WRITING AND ART
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LETTERING
BOB LAPPAN

EDITORIAL ADVICE AND
SELECTIVE EGO-TRIMMING
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EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
The book you’re about to read took 15 months to produce and many of the ideas it contains had been on the back-burner for over nine years, so acknowledging all of those who have helped in its development may be next to impossible. Furthermore, since its initial publication in the comics industry, I’ve received tremendous support from hundreds of fellow travelers in all corners of the publishing world. My apologies to anyone who is not listed below and should have been.

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Scott McCloud
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT 2

2
THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS 24

3
BLOOD IN THE GUTTER 60

4
TIME FRAMES 94

5
LIVING IN LINE 118

6
SHOW AND TELL 138

7
THE SIX STEPS 162

8
A WORD ABOUT COLOR 185

9
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER 193
MY OLD PAL MATT FEAZELL CALLED THE OTHER DAY.

SO, SCOTT, WHAT'S YOUR NEXT PROJECT GOING TO BE NOW THAT YOU'VE FINISHED "ZOT"?

WELL, IT'S A BIT HARD TO DESCRIBE, MATT. IT'S SORT OF A COMIC BOOK ABOUT COMICS!

YOU MEAN LIKE A HISTORY??

NOT EXACTLY NO... ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOME HISTORY IN IT... IT'S MORE AN EXAMINATION OF THE ART-FORM OF COMICS, WHAT IT'S CAPABLE OF, HOW IT WORKS.

YOU KNOW, HOW DO WE DEFINE COMICS, WHAT ARE THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF COMICS, HOW DOES THE MIND PROCESS THE LANGUAGE OF COMICS—THAT SORT OF THING.

I HAVE A CHAPTER ON CLOSURE—ALL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN THE PANELS, THERE'S ONE ON HOW TIME FLOWS THROUGH COMICS, ANOTHER ON THE INTERACTION OF WORDS AND PICTURES AND STORYTELLING.

I EVEN PUT TOGETHER A NEW COMPREHENSIVE THEORY OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR COMICS AND FOR ART IN GENERAL??

OH.

AREN'T YOU KIND OF YOUNG TO BE DOING THAT SORT OF THING?
UNDERSTANDING COMICS
COMICS WERE THOSE BRIGHT, COLORFUL MAGAZINES FILLED WITH BAD ART, STUPID STORIES AND GUYS IN TIGHTS.

I read REAL BOOKS, NATURALLY. I WAS MUCH TOO OLD FOR COMICS!

BUT WHEN I WAS IN 8TH GRADE, A FRIEND OF MINE (WHO WAS A LOT SMARTER THAN I WAS) CONVINCED ME TO GIVE COMICS ANOTHER LOOK AND LENT ME HIS COLLECTION.

SOON, I WAS HOOKED!
In less than a year, I became totally obsessed with comics! I decided to become a comics artist in 10th grade and began to practice, practice, practice!

I felt that there was something lurking in comics... something that had never been done.

Some kind of hidden power!

But whenever I tried to explain my feeling, I failed miserably.

Comic HA! HA! HA! But it's -- Buh...

Sure, I realized that comic books were usually crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kid's fare --

But --

They don't have to be!

The problem was that for most people, that was what "comic book" meant!

Don't gimme that comic book talk, Barney!

If people failed to understand comics, it was because they defined what comics could be too narrowly!

A proper definition, if we could find one, might give lie to the stereotypes --

-- and show that the potential of comics is limitless and exciting!

This is where our journey begins.
"COMICS" is the word worth defining, as it refers to the medium itself, not a specific object as "COMIC BOOK" or "COMIC STRIP" do.

We can all visualize a comic.

The world of comics is a huge and varied one. Our definition must encompass all these types--

But what--

--is--

--COMICS?
MASTER COMICS ARTIST WILL EISNER USES THE TERM SEQUENTIAL ART WHEN DESCRIBING COMICS.

TAKEN INDIVIDUALLY, THE PICTURES BELOW ARE MERELY PICTURES.


NOTICE THAT THIS DEFINITION IS STRICTLY NEUTRAL ON MATTERS OF STYLE, QUALITY OR SUBJECT MATTER.

MUCH HAS ALREADY BEEN WRITTEN ON THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS OF COMIC ART; ON PARTICULAR ARTISTS, PARTICULAR TITLES, PARTICULAR TRENDS.

BUT TO DEFINE COMICS, WE MUST FIRST DO A LITTLE AESTHETIC SURGERY AND SEPARATE FORM FROM CONTENT!
THE ARTFORM--THE MEDIUM--KNOWN AS COMICS IS A VESSEL WHICH CAN HOLD ANY NUMBER OF IDEAS AND IMAGES.

The "content" of those images and ideas is, of course, up to creators, and we all have different tastes.

GAAK

WHEEEEEEZ!

KAF! KAF!

GLUGH-GGH...

PTU!!!

Ahem...

THE TRICK IS TO NEVER MISTAKE THE MESSAGE--

--FOR THE MESSENGER.

AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER VIRTUALLY ALL THE GREAT MEDIA HAVE RECEIVED CRITICAL EXAMINATION, IN AND OF THEMSELVES.

BUT FOR COMICS, THIS ATTENTION HAS BEEN RARE. LET'S SEE IF WE CAN HELP RECTIFY THE SITUATION.

*EISNER'S OWN COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART BEING A HAPPY EXCEPTION.*
EISNER'S TERM SEEMS LIKE A GOOD PLACE TO START.

Let's see if we can expand it to a proper dictionary-style definition.

ANY IDEAS?

There are a lot of different kinds of art. How about something a little more specific?

Okay.

HOW'S THIS?

Hey, what about animation?!

Beg pardon?

Hmm... good point.

Sequential Visual Art

I guess the basic difference is that animation is sequential in time but not spatially juxtaposed as comics are.

Each successive frame of a movie is projected on exactly the same space—the screen—while each frame of comics must occupy a different space.

Space does for comics what time does for film!

*Juxtaposed = adjacent, side-by-side. Great art school word.
Anyway, this should make it a bit more specific.

Does it have to say "art"? Doesn’t that imply some sort of value judgment?

**Juxtaposed Sequential Visual Art**

Okay, how about this?

**Juxtaposed Sequential Static Images**

Now it sounds kind of arbitrary.

Okay, how about this?

**Juxtaposed Static Images in Deliberate Sequence**

What about words?

Oh, it doesn’t have to contain words to be comics...

Huh?

Letters are static images, right?

When they’re arranged in a deliberate sequence, placed next to each other, we call them words!

No, no. I mean, doesn’t that definition describe words??

Tell ‘im, Bob!
Okay, how does this sound?

Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence.

What about Batman? Shouldn't it have Batman in it?

Who let him in?

Well, anyway, this should do for now.

We'll just type it up, add a little bit on the uses of comics, and—

Tap tap tap tap tap tap

There!

Comics (kom'iks)n. plural in form, used with a singular verb. 1. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

2. Superheroes, in bright colorful costumes, fighting dastardly villains who want to conquer the world in recent sensational (and pounding action sequences)

3. Cute, cuddly animals, mice and圆形 bears, dancing to and fro

4. Corruptor of our Nation's Youth

---and in most cases, this is the only definition we're likely to need.

But, with a specific definition under our belts—

Sequential art

Perhaps we can shed some new light on the history of comics.

Most books about comics begin shortly before the turn of the century, but I think we can venture a bit farther than that.
ACTUALLY, A LOT FARTHER!

HERE'S JUST A PIECE OF THE EPIC STORY CONTAINED IN A PRE-COLUMBIAN PICTURE MANUSCRIPT "DISCOVERED" BY CORTÉS AROUND 1519.

THIS 36-FOOT LONG, BRIGHTLY-COLORED, PAINTED SCREENFOLD TELLS OF THE GREAT MILITARY AND POLITICAL HERO 8-DEER "TIGER'S-CLAW."

IS IT COMICS? YOU BET! IT IS! WE CAN EVEN READ SOME!

* OR "OCELOT'S CLAW" DEPENDING ON WHOSE BOOK YOU READ.

THIS SEQUENCE IS BASED ON A READING BY MEXICAN HISTORIAN AND ARCHEOLOGIST ALFONSO CASO.
FIRST, WE SEPARATE WORDS FROM PICTURES.

THEN REVERSE IT AND STRAIGHTEN IT OUT (THE ORIGINAL READ RIGHT-TO-LEFT AND ZIGZAGGED) AND BEGIN:

THE YEAR: 1049 AD
THE DATE: MAY 3
THE PLACE: HERE!

OUR HERO, 8-DEER "TIGER'S CLAW," CONQUERS THE PLACE AND CAPTURES THE 9-YEAR-OLD PRINCE, 4-WIND "SERPENT OF FIRE."

8-DEER ALSO CAPTURES THE PRINCE'S OLDER BROTHERS, 10-DOG "EAGLE COPAL BURNING" AND 6-HOUSE "ROW OF FLINT KNIVES" AND PUTS 'EM ON ICE.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, 8-DEER AND (PROBABLY) HIS BROTHER, DISGUISED AS TIGERS, ENGAGE IN SACRIFICIAL GLADIATORIAL COMBAT WITH THE PRINCE, 10-DOG, AND ANOTHER WARRIOR DISGUISED AS DEATH.

8-DEER KILLS THE OTHER PRINCE, 6-HOUSE "ROW OF FLINT KNIVES" EIGHT DAYS LATER.

*WE KNOW THE YEAR; I'M JUST GUESSING AT THE DATE REPRESENTED BY "12 MONKEY."
HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE CORTÉS BEGAN COLLECTING COMICS, FRANCE PRODUCED THE STRIKINGLY SIMILAR WORK WE CALL THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY.

THIS 230 FOOT LONG TAPESTRY DETAILS THE NORMAN CONQUEST OF ENGLAND, BEGINNING IN 1066.

TRANSLATION: THE BATTLE NAGES

BISHOP ODIN ENCOURAGES HIS SOLDIERS

FAR FROM DISQUALIFYING THESE AS COMICS, I THINK MODERN COMIC BOOK ARTISTS SHOULD TAKE NOTE OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF SUCH WHOLE PAGE COMPOSITIONS AND HOW FEW ARTISTS HAVE MADE GOOD USE OF THEM SINCE!

PERENNIAL EXCEPTION WILL EISNER.

WHICH ONE IS THE PRINCE?

WHAT, NO HORSES?

FINDING COMICS BEYOND OUR OWN MILLENNIUM IS A BIT TRICKIER.

AT FIRST GLANCE, EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHICS WOULD SEEM TO FIT OUR DEFINITION PERFECTLY.

BUT MUCH DEPENDS ON OUR USE OF THE WORD "PICTORIAL."

I'M USING IT TO INDICATE AT LEAST SOME RESEMBLANCE TO THE SUBJECT. BUT THESE GlyphS REPRESENT ONLY SOUNDS, NOT UNLIKE OUR ALPHABET.
READING LEFT TO RIGHT WE SEE THE EVENTS OF THE
CONQUEST, IN DELIBERATE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER
UNFOLD BEFORE OUR VERY EYES.

AS WITH THE MEXICAN CODEX,
THERE ARE NO PANEL BORDERS PER SE,
BUT THERE ARE CLEAR DIVISIONS OF SCENE
BY SUBJECT MATTER.

DUKE WILLIAM REMOVES HIS HELMET TO RALLY HIS SOLDIERS

HAROLD'S ARMY IS CUT TO PIECES

EGYPTIAN PAINTING IS ANOTHER
MATTER. SOME, LIKE THIS, MAY SEEM
TO BE CONCERNED WITH SEQUENCE,
BUT ARE ACTUALLY SHOWING
TWO DIFFERENT LOCATIONS,
EVENTS AND CASTS,
GROUPED ONLY BY
SUBJECT.

I HAD BEEN TRYING TO FIND SEQUENCE IN EGYPTIAN
PAINTINGS FOR YEARS WHEN I BEGAN THIS BOOK AND
WAS READY TO CALL IT QuITS--

--UNTIL I DISCOVERED THAT
THE BOOKS I HAD BEEN USING AS
REFERENCE--

--HAD ONLY BEEN SHOWING ME
PART OF THE PICTURE!
HERE'S THE COMPLETE SCENE* PAINTED OVER THIRTY-TWO CENTURIES AGO FOR THE TOMB OF "MENNA," AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SCRIBE.

GOING UP THIS TIME!

AS WOULD BE DONE 2,700 YEARS LATER IN MEXICO, THE EGYPTIANS READ THEIR COMICS ZIG-ZAG.

* MORE NEARLY COMPLETE, ANYWAY.

STARTING AT THE LOWER LEFT, WE SEE THREE WORKERS REAPING WHEAT WITH THEIR SICKLES--

THEN CARRYING IT IN BASKETS TO A THRESHING LOCATION. (IN THE BACKGROUND TWO GIRLS FIGHT OVER BITS OF WHEAT LEFT BEHIND. AS TWO WORKERS SIT UNDER A TREE, ONE SLEEPING, ONE PLAYING THE FLUTE!)
THE SHEAVES ARE THEN RAKED OUT INTO A THICK CARPET OF WHEAT.

THEN OXEN TREAD KERNELS OUT OF THE HUSKS.

NEXT, PEASANTS SEPARATE THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF.

OLD MENNA HIMSELF LOOKS ON.

-- AS LOYAL SCRIBES RECORD THE YIELD ON THEIR TABLETS.

NOW AN OFFICIAL USES A MEASURING ROPE TO SURVEY THE LAND AND DECIDE HOW MUCH WHEAT IS OWED IN TAXES.

AND AS MENNA WATCHES, FARMERS LATE IN PAYING THEIR TAXES ARE BEATEN.

I'VE ONLY SCRATCHED THE SURFACE IN THIS CHAPTER... TRAJAN'S COLUMN, GREEK PAINTING, JAPANESE SCROLLS... ALL THESE HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED AND ALL SHOULD BE EXPLORED.

BUT THERE IS ONE EVENT WHICH LOOMS AS LARGE IN COMICS HISTORY AS IT DOES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WRITTEN WORD.

THE INVENTION OF PRINTING.

* FACE BOLTED OUT BY FUTURE GENERATIONS OF LEADERS
WITH THE INVENTION OF PRINTING, THE ART-FORM WHICH HAD BEEN A DIVERSION OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL NOW COULD BE ENJOYED BY EVERYONE!

THE SOPHISTICATION OF THE PICTURE-STORY DID GROW, HOWEVER, REACHING GREAT HEIGHTS IN THE NIMBLE HANDS OF WILLIAM HOGARTH.

HERE IS A TINY PIECE (ABOUT ONE TWENTIETH) OF THE SECOND PLATE FROM HOGARTH'S SIX-PLATE PICTURE-STORY "A HARLOT'S PROGRESS," PUBLISHED IN 1731.

DESPITE THE LOW "PANEL-COUNT," THESE LUSH, RENDERED PICTURES TELL A STORY RICH IN DETAIL AND MOTIVATED BY STRONG SOCIAL CONCERNS.

* MAYBE I SHOULDN'T SAY "INVENT." EUROPEANS WERE A BIT LATE IN DISCOVERING PRINTING.
Hogarth's stories were first exhibited as a series of paintings and later sold as a portfolio of engravings. Both the paintings and engravings were designed to be viewed side-by-side -- in sequence!

"A harlot's progress" and its sequel "A rake's progress" proved so popular, new copyright laws were created to protect this new form.

The father of the modern comic in many ways is Rodolphe Töpffer, whose light satiric picture stories, starting in the mid-1800's, employed cartooning and panel borders, and featured the first interdependent combination of words and pictures seen in Europe.

Unfortunately, Töpffer himself failed to grasp at first the full potential of his invention, seeing it as a mere diversion, a simple hobby...

"If for the future, he [Töpffer] would choose a less frivolous subject and restrict himself a little, he would produce things beyond all conception."

—Goethe

Even so, Töpffer's contribution to the understanding of comics is considerable, if only for his realization that he who was neither artist nor writer--

--had created and mastered a form which was at once both and neither.

A language all its own.
BRITISH CARICATURE MAGAZINES KEPT THE TRADITIONS ALIVE AND AS THE 20TH CENTURY DREW NEAR, THE COMICS WE CALL COMICS BEGAN TO APPEAR AND EVENTUALLY TO THRIVE IN A STEADY STREAM OF WAKING DREAMS THAT HAS YET TO ABATE.

BUT EVEN IN THIS CENTURY, OUR DEFINITION CAN HELP TO ILLUMINATE THE WORKS OF SOME UNSUNG HEROES.

SOME OF THE MOST INSPIRED AND INNOVATIVE COMICS OF OUR CENTURY HAVE NEVER RECEIVED RECOGNITION AS COMICS, NOT SO MUCH IN SPITE OF THEIR SUPERIOR QUALITIES AS BECAUSE OF THEM.

FOR MUCH OF THIS CENTURY, THE WORD "COMICS" HAS HAD SUCH NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS THAT MANY OF COMICS' MOST DEVOTED PRACTITIONERS HAVE PREFERRED TO BE KNOWN AS "ILLUSTRATORS," "COMMERCIAL ARTISTS" OR, AT BEST, "CARTOONISTS!"

AND SO, COMICS' LOW SELF-ESTEEM IS SELF-PERPETUATING! THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE NECESSARY TO COUNTERACT COMICS' NEGATIVE IMAGE IS OBSCURED BY THAT NEGATIVITY.

WOODCUT ARTIST LYND WARD IS ONE SUCH MISSING LINK. WARD'S SILENT "WOODCUT NOVELS" ARE POWERFUL MODERN FABLES, NOW Praised BY COMICS ARTISTS, BUT Seldom Recognized AS COMICS.

FROM WARD'S GOD'S MAN, 1929
Artists like Ward and Belgian Francis Masereel said much through their woodcuts about the potential of comics, but few in the comics community of the day could get the message. Their definition of comics, then as now, was simply too narrow to include such work.

Quite a different case is Max Ernst's surreal "collage novel," *A Week of Kindness*.

This 182-plate sequence of collages is widely considered a masterpiece of 20th-century art, but no art history teacher would dream of calling it "comics"!

Yet, despite the lack of a conventional story, there is no mistaking the central role which sequence plays in the work. Ernst doesn't want you to browse the thing, he wants you to read it.

From Frank Masereel's *Passionate Journey*, 1919.
IF WE DON'T EXCLUDE PHOTOGRAPHY FROM OUR DEFINITION, THEN HALF OF AMERICA HAS BEEN IN COMICS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.

MEANWHILE, PICTURES IN SEQUENCE ARE FINALLY BEING RECOGNIZED AS THE EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION TOOL THAT THEY ARE, BUT STILL NOBODY REFERS TO THEM AS COMICS. "DIAGRAMS" SOUNDS MORE DIGNIFIED, I SUPPOSE.

FROM STAINED GLASS WINDOWS SHOWING BIBLICAL SCENES IN ORDER TO MONET'S SERIES PAINTINGS, TO YOUR CAR OWNER'S MANUAL. COMICS TURN UP ALL OVER WHEN SEQUENTIAL ART IS EMPLOYED AS A DEFINITION.

IN SOME COUNTRIES, PHOTO-COMICS ARE, IN FACT, QUITE POPULAR.

**com-ics** (kom’iks)n. plural in form, used with a singular verb. 1. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

SINGLE PANELS LIKE THIS ONE ARE OFTEN LUMPED IN WITH COMICS, YET THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A SEQUENCE OF ONE!

FOR ALL THE DOORS THAT OUR DEFINITION OPENS, THERE IS ONE WHICH IT CLOSES.

"Mommy, why ain't I Juxtaposed?"

SUCH SINGLE PANELS MIGHT BE CLASSIFIED AS "COMIC ART" IN THE SENSE THAT THEY DERIVE PART OF THEIR VISUAL VOCABULARY FROM COMICS...
But I say they're no more Comics than this still of Humphrey Bogart is film!

They are Cartoons, as am I, and there is a long-standing relationship between comics and cartoons.

--- But they are not the same thing! One is an approach to picture-making—a style, if you like—while the other is a medium which often employs that approach.

More on this later.

This same single panel might also be labelled comics for its juxtaposition of words and pictures.

A great majority of modern comics do feature words and pictures in combination and it's a subject worthy of study, but when used as a definition for comics, I've found it to be a little too restrictive for my taste.

Of course, if anyone wants to write a book taking the opposite view, you can bet I'll be the first in line to buy a copy!

"Mommy, why ain't juxtaposed?"

If comics' spectacularly varied past is any indication, comics' future will be virtually impossible to predict using the standards of the present.

But our definition can offer us some clues.

And this time, the secret is not in what the definition says but in what it doesn't say!
FOR EXAMPLE, OUR DEFINITION SAYS NOTHING ABOUT SUPERHEROES OR FUNNY ANIMALS. NOTHING ABOUT FANTASY/SCIENCE-FICTION OR READER AGE.

NO GENRES ARE LISTED IN OUR DEFINITION, NO TYPES OF SUBJECT MATTER, NO STYLES OF PROSE OR POETRY.

NOTHING IS SAID ABOUT PAPER AND INK. NO PRINTING PROCESS IS MENTIONED. PRINTING ITSELF ISN'T EVEN SPECIFIED! NOTHING IS SAID ABOUT TECHNICAL PENS OR BRISTOL BOARD OR WINDSOR & NEWTON FINEST SABLE SERIES 7 NUMBER TWO BRUSHES!

