

# CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT.



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!**



IF PEOPLE FAILED TO **UNDERSTAND** COMICS, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY DEFINED WHAT COMICS COULD BE **TOO NARROWLY!**





--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!**



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*.



≡GLUG≡  
≡GLUG≡



≡GAAK≡  
≡WHEEEZZ≡  
≡KAF! KAF!≡  
GLUGH-GGH...



-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*.

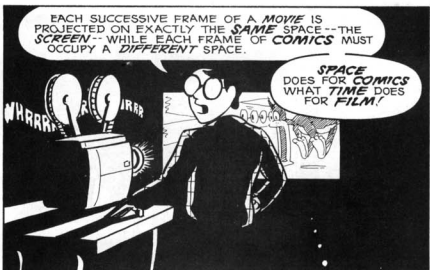
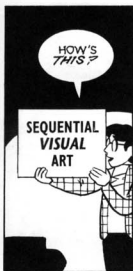
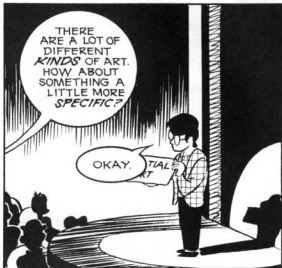
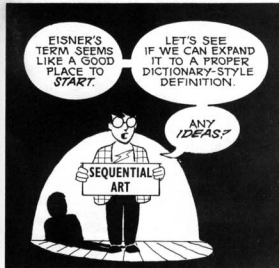


BUT FOR *COMICS*, THIS ATTENTION HAS BEEN *RARE*.\*

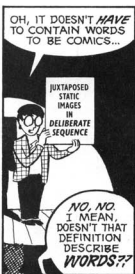
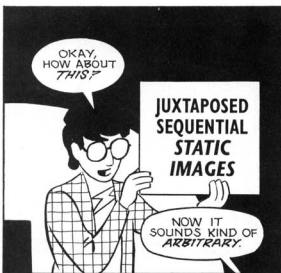
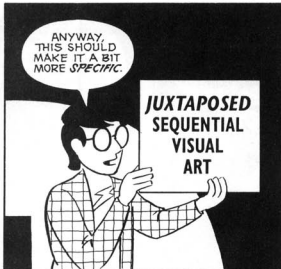
LET'S SEE IF WE CAN HELP *RECTIFY* THE SITUATION.

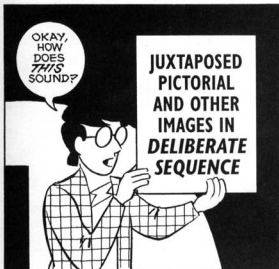


\* EISNER'S OWN COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART BEING A HAPPY EXCEPTION.

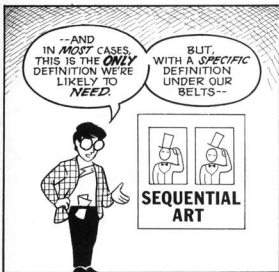


\*JUXTAPOSED= ADJACENT, SIDE-BY-SIDE.  
GREAT ART SCHOOL WORD.

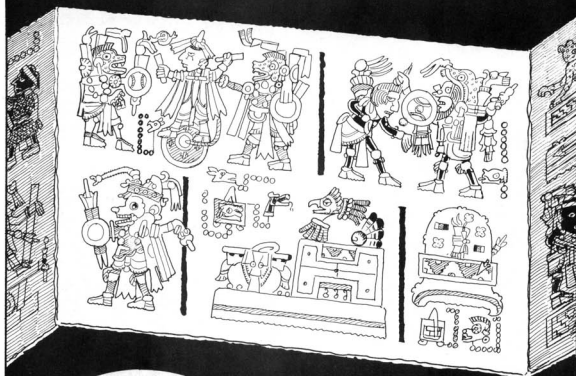
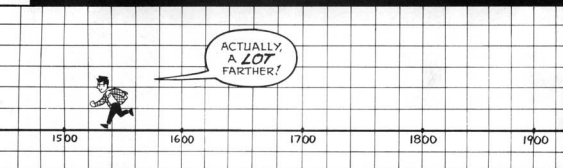




**adv.**  
**com-ics** (kom'iks)**n.** plural in form, used with a singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. **2.** Superheroes in bright colorful costumes, fighting dastardly 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 end for Hippy Hop, Hippy Hop. **4.** Corruption of our Nation's youth.  
**com-ing** (kum'ing) **adv.**



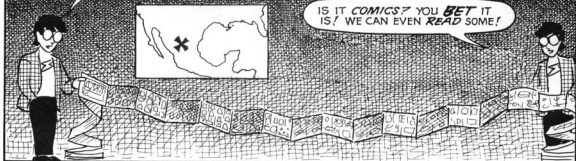




HERE'S  
JUST A PIECE OF THE  
EPIC STORY CONTAINED  
IN A PRE-COLUMBIAN  
PICTURE MANUSCRIPT  
"DISCOVERED" BY CORTÉS  
AROUND 1519.

