

The University of Canberra

S W Smith

Academaesthetics: How the essay and comic can save each other

Abstract

This project is an essay/comic book hybrid that analyses a number of common general perceptions and misunderstandings surrounding both the essay and the comic, and uses the contrast and similarities between the forms to suggest some new ways of understanding them.

Shane Smith is currently completing an Honours project in Creative Communication at the University of Canberra.

TEXT

Vol 11 No 2 October 2007

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

Editors: Nigel Krauth & Jen Webb

Text@griffith.edu.au

ACADEMAESTHETICS


How the essay and comic can save each other

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PERCEPTIONS HAVE BEEN UNFAVOURABLE TO BOTH THE ESSAY AND THE COMIC BOOK.

THERE HAS BEEN A STEADY DECLINE IN THE POPULARITY OF THE ESSAY AS READING MATERIAL, BECAUSE IT IS SEEN AS LACKING THE EMOTIONAL AND AESTHETIC APPEALS OF FICTION.


AND DESPITE PERSISTENT SUPPORT FOR COMICS AS AN ART FORM WITH LIMITLESS POTENTIAL, COMICS ARE STILL GENERALLY REGARDED AS ONE-DIMENSIONAL JUVENILE SENSATIONALISM.






SO WHY HAS THIS HAPPENED?
WHAT CAUSED THESE
PERCEPTIONS TO DEVELOP?

WHY ARE THE COMIC AND
ESSAY IN SUCH DISFAVOUR?



BY ANALYSING THE HISTORIES
OF THE ESSAY AND THE COMIC,
AND THE SOCIAL DISCOURSES
SURROUNDING THEM, I AIM TO
ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.



AND I HOPE THAT THIS
ESSAY/COMIC HYBRID
PRESENTATION OF MY
FINDINGS WILL SERVE
AS A WINDOW INTO
UNDERSTANDING THESE
TWO FORMS.

ACADENMAESTHETICS

By S.W. Smith



DEFINING 'ESSAY'
IS PROBLEMATIC.

GEORG LUKACS QUESTIONS
WHETHER ESSAYS POSSESS
A UNIFYING PRINCIPLE:

*What is this unity – if unity there is?*¹

THEODORE ADORNO IS EQUALLY
UNABLE TO QUANTIFY ESSAYS:

*the essay ... is lacking a convincing tradition*²

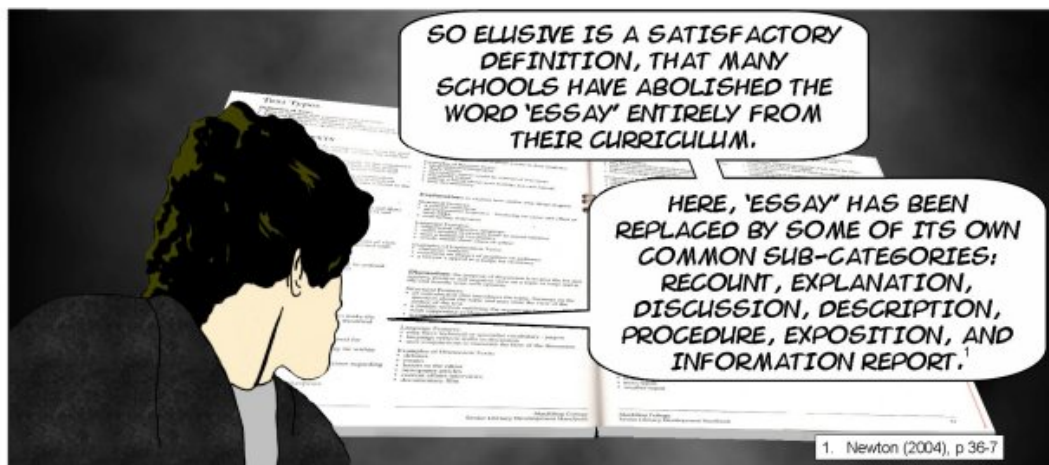
AND PETER HOHENDAHL
CAN ONLY DEFINE THE
ESSAY BY WHAT IT IS NOT:

*neither a scientific article ... nor a [systematic] tractate*³

1. as quoted by Huhn (1999), p 183

2. Adorno (1984), p 151

3. Hohendahl (1997), p 220







THERE ARE A GREAT MANY
ESSAYS AROUND THAT
UTILISE A CONVERSATIONAL
OR ANECDOTAL TONE, RATHER
THAN AN ARGUMENTATIVE OR
RHETORICAL ONE.⁵

NEEDLESS TO SAY, THESE
DIFFERENT ESSAYS EMBODY A
VIRTUALLY INFINITE RANGE OF
STRUCTURES --

-- SUCH THAT IT COULD BE
SAID THAT THERE IS NO
SINGLE STRUCTURAL
PRINCIPLE TO UNITE THE
FIELD OF ESSAY WRITING.

SO - AS IT CANNOT BE
ADEQUATELY DEFINED BY EITHER
STRUCTURE OR CONTENT, WHAT
HAS LED TO CURRENT
PERCEPTIONS OF THE ESSAY?

WHILE WE THINK ABOUT
THAT, LET'S TAKE A LOOK
AT THE COMIC BOOK.



1. Herbert (2005), p 248
2. Dowse (2005), p 19
3. MacNeill (2005), p 47
4. Spears (2005), p 39
5. Bloom (2005), p 418



com-ics (kóm'iks)*n.* plural in form, used with a singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

2. Superheroes in bright, colorful costumes, fighting deviously villainous who work to conquer the world, in violent, sensational, pulse-pounding action sequences!! **3.** Cute, cuddly bunnies, mice, and roly-poly bears, dancing to sweet, happy-hop, happy-hop. **4.** Cornerpiece of our Nation's youth world: big, funny and sad.



image from McCloud (1993), p 9, panels 5-6

the additive fusion of the text and image relationship to achieve a narrative end, with particular importance placed upon the speech balloon.¹



image from <http://www.rcharvey.com/release.html>, (2006)

THESE DEFINITIONS ARE NOT COMPLEMENTARY, NOR ARE THEY ALL-INCLUSIVE.

BASICALLY, THE PROBLEM IS THAT SO MANY THINGS HAVE BEEN CALLED COMICS, THAT FOR EVERY 'RULE,' THERE IS ALWAYS AN EXCEPTION THAT IS ALSO A COMIC.

1. as quoted by Cohn (2006), p 2

AND ON THE OTHER HAND,
ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT ALWAYS
IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS,
DEFINING COMICS BY THEIR
CONTENT IS LIKEWISE FUTILE.¹

AS WITH THE ESSAY,
THE WORLD OF THE
COMIC IS PRACTICALLY
INFINITE IN TERMS OF
SCOPE AND POTENTIAL.²

1. Cohn (2005), p 16

2. McCloud (1993), p 22-3

OF COURSE, HOWEVER, WE
CANNOT THROW OUT ALL
DEFINITIONS AND REPLACE
THEM WITH NOTHING.

IT IS NECESSARY TO
IDENTIFY COMICS AND
ESSAYS AS DISTINCT
ENTITIES IF ANY
RESEARCH INTO THEM
IS TO BE OF VALUE.



NEIL COHN PROPOSES
AN ALTERNATIVE
UNDERSTANDING OF
COMICS:

Categorically, comics can only be understood as sociological, literary, and cultural artefacts, independent from the internal structures comprising them¹.



image from Cohn (2006),
http://www.comixpedia.com/comic_theory_101_too_many_twos

HE MAKES THE CASE THAT COMICS
ARE DEFINED NOT BY RIGID
STRUCTURAL BOUNDARIES, BUT
MORE BY 'CULTURAL
CATEGORISATION,' WHICH CAN
INCLUDE SUCH FACTORS AS
READERSHIP, PROCESSES OF
PUBLISHING, OR CONTENT².

IN HIS QUEST TO DEFINE
ART, MORRIS WEITZ DRAWS
UPON WITTGENSTEIN TO
ARRIVE AT A COMPARABLE
CONCLUSION.

If we actually look and see what it is that we call "art," we will also find no common properties – only strands of similarities [...] such that we can say of [art] that it forms a family with family resemblances and no common trait.³

IT WOULD NOT BE
UNREASONABLE, THEN,
TO APPLY THIS KIND
OF THINKING TO THE
ESSAY, ALSO.

INDEED, THESE LOOSE
DEFINITIONS ARE NECESSARY
IN ALL NON-LOGICAL FIELDS
OF EXPRESSION, UNLESS WE
CHOOSE TO "ARBITRARILY
CLOSE THEM BY STIPULATING
THE RANGES OF THEIR USES."⁴

OF COURSE, THIS MAKES THE
PROCESS OF DEFINING COMICS
AND ESSAYS HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE,
AND EQUATES TO LITTLE MORE
THAN "I KNOW IT WHEN I SEE IT."

1. Cohn (2005), p 16

2. Cohn (2003), p 14

3. Weitz (1956), p 31

4. Weitz (1956), p 31

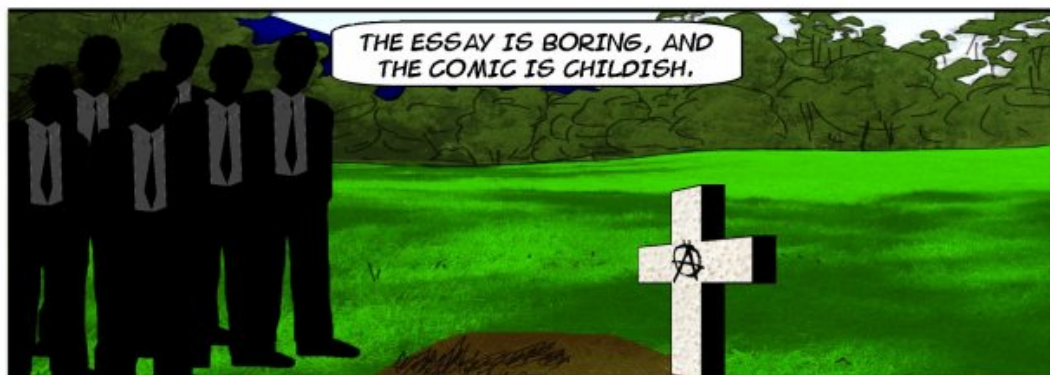
ALTHOUGH THESE OPEN DEFINITIONS ARE A BOON IN TERMS OF EXPERIMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT, THEY ARE ALSO GREATLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURRENT STATE OF MISUNDERSTANDING.



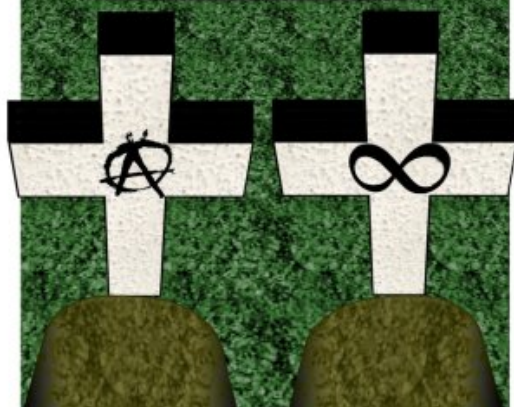
BY ALLOWING EACH PERSON TO DEFINE FOR THEMSELVES WHAT THE FORMS MEAN, DESPITE THE INFINITE VARIETY IMPLICIT IN THE DEFINING PROCESS, CERTAIN GENERAL SOCIAL ASSUMPTIONS HAVE CROPPED UP:



THE ESSAY IS BORING, AND THE COMIC IS CHILDISH.



