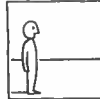


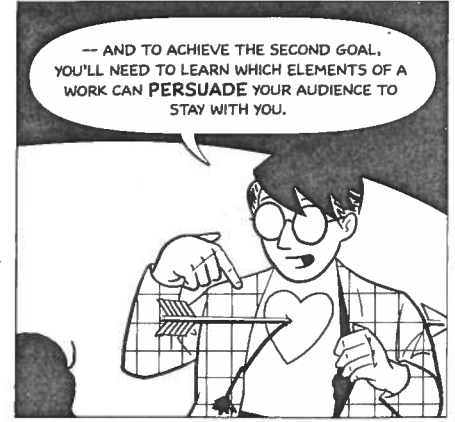
Chapter One

Writing with Pictures

Clarity, Persuasion and Intensity



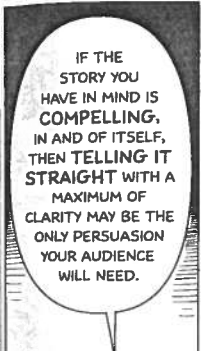
TO ACHIEVE THAT FIRST GOAL, YOU'LL NEED TO LEARN THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATING WITH CLARITY --



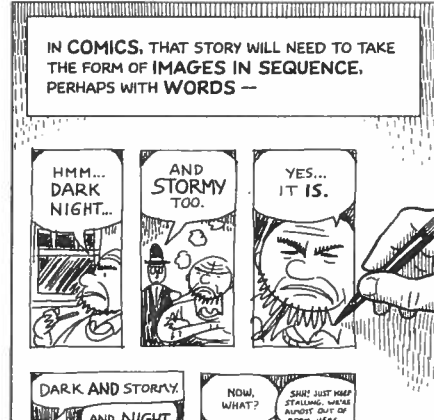
-- AND TO ACHIEVE THE SECOND GOAL, YOU'LL NEED TO LEARN WHICH ELEMENTS OF A WORK CAN PERSUADE YOUR AUDIENCE TO STAY WITH YOU.



FOR AS LONG AS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TELLING STORIES TO ONE ANOTHER, STORYTELLERS LIKE YOU AND ME HAVE WANTED TWO THINGS FROM OUR AUDIENCES.



IF THE STORY YOU HAVE IN MIND IS COMPELLING, IN AND OF ITSELF, THEN TELLING IT STRAIGHT WITH A MAXIMUM OF CLARITY MAY BE THE ONLY PERSUASION YOUR AUDIENCE WILL NEED.



IN COMICS, THAT STORY WILL NEED TO TAKE THE FORM OF IMAGES IN SEQUENCE, PERHAPS WITH WORDS --



HMM... DARK NIGHT...

AND STORMY TOO.

YES... IT IS.

DARK AND STORMY.

NOW, WHAT?

SAID JUST WHAT STANDING, WERE AUNTY OUT OF



-- SO LET'S START BY EXAMINING HOW THAT CONVERSION IS DONE WHEN CLARITY AND COMMUNICATION ARE THE PRIMARY GOALS.



WE WANT THEM TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE HAVE TO TELL THEM --



-- AND WE WANT THEM TO CARE ENOUGH TO STICK AROUND 'TIL WE'RE DONE.



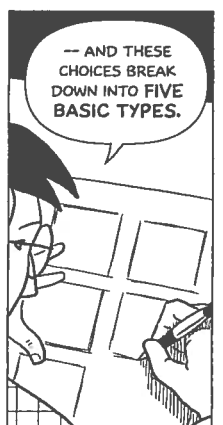
It was a dark and stormy night...

tap tap tap

APOLOGIES TO C. SCHULZ.



COMICS REQUIRES US TO MAKE A CONSTANT STREAM OF CHOICES REGARDING IMAGERY, PACING, DIALOGUE, COMPOSITION, GESTURE AND A TON OF OTHER OPTIONS --



-- AND THESE CHOICES BREAK DOWN INTO FIVE BASIC TYPES.

CHOICE OF MOMENT

DECIDING WHICH MOMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A COMICS STORY AND WHICH TO LEAVE OUT.

CHOICE OF FRAME

CHOOSING THE RIGHT DISTANCE AND ANGLE TO VIEW THOSE MOMENTS —

— AND WHERE TO TRIM THEM.

STARTING AT THE TOP, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT EACH ONE AND HOW THEY FIT TOGETHER.

- CHOICE OF MOMENT
- CHOICE OF FRAME
- CHOICE OF IMAGE
- CHOICE OF WORD
- CHOICE OF FLOW

THESE EARLY CHOICES ARE COMICS' ROUGH PLANNING STAGE WHERE A STORY'S EVENTS ARE FIRST BROKEN DOWN INTO READABLE CHUNKS.

CHOICE OF IMAGE

RENDERING THE CHARACTERS, OBJECTS AND ENVIRONMENTS IN THOSE FRAMES CLEARLY.

CHOICE OF WORD

PICKING WORDS THAT ADD VALUABLE INFORMATION AND WORK WELL WITH THE IMAGES AROUND THEM.

HEY!

BANDS WITH NAMES
N ZERO, ZERO...
ZERO...

SUPPOSE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT YOU WANTED TO SHOW A MAN WALKING...

NOTHING FANCY. JUST A SKETCH.

CHOICE OF FLOW

GUIDING READERS THROUGH AND BETWEEN PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN.

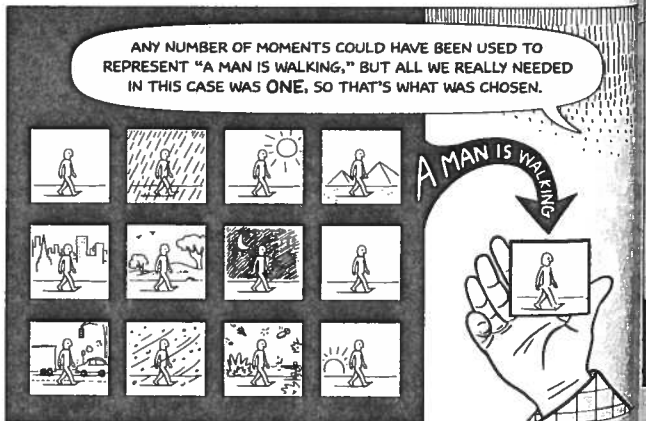
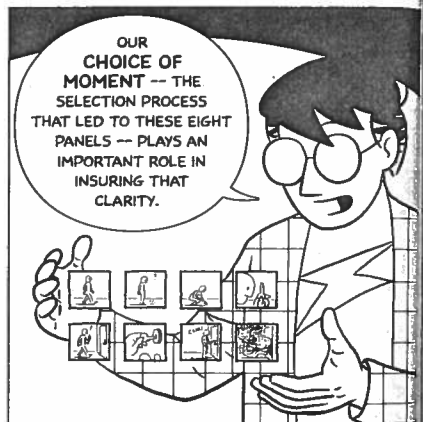
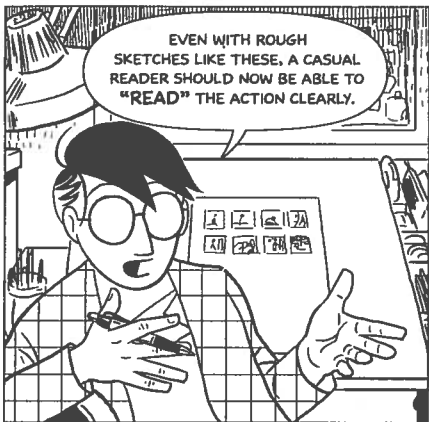
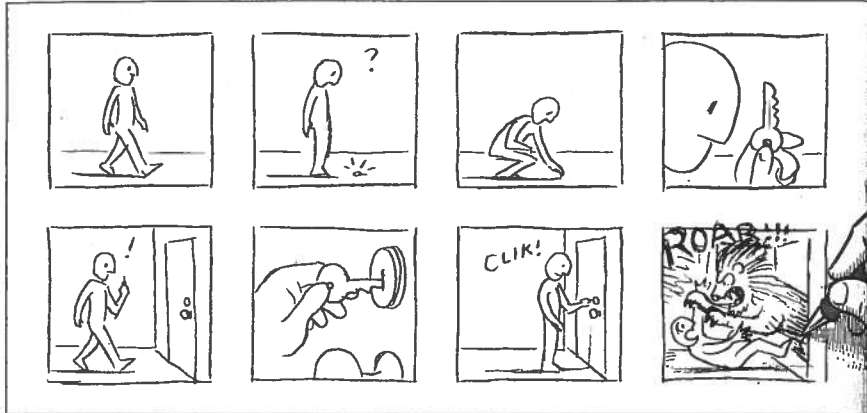
THESE ARE THE FIVE ARENAS WHERE YOUR CHOICES CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLEAR, CONVINCING STORYTELLING AND A CONFUSING MESS.

