

Grammar of Comic Pages and Panels

One of the most salient features of visual narratives in comics is the way that the elements are arranged on a page—the “external compositional structure” (ECS) of a page’s layout. In this sense, the composition is “external” to the panel—i.e., it plays a role in a larger structure like a page—rather than “internal” (i.e. what is inside of a panel). In American and European comics, page layouts are thought to be read in a left-to-right and down, “Z-path” order, inherited from written language, though studies have shown that various complex spatial arrangements of panels push readers to navigate pages in ways that deviate from this path.

[The changing pages of comics: Page layouts across eight decades of American superhero comics](#)

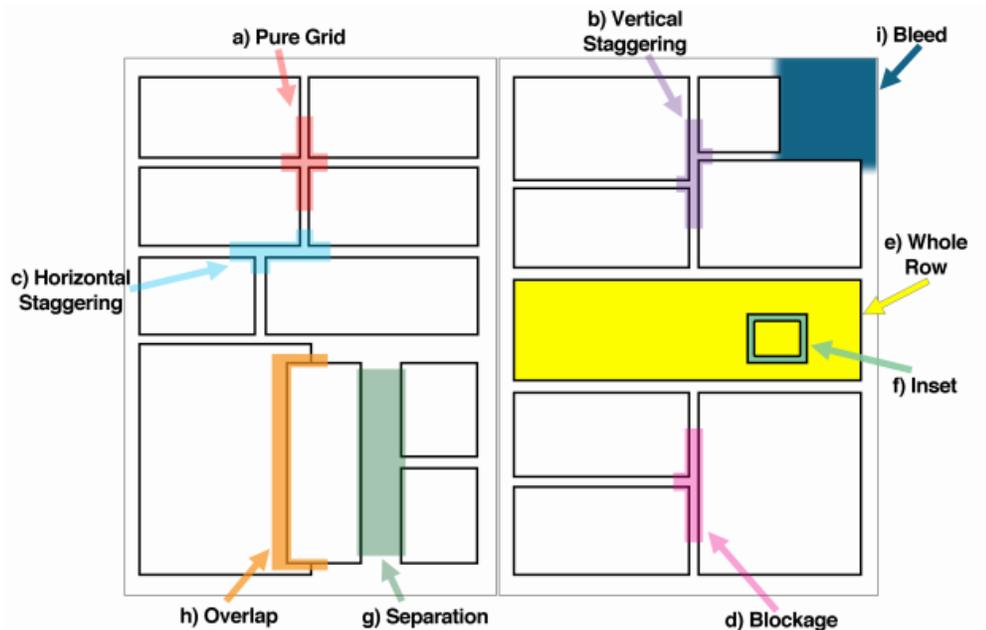
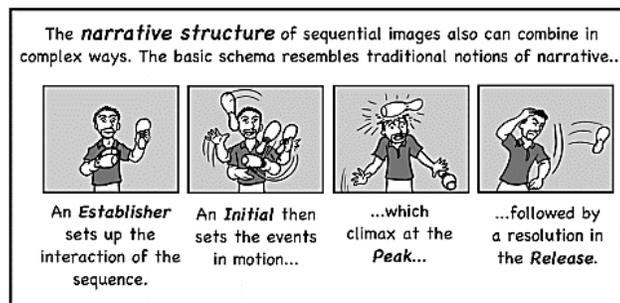


Figure 1. Schematized features of panel arrangements in page layouts.



[Climbing trees and seeing stars: combinatorial structure in comics and diverse domains](#)

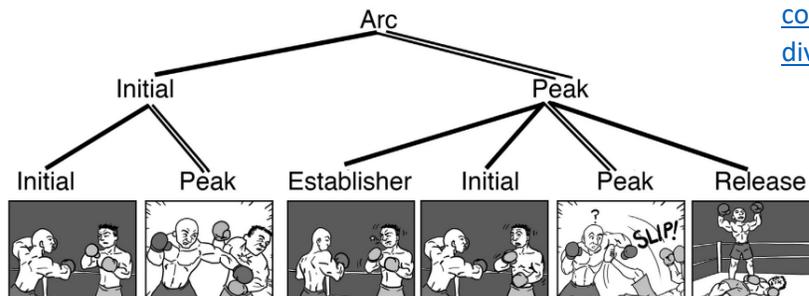


Fig. 1. A narrative sequence with two narrative constituents.

So, a page like this one from the comic *Scott Pilgrim* yields a **right-branching structure** of recursive embedding.

