

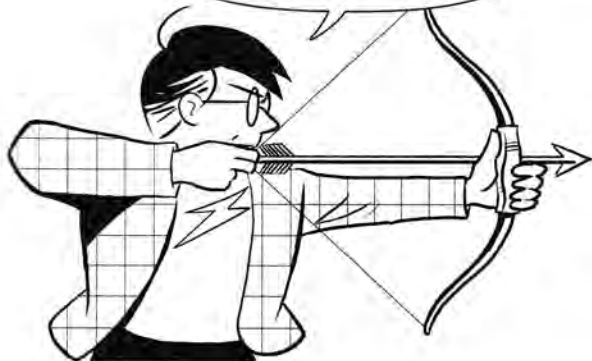
Chapter One

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.



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.

It was a dark
and stormy
night...



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



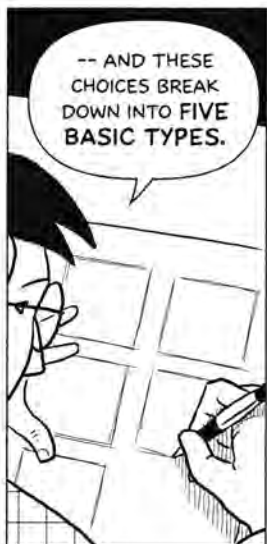
-- SO LET'S START BY
EXAMINING HOW THAT
CONVERSION IS DONE
WHEN **CLARITY** AND
COMMUNICATION
ARE THE PRIMARY
GOALS.



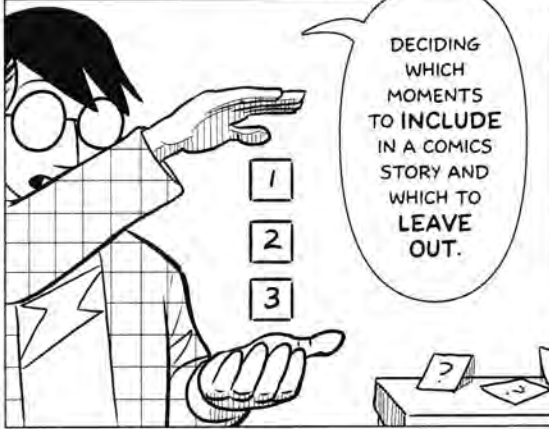
COMICS REQUIRES
US TO MAKE A CONSTANT STREAM OF
CHOICES REGARDING IMAGERY, PACING,
DIALOGUE, COMPOSITION, GESTURE AND
A TON OF OTHER OPTIONS --



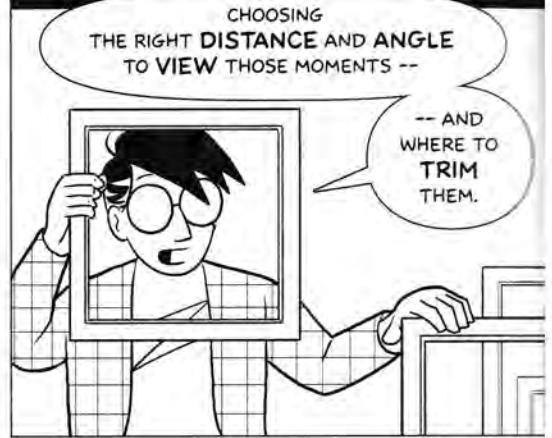
-- AND THESE
CHOICES BREAK
DOWN INTO FIVE
BASIC TYPES.



