COMICS AS A TOOL FOR INQUIRY
(CONCERNING A DISSERTATION IN COMIC BOOK FORM)
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AN IMAGE-TEXT DOCUMENTATION OF THE AUTHOR’S TALK PRESENTED AT SEQUENTIAL SMART MAY 19, 2012:
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ABSTRACT: Comix’ integration into classrooms and other educational forums is exciting and long overdue. Yet, this increasing recognition as a literacy gateway is only the tip of the iceberg. Comix are an essential medium in their own right, ripe for exploration across academia. Through his interdisciplinary doctoral dissertation created entirely in comic book form, the author expands the boundaries of what comics can achieve while radically reimagining what scholarship can look like. In both content and form, his dissertation serves to challenge the verbal’s dominance as the mode for serious thought and the narrow notion of intelligence imposed by standardized assessment. Richly dense, multi-dimensional, and multimodal, comics are uniquely suited to speak to the complexity of our thinking making them a fertile site for creative and critical practice. In his presentation, the author will draw on his dissertation and the comics course he developed for teachers at Columbia University’s Teachers College.

PLEASE NOTE, WHILE THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDES COMIX EXCERPTS FROM THE AUTHOR’S DISSERTATION AND OTHER COMIX WORKS - THIS IS NOT A COMIC ITSELF. FOR SAMPLES OF SOLUSANS’S COMIX, PLEASE SEE: WWW.SPINWEAVEANDCLUT.COM
ALL ARTWORKS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED, ALL OTHERS & THEIR RESPECTIVE CREATORS/PUBLISHERS, REPRODUCED HERE UNDER ACADEMIC FAIR USE.

COMIX’ ONGOING INTEGRATION INTO CLASSROOMS TO AID IN LITERACY EFFORTS AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IS EXCITING AND LONG OVERDUE. YET, IN THE HASTE TO ELEVATE COMICS AS A CATCH-ALL SOLUTION FOR IMPROVING CLASSROOM LEARNING, WE RUN THE RISK OF REDUCING COMICS TO A MERE GATEWAY SERVING TO INTRODUCE STUDENTS TO MORE “SERIOUS” EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND SUBJECTS. IN THE PROCESS, WE MISS OUT ON POSSIBILITIES ACROSS ACADEMIA. THE MEDIUM HAS TO OFFER IN ITS OWN RIGHT, COMIX ARE A POWERFUL TOOL FOR THOUGHT. THROUGH A DISSERTATION CREATED ENTIRELY IN COMIC BOOK FORM, I SEEK TO EXPAND THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT COMIX CAN ACHIEVE WHILE RADICALLY REIMAGINING WHAT SCHOLARSHIP CAN LOOK LIKE.

IN THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION, WE WILL TAKE UP WHAT I’M UP TO IN MY DISSERTATION ALONGSIDE HOW I’M USING COMIX TO GO ABOUT IT. THUS, THIS WILL BE PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON THE MEDIUM WHICH WILL DOVETAIL BACK INTO THE DISSERTATION PREMISE - THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT “UNFLATTENING”.

FIRST, LET’S ADDRESS FLATNESS. BY THAT I MEAN A FLATNESS OF SIGHT, OF POSSIBILITIES. IT’S A STATE OF “THIS IS HOW IT IS” WHERE EVEN OUR CHOICES ARE PRE-DEFINED, AKIN TO WHAT HERBERT MARCUSE (1941, 1964) DESCRIBED AS A “PATTERN OF ONE-DIMENSIONAL THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOUR” WHERE INHABITANTS LACK A “CRITICAL DIMENSION” TO TRANSCEND THEIR EXISTING STATE.

HERE, EVEN CHOICES (OF WHAT THERE ARE SNURVELY MARKED) ARE PRE-DEFINED.

THIS FLATNESS IS NOT LITERAL.

WE IT ELODES ITS TRUE NATURE UNDER A HYPER-STERODED FACADE.

IN THE PLACE OF CHOICE, IN THE PLACE OF A SINGLE CHOICE.

WHERE INHABITANTS COMPLY TO WHAT MARCUSE CALLED “A PATTERN OF ONE-DIMENSIONAL THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOUR” LACKING “A CRITICAL DIMENSION” OR POTENTIALS TO TRANSCEND THEIR EXISTING STATE.

