



UNDERSTANDING

COMICS

THE INVISIBLE ART

SCOTT MCCLOUD

**"A REMARKABLE NEW BAEDEKER OF THE TOONS."
—GARRY TRUDEAU, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW**



INTRODUCTION



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?



CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT.



WHEN I WAS A
LITTLE KID
I KNEW
EXACTLY
WHAT COMICS
WERE.



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! BOOKS? HA! HA!

BUT IT-- 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!

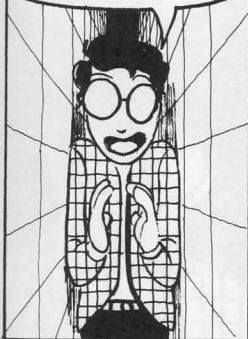


THE **PROBLEM** WAS THAT FOR MOST **PEOPLE**, THAT WAS WHAT "COMIC BOOK" **MEANT!**

DON'T GIMME THAT **COMIC BOOK** TALK, **BARNEY!**

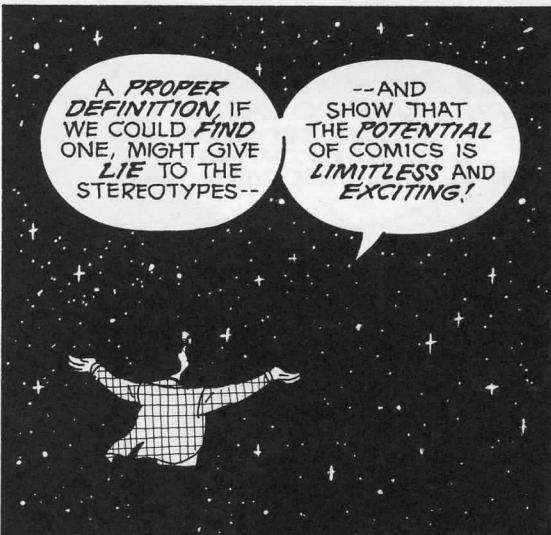


IF PEOPLE FAILED TO **UNDERSTAND** COMICS, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY DEFINED WHAT COMICS COULD BE **TOO NARROWLY!**



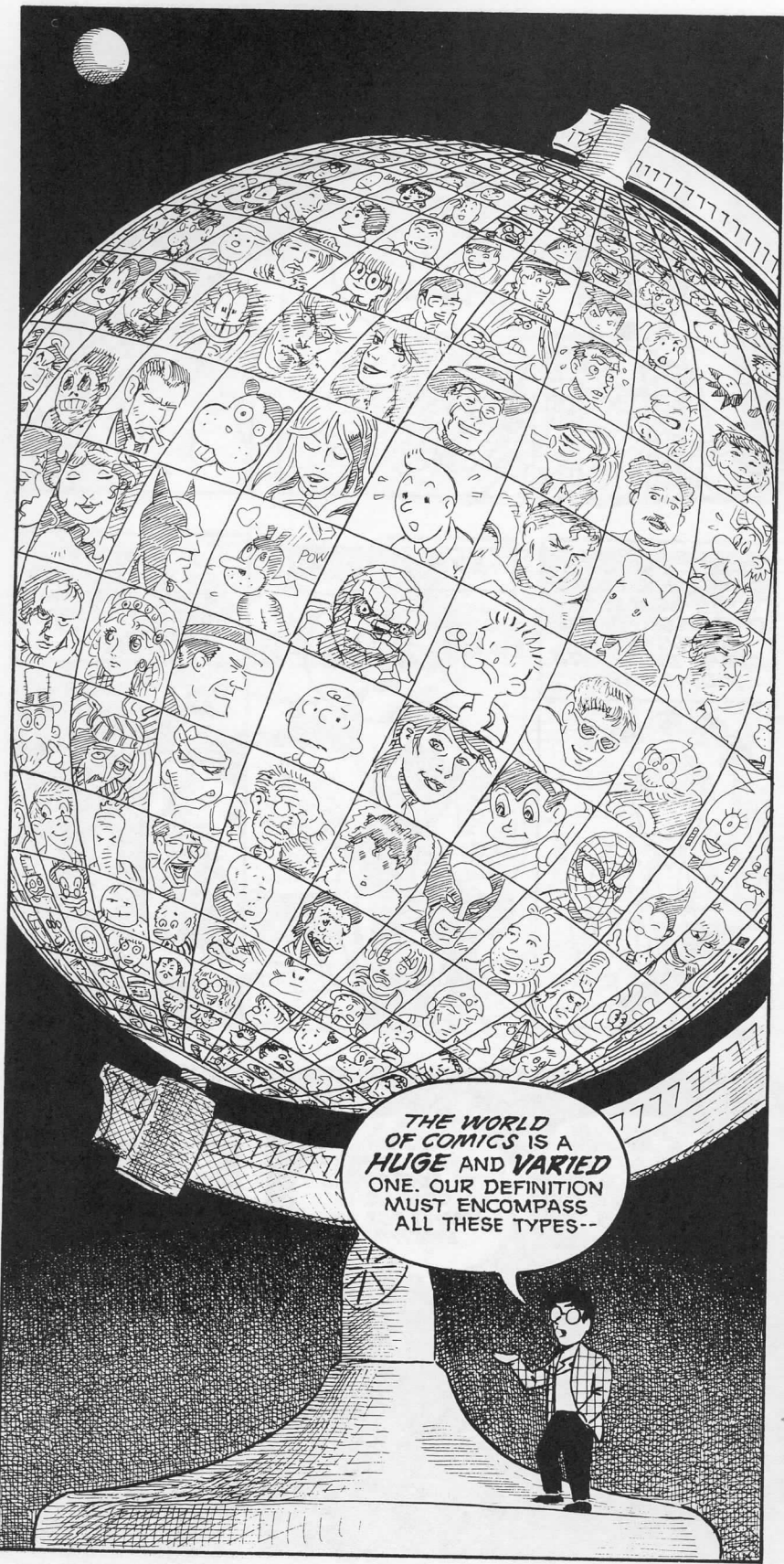
A **PROPER DEFINITION**, IF WE COULD **FIND** ONE, MIGHT GIVE **LIE** TO THE STEREOTYPES--

