

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!**



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-- 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!

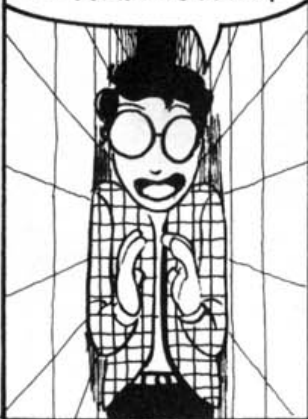


THE **PROBLEM** WAS THAT FOR **MOST PEOPLE**, THAT WAS WHAT "COMIC BOOK" **MEANT!**

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?

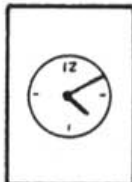
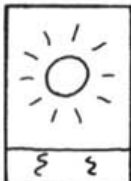
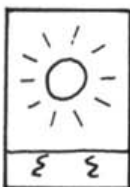


MASTER COMICS ARTIST *WILL EISNER* USES THE TERM **SEQUENTIAL ART** WHEN DESCRIBING COMICS.

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
WHEEEZ
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*.

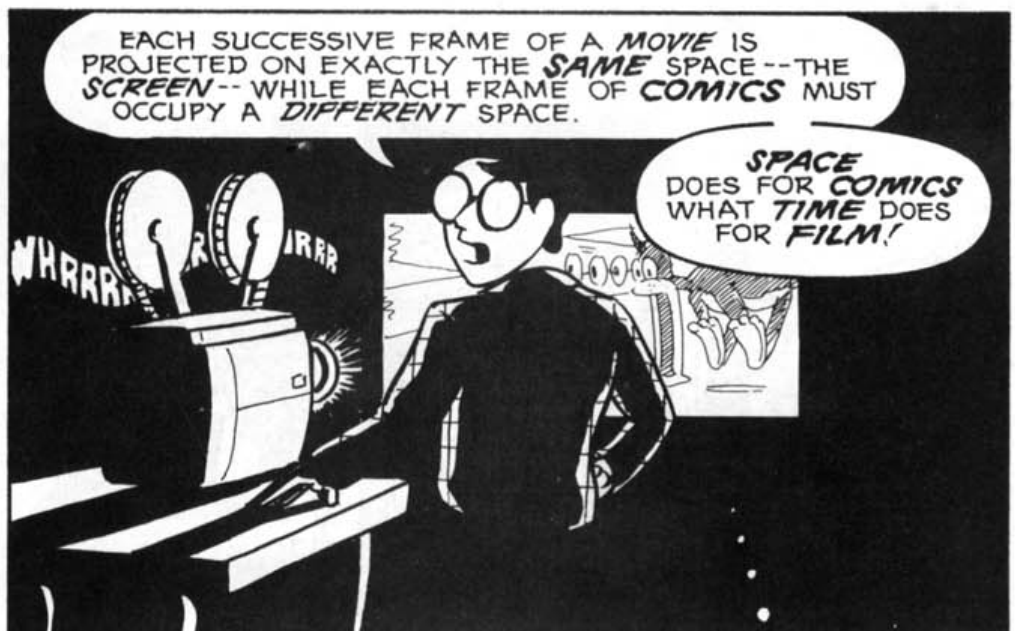
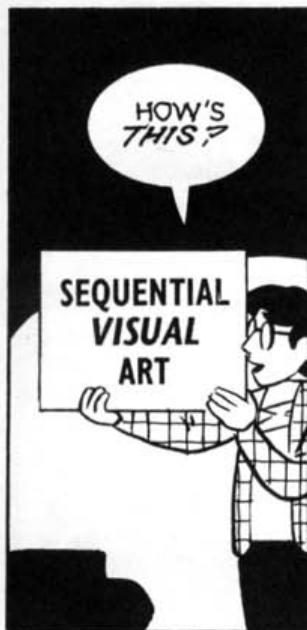
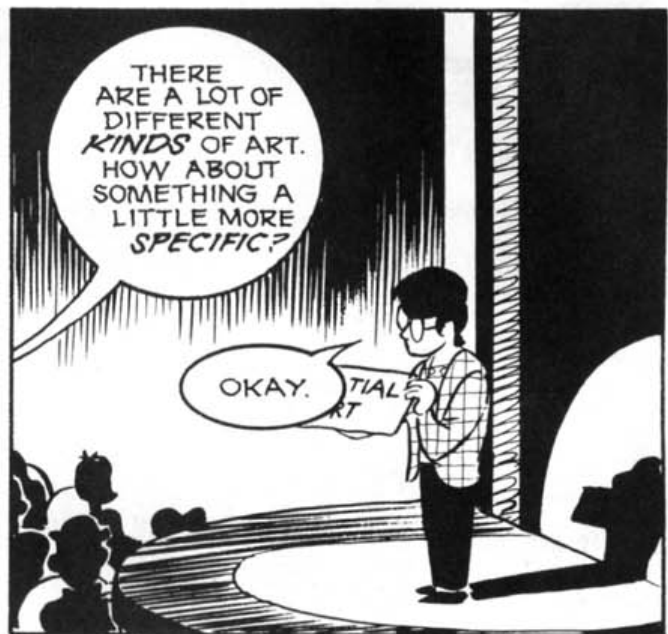
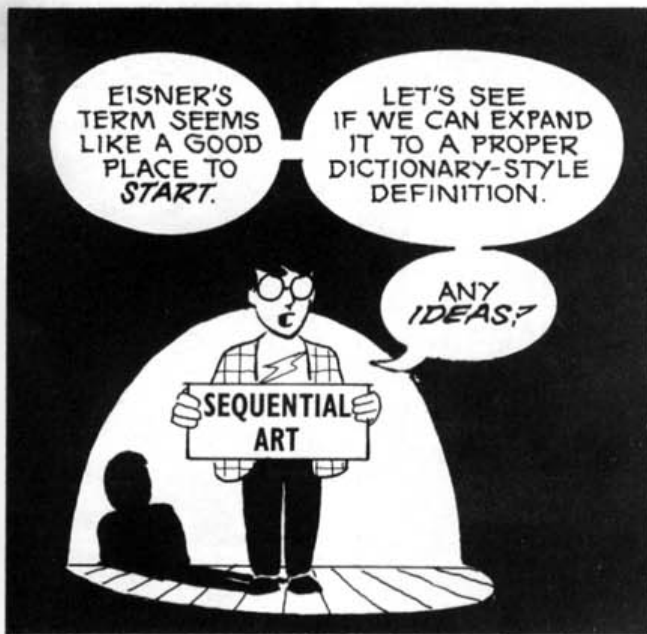