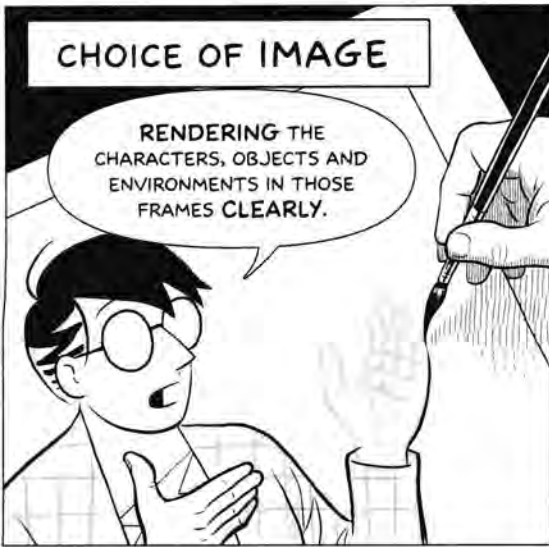
CHOICE OF MOMENT



CHOICE OF FRAME



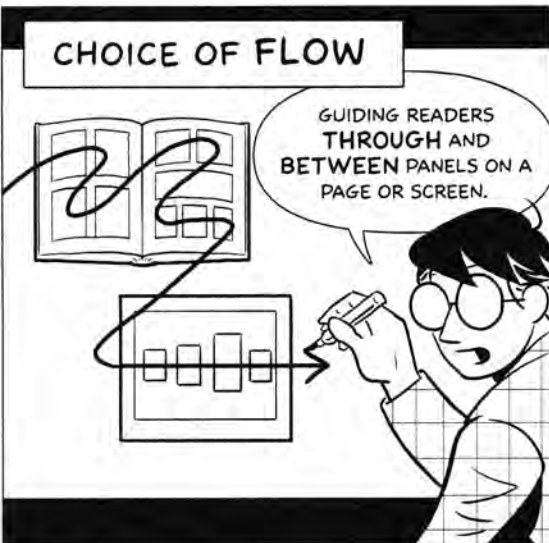
CHOICE OF IMAGE








CHOICE OF WORD








CHOICE OF FLOW



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

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.



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

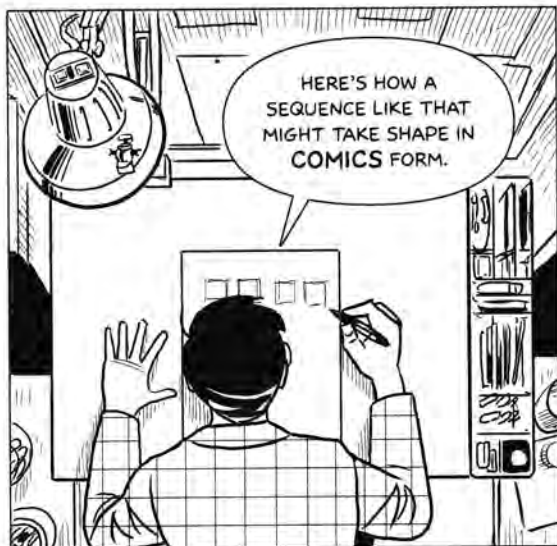
NOTHING FANCY, JUST A SKETCH.

