

## Chapter Three

# The Power of Words

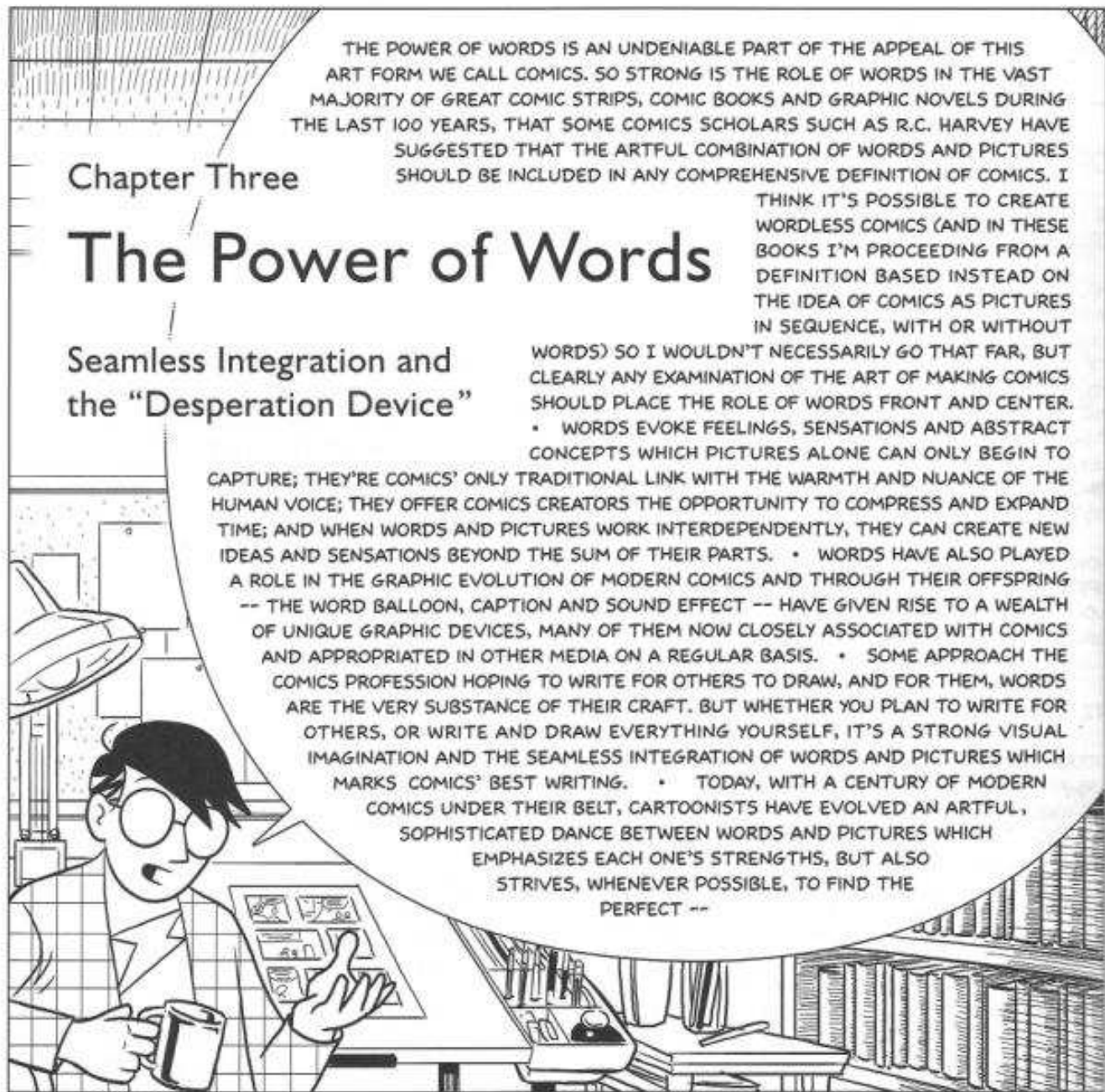
## Seamless Integration and the "Desperation Device"

THE POWER OF WORDS IS AN UNDENIABLE PART OF THE APPEAL OF THIS ART FORM WE CALL COMICS. SO STRONG IS THE ROLE OF WORDS IN THE VAST MAJORITY OF GREAT COMIC STRIPS, COMIC BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS DURING THE LAST 100 YEARS, THAT SOME COMICS SCHOLARS SUCH AS R.C. HARVEY HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THE ARTFUL COMBINATION OF WORDS AND PICTURES SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN ANY COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION OF COMICS. I

THINK IT'S POSSIBLE TO CREATE WORDLESS COMICS (AND IN THESE BOOKS I'M PROCEEDING FROM A DEFINITION BASED INSTEAD ON THE IDEA OF COMICS AS PICTURES IN SEQUENCE, WITH OR WITHOUT

WORDS) SO I WOULDN'T NECESSARILY GO THAT FAR, BUT CLEARLY ANY EXAMINATION OF THE ART OF MAKING COMICS SHOULD PLACE THE ROLE OF WORDS FRONT AND CENTER.

• WORDS EVOKE FEELINGS, SENSATIONS AND ABSTRACT CONCEPTS WHICH PICTURES ALONE CAN ONLY BEGIN TO CAPTURE; THEY'RE COMICS' ONLY TRADITIONAL LINK WITH THE WARMTH AND NUANCE OF THE HUMAN VOICE; THEY OFFER COMICS CREATORS THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMPRESS AND EXPAND TIME; AND WHEN WORDS AND PICTURES WORK INTERDEPENDENTLY, THEY CAN CREATE NEW IDEAS AND SENSATIONS BEYOND THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS. • WORDS HAVE ALSO PLAYED A ROLE IN THE GRAPHIC EVOLUTION OF MODERN COMICS AND THROUGH THEIR OFFSPRING -- THE WORD BALLOON, CAPTION AND SOUND EFFECT -- HAVE GIVEN RISE TO A WEALTH OF UNIQUE GRAPHIC DEVICES, MANY OF THEM NOW CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH COMICS AND APPROPRIATED IN OTHER MEDIA ON A REGULAR BASIS. • SOME APPROACH THE COMICS PROFESSION HOPING TO WRITE FOR OTHERS TO DRAW, AND FOR THEM, WORDS ARE THE VERY SUBSTANCE OF THEIR CRAFT. BUT WHETHER YOU PLAN TO WRITE FOR OTHERS, OR WRITE AND DRAW EVERYTHING YOURSELF, IT'S A STRONG VISUAL IMAGINATION AND THE SEAMLESS INTEGRATION OF WORDS AND PICTURES WHICH MARKS COMICS' BEST WRITING. • TODAY, WITH A CENTURY OF MODERN COMICS UNDER THEIR BELT, CARTOONISTS HAVE EVOLVED AN ARTFUL, SOPHISTICATED DANCE BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES WHICH EMPHASIZES EACH ONE'S STRENGTHS, BUT ALSO STRIVES, WHENEVER POSSIBLE, TO FIND THE PERFECT --



-- BALANCE  
BETWEEN THE  
TWO.

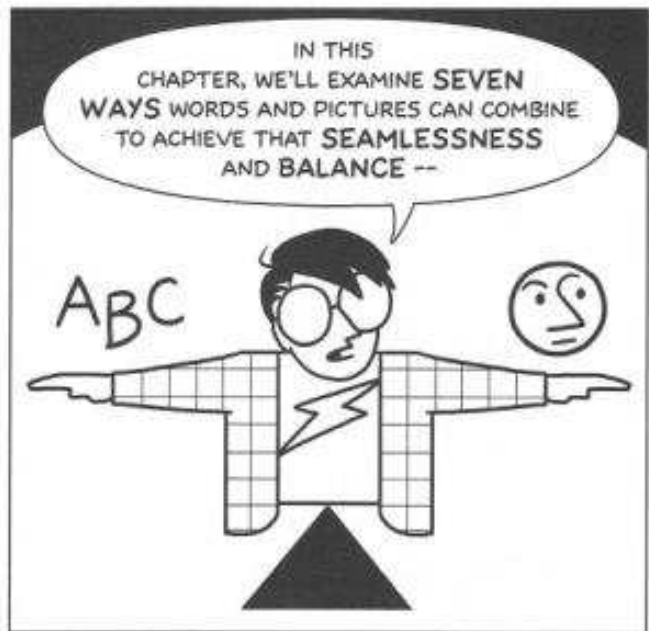


IN MOST GREAT COMICS, THAT BALANCE IS  
A DYNAMIC ONE. SOMETIMES WORDS TAKE  
THE LEAD, SOMETIMES PICTURES DO --

-- BUT BOTH WORK  
TOGETHER TO  
PROPEL THE STORY  
FORWARD.



COMICS IS A MEDIUM OF **FRAGMENTS** -- A PIECE OF TEXT HERE, A CROPPED PICTURE THERE -- BUT WHEN IT WORKS, YOUR READERS WILL **COMBINE** THOSE FRAGMENTS AS THEY READ AND EXPERIENCE YOUR STORY AS A **CONTINUOUS WHOLE**.





IN *UNDERSTANDING COMICS*, I IDENTIFIED A FEW DISTINCT CATEGORIES OF WORD/PICTURE COMBINATIONS.\*

MIRANDA GAVE ME THE KEYS AND SMILED ...



### 1. WORD-SPECIFIC

WORDS PROVIDING ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW, WHILE THE PICTURES ILLUSTRATE ASPECTS OF THE SCENE BEING DESCRIBED.



### 2. PICTURE-SPECIFIC

PICTURES PROVIDING ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW, WHILE THE WORDS ACCENTUATE ASPECTS OF THE SCENE BEING SHOWN.



### 3. DUO-SPECIFIC

WORDS AND PICTURES BOTH SENDING ROUGHLY THE SAME MESSAGE.



### 4. INTERSECTING

WORDS AND PICTURES WORKING TOGETHER IN SOME RESPECTS WHILE ALSO CONTRIBUTING INFORMATION INDEPENDENTLY.



### 5. INTERDEPENDENT

WORDS AND PICTURES COMBINING TO CONVEY AN IDEA THAT NEITHER WOULD CONVEY ALONE.



### 6. PARALLEL

WORDS AND PICTURES FOLLOWING SEEMINGLY DIFFERENT PATHS WITHOUT INTERSECTING.



### 7. MONTAGE

WORDS AND PICTURES COMBINED PICTORIALY.

IT MIGHT HELP TO THINK OF THESE SEVEN CATEGORIES DIAGRAMMATICALLY.

