



REINVENTING COMICS



SCOTT McCLOUD

Reinventing Comics

THE EVOLUTION OF AN ART FORM

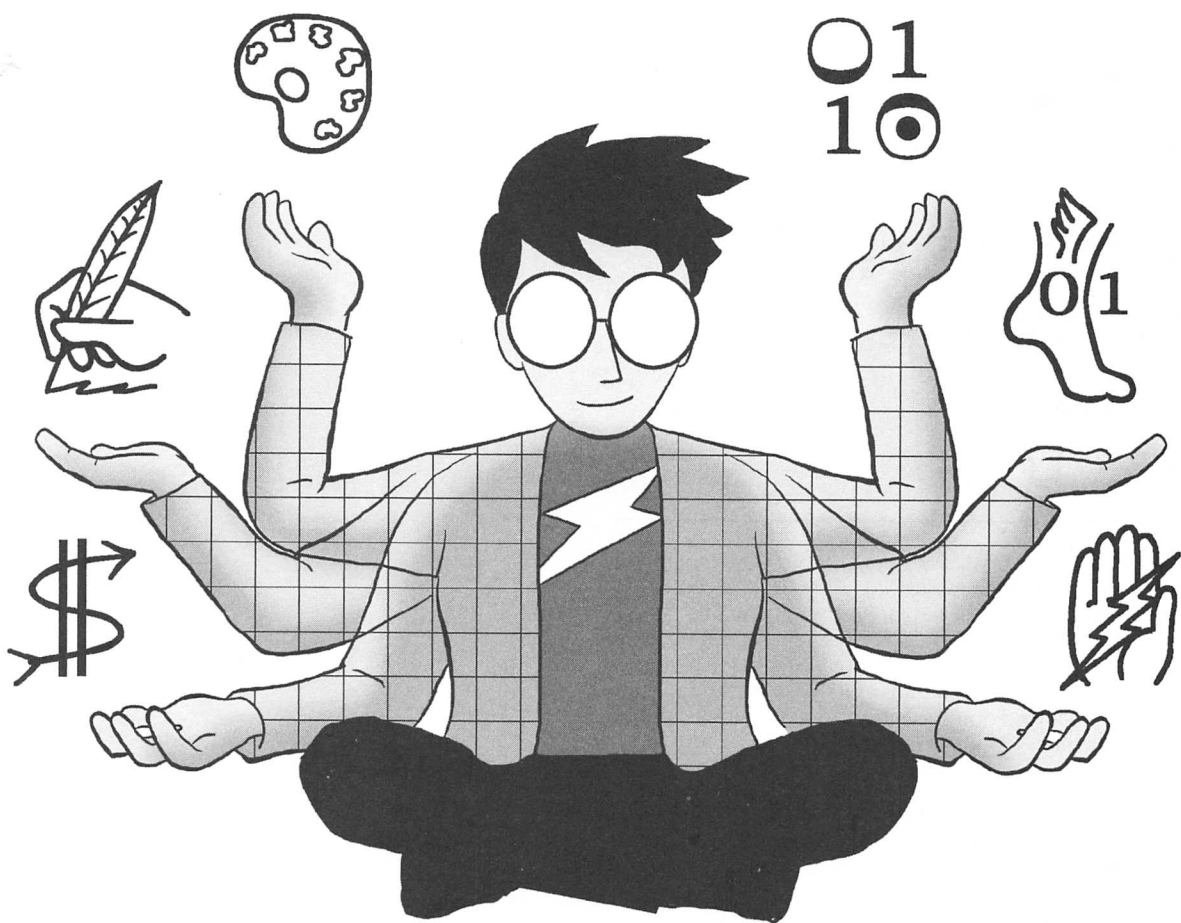


#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

Scott McCloud

W. Morrow

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by SCOTT
McCLOUD

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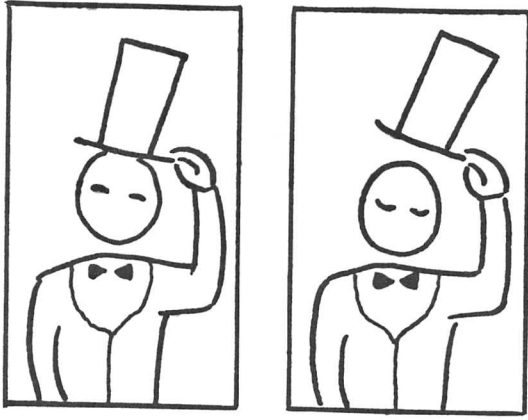
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UNDERSTANDING SEQUELS

When Kitchen Sink Press published *Understanding Comics* in 1993, it had a single-page "Introduction" that wasn't much more than a gag, since I felt confident that the book would speak for itself. This book, on the other hand, already had a 215-page introduction (called *Understanding Comics*) which may lead to some false expectations, so let me set the record straight before you plunge in.

Reinventing Comics is, in any reasonable sense of the word, a "sequel," but it's not a retread of the first book's topics; in fact there's very little overlap between the two. Like its predecessor, the book you're about to read came about primarily because I can't stop thinking! Almost as soon as the ink was dry on *U.C.*, I became fascinated with the possibilities surrounding computers and comics. When the Web came out of its shell several months later, fascination quickly turned to obsession, and within two years, most of the ideas found in Part Two had taken root.

Part One's origins are more scattered, reaching back to my first experiences as a fan and professional comics artist in the 80s and 90s. While *Understanding Comics* chronicled what I saw as comics' exciting internal life, I was equally fascinated with its external life—the story of what people have actually done with comics in the 20th century. Valuing firsthand experience and observation, I decided to focus on my own era and region, reporting on the many ongoing battles to reinvent the way comics are created and perceived in North America. These were my pre-'93 obsessions which fell outside of *U.C.*'s formal boundaries and they reflect the diversity of my interests during that period.

Putting the ideas in Parts One and Two together wasn't easy. They are two very different books; the first, a collection of battlefront essays; the second, a full-blown manifesto for radical change. Fortunately since early 1994, I've been carrying around a chart of comics' potential which shows it expanding in many

directions simultaneously. This image, which I eventually called "The Twelve Revolutions," offered a convenient structure for this book-in-progress which itself seemed ready to blow apart at any moment! Even with such a unifying device, I have no illusions that this book will be even half as cohesive and singular a statement as its predecessor. At the outer edges of any of these revolutions are many unanswered questions, unfinished stories and endlessly debatable conclusions. For this reason among others, I plan to expand on and refine these ideas through my web site in the coming months and years. Like the revolutions it describes, this is a book that may be forever "under construction," but hey, I don't mind if you don't!

Understanding Comics had a long honeymoon. The "great debate" I hoped to start about comics' formal properties didn't get seriously under way until the book had already been on comics shelves for over five years. By that point, the book you're holding was already in progress, so those hoping for "Understanding Comics Revisited" will have to wait a bit longer (I'm afraid that five years of curtain calls didn't offer much basis for critical self-evaluation). Fortunately, the honeymoon for this book should last about five minutes, so I don't expect a recurrence of that problem.

The day *Understanding Comics* saw print, my life and career changed its shape forever. Like a band with a hit song, I became instantly linked with that unique work. For some artists, that kind of connection can be a curse, but luckily for me I actually liked the book, and whatever its errors or omissions I still do.

And now for something completely different.

— Scott McCloud

www.scottmccloud.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Denis Kitchen and Judith Hansen for getting this book off the ground and for flying it to safety respectively.

Paul Levitz and DC Comics for having the courage to publish a diversity of views.

Karen Berger, Joan Hilty and Jim Higgins for care and feeding par excellence.

Kurt Busiek for convincing me to rewrite over half of Part One; hopefully for the better, though he hasn't seen the new version yet because I'm afraid he'll convince me to do it again and I'm out of time!

John Roshell, font of wisdom.

Amie Brockway for truly artful direction (and the cover idea).

The countless Web designers, game designers, interface experts and researchers who have relentlessly hunted me down since '93 and helped me reclaim my geek heritage. ;-)

Peter Sanderson for indexing on very short notice.

Will Eisner and Art Spiegelman, as always.

Muriel Cooper, I was a fool not to meet you when I had the chance.

Ivy, Sky and Winter for love and support beyond measure.

Our parents (someday I'll get a real job, I swear).

And for inspiration, advice, logistic/technical support or just good conversation (check all that apply):

Dana Atchley, Steve Bissette, Molly Bode at Mirage, Corey Bridges, Charles Brownstein, Doug Church, Chris Couch, Samuel R. Delany, Helen Finlay at *Comics Buyer's Guide*, Katy Garnier, Cayetano Garza, Matt Gorbet and the whole gang at Xerox PARC, Neil Gaiman, Henry Jenkins, Mark Landman, Janet Murray and everyone at the Media Lab, Heidi MacDonald, Larry Marder, Dwayne McDuffie, Peter Merholz, Jerry Michalski, Frank Miller, Rand and Robyn Miller, Jakob Nielsen, Chris Oarr and the CBLDF, Ramana Rao, Howard Rheingold, Jamie Riehle, Adam Philips, Ralph and Mike at Ralph's Comics Corner, Jim Salicrup, Jesse Scanlon at *Wired*, David Small, Edward Tufte, Rick Veitch, Steve Weiner, Doug Wheeler, Frank Wolfe, Will Wright and Bernard Yee.

And thanks most of all to that special someone — you know who you are — who I stupidly left off this list and will no doubt remember ten minutes after the book goes to press and probably never live it down.

UNDERSTANDING COMICS

R E V I S I T E D

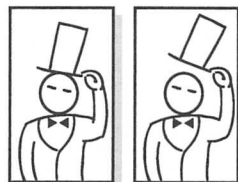
A RECAP IN 3 PAGES



The medium we call *comics* is based on a simple *idea*:



The idea of placing *one picture* after *another* to show the *passage of time*.



The *potential* of that idea is *limitless*, but perpetually *obscured* by its *limited application* in *popular culture*.



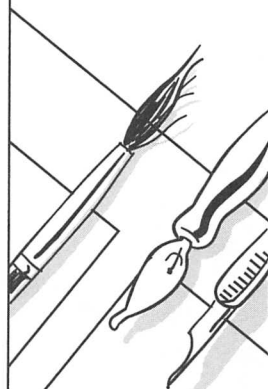
To *understand* comics, we need to separate *form* from *content* --



-- and see with clear eyes how *other eras* have used this same idea to *beautiful ends* --



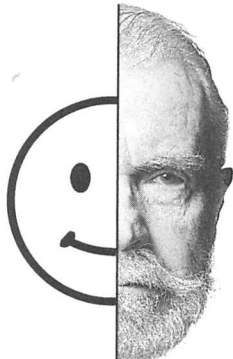
-- and what a limited palette of *tools* and *ideas* our *own* era has used.



Comics is a *language*. Its *vocabulary* is the full range of *visual symbols* --



-- including the power of *cartooning* and *realism*, both *apart* and in startling *combinations*.



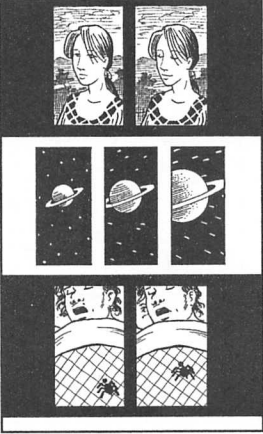
The *heart* of comics lies in the space *between* the panels --



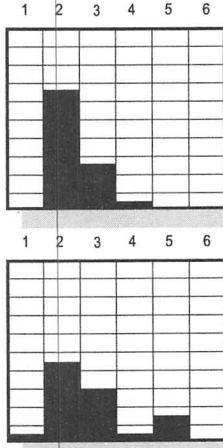
-- where the reader's *imagination* makes *still pictures* come *alive!*



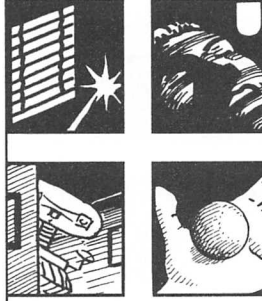
It's a process that can be *quantified*, *classified* --



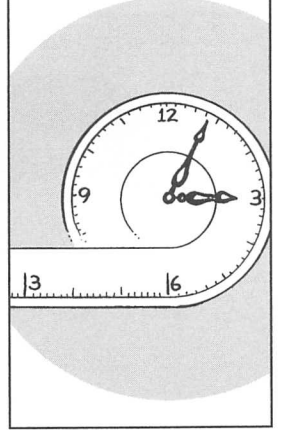
-- and even *measured* --



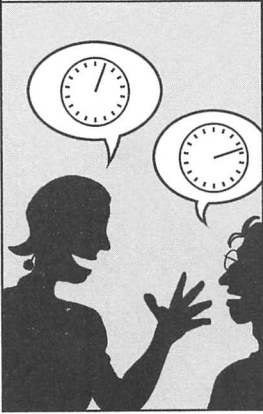
-- yet remain utterly *mysterious* in the way it paints its *mental pictures*.



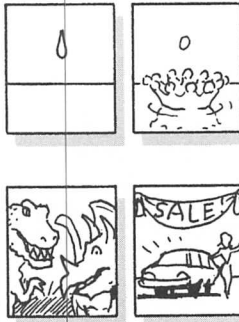
In relying on *visual sequence*, comics substitutes *space* for *time*.



Yet there is no *conversion chart* and *time* flows through comics --



-- in a staggering *variety* of ways.



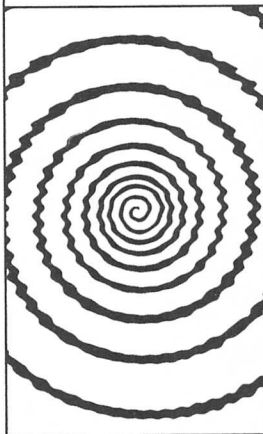
Through their *still images* using only *one sense* --



-- comics represents *all* the senses --



-- and through the character of the *lines* themselves --



-- comics represents the invisible world of *emotion*.



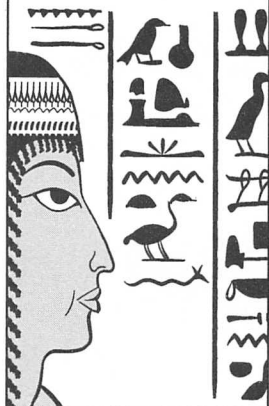
Lines evolving to become *symbols* in their own right --



-- as they *dance* with the much *younger* symbols called:



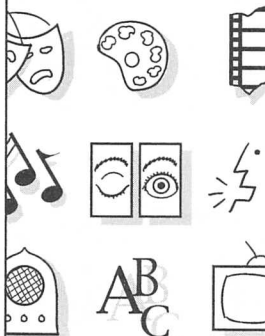
Reunited after thousands of years apart --



-- in a relationship far closer than in any other form.



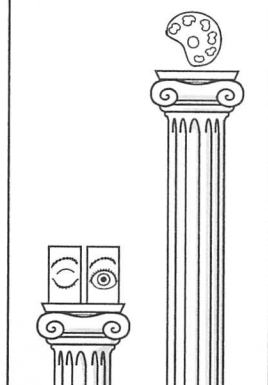
Like other media, comics is merely a simple idea --



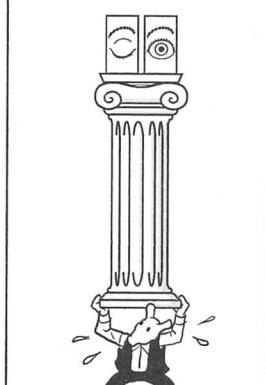
-- in search of complex applications --



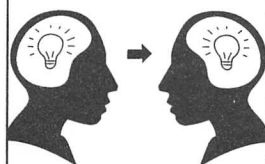
-- yet comics remains relegated to non-art status by conventional wisdom.



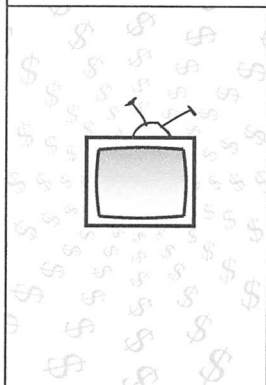
A status some try to combat, (though some in the community relish it).



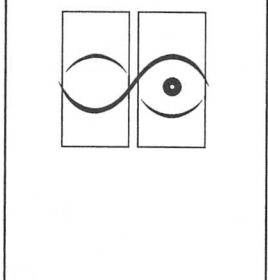
Comics' place in society is vital, though, as one of the few forms of personal communication --



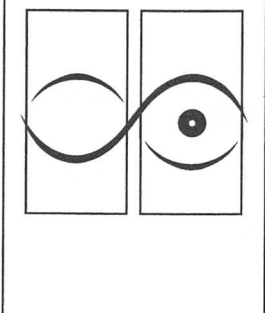
-- in a world of committee-built automatons and corporate mass-marketing.



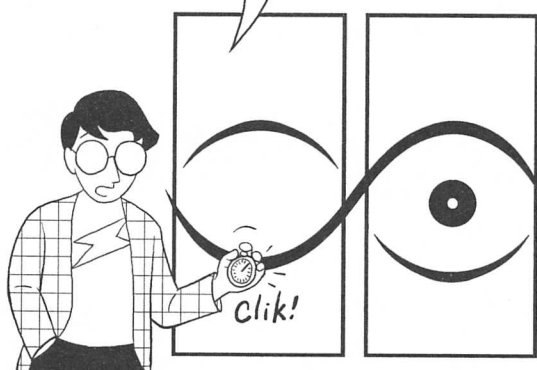
Comics offers a medium of enormous breadth and control for the author --

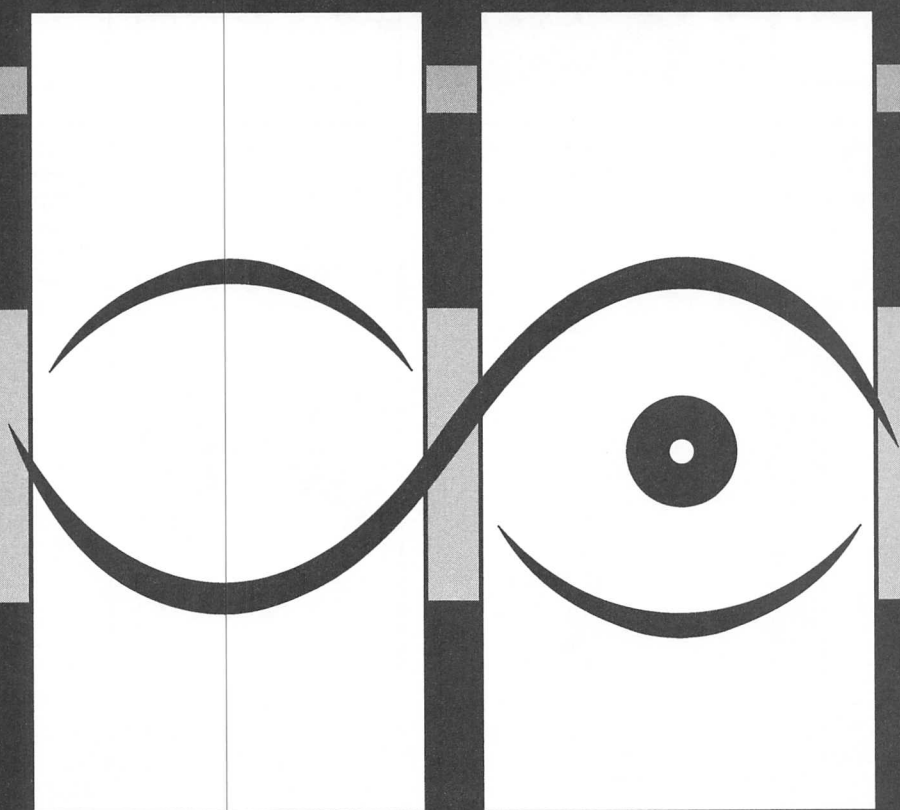


-- a unique, intimate relationship with its audience --



-- and a potential so great, so inspiring, yet so brutally squandered, it could bring a tear to the eye.



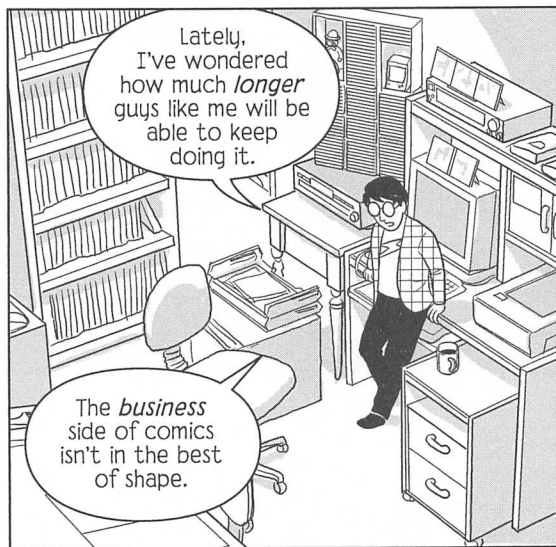
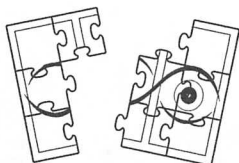


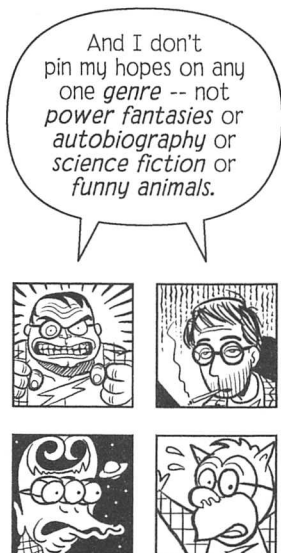
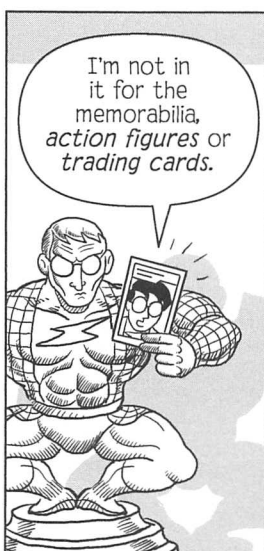
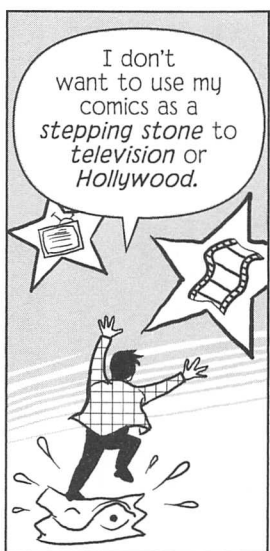
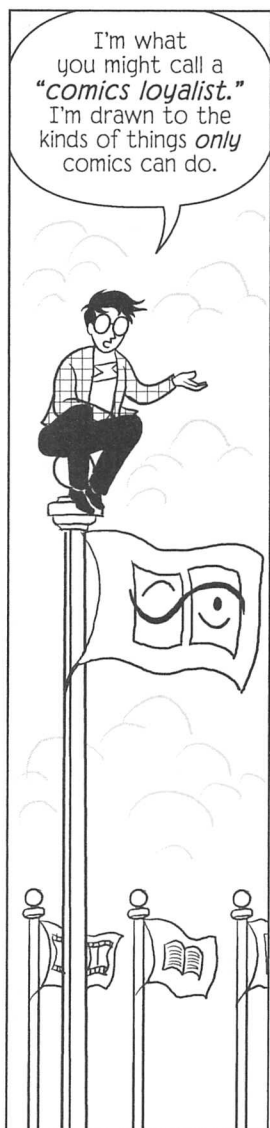


REINVENTING COMICS

INTRODUCTION

The Twelve Revolutions





Even as a *kid*, I was more interested in *comics'* future than its past or *present*.



As a *young American mainstream fan*, I always responded to the artists with the *weirder*, more *innovative styles*.



I gravitated first to the more adventurous *superhero artists* --



-- then to more challenging and/or titillating *power fantasies* from abroad.



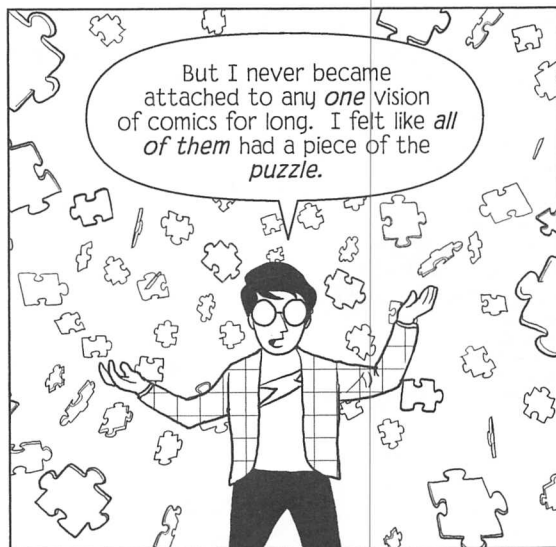
And soon discovered the *forward-thinking art* of early *pioneers* --



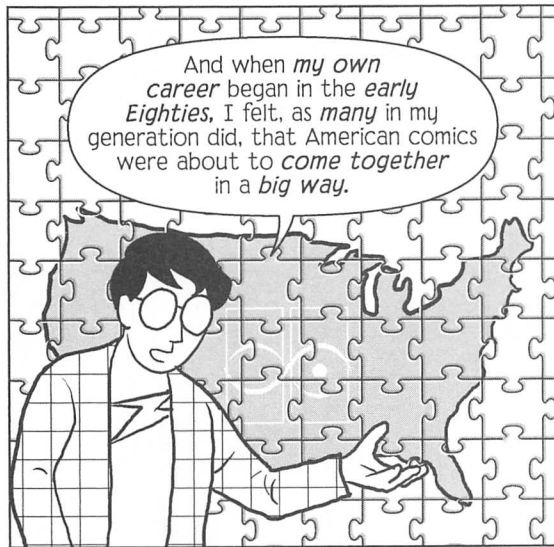
-- eventually traveling to some of the *furthest corners* of comics for *inspiration*.

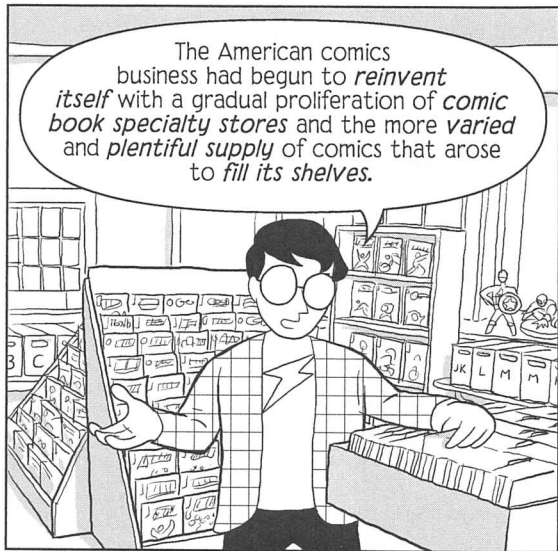


But I never became attached to any *one* vision of comics for long. I felt like *all of them* had a piece of the puzzle.



And when *my own career* began in the *early Eighties*, I felt, as *many* in my generation did, that American comics were about to *come together* in a *big way*.





Comics' *public image* began to *swell* due to an increasingly adventurous *mainstream* and some insanelly popular *licensing*.



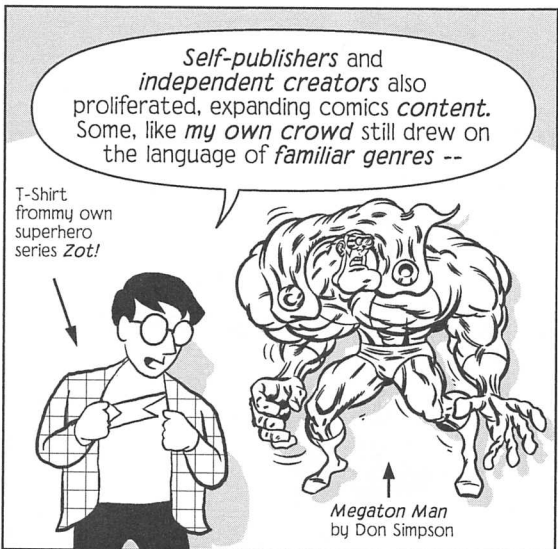
The Dark Knight Returns by Frank Miller.



Watchmen by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.



The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird.



-- while others created more truly *independent* work which sought to reach *beyond* comics fandom and *strike a chord* in the *real world* outside.



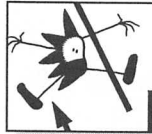
Maus: A Survivor's Tale by Art Spiegelman.



Love and Rockets by Los Bros. Hernandez.



Eightball by Dan Clowes.



Tales of the Beanworld by Larry Marder.



American Splendor by Harvey Pekar and Various.



Yummy Fur by Chester Brown.

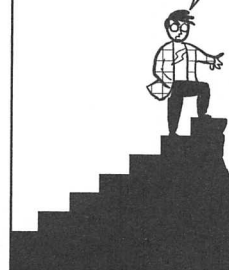


Sales were up, *innovation* was up, Our *public image* was up -- and we all hoped it was just the *beginning*.

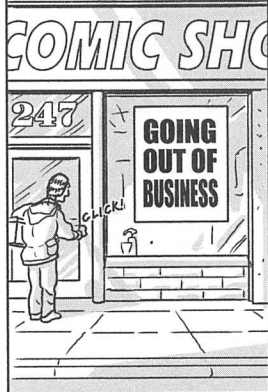


It wasn't. It was our *peak*.

And the *decline* that followed was a *hard one*.



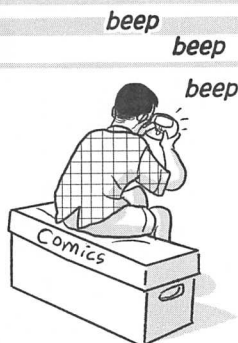
From 1994 to 1998, a *huge number* of American comic book retailers *shut down*.



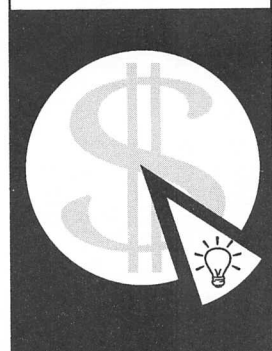
Too much of comics' growth had been built on a bubble of *collectors-item speculation*, utterly *out of touch* with the works' *content* or even the simple principles of *supply* and *demand*.



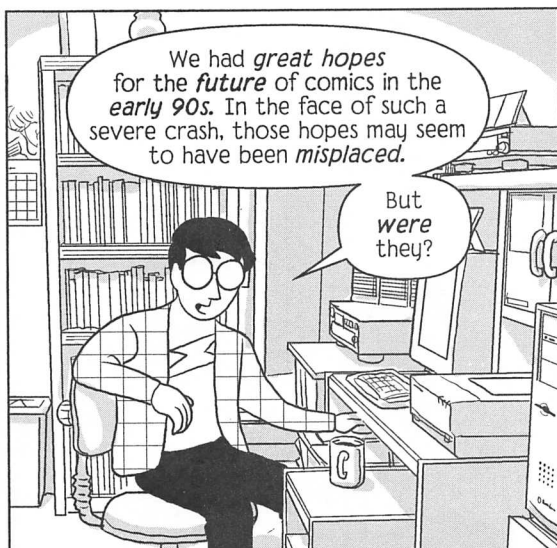
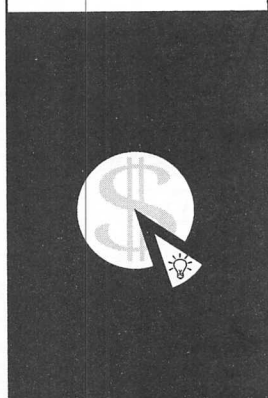
When the *bubble burst*, many fans *left comics entirely*, soured by their experience.



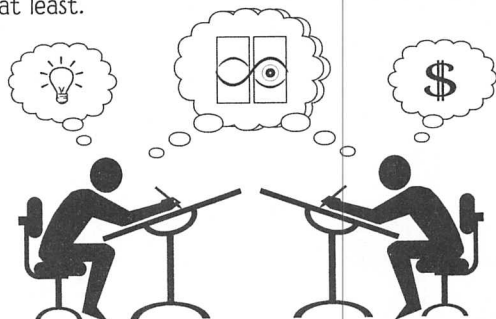
The more *innovative work* -- a traditional predictor of *future health* -- had always comprised a *small slice* of the industry *pie* --



-- but as the *pie shrank*, so did the *slice*, and many creators could *no longer* make a *living*.



Comics professionals didn't always *agree* on their *long-term goals* for the *art form*, or for the *industry*, but there was some *common ground* at least.



Ideas that few *objected* to, and many worked hard to *achieve*.

One: That comics can yield a body of work *worthy of study* and meaningfully represent the *life, times* and *world-view* of its author.



Comics as Literature

Two: That comics' formal *artistic properties* might be recognized as capable of achieving the *same heights* as forms like *painting* or *sculpture*.



*Comics
as Art*

Three: That *comics creators* might gain more *control* over the *fate* of their creations and a *fair financial stake* in them.



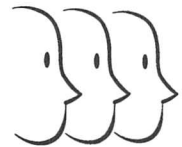
*Creators'
Rights*

Four: That the *business* of comics might be *reinvented* so as to better serve *producer* and *consumer* alike.



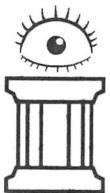
*Industry
Innovation*

Five: That the *public perception* of comics could be improved to at least acknowledge the *potential* of the form and be prepared to *recognize* progress when it occurs.



*Public
Perception*

Six: That *institutions* of *higher learning* and the *law* could overcome popular prejudice and treat comics with an *even hand*.



*Institutional
Scrutiny*

Seven: That comics could *appeal to* more than just *boys* and be *made by* more than just *men*.



*Gender
Balance*

Eight: That comics could *appeal to* and be *made by* more than just *straight white upper-middle class* males.



*Minority
Representation*

Nine: That comics was capable of handling a wide *variety* of *genres*, not just *adolescent power fantasies*.



*Diversity
of Genre*

Despite many subsequent *setbacks*, those ten years from 1984 to 1994 did, in fact, show *genuine progress* in most of these areas.



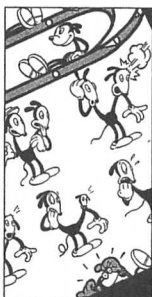
Art Spiegelman's *Pulitzer Prize* for *Maus* and subsequent *Museum of Modern Art* show were *symbolic victories* for the cause of comics as literature *and* comics as art.



And some *progress* followed as others published works of relative *seriousness*, *depth* and *formal complexity*.



From Hell by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell.

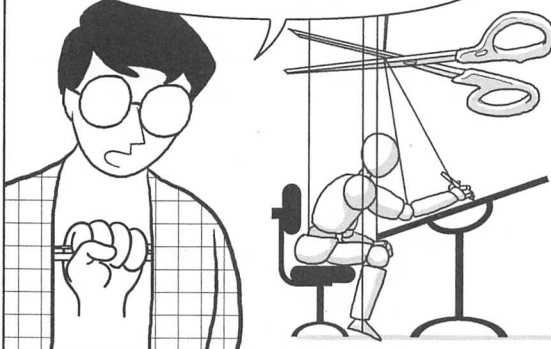


Acme Novelty Library by Chris Ware.



"Discovering America" by David Mazzucchelli.

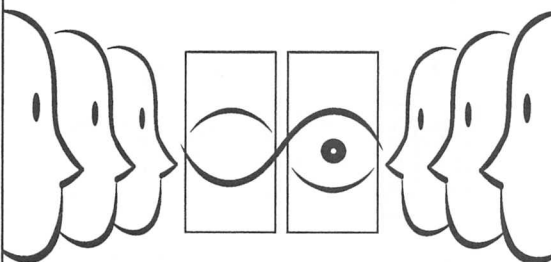
Creator ownership and *control* made *impressive strides* from 1984 to 1994, becoming the *norm* in some sectors of the industry -- though not always in the way my peers and I *anticipated*.



And though it's grown *decrepit* of late, the *comics industry* did at least *grow for a time* with many *hard* but *valuable lessons* learned along the way.*

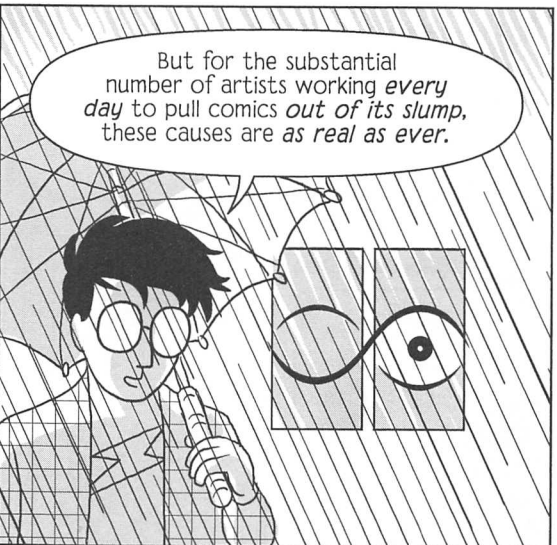
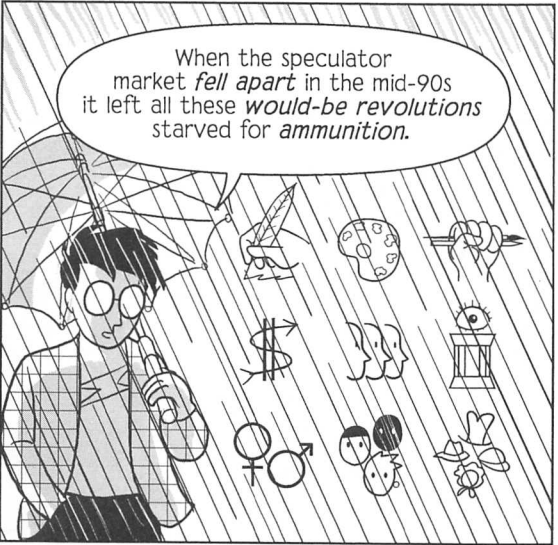
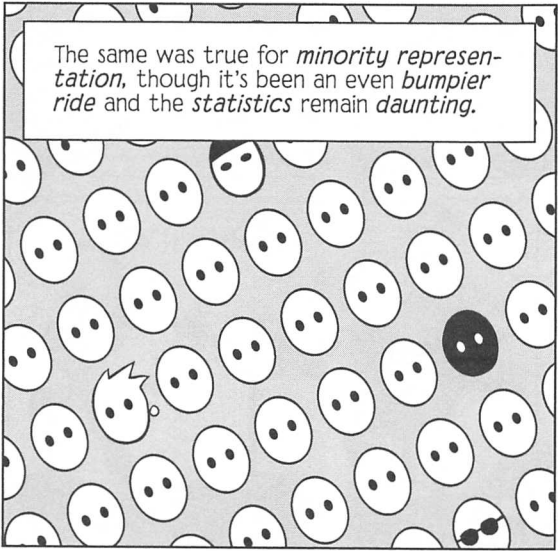
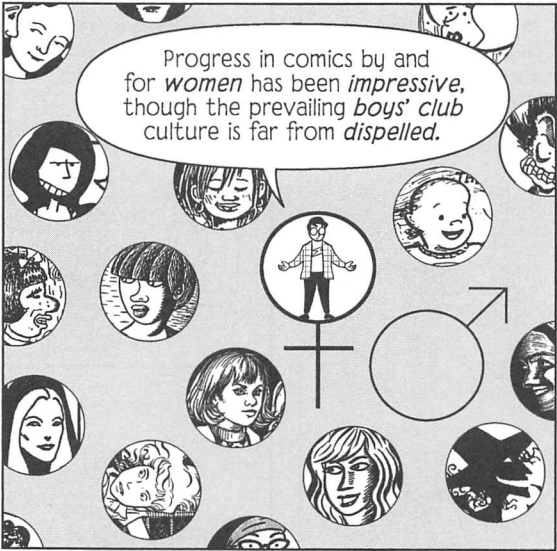
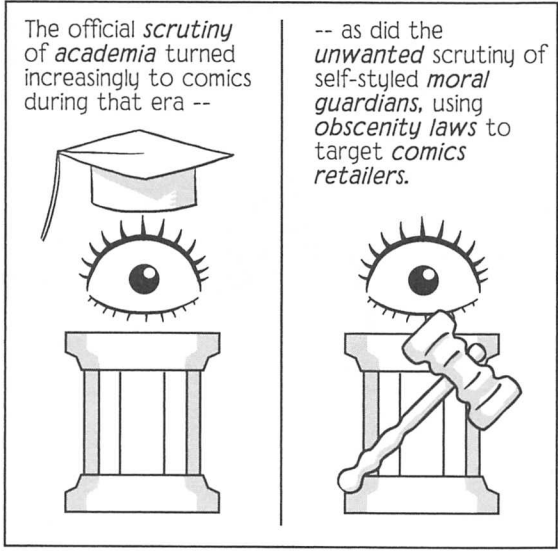


Encouraging gains were made in *public perception*. Comics coverage in the *print media* was substantially transformed as media-savvy comics *readers* were given assignments formerly handed to *outsiders*.



Comics even gained a faint aura of *coolness* that has yet to dissipate entirely.

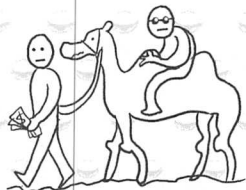
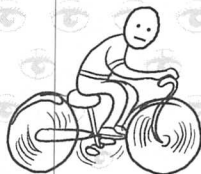
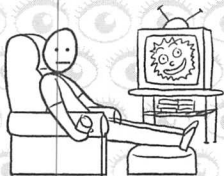
*As the Eighties began, many comics shops didn't even have cash registers!



The most serious *threats* comics faces *now* are the loss of *new talent* as viable professional opportunities *dwindle* --



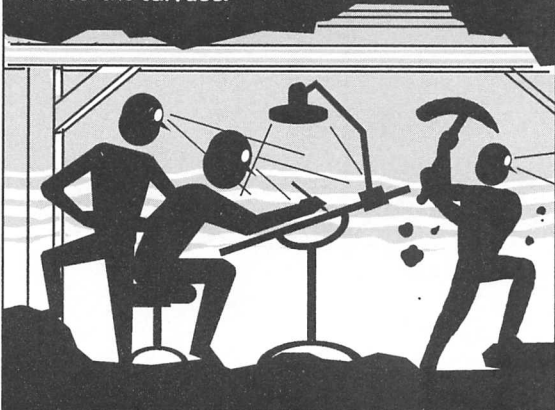
-- and the loss of *new readers* as the *visibility* of comics as a *pastime* is diminished.



As the Nineties drew to a close, those still *making comics* in North America included some of the *brightest*, most *talented* and *diverse* cartoonists of the *century*.*



Increasingly *insular*, many of comics' *young progressive talents* continue to delve *deeper* into the art form's *unexplored potential* like miners searching for a *new vein*, sending less and less to the *surface*.



If there is a "*mother lode*" of *new ideas* waiting to be found, it may all be *worth it* --



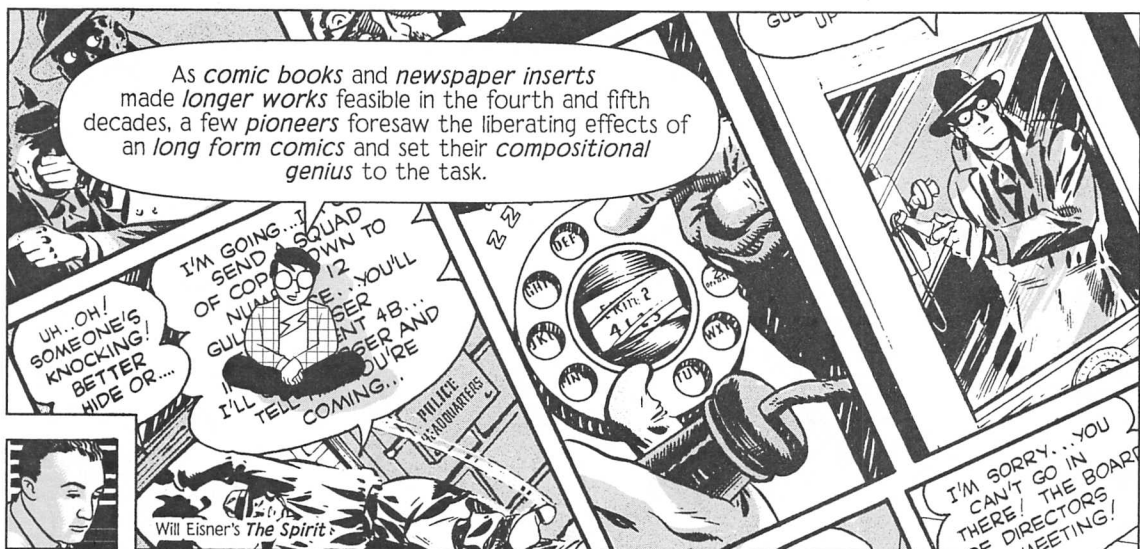
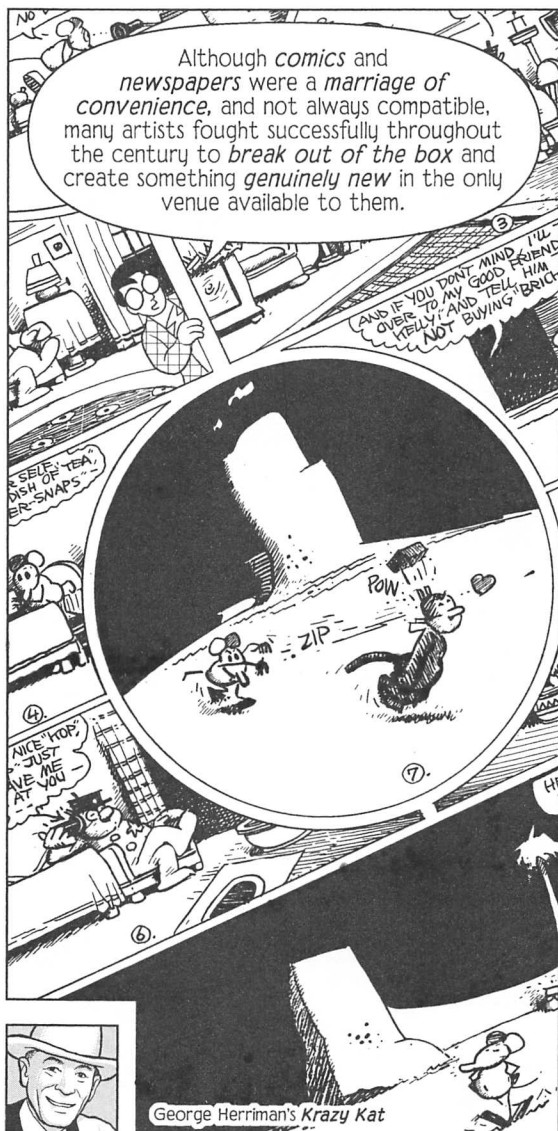
-- but if the *business* of comics doesn't improve soon, those new ideas may remain *buried* for a *long time*.



Fortunately, the story of comics in America is one of *constant innovation*. Whatever the *state of comics* at the *century's end*, I'm betting that the *next generation* won't rest --

-- until they've *reinvented* the medium and the industry from *top to bottom*.





DIDN'T YOU
ME... YOU STILL
THERE!? ...GET O
AND CALL YOUR
MOTHERS!

WHAT IS THE
HOW DARE
YOU FOOLS
INTERFERE!

...YES... **BUPGOO**
MAKES A GLASS OF
MILK LOOK EXACTLY
LIKE A GLASS
OF **BEER!**

-- and eventually paid a *stiff price* for their *excesses*.

WHY... HERE
COMES
ZABELLA

Art from *MAD* by Harvey Kurtzman and Various.

SUDDENLY

Jack Kirby's *New Gods*

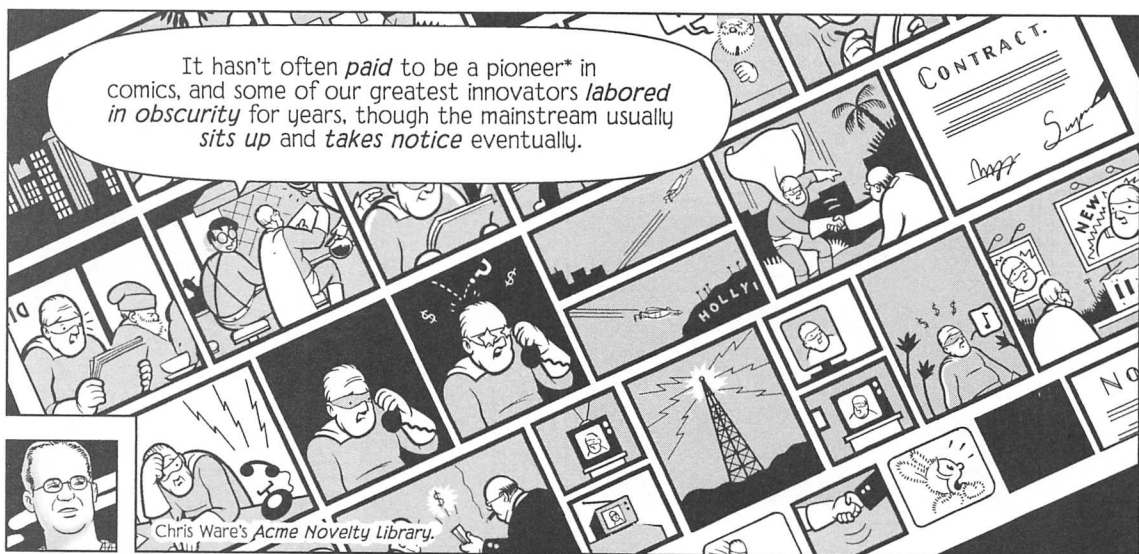
NO
EXAGGER
ATION

WHO CAN FIGURE IT
WHY THEY DO WHAT
THEY LIKE OR DON'T LIKE
THEY DRIVE ME

ON
BAY-
REE!

LIKE THIS WOMAN I WAS IN WITH IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES SO --- WHAT A --- I STICED WHEN I THINK OF H RIGHT NOW F'R INSTANCE

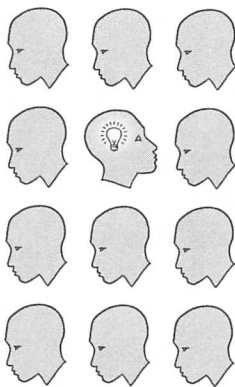
R. Crumb's "I'm Grateful! I'm Grateful!" from *Weirdo*.



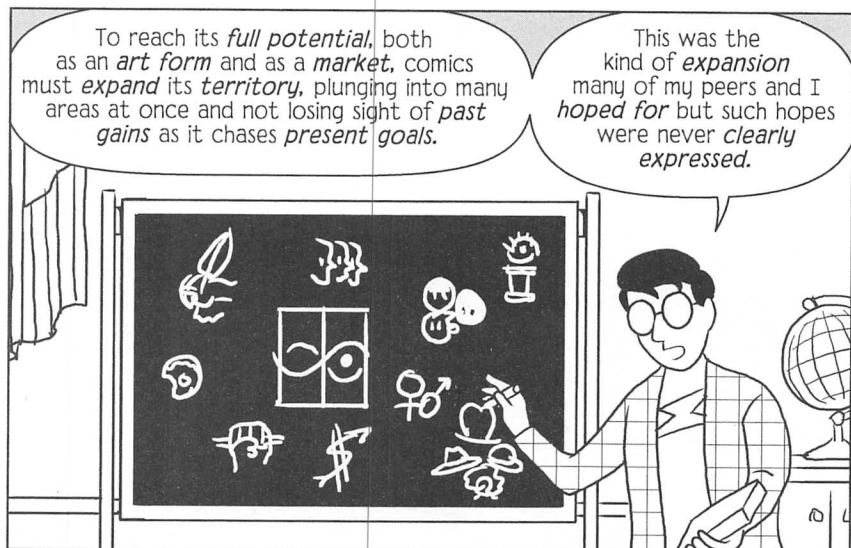
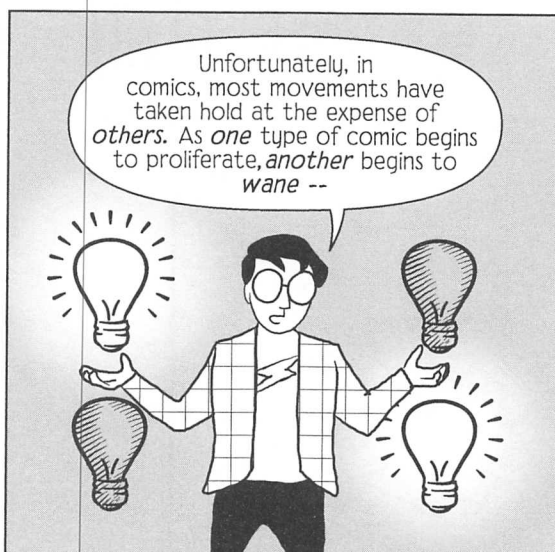
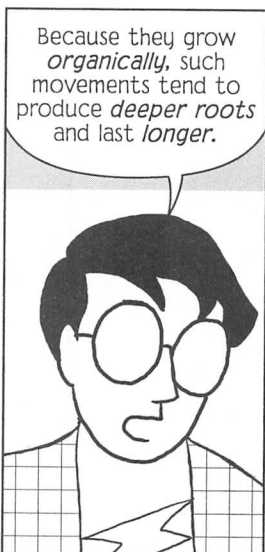
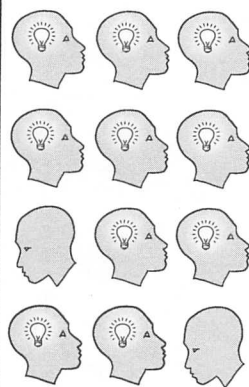
*Definition of a pioneer: That guy in the path ahead of you with the arrow in his back!



Instead, they usually begin with the *vision* of one or two *lone rebels* --



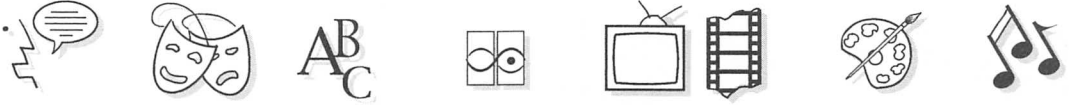
-- and *grow* as others *join* one at a time.



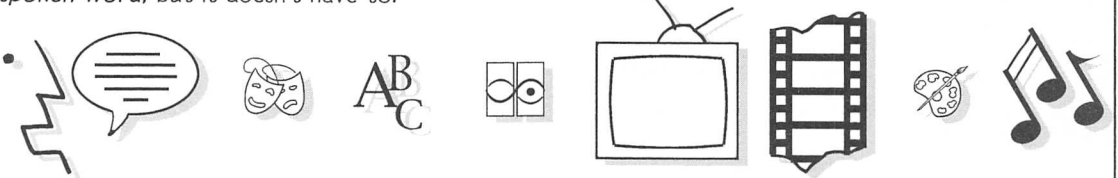
This was the kind of *expansion* many of my peers and I *hoped for* but such hopes were never *clearly expressed*.



Comics is one of a small handful of *basic art forms* and *communication media*. I want to see it take its place among them as a *viable option* for *creator* and *audience* alike.



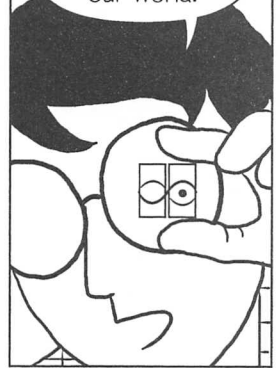
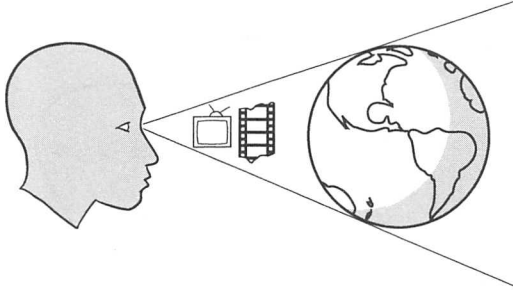
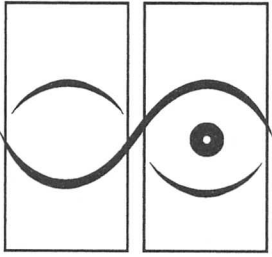
Comics may never attain the *popular heights* of the *moving image* or the *ubiquitousness* of the *spoken word*, but it doesn't have to.



Even if relegated to *minority status*, comics offers an invaluable *window* through which we can view our world.

Today, the *moving image* -- both through *movies* and *television* -- accounts for the *lion's share* of such windows.

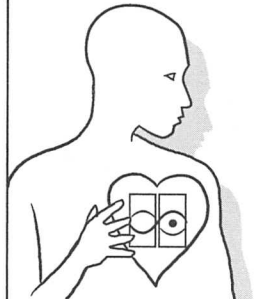
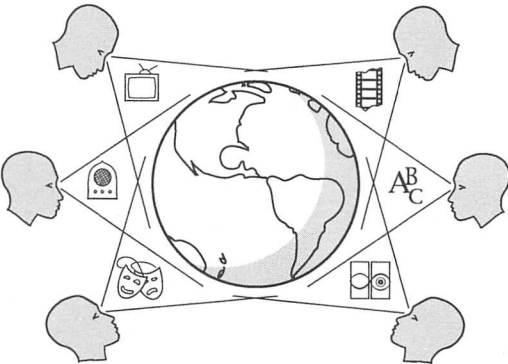
Comics, like other minority forms, are vital to *diversifying* our *perceptions* of our world.



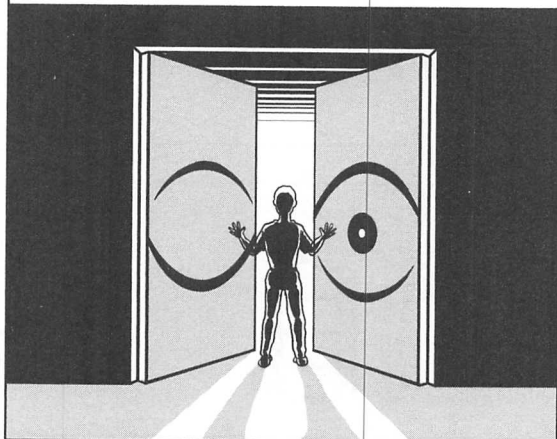
The best way to understand the nature of our environment is to *return* to it from as many vantage points as possible -- *triangulating* its shape from *without*.

To be a *part* of that process, comics needs to appeal to basic human *needs* and *desires* -- offering a view of the world worth *returning* to.

To start with, that means tailoring comics to a *much broader audience*, incorporating a more *diverse spectrum* of *styles* and *subject matter*.



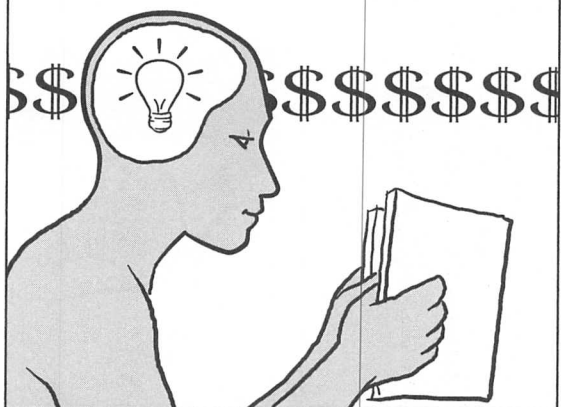
On a more *fundamental level*, it means offering a world far more *vivid* and *memorable* to the reader than what comics offers *now* --



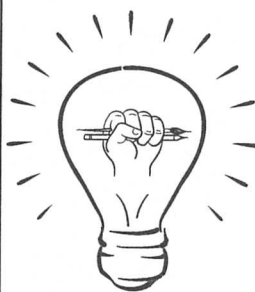
-- and establishing direct, meaningful *exchange of ideas* and *experiences* between *creator* and *reader*.



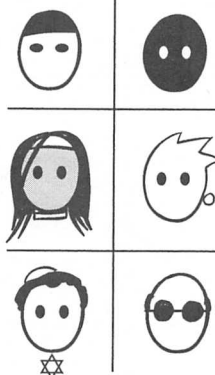
I see an industry based on consumers' *genuine enjoyment*, rather than on *short-term exploitation*, *inbreeding* and *second-guessing*.



An environment where positive innovation is *rewarded* instead of *smothered at birth* --

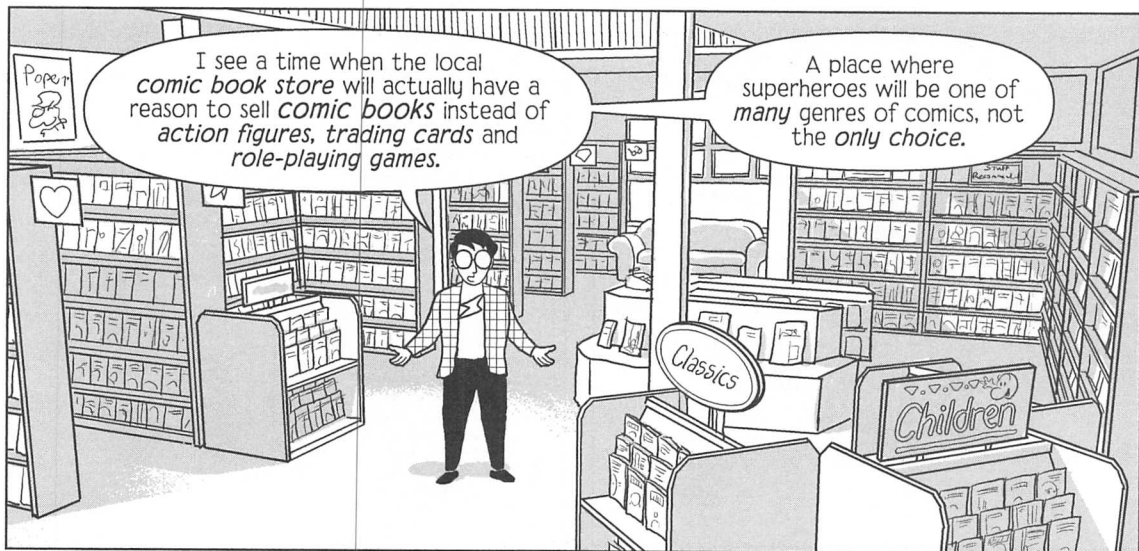


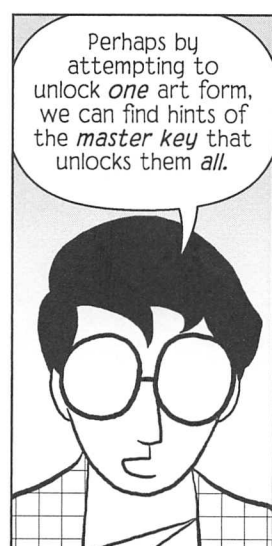
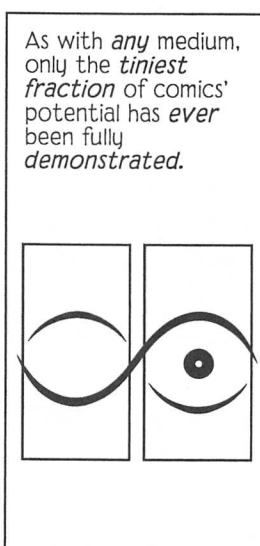
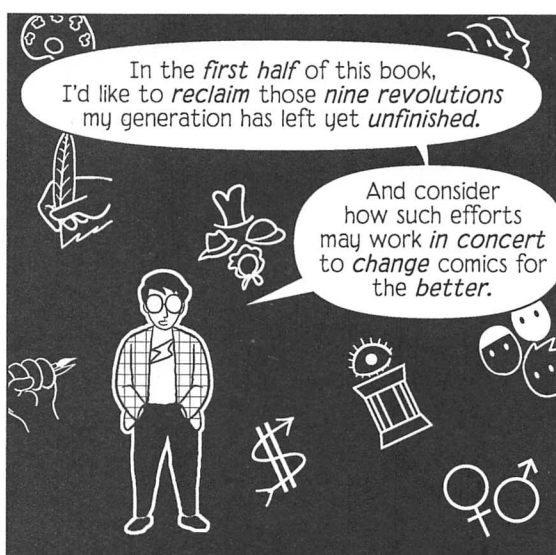
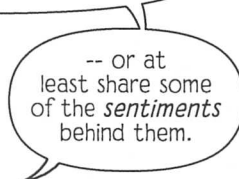
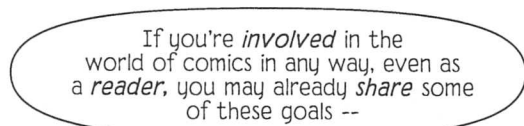
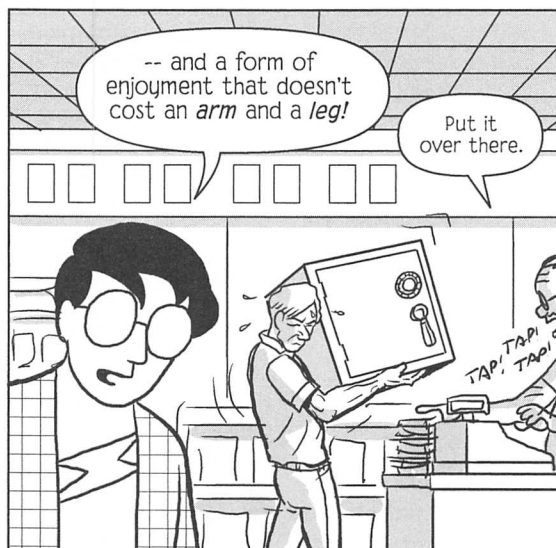
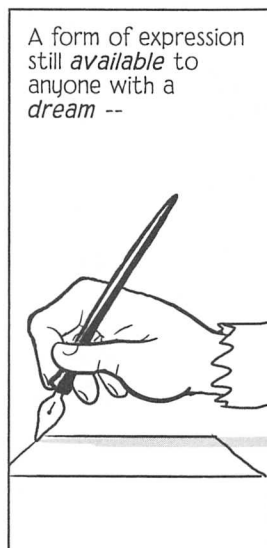
-- and where that innovation comes from *all quarters of society*.



I see a time when the local *comic book store* will actually have a reason to sell *comic books* instead of *action figures*, *trading cards* and *role-playing games*.

A place where superheroes will be one of *many* genres of comics, not the *only choice*.







Comics as literature



Comics as art



Creators' rights



Industry innovation



Public perception



Institutional scrutiny



Gender balance



Minority representation



Diversity of genre.

The *second half* of this book will take an in-depth look at three *new revolutions* -- all dealing with *computers* -- which have started to come into their own in the last few years.



Digital production:

The *creation* of comics with *digital tools*.



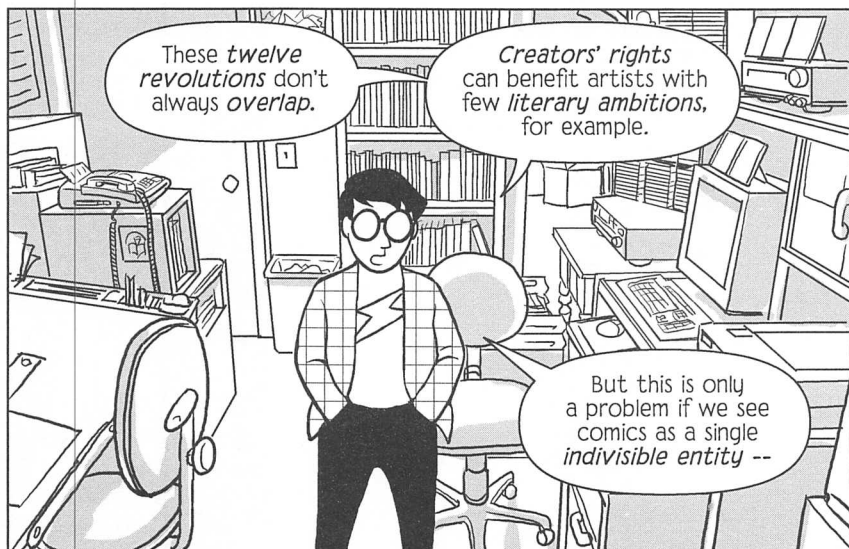
Digital Delivery:

The *distribution* of comics in *digital form*.



Digital Comics:

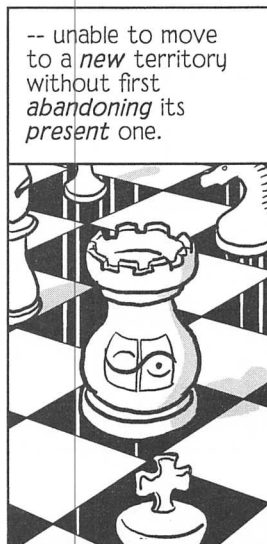
The *evolution* of comics in a *digital environment*.



These *twelve revolutions* don't always overlap.

Creators' rights can benefit artists with few *literary ambitions*, for example.

But this is only a problem if we see comics as a single *indivisible entity* --



-- unable to move to a *new* territory without first *abandoning* its *present* one.

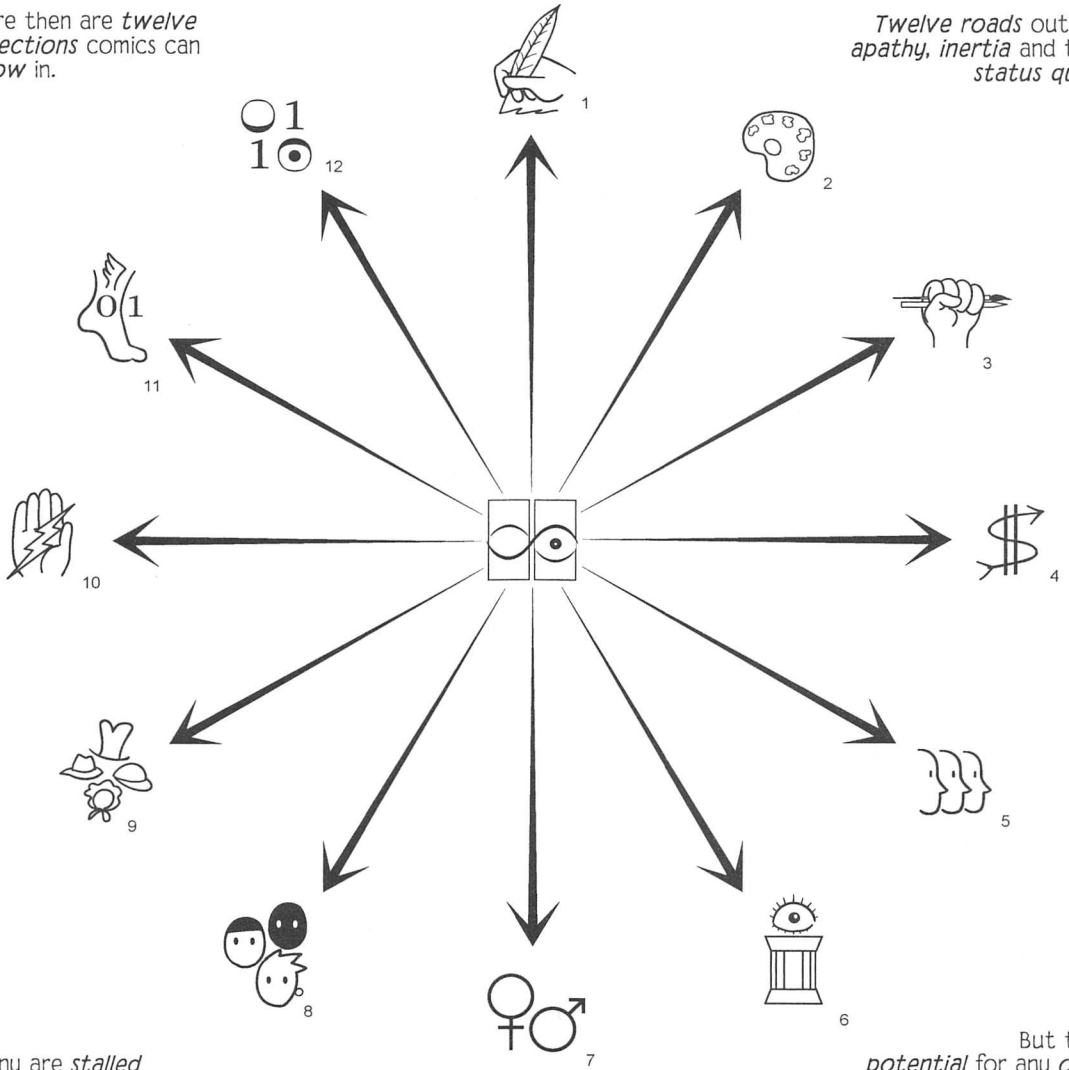


I think the challenge for comics in the 21st Century is *not* to move "*forward*" as so many would have it.

The challenge is to *grow outward!*

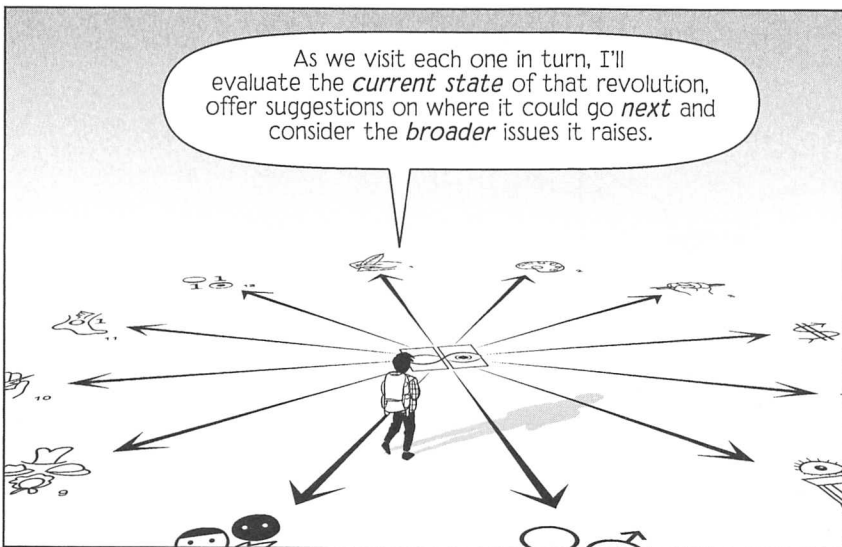
Here then are *twelve directions* comics can grow in.

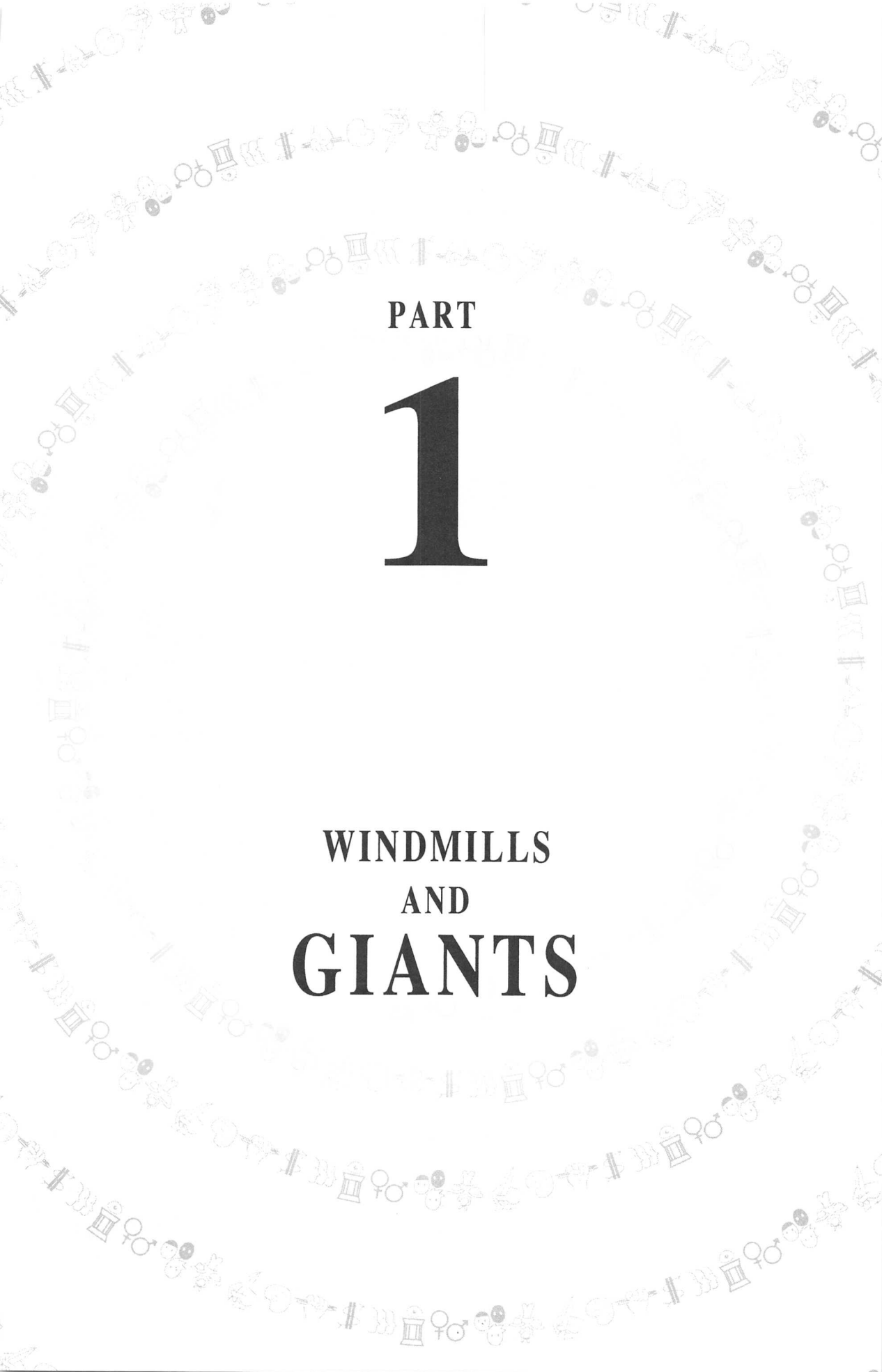
Twelve roads out of apathy, inertia and the status quo.



Many are *stalled* as I write this. Some even *losing ground*.

But the *potential* for any *one* of these factors to change comics is as *great* as *ever*.





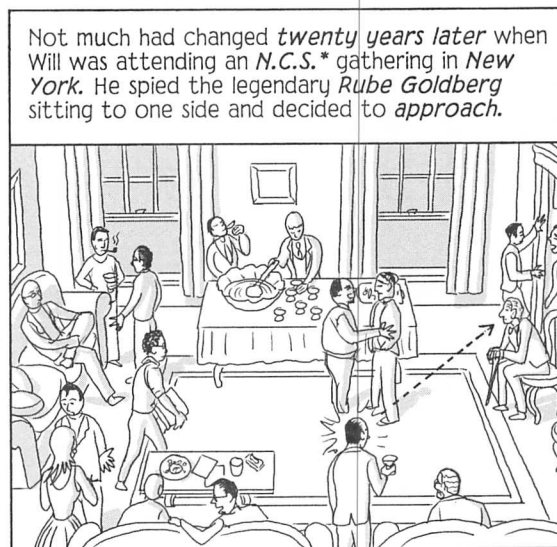
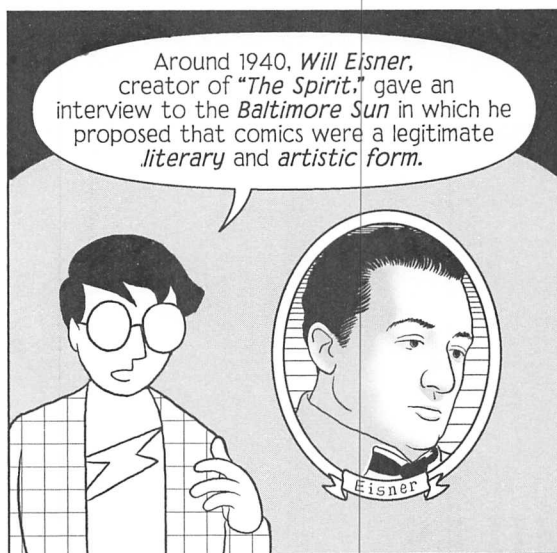
PART

1

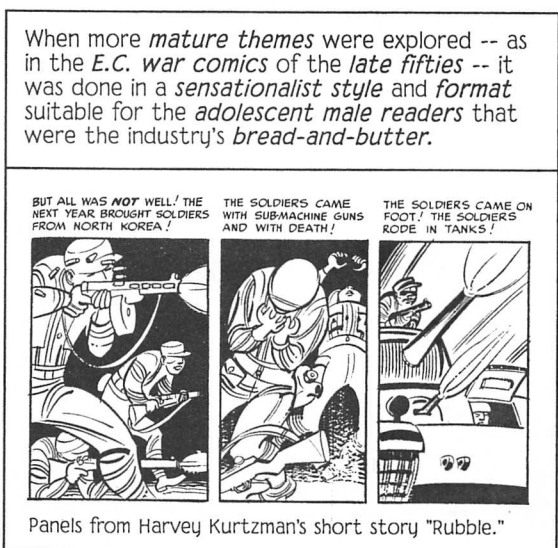
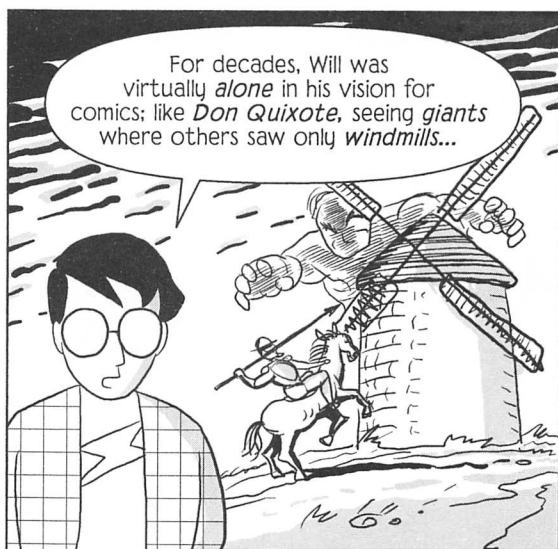
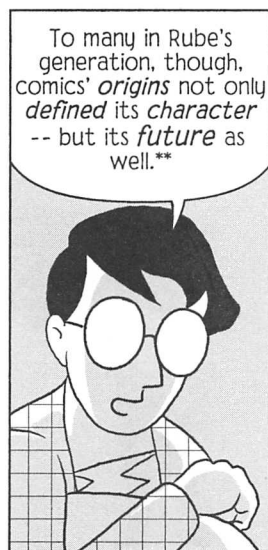
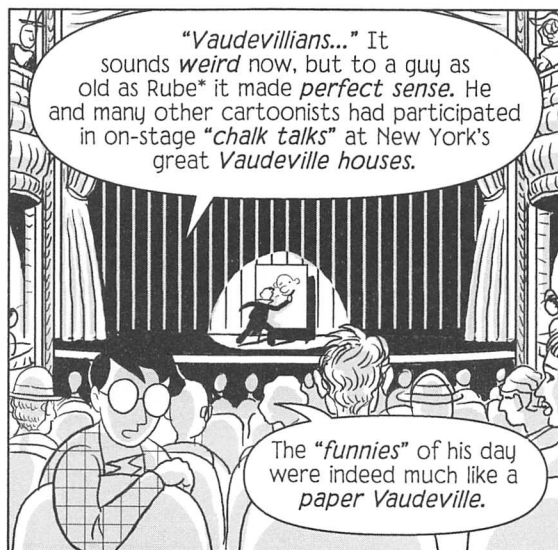
WINDMILLS
AND
GIANTS

SETTING COURSE

A "Low" Art Takes the High Road



*National Cartoonists' Society.



*Goldberg was already a teenager at the turn of the century when American newspaper comics were born.

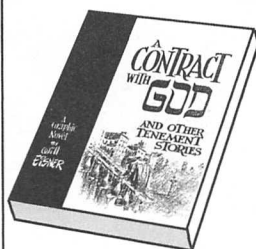
**To be fair to Rube, my phrasing doesn't necessarily describe his own views. See Bibliography for further reading on this remarkable character from history.

In 1978, Eisner -- still known primarily for the comics pages he penned *30 years earlier** -- created a *178-page comic* called "*A Contract With God*" and quietly inaugurated a *revolution* in the way American comics were viewed.



1

Though technically a collection of four *short stories*, Eisner termed his creation a "*graphic novel*."



Ironically, after 40 years of *magazines* called "*comic books*" --



-- the field finally had a comic that actually *was* a "book" and its author *couldn't* use the term without fear of *degrading* the work!



Despite its bizarre origin, the term *stuck* -- and so did the *idea*. *A Contract With God* was a *serious work*, drawn from Will's own *life experience* and a *sincere exploration* of comics' *storytelling potential*.



Like the E.C. creators, Eisner didn't abandon the *cartoony exaggeration* and *accessible writing style* that marked his *early work* --

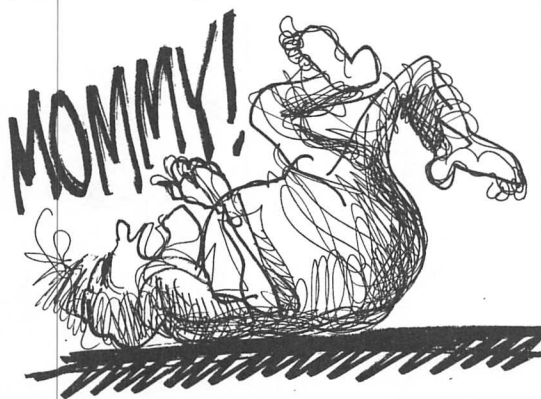
I ASK YOU... WERE THE TERMS NOT CLEARLY WRITTEN?



-- but he had *turned* those talents in a striking *new direction* and others gradually *followed suit*.



A few works, like Jules Feiffer's "*Tantrum*" published a year later, followed Eisner's lead closely (though Feiffer** went with "*novel in cartoons*") and further demonstrated the possibilities of *long-form comics*.

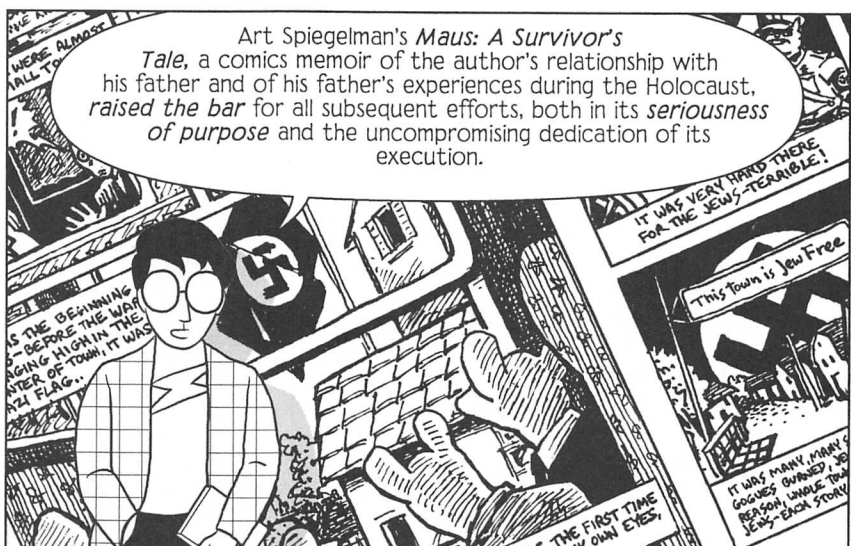
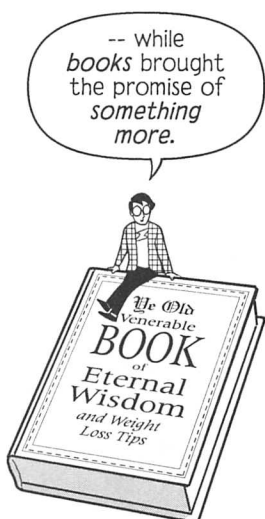
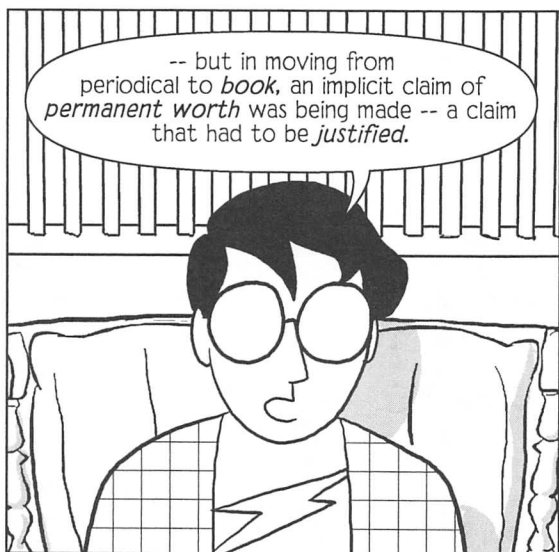
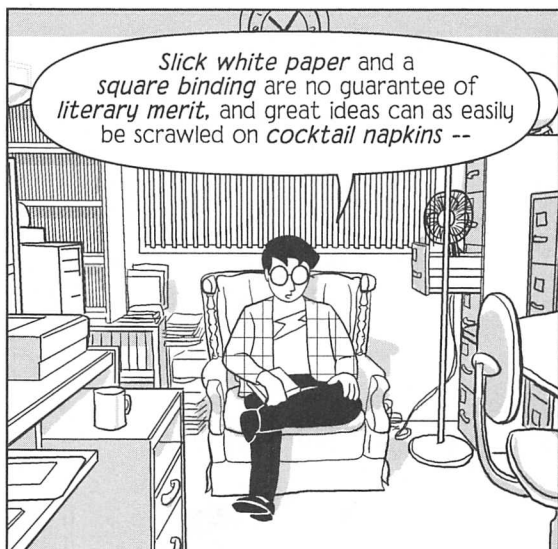
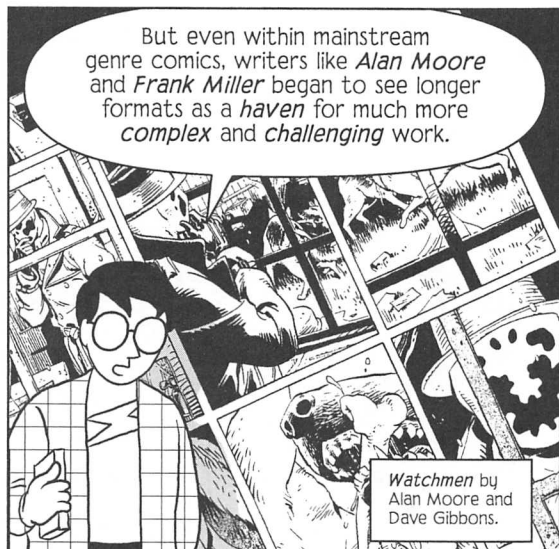


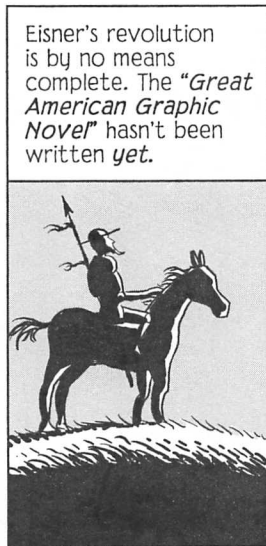
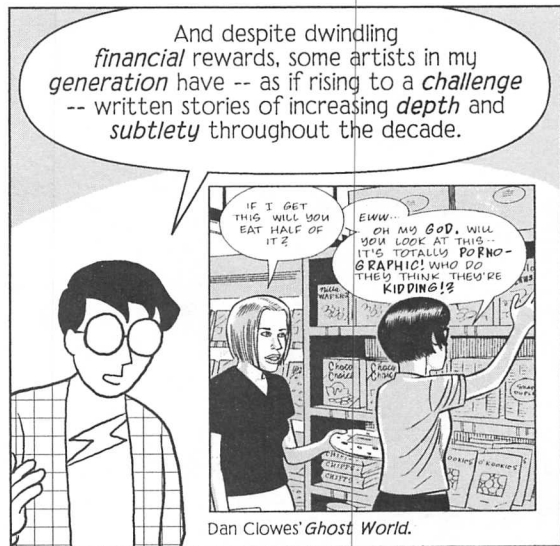
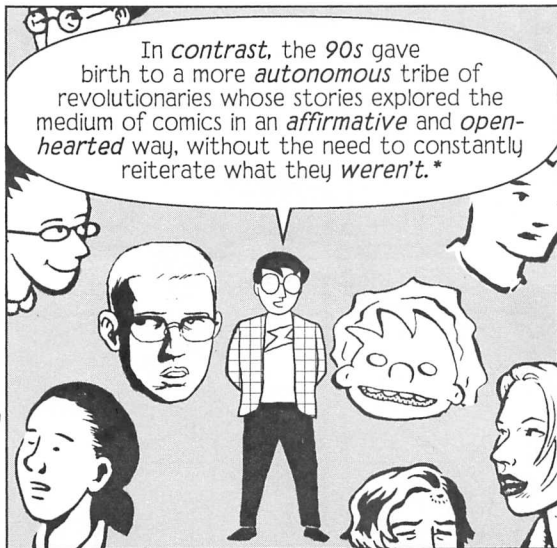
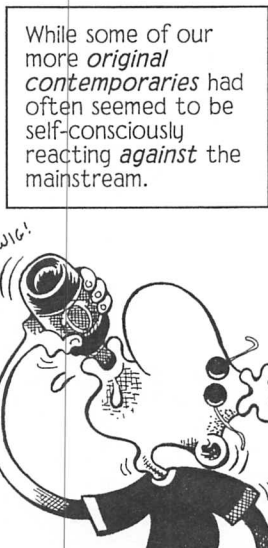
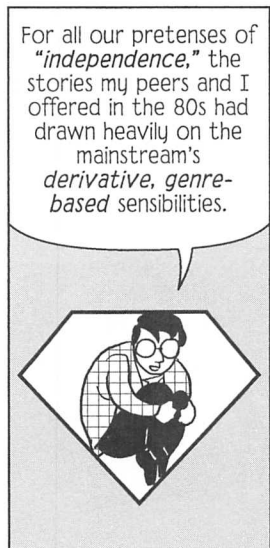
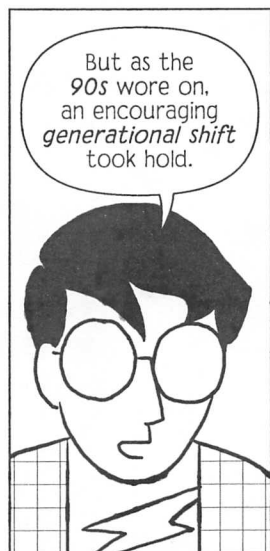
Many used the term "graphic novel" more *cynically*, to repackage *run-of-the-mill stories* from popular *mainstream titles*.