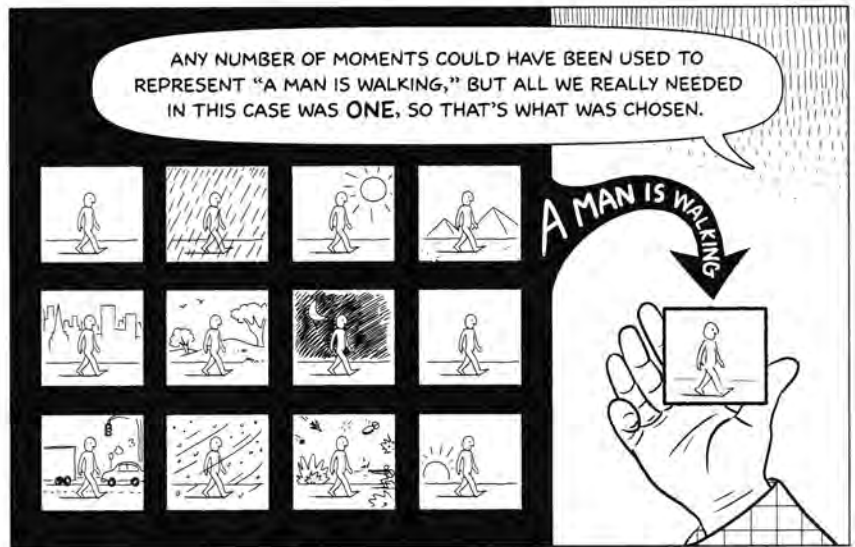
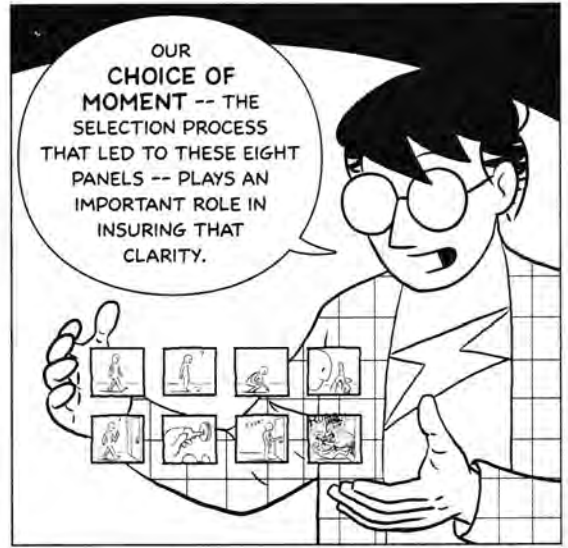
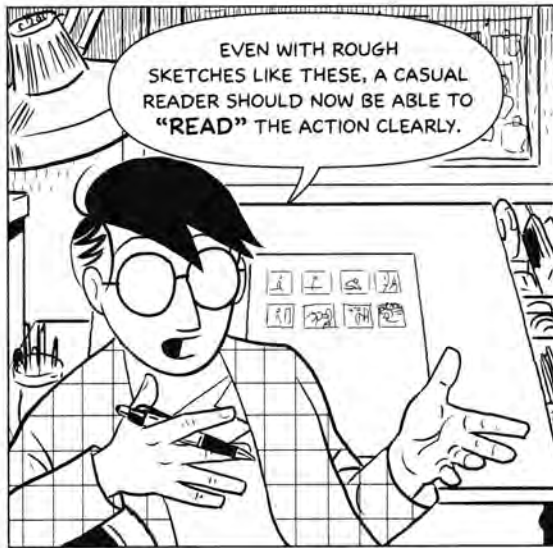
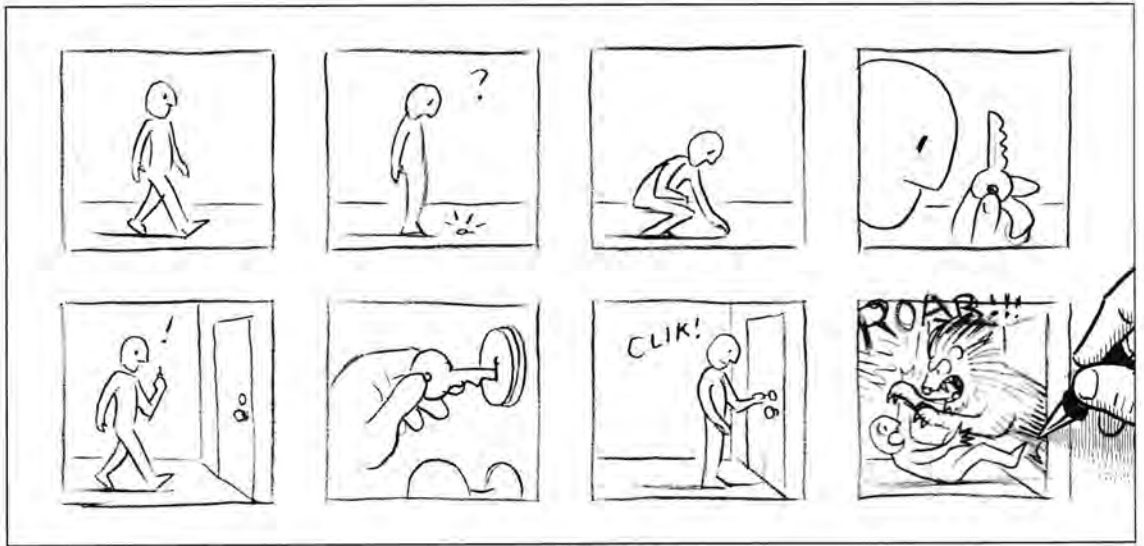


THEN, LET'S SAY THE MAN FINDS A **KEY** ON THE GROUND, PICKS IT UP, TAKES IT WITH HIM AND COMES TO A **DOOR**.

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."



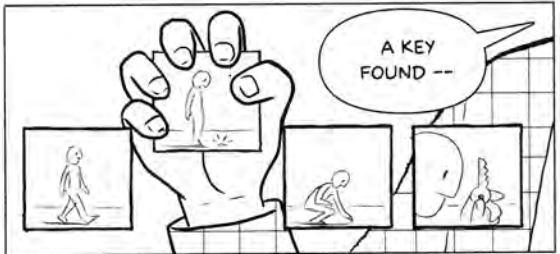
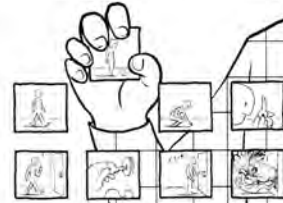
"He unlocks the door."



