TOOLS OF THE "EN-EH-MEE"

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GRANT MORRISON'S UTOPIA AND THE MEANS TO END THERE

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Abstract:

This thesis analyzes the impact of the Dark Age of comics on Grant Morrison's

comic book series *The Invisibles*, specifically arguing that the traditional

superhero figure enacts a certain narrative violence on the characters and text

itself, both through direct violence and in the limiting of potential narratives. The

first chapter establishes *The Invisibles*' contemporary comic tropes, establishing

Dark Age superheroes as an exceptionalist figures who use extreme violence to

separate themselves from a perceived corrupt society. As such, this thesis

moves from a psychoanalytic approach to heroism towards a schizoanalytic

approach found in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand*

Plateaus, demonstrating how similar cycles of pathologization found in their

critique of psychoanalysis also apply to *The Invisibles*' attempt to innoculate itself

against its own sensationalized violence. In doing so, the series eventually

purges itself of the hero's underlying ideological violences and attempts to

actualize a Morrison's own notions of utopia through the medium of comics,

valuing multiplicities and the production of narratives to inform the experience of

reality over a limitation of narratives based on violent conflict.

Acknowledgements

A proper full list of acknowledgements, the people who helped me get to this point, would be longer than this already lengthy thesis, so I shall keep this brief.

To my family, who let me know where I'm from and where I am going, to my friends here and away, some gone and others whom I will never let go, my wonderful committee, and this department: thank you. This thesis speaks of Utopia, an ideal world, and these people are proof that such a place is possible. You probably don't know Shirley Hale, Neil Edwards, Anne Savage, the three office ladies who hold the English and Cultural Studies department at McMaster together, or any of my dear friends, and as such you lead a shadow of an existence.

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A Note on Citations:

As of writing this, the MLA Handbook does not have an agreed upon mode of citing comic books and graphic novels and, as such, I have taken certain liberties in the referencing of material. My thesis commits the sin of many literary analyses of graphic literature and favours referencing writers over artists because I am primarily focusing on the work of Grant Morrison, who has illustrated a single page of all the works I am investigating. When referring to specific panels or art within these books, I will reference the artist, but direct quotes of the actual words will be instead attributed to Morrison alone. This prejudice follows with other comics as well.

In terms of citations, for pagination and Works Cited entries, I will generally refer to the graphic novel collections of single issues as these are, by far, the easiest method for obtaining these works for interested readers. This leads to other issues, as most graphic novels frustratingly do not paginate, or simply reproduce the pagination of the original comics, which means the *Watchmen* trade paperback collection has twelve page '1's. In these instances, I will refer to the issue number, followed by the page number; so, for the twelfth page of the second issue of the aforementioned collection, the citation will read (Moore 2.12) for ease and simplicity. For graphic novels that collect issues that

are not simply the first issue, the original issue number will be used as these collections frequently divide issues with the original, numbered covers. If not, a quick look at the copyright information page will provide the necessary information.

In regards to accurate representations of lettering, comics often bold important words and frequently use all caps for various reasons, from stylistic choices to font copyrighting practices. While some writers insist on maintaining these emphases, they are frequently overly distracting. For example, to accurately represent a line from *Watchmen*, I would have to write the following quote as such: "'DOG CaRCaSS In aLLey THIS MORnInG' (Moore 1.1)," which is difficult to read in this font and, as such, would instead read as "Dog carcass in alley this morning" (Moore 1.1).

"Doing it right

Everybody will be dancing and will

Feeling it right

Everybody will be dancing and be

Doing it right

Everybody will be dancing and we'll be

Feeling alright

If you do it right, let it go all night,

Shadows on you break, Out into the light,

If you lose your way tonight, that's how you know the magic's right."

-Daft Punk featuring Panda Bear, "Doin' it Right."

Introduction:

"And So We Return and Begin Again"

In the final issue of Scottish comic writer Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*, a man calling himself King Mob defeats his nemesis, and ultra-dimensional alien demon named The-King-of-All-Tears, with a joke gun that shoots out a flag with the word "POP!" written on it (Morrison, *Kingdom* 281). This may seem like a strange way to destroy a character that claims to be in control of this entire aeon, but The King-of-All-Tears has been dosed with a drug that forces its victims to perceive words as reality and, consequently, he 'pops' into Morrison's positive apocalypse, the SuperContext, which "absorbs the King effortlessly, welcoming his quaint ferocity, converting it into narrative" (281). As Douglas Wolk points out:

> "Most of the hallmarks of Morrison's work are present in this deeply weird scene: reality-bending metafictional freakouts dressed up in action-adventure drag; metaphors that make visible the process by which language creates an image that in turn becomes narrative; a touch of feel-good self-improvement; faith in the power of pop and popularity to do magic; and skinny bald men who are stand-ins for Morrison himself, heroically conquering sadness and making the world evolve" (258).

Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles* is a comic series that ran from 1994 to 2000, serialized in three volumes that culminate in nearly sixty individual issues of metaphysical freak-outs, sensationalized violence, magic, alien abductions, utopia, and meditations on the interplay of fiction and reality. The series, like

many of its characters, is in a constant state of flux, taking up and shedding generic conventions, tropes, cosmological models, and even conflicting ideas on the nature of the universe as it progresses. As King Mob metafictionally comments, "It's a thriller, it's a romance, it's a tragedy, it's a porno, it's neo-modernist kitchen sink science fiction that you catch, like a cold" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 271). The series continually draws on various influences, such as BBC television shows like *The Prisoner*, the novels of Michael Moorcock and Philip K. Dick, a variety of conspiracy theories, books on magic rituals and the occult, and Western comics that Morrison has encountered throughout his life. Thus, studying *The Invisibles* necessitates an awareness of the series' contemporary cultural climate, which plays into the series metafictional experiments.

Morrison blends the letter columns, online forums, his personal history, and even an acting out of the characters in real life into *The Invisibles*, intertextually pushing the boundaries between fiction and reality. One of the key moments in the series arguably occurs in the letter columns rather than the comic proper, with Morrison describing an alien abduction he apparently experienced whilst writing the column (*The Invisibles* 1.2.25). In between writing paragraphs, Morrison claims to have been taken out of space and time and taught the "structure of the universe and the meaning of Life and Death were *actually* explained… by higher dimensional entities made of liquid chrome" (1.2.25). Much of *The Invisibles* is an attempt to relate what he experienced and learned in that encounter between paragraphs. His first attempt is the letter column, blending intertextuality with metafiction to discuss his own break in the series' cosmology and develop the comic along his own personal experiences.

To understand *The Invisibles* in its entirety, then, would require the reader to be Morrison, but such an attempt runs counter to the series' utopian visions. *The Invisibles*, like its titular group of rebels, is "suspicious of any kind of authority, including narrative authority" (Singer 106) and to submit to any one perspective or power structure is to undermine the comic's attempt to decenter itself, authoritatively, generically, and subjectively. At its core, the series is about the Invisibles, a group of international freedom fighters engaged in an ongoing war with the Outer Church, a group that controls and is the root of many of the conspiracy theories that exist in our own world. While the Invisibles represent freedom, autonomy, and agency, the Outer Church is interested in control, conformity, and obedience, a classic superhero dichotomy that comics have been retelling since the genre's inception. However, the series is ultimately a treatise on Morrison's notions of utopia and, as it progresses, the major conflict between the Invisibles and the Outer Church becomes increasingly complicated. Major conflicts throughout the series are increasingly critiqued for their relevance to the actualization of the AllNOW, Morrison's utopia, by passing through the Supercontext, a positive apocalyptic event that happens in the series' final pages.

That being said, this project approaches *The Invisibles* through the lens of its contemporary comic culture, namely the advent of the 'grim and gritty' realism that began to dominate the mainstream superhero comics of the nineteen nineties. To isolate the series from its contemporary culture would be to limit its agency within said culture, to divide fiction from reality in such a way as to be counter-intuitive to the series' interplay of the binary. Chapter one, then, establishes the dominant tropes and assumptions of the mainstream superhero

comics in the late nineteen eighties and nineties to examine the figure's impact and relationship to Morrison's own writing. In doing so, I will argue that the Dark Age of comics, the period during which *The Invisibles* was published, changed the superhero genre by prioritizing a realist perspective on the fictional construct. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* will act as the exemplary texts of this concept, which saw the superhero become pathologized and directly linked to the violence and conditions of violence that the superhero claims to fight and continually defeat. The fallout of these texts within Western superhero comics will be examined in how the superhero curiously became hyper-individuated from reality, reflected in both his ability to live in an insulated ethical code that justified an intensification of violence, but also in the figure's increasingly exaggerated anatomy, which acts as a blank parody of the realist impositions of the Dark Age. Much of the chapter will analyze the relationships between heroes, the communities they protect, and the fundamental problems with imposing realism on fictional constructs from a psychoanalytic perspective. From such a perspective, superheroes can be seen to continually reinforce the conflicts they perpetuate, as *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* suggest, but such a relationship assumes a reality that can indeed be imposed on fiction. The chapter will conclude with a look at Morrison's early metafictional experiments in *Animal Man*, which ends in a conversation between the titular hero and Morrison himself. In their talk, Morrison's anxieties about the relationship between fiction and reality highlight concerns more fully expressed in *The Invisibles*, where Morrison performs various metafictional experiments that attempt to free fiction from the imposition of realism. In doing

so, Morrison allows texts a certain agency in reality in ways that reflect Ernst Van Alphen's assertions about the objectification of cultural products. For Van Alphen, cultural products are disciplined into objects that reflect their cultural conditions over contributing to culture's production because "the aesthetic enactment of understanding achieves a disassociation or distancing from conventional assumptions" (xvi). Morrison's metafictional experiments, especially as his work progresses, works to form these moments of disassociation and distance from contemporary culture to suggest differing modes of interacting with reality, and thus produce *The Invisibles*' utopian goals.

Chapter two will then look at Morrison's various metafictional devices and their attempts to innoculate readers against the values of Dark Age superheroes. In these experiments, Morrison replicates Van Alphen's suggestion that "the crucial function of aesthetic disruptions of understanding consists precisely in triggering efforts to form new signifiers" (xvi), and indeed this second chapter will analyze the series' increasing anxiety towards Dark Age heroics and conventionally defined heroics in general. The character King Mob, and his curious relationship to his creator, will be the primary focus of this chapter as his movement through various iterations of the hero figure will complicate Morrison's previous metafictional commentaries. *The Invisibles*' complicated relationship to sensational violence, which is a central anxiety in its heightened experience and consequences, also simultaneously critiques the very ideological assumptions that allow for gruesome violence to be considered entertaining. Many of King Mob's actions in the series are open references to various iterations of the hero trope in popular media, from the Dark Age superhero in the series' openings to

the James Bond figure that dominates much of the second volume's look, tone, and story. King Mob's movement into a protagonist in the second volume at once revels in the violence allowed by the easy binary good and evil while becoming increasingly critical of how that violence, instead of solving conflicts, actually perpetuates and escalates the conditions that allow such conflicts. In doing so, King Mob recreates psychoanalysis' cycle of pathologization, confirmation of pathologization, and assumption of its existence in reality that Deleuze and Guattari critique in *Anti-Oedipus*.

The series itself frequently uses the metaphor of innoculation to discuss its movements towards utopia and King Mob's violence is increasingly critiqued as such an innoculation against the pathology of the hero, with the consequences of his actions limiting the agency of himself, other characters, readers, and even Morrison's desire for an actualization of utopia in reality. King Mob's insistence on the hero trope, with its repetitive and limiting capabilities, opposes the series' own insistence on multiplicity as an effective mode of resistance. The hero's repetitive cycles of violence and insistence on participation from the characters in the story are thus violent on the text itself, which purges itself of the hero's approach to violence in its conclusion, focusing instead on the potentiality of multiplicities. As such, this chapter will also shift its theoretical framework from psychoanalysis to Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis to critique the singularization of narratives that the hero trope necessitates because of the series' disavowal of heroic individuation and focus on lack. As such, the series moves towards Van Alphen's new signifiers by the its conclusion, suggesting ulterior modes of resistance that are proven more effective in their fundamentally

different approach to the series' central conflicts. Only in his final break from the hero's forceful interpolation of characters into specific, often dangerous roles, will *The Invisibles* and its characters be able to move into the Supercontext. This break sees King Mob shift his identity from James Bond to a self-titled ontological terrorist, who prioritizes production and multiplicities over the limitation of agency and narrative potentials.

The third chapter will thus analyze King Mob's new tactics as an ontological terrorist who moves the series' perspective on conflict from war to rescue mission. In doing so, King Mob becomes a producer of narratives which limit characters to certain generic expectations, moving himself towards the fluidity in identity, power, and linguistics that the series argues are conditions of Morrison's utopia, the AllNOW. As an ontological terrorist, King Mob attempts to engage with the underlying ideology of the hero and the potential for fiction to impact reality in tangible ways, absorbing the modes of resistance that other, more enlightened Invisibles have been deploying throughout the series. As such, King Mob is able to shed his insistence on conflict and more directly and effectively move humanity into the Supercontext. Rather than singular combat, King Mob uses the resources of global capitalism to disseminate products that replicate the AllNOW, using the very tools he once openly fought against to cause cultural shifts towards more fluid models of power, identity, linguistics, and navigation through time. This approach to multiplicity represents a shift in analyzing the hero trope from a psychoanalytic perspective to Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, which favours multiplied subjectivities for articulating positions within society. The third chapter will conclude by looking at how

Morrison's continued affiliation with King Mob causes the series itself to become a handbook of this fluidity, with the properties of comics allowing Morrison the opportunity to mimic the utopia he imagines.