*The Spirit, a multipage newspaper comic section, highly influenced the newly-born field of comic books.

**...or his publisher.





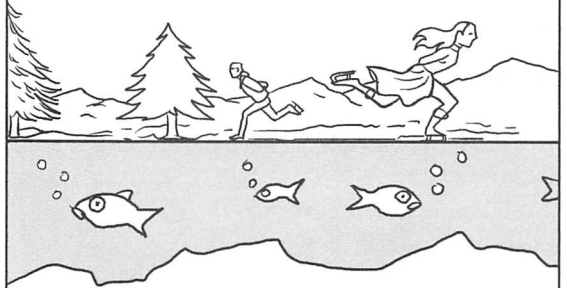
Measuring our progress in this area is difficult when a practical *definition* of high literature is somewhat *elusive*.



But, we can look at some of the *virtues* rightly *associated* with great writing and see how modern comics have begun to *incorporate* them.



Depth is one such virtue. Comics has long been perceived as a *linear, plot-driven* form, lacking prose's ability* to handle *layers of meaning -- subtext* -- within a story.



Skating along the *surface* without ever probing *deeper*.

But various works in recent years have yielded *new strategies* uniquely *suited to comics* --



-- which can help a story's *double life* emerge *visually*.



1994's *Jar of Fools* by Jason Lutes is an *interesting case*.



Lutes' *modern melodrama* was written and drawn in a *simple, accessible style*, but readers willing to *read between the lines* found their efforts *rewarded*.



To help make sense of the following excerpt, here's a *micro-synopsis* courtesy of Lutes himself:



"Magic has lost its meaning for an unemployed magician named Ernie Weiss.



"Haunted by the death of his escape-artist brother and a failed romance, his remaining hope lies with his aging mentor Al Floss.



"...But Al is a fugitive from the retirement home, slipping further into senility with each passing day."



In the following scene, Al is helping Ernie get back in shape for a *comeback*.

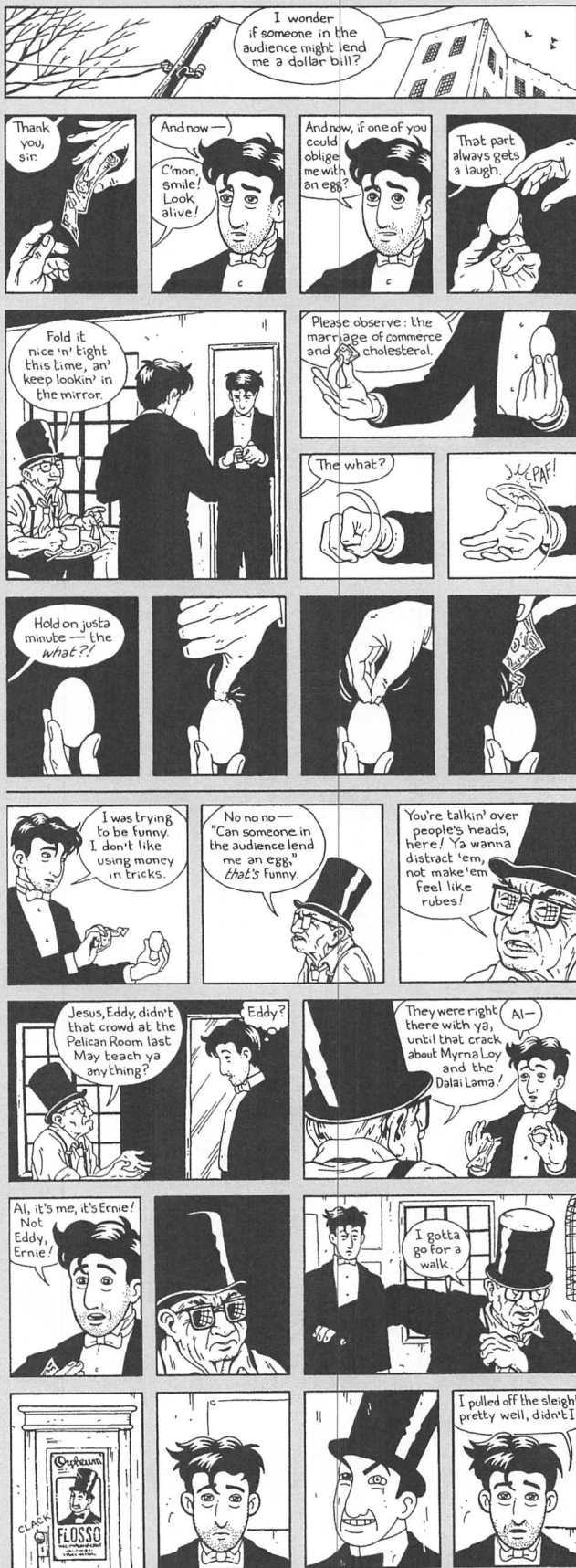
Seen earlier, on Ernie's door, was an *old poster* of Al from his *younger days*.



Bear in mind also that Al is entirely *dependent* on Ernie's *hospitality*.



*Prose is a part of comics' arsenal, of course, but has historically played a severely restricted role compared to classic works of literature.



Throughout *Jar of Fools*, Lutes alternates a few basic themes on almost *every* page. Here are some *examples*:

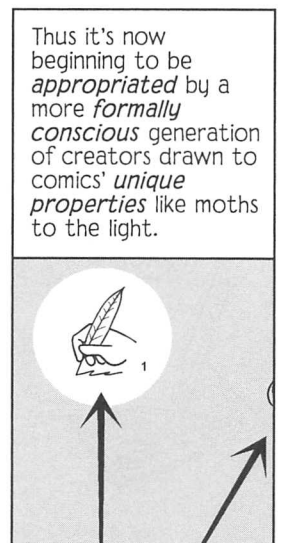
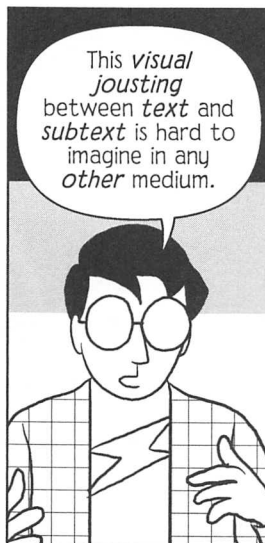
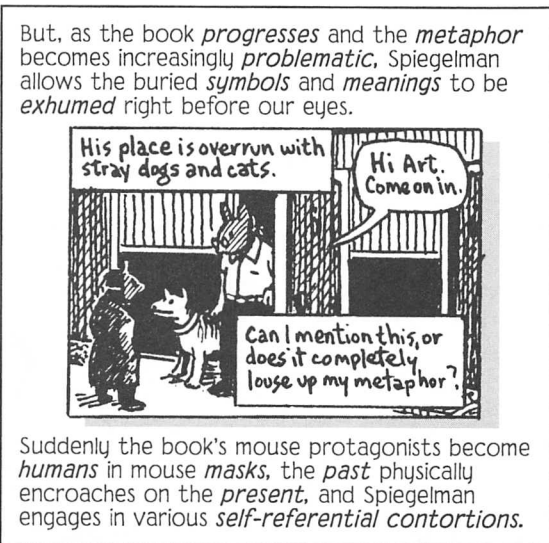
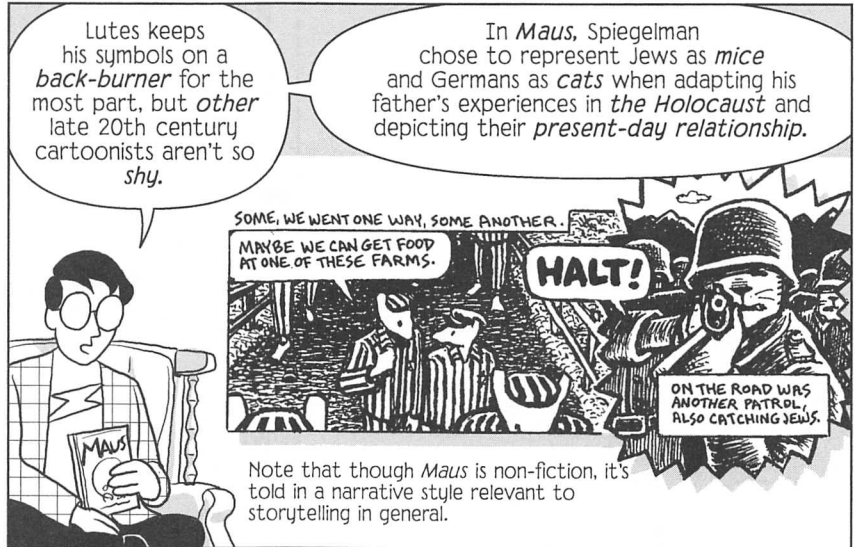
"C'mon smile!" By this point (page 51), we've seen ample *evidence* of Ernie's chronic *depression* -- yet this simple *inability to smile* drives the point home in a scene ostensibly about *something else* altogether.

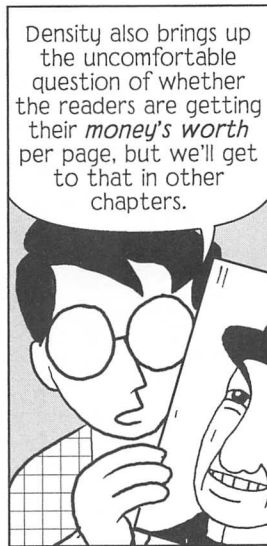
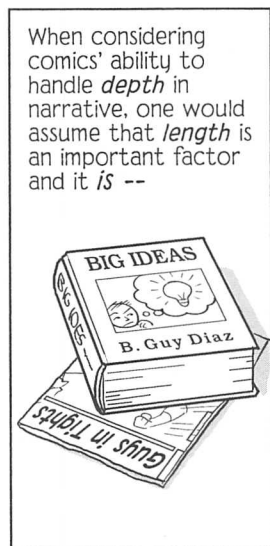
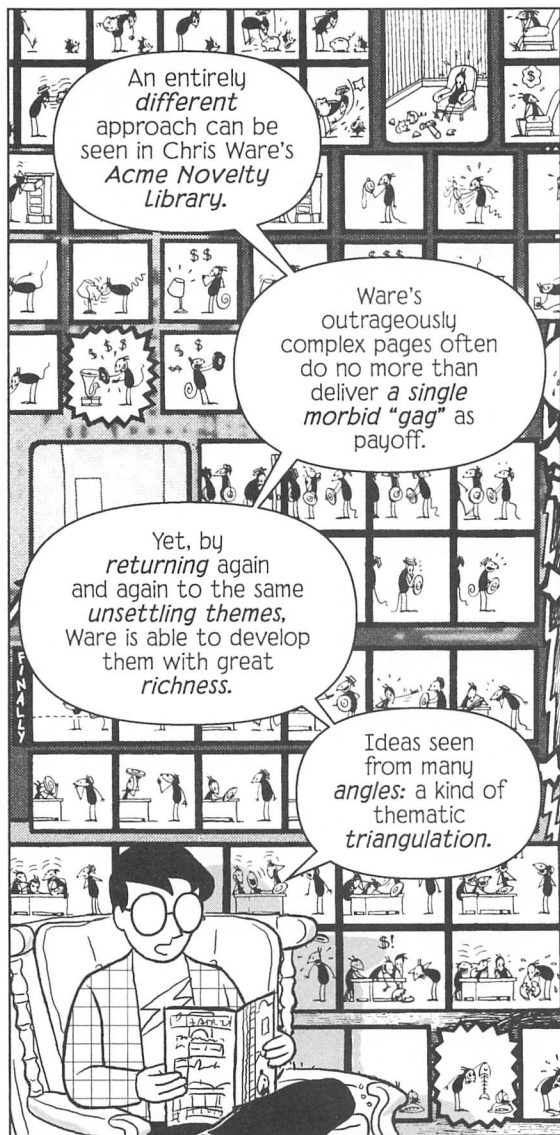
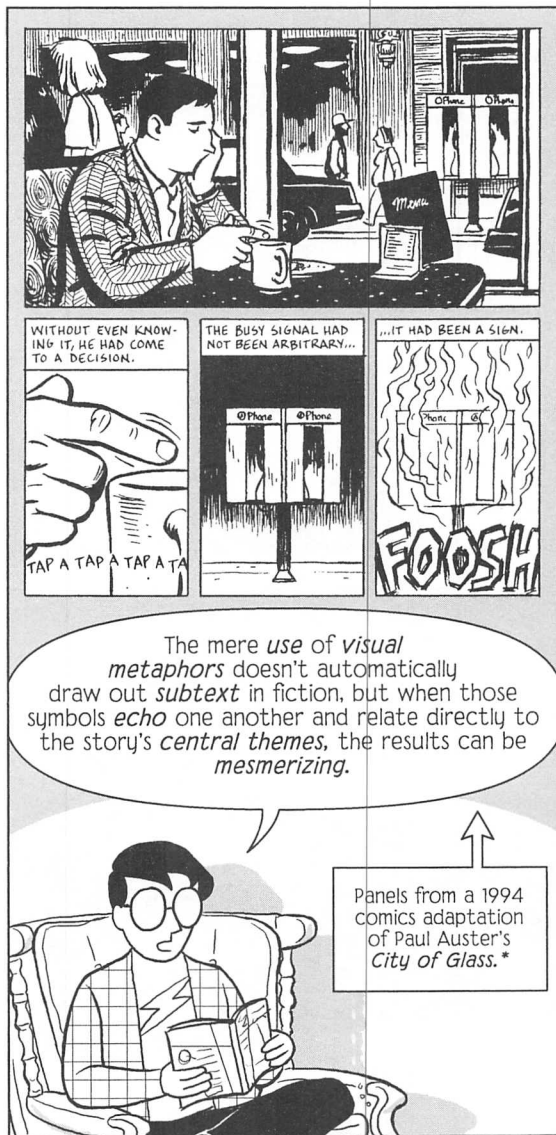
Al's breakfast reminds us, even as he takes *command*, of how each character is *dependent* on the other for survival in a rather *bleak-looking world* (see panel 1).

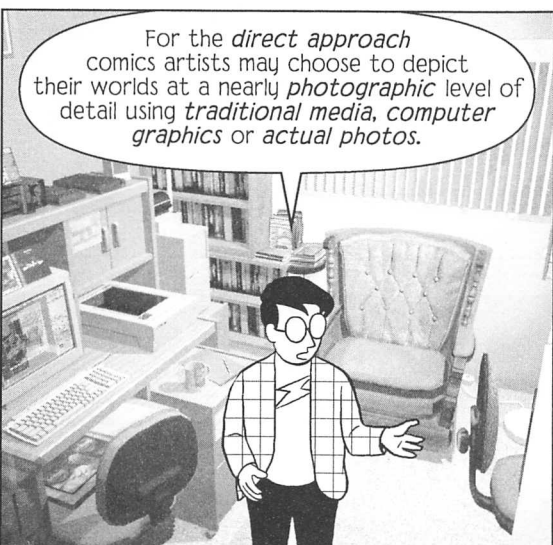
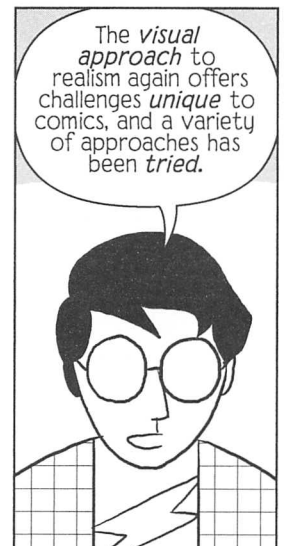
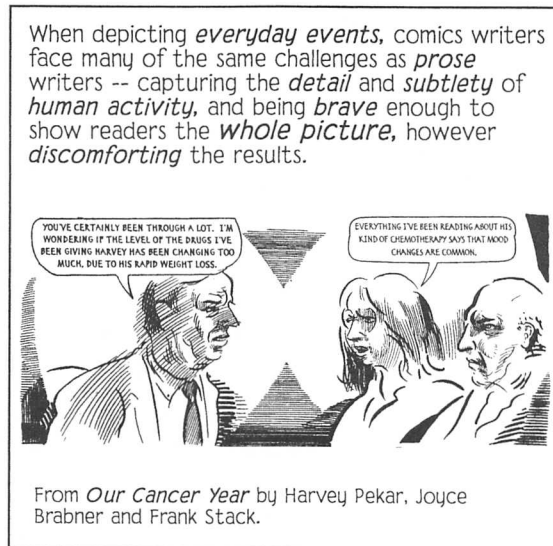
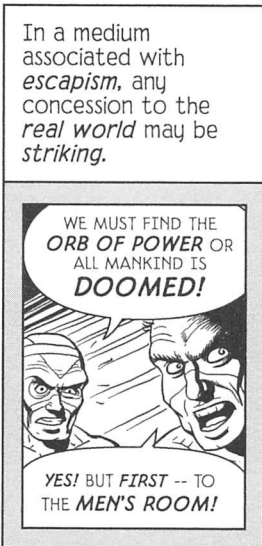
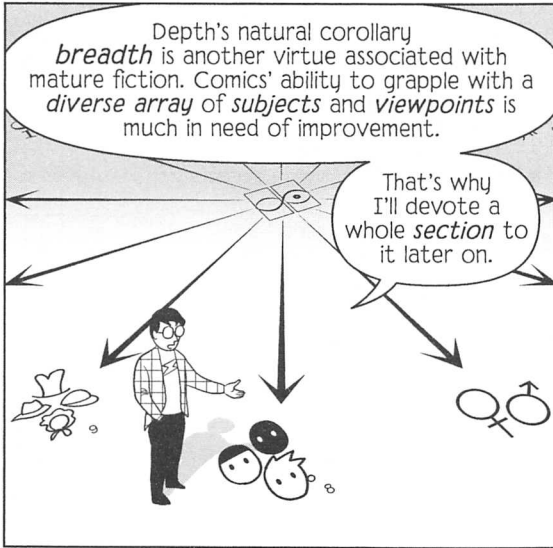
Magic *itself* is an underlying *motif*. Notice that Ernie performs the trick for *us*. Throughout the book are *tricks, illusions* and *mysteries* occurring as part of everyday life -- magic as a *powerful* but *dormant* force.

No element is wasted. A *reflection* in a pair of *glasses* helps evoke the wall of *alienation* that abruptly descends between the two, while a small "*clack*" rather than an angry "*Slam!*" indicates a *disoriented* exit, not an *angry* one.

Finally, in those *last three panels*, we see an isolation so *acute* that it reaches out to *inanimate objects* for company; plus an unfulfilled need for *approval*, and a clear suggestion that the *history* of that need spans *many years*.









I really didn't have a clue when I started this thing. It was crazy to think I could find hate.

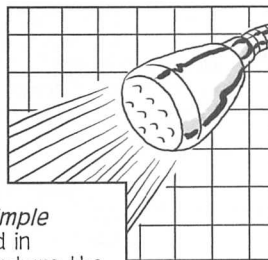
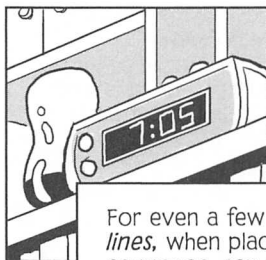
Only now, after studying, tons of old magazines, can I see that there are literally hundreds of obscure cartoonists--any of whom could have sold, through a stroke of luck, a lone gag to the 'New Yorker.'



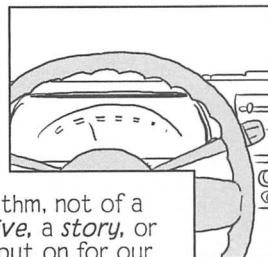
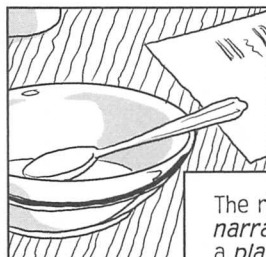
excerpt from *It's a Good Life if You Don't Weaken* by Seth.



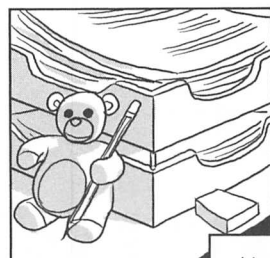
This may be why a growing number of comics creators in pursuit of a sense of the *real* sometimes opt for styles of drawing that are, at first blush, *anything but...*



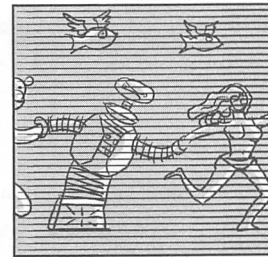
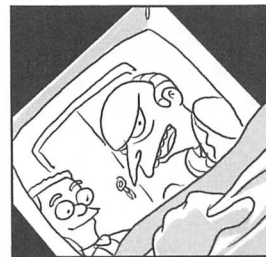
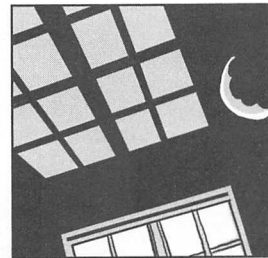
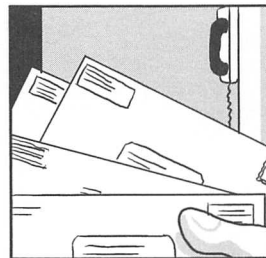
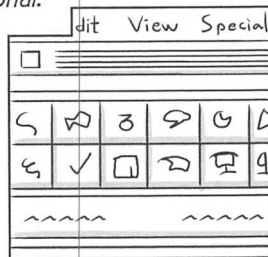
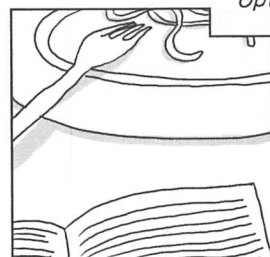
For even a few *simple lines*, when placed in *sequence*, can capture the *rhythm* of the *unbidden images* that our eyes encounter every day.



The rhythm, not of a *narrative*, a *story*, or a *play* put on for our benefit, but of the *simple experience* of being *alive on Earth*.



Meanings optional.



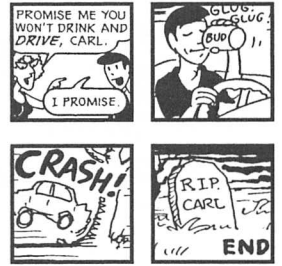
In North America, comics have long been confined to *short periodical installments* and have dutifully adapted an efficient "*just the facts, Ma'am*" approach to storytelling.



The *transitions* from one panel to another have predominantly been in the form of *discrete actions*.

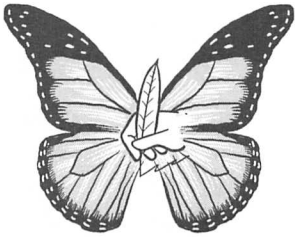


And the *choice* of actions has been traditionally based on *keeping the plot moving*.



These examples are from *Understanding Comics*. No, they're *not* real!

Though *longer formats* have begun to proliferate, North American storytelling is still emerging from its *periodical cocoon* --



--and has yet to *stretch its wings* to the degree other media have.

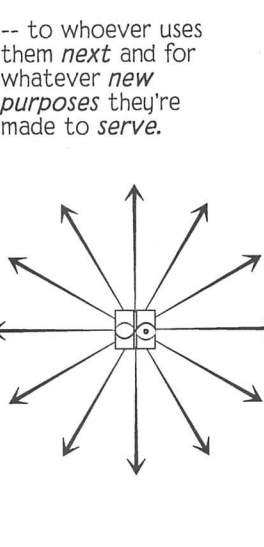
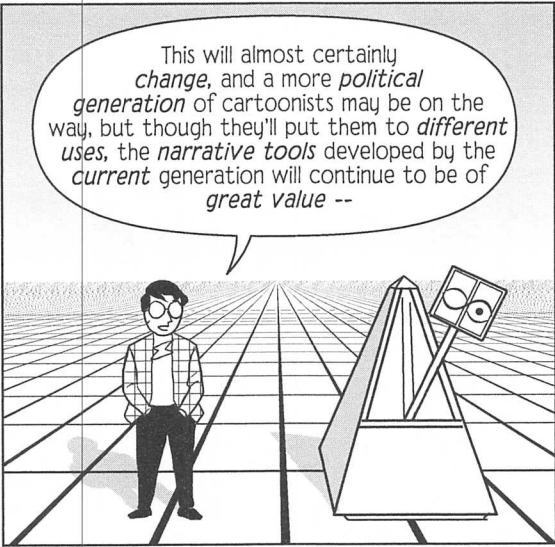
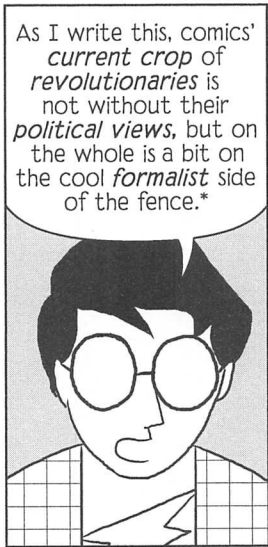
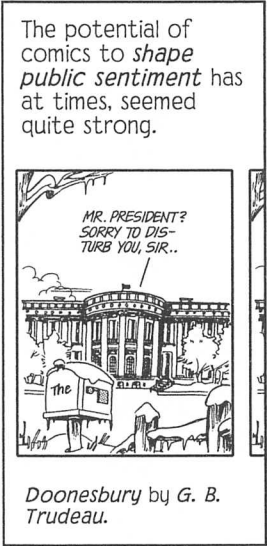
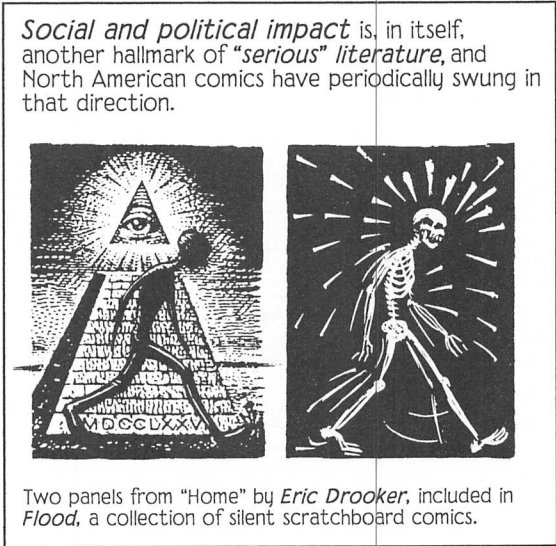
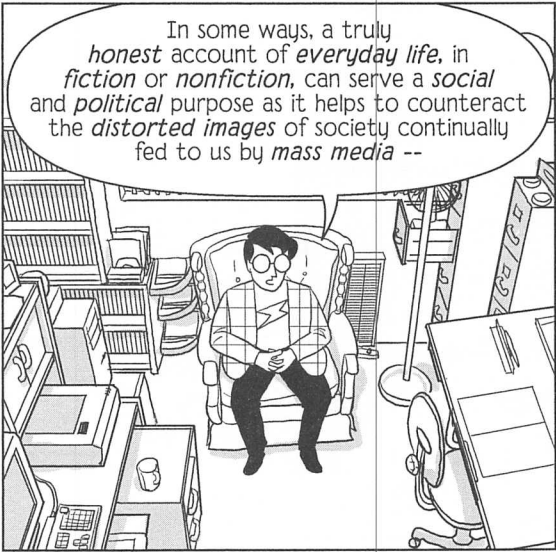


Finding those *moments within moments* may be one of the *central motifs* of this revolution of mature comics which, in many respects, is still in its *infancy*.

Realism and the art of *caricature* might seem *strange bedfellows*, but comics artists who employ the art of *exaggeration* --

-- often succeed at capturing the wide *variety* of real world human *appearances* in a way many more restrained and "*serious*" creators *do not*.

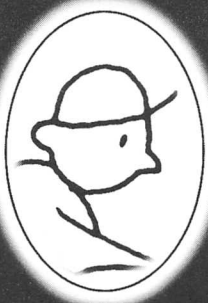




*As am I, so I'm not going to have as much to say about this one.

Emotional resonance, the forging of an emotional *connection* between *creator* and *reader* without resorting to cheap *manipulation*, is another frontier being explored today.

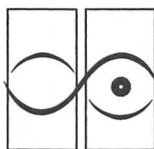
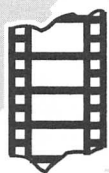
Some, like *Chester Brown* and *Gilbert Hernandez* take advantage of the cumulative effects of novel-length works to connect with their audiences. Others such as *Carol Tyler* and *John Porcellino* may hit their marks in a few short pages.



The emotional *impact* of a work is as *subjective* as anything we've discussed, so I can't say much about the *mechanics* of it.

In considering comics creators' *relationships* with their *audience*, though, it's worth noting that those bonds are far *different* from the ones forged in *cinema* and *prose*.

The partnership between *creator* and *reader* in comics is far more *intimate* and *active* than *cinema*, while comics' *symbolic static images* may cut *straight to the heart* without the continual mediation of prose's *authorial voice*.



On the *cutting edge* of comics' literate forays are effects so *peculiar to comics* that they *defy comparison* to any other form, such as the differing views of the world presented by Dylan Horrocks' cartoonist-narrators in his graphic novel *Hicksville*.*

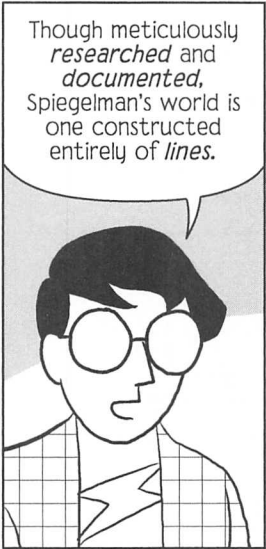
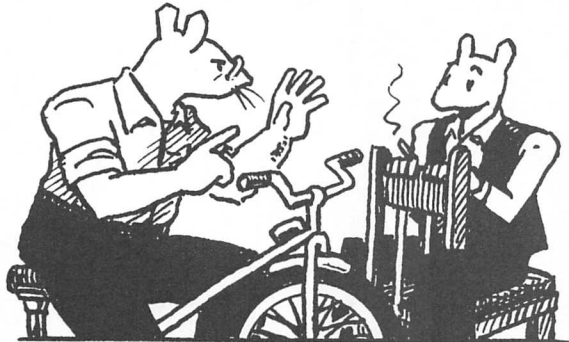
Or the strange *narrative splicing* in Richard Macguire's time-hopping short subject "Here."



*Note: Although discussing English language comics has mostly led us toward works from North America and England, there are exceptions. Dylan Horrocks is from New Zealand.



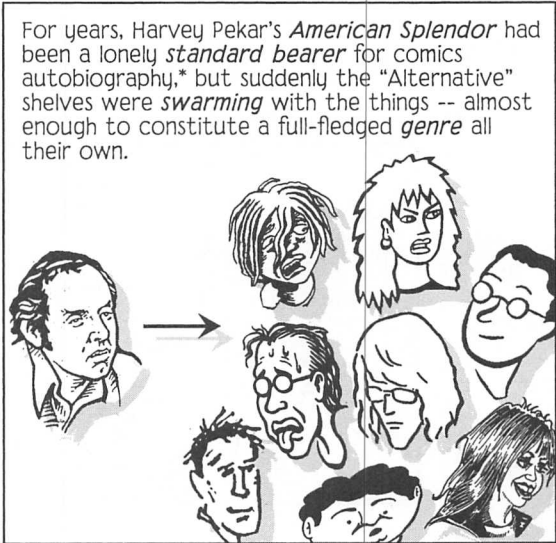
*Fiction and nonfiction bleed into one another easily in comics. The first time **Maus** hit the **New York Times Bestseller List** it was mistakenly listed as "fiction" and one look at its protagonists shows *why*.*



In the *late-80s* and *early-90s*, cartoonists embraced a decidedly unglamorous *confessional style* of autobiography, as if to consciously *contradict* the mainstream's popular *power fantasies* in every respect.



From Joe Matt's *Peep Show*.



For years, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* had been a lonely *standard bearer* for comics autobiography,* but suddenly the "Alternative" shelves were *swarming* with the things -- almost enough to constitute a full-fledged *genre* all their own.

Though seen by some as a *creative dead-end*, this phase would eventually produce a modest quantity of *accomplished* and *memorable* work.



From Chester Brown's *I Never Liked You*.

Work which would inform much of the *naturalistic fiction* that was to come.



Seth's *It's a Good Life if You Don't Weaken* was assumed by most to be autobiography, but was in fact *fiction*.

*There were others, but most published sporadically and were associated with the dwindling original underground scene.

The *narrative tools* developed by *fiction* writers are equally applicable to narrative *non-fiction*, as in the historical comics of Texan underground veteran *Jack Jackson* --



-- though others like comics journalist *Joe Sacco* have experimented with *brand new narrative techniques* to better suit their *true-life source material*.



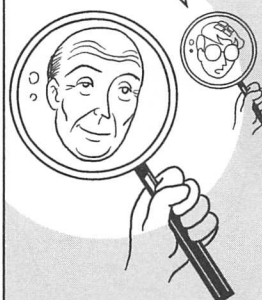
Pure *nonfiction* comics -- those that examine a subject *directly* without the pretense of a story -- remain *scarce*.



Larry Gonick's *Cartoon History of the Universe* and its many sequels *set the tone* for modern *nonfiction comics* but only a few have followed his lead.*



Will Eisner has long advocated the potential of *non-fiction comics* but that revolution has yet to kick in.



Still, *real-life sensibilities* remain a vital component of comics' literary *front line* --



-- and that revolution looks *promising* indeed.

The foundation for *truly adult comics*** will always be the existence of more *challenging* and fulfilling *genre works* for *various age levels*, and here too a revolution is *beginning...*



This is the source of *new readers* without which the *adult comics revolution* would eventually become an *empty room*.



*Yours Truly is one of those few. Gonick's work, along with Spiegelman's comics essay "Cracking Jokes," helped inspire the type of comics you're reading now.

**an effort is under way to reclaim this term from the violent and/or dimwitted porn it usually refers to.

The split between comics as *literature* and comics, as "high" *art* may seem to reflect comics own split between *words* and *pictures*...

(especially if you read too much into my choice of *symbols*!)

1. ABC

2.

But in fact, the *literature* of comics is a *subset* of the much *larger* issues surrounding *comics* and *art*.



And the split *between these* two aspirations has less to do with *words* and *pictures* --

-- and more to do with *content* and *form*.

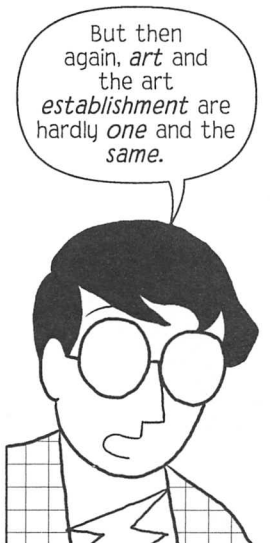
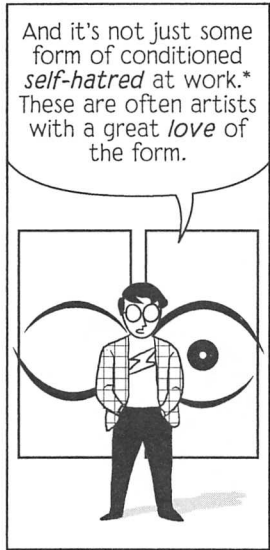
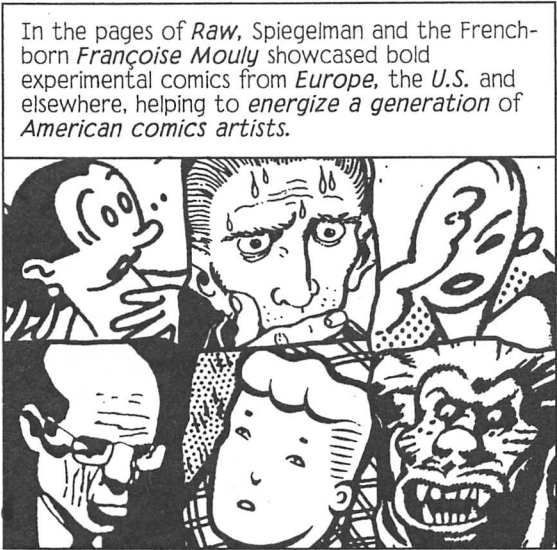
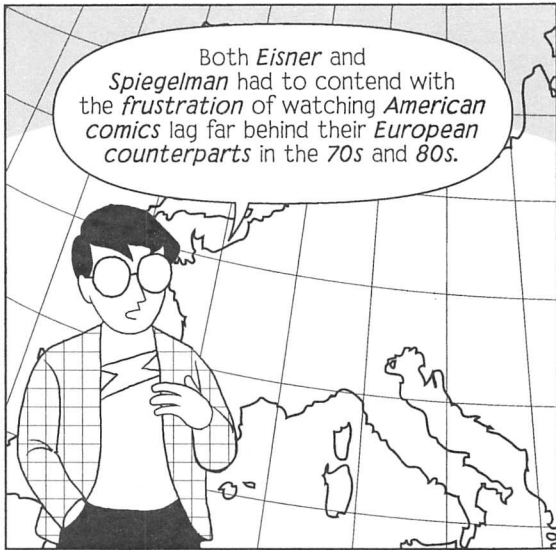
Now, as always, it's important to note that the line *between* content and form is a *blurry* one.

But generally speaking, our *first* revolution, even at its most *formally inventive*, is still geared toward the *stories, themes* and *ideas* of a work --

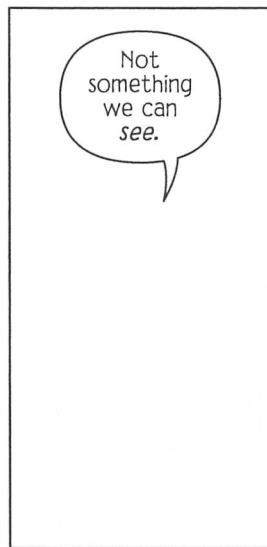
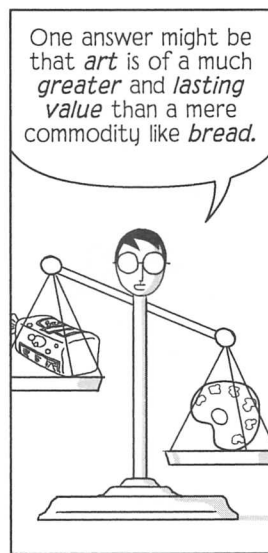
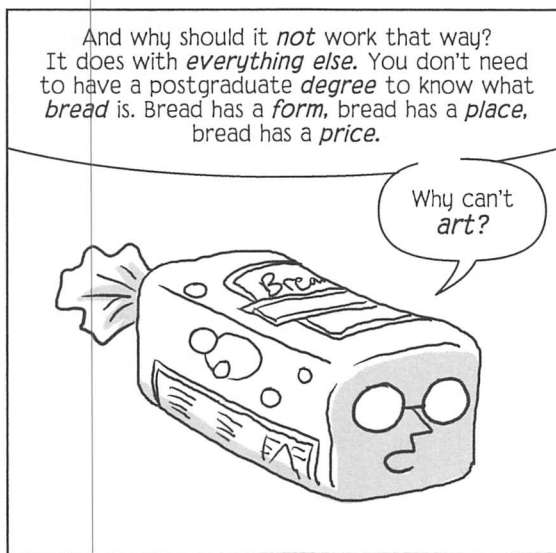
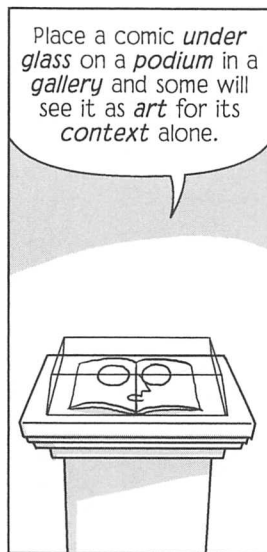
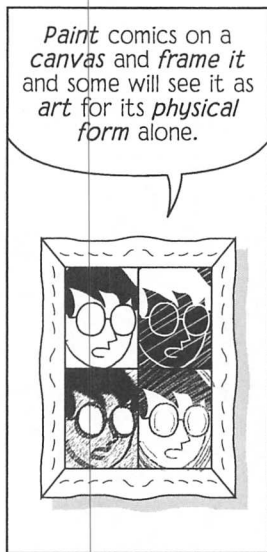
-- while the "*art comics*" phenomenon that constitutes our *second revolution* is more about the *frontiers* of *sequential art* as a unique *medium of expression*.

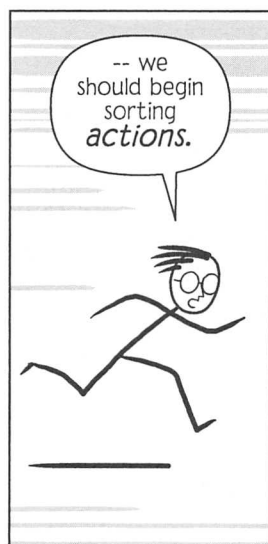
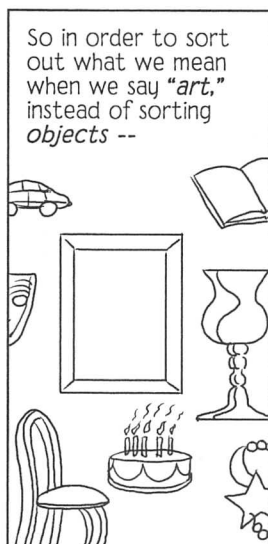
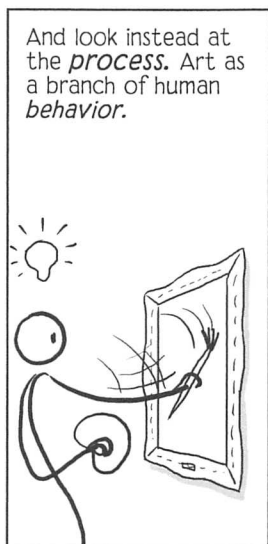
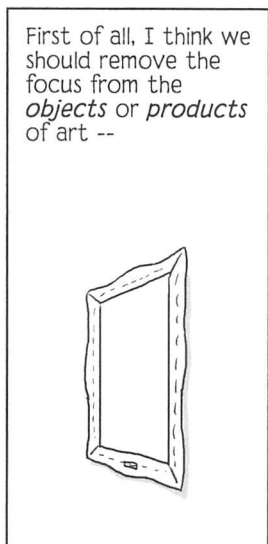
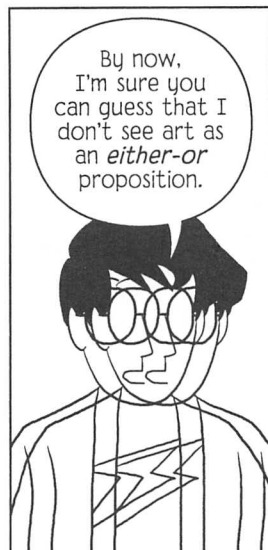
Art Spiegelman looms large in *this* revolution *also*, due to his pioneering *early work* and the influential avant-garde anthology *Raw* which he co-edited with *Françoise Mouly* in the 80s and early 90s.

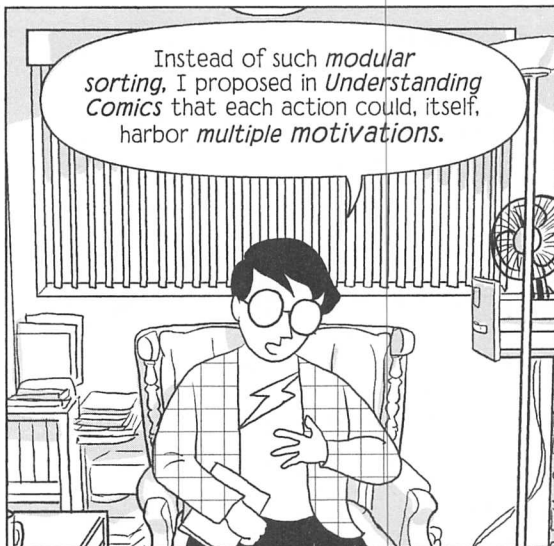
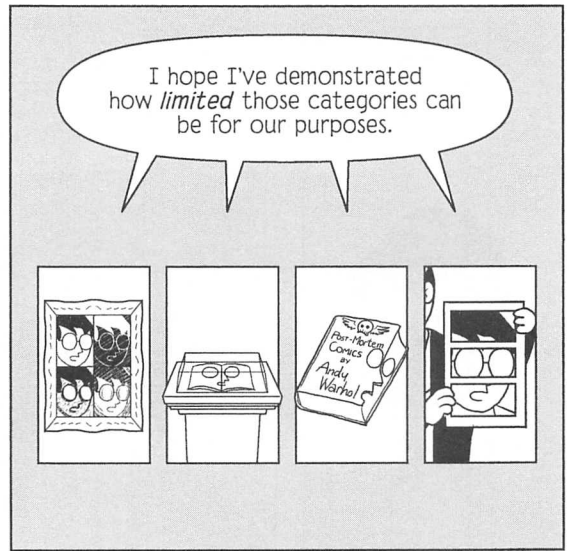
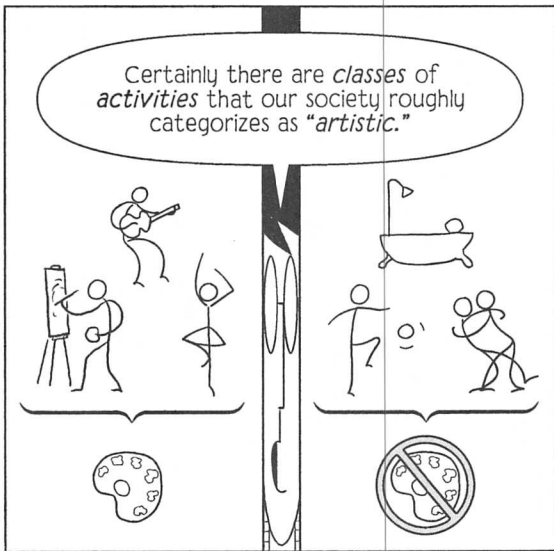
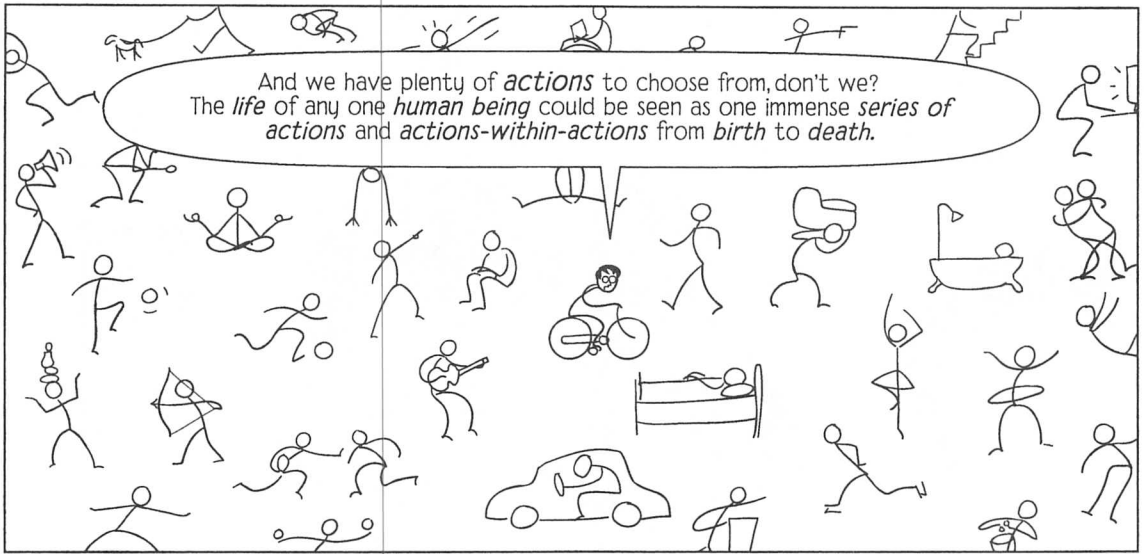


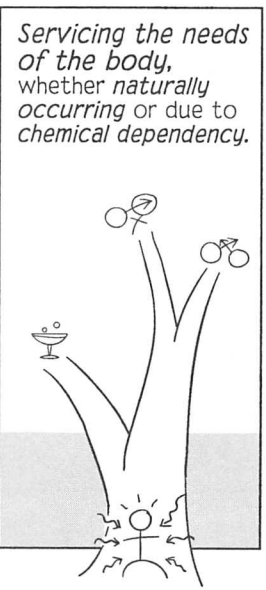
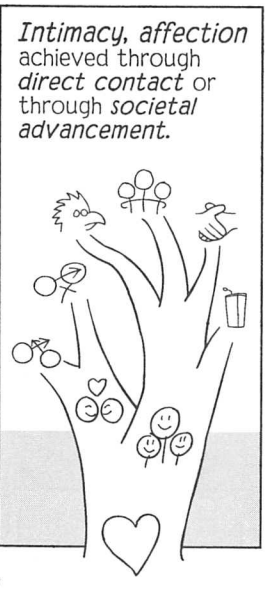
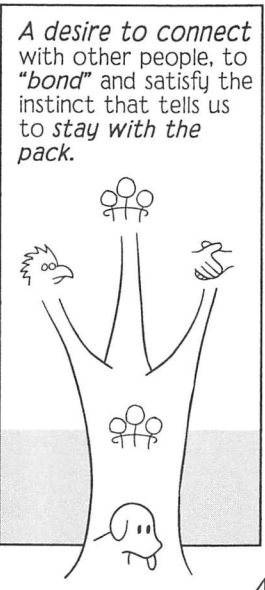
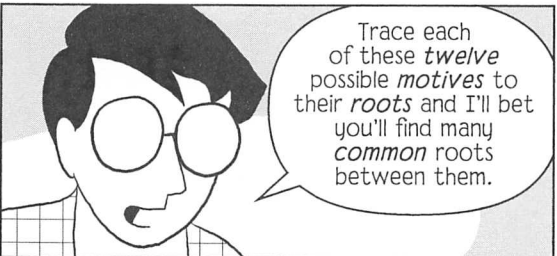
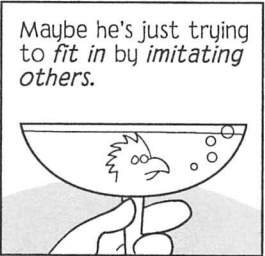
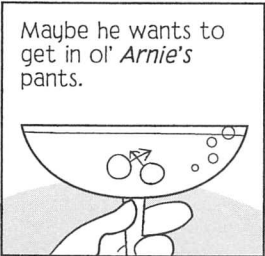
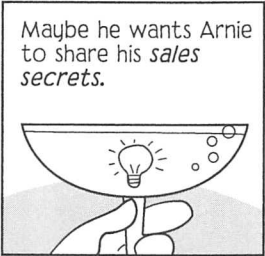
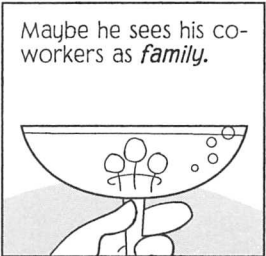
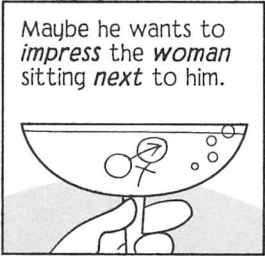
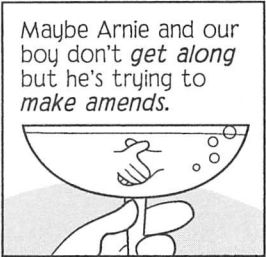
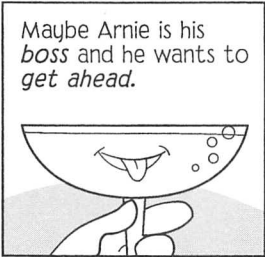
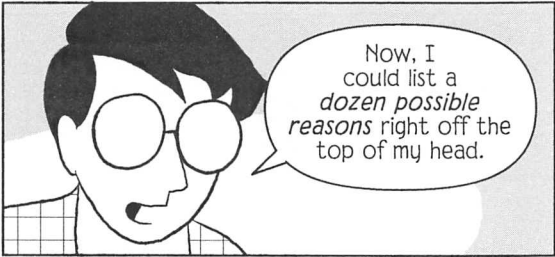


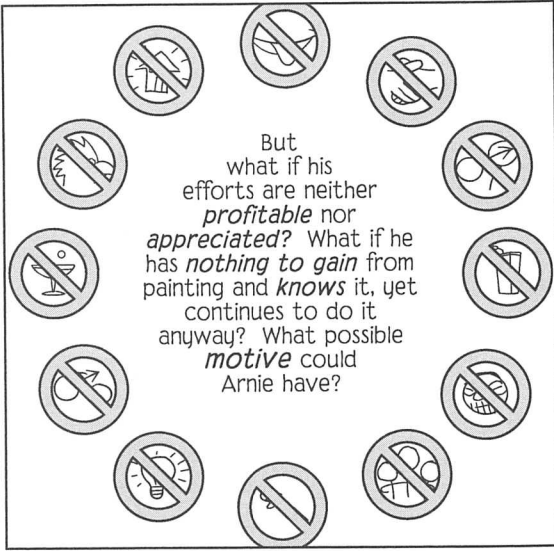
*Though I've seen that in action too, occasionally.











But what if his efforts are neither *profitable* nor *appreciated*? What if he has *nothing to gain* from painting and *knows* it, yet continues to do it anyway? What possible *motive* could Arnie have?

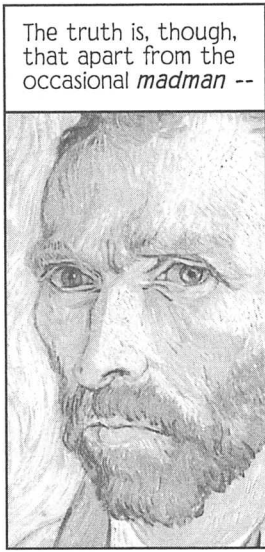


If the only honest answer is "*the work*" --

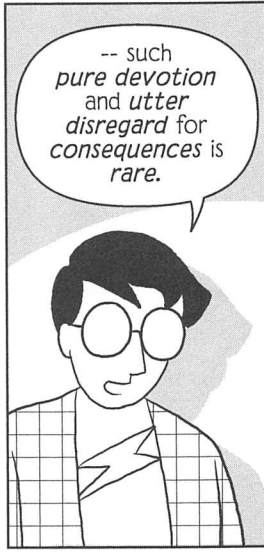


-- then as far as I'm concerned, you're dealing with an *Artist*.

Capitol
"A" Artist.
"Fine" Artist.
The real thing.



The truth is, though, that apart from the occasional *madman* --



-- such *pure devotion* and *utter disregard* for *consequences* is *rare*.



Instead, our *modern conception* of artistic integrity -- and I can get behind this one -- is that an artist may *hope* for success but will never alter his work to *obtain* it.



As with so many aspects of *human behavior*, though, there are virtually no absolutes between *art* and *not-art*. Rather than *black* or *white*, most are some shade of *gray*.



Even the most *lofty* of pursuits are bound to have some element of *self-interest* in them.

And even the most *trivial* of actions will have an element of *art...* from the way we *sign our names* --



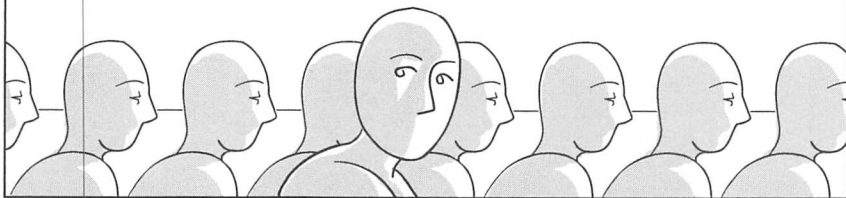
-- to the *distinctive way* we raise a glass.

Evolution sets a *narrow path*.

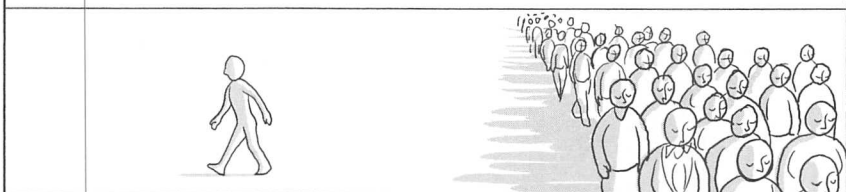
The great *variety* of our *actions* hides the fact that nearly every one of them carries us in the *same direction*; fulfilling our *evolutionary mandate*; locked in the *parade* of a million generations.

Thinking we *stray* far more than we *do*.

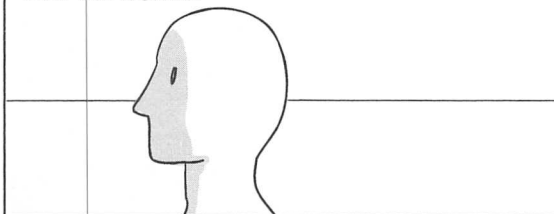
The artist *breaks step*...



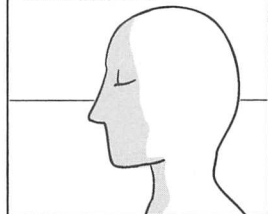
Moves *laterally*...



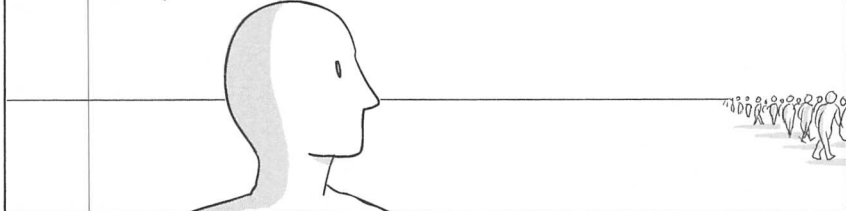
Sees the *world*...



Sees *inside*...



And sees the *parade*...



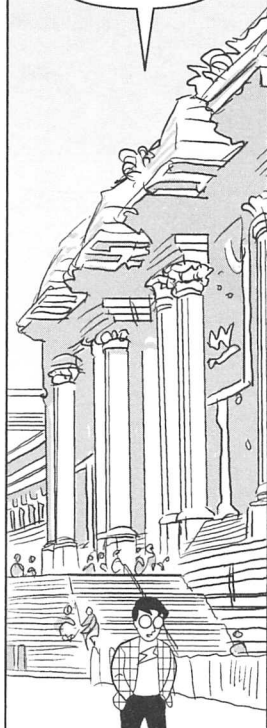
We *all* have this *ability* and we all *exercise* it to *varying degrees* throughout our lives.

But society has named some of its members "*artists*" and some of its creations "*art*" in hopes of making *sense* of the world.

The boundaries that result are *irrational* and *arbitrary* --

-- but they are *human*, and although comics has rarely been a *beneficiary* of these distinctions, creators can certainly try to work *within* them --

-- at the same time they work to *overcome* them.



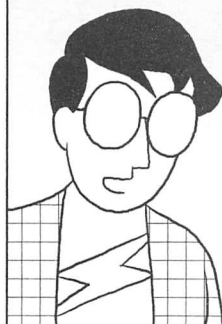
At institutions like this one,* we can worship the *idea* of art and symbolize its *value* to ourselves as a society without *ever*, among any of its two million objects, ever being told *what it is*.



This same *symbolic battle* can be waged on *behalf* of comics --



-- while the *real struggle* takes place on the *page* to make comics *worthy* of that devotion.

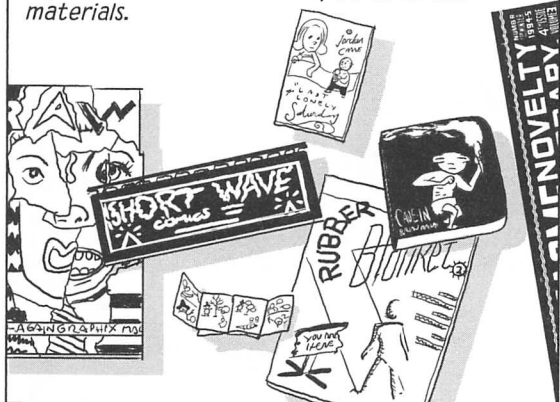


All the *awards, exhibits, grants* and *ceremonies* add nothing of *value* to the *page*.



But they do send a *message* to the *young artist* that "Yes, this society places *value* on your *work* and on your *goals*."

Sometimes a work can signal its artistic agenda by mere *physical presence*. One of the post-Raw developments is an increased awareness of the comic book as *art object* -- a willingness to experiment with unusual *shapes, sizes* and *materials*.

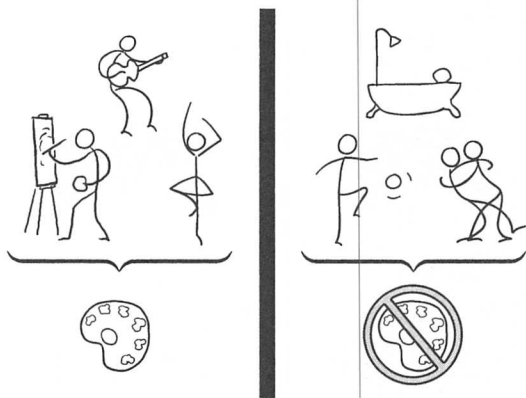


Larger page-sizes, in particular, have evoked the *painter's canvas*, and indeed some new work veers closer to *painterly tradition*.



* The Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan.

Of course, a mere *resemblance* to *painting* or *printmaking* is no more meaningful than the "art" "non-art" pecking order discussed earlier --



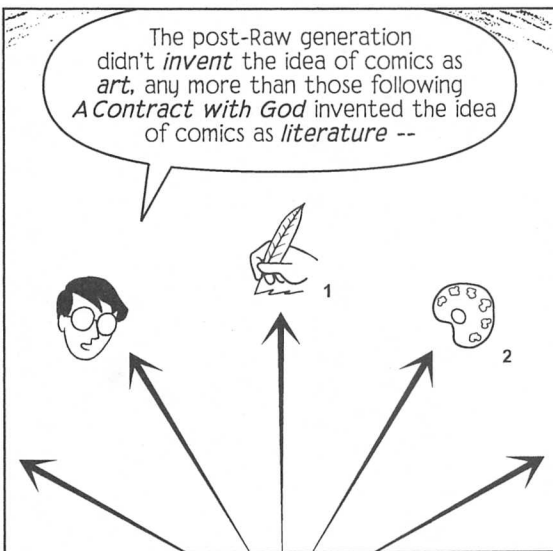
-- but when combined with an appreciation for the latent powers of the *picture plane*, and informed by an understanding of modern *art history*, such a *linkage* can benefit comics as an *art form* --



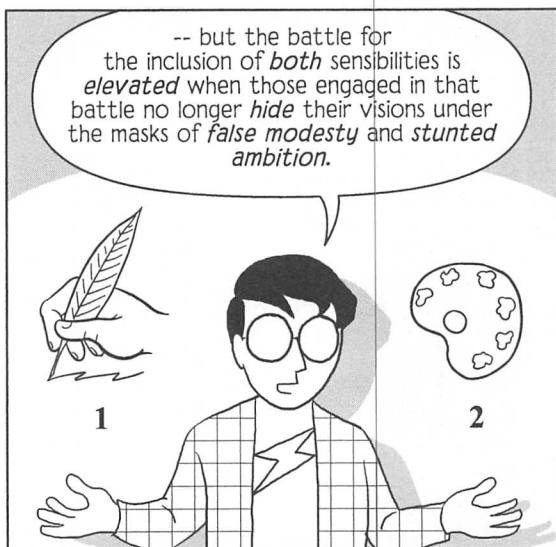
-- and when galleries and museums stage *exhibitions* of such work, the effect can be *galvanizing* for *readers* and *nonreaders* alike.*



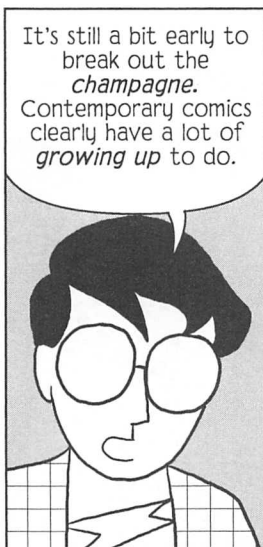
The post-Row generation didn't *invent* the idea of comics as *art*, any more than those following *A Contract with God* invented the idea of comics as *literature* --



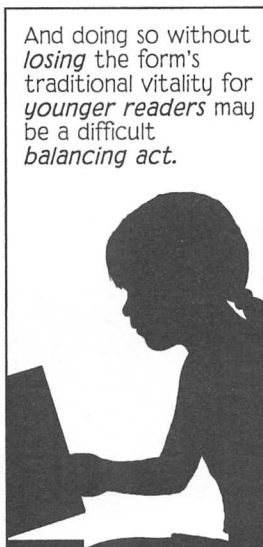
-- but the battle for the inclusion of *both* sensibilities is *elevated* when those engaged in that battle no longer *hide* their visions under the masks of *false modesty* and *stunted ambition*.



It's still a bit early to break out the *champagne*. Contemporary comics clearly have a lot of *growing up* to do.



And doing so without *losing* the form's traditional vitality for *younger readers* may be a difficult *balancing act*.



*I can think of three such shows (courtesy of the Whitney, MoMA and the Exit Art Gallery) that left an indelible impression on me and others I've spoken to.

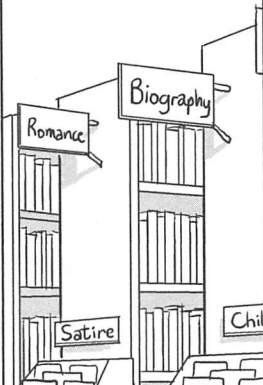
The *literature* of *comics* has so far displayed only the tiniest *fraction* of its *potential*.



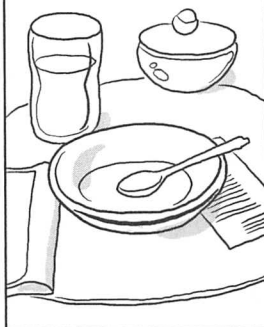
Comics' ability to handle *layers of meaning* remains so often neglected that *any demonstration* of it is an *event*.



Whole *subject areas* explored at length in *other media* remain virtually *untouched* by comics.



Comics has only *begun* to step out of its *escapist cocoon* and breathe in the bracing air of *everyday life*.



Comics' *emotional* powers remain under *lock and key* in all but the most *subtle* and *dedicated hands*.



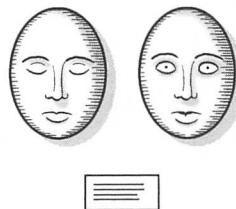
And the potential of comics to *communicate ideas* -- maybe its greatest *promise* -- is, to date, just its *best-kept secret*.



The "*fine art*" of comics is an equally *unexplored continent* of *possibilities*.



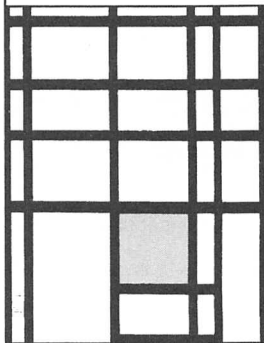
Artists have only *begun* to consider *new physical forms* for sequential art.



The *design* and *composition* of comics is still rarely seen for its own *aesthetic value*; usually relegated to *storytelling* or *shelf appeal* alone.



And comics' *ability* to raise the kind of *fundamental questions of form* so central to art in this century has yet to be *seriously tested*.



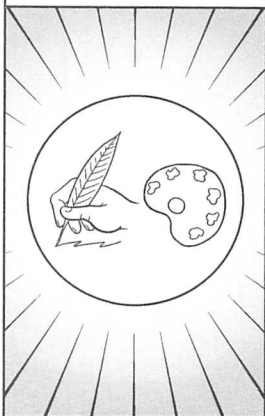
Finally, we have yet to fully confront the nature of works so *seamlessly conceived* and *executed* --



-- as to defy classification as "*literature*" or "*art*" even as they rise to the level of comics' *highest achievements*.



Both of comics' higher roads have been easily *dismissed* throughout the years --



-- especially when associated with such a disreputable "*low art*."



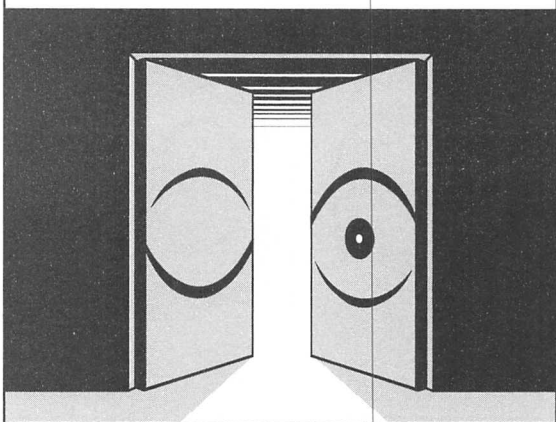
Within comics and *without*, such ideas are often seen as *pretentious* or *misguided*, and indeed they *would* be --



-- if there was anything *intrinsic* to comics that limited its future to a mere *repetition* of its *past*.



But there's *nothing* to *stop* these doors, held barely ajar for so many years, from being flung *wide open* to welcome *anything* human imagination can send its way.



The *trappings* and *labels* of *high art* and *literature* may be a sham, but both *ideals* harbor *real power* under their *masks*.



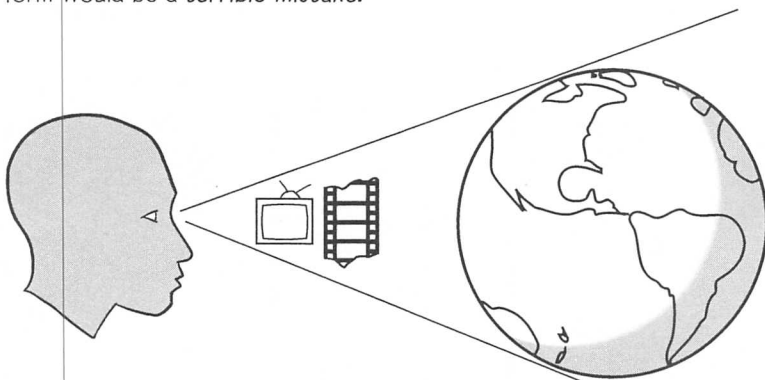
One is our best hope of understanding *ourselves* and our *world* --

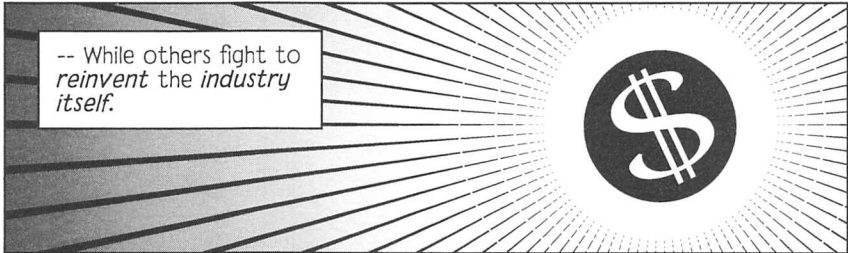
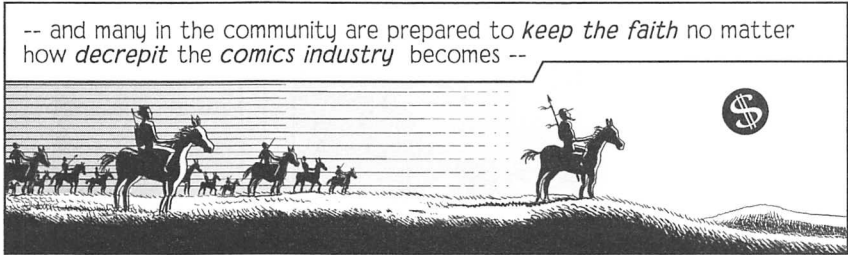
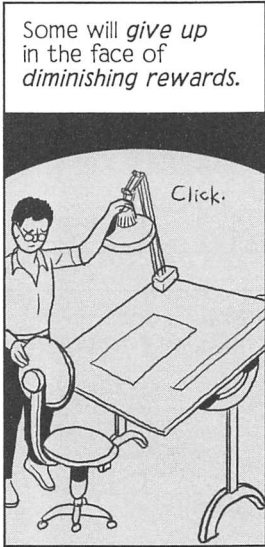
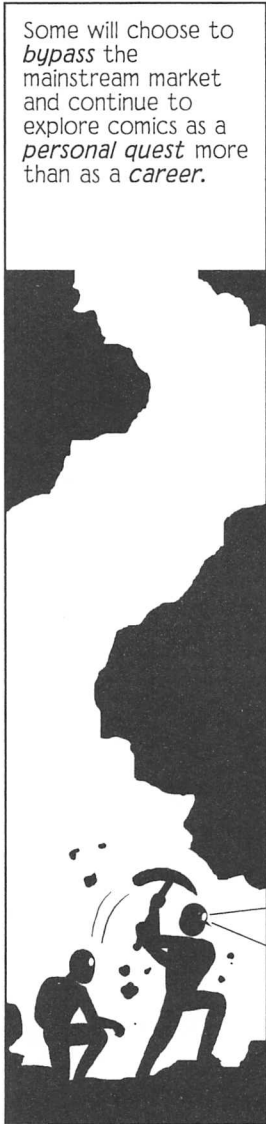
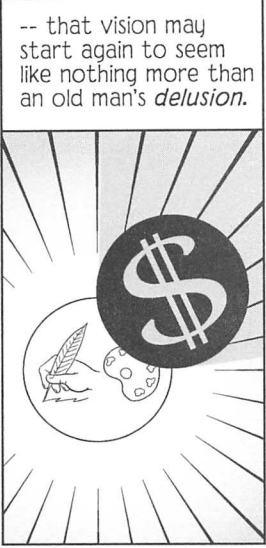
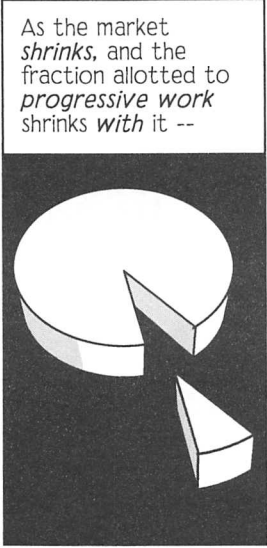


-- the other, our best hope of understanding our *potential*.



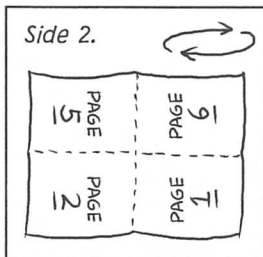
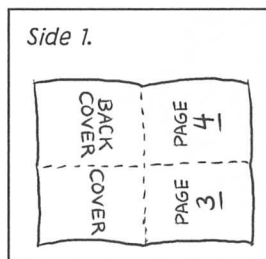
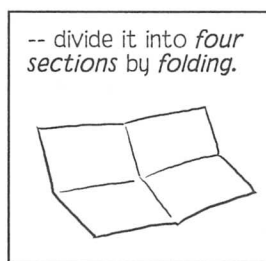
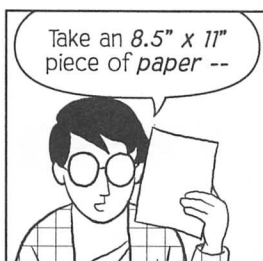
In a world as *screwed-up* as this one, that kind of *knowledge* may be our last hedge against a bleak *dead end*. To trust it exclusively to the massive committee-led, bottom-line-driven *feedback loop* of a single popular form would be a *terrible mistake*.



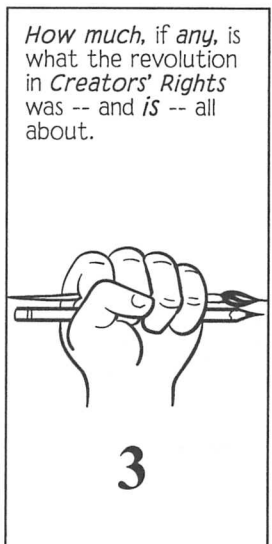
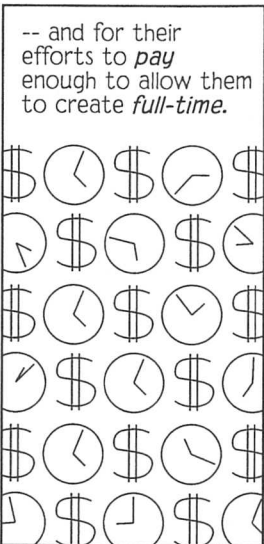
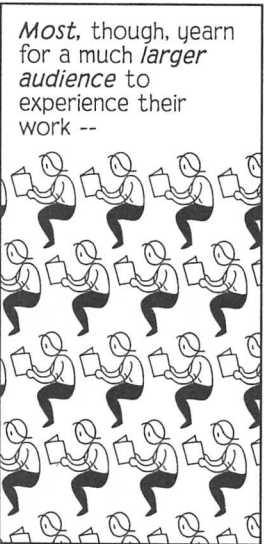
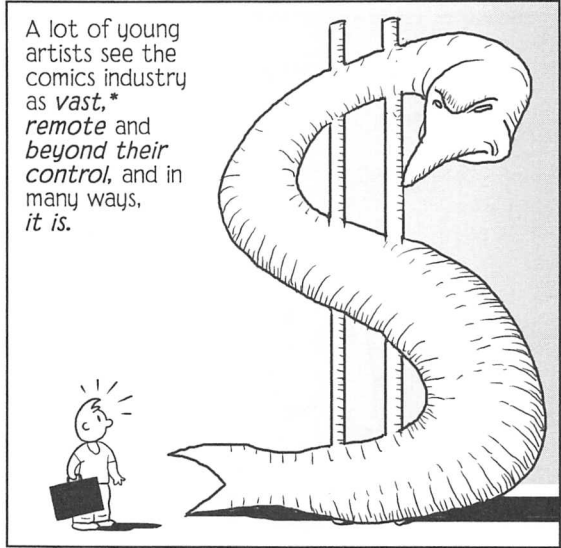
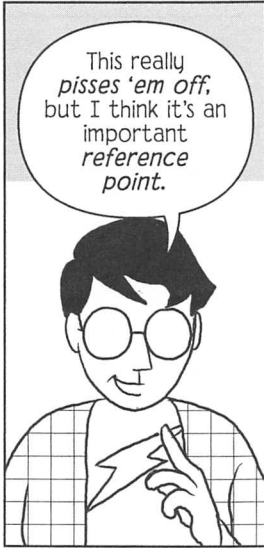


NEGATIVELAND

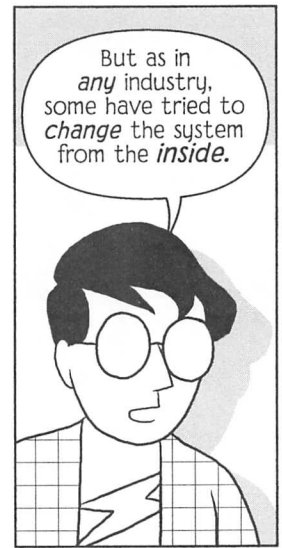
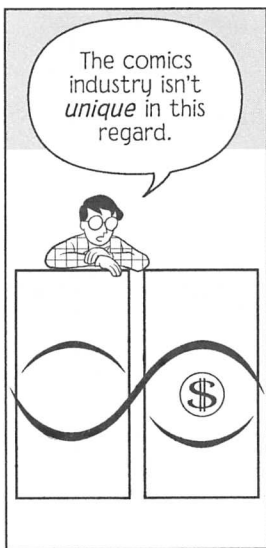
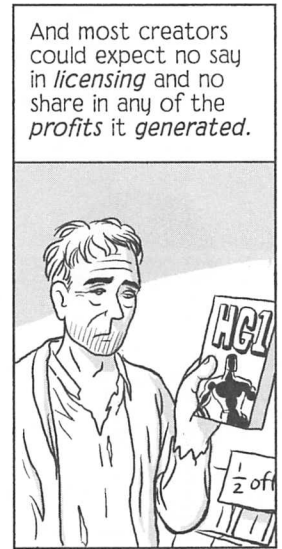
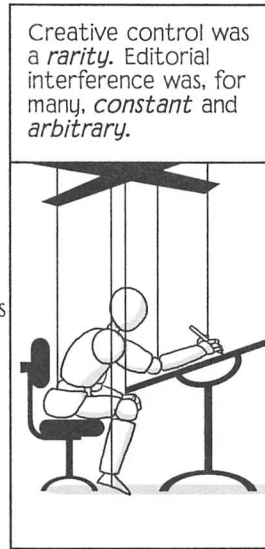
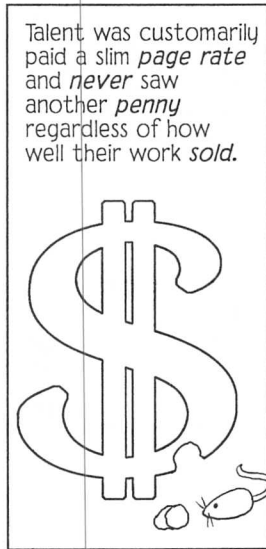
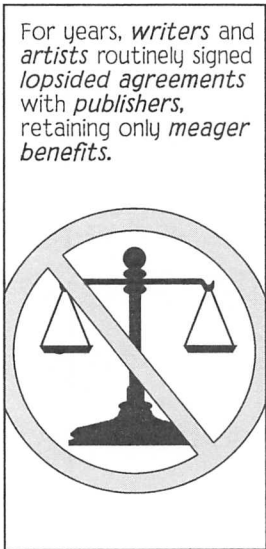
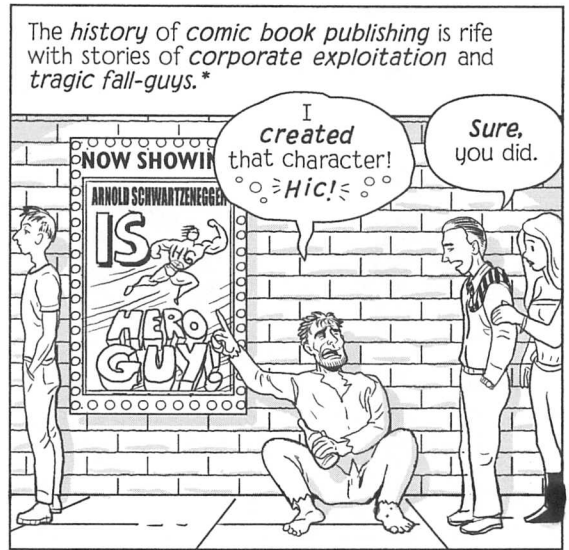
The Business of Comics

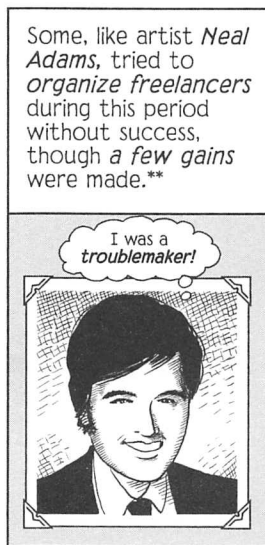
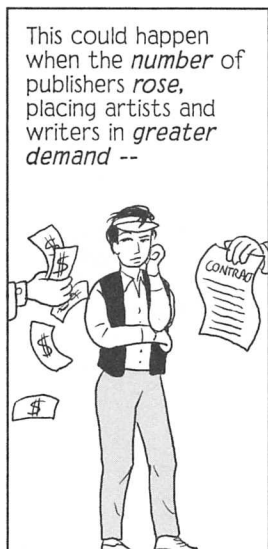
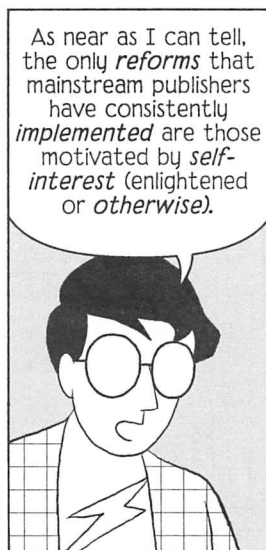
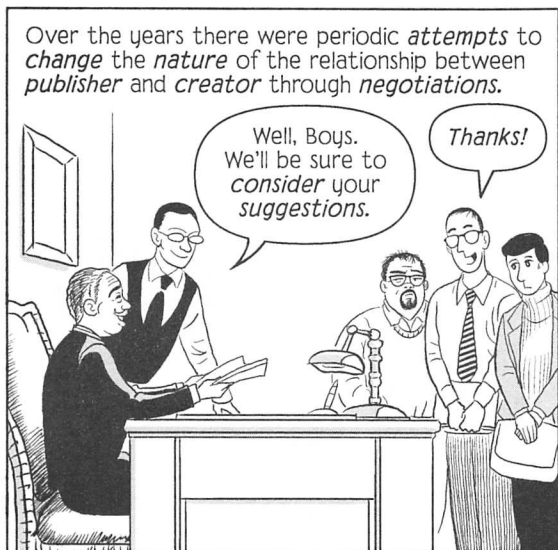


*As for questions 1 and 2: I get my ideas anywhere I can, and I use a Wacom tablet and pen to produce my work digitally (i.e., I haven't used pen and ink in a while).



*Okay, relatively speaking.

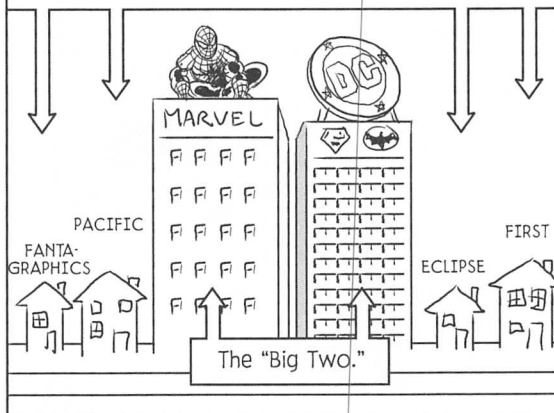




*In large part due to the forced closing of many "head shops" where U.G. comix were sold alongside drug paraphernalia.

**Notably on behalf of Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster.

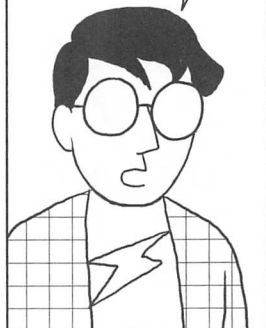
In the *early Eighties*, smaller publishers, many inspired by the freewheeling *undergrounds*, began to emerge, offering unprecedented levels of *ownership* and *control* to comics creators.*



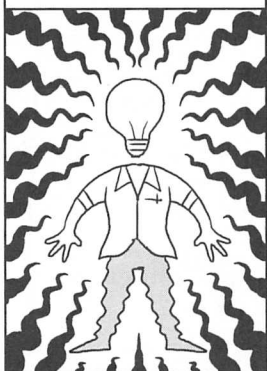
Fresh out of college in 1982, I landed a job in DC's production department doing *paste-up*.



When I had a proposal for a *comic of my own* ready in late '83, I showed it to my bosses.



I would have *sold my soul* to have my own book. I would have slept on a *bed of nails* or walked through *fire*.



But by '83, there was an idea gaining strength, even among us *kids*, that there were *two things* you should *never* give up. And when DC expressed some *mild interest*, and asked what *I* would want in *return*, I *told* them.



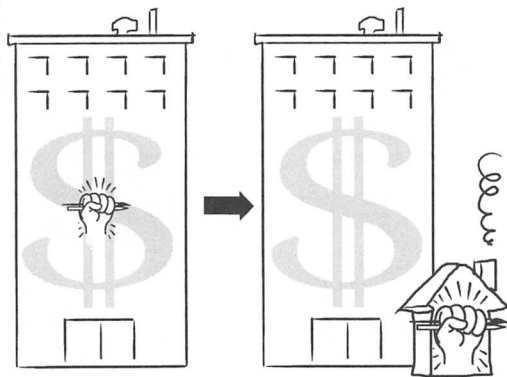
Oh yeah, big chance of that!



Of course, I *knew* in advance what the answer would be. I just wanted to be *loyal* to my alma mater and try them *first*.



A *generational shift* was taking place from those who -- like Adams -- had fought to improve conditions *within* the mainstream, to those who chose the *independents*.** Even then, I knew my fate lay with the *second group*.

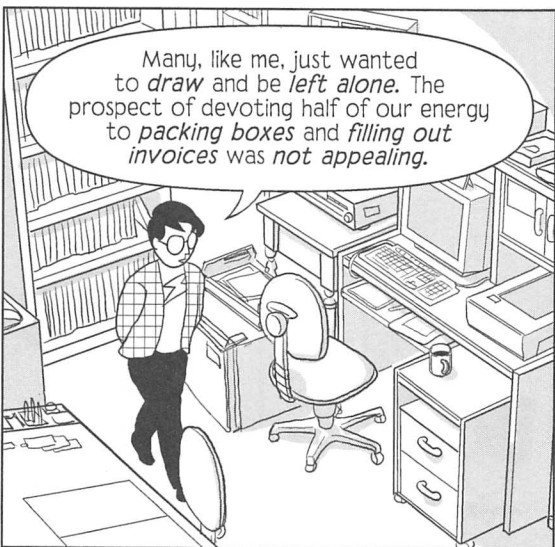
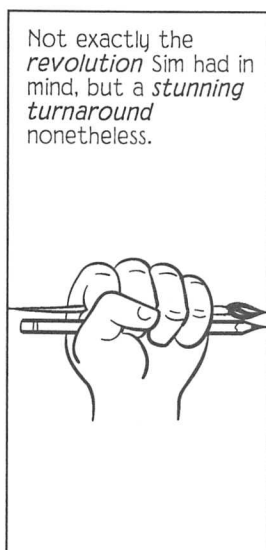
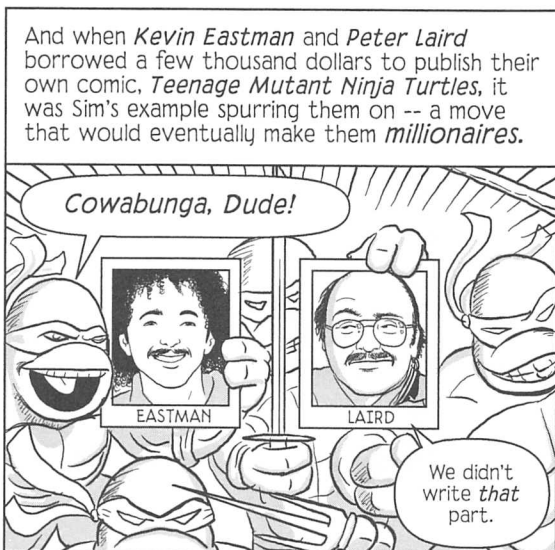
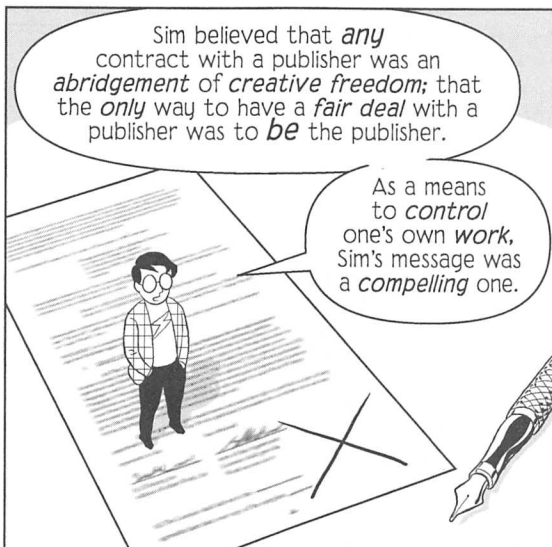


But to some -- like maverick self-publisher *Dave Sim* -- the only way to insure *true* creative freedom was to go it *alone*.