- CHOICE OF MOMENT
- CHOICE OF FRAME
- CHOICE OF IMAGE
- CHOICE OF WORD
- CHOICE OF FLOW

THEN, LET'S SAY THE MAN FINDS A KEY ON THE GROUND, PICKS IT UP, TAKES IT WITH HIM AND COMES TO A DOOR.

SO, HE UNLOCKS THE DOOR AND THEN A... I DUNNO... A HUNGRY LION JUMPS OUT!

HERE'S HOW A SEQUENCE LIKE THAT MIGHT TAKE SHAPE IN COMICS FORM.



EACH PANEL FURTHERS THE "PLOT."



"A man is walking."



"He finds a key on the ground."



"He takes it with him, then he comes to a locked door."

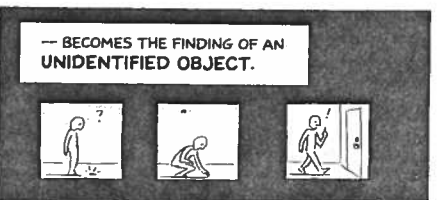
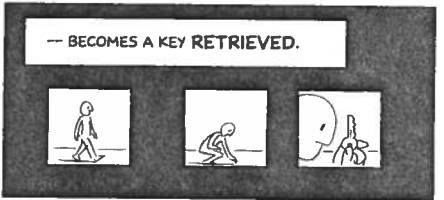
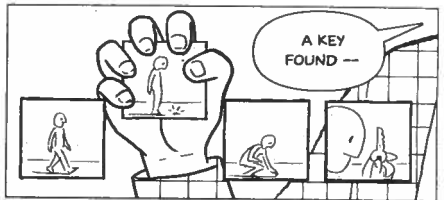
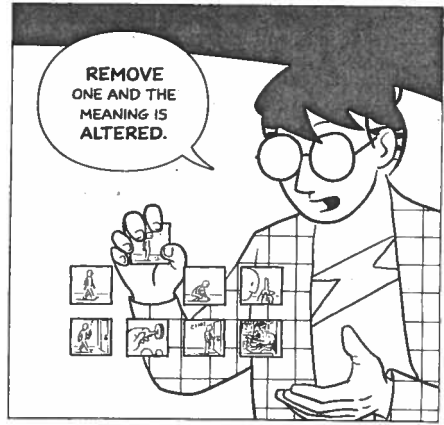


"He unlocks the door."



"Then a hungry lion jumps out."

AND IN THIS CASE, EIGHT PANELS IS WHAT WE NEEDED TO GET THE JOB DONE.



WHEN CLARITY IS YOUR SOLE PURPOSE --

YOUR STORY'S MOMENTS SHOULD BE LIKE A DOT-TO-DOT PUZZLE. REMOVE ONE DOT AND YOU CHANGE THE SHAPE OF THE STORY.

OR IF THAT'S NOT THE CASE, MAYBE THAT PARTICULAR "DOT" WASN'T NEEDED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

"HE FINDS A KEY ON THE GROUND" BREAKS DOWN INTO THREE SUCH ACTIONS: SEEING, REACHING DOWN AND EXAMINING (I.E., GIVING READERS A CLEAR VIEW OF THE KEY ITSELF).

EACH PANEL SHOWS A COMPLETE ACTION, BECAUSE WE'RE ADAPTING A PLOT THAT'S ANCHORED ENTIRELY IN ACTIONS.

IF THE PLOT CALLED FOR THE MAN TO "SLOWLY" REACH DOWN, A CERTAIN NUMBER OF EXTRA "DOTS" MIGHT HAVE BEEN NECESSARY TO SHOW THE FINDING OF THE KEY --

-- BUT BECAUSE WE'RE ILLUSTRATING THE FACT OF THESE ACTIONS, RATHER THAN THEIR QUALITY, ONE PANEL PER ACTION SEEMS TO BE ENOUGH.

CONSIDER WHAT YOU WANT FROM EACH PART OF YOUR STORY: DO YOU WANT TO JUMP AHEAD TO A KEY EVENT? DO YOU WANT TO PUT ON THE BRAKES AND FOCUS ON SMALLER MOMENTS? DO YOU WANT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO CONVERSATIONS AND FACES?

DEPENDING ON YOUR ANSWERS, YOU'LL FIND THAT CERTAIN TYPES OF TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PANELS MAY GET THE JOB DONE BETTER THAN OTHERS.

THESE PANEL TO PANEL TRANSITIONS COME IN SIX VARIETIES*, INCLUDING:

1. MOMENT TO MOMENT

A SINGLE ACTION PORTRAYED IN A SERIES OF MOMENTS.

2. ACTION TO ACTION

A SINGLE SUBJECT (PERSON, OBJECT, ETC...) IN A SERIES OF ACTIONS.

3. SUBJECT TO SUBJECT

A SERIES OF CHANGING SUBJECTS WITHIN A SINGLE SCENE.

4. SCENE TO SCENE

TRANSITIONS ACROSS SIGNIFICANT DISTANCES OF TIME AND/OR SPACE.

5. ASPECT TO ASPECT

TRANSITIONS FROM ONE ASPECT OF A PLACE, IDEA OR MOOD TO ANOTHER.

6. NON SEQUITUR

A SERIES OF SEEMINGLY NONSENSICAL, UNRELATED IMAGES AND/OR WORDS.



* SEE UNDERSTANDING COMICS PAGES 70-89 FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIX TRANSITIONS.

1

MOMENT TO MOMENT TRANSITIONS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE USEFUL FOR SLOWING THE ACTION DOWN, INCREASING SUSPENSE, CATCHING SMALL CHANGES AND CREATING MOVIE-LIKE MOTION ON THE PAGE.

2

ACTION TO ACTION TYPES ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR EFFICIENCY. THE CARTOONIST ONLY PICKS ONE MOMENT PER ACTION, SO EACH PANEL HELPS FURTHER THE PLOT AND KEEP THE PACE BRISK.

3

SUBJECT TO SUBJECT TRANSITIONS ARE EQUALLY EFFICIENT AT MOVING THE STORY FORWARD --

-- WHILE CHANGING ANGLES TO DIRECT READER ATTENTION AS NEEDED.*

* ALTHOUGH THEY PRIMARILY RELATE TO CHOICE OF MOMENT, TRANSITIONS THREE AND FIVE ALSO TOUCH ON THE UPCOMING TOPIC CHOICE OF FRAME.

4

SCENE TO SCENE JUMPS CAN HELP COMPRESS A STORY DOWN TO A MANAGEABLE LENGTH, WHILE STILL ALLOWING FOR A RANGE OF TIME-SPANS AND A BREADTH OF LOCATIONS. LOOK HARD AT YOUR STORIES AND YOU MAY FIND YOU CAN CUT A LOT OUT.

6

AND FINALLY THE NON SEQUITUR, WHICH, THOUGH IT MAY NOT DO ANYTHING TO ADVANCE A STORY --

-- HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN EXPERIMENTAL COMICS, PROVIDING THE OCCASIONAL NONSENSE GAG IN OTHERWISE RATIONAL STORIES.

5

SOMETIMES IT MAY SUIT YOUR NARRATIVE TO HAVE TIME STAND STILL AND LET THE EYE WANDER.

ASPECT TO ASPECT TRANSITIONS DO JUST THAT, AND THEY'VE BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY IN JAPAN -- AND RECENTLY, IN NORTH AMERICA -- TO CREATE A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE AND MOOD.

IF YOU HAVE A STORY THAT'S VERY PLOT-DRIVEN, YOU MAY FIND THAT A LOT OF ACTION TO ACTION TRANSITIONS WITH A FEW SUBJECT TO SUBJECTS AND SCENE TO SCENES ARE ALL YOU NEED.

THESE TEND TO CLARIFY THE FACTS OF A SCENE: WHO DOES WHAT, WHERE IT'S DONE, HOW IT'S DONE AND SO FORTH.



