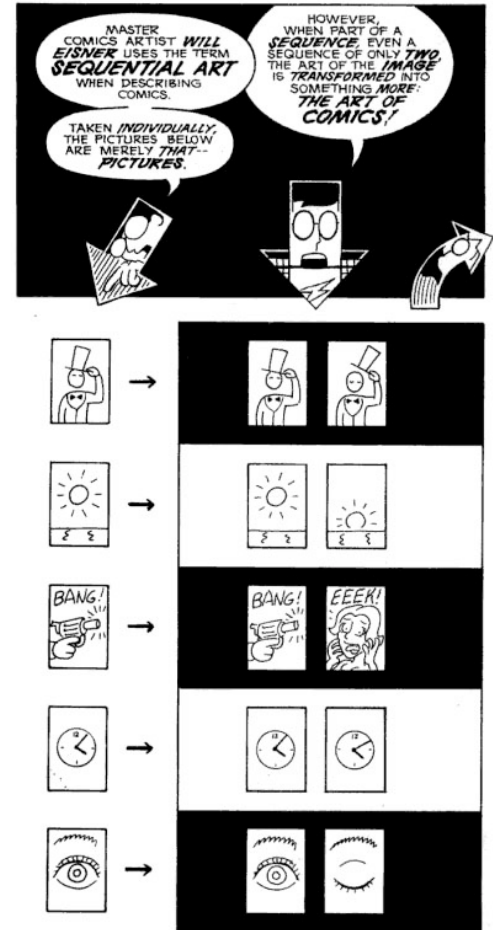
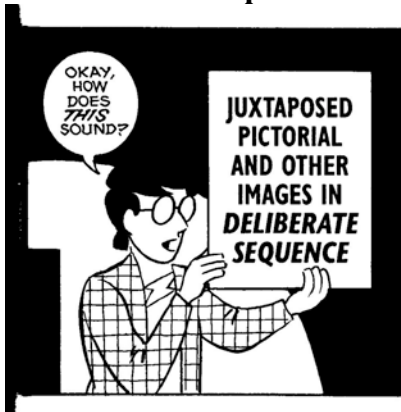


What Comics are and how they work

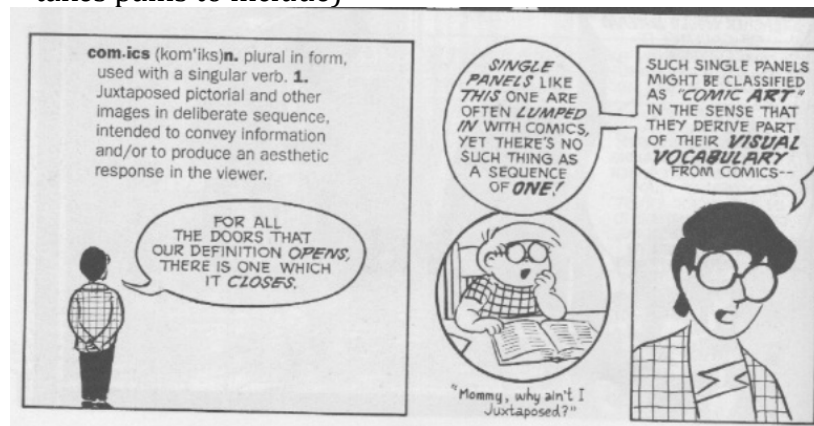
- **Eisner from Sequential Art (1985)**
 - “I found that I was involved with an ‘art of communication’ more than simply an application of art.” (Illustration vs. visualizing/storytelling...)
- McCloud’s definition from *Understanding Comics* (1993):
 - **“Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (p. 9).**



- **Alternative definitions:**
 - David Kunzle:
 - There must be a sequence of separate images
 - There must be a preponderance of image over text
 - The medium in which the strip appears and for which it is originally intended must be reproductive; that is in printed form, a mass medium
 - The sequence must tell a story that is both moral and topical [deal with contemporary society]
 - From Jungst’s “Information comics” – the prototypical comic (p. 14)
 - “best example of a kind” as she puts it: “A comic is a narrative in a sequence of panels combined into a page layout where words appear in speech balloons, captions or as onomatopoeia integrated into the picture”
 - Jungst continues: “If this is ‘the best example’, this means that there are less typical examples of the comic which make up the fuzzy edges of the prototype. There may be texts which do not have every element the prototype has but which are comics rather than anything else. However, the prototype is something that not only the target groups for information comics should

be able to relate to, but rather something everyone in a given culture will recognize as a comic at the first glance..."