*Though more progressive as a group, not all the "independents" were equally creator-friendly, as many artists would later discover.

**Some, like Frank Miller, would fight in both arenas.



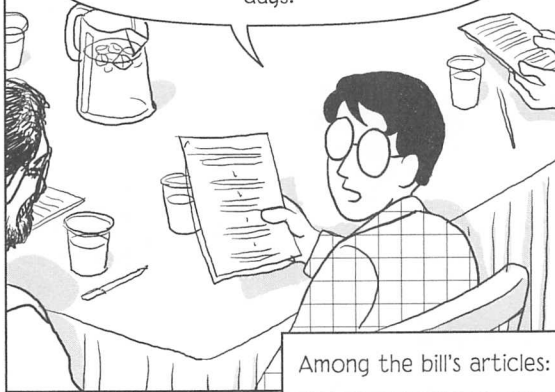
*A path he'd been successfully following since 1977, and which, along with Wendy and Richard Pini's *Elfquest* -- was a mainstay of early comics stores.

**The meeting was hosted by Sim, an Ontario native, and was spurred on by some equally contentious distributor disputes. Not pictured: John Totleben, because I, uh... couldn't find a picture of him.

In an attempt to *clarify* creators' concerns,* I offered a rough draft of a "*Creators' Bill of Rights*" at a follow-up meeting hosted by Eastman and Laird in *Northampton, Massachusetts*. It was quickly *adopted* by the group.

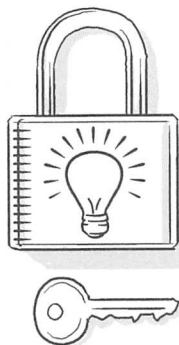


This bill of *thirteen rights* that we felt creators should no longer *sign away* was a good *snapshot* of the *debates* going on in those days.**

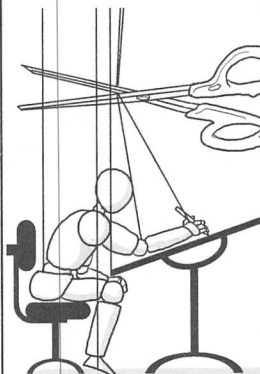


Among the bill's articles:

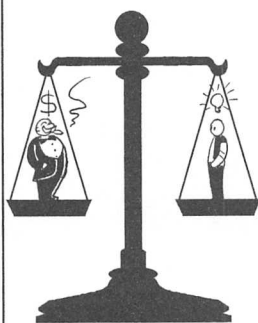
1. "The right to *full ownership* of that which we *fully create*."



2. "The right to *full control* over the *creative execution* of that which we *fully own*."



6. "The right to employ *legal counsel* in any and all *transactions*."



8. "The right to *prompt payment* of a *fair and equitable share* of profits derived from *all* of our creative works."



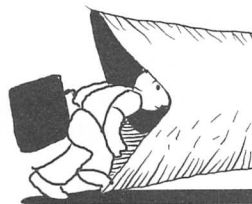
I didn't see the Bill as a demand for changes in *publisher behavior*.



It was my belief -- *then as now* -- that creators already *had* the *power* to *control their destinies* --



-- *IF* they didn't *sign* that power away --

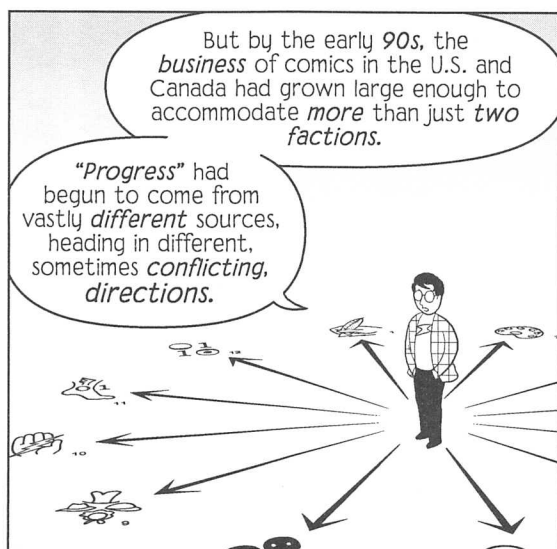
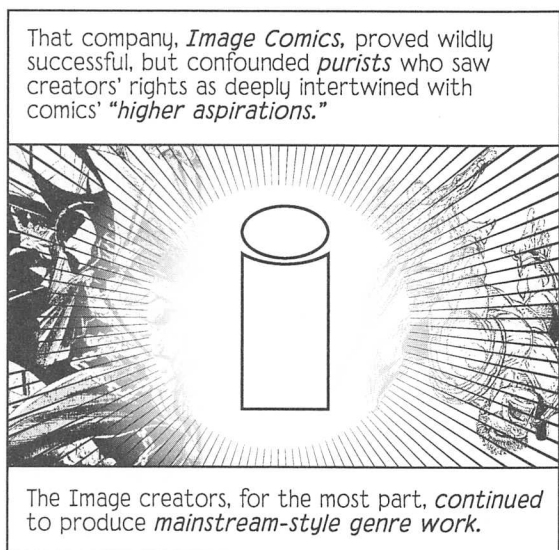
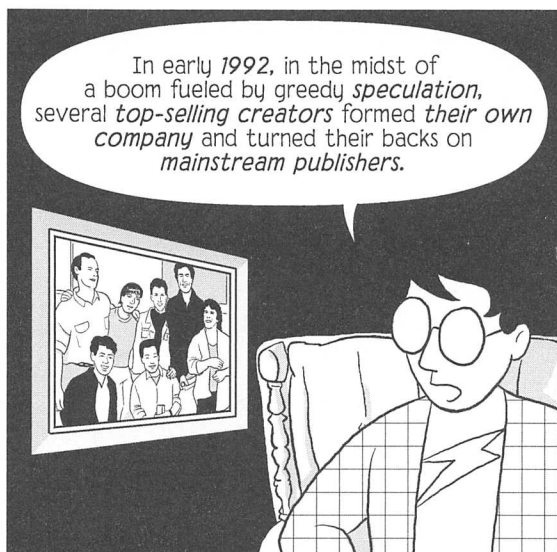
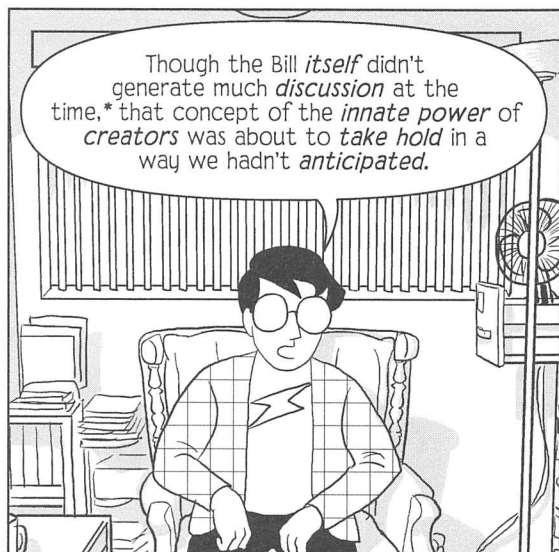


-- and for me, the Bill was a *unilateral statement* of our intent to *keep* that power.



*Many had found the Manifesto somewhat confusing. Pictured l.to r.: Ken Mitchroney, Mark Martin, Michael Dooney, Steve Lavigne, Peter Laird (sitting), Kevin Eastman, Ryan Brown, Michael Zulli, Richard Pini, Me, Larry Marder, Dave Sim, Rick Veitch and Steve Bissette. Not pictured: Eric Talbot and Gerhard.

**See my site for the complete bill and annotations.



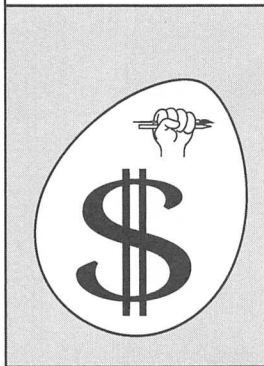
*...although, it became a topic of heated debate as I was finishing this book, strangely enough. Check my site for details.

**Nor did all of the Image partners treat their own hired talent equally.

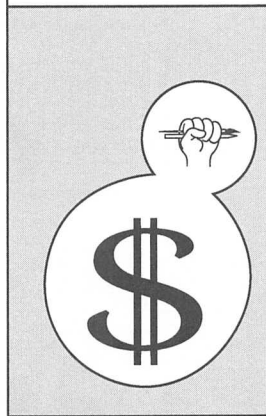
By the early *Nineties*, the fight for *creators' rights* within the *mainstream* seemed *less urgent*; there were too many *alternatives* to put up with a *lousy contract*.*



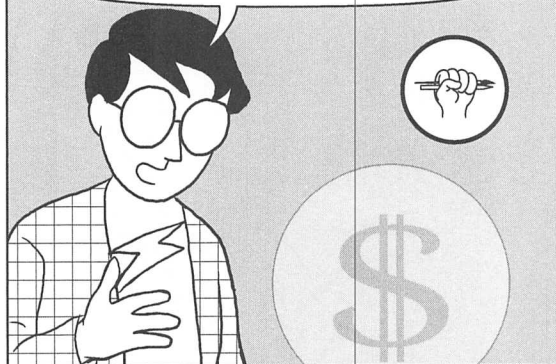
The generation of artists *preceding* mine had fought for their rights from *within* the mainstream.



My own generation had fought using the *leverage* of the "*alternative*" press.



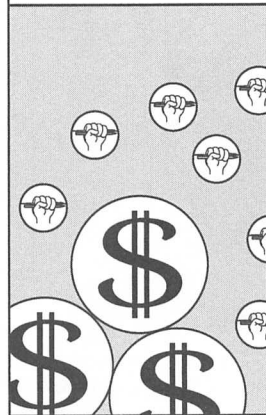
But by the *Nineties*, many young progressive artists had moved *beyond* such battles, showing no interest in work-for-hire, *assembly-line* comics and taking their creative property rights as a *given*.



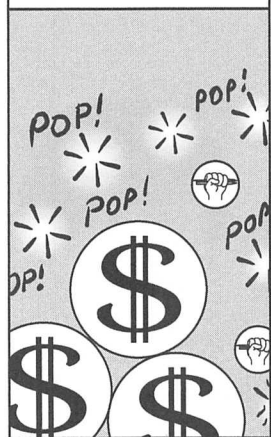
Aesthetically, this was a *healthy* move -- a hallmark of a generation more in thrall to the *potential* of an *art form* than the agendas of its various *warring factions*.



But in the *long run*, it may prove their *Achilles' heel* if hard times *worsen* --

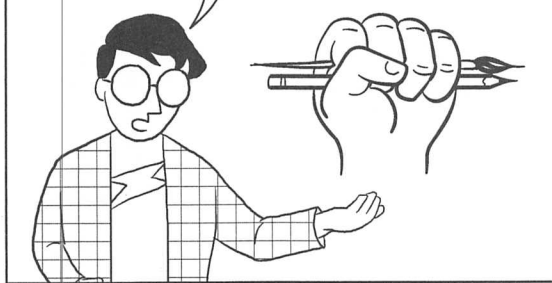


-- and publishing alternatives continue to *vanish*.

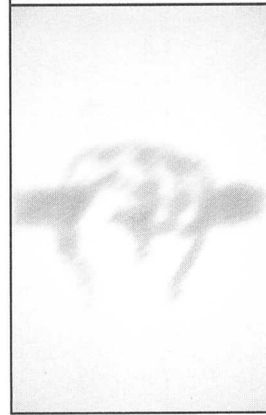


The landscape of the comics industry is constantly *changing*. Comics creators will *adapt* as they always have to "*stay in the game*."

But the *principles* underlying the *Creators' Rights movement* will remain *relevant* for a long time to come.



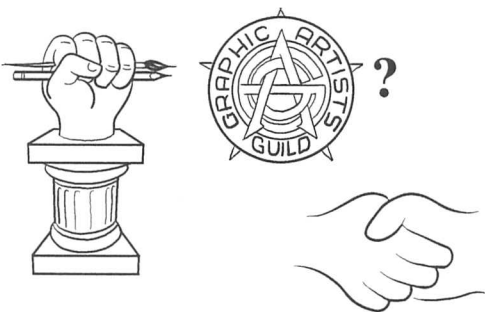
If the *memory* of those battles is lost, *future* battles may be lost as well.**



*...relatively speaking! The perfect publisher is as elusive as the perfect artist.

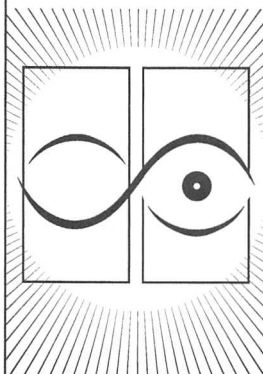
**Visit scottmcccloud.com to learn much more about the long, screwed-up history of comics' labor practices as well as updates on recent developments.

To preserve *past gains* and press for *more* may require some *organization* or a *partnership* with *others* --



-- and far more *communication* among creators in *all areas* of comics, but it should be *worth the effort* --

-- because the *results* of the struggle could help decide between a new flood of *creative innovation* --



-- or a *lost decade* of *forgettable crap*.



Which brings us to our *fourth* revolution, and a *bloody* one it is!



Reinventing the Business of Comics.

I don't think comics were *invented* in America as is often claimed,* but the U.S. did give comics an exciting *rebirth* in the *20th century*.

All the *sadder* then that despite some *high points*, the history of the U.S. comics *industry* is a long trail of *chronic blunders* and *squandered potential*.



Despite their vigorous *head start*, U.S. comics have lagged *far behind* their *European* and *Japanese counterparts* in both *popularity* and *cultural acceptance*.



As an *American*, I'm *proud* of the contributions made by artists in the U.S. *over the years* --



-- but I'm also *embarrassed* by the mountains of *ignorance* they've had to scale to *make* them.



The *seeds* of the U.S. market's fate may lie in its *origins* -- a *marriage of convenience* with 20th century *newspapers*.**



Newspaper comics weren't so much an industry of their own as they were a *craft within the newspaper industry* -- and not a very *respected* one at that, despite their *high popularity*.



*See the first chapter of *Understanding Comics* for my unconventional survey of comics throughout history.

**comics began appearing in American newspapers just before the dawn of the 20th century.

Not surprisingly, many serious *journalists* and *editors* often *resented* the little *crowd-pleasers*. Comics weren't always *welcome guests*.

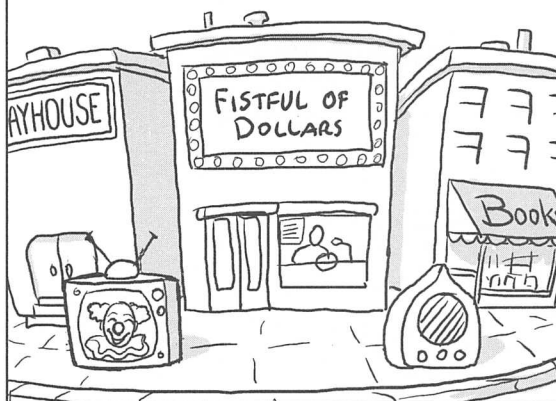
Whadda we *got*, people?

City Hall may be takin' *kickbacks* on the new bridge, Chief...

Got a possible *lead* on the *Skid Row* murders...

I have a *boat* on my head!

Comics' *subset status* differed from *radio*, *television*, *movies*, *prose* and *theater*, each of which had a *discrete identity* through a dedicated *venue* or *appliance*.



That dynamic *changed* about 35 years after comics' American rebirth when some comics *became* the product in the form of *comic books* --

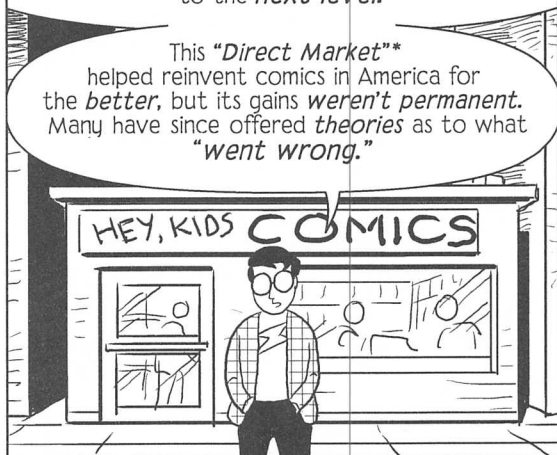


-- but for most of their existence, the *selling* of *comic books* was primarily a subset of the *magazine industry*, or of *general store* and *pharmacy* merchandise.



It would take another 40 years for *dedicated comics stores* to emerge and take the industry to the *next level*.

This "*Direct Market*"** helped reinvent comics in America for the *better*, but its gains *weren't permanent*. Many have since offered *theories* as to what "*went wrong*."



First though, let's consider how *scale* and *complexity* can affect *any* such market --



-- and slowly *kill* the forces that *gave* it *life*.



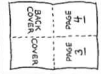
**"Direct" refers to the direct sales of nonreturnable comic books to comics specialty stores, a system championed in its early days by convention promoter Phil Seuling.

At the *beginning* of this *chapter*, I described a *simple form of commerce*. Let's get even *simpler* now.

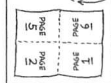
Draw a comic in the following arrangement:



Side 1.



Side 2.



Now, get a 2-sided copy.



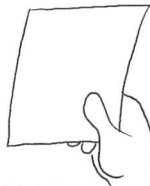
Fold it, staple it, and trim it."



Then sell it to a friend for 25 cents.



An *artist* takes a piece of *paper* --



-- *folds it in half* --



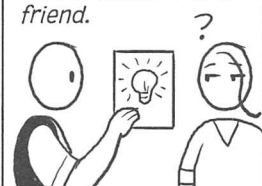
-- picks up a *pen* --



-- *draws a comic* --



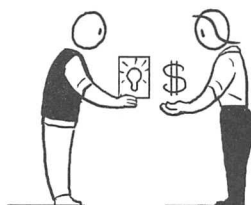
-- and shows it to a *friend*.



The friend *likes* it --

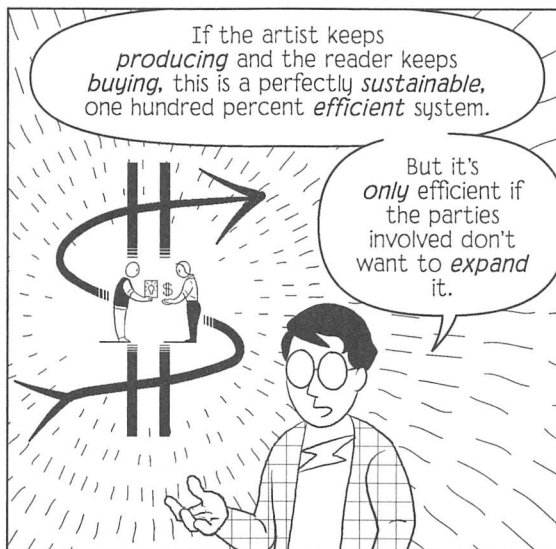


-- and *buys* it.

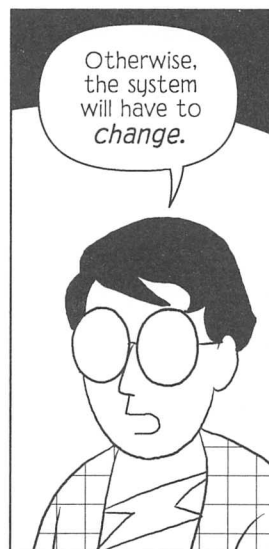


If the artist keeps *producing* and the reader keeps *buying*, this is a perfectly *sustainable*, one hundred percent *efficient* system.

But it's *only* efficient if the parties involved don't want to *expand* it.



Otherwise, the system will have to *change*.



For example, say the friend -- our *reader* -- tells *ten* friends and they all want to buy our artist's creation. Maybe the artist *isn't* willing to draw *ten* *duplicates* of his comic, but he'd like the *larger* audience.



A quick trip to the *copy shop* --



-- and *everyone's* desires are easily *satisfied*.



But to *accomplish* this, our artist had to *compromise* in two ways:



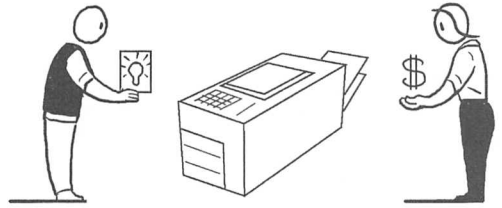
First, a piece of that money went to *pay* for the *copies*.



Second, the copies may *vary* from the original in *appearance* and *quality* (from 2 colors to 1, for example)



A *step* has been introduced between our principal players and with it, a *complicating* of the process, an element of *compromise*, and a new *beneficiary* of the overall transaction (i.e., the *copy shop*).

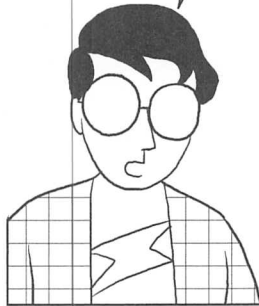


If the *levels* of each variable are *acceptable* to our players, the system continues to *function*.

And in *time*, the artist may *adapt* the work to fit the technology of *reproduction*.



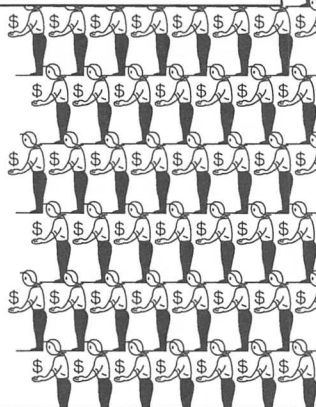
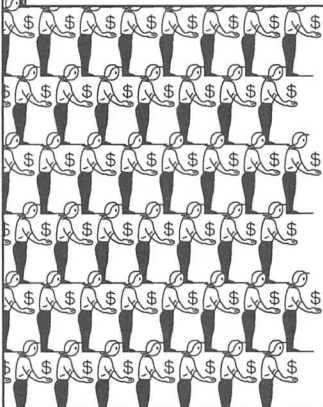
Thus, a *process* begun at the behest of the *creator* of the work has begun to *change* that work to *accommodate* it.



These four effects -- increased *complexity*, modification of the *original*, reduced *profit per-unit* and *changes* by the creator in *reaction* to the system -- will all be *amplified* as the process *grows*.



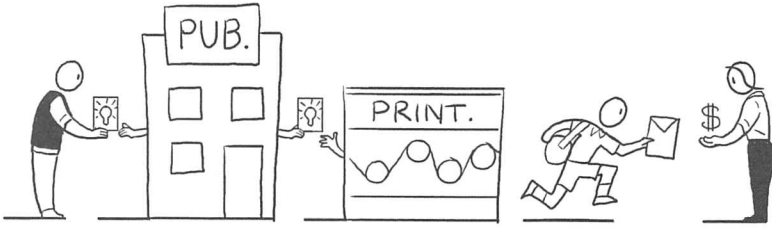
Speaking of which, it seems our hypothetical artist is finding that he has more *money* now but *less time* left for *drawing*, and his work's *potential for growth* may be more than he can *handle*.



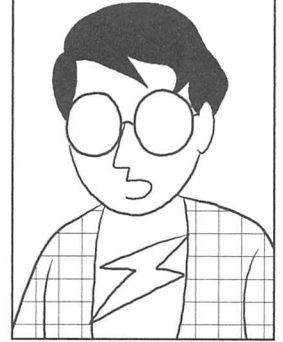
Enter the *publisher*.



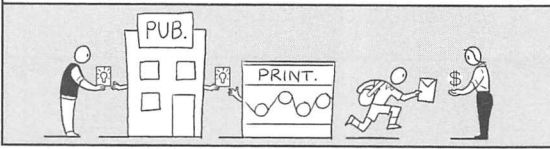
Now the artist can get back to *work* and let *someone else* do the *selling*. The publisher uses a *professional printer* (and pre-press house) and a simple distribution method -- say the *mail* -- to get the product to *many readers simultaneously*.



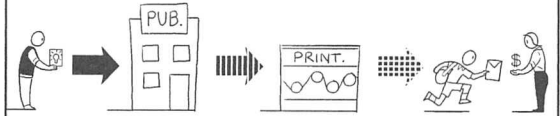
And again, we see our *four effects* come into play.



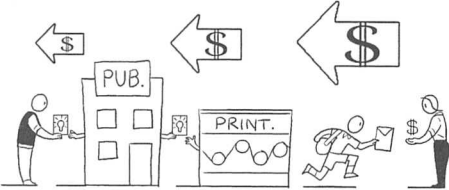
Increased *complexity*.



Modification of the original.



Some more *money* siphoned off.



And the *creative changes* that the publisher may expect or *require* of the creator.



Now, our artist *doesn't need* to go any *further* if he *doesn't want* to.



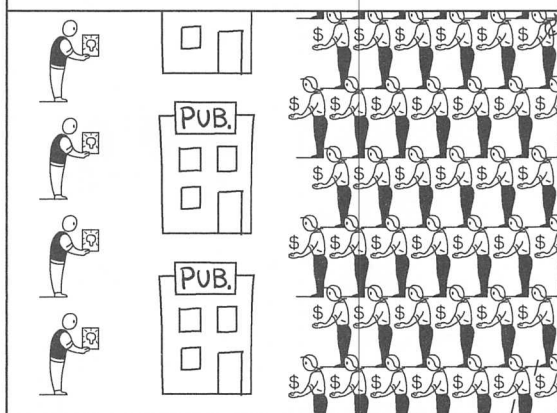
There's *nothing* to *stop* him from going right back to that *simplest form* of *commerce*.



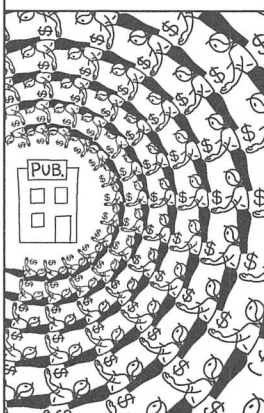
But for any of several reasons, he feels the urge to *continue*.



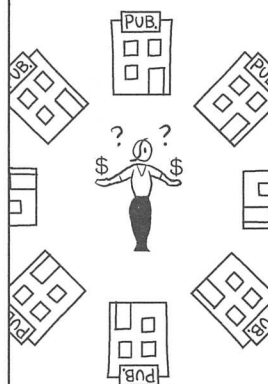
Soon, our *microscopic market* isn't so *microscopic* anymore. There are *many* artists, *several publishers* and a growing horde of *eager readers*.



But each publisher is a bit *overwhelmed* by the sheer *number* of readers.



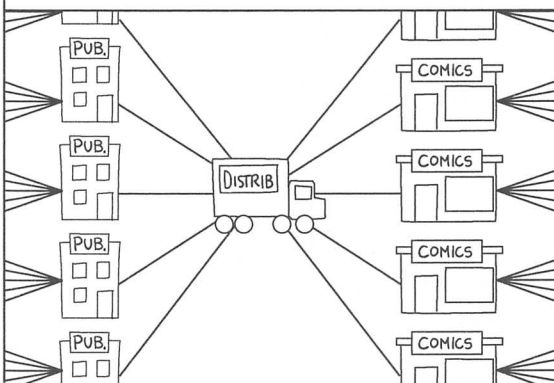
And each *reader* has better things to do than *keep track* of each individual *publisher*.



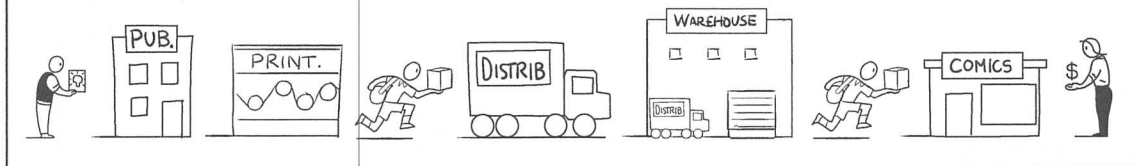
Enter the *retailer* who solves *both* problems by *connecting* the reader with many publishers and the publisher with the many *readers*.



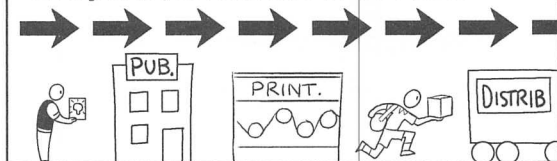
And as the number of *publishers* and *retailers* continues to grow to an *unmanageable number*, the once-humble task of *delivering* the "*product*" takes on *growing importance* and the *distributors* come into their own.



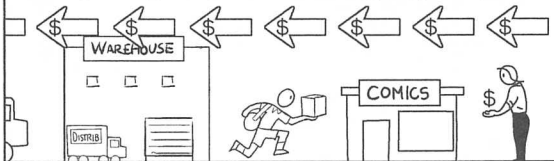
With this addition, we have a *rough approximation* of today's "*direct*" market which evolved in the *Seventies* and *Eighties* (albeit through an entirely *different series of steps**).



At this level of *complexity*, the process still requires the hand of the artist to send the work on its journey *downstream* to the reader --

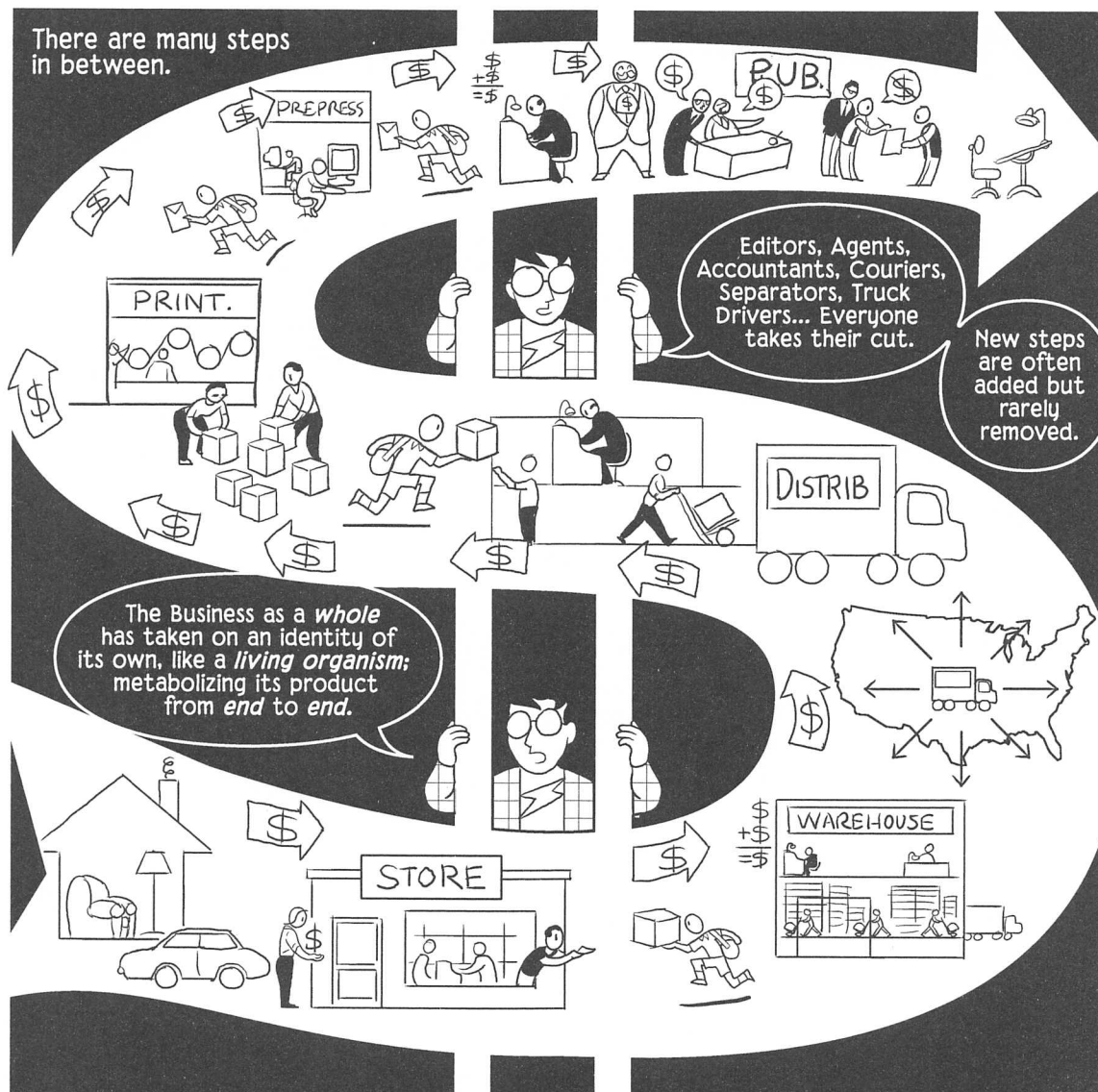


-- but the reader's *money*, flowing *upstream*, has become the system's *reason for being* and the system itself has taken on a *life of its own*.



*For example, comics never had to start from scratch, but instead piggybacked on pre-existing industries throughout the century.

There are many steps
in between.



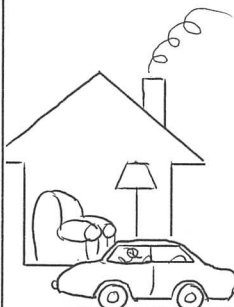
It's a *long* way from
our *original* system,
but one thing has *still*
not changed --



-- because after the
reader's money has
departed on its *long*
journey through the
system --



-- and the comic has
been *bagged* and
brought to the
reader's *home* --



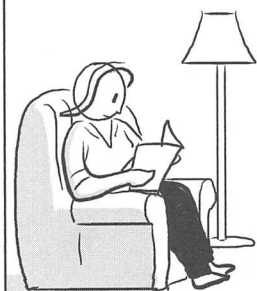
-- sooner or later,
that comic is going to
be taken *out* of the
bag and *opened*.



And when it is...



This is where the "product" is finally *delivered*; the *experience* that the reader *paid* for.



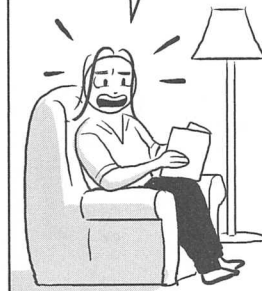
Across a gulf of *time* and *distance*, the reader and the artist engage in an intimate *conversation*.

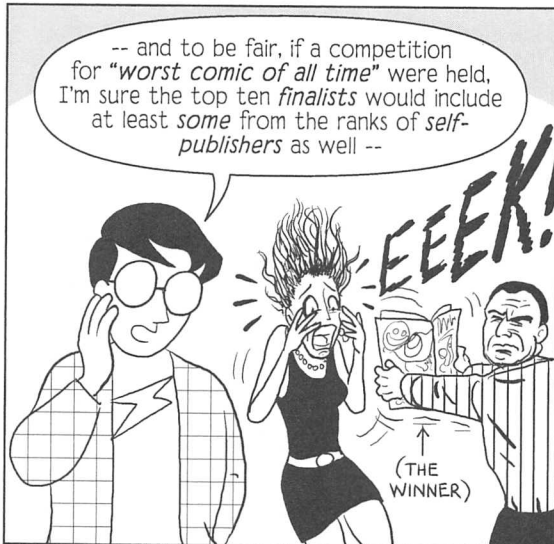
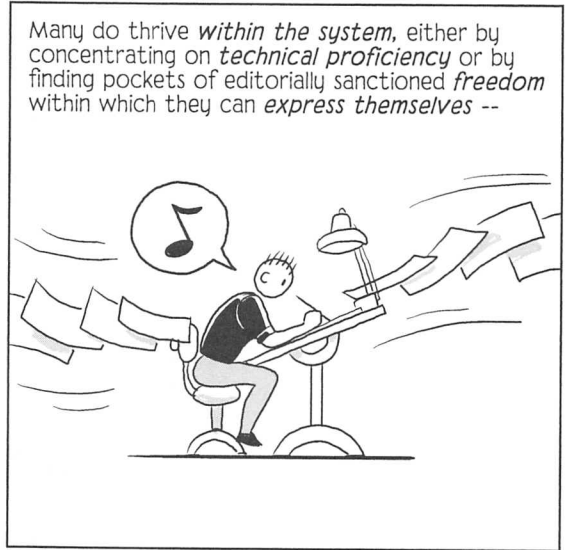
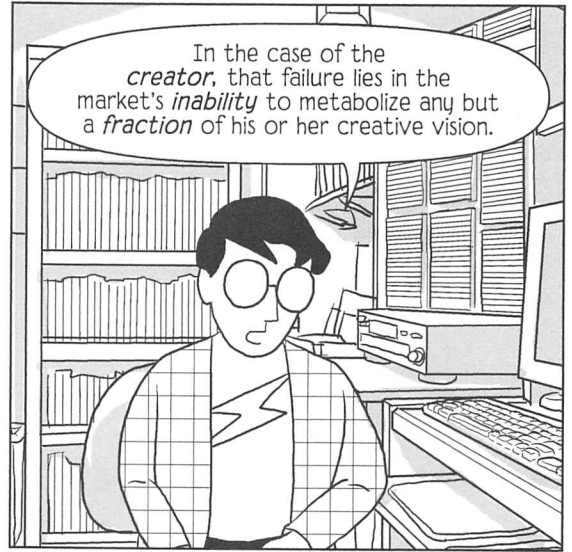
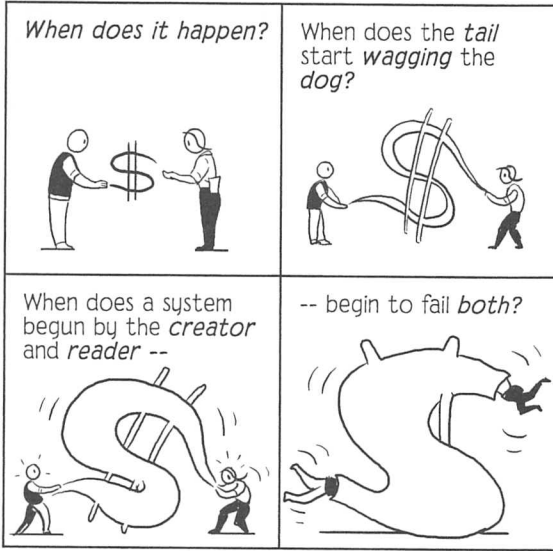


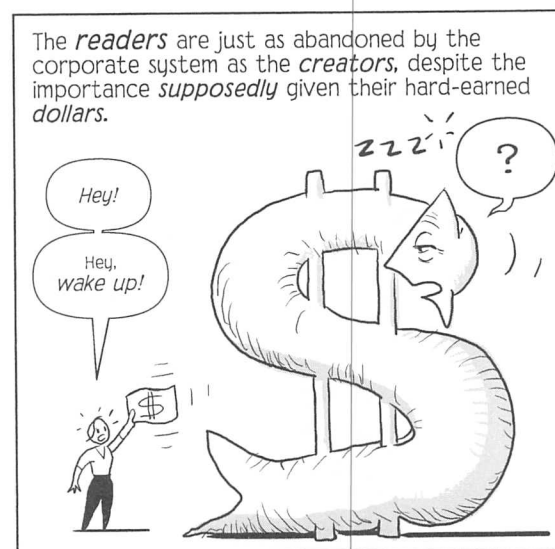
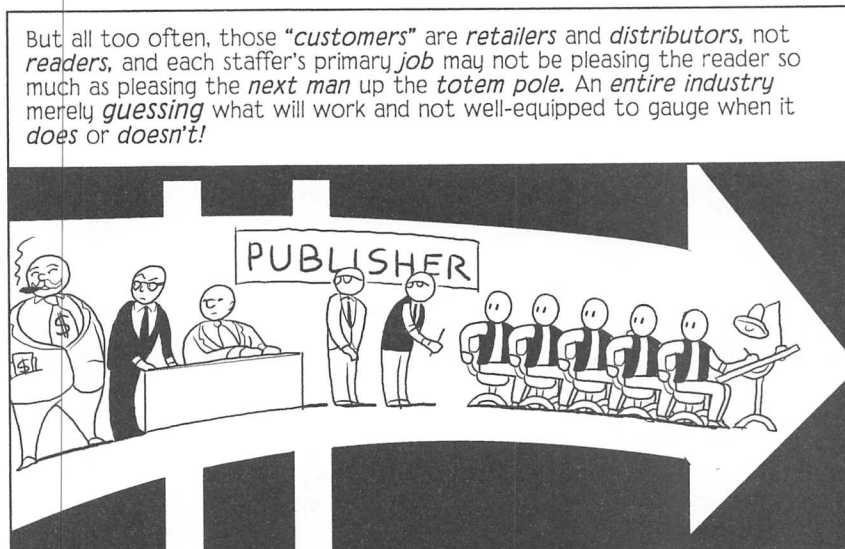
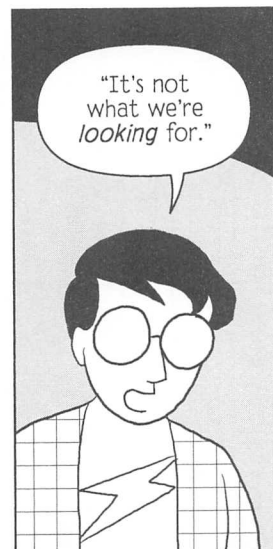
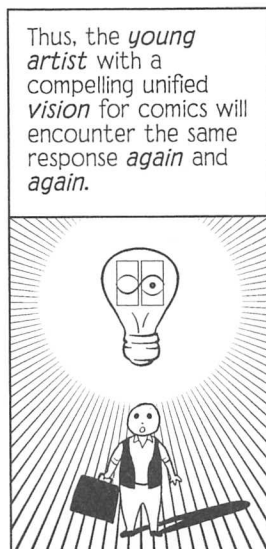
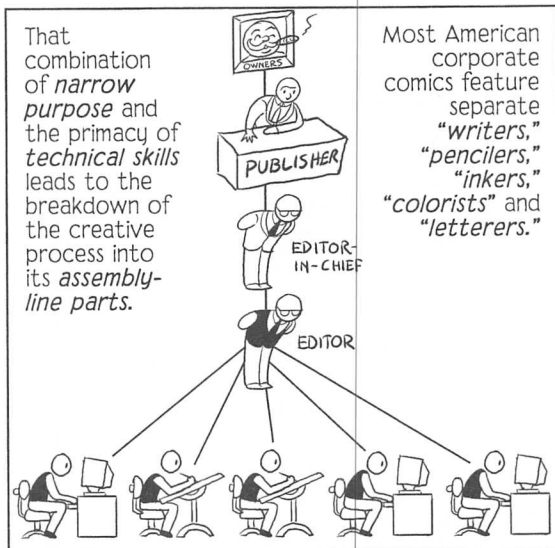
A silent *call* and *response* of stories and *images* with only paper and ink between --



This comic **SUCKS!**

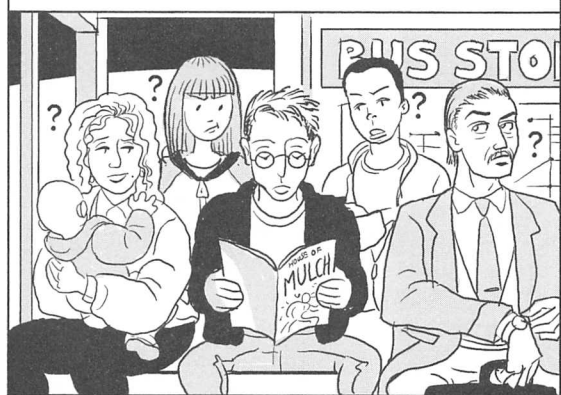








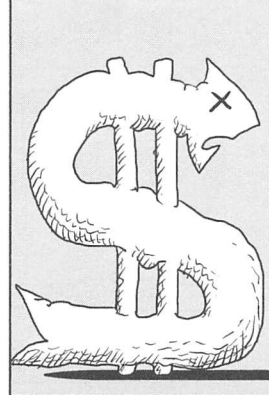
As I see it, mainstream comics now speak only to the hardcore few who *stayed*; conversing in a weird, garbled, visual *pig Latin* only they can understand: rendering the term "mainstream" a *hollow joke* --



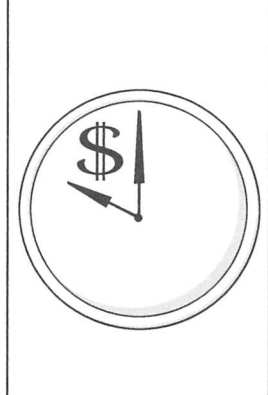
-- while the *true* mainstream, the other 99.9% of the populace, find enjoyment *elsewhere*.



This has led some to declare the direct sales market a *failure*, but I *disagree*.



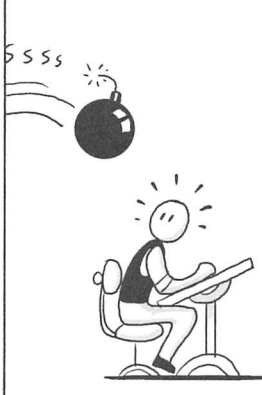
The direct market succeeded as *all* complex closed systems succeed: *for a time* --



-- until the *economies of scale* begin to prop up the *interests* of the *large* --

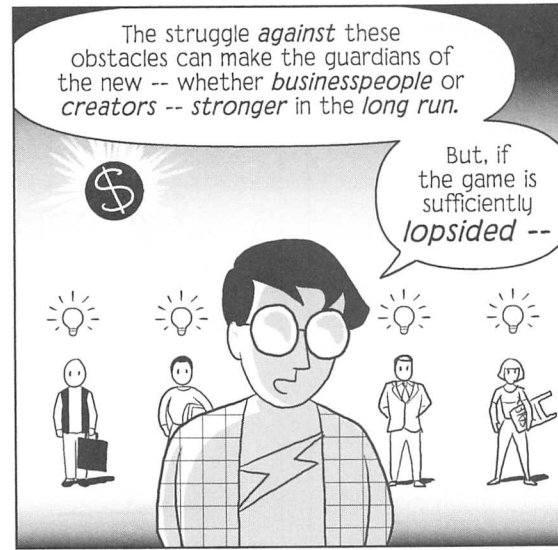
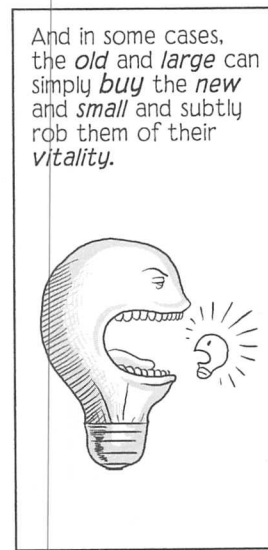
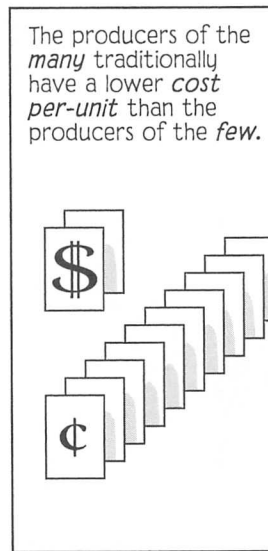
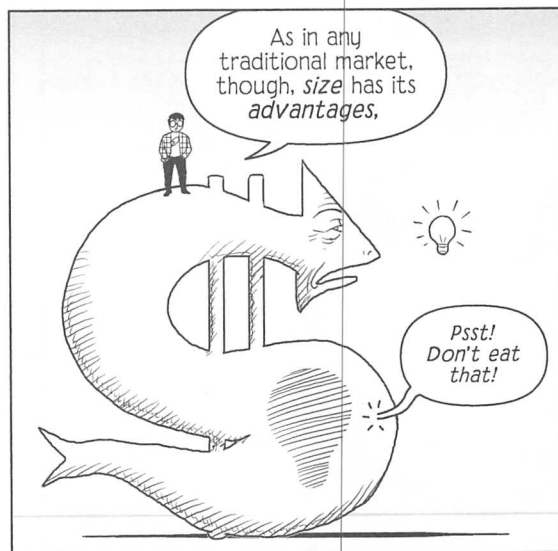
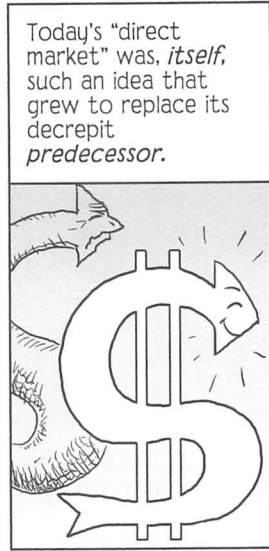
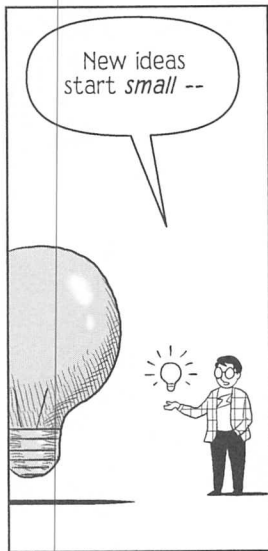


-- and no longer accept the *innovations* of the *small*.



Whether that system can be *salvaged* or should be *scrapped* will depend on whether that imbalance can be *corrected*.





*And many retailers have precious little space to begin with, so who can blame them?

-- then the system can only *recycle* what it's already *produced* --



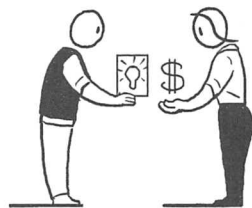
-- and *fail* to grow *healthy* --



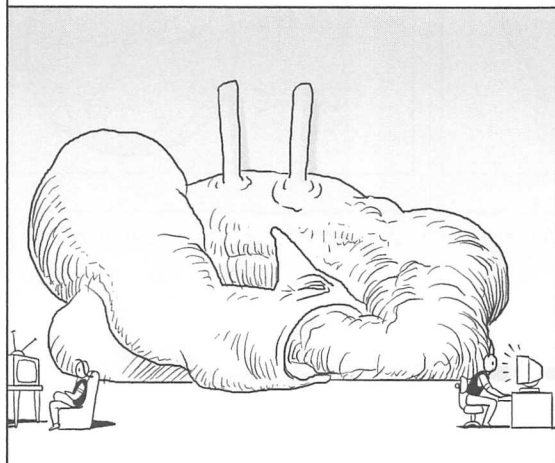
-- or to grow at *all* --



-- and the *producers* and *consumers* alike --



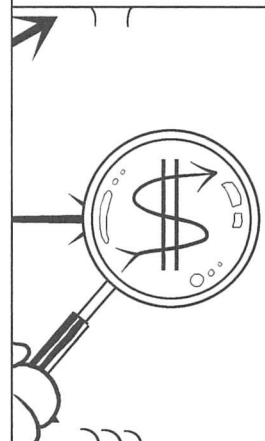
-- will find *better* things to do with their *money*, *time*, *energy* and *vision*.



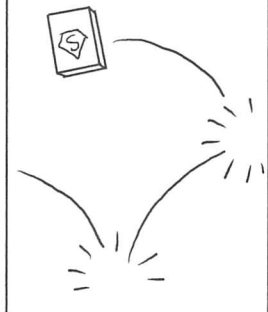
Many *voices* in the trade press have proposed various ways to *reinvent* the *business* of comics.



There's no shortage of *strategies* for comics' *salvation*.



Some propose a reversion to the *returnability* of unsold comics -- a *standard practice* in the days of *newsstand distribution*.



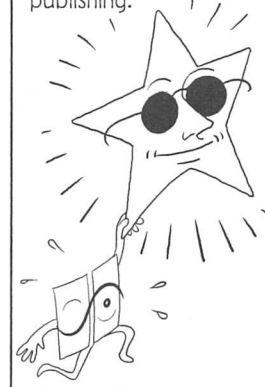
Some publishers see hope in an embryonic *graphic novel* selection in many *bookstores*.



Some propose *public awareness campaigns* on a national level.

Got Comics?

Some count on Hollywood licenses and ancillary merchandise to subsidize comics publishing.



Unfortunately, *comics itself* is often prey to the economies of scale, just getting *noticed* is a *herculean task* for an industry so *small*.



"SURE, WHO DOESN'T?"



"AS OFTEN AS WE CAN."

"PRETTY OFTEN."



"...SHOULD DO IT MORE."

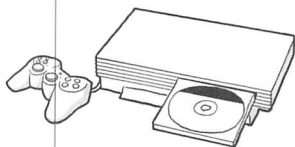


"WOW, NOT FOR A WHILE."

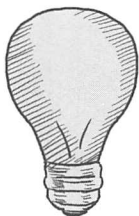


"DO THEY STILL MAKE THOSE??"

Societal changes in how we find *escape*, the *role* of *reading* in the general population, and a loss of specific times and places *appropriate* to comics must all be considered as factors in the industry's decline --



Size as advantage *within* the industry.



Size as unpleasant *reality* in the *world at large*.



And the *size* and *complexity* of the industry *itself*, which can no longer be justified in the face of *diminishing returns*.



Increasingly, many of comics' best creative minds are finding *alternatives* to the direct market, often forging renewed *personal contact* with *retailers* or with the *readers themselves*.



Some even find their meager print runs *liberating*; a chance to rediscover the power of *hands-on craftsmanship* --



-- or the excitement of *guerrilla marketing*.*



*When a book's print run is in the hundreds, one good stunt can double it in a day!

The connection between *artist* and *reader* is -- and always *will* be -- the one *indispensible part* of the comics *industry* --



CONTACT



-- regardless of the *army of middlemen* it takes to *deliver* it.

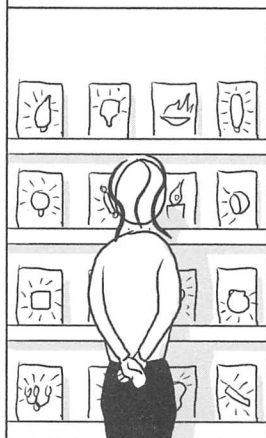
In 1987, I proposed a *Creators' Bill of Rights* to strengthen *one end* of that connection.



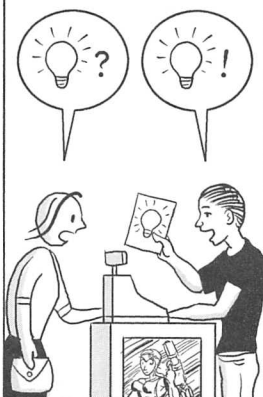
And, though never articulated, I think there's also a *Readers' Bill of Rights* in force that the industry has *ignored* to its *peril*.



1. The right to know *what* can be bought and *why* to buy it.



2. The right to *buy* what we want when we *know* that we *want* it.



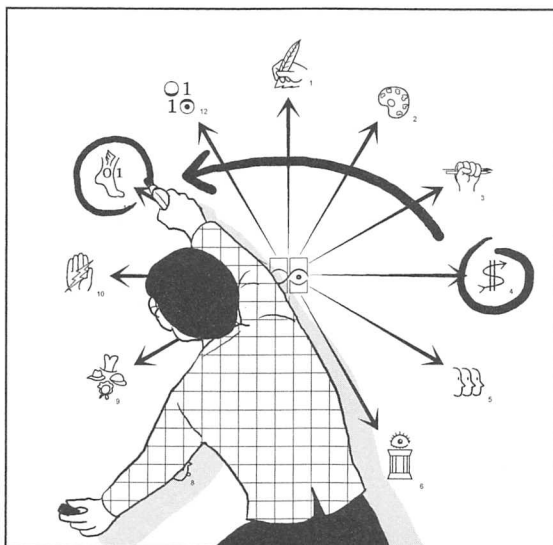
3. The right to a *fair price*.



If the direct market can finally reflect the will of both *creators* and *readers* it might survive and even *grow*.



And if it *doesn't* --

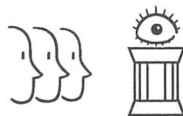


-- then *something else will*.



COMMUNITY STANDARDS

The View from Outside



In *May* of 1995, I was planning a reference-taking trip to *Washington, D.C.** when I was invited, along with writer Neil Gaiman, to be on National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* hosted by Ray Suarez.

N.P.R. audiences include a lot of *avid readers*, so this was a welcome opportunity to spread the word about comics' *potential* as *serious literature*.

Neil and I had found an increasingly *knowledgeable* and *comics-savvy* breed of journalist emerging in the *mid-90's*. We were confident that we could make a strong case that comics weren't just *sensationalist garbage* anymore.



The topic was "*Adult Comics*." I was in N.P.R.'s D.C. Studio while Neil joined us from *Minneapolis*. Ray began his introduction:

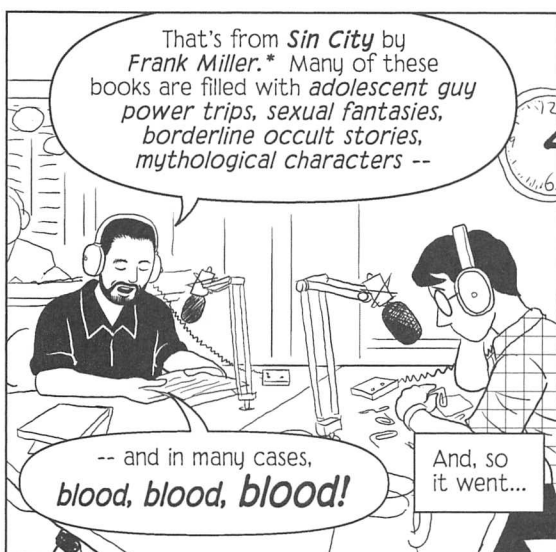
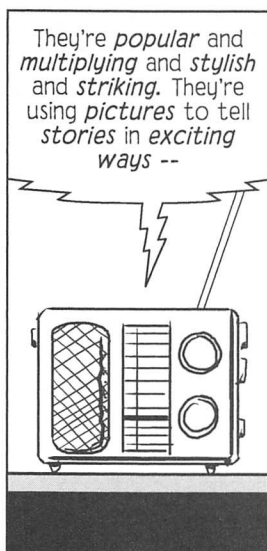
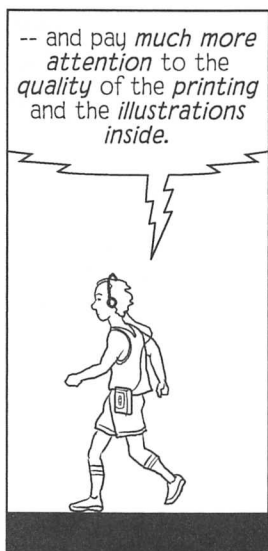
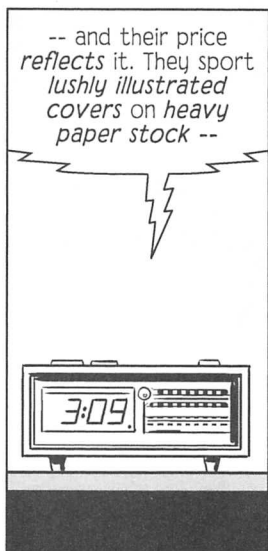
For many devotees of these volumes, the term "*comic book*" is *dismissive* and really not quite *accurate*. Some people favor "*graphic novel*."

Their *production quality* is a *far cry* from the comics you may have *grown up* reading; mediocre *color separations* on *cheap newsprint* --



← Neil

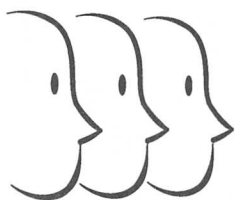
*I needed photo reference for a graphic novel that partially took place in D.C.



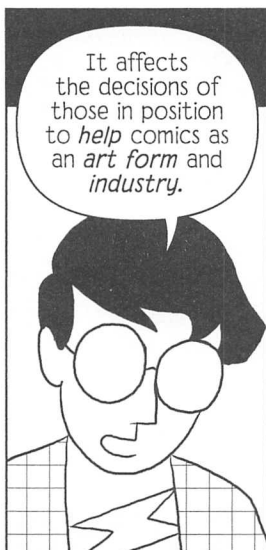
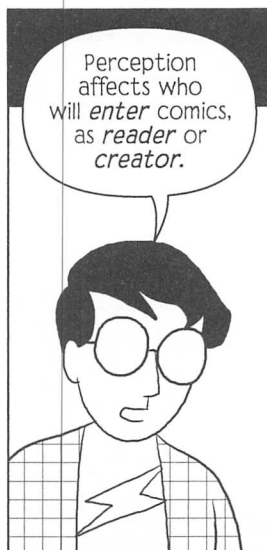
*Miller's *Sin City* is a tongue-in-cheek, over-the-top hyper-noir genre send-up. Unfortunately, the more ironic aspects were utterly lost in the translation.

**In fact, I've remained a loyal listener to the show for years. In late '99, Ray left for a spot on P.B.S.'s *the News Hour*.

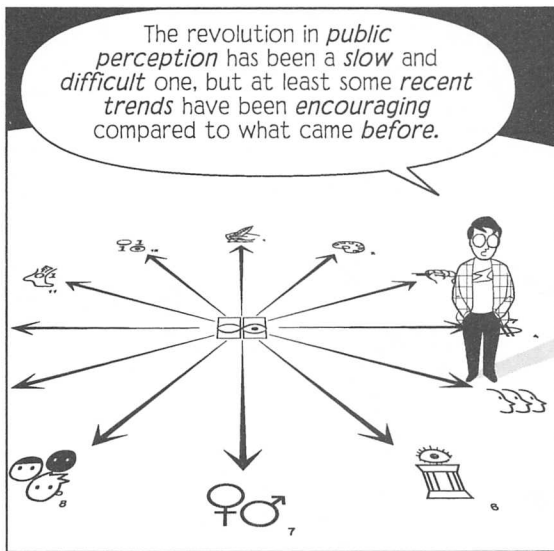
Public perception matters.



5



I know it affected *me*. As a precocious book-reading kid, I bought the idea of comics as trash *hook, line and sinker*. If a grade school classmate* hadn't broken *through* those prejudices, you wouldn't be reading this today.



*Note to trivia buffs: That friend, Kurt Busiek, also went into the comics and has become one of the 90s best and most popular superhero writers.

**Thanks in large part to the campy smash-hit *Batman* TV show of the 60s.

In the wake of the deconstructionist heroes of *Miller* and *Moore*, coverage began to change to a "comics aren't just for kids, anymore" motif; sometimes with an *accusatory angle* that comics were therefore a *danger* to children.



The underlying assumption that *comics* and *kids* were *inextricably linked* continued to frame *both sides* of the debate, even as *college-aged* and *young adult* readers were discovering more and more material aimed directly at *them*.



But as those readers grew into the *1990s*, a surprising number found their *own* voices in the media landscape.



By the time *I* hit the news circuit in 1993, I found that many *newspapers, magazines* and *radio stations* had gained at least one bona fide *comics enthusiast* on their staffs; and *those* reporters weren't relying on *sound effects*!

He Sketches Out Why We're Drawn to Comics

By Neil Gaiman
Scribble

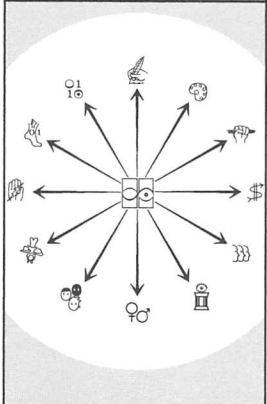
Though, many *did*, uh... have a thing for *puns*.



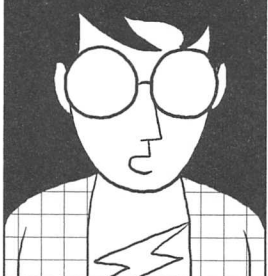
Our moles were *everywhere*! Even though comics fans were *few*, they were a *smart* and *media-savvy* lot, disproportionately inclined to enter "*the biz*" --



-- *and* more likely to know comics' *true revolutions* when they *saw* them.



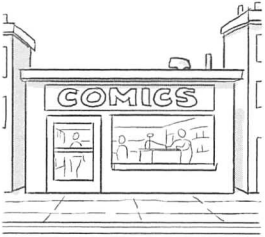
But, no matter how *fair* or *knowledgeable* the reporter, the *comics industry* can still be its own *worst enemy*.



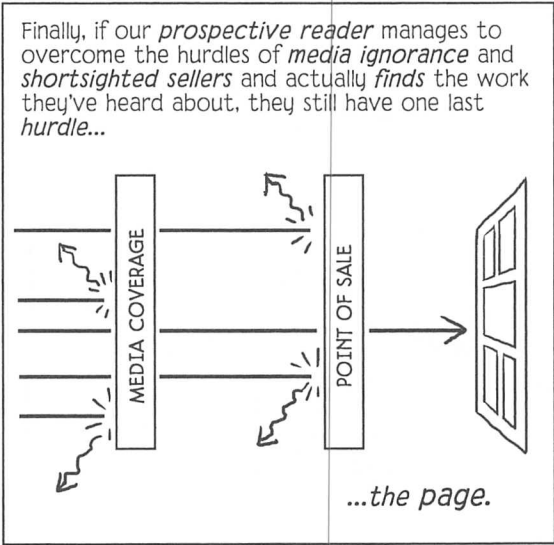
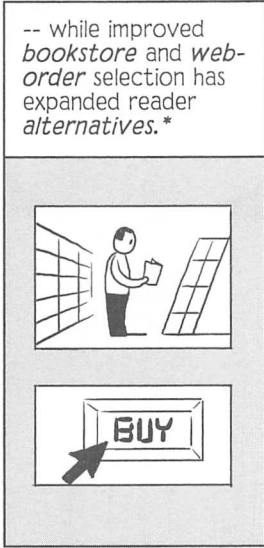
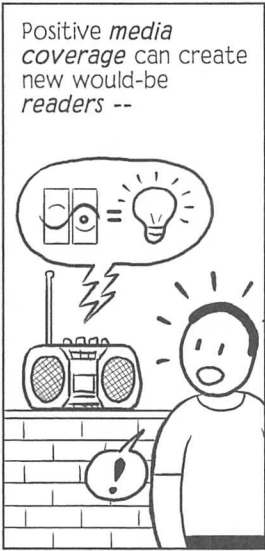
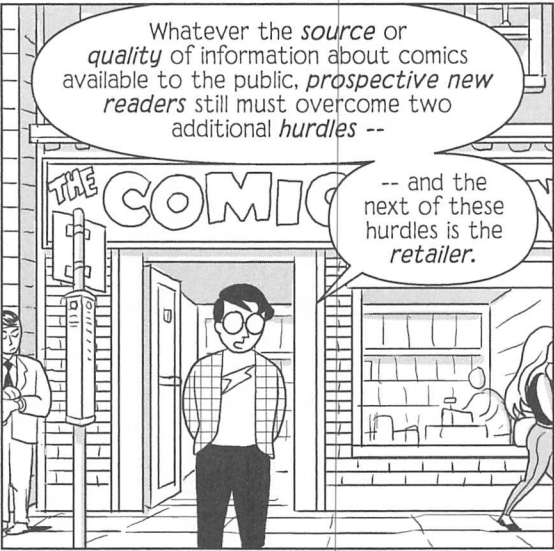
To Neil and me, Ray Suarez's "*blood, blood, blood*" intro didn't describe *our* revolutions at all* --



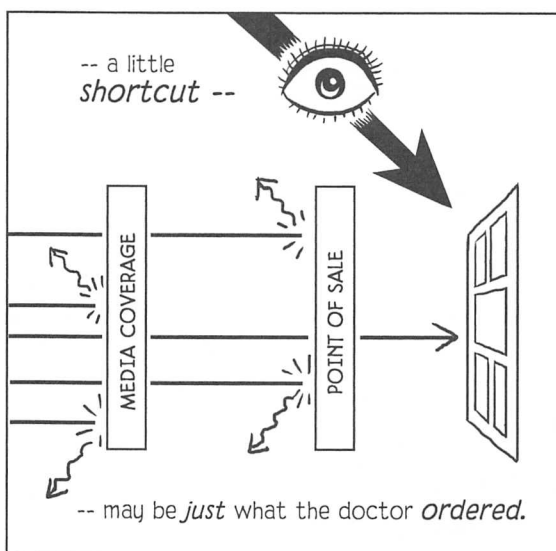
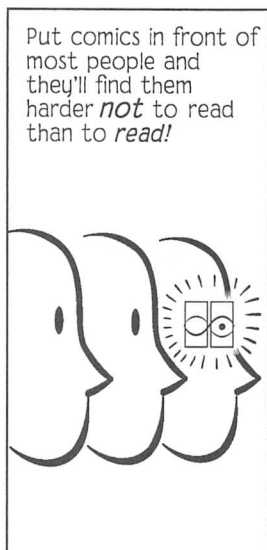
-- but, had any of Ray's listeners stepped into their local *comics store* that day, they might not have found all that much to *contradict* him.



*There were some elements of horror in Neil's *Sandman* series, but rarely taking center stage.



*A double-edged sword, of course, since these sellers can cut into each others' markets.



*Specifically, pages from the more accessible general interest books with the potential to reach a broader audience.

**I'll describe this oddball idea in a bit more detail on my site.

It seems like some gruesome *fairy tale* now, but there actually was a time when *comic books* were literally *burned in the streets!*

In the *mid-50s* the book *Seduction of the Innocent* by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham helped trigger a *firestorm* of *anti-comics hysteria*.

Wertham's book implicated comics in everything from *juvenile delinquency* to sexual "*perversions*" to *race hatred*.*

Public ire descended most *fiercely* on the gruesome *crime* and *horror* comics which *young readers* of the day had developed an *insatiable appetite* for.

The ever-popular "*injury-to-the-eye*" motif.

In 1954, a *Senate subcommittee* on *juvenile delinquency* convened in *New York*** to tackle the issue.

...a man with a *bloody ax* holding a *woman's head* up which has been *severed from her body*. Do you think that is in "*good taste*?!"

Yes, sir, I *do...* for the cover of a *horror comic*.

It was a *public relations disaster* for comics.

E.C. publisher William Gaines.

Thanks to the *first amendment* to the *U.S. Constitution*, Congress was unable to officially *cancel* comics --

*Check my site for some amusing examples of Wertham's tactics.

**Most comics publishers were located in Manhattan.

-- but that same year, *comics publishers* agreed to a strict *code of ethics* that would dominate the industry for decades to come and created an *authority* with the power to *enforce* it.



The Comics Code imposed the *severest restrictions* of any narrative medium of its day. Gone were any depictions of *gore, sex* or *sadistic behavior* --

-- but gone *too* were any *challenges* to *established authority* --



-- the *unique details* of any *crime* --



-- any hints of "*illicit relations*" or the *condoning* of *divorce* --



-- any references to *physical afflictions* or *deformities* --



-- and any allusions to "*sexual perversions*" of any kind.



To understand the *impact* of the *Code*, imagine that *movie producers* were subjected to *far more stringent* requirements for a film to receive a "*G*" rating --

-- and that there *were* no other acceptable ratings!



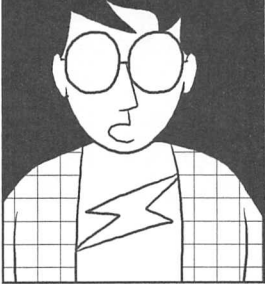
The business would *recover* but the *art* of comics had been dealt a *severe blow*.



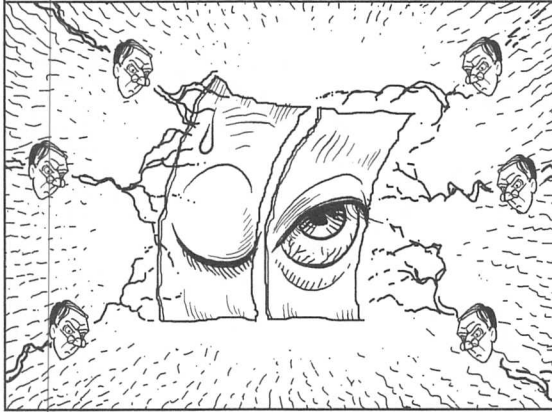
And the *comics community* had found its very own *bogeyman*.



Public perception matters.



Wertham's attack on comics seemed to create a *plague of public hostility*, but his was an *opportunistic infection*. Comics' *immune system* had been weakened *years before* --



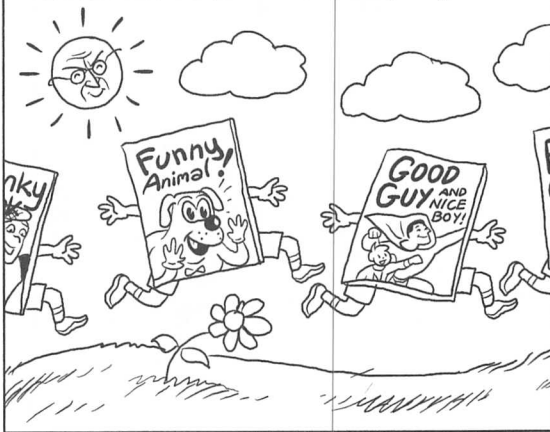
-- both by *frequent contentions* that comics were an *artistically bankrupt* form --



-- and that *children* were its only possible audience.



The Comics Code helped perpetuate both ideas by insuring that the industry's *highest aspirations* for *years to come* would be merely producing "*harmless entertainment*" for the *young*.



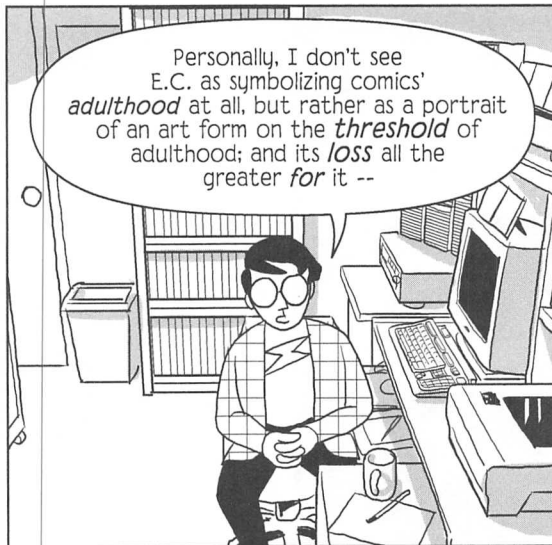
Despite its *gory excesses*, E.C. Comics -- the most celebrated *casualty* of the *post-code period** -- represented a *high water mark* of *challenging stories* and *bold innovative art work*. For many, E.C. has since become a *symbol* of the promise of "*adult*" comics."



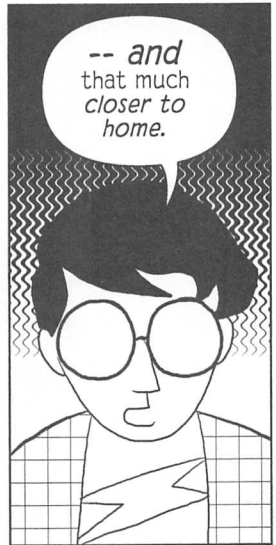
For all its *virtues*, though, E.C.'s house styles were often *sensational* and their target audiences largely *juvenile*.



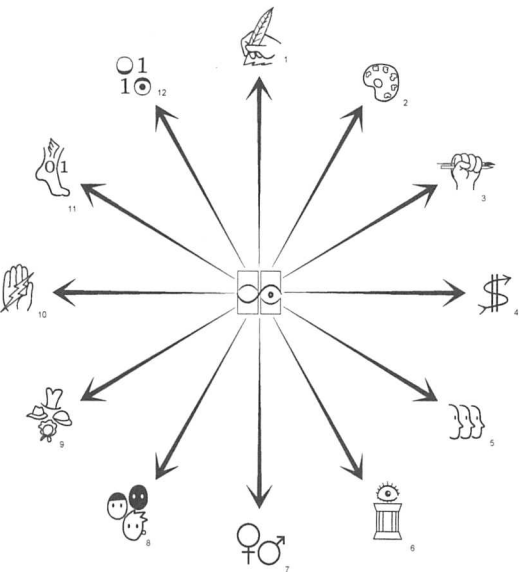
Personally, I don't see E.C. as symbolizing comics' *adulthood* at all, but rather as a portrait of an art form on the *threshold* of adulthood; and its *loss* all the greater *for* it --



-- and that much *closer to home*.

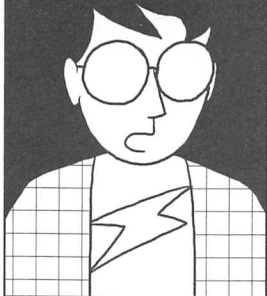


In the arena of *English language comics*, the last 15 years have yielded more *friends of comics* than ever before who are willing to *aim high* -- and many of whom have *hit their mark*.



But with *so far to go* on so many fronts, comics' *future* is no less *precarious* than it was in the *E.C. days*. A medium once more on the *threshold of adulthood*.

And there's no shortage of "*moral guardians*" prepared to *stop it dead in its tracks*, even today.



But rather than focus on comics' lack of *literacy* or *artistic worth*, as was done before *World War II* --



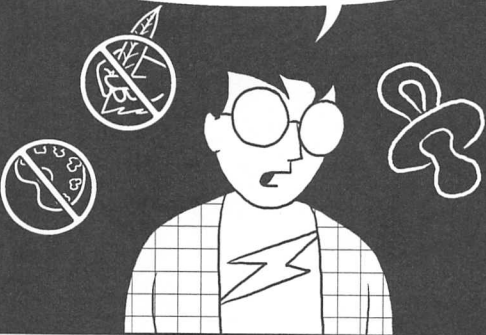
-- or on comics' alleged role in *juvenile delinquency* as was done in *Wertham's day* --



-- the censors of *recent years* have targeted the *one form of speech* that U.S. courts have *thrown to the wolves*.



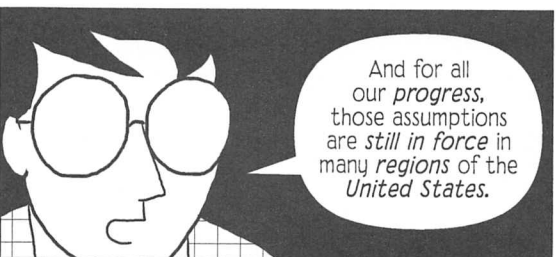
Public perception MATTERS.
As long as the broader community assumes that comics, *by their nature*, are without *social value* and, *by their nature*, are suitable only for *kids* --



-- then charges of *obscenity* will always *hit their mark*.



And for all our *progress*, those assumptions are *still in force* in many *regions* of the *United States*.



Panel 5 art by Reed Waller

Panel 7 art by Edouard Manet... sort of...

Now personally, I find the very *concept* of obscenity laws for adults "*patently offensive*" and a classic case of unwarranted *government intrusion* --

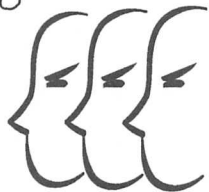
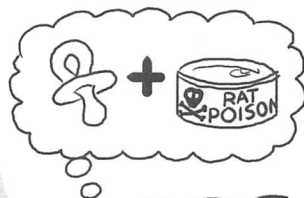
-- but it would be hard to deny that the issues surrounding *children* and pornography pose some complex *problems* --



-- or that the right of *parents* to guide their children's *reading* should be *paramount*.



The *dilemma* for comics' front-line soldiers, the *retailers*, is that in many communities, obscene *comic books* are automatically equated with *obscenity* for *kids*.



So *powerful* is this *assumption* that in a Georgia case in 1994,* a state's witness testified that a selection of seized comics could *damage children* even though the retailer in question *had not even been accused of selling them to children!*



Modern *obscenity laws* frequently hinge on the vague notion of "*community standards*"*** --



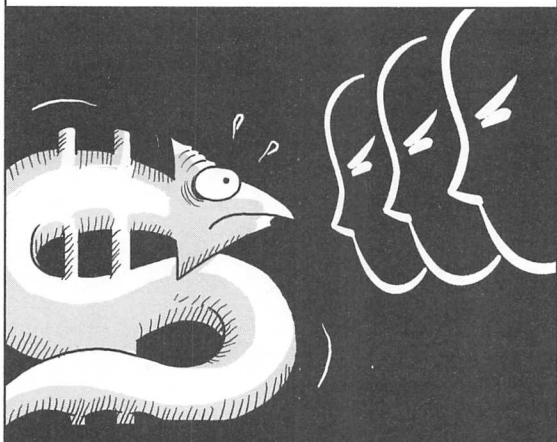
-- emboldening *some* communities to target comics stores they don't like with *searches, seizures* and selective *prosecutions*.



The *impact* of such tactics has ranged from the *financial* to the *aesthetic* to the *personal*.



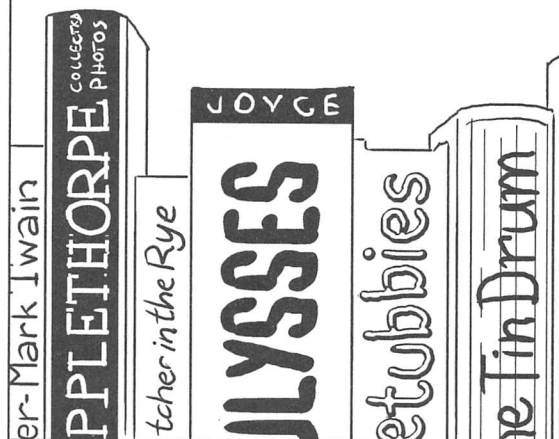
Financial for an industry struggling to gain a measure of *stability* and *public acceptance* while constantly being *pushed* to the *margins*.



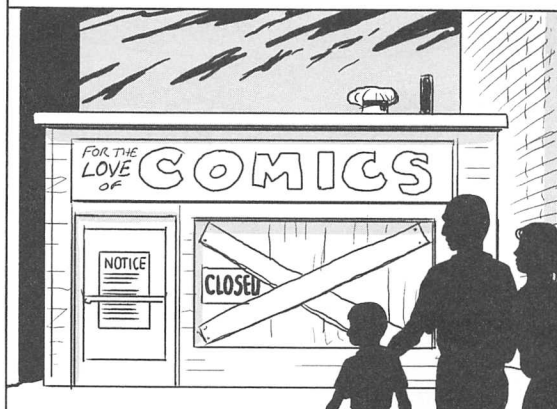
*Lee vs. State of Georgia

***Though not explicitly stated, this was the practical effect of 1973's Miller vs. State of California.

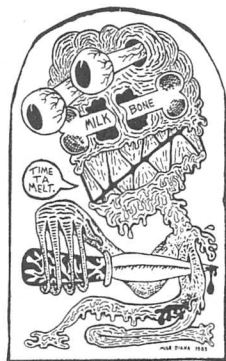
Aesthetic for the *publishers* and *creators* unable to push the boundaries of "*good taste*" in the name of its frequent nemesis, "*good art*."



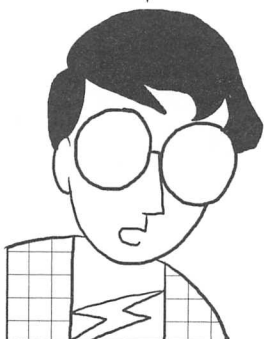
And *personal* for the *retailers* and their *families* whose *fortunes* and *reputations* have been *annihilated* by *seizures*, *closings* and *legal wrangling* --



-- or, for an artist like *Mike Diana* who was told, under penalty of *law* --



-- *exactly* what he *could* and *couldn't* draw.*



In contrast to the full-scale *retreat* of mid-50's publishers, the friends of *modern comics* have taken the first steps toward a concerted, organized *legal defense* of comics' producers and retailers.

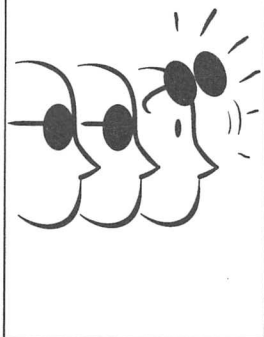


www.cbldf.org**

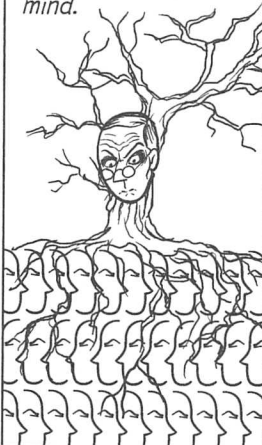
If such efforts can *survive* through the lean times they'll enable the comics community to *react swiftly* to new attacks.



But until widespread public *ignorance* of comics' potential worth is successfully *countered* --



-- *comics censorship* will always find *fertile ground* in the *public mind*.

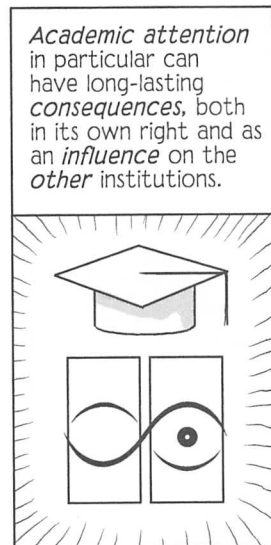
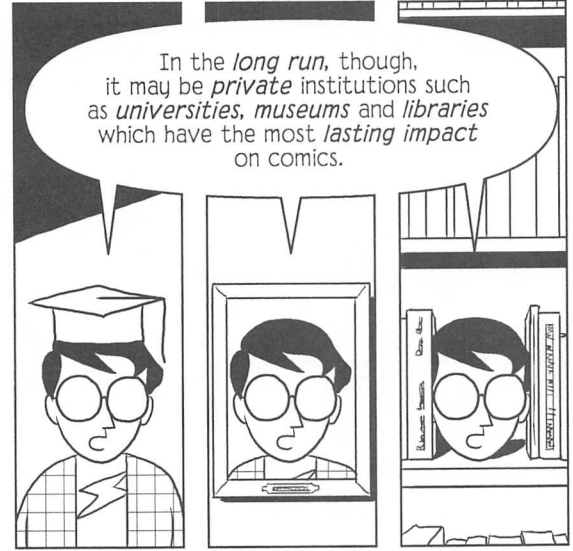
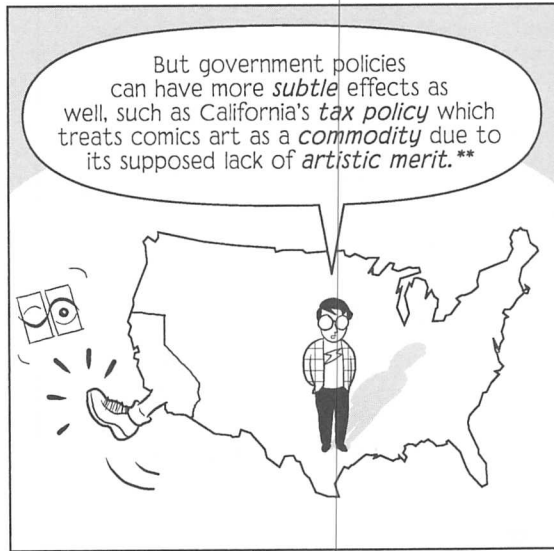
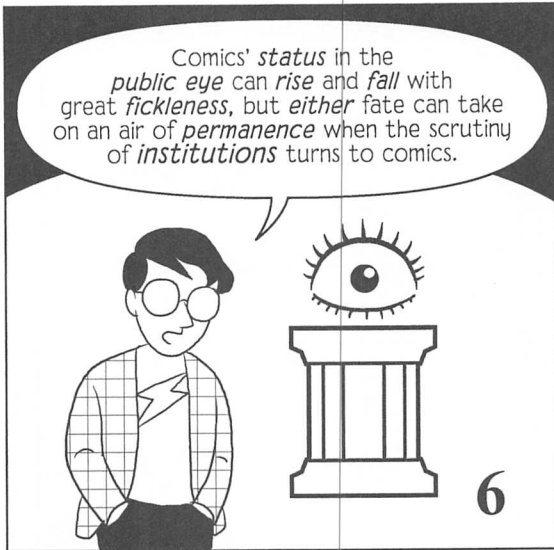


Thus, as misinformation about comics in the *short term* needs *correcting*, the truth about comics in the *long term* needs *preserving*.

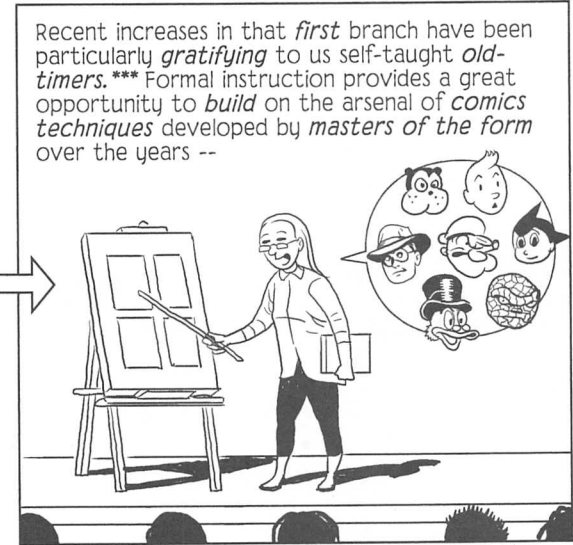


*In the privacy of his own home, even! Sheer lunacy, courtesy of a Pinellas County, Florida court ruling.

**The C.B.L.D.F. offers much more info on these issues on its web site (oh, and all contributions are deductible, hint, hint)



Comics in academia can take *two forms*: The study of comics with an eye toward *creating* them, and the *analysis* of comics as an *academic pursuit*.

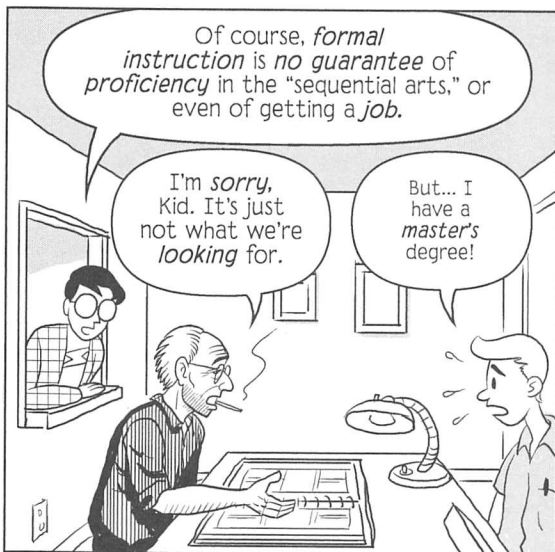
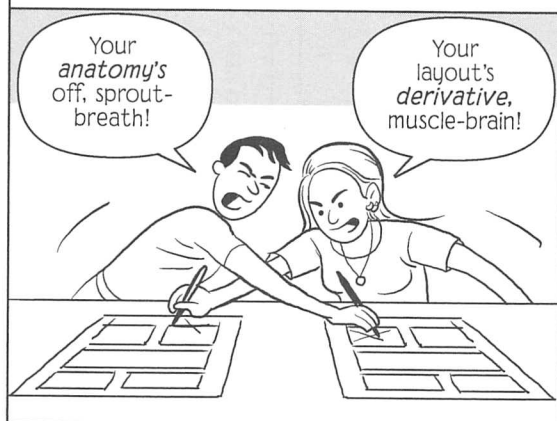


*Though, in the end, it was industry capitulation, not legal sanction, that dealt the severest blow.

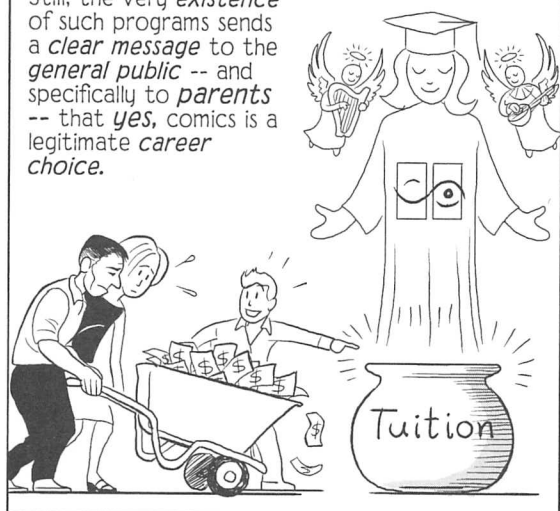
**Check my site for more details on the dispute between artist Paul Mavrides and the State of California.

***I was born in 1960 and majored in "Illustration," the closest thing to comics I could find.

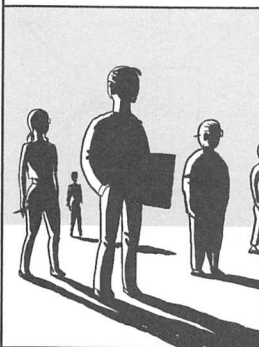
-- and can offer an exhilarating atmosphere of *camaraderie*, *cross-pollination* and *competitive energy* that comes from a group of students with *common goals*.