EVERYTHING HAS ITS PLACE.

FORGOTTEN IS THE WONDER OF WHAT MIGHT BE.

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EVERYTHING HAS ITS PLACE.

FORGOTTEN IS THE WONDER OF WHAT MIGHT BE.
WHILE THE VISUAL HAS BEEN SEQUESTRERED TO THE WORLD OF SPECTACLE AND AESTHETICS, TEXT HAS BEEN PRIVILEGED AS THE PROPER MODE OF EXPLANATION AS THE TOOL OF THOUGHT. THE CURRENT CULTURE OF TESTING AND ACADEMIC BIAS FOR THE VERBAL-LINGUISTIC FURTHER AMPHILIES THIS DISPARITY.

THIS EMPHASIS ON ONE-MODE OF THINKING SACRIFICES A NIMBLENESS OF MIND — A MULTIPLICITY OF APPROACHES TO HOW WE LEARN — FOR AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM ORDERED AROUND A LIMITED NOTION OF INTELLIGENCE.


AND WHEN THEY GROW UP?

FLATTENNESS IS A GREAT WEIGHT, SUFFOCATING AND OBLITERATING IN ITS WAKE. THE VERY CAPABLE, DYNAMIC CREATURE THAT ONCE OPENED ITS EYES WIDE, ANIMATED AND違反 WITH PROMISING, ENDS UP STUCK, ITS VISION NARROWED, POTENTIAL ENERGY CURTAILED — A TOP DORMANT, NEVER TO BE SPUN.
Swimming within the words, the world that defines and contains us — it’s hard to conceive how to step outside and discover new possibilities. I find this passage from Italo Calvino helpful in articulating where I want to go from here: “Whenever humanity seems condemned to flatness, I think we should fly like butterflies into a different space. I don’t mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification.”

The key is in gaining perspective...

...and the means to create perspective lies right between our eyes. We are always negotiating the difference between the views of two eyes - two vantage points converge to produce stereoscopic vision - two flat images become three-dimensional.

Let us look to our ways of seeing themselves, and how quite literally, the means to create perspective lies right between our eyes.

The distance separating our eyes means that there is a difference between the view each produces - think there is no single, "correct" view.

This becomes evident by looking alternately through only one eye at a time...

And it is this displacement - parallax - which enables us to perceive depth.

Which view is true? Which view is false?

Our stereoscopic vision is the creation and integration of two views, making on two feet, a constant negotiation between two distinct sources.

By moving a step forward, around the kiln, we essentially create two eyes, a great distance apart. The displacement of the observations from each against a distant object allows us to calculate distances to the stars.

Thereby unfolding the mystery to reveal the vast depths of space.

Primary reasons for using comics in educational settings:

Comics play an important role as a literacy tool - this was certainly my experience as a child.

Examples of projects using comics to transcend and bridge literacy barriers include world comics, which call comics a “low tech communication medium” that anyone can create & share to impact their community; the comic book project, which has been adopted to great effect in schools nationwide and making curriculum pop, an online network where educators interested in implementing comics into their individual classrooms can connect and share resources.

Outside of this living work, numerous research studies have demonstrated comic effectiveness as compared to text alone in terms of student engagement and retention of information. See for example, Holscher and Boomer (2011).

Comics possess great explanatory powers coupled with broad accessibility. I can hand a comic to someone as deep as anything I might write in straight text - yet people are willing to read them. In this way, I find they become persuasive.

Beyond these important arguments for using comics - I want to show they are more than simplifying bridges to somewhere else and demonstrate how particularly well-suited they are for serious inquiry and expanding the dimensionality of discourse.
IN ORDER TO SHOW THAT COMICS ARE NOT SUCH A TASK, LET'S EXPLORE WHAT COMICS ARE AND HOW THEY WORK...