NO MATERIALS ARE RULED OUT BY OUR DEFINITION. NO TOOLS ARE PROHIBITED.

THERE IS NO MENTION OF BLACK LINES AND FLAT COLORED INK. NO CALLS FOR EXAGGERATED ANATOMY OR FOR REPRESENTATIONAL ART OF ANY KIND.

NO SCHOOLS OF ART ARE BANISHED BY OUR DEFINITION, NO PHILOSOPHIES, NO MOVEMENTS, NO WAYS OF SEEING ARE OUT OF BOUNDS!
Those of you who make comics for a living—or would like to, someday—probably know that keeping up with all the advances in today's comics is a full-time job.

However much we may try to understand the world of comics around us, a part of that world will always lie in shadow—a mystery.

I'll do my best in the following chapters to shed light on that unseen side, but as we focus on the world of comics as it is, it should be kept in mind at all times that this world is only one—

--of many possible worlds!

Our attempts to define comics are an ongoing process which won't end anytime soon.

A new generation will no doubt reject whatever this one finally decides to accept and try once more to re-invent comics.

And so they should.

Here's to the great debate!
Here's a painting by Magritte called "The Treachery of Images."

The inscription is in French. Translated, it means "This is not a pipe."

And indeed this is not a pipe. This is a painting of a pipe.

Right?

See page 216 for more information.
WELL, ACTUALLY, THAT'S WRONG. THIS IS NOT A PAINTING OF A PIPE, THIS IS A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.

N'EST-CE PAS?

NOPE, WRONG AGAIN. IT'S A PRINTED COPY OF A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.

TEN COPIES, ACTUALLY. SIX, IF YOU FOLD THE PAGES BACK.

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I'M SAYING?

IF YOU DO, HAVE YOUR EARS CHECKED, BECAUSE NO ONE SAID A WORD.
These are not ideas.

This is not a man.

This is not a country.

This is not a leaf.

These are not people.

This is not music.

Welcome to the strange and wonderful world of the icon!

This is not my voice.

Splat!

This is not sound.

This is not law.

This is not me.

This is not a planet.

This is not a car.

This is not food.

Tundra

This is not a company.

This is not a face.

These are not separate moments.
Now, the word icon means many things.

For the purposes of this chapter, I'm using the word "icon" to mean any image used to represent a person, place, thing or idea.

That's a bit broader than the definition in my dictionary, but it's the closest thing to what I need here.

"Symbol" is a bit too loaded for me.

The sorts of images we usually call symbols are one category of icon, however.

Then there are the icons of language, science and communication.

And finally, the icons we call pictures: images designed to actually resemble their subjects.

These are the images we use to represent concepts, ideas and philosophies.

Icons of the practical realm.

But as resemblance varies, so does the level of iconic content.

Or, to put it somewhat clumsily, some pictures are just more iconic than others.
IN THE NON-PICTORIAL ICONS, MEANING IS FIXED AND ABSOLUTE. THEIR APPEARANCE DOESN'T AFFECT THEIR MEANING BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT INVISIBLE IDEAS.

IN PICTURES, HOWEVER, MEANING IS FLUID AND VARIABLE ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE. THEY DIFFER FROM "REAL-LIFE" APPEARANCE TO VARYING DEGREES.

WORDS ARE TOTALLY ABSTRACT ICONS. THAT IS, THEY BEAR NO RESEMBLANCE AT ALL TO THE REAL MCCOY.

BUT IN PICTURES THE LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION VARIES. SOME, LIKE THE FACE IN THE PREVIOUS PANEL, SO CLOSELY RESEMBLE THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS AS TO ALMOST TRICK THE EYE!

OTHERS, LIKE YOURS TRULY, ARE QUITE A BIT MORE ABSTRACT AND, IN FACT, ARE VERY MUCH UNLIKE ANY HUMAN FACE YOU'VE EVER SEEN!

LET'S SEE IF WE CAN PUT THESE PICTORIAL ICONS IN SOME SORT OF ORDER.

THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT SET THESE APART FROM ACTUAL FACES--THEY'RE SMALLER, FLATTER, LESS DETAILED, THEY DON'T MOVE. THEY LACK COLOR--BUT AS PICTORIAL ICONS GO, THEY ARE PRETTY "REALISTIC."

COMMON WISDOM HOLDS THAT THE PHOTOGRAPH AND THE REALISTIC PICTURE ARE THE ICONS THAT MOST RESEMBLE THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS.
SOMETHING MORE ABSTRACT IS THIS STYLE OF DRAWING FOUND IN MANY ADVENTURE COMICS.

ONLY OUTLINES AND A HINT OF SHADING ARE STILL PRESENT, BUT WE EASILY RECOGNIZE THIS AS A HUMAN FACE.

WHY, THEN, IS THE FACE ABOVE SO ACCEPTABLE TO OUR EYES? WHY DOES IT SEEM JUST AS REAL AS THE OTHERS?

AS WE CONTINUE TO ABSTRACT AND SIMPLIFY OUR IMAGE, WE ARE MOVING FURTHER AND FURTHER FROM THE "REAL" FACE OF THE PHOTO.

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE ICON WE CALL--

--- THE CARTOON? ---
WHY--
--ARE--
--WE--
--SO--
--INVOLVED?

WHY WOULD ANYONE YOUNG OR OLD, RESPOND TO A CARTOON AS MUCH OR MORE THAN A REALISTIC IMAGE?

WHY IS OUR CULTURE SO IN THRALL TO THE SIMPLIFIED REALITY OF THE CARTOON?

DEFINING THE CARTOON WOULD TAKE UP AS MUCH SPACE AS DEFINING COMICS, BUT FOR NOW I'M GOING TO EXAMINE CARTOONING AS A FORM OF AMPLIFICATION THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION.

WHEN WE ABSTRACT AN IMAGE THROUGH CARTOONING, WE'RE NOT SO MUCH ELIMINATING DETAILS AS WE ARE FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC DETAILS.

BY STRIPPING DOWN AN IMAGE TO ITS ESSENTIAL "MEANING," AN ARTIST CAN AMPLIFY THAT MEANING IN A WAY THAT REALISTIC ART CAN'T.
THOUGH THE TERM IS OFTEN USED DISPARAGINGLY, IT CAN BE EQUALLY WELL APPLIED TO MANY TIME-TESTED CLASSICS. SIMPLIFYING CHARACTERS AND IMAGES TOWARD A PURPOSE CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR STORYTELLING IN ANY MEDIUM.

CARTOONING ISN'T JUST A WAY OF DRAWING, IT'S A WAY OF SEEING!

THE ABILITY OF CARTOONS TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON AN IDEA IS, I THINK, AN IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR SPECIAL POWER, BOTH IN COMICS AND IN DRAWING GENERALLY.

BUT, I BELIEVE THERE'S SOMETHING MORE AT WORK IN OUR MINDS WHEN WE VIEW A CARTOON—ESPECIALLY OF A HUMAN FACE—which warrants further investigation.

ANOTHER IS THE UNIVERSALITY OF CARTOON IMAGERY. THE MORE CARTOONY A FACE IS, FOR INSTANCE, THE MORE PEOPLE IT COULD BE SAID TO DESCRIBE.

THE FACT THAT YOUR MIND IS CAPABLE OF TAKING A CIRCLE, TWO DOTS AND A LINE AND TURNING THEM INTO A FACE IS NOTHING SHORT OF INCREDIBLE!

BUT STILL MORE INCREDIBLE IS THE FACT THAT YOU CANNOT AVOID SEEING A FACE HERE. YOUR MIND WON'T LET YOU!
ASK A FRIEND TO DRAW YOU SOME SHAPES ON A PIECE OF PAPER. THEY SHOULD BE CLOSED CURVES BUT OTHERWISE CAN BE AS WEIRD AND IRREGULAR AS HE OR SHE WANTS.

LET'S SAY THE RESULTS LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

NOW - YOU'LL FIND THAT NO MATTER WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THOSE SHAPES CAN BE MADE INTO A FACE WITH ONE SIMPLE ADDITION.

YOUR MIND HAS NO TROUBLE AT ALL CONVERTING SUCH SHAPES INTO FACES, YET WOULD IT EVER MISTAKE THIS—

--FOR THIS?

WE HUMANS ARE A SELF-CENTERED RACE.
WE SEE OURSELVES IN EVERYTHING.

WE ASSIGN IDENTITIES AND EMOTIONS WHERE NONE EXIST.

AND WE MAKE THE WORLD OVER IN OUR IMAGE.
THINK OF YOUR FACE AS A MASK.

THAT'S WHAT IT IS, AFTER ALL.

A MASK.

FACING OUTWARD.

WORN FROM THE DAY YOU WERE BORN.

SLAVE TO YOUR EVERY MENTAL COMMAND.

SEEN BY EVERYONE YOU MEET.

BUT NEVER BY YOU.

OPEN ITS EYES NOW.

JUST THINK IT. THE MASK WILL OBEY.
ALL SET?
GOOD.
NOW, SMILE.

C'MON.
NOBODY'S LOOKING.

GOOD, NOW, WHAT
CHANGED WHEN
YOU SMILED? WHAT
DID YOU SEE?
NOTHING, RIGHT.

YET, YOU KNOW
YOU SMILED! NOT
JUST BECAUSE YOU
FELT YOUR CHEEKS
COMPRESS OR THE
CRINKLING AROUND
YOUR EYES!

YOU KNOW YOU
SMILED BECAUSE
YOU TRUSTED THIS
MASK CALLED YOUR
FACE TO RESPOND!

BUT THE FACE YOU
SEE IN YOUR MIND
IS NOT THE SAME AS
OTHERS SEE!

WHEN TWO PEOPLE INTERACT, THEY USUALLY LOOK DIRECTLY
AT ONE ANOTHER, SEEING THEIR PARTNER'S FEATURES IN
VIVID DETAIL.
Each one also sustains a constant awareness of his or her own face, but this mind-picture is not nearly so vivid; just a sketchy arrangement... a sense of shape... a sense of general placement.

Something as simple and as basic--

--as a cartoon.

Thus, when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face--

But when you enter the world of the cartoon--

I believe this is the primary cause of our childhood fascination with cartoons though other factors such as universal identification, simplicity and the childlike features of some cartoon characters also play a part.

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.

That's why I decided to draw myself in such a simple style.

Would you have listened to me if I looked like this??

We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!
I doubt it! You would have been far too aware of the messenger to fully receive the message!

Apart from what little I told you about myself in Chapter One, I'm practically a blank slate!

It would never even occur to you to wonder what my politics are, or what I had for lunch or where I got this silly outfit!

I'm just a little voice inside your head. A concept.

You give me life by reading this book and by "filling up" this very iconic (cartoony) form.

Who I am is irrelevant. I'm just a little piece of you.

But if who I am matters less, maybe what I say will matter more.

That's the theory, anyway.

So far, we've only discussed faces, but the phenomenon of non-visual self-awareness can, to a lesser degree, still apply to our whole bodies. After all, do we need to see our hands to know what they're doing?

There's more, too!
The late great Marshall McLuhan observed a similar form of non-visual awareness when people interact with inanimate objects.

When driving, for example, we experience much more than our five senses report.

The whole car—not just the parts we can see, feel, and hear—is very much on our minds at all times.

The vehicle becomes an extension of our body. It absorbs our sense of identity. We become the car.

If one car hits another, the driver of the vehicle being struck is much more likely to say:

**KLUNK!**

Hey! He hit me!!

Than “He hit my car!”

Or “His car hit my car”, for that matter.

Our identities and awareness are invested in many inanimate objects every day. Our clothes, for example, can trigger numerous transformations in the way others see us and in the way we see ourselves.
OUR ABILITY TO EXTEND OUR IDENTITIES INTO INANIMATE OBJECTS CAN CAUSE PIECES OF WOOD TO BECOME LEGS...

PIECES OF METAL TO BECOME HANDS...

PIECES OF PLASTIC TO BECOME EARS...

PIECES OF GLASS TO BECOME EYES.

AND IN EVERY CASE, OUR CONSTANT AWARENESS OF SELF...

-- FLOWS OUTWARD TO INCLUDE THE OBJECT OF OUR EXTENDED IDENTITY.

AND JUST AS OUR AWARENESS OF OUR BIOLOGICAL SELVES ARE SIMPLIFIED CONCEPTUALIZED IMAGES--

-- SO TOO IS OUR AWARENESS OF THESE EXTENSIONS GREATLY SIMPLIFIED.

ALL THE THINGS WE EXPERIENCE IN LIFE CAN BE SEPARATED INTO TWO REALMS, THE REALM OF THE CONCEPT--

-- AND THE REALM OF THE SENSES.
Our identities belong permanently to the conceptual world. They can't be seen, heard, smelled, touched or tasted. They're merely ideas and everything else—at the start—belongs to the sensual world, the world outside of us.

Gradually we reach beyond ourselves.

We encounter the sight, smell, touch, taste and sound of our own bodies.

And of the world around us.

And soon we discover that objects of the physical world can also cross over—

—and possess identities of their own.

Or, as our extensions—

—begin to glow—

—with the life—
--WE LEND TO THEM.

BY DE-EMPHASIZING THE APPEARANCE OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD IN FAVOR OF THE IDEA OF FORM, THE CARTOON PLACES ITSELF IN THE WORLD OF CONCEPTS.

THROUGH TRADITIONAL REALISM, THE COMICS ARTIST CAN PORTRAY THE WORLD WITHOUT--

--AND THROUGH THE CARTOON, THE WORLD WITHIN.

WHEN CARTOONS ARE USED THROUGHOUT A STORY, THE WORLD OF THAT STORY MAY SEEM TO PULSE WITH LIFE.

INANIMATE OBJECTS MAY SEEM TO POSSESS SEPARATE IDENTITIES SO THAT IF ONE JUMPED UP AND STARTED SINGING IT WOULDN'T FEEL OUT OF PLACE.

BUT IN EMPHASIZING THE CONCEPTS OF OBJECTS OVER THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, MUCH HAS TO BE OMITTED.

IF AN ARTIST WANTS TO PORTRAY THE BEAUTY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD--

--REALISM OF SOME SORT IS GOING TO PLAY A PART.
When drawing the face and figure, nearly all comics artists apply at least some small measure of cartooning, even the more realistic adventure artists—

—Are a far cry from photo-realists!

Storytellers in all media know that a sure indicator of audience involvement—

—is the degree to which the audience identifies with a story’s characters.

And since viewer-identification is a specialty of cartooning, cartoons have historically held an advantage in breaking into world popular culture.

On the other hand, no one expects audiences to identify with brick walls or landscapes and indeed, backgrounds tend to be slightly more realistic.

In some comics, this split is far more pronounced. The Belgian “clear-line” style of heroes, Tintin combines very iconic characters with unusually realistic backgrounds.
This combination allows readers to mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world.

In the world of animation, where the effect happens to be a practical necessity, Disney has used it with impressive results for over 50 years!

In Europe it can be found in many popular comics, from Asterix to Tintin to works of Jacques Tardi.

In American comics, the effect is used far less often, although it has crept up in the works of artists as diverse as Carl Barks, Jaime Hernandez and in the team of Dave Sim and Gerhard.

In Japan, on the other hand, the masking effect was, for a time, virtually a national style!

Thanks to the seminal influence of comics creator Osamu Tezuka, Japanese comics have a long, rich history of iconic characters.

But, in recent decades Japanese fans also developed a taste for flashy, photo-realistic art.

Art © Hayasi and Osima.
THE RESULTANT HYBRID STYLES HAD TREMENDOUS ICONIC RANGE FROM EXTREMELY CARTOONY CHARACTERS TO NEAR-PHOTOGRAPHIC BACKGROUNDS.

BUT JAPANESE COMICS ARTISTS TOOK THE IDEA A STEP FURTHER.

SOON, SOME OF THEM REALIZED THAT THE OBJECTIFYING POWER OF REALISTIC ARTS COULD BE PUT TO OTHER USES.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE MOST CHARACTERS WERE DESIGNED SIMPLY TO ASSIST IN READER-IDENTIFICATION:

--OTHER CHARACTERS WERE DRAWN MORE REALISTICALLY IN ORDER TO OBJECTIFY THEM, EMPHASIZING THEIR "OTHERNESS" FROM THE READER.

A PROP LIKE THIS SWORD MIGHT BE VERY CARTOONY IN ONE SEQUENCE--

--DUE TO THE "LIFE" IT POSSESSES AS AN EXTENSION OF MY CARTOON IDENTITY!

BUT SUPPOSE I NOTICE SOME MYSTERIOUS WRITING CARVED ON THE SWORD'S HILT.

IN JAPANESE COMICS, THE SWORD MIGHT NOW BECOME VERY REALISTIC, NOT ONLY TO SHOW US THE DETAILS, BUT TO MAKE US AWARE OF THE SWORD AS AN OBJECT, SOMETHING WITH WEIGHT, TEXTURE AND PHYSICAL COMPLEXITY.

IN THIS AND IN OTHER WAYS, COMICS IN JAPAN HAVE EVOLVED VERY DIFFERENTLY FROM THOSE IN THE WEST.

WE'LL RETURN TO THESE DIFFERENCES SEVERAL TIMES DURING THIS BOOK.
I LIKE THE MASKING EFFECT, PERSONALLY, BUT IT'S JUST ONE OF MANY POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO COMICS ART.

MANY OF MY FAVORITE ARTISTS USE IT VERY RARELY.

STILL, I HOPE THE JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE ON CARTOONING HELPS DEMONSTRATE THAT ONE'S CHOICE OF STYLES CAN HAVE CONSEQUENCES FAR BEYOND THE MERE "LOOK" OF A STORY.

AS I WRITE THIS, IN 1992, AMERICAN AUDIENCES ARE JUST BEGINNING TO REALIZE THAT A SIMPLE STYLE DOESN'T NECESSITATE SIMPLE STORY.

THE PLATONIC IDEAL OF THE CARTOON MAY SEEM TO OMIT MUCH OF THE AMBIGUITY AND COMPLEX CHARACTERIZATION WHICH ARE THE HALLMARKS OF MODERN LITERATURE, LEAVING THEM SUITABLE ONLY FOR CHILDREN.

BUT SIMPLE ELEMENTS CAN COMBINE IN COMPLEX WAYS, ASATOMS BECOME MOLECULES AND MOLECULES BECOME LIFE.

AND LIKE THE ATOM, GREAT POWER IS LOCKED IN THESE FEW SIMPLE LINES.

AND LIKE THE ATOM, GREAT POWER IS LOCKED IN THESE FEW SIMPLE LINES.

RELEASEABLE ONLY BY THE READER'S MIND.
"REALITY"

WAIT! THERE'S MORE!

WE'VE REDUCED THIS FACE TO TWO DOTS AND TWO LINES. IS OUR ICONIC ABSTRACTION SCALE COMPLETE?

THE SCALE SHOWS SEVERAL SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT PROGRESSIONS. LET'S CONCENTRATE ON ONE AND SEE IF WE CAN TAKE IT ANY FURTHER.

COMPLEX → SIMPLE

REALISTIC → ICONIC

OBJECTIVE → SUBJECTIVE

SPECIFIC → UNIVERSAL

CAN ANY CONFIGURATION OF INK ON PAPER BE MORE ABSTRACTED FROM "REALITY"--

--YET STILL REPRESENT A FACE AS CLEARLY AS THIS ONE?

I SAY THE ANSWER IS YES.

HERE'S A PART OF THE SOLUTION.

JUST DRAW A LINE STRAIGHT DOWN FROM EACH OF THE DOTS TO THIS HEIGHT FOR THE ANSWER.
MEANING RETAINED.

RESEMBLANCE GONE.

--ARE THE ULTIMATE ABSTRACTION.

WORDS--

WRITING AND DRAWING ARE SEEN AS SEPARATE DISCIPLINES. WRITERS AND ARTISTS AS SEPARATE BREEDS--

AND "GOOD" COMICS AS THOSE IN WHICH THE COMBINATION OF THESE VERY DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION IS THOUGHT TO BE HARMONIOUS.

BUT JUST HOW "DIFFERENT" ARE THEY?

WORDS, PICTURES AND OTHER ICONS ARE THE VOCABULARY OF THE LANGUAGE CALLED COMICS.

A SINGLE UNIFIED LANGUAGE DESERVES A SINGLE, UNIFIED VOCABULARY.

WITHOUT IT, COMICS WILL CONTINUE TO LIMP ALONG AS THE "BASTARD CHILD" OF WORDS AND PICTURES.

SEVERAL FACTORS HAVE CONSPIRED AGAINST COMICS RECEIVING THE UNIFIED IDENTITY IT NEEDS.

AND AMONG THEM LIE SOME OF OUR VERY BEST INSTINCTS.
Both artist and writer begin, hands joined across the gap, with a common purpose: to make comics of "quality."

The artist knows that this means more than just stick-figures and crude cartoons. He sets off in search of a higher art.

The writer knows that this means more than just oof! pow! blam! and one-a-day gags. She sets off in search of something deeper.

In museums and in libraries, the artist finds what he's looking for. He studies the techniques of the great masters of Western art. He practices night and day.

She too finds what she's looking for, in the great masters of Western literature. She reads and writes constantly. She searches for a voice uniquely hers.

Finally, they're ready. Both have mastered their arts. His brushstroke is nearly invisible in its subtlety, the figures pure Michaelangelo. Her descriptions are dazzling. The words flow together like a Shakespearean sonnet.

