

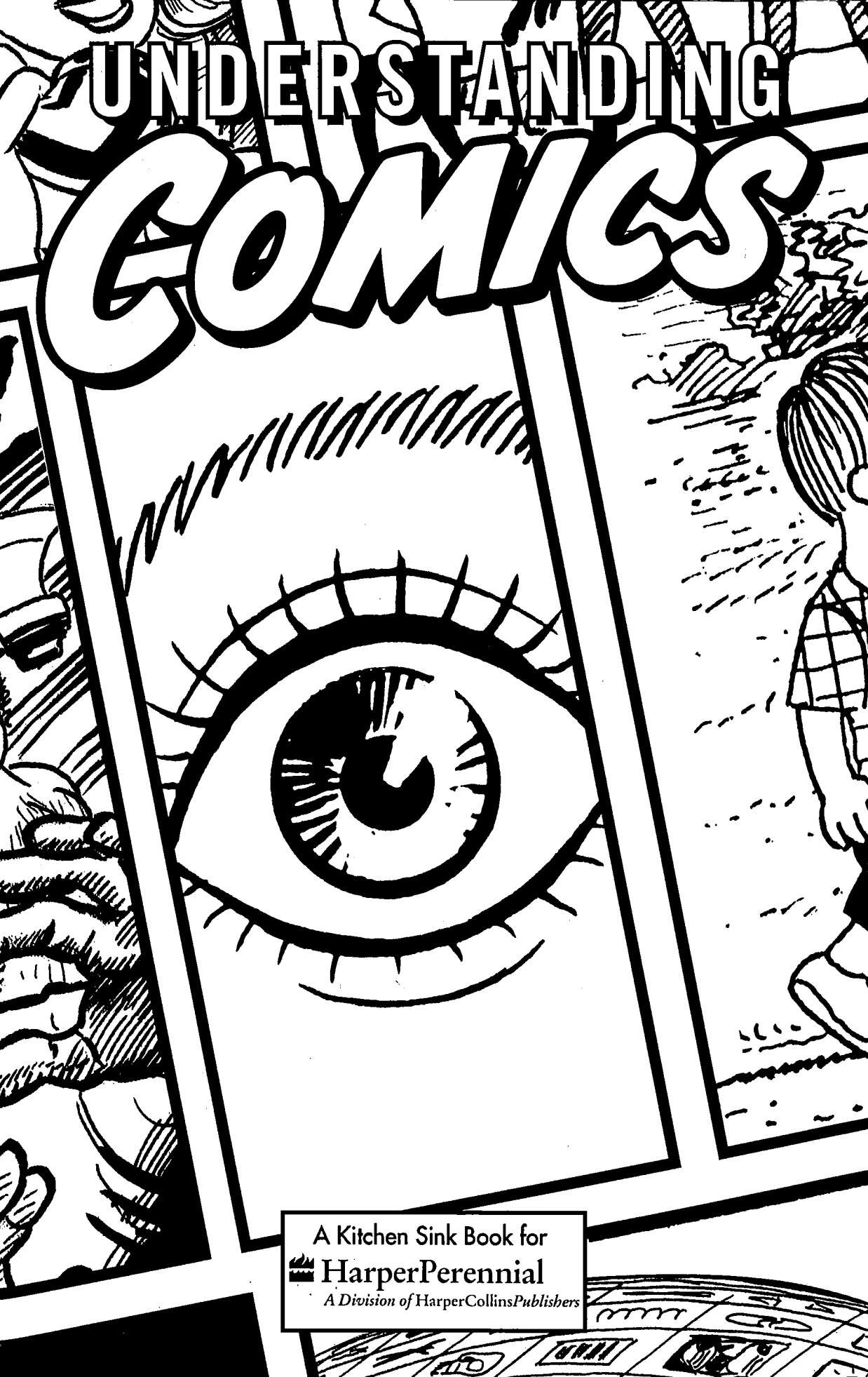
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UNDERSTANDING

COMICS

A Kitchen Sink Book for



HarperPerennial

A Division of HarperCollinsPublishers

WRITING AND ART
SCOTT McCLOUD

LETTERING
BOB LAPPAN

EDITORIAL ADVICE AND
SELECTIVE EGO-TRIMMING
STEVE BISSETTE
KURT BUSIEK
NEIL GAIMAN
BOB LAPPAN
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LARRY MARDER
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EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS
WILL EISNER

EDITOR
MARK MARTIN

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CHAPTER FOUR

TIME FRAMES.

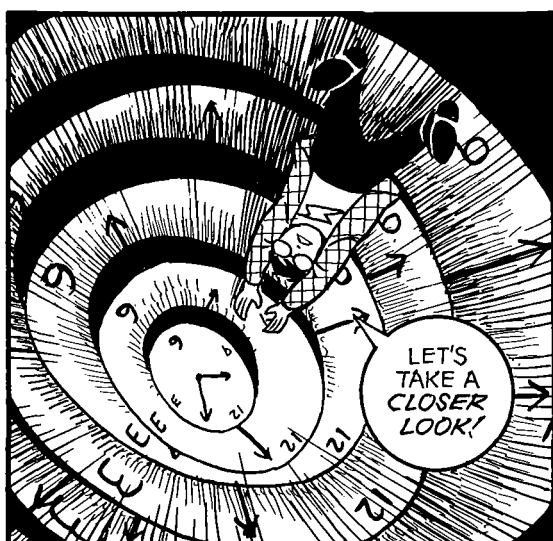
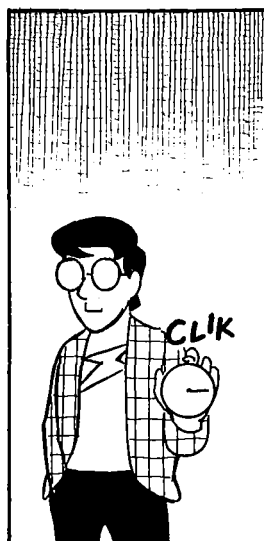
SO! LET'S SEE:
EACH PANEL OF A
COMIC SHOWS A
SINGLE MOMENT
IN TIME.

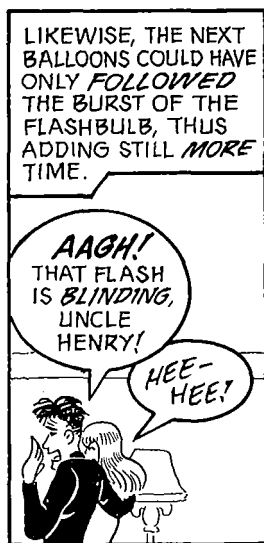
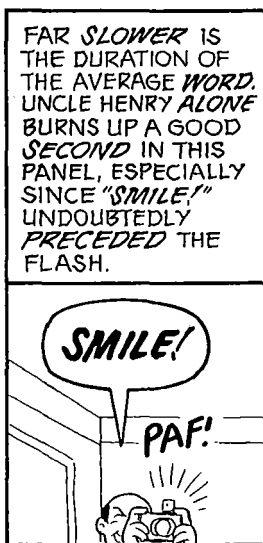
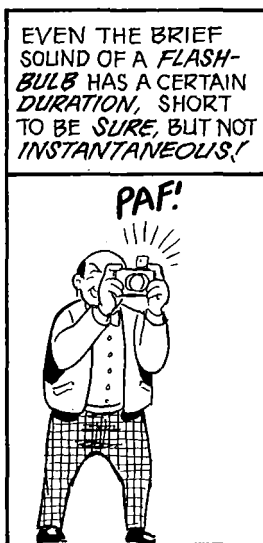
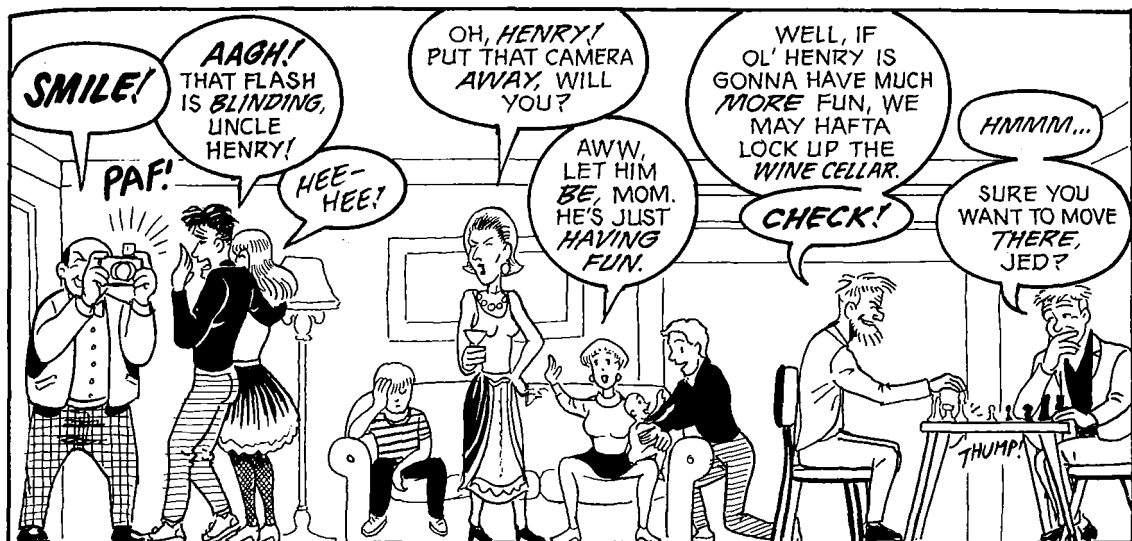


AND *BETWEEN*
THOSE FROZEN
MOMENTS-- BETWEEN
THE PANELS-- OUR
MINDS FILL IN THE
INTERVENING MOMENTS,
CREATING THE ILLUSION
OF *TIME AND MOTION*.

