

# CHAPTER FOUR

## TIME FRAMES.

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

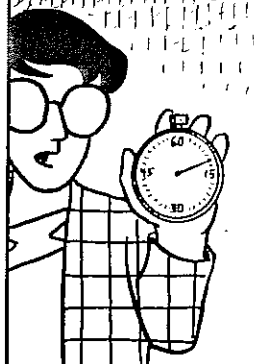


AND *BETWEEN* THOSE FROZEN MOMENTS-- BETWEEN THE PANELS-- OUR MINDS FILL IN THE *INTERVENING MOMENTS*, CREATING THE ILLUSION OF *TIME AND MOTION*.



LIKE A LINE DRAWN BETWEEN TWO POINTS.

RIGHT?



CLIK



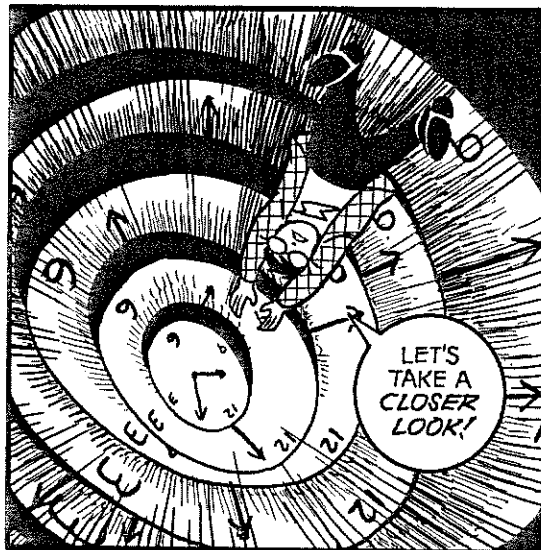
NAAH!  
OF COURSE NOT!

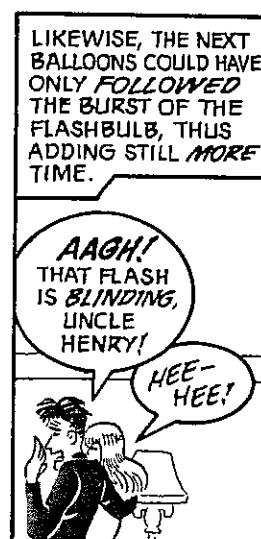
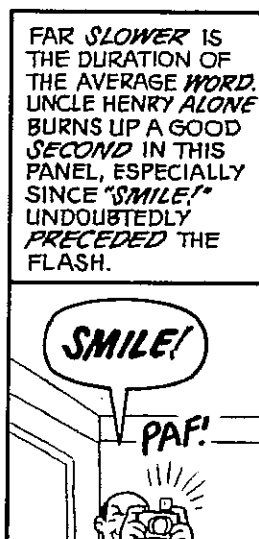
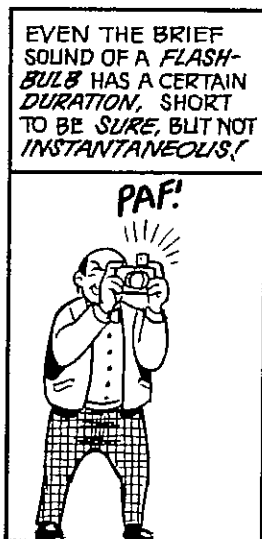
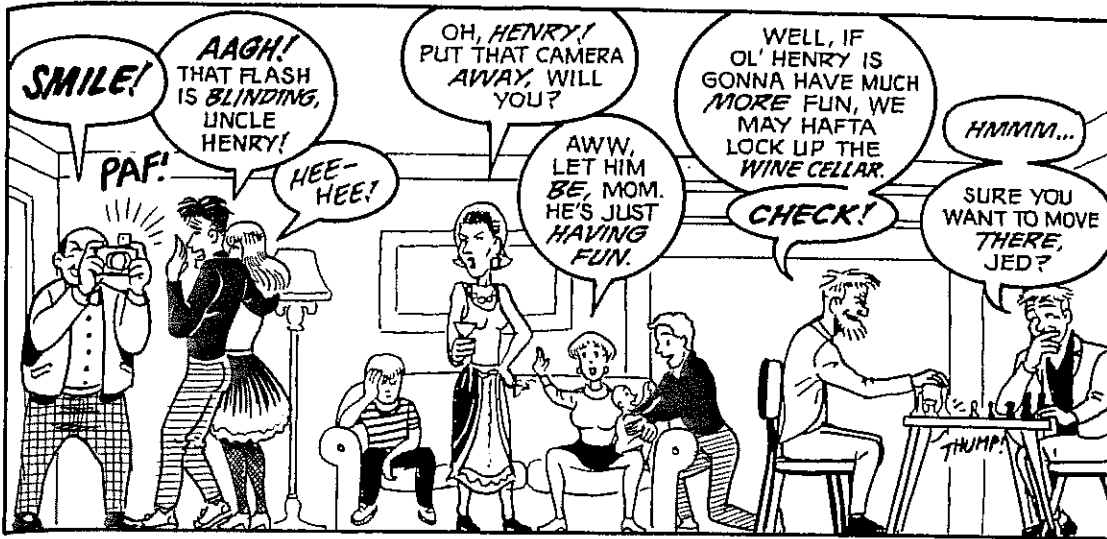


TIME IN COMICS IS *INFINITELY* WEIRDER THAN *THAT!*



LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK!