This project, then, focuses on *The Invisibles*' overarching anxiety with the modes of violence produced by superheroes, specifically the impact of realism on the series' contemporary constructions of superheroic conflict. By analyzing the impact of realism on the superhero construct, this thesis argues that the imposition of a certain interpretation of reality limits fiction's capacity to impact reality, rendering fiction ineffectual on the assumption that reality has a single, discernible base from which this interpretation is drawn. As the first chapter argues, the impact of a specific form of heroism developed in the wake of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* favours a certain moral exceptionalism that values individual assertions of ethics against a corrupt status quo over attempts to change the status quo directly. The heroes of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* value individuality and privilege over the community's they apparently protect, failing to engage with the underlying violences of their own heroic ideologies. As such, realism's impact on the superhero ironically renders the figure impossible and decidedly separate from the conditions under which it fights. *The Invisibles*' anxiety towards the hero construct, by contrast, assumes art directly influences the culture from which it is produced. Rather than standing apart, Morrison's fiction attempts to use multiplicities and various metafictional devices to push against this disciplining of art into cultural object. By interrogating the hero figure within the text, primarily through King Mob's impact on the story and Morrison's own relationship to the character, I will demonstrate

similar limitations are enacted upon the series' itself, which restricts characters to certain roles eventually revealed to be harmful or inconsequential to the series' actualization of utopia. The hero's insistence on certain ideological frameworks, especially the necessity of an othered enemy to combat, demonstrate the violent effects these conditions create for both *The Invisibles* as a text and the characters within. In doing so, the text hopes to purge itself and the audience of the violent underlying ideologies of the hero, who attempts to exert a singular, exceptional reality over those around him, and move towards an inclusive utopia that seeks integration over conflict, humanity's rescue into the AllNOW over domination through escalating violence between enemies. Only through rereading the text, however, can the audience begin to replicate the conditions for a differing mode of heroics that the series eventually endorses, which is mimicked by King Mob's final transformation into an ontological terrorist. As opposed to the traditional heroics the series explores, ontological terrorism attempts to use the relationship between reality and fiction to influence reality, destabilizing the notion of a single authority within both the text and experiences of reality. As such, the series' own values of multiplicity and instability in regards to the production of reality are actualized in its utopian visions, valuing empathy over othering to hopefully invade the audience's reality in the very act of reading the comic series itself. *The Invisibles*, then, acts as a handbook for the actualization of Morrison's utopia, both in terms of content and the experience of reading and rereading the comic book, operating to draw Morrison's ideal society into our own reality through the act of reading and rereading a comic book.

Chapter One:

Realistic Fictions, Fictional Realities

In order to argue about the works, politics, and aesthetics of Grant

Morrison, it is necessary to place him within the appropriate publishing context.

That is, Morrison's work operates with an extremely intimate and long-standing

awareness of the dominant modes of comic storytelling within which he is writing.

The continued popularity of Morrison and his work is due, in part, to his ability to

mimic or play off these dominant modes while maintaining his own distinct voice.

To write about Morrison, then, is to write about his life and the history of comics

published around his own, an approach Morrison himself frequently incorporates,

including in *The Invisibles*, *Supergods*, and, as we will see in this chapter, *Animal

Man*.

This chapter situates Morrison in his chosen medium's most directly

related historical period, a period of comics that started in the mid-eighties and

continues to influence mainstream comics called the Dark Age, which is heavily

influenced by two mainstream comic series: Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons'

Watchmen and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. This chapter, however,

is less interested in explaining this history and the period's dominant tropes,

which have been accomplished many times over by very perceptive writers that I

will refer to throughout, and more concerned with these works' claims to realism

and their subsequent impact on the perception and representation of the

superhero figure. These claims result in a trend towards hyper-violent and

sexually aggressive work that, when viewed as reflective of the contemporary

culture, offer certain expectations of the role of popular art in the society which produces and consumes them. For Morrison, these concerns are paramount for interceding with his own work, where many of the dominant tropes of Dark Age comics are both celebrated and condemned. Rather than use the superhero genre to reflect and imitate a certain reality, Morrison's work necessitates a continuum in which fiction and reality both can productively inform each other. Thus, in his early metafictional experiments in *Animal Man*, Morrison analyzes the effects of reality on fiction, interrogating how the Dark Age's aesthetics and assertions, found through realist approaches, inform perceptions of reality. So, to begin, I will analyze *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* in regards to how their particular claims to realism insist on these perceptions of reality which, in turn, limit fiction's ability to inform an experience of reality.

"Reassembling Myself was the First Trick I Learned"

The Dark Age of comics, referred to as the revisionist period as well as the Iron Age, is marked by an increase in violence and sexual aggression that was before mostly implicit in comic books. These tropes are generally applied to the superhero narratives that continue to dominate contemporary comic production and the period attempts a specific 'grim and gritty' realism that claims to analyze the superhero by placing the figure in a contemporary, realist setting. *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* both emphasize these settings with artwork that similarly attempts to ground the superhero genre, which is often criticized for its disproportionate anatomies, in more believable bodies and settings.

The very naming of the Dark Age is representative of a fluid system that attempts to legitimize the medium to which it refers, at once acknowledging how realism operates counter-intuitively while claiming some sort of authority. Geoff Klock's insistence on 'revisionist,' for example, is in keeping with his readings of the period. Indeed, Klock's approach views *Watchmen*'s and *The Dark Knight Returns*' impact on the course of the superhero genre as representative of the first "strong misreadings" (25) of the genre. These misreadings, in keeping with Klock's application of Harold Bloom's theories concerning influence, recalibrate the genre by considering much of the underlying assumptions of previous superhero stories: namely, that "heroes can simply look after a population without complications" (62). Klock concludes that the revisionist period embraces the "paternalism cum fascism [that] is always present" (41) in the conventions of superhero stories. The superhero, after all, operates on retroactive praise instead of prior consent from the community he protects and these claims allowed for a differing approach to superheroes in their relationship to their communities.

These series' claims to realism, however, attempt to singularlize their own representations, denying that "'reality,' and the experience of its density, is sustained not by A/ONE fantasy, but by an INCONSISTENT MULTITUDE of fantasies" (Žižek "Ridiculous Sublime" 41, emphasis in original). The realism in the works of Moore and Miller, as will be discussed, instead attempts to reflect a concrete reality that asserts an authority over the representations of reality, in accordance with Fredric Jameson's own assessment of the realist novel, that has the "task of producing as though for the first time that very life world, that very

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'referent'- the newly quantifiable space..., of which this new narrative discourse will claim to be the 'realistic' reflection" (*Unconscious* 152). Realism, for Jameson, is already involved in the production of the culture it presumes to reflect, collapsing the critical distance between representation and what is being represented by claiming an interaction between realism's fiction and reality. In this capacity, the 'reality' realism reflects is already involved in the production of such a space, not separate, but still attempts to assert a certain authority in this critical, nonexistent separation; namely through the assumption there is a basic, singular, and representable reality which fictional constructs can be subjected to. However, Žižek argues that the "fantasmatic support of reality is in itself necessarily multiple and inconsistent" (41); rather than reality being a recognizable and stable referent from which realism draws authority, a more accurate model for experiencing reality must destabilize the notion of a singular base. Thus, Klock argues Morrison's work, in contrast to realism, "is paradoxically more 'realistic'... [because], reality, like the superhero narrative, is supported by an inconsistent base" (Klock 127). The period's realist authority, however, continues to influence and dominate the style of superhero comics, but my specific choice to refer to the period as the 'Dark Age' stems from a desire to destabilize the impact so I can question the legitimacy of the dominant tropes of the period, beginning with *Watchmen*'s claims to realism that argue the superhero's ultimate ineffectiveness.

Near the end of its first issue, one of *Watchmen*'s costumed heroes writes that "super-heroes had escaped from their four-color world and invaded the plain, factual black and white of the headlines" (1.32), a claim writer Alan Moore himself

makes of the series, which is written to "approximate real life as closely as one can in a comic book" (Sharrett "Alan Moore" 49). According to Moore and *Watchmen*, the world of Watchmen is identical to our historical reality until the publication of *Action Comics #1*, after which people started dressing up and mimicking superheroes and *Watchmen*'s reality became irreparably different from our own (Moore 1.32). *Watchmen's* stylistic choices and narrative strategy use these claims to realism to render the hero ineffectual and argue the figure's presence would instead affect the world negatively, being both dangerous and a force of fear over hope. By placing the heroes within a realist setting, Moore can deconstruct the superhero on both a visual and narrative scale that forces a grounding of the hero in 'real world' expectations. This imposition of reality on the hero character regulates reception through *inability*, rather than the extraordinary ability, and renders characters inferior and problematic through their juxtaposition to other versions of idealized bodies, both other superheroes and real world celebrities.

    Watchmen's characters are drawn in a style that emphasizes the narrative's realist approach over the stereotypical focus on an idealized athletic and muscular body. Rorschach, for example, is frequently described by other characters as "fascinatingly ugly" (6.1) and artist Dave Gibbons uses "very little cartoony distortion" (Wolk 239) in his character design compared to other superhero work. The appearance of another hero character, Dan Dreiberg, is not overtly described as ugly like Rorschach, but, as an homage to Batman, Dan is continually juxtaposed with more athletic, ideal bodies and styles. In the seventh issue, Dan's sexual encounter with fellow hero Laurie is juxtaposed with a more

ideal man, the eventually revealed antagonist Ozymandias. As Ozymandias

performs gymnastics on the television, Dan and Laurie's awkward and clumsy

sexual encounter is juxtaposed with Ozymandias' precision and grace. The

encounter eventually ends in Dan's inability to achieve erection as the television

commentary observes "there's not the slightest tremor of effort. It's all one

smooth, seamless flow of motion," during which Dan is unable to unfasten

Laurie's blouse (7.14). Gibbons characters possess "a distinct sadness... [and

are] frumpy" (Klock 65) looking, Dan in particular is a middle-aged and slightly

overweight man who differs from the idealized superhuman body (*fig. 1*). He

frequently wears cardigans, ties, and baggy slacks that emphasize his

unfashionable clothing sense and averageness. After the failed sexual

encounter, a naked Dan jokes that he looks "pretty Devo" (7.20) to Laurie while

wearing his mask. Her response is to laugh, further reinforcing his average

appearance against celebrity idealism, even in his superhero costume, containing

his non-athletic body through humour.

Fig. 1. Dan Dreiberg compares himself to Devo and Laurie's reaction confirms his

non-idealized appearance, *Watchmen #7*, p.20, art by Dave Gibbons, 1986.

Dreiberg's less exaggerated body and unfashionable clothing differs from

the idealized bodies and fashions of fictional heroes and real celebrities. Dan,

and the superhero by extension, are grounded in a certain realism apart from the

usual cartoon distortion. Rather than a potent and empowered superhero,

Dreiberg is depowered and disempowered, devoid of the superhero figure's

capability and powers, by the imposition of reality. Jameson asserts that realist

novels produce "the newly quantifiable space of extension and market

equivalence, the rhythms of measurable time, the new secular and 'disenchanted'

object world of the commodity system, with... its bewilderingly empirical,

'meaningless,' and contingent *Umwelt*" (152) that locates heroes in a quantifiable space. In *Watchmen*, this quantifiability renders Dan and the other heroes unremarkable, decidedly inferior to the characters they critique; Placed in a stable and realist setting, the heroes themselves become subject to that setting's limitations. As such, Dan, and the other characters in *Watchmen*, similarly cannot move beyond the everyday by the series' limitations of setting and tone. By placing superheroes in reality, as *Watchmen* openly claims to do, they become part of realism's mundane existence, quantifiable and realistically reflected in the new reality, of which the only conclusion is their disempowerment by the paralyzing effects of this supposedly realistic, everyday experience. Superheroes in the real world, then, could not act like they do in fiction because reality, as a representable and assertive basic structure, reinforces its own unification and, with it, disciplines the superhero into a similarly mundane existence that also acts to reproduce these conditions within reality. Dreiberg's counterpart, Batman, who shares many of Dreiberg's traits, from underground lair to a multitude of gadgets to aid in his crime-fighting, also has a long history of compensating for a lack of embodied superpowers with money, intelligence, and sheer will. Dreiberg, by contrast, is humanized in his lack of superpowers, rendered a figure of impotency by the realist aesthetics and setting of the narrative in which he exists. Rather than a character who stands for the potentiality of humanity, Dreiberg becomes a figure of everyday mundanity, a reflection of reality over a symbol of potentiality. Dan's unexceptionalism renders his heroism debatable and impotent, which in turn questions how such a figure could interact with its larger society in a positive way.

While the characters themselves are depicted in such a way as to reinforce their impotence, sexually and otherwise, the role of the hero in general is removed as well by Moore's juxtaposition of superhero tropes with his own "dark realism" (Wolk 105). Ozymandias, for example, spends much of an issue detailing his plan to save humanity, taking a proactive role in what he believes is a heroic deed. The scheme, to murder millions of people in New York by faking an alien invasion, is dependent on the other heroes' silence, going against the usual "baby-bird school of moralizing" (Sharrett "Alan Moore" 45) of superhero comics. This morality is extremely rigid in keeping with the superhero as exemplary of humanity, in addition to always being correct as the superhero must always be victorious by the end of the story. Ozymandias' plan and active approach challenges the traditional hero-villain binary in which "villains are proactive and heroes are reactive" (Coogan 110) and he fulfills many tropes of the supervillain, such as the long monologue detailing an evil scheme, a willingness to murder, and a desire for a new world order. As the plan had been enacted before Ozymandias' monologue, an inversion of a dominant superhero trope where the superhero thwarts the plan after discovering what it entails, the heroes in *Watchmen* must remain silent to ensure the plan's success. *Watchmen*'s heroes, then, are expected to stay silent, to compromise their usual ethical code, so the dominant powers will continue to believe the threat is indeed alien, meaning, as Dreiberg observes, "We are damned if we stay quiet, Earth's damned if we don't" (12.20). Indeed, traditional superheroics would condemn and reveal the truth behind the deaths of millions of innocent victims and, in effect, ruin Earth's chance at peace in *Watchmen*'s scenario. Instead, the choice

to remain silent allows for a reconfiguring of the socialist utopia present at the end of H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, in which an actual alien threat ends in a similar global cooperation, as, from "across the Atlantic, corn, bread, and meat were tearing to [Britain's] relief" (Wells 184). In order to achieve this utopia and end tensions between the United States and Russia, the hero must remain ineffectual, and the traditionally coded villain character, the mad genius who attempts to control the world at the cost of human lives, instead saves the Earth from nuclear holocaust. The utopia found at the end of Wells' novel, then, is given a certain cynicism that justifies the utopia on fear over a faith in humanity, moving the role of the superhero from idealized subject to a feared power. This inversion of villain and hero, in which the villain becomes heroic, "deconstructs the hero by developing its heroes -- extending traditional hero fantasies beyond their limits -- to the point where... these fantasies, realized, become nightmares" (Thompson 106). The nightmare is at once the hero's simple morality, which would, in "exposing this threat, ...destroy any chance of peace, dooming Earth to worse destruction" (Moore 12.20) and the denial of humanity's perfectibility; the hero cannot act as a figure of humanity's future, only a condemnation of its contemporary existence.

