

CHAPTER TWO

THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS.

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?



WELL, ACTUALLY, THAT'S **WRONG**. THIS IS **NOT** A PAINTING OF A PIPE, THIS IS A **DRAWING** OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.



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



TEN COPIES, ACTUALLY.

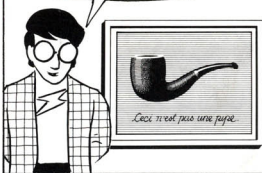
SIX, IF YOU FOLD THE PAGES BACK.



DO YOU HEAR WHAT I'M SAYING?



IF YOU **DO**, HAVE YOUR **EARS** CHECKED, BECAUSE NO ONE SAID A WORD.





THIS IS NOT A MAN.



THESE ARE NOT IDEAS.



THIS IS NOT A COUNTRY.



THIS IS NOT A LEAF



THESE ARE NOT PEOPLE



THIS IS NOT A COW.



THIS IS NOT MY VOICE.



THIS IS NOT MUSIC.



THESE ARE NOT FLOWERS.



THIS IS NOT SOUND.



THIS IS NOT ME.



THIS IS NOT LAW.



THIS IS NOT A PLANET.



THIS IS NOT FOOD.



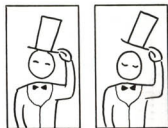
THIS IS NOT A CAR.



THIS IS NOT A COMPANY.



THIS IS NOT A FACE.



THESE ARE NOT SEPARATE MOMENTS.

THIS IS PAPER

NOW, THE WORD **ICON** MEANS MANY THINGS.

THIS IS PAPER



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**.

ICON

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.



THESE ARE THE IMAGES WE USE TO REPRESENT **CONCEPTS**, **IDEAS** AND **PHILOSOPHIES**.

THEN THERE ARE THE **ICONS** OF **LANGUAGE**, **SCIENCE** AND **COMMUNICATION**.

A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4
?	:	!	*
田	木	雨	石
+	=	×	÷
\$	%	©	¢
♫	♪	♪	🎵
☞	▲	☰	∞
Ω	Φ	↔	℞
☐	☁	☞	☐

ICONS OF THE **PRACTICAL** REALM.

AND FINALLY, THE **ICONS** WE CALL **PICTURES**: IMAGES DESIGNED TO ACTUALLY **RESEMBLE** THEIR SUBJECTS.



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**.

EYE



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**.



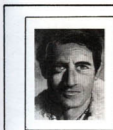
REALITY THIS WAY.





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

SOMEWHAT
MORE ABSTRACT
IS **THIS** STYLE
OF DRAWING
FOUND IN MANY
ADVENTURE
COMICS.



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

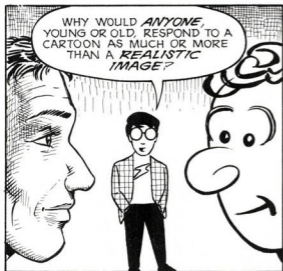
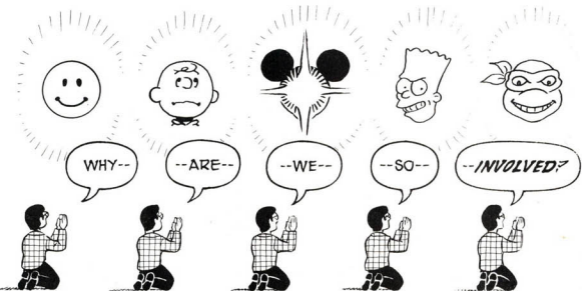
AS WE CONTINUE
TO ABSTRACT AND
SIMPLIFY OUR IMAGE,
WE ARE MOVING FURTHER
AND FURTHER FROM THE
"REAL" FACE OF THE
PHOTO.



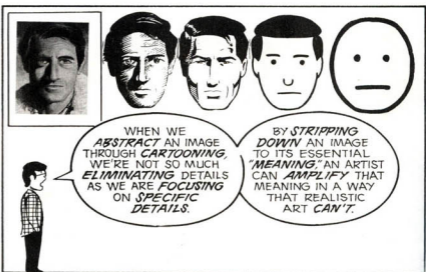
WHAT
IS THE SECRET
OF THE ICON
WE CALL--

--THE
CARTOON?





