CHAPTER TWO

THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS.

WELL, ACTUALLY THAT'S WORSE. THIS IS NOT A PAINTING OF A PIPE. THIS IS A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.

NOPE. WORSE AGAIN. IT'S A PRINTED COPY OF A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.

N'EST-CE PAS?

HERE'S A PAINTING BY MAGRITTE CALLED "THE TREACHERY OF IMAGES."

THE INSCRIPTION IS IN FRENCH. TRANSLATED, IT MEANS "THIS IS NOT A PIPE."

TEN COPIES, ACTUALLY. SIX IF YOU FOLD THE PAGES BACK.

AND INDEED THIS IS NOT A PIPE.

RIGHT?

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I'M SAYING?

IF YOU DO, HAVE YOUR EARS CHECKED, BECAUSE NO ONE SAID A WORD.

SEE PAGE 216 FOR MORE INFORMATION.
This is not a man.

This is not a country.

This is not a leaf.

This is not a person.

This is not a cow.

This is not my voice.

This is not sound.

This is not law.

This is not a car.

This is not food.

This is not a company.

These are not ideas.

These are not ideas.

These are not people.

Now, the word "icon" means many things.

Welcome to the strange and wonderful world of the ICON!

Splat!

Icon

These are not separate moments.

These are the images we use to represent concepts, ideas and philosophies.

Icons of the practical realm.

For the purposes of this chapter, I'm using the word "icon" to mean any image used to represent a person, place, thing or idea.

That's a bit broader than the definition in my dictionary, but it's the closest thing to what I need here.

"Symbol" is a bit too loaded for me.

KITCHEN SINK PRESS

AND FINALLY, THE ICONS WE CALL PICTURES: IMAGES DESIGNED TO ACTUALLY RESEMBLE THEIR SUBJECTS.

The sorts of images we usually call symbols are one category of icon, however.

Then there are the icons of language, science and communication.

But as resemblance varies, so does the level of iconic content.

Or, to put it somewhat clumsily, some pictures are just more iconic than others.
IN THE NON-PICTORIAL ICONS, MEANING IS FIXED AND ABSOLUTE. THEIR APPEARANCE DOESN'T AFFECT THEIR MEANING BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT INVISIBLE IDEAS.

WORDS ARE TOTALLY ABSTRACT ICONS THAT IS, THEY Bear NO RESSEMBLANCE AT ALL TO THE REAL MCCOY.

LETS SEIF WE CAN PUT THESE PICTORIAL ICONS IN SOME SORT OF ORDER.

IN PICTURES, HOWEVER, MEANING IS FLUID AND VARYING ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE. THEY DIFFER FROM "REAL-LIFE" APPEARANCE TO VARYING DEGREES.

BUT IN PICTURES, THE LEVEL OF ABstraction Varies. SOME, LIKE THE FACE IN THE PREVIOUS PANEL SO CLOSTLY RESEMBLE THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS AS TO ALMOST TEAS THE EYE!

OTHERS LIKE YOURS TRULY ARE QUITE A BIT MORE ABSTRACT AND, IN FACT, ARE VERY MUCH UNLIKE ANY HUMAN FACE YOU'VE EVER SEEN!

THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT SET THESE APART FROM ACTUAL FACES - THEY'RE SMALLER, FLATTED, LESS DETAILED. THEY DON'T MOVE, THEY LACK COLOR - BUT AS PICTORIAL ICONS GO, THEY ARE PRETTY "REALISTIC."

COMMON WISDOM HOLDS THAT THE PHOTOGRAPH AND THE REALISTIC PICTURE ARE THE ICONS THAT MOST RESEMBLE THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS.

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE ICON WE CALL-

--- THE CARTOON?---
Why are we so involved with cartoons? Why is our culture so in thrall to the simplified reality of the cartoon?

Film critics sometimes describe a live-action film as a "cartoon" to acknowledge the stripped-down intensity of a simple story or visual style.

Though the term is often disparagingly applied to many time-tested classics, simplifying characters and images toward a purer, more effective tool for storytelling in any medium.

Cartooning isn't just a way of drawing, it's a way of seeing.

