



# The Ampersand

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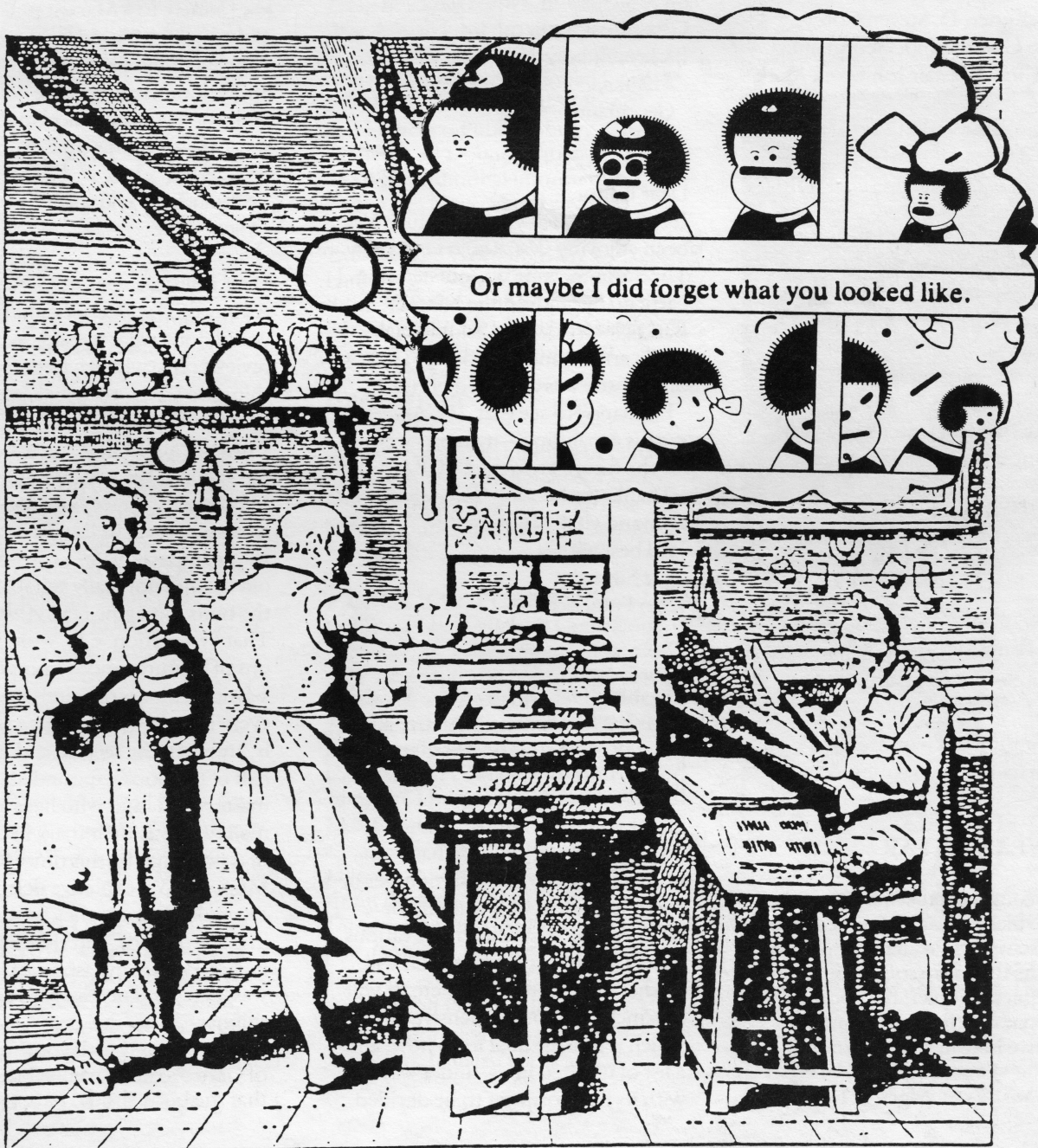
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*Special Issue:*

# COMICS



*The thought balloon of this Hartlem pressman contains a fragment of Love's Savage Fury. ©1986 Mark Newgarden (RAW 8)*

## Photographic Novels: Ink Theater

PHOTOGRAPHIC NOVELS — A HYBRID OF COMIC books and movies, published as magazines or books — flourish abroad, but are rarely seen in the U.S. We live in a photographic age, but most Americans' diet of dramatic stories comes not from print, but from the photographic dramas of TV and movies. In other countries, audiences feast on picture books for adults that range in quality from newsprint soap operas in coarse b&w halftones, to dramas by leading writers and designers, printed in full colour. This ink theater, or ink cinema, is aimed at all classes, from the semi-literate to sophisticated intellectuals.