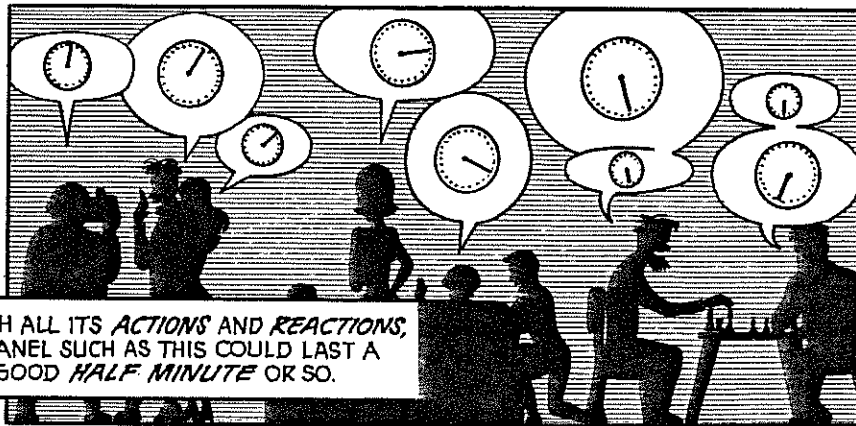


EVEN THE BRIEF SOUND OF A FLASHBULB HAS A CERTAIN DURATION, SHORT TO BE SURE, BUT NOT INSTANTANEOUS!

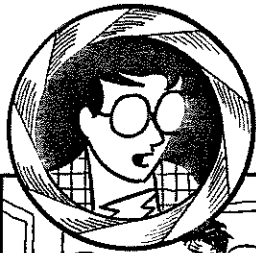
FAR SLOWER IS THE DURATION OF THE AVERAGE WORD. UNCLE HENRY ALONE BURNS UP A GOOD SECOND IN THIS PANEL, ESPECIALLY SINCE "SMILE!" UNDOUBTEDLY PRECEDED THE FLASH.

LIKEWISE, THE NEXT BALLOONS COULD HAVE ONLY FOLLOWED THE BURST OF THE FLASHBULB, THUS ADDING STILL MORE TIME.

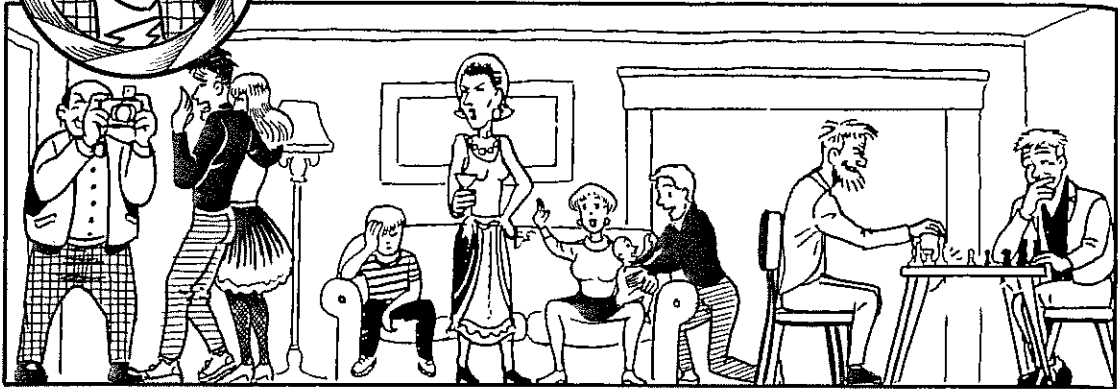
JUST AS PICTURES AND THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THEM CREATE THE ILLUSION OF TIME THROUGH CLOSURE, WORDS INTRODUCE TIME BY REPRESENTING THAT WHICH CAN ONLY EXIST IN TIME -- SOUND.



WITH ALL ITS ACTIONS AND REACTIONS, A PANEL SUCH AS THIS COULD LAST A GOOD HALF MINUTE OR SO.