A BRIEF HISTORY - RATHER THAN APPROACHING COMICS AS A NEW MEDIUM, INSTEAD LET US CONSIDER THEM AS CONTINUING THE LONG LINEAGE OF VISUAL NARRATIVES STEMMING FROM STORIES TOLD ON CAVE WALLS TO GRAND TAPESTRIES. PLACING COMICS IN THIS CONTEXT LENDS THEM A CERTAIN LEGITIMACY. THIS TRADITION OF VISUAL LANGUAGE PRE-FIGURES WRITTEN TEXT, AND PERHAPS COMICS RETURN US TO A TIME BEFORE THE RIFT BETWEEN IMAGE AND TEXT GREW SO WIDE. AS A CREATOR, I SEE WORKING WITH WORDS AND PICTURES INTERCHANGEABLY AS RESTORING A WHOLENESS TO MY THINKING.

ONE SIDE NOTE, JUST AS IMAGE PRECEDED TEXT, GESTURE PRE-FIGURES VERBAL SPEECH, AS LYNDA BARRY (2010) PUT IT, "IN MOTION YOU SPEAK THE LANGUAGE THAT LANGUAGE IS BASED ON" (P. 25). TO BARRY'S POETIC POINT, IT HAS BEEN SURMISED (TOMASELLO, 2010) THAT COMMUNICATION VIA GESTURE IN FACT PRE-FIGURES ORALITY IN OUR SPECIES' EVOLUTION.

COMICS AS WE MORE FORMALLY RECOGNIZE THEM KICKED OFF IN NEWSPAPERS IN THE 1890s - WITH RICHARD OUTCAULT'S YELLOW KID (PICTURED LEFT) FREQUENTLY NOTED AS THE FORERUNNER OF MODERN COMICS.

BUT IT WOULD BE THE 1938 DEBUT OF SUPERMAN WHERE COMICS TOOK OFF - SO TO SPEAK, BUT IN MANY WAYS THIS Merging MEDIUM ENDED UP BEING HI-JACKED BY A PARTICULAR GENRE (OR SET OF GENRES), AND WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS (MOST NOTABLY UNDERGROUND COMIX IN THE 1960s), COMICS WERE LIMITED IN THE SORTS OF STORIES THEY WERE DEEMED WORTHY TO TELL.

McFADDEN'S ROW OF FLATS FEATURING THE YELLOW KID FROM 1896

BUT THIS WOULD CHANGE...

IN 1978, WILL EISNER, ONE OF COMICS' EARLY MASTERS RETURNED TO PRODUCE WHAT HE REFERRED TO AS A "GRAPHIC NOVEL," PRIMARILY AS A MARKETING TERM TO APPEAL TO ADULT AUDIENCES AND BE SOLD IN BOOKSTORES. IN 1986, A TRIFECTA OF COMICS WERE RELEASED TO MAJOR CRITICAL SUCCESS, ART SPIEGELMAN'S PULITZER PRIZE WINNING "MAUS," ALAN MOORE'S "WATCHMEN" THE SLE COMIC ON TIME MAGAZINE'S 2005 LIST OF "ALL-TIME 100 GREATEST NOVELS," AND FRANK MILLER'S "THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS."

THESE WORKS PAVED THE WAY FOR MORE SERIOUS APPROACHES TO WHAT COULD BE ADDRESSED IN COMICS AND OPENED THE FLOODGATES FOR THE WORKS BEING PUBLISHED TODAY.

AND IT WOULD BE A COMIC ON COMICS THAT WOULD CHANGE EVERYTHING...
Understanding Comics

Rather than narrowing ourselves to a single definition, in the spirit of unflattening I want to explore several defining aspects of what comics are and how they do what they do.

First up is McCloud’s big idea of Juxtapositions.

McCloud made an inspired decision to locate comics’ origins not in their emergence near the start of the 20th century but to leap past that point and instead connect comics to the lineage of visual narratives as discussed prior. McCloud (1993) offered a definition of comics that reflected their place within the broader scope of visual language: “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (p. 9).

The negative space between panels - or glitters - is where 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). Juxtapositions are key - the reader stitches together the separate elements, connecting the dots to make meaning.

Comics are thus an active, participatory experience for the reader, akin to reader response theory or “Cool” in Marshall McLuhan’s media theory terminology.

The participatory nature of comics is further compounded by the distilled drawing styles employed. McCloud holds up cartooning as allowing the reader to inhabit the characters on the page. We recognize ourselves in the saddest of fables. Readers become animators, breathing life into the static visual elements through their imaginations.