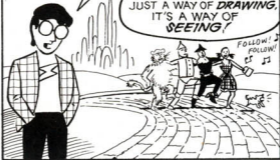
DEFINING THE CARTOON WOULD TAKE UP AS MUCH SPACE AS *DEFINING COMICS*, BUT FOR *NOW*, I'M GOING TO EXAMINE CARTOONING AS A FORM OF *AMPLIFICATION THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION*.



FILM CRITICS WILL SOMETIMES DESCRIBE A *LIVE-ACTION* FILM AS A "CARTOON" TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE STRIPPED-DOWN *INTENSITY* OF A SIMPLE STORY OR VISUAL STYLE.



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.



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.



ONE



A FEW



THOUSANDS



MILLIONS



(NEARLY) ALL

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

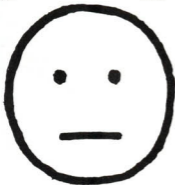


BUT I BELIEVE THERE'S SOMETHING *MORE* AT WORK IN OUR MINDS WHEN WE VIEW A CARTOON--ESPECIALLY OF A HUMAN FACE--WHICH WARRANTS FURTHER INVESTIGATION.



WHAT

ARE YOU



REALLY

SEEING?

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!*

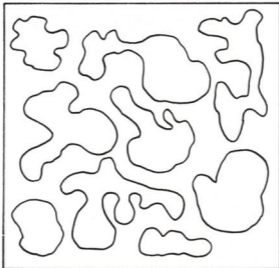


BUT STILL *MORE* INCREDIBLE IS THE FACT THAT YOU CANNOT *AVOID* SEEING A FACE HERE. YOUR MIND WON'T *LET* YOU!

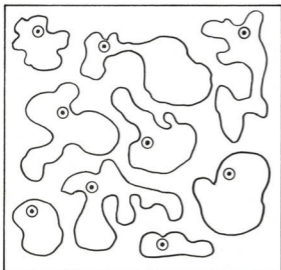


ASK A FRIEND TO DRAW YOU SOME SHAPES ON A PIECE OF PAPER. THEY SHOULD BE **CLOSED CURVES**. BUT **OTHERWISE** CAN BE AS **WEIRD** AND **IRREGULAR** AS HE OR SHE WANTS.

LET'S SAY THE RESULTS LOOK SOMETHING LIKE **THIS**.



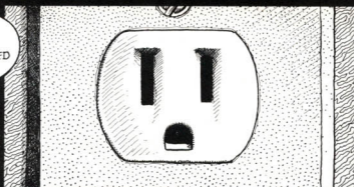
NOW-- YOU'LL FIND THAT NO MATTER WHAT THEY **LOOK** LIKE, EVERY SINGLE **ONE** OF THOSE SHAPES **CAN** BE MADE INTO A FACE WITH ONE SIMPLE ADDITION.



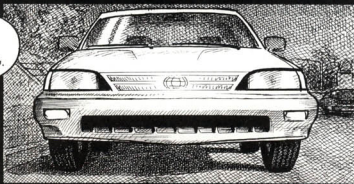
YOUR MIND HAS NO TROUBLE AT ALL CONVERTING SUCH SHAPES INTO FACES, YET WOULD IT EVER MISTAKE **THIS**--



WE HUMANS ARE A SELF-CENTERED RACE.



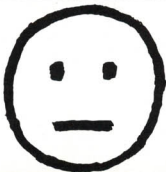
WE SEE
OURSELVES
IN
EVERYTHING.



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.



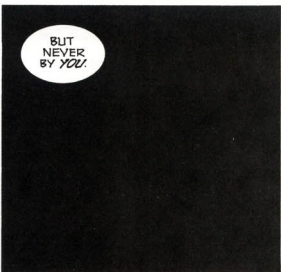
SLAVE TO
YOUR EVERY
MENTAL
COMMAND.



SEEN BY
EVERYONE
YOU MEET.



