the cartoon
as an instrument
of political education

'C'MON, KNOCK IT OFF!'
Introduction

One of the major marks of the urban industrial civilization is its visual nature. The image cannot be separated from any civilization. From pre-historic peoples who put their sacred drawings on cave walls to the contemporary city, the image, and the message which it contains, has come a long way. The city itself puts out visual images which we absorb without being aware. The way a city is arranged spatially, the inequality between the “beautiful” sections and the poorer sections, the importance given to certain buildings with their grandness and their locations, accessible by way of wide avenues: all these are symbols, messages which tell us how the urban society is established. The city can be read in its fabric, and this implies a system of well-defined ideological values.

But the city contains more explicit messages—the special lighting for certain areas and buildings, the festival of neon advertising, large publicity posters, department store windows, theatre and cinema marquees, the covers of magazines on sale in news-stands, advertising in and on the public transportation systems, are all broadcasting visual messages for which we are the recipients, to be reached, to be impressed, and to be convinced. If we add to this the fact that our free time is largely taken up with television and cinema, we see how the circle is closed.

We can say that in all these forms of communication there is a message with a more or less explicit ideological content, giving us a certain world-view and leading us to a consensus. The totality of information given out by all these images has a striking homogeneity with regard to the models, ideas, and ways of life which are offered to us. To understand this, (and why it is so), is a necessary first step in avoiding the trap—a trap which is all the more dangerous because it presents itself in apparent innocence and gives a certain aesthetic pleasure to the eye.

All perception of reality is, in a sense, preceded or anticipated by an ensemble of ideas which represent it. More and more, before knowing something—or even in place of knowing it—we have a representation of it, and image of it, or an idea of it. Ideas, values, and world-views, all are articulated according to the way human beings are socially linked to each other. Images come out of social myths and constantly refer us to cultural models generated by a society which is organized according to very well defined rules. When, within a society, a group controls the material means necessary to the survival of that society, this same group also controls the means of producing ideas insights, and world-views.

Just as with the arrangement of the city—decided according to material interests and imposed on the population—information is also controlled, selected, and processed by a minority, and this information is adapted to the minority interests before being released. Then the released ideological information, (which does not correspond to reality, which veils reality, which bit by bit replaces reality), is finally accepted as reality itself. Points of friction disappear, or, robbed of their content, are presented according to the minority point of view. The powerful force of persuasion, which is the consequence of this manipulation, tries to anesthetize critical capacity and create a false homogeneous world and a consensus about what is necessary for that world’s perpetuation. So it is that things in place tend to stay in place and any unavoidable change is reduced to a simple adjustment which does not threaten the established order.
That is the unstated wish of the ruling class. In reality, however things are not quite so simple. Social practices, class interests, cultural and political factors, are all elements which prevent this total massification. One’s involvement in society can unveil the hidden reality. Certain elements break, time and again, the bubble of internal logic of these mechanisms and unveil the reality around it. Even though the most powerful means of communication is always the revolutionary process itself, it would be false to say that apart from exceptional moments, (like May 1968 in France for example), there is no way to grasp reality or to decode the mechanisms of which it is composed. The important lesson to learn from those privileged moments is the idea of participation, that is, a social and political practice in which people educate themselves. Such education can be the result of an event, but it can also be had through the daily practice of deciphering the reality around us. That is the only way to break the separation between ideas and things, between the intellectual and the material, between those who know and process information and those who do not know but receive it passively.

The question we deal with in this document concerns comic strips and cartoons and their potential role in a process of political education. The cartoon is presented here as an example—among others—of the possibility of breaking the monopoly on information and of unveiling the mechanisms which are hidden behind events as presented to us. We are not interested in justifying cartoons as serious communication or attributing to them more possibility than they actually have. Our aim is to discuss and examine certain concrete examples.

This study could have been done on the basis of cartoons published in Europe, Latin America, or North America, but we have taken, rather, the work of one of the members of the IDAC collective, which means that the cartoons presented here have particular interest to us. In fact, the themes here dealt with have been touched in previous IDAC Documents in one way or another — development education, process of raising awareness, critique of the highly industrialized society. Finally, we look at this medium because, beginning this year, we are undertaking the production of audio-visual materials—slides, super 6 films, and video tapes—in which the cartoon will play a significant role. Before getting to the concrete examples of cartoons and considering their possibilities, it would be interesting to look at this means of expression, to understand its characteristics and its limitations.

