

LET'S START THEIR STORY WITH A BIG **ESTABLISHING SHOT** TO SHOW WHERE THE ACTION IS TAKING PLACE, THEN A **MIDDLE SHOT** TO INTRODUCE CHARACTERS A AND B, AND THEN A **CLOSE-UP** ON CHARACTER A.



**THREE MOMENTS**, ACCOMMODATING THREE DIFFERENT FRAMES ON THE SAME SCENE.



NO FIREWORKS IN THE **IMAGES** DEPARTMENT. JUST A FEW RECOGNIZABLE DETAILS, BUT OUR CHOICE OF IMAGE IS AT LEAST **SPECIFIC**. WE KNOW WE'RE IN A MIAMI-LIKE CITY; WE KNOW CHARACTER A IS A SERIOUS GUY.








WE KNOW WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW -- FOR NOW.

NOW AS A STARTS FOLLOWING B, NOTICE HOW BOTH ARE SHOWN IN FRAME. TO REINFORCE THEIR **RELATIVE POSITIONS**. ALSO, DESPITE CHANGING VIEWING ANGLES, BOTH MAINTAIN A **LEFT-TO-RIGHT FORWARD FLOW**, TRACKING THE READER'S USUAL READING DIRECTION.



NO MATTER WHAT WORKING METHOD YOU CHOOSE, MAKING COMICS COMES DOWN TO A SERIES OF DECISIONS --

-- AND EACH DECISION YOU MAKE CAN BE INFORMED BY, AND EVALUATED ON THE BASIS OF, THESE FIVE CATEGORIES.

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

EXAMPLE: LET'S IMPROVISE A SIMPLE STORY, TOLD AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE, AND SEE HOW OUR FIVE KINDS OF CHOICES CAN BE MADE IN REAL TIME.

WE'LL START WITH A FEW THROWAWAY CHARACTERS.

