

MATE PD DAY 2017

GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMICS

STUDIES IN THE CLASSROOM

(SY)

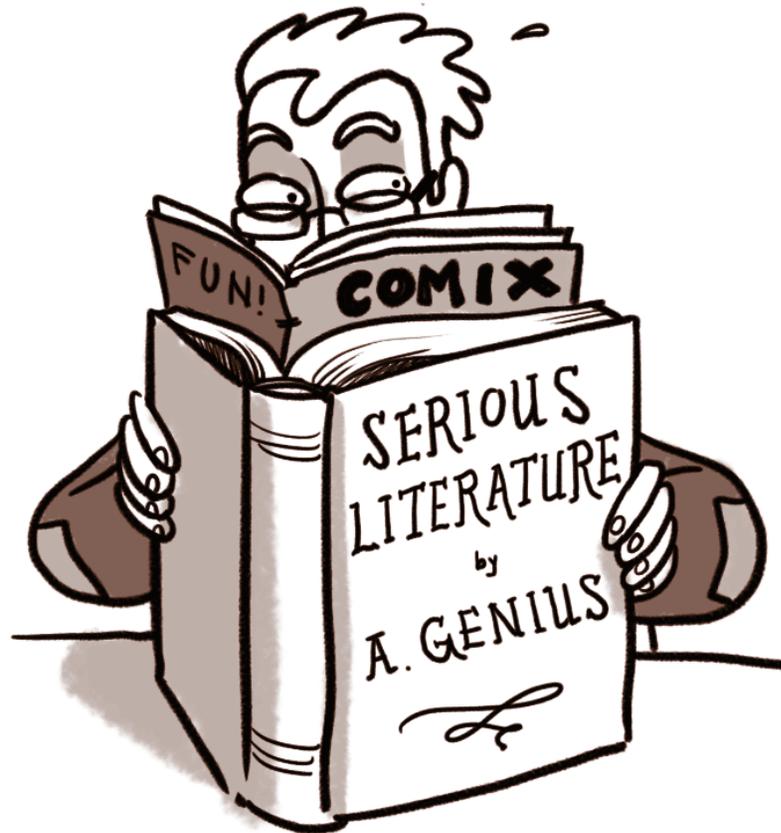
**Dr. Candida Rifkind, Department of English,
University of Winnipeg
c.rifkind@uwinnipeg.ca**

OUTLINE

1. Definitions
2. What is comics studies?
3. Why use graphic storytelling in the classroom?
4. Critical skills: terminology



PERCEPTION OF COMICS



CASUAL USE OF TERMINOLOGY

comics vs. graphic novels vs. graphic narratives



COMICS STUDIES TERMINOLOGY

- **Comics** (generally *singular*, despite the *s*) = the medium.
- A **comic** = any complete work in the comics medium, regardless of genre or length. Rather like “film” or “poem.”
- A **comic book** = any complete work made in the comics medium that is long enough to involve several pages of material or have a collective title.
- A **graphic novel** = a complete work of fiction in the comics form which, if printed, is long enough to be bound as a trade volume, so with a glued or sewn spine. It is a novel, just as *Jane Eyre* is a novel, but it is told in comics, not prose.
- a **graphic narrative** = a complete work of either fiction or non-fiction (the line is often blurred) in the form of comics.

Source: “How Not To Write Comics Criticism”

<http://www.dylanmeconis.com/how-not-to-write-comics-criticism/>



LET'S BE MORE PRECISE IN DEFINING COMICS:

- sequence of images placed in relation to each other on the page
- may or may not contain words but usually contains pictures
- written with the intention of being a comic
- uses the art form of cartooning, although there are many different styles
- generally uses panels and gutters (as opposed to picture books, for example)



WHAT IS COMICS STUDIES?

- Scholarly study of comics & graphic novels
- 1996 = publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* changes perceptions of storytelling in graphic form
- Around 2000 = beginnings of comics studies in universities and colleges
 - usually as part of existing Humanities fields and courses, eg. English, History, Women's and Gender Studies, Media Studies, Rhetoric and Composition, Education, etc.
- Around 2010 = dedicated courses and degree programs

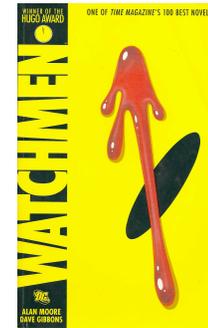
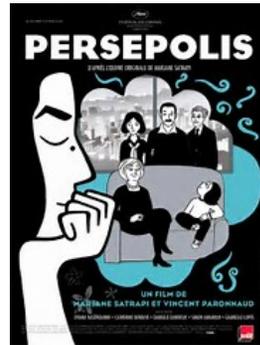
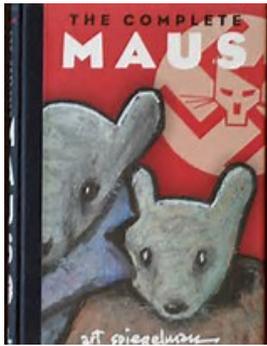


WHAT IS COMICS STUDIES?

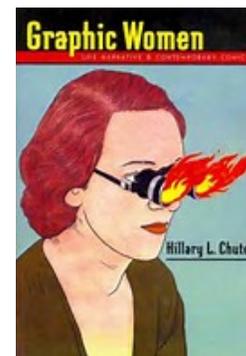
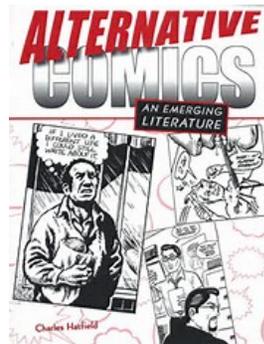
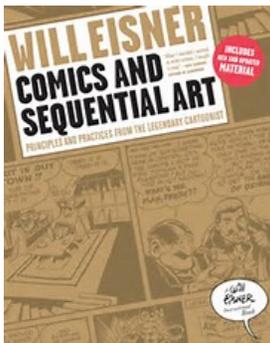
- Diverse field (“indiscipline” rather than a discipline)
- Multiple disciplinary approaches from literary studies to film studies to communication to neuroscience
- Multiple methodologies, for instance:
 - formalist (technique)
 - cultural studies (text within cultural contexts)
 - audience studies (reception)
 - adaptation studies (both ways: comics adapting existing works and adaptations of comics into film or theatre)
- Scholars sometimes also creators, fans have knowledge to share with academics



MOST STUDIED COMICS IN ACADEMIA



LANDMARK WORKS IN COMICS STUDIES



COMICS STUDIES RESEARCH: ORGANIZATIONS

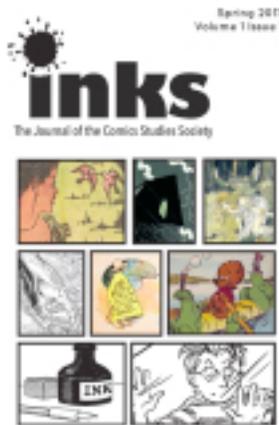
Canadian Society for the Study of Comics/La Société canadienne pour l'étude de la bande dessinée.