OF COURSE, THERE IS A LOT MORE TO THIS. WHAT CAUSED THESE LIMITED PERCEPTIONS OF THE ESSAY AND COMIC TO OVERTAKE NOTIONS OF MULTIPLICITY AND VARIETY?



IT'S TIME TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ESSAY AND COMIC, AND SEE IF AN ANSWER CAN BE FOUND.



PART ONE:
DEFINITIONS

PART TWO:
THE ESSAY

PART THREE:
THE COMIC

PART FOUR:
CONCLUSION

PART TWO: THE ESSAY

THE ESSAY IS IN DECLINE AS FAVOURED READING MATERIAL*. MY RESEARCH HAS LED ME TO DERIVE THREE PRIMARY REASONS FOR THIS.

1. Invisible Author
2. Singular Perspective
3. Elitist Position

* SIMONSON (1964) P 34

WE CAN ALREADY SEE SOME SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THESE THREE FACTORS, AND COHN'S 'CULTURAL CATEGORISATION.'

THIS LEGITIMISES THE CLAIM THAT CULTURALLY-DERIVED DEFINITIONS PLAY A PART IN THESE MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

INVISIBLE AUTHOR

SINGULAR PERSPECTIVE

ELITIST POSITION

READERSHIP

PROCESSES OF PUBLISHING

CONTENT

LET'S FLESH THESE IDEAS OUT A BIT.

IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT HIGH SCHOOL DRUMMED INTO ME, IT WAS THE 'RIGHT WAY' TO WRITE AN ESSAY.

INVISIBLE

AUTHOR

NO FIRST-PERSON REFERENCES, NO COLLOQUIALISMS, AND NO INFORMAL LANGUAGE.

THIS OBJECTIVE CRITICAL AESTHETIC HAS BEEN LINKED TO T.S. ELIOT'S MANIFESTO OF MODERNISM.¹

the progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality...²

the artist
self-sacrifice
extinction
of person

IN SHORT, ESSAY WRITERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO HIDE BEHIND THEIR WORDS, TO ESSENTIALLY BECOME ANONYMOUS AND INVISIBLE IN THEIR PURSUITS OF OBJECTIVE ABSOLUTE TRUTH.

1. Bloom (2005), p 418

2. Eliot (1920), p 499

THIS APPEARANCE OF ANONYMITY IS IDENTIFIED BY HAROLD SIMONSON AS THE REASON FOR THE DECLINE OF THE ESSAY.

The essay is more explicit, logical, disciplined, even pedantic – or so it may appear; and therefore students associate hard work with understanding it.¹

THIS IS NOT A FAILURE OF THE STUDENT; RATHER, SIMONSON STATES THAT STUDENTS HAVE JUST BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO A CERTAIN KIND OF READING:

THAT WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO EMPATHISE WITH A PROTAGONIST OR NARRATOR.²

Humanness [of the author or artist] is always the indispensable element of his work³

THE GROWING NUMBER OF PERSONAL ESSAYS⁴ SERVES TO SHOW THAT THIS CONSIDERATION IS NOT BEING IGNORED.

THE POST-MODERN, POST-ELIOT ESSAY IS PREVALENT --

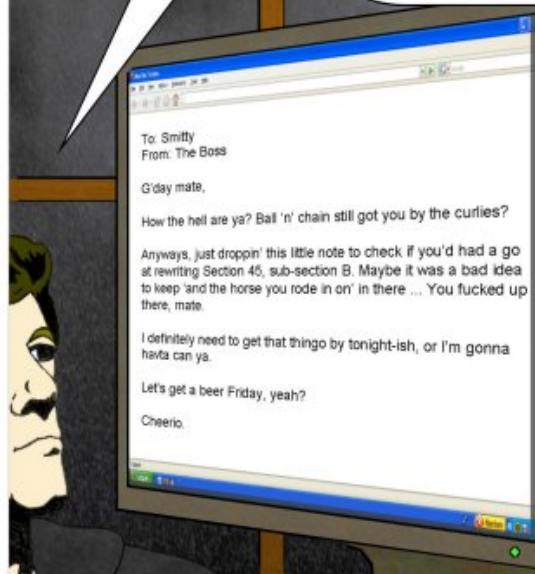
-- SO WHY ARE ESSAYS STILL REGARDED AS INACCESSIBLE AND UNINTERESTING?

1. Simonson (1964), p 34
2. Simonson (1964), p 34
3. Simonson (1964), p 36
4. Bloom (2005), p 418

THERE CAN BE NO ARGUMENT THAT WE NEED, AT TIMES, TO DISTANCE OURSELVES FROM WHAT WE WRITE.

BUT THERE IS A HUGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WRITING FORMALLY, AND STRIVING FOR OBJECTIVITY.

FORMAL WRITING OFTEN ALLOWS SUCH THINGS AS CLARITY OF ARGUMENT, A LARGER PERSPECTIVE, OR THE APPEARANCE OF AUTHORITY.¹



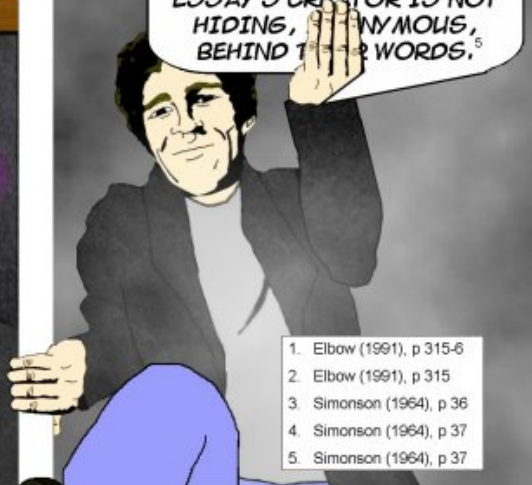
IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT, JUST AS OBJECTIVITY IS IMPOSSIBLE², SO TOO IS IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE AUTHOR TO BE REMOVED FROM WHAT HE OR SHE WRITES.

The point then is that in reading essays the student should pass beyond rhetorical mechanics and get into the mood and attitude of the writer who mysteriously becomes one with his art.³



THE ONUS IS NOT JUST UPON THE STUDENT, THOUGH. SIMONSON MAKES THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE "REAL PERSON" AND THE "MASK" OR "PERSONAGE" IN TERMS OF ESSAY WRITING.⁴

IT IS MUCH EASIER FOR A DIALOGUE BETWEEN READER AND WRITER TO BE FORMED WHEN THE ESSAY'S CREATOR IS NOT HIDING, ANONYMOUS, BEHIND THE WORDS.⁵



1. Elbow (1991), p 315-6
2. Elbow (1991), p 315
3. Simonson (1964), p 36
4. Simonson (1964), p 37
5. Simonson (1964), p 37

IN OTHER WORDS, THE
READER NEEDS TO IDENTIFY
WITH THE AUTHOR --

-- TO RECOGNISE WHO THEY ARE
AND WHAT THEIR CONCEPTUAL
POSITION IS, AND TO RECOGNISE
THE PROCESSES OF AUTHORIAL
LOGIC, WIT, IRONY AND/OR
CHARACTER INVOLVED IN
CONSTRUCTING AN ESSAY.¹



1. Smith (2007), p 15

THE ESSAY COMPONENT OF THIS
PROJECT AIMS TO MAKE
PROCESSES OF CONSTRUCTION
LESS INVISIBLE TO ESSAY
READERS.



BUT HOW DOES THE COMIC
FACTOR INTO ALL OF THIS?

THERE ARE TWO WAYS.



SCOTT McCloud IDENTIFIES A NARCISSISTIC MOTIVATION FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF CARTOONS AND COMICS.

We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!

SO, IF ALL WE WANT IS A NARRATOR TO EMPATHISE WITH, COULD WE POSSIBLY HOPE FOR BETTER THAN A CARTOON?

HOWEVER, WHERE SIMONSON CLAIMS THAT A VISIBLE AND PROMINENT AUTHORIAL PERSONALITY IS PARAMOUNT², McCLOUD CLAIMS THAT ONE INTERFERES WITH THE OTHER:

1. McCloud (1993), p 36
2. Simonson (1964), p 37



images from McCloud (1993), p 36, panels 3-4, 8-9; p 37, panels 1, 7-8

THIS PIECE ATTEMPTS TO GENERATE NARRATOR EMPATHY BY, AS McCLOUD DID, LITERALLY MAKING THE AUTHOR VISIBLE.

HOWEVER, MAINTAINING AN AUTHORITATIVE VOICE IS PART OF THE EXPERIMENT. I WISH TO SHOW, AS SIMONSON DID, THAT AN ESSAY CAN BE SIMULTANEOUSLY PERSONAL AND FORMAL, AND CAN NAVIGATE BETWEEN THE TWO AT WHIM.



SO, MY FIRST GOAL WITH PRESENTING THIS ESSAY IN THE COMIC FORM WAS TO MAKE THE AUTHOR A VISIBLE PRESENCE.

THE SECOND IS TO USE VISUAL METAPHOR AND IMAGERY TO MAKE THE AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE A PRESENCE IN THE TEXT.

THROUGHOUT ACADEMAESTHETICS, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF NON-TEXTUAL AND SUB-TEXTUAL ARGUMENTS, THEMES, AND CONCEPTS BEING PRESENTED.

BECAUSE THE ESSAY IS SO OFTEN SEEN AS ANONYMOUS, READERS RARELY TRY TO DETECT SUBTEXT IN THE ESSAYS THEY READ.¹ YET, ITS PRESENCE IS A MAJOR PART OF THE ESSAY'S STRUCTURAL MAKEUP.²

THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS A SIMPLE ONE: BY PUTTING THE AUTHOR RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF THE READER IN SUCH A CLEAR CLOSE-AT-HAND WAY, THE READER COMES TO UNDERSTAND AND WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO IDENTIFY MORE WITH THE ESSAY, WHETHER IT IS PRESENTED AS A COMIC OR NOT, AND WILL LEARN HOW TO BETTER READ AN ESSAY.

EITHER WAY, LET'S MOVE ON TO THE NEXT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF THE ESSAY.

1. Simonson (1964), p 36
2. Simonson (1964), p 36

JUST LIKE SIMONSON,
PETER HOHENDAHL NOTICES
FICTIONAL TEXTS BEING
READ INSTEAD OF ESSAYS.

~~INVISIBLE AUTHOR~~

THE REASON HE STATES IS NOT
TO DO WITH EMPATHY; RATHER,
HE CLAIMS THAT FICTIONAL
TEXTS ARE ABLE TO PRESENT
INFORMATION IN A WAY THAT
AN ESSAY CANNOT.

SINGULAR PERSPECTIVE

The shift to an aesthetic mode of articulation has, it seems to me, fundamental implications for the subject position.

While the critical discourse of the essay allowed for fragmentation and decentering, [...] fictional narrative offers a plurality of voices with differing, conflicting positions.

