fig. 83
Cover Chapter Nine: Timelines
oil, acrylic and ink on wood,
2008,
40 x 27.5 cm / 16 in x 11 in

CHAPTER NINE

Timelines, Comics and a Plurogenic View of Art History

> To a fellow compulsive diagrammer.
> — James Elkins[1]

Models of Art History

As I began applying the theory of central trope to various artists and artworks, I asked myself how it could also be employed to consider broader questions. One outcome of this speculation was the preceding chapter, where I used metaphor(m) to address painting as a whole, the novel and Christian Doelker's notion of the extended text. Similarly, in this chapter I asked myself what a model of art history itself could look like if I treated the standard timeline as an artwork of sorts, and attempted to create a new one which would embody a central trope incorporating a contemporary conception of history while retaining heuristic use as a learning device. The mere hubris of challenging traditional and current models of art history and endeavoring to construct a new one is highly agonistic. Once again, I feel this is Bloomian, yet not Oedipal. I am not aiming to utterly dismiss the timeline, as some have done, as I discuss below. In a dialogical fashion I am answering back to the calls of the models of art history now in use, trying to improve upon them by shaping a new and better trope for understanding the discipline.

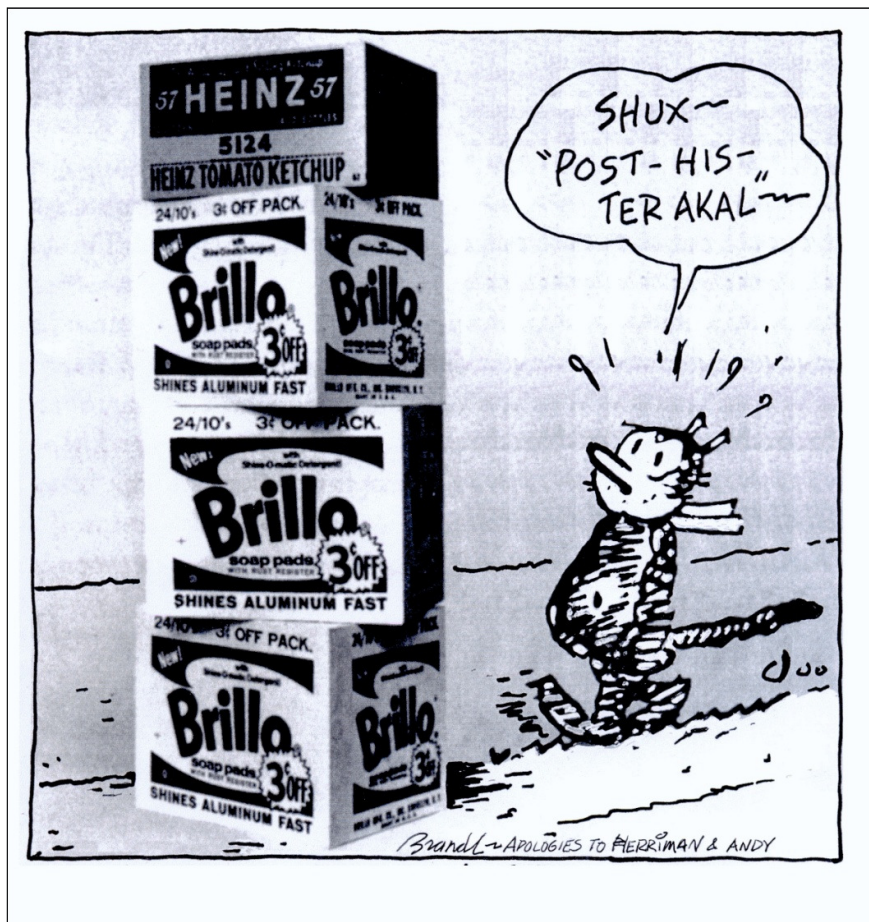[1] James Elkins, personal communication: autograph in book, *Stories of Art*, 2008.

fig. 84
Cartoon concerning Arthur Danto's discovery of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* sculpture, David Carrier's interpretation of that and my response.

Post-His-Terakal
ink on paper,
2001,
20 x 20 cm / 8 in x 8 in [2]

I believe I have discovered a useful metaphor(m) in the image of a braided rope: a simple, yet evocative image which allows one to teach art history as a developmental succession, yet avoid teleological inferences; to retain a core focus, yet eclipse the illusion of exclusivity; to clearly indicate that there is a wealth of art not being immediately presented in the standard survey, yet maintain a pragmatically serviceable picture. I began my considerations originally by searching for an adequate model of a timeline with which to teach the history of comics and sequential art. Thus, I present and scrutinize the handful of

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[2] This cartoon was made for use as an illustration with an article I wrote on David Carrier's book, *the Philosophy of Comics*, wherein I first criticized Danto's theory of art history. Danto, upon discovering my article and cartoon, expressed his enjoyment of it. I gave it to him and it now hangs over his desk, or in the form artists like to write, it is "Collection Arthur C. Danto." Mark Staff Brandl, "Art, Philosophy and Comics: Beyond The End of Art History, A Discussion of *The Aesthetics of Comics* by David Carrier," *The Art Book*, 8, no. 2 (March 2001): 26-28.

models of both art history and comic history I found most widespread, comparing and contrasting them, evaluating each for strengths and weaknesses. Some of these models are openly proclaimed, some are unacknowledged, even unrecognized by their proponents, yet I am certain they ring true, as I assessed a wide variety of publications, panel discussions, teachers and interviews in my search to locate these models. Finally, I present my own trope for the timeline and explain why I believe it is an improvement.

The conceit or extended metaphor shaping this chapter is a type of internal debate. This chapter is a model of thinking through and arriving at a new thought model by agonistically arguing with existing ones under the light of cognitive metaphor theory. I tested the waters of this debate in two seas while writing the chapter. First, in a preliminary presentation of the idea at the annual conference of the CAA (the College Art Association, the US national art historians organization) in Chicago in a session titled "Comics in Art History" organized by art historian, professor of 18th and 19th century European art, Patricia Mainardi and art historian, of Rococo and comics art, and artist Andrei Molotiu. Their input as well as that of the audience was extensive and informative. Then I discussed the idea while writing the final draft with my fellow guests at the Casa Zia Lina foundation on Elba, (a New York playwright, Viennese Jazz pianist, and two German visual artists). They were additionally helpful, especially Martina Altschäfer, a Rüsselsheim artist who deals with metaphoric compositional structure in her large-scale figurative drawings. Thus, this chapter is metaphorically an intertwining of presentation and dialogue which how it that actually came into being. This in many ways also resembles an expansion of the form of a diagram with explanation.

Art history**,** like anything else, has its own history, as well as the history of teaching it. Art history has most productively been practiced and taught as the scholarly study of works of art through their historical development and in their stylistic and geographic contexts. This was accomplished primarily in three sub-disciplines until recently. As the famed art historian Ernst Gombrich declared, "the field of art history [is] much like Caesar's Gaul, divided in three parts inhabited by three different, though not necessarily hostile tribes: (i) the connoisseurs, (ii) the critics, and (iii) the academic art historians."[3]

This has dramatically changed: connoisseurs are regrettably long gone; critics are sliding steadily farther and farther down the slope into insignificance. Historians remain, yet

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[3] Ernst Gombrich, *The Essential Gombrich*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 7.

are under the pressure of several new cohorts or competitors: art theorists, curators, and increasingly creative philosophers of art. (It is notable that no one seems to mention collectors or artists in discussions of artworld power, two glaring omissions, but that is another story.) The relationships among this crew can be strained and have affected the conceptions and thus the teaching of art history. Instructors of art history have increasingly found arguments for why the presentation of the small standard canon is inadequate — quite rightly, when one contemplates the sexism, classism, geographical chauvinism, even ageism in it. Much of art history has unfortunately become limited to discussion of the traditional narrow canon, or, worse, abstract and feckless conceptualizing about so-called conditions for judgment, timorous avoidance of *any* timeline due to postmodern guilt, treating artworks as mere stand-ins for particular ideologies. The problems with the first option are obvious and have been widely criticized; I described them above: it is constricted, nationalistic, continentally chauvinistic (favoring Europe and North America), racist, and so on. The second, however, is no better; it is a pathological, symptomatic vision of art. The avoidance of any model is pernicious; it is fearful and an active impediment for beginning students to learning about and appreciating art.

But how are we to teach art history, avoiding both the Scylla and Charybdis I mentioned? As both a docent of art history and a practicing artist, I began struggling with this, while simultaneously contemplating the additional opportunity I was offered to teach the history of comics, all while writing my dissertation on metaphor(m). Comics, with their creatively "impurist" blending of diverse traits and very short yet multifarious history, lead me to a new visualization of art history: one with convolution, expansiveness and development.

On the following three pages are the handouts I use when teaching the Introduction to Art History survey class.

fig. 85, 86 and 87
Quicky Crash Course Timelines

ART HISTORY TIMELINE,
QUICKY CRASH COURSE (SHORT FORM)

Prehistoric *30-20000 BCE*-------------------------------- ----------

Egypt (Ancient) c.2500 BCE -----------------------------------

Other Early Civilizations

  Mesopotamia c.2000 BCE--
      /Babylon/Sumeria
  Africa c.1000 BCE--
      (-Benin, Zimbabwe, Mali, Ife)
  China c.1000 B--
  Pre-Columbian South America-----------------------------------
      (-Toltec, Olmec, Aztec, Mayan, Navaho) c.500 BCE
  India c.1500 BCE ---

Greece (Ancient) c.400 BCE-----------------------------------
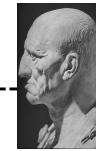
Rome (Ancient)------------------------------**0** (1)----------------

  Byzantine c.500 CE---

Middle Ages/Medieval c.1000 CE ----------------------- ---
  incl. Romanesque, Gothic, Islamic)

Japan c.1100 CE --

Renaissance 1400s CE ---
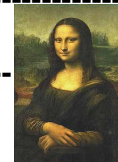
  Mannerism late 1500s CE --

Baroque 1650 CE--

  Rococo 1750 CE ---

Classicism/ 1800 CE --- ---

Romanticism/--
    (Historicism - both)

  Academics late 1800s CE --

Modernism 1850 CE ----------------------------------- --------

Postmodernism 1980 CE --------------------------------- **NOW**

MODERNISM (Close-Up)

Realism 1850---

Impressionism 1860 ---

Post-Impressionism 1880 ---

Fauvism 1900 --

Cubism / Picasso 1910------------------------------- ------------
   Analytic 1910---
   Synthetic 1915--

Futurism 1915 --

Expressionism 1915 -- -

Dada 1916--

Surrealism 1920 --- ---------

Constructivism 1925--------------------------------- -------------

Abstraction (De Styl, usw.) 1930-------------------------------- --
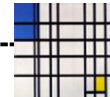
Social Protest Art / Murals 1940 ----------------------------------

Abstract-Expressionism 1950 --------------------------------- ----
 (Action Painting)
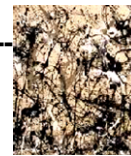
Color Field / Post-Painterly late 1950s--------------- --------------

Pop Art 1960 ---

Op Art 1965 ---

Hard Edge /Formalism 1965---------------------------------------

Kinetic 1965 --
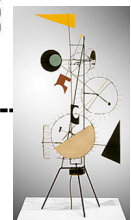
Minimalism 1965 -- --

Fluxus / Neo-Dada 1965 --------------------------------------- -

Conceptual Art 1970 --

Performance / Body Art 1975------------------------------------

Photo-Realism 1975 --

Installation 1975-- ---
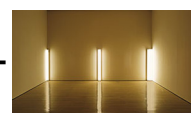
Earth Art / arte povera 1975 --------------------------------- --

   (Joseph Beuys 1975)--------------------------------------

Postmodernism (Close Up)

Feminism 1975 --

New Image 1978--
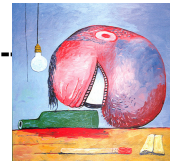
Pattern 1979--

Neo-Expressionism 1980----------------------------------
        (many Neos, Graffitti, usw)

Neo-Geo / Appropriation 1985------------------------------

Neo-Conceptual / Video Installation 1990--------------------
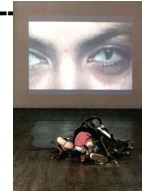
Conceptual Abstract Painting 2000--------------------------------

Feeble Painting / Neo-Conceptual "Activities" 2004----------

Social Practice Art 2008---

Extended Painting 2009---

?

