

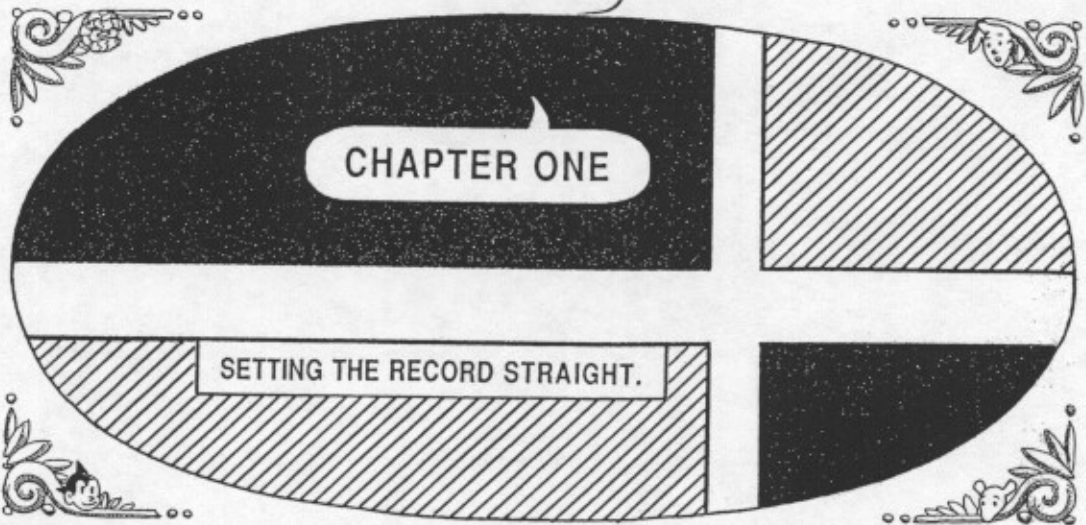


INTRODUCTION

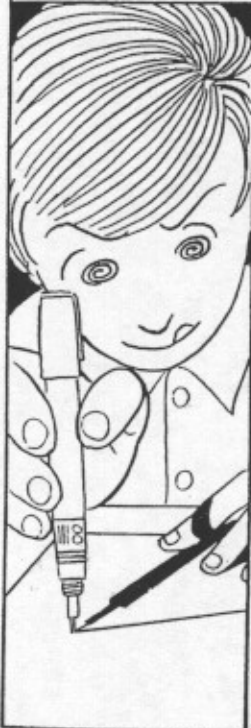


From Understanding Comics
Scott McCloud

McCloud Understanding Comics



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 BOOKS?! HA! HA!

BUT IT'S-- BUH...



SURE, I REALIZED THAT COMIC BOOKS WERE USUALLY **CRUDE, POORLY-DRAWN, SEMILITERATE, CHEAP DISPOSABLE KIDDIE 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.**



SEE PAGE 216 FOR COPYRIGHT INFORMATION.



--WHILE NOT BEING SO BROAD AS TO INCLUDE ANYTHING WHICH IS CLEARLY NOT COMICS.



"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.



BUT WHAT--

--IS--

--COMICS?




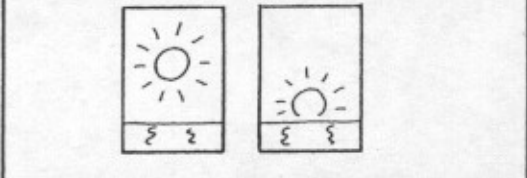



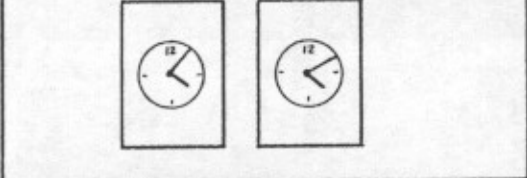

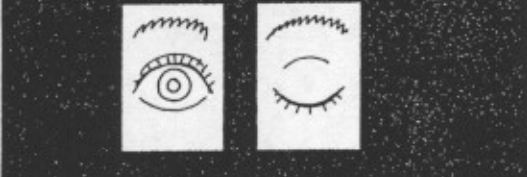


MASTER COMICS ARTIST *WILL EISNER* USES THE TERM **SEQUENTIAL ART** WHEN DESCRIBING COMICS.

TAKEN *INDIVIDUALLY*, THE PICTURES BELOW ARE MERELY *THAT--PICTURES*.