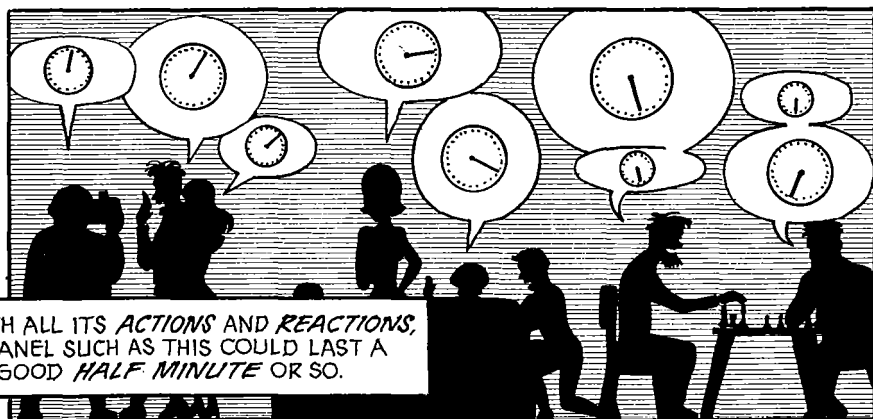


LIKE A LINE DRAWN
BETWEEN TWO POINTS.

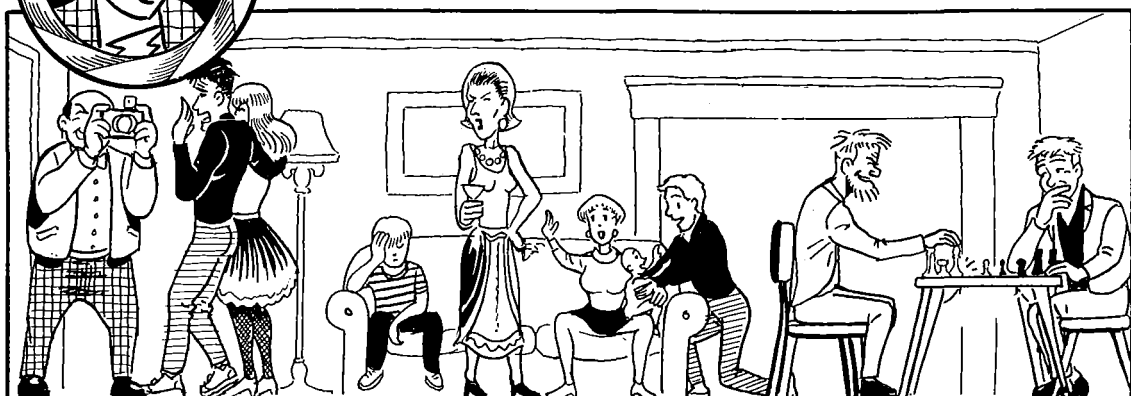




JUST AS PICTURES AND THE INTERVALS *BETWEEN* THEM CREATE THE ILLUSION OF TIME THROUGH *CLOSURE*, *WORDS* INTRODUCE TIME BY REPRESENTING THAT WHICH CAN ONLY EXIST *IN* TIME -- *SOUND*.



BUT HOW COULD THIS BE ANYTHING BUT A *SINGLE MOMENT*?
OUR EYES HAVE BEEN *WELL-TRAINED* BY THE *PHOTOGRAPH*
AND BY *REPRESENTATIONAL ART* TO SEE ANY SINGLE
CONTINUOUS IMAGE AS A *SINGLE INSTANT IN TIME*.



BUT THE ACTIONS THAT WE SEE
OCCURRING SEEMINGLY AT THE SAME
TIME OBVIOUSLY *CAN'T BE!*



ANOTHER
WAY TO LOOK AT
IT: LET'S THINK OF
TIME AS A
ROPE.



EACH INCH
REPRESENTS A
SECOND.



SUCH A ROPE
MIGHT BE SAID
TO WIND SOME-
THING LIKE *THIS*
THROUGH OUR
PANEL.

SIMPLIFIED
OF COURSE,
SINCE EACH
BALLOON HAS
ITS OWN *TWISTS*
AND *URNS*.



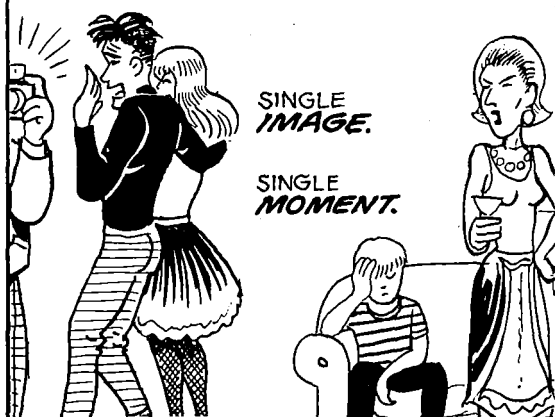
AND SINCE EACH
FACE AND FIGURE
IS DRAWN TO MATCH
HIS/HER OWN
WORDS--



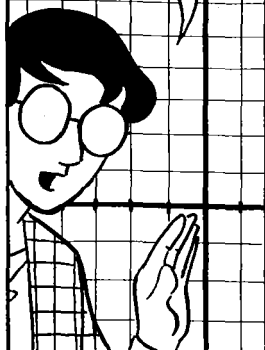
--THOSE FIGURES, FACES AND WORDS ARE MATCHED IN **TIME** AS WELL.



THE PROPERTIES OF THE SINGLE CONTINUOUS **IMAGE**, MEANWHILE, TEND TO MATCH EACH FIGURE WITH EVERY **OTHER** FIGURE.



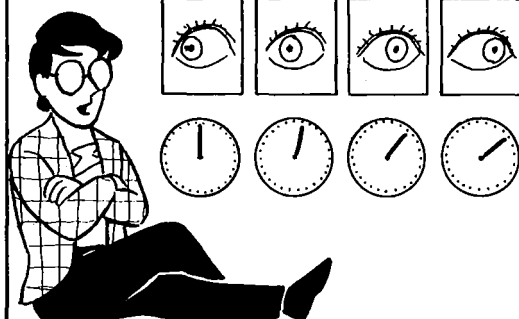
PORTRAYING TIME ON A LINE MOVING **LEFT TO RIGHT**, THIS PUTS ALL THE **IMAGES** ON THE SAME VERTICAL AXIS.



AND **TANGLES UP TIME** BEYOND ALL RECOGNITION!



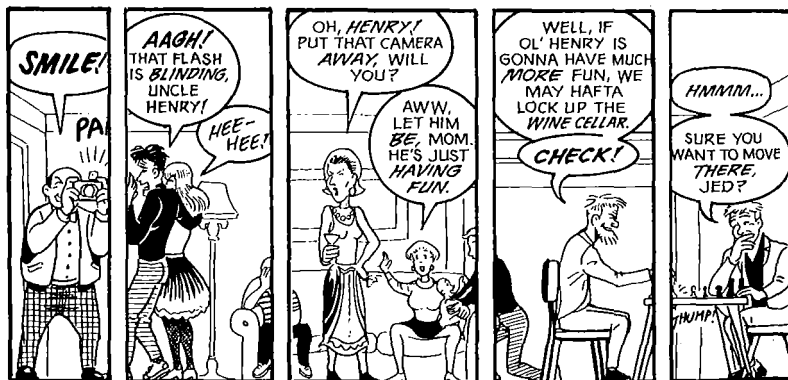
PERHAPS WE'VE BEEN TOO CONDITIONED BY PHOTOGRAPHY TO PERCEIVE SINGLE IMAGES AS **SINGLE MOMENTS**. AFTER ALL, IT DOES TAKE AN EYE **TIME** TO MOVE ACROSS SCENES IN **REAL LIFE**!



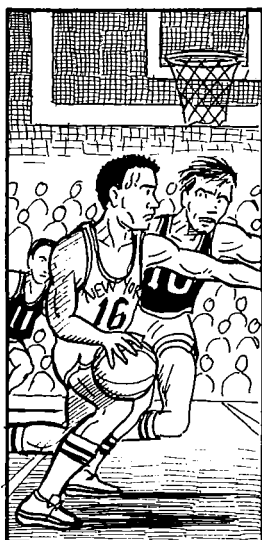
EACH FIGURE IS ARRANGED FROM **LEFT TO RIGHT** IN THE SEQUENCE WE WILL "**READ**" THEM, EACH OCCUPYING A DISTINCT **TIME SLOT**.



IN SOME RESPECTS THIS PANEL BY ITSELF ACTUALLY **FITS** OUR **DEFINITION** OF COMICS! ALL IT NEEDS IS A FEW **GUTTERS** THROWN IN TO **CLARIFY THE SEQUENCE**.

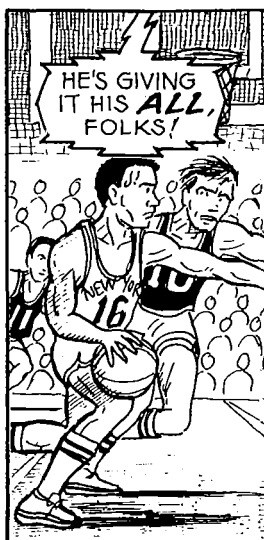


ONE PANEL, OPERATING AS **SEVERAL** PANELS.



NOT *ALL* PANELS
ARE LIKE THAT,
OF COURSE.

