

## 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 FINE 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.



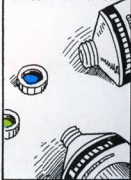
COLOR CAN BE A *FORMIDABLE ALLY* FOR ARTISTS IN ANY VISUAL MEDIUM.



YET IN *COMICS* THE CAREER OF COLOR HAS BEEN, WELL... A BIT "*SPOTTY*."



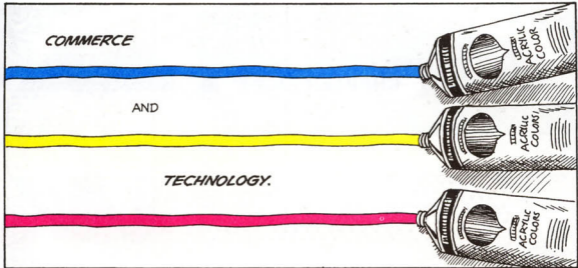
THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR THE *STORMY RELATIONSHIP* BETWEEN COMICS AND COLOR, BUT MOST CAN BE *SUMMED UP* IN *TWO WORDS*...



COMMERCE

AND

TECHNOLOGY.

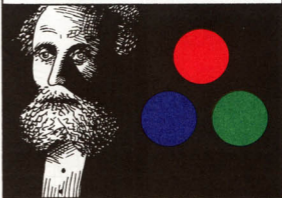


NOW **ALL** ASPECTS OF COMICS HISTORY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY **COMMERCE**. MONEY HAS A TREMENDOUS EFFECT ON WHAT IS AND **ISN'T** SEEN.

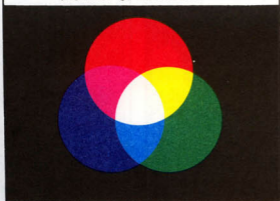
BUT **COLOR** IN COMICS HAS ALWAYS BEEN UNUSUALLY **SENSITIVE** TO THE **SHIFTING TIDES OF TECHNOLOGY**.



THE TECHNOLOGY OF COLOR REPRODUCTION WAS FIRST ANTICIPATED IN **1861** WHEN SCOTTISH PHYSICIST **SIR JAMES CLERK-MAXWELL** ISOLATED WHAT WE NOW CALL **THE THREE ADDITIVE PRIMARIES**.



THESE COLORS -- ROUGHLY, **RED, BLUE AND GREEN** -- WHEN PROJECTED TOGETHER ON A SCREEN IN **VARIOUS COMBINATIONS**, COULD REPRODUCE EVERY COLOR IN THE **VISIBLE SPECTRUM**.



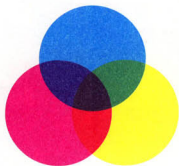
THEY WERE CALLED **ADDITIVE** BECAUSE THEY LITERALLY **ADDED UP TO PURE WHITE LIGHT**.



EIGHT YEARS LATER, FRENCH PIANIST **LOUIS DUCOS DU HAURON**\* DEVISED THE IDEA OF THREE **SUBTRACTIVE PRIMARIES**.



THESE COLORS -- CYAN, MAGENTA AND YELLOW\* -- CAN ALSO MIX TO PRODUCE ANY HUE IN THE VISIBLE SPECTRUM, BUT RATHER THAN ADDING LIGHT, THESE THREE DO IT BY **FILTERING IT OUT!**



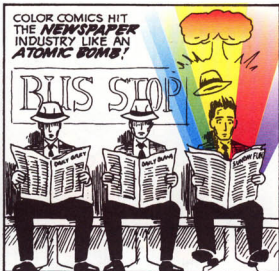
THIS SUBTRACTIVE EFFECT WAS ACHIEVED THROUGH TRANSPARENT SUBSTANCES SUCH AS CELLOPHANE, COLORED GLASS, WATER COLORS --



--OR PRINTERS' INK!



COLOR COMICS HIT THE **NEWSPAPER** INDUSTRY LIKE AN **ATOMIC BOMB!**



COLOR BOOSTED **SALES**, BUT IT ALSO BOOSTED **COSTS!** MEASURES WERE TAKEN TO **STREAMLINE** THE PROCESS AND MAKE IT MORE **COST-EFFECTIVE.**



AND THE STANDARD "**FOUR COLOR**" PROCESS TOOK OVER.



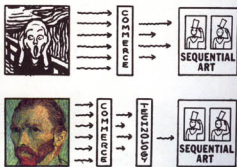
THIS PROCESS RESTRICTED THE INTENSITY OF THE THREE PRIMARIES TO 100%, 50% AND 20%, USING **BLACK INK** FOR THE LINE WORK.



THE LOOK OF THESE COLORS, HELD BY **BOLD, SIMPLE OUTLINES**, AND REPRODUCED ON **CHEAP NEWSPRINT** EVENTUALLY BECAME THE LOOK OF COMICS IN AMERICA.



SO, WHILE THE EXPRESSIVE ART OF **LINE** WAS SUBJECT TO THE **SUBTRACTIVE FILTER** OF COMMERCE ON ITS WAY TO COMICS, **COLOR** WAS SUBJECT TO THE FILTERS OF BOTH COMMERCE AND **TECHNOLOGY!**



\* FOR OPAQUE PIGMENTS: RED, YELLOW AND BLUE. I KNOW, IT'S TOTALLY WEIRD.