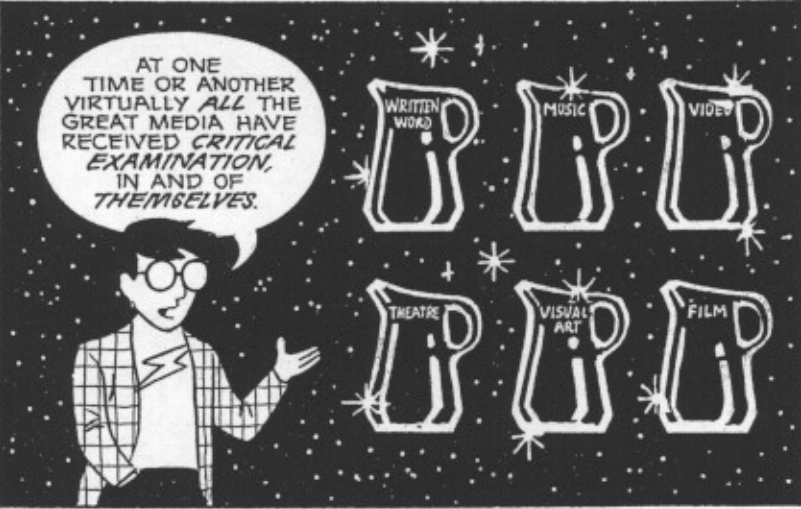
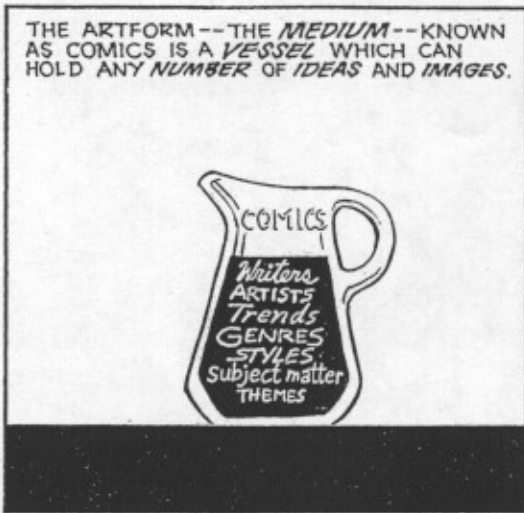
HOWEVER, WHEN PART OF A **SEQUENCE**, EVEN A SEQUENCE OF ONLY **TWO**, THE ART OF THE **IMAGE** IS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING MORE: **THE ART OF COMICS!**

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

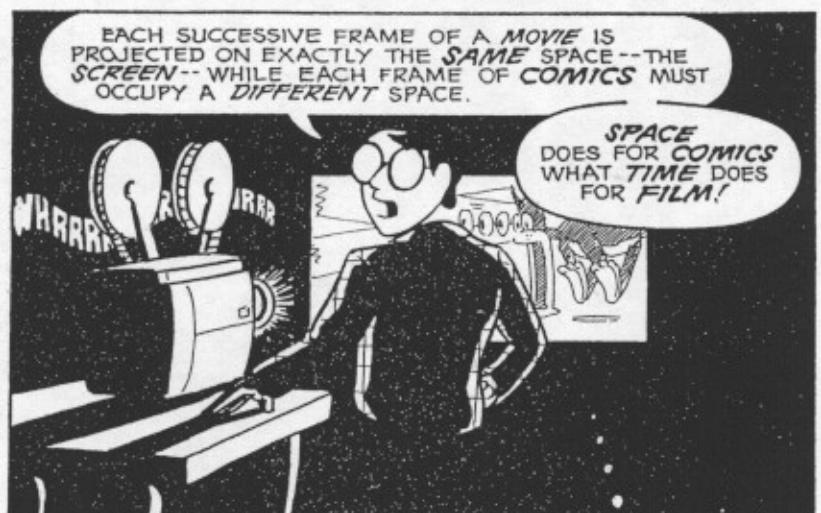
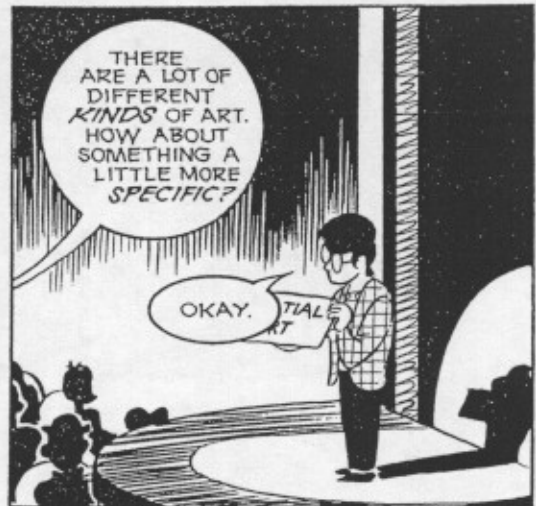
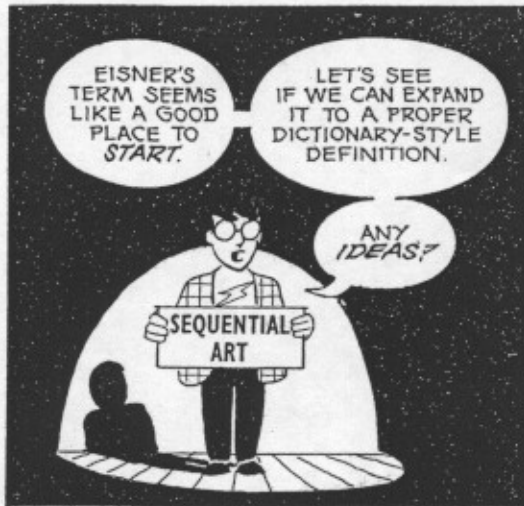
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	