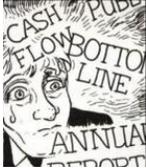
(O'Malley 2005)

Given that most *actual* comic pages organize these **narrative structures** into **page layouts**, these two structures need to interface together.

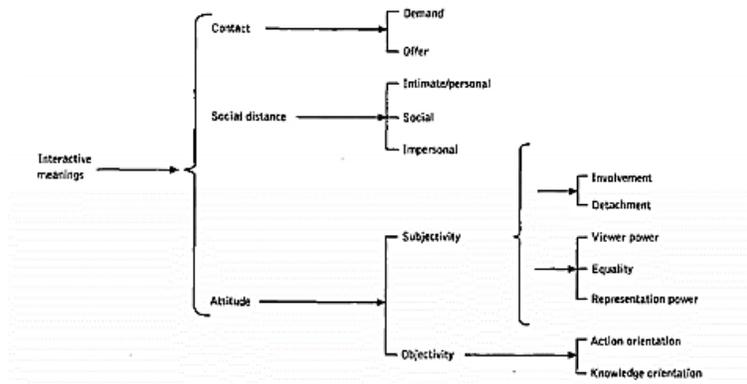
Graphic structure

Layout

Narrative

	word specific	picture specific	duo specific	additive	parallel	montage	inter-dependent
<i>word/image relation</i>	words tell story	image tells story	words & images tell same story	words add information to image	words & images tell different stories	words integral part of image	words & image both necessary
<i>panel transition</i>	<p>moment to moment event viewed over a short period of time</p> <p>action to action sequential movement within an event</p> <p>subject to subject two shots or viewpoints within the same scene</p> <p>scene to scene scene shift in space /time</p> <p>aspect to aspect different views of the same scene</p> <p>non- sequitur</p>	   	   				

positioning of the viewer

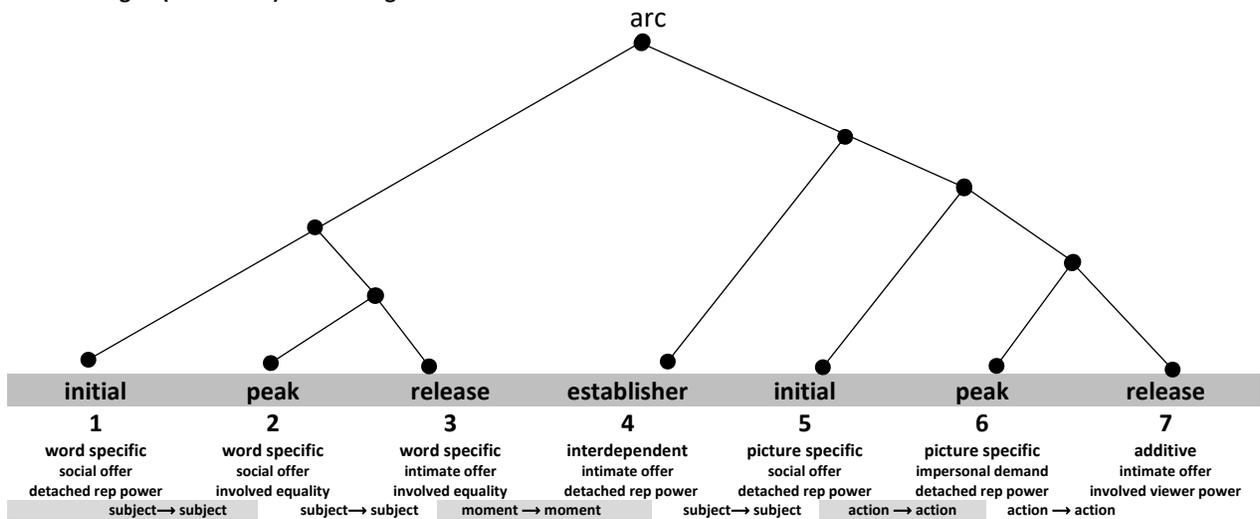


modality markers

- **Color Saturation:** full color saturation to absence of color.
- **Color differentiation:** maximally diversified range of colors to monochrome.
- **Color modulation:** fully modulated with many different shades to unmodulated color.
- **Illumination:** fullest play of light and shade to its absence.
- **Brightness:** maximum degrees of brightness to just two degrees.
- **Contextualization:** absence of background to fully articulated background.
- **Representation:** maximum abstraction to maximum pictorial detail.
- **Depth:** absence of depth to maximally deep perspective.



Justice League (2011-2016) Vol. 1: Origin



arc {{initial (peak, release)) (establisher (initial (peak, release)))}}