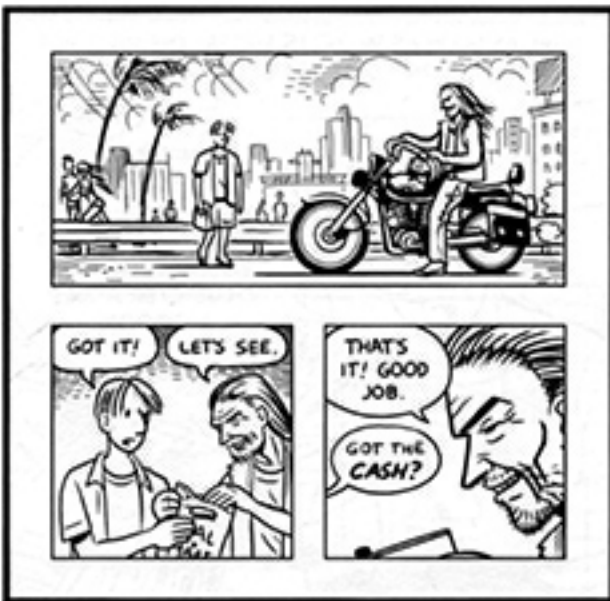
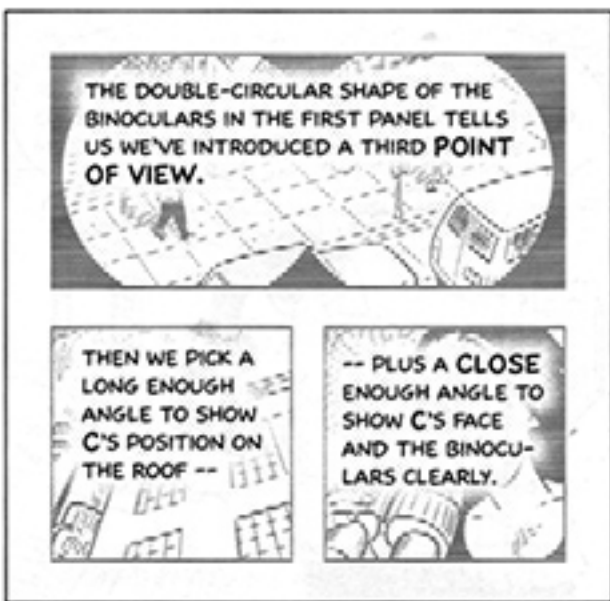
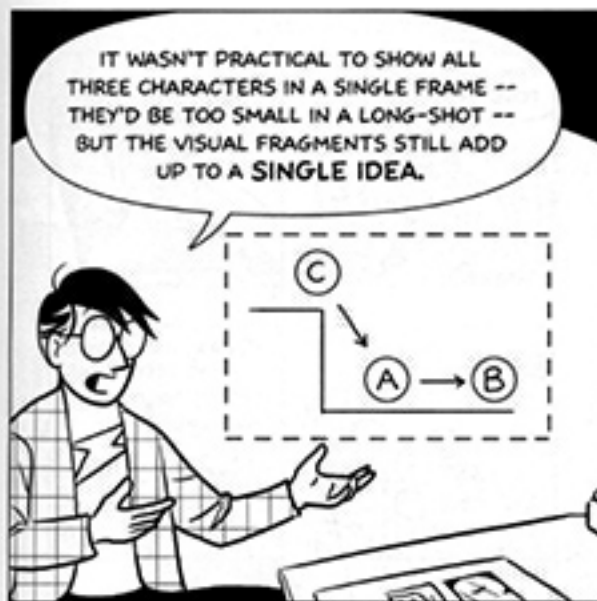
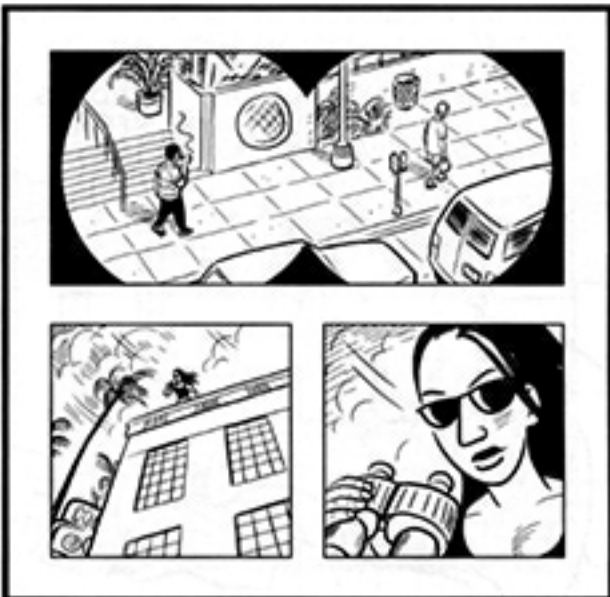
AN UNDERCOVER COP.

A HAPLESS DOOFUS.

A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN.

A SCRUFFY GUY.





THE NEXT TWO MOMENTS ARE FRAMED A BIT TOO CLOSE TO SHOW US EXACTLY WHAT IS BEING BOUGHT OR FOR HOW MUCH AND THE WORDS AREN'T VERY SPECIFIC EITHER. CHOICE OF FRAME AND CHOICE OF WORD ARE BOTH HOLDING OUT ON US!



BECAUSE OF THAT DELIBERATE LACK OF INFORMATION, WE ONLY KNOW WHAT CHARACTER A KNOWS. IN FACT, PANEL TWO HERE IS SHOT FROM A'S POINT OF VIEW, SO HIS DISCOVERY FEELS LIKE OUR OWN.



NOW, AS SOON AS WORDS ENTER, THE PICTURES ALONE WOULDN'T QUITE TELL THE WHOLE STORY.



NOTICE TOO HOW MANY OF THESE ACTION TO ACTION CHOICES ARE COMPOSED FOR LEFT-TO-RIGHT FLOW RESULTING IN A SENSE OF FORWARD MOMENTUM.



