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## “Beyond Closure: Visual Flow and Reader Engagement in Osamu Tezuka’s *Buddha*”

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### Abstract

This paper examines how reader engagement in Osamu Tezuka’s *Buddha* is organized through experiential structures that extend beyond closure-centered models of comics participation. While comics theory has traditionally emphasized inferential continuity between sequential panels, the sequences examined in Volume 2 frequently structure reading through decompressed temporality, rhythmic pacing, environmental immersion, directional movement, and symbolic continuity. Drawing on close visual reading and micro-sequential analysis, the study proposes the concept of visual flow to describe the coordinated movement of reader attention through pacing, spatial arrangement, visual rhythm, environmental scale, and affective continuity across manga space. The paper argues that these sequences generate continuous perceptual fields that guide readers emotionally, temporally, and spatially across the page. Through analyses of contemplative pacing, directional sequencing, rhythmic choreography, environmental atmosphere, and symbolic imagery, the study demonstrates how Tezuka structures reading as an immersive experience of visual navigation. By expanding reader engagement from inferential completion toward experiential immersion, the paper contributes to broader discussions of temporality, perception, and spatial organization in manga narration.

**Keywords:** Manga Narration, Visual Flow, Reader Engagement, Comics Studies, Phenomenology of Reading.

### I. Introduction

Comics studies has long emphasized the active role of readers in constructing narrative continuity from sequential visual forms. Among the most influential formulations of this process is Scott McCloud’s concept of “closure,” developed in *Understanding Comics* (1993). McCloud argues that comics narration depends upon the reader’s ability to connect fragmented visual moments across gutters and panel transitions, transforming discrete images into continuous narrative experience. Closure theory has therefore played a foundational role in explaining how sequential art generates inferential continuity through active reader engagement.

While closure remains crucial to understanding comics narration, manga frequently produces forms of engagement that extend beyond inferential completion alone. Many manga sequences organize attention not through rapid causal progression but through slowed pacing,

contemplative stillness, rhythmic repetition, environmental emphasis, and extended visual duration. Readers are invited not simply to infer what occurs between panels but to move through the experiential rhythm of the page itself.

Although manga studies has generated important scholarship on visual style, cinematic influence, narrative pacing, and transnational readership, the experiential structures through which manga guides reader attention remain comparatively under-theorized. Closure-centered models explain important aspects of sequential continuity, yet they cannot fully account for the ways manga often structures reading through decompressed pacing, environmental immersion, spatial navigation, symbolic continuity, and affective rhythm. Such sequences require a broader framework capable of explaining how readers move perceptually, emotionally, and temporally through manga space.

This paper proposes the concept of visual flow to describe these broader structures of engagement in manga narration. Visual flow refers to the organized movement of reader attention through rhythm, pacing, directional sequencing, spatial arrangement, environmental scale, and affective continuity across the manga page. Rather than functioning solely as a succession of discrete panels linked through closure, manga narration often creates continuous perceptual fields that shape reading as an embodied movement through visual space.

Drawing on close visual reading and micro-sequential analysis of selected sequences distributed throughout Volume 2 of Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha*, this study examines how manga organizes attention through decompressed temporality, contemplative pacing, directional movement, rhythmic repetition, environmental immersion, and symbolic continuity. The paper argues that these sequences structure reading through experiential systems of visual flow that extend beyond closure-centered models of comics participation. While inferential continuity remains important, reading also depends upon immersion in visual rhythm, spatial atmosphere, temporal duration, and movement across the page. All page references correspond to Volume 2: *The Four Encounters* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006).

## **II. Beyond Closure: Visual Flow and Experiential Participation in Manga**

Closure theory remains central to understanding how comics organize narrative continuity through sequential fragmentation. By requiring readers to connect discrete visual moments across gutters and panel transitions, comics narration transforms reading into an active process of inferential engagement. *Understanding Comics* (1993) remains especially influential because it foregrounds the reader as a co-producer of narrative continuity rather than a passive observer of visual representation.

