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EIGHTBALL

no 16

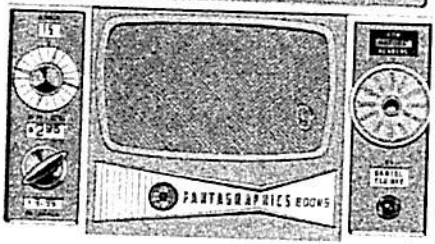
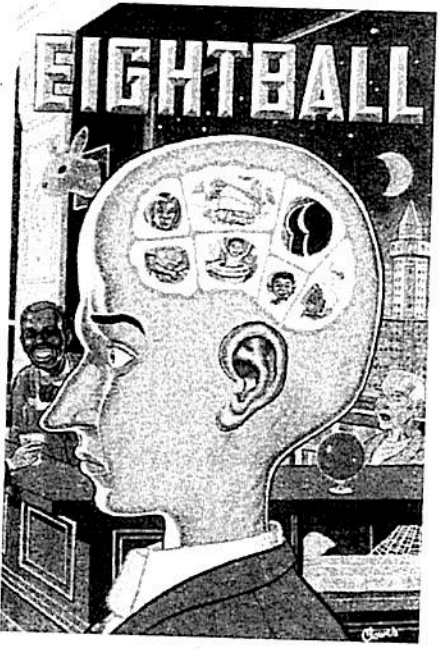


DANIEL GILLESPIE CLOWES

\$3.95
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In This Issue:
Like a Weed, Joe
IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE
MCMXLXVI
SQUIRREL GIRL
CANDY-PANTS
Ghost World

RECOMMENDED
MATURE
READERS



"Maintaining an Icy Distance Between Artist and Reader Since 1989," a slogan used by Dan Clowes to describe *Eightball*, his comic book series. Clockwise from top: issues #16 (1995), #17 (1996) and #15 (1995).

cover artwork © Daniel Clowes

dan clowes

is one of the independent comic industry's most widely recognized artists. His critically-acclaimed and innovative series *Eightball* is enormously successful. Born in Chicago in 1962, he graduated with an art degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and entertained a short-lived career in the professional art world before turning to comics. From 1985–89, Fantagraphics published six issues of Clowes's *Lloyd Llewellyn*, a "kitsch-noir" private-eye story. In 1989, he began *Eightball*, a wide assortment of continuing stories spanning 17 issues at present. Fantagraphics (Seattle) has since released several books compiled from *Eightball* including *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron*, *Orgy Bound*, *Lout Rampage* and *Pussey!*

Clowes's work has also appeared in Weirdo, Young Lust, The Village Voice and Donut Sissy. He has designed eleven album covers, a skateboard and the can for OK Soda, Coca-Cola's disastrous "Gen-X" soft drink. The comic Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron features a powerful dream-like narrative in which a Clowes look-alike tries to make sense of a perverse and poignant world of '50s snuff films, cult communes, desperate potato-head waitresses and crazed conspiracy theorists. The stark graphics further the dark and disturbing tone of this series. Ghost World, a storyline from Eightball about two severely disaffected teenage girls, is currently being adapted for film—screenplay by Clowes, direction by Terry Zwigoff (Crumb). Pussey! and Orgy Bound are more lighthearted looks at a variety of subjects including some sadly appealing characters of youth culture. Currently, Clowes lives in Berkeley, CA with his wife.

DAN CLOWES: I was born in 1961, but grew up surrounded by late '50s to early '60s schlock. My brother, who's ten years older than me, was a big comics nerd. He bought illustrated magazines, science fiction—stuff like *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. I was immediately drawn to this imagery. Around age three or four, I started tracing images from old *Batman* comics. My drawing just blossomed from there.

ANDREA JUNO: So you were nurtured on monster/superhero comics?

DC: We didn't have any standards at all. My brother would just buy every single comic that came out—*Mad* magazine and all the bad imitations, like *Cracked*.

AJ: What about underground comics?

DC: The first time I saw an underground comic was when I was over at a friend's house—I was probably eight or nine years old. He pulled out a stack of his dad's *Playboy's* and *Penthouse's*. One magazine had an article about underground comics. I was so enthralled by this, just the idea that pornographic comics were out there. I wanted these more than anything in the world. There was a picture of a Robert Crumb comic called *Big Ass*. My friend and I wound up drawing our own version of *Big Ass*, as we imagined it would be. Unfortunately, my friend got possession of our drawings; I would give anything to see mine. It was an eight year old's version of what an adult pornographic comic would be like. It wasn't until I was ten that I saw an actual Robert Crumb comic. It was probably one of the *Zap's*, and it was just basically pornography. I didn't see it as fine art.

AJ: Did you go to art school or—?

DC: I went to the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Lovely Brooklyn. I actually graduated; most cartoonists go for six weeks and give up. I wasn't that smart.

AJ: Your comic "Art School Confidential" is a very scathing take on art school.

DC: That comic is like folk art because so many people have xeroxed the story to pass out in art school or put on a bulletin board, and then somebody else takes it down and xeroxes that.