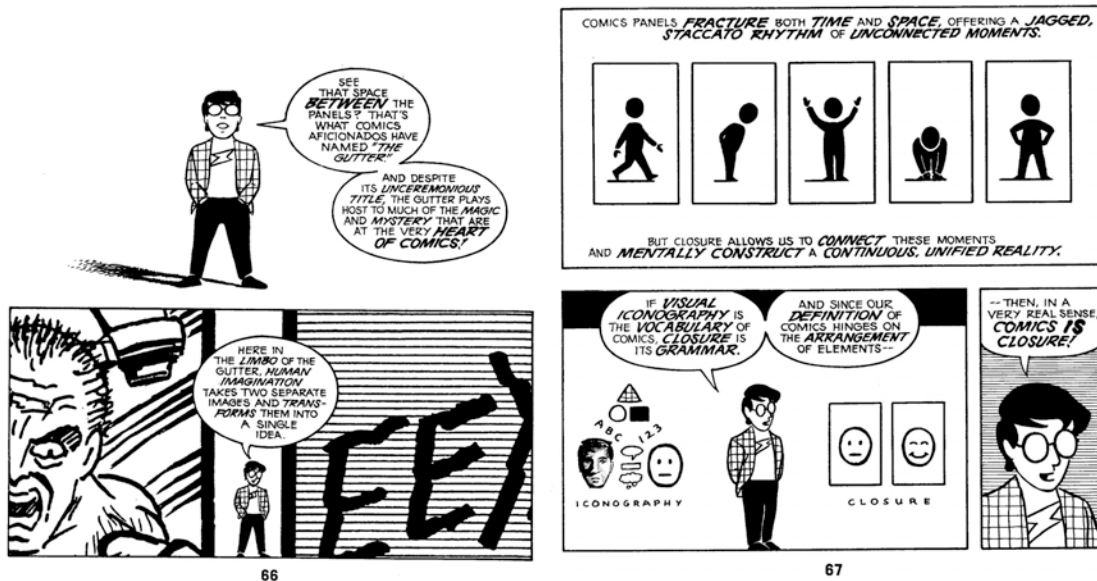
- Abel/Madden Definition from "Drawing Words and Writing Pictures"
 - Are there multiple images that are intended to be read in a certain order?
 - If there's only a single image, does it have a kind of narrative to it?
 - Is there a combination of both text and images?
- RC Harvey – comics depend on **visual-verbal blending**... (I'll leave the issue of McCloud's intentional omission of the verbal for a later time.)
- What **McCloud's definition does** is open wide the field of comics – about ALL that they can be. It says nothing of genre, of drawing style, of balance of image/text – it's a definition that broadens our thinking and the future of comics – with ONE exception...
 - McCloud P. 20 – the Single panel.... (which Abel/Madden's definition takes pains to include)



- Juxtaposition of another sort...
- Think Hogarth, Toppfer and idea of Caricature – let's return to that in a moment.
- A definition of comics is useful in what enables and ways that it demonstrates what comics can do similarly to other media (say film) and that it can handle uniquely. What powers they possess and where comics should be integrated tomorrow...
- The **Juxtaposition** of sequential images leads to the idea of CLOSURE



- Comics are composed of individual fragments – these include the separate panels (“frames” that contain the images), word or dialogue balloons (emanating from a speaker), and text boxes (narrative voiceovers). **KEY: YOU hold FRAGMENTS together!**