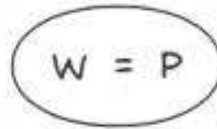
WORD-SPECIFIC



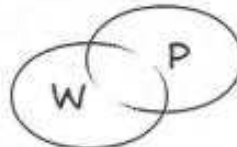
PICTURE-SPECIFIC



DUO-SPECIFIC



INTERSECTING



INTERDEPENDENT



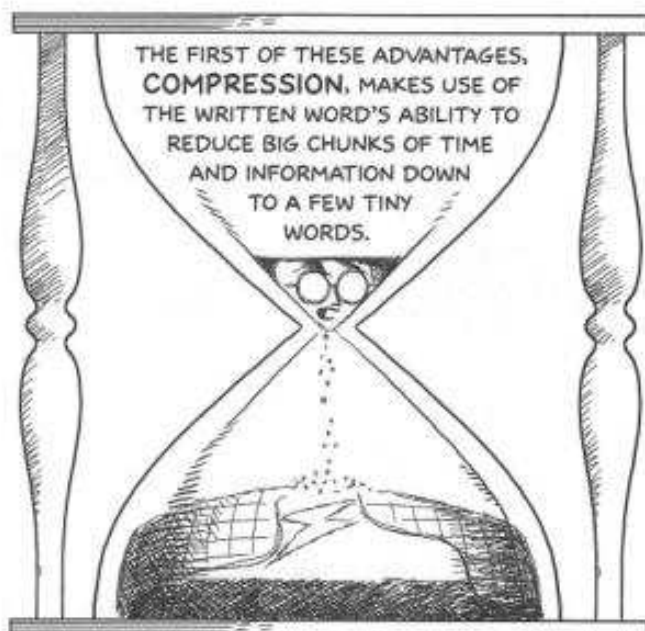
PARALLEL



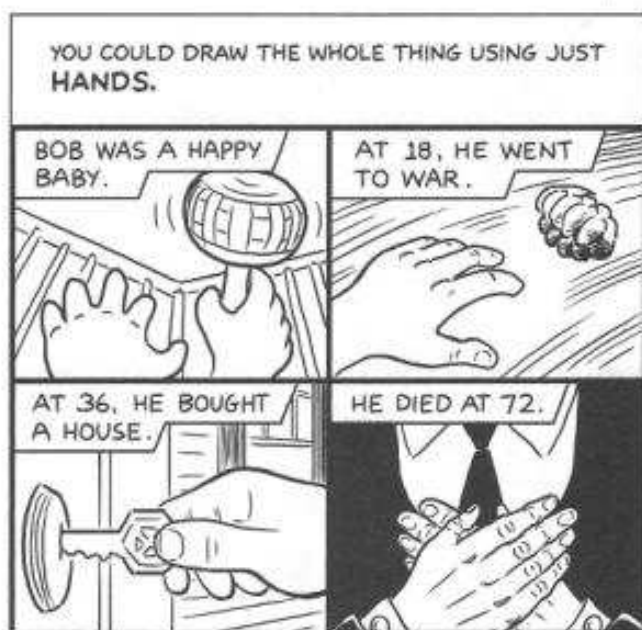
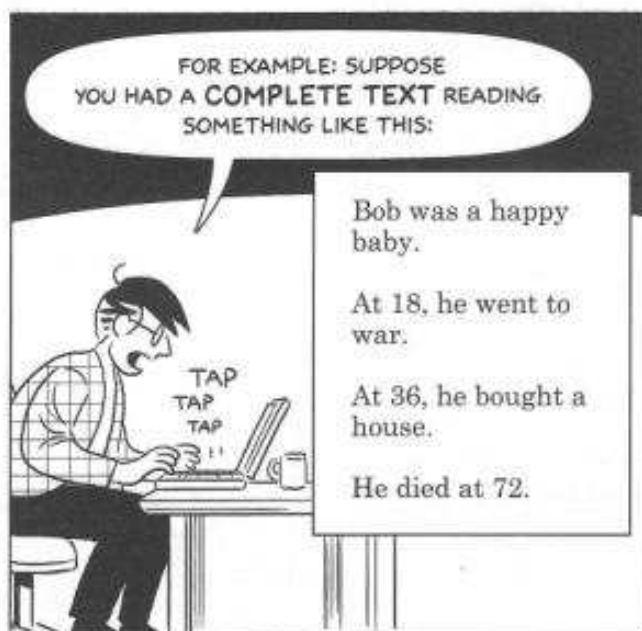
MONTAGE



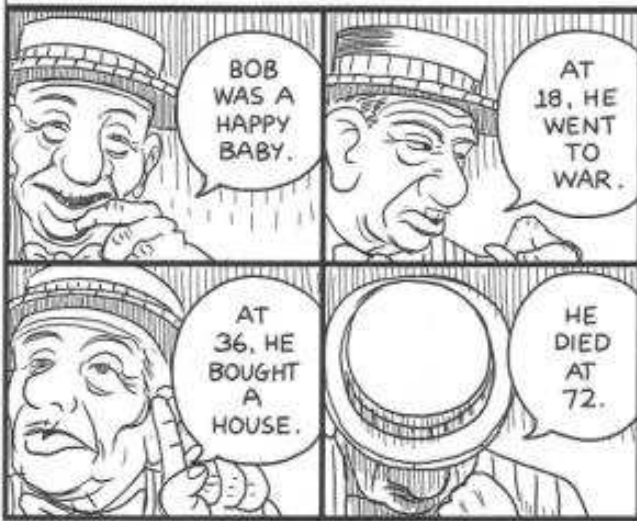
\*SEE *UNDERSTANDING COMICS* PAGES 153-155. NOTE THAT I'VE CHANGED THE NAME OF ONE CATEGORY, "ADDITIVE" IS NOW "INTERSECTING".



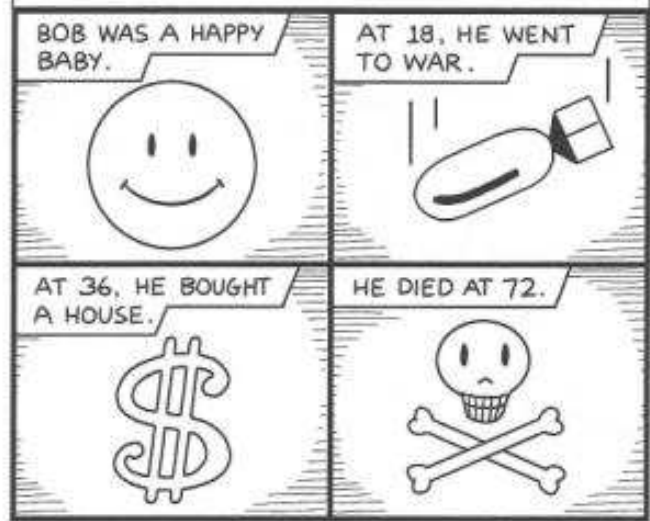
ANOTHER ADVANTAGE OF WORD-SPECIFIC COMBOS IS THE WAY THEY FREE UP THE PICTURES BY PULLING THE WHOLE WEIGHT OF THE STORY USING WORDS ALONE.



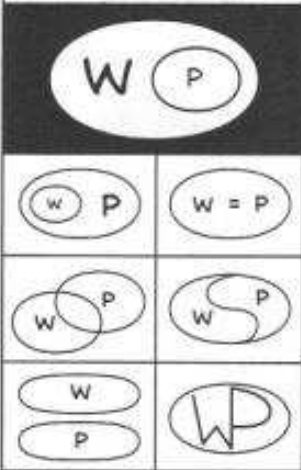
YOU COULD SHOW A NARRATOR SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO THE READER.



YOU COULD EVEN ILLUSTRATE IT ENTIRELY WITH SYMBOLS.



MOST WORD-SPECIFIC COMBOS OCCUR ALONGSIDE OTHER SORTS OF COMBOS.



MOST CARTOONISTS LIKE TO LET THE PICTURES TELL THE STORY JUST AS OFTEN AS WORDS.



BUT THERE ARE LARGELY WORD-SPECIFIC COMICS THAT MAKE USE OF THAT "ARTISTIC LICENSE" ON A REGULAR BASIS.



IN FACT, YOU'RE READING ONE NOW.



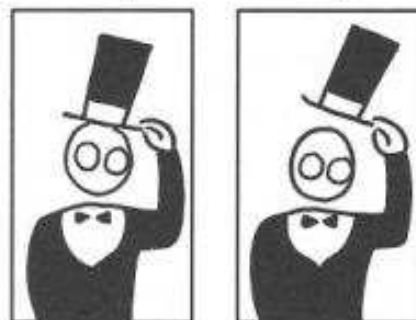
PICTURE-SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS SIMILARLY GIVE LICENSE TO THE WORDS, AND THEY OFFER OTHER BENEFITS.



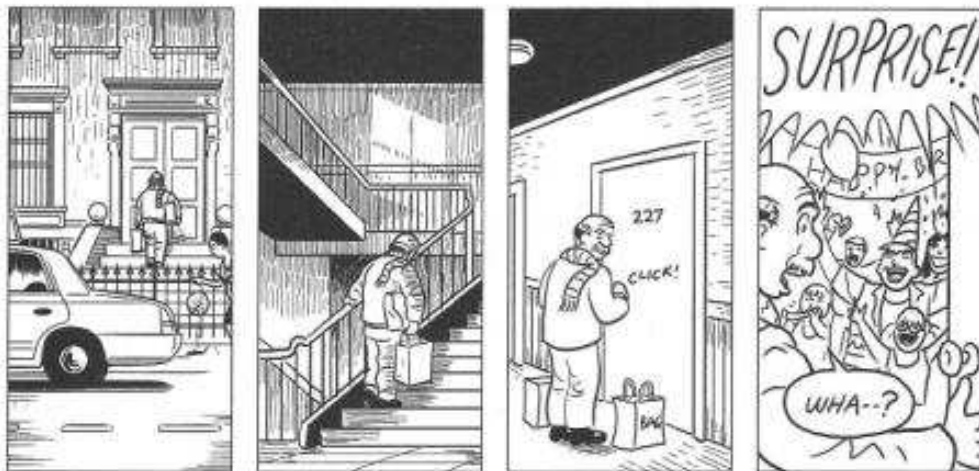
2. PICTURE-SPECIFIC



AMONG THEM, A CLOSER LINK TO THE WHOLE IDEA OF SEQUENTIAL VISUAL STORYTELLING WHICH THE ART OF COMICS IS BASED ON.



BECAUSE OF THE PICTORIAL NATURE OF COMICS, PICTURE-SPECIFIC SEQUENCES CAN FUNCTION WITHOUT ANY WORDS AT ALL FOR AS LONG AS NECESSARY --



-- unlike word-specific sequences, which can't go picture-less for more than a panel or two without simply becoming prose.



WHEN BOTH WORDS AND PICTURES ARE TELLING THE SAME STORY, YOU'VE GOT A DUO-SPECIFIC COMBO.

HE JABBED HIS FINGER!  
HA! I JAB MY FINGER AT YOU!

3. DUO-SPECIFIC

W = P

HERE'S ONE NOW:

I AM STANDING IN A PANEL!