The screenshot shows the website for the Canadian Society for the Study of Comics (CSSC) and the Société canadienne pour l'étude de la bande dessinée (SCEBD). The navigation menu at the top includes: CSSC/SCEBD, ABOUT US, CONFERENCES, MEMBERSHIP, CONTACT, ACCUEIL, À PROPOS DE NOUS, CONFÉRENCES, ADHÉSION, CONTACTEZ NOUS, and CSSC/SCEBD CONSTITUTION. The main content area features a logo with the text 'CSSC CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF COMICS' and 'SCEBD SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE POUR L'ÉTUDE DE LA BANDE DESSINÉE'. Below the logo is a blog post titled 'CSSC CONFERENCE MAY 11-12 IN TORONTO' dated May 2, 2017. The post text reads: 'The annual conference and the Toronto Comic Arts Festival are fast approaching, and here's what's up! At the bottom of this post you'll find an up-to-date full programme for the conference (please note that some panels have changed and all panels will be held at the Marriott Bloor Yorkville); take a look and see what's in store! Here are a few highlights: Keynote by Rebecca Wanzo: Wanzo, associate professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Washington University in St. Louis'. A search bar and a 'RECENT POSTS' section are also visible on the right side of the page.



COMICS STUDIES RESEARCH: ORGANIZATIONS

- Comics Studies Society



The image is a screenshot of the Comics Studies Society website. At the top, there is a dark blue navigation bar with the following links: 'Comics Studies Society', 'Membership', 'Grad Caucus', 'Journal', 'Support / Shop', 'Documents', 'Resources / Events', and 'Contact'. Below the navigation bar is a large banner with the text 'THE COMICS STUDIES SOCIETY' in a stylized, yellow, outlined font. The banner features a comic book illustration of a muscular man in a blue suit with a yellow and red belt, flying through the air towards a group of people. Below the banner are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. The main content area has the heading 'Election (April 2017)' followed by a blue speech bubble icon and a paragraph of text: 'Our third annual election for the Society's Board positions is now live. We hope you'll take some time to review the robust list of nominees and cast your vote for those individuals you feel are best able to lead our Society forward. In this election cycle, you will be selecting one Second Vice President (who will rotate through to become the Society's President), one Executive Secretary, and two Members at Large. Thank you for your help in building the CSS to be a strong, diverse, and interdisciplinary organization for all of us who are interested in promoting thoughtful attention to comics.'



COMICSRESEARCH.ORG

BLOG / NEWS / UPDATES
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Comics in General
Academic Resources
Anthologies
Cartoonists
Collecting Guides
Countries / Regions
Genres / Kinds of Comics
How-To Guides
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Periodicals
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Introduction

ComicsResearch.org primarily covers book-length works about comic books and comic strips, from "fannish" histories to academic monographs, providing detailed information and guidance on further research. Each entry will include the book's Table of Contents as well as (if applicable) a list of comics works reprinted in it (and their sources, sometimes undocumented), other general notes on content and organization, ISBN numbers, and reviews—either included on these pages, listed from print sources, or linked to from on-line sources. Books in any language, about comics from any country, are included. If you would like to suggest additional titles to include, or if you have a review that you'd like to contribute, please [contact us](#).

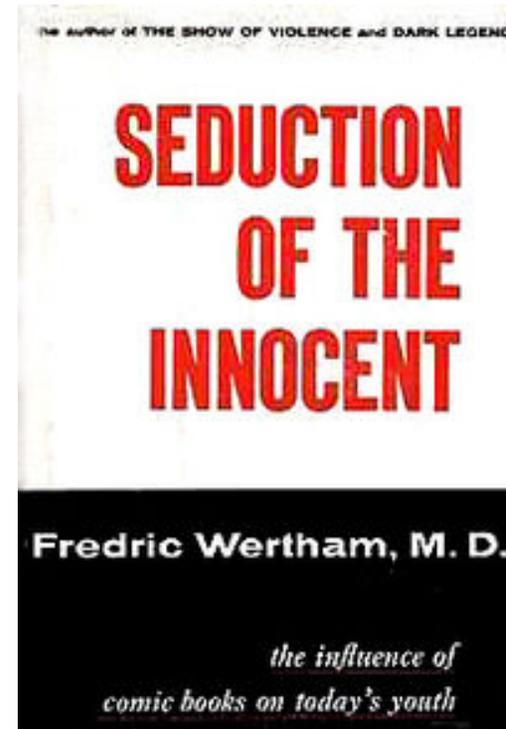
ComicsResearch.org Subject Categories

- [Comics in General](#): General works on comics.
- [Academic Resources](#): Information on schools, conferences, journals, and more.
- [Anthologies](#): Anthologies of comics which include substantial introductory essays, books which generally reproduce "classic" or otherwise significant comics.
- [Cartoonists](#): Works on individual cartoonists.
- [Collecting Guides](#): Usually focus on the investment value of comic books, but which often include historical essays and related matter.
- [Countries](#): Works on comics produced in specific countries.
- [Genres of Comics](#): Works about specific comics genres.
- [How-To Guides](#): Books for the aspiring cartoonist, artist, writer, publisher, etc.
- [Interview Collections](#): Collections of interviews with comics professionals.
- [News About Comics](#): Links to on-line sources for news about comics.