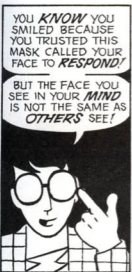
BUT
NEVER
BY *YOU.*



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*.

THIS, WHEN YOU LOOK AT A PHOTO OR REALISTIC DRAWING OF A FACE--



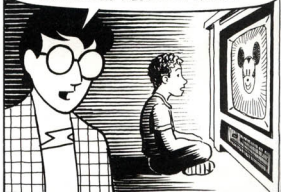
--YOU SEE IT AS THE FACE OF *ANOTHER*.

BUT WHEN YOU ENTER THE WORLD OF THE *CARTOON*--



--YOU SEE *YOURSELF*

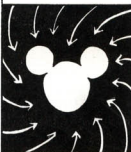
I BELIEVE THIS IS THE *PRIMARY CAUSE* OF OUR CHILDHOOD FASCINATION WITH *CARTOONS*, THOUGH OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS *UNIVERSAL IDENTIFICATION*, *SIMPLICITY* AND THE *CHILDLIKE FEATURES* OF MANY *CARTOON* CHARACTERS ALSO PLAY A PART.



THE *CARTOON* IS A *VACUUM* INTO WHICH OUR *IDENTITY* AND *AWARENES* ARE *PULLED*...



...AN *EMPTY SHELL* THAT WE INHABIT WHICH *ENABLES* US TO TRAVEL IN *ANOTHER REALM*.



WE DON'T JUST *OBSERVE* THE *CARTOON*, WE *BECOME* IT!

THAT'S WHY I DECIDED TO *DRAW* MYSELF IN SUCH A *SIMPLE STYLE*.



WOULD YOU HAVE *LISTENED* TO ME IF I LOOKED LIKE *THIS*??



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?



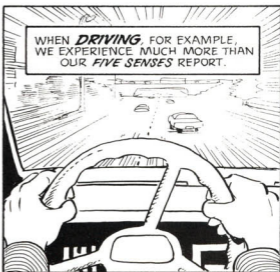
THERE'S **MORE**, TOO!



THE LATE GREAT **MARSHALL MELUHAN** OBSERVED A **SIMILAR** FORM OF **NON-VISUAL AWARENESS** WHEN PEOPLE INTERACT WITH **INANIMATE OBJECTS**.



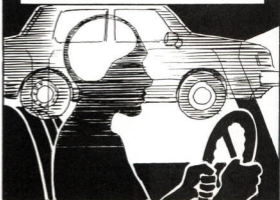
WHEN **DRIVING**, FOR EXAMPLE, WE EXPERIENCE MUCH MORE THAN OUR **FIVE SENSES** REPORT.



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!

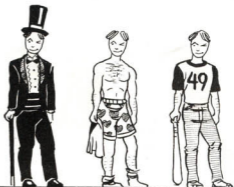
**HEY!
HE HIT
ME!!**



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*...



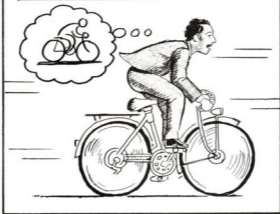
PIECES OF GLASS TO BECOME *EYES*.



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*--

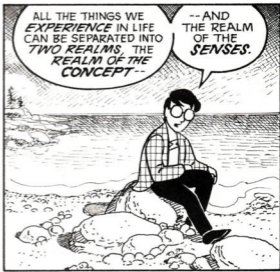


--SO TOO IS OUR AWARENESS OF *THESE* EXTENSIONS GREATLY *SIMPLIFIED*.



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--

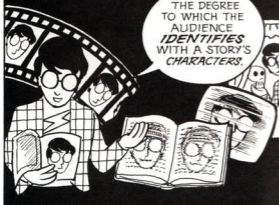


--ARE A *FAR* CRY FROM *PHOTO-REALISTS*!