THERE IS A WATERMELON ON MY HEAD!

NOW IT IS GONE...

...SCOTT SAID SADLY.

WELL, OBVIOUSLY I'M NOT A FAN OF COMBINATIONS THAT ARE JUST POINTLESSLY REDUNDANT LIKE THAT. FORTUNATELY, MODERN COMICS WRITERS AVOID REDUNDANCY MOST OF THE TIME.

AND DUO-SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS DO HAVE SOME LEGITIMATE USES.

INFO-COMICS, FOR EXAMPLE, USE REDUNDANCY TO INSURE MAXIMUM CLARITY.

EXIT

WALK, DON'T RUN, TO THE NEAREST EXIT.

DUO-SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS CAN ALSO BE USED TO EVOKE A CHILDREN'S BOOK TONE --

Rollo and Squeezer, the dummy, shared a bath.

-- OR TO LEND AN AIR OF ANTIQUE STORYTELLING TRADITIONS.

AND JUST AS HE TOOK HER INTO HIS ARMS, THE FORTRESS WALL GAVE WAY TO THE FLOOD.



INTERSECTING COMBINATIONS CAN BE A BIT HARDER TO PICK OUT THAN OUR LAST THREE, BUT THEY'RE USEFUL AND PRETTY COMMON.




HOW D'YA LIKE MY NEW THREADS, BABE?

4. INTERSECTING



THESE ARE PANELS IN WHICH THE WORDS AND PICTURES COVER **SOME** OF THE SAME GROUND, BUT EACH ADDS SIGNIFICANT **DETAIL** OR **PERSPECTIVE** TO THE SCENE.

HOW D'YA LIKE MY NEW THREADS, BABE?



↑

IMPORTANT INFO ABOUT THE CHARACTER'S ATTITUDE AND HIS TARGET AUDIENCE.

↑

IMPORTANT INFO ABOUT THE CHARACTER'S PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND FASHION CHOICES.

LEFT TO THEIR INSTINCTS, MANY CARTOONISTS WILL USE A LOT OF INTERSECTING COMBINATIONS, CREATING PAGES WHICH READERS COULD PARTIALLY MAKE SENSE OF WITHOUT THE WORDS, AND PARTIALLY MAKE SENSE OF WITHOUT THE ART.



WHAT'S THIS? TWO EGGS, PAL! WHAT? DID TH' PRICE GO UP?

WHAT'S WRONG SHUICHI?

WHAT'S YOUR NAME KID? "WILLIE"

Heading for town? Sure, get in.

HERE'S A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR YOUR EFFORTS GOSH WOW

DO THEY WORK? I CAN MOVE 'EM A BIT... BUT I DON'T THINK I CAN FLY.

Jean-Christophe, are you OK?

INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATIONS AREN'T AS COMMON, BUT WHEN DONE WELL THEY CAN ACHIEVE MEMORABLE EFFECTS.



5. INTERDEPENDENT



HERE, THE RESULT OF WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMBINATION IS UTTERLY UNLIKE WHAT EITHER COULD ACHIEVE ALONE.

WITHOUT THE ART, WE WOULD TAKE HER WORDS AT FACE VALUE.

I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU...

WITHOUT THE WORDS, WE WOULDN'T KNOW SHE WAS LYING.



IN THE COMICS ADAPTATION OF PAUL AUSTER'S *CITY OF GLASS*, STORYTELLERS KARASIK AND MAZZUCHELLI USE SUCH A COMBINATION TO SYMBOLICALLY SHOW THE INNER TURMOIL OF A MAN ("QUINN") WHOSE WIFE AND CHILD HAD DIED.

IN PANEL TWO, ONLY THE WORDS TELL US THE SOURCE OF QUINN'S EMOTIONAL "WOUND" AND ONLY THE ART PORTRAYS THE MOMENT AS ANYTHING MORE THAN A POLITE CONVERSATION.



INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATIONS KEEP READERS' MINDS FULLY ENGAGED BECAUSE THEY REQUIRE THEM TO ASSEMBLE MEANINGS OUT OF SUCH DIFFERENT PARTS. SUCH EFFECTS CAN BE STIMULATING, GRATIFYING --

-- AND A KIND OF EXPERIENCE RARELY FOUND OUTSIDE OF COMICS.



IN PARALLEL COMBINATIONS, WORDS AND PICTURES DON'T CONNECT AT ALL --



6. PARALLEL

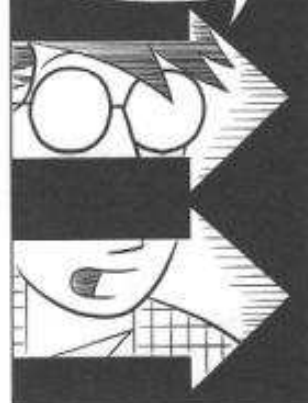
W

P

-- THOUGH THEIR PATHS MAY BEND TOWARD EACH OTHER IN LATER PANELS.



SUCH COMBINATIONS CAN HAVE BOTH PRACTICAL AND AESTHETIC APPLICATIONS.



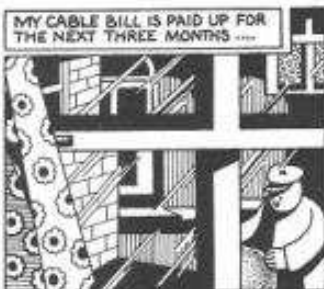
DIALOGUE FROM ONE SCENE CAN RUN THROUGHOUT ANOTHER TO SAVE ROOM AND CREATE A DENSE, LAYERED TEXTURE --



-- OR IT CAN BE USED TO SOFTEN A TRANSITION FROM ONE SCENE TO ANOTHER.



PARALLEL COMBINATIONS CAN ALSO BE PUT TO MORE EXPERIMENTAL USES --



-- SUCH AS IN ART SPIEGELMAN'S 1973 PAGE "DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE" WHERE THE CONTENTS OF THE CAPTIONS REFER PRIMARILY TO THE PICTURES THAT PRECEDE THEM, CREATING A DISORIENTING SENSE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL INERTIA.\*



\* FOR THIS READER, AT LEAST.

AND FINALLY THERE'S THE MONTAGE WHERE WORDS AND LETTERS TAKE ON PICTORIAL QUALITIES AND ARE COMBINED MORE FREELY WITH THE PICTURES THAT SURROUND THEM.



THE USE OF PURE COLLAGÉ TECHNIQUES IN COMICS HAS BEEN PRETTY RARE OVER THE YEARS, BUT CARTOONISTS DABBLE IN IT FROM TIME TO TIME --



-- THE MOST FAMOUS EXAMPLE BEING WILL EISNER WHO DEvised MANY INGENIOUS WAYS TO INCORPORATE LOGOS DIRECTLY INTO A STORY'S OPENING PANEL.



THE IDEA THAT WORDS MIGHT "CROSS THE FENCE" INTO PICTORIAL TERRITORY ONCE IN A WHILE SEEMS REASONABLE --



SOME MODERN CARTOONISTS HAVE TESTED THE POTENTIAL OF TREATING COMMON ELEMENTS LIKE CAPTIONS AND WORD BALLOONS WITH A STRONG PICTORIAL SENSIBILITY --



-- AND OF COURSE THE SOUND EFFECT SPILLS OVER INTO THIS TERRITORY OFTEN --



-- BUT FOR THE MOST PART, MONTAGE REMAINS A LARGELY UNEXPLORED TERRITORY.



MIRANDA GAVE ME THE KEYS AND SMILED...



### 1. WORD-SPECIFIC

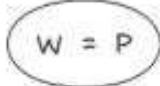


THERE'S NO SET RULE FOR WHEN AND HOW TO USE A GIVEN TYPE OF WORD PICTURE COMBINATION. MOST CARTOONISTS JUST RELY ON THEIR INSTINCTS AND DON'T GET HUNG UP ON ANYONE'S NERDY CATEGORIES.

### 2. PICTURE-SPECIFIC



### 3. DUO-SPECIFIC



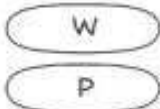
### 4. INTERSECTING



### 5. INTERDEPENDENT



### 6. PARALLEL



### 7. MONTAGE



PLAY AROUND, SEE WHAT WORKS FOR YOU, AND BUILD YOUR OWN INSTINCTS THROUGH PRACTICE.



BUT WHEN THOSE INSTINCTS FAIL -- AND IT HAPPENS TO ALL OF US --

-- THIS IS A ROAD MAP THAT CAN HELP YOU GET BACK ON COURSE.

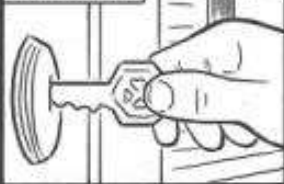


ASK YOURSELF A FEW QUESTIONS NOW AND THEN:



AM I TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE FREEDOM WORDS GIVE TO MY ART?

AT 36, HE BOUGHT A HOUSE.



AM I TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE FREEDOM MY ART GIVES TO MY WORDS?

HEY... DO I SMELL FRESH-BAKED COOKIES?



ARE THERE GOOD REASONS TO TELL MY READERS ANYTHING TWICE?

JUST AS HE TOOK HER TO HIS ARMS, THE FORTRESS GAVE WAY TO THE FLOOD.



ARE BOTH PICTURES AND WORDS CONTRIBUTING SOMETHING OF VALUE TO EACH PANEL?



COULD THE TWO TOGETHER BE MORE THAN THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS?



OR COULD THEY EACH CARRY A VASTLY DIFFERENT MESSAGE?



DO WORDS AND PICTURES NEED TO BE TREATED ALL THAT DIFFERENTLY?



ONCE AGAIN, THERE'S NO "WRONG" WAY TO MIX WORDS WITH PICTURES, BUT IF YOU WANT TO HOLD YOUR READERS' ATTENTION --



FIRST: KEEP YOUR WORD COUNT UNDER CONTROL! IF HALF OF EVERY PANEL IS COVERED IN WORDS, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER SAYING MORE WITH THE PICTURES, ADDING MOMENTS TO BREAK UP THE TEXT INTO SMALLER CHUNKS, OR SIMPLY USING FEWER WORDS TO GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS. ALSO, DON'T THINK THAT, UM... OH CRAP, I'M, RUNNING OUT OF ROOM -- JUST DON'T DO THIS!!



CONSIDER USING A HEALTHY VARIETY OF COMBINATIONS SO THAT NEITHER SIDE OF YOUR READERS' BRAINS IS NEGLECTED.