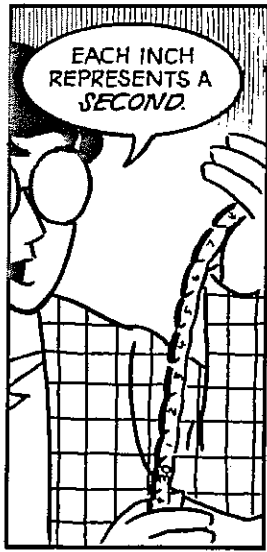
*BUT HOW COULD THIS BE ANYTHING BUT A SINGLE MOMENT? OUR EYES HAVE BEEN WELL-TRAINED BY THE PHOTOGRAPH AND BY REPRESENTATIONAL ART TO SEE ANY SINGLE CONTINUOUS IMAGE AS A SINGLE INSTANT IN TIME.*



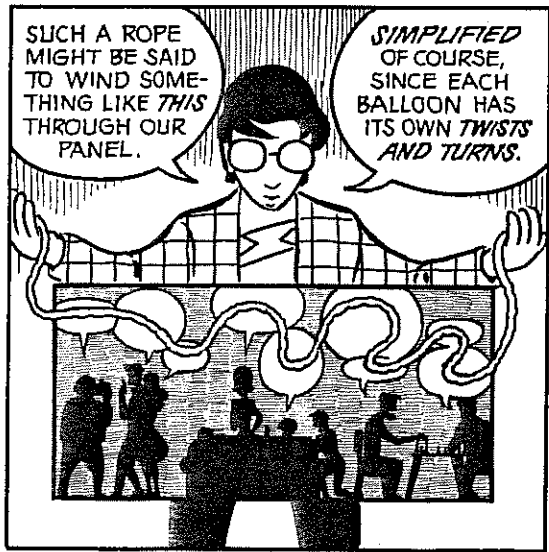
*BUT THE ACTIONS THAT WE SEE OCCURRING SEEMINGLY AT THE SAME TIME OBVIOUSLY CAN'T BE!*



*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 TURNS.*



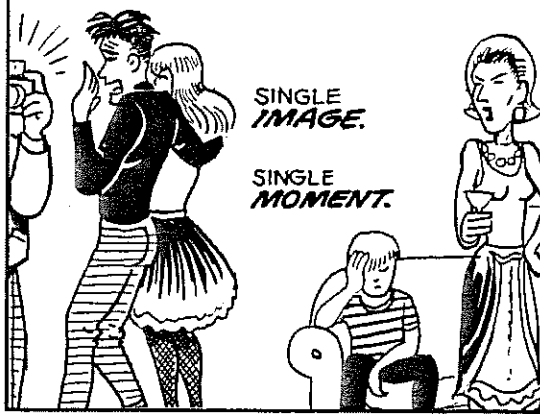
*AND SINCE EACH FACE AND FIGURE IS DRAWN TO MATCH HIS/HER OWN WORDS--*

*SMILE!*  
*AAGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING, UNCLE HENRY!*  
*PAF!*  
*HEE-HEE!*

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



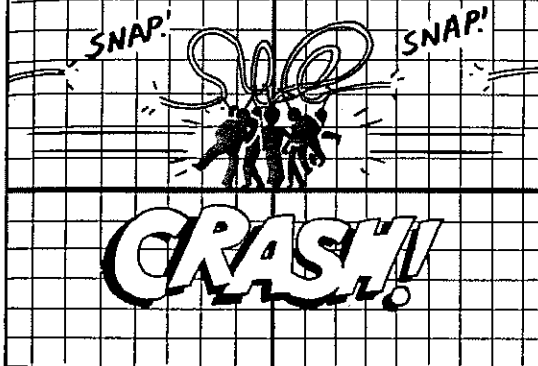
THE PROPERTIES OF THE SINGLE CONTINUOUS **IMAGE**, MEANWHILE, TEND TO MATCH EACH FIGURE WITH EVERY **OTHER** FIGURE.



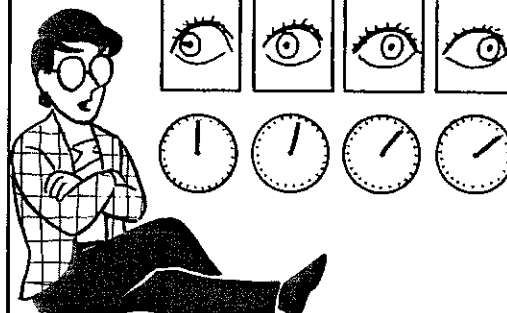
PORTRAYING TIME ON A LINE MOVING **LEFT TO RIGHT**, THIS PUTS ALL THE **IMAGES** ON THE SAME VERTICAL AXIS.



