

From *Show and Tell* (graphic essay)

SCOTT MCCLOUD

Scott McCloud (b. 1960) decided to become a comics artist when he was in tenth grade. After graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in illustration, McCloud worked in the production department of DC Comics until he began publishing his own comic series, “Zot!” and “Destroy!!” McCloud is the author of *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) and *Reinventing Comics* (2000). In *Understanding Comics*, from which the following excerpts are taken, a caricature of McCloud guides the reader through a study of what he calls sequential art by tracing the relationship between words and images.

Exploring the Text

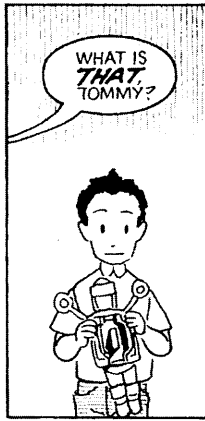
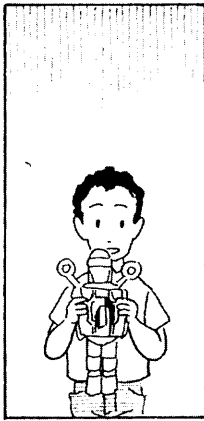
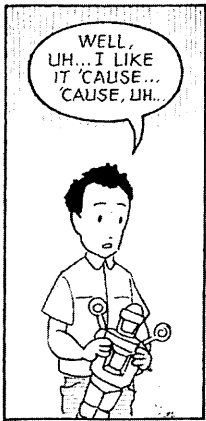
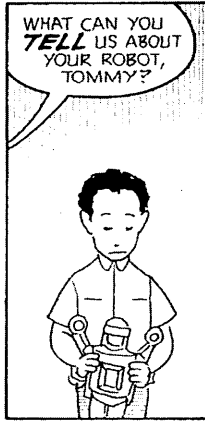
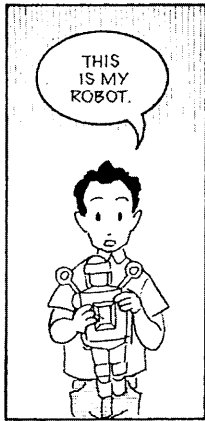
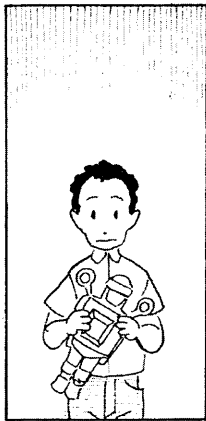
1. Scott McCloud begins with a series of sixteen panels of a boy demonstrating how his toy robot turns into an airplane. Six of the panels have no words, yet the vignette manages to establish both pathos and ethos. How does McCloud accomplish this? Consider the drawings and the words separately, and then consider them together.
2. Why does McCloud use the show-and-tell vignette to open the piece? How does it support the piece’s main idea?
3. On page 741, McCloud defines comics (although he says it isn’t *his* definition) as “words and pictures in combination.” He suggests that this is essentially show-and-tell. Trace how he uses classification to expand and refine his definition. How does he provide examples for each of his categories?
4. On page 745, McCloud uses dance as a metaphor to explain the possibilities in the relationship between words and images. Do you consider the words or the illustrations more powerful in illustrating that relationship? Can either stand alone?
5. What audience is McCloud addressing? In what ways does he acknowledge that audience? How does he establish ethos?
6. McCloud uses comic-book conventions such as exaggerated facial expressions to show emotion and a character walking left to right to create a sense of slowness and difficulty. Find other examples of these conventions, and compare them to the conventions of language he employs.
7. Charles McGrath, an editor of the *New York Times Book Review*, wrote in a 2004 essay “Not Funnies,” that comic books are “what novels used to be — an accessible, vernacular form with mass appeal.” He says that if the “highbrows” are right, they are a “form perfectly suited to our dumbed-down culture and collective attention deficit.” How might Scott McCloud respond to McGrath and the “highbrows”? How does McCloud address the gap between high and low culture?
8. How would you describe the tone of “Show and Tell” (p. 738)? How does McCloud create it? Are the words or images more instrumental in creating the tone? Are there places where the words and images create different tones?