Our interest here is to see how a visual means of expression, widely used and accepted, as is the cartoon, can serve as a pedagogical instrument to set in motion a process of political education and to see what can be learned from the examples which we shall use.

First of all, we must define our terms. We are not interested in discussing the “apolitical” cartoon. To begin with, it is possible to say that the “apolitical” cartoon does not exist, because all cartoons necessarily express the social myths which underlie well defined social models. This point has been extremely well documented in an interesting study made by Mattel art and Doffraan in which they analyze the ideological implications of Donald Duck cartoons and comic strips.
Freud, in his book, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, proposes a division between innocent jokes, (that is, those jokes which apparently have no reason for being other than to make one laugh), and those to which Freud dedicates the larger part of his study, which have another purpose and meaning. In this latter category we have cartoons which expose through satire and comedy, the “real” hidden nature of what we want to show.

My presenting a Hitler as comic and ridiculous, Charlie Chaplin, in The Great Dictator, managed to secure a victory which was materially impossible at the time. The audience showed its approval and complicity through laughter. Humor “will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that had become inaccessible”, says Freud.

Humor represents a rebellion against authority, liberation from absolute control. Between the author and the object of the satire, there is the public, the audience, which reacts through laughter when it sees what the author tries to show and rediscovers the reality which had been previously hidden.

Our main concern here, then, is the political cartoon —be it an individual drawing or a sequence of drawings. When cartoonists like Levine, Tim, Steadman, or Sorel draw their cartoons, they unveil some of the characteristic traits of an individual which were previously hidden from us. But the cartoon does not attack the person as an individual, but rather as a representative of an institution, of a moral or religious dogma, or of things that were considered too “serious”, so that a critique can be made only indirectly. The cartoon, while attacking one specific target, often gives the impression of dealing with an entirely different, subject. The fables are examples of this—as we shall see in the cartoons selected for this document.

It is interesting to consider the relationship between the image and the person who receives that image. McLuhan classifies the comic strip among what he calls the (6) “cool” media which, according to him, give little information on a subject but demand the participation of the reader-observer so that the message can be completed, McLuhan’s main interest is the medium in itself, its technique which he equates with its content. Without going that far and without entering here into a critique of his work, (for that, see Baldelli, Eco, among others), it is true that the cartoon has remarkable pedagogical possibilities of communication, since it does open the way to interactions, to feedback, to the reader’s responsibility in decoding and processing the message presented. (7)

The author organizes the information, which exists in a raw state. This information is taken, processed, and sent back to the audience.

That leads us to deal briefly with an often mentioned problem: the intellectual’s contribution to a process of social change. When the subject matter of a political cartoon is a reality consciously or sub-consciously experienced by large numbers of people, (be it international happening or local event) its possibilities of communication increase considerably. This reality, which is re-processed and codified by the artist, on the basis of an experience common to that artist and those who will work out the message of the drawing, is clarified by the people’s participation. The message is shaped, and its de-codification becomes a shared experience, a synthesis from which a new step forward might be taken on the way to political consciousness.
The cartoonist’s message will be the more valid in so far as that cartoonist is in direct contact with the audience he or she would like to reach, and according to his or her capacity to be witness and spokesman, with a work grounded in political practice. Such a work can put in motion a process of critical analysis shared by a large number of people, thus becoming an instrument in the process of social change and political education.

The drawn, reconstructed, and remodeled image of people and situations introduces a critical dimension which we thought only words were capable of. After the leaflet and the poster, the cartoon—thanks to the distance between what is represented and the experienced situation—draws attention to relationships, traits, and associations until then only implicit. One finds then, that the image ceases to be a mere shadow of what is real and proposes, (or sometimes even imposes), another interaction, another global meaning.

The cartoon, then, becomes a valuable instrument of parallel education, a political tool designed to inform, to educate, and to mobilize.