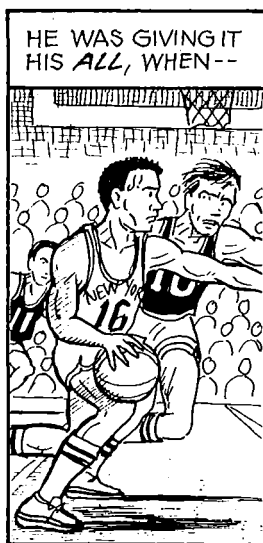
A SILENT PANEL
SUCH AS THIS COULD
INDEED BE SAID TO
DEPICT A *SINGLE*
MOMENT!



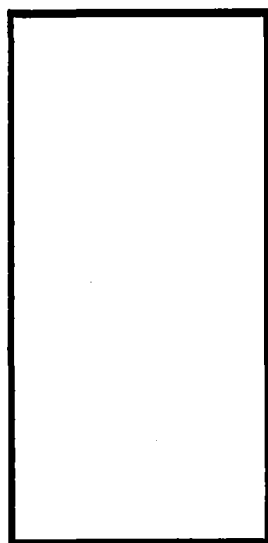
IF *SOUND*
IS INTRODUCED,
THIS CEASES TO BE
TRUE--



-- *BUT*, IN
AN OTHERWISE
SILENT *CAPTIONED*
PANEL, THE SINGLE
MOMENT CAN
ACTUALLY BE
HELD.



THESE VARIOUS
SHAPES WE CALL
PANELS HOLD IN
THEIR BORDERS ALL
OF THE ICONS THAT
ADD UP TO THE
VOCABULARY OF
COMICS.



ALL
EXCEPT
ONE.

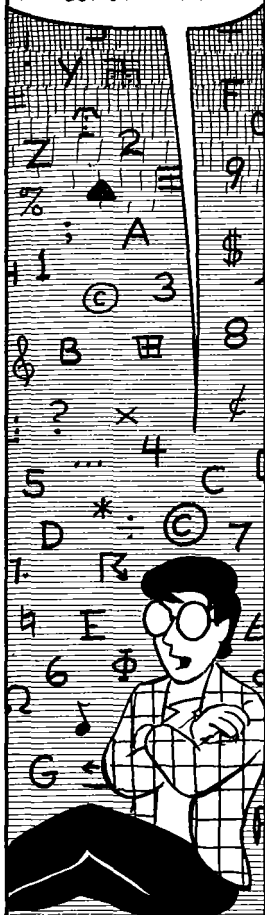


FOR JUST AS THE
BODY'S LARGEST ORGAN
-- OUR *SKIN* --
IS SELDOM *THOUGHT*
OF AS AN ORGAN--



-- SO TOO IS THE PANEL *ITSELF*
OVERLOOKED AS COMICS' MOST
IMPORTANT *ICON!*

THESE ICONS WE CALL PANELS OR "FRAMES" HAVE NO **FIXED** OR **ABSOLUTE MEANING**, LIKE THE ICONS OF **LANGUAGE, SCIENCE** AND **COMMUNICATION**.



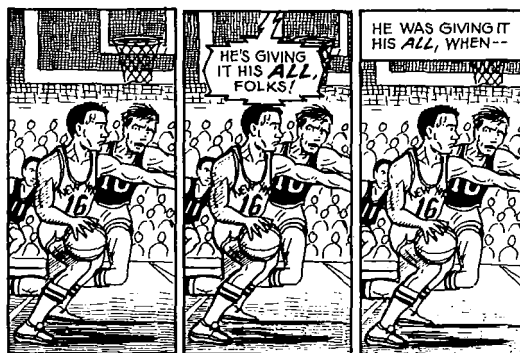
NOR IS THEIR MEANING AS **FLUID** AND **MALLEABLE** AS THE SORTS OF ICONS WE CALL **PICTURES**.



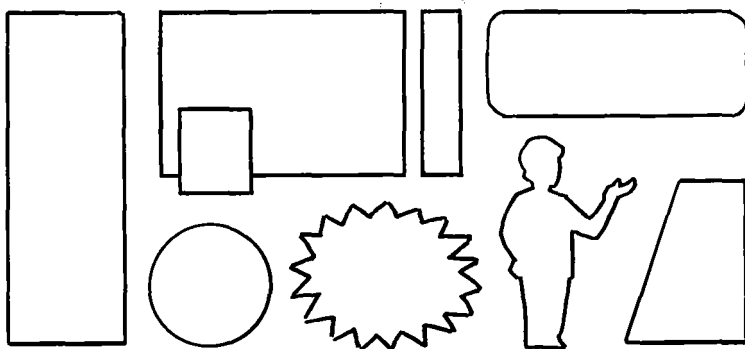
THE PANEL ACTS AS A SORT OF **GENERAL INDICATOR** THAT **TIME** OR **SPACE** IS BEING **DIVIDED**.



THE **DURATIONS** OF THAT **TIME** AND THE **DIMENSIONS** OF THAT **SPACE** ARE DEFINED MORE BY THE **CONTENTS** OF THE PANEL THAN BY THE PANEL **ITSELF**. *



PANEL **SHAPES** VARY **CONSIDERABLY** THOUGH, AND WHILE DIFFERENCES OF SHAPE DON'T AFFECT THE SPECIFIC "**MEANINGS**" OF THOSE PANELS VIS-A-VIS **TIME**, THEY CAN AFFECT THE **READING EXPERIENCE**.

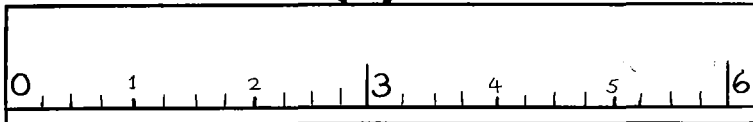
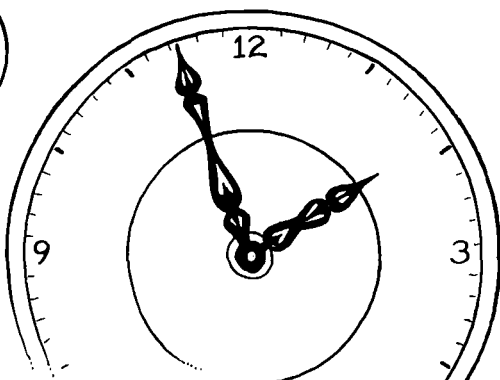


WHICH BRINGS US TO THE STRANGE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN **TIME** AS **DEPICTED** IN COMICS AND **TIME** AS **PERCEIVED** BY THE **READER**.



* EISNER DISCUSSES THIS UNDER THE HEADING "FRAMING TIME" IN *COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART*.

IN LEARNING TO READ COMICS
WE ALL LEARNED TO PERCEIVE
TIME **SPATIALLY**, FOR IN THE WORLD
OF COMICS, **TIME AND SPACE**
ARE **ONE AND THE SAME**.



THE PROBLEM
IS **THERE'S NO
CONVERSION
CHART!**



THE FEW CENTIMETERS
WHICH TRANSPORT US FROM
SECOND TO SECOND IN **ONE**
SEQUENCE COULD TAKE US A
HUNDRED MILLION YEARS
IN ANOTHER.



SO, AS **READERS**,
WE'RE LEFT WITH ONLY
A **VAGUE SENSE**
THAT AS OUR EYES
ARE MOVING THROUGH
SPACE, THEY'RE ALSO
MOVING THROUGH
TIME--WE JUST
DON'T KNOW BY
HOW MUCH!



IN MOST CASES IT'S NOT HARD TO
MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS AS TO THE
DURATION OF A GIVEN SEQUENCE, SO
LONG AS THE **ELEMENTS** OF THAT
SEQUENCE ARE **FAMILIAR** TO US.



I ALWAYS FIGURED
MARY-ANNE WOULD
GO FOR GILLIGAN.



I GUESS.



FROM A **LIFETIME**
OF CONVERSATIONS,
WE CAN BE SURE
THAT A "**PAUSE**"
PANEL LIKE THIS
LASTS FOR NO MORE
THAN SEVERAL
SECONDS.

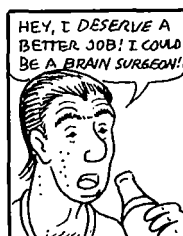




BUT IF THE CREATOR OF THIS SCENE WANTED TO *LENGTHEN* THAT PAUSE, HOW COULD HE OR SHE DO SO? ONE OBVIOUS SOLUTION WOULD BE TO ADD MORE PANELS, BUT IS THAT THE ONLY WAY?



IS THERE ANY WAY TO MAKE A SINGLE SILENT PANEL LIKE THIS ONE SEEM *LONGER*? HOW ABOUT WIDENING THE SPACE *BETWEEN* PANELS? ANY *DIFFERENCE*?

