COMICS & SEQUENTIAL ART

by

Will Eisner

EXPANDED EDITION
PRINT AND COMPUTER
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FORWARD

This work is intended to consider and examine the unique aesthetics of Sequential Art as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea. It is studied here within the framework of its application to comic books and comic strips, where it is universally employed.

This ancient form of art, or method of expression, has found its way to the widely read comic strips and books which have established an undeniable position in the popular culture of this century. It is interesting to note that Sequential Art has only recently emerged as a discernible discipline alongside film making, to which it is truly a forerunner.

For reasons having much to do with usage and subject matter Sequential Art has been generally ignored as a form worthy of scholarly discussion. While each of the major integral elements, such as design, drawing, caricature and writing, have separately found academic consideration, this unique combination has received a very minor place (if any) in either the literary or art curriculum. I believe that the reason for this sits as much on the shoulders of the practitioner as the critic.

Certainly, thoughtful pedagogical concern would provide a better climate for the production of more worthy subject content and the expansion of the medium as a whole. But unless comics address subjects of greater moment how can they hope for serious intellectual review? Great artwork alone is not enough.

The premise of this book is that the special nature of Sequential Art is deserving of serious consideration by both critic and practitioner. The modern acceleration of graphic technology and the emergence of an era greatly dependent on visual communication makes this inevitable.

This work was originally written as a series of essays that appeared randomly in *The Spirit* magazine. They were an outgrowth of my teaching a course in Sequential Art at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Organizing the syllabus for this course brought into sharp focus the fact that
during most of my professional life, I had been dealing with a medium more demanding of diverse skills and intellect than either I or my contemporaries fully appreciated. Traditionally, most practitioners with whom I worked and talked produced their art viscerally. Few ever had the time or the inclination to diagnose the form itself. In the main they were content to concentrate on the development of their draftmanship and their perception of the audience and the demands of the marketplace.

As I began to dismantle the complex components, addressed the elements hitherto regarded as ‘instinctive’ and tried to examine the parameters of this art form, I found that I was involved with an ‘art of communication’ more than simply an application of art.

It is always difficult to allocate fairly credit for the assistance one gets in a work of this kind because much of it comes indirectly. To Tom Inge, who encouraged the idea of this effort at the inception and Catherine Yronwode, who contributed generous and thoughtful editorial support, my gratitude. To the hundreds of students I have had the pleasure of working with during my 15 years at The School Of Visual Arts, my appreciation. It was in the process of trying to serve their eager interest and learning demands that I was able to develop the structure of this book.
CHAPTER 1

‘COMICS’ AS A FORM OF READING

In modern times the daily newspaper strip, and more recently the comic book, provide the major outlet for sequential art. As the form’s potential has become more apparent, better quality and more expensive production have been introduced. This, in turn, has resulted in slick full-color publications that appeal to a more sophisticated audience, while black-and-white comic books printed on good paper have found their own constituency. Comics continue to grow as a valid form of reading.

The first comic books (circa 1934) generally contained a random collection of short features. Now, after almost 50 years, the appearance of complete ‘graphic novels’ has, more than anything else, brought into focus the parameters of their structure. When one examines a comic book feature as a whole, the deployment of its unique elements takes on the characteristic of a language. The vocabulary of Sequential Art has been in continuous development in America. From the first appearance of comic strips in the daily press at the turn of the century, this popular reading form found a wide audience and in particular was a part of the early literary diet of most young people. Comics communicate in a ‘language’ that relies on a visual experience common to both creator and audience. Modern readers can be expected to have an easy understanding of the image-word mix and the traditional deciphering of text. Comics can be called ‘reading’ in a wider sense than that term is commonly applied.

Tom Wolf, writing in the Harvard Educational Review (August 1977) summarized it this way:
“For the last hundred years, the subject of reading has been connected quite directly to the concept of literacy; . . . learning to read . . . has meant learning to read words. . . . But . . . reading has gradually come under closer scrutiny. Recent research has shown that the reading of words is but a subset of a much more general human activity which includes symbol decoding, information integration and organization. . . . Indeed, reading — in the most general sense — can be thought of as a form of perceptual activity. The reading of words is one manifestation of this activity; but there are many others — the reading of pictures, maps, circuit diagrams, musical notes . . .”