Comics are a warm, friendly medium. You can deal with the most hateful issues, really painful and horrible material and yet, it somehow comes across being palatable or even cheerful.



Dan Clowes (1996).

"Art School Confidential" from *Orgy Bound* (1996).

THEY ALL THOUGHT I WAS IN ART SCHOOL TO LEARN THE VARIOUS TECHNIQUES OF SELF-EXPRESSION PARAGANIT TO A CAREER IN THE VISUAL ARTS... AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED 'EM TO THINK! ACTUALLY, I WAS THERE AS A FREE LANCE UNDERCOVER AGENT IN ORDER TO LEARN FIRST HAND THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT THE BIGGEST SCAM OF THE CENTURY!

ART SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL



THE STORY THAT...

BLOWS THE LID OFF A MILLION-DOLLAR RACKET!

SEE
RICH GUYS WHO DRAW WORSE THAN YOUR SEVEN YEAR-OLD SISTER!



HAS BEEN FAMOUS-ARTIST PROFESSORS WHO COULDN'T TEACH A DOG TO BARK!

SELF-OBSSESSED NEOPATIC ART-GIRLS WHO MAKE THEIR OWN CLOTHES!



People have told me about copies they've seen on their professors' desks where the strip was blurry and almost unrecognizable—it had been xeroxed or passed around so many times. That's one of my goals—to create something that will be xeroxed forever.

AJ: That comic very accurately captures some of the pretensions of art school.

DC: I've actually met a lot of kids who were in high school at the time they read it, and after reading it they decided not to go to art school.

AJ: Good for you. [laughs] You're an influence on your generation.

DC: I am very proud of it. [laughs]

When I was working on it, I knew I could easily go on for 20 pages, but I cut it down to the bare minimum. I thought, "Who cares about art school? Seven people have gone to art school." As it turned out, everybody likes that story more than any other work I've done.

AJ: What was the response to your talent in art school?

DC: It's where I first learned that comics were looked upon with disgust by "fine artists" (and even hack illustrators). It didn't dawn on me until I went to art school and tried to hand in some cartoons. The teacher said, in this condescending voice, "Well, these are very nice, but we're here to teach art, not cartoons." I thought, "What's wrong with what I'm doing?" Throughout art school, they were constantly telling me if my style was more sophisticated and not this "Betty and Veronica" kind of thing, I might really go places. Such fuckers! It wasn't until I graduated that I realized they were all failures. All my teachers were guys who taught art school because they weren't able to find work as illustrators. It's the great scam of our time.

AJ: You also point out the fact that they don't want students to succeed because they're still trying—

DC: They don't want students taking away jobs. This one guy was like, "You're going to be a big illustrator, kid; I'm going to give you my list of references." He gave me a list of all these art directors I should call. I called every one of them, and 95 percent of them had retired ten years before. This guy hadn't gotten work in years; it was just so pathetic. The list was completely out of date, this guy was totally out of touch.

AJ: I've always been critical and ambivalent about the art world as an industry.

DC: I would love to get that kind of money for my art work.

AJ: Do you have aspirations to do painting—to have that approval from society, since painting is considered

more “high brow”?

DC: The approval isn't what interests me. But I like the idea of being able to do paintings and sell them like Robert Williams does.

AJ: Because of the money, or do you actually want to create paintings?

DC: I've done three or four covers as paintings, and I'm working on another one now. I'm not sure I'd want to do it full time, but I can envision a time in 20 years where I would be more interested in just doing paintings. It would be nice to be able to sell them and make a living.

AJ: But I love the narrative aspect of your work. By comparison, a painting seems static.

DC: If I did paintings, I'd have to somehow work it out so the painting had a narrative content which I was satisfied with, which somehow took the place of what I'm doing in the comics. I can't envision this happening right now. Many artists seem to eliminate everything that is not absolutely essential to their work over time. They wind up doing distilled versions of what they've done their whole careers. I can see myself doing something like that.

AJ: Oh no. I'd miss your comics.

DC: I'm saying this is something I might consider doing in 20 years. I don't have any idea what I'm doing for the next issue of *Eightball*, so you can see how well I plan ahead....

AJ: Maybe there are benefits to working in a genre that isn't financially or socially rewarded. The genre isn't so self-conscious, kind of like pulp fiction was in the '50s and '60s.

DC: That's why I like comics—I like the fact that comics are not held up as high art because nobody's paying much attention. I can do whatever I want and not feel self-conscious. I don't feel like I have to impress Clement Greenberg [prominent art critic]. I just have to impress the shmuck who buys my comics in Albany. It's very comfortable in terms of the subject matter. I feel no qualms about doing anything that I want, but if I had a really, really serious audience writing serious criticism about every piece I did, I'd move to Montana, and never read reviews. It would paralyze me. I can't understand how a film director can make a movie that's universally panned and then go back and make another movie. It would be impossible for me.

AJ: But your work has been widely reviewed in fanzines and national magazines like *Spin*.