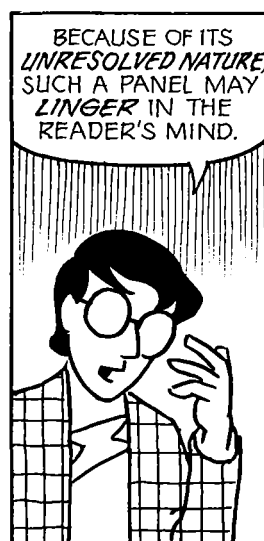
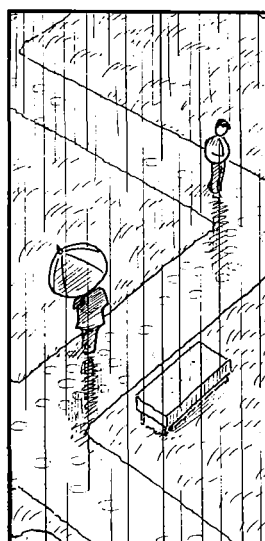
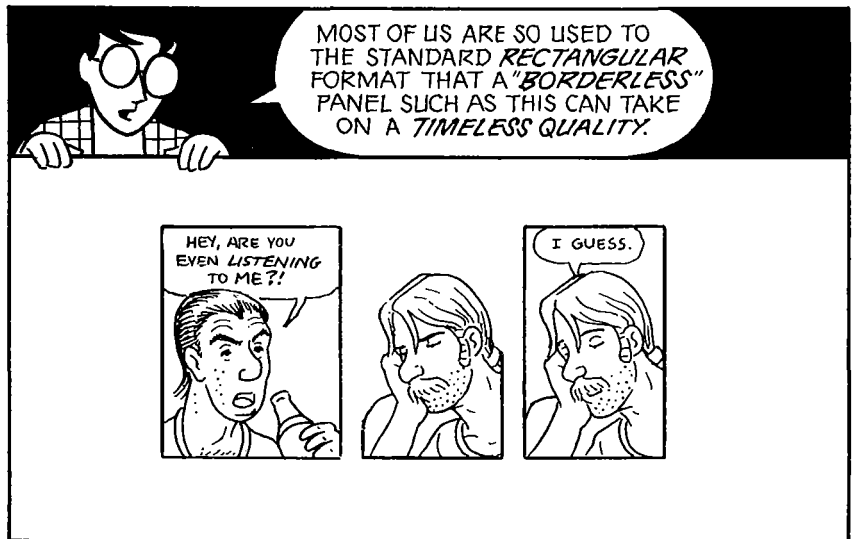
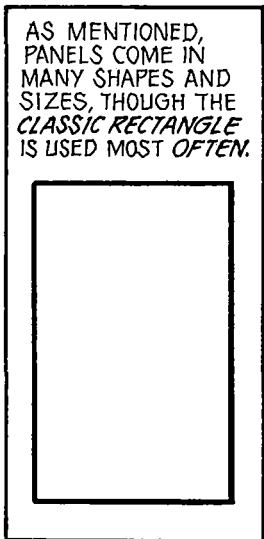
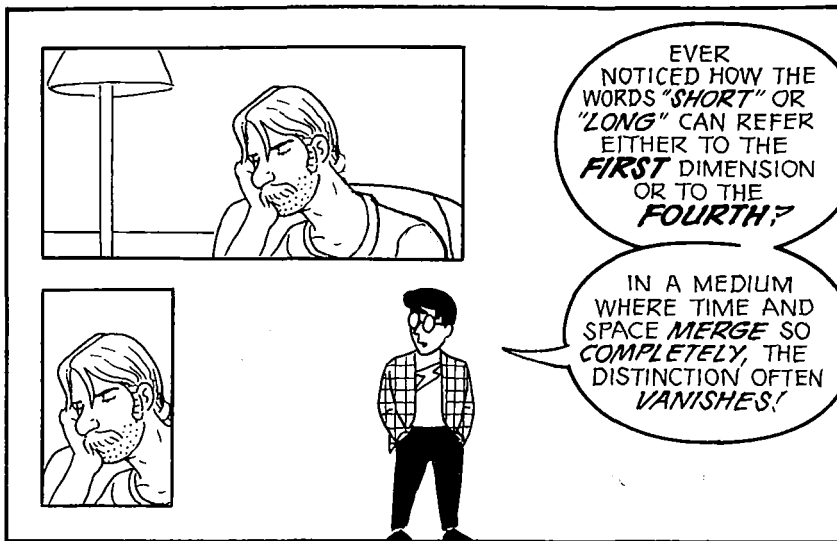


WE'VE SEEN HOW TIME CAN BE CONTROLLED THROUGH THE *CONTENT* OF PANELS, THE *NUMBER* OF PANELS AND CLOSURE *BETWEEN* PANELS, BUT THERE'S STILL *ONE MORE*.



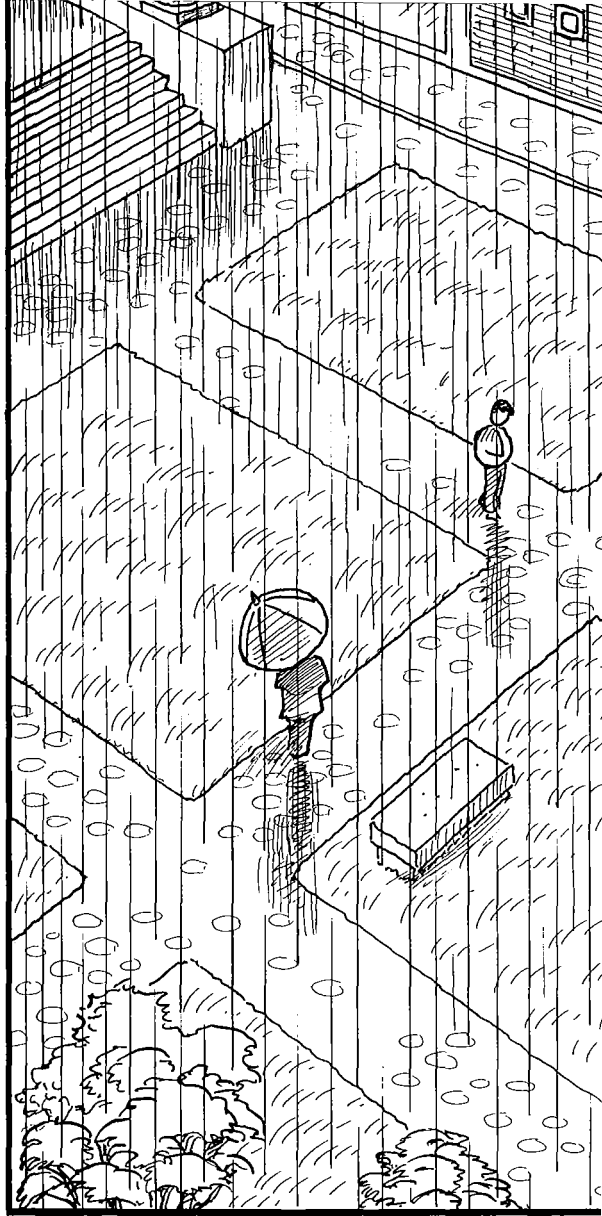
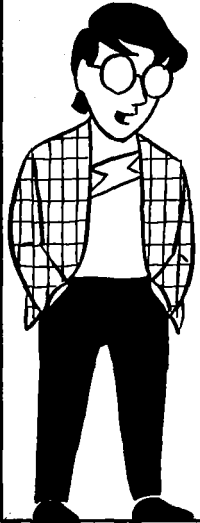
AS UNLIKELY AS IT SOUNDS, THE PANEL *SHAPE* CAN ACTUALLY MAKE A *DIFFERENCE* IN OUR *PERCEPTION* OF TIME. EVEN THOUGH THIS LONG PANEL HAS THE SAME BASIC "MEANING" AS ITS SHORTER VERSIONS, STILL IT HAS THE *FEELING* OF GREATER LENGTH!



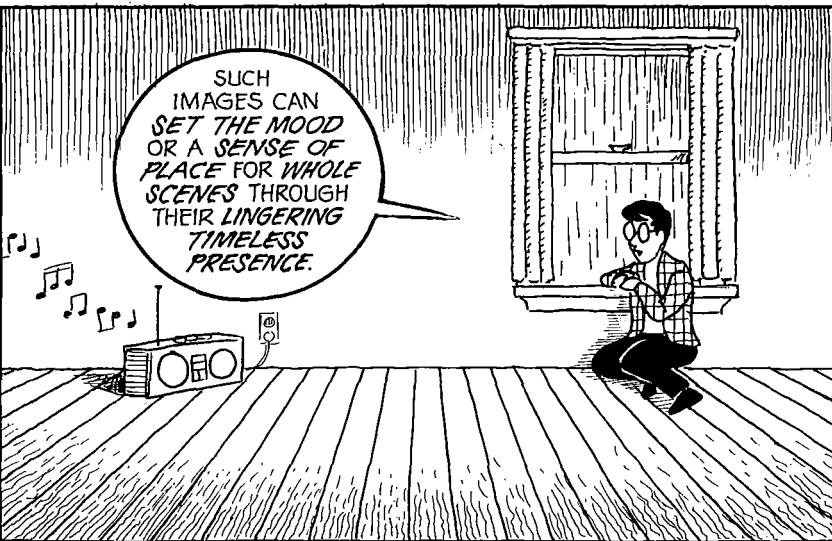


WHEN
"BLEEDS" ARE
USED -- I.E.,
WHEN A PANEL
RUNS OFF THE
EDGE OF THE
PAGE -- THIS
EFFECT IS
COMPOUNDED.

TIME IS
NO LONGER
CONTAINED
BY THE
FAMILIAR
ICON OF THE
CLOSED PANEL,
BUT INSTEAD
HEMORRHAGES
AND ESCAPES
INTO
TIMELESS
SPACE.

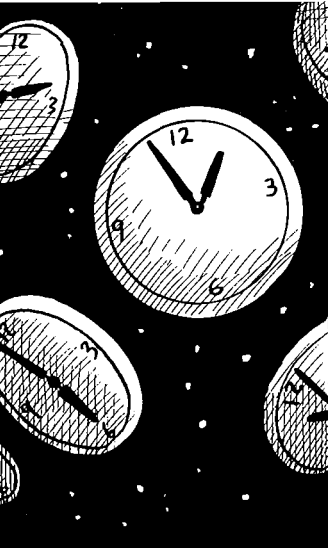


SUCH
IMAGES CAN
SET THE MOOD
OR A *SENSE OF*
PLACE FOR *WHOLE*
SCENES THROUGH
THEIR *LINGERING*
TIMELESS
PRESENCE.