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

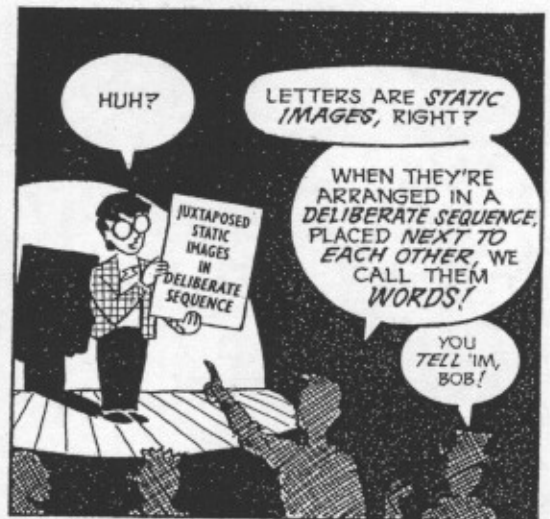
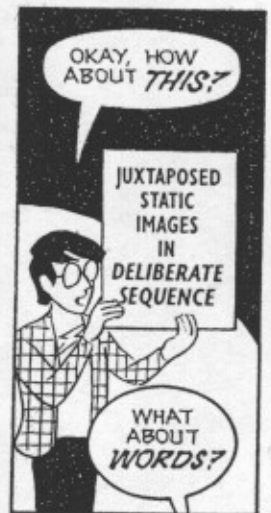
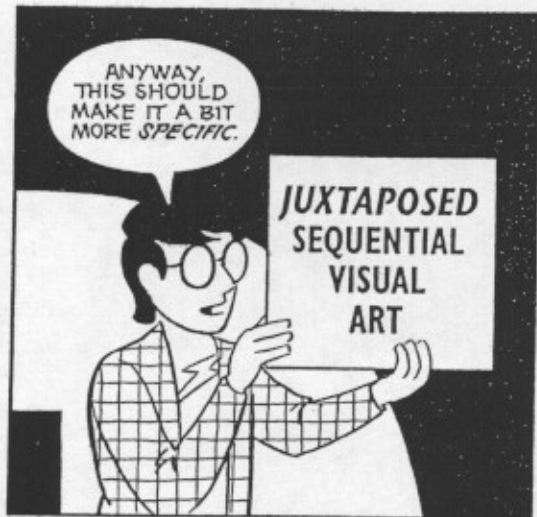
BUT TO **DEFINE** COMICS, WE MUST FIRST DO A LITTLE **AESTHETIC SURGERY** AND SEPARATE **FORM** FROM **CONTENT!**

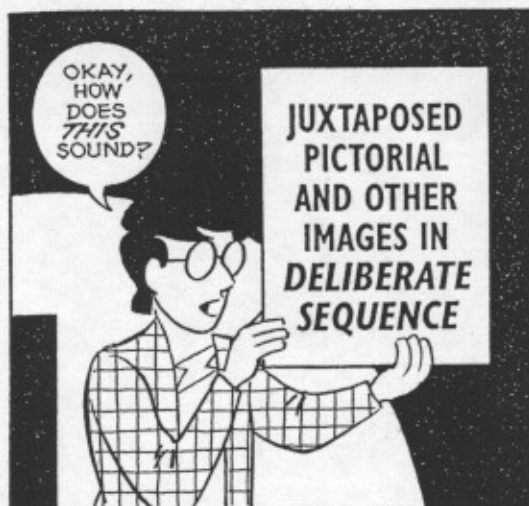


* EISNER'S OWN COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART BEING A HAPPY EXCEPTION.



*JUXTAPOSED= ADJACENT, SIDE-BY-SIDE. GREAT ART SCHOOL WORD.