MOST OF ALL, KEEP FOCUSED ON YOUR STORY, WHICH BOTH WORDS AND PICTURES SHOULD EQUALLY SERVE --



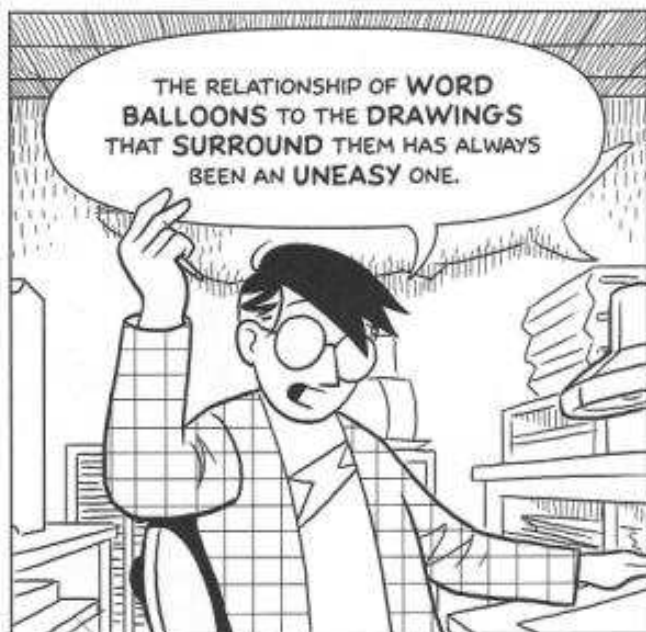
-- BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOUR READERS WILL BE FOCUSED ON IF YOU DO YOUR JOB RIGHT.



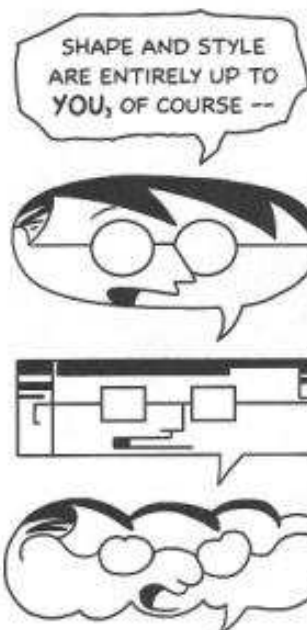
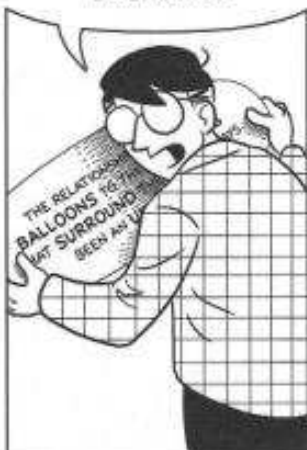
NOW THAT WE'VE COVERED THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF MIXING WORDS AND PICTURES TO TELL A STORY, LET'S EXAMINE HOW THE TWO ARE COMBINED GRAPHICALLY --

-- STARTING WITH THESE FREAKY, WORD-FILLED BLOBS OVER MY HEAD!





BALLOONS DON'T EXIST IN THE SAME PLANE OF REALITY AS THESE PICTURES, YET HERE THEY ARE, FLOATING ABOUT LIKE PHYSICAL OBJECTS!



-- BUT ALSO TO AVOID FORCING PICTURES TO REPRESENT TOO MANY EMOTIONS IN A SINGLE IMAGE.

ONE BALLOON REPRESENTING FOUR EMOTIONS.

THIS WILL BE THE **BEST PARTY EVER!** WHY, IF---  
 WAIT A MINUTE... WHAT DID HE SAY ABOUT "FRANCE"? OH MY GOD, THAT'S **THIS WEEKEND!** HE WONT **BE HERE!** MY PARTY IS **RUINED!!**



FOUR BALLOONS REPRESENTING FOUR EMOTIONS.



ALSO, WHEN OVERSIZED WORD BALLOONS TIP THE TEXT/IMAGE BALANCE TOO FAR, A KIND OF NEUTRALITY OF IMAGE KICKS IN -- AN EXTREME VERSION OF THE "EMOTIONAL AVERAGE" MENTIONED EARLIER -- AND A COMIC CAN START TO FEEL MORE LIKE ILLUSTRATED PROSE. ALSO, IN PANELS LIKE THIS ONE, OR THIS CHAPTER'S FIRST PAGE, THE READER IS LIKELY TO START NOTICING THAT THEY'RE JUST READING TEXT -- EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEBATING WHETHER TO SKIP PARTS OR NOT --

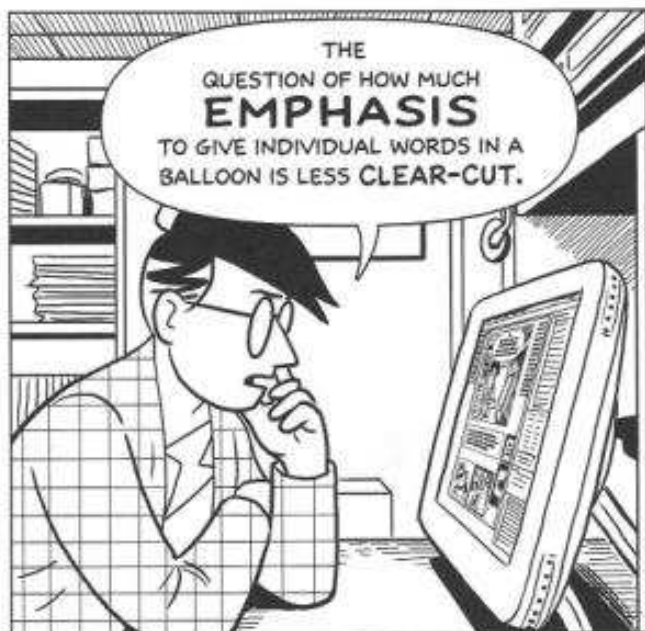
-- WHILE IN MORE BALANCED COMBINATIONS TEXT AND IMAGE KEEP TAPPING EACH OTHER ON THE SHOULDER --

-- SO THE READER NEVER LOOKS LONG ENOUGH TO BREAK THE SPELL!



TAP: TAP:





THOSE OF US WHO STARTED OUT IN THE MELODRAMATIC WORLD OF SUPERHERO COMICS BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO FREQUENT USES OF OVERSIZED, BOLD OR ITALICIZED LETTERING.



ALLOWING FOR STRONG VARIATIONS IN LETTERING CAN HELP TO INTEGRATE WORDS AND PICTURES BY CELEBRATING THEIR COMMON ROOTS AS GRAPHIC SYMBOLS.

SOME CARTOONISTS USE DRAMATIC VARIATIONS OF SIZE AND SHAPE TO PORTRAY VOCAL INFLECTION ON A WORD-TO-WORD BASIS.



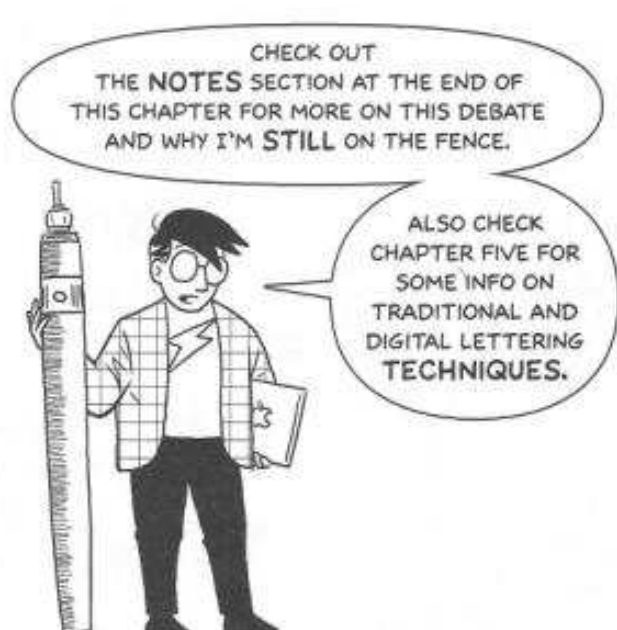
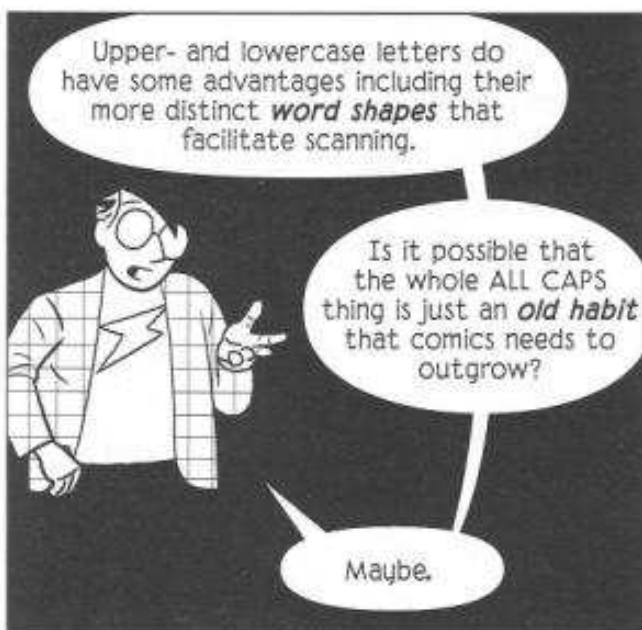
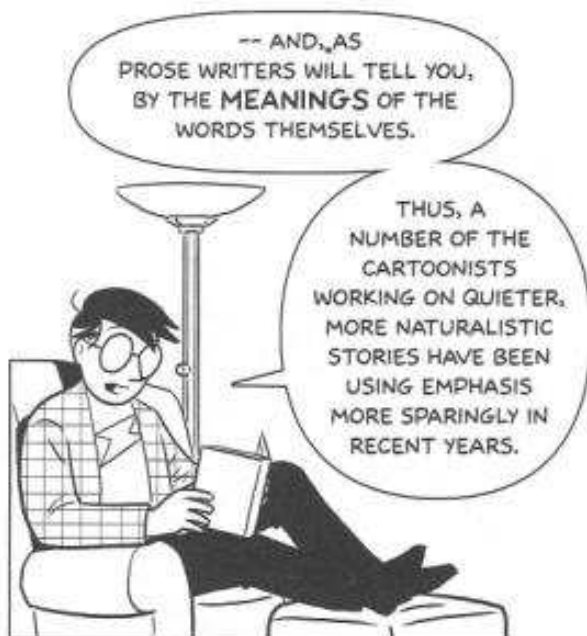
AND OF COURSE, NOTHING SAYS

**LOUD**  
LIKE A  
BIG FONT!

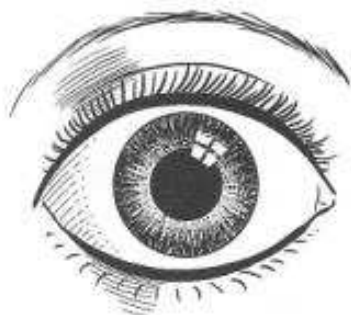


ON THE OTHER HAND, WILL EISNER -- HIMSELF A LONG-TIME USER OF BIG WORDS -- POINTS OUT THAT HOW WE "HEAR" A WORD BALLOON IS ALSO AFFECTED BY THE EXPRESSIONS AND BODY LANGUAGE OF THE SPEAKER, REGARDLESS OF HOW THE DIALOGUE IS LETTERED\* --





THANKS TO FILM AND TELEVISION, WE'VE GOTTEN USED TO STORIES THAT CONTINUOUSLY USE SIGHT AND SOUND AND OFFER RICH, IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES.