Indeed, the one character in *Watchmen* who refuses to remain silent, to never compromise, is murdered to ensure the plan succeeds. Rorschach, a hero who murders the criminals he faces, codifies the superhero's rigid morality in a nihilist vigilantism that exposes the problematic ethics of costumed heroes. His mask mimics the Rorschach ink-blot test, "black and white. Moving. Changing shape... but never mixing. No gray" (Moore 6.10) in a similar view of his own

black-and-white morality. When faced with the decision to remain silent,

Rorschach refuses to compromise and instead leaves to expose what has

happened. Rorschach argues that "not even in the face of Armageddon. Never

compromise" (Moore 12.20) and his methodology, his uncompromising morality

and extremely reactionary violence, became one of the hallmarks of the Dark

Age. Rorschach's heroic methodology assumes this uncompromising stance that

excuses those who self-identify as ethically superior from their violent actions.

Rorschach, for example, frequently kills those he deems criminal outside the laws

of the community he claims to protect and does so as an insistence on his

privileged position. As such, in the viewpoint of many Dark Age heroes, the

violence is a necessity to actualizing a worldview that continually reinforces the

hero's own exceptionalism, fatally removing those opposed and establishing an

ethically superior space outside the status quo over a direct engagement with the

conditions that lead to such violent events. The notion of an uncompromising

ethical stance, and the violent assertion of such a worldview, weighs heavily on

Morrison's work, as I will discuss later, but this exposure of superhero morality

hearkens an interrogation into the figure's underlying politics. For Rorschach, the

methodology reflects how "the wishful fantasies of power stem not just from that

we are powerless to live up to our own ideals, but also from an even deeper fear

that these ideals themselves are mere *projections* with which we cover over and

so conceal from ourselves 'the real horror' that 'in the end' reality 'is simply a

meaningless blackness'" (Thomson 107, emphasis in original). Rorschach

inverts superheroic romanticism and instead becomes, over an idealized figure of

good, a "blank onto which others would project their own fears" (107). The

superhero, then, operates not on the hope for a better future, the 'Utopia Theatre' is destroyed in the series final act, but a reorganizing of fear against an outward threat that reflects the inward politics of those organized against the alien threat. The moral superiority and ability to never compromise in traditional superheroes is instead reconfigured as a threat to safety by *Watchmen*'s finale, with the injection of the fictional construct of the superhero into reality ultimately rendering them unable to combat the violence they claim to suppress.

This contrasting of superheroes and supervillains within a realist setting argues that both the individual hero and the very concept of the superhero are dangerous to reality while being ineffective at stopping crime. If the superhero cannot exist in reality, then the optimism and simplification of hero and villain along a black-and-white morality is ultimately dangerous to the real world. Moore's book, then, questions not only the role of the hero, but the place of the representation of the hero as well, arguing that superheroes cannot act as idealized characters because of their inability to exist without issue in a world closely approximated to our own. Indeed, the only super powered character in the narrative, Jon Osterman, becomes increasingly detached from the ordinary citizens of the world, at one point responding to the death of a man he knows with, "Life and death are unquantifiable abstracts, why should I be concerned?" (1.21). Osterman eventually leaves Earth entirely, deciding "human affairs cannot be [his] concern" (12.27). The world of *Watchmen*, then, represents an attempt to subjugate the superhero to a singular reality in which the figure is rendered incompetent by a master narrative, that is, reality. However, Moore's insistence that superpowers would only further alienate a superhero from regular

humans is antithetical to the superhero politics of Frank Miller's realist approach in *The Dark Knight Returns*, which instead reveals the underlying fascist tendencies of the superhero. In doing so, the superhero's inconsistent base is revealed as multiple even within these claims to realism, which are multiple while feigning singularity.

"We Must Not Remind Them That Giants Walk the Earth"

Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, the other seminal work of the Dark Age, instead uses a combination of hyper-violence and claims to realism to intensify the politics of the heroes, pushing *Watchmen*'s discussion of fear into the realm of fascism. Geoff Klock argues that "illegal, physically violent coercion plays a role in all superhero stories," but the anti-democratic nature of this violence highlights the superhero's "flirtation with fascism" (41) that strips the rights of the people the hero protects. Miller makes similar claims to realism as *Watchmen*, arguing that he "simply put Batman, this unearthly force, into a world closer to what I [Miller] know" (Sharrett "Batman" 39). Batman, like Rorschach, controls people by fear but, unlike Rorschach, Batman is successful in brutally suppressing criminal violence through coercion and hyper-violence. Batman nearly cripples one of the first criminals he encounters and responds by saying, "He's young. He'll probably walk again. But he'll stay scared" (Miller 39), justifying his willingness to potentially permanently maim another person on the basis of sustaining fear in those relegated to the role of criminal enemy in the community. The citizens of Miller's Gotham City, by extension, are also controlled by fear, like Moore's world population, but this control is accomplished

by displays of superheroism rather than supervillainy while still complicating the distinctions between them.

Miller's villains are debated in a hyperbolic liberal media that at once stabilizes Batman's morality while questioning his enemies' ontology. The Joker is apparently a well-behaved inmate until he hears of Batman's return, upon which his trademark grin returns (*fig. 2*). Joker's psychologist, Dr. Wolper, argues that "Batman's psychotic sublimative/psycho-erotic behaviour pattern is like a net. Weak-egoed neurotics[...] are drawn into corresponding intersecting patterns. You might say Batman commits the crimes... using his so-called villains as narcissistic proxies" (Miller 47). Wolper's belief in the rehabilitation of his patients, all a part of Batman's rogues' gallery, is systematically broken down as each resorts back to their former behaviours until the Joker himself kills Wolper. While the Batman and his villains are argued to share an intrinsic relationship, Batman himself remains morally superior because the "dominant political order [is] depicted as irredeemably corrupt and bankrupt" (Uricchio & Pearson 209). The Batman, in Miller's realism, becomes an unearthly force against a corrupt status quo that would outlaw him, exposing the vigilante's basic politics: that the status quo is insufficient in distributing justice. The vigilante, then, becomes an extralegal figure who exists to enact the supposed desire of a populace cursed with an incompetent governing body. While "Moore's realism does not ennoble and empower his characters as Miller's realism does for Batman" (Klock 63), Miller's Batman is empowered by his position against dominant, status quo violence.

Fig. 2. The Joker's smile returns after hearing of Batman's reappearance, *The Dark Knight Returns*, p. 41, art by Frank Miller, 1986.

While Miller carefully connects Batman to his foes, Batman's relationship to his villains stops short of vilifying Batman outright, instead justifying Batman's extra-legal status by condemning the governmental and political system he opposes. Batman himself embraces this extra-legal status, arguing, '"We've always been criminals.' 'We have to be criminals'" (Miller 135), but this very position reinforces politics of exceptionalism and individuality, that social cohesion operates best on the fear instilled in others. The relationship Batman shares with his villains, that he in part produces and is thus responsible for them,

also exposes how "any understanding of the Joker [or other villain]-- violent, insane, or sexually deviant-- will reflect an aspect of the Batman" (Klock 36). However, Batman's crusade against criminality is couched in a response to the incompetent dominant status quo, which sympathizes with the Joker and aids in his escape and crimes. Batman, for his illegal status, maintains a position that "reaffirms the Batman's role as a lone vigilante striving for a higher justice. Society may be corrupt but the Batman's honor and vision remain above reproach" (Uricchio & Pearson 209); or, as Miller himself states, "Batman makes his devils work for the common good" (Sharrett 44), absolving Batman of his own criminality on the basis of the greater good. So, while Miller's Batman blurs the distinctions between hero and villain, his hyper-violent, anti-heroic approach maintains a good-evil binary that justifies Batman's extremity on the basis of a realist society. Miller argues that comic book censorship, which had a significant impact on comics' stories and themes into the nineteen nineties, created an unrealistic society in which "authority is always right, policemen never take bribes, [and] our elected officials always serve our best interests" (Sharrett 38); instead, Miller observes that "the world we live in does not resemble the world of the censors" and aligns his own setting with this more pessimistic realism that takes into account the world as "terrifying" (38). By grounding Batman's actions in specific claims to realism, Miller intensifies the superhero's flirtations with fascism while absolving the superhero of any legal responsibility because of an unfailing morality. Rather than rendering the individual hero ultimately ineffectual, as in *Watchmen*, Miller produces a necessarily fascistic figure who

carries out the will of the people, governed by a corrupt status quo, without their permission, only their retroactive approval.

However, both *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* at once make claims to realism while purposefully diverting from the norm by injecting the superhero into a realist setting. With the appearance of Dr. Manhattan, the only character with actual super-powers in the series, history is even further displaced from contemporary reality, introducing various technologies that result from Manhattan's powers while reconfiguring the Cold War relationships between the United States of America and Russia. Miller's own work similarly claims to inject the superhero into a more realistic worldview and politics, but this reality also "includes cannibalistic gang members, topless Nazis, foul-mouthed flying robots, and a yuppie caricature named 'Byron Brassballs'" (Singer 53). These diversions from history always already displace the comics' realism from reality in stark ways, from the comic history the series engages with to the historical moments reconsidered throughout each narrative. *Watchmen*'s placing of a fictional construct, the superhero, into reality for an alternate history "makes the case that if our superhero fantasies were realized, our world would be radically altered, and not for the better" (Thomson 105). The intrusion of fiction into reality, for both works, operates to demonize the hero and blur distinctions between hero and villain. The response to this imposition of reality was a hero freed of the usual romanticized community who could use more extreme violence, tropes that came to dominate mainstream superhero comics in the nineties.

"You Take this Vigilante Stuff Too Seriously"

The artistic style of these comics has come to be known as "grim and gritty" (Wandtke 97) realism, a realist approach that foregrounds a pessimistic and ultimately nihilistic worldview. Batman and Rorschach's hyper-violent, anti-heroic methodology and willingness to react against the status quo or dominant powers became the major tropes of the Dark Age, distilling the politics discovered through realism into power fantasies supposedly targeting mature, adult audiences. Superheroics were to reflect Rorschach's black-and-white, never compromise, moral stance and the figure's methodology became increasingly indistinguishable from traditional villainy. Moore's characters, with their ineffective and unidealized presentation, become in *The Dark Knight Returns* an onus for a more violent methodology: if heroes subjected to the real world are unable to fulfill their function, then heroes must become more extreme in their tactics. Such a tactic served to collapse the divide between hero and villain as both became willing to use extreme methods to assert their own ideologies. So, while Iain Thomson argues *Watchmen* develops "its heroes precisely in order to *deconstruct* the very idea of the hero, overloading and thereby shattering this idealized reflection of humanity and so encouraging us to reflect upon its significance from the many different angles of the shards left lying on the ground" (101), I argue that the ways the politics of the Dark Age's realism were taken up articulates a worldview that is at once pessimistic, fascistic and justified because of realism's claims to authority. Moreover, this authority attempts to assert a singular, stable base for which the realism occurs over the multiplicities argued by Žižek. The realism of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*, after all, is based firmly in fictional constructs. Moore's comic continually digresses from

American history while remaining cognizant of major motivating factors, such as Cold War tensions in a society where the omnipotent Dr. Manhattan could simply remove the threat. Most indicative, however, is how the Presidents of the United States in both works are serving past their second term by forcing legislation that extends their reign indefinitely, marking a governmental and legal difference that articulates a very different political structure from the texts' contemporary reality. Thus, the society in which the comics are reacting is always already fictional, Gotham City remains a fictional city in its entirety, and the justifications for the hyper-violent fascistic superheroes that dominate the Dark Age at once reappropriate these conclusions while exposing the always already fictional qualities of their supposed realism.

In order to understand the reclaiming of the overtly fictional in Dark Age comics, I must first discuss the relationship between the superhero, his community, and the reader's engagement with the genre's escapist power fantasies. Superheroes, as discussed, are generally reactive to violence rather than proactive in its prevention, which would generally make for less spectacular stories. Part of the reason for this reactive stance, apart from obvious commercial reasons, is the superhero's wish to be desired by the citizens of the community he protects. In *The American Monomyth*, Robert Jewett and John Lawrence outline the classic superhero narrative, in which "a community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task" (4). The hero, in this story, represents the ideal person, able to denounce temptations to restore a community to an idealist paradise free

of internal conflict. In this capacity, the hero saves the community from an external other and is praised by the citizens as a desirable and wanted subject. Superheroes in turn interpret this idealized gaze as justification for their selfless acts that operate outside the established legal structures, the flirtations with fascism exposed in *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*.