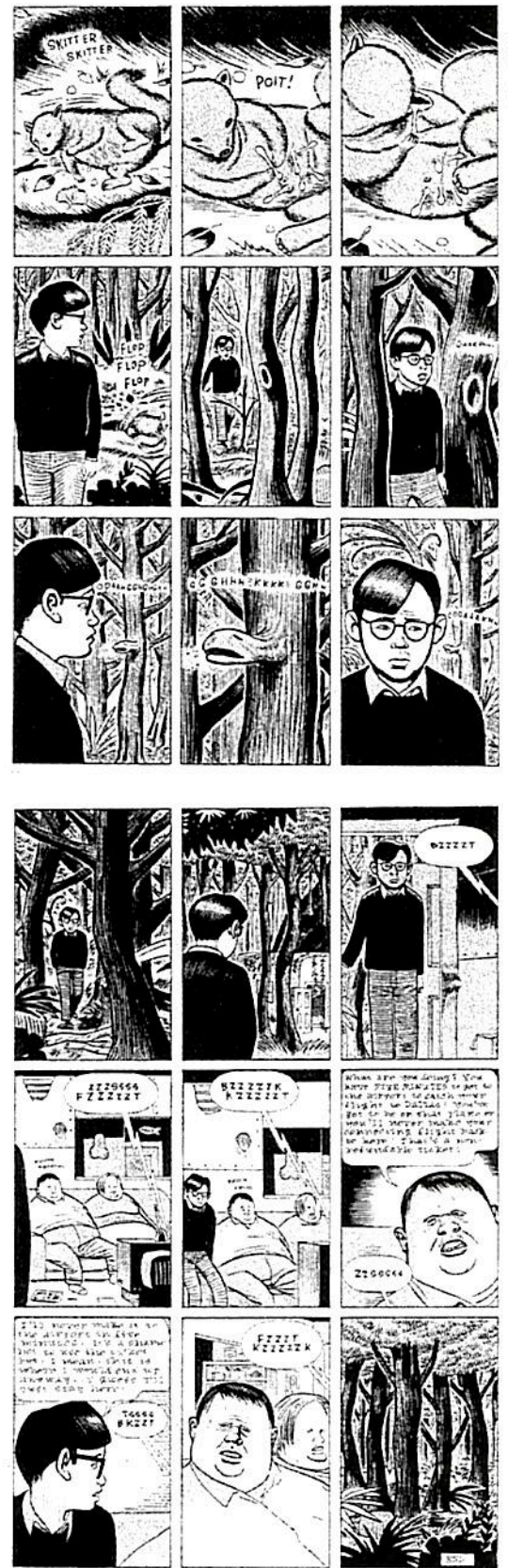
DC: In this field, I don't even take the best criticism seriously. I don't think people understand comics enough to criticize them unless they've been doing them themselves for years. It's a very complex form.

AJ: It's interesting to hear you say you'd be paralyzed if you thought people were seriously looking at your work, because you are definitely one of the more famous cartoonists in this field.

DC: It's like being the most famous badminton player.

AJ: I've noticed that comics can deal with race, sex and violence in an unfettered way—they're like the id of society. Perhaps, because it's a populist, unglamorous medium, it can get away with more. Other forms try, but too often they seem dogmatic or explosive.

DC: This is a warm, friendly medium. You can deal with the most hateful issues, really painful and horrible material and yet, it somehow comes across being palatable or even cheerful. The same material would likely be harsher if you saw it on film. In a comic, it's slightly removed, which makes it less directly confrontational.



Selected pages from “Nature Boy” in *Orgy Bound* (1996).



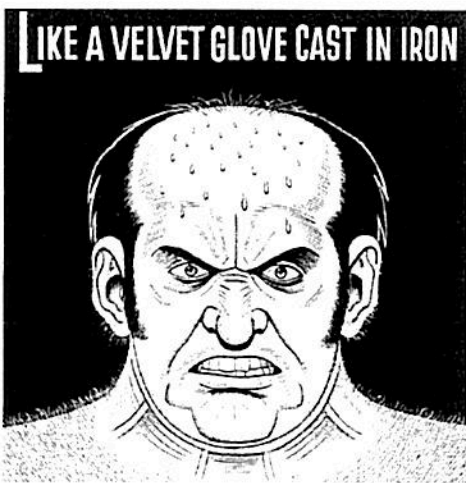
Selected panels from *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* (1995). This is one of several story lines. The protagonist, after stopping in a strange town, is being told by the woman at whose house he is staying the story of how she gave birth to her strange daughter, Tina, who has a potato-shaped head (more on following page).



© Daniel Clowes



Like a **VELVET**
GLOVE cast in IRON



Selected panels from *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* (1995).

your childhood *Superman*'s, they'd be worth a million dollars now. They talk about the value of comics, but they don't understand the qualitative difference between Robert Crumb and some shmuck who draws *Batman*.

AJ: The collector mentality often can bring about a negative fallout, as was the case with '50s and '60s lounge albums. Once they were available and dirt cheap; now they're overpriced rarities. However, inventive people can always find undiscovered, cheap territory. Records and clothing from the '80s haven't really been mined.

DC: I'm not man enough to deal with the '80s. I can't face the '80s!

AJ: That's surprising since your work strikes a chord with people your age. Do you feel *simpatico* with your generation?