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



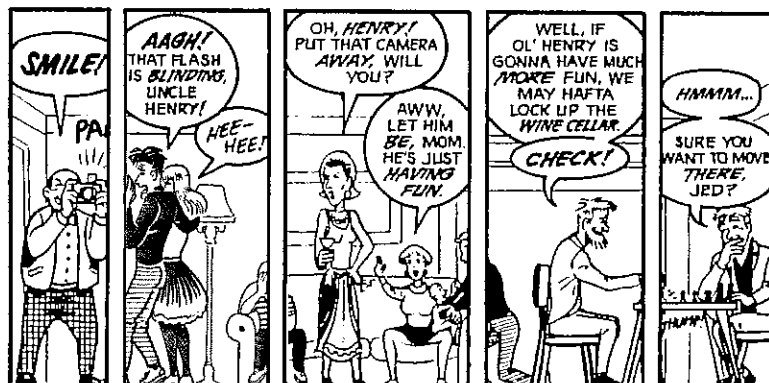
PERHAPS WE'VE BEEN TOO CONDITIONED BY PHOTOGRAPHY TO PERCEIVE SINGLE IMAGES AS **SINGLE MOMENTS**. AFTER ALL, IT DOES TAKE AN EYE **TIME** TO MOVE ACROSS SCENES IN **REAL LIFE!**



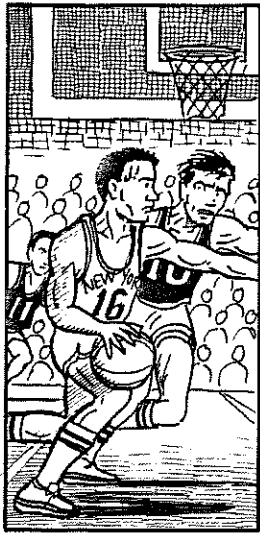
EACH FIGURE IS ARRANGED FROM **LEFT TO RIGHT** IN THE SEQUENCE WE WILL **'READ'** THEM, EACH OCCUPYING A **DISTINCT TIME SLOT**.



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**.

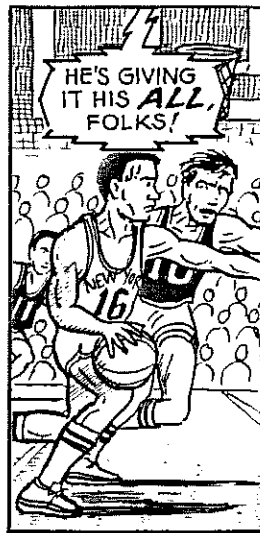


**ONE** PANEL, OPERATING AS **SEVERAL** PANELS.



NOT ALL PANELS ARE LIKE THAT, OF COURSE.

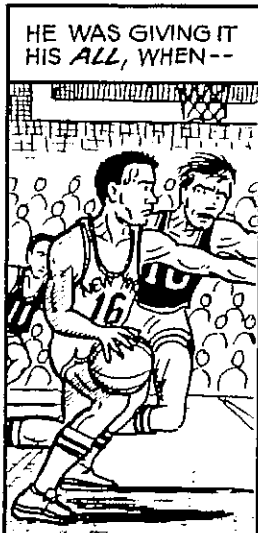
A SILENT PANEL SUCH AS THIS COULD INDEED BE SAID TO DEPICT A SINGLE MOMENT!



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



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



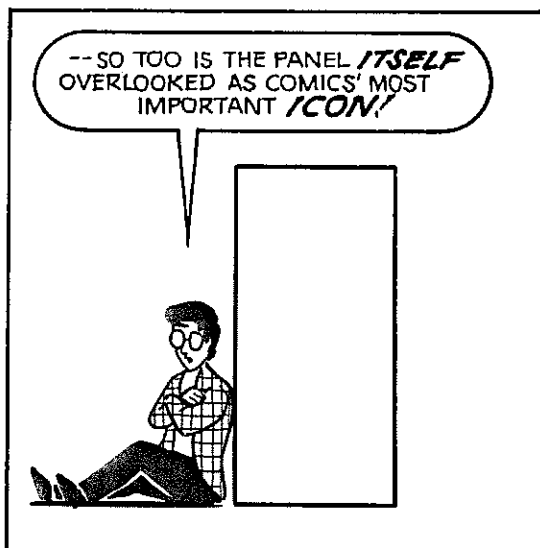
THESE VARIOUS SHAPES WE CALL PANELS HOLD IN THEIR BORDERS ALL OF THE ICONS THAT ADD UP TO THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS.



ALL EXCEPT ONE.

