WRITING AND ART
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BOB LAPPAN

EDITORIAL ADVICE AND
SELECTIVE EGO-TRIMMING
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Scott McCloud
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INTRODUCTION

MY OLD PAL MATT PEAZELL CALLED THE OTHER DAY.

SO, SCOTT, WHAT'S YOUR NEXT PROJECT GOING TO BE NOW THAT YOU'VE FINISHED "ZOT"?

WELL, IT'S A BIT HARD TO DESCRIBE MATT. IT'S SORT OF A COMIC BOOK ABOUT COMICS!

YOU MEAN LIKE A HISTORY?

NOT EXACTLY NO... ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOME HISTORY IN IT... IT'S MORE
AN EXAMINATION OF THE ART-FORM OF COMICS, WHAT IT'S CAPABLE OF, HOW IT WORKS.

YOU KNOW, HOW DO WE DEFINE COMICS. WHAT ARE THE BASIC ELEMENTS
OF COMICS. HOW DOES THE MIND PROCESS THE LANGUAGE OF COMICS--THAT SORT OF
THING.

I HAVE A CHAPTER ON CLOSURE--ALL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN
THE PANELS. THERE'S ONE ON HOW TIME FLOWS THROUGH
COMICS. ANOTHER ON THE INTERACTION OF WORDS AND PICTURES AND
STORYTELLING.

I EVEN PUT TOGETHER A NEW COMPREHENSIVE THEORY
OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
COMICS AND ART IN GENERAL!!

OH.

AREN'T YOU KIND OF YOUNG TO BE DOING THAT SORT OF
THING?

"ZOT"?
THE EQUATION IS EXACTLY THE SAME.

AND HERE'S HOW TO CHECK IF IT WORKS.

1. ADD THE TWO NUMBERS ON THE LEFT SIDE.
2. SUBTRACT THE NUMBER ON THE RIGHT.
3. CHECK IF THE ANSWER MATCHES THE ONE YOU SAW IN THE EQUATION.

IF IT DOES, THE EQUATION IS CORRECT.

THE EQUATION IS COMPLETED.

AND NOW, HERE'S THE SOLUTION.

X = 5

AND THAT MEANS THE EQUATION IS CORRECT.

THE EQUATION IS COMPLETED.

AND NOW, HERE'S THE SOLUTION.

X = 5

AND THAT MEANS THE EQUATION IS CORRECT.
CHAPTER SIX

SHOW AND TELL.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR ROBOT, TOMMY?

THIS IS MY ROBOT.

IT'S GOT ONE OF THESE THINGS.

WELL UH... I LIKE IT 'CAUSE... 'CAUSE UH.

WHAT IS THAT, TOMMY?
IT'S THIS THING AND IF YOU PULL IT, IT GOES LIKE THIS.

AND... AND THEN YOU CAN DO THIS AND IT GOES UP AND YOU FLIP THIS.

I DID IT WRONG. WAIT.

LOOK, IT'S A AIRPLANE NOW!

THANK YOU, TOMMY.

WE ALL STARTED OUT LIKE THIS, DIDN'T WE? USING WORDS AND IMAGES INTERCHANGEABLY. IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER WHICH WE USED, SO LONG AS IT WORKED.

IT'S CONSIDERED NORMAL IN THIS SOCIETY FOR CHILDREN TO COMBINE WORDS AND PICTURES, SO LONG AS THEY GROW OUT OF IT.
TRADITIONAL THINKING HAS LONG HELD THAT TRULY GREAT WORKS OF ART AND LITERATURE ARE ONLY POSSIBLE WHEN THE TWO ARE KEPT AT ARM'S LENGTH.

WORDS AND PICTURES TOGETHER ARE CONSIDERED, AT BEST, A DIVERSION FOR THE MASSES; AT WORST, A PRODUCT OF CRASS COMMERCIALISM.

AS CHILDREN, OUR FIRST BOOKS HAD PICTURES GALORE AND VERY FEW WORDS BECAUSE THAT WAS "EASIER." THEN, AS WE GREW, WE WERE EXPECTED TO GRADUATE TO BOOKS WITH MUCH MORE TEXT AND ONLY OCCASIONAL PICTURES.— AND FINALLY TO ARRIVE AT "REAL" BOOKS—THOSE WITH NO PICTURES AT ALL.