DC: I certainly grew up with the universal pop culture. I watched the same TV shows as everybody my age, but I was hyper-critical from an early age. I never liked all the music people now say they like (in an ironic way). Disco, Led Zeppelin, I *hated* all that stuff the minute I heard it.

AJ: What do you like?

DC: When I was in high school, I would only listen to the old records my grandparents had. I wanted to listen to music that was the antithesis of what most people would listen to. So I listened to Burl Ives records and marching bands. I was a pretty messed-up kid. I have no fond recollections of '70s music. I have feelings of horrible existential nausea when I think about the Bee Gees. I don't find it cute at all. It's just hateful. I couldn't go to see *Pulp Fiction* 'cause I still hate John Travolta so much. I had such a hatred for him when I was a teenager. I couldn't understand why girls loved this guy. This idiotic, Brooklyn bohunk. I haven't gotten over it yet. I have no nostalgia for adolescence. I have only nostalgia for when I was such a small child that I placed no societal values on things. I only have fond memories of stuff I owned prior to 1966.

AJ: Throughout your work, you have a genuine enthusiasm about discarded, unacknowledged culture: strange old porn films, '50s lounge music, Chicago's "Ye Olde" type bars that are dark and cluttered, '50s pulp porn novels by obscure writers. These aren't easily bought or found in mass culture.

DC: It's definitely the discovery which is exciting. I would stay up until three in the morning if I thought they were going to show *The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus*. I sat by the television waiting for it to come on, and it was a great event. Now that I own a copy of the tape, I never watch it, because I can watch it at any time. It loses its excitement somehow. It doesn't have that allure if it's not an obscure thing that you have to go to all this effort to see.

AJ: What are the movies you've spent time trying to find? What are your influences?

DC: I'm influenced by the more obvious things—my favorite film directors are Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock and Jean Renoir.

AJ: Jean Renoir—obvious? Hardly anyone mentions him as an influence. I love *The Crimes of Monsieur Lange*.

DC: I like guys who can really tell a story, who have a narrative sense. It would be nice to say that I'm really into Ray Dennis Steckler [director of exploitation films like *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies*], but I can't say those types of movies are influences, beyond their wild abandon and lack of concern for making a buck.

AJ: What about books?

DC: For better or for worse, I tend to read the kind of work I'm aspiring to do. For example, I was trying to do a complex narrative, so I read Nabokov and reread *Madame Bovary*. When I wanted to get a sense of how to write succinct, concise fiction, I read *The New Yorker* short story writers like John Cheever and John Updike. Lately, I've been just reading screenplays because I'm trying to learn how

to write a screenplay.

AJ: Uh-oh.

DC: It's pretty scary. I'd love to read a good screenplay. I've been reading modern Hollywood screenplays just to get a sense of the form.

AJ: What's the screenplay?

DC: I'm working on it with Terry Zwigoff. We're not going to sign anything until we get everybody to accept our terms. We want to have the final say over what takes place. We're trying to write something that appeals to both of us, and could actually be made as a real movie. I don't know if that's possible or not. If it never happens, I'll have learned something.

AJ: Do you really think you'll be able to keep control of the project?

DC: If Terry hadn't made a film which was on more top ten lists than any other in this decade, I wouldn't even be considering it as a possibility. I would figure we had no chance at all. But because people are actually paying attention to him and I can ride his coat-tails, it seems like a good opportunity.

AJ: I'm cynical about screenplays and Hollywood.

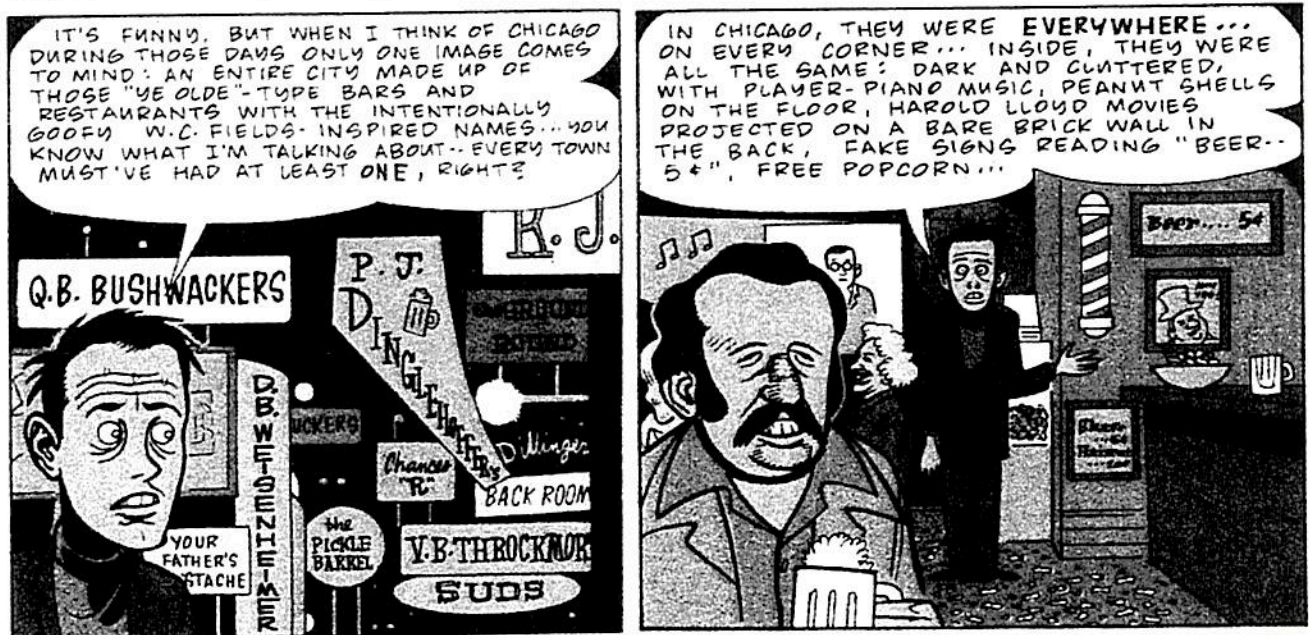
DC: I want to get out of it the minute the screenplay's done. I'll give it to Terry, and then it's his problem. I'll go back to my comics, but this is the one decent opportunity I'll ever have to work with somebody I actually like and respect. I can't imagine getting along very well with anybody else in Hollywood. I'd want to strangle them after a day. Terry's the only guy I've ever met who's more bitter and cynical than I am. I have to be the upbeat guy in the relationship, "Come on, Terry, it's not so bad."