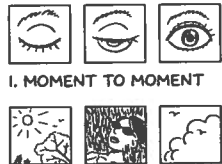
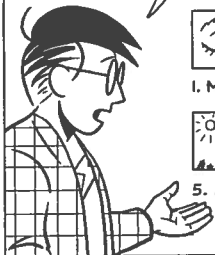
2. ACTION

3. SUBJECT

2. ACTION

4. SCENE

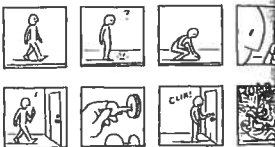
TRANSITIONS ONE AND FIVE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HELP CLARIFY THE NATURE OF AN ACTION, IDEA OR MOOD, AND WORK WELL IN MORE NUANCED OR EMOTIONALLY-DRIVEN STORES.



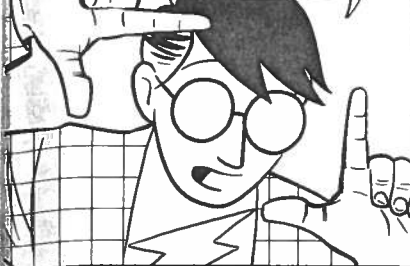
1. MOMENT TO MOMENT

5. ASPECT TO ASPECT

WHATEVER YOUR CHOICE OF MOMENT, THOUGH, CLARITY MEANS LETTING THESE TECHNIQUES OPERATE QUIETLY IN THE BACKGROUND AND LETTING THE CONTENT OF THE WORK SPEAK FOR ITSELF.



CHOICE OF FRAME IS THE STAGE WHERE YOU DECIDE HOW CLOSELY TO FRAME AN ACTION TO SHOW ALL THE PERTINENT DETAILS --



-- OR HOW FAR TO PULL BACK TO LET THE READER KNOW WHERE AN ACTION IS TAKING PLACE --

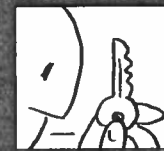
-- AND MAYBE GIVE A SENSE OF BEING THERE IN THE PROCESS.



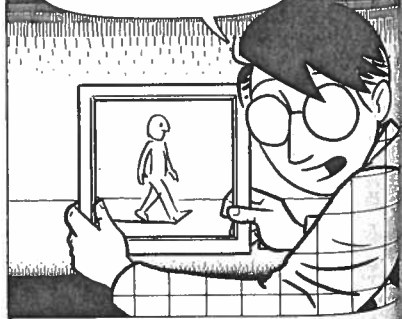
OF COURSE, CHOOSING THE RIGHT MOMENT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.



ONCE YOU'VE PICKED THE RIGHT MOMENTS FOR THE JOB, YOU'LL NEED TO SHOW YOUR READERS WHERE THAT MOMENT'S FOCUS LIES.



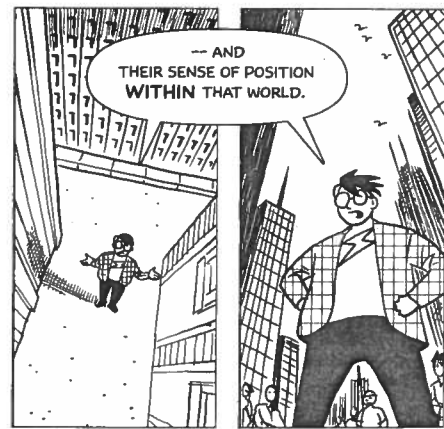
AND THAT'S WHEN PICKING THE RIGHT VIEW OF THAT MOMENT CAN BE CRUCIAL.



IT'S THE STAGE WHERE YOU DECIDE HOW COMPOSITIONAL FACTORS LIKE CROPPING, BALANCE AND TILT AFFECT YOUR READERS' IMPRESSIONS OF YOUR WORLD --



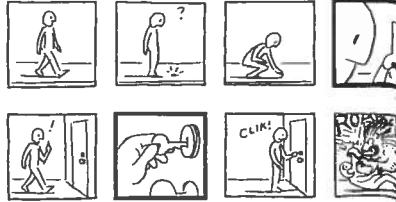
-- AND THEIR SENSE OF POSITION WITHIN THAT WORLD.



THE CHOICE OF MOMENT FOR OUR ORIGINAL EXAMPLE WAS PRETTY SIMPLE (JUST STRAIGHT ACTION TO ACTION) --

-- AND THE CHOICE OF FRAME FOR THOSE PANELS WAS TOO.

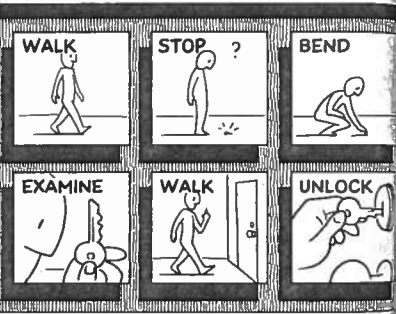
TWO OUT OF THE EIGHT PANELS FEATURED CLOSE-UPS TO SHOW A FEW IMPORTANT DETAILS --



-- BUT OTHERWISE, THE ACTION WAS SHOWN FROM A FIXED MIDDLE DISTANCE AND FIXED VIEWING ANGLE.

OUR TALE COULD HAVE BEEN SHOT FROM MANY ANGLES AND DISTANCES, BUT BY OFFERING A VIEW OF THE ACTION THAT BARELY CHANGES --

-- THE READER IS ENCOURAGED TO FOCUS ON WHAT DOES CHANGE, SUCH AS THE POSITION AND ATTITUDE OF THE CHARACTER, AS WELL AS HIS UNCHANGING FORWARD STANCE --



THAT SAID, SOME SCENES REQUIRE FREQUENT CHANGES OF FRAME, SUCH AS THE FLIP-FLOPPING ANGLES OF SUBJECT TO SUBJECT TRANSITIONS USED TO CAPTURE THE RHYTHM OF TWO PEOPLE IN CONVERSATION.

WHY DO I HAVE TO GET MAULED BY THE HUNGRY LION?!

BECAUSE IT'S FUNNY!

I'M TIRED OF BEING A THROW-AWAY CHARACTER.

TO YOU, MAYBE.

BUT, LOOK AT ALL THE PANELS YOU'VE BEEN IN!

YOU MEAN I HAVE TO KEEP DOING THIS?!

HEY, AT LEAST YOU GET TO APPEAR AGAIN. THIS IS MY LAST PANEL EVER!

IT'S ONLY PAGE 21!

OH, DORIS...

SNIFFE

-- INSTEAD OF BEING DISTRACTED BY NEEDLESSLY VARYING SHOTS, IRRELEVANT TO THE NARRATIVE.

READERS LIKE CHANGE AND VARIETY, SO IT'S TEMPTING TO VARY ANGLES A LOT. JUST MAKE SURE THAT THE CHANGES IN YOUR ARTWORK --

-- AREN'T DISTRACTING READERS FROM MORE IMPORTANT CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN YOUR STORY.

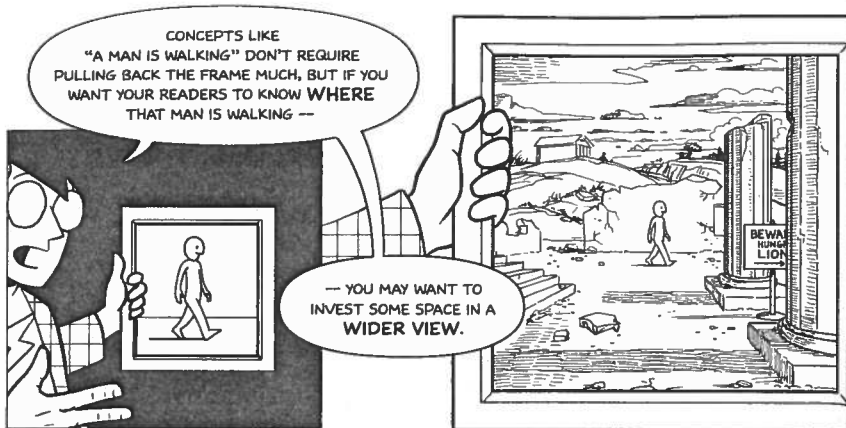
AND THERE'S NO NEED TO KEEP EVERY PANEL AT EYE LEVEL.

A "WORM'S EYE" VIEW CAN GIVE WEIGHT AND GRANDEUR TO OBJECTS --

-- AND CHARACTERS --

-- WHILE GETTING ABOVE A SCENE CAN GIVE READERS ACCESS TO A WEALTH OF INFO ABOUT A SETTING --

-- AND A SENSE OF "RISING ABOVE IT ALL" EMOTIONALLY AS WELL.