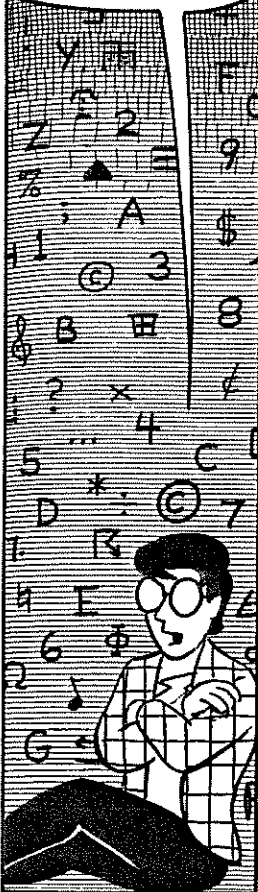


FOR JUST AS THE BODY'S LARGEST ORGAN -- OUR SKIN -- IS SELDOM THOUGHT OF AS AN ORGAN --

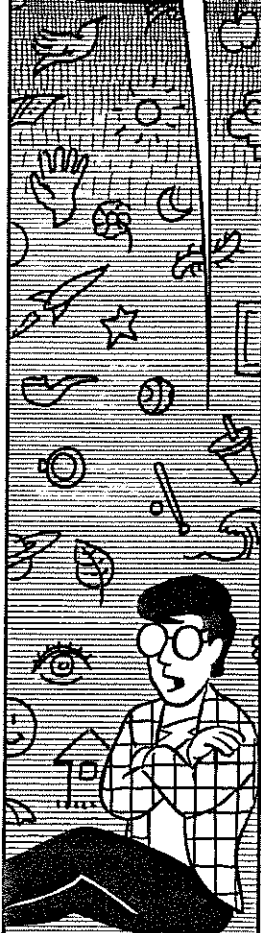


-- SO TOO IS THE PANEL ITSELF OVERLOOKED AS COMICS' MOST IMPORTANT ICON!

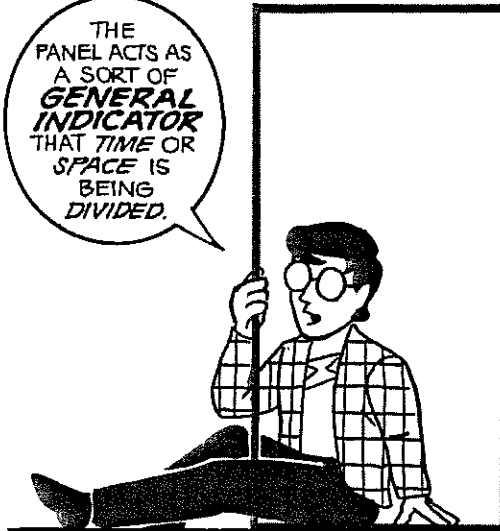
THESE ICONS WE CALL PANELS OR "FRAMES" HAVE NO **FIXED** OR **ABSOLUTE MEANING**, LIKE THE ICONS OF **LANGUAGE, SCIENCE** AND **COMMUNICATION**.



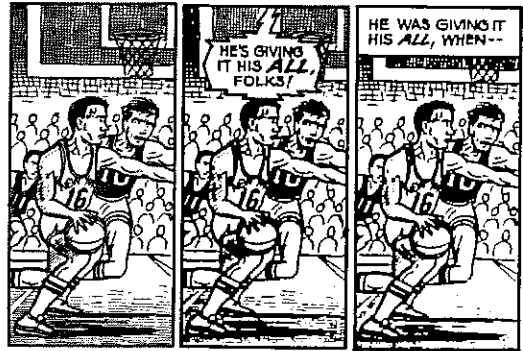
NOR IS THEIR MEANING AS **FLUID** AND **MALLEABLE** AS THE SORTS OF ICONS WE CALL **PICTURES**.



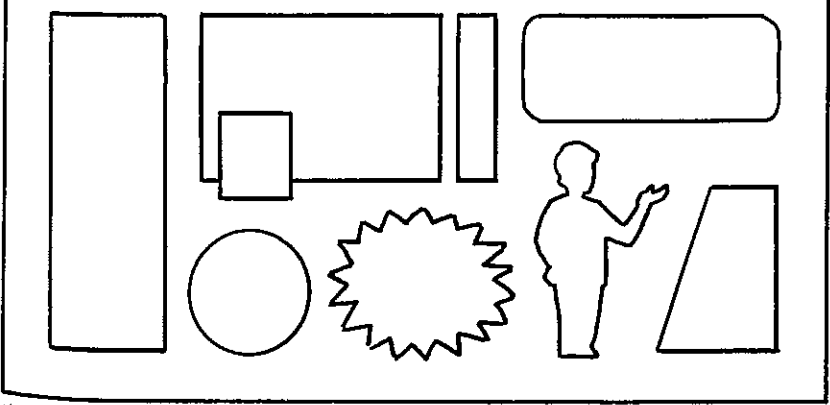
THE PANEL ACTS AS A SORT OF **GENERAL INDICATOR** THAT **TIME** OR **SPACE** IS BEING **DIVIDED**.



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**.