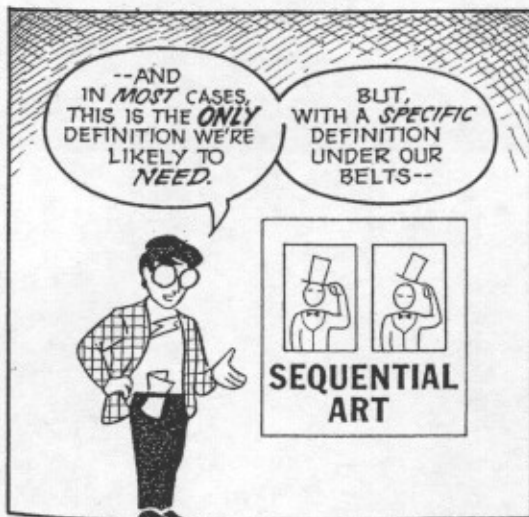


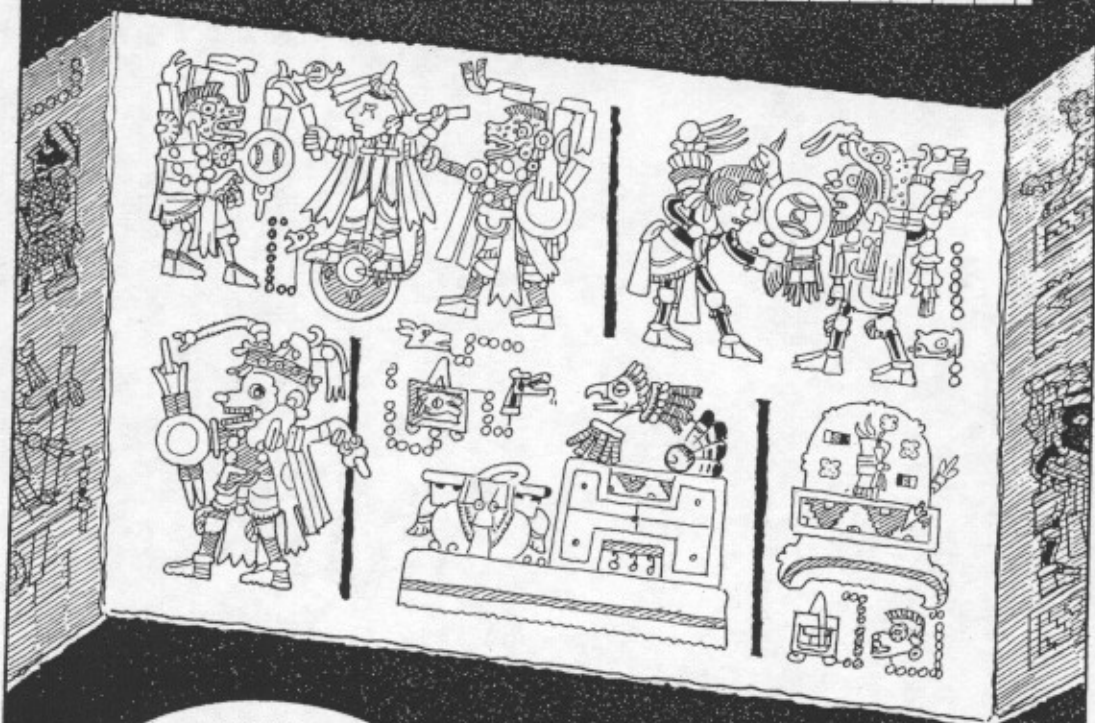
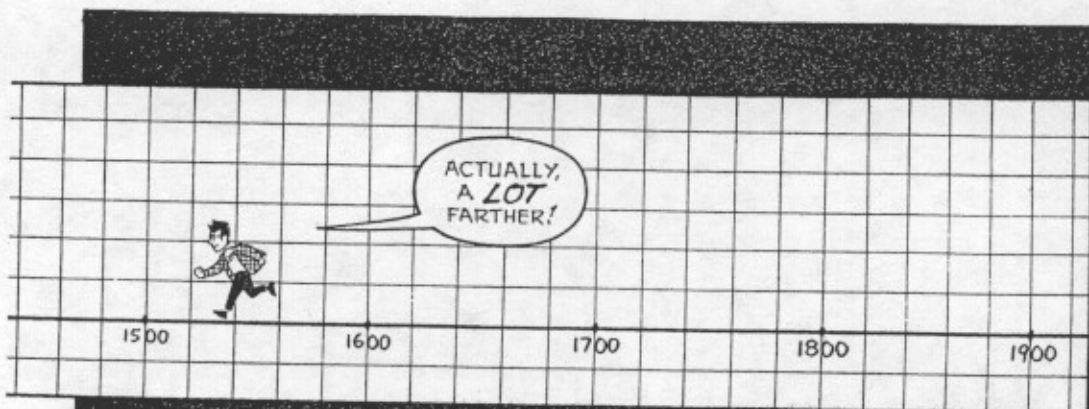


adv.

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. **2.** Superheroes in bright, colorful costumes, fighting dastardly villains who want to conquer the world, in violent, sensational, pulse-pounding action sequences! **3.** Cute, cuddly bunnies, mice and roly-poly bears, dancing to and fro. Hippy-hop, hippy-hop. **4.** Concept of our Nation's youth.

com-ing (kum'ing) adj.

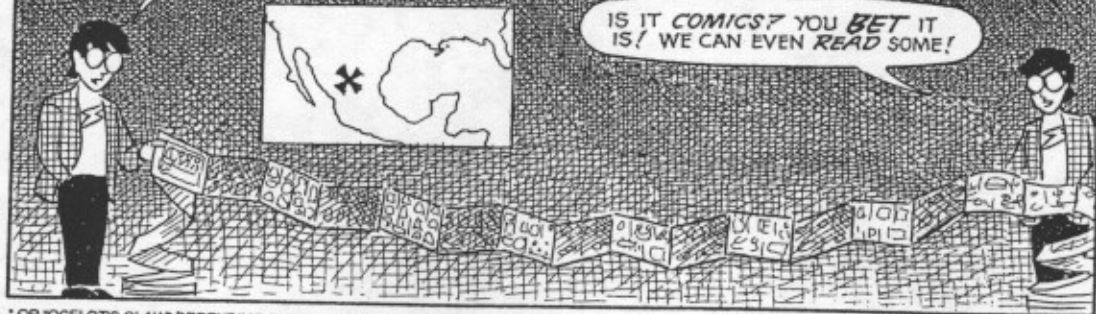




HERE'S JUST A PIECE OF THE EPIC STORY CONTAINED IN A PRE-COLUMBIAN PICTURE MANUSCRIPT "DISCOVERED" BY CORTÉS AROUND 1519.