YET, WHEN CHARACTER A TURNS HIS HEAD AGAINST THE FLOW, IT HELPS PUT ON THE BRAKES JUST AS THE ACTION SLOWS DOWN.



OR -- AS HAPPENS NEXT --  
THE CAMERA CAN SHARE INFORMATION WITH  
READERS THAT CHARACTER A DOES NOT HAVE.  
SPECIFICALLY, THE AMOUNT OF MONEY B GOT,  
AND THE PRESENCE OF A GUN IN PANEL 4.



NOTICE HOW  
MOMENT, FRAME AND IMAGE  
ACCOMMODATE EACH OTHER: ADDING  
MOMENTS TO INCLUDE ANGLES WHICH  
REVEAL MEANINGFUL DETAILS.



NEXT, IT'S WORTH PULLING BACK THE  
FRAME, NOT FOR A NEW SCENE, BUT BECAUSE OUR  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCENE IS CHANGING.

ALSO WITH  
PHYSICAL CONFLICTS,  
THE LOCATIONS  
OF CHARACTERS  
MATTER.



HERE ALSO, WE SEE HOW WORDS AND PICTURES  
CAN OPERATE ON DIFFERENT PLANES: ONE  
RELAYING DIALOGUE THAT ALL CAN HEAR; THE  
OTHER SHOWING INFORMATION (THE AMOUNT OF  
MONEY) THAT ONLY SOME KNOW ABOUT.

GOTTA TAKE YOU  
BACK TO THE STATION

JUST A FEW  
QUESTIONS...



AND BY LETTING READERS "IN ON THE SECRET,"  
OUR CHOICE OF FRAME AND IMAGE MAY LEAVE  
THEM FEELING A BIT LIKE COLLABORATORS.



AND AS THE SCENERY STARTS SHIFTING FAST, IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE FRAMING THE ACTION WITH **LONG-SHOTS** AND **MIDDLE-SHOTS** TO ALLOW READERS TO TAKE IT ALL IN.



DUDE, IS SOMEONE STANDING ON THAT TRUCK?!



HAVING KEPT ALL FRAMES AT THE SAME HEIGHT TO THIS POINT, ADDING A **DOUBLE-HEIGHT** PANEL CAN CHANGE THE **FLOW** OF ACTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE A **VERTICAL** SHIFT.



AND FINALLY, A FEW **CLOSE-UPS** AS WE MOVE IN FOR SOME CHARACTERIZATION --



-- OR WHAT PASSES FOR IT WITH A **THROW-AWAY** STORY LIKE THIS ONE.\*



TO BE CONT... OH, NEVER MIND.

\* OBVIOUSLY, THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD STORYTELLING AND A GOOD STORY. I'M OFFERING THIS AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE FORMER ONLY.

**EXTREME  
DEPTH  
CUES.**

THE SENSE OF GREAT  
DISTANCES, EXTREME  
CLOSENESS AND THE  
CONTRAST BETWEEN  
THEM.



**WILD  
VARIATIONS OF  
FRAME  
SIZE AND  
SHAPE.**



**GRAPHIC CONTRAST.  
BOLD JUXTAPOSITIONS OF COLOR,  
SHAPE AND BRIGHTNESS.**



**EXAGGERATED POSES AND  
EXPRESSIONS!!**



**VIRTUOSO  
DRAWING  
TECHNIQUE.**



**BREAKING THE FOURTH WALL.  
BORDERLESS AND BORDER-BREAKING CHARACTERS  
AND OBJECTS.**



**DIAGONALS.  
TILTED SUBJECTS, ANGLES --**



NOW, THE WAY I'VE ILLUSTRATED THEM HERE, THESE QUALITIES MAY RECALL CERTAIN GENRES OF COMICS.



PARTICULARLY THOSE INVOLVING A HIGH INCIDENCE OF HITTING, BLEEDING, COLLISIONS, EXPLOSIONS OR PEOPLE SAYING "OH MY GOD, NO!" ON A REGULAR BASIS.

TAKE THAT!



SKREEE!

PREPARE TO FIRE!



OH MY GOD, NO!