--AND SHOW THAT THE **POTENTIAL** OF COMICS IS **LIMITLESS** AND **EXCITING!**



THIS IS WHERE OUR JOURNEY **BEGINS.**





--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?

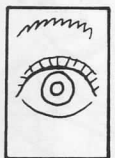
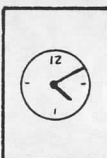
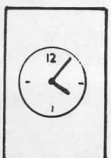
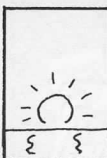
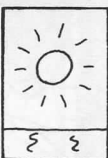
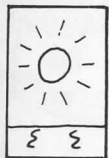


MASTER COMICS ARTIST *WILL EISNER* USES THE TERM **SEQUENTIAL ART** WHEN DESCRIBING COMICS.

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 *MESSANGER*.



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

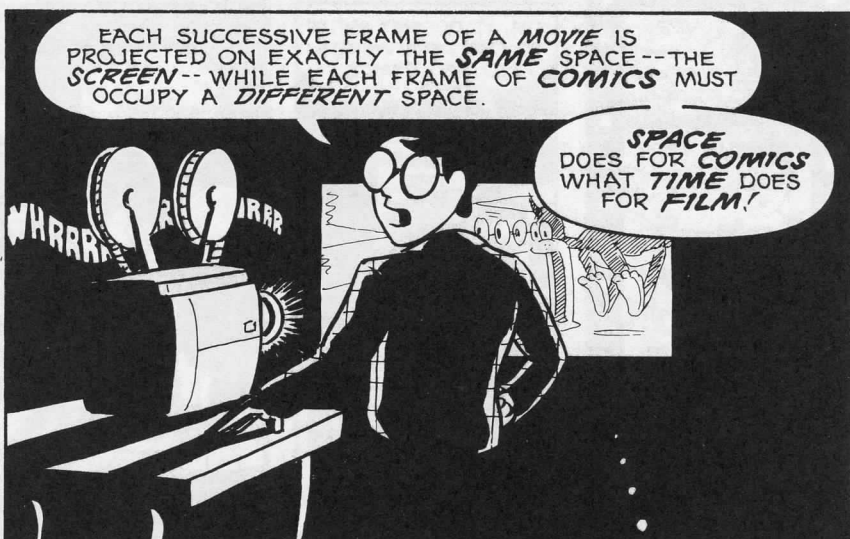
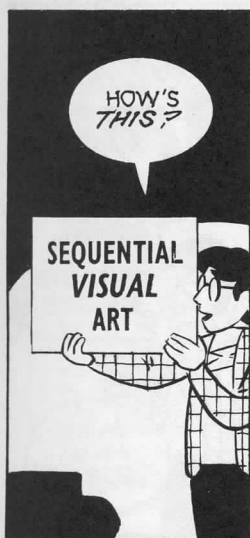
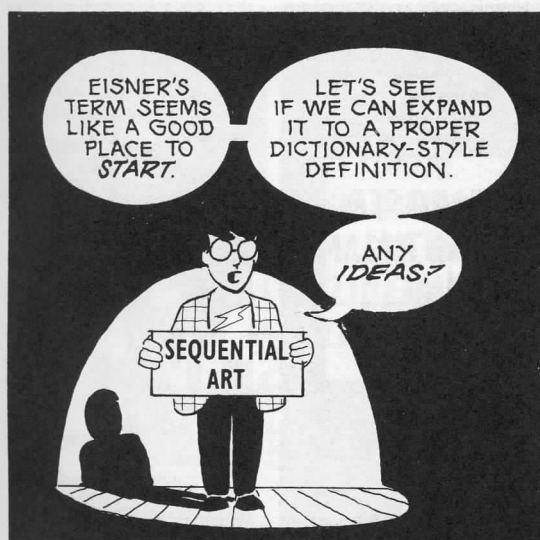