They're ready to join hands once more and create a comics masterpiece.

? • FACE • ?

Two eyes. One nose. One mouth.

The youth's terror twinges. So gags... on now...
PICTURES ARE RECEIVED INFORMATION. WE NEED NO FORMAL EDUCATION TO "GET THE MESSAGE." THE MESSAGE IS INSTANTANEOUS.

WRITING IS PERCEIVED INFORMATION. IT TAKES TIME AND SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE TO DECODE THE ABSTRACT SYMBOLS OF LANGUAGE.

WHEN PICTURES ARE MORE ABSTRACTED FROM "REALITY," THEY REQUIRE GREATER LEVELS OF PERCEPTION, MORE LIKE WORDS.

WHEN WORDS ARE BOLDER, MORE DIRECT, THEY REQUIRE LOWER LEVELS OF PERCEPTION AND ARE RECEIVED FASTER, MORE LIKE PICTURES.

OUR NEED FOR A UNIFIED LANGUAGE OF COMICS SENDS US TOWARD THE CENTER WHERE WORDS AND PICTURES ARE LIKE TWO SIDES OF ONE COIN!

BUT OUR NEED FOR SOPHISTICATION IN COMICS SEEMS TO LEAD US OUTWARD, WHERE WORDS AND PICTURES ARE MOST SEPARATE.

BOTH ARE WORTHY ASPIRATIONS. BOTH STEM FROM A LOVE OF COMICS AND A DEVOTION TO ITS FUTURE.

CAN THEY BE RECONCILED?

I SAY THE ANSWER IS YES, BUT SINCE THE REASONS BELONG IN A DIFFERENT CHAPTER, WE'LL HAVE TO COME BACK TO THIS LATER.
Iconic abstraction is only one form of abstraction available to comics artists.

Usually the word "abstraction" refers to the non-iconic variety, where no attempt is made to cling to resemblance or meaning.

The type of art which often prompts the question: "What does it mean?"

Earning the reply "It means what it is!"

In this case -- -- ink on paper.
This is the realm of the art object, the picture plane, where shapes, lines, and colors can be themselves and not pretend otherwise.

Below me, the area described by these 3 vertices—"reality", language and the picture plane—represents the total pictorial vocabulary of comics or of any of the visual arts.

Reality

Language

Face

Most comics art lies near the bottom—that is, along the iconic abstraction side where every line has a meaning.

Near the line, but not necessarily on it! For even the most straightforward little cartoon character has a meaningless line or two!

If we incorporate language and other icons into the chart, we can begin to build a comprehensive map—

--of the universe called comics.

Watch that nose!
realistic anatomical base. Simpson distorts and exaggerates M.M.'s features to the brink of abstraction. 22. MICHAEL CHERRIS of SILENT INVASION, 0 Children and Hanrock. 24. RICK GERRITZ. 25. PETER KUPPER. 26. GARRY TRUDEAU, 0 COMICSBIB: 27. LINDA BARRY. 28. SAMPEL SHIBATA. 29. CHARLES BUNSEN. 30. BABY. 29 1/2. (Whops.) CLIFF PETERS. 31. FRIDAY PERS. 32. POLLY OLDBERG'S. 33. PETER BAGGE'S Becky from KILONGEN. 34. SERGIO ARANAGRO POLO'S THE WANDERER. Simple, straightforward, yet true of a strong quality. 35. ROBERTA GREGORY, Blotchy Bitch from NAUGHTY BITS. 36. DAVID MAZZUCHELLI from BATMAN YEAR ONE. 37. DAVE MACK from PUNISHER. 38. JIM WATTS from WILLOW. 39. CAROL SIMPSON from MEGATON MAN. Beginning from a

ALL COPYRIGHTS REMAIN WITH THE CREATOR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Keep in mind that these are only copies of the originals drawings.

PLEASE NOTE: ARTISTS IN THIS CHART ARE NOT NECESSARILY CHOSEN FOR ARTISTIC MERIT. SOME VERY IMPORTANT CREATORS ARE NOT INCLUDED.
Most of the preceding examples were placed on our chart based on the drawing styles used on specific characters.

Each creator employs a range of styles, though, and many occupy several places on the chart during a given project.

Some, like Matt Feazell's Cynicalman, keep to one area consistently.

The combination of extremely iconic characters and environments, mixed with simple, direct language and a sound effect or two would give us a shape something like this:

But others range considerably from one end of the chart to the other.

We've already discussed the range of Hergé and others who contrast iconic characters with realistic backgrounds.

Sound on!

O.K... let's roll!

Vision on!

Hergé stretches nearly from left to right—from realism to cartooning—but ventures very little into the upper world of non-iconic abstraction.
MARY FLEENER, ON THE OTHER HAND, VARIIES ONLY SLIGHTLY IN HER LEVEL OF ICONIC CONTENT, WHILE THE LEVEL OF NON-ICONIC ABSTRACTION GOES NEARLY FROM TOP TO BOTTOM!

ART © MARY FLEENER.

HEY!! COME TA THINK OF IT... WHAT ABOUT THAT WALKIN' TIME BOMB?!! THAT'S RIGHT!! IF HE'S STILL LOOSE... THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT'LL HAPPEN.!!

IN THE MID-SIXTIES, JACK KIRBY, ALONG WITH STAN LEE, STAKED OUT A MIDDLE GROUND OF ICONIC FORMS WITH A SENSE OF THE REAL ABOUT THEM, BOLSTERED BY A POWERFUL DESIGN SENSE.

ART: JACK KIRBY AND JOE SINFOT (MY FACSIMILE)
SCRIPT: STAN LEE.

TODAY, MANY AMERICAN MAINSTREAM COMICS STILL FOLLOW KIRBY'S LEAD FOR STORYTELLING, BUT THE DESIRE FOR MORE REALISTIC ART AND MORE ELABORATE SCRIPTS HAS PUSHED ART AND STORY FURTHER APART IN MANY CASES.

A FIGHT STARTED ON HIS DOORSTEP, HE PUT A STOP TO IT. FAR AS ANYONE KNOWS, ALL THE SURVIVORS ARE PRETTY MUCH OKAY.

WAY YOU TALK, NICHOLAS. FOLKS EXPECT HIM TO START NUKIN' MAMA RUSSIA ANY MOMENT!

ART: JIM LEE AND SCOTT WILLIAMS (FACSIMILE)
SCRIPT: CHRIS CLAREMONST.
In the eighties and nineties, most of the counterculture of independent creators, working mostly in black and white, stayed to the right of mainstream comics art while covering a broad range of writing styles.

This follows the lead of the post-Kurtzman generation of underground cartoonists who used cartoony styles to portray adult themes and subject matter.

Ironic that the two bastions of cartoony art are underground and children's comics! Pretty far apart as genres go!

Some artists, such as the irrepressible Sergio Aragonés, staked their claim on a particular area long ago and have been quite happy since.

Others, such as Dave McKean, are forever on the move, experimenting, taking chances, never satisfied.
WHEN AN ARTIST IS DRAWN TO ONE END OF THE CHART OR ANOTHER, THAT ARTIST MAY BE REVEALING SOMETHING ABOUT HIS OR HER STRONGEST VALUES AND LOYALTIES IN ART.

THOSE WHO APPROACH THE LOWER LEFT, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE PROBABLY ATTRACTION BY A SENSE OF THE BEAUTY OF NATURE.

THOSE AT THE TOP BY THE BEAUTY OF ART.

AND THOSE ON THE RIGHT BY THE BEAUTY OF IDEAS.

FOR COMICS TO MATURE AS A MEDIUM, IT MUST BE CAPABLE OF EXPRESSING EACH ARTIST'S INNERMOST NEEDS AND IDEAS.

BUT EACH ARTIST HAS DIFFERENT INNER NEEDS, DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW, DIFFERENT PASSIONS, AND SO NEEDS TO FIND DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION.*

THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF VISUAL ARTS BELONGS IN THIS SPACE. MONET SET UP HIS EASEL ALONG THE LEFT FACE, MONDRIAN AT THE TOP, REMBRANDT LOWER LEFT, MATISSE RIGHT ABOVE WHERE I'M STANDING.

AND NEARLY EVERY MOVEMENT OR MANIFESTO PLANTED ITS FLAG AND LOUDLY PROCLAIMED THE DISCOVERY OF THE ONLY PATCH OF GROUND WORTH BUILDING ON.

* CHECK OUT WASSILY KANDINSKY'S TERRIFIC 1912 ESSAY, "ON THE PROBLEM OF FORM"
BY DRAWING BORDERS AROUND THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS, I HOPE I HAVEN'T MADE IT SEEM SMALLER THAN IT IS.

COMICS ARTISTS HAVE A UNIVERSE OF ICONS TO CHOOSE FROM!

AND IT'S EXPANDING ALL THE TIME!

OURS IS AN INCREASINGLY SYMBOL-ORIENTED CULTURE.

AS THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY APPROACHES, VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY MAY FINALLY HELP US REALIZE A FORM OF UNIVERSAL COMMUNICATION.

SOCIETY IS INVENTING NEW SYMBOLS REGULARLY, JUST AS COMICS ARTISTS DO.
ICONS DEMAND OUR PARTICIPATION TO MAKE THEM WORK.

THERE IS NO LIFE HERE EXCEPT THAT WHICH YOU GIVE TO IT.

IT'S YOUR JOB TO CREATE AND RECREATE ME MOMENT BY MOMENT, NOT JUST THE CARTOONIST'S.

IT'S BEEN OVER TWENTY YEARS SINCE MCCLUHAN FIRST OBSERVED THAT THOSE PEOPLE GROWING UP IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY DIDN'T WANT GOALS SO MUCH AS THEY WANTED ROLES! AND THAT'S WHAT VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY IS ALL ABOUT.

SMILE! PAF!

AS IT HAPPENS, ONLY TWO POPULAR MEDIA WERE IDENTIFIED BY MCCLUHAN AS 'COOL' MEDIA-- THAT IS, MEDIA WHICH COMMAND AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT THROUGH ICONIC FORMS.

ONE OF THEM, TELEVISION, HAS REACHED INTO THE LIVES OF EVERY HUMAN BEING ON EARTH--

--AND FOR BETTER OR WORSE, ALTERED THE COURSE OF HUMAN AFFAIRS FROM HERE 'TIL DOOMSDAY.

THE FATE OF THE OTHER ONE, COMICS--

--IS ANYONE'S GUESS.

SEQUENTIAL ART
CHAPTER THREE

BLOOD IN THE GUTTER.

WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG, I HAD A RECURRENT DAYDREAM THAT THE WHOLE WORLD WAS JUST A SHOW PUT ON FOR MY BENEFIT, THAT UNLESS I WAS PRESENT TO SEE THINGS, THEY JUST--

---CEASED TO EXIST.
LATER IN LIFE, I FOUND OTHERS WHO HAD SIMILAR DAYDREAMS AS CHILDREN. NONE OF US EVER REALLY BELIEVED THESE THEORIES, BUT WE HAD ALL BEEN FASCINATED BY THE FACT THAT THEY COULD NOT BE DISPROVED!

EVEN TODAY, AS I WRITE AND DRAW THIS PANEL, I HAVE NO GUARANTEE THAT ANYTHING EXISTS OUTSIDE OF WHAT MY FIVE SENSES REPORT TO ME.*

I'VE NEVER BEEN TO MOROCCO, BUT I TAKE IT ON FAITH THAT THERE IS A MOROCCO!

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE EARTH FROM SPACE FIRSTHAND, YET I TRUST THAT THE EARTH IS ROUND.

I'VE NEVER BEEN IN THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET, YET I ASSUME IT HAS AN INTERIOR, THAT IT ISN'T JUST SOME BIG MOVIE SET!

IN THIS PANEL YOU CAN'T EVEN SEE MY LEGS, YET YOU ASSUME THAT THEY'RE THERE.

EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE NOT!

* NOT TO SAY OUR SENSES ARE ANY KIND OF GUARANTEE!
All of us perceive the world as a whole through the experience of our senses. Yet our senses can only reveal a world that is fragmented and incomplete.

Even the most widely travelled mind can only see so much of the world in the course of a life. Our perception of "reality" is an act of faith, based on mere fragments.

As infants, we’re unable to commit that act of faith. If we can’t see it, hear it, smell it, taste it or touch it, it isn’t there!

The game “Peek-a-Boo” plays on this idea. Gradually, we all learn that even though the sight of mommy comes and goes, mommy remains.
THIS PHENOMENON OF OBSERVING THE PARTS BUT PERCEIVING THE WHOLE HAS A NAME. 

IT'S CALLED CLOSURE.

IN OUR DAILY LIVES, WE OFTEN COMMIT CLOSURE, MENTALLY COMPLETING THAT WHICH IS INCOMPLETE BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE.

SOME FORMS OF CLOSURE ARE DELIBERATE INVENTIONS OF STORYTELLERS TO PRODUCE SUSPENSE OR TO CHALLENGE AUDIENCES.

OTHERS HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY, WITHOUT MUCH EFFORT... PART OF BUSINESS AS USUAL.

IN RECOGNIZING AND RELATING TO OTHER PEOPLE, WE ALL DEPEND HEAVILY ON OUR LEARNED ABILITY OF CLOSURE.

IN AN INCOMPLETE WORLD, WE MUST DEPEND ON CLOSURE FOR OUR VERY SURVIVAL.
Closure can take many forms. Some simple, some complex.

Sometimes, a mere shape or outline is enough to trigger closure.

The mental process described in Chapter Two whereby these lines become a face could be considered closure.

Every time we see a photograph reproduced in a newspaper or magazine, we commit closure.

Our eyes take in the fragmented, black-and-white image of the “half-tone” patterns—

—and our minds transform it into the “reality”—

—of the photograph!
In electronic media, closure is constant, even overpowering!

In film, closure takes place continuously—twenty-four times per second, in fact—as our minds, aided by the persistence of vision, transform a series of still pictures into a story of continuous motion.

A medium requiring even more closure is television, which, in reality, is just a single point of light racing across the screen so fast that it's described my face hundreds of times before you can even swallow that corn chip!!

Between such automatic electronic closure and the simpler closure of everyday life—

--there lies a medium of communication and expression which uses closure like no other...

...a medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion.

SEE THAT SPACE BETWEEN THE PANELS? THAT'S WHAT COMICS AFICIONADOS HAVE NAMED "THE GUTTER".

AND DESPITE ITS INCEREMONIOUS TITLE, THE GUTTER PLAYS HOST TO MUCH OF THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY THAT ARE AT THE VERY HEART OF COMICS.

HERE IN THE LIMBO OF THE GUTTER, HUMAN IMAGINATION TAKES TWO SEPARATE IMAGES AND TRANSFORMS THEM INTO A SINGLE IDEA.
Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you something must be there!

Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments.

But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality.

If visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics, closure is its grammar. And since our definition of comics hinges on the arrangement of elements—

Then, in a very real sense, comics is closure!
THE CLOSURE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IS CONTINUOUS, LARGELY INVOLUNTARY AND VIRTUALLY IMPERCEPTIBLE.

BUT CLOSURE IN COMICS IS FAR FROM CONTINUOUS AND ANYTHING BUT INVOLUNTARY!

NOW YOU DIE!!
NO!
NO!

EYYAA!!

EVERY ACT COMMITTED TO PAPER BY THE COMICS ARTIST IS AIDED AND ABETTED BY A SILENT ACCOMPLICE.

I MAY HAVE DRAWN AN AXE BEING RAISED IN THIS EXAMPLE, BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WHO LET IT DROP OR DECIDED HOW HARD THE BLOW, OR WHO SCREAMED, OR WHY.

AN EQUAL PARTNER IN CRIME KNOWN AS THE READER.

NOW YOU DIE!!
NO!
NO!

EYYAA!!

ALL OF YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE MURDER. ALL OF YOU HELD THE AXE AND CHOSE YOUR SPOT.

THAT, DEAR READER, WAS YOUR SPECIAL CRIME, EACH OF YOU COMMITTING IT IN YOUR OWN STYLE.
TO KILL A MAN BETWEEN PANELS IS TO CONDEMN HIM TO A THOUSAND DEATHS.

PARTICIPATION IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN ANY MEDIUM. FILMMAKERS LONG AGO REALIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLOWING VIEWERS TO USE THEIR IMAGINATIONS.

BUT WHILE FILM MAKES USE OF AUDIENCES’ IMAGINATIONS FOR OCCASIONAL EFFECTS, COMICS MUST USE IT FAR MORE OFTEN!

FROM THE TOSSING OF A BASEBALL TO THE DEATH OF A PLANET, THE READER’S DELIBERATE, VOLUNTARY CLOSURE IS COMICS’ PRIMARY MEANS OF SIMULATING TIME AND MOTION.

CLOSURE IN COMICS FOSTERS AN INTIMACY SURPASSED ONLY BY THE WRITTEN WORD. A SILENT, SECRET CONTRACT BETWEEN CREATOR AND AUDIENCE.

HOW THE CREATOR HONORS THAT CONTRACT IS A MATTER OF BOTH ART AND CRAFT.

LET’S TAKE A LOOK AT THE CRAFT.
MOST PANEL-TO-PANEL TRANSITIONS IN COMICS CAN BE PLACED IN ONE OF SEVERAL DISTINCT CATEGORIES. THE FIRST CATEGORY—WHICH WE'LL CALL MOMENT-TO-MOMENT—REQUIRES VERY LITTLE CLOSURE.

1.

NEXT ARE THOSE TRANSITIONS FEATURING A SINGLE SUBJECT IN DISTINCT ACTION-TO-ACTION PROGRESSIONS.

2.

WHAM!

BURP!

CRASH!
THE NEXT TYPE TAKES US FROM SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT WHILE STAYING WITHIN A SCENE OR IDEA. NOTE THE DEGREE OF READER INVOLVEMENT NECESSARY TO RENDER THESE TRANSITIONS MEANINGFUL.

DEDUCTIVE REASONING IS OFTEN REQUIRED IN READING COMICS SUCH AS IN THESE SCENE-TO-SCENE TRANSITIONS, WHICH TRANSPORT US ACROSS SIGNIFICANT DISTANCES OF TIME AND SPACE.
A FIFTH
TYPE OF TRANSITION,
WHICH WE’LL CALL
ASPECT-TO-ASPECT,
BY PASSES TIME FOR THE
MOST PART AND SETS A
WANDERING EYE ON
DIFFERENT ASPECTS
OF A PLACE, IDEA
OR MOOD.

5.

AND
FINALLY, THERE’S
THE NON-SEQUITUR,
WHICH OFFERS NO
LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN PANELS
WHATSOEVER!

6.
This last category suggests an interesting question: is it possible for any sequence of panels to be totally unrelated to each other?

Personally, I don't think so.

No matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of--

Alchemy: at work in the space between panels which can help us find meaning or resonance in even the most jarring of combinations.

Such transitions may not make "sense" in any traditional way, but still a relationship of some sort will inevitably develop.

Bang!

By creating a sequence with two or more images, we are endowing them with a single--

--overriding identity, and forcing the viewer to consider them as a whole.

However, different they had been, they now belong to a single organism.

Closure for blood, gutters for veins...

Ge bicycl purce!
1. MOMENT-TO-MOMENT
2. ACTION-TO-ACTION
3. SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT
4. SCENE-TO-SCENE
5. ASPECT-TO-ASPECT
6. NON-SEQUITUR

THIS SORT OF CATEGORIZATION IS AN INEXACT SCIENCE AT BEST, BUT BY USING OUR TRANSITION SCALE AS A TOOL --

-- WE CAN BEGIN TO UNRAVEL SOME OF THE MYSTERIES SURROUNDING THE INVISIBLE ART OF COMICS STORYTELLING!

MOST MAINSTREAM COMICS IN AMERICA EMPLOY STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES FIRST INTRODUCED BY JACK KIRBY, SO LET'S START BY EXAMINING THIS LEE-KIRBY COMIC FROM 1966.

ALTOGETHER, I COUNT NINETY-FIVE PANEL-TO-PANEL TRANSITIONS. LET'S SEE HOW THEY BREAK DOWN PROPORTIONATELY.

BY FAR, THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF TRANSITION IN KIRBY'S ART IS ACTION-TO-ACTION. I COUNT SIXTY-TWO OF THEM IN THIS STORY -- ABOUT SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER.

SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT TRANSITIONS ACCOUNT FOR AN ADDITIONAL NINETEEN -- ABOUT TWENTY PERCENT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER.

[TRACED AND SIMPLIFIED FOR CLARITY'S SAKE]
AND SINCE ALL
OF THE REMAINING
TRANSITIONS ARE FROM
SCENE-TO-SCENE,
WE HAVE THE
FOLLOWING
BREAKDOWN:

1 -
2 65%
3 20%
4 15%
5 -
6 -

AS A BAR GRAPH
IT WOULD LOOK
SOMETHING LIKE
THIS.

1 2 3 4 5 6

L

THIS EMPHASIS ON
ACTION-TO-ACTION
STORYTELLING SUITS
MOST PEOPLE'S IDEAS
ABOUT KIRBY, BUT
IS HE UNIQUE
IN THIS RESPECT?