Still, the very *existence* of such programs sends a *clear message* to the *general public* -- and specifically to *parents* -- that *yes*, comics is a legitimate *career choice*.



We can only guess how many *potential masters* of the form never put pen to paper because of the utter *absence* of official *recognition*.



We *want* to believe that *great artists* will always find their *destined careers*, no matter what society *tells* them, but for *many*, ambition can be a *delicate thing* --

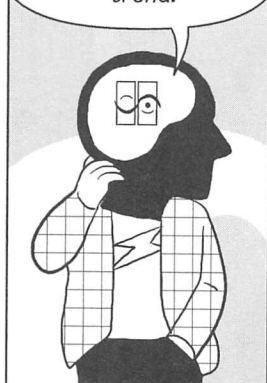


-- and finding the *right road* may not be possible, even for the *brightest* of imaginations --



-- when that road *can't be found* on any *map*.

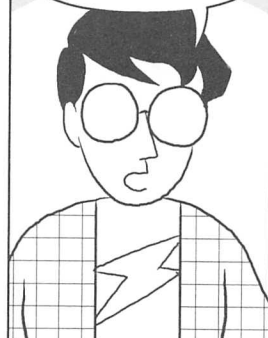
The *second branch* of academic attention; the study of comics *for its own sake*; is another encouraging *trend*.

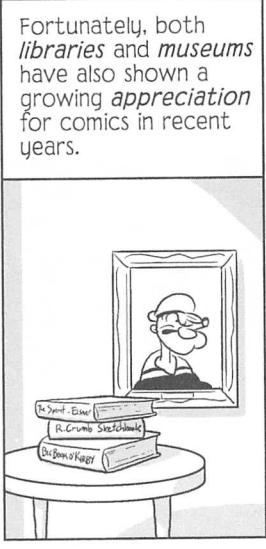
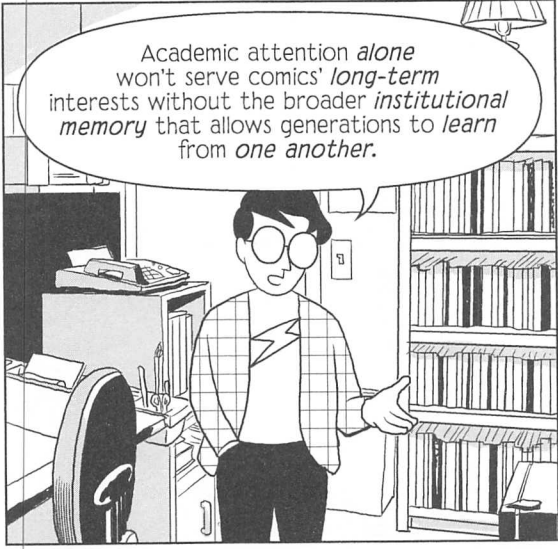
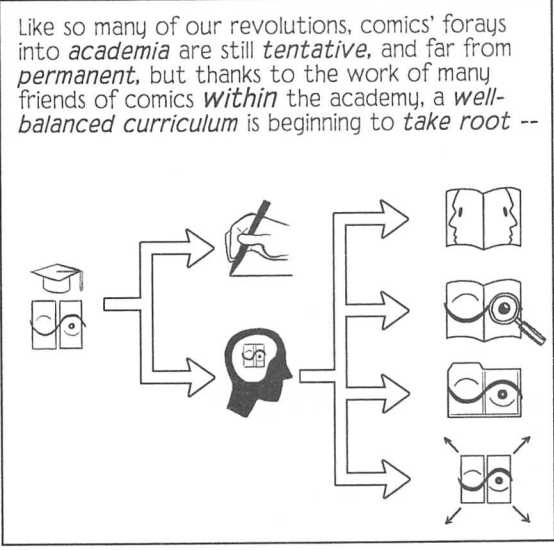
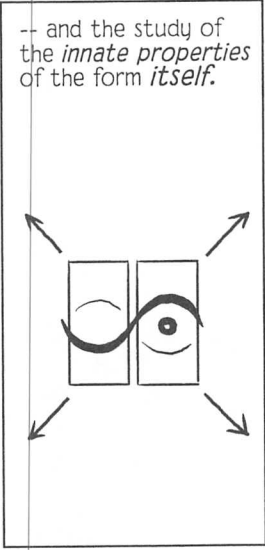
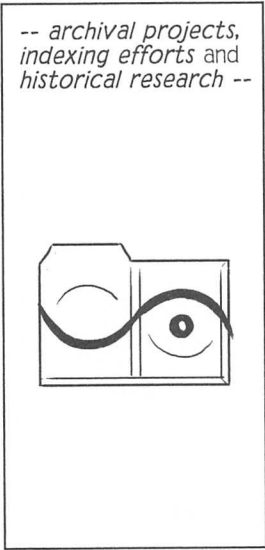
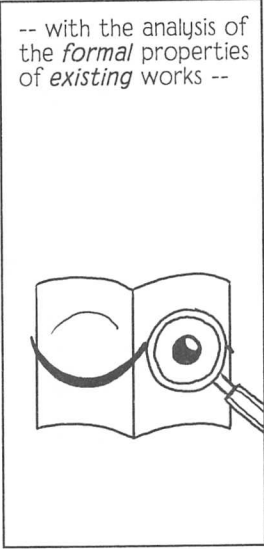
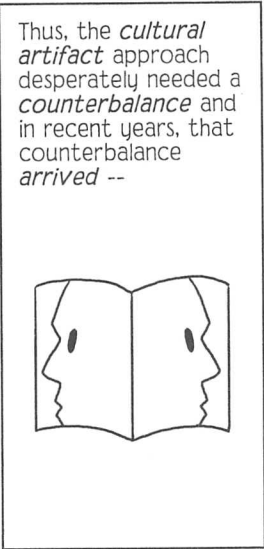
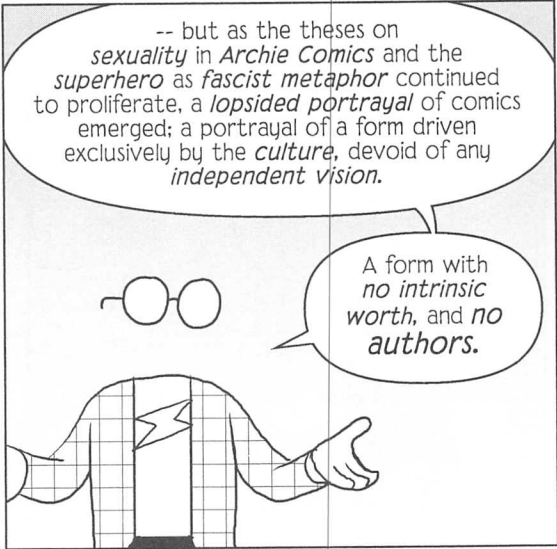


For many years, "*comics studies*" echoed public perception by relegating comics primarily to the status of *cultural artifact*.

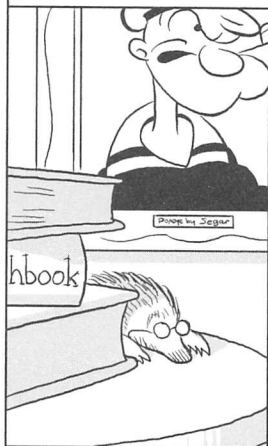


Of course, comic strips and books *are* cultural artifacts, as *any* work of art is, and they are *worthy* of study as *such** --

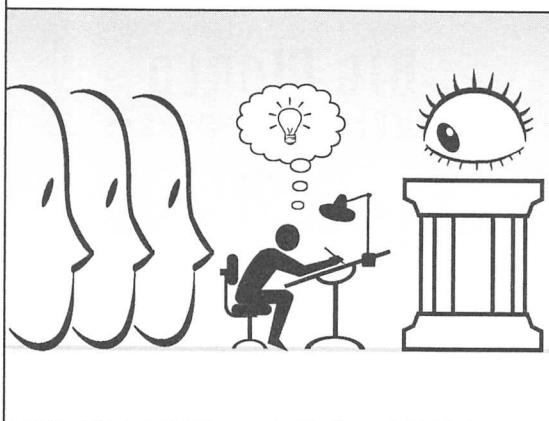




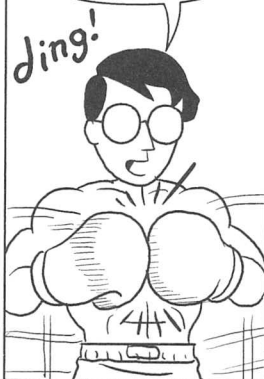
And *there too*, our "*moles*" are quietly making a *difference*.



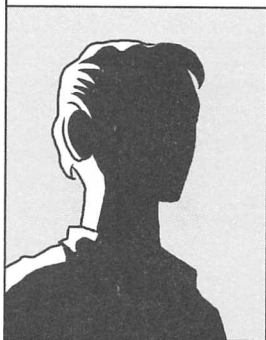
Historically, comics' great *creative minds* haven't much worried about the way outsiders *viewed* them, and as long as their *pens* were in *motion*, that ambivalence was probably for the *best*.



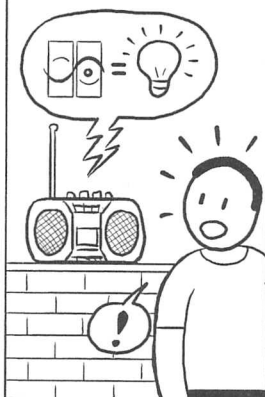
But, when the pens are *down*, it is a fight worth *fighting*.



The *perception* of comics from the outside is the *gateway* that comics' *future masters* will need to pass *through* --



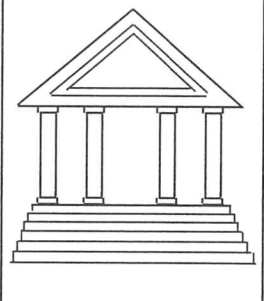
-- it affects the ability of comics' *best work* to find its *rightful audience* --



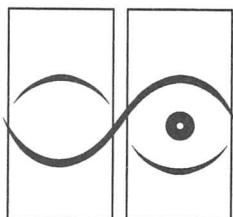
-- it can *make* or *break* comics when the going gets *rough* --



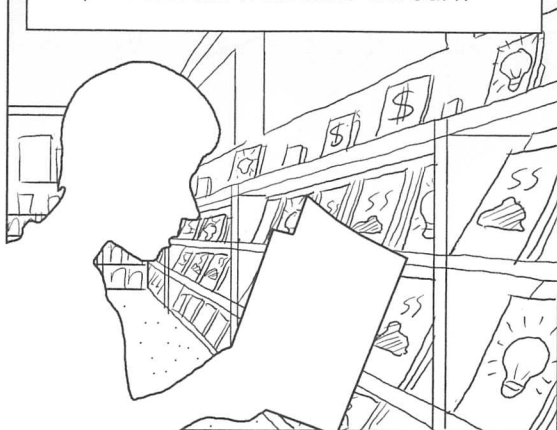
-- and it can tip the scales between a constructive inter-generational *dialogue* and terminal *cultural amnesia*.



As long as *friends* of comics are *out in force*, then comics' huge *potential* may finally get the *respect* that it's *due* --



-- while the day-to-day *reality* of available *stories* and *art* will ultimately gain the respect that *the work itself* can *earn* --



-- for *better* or for *worse*.



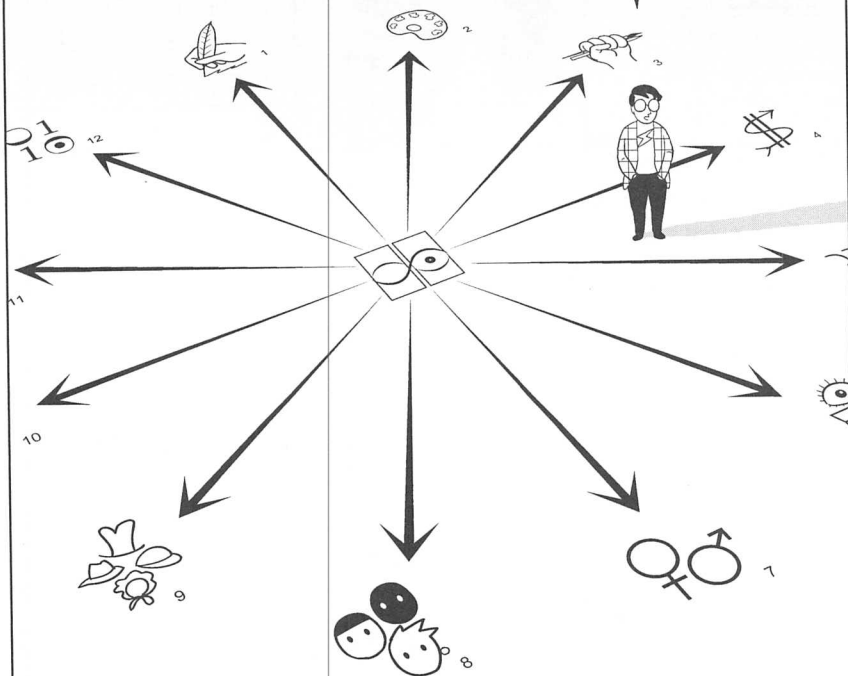
BIG WORLD

The Battle for Diversity



Moving comics forward means moving comics *outward*, expanding the *boundaries* of the medium in *all directions*.

The *twelve revolutions* that I've chosen for this book are a *diverse set*, and for *three* of them, diversity is a *central theme*.



7. Gender Balance.



8. Minority Representation.



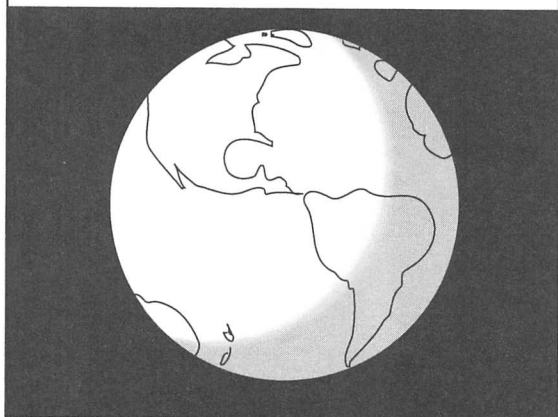
9. Diversity of Genre.



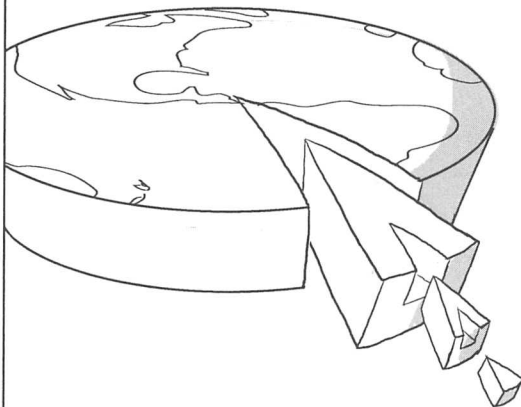
And *all three* stem from a *single idea*.



The idea: That it's a *big world* out there; a world filled with millions of potential *stories* by millions of potential *writers* and *artists*, with the power to connect with *billions* of potential *readers* --



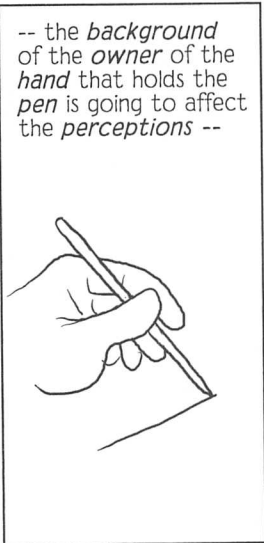
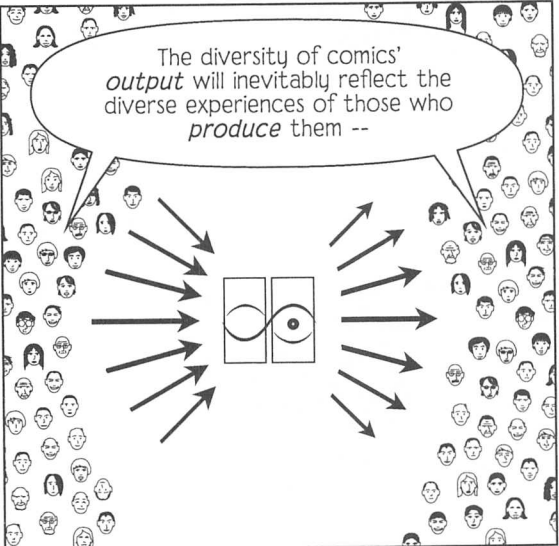
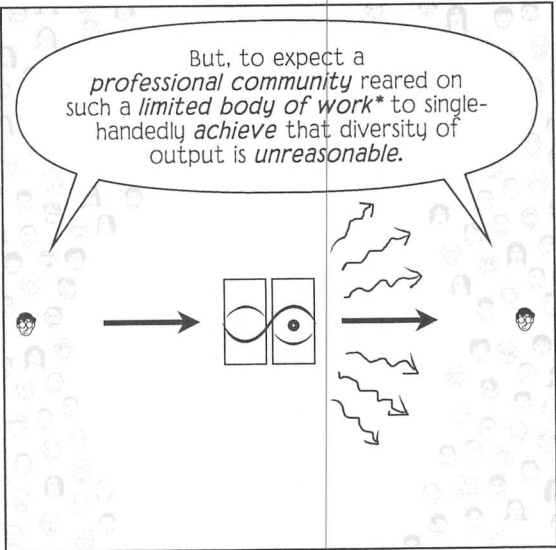
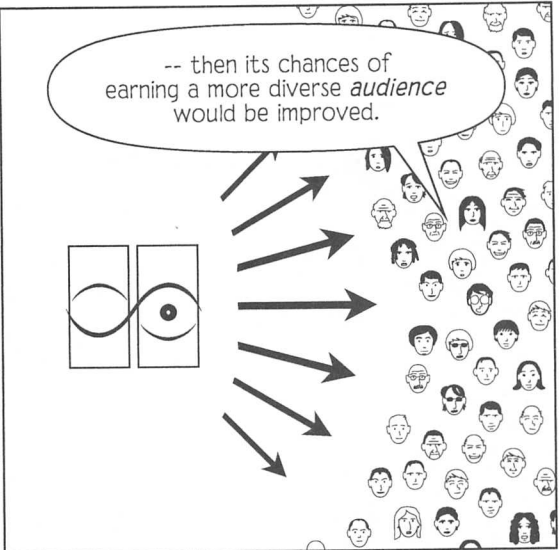
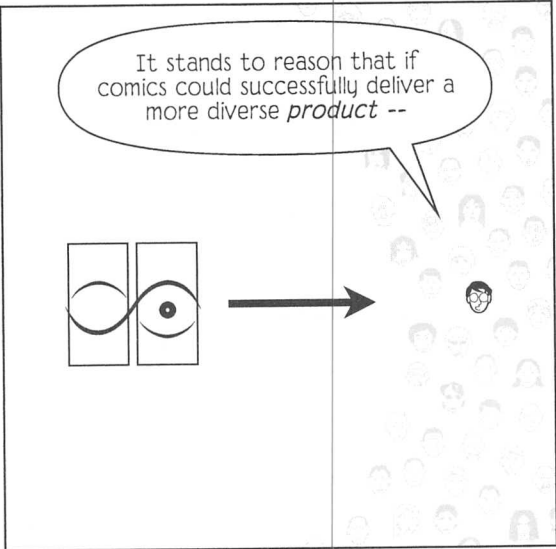
-- and that out of such an *enormous pie*, comics has reached just a *slice of a slice* of a *slice*...



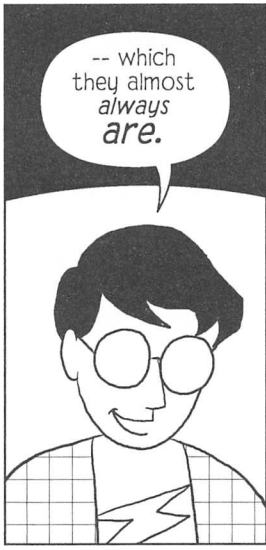
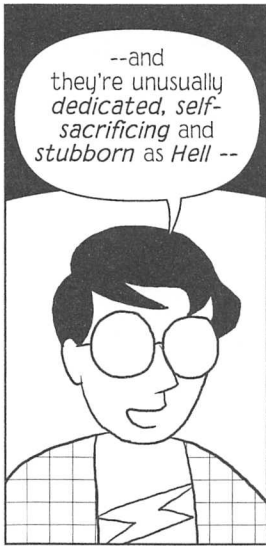
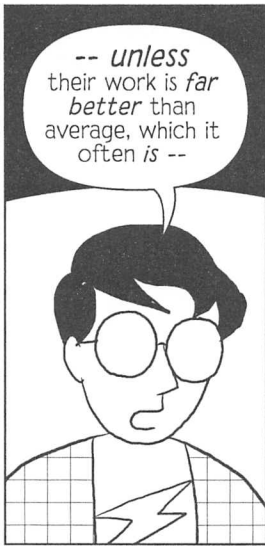
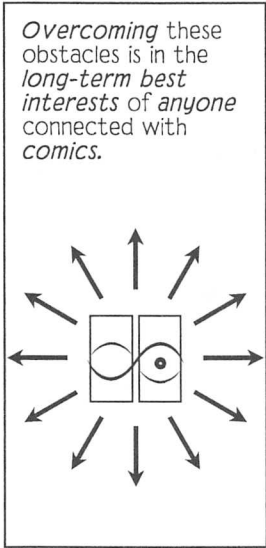
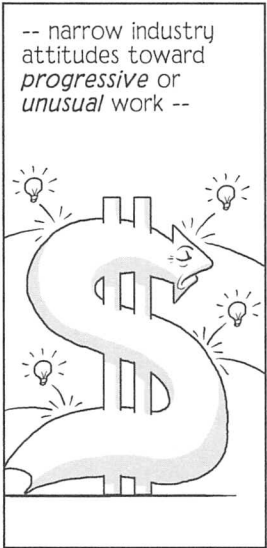
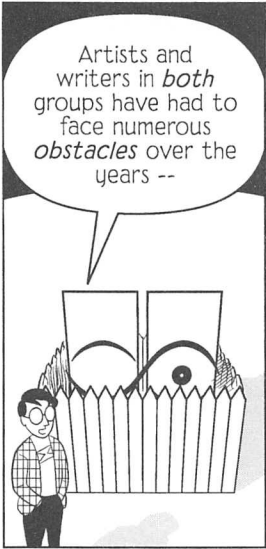
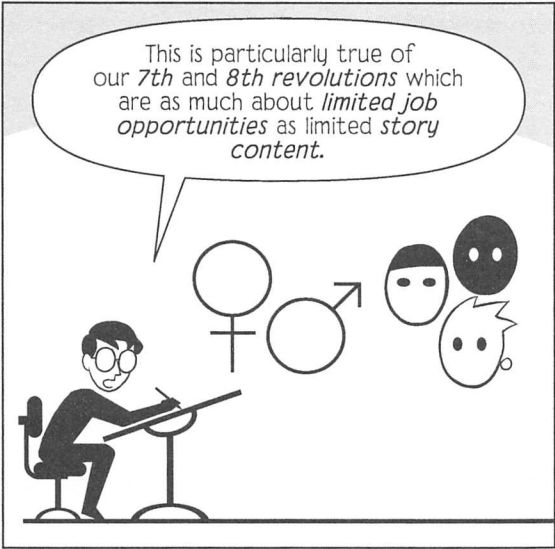
As I write this, the *active readership* for comic books and graphic novels in North America is hard to measure, but is almost certainly *below 500,000 people*.

That's approximately *one* in every *thousand* potential readers.

Meanwhile, the more historically popular comics *strips* have lost ground year after year as *fewer and fewer* people regularly read *newspapers*.



*At times, as a substitute for "real world" experiences.



The history of *gender imbalance* in comics is one of the most striking examples of comics' *squandered potential*.



To the extent that comics has been a "*boys' club*" in the U.S., it has blundered away *half* of its *potential power* (and potential *audience*) with a *single swipe*.



To a *fourteen-year-old, male, mainstream comics fan* in the *mid-70s*,* the very *idea* of women making comic books was *exotic*.



The few popular titles *read* by *girls* were created primarily by *men* --



-- and if ever there was a genre *tailor-made* for *adolescent boys*, the market-winning *Superheroes* were *it*.



At that time, the *spinner rack* at my local convenience store represented the *whole world of comics* to me, and it was a *male-dominated world*.



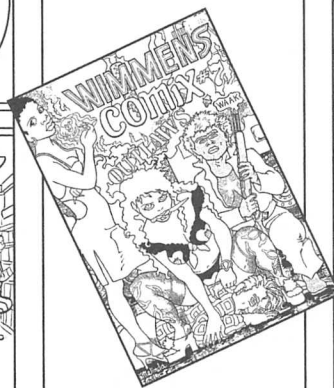
Of course, the spinner rack wasn't telling the *whole story*, but I didn't know that *yet*.



It wasn't until a few years *later* that I discovered *comics stores*, with their superior *selections* --



-- and found that women were *indeed* making comics --



-- and that they'd been doing it for a *long time*.



*Me, in other words.

Though an *invisible history* for many young fans of my generation, the story of *women comics creators* in the *early* and *mid-20th Century* has finally been *reconstructed* in recent years.*



Dating back to the very *beginnings* of comics in *North America* --



Art by Rose O'Neill, 1896

-- it's a history reflecting decades of *events, ideas* and *styles* --



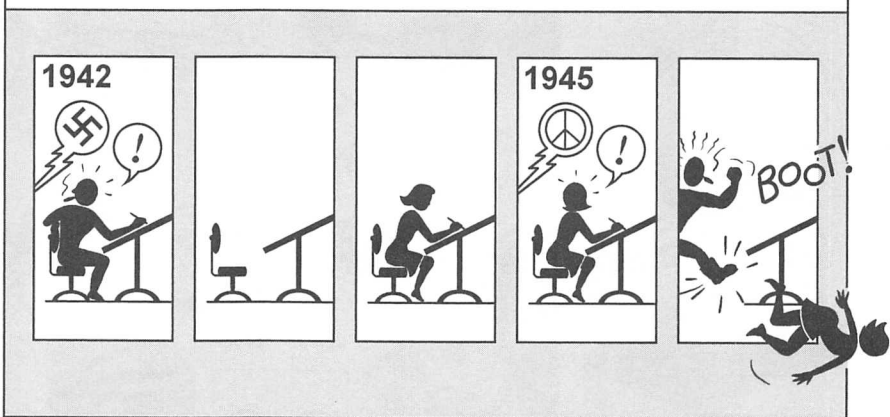
Katherine Price, 1913

-- and features *very different takes* on their respective eras than the worlds of contemporary *male* cartoonists.



Gladys Parker, 1944

It's not a history without its *ups* and *downs*, of course. The *labor shortages* of *World War II* offered some *modest gains*, for example, but those opportunities were largely *revoked* in the "*back-to-the-kitchen*" climate of the *1950s*.



But during the *late 50s* and *early 60s*, when fewer and fewer women were *making* comics --



-- the *idea* of making comics was nevertheless planted in a *loyal minority* of girls who still *read* them --



-- and by the *late 60s*, when the market for *traditional "girls' comics"* was *dying*, those same young artists had to find or make their *OWN markets* to be heard --

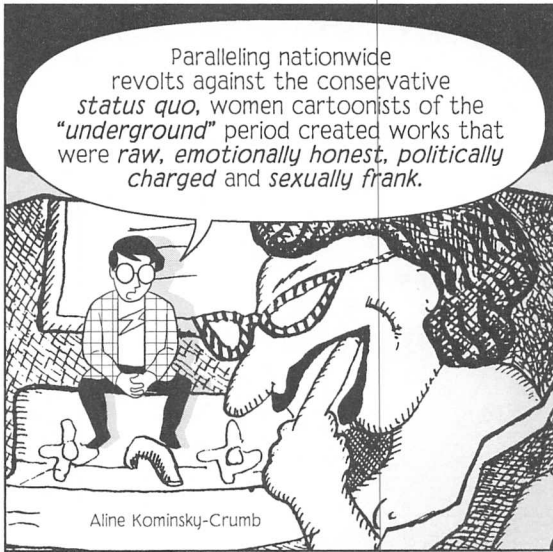


-- which was probably *just as well* --



-- 'cause they weren't all "*traditional*" girls!

*In large part, due to Trina Robbins and Cat Yronwode's *Women and the Comics* and Robbins' subsequent books on the topic (see bibliography.)



These same qualities, nearly *30 years later*, are still present in the works of many leading *female cartoonists* --*



Carol Lay



Phoebe Gloeckner



Lynda Barry



Julie Doucet

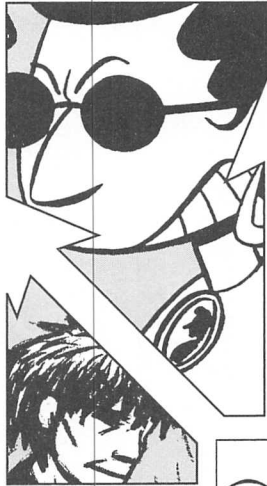


Roberta Gregory



Fiona Smyth

-- but today's field of women cartoonists, as a *whole* -- though a minority still -- are far too *numerous*, and their work too *varied*, to classify as any one kind of "*movement*."

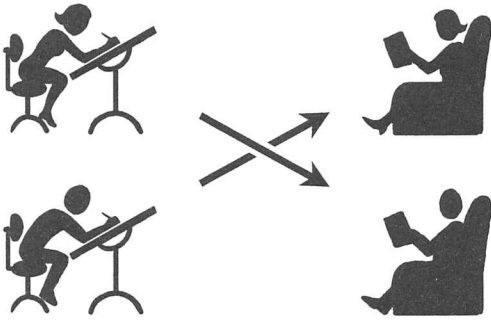


With *years* to accumulate *large* and *consistent* bodies of work in everything from *autobiography* to *science fiction* to *urban parables* to *high fantasy*, the worlds of *individual creators* now far outweigh the novelty of their *gender* for all but the most close-minded readers.

Top row (left to right): Jessica Abel, Carol Swain, Carol Lay, Linda Medley, Lea Hernandez and Colleen Doran. Bottom row: Megan Kelso, Trina Robbins, Mary Fleener, Leela Gorman, Lynn Johnston, Jill Thompson.

*Perhaps best exemplified by several of the artists featured in the two-volume *Twisted Sisters* anthologies (see bibliography).

And *with* this diversity, an increasing *crossover* between *readers* and *writers* of *different genders* has occurred.



For all its *breadth*, though, the last few decades of women's comics have borne out some *common traits*, and whether *innate* or *culturally influenced*, they're an important factor in the dynamics of our *seventh revolution*.



Among them: a consistent emphasis on *characterization* and *emotional nuance* -- with their attendant differences in *story structure* --



Panels from *Finder* by Carla Speed McNeil

-- and an increased awareness of the *picture plane* and decreased reliance on *illusionistic depths of field*.

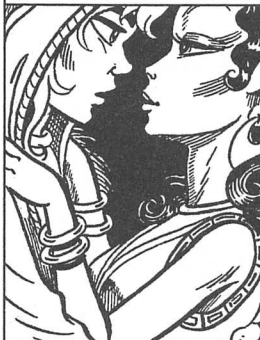


Nowhere by Debbie Drechsler

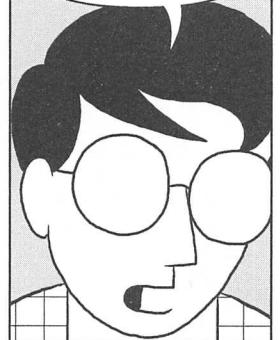
Such a *different take* on an *art form* (and on life in general) can open new doors for readers of *both sexes*. I know in my own case, that discovering Wendy and Richard Pini's self-published *Elfquest* comics as a young reader completely changed my understanding of comics' *potential*.

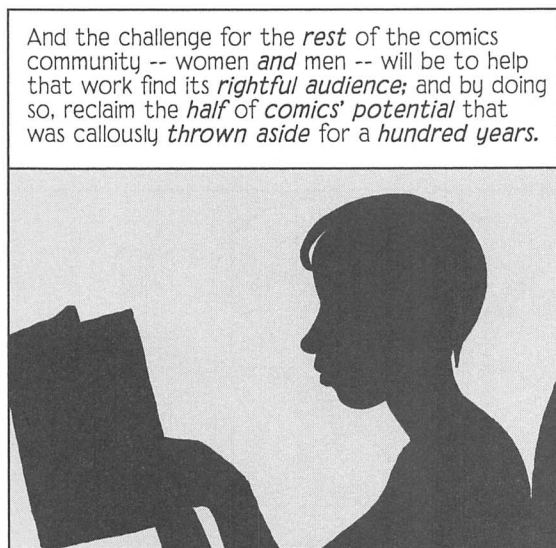
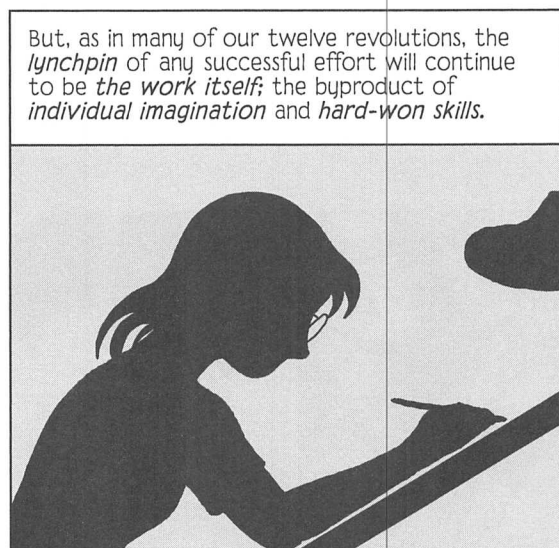
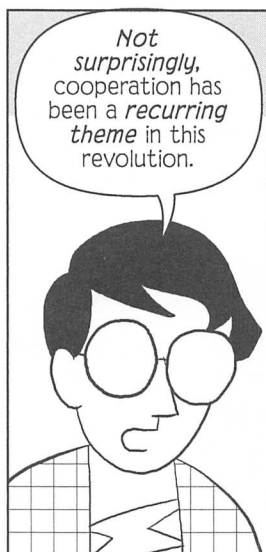
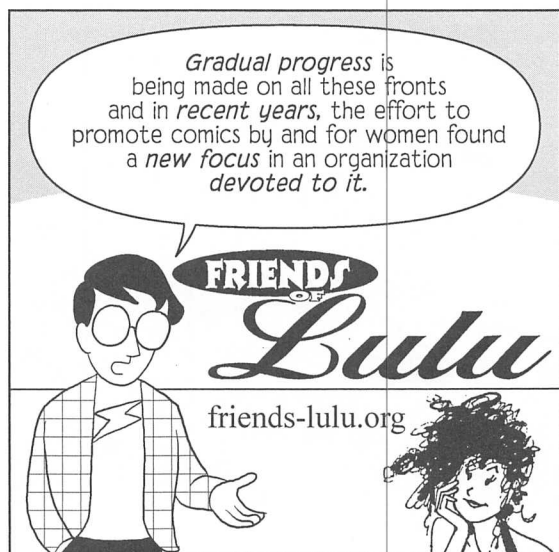
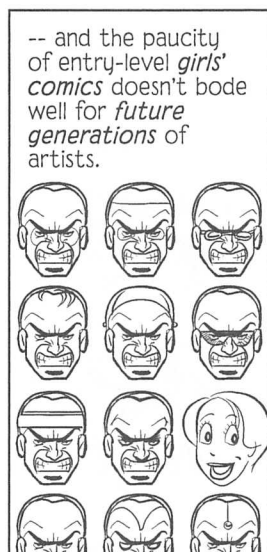


That encounter with *one creator's work* made a *crucial difference* in the way I chose to make my *own* comics from that point on.



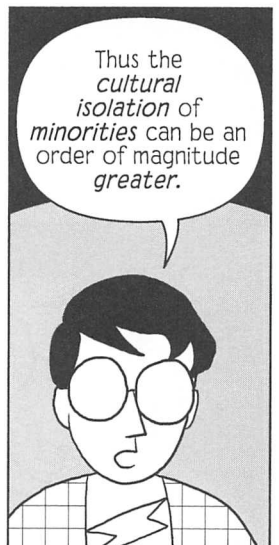
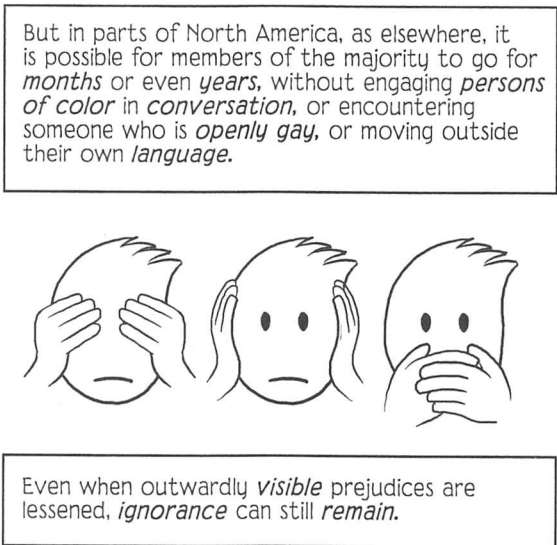
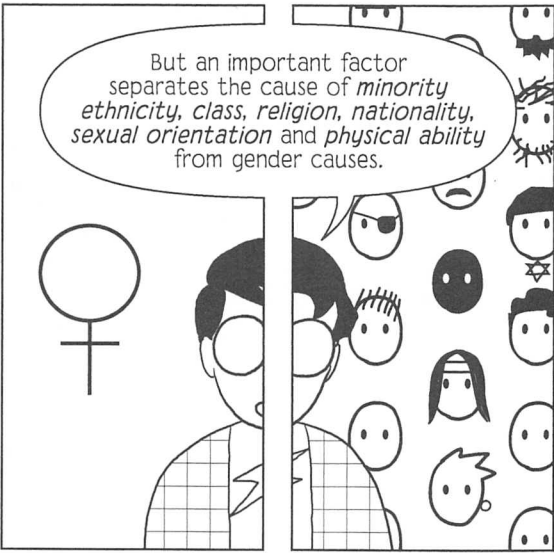
Had I been a *girl* during that era, it might have been the *only* thing *encouraging* me to make comics *at all*.

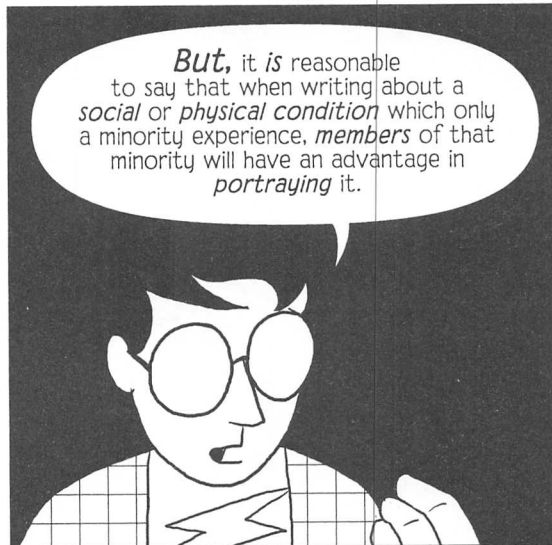
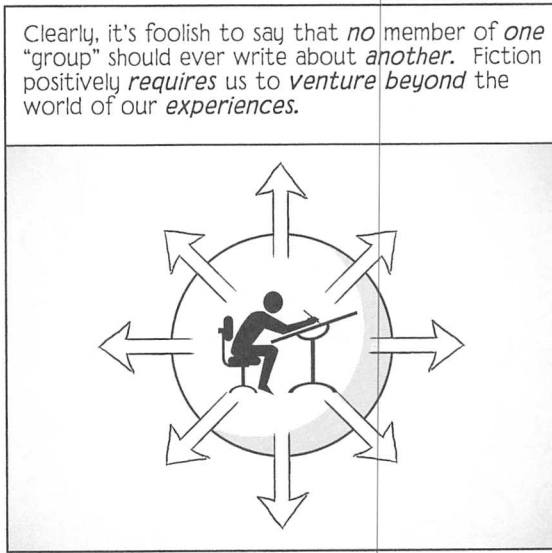
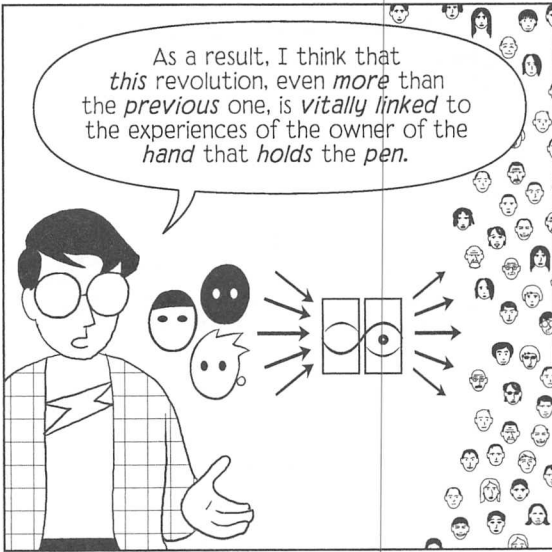




*Outright discrimination may be harder to measure or prove in today's harassment-wary climate, but there are some genuine horror stories.

**Dave Sim's personal misogyny became a public issue in the mid-90s following the publication, in his series *Cerebus*, of a text feature about women.





-- it can create a *distorted view* in popular culture when members of a given *minority*, for whatever reason, have little or no *outlet* of *their own*.



Such was the case when I started reading comics in the *mid-70s*; a time when some *mainstream comics writers* first tackled various *social issues*.

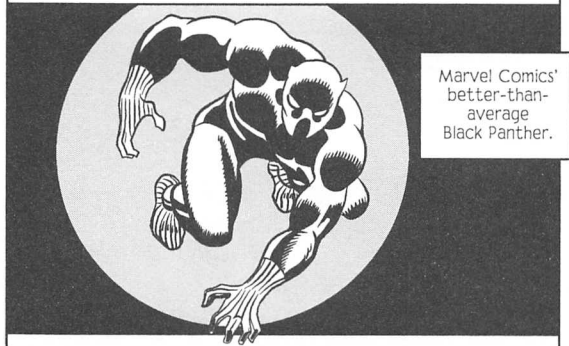


Skin Color was a popular subject as *white writers* and *artists* strove to give voice to *African-American* concerns -- with predictably *mixed results*.



Green Lantern and Green Arrow by Dennis O'Neill and Neal Adams.

Black Superheroes began appearing occasionally, but their *white creative teams* often seemed *unsure* how to present positive *role models* without draining their subjects of their *humanity*.



Despite some *clunkers*, though, the problem wasn't so much in *individual creative approaches* --

-- as it was in a *system* that left the work in only *one set* of *hands*.



Gradually, the ranks of comics freelancers began taking on more *color* and in the early Nineties, a *multicultural* group of *artists* and *writers* called *Milestone* formed an alliance with publisher *DC Comics* to produce a line of multi-cultural *heroes*.



Milestone Media

The venture was *criticized* in the trade press by members of the Afro-Centric organization *ANIA** who considered the deal a "*sell-out*."



*From the Swahili word meaning "protect and defend."

Though I'm hardly *qualified to judge* the debate that followed,* in general terms, it revolved around such issues as *independence, pride* and the *value* (or lack thereof) in *mainstream acceptance* --

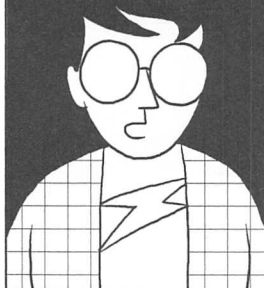


Milestone Comics title *Static* by Dwayne McDuffie, Robert L. Washington III, John Paul Leon and Steve Mitchell.**



Heru Son of Ausar, by Roger Barnes, published by ANIA member publisher Afrocentric.

-- and involved exactly the kind of thorny *moral issues* that *superhero comics* seem designed to *gloss over* --



-- and that *white writers* like yours truly were utterly *clueless* about.



Beyond the stark *morality plays* of superhero comics, other *independent creators* drew on their experiences to break past the *role-model/victim/stereotype* parameters that had boxed in mainstream writers in the *70s and 80s*.

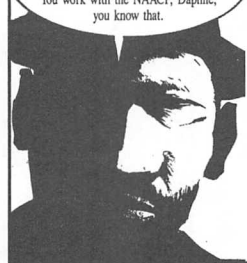


In 1993, *Ho Che Anderson*, a black Canadian artist caused a stir by portraying *Martin Luther King* as a fallible *human being*, as well as a great *leader*, in the graphic novel *King*.

Martin, you are a very funny man. You say that you don't care about material things... And look at the hotel you're staying in. And the way you are about your clothes. You're trying to tell me you don't care at all about material possessions. Well...come on....



Well, no, no... I won't say that I don't care. You know, I think it's important the way I look or the way a man in my position carries himself, a public figure. People wouldn't be as inclined to frequent my addresses if I showed up looking ratty. You work with the NAACP, Daphne, you know that.



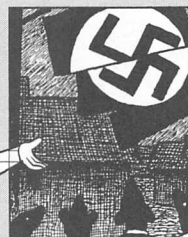
A decade before, the number of interesting *Mexican* and *Mexican-American* characters in comics had *tripled overnight* with the debut of *Love and Rockets* by The Hernandez Brothers.



And for over two decades now, *Jewish-American* creators *Art Spiegelman* and *Will Eisner* have made personal heritage a *centerpiece* of their most celebrated comics work.



To the Heart of the Storm by Will Eisner.



Maus: A Survivor's Tale (again!) by Art Spiegelman.

*Bad enough that I was a total nonparticipant, but this book is even a friggin' DC Comics production; hardly neutral territory!

**Pictured: Cover art by Denys Cowan and Jimmy Palmiotti.

The story of *Jewish creators* in America has a *twist* to it. Hardly underrepresented in the New York-based comic book industry, Jewish *tradition* was nevertheless completely *invisible* to comic book readers for many years.*

Stanley Lieber
a.k.a. "Stan Lee."

Jacob Kurtzberg
a.k.a. "Jack Kirby."

Unlike *actors, politicians* or *athletes*, the *individual stories* of comics artists often get *lost* behind the stories they *write* and *draw*.

Script by Stan Lee. Art by Marie Severin and Frank Giacoia.

Reclaiming the *history* of *minority participation* in comics can be a *daunting task* when a cartoonist's *name* may be the researcher's only *starting point* --

-- or when a *hostile environment* has led to a *masked* or *incomplete public image*.

I think sometimes that *George Herriman* makes a fitting symbol for this *century* of *hidden stories*.

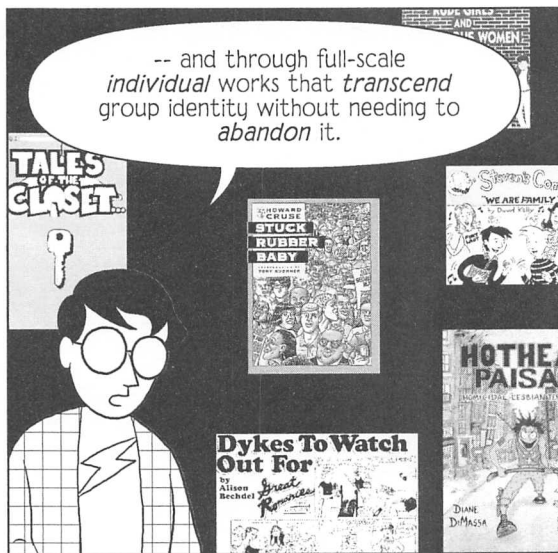
Herriman's comic strip *Krazy Kat* is frequently cited as *one of the best*, if not *the best* comic of the century.

Little is known about Herriman's *family background* beyond the fact that his *birth certificate* in 1880 lists him as "*colored*" --

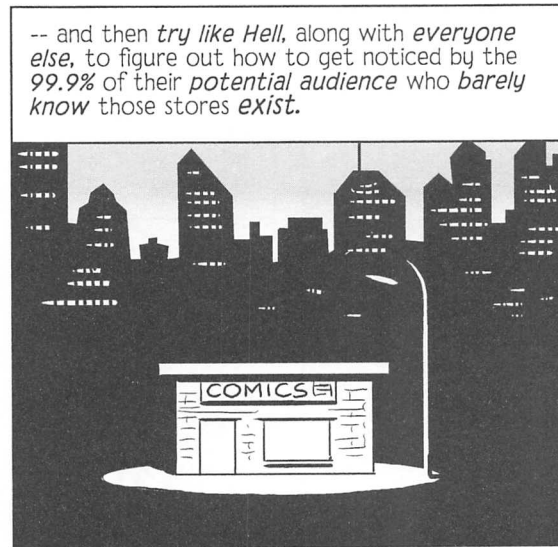
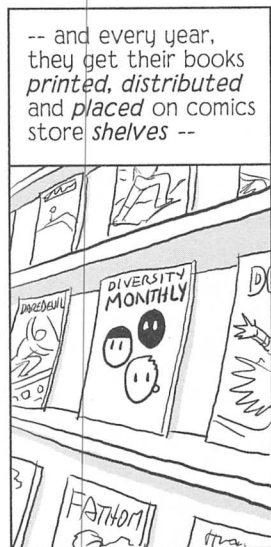
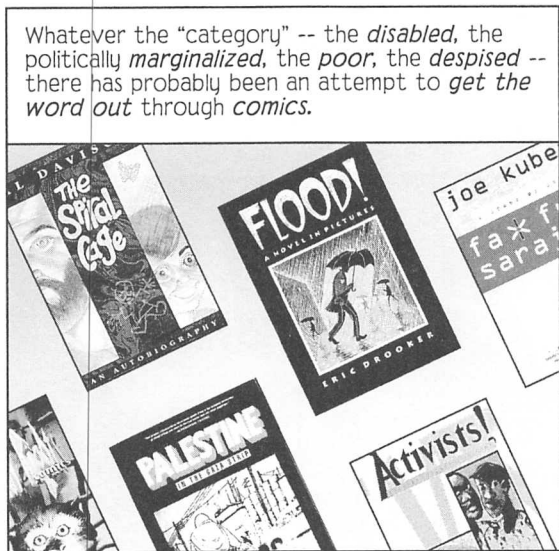
-- that he once told a close friend that he was *creole* and because his *hair* was *kinky*, he thought he might have some "*Negro blood*" --

-- and that wherever he went, Herriman was almost *never seen* without his *hat* on his *head*.

*Among the *many* other prominent creators who were/are Jewish: Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (Superman) Harvey Kurtzman (Mad Magazine) and Neil Gaiman (Sandman).



In the graphic novel *Stuck Rubber Baby* (1995) by Howard Cruse, the value of first-hand *emotional testimony** is demonstrated vividly in the kind of *richly-textured, heartfelt narrative* that "guessing" could never deliver.



*Although S.R.B. is fiction, Cruse drew heavily on his own background and experiences when writing the book.

Our *Ninth Revolution*, the *Diversity of Genre*, is where that challenge is met head on.

Diversity of Genre is a key *result* of our *two previous* revolutions and also, in a sense, *contains* them both.

It also confronts many of the same *obstacles*.

Like most words, "genre" sports an *evolving definition*. I'm using it *here* to mean a *broad category* of *fiction* or *nonfiction* in any communications medium which *presupposes* certain elements of *style* or *content*.

Among the *popular genres* featured on today's *comics store shelves* are:

1. *Superhero Comics* --

2...

...

No need to dwell on *sales*.



By the early Nineties, *autobiographical* comics* were becoming common enough among independents as to almost deserve *their own section* in *comic book stores* --



Joe Matt
Peepshow



Chester Brown
Yummy Fur



Seth
Palookaville

-- and their self-deprecating *confessional style* had become *familiar* enough to warrant *parody*.



Partially in *response*, a growing body of *naturalistic fiction* has begun to come into focus as a *fertile new territory* for North American cartoonists to consider. Though healthy for its *lack* of a common "style," qualities such as *dramatic understatement*, *subtle, unhurried characterization*, and *clear, unpretentious art* are all becoming associated with the trend.



Dan Clowes
"Caricature"



Jessica Abel
"Jack London"



Seth
"Clyde Fans"



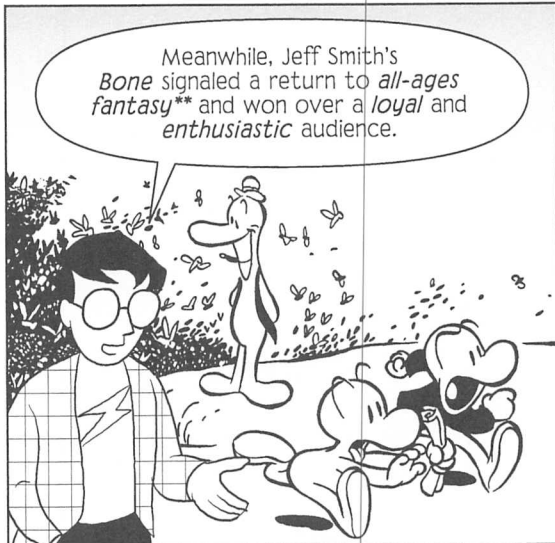
Adrian Tomine
"Alter Ego"



Jordan Crane
"Floating"



Matt Madden
"Black Candy"



The superior *craftsmanship*, *humanist themes* and *light humor* of *Bone* was reflected in several of its best *contemporaries* and has given comic book fantasy a *new lease on life*.



Akiko by
Mark Crilley



Castle Waiting
by Linda Medley



Scary Godmother
by Jill Thompson

*Many of them from Canada for some reason.

**Wendy Pini's *Elfquest* was a standard-bearer in this category throughout the 1980s (despite some more adult passages).

Recently, a *minimalist* aesthetic has captured a *significant number* of comics' leading *new talents*.



John Porcellino



Tom Hart



James Kochalka



Brian Ralph



Ron Rege



Craig Thompson



Jason Shiga

An aggressively *experimental* wing has also formed. Though antithetical in some respects to the very *idea* of a common style, such approaches do share a common *spirit* of *formal exploration* and *intellectual challenge*.



Acme Novelty Library
by Chris Ware

Jack's Luck Runs Out
by Jason Little

The Wiggly Reader
by John Kerschbaum

Speedy
by Warren Craghead

Today's *erotic comics* certainly constitute a full-fledged *genre* with *stylistic conventions* of its own, though it tends to fly *under the radar* of most readers.

Birdland
by Gilbert Hernandez.

One of the few "high profile" sex comics in recent years.

Some genres, like *crime fiction*, can boast only one or two *outstanding works*; not enough to gain any sort of *market presence*.

Stray Bullets
by David Lapham

Other genres, like *romance*, have found the present market *hostile* and their *intended audience* *difficult to reach*.

Empty Love Stories by Steve Darnall and various.
(art by Colleen Doran)

And, of course, there are *comics* and *creators* that simply *defy categorization* of any sort; often to their credit (*aesthetically* if not *commercially*) --

Frank by Jim Woodring

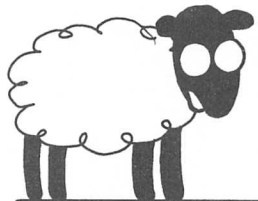
You Are Here by Kyle Baker

Jupiter by Jason Sandberg

Cerebus by Dave Sim

-- just as there are *categories* that many comics belong to in *name*, but not necessarily in *spirit*.

Genres are rarely created out of whole cloth.



When *Batman* made his 1939 debut in the bimonthly title *Detective Comics*, it was the *detective genre* that determined much of the *story structure*.



Although the superhero as a *story premise* was popular from *day one* --



-- it would take *decades* for the superhero genre as we know it today to reach *maturity*.*



In the 60s and 70s, veteran artist *Jack Kirby* seized on the central theme of superhero stories -- *POWER* -- and made it the *central motif* of superhero *art* as well; challenging all *subsequent* pencil-pushers to try to *outdo* him.



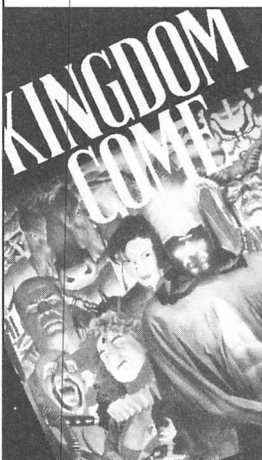
To this day, nearly all superhero comics conform to the genre prerequisites of *musclebound anatomy* --



-- exaggerated *depths of field* --



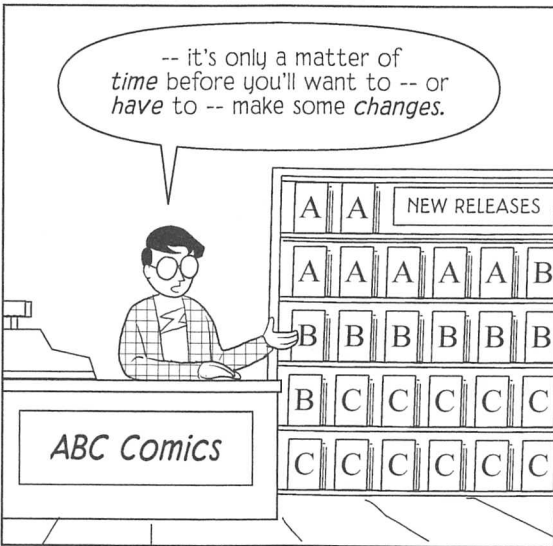
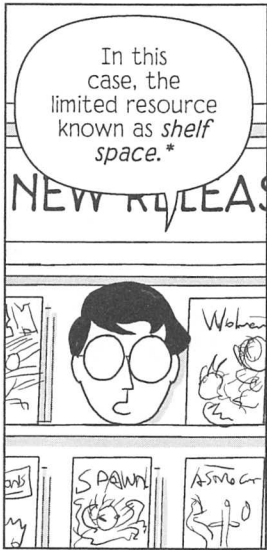
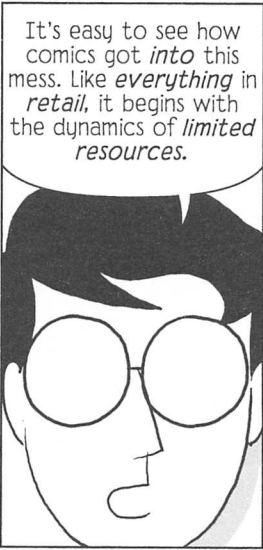
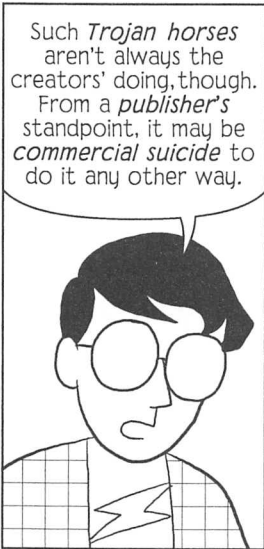
-- and *ever-escalating stakes*!

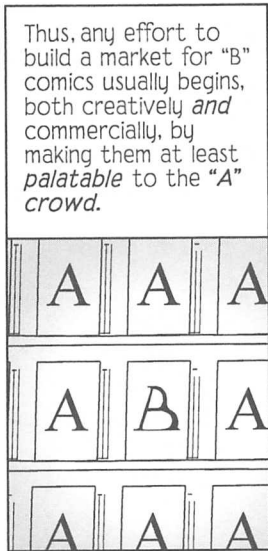
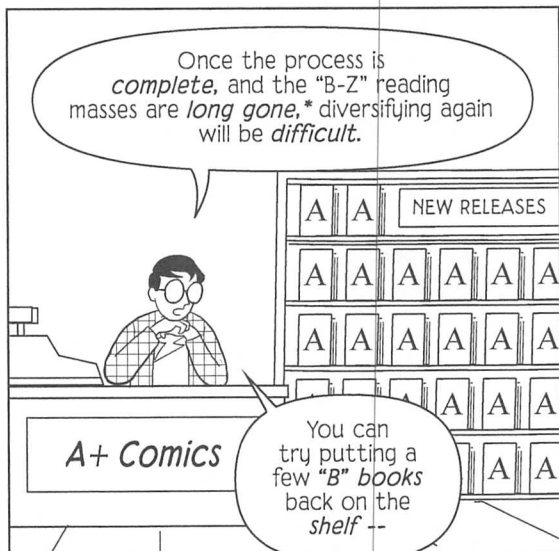


After 60 years of *mutations*, the *superhero genre* currently incorporates hundreds of embedded stylistic "*rules*" governing *story structure*, *page composition* and *drawing style* --

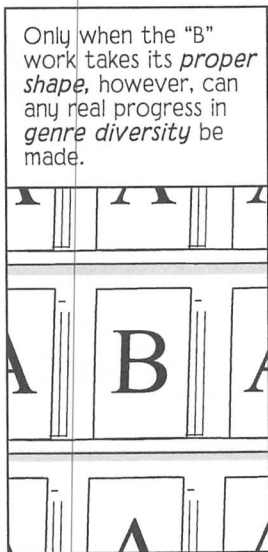


*...or senility, depending on your point of view.

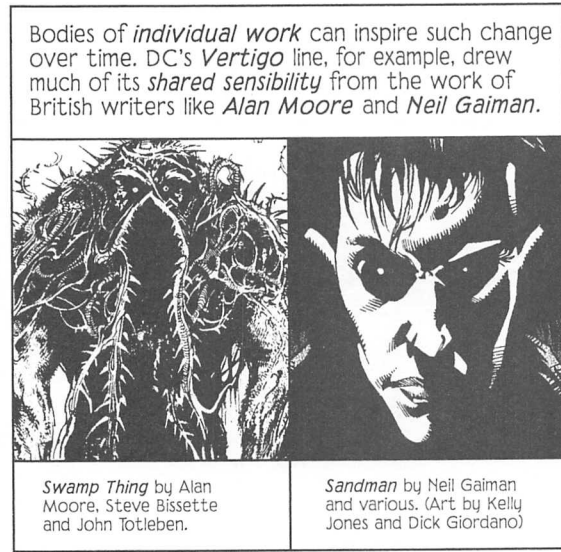




Thus, any effort to build a market for "B" comics usually begins, both creatively *and* commercially, by making them at least *palatable* to the "A" crowd.

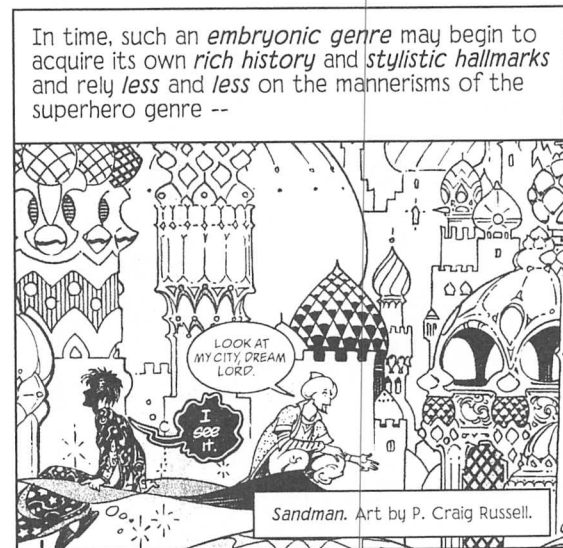


Only when the "B" work takes its *proper shape*, however, can any real progress in *genre diversity* be made.

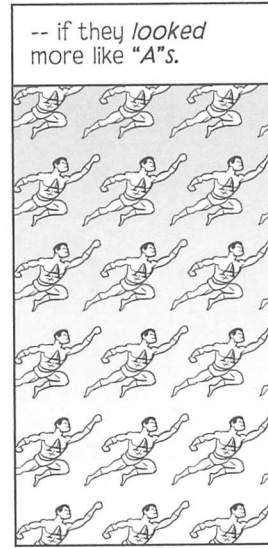


Swamp Thing by Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben.

Sandman by Neil Gaiman and various. (Art by Kelly Jones and Dick Giordano)

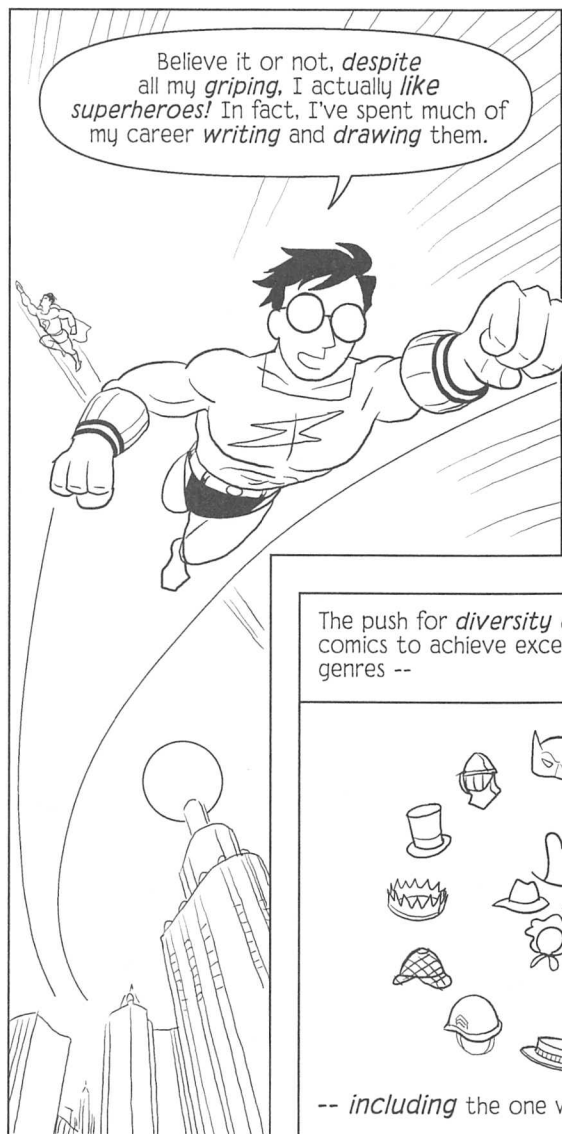


In time, such an *embryonic genre* may begin to acquire its own *rich history* and *stylistic hallmarks* and rely *less and less* on the mannerisms of the superhero genre --

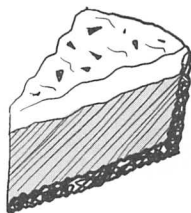


-- if they *looked* more like "A"s.

*Nearly all of the top 100 selling titles in October 1999 were superhero comics (or quasi-superheroes like Xena and "Stone Cold" Steve Austin.)



For me, superheroes are like those *chocolate pies* with *whipped cream* on top and that *Oreo cookie crust*... you know the ones, *right?*

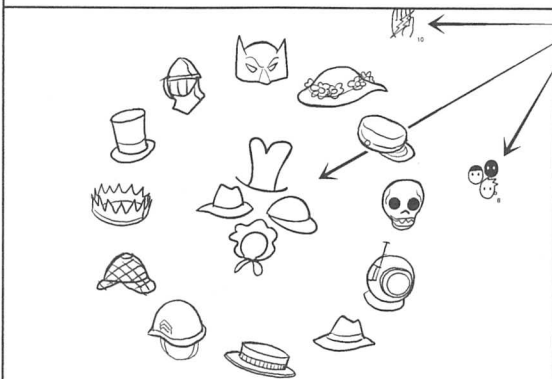


They taste *great* --

-- but who wants to eat *nothing but chocolate pies for the rest of their lives?!*



The push for *diversity of genre* is the push for comics to achieve excellence in many *different* genres --



-- including the one with the *guys in tights*.

It's hard for creators to *appreciate* that potential, though, without any basis for *comparison*. In such a vacuum, superhero comics have become increasingly *inbred* and *uninspiring*.



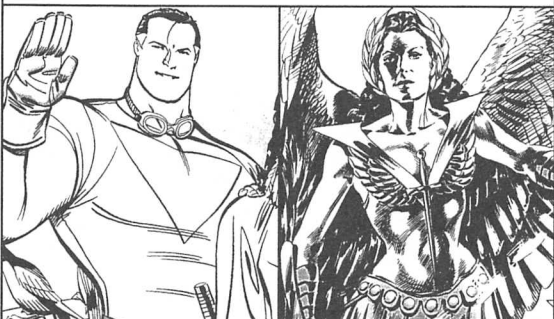
Fortunately, there have been *exceptions*. In the *80s*, those who best *understood* superheroes began *deconstructing* the genre, hoping to kick some *life* into the old clunkers by *breaking* nearly *every one* of the tried and true "*rules*."



Frank Miller's cranky old bad-ass Batman from *The Dark Knight Returns*.

The vigilante Rorschach from *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.

The deconstruction of the 80s laid bare the *inner workings* of the genre and became the foundation of a sturdy and streamlined *reconstruction* by writers in the 1990s.



Tom Strong by Alan Moore (again!) and Chris Sprouse.

Winged Victory, from Kurt Busiek's *Astro City*. Art by Brent Anderson.

Some think that the *superhero genre* and *comics* were *made for each other*, that it's just a case of "*comics doing what comics does best.*"



I disagree on *both* counts. *One*: I don't think there's anything *intrinsic to comics* that *restricts* it to such *power fantasies*.



Two: We haven't been the "*best*" at it in *years*.



The postwar *Japanese* and *European* comics markets have forcefully demonstrated that comics can thrive in *dozens* of *genres* at once without relying on the *guys in Spandex* --



-- while in *movies*, *TV* and *games*, a flood of *superheroes* and related *power fantasies* are capturing the imaginations of far more kids than any of their four-color *forerunners*.



Superheroes are *first* and *foremost* about *role-playing* -- becoming the *character*.



I discussed in *Understanding Comics* why I think comics has a great *untapped potential* for *audience participation*.*

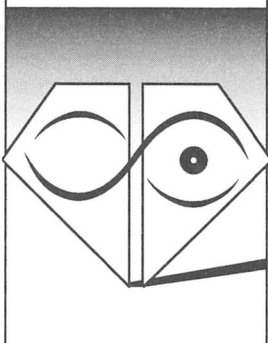


But in the arena of *first-person power fantasies* in which superheroes belong, a *new technology* already *kicks comics' butt*, and it's only going to *gain strength* in the coming years.



*In Chapter 2. "The Vocabulary of Comics."

Comics can no longer afford to put all its *eggs* in one *basket*, and a growing number of creators and business people now *recognize* this.



But others view comics' eventual rendezvous with superheroes as historically *inevitable*; a kind of "*manifest destiny*."



I think the development of genres *in general* may have been inevitable --



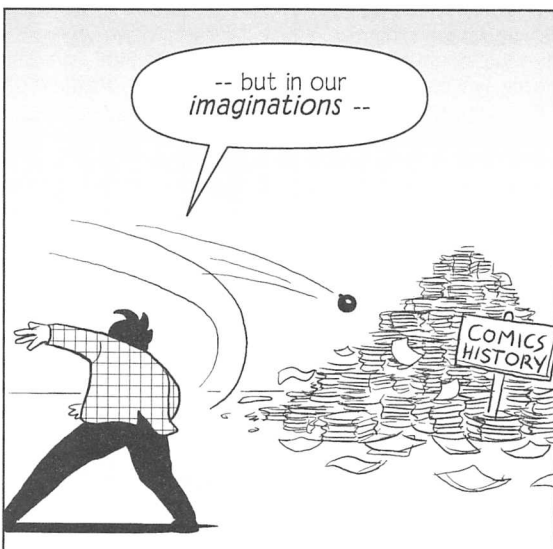
-- but the ascent of any *one* genre is, I think, a largely *arbitrary* process.



Unfortunately, there's no way to *replay* the 20th century with *different variables* to *test* this idea --



-- but in our *imagination* --



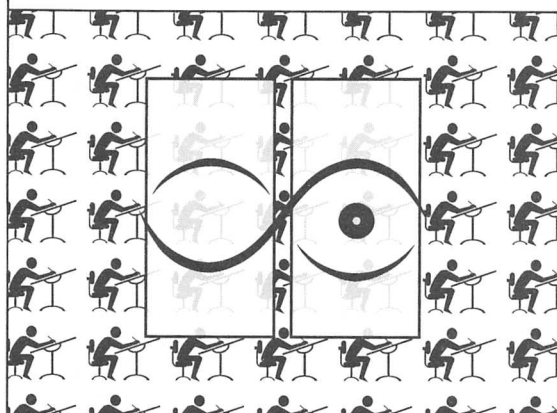
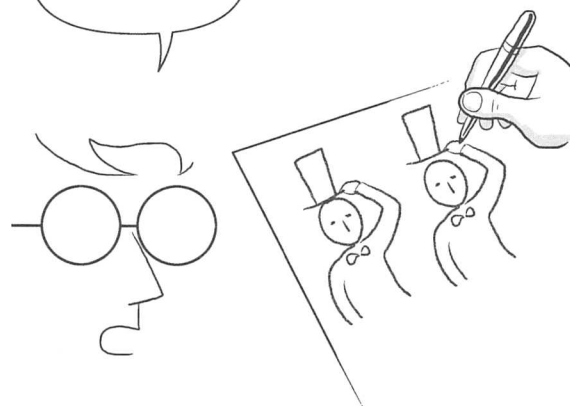
-- we can at least *postulate* a world in which comics *never* existed --

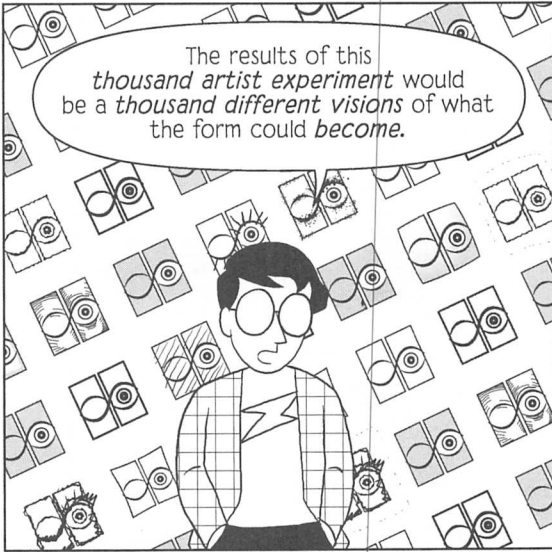


-- then into this blank slate, propose a *simple idea*:

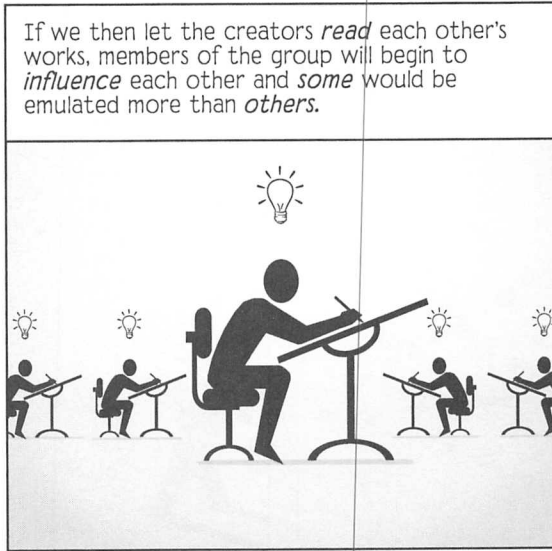
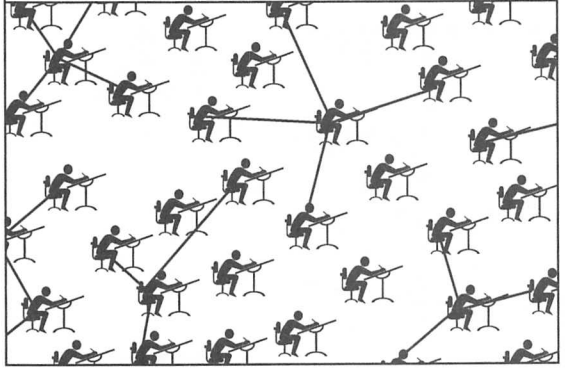
To *communicate* a *narrative* of some sort by placing *one picture* after *another*.

Then, give some *paper* and *pens* to a *thousand writers* and *artists*, give them *no guidelines* for *content* or *style*, tell them they can add *words* if they want and *set them loose*.

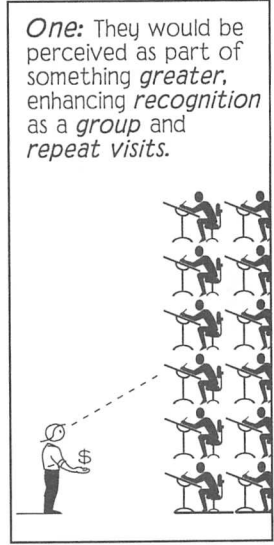
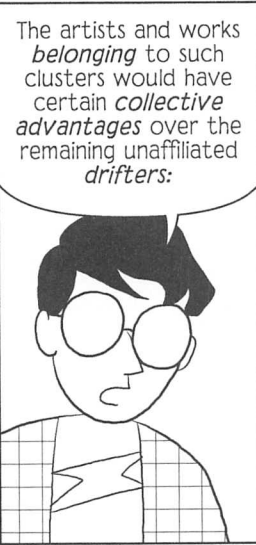
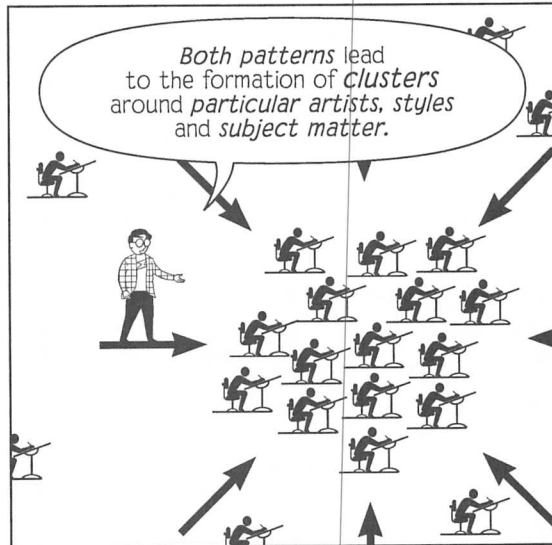
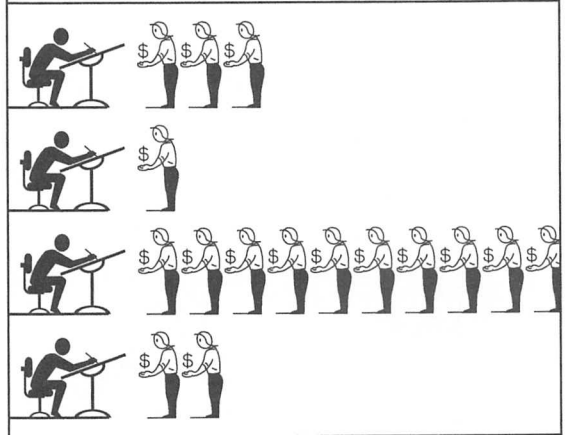


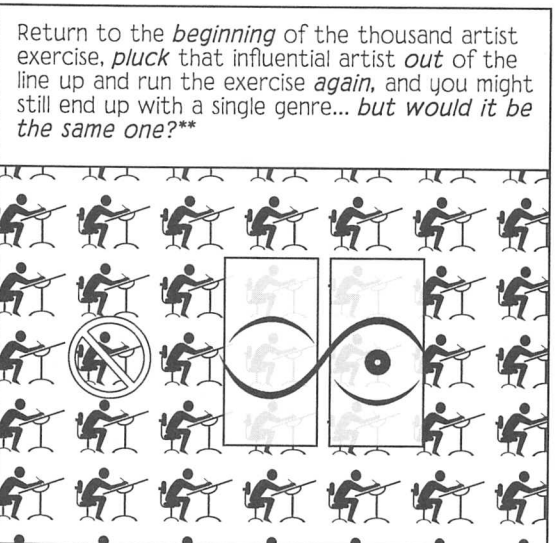
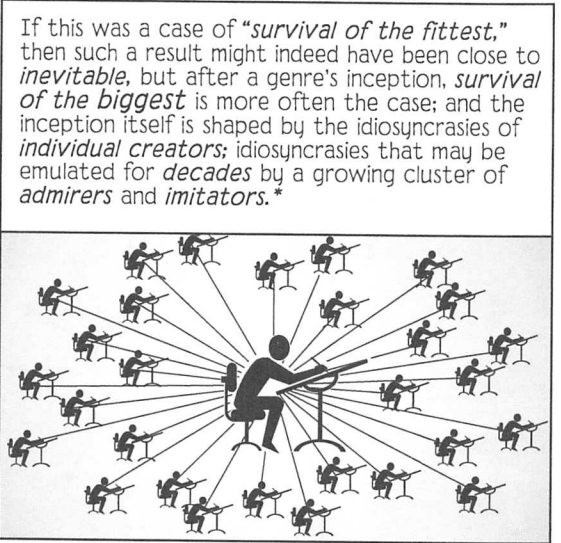
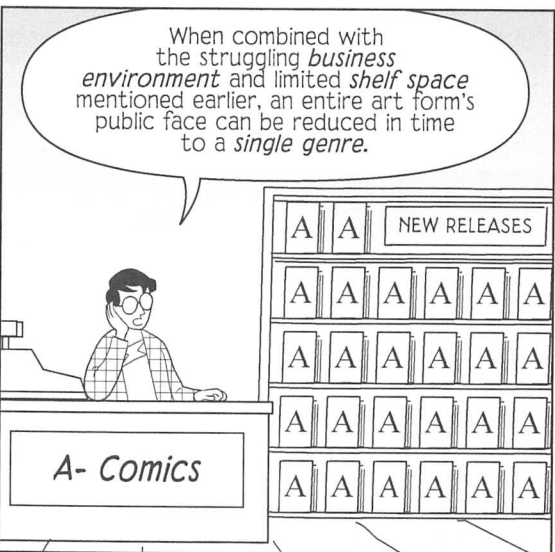
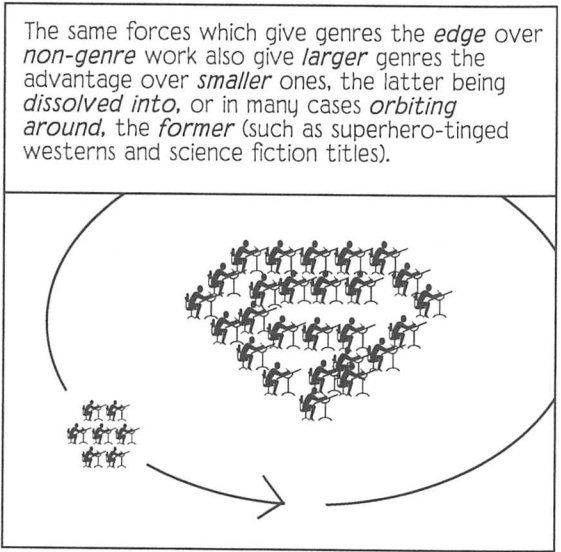
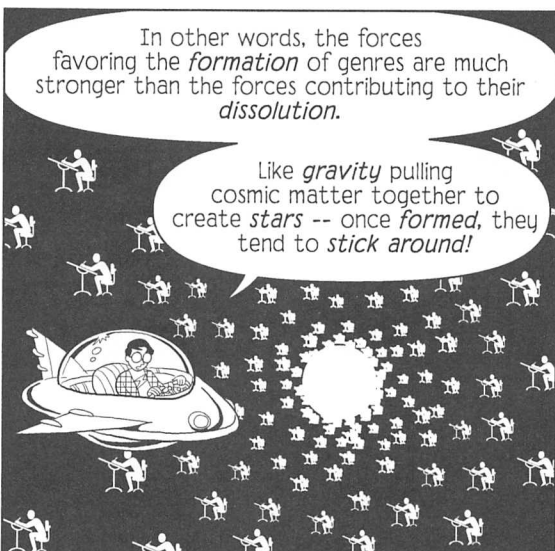
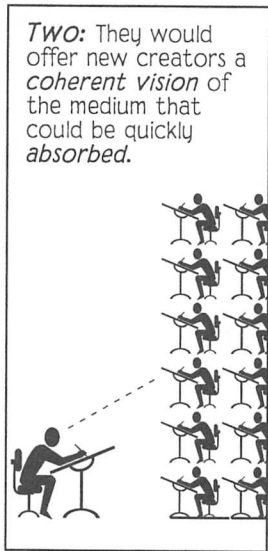


Some of those visions would undoubtedly exhibit *shared subjects, styles or sensibilities*, but assuming each artist had worked *apart* from his/her peers, such common threads would be *coincidental* (though they could have stemmed from shared *societal influences*).



Similarly, if we were to make the byproducts of the experiment available for *sale*, some *works* would be in *greater demand* than others.

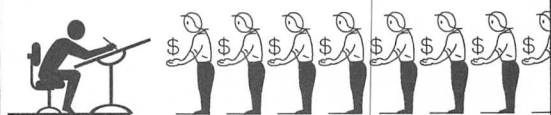




*Artists who, despite their devotion to the original creator, may be unsure of which of his/her personal quirks was the work's secret ingredient.

**Real-life example: What if Jerry Siegel had never met Joe Shuster?

The phenomenon of the *popular artist* or *style* may seem less subject to *chance* when seen as the *byproduct* of the *culture at large* --



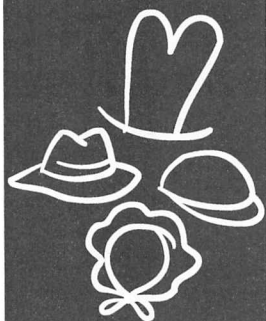
-- but the *general public* is often *in thrall* to the same idiosyncratic individuals that the *creative community* is --



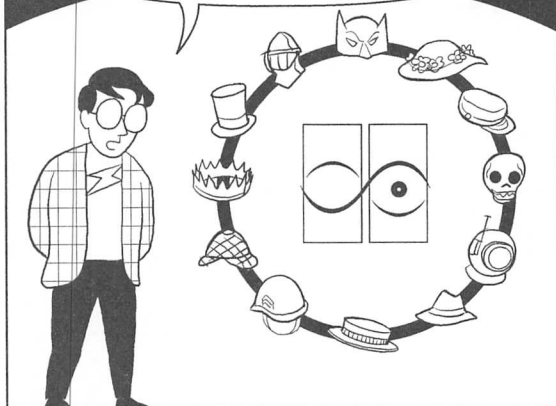
-- and at the time immediately following its *inception*, a genre's popularity may be the product of *fleeting fashion*, the *zeitgeist* of its day, or *temporary market conditions*.



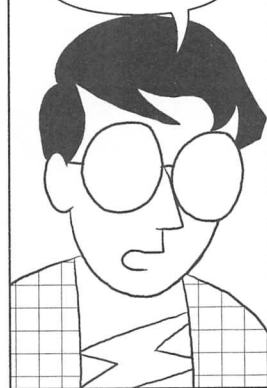
In some respects, the battle for diversity of genre is a battle *against* the very *idea* of the genre *itself*.



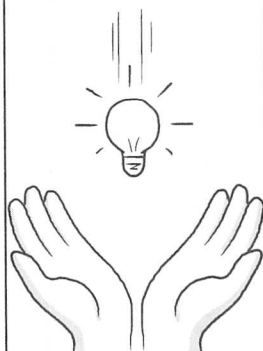
After all, a greater *number* of genres could be seen as just a greater number of rule-bound *cages* to *lock* comics into.



But for an artist intent on following *no rules* at all* --



-- the chance of finding a place on *somebody's* shelf is at least *increased* in a diverse marketplace --



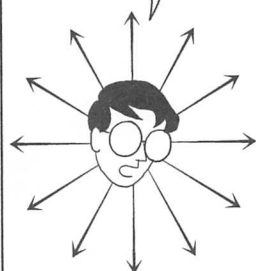
-- and for those who *pick* and *choose* their rules, a wealth of *techniques* can be gleaned from those who have been *at it* for a while.



Nowhere was this demonstrated more vividly than in the postwar *Japanese* comics market.



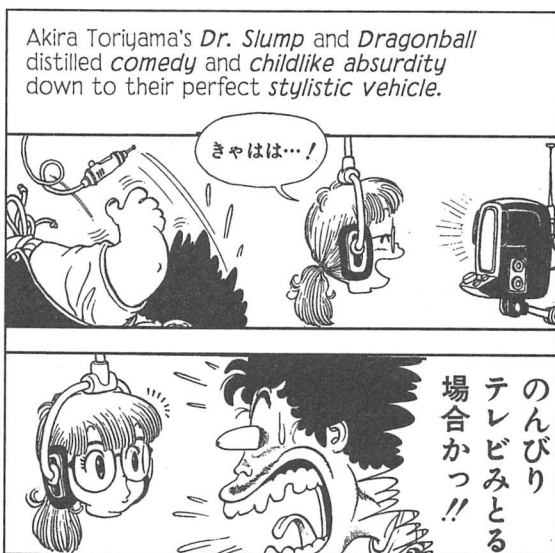
Comics genres *diversified wildly* in Japan during the *50s* and *60s* and as each genre *grew*, it grew in a *different way*.



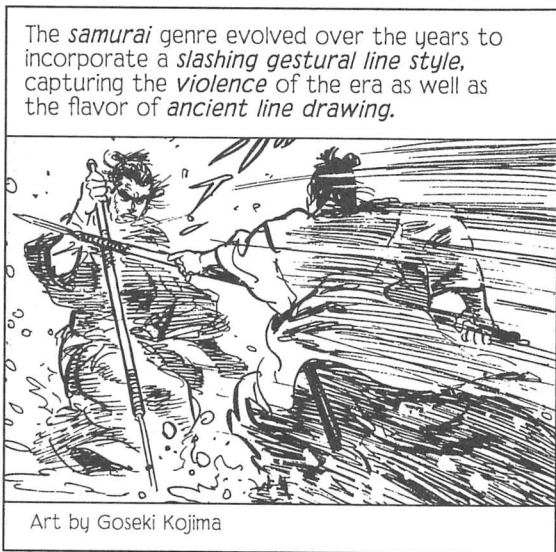
* i.e., the kind comics desperately needs more of.



Shinji Mizushima's classic *baseball* comic *Dokaben*, for example, featured a *rubbery physicality* that perfectly captured the *motion* and *dynamics* of the game.

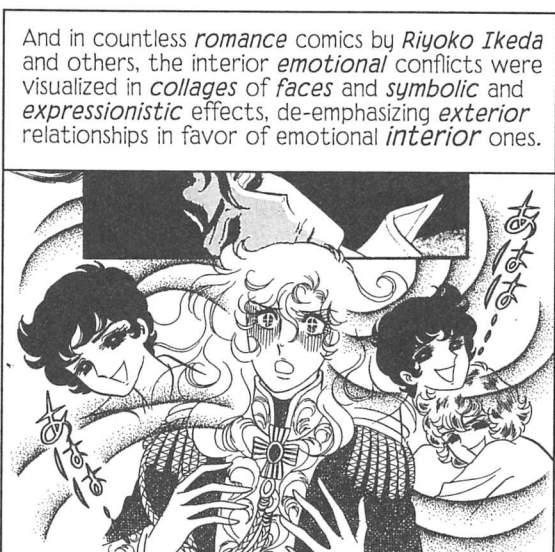


Akira Toriyama's *Dr. Slump* and *Dragonball* distilled *comedy* and *childlike absurdity* down to their perfect *stylistic vehicle*.



Art by Goseki Kojima

The *samurai* genre evolved over the years to incorporate a *slashing gestural line style*, capturing the *violence* of the era as well as the flavor of *ancient line drawing*.



And in countless *romance* comics by *Riyoko Ikeda* and others, the interior *emotional* conflicts were visualized in *collages of faces* and *symbolic* and *expressionistic* effects, de-emphasizing *exterior* relationships in favor of emotional *interior* ones.



In the aptly-titled *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*,* penciller John Buscema shows us a multipanel *conversation* --



-- then draws the same panels in the *dynamic house style* (i.e., refined Kirby) of that era's *Marvel Comics*.



*Still available in stores after all these years (it came out in '77). Many of its basic rules still are followed -- consciously or not -- in today's superhero comics.

Yet in *both* examples, the *physical* relationships are *reiterated* in nearly *every panel*!*

Like *game pieces* assembled for a *skirmish*, always wary of the other guy's *position*.

This and countless other mannerisms are so *deeply entrenched* in American comics that even "*alternative*" creators have trouble breaking out of them; inhibiting the growth of other genres.

A conscious *examination* of these tendencies can help artists *break out* of their *box*, but the *greatest progress* will come from the same sources it always has; the *individual efforts* of artists with a vision *too strong* to be *contained*.

In some respects, the fight for *gender balance* and *minority representation* may seem at *odds* with genre issues.

The first two argue for a body of work that represents the world *as it is*, yet the third seems geared toward our need to escape *from* it.

Ironically, it's often those most schooled in life's *harshest realities* who grow up least inclined to *revisit* them in *fiction*.

*Five out of six panels in the original illustration.

Some in comics' *progressive wing* tend to *sneer* at *escapist fiction*. I can come across that way *myself*.



