CHAPTER THREE

BLOOD IN THE GUTTER.

WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG, I HAD A RECURRENT DAYDREAM THAT THE WHOLE WORLD WAS JUST A SHOW PUT ON FOR MY BENEFIT. THAT UNLESS I WAS PRESENT TO SEE THINGS, THEY JUST--

EVEN TODAY AS I WRITE AND DRAW THIS PANEL, I HAVE NO GUARANTEE THAT ANYTHING EXISTS OUTSIDE OF WHAT MY FIVE SENSES REPORT TO ME.*

I'VE NEVER BEEN TO MOROCCO, BUT I TAKE IT ON FAITH THAT THERE IS A MOROCCO!

I'VE NEVER BEEN TO MOROCCO, BUT I TAKE IT ON FAITH THAT THERE IS A MOROCCO!

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE EARTH FROM SPACE FIRSTHAND, YET I TRUST THAT THE EARTH IS ROUND.

IN THIS PANEL YOU CAN'T EVEN SEE MY LEGS. YET? YOU ASSUME THAT THEY'RE THERE.

EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE NOT!

* NOT TO SAY OUR SENSES ARE ANY KIND OF GUARANTEE!
ALL OF US PERCEIVE THE WORLD AS A WHOLE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR SENSES.

YET OUR SENSES CAN ONLY REVEAL A WORLD THAT IS FRAGMENTED AND INCOMPLETE.

EVEN THE MOST WIDELY TRAVELLED MIND CAN ONLY SEE SO MUCH OF THE WORLD IN THE COURSE OF A LIFE.

OUR PERCEPTION OF "REALITY" IS AN ACT OF FAITH, BASED ON MORE FRAGMENTS.

AS INFANTS, WE'RE UNABLE TO COMMIT THAT ACT OF FAITH. IF WE CAN'T SEE IT, HEAR IT, SMELL IT, TASTE IT OR TOUCH IT, IT ISN'T THERE!

THE GAME "PEEK-A-BOO" PLAYS ON THIS IDEA. GRADUALLY, WE ALL LEARN THAT EVEN THOUGH THE SIGHT OF MOMMY COMES AND GOES, MOMMY REMAINS.

THE PHENOMENON OF OBSERVING THE PARTS BUT PERCEIVING THE WHOLE HAS A NAME: IT'S CALLED CLOSURE.

SOME FORMS OF CLOSURE ARE DELIBERATE INVENTIONS OF STORYTELLERS TO PRODUCE SUSPENSE OR TO CHALLENGE AUDIENCES.

IN OUR DAILY LIVES, WE OFTEN COMMIT CLOSURE MENTALLY COMPLETING THAT WHICH IS INCOMPLETE BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE.

OTHERS HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY, WITHOUT MUCH EFFORT... PART OF BUSINESS AS USUAL.

IN RECOGNIZING AND RELATING TO OTHER PEOPLE, WE ALL DEPEND HEAVILY ON OUR LEARNED ABILITY OF CLOSURE.

IN AN INCOMPLETE WORLD, WE MUST DEPEND ON CLOSURE FOR OUR VERY SURVIVAL.
Closure can take many forms. Some simple, some complex.

The mental process described in Chapter Two whereby these lines become a face could be considered closure.

A medium requiring even more closure is television, which in reality is just a single point of light, racing across the screen so fast that it's described my face hundreds of times before you can even swallow that corn chip!*

A medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion.

SEE THAT SPACE BETWEEN THE PANELS? THAT'S WHAT COMICS AFICIONADOS HAVE NAMED "THE GUTTER."

AND DESPITE ITS UNCEREMONIOUS TITLE, THE GUTTER PLAYS HOST TO MUCH OF THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY THAT ARE AT THE VERY HEART OF COMICS!

HERE IN THE LIMBO OF THE GUTTER, HUMAN IMAGINATION TAKES TWO SEPARATE IMAGES AND TRANSFORMS THEM INTO A SINGLE IDEA.

IF VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY IS THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS, CLOSURE IS ITS GRAMMAR. AND SINCE OUR DEFINITION OF COMICS HINGES ON THE ARRANGEMENT OF ELEMENTS—

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.