THE GREAT MYTHS ABOUT COMICS = THEY ARE “EASY” AND “BAD”

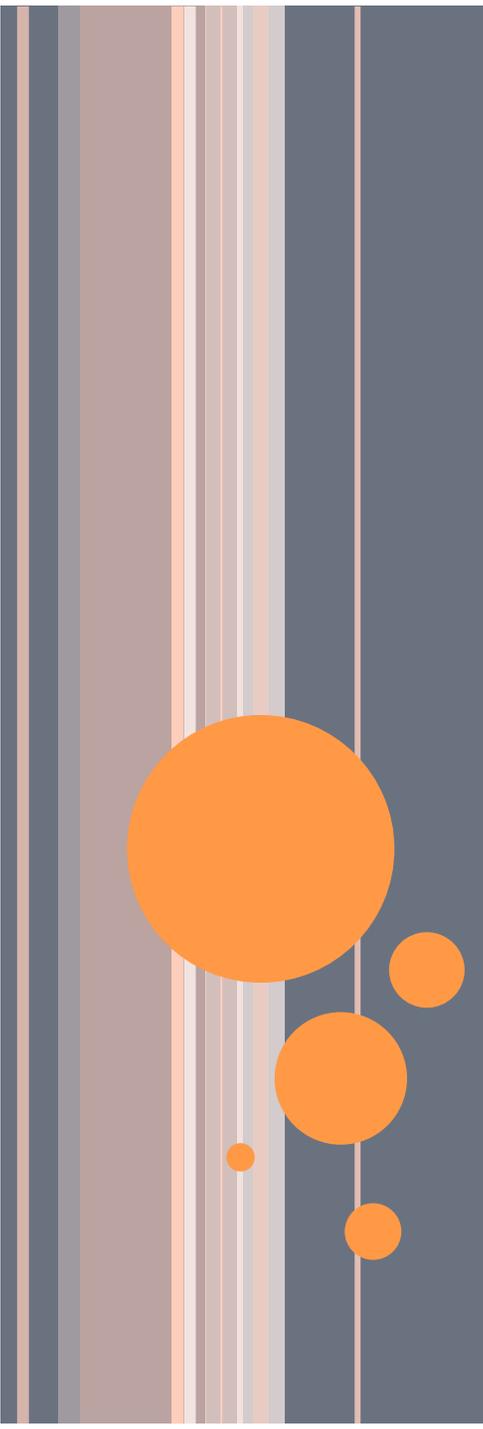
- **myth 1: comics are only aids to “higher” literacy**
- **myth 2: comics are disreputable forms of pop culture that corrupt youth**



COMICS ARE NOT “EASY”

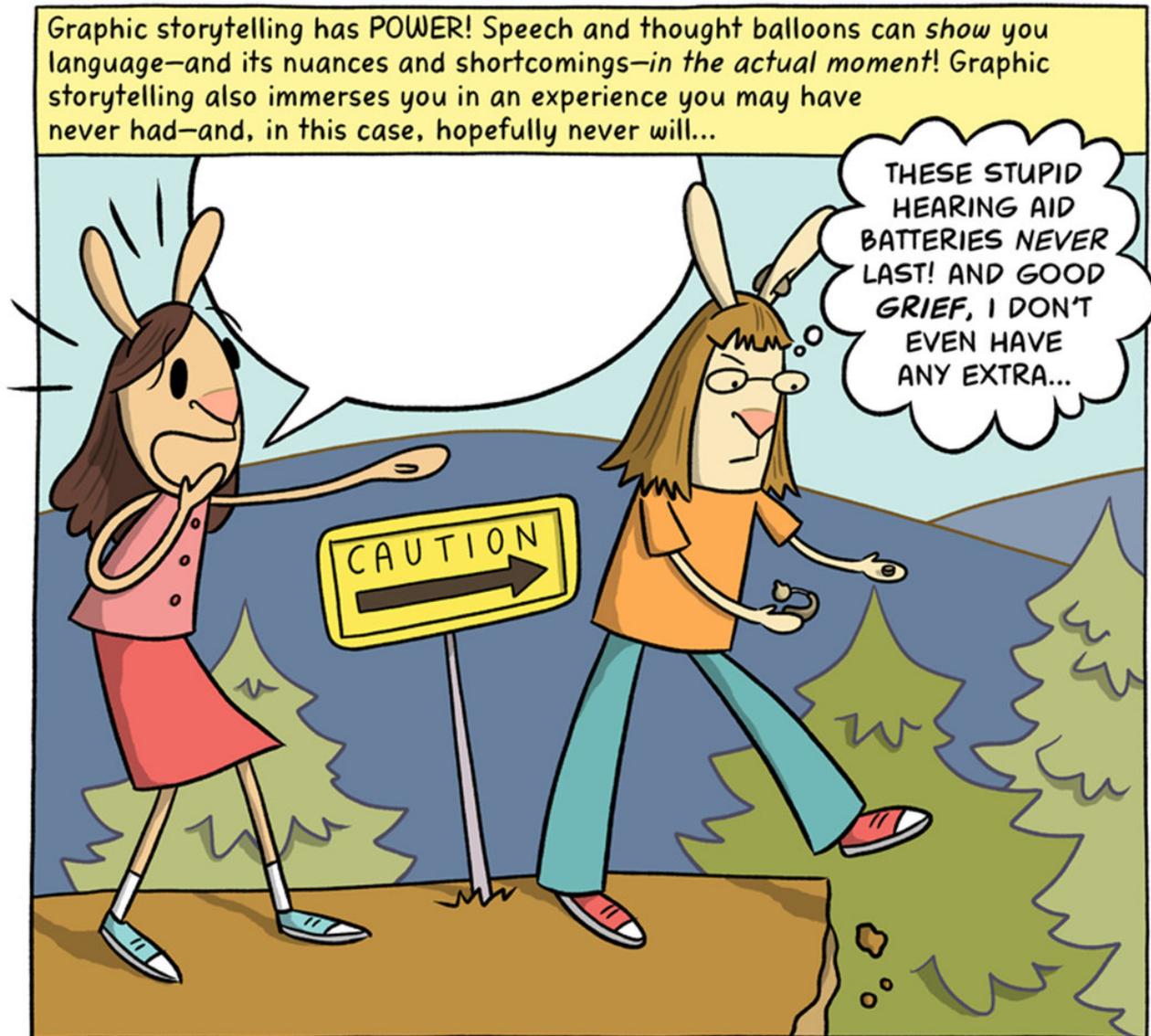
- **complex form of communication that uses multiple codes**
- **visual & verbal systems appear simultaneously**
- **reader must decode them individually & in relation to each other**
- **comics are also fragmented units of meaning**
- **reader must piece together the information in each little box and organize it into a story**
- **THE READER IS AN ACTIVE AGENT IN CREATING MEANING**





**WHY USE GRAPHIC
STORYTELLING
IN THE CLASSROOM?**

“The Comics Artist Challenge”, *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, OCT. 13, 2015



CECE BELL is the author of the graphic novel *El Deafo*, a Newbery Honor winner.