BUT AS COMICS CREATORS, IF WE WANT TO REPRODUCE THAT KIND OF EXPERIENCE, WE NEED TO DO IT USING ONLY ONE SENSE.



WORDS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN COMICS BY BRIDGING THAT GAP. THEY GIVE VOICE TO OUR CHARACTERS, ALLOW US TO DESCRIBE ALL FIVE SENSES --



-- AND IN THE CASE OF SOUND EFFECTS, THEY GRAPHICALLY BECOME WHAT THEY DESCRIBE --

**BANG!**

-- AND GIVE READERS A RARE CHANCE TO LISTEN --



-- WITH THEIR EYES.



CREATING GREAT SOUND EFFECTS DOESN'T REQUIRE THE SORT OF METHODOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY THAT GOOD BALLOON LETTERING NEEDS.



SOUND EFFECTS ARE ONE-SHOT INVENTIONS YOU CAN IMPROVISE LIKE CRAZY.



ONCE AGAIN; NO "RIGHT" OR "WRONG" APPROACHES --

-- BUT THERE ARE SOME SET VARIABLES THAT YOU CAN IMPROVISE WITHIN, INCLUDING...



**LOUDNESS**, AS INDICATED BY SIZE, BOLDNESS, TILT AND EXCLAMATION POINTS.



**TIMBRE**. THE QUALITY OF THE SOUND, ITS ROUGHNESS, WAVINESS, SHARPNESS, FUZZINESS, ETC...



**ASSOCIATION**. FONT STYLES AND SHAPES THAT REFER TO OR MIMIC THE SOURCE OF THE SOUND.



**GRAPHIC INTEGRATION**. PURE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS OF SHAPE, LINE AND COLOR -- AS WELL AS HOW THE EFFECT MIXES WITH THE PICTURE.



OF COURSE, IF YOU'RE GOING FOR A MORE UNDERSTATED KIND OF STORY YOU MAY WANT TO AVOID TOO MANY FLASHY EFFECTS --

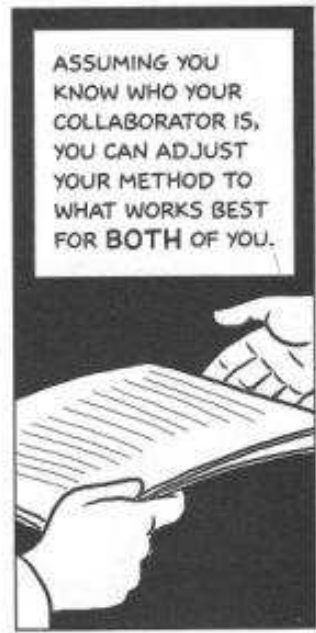
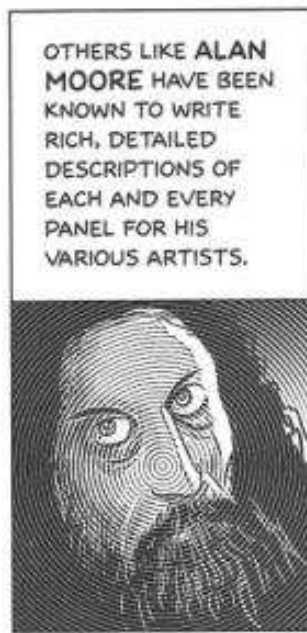
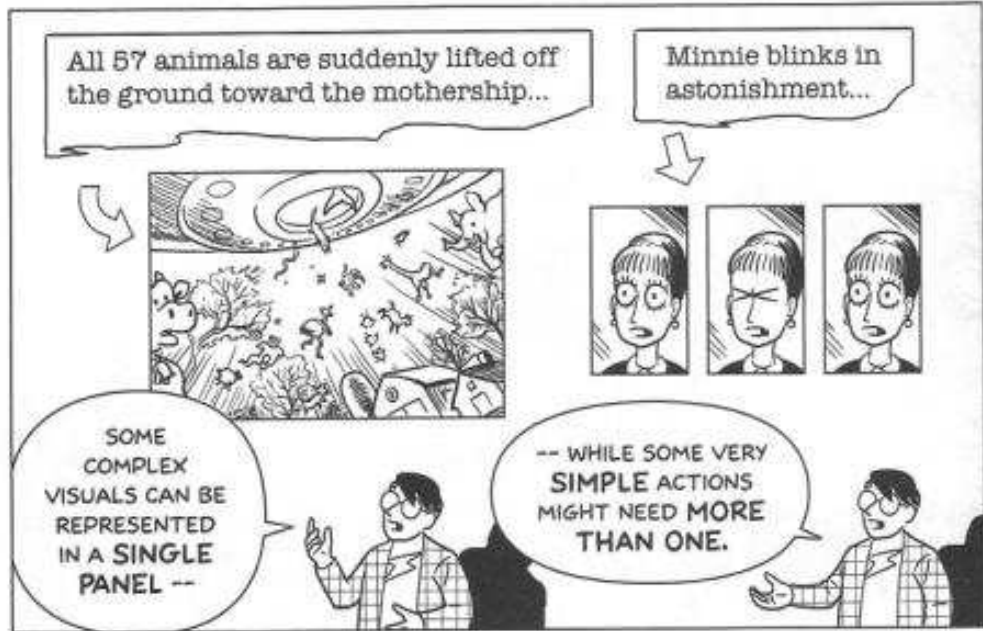


-- BUT IF YOU DON'T MIND SHOWING-OFF ONCE IN A WHILE --



-- SOUND EFFECTS ARE A GREAT WAY TO DO IT!





\*NOT RIGHT THERE IN THE OFFICE, OBVIOUSLY. I JUST WANTED TO SHOW WHICH ONE WAS JACK.

THE COMICS SCRIPT IS THE TOOL MOST ASSOCIATED WITH WRITING COMICS THAT OTHERS WILL DRAW --



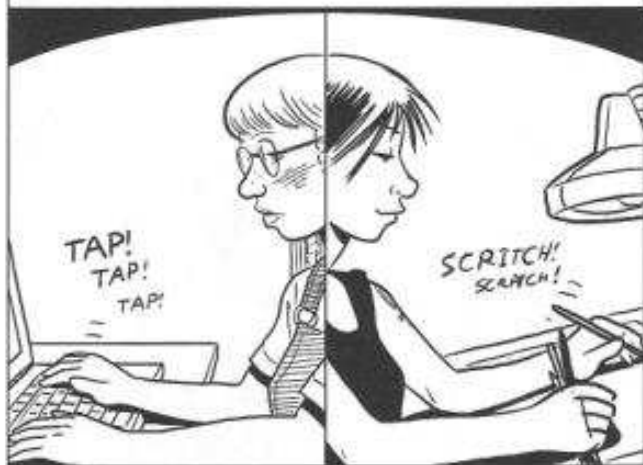
-- THOUGH THERE ARE SOME LONE CARTOONISTS WHO WRITE FULL SCRIPTS FOR THEMSELVES.



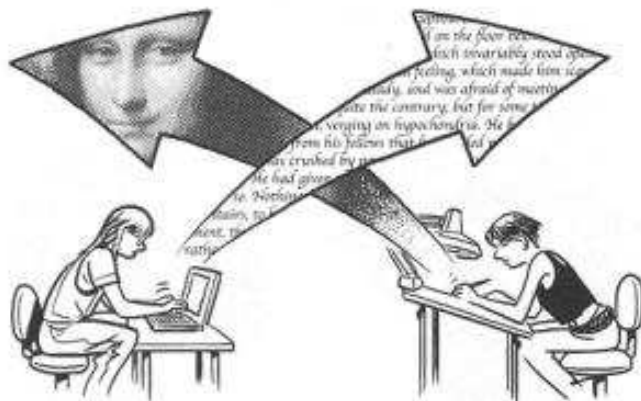
WRITING COMICS SCRIPTS IS AN ART UNTO ITSELF; CHECK THE BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR SOME BOOKS THAT CAN GIVE YOU DETAILED GUIDES ON HOW IT'S DONE.



BUT REMEMBER, EVEN IF YOU TEAM UP WITH SOMEONE TO CREATE COMICS, YOUR STORIES WILL BE AT THEIR STRONGEST IF THEY FEEL LIKE THEY WERE CREATED WITH A SINGLE-MINDED PURPOSE.



BEWARE OF THE WRITER-VERSUS-ARTIST SYNDROME WHERE ONE COLLABORATOR TRIES TO WIN THE READER OVER WITH EVOCATIVE PROSE AND THE OTHER TRIES TO DAZZLE THE READER WITH SUMPTUOUS ART --



-- WHILE NEITHER ART NOR WRITING EVER FULLY ACKNOWLEDGES EACH OTHER.