BUT FOR *COMICS*, THIS ATTENTION HAS BEEN *RARE*.*

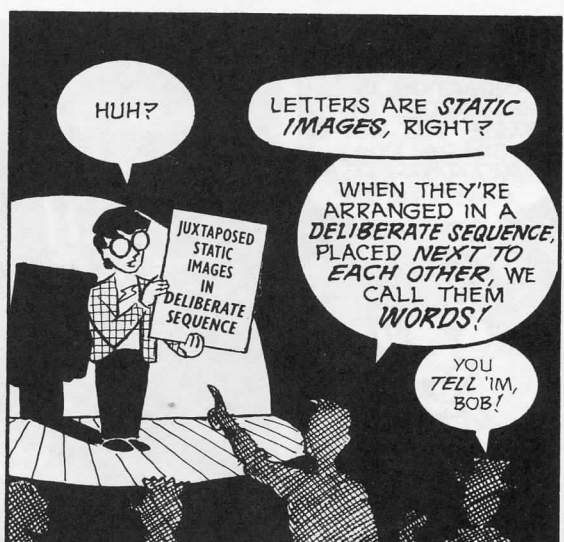
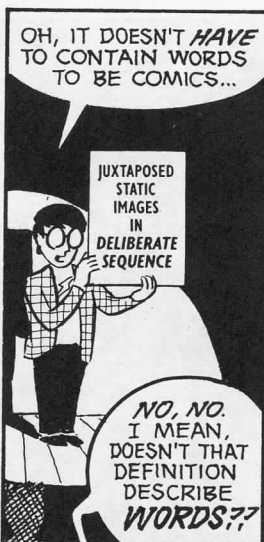
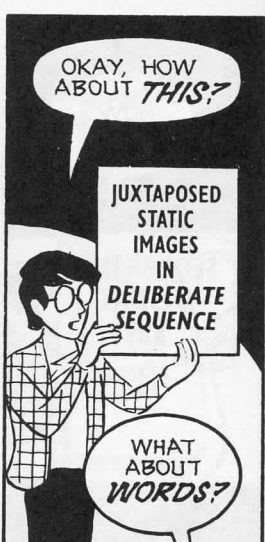
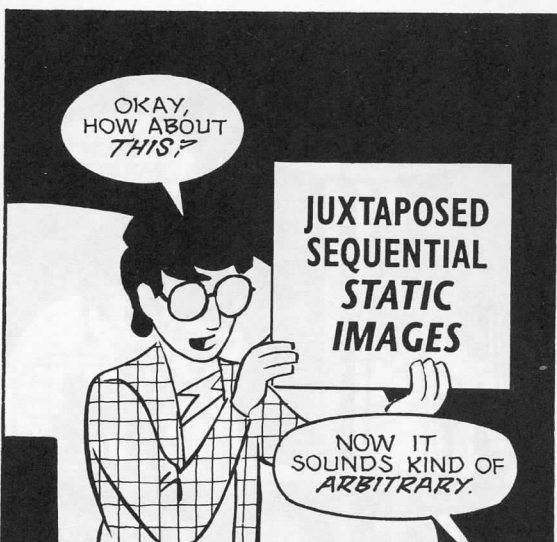
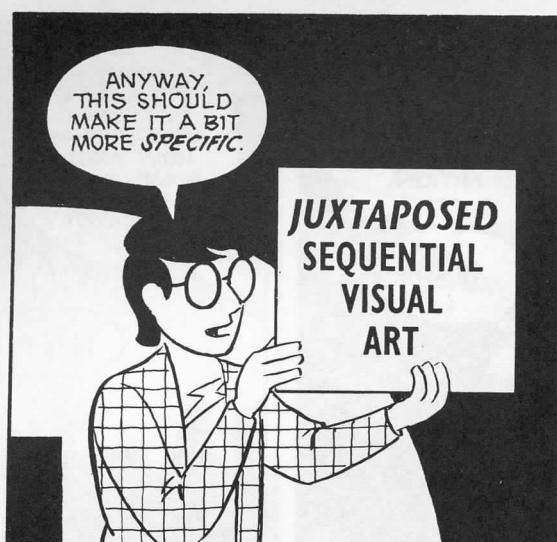
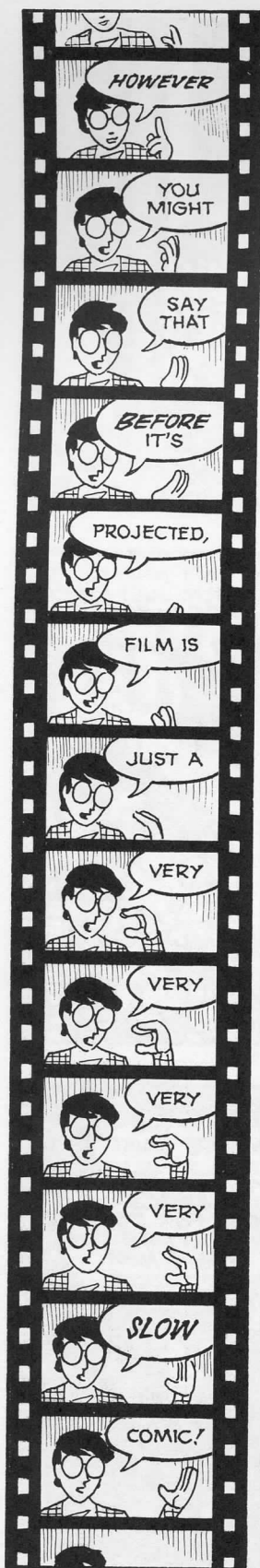
LET'S SEE IF WE CAN HELP *RECTIFY* THE SITUATION.