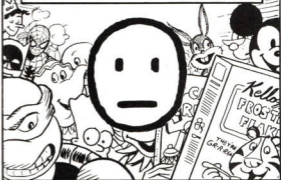


STORYTELLERS IN *ALL* MEDIA KNOW THAT A SURE INDICATOR OF *AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT*--

--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 *PROMINENT*. THE BELGIAN "*CLEAR-LINE*" STYLE OF HERGÉ'S *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.



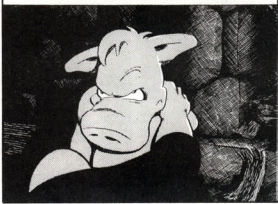
ONE SET OF LINES TO **SEE**. ANOTHER SET OF LINES TO **BE**.



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!**

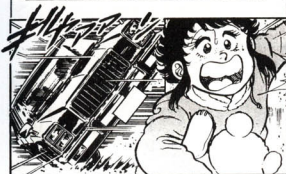
IN **EUROPE** IT CAN BE FOUND IN MANY POPULAR COMICS, FROM **ASTERIX** TO **TINTIN** TO WORKS OF **JACQUES TARDI**.

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**.



CEREBUS © DAVE SIM.

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.**



THE RESULTANT HYBRID STYLES HAD TREMENDOUS ICONIC *RANGE*, FROM EXTREMELY CARTOONY CHARACTERS TO *NEAR-PHOTOGRAPHIC* BACKGROUNDS.



"MONA GOES TOKYO"

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 *REALISTIC* IN ORDER TO *OBJECTIFY* THEM, EMPHASIZING THEIR "*OTHERNESS*" FROM THE *READER*.



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



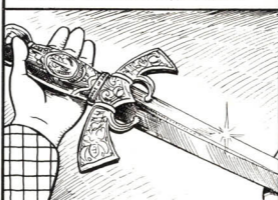
--DUE TO THE "*LIFE*" IT POSSESSES AS AN EXTENSION OF MY *CARTOON* IDENTITY!/"



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



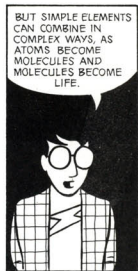
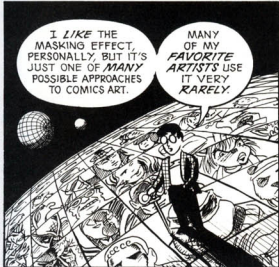
IN JAPANESE COMICS, THE *SWORD* MIGHT *NOW* BECOME VERY *REALISTIC*, NOT ONLY TO SHOW US THE *DETAILS*, BUT TO MAKE US AWARE OF THE *SWORD* AS AN *OBJECT*, SOMETHING WITH *WEIGHT*, *TEXTURE* AND *PHYSICAL* COMPLEXITY.

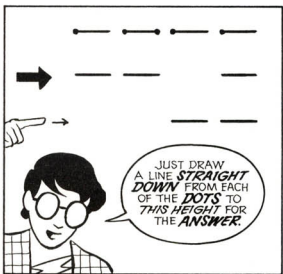
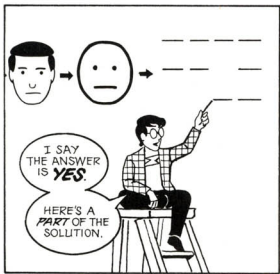
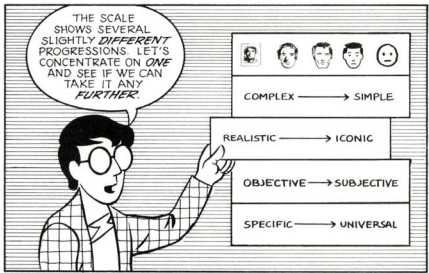
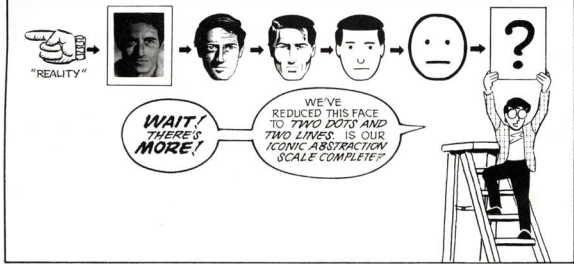


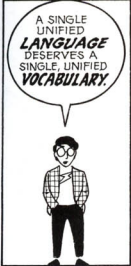
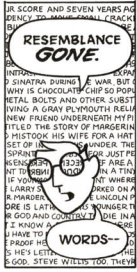
IN THIS AND IN *OTHER* *WAYS*, COMICS IN JAPAN HAVE EVOLVED VERY *DIFFERENTLY* FROM THOSE IN THE WEST.