Two other points should be raised here. First, one must establish a difference between the critical dimension of the cartoon on the one hand, and political propaganda on the other. There is, in fact, a risk that this medium become a vehicle for messages so biased that the final result is negative, even though there is validity in the subject matter which should have been communicated. Edmundo Desnoes, in his presentation of a Cuban poster exhibition, (9) points up this problem in recognizing that, although the posters have an excellent graphic quality, they constitute a kind of short-cut to authentic communication, since real communication cannot take place on a one-way basis. The critical impact of the cartoon comes from the participation which is asked from the reader-observer in the work of deciphering or decoding the message. A certain effort of reflection is required to discover a cartoon’s most complete meaning.

Another point which it would be good to consider for a moment is the cartoon medium’s characteristic. The cartoon has the qualities of the printed press. That means that it can be rapidly executed, cheaply produced, given a wide and quick distribution, and can deal with current issues and immediate situations.

Contrary to the “elitist culture” cartoons enjoy a wide acceptance, permitting a use of free and direct expression not usually granted to other vehicles. Cartoons have an ability to bring together visually elements which were originally scattered, isolated, or hidden from view. The assemblage of these elements, then, creates a new reality.

Humor created by contrast, of ideas, by nonsense, by surprise, and by the unveiling of things that would have otherwise remained hidden, is an essential part of this medium.

In the “dream work” described by Freud there is also this process of condensation which bears a striking resemblance to the technique of the cartoon and of the comic strip. Moreover, being a non-permanent medium of communication, (the paper is “used” and thrown away), the cartoon has a great flexibility in its distribution, and it can create a receptive attitude, thanks to the seeming ease with which the message is presented and conveyed. Since cartoons and comic strips give the impression of demanding less effort than a written text on the part of the reader-observer one is naturally more open to receiving it and to considering what it wants to say.
And that should be enough written introduction, for there is a contradiction present in spending too much time discussing in writing the subject of visual communication.
1. See Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, Para Leer el Pato Donal,

2. See Pio Baldelli, Informazione e Contro-Informazione, Milan,

3. Dorfman and Mattelart, op. cit.

4. Freud, Sigmund, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,

5. idem.

6. McLuhan, Marshall, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,

7. See the preface by Umberto Eco in I Fumetti di Unidad Popular—
uno strumento di informazione popolare ne Cile di Allende,
CELUC—IL Manifesto, Milan, 1974.

8. See Anne Marie Thibault-Laulan, L'image dans la Société Contem-

9. Desnoes, Humberto, Introduction to an Exhibition of Cuban Posters

The stories following in this document have appeared in O Pasquim,
a Brazilian humoristic weekly edited in Rio. The author of the
drawings is one of the founders and regular contributors to that
weekly. Some of the other drawings—especially those dealing with
aid and development—have been printed in different publications
of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and in the Jornal do Brasil.
We especially thank the CCEPD in Geneva for permitting the re-publica-
cation here of drawings which were done for their use.

The comic strips and cartoons are the work of a member of the IDAC
staff, CLAUDIUS CECCON.
Hi, Lili!

Hi, Joe.

Give me a bite of your cake?

I can't.

Why?

Cause, if I give it away I'd be hungry.

What about me? I'm hungry too!

So what?

So you give me half.

Then neither of us will be satisfied.

But at least I'd be less hungry than before.

Look, Joe: If we both are hungry, that means 100% hunger. If I eat my cake then the famine is reduced by 50%.

True - but the 50% that's left is mine. That's a violence!

Sorry, but statistics are neutral.

If the problem is statistical, I have a better idea.

What is it?

I eat the cake...

...then the neutrality of statistics is in my favour...

...and remember... violence breeds violence!
I just read in a newspaper that in 30 years the Latin American population will rise 123 percent above 1970. There will be 355 million more people!

235 million more will move into the big cities. 85 million new workers will need jobs. 100 million more kids will need schools!

BRAZIL WILL HAVE HALF THAT POPULATION! WHERE CAN WE PUT 117.5 MILLION MORE INHABITANTS IN OUR URBAN CENTERS?

RELAX, LILI - THEY WONT bother us, cause most of them cant pay the rent in this area.