APPEARENTLY NOT! HERE'S A GRAPH OF
PANEL TRANSITIONS IN HERGÉ'S TINTIN
AND THE PROPORTION ARE VERY
SIMILAR TO KIRBY'S

1 2 3 4 5 6

L

NOW, HERGÉ'S AND
KIRBY'S STYLES
ARE NOT SIMILAR!
IN FACT, THEY'RE
RADICALLY
DIFFERENT!!

IS THERE SOME KIND
OF UNIVERSAL
PROPORTION AT
WORK? HERE, OR
IS THERE ANOTHER
COMMON LINK?
MAYBE A SIMILARITY
OF GENRES?

A RANDOM
SAMPLING OF
VARIOUS AMERICAN
COMICS SHOWS THIS
SAME PROPORTION
PRETTY
CONSISTENTLY.

X-MEN #1
CLAREMONT & LEE
FRANK IN THE RIVER
WOODRING

“HEARTBREAK SOUP”
G. HERNANDEZ
A CONTRACT WITH GOD
EISNEIR

BETTY & VERONICA
DOYLE & DECARLO
MAUS
SPIEGELMAN

NAUGHTY BITS
GREGORY
DONALD DUCK
BARKS

75
A survey of well-known European artists yields similar, if not quite as uniform, results.

What can we deduce from this?

Are these three types of transitions all anyone should ever need to tell a story in comics?

If we choose to see stories as connected series of events, then the predominance of types 2-4 are easily explained.

Types 2-4 show things happening in concise, efficient ways.

Type 1 shows actions like type 2, but it tends to require several panels to do what type 2 does in two.
AND, OF COURSE, NON-SEQUITURS ARE UNCONCERNED WITH EVENTS OR ANY NARRATIVE PURPOSES OF ANY SORT.

SOME EXPERIMENTAL COMICS, LIKE THOSE OF ART SPIEGELMAN'S EARLY PERIOD, EXPLORE A FULL RANGE OF TRANSITIONS—

THOUGH GENERALLY IN THE SERVICE OF EQUALLY RADICAL STORIES AND SUBJECTS.

BUT BEFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT TYPES 2-4 HAVE A MONOPOLY ON STRAIGHTFORWARD STORYTELLING, LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT OSAMU TEZUKA FROM JAPAN.

TEZUKA IS A FAR CRY FROM THE EARLY SPIEGELMAN. HIS STORYTELLING IS CLEAR AND STRAIGHTFORWARD. BUT LOOK AT HOW HE CHARTS!

STORIES FROM SPIEGELMAN'S ANTHOLOGY BREAKDOWNS:

"DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE"  "INTRODUCTION"  "MAUS" (ORIGINAL)

"SKINLESS PERKINS"  "PRISONER ON THE HELL PLANET"  "CRACKING JOKES"

"REAL DREAM" 1975

JUST WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?
ACTION-TO-ACTION TRANSITIONS STILL DOMINATE IN TEZUKA'S WORK, BUT TO A LESSER DEGREE.

IN FACT, SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT TRANSITIONS ACCOUNT FOR NEARLY AS MANY AS ACTION.

HERE ALSO WE SEE OUR FIRST EXAMPLES OF MOMENT-TO-MOMENT TRANSITIONS.

THOUGH THE LATTER TYPE ONLY ACCOUNTS FOR FOUR PERCENT OF THE TOTAL, SUCH SEQUENCES CONTRAST STRIKINGLY WITH THE WESTERN TRADITIONS EXEMPLIFIED BY KIRBY AND HERGE.

BUT, MOST STRIKING OF ALL IS THE SUBSTANTIAL PRESENCE OF THE FIFTH TYPE OF TRANSITION, A TYPE RARELY SEEN IN THE WEST.
Aspect-to-Aspect transitions have been an integral part of Japanese mainstream comics almost from the very beginning.

Most often used to establish a mood or a sense of place, time seems to stand still in these quiet, contemplative combinations.

Even sequence, while still an issue, seems far less important here than in other transitions.

Rather than acting as a bridge between separate moments, the reader here must assemble a single moment using scattered fragments.
IN EXAMINING SEVERAL JAPANESE ARTISTS, WE FIND SIMILAR PROPORTIONS TO TEZUKA'S, INCLUDING A HIGH INCIDENCE OF THE FIFTH TYPE.

WHY?

LENGTH MAY BE ONE OF THE FACTORS AT WORK HERE. MOST JAPANESE COMICS FIRST APPEAR IN ENORMOUS ANTHOLOGY TITLES WHERE THE PRESSURE ISN'T AS GREAT ON ANY ONE INSTALLMENT TO SHOW A LOT "HAPPENING."

AS SUCH, DOZENS OF PANELS CAN BE DEVOTED TO PORTRAYING SLOW CINEMATIC MOVEMENT OR TO SETTING A MOOD.

BUT I DON'T THINK LONGER STORIES ARE THE ONLY FACTOR, OR EVEN THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE.

I BELIEVE THERE'S SOMETHING A BIT MORE FUNDAMENTAL TO THIS PARTICULAR EAST/WEST SPLIT.

HERGÉ KIRBY TEZUKA
Traditional Western art and literature don't wander much. On the whole, we're a pretty goal-oriented culture.

But, in the East, there's a rich tradition of cyclical and labyrinthine works of art.

Japanese comics may be heirs to this tradition, in the way they so often emphasize being there over getting there.

Through these and other storytelling techniques, the Japanese offer a vision of comics very different from our own.

For in Japan more than anywhere else, comics is an art...
THE IDEA THAT ELEMENTS OMITTED FROM A WORK OF ART ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THAT WORK AS THOSE INCLUDED HAS BEEN A SPECIALTY OF THE EAST FOR CENTURIES.

IN THE GRAPHIC ARTS THIS HAS MEANT A GREATER FOCUS ON FIGURE/GROUND RELATIONSHIPS AND "NEGATIVE SPACE."

"THE GREAT WAVE OFF KANAGAWA" BY HOKUSAI (C. 1829) (TURN THIS PICTURE UPSIDE DOWN TO SEE THE OTHER WAVE OF NEGATIVE SPACE... NATURE'S YIN AND YANG.)

IN MUSIC TOO, WHILE THE WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION WAS EMPHASIZING THE CONTINUOUS, CONNECTED WORLDS OF MELODY AND HARMONY, EASTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC WAS EQUALLY CONCERNED WITH THE ROLE OF SILENCE!

IN THE LAST CENTURY OR TWO, AS WESTERN CULTURAL INFLUENCES SWEPT THE EAST, SO TOO HAVE EASTERN AND AFRICAN IDEAS OF FRAGMENTATION AND RHYTHM SWEPT THE WEST.

FROM DEBUSSY TO STRAVINSKY TO COUNT BASIE, WESTERN MUSIC HAS GRADUALLY INCORPORATED A STRONG AWARENESS OF THE POWER OF FRAGMENTATION AND INTERVALS.
In the visual arts, the impact of Eastern ideas was both powerful and lasting.

The traditional emphasis in Western art upon the primacy of foreground subjects and continuousness of tones gave way to fragmentation and a new awareness of the picture plane.

Facsimile of “Figure” by Pablo Picasso

In theatre, the idea that “Less is more” has real practical implications. One of the most successful shows in history is The Fantasticks – a play whose entire set came in three pieces: a tattered banner, a stick and a cardboard moon.

The mastery of any medium using minimal elements has long been considered a noble aspiration.

*What do you think this painting by Al Held is called?*

“Answer: “The Big N”

[See page 216]
HERE'S A STORY.

I PROMISE.

PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, CARL.

I PROMISE.

WELL, IT'S GETTING LATE!

I BETTER GO NOW!

HMM...

I SEEM TO HAVE LOST MY KEYS! CAN I BORROW YOURS?

OKAY, THEY'RE IN MY PURSE.

THANKS!

SLAM!

BRUM!

DARN! TRAFFIC SLOWDOWN.

 Hmm ...

I'LL TAKE A SHORT-CUT!

HERE I AM!

I HOPE DAISY IS READY!

DING-DONG!

HI, CARL! HI, DAISY!

I'M SORRY, CARL, BUT I CAN'T GO OUT WITH YOU TONIGHT!

AWW!

HOW ABOUT TOMORROW NIGHT?

OKAY!

SMOK!

TOMORROW IT IS.

WHAT'LL I DO NOW?

I KNOW, I'LL RENT A VIDEO!

VIDEO HOUSE

HMM...

I ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE THIS ONE!

$3.50, PLEASE.

HERE YA GO.

SAY, DO YOU KNOW BILL'S LAST NAME?

BILL WHO?

THAT'S WHAT I'M ASKING YOU.

I DON'T KNOW ANY "BILLS!"

HAVE A NICE DAY!

I'LL BUY SOME BEERS.

ONE BEER WON'T HURT.

GLUG! GLUG!

CRASH!

RIP, CARL.

END
HERE'S A STORY.

I PROMISE.

BRUM!

HERE I AM!

I PROMISE.

HERE'S A STORY.

GLUG! GLUG!

CRASH!

RI.P.

Carl.

END

END

I'LL BUY SOME BEERS.

GLUG! GLUG!

CRASH!

RI.P.

Carl.

END

AND FINDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN TOO MUCH AND TOO LITTLE IS CRUCIAL TO COMICS CREATORS THE WORLD OVER.

THE ART OF COMICS IS AS SUBTRACTIVE AN ART AS IT IS ADDITIVE.

PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, CARL.

I PROMISE.

PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, CARL.

I PROMISE.

RIP.

Carl.

END

TO STRIKE THAT BALANCE, CREATORS REGULARLY MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEIR READERS' EXPERIENCES.

SOME SEEM PRETTY SAFE, LIKE THE ASSUMPTION THAT THIS WILL BE PERCEIVED BY AUDIENCES AS AN EYE CLOSING.

SAFE THAT IT IS THE AUDIENCE DOESN'T READ ANY TO TELL.
We assume as readers that we will know what order to read panels in, but the business of arranging those panels is actually quite complex.

So complex, in fact, that even seasoned pros will sometimes blow it.

As closure between panels becomes more intense, reader interpretation becomes far more elastic.

And managing it becomes more complicated for the creator.

Some artists can be deliberately ambiguous. Of course, and offer us no strict interpretation to go on.

Closure can be a powerful force within panels as well as between them, when artists choose to show only a small piece of the picture.

Comics can be maddeningly vague about what it shows us.

By showing little or nothing of a given scene--

--and offering only clues to the reader--

--the artist can trigger any number of images in the reader's imagination.
READERS FACED WITH PANELS LIKE THESE WILL HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS.

CLAK! CLAK! CLAK!

BY CONSTRUCTING WHOLE IMAGES BASED ON THESE FRAGMENTS, READERS ARE PERFORMING CLOSURE, JUST AS--

WHOOSH!

Splip Splip

?

Ding! Ding!

UH--JUST AS READERS COMPLETE AN ACTION OR IDEA BETWEEN--

OW!

OW!

Ding! Ding!

`AHEM!` I SAY, JUST AS READERS COMPLETE--

--AN ACTION OR--

OW! OW!

STOP THAT!

Ding! Ding!

OW!

Ding! Ding!

OW!
WHATEVER THE MYSTERIES WITHIN EACH PANEL, IT'S THE POWER OF CLOSURE BETWEEN PANELS THAT I FIND THE MOST INTERESTING.

THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE AND WONDERFUL THAT HAPPENS IN THIS BLANK RIBBON OF PAPER.

WE ALREADY KNOW THAT COMICS ASKS THE MIND TO WORK AS A SORT OF IN-BETWEENER -- FILLING IN THE GAPS BETWEEN PANELS AS AN ANIMATOR MIGHT -- BUT I BELIEVE THERE'S STILL MORE TO IT THAN THAT.

LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE FIFTH TYPE OF TRANSITION, THE ONE SO POPULAR IN JAPAN.

HERE'S A FOUR-PANEL ESTABLISHING SHOT OF AN OLD-FASHIONED KITCHEN SCENE.

CHOP! CHOP! CHOP!
NOW, MOST OF YOU SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE PERCEIVING THAT YOU'RE IN A KITCHEN FROM THOSE FOUR PANELS ALONE.

WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF CLOSURE, YOUR MIND IS TAKING FOUR PICTURE FRAGMENTS AND CONSTRUCTING AN ENTIRE SCENE OUT OF THOSE FRAGMENTS.

BUT THE SCENE YOUR MIND CONSTRUCTS FROM THOSE FOUR PANELS IS A VERY DIFFERENT PLACE FROM THE SCENE CONSTRUCTED FROM OUR TRADITIONAL ONE-PANEL ESTABLISHING SHOT!

LOOK AGAIN.

YOU'VE BEEN IN KITCHENS BEFORE, YOU KNOW WHAT A POT ON THE BOIL SOUNDS LIKE; DO YOU ONLY HEAR IT IN THAT FIRST PANEL?

AND WHAT ABOUT THE CHOPPING SOUND? DOES THAT ONLY LAST A PANEL OR DOES IT PERSIST? CAN YOU SMELL THIS KITCHEN? FEEL IT? TASTE IT?

COMICS IS A MONO-SENSORY MEDIUM. IT RELIES ON ONLY ONE OF THE SENSES TO CONVEY A WORLD OF EXPERIENCE.

BUT WHAT OF THE OTHER FOUR?

WE REPRESENT SOUND THROUGH DEVICES SUCH AS WORD BALLOONS.

WITHIN THESE PANELS, WE CAN ONLY CONVEY INFORMATION VISUALLY.

BUT BETWEEN PANELS, NONE OF OUR SENSES ARE REQUIRED AT ALL.

WHICH IS WHY ALL OF OUR SENSES ARE ENGAGED!

BUT ALL IN ALL, IT IS AN EXCLUSIVELY VISUAL REPRESENTATION.
SEVERAL TIMES ON EVERY PAGE THE READER IS RELEASED—LIKE A TRAPEZE ARTIST INTO THE OPEN AIR OF IMAGINATION.

THEN CAUGHT BY THE OUTSTRETCHED ARMS OF THE EVER-PRESENT NEXT PANEL?

CAUGHT QUICKLY SO AS NOT TO LET THE READER FALL INTO CONFUSION OR BOREDOM.

BUT IS IT POSSIBLE THAT CLOSURE CAN BE So MANAGED IN SOME CASES—

IN CHAPTER TWO, WE DISCUSSED VARIOUS TYPES OF ICONIC AND NON-ICONIC DRAWING STYLES.

DO THESE AFFECT CLOSURE?

SINCE CARTOONS ALREADY EXIST AS CONCEPTS FOR THE READER, THEY TEND TO FLOW EASILY THROUGH THE CONCEPTUAL TERRITORY BETWEEN PANELS.

IDEAS FLOWING INTO ONE ANOTHER SEAMLESSLY.
But realistic images have a bumpier ride. Theirs is a primarily visual existence which doesn't pass easily into the realm of ideas.

And so, what seemed like a continuous series of moments in the last example, here looks a little more like a series of still pictures...

Similarly, I think when comics art veers closer to concerns of the picture plane, closure can be more difficult to achieve, though for different reasons.

Now it's the unifying properties of design that make us more aware of the page as a whole, rather than its individual components, the panels.

-- Then closure is probably not happening without some effort.

Of course, making the reader work a little may be just what the artist is trying to do. Once again, it's all a matter of personal taste.
The comics creator asks us to join in a silent dance of the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible.

This dance is unique to comics. No other artform gives so much to its audience while asking so much from them as well.

This is why I think it's a mistake to see comics as a mere hybrid of the graphic arts and prose fiction. What happens between these panels is a kind of magic only comics can create.
HERE IN THIS STUDIO, I'VE TRIED TO CONTROL THAT PROCESS AND USE IT TO MAKE MY CASE.

BUT I CAN ONLY POINT THE WAY. I CAN'T TAKE YOU ANYWHERE YOU DON'T WANT TO GO.

ALL I CAN DO IS MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOU AND HOPE THAT THEY'RE CORRECT—

--JUST AS WE ALL ASSUME, EVERY DAY, THAT THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN MEETS THE EYE.

ALL I ASK OF YOU IS A LITTLE FAITH—

--AND A WORLD OF IMAGINATION.
CHAPTER FOUR

TIME FRAMES.

SO! LET'S SEE: EACH PANEL OF A COMIC SHOWS A SINGLE MOMENT IN TIME.

AND BETWEEN THOSE FROZEN MOMENTS--BETWEEN THE PANELS--OUR MINDS FILL IN THE INTERVENING MOMENTS, CREATING THE ILLUSION OF TIME AND MOTION.

LIKE A LINE DRAWN BETWEEN TWO POINTS.

NAAH! OF COURSE NOT!

TIME IN COMICS IS INFINITELY WEIRDER THAN THAT!

LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK!
SMILE!

AAGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING, UNCLE HENRY!

PAF!

HEE-HEE!

OH, HENRY! PUT THAT CAMERA AWAY, WILL YOU?

AWW, LET HIM BE, MOM. HE'S JUST HAVING FUN.

WELL, IF OL' HENRY IS GONNA HAVE MUCH MORE FUN, WE MAY HAFTA LOCK UP THE WINE CELLAR.

CHECK!

HMM...

SURE YOU WANT TO MOVE THERE, JED?

THUMP!

SINGLE MOMENT?

HARDLY!

WHIRRRRR

PAF!

EVEN THE BRIEF SOUND OF A FLASHBULB HAS A CERTAIN DURATION. SHORT TO BE SURE, BUT NOT INSTANTANEOUS!

SMILE!

PAF!

FAR SLOWER IS THE DURATION OF THE AVERAGE WORD. UNCLE HENRY ALONE BURNS UP A GOOD SECOND IN THIS PANEL, ESPECIALLY SINCE "SMILE!" UNDOUBTEDLY PRECEDED THE FLASH.

AAGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING, UNCLE HENRY!

HEE-HEE!

LIKEWISE, THE NEXT BALLOONS COULD HAVE ONLY FOLLOWED THE BURST OF THE FLASHBULB, THUS ADDING STILL MORE TIME.

JUST AS PICTURES AND THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THEM CREATE THE ILLUSION OF TIME THROUGH CLOSURE, WORDS INTRODUCE TIME BY REPRESENTING THAT WHICH CAN ONLY EXIST IN TIME -- SOUND.

WITH ALL ITS ACTIONS AND REACTIONS, A PANEL SUCH AS THIS COULD LAST A GOOD HALF MINUTE OR SO.

95
BUT HOW COULD THIS BE ANYTHING BUT A SINGLE MOMENT? OUR EYES HAVE BEEN WELL-TRAINED BY THE PHOTOGRAPH AND BY REPRESENTATIONAL ART TO SEE ANY SINGLE CONTINUOUS IMAGE AS A SINGLE INSTANT IN TIME.

BUT THE ACTIONS THAT WE SEE OCCURRING SEEMINGLY AT THE SAME TIME OBVIOUSLY CAN'T BE!

ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT IT: LET'S THINK OF TIME AS A ROPE.

EACH INCH REPRESENTS A SECOND.

SUCH A ROPE MIGHT BE SAID TO WIND SOMETHING LIKE THIS THROUGH OUR PANEL.

SIMPLIFIED OF COURSE, SINCE EACH BALLOON HAS ITS OWN TWISTS AND TURNS.

AND SINCE EACH FACE AND FIGURE IS DRAWN TO MATCH HIS/HER OWN WORDS—

SMILE! AUGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING, UNCLE HENRY!

PAP! HEE-HEE...
--Those figures, faces and words are matched in time as well.

The properties of the single continuous image meanwhile, tend to match each figure with every other figure.

Single image.

Single moment.

Portraying time on a line moving left to right, this puts all the images on the same vertical axis.

And tangels up time beyond all recognition!

Snap! Snap! CRASH!

Perhaps we've been too conditioned by photography to perceive single images as single moments. After all, it does take an eye time to move across scenes in real life!

Each figure is arranged from left to right in the sequence we will 'read' them, each occupying a distinct time slot.

In some respects this panel by itself actually fits our definition of comics! All it needs is a few gutters thrown in to clarify the sequence.

One panel, operating as several panels.

Aagh! That flash is blinding, Uncle Henry! Hee-hee!

Oh, Henry, put that camera away, will you?

Aww, let him be. Mom's just having fun.

Well, if Ol' Henry is gonna have much more fun, we may hafta lock up the wine cellar.

Check!

Hmmm...

Sure you want to move there, Jed?
NOT ALL PANELS ARE LIKE THAT, OF COURSE.
A SILENT PANEL SUCH AS THIS COULD INDEED BE SAID TO DEPICT A SINGLE MOMENT!

HE'S GIVING IT HIS ALL, FOLKS!

IF SOUND IS INTRODUCED, THIS CEASES TO BE TRUE--

--BUT, IN AN OTHERWISE SILENT CAPTIONED PANEL, THE SINGLE MOMENT CAN ACTUALLY BE HELD.

HE WAS GIVING IT HIS ALL, WHEN--

THESE VARIOUS SHAPES WE CALL PANELS HOLD IN THEIR BORDERS ALL OF THE ICONS THAT ADD UP TO THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS.

FOR JUST AS THE BODY'S LARGEST ORGAN--OUR SKIN--IS RARELY THOUGHT OF AS AN ORGAN--

SO TOO IS THE PANEL ITSELF OVERLOOKED AS COMICS' MOST IMPORTANT ICON!
These icons we call panels or "frames" have no fixed or absolute meaning, like the icons of language, science and communication.

Nor is their meaning as fluid and malleable as the sorts of icons we call pictures.