WE'LL RETURN TO THESE DIFFERENCES SEVERAL TIMES DURING THIS BOOK.





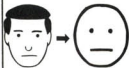


BOTH ARTIST AND WRITER BEGIN, HANDS JOINED ACROSS THE GAP, WITH A COMMON PURPOSE: TO MAKE COMICS OF "QUALITY"



"ARTIE"

"RITA"



FACE

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.

*They youths
grow livery,
so gags'd
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.



RECEIVED

FACE

TWO EYES,
ONE NOSE,
ONE MOUTH.

*They you'll be
so glad
on now...*

PERCEIVED

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** 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.

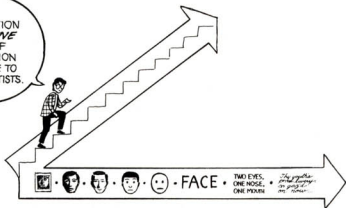
CAN THEY BE **RECONCILED?**



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?"*

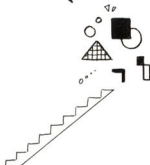


EARNING
THE REPLY
"IT *MEANS*
WHAT IT
IS!"

IN
THIS CASE--



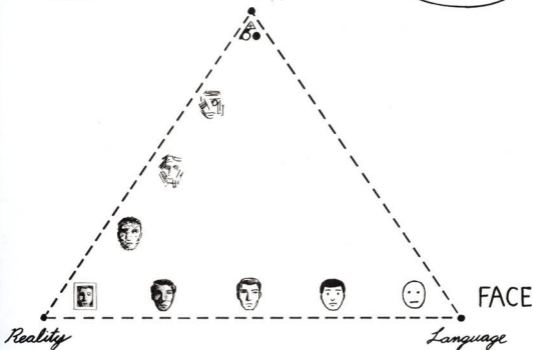
--INK
ON
PAPER.



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.

The Picture Plane



TWO EYES,
ONE NOSE,
ONE MOUTH

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 **STRAIGHT-FORWARD** 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!



MARY FLEENER at her most abstract: 2. MARISICAL • Piker. 3. DAVE MOKEAN employing one of the many styles found in his series: CAGES. 4. MARC HEMPEL's GREGORY & LARRY. 5. LARRY MARDER's Banash from TALES OF THE BEANWORLD. "Resembling" nothing ever seen (hence all the way to the right), Marder's beans walk the line from design to meaning. 7. SAUL STIENBERG. 8. PENNY MORAN VANHORN from THE LIBRARIAN. 9. LORENZO MATTOTTI in FIRES (© Editions Albin Michel S.A.) combines deeply impressionistic lighting with iconic forms and strong, design-oriented compositions. In other words, he's a hard one to place. 10. ALINE KOMINSKY-CRUMB. 11. PETER BAGGIE's Chucky-Boy from NEAT STUFF. Compare to 39. 12. KRISTINE KRYTTE. 13. REA IRVIN. THE SMYTHES © Field Newspaper Syndicate. 14. STEVE WILLIS's Morly. 15. PHIL YEH's FRANK THE UNICORN. 16. JERRY MORIARTY's "Jack Survives". Based closely on real world light and shadow, but decomposed into rough shapes. Similar effects are found in nos. 8, 18, 19, 20 and 24. 17. JEFF WONG's art for Scott Russo's JIZZ. 18. ROLF STARK's expressive RAIN. 19. SPAIN'S TRASHMAN. 20. FRANK MILLER in THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS. Batman © D.C. Comics. Batman created by Bob Kane. 21. WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEB's Wolverine MacMillan from JOURNEY. 22. DON SAMPSON's MEGATON MAN. Beginning from a