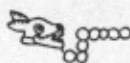
THIS 36-FOOT LONG, BRIGHTLY-COLORED, PAINTED SCREENFOLD TELLS OF THE GREAT MILITARY AND POLITICAL HERO 8-DEER "TIGER'S-CLAW."*

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 ARCHAEOLOGIST ALFONSO CASO.

FIRST, WE SEPARATE WORDS FROM PICTURES.



8-DEER
"TIGER'S
CLAW"

(A NAME)



11 HOUSE 12 MONKEY

(A DATE)

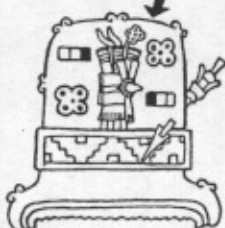


GOD
XIPE'S
BUNDLE

(GLYPH FOR PLACE WHOSE
NAME WE DON'T KNOW.)

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

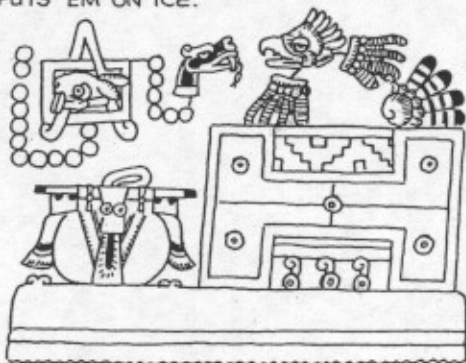
THE YEAR: 1049 AD
THE DATE: MAY 3*
THE PLACE: *HERE!*



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.

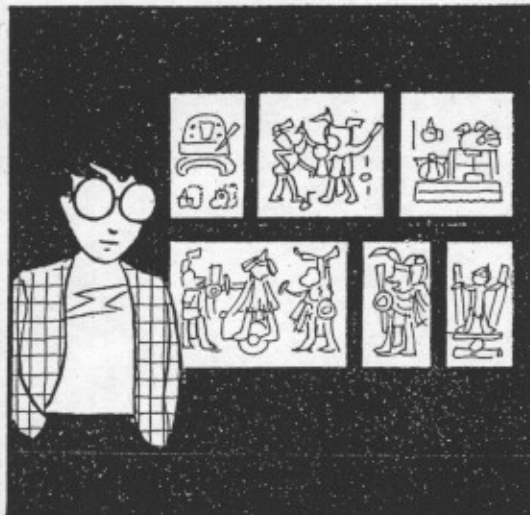


(I'M TAKING THE TRANSLATOR'S WORD ON THIS ONE.)