The Italian author Italo Calvino (1996) credited comics’ participatory nature as fostering his imagination even after learning to read. He preferred to share the text and decipher “within the pictures and their sequence” (p. 94).
THE SECOND ASPECT: COMICS POSSESS A DUAL NATURE - BOTH A LANGUAGE & ART/SEQUENTIAL & SIMULTANEOUS.

SO YES, WHILE COMICS ARE READ SEQUENTIALLY, PANEL BY PANEL, LIKE TEXT, AT THE SAME TIME THE COMICS PAGE IS ALSO VIEWED ALL-AT-ONCE, LIKE VISUAL ART. THIS “ALL-AT-ONCENESS” - OR SIMULTANEOUS - SPEAKS TO OUR ABILITY TO SEE THE WHOLE AND THE PARTS AT THE SAME TIME (ANOTHER FORM OF CLOSURE). THIS COMICS POSSESS A DISTINCT DUAL NATURE - WHERE SEQUENTIAL IS ENCODED WITHIN THE SIMULTANEOUS.

THIERRY GROENSTEEN LIKENS THE ORGANIZATION OF SIMULTANEOUS IMAGES IN COMICS TO A SYSTEM OR A NETWORK (P. 146). A CONNECTED SPACE OF ASSOCIATIONS STRETCHES WEBSITE-CHARGE ACROSS THE PAGE, BRAIDING THE FRAGMENTED ELEMENTS TOGETHER ON THE PAGE (_PANELS, TEXT BOXES, ETC) INTO A COHESIVE WHOLE.

DUE TO THE CONNECTED, SIMULTANEOUS NATURE OF THE COMICS PAGE, TIME IN COMICS (QUITE UNLIKE FILM), TRANSPIRES IN SPACE.
COMICS’ DUAL GEOFINTIAL-SIMULTANEOUS NATURE OFFERS SOME NEAT IMPLICATIONS…

SPECIFICALLY THIS PROVIDES THEM WITH AN EXPANSIVE CAPACITY FOR LAYERED, PARALLEL, AND INTERWOVEN NARRATIVES. COMICS CAN INTERLACE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF STORY WITHIN A SINGLE SPACE IN WAYS QUITE DISTINCT FROM WHAT TEXT OR FILM CAN ACHIEVE.

BECAUSE WE VISUALLY TAKE IN THE ENTIRE COMPOSITION ALL AT ONCE, SEPARATE ELEMENTS REMAIN DISTINCT WHILE STILL BEING SEEN AS PART OF THE GREATER, COHESIVE WHOLE.

THINK OF THIS A BIT LIKE FOOTNOTES: IN COMICS, INSTEAD OF HAVING TO LEAVE YOUR SPOT FIND THE FOOTNOTE AND RETURN BACK TO YOUR PLACE, IT IS ALL THERE - PRESENT AND INTEGRATED VISUALLY.

SOME EXAMPLES WILL ILLUMINATE THIS FURTHER.

THE CHAIN-LIKE SEQUENTIAL READING OF TEXT CAN THEN BE CLEARED AND OPENED UP TO NONLINEAR STORYTELLING APPROACHES.


IN THIS SINGLE PANEL FROM WATCHMEN BY MOORE & GIBBONS, THE PARCHMENT PROVIDES A VISUAL CLUE ALERTING THE READER THAT THE LIPPER TEXT IS OCCURRING IN A SEPARATE SPACE. IN FACT THIS IS A COMIC BEING READ BY A CHARACTER WITHIN THE MAIN NARRATIVE. THE TEXT “BLACK SAILS AGAINST THE YELLOW INDIES SKY…” IS OVERLAID ON A CLOSEUP IMAGE OF A YELLOW AND BLACK FALLOUT SHIELD SIGN - METATEXTUALLY THE TWO REALITIES SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER OF SIGNS OF WAR.

THE CHECKERBOARD COLORING OF THIS 3-PANEL GRID FROM WATCHMEN ILLUMINATES THE WAYS THE AUTHORS UTILIZE THE MEDIUM TO HELP KEEP READERS FIRMLY GROUNDED IN MULTIPLE NARRATIVES. HERE THE “X” BRIGHTLY-COLORED PANELS ARE TAKING PLACE IN CALIFORNIA, INTERCUT WITH THE “O” PANELS IN NEW YORK CITY. EVEN WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO DISCERN THE DIALOGUE - THE VISUAL PATTERNS STAND OUT.

