.

19. "Hogarth's ambition was to present himself, an English artist and a Londoner, as the visual interpreter of contemporary urban life [...]. Today the phrase 'Age of Hogarth' is often used to describe the early-Georgian period, just as 'Hogarthian London' has come to characterize its capital city. In his own time, William Hogarth (1697–1764) was appreciated as the most dynamic and influential artist working in Britain" (Riding, 1).

20. Cf. Klucinskas: "Sa [Hogarth] modernité se manifeste d'abord par son choix de sujets" (5).

21. According to Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, this passage in Burney is "the first recorded instance of the verb *to shop*" (91).

22. On this point, see Angela Rosenthal's fascinating essay entitled "Unfolding Gender: Women and the 'Secret' Sign Language of Fans in Hogarth's Work," *passim*. See also Crary, Chapter 1, *passim*.

23. The main players in these debates were Joseph Addison who published *Pleasures of the Imagination*, in 1712 as numbers 411 through 421 of *The Spectator*, Lord Shaftsbury, Joshua Reynolds and Jonathan Richardson, to whom Hogarth disparagingly refers below.

24. See Paul Sandby's *The Author Run Mad* (1754), published in the 1997 edition of *The Analysis of Beauty*.

25. "[...] it is not unreasonable to suppose, that this discernment [of the eye] is still capable of further improvements by instructions from a methodical enquiry; which the ingenious Mr. Richardson, in his treatise on painting, terms *the art of seeing*" (Hogarth, 94).

26. In a similar vein, Shesgreen writes that Hogarth eschewed "the usual sources of material like the Bible, history, mythology, and previous art, drawing instead on his own experience and imaginations" (573).

27. See North and Weingast. Their article is often credited as one of the first to identify the "financial revolution."

28. For a detailed account of the South Sea Bubble, see Dale, 96–140.

29. See for example, Helen Julia Paul, *forthcoming*.

30. As I have argued elsewhere (Goggin, *forthcoming*) along with many others, art and money are not separable, and this includes art in general. Probably the most forceful argument in this regard can be found in Marc Shell's *Art and Money*, *passim*.