AJ: Getting back to what you were saying about Nabokov and Flaubert, I'm interested in your thoughts on creating work that has a complex narrative. Your work, such as *Velvet Glove*, is like a mini-movie or a dream.

DC: Shorter pieces are fun, and they draw people into reading the magazine. My intention with shorter pieces is to not repel readers, as a long continued story might do. But the fun, short pieces are actually harder because you have to distill your ideas down into one page. Every one page story I've done could easily have gone on for pages and pages. I've wasted so much material by turning out those little wacky, one-page vignettes. Doing the narratives is much more satisfying. You can really draw a reader in. It requires more work on the part of the reader who has

It's the only kind of visual narrative completely created out of one person's mind. In a movie, set designers can't create sets exactly as you envisioned. Whereas in comics, you make it exactly what you want, exactly what you're seeing in your own head.

Selected panels from "Chicago" from *Orgy Bound* (1996).



© Daniel Clowes



Dan with wife, Erika.

you can control absolutely everything and make it exactly what you want, exactly what you're seeing in your own head. You're transferring that to the page. And I think there's something really powerful about that.

AJ: I love film, but—

DC: No, I do too. I think some of the most successful films, the ones I find the most enjoyable, are the ones where the director's gone into it realizing he cannot get his exact vision up on the screen, knows the compromises he's going to have to make and designs the narrative to fit those compromises. The director senses the artificiality that's inherent in making a film, and he uses that to his benefit.

AJ: Like *Marnie*.

DC: Completely hokey. Hitchcock would have been an amazing cartoonist. Had there been money in it, he might have gone into it. Lots of film directors were cartoonists when they started. Fellini wanted to be a cartoonist and wasn't really good enough. I saw a TV special on Scorsese where they showed storyboards he'd done when he was 12 years old. He did these watercolored, Cinemascope-proportioned story boards of a Biblical epic, all fetishistically detailed. It was amazing; it was like Henry Darger [Chicago "outsider" artist who lived in isolation while creating detailed, epic narrative drawings].

I have no nostalgia for adolescence. I have only nostalgia for when I was such a small child that I placed no societal values on things. I only have fond memories of stuff I owned prior to 1966.

DC: Drug-addicted male prostitute?

AJ: What is your lifestyle like?

DC: That's a pretty broad question. What do you mean?

AJ: Most people would probably think of all these clichés that you were like. Hopefully you're not like them.

DC: Drug-addicted male prostitute?

AJ: There you go.

DC: Yeah, that's what I am.

AJ: You're married, you have a—

DC: I'm married for the second time.

AJ: Wow, you're only 35.

DC: My wife is a grad student in English Literature at Berkeley and that's why we live here.

AJ: How often do you work?

DC: Every day. Every day, without fail. I wouldn't know what to do in my mind if I didn't work that little bit every day. I feel horrible when I don't work.

AJ: So you don't live this bad attitude degenerate lifestyle associated with alternative artists?



Pages selected from "The Happy Fisherman" in *Orgy Bound* (1996).



© Dan Clowes



Selected pages from *Ghost World* from *Eightball* #16 (1995).



© Daniel Clowes

DC: Whenever people fly me to someplace for a signing at a comic book store or art gallery, they never recognize me when I get off the plane. They always seem vaguely disappointed when they find out it's me. I'm just wearing a raincoat or something. They think, "The guy looks like an insurance salesman."

AJ: That's great.

DC: And I always think, "What did you want me to be?" Some bad-ass artist with a leather jacket saying, "Hey, man, where's the beer?"

I've had people come up to me and say, "Hey, fuckface!" and just abuse me, because they think they're going to get it right back. They figure they'll beat me to the punch. It usually hurts my feelings.