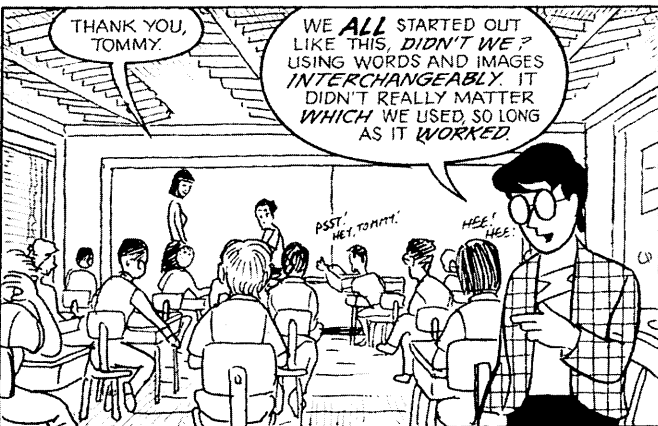
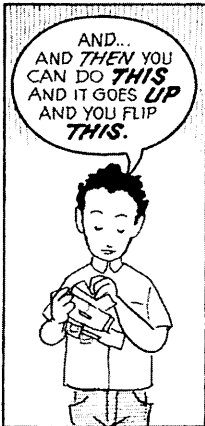
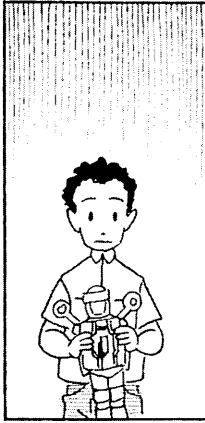
CHAPTER SIX

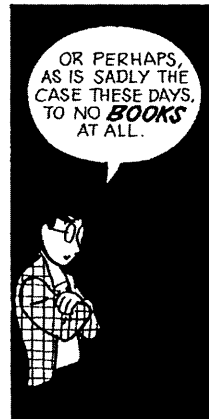
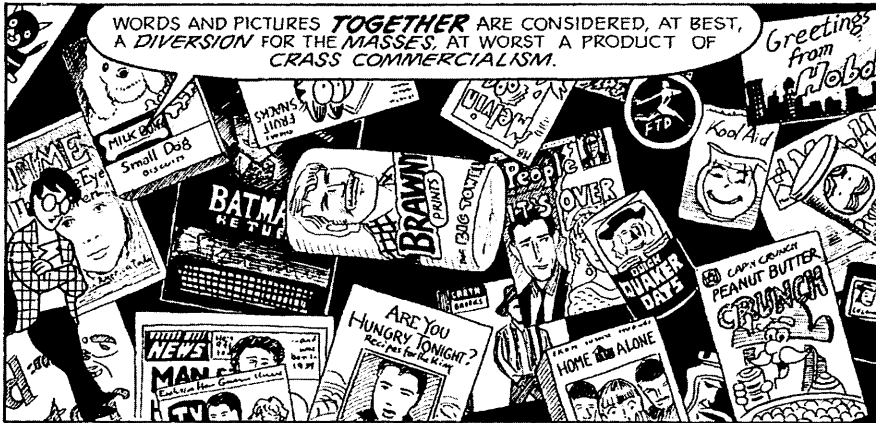
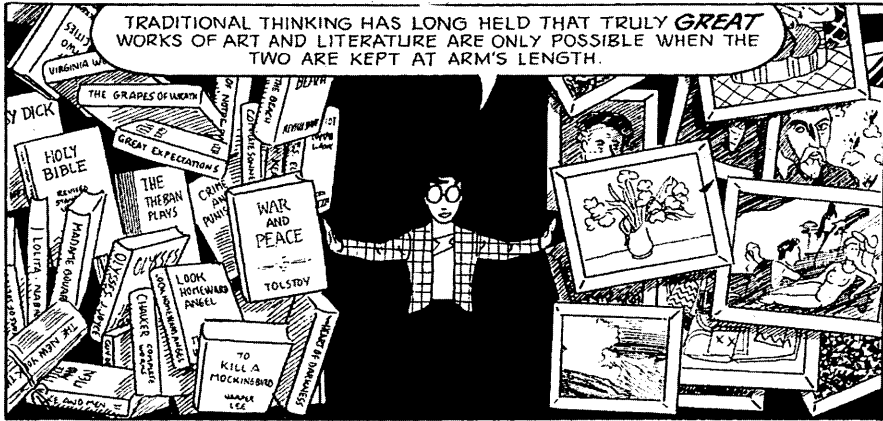
SHOW AND TELL.