BUT FOR *COMICS*, THIS ATTENTION HAS BEEN *RARE*.*

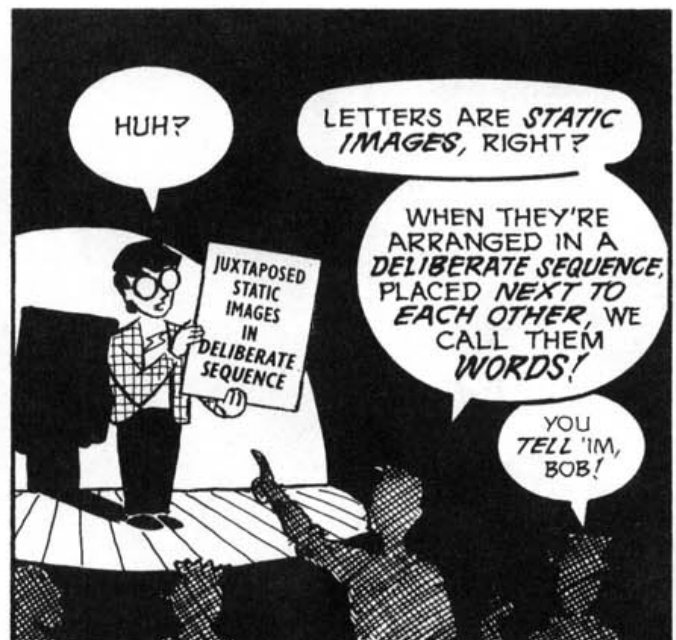
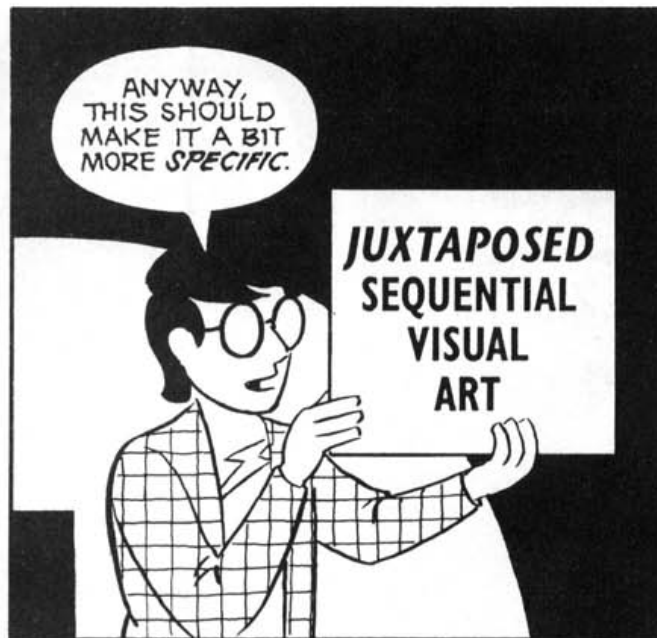
LET'S SEE IF WE CAN HELP *RECTIFY* THE SITUATION.

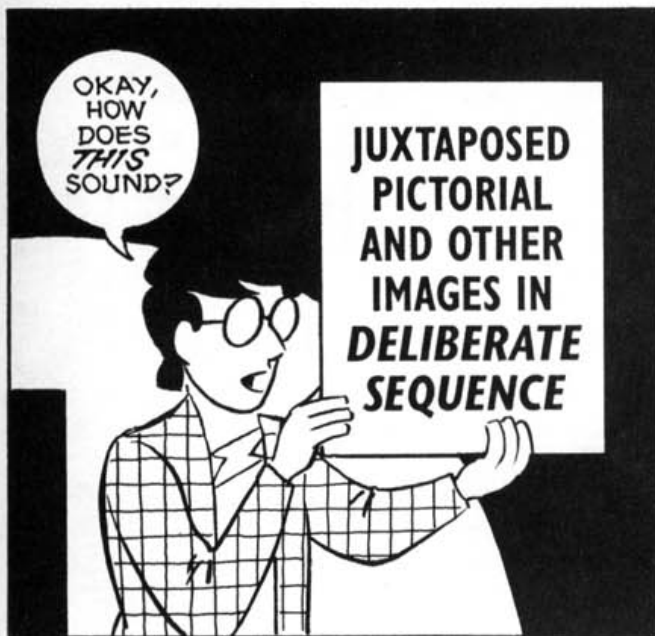


*EISNER'S OWN COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART BEING A HAPPY EXCEPTION.

