

CHAPTER EIGHT

A WORD ABOUT COLOR.

IN CHAPTER FIVE WE DEALT WITH THE EXPRESSIONISTIC POTENTIAL OF *LIVES* 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.

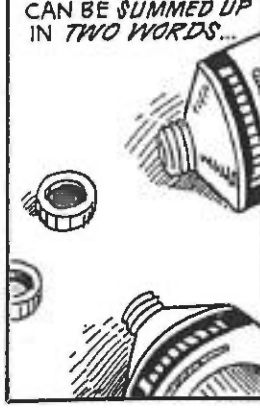


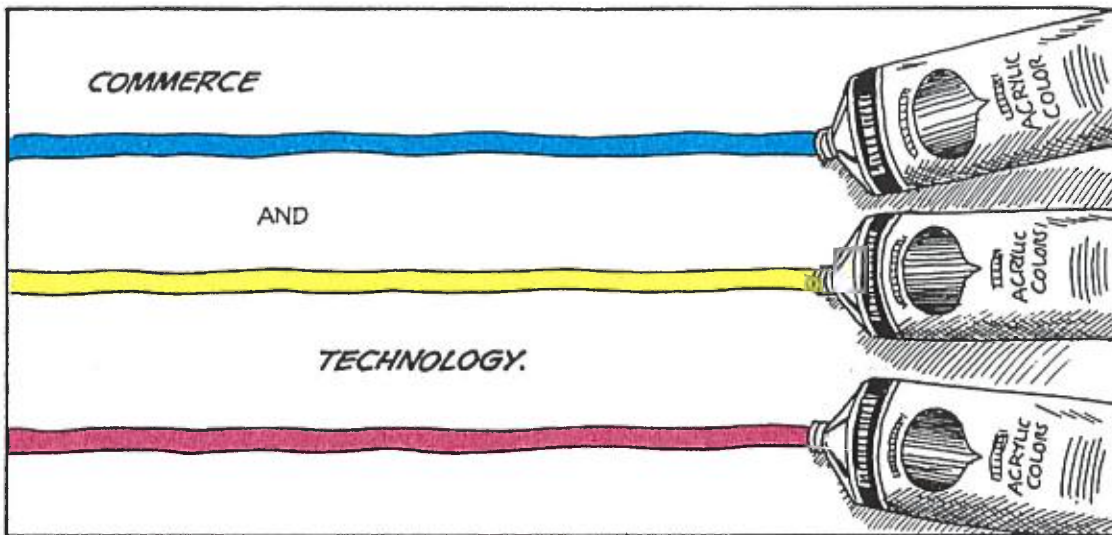
OTHERS, LIKE *KANDINSKY*, BELIEVED THAT COLORS COULD HAVE PROFOUND *PHYSICAL* AND *EMOTIONAL* EFFECTS ON PEOPLE.

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...





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.**

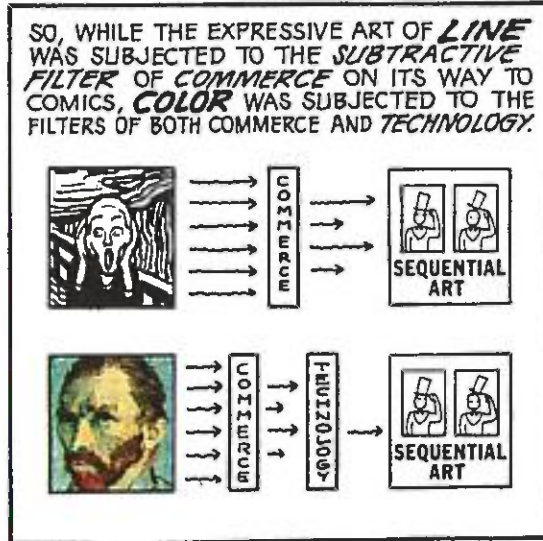
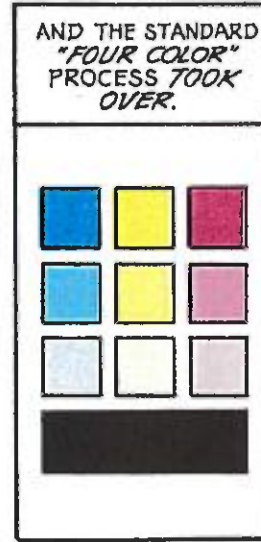
THESE COLORS -- ROUGHLY, **RED, BLUE** AND **GREEN** -- WHEN PROJECTED TOGETHER ON A SCREEN IN **VARIOUS COMBINATIONS**, COULD REPRODUCE EVERY COLOR IN THE **VISIBLE SPECTRUM.**