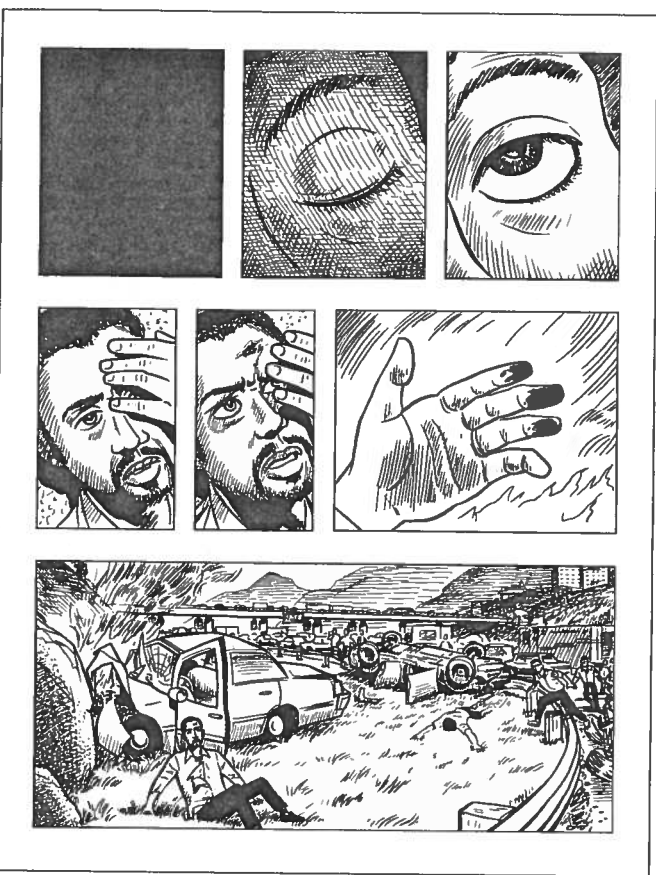


CONCEPTS LIKE "A MAN IS WALKING" DON'T REQUIRE PULLING BACK THE FRAME MUCH, BUT IF YOU WANT YOUR READERS TO KNOW WHERE THAT MAN IS WALKING —

— YOU MAY WANT TO INVEST SOME SPACE IN A WIDER VIEW.

ON THE OTHER HAND, BECAUSE READERS WANT AND EXPECT THAT SENSE OF PLACE, A CLEVER STORYTELLER CAN CHOOSE TO DELAY THE ESTABLISHING SHOT TO INCREASE SUSPENSE —

— OR TO MIRROR THE THOUGHTS OF A CHARACTER WHO'S TEMPORARILY UNAWARE OF HIS OR HER SURROUNDINGS.

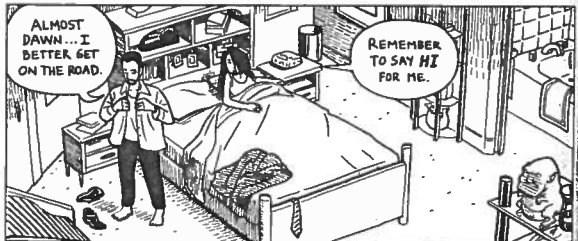


READERS NEED THAT INFORMATION ESPECIALLY WHEN MOVING FROM SCENE TO SCENE —

— HENCE THE TRADITION OF THE ESTABLISHING SHOT: A BIG LONG-SHOT PANEL OR TWO AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH NEW SCENE, USUALLY FOLLOWED BY SOME MIDDLE GROUND AND CLOSE-UP PANELS OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS.



UH-OH. LOOK AT THE TIME!



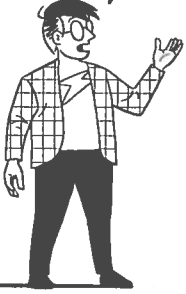
ALMOST DAWN... I BETTER GET ON THE ROAD.

REMEMBER TO SAY HI FOR ME.



DRAWING DETAILED ESTABLISHING SHOTS CAN BE HARD WORK BUT THEY'RE WORTH THE EFFORT IF, BY DOING SO, YOU CAN CREATE A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE IN THE IMAGINATIONS OF YOUR READERS.

LOOK FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC IN CHAPTER FOUR.



IF I HURRY, I CAN MAKE IT THERE BY SUNDOWN.

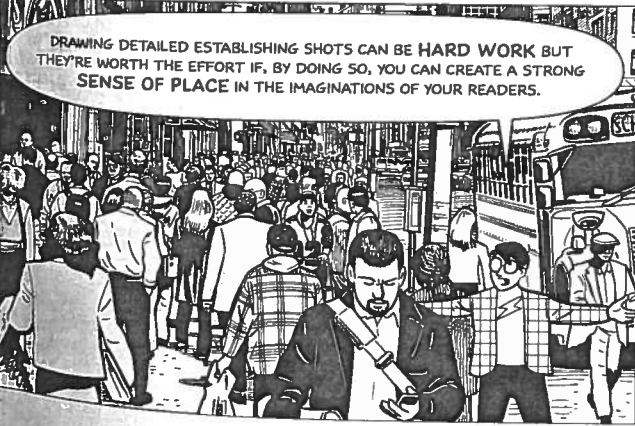
DON'T HURRY TOO MUCH.

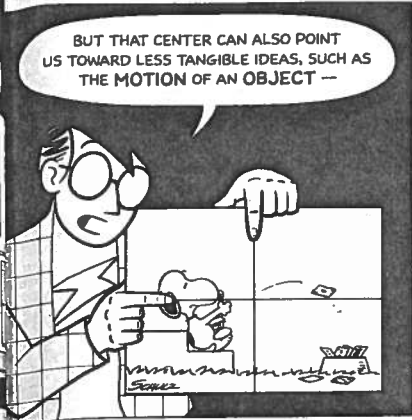
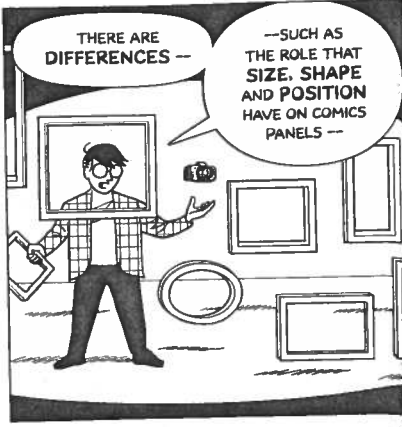
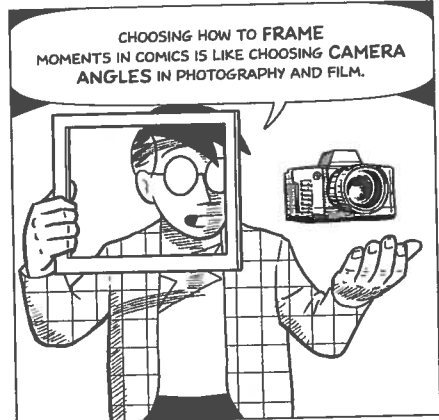


DRIVE SAFELY, OKAY?



DON'T I ALWAYS?

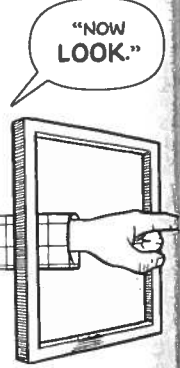
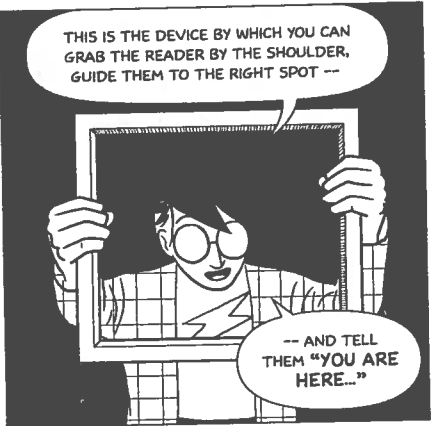
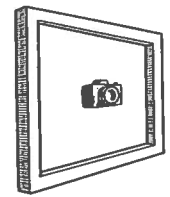




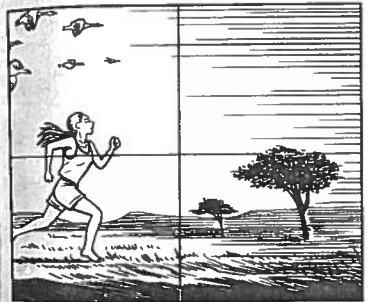
-- A MYSTERIOUS ABSENCE --



-- BUT TO THINK OF THAT FRAME AS THE READER'S CAMERA IS A USEFUL METAPHOR.