BUT WHILE THE "EXAGGERATED POSES AND EXPRESSIONS" --



-- OR "VIRTUOSO DRAWING TECHNIQUES" OF OTHER GENRES MIGHT TAKE ON DIFFERENT FLAVORS --



-- THE BASIC EFFECT OF SUCH TECHNIQUES STAYS CONSTANT: ATTRACTING AND/OR EXCITING READERS AS SOON AS THEY PICK A COMIC OFF THE SHELF OR LOAD IT INTO THEIR BROWSER.



THIS IDEA OF ADDING A LITTLE PIZAZZ TO A STORYTELLER'S STYLE IS A TIME-HONORED TRADITION.



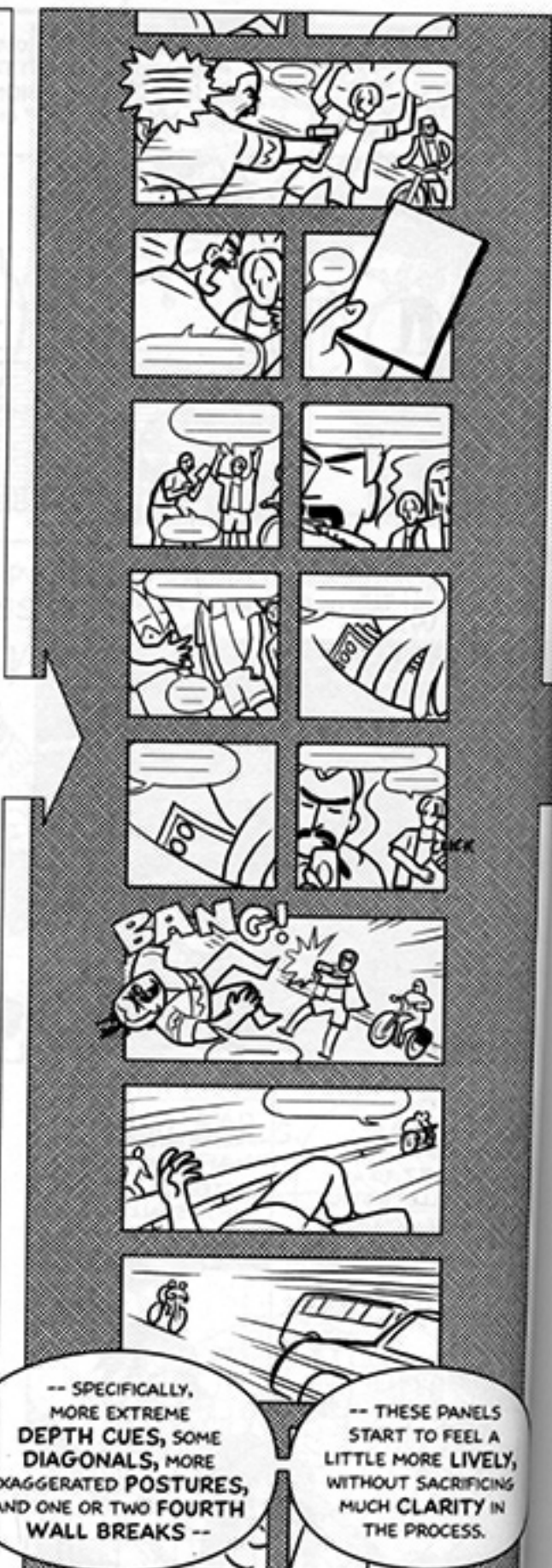
CLARITY WITHOUT ANY PRESENTATIONAL FLAIR WHATSOEVER CAN BE A BITTER PILL FOR SOME TO SWALLOW.



THING IS, WHILE CLARITY AND INTENSITY CAN GO HAND IN HAND, YOU CAN ONLY LEAN ON ONE SIDE SO HARD BEFORE THE OTHER STARTS TO SUFFER.