LAYERS OF TIME JUXTAPOSED IN SPIEGELMAN’S “MAUS”
ASPECT THREE: VISUAL-VERBAL WEAVIN.

NOT ONLY DO COMICS FUNCTION LIKE A HYBRID BETWEEN TEXT AND IMAGE, THIS SEQUENTIAL-SIMULTANEOUS ECOSYSTEM FACILITATES DIRECT VISUAL-VERBAL WEAVIN'. UNLIKE MAGAZINES OR NEWSPAPERS WHERE TEXT AND IMAGE MAY LIE ON THE SAME PAGE BUT REMAIN SEPARATE ENTITIES, IN COMICS, TEXT BECOMES A VISUALIZED ELEMENT WITHIN THE PAGE. ON FACT MODERN COMICS PIVOTED FROM THE DILUTION OF TEXT-IMAGE BOUNDARIES INTO ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER SECTIONS (COUCH, 2001) AS A.C. HARVEY (1947) STATES, COMICS DEPEND ON THIS BLENDING SUCH THAT "NEITHER WORDS NOR PICTURES ARE QUITE SATISFACTORY WITHOUT THE OTHER." (P. 641).

COMICS ALLOW THE VISUAL AND VERBAL TO RESONATE AND COMPLEMENT SUCH THAT THE FRUITS OF THEIR UNION MULTIPLY AND EXCEED WHAT EITHER CAN ACCOMPLISH ALONE. NOTED INFORMATION DESIGNER EDWARD TUFTE (1990) EXPOUNDS UPON THE NATURE OF DIRECTLY INTEGRATING IMAGE AND TEXT IN ORDER TO ESCAPE WHAT HE SEES AS A FLATNESS OF INFORMATION DISCOURSE AND ORCHESTRATE A GREATER DIMENSIONAL WHOLE.

AND FINALLY, VISUAL-VERBAL INTERDEPENDENCY IS A SUBSET OF COMICS' INHERENT MULTIMODALITY.

THIS DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMICS EXEMPLIFIES GUNTER KRESS’S (2001) NOTION OF MULTIMODALITY, WHERE MEANING RESIDES IN MULTIPLE CHANNELS CONTRIBUTING ENSEMBLE TO THE WHOLE. THINGS LIKE GESTURE, IMAGE, AND ACTION ARE NOT ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE "REAL" THING, BUT INTEGRAL TO THE CREATION OF THE ENTIRE MEANING, THEIR INTERACTION FORMS A KIND OF RESONANCE WHERE EACH ENRICHES AND BRINGS GREATER COMPLEXITY OF MEANING TO THE OTHER, REINFORCING AND GROWING NOT IN ADDITIVE FASHION BUT RATHER MULTIPlicative.

DAVID MASSUCHELLI’S ASTERIOS POLYP (PICTURED) OFFERS A PARTICULARLY POWERFUL EXAMPLE WHICH POINTS TO THE MEDIUM’S POTENTIAL FOR MULTI-DIMENSIONAL COMMUNICATION.

AT THE SURFACE LEVEL, THE TEXT TELLS A STORY (THE DIALOGUE), WHILE THE DRAWN ACTORS SHOW WHAT IS HAPPENING. FURTHER INFORMATION IS PRESENTED IN THE CHOICE OF FONTS, DISTINCT AND LINKED SPECIFICALLY TO EACH CHARACTER, AS IS THE SHAPE OF THEIR BALLOONS — HERE ROUNDED, HIS HARD AND GEOMETRIC. BOTH THE STYLE IN WHICH THE CHARACTERS ARE RENDERED AND THE COLORS ASSIGNED TO THEM (WHICH ALSO BLEND INTO THEIR ENVIRONMENT), FURTHER CONTRIBUTE TO UNFOLDING DYNAMICS OF THEIR EXCHANGE. ALL OF THIS INFORMATION IS BEING RECEIVED VIA MANY CHANNELS SIMULTANEOUSLY, TRANSFORMING SOMETHING SEEMINGLY SIMPLE IN APPEARANCE INTO SOMETHING QUITE COMPLEX COMPARABLE TO THE LAYERED ORCHESTRATION OF MUSIC BETWEEN LYRICS, MELODY, BEAT, AND MORE.
IN CONSIDERING THE SHAPE OF OUR THOUGHTS - I’M REMINDED OF MY GRANDMA’S SIDETRACK-FILLED STORIES AND HOW CLEAR MY THOUGHTS ARE WHILE I’M RUNNING, WHICH ALWAYS SEEM FLAT AND MISSED SOMETHING WHEN I TRY TO COMMIT THEM TO WRITTEN PAPER.