The ability of cartoons to focus our attention on an idea is, I think, an important part of their special power, both in comics and in drawing generally.

Why would anyone, young or old, respond to a cartoon as much or more than a realistic image?

Another is the universality of cartoon imagery. The more cartony a face is, for instance, the more people it could be said to describe.

Defining the cartoon would take up as much space as defining comics but for now, I'm going to examine cartooning as a form of amplification through simplification.

When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details.

By stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't.

The fact that your mind is capable of taking a circle, two dots and a line and turning them into a face is something short of incredible.

But still, more incredible is the fact that you cannot avoid seeing a face here. Your mind won't let you!
ASK A FRIEND TO DRAW YOU SOME SHAPES ON A PIECE OF PAPER. THEY SHOULD BE CLOSED CURVES, BUT OTHERWISE CAN BE AS WEIRD AND IRREGULAR AS HE OR SHE WANTS.

LET'S SAY WE RESULTS LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

NOW, YOU'LL FIND THAT NO MATTER WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THOSE SHAPES CAN BE MADE INTO A FACE WITH ONE SIMPLE ADDITION.

YOUR MIND HAS NO TROUBLE AT ALL CONVERTING SUCH SHAPES INTO FACES, YET WOULD IT EVER MISTAKE THIS-- --FOR THIS?

WE SEE OURSELVES IN EVERYTHING.

WE ASSIGN IDENTITIES AND EMOTIONS WHERE NONE EXIST.

AND WE MAKE THE WORLD OVER IN OUR IMAGE.

WE HUMANS ARE A SELF-CENTERED RACE.
THINK OF YOUR FACE AS A MASK.

THAT'S WHAT IT IS, AFTER ALL.

ALL SET?

GOOD.

NOW, SMILE.

A MASK.

FACING OUTWARD.

WORN FROM THE DAY YOU WERE BORN.

SLAVE TO YOUR EVERY MENTAL COMMAND.

C'MON, NOBODY'S LOOKING.

GOOD, NOW WHAT CHANGED WHEN YOU SMILED? WHAT DID YOU SEE?

NOTHING, RIGHT.

YET, YOU KNOW YOU SMILED! NOT JUST BECAUSE YOU FELT YOUR CHEEKS COMRESS OR THE CRINKLING AROUND YOUR EYES!

SEEN BY EVERYONE YOU MEET.

BUT NEVER BY YOU.

OPEN ITS EYES NOW.

JUST THINK IT THE MASK WILL OBEY.

YOU KNOW YOU SMILED BECAUSE YOU TRUSTED THIS MASK CALLED YOUR FACE TO RESPOND!

BUT THE FACE YOU SEE IN YOUR MIND IS NOT THE SAME AS OTHERS SEE!

WHEN TWO PEOPLE INTERACT, THEY USUALLY LOOK DIRECTLY AT ONE ANOTHER, SEEING THEIR PARTNER'S FEATURES IN VIVID DETAIL.
EACH ONE ALSO SUSTAINS A CONSTANT AWARENESS OF HIS OR HER OWN FACE. BUT THIS MIND-PICTURE IS NOT NEARLY SO VIVID; JUST A SKETCHY ARRANGEMENT... A SENSE OF SHAPE... A SENSE OF GENERAL PLACEMENT.

SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AND AS BASIC... AS A CARTOON.

I DOUBT IT! YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN FAR TOO AWARE OF THE MESSENGER TO FULLY RECEIVE THE MESSAGE.

APART FROM WHAT LITTLE I TOLD YOU ABOUT MYSELF IN CHAPTER ONE, I'M PRACTICALLY A BLANK SLATE!

IT WOULD NEVER EVEN OCCUR TO YOU TO WONDER WHAT MY POLITICS ARE, OR WHAT I HAD FOR LUNCH! OR WHERE I GOT THIS SILLY OUTFIT!

I'M JUST A LITTLE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD. A CONCEPT.

THUS, WHEN YOU LOOK AT A PHOTO OR REALISTIC DRAWING OF A FACE--

--YOU SEE IT AS THE FACE OF ANOTHER.