OR PERHAPS, AS IS SADLY THE CASE THESE DAYS, TO NO BOOKS AT ALL.
MEANWHILE, WORDS AND MOVING PICTURES HAVE HALF THE WORLD IN THRALL TO THEIR CHARMs, BUT MUST STRUGGLE TO MAKE THEIR POTENTIAL UNDERSTOOD.

WORDS AND PICTURES ARE AS POPULAR AS EVER, BUT THIS WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT THE COMBINATION IS SOMEHOW BASE OR SIMPLISTIC HAS BECOME A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY.

THE ROOTS OF THIS ATTITUDE RUN PRETTY DEEP.

AS NEAR AS WE CAN TELL, PICTURES PREDATE THE WRITTEN WORD BY A LARGE MARGIN. HERE ARE SOME BIG HITS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF CAVE PAINTING, ABOUT 15,000 YEARS AGO.

SOME OF THIS ART SHOWS CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO DETAIL, VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION.

BUT OTHERS WERE VERY ICONIC, ACTING AS SYMBOLS RATHER THAN PICTURES—MORE LIKE A PRIMITIVE LANGUAGE.
As mentioned in our last chapter, the earliest words were, in fact, stylized pictures.

As seen, most of these early words stayed close by their parents, the pictures.

It didn’t take long, though -- relatively speaking -- before ancient writing started to become more abstract.

Some written languages survive to this day, bearing traces of their ancient pictorial heritage.

* See page 129.
BUT IN TIME, MOST MODERN WRITING WOULD COME TO REPRESENT SOUND ONLY AND LOSE ANY LINGERING RESEMBLANCE TO THE VISIBLE WORLD.

There's More! Order Today and receive FREE GIFTS!

WITH THE INVENTION OF PRINTING, THE WRITTEN WORD TOOK A GREAT LEAP FORWARD.

-- AND ALL OF HUMANITY WITH IT.

BUT WHERE HAD THE PICTURES ALL GONE?

WORDS AND PICTURES DID STILL COEXIST AT THIS STAGE IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION.

BUT THOSE INSTANCES WERE BECOMING THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE.

*IN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS, FOR EXAMPLE.*
Abstract art or symbolic, more representational and specific pictures. Meanwhile, it began to grow in the opposite direction: less elaborate and less like a drawing. Important: When they were white like oil and renouncing to mix, separate, spread, separate more elaborated from the abstract. Germans combined as in this way becoming important.
John Keats
1819

Ode on a Grecian Urn

I
Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both.

In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

BY THE EARLY 1800'S,
WESTERN ART
AND WRITING HAD DRIFTED ABOUT AS
FAR APART AS WAS POSSIBLE.

ONE WAS OBSESSED WITH
RESEMBLANCE
LIGHT AND COLOR,
ALL THINGS VISIBLE...

...THE OTHER RICH IN
INVISIBLE
TREASURES,
SENSES, EMOTIONS,
SPIRITUALITY, PHILOSOPHY...

PICTURES
AND WORDS,
ONCE TOGETHER
IN THE CENTER OF
OUR ICONIC
ABSTRACTION
CHART, HAVE AT
THIS POINT
DRIFTED TO
OPPOSITE CORNERS.
IN A WAY, PICTURES AND WORDS HAD REACHED THE END OF A 5,000 YEAR JOURNEY. IF THEY WERE TO CONTINUE MOVING, WHERE WOULD THEY GO?

IMPRESSIONISM SENT WESTERN ART TOWARD THE ABSTRACT VERTEX, BUT IN A WAY THAT CLUNG TO WHAT THE EYE SAW.

IMPRESSIONISM, WHILE IT COULD BE THOUGHT OF AS THE FIRST MODERN MOVEMENT, WAS MORE A CULMINATION OF THE OLD. THE ULTIMATE STUDY OF LIGHT AND COLOR.

SOON AFTER CAME THE EXPLOSION! EVERY WHICH WAY BUT BACKWARDS!

STRING REPRESENTATIONAL STYLES WERE OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE TO THE NEW SCHOOLS. ABSTRACTION. BOTH ICONIC AND NON-ICONIC MADE A SPECTACULAR COMEBACK!
SOME ARTISTS HEADED UPWARD TO THE SUMMIT OF THE PICTURE PLANE, WANTING NEITHER RESEMBLANCE NOR EXTERNAL "MEANING."

BUT THE MAIN THRUST WAS A RETURN TO MEANING IN ART, AWAY FROM RESEMBLANCE, BACK TO THE REALM OF IDEAS.

