CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SIX STEPS.

SO FAR, WE'VE MOSTLY DEALT WITH THE UNIQUE PROPERTIES OF COMICS.

BUT THERE ARE PROPERTIES THAT COMICS SHARE WITH ALL OTHER ART FORMS.

THOUGH IT SEEMS INNOCUOUS ENOUGH NOW, THERE WAS A TIME WHEN SUCH A SIMPLE IDEA WAS RIDICULED.

EVEN TODAY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ASK THE QUESTION, "CAN COMICS BE ART?"

IT IS--

"I'M SORRY--"

A REALLY STUPID QUESTION!

COMICS IS JUST ONE OF MANY FORMS OF SELF-EXPRESSIOM AND COMMUNICATION AVAILABLE TO US.

BUT IF WE MUST ANSWER IT, THE ANSWER IS YES.

ESPECIALLY IF YOUR DEFINITION OF ART IS AS BROAD AS MINE!
Art, as I see it, is any human activity which doesn’t grow out of either of our species’ two basic instincts: survival and reproduction!

Graah! Eek!!

Example: here’s a prehistoric male chasing a prehistoric female with only one thing on his mind—reproduction!

So strong is this instinct that it governs his every move! Not one step is wasted in the pursuit of his goal.

The female—afraid for her survival—manages to hide. Now, deprived of his goal, the male stands indecisive.

And survives.

Suddenly—ruar!

Now all of his thoughts and actions are focused on that other vital human instinct: survival!

Again his legs propel him forward with maximum efficiency.

It’s a happy fact of human existence that we simply can’t spend our every waking hour eating and having sex! No matter how practically we pursue our goals, there will inevitably be times when we just don’t have a thing to do!
WHAT MAY LOOK LIKE A TRIBE OF BORED, INACTIVE CAVES-Dwellers BELOW US IS, IN FACT, A THRIVING ART COLONY.

SEE THAT OLD WOMAN WITH THE STICK? NOTICE THE LINES SHE'S MAKING IN THE DIRT.

TODAY SHE HAS A STOMACHACHE AND HER LINES ARE TIGHT AND ANGULAR. YESTERDAY SHE FELT BETTER AND HER LINES WERE OPEN AND CURVED.

FIRST, THEY PROVIDE EXERCISE FOR MINDS AND BODIES NOT RECEIVING OUTSIDE STIMULUS.

SECOND, THEY PROVIDE AN OUTLET FOR EMOTIONAL IMBALANCES, ADDING TO THE RACE'MENTAL SURVIVAL.

THIRD AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT TO OUR SURVIVAL AS A RACE, SUCH RANDOM ACTIVITIES OFTEN LEAD TO USEFUL DISCOVERIES!

AND OVER THERE A MAN BEATS A SIMPLE RHYTHM WITH A PAIR OF STicks. HE DOES'T KNOW WHY BUT THE SOUND PLEASES HIM.

NEARBY, A BOY KICKS UP PEBBLES AND DIRT AND PUMMELS THE AIR WITH HIS FOOT.

TODAY HE LOST A FIGHT WITH HIS BROTHER. NOW ALL HE CAN DO IS DANCE AWAY HIS Frustration.

WHILE OVER HERE, A LITTLE GIRL SINGS HER SONG OF YOUTH.

DOHRRRR! YIP! GREEEEEAAHHH! WUK! WUK!

THis FUNCTION WOULD ALSO BE PERFORMED IN LATER CENTURIES BY SPORTS AND GAMES.

ART AS SELF EXPRESSION: THE ARTIST AS HERO; FOR MANY, ITS HIGHEST PURPOSE.


BECAUSE OF ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM OUR EVOLUTION-BRED INSTINCTS, ART IS THE WAY WE ASSERT OUR IDENTITIES AS INDIVIDUALS AND BREAK OUT OF THE NARROW ROLES NATURE CAST US IN.

OF COURSE, THE GENIUS OF "MOTHER NATURE" IS SUCH THAT EVEN THESE THINGS DO HAVE THEIR USES FROM AN EVOLUTIONARY STANDPOINT.

THREE, IN FACT:

A LOT HAS CHANGED IN HALF A MILLION YEARS, BUT SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE.