For the past 53 years, modern comic book artists have been developing in their craft the interplay of word and image. They have in the process, I believe, achieved a successful cross-breeding of illustration and prose.

The format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (eg. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (eg. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading of the comic book is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit.

To conclude, Wolf’s reconsideration of reading is an important reminder that the psychological processes involved in viewing a word and an image are analogous. The structures of illustration and of prose are similar.

In its most economical state, comics employ a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols. When these are used again and again to convey similar ideas, they become a language — a literary form, if you will. And it is this disciplined application that creates the ‘grammar’ of Sequential Art.

As an example, consider the concluding page from the Spirit story, “Gerhard Shnobble,” the story of a man who is determined to reveal to the world his ability to fly, only to be shot down by a stray bullet, his secret sealed forever by his pointless death. (See page 9.)

The concluding page depicts the death of Gerhard, as he is hit by a stray bullet from a shoot-out on a rooftop. The first panel presents the reader with the climax of the story.
AND SO... LIFLESS...
GERHARD SHNOBBLE FLUTTERED EARTHWARD.

BUT DO NOT WEEP FOR SHNOBBLE...

RATHER SHED A TEAR FOR ALL MANKIND...

FOR NOT ONE PERSON IN THE ENitre CROWD THAT WATCHED HIS BODY BEING CARTED AWAY...KNEW OR EVEN SUSPECTED THAT ON THIS DAY GERHARD SHNOBBLE HAD FLOWN.
A description of the action in this panel can be diagrammed like a sentence. The predicates of the gun-shooting and the wrestling belong to separate clauses. The subject of “gun-shooting” is the crook, and Gerhard is the object direct. The many modifiers include the adverb “Bang, Bang” and the adjectives of visual language, such as posture, gesture, and grimace.

The second panel concludes the subplot, and again uses the language of the body and the staging of graphic design to delineate the predicates.

The final transition requires the reader to break from the convention of the left-to-right sequence. The eye follows the air stream down past a nebulous background, onto the solid body on the ground; and then bounces back upward to view the half-tone cloud in which Gerhard is resurrected. This bounce is unique to the visual narrative. The reader must implicitly use a knowledge of physical laws (i.e. gravity, gases) to ‘read’ this passage.

The accompanying text adds some unillustrated thoughts hand-lettered in a style that is consistent with the sentiment that its message conveys. The visual treatment of words as graphic art forms is part of the vocabulary.

TEXT READS AS AN IMAGE

Lettering, treated ‘graphically’ and in the service of the story, functions as an extension of the imagery. In this context it provides the mood, a narrative bridge, and the implication of sound. In the following extract from a graphic novel, Contract With God, the use of, and treatment of text as a “block” is employed in a manner which conforms to such a discipline.
The 'meaning' of the title is conveyed by the employment of a commonly recognized configuration of a tablet. A stone is employed — rather than parchment or paper, for example, to imply permanence and evoke the universal recognition of Moses' 10 commandments on a stone tablet. Even the mix of the lettering style — Hebraic vs. a condensed Roman letter — is designed to buttress this feeling.

All day
the rain
poured
down on
the Bronx
without mercy

The sewers overflowed
and the waters rose
over the curbs of the street.

Here, the lettering is employed to support the 'climate.' Designing the typeface to permit it to be drenched by the rain, converts the normally mechanical aspect of type into supportive involvement in the imagery.
Another example of how text rendered in concert with the art shows how the ‘reading’ of it can be influenced. In the following page from *The Spirit’s Case Book of True Ghost Stories*, the dialogue executed in a certain manner tells the reader how the author wishes it to sound. In the process it evokes a specific emotion and modifies the image.

*I CAME TO YOUR HOUSE AS A FRIEND AND YOU MURDERED ME!... FOR THIS MAY YOUR PEOPLE BE PARALYZED BY THE STAIN OF MY BLOOD*

Compare this lettering style and treatment with the example on page 11. Here, the effect of terror, implication of violence (blood) and anger brings the text into direct involvement.
CHAPTER 2

IMAGERY

‘Comics’ deal with two major communicating devices, words and images. Admittedly this is an arbitrary separation. But, since in the modern world of communication they are treated as independent disciplines it seems valid. Actually, they are derivatives of a single origin and in the skillful employment of words and images lies the expressive potential of the medium.