The panel acts as a sort of general indicator that time or space is being divided.

The durations of that time and the dimensions of that space are defined more by the content of the panel than by the panel itself.*

Panel shapes vary considerably though, and while differences of shape don't affect the specific "meanings" of those panels vis-a-vis time, they can affect the reading experience.

Which brings us to the strange relationship between time as depicted in comics and time as perceived by the reader.

* Eisner discusses this under the heading "Framing Time" in *Comics and Sequential Art*.
In learning to read comics, we all learned to perceive time spatially. For in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same.

The problem is, there's no conversion chart!

The few centimeters which transport us from second to second in one sequence could take us a hundred million years in another.

So, as readers, we're left with only a vague sense that as our eyes are moving through space, they're also moving through time--we just don't know by how much!

In most cases, it's not hard to make an educated guess as to the duration of a given sequence, so long as the elements of that sequence are familiar to us.

I always figured Mary-Anne would go for Gilligan.

I guess.
BUT IF THE CREATOR OF THIS SCENE WANTED TO LENGTHEN THAT PAUSE, HOW COULD HE OR SHE DO SO? ONE OBVIOUS SOLUTION WOULD BE TO ADD MORE PANELS, BUT IS THAT THE ONLY WAY?

D'YA THINK THE RED SOX COULD FINALLY DO IT THIS YEAR?

I GUESS.

IS THERE ANY WAY TO MAKE A SINGLE SILENT PANEL LIKE THIS ONE SEEM LONGER? HOW ABOUT WIDENING THE SPACE BETWEEN PANELS? ANY DIFFERENCE?

WE'VE SEEN HOW TIME CAN BE CONTROLLED THROUGH THE CONTENT OF PANELS, THE NUMBER OF PANELS AND CLOSURE BETWEEN PANELS, BUT THERE'S STILL ONE MORE.

HEY, I DESERVE A BETTER JOB! I COULD BE A BRAIN SURGEON!

I GUESS.

AS UNLIKELY AS IT SOUNDS, THE PANEL SHAPE CAN ACTUALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR PERCEPTION OF TIME. EVEN THOUGH THIS LONG PANEL HAS THE SAME BASIC "MEANING" AS ITS SHORTER VERSIONS, STILL IT HAS THE FEELING OF GREATER LENGTH!

THAT MADONNA, MAN. SHE'S ONE HOT BABE!

I GUESS.
EVER NOTICED HOW THE WORDS "SHORT" OR "LONG" CAN REFER EITHER TO THE FIRST DIMENSION OR TO THE FOURTH?

IN A MEDIUM WHERE TIME AND SPACE MERGE SO COMPLETELY, THE DISTINCTION OFTEN VANISHES!

THE PANEL BORDER IS OUR GUIDE THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, BUT IT WILL ONLY GUIDE US SO FAR.

AS MENTIONED, PANELS COME IN MANY SHAPES AND SIZES, THOUGH THE CLASSIC RECTANGLE IS USED MOST OFTEN.

MOST OF US ARE SO USED TO THE STANDARD RECTANGULAR FORMAT THAT A "BORDERLESS" PANEL SUCH AS THIS CAN TAKE ON A TIMELESS QUALITY.

HEH, ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME??

I GUESS.

WHEN THE CONTENT OF A SILENT PANEL OFFERS NO CLUES AS TO ITS DURATION, IT CAN ALSO PRODUCE A SENSE OF TIMELESSNESS.

BECAUSE OF ITS UNRESOLVED NATURE, SUCH A PANEL MAY LINGER IN THE READER'S MIND.

AND ITS PRESENCE MAY BE FELT IN THE PANELS WHICH FOLLOW IT.
When "bleeds" are used -- i.e., when a panel runs off the edge of the page -- this effect is compounded.

Time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the closed panel, but instead hemorrhages and escapes into timeless space.

Such images can set the mood or a sense of place for whole scenes through their lingering timeless presence.

Once again, this is a technique used most often in Japan and only recently adopted here in the West.
IN COMICS, AS IN FILM, TELEVISION AND "REAL LIFE," IT IS ALWAYS NOW.

THIS PANEL AND THIS PANEL ALONE REPRESENTS THE PRESENT.

ANY PANEL BEFORE THIS -- THAT LAST ONE, FOR INSTANCE -- REPRESENTS THE PAST.

LIKEWISE, ALL PANELS STILL TO COME -- THIS NEXT PANEL, FOR INSTANCE -- REPRESENT THE FUTURE.

BUT UNLIKE OTHER MEDIA, IN COMICS, THE PAST IS MORE THAN JUST MEMORIES FOR THE AUDIENCE AND THE FUTURE IS MORE THAN JUST POSSIBILITIES!

BOTH PAST AND FUTURE ARE REAL AND VISIBLE AND ALL AROUND US!

WHEREVER YOUR EYES ARE FOCUSED, THAT'S NOW. BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOUR EYES TAKE IN THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE OF PAST AND FUTURE!

LIKE A STORM FRONT, THE EYE MOVES OVER THE COMICS PAGE, PUSHING THE WARM, HIGH-PRESSURE FUTURE AHEAD OF IT, LEAVING THE COOL, LOW-PRESSURE PAST IN ITS WAKE.

WHEREVER THE EYE HITS LAND, WE EXPECT IT TO BEGIN MOVING FORWARD.

BUT EYES, LIKE STORMS, CAN CHANGE DIRECTION!

-3 -2 -1 +1
ONE BEER WON'T HURT.

GLUG! GLUG! CRASH!

RIP CARL END

YET WE SELDOM DO CHANGE DIRECTION, EXCEPT TO RE-READ OR REVIEW PASSAGES. IT'S LEFT-TO-RIGHT, UP-TO-DOWN, PAGE AFTER PAGE.

NAH, I BETTER NOT. I'LL JUST GO HOME NOW. HI, MOM, I'M HOME. IT'S A NOTE! I'VE GOTTEN TO BORNEO.

I'LL JUST DRIVE AROUND A WHILE. OH MY GOD! I'M IN THE WRONG HOUSE!

HMM... A FORK TO THE RIGHT IS THE VIDEO STORE. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

NAAH! I'LL GO LEFT. OH, HI, MR. GORDON!

CARL?

THIS MAY, IN PART, BE THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER MEDIA LIKE FILM AND TELEVISION WHERE VIEWER CHOICE HAS NOT GENERALLY BEEN FEASIBLE.

CONDITIONED AS WE ARE TO READ LEFT-TO-RIGHT AND UP-TO-DOWN, A MISCHIEVOUS CARTOONIST CAN PLAY ANY NUMBER OF TRICKS ON US.

THE INCREDIBLE MR. SPOT

THE END OF THE MONTH... BROKE AGAIN!

I'LL JUST BORROW SOME MONEY FROM MYSELF IN THE FUTURE!

NOW I CAN GO OUT TO DINNER!

MY COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEF, AND THE CHEF PLEASE!

OUR MOTHER... EAT...

HEY!
COMICS READERS ARE ALSO CONDITIONED BY OTHER MEDIA AND THE "REAL TIME" OF EVERYDAY LIFE TO EXPECT A VERY LINEAR PROGRESSION. JUST A STRAIGHT LINE FROM POINT A TO POINT B. BUT IS THAT NECESSARY?

FOR NOW, THESE QUESTIONS ARE THE TERRITORY OF GAMES AND STRANGE LITTLE EXPERIMENTS.

BUT VIEWER PARTICIPATION IS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING AN ENORMOUS ISSUE IN OTHER MEDIA.

HOW COMICS ADDRESSES THIS ISSUE--OR FAILS TO--COULD PLAY A CRUCIAL PART IN DEFINING THE ROLE OF COMICS IN THE NEW CENTURY.

TIME WILL TELL.
AS MENTIONED EARLIER, TIME AND SPACE IN THE WORLD OF COMICS ARE CLOSELY LINKED.

AS A RESULT, SO TOO ARE THE ISSUES OF TIME AND MOTION.

---

AS DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER THREE, MOTION IN COMICS IS PRODUCED BETWEEN PANELS BY THE MENTAL PROCESS CALLED CLOSURE.

---

DESPITE COMICS' THREE THOUSAND YEAR HISTORY, IT WASN'T UNTIL TOPPERS MID-1800S DOODLINGS THAT SPECIFIC MOTIONS WERE PORTRAYED IN COMICS IN THE NOW-FAMILIAR PANEL-TO-PANEL FORM.

---

WITHIN A FEW YEARS, HOWEVER, MOTION WAS A HOT TOPIC INDEED!
IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY IT SEEMED LIKE EVERYONE WAS TRYING TO CAPTURE MOTION THROUGH SCIENCE!

BY 1880, INVENTORS THE WORLD OVER KNEW THAT MOVING PICTURES WERE JUST AROUND THE CORNER. EVERYONE WANTED TO BE FIRST!

MY STROBOSCOPE IS SUPERIOR IN EVERY WAY TO THE OBSOLETE ZOÉTROPE!

BAH! MY PRAXINOSCOPE IS BETTER!

Fools! My KINEMATOSCOPE will show you! Ha! Child's play! These are but mere toys, next to the awesome PHANTASMATOPE.

FRAUDS ALL! My ZOO PRAXINOSCOPE will...!

EVENTUALLY THOMAS EDISON, THAT OLD SCALLYWAG, FILED THE FIRST PATENT ON A PROCESS USING STRIPS OF CLEAR PLASTIC PHOTO AND FILM WAS OFF AND RUNNING!

IF YOU'RE GOING TO PAINT A WORLD... --FILLED WITH MOTION--

--THEN BE PREPARED TO PAINT MOTION!

DUCHAMP, MORE CONCERNED WITH THE IDEA OF MOTION THAN THE SENSATION, WOULD EVENTUALLY REDUCE SUCH CONCEPTS AS MOTION TO A SINGLE LINE.

AS THE MOVING PICTURE BEGAN ITS SPECTACULAR RISE, A FEW OF THE MORE RADICAL PAINTERS OF THE DAY EXPLORED THE IDEA THAT MOTION COULD BE CONVEYED IN A SINGLE IMAGE ON CANVASS.

THE FUTURISTS IN ITALY AND MARCEL DUCHAMP IN FRANCE BEGAN THE SYSTEMATIC DECOMPOSITION OF MOVING IMAGES IN A STATIC MEDIUM.

IT WASN'T A BAD IDEA!

DUCHAMP SOON MOVED ON, THE FUTURISTS DISBANDED AND FINE ARTISTS GENERALLY LOST INTEREST IN THIS OTHER TYPE OF MOVING PICTURE.

BUT THROUGHOUT THIS SAME PERIOD ANOTHER MEDIUM, LESS CONSPICUOUSLY HAD BEEN INVESTIGATING THIS SAME AREA.

I'M SURE YOU CAN ALL GUESS WHICH MEDIUM I MEAN!
FROM ITS **EARLIEST DAYS**, THE MODERN COMIC HAS GRAPPELED WITH THE PROBLEM OF SHOWING MOTION IN A **STATIC MEDIUM**.

**HOW DO YOU SHOW THIS ASPECT OF TIME IN AN ART WHERE TIME STANDS STILL?**

AND IN COMICS, UNLIKE PAINTING, IT WAS MORE THAN JUST A **THEORETICAL QUESTION**!

THOUGH SEQUENTIAL ART SURVIVED FOR MANY CENTURIES **WITHOUT** DEPICTING MOTION, ONCE THE GENIE WAS OUT OF THE BOTTLE IT WAS PERHAPS **INEVITABLE** THAT MORE AND MORE EFFICIENT MEANS WOULD BE SOUGHT. AT FIRST, THIS SEARCH CENTERED ON **MULTIPLE IMAGES IN SEQUENCE**.

**BUT JUST AS A SINGLE PANEL CAN REPRESENT A SPAN OF TIME THROUGH SOUND**--

**--SO TOO CAN A SINGLE PANEL REPRESENT A SPAN OF TIME THROUGH PICTURES!**

**SOMEBEFORE BETWEEN THE FUTURISTS' DYNAMIC MOVEMENT AND DUCHAMP'S DIAGRAMMATIC CONCEPT OF MOVEMENT LIES COMICS' "MOTION LINE."**
IN THE BEGINNING MOTION LINES--OR "ZIP-RIBBONS" AS SOME CALL THEM--WERE WILD, MESSY, ALMOST DESPERATE ATTEMPTS TO REPRESENT THE PATHS OF MOVING OBJECTS THROUGH SPACE.

OVER THE YEARS, THESE LINES BECAME MORE REFINED AND STYLIZED, EVEN DIAGRAMMATIC.

EVENTUALLY, IN THE HANDS OF HEROIC FANTASY ARTISTS LIKE BILL EVERETT AND JACK KIRBY--

--THOSE SAME LINES BECAME SO STYLIZED AS TO ALMOST HAVE A LIFE AND PHYSICAL PRESENCE ALL THEIR OWN!
BECAUSE OF THEIR ABILITY TO DEPICT ACTION WITH DRAMA, SUCH CONSPICUOUS ACTION LINES HAVE BEEN AN AMERICAN SPECIALTY FOR YEARS.

IN THIS APPROACH, BOTH THE MOVING OBJECT AND THE BACKGROUND ARE DRAWN IN A CLEAR, ARTICULATED STYLE, AND THE PATH OF MOTION IS IMPOSED OVER THE SCENE.

OTHER ARTISTS TRIED ADDITIONAL EFFECTS SUCH AS MULTIPLE IMAGES OF THE SUBJECT, ATTEMPTING TO INVOLVE THE READER MORE DEEPLY IN THE ACTION.*

STILL OTHERS, SUCH AS MARVEL'S GENE COLAN, BEGAN INCORPORATING PHOTOGRAPHIC STREAKING EFFECTS WITH SOME INTRIGUING RESULTS IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES.

* MULTIPLE IMAGES CAN BE FOUND IN THE WORK OF KIRKSTEIN, INFANTINO AND OTHERS.
COLAN, who was also a FILM-BUFF, was of course aware that when a camera's shutter speed is too slow to fully freeze a moving object's image, an interesting BLURRING effect occurs.

A car going at 60 MPH might look like this.

BUT IF THE CAMERA MOVES WITH THE MOVING OBJECT, THAT OBJECT WILL REMAIN FOCUSED WHILE THE BACKGROUND WILL NOW BE STREAKED.

AND IN EUROPE WHERE MOTION LINES WERE USED ONLY SPARINGLY, IT WAS LIKewise IGNORED.

BUT IN JAPAN, ONCE AGAIN, A VERY DIFFERENT COMICS CULTURE EMBRACED THIS VERY DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF MOTION AS THEIR OWN!
"SUBJECTIVE MOTION," AS I CALL IT, OPERATES ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT IF OBSERVING A MOVING OBJECT CAN BE INVOLVING, BEING THAT OBJECT SHOULD BE MORE SO.

JAPANESE ARTISTS, STARTING IN THE LATE 60's, BEGAN PUTTING THEIR READERS "IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT" WITH PANELS LIKE THESE.

AND STARTING IN THE MID-EIGHTIES, A FEW AMERICAN ARTISTS BEGAN TO ADOPT THE EFFECT IN THEIR OWN WORK, UNTIL BY THE EARLY NINETIES IT HAS BECOME FAIRLY COMMON.

ARE THESE THE ONLY WAYS WE CAN PORTRAY MOTION IN A SINGLE PANEL? THINK ABOUT IT.
IN A MEDIUM WHERE TIME AND SPACE MERGE--

--THE STORYTELLER HAS SOME UNUSUAL TOOLS AT HIS/HER DISPOSAL--

--SUCH AS THE POLYPTYCH, WHERE A MOVING FIGURE OR FIGURES--

--IS IMPOSED OVER A CONTINUOUS BACKGROUND.

IN COMICS, COMPOSITION FOLLOWS A VERY DIFFERENT SET OF RULES THAN IN MOST GRAPHIC ARTS.

BY INTRODUCING TIME INTO THE EQUATION, COMICS ARTISTS ARE ARRANGING THE PAGE IN WAYS NOT ALWAYS CONDUCIVE TO TRADITIONAL PICTURE-MAKING.

HERE, THE COMPOSITION OF THE PICTURE IS JOINED BY THE COMPOSITION OF CHANGE. THE COMPOSITION OF DRAMA--

--AND THE COMPOSITION OF MEMORY.

IF THE COMPOSITION OF A SINGLE PANEL IS TRULY "PERFECT," DOESN'T THAT IMPLY THAT IT CAN--OR EVEN SHOULD--STAND ALONE?

THE NATURAL WORLD CREATES GREAT BEAUTY EVERY DAY, YET THE ONLY RULES OF COMPOSITION IT FOLLOWS ARE THOSE OF FUNCTION AND CHANCE.

COMICS, AT ITS BEST, SHOULD DO NO LESS.
As we've seen, the interaction of time and comics generally leads us to one of two subjects: sound or motion.

**Sound** breaks down into two subsets: word balloons and sound effects.

Both types add to the duration of a panel partially through the nature of sound itself and by introducing issues of action and reaction.

Motion also breaks down into two subsets. The first type—panel-to-panel closure—was important enough to merit its own chapter.

The other type—motion within panels—can be further divided into several distinct styles. I've covered the ones I know, but there may be many others. Time will tell.

The workings of time in comics should be as simple as—

One—two—three—

—but they're not.

Tick tick tick
I've been trying to figure out what makes comics "tick" for years and I'm still amazed by the strangeness of it all.

But no matter how bizarre the workings of time in comics is--

--the face it presents to the reader--

--is one of simple normality.

Or the illusion of it, anyway.

All depends on your frame of mind.
CHAPTER FIVE

LIVING IN LINE.

CAN EMOTIONS BE MADE VISIBLE?

IS THIS ANGER?

JOY?

SERENITY?
CAN ONE SENSE SPEAK FOR ALL FIVE?

LOUD?

RANK?

COLD?

QUIET?

SOUR?

WARM?
THE IDEA THAT A PICTURE CAN EVOKE AN EMOTIONAL OR SENSUAL RESPONSE IN THE VIEWER IS VITAL TO THE ART OF COMICS.

IN CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR WE INVESTIGATED THE VARIOUS WAYS TIME AND MOTION COULD BE PORTRAYED, BOTH BETWEEN PANELS, THROUGH CLOSURE--

--AND WITHIN A SINGLE PANEL OR IMAGE.

THE INVISIBLE WORLD OF SENSES AND EMOTIONS CAN ALSO BE PORTRAYED EITHER BETWEEN OR WITHIN PANELS.

WE'VE TOUCHED UPON THE FORMER CATEGORY IN CHAPTER THREE, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LATER?

HOW CAN A SINGLE IMAGE REPRESENT THE SENSES AND EMOTIONS AND HOW DOES THIS IDEA APPLY TO COMICS?

ONCE AGAIN WE CAN TURN TO THE WORLD OF "FINE ARTS" FOR SOME IDEAS.
IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES, SOMETHING KIND OF SCARY WAS GOING ON...

NO SOONER HAD THE IMPRESSIONISTS FINALLY CONVINCED THEIR PEERS THAT THE WORLD THEY SAW WAS THE WORLD AS IT IS TRULY SEEN--

--THAN ANOTHER UNSEEN WORLD BEGAN TO MAKE ITSELF VISIBLE.

IN THE WORKS OF EDWARD MUNCH AND VINCENT VAN GOGH, THE OBJECTIVE STUDY OF LIGHT SO PRIZED BY THE IMPRESSIONIST MAINSTREAM WAS BEING ABANDONED IN FAVOR OF A NEW, FRIGHTENINGLY SUBJECTIVE APPROACH.

EXPRESSIONISM, AS IT CAME TO BE CALLED, DIDN'T START AS A SCIENTIFIC ART, BUT RATHER AS AN HONEST EXPRESSION OF THE INTERNAL TURMOIL THESE ARTISTS JUST COULD NOT REPRESS.

THE SCIENCE OF IT WASN'T FAR BEHIND THOUGH!
As the new century got under way, cooler heads such as Wassily Kandinsky took great interest in the power of line, shape and color to suggest the inner state of the artist and to provoke the five senses.

Angry reds... placid blues... anxious textures... loud shapes... quiet lines... cold greens...

These were strange ideas in 1912!

Kandinsky and his peers were searching for an art that might somehow unite the senses.

-- And in doing so, unite the different artforms which appealed to those different senses.

We call this idea synaesthetics.

Not surprising, then, that similar ideas were expressed by creators in other fields such as Richard Wagner and the French poet Baudelaire.

“Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.”

— Paul Klee, painter, cartoonist.

Art historians have generally held that while painters, musicians and poets have grappled with such ideas, practitioners of the “low” art of comics have remained blissfully ignorant of them.

But have they?
IN SURVEYING A CENTURY OF COMICS, ONE FINDS ARTISTS LIKE THE UNDERGROUND'S RORY HAYES, WHO ARE BLATANTLY EXPRESSIONISTIC, BUT SUCH ARTISTS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN.

MOST HAVE WORKED IN A FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD STYLE. ICONIC, MAYBE, BUT NOT FILLED WITH THE EXPRESSIVE LINES OF A MUNCH OR THE COLORS OF A VAN GOGH.

CAN WE SAY, THEREFORE, THAT ONE OF THESE TWO CREATORS IS EXPRESSING MOOD AND EMOTION AND THE OTHER IS NOT? OR DOES THE DIFFERENCE LIE IN WHAT IS BEING EXPRESSED?