MEANWHILE, THE WRITTEN WORD WAS ALSO CHANGING. POETRY BEGAN TURNING AWAY FROM THE ELUSIVE, TWICE-ABSTRACTED LANGUAGE OF OLD TOWARD A MORE DIRECT, EVEN COLLOQUIAL, STYLE.

IN PROSE, LANGUAGE WAS BECOMING EVEN MORE DIRECT, CONVEYING MEANING SIMPLY AND QUICKLY, MORE LIKE PICTURES.

"MEANING" WAS NOT ABANDONED BY ANY MEANS, BUT AUTHORS WERE DEFINITELY MOVING LEFT--

AND HEADED FOR A COLLISION!

JOHN KEATS
Ode on a Grecian Urn

Facing West from California's Shores

FACING WEST FROM CALIFORNIA'S SHORES,
INQUIRING, TIRELESS, SEEKING
WHAT IS YET UNFOUND,
I, A CHILD, VERY OLD, OVER WAVES, TOWARDS THE HOUSE OF MATERNITY, THE LAND OF MIGRATIONS, LOOK AFAR.
LOOK OFF THE SHORES OF MY WESTERN SEA, THE CIRCLE ALMOST CIRCLED:
FOR STARTING WESTWARD FROM HINDUSTAN,
FROM THE VALES OF KASHMIR, FROM ASIA,
FROM THE NORTH, FROM THE GOD, THE SAGE,
AND THE HERO, FROM THE SOUTH, FROM THE FLOWERY PENINSULAS AND THE SPICE ISLANDS,
LONG HAVING WANDERED SINCE, ROUND THE EARTH HAVING WANDERED,
NOW I FACE HOME AGAIN,
VERY PLEASED AND JOYOUS:
(BUT WHERE IS WHAT I STARTED FOR,
SO LONG AGO?
AND WHY IS IT YET UNFOUND?)
AND IN POPULAR CULTURE
THE TWO FORMS COLLIDED
AGAIN AND AGAIN WITHOUT
ANY PRETENSES OF "HIGH" ART

NOWHERE IS THIS COLLISION
MORE THOROUGHLY EXPLORED THAN
THE MODERN COMIC, AND IT'S
NOT A RECENT OBSESSION.

LET'S GO BACK TO
THE EARLY 1900'S
BEFORE ANY OF
THIS HAPPENED,
WHEN WORDS AND
PICTURES HAD
DRIFTED AS FAR
APART AS
POSSIBLE.

UP TO THAT POINT, EUROPEAN
BROADSHEETS HAD OFFERED REMINDERS
OF WHAT WORDS AND PICTURES COULD
DO WHEN COMBINED.

BUT AGAIN IT WAS RODOLPHE
TOFFFER WHO FORESAW THEIR
INTERDEPENDENCY AND BROUGHT
THE FAMILY BACK TOGETHER AT LAST.

M. CREDIN ADVERTISES FOR A TUTOR, AND MANY APPLY FOR THE JOB.

I'M SURE THAT
THESE IDEAS WERE
THE FURTHER THING
FROM TOFFFER'S
MIND WHEN HE
PUT PEN TO
PAPER—

BUT THE FACT
THAT THE MODERN
COMIC WAS BORN
JUST AS ART AND
WRITING WERE
PREPARING TO
CHANGE DIRECTION
IS AT LEAST
INTRIGUING.

AND PERHAPS THIS
COMMON THREAD OF
UNIFICATION
DID GROW OUT OF
A SHARED INSTINCT
OF THE DAY...

...AN INSTINCT
WHICH SAID THAT
WE HAD REACHED
THE END OF A LONG
JOURNEY AND
THAT IT WAS TIME
AT LAST TO HEAD
FOR HOME.
UNFORTUNATELY FOR COMICS, NO SOONER HAD THE FINE ARTS RE DISCOVERED THE LINK BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES -- THAN MODERN ART ITSELF BECAME VIRTUALLY INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO THE AVERAGE VIEWER!

WHAT THE HECK IS THAT?!!

IT'S A HOAX, I TELL YA! MY TWO-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER CAN PAINT BETTER THAN THAT!

DO PEOPLE REALLY PAY MONEY FOR THIS??

IN FACT, THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S PERCEPTIONS OF "GREAT" ART AND "GREAT" WRITING HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH IN 150 YEARS. ANY ARTIST WISHING TO DO GREAT WORK IN A MEDIUM USING WORDS AND PICTURES WILL HAVE TO CONTEND WITH THIS ATTITUDE.