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

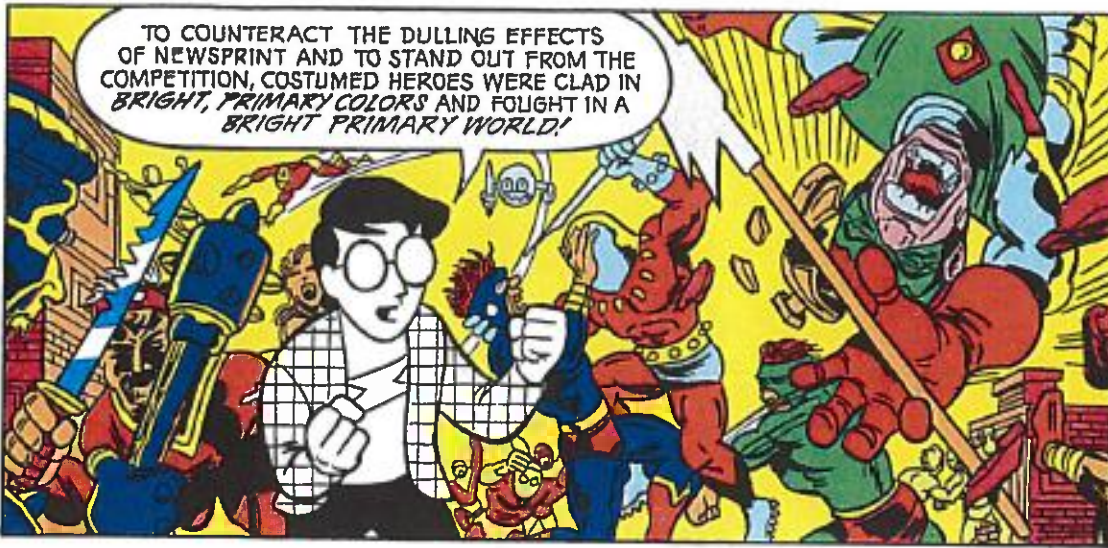
EIGHT YEARS LATER, FRENCH PIANIST **LOUIS DUCOS DU HAURON** * DEVISED THE IDEA OF THREE **SUBTRACTIVE** PRIMARIES.

* WHOM I **DON'T** HAVE A PICTURE OF.

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!**



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



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.

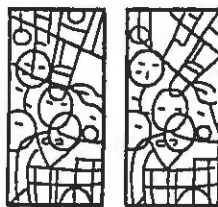


MANY SEE THE SUPERHERO AS A FORM OF *MODERN MYTHOLOGY*. IF SO, THIS ASPECT OF COLOR MAY PLAY A PART.

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.

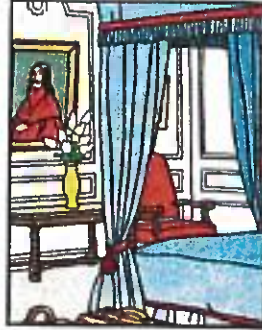
FROM *STEVE DITKO* TO *CARL BARKS* TO *P. CRAIG RUSSELL*, THAT LOVE OF SHAPES PERSISTS IN WORLDS FAIRLY *GLOWING* WITH THE MYSTERY OF *FIRST ENCOUNTERS*.

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.



HERGE 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 HERGE, 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.



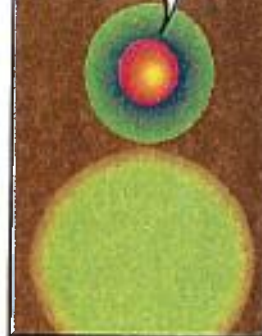
COLORS COULD EXPRESS A DOMINANT MOOD.



TONES AND MODELLING COULD ADD DEPTH.



WHOLE SCENES COULD BE VIRTUALLY ABOUT COLOR!





COLOR AS SENSATION,
COLOR AS ENVIRONMENT.

COLOR AS COLOR!



SINCE THE LATE 70'S, MORE AND MORE "UPSCALE" COLOR PROJECTS HAVE BEGUN APPEARING IN AMERICA.



SOME PUBLISHERS AT THE BEGINNING TRIED APPLYING THE TRADITIONAL "FOUR-COLOR" PROCESS TO BETTER PAPER WITH GARISH RESULTS.

TAKE THAT!



WHEN MODELLING AND MORE SUBTLE HUES WERE APPLIED, THOUGH, THEY SEEMED OUT OF PLACE ON THE OLD SHAPE-SENSITIVE LINE DRAWINGS.

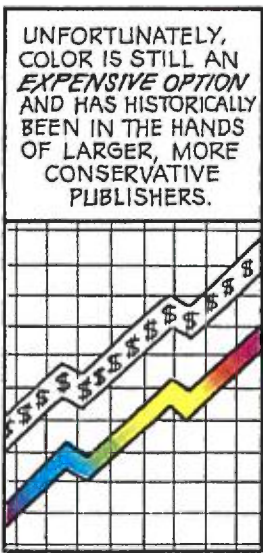
TAKE THAT!



THE SURFACE WAS CHANGING, BUT NOT THE CORE. FOR ALL THEIR SUBTLE HUES, COMICS WERE STILL BEING WRITTEN IN PRIMARY COLORS!



THE NEW FORM REQUIRED THE CREATION OF NEW IDIOMS!



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



THIS IS BEGINNING TO CHANGE AS I WRITE THIS, BUT IT'S STILL THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE. COMIC ARTISTS WANTING TO CONDUCT BOLD NEW EXPERIMENTS IN COMICS ART--

--STILL HAVE TO LEARN IN MOST CASES TO BE BOLD IN BLACK AND WHITE!