--YOU SEE YOURSELF.

BUT WHEN YOU ENTER THE WORLD OF THE CARTOON--

I BELIEVE THIS IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF OUR CHILDHOOD FASCINATION WITH CARTOONS, THOUGH OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS UNIVERSEL IDENTIFICATION, SIMPLICITY AND THE CHILDLIKE FEATURES OF MANY CARTOON CHARACTERS ALSO PLAY A PART.

YOU GIVE ME LIFE BY READING THIS BOOK AND BY "FILLING UP" THIS VERY ICONIC CARTOONY) FORM.

WHO I AM IS IRRELEVANT. I'M JUST A LITTLE PIECE OF YOU.

BUT IF WHO I AM MATTERS LESS, MAYBE WHAT I SAY WILL MATTER MORE.

THAT'S THE THEORY ANYWAY.

THE CARTOON IS A VACUUM INTO WHICH OUR IDENTITY AND AWARENESS ARE PULLED.

AN EMPTY SHELL THAT WE INHABIT WHICH ENABLES US TO TRAVEL IN ANOTHER REALM.

THAT'S WHY I DECIDED TO DRAW MYSELF IN SUCH A SIMPLE STYLE.

WOULD YOU HAVE LISTENED TO ME IF I LOOKED LIKE THIS?

WE DON'T JUST OBSERVE THE CARTOON, WE BECOME IT!

SO FAR, WE'VE ONLY DISCUSSED FACES, BUT THE PHENOMENON OF NON-VISUAL SELF-AWARENESS CAN, TO A LESSER DEGREE, STILL APPLY TO OUR WHOLE BODIES. AFTER ALL, DO WE NEED TO SEE OUR HANDS TO KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING?

THERE'S MORE, TOO!
THE LATE GREAT MARSHALL MCLuhan observed a similar form of non-visual awareness when people interact with inanimate objects.

WHEN DRIVING, FOR EXAMPLE, WE EXPERIENCE MUCH MORE THAN OUR FIVE SENSES REPORT.

OUR ABILITY TO EXTEND OUR IDENTITIES INTO INANIMATE OBJECTS CAN CAUSE PIECES OF WOOD TO BECOME LEGS...

PIECES OF METAL TO BECOME HANDS...

PIECES OF PLASTIC TO BECOME EARS...

PIECES OF GLASS TO BECOME EYES.

THE WHOLE CAR—NOT JUST THE PARTS WE CAN SEE, FEEL AND HEAR—IS VERY MUCH ON OUR MINDS AT ALL TIMES.

THE VEHICLE BECOMES AN EXTENSION OF OUR BODY. IT ABSORBS OUR SENSE OF IDENTITY: WE BECOME THE CAR.

AND IN EVERY CASE, OUR CONSTANT AWARENESS OF SELF

FLOWS OUTWARD TO INCLUDE THE OBJECT OF OUR EXTENDED IDENTITY.

AND JUST AS OUR AWARENESS OF OUR BIOLOGICAL SELVES ARE SIMPLIFIED CONCEPTUALIZED IMAGES—

IF ONE CAR HITS ANOTHER, THE DRIVER OF THE VEHICLE BEING STRUCK IS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO SAY:

HEY! HE HIT ME!!

THAN "HE HIT MY CAR!" OR "HIS CAR HIT MY CAR", FOR THAT MATTER.

OUR IDENTITIES AND AWARENESS ARE INVESTED IN MANY INANIMATE OBJECTS EVERY DAY. OUR CLOTHES, FOR EXAMPLE, CAN TRIGGER NUMEROUS TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE WAY OTHERS SEE US AND IN THE WAY WE SEE OURSELVES.

--S0 TOO IS OUR AWARENESS OF THESE EXTENSIONS GREATLY SIMPLIFIED.

ALL THE THINGS WE EXPERIENCE IN LIFE CAN BE SEPARATED INTO TWO REALMS, THE REALM OF THE CONCEPT—

--AND THE REALM OF THE SENSES.
OUR IDENTITIES BELONG PERMANENTLY TO THE CONCEPTUAL WORLD. THEY CAN'T BE SEEN, HEARD, SMELLED, TOUCHED OR TASTED. THEY'RE MERELY IDEAS, AND EVERYTHING ELSE--AT THE START--BELONGS TO THE SENSUAL WORLD, THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF US.