ONCE AGAIN, THIS
IS A TECHNIQUE
USED MOST OFTEN
IN JAPAN AND ONLY
RECENTLY ADOPTED
HERE IN THE WEST.





IN COMICS, AS IN *FILM*, *TELEVISION* AND "*REAL LIFE*," IT IS ALWAYS **NOW**.

THIS PANEL AND **THIS** PANEL **ALONE** REPRESENTS THE **PRESENT**.

ANY PANEL **BEFORE** THIS-- THAT **LAST** ONE, FOR INSTANCE-- REPRESENTS THE **PAST**.

LIKEWISE, ALL PANELS **STILL TO COME**-- THIS **NEXT** PANEL, FOR INSTANCE-- REPRESENT THE **FUTURE**.

BUT **UNLIKE** OTHER MEDIA, IN COMICS, THE PAST IS MORE THAN JUST **MEMORIES** FOR THE AUDIENCE AND THE FUTURE IS MORE THAN JUST **POSSIBILITIES**!

BOTH **PAST** AND **FUTURE** ARE **REAL** AND **VISIBLE** AND **ALL AROUND US**!

WHEREVER YOUR EYES ARE FOCUSED, THAT'S **NOW**. BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOUR EYES TAKE IN THE **SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE** OF **PAST** AND **FUTURE**!

LIKE A **STORM FRONT**, THE EYE MOVES OVER THE COMICS PAGE, PUSHING THE WARM, HIGH-PRESSURE **FUTURE** AHEAD OF IT, LEAVING THE COOL, LOW-PRESSURE **PAST** IN ITS WAKE.

-3

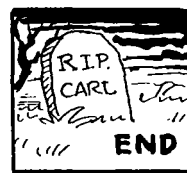
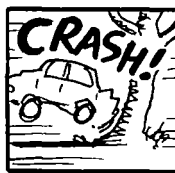
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WHEREVER THE EYE HITS **LAND**, WE EXPECT IT TO BEGIN MOVING **FORWARD**.

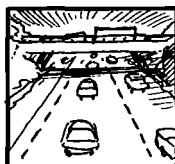
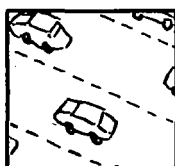
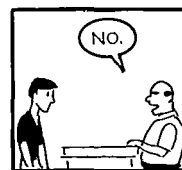
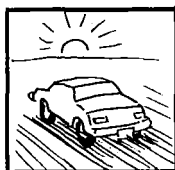
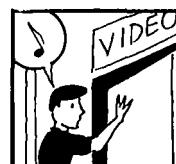
BUT **EYES**, LIKE **STORMS**, CAN **CHANGE DIRECTION**!



YET WE SELDOM **DO** CHANGE DIRECTION, EXCEPT TO **RE-READ** OR **REVIEW** PASSAGES. IT'S **LEFT-TO-RIGHT, UP-TO-DOWN, PAGE AFTER PAGE.**



THE IDEA THAT THE READER MIGHT **CHOOSE** A DIRECTION IS STILL CONSIDERED **EXOTIC.**

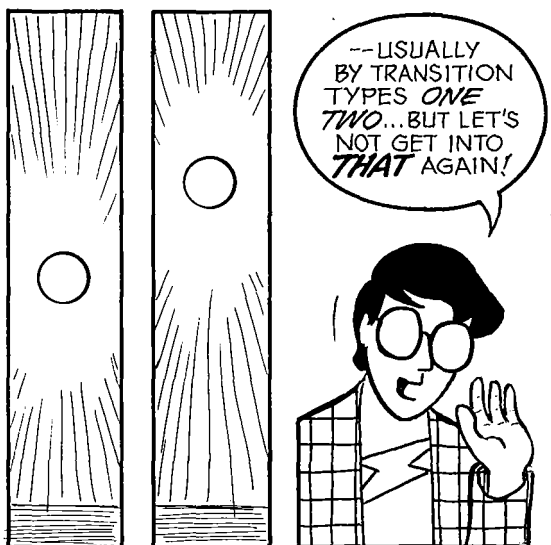
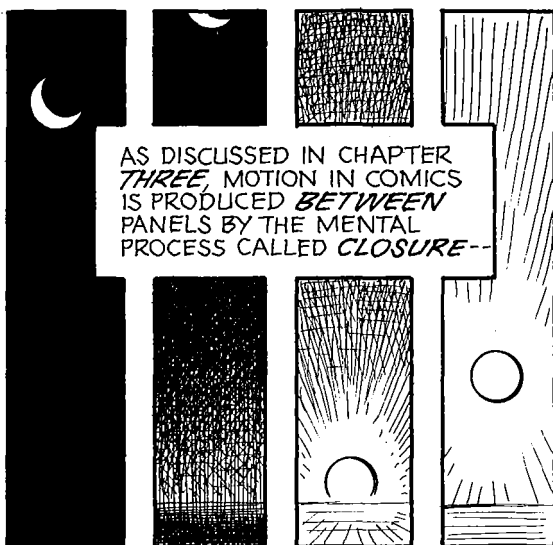
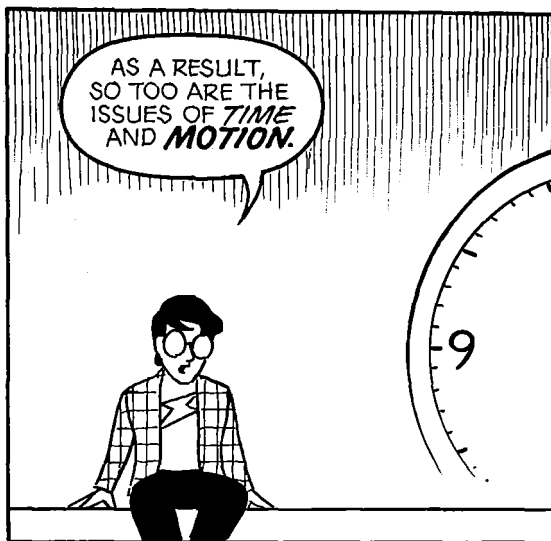
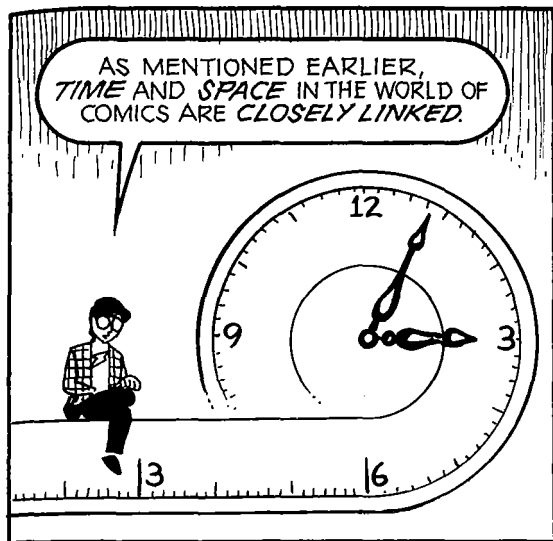


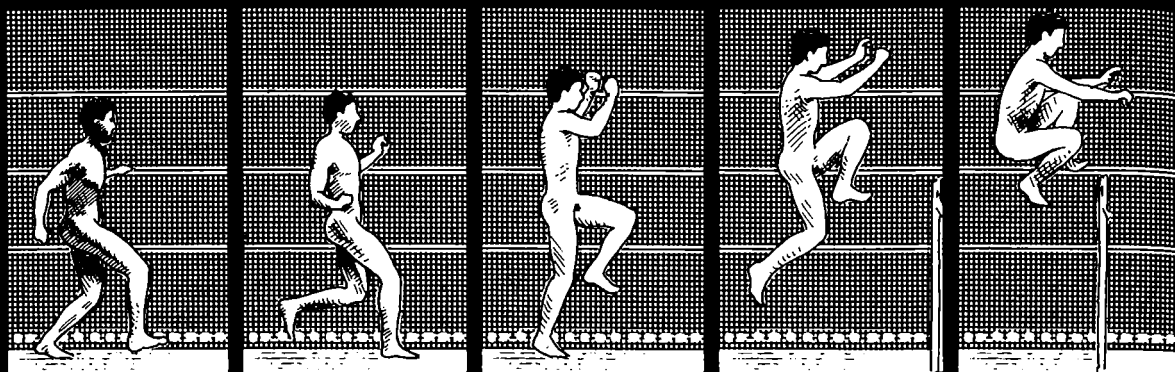
THIS MAY, IN PART, BE THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER MEDIA LIKE **FILM** AND **TELEVISION** WHERE VIEWER CHOICE HAS NOT GENERALLY BEEN **FEASIBLE.**



CONDITIONED AS WE ARE TO READ **LEFT-TO-RIGHT** AND **UP-TO-DOWN**, A MISCHIEVOUS CARTOONIST CAN PLAY ANY NUMBER OF **TRICKS** ON US.







IN THE
LAST QUARTER OF
THE *NINETEENTH*
CENTURY IT SEEMED
LIKE *EVERYONE*
WAS TRYING TO
CAPTURE MOTION
THROUGH
SCIENCE!



BY 1880, INVENTORS THE WORLD OVER KNEW
THAT "MOVING PICTURES" WERE JUST AROUND
THE CORNER. *EVERYONE* WANTED TO BE *FIRST!*

MY *STROBOSCOPE* IS SUPERIOR IN EVERY
WAY TO THE OBSOLETE *ZOËTROPE!*

BAH! MY *PRAXINOSCOPE* IS BETTER!

