

# MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

## Elemental Forces Elemental Dispositions: fire/water

DARA BIRNBAUM

*“ . . . under duress and beyond duress, in answer to the entreaty which strips and flays me and destroys my ability to answer, outside the world, where there is nothing save the attraction and the pressure of the other.”*

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

Force can be seen as elemental destruction. It can be seen as that which overpowers, takes over. It can be that which produces a change in a body's state of rest or motion. In itself, force can be perceived as *body* (e.g., the armed forces; the police). Yet, counter to force, *reaction* also empowers, giving back to the body its elemental disposition: its capacity for expression.

The portrayal of force, action and reaction, can be seen to infiltrate various forms of mass media, pan-culturally. It seems a necessary component to the portrayal of the everyday. While the means of drawing oppositional elements varies through cultures, it also remains surprisingly the same. Perhaps a similarity of need yields the consistency within varying representations.

The need to portray reaction, to enforce one's position upon action, is a necessary part of the representation; a key component of the narrative flow. Reaction is, after all, not necessarily regression: it can be seen as the ability to grimace at the primary factors of life that are outside of one's control. The victim is no longer *victim*, in the sense that the strength of the reaction, as expressed through bodily gesture, can overpower even the worst of the disaster. The representation of reaction restores a sense of humility to the disaster; it re-establishes a body for its victim. Even in the most stereotypical of signs, the grimace can be seen as a form of emancipation.

Animation operates as a closed system of representation, of cells, each of which posits its ability for extension in a multitude of dimensions. This basic structure, of cell after cell, allows for endless expressions—it forges a

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flow which leads up to and away from an event that is usually cataclysmic. The moment of the cataclysm acts as a pause within the linear flow. Each cell acts as a component vital to the corporeal body of the text. When a cell is isolated, taken out of its body and dislocated, narrative moments are forced to recombine into a succession of violent (violated) events. Each extracted cell can be seen as a moment which suspends *becoming*. Aligned cell by cell, these suspended moments perform a narrative of *intensities*.

There is an entropy proper to sign systems that diminishes their capacity to signify. . . . As long as the forces are at work, no sign emerges. . . . We see that the meaning of the sign has to do with a differential gap resulting from the relation between forces.<sup>1</sup>



By dislocating and reconfiguring disaster within a strip composed only of similar elements (disaster upon disaster), the reader is provided with a consistent narrative. Piled upon each other, without abyss, cells upon cells command the reader to continue within the narrative flow. Yet, at the same time, the reader is also asked to pierce each frame in order to extract each artist's hand, to recognize individualized composition and stylized *look*. Within a newly engaged series, singular strokes of individuality are combined in order to take a larger look into the generalized issues of the subject matter.

<sup>1</sup> Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 140.

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## NOTE:

The following animations have been extracted from comic book series that originated in the United States, Belgium, Holland, and Japan. The imagery has been cropped and dislocated from its original placement within the narrative. Further alterations were made to the aspect ratio of selected images in an attempt to provide a more consistent "frame" for the viewer; a more seamless reading of the new script. Almost all of the chosen animation cells have been reduced from color to black-and-white due to the limitations of publishing. In addition, the black-and-white renditions of these images have been altered by adjustments to gray-scale, as well as brightness and contrast ratios, again to provide a more fluid framework for reading.