—THEN, IN A VERY REAL SENSE, COMICS IS CLOSURE!
THE CLOSURE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IS CONTINUOUS, LARGELY INVOLUNTARY AND VIRTUALLY IMPERCEPTIBLE. BUT CLOSURE IN COMICS IS FAR FROM CONTINUOUS AND ANYTHING BUT INVOLUNTARY!

TO KILL A MAN BETWEEN PANELS IS TO CONDEMN HIM TO A THOUSAND DEATHS. PARTICIPATION IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN ANY MEDIUM. FILMMAKERS LONG AGO REALIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLOWING VIEWERS TO USE THEIR IMAGINATIONS.

NOW YOU DIE!!

NO!

EYAA!!

EVERY ACT COMMITTED TO PAPER BY THE COMICS ARTIST IS AIDED AND ABETTED BY A SILENT ACCOMPlice.

BUT WHILE FILM MAKES USE OF AUDIENCES’ IMAGINATIONS FOR OCCASIONAL EFFECTS, COMICS MUST USE IT FAR MORE OFTEN.

FROM THE TOSSING OF A BASEBALL TO THE DEATH OF A PLANET, THE READER’S DELIBERATE VOLUNTARY CLOSURE IS COMICS’ PRIMARY MEANS OF SIMULATING TIME AND MOTION.

AN EQUAL PARTNER IN CRIME KNOWN AS THE READER. I MAY HAVE DRAWN AN AXE BEING RAISED IN THIS EXAMPLE, BUT I’M NOT THE ONE WHO LET IT DROP OR DECIDED HOW HARD THE BLOW, OR WHO SCREAMED, OR WHY.

ALL OF YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE MURDER. ALL OF YOU HELD THE AXE AND CHOSE YOUR SPOT.

CLOSURE IN COMICS FOSTERS AN INTIMACY SURPASSED ONLY BY THE WRITTEN WORD. A SILENT, SECRET CONTRACT BETWEEN CREATOR AND AUDIENCE.

LET’S TAKE A LOOK AT THE CRAFT.

THAT, DEAR READER, WAS YOUR SPECIAL CRIME. EACH OF YOU COMMITTING IT IN YOUR OWN STYLE.
MOST PANEL-TO-PANEL TRANSITIONS IN COMICS CAN BE PLACED IN ONE OF SEVERAL DISTINCT CATEGORIES. THE FIRST CATEGORY—WHICH WE CALL MOMENT-TO-MOMENT—REQUIRES VERY LITTLE CLOSURE.

NEXT ARE THOSE TRANSITIONS FEATURING A SINGLE SUBJECT IN DISTINCT ACTION-TO-ACTION PROGRESSIONS.

THE NEXT TYPE TAKES US FROM SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT WHILE STAYING WITHIN A SCENE OR IDEA. NOTE THE DEGREE OF READER INVOLVEMENT NECESSARY TO RENDER THESE TRANSITIONS MEANINGFUL.

DEDUCTIVE REASONING IS OFTEN REQUIRED IN READING COMICS SUCH AS IN THESE SCENE-TO-SCENE TRANSITIONS, WHICH TRANSPORT US ACROSS SIGNIFICANT DISTANCES OF TIME AND SPACE.
A fifth type of transition, which we'll call aspect-to-aspect, bypasses time for the most part and sets a wandering eye on different aspects of a place, idea, or mood.

And finally, there's the non-sequitur, which offers no logical relationship between panels whatsoever.

This last category suggests an interesting question: is it possible for any sequence of panels to be totally unrelated to each other? Personally, I don't think so.

No matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of:

Such transitions may not make "sense" in any traditional way, but still a relationship of some sort will inevitably develop.

By creating a sequence with two or more images, we are endowing them with a single:

However, different they had been, they now belong to a single organism.

Danger!!

Closing for blood gutters for viewing:
And since **ALL** of the remaining transitions are from **SCENE-TO-SCENE**, we have the following breakdown:

![Bar graph](image)

**1. MOMENT-TO-MOMENT**

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**2. ACTION-TO-ACTION**

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**3. SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT**

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**4. SCENE-TO-SCENE**

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**5. ASPECT-TO-ASPECT**

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**6. NON-SEQUITUR**

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By far, the most common type of transition in Kirby's art is **ACTION-TO-ACTION**, i.e., sixty-two of them in this story—about sixty-five percent of the total number.

**SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT** transitions account for an additional nineteen—about twenty percent of the total number.

**X-MEN ###**

**HARDMAN'S STORY**

**JERRY & VERDENA**

**NORMAN TAYLOR**

---

A random sampling of various American comics shows this same proportion pretty consistently.

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This emphasis on **ACTION-TO-ACTION** story telling suits most people's ideas about Kirby, but is he unique in this respect?
A SURVEY of well-known European artists yields similar, if not quite as uniform, results.

WHAT CAN WE DEDUCE FROM THIS?

SQUIRREL THE MORE
ARTEMIS
MELONITE IMPACT
THE LONG TIMELAPSE

L L L L

MAGAZINE
OUTSIDING INVISIM
CREATOR & PRODUCER
"BANANAS" & PRODUCER

"PLANTIFF"!
"LICK!"
"THE BLACK ISLAND"
"THE BLACK DREAMS"

THUNDER
PRANKA
IN-AGE
JONNY SWIFT

1 2 3 5 6

--WHILE IN THE FIFTH TYPE BY DEFINITION, NOTHING HAPPENS AT ALL!

1 2 3 4 5 6

AND, OF COURSE, NON-SEQUITURS ARE UNCERCONCERNED WITH EVENTS OR ANY NARRATIVE PURPOSES OF ANY SORT.

2

ARE THESE THREE TYPES OF TRANSITIONS ALL ANYONE SHOULD EVER NEED TO TELL A STORY IN COMICS?

3

IF WE CHOOSE TO SEE STORIES AS CONNECTED SERIES OF EVENTS, THEN THE PREDOMINANCE OF TYPES 2-4 ARE EASILY EXPLAINED.

4

STORIES FROM SPIEGELMAN'S ANTHOLOGY BREAKDOWNS:

TYPES 2-4 SHOW THINGS HAPPENING IN CONCISE, EFFICIENT WAYS.

TYPE 1 SHOWS ACTIONS LIKE TYPE 2, BUT IT TENDS TO REQUIRE SEVERAL PANELS TO DO WHAT TYPE 2 DOES IN TWO.

1 2 3 5 6

1 2 3 5 6

"DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE"
"MAUS" (ORIGINAL)

"SKINLESS PERKINS"
"PRISONER ON THE HELL PLANET"
"CRACKING JOKES"

1 2

1 2 3

1 2

FRONT AND BACK COVERS
"ACE-HOLE MIDGET DETECTIVE"
"REAL DREAM 1975"

76

JUST WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

77
ACTION-TO-ACTION TRANSITIONS still dominate in Tezuka's work, but to a lesser degree.

IN FACT, SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT TRANSITIONS account for nearly as many as action.

ASPECT-TO-ASPECT TRANSITIONS have been an integral part of Japanese mainstream comics almost from the very beginning.

Most often used to establish a mood or a sense of place, time seems to stand still in these quiet, contemplative combinations.

Even sequence while still an issue, seems far less important here than in other transitions.

Here, also, we see our first examples of moment-to-moment transitions.

Though the latter type only accounts for four percent of the total, such sequences contrast strikingly with the Western traditions exemplified by Kirby and Herge.

Rather than acting as a bridge between separate moments, the reader here must assemble a single moment using scattered fragments.

But, most striking of all is the substantial presence of the fifth type of transition, a type rarely seen in the West.

TASH
IN EXAMINING SEVERAL JAPANESE ARTISTS, WE FIND SIMILAR PROPORTIONS TO TEZUKA'S, INCLUDING A HIGH INCIDENCE OF THE FIFTH TYPE.

WHY?

LENGTH MAY BE ONE OF THE FACTORS AT WORK HERE. MOST JAPANESE COMICS FIRST APPEAR IN ENORMOUS ANTHOLOGY TITLES WHERE THE PRESSURE ISN'T AS GREAT ON ANY ONE INSTALLMENT TO SHOW A LOT "HAPPENING."

WHEN INDIVIDUAL FEATURES ARE COLLECTED, THEY MAY RUN FOR THOUSANDS OF PAGES.

IN JAPAN, DOZENS OF PANELS CAN BE DEVOTED TO PORTRAYING SLOW CINEMATIC MOVEMENT OR TO SETTING A MOOD.

