THE TAO OF COMICS
WHY?

should we care about comics?
should we study comics?
ORIGINALLITY OF THE MEDIUM

- Comics represent a unique and powerful form of communication

- Comics tell stories and involve readers in ways that no other medium - not plays, novels, or film - can duplicate

“what we’ve got is the most portable, limitless, intense, personal, focused, intimate, compelling, wonderful visual medium in creation”

Jim Shooter
DO COMIC BOOKS TELL STORIES IN A NEW WAY?
Minutos Más Tarde.

P: Peggy, soy J-Jimmy... si te das prisa y miras ahora por la ventana verás un arco iris.

H: Hola, Peggy?

¿Lo ves? ¿Lo ves? Ja, Ja, vaya, sería divertido salir ahora mismo a dar un paseo y observar el arco iris, por ejemplo.
NEW FORM OF LITERACY

- **Visual Literacy** - the ability to understand pictorial information has become one of the most basic skills in the latter half of the 20th Century

- Challenge the supremacy of the purely printed word

- Blur the boundaries between the picture and the word - both must be read as an integrated whole
DISTRICT ATTORNEY HARVEY DENT, THIS IS --

WELL, I DON'T HAVE TO BE A DETECTIVE TO SEE... ...YOU TWO ALREADY KNOW EACH OTHER.

I'VE... COME TO APPRECIATE OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

BATS.

DENT.

AND HOW HE CROSSES A LINE WE... CAN'T.
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Until the spread of the television, the comic book was the dominant element in the culture of American youth.

- In 1947, 95% of boys & 91% of girls between the ages of 6 and 11 purchased comic books; 87% of boys & 81% of girls between the ages of 12 and 17 purchased comic books.

- Safe to say that comic books have touched the lives of nearly everyone alive today.
HIGHLY REFLECTIVE OF CULTURE/POP CULTURE

- Time from production to publication extremely short with comics (publication frequency is also much higher compared to other media - books, etc.

- Comic books are more “nimble” - current events, themes, social concerns, etc. can be included in comic book story-lines very quickly

- Far more reflective of current events/popular culture - fine grained representation of current events/popular culture
WHAT?

is a comic anyway?
You're gonna have pancakes.

Pancakes.

No way!

I don't like pancakes--!

Klink

You've never had them before, just try them.

They're yucky...

One bite.

General Norton Ricker
WHAT?
is a graphic novel then?
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

- In recent years, some people have attempted to “rehabilitate” the image of comic books by using a different term - graphic novel.

- For creators - graphic novel distances comic books from their periodical and commercial foundations

- For publishers - graphic novel elevates the status of the medium and facilitates entrance into bookstores, libraries, and universities.
COMIC BOOKS
VS.
COMIC STRIPS
Here's the World War I Flying Ace leaping from his burning plane. As he lands, he sprawls in the wet mud. Severely wounded, he must make his way back through enemy lines... He must find an aid station before he collapses!

There it is! The Essex farm dressing station!

Ah! A beautiful nurse approaches...

Tripped over your supper dish again, I see...
JON... I KNOW PEOPLE THINK ME CALLOUS, BUT I'VE MADE MYSELF FEEL EVERY DEATH. BY DAY I IMAGINE ENDLESS FACES. BY NIGHT...

WELL, I DREAM ABOUT SWIMMING TOWARDS A HIDEOUS... NO. NEVER MIND. IT ISN'T SIGNIFICANT...

WHAT'S SIGNIFICANT IS THAT I KNOW. I KNOW I'VE STRUGGLED ACROSS THE BACKS OF MURDERED INNOCENTS TO SAVE HUMANITY... BUT SOMEONE HAD TO TAKE THE WEIGHT OF THAT AWFUL, NECESSARY CRIME.

I'D HOPED YOU'D UNDERSTAND, UNLIKE RORSCHACH...

YOU NEEDN'T CONSIDER RORSCHACH. I STRONGLY DOUBT HE'LL REACH CIVILIZATION.

...BUT YES, I UNDERSTAND, WITHOUT CONDONING OR CONDEMNING HUMAN AFFAIRS CANNOT BE MY CONCERN. I'M LEAVING THIS GALAXY FOR ONE LESS COMPLICATED.

BUT YOU'D REGAINED INTEREST IN HUMAN LIFE...
PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE

- little difference between comic books & comic strips

- both essentially products of the printing press (even though paper quality, paper size, and binding vary)

- digital production & distribution may change this in the future.
DISTRIBUTION PERSPECTIVE

- comic books and comic strips come from two different media categories:
  - comics strips were a component of the newspaper medium
  - comic books were part of the magazine medium
- comic strips are still tied very closely to newspapers, while comic books (because of the direct market) are no longer associated with magazine distribution
- digital is changing everything
design perspective

- comic strips and comic books have different (and unique) formal aspects - their “language.”

- specifically, comic books and comic strips use encapsulation differently
ENCAPSULATION:

choosing certain moments of prime action from the imagined story and encapsulating, or enclosing, renderings of those moments in a discrete space.
IN 1979 A REVOLUTION TOOK PLACE. IT WAS LATER CALLED “THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION”.

THEN CAME 1980: THE YEAR IT BECAME OBLIGATORY TO WEAR THE VEIL AT SCHOOL.

WE DIDN’T REALLY LIKE TO WEAR THE VEIL, ESPECIALLY SINCE WE DIDN’T UNDERSTAND WHY WE HAD TO.
WE GO DOWN TOGETHER.

I BURN HIM.

HE BURNS ME.

UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO BURN BUT THE AIR.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COMIC STRIPS</strong></th>
<th><strong>COMIC BOOKS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very few panels</td>
<td>many panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the panel is the only unit of encapsulation</td>
<td>units of encapsulation include the panel, the page, the two page spread, and the inset panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>layout is normally rigid</td>
<td>layout can be creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composition is usually simple</td>
<td>composition can be complex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HULK SMASH MUMBO JUMBO!

HULK! DON'T!

WHO'S IN THERE? IT'S FLAT WITH ALL KINDS OF MUMBO JUMBO!
CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

- The clearest difference between comic books and comic strips is their differing roles in our culture.

- They exist for different purposes and serve different audiences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMIC STRIPS</th>
<th>COMIC BOOKS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>exist to sell newspapers</td>
<td>exist as products in their own right, as promotional tie-ins, and as literary and artistic expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comes to readers “unbidden,” as a supplement within the newspapers</td>
<td>readers must actively seek them out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most Americans read comic strips</td>
<td>fewer and fewer people read comic books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>readers derive brief pleasure and go on about their lives</td>
<td>can be a way of life for fans (fandom subculture); are designed to be periodical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no stigma</td>
<td>stigma attached to reading, following, enjoying comics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A CHRONOLOGY OF COMICS

gold, silver, bronze (and beyond)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>“ERAS”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1897-1937</td>
<td>Platinum or Pre-Golden Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938 - 1955</td>
<td>Golden Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 - 1970</td>
<td>Silver Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 - 1985</td>
<td>Bronze Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 - Present</td>
<td>Modern Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 - 1999</td>
<td>Chrome/Chromium/Copper Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 - Present</td>
<td>Post-Modern Age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GOLDEN AGE

DC Action Comics #1

1938
SILVER AGE

DC Action Comics #1

1938
BRONZE AGE

Jack Kirby’s Fourth World (Kirby leaves Marvel)

1970
MODERN AGE

Watchmen/Dark
Knight Returns

1986
CHROMIUM AGE
Speculation - Death of Superman
1992
POSTMODERN AGE

Marvel Ultimate Universe

1999