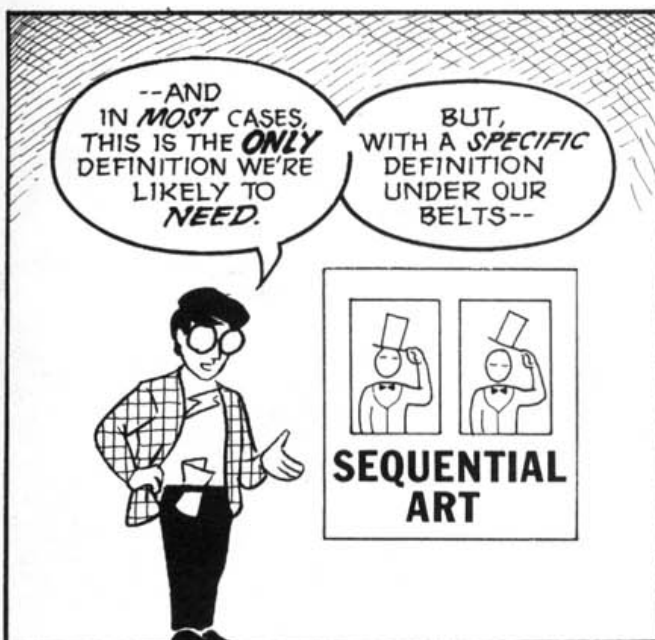


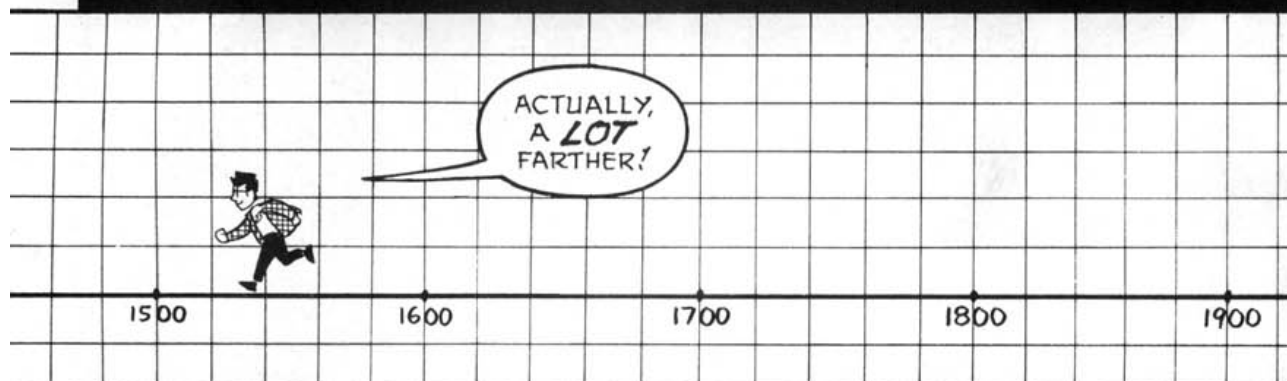
* JUXTAPOSED= ADJACENT, SIDE-BY-SIDE. GREAT ART SCHOOL WORD.





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.** Corruption of our Nation's youth.

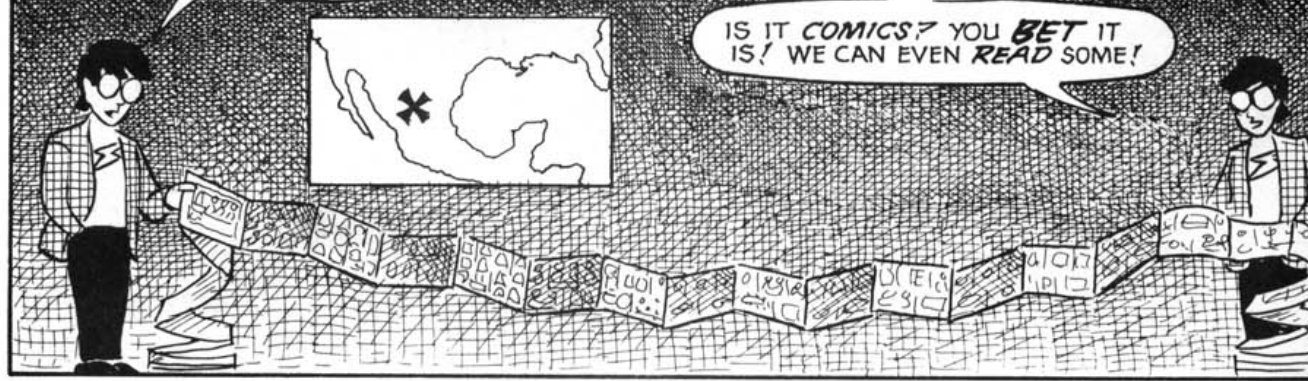




HERE'S JUST A PIECE OF THE EPIC STORY CONTAINED IN A PRE-COLUMBIAN PICTURE MANUSCRIPT "DISCOVERED" BY CORTÉS AROUND 1519.

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

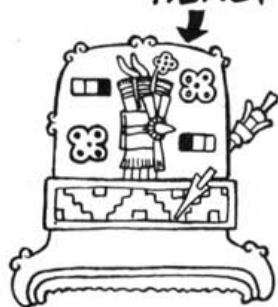
(GLYPH FOR PLACE WHOSE
NAME WE DON'T KNOW.)