The plurality of voices invites the reader to negotiate between a number of subject positions.¹




1. Hohendahl (1997), p 227



IN SHORT, HERE HOHENDAH
MAKES TWO STATEMENTS:

FIRST, THAT THE ESSAY IS
INCAPABLE OF PRESENTING
MORE THAN A SINGLE VOICE --



-- AND SECOND, THAT FICTIONAL
TEXTS OFFER A RANGE OF
POSITIONS AND VOICES TO
NAVIGATE AND CHOOSE BETWEEN.



I WOULD LIKE TO CHALLENGE,
OR AT LEAST, EXPLORE BOTH
OF THESE STATEMENTS.

"Essays have a singular perspective"

ACCORDING TO RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS, THE ESSAY, REGARDLESS OF LEVEL OF PERSONAL INTIMACY, DOES NOT - INDEED, CANNOT - REPRESENT A SINGLE PERSPECTIVE.¹

THIS IS PARTLY BECAUSE, AS SHE ARGUES, READER INTERPRETATION IS KEY.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS ABOUND IN ESSAYS; THEY ARE ENCOURAGED.²

HOW CAN A SINGULAR PERSPECTIVE BE CONTAINED WITHIN A MULTIPLICITY OF MEANINGS?

FURTHERMORE, SHE ARGUES THAT EVEN UNAMBIGUOUS, FORMAL ESSAYS ARE FAR FROM SINGULAR.

... essays are practices in multiplicity, in polyvocality, in intercutting other opinions, in offering heterogeneous, faceted perspectives. And the essay, in the main, does not try to settle, to force one way of considering a question ...³

1. DuPlessis (1996), p 31-2
2. DuPlessis (1996), p 32
3. DuPlessis (1996), p 32

INDEED, THE ESSAY DOES NAVIGATE A NUMBER OF OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES IN ITS QUEST TO PRESENT ITS OWN INDIVIDUAL TRUTH.

HOWEVER, AS HOHENDAHL
SUGGESTS, THE ESSAY GENERALLY
DOES END UP DERIVING FROM THE
MULTIPLICITY OF VOICES A
SINGULAR POINT OF VIEW:



THAT OF THE NARRATOR.



SO, ALTHOUGH ON ONE HAND, THE
ESSAY DOES PRESENT ITSELF IN A
SINGULAR VOICE, IT IS
SIMULTANEOUSLY OPENING ITSELF TO
THE VAST MULTIPLICITIES OF HUMAN
EXPERIENCE THROUGH ITS AUDIENCE.¹

*In short, essays are not a way of
gaining a voice but of losing one in the
largeness of something else.*

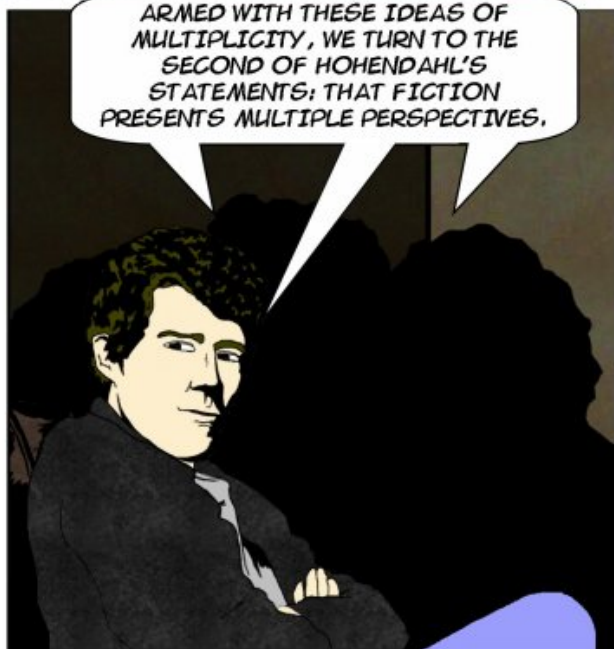
*... the essay is transpersonal,
collective, based not on I but on we
and it and she and he (and others too)
in peculiar and unstable mixtures.²*



1. DuPlessis (1996), p 32

2. DuPlessis (1996), p 32

ARMED WITH THESE IDEAS OF
MULTIPLICITY, WE TURN TO THE
SECOND OF HOHENDAHL'S
STATEMENTS: THAT FICTION
PRESENTS MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES.



"Fiction has multiple perspectives"



AT ITS HEART, ANY STORY IS ABOUT CONFLICT.

AND OF COURSE, THIS CLASH OF OPPOSING PERSPECTIVES CERTAINLY SEEMS, AT FIRST, TO PRESENT A NUMBER OF DIFFERING OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR A READER TO NAVIGATE.

INDEED, AT SOME LEVEL, IT DOES.

HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT, IN TERMS OF THE SUBJECT POSITION, EACH CHARACTER THAT EMBODIES A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE HAS BEEN PENNED BY THE SAME PERSON.


WHAT IS BEING PRESENTED TO THE READER IS NOT A NUMBER OF SUBJECT POSITIONS, BUT INSTEAD, FRAGMENTS OF A SINGLE ONE.




THE POSTMODERN
SUBJECT IS A
FRAGMENTED ONE.



ALWAYS IN FLUX, AND
NEVER COMPLETE.¹



CONSTANTLY UNDER THE
INFLUENCE OF
SURROUNDINGS.²




AND NO TRUE, UNITED
SELF BEHIND THE
FRAGMENTS.³



FROM THE MIND OF THIS
FRAGMENTED AUTHOR COME
HIS/HER CHARACTERS.




EACH ONE REPRESENTS PART
OF THE AUTHOR'S PSYCHE.



EACH ONE CONFORMS, TO
SOME DEGREE, TO CARL JUNG'S
CHARACTER ARCHETYPES.



THESE ARCHETYPES ARE
ANALOGIES FOR THE PSYCHE
OF THE AUTHOR⁴ WHICH,
WHILE FRAGMENTED, IS
STILL A SINGLE COLLECTIVE.

- 
1. O'Shaughnessy & Stadler (2002), p 211
 2. O'Shaughnessy & Stadler (2002), p 211
 3. O'Shaughnessy & Stadler (2002), p 313
 4. Wells (2006), p 13

SO, JUST AS WITH THE ESSAY,
A FICTIONAL TEXT GENERALLY DOES
END UP DERIVING FROM THE
MULTIPLICITY OF VOICES A
SINGULAR POINT OF VIEW:



THAT OF THE AUTHOR.



WHAT WE CAN SEE HERE IS THAT EVERYTHING DEPENDS UPON HOW THE PIECE, FICTION OR ESSAY, IS READ.

THERE IS ROOM FOR MULTIPLICITY IN BOTH THE ESSAY AND IN FICTIONAL PIECES, IF THE AUDIENCE IS WILLING TO FIND IT.

WITH THIS COMIC, IT IS NOT MY GOAL TO PROPOUND A SINGLE, RIGID, LIMITING POINT OF VIEW. INSTEAD, I ENCOURAGE MULTIPLE READER INTERPRETATIONS.

AND IN THIS ESSAY, I HAVE JUST PRESENTED TWO IRRECONCILABLE THEORIES ABOUT HOW WE READ AND WRITE.

PART TWO: THE ESSAY

"Essays have a singular perspective"

THE ESSAY IS IN READING MATERIAL LED ME TO DECIDE REASONS FOR THE

1. Invi
2. Sing
3. Eliti

ACCORDING TO ALEXIS BLUM, INTELLECTUALS, THE ESSAY, BECAUSE OF ITS ON PERSONAL, SUBJECTIVE, DOES NOT FORMED, CURRENT, REPRESENT A SINGLE PERSPECTIVE.

THIS IS PARTLY BECAUSE AS ONE WRITES, READER IDENTIFICATION IS KEY.

MULTIPLE READINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS AROUND IN ESSAYS, THEY ARE ENCOURAGED.

HOW CAN A SINGULAR PERSPECTIVE BE COMBINED WITH A MULTIPLICITY OF READER?

FURTHERMORE, SHE ADDED THAT ESSAYS REMAIN FORMER, ESSAYS ARE FAR FROM COMPLICATED.

INSTEAD, THE ESSAY DOES SUBSTITUTE A SENSE OF DIVING INTO PROBLEM IN ITS QUEST TO REVEAL THE ONE PROVISIONAL TRUTH.

"Fiction has multiple perspectives"

AT ITS HEART, ANY STORY IS ABOUT CONFLICT.

ANY OF COURSE, THIS CLASH OF OPPOSING PERSPECTIVES SEEM ONLY ASIDE, AT FIRST, TO INEVITABLY A BLEND OF DIFFERING DIVISIONS AND REASONS FOR HOW A READER TO HANDLE.

THUS, AT ONCE

POSSIBLY, IT IS ENOUGH OF TO REVEAL THAT, IN TERMS OF THE QUALITY PERSPECTIVE, EACH CHARACTER THAT EMBODIES A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE HAS BEEN PERCEIVED BY THE SAME PERSON.

WELL OF BEING PRECIPITATED TO THE READER TO NOT A NUMBER OF SUBJECT POSITIONS, BUT DIFFERENT REASONS FOR A SINGLE ONE.

I LEAVE IT TO YOU TO DECIDE WHAT TO BELIEVE.

SO, LET'S MOVE ON TO THE THIRD AND FINAL REASON FOR THE DECLINE OF THE ESSAY AS READING MATERIAL.

~~INVISIBLE AUTHOR~~

THELMA MCCORMACK WRITES
OF A CLASS DIVIDE IN WHICH
INTELLECTUAL INSTITUTIONS
HAVE BECOME SEPARATED
FROM POPULAR CULTURE.¹

~~SINGULAR DISSENTIVE~~

ELITIST POSITION

GERALD GRAFF NOTES THAT
THE ESSAY, THE TOOL OF THE
INTELLECTUAL², IS A MAJOR
FORCE IN THIS SEPARATION.

Hiding behind smoke screens of esoteric terminology, theorists turn their backs on outsiders, including most students, and carry on endless private conversations with other theorists.³

The essay can be perceived as part of the implicit elitism that Gouldner attributes to intellectuals as a social group.⁴

IT WOULD COME AS LITTLE
SURPRISE, THEN, TO HEAR THAT
THE THIRD REASON FOR THE
ESSAY'S DECLINE IS THAT IT IS
SEEN AS EXCLUSIVE AND ELITIST.

1. McCormack (1961), p 482

2. Hohendahl (1997), p 219

3. as quoted by Bloom (2005), p 419

4. Hohendahl (1997), p 230

LYNN BLOOM CLAIMS THAT THE RISING NUMBERS OF PERSONAL ESSAYS, AIMED AT MUCH LARGER AUDIENCES, ARE TURNING THIS PERCEPTION AROUND.

IT IS STILL WORTH MENTIONING, HOWEVER, AS THIS PERCEPTION STILL PERSISTS TO SOME EXTENT WHERE THE ESSAY IS CONCERNED.

THIS PIECE AIMS TO CHALLENGE THE ELITIST PERCEPTION IN THREE WAYS.