Post- Postmoderism?

While I still find these "crash course" timelines useful and students enjoy having them, I wanted an over-all timeline image. I drew a large one about 3.5 meters or 12 feet long and hung it permanently on the wall behind where the images are projected during class, for casual reference whenever anyone desired. A rather standard one, it ran left to right, along a straight line, travelling through all the major epochs, periods and movements. It was much like those seen in well-known art history textbooks. I added political and other cultural events above the time line to give a certain amount of context. However, whenever I looked at it, the basic image of a straight line disturbed me. It was not tropaically evocative in any way of how I saw history. It did not display a creative metaphor(m).

I began sketching various images as potential timeline substitutes, including doing so with students, inspired by James Elkins's first chapter in his book *Stories of Art.*[4]

Here is an Example from his book.

Plate 1. The history of art imagined as a field of stars. Drawing: author.
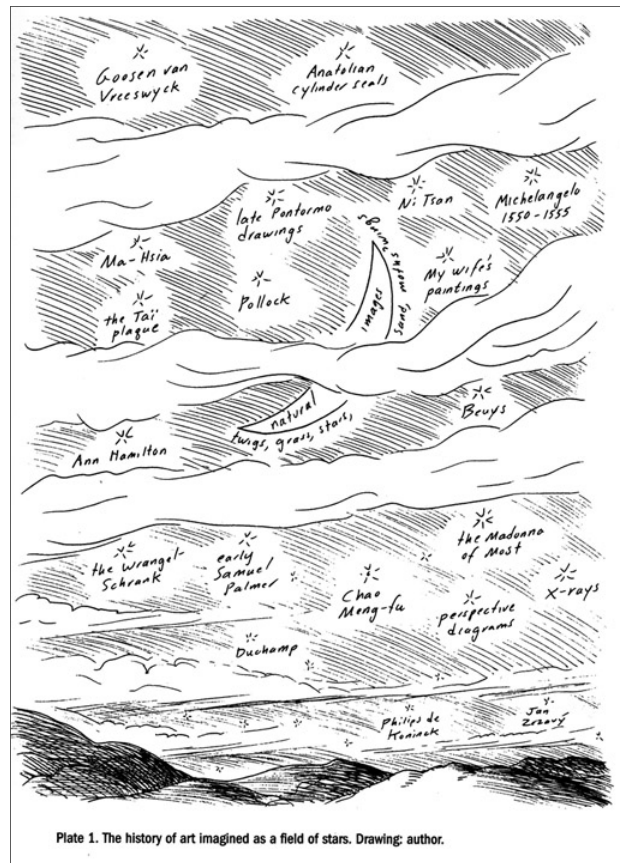
fig. 88
A plate drawn by James Elkins showing one of his imaginary conceptions of art history.[5]

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[4] James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1–38.
[5] Ibid., plate 1, pg.3.

And here is the famous diagram by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. of art between 1890 and 1945. [6]
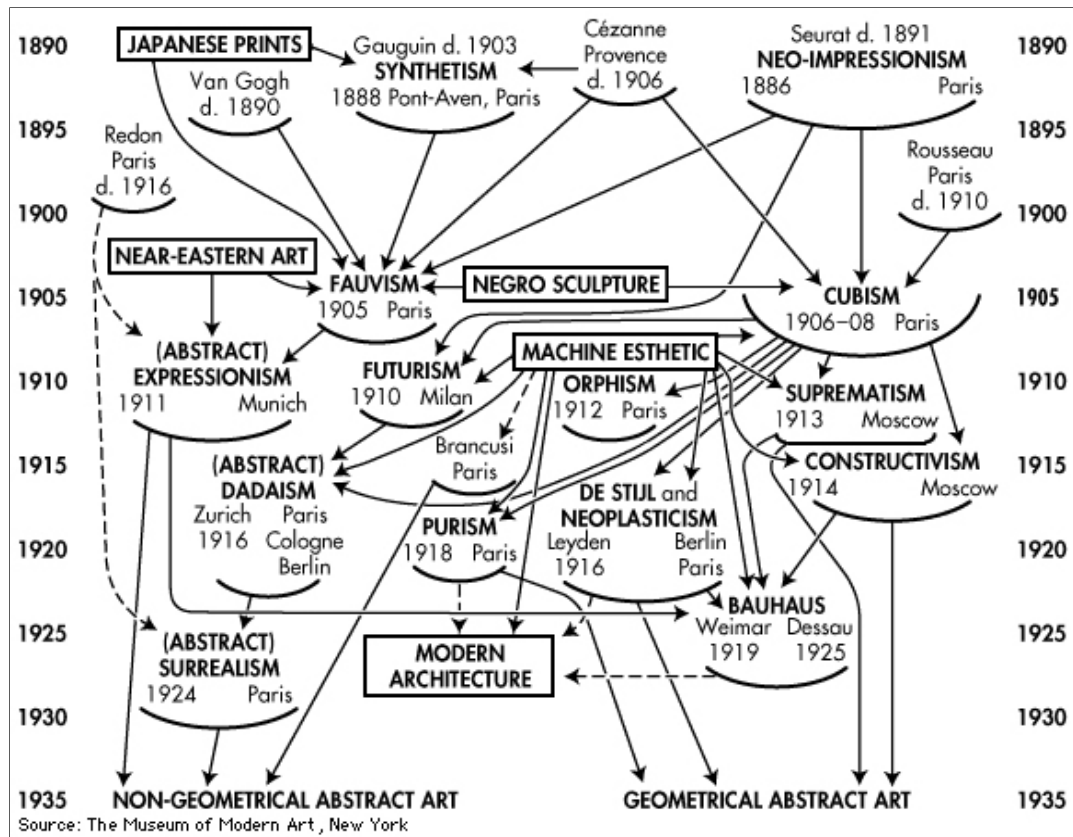

fig. 89
by Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Concocting our own similar page-filling images was an enlightening experience and I can recommend it. Nonetheless, it offered no new form useful for general instruction. In particular, I wanted to address an existing instructional condition which I find notably harmful. In various schools of which I am aware, there is an increasing tendency to teach no timeline whatsoever due to the postmodern fear of the limitations of the canon. There are instructors who follow the Octoberists and perform only meta-history, discussing the inadequacies of the standard timeline, but not in fact teaching that standard aforehand, nor offering any replacement for it. One art historian I know teaches only two artists in a year-long Introduction to Art History class; she delves into them in depth, which purportedly gives students tools for dealing with all of art history. I find that preposterous. Others teach thematically — e.g. a survey of how differing artists dealt with fire over the run of history.

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[6] Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (Barr designed the diagram in 1935 for the exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art."). Reprinted in James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pg. 12.

This is too much like superficial art appreciation classes and far too restricted; it verges on vapid.

Weighing heavily on my mind was the fact that practicing artists with completed degrees, in addition to beginning students, had been repeatedly approaching me requesting that I conduct some sort of remedial continuing education class in general art history. The word had spread after I had jokingly summarized the survey in several panel discussions. They were hungry for some sort of skeleton on which to base their own personal study of art history, a traditional desire perhaps, yet also paedagogically a proven one. Most importantly, the artists and students with whom I spoke were also open to critical questioning of the timeline. The two desires are not mutually exclusive; in fact, I would assert that one requires the former to conduct the latter. I created a purposefully entertaining, yet completely straight-forward, hour-and-a-half-long lecture wherein I explain the entire history of art from Prehistoric through Postmodern.[7] By its mere speed alone, it becomes amusing, yet viewers have told me that it is also edifying. Titled "A Quicky Crash Course in Art History," it is somewhere between lecture and performance art. I have done it in both English and German. I have further developed it as well into the year-long course I teach at the Kunstschule in Liechtenstein.

Yet, I had still not solved my self-posed problem of how to present a concise, understandable image of the entire history of art which also clearly exhibited the accurate, to my mind, criticisms of the standard timeline introduced by feminists and then expanded by other socially progressive thinkers. At the same time as I was struggling with this problem, I was offered the opportunity to teach a class in comics and sequential art. I wished to begin the week-long module with a short overview of the history of that artistic form. My musings on how to present the history of comics finally showed me the way to a new image of the entire art history timeline.

Before I review various conceptions of the timeline and reveal my own, let me be a bit coquettish with the attention of the readers. What are the apparent differences between the history of fine art and the history of comic (or sequential) art? First, almost the entire history of comics occurs in what is known in the culture at large as Modernism, the most recent part in Postmodernism. Modernism began approximately in the late 1840s; comics, as we know

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[7] A 37 second version of my PowerPoint images which accompany this performance/speech is on-line on youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIP0a6HBAUs.

them, began in the 1830s. In the world of fans of comics there is an unfortunate abridgment of this history into the Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age, and the fully misnamed "Modern Age," meaning comics from the mid-1980s until the present day, as CGC (Certified Guaranty Company), the commercial comic grading company, and the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* maintain.[8] This last designation is nonsensical and separates comics' terminology naively from the rest of culture. Even in stylistic terms alone, *The Watchmen* comic[9], *Maus*[10] and Andrei Molotiu's *Abstract Comics: The Anthology*[11] are clearly "after Modernism," thus Postmodern. Second, comics has an comparatively clear beginning with Rodolphe Toepffer and his stories such as the *Histoire de M. Jabot* created and published between 1831 and 1846.[12] The history of fine art, in comparison, begins somewhere in the mists of prehistory as art, religion and magic, perhaps as long ago as 100,000 B.C.[13] Third, the history of comics is exceedingly "compressed." It passes through phases fairly analogous to the epochs of fine art, yet within only about 110 years: from simple, "primitive" beginnings; through foundational, illustrational handicraft; traditionalist sophistication; various experimental stages; unique Renaissances; avant-garde expansion; through to Postmodernism. Fourth, and most edifying, comics has always contained a considerable breadth. A wide variety of intertwined genres and approaches exist simultaneously, contrasting with, complementing, and influencing one another. One example would be the 1960s, with its mainstream superheroes, humorous cartoon animals, mystery comics, war stories, science fiction, horror comics, parodies, film adaptations, underground comix, pornography, religious tracts and much more. All of these characteristics have much to teach us about the true nature of art history, but chiefly the last named trait.