“The Comics Artist Challenge”, *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, OCT. 13, 2015



JILLIAN TAMAKI is a cartoonist and illustrator living in Toronto.



**Comics studies:
as easy & as hard as answering
the question
“WHAT DO YOU SEE?”**



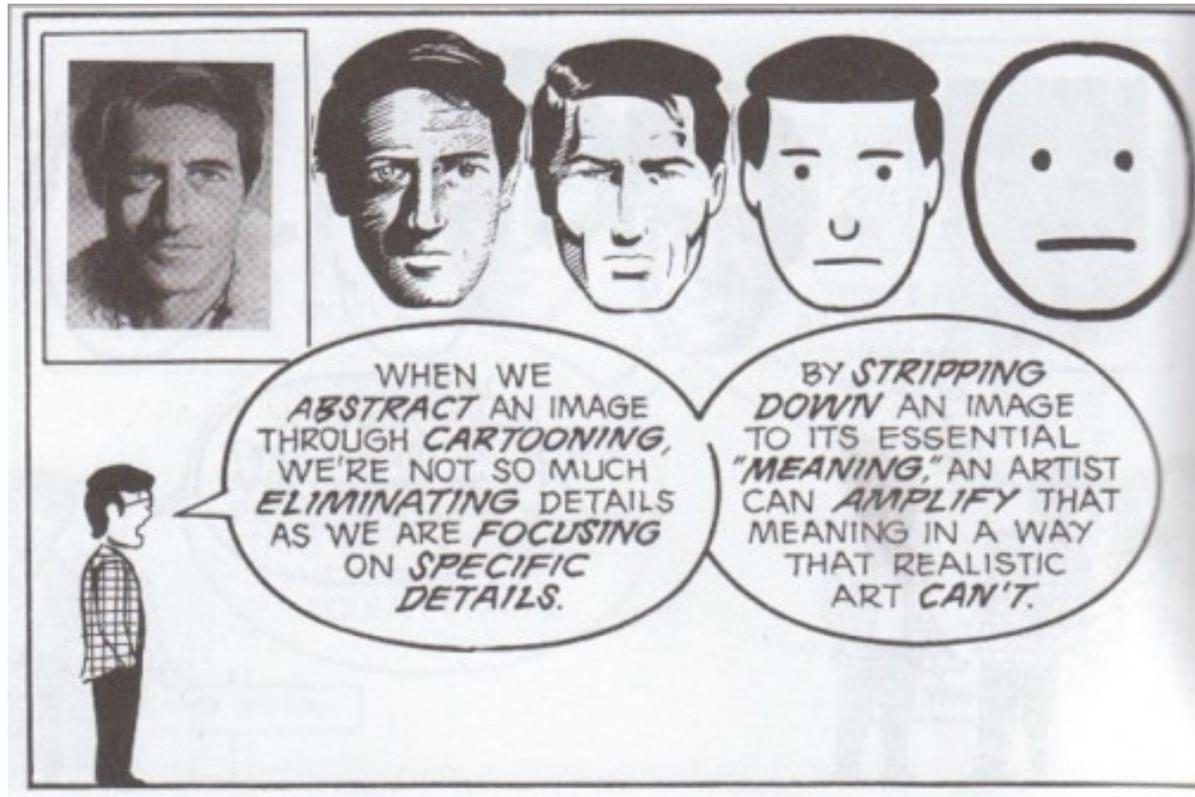
COMICS USE VISUAL METAPHORS



In *Epileptic*, David B. draws the story of growing up with a brother who has epilepsy



ALL COMICS SHARE THE ART OF CARTOONING, OR “AMPLIFICATION THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION”



SCOTT MCCLOUD ON CARTOONING (FROM *UNDERSTANDING COMICS*)

“cartooning [is] a form of *amplification through simplification*. When we *abstract* an image through cartooning, we are not so much *eliminating* details as we are *focusing* on *specific details*. By *stripping down* an image to its essential ‘*meaning*,’ an artist can *amplify* that meaning in a way that realistic art *can’t*” (30).

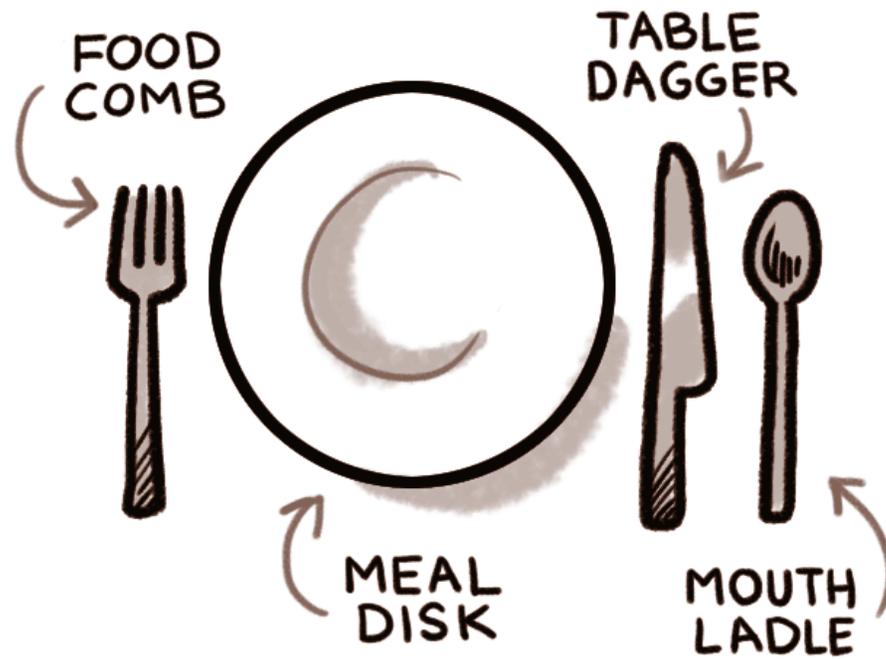


RECAP: COMICS ARE COMPLEX

- **pictures + words**
 - elements of comics
- **pictorial + verbal**
 - sign systems of comics
- **reading + looking**
 - reading process of comics
- each requires decoding on its own and then in relation to the other