FIRSTLY, THIS INFORMATION IS BEING PRESENTED IN CLEAR, STRAIGHTFORWARD LANGUAGE, MAKING IT AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE.

SECONDLY, THE PICTURES, LAYOUT, AND VISUAL AIDS ARE ALL AIMED AT FACILITATING UNDERSTANDING - AGAIN, COMBATING EXCLUSIVITY.

AND LASTLY, WHAT BETTER WAY TO OVERCOME THE CONCEPT OF ELITISM THAN BY MARRYING THE ESSAY TO THE (ALLEGED) MOST IMMATURE, BASE FORM THAT EVER EXISTED --

-- THE COMIC!

MORE ON THAT LATER.

ONE FINAL WORD ON THE
ESSAY BEFORE WE MOVE ON
TO THE COMIC BOOK.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO CLARIFY THAT
DESPITE THE GROWING NUMBERS
OF PERSONAL ESSAYS, I DO NOT
BELIEVE THAT ACADEMIC WRITING
IS IN ITS DEATH THROES.

AT FIRST GLANCE, THERE
APPEARS TO BE A TREMENDOUS
DIVIDE BETWEEN PERSONAL
WRITING AND MORE DISTANT
'LOGICO-SCIENTIFIC'¹ WRITING.

CERTAINLY, PETER ELBOW
SEES THEM AS DISTINCT.

... they conflict with each other [...] progress toward one [academic writing] could undermine progress toward the other [personal writing].²

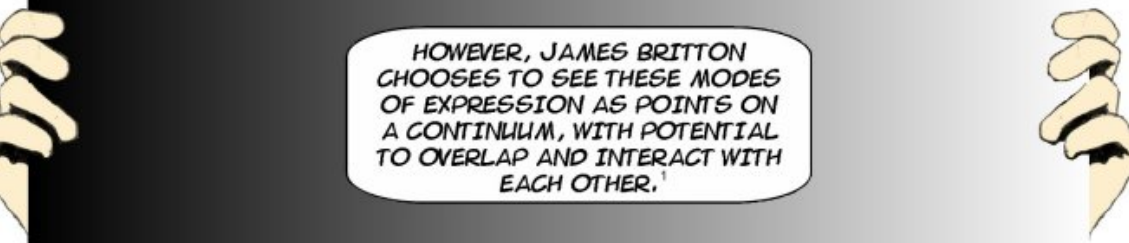
A distant mountain is a good guide [...] But I feel as though I am trying to walk toward two different mountains.³



1. Bruner, as quoted by Mlynarczyk (2006), p 6

2. as quoted by Mlynarczyk (2006), p 11

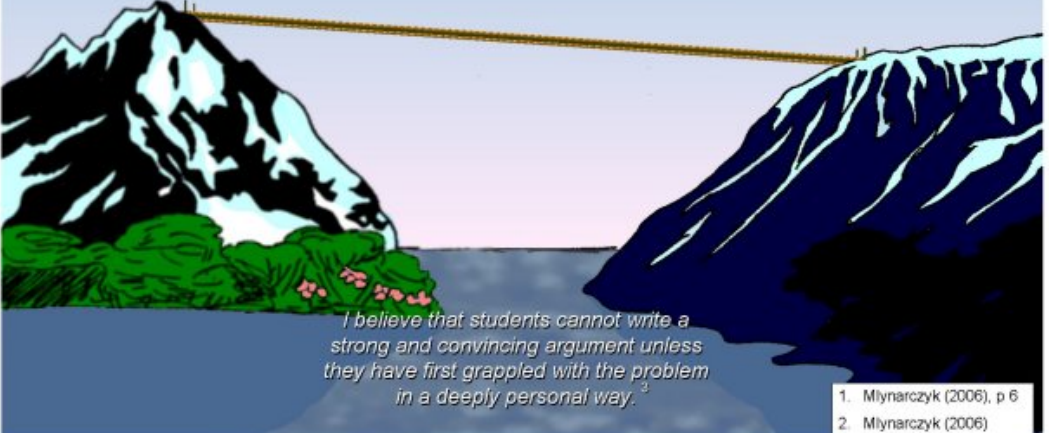
3. as quoted by Mlynarczyk (2006), p 11



HOWEVER, JAMES BRITTON
CHOOSES TO SEE THESE MODES
OF EXPRESSION AS POINTS ON
A CONTINUUM, WITH POTENTIAL
TO OVERLAP AND INTERACT WITH
EACH OTHER.¹

AND REBECCA MLYNARCZYK HAS
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE THAT THE
TWO ARE NOT SO DISTANT
FROM EACH OTHER.

BY TEACHING HER STUDENTS BOTH
PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL WRITING
TECHNIQUES, SHE FOUND THAT THEY
REINFORCED EACH OTHER, AND HELPED
THE STUDENTS TO FIND THE RIGHT
VOICE FOR DIFFERENT SITUATIONS.²




*I believe that students cannot write a
strong and convincing argument unless
they have first grappled with the problem
in a deeply personal way.³*

1. Mlynarczyk (2006), p 6

2. Mlynarczyk (2006)

3. Mlynarczyk (2006), p 23

SO, IN CONCLUSION, RATHER THAN
SEEING THE DEATH OF THE ACADEMIC
ESSAY, I BELIEVE WE ARE SEEING THE
START OF A NEW DYNAMIC --



-- ONE IN WHICH PERSONAL
AND IMPERSONAL WRITINGS
ENTER INTO A DIALOGUE,
REINFORCING EACH OTHER,
RATHER THAN CHALLENGING
AND DESTROYING.

**PART TWO:
THE ESSAY**



**PART ONE:
DEFINITIONS**

**PART TWO:
THE ESSAY**

**PART THREE:
THE COMIC**

**PART FOUR:
CONCLUSION**

MY RESEARCH HAS LED ME TO
DERIVE THREE INTERRELATED
REASONS FOR THE COMMON
PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMIC
BOOK AS A JUVENILE MEDIUM.

**PART THREE:
THE COMIC**

**HISTORICAL
INERTIA!!**

**PROCESSES OF
PRODUCTION!!**


**VISUAL
LITERACY!!**



IN RECENT YEARS, BEFORE I GOT 'INTO' COMICS, I ALWAYS ASSUMED THAT THEY WERE ALL ABOUT SUPERHEROES.


EVEN AFTER I HAD BEEN EXPOSED TO OTHER GENRES WITHIN THE FIELD, I CONTINUED TO BELIEVE THIS FOR QUITE A LONG TIME.

HISTORICAL INERTIA !!




THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE COMIC BOOK IS LITTERED WITH EXAMPLES OF PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES THAT ENDURED THE TEST OF TIME, DESPITE OPPOSITION AND CONTRARY EVIDENCE.

THIS "HISTORICAL INERTIA" IS CERTAINLY A MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THE CURRENT PERCEPTION OF COMICS.

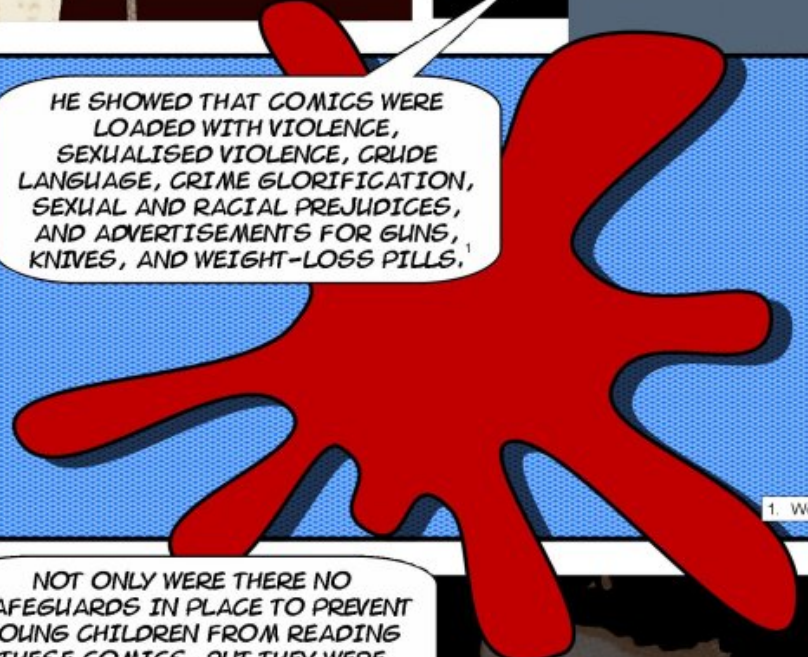
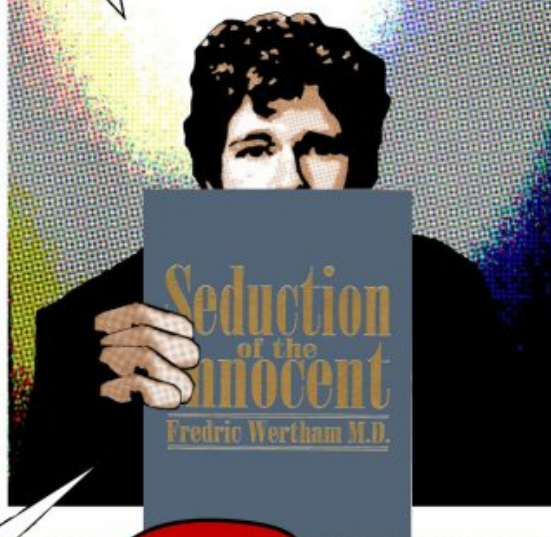


TO EXAMINE THIS IDEA MORE CLOSELY, I CHOOSE TO BEGIN HERE:

1950s AMERICA, THE HEIGHT OF THE COMIC BOOK'S POPULARITY.




IN 1954, CHILD PSYCHIATRIST
FREDRIC WERTHAM PUBLISHED
THE RESULTS OF A SEVEN-YEAR
STUDY THAT INVESTIGATED THE
COMIC INDUSTRY AND COMIC
BOOKS THEMSELVES.



HE SHOWED THAT COMICS WERE
LOADED WITH VIOLENCE,
SEXUALISED VIOLENCE, CRUDE
LANGUAGE, CRIME GLORIFICATION,
SEXUAL AND RACIAL PREJUDICES,
AND ADVERTISEMENTS FOR GUNS,
KNIVES, AND WEIGHT-LOSS PILLS.¹

1. Wertham (1954)

NOT ONLY WERE THERE NO
SAFEGUARDS IN PLACE TO PREVENT
YOUNG CHILDREN FROM READING
THESE COMICS, BUT THEY WERE
BEING MARKETED DIRECTLY
TOWARDS YOUNG CHILDREN.



THIS BOOK IS WIDELY
REGARDED AS THE CATALYST
FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF THE
COMIC'S LIFE! THAT UNDER
THE COMICS CODE.

HOWEVER, EVEN YEARS
BEFORE ITS PUBLICATION,
THERE WAS A FAIRLY
VOCAL MOVEMENT
AGAINST COMIC BOOKS.

PUBLIC COMIC
BURNINGS WERE
NOT UNUSUAL IN
THE LATE FORTIES.²

ALREADY WE CAN SEE A DICHOTOMY
IN THE WAY COMICS WERE PERCEIVED,
SEEN AS SIMPLE CHILDREN'S
ENTERTAINMENT, AND YET UTTERLY
UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN.