"Then a hungry lion jumps out."

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

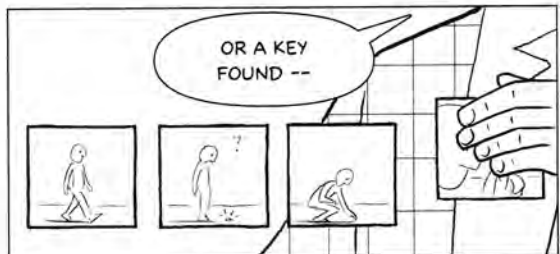
REMOVE ONE AND THE MEANING IS ALTERED.



-- BECOMES A KEY RETRIEVED.



OR A KEY FOUND --

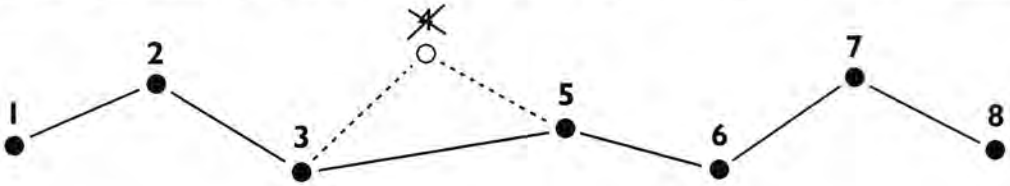
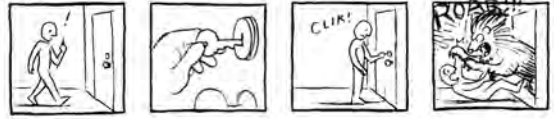


-- BECOMES THE FINDING OF AN UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT.



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.



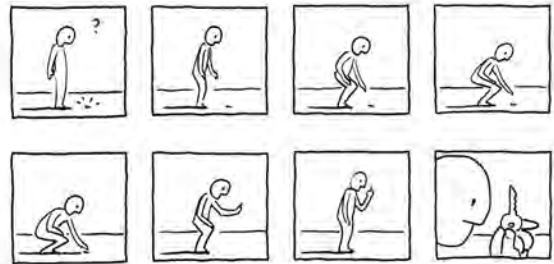
OR IF THAT'S NOT THE CASE, MAYBE THAT PARTICULAR "DOT" WASN'T NEEDED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

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



"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).

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.

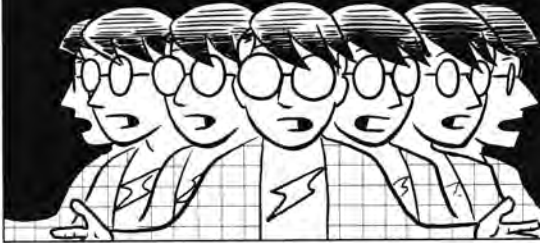
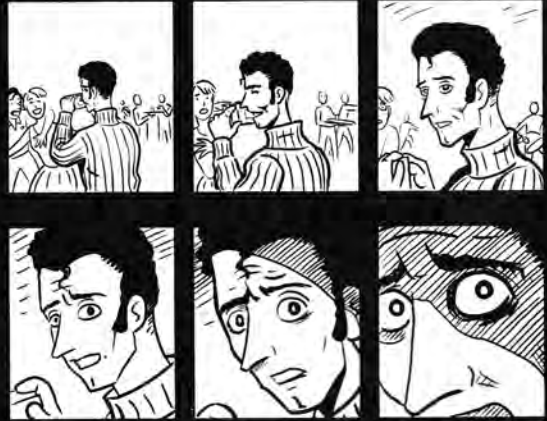


6. NON SEQUITUR



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

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.



I'M GONNA SIT RIGHT HERE 'TIL SOMETHING
GOOD COMES ON!
 SUIT YOURSELF.



ONE YEAR LATER...



MEANWHILE, IN PARIS...