This special mix of two distinct forms is not new. Their juxtaposition has been experimented with from earliest times. The inclusion of inscriptions employed as statements by the people depicted in medieval paintings was generally abandoned after the 16th century. Thereafter the efforts by the artists who sought to convey statements that went beyond decoration or portraiture were confined to facial expressions, postures, and symbolistic backdrops. The use of inscriptions reappeared in broadsheets and popular publications in the 18th century. Now the artists who dealt in story-bearing art for the mass audience sought to create a gestalt, some cohesive language, as the vehicle for the expression of a complexity of thoughts, sounds, actions, and ideas in a sequenced arrangement separated by boxes. This stretched the capabilities of simple imagery. In the process the modern narrative artform, which we call comics (and the French call Bande Dessinee) evolved.

IMAGERY AS A COMMUNICATOR

Comprehension of an image requires a commonality of experience. This demands of the sequential artist an understanding of the reader’s life experience if his message is to be understood. An interaction has to develop because the artist is evoking images stored in the minds of both parties.
The success or failure of this method of communicating depends upon the ease with which the reader recognizes the meaning and emotional impact of the image. Therefore, the skill of the rendering and the universality of form chosen is critical. The style and the appropriateness of technique become part of the image and what it is trying to say.

LETTERS AS IMAGES

Words are made up of letters. Letters are symbols that are devised out of images which originate out of familiar forms, objects, postures and other recognizable phenomena. So, as their employment becomes more sophisticated, they become simplified and abstract.

In the development of Chinese and Japanese pictographs, a welding of pure visual imagery and a uniform derivative symbol took place. Ultimately, the visual image became secondary and the execution of the symbol alone became the arena of style and invention. The art of calligraphy emerged from this simple rendering of symbols and ascended to become a technique which, in its individuality, evoked beauty and rhythm. In this way, calligraphy added another dimension to the use of the pictograph. There is here a certain similarity to the modern comic strip if one considers the effect the cartoonist’s style has upon the character of the total product.

In Chinese calligraphy the style of the brushstroke confines itself to beauty of execution. This is not unlike the style of a ballerina executing the same choreography as her predecessor but in a style that is, at once, unique and expressive of greater dimension. In comic art, the addition of style and the subtle application of weight, emphasis and delineation combine to evoke beauty and message.

Chinese letter or pictograph rendered in two styles of brushstroke.

Letters of a written alphabet, when written in a singular style, contribute to meaning. This is not unlike the spoken word, which is affected by the changes of inflection and sound level.
For the purposes of illustration let us follow the progression of a single expression from ancient usage to the modern comic strip. The ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for the idea of worship was the symbol shown below and which the Chinese similarly depicted.

Egyptian  Chinese

A rough example of the effect that 'calligraphic' style has on the basic worship symbol as might be used in comics.

In the modern comic strip the 'pictograph' for worship would be conveyed with calligraphic style variations. Through lighting or 'atmosphere' it could be modified in emotional quality. Finally, coupled with words, it would form a precise message to be understood by the reader.

Here the use of 'atmospheric' lighting subtly alters the emotional nuance of the 'worship symbol' in each panel.

... The underlying symbolic posture is given verbal and visual amplification. Dialogue, visually familiar objects (such as spears, architectural elements and costume) and facial expressions, convey precise emotional messages.
It is here that the expressive potential of the comic artist is in the sharpest focus. After all, this is the art of graphic story-telling. The codification becomes, in the hands of the artist, an alphabet with which to make an encompassing statement that weaves an entire tapestry of emotional interaction.

By the skilled manipulation of this seemingly amorphic structure and an understanding of the anatomy of expression, the cartoonist can begin to undertake the exposition of stories that involve deeper meanings and deal with the complexities of human experience.

This basic symbol, derived from a familiar attitude, is amplified by words, costume, background and interaction (with another symbolic posture) to communicate meanings and emotion.

IMAGES WITHOUT WORDS

It is possible to tell a story through imagery alone without the help of words. The following *Spirit* story "HOAGY THE YOGI, Part 2" (first published March 23, 1947), executed entirely in pantomime, is an attempt to exploit imagery in the service of expression and narrative. The absence of any dialogue to reinforce action serves to demonstrate the viability of images drawn from common experience.
Dere Spirit

I am off on the hi-road

of adventure in the jungle

of Howdy the Yog's who thinks

I am a ghost he made appear

last week. I think he is a

FOOL but since he is paying

my fare I don't care. He says

we are going to sell the magic

lunch-box to a Eastern pot-

king.