THE FORMER HELD ON³, DESPITE
THE CONTRADICTORY
REVELATIONS OF THE LATTER.

1. McCloud (2000), p 86-87

2. Jones (2004), p 240-241

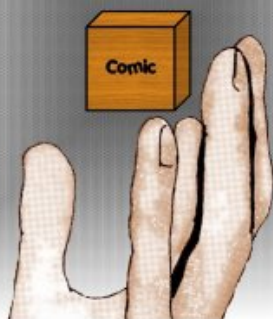
3. Tabachnick (2007), p 27

AFTER A U.S. SENATE SUB-COMMITTEE MET IN 1954 TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE, COMICS PUBLISHERS AGREED TO SELF-REGULATE THEMSELVES ACCORDING TO A STRICT CODE.



AND IN DOING SO, THEY WOULD SET IN CONCRETE A PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF COMICS THAT WOULD PERSIST FOR THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS.

ALTHOUGH THE CODE DEALT THOROUGHLY WITH OBJECTIONABLE MATERIAL, COMICS WERE RESTRICTED TO CONTENT FAR MORE RESTRAINED THAN WHAT WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR A FILM TO RECEIVE A "G" RATING --



-- AND THERE WERE NO OTHER OPTIONS.¹

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE

AUTHORITY

ADHERING TO THE CODE WAS MANDATORY, IF PUBLISHERS WISHED TO KEEP THEIR CURRENT LINES OF DISTRIBUTION OPEN.

NEWSSTANDS WOULD NOT STOCK A COMIC THAT HAD NOT BEEN APPROVED BY THE COMIC CODE AUTHORITY², AN ORGANISATION THAT PUBLISHERS WERE FORCED TO JOIN TO STAY IN BUSINESS.³

AS ONE PUBLISHER ADMITTED TO ITS READERS ON A LETTERS PAGE:

*Magazines that do not get onto the newsstands do not sell well.*⁴

1. McCloud (2000), p 87
2. Pustz (1999), p 42
3. Pustz (1999), p 42
4. as quoted by Pustz (1999), p 42

A superhero with a red cape is flying through a dark sky. Below, a landscape features several wooden signs on posts. The signs are labeled '1980' and '1990'. The ground is uneven and appears to be made of dirt or sand. The overall scene is a metaphorical representation of the comic book market's evolution.

THIS IS WHEN THE SUPERHERO COMIC BEGAN TO DOMINATE THE COMIC MARKET¹, A FORCE OF HISTORICAL INERTIA THAT PERSISTS EVEN TO THIS DAY.²

HOWEVER, THE UNDERGROUND COMIC MARKET, WHICH FOREWENT CODE APPROVAL³, HAS SHOWN US WHAT WE'VE KNOWN ABOUT OTHER FORMS OF EXPRESSION FOR A LONG TIME:

Art is no longer governed by its subject, by what it speaks of: art can show and speak of everything in the same manner.⁴

1. Weiner (2003), p 9
2. McCloud (2000), p 111
3. Weiner (2003), p 12
4. Rancière (2003), p 205

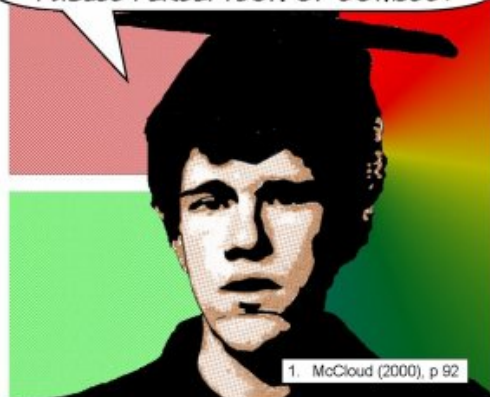
A stylized, high-contrast portrait of a young man with dark, curly hair. He is looking slightly to the side. The background is a vibrant rainbow gradient, transitioning from red on the left to yellow in the center and blue on the right.

JUST AS WITH THE ESSAY, THE COMIC MARKET ENCOMPASSES A MYRIAD OF GENRES, AIMED AT ALL AGE LEVELS --

A stylized, high-contrast portrait of the same young man with dark, curly hair. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is divided into four quadrants of different colors: red (top-left), blue (top-right), green (bottom-left), and yellow (bottom-right).

-- SO WHY IS THE COMIC STILL SEEN AS JUVENILE AND SIMPLISTIC?

SCOTT MCCLOUD IDENTIFIES ACADEMIC ATTENTION AS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN CHANGING THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF COMICS.

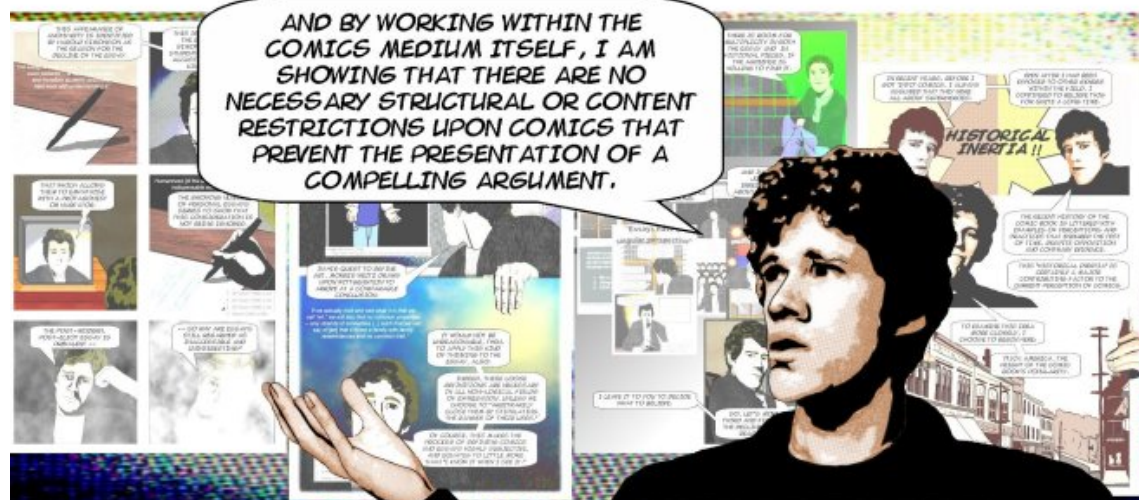


1. McCloud (2000), p. 92

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE ISSUES SURROUNDING COMICS, SUCH AS HISTORICAL INERTIA, IS ONE OF THE PRIMARY GOALS OF THE ESSAY WITHIN THIS ACADEMIC DISSERTATION.

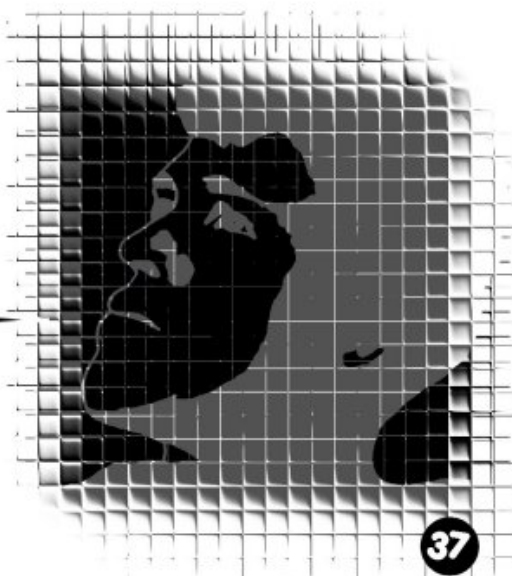



AND BY WORKING WITHIN THE COMICS MEDIUM ITSELF, I AM SHOWING THAT THERE ARE NO NECESSARY STRUCTURAL OR CONTENT RESTRICTIONS UPON COMICS THAT PREVENT THE PRESENTATION OF A COMPELLING ARGUMENT.



THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS A SIMPLE ONE: I AM ATTEMPTING TO ENCOURAGE READERS TO CONSIDER THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMIC BY SUBVERTING THE EXPECTATIONS OF SIMPLICITY THAT HISTORY HAS DRUMMED INTO THEM.

WITH THIS IN MIND, WE TURN TO THE SECOND OF THE REASONS FOR THE COMIC'S STATUS: PROCESSES OF PRODUCTION.






THE PRODUCTION PROCESSES OF THE
MAINSTREAM COMIC MARKET
CONTRIBUTE TO COMMON
PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMIC BY
RECYCLING CHARACTERS AND IDEAS.

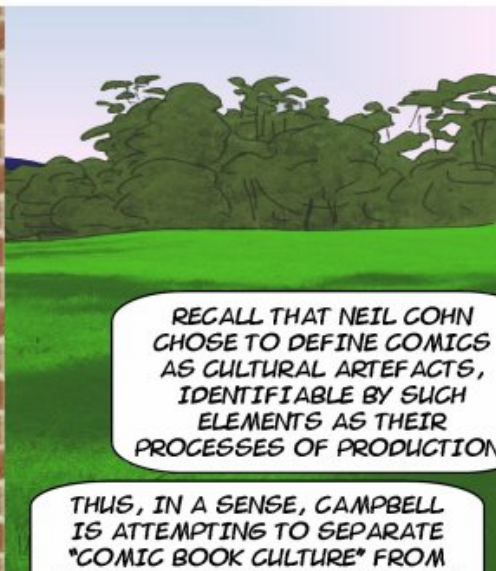


**PROCESSES OF
PRODUCTION !!**




**EDDIE CAMPBELL HAS THIS TO
SAY ABOUT COMIC BOOKS:**

I propose that we just accept that comic books are now about superheroes. The reason for this strategy is that it really has now become too difficult to try and change the public perception. If we want to use the graphic vocabulary of the comic book to create something else, let's call it something else.¹



RECALL THAT NEIL COHN
CHOSE TO DEFINE COMICS
AS CULTURAL ARTEFACTS,
IDENTIFIABLE BY SUCH
ELEMENTS AS THEIR
PROCESSES OF PRODUCTION.²

THUS, IN A SENSE, CAMPBELL
IS ATTEMPTING TO SEPARATE
"COMIC BOOK CULTURE" FROM
VISUAL LANGUAGE, ONE OF THE
PROCESSES OF PRODUCTION.



HOWEVER, THESE ATTEMPTS
HAVE NOT NOTICEABLY
CHANGED THE INDUSTRY.

HERE'S WHY I THINK THIS
IS THE CASE.