This relationship between hero and community, then, involves a relationship of desire between the hero and community, in which the hero is rendered desirable to himself through the community's actions, which can be better explained using Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Jacques Lacan's Graph of Desire (*fig. 3*). The classic superhero, as the subject, occupies the lowest tier of Lacan's graph, which connects the ideal ego, the i(o), to the imagined other, the *e*, by a line representing imaginary identification. As an ideal ego, the hero must "identify himself with the imaginary other, he must alienate himself" (Žižek *Sublime* 116) from his own person in order to properly identify with the community. This connection and separation from the imaginary other is represented by the line connecting the superhero and the community, an imaginary identification which "is the identification with the image in which we appear likable to ourselves" (116). In order to appear likable, the hero interprets his desirability through the gaze and imagined identification between the community and the superhero, namely that the community perceives the hero as a necessary aid to an otherwise perfect system, an ideal citizen who selflessly saves the community from ruptures in the baseline peaceful state. By defeating these external threats and allowing the system to maintain itself, superheroes are never in direct conflict with the community and can perceive themselves as ideal,

both necessary and necessarily likable, and thus identify with the ideal ego. Through this process, the hero's desire to appear likable is perceived through an external gaze representing the internal wish to be seen as both necessary and ideal; the superhero is the ideal citizen and desired for his position as at once above the community and the potentiality of each citizen within the community. In short, the superhero is a figure that sees itself as a representation of hope, of a utopian subject and citizen that is both exceptional and necessary to the maintaining of an ideal community.
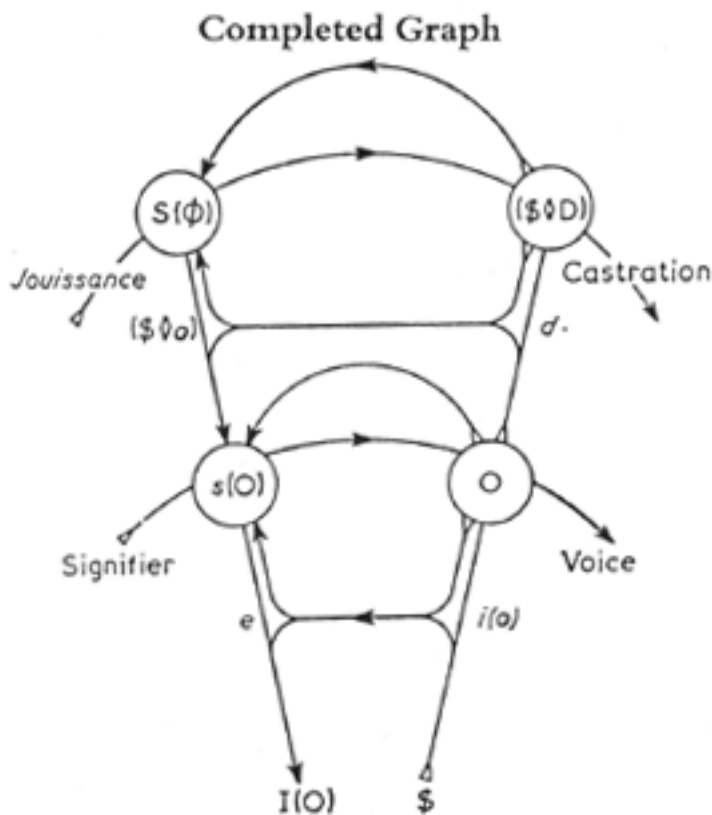

Fig. 3. Lacan's completed Graph of Desire, reprinted in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 136, 1989.

The Dark Age, however, reimagines the relationship between hero and community as one premised on a depoliticized individuality that maintains power through fear. Superheroes in the Dark Age appropriate the nihilistic worldview of Rorschach and the hyper-violent fascism of Miller's Batman to instead create heroes whose blurred distinction between hero and villain sustains the power fantasy of the hero while remaining ambivalent to the role of the hero as ideal subject. Ozymandias' final plan, the reorganization of Cold War fear towards an external threat, suggests the hero cannot ethically operate as the idealized hero. Instead, if the hero is to become heroic, they must adopt certain traits traditionally associated with the villain: they are to be proactive and deploy fear in this proactive stance against a corrupt status quo. This negative worldview operates on the conclusions drawn from the authoritative claims of grim and gritty realism; namely that heroes are no longer able to operate idealistically and instead must create a society in which they exercise their power as they feel necessary. The superhero subsequently reclaims the power fantasy inherent in the genre's construction, but also remains an ethical force, now justified through the lack of sufficient morality within the status quo.

The reader's relationship to the superhero operates identically to how the superhero renders themselves desirable to themselves along Lacan's graph. The superhero genre, as an escapist power fantasy, depends on the reader's identification with the hero on the basis of the figure's idealistic status. The hero is able to perform the actions the reader cannot, in terms of superpowers, but more importantly as a subject capable of defending against threats to the reader. As the hero was exposed as fascistic and insufficient in both Miller and Moore,

the Dark Age reaction was to appropriate the hero's violence and aggression into a narrative of the exercise of power not for the good of a community, which has been rendered corrupt and evil, but in an individualistic construct which contains opposition through fear and the threat of death. As Grant Morrison himself points out, the Dark Age heroes "killed: readily and without mercy. They understood that Gen X didn't want super Boy Scouts. They were post-Miller superheroes, off the leash, finally able to hit the bad guys where it hurt" (*Supergods* 246). Superheroes were no longer concerned with the ethical code Moore rendered obsolete; instead, they met the supervillain's willingness to kill for an ideal world with murder deployed as tool to create a space outside the community altogether. This outside space operates on the display of potency in which the "power fantasies were not of social justice or utopian reform, but of nihilistic, aimless hedonism and revenge" (246). Matthew Costello locates this retreat into individualism in late Cold War politics, a driving anxiety in the Dark Age, as Americans became "increasingly preoccupied with personal lives, and increasingly aware of the excess of governmental action, often justified by Cold War security needs, ... [and thus] retreated into privacy" (164). Thus, the relationship between hero, villain, community, and reader locates the discoveries of Moore's and Miller's realist approach in the presence of villains and heroes who, despite their similar tactics, are justified on the basis of a superior moral stance of exceptionalism, able to act because no one else is willing to 'do what is necessary.' Hence, the superhero, no longer able to defend a utopic community, is instead cast as a threat to the government, villains, and citizens who are not in line with the superhero's more liberated ethics. This manifests in ultra-power

fantasies in the characters themselves as the dominant artistic styles of the period became exaggerated visual reminders of the potency of the hero willing to be proactive and fatally dangerous.

As one of the most popular artists of the Dark Age comics, Rob Liefeld's style fully encapsulates this overly fictional escapism in the Dark Age power fantasy, a blank parody of Gibbons' or Miller's realist approach. Liefeld is famous for creating anatomically impossible figures whose hyper-sexuality and penchant for similarly impossibly large guns fully display the fictional reappropriation of the realism suggested in *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. Instead of middle-aged men with receding hairlines and impotence, Liefeld's art is overly potent; male characters are impossibly muscular, with massive shoulders and tiny waists, often carrying guns in arms larger than the bodies of his female figures, whose long legs, tiny waists, and enormous breasts highlight the otherness of the hero from the average citizen, for example:

Fig. 4 & 5. Rob Liefeld's exaggerated bodies, seen here in two covers of popular superhero titles, re-establish the superhero as an unobtainable, impossible figure, *Glory/Avengelyne #1* & *X-Force (1991) #9*, 1995 & 1992.

Rather than accepting realism's humanizing, Liefeld's superhumans are justified in their actions because of their impossibility to become real, instead representing a potent ideal that can only exist on the printed page. The Dark Age's exceptionalism, which allows superheroes to do as they see necessary based on their difference from humanity, is here given a form that is no longer human, but superhuman, so different from the average person that to even look like them is a physical impossibility.   Liefeld's artistic style, as a parody of *Watchmen*'s realism, exposes the assumption that superheroes can be disciplined by a unified reality and reclaims the superhero as an overtly fictional escapist power fantasy, politically indifferent and fearfully potent.

The Dark Age's typically dystopian setting similarly reflects the realist settings of the Age's seminal works, as superheroes are allowed to impact humanity directly simply because they are better than the normal citizen, articulating an exceptionalism that is able to stand against the gray and dominating status quo in *Watchmen* to uphold a black-and-white fascistic morality Moore problematized. The hero's recent grounding in reality is instead interpreted as the ultimate will of the community they protect, themselves as individuals, fighting against corrupt systems and increasingly violent villains with a force of finality. Dark Age heroes do not react to violence through battles to the near death, but instead murder their enemies for the supposed greater good. Characters such as the Punisher and Wolverine became increasingly popular in the wake of *The Dark Knight Returns* (Costello 167), offering anti-heroic characters who operated by their own "darker notion of justice" (169) that asserts their individuality and independence, killing those who stood in their way, either through the impossibly large and phallic guns or, in the case of Wolverine, blades that literally sprang from his hands on command.

Thus, the Dark Age tropes of hyper-violence, increasingly aggressive sexuality, and fascistic politics are justified in the former discoveries found in the realist approach. Realism's ultimate assertion, that superheroes are ineffectual and ultimately unable to fight the violence they claim to be stopping, caused the superhero construct to respond by becoming more individuated, more drastic, and more willing to use more graphic violence to assert a privileged worldview. This assertion is inherently dependent on a complete separation from a status quo exposed as unchanging and inherently evil, which creates a simple binary of

justified anarchistic hero and conformist, oppressive political structures. Despite their otherness in look, the superheroes of the Dark Age justify their actions in their reflection of society rather than a representation of an idealized figure protecting an idealized community from external threats. While the decreased differentiation between hero and villain is a hallmark of Dark Age comics, the morality remained black-and-white, never mixing, as the heroes, despite their ultra-violent approach, are continually absolved of their violence through their willingness to take matters into their own hands in lieu of a competent status quo. The superhero, then, remains ideal precisely because they remain a power fantasy that stands for a better world, albeit a world concerned with personal assertions of power or societal cohesion. The hero's newly realist settings and politics, however, necessitated a more dramatic response to an increasingly unbelievable situation.

Thus, the superhero, despite the apparent changing, remains a fictional construct that, when invaded by reality, still operates as a spectacular solving of the violence facing an increasingly cynical audience. Rather than offering solutions to the gray morality proposed by Moore, or the self-producing relationship between hero and villain in Miller, the Dark Age is a place of unheroic heroes, the good barbarian who operates outside the moral realm precisely to maintain it, which is the mode of heroics that Morrison's work anxiously engages and revels in. The Dark Age tropes, did, however, expose the root issues of one romanticized aspect of the classic superhero narrative: that the status quo is representative of an ideal invaded from outside. The Dark Age response was to abandon the community altogether and fight against the system for an individual

power display, but *Animal Man*, Grant Morrison's major work after the release of

Watchmen and *The Dark Knight Returns*, explores the superhero's relationship to

the status quo in both the fictional realm and reality. Rather than hypothesizing

what happens when heroes invade reality, *Animal Man* discusses the impact of

reality on art to discuss the agency of art in reality. Rather than art as reflection

of a supposedly realist worldview, Morrison's Animal Man, real name Buddy

Baker, becomes increasingly aware of his own existence in order to question how

worldviews are articulated and impact each other in fiction and reality.

"A Puppet Who Can See the Strings"

Grant Morrison's own work operates on a similar thesis to *Watchmen* and

The Dark Knight Returns: that the injection of a fictional construct into reality, or

vice-versa, irreversibly changes that entire universe, placing fiction and reality on

a continuum that can inform itself. However, while *Watchmen* and *The Dark

Knight Returns* inject fictional constructs into an approximation of reality to

discover the implications of the superhero, Morrison's hypothesis suggests the

intrusion of reality into fiction, or fiction into reality, can explore fiction's influence

in reality. Much of Morrison's work operates within the bounds of Dark Age

tropes for both commercial and thematic reasons but also questions realism's

authority. In short, if realism can make claims to reflect contemporary reality,

how does the overtly fictional make claims on reality as active cultural agents? In

the final issues of *Animal Man*, Grant Morrison becomes an increasingly overt

presence in the narrative, culminating in a meeting with the titular protagonist to

discuss the dominance of Dark Age tropes.

The issues leading up to Morrison and Buddy Baker's meeting deliberately reproduce and examine Dark Age tropes. After Buddy's family is murdered, for example, he adopts a Dark Age inspired costume that has an ironic leather jacket (Buddy spends much of the series defending animal rights) and becomes one of the "psychologically damaged sociopaths in trench coats, jackboots, and stubble" (Morrison *Supergods* 216) that dominate Dark Age superhero comics. Buddy subsequently teams up with a villain from an earlier story, killing those responsible for his family's death, before attempting to find who was truly responsible: Morrison himself. Morrison explains his use of tropes is because "pointless violence and death is 'realistic.' Comics are 'realistic now" (Morrison *Deus Ex Machina* 218), while the murder of Buddy's family itself is necessary because "all good stories need drama and it's easy to get cheap emotional shock by killing popular characters" (212). By retroactively commenting on his own use of Dark Age tropes, Morrison openly acknowledges the commercial reasons for their deployment while commenting on their impact; namely that the Dark Age's grim and gritty worldview is not a singular truth, but another fiction that does not necessarily need to be authoritative. This undermining of the superhero's authority, which forms the base of Dark Age violence and nihilism, is instead an attempt to rewrite the capacity of fiction to operate with more agency and rearticulate the genre of realism. In Morrison's work, realism is instead concerned with the relationship between fiction and reality in a differing mode, one in which the superhero actively deploys themselves against a status quo to manifest change within reality rather than in another layer of fiction. Morrison openly admits to using *Animal Man* as a

platform for his own convictions about animal rights; Buddy Baker "cares about animals because [Morrison] wanted to draw people's attention to what's happening in the world" (218), namely the abuses of animals to sustain certain world practices. For Morrison, the deployment of Animal Man, both the character and the comic, in reality represents a mode of superhero story that rejects the trend of "making your world [the comic world] more violent... more 'realistic,' more 'adult'" (224) and instead interrogates what superhero comics generally avoid: direct confrontation with the status quo.