NO MATTER WHAT KINDS OF WORD/PICTURE MIXTURES YOU PUT IN YOUR COMICS --

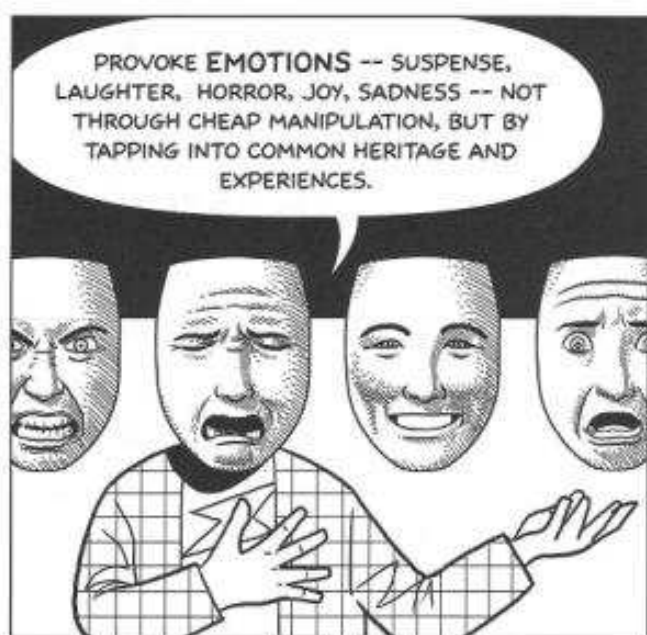
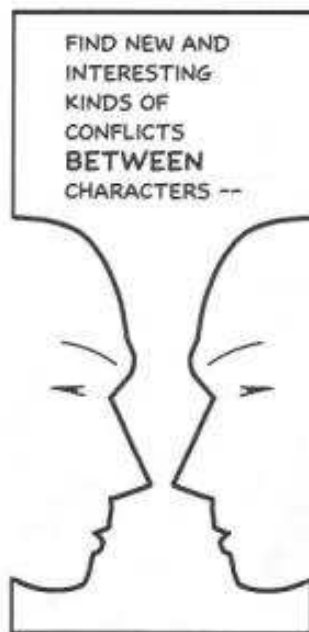
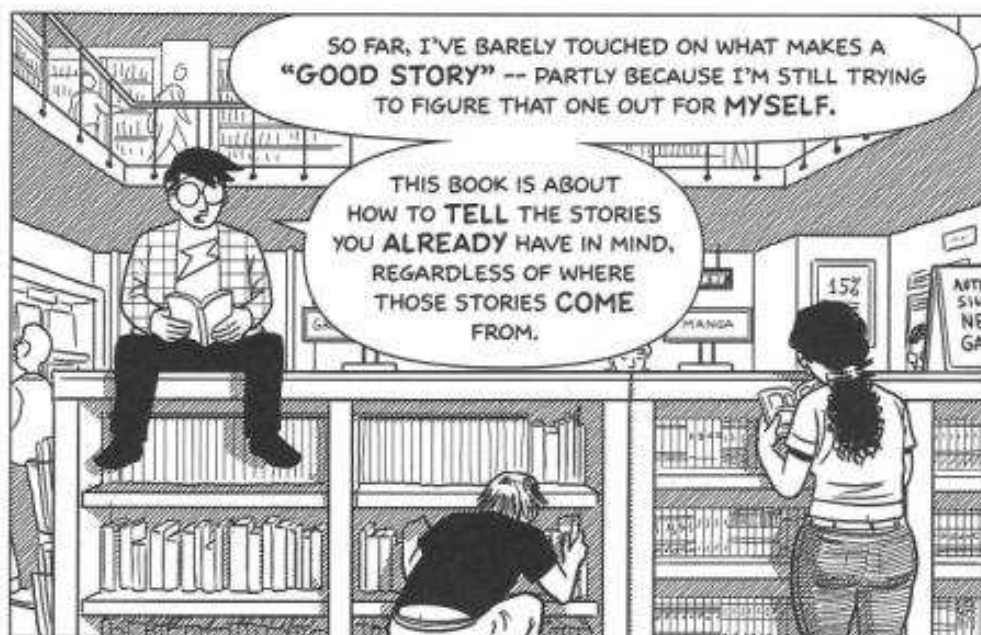


-- IT'S WHEN WORDS AND PICTURES COMBINE SEAMLESSLY THAT COMICS ARE AT THEIR BEST.

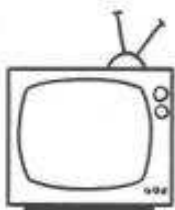


WHETHER YOU WORK ALONE OR AS PART OF A TEAM, THAT'S A GOAL WORTH PURSUING.





BASICALLY, IT'S THE SAME ADVICE YOU'LL GET, NO MATTER WHAT MEDIUM YOU CHOOSE TO TELL YOUR STORIES IN.



COMICS IS DIFFERENT FROM THESE OTHER MEDIA IN TERMS OF ITS CHALLENGES, TOOLS AND WORKING METHODS --

-- BUT THOSE BASIC GOALS ARE THE SAME --

-- BECAUSE ALL STORIES WIND UP IN THE SAME PLACE: THE MINDS OF THE AUDIENCE.

THIS IS WHY I DON'T THINK THERE'S A TYPE OF STORY THAT'S "RIGHT" FOR COMICS --

-- AND WHY IT'S A MISTAKE TO LIMIT THE KINDS OF STORIES WE TELL IN AN ATTEMPT TO SQUEEZE OURSELVES INTO SOMEONE ELSE'S SHELF SPACE.

NOBODY KNOWS WHAT WILL WORK UNTIL THEY TRY IT. SOME OF COMICS' BIGGEST SUCCESS STORIES IN RECENT YEARS HAVE EXPLORED SUBJECTS THAT NO ONE WAS WRITING ABOUT AT THE TIME.

STORIES NO ONE HAD ANY REASON TO THINK WOULD SUCCEED.

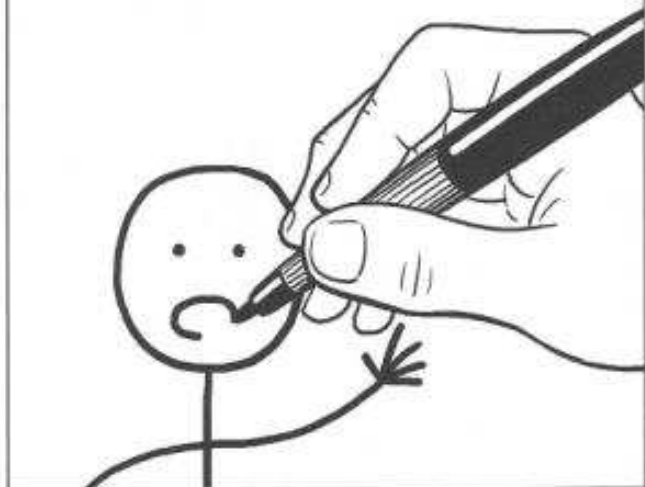
MY ADVICE? WRITE WHAT YOU WANT TO READ.

YOU'LL HAVE MORE FUN DOING IT --

-- AND IF ALL ELSE FAILS, YOU'LL ALWAYS HAVE AT LEAST ONE LOYAL READER.



IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT THE SAME FEW DOTS AND LINES THAT CAN DRAW A PERSON --



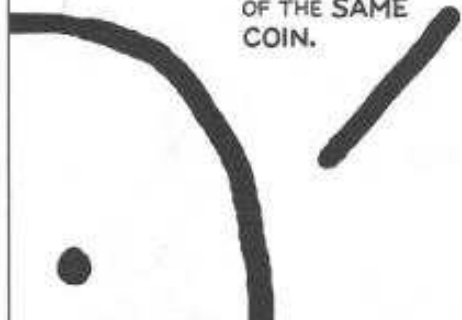
-- CAN AS EASILY WRITE WHAT THAT PERSON SAYS.



WORDS AND PICTURES, FOR ALL THEIR DIFFERENCES --

tax

-- ARE JUST TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN.



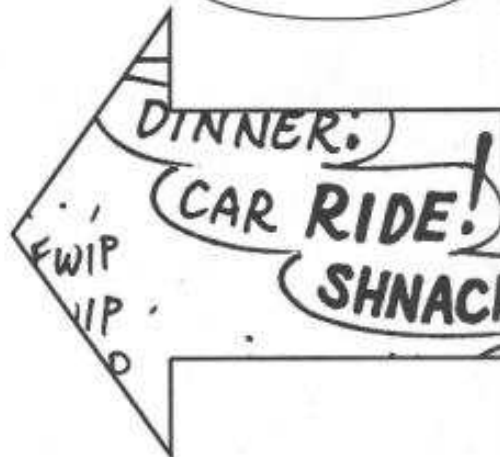
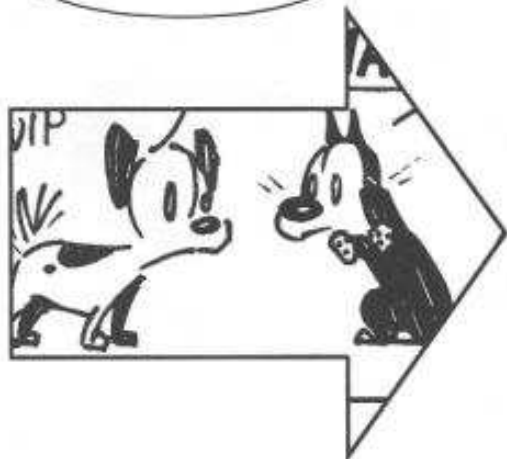
BOTH SHARE A COMMON PURPOSE AND A COMMON HERITAGE.



GREAT CARTOONISTS DEMONSTRATE HOW SEAMLESSLY THE TWO CAN BE COMBINED --

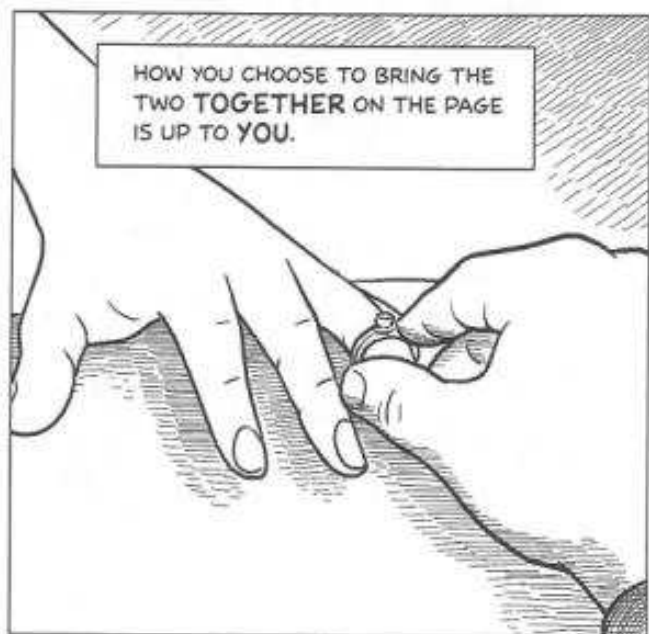
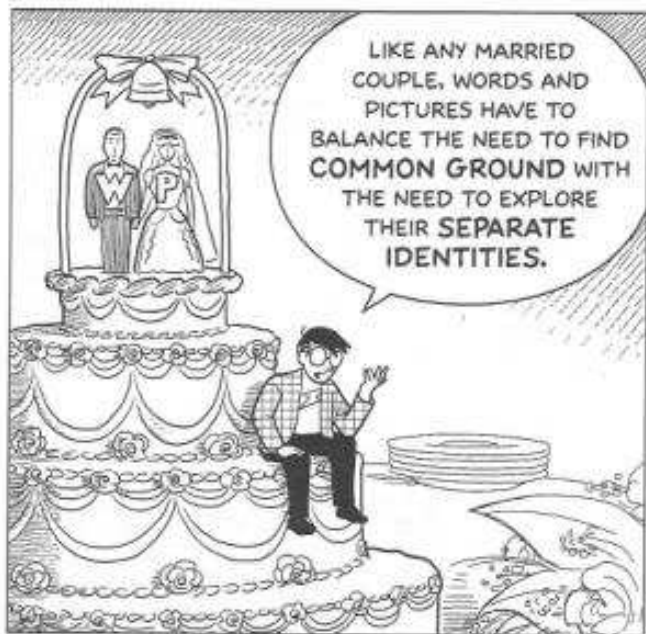
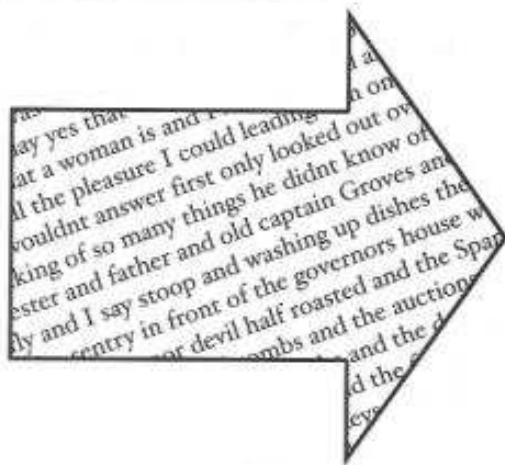
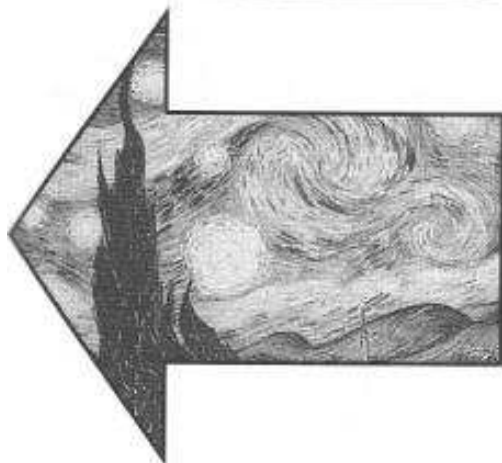
-- BY EMPHASIZING THE CALLIGRAPHIC QUALITIES OF SIMPLE CARTOON IMAGES --