Yet many manga sequences, particularly within Tezuka's narrative practice in *Buddha*, structure reading through processes that exceed inferential completion alone. Many sequences slow narrative progression through decompressed pacing, rhythmic repetition, contemplative spacing, and environmental emphasis that redirect attention away from rapid causal advancement.

In such moments, readers are invited not simply to determine what happens between panels but to inhabit the movement of the page across time, atmosphere, and visual rhythm.

To address these broader structures of engagement, this study proposes the concept of visual flow. Visual flow refers to the coordinated movement of reader attention across manga space through pacing, directional composition, rhythmic sequencing, spatial arrangement, environmental scale, and affective continuity. Manga pages often generate continuous perceptual fields that guide readers emotionally, temporally, and spatially across the visual environment.

The distinction between inferential and experiential reading is crucial to the present argument. Closure-centered models primarily explain how readers cognitively construct continuity between fragmented narrative moments. Such emphasis on readerly activity recalls *The Implied Reader* (1974), which similarly understands reading as a process shaped through textual gaps and imaginative participation. Manga, however, often guides attention through immersion, synchronization, dwelling, and perceptual navigation. Slowed gestures, environmental silence, repeated framings, spatial openness, and rhythmic visual structures encourage readers to linger within visual duration rather than move rapidly toward narrative resolution.

These structures become especially visible in sequences where narrative action is temporarily suspended in favour of atmosphere, contemplation, or environmental immersion. In such moments, reading becomes not only interpretive but embodied. Attention disperses across silence, landscape, gesture, spacing, and visual rhythm, generating modes of engagement that exceed purely informational continuity.

The concept of visual flow also helps explain how manga guides reader movement through directional choreography and spatial organization. Attention is shaped not only by narrative causality but also by diagonals, bodily movement, visual density, page architecture, and environmental scale. Manga reading therefore unfolds as a form of embodied navigation through dynamic visual environments structured by rhythm, pacing, atmosphere, and movement.

This framework does not reject closure theory; rather, it situates closure within a broader phenomenology of manga reading. Inferential continuity remains essential to comics narration, yet it cannot fully account for the experiential complexity of manga form. Manga frequently structures reading through temporal duration, contemplative pacing, symbolic atmosphere, environmental immersion, and perceptual movement across the page.

The analyses that follow examine how these structures operate through multiple modes of visual flow in *Buddha Volume 2*. Through close visual reading and micro-sequential analysis, the study explores how decompressed temporality, directional movement, rhythmic repetition, environmental immersion, and symbolic continuity shape manga reading as an embodied experience of visual engagement.

### **III. Visual Flow as Participatory Structure**

The preceding discussion suggests that manga cannot be understood solely through inferential closure between sequential panels. While closure remains central to comics narration, manga frequently organizes reading through broader experiential structures involving temporality,

rhythm, spatial movement, environmental immersion, and affective continuity. These interacting dimensions may be understood through the concept of visual flow.

Visual flow does not designate a single formal device but the coordinated organization of perceptual attention across multiple experiential dimensions of manga narration. It refers to the movement of reader attention through pacing, directional composition, rhythmic sequencing, environmental scale, and spatial arrangement across manga space. Rather than functioning merely as isolated narrative units connected through cognitive inference, manga pages often generate continuous perceptual fields within which readers move emotionally, temporally, and spatially. Meaning emerges through the reader's movement across these perceptual structures.

This experiential mode of reading operates through multiple overlapping forms of visual organization. Decompressed temporal sequences slow narrative movement through silence, repeated framings, contemplative pacing, and environmental spacing, encouraging readers to dwell within affective duration rather than move rapidly toward narrative resolution. Directional and rhythmic sequences organize attention through bodily synchronization, navigational movement, and perceptual propulsion across visual space. Environmental and symbolic sequences further redistribute attention across landscape, atmosphere, spatial scale, and affective imagery, transforming setting into an active structure of engagement.