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*

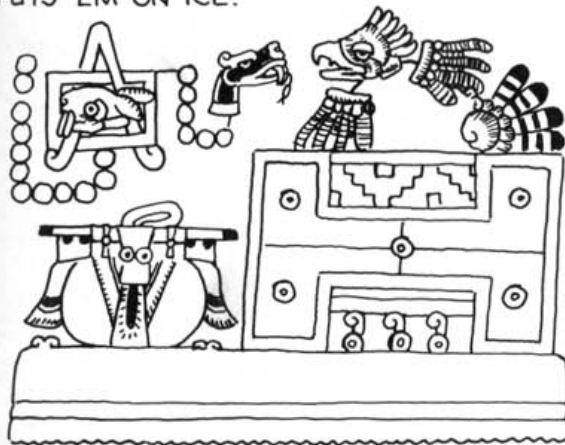
THE PLACE: *HERE!*



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

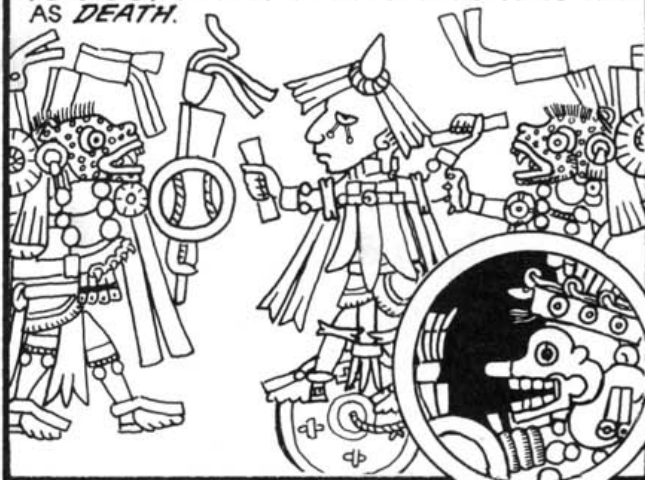


8-DEER ALSO CAPTURES THE PRINCE'S OLDER
BROTHERS, 10-DOG "EAGLE COPAL BURNING"
AND 6-HOUSE "ROW OF FLINT KNIVES" AND
PUTS 'EM ON ICE.

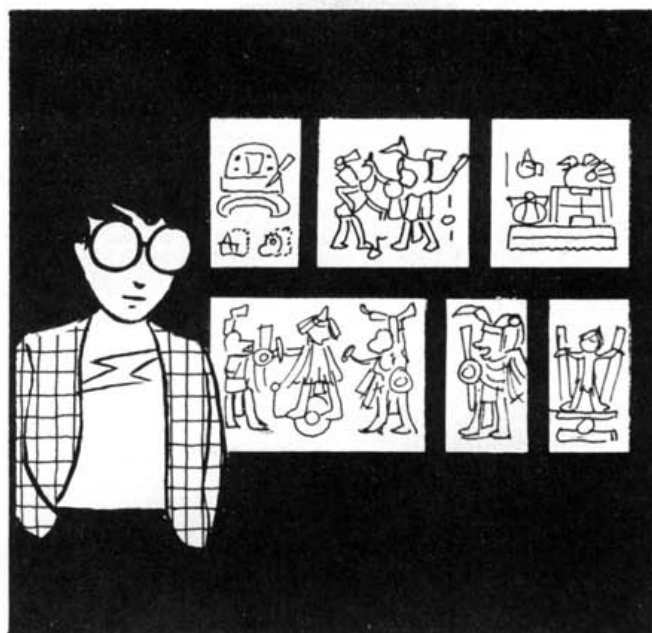
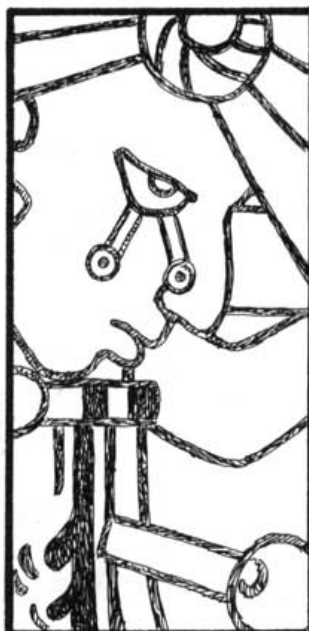
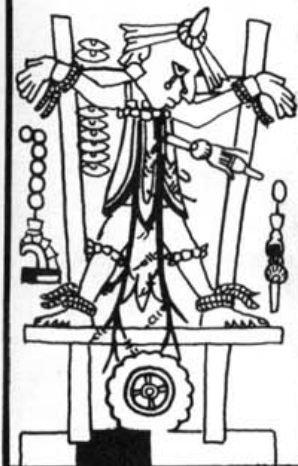


(I'M TAKING THE TRANSLATOR'S WORD ON THIS ONE.)

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"

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!**

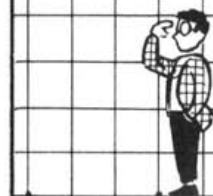
PERENNIAL EXCEPTION **WILL EISNER**.



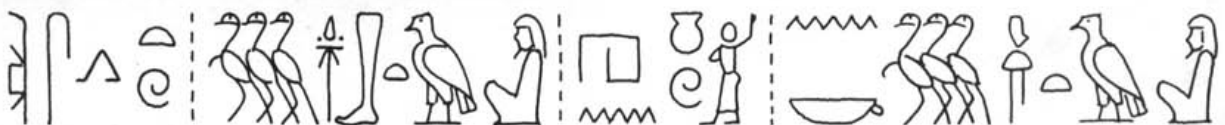
WHICH ONE IS THE **PRINCE?**



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



0 00 11 00 12 00



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**.



= "ba'u"



= "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 tu baiu
abta, hennu-nek
baiu 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 QUILTS--

--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**.



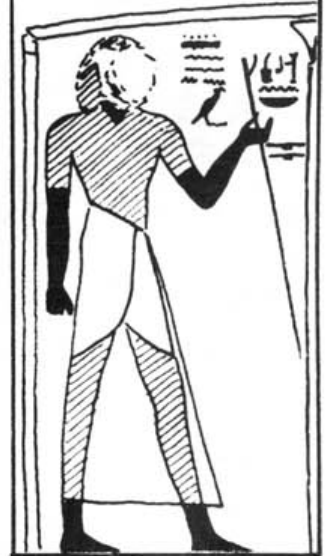
THEN OXEN TREAD **KERNELS** OUT OF THE **HUSKS**.



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**.



