Comics and the TV Weather Report

Tracing the Visual Style of Contemporary Science's Most Popular Genre

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Comic Art: America’s Common Visual Culture

Beginning in the 1890s, newspapers introduced comic art to audiences across the United States. Americans of every class loved comic strips, which made them a natural format for advertising. Cheap comic books, developed in the mid-1930s, became very popular with young readers.

Drawing the Weather on TV

During the late 1940s, discharged military meteorologists invented the TV weather report. They developed a visual style that combined simplified maps with caricatures, pictographs, and anthropomorphic weather features. Station managers misread this educational strategy as entertainment, however, and began to hire cartoonists rather than meteorologists. While weather reports took on a more serious tone in the 1960s, they still use the graphical language of comic art.

Mobilizing the Comics for Technical Training

In the late 1930s, some illustrators began to use comic art in educational books. When World War II required millions of draftees to learn novel technical tasks, the U.S. military drafted cartoonists to make lessons memorable and easier to understand. Illustrated manuals, posters and textbooks significantly reduced training times.