PEANUTS

CHARLES SCHULZ

I'VE BEEN FEELING KIND OF DEPRESSED ALL WEEK.

IF THESE LINES ARE EXPRESSIVE OF FEAR, ANXIETY AND MADNESS--

THEN COULDN'T THESE LINES BE SAID TO PORTRAY CALM, REASON AND INTROSPECTION?

IN TRUTH, DON'T ALL LINES CARRY WITH THEM AN EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL?
BY DIRECTION ALONE, A LINE MAY GO FROM PASSIVE AND TIMELESS --

--TO PROUD AND STRONG --

--TO DYNAMIC AND CHANGING --

BY ITS SHAPE, IT CAN BE UNWELCOMING AND SEVERE --

--OR WARM AND GENTLE --

--OR RATIONAL AND CONSERVATIVE --

BY ITS CHARACTER IT MAY SEEM SAVAGE AND DEADLY --

--OR WEAK AND INSTABLE --

--OR HONEST AND DIRECT.

THE MOST BLAND "EXPRESSIONLESS" LINES ON EARTH CAN'T HELP BUT CHARACTERIZE THEIR SUBJECT IN SOME WAY.

AND WHILE FEW COMIC ARTISTS MAY CONSIDER THEMSELVES EXPRESSIONISTS, THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THEY CAN'T TELL ONE LINE FROM ANOTHER!
IN DICK TRACY FOR EXAMPLE, CHESTER GOULD USED BOLD LINES, OBTUSE ANGLES AND HEAVY BLACKS TO SUGGEST THE MOOD OF A GRIM, DEADLY WORLD OF ADULTS—

-- WHILE THE GENTLE CURVES AND OPEN LINES OF CARL BARKS' UNCLE SCROOGE CONVEY A FEELING OF WHIMSY, YOUTH AND INNOCENCE.

-- IN R. CRUMB'S WORLD, THE CURVES OF INNOCENCE ARE BETRAYED BY THE NEUROTIC QUIL-LINES OF MODERN ADULTHOOD, AND LEFT PAINFULLY OUT OF PLACE—

-- WHILE KRISTINE KRYTRE'S ART, THE CURVES OF CHILDHOOD AND THE MAD LINES OF A MUNCH CREATE A CRAZY TODDLER LOOK.

IN THE MID-1960S WHEN THE AVERAGE MARVEL READER WAS PRE-ADOLESCENT, POPULAR INKERS USED DYNAMIC BUT FRIENDLY LINES A LA KIRBY/SINNOTT.

But when Marvel's reader base grew into the anxieties of ADOLESCENCE, THE HOSTILE, JAGGED LINES OF A ROB LIEFELD STRUCK A MORE RESPONSIVE CHORD.

FOR DECADES OF COLOR COMIC BOOKS, THE SIGNATURE STYLES OF INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS LIKE NICK CARDY HAVE INFUSED PERSONAL EXPRESSION INTO EVERY STORY—

-- While JULES FEIFFER'S LINEY LINES DID BATTLE WITH THEMSELVES IN A PANTOMIME OF THE INNER STRUGGLES OF MODERN LIFE.

IN JOSE MUNOZ'S WORK, DENSE PUDDLES OF INK AND FRAYING LINEWORK COMBINE TO EVOKE A WORLD OF DEPRAVITY AND MORBID DECAY—

-- While JOOST SWART'S CRISS-CROSS LINES AN JAZZY DESIGNS SPEAK OF COOL SOPHISTICATION AND IRONY.

IN SPIEGELMAN'S "PRISONER ON THE HELL PLANET" DELIBERATELY EXPRESSIONISTIC LINES DEPICT A TRUE-LIFE HORROR STORY.

AND IN EISNER'S MODERN WORK A FULL RANGE OF LINE STYLES CAPTURE A FULL RANGE OF MOODS AND EMOTIONS.
NOW, IF PICTURES CAN, THROUGH THEIR RENDERING, REPRESENT INVISIBLE CONCERNS SUCH AS EMOTIONS AND THE OTHER SENSES—

--THEN THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PICTURES AND OTHER TYPES OF ICONS LIKE LANGUAGE WHICH SPECIALIZE IN THE INVISIBLE MAY SEEM A BIT BLURRY!

IN FACT, WHAT WE'RE SEEING IN THE LIVING LINES OF THESE PICTURES IS THE PRIMORDIAL STUFF FROM WHICH A FORMALIZED LANGUAGE CAN EVOLVE!

I'LL GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE.

LET'S SAY I WANTED TO SMOKE THIS PIPE--

--ASSUMING IT IS A PIPE--

--AND I LIT IT WITH A MATCH LIKE SO:
NOW, YOU'LL NOTICE — COUGH! — AHEM! — YOU'LL NOTICE A FEW WAVY LINES RISING FROM THE PIPE.

NOW, LET'S SUPPOSE THAT MY PIPE AND I HAVE GONE FOR A LITTLE WALK —

— AND COME ACROSS AN OVERTURNED GARBAGE CAN.

THE STRONG SMELL OF ROTTEN GARBAGE CAN'T BE SEEN YET HERE'S ANOTHER PRETTY SIMILAR SET OF WAVY LINES.

DESPITE THEIR SUPERFICIAL RESEMBLANCE, THESE ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT SETS OF LINES. ONE REPRESENTS A VISIBLE PHENOMENON, SMOKE, WHILE THE OTHER REPRESENTS AN INVISIBLE ONE, OUR SENSE OF SMELL.

NOT REALLY A PICTURE ANYMORE, THESE LINES ARE MORE A VISUAL METAPHOR — A SYMBOL.

AND SYMBOLS ARE THE BASIS OF LANGUAGE!
TAKEN OUT OF THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT, THEY CAN NOW BE APPLIED ANYWHERE AND THE READER WILL INSTANTLY KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN.

EVEN THE FLIES HAVE OVER THE YEARS BEEN APPROACHING THE ABSTRACT STATUS OF LINGUISTIC SYMBOLS.

WHENEVER AN ARTIST INVENTS A NEW WAY TO REPRESENT THE INVISIBLE, THERE IS ALWAYS A CHANCE THAT IT WILL BE PICKED UP BY OTHER ARTISTS.

IF ENOUGH ARTISTS BEGIN USING THE SYMBOL, IT WILL ENTER THE LANGUAGE FOR GOOD--

--AS MANY HAVE THROUGH THE YEARS.
In dealing with the face itself, the line between the visible and invisible worlds becomes even less clear.

The cartoon face is an abstract, but it is based upon visual data.

Some indicators of emotion are also visually based, such as the familiar sweat bead.

But when such images begin to drift out of their visual context--they drift into the invisible world of the symbol.

This drift from visible to invisible has been the basis of all written languages since civilization began.
Sumerians in ancient Mesopotamia got things rolling over 5,000 years ago when a need was found to record certain commodities. These first symbols—cartoons, really—gradually evolved away from any resemblance to their subject, toward the highly abstracted forms of modern languages... and eventually to our totally abstract sound-based system.

The longer any form of art or communication exists, the more symbols it accumulates.

The modern comic is a young language, but it already has an impressive array of recognizable symbols. And this visual vocabulary has an unlimited potential for growth.

Within a given culture these symbols will quickly spread until everybody knows them at a glance.

But what happens when a language evolves in more than one distinct culture at a time?

The answer, of course, is that more than one set of symbols will evolve! So it was, once again, in Japan where comics developed for years in relative isolation from their Western cousins.
BACKGRONDS CAN BE ANOTHER VALUABLE TOOL FOR INDICATING INVISIBLE IDEAS... PARTICULARLY THE WORLD OF EMOTIONS.

EVEN WHEN THERE IS LITTLE OR NO DISTORTION OF THE CHARACTERS IN A GIVEN SCENE, A DISTORTED OR EXPRESSIONISTIC BACKGROUND WILL USUALLY AFFECT OUR "READING" OF CHARACTERS' INNER STATES.

CERTAIN PATTERNS CAN PRODUCE AN ALMOST PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECT IN THE VIEWER.

BUT FOR SOME REASON, READERS WILL ASCRIBE THOSE FEELINGS, NOT TO THEMSELVES, BUT TO THE CHARACTERS THEY IDENTIFY WITH.

SUCH INTERNAL EFFECTS ARE, OF COURSE, BEST SUITED TO STORIES ABOUT INTERNAL MATTERS.

WHEN A STORY HINGES MORE ON CHARACTERIZATION THAN COLD PLOT, THERE MAY NOT BE A LOT TO SHOW EXTERNALLY—

BUT THE LANDSCAPE OF THE CHARACTERS' MINDS CAN BE QUITE A SIGHT!
This principle is evident in many European color comics and in Japanese romance comics where expressionistic effects have been devised for almost any emotion imaginable.

Expressionism and synaesthetics are distortive by their nature. If strong enough, their effects can obscure their subjects.

But a lack of clarity can also foster greater participation by the reader and a sense of involvement which many writers and artists prefer.

Creators who use these effects may need to clarify what is being shown. However, either through the content of surrounding scenes or, of course, through words.
BY FAR, THE MOST WIDELY-USED, MOST COMPLEX AND MOST VERSATILE OF COMICS' MANY SYNAESTHETIC ICONS IS THE EVER-PRESENT, EVER-POPULAR WORD BALLOON!

VARIATIONS IN BALLOON SHAPE ARE MANY AND NEW ONES ARE BEING INVENTED EVERY DAY.

I WILL BE--

AARH!

HEE HEE HEE HEE

IT'S SO QUIET!

OH, IT'S YOU.

TIMBER!!

WHILE INSIDE THOSE BALLOONS, SYMBOLS ARE CONSTANTLY BEING APPROPRIATED OR EVEN INVENTED TO COVER THE NON-VERBAL.

ZZZZ ZZZZZ

OH @?!?

?

...

Even the variations of lettering styles, both in and out of balloons, speak of an ongoing struggle to capture the very essence of sound.

CRASH!

HA-HA!

MAAY-BEE I DON'T EVEN WANT SHRIMP FOR DINNER!

[La-Dii-Doo! La-Dii-Doo!]

SKLICK!

WHUMP!

KRAK!

AND AS FOR THE ESSENCE OF THOUGHT...

* Eisner describes the word balloon as a "desperation device."
OF COURSE WORDS THEMSELVES, MORE THAN ALL THE OTHER VISUAL SYMBOLS, HAVE THE POWER TO COMPLETELY DESCRIBE THE INVISIBLE REALM OF SENSES AND EMOTIONS.

WORDS CAN TAKE EVEN SEEMINGLY NEUTRAL IMAGES AND INVEST THEM WITH A WEALTH OF FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES.

I SAT BY THE OPEN WINDOW, HOPING TO CATCH A WHIFF OF THE OLD CHARCOAL GRILLS. FROM NEXT DOOR CAME THE OTHERWORLDLY HUM OF TELEVISION. THE OLD CLOCK STRUCK A LAZY EIGHT.

AS NOTED, PICTURES CAN INDUCE STRONG FEELINGS IN THE READER, BUT THEY CAN ALSO LACK THE SPECIFICITY OF WORDS.

WORDS, ON THE OTHER HAND, OFFER THAT SPECIFICITY, BUT CAN LACK THE IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL CHARGE OF PICTURES, RELYING INSTEAD ON A GRADUAL CUMULATIVE EFFECT.

TOGETHER, OF COURSE, WORDS AND PICTURES CAN WORK MIRACLES.

I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I'M ON TO YOUR PLOT... I KNOW YOU PUT SOMETHING IN MY DOG'S FOOD THAT MADE HIM NOT LOVE ME ANYMORE AND...

BUT WE'LL GET TO THAT IN THE NEXT CHAPTER.
Perhaps it's too much to ask of one sense that it be responsible for conveying such a wide world of experiences.

But we make that process work by bringing the full power of our own experiences to bear on the world our eyes report.

In this chapter, we've dealt with the invisible worlds of senses and emotions, but in fact all aspects of comics show it to be an art of the invisible.

What you see is seldom what you get. If all you're seeing (seeing even now) is just ink and paper.
In the end, what you get is what you give.
CHAPTER SIX

SHOW, AND TELL.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR ROBOT, TIMMY?

THIS IS MY ROBOT.

WELL, UH... I LIKE IT 'CAUSE... 'CAUSE, UH...

IT'S GOT ONE OF THESE THINGS.

WHAT IS THAT, TIMMY?
IT'S THIS THING AND IF YOU PULL IT, IT GOES LIKE THIS.

KUNK!

THE HEAD FLIPS BACK.

...?

Yeah.

AND... AND THEN YOU CAN DO THIS AND IT GOES UP AND YOU FLIP THIS.

I DID IT WRONG. WAIT.

LOOK, IT'S A AIRPLANE NOW!

THANK YOU, TOMMY.

WE ALL STARTED OUT LIKE THIS, DIDN'T WE? USING WORDS AND IMAGES INTERCHANGEABLY. IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER WHICH WE USED, SO LONG AS IT WORKED.

IT'S CONSIDERED NORMAL IN THIS SOCIETY FOR CHILDREN TO COMBINE WORDS AND PICTURES, SO LONG AS THEY GROW OUT OF IT.
Traditional thinking has long held that truly great works of art and literature are only possible when the two are kept at arm's length.

Words and pictures together are considered, at best, a diversion for the masses, at worst a product of crass commercialism.

As children, our first books had pictures galore and very few words because that was "easier." Then, as we grew, we were expected to graduate to books with much more text and only occasional pictures. -- And finally to arrive at "real" books -- those with no pictures at all.

Or perhaps, as is sadly the case these days, to no books at all.
Meanwhile, words and moving pictures have half the world in thrall to their charms, but must struggle to make their potential understood.

Words and pictures are as popular as ever, but this widespread feeling that the combination is somehow base or simplistic has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The roots of this attitude run pretty deep.

As near as we can tell, pictures predate the written word by a large margin. Here are some big hits from the golden age of cave painting, about 15,000 years ago.

Some of this art shows considerable attention to detail, very much concerned with pictorial representation.

But others were very iconic, acting as symbols rather than pictures—more like a primitive language!
As mentioned in our last chapter, the earliest words were, in fact, stylized pictures.

As seen, most of these early words stayed close by their parents, the pictures.

It didn't take long, though—relatively speaking—before ancient writing started to become more abstract.

Some written languages survive to this day, bearing traces of their ancient pictorial heritage.

* See page 127.
But, in time, most modern writing would come to represent sound only and lose any lingering resemblance to the visible world.

But where had the pictures all gone?

With the invention of printing, the written word took a great leap forward—

—and all of humanity with it.

But those instances were becoming the exception, not the rule.

*In illuminated manuscripts, for example.*
MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHEN THEY WERE COMBINED, AS IN THIS GERMAN COMIC FROM THE 1400's, WORDS AND PICTURES STAYED SEPARATE, REFUSING TO MIX LIKE OIL AND WATER.

THE WRITTEN WORD WAS BECOMING MORE SPECIALIZED, MORE ABSTRACT, MORE ELABORATE—

--AND LESS AND LESS LIKE PICTURES.

PICTURES, MEANWHILE, BEGAN TO GROW IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION: LESS ABSTRACT OR SYMBOLIC, MORE REPRESENTATIONAL AND SPECIFIC.

FASSIMILE DETAILS OF PORTRAITS BY DURER (1519) REMBRANDT (1660) DAVID (1788) AND INGRES (1810-15).
Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

BY THE EARLY 1800'S, WESTERN ART AND WRITING HAD DRIFTED ABOUT AS FAR APART AS WAS POSSIBLE.

ONE WAS OBSESSED WITH RESEMBLANCE, LIGHT AND COLOR, ALL THINGS VISIBLE...

THE OTHER RICH IN INVISIBLE TREASURES, SENSES, EMOTIONS, SPIRITUALITY, PHILOSOPHY...

PICTURES AND WORDS, ONCE TOGETHER IN THE CENTER OF OUR ICONIC ABSTRACTION CHART, HAVE AT THIS POINT DRIFTED TO OPPOSITE CORNERS.
In a way, pictures and words had reached the end of a 5,000 year journey. If they were to continue moving, where could they go? For pictures, there was only up!

Impressionism sent Western art toward the abstract vertex, but in a way that clung to what the eye saw.

Impressionism, while it could be thought of as the first modern movement, was more a culmination of the old, the ultimate study of light and color.

Soon after came the explosion! Expressionism, futurism, dada, surrealism, fauvism, cubism, abstract expressionism, neo-plasticism, constructivism.

Every which way but backwards!

Strict representational styles were of little importance to the new schools. Abstraction, both iconic and non-iconic, made a spectacular comeback!

Facsimile details of portraits by Picasso, Leger and Klee.
SOME ARTISTS HEADED UPWARD TO THE SUMMIT OF THE PICTURE PLANE, WANTING NEITHER RESEMBLANCE NOR EXTERNAL "MEANING."

BUT THE MAIN THREAT WAS A RETURN TO MEANING IN ART, AWAY FROM RESEMBLANCE, BACK TO THE REALM OF IDEAS.

MEANWHILE, THE WRITTEN WORD WAS ALSO CHANGING. POETRY BEGAN TURNING AWAY FROM THE ELUSIVE, TWICE-ABSTRACTED LANGUAGE OF OLD TOWARD A MORE DIRECT, EVEN COLLOQUIAL, STYLE.

IN PROSE, LANGUAGE WAS BECOMING EVEN MORE DIRECT, CONVEYING MEANING SIMPLY AND QUICKLY, MORE LIKE PICTURES.

"MEANING" WAS NOT ABANDONED BY ANY MEANS, BUT AUTHORS WERE DEFINITELY MOVING LEFT--

--AND HEADED FOR A COLLISION!

Walt Whitman 1890
Facing West from California’s Shores

Facing west, from California’s shores,
Inquiring, tireless, seeking
what is yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar
Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled:
For starting westward from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmir, From Asia, from the north, from the God, the soge, and the hero, From the south, from the flowery peninsulas and the spice islands, Long having wandered since, round the earth having wandered,
Now I face home again, very pleased and joyous;
(But where is what I started for, so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?)

Ode on a Grecian Urn

John Keats 1819

Thou still unravished bride of quietness, Thou foster-child of silence and slow time, Sylvan historian, who canst thus express A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme: What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape Of such a green and dullenned height. In Tempe or the dales of Arcady? What meads or groves are these, where maidens tan?
Portrait de TRISTAN TZARA
par FRANCIS PICABIA

THE WORK OF DADAISTS, FUTURISTS AND VARIOUS INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS OF THE MODERN ERA BREACHED THE FRONTIER BETWEEN APPEARANCE AND MEANING!

---

DADA POSTER FOR THE PLAY "THE BEARDED HEART"

PAINTINGS INCREASINGLY TOOK ON SYMBOLIC, EVEN CALLIGRAPHIC, MEANINGS...

WHILE SOME ARTISTS ADDRESSED THE IRONIES OF WORDS AND PICTURES HEAD-ON!

LECI N'EST PAS UNE PIPE.
AND IN POPULAR CULTURE THE TWO FORMS COLLIDED AGAIN AND AGAIN WITHOUT ANY PRETENSES OF 'HIGH' ART.

NOWHERE IS THIS COLLISION MORE THOROUGHLY EXPLORED THAN THE MODERN COMIC, AND IT'S NOT A RECENT OBSESSION.

LET'S GO BACK TO THE EARLY 1800's BEFORE ANY OF THIS HAPPENED, WHEN WORDS AND PICTURES HAD DRIFTED AS FAR APART AS POSSIBLE.

UP TO THAT POINT, EUROPEAN BROADSHEETS HAD OFFERED REMINDERS OF WHAT WORDS AND PICTURES COULD DO WHEN COMBINED.

BUT AGAIN IT WAS RODOLPHE TOPF, WHO FORESAW THEIR INTERDEPENDENCY AND BROUGHT THE FAMILY BACK TOGETHER AT LAST.

M. CREPIN ADVERTISES FOR A TUTOR, AND MANY APPLY FOR THE JOB.

I'M SURE THAT THESE IDEAS WERE THE FURTHEST THING FROM TOPF'S MIND WHEN HE PUT PEN TO PAPER--

--BUT THE FACT THAT THE MODERN COMIC WAS BORN JUST AS ART AND WRITING WERE PREPARING TO CHANGE DIRECTION IS AT LEAST INTRIGUING.

AND PERHAPS THIS COMMON THREAD OF UNIFICATION DID GROW OUT OF A SHARED INSTINCT OF THE DAY...

...AN INSTINCT WHICH SAID THAT WE HAD REACHED THE END OF A LONG JOURNEY AND THAT IT WAS TIME AT LAST TO HEAD FOR HOME.
UNFORTUNATELY FOR COMICS, NO SOONER HAD THE FINE ARTS REDISCOVERED THE LINK BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES --

-- THAN MODERN ART ITSELF BECAME VIRTUALLY INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO THE AVERAGE VIEWER!

WHAT THE HECK IS THAT?!

IT'S A HOAX, I TELL YA! MY TWO-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER CAN PAINT BETTER THAN THAT!

DO PEOPLE REALLY PAY MONEY FOR THIS?!!

COOL.

IN FACT, THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S PERCEPTIONS OF "GREAT" ART AND "GREAT" WRITING HASN'T CHANGED MUCH IN 150 YEARS. ANY ARTIST WISHING TO DO GREAT WORK IN A MEDIUM USING WORDS AND PICTURES WILL HAVE TO CONTEND WITH THIS ATTITUDE.