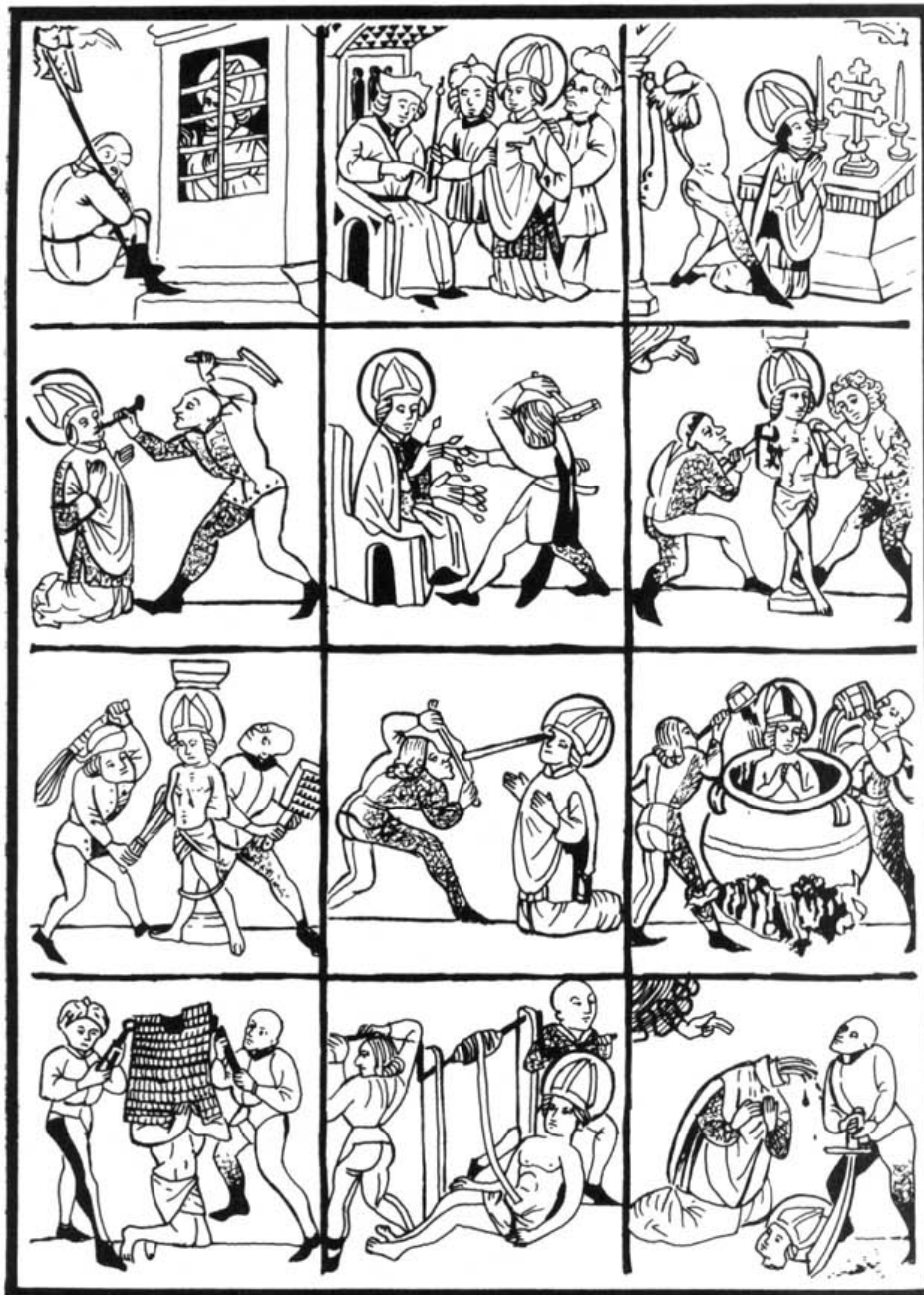
BUT THERE IS **ONE** EVENT WHICH **LOOMS** AS LARGE IN **COMICS** HISTORY AS IT DOES IN THE HISTORY OF THE **WRITTEN WORD**.



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*.

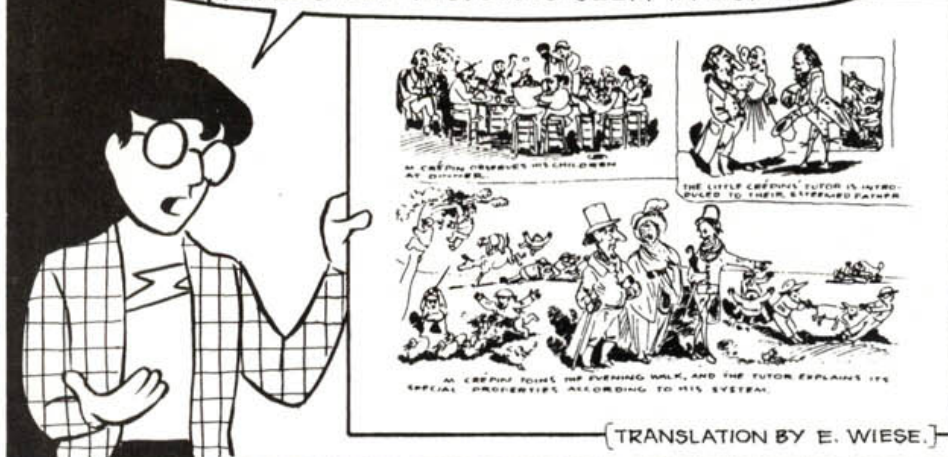
BOTH THE PAINTINGS AND ENGRAVINGS WERE DESIGNED TO BE VIEWED *SIDE-BY-SIDE* -- *IN SEQUENCE!*



"*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 *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