These modes rarely function independently. Rhythm shapes temporality; environmental immersion slows perceptual movement; directional composition structures emotional tension; symbolic imagery redistributes affect across visual space. In these sequences, manga reading emerges through the interaction of multiple experiential structures rather than through a single narrative mechanism alone. Visual flow functions as a multilayered system through which manga organizes reader consciousness across movement, atmosphere, duration, and spatial perception. This understanding also resonates with *The System of Comics* (2007), which emphasizes the spatial and relational organization of comics form, particularly the ways comic pages generate meaning through interconnected visual structures rather than isolated sequential units.

Such a framework expands closure-centered models of comics narration without rejecting them. Inferential continuity remains important, yet these sequences also organize attention through rhythm, atmosphere, silence, and spatial movement across the page. Readers do not simply connect narrative events across panels; they inhabit visual rhythm, environmental silence, spatial atmosphere, and temporal duration across the page.

The analyses that follow examine how these structures operate in *Buddha Volume 2* through decompressed temporality, directional movement, rhythmic sequencing, environmental immersion, and symbolic continuity. Together, these elements reveal manga narration as a process of perceptual and affective organization structured through systems of visual flow.

#### **IV. Temporal Decompression and Contemplative Participation**

One of the most distinctive ways manga organizes reader attention is through temporal decompression. Rather than advancing narrative action through compressed sequential progression, many manga sequences deliberately slow narrative tempo, extending moments across multiple panels and redistributing attention toward gesture, silence, atmosphere, and spatial

duration. Such decompressed pacing also recalls broader discussions of temporality and movement in manga and anime studies, particularly *The Anime Machine* (2009), which emphasizes dynamic perceptual organization across visual space (Lamarre 7–10).

This temporal structure becomes especially visible in several sequences from *Buddha*, where narrative movement repeatedly slows in favour of contemplative pacing and emotional suspension. In these moments, Tezuka shapes visual flow through rhythmic delay, environmental spacing, and decompressed emotional progression, encouraging readers to dwell within transitional experience rather than merely process narrative information.

A particularly significant example occurs in the emotionally restrained sequence spanning pages 227–231. Here visual progression slows through fragmented dialogue, repeated framings, extended pauses, and environmental continuity. Rather than emphasizing rapid informational movement, the sequence disperses emotional meaning gradually across silence, bodily distance, and rhythmic spacing between panels. Narrative action remains minimal, yet the pacing generates sustained affective duration.

Page 231 is especially important in this regard. Repeated horizontal framings, minimal bodily movement, and expanding visual silence slow perceptual rhythm almost to stillness. Narrative progression becomes secondary to temporal experience itself. Environmental continuity across panels stretches emotional duration and transforms silence into a structure through which readers inhabit hesitation and emotional suspension.

This decompressed temporality reappears in Siddhartha's departure sequence on pages 350–353. Tezuka slows narrative progression through fragmented exchanges, dreamlike imagery, darkened spatial isolation, and repeated pauses between movement and speech. Particularly striking is the recurring luminous white figure that functions less as a stable narrative object than as a visualized ethical pull guiding Siddhartha beyond palace life. The sequence repeatedly delays decisive movement, generating tension through hesitation and emotional suspension rather than dramatic action.

The contemplative dimension of manga temporality becomes even more pronounced in the environmental journey sequences spanning pages 358–361. Landscape increasingly dominates visual attention while verbal density decreases significantly. Human figures appear diminished within expanded environmental space, and the pacing slows through panoramic framing, widened spatial intervals, and reduced action density. Page 359 is especially striking because narrative momentum nearly dissolves into atmospheric duration. The black sun, barren trees, and elongated shadows suspend action within an experience of existential stillness, transforming environmental space into contemplative temporality.

Tezuka further intensifies this temporal suspension in the ritualized haircutting sequence on pages 362–363. Gradual bodily gestures, isolated framings, slowed movement, and symbolic pacing transform the sequence into an experience of ceremonial duration. Narrative progression becomes secondary to rhythmic transformation. The enlarged luminous face on page 363 momentarily interrupts ordinary sequential rhythm altogether, producing an almost iconic suspension of narrative time.