I am sure to come back

a milionaire and will open

up my own Detekiff kung-fu

kingdom.

Ebony

THE SPIRIT

by Will Eisner

% Commissioner

Dol-an

Central City,

U.S.A.
Words like "BANG" are used to add sounds, a dimension not really available to the printed medium.

Symbols like $ and ?? are used as thoughts rather than speech.
The postcard and the text on it is at once a symbol and a narrative bridge. It is important here because it is necessary that the rhythm of pantomime, a visual language, flow undisturbed.

The changes of scenery serve to convey location.

The rate of speed at which the action moves 'forces' the reader to supply the dialogue. It is a phenomenon of comic strip reading that seems to work well.
Balloons, here, are confined to thoughts which are conveyed by images inside them.

Comically recognized images taken out of familiar experience convey action (footprints) and time (the moon).
Dear Spirit,

I am on my way home... I have 1 million pesos and enclosed a gift for you. It is a thing I bought for only 100 pesos. The man said there is only two in the world. The other was bought by Noisy Sneed the Imposter. You been suspicious of Clancy.

Facial expressions affecting the narrative require close-ups.

The door label and the position of the hat suspended in the speed stream are narrative devices. The clock on the wall fixes the lapse of time.
In any pantomime, expression and gesture must be exaggerated in order to be read.
Background art is more than mere stage setting. It is a part of the narration.

Speed lines indicate motion. They are part of the visual language.
IMAGES WITHOUT WORDS

Images without words, while they seem to represent a more primitive form of graphic narrative, really require some sophistication on the part of the reader (or viewer). Common experience and a history of observation are necessary to interpret the inner feelings of the actor.

Sequential art as practiced in comics presents a technical hurdle that can only be negotiated with some acquired skill. The number of images allowed is limited, whereas in film an idea or emotion can be expressed by hundreds of images displayed in fluid sequence at such speed as to emulate real movement. In print this effect can only be simulated.

For example:

SHE: "Oh, how my life is spent — ruined by living with you."
HE: ( . . . No answer)
SHE: "You stupid fool . . . look at you! A weak nobody."
HE: (Thinking.) I can't stand it anymore . . . her damn nagging.

SHE: "Stop sitting at the TV day after day. You do nothing!! Nothing!"

SHE: "Listen, I'm telling you I'm not going to take much more of this."

This sequence from Life on Another Planet is yet another example of the narrative use of the image commonly experienced. Here, particularly because of the theme, with its demand for 'real' emotion and sophisticated interaction, there is little room for ambiguity in art. As in calligraphy the rendering of the line and the style of application attempt to combine a sense of character with the appropriate emotional ingredients.
CHAPTER 3

"TIMING"

The phenomenon of duration and its experience—commonly referred to as 'time'—is a dimension integral to sequential art. In the universe of human consciousness time combines with space and sound in a setting of interdependence wherein conceptions, actions, motions and movement have a meaning and are measured by our perception of their relationship to each other.

Because we are immersed throughout our lives in a sea of space-time, a large part of our earliest learning is devoted to the comprehension of these dimensions. Sound is measured audibly, relative to its distance from us. Space is mostly measured and perceived visually. Time is more illusory: we measure and perceive it through the memory of experience. In primitive societies the movement of the sun, the growth of vegetation or the changes of climate are employed to measure time visually. Modern civilization has developed a mechanical device, the clock, to help us measure time visually. The importance of this to human beings cannot be underestimated. Not only does the measurement of time have an enormous psychological impact, but it enables us to deal with the real business of living. In modern society one might even say that it is instrumental to survival. In comics it is an essential structural element.

TIME

A simple action whose result is immediate . . . seconds.

TIMING

A simple action wherein the result (only) is extended to enhance emotion
Critical to the success of a visual narrative is the ability to convey time. It is this dimension of human understanding that enables us to recognize and be empathetic to surprise, humor, terror and the whole range of human experience. In this theater of our comprehension, the graphic storyteller plies his art. At the heart of the sequential deployment of images intending to convey time is the commonality of its perception. But to convey ‘timing,’ which is the manipulation of the elements of time to achieve a specific message or emotion, panels become a critical element.