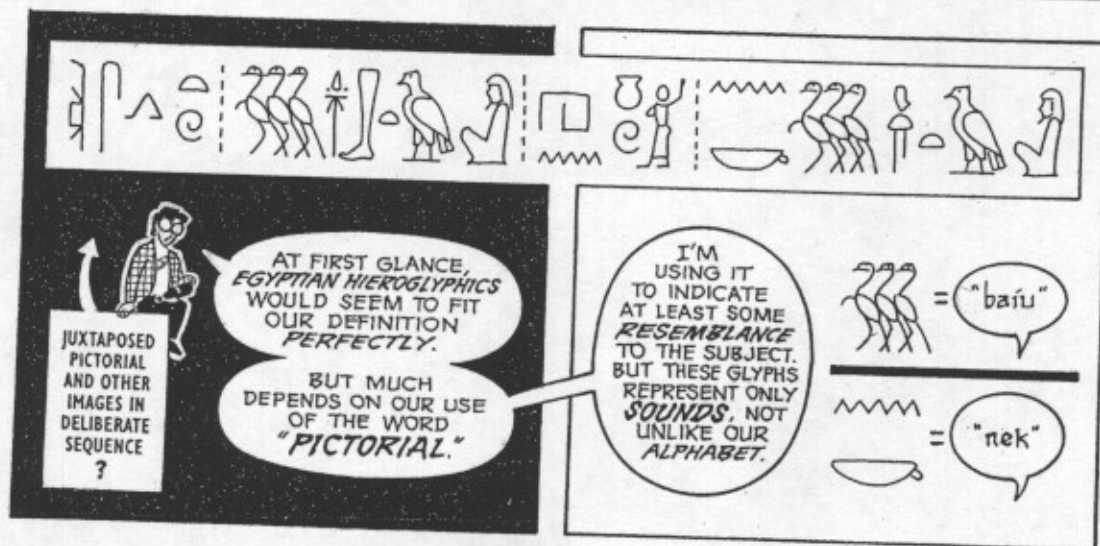
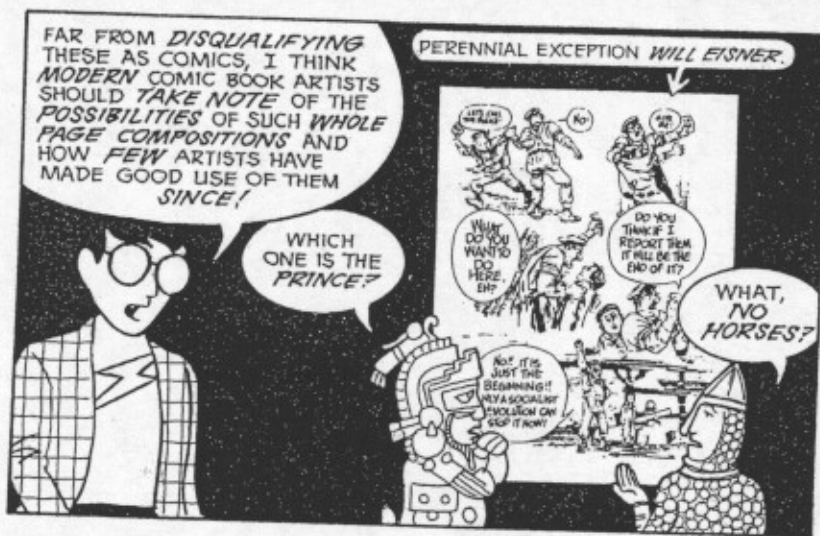
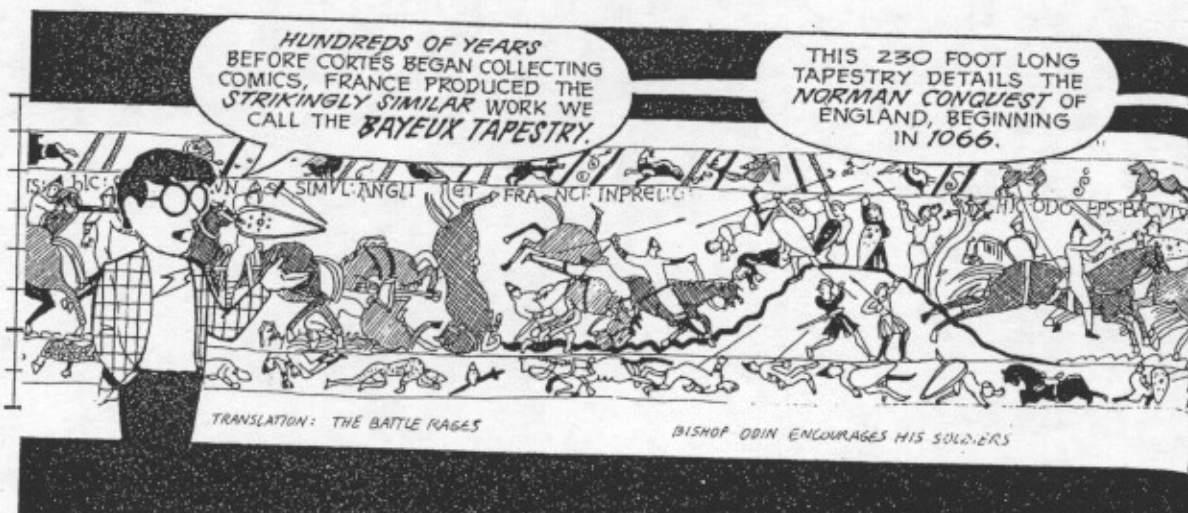
THE FOLLOWING YEAR, 8-DEER AND
(PROBABLY) HIS BROTHER, DISGUISED
AS *TIGERS*, ENGAGE IN SACRIFICIAL
GLADIATORIAL COMBAT WITH THE PRINCE,
10-DOG, AND ANOTHER WARRIOR DISGUISED
AS *DEATH*.



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"



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

THIS THEIR *REAL* DESCENDENT IS *THE WRITTEN WORD* AND NOT COMICS.

"ses tu bafu abta, hennu-nek bafu amenta"

"FOLLOW THEE, THE SOULS OF THE EAST. PRAISE THEE, THE SOULS OF THE WEST."

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!



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'LL GLADLY ADMIT THAT I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE OR WHEN COMICS ORIGINATED. LET OTHERS WRESTLE WITH THAT ONE.

? B.C. ? A.D.



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 GOUSED OUT BY FUTURE GENERATIONS OF LEADERS

ART RESTORED FOR CLARITY - OTHERWISE UNCHANGED.



WITH THE INVENTION OF PRINTING* THE ART-FORM WHICH HAD BEEN A DIVERSION OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL NOW COULD BE ENJOYED BY EVERYONE!



POPULAR TASTES HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH IN FIVE CENTURIES. CHECK OUT "THE TORTURES OF SAINT ERASMUS," CIRCA 1460. WORD HAS IT THIS GUY WAS A VERY POPULAR CHARACTER.



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.

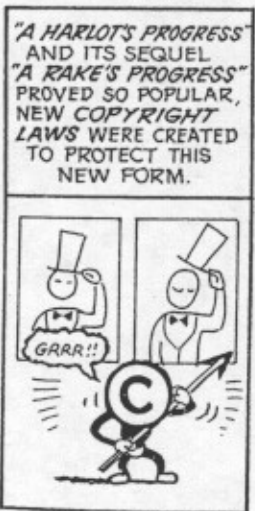
DESPITE THE LOW "PANEL-COUNT" THESE LUSH, RENDERED PICTURES TELL A STORY RICH IN DETAIL AND MOTIVATED BY STRONG SOCIAL CONCERNS.

