



TOWARDS A PANOPTICAL REPRESENTATION OF TIME AND MEMORY: CHRIS WARE, MARCEL PROUST AND HENRI BERGSON'S "PURE DURATION"

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ABSTRACT

The way we conceive time is conditioned by sequential narrative mediums that generally work in a linear manner. Literature and film force the reader or spectator to grasp single units of meaning one at a time according to our dominant conception of duration; that is, a chain of frozen moments that come and go in a continuous succession.

Henri Bergson challenged that idea, arguing that we can only truly perceive time in those exceptional occasions of self-absorption in which we lose the sense of succession, melting past and present in an organic whole. Bergson called this particular conception of time "pure duration", developing a new theory of memory that inspired some of the most important modernist novelists, especially Marcel Proust, who reconstructed his life remembrances following Bergson's theories in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

In this article I relate both Bergson's theory and Proust's narrative technique to the work of Chris Ware. By conceiving the page as a network of panels that must be grasped simultaneously, Ware challenges the merely sequential narrative technique most comics use, directly addressing Bergson's notion of "pure duration" as a perception of overlapping moments. Ware has shown, as I will argue here, that comics may be the ideal medium for representing time in a non-linear manner because of its panoptic quality: its power to make the reader see past, present and future simultaneously in the panels of a single page.