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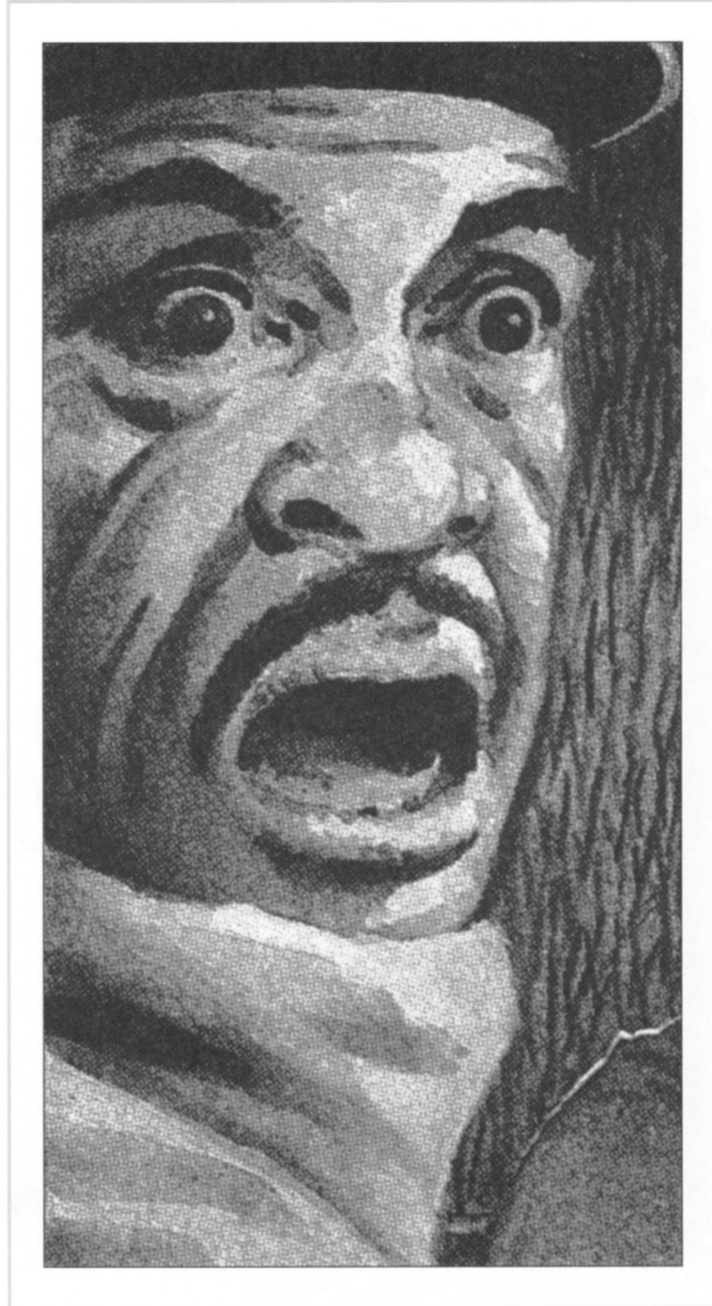
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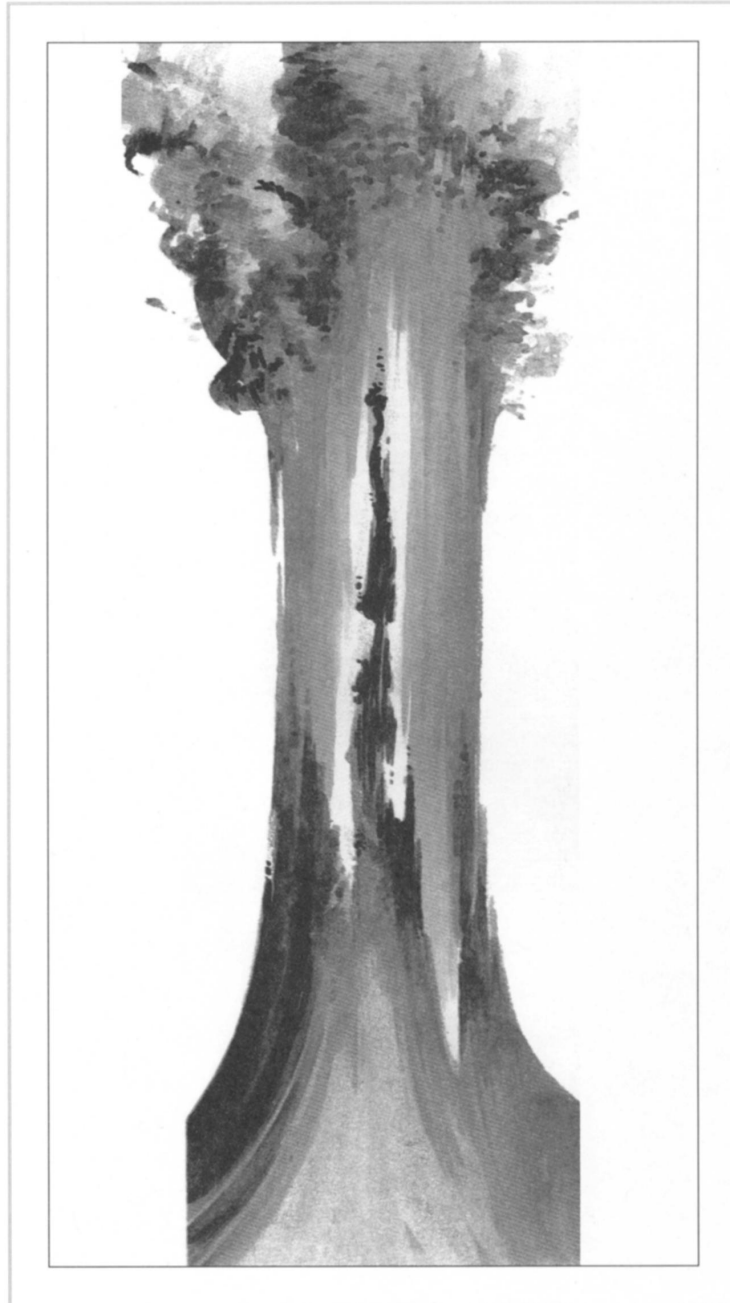
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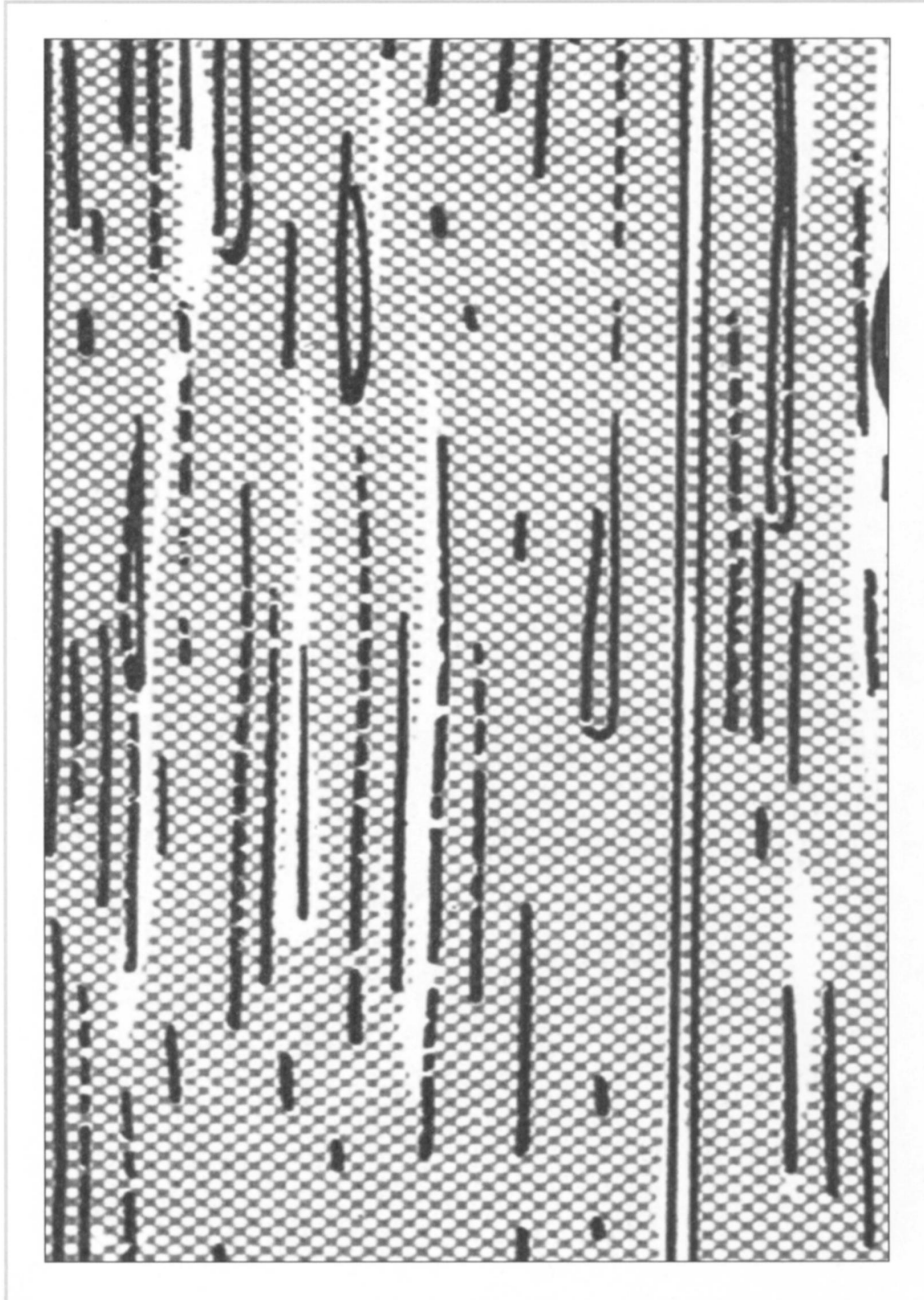
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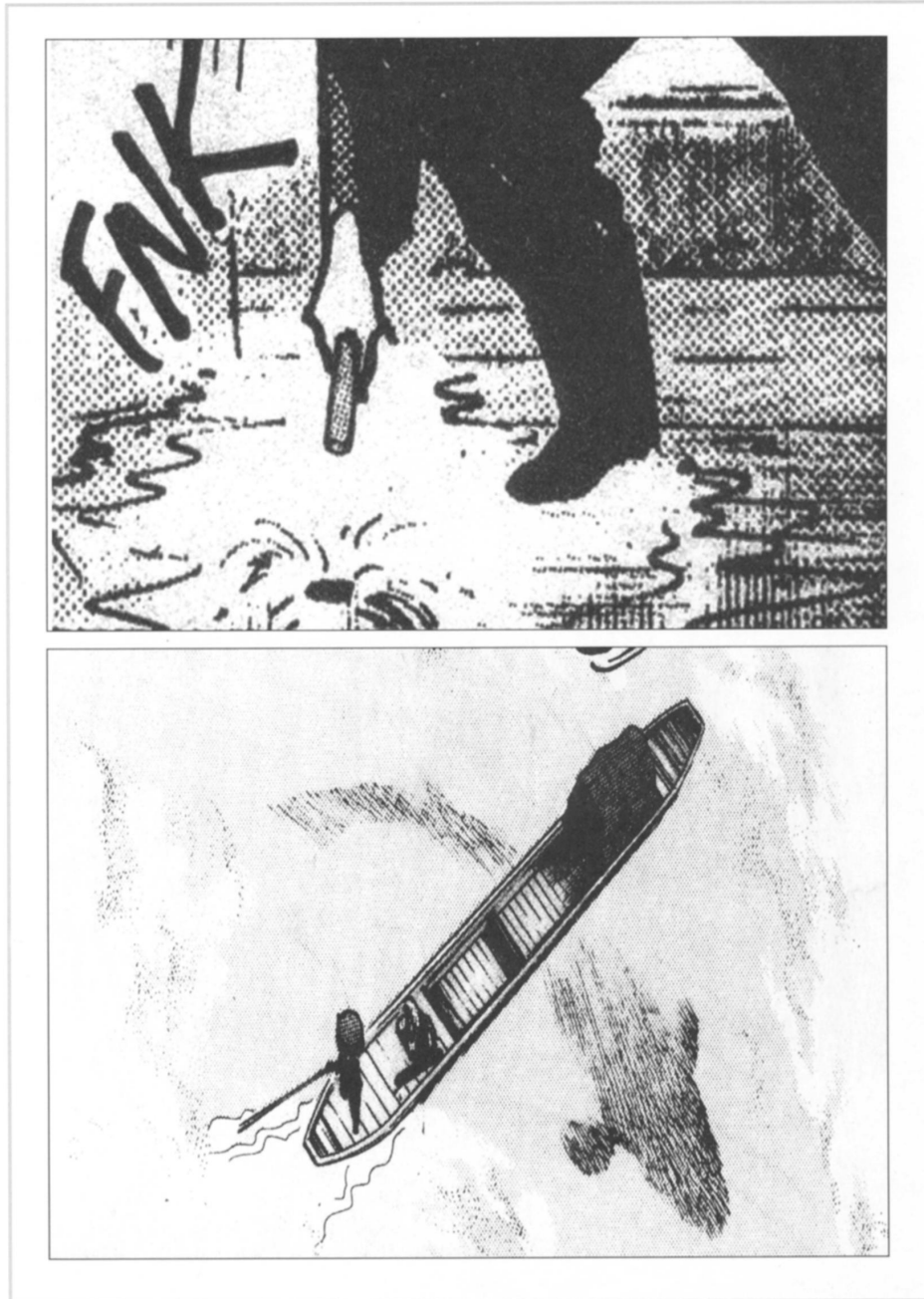