IN OTHERS AND IN THEMSELVES...

Thou still unravish'd bride
Thou foster-child of silence
Sylvan historian, who can's
A flowery tale more sweetly
What leaf fring'd legend he
Of deities or mortals, or
In Tempe or the dales
What men or gods are the
What mad pursuit? What
What pipes and timbrels

BECAUSE, DEEP DOWN INSIDE, MANY COMICS CREATORS STILL MEASURE ART AND WRITING BY DIFFERENT STANDARDS AND ACT ON THE FAITH THAT "GREAT" ART AND "GREAT" WRITING WILL COMBINE HARMONIOUSLY BY VIRTUE OF QUALITY ALONE.

* NOT AS MUCH AS WE LIKE TO THINK IT HAS, ANYWAY.
THE ART FORM OF COMICS IS MANY CENTURIES OLD, BUT IT'S PERCEIVED AS A RECENT INVENTION AND SUFFERS THE CURSE OF ALL NEW MEDIA.

EVER SINCE THE INVENTION OF THE WRITTEN WORD, NEW MEDIA HAVE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD.

CAREFUL, JACOB! IF YOU KEEP DOING THIS, YOU'LL STOP USING YOUR MEMORY!

FAR TOO MANY COMICS CREATORS HAVE NO HIGHER GOAL THAN TO MATCH THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OTHER MEDIA, AND VIEW ANY CHANCE TO WORK IN OTHER MEDIA AS A STEP UP.

THE CURSE OF BEING JUDGED BY THE STANDARDS OF THE OLD.

EACH NEW MEDIUM BEGINS ITS LIFE BY IMITATING ITS PREDECESSORS. MANY EARLY MOVIES WERE LIKE FILMED STAGE PLAYS. MUCH EARLY TELEVISION WAS LIKE RADIO WITH PICTURES OR REDUCED MOVIES.

AND AGAIN, AS LONG AS WE VIEW COMICS AS A GENRE OF WRITING OR A STYLE OF GRAPHIC ART THIS ATTITUDE MAY NEVER DISAPPEAR.
WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMBINATION MAY NOT BE MY DEFINITION OF COMICS, BUT THE COMBINATION HAS HAD TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE ON ITS GROWTH.

A HUGE RANGE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCES CAN BE PORTRAYED IN COMICS THROUGH EITHER WORDS OR PICTURES.

AS A RESULT—and despite its many other potential uses—COMICS HAVE BECOME FIRMLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE ART OF STORYTELLING.

AND INDEED, WORDS AND PICTURES HAVE GREAT POWERS TO TELL STORIES WHEN CREATORS FULLY EXPLOIT THEM BOTH.

AND SO FAR, WE’VE ONLY SEEN THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG!

AS CHILDREN, WE “SHOW AND TELL” INTERCHANGEABLY, WORDS AND IMAGES COMBINING TO TRANSMIT A CONNECTED SERIES OF IDEAS.

THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WORDS AND PICTURES CAN COMBINE IN COMICS IS VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED.

BUT LET’S TRY TO BREAK IT DOWN INTO SOME DISTINCT CATEGORIES.
FIRST, WE HAVE THE WORD SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS, WHERE PICTURES ILLUSTRATE, BUT DON'T SIGNIFICANTLY ADD TO A LARGELY COMPLETE TEXT.

WE STUMBLED BACK TO THE APARTMENT SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN, VOMITING EVERY 20 YARDS.

JUDY GAVE ME HER KEYS AND SMILED.

THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION WAS ADOPTED BY THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS IN 1787 AND PUT INTO EFFECT IN 1789.

THEN THERE ARE PICTURE SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS WHERE WORDS DO LITTLE MORE THAN ADD A SOUNDTRACK TO A VISUALLY TOLD SEQUENCE.

HE DID IT!

MMM...

AND, OF COURSE, DUO-SPECIFIC PANELS IN WHICH BOTH WORDS AND PICTURES SEND ESSENTIALLY THE SAME MESSAGE.

GRIM-FACED, GEORGE LIFTED HIS LOLLYPOP.

BUT THE CAPTAIN'S MIGHTY BLOW MISSES ITS INTENDED TARGET! BLAST! HE DODGED MY PUNCH AND I STRUCK THIS BRICK WALL!

HA! I DODGED YOU!

I FEEL SO SAD!

...THOUGHT AMY.
Another type is the **additive** combination where words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa.

My head feels like a smashed pumpkin!

Is this the same Jupiter of my youth?

In **parallel** combinations, words and pictures seem to follow very different courses—without intersecting.

"Talked to Bill yet?"

"Sally did. Why?"

"The test results came back. All negative."

"Really? That's great!"

Well...

Still another option is the **montage** where words are treated as integral parts of the picture.

Cash Flow/Bottome Line Annual Report


HAPPY!
Perhaps the most common type of word/picture combination is the interdependent, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone.

I ask you, does this guy look like a C.E.O. to you?

"And just guess who drove up in Bob's truck an hour later?"

"Hey, Marge! Oh, my God!"

"After college, I pursued a career in high finance."

He's lying.

UH-HUH.

Generally speaking, the more is said with words, the more the pictures can be freed to go exploring and vice versa.

Interdependent combinations aren't always an equal balance though and may fall anywhere on a scale between types one and two.
In comics at its best, words and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading.

When both partners try to lead, the competition can subvert the overall goals...

...tho[u]gh a little playful competition can sometimes produce enjoyable results.

But when these partners each know their roles...

--and support each other's strengths--

--comics can match any of the art forms it draws so much of its strength from.
WHEN **PICTURES** CARRY THE WEIGHT OF CLARITY IN A SCENE, THEY FREE WORDS TO EXPLORE A WIDER AREA.

LET'S SAY I SHOW YOU A WOMAN WALKING ACROSS THE STREET IN THE RAIN, BUYING A PINT OF ICE CREAM AND EATING IT IN HER APARTMENT—

--ALL IN PICTURES.
WHEN A SCENE SHOWS YOU ALL YOU "NEED" TO KNOW, LIKE THIS ONE, THE LATITUDE FOR SCRIPTING GROWS ENORMOUSLY.

I MAY BE ALONE LIKE THIS FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

IT COULD BECOME AN INTERNAL MONOLOGUE.

INTERDEPENDENT

PERHAPS SOMETHING WILDLY INCONGRUOUS

"MISSION CONTROL, MISSION CONTROL, DO YOU READ ME?"

PARALLEL

MAYBE IT'S ALL JUST A BIG ADVERTISEMENT!

YOU'LL LOVE THE TASTE!

INTERDEPENDENT

OR A CHANCE TO RUMINATE ON BROADER TOPICS.

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS...

CHOCOLATE CHOCOLATE CHIP

INTERDEPENDENT
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE **WORDS**
LOCK IN THE "MEANING" OF A SEQUENCE,
THEN THE **PICTURES** CAN REALLY TAKE OFF.

SAME SCENE NOW, BUT THIS TIME ALL **IN WORDS**!

I CROSSED THE STREET TO THE **CONVENIENCE STORE**. THE RAIN SOAKED INTO MY BOOTS.

I FOUND THE LAST PINT OF **CHOCOLATE CHOCOLATE CHIP** IN THE **FREEZER**.

THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID **NO THANKS**. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK...

I WENT BACK TO THE APARTMENT—

--AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR. **ALONE AT LAST.**
NOW, ONE COULD JUST COMBINE THE PICTURES FROM PAGE 157 WITH THE WORDS FROM PAGE 159 --

--BUT WHAT ARE SOME OTHER OPTIONS?

I CROSSED THE STREET TO THE CONVENIENCE STORE. THE RAIN SOAKED INTO MY BOOTS.

I FOUND THE LAST PINT OF CHOCOLATE CHIP IN THE FREEZER.

THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID NO THANKS. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK.

I WENT BACK TO THE APARTMENT -- AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

IF THE ARTIST WANTS TO, HE/SHE CAN NOW SHOW ONLY FRAGMENTS OF A SCENE.

(WORD SPECIFIC)

OR MOVE TOWARD GREATER LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION OR EXPRESSION.

THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID NO THANKS. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK...

(AMPLIFICATION)

Perhaps the artist can give us some important emotional information.

I WENT BACK TO THE APARTMENT --

(INTERDEPENDENT)

OR SHIFT AHEAD OR BACKWARDS IN TIME.

--AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

ALONE AT LAST.

(WORD SPECIFIC)
Some of the secrets of those first alchemists may have been lost in the ancient past.

But we have some powerful magic right here in the 20th century, too! The richness of modern language is an irreplaceable commodity!

This is an exciting time to be making comics, and in many ways I feel very lucky to have been born when I was.

Still, I do feel a certain vague longing for that time over 50 centuries ago—

When to tell was to show—

-- and to show was to tell.

--and to show was to tell.
COMICS IS JUST ONE OF MANY FORMS OF SELF-EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION AVAILABLE TO US.
So far, we’ve mostly dealt with the **unique** properties of comics.

But there are properties that comics share with **all other** art forms.

Though it seems innocuous enough now, there was a time when such a simple idea was **ridiculed**.

Even **today**, there are those who ask the question, **“Can comics be art?”**

It is—

---I’m sorry---

A really **stupid** question!

**But** if we must answer it, the answer is **yes**.

Especially if your definition of art is as **broad** as mine!
Art as I see it, is any human activity which doesn't grow out of either of our species two basic instincts: survival and reproduction!

Graah!  Eek!

Example: Here's a prehistoric male chasing a prehistoric female with only one thing on his mind -- reproduction!

So strong is this instinct that it governs his every move! Not one step is wasted in the pursuit of his goal.

The female -- afraid for her survival -- manages to hide. Now deprived of his goal, the male stands indecisive.

Suddenly -- Quaah!

Now all of his thoughts and actions are focused on that other vital human instinct -- survival!

Again his legs propel him forward with maximum efficiency!
TRAPPED ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF, HIS MIND CAN ONLY CONCEIVE OF ONE PATH TO SURVIVAL!

AND SURVIVES.

HE TAKES IT!

HIS NEXT MOVE MIGHT BE TO LOOK FOR FOOD (SURVIVAL) OR PERHAPS ANOTHER FEMALE (REPRODUCTION).

BUT INSTEAD...

THPLPLP!!

ART.

IT'S A HAPPY FACT OF HUMAN EXISTENCE THAT WE SIMPLY CAN'T SPEND OUR EVERY WAKING HOUR EATING AND HAVING SEX! NO MATTER HOW FRANTICALLY WE PURSUE OUR GOALS, THERE WILL INEVITABLY BE TIMES WHEN WE JUST DON'T HAVE A THING TO DO!

UGH.

UGH.

HRMMM...
WHAT MAY LOOK LIKE A TRIBE OF BORED, INACTIVE CAVE-DWELLERS BELOW US IS, IN FACT, A THRIVING ART COLONY!

SEE THAT OLD WOMAN WITH THE STICK? NOTICE THE LINES SHE'S MAKING IN THE DIRT?

TODAY SHE HAS A STOMACHACHE AND HER LINES ARE TIGHT AND ANGULAR. YESTERDAY SHE FELT BETTER AND HER LINES WERE OPEN AND CURVED.

AND OVER THERE A MAN BEATS A SIMPLE RHYTHM WITH A PAIR OF STONES. HE DOESN'T KNOW WHY, BUT THE SOUND PLEASES HIM.

NEARBY, A BOY KICKS UP PEBBLES AND DIRT AND PUMMELS THE AIR WITH HIS FIST.

TODAY HE LOST A FIGHT WITH HIS BROTHER. NOW ALL HE CAN DO IS DANCE AWAY HIS FRUSTRATION.

WHILE OVER HERE, A LITTLE GIRL SINGS HER SONG OF YOUTH!

BECAUSE OF ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM OUR EVOLUTION-BRED INSTINCTS, ART IS THE WAY WE ASSERT OUR IDENTITIES AS INDIVIDUALS AND BREAK OUT OF THE NARROW ROLES NATURE CAST US IN.

OF COURSE, THE GENIUS OF "MOTHER NATURE" IS SUCH THAT EVEN THESE THINGS DO HAVE THEIR USES FROM AN EVOLUTIONARY STANDPOINT.

THREE, IN FACT.
FIRST, they provide exercise for minds and bodies not receiving outside stimulus.

SECOND, they provide an outlet for emotional imbalances, aiding in the race's mental survival.

THIRD, and perhaps most importantly to our survival as a race, such random activities often lead—

-- TO USEFUL DISCOVERIES!

A lot has changed in half a million years, but some things never change.

The processes are more complex now, but the instincts remain the same. Survival and reproduction still hold the upper hand.

ART AS SELF EXPRESSION, THE ARTIST AS HERO; FOR MANY, ITS HIGHEST PURPOSE.

ART AS DISCOVERY, AS THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH, AS EXPLORATION; THE SOUL OF MUCH MODERN ART AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF LANGUAGE, SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY.

* Along with their many related feelings and customs.
Yet in almost everything we do there is at least an element of art.

Perhaps a little unnecessary choreography on the assembly line.

Oom, beehbee!

Or the personal style of a bicycle messenger.

Honk! Honk!

Or just the way we sign our names!

In some occupations, the latitude for self-expression is greater. Survival -- making a living -- goes hand in hand with creative desire.

I think it's fair to say that some activities have more art in them than others.

Life is a series of minute decisions, some motivated by survival, some not, and proportions do vary.

But to proclaim, as so many so often do, that --

That's not art!

That presumes that art is an either/or proposition. I don't think it is.

Rare is the person in any occupation who expresses nothing.

And rare is the artist who cares nothing for success, i.e., survival!
But the ideal of the latter is alive in the hearts of many artists who may hope for success, but won't alter their work to obtain it.

The "fine artist"—the pure artist—says to the world: "I didn't do this for money! I didn't do this to match the color of your couches!"

"I didn't do this to get laid! I didn't do this for fame or power or greed or anything else! I did this for art!"

In other words: "My art has no practical value whatsoever!"

"But it's important!"

And sometimes it is, though it might take a century or two for the rest of the world to find out!

This is as true in comics as it is in painting, writing, theatre, film, sculpture, or any other form...

...because the creation of any work in any medium will always follow a certain path.
A Path Consisting of Six Steps:

1. Idea/Purpose: The impulses, the ideas, the emotions, the philosophies, the purposes of the work... the work's "content."
3. Idiom: The "school" of art, the vocabulary of styles or gestures or subject matter. The genre that the work belongs to... maybe a genre of its own.
4. Structure: Putting it all together... what to include, what to leave out... how to arrange, how to compose the work.
Fifth: Constructing the work, applying skills, practical knowledge, invention, problem-solving, getting the "job" done.

Sixth: Production values, finishing. The aspects most apparent on first superficial exposure to the work.

In all the arts, it's the surface that people appreciate most easily, like an apple chosen for its shiny skin.

The latest "fan favorite" often looks better at a glance than the older artists who had the ideas and created the idioms, but were less interested in surfaces.

But often if we bite into that shiny new apple ---

Crunch! ---

Hollow.

It's a cycle as old as art itself.
IN COMICS, THE CYCLE BEGINS ALL OVER THE WORLD, AS YOUNG READERS DISCOVER COMICS FOR THE FIRST TIME AND IN A FEW CASES, BEGIN TO DEVELOP A LOVE FOR COMICS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME!

IN THIS EARLY STAGE, THESE READERS ARE EXPERIENCING THE CHARACTERS, IDEAS, EVENTS AND EMOTIONS OF THE STORY DIRECTLY.

COMICS IS ACTING AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN STORYTELLER AND AUDIENCE.

BUT IN SOME, AN AWARENESS OF THE FORM BEGINS TO DEVELOP, AN AWARENESS THAT ALL COMICS ARE JUST INK ON PAPER--

--THAT MAKING THEM ONLY REQUIRES CERTAIN SKILLS--

--AND THAT THOSE SKILLS CAN BE LEARNED!
ONE OF THEM--FULL OF BIG IDEAS--MAKES THE BIG DECISION.

I'M GONNA MAKE COMICS WHEN I GROW UP!

HE'S OFF TO A LOGICAL START. HE HAS THE IDEAS AND HE'S CHOSEN COMICS AS HIS FORM OF EXPRESSION. MAYBE NOW HE'LL CONSIDER WHAT TYPES OF COMICS ARE RIGHT FOR HIM.

BUT PROBABLY NOT.

MORE LIKELY HE POSTPONES HIS OWN IDEAS AND BEGINS TO STUDY THE CRAFT OF OTHER ARTISTS IN HIS ATTEMPT TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL.

HE BUYS THE "RIGHT" BRUSH, THE "RIGHT" PENS AND THE "RIGHT" PAPER AND BEGINS TO PRACTICE.

EVENTUALLY...

LOOK, JACK! I CAN DRAW AS WELL AS A PROFESSIONAL!

WOW!

BUT WHEN HE BRINGS THE WORK TO A REAL PROFESSIONAL AT THE LOCAL CON:

...ANATOMY IS VERY POOR... SEE HOW THAT MUSCLE CONNECTS?... AND THAT PERSPECTIVE, YEESH!!...DO YOU KNOW WHAT A VANISHING POINT IS?... AND AS FOR FACES...

GULP!

SO HE BUYS SOME BOOKS ON ANATOMY AND PERSPECTIVE, STUDIES A VARIETY OF DRAWING TECHNIQUES AND PRACTICES, PRACTICES, PRACTICES FOR MONTHS.
But somehow, it never quite "clicks" for him. Maybe he just doesn't have enough skill... maybe he loses interest... maybe life just gets in the way... but for whatever reason--

He leaves his dreams of making comics behind.

But all over the world, others have undergone similar experiences and haven't given up yet!

One of them is now ready to take the next step! She's studied her craft all the way through high school and into college.

She's a good, hardworking student.

"I think I've really made a breakthrough!"

"This is very good."

But when she shows her work to a seasoned pro...

"You're a skilled scripter and draftsman, but your storytelling isn't good enough, you have no sense of pacing... these layouts are very muddy... you have to compose your stories..."

"Gulp!"

Her skills can get her work at this point, but only as an assistant to others. Until she understands the structure of comics beneath the craft, this is as far as she can go.
But maybe this is Enough for this particular artist. Enough to just be part of the Art, Business, and Community of Comics without necessarily calling the shots.

But elsewhere, another creator has been through the same sort of process and he wants more!

He spends his every waking hour working out the difficult principles of comics composition and storytelling, the kind they don’t teach in books.*

He discovers that his favorite artist was actually just a watered-down version of an older, less-polished artist whom he had always taken for granted.

Please, try to get some sleep, honey.

This guy was God!

He learns to see beneath the crafts of craftsmanship and scripting to see the whole picture: pacing, drama, humor, suspense, composition, thematic development, irony—soon they’re all at his command!

I’ve done it! I’ve learned all there is to know!

This time I’ll get my own book, I’m sure of it!

* Well, okay, one book! Eisner’s, again.
AND LET'S SAY IT WORKS! HE DOES LAND HIS OWN BOOK AND SOON IS ESTABLISHED AS A CREATOR OF GREAT SKILL. HE UNDERSTANDS COMICS STORYTELLING BETTER THAN MOST.

<THAT GUY'S ART IS ALL JUST 'SURFACE'>

AND HE KNOWS IT! <WOW!>

HIS WORK ISN'T PARTICULARLY ORIGINAL, THE CRITICS DON'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO HIM, BUT HE MAKES A DECENT LIVING FOR HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY AND THAT'S ENOUGH FOR HIM...

...ENOUGH THAT FOR WHAT HE DOES, HE'S ONE OF THE BEST.

BUT ANOTHER ARTIST HAS MADE IT THROUGH THE SAME SORTS OF HURDLES AND REACHED THE SAME LEVELS OF SUCCESS AND STILL ISN'T SATISFIED

SHE WONDERS IF HER SUCCESS REALLY MEANS ANYTHING WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY OTHERS DOING THE SAME THINGS IN THE SAME WAYS, SHE WANTS AN IDENTITY.

SHE BELIEVES THAT THERE'S SOMETHING MORE--SOME PIECE OF THE PUZZLE--THAT SHE STILL HAVEN'T FOUND.

SHE BEGINS TO INVENT NEW WAYS OF SHOWING "THE SAME OLD THING." SHE DEVELOPS INNOVATIVE NEW TECHNIQUES AND STARTS DOING AWAY WITH "THE SAME OLD THING" ALTOGETHER!
As she creates her own personal idiom of comics, she finds the whole of her work changing to suit that idiom.

Let's say that financial success and the respect of her peers soon follow.*

I want to thank all of those who helped me to achieve my full potential!

*Hostility, rejection and poverty are also possible, of course.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap!

Young artists begin to imitate her style, but most of them only seem to appreciate the "surface."

And maybe she'll be satisfied with that kind of success, secure in the knowledge that whatever she knows, she's on the right path to find out.

Want to show me your portfolio?

Could I?

But elsewhere, another creator has made it to this same place and still feels dissatisfied. He feels that something very important has been neglected...

Something fundamental, something at the core of who he is as an artist. With these thoughts on his mind, it's only a matter of time before he asks that one simple question:

Why am I doing this?
AND NOW, THE BIGGEST QUESTION OF ALL: DOES THIS ARTIST WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE THROUGH HIS ART OR DOES HE WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT ART ITSELF?