THE PROCESSES ARE MORE COMPLEX NOW, BUT THE INSTINCTS REMAIN THE SAME: SURVIVAL AND REPRODUCTION STILL HOLD THE UPPER HAND.

*ALONG WITH THEIR MANY RELATED FEELINGS AND CUSTOMES.
IN SOME OCCUPATIONS, THE LATITUDE FOR SELF-EXPRESSON IS GREATER.
SURVIVAL--MAKING A LIVING--GOES HAND IN HAND WITH CREATIVE DESIRE.

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT SOME ACTIVITIES HAVE MORE ART IN THEM THAN OTHERS.

LIFE IS A SERIES OF MINUTE DECISIONS SOME MOTIVATED BY SURVIVAL, SOME NOT.
AND PROPORTIONS DO VARY.

BUT TO PROCLAIM, AS SO MANY OFTEN DO, THAT--
THAT'S NOT ART!

RARE IS THE PERSON IN ANY OCCUPATION WHO EXPRESSS NOTHING.
...AND RARE IS THE ARTIST WHO CARES NOTHING FOR SUCCESS.
IE, SURVIVAL.

BUT THE IDEAL OF THE LATTER IS ALIVE IN THE HEARTS OF MANY ARTISTS WHO
MAY HOPE FOR SUCCESS, BUT WOULDN'T ALTER THEIR WORK TO OBTAIN IT.

THE FINE ARTIST--THE PURE ARTIST--SAYS TO THE WORLD: "I DIDN'T DO THIS FOR MONEY. I DIDN'T DO THIS TO MATCH THE COLOR OF YOUR COUCHES!

I DIDN'T DO THIS TO GET LAID. I DIDN'T DO THIS FOR FAME OR POWER OR GREED OR ANYTHING ELSE! I DID THIS FOR ART!

AND SOMETIMES IT TAKES A CENTURY OR TWO FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD TO FIND OUT!

"PURE" ART IS ESSENTIALLY TIED TO THE QUESTION OF PURPOSE--OF DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF ART.

THIS IS AS TRUE IN COMICS AS IT IS IN PAINTING, WRITING, THEATRE, FILM, SCULPTURE, OR ANY OTHER FORM.

...BECAUSE THE CREATION OF ANY WORK IN ANY MEDIUM WILL ALWAYS FOLLOW A CERTAIN PATH.
A PATH CONSISTING OF SIX STEPS:

1. IDEA/PURPOSE

2. FORM

3. IDIOM

4. STRUCTURE
   - FOURTH: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER... WHAT TO INCLUDE, WHAT TO LEAVE OUT, HOW TO ARRANGE, HOW TO COMPOSE THE WORK.

5. CRAFT
   - FIFTH: CONSTRUCTING THE WORK, APPLYING SKILLS, PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE, INVENTION, PROBLEM-SOLVING, GETTING THE JOB DONE.

6. SURFACE
   - SIXTH: PRODUCING VALUES, FINISHING. THE ASPECTS MOST APPARENT ON FIRST SUPERFICIAL EXPOSURE TO THE WORK.

IN ALL THE ARTS, IT'S THE SURFACE THAT PEOPLE APPRECIATE MOST EASILY, LIKE AN APPLE CHOSEN FOR ITS SHINY SKIN.

THE LATEST "FAN FAVORITE" OFTEN LOOKS BETTER AT A GLANCE THAN THE OLDER ARTISTS WHO HAD THE IDEAS AND CREATED THE IDIOMS, BUT WERE LESS INTERESTED IN SURFACES.
IN COMICS, THE CYCLE BEGINS ALL OVER THE WORLD, AS YOUNG READERS DISCOVER COMICS FOR THE FIRST TIME AND IN A FEW CASES, BEGIN TO DEVELOP A LOVE FOR COMICS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME!

ONE OF THEM—FULL OF BIG IDEAS—MAKES THE BIG DECISION.

"I'M GONNA MAKE COMICS WHEN I GROW UP!"

HE'S OFF TO A LOGICAL START, HE HAS THE IDEAS AND HE'S CHOSEN COMICS AS HIS FORM OF EXPRESSION. MAYBE NOW HE'LL CONSIDER WHAT TYPES OF COMICS ARE RIGHT FOR HIM.

BUT PROBABLY NOT.