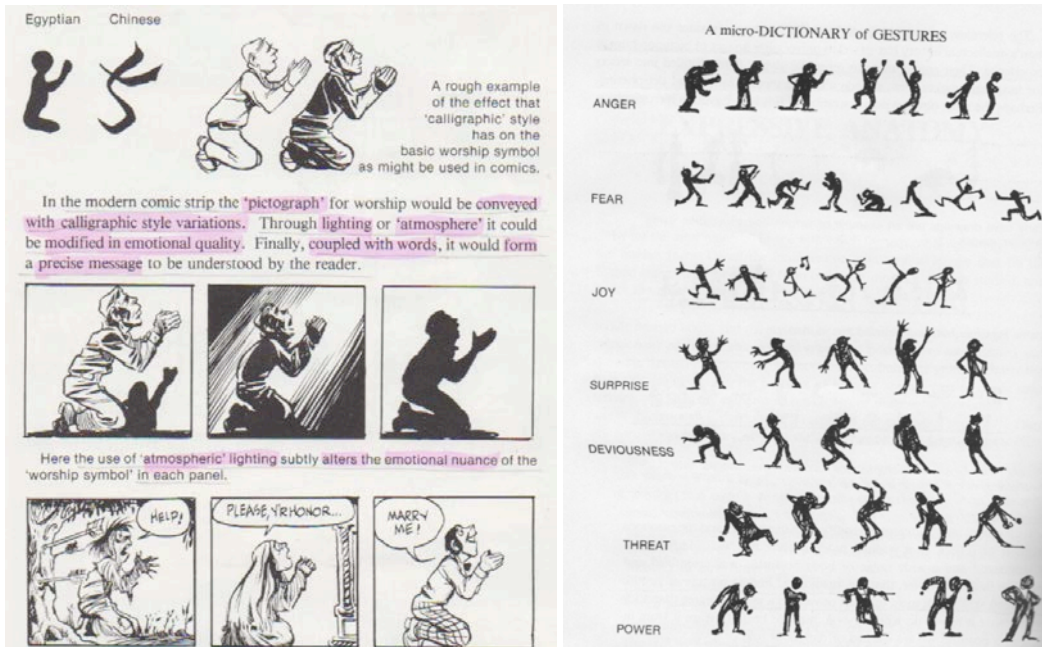


- The negative space between panels is termed the “gutters,” and it is here that McCloud suggests comics derive their lifeblood, for, “In the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (p. 66).
 - The graphic reader constructs meaning and a cohesive narrative from the static, juxtaposed panels through a gestalt-like act of closure – what McCloud defines as “observing the parts but perceiving the whole,” (p. 63). Comics are thus an active, participatory experience for the reader – a “cool” medium in Marshall McLuhan’s terminology (as contrasted to film, which McLuhan described as “hot” because the viewer is passively engaged, trapped in the darkness of the cinema having to follow along frame by frame. Comics are on the other side of the spectrum...)
- A passage from Italo Calvino’s “Six Memos for the New Millenium”:
 - The Italian writer Italo Calvino credits looking at translated American comic strips before he learned to read as being instrumental in opening his mind to imagination, this “*thinking* in terms of images. ... I could easily dispense with the words – the pictures were enough. ... in my mind I told myself the stories, interpreting the scenes in different ways” (p. 93). Even after he was reading, he recounts, “I preferred to ignore the written lines and to continue with my favorite occupation of daydreaming *within* the pictures and their sequence” (p. 94). Calvino’s comments not only point to the literacy aspects of reading comics, but to the participatory nature of the medium...