BUT I DON'T THINK LONERGermo STORIES ARE THE ONLY FACTOR, OR EVEN THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE.

I BELIEVE THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE MORE FUNDAMENTAL TO THIS PARTICULAR EAST/WEST SPLIT.

JAPANESE COMICS MAY BE HEIRS TO THIS TRADITION, IN THE WAY THEY SO OFTEN EMPHASIZE BEING HERE OVER GETTING THERE.

THROUGH THESE AND OTHER STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES, THE JAPANESE OFFER A VISION OF COMICS VERY DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN.

FOR IN JAPAN, MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, COMICS IS AN ART.
THE IDEA THAT ELEMENTS OMITTED FROM A WORK OF ART ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THAT WORK AS THOSE INCLUDED HAS BEEN A SPECIALITY OF THE EAST FOR CENTURIES.

IN THE VISUAL ARTS THIS HAS MEANT A GREATER FOCUS ON FIGURE/GROUND RELATIONSHIPS AND "NEGATIVE SPACE."

"WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS PAINTING BY AL HILD IS CALLED?"

IN MUSIC TOO, WHILE THE WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION WAS EMphasIZING THE CONTINUOUS, CONNECTED WORLDS OF MELODY AND HARMONY, EASTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC WAS EQUALLY CONCERNED WITH THE ROLE OF SILENCE!

THE TRADITIONAL EMPHASIS IN WESTERN ART UPON THE PRIMACY OF FOREGROUND SUBJECTS AND CONTINUOUSNESS OF TONES GAVE WAY TO FRAGMENTATION AND A NEW AWARENESS OF THE PICTURE PLANE.

IN THE LAST CENTURY OR TWO, AS WESTERN CULTURAL INFLUENCES SWEEPED THE EAST, SO TOO HAVE EASTERN AND AFRICAN IDEAS OF FRAGMENTATION AND RHYTHM SWEEP THE WEST.

FROM DEBUSSY TO STRAVINSKY TO COUETT BASE, WESTERN MUSIC HAS GRADUALLY INCORPORATED A STRONG AWARENESS OF THE POWER OF FRAGMENTATION AND INTERVALS.

IN THEATRE, THE IDEA THAT "LESS IS MORE" HAS REAL PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS. ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SHOES IN HISTORY IS "THE FANTASTICS" — A PLAY WHOSE ENTIRE SET CAME IN THREE PIECES: A TATTERED BANNER, A STICK AND A CARDBOARD MOON.

FROM "DEBI" TO "THE BIG N"
WE ASSUME AS READERS THAT WE WILL KNOW WHAT ORDER TO READ PANELS IN, BUT THE BUSINESS OF ARRANGING THOSE PANELS IS ACTUALLY QUITE COMPLEX.

AS CLOSURE BETWEEN PANELS BECOMES MORE INTENSE, READER INTERPRETATION BECOMES FAR MORE ELASTIC.

AND MANAGING IT BECOMES MORE COMPLICATED FOR THE CREATOR.

READERS FACED WITH PANELS LIKE THESE WILL HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS.

BY CONSTRUCTING WHOLE IMAGES BASED ON THESE FRAGMENTS, READERS ARE PERFORMING CLOSURE, JUST AS...

WHOOSH!

CLAK! CLAK! CLAK!

= Slip Slip =

SOME ARTISTS CAN BE DELIBERATELY AMBIGUOUS, OF COURSE, AND OFFER US NO STRICT INTERPRETATION TO GO ON.

CLOSURE CAN BE A POWERFUL FORCE WITHIN PANELS AS WELL AS BETWEEN THEM, WHEN ARTISTS CHOOSE TO SHOW ONLY A SMALL PIECE OF THE PICTURE.

COMICS CAN BE MADDENINGLY VAGUE ABOUT WHAT IT SHOWS US.

BY SHOWING LITTLE OR NOTHING OF A GIVEN SCENE--

--AND OFFERING ONLY CLUES TO THE READER--

--THE ARTIST CAN TRIGGER ANY NUMBER OF IMAGES IN THE READER'S IMAGINATION.

--AN ACTION OR--

OW! OW!

STOP THAT!

DING! DING!

OW!