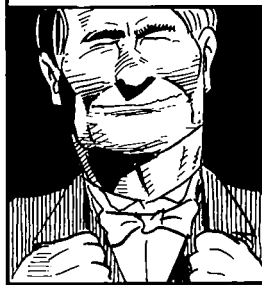
FOOLS! MY
KINEMATOSCOPE
WILL SHOW YOU!

HA! CHILD'S PLAY!
THEY ARE BUT
MERE TOYS NEXT
TO THE AWESOME
PHANTASMATROPE!

FRAUDS ALL! MY *ZOÖPRAXINOSCOPE* WILL--!

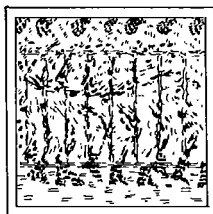


EVENTUALLY
THOMAS EDISON,
THAT OLD SCALLYWAG,
FILED THE FIRST
PATENT ON A
PROCESS USING STRIPS
OF CLEAR PLASTIC
PHOTOS AND *FILM*
WAS *OFF AND*
RUNNING!



AS THE *MOVING PICTURE* BEGAN ITS SPECTACULAR RISE, A FEW OF
THE MORE RADICAL *PAINTERS* OF THE DAY EXPLORED THE IDEA THAT
MOTION COULD BE DEPICTED BY A *SINGLE* IMAGE ON CANVAS.

THE FUTURISTS IN ITALY AND *MARCEL DUCHAMP*
IN FRANCE BEGAN THE *SYSTEMATIC DECOMPOSITION* OF
MOVING IMAGES IN A *STATIC MEDIUM*.



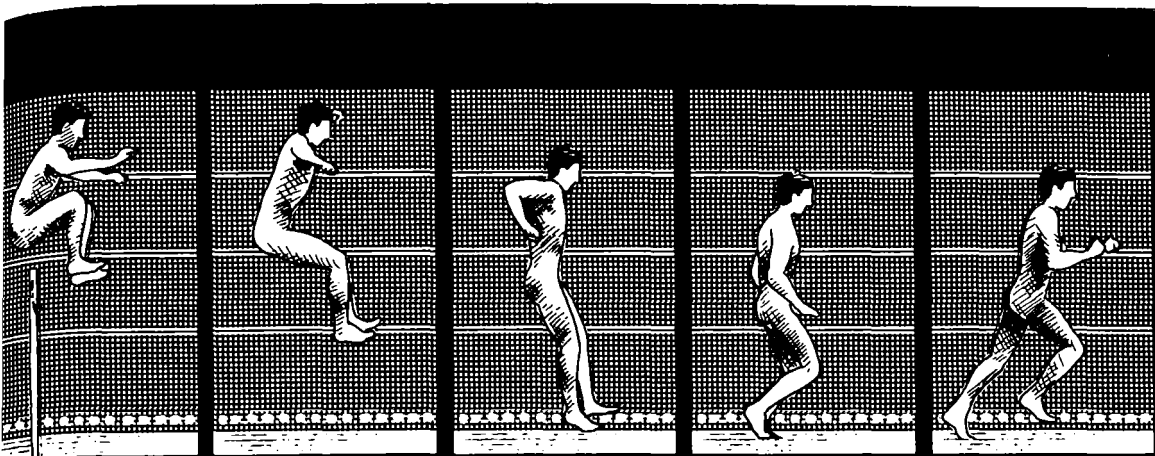
Girl Running on a Balcony
by Balla



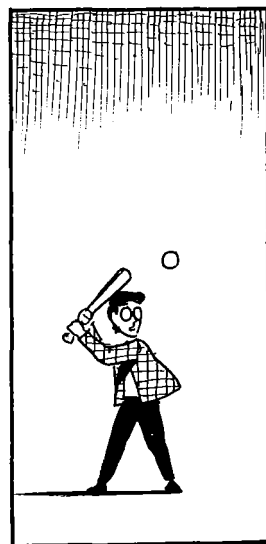
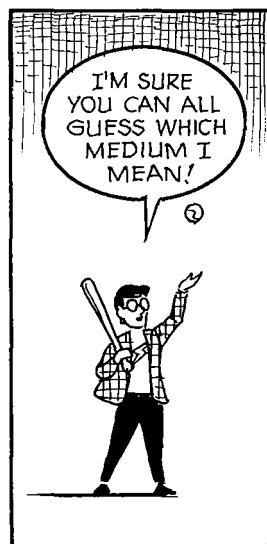
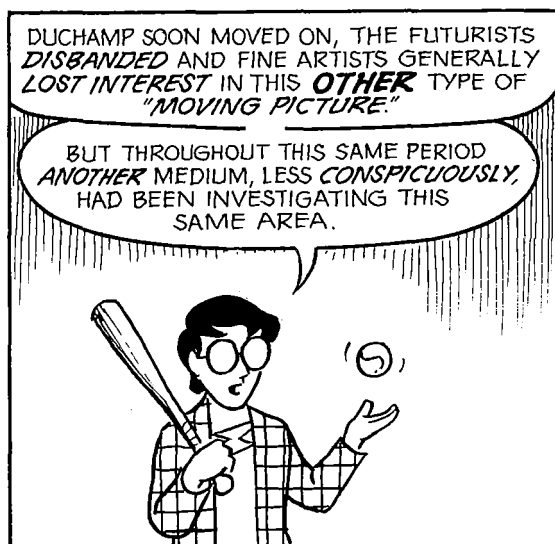
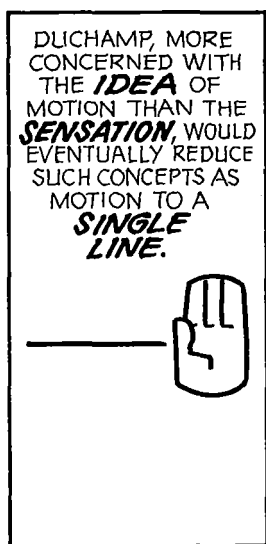
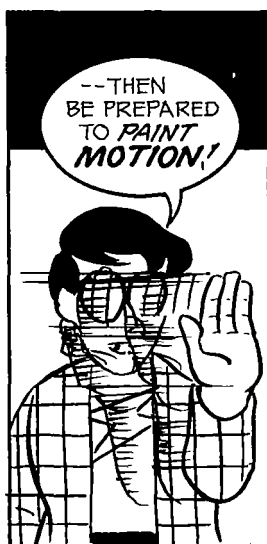
Nude Descending a
Staircase #2 by
Duchamp

IT
WASN'T A
BAD IDEA!





COPIED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE.

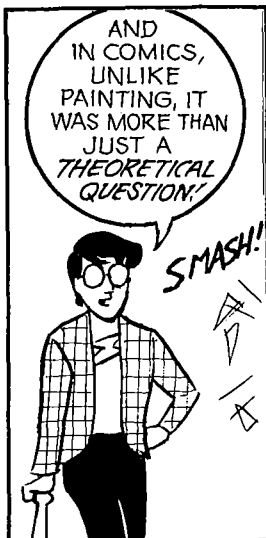




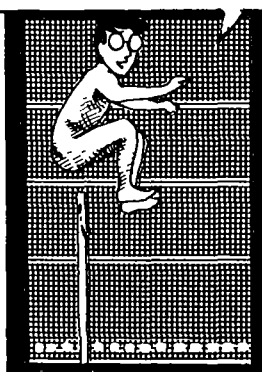
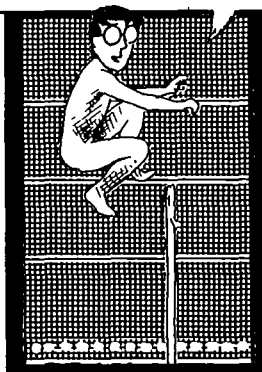
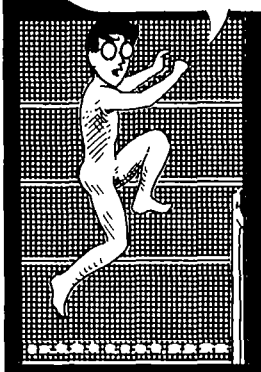
FROM ITS *EARLIEST DAYS*, THE MODERN COMIC HAS GRAPPLED WITH THE PROBLEM OF SHOWING MOTION IN A *STATIC MEDIUM*.



HOW DO YOU SHOW THIS ASPECT OF TIME IN AN ART WHERE *TIME STANDS STILL*?



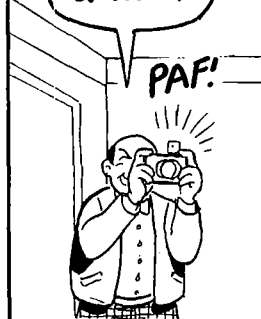
THOUGH SEQUENTIAL ART SURVIVED FOR MANY CENTURIES *WITHOUT* DEPICTING MOTION, ONCE THE GENIE WAS OUT OF THE BOTTLE IT WAS PERHAPS *INEVITABLE* THAT MORE AND MORE EFFICIENT MEANS WOULD BE SOUGHT. AT FIRST, THIS SEARCH CENTERED ON *MULTIPLE* IMAGES IN SEQUENCE.



BUT JUST AS A SINGLE PANEL CAN REPRESENT A *SPAN* OF TIME THROUGH *SOUND* --

SMILE!