AJ: Artists don't have to have a swaggering, bad-ass attitude. They already have bravado in their work. It takes courage to manifest their vision—that's taking real risks.

DC: I don't know how you could learn to be a good artist if you're some party animal. It's too much work.

AJ: Your work features men who are so pathetic—either misogynistic or overly concerned about not being "fags." They're constricted, lonely, obnoxious. But the women characters, for example, in your serial comic *Ghost World*, are eloquent, funny and without artifice. Does that reflect your attitudes toward maleness?

DC: I can't even comment on something like that. It really isn't something where I sit down and think, "Well, my agenda for presenting maleness is such and such." These are all *characters*, and they appear to me as characters. It's for somebody else to psychoanalyze me and—

AJ: It's for me to—

DC: —write me off as a pathetic, horrible loser.

AJ: No, I don't mean you are pathetic.

DC: Clearly, I'm playing out something in these stories. There's some reason for me to work ten hours every day, drawing these stories for no money. There's got to be some emotional conflicts I'm trying to deal with. I think the whole gender thing has to do with it, but I'm not exactly sure how or why.

AJ: Can you make a stab?

DC: I came from a really fucked-up, fragmented family, and grew up with a very uncertain sense of who I was, or what I could be or what I was supposed to be, because I had many levels of existence as a young kid. My parents divorced when I was a year old. I lived with my mom who was very poor and unstable. She remarried a race car driver, who immediately died. She went into a black depression for years. My dad was an ex-steel worker who inherited some money, and spent it very frugally. He lived in a bachelor pad and did nothing but read books for years. Then I lived with my grandparents who were college professors. I had a very tenuous sense of what I was supposed to grow up to be. Nobody ever really talked to me. I think all my various parents decided that the other parent was telling me how to do things, so they didn't have to. I had to figure life out on my own, to some extent. I think that's what this whole process is carrying on. I use comics to figure out how to deal with living, how to understand what's going on in the world. It's hard to put it into words—I'm simplifying—but that's the basic idea.

AJ: Yet, your work isn't exactly autobiographical, right?

DC: On some level it is. I even think all those superhero comics are, on some level, autobiographical....

AJ: I love your piece, "I Hate Christians." Were you raised in a religious home?

DC: My mother was Jewish and my dad was a lapsed Episcopalian. Neither of them believed or had any interest in any religion. I was raised with no mention of God. They didn't say, "Don't believe the kids who say there's a God, because there isn't a God."

AJ: What do you think about religion now? "I Hate Christians" seems to—

DC: I started out thinking I'd write a real hatchet piece. It would be done strictly for laughs. And then as I got into it, I realized I couldn't, in good conscience, be flippant. I had to deal with the whole issue. It was disappointing to many of my readers. They saw the title, and expected a tirade.

AJ: I like your work because it is more thoughtful than a tirade. Why just pick on

I have horrible feelings of existential nausea when I think about the Bee Gees. I don't find it cute at all. It's just hateful. I couldn't go to see *Pulp Fiction* 'cause I still hate John Travolta so much.



First page of "A Message to the People of the Future" in *Oryg Bound* (1996).

Christians, as opposed to other institutionalized, ossified religions?

DC: When I hear the word "Christian," I tend to think of the guy on the golf course with a pink Lacoste shirt stretched over his Michelin Man-like body. But in reality, many Christians are hardworking people—people who are in some way commendable. It's unfortunate to paint them all with the same brush.

AJ: It was refreshing to read *Ghost World* because usually when men take a woman's persona you can feel some agenda, either good or bad. I don't feel that with your two teenage girls.

DC: I've had many friends similar to those two girls. Probably because I'm a very quiet person, the girls I hung around with would forget and talk as though I wasn't there. I felt like I was eavesdropping on the way girls would talk when nobody was around. Although the subject matter was slightly different, their vocabulary was not that different from my own. It's not the way it's presented in media at all. I've never seen a movie where the girls seem real. They make them character types or archetypes: the brainy nerd with glasses, the foul-mouthed slut. They're just types who don't get to have multifaceted personalities. I'm not trying to make a point about women, I'm just showing them as I know certain ones to be.

AJ: Can you do that with a male character?

DC: I have a lot of contempt for males whereas I have a fondness for females. I have a certain sympathy for females that I don't have for males. It would be the ultimate challenge for me to write a really likable male character who wasn't just some extrapolation of myself—self-hate and/or self-love. If someday I do it, it's probably a sign that I've matured as an artist.

AJ: You're work's been described as nihilistic (which, incidentally, I don't see). Do you have a nihilistic view of the future?

DC: I try not to think of the future because I tend to get really depressed and almost unable to work. In terms of making a living, I do feel that I'm at the whims of the marketplace. Lately, the distributors of comics have been going out of business and buying each other, creating monopolies. I try not to pay any attention, but it's gotten so scary. It actually seems really threatening, as though tomorrow the whole business as we know it could end. It would have to be restructured and who knows who would be able to survive. It would be like an earthquake; we'd have to rebuild out of the rubble. I hate the idea—which I hear often—that the future market for comics will be on computer screen. I have no interest at all in computers, and I have no interest in seeing my work on a computer screen. It doesn't do anything for me. I'm only happy to see it on cheap paper. I don't like the idea of my only distribution alternative being the computer. So I try to plan as though the business will exist forever as it is now. Obviously, I'm being unrealistic, but it's the only way I know to contend with

the day-to-day issues of the changing marketplace. I hope I can continue to do a comic even if there's no profit.