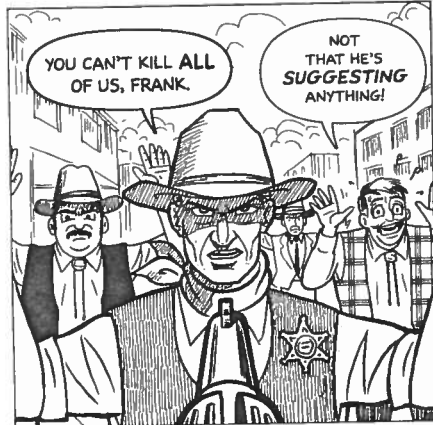
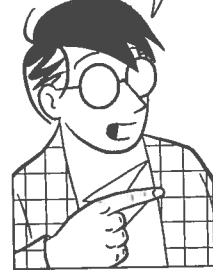
-- A DISTANCE ABOUT TO BE CROSSED --



-- A DISTANCE CROSSED ALREADY --



READERS WILL ASSIGN IMPORTANCE TO CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS PLACED IN THE CENTER --



-- AND SOME COMIC ARTISTS OBLIGE BY PUTTING THEIR MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT THERE.



-- OR THE UNSEEN OBJECT OF A CHARACTER'S ATTENTION.



PANEL ONE: ART BY CHARLES SCHULZ. PANEL FOUR: ART BY LUIS HERNANDEZ (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).



NEXT UP IS YOUR
CHOICE OF IMAGE:
 CREATING PICTURES TO FILL
 THOSE FRAMES AND BRING THE
 WORLD OF YOUR STORY TO
 LIFE VISUALLY.

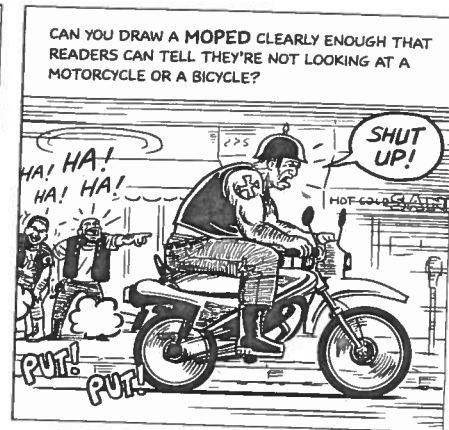


AFTER ALL
 THAT PLANNING,
 CHOOSING, ARRANGING
 AND SKETCHING THINGS OUT,
 HERE'S THE PART OF THE PROCESS
 WHERE YOU GET TO PICK UP YOUR
 PEN, BRUSH OR DIGITAL STYLUS
 AND FINALLY **DRAW**
 SOMETHING!



DON'T JUST RELY
 ON STOCK GENERIC
 FEATURES; A DRESS,
 A CAR, A SMILE...

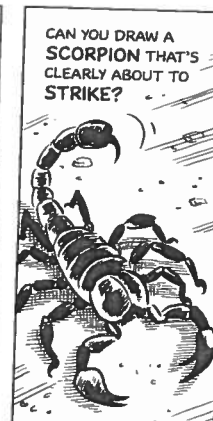
GET
 READY TO GET
SPECIFIC.



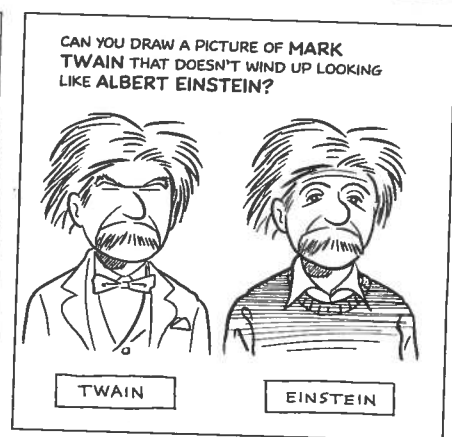
CAN YOU DRAW A MOPED CLEARLY ENOUGH THAT
 READERS CAN TELL THEY'RE NOT LOOKING AT A
 MOTORCYCLE OR A BICYCLE?



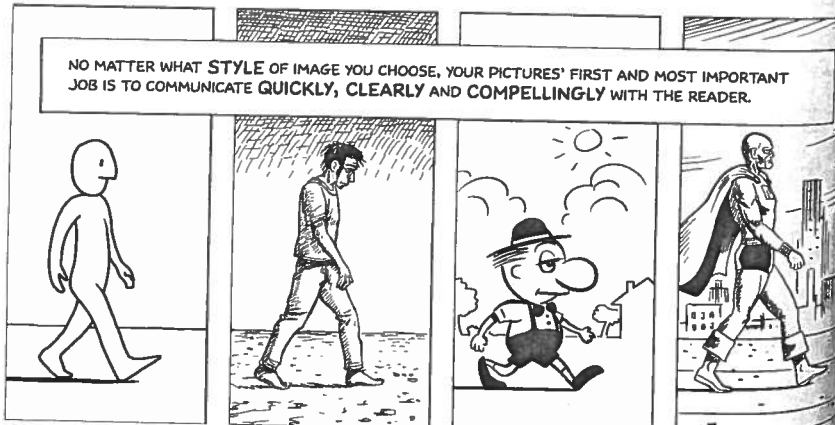
CAN YOU DRAW AN
 EXPRESSION OF MOCK
 DISAPPROVAL THAT
 WON'T BE MISTAKEN
 FOR THE REAL
 THING?



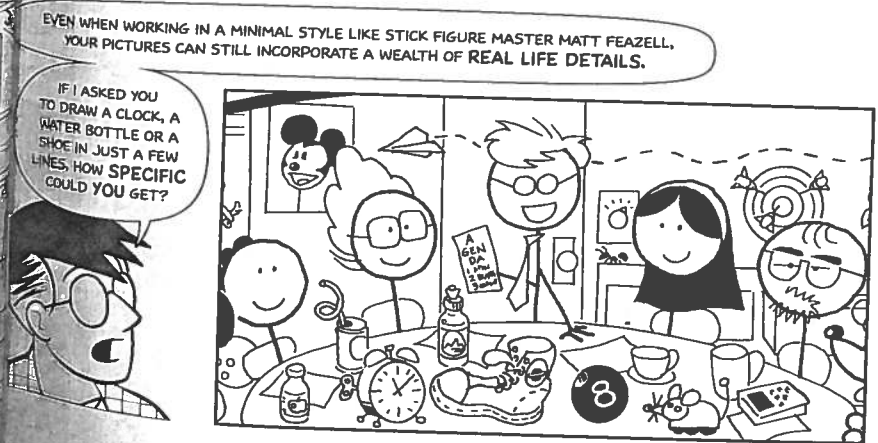
CAN YOU DRAW A
 SCORPION THAT'S
 CLEARLY ABOUT TO
 STRIKE?



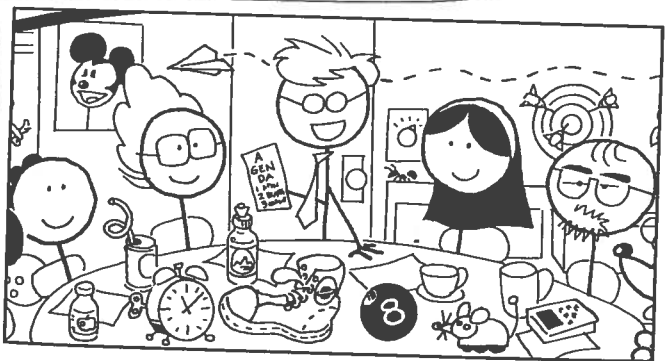
CAN YOU DRAW A PICTURE OF MARK
 TWAIN THAT DOESN'T WIND UP LOOKING
 LIKE ALBERT EINSTEIN?



NO MATTER WHAT **STYLE OF IMAGE** YOU CHOOSE, YOUR PICTURES' FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT
 JOB IS TO COMMUNICATE QUICKLY, CLEARLY AND COMPELLINGLY WITH THE READER.



IF I ASKED YOU
 TO DRAW A CLOCK, A
 WATER BOTTLE OR A
 SHOE IN JUST A FEW
 LINES, HOW SPECIFIC
 COULD YOU GET?



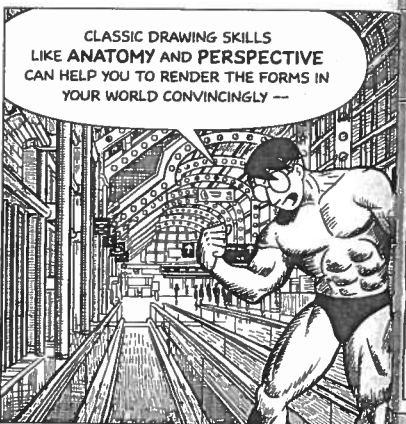
EVEN WHEN WORKING IN A MINIMAL STYLE LIKE STICK FIGURE MASTER MATT FEAZELL,
 YOUR PICTURES CAN STILL INCORPORATE A WEALTH OF REAL LIFE DETAILS.



