The Crowd and the Building: Flux in the Early *Illustrated London News*
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**Abstract**
When the illustrated newspaper was “invented” in 1842, festivals soon became prime content for the young *Illustrated London News*. Presenting festivals from home and abroad, illustrated papers were full of images and descriptions of spectacle in motion – including spectacular architecture and people. What was the relationship between the crowd and the building, in word and image, and how did it relate to the role architecture played in the public sphere? This article argues that the increasing plasticity of the text, alongside the rising dominance of the image, turned printing from static into an interactive medium. The page transformed from a surface into a space that could capture figures and buildings in flux. As styles multiplied in the age of historicism, text and image in the *Illustrated London News* provided an immersive, yet highly controlled, experience of
the metropolis and its events.

**Keywords:** architecture; festival; nineteenth-century; illustrated press; crowd.

**Figure Captions:**
Figure 1: “Lord Mayor’s Day,” *Illustrated London News*, 12 November 1842. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.BritishNewspaperArchive.co.uk).

Figure 2: “Her Majesty’s Excursion to Belgium,” *Illustrated London News*, September 30, 1843. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.BritishNewspaperArchive.co.uk).

Figure 3: “The Fete of Fraternity,” *Illustrated London News*, May 6, 1848. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.BritishNewspaperArchive.co.uk).

**Introduction**
A revolution took place in the early nineteenth century that was linked to both the industrial and the political upheavals of the time. The “second print revolution” had its roots in new printing techniques, improvements in paper production and changes to newspaper taxes as well as reduced censorship. During the 1830s and 40s newspapers, journals, illustrated magazines and books, and more ephemeral forms such as pamphlets, stationary or catalogues became available to more people at cheaper prices than ever before.1 Between 1836 and 1854 the circulation of English newspapers trebled, from 39 million to 122 million. *The Times* increased its output twentyfold over the century, from around 5,000 daily copies in the first decades to 100,000 by the end.2

A particular invention of this period was the illustrated newspaper. This new format of weekly papers relied on wood engraving, a relatively new technique that could easily be integrated with printed type and thus allowed for very large print runs.3 Examples of it quickly emerged in most European countries, in North and South America and elsewhere. The *Illustrated London News*, the first newspaper to give equal weight to both image and text, was launched on May 14, 1842 and quickly became a resounding success.4 Five years later it promised in an advertisement to show “Royalty and ... its pageant splendour, ... the homelier ceremonies of the festivals, sights,
shows, spectacles, and sports of the people ... the great creations of genius in architecture, painting, and sculpture,” among a lengthy list of other items of national and imperial pride. Aimed at the prospering middle classes, the paper’s “tone,” it claimed, “is best suited to good and general society” and “may be placed, with equal advantage and safety, upon the table of the library, the drawing-room, and the public institution.”

Festivals, pageants and processions of all kinds featured prominently throughout the long life of the Illustrated London News, but were particularly well represented in the early years of the newspaper, when it was still experimenting with the subjects and forms of representation most suited to its new medium.

It is one of the advantages of a journal like the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, that it is enabled, irrespective of political influences, and uncontaminated by party spirit – in a word, with truth, and without bias – to present to its readers pictorial records of all the high festivals of the nation. In doing this it is merely the illustrator of the history of the time; it does not seek to embody its own opinions among the details of events which the daily press pours forth, nor to tinge with the colour of party any of the circumstances of these great celebrations.

Thus write the editors when describing the installation of a new chancellor at Cambridge in 1842, just two months after the paper’s launch. Impartiality, believed its editor Frederick W.N. Bayley, was as important to success as was moral respectability. The image was key to ensure both: by being truthful, immediate and unbiased, so it seemed, it turned the illustrated newspaper into a chronicler of its own times.

Ranging from Lord Mayor’s Days and processions of the Temperance Movement to pageants abroad in honour of the visiting Queen Victoria, illustrated papers were full of images and descriptions of spectacle in motion, including architecture and people, joined in celebration of the event. It is this relationship between the crowd and the building, in word and image, that this article investigates. By examining the duality of the figure and the building in the illustrated press it identifies the role of architecture – both built and printed – in the emerging public sphere.