Story tellers and audiences since ancient times have liked seeing dramas acted out by real people. The appeal of photographic novels is similar to that of theater. The audience — literate and illiterate alike — can observe gesture, expression, costume, setting, and light. Great storytellers like Shakespeare and Molière were able to make contact with all classes, educated or not.

The photographic novel, while requiring some level of literacy, can also reach out to a wide audience, because so much information is conveyed visually. Like the comic book, the photographic novel is accessible to a semi-literate audience, and can often serve to improve reading skills. How many of us learned to read by pouring over comic books at an early age, relying on pictures for clues to a word's meaning? If picture books are so effective in helping children to read, why, given the enormous problem of adult illiteracy we face in America, do we have so few available for adults? Teachers of adult literacy classes clamor for elementary reading texts that speak to the interests and intelligence of older students. If the photographic novel can help improve literacy, that is justification enough for pursuing it. And why not pursue it at a high artistic level, one that can compare with the very best of theater and cinema?

U.S. publishers appear lately to be taking a more generous look at the semi-literate reader. Although the photographic novel has barely made a mark in this country, there is rapidly growing interest in graphic novels and literary comic books which are drawn with pen and ink. The old-fashioned attitude among some fiction editors that picture stories are only for kids seems, at long last, to be changing.

Publishers see a strong, potential market in the under-forty crowd — the baby-boom, TV generation — and their voracious appetite for visual communication. For many of this audience, picture books are an outgrowth of interest in movies and TV, not merely a childish regression.

The old literary guard may see the advent of graphic novels as an onslaught of "visual noise," but can't it just as easily be seen as part of the development of a universal, visual language? Picture-communication is a democratic form, crossing language barriers, reaching people with marginal reading skills, and, at its best, attaining the highest artistic standards. One need only look to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* for corroboration.

Initially rejected by a number of publishers, Spiegelman's graphic story of his family's ordeal in the Holocaust was published in 1986 by Pantheon, an emerging pioneer in the field of graphic novels. Today, *Maus*' sales approach 80,000 and are going strong. Twelve foreign language editions are in the works.

Undoubtedly, the accessibility of Spiegelman's comic book form is attracting an audience who normally would not read about the Holocaust. And admiring readers who never thought they would pick up a comic book have discovered one of brilliant artistic and literary quality. Pantheon is exploring this market further with *Read Yourself Raw*, an anthology of avant garde comics originally published in *Raw* by Françoise Mouly (Spiegelman's wife), and *Agony* by Mark Beyer. Even though *Maus* is drawn in ink, and is not photographic, there is enough similarity in forms to suggest that a quality photographic novel could have similar success.

Shouldn't American publishers take the graphic novel further, and enter into serious competition with the TV and movie studios? Many foreign publishers have already successfully demonstrated that cinematography can be translated into ink on paper.

The technology is at hand. Low-cost, desktop computers are already capable of combining text and images swiftly, and at the hands of a single designer. An array of technical specialists is no longer needed to produce visual/textual play. Using a microcomputer like the Macintosh, one will soon be able to grab frames from videotape, turn them into paint documents, and make process color separations direct to film. While in the paint document stage, it will be possible to add type, silhouette a figure, combine with figures from other documents, alter contrast or color, or paint on the image. With this kind of technology becoming affordable — perhaps under \$15,000 — it will soon be possible for movie studios, filmmakers, video artists, TV producers, or drama departments to work with graphic designers to bring their work easily to the printed page.

There are those who fear that the graphic novel will bring a diminishment of the literary tradition. They declare their love for books which leave all imagery to the reader's imagination. But the graphic novel represents an addition to — rather than a reduction of — the literary tradition. It translates into print the popular forms of theater & film, drawing to itself some people who would otherwise not be reading at all. It creates a bridge for adults who want to learn to read, but aren't yet able to tackle conventional books. The graphic novel, rather than replacing or detracting from the literary experience, expands what a book might do, and whom it might reach.

The following selections are a sample of photographic novels being produced now in Japan, Latin America and France. They are publications which have recreated, on paper, the experience of theater, TV, and cinema, and they are just a hint of what the future may hold for the printed book in the U.S.