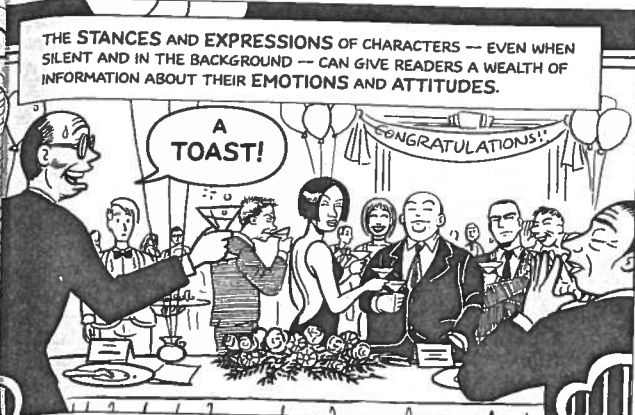
CHOICE OF IMAGE IS WHERE ALL THOSE TRADITIONAL HOW-TO-DRAW BOOKS CAN BE HELPFUL —



— AND DRAWING FROM LIFE EVEN MORE SO.



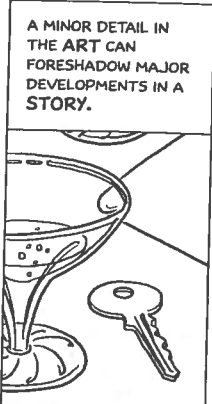
CLASSIC DRAWING SKILLS LIKE ANATOMY AND PERSPECTIVE CAN HELP YOU TO RENDER THE FORMS IN YOUR WORLD CONVINCINGLY —



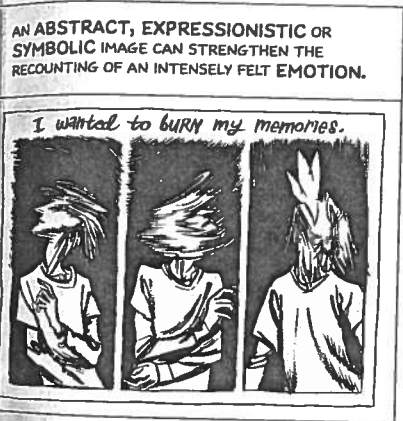
THE STANCES AND EXPRESSIONS OF CHARACTERS — EVEN WHEN SILENT AND IN THE BACKGROUND — CAN GIVE READERS A WEALTH OF INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES.

A TOAST!

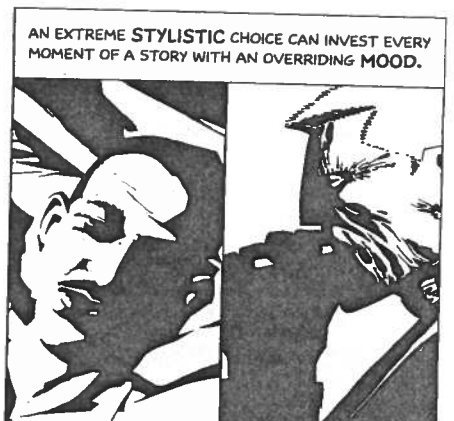
CONGRATULATIONS!



A MINOR DETAIL IN THE ART CAN FORESHADOW MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN A STORY.



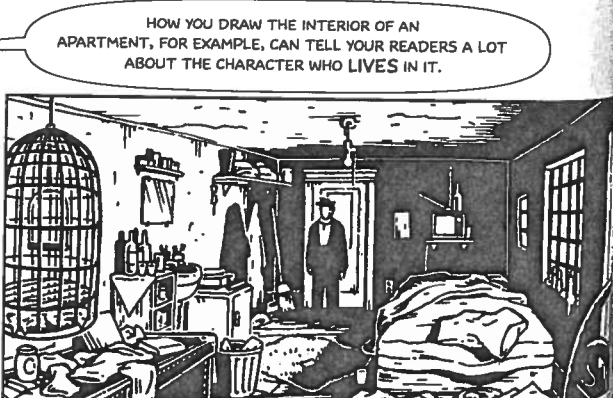
AN ABSTRACT, EXPRESSIONISTIC OR SYMBOLIC IMAGE CAN STRENGTHEN THE RECOUNTING OF AN INTENSELY FELT EMOTION.



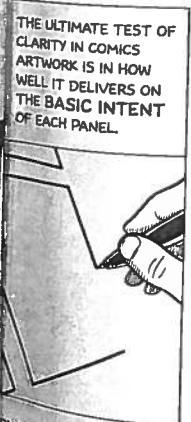
AN EXTREME STYLISTIC CHOICE CAN INVEST EVERY MOMENT OF A STORY WITH AN OVERRIDING MOOD.



— BUT IN COMICS, THOSE CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS CAN BE FAR MORE THAN JUST PRETTY PICTURES.



HOW YOU DRAW THE INTERIOR OF AN APARTMENT, FOR EXAMPLE, CAN TELL YOUR READERS A LOT ABOUT THE CHARACTER WHO LIVES IN IT.



THE ULTIMATE TEST OF CLARITY IN COMICS ARTWORK IS IN HOW WELL IT DELIVERS ON THE BASIC INTENT OF EACH PANEL.



YOU MIGHT ALREADY BE ABLE TO DRAW LIKE MICHELANGELO, BUT IF IT DOESN'T COMMUNICATE, IT'LL JUST DIE ON THE PAGE —

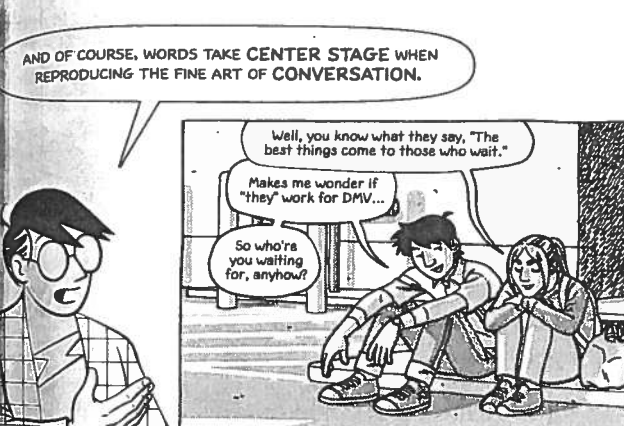
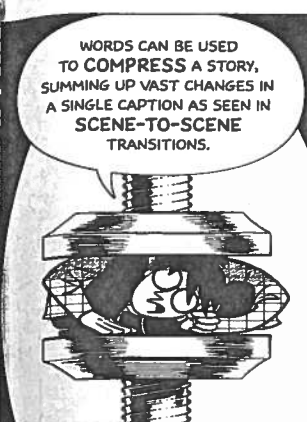
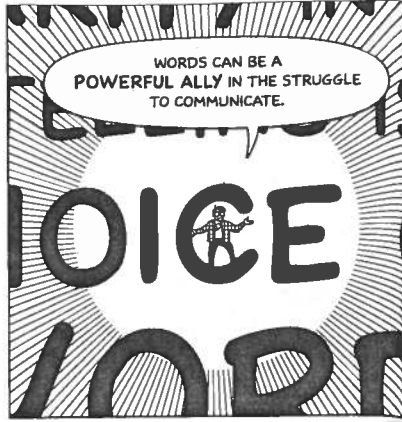
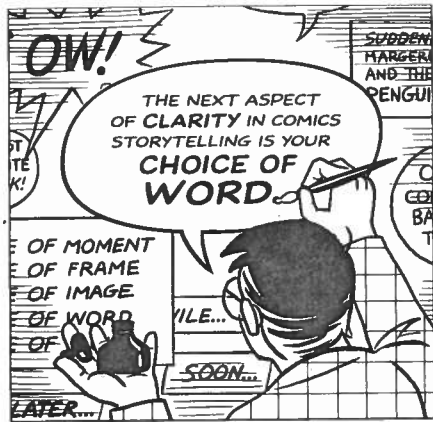
— WHILE A CRUDER BUT MORE COMMUNICATIVE STYLE WILL WIN FANS BY THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS.