COMICS STUDIES CRITICAL SKILLS: TERMINOLOGY



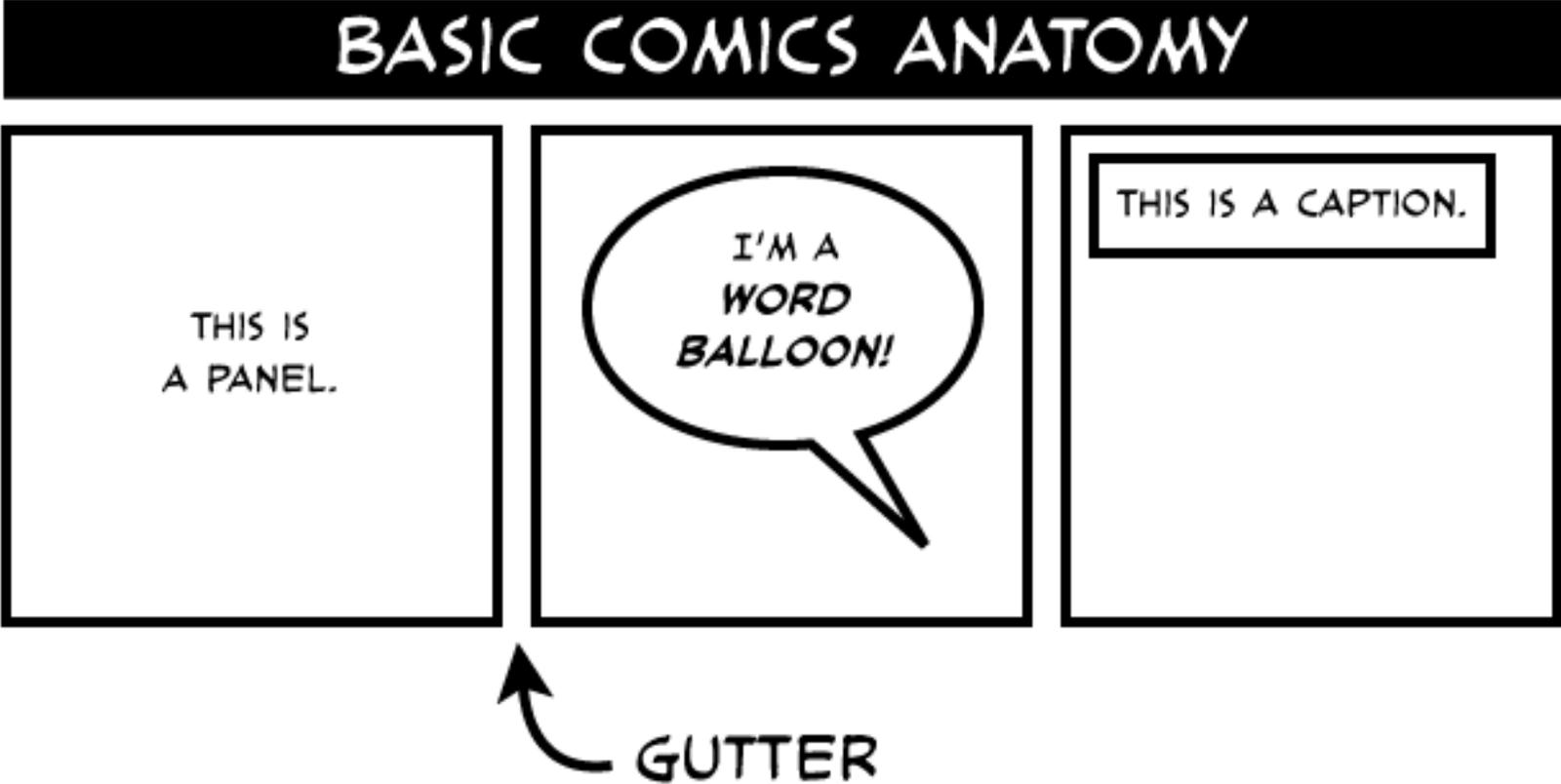
BASIC COMICS ANATOMY

THIS IS
A PANEL.

I'M A
WORD
BALLOON!

THIS IS A CAPTION.

GUTTER



1. PANEL

- single drawing or frame that is in sequence on the page (usually between 6 and 9 on page)
- when regular and linear units in sequence, referred to as the comics grid
- like “stills” in film or “frozen moments” in photographs
- one portion of the narrative
- language acts as a timer in panels
- wordless panels read as a pause
- reader in control of the speed of the page (vs. film)



COMICS OFTEN USE A GRID LAYOUT



a nine panel
regular grid in
Marjane
Satrapi's
Persepolis



IRREGULAR OR BROKEN GRIDS CONVEY MEANING TOO



Uncanny X-Men Annual #1 (Sorrentino/
Marvel)

Sorrentino is telling the story of a mutant named Eva Bell with the power to travel through time. But Eva isn't quite in control of her powers, so Sorrentino creates chaos, shattering panels and having them bleed into one another. By the time Eva has grasped a little bit of control (the bottom of the page), order is restored.

See: Vox.com "How to Read a Comic Book"

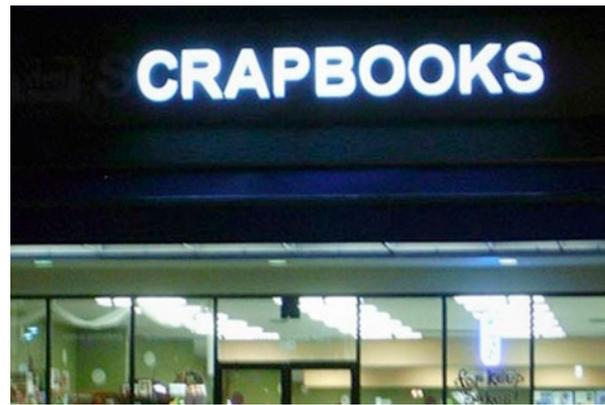
KEY CONCEPT: THE GUTTER



- the place where the reader's imagination fills in the gaps left by the cartoonist (the immersive experience)
- process of performing comics reading in this way = closure
- what narrative can you construct from these two panels? Let's hear them!