Michel de Certeau has famously described two ways of perceiving the city: the aerial, map-making perspective versus the eye-level view of the pedestrian. In the urban images of the Illustrated London News, and those of festivals in particular, one can make out attempts to merge these two essentially opposed viewpoints. By letting masses of walking people march either
across or into the page, the *Illustrated London News* combined experience with observation, being there with watching from afar. There are elevation-like processions spread across several pages as well as crowds walking into the page contained by the one-point perspective of streetscapes or interior spaces. This article first examines these two sometimes overlapping categories of images and links them to the ways in which the *Illustrated London News* turned society into a crowd in flux, moving yet contained by the Victorian cityscape.

**Flux: Walking Across the Page**

As Andrea Korda has argued, “Bourgeois readers wanted to see their own lives, their own actions and events, represented as meaningful contributions to their nation's history, and therefore required a new kind of history in which they could be the principal actors.”

She goes on to identify a paradox in the typical representational modes of the *Illustrated London News*: while the slightly elevated viewpoint adopted in most of its images presents a “trick” that “denies the bodily presences of the author,” suppressing “the body of either the draughtsman or the viewer” has the effect of leading the reader “to believe that they are seeing the event for themselves.” Without being part of a scene or an event, the reader could still be there. Korda defines this as “mechanical objectivity, which helped cultivate a new standard of immediacy.”

Without an obvious placeholder or point of view, how, then, was the reader transported into the event?

Representations of festivals, with their crowds and performers, help to clarify the way in which readers were drawn into events they could never experience in reality, as well as shed light on the role buildings and open spaces played in this process. London’s Lord Mayor’s Show is a case in point. In the annual spectacle the elected Lord Mayor of the City of London – for many centuries the grandest position a commoner could hold in Britain – travelled from the commercial hub of the City of London to Westminster’s political centre to swear loyalty to royalty and government.

The sumptuous spectacle, consisting of pageants first along the City’s street and then along the River Thames to Westminster, featured each November in the *Illustrated London News* across several pages. In its first year, the paper presented its readers with a page spread showing snapshots of the procession on water as well as of the Mayor’s inauguration and entrance to Westminster Hall.

[Figure 1 near here]

The most interesting image of this series depicts the return of the pageant from Westminster to the Guildhall (figure 1). The image stretches over the two pages, from bottom left, wandering up the middle and ending in the Guildhall – the *de facto* town hall of the City of London – in the top
right-hand corner. The accompanying text painstakingly describes the route taken by the procession: after a public breakfast in the Council Chamber of the Guildhall, the procession formed at 11.15am; crossing Cornhill and Gracechurch Street, dignitaries then embarked at the Southwark side of London Bridge. They arrived at Westminster, where oaths and ceremonies were performed, “shortly before three o'clock,” only to re-embark again soon after. Once arrived at Blackfriars Bridge, the procession reformed and returned via Farringdon Street to the Guildhall, where the festivities culminated in a banquet.13

The tone of the article is lively: “The spirit of bustle is abroad, and the myriad eyes of the metropolis are turned upon the many forms of pageantry and festival in which the accession of her chief magistrate is celebrated by the ‘City of the World’.” The paper claims to enable those “shut out by distance from the scene” – its readers – to partake in the event, to let them see through the “eyes of the metropolis.” Like the city itself, the pageant is personified, “moving with slow and cumbrous gorgeousness over land and water” – as well as over the page.14 Movement is emulated not only through depiction of the scene, but also in the laying out of word and image on the page – the caption, somewhat awkwardly, following the procession from one page to the next.

In this unusual image there is a curious combination of viewpoints and representational modes. The bottom strip on the left-hand page is a form of elevation, seen in other depictions of processions – for example the Lord Mayor’s Day in 1845 as well as the Shrewsbury Show in the same year, both discussed below. The viewer is at eye-level with the depicted figures, there is no background and both pedestrians and mounted individuals are shown in profile, moving steadily towards the right, in the direction of the text. Then the parade crosses the page and neatly assembles to march upwards on the right-hand page, now contrary to the direction of reading. The reader is suddenly elevated to a bird’s-eye view – or into the upper floor of a building opposite perhaps – looking at the backs of the people in the procession and their horses. The page margin and the black line between text columns confine the movement, acting rather like the facades of houses rising on both sides of the street. The page becomes architectural; architectural space is evoked through the graphic depiction of motion and layout conventions managing word-image relationships.