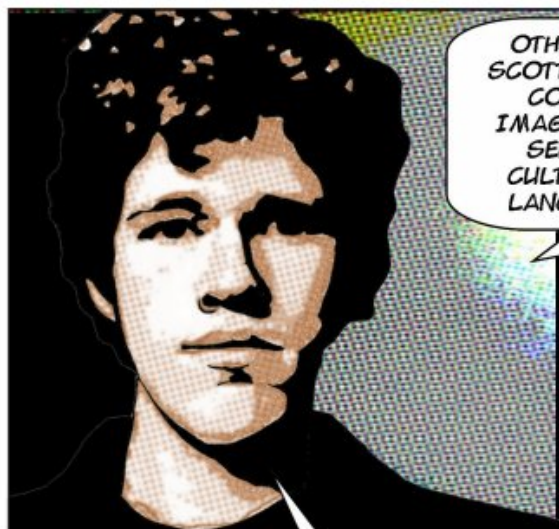
1. as quoted by Deppey (2004)

2. Cohn (2005), p 16

WHEN PRODUCING A COMIC OR GRAPHIC NOVEL, A CREATOR USES WHAT NEIL COHN HAS TERMED "VISUAL LANGUAGE," LITERALLY DEFINING THE SEQUENCING OF IMAGES AS A LANGUAGE.¹

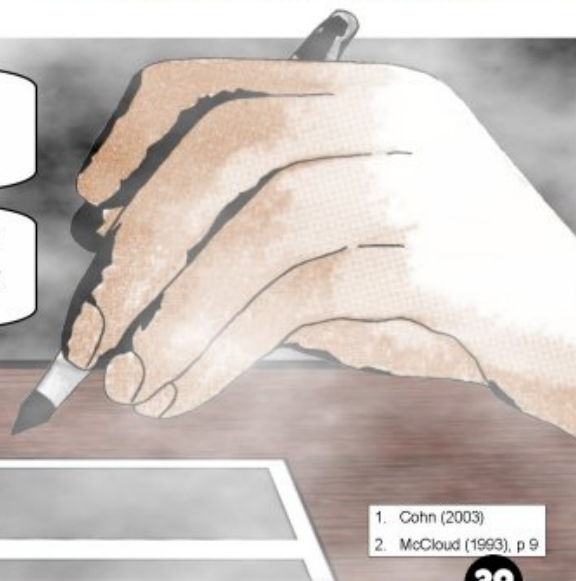


OTHER THEORISTS, SUCH AS SCOTT MCCLOUD, HAVE DEFINED COMICS AS "SEQUENTIAL IMAGES,"² WHICH ALLOWS NO SEPARATION BETWEEN THE CULTURAL ARTEFACT AND THE LANGUAGE IT IS WRITTEN IN.



THE QUESTION THEN BECOMES: WHEN SOMEONE SITS DOWN TO CREATE A WORK USING SEQUENTIAL IMAGES --

-- ARE THEY CREATING A COMIC, OR ARE THEY MERELY USING A LANGUAGE THAT IS MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH COMICS?



1. Cohn (2003)

2. McCloud (1993), p 9

THIS DISTINCTION IS, OF COURSE, OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE IF WE ACCEPT THAT COMICS ARE CULTURAL ARTEFACTS, BEARING WITH THEM ALL THE BAGGAGE OF READERSHIP AND CONTENT EXPECTATIONS.¹

UNFORTUNATELY, UNTIL THE DICHOTOMY OF DEFINITION IS RESOLVED, THERE CAN BE NO ANSWER TO THIS PROBLEM.

1. Cohn (2003), p. 14

I'M GOING TO LEAVE THIS CHOICE TO YOU.

YOU CAN CHOOSE TO READ THIS TEXT AS A COMIC THAT BORROWS STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF THE ESSAY--

-- OR AS AN ESSAY THAT USES A VISUAL LANGUAGE IN ADDITION TO ITS ENGLISH COMPONENTS.

NOW, ON TO WHAT I THINK IS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT, AND MOST OVERLOOKED, OF THE THREE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COMIC'S IMAGE:

BECAUSE THIS TOPIC, VISUAL LITERACY, IS SUCH A LARGE ONE, I HAVE DECIDED TO SPLIT IT UP INTO TWO PARTS:

IMAGES !!

IMAGES IN SEQUENCE !!



THERE ARE MANY REASONS THAT WE MIGHT USE PICTURES AND IMAGES TO COMMUNICATE.

THERE IS A LOT OF EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT IMAGES AND TEXT, ESPECIALLY WHEN USED IN CONJUNCTION, CAN GREATLY AID UNDERSTANDING.¹

ASIDE FROM THE SEVEN EXPLICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF IMAGES, THOSE WHICH AID AND STREAMLINE UNDERSTANDING, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.

- Expressive
- Descriptive
- Constructional
- Functional
- Logico-mathematical
- Algorithmic
- Data Display²



1. Brubaker; Miller; Watkins (2004), p 24

2. Brubaker; Miller; Watkins (2004), p 25-6

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER AREAS IN WHICH IMAGES CAN BE SAID TO HAVE A CLEAR ADVANTAGE OVER TEXT.

Memory



Memory for pictures is superior to memory for words. (Paivio, 1983; Branch & Bloom, 1995)¹

Authority



Seeing is believing. Most people believe that pictures tell the truth. (Lefferts, 1982)²

Pace



It takes less time to read a graphically complex text than a 'plain' text. (Melin, 1999)³

Emotion



Pictures have a strong emotional impact. (Petterson, 1987, 1989)⁴

Accessibility



Iconic representations allow for a high degree of universal accessibility.⁵

Attraction



It is more likely that graphically complex texts will be read than 'plain' texts. (Melin, 1999)⁶

BUT OF COURSE, THEY OFTEN RELY UPON TEXT TO ACHIEVE MEANING.

Most pictures are capable of several interpretations until anchored to one by a caption. (Barthes, 1977)⁷

1. Petterson (2004), p 134
2. Petterson (2004), p 133
3. Petterson (2004), p 134
4. Petterson (2004), p 133
5. Cohn (2003), p 82
6. Petterson (2004), p 134
7. Petterson (2004), p 134

THERE ARE PITFALLS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING VISUALS TO CONVEY MEANING.



THERE ARE PLENTY OF COMMUNICATIONS THEORISTS WHO BELIEVE THAT MOST PEOPLE'S LEVEL OF VISUAL LITERACY IS NOT UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF DECIPHERING COMPLEX GRAPHICS.^{1, 2, 3}



THESE THEORISTS CLAIM THAT WE NEED TO BE EDUCATED IN VISUAL LANGUAGES IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS WE LEARN WRITTEN AND ORAL LANGUAGE.

THIS EDUCATION SHOULD INCLUDE MORE THAN JUST INSTRUCTION IN HOW TO READ PICTURES:

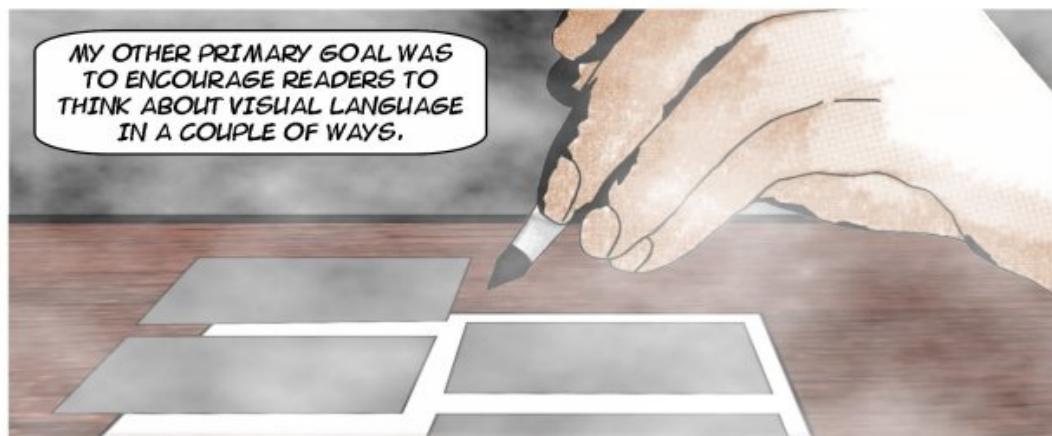
It's important to be actively engaged in making visuals, experiencing from within the process, to be able to theorise meaningfully about visual expression and communication.⁴



THUS, ONE OF MY GOALS WITH THIS PROJECT WAS TO USE VISUAL LANGUAGE IN SUCH A WAY AS TO LEND MEANING AND AUTHORITY TO MY ARGUMENTS ABOUT VISUAL LANGUAGE.



1. Messaris (1998), p 78
2. Boling; Eecarius; Frick; Smith (2004), p 188
3. Brubaker; Miller; Watkins (2004), p 24
4. Curtiss (2004), p 126



MY OTHER PRIMARY GOAL WAS
TO ENCOURAGE READERS TO
THINK ABOUT VISUAL LANGUAGE
IN A COUPLE OF WAYS.

THE TEXT OF THIS WORK
PROVIDES A THEORETICAL
BACKGROUND FOR
UNDERSTANDING VISUAL
COMMUNICATION.

THE IMAGES PROVIDE A
FERTILE GROUND FOR
EXPLORING THIS THEORY.
RECALL I STATED EARLIER
THAT I ENCOURAGE
MULTIPLE MEANINGS TO BE
DERIVED FROM THIS WORK.

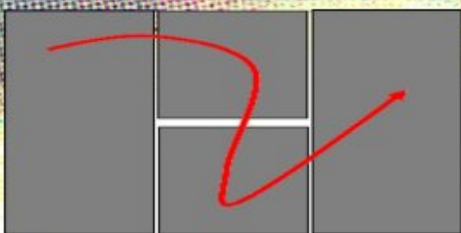
I HOPE THAT ACADEMAESTHETICS
HAS ENCOURAGED YOU TO
DEVELOP YOUR VISUAL
VOCABULARY SOMEWHAT.

BEFORE I BRING THIS BACK
TO PERCEPTIONS OF THE
COMIC, I WANT TO LOOK AT
IMAGES IN SEQUENCE --

-- THE LANGUAGE
MOST FREQUENTLY
EMPLOYED BY COMICS.

**IMAGES IN
SEQUENCE !!**

GOING BY NEIL COHN'S DEFINITION OF VISUAL LANGUAGE, IT WOULD NOT BE A HUGE STRETCH TO SAY THAT STATIC SINGLE IMAGES ARE NOT A LANGUAGE IN THEMSELVES --



-- BUT ARE RATHER LEXICAL ENTRIES, WAITING TO BE PUT INTO THE VISUAL EQUIVALENT OF SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS.

ERNST GOMBRICH STATES THAT A SINGLE PICTURE IS INCAPABLE OF MAKING A STATEMENT.

'The cat sits on the mat' is certainly not abstract, but although the primer may show a picture of a cat sitting on a mat, a moment's reflection will show that the picture is not the equivalent of the statement.¹



... although the sentence may be one possible description of the picture, there are an infinite number of other true descriptive statements you could make such as 'There is a cat seen from behind', or for that matter 'There is no elephant on the mat'.²

1. Gombrich (1962), p 138-9
2. Gombrich (1962), p 139

BUT WHEN THE SINGLE LEXICAL UNIT, A SOLITARY IMAGE, IS LINKED WITH ANOTHER, THE TWO TOGETHER CAN BE SAID TO MAKE A STATEMENT.

OF COURSE, CERTAIN AMBIGUITIES OF CONTEXT REMAIN, BUT FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, THERE IS A NARRATIVE IN THESE LINKED IMAGES.



PERHAPS SCOTT MCCLOUD'S MOST WIDELY CELEBRATED CONTRIBUTION TO COMICS RESEARCH IS FROM HIS WORK ON 'CLOSURE.'