But *all* readers want to be *transported* by fiction in the end, even if the journey is through a *mirror* of the world we already *know* --

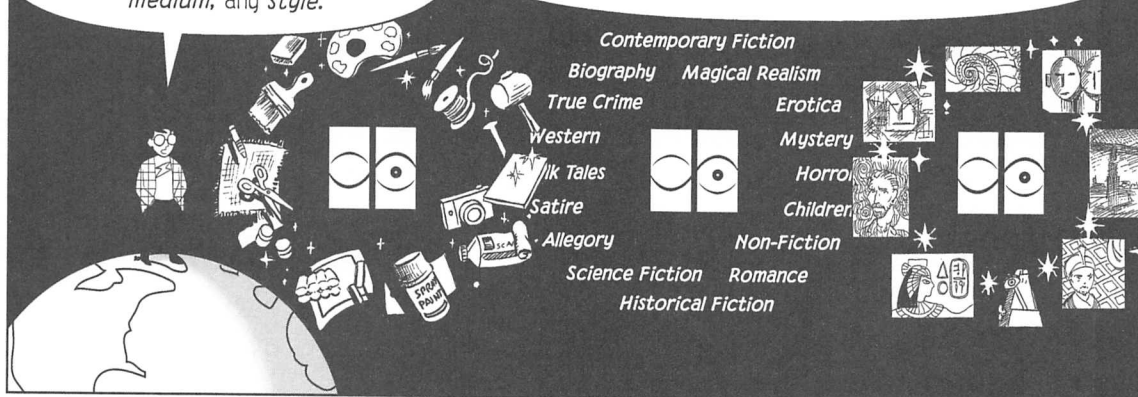


-- and as long as no one gave us a *choice* of the world we were *born into*, a little *escape* seems a *reasonable request*, and one of the *many* that comics can *fulfill*.



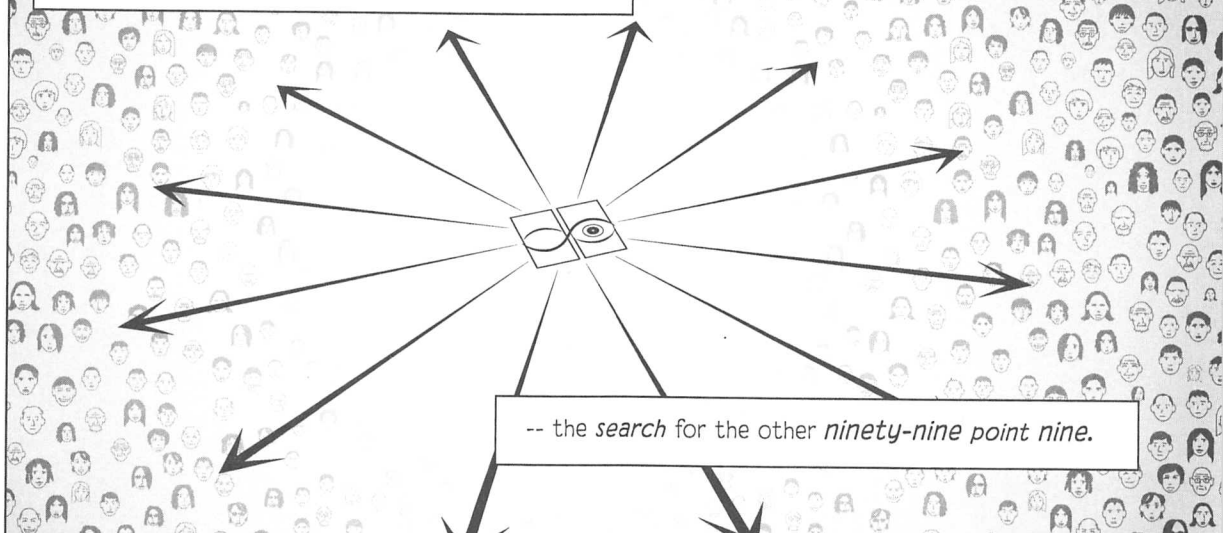
As I said in *Understanding Comics*, I believe this form can handle virtually *anything* we throw at it; any *subject*, any *physical medium*, any *style*.

The limits were rarely in comics *itself*, but in the *imaginations* of those who've worked *within* it; leaving an *art form* at *century's end* that's failed to demonstrate more than *one tenth* of its *potential* --



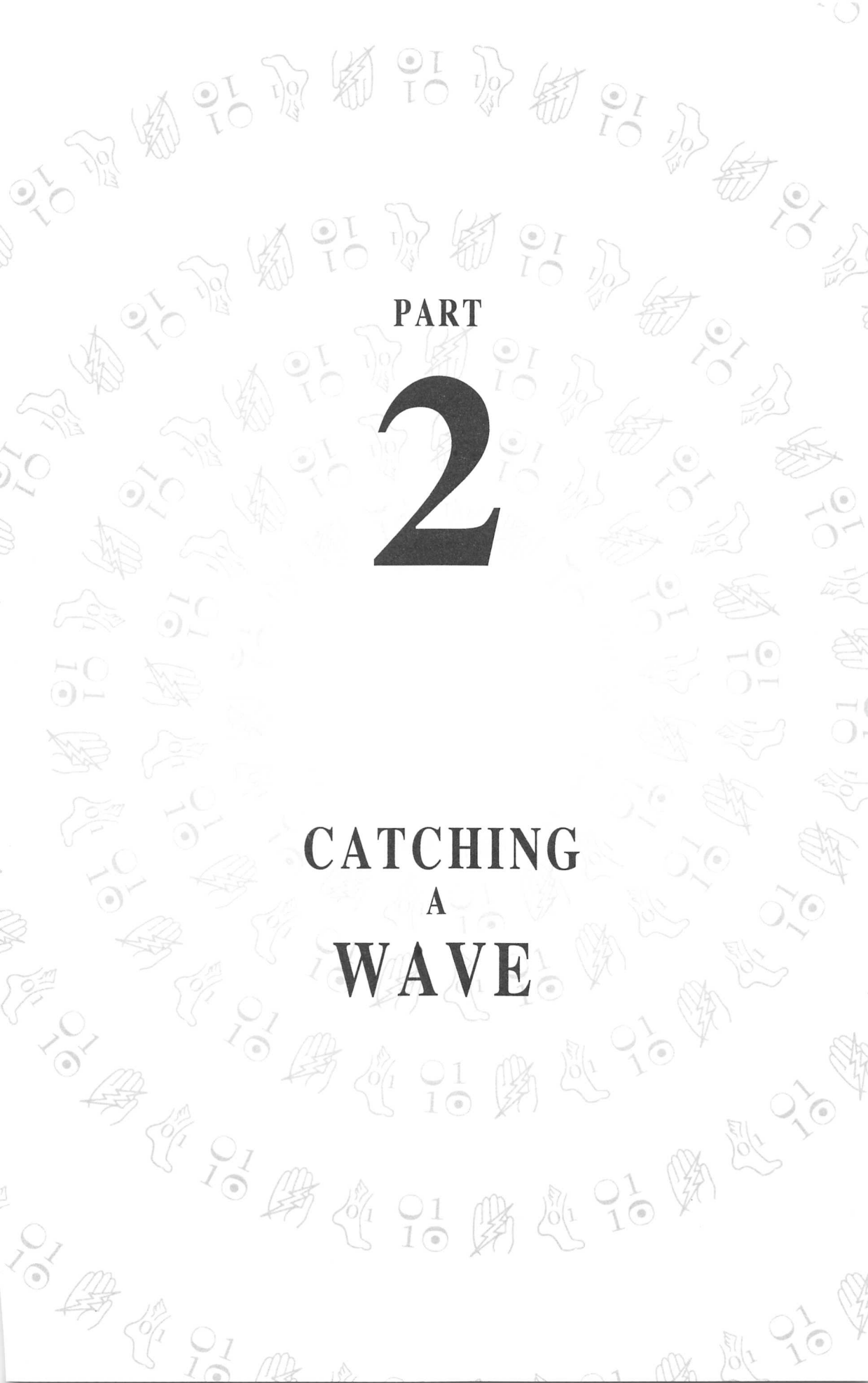
Contemporary Fiction
 Biography Magical Realism
 True Crime Erotica
 Western Mystery
 Folk Tales Horror
 Satire Children
 Allegory Non-Fiction
 Science Fiction Romance
 Historical Fiction

-- and leaving as a *challenge* for a *new* century --



-- the *search* for the other *ninety-nine point nine*.





PART

2

CATCHING
A
WAVE

THE THING ABOUT TOOLS

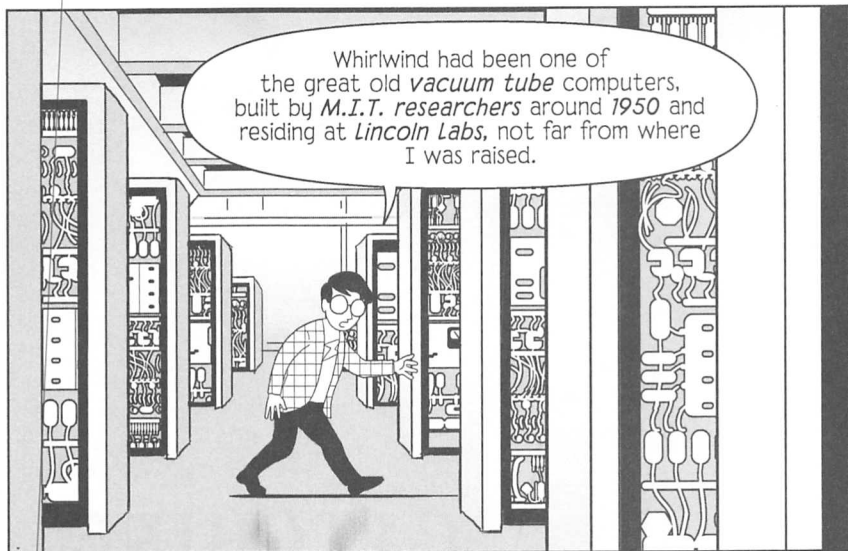
Some Thoughts on Computers

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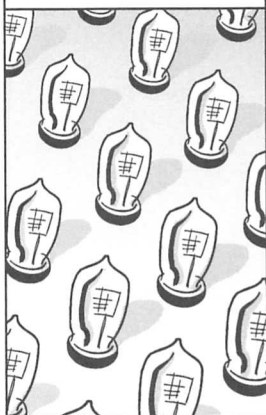
When I was in *grade school* in the *early 70s*, my *father* told me about an old computer called *Whirlwind*.



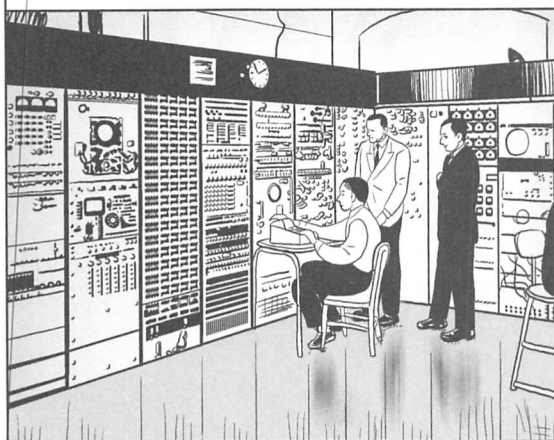
Whirlwind had been one of the great old *vacuum tube* computers, built by *M.I.T. researchers* around 1950 and residing at *Lincoln Labs*, not far from where I was raised.



He said it grew to use over *12,000 vacuum tubes* and *20,000 diodes*.



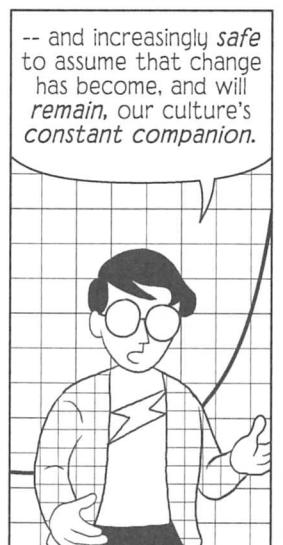
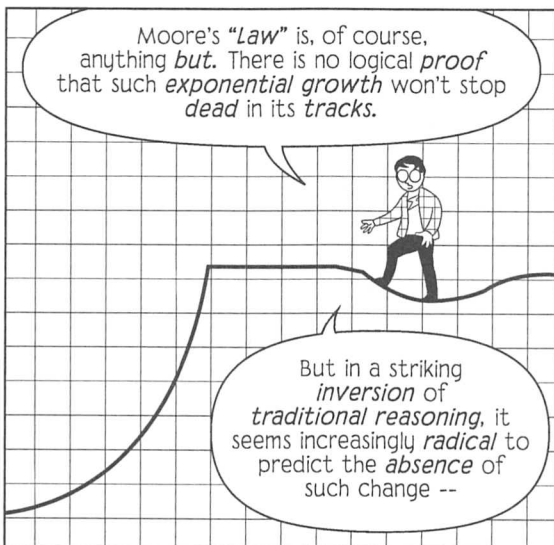
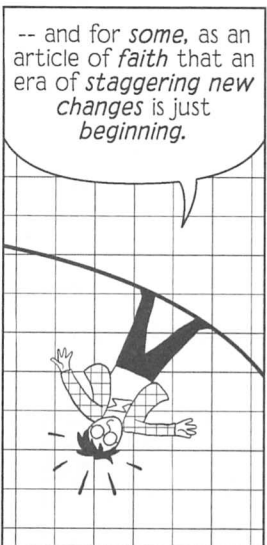
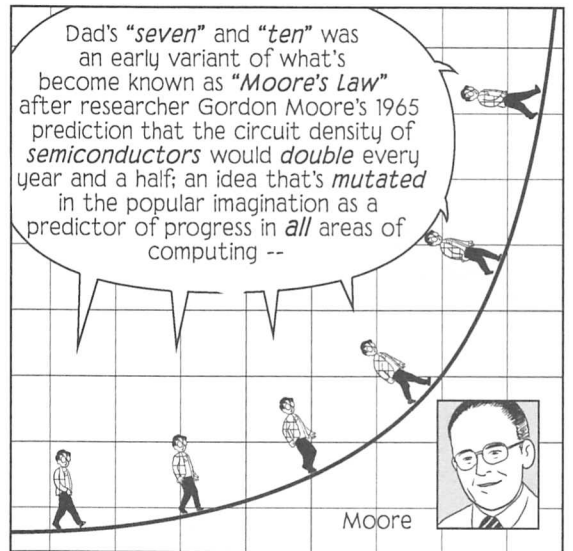
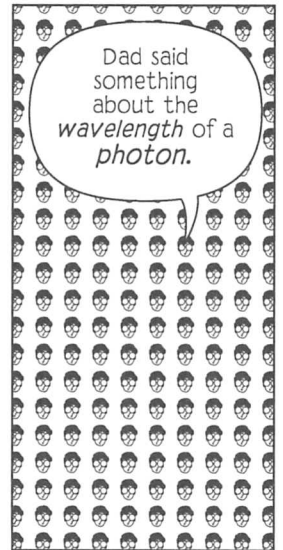
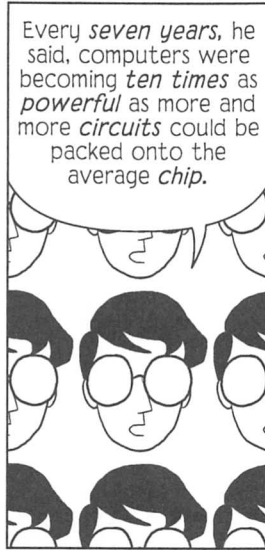
Inhabiting *3,100 square feet* on *two floors*, it was the *largest* and most *powerful* computer on the *face* of the *Earth*.



Then he said:

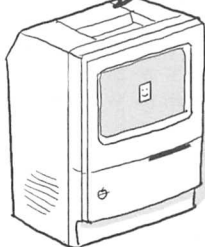
At my company *today*, we could build a computer *1,000 times more powerful* than Whirlwind --





My *first computer*,* bought in late '92, offered my first real-world *exposure* to the *steep curve* of Moore's Law --

Ding!



* Like most graphic artists at the time, I got a Mac.

-- as I watched in awe how quickly each *new generation* of *machines* *trowned* the last.



As I write this, less than *eight years later*, my first machine's bargain-basement *descendants* already sport *twelve* times the *speed*, *twenty* times the *memory* and *eighty* times the *storage*!



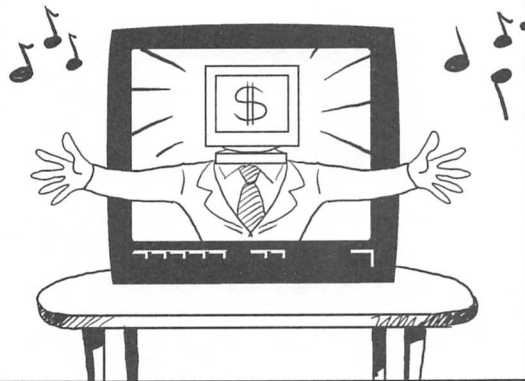
And by the time you read this, those *new* machines will already look *slow*, *weak* and *overpriced*!



As PC sales have *risen*, so has *public awareness* of the staggering *pace* of the changes, and with it a rise in *hype* and reckless *speculation*.



Computer makers and *online merchants* have *seized* on the public excitement and tried to *redirect* it to their own *products* and *services*, promising to deliver the wonders of a *brave new world* into consumers' *homes*.



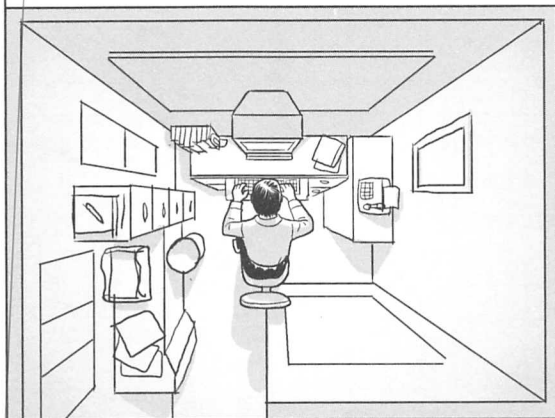
That world doesn't fit in a *cardboard box* just *yet*, though, and some *disillusionment* may be *inevitable*.

Do you have your receipt?

CUSTOMER SERVICE



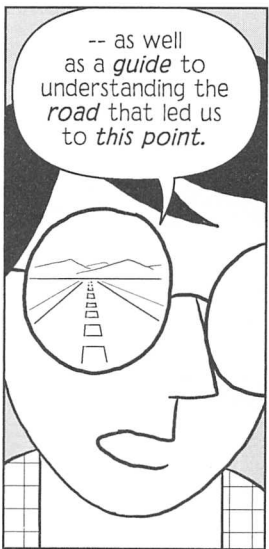
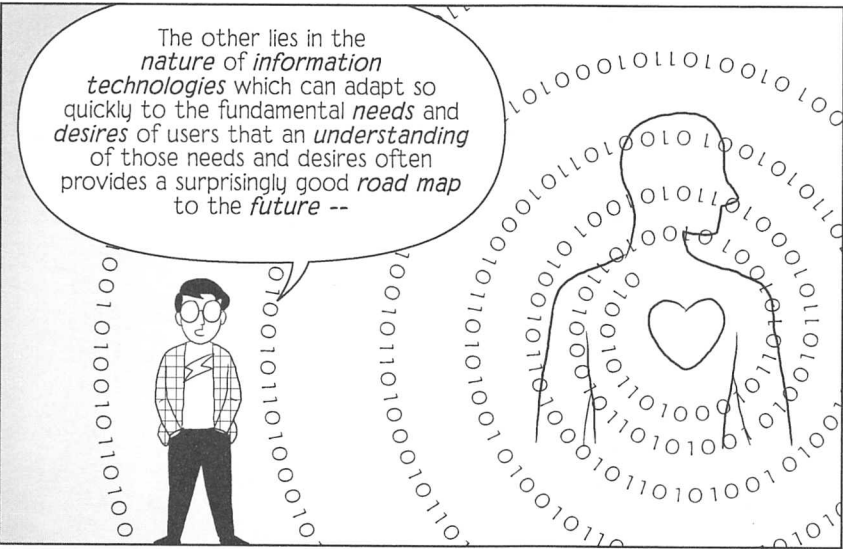
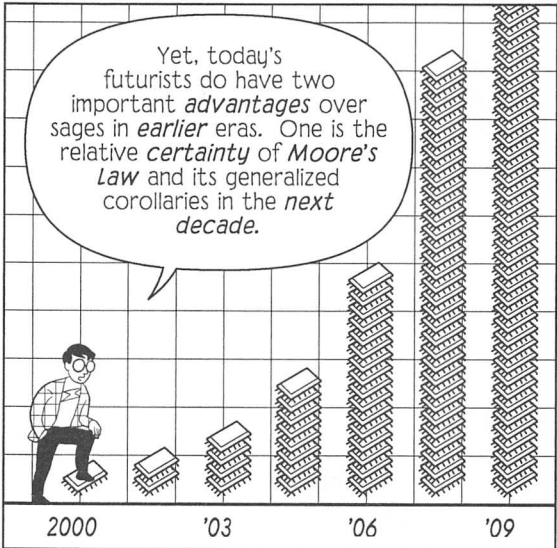
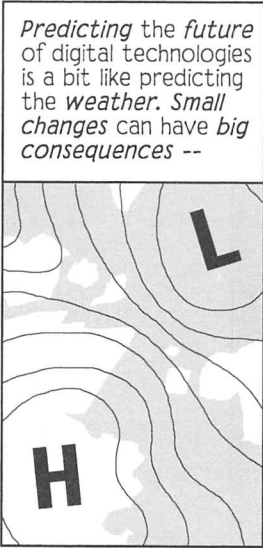
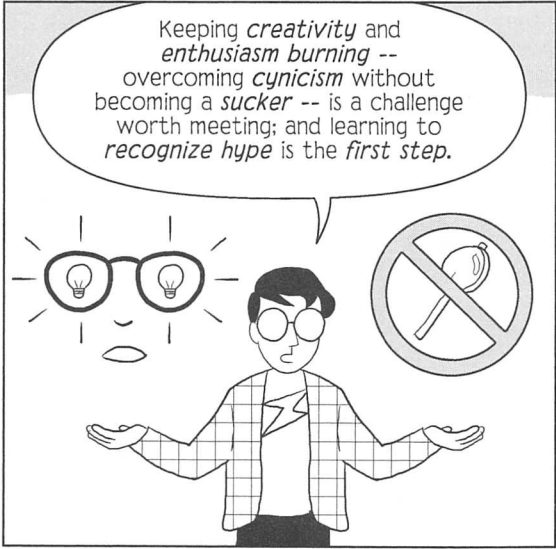
Meanwhile, many *digital professionals* work in a *less idealistic* world than the one they entered a few years ago. The "*business of the future*" for many has been demoted to "*business as usual*."

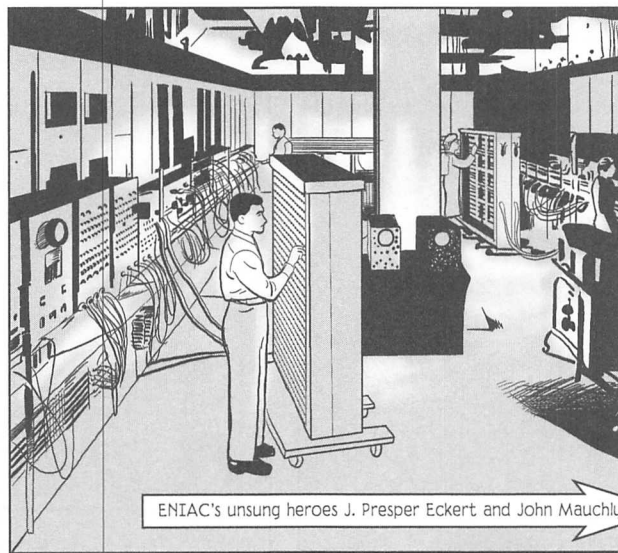
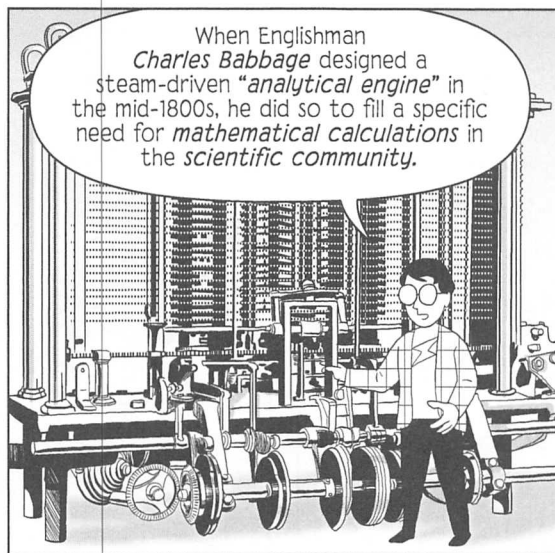


The gulf between hype and reality can produce both *suckers* and *cynics*.



*Like most graphic artists at the time, I got a Mac.

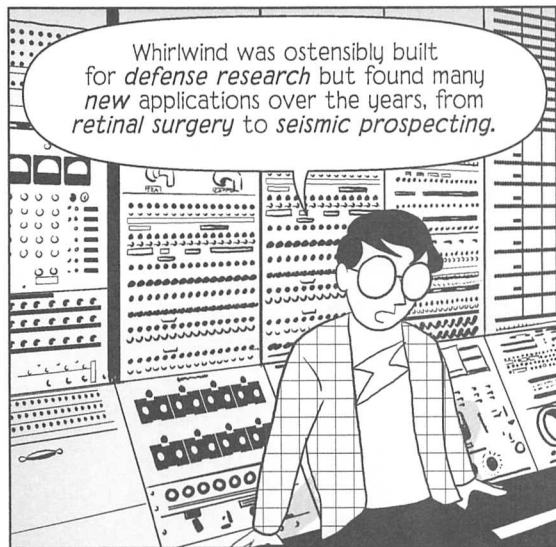
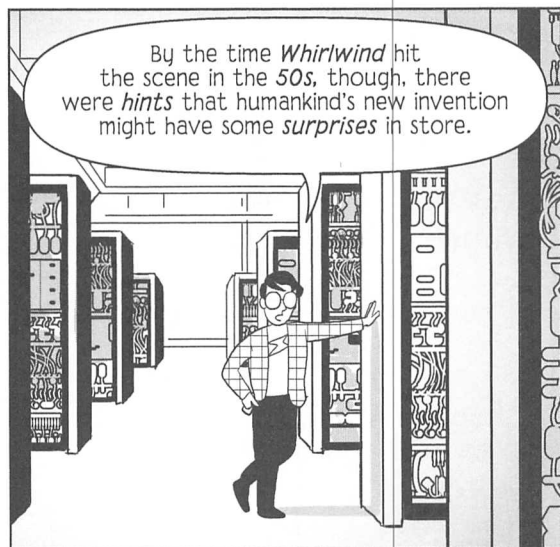


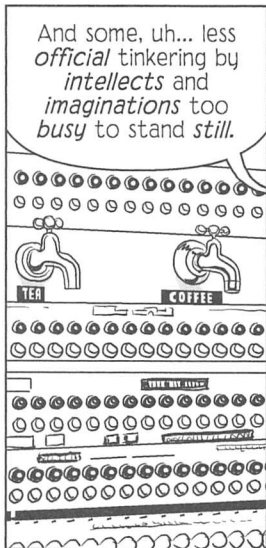


-- but the needs remained, and when the first electronic programmable computers like *ENIAC* made their debut in the 1940s it was to fill specific governmental and institutional needs for the kinds of number-crunching no human could do.

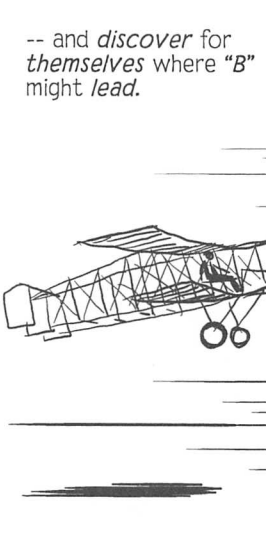
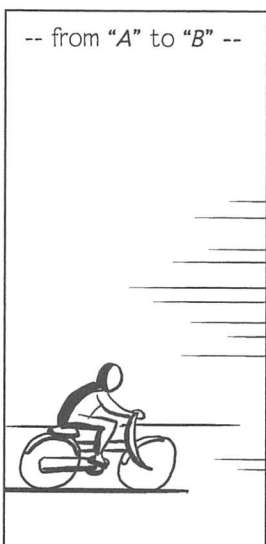
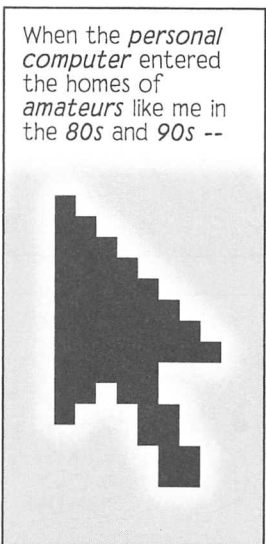
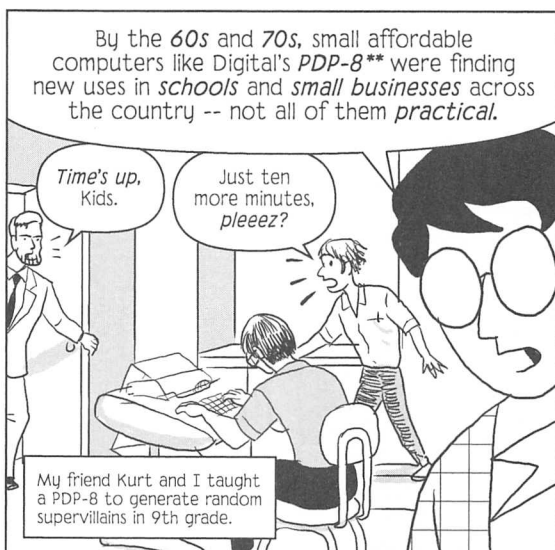
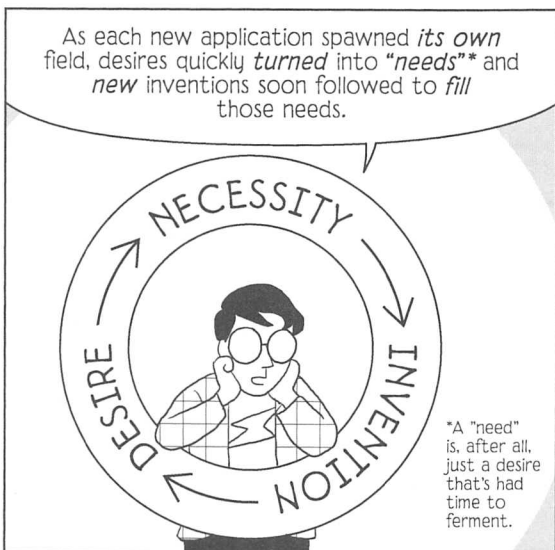
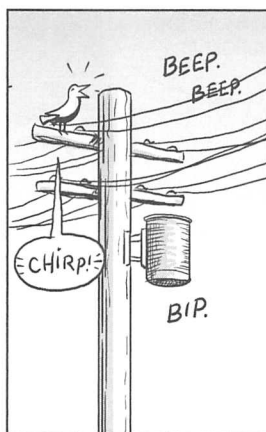
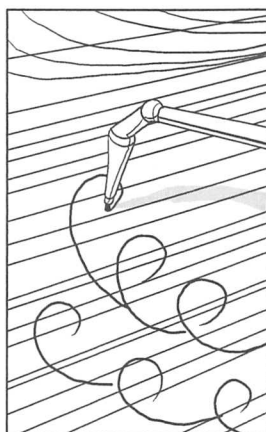


ENIAC's unsung heroes J. Presper Eckert and John Mauchly.



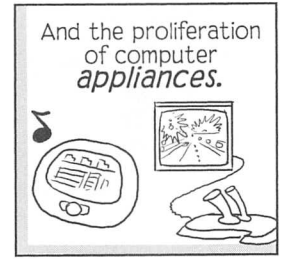
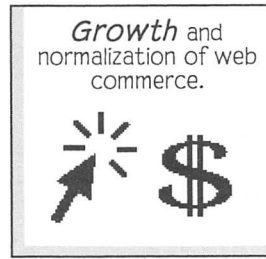
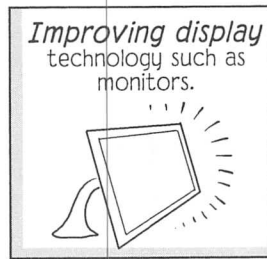
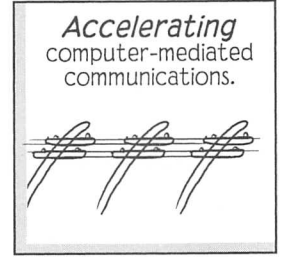
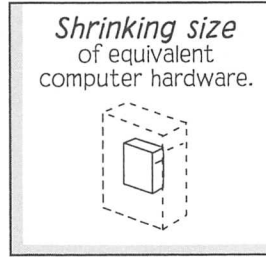
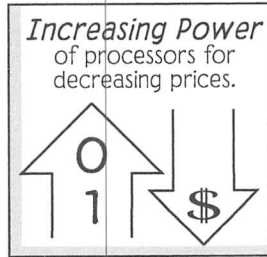
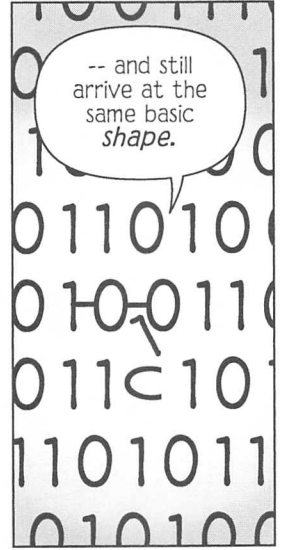
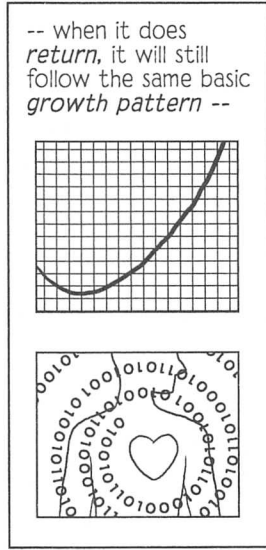
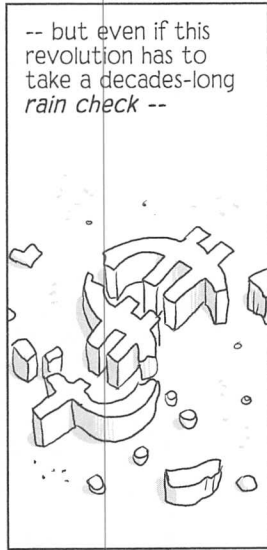


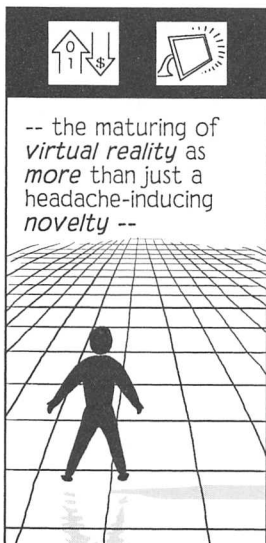
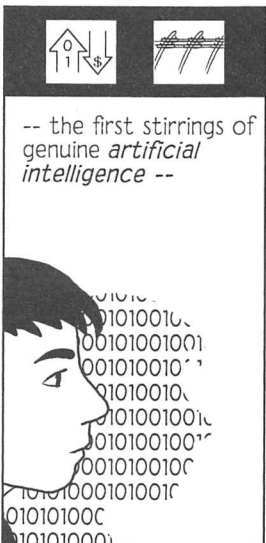
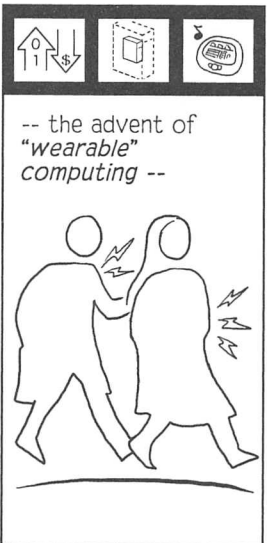
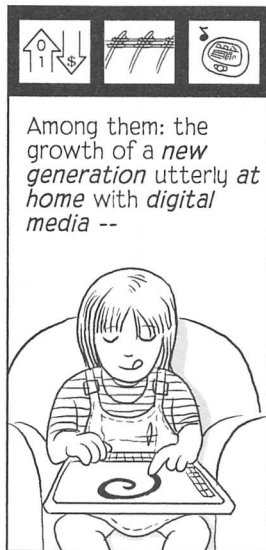
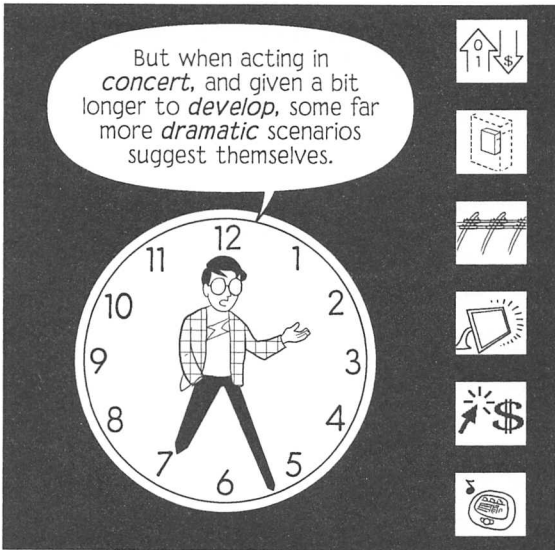
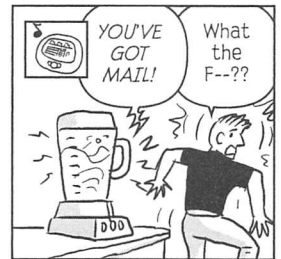
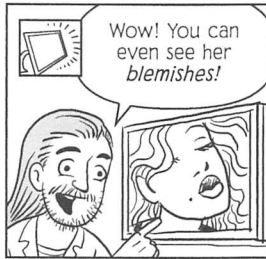
Computers had fulfilled *needs* but also created *desires* in their creators to *go further* -- desires that would ultimately give birth to such unanticipated applications as *computer graphics*, *networking* and *real-time interactivity*.

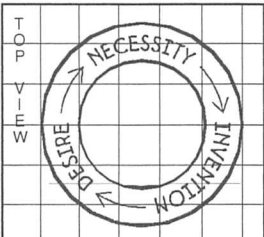


*A "need" is, after all, just a desire that's had time to ferment.

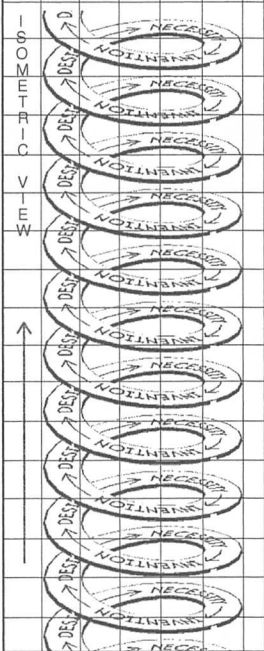
**"Affordable" from an institutional point of view, i.e., under \$20,000.







Each cycle of *need, invention and desire* takes us to a new *technological level*, in which the *traditional assumptions* of the *previous level* can be rendered *obsolete*.



It's my goal in the *rest* of this *book* to explore aspects of the *intersection* between *comics* and *digital media* which I think will *remain relevant*, even in a *distant future* where today's "supercomputers" --

-- are *perceived* as nothing more than *dust-gathering relics*.*

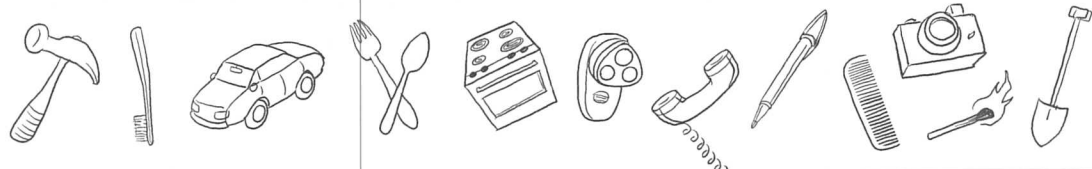
Some take *comfort* in the idea that computers are "*just another tool*," but the *history* of *human tools* hardly supports the sentiment behind the word "*just*."

Tools change worlds when the ideas behind them are *strong enough*.

The thing about tools is that *tools* --

-- are rarely about the *thing*.

The tools of everyday life, taken *individually*, may seem *tame* and *familiar*, but strip away the surface and nearly *all* of them harbor one of a few *simple, powerful ideas*:



That the *world* can be *shaped* to our *will*.

That *thoughts* can be *sent* through *time* and *distance*.

That we can *extend* our *physical abilities*.

That we can extend our *lives*.

*Five years from now, for example.



That the *work* of the *mind* can be *extended*.

That *intelligence* can be *recreated*.

That *distance* can be *erased*.

That *information* alone can make a *world*.

As I tackle these *three aspects of comics and computers*, I'll be referring to the present, but for the most part, I'll be discussing a world still *waiting* to be *born*.

And I'll try to consistently *get past* the *big fat metal boxes* --

-- that can be such a *distraction* from the *promise* --

-- of a *new technology* --

-- just as, for *years*, our *stapled, color pamphlets* --

-- have been a *distraction* from the *promise* --

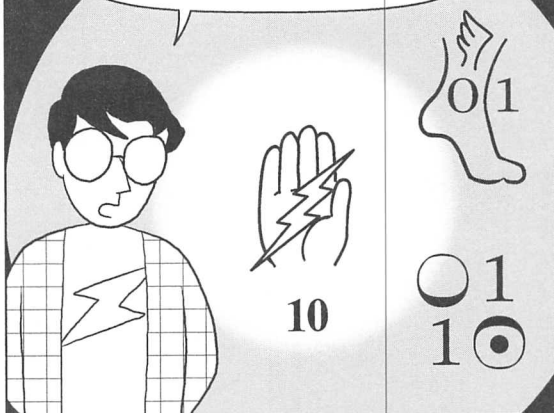
-- of an *art form*.

THROUGH THE DOOR

Digital Production



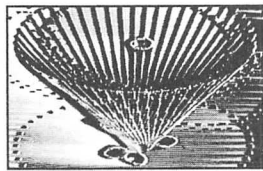
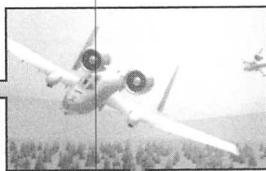
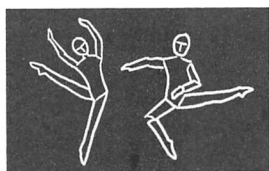
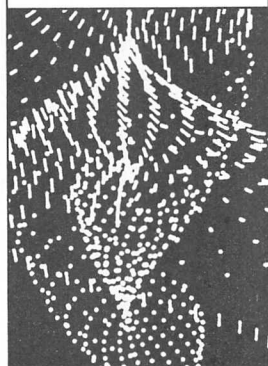
Using *computers to make art* is an idea nearly as old as *computers themselves*.



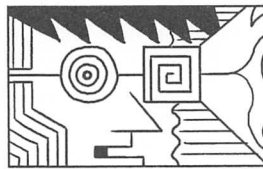
Even the old *vacuum tube giants* like Whirlwind dabbled *occasionally*.



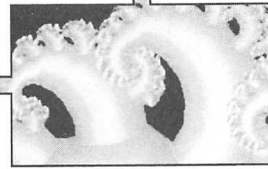
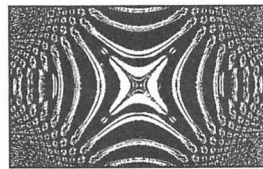
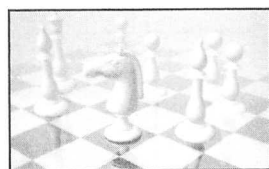
But it wasn't until the *1970s* that computers were generating *unique new images* on a *regular basis*.



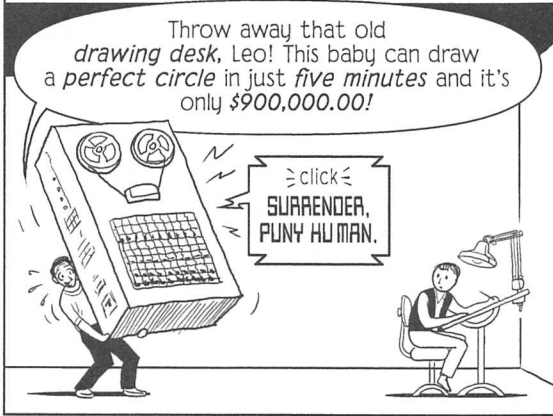
Some early computer artists used the new tools to *imitate, refer to and process* the appearance of the *physical world*.



Others revealed in the kinds of imagery that *only computers* could *produce*.



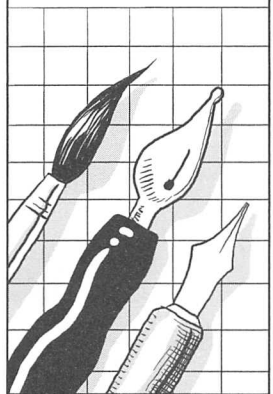
Proponents of *both* approaches saw computers as a boon to artists in *all* fields. but few *individual artists* had much incentive to *switch tools* during computing's *early years*.



And, though far *cheaper*, the *personal computers* of the 70s and *early 80s* were still primarily *number-crunchers*. *not easels*.



The *technology* of *making pictures* was already a *subtle* and *sophisticated* one, long *before computers*.



Most artists showed *little interest* in making art by *entering commands* into a *machine* when they could stay rooted in a far more *intuitive* world where "*what you see is what you get*."



THE FACE OF COMPUTING IN THOSE DAYS -- THE "INTERFACE" BETWEEN MACHINE AND USER -- WAS A STARK ARRAY OF WRITTEN COMMANDS, OFTEN IN AN ARCAINE LANGUAGE REQUIRING SPECIA --

> WARNING: ERROR LINE 47.

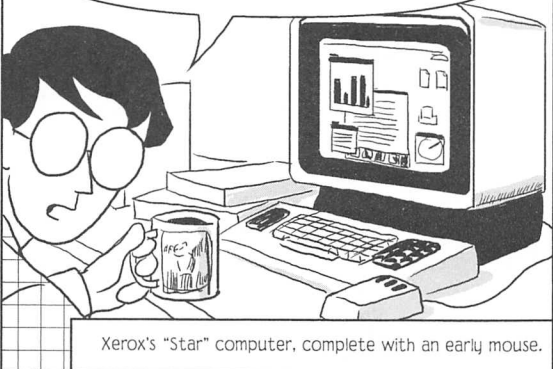
-- LIZED KNOWLEDGE TO ACCOMPLISH EVEN THE SIMPLEST OF TAS --

> ILLEGAL COMMAND: 132452 SYS/D4038
> SYS STAT/MEM CONF837-97 A:&)%

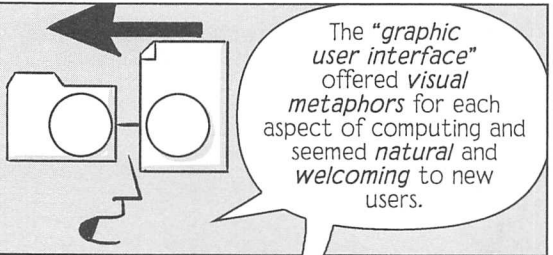
-- KS. (OH, NEVER MIND...)

> ABORT?■

But as early as 1973, engineers at Xerox's *Palo Alto Research Center** had been investigating a way to *represent* the landscape of computing *graphically* in hopes of dramatically increasing *usability*.



Xerox's "Star" computer, complete with an early mouse.



The "graphic user interface" offered *visual metaphors* for each aspect of computing and seemed *natural* and *welcoming* to new users.

Xerox was unable to successfully *market* their innovation, but *others* soon *did*** with some *spectacular results*.



The Apple Macintosh, 1984

Microsoft Windows, 1985



*Known as "Xerox PARC"

**Apple execs (including Steve Jobs) visited Xerox PARC shortly before creating the style of interface now found in Macs. Microsoft soon followed suit with Windows.

Unfortunately, in the 80s, the G.U.I.'s impressive toolbox was hampered by a lack of *speed* and *power*.



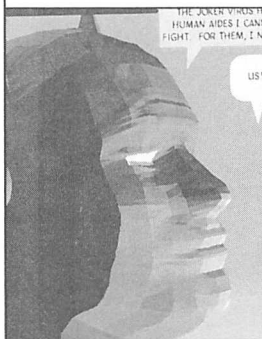
The adage that "*a picture is worth a thousand words*" proved an *understatement* when a single *print-quality image* could be composed of up to *100,000,000 pixels*.*



Thus, the first *digitally-produced* comics** in the mid-80's were necessarily *raw* and required *enormous* investments of *time* and *expense*.



Later, more *elaborate* digital comics art often allied itself with *safe*, *familiar* genres.



Art from *Batman: Digital Justice* by Pepe Moreno

As the technology has *matured*, a few have used computers in the service of a distinctly *natural* media sensibility.



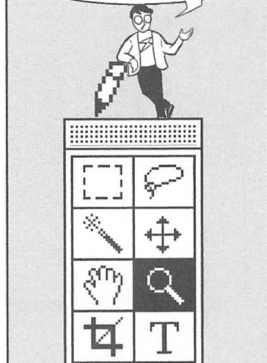
Art from *Mr. Punch* by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean.

And a few, *very* few, have put the most *exotic* aspects of computer generated imagery *front* and *center* in hopes of presenting something unmistakably *new*.

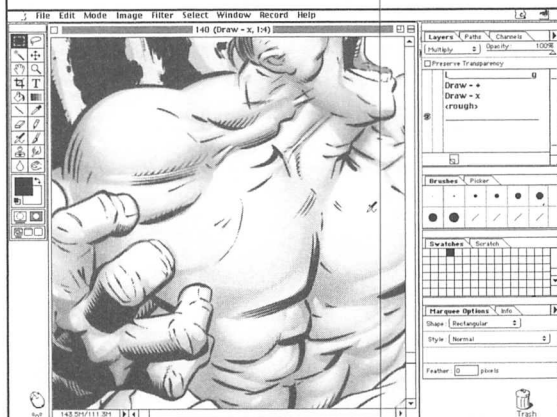


Art from *Blue Loco* by Mark Landman

Meanwhile, *behind the scenes*, computers are becoming ubiquitous in the *finishing* of comic book art for publication.



As of this writing, the *lettering* and *coloring* of pen-and-ink *mainstream* titles is rapidly being commandeered by *digital* systems, with surprisingly *understated* results in many cases.



Many in the profession use the computer as merely a *tool* to accomplish more *efficiently* tasks that were already being done in the years when *color separation* was up to a team of *old ladies* in *Bridgeport* with *Exacto Knives*.



*Pixels: Short for picture elements, the tiny dots that computers process to create the illusion of continuous tones.

**Pictured: *Shatter* by Peter Gillis and Mike Saenz, produced on a Mac in 1985 when they were just those tiny little things!.

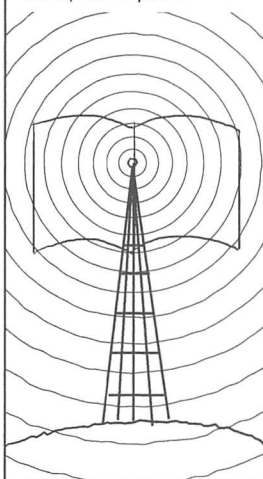
Such *conservatism* is a small example of the *broad tendency* we all have to interpret *new media* through the *filter* of the *old*.*



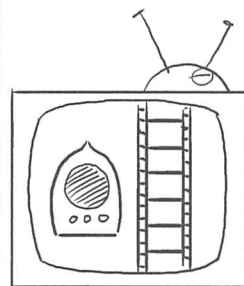
Early *written language* was filled with artifacts of the *oral tradition* --



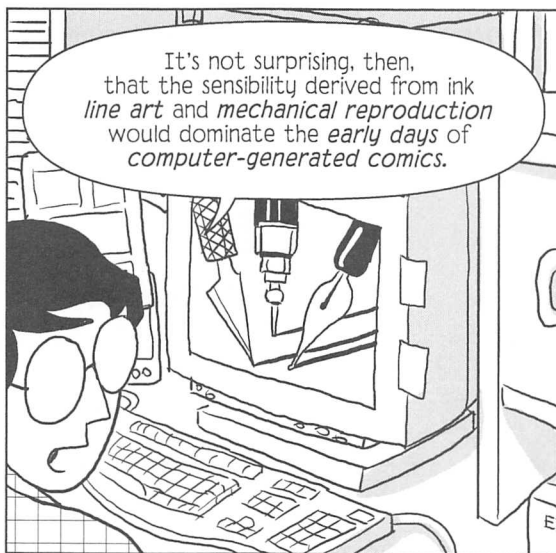
-- early *radio* was steeped in *print* --



-- early television was bred of radio and the movies.



It's not surprising, then, that the sensibility derived from *ink line art* and *mechanical reproduction* would dominate the *early days* of *computer-generated comics*.



Naturally, a sensibility of ink drawing will always be relevant to works *reproduced* in ink --



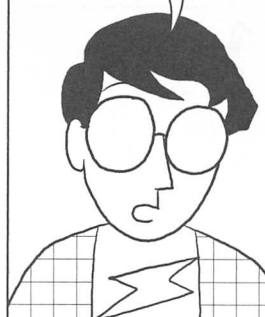
-- and even art destined for the *screen* can benefit from the study of *old masters* --



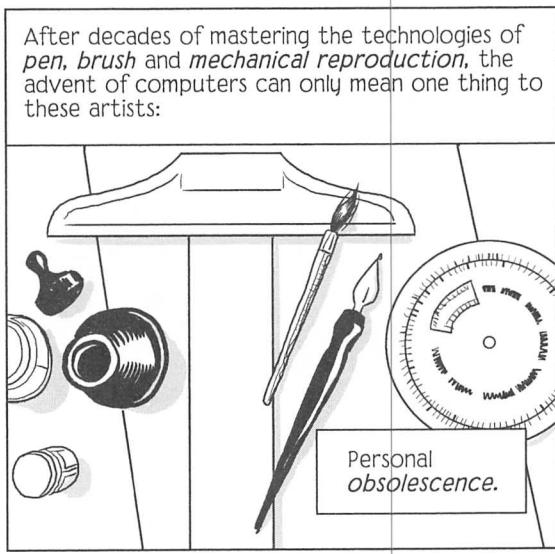
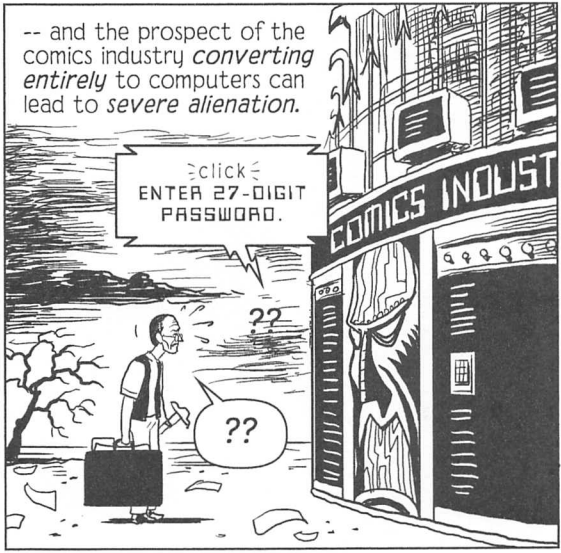
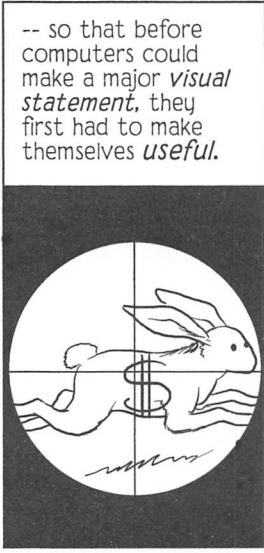
-- but to choose computers as one's *primary* art-making tool is to choose an almost *superhuman* palette of *options* --



-- and to devote it to merely *imitating* their predecessors is a bit like hunting *rabbits* with a *battleship*.

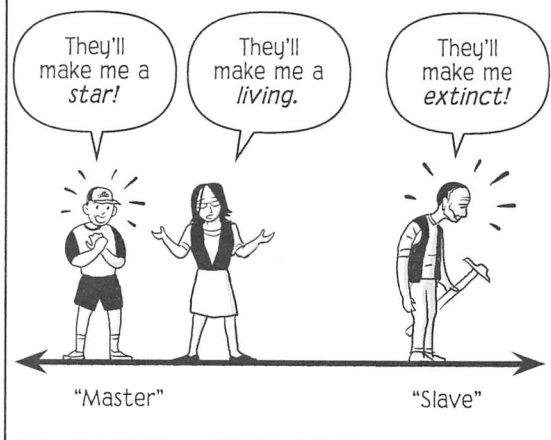


*Marshall McLuhan was a frequent proponent of this idea.



*Though every generation has its share of artists who avoid computers like the plague.

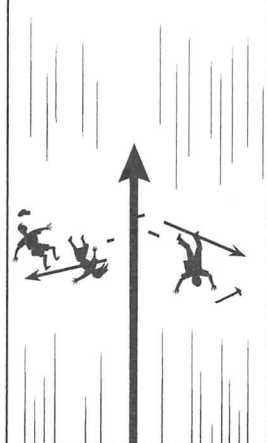
Groups one and two see themselves as *masters* (or *potential* masters) of the new tools, those in group three feel like *slaves* -- or *worse*.



Despite their differences, though, *all three* views cast computers as either helping or hindering the *goals* of the artists without significantly changing the *nature* of those goals --



-- and *all three* will feel the ground *shift* beneath their *feet* --



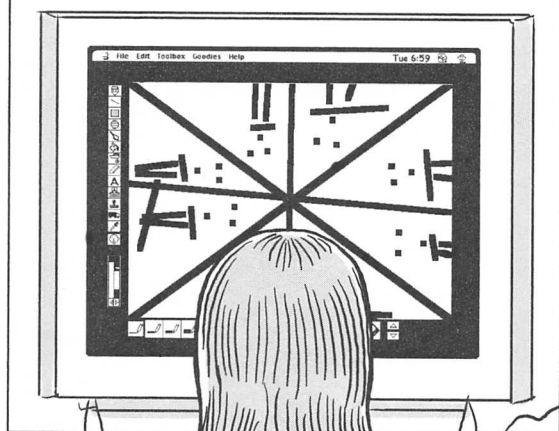
-- when the *next* generation gets in the game.



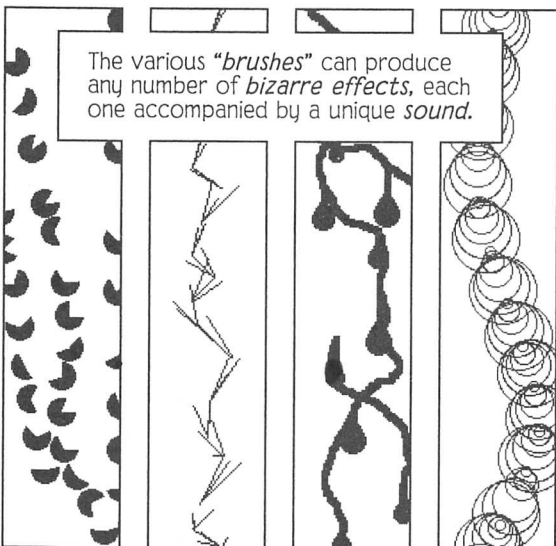
It's my guess that those who will do the most to *reinvent* the *look* of comics, *whatever* their *age*, will do so with an *attitude* much like my 4- and 6-year-old *daughters*.



One of my kids' favorite art programs is *Kid Pix*,* a versatile application featuring a wide *variety* of nifty *tools*.

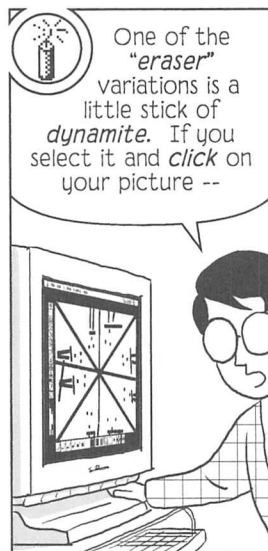
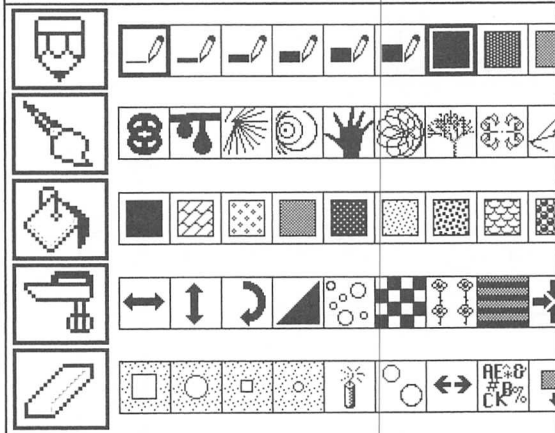


The various "*brushes*" can produce any number of *bizarre effects*, each one accompanied by a unique *sound*.



*Kid Pix has been around for years and is considered something of a classic. Even I like playing with it.

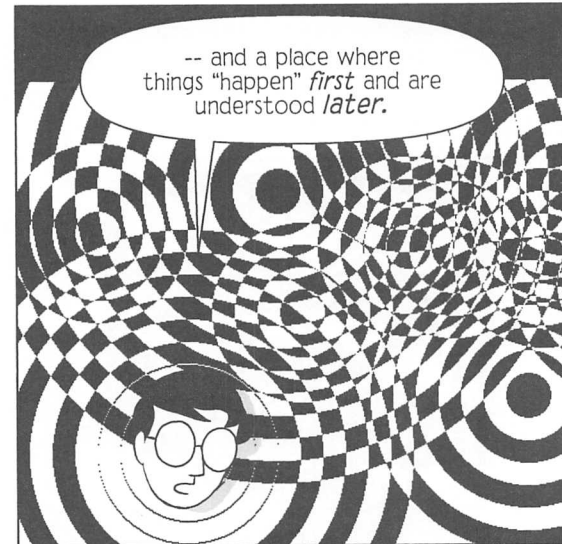
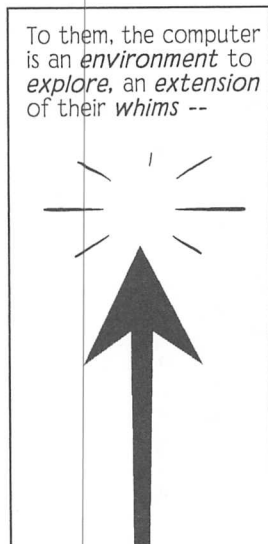
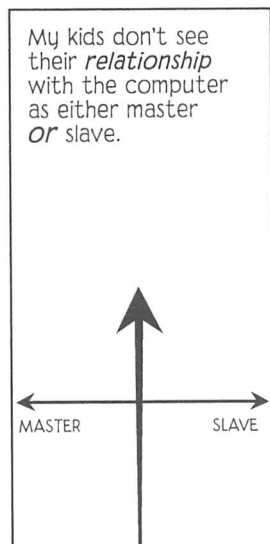
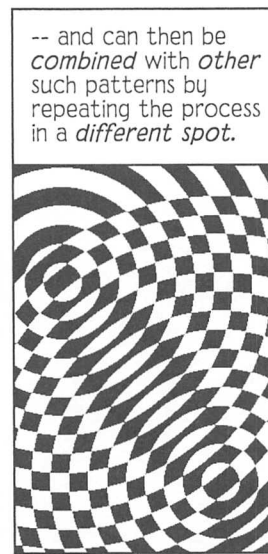
Each item on the *tools palette* has a vast *sub-palette* of *variations*, and even our *youngest* has *explored* them thoroughly.

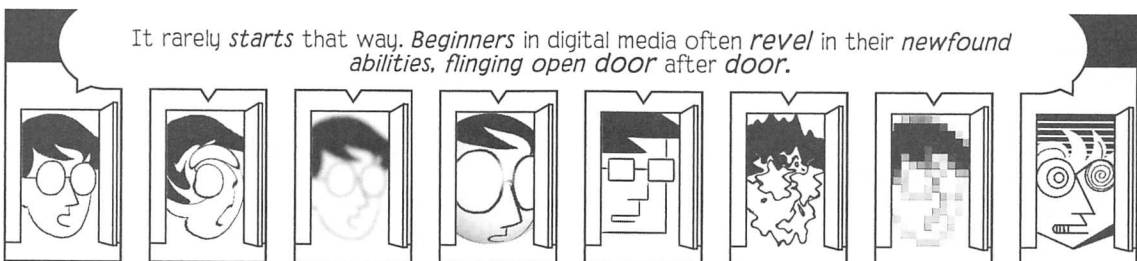
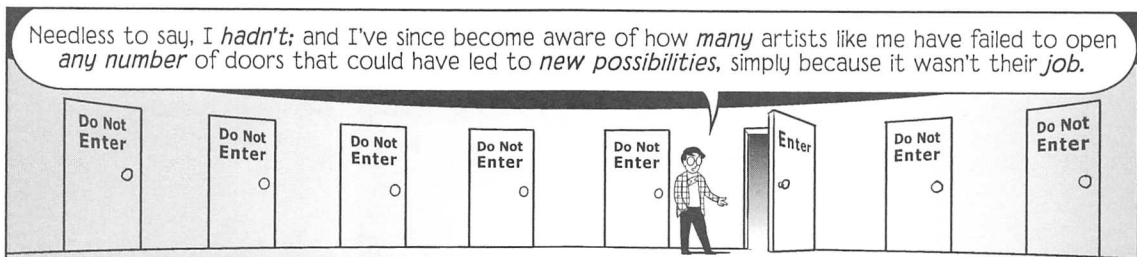
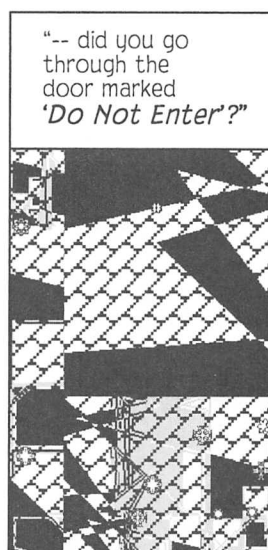
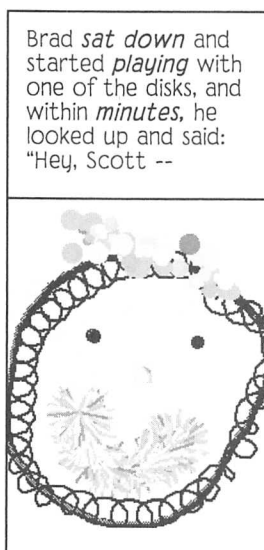
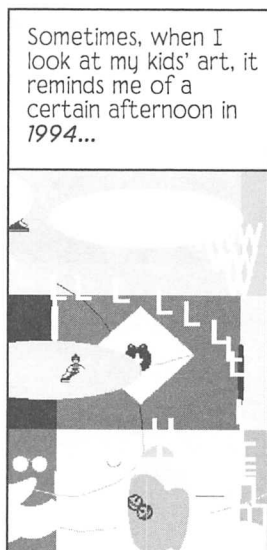
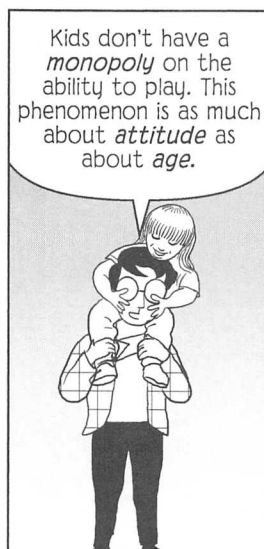


-- there'll be a *loud boom*, some spreading *concentric circles* --



-- and the picture will *disappear*.



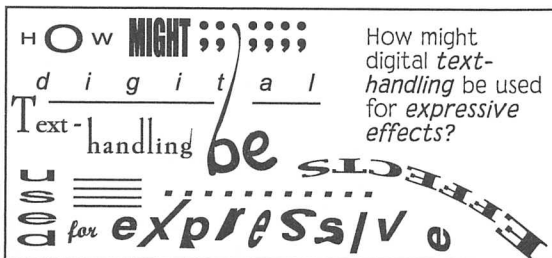




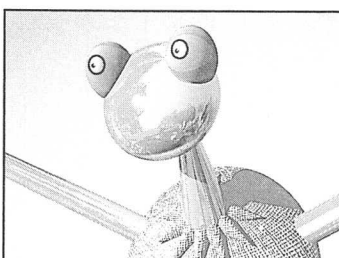
What are the *outer limits of sequential abstraction and readability?*



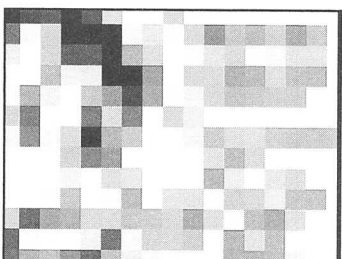
How could *motion* be represented through *streaks, noise and motion blurs*?



How might digital *text-handling* be used for *expressive effects*?



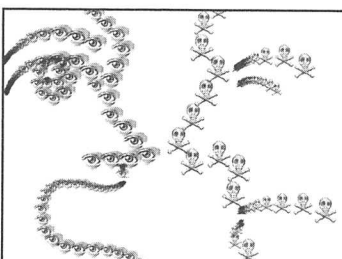
How does *cartoon stylization* operate in a *3-D environment*?



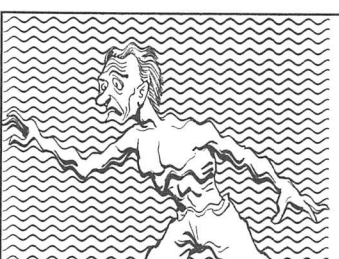
How would readers decode a mosaic of oversized "*pixels*"?



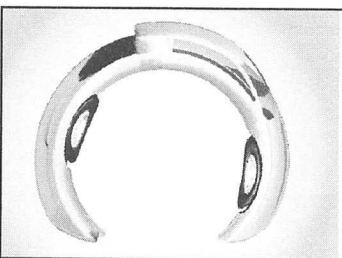
What are the narrative effects of the perfectly *symmetrical* images that computers can produce?



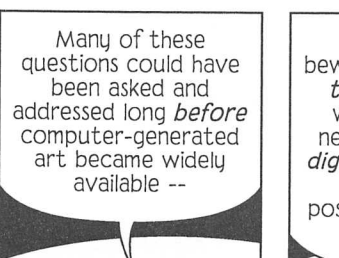
How might artists use the multilayered effects of "*image hoses*" and custom *brush* effects?



How can *ripple and wave* distortions raise *anxiety* levels in an image?

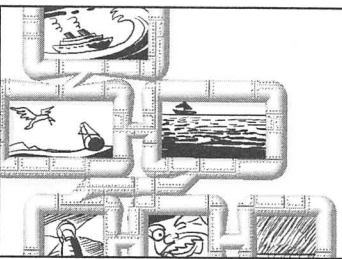


How can programs that render *realistic* imagery contribute to the *surrealistic*?

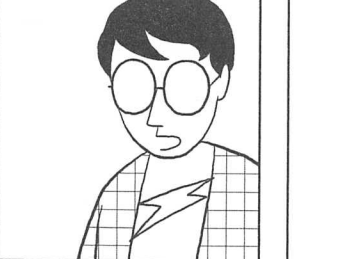


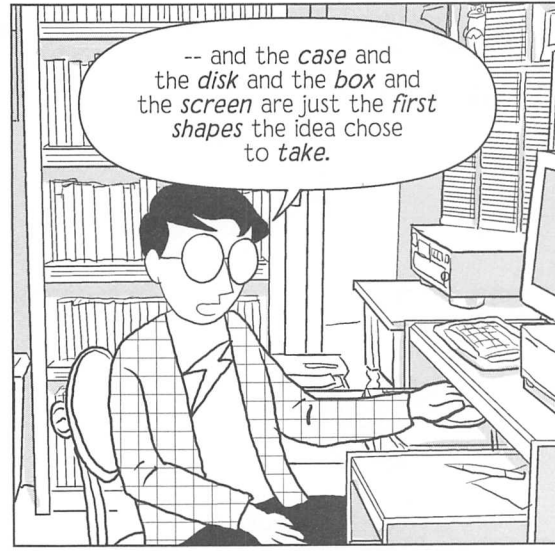
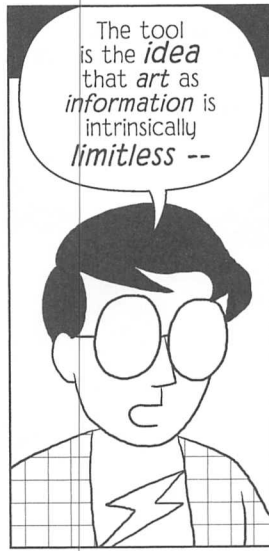
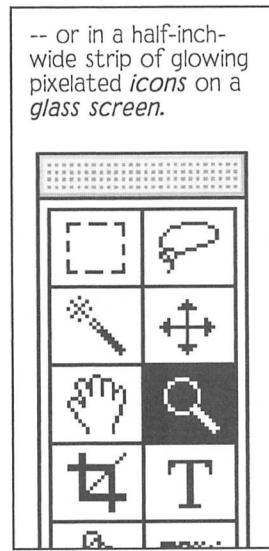
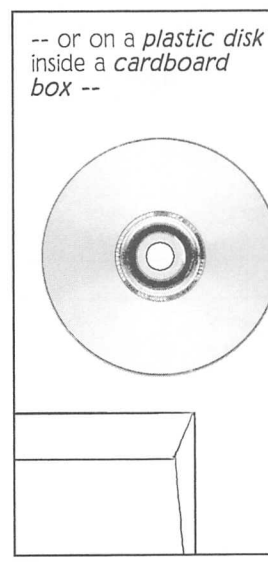
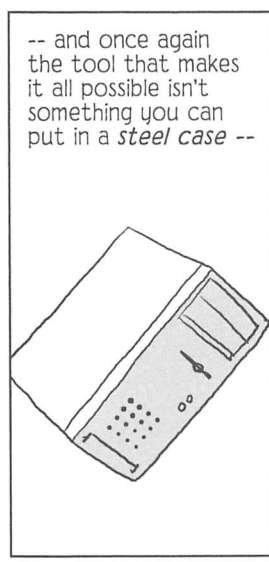
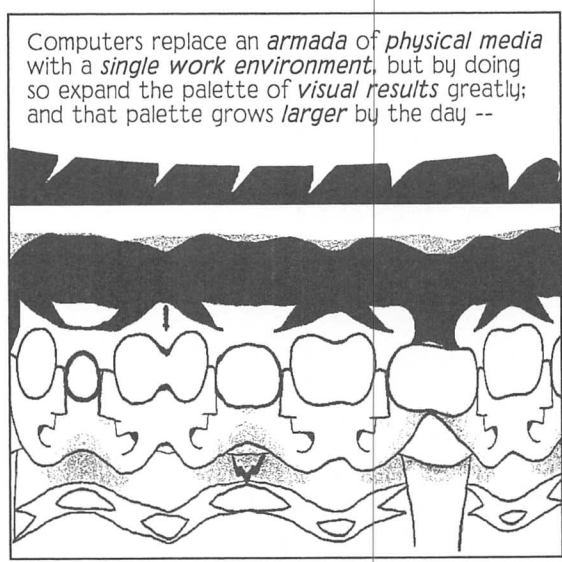
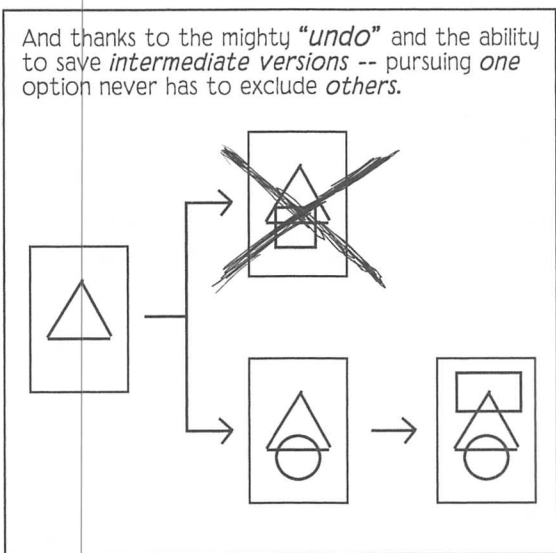
Many of these questions could have been asked and addressed long *before* computer-generated art became widely available --

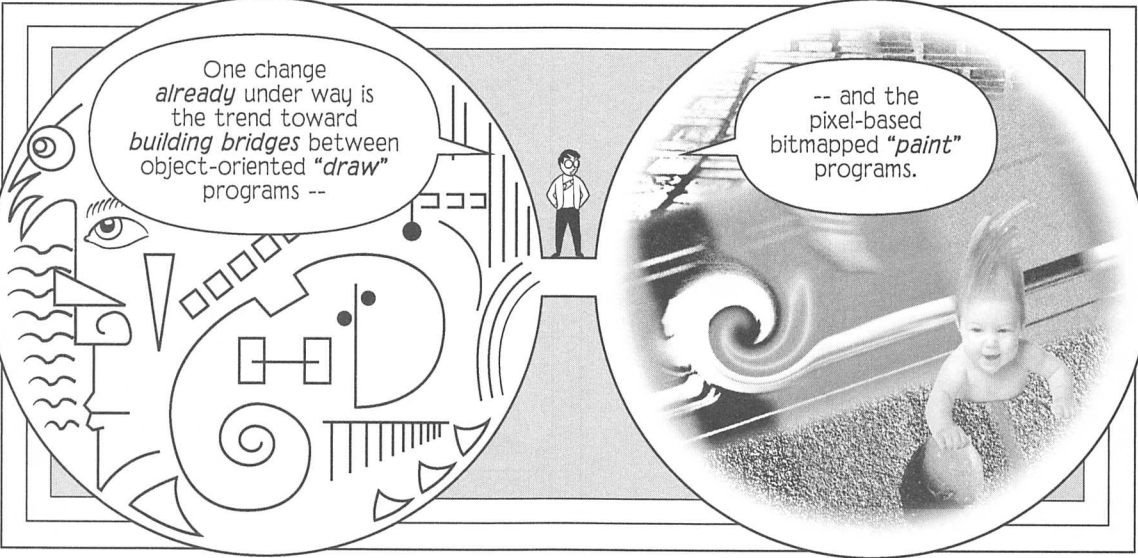
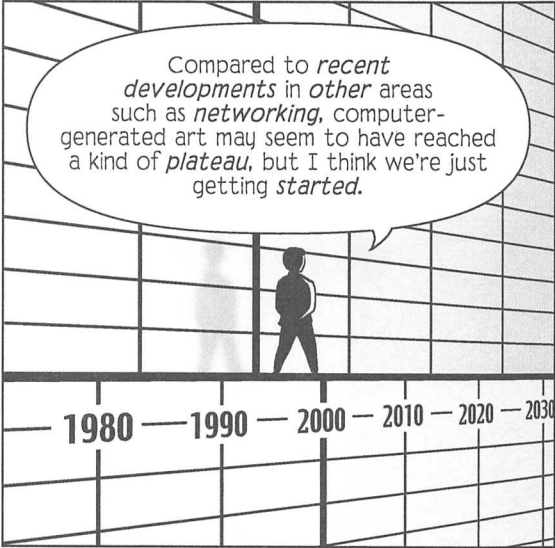
-- but while a bewildering *variety* of *traditional tools* would have been necessary to do so, *digital* tools can now put all of these possibilities in a *single location*:



How would it affect our sense of time if the panels *themselves* took on a *physical presence*?

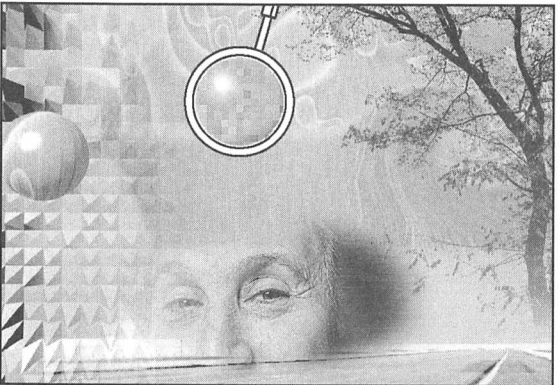
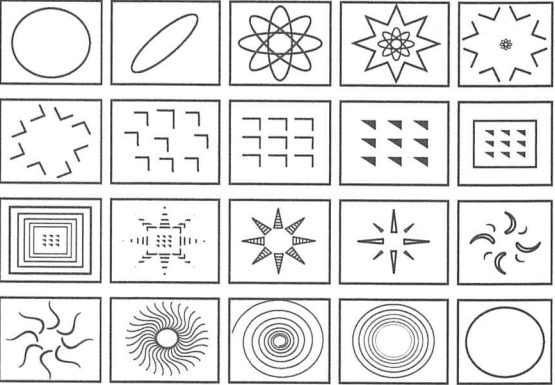


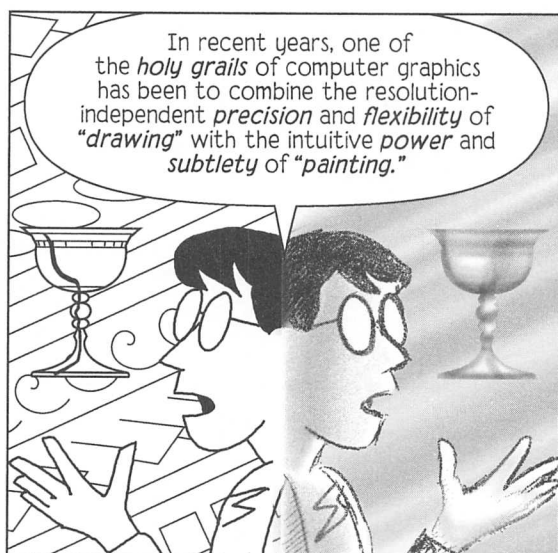
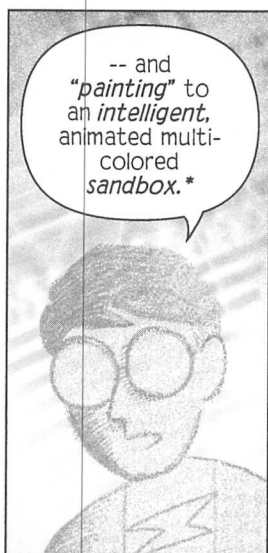




Since every piece of a "draw" program's output is a *mathematically defined object*, it can be *moved*, *duplicated* and *transformed* again and again while always staying *sharp* and *precise*.

In contrast, "paint" programs store and process images as vast mosaics of tiny *pixels* which *shift colors* imperceptibly with each *change* made to the *whole picture*.

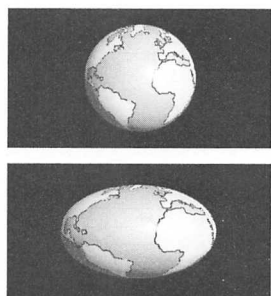
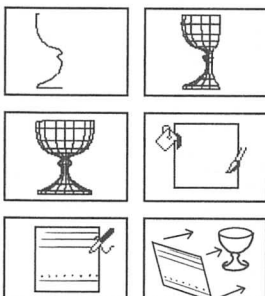
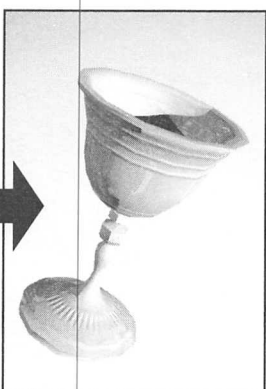
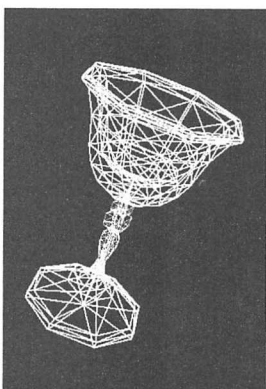




This *convergence* of *application strategies* may have its greatest impact on 3-D *modelers*, most of which generate "drawn" wireframe *skeletons* wrapped in "painted" *skins* of light and texture.

The *preparation* of such models has traditionally been a tedious *step-by-step* procedure that reflects the *rift* between the two types of programs --

-- but as processor power continues to *grow*, artists are gaining the ability to render images *on the fly*, even in the early modeling phase --

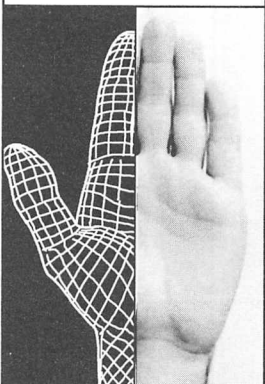
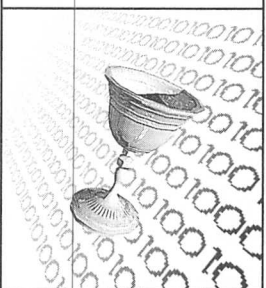
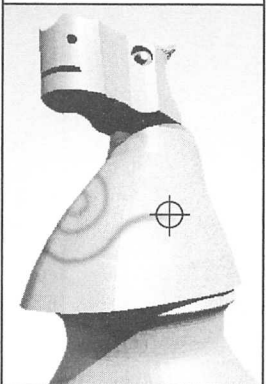


-- as well as "painting" *directly* on *finished models* rather than just their *flattened prefabricated skins*.

In other words, by *breaking down* the construction of a particular *type* of imagery into its constituent *parts*, computers gained power to *generate* such images --

-- but by putting the parts *back together*, collapsing those steps into an *integrated intuitive process* --

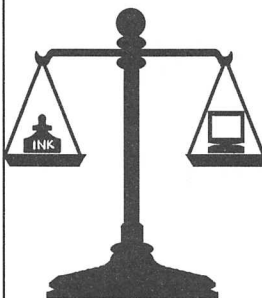
-- developers are giving the artists who *use* these tools a much appreciated *shortcut* to *mastering* them.



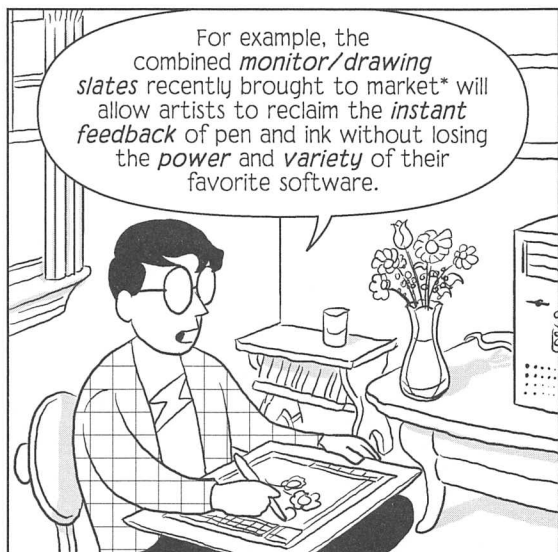
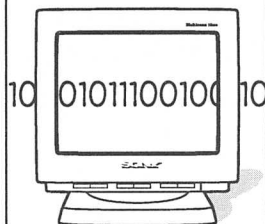
*Unfortunately, I can't remember who first made this comparison; anyone want to take credit? (I'll list you on scottmcccloud.com).



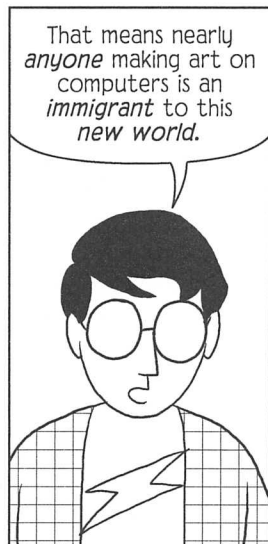
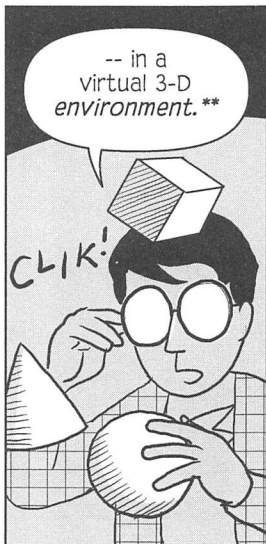
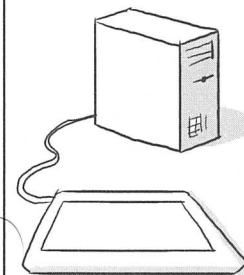
The often cited *tradeoff* between the *power* of computing and the *spontaneity* of pen and ink is only a *temporary condition*.



Advances in both *software* and *hardware* will *return* spontaneity to many artists within the *decade*.

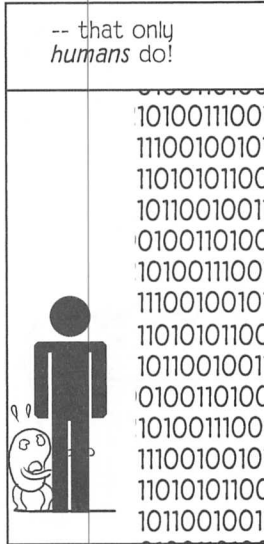
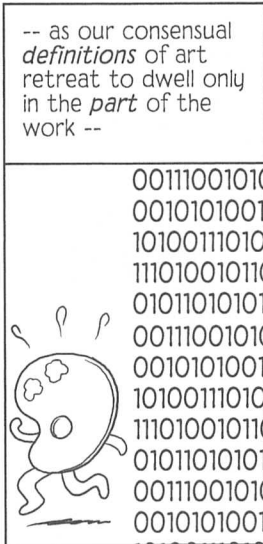
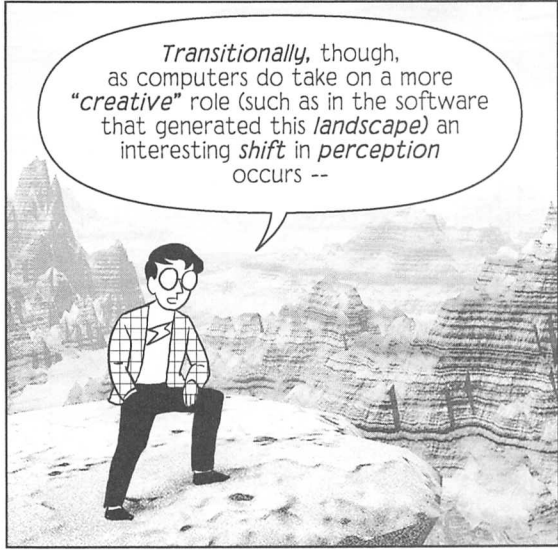
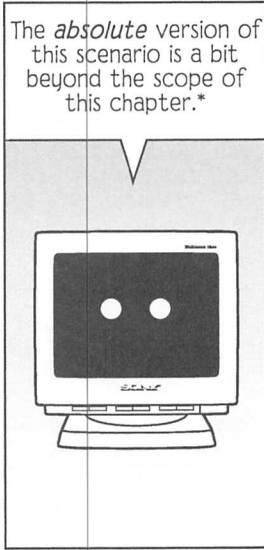
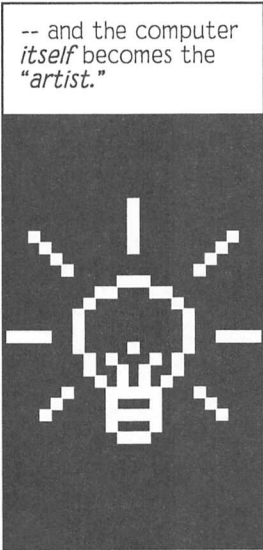
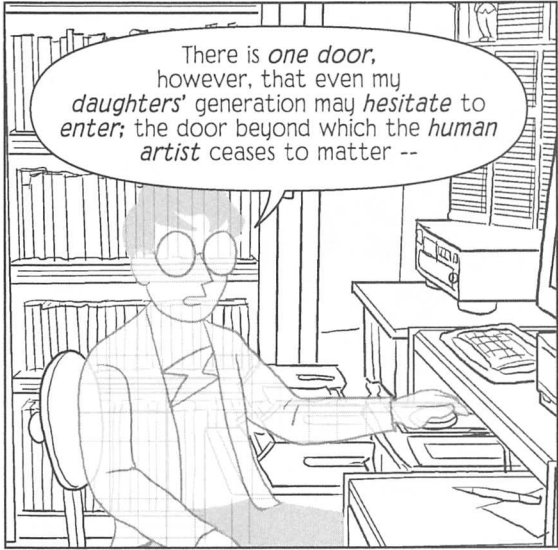


As the trend toward *miniaturization* continues its march, such monitor/tablets and the *computers* that *run* them --



*Still expensive... for *now*.

**I've had the pleasure of using prototypes of the kind of force-feedback devices necessary to accomplish this. They're a long way from "point-and-click!"



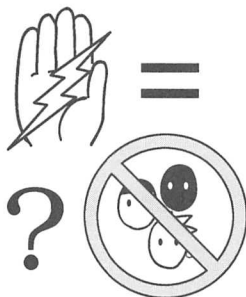
*Leading as it does directly into some of the broader topics associated with artificial intelligence.