Together, these sequences show how Tezuka frequently structures reading through duration rather than rapid narrative advancement alone. Slowed pacing, rhythmic spacing, environmental silence, and contemplative suspension transform reading into a temporal experience shaped by waiting, stillness, and affective immersion.

## **V. Directional and Rhythmic Flow**

While decompressed temporality structures reading through contemplative duration and emotional suspension, manga narration also frequently organizes attention through directional movement and rhythmic propulsion. In such sequences, visual flow operates through momentum, repetition, bodily synchronization, and navigational movement across the page.

This kinetic dimension becomes particularly visible in the movement sequences on pages 219–220 of *Buddha*. Here Tezuka organizes page composition around diagonal propulsion, compressed motion, and rapid directional sequencing. Repeated movement vectors and dynamic bodily positioning guide the reader's eye continuously across the page, generating a strong sense of perceptual acceleration. Visual continuity emerges through the choreography of movement itself rather than through isolated narrative units. Such sequencing also recalls *The Visual Language of Comics* (2013), which understands comics as structured visual language systems that organize perception through patterned graphic arrangements.

A more spatially controlled form of directional movement appears in Siddhartha's nocturnal departure sequence on pages 354–357. These pages organize visual flow through layered architectural space, shadowed movement, partial bodily visibility, and carefully staged transitions across gates and corridors. Reader attention moves cautiously through fragmented spatial fields that mirror Siddhartha's own stealth movement through the palace environment.

Page 355 is especially significant in this regard. Narrow horizontal framings, interrupted visibility, and darkened spatial segmentation slow directional movement while simultaneously intensifying spatial tension. The page repeatedly delays full visual disclosure, compelling readers to negotiate layered architectural space rather than simply follow linear narrative progression. Spatial navigation itself becomes central to the reading experience.

A different mode of visual propulsion emerges in the dance and performance sequences on pages 22–24. Here visual flow is organized through rhythmic repetition and bodily synchronization rather than narrative urgency. Repeated dancer movements, sweeping compositional curves, musical motifs, and recurring gestural patterns generate a patterned visual tempo that extends across panel boundaries. Such rhythmic organization also resonates with manga studies scholarship that emphasizes the dynamic interaction between movement, page layout, and reader navigation across visual space, particularly discussions in Jaqueline Berndt's work on manga form and reading practices (Berndt). Page 22 is especially revealing because bodily choreography directly shapes reading movement. Elongated diagonals, flowing movement arcs, and repeated visual rhythms guide attention continuously across the page, producing an experience of rhythmic continuity rather than discrete sequential segmentation.

This rhythmic immersion becomes more complex on pages 23–24, where repetitive spectacle is juxtaposed against Siddhartha’s emotional detachment. Looping gestures, repeated clap sounds, and recurring dancer formations create an almost excessive rhythmic continuity that threatens to overwhelm perceptual attention. Yet Siddhartha’s stillness interrupts this visual rhythm, generating tension between sensory immersion and contemplative withdrawal.

Together, these sequences demonstrate how Tezuka organizes reading through movement, rhythm, and spatial traversal across dynamic visual environments. Directional composition, patterned repetition, and navigational tension guide attention across dynamic visual environments in which reading becomes an experience of rhythmic and spatial navigation across dynamic visual environments.

## **VI. Environmental Immersion and Symbolic Flow**

A particularly significant dimension of manga visual flow emerges through environmental immersion and symbolic spatiality. In many manga sequences, environments do not function merely as passive settings surrounding narrative action; they become active temporal and affective structures that shape the reading experience itself. Landscape, atmosphere, spatial scale, and environmental silence repeatedly redirect attention away from rapid narrative progression toward contemplative immersion within visual space.

This environmental mode of reading appears prominently in the journey sequences spanning pages 358–361 of Buddha. As Siddhartha moves away from palace life, environmental scale increasingly dominates page composition. Mountains, forests, rivers, barren trees, and open landscapes occupy progressively larger portions of visual space while verbal density decreases considerably. Human figures frequently appear diminished within wider environmental settings, shifting attention from narrative action toward atmospheric perception.