GRADUALLY WE REACH BEYOND OURSELVES.

--WE LEND TO THEM.

BY DE-EMPHASIZING THE APPEARANCE OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD IN FAVOR OF THE IDEA OF FORM, THE CARTOON PLACES ITSELF IN THE WORLD OF CONCEPTS.

THROUGH TRADITIONAL REALISM, THE COMICS ARTIST CAN PORTRAY THE WORLD WITHOUT--

WE ENCOUNTER THE SIGHT, SMELL, TOUCH, TASTE AND SOUND OF OUR OWN BODIES.

AND OF THE WORLD AROUND US.

AND SOON WE DISCOVER THAT OBJECTS OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD CAN CROSS OVER--

AND THROUGH THE CARTOON, THE WORLD WITHIN.

WHEN CARTOONS ARE USED THROUGHOUT A STORY, THE WORLD OF THAT STORY MAY SEEM TO PULSE WITH LIFE.

---AND POSSESS IDENTITIES OF THEIR OWN.

OR, AS OUR EXTENSIONS--

--BEGIN TO GLOW--

--WITH THE LIFE--

INANIMATE OBJECTS MAY SEEM TO POSSESS SEPARATE IDENTITIES SO THAT IF ONE JUMPED UP AND STARTED MOVING, IT WOULDN'T FEEL OUT OF PLACE.

BUT IN EMphasizing THE CONCEPts OF OBJECTS OVER THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, MUCH HAS TO BE OMITTED.

IF AN ARTIST WANTS TO PORTRAY THE BEAUTY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD--

--REALISM OF SOME SORT IS GOING TO PLAY A PART.
WHEN DRAWING THE FACE AND
FIGURE, NEARLY ALL COMICS ARTISTS
APPLY AT LEAST SOME SMALL MEASURE
OF CARTOONING. EVEN THE MORE
REALISTIC ADVENTURE ARTISTS-

--ARE A FAR CRY FROM
PHOTO-REALISTS!

STORYTELLERS IN ALL MEDIA
KNOW THAT A SURE INDICATOR OF
AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT--

--IS THE DEGREE
TO WHICH THE
AUDIENCE
IDENTIFIES
WITH A STORY'S
CHARACTERS.

AND SINCE VIEWER-IDENTIFICATION
IS A SPECIALTY OF CARTOONING,
CARicatures HAVE HISTORICALLY HELD
AN ADVANTAGE IN BREAKING INTO
WORLD POPULAR CULTURE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, NO
ONE EXPECTS AUDIENCES TO
IDENTIFY WITH BRICK WALLS
OR LANDSCAPES AND INDEED
BACKGROUNDs TEND TO BE
SLIGHTLY... REALIST.

IN SOME COMICS, THIS SPLIT IS
FAIR MORE PRONOUNCED. THE
BELGIAN "CLEAR-LINE" STYLE
OF HERGE'S TINTIN COMBINES
VERY ICONIC CHARACTERS WITH
UNUSUALLY REALISTIC BACKGROUNDS.

THESE COMBINATION ALLLOWS READERS TO MASK THEMSELVES IN A
CHARACTER AND SAFELY ENTER A SENSUALLY STIMULATING WORLD.

ONE SET OF LINES TO SEE ANOTHER SET OF LINES TO BE.

IN THE WORLD OF
ANIMATION, WHERE
THE EFFECT HAPPENS
TO BE A PRACTICAL
NECESSITY, Disney
HAS USED IT WITH
IMPRESSIVE RESULTS
FOR OVER 50 YEARS!

IN EUROPE IT CAN
BE FOUND IN MANY
POPULAR COMICS
FROM ASTERIX TO
TINTIN, TO WORKS OF
JACQUES TARDI!