Thou still unravished bride
Thou foster-child of silence
Sylvan historian, who canst
A flowery tale more sweetly
What leaf fringed legend he
Of deities or mortals, or
In Tempe or the dales
What men or gods are these
What mad pursuit? What speed
What passion and what limb!

In others' and in themselves...

...because, deep down inside, many comics creators still measure art and writing by different standards and act on the faith that "great" art and "great" writing will combine harmoniously by virtue of quality alone.

* NOT AS MUCH AS WE LIKE TO THINK IT HAS, ANYWAY.
THE ART FORM OF COMICS IS MANY CENTURIES OLD, BUT IT'S PERCEIVED AS A RECENT INVENTION AND SUFFERS THE CURSE OF ALL NEW MEDIA.

THE CURSE OF BEING JUDGED BY THE STANDARDS OF THE OLD.

EVER SINCE THE INVENTION OF THE WRITTEN WORD, NEW MEDIA HAVE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD.

CAREFUL, JACOB! IF YOU KEEP DOING THIS, YOU'LL STOP USING YOUR MEMORY!

EACH NEW MEDIUM BEGINS ITS LIFE BY IMITATING ITS PREDECESSORS. MANY EARLY MOVIES WERE LIKE FILMED STAGE PLAYS, MUCH EARLY TELEVISION WAS LIKE RADIO WITH PICTURES OR REDUCED MOVIES.

FAR TOO MANY COMICS CREATORS HAVE NO HIGHER GOAL THAN TO MATCH THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OTHER MEDIA, AND VIEW ANY CHANCE TO WORK IN OTHER MEDIA AS A STEP UP.

AND AGAIN, AS LONG AS WE VIEW COMICS AS A GENRE OF WRITING OR A STYLE OF GRAPHIC ART THIS ATTITUDE MAY NEVER DISAPPEAR.
WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMBINATION MAY NOT BE MY DEFINITION OF COMICS, BUT THE COMBINATION HAS HAD TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE ON ITS GROWTH.

A HUGE RANGE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCES CAN BE PORTRAYED IN COMICS THROUGH EITHER WORDS OR PICTURES.

AS A RESULT—AND DESPITE ITS MANY OTHER POTENTIAL USES—COMICS HAVE BECOME FIRMLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE ART OF STORYTELLING.

AND, INDEED, WORDS AND PICTURES HAVE GREAT POWERS TO TELL STORIES WHEN CREATORS FULLY EXPLOIT THEM BOTH.

AND SO FAR, WE'VE ONLY SEEN THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG!

AS CHILDREN, WE "SHOW AND TELL" INTERCHANGEABLY WORDS AND IMAGES COMBINING TO TRANSMIT A CONNECTED SERIES OF IDEAS.

THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WORDS AND PICTURES CAN COMBINE IN COMICS IS VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED.

BUT LET'S TRY TO BREAK IT DOWN INTO SOME DISTINCT CATEGORIES.
FIRST, WE HAVE THE
WORD SPECIFIC
COMBINATIONS,
WHERE PICTURES
ILLUSTRATE, BUT
DON'T SIGNIFICANTLY
ADD TO A LARGELY
COMPLETE
TEXT.

JUDY GAVE ME HER
KEYS AND SMILED.

THE UNITED STATES
CONSTITUTION WAS
ADOPTED BY THE
SECOND CONTINENTAL
CONGRESS IN 1787
AND PUT INTO EFFECT
IN 1789.

THEN
THERE ARE
PICTURE SPECIFIC
COMBINATIONS
WHERE WORDS DO
LITTLE MORE THAN
ADD A SOUNDTRACK
TO A VISUALLY
TOLD SEQUENCE.

HE DID IT!

AND, OF COURSE,
DUO-SPECIFIC
PANELS IN WHICH
BOTH WORDS AND
PICTURES SEND
ESSENTIALLY
THE SAME
MESSAGE.

BUT THE CAPTAIN'S MIGHTY
BLOW MISSES ITS INTENDED
TARGET!

BLAST! HE
DODGED MY PUNCH AND
I STRUCK THIS BRICK
WALL!

GRIM-FACED,
GEORGE LIFTED
HIS LOLLYPOP.

HA! I
DODGED
YO!
I FEEL SO SAD!