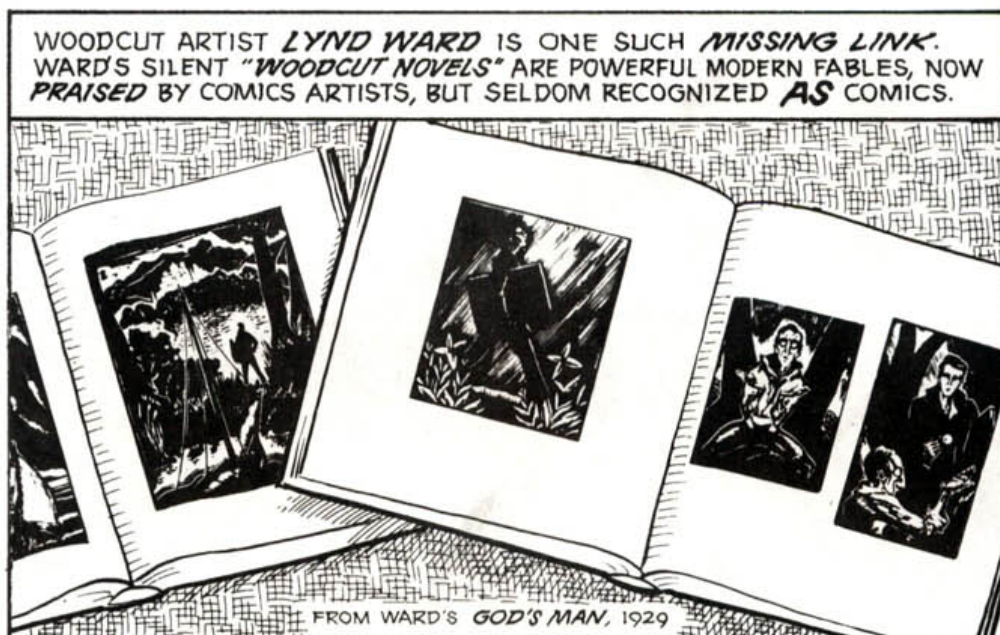
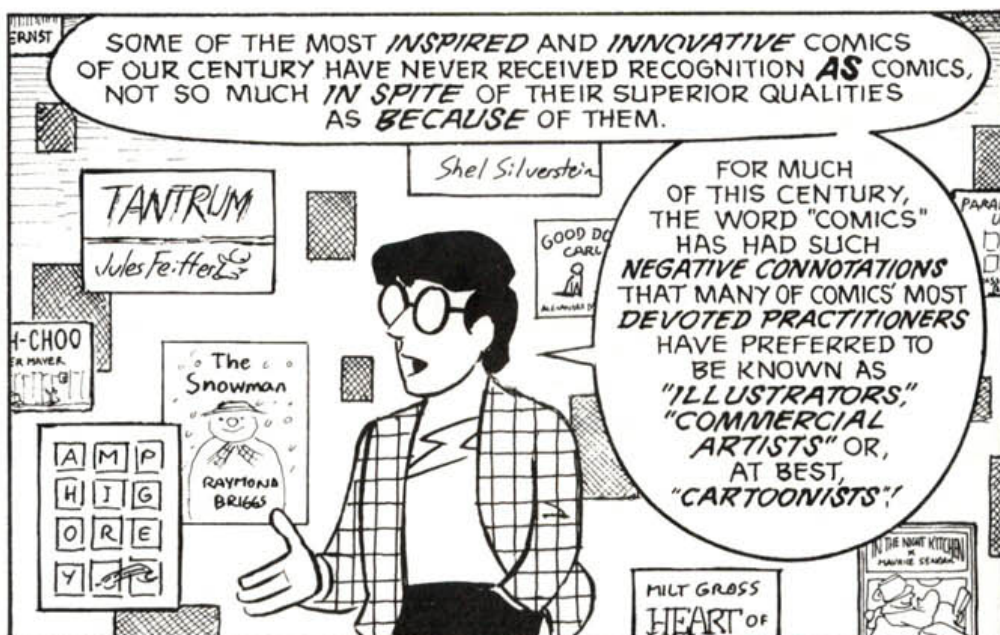
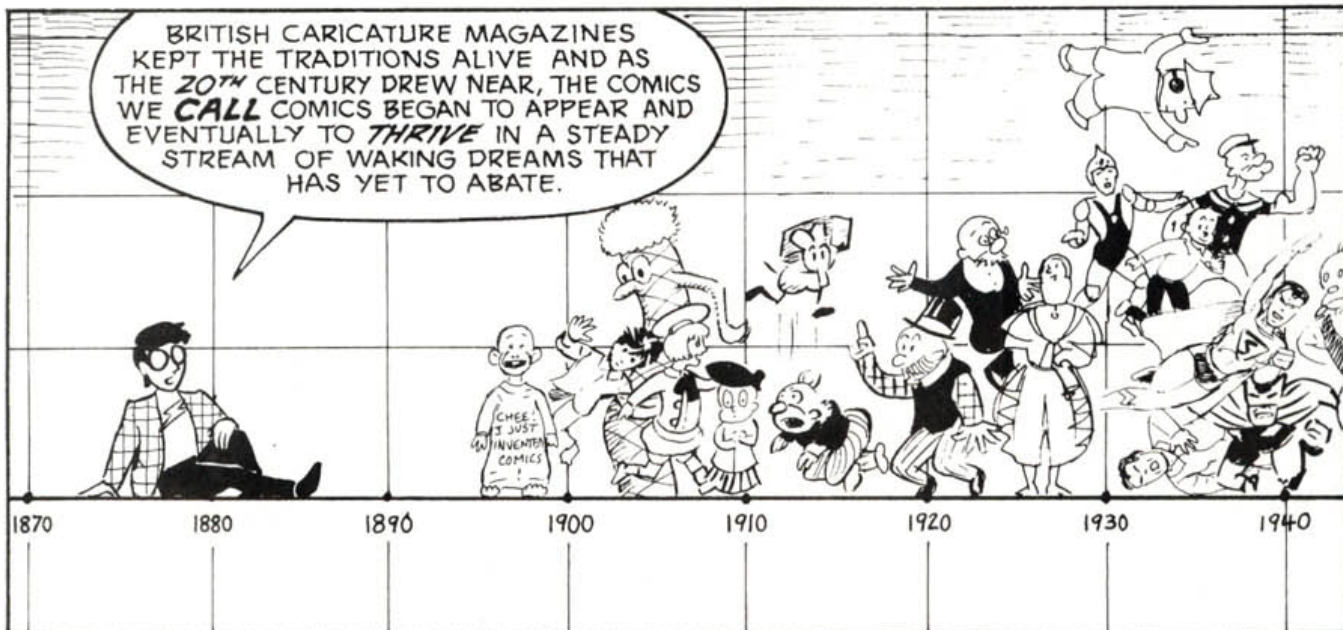
EVEN SO, TÖPFFER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE *UNDERSTANDING* OF COMICS IS CONSIDERABLE, IF ONLY FOR HIS REALIZATION THAT HE WHO WAS NEITHER ARTIST NOR WRITER--