realistic anatomical base, Simpson distorts and exaggerates M.M.'s features to the brink of abstraction. 23. MICHAEL CHERKAS from SILENT INVASION. © Chelsea and Hancock. 24. RICK GEARY. 25. PETER KUPFER. 26. GARRY TRUDEAU's DOONESBURY. 27. LYNDA BARRY. 28. SAMPEI SHIRATO. 29. CHARLES BURNS's BIG BABY. 29 1/2. (Whoops) CLIFF STRETT. The character created from POLLY AND HER PALS might belong a bit lower, but Strett's art, like Fleener's often heads upward toward the wily abstract. P.A.H.P. is © Newspaper Features Syndicate, Inc. 30. SERGIO ARAQUENOS's GROO THE WANDERER. Simple, straightforward, but with a strong gestural quality that always reminds us of the hand that holds the pen (also true of 14, 28, 31, 41). 31. ROBERTA GREGORY's Botby Blotch from NAUGHTY BITS. 32. DAVID MAZZUCHELLI from BATMAN: YEAR ONE. Commissioner Gordon © D.C. Comics. 33. JOE MUNOZ from "Master Control, Master Wilcox." © Munoz and Sampayo. 34. CAROL

SWAIN. 35. CHESTER GOULD's DICK TRACY © Chicago Tribune-New York Syndicate. Inc. 36. JACK KIRBY's Darkseed. © D.C. Comics. 37. BOB BURDEN. 38. DANIEL TORRES's Rocco Vargas from TRITON. 39. PETER BAGGIE's Buddy Bradley from HATE. Compare to 11. 40. SETH. 41. MARK MARTIN. 42. JULIE DOUCEY. 43. EDWARD GOREY. 44. CRAIG RUSSELL's Mowgli from Kingling's THE JUNGLE BOOKS. Russell's characters are as finely observed and realistically based as Hal Foster's or Dave Stevens' but with an unparalleled sense of design that draws them toward the upper vertex. Lateley, Russell has been moving a bit higher and toward the right in some cases. 45. GOSKEI KOJIMA from KOZURE OKAMI

"Wail and Curb") © Koke and Kojima. 46. EDDIE CAMPBELL's ALICE. Realistic in tone, but also gestural and spontaneous. The process of drawing left hand hidden from view. 47. ALEX TOTH. Zero © ZeroProductions, Inc. Art © Walt Disney Productions © Disney. 48. WILLIE EISNER from TO THE HEART OF THE STORM. 49. DORI SEDA. 51. R. CRUMB's iconic blend of realistic and cartoonish characters, usually staying about this high but occasionally venturing upward. 52. STEVE DITKO. 53. NORMAN OSO. 54. VALENTINE'S NORMALMAN sits a bit to the right and up from his current SHADOWHAWK (whose iconic mask makes a bit harder to place). 55. ROZ CHAST. 56. JOOST SWARTZ's Anton Makassar. 57. ELZIE SEGAR's POPYE © King Features Syndicate, Inc. 58. GEORGE HERRIMAN's "Offisa Pupp" from KRAZY KAT. © International feature Service. Inc. 59. JIM WOODRING's FRANK. 60. NEAL ADAMS from X-MEN © Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. (X-Men created by Lee and Kirby). GIL KANE from ACTION COMICS © D.C. Comics, Inc. 62. MILTON CANIFF's STEVE CANYON. 63. JIM LEE. Nice Fury appearing in X-MEN. Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. 64. JOHN BYRNE. Superman © D.C. Comics, Inc. (Superman created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster). 65. JACQUES TARDI from LE DEMON DES GLACES © Dargaud Editeur. 66. JEAN-CLAUDE MEZIERES. Laureline from the VALERIAN series. © Dargaud Editeur. 67. BILL GRIFFITH's ZIPPY THE PINHEAD. 68. JOE MATT. 69. KYLE BAKER from WHY I HATE SATURDN. TRINA ROBBINS.