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<sup>rd</sup>

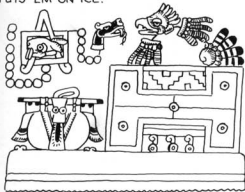
THE PLACE: *HERE!*



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

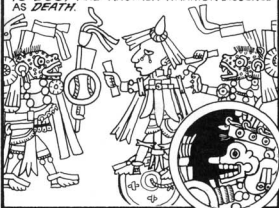


8-DEER ALSO CAPTURES THE PRINCE'S OLDER  
BROTHERS, 10-DOG "EAGLE COPAL BURNING"  
AND 6-HOUSE "ROW OF FLINT KNIVES" AND  
PUTS 'EM ON ICE.

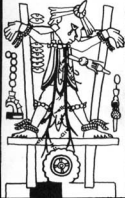


(I'M TAKING THE TRANSLATOR'S WORD ON THIS ONE.)

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"

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 RAGES

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 FISHER**



WHICH ONE IS THE **PRINCE?**

WHAT, **NO HORSES?**

FINDING COMICS BEYOND OUR OWN **MILLENNIUM** IS A BIT **TRICKIER**.



900 1100 1200



JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE?

AT FIRST GLANCE, **EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS** 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.



= "baü"



= "nek"

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

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

"ses lu baü abta, hiennu-nek baü 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.



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.



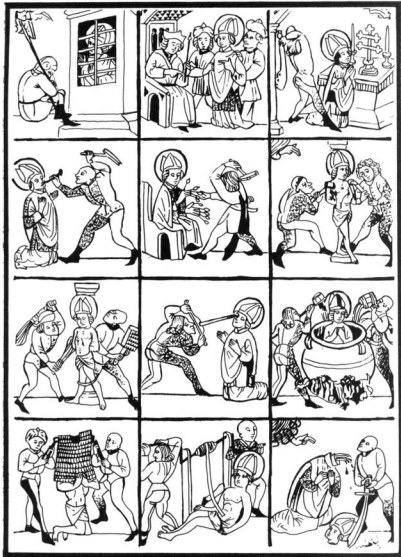
BUT THERE IS **ONE** EVENT WHICH LOOMS AS LARGE IN **COMICS** HISTORY AS IT DOES IN THE HISTORY OF THE **WRITTEN WORD**.



THE **INVENTION OF PRINTING**.



\*FACE GOUGED 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!*



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*.

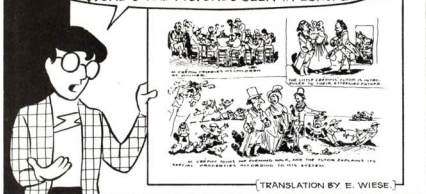
BOTH THE PAINTINGS AND ENGRAVINGS WERE DESIGNED TO BE VIEWED *SIDE-BY-SIDE* --IN SEQUENCE!



"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 *RUDOLPHE 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--

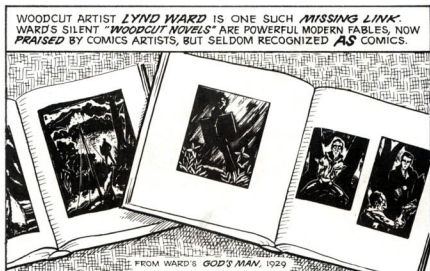
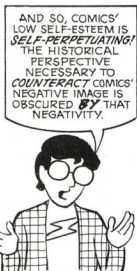
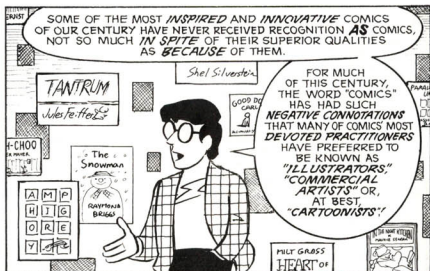
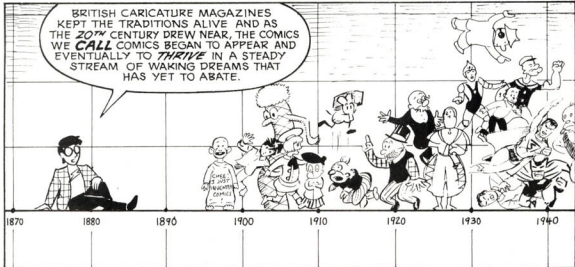


-- HAD CREATED AND MASTERED A FORM WHICH WAS AT ONCE *BOTH* AND *NEITHER*.



A LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN.







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 20<sup>TH</sup> 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!



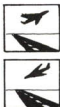
IF WE DON'T EXCLUDE **PHOTOGRAPHY** FROM OUR DEFINITION, THEN HALF OF **AMERICA** HAS BEEN IN COMICS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.



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--



THANKS TO MATT FELDZELL FOR THE SUBJECTIONS.

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**

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!



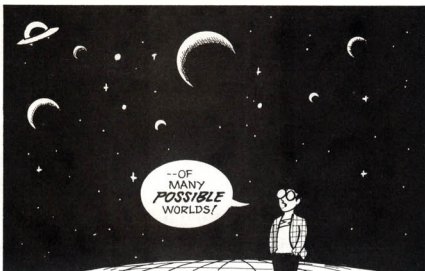


THOSE OF YOU WHO **MAKE** COMICS FOR A LIVING -- OR WOULD **LIKE** TO, SOMEDAY -- PROBABLY KNOW THAT KEEPING UP WITH ALL THE **ADVANCES** IN TODAY'S COMICS IS A **FULL-TIME JOB**.

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** --



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!**