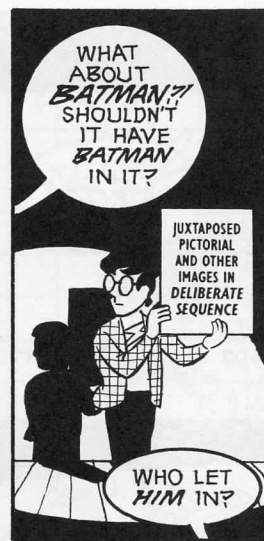
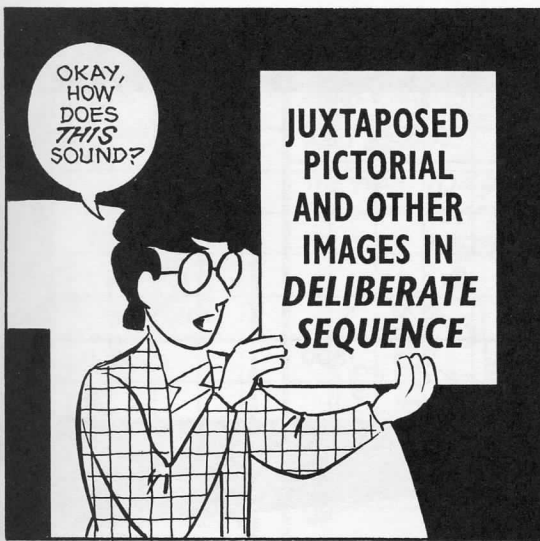


*EISNER'S OWN COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART BEING A HAPPY EXCEPTION.



*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, buddy bunnies, mice and rascally bears, dancing to and fro Hippy Hop, Hippy Hop. **4.** Corruptor of our Nation's youth. **com-ing** (kum'ing) **adv.**