IN AMERICAN COMICS, THE EFFECT IS USED
FAR LESS OFTEN, ALTHOUGH IT HAS CREEPED UP
IN THE WORKS OF ARTISTS AS DIVERSE AS
CARL BARKS, JAIME HERNANDEZ AND IN
THE TEAM OF DAVE SIM AND GERHARD.

THANKS TO THE
SEMINAL INFLUENCE
OF COMICS CREATOR
OSAMU TEZUKA,
JAPANESE COMICS HAVE
A LONG RICH HISTORY OF
ICONIC CHARACTERS.

IN JAPAN, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE
MASKING EFFECT WAS, FOR A TIME,
VIRTUALY A NATIONAL STYLE!

BUT, IN
RECENT DECADES
JAPANESE FANS ALSO
DEVELOPED A TASTE
FOR FLASHY, PHOTO-
REALISTIC ART.
THE RESULTANT HYBRID STYLES
WITHE THE TENDENCY TO DRAW EXTREMELY CARTOON-LIKE CHARACTERS
ON SANDY BACKGROUND.

BUT JAPANESE
COMIC ARTISTS
TOOK THE IDEA
ONE STEP FURTHER.

SOON, SOME OF THEM
REALIZED THAT THE
OBJECTIFYING POWER
OF REALISTIC ARTS
COULD BE PUT TO
OTHER USES.

I LIKE THE
MASKING EFFECT.
PERSONALLY, BUT IT'S
JUS ONE OF MANY
POSSIBLE APPROACHES
TO COMICS ART.

MANY OF MY
FAVORITE
ARTISTS USE
IT VERY
RARELY.

STILL, I HOPE THE JAPANESE
PERSPECTIVE ON CARICATURE HELPS
DEMONSTRATE THAT ONE'S CHOICE
OF STYLES CAN HAVE CONSEQUENCES
BEYOND THE MERELY "LOOK" OF A STORY.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE
MOST CHARACTERS
WERE DRAWN MORE
REALISTICALLY IN ORDER
TO OBJECTIFY THEM,
EMPHASIZING THEIR
"DISTANCE" FROM THE
READER.

A PROP
LIKE THE SWORD
MIGHT BE VERY
CARTOON-LIKE IN ONE
SEQUENCE.

DUE TO THE "LIFE" IT POSSESSES AS
AN EXTENSION OF MY CARTOON
IDENTITY.

AS I WRITE THIS,
IN 1992, AMERICAN
AUDIENCE ARE JUST
BEGINNING TO REALIZE
THAT A SIMPLE STYLE
DOESN'T NECESSITATE
A SIMPLE STORY.

THE PLATONIC IDIOM
OF THE CARTOON
MAY SEEM TO
OMIT MUCH OF
THE AMBITIOUS
AND COMPLEX
CHARACTERIZATION
 WHICH ARE THE HALLMARKS OF
MODERN LITERATURE.
LEAVING THEM
SUITABLE ONLY
FOR CHILDREN.

BUT SIMPLE ELEMENTS
CAN COMBINE IN
COMPLEX WAYS, AS
ATOMS BECOME
MOLECULES AND
MOLECULES BECOME
LIFE.

IN JAPANESE COMICS, THE SWORD MIGHT NOW
BECOME VERY REALISTIC, NOT ONLY TO SHOW US
THE DETAILS, BUT TO MAKE US AWARE OF THE
SWORD AS AN OBJECT, SOMETHING WITH WEIGHT,
TEXTURE, AND PHYSICAL COMPLEXITY.

IN THIS AND IN OTHER
WAYS, COMICS IN
JAPAN HAVE EVOLVED
VERY DIFFERENTLY FROM THOSE IN THE WEST.

AND LIKE THE ATOM,
GREAT POWER IS
LOCKED IN THESE
FEW SIMPLE LINES.

WE'LL RETURN
TO THESE DIFFERENCES
SEVERAL TIMES
DURING THIS BOOK.

RELEASEABLE ONLY
BY THE READER'S MIND.

THERE'S A LOT MORE TO
CARICATURE THAN MEETS
THE EYE!
"REALITY"

WAIT! THERE'S MORE!

WE'VE REDUCED THIS FACE TO TWO DOTS AND TWO LINES. IS OUR ICONIC ABSTRACTION SCALE COMPLETE?