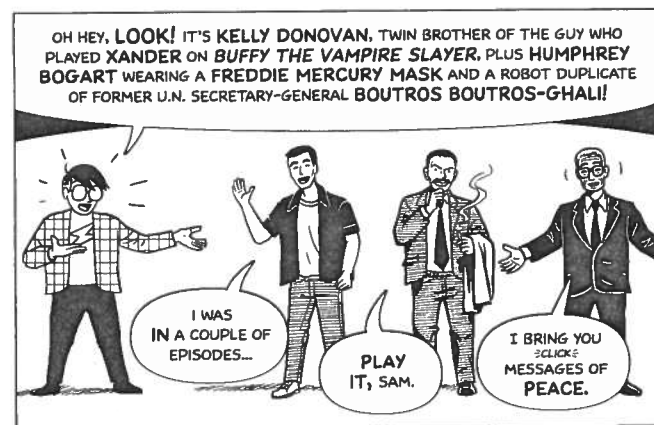
QUESTION NUMBER ONE: WILL READERS GET THE MESSAGE?

PANEL FOUR: ART BY JASON LUTES (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

PANEL THREE: ART BY CRAIG THOMPSON. PANEL FOUR: ART BY HO CHE ANDERSON AND FRANK MILLER (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).



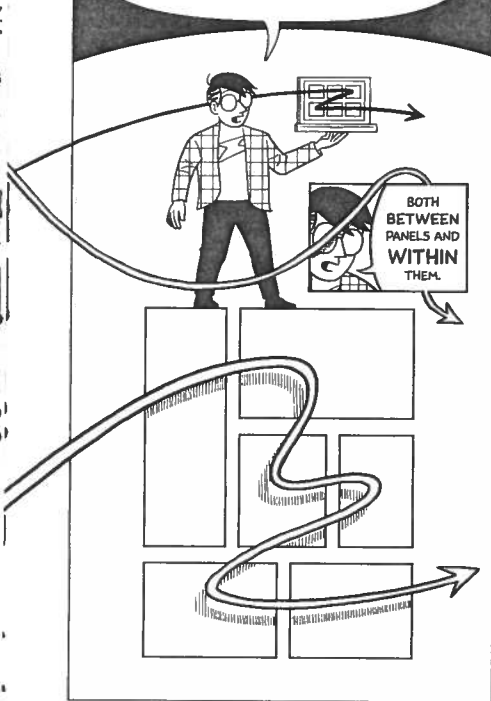
Words alone have been telling stories clearly for millennia. They've done just fine without pictures...



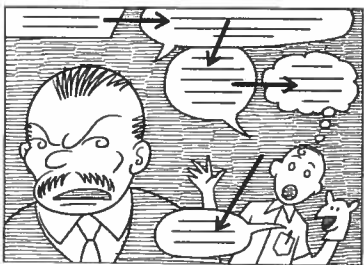
SPECIAL THANKS TO KELLY DONOVAN (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

PANEL TWO: ART BY DEREK KIRK KIM (SEE ART CREDITS, PAGE 258).

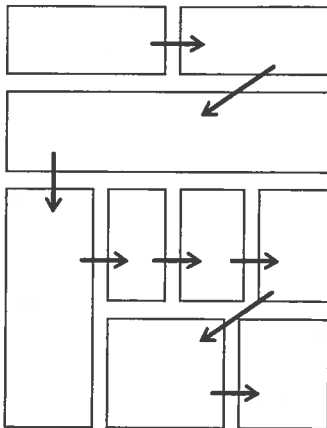
FINALLY, AFTER CHOOSING JUST THE RIGHT MOMENTS, FRAMES, IMAGES AND WORDS, ALL THAT'S LEFT IS YOUR CHOICE OF FLOW: HOW YOU GUIDE YOUR AUDIENCE THROUGH YOUR WORK FROM BEGINNING TO END.



-- AND THAT WITHIN EACH PANEL, THE SAME PRINCIPLES WILL APPLY TO CAPTIONS AND WORD BALLOONS.



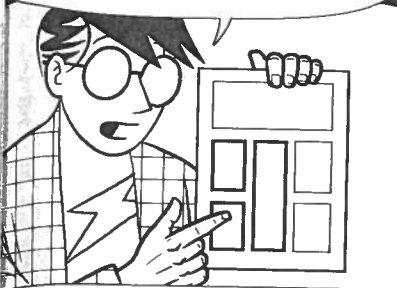
BETWEEN PANELS, YOUR CHOICE OF FLOW WILL RELY ON THE UNWRITTEN CONTRACT WHICH STATES THAT PANELS ARE READ LEFT-TO-RIGHT FIRST, THEN UP-TO-DOWN* --



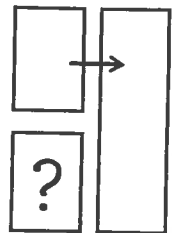
IT ALSO MEANS BEING ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ANY PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS THAT CAN HELP -- OR HINDER -- THAT FLOW.

- 🕒 CHOICE OF MOMENT
- 🖼️ CHOICE OF FRAME
- 👁️ CHOICE OF IMAGE
- 🗣️ CHOICE OF WORD
- 📄 CHOICE OF FLOW

THE EASIEST WAY TO AVOID PANEL-TO-PANEL CONFUSION IS TO JUST KEEP IT SIMPLE, BUT IF YOU LIKE TO MIX THINGS UP, KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR CERTAIN INHERENTLY CONFUSING ARRANGEMENTS LIKE THIS ONE --



-- IN WHICH HABIT WILL SEND YOUR READERS LEFT TO RIGHT, LEAVING THE LOWER LEFT-HAND PANEL UNREAD --



-- AND PRODUCING JUST ENOUGH SPLIT-SECOND CONFUSION TO YANK READERS OUT OF THE WORLD OF THE STORY.



SURE, THERE ARE WAYS TO COMPEL READERS' EYES TO MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

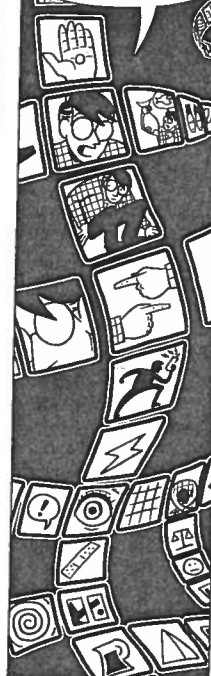


JUST MAKE SURE YOUR LAYOUT IS SERVING YOUR STORY --

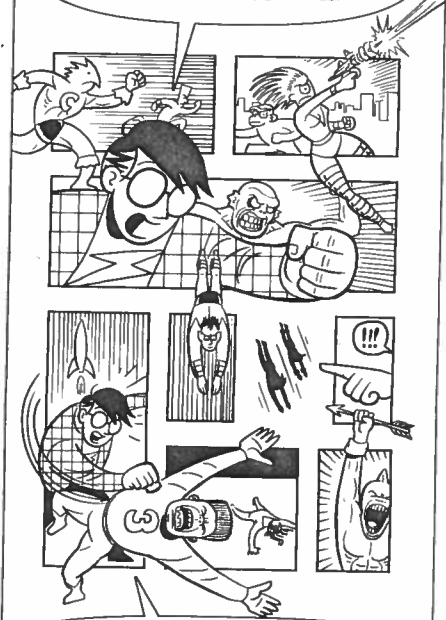
-- INSTEAD OF THE OTHER WAY AROUND --



-- UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU WANT TO GO THE EXPERIMENTAL ROUTE, AS I SOMETIMES DO, BUT THAT'S A WHOLE OTHER BOOK!



ANOTHER SOURCE OF "WHICH COMES NEXT?" CONFUSION WHEN PANEL ARRANGEMENTS ARE OBSCURED BY TOO MANY "FOURTH WALL" BREAKS AND BORDERLESS IMAGES.



THE COMPOSITIONS AND MOTION IN YOUR FRAMES CAN HELP GUIDE THE READERS' EYES, BUT MAKE SURE THEY'RE BEING GUIDED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!

* OR RIGHT-TO-LEFT IN SOME CULTURES, OF COURSE.

HOW YOUR CHOICE OF FRAME CHANGES FROM PANEL TO PANEL CAN ALSO AFFECT THE READING FLOW.

BY ROTATING THE VIEWING ANGLE TOO FAR BETWEEN PANELS, CHARACTERS CAN SEEM TO SWITCH PLACES, CREATING CONFUSION.

THESE WOODS ARE HAUNTED! WE MUST RETREAT!

IT'S TRUE! THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE!

I'LL TELL THE CAPTAIN!

AND I'LL START THE TANK!

WAIT!! WHO SAID THAT?!

YOU DID, YOU MORON!

THERE'S NO WAY TO FORCE READERS TO TAKE A SPECIFIC PATH. BUT WITH EXPERIENCE, YOU CAN RELIABLY PREDICT WHAT THEY'LL PAY ATTENTION TO -- AND BE DISTRACTED BY -- AND USE THAT KNOWLEDGE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.

