

# The Visualization of Time

Eisenstein Cut, Graphic Novels,  
and Chris Ware

Research Brief by Design Made  
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**Topic:**

Research into the means of visual narration and the depiction of multiple layers of content.

**Premise:**

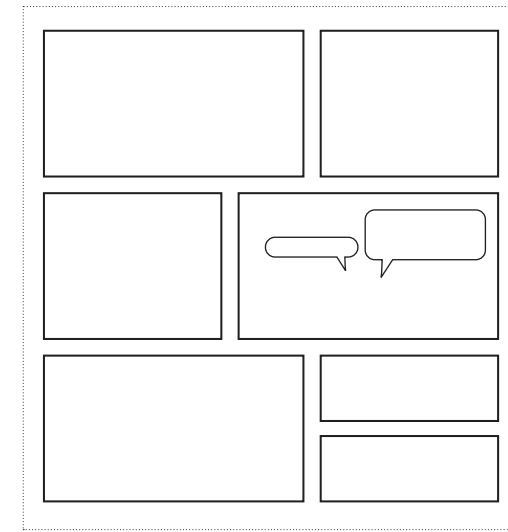
The graphic novels of Chris Ware present a unique way of storytelling that transcends motion cinematography and typical cell-based linear story telling. Besides being visually beautiful, his work is a masterful example of non-narrative communication of an event, i.e., no words. His work includes an architectural analysis of scenes, codification through color and scale, and cinematic handling of sequence, content, and time.



Basic cinema structure

## 1 Cinema

The basic cinema structure consists of a moving single image. The above diagram shows the basic editing structure with the current shot—what the viewer is seeing at that point—in the center, to the left is the image previously seen, and on the right the forthcoming image. Most cinema today follows this structure and uses a continuous visual narrative, which Sergei Eisenstein calls the Lebehov method. Eisenstein, the creator of montage, distinguishes his method from conflict or collision. To understand this, consider a simple scene of people in protest on a city street. The Lebehov method would consist of a continuous feed of images of the scene—possibly using cuts, close-ups, and different angles—as the situation unfolds. Essentially, the scene is the viewed content. In the case of Eisenstein, he would interject shots of images that were not of the actual scene, such as the head cut off a cow, as he did in his film *October*. Eisenstein would also use detailed close-up shots, such as a tightened fist, a fist raised in the air with force, and the faces of the people as they yell. In both methods, the cinematographers seek to build the narrative and create an emotional response in the viewer. Still, Eisenstein's method uses more aggressive cuts and content to make his affect and tell his story. The shot, for Eisenstein, becomes a critical element, and he crafts the individual shot and how it fits within a sequence or series of shots. Eisenstein's montage is a collective of images pieced together rather than only being a dissection of a scene by the camera.

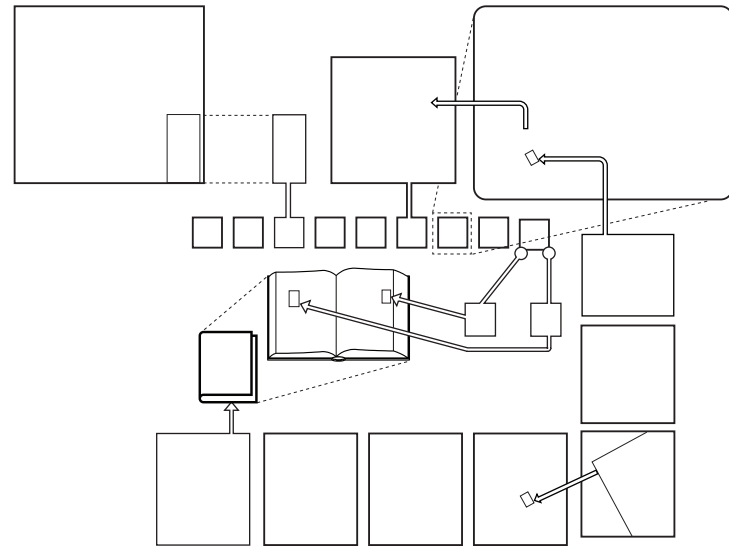


Common graphic novel structure

## 2 Graphic Novel

The typical graphic novel structure consists of a series of cells that fit within the page format. For most graphic novelists, the page is dissected into a series of rectangles (cells) of various sizes (as shown above). The cells would all be the same size for the standard comic, but most graphic novels use varying cell sizes. This includes details, emphasizes a particular moment or scene, or includes more or less content in the cell. This variation allows the camera to change size—allowing for a wide shot or focusing on a smaller piece of information.

The graphic novel is shots of a film arranged across a sheet. It typically tells a single story in a linear manner.

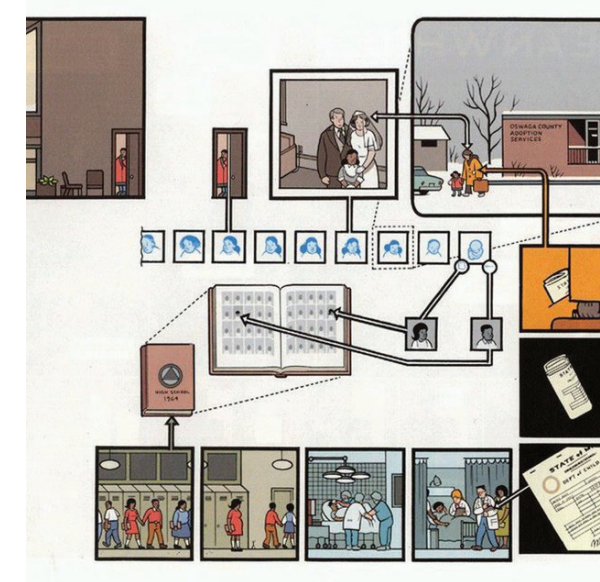


Sample of Chris Ware Structure

### 3 Chris Ware, Dissected Shot

Chris Ware's graphic novels are a new form of graphic novel and cinematic story-telling. Chris both uses and breaks the standard structure. First, he will run more than one story in parallel, breaking the page into essentially two graphic novels. Still, the stories will eventually intersect for Chris—they typically follow different people within the same context (a building or city). This is equivalent to dividing the single cinematic frame into two or more frames, and there are several examples of this in motion cinema sometimes used for a transition—such as in vintage spy films—or the movie's duration as in *Timecode*.

### 4 Chris Ware, Time



More profoundly, Chris Ware completely breaks down the graphic novel and cinematic structures by using white space and the margins between the cells as space to communicate and through architectural means of diagramming. Chris will break a flow and begin to dissect a scene, providing much greater context than can be contained within the cell, including the various threads of people's lives within the current scene or that have been in or will come into the main story. He may extract an element from the scene, such as a letter, and show the entire specimen, or he will go back in time and provide historical context for a scene, moment, or artifact. Chris will also play with time through flashbacks, slowing down time, or using the scale of the cell. For example, he may pause on a single scene and then have a series of cell offshoots that run through different aspects of the scene. It could provide more context on a character's life or focus on an element/prop within the scene. These actions are similar to what we see in cinema—flashbacks cut to provide another perspective of the situation—but in cinema, they continue in a linear progression and are confined to the shot, the screen. Chris has the full page available to him, forcing the reader to decide in what order to view. A page by Chris is like a forensic board where one has all the information laid out before them.