5

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

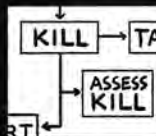
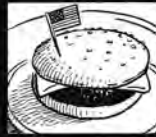
ASPECT TO ASPECT
 TRANSITIONS DO JUST THAT, AND
 THEY'VE BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY IN
 JAPAN -- AND RECENTLY, IN NORTH
 AMERICA -- TO CREATE A STRONG
 SENSE OF PLACE AND MOOD.



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.



IF YOU HAVE A STORY THAT'S VERY **LOT-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.

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.



1. MOMENT TO MOMENT



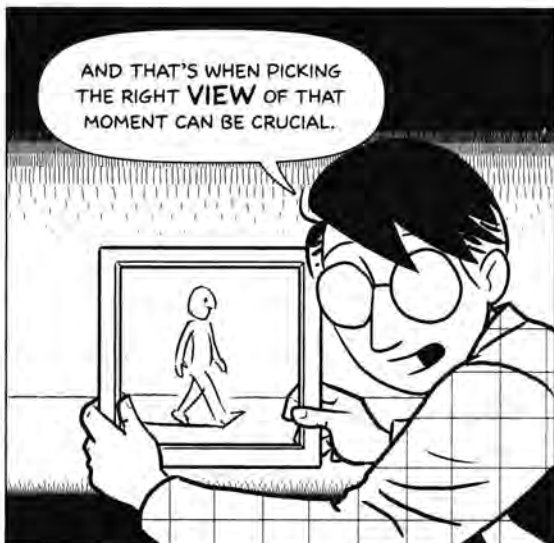
5. ASPECT TO ASPECT

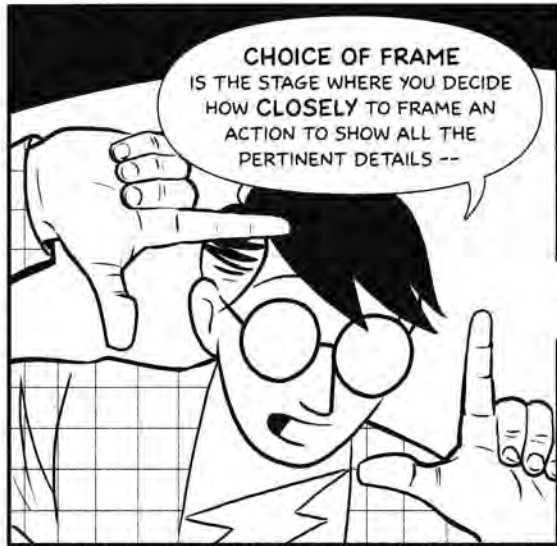


OF COURSE, CHOOSING THE **RIGHT MOMENT** IS ONLY THE **BEGINNING**.

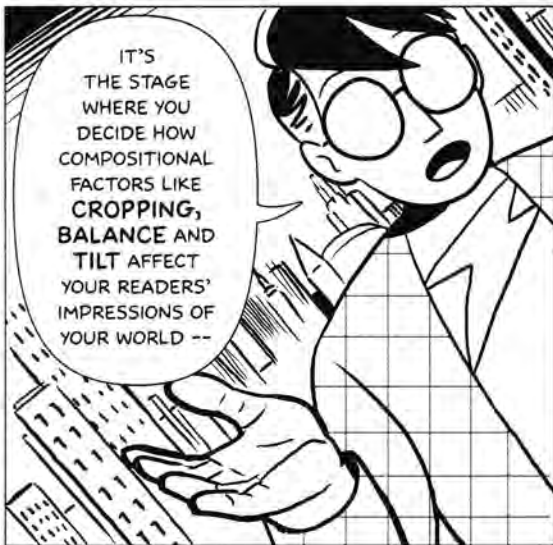
ONCE YOU'VE PICKED THE **RIGHT MOMENTS** FOR THE JOB, YOU'LL NEED TO SHOW YOUR READERS WHERE THAT **MOMENT'S FOCUS** LIES.

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





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



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 --

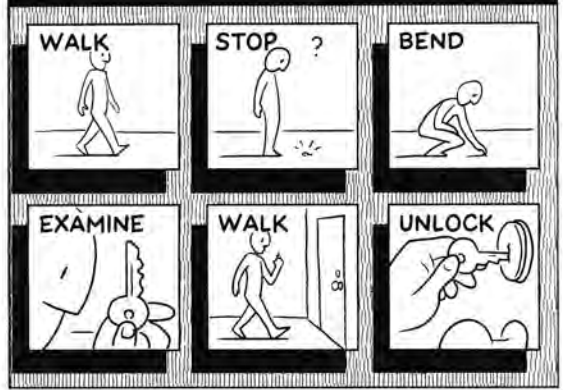


-- BUT OTHERWISE, THE ACTION WAS SHOWN FROM A **FIXED MIDDLE DISTANCE** AND **FIXED VIEWING ANGLE**.