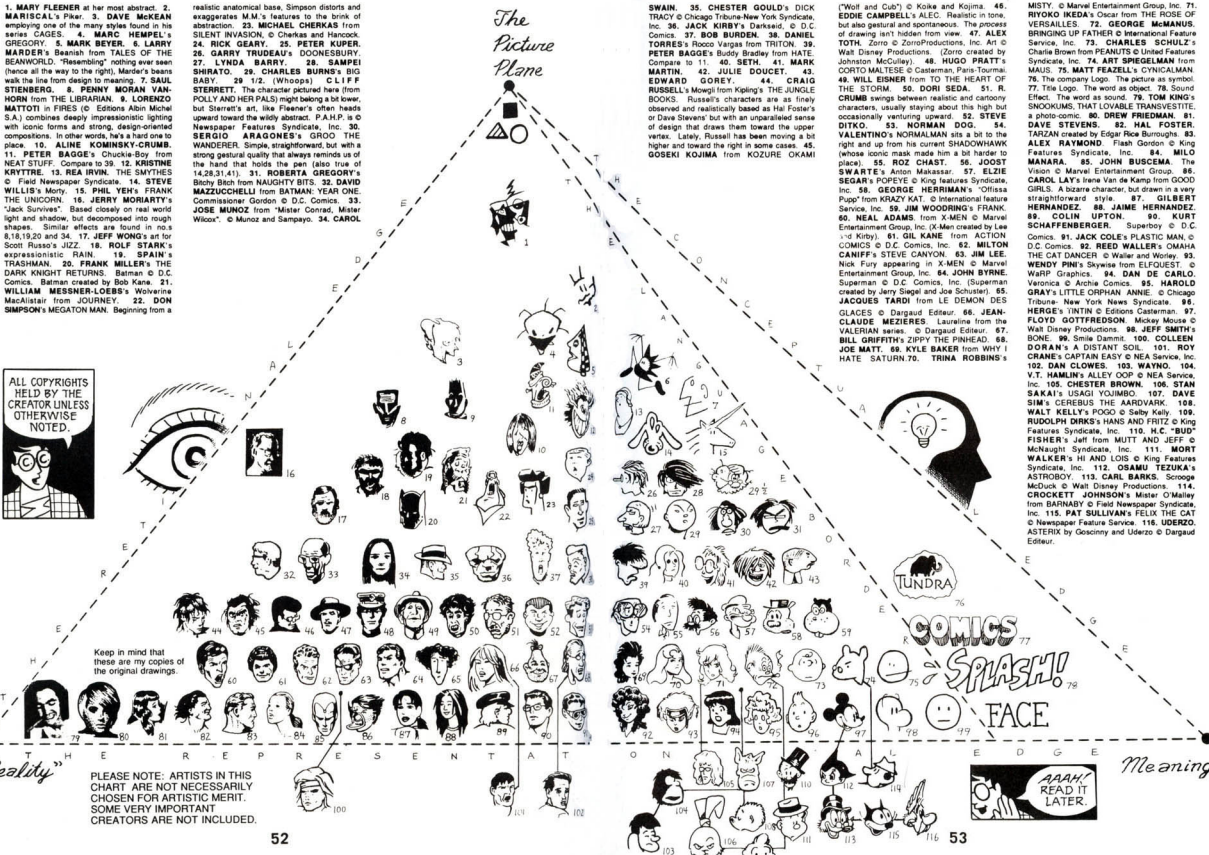
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ALL COPYRIGHTS HELD BY THE CREATOR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Keep in mind that these are my copies of the original 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.



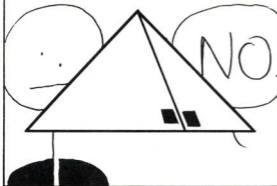
EACH CREATOR EMPLOYS A *RANGE* OF STYLES, THOUGH, AND MANY OCCUPY *SEVERAL* PLACES ON THE CHART DURING A GIVEN PROJECT.



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 HERGE AND OTHERS WHO CONTRAST *ICONIC* CHARACTERS WITH *REALISTIC* BACKGROUNDS.