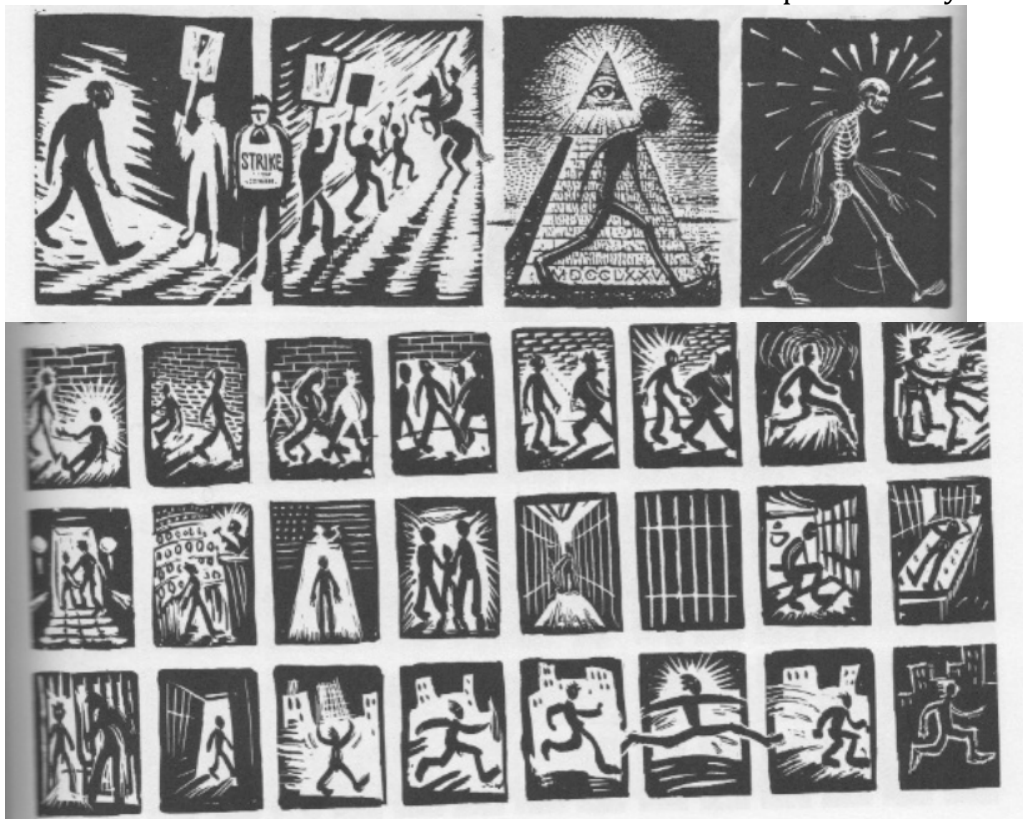
- The participatory nature of comics is further compounded by the simplified (but not simplistic) drawing styles employed, which allow the reader to live within & inhabit characters on the page.



- McCloud (p 30-1) suggests that the Cartoon is a stand-in for YOU – maybe... BUT,
 - Consider instead the cartoon as being akin to a cardboard box that a child first transforms into a spaceship and then a castle – the cartoon is a space for imagination (as Calvino wrote)
- David Carrier writes on Caricature in Heer and Worcester p. 107:
 - “How is it that from one isolated image we envision earlier and later moments of an ongoing visual narrative? Caricatures pose this equally interesting but much less discussed question.” [goes on to discuss the idea of PROJECTION ... Artist tries to convey intent through image] and we’re back to thinking about gesture again.
- The success of superheroes and funny animals and manga is attributable to how much of the story they can convey in caricature even before the sequential part...
- Wordless comics perhaps need more caricature/gesture/moment-to-moment work to convey meaning
 - Eisner on Gesture – a visual language

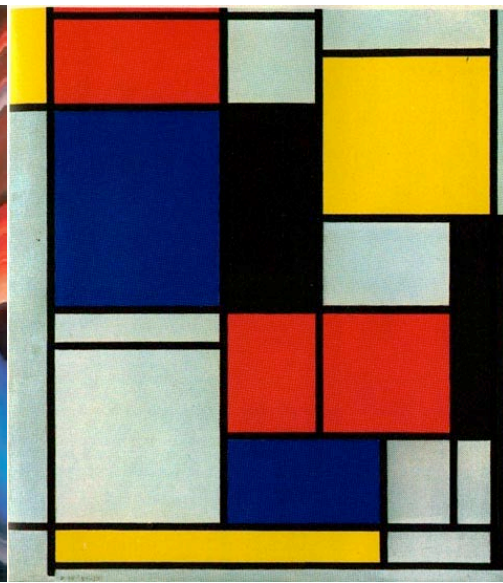
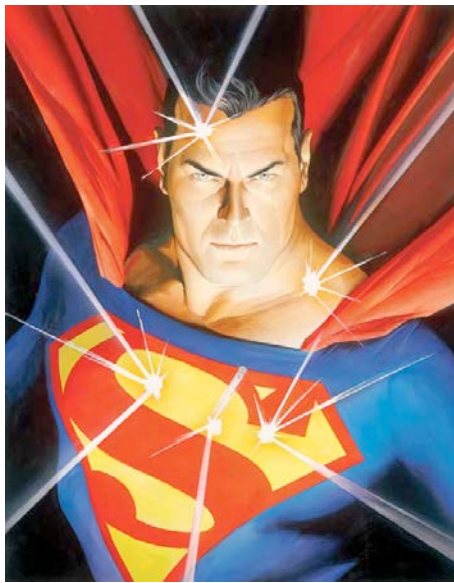
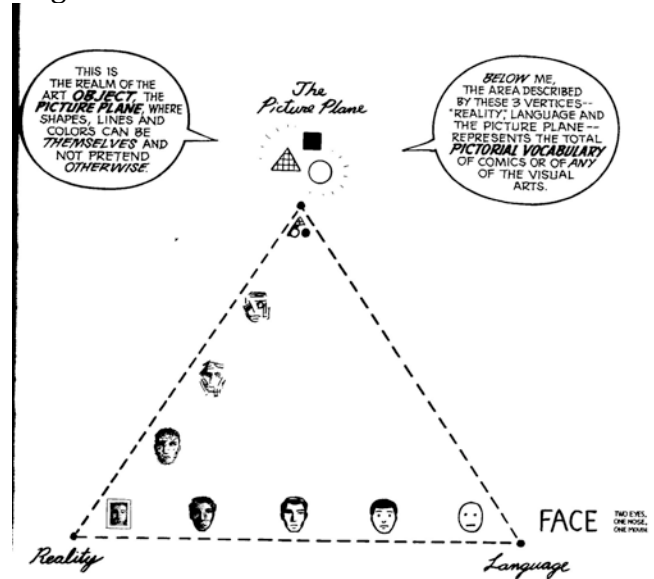