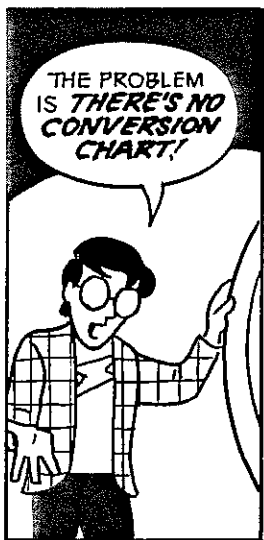
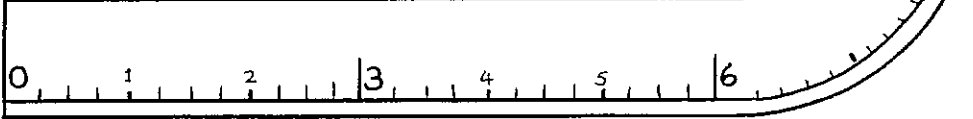
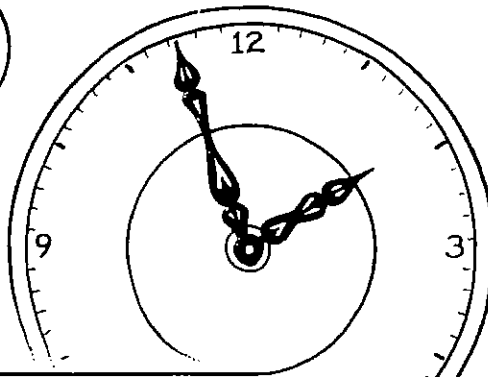


WHICH BRINGS US TO THE STRANGE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN **TIME** AS **DEPICTED** IN COMICS AND **TIME** AS **PERCEIVED** BY THE **READER**.

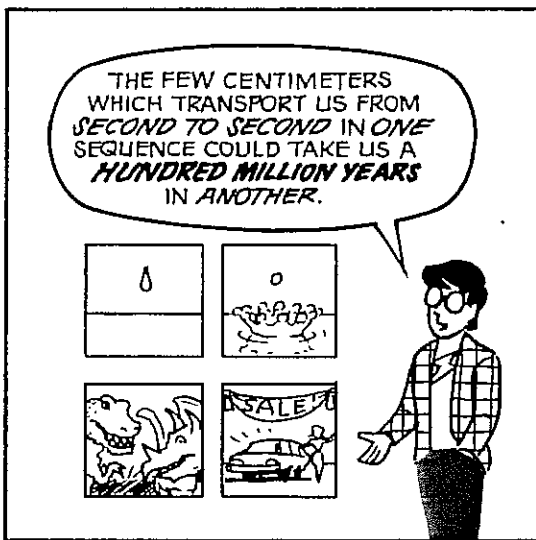


\* EISNER DISCUSSES THIS UNDER THE HEADING "FRAMING TIME" IN **COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART**.

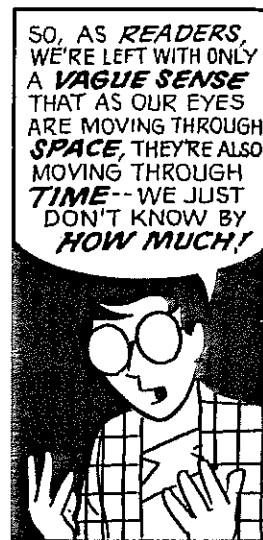
IN LEARNING TO READ COMICS WE ALL LEARNED TO PERCEIVE TIME *SPATIALLY*, FOR IN THE WORLD OF COMICS, *TIME AND SPACE ARE ONE AND THE SAME.*



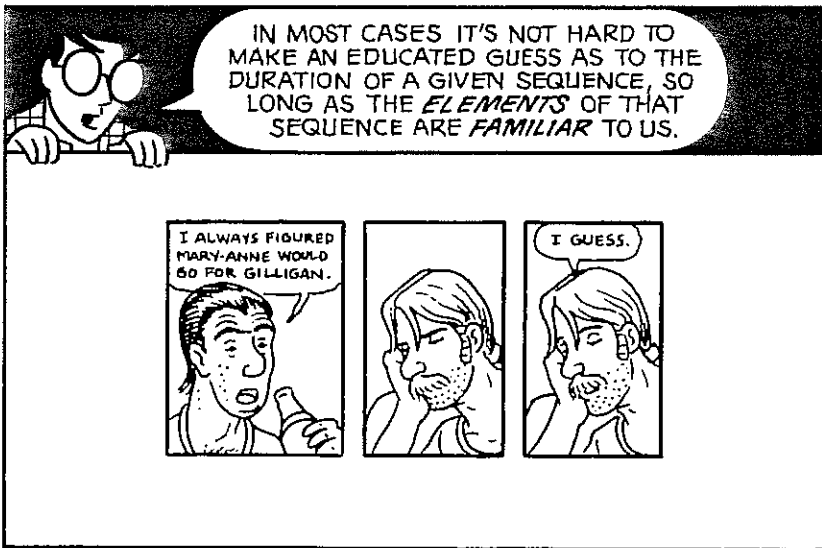
THE PROBLEM IS *THERE'S NO CONVERSION CHART!*



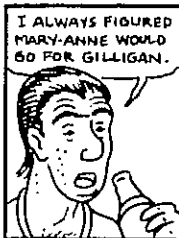
THE FEW CENTIMETERS WHICH TRANSPORT US FROM *SECOND TO SECOND* IN *ONE* SEQUENCE COULD TAKE US A *HUNDRED MILLION YEARS* IN *ANOTHER.*



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.