As I write this, despite *plummeting prices*, getting *started* in computer graphics is still far from *cheap** --

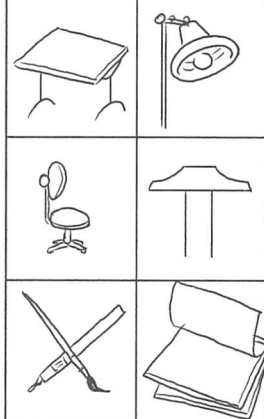
COMPUTER ?



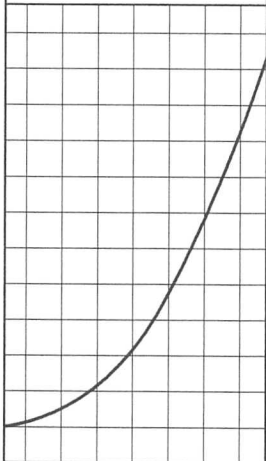
-- and may seem to contravene the spirit of at least one of our *earlier* revolutions which often revolves around *economically disadvantaged* artists.



Still, *traditional art* was never without its *expenses* --



-- and *Moore's Law* isn't done with us yet!



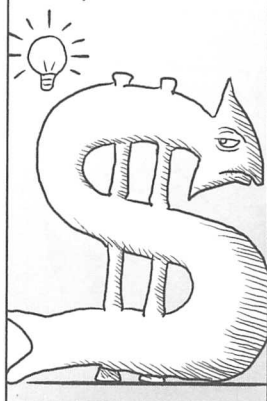
Within a *decade*, anyone with *modest means* and *sufficient desire* will be ready and able to *reinvent the look of comics* forever --



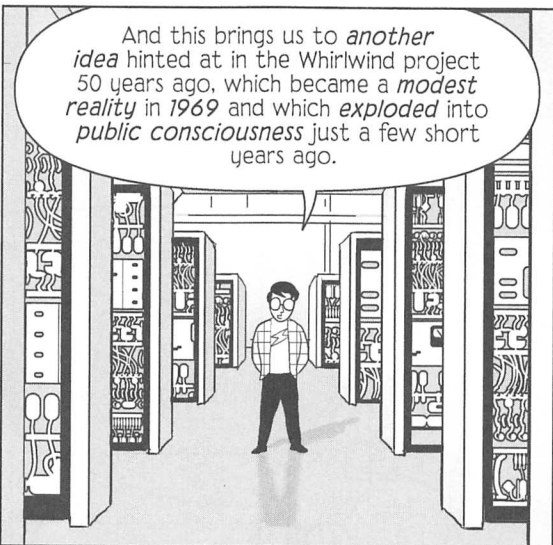
-- *if* they can find a way to *reach* their potential *audiences*.



Unfortunately, as we've seen, that kind of connection is hardly *guaranteed* in today's market.



And this brings us to *another idea* hinted at in the Whirlwind project 50 years ago, which became a *modest reality* in 1969 and which *exploded* into *public consciousness* just a few short years ago.



And it's an idea that *won't be going away* anytime *soon*.



*Entry-level computers have gone as low as \$400 at the beginning of Year 2000 but that's without a monitor, graphics software or graphics-related peripherals like scanners.

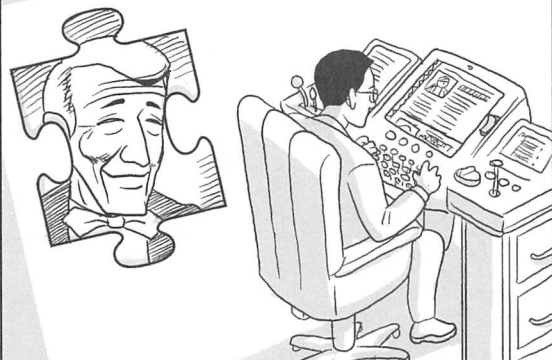
THE FRICTIONLESS ECONOMY

Digital Delivery



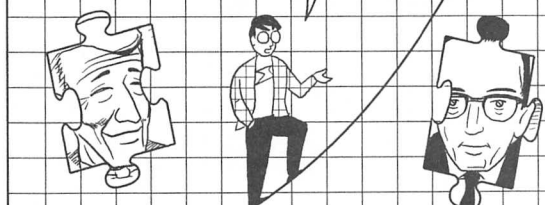
The *diffuse, distributed nature* of what we now know as the *Internet* is reflected in its *origins*; the *hard work* and *brainstorming* of a scattered group of *fertile minds*.

Vannevar Bush in his 1945 paper "*As We May Think*"* envisioned a world in which all *human knowledge* might be available through a single desk-like mechanism he called a "*Memex*."



Inspired by Bush, J.C.R. Licklider** headed the study "*Libraries of the Future*" in the early 60s which began to sketch out a structure for a *vast network of information* which users could access at home.

Bush, Licklider and others were counting on technologies to blossom and enable a *man-machine relationship* far beyond the *utilitarian role* assigned to computing in the *mid-20th century*.



*Bush was director of the Federal Office of Scientific Research and Development at the time. The article was first printed in The Atlantic Monthly.

**Licklider was, at various times, a psychologist, an engineer and an acoustics expert.

Shortly before Licklider's paper, a *general-turned-President* in response to Cold War pressures, had set up a *new agency* to develop *high technology* in the name of national defense and called it the *Advanced Research Projects Administration* or *A.R.P.A.**

Though granted a *two billion dollar* budget, the vast majority had been quickly *hijacked* when the creation of the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration* or *N.A.S.A.* grabbed nearly all of A.R.P.A.'s defense functions.

Left with a mere *\$150 million* and a *new director*, A.R.P.A. survived by redefining its mission and concentrating on long-term *peace-time research*. Licklider was hired and quickly swayed the agency's attention toward *computer sciences* and passed it to his successors, *Ivan Sutherland* --

-- and then to *Bob Taylor* who, as head of the part of A.R.P.A. which had been renamed the *I.P.T.O.*,** got himself a cool million to try a "*networking experiment*" and hired *Larry Roberts* of *Lincoln Labs* to be its program manager.

Taylor noticed that computers around the country weren't able to exchange *resources* and *information*. It bugged him that important work wasn't being *shared*. He saw a *need* and proposed a *solution*.

But Taylor shared Licklider's *revolutionary views*, and he knew that if the experiment *succeeded* they could be on to something *big*.

It *did* -- and they *were*.

A hand-drawn network diagram on graph paper. The nodes are labeled: DART, MAC, HARY, BBK, LL, ETL, and ARRA. The edges and their weights are: DART to MAC (1.3), DART to HARY (1.8), MAC to HARY (1.1), HARY to BBK (1.5), HARY to LL (1.4), BBK to LL (1.6), LL to ETL (1.6), and ETL to ARRA (1.5). On the left side, there is a cartoon drawing of a man's head with a large puzzle piece behind it. The word "MICH" is written near the top left.

The diagram consists of two parts. On the left, a puzzle piece contains a sketch of a man's face, with the name 'Clark' written below it. On the right, a central circle contains the text '01'. Four arrows radiate from this central circle to four '01' labels positioned at the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners of the diagram.

B. B. N.

Heart

Will Crowther

Dave Walden

Truett Thach

Ben Barker

Severo Ornstein

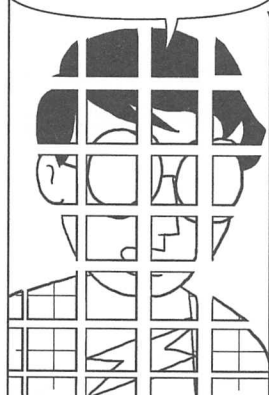
Bob Kahn



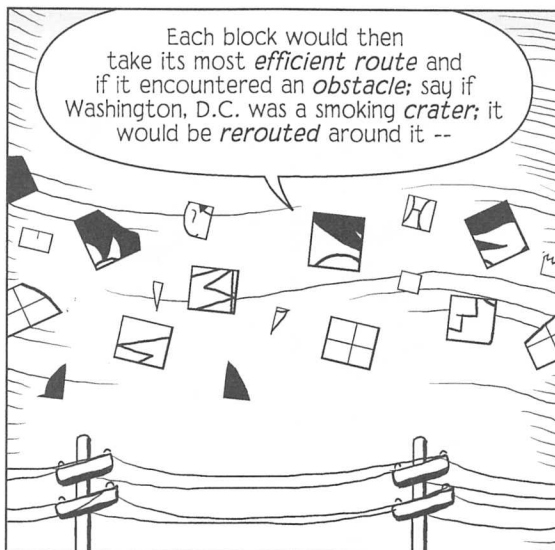
Baran

A black and white illustration of a night sky. A large, detailed crescent moon is positioned on the right side, with a bright star on its upper surface. In the center of the image is a star with a prominent crosshair. Several other stars of varying sizes are scattered across the dark background.

Baran proposed that *data* could be *split* into *tiny blocks*, then the blocks assigned a common *destination*.



Each block would then take its most *efficient route* and if it encountered an *obstacle*; say if Washington, D.C. was a smoking *crater*; it would be *rerouted* around it --



-- until all the pieces *were reunited* at their *destination*.



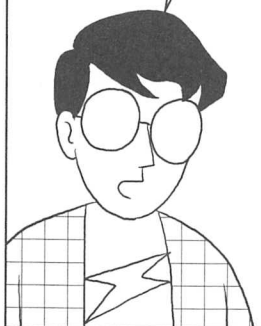
Baran's idea was *sound*, but smug executives at early 60s *AT&T** treated Baran as a *crank*.



Years later, Baran's work was unwittingly *duplicated* (and somewhat *improved* upon) by British computer scientist *Donald Watts Davies*.



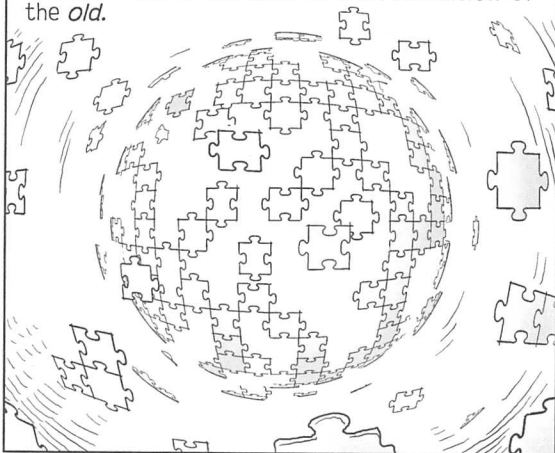
And Davies gave it the name it still bears today: "*packet switching*."



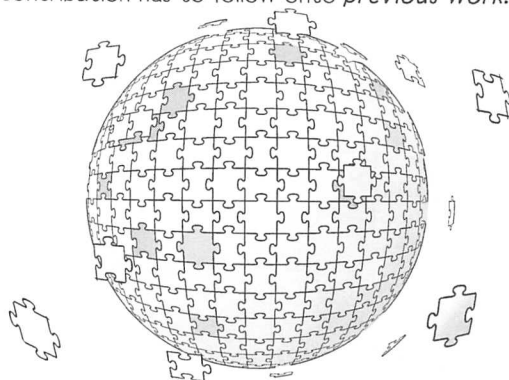
Drawn to its *efficiency* more than Baran's *Cold War* concerns, the B.B.N. team made *good use* of the technology; and of Baran and Davies' *advice*.



Baran himself would later reflect that *technological progress* was a *cumulative* process, that each new *innovation* was built on the *foundation* of the *old*.



"If you're not *careful*" he said, "you can *con yourself* into believing that you did the *most important part*, but the *reality* is that each contribution has to follow onto *previous work*."



"Everything is tied to everything else."

*Still a monopoly in those days.

In 1969, thanks to N.A.S.A., Humankind would *land* on the Moon --

-- and a few months later, thanks to N.A.S.A.'s little sibling A.R.P.A., two big fat *computers* would land at U.C.L.A. and the *Stanford Research Institute* --

-- and begin
talking to
each other.

Santa Barbara was next in what was dubbed the *ARPANET*, then the *University of Utah*, *B.B.N.*, *M.I.T.*, *Rand*, *S.D.C.*, *Harvard*, *Lincoln Labs*, *Stanford University* and *Carnegie Mellon*.

And as the network *grew* and others sprung up overseas, *Vint Cerf* of the newly formed *International Network Working Group* --



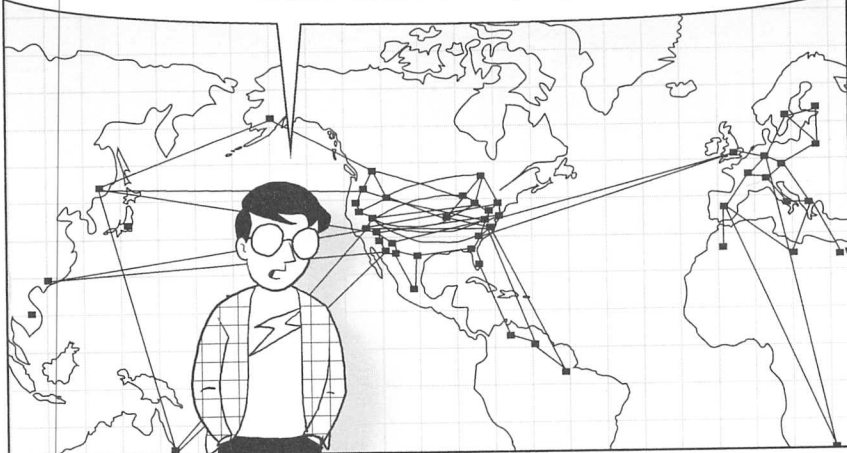
Cerf

-- and B.B.N. alumnus *Bob Kahn* worked out the protocol called *TCP / IP* which *standardized communications* between all networks, creating an "*internet*."



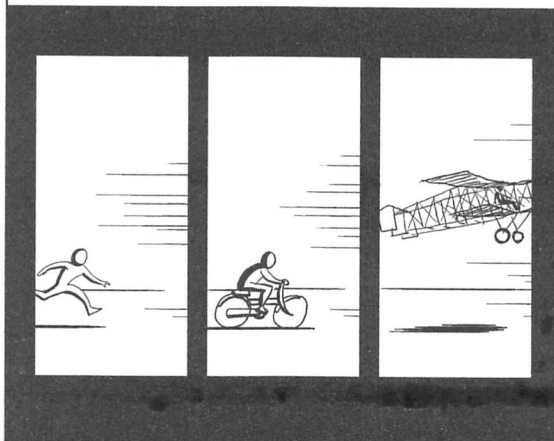
Kahn

And as this *network* of networks, of which the *ARPANET* was merely a dwindling *part*, grew to encompass more of the *World*, it seemed *insufficient* to call it an *internet* any longer.

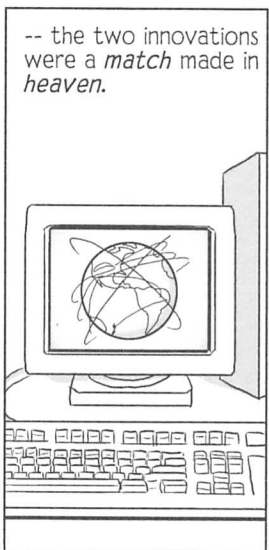
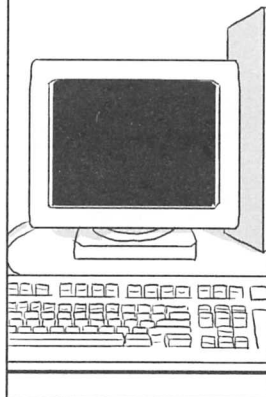




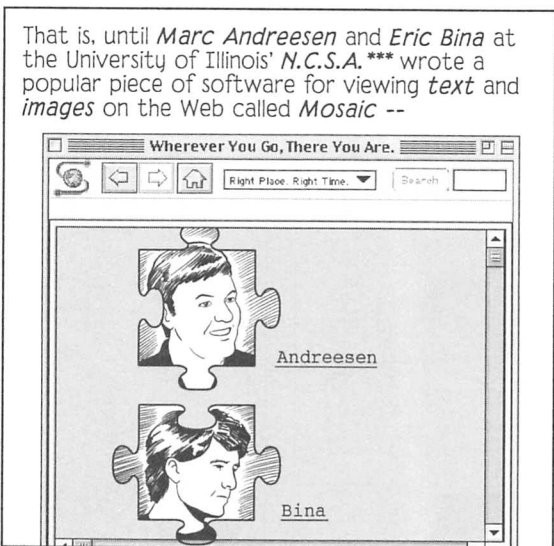
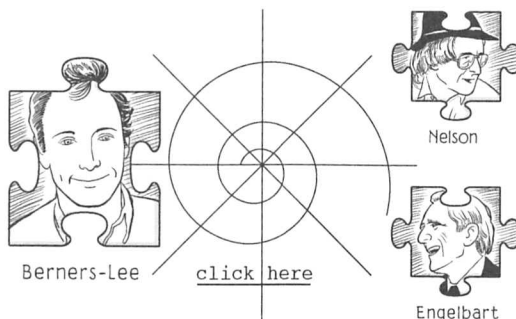
E-mail, newsgroups, chat, multiplayer games; a dozen *unforeseen* uses quickly converged on the *new technology* and --



-- when the *home computer* boom of the 80s and 90s struck --



The *latest piece* of today's puzzle was delivered by *Tim Berners-Lee* at *C.E.R.N.*,* who in 1987 proposed a *protocol*** for *linking documents* on the Internet by *content* rather than *location*. His idea was built on the concept of "*hypertext*" first proposed by *Ted Nelson* in 1960, and on later work by *Doug Engelbart* at *S.R.I.*



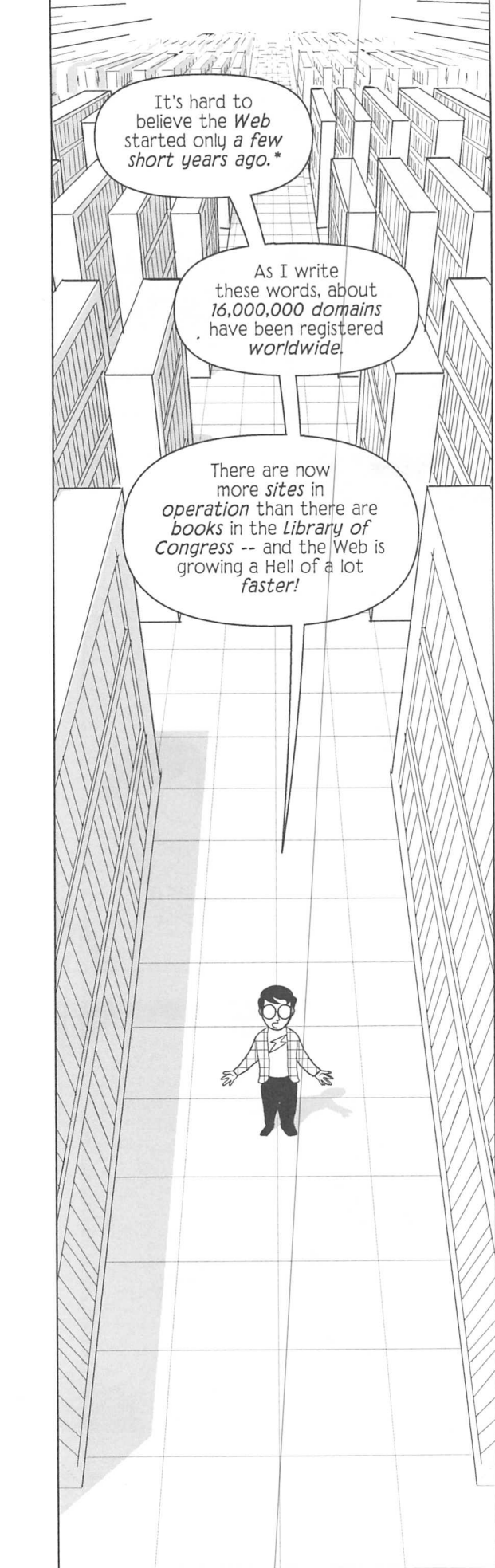
-- followed by a *commercial* version at a new company called *Netscape* --



*Centre Europeen de la Recherche Nucleaire, a particle physics laboratory in Geneva.

**H.T.T.P. (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) and its language. H.T.M.L. (Hypertext Mark-Up Language).

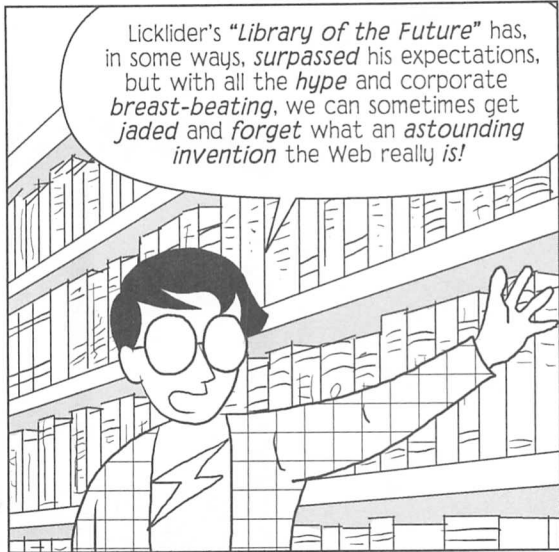
***The National Center for Supercomputing Applications



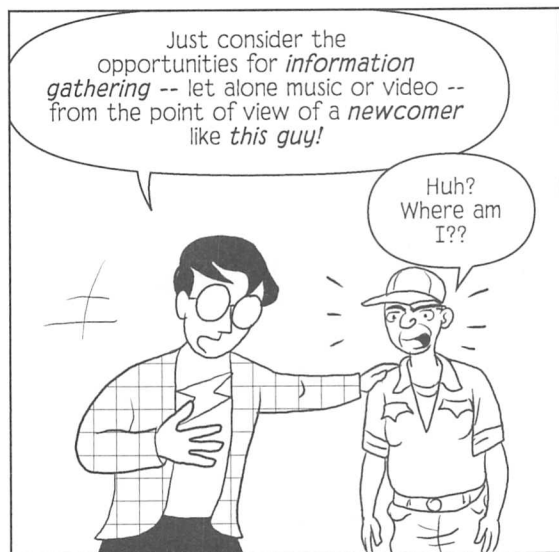
It's hard to believe the *Web* started only *a few short years ago*.*

As I write these words, about *16,000,000 domains* have been registered *worldwide*.

There are now more *sites* in *operation* than there are *books* in the *Library of Congress* -- and the Web is growing a Hell of a lot *faster!*



Licklider's "*Library of the Future*" has, in some ways, *surpassed* his expectations, but with all the *hype* and corporate *breast-beating*, we can sometimes get *jaded* and *forget* what an *astounding invention* the Web really is!



Just consider the opportunities for *information gathering* -- let alone music or video -- from the point of view of a *newcomer* like *this guy!*

Huh?
Where am I??



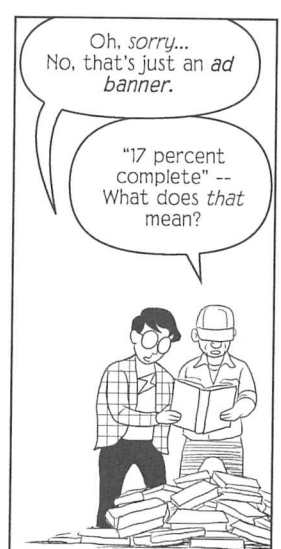
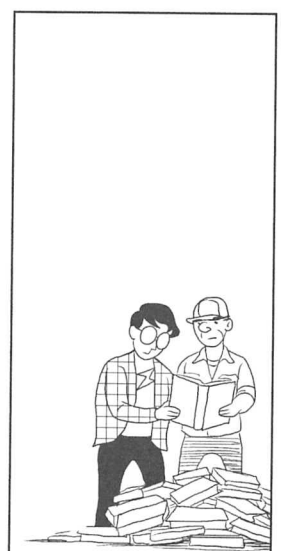
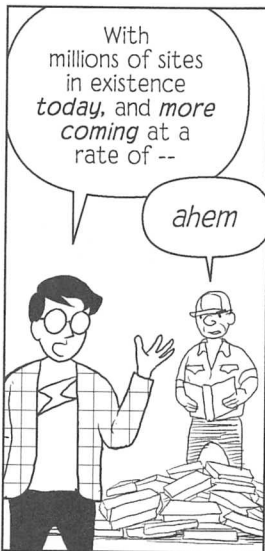
Imagine *anything* you could possibly want to know about; *any subject!*

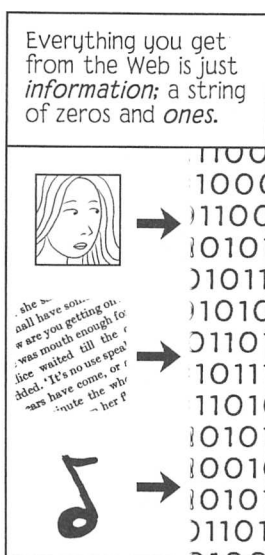
?

Anything at all!



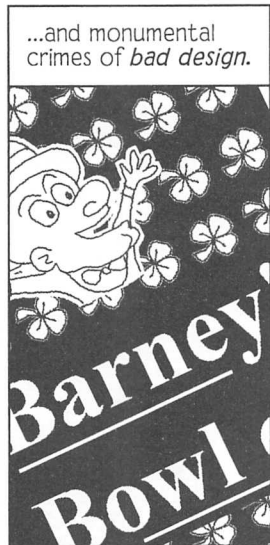
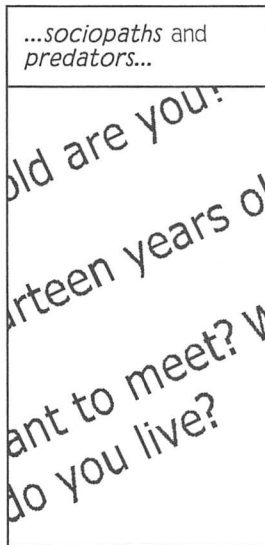
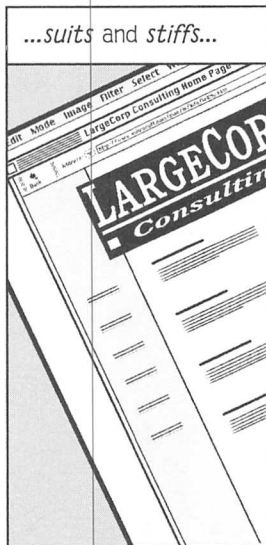
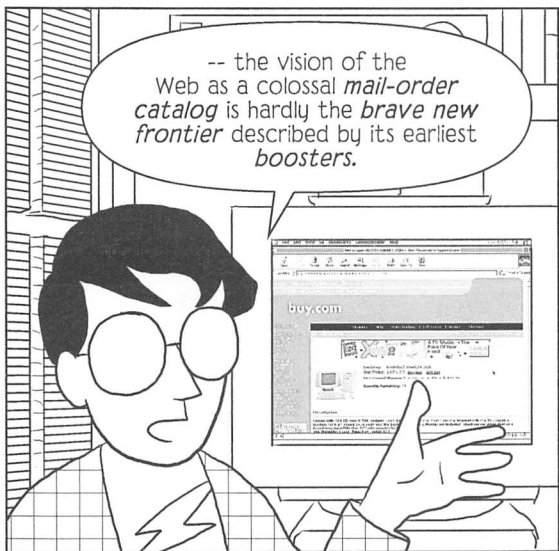
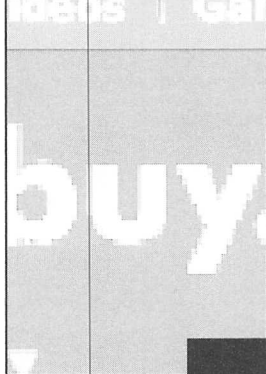
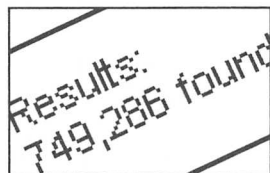
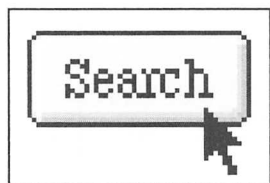
Uh...
How about *fishing?*

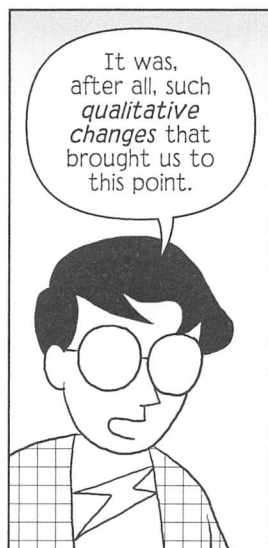




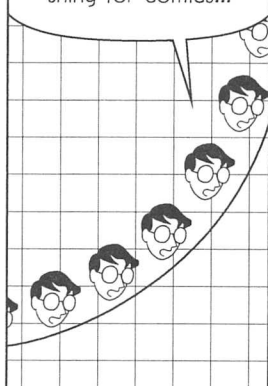
Meanwhile, finding one's way around can still be *frustrating*, despite proliferating *search options* --

-- and though *selling merchandise* on the Web is, by any measure, an *explosive new market* --





But, as bandwidth grew, the path from *text* to *single images* to *multiple images* could only mean one thing for comics...



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Digital delivery *side-steps* the question of how a comic is *produced*.

In fact, most of the flavors of *digital production* discussed in the last chapter are usually aimed at *print* --

-- while many comics being delivered online today are scanned from artwork done in *pen* and *ink*.*

Digital delivery does *not* refer to comics on *CD-ROM* or other storage media** which may exist as zeros and ones on the *inside* --

-- but still need to travel as *objects* -- plastic *disks* in plastic *cases* -- to be packed into *cardboard boxes*, stuffed in *freight trucks* and crammed onto limited *shelf space*.

Nor does it refer to the distribution of *printed comics* via *online ordering*, though the growth of such services is *significant*.

Digital delivery could refer to comics delivered through *online services* or sent within an organization's own *internal network* (known as an "*intranet*").

But to date, the *lion's share* of digital delivery has been through *the Web*, and for a *snapshot* of digitally delivered comics at the *turn of the century*, that's the "*place*" to look.

*Expect the intersection set to grow rapidly, though.

**Though they may be digital *comics* -- see next chapter.

As I write this, *comics on the Web* are still making that transition from *promotion* to *delivery*.

Hundreds of sites now offer *information* about *comics creators* and their work, art samples, online ordering --

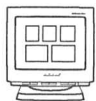
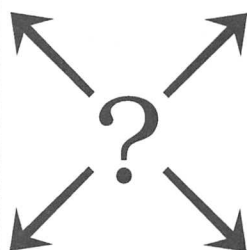
-- and a *small* but *growing* number of artists are creating comics designed *exclusively* for viewing on the Web.

Screen images from Comicon.com.

Online comics are still in their *frontier* stage. Everybody is pretty much *writing their own rules*.



As a result, a variety of different approaches is being tested in hopes of *striking gold*.*



From the very earliest strips, a screen-fitting *page-by-page* approach has been a practical solution for some cartoonists --



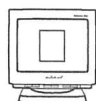
Argon Zark by Charlie Parker
zark.com



Megaton Man by Don Simpson
megatonman.com



Leisuretown by Tristan Farnon
leisuretown.com

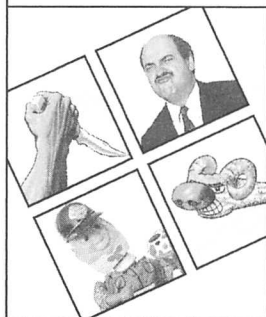


-- while others employ a *panel-by-panel, click-through* approach.



Crazy Boss by Mark Martin
markmartin.net

Various *collective efforts* have come and gone.



The "Art Comics" collective (an early one that stuck with it).
artcomic.com

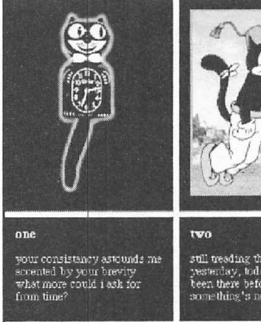
*Aesthetically, more than financially -- at least for now.

Some online comics offer hypertext-based *interactivity*.



Impulse Freak by Ed Stasny and various.
sito.org/synergy/iffreak/hotwired/

Some include limited, looping *animations* --

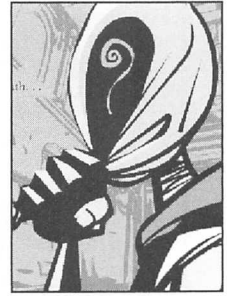


Magic Inkwell by Cayetano Garza.
magicinkwell.com

-- and some, using browser enhancements, such as the plug-in *Flash*, offer *multimedia productions* with *sound* and *motion* throughout.



Star Wars: The Phantom Menace online comic at starwars.com



The Haunted Man by Mark Badger at darkhorsecomics.com

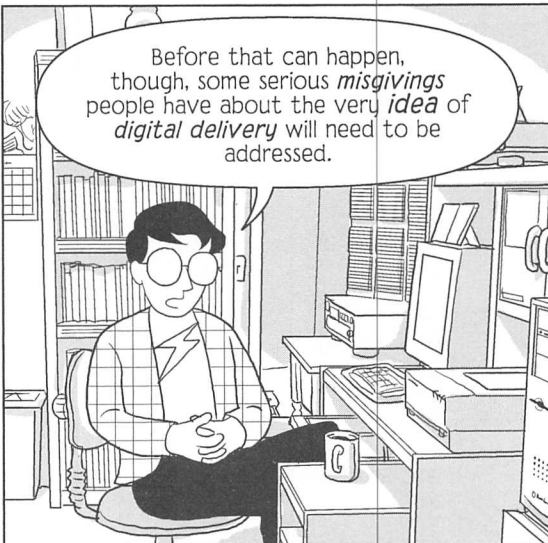
Through *discussion boards* and *group projects*, a sense of *community* is beginning to emerge and that community will be going through some dramatic *upheavals* in the next few years --



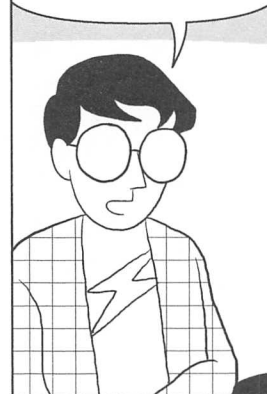
-- when the other 90% of creators *get in the game!*



Before that can happen, though, some serious *misgivings* people have about the very *idea* of *digital delivery* will need to be addressed.

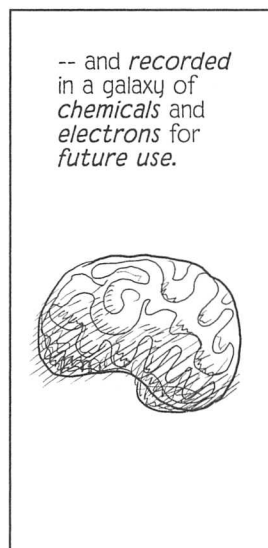
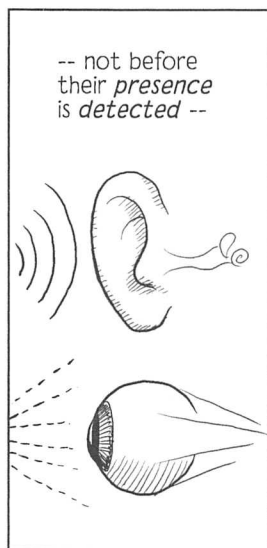
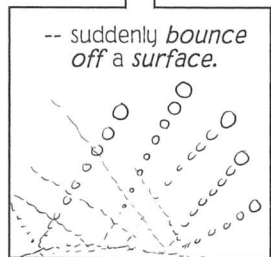
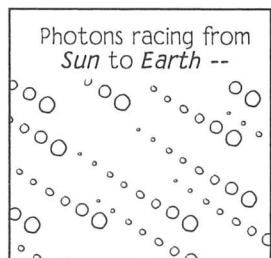
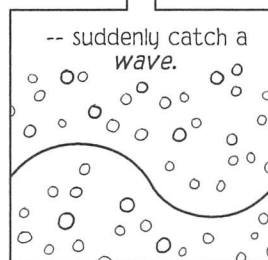
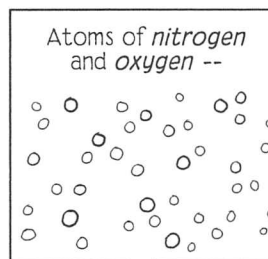
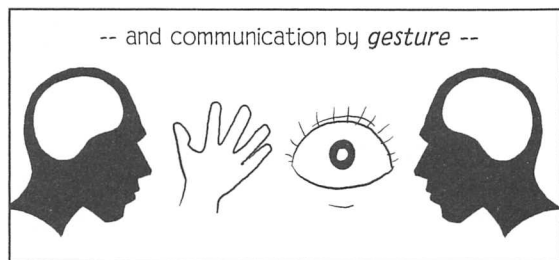
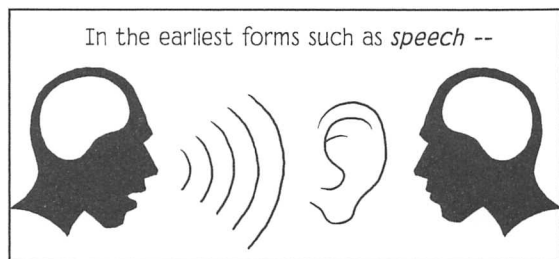
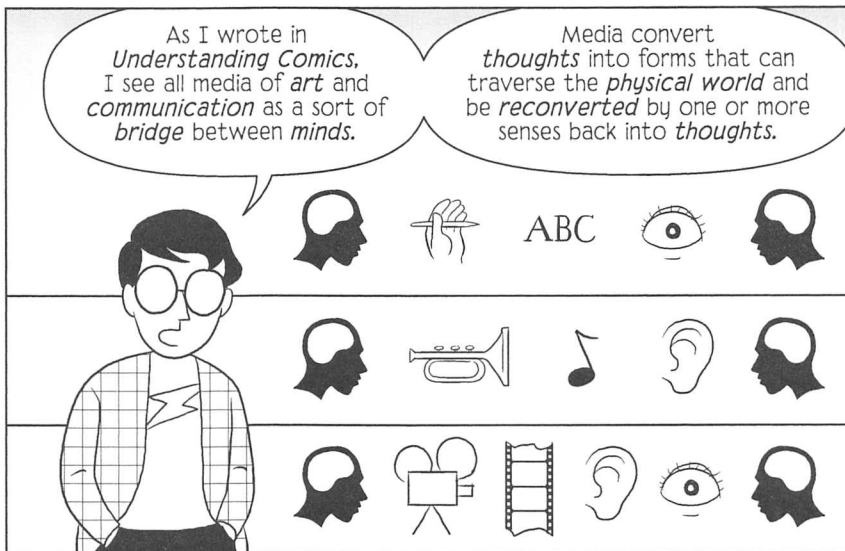


These are basic issues that are cropping up in the evolution of *all* media in the "*information age...*"



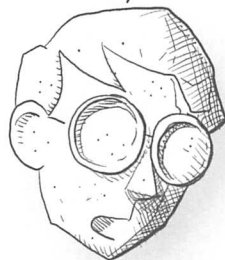
...a source of *anxiety* as we move from *paper* and *plastic* to pure transmitted *information*.



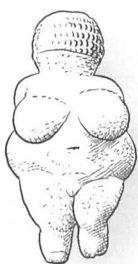


The art and information *represented* by those patterns could be stored in the minds of either *sender* or *receiver* for a *lifetime*, but between the two, they were only *manifest* in *matter* and *energy* for a *moment*.

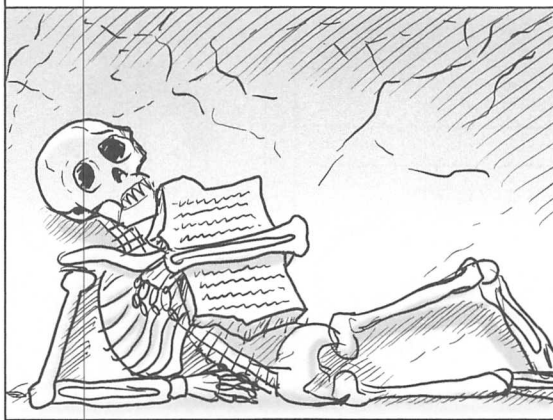
Yet by this method, ideas could be passed from *generation to generation* as if they were *tangible objects*.



Which is what -- at some point in history* -- they finally *became*, as ideas found *physical embodiment* in the arts of *painting*, *sculpture* and the *written word*.



Far more *durable* than arrangements of *light* or *air*, these were patterns that *stayed* long after their originators were *silent*, *departed* from their *homes*, or *departed altogether*.



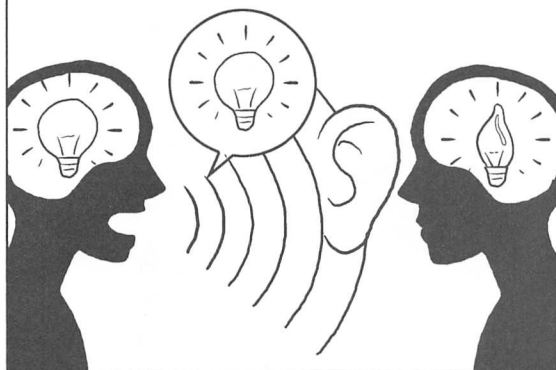
As *years* *passed*, these objects would mean *different things* to different *generations* --



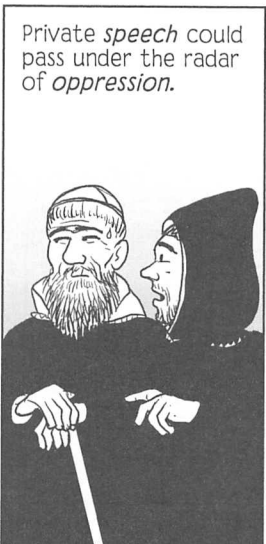
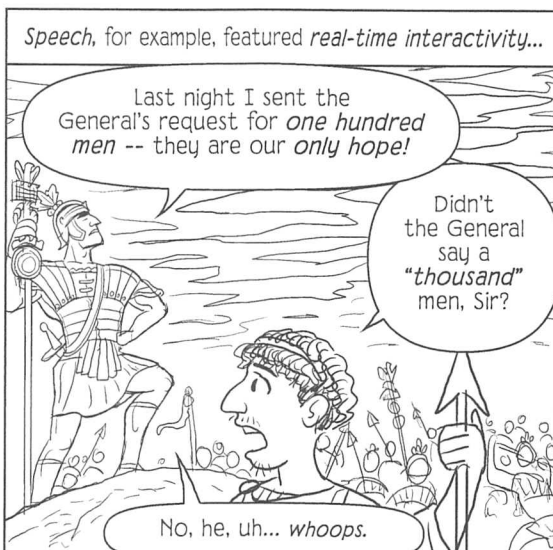
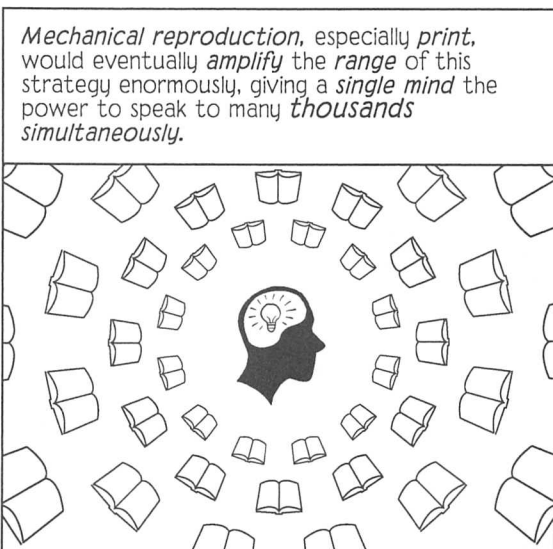
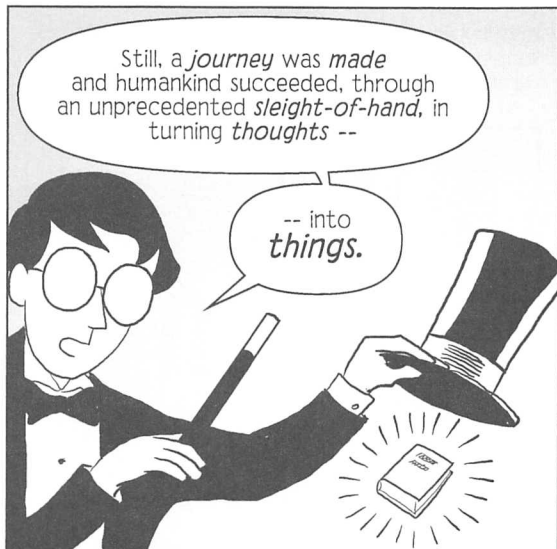
-- or, in passing great *distances*, they would be *understood* differently by different *cultures*.



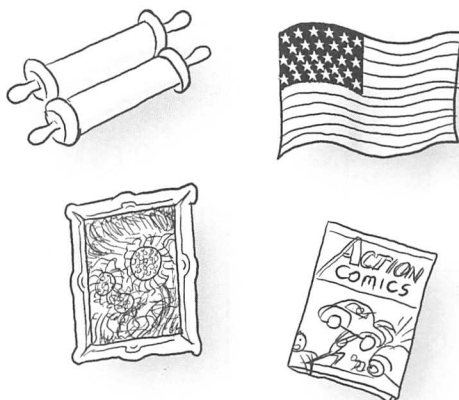
But even though experiences could never be *perfectly replicated* across *years* or *miles* -- any more than they had been perfectly replicated across a few inches of *vibrating air*.

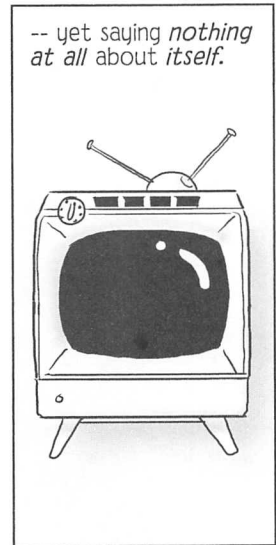
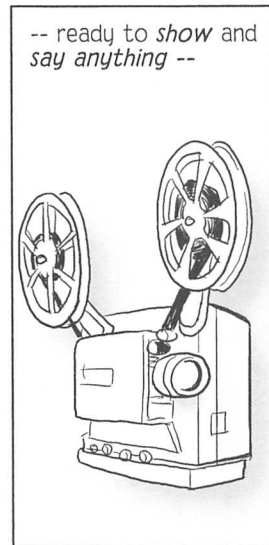
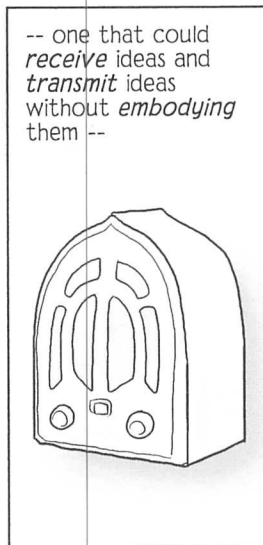
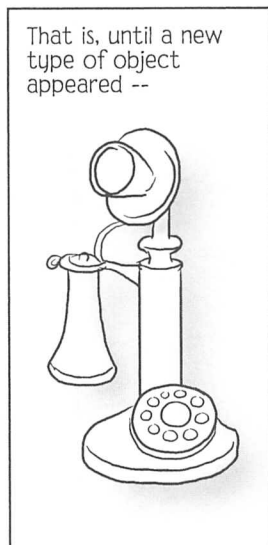
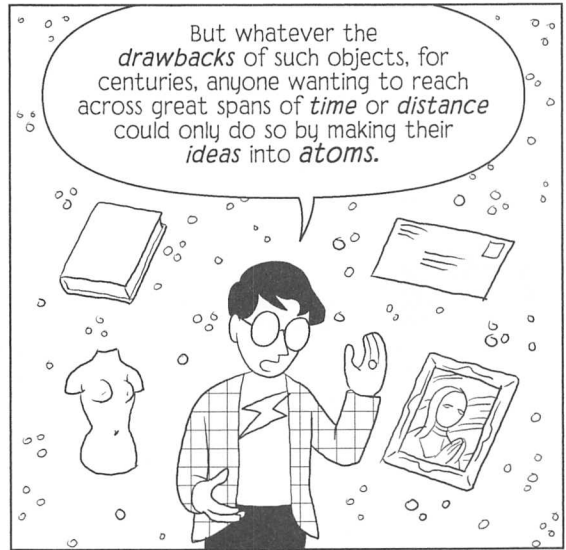
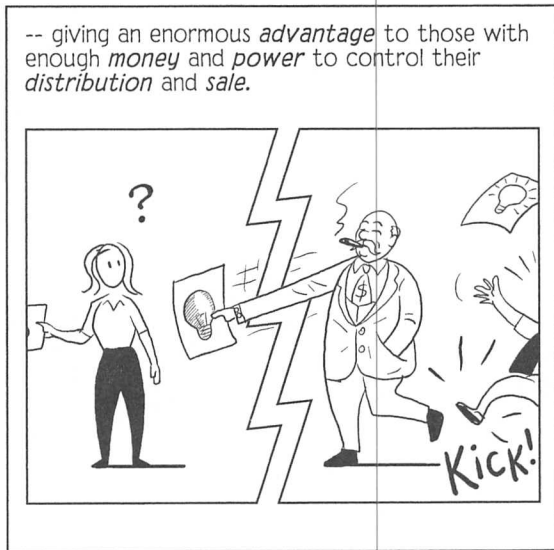
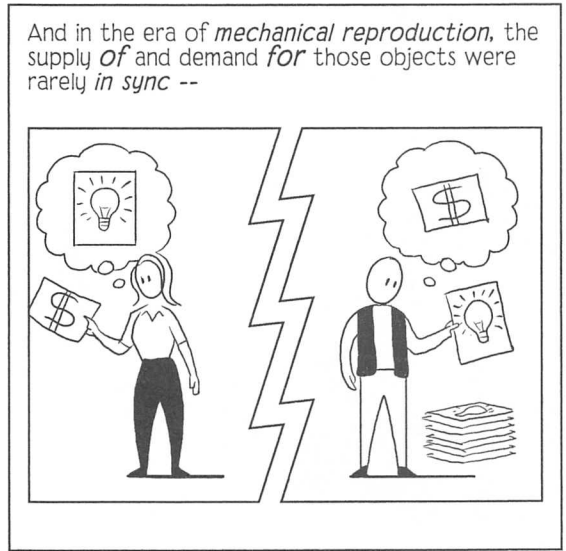


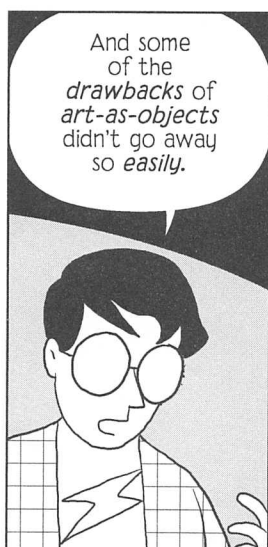
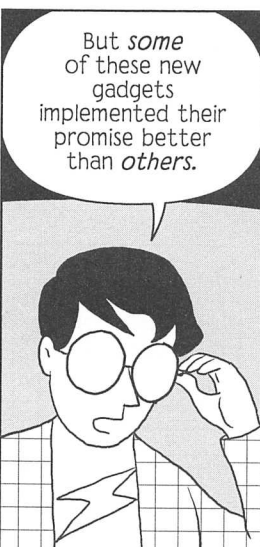
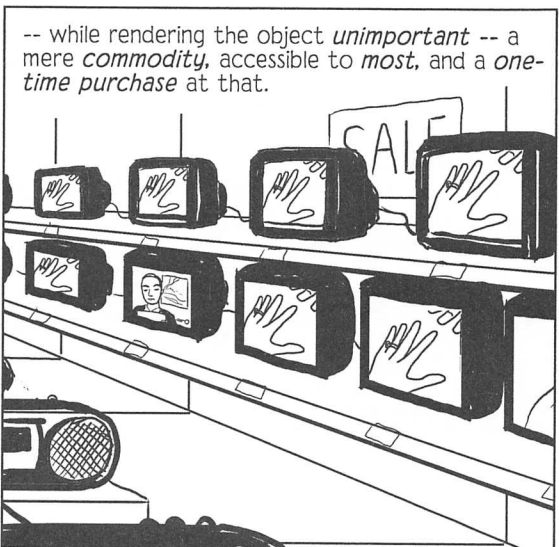
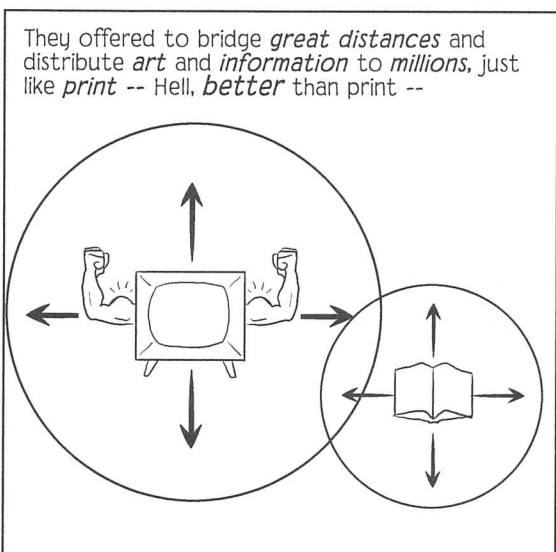
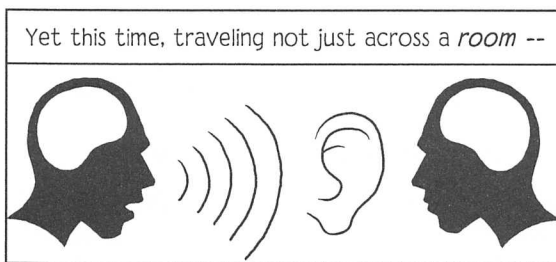
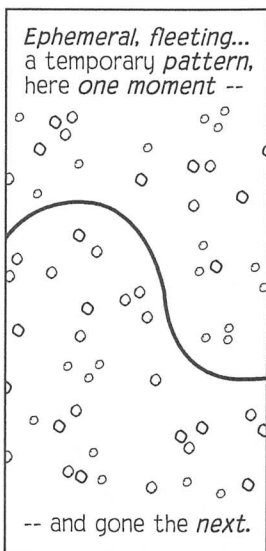
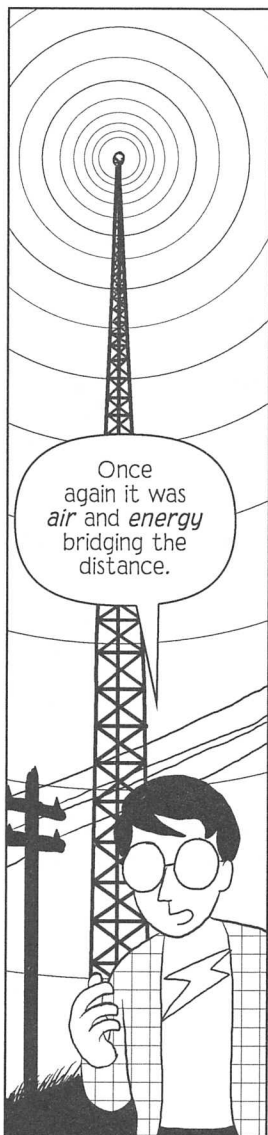
*Our best guess is between 40,000 and 10,000 B.C.



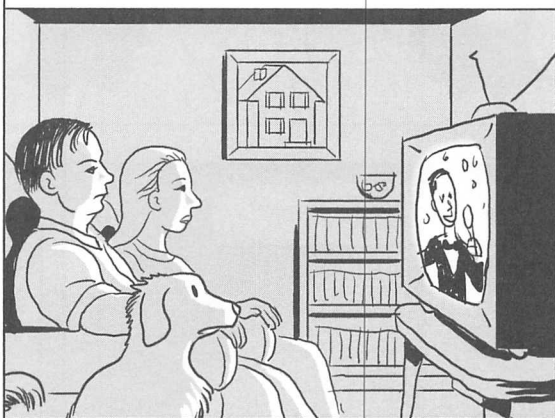
And for *some*, the object *itself* could be venerated, far more than the *ideas* it originally embodied.



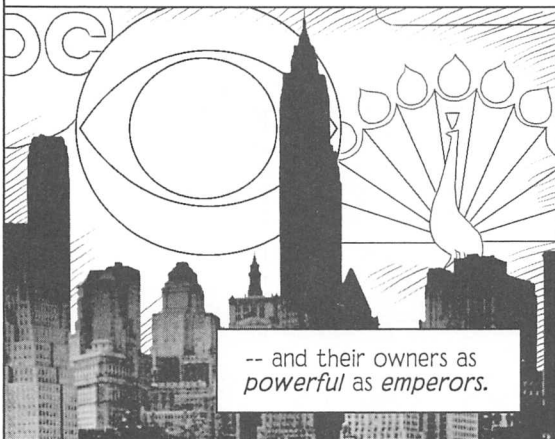




Broadcasters, for example, proved to be as *one-way* as their *paper-and-ink predecessors*, allowing little of the *real-time interactivity* of speech.



And though no one could ever own the air itself, *airwaves** turned out to be as *precious* and *limited* a resource as a thousand *Ming vases* --



Today's *mass media* have become synonymous with multinational *corporate culture*.



Despite their technological differences, print publishers and broadcasters serve the *same master* -- the one in control of *limited resources*.



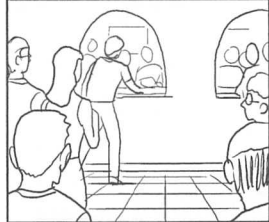
Whether it be *shelf space* in a bookstore --**



-- *screens* at your local *multiplex* --

GARGANTUA SHOWTIMES

DAILY	11:00	11:10	11:20
	12:30	12:40	12:50
	1:00	1:10	1:20
	1:30	1:40	1:50
	2:00	2:10	2:20
	3:30	3:40	3:50
	4:00	4:10	4:20
	4:30	4:40	4:50
	5:00	5:10	5:20



-- *display space* in *catalogs* --



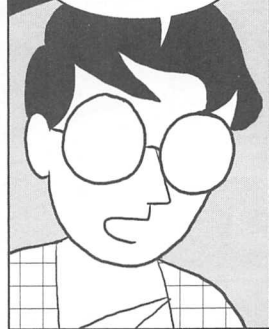
-- *slots* on a network *TV schedule* --



-- or the *perfect space* between *one number* and *another* --



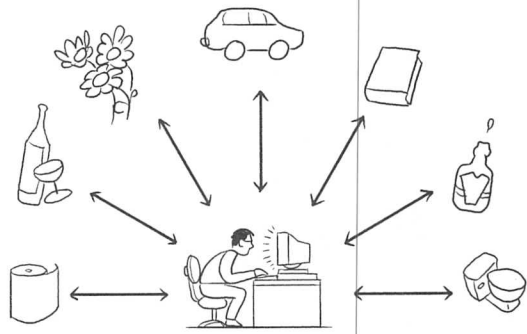
-- the content of what you can *see*, *read*, or *hear* has been led on a very short *leash* down a very narrow *path*.



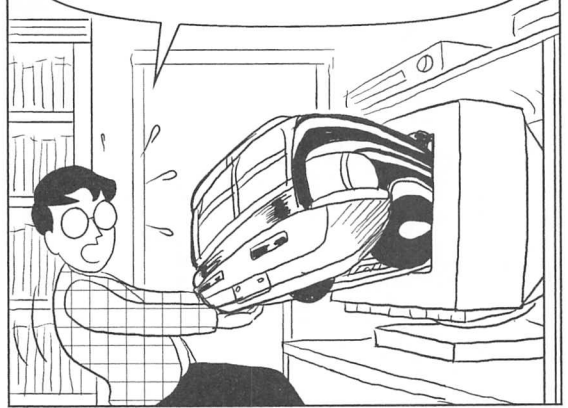
*i.e., radio and television frequencies, or, in more recent times, cable franchises.

**Many don't realize the degree to which retailer displays are paid for by producers.

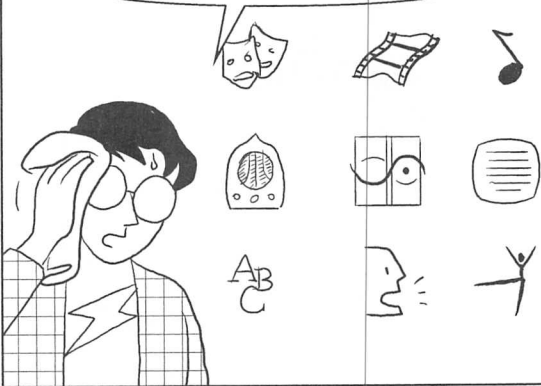
For the sale of *physical goods*, the Web's interactive and decentralized nature has already begun to *rewrite* many of the *rules of commerce* --



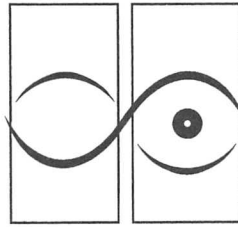
-- but until we figure out how to send a *Dodge pickup* over the *phone lines*, at least *some* of the current *market forces* will remain the *same*!*



On the other hand, when the "*product*" is ultimately just a visual or auditory *experience*, it *may not* have to arrive as an object *at all*!



And the transformation of *this* segment of the economy will rewrite nearly *every rule in the book*!



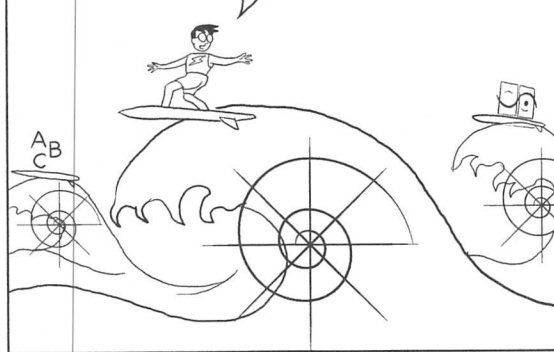
Digital delivery is the *real thing* -- a genuine full-scale *revolution* --



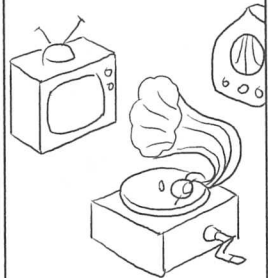
-- but for all the public *ballyhoo*, the first *wave* of that change has yet to *reach shore* as I write this.



When the time comes, comics will *ride that wave* alongside any form that can be transmitted as *pure information*, and the *courses* of their transformations will bear some *similarities*.

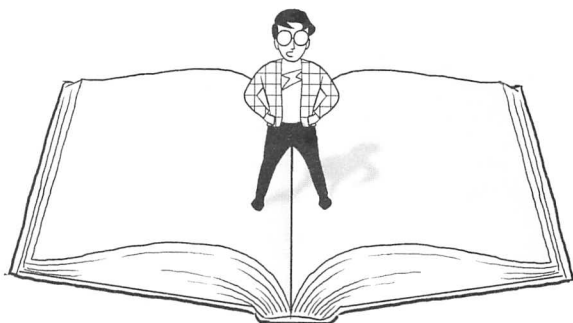


Before that can happen, though, each will first have to expand *beyond* the *technologies* that originally brought them into our lives.



*For example, the price per unit and delivery costs of physical goods will still favor the largest producers.

And probably the *greatest* of *all* these *technologies* is the one you're holding *right now*.



Print has a *loyal following*. If moving to *online comics* means abandoning *paper* and *ink*, there are plenty of readers who'll be happy to stay unplugged *forever*, thank you very much!



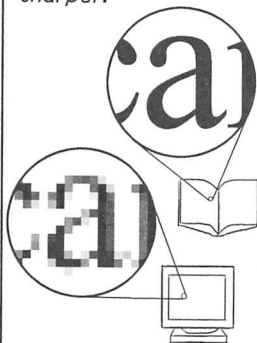
Ask them *why* and they'll probably begin by listing print's *advantages* over computers --



-- and it's an *impressive list!*



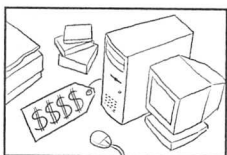
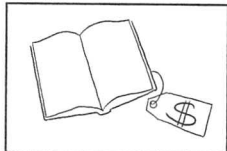
For example: Ink on paper offers far higher *resolutions* than desktop screens; as much as *ten times sharper*.



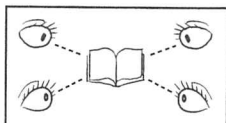
Print is more *portable*; able to fit into a *coat pocket* or tucked under a *pillow*. Most computers can't come *close*.



Print is *cheap*. The price of entry is just a *few dollars* versus a *thousand* or more for computer equipment.



Print is "*cross-platform*."* Anyone with a pair of *eyes* can see what's on the page. No special *hardware* or *software* required.



Print is *fast*! Once you open the page, the words and images are *already there*, and you can *flip through* them at any speed you choose.



Print is *easy*. There's no *learning curve* to accessing the technology of paper and ink. Even the smallest of *children* can do it.



*Operating systems like MS-DOS/Windows, the MacOS or Linux are examples of different platforms. Documents tend to open in only one such environment.

In these and other practical arenas, *print* continues to win *hands down* over *digital*, but for *how long*?



Although the technology of *manufacturing print* has evolved considerably over time, the experience of *using* it hasn't changed much in 500 years.



The *user experience* of computing, on the other hand, is changing literally *by the month*.



Sharper displays for example, are fast becoming *practical* as *CPUs* and *monitor technology* track the jaw-dropping pace of *Moore's Law*.*



Portable PCs lag only a few years behind their *desktop equivalents*. Each new generation is *smaller* and *lighter* than the last.



Sub-\$500 PCs are already a *reality* with *more price drops* on the way.



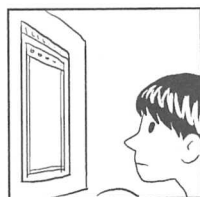
The Web itself has given *all users* -- regardless of platform -- a *common interface* for a world of *information*.



Speed of access is increasing in many regions due to overwhelming consumer *demand* and a variety of *competing technologies*.**



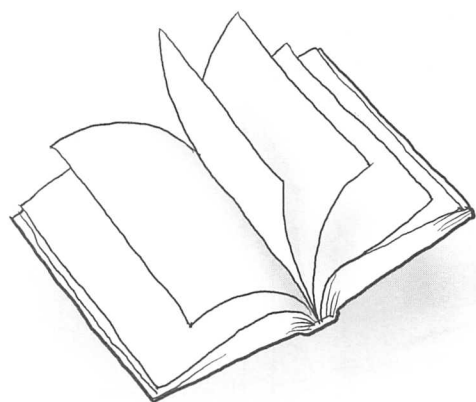
Finally, *ease of use* -- though hardly a solved problem -- has *matured*, and as producers court the *unplugged millions*, it will remain a *priority*.



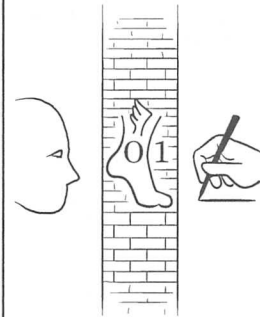
*Monitors have been a bottleneck for a while with only cosmetic improvements, but several breakthroughs are imminent.

**Cable modems, D.S.L., satellite and fiber all have the potential for enormous leaps in bandwidth, and are all on market in many communities now.

Beyond *practical* issues, though, is there some intrinsic *aesthetic* quality to *paper and ink* that *digital media* can never *match*?



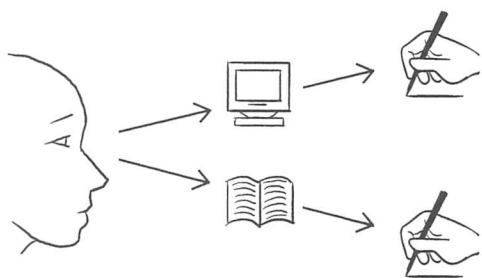
For example, does digital delivery add a wall of *separation* between *reader* and *artist* --



-- and is there a fundamental need on our part to *touch* what we read in the form of *books* or *magazines*?

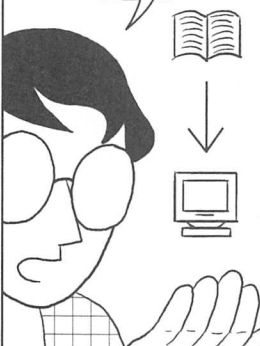


Regarding the *first* question, surely *both* technologies are equally separated from the *artist*. Neither *screen* nor *page* represents true *personal contact*.



After all, the switch from *print* to *digital* was never about *technology* overcoming *art* --

-- but merely about *one* technology overcoming *another*.



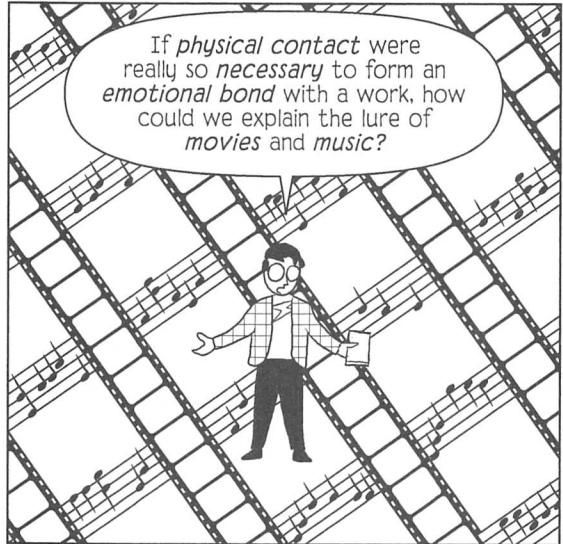
That *second* question, though, does pinpoint a more *meaningful difference*. Will comics *lose their magic* if we can no longer *touch* them?

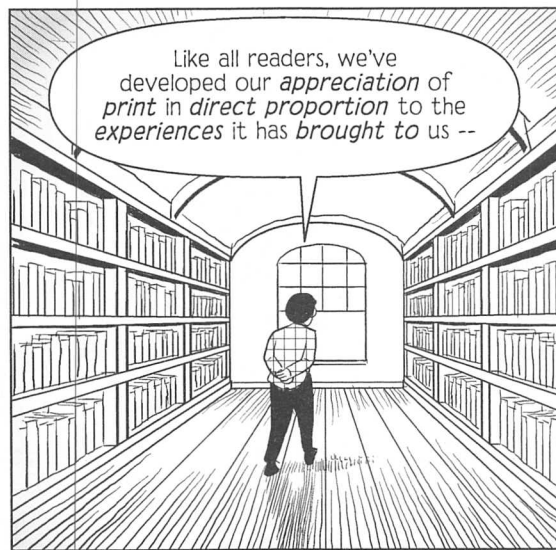
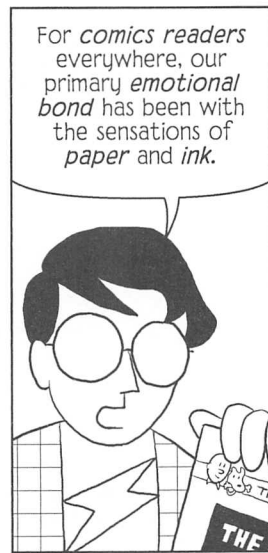
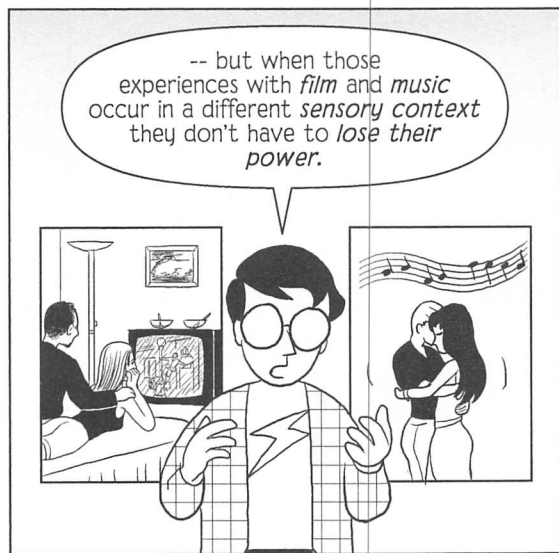
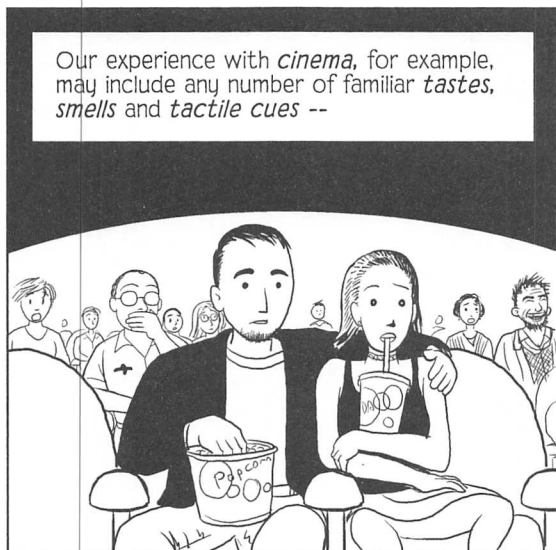


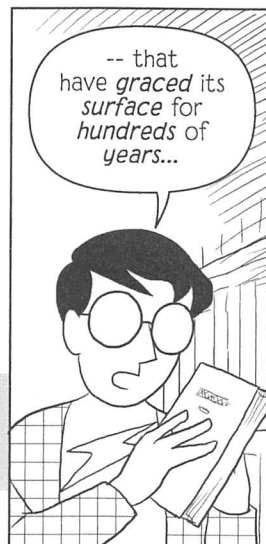
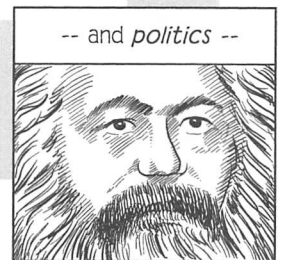
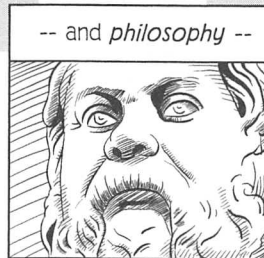
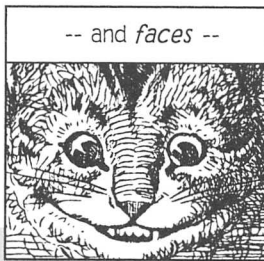
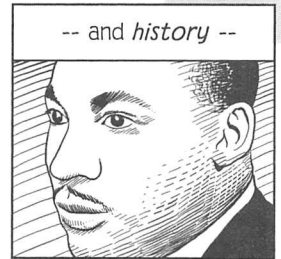
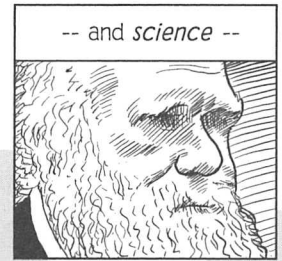
In the end, I don't think that comics readers need to *hold* or *own* comics to experience them *fully*.



If *physical contact* were really so *necessary* to form an *emotional bond* with a work, how could we explain the lure of *movies* and *music*?







...print is
nothing but
flat, dead,
wood.



Okay, I *know* what you're *thinking*: If print is so *unnecessary*, why are you reading this as a *book*?

Many of the reasons stem from print's *temporary advantages* discussed earlier --



-- but those all address the *user experience*, leaving *wide open* the question: How is *anyone* going to *make a living* off this stuff?!



On a network like the *Web*, there are *three kinds* of things you can *sell*:

Physical products --



-- advertising space --

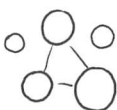


-- and the *intangible experiences* of the Web *itself*.

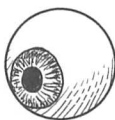


In *other* words:

ATOMS --



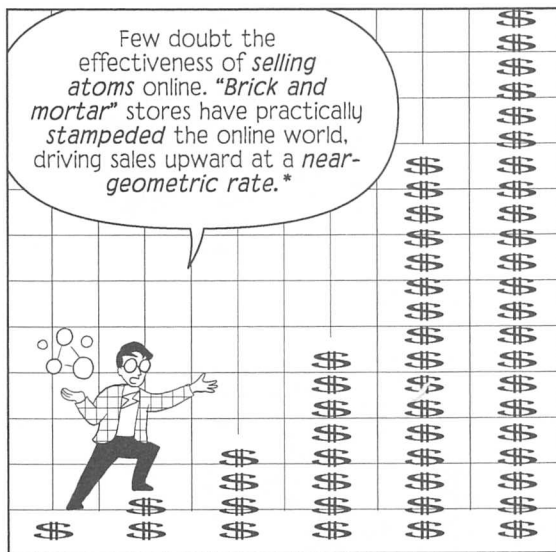
-- EYEBALLS --



-- AND BITS.

01

Few doubt the effectiveness of *selling atoms* online. "*Brick and mortar*" stores have practically *stampeded* the online world, driving sales upward at a *near-geometric rate*.*

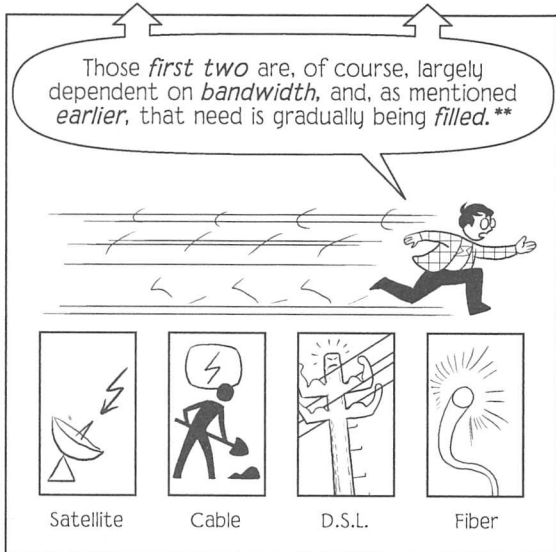
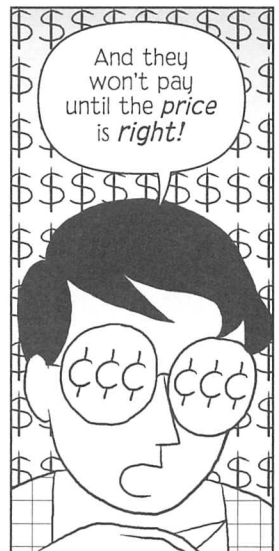
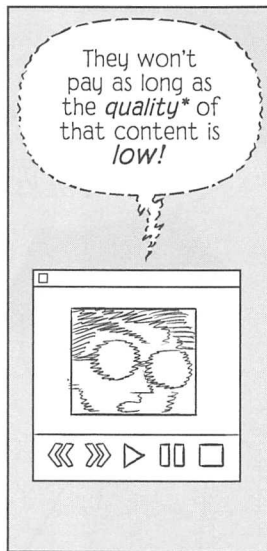


Advertising too has settled in (though *less comfortably*) as content producers scramble for ways to *force-feed* the old broadcast world's *bitterest pill*.**



*And a money-mad stock market with it, though that particular bubble has to burst sooner or later.

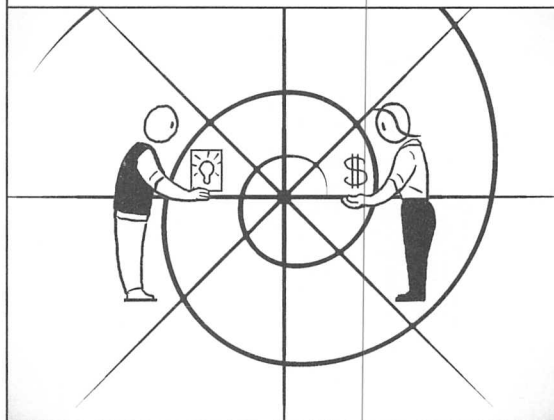
**Or, through a fast-evolving science, to give users better incentives to swallow.



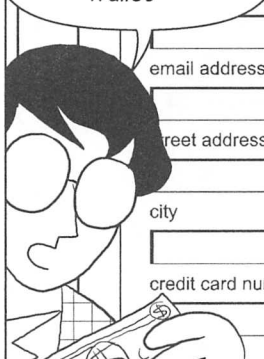
*Technical quality that is: sharp pictures, good sound, etc.; though, of course, the same could be said of artistic quality.

**Luckily, much of consumer demand will be driven by activities like video conferencing which require far more bandwidth than comics.

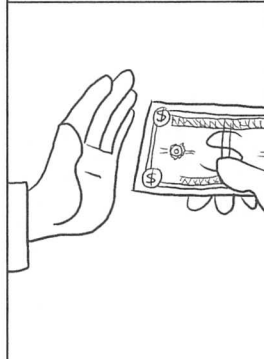
Just as in the *physical world*, if readers and creators want to *buy and sell* the *experience of comics on the Web*, a market will *grow around them*.



For readers, though, the Web's *version* of that transaction is, at present, far more *complicated* than pulling *cash* out of a *wallet* --



-- and due to the costs of *the transaction itself*, anything less than *ten dollars* probably *isn't worth it* to the *creator*.



That *first problem* -- *the hassle factor* -- is being addressed already through *automated solutions* which securely store *personal information* for *instant retrieval* at a *later date*.*



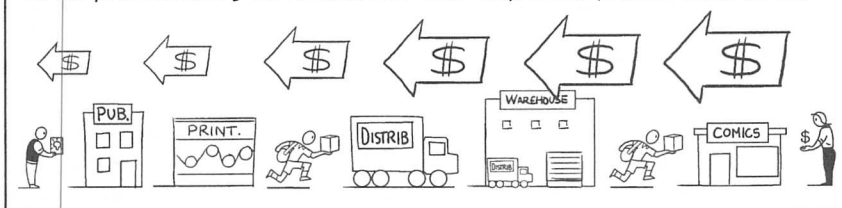
But the *payment threshold* problem is a more serious *obstacle*. Like any *product* or *service* on the Web, tomorrow's online comics are bound to settle on an approximate "*right*" price -- and *ten bucks ain't it!*



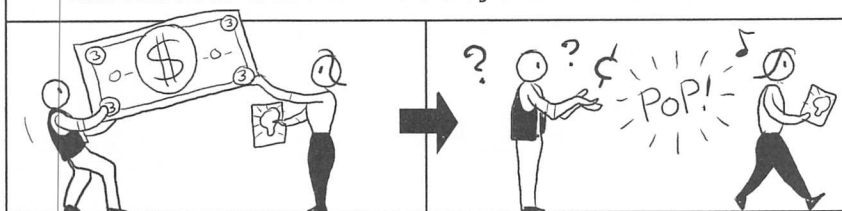
As I write this, the *average price* of an American comic book is about *three dollars*.**



In the *print industry* we've seen how *each step* in the process takes its *cut* --



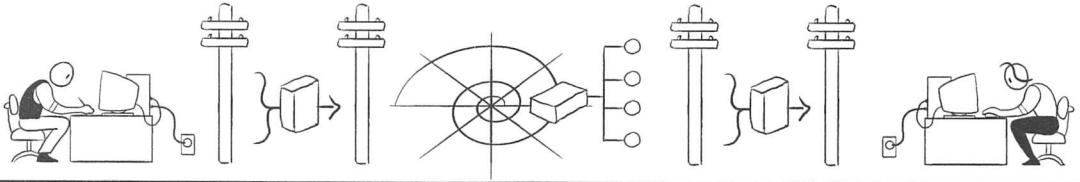
-- until that *three dollars* turns to *thirty cents* in the *creator's hands!*



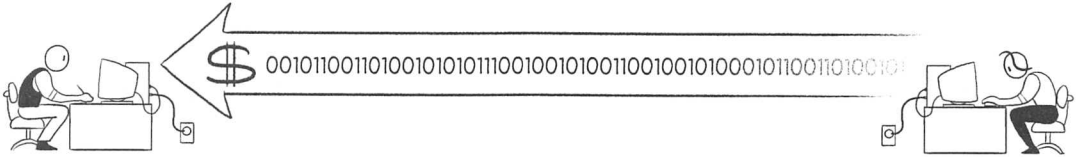
*Rule of thumb in computing: For any series of steps you have to perform again and again, there'll be someone trying to automate it for you.

**A bit lower for some mainstream titles; a bit higher for some "indies."

The Web, at first glance, may seem every bit as *convoluted* a system as today's *comics market* and one might expect it to *siphon money* just as *quickly* --



-- but the "*money*" in this case is *pure information* and can *travel* through the *network* without losing one *iota* of its *value*.



That means that *IF* our *online creator* could find a method of payment with, say, a *ten percent* transaction cost, he could be making *ninety percent* on each sale.



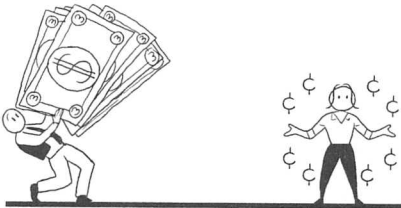
OR he *could* ask for an amount *closer* to what he would have gotten in the *print market* --



-- helping to create a readership with *ten times the buying power!*



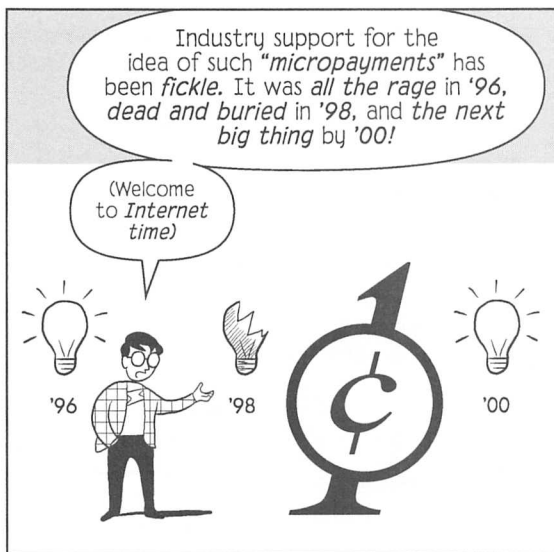
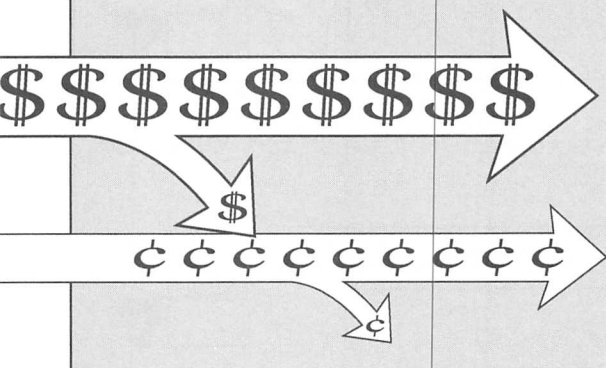
Finding a balance between the two is what *markets* are all about --



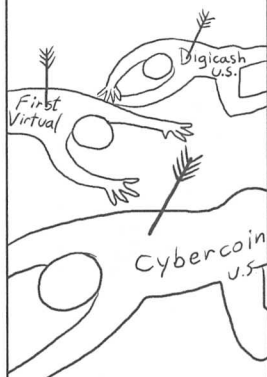
-- but if you want *my* two cents, I think the *smaller price* has the *bigger future*.



Since the *mid-90s*, many *webwatchers* (including *Yours Truly*) have advocated *scalable payment systems* in which the costs of *selling* remain a *small portion* of the *total price* even at levels of a *few cents*.*



Despite *high hopes*, micropayment *pioneers* encountered a *fatally apathetic consumer base* in the *mid-90's*.



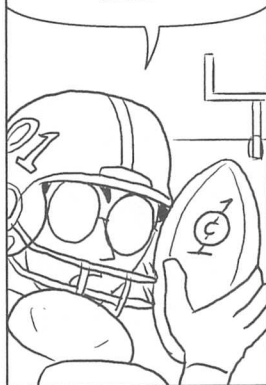
Web surfers in those days were still "*paying with their time*" when it came to *Web content*, so the poor showing was *understandable*.



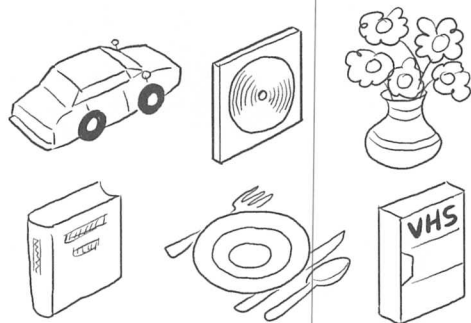
As of *2000*, though, rapid growth in areas like *downloadable music* have suggested a potentially more *welcome climate* --



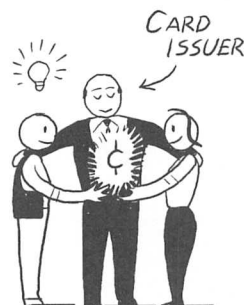
-- and with the promise of *true broadband* on the horizon, a growing roster of *new players* is poised to *enter the field*.**



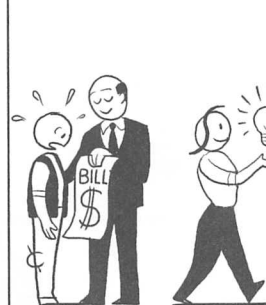
The problem with *traditional credit cards* is that every transaction, *large* or *small*, has a *fixed cost* to cover things like *billing* and *customer service*; a cost which can take *big bites* out of *small purchases*.



Thus, if an artist wants to charge his readers *30 cents* using such means, he *can* --

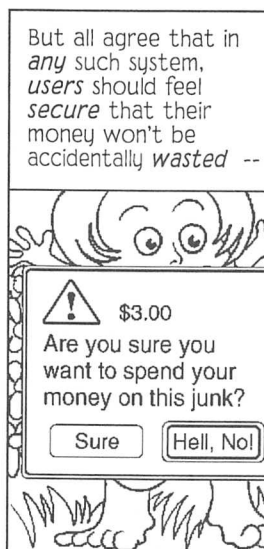
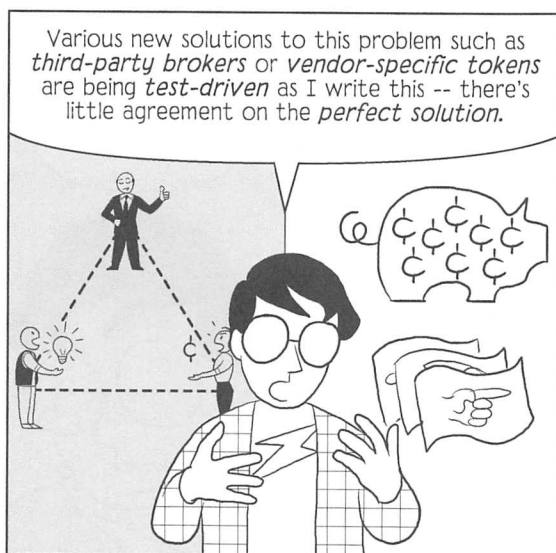
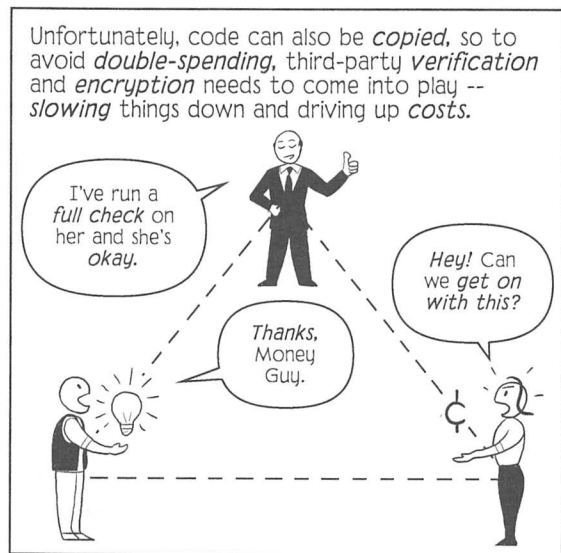
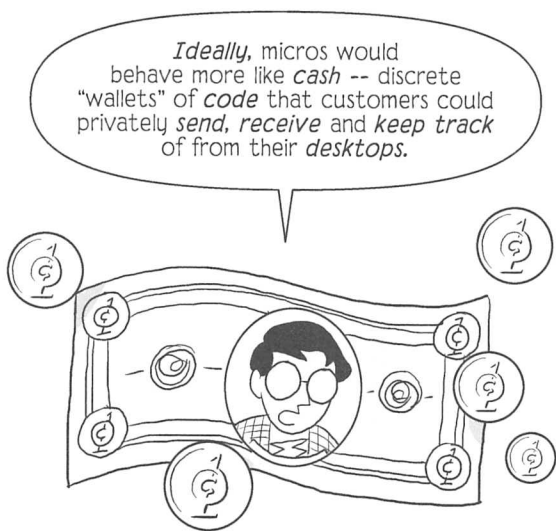


-- but he'll be charged a *buck* or two for the *privilege*!

