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An Existence Between Panels

Before he was Emperor, Julius Cæsar was with an army and knocking about ancient Belgium. He was looking for an opponent. He was between what defined him: military conquests. The terrain was trackless, flat and monotonous. The enemy, tribal Celts, would appear and vanish into the moors. There were no points of reference—mountains, defined waterways, Roman roads, mile posts, singular volcanoes—just fens and quaking bogs. It was the Everglades of The Classical World, if you would. Venting his frustration, Cæsar wrote in his Gallium Bella this query: ‘ubinam gentium sumus?’

Where in the world are we?

Cæsar was between narrative sequences. He was between panels. The general and his army were in the area that exists between the Pharonic cartouches, the off-white borderland between the panels of the funny pages. Like many of us in the day-to-day, Cæsar was in the area a museum curator designates as the breathing space between the hung 2D pieces of an exhibit. That area we occupy from the completion of one of life’s tasks to the beginning of the other. How to answer the future Emperor of Rome’s ‘ubinam gentium sumus?’ We are between the panels.

To amplify a great line from 2,000 year-old campaign reportage, the Latins had a word for the mental position of an individual: *sentienta*. How does any one person view the world or their place in it? What is their point of view? Cæsar had a concrete position—he saw flatness and an overcast sky. Undisturbed by landmarks and buildings, his perspective was an echo chamber of flat space. So, too, can a person’s *sentienta* concern the space between panels.

We live in a world where the space between Internet searches is the space between panels. Imagine the task of cleaning and fixing two adjacent windows. You start on the left, do the work, move on to the one on the right. BUT betwixt and between is that piece of the wall. Consider that area as more than a part of the structure. That area can open, it can reveal, it has no limits that the mind recognizes. That is the space between one of life’s sequences and the next. This space between panels is being explored. It is being occupied.

It is one of those secret oubliettes that a mind like Copernicus’ or Minkowski’s would rediscover for us. Then codify the discovery, simplify that and pass the information on. They wanted us to catch on and catch up. We are. We do have a contemporary response for the Cæsar.

The art and ephemera of **Academy Records** is exploring the land between two mountains. Indeed, the current work shows the influence of the trackless vista that is the current electronic age. There is a massive volume of freedom of exploration to it. There is a willingness to evenly weigh one event with the other. This is work mined from the area between the panels.

The analog work of John Heartfield hinted at a world to come. His had the same sentient perspective. The “cut-up machine” word generator of William Burroughs reminds us of the same. The discard and repurposed works of Joseph Cornell are present in it. Cornell’s work is the art created from the alleys - between the purposed narratives of a media-based civilization. The data-driven world has been moving there.

There are contemporary references that explore the space between panels. Here is one:

In the on-line series *Doom Patrol* a reluctant and ‘complicated’ group of Heroes must enter into a realm between the panels. They must engage in a creative performance battle with the character of Mr. Nobody.

Another is the Purple Dimension as created by Steve Ditko for the original *Dr. Strange* series in the mid-1960s.

One of the worries is when one does leave the space between panels, what tokens, what emblems does one return with? Outside of a mental-dry cleaning, what is the proof? Or, better, is proof needed to show that one was between the panels?

Is there a there there? Can the traveler show a kind of receipt? Or is it like Danny Boyle’s film, *Sunshine?* In the final reel of that film about a skeptical future, human-created architecture contends with an existence that is not defined by space-time or physics. It is a visual precinct that shows the limits of Minkowski space. It is a place where time, gravity and space are pushing the quantifying ability of a person’s relationship with physics.

Academy Record’s work is asking us to accept the voucher and depart from the physics of the day-to-day. We should take this opportunity and slip into the world between panels. We fall there repeatedly in our ‘searches of Internet import’. We should celebrate the chance that commemorates a dedicated exploration of that realm.

–Danny Sutherland
Chicago, January 2022

Works properly and improperly represented:

Commentarii de Bello Gallico, Cæsar, Julius Circa 50 b.c.e.

DOOM PATROL, “Penultimate Patrol”, WB, Season One, Episode 14, Release date 05 17. 2019.

Strange Tales, ‘Master of Black Magic’, Ditko, Steve, July 1963, Vol. 1 # 110.

First appearance of Dr. Strange, *Strange Tales* was a publication of Marvel Comics

Sunshine, (2007), Boyle, Danny, Moving Picture Company, 107 min.