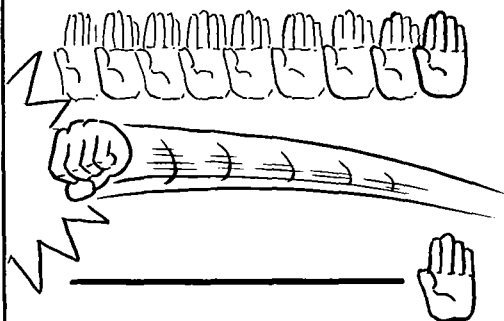
PAF!



--SO TOO CAN A SINGLE PANEL REPRESENT A *SPAN* OF TIME THROUGH *PICTURES!*



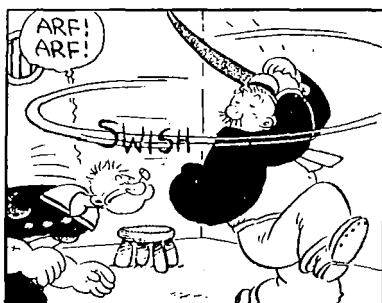
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE FUTURISTS' *DYNAMIC* MOVEMENT AND DUCHAMP'S DIAGRAMMATIC *CONCEPT* OF MOVEMENT LIES COMICS' *"MOTION LINE."*



IN THE BEGINNING, MOTION LINES--OR "ZIP-RIBBONS" AS SOME CALL THEM--WERE *WILD, MESSY*, ALMOST **DESPERATE** ATTEMPTS TO REPRESENT THE PATHS OF MOVING OBJECTS THROUGH SPACE.



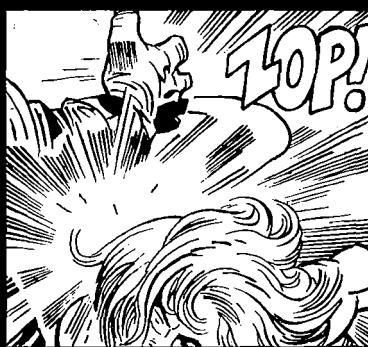
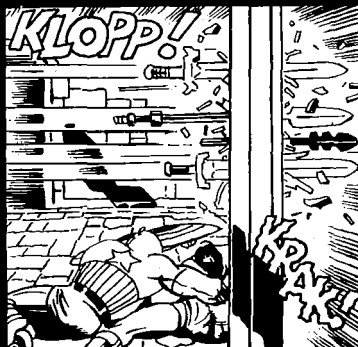
OVER THE YEARS, THESE LINES BECAME MORE *REFINED AND STYLIZED*, EVEN **DIAGRAMMATIC**.



EVENTUALLY, IN THE HANDS OF *HEROIC FANTASY* ARTISTS LIKE **BILL EVERETT** AND **JACK KIRBY**--

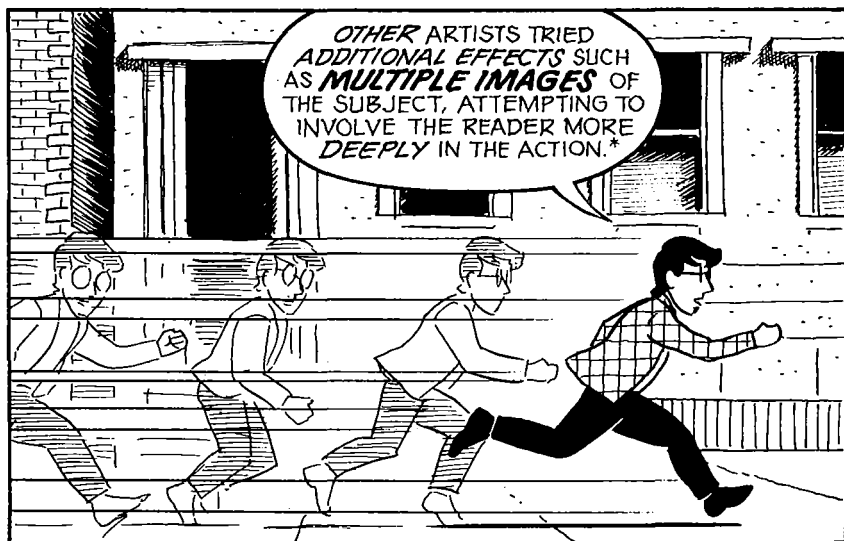
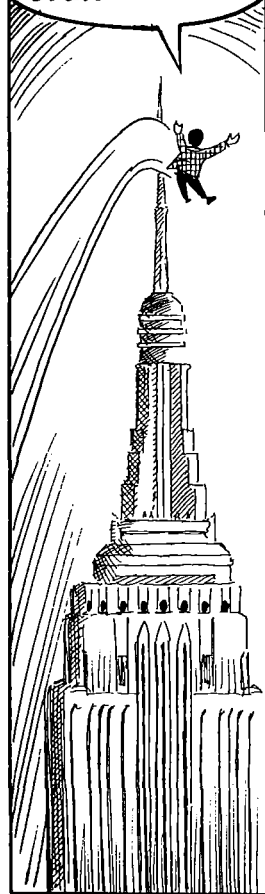


--THOSE SAME LINES BECAME *SO* STYLIZED AS TO ALMOST HAVE A *LIFE* AND *PHYSICAL PRESENCE* **ALL THEIR OWN!**



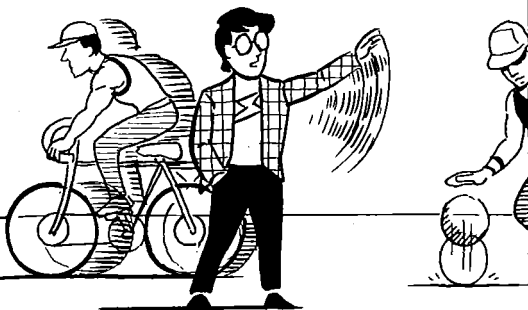


IN THIS APPROACH, BOTH THE **MOVING OBJECT** AND THE **BACKGROUNDS** ARE DRAWN IN A **CLEAR, ARTICULATED STYLE**, AND THE **PATH** OF MOTION IS IMPOSED **OVER** THE SCENE.

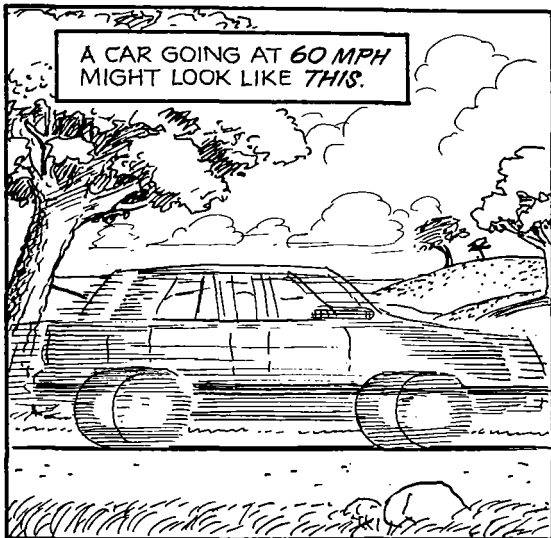


* MULTIPLE IMAGES CAN BE FOUND IN THE WORK OF KRIGSTEIN, INFANTINO AND OTHERS.

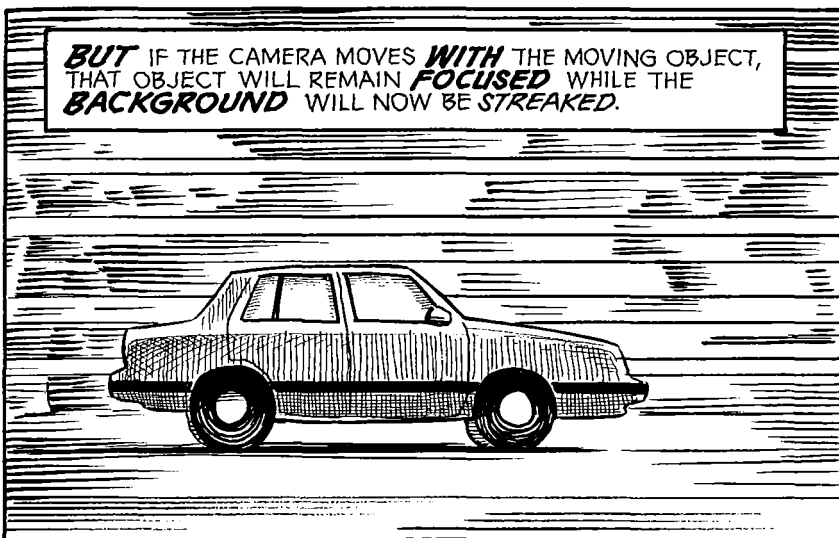
COLAN, WHO WAS ALSO A *FILM-BUFF*, WAS OF COURSE AWARE THAT WHEN A CAMERA'S SHUTTER SPEED IS TOO SLOW TO FULLY FREEZE A MOVING OBJECT'S IMAGE, AN INTERESTING *BLURRING* EFFECT OCCURS.



A CAR GOING AT 60 MPH MIGHT LOOK LIKE *THIS*.



BUT IF THE CAMERA MOVES *WITH* THE MOVING OBJECT, THAT OBJECT WILL REMAIN *FOCUSED* WHILE THE *BACKGROUND* WILL NOW BE *STREAKED*.