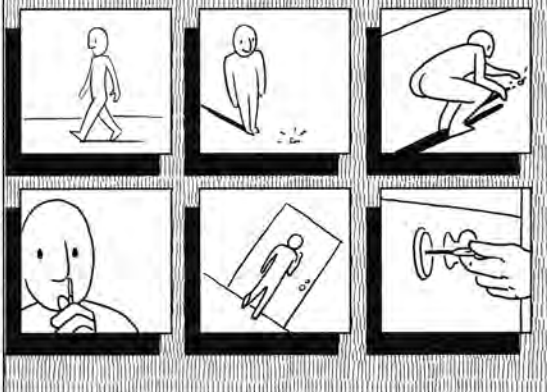
OUR TALE COULD HAVE BEEN SHOT FROM **MANY** ANGLES AND DISTANCES, BUT BY OFFERING A VIEW OF THE ACTION THAT **BARELY** CHANGES --



-- 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** --



-- 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**.



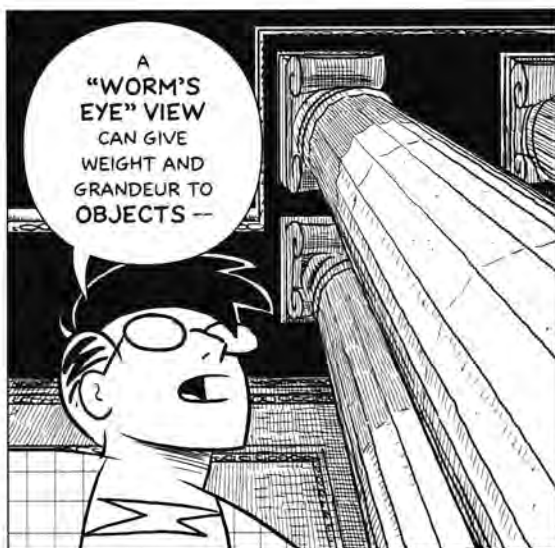
THAT SAID, SOME SCENES REQUIRE FREQUENT **CHANGES** OF FRAME, SUCH AS THE FLIP-FLOPPING ANGLES OF SUBJECT TO SUBJECT TRANSITIONS USED TO CAPTURE THE RHYTHM OF TWO PEOPLE IN CONVERSATION.



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 --



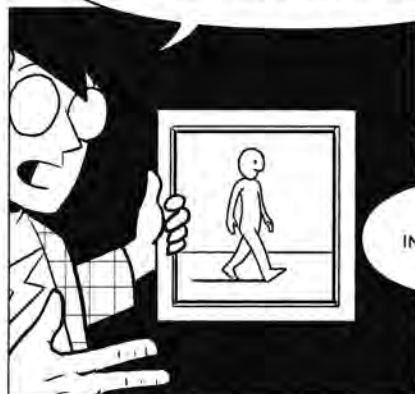
-- WHILE GETTING ABOVE A SCENE CAN GIVE READERS ACCESS TO A WEALTH OF INFO ABOUT A SETTING --



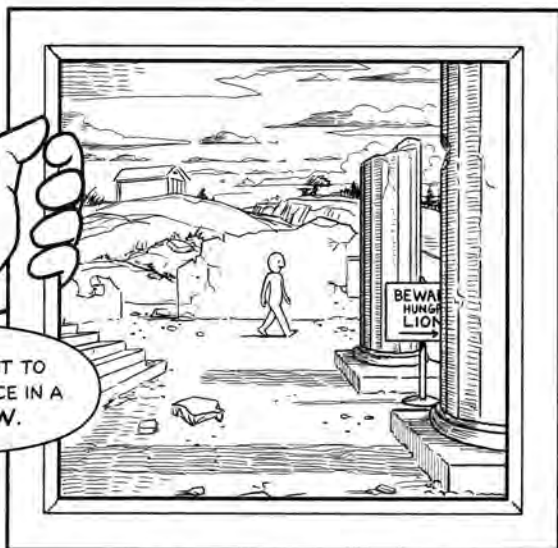
-- AND A SENSE OF "RISING ABOVE IT ALL" EMOTIONALLY AS WELL.