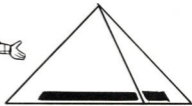
Sound on!

O.K...Let's roll!

Vision on!



HERGE STRETCHES NEARLY FROM *LEFT* TO *RIGHT*-- FROM *REALISM* TO *CARTOONING*-- BUT VENTURES VERY LITTLE INTO THE *LIPPER* WORLD OF *NON-ICONIC* ABSTRACTION.



MARY FLEENER, ON THE OTHER HAND, VARIES 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 TELLIN' WHAT'LL HAPPEN!!

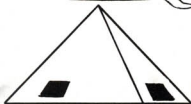


ART: JACK KIRBY AND JOE SINNOTT (MY FACSIMILE)
SCRIPT: STAN LEE.

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.



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.

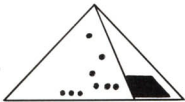
WAY YOU TALK, NICHOLAS, FOLKS EXPECT HIM TO START NUKIN' MAMA RUSSIA ANY MOMENT.



ART: JIM LEE AND SCOTT WILLIAMS (FACSIMILE)
SCRIPT: CHRIS CLAREMONT.



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.

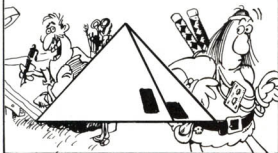


IRONIC THAT THE TWO BASTIONS OF *CARTOONY* ART ARE *UNDERGROUND* AND *CHILDREN'S* COMICS!

PRETTY FAR APART AS GENRES GO!



SOME ARTISTS, SUCH AS THE IRREPRESSIBLE *SERGIO ARAGONES*, 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 ATTRACTED 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*.*

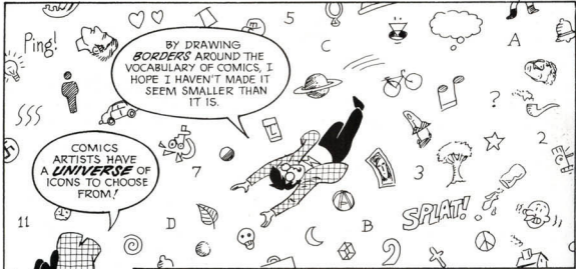


THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF VISUAL ARTS BELONGS IN THIS SPACE. MONET SET UP HIS EASEL ALONG THE *LEFT FACE*, MONDRIAN AT THE *TOP*, REMBRANDT *LOWER LEFT*, MATISSE RIGHT ABOVE WHERE I'M STANDING.

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"

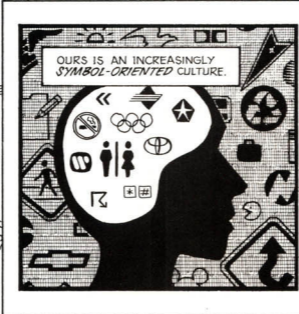


BY DRAWING **BORDERS** AROUND THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS, I HOPE I HAVEN'T MADE IT SEEM SMALLER THAN IT IS.

COMICS ARTISTS HAVE A **UNIVERSE** OF ICONS TO CHOOSE FROM!



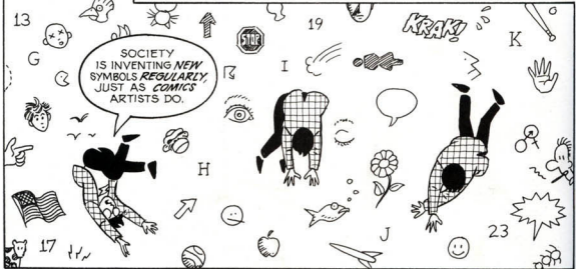
AND IT'S EXPANDING ALL THE TIME!



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.

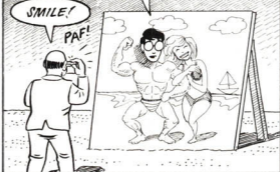
THERE IS NO LIFE HERE EXCEPT THAT WHICH YOU GIVE TO IT.

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

IT'S BEEN OVER TWENTY YEARS SINCE MCLUHAN 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.

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

SMILE!
PAF!



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.