AJ: Going back to my previous question, I don't find your work nihilistic. I find that interpretation to be a mistaken one.

DC: People who see nihilism are unable to see beneath the surface. I don't see how someone could be nihilistic and put the amount of effort into their artwork that I do. I hope that somebody's getting something out of the work. That's all I can hope for.

AJ: So who do you think your fans are?

DC: It's hard to say because I only know the people who send mail or attend a signing. It's a specific kind of person who will bother to write a letter, and I doubt they represent the people who are most interested in my work. I've certainly never written a fan letter to anybody, even artists I absolutely worship. In fact, I would be less likely to write to them because I'd be too nervous. But the mail is the only barometer I have, and judging from that, I would say it's about 60 percent male and 40 percent female, very few younger than 20, very few older than 40. Thoughtful loner types who must all be fairly good people because they've actually taken the plunge and gone into the comic store and bought this kind of work. It's a perfect audience. You're getting an almost elite audience—people who will make an effort to find the work.

AJ: I'm surprised you have so many female fans.

DC: There's so few things out there for women to read. It's believable that they would discover this stuff if they had any interest in comics at all.

If you went into a comic store ten years ago, the chance of seeing a woman in there would be about the same chance as seeing a camel in there. It was just completely impossible—never, never would have happened. Nowadays, two out of 15 people might be women. In Berkeley, it's certainly much higher; I think there's been some headway.

AJ: Do you have any favorite cartoonists? I know some people don't like talking about their influences, so—

DC: I don't mind saying. I've said it a million times, and it's very obvious. Robert Crumb would be my main influence. To me, he's the consummate cartoonist. He's always grown as an artist, experimented, worked at all his abilities, always tried to struggle with his inner demons in an honest way. That's been a great example for me. I also like Harvey Kurtzman, the creator of *Mad* magazine. He was a genius who's been forgotten by the mass public, but invented a style of comedy that thrives today. I like the old guys: George Herriman, Winsor McCay, Charles Schulz. *Peanuts* is like a diary of a manic depressive. He's got really serious psychological problems that he's grappling with in a way that has somehow turned into a mainstream phenomenon. My favorite comic strip of all time is *Barnaby* by Crockett Johnson.

AJ: What about contemporary artists?

DC: There's a lot of modern artists who I really love. I love the Hernandez brothers. I consider them a big influence—they invented a whole new way of doing comics. I like Charles Burns and Drew Friedman, Chris Ware, Chester Brown. I could go on and on. There's

Selected page from "Zubrick and Pogeypait," in *Orgy Bound* (1996).



UGLY GIRLS

By Danny Clowes

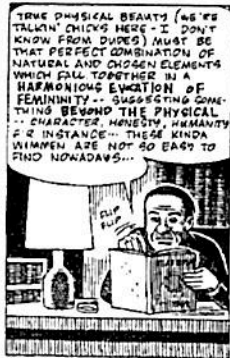


PUSSYCAT, PUSSYCAT, I'VE GOT FLOWERS AND LOTS OF HOURS TO SPEND WITH YOU!



HELLO, I'M 'CHARLIE', ANOTHER TRANSPARENT O'FLOWER STAND-IN, AND I'M HERE TO TELL ALL YOU FELLERS IN OUR DEADLY ADVANCE THAT YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT FROM SHINDLE WHEN IT COMES TO BEAUTIFUL WOMEN! YOU DOGS OVER THE LAKE OF MARION MONROE OR FIM BAGINER OR SOME EXCISE 'SUPERMODEL' 'CAUSE YOU GOT NO AESTHETICS, MAN! LOOK AROUND YOU-- THESE ARE WORKS OF ART WALKING THESE STREETS AND YOU'RE SNEEZING IN BY BORING, IDEALIZED FANTASY BULLSHIT! WHAT YOU CRASSLY DRINGS AS 'UNLASSIC' I FIND COMPELLING! I'M RIGHT AND YOU'RE WRONG!

Selected pages of "Ugly Girls" in *Orgy Bound* (1996)



TRUE PHYSICAL BEAUTY (AS WE TALKIN' CHICKS HERE - I DON'T KNOW FROM DUDES) MUST BE THAT PERFECT COMBINATION OF NATURAL AND CHOSEN ELEMENTS WHICH FALL TOGETHER IN A HARMONIOUS EVOLUTION OF FEMININITY... SUGGESTING SOMETHING BEYOND THE PHYSICAL... CHARACTER, HONESTY, HUMANITY & R IN INSTANCE... THESE KINDA UNWOMEN ARE NOT SO EASY TO FIND NOWADAYS...



HELLO! HELLO! TAKE A LOOK AT THIS ONE, BUDDY, SHE'S A WONDER!