CLOSURE HAPPENS ALL THE TIME



closure = “the phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 63)



GUTTER =
SPACIALIZES TIME ON THE PAGE

“Each panel is a moment of time. And then the gutter is the time occurring, and the next panel is what happens after that time's occurred.”

-- Christian Ward qtd. in “How To Read a Comic Book” at Vox.com



READER AS ACCOMPLICE IN MAKING MEANING

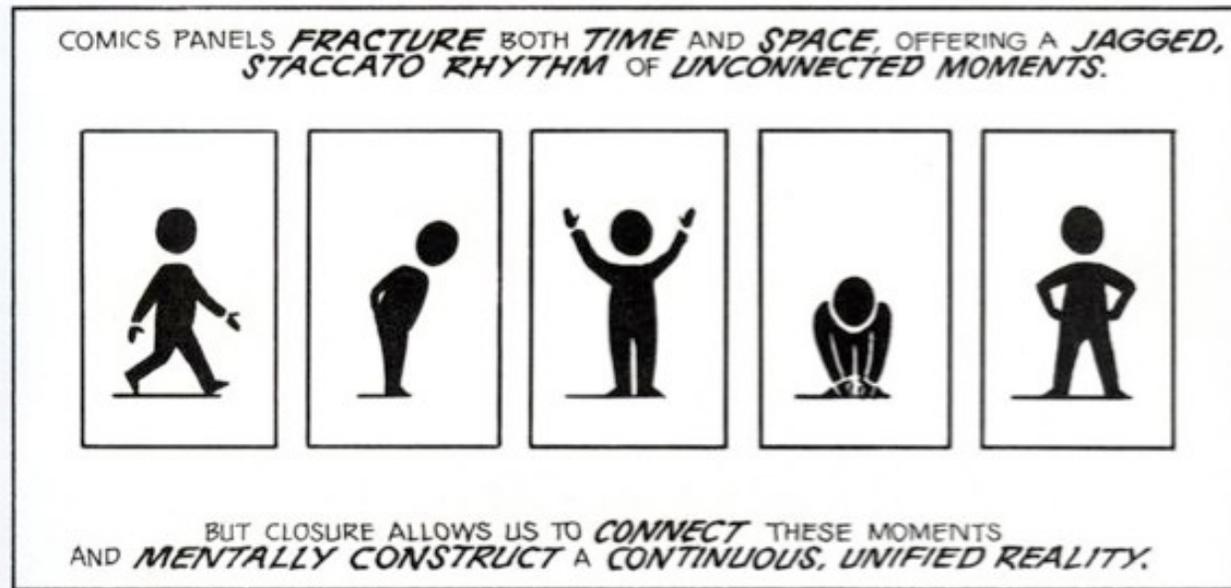


McCloud,
*Understanding
Comics* 68

What information does the reader project into the gutter to make sense of the narrative?



CLOSURE = MULTIPLE INTERPRETIVE POSSIBILITIES

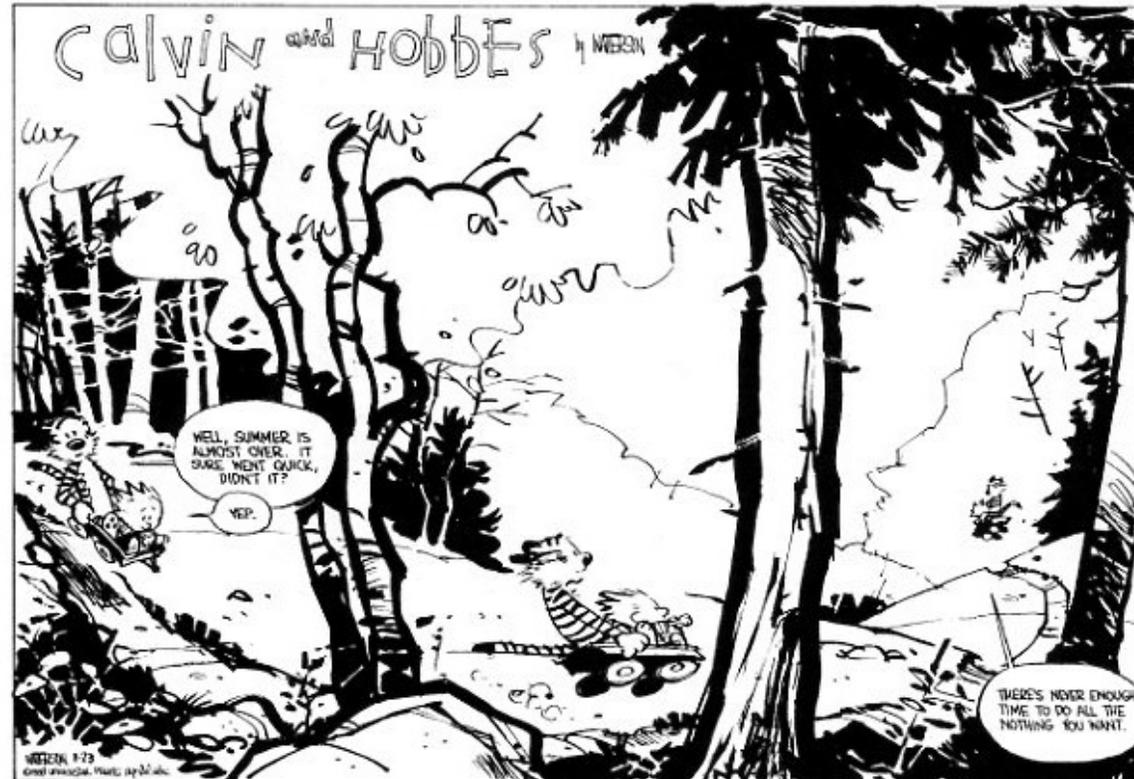


what narratives can you construct from this sequence?