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[8] *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*. York, Pennsylvania: Gemstone Publishing.
[9] Alan Moore (author), Dave Gibbons (artist), *Watchmen: Absolute Edition* (New York: DC Comics, 2005).
[10] Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).
[11] Andre Molotiu, ed., *Abstract Comics: The Anthology: 1967-2009* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2009).
[12] Rodolphe Toepffer, *Histoire de M. Jabot*. (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2010). Wikipedia contributors, " RodolpheToepffer," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, w*ebite: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolphe_Toepffer >. Please also note that in this sentence comics and many others, *comics* is treated as a singular collective noun. This is the standard practice in the field of the study of comics.
[13] For example: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History," <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/preh/hd_preh.htm >.

Timelines

Let us now take a short look at the eight prominent visions of the timeline, that is, art history and the instruction of art history. I have drawn them and clarify them, each in turn. This is followed by a parallel, corresponding series of comics history timelines. I also critique them, highlighting the problems with each. Finally I present my own heuristic diagram of the history of fine art (and comics).
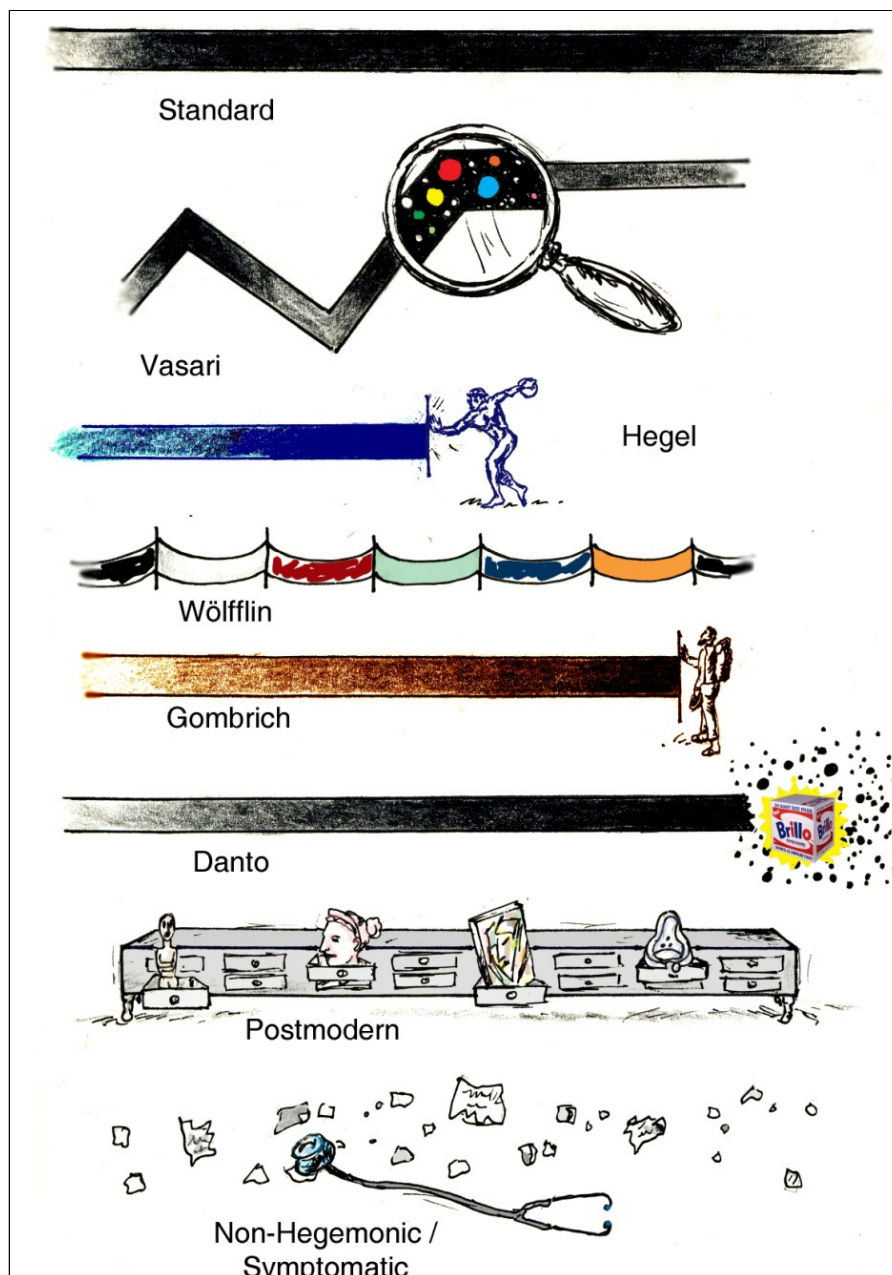
Here is an image of all the timeline models I discuss before coming to my own.

fig. 90
Models of Art
History
Timelines

Let us progress through this figure, one timeline at a time. First, each image is presented and then the philosophy of history it illustrates is discussed.

Standard

fig. 91

According to the customary presentation of art history, art fades into history, its origin uncertain, marches on, and does not end: the well-established notion of a general march of history. This is tolerable, simply not enough. It does not reflect the real complexity and multifariousness of actual history, in fact, it suggests exactly the opposite: a tidy, hierarchically clear, perhaps even evolutionary chain of events. I call this the standard time line.

Vasari

fig. 92

Giorgio Vasari was the Mannerist painter whose book *The Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times*, started art history.[14] The *Vite*, as it is nicknamed among art historians, is spotty, anecdotal, full of rumors, conjecture, folk etymology of names, incorrect "facts," — and is downright entertaining. Vasari believes, as many people of his time did, that the arts began in the mists of history, steadily improved, reaching a pinnacle in ancient Greece, then declined, only to reach a new and higher peak in the Renaissance. What happens after that is not entirely clear in Vasari's theory. It appears that he believed art could, at best, stay at this level of achievement. This was to be accomplished by emulating the great geniuses of the Renaissance, especially Michelangelo. His writing concentrates on the individual lives of those artists he chooses to

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[14] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere. (New York: Random House, 2006).

discuss; at points, it reads like a scattershot soap-opera. I thus see his timeline as a simple line, with two crests, the first Ancient Greece and Rome, the second, the Renaissance, the one he minutely describes.

fig. 93
The Discobolus,
marble Roman copy of original Greek bronze by Myron,
c. 450 BCE
height 155 cm / 61 in
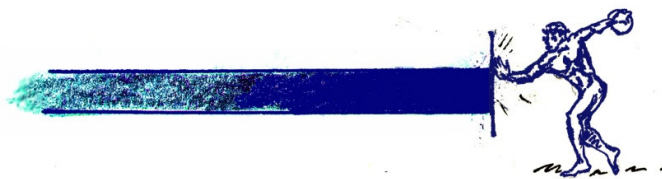
fig. 94

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's conception of history is the quintessence of the teleological philosophy of history and began the tendency toward eschatology, discourse about last things, that has become so common. This philosopher argued that history is a constant process of dialectic clash and that it progresses. I agree with the first, and guardedly

grant the idea of development, albeit not one that I would call progress. Hegel's teleology is passively, perhaps even innocently, accepted by many nowadays. It was recently actively taken up anew by Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History and the Last Man.*[15]

According to Hegel, "Art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest possibilities, a thing of the past," *Philosophy of Fine Art.*[16] He may be over-interpreted, and was himself rather vague about what exactly he felt about art from his own time, especially if you read his original texts in German, but he has long been seen as believing that true beauty and perfection in art ended in ancient Greece. Since these are his values in art, it is fair to say that for Hegel art ended in the Antique. Thus several of my students came up with the image of a famous Greek sculpture holding back any further advance in a straight timeline. Hegel's idea is primarily based in two teleological fallacies; first, he is attributing agency and a goal to the flow of time and, second, even if there were a goal, it would not necessarily be perfection or perfection according to a Greek understanding of it.
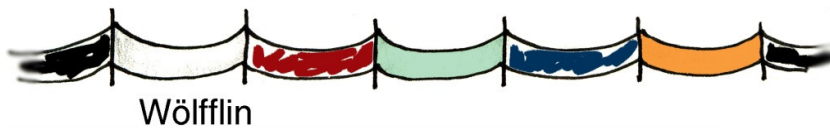

Wölfflin

fig. 95

Heinrich Wölfflin in 1915 in *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* ("Principles of Art History"), formulated five pairs of opposed or contrary precepts in the form and style of art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which demonstrated a shift in the nature of artistic vision between the two periods.[17] This has been expanded on occasion by other historians into a permanent state of shifting swings of the pendulum, or waves of ebb and flow — something like a dialectical version of the idea of cyclical history so very popular in Eastern religions.[18] The most famous of these, and for many years the dominant philosophy of art history's timeline, was Clement Greenberg's teleological vision of the progress of art through back-and-forth discoveries of "significant form." Greenberg's theory is Hegelian in that he believes

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[15] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon, 1992).
[16] Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art (Hegel's Lectures on Absolute Spirit) 1820-1829* (London: Continuum; Facsimile of 1920 edition, August 1, 1999).
[17] Heinrich Wölfflin *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*: *Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*. (Basel: Schwabe, 2004).
[18] Wölfflin's idea has been highly influential on all formal and formalist analyses of art and has inspired other historians who believe in cyclical changes of art styles, including Clement Greenberg. There have been other such cyclical or pendular theories of art history as well including that of Johann Joachim Winckelmann.

in evolution and improvement in art, yet it is also a very Oedipal version of Wölfflin's pendulum: linear one period, painterly the next, etc.[19] This model is clearly too limited. Such agonistic, dialectical struggle does occur, as I have discussed in this dissertation, but it is neither the only option nor the only struggle. Art sometimes advances through homage or through wholly new pressures and skirmishes, as I explored in Chapter Seven. Moreover, history does appear to have stronger and weaker periods, "peaks and valleys," and has far more than one set of alternating waves, at the very least.

Gombrich

fig. 96

Ernst Gombrich offers a timeline highly similar to Hegel's, but ending with Realism. For him, a motivation toward illusionism is the explanation of all of art history. Following Danto's criticism, we can see that Gombrich fails to account for the evolution of Modernist and contemporary art away from standard representational naturalism.[20] Accordingly, Gombrich's theory is unable to encompass, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, in fact almost all artists after about 1845. In his wonderfully written, but thus inadequate book *The Story of Art*, Gombrich does seem to founder after Courbet.[21]

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[19] Clement Greenberg, "Cézanne and the Unity of Modern Art," *The Partisan Review*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1951); reprinted in *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, vol. 3 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 82-91.
[20] See, a.o., Arthur C.Danto, *Embodied Meanings; Critical Essay and Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; The Noonday Press, 1995, p. 205.
[21] Ernst H.Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1989), pp. 405-509.

fig. 97
Gustave Courbet,
Bonjour Monsieur Courbet,
oil on canvas,
1854,
129 x 149 cm / 50 ¾ in x 58 5/8 in

Therefore I have drawn Gombrich's timeline quite like the illustration of Hegel's, but being called to a stop by Courbet from his painting shown above. Criticisms can be made of Gombrich's eschatological and teleological timeline comparable to those I discussed concerning Hegel's, thus I will not reiterate them.

fig. 98

Arthur C. Danto's theory of art history is probably the most widely accepted at this moment, although I believe Danto has been misinterpreted and simplistically mouthed by much of the artworld. In the chapter titled "The End of Art" in his book *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Danto clearly describes the end of history, rather than of art itself:

"When one direction is as good as another...."[22] According to this model, linear progress existed in art history up until the found object, or found-object-like art.

fig. 99
Andy Warhol,
Brillo Boxes,
acrylic and silkscreen ink on wood,
1969,
dimensions variable, stack of units, each
50.8 x 50.8 x 43.2 cm / 20 in x 20 in x 17 in

Danto thanks Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* for his insight: an art object that is indiscernible from a real non-art object. After the end of this linear progress, anything goes. Art has become its own philosophy and progress has disappeared. Pluralism reigns. There is much to discuss here, but I will limit myself to my own re-historization of pluralism and indeed progress itself as concepts, which again, I derive from the brief yet multifaceted history of comics.

There might be a dynamic version of pluralism, were we to follow Diana L. Eck of *The Pluralism Project at Harvard University*, who suggests that pluralism is or could be "not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity."*[23] Unfortunately, I do not find this to be true of the current use of the idea in the artworld. Moreover, pluralism is not unique. It has been used to describe many art periods in the past. Let me quickly historicize it. Here is

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[22] Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.115.
[23] Diana L. Eck, "The Pluralism Project at Harvard University," website direct page link:
<http://pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism.php>.

a modification of one of my charts above. Each arrow points to a time which has been claimed to be pluralistic.
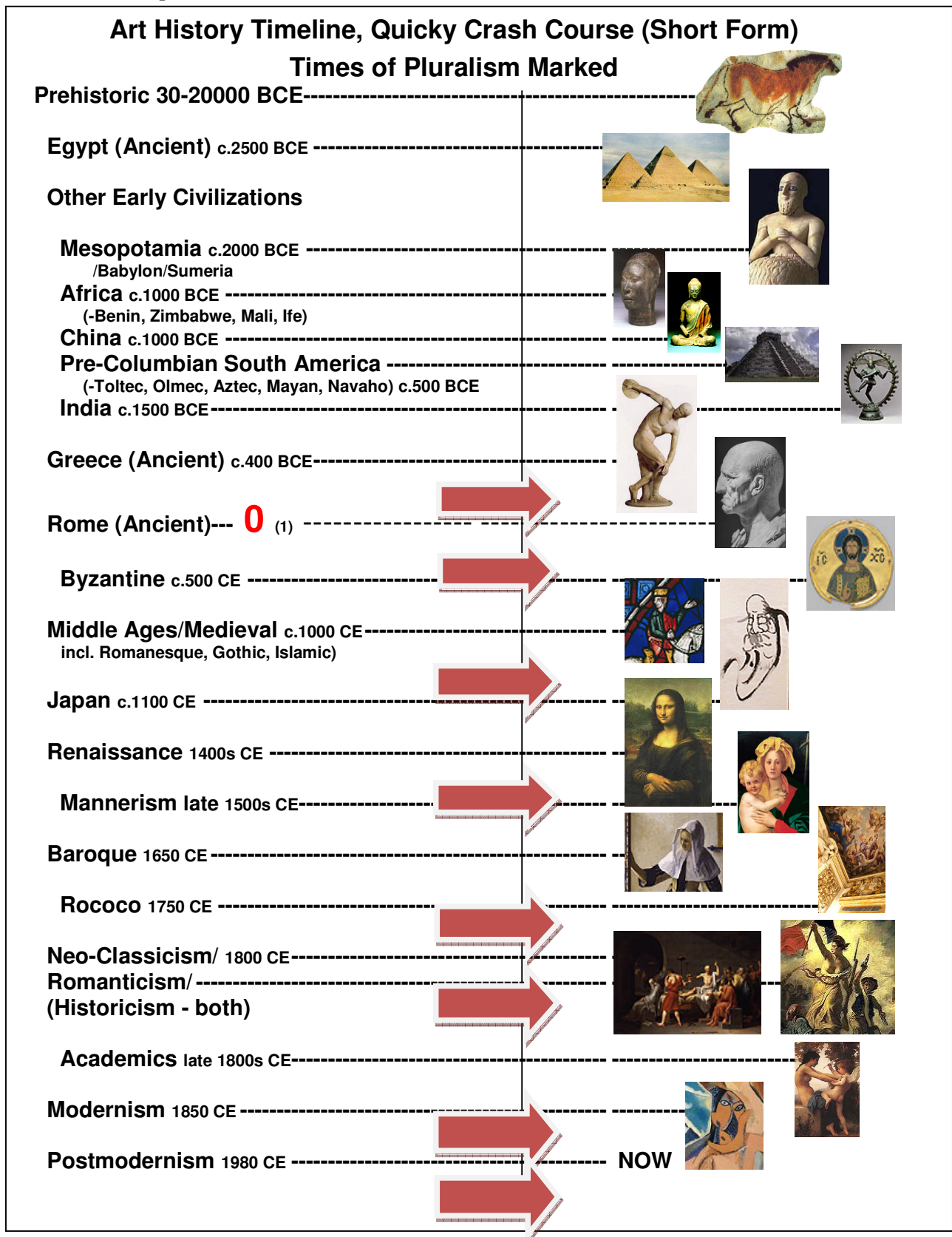

Art History Timeline, Quicky Crash Course (Short Form)
Times of Pluralism Marked

Prehistoric 30-20000 BCE----------------------------------

Egypt (Ancient) c.2500 BCE ------------------------

Other Early Civilizations

Mesopotamia c.2000 BCE -------------------
/Babylon/Sumeria
Africa c.1000 BCE -------------------------
(-Benin, Zimbabwe, Mali, Ife)
China c.1000 BCE -----------------------
Pre-Columbian South America -----------------
(-Toltec, Olmec, Aztec, Mayan, Navaho) c.500 BCE
India c.1500 BCE-------------------------

Greece (Ancient) c.400 BCE-------------------

Rome (Ancient)--- **0** (1) ------------------

Byzantine c.500 CE -------------------

Middle Ages/Medieval c.1000 CE------------
incl. Romanesque, Gothic, Islamic)

Japan c.1100 CE -----------------------

Renaissance 1400s CE ------------------

Mannerism late 1500s CE------------------

Baroque 1650 CE -----------------------

Rococo 1750 CE --------------------

Neo-Classicism/ 1800 CE---------------
Romanticism/ ---------------------
(Historicism - both)

Academics late 1800s CE--------------

Modernism 1850 CE ------------------

Postmodernism 1980 CE --------------- **NOW**

fig. 100
Pluralisms

Here are a few citations of scholars who have described the pluralism of these periods of art history. Franklin Einspruch explained late Antique Greek art, Hellenism, in terms of pluralism: "The artistic achievements of Greece simultaneously peak and founder in Hellenism." [24] This is so pervasive a description of this period that it has been used the other way round. Tim Muldoon claims that "we are living amidst a kind of postmodern Hellenism" now. [25] Francesca Tronchin, discussing Late Roman culture writes: "As the pluralism of Roman art itself rises in stock among scholars, however, such additive or syncretistic systems are now being paid fresh attention."[26] Susan von Daum Tholl in her entry on Carolingian art in *the Encyclopedia of Medieval Germany* states, "Historians of the period have repeatedly uncovered a pluralism."[27] Judith Steinhoff demonstrates that Siena's Trecento, Mannerist, artistic culture of the mid- and late fourteenth century was intentionally pluralistic in her book *Sienese Painting After the Black Death: Artistic Pluralism, Politics, and the New Art Market*.[28] Franklin Toker claims that the period to most strongly evidence "different and even opposing art movements was the eighteenth century… in France and Germany with the Rococo movement."[29] Austrian art historian Hans Sedlmayr, in his book *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*, claims pluralism for all the architecture of Historicism, the period(s) which painters know better as Romanticism and Neo-Classicism. [30] Corinne Robins's book *The Pluralist Era; American Art, 1968-1981* claimed the exclusive application of the term *Pluralist* to the art of the 1970s and early 1980s, before the explosions of Neo-Expressionism and Neo-Conceptualism occurred. This was a common claim at that time, though Pluralism was actually often denigrated in order to promote either of the two named Neos. This was true until very recently, when the term Pluralism appears to be in the process of being co-opted by the Neo-Conceptualists themselves.[31] And then there is now. One example is Jim Auer's 1995

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[24] Franklin Einspruch, "Sliding Gracefully Down the Slippery Slope of Hope," *Artblog.net: Franklin Einspruch on making art, looking at art, and other requisites of life*, blog website, direct page link:< http://artblog.net/?name=2004-06-16-09-02-hope> (2004), last accessed 1 September, 2010.

[25] Tim Muldoon, "Shepherding the Postmodern Flock," *Chicago Studies* 42/1, (spring, 2003), pp. 81-92.

[26] Sinclair Bell and Francesca Tronchin, "Between Canon and Kitsch: Eclecticism in Roman Homes," Session Description for the 8th Roman Archaeology Conference, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Getty Research Institute, (April, 2009).

[27] Susan von Daum Tholl, s.v. "Carolingian Art and Architecture, Painting," *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia,* ed. John M Jeep (New York, Garland, 2001).

[28] Judith Steinhoff, *Sienese Painting After the Black Death: Artistic Pluralism, Politics, and the New Art Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[29] Franklin Toker, Course Description, "Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Fall Term 2001;" University of Pittsburgh, website direct page link: <http://vrcoll.fa.pitt.edu/ftoker/tokerfile/0010sb01-10.html>, last accessed 14 August 2010.

[30] Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006).

[31] Corinne Robins, *The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968-1981* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

review "Seductive and Sensational: Art Museum Exhibit Embraces Pluralism," in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.[32]

To summarize, pluralism is nothing new. It has historically arisen within and/or been used to describe the cultural experimentation and fumbling about after any given "strong" period of art history and before the next one arose. At this art historical moment, the shadow of High Modernism hangs over us, much as that of the Renaissance did over the Mannerists. In place of Donatello**,** Leonardo, Raphael**,** etc., — and most of all Michelangelo, we have the School of Paris, the Action Painters, Pop, the Conceptualists, Minimalists, etc., — and most of all Duchamp; or, in comics, the shadow of Jack Kirby, Will Eisner, Harvey Kurzman. Pluralism is a standard condition of transitional periods and is most often taken to be an end point, yet never was. As New York painter David Reed said to me, "We must get over trying to be the first or thinking we are the last. We are in the midst of a long line or artists. There are those before us and there will be many after us."[33]

I have heard it contended that *this* time there has been a "sea change," as the saying goes. This new period of Pluralism, or whatever else it may be, has changed everything. This is both true and false. Every change in art history has made this claim, and in fact *has* changed everything afterwards, that itself is, thus, not uniquely true. This claim of a "sea change" has been made, and I believe is indeed true, just not uniquely so, of the Renaissance, Modernism, Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Conceptualism, Neo-Expressionism, and others. Most importantly, there will be other such "sea changes" in the future.
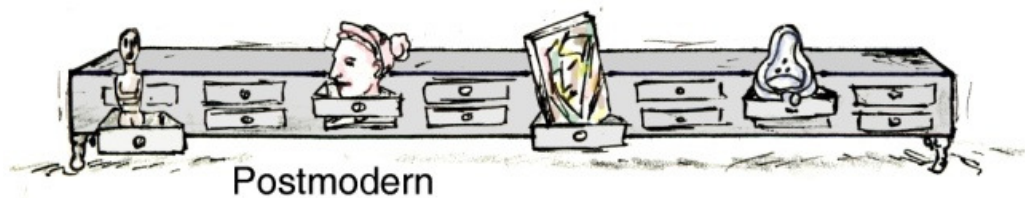

Postmodern

fig. 101

Post-Modernist was originally a hyphenated term when it appeared in wide use in the 1980s. The trendier it became, the less frequently the hyphen appeared, in emulation of French usage.

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[32] Jim Auer, exhibition review "Seductive and Sensational: Art Museum Exhibit Embraces Pluralism," in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (September 10, 1995), pp. 1 and 15.
[33] David Reed, personal communication, 2000.

The 80s conception of art history, particularly embraced by the Neo-Expressionists, but some Neo-Conceptualists and others as well, is one I refer to as the "shopping mall" theory of history, or simply *Postmodern*. The idea that all styles of the past were equal, equally dead, and free for reuse as one wished: just pick and choose, as at a shopping center, or from a huge cabinet of curiosities. Spontaneous emotion and/or supposed irony were seen as enough to cover for rootless plagiarism. A student of mine helped concretize my notion in this image of a timeline which not a line at all, but rather a chest of drawers with dusty old artifacts in no particular order, which are free to be sorted through and selected with no thought of history or content.
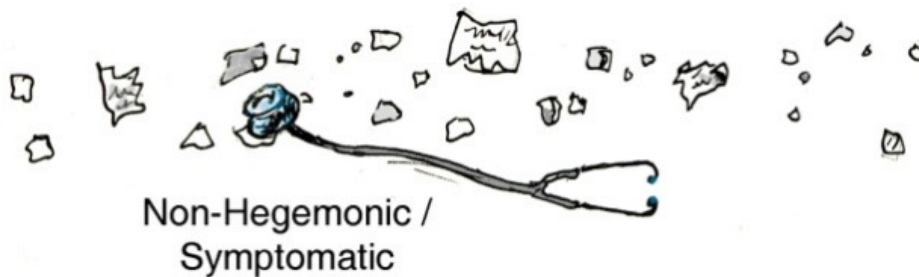
fig. 102

The last of the art history timelines and timeline substitutes I analyze is one I call the *Non-Hegemonic* or when less magnanimous, the *Symptomatic* timeline. This might also be called an anti- or non-model, anti-canon: "I give up." I have already objected to this approach above. In the name of "decentering the discourse" or the like, some art historians do nothing innovative, allowing their fear of incorrectness to lead them into a far worse scenario, a decent into a Consensus-Correct yet unproductive morass of avoidance. They teach only potential systems of interpretation, nothing about the primary subject — art — itself. This is often coupled with a deconstructive, quasi-Freudian perception of art as no more than a symptom of some social sickness, one in need of some all-knowing theorist's interpretative cure. Yes, thank God, the wide acceptance of the Western canon as self-evidently universal (even in non-Western regions) is over; yet it is not being significantly enlarged in such a model, but instead becomes a shrunken paucity of visual-aids to criticism. Heuristically, this vision of art history is clearly useless.

Comics Timelines

Let us now take a short look, analogous to the discussion above, at nine prominent timeline models for comics history. I have also sketched, explain and criticized them, each in turn. As a start, here is a table displaying how the timeline models for fine art and for comics parallel one another quite closely.

Equivalences:

FINE ART HISTORY	COMICS ART HISTORY
Standard	*Homogeneous Lump* (No Standard)
Vasari	Erratic
Hegel	Originless Steady State
Wölfflin	Peaks and Valleys
Gombrich	Superheroes
	Alternative
Danto	Pluralistic Denouement
Postmodernist	Sectarian (separate from other history)
Symptomatic	Disputes about the Canon / Building
Braid	Braid

fig. 103
Chart of timelines.

Here is an image of all the comic art timeline models followed by a short analysis of each of them. As can be seen in the chart above, they are quite analogous to the major models of art history. Dissecting them was the activity that helped guide me to attempting to form a new model for art history as a whole, one informed by cognitive metaphor theory, Bloomian agon and my idea of metaphor(m).
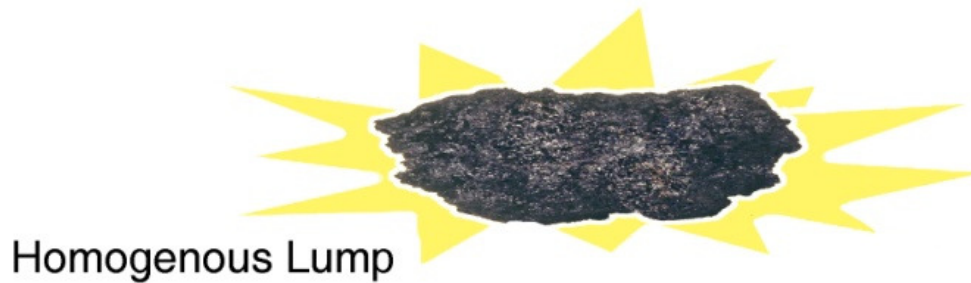
Homogenous Lump

Erratic

Originless Steady State

Peaks and Valleys

Superheroes

Alternative

Pluralistic Denouement

Sectarian

Disputes / Building
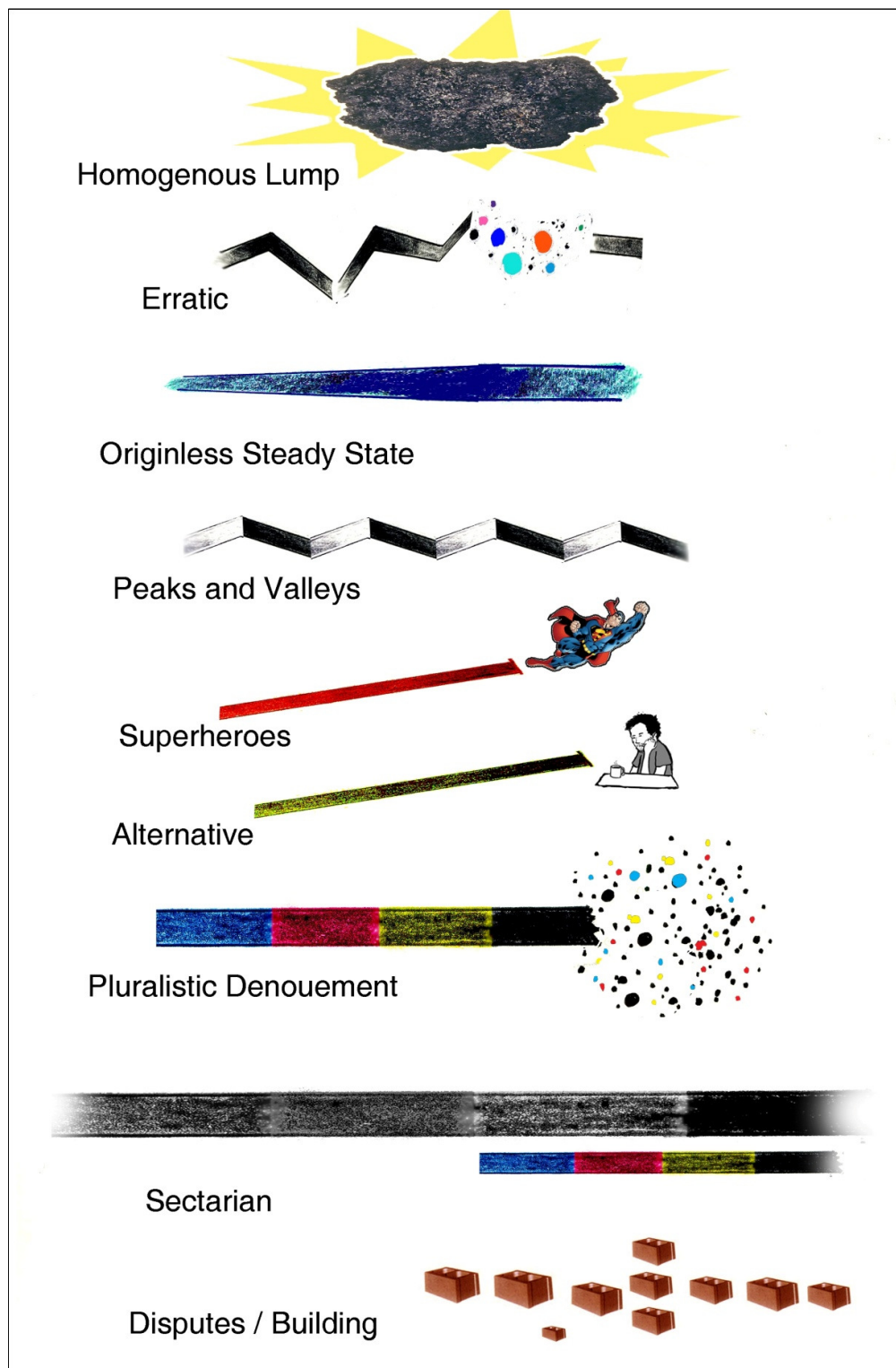
fig. 104
Timeline Models Comics History

Homogenous Lump

fig. 105

The standard timeline of comics is — none. In the world at large, particularly the popular press, comics is seen not as an art form (the 9th art as the comics-friendly French have it), but rather a undifferentiated mass, a pop fad, like bellbottoms, *Tamagotchi* digital pets or baseball caps on backwards. The form is seen as having only a rather mute presence, little to no development. Thus I have envisioned it as a picture of a homogeneous lump (with a suitably crowd-pleasing cartoon-starburst background).

R.Z. Sheppard's approving review of Michael Chabon's Pulitzer prize-winning *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*[34] describes it, among other things, as a "serious but never solemn novel about the American comic book's Golden Age," yet an editor nailed a typical title above Sheppard's text: "Books: Biff! Boom!"[35] Derik Badman sums up such a view of comics in his review of ***Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*** by Douglas Wolk,[36] writing "think of all those 'Biff Bam Boom: Comics have grown up' articles that still appear."[37] What can we learn from this? That art history, fine or comic, can indeed appear to be one large glob when the standard timeline is presented over-reverently and flatly, or when not taught at all as in the case of the symptomatic art history approach, or due to the lack of survey courses about history, whether comics or fine art.

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[34] Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (New York: Random House, 2000).
[35] R. Z. Shepard, "Books: Biff! Boom!"in *Time Magazine*, (Monday, Sep. 25, 2000), on-line at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,998023,00.html#ixzz0bH8rEnBv>.
[36] Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2007).
[37] Derik Badman, review of *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* by Douglas Wolk, *MadInkBeard*, blog website direct page link: <http://madinkbeard.com/blog/archives/reading-comics-by-douglas-wolk/> (28 January, 2008).

Erratic

fig. 106

Erratic is my term for the kind of spotty, limited sense of history autodidactic artists (or those who studied under the Symptomatic approach) often reveal. They have knowledge of their one or two private influences and not much more. This generally limits them to being hacks in comics or followers of fashion in fine art.[38] For instance, in many interviews with comic artists, one hears the same few names: Noel Sickles, Alex Raymond, Hal Foster, among the older generations, later Jack Kirby, now "manga" (often without the speaker even having heard of Osamu Tezuka's *Mighty Atom / Astro Boy* in begun in 1951or Machiko Hasegawa's *Sazae-san* begun in 1946, the two bases for the manga style). Most of these are great artists, but there are many more, and a familiarity with them and the contexts from which they arose can result in far more individual art. Choosing your own influences is a large part of independence. What is the lesson to be considered for a timeline model? Art history instruction must not be too prescriptively reverential, but also should not be left to the vagaries of what one accidentally stumbles over. A solid skeleton of history, even if limited, offers developing artists something upon which to hang their independently gained knowledge, something upon which to build, something to critique and wider opportunities for discovering their own choice of precursors. This is especially true when the timeline is presented with supplementary criticism and attempts at expansion. An adequate model must somehow offer clear structure, yet also already in itself visually suggest its own inadequacies.

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[38] *Hack* is the common term in the world of applied art, such as illustration or comics, for a creator who is simply work-a-day, probably with little natural talent; one who is employed as a drudge, doing inferior, derivative work for pay, with no aspirations to art.
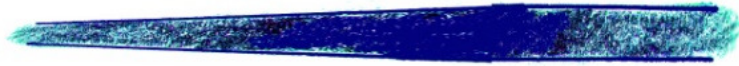
Originless Steady State

fig. 107

The model I term the *Originless Steady State* is in fact a combination of several erroneous beliefs: that comics history has no beginning, that it has no development and that it is therefore some sort of simple presence, not therefore much different than the media notion of comics as a lump. Generally, people who follow this view do not believe there is a teleological end to comics history, as their counterparts in fine art do, yet they believe there is no real beginning to it. In an endless regression based on the continuum fallacy (also called the *fallacy of the beard* in logic), they find comics stretching back to prehistoric cave paintings or the like. The continuum fallacy is when someone believes that two conditions, or in our case periods or artforms, cannot be considered distinct, or to even exist at all, because between them there exists a continuum of states, or because their "edges" are fuzzy. This may be true of painting to an extent, but think how ludicrous it would sound applied to film or photography, two modern artforms historically analogous in many ways to comics. In short, beware of "fishing expeditions." If one searches hard enough, there is almost always something earlier that is *somewhat* similar but that fact may simply be a coincidence, not truly, essentially linked to the object of study, or linked, yet only a distant ancestor. That is why we have the prefix *proto-* in our languages and the idea of precursors in our cultures. For instance, ancestors of comics include Japanese scrolls, Trajan's Column and the work of William Hogarth, none of these are comics in the sense it is used today. Scott McCloud, in his justifiably praised book *Understanding Comics*, incorrectly tries to push the origin of comics back to ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. This is indeed a fishing expedition in which he mistakenly collapses pictographs with visual sequentiality.[39]

As example of what the "Steady State" model advocates need to know is the origin of their beloved artform. The medium as we know it today began to take form in the 19th century, among European and American artists after the consolidation and creation of

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[39] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Kitchen Sink, 1993).

foundationally essential characteristics by the man entitled to be lauded as the creator of comics, Rodolphe Toepffer.

fig. 108
Rodolphe Toepffer, pages 9, 10, 11 and 12 from *Histoire de M. de* M.*Vieux Bois,* original pen and ink on paper, drawn 1827, published in Geneva 1837 and following

Toepffer was born in Switzerland in 1799. His father was a regionally well-known painter, yet Toepffer was less gifted with technical drawing abilities. He became a teacher of French, yet had an amazing idea which manifested itself in his books published in the 1830s and 40s. These were the first true comics. What made his works different from previous narrative images was his invention of panels, closure, and the interdependence of the acts of reading and viewing. Furthermore, he knew what he had accomplished, writing about it in theoretical articles and even sending copies of his comics to Goethe, who, incidentally, loved them, encouraging Toepffer to produce more.[40] In 1843, Rodolphe Toepffer formalized his thoughts on these picture stories in his *Essay on Physiognomics*.[41] Thus, we have the necessary and sufficient conditions and self-awareness of his innovation which are essential for identifying him as the initiator of a new form. This is parallel to the information we have for Wassily Kandinsky which separates his imaginative creation of abstract art from earlier forms of patterning or decoration.

David Carrier, in his book *The Aesthetics of Comics*, maintains that comics have had no genuine progress, in the way that fine art has had. That is, "all of these changes in comics' content have not been accompanied by any dramatic developments in their visual technology."[42] I disagree and would point out the ever increasing discussions in journals and books on comics concerning history (Golden Age, Second Heroic Age, Underground Period, etc.), and formal innovation (narrative techniques, Will Eisner, "camera" angles, Jack Kirby, etc.) Carrier, though, does not wish to denigrate comics, but rather highlight his belief that fine art as well no longer has, perhaps never *exclusively*, had a single historical tale solely based on sensational stylistic evolution. These two assertions, though, should not be combined. The sense of historical development is of utmost importance in a timeline model, albeit one without a teleological goal — and the fact that not having one clear goal and a straight line to it does not mean that no clear historical fruition has occurred. Additionally, although it is difficult to represent this in an illustration, it is important when teaching and presenting a representation of art history to explain the logic behind definitions and

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[40] Goethe's enthusiastic reaction and encouragement is recorded by Johann Peter Eckermann in his *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens,* Tempel Klassiker (Leipzig:Tempel Verlag, 1958) in an entry dated 4 January 1831. Accessible in German on the web at <www.wissen-im-netz.info/literatur/goethe/biografien/eckermann/3-1830ff/18310104.htm>.

[41] Rodolphe Toepffer, "Essay on Physiognomics," in *Enter: The Comics — Rodolphe Topffer's* (sic) *Essay on Physiognomy and the True Story of Monsieur Crepin*, trans. Ellen Wiese (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1965).

[42] David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park, PA: Penn. State Univ. Press), p. 113.

designations, including imparting a comprehension that epochs, periods, movements and the like have overlapping, blurry edges. Conceptions such as fuzzy categories, paradigmatic categories and so on must somehow have room within a model.

Peaks and Valleys

fig. 109

The model of comic history I refer to as *Peaks and Valleys* is not held to be true, at least openly, by many comic historians, but is important to describe, as I have met quite a few fans who believe it. These are primarily the same people who also hold to one of the two following models. This is the belief that there were better and worse periods for comics. It is much like the pendulum of Wölfflin, but more judgmental. Of course, if you hold to the belief that superheroes or alternative autobiographical comics are the epitome of the artform, then periods are qualitatively rubbish in any time such as the 1950s, with few superheroes, or before the 1970s, with virtually no autobiographies.

This is plainly a harshly restricted view of any artform, but it has a kernel of truth in it. There do appear to be stronger and weaker periods of art, when one considers quality on the average at a given time, even if individual artists can be stronger or weaker in *any* timeframe. At the highest quality level of achievement, no artist is truly better than another: e.g., Picasso is not better than Michelangelo. Nevertheless, the Renaissance, Baroque, Modernism, the High Classical period of ancient Greek art — all appear much more creative and self-confident than Mannerism, Rococo, Postmodernism and Hellenism, for example. Likewise, popular music from 1960 to 1968 appears more resourceful and confident than, say, that from 1974 to 1980. Or the Marvel Comics "age" in the 60s can be, and has been, so compared to the comics of the 50s at DC. A useful model of an art history timeline needs to suggest this, yet allow for open disagreement about value judgments.

Superheroes

fig. 110

There is also a version of the history of comics which focuses only on heroic fiction, envisioning superheroes as the end and epitome of comic art. While it is true that superheroes may be the only genre completely original to comics and actually one of my personal favorites, it is only one of many possibilities, and as it is a highly popular subgenre, it has often been far too mediocre. People who support this version of comic history often conflate the comic book industry and the medium. Instead of Toepffer, such histories usually begin with adventure pulp magazines. A similar limitation of vision is also present in Germany where they tend to see comics as coextensive with the "Ducks," (the Disney adventures of Donald, Scrooge McDuck and other related figures), nothing more, nothing less. Certainly, Carl Barks was a genius, the artist, author and creator of many of these characters. Returning to superheroes, in my opinion Jack Kirby holds a position within comics comparable to a combination of Michelangelo and Picasso in fine art. However, either superheroes or Donald Duck alone hopelessly restricts the medium, keeping it in a self-made ghetto.

For an example of such a conception of comics history in practice, there is Gary Scott Beatty on the *Comic Arts Direct* website. He has "A Brief History of Illustrated Stories (Comic Books)" which, as he claims, "concentrates, not on my own favorites, but on defining movements that shaped our industry." After the revealing use of *industry* as a metonymy for *artform*, Beatty lists as important comic events: Gilgamesh, the Bible (no pictures!), *The Shadow*, *Mad* magazine, *Giant Sized X-Men* No. 1**, "**Crisis on Infinite Earths," and, fortunately, *Zap* No.1. [43] Some of the earliest books on comics promoted the superhero timeline. These include two of my childhood favorites, *The Steranko History of Comics* by James Steranko,[44] and *The Penguin Book of Comics* by George Perry and Alan Aldridge.[45]

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[43] Gary Scott Beatty, "A Brief History of Illustrated Stories (Comic Books)," the *Comic Arts Direct* website, <http://www.comicartistsdirect.com/>, last accessed 1 January , 2010.

[44] James Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics*, (Reading, Pa.: Supergraphics, Vol.1 1970, Vol.2 1972).

[45] George Perry and Alan Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics* (London: Penguin Books, 1971).

The most notorious magazine catering exclusively to fans of superheroes is *Wizard Magazine*.[46]

fig. 111

This model is favored by a comics public similar to the superhero cadre, yet the two are avowed enemies. *Alternative comics* means non-mainstream comics from smaller publishers, yet has in many minds come to be identified almost solely with autobiographical works such as the graphic novel *David Chelsea in Love*.[47] As Wikipedia wittily describe this phenomenon, by the 1990s "the autobiographical genre had turned into English-speaking alternative comics subculture's 'signature genre' in much the way that superhero stories dominated the American mainstream comic books, the stereotypical example recounting the awkward moment which followed when, the cartoonist sitting alone in a coffee shop when his ex-girlfriend walks in."[48] This timeline is generally identical to that of the superhero idea above, but goes on to culminate in autobiographical graphic novels. The chief proponent of this worldview is *The Comics Journal* magazine, from Fantagraphics, which, however, publishes a far wider range of creative works.[49]

The truth is that in addition to superheroes, comic books have traditionally featured a great variety of storytelling genres. There have been comics about crime, cowboys, romance, horror, war, funny animals, magic, science fiction, true adventures, sports, teenagers, pornography, religious comics, biography, TV and film adaptations, and more. Varieties of alternative comics include, besides autobiographical books, also underground, hippie, punk, social criticism, music adaptations, thrillers, drama, African-American themed, fantasy, abstract comics and more.

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[46] *Wizard Magazine*, Congers, New York.
[47] David Chelsea, *David Chelsea in Love* (New York: Reed Graphica 1992, 2003).
[48] Wikipedia, (author " Ria777") s.v. "Autobiographical Comics," 20 September 2006, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiographical_comic>, accessed 30 December 2009.
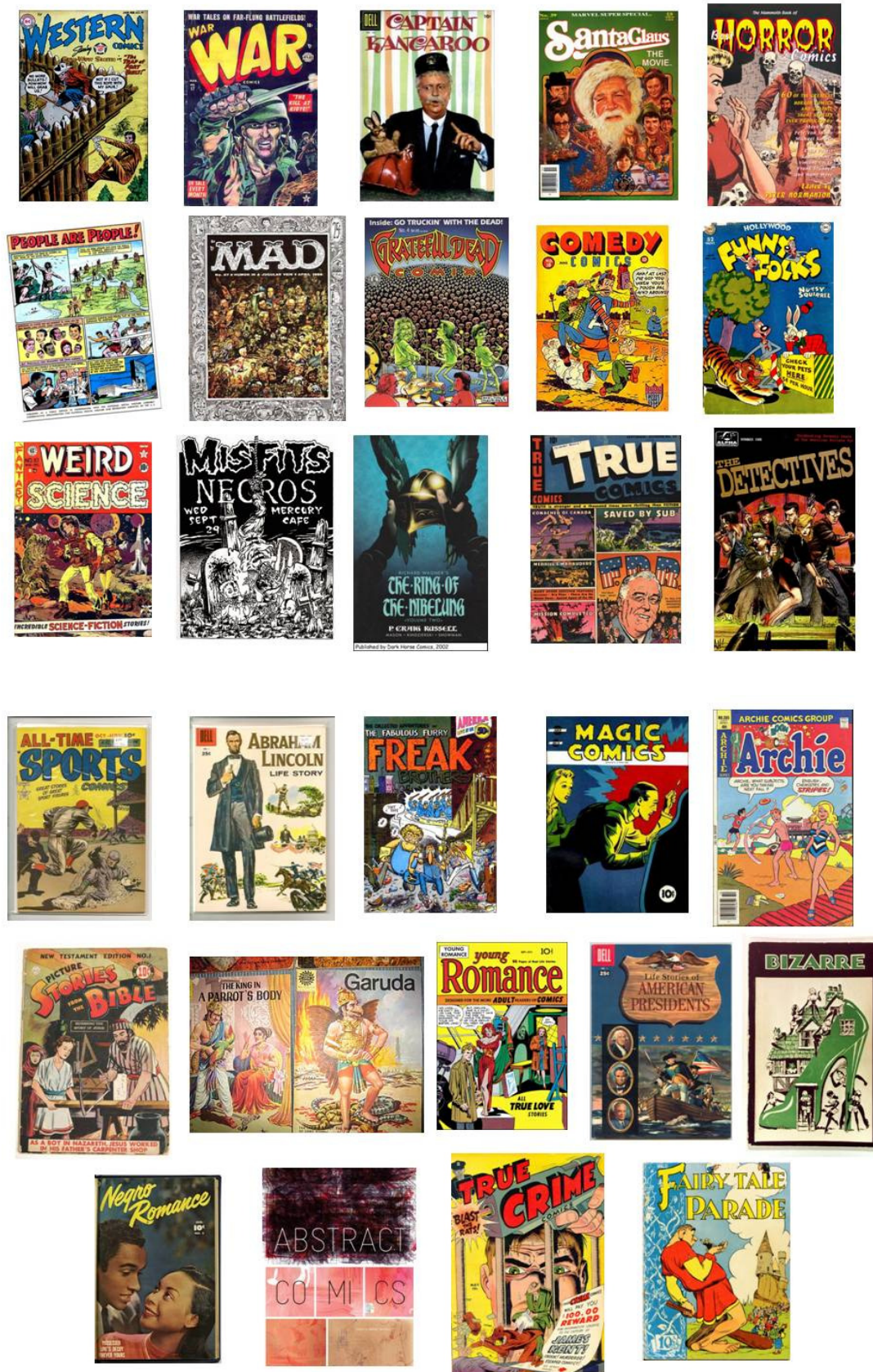[49] *The Comics Journal* magazine (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics).

fig. 112
Covers displaying some of the wide variety of genres which have been featured in comics.

Both of these cases, the Superhero and the Alternative Comics models, are significant to consider when envisioning a potentially new timeline: we see that in truth there has been an extraordinary variety of artistic approaches existing concurrently, while not falling into a pluralistic chaos; however, this multiplicity is often straightjacketed into one or the other of two false teleologies.

Pluralistic Denouement

fig. 113

This model of comics history is a duplicate of the Dantoesque fine art timeline, also ending in pluralism. I have discussed the difficulties with this well enough already above. Let me add, though, that akin to the 7 examples I described of pluralist periods throughout fine art history, there have been at least 4 times when pluralism appeared to rule the history of comics: at the end of the Golden Age, at the end of Silver Age, during the so-called Black-and-White-Explosion, and now. Obviously, since their inception, comics have been multi-genre, multi-style, multifaceted, diversified, and yet do not lack certain strands of development. Hence pluralist and yet not, at all times.
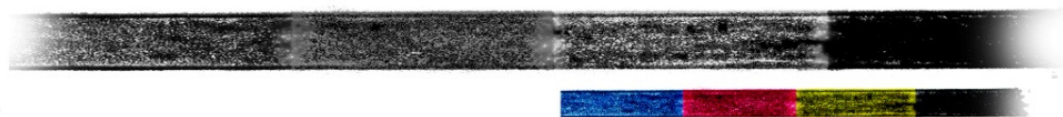
Sectarian

fig. 114

This is a solipsistic conception of history peculiar to comics. There are those who suggest that comics should ignore larger art and cultural history and simply concentrate on itself, as a unique entity. I refer to this model of comics history as *Sectarian*, as it promotes a rather stand-offish separation of comics from mainstream culture. Jason Ramos offers the most cogent argument for this position that I have read, although I do not agree. He writes:

> I would offer that those who are as intrigued by the idea of trying to make sense of the overall historical / theoretical narrative of comics (like me), should try to begin to create new language for it. Comics continually come off as an "insecure" medium, forever seeking

the validation and attention of the art-world discourse. There are models for mediums that hold their own with their own history, language, and legitimacy, Venn-diagramming into the fine art world to varying degrees (photography, architecture, film).[50]

Ramos is of course wrong about architecture, which has long been an integral part of standard art history, and about photography, which has been incorporated into art history for a few decades. He is right to an extent about film, but this has not always been advantageous for the medium. I agree with him that there is "an advantage to be gained, artistically, from comics retaining something of its culturally illegitimate status." Also, comics scholarship does need to develop its own vocabulary for elements peculiar to the form; for instance, two terms I have personally brought to the study of comics are *iconosequentiality* and *comigraphic*. Neither of comics cultural status nor new vocabulary precludes envisioning a more complete timeline for comics, for art history and for the integration of the two.
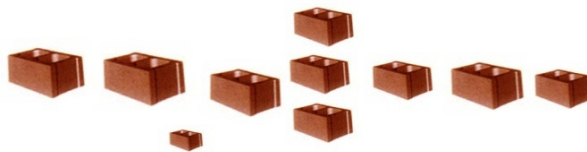

Disputes / Building

fig. 115

There is no "symptomatic" conception of history in comics yet. The scene has not been invaded by poststructuralist doubt. The comics canon has just begun to be consolidated. Perhaps the first important attempt was Art Spiegelman's "Masters of American Comics," of 2006-2007 with in-depth presentations of 15 influential artists: Winsor McCay, Lyonel Feininger, George Herriman, E.C. Segar, Frank King, Chester Gould, Milton Caniff, Charles M. Schulz, Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, Harvey Kurtzman, R. Crumb, Art Spiegelman, Gary Panter and Chris Ware. This immediately elicited extensive discussion about who was missing, including an entire exhibition "Out of Sequence: Underrepresented Voices in American Comics" in 2008-2009. Curated by John Jennings and Damian Duffy, the exhibition showcased, as they said, "areas of sequential art that might otherwise be overlooked or underappreciated. These areas include the work of women and minority artists and small press and webcomics creators," and abstract and gallery comic artists. It explored "alternate histories of American comics" and suggested "some of the limitless possibilities for

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[50] Jason Ramos, "Reflections and Generalizations of the Culture at Large," on *Commit to Making a Masterpiece Every Time: The blog of Los Angeles based artist Jason Ramos,* blog website: <http://jasonramos.blogspot.com/search?q=Reflections+and+Generalizations+of+the+Culture>, last accessed 1 August, 2009.

the medium in the past, present, and future."[51] Instead of maintaining a rigid canon or rejecting the idea *in toto*, comics currently has the enviable position of having a canon in a constant state of dialogical construction. I label this model, or more exactly stated model-building activity, *Disputes about the Canon / Building the Canon.*

The Braided Rope Model

fig. 116

After this study, analysis and debate, both with others and myself, came the real work: proposing a solution for the problems I critiqued. This contemplation of models for the history of comics and the concomitant comparison of them to those in the history of fine art brought up the question, what kind of model could I create? What *form* would this take if it incorporated history as I have described it, characterized by ruptures; simultaneous paths; aspects coming in and out of focus; hidden roads; ignored elements; mainstream currents; discontinuities where a path ends, yet begins again later; non-teleological — and yet with forms of development, not a static mass; where there is indeed historical change, movement and direction. I took my clues from comics, and my terminology from mass-media theorist Christian Doelker. (A concern with the overlap of philosophy, comics and "fine" art of course returns me to the interests within my own artworks.) I published two essays on Carrier's book *The Aesthetics of Comics* in 2001 and 2003.[52] I found the book very intellectually stimulating as was my long email exchange with Carrier in which I further honed my notions. Carrier's book is a promising cross-over among art history, philosophy and comics. Furthermore, in it he presents a direct struggle with the Danto-Dickie Institutional Theory of the ontology of art now so dominant, which I touched on in several parts of this dissertation, particularly Chapter One. I mentioned some of Carrier's points when I presented the Dantoesque model timeline above. My response, in short, is that I do not feel that we now have an end of either art or art history. It is the death of *one* western, reductivist master narrative: that single, simple march-

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[51] Damian Duffy and John Jennings, press release and catalogue for exhibition *Out of Sequence: Underrepresented Voices in American Comics* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois, Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion, 2008).

[52] This article was originally published in *The Art Book*, London, in March 2001, as mentioned in footnote no. 2 above. A modified version also appeared in the US as "Posthistorical Art: Or, Comics and the Realm of Absolute Knowledge," *The Comics Interpreter*, 2, no.1 (2003), pp. 24-26.

of-history idea which was taken for granted until recently. This is also a history of art which has ignored vernacular art such as comics, the contributions of women, the entire world outside Europe and North America, and much more.

Carrier writes, "unlike Danto, I think that there is more than one way to tell the story of art's history." While this would seemingly call for multiple histories, Carrier terms such a position "posthistorical."[53] Numerous and divers stories are not necessarily "post-story;" they simply embody the amendment of one dominant tale into many narratives. The art of comics, with its history of addition and variation rather than reduction, has inspired me to a new model. Art history could have many narratives or even narrative climaxes other than ontology or formal reduction; and multiple ones at that. The future of both fine and comic art might not be *posthistorical*, but rather *polyhistorical*. As I mentioned in Chapter Eight, while most literary theorists use the term *text* to prejudicially favour reading over seeing, Doelker traces the term back to its root in *weaving* or a *cable*. (*texo, texere*: to braid, weave).

This is a highly evocative image which inspired in me a new metaphor for the timeline. I picture, in a very Wittgensteinian manner, an interwoven mass of filaments, some longer, some shorter, each a "history," each independent to an extent, yet touching on various others, some ending only to begin again farther on, all travelling nonetheless in a certain concert. To use Doelker's terminology, we could have an art history which is *plurogenic* (multistrand*)*, as opposed to Greenberg or Danto's *monogenic* (single strand) conceptions. This is an image of history as a cable of integrated stories; we have simply focused far too long on only one strand.
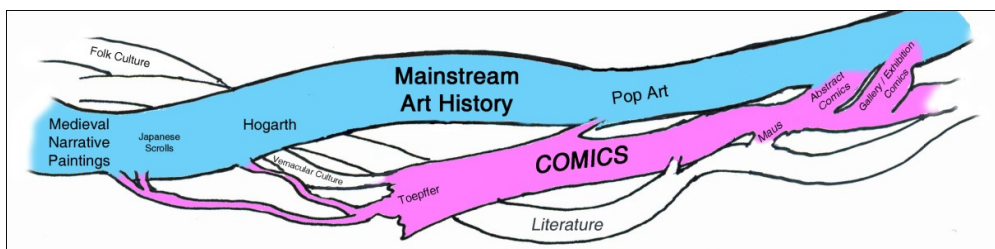

fig. 117

At first I thought of a cable. However, stumbling in internet across one another's similarity of thought, art critic John Perreault and I discussed and hybridized our two streams of thought. Perrault had asked a class he taught, "What if the current rigidity and defeatism

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[53] David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park, PA: Penn. State Univ. Press), p. 115.

were not caused by the critics, the curators, and the historians but by their image of history?" After first flirting with an image resembling the DNA double helix, Perrault settled on the braid. He writes, "But isn't the braid too difficult to use? The heuristic braid diagram is the visual equivalent of multitasking and polyphony, and no more difficult than these. … If you can follow a fugue or the various voices in jazz, then you can braid."[54] Crossing that with my vision of the cable, we achieved the new model: a braided rope. A rope can be made of various intertwining plaits of strands, sometimes even in opposite rotations, it can have strands of various thicknesses, and even have some frayed filaments, yet retain much of its tensile strength. Most of us have bodily experiences of working with thick ropes, know how they are linear, yet can be coiled, knotted and so on. All of these properties are metaphorically useful for a promising model of art history.

Here is my final sketch of a new model for the art history timeline.
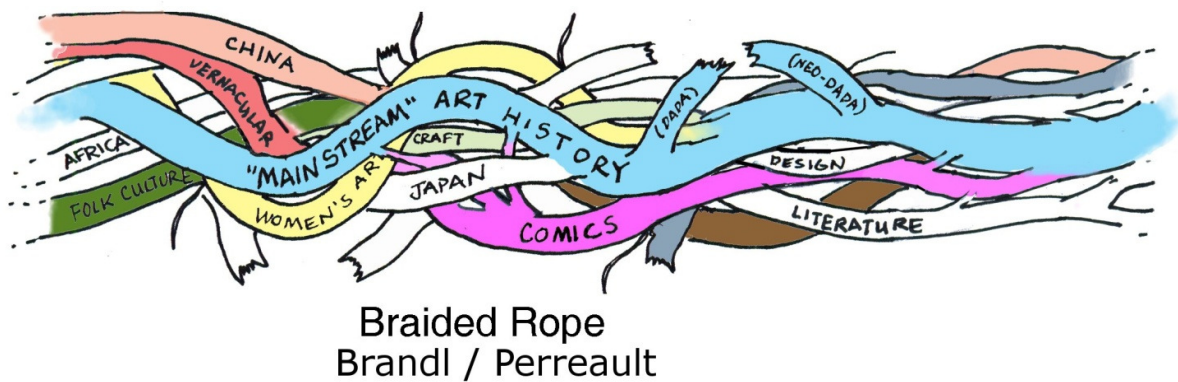

Braided Rope
Brandl / Perreault

fig. 118

I am now drawing this quite large for hanging in the classroom, with far more detail and specific, benchmark dates. Above the braid, I have also a variety of societal, political and the cultural events (such as the World Wars, appearances of alphabets, Buddha's birth, and much more). The blue strand in the middle bears all the customary epochs and periods of art history from my survey class as shown in figures 85, 86 and 87 above. Throughout the year, students, in addition to learning these, will add various other facts and events to appropriate strands, filling in comics history, Chinese art history, more information about women artists and so on.

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[54] John Perreault, *Artopia* website: < http://www.artsjournal.com/artopia/>. Summary of his "braid" ideas on *The Art Section* website, "The Braid: A New Paradigm for Art," direct link to page: <http://zoolander52.tripod.com/theartsectioncopycopy/id1.html>,last accessed 27 August, 2010.

A New Metaphor(m) for the Timeline

Let me list what I feel are a few of the strengths this metaphoric model adds to the teaching and study of art history. Following cognitive metaphor theory, it allows us to access a variety of cultural metaphors to focus on, yet critically regard, our subject. We retain something of the *"CAUSES AND EFFECTS ARE LINKED OBJECTS"* which dominates most standard timeline models, but it becomes only one helpful trope among many, not the central one. Metaphors of weaving and construction become more important. *"IDEAS ARE CONSTRUCTED OBJECTS"* comes to the fore, with its important corollaries, *"The mind is a builder"* and *"Thinking is building/forming/shaping."* We become keenly aware that our idea of art history is an object built by us, thus one that is not beyond reproach (or praise) and can be altered at any time. A braid is generally felt to be a very handmade object as well, reestablishing metaphorically the personal body-based experiences and embodied reasoning that most artists feel is too absent from art history instruction. The braid metaphor helps to thus humanize a trope that sometimes appears all too predetermined. The various strands that form the braid are also path-like, giving us access to those foundational metaphors and their implications. *"Reasoning is following a path"* is one such trope. *"Arguments are paths on which thought travels"* is another. Both assist the viewer of such a timeline to conceive of following the strands, jumping between them, looking for hidden ones and so on as actions involving working out history itself in one's mind, placing the emphasis on personal interpretation rather than simple memorization. The braided-rope timeline still has a "mainstream" main strand, which helps anchor the students' knowledge as they first learn facts. Oppositely, it helps to draw attention to the fact that much is occurring outside the tradition Eurocentric area of focus, such as Chinese art, which we could, and later should, study as well. The braided strands display how very much is taking place simultaneously in a variety of locations. They highlight the existence of long, unbroken lines of tradition in areas and fields that appear to have come and gone in the normal timeline, such as icon painting. In the additions to be brought by students, hopefully it will be clearer that Africa is not just a site for so-called primitive art, that it has long and often sophisticated traditions, but also ruptures due to colonialism and wars. Supplementary strands focusing on women's handicrafts, folk, popular and vernacular culture can be added. Transformations can be displayed, such as that from handicraft into design. It becomes clear that ideas continue on past their peaks of influence, disappearing temporarily, perhaps even ending (such as Dada), only to start up

again in a new fashion later. Crossovers and mergers can be shown, such as women into the mainstream of artists, popular elements into fine art, and the like. Comics will of course be expanded, as I also teach a module on them, thus I can use the same timeline, beginning where comics have their own, separate history, yet showing at what points this artform comes close to fine art, perhaps now beginning to merge with it as photography has. Best of all, it is a learnable, understandable heuristic image that frankly exhibits that art history is also a question of where one is focusing one's attention.

I believe I have discovered a useful metaphor(m) in the image of a braided rope: a simple, yet evocative image which allows one to teach art history as a developmental succession, yet avoid teleological inferences; to retain a core focus, yet eclipse the illusion of exclusivity; to clearly indicate that there is a wealth of art not being immediately presented in the standard survey, yet maintain a pragmatically serviceable image.

CHAPTER NINE: THE SEQUENCE

In this chapter, I suggested a new model of art history by agonistically arguing with existing ones under the light of cognitive metaphor theory.
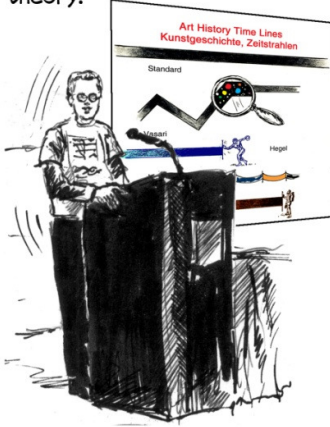
I tested my idea while writing the chapter. First, in a preliminary presentation at the annual conference of the CAA (the College Art Association, the US national art historians organization) in Chicago...

... in a session titled "Comics in Art History" organized by art historian Patricia Mainardi and art historian and artist Andrei Molotiu.
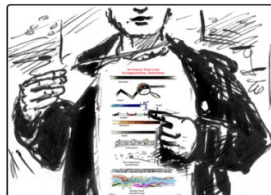
I also discussed the rough draft of the chapter in the Kunstschule Liechtenstein in an evening art discussion group.

I applied the thoughts and process behind my idea of metaphor(m) to a larger, yet highly pragmatic question: How do I teach a survey of art history nowadays?

How can I envision a more accurate yet still heuristically useful metaphor for the timeline?

(That's me in a podcast, left, and a video interview, right, after the speech, still talking about the idea — which I also had illustrated on my T-shirt.)

Lakoff and Johnson describe how a new imaginative metaphor for love could cure us of some bad habits grounded in tropes such as "LOVE IS MADNESS" or "LOVE IS WAR" ...

... There could be a better one such as "LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART."

After analyzing and learning "not to think of (or with)" existing timeline models which I find inadequate, I created a model of the passage of art history as a braided rope...
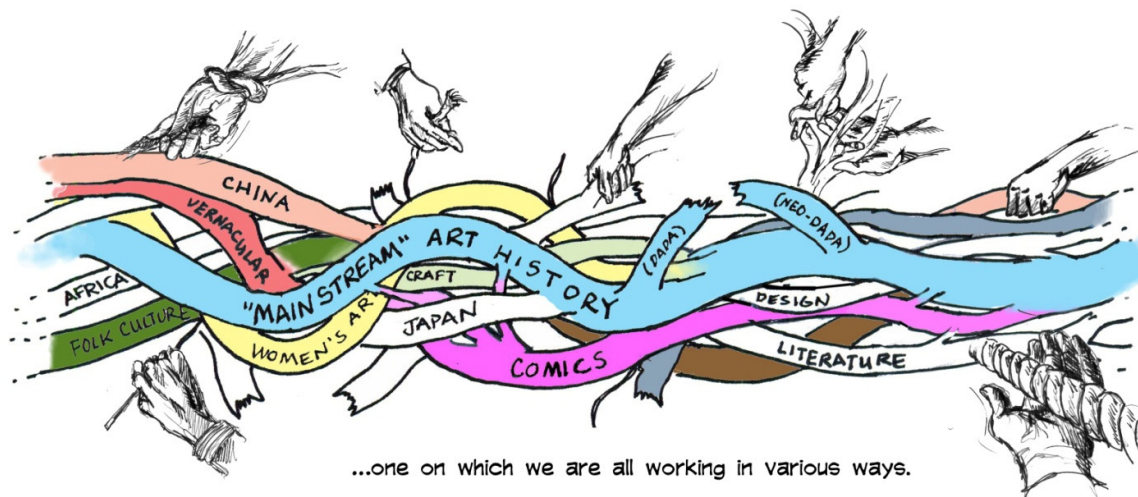
...one on which we are all working in various ways.