FOR EXAMPLE, IF WE TAKE THE BASIC COMPOSITIONS FOUND IN OUR SAMPLE STORY, AND APPLY EVEN A FEW OF THESE DYNAMIC EFFECTS --

-- SPECIFICALLY, MORE EXTREME DEPTH CUES, SOME DIAGONALS, MORE EXAGGERATED POSTURES, AND ONE OR TWO FOURTH WALL BREAKS --

-- THESE PANELS START TO FEEL A LITTLE MORE LIVELY, WITHOUT SACRIFICING MUCH CLARITY IN THE PROCESS.



BUT RAMP  
UP THOSE SAME ELEMENTS  
TOO MUCH AND YOU GET  
AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE  
JUMBLE.

IN SUCH CASES, THE  
INTENSITY OF THE  
WORK AS A WHOLE  
CAN ACTUALLY GO  
DOWN.



AFTER ALL, IF EVERY  
PANEL IS TURNED UP TO FULL  
VOLUME AT ALL TIMES, ANY  
HOPE OF DRAMATIC  
CONTRAST IS LOST!



IN FACT, THERE'S NO SINGLE LEVEL OF  
INTENSITY THAT'S LIKELY TO WORK IN EVERY PANEL.  
IT'S IN THE VARIATION BETWEEN PANELS THAT  
TRUE DYNAMIC EFFECTS ARE CREATED.



DEPTH CONTRAST



GRAPHIC CONTRAST



DIAGONALS



EXTREME POSES



4TH WALL BREAKS



FRAME VARIATION



SURFACE APPEAL



WHEN MAKING COMICS FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT'S TEMPTING TO TRY TO MAKE EVERY MOMENT OF A STORY HIT LIKE A THUNDERSTORM.

BUT JUST AS A THUNDERCLOUD NEEDS TIME TO GROW AND GATHER STRENGTH BEFORE THE RAIN --

-- COMICS STORIES NEED TIME TO BUILD ON THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPECTATIONS OF READERS BEFORE THEY CAN DELIVER THEIR STRONGEST MOMENTS.



READERS CRAVE DRAMATIC CHANGES, BUT TO HIGHLIGHT CHANGE REQUIRES AN UNCHANGING POINT OF REFERENCE.



THE FIXED, QUIET BACKGROUND SETS THE STAGE FOR THE CACOPHONOUS INTRUDER.



THE FIXED CAMERA ANGLE DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE ZOOM.



THE FIXED THREE-BY-THREE PANEL GRID PREPARES FOR THE IMPACT OF THE FULL-PAGE PANEL.




AND THE FIXED MIDDLE GROUND SHOT CONTRIBUTES TO THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE CLOSE-UP.




-- AND THEN STRIKE LIKE LIGHTNING WHEN IT COUNTS.






FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN **INTENSITY** AND **CLARITY** IS MORE THAN JUST A PRACTICAL CHALLENGE.


**INTENSITY**                      **CLARITY**




IT ECHOES A BROADER **PHILOSOPHICAL DIVIDE** IN COMICS CULTURE --




-- BETWEEN THE JOY OF TELLING STORIES WITH A STRONG **PERSONAL FLAIR**, MAKING OLD STORIES SEEM **NEW**, TAKING READERS ON A **THRILLING RIDE** AND CELEBRATING **VIRTUOSITY OF TECHNIQUE** --



-- AND THE BELIEF THAT THE STORIES MOST **WORTH TELLING** CAN BE TOLD WITHOUT ANY BELLS AND WHISTLES; THAT THE **CHARACTERS AND EVENTS** IN A STORY WILL BE REASON ENOUGH TO KEEP READING, IF THE PRESENTATION IS **CLEAR AND EFFECTIVE**.



COMICS HAS SEEN PLENTY OF GREAT TALENTS ON **BOTH ENDS** OF THE SCALE. THERE'S NO "RIGHT" CHOICE.



BUT WHICHEVER SIDE YOU PLAN TO LEAN TOWARD --

-- THE PRINCIPLES OF **PURE, CLEAR STORYTELLING** SHOULD BE YOUR **STARTING POINT**.