IN CONVERSATION, I OFTEN CATCH MYSELF INTERJECTING ONE THOUGHT ON TOP OF ANOTHER, ALL OUT OF SEQUENCE.

MY PARTICULAR PENDANT FOR PARENTHESES (NOT TO MENTION ALLITERATION (ANOTHER STORY ALTOGETHER)) BRINGS TO MIND MY GRANDMOTHER WHO DELIGHTED IN TELLING STORIES OFHER DAILY VISITS TO THE STREETS, ITS INHABITANTS, LAYERS DEEP IN NESTED STORY.

SHE’D BE TALKING ABOUT SO-AND-SO, AND THE MENTION OF THE STREET THIS PERSON LIVED ON, SENT HER OFF VISITING ITS INHABITANTS, LAYERS DEEP IN NESTED STORY.

(SHE ALSO LOVED DOING CROSSWORD PUZZLES – HMMWW...)

I THINK COMICS OFFER A MEANS BY WHICH THESE MEANDERING, INTERSECTING NARRATIVES COULD BE WELL REPRESENTED.

AND THAT HAS ME WONDERING...

WHAT DO OUR STORIES LOOK LIKE BEFORE WE TELL THEM?

OR, HOW CAN WE BEST DESCRIBE

The Shape of Our Thoughts

a meditation on comics

GUSSERNE K. LANGER (1957) CITES BERTRAND RUSSELL AS REGRETTING "WE CANNOT CONSTRUCT A LANGUAGE WHICH WOULD EXPRESS ALL RELATIONS BY ANALOGOUS RELATIONS; THEN WE WOULD NOT BE TEMPTED TO MISCONSTRUE LANGUAGE" (P. 81). BUT PERHAPS WITH COMICS - WE CAN HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS, RICHLY DENSE AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL, COMICS ARE UNICALLY SUITABLE TO CAPTURE AND REPRESENT THE COMPLEXITY OF OUR THOUGHTS.

WITH THEIR CAPACITY FOR JUXTAPOSITION: THEIR DUAL SEQUENTIAL AND SIMULTANEOUS NATURE; VISUAL-VERBAL WEAVING, AND INHERENT MULTIMODALITY, COMICS HANDLE THE NESTED, TANGENTIAL, PARENTHEtical AND ALL-OVER NATURE OF OUR THINKING AND OFFER A WHOLENESS OF EXPRESSION THAT FAR EXCEEDS THEIR DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE APPEARANCE.

PERHAPS THIS NETWORK OF SPATIALLY CONNECTED IMAGES AND WORDS SHARES SOME RESEMBLANCE WITH WHAT GOES ON IN OUR HEADS...

BENEATH COMICS’ APPROACHABLE APPEARANCE LIES A DECEPTIVELY DENSE, MULTI-MODAL, MULTI-DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURE.

A COMPOSITION OF NODES AND GAPS - DYNAMICALY LINKED.

NOT UNLIKE WHAT GOES ON INSIDE OUR HEADS...

I WONDER HOW MY GRANDMOTHER’S STORIES MIGHT BE COMPOSED BY CHRIS WARE - WHOSE WORKS (BELOW) DEMONSTRATE THE GREAT POTENTIAL FOR CONVEYING THE COMPLEXITY AND TANGENTIAL NATURE OF OUR NARRATIVES.
COMICS FACILITATE CREATIVE SEEING.

In their capacity for intersecting multiple perspectives, comics facilitate the making of unexpected connections, exemplifying Max Ernst's (Shielen, 1952) definition of creativity: "the pairing of two realities which apparently cannot be paired on a plane apparently not suited to them" (p. 66). Comics are thus a fertile site for play and imagination, laden with potential for creative possibilities.