...um. Chananao vero po
...primogranum huum:
...regum; et amotto
...et ubulcum et fam
...um. July leui: flay
...ad- et lud a mag
...grum fatur
...ro bap.

...ph
...othan
...uly rabi
...ad. July la
...la-dilom-ffe
...um- abohim
...n fuit qmna
...naaty- et reat
...non: abia r a
...July dilon: by
...an r charan. July
...di fuit rpa-qui
...za edon: at
...cabid. Sale
...ite r duma
...dr: rpa
...br bodra. Il
...us: rpa
...pnamorut
...regmanit
...pccollit r
...cumen cunaria r








WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMBINATION MAY NOT BE MY *DEFINITION* OF COMICS, BUT THE COMBINATION HAS HAD *TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE* ON ITS *GROWTH*.


com-ics (kom'iks)n. plural form, used with a singular. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce response in the reader. 2: Superheroes, costumes, tight villainous who want to wreck the world.



A HUGE RANGE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCES CAN BE *PORTRAYED* IN COMICS THROUGH EITHER WORDS OR PICTURES.





AS A RESULT--AND DESPITE ITS MANY *OTHER* POTENTIAL USES -- COMICS HAVE BECOME *FIRMLY IDENTIFIED* WITH THE ART OF *STORYTELLING*.



AND *INDEED*, WORDS AND PICTURES HAVE *GREAT* POWERS TO TELL STORIES WHEN CREATORS FULLY EXPLOIT THEM *BOTH*.

DADA
BIOGRAPHY
HORROR
ROMANCE
SURREALISM
BLANK
VERSE
HISTORICAL
FICTION
EPIC
POETRY
FOLK TALES
SOCIAL
ALLEGORY
EROTICA
ADAPTATIONS
RELIGIOUS
TOPICS
STREAM
OF CONSCIOUSNESS
SATIRE

SEQUENTIAL ART





AND SO FAR, WE'VE ONLY SEEN THE *TIP OF THE ICEBERG!*



AS CHILDREN, WE "SHOW AND TELL" *INTERCHANGEABLY* WORDS AND IMAGES COMBINING TO TRANSMIT A *CONNECTED SERIES OF IDEAS*.

IT'S NOT ONE OF THESE THINGS




THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WORDS AND PICTURES CAN *COMBINE* IN COMICS IS VIRTUALLY *UNLIMITED*.



BUT LET'S TRY TO BREAK IT DOWN INTO SOME DISTINCT *CATEGORIES*.



FIRST, WE HAVE THE **WORD SPECIFIC** COMBINATIONS, WHERE PICTURES **ILLUSTRATE**, BUT DON'T SIGNIFICANTLY **ADD** TO A LARGELY **COMPLETE** TEXT.



WE STUMBLED BACK TO THE APARTMENT SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN, **VOMITING** EVERY 20 YARDS.

JUDY GAVE ME HER KEYS AND SMILED.

THE **UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION** WAS ADOPTED BY THE **SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS** IN 1787 AND PUT INTO EFFECT IN 1789.

THEN THERE ARE **PICTURE SPECIFIC** COMBINATIONS WHERE WORDS DO LITTLE MORE THAN ADD A **SOUNDTRACK** TO A VISUALLY TOLD SEQUENCE.



HE **DID IT!**

MMM... MMM...

AND, OF COURSE, **DUO-SPECIFIC** PANELS IN WHICH BOTH WORDS AND PICTURES SEND ESSENTIALLY THE **SAME MESSAGE**.



GRIM-FACED, GEORGE LIFTED HIS LOLLYPOP.

BUT THE CAPTAIN'S MIGHTY BLOW **MISSES** ITS INTENDED TARGET!

BLAST! HE DODGED MY PUNCH AND I STRUCK THIS **BRICK WALL!**

HA! I DODGED YOU!