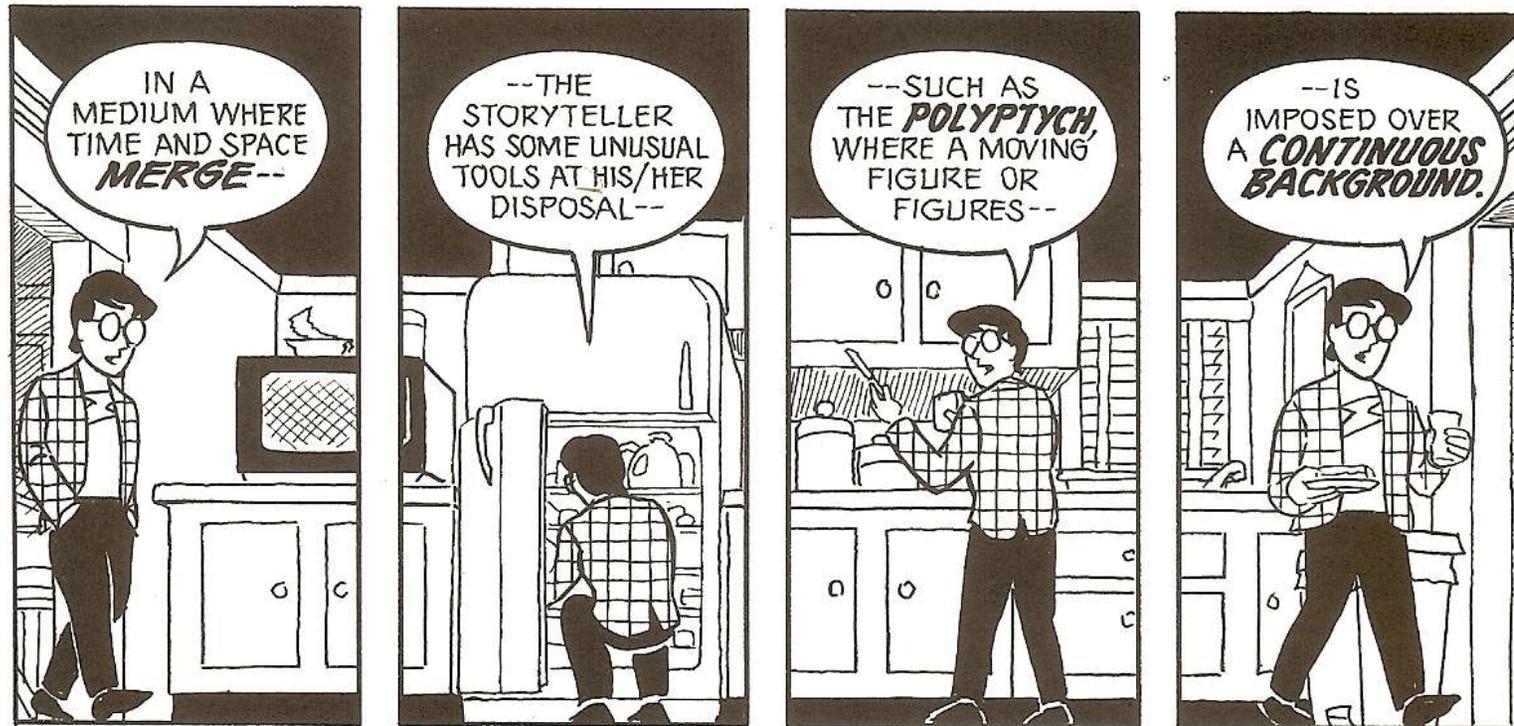


MULTIPLE ACTIONS CAN EXIST WITHIN ONE PANEL (SYNCHRONISM)

Reproduced in
Hatfield, *Alternative
Comics* (54)



MULTIPLE PANELS CAN DIVIDE CONTINUOUS BACKGROUND (POLYPTYCH)