OW!
Whatever the mysteries within each panel, it's the power of closure between panels that I find the most interesting.

There's something strange and wonderful that happens in this blank ribbon of paper.

Now, most of you should have no trouble perceiving that you're in a kitchen, from those four panels alone.

With a high degree of closure, your mind is taking four picture fragments and constructing an entire scene out of those fragments.

But the scene your mind constructs from those four panels is a very different place from the scene constructed from our traditional one-panel establishing shot.

Look again.

You've been in kitchens before, you know what a pot on the boil sounds like; do you only hear it in that first panel?

We already know that comics ask the mind to work as a sort of in-betweener -- filling in the gaps between panels as an animator might -- but I believe there's still more to it than that.

Let's take another look at the fifth type of transition, the one so popular in Japan.

And what about the chopping sound? Does that only last a panel or does it persist? Can you smell this kitchen? Feel it? Taste it?

Comics is a mono-sensorial medium, it relies on only one of the senses to convey a world of experience.

We represent sound through devices such as word balloons.

But what of the other four?

Within these panels, we can only convey information visually.

But between panels, none of our senses are required at all.

Which is why all of our senses are engaged!
SEVERAL TIMES ON EVERY PAGE THE READER IS RELEASED—LIKE A TAME PIGGY INTO THE OPEN AIR OF IMAGINATION.

THEN CAUGHT BY THE OUTSTRETCHED ARMS OF THE EVER-PRESENT NEXT PANEL!

CAUGHT QUICKLY SO AS NOT TO LET THE READER FALL INTO CONFUSION OR BOREDOM.

BUT IS IT POSSIBLE THAT CLOSURE CAN BE SO MANAGED IN SOME CASES?

BUT REALISTIC IMAGES HAVE A BUMPIER RIDE. THEIRS IS A PRIMARILY VISUAL EXISTENCE WHICH DOESN'T PASS EASILY INTO THE REALM OF IDEAS.

AND SO, WHAT SEEMED LIKE A CONTINUOUS SERIES OF MOMENTS IN THE LAST EXAMPLE, HERE LOOKS A LITTLE MORE LIKE A SERIES OF STILL PICTURES.

TO ME ANYWAY, THESE THINGS ARE ALL SUBJECTIVE!

---THAT THE READER MIGHT LEARN TO FLY?

IN CHAPTER TWO, WE DISCUSSED VARIOUS TYPES OF ICONIC AND NON-ICONIC DRAWING STYLES.

DO THESE AFFECT CLOSURE?

SIMILARLY, I THINK WHEN COMICS ART VEERS CLOSER TO CONCERNS OF THE PICTURE PLANE, CLOSURE CAN BE MORE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE, THOUGH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.

A GOOD RULE OF THUMB IS THAT IF READERS ARE PARTICULARLY AWARE OF THE ART IN A GIVEN STORY—

NOW IT'S THE UNIFYING PROPERTIES OF DESIGN THAT MAKE US MORE AWARE OF THE PAGE AS A WHOLE, RATHER THAN ITS INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS, THE PANELS.

SINCE CARTOONS ALREADY EXIST AS CONCEPTS FOR THE READER, THEY TEND TO FLOW EASILY THROUGH THE CONCEPTUAL TERRITORY BETWEEN PANELS.

I THINK THE ANSWER IS YES.

IDEAS FLOWING INTO ONE ANOTHER SEAMLESSLY.

OF COURSE, MAKING THE READER WORK A LITTLE MAY BE JUST WHAT THE ARTIST IS TRYING TO DO. ONCE AGAIN, IT'S ALL A MATTER OF PERSONAL PREFERENCE.

---THEN CLOSURE IS PROBABLY NOT HAPPENING WITHOUT SOME EFFORT.
The Comics
Creator asks us to join in a silent dance of the seen and the unseen.

Visible and the invisible.

This dance is unique to comics. No other art form gives so much to its audience while asking so much from them as well.

This is why I think it's a mistake to see comics as a mere hybrid of the graphic arts and prose fiction.

What happens between these panels is a kind of magic only comics can create.

All I can do is make assumptions about you and hope that they're correct.

Just as we all assume, every day, that there's more to life than meets the eye.

--And a world of imagination.

All I ask of you is a little faith.