...THOUGHT AMY.
Perhaps the most common type of word/picture combination is the interdependent, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone.

I ask you, does this guy look like a CEO to you??

And just guess who drove up in Bob's truck an hour later!

Oh, my god!

He's lying.

Uh-huh.

AFTER COLLEGE, I PURSUED A CAREER IN HIGH FINANCE.

Hurry up, Willy!

INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATIONS AREN'T ALWAYS AN EQUAL BALANCE though and may fall anywhere on a scale between types one and two.

Generally speaking, the more is said with words, the more the pictures can be freed to go exploring and vice versa.

P

W

P

W

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In comics at its best, words and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading.

When both partners try to lead, the competition can subvert the overall goals...

...though a little playful competition can sometimes produce enjoyable results.

But when these partners each know their roles--

---and support each other's strengths---

---comics can match any of the art forms it draws so much of its strength from.
WHEN PICTURES CARRY THE WEIGHT OF CLARITY IN A SCENE, THEY FREE WORDS TO EXPLORE A WIDER AREA.

LET'S SAY I SHOW YOU A WOMAN WALKING ACROSS THE STREET IN THE RAIN, BUYING A PINT OF ICE CREAM AND EATING IT IN HER APARTMENT--

--ALL IN PICTURES.
WHEN A SCENE SHOWS YOU ALL YOU "NEED" TO KNOW, LIKE THIS ONE, THE LATITUDE FOR SCRIPTING GROWS ENORMOUSLY.

I MAY BE ALONE LIKE THIS FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

IT COULD BECOME AN INTERNAL MONOLOGUE.

(INTERDEPENDENT)

PERHAPS SOMETHING WILDLY INCONGRUOUS

"MISSION CONTROL, MISSION CONTROL, DO YOU READ ME?"

(PARALLEL)

MAYBE IT'S ALL JUST A BIG ADVERTISEMENT?

YOU'LL LOVE THE TASTE!

(INTERDEPENDENT)

OR A CHANCE TO RUMINATE ON BROADER TOPICS:

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS...

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS...

(INTERDEPENDENT)
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE WORDS LOCK IN THE "MEANING" OF A SEQUENCE, THEN THE PICTURES CAN REALLY TAKE OFF.

SAME SCENE NOW, BUT THIS TIME ALL IN WORDS!

I CROSSED THE STREET TO THE CONVENIENCE STORE. THE RAIN SOAKED INTO MY BOOTS.

I FOUND THE LAST PINT OF CHOCOLATE CHIP IN THE FREEZER.

THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID NO THANKS. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK...

I WENT BACK TO THE APARTMENT--

-- AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

ALONE AT LAST.
NOW, ONE COULD JUST COMBINE THE PICTURES FROM PAGE 157 WITH THE WORDS FROM PAGE 169.

-- BUT WHAT ARE SOME OTHER OPTIONS?

I CROSSED THE STREET TO THE CONVENIENCE STORE. THE RAIN SOAKED INTO MY BOOTS.

IF THE ARTIST WANTS TO, HE/SHE CAN NOW SHOW ONLY FRAGMENTS OF A SCENE.

WORD SPECIFIC

---AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID NO THANKS. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK.

AMPLIFICATION

OR MOVE TOWARD GREATER LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION OR EXPRESSION.

PERHAPS THE ARTIST CAN GIVE US SOME IMPORTANT EMOTIONAL INFORMATION.

I WENT BACK TO THE APARTMENT---

INTERDEPENDENT

OR SHIFT AHEAD OR BACKWARDS IN TIME.

AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

WORD SPECIFIC

ALONE AT LAST

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THE PICTURE PLANE

RESEMBLANCE MEANING

HOWEVER MUCH WE MAY CHART THESE THINGS, THEY'RE ALL ULTIMATELY BEST LEFT TO THE CREATOR'S INSTINCTS.

THE MIXING OF WORDS AND PICTURES IS MORE ALCHEMY THAN SCIENCE.

SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THOSE FIRST ALCHEMISTS MAY HAVE BEEN LOST IN THE ANCIENT PAST.

BUT WE HAVE SOME POWERFUL MAGIC RIGHT HERE IN THE 20TH CENTURY, TOO!

THE RICHNESS OF MODERN LANGUAGE IS AN IRREPLACEABLE COMMODITY.

-- WHEN TO TELL WAS TO SHOW --

-- AND TO SHOW WAS TO TELL --

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