TO COUNTERACT THE DULLING EFFECTS OF NEWSPRINT AND TO STAND OUT FROM THE COMPETITION, COSTUMED HEROES WERE CLAD IN BRIGHT, PRIMARY COLORS AND FOUGHT IN A BRIGHT PRIMARY WORLD!



THE COLORS WERE PICKED FOR STRENGTH AND CONTRASTED STRONGLY WITH ONE ANOTHER, BUT ON MOST PAGES NO ONE COLOR DOMINATED.



WITHOUT THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF SINGLE-COLOR SATURATION, THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF AMERICAN COLOR COMICS --



-- WAS OFTEN CANCELLED OUT TO AN EMOTIONAL GREY.



AS ALWAYS, THERE WERE SOME EXCEPTIONS, BUT THIS WAS THE OVERALL TREND.



HOWEVER, WHILE COMICS COLORS WERE LESS THAN EXPRESSIONISTIC, THEY WERE FIXED WITH A NEW ICONIC POWER. BECAUSE COSTUME COLORS REMAINED EXACTLY THE SAME, PANEL AFTER PANEL, THEY CAME TO SYMBOLIZE CHARACTERS IN THE MIND OF THE READER.

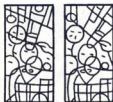


MANY SEE THE SUPERHERO AS A FORM OF MODERN MYTHOLOGY. IF SO, THIS ASPECT OF COLOR MAY PLAY A PART.

SYMBOLS ARE THE STUFF OF WHICH GODS ARE MADE.



ANOTHER PROPERTY OF FLAT COLORS IS THEIR TENDENCY TO EMPHASIZE THE SHAPE OF OBJECTS, BOTH ANIMATE AND INANIMATE --





--AS ANY CHILD WHO HAS EVER "COLORED-BY-NUMBERS" KNOWS INSTINCTIVELY.



THESE COLORS **OBJECTIFY** THEIR SUBJECTS. WE BECOME MORE AWARE OF THE **PHYSICAL FORM** OF OBJECTS THAN IN **BLACK AND WHITE**.

A GAME IN MOTION BECOMES A BALL IN AIR. A FACE SHOWING EMOTION BECOMES A HEAD AND TWO HANDS.



THE WORLD TAKES ON THE CHILDHOOD REALITY OF THE **PLAYGROUND** AND RECALLS A TIME WHEN SHAPE **PRECEDED** MEANING. OBLONG SWING SETS. CYLINDRICAL JUNGLE GYMS. THE WONDER OF **THINGS!**



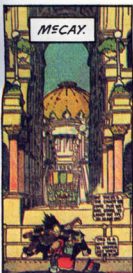
DOESN'T IT **FOLLOW** THEN THAT THE MASTERS OF **FLAT-COLOR** COMICS ARE, ABOVE ALL, MASTERS OF **FORM** AND **COMPOSITION**?



KIRBY.



MCCAY.



COLE.



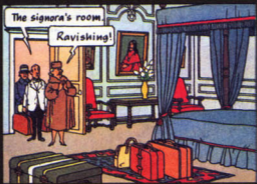
FROM **STEVE DITKO** TO **CARL BARKS** TO **F. CRAIG RUSSELL**, THAT LOVE OF SHAPES PERSISTS IN WORLDS FAIRLY **GLOWING** WITH THE MYSTERY OF **FIRST ENCOUNTERS**.

ANY WONDER THEN THAT COMICS IN AMERICA HAS BEEN SO RELUCTANT TO "**GROW UP**"?

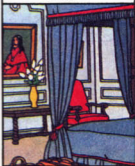


IN EUROPE HERGE CAPTURED THE MAGIC OF SUCH FLAT COLORS WITH UNPRECEDENTED SUBTLETY.

The signora's room.  
Ravisking!



HERGÉ CREATED A KIND OF *DEMOCRACY OF FORM* IN WHICH NO SHAPE WAS ANY LESS IMPORTANT THAN ANY *OTHER*-- A COMPLETELY OBJECTIVE WORLD.



COMICS PRINTING WAS SUPERIOR IN EUROPE AND FOR HERGÉ, FLAT COLORS WERE A PREFERENCE, NOT A NECESSITY.

BUT OTHERS SUCH AS *CLAVELOUX*, *CAZA* AND *MOEBIUS* SAW IN THEIR SUPERIOR PRINTING AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH A MORE INTENSE *SUBJECTIVE* PALETTE.

SOME OF THIS WORK BEGAN REACHING AMERICA IN THE 70's, INSPIRING MANY YOUNG ARTISTS TO LOOK BEYOND THEIR FOUR-COLOR WALLS.



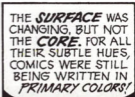
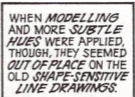
SUDDENLY IT SEEMED POSSIBLE FOR COLOR TO TAKE ON A CENTRAL ROLE.

COLORS COULD EXPRESS A DOMINANT MOOD.

TONES AND MODELLING COULD ADD DEPTH.

WHOLE SCENES COULD BE VIRTUALLY ABOUT COLOR!





UNFORTUNATELY, COLOR IS STILL AN *EXPENSIVE* OPTION AND HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN IN THE HANDS OF LARGER, MORE CONSERVATIVE PUBLISHERS.