A driving anxiety of *Watchmen* is the classic superhero's relationship to the dominant power structures, which is actively obscured by the superhero's desire. To return to Lacan's graph and Žižek's interpretations, the superhero's desire bypasses the inherent and necessary violence of the status quo to maintain the hero as ideal subject. The imaginary identification between hero and community also maintains the ideological system of the Big Other, the (O) on the graph, because of a focus on external threats to an internally ideal community. By returning a community to an idealized status quo, classic superhero narratives fixedly gaze outwards whilst ignoring inner turmoil, reflecting Žižek's subjective violence, violence that "is experienced... against a background of a non-[violence]" (Žižek, *Violence* 2). According to Žižek, subjective violence is also "enacted by social agents [and] evil individuals... [and] is just the most visible" (11) form of violence. The superhero views violence subjectively because of his outward gaze towards external threats and, because of his inherently stylized powers, he publicly engages with very visible violence. This defense of the populace is without the community's consent and protects it

through acts intrinsically against the community's ideals, this flirtation with fascism, by existing outside the legal and democratic structures to maintain the dominant ideology. The subjective violence of the superhero's battles may continually restore the community, but this violent methodology is also inherently anti-democratic: superheroes exist outside legal frameworks and act independently, seeing themselves as necessary without the community's consultation, and with only retroactive endorsement and admiration. This process of redemption outside the democratic system lets the Big Other maintain itself: the external threat is contained and "ensures that [the community] bears no guilt for the redemptive process," according to Jewett (212), as the violence required to maintain the status quo is enacted by an ideal subject who remains outside the usual structures. Further, the hero's interventions and imaginary identification operates as fantasy, which Žižek argues is "*a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance*" (142, emphasis in original). The system, unable to properly defend against the external threats, uses a form of violence opposed to the democratic ideals of the community and creates a system in which this anti-democratic intervention is praised by the citizens. The superhero is an admired part of the community, at once inherently opposed to the community's ideals and naturalizing the ideology of the Big Other.

     For Morrison, fiction plays a key role in subverting the superhero trope of ignoring or endorsing the status quo because of fiction's durability and dissemination. Morrison's *Animal Man* follows the exploration of realism within fiction to discuss the relationship superheroes have to reality, inverting Moore's thesis of reality imposed on fiction. Buddy Baker, as a hero, is actively involved in

animal rights issues because Morrison views fiction as more durable than human existence. In their conversation, Buddy asks Morrison if he is real, to which Morrison responds, "Of course you're real! We wouldn't be standing here if you weren't real. You existed long before I wrote about you and, if you're lucky, you'll still be young when I'm old or dead. You're more real than I am" (214-5). Buddy Baker's world and fictional experiences, more than merely reflecting a certain viewpoint of reality, become an active resistance to how "art is 'disciplined' as a historical product instead of a historical agent" (Van Alphen xiii) precisely because it can interact with reality and, in certain capacities, is more durable in its representations. Animal Man's active involvement in various animal rights issues existing in both worlds is an attempt to move from realism as reflection to an active agent in cultural thinking, from the reactive superhero violence that superficially moves against a status quo to a mode of superheroics that investigates the superhero's role in reality. *Animal Man* ends in Morrison arguing that superheroes do not need to indirectly uphold a violent status quo, but can work more actively in changing their world and contemporary reality. Van Alphen suggests "the intellectual and performative power of art to reinterpret, indeed to rewrite, ... naturalized sociocultural... constructions" (xviii). So, Morrison's rewriting of Buddy Baker to incorporate his own animal rights concerns, and his inclusion of PETA's contact information in the final issue, is an attempt to deploy the "durability and potency of fiction" for an impact on reality. *Animal Man* explores this impact, the ways in which fictional constructs, manifested through artistic representation, change the viewpoint of realist discourses by exposing their underlying fictions, Zizek's inconsistent multitudes. Hence, when Buddy first

sees the reader looking at him (*fig. 6*), he is drawn in "a simple cartoonish style that ultimately made him seem more human" (Morrison *Supergods* 219), blurring the representations of fiction and reality and asserting a certain 'realness' in Buddy's simple drawing. Buddy Baker *is* ultimately fictional, even in his own reality, but the final issues of *Animal Man* expose how the Dark Age's claims to realism are also fictions that can be reinterpreted, rewritten, to express the multiplicity of experiencing reality.

Fig. 6. Buddy Baker turns around and tells readers he can see them, *Deus Ex Machina*, p. 41, art by Chas Truog & Doug Hazelwood, 2003.

The tension between superhero and dominant power structures gradually rises in *Animal Man* until the hero discovers the absolute authority: the imposition of the will of the author and publisher, who insist that even the production of Buddy Baker's world is multiple. Morrison expresses surprise that Buddy cannot tell that "someone else writes [his] life when [he's] with the Justice League" (*Deus Ex* 213). Buddy also meets another version of himself from before a retroactive continuity fix by the publisher, who informs Buddy that "our lives are not our own" (39), questioning both the singularity of Buddy's existence while affirming the multiple base structuring his experience of his reality. His struggle against the status quo is similarly located in an impossible conundrum: the protagonist appears to rely on the will of the author to imprint onto the hero's actions. Rather than project the effects of reality onto fiction, as is the case in Miller's and Moore's grim and gritty realism, Morrison *interrogates* the effects of reality onto fiction to explore the changing aesthetics and attitudes the authoritative claims of realism are having on perceptions of reality. *Animal Man* is less concerned with exposing the ultimate ineffectiveness of the superhero as a fictional construct than surmising the relationship between fiction and reality within reality, claiming that reality is also fantastic and based on a set of ontological assumptions that claim singular mastery but are unable to contain the entirety of existence. If *Watchmen* shows the effects of imposing a singular reality onto fiction, Morrison's texts explore the imposition of fiction onto reality and, in doing so, engage with the effects of fiction on the status quo. Rather than agents in supporting, or power fantasies actively separating from these dominant structures, Morrison's metafictional experiments make it possible for superheroes to operate along a

more grounded hope rather than a misdirection of fear. By subjecting Buddy Baker to reality, he is invigorated in an active engagement with status quo violence beyond using fear for control. The superhero can instead engage with the inconsistent multiplicities of reality, adding to these underlying operations that can inform the relationship audiences have with their own acceptance of claims to singular realities.

Chapter Two:

Grant "King Mob" Morrison: The Hero as Pathogen

Whereas Grant Morrison's metafictional experimentations in *Animal Man* focus on descending into a fictional universe, his experimentations in *The Invisibles* attempt to reverse this process and actualize fictional characters in our reality. Rather than writing himself into his comics, Morrison began to "explore the interface between fact and fiction in a more personally involving way" (Morrison, *Supergods* 254), acting out his characters in reality as a means to reexamine and push metafictional devices. Being a self-described magician, Morrison relates these experiments to magical rituals, with *The Invisibles* itself being a *hypersigil*: "an immensely powerful and sometimes dangerous method for actually altering reality in accordance with intent" ("Pop!" 20). Hypersigils eschew objective representation and instead attempt to actively change the experience of reality for audiences, creators, and by extension humanity, to create "a comic that would somehow take [root] in the minds of other people and spread, almost like a kind of virus of how it felt to experience these things" (Meaney 303). In other words, Morrison's metafictional strategies treat reality as a collective fiction, what Žižek defines as "the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes" (Žižek, *Violence* 13). By changing the forms of productive processes and even the identities he uses to navigate reality, Morrison's metafiction attempts to move from influencing literature to infecting the basis of reality.

The performative aspect of Morrison's metafictional experiences is inherently multiple, and this multiplicity and ability to move between identities aid in his own navigations of reality. For example, he invented a female persona because he "found that the 'girl' was smarter and more courageous and could more easily negotiate with and fend off predatory 'demonic entities" (Morrison, *Supergods* 256), performing alternate identities to interact with his experiences in differing modes. Where the Grant Morrison character in *Animal Man* establishes a hierarchy of reality invading fiction, his "ego-dissolving" (253) experiments with his female alter-ego reverses the process, prioritizing fictional devices that help the creator navigate the multiplicities of reality using multiple identities. This manifesting of fictional constructs in reality acts, in part, as a resistance to the disciplining of art into cultural object, as described by Ernst Van Alphen, and attempt to actively alter perceptions of both creator and audience. By performing certain characters in reality, Morrison destabilizes the notion of a unified subject and, in doing so, can manifest beneficial traits in his everyday experience, a process that becomes increasingly complex because of his relationship to King Mob in *The Invisibles*.

While Morrison's female figure is most clearly a surrogate for Lord Fanny in *The Invisibles*, Morrison most intimately weaves his own life with the King Mob. King Mob shares much of Morrison's own personal history, such as becoming financially successful through writing in the late eighties, being in a band through most of that same period, sharing a last name, and even having what Morrison describes as his "Kathmandu Experience," an epiphany he had in the metaphorical language of an alien abduction (Morrison, *Entropy* 48, 59). To

further develop King Mob, Morrison also performed much of the character in his own life during the series' publication, similar to the girl figure, by mimicking King Mob's perceived lifestyle to investigate both the romanticization of the hero figure and the relationship between fiction and reality. As Marc Singer describes, "Rather than basing the character on himself he began to model himself after the character, shaving his head, studying the martial arts, and hanging out in fetish clubs" (14). Morrison himself argues his relationship to King Mob is an attempt to "blend my life, my appearance, my world with King Mob's until I could no longer tell us apart" (*Supergods* 259). This blending of fictional construct and real person is integral to understanding Morrison's utopian ideals, discussed in the next chapter, but also acts, to use a frequent metaphor throughout the series, as an innoculation against certain approaches to conflict and fictionality. The innoculation speaks to an increasing anxiety within *The Invisibles* and in Morrison's relationship to his characters, namely the damaging effects of the hero figure and the singularizing of both narratives and reality experiences.

Specifically, King Mob is at once a power fantasy and a continually critiqued embodiment of the dangerous variations of the hero figure, especially the excessive violence and sensationalism that *The Invisibles*' contemporary comics and media, as well as the series itself, perpetuate. As *The Invisibles* progresses, King Mob's role within the titular group, the members' conflicts, and the series in general shift to provide a handbook in comic form for the shedding of basic underlying assumptions of the superhero narrative discussed in the previous chapter and with it a critique of the role of the hero in creating and overcoming conflict. This chapter, then, argues that King Mob negatively impacts

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The Invisibles' narrative because of his narcissistic emphasis on being a heroic figure, which in turn critiques the basic underlying assumptions of the various modes of heroism that make up the series' influences and direction. To begin, I will discuss Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis' process of pathologization and subsequent confirmation of said pathogen, which asserts a certain reality based on the discovery of a previously confirmed concept, such as the Oedipus Complex, that, according to *Anti-Oedipus*, necessarily serves as the metaphorical structure for many of Freud's diagnoses. Subsequently, I will further problematize the Dark Age superhero's counterproductive and dangerous narrative before moving through the other iterations of the hero figure King Mob indulges. Using the series' innoculation metaphor, I will argue that King Mob's various hero identifications create problematic, limited relationships based on an ideology that insists on an "invasion of threatening 'not-self' material" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 277). King Mob's endorsement of various versions of the hero figure perpetuate the heroic ideology that necessitates conflict with an othered villain in order to construct itself. Thus, *The Invisibles*, and the act of reading it, is purposefully "the confronting and integration of 'not-self'" (277) ideologies that continually construct enemies that make violence a perpetual spectacle that is never fully effective at changing the underlying social conditions. These critiques come in the text primarily through various epiphanies each major character experiences, and Dane's increasingly articulate revelation of nonviolence is juxtaposed against King Mob's increasingly repetitive and ineffective modes of resistance. By shifting from the previous psychoanalytic approach to Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, I will demonstrate how King Mob's heroism

requires a shift the metaphorical language of the hero's conflict from war to rescue in an attempt to subvert this heroic ideology and avoid the mythical roots and tragic inevitability of King Mob's personas. King Mob's own insistence on these ideologies directly impact the narrative potentials of various characters, which lays the groundwork for his shift to ontological terrorism in the series' final issue, which will be analyzed in relation to Morrison's utopian vision in the third chapter. King Mob's terrorism utilizes varying narratives throughout *The Invisibles* to critique the notion of a singular experience of reality and break psychoanalysis' cycle of pathologization and confirmation and instead show "how, in the subject that desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 105). The underlying notion of an enemy to combat, a necessity for the superhero narrative, is thus exposed and critiqued in the series' multiple approaches and King Mob's increasing violence, which is dangerously cyclical and similar to mainstream superhero comics' dependency of serial, continual threats. As King Mob's character development is linked to both the status of *The Invisibles* as a product within society and the changing articulation of the conflict between heroes and villains, the relationship between his creator, his liminal space between fiction and reality, and his development throughout the series highlights the dominant problems of Dark Age comics and the conceptualization of the hero figure more generally.