* MAYBE I SHOULDN'T SAY "INVENT". EUROPEANS WERE A BIT LATE IN DISCOVERING PRINTING.

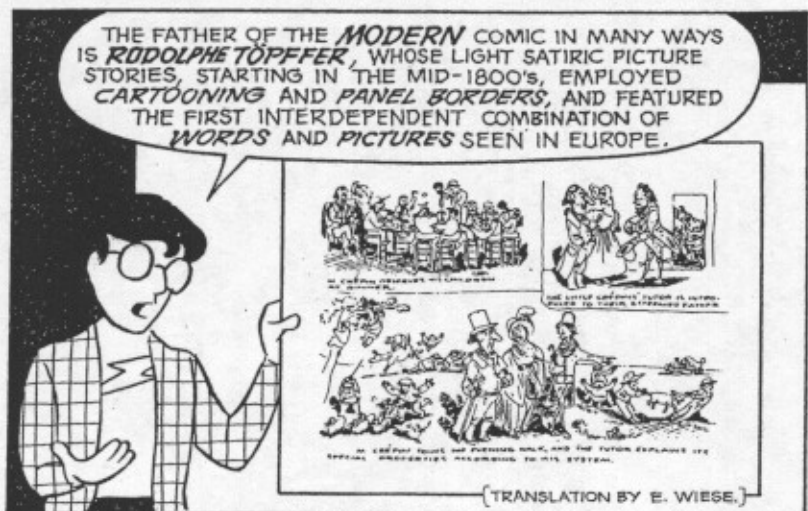


HOGARTH'S STORIES WERE FIRST EXHIBITED AS A SERIES OF *PAINTINGS* AND LATER SOLD AS A PORTFOLIO OF *ENGRAVINGS*.

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.

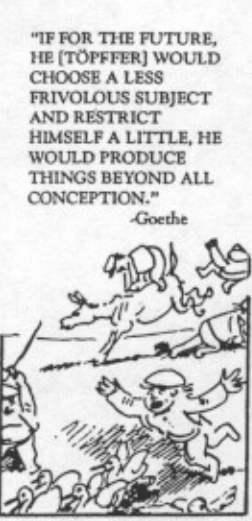


THE FATHER OF THE *MODERN* COMIC IN MANY WAYS IS *RODOLPHE TÖPFFER*, WHOSE LIGHT SATIRIC PICTURE STORIES, STARTING IN THE MID-1800'S, EMPLOYED *CARTOONING* AND *PANEL BORDERS*, AND FEATURED THE FIRST INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATION OF *WORDS* AND *PICTURES* SEEN IN EUROPE.

(TRANSLATION BY E. WIESE.)



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

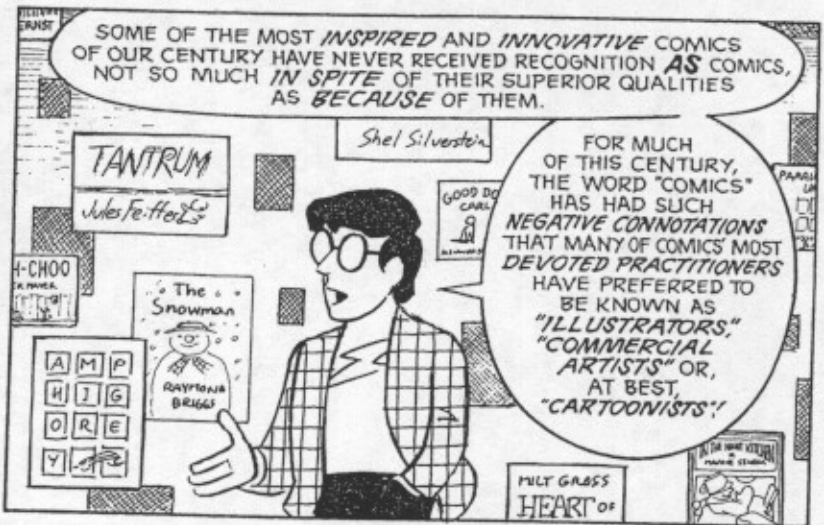
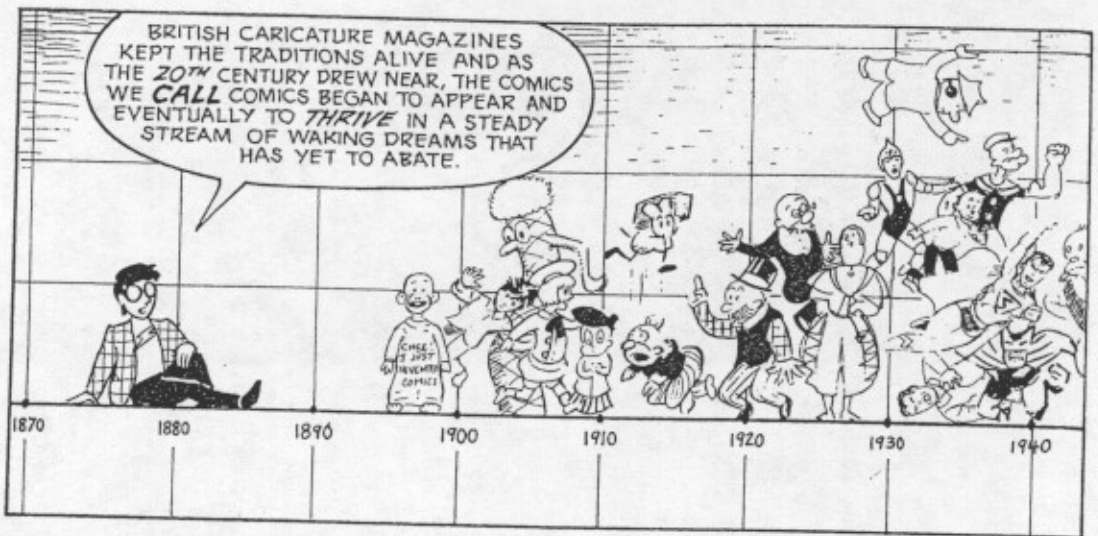