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



A LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN.





ARTISTS LIKE WARD AND BELGIAN *FRANS 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!



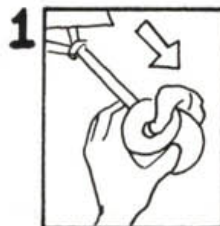
IF WE DON'T EXCLUDE **PHOTOGRAPHY** FROM OUR DEFINITION, THEN HALF OF **AMERICA** HAS BEEN IN COMICS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.



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.

THANKS TO MATT FEZZELL FOR THE SUGGESTIONS.

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.

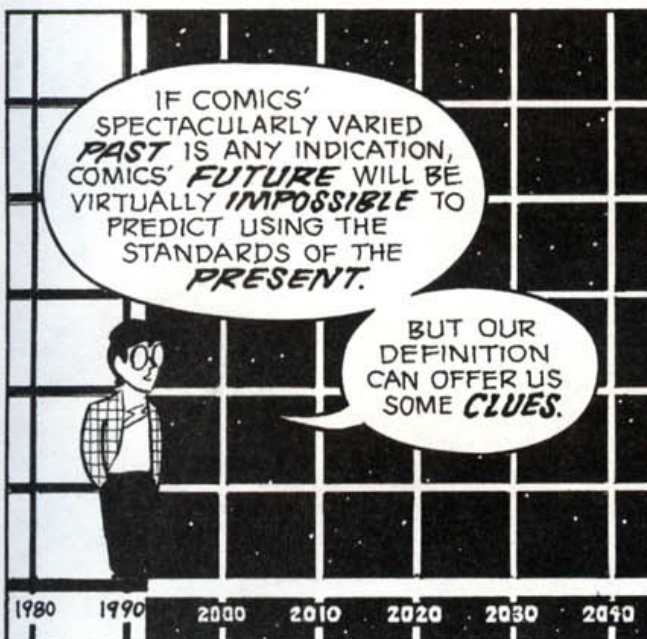


OF COURSE, IF ANYONE WANTS TO WRITE A BOOK TAKING THE **OPPOSITE** VIEW, YOU CAN BET I'LL BE THE FIRST IN LINE TO **BUY** A COPY!