<div align="center">Hero as Other, Other as Villain</div>

Broadly, the relationship between the hero figure and violence follows the same critique of psychoanalysis argued in *Anti-Oedipus*, which exposes the cycle through which a pathology is confirmed as true by insisting such a pathology

always existed and is the most logical explanation. *The Invisibles*' desire to move beyond traditional heroism follows a similar process to change the metaphorical conceptualization of conflict. As one Invisible argues in the final volume, "We lied. We are not at war. There is no enemy. This is a rescue operation" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 18), shifting the larger metaphorical topography of conflict from battle to emancipation. The hero figure in *The Invisibles*, and even the series itself, is discussed in terms of innoculation, an exposure to a pathogen as a means of resisting. The innoculation metaphor suggests the experience of the pathogen is essential to a movement beyond it, but also that the disease is able to be overcome and never experienced fully, that the true experience of the disease being resisted can be avoided entirely. In the context of *The Invisibles*, this innoculation process comes through a reading and rereading of the series, an engagement with the text as hypersigil that, through Morrison's various metafictional strategies, offers a differing form of heroism no longer reliant on the construction of an enemy, but the rescue of humanity.

Psychoanalysis for Deleuze and Guattari, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, "encounters the Father everywhere" (*Anti-Oedipus* 57) and insists that the pathogen, the Oedipus complex, exists because constant diagnoses confirm its totalizing presence. For the psychoanalyst, a fantasy involving a beaten child, for example, "wants to deliberately reduce the *group* character of the fantasy to a purely individual dimension: the beaten children must in a way be the ego... and the one who does the beating must be the father" (59). The repeated use of the word 'must' exposes a relationship between insistence on a theory and the confirmation of said theory in reality, how the

Oedipus Complex attempts to narrativize fantasy to "impose... [a] triangulation implying that it was produced by the parents" (15) as a means to limit experience into a certain pathology. Even as the Oedipus Complex is continually "complicated, or rather 'desimplified'" (14) through variations and individual cases, the underlying confirmation of the existence of an Oedipus Complex limits the possibility to move beyond this singular narrative, despite a growing complexity and number of iterations of the same notion. In terms of the hero figure in *The Invisibles*, King Mob's character development mirrors this process, moving through various familiar tropes with increasing intensity and critique for the purposes of severing ties to the ontological issues behind heroism itself. Thus, King Mob's final iteration before entering the series' utopic finale, the Supercontext, is that of a new category, the ontological terrorist who is more concerned with the hero's underlying beliefs than the continual attempt to reinforce a flawed ideological construct. In becoming an ontological terrorist, King Mob attempts to move from the various desimplifications of the hero figure towards a more multi-faceted rearticulation of conflict that absorbs multiple perspectives, but this is accomplished after King Mob spends the rest of the series insisting on his status of exceptional hero.

The series grounds multiple perspectives against singular constructs for this same purpose, utilizing various competing authorities and perspectives to resist a centered textual authority. A continual question throughout the series is what *The Invisibles* is and who is telling the story: Dane tells the story to a friend in the future (Morrison, *Entropy* 157), Miles Delacourt writes a novel called *The Invisibles* (Neighly 262-3) that Robin subsequently rewrites to include herself with

the hope that, "If I write hard enough and honestly enough, I think I can make it real" (Morrison, *Quimper* 155), and King Mob is seen reading the previous issue of the series (Morrison, *Bloody Hell*, 16). The final issue even suggests that *The Invisibles* is a video game in which players can "play any of 300 characters, some more immersive than others" (Morrison, *Invisible Kingdom* 271). Multiplying the authors and narrative perspectives throughout the series "has the effect of distributing authorial control from Morrison to his characters and ultimately his readers" (Singer 106) and this resistance to a central authority mirrors the series' movement through a variety of genres and cosmological explanations for the nature of its universe, which questions how the "series adopts diverse implied authors, narrators, cosmologies, and genres while questioning the ideological assumptions of each of its constituent elements" (101). In this capacity, *The Invisibles* is "deeply suspicious of any kind of authority, including narrative authority" (106) and resists a singular authorial voice to which specific meaning can be ascribed. As such, the series' continual use and interrogation of various genres and tropes acts as a resistance to a preferred narrative through which the reader can experience the story, asking instead that readers hijack the text for their own growth towards Morrison's envisioned utopia, which itself is both individual and collective.

Such multiplicities continue to resist a singularizing narrative, an attempt to limit the experience of reality to realism's singularity and question how Žižek's quilting process "performs the totalization by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed - that is to say, by means of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning" (Žižek, *Sublime* 96). With

King Mob, his movement through various iterations of the hero represents the various quiltings that occur generically, engaging with the various means by which the hero is both similar and different in *The Invisibles*' contemporary media. The series' use of multiple genres, then, highlights the various ideological fixations that the hero undergoes in the construct's various iterations, all of which ironically insist on limited narrative constructs to assert themselves within a text that is inherently multiplied. Within these multiple perspectives, King Mob's role is continually defined along various generic lines, drawing from variations of the hero figure to critique approaches to conflict more generally while also addressing the dominant modes of conflict popular at *The Invisibles* time of publishing. In this capacity, the hero figure's differing modes of quilting meaning in both violent conflict and the perpetuation of certain ideological constructs, is destabilized by the multiplicities of the series' narrators, perspectives, and narrative authorities. Instead, *The Invisibles* operates as a working through these assumptions through exposure, a zeroing in on the hero figure's underlying narrative to expose the dangers of quilting readers' experiences of the hero, and resisting the desimplification process that perpetuates rather than addresses a singularizing pathologization of the experience of reality.

Masks, Leather, Bullets

King Mob's opening identity as a Dark Age superhero highlights how this mode of superheroism intensifies rather than interrogates a more useful mode of conflict, utilizing fatal violence to assert singular exceptionalism over social cohesion. King Mob's initial appearance is decidedly Dark Age, most easily

connected to the Dark Age's power fantasies, of which he carries many indicators: "King Mob" is a codename, one of multiple names he uses throughout the series, including Gideon Stargrave, his pen name Kirk Morrison, and his birth name Gideon Starorzewski. He also wears a distinguishable leather costume with a mask reminiscent of Dark Age costumes (*fig. 7*), possesses supernatural abilities like training in psychic warfare and the ability to leap through time and dimensions, and "routinely break[s] the law in the service of a higher morality" (Singer 109). These traits can be easily extended to most of the other members of the Invisibles cell, especially Ragged Robin and Lord Fanny, indebting the series to superhero tropes more generally and King Mob, like the series to which he belongs, initially operates as a commentary on the superhero.

Fig. 7. King Mob's costume, complete with mask and Dark Age aesthetic, *Say*

You Want a Revolution, p. 41, art by Steve Yeowell, 1994.

King Mob's first appearance is most directly connected to the perspective

of Dane, whom King Mob breaks out of a juvenile detention center called

Harmony House while adhering to certain tropes of adolescent power fantasies

with a focus on autonomy and subjectivity. As the protagonist of these first issues, Dane's perspective is prioritized, so Dane and the narrative authority itself see in King Mob an adolescent rebellion against authority, being "in awe of King Mob's ultra-cool, violent liberation" (Meaney 27). King Mob operates as a surrogate fantasy that reflects Dane's own desire to, in his words, "Get out of [Harmony House] first chance I get" (32), to escape his imprisonment as an expression of rebellion and rejection of the centre's values. For Dane, King Mob's deployment of violence, his visceral and successful destruction of a building linked to a conformist status quo, operates as a wish fulfillment and the character is limited to "enigmatic images of rebellion" (Meaney 36) because of Dane's prioritized viewpoint. Hence, when Dane is finally able to talk to King Mob, he admires how King Mob can "just go around killing people and blowing things up" (Morrison, *Revolution* 44), which asserts King Mob's autonomy from the systems that initially imprisoned Dane. The narrative revels in King Mob's violence as a reflection of Dane's own excitement at seeing his desire to destroy those keeping him trapped actualized. In this capacity, King Mob's initial relationship to Dane purposefully mimics the power dynamics of the superhero figure in Dark Age comics, at once easing potential readers into a familiar story structure while highlighting the simplicity and juvenility of the basic tenants of the Dark Age superheroes. King Mob thus fully encapsulates the Dark Age figure, not only visually, but in his hyper-violence, his ability to kill without remorse for a moral code he believes is right, much like *Watchmen*'s Rorschach or Batman in *The Dark Knight Returns*. King Mob's sensationalism, however, is dependent on an enemy whose worth has been removed in order for readers, and Dane, to

endorse and revel in his particular brand of heroism that problematically assigns worth to exceptionality.

By contrast, Harmony House's director, Mr. Gelt, places collectivity and conformity in simplistic binary thinking typical of the exceptional good versus status quo evil found in the realism of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. Harmony House inmates are given cards that say only "Yes" or "No" and Gelt explains the relationship between rebellion and conformity as a "war between good and evil. The forces of chaos [that] are forever seeking ways to gain footholds in young and impressionable minds" (31). Gelt aims to educate the inmates to "accept and understand [their] place as part of the status quo" (Morrison, *Revolution* 31). To do so, Gelt wishes to make the inmates "smooth between the legs, smooth between the ears" (40), removing both their sexuality and capacity for thought, and condemns emotion by praising neutral expressions over indulging in emotive expressions (*fig. 8*). The ideal inmate for Harmony House, then, is emotionally, sexually, and cognitively inert, willing to accept a position within the existing status quo that negates their own exceptionalism in favour of working as a unit within a larger structure. An Archon asks Gelt, "Did-I-not-give-you-new-eyes-to-see? Did-I-not-take-your-sin-away-and-leave-that-beautiful-ruin-between-your-legs?" (Morrison, *Revolution* 36), suggesting that Gelt has subjected himself to a similar smoothing process, a process that makes him a slave that, according to Meaney, means "in his slavery, he finds purpose, but he has lost much of makes him human" (25). In such a disavowal of Gelt's humanity, however, Meaney replicates King Mob's construction of the enemy: simply because Gelt no longer has certain qualities the Dark Age hero values,

namely potency, emotion, and individuality, does not necessarily remove his worth as a human life. Yet King Mob's perception of his enemy necessitates this removal of humanity along his own personal criterion to which his other opponents are also subjected.
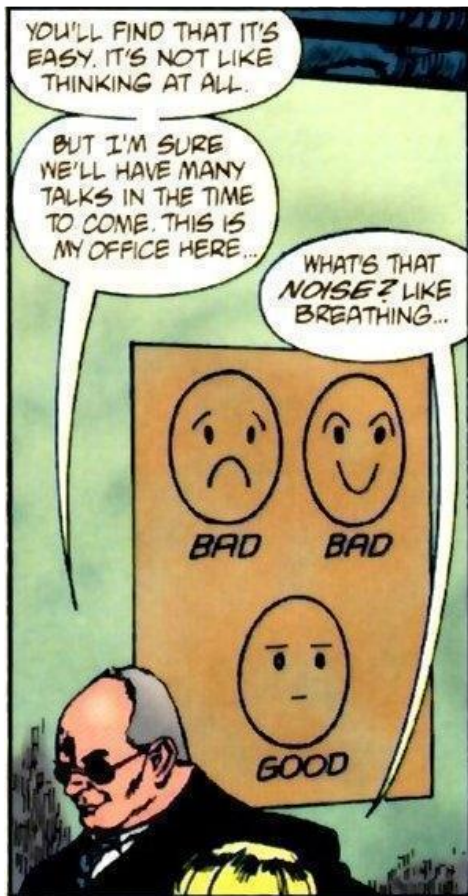

Fig. 8. Mr. Gelt explains his thoughts on thinking with a poster in the background condemning emotion, *Say You Want A Revolution*, p. 35, art by Steve Yeowell, 1994.

Thus, King Mob's dramatic appearance at Harmony House represents, for Dane and the reader, the desired rebellious figure, the extreme counterpoint to

Mr. Gelt, who inherently embodies many of the ideals and assumptions of Dark Age superheroes. King Mob's single-handed destruction of Harmony House, speaking in "snappy action banter moviegoers have been conditioned to associate with death" (Meaney 27), and shooting multiple security guards and the House's director, Mr. Gelt, are all indicative of Dark Age exceptionalism, the sometimes fatal and spectacular assertion of a supposedly more desirable higher morality above the corrupt status quo it resists. Mr. Gelt, Dane, King Mob, and the narrative's privileged perspective all indulge a binary thinking between good and evil. However, this binary constructs a war between the Invisibles and the members of the Outer Church, rendering legible a definitive conflict between opposing forces that necessitates such violence. King Mob, then, mimics Dark Age heroes, glorifying this violent conflict and avoiding harm; in doing so, King Mob fatally fulfills Dane's most immediate desires while reflecting binaries between exceptional heroes and conformist villains, the simplistic narrative between those destroying the world through a violent status quo and those attempting to prioritize their own personal autonomy.

The Dark Age superhero, the first iteration of King Mob's heroism, in the opening issue of *The Invisibles* adheres to a psychoanalytic perspective of pathology and confirmation of reality and, as such, approaching King Mob's relationships with Dane, the audience, and himself psychoanalytically is useful for exposing the desires of the superhero figure. King Mob acts as Dane's imaginary other, the idealized character to which Dane aspires to be, and can thus justify his own actions through King Mob's violence. King Mob, for Dane, is a character which allows Dane "to put his identity outside himself, so to speak, into the image

of his double" (Žižek, *Sublime* 116). Dane's infatuation with King Mob's car thus acts as a segue to Dane expressing a desire "to get into this [The Invisibles] after all" (Morrison, *Revolution* 45): the car, as a symbol of King Mob's exceptional lifestyle, indicates to Dane a literal mode of transport away from his own failed resistance. The car also indicates a supposedly more dramatic, definitive, and effective version of Dane's rebellious methodology, hence the simplified conflict of Gelt's forces of the status quo and King Mob's individuality. Dane, at the onset of the series, endorses King Mob's methodology because of this desire to confirm his perceived similarity to King Mob, for Dane to become his own imagined heroism that effectively resists the "decidedly evil" (Meaney 27) Gelt and his views on idealized subjects. Thus, King Mob's heroism initially appears as the desired mode for changing the status quo, of resisting the order in which the villain is able to misuse the bureaucracy of the ineffective everyday experience, yet this breaking free of the system only creates further dependency. In expressing a desire to join the Invisibles and mimic King Mob's methodology, Dane is practicing imaginary identification: King Mob, and the wish to become him, allows Dane to see a potentiality in his own violent tendencies, reinforcing his views on conflict and rebellion while ignoring how this approach in actuality supports the status quo Dane and King Mob claim to oppose.