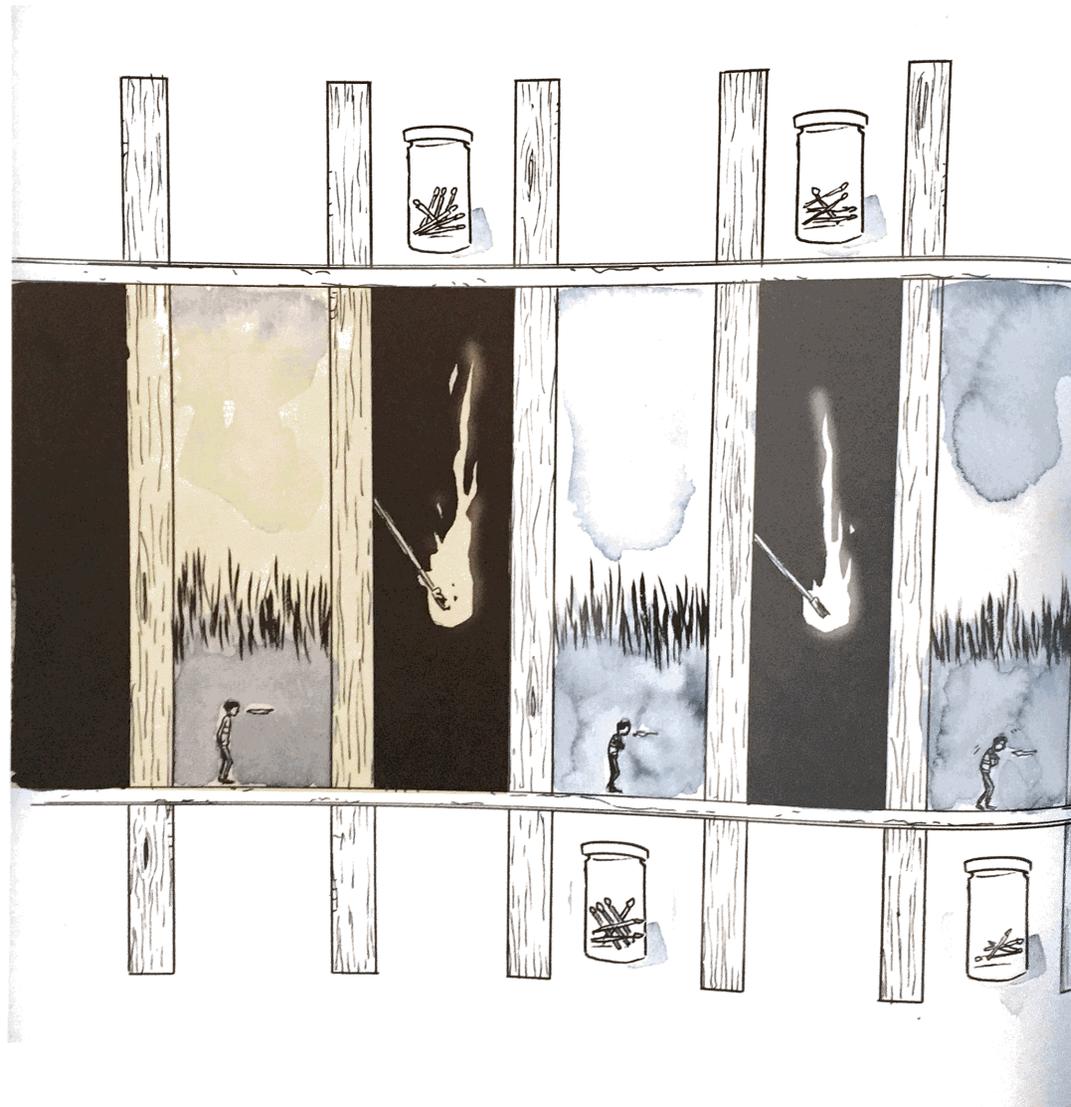


McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (115)



GUTTERS MAY BE PICTORIAL ELEMENTS TOO

From
*Secret
Path,*
Gord
Downie
and Jeff
Lemire



3. BALLOON

- space that contains the verbal text
- may be a speech balloon or a thought balloon
- variations in shape may be significant



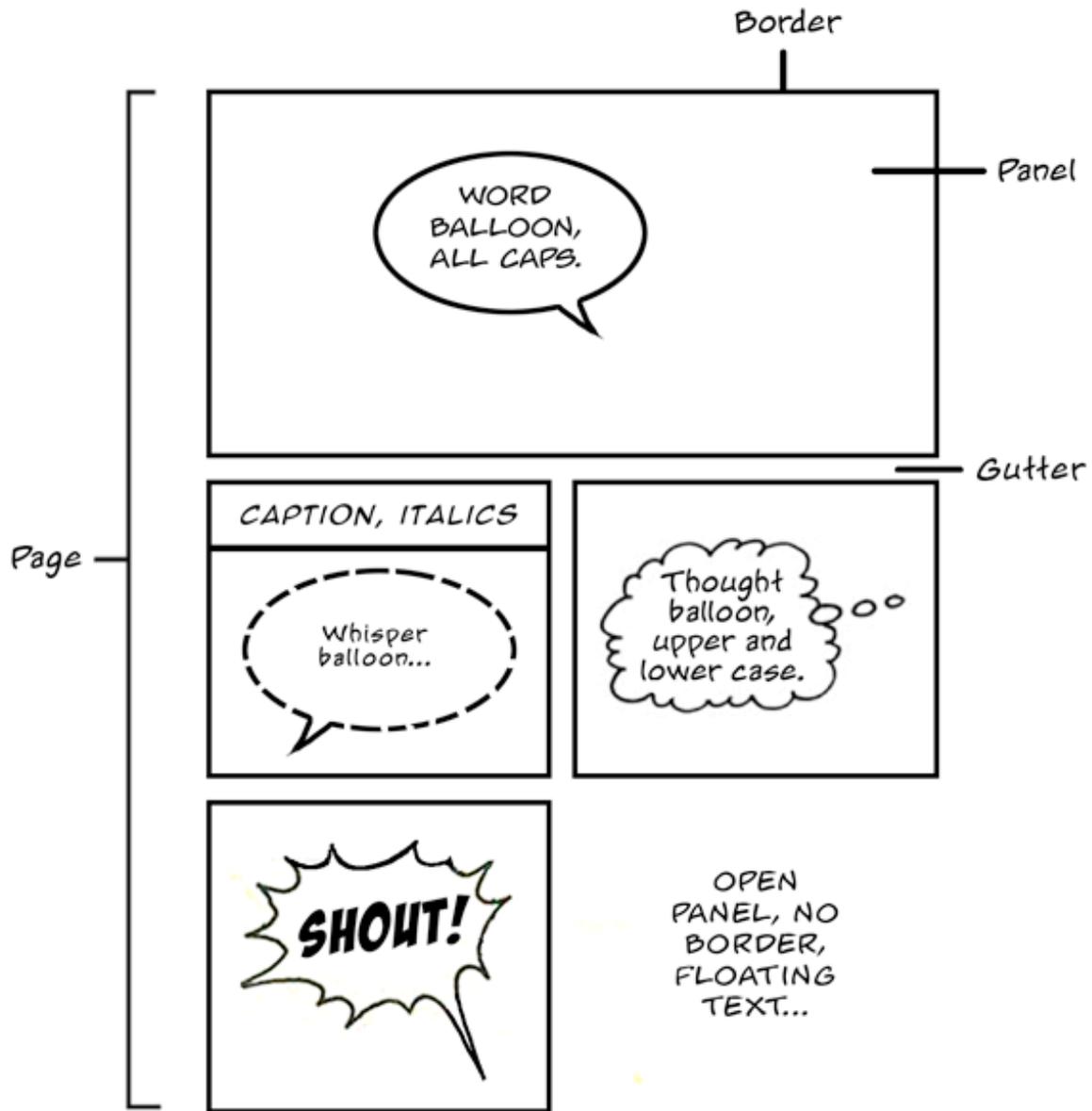
FROM *SECRET PATH*,
GORD DOWNIE AND JEFF LEMIRE



4. CAPTION

- other linguistic element of comics
- not inside the panel but on top or bottom
- equivalent to a film voice-over or narration
- voice of the artist, narrator, or external authority?
- different time-space from the action of the comic?
- WHO IS SPEAKING?
- WHERE DO THEY EXIST: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE?





THE VISUAL GRAMMAR OF COMICS: EMANATA (SIGNS TO CONVEY EMOTION)