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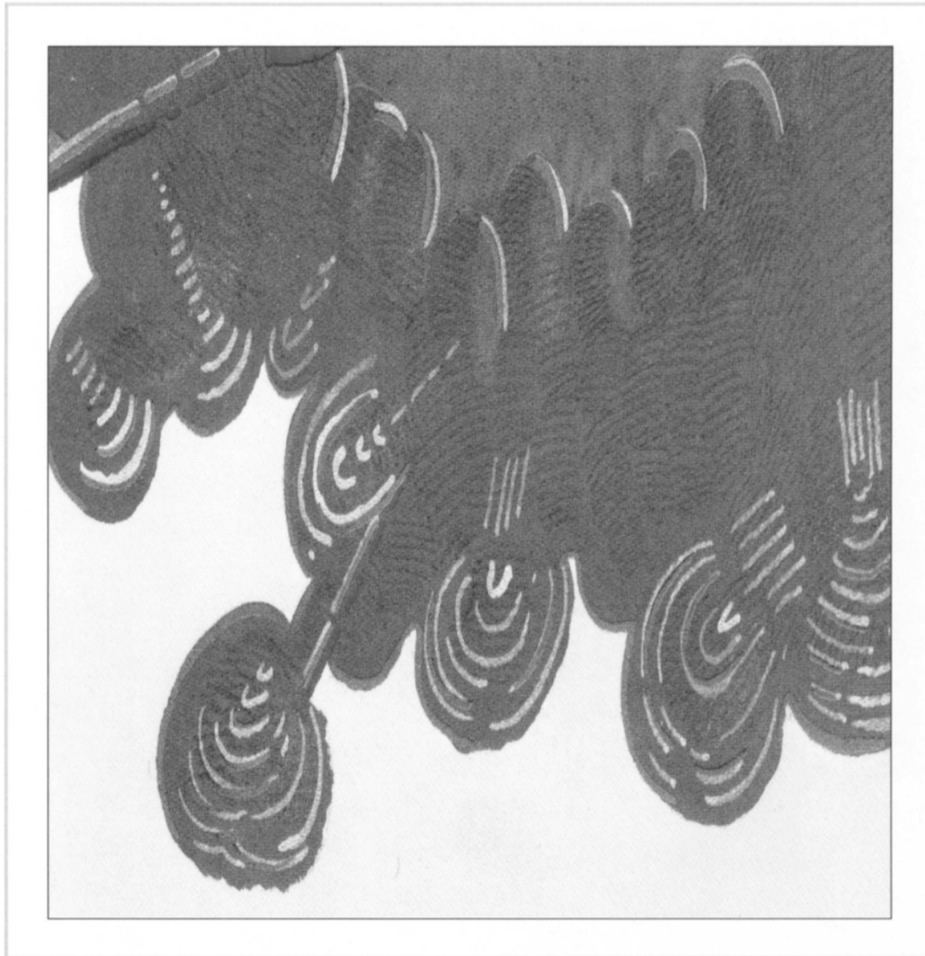
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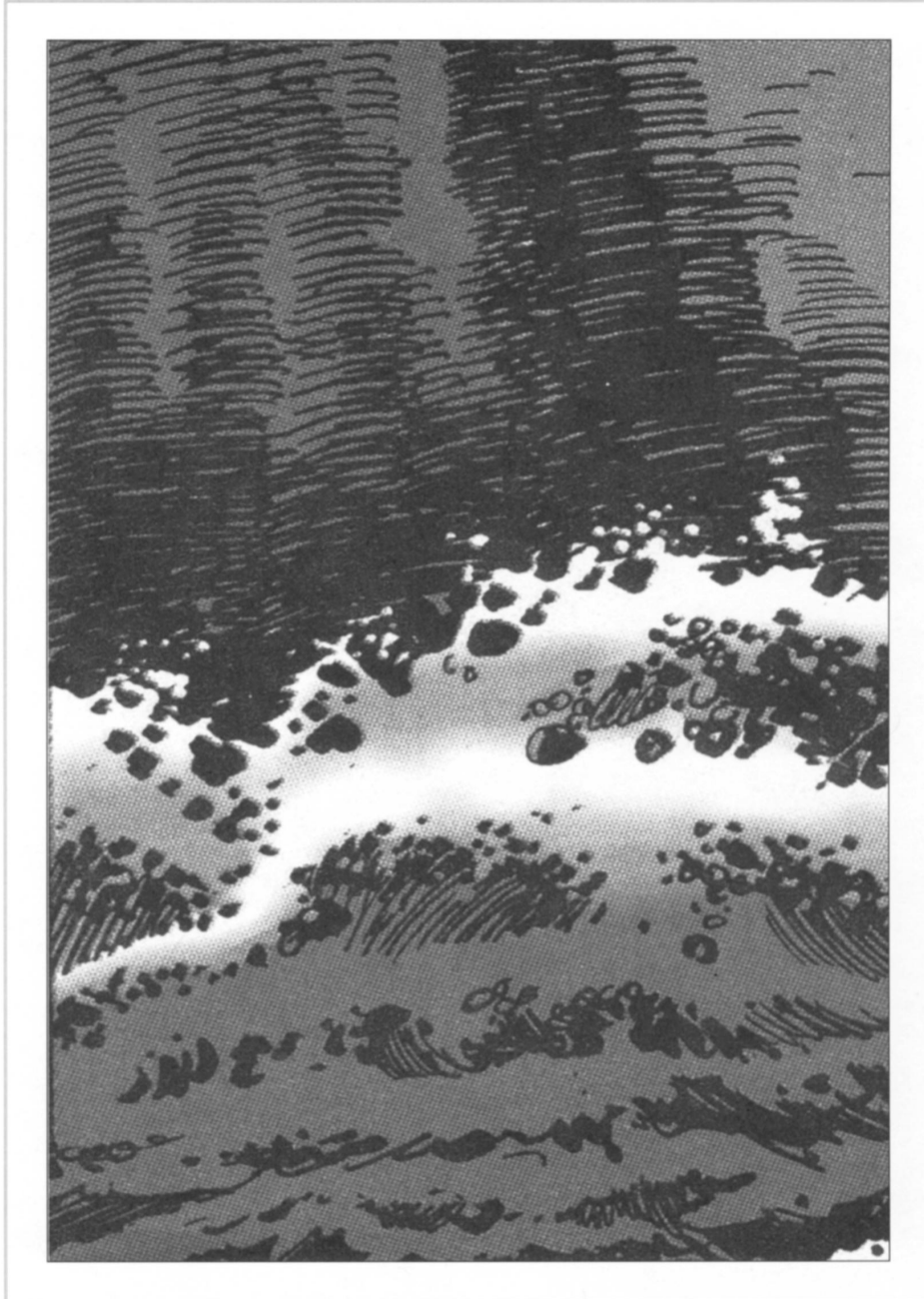
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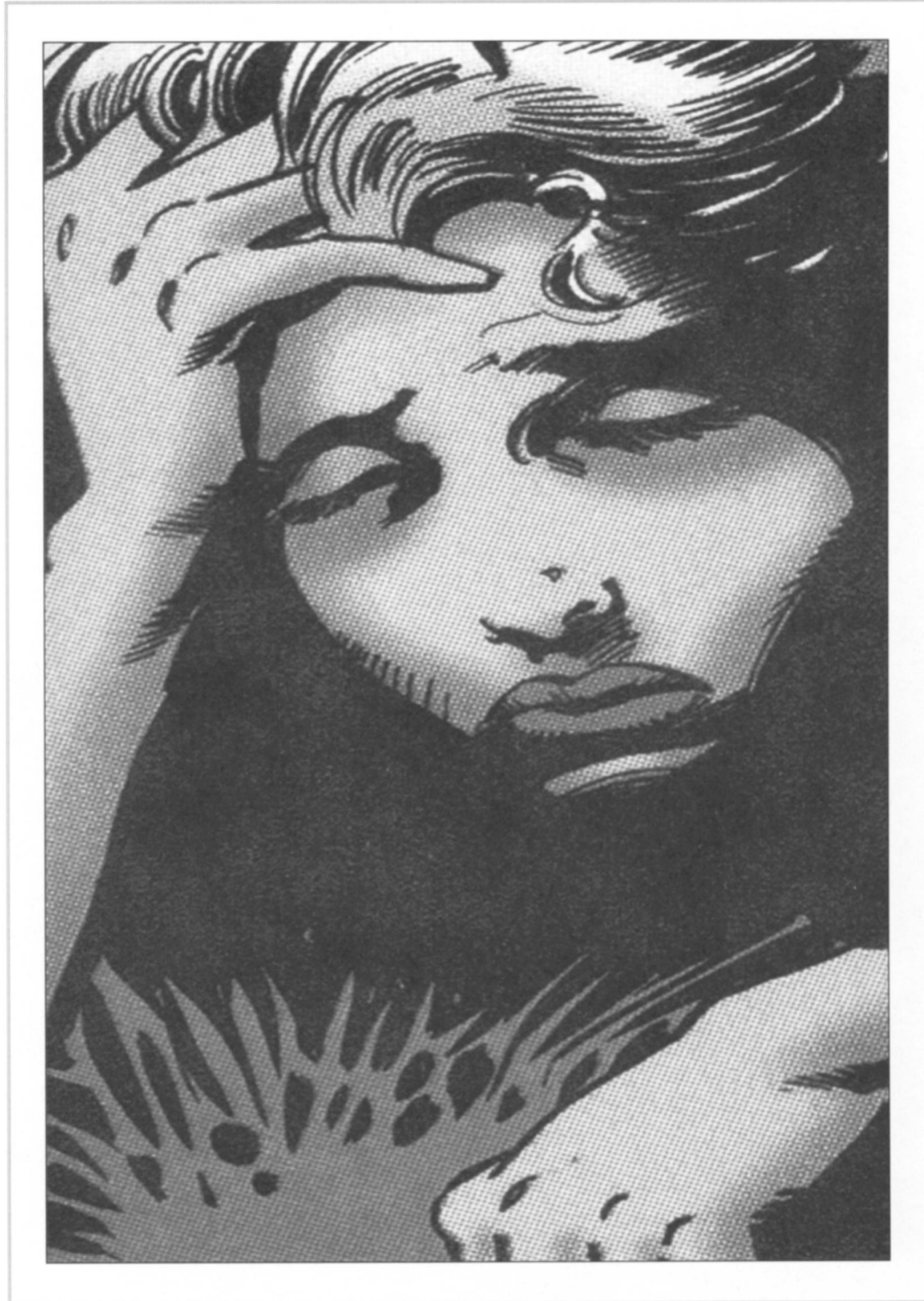
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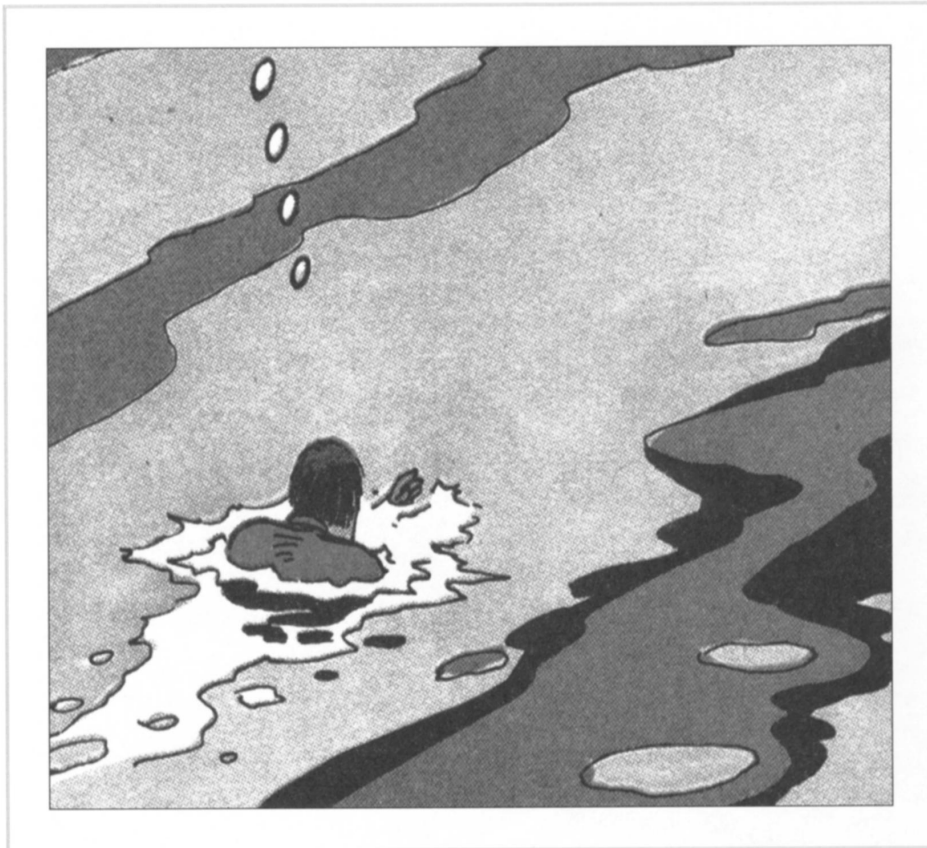