Dane actively resists the ideology of Harmony House, but this rebellion is framed within a specific narrative of expected and temporary adolescent venting of feelings for easier assimilation, a necessity for the proper participation in the status quo. As Patrick Meaney argues, Dane's rebellion "ironically... is actually fulfilling societal expectations: society has taught him that rebellion is the role of

young people, a way to 'get that out of your system' before settling in for a normal life" (23). Thus, much of Dane's rebellion in the series' opening issue is counterproductive and reflects Žižek's subjective violence, a symptom of a status quo that "creates the conditions for the explosions of... violence" (*Violence* 36-7). Dane's violence, rather than engaging with the system, instead creates the conditions for the perpetuation of this dangerous status quo, reinforcing the need to turn an adolescent rebel into "just another blank, brutalized face" (Morrison, *Revolution* 15). His desire to destroy his school, for example, reflects how throughout the first issue Dane is "being confronted with the possibility that he could have something more and always rejecting it in favour of the status quo" (Meaney 23) that he believes he is opposing. Thus, Dane rejects knowledge in favour of its metaphorical abolition: destruction, in Dane's rebellious methodology, represents a means of escape while education represents a further involvement in the status quo. To be a member of the status quo, then, is to lose one's value to conformity. The violence is therefore inherently spectacular, a reflection of subjective violence's tendency to be "the most visible" form of violence, and Dane's introduction into the narrative fittingly begins with him yelling "Fuuuuuuuuuck" while throwing a Molotov Cocktail into the school library (Morrison, *Revolution* 9).   However, Dane is destroying knowledge in favour of continued ignorance, an act his teacher, an undercover Invisible, compares to fascism since "only Nazis burn books" (Morrison, *Revolution* 15) and to educate Dane on revolution, topics like Soviet anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin, to "other ways" (28) of resistance beyond those spectacles that endorse a violent status quo. Thus, when King Mob arrives to save Dane from the Harmony House, his

form of rebellion, with its definitive and spectacular results, remains a violence that only appears to be productive and conclusive, getting results where Dane's rebellions only creates a further dependency on the Outer Church's desired status quo subjectivity. By denying how his rebellion methodology only creates further dependency on the status quo, Dane is using his imaginary identification with King Mob, and by extension a romanticization of the Dark Age superhero, to bypass the (O) on Lacan's Graph of Desire, the dominant symbolic order. Hence, at the beginning of the second issue, Dane is abandoned to homelessness in the streets of London, victimized and dependent on charity to merely live. To participate in the status quo, consumption and capitalism, for Dane, becomes a commodity, something desired rather than something opposed, and his supposedly successful rebellion consequently makes him more dependent on the systems he claims to oppose.

King Mob himself is equally deluded by his own heroic posturing, however, and spends much of the series actively disregarding the various modes of resistance that could potentially end, rather than forever perpetuate, the conflicts inherent between the Outer Church and the Invisibles. Most tellingly, when King Mob recounts his breaking into Harmony House to his friend Edith, the panels purposefully mimic Rob Liefeld's exaggerated style (*fig. 9*), highlighting King Mob's self-perception, which endorses the forms of violence that Dark Age superheroes engage with, regardless of the serialized nature of superhero comics which rely on a perpetuation of conflict over the resolution of problems. King Mob's own perception is another form of psychoanalytic desire: he uses how Dark Age superheroes view themselves to justify his actions and, like Dane,

ignores how an adherence to a Dark Age narrative is both destructive and ultimately ineffective. As Edith says, "That's the most preposterous nonsense I've ever heard, Gideon. If you must come in here with both barrels blazing, then at least keep it plausible. Never mind your exploits in Harmony House, tell me why you're here before I nod off" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 118). Edith's refusal to call King Mob by his codename is indicative of her condemnation of the Dark Age hero figure, with her threat of nodding off suggesting a metafictional boredom with this specific style of storytelling, a theme that intensifies in the latter half of the series' second volume. For Edith, King Mob's views of his exploits are annoying, unproductive, and show how he has "become complacent" (118): she is indifferent to his posturing and is instead interested in how she can help the conflict in a more effective capacity. However, King Mob's own desire to write his narrative as a Dark Age superhero story is indicative of his own imaginary identification, which bypasses his inherent support of the status quo, the Big Other he claims to fight against, and ignores how violence is cyclical instead of final, similar to Dane's arc in the series' opening issue.

Fig. 9. King Mob retells his rescuing of Dane from Harmony House, with an art style reflecting Rob Liefeld's exaggerated artistic style, *Apocalipstick*, p. 117, art by Jill Thompson, 1995.

In this capacity, King Mob's fulfillment of superhero tropes comments on the deployment of violence in superhero narratives both before and during the Dark Age, depicting how Dark Age heroes merely intensify rather than change the underlying problems of the superhero's "flirtations with fascism" (41), to once again use the words of Geoff Klock. King Mob's violence continually reaffirms a

subjective violence that ignores objective violence through the perpetuation of conflict and a desire to separate himself from the community. Ironically, the Invisibles and King Mob all believe they are working to change society, a viewpoint that runs counter to their individualistic values.

However, in exposing this objective violence, both King Mob and Dane instead endorse a spectacular violence that claims to solve problems by eliminating a succession of singular enemies that stand in for larger issues rather than engaging those issues directly. For Dane, his desire is to eradicate the school and Harmony House, the latter of which is represented by Mr. Gelt and his faceless, uniformed soldiers, yet the appearance of Ms. Dyer and an Archon of the Outer Church in the first issue also indicates a more significant enemy. The defeat of Mr. Gelt is pleasurable, but combatting these entities as a means of ending the world they perpetuate suggests an ever growing yet still legible series of individuals that, if eradicated, will no longer stand between *The Invisibles* and its initial simplistic dichotomy between friend and enemy. This continual appearance of additional enemies points to the escalation and perpetuation of conflict, yet also speaks to the consequences of adhering to a view of conflict along a metaphorical language of war, as both sides of the conflict do. Deleuze and Guattari argue that in psychoanalysis "a subject, defined as a fixed ego of one sex or another, who necessarily experiences as a lack his subordination to the tyrannical complete object" (*Anti-Oedipus* 60). This psychoanalytic process of defining according to lack is in keeping with the metaphors of castration that dominate psychoanalytic discourses, how "castration designates the operation by which psychoanalysis castrates the unconscious, injects castration into the

unconscious" (60). In doing so, psychoanalysis quilts an ideological framework that structures reality along terms of lack and absence, and the Dark Age heroes' willingness to kill for their own autonomy only creates a more intensified lack rather than an escape from the metaphorical landscape of conflict as war. In killing singular enemies, as King Mob purposefully does in the first issue, the larger problems surrounding conflict are left unaddressed, instead focusing on creating various lacks: dead enemies that must be replaced with increasingly dangerous threats.

In this capacity, King Mob's insistence on singularity in a text that endorses multiplicity as an effective mode of resistance, limits the agency of every character in *The Invisibles*, up to the narrative potentiality of series itself. His prioritization of a specific identity, that of an exceptionalist and autonomous hero figure, imposes a hierarchy on identity, negating the inconsistent multiplicities that form the continual fragmentation of the self. By favouring a single identity, King Mob is attempting to unify his subjectivity along preference that represents "a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier... that bind[s] us" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Plateaus* 159). King Mob's refusal of a more multiplied model of identity, then, is what I will refer to as *identity narcissism*: the prioritization of one identity that attempts to organize and hierarchize the multiplicities of identity into a singular subject, much in a similar way that realism attempts to authoritatively singularize the inconsistent multiplicities of the experience of reality. *The Invisibles'* model of identity is multiple as a form of resistance against various authorities, and while these contextual identities may elicit similar characteristics, they are necessarily different to ease in the

combining with other multiplicities. To prioritize an identity, to be narcissistic, is

to either ignore or organize the context around a perceived primary identity

instead of continually navigating the various multiplicities that form experiences of

reality. Identity narcissism, then, is an attempt to be the General of an

"acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General" (*Plateaus*

21), to align the experiential landscape in a similar mode to King Mob's insistence

on a metaphorical landscape that positions certain characters in specific roles to

perpetuate the underlying quilted ideological assumptions. For King Mob

specifically, his insistence on organizing his metaphorical landscape around the

hero limits the agency of those around him, who are increasingly multiple as the

series progresses. Identity narcissism operates similarly to Deleuze and

Guattari's masochist body, which "uses suffering as a way of constituting a body

without organs and bringing forth a plane of consistency of desire" (*Plateaus*

155). King Mob's hero tropes perpetuate conflict over moving past or ending

such cycles and, as such, impose upon the narrative a delay in actualizing the

series' utopia. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari's argument that the masochist delays

pleasure "as long as possible because it interrupts the continuous process of

positive desire" (155), applies to King Mob as well: his refusal to move beyond

his particular form of heroism acts as a block to the pleasure of utopia, instead

revelling in the desires produced and constituted by the repetition of heroic tropes

and generic expectations. Thus, identity narcissism, and its relationship to the

masochist body, will define the rest of this chapter, which will argue that King

Mob's singularizing of narratives restricts the agency and capacities for

resistance, first by way of analyzing Dane's own movement away from King Mob's heroic violence.

The violence endorsed in *The Invisibles*' first issue neither examines the relationship between ally and enemy in *The Invisibles* nor the cyclical nature of restoring a community to a harmonious yet objectively violent state, the ultimate outcome of both King Mob and Dane's initial approach to conflict. This attempt to create a world without the enemy is complicated by King Mob's initial discussions of the utopia he and his fellow Invisibles imagine, at once recognizing the place of the enemy within it while maintaining an individualistic approach to the utopia that avoids a direct confrontation with his methodology. When King Mob explains the Invisibles' desired utopia to the Marquis De Sade, it is still an individual experience, "a track that'll result in everyone getting the exactly the kind of world they want. Everyone including the enemy" (Morrison, *Revolution* 204). While he recognizes the utopia of his enemies, King Mob still desires an individual experience, one in which everyone, however incongruent, will have a personal utopian experience. This individuation, however, becomes complicated as the series' multiple perspectives expose King Mob and the Invisibles' increasing violence.

Satellite of Love

After the initial issue, the consequences of King Mob's actions are increasingly critiqued from a variety of narrative perspectives, but Dane's alien abduction experience most immediately begins to question King Mob and the Invisibles' approaches to conflict and violence, both in desired outcome and the

form in which these moments are presented. Every major character in *The Invisibles* undergoes a similar experience: an encounter with a "mysterious satellite and a sort of cosmic placenta designed to help deliver humanity into the next level of consciousness" (Singer 116) called Barbelith. Each of these encounters operates along differing metaphorical languages: King Mob's epiphany, for example, has a strange submarine that comes "through a cultural lens formed through reading books like *Illuminatus!*, which featured a sci-fi submarine" (Neighly 73).

Each epiphany changes the character's perspective, yet the resulting actions and ideas argue against Barbelith communicating universal truths expressed through differing metaphorical lenses that immediately and finally change the character. Dane's encounter, for example, results in "a four-dimensional super-conducting crystal structure" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 193) being injected into him, arguing that the initiation happens over time rather than a singular moment. By expanding the epiphany across time, characters can move through necessary roles and identities to aid in the actualization of the series' final utopia, the Supercontext, because they continually change rather than becoming a fully actualized being that would become a singular authority, which would run counter to the series' notion that resistance comes through multiplicity. As such, Dane's own epiphany of non violence becomes increasingly articulate as the series progresses. His first adventure with the team, for example, involves travelling back in time to the French Revolution and Dane is violently ill for the duration of the trip, saying the experience is "like we're dreaming" (Morrison, *Revolution* 155). Dane's illness is "suggestive of the fact that he doesn't buy into

the mission the way the others do" (Meaney 45), placing a visceral reaction to the team's mission in his separation from their belief structure. As the series progresses, Dane's nonviolence and refusal to harm enemies becomes more articulate; when he plays video games with Boy, for example, he asks, "What am I learning here? How to blow some other poor bugger's brains out just when I'm getting over the trauma of the first one I done? ... I just thought that fucker in the balaclava might be a good laugh if you got to know him" (Morrison, *Mr. Quimper* 49). Despite being told "it's just a game" (49) by Boy, Dane's sympathy towards the virtual enemy characters is indicative of a changing point of view, one that considers the multiplicity of experience and questions the underlying assumptions of the Invisibles' conflict with the Outer Church, moving from a visceral reaction towards an argument for empathy with those classified as enemy combatants.

The alien figures who reveal the Barbelith epiphanies themselves are higher dimensional beings, characters who can navigate through time in ways the Invisibles cannot, and such a capacity confirms Dane's observation in the series' final issue: that "there's no difference between fate and free will" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 285). The epiphanies are at once realizations that dictate certain roles, but the characters in those roles still enact certain agencies in their decision-making. Thus, King Mob's increasingly violent behaviour can be seen as both an expression of certain tropes and the character's individual choices. This use of characters for specific narrative goals, the limiting of people to specific tropes, is a central tension as the series develops. However, the Barbelith epiphanies prioritize a more fluid approach to identity that aids in Dane's resistance of King

Mob's violent heroics, using characters for specific plot functions without eliminating their agency. As the aliens themselves operate outside the characters' own navigation of time, the epiphanies, in contrast to King Mob's heroics, overtly function by drawing humanity in general towards pleasure over a continual reinvestment in desire. The aliens, then, counter King Mob's identity narcissism through multiplicity, but also reject his staving off of pleasure in their explicit messages concerning humanity's utopian future.