I SEE THIS IN MY OWN CREATIVE PRACTICE, WHERE THE UNEXPECTED EMERGES OUT OF THE SPATIAL PLAY BETWEEN IMAGE AND TEXT.

BARBARA MARIA STAFFORD (1999) ARGUES THAT WE DERIVE NEW CONCEPTIONS THROUGH ANALOGIC PROCESSES, WHICH ARE INHERENTLY VISUAL. FOR "SEEING IS ABOUT BEING STRUCK THAT SOMETHING IS, OR CAN BE, CONNECTED TO SOMETHING ELSE" (p. 230). CONSTRUCTING METAPHORICAL RELATIONSHIPS IS THE HEART OF LEARNING AND FORGING NEW UNDERSTANDING – WE CREATE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE KNOWN AND UNKNOWN, JOINING THE DISSIMILAR TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE NEW. WE REFRAME OUR CONCEPTUAL SYSTEMS THROUGH THE ACTIVITY OF OUR PERCEPTUAL SYSTEM.

IN THEIR CAPACITY FOR INTERSECTING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES, COMICS EXEMPLIFY MAX ERNST'S DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY (SHIELEN, 1952). "THE PAIRING OF TWO REALITIES WHICH APPARENTLY CANNOT BE PAIRED ON A PLANE APPARENTLY NOT SUITED TO THEM" (P. 66).

THROUGH SUCH ANALOGIC PROCESSES, WHICH STAFFORD (1999) SUGGESTS ARE INHERENTLY VISUAL, WE JOIN THE DISSIMILAR TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE NEW.

ROBERT ROOT-BERNSTEIN (1985) FOUND THAT SCIENTISTS' TRAINING AS ARTISTS HELPED IN THEIR PROCESS OF DISCOVERING. HAVING ACCESS TO THE ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF SEEING ALLOWED THOSE INDIVIDUALS TO LOOK AT PROBLEMS AND MAKE CONNECTIONS IN WAYS THEIR MORE NARROWLY EDUCATED PEERS LIMITED TO A SINGLE MODE OF THINKING COULD NOT. ARMED WITH MULTIPLE WAYS OF SEEING, BARRIERS TUMBLE AND OUR CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES FLOURISH. IN EXPLORING THROUGH THE VISUAL AND THE VERBAL, WE OPEN OURSELVES TO DISCOVERIES AND EXPAND OUR CAPACITY TO MAKE MEANING BEYOND WHAT WE COULD HAVE WHILE REMAINING SOLELY TIED TO A SINGLE MODE.

AS SHE WRITES, "THE IMAGINATIVE LABOR OF MAKING A COHERENT MERMAID... IS SYMBIOTIC OF HOW KNOWLEDGE FORMATION ACTUALLY WORKS" (P. 29).

AMPHIBIOUS - COMICS LET US BREATHE IN TWO WORLDS.

MORE THAN GATEWAY TO LITERACY, THE SPATIAL INTERPLAY OF VISUAL AND VERBAL THAT DEFINES COMICS MAKES FOR A POWERFUL TOOL FOR INQUIRY PRIMED FOR CREATIVE AND CRITICAL PRACTICE.
UNFLATTENING IS A DISPLACEMENT OF OUR EXISTING FRAMES OF REFERENCE - TO STEP BEYOND "THIS IS HOW IT IS" TO "WHAT MIGHT BE." IT'S RECOGNIZING THAT THERE ARE MULTIPLE SIDES AND WE CAN TURN THINGS OVER AND SEE FROM OTHER SIDES.

TRANSFORMING SOMETHING WHEN IT'S ONCE ONLY KNEW IN ONE WAY, INTO SOMETHINGS MULTIDIMENSIONAL...

IMAGINE EDUCATION AS ACQUIRING THE MEANS TO FOLLOW OUR OWN PATHS AND WAYS OF MAKING MEANINGS. ULTIMATELY I INSERT THIS WORK INTO THE ONGOING EDUCATIONAL DEBATE AND OFFER IT AS A MEANS OF BROADENING CONSIDERATION FOR THE WAYS UNDERSTANDING CAN BE CREATED.

OPENING POSSIBILITIES AS WE GO FORTH AND FIND OUR OWN WAY.

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