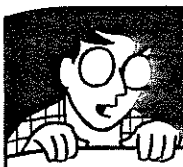


I GUESS.







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?



D'YA THINK THE SOX COULD FINALLY DO IT THIS YEAR?

I GUESS.



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



HEY, I DESERVE A BETTER JOB! I COULD BE A BRAIN SURGEON!





I GUESS.





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!



THAT MADONNA, MAN, SHE'S ONE HOT BABE!

I GUESS.





EVER NOTICED HOW THE WORDS "SHORT" OR "LONG" CAN REFER EITHER TO THE **FIRST** DIMENSION OR TO THE **FOURTH**?

IN A MEDIUM WHERE TIME AND SPACE **MERGE** SO COMPLETELY, THE DISTINCTION OFTEN **VANISHES!**

THE **PANEL BORDER** IS OUR **GUIDE** THROUGH **TIME AND SPACE**, BUT IT WILL ONLY GUIDE US **SO FAR.**

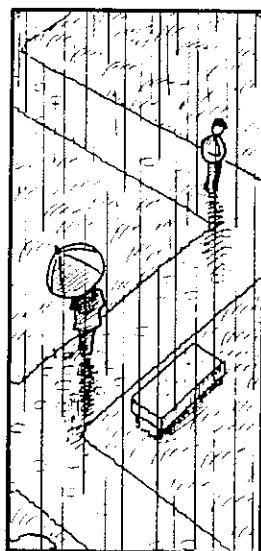
AS MENTIONED, PANELS COME IN MANY SHAPES AND SIZES, THOUGH THE **CLASSIC RECTANGLE** IS USED MOST OFTEN.

MOST OF US ARE SO USED TO THE STANDARD **RECTANGULAR** FORMAT THAT A "**BORDERLESS**" PANEL SUCH AS THIS CAN TAKE ON A **TIMELESS QUALITY.**

HEY, ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME?!

I GUESS.

WHEN THE **CONTENT** OF A SILENT PANEL OFFERS NO CLUES AS TO ITS **DURATION**, IT CAN ALSO PRODUCE A SENSE OF **TIMELESSNESS.**

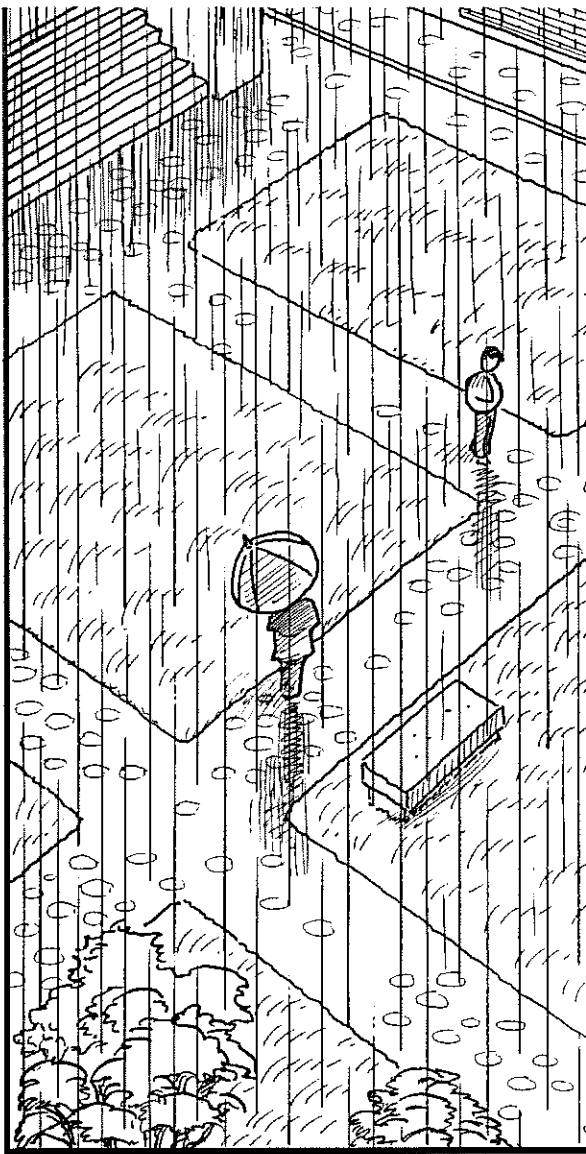
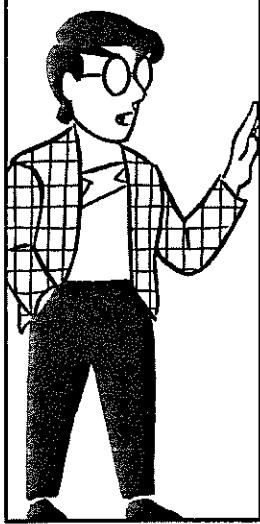
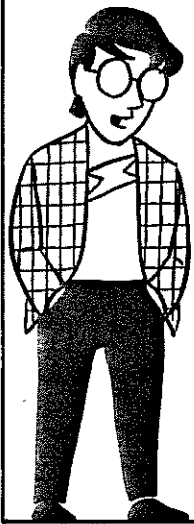


BECAUSE OF ITS **UNRESOLVED NATURE**, SUCH A PANEL MAY **LINGER** IN THE READER'S MIND.