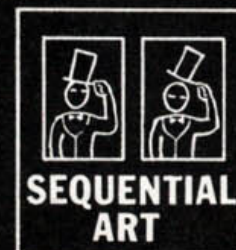


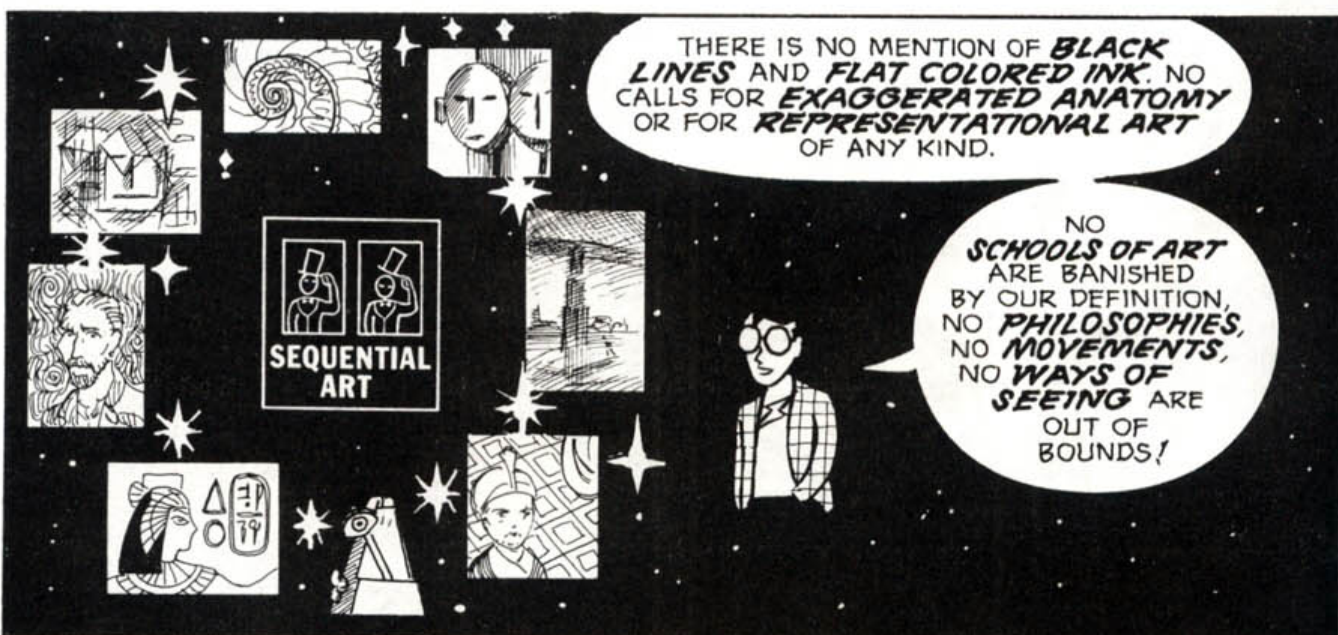
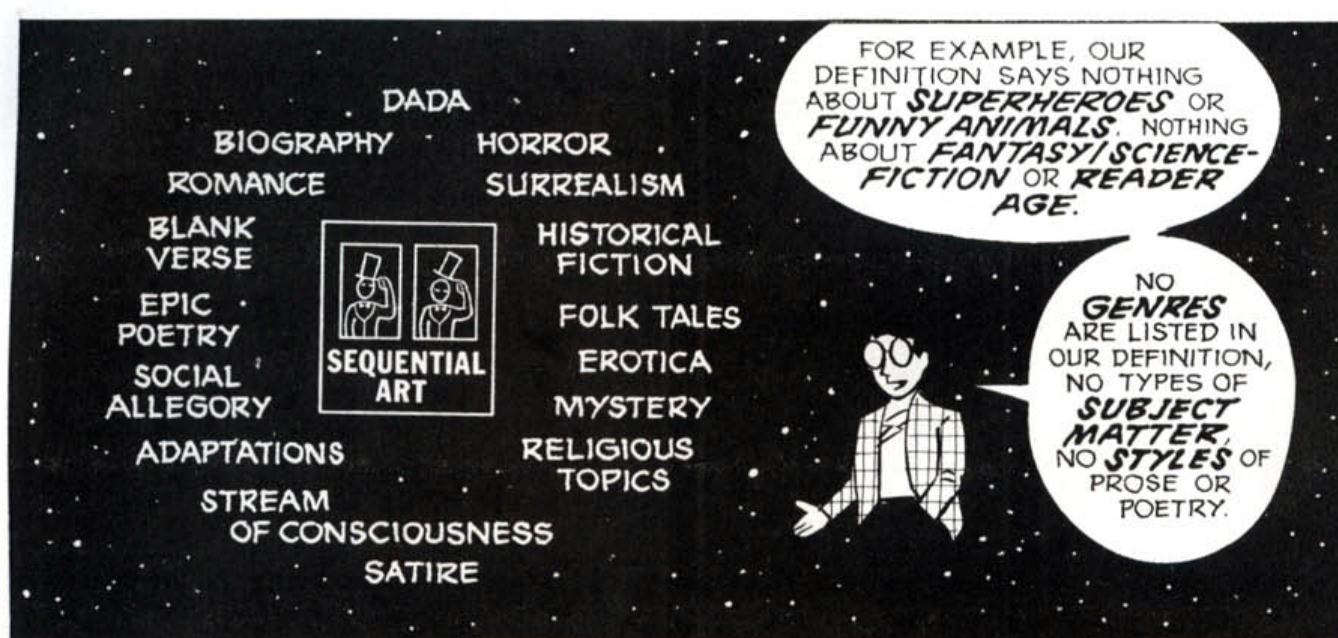
IF COMICS' SPECTACULARLY VARIED **PAST** IS ANY INDICATION, COMICS' **FUTURE** WILL BE VIRTUALLY **IMPOSSIBLE** TO PREDICT USING THE STANDARDS OF THE **PRESENT**.

BUT OUR DEFINITION CAN OFFER US SOME **CLUES**.



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





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**.

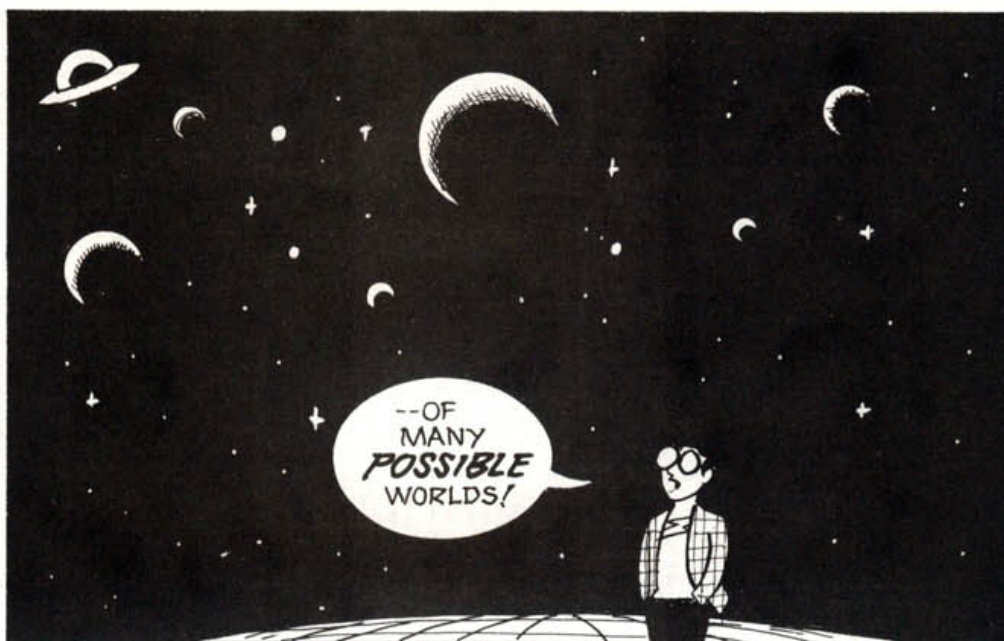
THERE ARE SO MANY COMICS IN PRINT TODAY THAT IT WOULD TAKE AN **ARMY** OF READERS TO STUDY THEM ALL.



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!**