JOE, GUESS HOW MANY NEW NEIGHBORS YOU RE GETTING...?
CLAUDIUS:

Lili.

I WANT YOU TO WRITE NOW SEE YOUR SCHOOL.

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING ABOUT?

HOW HARD IT IS TO HAVE A CLASSAWARENESS!
Claudius:

LILI

What's that mean, "blinders"?

Blinders are those things you put on a horse so it can't see right or left...

...then he can only see straight ahead.

And what if he turns his head?

Then you pull on the reins to keep him from turning.

What if he continues?

Then you use the whip.

And are these things used on people too?

That's enough of questions, Lili. Take this book - you're ready for Kafka!
I'M GONNA GET YOU OUT, OK?

NO, IT'S NOT OK!

WHY?! I JUST WANT TO SET YOU FREE!

BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE SET FREE HERE. I'M SECURE!

I HAVE A HOME, MEALS, AND A VIEW TOWARD THE SEA.

YOU ARE ALSO BEHIND BARS!

THE BARS PROTECT ME FROM LIONS, TIGERS AND WILD WOLVES.

BUT WE DON'T HAVE ANY OF THOSE ANIMALS HERE!

WE DON'T? WELL, ONE DAY WE MIGHT!

I'M SURE I'M BETTER OFF IN THE CAGE THAN I WOULD BE OUTSIDE!

WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

MY MASTER. A WISE MAN, GOOD, GENEROUS, PATERNAL, LOOKING AFTER MY WELL-BEING.

I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO THINK - HE THINKS FOR ME. I REPEAT WHAT HE SAYS, I SING, I WHISTLE...

BUT THAT'S NOT REAL LIFE, PARROT!

BUT I HAVE TO SURVIVE TOO, DON'T I?

BLUARGH!
Some
constraint
is necessary
to achieve
economic
growth...

- UN PEU DE CONTRAINTE EST NÉCESSAIRE
  POUR ATEINDRE LA CROISSANCE ÉCONOMIQUE.

- DE LA RÉPRESSION, VOILÀ CE QUI EST
  NÉCESSAIRE POUR MAINTENIR UNE
  DISTRIBUTION INJUSTE!

REPRESSION
IS NECESSARY
TO MAINTAIN
THIS UNJUST
DISTRIBUTION
OF WEALTH!
Claudius: LA GUERRE...

...C'EST LA GUERRE
WE CANNOT HAVE DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT SOME NEGATIVE ASPECTS...

That is (cough!) not (cough!) true! In this model (cough!) you get what you call (cough!) "development" and I (cough!) get what you (cough!) call "negative aspects" (cough!)

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ON NE PEUT PAS SE DÉVELOPPER SANS QUELQUE INCONVÉNIENT...
FAUX! AVEC UN TEL MODÈLE, VOUS AVEZ CE QUE VOUS APPELEZ "DÉVELOPPEMENT" ET MOI, CE QUE VOUS APPELEZ "INCONVÉNIENT"...
IN THE PAST, WOMEN STAYED AT HOME AND MEN WENT HUNTING...

THEN THE COLONIALISTS CAME, BRINGING NEW ATTITUDES, IMPOSING NEW MORALS...

THEN THE COLONIALISTS NEEDED SOME "NATIVES" FOR MINOR ADMINISTRATIVE WORK AND PREFERRED MEN TO DO IT...

TEA, BUWAH? JOLLY GOOD

THERE WERE OF COURSE "GOOD" "NATIVES" AND BAD ONES—ACCORDING TO THE COLONIALISTS STANDARDS, OF COURSE

YOU'RE A BAD BOY!

"TRADITIONALLY" WE ARE CONSIDERED AS INFERIOR.

AND WE WERE TOLD TO STAY AT HOME, ACCORDING TO OUR TRADITIONS

AND NOTHING REALLY CHANGED.

BAD FOR YOU... I WANT TO FREE MY PEOPLE!
3. They showed no discrimination at all between men and women...

4. Then they needed people to do manual work and men were stronger...

7. Women stayed at home, doing women things.

8. While men had new opportunities if they were "good."

11. There can be no freedom but freedom for all, men and women!

12. Our society is geared towards the principle of no exploitation of man by man. Yes? So now I'll struggle to gear it towards the principle of "no exploitation of woman by man," too!
Claudius

Bergman's films are incredible...