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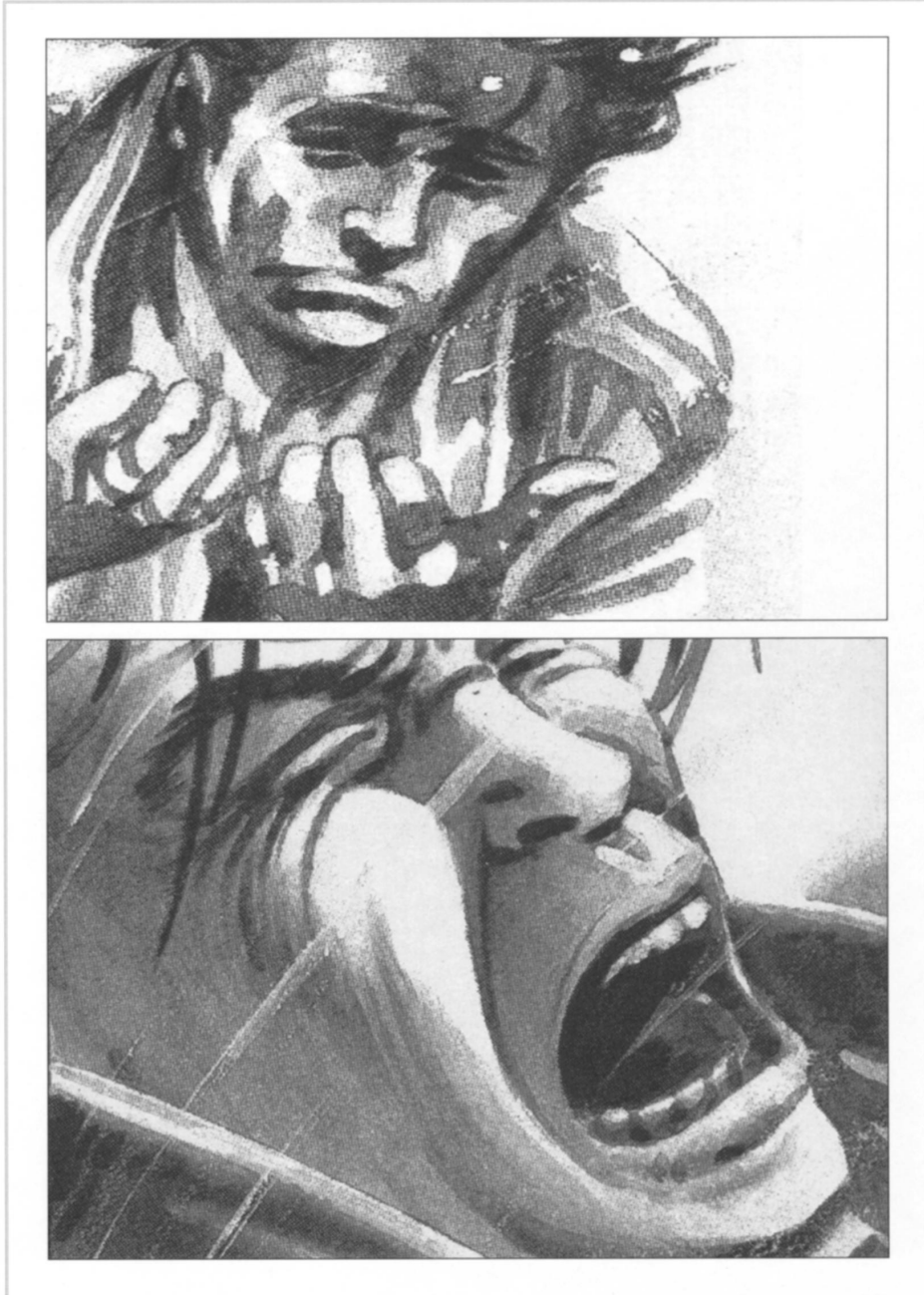
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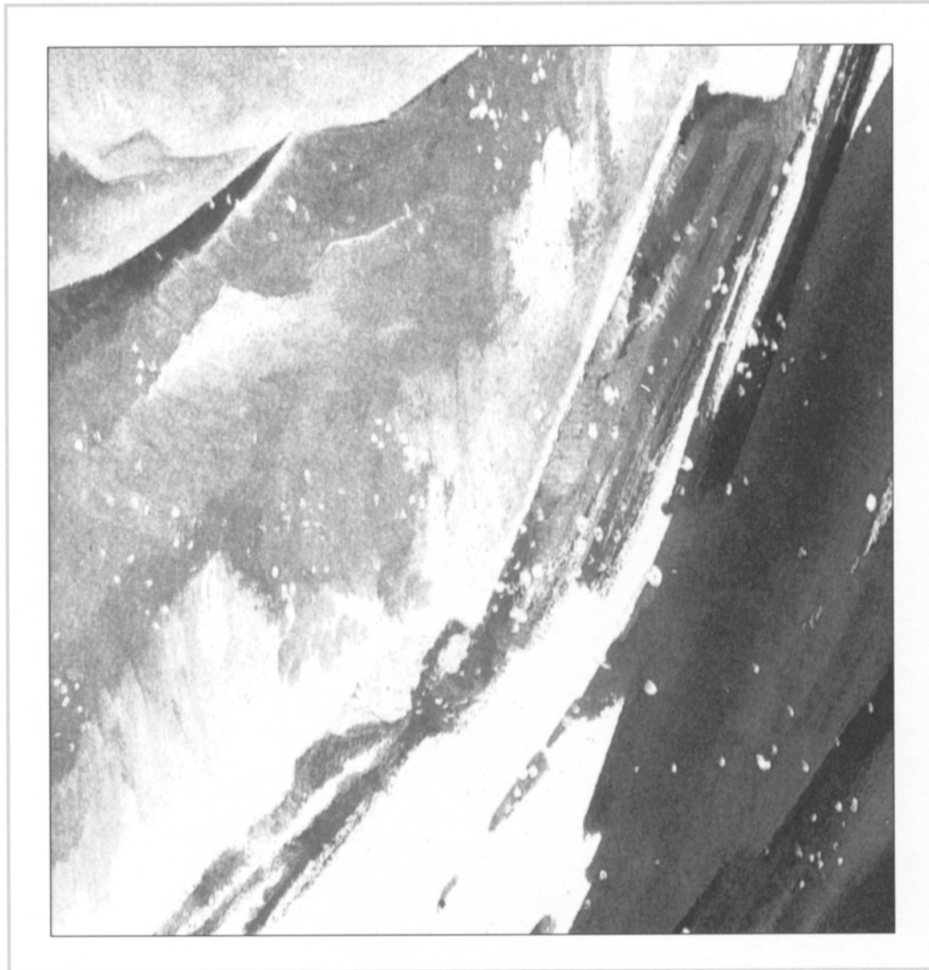
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New York, DC Comics/Vertigo

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“Crimes of Violence,” p. 62  
John Ostrander and Tom Mandrake  
New York, DC Comics

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*Max Faccioni—Detective* (1989)  
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Goffaux  
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*Max Faccioni—Detective* (1989)  
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*The Horrorist* 1 (December 1995), n.p.  
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*AVG Game* 71, no. 13 (1997)  
“Blood Scorpion,” p. 24  
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*The All New X-Men* 10 (1986)  
“The Uncanny X-Men: Performance”  
Chris Claremont, Arthur Adams, Terry Austin  
London, Boxtree Limited and Marvel Characters, Inc.

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*Manga Vizion* 2, no. 8 (1996)

“Mai, the Psychic Girl: Samurai Crusader, The Kumomaru Chronicles,” pp. 37, 38

Ryoichi Ikegami and Hiroi Oji

San Francisco, Manga Vizion

pp. 126–27

*Neef Ijso En Het Geheim Van de Dorstvogel* (1977)

Martijn Reeser, Hans Auer

Amsterdam, Uitgeverij Ploegsma

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*The Spectre: Crimes and Punishment* (1993)

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*De Brokkenmakers* (1987)

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*The Horrorist* 1 (December 1995), n.p.

Jamie Delano and David Lloyd

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