COMICS PANELS *FRACTURE* BOTH *TIME* AND *SPACE*, OFFERING A *JAGGED, STACCATO RHYTHM* OF *UNCONNECTED MOMENTS*.



BUT CLOSURE ALLOWS US TO *CONNECT* THESE MOMENTS AND *MENTALLY CONSTRUCT* A *CONTINUOUS, UNIFIED REALITY*.

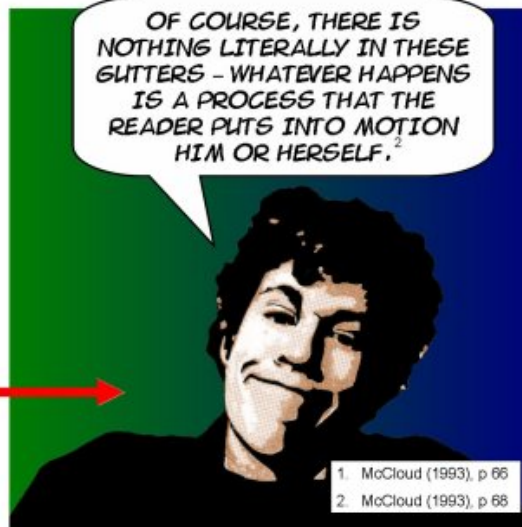
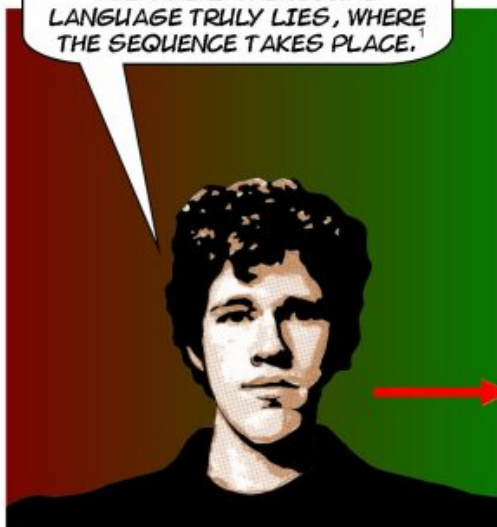
Image from McCloud (1993), p.67, panel 2



MCCLOUD STATES SIMPLY THAT THE GAPS BETWEEN IMAGES, KNOWN AS GUTTERS, ARE WHERE THE VISUAL LANGUAGE TRULY LIES, WHERE THE SEQUENCE TAKES PLACE.¹

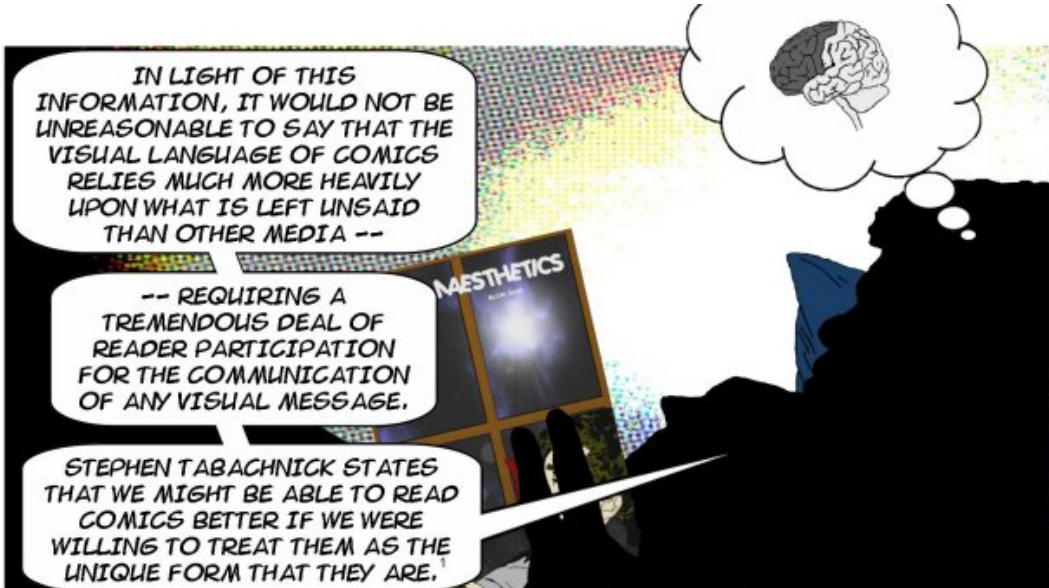


OF COURSE, THERE IS NOTHING LITERALLY IN THESE GUTTERS - WHATEVER HAPPENS IS A PROCESS THAT THE READER PUTS INTO MOTION HIM OR HERSELF.²



1. McCloud (1993), p.66

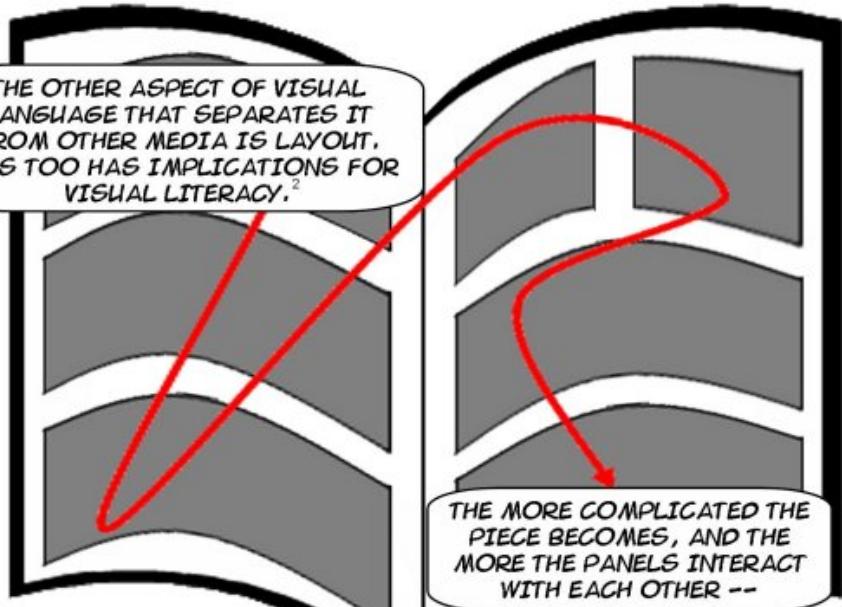
2. McCloud (1993), p.68



IN LIGHT OF THIS INFORMATION, IT WOULD NOT BE UNREASONABLE TO SAY THAT THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF COMICS RELIES MUCH MORE HEAVILY UPON WHAT IS LEFT UNSAID THAN OTHER MEDIA --


-- REQUIRING A TREMENDOUS DEAL OF READER PARTICIPATION FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF ANY VISUAL MESSAGE.

STEPHEN TABACHNICK STATES THAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO READ COMICS BETTER IF WE WERE WILLING TO TREAT THEM AS THE UNIQUE FORM THAT THEY ARE.¹




THE OTHER ASPECT OF VISUAL LANGUAGE THAT SEPARATES IT FROM OTHER MEDIA IS LAYOUT. THIS TOO HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR VISUAL LITERACY.²

THE MORE COMPLICATED THE PIECE BECOMES, AND THE MORE THE PANELS INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER --



-- THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT A PANEL WILL BE IGNORED ACCIDENTALLY, AND --



-- THE GREATER A LEVEL OF VISUAL LITERACY IS REQUIRED TO READ THEM WELL.

1. Tabachnick (2007), p.25

2. McCloud (1993), p.86

PAUL MAGEE SUGGESTS THAT READERS NEED TO COME TO TERMS WITH THEIR OWN ILLITERACY WHEN READING CONTEMPORARY POETRY.

To read lines such as these you need first to experience your own inability to read certain things, which is to say, you need to experience your own illiteracy.

Each successful poem is a reminder of the fact that we still don't know how to read.¹



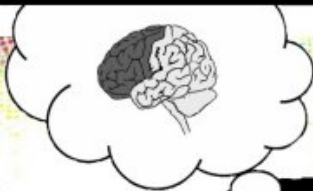
I WOULD LIKE TO DRAW UPON ANDREW ARNOLD TO EXTEND THIS THINKING INTO THE WORLD OF COMICS.

ARNOLD CLAIMS THAT POETIC MEANING, LANGUAGE AND SYNTAX IN COMICS SPRINGS NOT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS, BUT RATHER, FROM THOSE BETWEEN IMAGES.

IN THIS WAY, HE SAYS, COMICS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE POETIC.²



JUST AS EVERY POEM TOUCHES OUR ILLITERACIES, SO TOO DOES EVERY VISUAL CUE. THESE FORMS FORCE US TO EXTRACT INFORMATION RATHER THAN MERELY ABSORBING IT.



1. Magee (2007), p 1

2. Arnold (2007), p 12



Image from Ware (2000), p 1

SO, TO FULLY APPRECIATE THE COMIC AS A FORM WITH LIMITLESS POTENTIAL, WE NEED TO, AS BOTH READERS AND CREATORS, CHALLENGE OURSELVES WITH TEXTS THAT WE HAVE DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING.

AND EVENTUALLY, WE WILL FIND THAT WHAT SEEMS AT FIRST GLANCE TO BE NONSENSICAL OR OVERSIMPLE --

-- ACTUALLY CONTAINS LAYERS OF MEANING THAT WE HADN'T ANTICIPATED.

PART THREE
THE C

**PART ONE:
DEFINITIONS**

**PART TWO:
THE ESSAY**

**PART THREE:
THE COMIC**

**PART FOUR:
CONCLUSION**

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

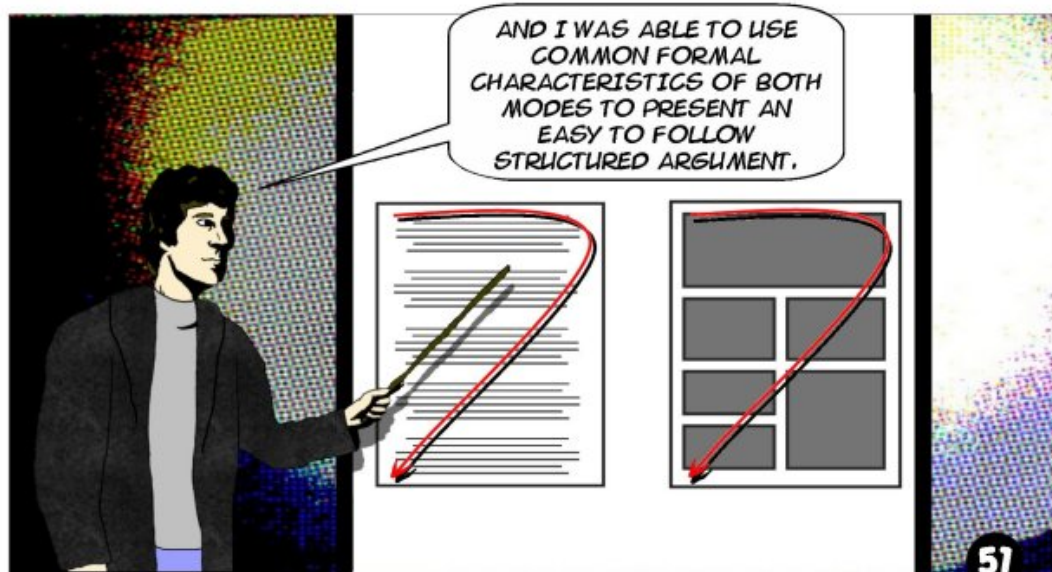
TO WRAP THINGS UP, I'LL
BEGIN WITH A BRIEF LOOK
AT THE ADVANTAGES OF
PRESENTING MY ARGUMENTS
IN THIS ESSAY / COMIC
HYBRID FORM.