A comic becomes ‘real’ when time and timing is factored into the creation. In music or the other forms of auditory communication where rhythm or ‘beat’ is achieved, this is done with actual lengths of time. In graphics the experience is conveyed by the use of illusions and symbols and their arrangement.

FRAMING SPEECH

The balloon is a desperation device. It attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound. The arrangement of balloons which surround speech—their position in relation to each other, or to the action, or their position with respect to the speaker, contribute to the measurement of time. They are disciplinary in that they demand cooperation from the reader. A major requirement is that they be read in a prescribed sequence in order to know who speaks first. They address our subliminal understanding of the duration of speech.

Steam from warm air expelled during conversation can be seen.
It is logical to combine that which is heard within that which is seen resulting in a visualized image of the act of speaking.

Americans call this a "balloon."
Italians refer to speech clouds as ‘FUMETTI,’ thus, giving a generic name to their comics.

Balloons are read following the same conventions as text (ie: left-to-right and top-to-bottom in western countries) and in relation to the position of the speaker.
The earliest rendering of the balloon was simply a ribbon emerging from the speaker's mouth — or (in Mayan friezes) as brackets pointing to the mouth. But as the balloon form developed, it too, became more sophisticated and its shape no longer just an enclosure. It took on meaning and contributed to the narration.

As balloons became more extensively employed their outlines were made to serve as more than simple enclosures for speech. Soon they were given the task of adding meaning and conveying the character of sound to the narrative.

Inside the balloon, the lettering reflects the nature and emotion of the speech. It is most often symptomatic of the artist's own personality (style), as well as that of the character speaking. Emulating a foreign language style of letter and similar devices add to the sound level and the dimension of the character itself. Attempts to 'provide dignity' to the comic strip are often tried by utilizing set-type instead of the less rigid hand lettering. Typesetting does have a kind of inherent authority but it has a 'mechanical' effect that intrudes on the personality of free-hand art. Its use must be carefully considered because of its effect on the 'message' as well.

A hand-lettered balloon conveys personality that is quite different from that of a typeset letter. It also has an effect on sound and style of speaking.
FRAMING TIME

Albert Einstein in his Special Theory (Relativity) states that time is not absolute but relative to the position of the observer. In essence the panel (or box) makes that postulate a reality for the comic book reader. The act of paneling or boxing the action not only defines its perimeters but establishes the position of the reader in relation to the scene and indicates the duration of the event. Indeed, it ‘tells’ time. The magnitude of time elapsed is not expressed by the panel _per se_, as an examination of blank boxes in a series quickly reveals. The imposition of the imagery within the frame of the panels acts as the catalyst. The fusing of symbols, images and balloons makes the statement. Indeed, in some applications of the frame, the outline of the box is eliminated entirely with equal effect. The act of framing separates the scenes and acts as a punctuator. Once established and set in sequence the box or panel becomes the criterion by which to judge the illusion of time.

A MEASURE OF TIME

Morse Code or a musical passage can be compared to a comic strip in that it employs the use of time in its expression.

In the modern comic strip or comic book, the device most fundamental to the transmission of timing is the panel or frame or box. These lines drawn around the depiction of a scene, which act as a containment of the action of segment of action, have as one of their functions the task of separating or parsing the total statement. Balloons, another containment device used for the entrapment of the representation of speech and sound, are also useful in the delineation of time. The other natural phenomena, movement or transitory occurences deployed within the perimeter of these borders and depicted by recognizable symbols, become part of the vocabulary used in the expression of time. They are indispensable to the story teller, particularly when he is seeking to involve the reader. Where narrative art seeks to go beyond simple decoration, where it presumes to imitate reality in a meaningful chain of events and consequences and thereby evoke empathy, the dimension of time is an inescapable ingredient.
This extract from a *Spirit* story ("PRISONER OF LOVE" first published Jan. 9, 1949) deals with 'timing'. Here, the human action and a concurrent phenomenon (burning paper) are 'timed' to create suspense. The 'time' allowed to the fight is related to the time it presumably takes for the papers in the basket to burn. The shape of the frames also contribute to rhythm.

The time lapse here is predicated on the knowledge of how long it takes for papers to ignite and burn.
Both of these critical devices, panel and balloon, when enclosing natural phenomena, support the recognition of time. J.B. Priestley, writing in *Man and Time*, summed it up most succinctly: "... it is from the sequence of events that we derive our idea of time."