MORE LIKELY HE POSTPONES HIS OWN IDEAS AND BEGINS TO STUDY THE CRAFT OF OTHER ARTISTS IN HIS ATTEMPT TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL.

HE BUYS THE "RIGHT" BRUSH, THE "RIGHT" PENS AND THE "RIGHT" PAPER AND BEGINS TO PRACTICE.

EVENTUALLY...

"LOOK, JACK! I CAN DRAW AS WELL AS A PROFESSIONAL!"

BUT WHEN HE BRINGS THE WORK TO A REAL PROFESSIONAL AT THE LOCAL CON:

"ANATOMY IS VERY POOR... SEE HOW THAT MUSCLE CONNECTS?... AND THAT PERSPECTIVE, YEP?... DO YOU KNOW WHAT A VANISHING POINT IS?... AND AS FOR FACES..."

"GULP!"

SO HE BUYS SOME BOOKS ON ANATOMY AND PERSPECTIVE, STUDIES A VARIETY OF DRAWING TECHNIQUES AND PRACTICES FOR MONTHS.

IN THIS EARLY STAGE, THESE READERS ARE EXPERIENCING THE CHARACTERS, IDEAS, EVENTS AND EMOTIONS OF THE STORY DIRECTLY.

COMICS IS ACTING AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN STORY-TELLER AND AUDIENCE.

BUT IN SOME, AN AWARENESS OF THE FORM BEGINS TO DEVELOP, AN AWARENESS THAT ALL COMICS ARE JUST INK ON PAPER—

"THAT MAKING THEM ONLY REQUIRES CERTAIN SKILLS—"

"AND THAT THOSE SKILLS CAN BE LEARNED!"
BUT SOMEHOW, IT NEVER QUITE "CLICKS" FOR HIM. MIGHT BE HE JUST DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH SKILL... MIGHT BE HE LOST INTEREST... MIGHT BE LIFE JUST GETS IN THE WAY... BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON...

---HE LEAVES HIS DREAMS OF MAKING COMICS BEHIND.

ONE OF THEM IS NOW READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP: SHE'S STUDIED HER CRAFT ALL THE WAY THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL AND INTO COLLEGE.

SHE'S A GOOD, HARDWORKING STUDENT.

5 CRAFT

"I THINK I'VE REALLY MADE A BREAKTHROUGH!"

"THIS IS VERY GOOD."

BUT WHEN SHE SHOWS HER WORK TO A SEASONED PRO...

"YOU'RE A SKILLED SCRIPTER AND DRAFTSPERSON, BUT YOUR STORYTELLING ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH. YOU HAVE NO SENSE OF PACING... THESE LAYOUTS ARE VERY MUDSY... YOU HAVE TO CONVINCE YOUR STORIES..."

HER SKILLS CAN GET HER WORK AT THIS POINT, BUT ONLY AS AN ASSISTANT TO OTHERS. UNTIL SHE UNDERSTANDS THE STRUCTURE OF COMICS BEYOND, THE CRAFT, THIS IS AS FAR AS SHE CAN GO.

HE LEARNS TO SEE BEYOND THE CERTAINTY OF DRAFTSMANSHIP AND SCRIPTING TO SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE—PACING, DRAMA, HUMOR, SUSPENSE, COMPOSITION, THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT—SOON THEY'RE ALL AT HIS COMMAND!

"I'VE DONE IT! I'VE LEARNED ALL THERE IS TO KNOW!"

*WELL, OKAY, ONE BOOK! 80MERS, AGAIN

BUT ELSEWHERE, ANOTHER CREATOR HAS BEEN THROUGH THE SAME SORT OF PROCESS AND HE WANTS MORE!
AND LET'S SAY IT WORKS! HE DOES LAND HIS OWN BOOK AND SOON IS ESTABLISHED AS A CREATOR OF GREAT SKILL. HE UNDERSTANDS COMICS STORYTELLING BETTER THAN MOST.

HIS WORK ISN'T PARTICULARLY ORIGINAL, THE CRITICS DON'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO HIM, BUT HE MAKES A DECENT LIVING FOR HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY AND THAT'S ENOUGH FOR HIM.

THAT GUY'S ART IS ALL JUST "SURFACE"!

AND HE KNOWS IT!