THE SCALE SHOWS SEVERAL SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT PROGRESSIONS. LET'S CONCENTRATE ON ONE AND SEE IF WE CAN TAKE IT ANY FURTHER.

CAN ANY CONFIGURATION OF DOTS "REALITY"

MORE ABSTRACTED FROM COMIC BOOKS, NOTABLY ICONIC

-- YET STILL REPRESENT A FACE AS CLEARLY AS THIS ONE?

WRITING AND DRAWING ARE SEEN AS DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES, WRITERS AND ARTISTS AS SEPARATE BREEDS--

AND "GOOD" COMICS AS THOSE IN WHICH THE COMBINATION OF THESE VERY DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION IS THOUGHT TO BE HARMONIOUS.

A SINGLE LANGUAGE DESERVES A SINGLE, UNIFIED VOCABULARY.

WITHOUT IT, COMICS WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN TWO SEPARATE ENTRIES AS THE 'BASTARD CHILD' OF WORDS AND PICTURES.

A NUMBER OF FACTORS HAVE CONSPIRED AGAINST COMICS RECEIVING THE UNIFIED IDENTITIES IT NEEDS.

AND AMONG THEM, I LIST SOME OF OUR VERY BEST INSTINCTS.

S

WORDS, PICTURES AND OTHER ICONS ARE THE VOCABULARY OF THE LANGUAGE CALLED COMICS.

ON PAPER, THEY DANCE ON PAPER. JUST LINES ON PAPER. JUST LINES.

JUST LINES ON PAPER. JUST A FORM OF PAPER.
both artist and writer begin. hands joined across the gap, with a common purpose: to make comics of "quality."

the artist knows that this means more than just stick-figures and crude cartoons. he sets off in search of a higher art.

the writer knows that this means more than just comic-book blab! and one-a-day gags. she sets off in search of something deeper.

pictures are received information. we need no formal education to "get the message." the message is instantaneous.

writing is perceived information. it takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language.

in museums and in libraries, the artist finds what he's looking for. he studies the techniques of the great masters of western art. he practices night and day.

she too finds what she's looking for. she reads and writes constantly. she searches for a voice uniquely hers.

finally, they're ready. both have mastered their arts. his brushstrokes are nearly invisible in its subtlety. the figures pure michelangelo. her descriptions are dazzling. the words flow together like a shakespearean sonnet.

they're ready to join hands once more and create a comics masterpiece.

our need for a unified language of comics sends us toward the center where words and pictures are like two sides of one coin.

but our need for sophistication in comics seems to lead us outward, where words and pictures are most separate.

both are worthy aspirations. both stem from a love of comics and a devotion to its future.

i say the answer is yes, but since the reasons belong in a different chapter, we'll have to come back to this later.

ours is...
Iconic Abstraction is only one form of abstraction available to comics artists.

Usual the word "abstraction" refers to the non-iconic variety, where no attempt is made to cling to resemblance or meaning.

The type of art which often prompts the question: "What does it mean?"

Earning the reply "It means what it is!" in this case.

Ink on paper.

Below me, the area described by these three vertices: reality, language, and the picture plane. Represents the total pictorial vocabulary of comics or of any of the visual arts.

Most comics art lies near the bottom—that is, along the iconic abstraction side where every line has a meaning.

Near the line, but not necessarily on it. For even the most straightforward little cartoon character has a "meaningless" line or two!

If we incorporate language and other icons into the chart, we can begin to build a comprehensive map.
Most of the preceding examples were placed on our chart based on the drawing styles used on specific characters. Each creator employs a range of styles, though, and many occupy several places on the chart during a given project. Some, like Matt Feazell's Cynicalman, keep to one area consistently. The combination of extremely iconic characters and environments, mixed with simple, direct language and a sound effect or two, would give us a shape something like this.

Hergé stretches nearly from left to right— from realism to cartooning— but ventures very little into the lower world of non-iconic abstraction.

The other hand, varies only slightly in her level of iconic content, while the level of non-iconic abstraction goes nearly from top to bottom.