Once the procession arrives at the top of the page and turns into what must be Cheapside, the viewer is slightly lowered again, yet retains the elevated position so typical for images in the Illustrated London News, just above natural eye level. Streets are widened to give a better view –
King Street leading up to the Guildhall would have more accurately been depicted as a narrow thoroughfare, mostly blocking the view of the Guildhall itself for any viewer from this angle. It is only here, once turned towards the top of the page and with a more conventional position of the viewer adopted, that architecture makes any graphic appearance. There is the Guildhall on the right, the final destination of the procession, with quickly sketched, unhatched facades of Cheapside to the left. Both of them remain in contrast to the dark crowd of indistinguishable onlookers lining the streets, forming a neat horizontal line towards the buildings behind – the crowd homogenized into an architectural shape. Crowd and buildings now shape the processional space as the margin and black line had done previously in the upwards march.

Most of the illustrations of the 1842 Lord Mayor’s Show bear the signature of John Gilbert, the most famous of the artists employed by the early Illustrated London News. As Mason Jackson remarked in his 1885 work on the illustrated press, Gilbert’s “wonderful facility and bold picturesqueness were exactly suited to the requirements of an illustrated newspaper.” Jackson claimed that while the “first enabled him to do his work with marvellous quickness, … the second was an excellent counterpoise to the damaging effects of hurried engraving and rapid printing.” Similarly, Jackson’s contemporary Henry Vizetelly referred to “Mr. John Gilbert's facile and imaginative pencil.” More recently, historian Celina Fox has echoed such judgment by noting Gilbert's “predilection for flattering portrayals of grand occasions.” Even if the Illustrated London News repeatedly claimed the veracity of its images, it is clear that they could not have been exact recordings of the events. John Gilbert might very well have observed the Lord Mayor’s Show in 1842, but he will not have made all sketches on the spot, and certainly not of all the details – proven at the very least by the changing viewpoint adopted. Gilbert was accredited at the time, as well as by later historians, with the capacity to construct images “picturesquely” and fill in the gaps in eye-witness sketches (or written reports, as images were frequently drawn from verbal accounts). Most often, such gaps were filled by crowds of stereotyped male figures carrying top-hats.

[Figure 2 near here]

The technique of letting a pageant walk across its pages remained a favourite tool for the editors of the Illustrated London News. In September 1843, readers could indulge in a rather particular spectacle: the Ommegang of Antwerp (figure 2). Included on the occasion of the Queen’s visit to Belgium, the annual procession showcased a giant on a carriage drawn by 8 horses, followed by a slightly smaller giantess, a whale with a cupid riding on it squirting water into the crowd, an almost life-size model of a ship, as well as the figure of Britannia. All these structures march
across the single page in an s-shaped movement from the top right, crossing to the left, then back to the right in the middle and to the left at the bottom. Two sections of text are placed in the remaining space, again confining the area of the festival movement. The viewer here remains in the same slightly elevated position throughout what are in fact five separate images linked by the processional flow.

There is a white strip (a small void) between the crowd and the buildings in the background which, as at Cheapside, are sketched only in outline – without hatching or shadows – to emphasize the procession and the figures accompanying it. The buildings are necessary to hold the parade in shape, to keep it moving in an aligned direction and to tame the mass into a crowd – yet they appear to remain at a distance from it. “The procession,” the paper wrote, “debouched from one of the avenues,” like a river confined by rocky banks, until it finally emerged into a wider space, calming down and reducing its speed.¹⁹