FIRSTLY, LITERALLY DRAWING
THE AUTHOR OUT INTO THE OPEN
MAKES FOR A MUCH MORE
PERSONAL COMMUNICATIVE
MODEL, ENCOURAGING
AUDIENCE EMPATHY.



BY PRODUCING DELIBERATELY
AMBIGUOUS VISUAL CUES, I NOT
ONLY BROUGHT THE ABSOLUTE
AUTHORITY OF THE AUTHOR INTO
QUESTION, BUT I ALSO
ENCOURAGED READERS TO DEVELOP
VISUAL LITERACY BY DECIPHERING
MULTIPLE MEANINGS.





AND HOPEFULLY, I HAVE ENCOURAGED YOU TO THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN PERCEPTIONS OF BOTH THE ESSAY AND THE COMIC.

LET THIS PIECE STAND NOT AS A TREATISE TO ABOLISH THE KINDS OF ESSAYS AND COMICS THAT GENERATED THESE PERCEPTIONS --



-- BUT INSTEAD LET IT SERVE AS A CRY FOR A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF BOTH FORMS, AND THE VIRTUAL INFINITY OF OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO CREATORS OF EITHER.

ACADEMAESTHETICS IS THE FIRST PIECE EXPLICITLY CREATED TO SHOW THE COMBINED POWER OF THE ESSAY AND COMIC.



ITS LAST AND MOST IMPORTANT GOAL WAS NOT TO ANSWER QUESTIONS --

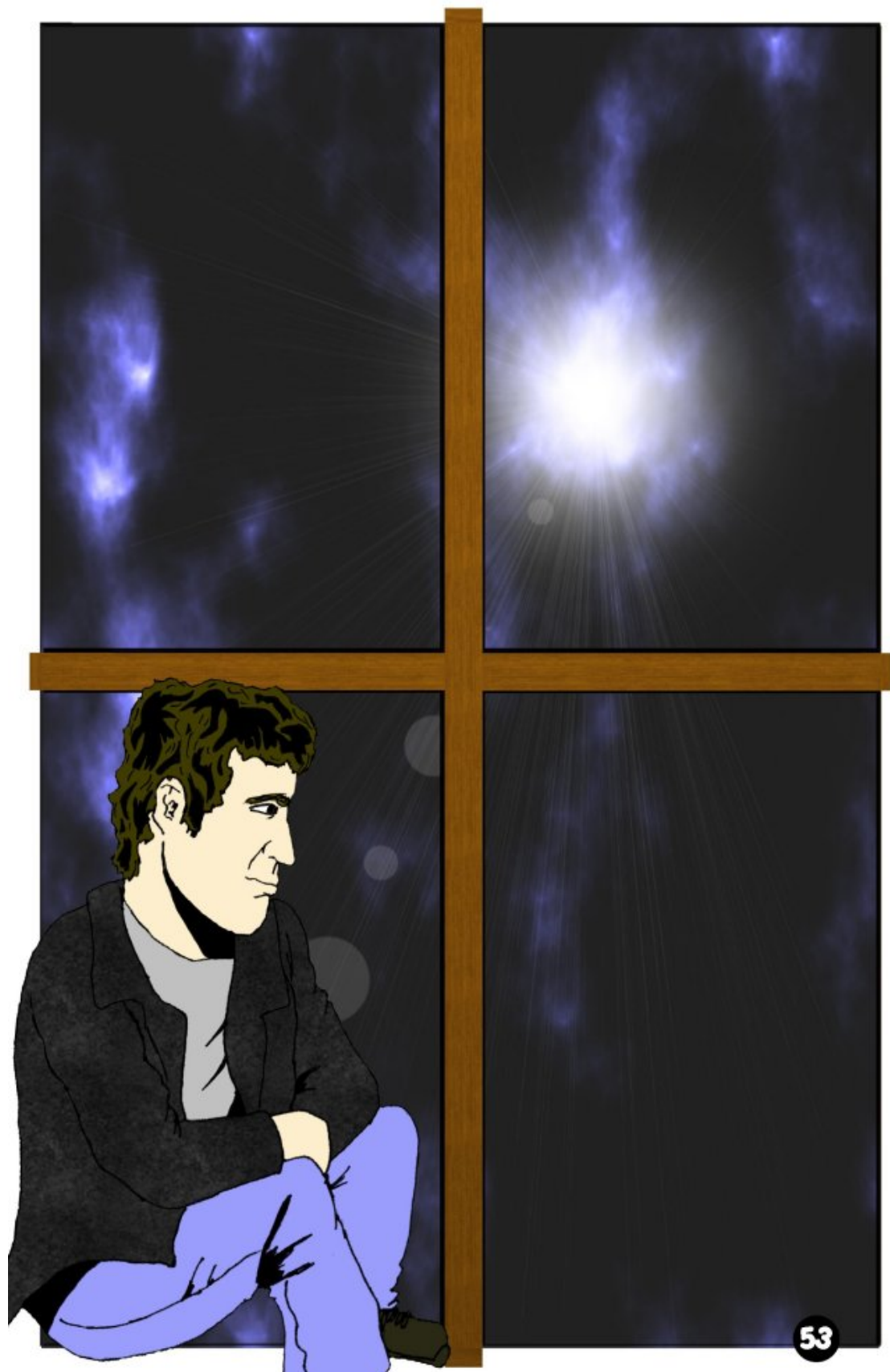
PART ONE:
DEFINITIONS

PART TWO:
THE ESSAY

PART THREE:
THE COMIC

PART FOUR:
CONCLUSION

-- BUT TO ENCOURAGE YOU, FUTURE ESSAY AND COMIC CREATORS, TO ASK THEM.



Adorno, T.W.; Hultot-Kentor, Bob; Will, Frederic (1984), *The Essay as Form*, New German Critique, No. 32, pp 151-171

Bloom, Lynn Z. (2005), *Academic Essays and the Vertical Pronoun*, Literature Interpretation Theory, No. 16, pp 417-430

Brubaker, Doug; Miller, Etta; Watkins, Janet Kelly (2004), *The Role of the Visual Image: What Are Students Really Learning from Pictorial Representations?*, Journal of Visual Literacy, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp 23-40

Cohn, Neil (2003), *Early Writings on Visual Language*, Emaki Productions, www.emaki.net

Deppay, Dirk (2004), *Eddie Campbell* [on-line], http://www.etcj.com/273/l_campbell.html, accessed 06-03-2007

Arnold, Andrew D. (2007), *Comix Poetics*, World Literature Today, Vol. 81, No. 2, pp 12-15

Baling, Elizabeth; Eccarius, Malinda; Frick, Ted; Smith, Kennan (2004), *Instructional Illustrations: Intended Meanings and Learner Interpretations*, Journal of Visual Literacy, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp 185-204

Cohn, Neil (2005), *Un-defining 'Comics': Separating the Cultural from the Structural in 'Comics'*, International Journal of Comic Art, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp 236-248 (1-21)

Curtiss, Deborah Pratt (2004), *The Oldest Literacy*, Journal of Visual Literacy, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp 121-128

Dowse, Sara (2005), *One Touch of Venus*, The Best Australian Essays 2005 (ed. Dessaux, Robert), Black Inc., Melbourne, pp 19-32

REFERENCES

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau (1996), *f-Words: An Essay on the Essay*, American Literature, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp 15-45

Elot, T.S. (1920 - reprinted 1998), *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends (2nd Ed) (ed. Richter, David H), Boston, Bedford, pp 498-503

Herbert, Tim (2005), *The Chop*, The Best Australian Essays 2005 (ed. Dessaux, Robert), Black Inc., Melbourne, pp. 242-250

Huhn, Tom (1999), *Lukacs and the Essay Form*, New German Critique, No. 78, pp 183-192

MacNeill, Ian (2005), *On Being a Teacher*, The Best Australian Essays 2005 (ed. Dessaux, Robert), Black Inc., Melbourne, pp 46-56

Elbow, Peter (1997), *Can Personal Expressive Writing do the Work of Academic Writing?*, Pre/Text, Vol 11, No. 1, pp 315-318

Gombrich, E.H. (1982), *The Image and the Eye*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London

Hohendahl, Peter Uwe (1997), *The Scholar, the Intellectual, and the Essay: Weber, Lukacs, Adorno, and Postwar Germany*, The German Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 3, pp 217-232

Jones, Gerard (2004), *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*, William Heinemann, London

Phagee, Paul (2007), *New Rivers: On Poems We Don't Know How to Read* (unpublished)

- McCormack, Thelma (1961), *Social Theory and the Mass Media*, The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp 479-489
- McCloud, Scott (2000), *Reinventing Comics*, Paradox Press, New York
- Młynarczyk, Rebecca Williams (2006), *Personal and Academic Writing: Revisiting the Debate*, Journal of Basic Writing, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp 4-25
- O'Shaughnessy, Michael; Stadler, Jane (2002), *Media and Society: An Introduction (Second Edition)*, Oxford University Press, New York
- Pustz, Matthew J. (1999), *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson
- McCloud, Scott (1993), *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Paradox Press, New York
- Messaris, Paul (1998), *Visual Aspects of Media Literacy*, International Communications Association, pp 70-79
- Newton, Robert (2004), *MacKillop College – Senior Literacy Development Handbook: Preliminary Course 2004, HSC Course 2005*, MacKillop College, Bathurst
- Petterson, Rune (2004), *Gearing Communications to the Cognitive Needs of Students: Findings From Visual Literacy Research*, Journal of Visual Literacy, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp 129-154
- Rancière, Jacques (2003), *Jacques Rancière, Politics and Aesthetics, An Interview*, Angelaki, Journal of the Theoretical Humanities, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp 203-207

REFERENCES

- Simonson, Harold (1964), *The Essay as Art*, College Composition and Communication, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp 34-37
- Spears, Steve J (2005), *AA and Me: A Love Story*, The Best Australian Essays 2005 (ed. Dessak, Robert), Black Inc., Melbourne, pp. 39-45
- Tabachnick, Stephen E (2007), *A Comic-Book World*, World Literature Today, Vol. 81, No. 2, pp 24-28
- Ware, F. C. (2000), *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Jonathan Cape
- Weiner, Stephen (2003), *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, Nanter Beall Minoustchine Publishing Inc., New York
- Weltz, Morris (1956), *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics*, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp 27-35
- Wells, Tom (2006), *Master of the Two Worlds: Society's Dream of Absorbing Its Shadow* (unpublished)
- Wertham, Fredric (1954 – reprinted 2004), *Seduction of the Innocent*, Main Road Books Inc., New York