BUT ANOTHER ARTIST HAS MADE IT THROUGH THE SAME SORTS OF HURDLES AND REACHED THE SAME LEVELS OF SUCCESS AND STILL ISN'T SATISFIED

SHE WONDERS IF HER SUCCESS REALLY MEANS ANYTHING WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY OTHERS DOING THE SAME THINGS IN THE SAME WAY. SHE WANTS AN IDENTITY.

SHE BELIEVES THAT THERE'S SOMETHING MORE—SOME PIECE OF THE PUZZLE—THAT SHE STILL HASN'T FOUND.

SHE BEGINS TO INVENT NEW WAYS OF SHOWING THE SAME OLD THING. SHE DEVELOPS INNOVATIVE NEW TECHNIQUES AND STARTS DOING AWAY WITH THE SAME OLD THINGS ALTOGETHER.

BUT ELSEWHERE, ANOTHER CREATOR HAS MADE IT TO THIS SAME PLACE AND STILL FEELS DISCONTENT. HE FEELS THAT SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT HAS BEEN NEGLECTED...

AS SHE CREATES HER OWN PERSONAL IDIOM OF COMICS, SHE FINDS THE WHOLE OF HER WORK CHANGING TO SUIT THAT IDIOM.

3 4 5
IDIOM STRUCTURE CRAFT SURFACE

4 5 6
CRAFT SURFACE

YOUNG ARTISTS BEGIN TO IMITATE HER STYLE, BUT MOST OF THEM ONLY SEEM TO APPRECIATE THE "SURFACE."

WANT TO SHOW ME YOUR PORTFOLIO?

COULD IT?

AND MAYBE SHE'LL BE SATISFIED WITH THAT KIND OF SUCCESS, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WHATEVER SHE DOESN'T KNOW, SHE'S ON THE RIGHT PATH TO FIND OUT.

SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL, SOMETHING AT THE CORE OF WHO HE IS AS AN ARTIST, WITH THESE THOUGHTS ON HIS MIND, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE HE ASKS THAT ONE SIMPLE QUESTION:

WHY AM I DOING THIS?
AND NOW, THE BIGGEST QUESTION OF ALL: DOES THIS ARTIST WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE THROUGH HIS ART OR DOES HE WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT ART ITSELF?

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY AT ALL?

PERSONALLY, I THINK WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO THE WORLD.

THE REAL QUESTION IS WILL ANYONE LISTEN? AND UNFORTUNATELY THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW THAT IN ADVANCE.

ASSUMING HE DOESN'T LET THAT STOP HIM, HERE'S WHAT THESE TWO CHOICES COULD MEAN...

AND...

CREATORS WHO TAKE THIS PATH ARE OFTEN PIONEERS AND REVOLUTIONARIES—ARTISTS WHO WANT TO SHAKE THINGS UP, CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE THINK, QUESTION THE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS THAT GOVERN THEIR CHOSEN ART.

(IN OTHER ART FORMS: STRAVINSKY, PICASSO, VIRGINIA WOOLF, ORSON WELLES, ETC.)

BY CHOOSING FORM, HE'D BE SETTING UP TO BECOME AN EXPLORER.

HIS GOAL: TO DISCOVER ALL THAT THE ART FORM IS CAPABLE OF.

AND HIS ART WOULD NOT LACK FOR IDEAS OR FOR A PURPOSE.

HIS ART WOULD JUST BECOME HIS PURPOSE AND THE IDEAS WOULD ARRIVE IN TIME TO GIVE IT SUBSTANCE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE CHOSES THE FIRST STEP AS HIS GOAL, THEN HIS ART BECOMES A TOOL.

AND THE POWERS OF THAT ART WILL RLY ON THE POWERS OF THE IDEAS WITHIN.

NOW "TELLING THE STORY" (OR IN THE CASE OF NON-FICTION, "DELIVERING THE MESSAGE") TAKES PRIORITY OVER INVENTION.

BUT TELLING A STORY AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE MAY REQUIRE SOME INVENTION. IT OFTEN DOES...
This is the path of great storytellers, creators who have something to say through comics and devote all their energies to controlling their medium, refining its ability to convey messages effectively.

(In other art forms: Capra, Dickens, Woody Guthrie, Edward R. Murrow, etc.)