Streets as riverbeds channelling the movement of people became a typical metaphor employed at the time. In its now familiar mode, the Illustrated London News also presented the Shrewsbury Show in June 1845.²⁰ On the bottom half of the page, a neat line of men, mostly in top hats, and some figures in historic costumes meander up the page in a now denser s-shape, with the accompanying text set above. The houses in the background are again drawn lightly in lines only, distinguishing them from the dark coats and hats of the members of the procession. Flags – standard accessories of any pageant – are raised diagonally, pointing in the direction of movement, their bearers waving them in perfect uniformity with the fabric stretching out behind. The houses provide the context of a small medieval town; none are more than three stories high, many with gables turned towards the street. The angle of the flag posts and the swaying fabric are in contrast to the orthogonality of the buildings; architecture serves to contain, give shape and funnel movement – the riverbed of the human flow.

Snaking movements across the page with text inserted in the leftover space soon became customary for the Illustrated London News, in a clear sign of how the image began to dominate the word. In September 1845, a peasant procession in Gotha, again in front of the Queen, is shown meandering from the bottom of the page to the top, with text squeezed in two unevenly spaced columns on the mid-right side of the page.²¹ As before, there is a switch of viewpoint, from being almost at eye-level to an exaggeratedly elevated position, before ending up only slightly raised. Again, figures are first shown in profile, then from the back and finally once more
in profile; again, architecture is shown only in the final stretch of the procession, where Victoria sits on the balcony of a Classical building flanked by two pavilions. Again, flags support the impression of movement.

**The Crowd: Controlling the Audience**

In her seminal book *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has hailed printing’s “capacity to produce uniform spatio-temporal images.” Since Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press it has been possible in most cases to accurately reproduce both text as well as images. The resulting possibility of standardization within representation, while not absolute, has since been argued to be fundamental to modern epistemology. And yet, during the so-called second print revolution of the nineteenth century, when printing presses reached outputs never seen before and railways (and later the telegraph) carried printed news across ever larger areas, was the printed page really such a stable medium? Did the illustrated press really freeze events on the page, together with their human crowd and architectural setting, for standardized consumption by the remote reader-viewer? Or did it, rather, leave space for subjective experience?

The second part of this article shows how the increasing dominance of the image over the text, together with the resulting growing plasticity of the text, turned printing into a more interactive medium than before. The page was transformed from a surface into a space that could capture figures and buildings in flux – enabling the reader to join in the events depicted. As styles multiplied in the age of historicism, text and image in the *Illustrated London News* provided an immersive experience of the metropolis and its events. Indeed, the illustrated newspaper became the “eye of the metropolis” and thus helped to define contemporary modes of vision.

As well as the participants in the procession and the disembodied viewer-reader, there is a third actor in these images, described in the accompanying texts: the crowd. Charles Knight, editor of the *Penny Magazine* (1832-45) and founder of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, remarked in his memoirs that the staple material of the *Illustrated London News* in particular – and in this it distinguished itself from the earlier *Penny Magazine* – were festivals:

- Civic Processions and Banquets;
- Political and Religious Demonstrations in crowded halls;
- Theatrical Novelties;
- Musical Meetings;
- Races;
- Reviews;
- Ship Launches – every scene, in short, where a crowd of great people and respectable people can be got together, but never, if possible, any exhibition of vulgar poverty.

In addition to this respectable crowd, there was also, of course, a very different type of “crowd” at
the time – feared by conservatives and liberals alike. Charles Mackay explores one kind of these in his *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, first published in 1841 and still referred to in contemporary studies of crowd psychology. Mackay described mass “delusions” across history, such as the Crusades, witch hunts, or the search for the philosopher's stone, and also economic bubbles, in which “crowds” become obsessed, with disastrous results:

We find that whole communities suddenly fix their minds upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit; that millions of people become simultaneously impressed with one delusion, and run after it, till their attention is caught by some new folly more captivating than the first. We see one nation suddenly seized, from its highest to its lowest members, with a fierce desire of military glory; another as suddenly becoming crazed upon a religious scruple; and neither of them recovering its senses until it has shed rivers of blood and sowed a harvest of groans and tears, to be reaped by its posterity.24

Mackay also remarks upon the so-called Railway Mania of the 1840s, in which the price of railway shares first increased dramatically, only then to collapse disastrously. One could perhaps identify a form of print mania at the same time. What becomes obvious here is that, in the age of the Reform Acts, the crowd and the mass as distinct phenomena had to be contained and controlled – turned into something “great” and “respectable” rather than “crazed” and able to cause catastrophe. The illustrated newspaper was a valuable accomplice in this feat.

[Figure 3 near here]

Consequently, the crowd in the *Illustrated London News* is, as Knight had pointed out, ordered, respectable, maybe even “great,” and often geometrically constructed. A dense crowd neatly lined the route of the National Guard parading for the “Fête de la Fraternité” around the Arc de Triomphe on April 20, 1848, amalgamated in the *Illustrated London News* on 6 May into an organic mass consisting of points, lines, surfaces and solids, repeated in their hundreds, even thousands (figure 3). The editors proudly proclaimed that, “by the aid of our Parisian Artist, we are enabled to present our readers with a picture of the stupendous whole.” In a short text framing the nearly full-page image, they quoted from a description by the novelist Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin (who published under the pseudonym George Sand) in *La Cause du Peuple*, a short-lived, un-illustrated newspaper. Translated into English, the *Illustrated London News* recounted her declaring: “What a spectacle! … never have so many human beings been crowded together in so small a space … from every suburb of Paris every citizen seemed to come with his family.” The crowd, in Dupin’s eyes, is formed by its surroundings: “What a framework for what
a scene!” she exclaimed, “the gigantic enclosure of an immense city – with its lofty domes, its proud monuments, its spires, its pinnacles, its yellow river, its vast surrounding meadows, its innumerable houses.” However, very little of this “framework” is visible in the illustration; the houses that are shown, in the top right of the image, seem very muted in the way they look onto the spectacle before them. In this regard, the image appears to reflect the attitude expressed by Victor Hugo in later editions of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, in the chapter “This Will Kill That” (“ceci tuera cela”), added in 1832, and explained lucidly by Neil Levine:

Writing in the heat of the events of the summer of 1830 and recalling the role of the printing-press in the Revolution of 1789, Hugo saw absolutely no reason to think that architecture would play any part in the shaping of modern society. Rather than being preoccupied with expressing its abilities through architecture, wrote Hugo, humanity was now on the “scaffolding” of “the metropolis of the universal mind:” “The printing-press, that giant machine, … is constantly spewing out fresh material for its erection.” In the *Illustrated London News*’s representation of the Paris festival, the city’s buildings are indeed inexpressive and passive, while the engraver focused on the depiction of the crowd, which, with its flags and standards, seems to carry the Arc de Triomphe like a giant relic promenaded in a religious procession (or mania, as Mackay would have called it).

Looking at the image of the “Fête de la Fraternité” more closely, it becomes apparent that the crowd consists of ranges of short vertical hatching, with spots of white marking faces and black blobs indicating hats and headdresses: tightly packed torsos and uniform heads. Bodily contact is the oldest characteristic of the term “crowd,” with examples given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* since the sixteenth century: “A large number of persons gathered so closely together as to press upon or impede each other.” Interestingly, the nineteenth century saw a widening of the term into a very specific direction: “crowd” could now also refer to a “mass of spectators; an audience,” giving the concept an explicitly theatrical connotation. At the same time, the crowd, the coming together of large numbers of people, was spatialized. For example, when the *Illustrated London News* wrote in 1845 that the Lord Mayor’s show drew “a vast concourse of people” it referred purely to the number of individuals, rather than the area they converged upon. Only from the second half of the nineteenth century, did “concourse” begin to be used to describe large built spaces, most commonly American railway stations.