AND...

DO I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY AT ALL?

PERSONALLY, I THINK WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO THE WORLD.

THE REAL QUESTION IS "WILL ANYONE LISTEN?" AND UNFORTUNATELY THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW THAT IN ADVANCE.

ASSUMING HE DOESN'T LET THAT STOP HIM, HERE'S WHAT THESE TWO CHOICES COULD MEAN...

1 2
IDEA/PURPOSE FORM
2 FORM

BY CHOOSING FORM, HE'D BE SETTING UP TO BECOME AN EXPLORER.

HIS GOAL: TO DISCOVER ALL THAT THE ART FORM IS CAPABLE OF.

AND HIS ART WOULD NOT LACK FOR IDEAS OR FOR A PURPOSE.

HIS ART WOULD JUST BECOME HIS PURPOSE AND THE IDEAS WOULD ARRIVE IN TIME TO GIVE IT SUBSTANCE.

CREATORS WHO TAKE THIS PATH ARE OFTEN PIONEERS AND REVOLUTIONARIES—ARTISTS WHO WANT TO SHAKE THINGS UP, CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE THINK, QUESTION THE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS THAT GOVERN THEIR CHOSEN ART.

(MORE THREE PANELS SHOWING PHOTOS OF MCCAY, SPIEGELMAN, HERRIMAN, STERRET, MOEBIUS)

(IN OTHER ART FORMS: STRAVINSKY, PICASSO, VIRGINIA WOOLF, ORSON WELLES, ETC.)

1 IDEA/PURPOSE

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE CHOOSES THE FIRST STEP AS HIS GOAL, THEN HIS ART BECOMES A TOOL.

AND THE POWERS OF THAT ART WILL RELY ON THE POWERS OF THE IDEAS WITHIN.

NOW "TELLING THE STORY" (OR IN THE CASE OF NON-FICTION, "DELIVERING THE MESSAGE") TAKES PRIORITY OVER INVENTION.

 BUT TELLING A STORY AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE MAY REQUIRE SOME INVENTION. IT OFTEN DOES.
This is the path of great storytellers, creators who have something to say through comics and devote all their energies to controlling their medium, refining its ability to convey messages effectively.

(in other art forms: Capra, Dickens, Woody Guthrie, Edward R. Murrow, etc.)

Fortunately, this choice never has to be permanent. It can change as often as an artist changes projects!

No work of art can be totally without “content” any more than it can exist without a form! But it does help to set some priorities.

Hey, I’m driving! No, I’m driving!

This is a problem in many “assembly line” comics where creative specialization has “scripters,” “pencillers” and “inkers” all working at cross-purposes in their attempts to get noticed.

Not that we “creator/writer/artist” types never run into this problem...

Damn! Needed to have some more dialogue here, but I really want to draw that snazzy close-up!
THE MORE AN ARTIST DEVOTES HIM/HERSELF TO EITHER OF THESE TWO FOCAL POINTS, THE MORE DRAMATIC THE CHANGE IF HE/SHE DECIDES TO SWITCH!

ART SPIEGELMAN'S AGGRESSIVELY EXPERIMENTAL WORK OF THE SEVENTIES AND EARLY EIGHTIES LEFT NO ONE PREPARED FOR THE UNASSUMING "REPORT" STYLE OF HIS LANDMARK BIOGRAPHY "MAUS."

PERHAPS IF STRIPPED DOWN FAR ENOUGH, MOST ARTISTS' ULTIMATE GOALS ARE NOT THAT DIFFERENT FROM ANYONE ELSE'S. EVEN FOR THOSE WITH HIGH IDEALS, BASIC INSTINCTS EXERT A POWERFUL ATTRACTION.

AND WHEN ART BECOMES A JOB OR A MATTER OF SOCIAL STATUS THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFUSING ONE'S GOALS GOES UP CONSIDERABLY.

BUT EVEN IF WE TAKE LIFE'S DISTRACTIONS INTO ACCOUNT, IT'S STILL AMAZING HOW MUCH TIME AND EFFORT IS SPENT BY COMICS CREATORS TRYING TO GET WHAT THEY WANT OUT OF COMICS --

--BEFORE THEY EVEN KNOW WHAT THEY WANT!

OF COURSE, NOT EVERYBODY TAKES THE LONG WAY AROUND. SOME ARTISTS HAVE NO TROUBLE SETTING GOALS AND ACHIEVING THEM WITHOUT ANY DETOUBS...

HERE'S A STORY I Drew ABOUT MY DOG BUSTER!

...ESPECIALLY IF THEIR GOALS ARE MODEST ONES.
Any artist creating any work in any medium will always follow these six steps whether they realize it or not.

All works begin with a purpose, however arbitrary; all take some form; all belong to an idiom (even if it's an idiom of one); all possess a structure; all require some craft; all present a surface.

And all aspects of comics have the potential for self-expression, even when economic survival is the artist's main concern.

There's always room for a certain amount of "art."

But the more a creator learns to command every aspect of his/her art and to understand his/her relationship to it, the more "artistic" concerns are likely to get the upper hand.

The order of the six steps is innate, like the arrangement of bones in a dinosaur's skeleton. They can be discovered in any order, but when brought together, they will always fall into place.

1. Idea/Purpose
2. Form
3. Idiom
4. Structure
5. Craft
6. Surface
In practice, any aspect of comics may be the one which first draws an artist into its orbit.

Still, the learning process for most artists is a slow and steady journey from end to beginning.

From Surface to Core.

And it's at the core of art that the most important question is finally asked:

1. Idea/Purpose
2. Form

"Why am I doing this?"

When form rules the work, it may seem somewhat artificial at the core, like a seedless fruit.

But such works don't take the shape of art for granted and by questioning our fundamental assumptions—
--Can anticipate a world of unknown experiences.

While if ideas rule the work and determine its shape, comics can help plant those ideas far and wide.

And the cycle can begin again.
In Chapter Five we dealt with the expressionistic potential of lines as anticipated by artists at the turn of the century, but of course it was color which most captivated artists of that era.

Throughout art history, color has been a powerful, even predominant, concern of fine artists everywhere.

Some, like Georges Seurat, devoted their lives to its study.

Others, like Kandinsky, believed that colors could have profound physical and emotional effects on people.

Color can be a formidable ally for artists in any visual medium.

Yet in comics, the career of color has been, well... a bit “spotty.”

There are many reasons for the stormy relationship between comics and color, but most can be summed up in two words...
Now all aspects of comics history have been affected by commerce. Money has a tremendous effect on what is and isn't seen.

But color in comics has always been unusually sensitive to the shifting tides of technology.

The technology of color reproduction was first anticipated in 1861 when Scottish physicist Sir James Clerk-Maxwell isolated what we now call the three additive primaries.

These colors -- roughly, red, blue and green -- when projected together on a screen in various combinations, could reproduce every color in the visible spectrum.

They were called additive because they literally added up to pure white light.

Eight years later, French pianist Louis Ducos du Hauron * devised the idea of three subtractive primaries.

* Whom I don't have a picture of.
These colors -- cyan, magenta, and yellow -- can also mix to produce any hue in the visible spectrum, but rather than adding light, these three do it by filtering it out!

This subtractive effect was achieved through transparent substances such as cellophane, colored glass, water colors --

--- or printer's ink!

Color comics hit the newspaper industry like an atomic bomb!

Bus stop

Color boosted sales, but it also boosted costs! Measures were taken to streamline the process and make it more cost-effective.

And the standard "four color" process took over.

This process restricted the intensity of the three primaries to 100%, 50%, and 20%, using black ink for the line work.

The look of these colors, held by bold, simple outlines, and reproduced on cheap newsprint eventually became the look of comics in America.

So, while the expressive art of line was subjected to the subtractive filter of commerce on its way to comics, color was subjected to the filters of both commerce and technology.

*For opaque pigments: red, yellow and blue. I know, it's totally weird.*
TO COUNTERACT THE DULLING EFFECTS OF NEWSPRINT AND TO STAND OUT FROM THE COMpetition, COSTUMED HEROES WERE GLAD IN BRIGHT, PRIMARY COLORS AND FOUGHT IN A BRIGHT PRIMARY WORLD!

THE COLORS WERE PICKED FOR STRENGTH AND CONTRASTED STRONGLY WITH ONE ANOTHER, BUT ON MOST PAGES NO ONE COLOR DOMINATED.

WITHOUT THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF SINGLE-COLOR SATURATION, THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF AMERICAN COLOR COMICS--

-- WAS OFTEN CANCELLED OUT TO AN EMOTIONAL GREY.

AS ALWAYS, THERE WERE SOME EXCEPTIONS, BUT THIS WAS THE OVERALL TREND.

HOWEVER, WHILE COMICS COLORS WERE LESS THAN EXPRESSIONISTIC, THEY WERE FIXED WITH A NEW ICONIC POWER. BECAUSE COSTUME COLORS REMAINED EXACTLY THE SAME, PANEL AFTER PANEL, THEY CAME TO SYMBOLIZE CHARACTERS IN THE MIND OF THE READER.

MANY SEE THE SUPERHERO AS A FORM OF MODERN MYTHOLOGY. IF SO, THIS ASPECT OF COLOR MAY PLAY A PART.

SYMBOLS ARE THE STUFF OF WHICH GODS ARE MADE.

ANOTHER PROPERTY OF FLAT COLORS IS THEIR TENDENCY TO EMPHASIZE THE SHAPE OF OBJECTS, BOTH ANIMATE AND INANIMATE--
--as any child who has ever "colored-by-numbers" knows instinctively.

these colors objectify their subjects. we become more aware of the physical form of objects than in black and white.

a game in motion becomes a ball in air. a face showing emotion becomes a head and two hands.

the world takes on the childhood reality of the playground and recalls a time when shape preceded meaning. oblong swing sets. cylindrical jungle gyms. the wonder of things!

doesn't it follow then that the masters of flat-color comics are, above all, masters of form and composition?

from steve ditko to carl barks to p. craig russell, that love of shapes persists in worlds fairly glowing with the mystery of first encounters.

any wonder then that comics in america has been so reluctant to "grow up"?
In Europe Herge captured the magic of such flat colors with unprecedented subtlety.

The signora’s room.

Ravishing!

Herge created a kind of democracy of form in which no shape was any less important than any other—a completely objective world.

Comics printing was superior in Europe and for Herge, flat colors were a preference, not a necessity.

But others such as Claveloux, Caza, and Moebius saw in their superior printing an opportunity to express themselves through a more intense subjective palette.

Some of this work began reaching America in the 70s, inspiring many young artists to look beyond their four-color walls.

Suddenly it seemed possible for color to take on a central role.

Colors could express a dominant mood.

Tones and modeling could add depth.

Whole scenes could be virtually about color!
Since the late 70's, more and more "upscale" color projects have begun appearing in America. Some publishers at the beginning tried applying the traditional "four-color" process to better paper with garish results.

Take that!

Color as sensation, color as environment.

Color as color!

When modeling and more subtle hues were applied, though, they seemed out of place on the old shape-sensitive line drawings.

Take that!

The surface was changing, but not the core. For all their subtle hues, comics were still being written in primary colors.

This is beginning to change as I write this, but it's still the exception, not the rule. Comic artists wanting to conduct bold new experiments in comics art—

--still have to learn in most cases to be bold in black and white!
The differences between black-and-white and color comics are vast and profound, affecting every level of the reading experience.

In black and white, the ideas behind the art are communicated more directly, meaning transcendence loss form, art approaches language.

In flat colors forms themselves take on more significance. The world becomes a playground of shapes and space.

And through more expressive colors, comics can become an intoxicating environment of sensations that only color can give.

The surface qualities of color will continue to attract readers more easily than black and white, and the story of color will no doubt continue to be intertwined with the forces of commerce and technology.

We live in a world of colors, not just black and white. Color comics will always seem more "real" at first glance.

But comics readers look for many things besides "reality" and, technology notwithstanding, color will never replace black and white entirely.

One thing's for sure, though. When used well, color in comics can--like comics itself--

--amount to far more than the sum of its parts.
Chapter Nine

Putting it all together.

So, why is this medium we call comics so important? Why should we try so hard to understand comics?

Sequential Art

I think the answer lies deep within the human condition...
WE ALL LIVE IN A STATE OF PROFOUND ISOLATION.

NO OTHER HUMAN BEING CAN EVER KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE YOU FROM THE INSIDE.

AND NO AMOUNT OF REACHING OUT TO OTHERS CAN EVER MAKE THEM FEEL EXACTLY WHAT YOU FEEL.

ALL MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION ARE A BY-PRODUCT OF OUR SAD INABILITY TO COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY FROM MIND TO MIND.
Sad, of course, because nearly all problems in human history stem from that inability.

Each medium (the term comes from the Latin word meaning middle) serves as a bridge between minds.

Spoken word

Media convert thoughts into forms that can traverse the physical world and be re-converted by one or more senses back into thoughts.

ABC

Written word

Music

Cinema

In comics the conversion follows a path from mind to hand to paper to eye to mind.

Ideally the artist's 'message' will run this gauntlet without being affected by it, but in practice this is rarely the case.
The comics I "see" in my mind will never be seen in their entirety by anyone else, no matter how hard I try.

Ask any writer, filmmaker, or painter just how much of a given project truly represents what he/she envisioned it to be.

You'll hear twenty percent... ten... five...

Few will claim more than thirty.

The mastery of one's medium is the degree to which that percentage can be increased, the degree to which the artist's ideas survive the journey.

--or for some artists, the degree to which the inevitable detours are made useful by the artist.

As I said in Chapter Seven, I believe we all have something to say to the world. I'm a firm believer in the inherent worth of all inner truths.

There's only one power that can break through the wall which separates all artists from their audience--the power of understanding.
TODAY, COMICS IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW FORMS OF MASS COMMUNICATION IN WHICH INDIVIDUAL VOICES STILL HAVE A CHANCE TO BE HEARD.

THOSE OF US WHO TACKLE THE BUSINESS OF COMICS HAVE MANY OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME—

—BUT THEY PALE IN COMPARISON TO WHAT A FILMMAKER OR PLAYWRIGHT HAS TO CONTEND WITH.

COMICS WELCOMES ANY WRITER OR ARTIST TO STEP INTO ITS WORLD, A WORLD AS CLOSE AS PEN OR PENCIL AND PAPER.
The wall of ignorance that prevents so many human beings from seeing each other clearly can only be breached by communication.

And communication is only effective when we understand the forms that communication can take.

I've been trying to understand comics for about 15 years. Here's what I've come up with so far.
THE FIRST STEP IN ANY SUCH EFFORT IS TO CLEAR OUR MINDS OF ALL PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT COMICS.

ONLY BY STARTING FROM SCRATCH CAN WE DISCOVER THE FULL RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES COMICS OFFER.

THIS MEANS LEARNING TO SEPARATE THE FORM OF COMICS FROM ITS OFTEN INCONSISTENT CONTENTS.

THE BEST DEFINITION FOR COMICS WILL, I THINK, BE THE MOST EXPANSIVE.

SEQUENTIAL ART

WITH A LITTLE REFINING, SUCH A DEFINITION CAN TAKE COMICS FAR INTO THE FUTURE --

JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE

-- AND FAR INTO THE PAST, BEYOND THE ARTIFICIAL "STARTING POINT" OF 1896 AND "THE YELLOW KID!"

HONK! HONK!
OVER THREE THOUSAND YEARS BEYOND!

THERE'S AN INCREDIBLE WEALTH OF ANCIENT COMICS AND SOME MAY/YET HOLD THE KEY TO COMICS' FUTURE!

DISCOVERING AND CATALOGING THIS WORK HAS ALREADY BEGUN.* BUT THERE'S MUCH MORE THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE!

THERE'S A BIG GAPING HOLE IN THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF ART AND IT'S HIGH TIME SOMEBODY FILLED IT!!

*SEE PAGE 216 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.
"...the picture-story, which critics disregard and scholars scarcely notice, has had great influence at all times, perhaps even more than written literature."

Rudolphe Topffer
1845

"...in addition, the picture-story appeals mainly to children and the lower classes..."

Rudolphe Topffer
1845

ELEVATED BEYOND THEIR HERITAGE BY A CHANGE OF NAME!
COMICS IS A SIGHT-BASED MEDIUM.

THE WHOLE WORLD OF VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY IS AT THE DISPOSAL OF COMICS CREATORS!

FACE

- TWO EYES
- ONE MOUTH
- ONE NOSE

INCLUDING THE FULL RANGE OF PICTORIAL STYLES, FROM REALISTIC REPRESENTATIONAL ART TO THE SIMPLEST CARTOONS --
AND THE **INVISIBLE** WORLD OF SYMBOLS AND LANGUAGE!
THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, COMICS HAS HARNESSED THE POWER OF CARTOONS TO COMMAND VIEWER INVOLVEMENT AND IDENTIFICATION--

AND REALISM TO CAPTURE THE BEAUTY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE VISIBLE WORLD.

CREATOR AND READER ARE PARTNERS IN THE INVISIBLE CREATING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING, TIME AND TIME AGAIN.
BUT NOWHERE IS THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE MORE CONSPICUOUS THAN IN PICTURES AND WORDS...

...A SPLIT FORETOLD IN THE BIRTH OF ART ITSELF--

-- BEGIN IN EARNEST OVER 5,000 YEARS AGO--

-- AND GROWN WIDER AND WIDER FOR CENTURIES UNTIL EVENTUALLY, ALL CONNECTION WAS LOST--

FACE
-- AND THEN

REDISCOVERED
IN THE GREAT MADNESS
THAT WAS THE
TWENTIETH
CENTURY!

TODAY'S COMICS
DO THEIR DANCE
WITH THE INVISIBLE
BETTER THAN
EVER BEFORE.

BUT THE
LANGUAGE OF
COMICS CONTINUES
TO EVOLVE--
--AS ALL LANGUAGE MUST EVOLVE--

--BECAUSE EMBEDDED IN ALL PICTURES OF THE VISIBLE WORLD ARE THE SEEDS OF THE INVISIBLE.

THE SEEDS OF EXPRESSIONISM AND SYNAESTHETICS.
BUT EVOLUTION IS A TRICKY THING. SPECIES EVOLVE DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT CLIMATES.

SO IT WAS IN JAPAN WHERE COMICS DEVELOPED IN RELATIVE ISOLATION, SPawning A HOST OF UNIQUE APPROACHES TO MAKING COMICS.

EXPRESSIONISM

WORD-PICTURE LINKAGE

SUBJECTIVE MOTION

COLLAGE

STORYTELLING

FORMATS

THE "MASKING" EFFECT

ICONIC CHARACTERS
AS COMICS GROWS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY, CREATORS WILL ASPIRE TO MANY HIGHER GOALS THAN APPEALING TO THE "LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR."

IGNORANCE AND SHORT-SIGHTED BUSINESS PRACTICES WILL NO DOUBT OBSCURE THE POSSIBILITIES OF COMICS FROM TIME TO TIME AS THEY ALWAYS HAVE.

BUT THE TRUTH ABOUT COMICS CAN'T STAY HIDDEN FROM VIEW FOREVER AND SOONER OR LATER--

--THE TRUTH WILL SHINE THROUGH!
TODAY THE POSSIBILITIES FOR COMICS ARE-- AS THEY ALWAYS HAVE BEEN-- ENDLESS.

COMICS OFFERS TREMENDOUS RESOURCES TO ALL WRITERS AND ARTISTS: FAITHFULNESS, CONTROL, A CHANCE TO BE HEARD FAR AND WIDE WITHOUT FEAR OF COMPROMISE...

IT OFFERS RANGE AND VERSATILITY WITH ALL THE POTENTIAL IMAGERY OF FILM AND PAINTING PLUS THE INTIMACY OF THE WRITTEN WORD.
AND ALL THAT’S NEEDED IS THE DESIRE TO BE HEARD—

1 2 3 4 5 6

--THE WILL TO LEARN--

--AND THE ABILITY TO SEE.
THIS IS THE WORLD OF COMICS AS I UNDERSTAND IT SO FAR.
I'VE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT COMICS SINCE BEGINNING THIS PROJECT AND I KNOW I HAVE A LOT LEFT TO LEARN.

I HOPE YOU'LL ALL CONSIDER EXPLORING--OR CONTINUING TO EXPLORE--COMICS ON YOUR OWN!

HOWEVER YOU EXPERIENCE COMICS--AS READER, CREATOR OR BUSINESSPERSON--THERE ARE A MILLION AND ONE WAYS YOU CAN HELP COMICS TO GROW INTO THE NEXT CENTURY.

THINK ABOUT IT.
AND THANKS FOR LISTENING.

HMM?

OH, WOW, DID I TAKE THAT LONG? I'M SORRY. I BETTER LET YOU GO!

BACK TO THE OLD DRAWING BOARD!

AT LEAST YOU'RE NOT MARRIED TO HIM. I GET THIS ALL THE TIME!
Selected Bibliography.


Special note: Kunzle's book (see above) has gone virtually unnoticed by the comics community but is an enormously important work, covering nearly 400 years of forgotten European comics. Check it out!

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Letters of comment are appreciated (if seldom answered due to overwhelming commitments), but I would especially appreciate a public discussion of these issues in comics’ trade journals, art magazines, computer net and any other forum. This book is meant to stimulate debate, not settle it.

I've had my say.

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