EVEN SO, TÖPFFER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE *UNDERSTANDING* OF COMICS IS CONSIDERABLE, IF ONLY FOR HIS REALIZATION THAT HE WHO WAS NEITHER ARTIST NOR WRITER--



-- HAD CREATED AND MASTERED A FORM WHICH WAS AT ONCE *BOTH* AND *NEITHER*.

A LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN.





ARTISTS LIKE WARD AND BELGIAN FRANK 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.



FROM FRANK MASEREEL'S *PASSIONATE JOURNEY*, 1919.

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!



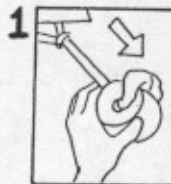
IF WE DON'T EXCLUDE *PHOTOGRAPHY* FROM OUR DEFINITION, THEN HALF OF AMERICA HAS BEEN IN COMICS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.



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



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.

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.

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



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



"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!**

HI, BOGEY.

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.

"Mommy, why ain't Juxtaposed?"

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!

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**.

1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030 2040

AND **THIS** TIME, THE SECRET IS NOT IN WHAT THE DEFINITION **SAYS** BUT IN WHAT IT **DOESN'T** SAY!

SEQUENTIAL ART

DADA

BIOGRAPHY HORROR

ROMANCE SURREALISM

BLANK VERSE

EPIC POETRY

SOCIAL ALLEGORY

ADAPTATIONS

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

SATIRE

HISTORICAL FICTION

FOLK TALES

EROTICA

MYSTERY

RELIGIOUS TOPICS

SEQUENTIAL ART

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.

SEQUENTIAL ART

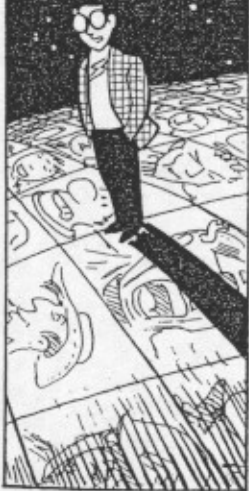
THERE IS NO MENTION OF *BLACK LINES* AND *FLAT COLORED INK*. NO CALLS FOR *EXAGGERATED ANATOMY* OR FOR *REPRESENTATIONAL ART* OF ANY KIND.

NO *SCHOOLS OF ART* ARE BANISHED BY OUR DEFINITION, NO *PHILOSOPHIES*, NO *MOVEMENTS*, NO *WAYS OF SEEING* ARE OUT OF BOUNDS!

SEQUENTIAL ART

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**.

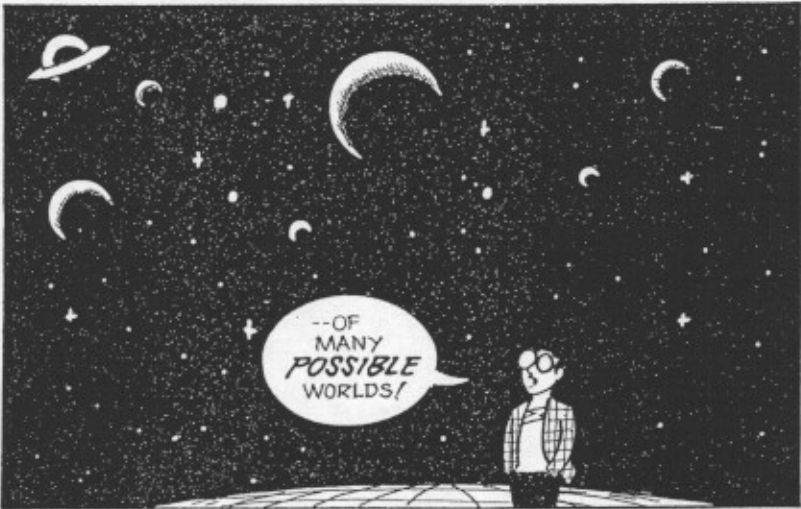
THERE ARE SO MANY COMICS IN PRINT TODAY THAT IT WOULD TAKE AN **ARMY** OF READERS TO STUDY THEM ALL.



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 **ON-GOING 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!**