■ Eric Drooker's "Flood" and Peter Kuper's "The System"



- McCloud's **Triangle of Abstraction** (p. 51-3)
 - Important to think about what type of imagery is being used to convey meaning and how that is working. Sure, Alex Ross's hyperrealistic superhero work is something to behold – but – does it contain the

same sort of impact as say Frank Miller's Dark Knight Returns drawings?



- **Time in comics** (quite unlike film), transpires in space. (This has broader implications going forward)
 - Eisner on Einstein (28) on relativity of time – how we frame it, rhythms
- BUT for now, talk about the transitions – the juxtapositions from which we derive meaning...
- McCloud identifies SIX types of Panel to Panel Transitions (Abel&Madden suggest a seventh). These are akin to GRAMMAR of comics, and we can find similar transitions (Cuts) in FILM. The ordering, as pointed out by Abel/Madden moves from requiring the least amount of closure to the most on the part of the reader.
 - The Six Types (Plus One):

1. Moment-to-Moment
2. Action-to-action
3. Subject-to-subject
4. Scene-to-scene
5. Aspect-to-aspect
 - Abel/Madden: (44) Symbolic transition
6. Non-sequitur

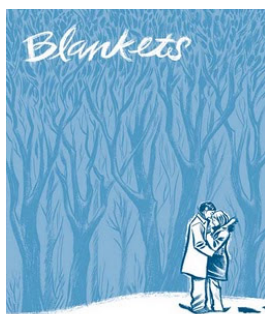


- Abel/Madden point out that it is the Author who creates **transitions** – and the reader who makes **closure**
- What is most important in all of this – is not parsing which type of transition is which within a particular comic, but WHAT an author chooses to put in **frame** and WHY, and HOW to get from point A to point B in a story. It's a matter of choosing what's most important to the tale one's telling, and what can be left out, and as McCloud points out, comics are a medium of absences – and it is through acts of closure, the reader can follow along.
- Consider moments within a frame SIGN POSTS of a sort – guides to move your reader along a path, and connect to panels before and to come.
- Authors use transitions to create a RHYTHM to the reading – and they do it in many different ways and those are continuing to evolve always – borrowing on past comics and other mediums (film, video games, etc)
- Look through comics – pick out how they use transitions, framing
 - Examples Below: Detective Comics #27 (1939), Dark Knight Returns, All Star Superman, Eisner, Blankets

- **Homework:**
 - Read McCloud Ch. 4 and 6;
 - Create a rough sketch of “how you got here” – either literally to class, to Teachers College, or metaphorical journey. Play with a 3-panel strip and a 2 page sequence, thinking about using the transitions... See the “Carl” story 84-5 for examples. The object is not to create a finished assignment, just to get playing and thinking about how to frame narrative – and as we look at others comics and our own, start to get a sense of how they work, what choices are being made, etc.
- We’ll look at our own work alongside the pros next class.

FOR NEXT TIME:

Comics are **Sequential** like TEXT, BUT ALSO **Simultaneous** – Like ART!



an illustrated novel by
CRAIG THOMPSON