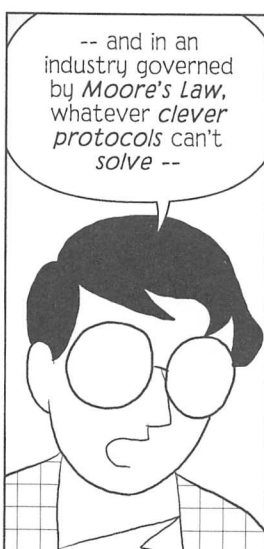
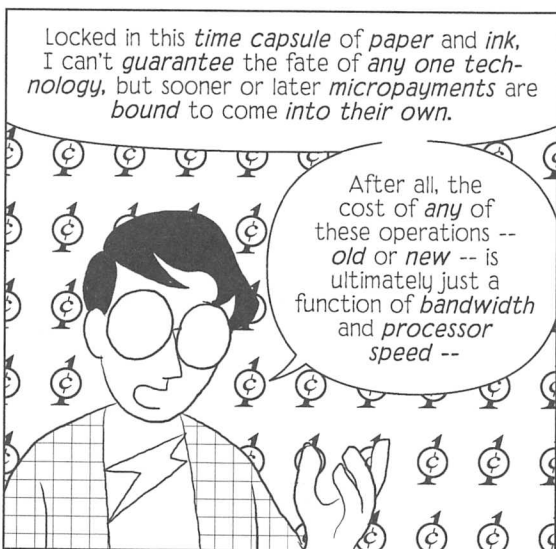
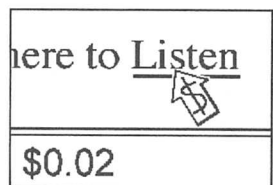
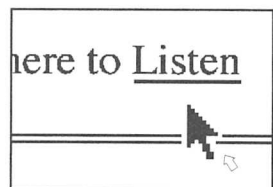


*The basic idea dates back to the Seventies and Ted Nelson's long-running (and controversial) "Xanadu" project.

**Check my site for updates on this fast-changing new market.



-- and that for *small amounts*, the process should be as *simple* as a *single click*.



Let's *skip ahead* just a *few years*, then,* to consider this world in which there's finally something *worth* paying for on the Web and an efficient method of paying for it.

Speed

Quality

Ease

Price

At *lower costs*, consumers would certainly *buy more* than before, not only *pocket the difference*.

(And let's face it: \$3.00 for a 20-minute read was never the *best deal*.)

Just as important, *innovation* would get a much-needed *jump start*.

When the price of entry is *high*, readers' willingness to "*take a chance*" on new work can *drop like a rock*!

Consider the fate of the daring and inventive *CD-ROMs* of the early *Nineties*.**

There's a big difference between: "*Try* this, it's really *good*." --

-- and "*Try* this, it's really good and it's *\$35.00*."

From the standpoint of a lone *new artist*, such *empowered consumers* can provide a much more welcoming *gateway* to the *marketplace*.

That's just the *beginning*, though!

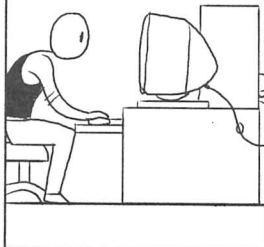
Returning now to our artist from *page 67*, let's say he decides to *go it alone* after all --

-- and *this time* when his audience grows to *ten people*, instead of choosing to go to *Kinko's* --

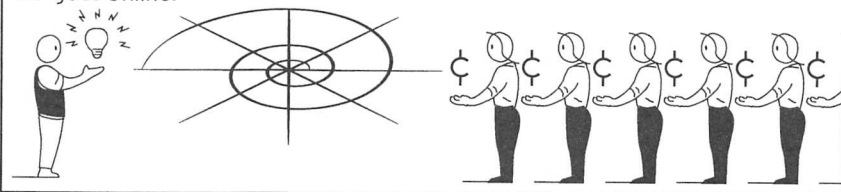
*I'm guessing no more than two years, so you'd better figure on four. "Right, but late" that's my motto.

**Much of the promise of these "expanded books" and innovative multimedia CD-ROMs was thwarted by a market turned sour in the mid-90's.

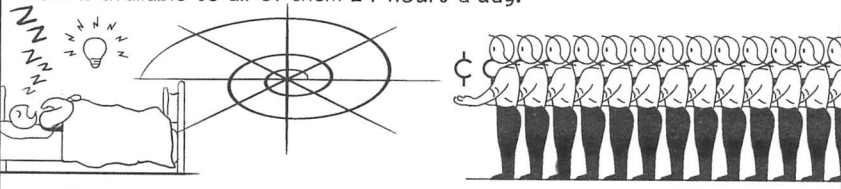
-- he borrows a friend's *scanner*, goes to his *home computer* and slaps together a simple *website*.*



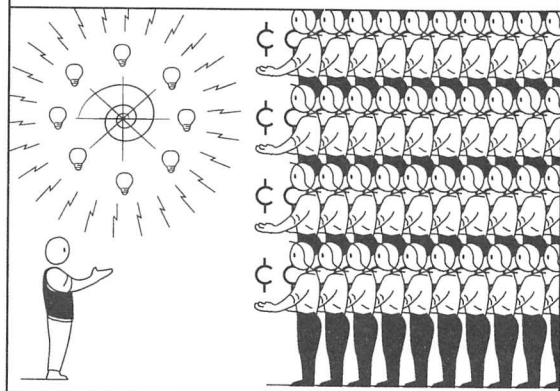
And using his 10 megs of *free space* that came with his *Internet access*, he goes *online*.



And when each of those ten *recommend* the site to *ten* of *their* friends, the work is available to *all* of them 24 hours a day.



So far, our *theoretical creator* has enjoyed a *free ride*, but suppose he wants to get *serious*. Instead of *one* online comic he wants to offer *one* a *month*, and instead of a *thousand* readers, he wants *ten thousand*.



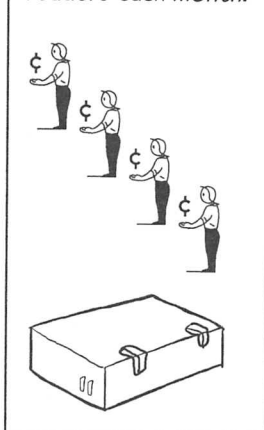
That extra space and traffic will come with a *price tag* and it can be pretty *high* if enough people *visit*.



The first effect of *micropayments* is that *success* no longer has to *kill* the site because *profits* can now *rise* faster than *costs* --



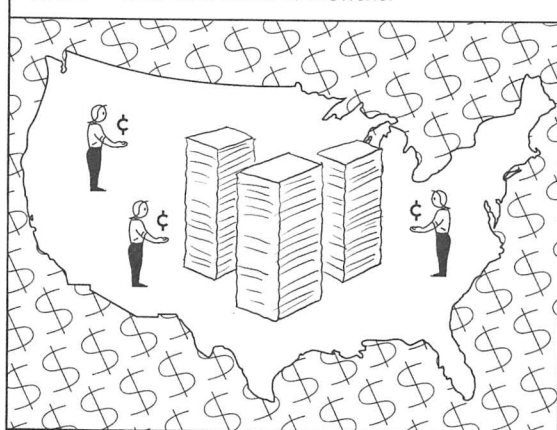
-- while the *price* of *storage* can be covered by just a *few* readers each *month*.



And if a few readers are all he *gets*, our creator can still *break even*.**

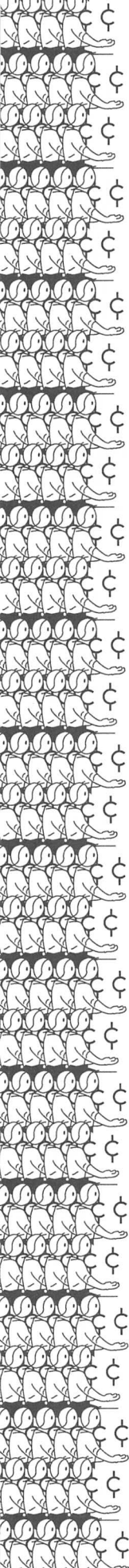


To make a *printed* comic available for sale to that *same few* readers would cost *thousands* of *dollars* in *pre-press*, *printing* and *shipping* costs -- and take *several months*!



*Yes, it really can be that simple. at least at the start, though I'll have more to say about the scan-it-in approach in our final chapter.

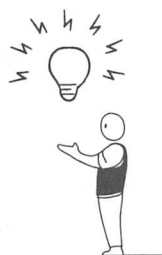
**Recoup the cost of making it available, that is. The cost of the creator's time is another matter, of course.



We're about to *enter* a *world* in which the path from selling *ten comics* to selling *ten thousand comics* to selling *ten million comics* is as *smooth* as *ice*.

An economy in which consumers' *interests* are served *directly*, not merely *guessed* at --

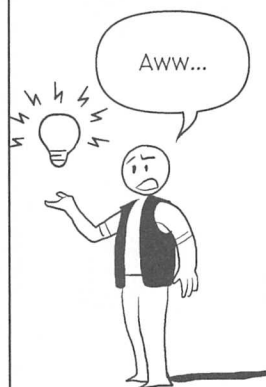
-- and in which the creator's work can *rise* or *fall* on the *strength* of that *interest* --



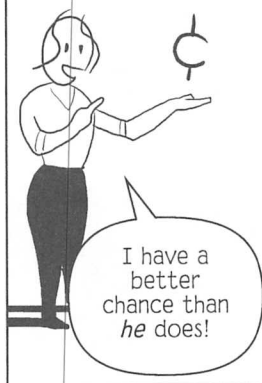
-- and not on any *other* reason *ever* again.



No *creator* has a right to expect a *huge audience* --



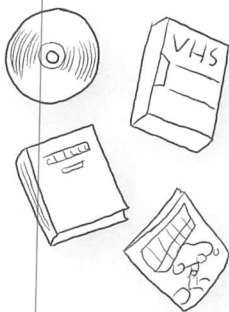
-- any more than *readers* have a right to expect comics *tailored to suit their needs* --



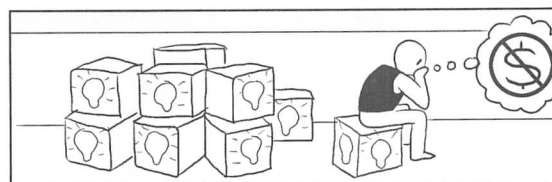
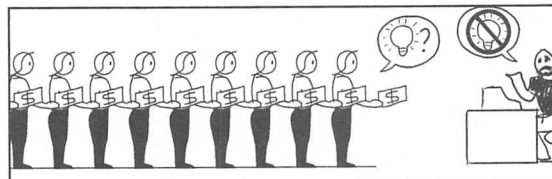
-- but *both* have a right to expect that when there's a *willing seller* and a *willing buyer*, the market won't *stand in their way!*

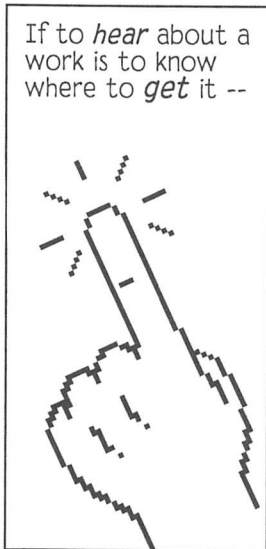
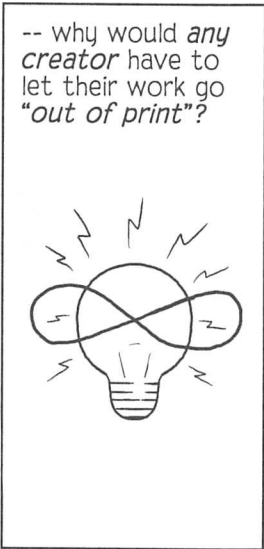
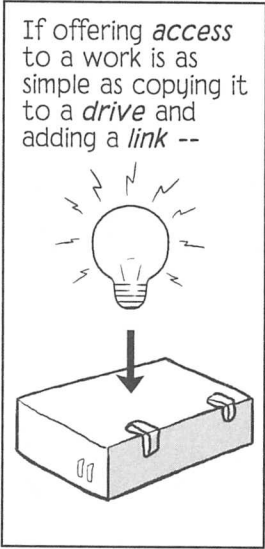
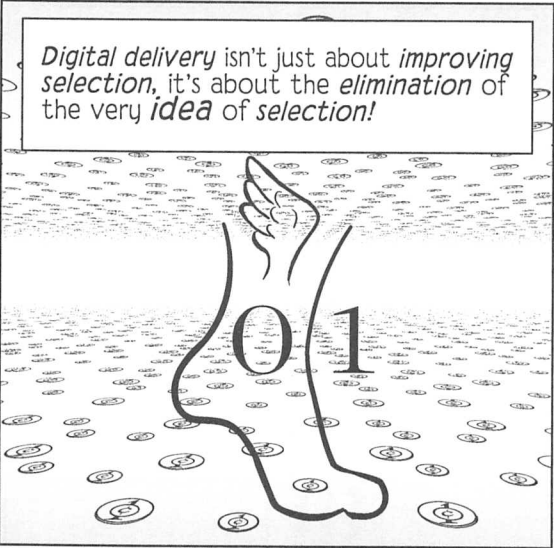
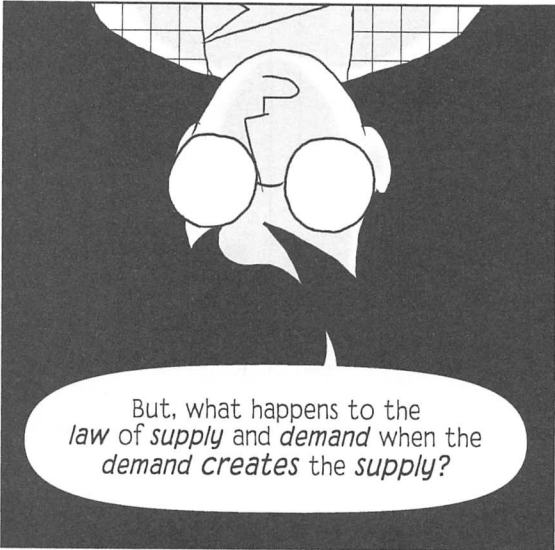


For as long as anyone can *remember*, our dreams have been sent from place to place as *objects* --



-- and *as* objects, they've been subjected to the strict laws of *supply* and *demand*, and *diverted* by those with *enough power* to *turn* those laws to their *advantage*.



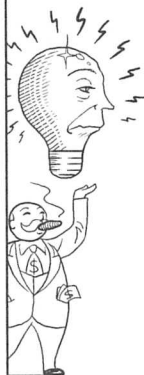


Here at the *Turn of the Century*, the *barons* of the *physical world* have begun to *leverage* their *influence* on the Web, leading some analysts to take a *New-Game-Same-Rules* attitude.

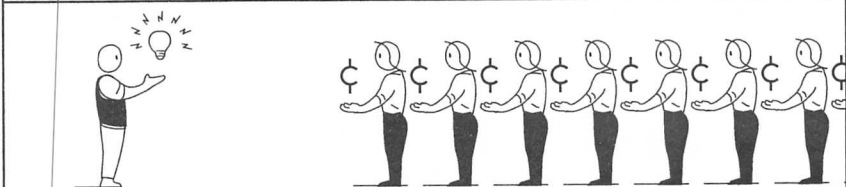
The evening news is filled with stories of *corporate mergers* and *takeovers*.

Industry *trade magazines* obsess over *Market Caps* and *I.P.O.s**

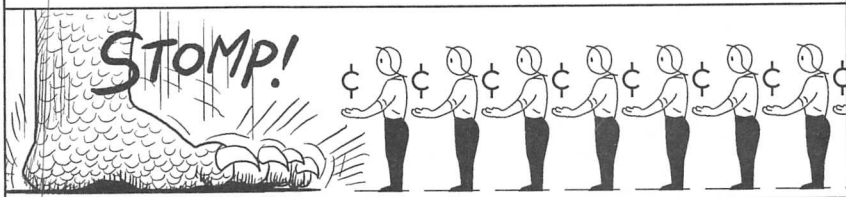
And on every other *street corner* and during every other *station break*, the "*Dot Coms*" clamor for *eyeballs*.



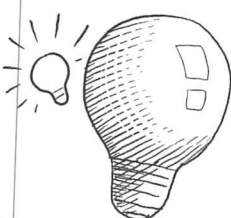
In such a *climate*, one might fear that our *lone creator* wouldn't *survive* --



-- because he'd never exceed his *thousand readers* once the *big boys* move in!



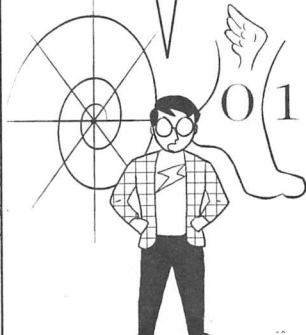
With more *cash* to throw into *production* and *promotion*, the *big* and *slick* frequently get a head start on the *small* and *innovative* --



-- and, in the *industry* that's grown up around *printed comics*, we've seen the tools by which the products of *bigger players* can easily crowd others *out of the market* entirely.



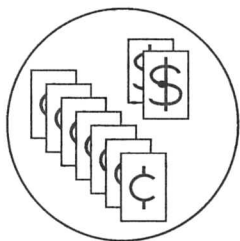
But if you think the *same rules* will *automatically* apply on the *Web* -- *think again!*



*Short for "market capitalization" and "initial public offering" -- and if you didn't know that already, consider yourself lucky.



After 16 years of *surviving* in the *old system*, I've seen firsthand the *advantages* that *scale* affords to the *biggest players*. They include:



A lower average *price-per-unit* cost based on higher *production runs*.



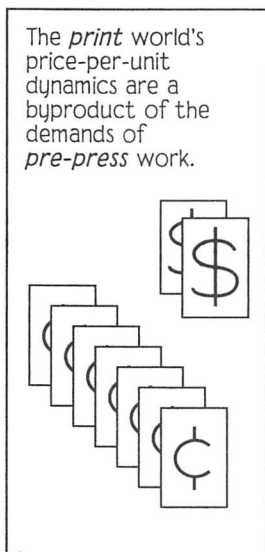
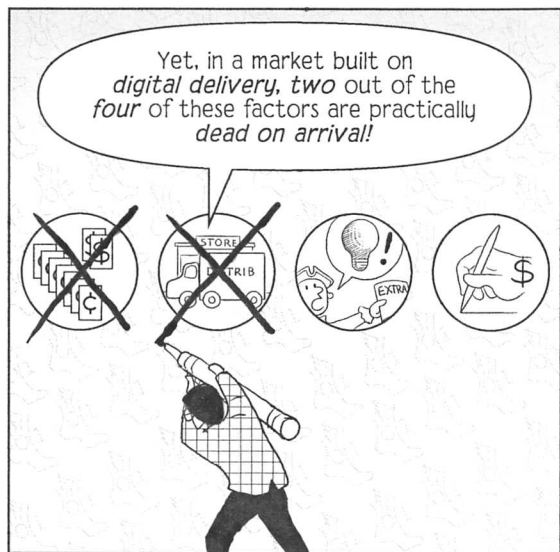
The means to *conquer distance* by insuring all *local retailers* are *well-stocked*.



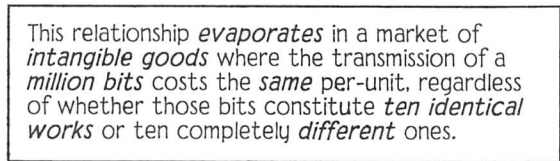
The means to *spread the word* of them through *ads* and *catalog placement*.



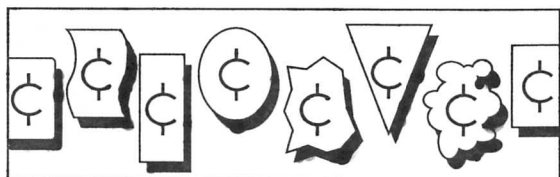
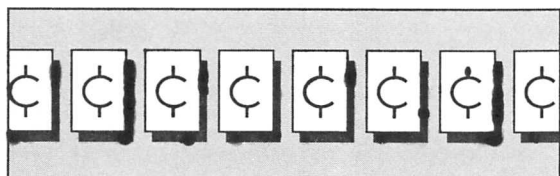
And the ability to *spend more* on the *production* of the work itself.



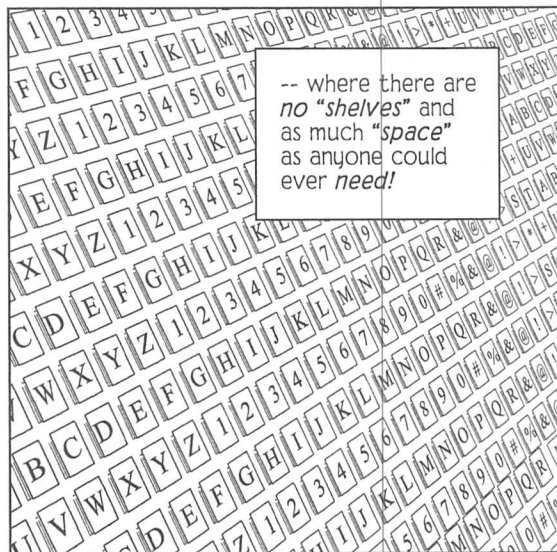
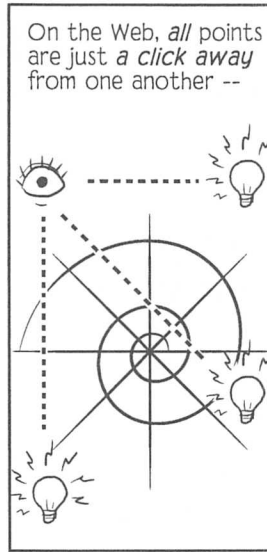
The *print* world's price-per-unit dynamics are a byproduct of the demands of *pre-press* work.



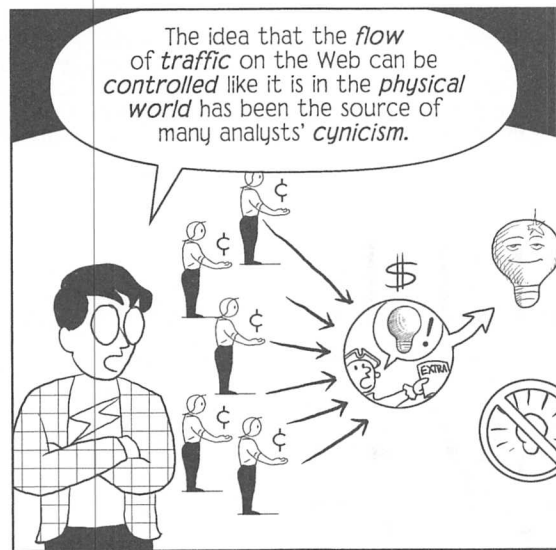
This relationship *evaporates* in a market of *intangible goods* where the transmission of a *million bits* costs the *same* per-unit, regardless of whether those bits constitute *ten identical works* or ten completely *different* ones.



*Unlike your internet access provider, the company that hosts your site could be anywhere on Earth.

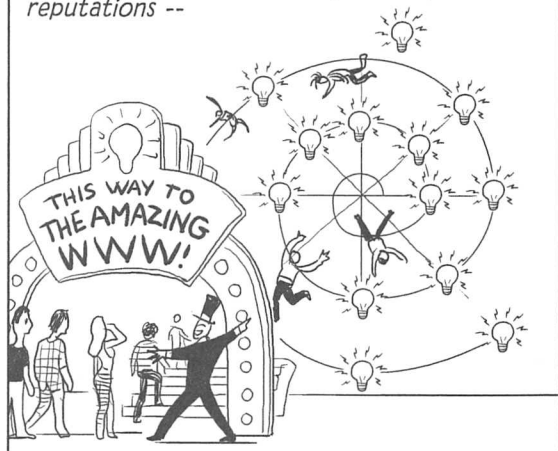


Of course, readers have to know *where* to *click!* Could that *knowledge* be *restricted* by those with the *deepest pockets?*

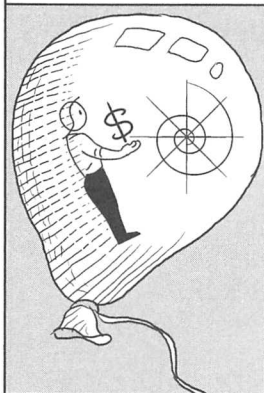


-- but that principle only *applies* if readers know they have an *alternative!*

Some fear that as more and more once-independent "portal" sites* are *bought* (often at *huge prices*) with the intent of maintaining their *impartial reputations* --



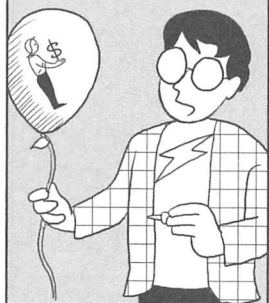
-- such sites may increasingly be *filled* with nothing but *paid endorsements* and *in-house promos*!



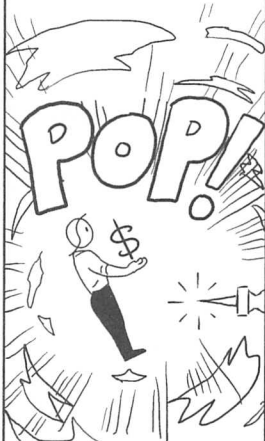
But unlike in the *physical* world, the brand loyalty of *online* consumers can't be easily *coerced* --



-- because you can only keep consumers *in* if you can lock the competition *out* --



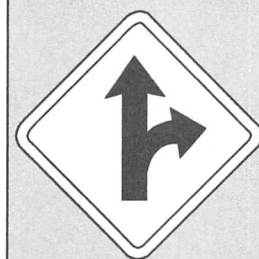
-- and the *truth* about the competition only has to penetrate *once*!



If your trusted portal only leads to sites that *pay* for the *privilege* or that the portal's parent *owns* --



-- then your experience is quickly *degraded* and you'll look *elsewhere*.

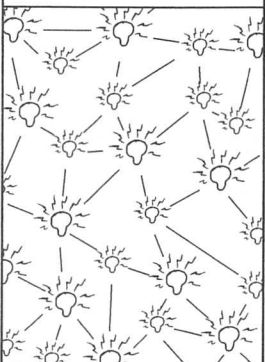


And unless you're *straight out of the box*,** you'll know you *can*.

You'll know because you'll know someone whose site *isn't* listed and who found out *why*.



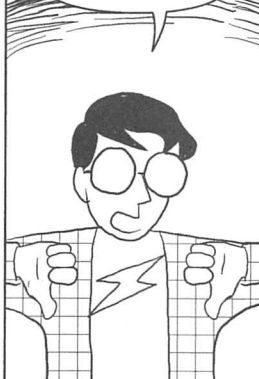
You'll know because the sites you visit will link to *other* sites with links to still *more* sites that can *never* all be *policed*.



And you'll know because there'll be at least *one subject* that you'll know enough *about* --

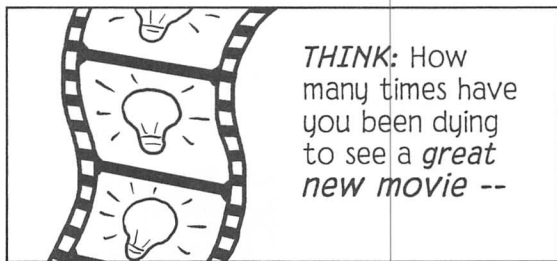


-- to know when the coverage *sucks*!

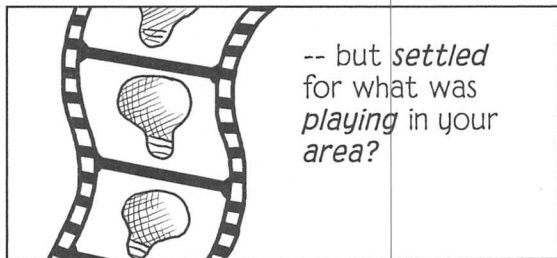


*Portals are sites that users depend on as guides or gateways to the Web at large -- though any site that commands a huge number of eyeballs may be considered a portal these days.

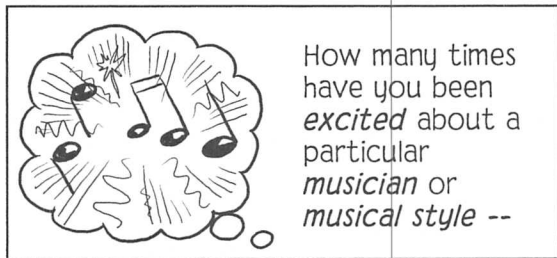
**We have a bumper crop of "newbies" right now, but that's just a sign of the transition to general ownership.



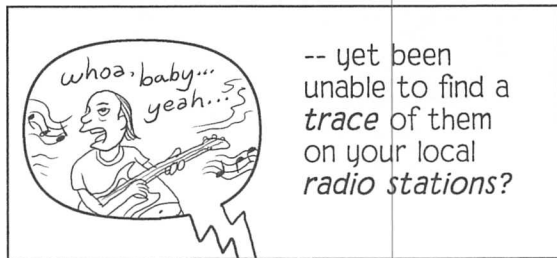
THINK: How many times have you been dying to see a *great new movie* --



-- but *settled* for what was *playing* in your area?



How many times have you been *excited* about a particular *musician* or *musical style* --



-- yet been unable to find a *trace* of them on your local *radio stations*?



How many times have you *tuned in* to a *just-okay TV show* --



-- because there was *nothing else on?!*

Now ask yourself: If *all movies ever made* were playing *next door*; if *all music ever recorded* was *ready to play whenever you wanted it*; if *every video* was at your *fingertips* --



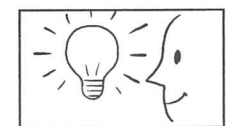
As the *promotional edge* of big players is *diminished* on the Web, the tools of *small players* are *amplified*.



Word of mouth, a longtime ally of the "*great-but-small*," was never a *guarantee* that readers could *find* and *buy* such comics in the *old system*.



Yet in the world of *bits*, word-of-mouth can carry a *link* to the comics *with* it, helping the *news* of good work spread like *wildfire!*



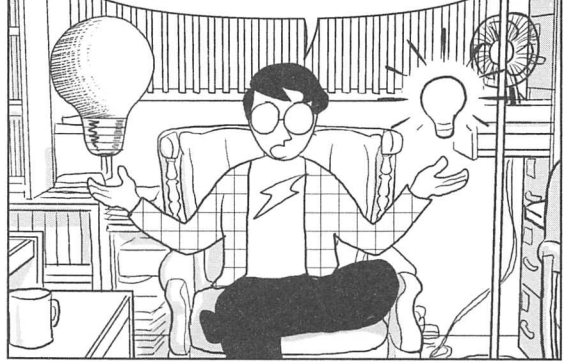
And as new *payment methods* allow readers to pay *small amounts* for content *about* content, the strengths of the *critic* can return *in force* --



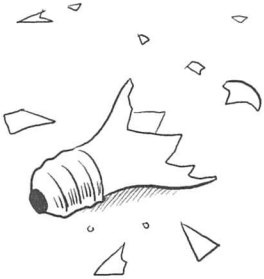
-- not only paid for by publishers and advertisers, but by *the readers themselves*.



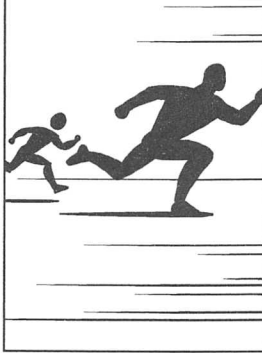
For these and *other* reasons, I think the Web offers a *level playing field*, but that doesn't mean that the *worthy ten percent* will suddenly become *ninety*; just that the *ten* will be allowed to become *eleven* --



-- instead of being *smashed* to *zero* by a *ninety* always grabbing for *more* --



-- and if *ten* can become *eleven*, then *eleven* can become *twelve*, and the race can be run on the runners' *strengths* at last!



Which brings us to the *one strength* that large producers will still have fully *on their side* in the *new economy*: The ability to devote more resources to the *production* of the work *itself*.



Large producers will continue to have more *money* on hand to throw into *talent*, *time* and cutting-edge *technology*.



The *lone, unfunded creator* will, as always, have to make up for his or her size with *creativity*, *skill*, *endurance* and *inspiration*.

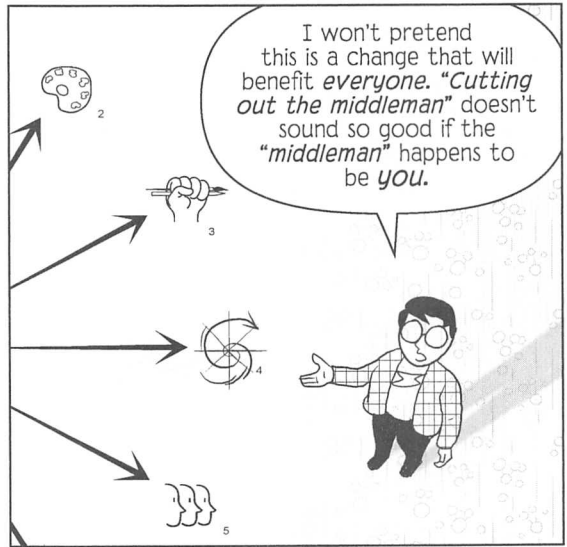
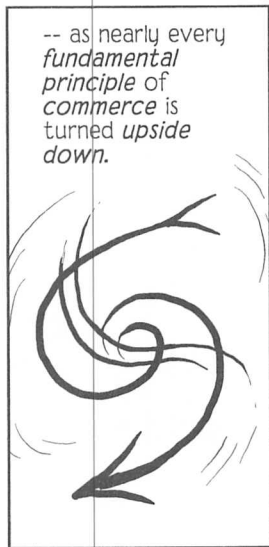
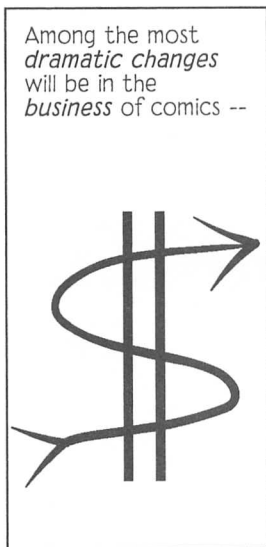
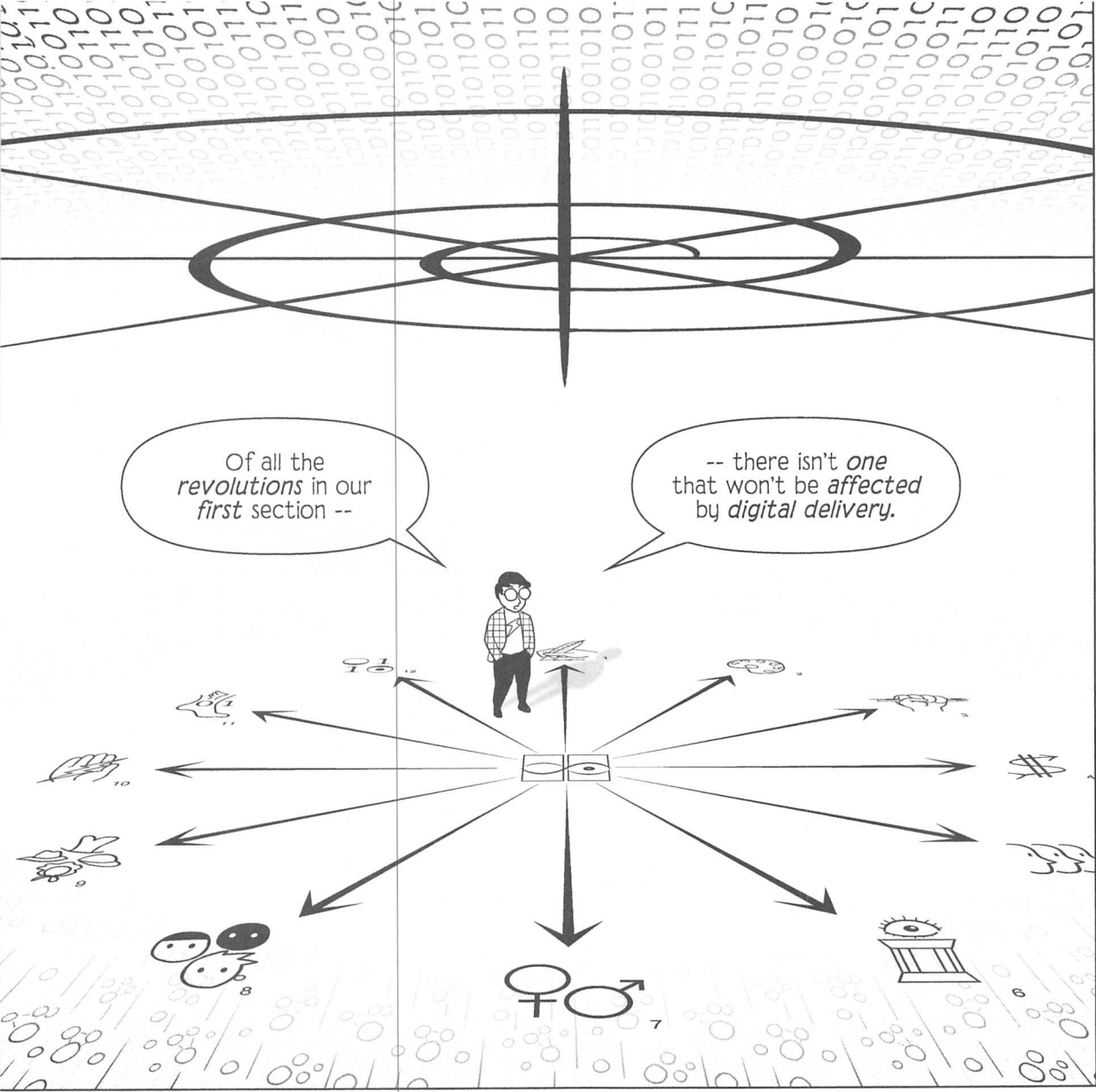


We can all guess who'll take the *early lead* in that race, and maybe they *deserve* to.



But in the *final lap*, you know who *my money's* on.

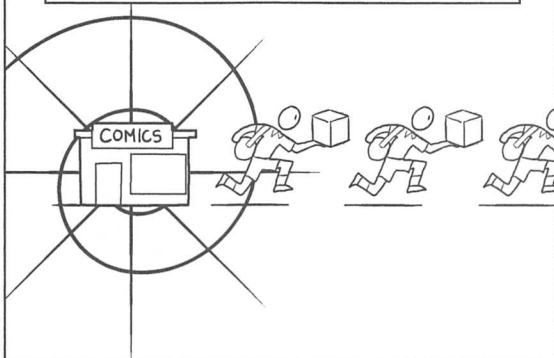




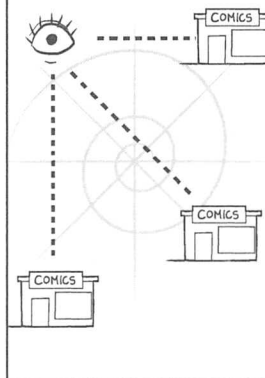
In the *depressed* market of year 2000, it's a rare comics retailer that isn't struggling to *survive*, and talk of "*digital delivery*" is unlikely to be very *encouraging*.



Some *retailers* have ventured *online themselves* in recent years, but since the product they sell remains a *physical* one, the *economies of scale* can make life tough for the *smaller shops*.



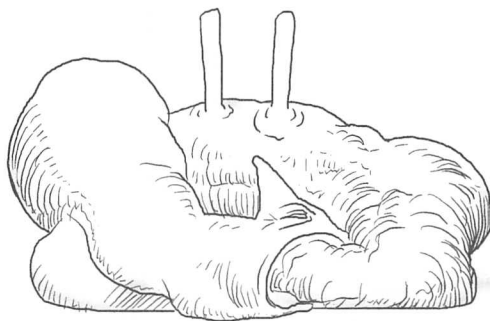
The Web can certainly help *spread the word* about good comics stores to *potential customers* --*



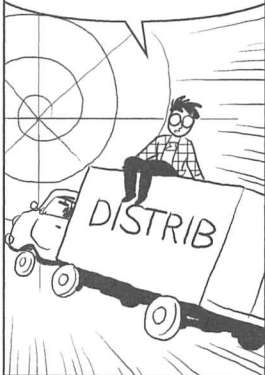
-- but probably the Web's best shot at doing more *good* than *harm* to retailers is in reviving *interest* and *awareness* of comics of *all kinds* among the *general public* --



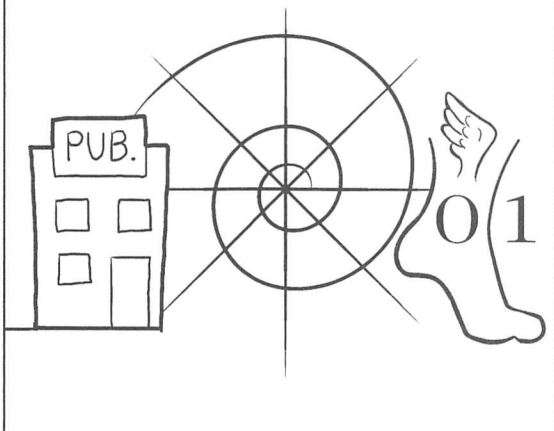
-- before the *negative trends* that have been *weakening* the *business* of comics since long *before* the Web are allowed to *run their course*.



American comics' largest direct-market *distributor* is already moving into *online commerce* and will no doubt *survive* --



-- but the fate of *individual publishers* will depend on their willingness to *embrace* this new market without *abandoning* the *old* --



-- and to offer creators *new* and *better reasons* not to simply *go it alone*.



*Don't underestimate the power of this one! I found an "indy-friendly" shop in my area using the Web, and I do all my comics shopping there now.

By severely restricting the *economies of scale* --



-- comics of literary and artistic merit --

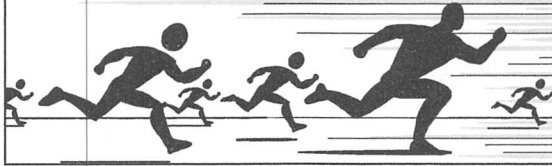


-- and those showcasing the full spectrum of human experience --

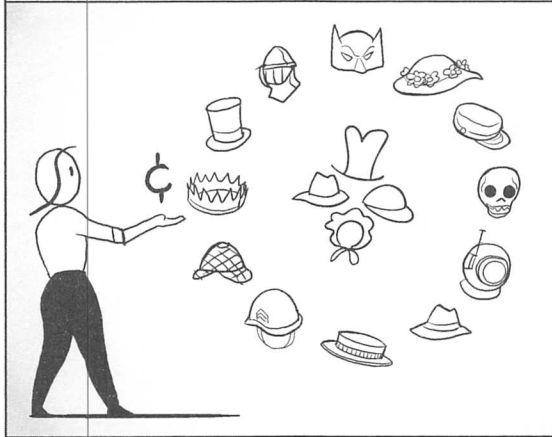


-- can *start* as small as they need to --

-- and *compete fairly* in a market driven by consumer demand alone.



-- but every *individual vision* of comics will at least get its *day in the sun* as *alternative genres explode* in every direction.*



Not *every* creator can expect to *strike* it *rich* in the new market --

I wish you'd stop saying that!



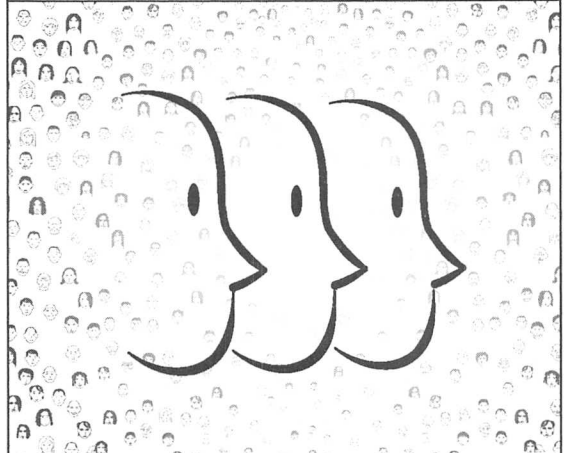
Comics designed to reach out to *non-fans* will no longer have to *hide* where only *fans* will see them --



-- but instead will connect with their *true market* --



-- and in time, comics can begin to earn the *diverse audience* it so desperately needs.

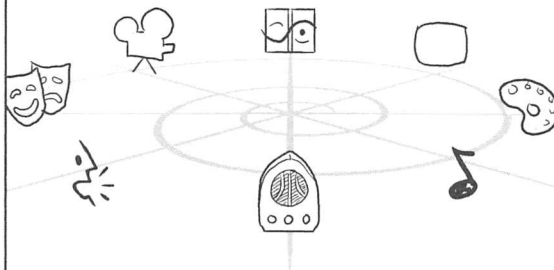


*This can be seen already at downloadable music sites like mp3.com where there are hundreds of genres and subgenres.

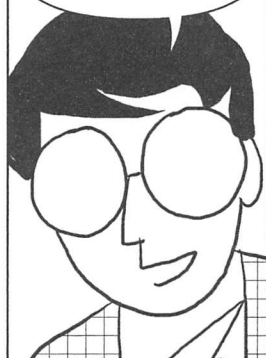
The specter of *censorship* hasn't necessarily *dimmed* --



-- but on *the Web*, comics need never be a *scapegoat* again, unless the whole of *art, literature, music* and *cinema* suffer the *same fate* --



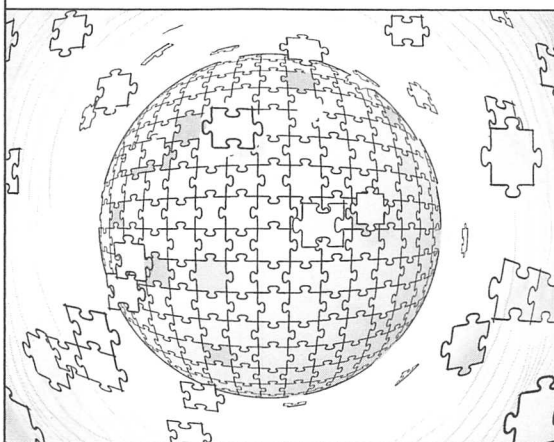
-- and if that's the case, then *this time* we *won't go down* without *one Hell* of a *FIGHT!*



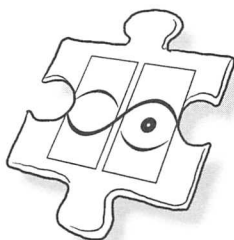
In this chapter I've made a case for the digital delivery of *all media*, not just *one*.



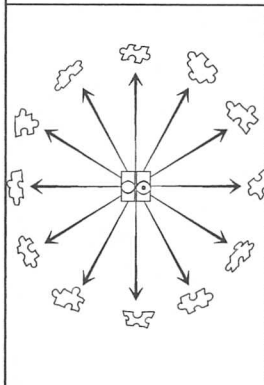
The Web is *the biggest collaborative positive effort* in *recorded history*, and there's every reason to think that it's still in its *infancy*.



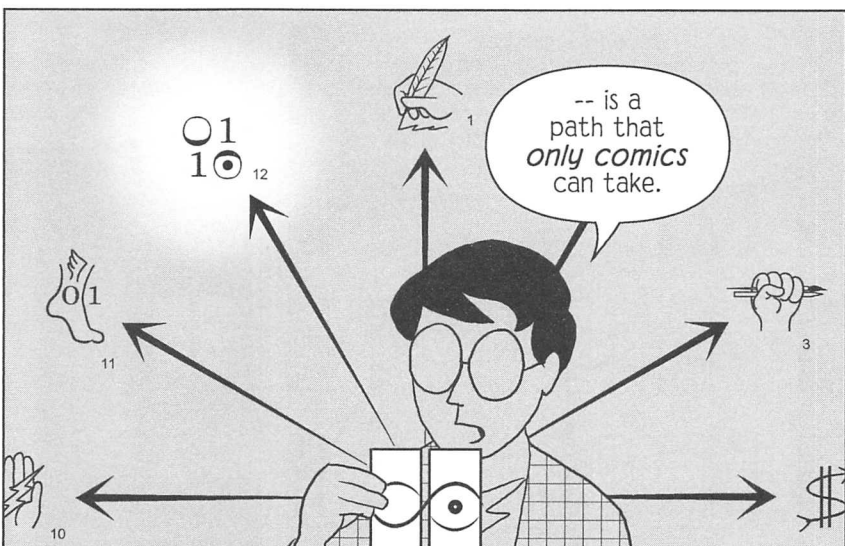
This form we call *comics* may be just a *piece* of the *puzzle* in this great undertaking. The Web is *far bigger* than *comics*.



Yet the *Web* is just a *piece* of comics' *OWN puzzle*, and beyond where the two of them *intersect* --



-- is a path that *only comics* can take.



-- it described the work of many *creators* who gave generously to the *art* of comics, if not its *culture* or *industry*.



Maurice Sendak



Edward Gorey



Max Ernst

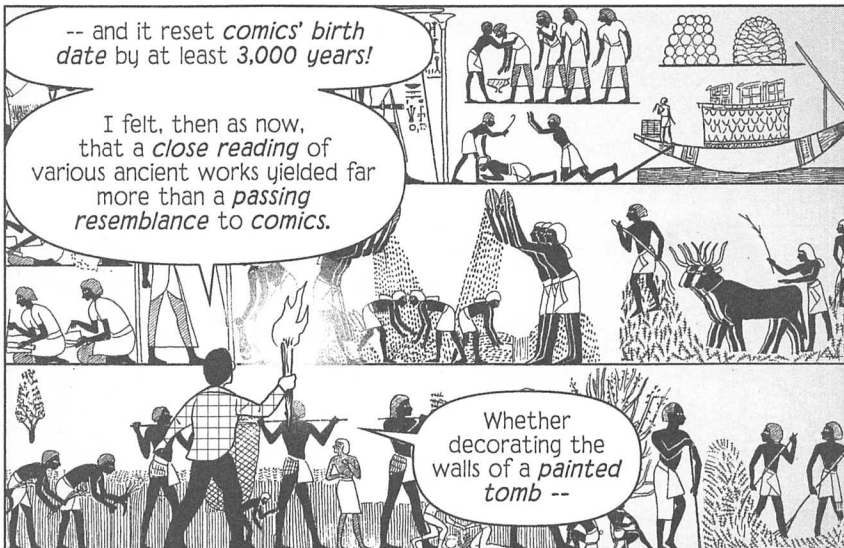
-- as well as the hordes of *less lofty* creations that nevertheless *belong* in comics' *camp* --



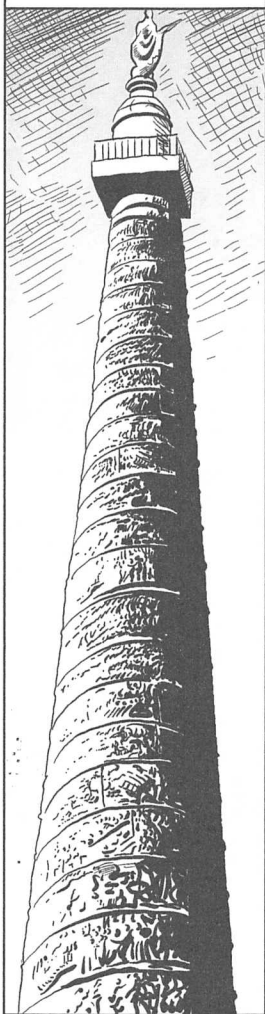
Airplane safety card.

-- and it reset *comics' birth date* by at least *3,000 years!*

I felt, then as now, that a *close reading* of various ancient works yielded far more than a *passing resemblance* to comics.



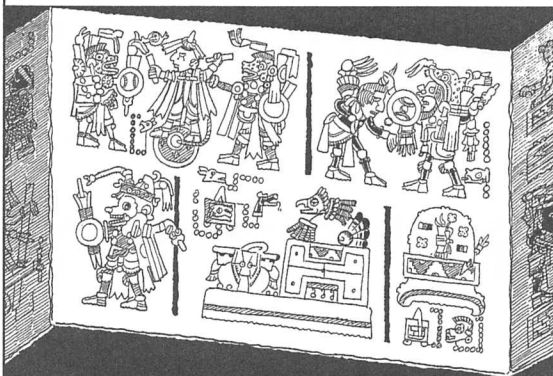
-- spiraling in *bas-relief* up a *stone column* --



-- parading across a *230-foot tapestry* --



-- or zigzagging across an *accordion-folded painted deerskin* --

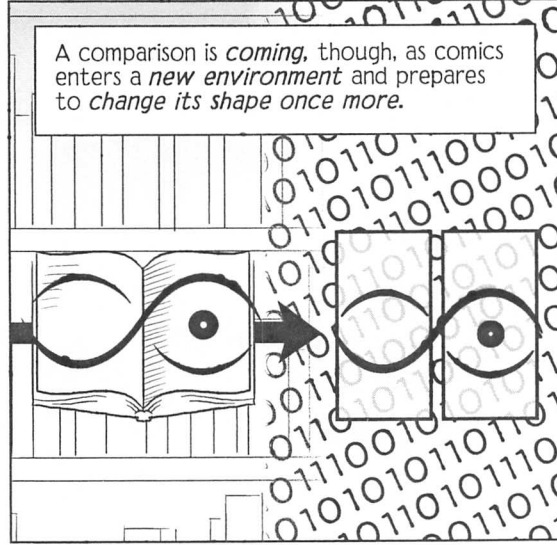
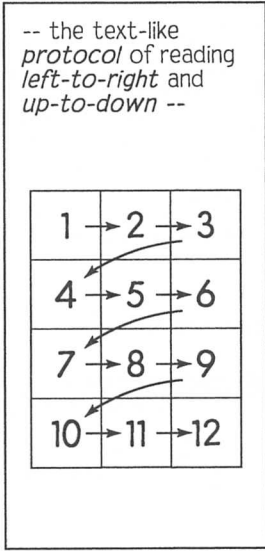


-- such works were, *despite* their exotic *styles*, *comics to the core*, telling stories in *deliberate sequences* of pictures.



It wasn't until the invention of *print**, though, that the more *familiar devices* of *modern comics* emerged.

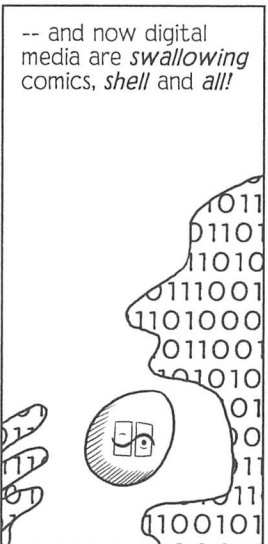
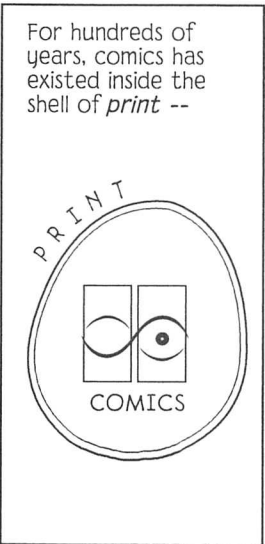
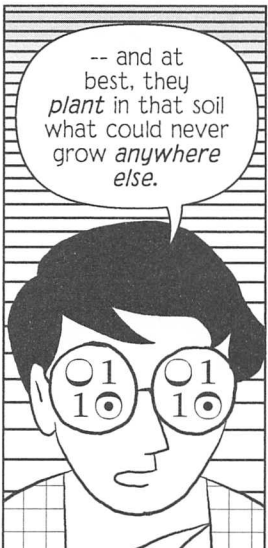
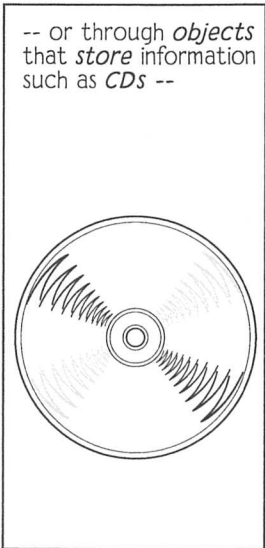
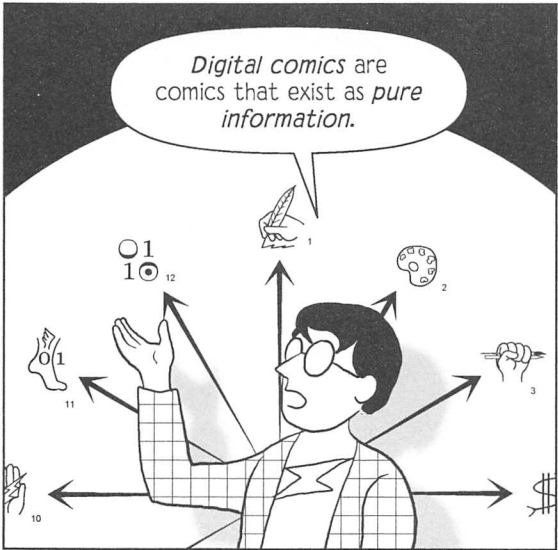
*European print at least.



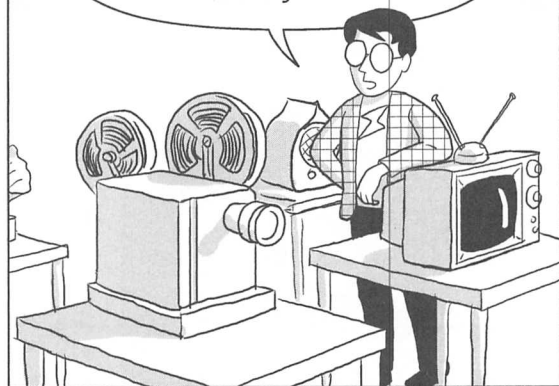
*Examples are from David Kunzle's massive landmark study *The Early Comic Strip* (see bibliography).

The *search* for those *new shapes* is the search for *digital comics*, our *twelfth* and *final* revolution.

01 10 12



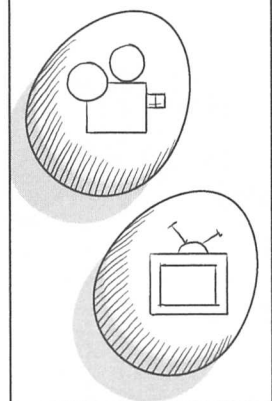
Comics and print
aren't *unique* in this regard.
Some forms of art in this century
have been so *associated* with their
respective technologies as to be
defined *by* them --



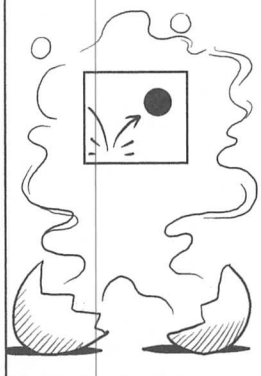
-- but, as the full spectrum of audio and visual
arts converge on the *single stage* of *digital
media*, those various technological shells will
begin to *separate* from their *contents*.



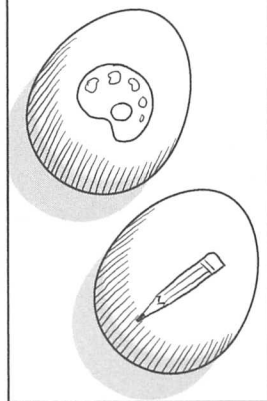
The technologies of
film projection and
television, for
example --



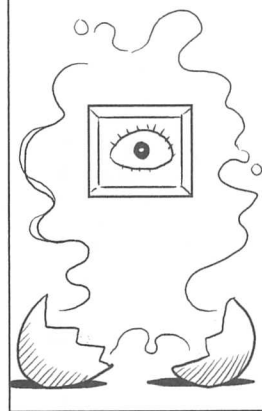
-- both harbor the
art of the *moving
image* --



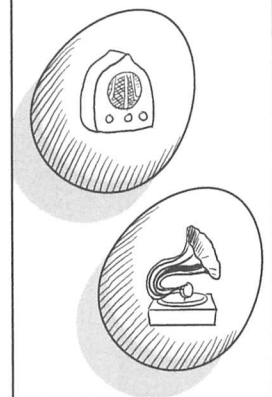
-- as the technologies
of *painting* and
drawing --



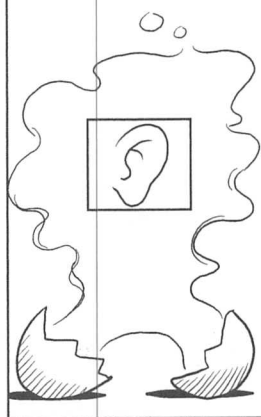
-- both harbor the
art of the *still
picture* --



-- and the
technologies of *radio*
and *sound playback*
devices --



-- both harbor the
art of *sound*,



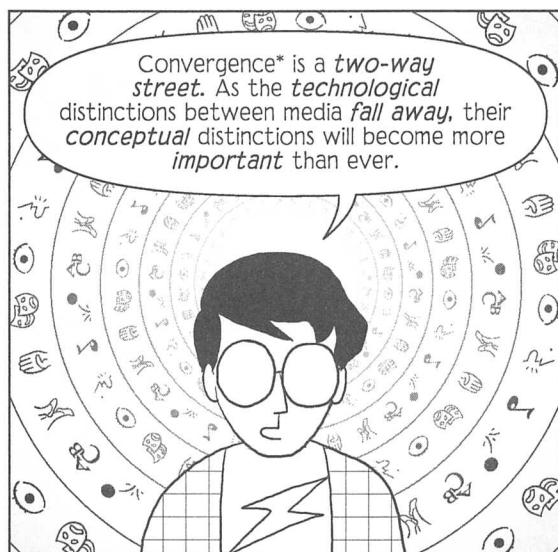
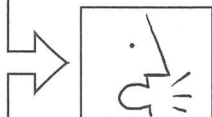
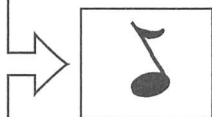
But as these
technological shells *fall away*,
don't expect all their contents to *mix*
into one big *clump*.



The art of *sound*, for example, is not an *irreducible concept*.



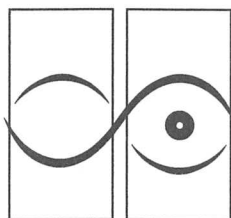
It harbors, among other things, the arts of *music* and the *spoken word*.



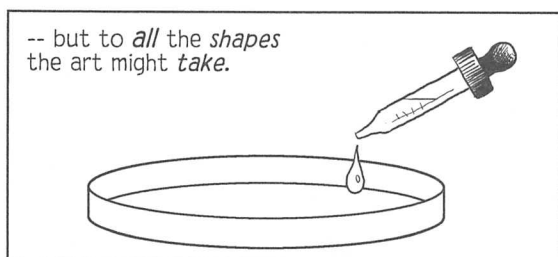
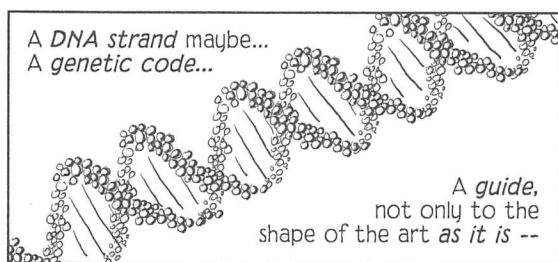
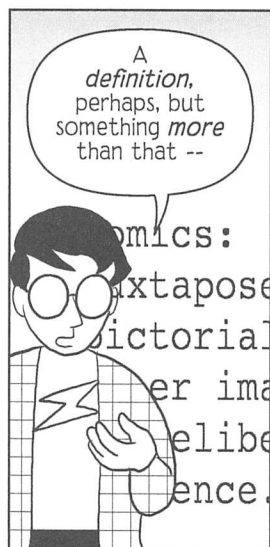
The resultant *media landscape* will be populated with *art forms* not rooted in a particular *machine*, *venue*, or *physical substance*, but in the implementation of their respective *ideas*.



Each one, a *simple*, *irreducible concept* --



-- one that *distinguishes* it from all *others*.



*Convergence was a popular term in the Nineties to describe the migration of traditional media to digital technology.

What *is* comics?

How can we *compress* the *idea* down to its *essence*?

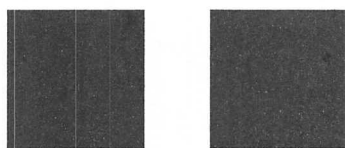
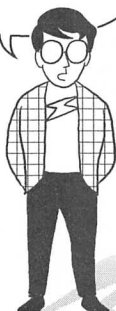


figure A.

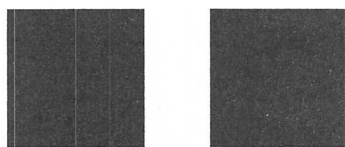


figure B.

If I told you that figure A *wasn't* comics and figure B *was*, would you *believe* me?



Suppose I told you that *figure A* was a picture of *two squares* --

-- and *figure B* was a picture of *one square* --

-- shown at *one moment*, then the *next*?



Run your finger over *A* and that finger is moving through *space*.



Run it over *B* and it's moving through *time*.



To *define* comics we needed something like *this* --

Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence.



-- but to grasp the *essence* of comics I think it's helpful --

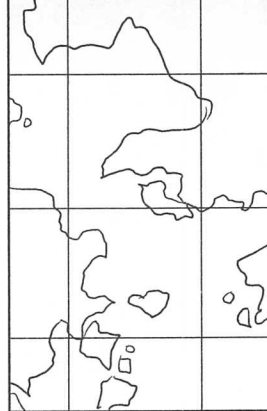
Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence.

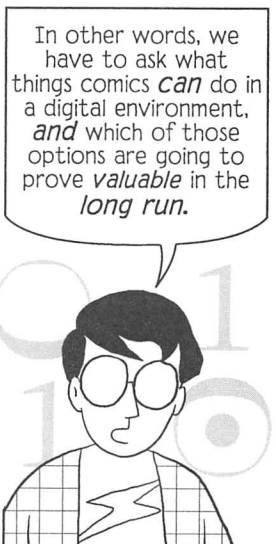
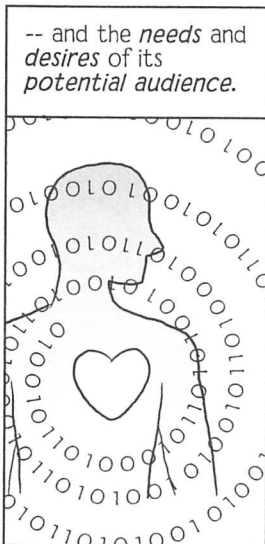
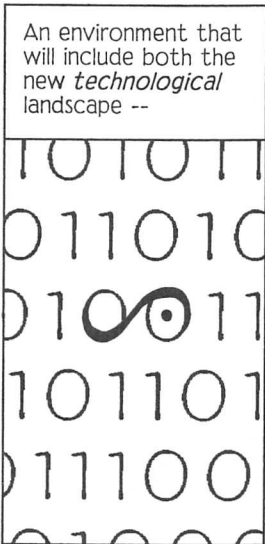
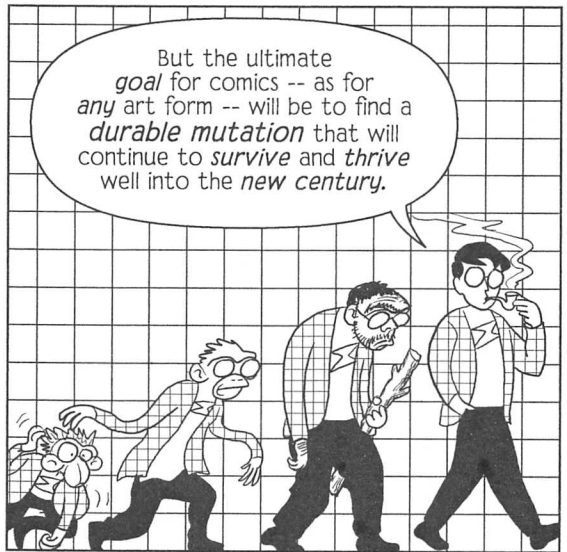
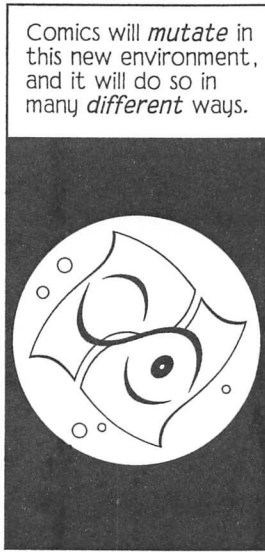
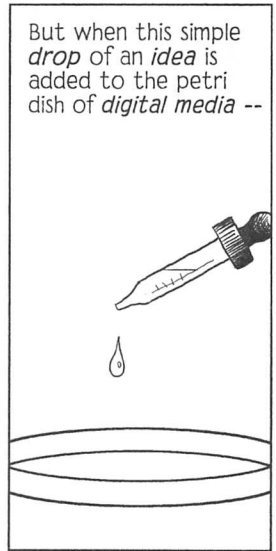
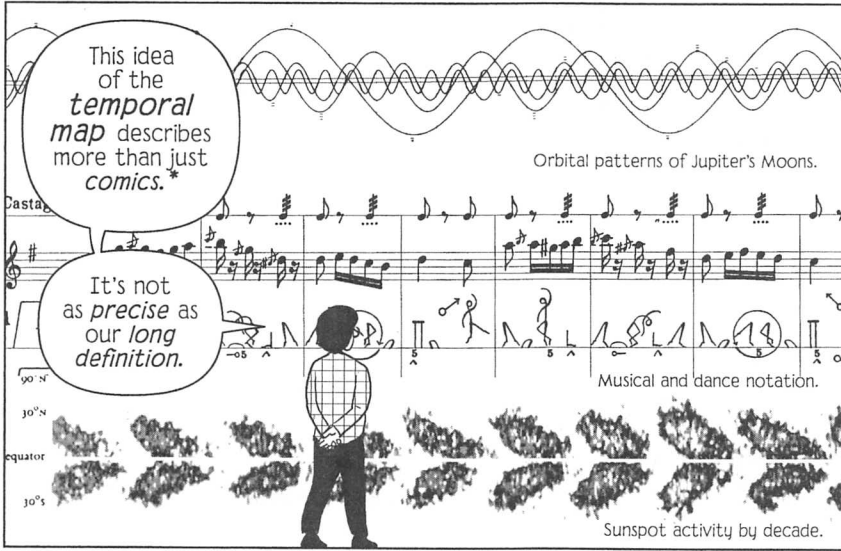


-- to also begin seeing comics as *this*.



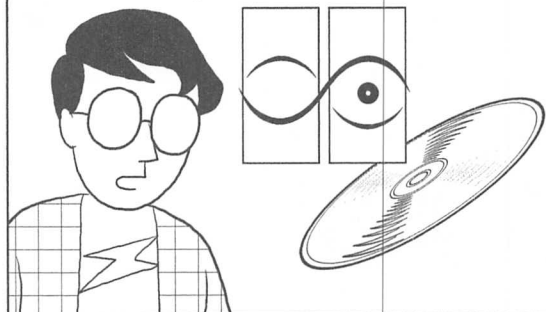
An *artist's map* of *time itself*.





*See Edward Tufte's groundbreaking books (listed in bibliography) for more on representing time graphically. Examples in this panel are from Tufte's *Envisioning Information*.

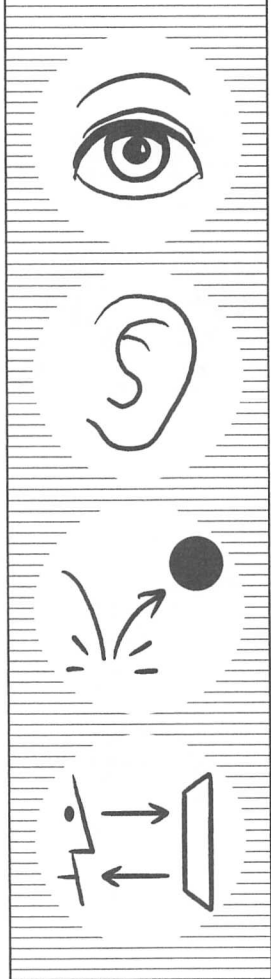
That *first* question --
What *can* comics do in a digital
environment? -- was first addressed by
cartoonists in the heyday of multimedia
CD-ROMs.*



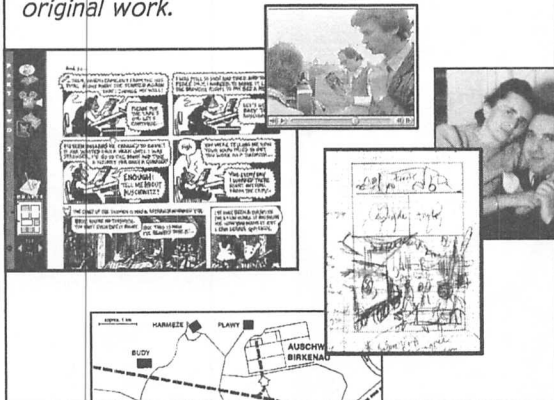
CD-ROMs gave many their first glimpse of
the *creative* possibilities of *digital* media.



Multimedia offered to
supplement comics' *visual* basics with
sound, *motion* and
interactivity.



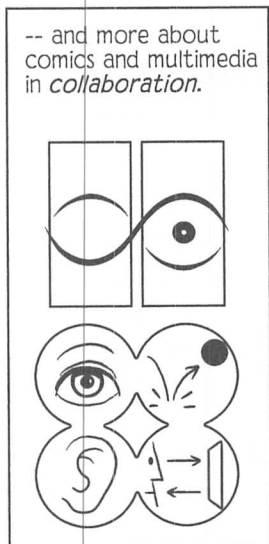
Some exercised such options in a *supplemental*
way. Art Spiegelman in converting *Maus*, treated
the plastic disks as "*five mile deep filing cabinets*,"
a way to offer *notes*, *sketches*, *home movies*
and other support material along with the
original work.



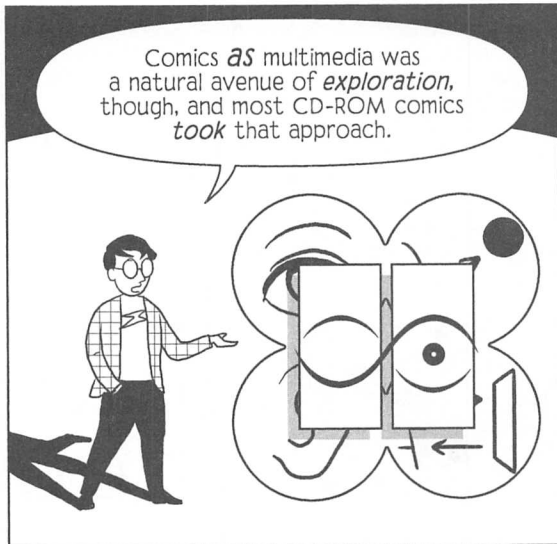
But because the
pages themselves
remained *unchanged*,
the work was less
about comics as
multimedia --



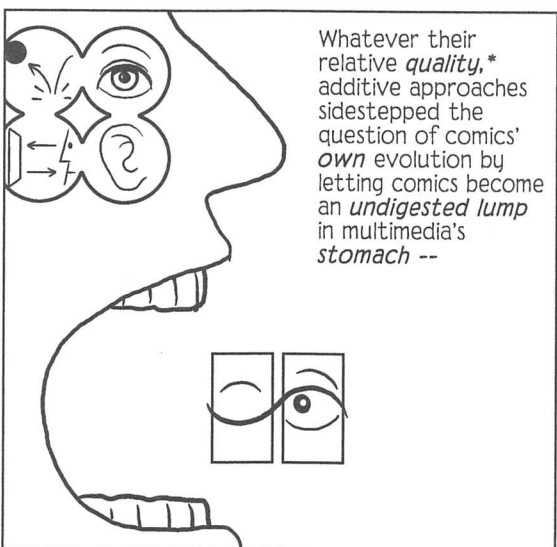
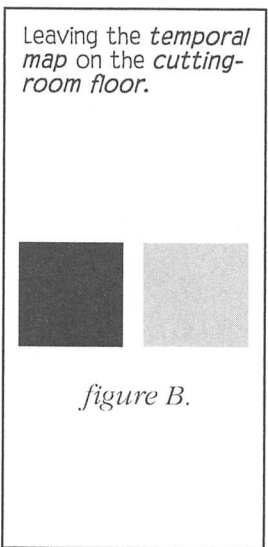
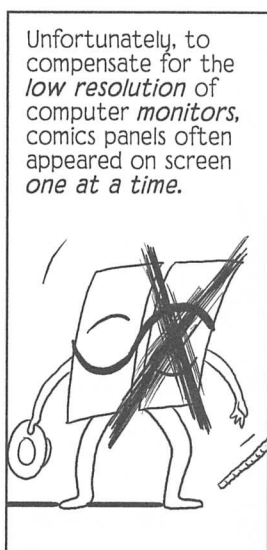
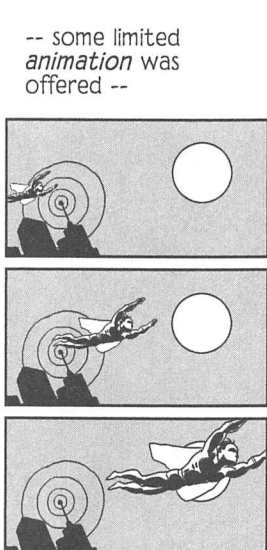
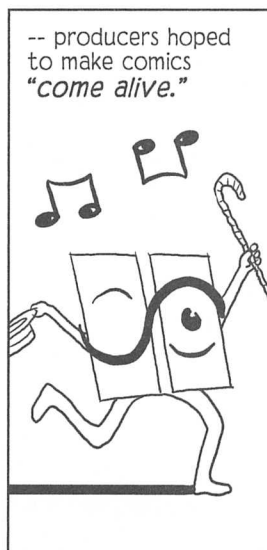
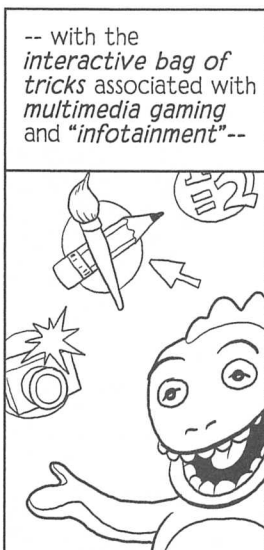
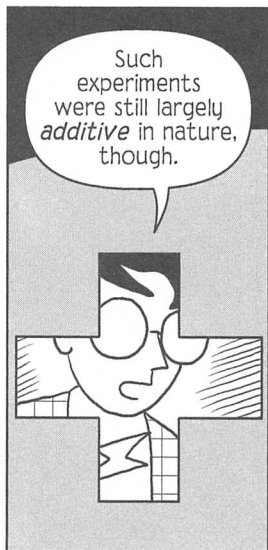
-- and more about
comics and multimedia
in *collaboration*.



Comics *as* multimedia was
a natural avenue of *exploration*,
though, and most CD-ROM comics
took that approach.

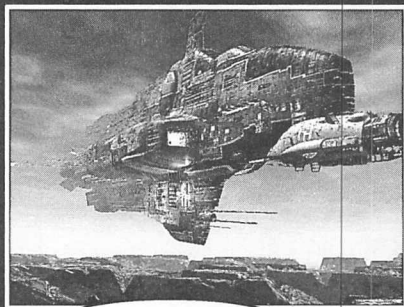
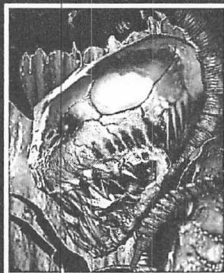


*Roughly the early Nineties, before the Web caught
on, (not that they've ceased to exist or anything...)



*Not always high, but that alone shouldn't discredit the idea.

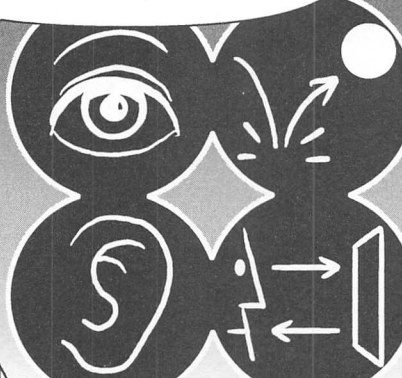
More *ambitious* and *innovative* projects like 1995's *Sinkha*, a CD-ROM graphic novel by Italian illustrator *Marco Patrito*, seemed to offer a *new* and possibly *vital mutation* of *comics*.



In *Sinkha*, lush digitally generated 3-D images -- some *static*, some *moving* -- are accompanied by *music*, frequently *juxtaposed* and combined with *text*.



The goal of making comics "*come alive*" seems *closer* in such works where the sound, motion and images create an *immersive experience*.



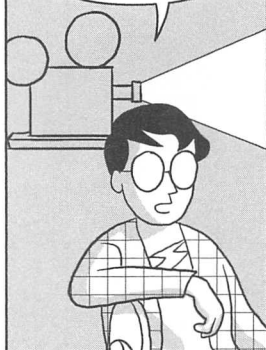
Here, though, the goal *itself* becomes a *slippery slope*.



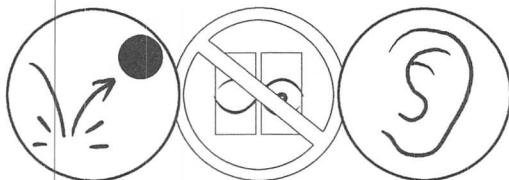
If *partial* sound and motion can help create an *immersive experience* --



-- won't *full* sound and motion do the job more *effectively*?



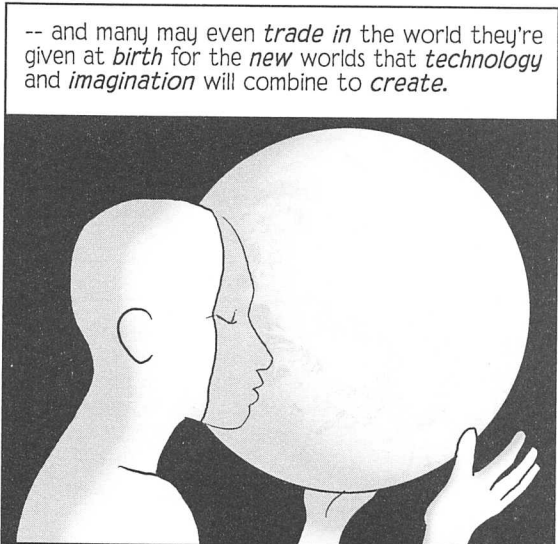
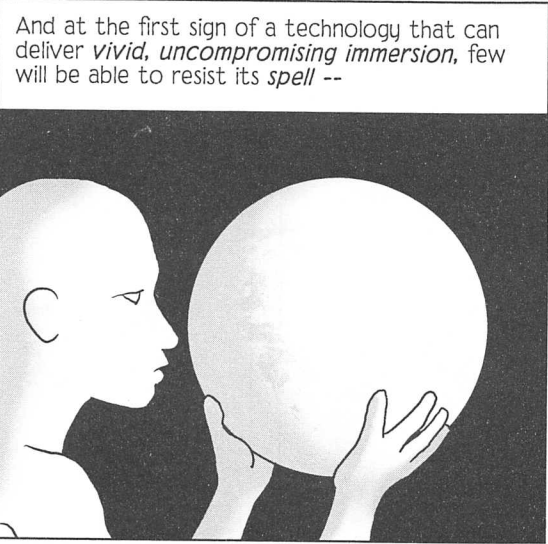
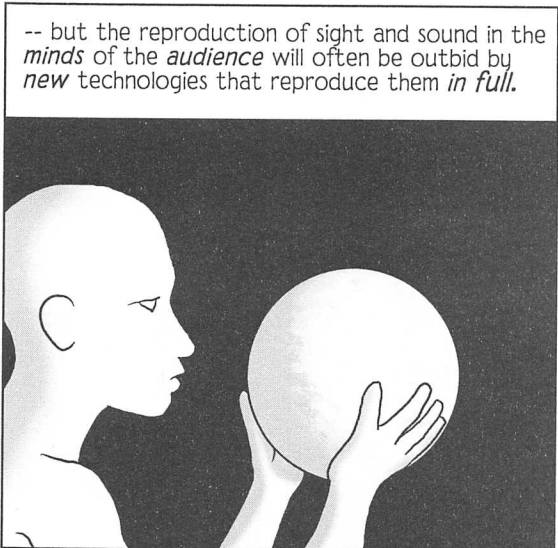
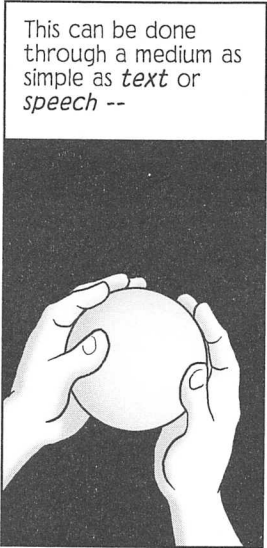
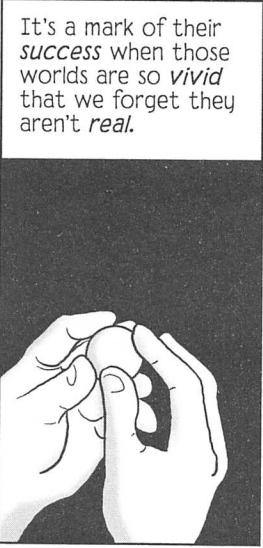
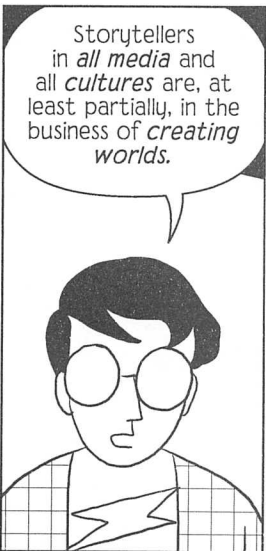
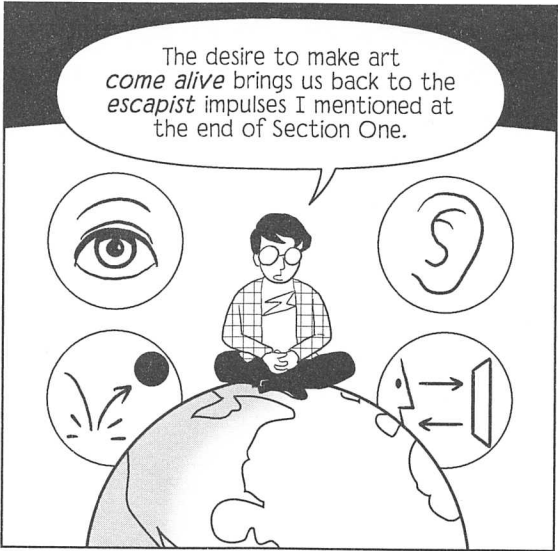
As the goal of "coming alive" is fulfilled more and more by *sound* and *motion* which represents time *through* time --

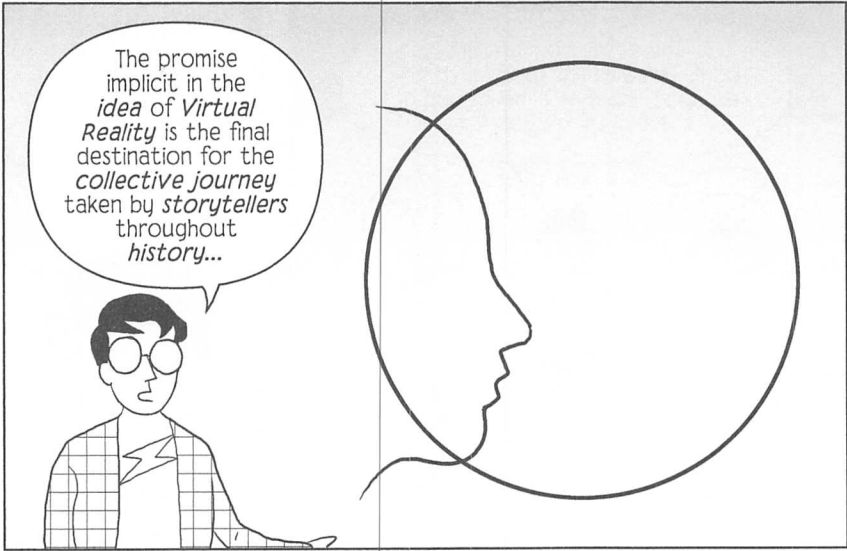


-- comics' *multi-image structure* -- the portrayal of time through *space* -- becomes *superfluous*, if not a *nuisance*, and isn't likely to endure.

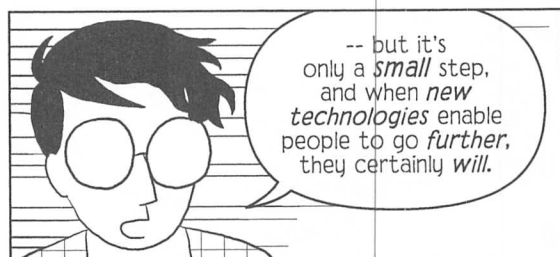
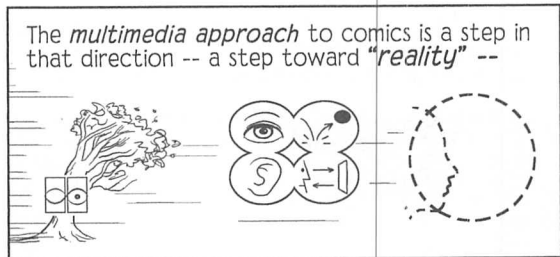
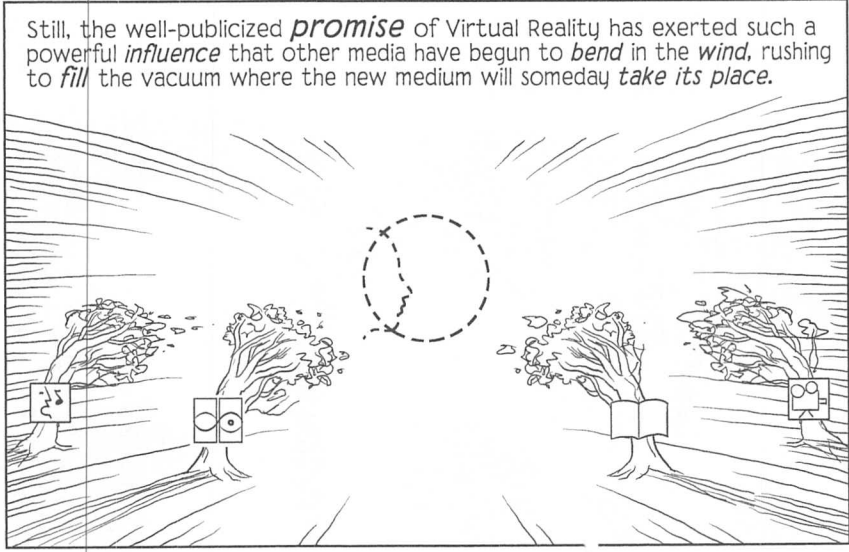
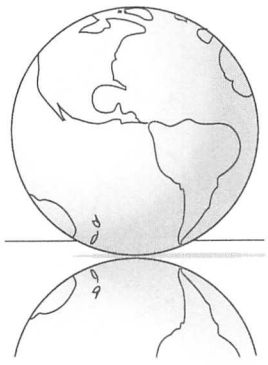
When it comes to *time-based* immersion, the art of *film* already does a *better job* than any tricked-up *comic* can.