LOOK AT THAT FACE! IT RADIATES INNOCENCE AND HONESTY... THE GLASSES AND MAHAICHT, SO PRACTICAL AND UNPRETENTIOUS... SHE'S STUNNING! I GHAH!

IS IT JUST ME?



ONCE WHEN I WAS A KID, AROUND 1972, I WAS AT A PUPPET SHOW IN STONY LAKE, MICHIGAN AND I SPOTTED THIS YOUNG BEAUTY ACROSS THE ROOM. I WAS MESMERIZED - AS - GUILTILY UNABLE TO TAKE MY EYES OFF HER. I POINTED HER OUT TO THE GUYS I WAS WITH (THE 'WHITE-TRASH LOCALS')... THEIR RESPONSE: "EWW, GROSS-O-DESS!"



SOME FIFTEEN YEARS LATER - SPOTTED THIS, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF ALL WOMEN, ON THE NUMBER SIX BUS IN CHICAGO... BY THIS TIME I KNEW NOT TO POINT HER OUT TO ANYBODY BUT TRUST ME WHEN I SAY SHE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE BEAUTIFUL...



... MESS I'M GETTING TOO PERSONAL HERE... AFTER ALL I'M ONLY A FICTIONAL CARTOON CHARACTER.



ALL I KNOW IS WHEN I SEE A "BEAUTIFUL" WOMAN I'M USUALLY BOWLED OVER BY A KIND OF EXISTENTIAL BOREDOM... LIKE I... WELL... IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN...



GALS WHO RUN INTO THIS GUMMIE THING ALWAYS LOOK LIKE THEY'RE TRYING TOO HARD... LIKE THEY'RE ENDEAVOURING TO BE HUMAN... UP A GIRL HAS ON, THE MORE I WONDER IF SHE'S ACTUALLY A GUY IN DRAG!

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probably 50 great modern cartoonists I could think of, if I wanted to make a list.

AJ: Any women in there?

DC: I love Julie Doucet. She's fantastic. I love Aline Kominsky and Debbie Drechsler. I like Phoebe Gloeckner—I wish she did more work. The general quality level of women cartoonists is higher than that of men cartoonists. Men run the gamut from high down to incompetent or muddled in their storytelling. Whenever I get a mini-comic in the mail from a woman, I always know it's going to be worth reading. It's always told in a straightforward way. It might not aspire to greatness, but meets the main criteria which is to be readable. I've found men cartoonists are very often not readable, and I think that's an interesting phenomenon.

AJ: But why do you think there are fewer women in the field?

DC: A huge factor is the lack of comics for little girls. All comics are for little boys. Girls probably read comics and think, "Why should I bother?" It's not surprising that little girls don't start drawing comics. I doubt somebody like Julie Doucet looked at comics when she was a kid. I think she was in art school and was drawing the way she drew and somebody said, "Oh, you should do comics." I think she was 20 when she learned about Robert Crumb. In order for there to be more women cartoonists, there has to be some education process where they're seeing comics when they're kids. Even if it's something stupid like *Barbie* comics. Then they can grow—

AJ: —and read *Twisted Sisters*.

DC: Exactly. I would love to see more women cartoonists because it's a really good medium for women to deal with very personal concerns without any worries about censorship, et cetera. It would be really great.

AJ: You're right. It's like rock and roll. Men grew up, ten years old, banging on their drums or wanking off on the guitar. It's only been recently that ten-year-old girls have been playing around with that.

DC: And now you see a million all-girl bands. Maybe in the next generation, it will even out a little more. They won't be ghettoized the way they are now. You still see articles about the cute girl bands, and they're all grouped together. Hopefully, in the next generation they'll just be part of the whole.

AJ: They'll be doing those hideous guitar solos.

DC: It's funny because I tend to like music when it's sloppily performed, really bad and out of tune. Yet, when I get comics which are even vaguely unprofessional, I throw them right in the garbage. I put a real premium on professionalism in my own field. When I see somebody who's been working for a long time and still hasn't gotten the knack for a certain technique, I feel frustrated for them....

AJ: I appreciate the "roll up your sleeves and get to work" attitude.

DC: I love the idea of wearing a green eye shade and a smock to the drawing board every day. There are old pictures of George Grosz at work in his studio and he's always wearing a tie and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a perfectly clean smock. I think that's great. That's the look. Nobody's going to see him all day and yet he has a tie on.

AJ: The work ethic is often lost when people confuse art with rebellion against mom and dad.

DC: Lots of people who get into comics just want to be rock stars. They see this as a more cowardly way to get attention, but it doesn't work that way. There's no immediate gratification at all.

AJ: You have a piece where you say, "Cartoonists don't score, rockers do."

DC: You're not going up on stage. It's not the same thing at all. People who get into comics for that reason are very quickly disappointed.

AJ: They buy a guitar.

DC: Often they do. ☹

I like the fact that comics are not held up as high art because nobody's paying much attention. I can do whatever I want and not feel self-conscious.

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The Beguiling, Toronto, Ontario

Comic Relief, Berkeley, CA

Fallout, Seattle, WA

Quimby's Queer Store, Chicago, IL