Mister, sir! Me some pennies.

Here, sonny.

What were you saying about Bergman?

As I started to say...

Sirs, can you hear me...

The Bergman of "Wild Strawberries" and the Bergman of "The Seventh Seal" are two different people.

Hey, master.

Another one? Take this, sir...

I saw "Wild Strawberries" eleven times.

Mene saw.

...you were saying?

You can't have a quiet conversation here.

Here come some more of them...

They don't have to see them.

The role of death in the Seventh Seal has the most dramatic force...

And then, sir! Anderson...

Hey! Hey, cut it out!

What are you doing? Stop it....
HEY, WE HAVE TO SEE WHAT KEYNES SAID ABOUT THIS...

...AND MARX'S FAMOUS THESIS ON FEUERBACH IN THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY OF 1846...

LUKAKS IN HIS EARLIER WORKS HAS A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS - WHAT ABOUT THAT?

FREUD AND REICH TOOK OTHER APPROACHES WHICH CONCERNED ONLY GEOGRAPHICALLY IN VIENNA - THE INDIVIDUAL OPPOSING AGAINST THE COLLECTIVE...

MARCUSE WAS LUCKY - HE HAD HISTORIC DISTANCE SO AS TO CLARIFY ALL THIS...

I KNOW ALL THAT - BUT NOW, TELL ME, HOW WILL WE EVER GET OUT OF ALL THIS CRAP?

HOW COULD I KNOW? ISN'T HE THE PROPHET?
It's this way, doctor. The automobiles are getting bigger and more powerful, with motors so strong that you can do amazing speeds...

...and then what?

...Plaf!

And the airplanes, what about them? Paris to New York in 6 hours! And then what?

Then you have an oil crisis and they have to stay on the runways.

And industry? It can produce anything and lots of it, all through computers... All material problems can be resolved, but then, exactly those who are in need can't buy...

And weapons? They are always more terrible than the year before. Atomic bombs, H bombs, super-bombs. It's no longer possible to make war without blowing yourself up, but everybody keeps getting better and better armed... until one day...

...put him in a straight-jacket, give him massive dose of tranquillizers and see that he gets a padded cell.

And when I say all this, they call me crazy. If I'm crazy, what are they? If being well means being like them...

...I'd rather be crazy!
Once upon a time...

there was a crow who had some cheese in his beak.
A fox who saw the cheese said:

The fox quickly swallowed the cheese.

The song finished.
The fox applauded and asked for an encore.
He told the fox that in foreign lands everyone would fall at the feet of such a talented, that great

things awaited the crow - fame, fortune, success and the fox proposed himself for manager.

But, in order to do that, I'll need some samples of your wondrous plumage...

"What a beautiful cheese... I mean crow, such marvelous plumage! What a voice you must have!

hearing this, the proud crow began to sing, dropping the cheese.

"Hitchy! Hitchy!" "Give me back my feathers!"

"Look, I'll de-feathered, I'll catch a cold and lose my wonderful voice."

Don't worry - they will grow back - next season you'll have a new crop.

"Croak? feathers don't come in crops! What shall we do?" you can disguise yourself - turkeys will just love that!
Once upon a time, there was a very smart wolf who ate sheep.

Even though it was a question of harmless animals, certain risks had to be overcome.
Afer considerable thought, the wolf had an idea.

Wolves are OK
Lambs are bad

He taught it how to be a wolf, using persuasion, force and brainwashing.

Soon the training ended and the lamb went off on a first mission: to get another lamb.

One night he attacked the flock and kidnapped a little lamb.

Then there were the practical lessons. The lamb learned to chase small animals.

No the wolf had no more need to take risks for food. All was done by a representative.

The sheep arrived among the flock. The others were scared. There was a smell of wolf.

But everything seemed to be OK to the pastor.

That night... All were a sheep.

That is: all but one.

At dawn, the traitor grabbed a lamb and made off. Before the others could even notice...

The wolf, receiving the captive, was very happy. His plan had worked well...

...but what he didn't know was that his sheep had tasted blood...

...and loved it.