-- AND THE PICTURE-LIKE IMMEDIACY OF SHORT BOLD WORDS.



BUT WORDS AND PICTURES ALSO HAVE THEIR SEPARATE HISTORIES AND SEPARATE STRENGTHS --

-- AND THESE HAVE ALSO BEEN A RICH SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR MANY OF THE CREATORS WHO ARE DRAWN TO COMICS.



# NOTES

## CHAPTER 3: THE POWER OF WORDS

### PAGE 128, PANEL ONE - R.C. HARVEY ON COMICS

IN R.C. HARVEY'S OWN WORDS: "...COMICS CONSIST OF PICTORIAL NARRATIVES OR EXPOSITIONS IN WHICH WORDS (OFTEN LETTERED INTO THE PICTURE AREA WITHIN SPEECH BALLOONS) USUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE MEANING OF THE PICTURES AND VICE VERSA."\*

### PAGE 129, PANEL ONE - A MEDIUM OF FRAGMENTS

SEE *UNDERSTANDING COMICS*, CHAPTER THREE, FOR 34 PAGES' WORTH OF MUSINGS ON WHAT I USUALLY REFER TO AS "CLOSURE," THE TENDENCY WE ALL HAVE TO TAKE INCOMPLETE INFORMATION AND FILL IN THE BLANKS, AND WHY I THINK IT'S ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE COMICS-READING EXPERIENCE.

### PAGE 134, PANEL NINE - THE SMELL OF COOKIES

WRITERS FREQUENTLY OVERLOOK THE OPPORTUNITY WORDS GIVE US TO REVEAL WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SENSES OF TOUCH, TASTE AND SMELL. ONE OF MY FAVORITE COMICS WHEN I WAS 14 YEARS OLD WAS *DAREDEVIL* (THE BLIND SUPERHERO WHO RELIES ON HIS HEIGHTENED OTHER SENSES TO FIGHT CRIME AND CHECK OUT JENNIFER GARNER IN THE RAIN) AND I STILL REMEMBER AN OVERVOICE CAPTION WHERE HE DESCRIBES TRACE SCENTS OF "CORDITE AND GUNPOWDER" ALL THESE YEARS LATER.



THE INFLUENCE OF MOVIES ON COMICS PROBABLY TIPS US TOWARD SIGHT AND SOUND AS THE DOMINANT SENSES, BUT WE SHOULD ALSO TAKE A PAGE FROM PROSE AND POETRY WRITERS WHO GIVE ALL FIVE SENSES THEIR DUE. GIVING READERS A WINDOW INTO A CHARACTER'S SENSORY EXPERIENCES CAN INCREASE THE INTIMACY OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THAT CHARACTER, AND STRENGTHEN THEIR DESIRE TO STAY WITH THE STORY.

### PAGE 139, PANEL THREE - DON'T TRIP ON MY LOGO!

HAVING A LOGO PHYSICALLY COEXIST WITH CHARACTERS RAISES QUESTIONS OF BELIEVABILITY. IF THE COMICS ARTISTS WANT US TO BELIEVE IN HIS OR HER WORLD AS A REAL PLACE, DOES A GIANT PLYWOOD BILLBOARD WITH THE CHARACTER'S NAME ON IT GET IN THE WAY OF THAT GOAL? I THINK THE ANSWER'S BOTH YES AND NO; IT'S ALL JUST A QUESTION OF TIMING.

THE SENSE OF LOSING YOURSELF IN A MOVIE, BOOK, COMIC OR PLAY DOESN'T HAPPEN INSTANTANEOUSLY. WHEN THE OPENING CREDITS TO A MOVIE START APPEARING, YOU'RE PERFECTLY AWARE THAT YOU'RE SITTING IN A DARK ROOM WITH STRANGERS WHILE LIGHT IS PROJECTED ON A SCREEN. IT'S ONLY A FEW MINUTES LATER, AFTER THOSE NAMES STOP APPEARING IN MID-AIR OVER THE ACTION, THAT THE MOVIE THEATER AND THE STRANGERS AND THE SCREEN ALL VANISH AND YOU'RE SIMPLY LIVING THE STORY. IF THE STORYTELLING IS GOOD ENOUGH (AND IF EVERYBODY TURNS OFF THEIR CELL PHONES AND SHUTS UP) YOU WON'T RETURN TO THAT DARK ROOM FILLED WITH STRANGERS UNTIL THE CLOSING CREDITS ROLL.

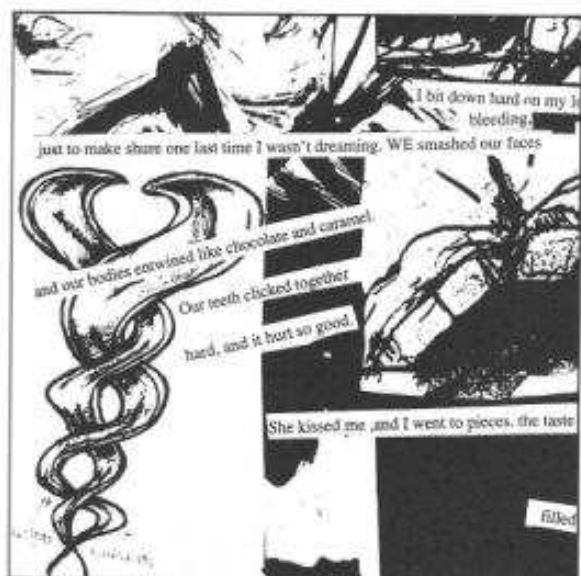
SIMILARLY, WHEN WE START READING A COMIC, A 16-FOOT HIGH LOGO ON PAGE ONE DOESN'T TAKE US OUT OF THE ACTION BECAUSE WE'RE NOT EVEN IN IT YET. WE KNOW THAT WE'RE HOLDING A STACK OF PAPER (OR LOOKING AT A GLOWING SCREEN) AND IT USUALLY TAKES A PAGE OR TWO TO FORGET. IT'S IN THAT ENTRY PHASE (AND ITS CORRESPONDING EXIT PHASE) THAT A LITTLE ARTIFICE CAN'T HURT, AND MIGHT ACTUALLY ENHANCE THE READING EXPERIENCE.



\*SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY

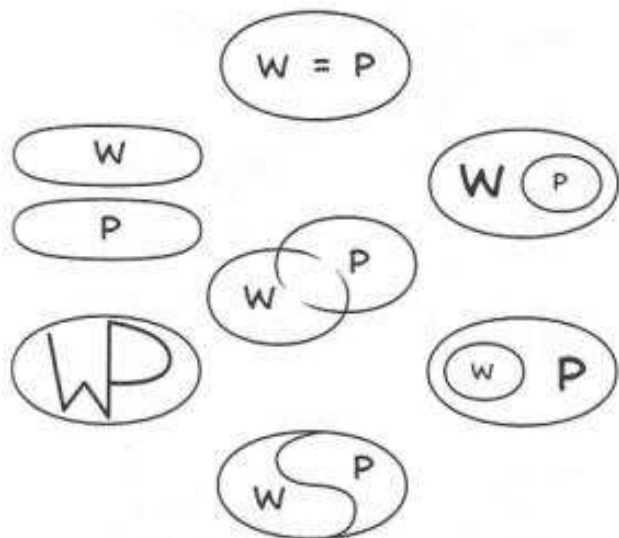
**PAGE 139, PANEL SIX - DAVID CHOE, MONTAGE AND WORD-SPECIFIC**

HERE'S A BIT MORE OF CHOE'S CUT-AND-PASTE APPROACH TO COMBINING WORDS AND ART (FROM HIS COMIC *SLOW JAMS*). NOTICE THAT THIS ALSO FOLLOWS THE WORD-SPECIFIC PATTERN. CHOE'S TYPED SENTENCES TELL US EVERYTHING WE NEED TO KNOW, SO THE PICTURES ARE FREED TO WANDER AS FAR AS THEY LIKE.



**PAGE 140-141 - USING (AND ABUSING) THE WORD-PICTURE CATEGORIES**

JUST TO REITERATE, I'M DEFINITELY NOT SUGGESTING THAT ANYONE SIT DOWN AND CAREFULLY CHOOSE THEIR WORD/PICTURE COMBINATIONS BEFORE CREATING A COMIC. AS WITH THE 6 PANEL TRANSITIONS IN CHAPTER ONE, I DON'T WANT THIS KIND OF CLASSIFICATION TO REPLACE WHATEVER INSTINCTS YOU HAVE. INSTEAD, BY ASKING THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS I POSE AT THE BOTTOM OF PAGE 140 AND AT TOP OF PAGE 141, I HOPE YOU CAN HONE YOUR INSTINCTS IN THE FUTURE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE WORD-PICTURE POSSIBILITIES IN A NATURAL, INTUITIVE WAY.