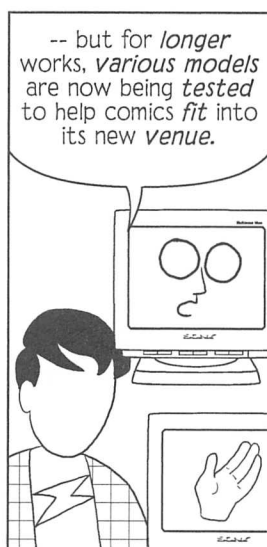
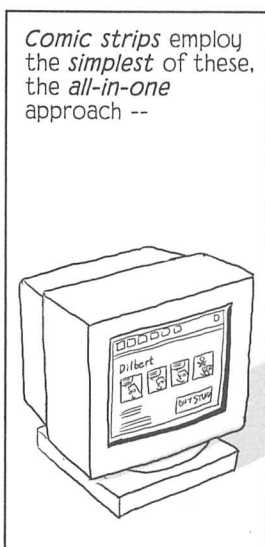
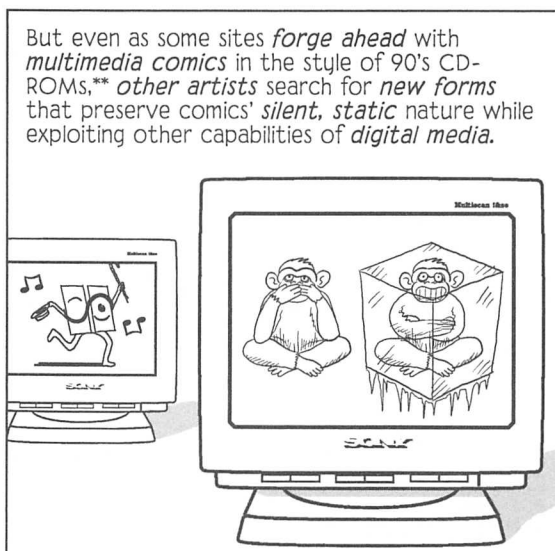
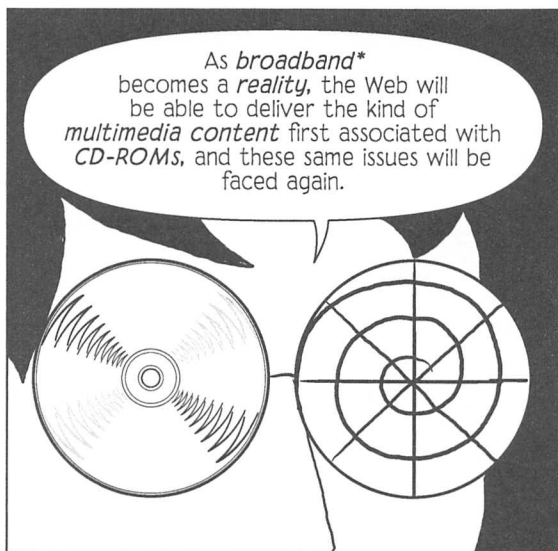
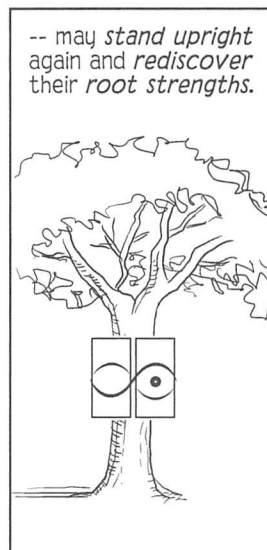
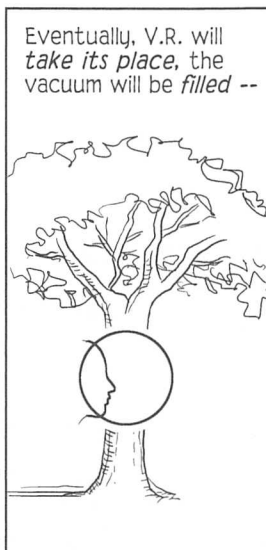




...the journey toward the *creation* of a *world* so *real* it can make us forget the one we *live* in.



*That is, a fully immersive doppelganger of real space and sensory experience. Note, this isn't necessarily what V.R. pioneers like Jaron Lanier meant by the term, merely what it's come to mean to most people since.

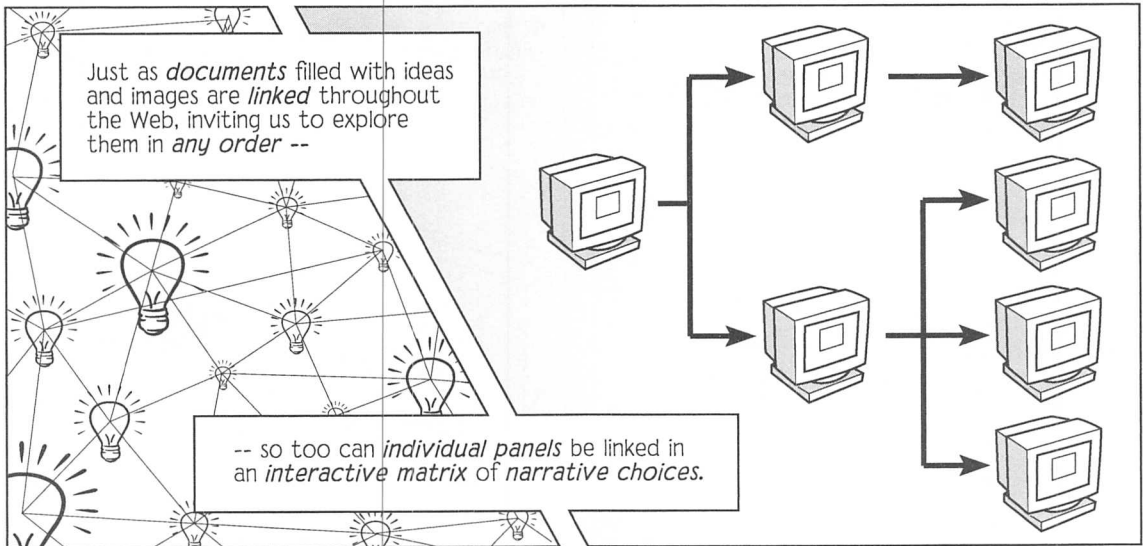
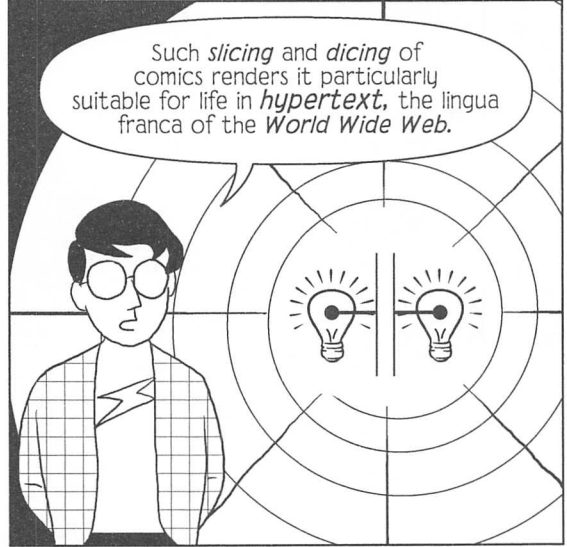
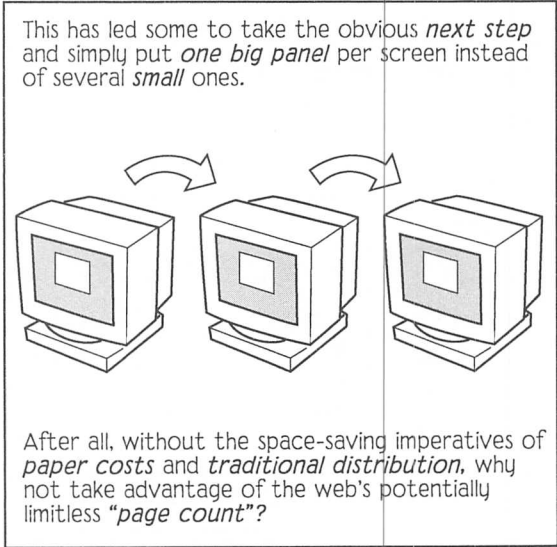
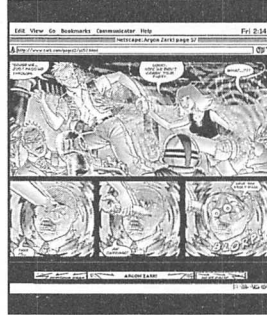


*High-bandwidth connections to the Web... the really fast stuff we're all waiting for.

**Check my site for links to some of the current Web comics in the multimedia/CD-ROM style.



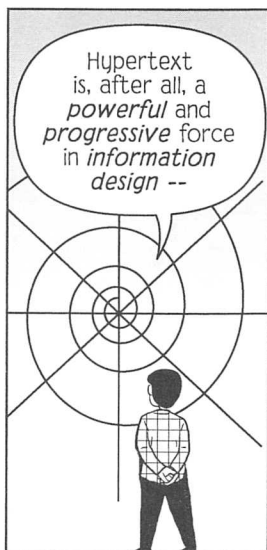
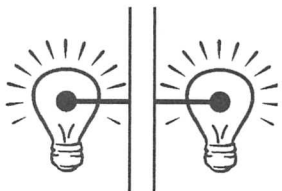
To compensate for the *low resolution* and *screen shape*, each page has roughly the same amount of visual information as a *half page* of printed comics.**



*Pictured: *Argon Zark* by Charlie Parker (Zark.com) was one of the earliest web comics to employ this model.

**Sadly, this concept seems beyond some designers who insist on standard page shapes even when there is no print version!

Any comic on the Web is in hypertext's *backyard*, it makes sense to *adjust* comics to fit its *new environment*.



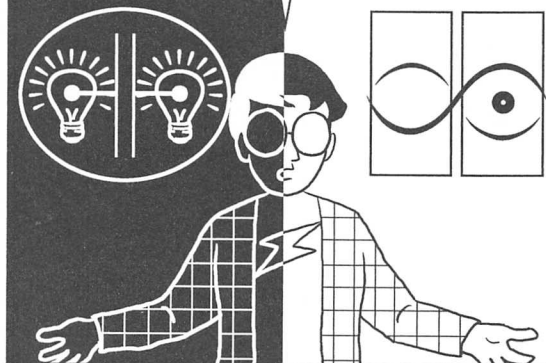
-- an idea that strives to match the agility of *human thought* --



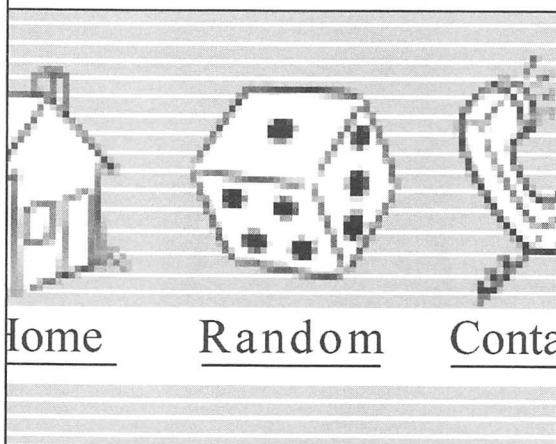
-- in ways the technology of print *never could*.

Index
 marlin, 16, 29,
 32, 127-128
 milk, 4, 54-57
 Mom, 2-41, 4
 moo-cow, 13
 66, 69, 71
 mortality,
 99, 101
 moxy fri
 5,

But for all of hypertext's *advantages*, the *basic ideas* behind hypertext and comics are *diametrically opposed*!



Hypertext relies on the principle that nothing exists in *space*. Everything is either *here*, *not here*, or *connected* to here --



-- while in the temporal map of *comics*, every element of the work has a *spatial relationship* to every *other* element at *all times*.

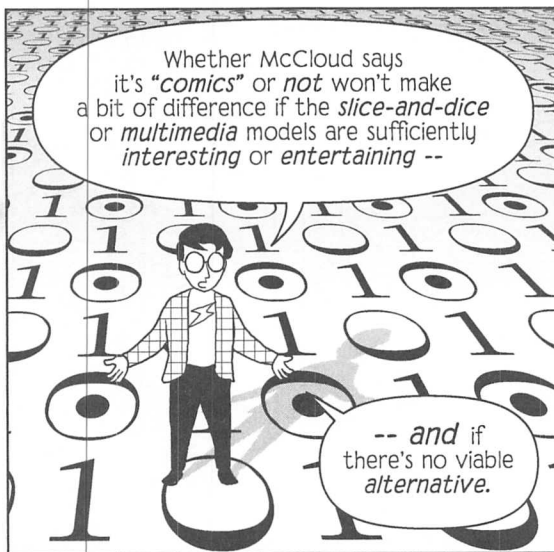
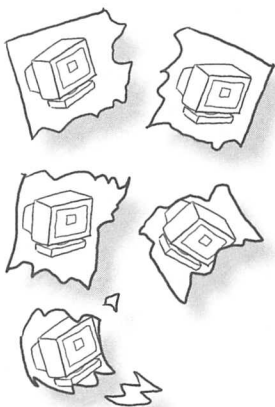


To break a comic down into single pictures is to *tear* that map to *shreds* --

-- and with it, the very *fabric* of comics' *core identity*.



But, hey --
is that a
problem?



Preserving the idea of the temporal map has an *aesthetic* appeal for guys like *me* --

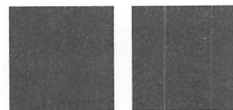
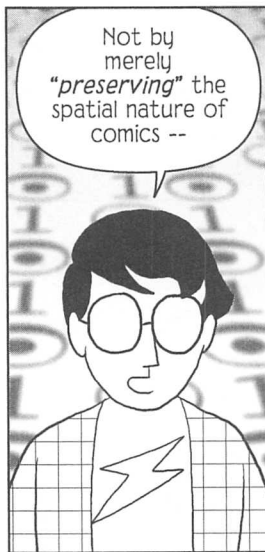
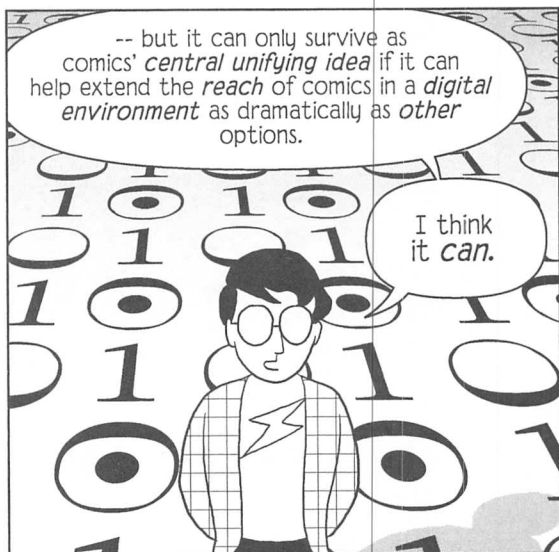
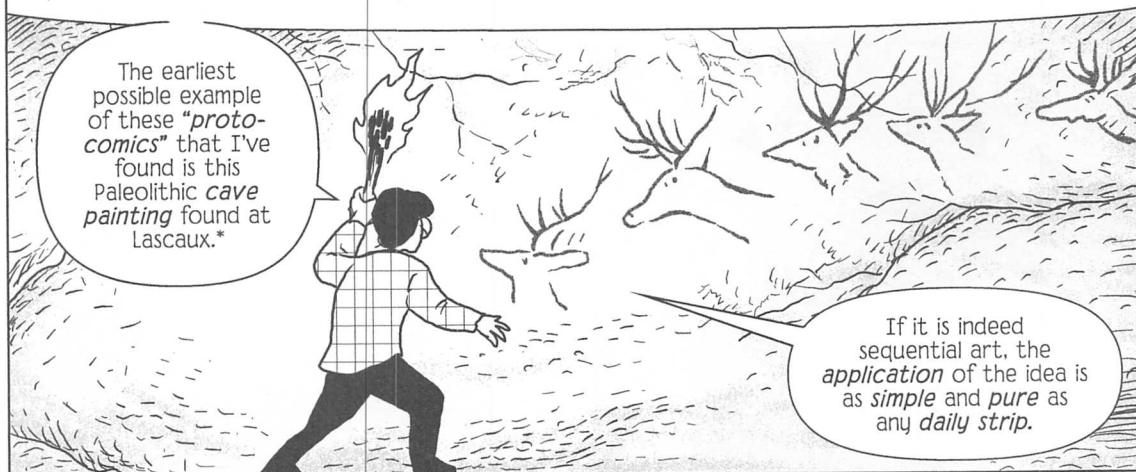


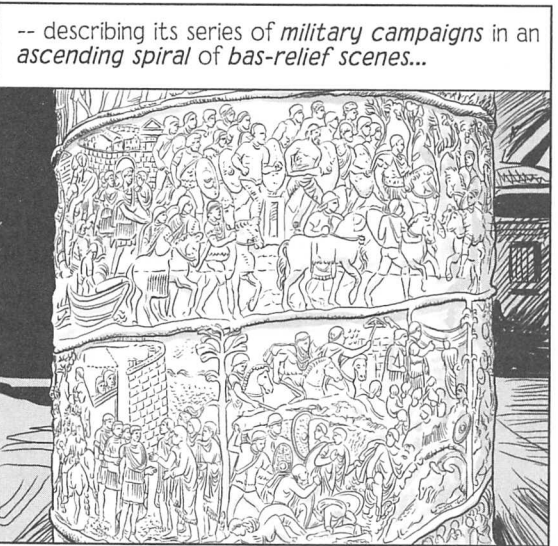
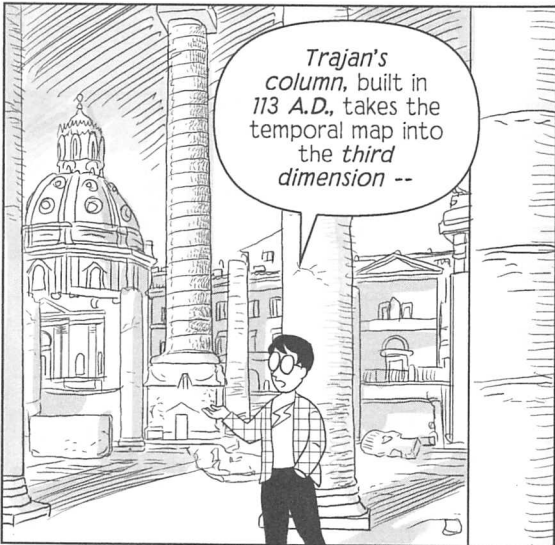
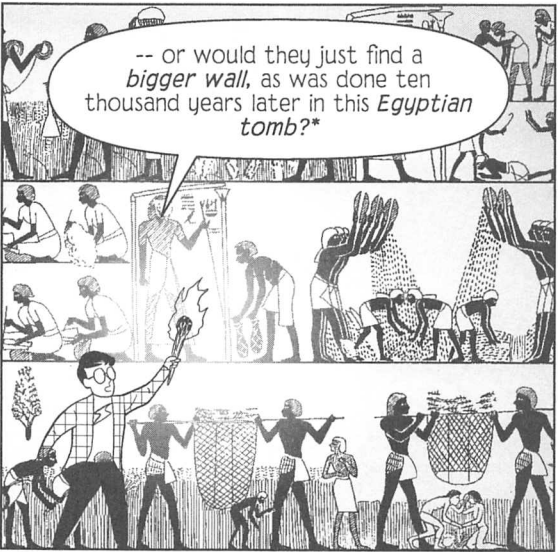
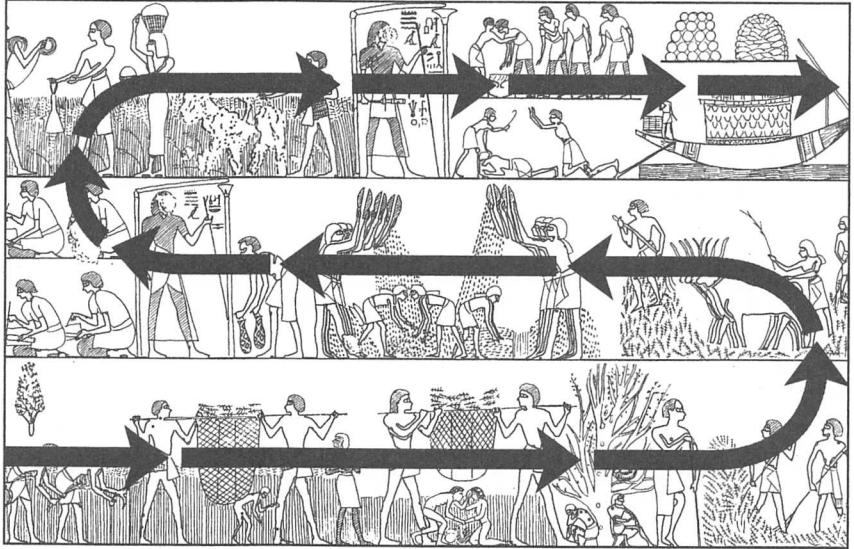
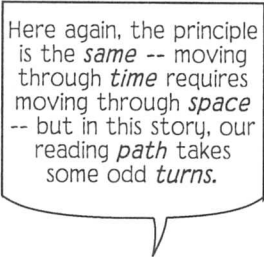
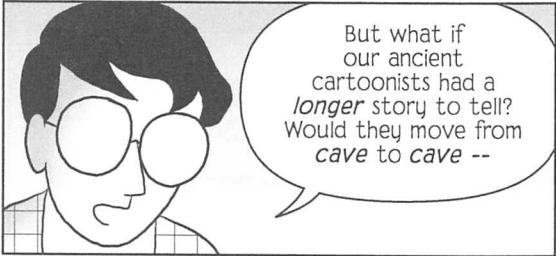
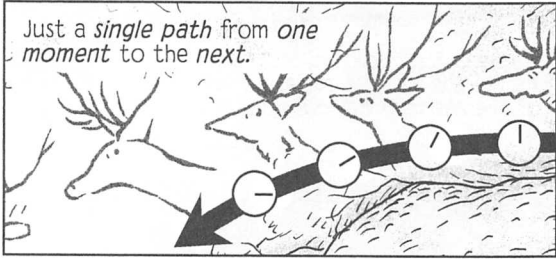
figure B.



In exploring the *design potential* of a pure *temporal map* in a *post-print world*, I believe we can find important *clues* in the kind of *pre-print* sequential art I wrote about in *Understanding Comics*.

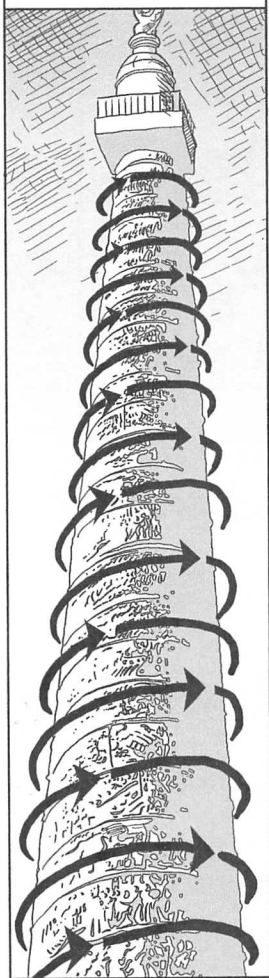


*N.Y.C.'s Museum of Natural History describes this 17,000-year-old painting as *maybe* portraying a single, individual deer "plunging into a stream, swimming across and emerging on the other side."

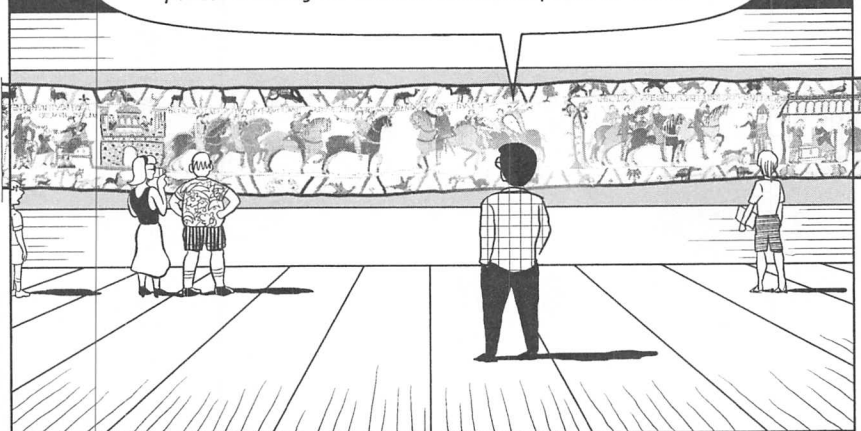


*The tomb of Menna the Scribe, circa 1,200 B.C.

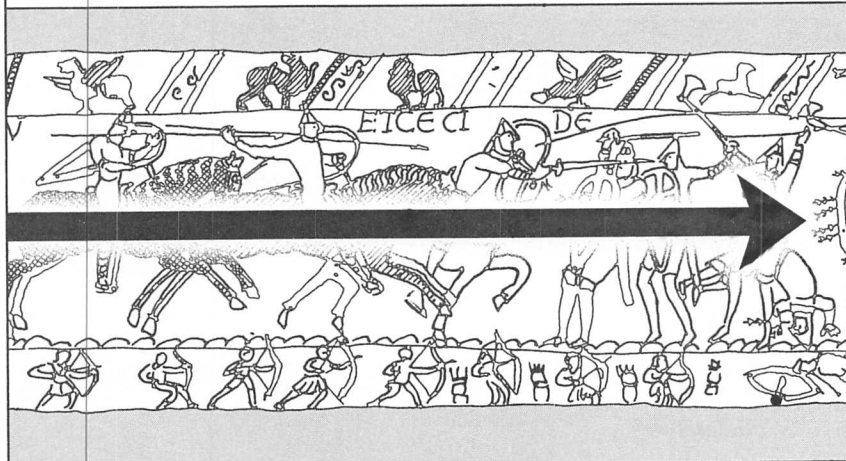
Very different from both *cave* and *tomb*, yet also following a single unbroken reading line.



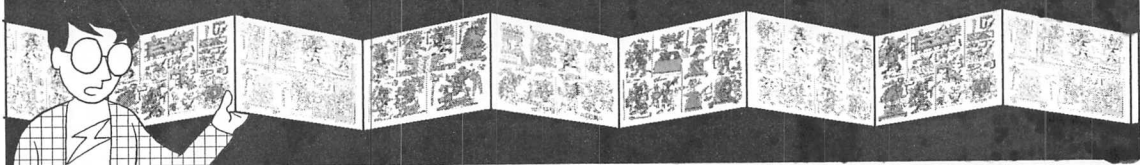
If we could *unwind* that column, we might produce something like the *Bayeux tapestry* with its *picture story* of the *Norman Conquest of 1066*.



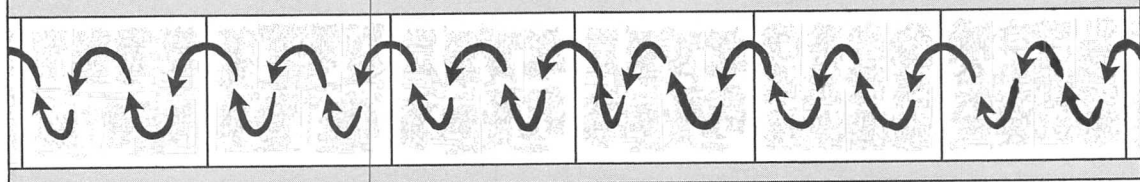
A *map of time* that for all its *complexity* is, from our standpoint, a single straight 230-foot *path* from *left* to *right*.



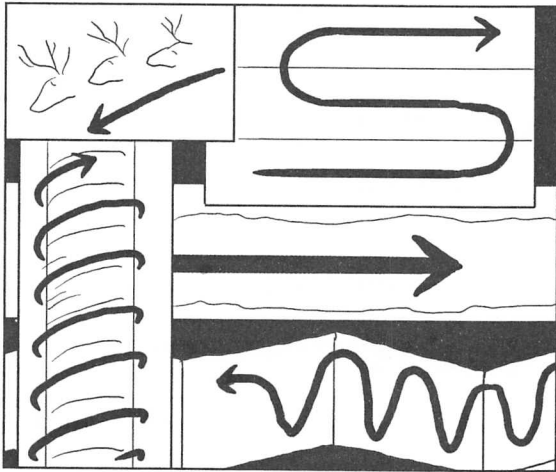
The "*Codex Nutall*" of pre-Columbian *Mexico* would, a few centuries later, tell its own story of conquest on *accordion-folded deerskin* --



-- and when laid *flat*, lead readers from *right* to left in a winding but unbroken *zigzag* of *generations*.



Paint, stone, cloth, skin... It would be hard to find five more *diverse* examples of the *temporal map*.



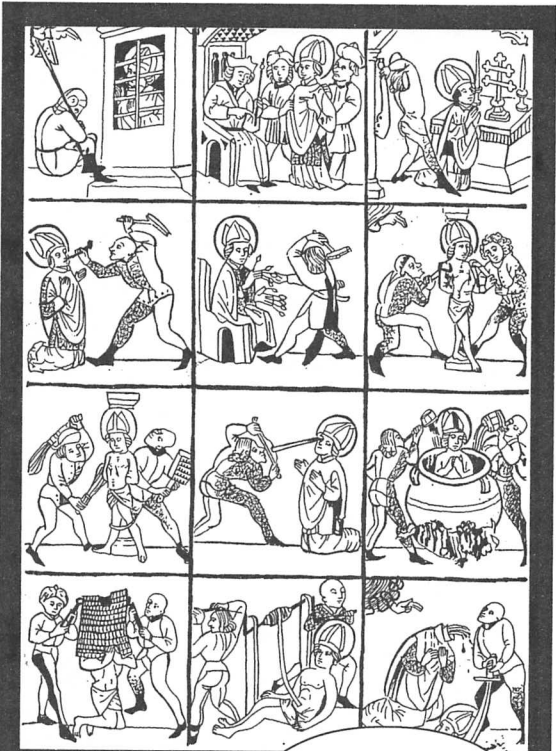
Yet all stayed true to the *nature* of the map -- and never violated its *basic tenet* that to move in *time* is to move in *space*.

And the longer the *time* --

-- the longer the *line*.

C.

B.



-- as the line that had *held* through eons of sequential art --

-- was *broken down* to fit in its new *box*.

SNAP!

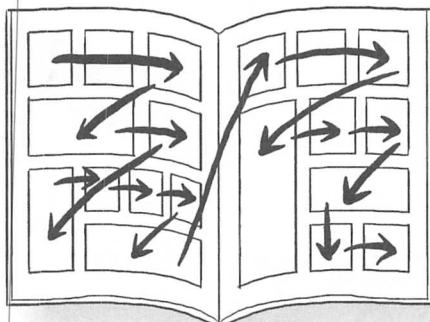
For the first time, *readers* of such picture stories could no longer assume that *adjacent images* meant adjacent *moments*. A *new formula* was taking hold, and it wasn't nearly as simple as the *old*.

But print was *different*. For all the benefits it *gave* to comics, there was one thing it *took away* --

The *ancestors* of printed comics *drew*, *painted* and *carved* their time-paths from *beginning to end*, without *interruption*.



Print, though, presented a landscape of tiny *cul-de-sacs*, asking readers to leap to *new paths* every few panels based on a *complex protocol*...

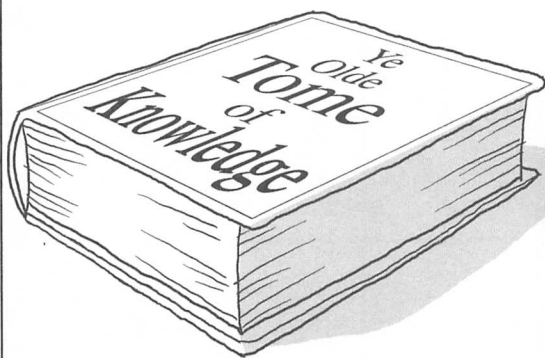


A protocol
 →
imported from the
 →
right and
 →
 down
 ↓
 tradition of the
 →
printed word.
 →

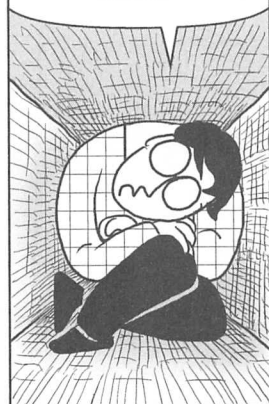
When the "cave wall" of the *page* came to an *end*, readers learned to simply *move on* to the *next* one,



Print *subverted space*, folding it upon itself, allowing stories to grow to *any length* without relying on *fraying cloth* or *crumbling stone*.



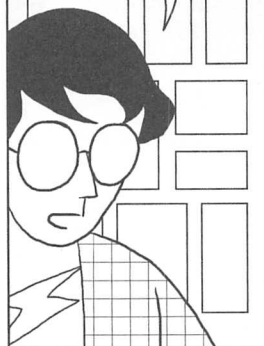
But to reap the *benefits* of print meant keeping comics' *core assets* packed into *tiny boxes*.*



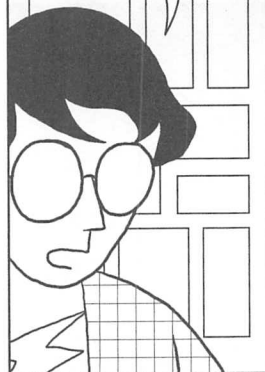
Since that fateful meeting of *art* and *technology*, much of the subsequent work of *creating* comics has been figuring out how to make it all "fit."



Every few inches, a *new barrier* is reached, another *limitation* tackled --

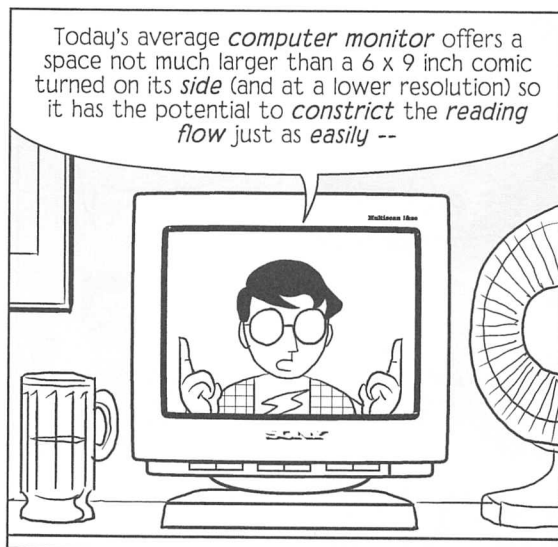
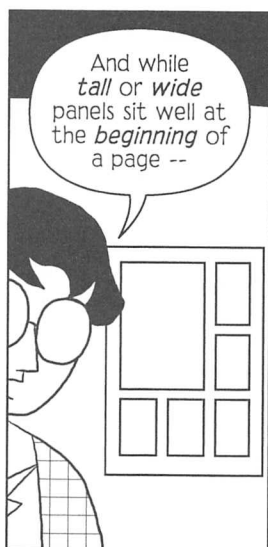


-- and naturally, we all learned to *live* with it.

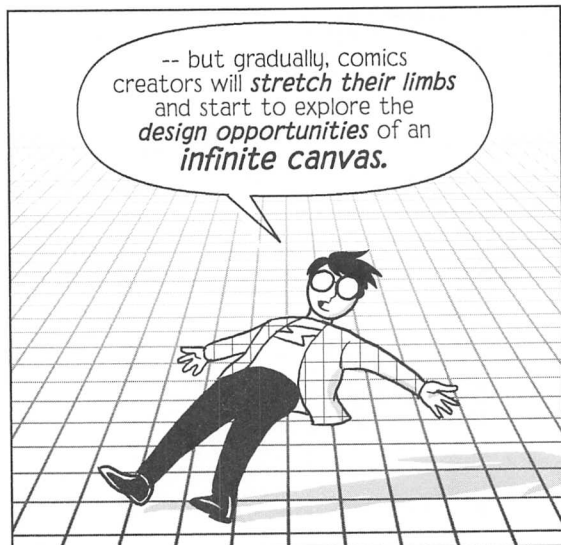
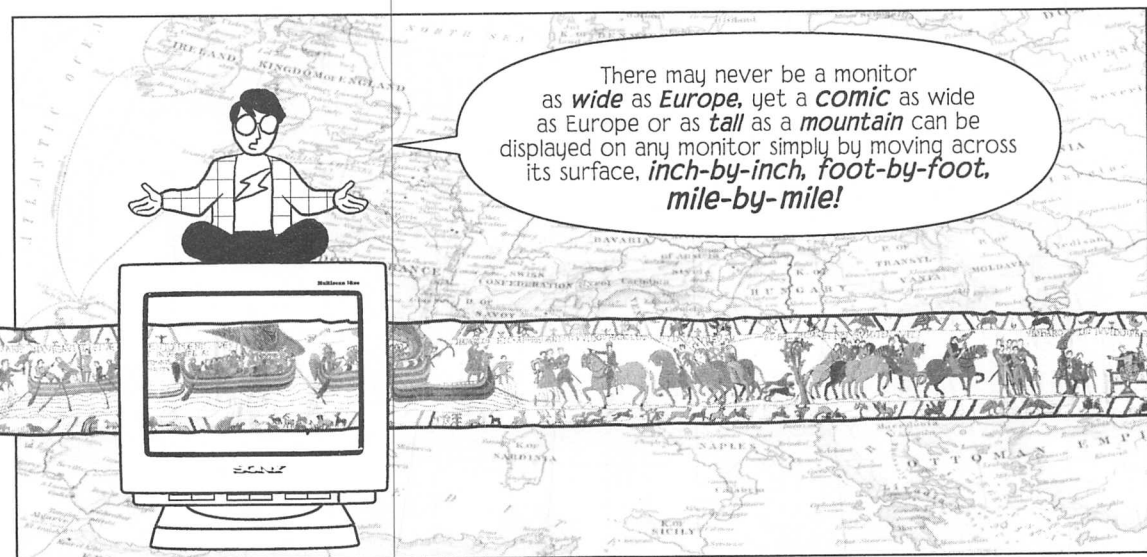


*Partially disassembled at that.

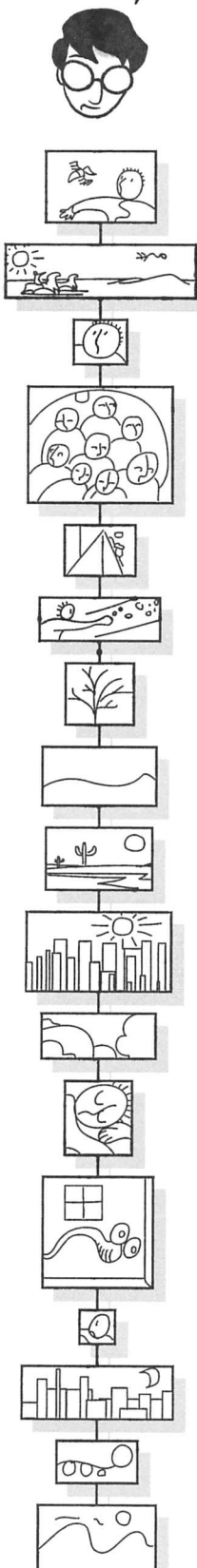
This small rectangular canvas we call "*the page*" has been the *only venue* for *long-form comics* throughout the *century*, and several generations of *artists* have devised thousands of *creative solutions* to the problems it presents; solutions I've *counted on* for the last 200 *pages*!



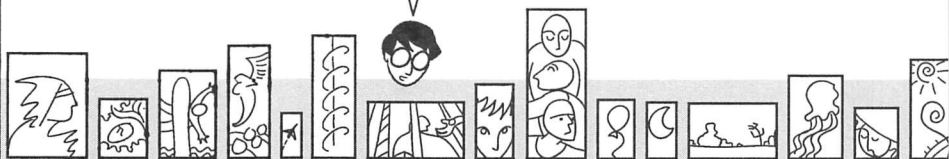
*I do it all the time! Go back and see if you can spot my various stalling and compression tactics throughout this book.



In a **digital environment** there's no reason a **500 panel story** can't be told **vertically** --

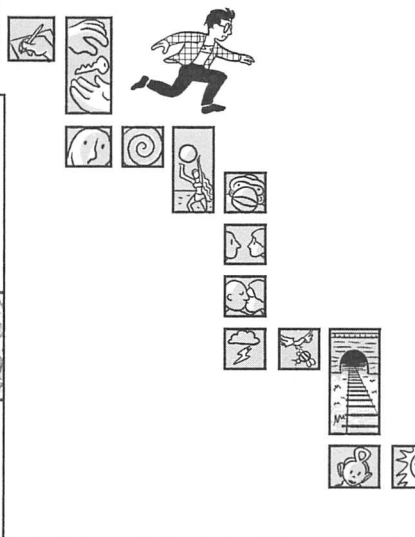
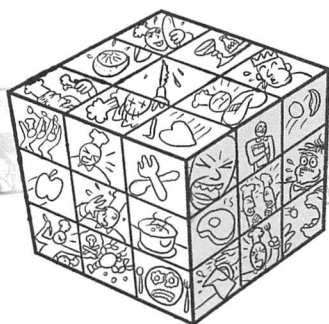


-- or **horizontally** like a **great graphic skyline**.

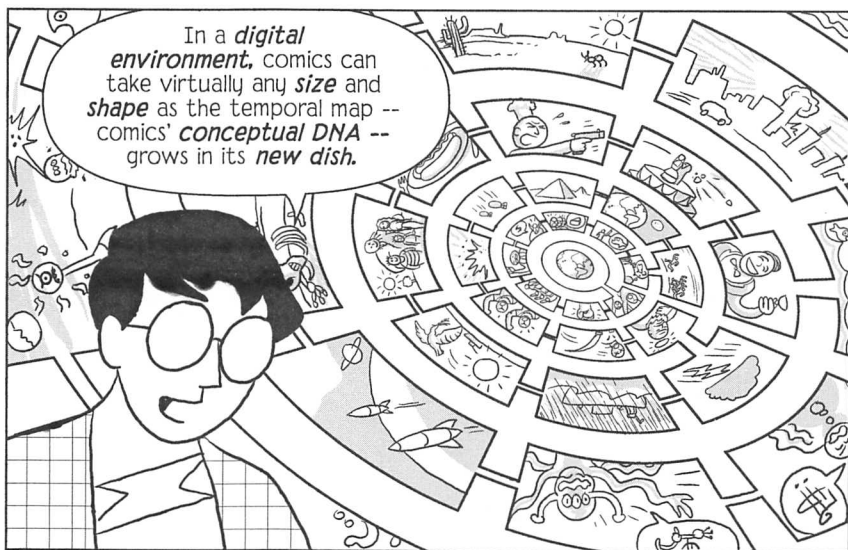


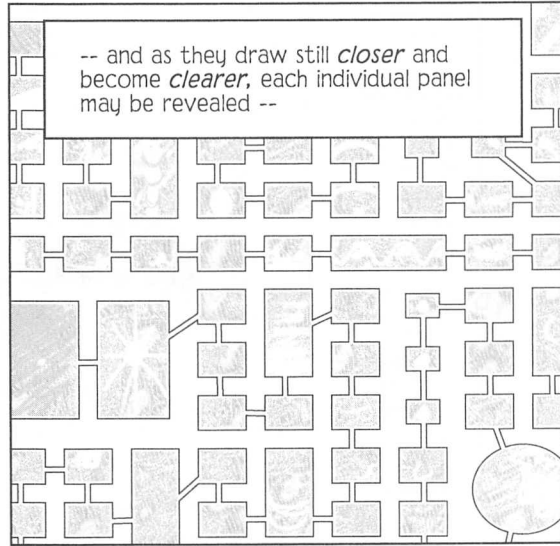
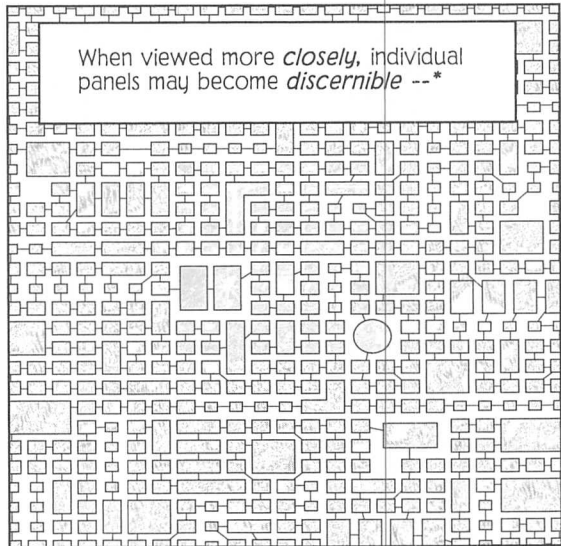
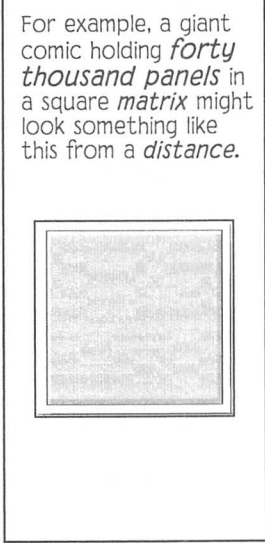
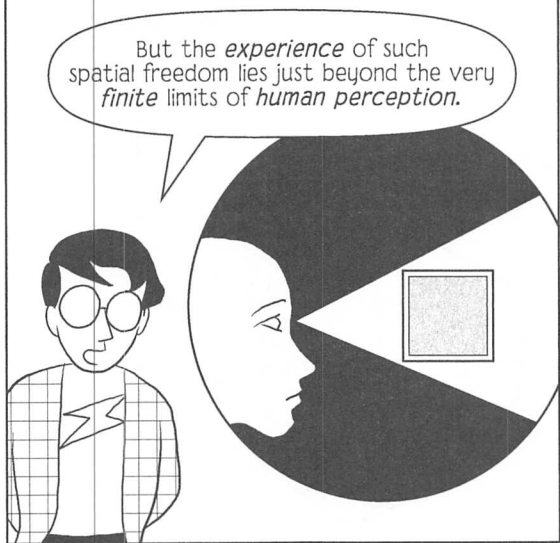
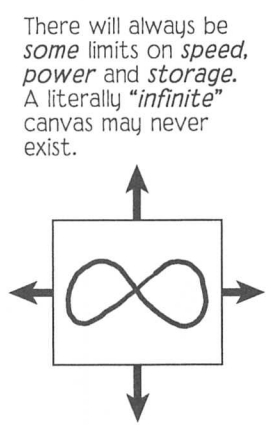
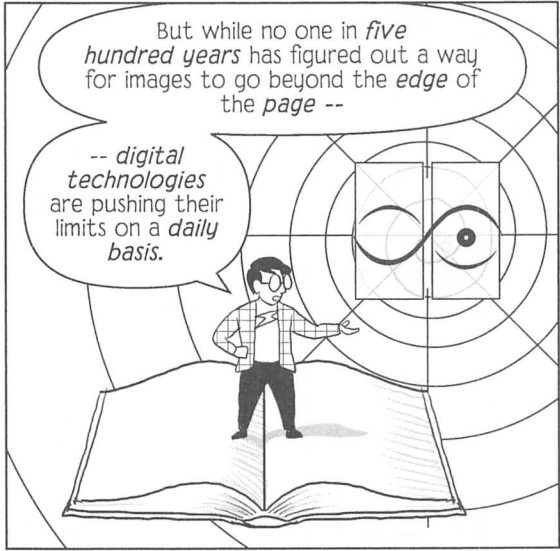
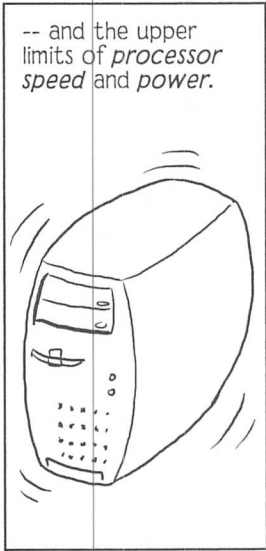
We could indulge our **left-to-right** and **up-to-down** habits from **beginning to end** in a **giant descending staircase** --

-- or pack it all into a **slowly revolving cube**.



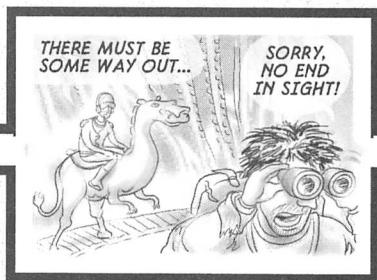
In a **digital environment**, comics can take virtually any **size** and **shape** as the temporal map -- comics' **conceptual DNA** -- grows in its **new dish**.





*And yes, believe it or not, such a mad contraption could be quite readable. If each panel were connected to the next one, you would always know where to read next (not that I'm seriously suggesting that anyone try this).

-- as a *full-size, high resolution color illustration*.



You may wonder how *any* computer, now or in the *near future*, could possibly hold this entire comic in memory *all at once*.

Answer:
It probably *can't*.

Nor should it *have to!*

The *human eye* can only *detect* so much *information* at a time, and has a limited *field of vision*. At the distance necessary to view the *whole* of such a comic, each individual panel need be no more --

-- than a single *dot* --

-- and by the time *individual panels* come into view, our field of vision will only take in a small part of the whole.

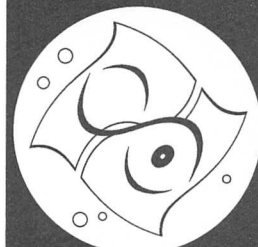
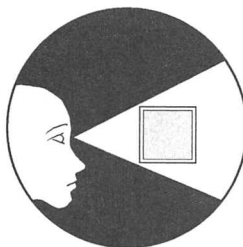
Thus, our monster comic may exist as *many* documents in *storage* --

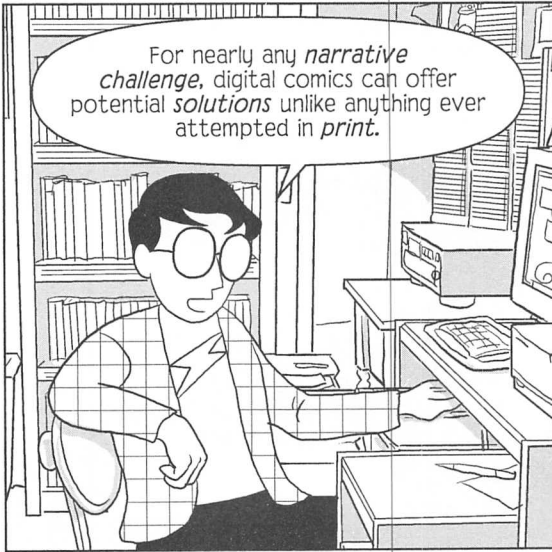
-- yet only *one* in the *mind's eye*.

tile127
tile128
tile129
tile130
tile131
tile132

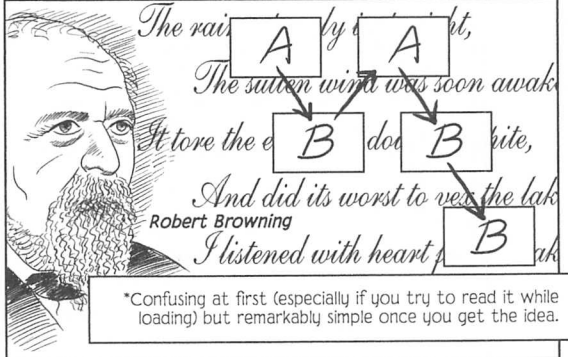
We haven't *reached* that threshold of human perception *yet*, of course* --

-- but that's no reason not to give our *imagination*s a good *head start!*

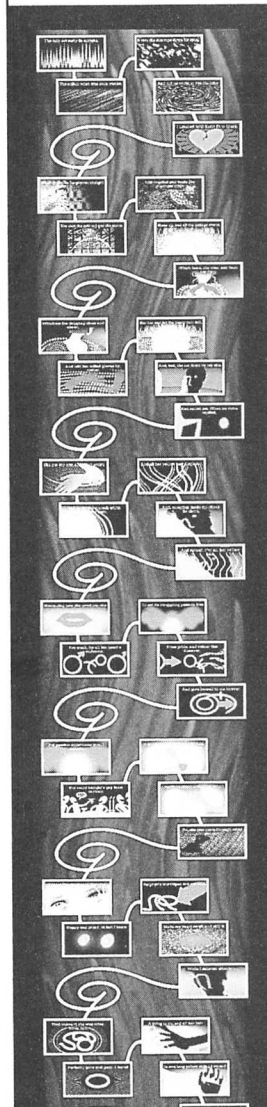




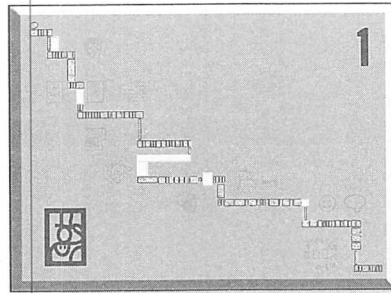
When adapting Browning's poem "*Porphyria's Lover*" for my site, I was able to reflect the *A-B, A-B-B rhyming structure* and *rhythm* of each *stanza* through a *zigzag panel arrangement*, using panel *connections* rather than position to determine *reading order**--



-- then connecting all *twelve stanzas* in a single descending *chain* set on a darkening *background*.

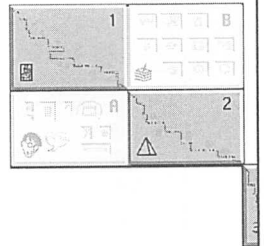


In a proposal for an Understanding Comics *CD-ROM*,** I took the *staircase* approach and was able to enclose each chapter in its own *rectangular tile* --

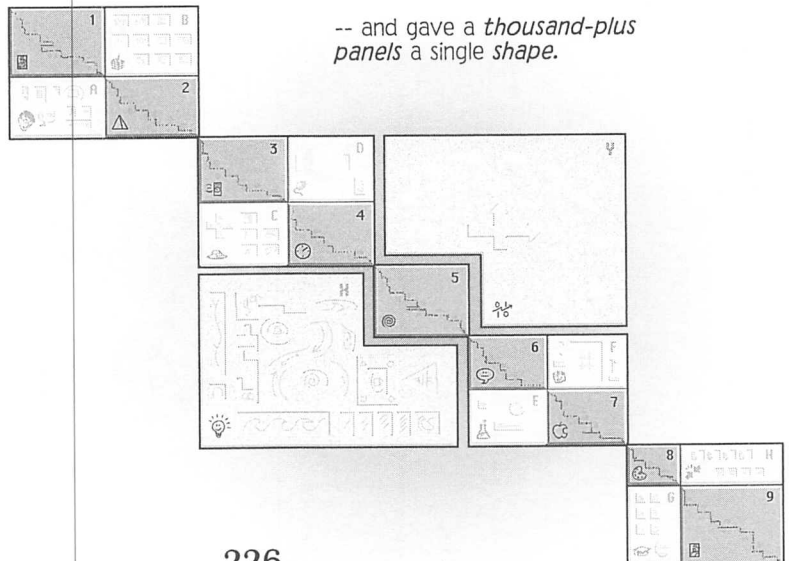


**...written, alas, shortly before that industry took a nosedive!

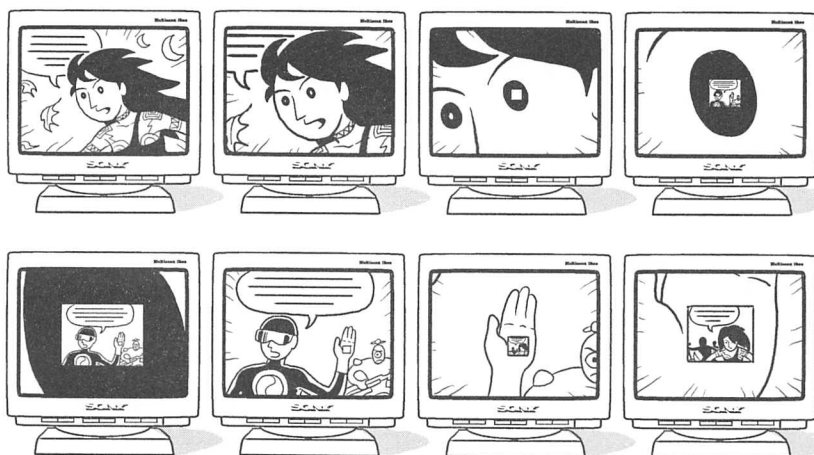
-- attach *other tiles* with supporting *information* --



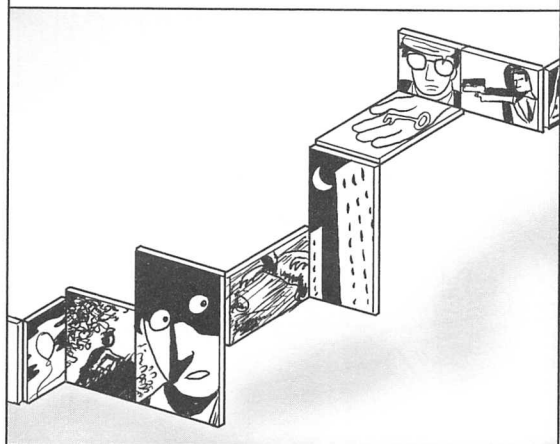
-- and gave a *thousand-plus panels* a single shape.



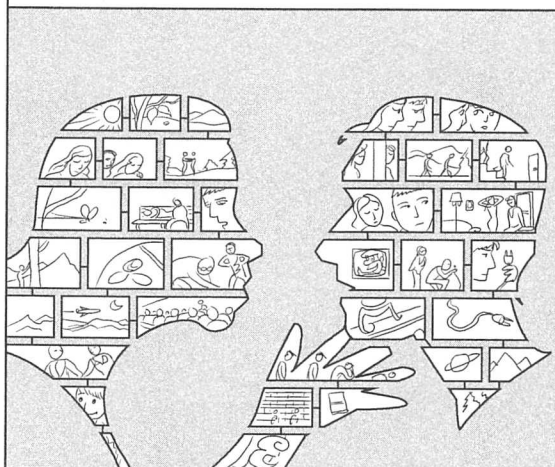
Navigating through a series of panels embedded in each *previous* panel may create a sense of *diving deeper* into a story.



A series of panels turned at *right angles* may keep the reader *off-guard*, never knowing what to expect around the next *corner*.



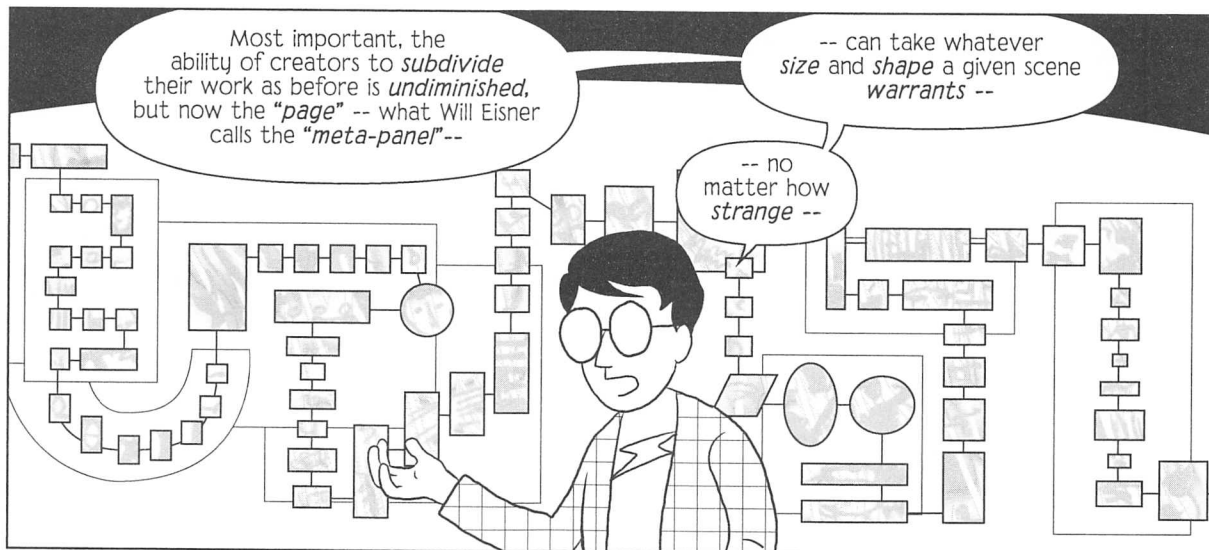
Giving a *pictorial shape* to *whole stories* may provide a *unifying identity*.



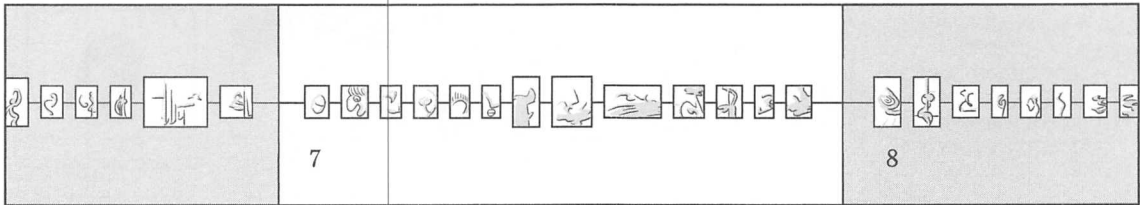
Most important, the ability of creators to *subdivide* their work as before is *undiminished*, but now the "*page*" -- what Will Eisner calls the "*meta-panel*"--

-- can take whatever *size* and *shape* a given scene *warrants* --

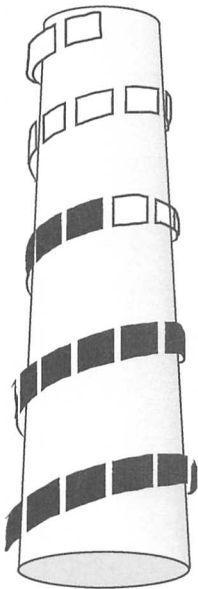
-- no matter how *strange* --



-- or how *simple* those sizes and shapes may be.



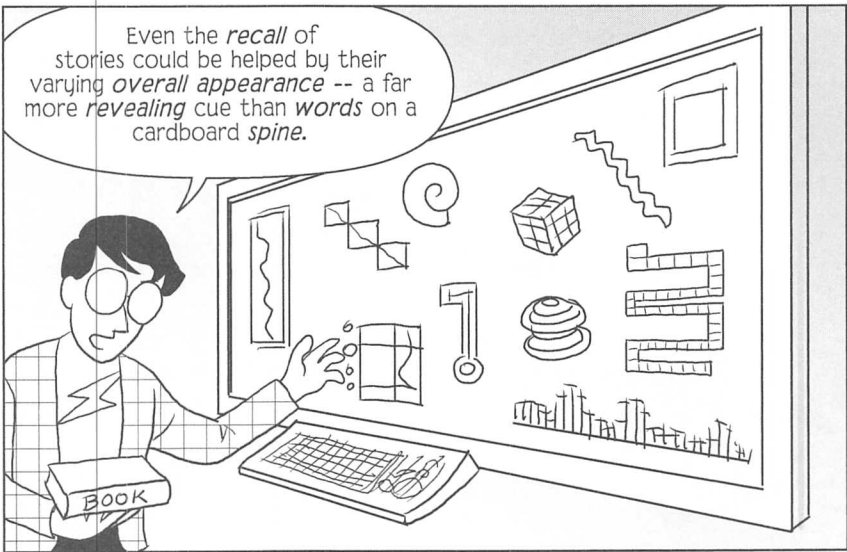
A sense of “*where you are*” at any given time could be provided through *color changes* in the panels already read.*



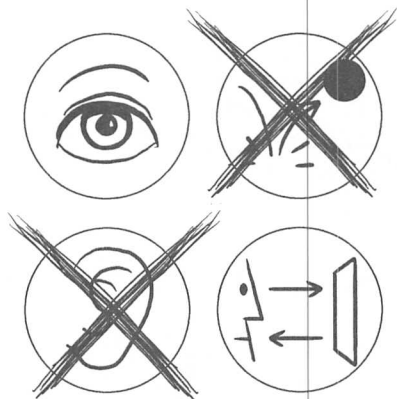
Background patterns and colors could reflect *changing moods*.



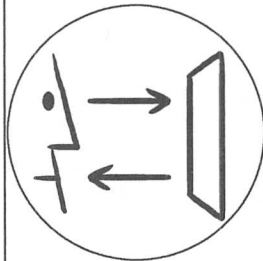
Even the *recall* of stories could be helped by their varying *overall appearance* -- a far more *revealing* cue than *words* on a cardboard *spine*.



To keep true to the simplicity of the *temporal map*, it may be necessary to *eliminate* the kind of autonomous *sound* and *motion* found in traditional *multimedia* --



-- but the option of *interactivity* is by no means *off-limits*.

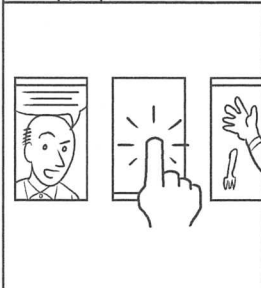
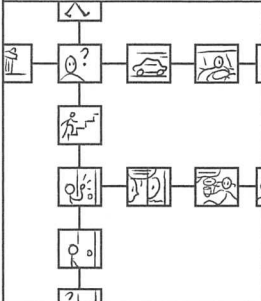


In fact, it's *crucial*.



*The same sense provided by the old traditional paper bookmark, yet lost in many hypertext-only comics.

Whether by *choosing a path*, revealing a *hidden window* or *zooming in* on a *detail*, there are countless ways to *interact* with sequential art in a *digital environment*.



Most important, the mere act of "*reading*" -- moving *through* -- digital comics should be a deeply *interactive* process.



Comics is a *still life*; *mute, unmoving* and *passive* in and of itself --

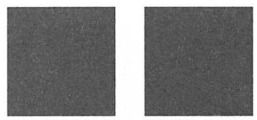


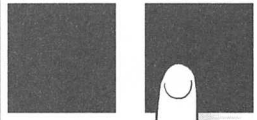
figure B.

-- but the act of *reading* comics -- even through the technology you hold in your *hands* -- is *anything but*.

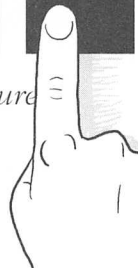
Comics in a digital environment will *remain* a still life --



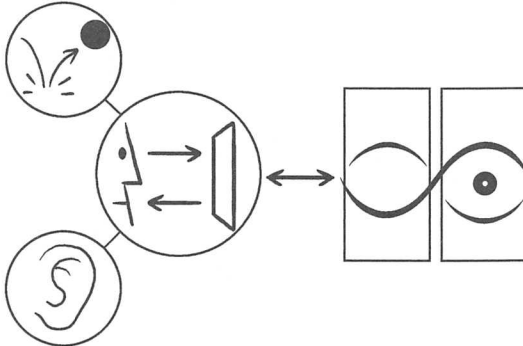
-- but a still life we explore *dynamically!*



figure



One nice *side effect* of interactivity is that sound and motion can actually *sneak in* through the back door as a *byproduct* of reader interaction.



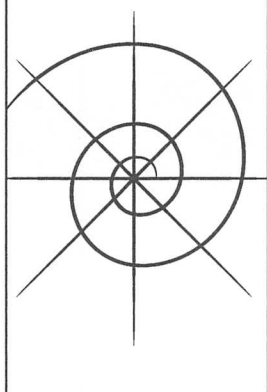
Sort of like the sound and motion *you* are about to produce with your *hand* on this piece of *paper*.



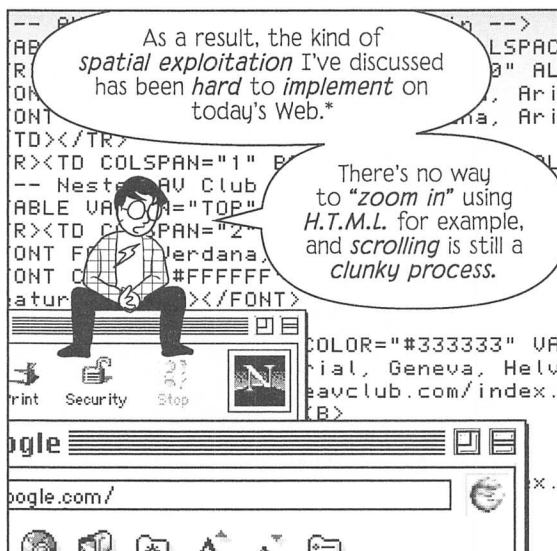
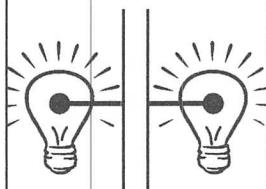
Next page, please.



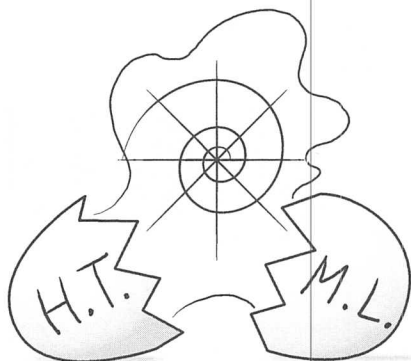
For the most part, here at the *turn of the century*, digital comics mean *Web comics* --



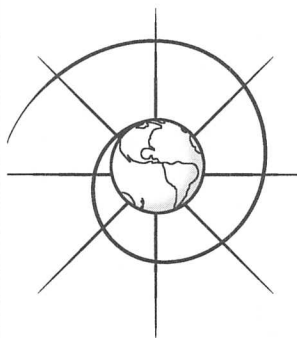
-- and Web comics, for the most part, mean *hypertext-based* comics.



Fortunately, the Web itself is *evolving* beyond the *limited definition* of its *origins* toward the *simpler*, more *enduring* idea --

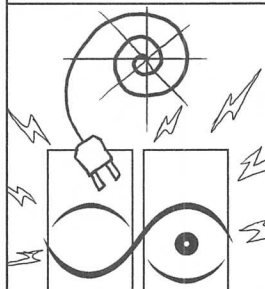


-- of absolute access --



--to absolutely everything --

-- and as such, *plugins* and Web-based *programming environments* that can take better advantage of *spatial models* have found the Web increasingly *accommodating*.**



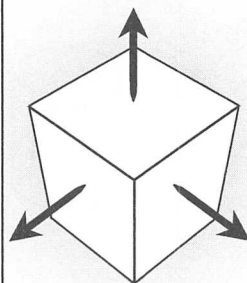
More *generally*, though, the idea that art and information can take on *shape* and *form* may not be as *dead* as the ascendance of hypertext through the Web might lead us to believe.



The lion's share of *art* and *information media* belonged to that spatial world for *thousands* of *generations* --



-- and soon, comics artists won't be the *only* ones contemplating the potential of an *infinite canvas*.



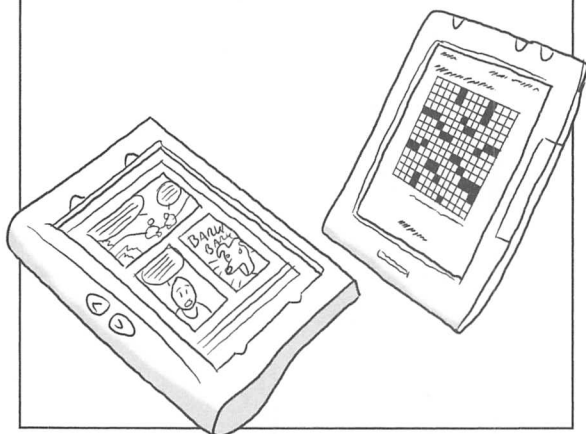
*I've run up against this problem in my own online comics from day one.

**Macromedia's Flash plug-in and Sun's Java O.S. both have some potential in this regard.

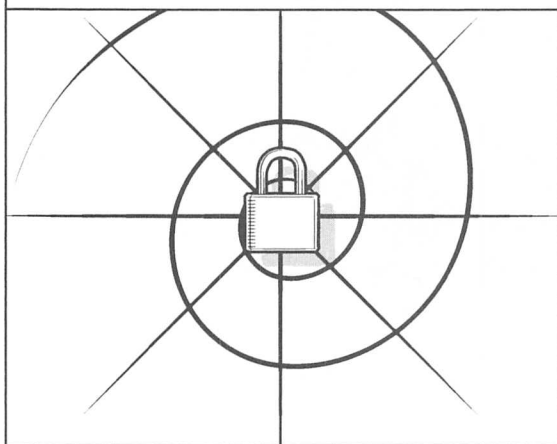
I can't *guarantee* the course that digital comics will take in the next 20 years. Small events taking place *now* may have lasting *consequences* for our twelfth revolution.



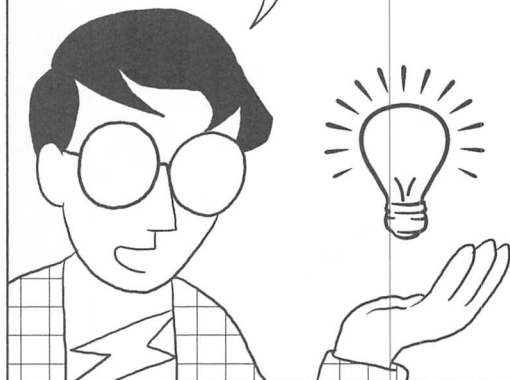
The advent of portable *reading devices* that assert the *screen-as-page* metaphor at the expense of the *screen-as-window* could *sidetrack* digital comics for years --



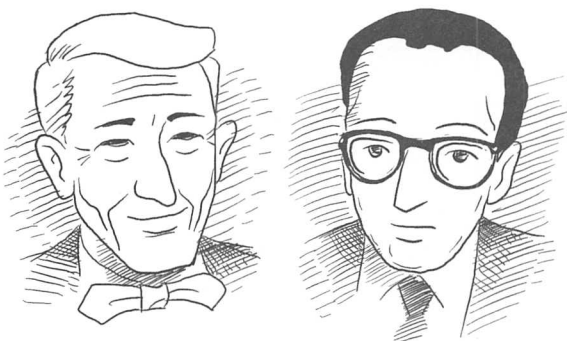
-- and the road toward preserving the open, *decentralized* architecture of the Web won't be without its *obstacles* and *detours*.



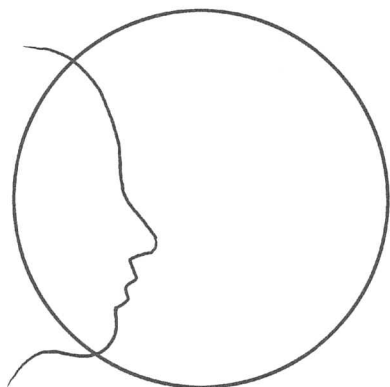
But a strong, simple *idea* can often *rise above* technological circumstance and acquire a legitimate air of *inevitability*.



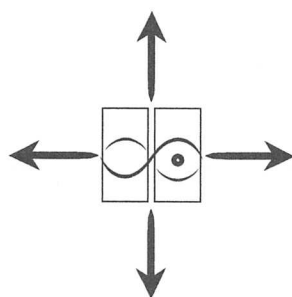
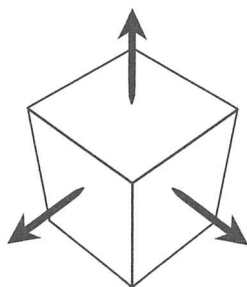
Such was the strength of the idea shared by *Vannevar Bush* and *J.C.R. Licklider*, 20 years apart, that all the world's *knowledge* could someday flow from the *tops* of our *desks* --



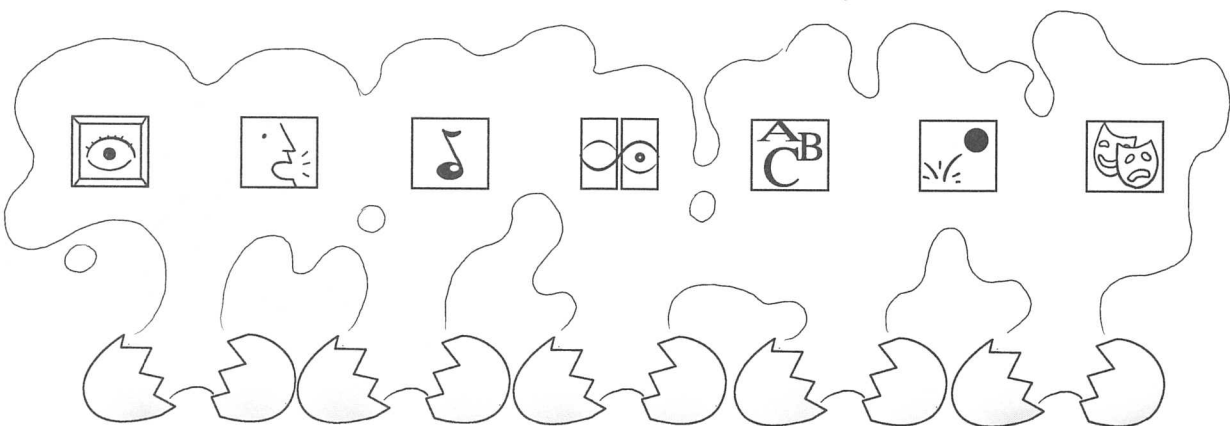
-- and such is today's popular belief that full visual and auditory *immersion*, until now the province of *science fiction*, will be an *everyday fact* before long.



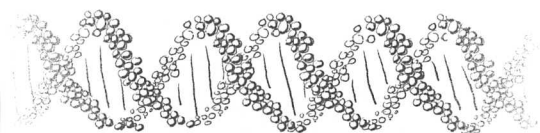
Spatial approaches to art and information will have no trouble *taking root* in such a world, whenever it arrives --



The *ideas* that *traditional media* harbor will continue to escape the *shells* of the technologies that brought them into being, until the irreducible *essence* of each has emerged --

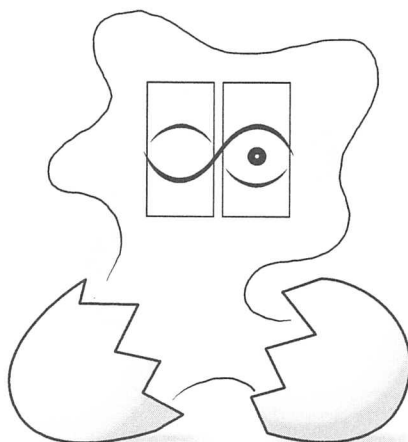


-- and with it the *code* --

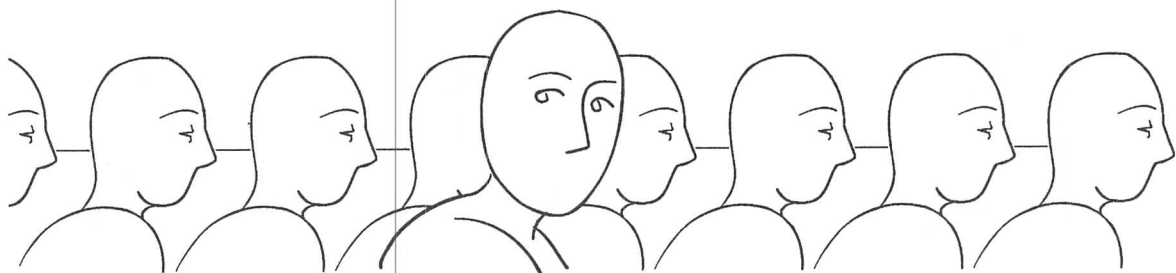


Comics *is* such an idea, and most of its checkered history has been the *shell*.

--for *new forms* to grow in their *new environment*.

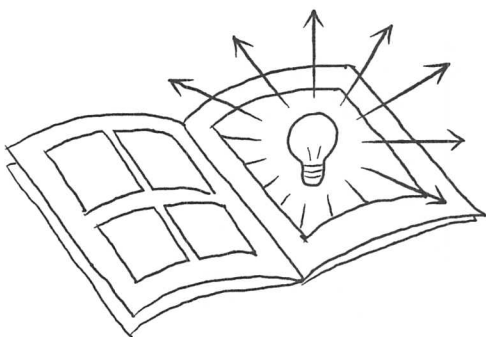
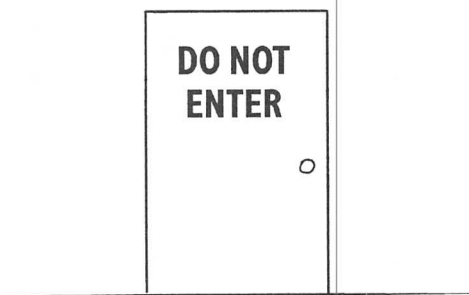


Here at the dawn of a *new century*, it's become a *cliché* to tout one's ability to think "*outside the box*," yet that's what any act of *true creation* requires.



For *artists in general*, that box is the stifling influence of *conventional wisdom* --

-- and for *comics artists in particular*, thinking outside the box will soon have an additional, very *literal* meaning.

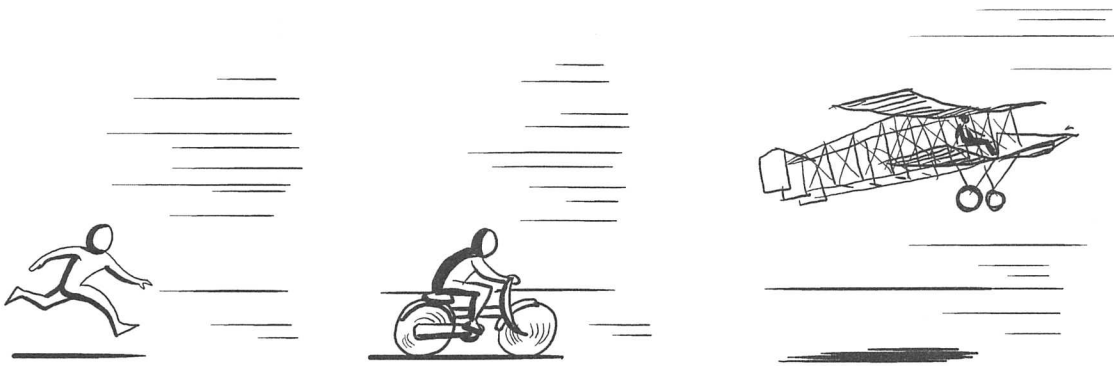


But it can also mean *rediscovering* a *simple truth* at the heart of a *complex system* --

-- taking on *quests* that *no one else* can see --

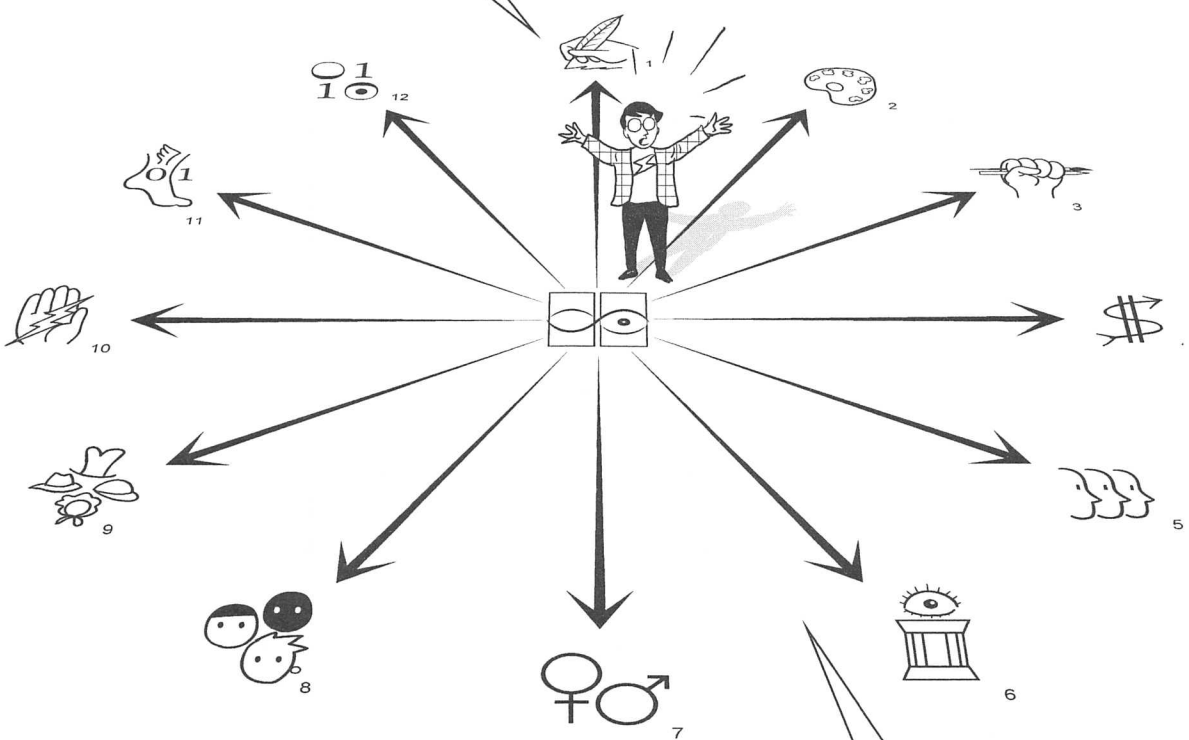


-- or finding in *solutions* to an old *need* --



-- the *beginnings* of a new *desire*.

No *art form* has lived in a smaller box than *comics* for the last *hundred years*.



I say we *blow the lid off!*

It's time for
comics to finally
grow up --



-- and find the
art beneath the
craft.



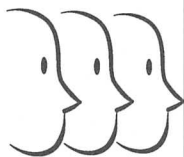
It's time for
comics to *respect* the
source of its *power* --



-- and *look*
beyond next
Thursday's *take*.



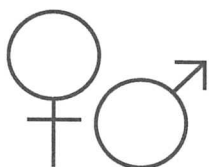
It's time for
comics' *public face* to
reflect the *truth* --



-- and for that
truth to outlive
the *lie*.



It's time for
comics to *balance*
the *scales* --



-- *see*
the
world --



-- and
broaden its
horizons.



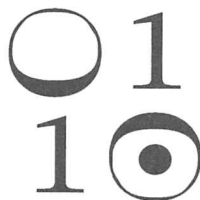
And it's time,
starting *now*,
for a *new*
set of *dreams* --

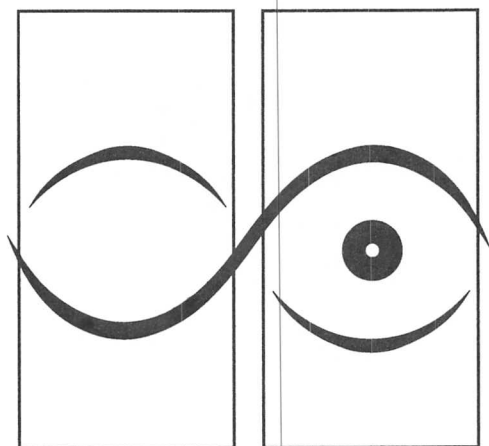


-- to find
new roads to
a *new generation* --

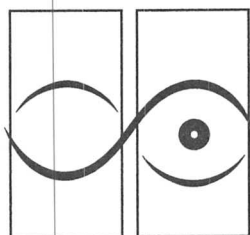


-- in a form
beyond
imagining.

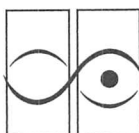




Comics is a *powerful idea*, but an idea that's been *squandered*, *ignored* and *misunderstood* for generations.



Today, for all the *hopes* of those who *value* it, this form seems increasingly *obscure*, *isolated* and *obsolete*.



So *small* at times as to almost *drop out of sight*.

Small...



...like an atom...

The background of the page is a light gray with a pattern of thin, dark gray lines radiating from the center towards the edges. Overlaid on these lines are several dark gray arrows of varying sizes, all pointing outwards from the center, creating a sense of expansion or divergence.

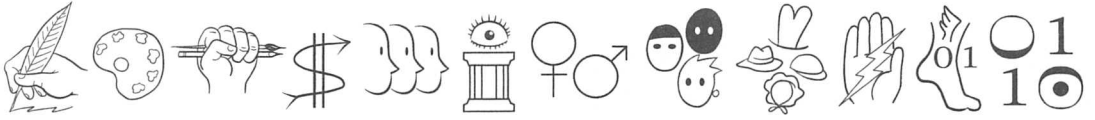
...waiting
to be
split.



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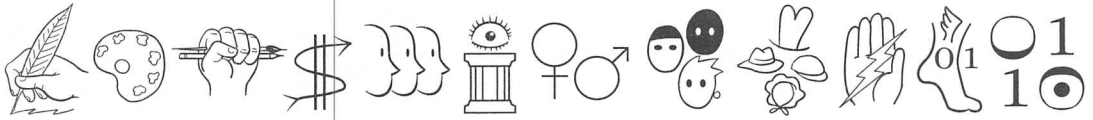


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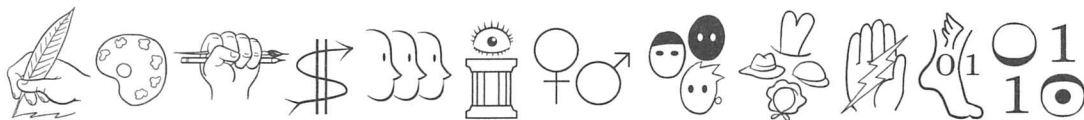
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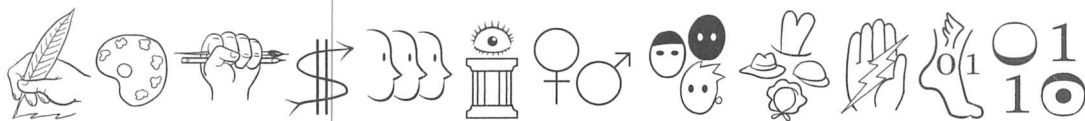
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I can't possibly list all of the books, comics, Web sites and magazine articles that have influenced my thinking since 1993, but here are a few titles that proved relevant to this project, plus one or two that simply changed the way I thought about art and/or technology in general.

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(I have a soft spot for Kurzweill, if for no other reason than that my blind father owned a Kurzweill text-to-speech machine way back when it was just Dad and Stevie Wonder. Kurzweill is my favorite kind of futurist — the unnerving kind.)

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LINKS

See pages 165 and 166 and visit scottmcccloud.com for links to online resources.

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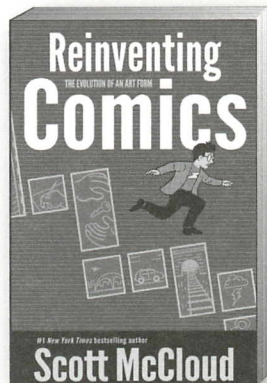
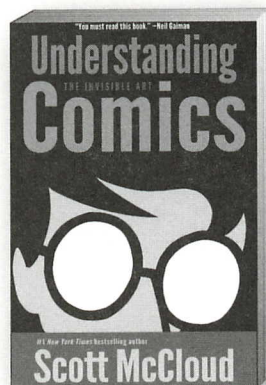
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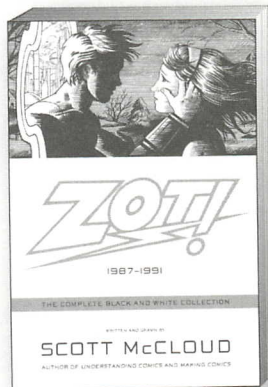
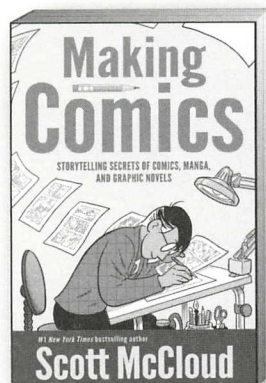
Following in the footsteps of *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud explores comics as art and literature; the chaotic comics industry; public perceptions of comics; and the fight for sexual and ethnic diversity. This comprehensive analysis covers comics' digital revolutions, including the challenges of production; the exploding world of online delivery; and finally, comics' startling transformations as it enters the digital landscape for a new century.

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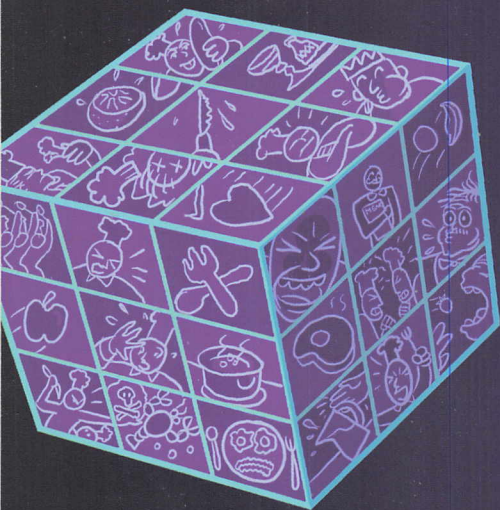
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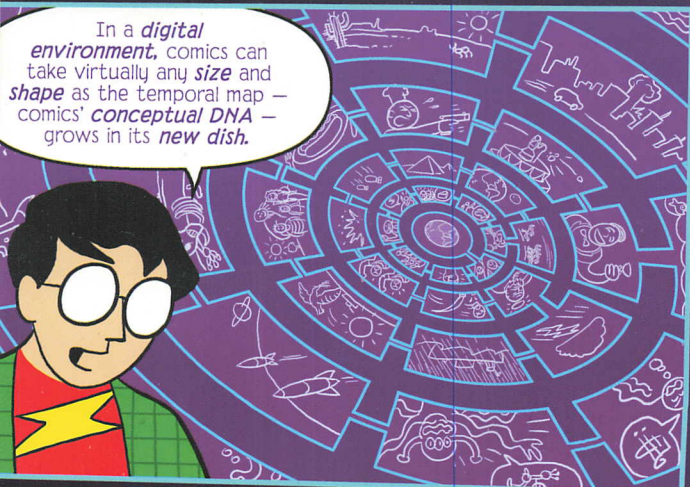
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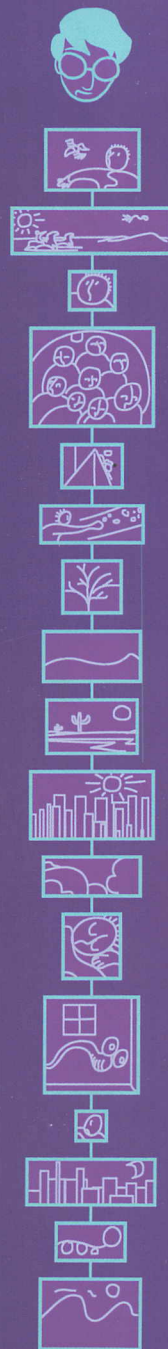
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Scott McCloud is the award-winning creator of *Zot!*, *The Sculptor*, and *Understanding Comics*. His books are available in more than twenty-two languages. His web comics and inventions can be found at scottmccloud.com.

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