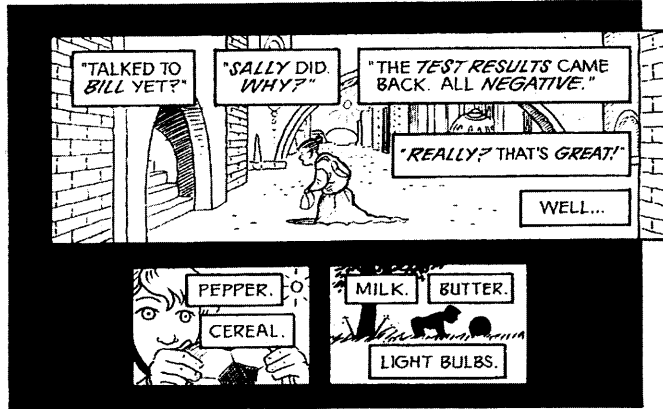
I FEEL SO SAD!

...THOUGHT AMY.

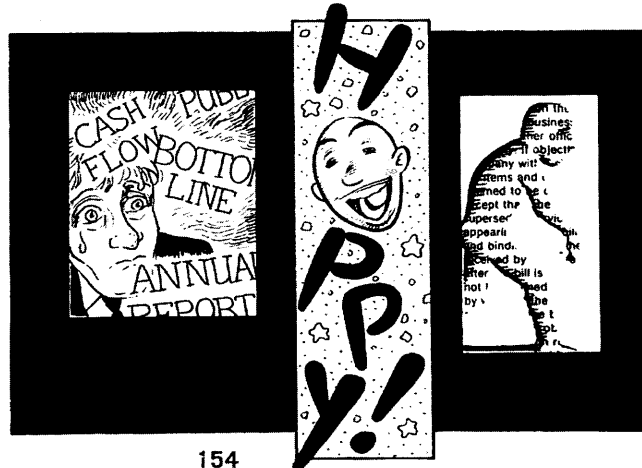
ANOTHER TYPE IS THE **ADDITIVE** COMBINATION WHERE WORDS **AMPLIFY** OR **ELABORATE** ON AN IMAGE OR **VICE VERSA**.



IN **PARALLEL** COMBINATIONS, WORDS AND PICTURES SEEM TO FOLLOW VERY DIFFERENT COURSES--WITHOUT **INTERSECTING**.



STILL ANOTHER OPTION IS THE **MONTAGE** WHERE WORDS ARE TREATED AS INTEGRAL PARTS OF THE PICTURE.



PERHAPS THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF WORD/PICTURE COMBINATION IS THE **INTERDEPENDENT**, WHERE WORDS AND PICTURES GO **HAND IN HAND** TO CONVEY AN IDEA THAT NEITHER COULD CONVEY ALONE.

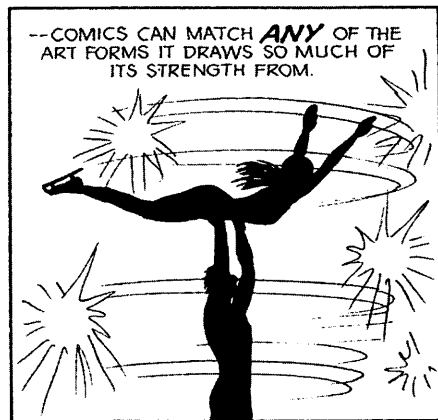
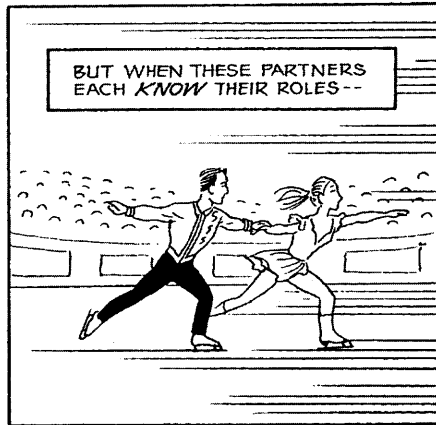
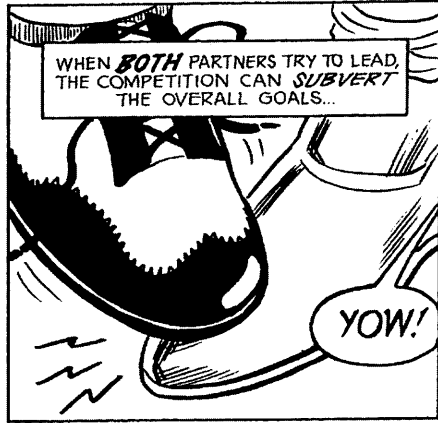


INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATIONS AREN'T ALWAYS AN **EQUAL BALANCE** THOUGH AND MAY FALL **ANYWHERE** ON A SCALE BETWEEN TYPES ONE AND TWO.