EVERY TECHNIQUE WE USE BEGINS ITS LIFE AS A CONSCIOUS PROCESS AND, WITH LUCK, GRADUALLY BECOMES SECOND NATURE. BUT NOT EVERY TECHNIQUE WORKS TO OUR ADVANTAGE IN THE LONG RUN AND IT PAYS TO CONSCIOUSLY SEPARATE GOOD INSTINCTS FROM BAD HABITS ONCE IN A WHILE.

**PAGE 142-145 - THE THOUGHT BALLOON AND ITS RELATIVES**

THOUGHT BALLOONS AREN'T AS COMMON AS THEY ONCE WERE, BUT THEY'RE STILL A GREAT WAY TO QUICKLY REVEAL A CHARACTER'S INNER LIFE (SEE "THE SMELL OF COOKIES" ABOVE). IN THE LAST COUPLE OF DECADES, THOUGH, CHARACTERS' THOUGHTS ARE AS LIKELY TO BE EXPRESSED IN THE FORM OF A CAPTION -- THE EQUIVALENT OF A MOVIE OVERVOICE. SUCH CAPTIONS SEEM TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE AUDIENCE IN A WAY THAT BALLOONS DON'T, AS IF THE CHARACTER WAS SENDING THEIR THOUGHTS DIRECTLY TO THE READER, AND CAN GIVE THE TEXT AN EXTRA LEVEL OF INTIMACY. THEY ALSO DON'T REQUIRE THE THINKER TO BE IN PANEL TO SHOW WHERE THE THOUGHT ORIGINATES FROM, SO THEY CAN APPEAR IN PANELS THAT ARE FRAMED FROM THE THINKER'S POINT OF VIEW. SUCH "THOUGHT CAPTIONS" ARE USUALLY IN PRESENT TENSE AND FIRST PERSON (BELOW LEFT) BUT PAST TENSE NARRATION (BELOW RIGHT) CAN COVER A LOT OF THE SAME GROUND.



THE TRADITIONAL THOUGHT BALLOON HAS ADVANTAGES, THOUGH. IT CAN OFFER A GLIMPSE INTO ANY CHARACTER'S THOUGHTS AT ANY TIME, AND DOESN'T REQUIRE REPETITION THROUGHOUT THE STORY. A THOUGHT CAPTION ONLY WORKS AS RUNNING NARRATION, AND READERS HAVE TO KNOW WHICH CHARACTER IS DOING THE THINKING, EVEN IN PANELS OVERFLOWING WITH CHARACTERS. A THOUGHT BALLOON, ON THE OTHER HAND, CAN APPEAR ONCE IN A 200 PAGE GRAPHIC NOVEL POINTING TO A RANDOM BYSTANDER, AND AUDIENCES WILL THINK NOTHING OF IT.

PAGE 142, PANEL SEVEN - BALLOON SHAPES

SOME EXAMPLES OF BALLOON SHAPES:



PAGE 144, PANEL THREE - COMMON ROOTS

FOR MUCH MORE ON WHY I SEE WORDS AND PICTURES AS TWO BRANCHES OF THE SAME TREE, SEE *UNDERSTANDING COMICS*, CHAPTER SIX, "SHOW AND TELL."

PAGE 145, LAST PANEL - THE LOWERCASE DEBATE

I KEEP GOING BACK AND FORTH ON THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO USE UPPER- AND LOWERCASE LETTERS IN WORD BALLOONS. THE FACT THAT I'M BACK TO ALL UPPERCASE IN THIS BOOK ISN'T IN ANY WAY AN INDICATION THAT I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.

ON THE ONE HAND, UPPERCASE COMIC BOOK LETTERING HAS THE FOLLOWING ARGUMENTS IN ITS FAVOR:

- ABOUT 98% OF ALL ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMICS IN THE LAST 100 YEARS HAVE USED IT, INCLUDING NEARLY ALL OF THE COMICS NOW CONSIDERED CLASSICS. IF IT AIN'T BROKE, WHY FIX IT?
- CAPITAL LETTERS ARE EASIER TO LETTER BY HAND.
- CAPS FILL THE SPACE MORE EFFICIENTLY.
- CAPS BLEND BETTER WITH PICTURES.
- CAPS LOOK BETTER WITH FREQUENT BOLD/ITALIC TYPE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, ADVOCATES OF USING UPPER AND LOWERCASE LETTERS MIGHT RESPOND:

- THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS COMICS HAVE RARELY DONE IN THE LAST 100 YEARS, INCLUDING MATURE THEMES, SUBTLE CHARACTERIZATION AND SOPHISTICATED ARTWORK; THAT'S NO REASON NOT TO TRY THEM.
- ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR COMICS IN HISTORY, *TINTIN*, USES UPPER- AND LOWERCASE LETTERING, AS DO OTHER EUROPEAN COMICS, AND IT LOOKS GREAT.
- EASIER DOESN'T EQUAL BETTER.
- A LITTLE WHITE SPACE NEVER HURT ANYONE.
- IF UPPER AND LOWERCASE LETTERS DON'T BLEND WITH PICTURES, HOW DO WE EXPLAIN FIVE CENTURIES OF ILLUSTRATED BOOKS?
- BOLD TYPE IS OVER-USED AND MELODRAMATIC.

FOR NOW, I'M STICKING WITH THIS UPPERCASE FONT MADE FROM MY HANDWRITING, BECAUSE I LIKE THE WAY IT BLENDS WITH MY PICTURES. IRONICALLY, I DON'T THINK IT WORKS AS WELL HERE IN THE NOTES SECTION, BUT I LIKE THE CONTINUITY OF APPEARANCE FROM THE COMICS PAGES SO THAT'S WHY YOU'RE READING IT NOW.

SOME THINGS I DO KNOW FOR SURE:

- THE OCCASIONAL BIG, BOLD WORD DOES SEEM TO ANCHOR THE TEXT AND PICTURE WHEN YOU FIRST GLANCE AT A PAGE (I.E., NEITHER PICTURES NOR WORDS SEEM OVERPOWERED).
- INCLUDING UPPERCASE, LOWERCASE, BOLD, ITALICS AND SIZE VARIATION THE WAY I DID IN THE LAST BOOK WAS A BIT CLUTTERED.
- I'LL PROBABLY KEEP CHANGING MY MIND FOR A WHILE.



## PAGE 148-149 - THE COMICS SCRIPT

SEE THE BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR POINTERS TO PRINTED COLLECTIONS OF WRITERS' SCRIPTS INCLUDING ALAN MOORE (AND ME, FOR THAT MATTER).

## PAGE 149, PANEL FIVE - WRITER VERSUS ARTIST

I FIRST DESCRIBED THIS SYNDROME IN *UNDERSTANDING COMICS*, PAGE 48, AND AGAIN IN CHAPTER SIX.

## PAGE 151 - WRITE FOR YOURSELF

IF YOU JUST WRITE THE KINDS OF STORIES YOU THINK OTHERS WILL WANT TO READ, YOU'LL BE COMPETING WITH CARTOONISTS WHO ARE FAR MORE ENTHUSIASTIC FOR THAT KIND OF COMIC THAN YOU ARE, AND THEY'LL KICK YOUR ASS EVERY TIME.

OR, TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY:



## OPTIONAL EXERCISES

### #1 - WORD-SPECIFIC (PAGES 131-133)

TAKE A FEW PARAGRAPHS FROM A NOVEL OR SHORT STORY AND TRY BREAKING THE TEXT INTO SMALL CAPTIONS. TRY OUT AT LEAST TWO VERY DIFFERENT WAYS OF ILLUSTRATING THOSE CAPTIONS IN COMICS FORM, ONE PER PANEL.

### #2 - PICTURE-SPECIFIC (PAGES 133-134)

FIND A COMIC WHERE THE PICTURES PRIMARILY TELL THE STORY. MAKE A COPY AND HAVE A FRIEND BLANK OUT ALL THE CAPTIONS. TRY OUT AT LEAST TWO VERY DIFFERENT WAYS OF FILLING THOSE CAPTIONS.

### #3 - MONTAGE (PAGE 139)

CAN YOU MAKE AN ENTIRE COMIC USING NOTHING BUT PICTURES AND WORDS CUT FROM THE LATEST ISSUE OF A POPULAR MAGAZINE? HOW DOES THE CUT-AND-PASTE LOOK OF IT AFFECT THE READING EXPERIENCE?

## #4 - BALLOON DISSECTING (PAGE 143)

FIND A COMICS PAGE WHERE THE WRITER HAS TRIED CRAMMING TOO MANY WORDS AND BALLOONS INTO EACH PANEL. IF YOU HAD ALL THE ROOM IN THE WORLD, HOW COULD YOU SPLIT THOSE BALLOONS INTO SEPARATE PANELS AND ILLUSTRATE THEM SO THAT EACH CHARACTER WAS EXPRESSING JUST ONE EMOTION PER BALLOON.

## #5 - EXTREME EMPHASIS (PAGE 144)

FIND A 2-4 MINUTE AUDIO SAMPLE OF SOMEONE TALKING WITH A LOT OF EXPRESSION IN THEIR VOICE (E.G., A COMEDIAN, POLITICIAN, RELIGIOUS LEADER, ACTOR IN AN EMOTIONAL SCENE...) AND LETTER THEIR DIALOGUE IN A WAY THAT REFLECTS THEIR TONE OF VOICE INCLUDING VOLUME, TIMBRE, DURATION, ETC... WOULD SUCH EXTREME EXPRESSIVENESS IN LETTERING WORK IN A COMICS PANEL? IF NOT, HOW MUCH WOULD YOU NEED TO TONE IT DOWN?

## #6 - SOUND EFFECTS LAB (PAGES 146-147)

PRODUCE AT LEAST TEN SOUNDS, USING OBJECTS IN THE ROOM YOU'RE IN RIGHT NOW. CAN YOU DRAW A SOUND EFFECT FOR EACH ONE THAT REFLECTS ITS VOLUME, DURATION AND TIMBRE? COULD A FRIEND SUCCESSFULLY GUESS THE SOURCE OF AT LEAST FIVE OF THEM, JUST BY LOOKING AT YOUR SKETCHES?

ALTERNATELY, THERE ARE SOME OLD SOUND EFFECTS RECORDS OUT THERE. THESE CAN ALSO BE A FUN JUMPING OFF POINT.



## #7 - SCRIPTING FOR OTHERS (PAGE 149)

PICK A SCENE FROM A MOVIE YOU LIKE AND TRY ADAPTING IT INTO A COMICS SCRIPT. CHOOSE YOUR MOMENTS AND FRAMING WITH THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF COMICS IN MIND, RATHER THAN JUST USING THE SHOTS THAT APPEARED IN THE MOVIE. WHAT WORKS IN FILM THAT DOESN'T WORK AS WELL IN COMICS AND VICE VERSA?

ADDITIONAL NOTES AT:  
[WWW.SCOTTMCCLOUD.COM/MAKINGCOMICS](http://WWW.SCOTTMCCLOUD.COM/MAKINGCOMICS)