The reader's orientation, the knowledge of how long it takes a drop of water to fall from the faucet, modified by the number of panels, helps measure the time elapsed. This reinforces the burning down of the fuse. In fact, one could even comprehend the time element without depicting the fuse.

In the following *Spirit* story, "FOUL PLAY" (first published March 27, 1949) time is critical to the emotional elements in the plot. It was necessary to frame a period of time that would encompass the plot. The problem was that a simple statement of time would not suffice. It would be too specific. It would mitigate the reader's involvement. A 'time rhythm' that is very believable had to be employed.

To accomplish this, a set of commonly experienced actions are used: a dripping faucet, striking a match, brushing teeth, and the time it takes to negotiate a staircase.

The number and size of the panels also contribute to the story rhythm and passage of time. For example, when there is a need to compress time, a greater number of panels are used. The action then becomes more segmented, unlike the action that occurs in the larger, more conventional panels. By placing the panels closer together, we deal with the 'rate' of elapsed time in its narrowest sense.

The shapes of the panels are also a factor. On a page where the need is to display a 'deliberate' meter of action, the boxes are shaped as perfect squares. Where the ringing of the telephone needs time (as well as space) to evoke a sense of suspense and threat, the entire tier is given over to the action of the ringing preceded by a compression of smaller (narrower) panels.

In comics, timing and rhythm are interlocked.
An example of timing. Allowing two panels for the lapse of time prior to the dropping of the body, the element of shock, surprise and a bit of humor is introduced.
Here, the length of time it takes for a droplet to fall acts as a 'clock.'

Timing and rhythm are interlocked. For example, the sudden introduction of a large number of small panels brings into play a new 'beat.'
IF... IF HE WAS... DEAD... AND SOMEONE SAW ME STEPPIN' OVER HIS BODY... THEY MIGHT THINK I KILLED HIM...

NAAH... BETTER MIND MY OWN BUSINESS... BEST KEEP OUTTA THINGS THAT DON'T CONCERN ME... YEAH... IT AIN'T MY Fault HE GOT KILLED!

HE'S STILL THERE... HE MIGHT NOT EVEN TURNED OVER... BUT HE'S DEAD... DRUNK'S USUALLY Twitch OR TURN OVER OR SOMETHING... MAYBE I SHOULD CALL THE COPS...

IT COULDA BEEN THIS WINDOW? HE'S DIRECTLY BELOW M-MY WINDOW!

THE LIGHTS... GOTA SEE... MAYBE SOMETHIN' HAPPENED WHILE I WAS OUT... IF THE COPS FIND ANYTHING IN MY ROOM, THEY'LL FRAME ME SURE!

HE'S STILL THERE... NO ONE'S FOUND HIM YET... LOOKS LIKE HE WAS PUSHED OUTTA A WINDOW...

PLOOP

YAWN

CREEAK

EGYOW!

CRASH
The rhythm is 'staccato'

...followed by a long-stretched out panel to convey a long ringing time

**RING**

**Hello...**

**This is Hendrix down in 4E...why don't you and yer friends cut out throwin' around furniture up there? It's 5 o'clock in the mornin'!! Ain't y'got no consideration?**

**Better send yer drunken friends home or I'll call the cops! What're y'doin' killin' somebody??**

**Click**

**When...Fr a moment...I thought there wuz blood onna floor...if only...mercuric...it's all...**

**Gotta get a grip on myself...**

**None o' my business...I didn't kill him...**

**Yeah...what am I worryin' about...?**

**Silly.**
Killing... Now he thinks I'm killing someone. If he tells that to the cops...

I'll never be able to deny it... They'll find that body right below my window!

Circumstantial evidence...

Even if I call the cops myself, they'll question the neighbors...

And they'll hang me!!

...Only one thing to do now... Get rid of the body...

Now, the pace quickens and the panels crowd each other.

Perspective is altered to add time lapse without altering the rhythm.
The rhythm is maintained by the use of narrow panels of equal size.

The last panel, here, is wider to permit the 'beat' to pause a bit.

Then the panel frequency resumes until the actor leaps through the window.
Now the 'beat' slows. Panels are more conventional.

The rhythm is slowed to a conventional pace. The story ends with a comfortable wide panel.