CONSIDER SHOWING YOUR WORK-IN-PROGRESS TO A FRIEND TO CATCH SUCH MIX-UPS IN THE ROUGH PLANNING STAGE -- AND IN THE FINISHED ART, OF COURSE.

DUDE, THIS GIRL'S BREAST DOES NOT LOOK RIGHT.

THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE MY DAD!

CHOICE OF FLOW IS PARTIALLY ABOUT CLEARING YOUR READERS' PATHS OF OBSTACLES TO A SMOOTH READING EXPERIENCE.

EQUALLY IMPORTANT THOUGH, IS HOW THE SIGHTS ALONG THAT PATH DRAW THE READERS' EYES.

FUMP!

YOUR READERS ARE HUMANS, JUST LIKE YOU AND ME, AND WE ALL SORT INFORMATION THE SAME WAY.

EVERY DAY, OUR FIVE SENSES TAKE IN AN OVERWHELMING AMOUNT OF INFORMATION, YET WE QUICKLY SEPARATE OUT WHAT WE CARE ABOUT FROM THE CHAOS AND DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TOWARD IT.

NOT ALL PICTURES ARE CREATED EQUAL. READERS FOCUS ON AREAS OF CHANGE AND RELEVANCE TO THE STORY--

-- WHILE BACKGROUND DETAILS AND REPEATED ELEMENTS JUST FADE FROM VIEW AND ARE IGNORED.

LOOKING AT THE TABLE-CLOTH IN THAT LAST PANEL?

TAP! TAP!

DIDN'T THINK SO.

AND AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S THAT FLOW OF SELECTED MOMENTS THAT WE REMEMBER --

-- AND ALL THOSE OTHER SENSATIONS ARE LEFT ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR.

IN COMICS, YOU CAN DO A LOT OF THAT "CUTTING" BEFOREHAND TO INSURE THAT THE FLOW OF IMAGES READERS SEE ARE EXACTLY THE ONES YOU WANT THEM TO SEE, IN THE ORDER THAT BEST SERVES YOUR STORYTELLING GOALS.

WEBCOMICS HAVE INTRODUCED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR -- AND POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO -- FLOW.

DAILY STRIPS AND SCREEN-FITTING COMICS PAGES FLOW IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS THEIR PAPER AND INK COUSINS, AND READING THEM IS A PRETTY INTUITIVE PROCESS.

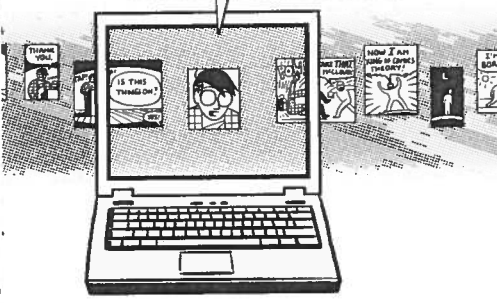
BUT MANY MULTI-PAGE WEBCOMICS YANK READERS OUT OF THE STORY BY CONSTANTLY FORCING THEM TO SCROLL. THEN HURRY THEM THEN CLICK. THEN SCROLL.

TOGETHER THESE FIVE KINDS OF CHOICES ARE WHAT COMMUNICATING THROUGH COMICS REQUIRES --

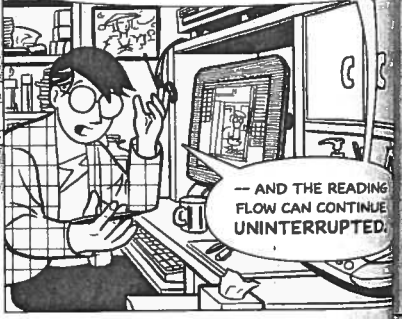
CLARITY

-- AND COMMUNICATING WITH CLARITY MEANS MAKING READER COMPREHENSION YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL.

SOME NEW EXPERIMENTAL FORMATS ARE DISTRACTING BY THEIR NATURE, OF COURSE, BUT EVEN THESE CAN ALLOW FOR SMOOTH READING IF ALL THE NAVIGATING IS DONE WITH A SINGLE CONTROL LIKE AN ARROW KEY.



NO MATTER WHAT SHAPE YOUR COMICS TAKE, AS LONG AS NAVIGATING THROUGH THEM IS A SIMPLE, INTUITIVE PROCESS, THAT PROCESS WILL BE TRANSPARENT TO THE READER --



CHOICE OF MOMENT

GOALS:

CONNECTING THE "DOTS." SHOWING THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER AND CUTTING THOSE THAT DON'T.

TOOLS:

THE SIX TRANSITIONS:
 1. MOMENT TO MOMENT
 2. ACTION TO ACTION
 3. SUBJECT TO SUBJECT
 4. SCENE TO SCENE
 5. ASPECT TO ASPECT
 6. NON SEQUENTUR

MINIMIZING PANEL COUNT FOR EFFICIENCY, OR ADDING PANELS FOR EMPHASIS. CHARACTER OF MOMENT, MOOD AND IDEA.

CHOICE OF FRAME

GOALS:

SHOWING READERS WHAT THEY NEED TO SEE. CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE, POSITION AND FOCUS.

TOOLS:

FRAME SIZE AND SHAPE.

CHOICE OF "CAMERA" ANGLES, DISTANCE, HEIGHT, BALANCE AND CENTERING.

THE "ESTABLISHING SHOT." REVEALING AND WITHOLDING INFORMATION. DIRECTING READER FOCUS.

CHOICE OF IMAGE

GOALS:

CLEARLY AND QUICKLY EVOKING THE APPEARANCE OF CHARACTERS, OBJECTS, ENVIRONMENTS AND SYMBOLS.

TOOLS:

EVERY ARTISTIC/ GRAPHIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.

RESEMBLANCE, SPECIFICITY, EXPRESSION, BODY LANGUAGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD.

STYLISTIC AND EXPRESSIONISTIC DEVICES TO AFFECT MOOD AND EMOTION.

CHOICE OF WORD

GOALS:

CLEARLY AND PERSUASIVELY COMMUNICATING IDEAS, VOICES AND SOUNDS IN SEAMLESS COMBINATION WITH IMAGES.

TOOLS:

EVERY LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.

RANGE, SPECIFICITY, THE HUMAN VOICE, ABSTRACT CONCEPTS, THE EVOCATION OF OTHER SENSES.

BALLOONS, SOUND EFFECTS AND WORD / PICTURE INTEGRATION*

CHOICE OF FLOW

GOALS:

GUIDING READERS BETWEEN AND WITHIN PANELS, AND CREATING A TRANSPARENT AND INTUITIVE READING EXPERIENCE.

TOOLS:

THE ARRANGEMENT OF PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN, AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF ELEMENTS WITHIN A PANEL.

DIRECTING THE EYE THROUGH READER EXPECTATIONS AND CONTENT.

USING MOMENT, FRAME, IMAGE AND WORD IN TANDEM.

WE'LL GET DOWN TO SOME NUTS AND BOLTS REGARDING THIS TOPIC IN CHAPTER FIVE, AND ITS ONLINE EXTENSION, "CHAPTER FIVE AND A HALF."

FOR NOW, THOUGH, WHETHER YOU WORK IN PRINT, THE WEB OR BOTH: IMPROVING FLOW CAN HELP YOUR AUDIENCE ENTER THE WORLD OF YOUR STORY AND PASS FROM ONE END TO THE OTHER WITHOUT EVER BEING TORN AWAY BY THE WORLD OUTSIDE.

DO THAT, AND YOUR STORYTELLING CAN PUT ITS FULL WEIGHT BEHIND THE "STORY" WITHOUT THE "TELLING" GETTING IN THE WAY.

THESE AREN'T "STEPS" THAT HAVE TO BE TAKEN IN SOME PREDETERMINED ORDER.

MOST COMICS ARTISTS JUGGLE ALL FIVE AS NEEDED.

DECISIONS HAVING TO DO WITH MOMENT, FRAME AND FLOW ARE LIKELY TO BE MADE IN THE PLANNING STAGES OF A COMIC, WHILE IMAGE AND WORD DECISIONS ARE USUALLY BEING MADE RIGHT UP TO THE FINISH LINE --

-- BUT YOU'LL FIND THESE CHOICES CAN FIT INTO ANY NUMBER OF WORKING METHODS.

* SEE CHAPTER THREE: "THE POWER OF WORDS" FOR MORE ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORD/PICTURE INTEGRATION AND OTHER TECHNIQUES RELATED TO CHOICE OF WORD.