Fortunately, this choice never has to be permanent. It can change as often as an artist changes projects!

No work of art can be totally without "content" any more than it can exist without a form, but it does help to set some priorities.

Hey, I'm driving! No, I'm driving!

This is a problem in many "assembly line" comics where creative specialization has "scripters," "pencillers" and "inkers" all working at cross-purposes in their attempts to get noticed.

Not that we "creator/writer/artist" types never run into this problem...

Damn! Needed to have some more dialogue here, but I really want to draw that snazzy close-up!

But even if we take life's distractions into account, it's still amazing how much time and effort is spent by comics creators trying to get what they want out of comics...

Before they even know what they want!

Perhaps if stripped down far enough, most artists' ultimate goals are not that different from anyone else's, even for those with high ideals. Basic instincts exert a powerful attraction.

And when art becomes a job or a matter of social status, the potential for confusing one's goals goes up considerably.

Of course, not everybody takes the long way around. Some artists have no trouble setting goals and achieving them without any detours..

...especially if their goals are modest ones.
ANY
ARTIST CREATING
ANY WORK IN ANY
MEDIUM WILL ALWAYS
FOLLOW THESE SIX
STEPS
WHETHER THEY REALIZE
IT OR NOT.

ALL WORKS BEGIN
WITH A PURPOSE.
HOWEVER, ARBITRARY
ALL TAKE SOME
FORM, ALL BELONG TO AN
IDIOM (EVEN IF IT'S
AN IDIOM OF ONE), ALL
POSSESS A STRUCTURE,
ALL REQUIRE SOME
CRAFT, ALL
PRESENT A
SURFACE.

ANY ASPECT OF COMICS
MAY BE THE ONE WHICH FIRST
AN ARTIST INTO ITS ORBIT.

AND ALL ASPECTS OF COMICS
HAVE THE POTENTIAL
FOR SELF-EXPRESSION,
EVEN WHEN ECONOMIC
SURVIVAL IS THE
ARTIST'S MAIN
CONCERN.

THERE'S
ALWAYS ROOM
FOR A CERTAIN
AMOUNT OF "ART."

FROM SURFACE TO CORE.

AND IT'S AT THE CORE OF ART THAT
THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IS
FINALLY ASKED:

1
IDEA/PURPOSE
"WHY AM I DOING THIS?"

2
FORM

WHEN FORM RULES THE WORK, IT MAY
SEEM SOMewhat ARTIFICIAL AT THE
CORE, LIKE A SEEDLESS FRUIT.

BUT SUCH WORKS DON'T TAKE THE
SHAPE OF ART FOR GRANTED, AND
BY QUESTIONING OUR FUNDAMENTAL
ASSUMPTIONS--
---CAN ANTICIPATE A WORLD OF UNKNOWN EXPERIENCES.

WHILE IF IDEAS RULE THE WORL AND DETERMINE ITS SHAPE, COMICS CAN HELP PLANT THOSE IDEAS IN AN IDEA.

AND THE CYCLE CAN BEGIN AGAIN.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A WORD ABOUT COLOR

IN CHAPTER FIVE WE DEALT WITH THE EXPRESSIONISTIC POTENTIAL OF LINES AS ANTICIPATED BY ARTISTS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, BUT OF COURSE IT WAS COLOR WHICH MOST CAPTIVATED ARTISTS OF THAT ERA.

THROUGHOUT ART HISTORY, COLOR HAS BEEN A POWERFUL, EVEN PREDOMINANT, CONCERN OF MANY ARTISTS EVERYWHERE.

SOME, LIKE GEORGES SEURAT, DEVOTED THEIR LIVES TO ITS STUDY.

OTHERS, LIKE KANDINSKY, BELIEVED THAT COLORS COULD HAVE PROFOUND PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS ON PEOPLE, THEIR WOUL SWELL AND SHAKE ME UNCOMFORTABLEM.

COLOR CAN BE A FORMIDABLE ALLY FOR ARTISTS IN ANY VISUAL MEDIUM.

YET IN COMICS THE CAREER OF COLOR HAS BEEN WIND... A BIT "SPOTTY."

THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR THE STORMY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMICS AND COLOR, BUT MOST CAN BE SUMMED UP IN TWO WORDS: