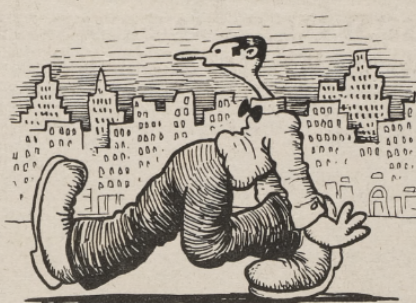


## In this issue:

- Marvel comics are literature, man: c2
- The prophetic R. Crumb: c4
- The fiction of "academic freedom": c6
- Baseball's not the same any more  
(and neither are we): c7

HEY HEY HEY...



Crumb: c4

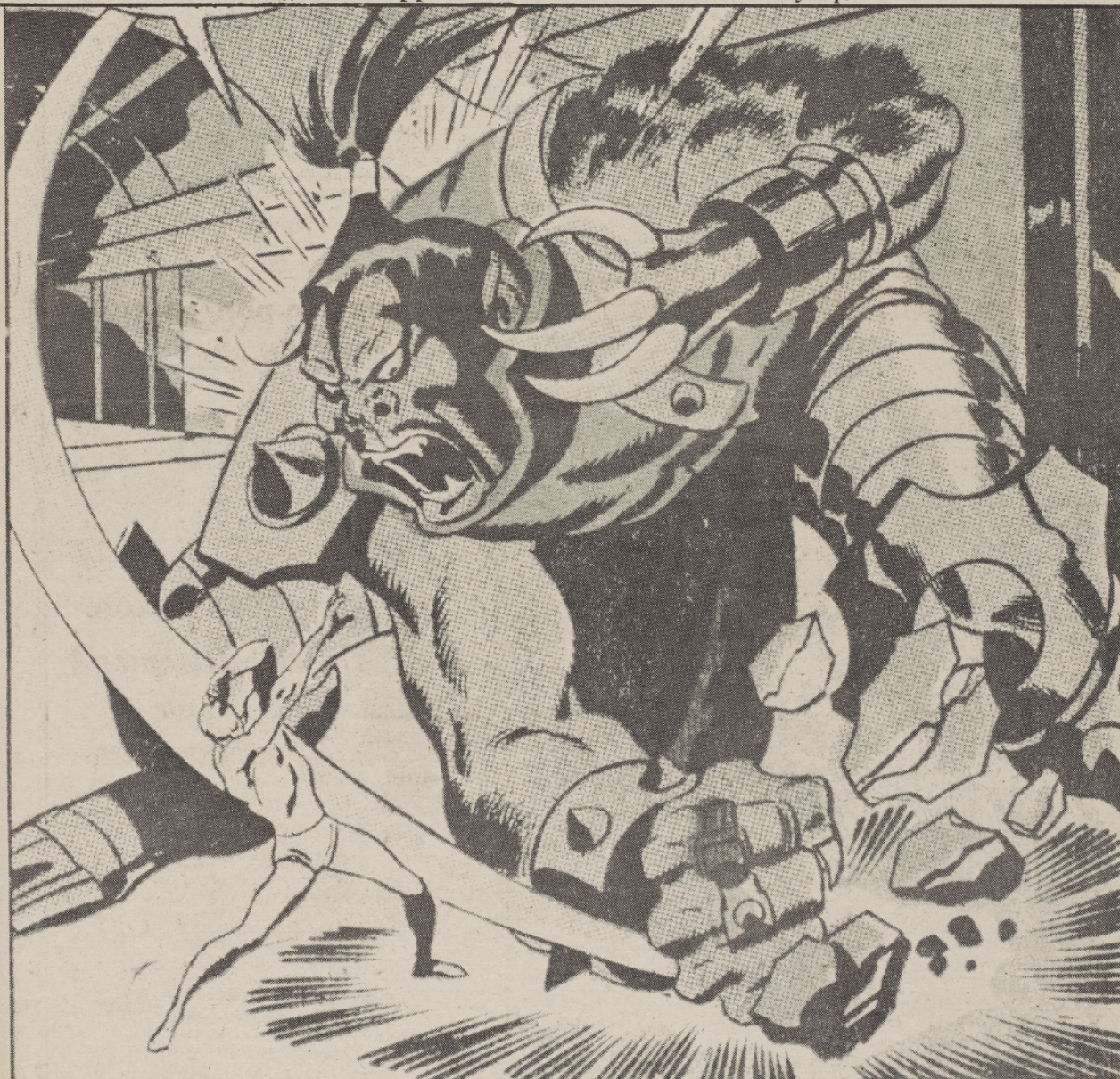
# CONNECTION

volume one

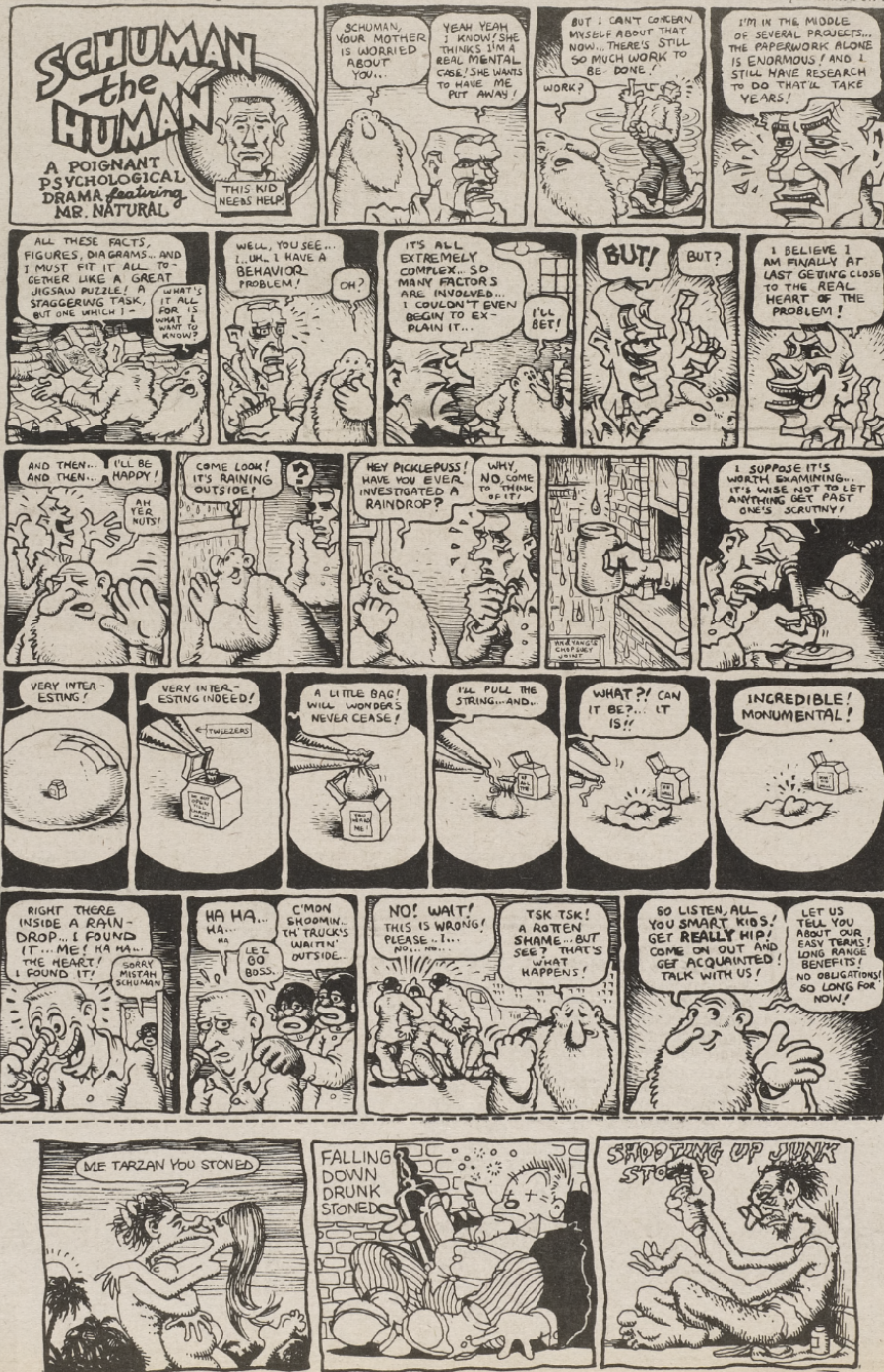
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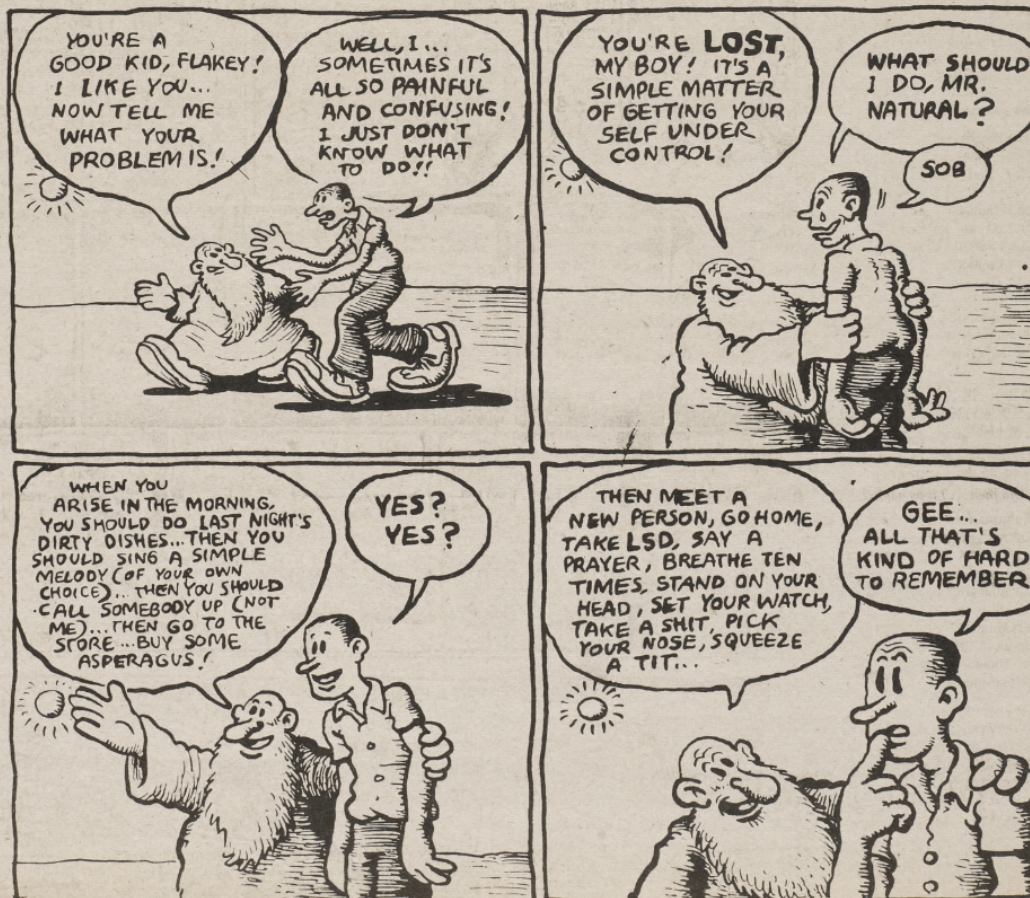
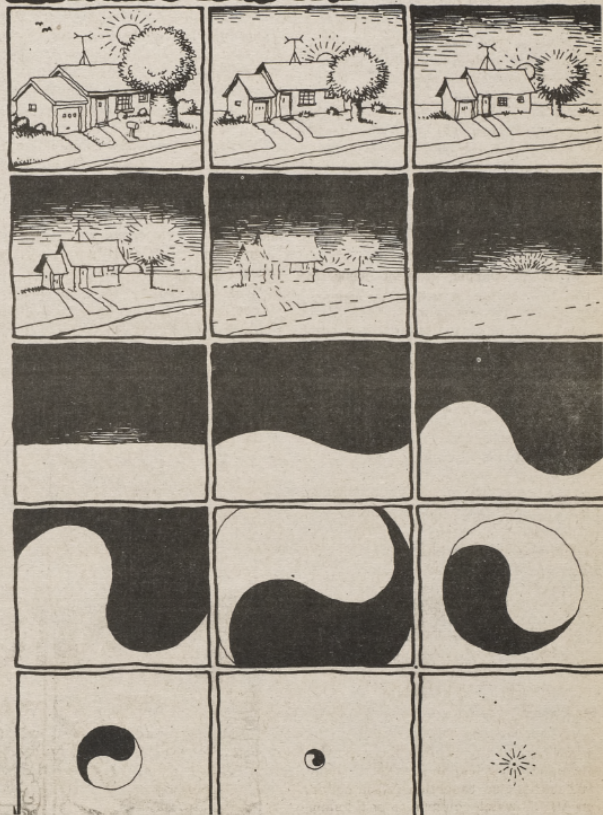




# Headcomix



# Kozmic Kapens





# Marvel

[continued from c-3]

a whole ethos, a philosophy, within the framework of the comic character. They seem desperate for someone to believe in—I guess McCarthy filled the bill for a while. Now, I have to resist taking myself too seriously."

Marvel projects, over-all, good middle-of-the road Jewish liberalism, in contrast to the staid, WASPish Republicanism of DC. "I try to present all sides of every question," Stan says. "Iron Man and Captain America are sort of our more conservative concessions to the Birch Society (laugh); Spiderman, Hulk, Silver Surfer, they're the liberals." In the "Crisis on Campus" Spiderman epic, the protesters (who want their university to construct low-rent housing) are sadly misjudged by the press, arrested, and jailed; when a cop pulls his gun, he is restrained—"fair" reporting. The Hulk is always battling the military-industrial complex; but the general trying to kill him is a nice guy. (And Marvel does print war comics; they sell). On the other hand, Iron Man (in reality Tony Stark, industrial tycoon) is an apologist for imperialism; Dr. Strange tells some hippies in the street to drop back in; and Randy Robertson, a black militant who calls Spiderman "Whitey" is told by his father that "the rules are the same, no matter who the players are..." Blacks and hippies appear regularly in Marvel's urban crowd scenes, a far cry from the sterile Aryan purity of DC's Metropolis; but Marvel was embarrassed when its first black super hero, an African philosopher-king with "jungle senses," turned out to be named the Black Panther, and tried to drop the "black" from his name.

Stan has tried to open up the editorial decisions of the magazines to his readership. He reads nearly 2000 fan letters a week, and often solicits opinions on specific policy questions (he acquiesced to overwhelming demand to keep the black in Black Panther.) Marvel invented the no-prize, a package of bubble-gum awarded to any reader who

can point out a factual mistake of inconsistency in any issue, and unlike DC, makes no pretence of trying to explain inexplicable mistakes. Stan admits he was wrong, and emphasizes the tautological nature of the comic universe in his replies—"We can roll our own erudite explanations as we go

along," he answered one earnest girl trying to explain the difference between white and black magic in Dr. Strange.

All of these innovations have not been without effect on the world of Brand Ehhh. A recently-tabulated do-it-yourself poll showed that Marvel has nearly 20% adult readers, compared to DC's

estimated 4%. "The competitors were really asleep at the switch" in 1961, Stan recalls. "It was very funny—when they did pick up on it, and they tried to imitate us, they imitated all the wrong things. Like they'll think our books are selling well because we use crooked panel borders. Years ago I used to get reports—because we know all the people who work at National and they come back and tell us a few things. They have a big conference down there and suddenly decide that our books are selling well because they have a lot of words on their covers and we took all the words off our covers. Or they decided our books were selling well because of the way we colored the titles. So they tried to color their titles like ours so we changed our colors. But it never occurs to them that our books are written better and that the artwork has more sincerity."

DC comics have begun to change in the last year; women's skirts have come off their ankles; Robin has Janis Joplin records, etc. The contemporary has entered in politics as well; instead of vague references to huge red claw nebulae trying to take over their sector of the galaxy, Superman goes to fight in Vietnam and zaps a few battalions of Vietcong per page. Hippies are portrayed as either communists or dupes; the underground press crops up in the form of "It's Your Bag," a "scandal-sheet" which guesses Batman's secret identity. 'Nuff said.

Stan is himself interested in the underground press, and interviewed me for a few minutes about it. He is impatient with the boundaries of propriety set by the Comics Code (he says it is "very strong"), which stipulates that crime does not pay, sex is bad and drugs unmentionable, and that characters must not have teeth that look like fangs, among other things. "I don't think there's any farther we can go and still keep it as a comic magazine," he says of his format. "I think we do enjoy any kind of experimenting we can think of, but now what we're doing is essentially repeating ourselves. If we get any further out, we won't have a comic book, and hopefully, we may do that sometime." Hopefully.



## R. Crumb: the sacred and the profane

[continued from c-4]

be an essentially fruitless exchange. Confused at first, Flakey is soon utterly stoned by the profusion of apocalyptic imagery. But Mr. Natural suddenly brings him down by dismissing "the whole sthick" as a put-on:

Meanwhile, a multitude of celestial voices will sing round about you and the earth shall smell of roses evermore! GOOD DAY!!

Mr. Natural's next miracle is to point to a mirage of a city in the distance, which again Flakey takes as real, and again must learn is illusory. The put-ons are intended to clean out Flakey's head by showing him the vacuousness of the "letter" of revelation. They succeed in eliciting as unconditioned and honest a response as he is capable of:

Sometimes it's all so painful and confusing! I just don't know what to do!! but when Flakey persists, Mr. Natural gives him a version of revelation designed to fulfill his expectations:

Sigh... Okay... You shall be visited by seven dragons, each with seven tongues of Fire! But that's not all!... A virgin shall burst forth from the sky, standing in a golden flaming chariot! In her right hand she will hold a snake and in her left a crescent moon!...

Mr. Natural how begins to try to convey "spirit," to heal and teach by using language as a metaphor:

When you arise in the morning, you should do last night's dirty dishes... Then you should sing a simple melody (of your own choice)... Then you should call somebody up (not me)... then go to the store... Buy some asparagus!

Flakey thinks he can follow - "Yes? Yes?" - Mr. Natural continues:

Then meet a new person, go home, take LSD, say a prayer, breathe ten times, stand on your head, set your watch, take a shit, pick your nose, squeeze a tit...

But the vision fails, for Flakey is trapped in the literal:

Gee... all that's kind of hard to remember...

and Mr. Natural, with exasperation, shouts TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT! Confused and discouraged, Flakey turns to leave, screaming with frustration, "Ah yer NUTS," and is answered by, "Don't you WISH!" At this point the old man offers the final revelation; he appears to Flakey transfigured: "His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as the light" (Matthew, 17:2). This is the "straight answer" for which Flakey has been searching, the truly straight answer to all questions, the answer that can perhaps only be articulated in the words of the child's joke with which Mr. Natural concludes:

Hey... know what? That's what!

Mr. Natural's child's joke is a "Kosmic Kaper" of the sort that Crumb himself plays in many of the frames of "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comix" (HEADCOMIX) and

on the inside back cover of ZAP number zero, a jest about "Nothing." And it is characteristic of Crumb's wit that he should recognize a Zen koan in a kid's game. For although Mr. Natural is a man of endless subtlety, breadthless experience and depthless wisdom, his ultimate insights and his unique appeal stem from his childishness, a childishness expressed in silliness and wonder. The inside front cover of ZAP number zero contains another Crumb self-portrait—Mr. Sketchum Is At It Again!—which makes the affirmation of Innocence explicit. Seated in the cliché pose of the cartoonist at his desk, the phony smile of Howdy Doody's Buffalo Bob pasted on his face, Mr. Sketchum introduces us to ZAP COMIX:

"ZAP" Comics will contain all the latest in humor! Audacious, irreverent! Provocative! you Bet!... And just Chock Full of Surprises! Every page will be jam-packed with thrills and laffs!

As he walks through his office, passing a window, he notices a dot on a building across the way. He zeroes in on it through a telescope, each time bringing it closer and closer...

It's a kid! And he's waving to us from

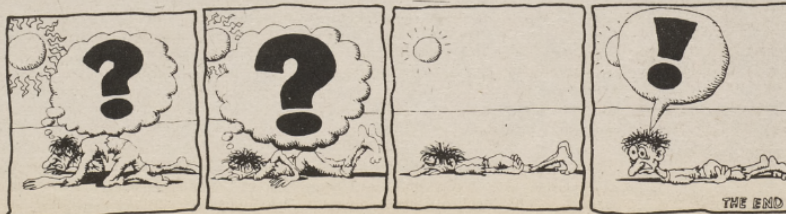
all the way over there! Must be miles! Isn't it amazing?

In the last frame, glowing like the transfigured Mr. Natural, Mr. Sketchum concludes:

See what I mean? Things like that are happening all the time in these comic strips... Wow! Don't miss a single issue!

And the front cover takes us even further, showing a naked hairy man in foetal position, surrounded by a placenta of electric charge—ZAP!—his umbilical cord plugged into a wall socket.

Jesus spoke of childlike consciousness as the prerequisite for salvation. (Matthew 18:3) But he advised his disciples to combine the innocence of the dove with the wariness of the serpent. (Matthew 10:16) As a teller of parables he embodied this combination in himself, distinguishing the sheep from the goats by the way they responded to his stories. R. Crumb provides a telescope through which we can rediscover the child within ourselves. But we must see and hear; for "the man who has, will be given more, till he has enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has." ZAP and Headcomix can be obtained at the New Yorker Bookshop.





# R. Crumb: the sacred and the profane

## The family that LAYS together STAYS together!



By STEVEN MARX

### Part II. The Profane

*"The Road of Excess Leads to the Palace of Wisdom"—Blake*

"The family that lays together stays together!" announces the caption of R. Crumb's panoramic centerfold in SNATCH COMIX. One's first response is probably to laugh at the profanation of two conventional American pieties: family worship and togetherness. But one soon realizes that the travesty is also a truth; that the "cartoon" is also a vision of harmony and delight. Ultimately, one may perceive that there is no real conflict between the parody and what is parodied: for laying is praying and praying is laying; both are the expression of devotion to God, in the Universe and in Man; both are the address and the reply.

In SNATCH COMIX pornographic fantasies replace the divine fantasies of Crumb's earlier work. The Sacred becomes the Profane; the mysterious becomes the obscene (unseen); for here, the Profane and the obscene are regarded as holy. The Profane has the same aura as the Sacred, and exposure to it has the same emotional effects as exposure to the Sacred: Dionysus and Apollo are merely different aspects of the same God. This is made explicit in John Thomson's "Spiritual Stag Film." (Yellow Dog, #4) Fucking, sucking and masturbating are acts of devotion to the Dionysiac deity. The reader contemplates these acts in SNATCH as exempla, and he is guided to imitative practice: "JERK OFF with Snatch Comics" proclaims the back cover as a ritual command.

The world of Blake's Experience parodies and reverses the world of Blake's Innocence, yet ultimately depicts the same reality and demands the same reverence: "Did he who made the Lamb make Thee?" The "unpredictable" little girl in "Phonus Balonus Blues," (EVO) is the same as Meatball. The picture of the hairy and sweaty Mr. Sketchum getting a blow job as he sits at the drawing board, found on the inside cover of SNATCH, parodies and reverses the picture of the bow-tied, clean-cut and naive Mr. Sketchum on the inside cover of ZAP #0, who introduces us to child-like delight. Yet, both are the same character—Crumb addressing the reader directly.

The invitation to the delights of Innocence is parodied by, and yet identi-

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fied with the invitation to the delights of Experience:

*It's a Kid! And he's waving to us from all the way over there!...See what I mean? Things like that are happening all the time in these comic strips...Wow! Don't miss a single issue! (ZAP)*

*The pleasure is ours folks! We really like drawing dirty cartoons! We hope you enjoy lookin' at em as much as we enjoy drawin' em!...What this world needs is more satisfied customers. (SNATCH)*

Both invitations are "profaned" by taking the verbal form of commercials, but the message in both is sacred and direct.



The second invitation may not be as easy to accept as the first. Some people are unable to look at SNATCH; others are frightened or depressed by it. A friend, after leafing through it quietly for five minutes, looked up and said one word: "Heavy." The passage from Innocence to Experience is always painful, even if the Experience is that of pleasure. There is a single frame by Howard Arnherst in SNATCH showing an infant in the cradle bawling with terror as a huge and gross but beautiful phallus comes crashing through its nursery window. The didactic purpose of SNATCH, and of most of Crumb's recent strips is to guide us through that passage. Like ZAP, SNATCH fulfills the perennial function of serious literature: to teach and delight; to teach through delight. It teaches the proper worship of Dionysus.

A critique of pornography per se can be nothing more or less than a critique of all literature. No matter what the book, the teaching it does is through

secondary experience; the delight it provides is substitute gratification. The limits and values of pornography supplies the theme of one of Crumb's most sensitive and compassionate "obscene" strips, "Dirty Dog," which appears in ZAP #3.

"Dirty Dog" begins with a bunny rabbit behind a TV camera in the upper corner of the first frame saying, "Hi! I'm God! Lets get going." Introduced by a quote from a blues—"I rather drink muddy water, lord/Sleep in a hollow log/Than to be up here in New York/Treated like a dirty dog,"—we discover him walking the streets, desolately searching for love: "I sure have been leading a Dog's life since I got to this town... Makes me horny as hell too...Jeez! I gotta meet some cunts!" He tries to make friends, but to no avail, so... "Dog-gone it anyhow...guess I'll go look at skin mags..." He goes into a porn bookstore; has a series of difficult encounters with the other customers, the manager and his own fantasies; selects a mag to buy and go home with. In the last frame we see him briskly truckin' down the street, the wrapped magazine under his arm, a glowing smile on his face, with the thought in mind, "Man oh man, this is a real good one!" In a corner of the last frame, the radiant bunny rabbit God points to Dirty Dog and looks out at the audience to say: "Poor old Dirty Dog! But he's happy."

ZAP #3 appeared in January of this year, announcing itself as a "special 69 issue." In several of the strips throughout the comic, there is a play on the resemblance of the figure "69" to the figure of the Yin-Yang. Underlying the structure of the comic as a whole, however, is an implicit assertion that the Sacred and the Profane themselves form a Yin-Yang; that the fleshly "soixante neuf" and the abstract principle of all change are analogous and interwoven: "Dig the Profile." Through an ingenious

method of reversing the pagination and a remarkable turning center spread, the editors have made the comic book readable in both directions, so that each cover is both front and back. Reading in one direction, one is oriented toward the Sacred: Rick Griffin's cover depicts a Peace Eye escaped from its shackles in the cave of the flesh, moving upward to the clear light of the void. The other direction is oriented toward the Profane: S. Clay Wilson's cover depicts a group of unspeakably ugly pirates threatening the reader with sharpened swords and glints in their eyes. And within ZAP #3 we find exalted apocalypses intermingled with gross fantasies. Indeed, as Rick Griffith shows in "The Secret of OXO" on the back cover of SNATCH, the Apocalypse is a gross fantasy.

The grossest strip in ZAP #3 is Wilson's "Captain Pissgums and his Pervert Pirates."

*They came from every crudcrusted corner of the globe, these lice-infested losers...some were sadists...some were masochists...some just licked stinky of boots...and the Captain settled for having his crew whiz into his mouth while others looked on delighted.*

Despite their grossness and violence, we soon discover that the pirates are delicately solicitous of one another's sexual proclivities, that the Captain is just; another one of the boys, and that their cruise is a kind of idyll:

*Good morning men, you look like hell... what we're gonna do though, is stay on this course for a while...I realize that sounds vague...but don't sweat it—today everybody gets a double ration of grog... and we're gonna keep on the same course and sail and sail and fuck. (cough)*

The narrative involves the interruption of the idyll because of the chase and capture of Pissgums' ship by another pirate vessel, "the Quivering Thigh," sailed by Fatima and her crew of dykes. The two sexually incompatible and competing crews have a huge and brutal rumble, and Pissgums' ship is destroyed. Then,

*The fighting between the pervert pirates and the dykes slowed down...everybody was tired. This feeling spread across the ship...it seemed everybody wanted to stop the sword-play, to sex it up instead!*

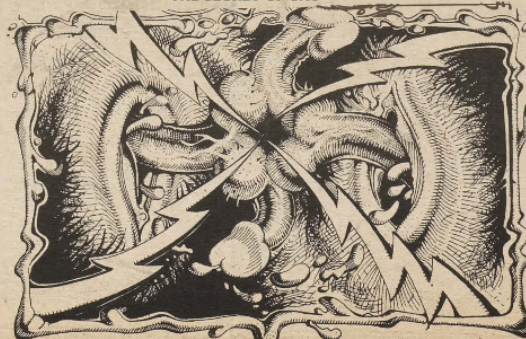
As the strip concludes, one of the dykes has a great idea:

*We can all aboard our ship. "The Quivering Thigh" and have some fun...Pull yourselves together, and even though we're dykes, we can use you men 'cuzz you're all hung so nice...Exceptions can be made so lets have ourselves a fat orgy.*

This happy ending is climaxed by an apocalypse, as Pissgums and Fatima remain behind in a clutch, and go down with the sinking ship:

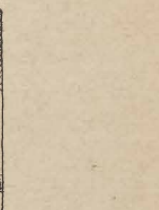
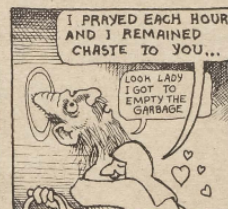
*Perhaps Pissgums and Fatima came to some conclusions before they went under with the ship.*

### THE SECRET OF OXO





SPIRITUAL  
STAG FILM



**THE PLEASURE IS OURS, FOLKS!**

WE REALLY **LIKE** DRAWING DIRTY CARTOONS! IT HELPS US GET RID OF PENT-UP ANXIETIES AND REPRESSIONS AND ALL THAT KINDA STUFF... WE HOPE **YOU** ENJOY LOOKIN' AT 'EM AS MUCH AS WE ENJOY DRAWIN' 'EM !!

"WHAT THIS WORLD NEEDS IS MORE SATISFIED CUSTOMERS!"

"The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true...

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life; and when he does the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt...

—Blake

—Blake



TALES FROM THE LAND OF GENITALIA.