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.



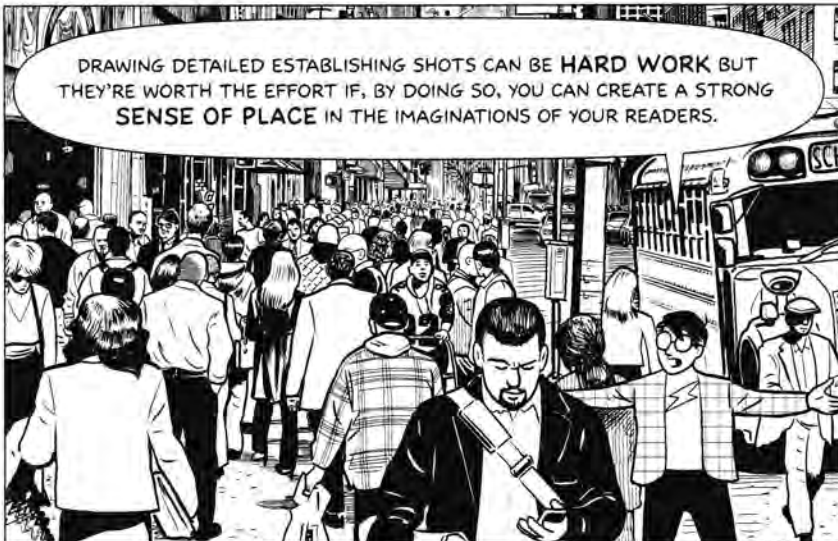
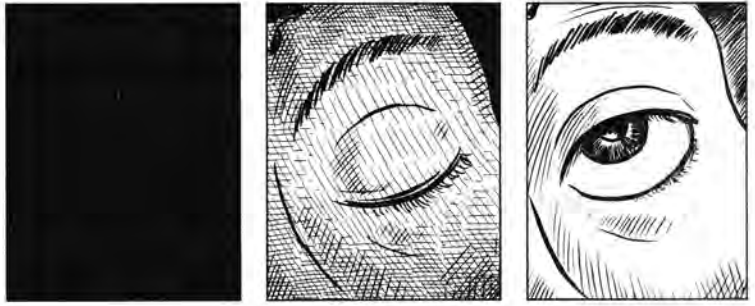
READERS
NEED THAT
INFORMATION
ESPECIALLY WHEN
MOVING FROM
SCENE TO
SCENE --

-- 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.



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 --

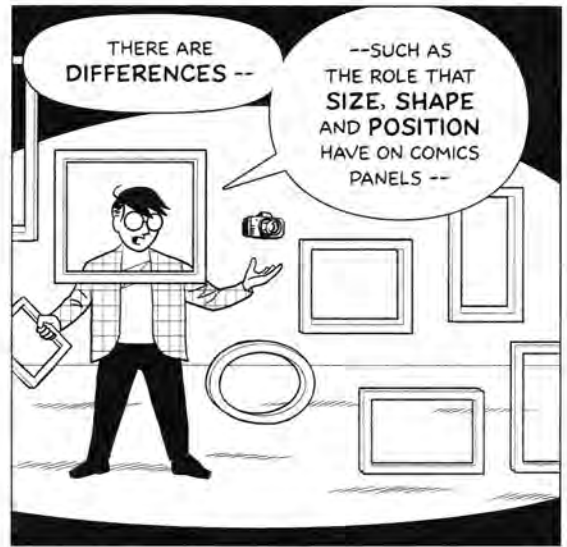
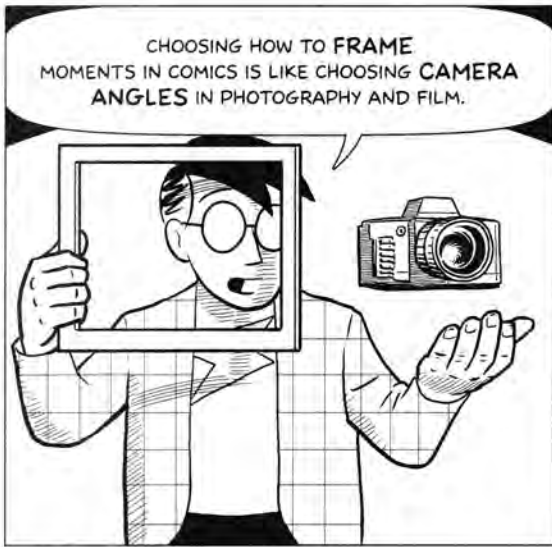
-- OR TO MIRROR THE THOUGHTS OF A CHARACTER WHO'S TEMPORARILY UNAWARE OF HIS OR HER SURROUNDINGS.