Page 359 is especially striking because narrative momentum nearly dissolves into environmental duration. The blackened sun, elongated shadows, barren trees, and widened visual stillness suspend conventional narrative progression almost entirely. Rather than directing attention toward immediate causal movement, the page encourages contemplative dwelling within environmental atmosphere. Spatial silence itself acquires emotional weight.

This environmental temporality intensifies further on pages 365–366. Tezuka repeatedly positions Siddhartha’s body against vast mountains, open terrain, and expansive natural environments that visually exceed individual human scale. Reduced dialogue and widened spatial intervals slow reading rhythm and disperse attention across landscape textures, spatial depth, and atmospheric continuity. Environmental space no longer functions merely as narrative background but as a perceptual field through which readers experience distance, solitude, and contemplative transition.

These environmental structures frequently acquire symbolic and affective dimensions as well. Manga landscapes often absorb and redistribute emotional meaning across visual space rather than confining affect solely within dialogue or bodily expression. This symbolic flow becomes especially visible in the concluding sequence on page 368. Tears dissolve into flowing water

imagery while lotus symbolism merges emotional experience with environmental continuity. Grief and transition become spatially distributed across the page through symbolic resonance rather than direct exposition alone.

A similar symbolic atmosphere appears earlier in the departure sequence through recurring luminous figures, environmental darkness, and dreamlike spatial isolation. These images function less as stable narrative objects than as symbolic directional forces shaping emotional and ethical movement across visual space.

Together, these sequences demonstrate how environmental atmosphere, spatial scale, and symbolic continuity shape reading within Tezuka's visual narration. Readers engage not only with sequential events but with shifting spatial moods, environmental silence, and affective landscapes that transform the page into an immersive perceptual environment.

## **VII. Conclusion**

This study has argued that reader engagement in manga narration extends beyond closure-centered models of inferential continuity. While closure remains an important mechanism through which readers connect fragmented visual moments across sequential space, the close readings from Buddha Volume 2 demonstrate that manga frequently structures reading through broader experiential dimensions involving temporality, rhythm, directional movement, environmental immersion, and symbolic continuity.

The concept of visual flow proposed in this paper provides a framework for understanding how manga guides attention across shifting systems of movement, atmosphere, pacing, and spatial organization. Rather than functioning solely as a succession of discrete panels linked through inferential closure, manga pages often generate continuous perceptual fields within which readers move emotionally, temporally, and spatially. Meaning emerges through the coordination of visual rhythm, spatial atmosphere, movement, and temporal duration across the page.

The analyses of decompressed temporality demonstrated how slowed pacing, silence, repeated framings, and contemplative spacing reorganize reading around affective duration rather than rapid narrative progression. Directional and rhythmic sequences further revealed how manga structures attention through bodily synchronization, perceptual propulsion, and navigational movement across visual space. Environmental and symbolic sequences expanded this framework by showing how landscapes, atmospheric scale, and symbolic imagery transform setting into an active experiential structure.

Taken together, these forms of visual flow suggest that manga narration frequently organizes reading through embodied processes of perception, atmosphere, rhythm, and spatial movement. In this sense, manga reading may also be understood through the phenomenological emphasis on embodied perception associated with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of lived spatial experience. Readers do not simply connect narrative events across panels; they move through atmospheres, rhythms, silences, and spatial environments that shape emotional and temporal experience across the page.

Such findings invite a broader understanding of comics narration beyond purely inferential models of sequential continuity. While closure theory remains foundational to comics studies, manga often structures reading through immersion, duration, navigation, and affective inhabitation. Visual flow therefore offers a way of understanding how manga sequences such as those examined in *Buddha* organize reader attention not simply through sequential representation but through movement across visual space.

More broadly, this framework opens further possibilities for manga and comics studies by encouraging greater attention to environmental narration, perceptual pacing, embodied reading, and the phenomenology of visual experience. Future studies may extend this approach to other manga traditions, genres, and artists in order to explore how different forms of visual flow shape distinct modes of reader engagement across graphic narrative traditions.

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