As the illustration of a procession of the Cork Total Abstinence Society in April 1843 clearly shows, the crowd as a viewing organism is often depicted by similar graphic techniques as foliage
The crowd, or audience, is here indicated by horizontal waves while buildings are sketched through vertical lines for edges and windows, topped by a horizontally hatched sky. Background figures are treated like foliage, both in terms of curved lines as well as light-dark contrast: organic matter contained by man-made walls. “Shouts of tens of thousands” accompanied the procession; “the living masses … thronged each side of the street, formed a spectacle so sublime as only a multitude of living human beings could offer to the eye.” Then, “the mighty mass halted, and formed into beautiful order.” The crowd, the populace, like nature in the eighteenth-century landscape garden, is tamed, rendered sublime yet controlled, immense and “mighty” but finally contained in “beautiful order” through its homogeneity and stereotyping (which, of course, had its origin in the sheer speed with which these images were produced). The threat to the existing order that emanated from “masses” – used for the first time in reference to the populace during this period – is contained and transformed into something sublime. But what is it that is shaping this order, containing the uncontrolled growth of the masses? Often, it is the streetscape, buildings lining roads and squares, muted guardians channelling the masses and turning the city into a stage set and the crowd into the audience, representing the reader-crowd. As we have seen, the page, with its newly dynamic word-image relationship, began to imitate this space as a form of control.

In Cork, rows of empty windows, reduced to short vertical lines, or slits, make up the linear perspective that contains the organic mass of the crowd. In an image depicting the 1843 Lord Mayor’s Show, entirely different to the one printed the previous year, well dressed ladies and gentlemen fill the balconies and windows of Ludgate Hill as the parade turns from Blackfriars Bridge towards St Paul’s Cathedral. In the foreground they are individuals but further to the back figures turn into ornamentation, like flower pots hung from windowsills; the further back one looks it appears that the crowd merges into a collage of top hats, filling the street until the shadows of St Paul’s portico are reached. St Paul’s here is the silent onlooker, the controlling element, the icon reigning over the streets bursting with the organic mass of the crowd. Details of the horses’ manes in the foreground reflect the decorations on the carriage as well as the dress and hats of the accompanying riders, while buildings on the left cast sharp shadows onto the crowd and the houses opposite. “Considerable crowds of gazers feasting their eyes and hearts” observed the spectacle, wrote the Illustrated London News. The crowd is the audience, it “gazes” and “feasts,” its hatching creating a flicker on the page indicating its state of flux.

The city and its buildings had to keep up with this flux. They set the scene and the “framework”
for it; they channelled and controlled it. As Jonathan Crary has argued, here “spectacle is not primarily concerned with looking at images but rather with the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilize, and separate subjects.” The visual-verbal representation of festivals in London, Paris, Shrewsbury, Cork, Antwerp or elsewhere around the world served, as Crary describes it, to “manage” attention; by controlling the flux of the spectacular, through mute architecture and sublime crowds, the Illustrated London News contributed to creating conditions of “noncoercive power.”

The Power of the Page

Repetition, multiplication and offsetting are the techniques employed to depict the crowd in the vast number of pictures in the illustrated press: rows and arrays of top hats, soldier’s helmets, raised arms, drawn swords or flags in parallel lines, turbans in Cairo or plain round circles for hats in Bern are repeated over and over again by the mechanically operating hands of the Illustrated London News’ engravers. Almost always they serve as a perspectival tool as well, diminishing in size, picking up vanishing lines from buildings and emphasizing central vanishing points.

None of these images showed cities as they appeared on a normal working day; they did not intend to depict everyday life. Instead, they are manipulated images of festivals, themselves highly staged events. Stage set and image both expressed the purposefulness of the festival: never idle, never entertainment only, always morally elevating and for the common good. All the upheaval, the possible threats emanating from large gatherings, the potential for rebellion they were deemed to hold in the so-called age of revolution, is in these images suppressed and controlled. But rather than through freezing movement or stopping it altogether, this control is carried out by a celebration of the flux through subjective viewpoints and representational techniques which enabled readers to experience the depicted event. The buildings and open spaces, in their mute pose channelling the crowd in flux, embodied, as did the coffee houses of the eighteenth century, the public sphere of the 1800s.

References


Wood engraving differed from wood cuts in that it used the end-grain of boxwood, providing precise and durable print blocks that could easily be integrated with type and thus allowed very large print runs. It became the technique of choice for the penny press and other illustrated mass media, including the Illustrated London News. See “Xylography,” in The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture, and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 295-300.


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31 Ibid.
36 Ibid.