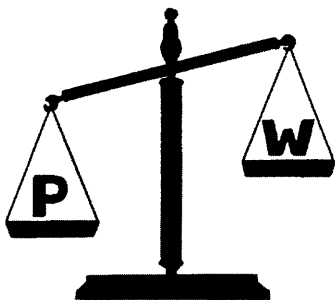
GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE MORE IS SAID WITH **WORDS**, THE MORE THE PICTURES CAN BE FREED TO GO EXPLORING AND **VICE VERSA**.

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$\frac{W}{P}$

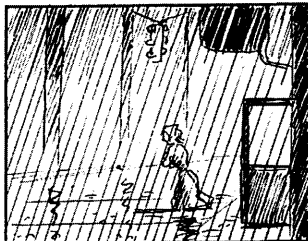
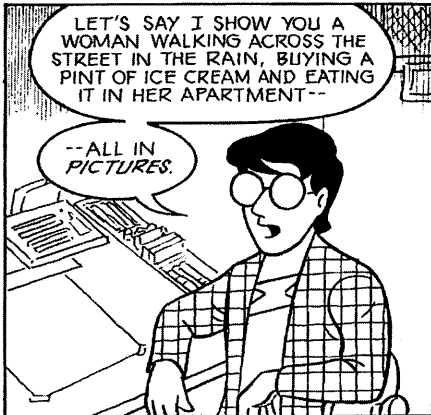


WHEN *PICTURES* CARRY THE WEIGHT OF CLARITY IN A SCENE, THEY FREE WORDS TO EXPLORE A WIDER AREA.



LET'S SAY I SHOW YOU A WOMAN WALKING ACROSS THE STREET IN THE RAIN, BUYING A PINT OF ICE CREAM AND EATING IT IN HER APARTMENT--

--ALL IN PICTURES.



WHEN A SCENE SHOWS YOU ALL YOU "NEED" TO KNOW, LIKE *THIS ONE*, THE LATITUDE FOR **SCRIPTING** GROWS ENORMOUSLY.

I MAY BE ALONE LIKE THIS FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

IT COULD BECOME AN **INTERNAL MONOLOGUE.**

(INTERDEPENDENT)

PERHAPS SOMETHING WILDLY **INCONGRUOUS**

"MISSION CONTROL, MISSION CONTROL, DO YOU READ ME?"

(PARALLEL)

MAYBE IT'S ALL JUST A BIG **ADVERTISEMENT.**

YOU'LL *Love* THE TASTE!

(INTERDEPENDENT)

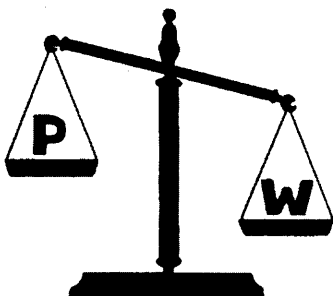
OR A CHANCE TO RUMINATE ON **BROADER TOPICS.**

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS...

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS...

(INTERDEPENDENT)

ON THE *OTHER* HAND, IF THE *WORDS* LOCK IN THE "MEANING" OF A SEQUENCE, THEN THE *PICTURES* CAN REALLY TAKE OFF.



I **CROSSED** THE STREET TO THE CONVENIENCE STORE. THE RAIN SOAKED INTO MY BOOTS.