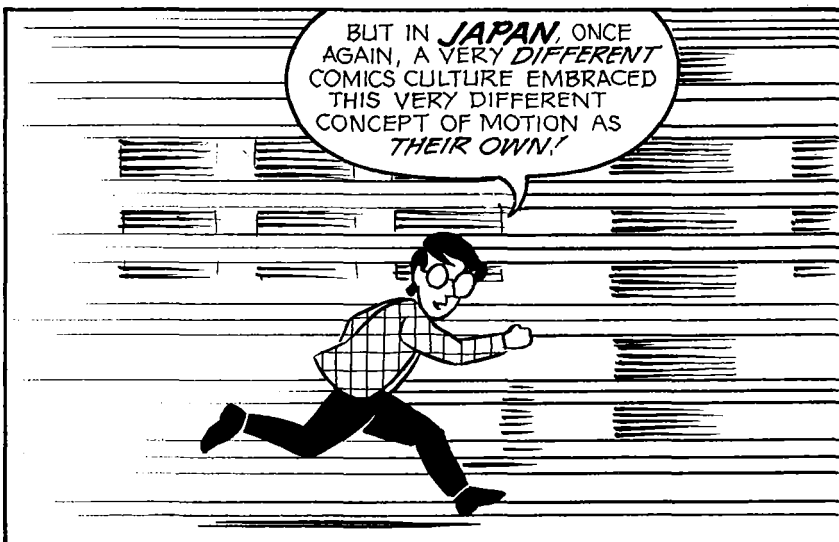
AMERICAN COMICS ARTISTS TOOK LITTLE OR NO INTEREST IN THIS KIND OF *PHOTOGRAPHIC TRICKERY*.



AND IN *EUROPE* WHERE MOTION LINES WERE USED ONLY *SPARINGLY*, IT WAS LIKEWISE IGNORED.



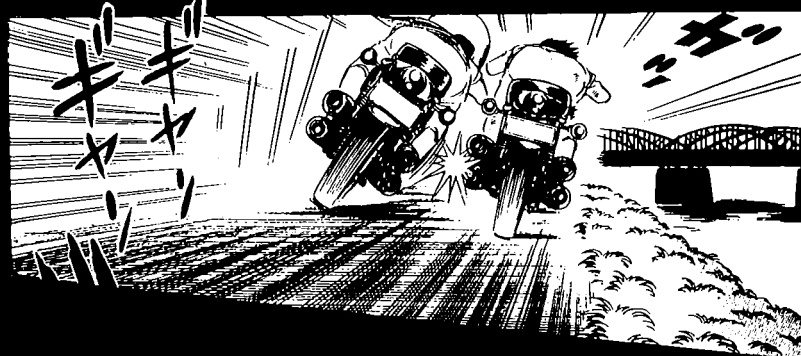
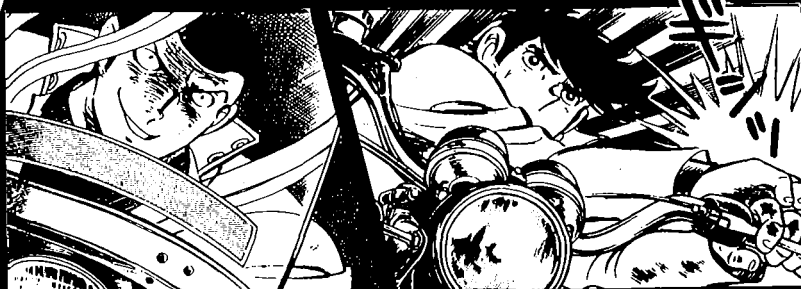
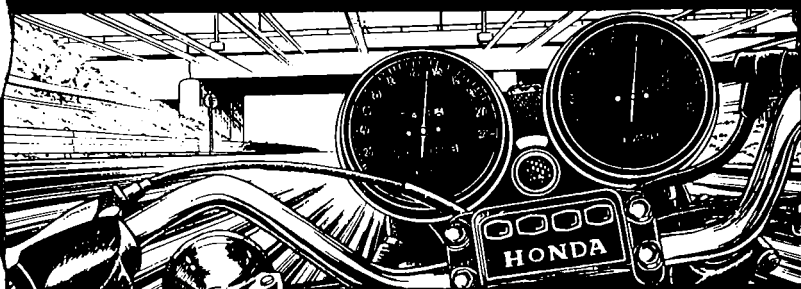
BUT IN *JAPAN*, ONCE AGAIN, A VERY *DIFFERENT* COMICS CULTURE EMBRACED THIS VERY DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF MOTION AS *THEIR OWN*!



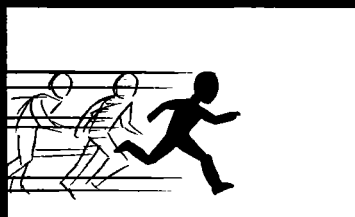
"SUBJECTIVE MOTION," AS I CALL IT, OPERATES ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT IF OBSERVING A MOVING OBJECT CAN BE INVOLVING, **BEING** THAT OBJECT SHOULD BE **MORE** SO.

JAPANESE ARTISTS, STARTING IN THE LATE 60's, BEGAN PUTTING THEIR READERS "IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT" WITH PANELS LIKE **THESE**.

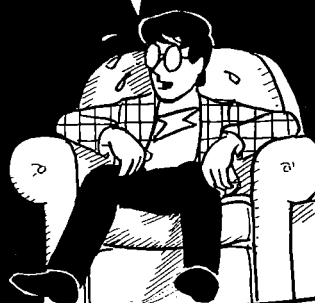
AND STARTING IN THE **MID-EIGHTIES**, A FEW **AMERICAN** ARTISTS BEGAN TO ADOPT THE EFFECT IN THEIR OWN WORK, UNTIL BY THE EARLY **NINETIES** IT HAS BECOME FAIRLY COMMON.

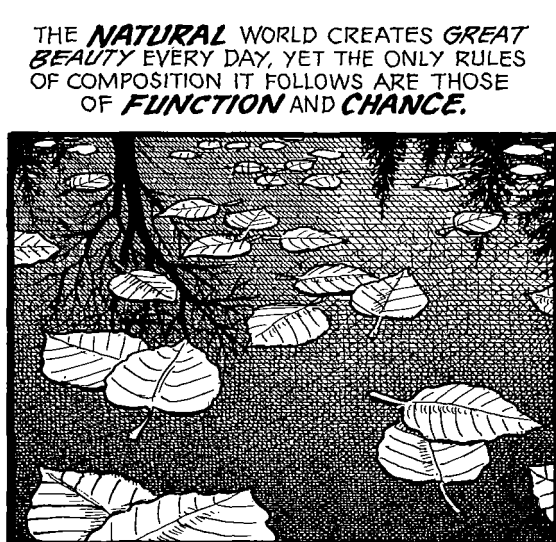
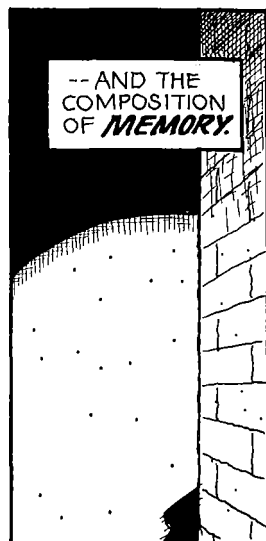
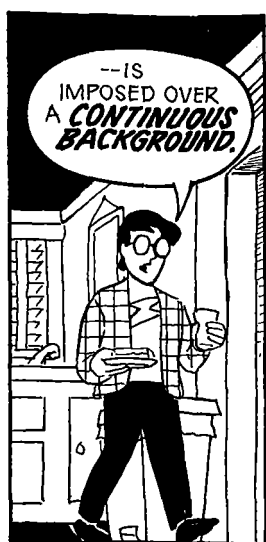
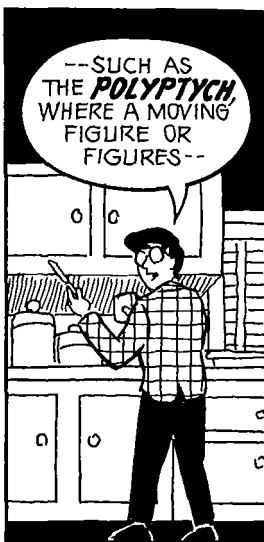


©石井いさみ?

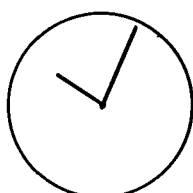


ARE THESE THE **ONLY** WAYS WE CAN PORTRAY MOTION IN A SINGLE PANEL? THINK ABOUT IT.





AS WE'VE SEEN, THE INTERACTION OF *TIME* AND *COMICS* GENERALLY LEADS US TO ONE OF TWO SUBJECTS: **SOUND** OR **MOTION**.



SOUND BREAKS DOWN INTO *TWO* SUBSETS: **WORD BALLOONS** AND **SOUND EFFECTS**.



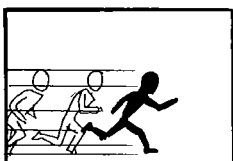
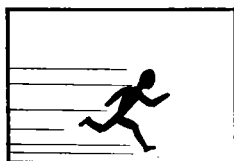
BOTH TYPES ADD TO THE **DURATION** OF A PANEL, PARTIALLY THROUGH THE NATURE OF SOUND *ITSELF* AND BY INTRODUCING ISSUES OF **ACTION** AND **REACTION**.



MOTION ALSO BREAKS DOWN INTO *TWO* SUBSETS. THE **FIRST** TYPE-- **PANEL-TO-PANEL CLOSURE**-- WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO MERIT ITS OWN CHAPTER.



THE **OTHER** TYPE -- **MOTION WITHIN PANELS**-- CAN BE **FURTHER** DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL DISTINCT **STYLES**. I'VE COVERED THE ONES I KNOW, BUT THERE MAY BE MANY **OTHERS**. TIME WILL TELL.



THE WORKINGS OF **TIME IN COMICS** SHOULD BE AS SIMPLE AS--

ONE--

--TWO--

--THREE--

--BUT THEY'RE NOT.