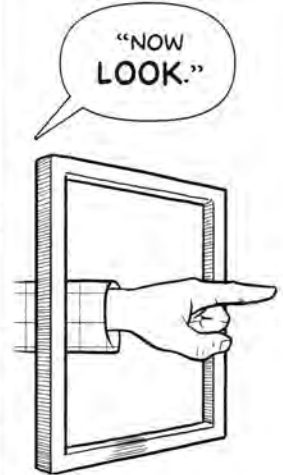
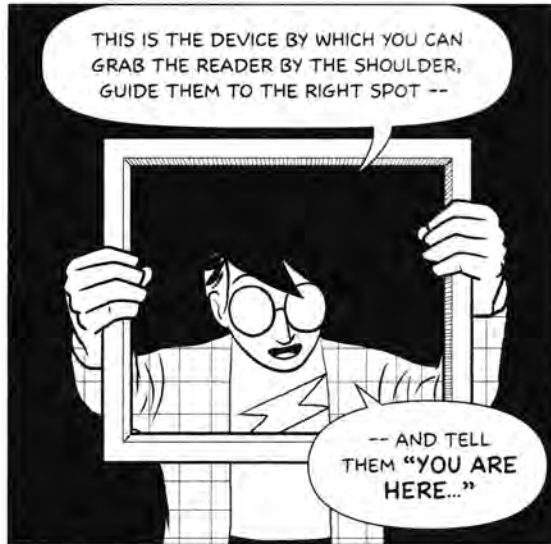
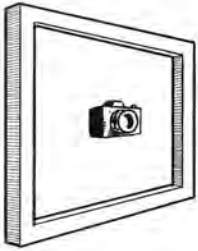
DRAWING DETAILED ESTABLISHING SHOTS CAN BE HARD WORK BUT THEY'RE WORTH THE EFFORT IF, BY DOING SO, YOU CAN CREATE A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE IN THE IMAGINATIONS OF YOUR READERS.

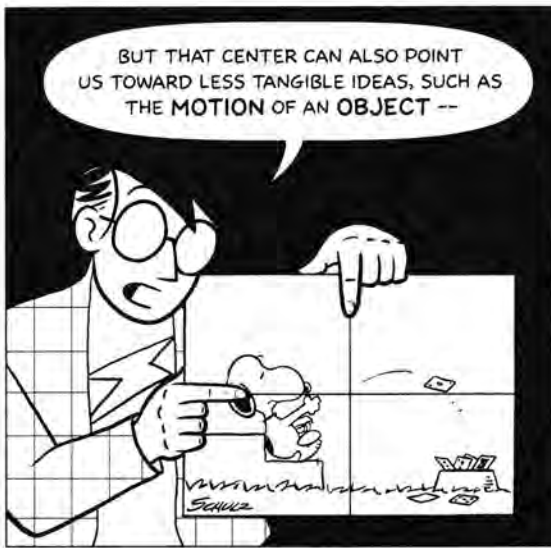
LOOK FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC IN CHAPTER FOUR.





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

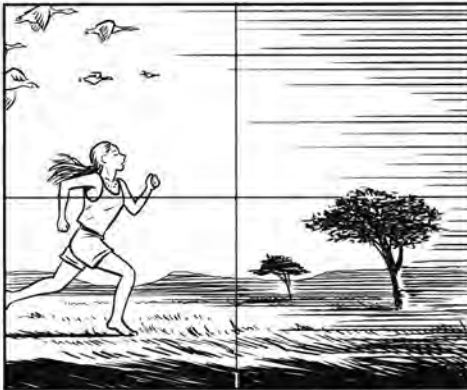




-- A MYSTERIOUS ABSENCE --



-- A DISTANCE ABOUT TO BE CROSSED --



-- A DISTANCE CROSSED ALREADY --



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