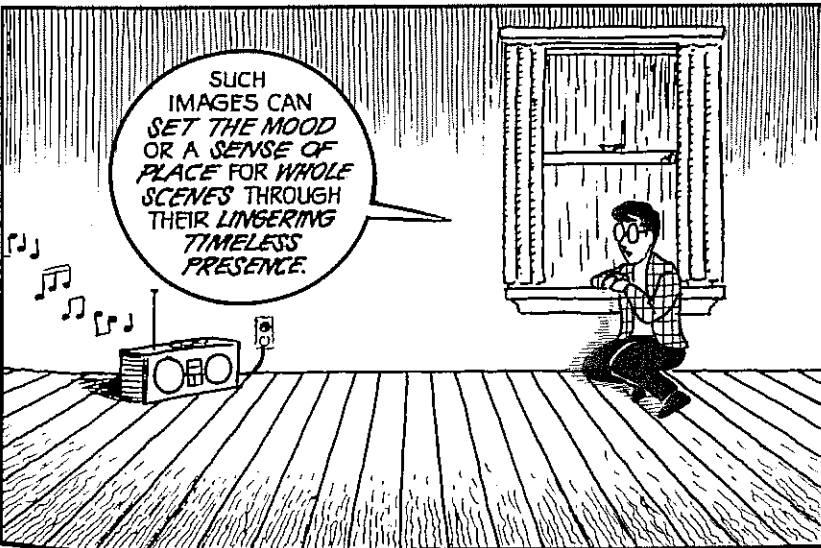
AND ITS PRESENCE MAY BE FELT IN THE PANELS WHICH **FOLLOW** IT.

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.

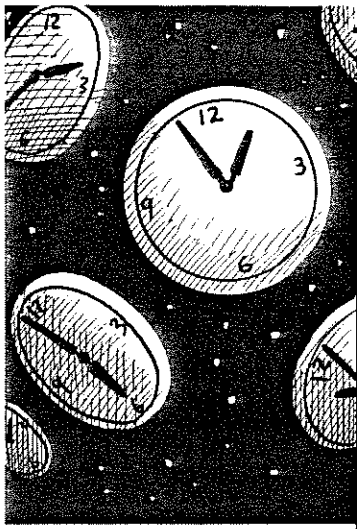


SUCH IMAGES CAN SET THE MOOD OR A SENSE OF PLACE FOR WHOLE SCENES THROUGH THEIR LINGERING TIMELESS PRESENCE.



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**.

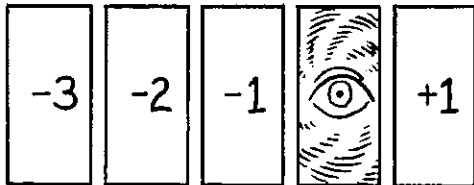
LIKEWISE, ALL PANELS **STILL TO COME**-- THIS **NEXT** PANEL, FOR INSTANCE-- REPRESENT THE **FUTURE**.

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!**

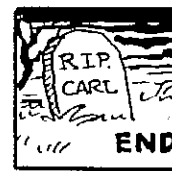
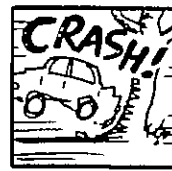
WHEREVER YOUR EYES ARE FOCUSED, THAT'S **NOW**. BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOUR EYES TAKE IN THE **SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE** OF PAST AND FUTURE!

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.



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

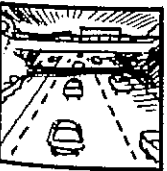
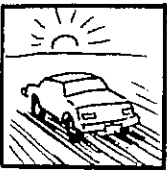
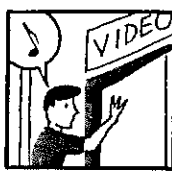
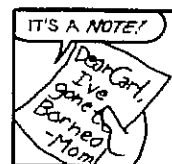
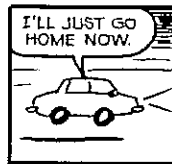
BUT **EYES**, LIKE **STORMS**, CAN **CHANGE DIRECTION!**



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.

<p>THE INCREDIBLE <b>MR. SPOT</b> ©1992 Matt Fozzard</p>	<p>THE END OF THE MONTH... BROKE AGAIN!</p>	<p>I'LL JUST BORROW SOME MONEY FROM MYSELF IN THE FUTURE!</p>
<p>NOW I CAN GO OUT TO DINNER!</p>	<p>MY COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEF, ANDRE! THE CHECK, PLEASE!</p>	<p>HEY!</p>