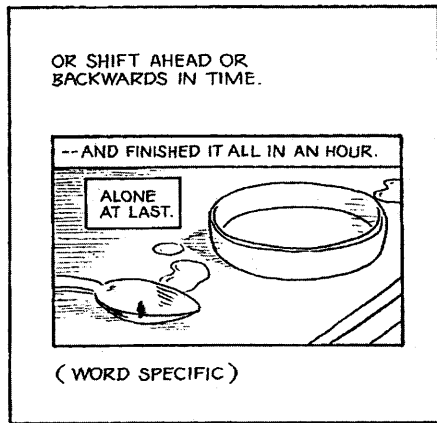
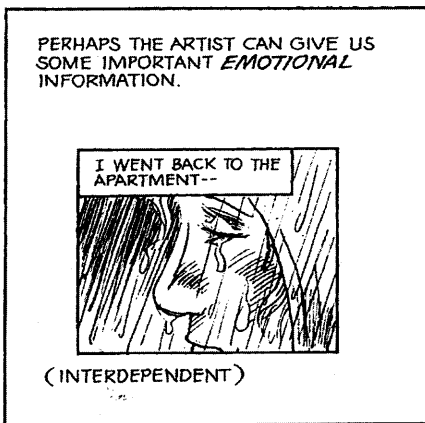
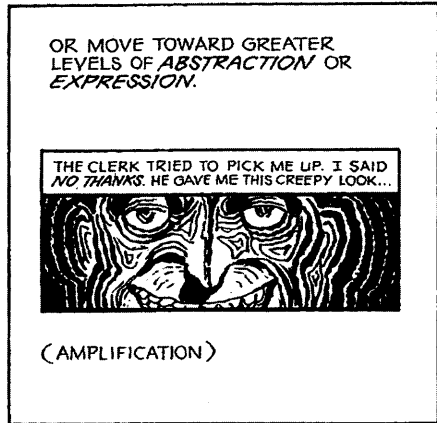
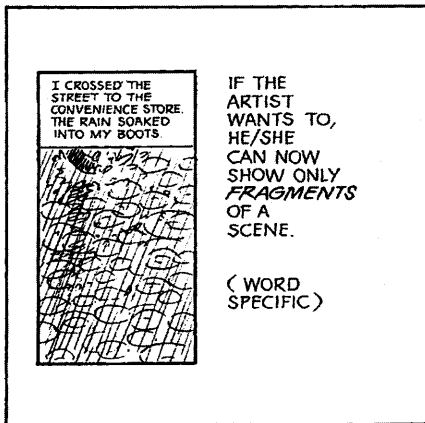
I **FOUND** THE LAST PINT OF CHOCOLATE CHIP CHOCOLATE CHIP IN THE FREEZER.

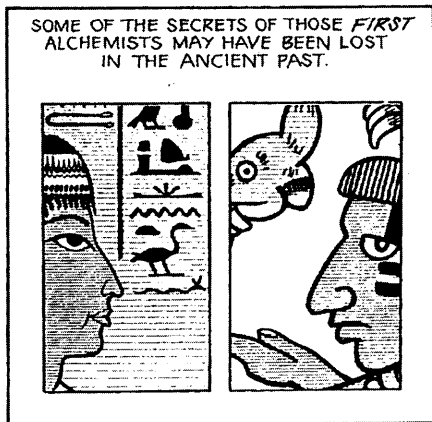
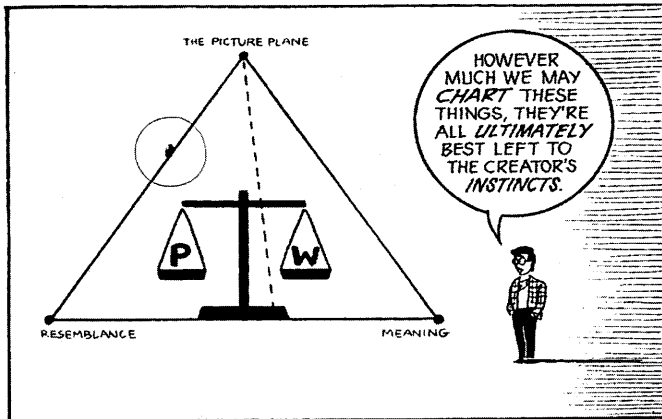
THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID **NO THANKS**. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK...

I **WENT** BACK TO THE APARTMENT--

--AND **FINISHED** IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

ALONE AT LAST.





SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THOSE *FIRST* ALCHEMISTS MAY HAVE BEEN LOST IN THE ANCIENT PAST.

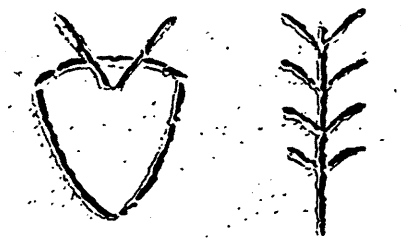


BUT WE HAVE SOME POWERFUL MAGIC RIGHT HERE IN THE 20TH CENTURY, TOO!

THE RICHNESS OF MODERN LANGUAGE IS AN IRREPLACEABLE COMMODITY!



-- WHEN TO TELL WAS TO SHOW--



-- AND TO SHOW WAS TO TELL.