*Lance Hidy*

**INK THEATER**

*The Bald Soprano*

Eugene Ionesco

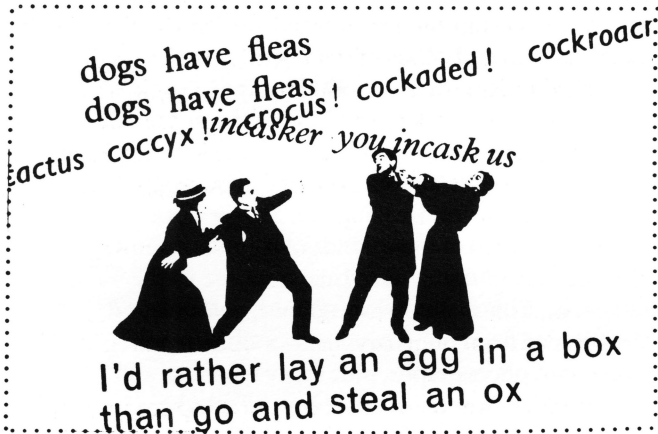
Typographical interpretation by Massin

Photographic interpretation by Henry Cohen

Based on the Nicolas Bataille Paris production

Translated by Donald M. Allen

Published in the U.S. by Grove Press, 1965



In this example of "ink theater," the page becomes a stage, usually with the actors presented in full figure. *The Bald Soprano* is a very conscious attempt to capture a particular acting company, with their costumes, their stylized gestures and postures, and stark set and lighting. Unlike a comic book, speech balloons are used infrequently, and the type is modulated to create the illusion of vocal sounds.

**INK THEATER WITH CINEMATIC AND CARTOON EFFECTS**

*Daughters of the Night*

By Jean Teulé

*Heavy Metal* magazine, Winter 1986, pp. 34-75



Tuelés's stories would appear to be descended from Cohen and Massin's work in *The Bald Soprano*. He too uses high-contrast photographs of his actors, whose costumes & poses have an artfulness which resembles theater more than the realism of film. But he uses cinematic techniques such as zooms, and close-ups. He has added color and speech balloons, and draws some of the figures in cartoon style. The visual techniques in *Daughters of the Night* could be approximated on a computer either with a video hook-up (camera or VCR), or scanning from photographic prints.

**INK TV**

*Amor Indestructible*

"Fotonovela Linda: Un Mundo de Emociones en una Fotonovela"

Starring Leticia Perdigon and Fortino Salazar

Director General: Carlos Vigil

Argumento y Adaptación: Guillermo Z. Vigil

Realización: Gonzalez Marquez

Coordinación: Nashely Gonzalez

Fotografía: Marcos Gonzalez, Jr.

Laboratorio: Marco Antonio Salgado

(U.S. 85¢)



The visual techniques of TV and movies are similar, but on TV we tend to see more low-budget productions like this Mexican *fotonovela*, which appears to have been made in only a few days. "Indestructible Love" resembles a TV soap opera, with its popular actors and heart-wrenching story. The sets are simple and the actors few. Speech balloons are pasted right on the photographs, and then shot as a coarse halftone. A poster of a popular *fotonovela* actor is printed on the inside of the fold-out cover, which can be removed from the staples and taped on the wall.



## INK MOVIES

### *The Dark Barge*

By Hiroyuki Itsuki

Creative directors: Hiroyuki Itsuki and Eiko Ishioka

Art direction: Eiko Ishioka

Graphic designers: Eiko Ishioka and Kyoko Inui

Photographer: Kazumio Kurigami

Assistant photographer: Hirotugu Nushioka

Actors: Teruhiko Yumura, Armelle Car de Lespinay

Stylist: Caroline Lancrenon

Makeup and hair stylist: Linda Mason

Editor: Kinjiro Ando

Coordinator: Yumiko Hori

Hiroyuki Itsuki is a very popular novelist in Japan whose work has been adapted for plays, movies, & TV, but never illustrated in print. The Japanese art director, Eiko Ishioka, collaborated with the author to make a movie on paper. She explains, "I treated the novel like a scenario, & the photographs were shot as scenes on location, using lighting, props, and costumes, and directed just like a movie. But when I yelled 'Lights! Camera! Action!,' Kazumi Kurigami, who is equally at home with both cinematography and still photography, came forward with a Leica instead of a Panaflex. The article was published over six months in a monthly magazine for young women."

## BEYOND MOVIES

### *The Vagabond Yata*

by Shibata Renzaburo (1917-78)

Graphic design: Tadanori Yokoo

Published by Shueisha, Tokyo, 1974

This book, *The Vagabond Yata*, written by Shibata Renzaburo, is a visionary work of design, exploding beyond the boundaries of cinema, into a kaleidoscope of color images and text. Done entirely through conventional photo-mechanical technology in 1974, it was a premonition of how computers would change the look of graphic design. This virtuoso display of graphic design was first serialized in a magazine, later published as a hardcover book.

It fits no category, but reflects the psychedelic era, including pop art and the Beatles rage. It can be compared with the Beatles' groundbreaking *Sgt. Pepper* album, which was a synthesis of many kinds of sounds, carefully edited and mixed. Possibly as a visual response to the Beatles' music, Yokoo used photographs, painting and drawings copied from photographs, woodblock prints combined with photographs, plus many typefaces and calligraphic styles. Sometimes the photographs bleed off a two-page spread, or tiny, silhouetted figures stand between lines of text. The variety seems endless, and could be a source of inspiration to American publishers and designers who are thinking about new forms for the book in the computer age.