Hey, come on! What's with your attitude? That's right! He's still looking at Hergé! That's what I was saying.

In the mid-sixties, Jack Kirby, along with Stan Lee, started a middle ground of iconic forms with a sense of the real about them, bolstered by a powerful design sense.

Mary Fleener, on the other hand, varies only slightly in her level of iconic content, while the level of non-iconic abstraction goes nearly from top to bottom.

Today, many American mainstream comics still follow Kirby's lead for storytelling. But the desire for more realistic art and more elaborate scripts has pushed art and story further apart in many cases.
IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES, MOST OF THE COUNTERCULTURE OF INDEPENDENT CREATORS WORKING MOSTLY IN BLACK AND WHITE, STAYED TO THE RIGHT OF MAINSTREAM COMICS ART WHILE COVERING A BROAD RANGE OF WRITING STYLES.

WHEN AN ARTIST IS DRAWN TO ONE END OF THE CHART OR ANOTHER, THEY ARTIST MAY BE REVEALING SOMETHING ABOUT HIS OR HER STRONGEST VALUES AND LOYALTIES IN ART.

THOSE WHO APPROACH THE LOWER LEFT, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE PROBABLY ATTRACTED BY A SENSE OF THE BEAUTY OF NATURE.

THOSE AT THE TOP BY THE BEAUTY OF ART.

THIS FOLLOWS THE LEAD OF THE POST-KURTZMAN GENERATION OF UNDERGROUND CARTOONISTS WHO USED CARTOON STYLES TO Portray ADULT THEMES AND SUBJECT MATTER.

IRONIC THAT THE TWO BASIONS OF CARTOONY ART ARE UNDERGROUND AND CHILDREN'S COMICS? PRETTY FAR APART AS GENRES GO!

AND THOSE ON THE RIGHT BY THE BEAUTY OF IDEAS.

FOR COMICS TO MATURE AS A MEDIUM, IT MUST BE CAPABLE OF EXPRESSING EACH ARTIST'S INNERMOST NEEDS AND IDEAS.

BUT EACH ARTIST HAS DIFFERENT INNER NEEDS, DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, AND SO ON TO FIND DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION.

SOME ARTISTS, SUCH AS THE IRREPRESSIBLE SERGIO ARAGONES, STAKED THEIR CLAIM ON A PARTICULAR AREA LONG AGO AND HAVE BEEN QUITE HAPPY SINCE.

OTHERS, SUCH AS DAVE MCKEAN, ARE FOREVER ON THE MOVE, EXPERIMENTING, TAKING CHANCES, NEVER SATISFIED.

THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF VISUAL ARTS BELONGS IN THIS SPACE. MONET SET UP HIS EASEL ALONG THE LEFT FACE MONDRIAN AT THE TOP, REMBRANDT LOWER LEFT, MATISSE RIGHT ABOVE WHERE I'M STANDING.

AND NEARLY EVERY MOVEMENT OR MANIFESTO PLANTED ITS FLAG AND LOUDLY PROCLAIMED THE DISCOVERY OF THE ONLY PATH OF GROUND WORTH BUILDING ON.

* CHECK OUT WAJSKY KANDINSKY'S TERRIFIC 1912 ESSAY, "ON THE PROBLEM OF FORM"
By drawing borders around the vocabulary of comics, I hope I haven't made it seem smaller than it is.

Comics artists have a universe of icons to choose from.

Ours is an increasingly symbol-oriented culture.

As the twenty-first century approaches, visual iconography may finally help us realize a form of universal communication.

It's your job to create and reconstitute moments by moment, not just the cartoonists.

It's been over twenty years since McLuhan first observed that those people growing up in the late twentieth century didn't want goals so much as they wanted roles, and that's what visual iconography is all about.

Society is inventing new symbols regularly, just as comics artists do.

One of them television has reached into the lives of every human being on earth.

--and for better or worse, altered the course of human affairs from here to doomsday.

The fate of the other one, comics--

As it happens, only two popular media were identified by McLuhan as "cool" media--that is, media which command audience involvement through iconic forms.

There is no life here except that which you give to it.