Dane's Barbelith epiphany occurs in the story arc after his escape from Harmony House and utilizes various metaphorical systems to communicate both Dane's role in the series and challenge his ideological endorsement of King Mob. Initially framed as an alien abduction before shifting to Christian imagery, Dane's experience argues a continued multiple approach to the shifting themes found throughout *The Invisibles*. During his encounter, the aliens state that Dane is "the /(Chosen One)/ This is /(your time)/ your world is dying but you can lead your people to /(global peace and harmony)/" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 194). The brackets and slashes are indicative of the epiphany's multiple nature, the ability to shift the metaphorical landscape to best aid the target with towards a desired effect. While the epiphany expresses a central goal, it still resists a specific narrative authority because the entirety of the experience is created and revealed to characters for a variety of meanings and expectations in behaviour. The bracketed 'Chosen One' is part of a "cultural gloss: imprinted Christian/Roman Catholic symbol structure" (Morrison, *Entropy* 122) that utilizes familiar tropes to Dane's upbringing to discuss his position as a singular Messiah, or chosen one, to bring about a positive end of the world. The brackets suggest this phrase is

easily replaceable and indeed Dane is continually referred to as the "Maitreya, the future Buddha" (Morrison, *Bloody Hell* 18) by other characters, drawing parallels between the return of the Christian Messiah and a similar Buddhist figure. By highlighting the interchangeability of the symbolic structure of the experience, the underlying message is given priority while emphasizing the multiple approaches that can be deployed for more effective communication. For Dane, this structure results in a demystification of his violent behaviour to emphasize his role as a character who is to introduce a differing approach to conflict, which endorses a multiplied perspective towards the series' central conflict.

Dane's encounter with Barbelith argues against the hero's ideology he formerly endorsed, gradually revealing a differing mode towards conflict that runs counter to King Mob's heroics. The epiphany focuses on the futility of Dane's violent methodology and the inherent violence of constructing an enemy to fight against. Dane's thoughts are depicted as images during the encounter that the aliens can see and respond to. One such image is a fantasy of murdering the aliens, a course of action the aliens oppose, stating that "violence. /(   )/ you cannot act effectively here" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 194, *fig. 10*). By arguing against Dane's default desire to destroy his enemies, much in the same way King Mob murdered various guards to rescue Dane, the aliens are suggesting that such violence, constructed as spectacular and subjective approaches to an underlying ideology, is ineffective. The next page sees Dane fall by a Möbius Strip, a shape that only has a single side, and the words "Which side are you on?" (195, *fig. 11*), addressing the dangers of constructing a simple binary of

good and evil. The aliens argue against the othering effect of the hero's

conceptualization of the enemy, instead suggesting that both sides are one and

the same. Indeed, the construction of a heroic identity insists "on conflict with or

difference from the other [that] depends on that other for its own existence"

(Singer 131). In their construction of an enemy, hero limit their narrative

potentiality to that of othered opposition, a concept that Morrison explores

through the shifting of perspective, which grants the enemies a voice to counter

the Invisibles increasing violence and inherently flawed ideology.

Fig. 10. The aliens in Dane's abduction experience react to his thoughts of killing

them, suggesting violence is an ineffective strategy, *Apocalipstick*, p. 194, art by

Paul Johnson, 1996.

Fig. 11. Dane is asked "Which side are you on?" next to a Möbius Strip,

suggesting the simple binary between the Invisibles and the Outer Church is

false, *Apocalipstick*, p. 195, art by Paul Johnson, 1996.

"What D'You Want to Be Killed By?"

Dane's epiphany of nonviolence, or of a differing mode of violence that

operates outside traditional heroics, highlights the limitations such narrative

practices enact on various subjects throughout the story. As such, King Mob's

interactions with his enemies become increasingly problematic as Morrison

deploys multiple perspectives to undermine King Mob's identity narcissism. In

doing so, the basic tenants of the hero trope, specifically the necessity of an

enemy to fight against, becomes a source of violence in itself, one that *The*

Invisibles counters by allowing the villains themselves to participate in the

narrative, to have their perspective favoured through a variety of story arcs that

benefit from the series' deployment of multiplicities to aid in an undermining of narrative authority. The use of these multiple perspectives allow Morrison to be increasingly critical of King Mob's callous approach, but also the increasing cynicism and disregard for life that allow spectators, including Morrison and the reader, to enjoy sensationalist violence.

The twelfth issue of the series, "Best Man Fall," retells King Mob's assault on Harmony House from a single enemy's perspective, grounding previous victims of sensational, consequence-free killings as victims of the hero figure's ideology and othering agenda. The issue prioritizes the viewpoint of Bobby Murray, an Englishman whose upbringing both implicates him in cycles of abuse while recognizing his own choices in these cycles of abuse, Dane's collapsing of fate and freewill. This shift in focus encourages a broader consideration of how subjects are interpolated into the hero's ideology, becoming part of a system of cyclical violence that is never 'truly' violent which, according to Žižek, is "to perform an act that violently disturbs the basic parameters of social life" (*Violence* 207), but instead reproduces the necessary conditions for its own existence. In this capacity, Morrison's single issue from the enemy's perspective both humanizes previously discarded casualties and dehumanizes the glorified heroic figure, King Mob the superhero by emphasizing the figure's similarity to its enemies, reducing them to nonhuman elements. Rather than imposing a certain mundane reality onto the hero to suggest an inherent villainy in the hero figure, as is the tactic in *Watchmen*, Morrison contextualizes those previously deemed unworthy of consideration through a multiplication of perspective, drawing those

previously othered into a conversation of the various deployments of the hero by both sides of the conflict.

Specifically, the perspective shift in "Best Man Fall" highlights the Möbius Strip lesson from Dane's epiphany, suggesting that the concept of opposing sides is an illusion. Indeed, early in the series, King Mob watches a shadow puppet performance where the role of the puppeteer, the dalang, is to "make us believe that we see a great war between two great armies, but there is no war. There is only the dalang" (Morrison, *Revolution* 124). While King Mob can witness this illusion of conflict that ties to the central themes of *The Invisibles*, he is still willfully trapped within the conditions of the hero where an exceptional individual can emerge from such a constructions, and continually engage in these affirmations of self that are afforded by reengaging with conflict.

Thus, King Mob's heroism necessitates an othering process which constructs enemies to perpetuate the promise of emerging victorious, individuated and exceptional, from a large war between two opposing armies, which requires limiting othered subjects into prescribed roles. To refer back to Lacan's Graph of Desire, King Mob's desire to be exceptional stems from an othering process against characters who must fit within his conflict narrative. If imaginary identification relies on "the identification with the image in which we appear likable to ourselves" (Žižek 116), then such an identification necessitates an othering, a perspective that hierarchizes an individual against the constructed space from which we appear likable. In perpetuating the hero's desire to defeat an enemy and win a conflict, the underlying ideology is quilted, aligning these underlying notions in such a way that "stops their sliding and fixes their meaning"

(Žižek 95). In doing so, however, the subject actively participates in the limitation of the othered object and, in doing so, limits the agency of said object. Specifically, King Mob's romanticization of the Dark Age superhero relies on the construction of an enemy that adheres to certain narrative tropes intrinsic to the heroic quest. To be feared by an enemy that he will eventually defeat is necessary to the construction of himself as a hero that requires an othering process through which King Mob can limit the enemy to that very role, prioritizing a specific narrative function within King Mob's own perspectives of both his role and narrative arc. In short, the hero requires an enemy, and such a requirement necessarily limits those perceived as enemies to that role, despite the possibility that they are not as reflective of such categorizations as the hero believes. As *The Invisibles* is a series that is inherently decentered to counteract various limitations and authorities symptomatic of a fixed position, the rigid aligning of metaphors around a dehumanized enemy becomes increasingly complicated. "Best Man Fall" therefore performs a recognition of the various means by which a subject is limited by various narrative strategies, highlighting the potentiality of the constructed enemy that is removed by his inevitable death.

The issue's title refers to a game Bobby plays as a child in which a player chooses the means of his death and the other players pretend to murder them in that mode. Bobby ironically chooses a firearm in the issue's opening when given the choice between "knife, grenade, or rifle (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 83), reinforcing how the choices he makes will culminate in his actual death. The game itself, however, involves mandatorily choosing a role, the willful interpolation into the player's death narrative: they may choose how they die but

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the end result remains a structural necessity of the game rather than an escapable fate. This collapse of predestination and agency limits the capacity for characters to act outside these predetermined roles, which compounds the tragedy of both Bobby's life and King Mob's heroic ideology by highlighting how their choices and allegiances to specific concepts limit their agency. Such an effect is reinforced in the story's non-linear structure, which connects emotional moments across Bobby's entire life to depict how "the lessons about relationships he learned as a child eventually lead him to abuse his wife Audrey" (64). Moments are presented out of order and in quick succession, both in transitions between pages and individual panels, to reinforce the consequences of various moments across larger periods of time. These transitions highlight Bobby's involvement in cycles of abuse that are reinforced by his own agency and a system of violence that he both supports and cannot effectively resist. His abuse at the hands of his brother, for example, is quickly juxtaposed with his wife's black eye, connecting Bobby's "lifelong association with love and violence" (64), and such moments are given greater context as the issue progresses, highlighting the abusive marriage of Bobby's parents that he hears through his bedroom door (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 93). Thus, the emphasis on the interconnections between Bobby's life and actions highlights the difficulty of escaping the roles that are given to him, rather than being able to decide on an entirely new narrative. Bobby's choices are limited, namely adolescent rebellion followed by employment in the military and subsequent employment at a private security firm, occupations that effectively channel Bobby's violent tendencies into the perpetuation of violent conditions.

Bobby's choices, to join the military after a brief phase of adolescent punk rebellion, mimic the expectations of rebellion that ultimately reinforce the status quo presented in the first issue, shifting from his initial "counter-cultural punk to establishment soldier" (Meaney 65). This reproduction of Dane's own rebellion in the first issue offer a more logical progression of Dane's previous views on rebellion that at once separate him from this mentality after his abduction experience while reinforcing King Mob's callousness and simplifications. Dane's friend Gaz similarly expressed his own hopes of joining the military in the first issue, where he argues, "It's not for the government, it's for your country. Anyway, I would be fighting for money" (Morrison, *Revolution* 32). Gaz's separations of country, government, and economics at once reinforce the resistance to the corrupt status quo, represented by the government, but fail to recognize how these elements collectively perpetuate violence. Bobby is similarly forced into this matrix, arguing his reason for taking the private security job at Harmony House is because "we need the money" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 97). So, while the narrative connects these three systems together, Bobby is unable to find a true mode of resistance, to be truly violent in Žižek's formulation that changes the conditions of social experience. Dane's Barbelith encounter, then, becomes a privilege, a means to move beyond the narrative of continually reinforced violence towards a differing mode of resistance, a focus on the objective violence that depends on superficial rebellion and continual reliance on the status quo towards a differing mode of conflict. For Bobby, however, his inability to effectively resist draws strong comparisons to King Mob's own

subjective, visible violence and the limitations Bobby experiences at being placed into the role of uniformed enemy.

According to Meaney, the issue's dramatic tonal shift from the first issue demonstrates Morrison's capacity to at once "embrace the fantasy of the ultra-cool assassin and recognize that, in reality, killing people has horrific consequences" (Meaney 63), speaking to the conflation of entertainment and critique of the hero figure's ideologies that the series attempts to innoculate Morrison and the audience. By critiquing and de-romanticizing King Mob's violence, the depiction "of an entire life-without excuse or condemnation-[and]... forces us to acknowledge the human cost of the violence that entertains us" (Singer 113). Morrison repeats the strategy later in the series, when King Mob kills another guard who, when shot, has memories of his life explode out of his body (*fig. 12*), adding a further dimension to the consequences of King Mob's increasing violence. In giving the enemy context and a prioritized perspective, however briefly, Morrison points to how the violence in the series "is neither psychologically healthy nor morally justifiable" and, with its multi-faceted depiction, King Mob shows "signs that he is not the romantic hero Dane initially believes him to be and that his murders are not heroic deeds to be celebrated or consumed uncritically" (Singer 112). Instead, the cost of approaching heroics as a war between good and evil, and the dismissal of the significance of those who become collateral damage, highlight the humanity of those sacrificed for the Invisibles' conviction that they are the 'good guys.'

Fig. 12. King Mob kills another guard, Lieutenant Lincoln, whose life explodes out of him in a condensed version of "Best Man Fall," *Bloody Hell in America*, p. 63, art by Phil Jimenez, 1997.

The insistence on heroes and villains ignore each subject's multiplicity in favour of a singularized narrative role and experience. This insistence on roles is itself a form of violence that necessitates certain roles that both Bobby and King Mob occupy in "Best Man Fall," arguing the imposition and impact of narratives, and the necessary tropes that ensure their perpetuation, limit the agency of those involved. King Mob's role in *The Invisibles* reflects a growing concern in the text's multiplicities, the limitation of individual agency at the hand of limited

narrative tropes, and the interplay of King Mob and Bobby's roles in "Best Man Fall" reflect this inability to move beyond certain narrative tropes. Rather than actively pushing the plot forward, King Mob instead acts as a limitation on characters, effectively removing them from the story in various capacities which at once highlight the constructions necessary for his own chosen role, but also the dangers of being unable to shift through these tropes more fluidly. King Mob treating Bobby solely as his enemy, despite how he does not "buy into the Archon's agenda" (Meaney 65), singularizes both of their narratives; Bobby's status as the enemy overshadows his status as a human being who "becomes collateral damage of the Invisibles' war" (Meaney 65). In painting Bobby as a faceless soldier, King Mob can dismiss his life similarly to how he dismissed Dane's friend Gaz, an action that requires increasing violence over social cohesion by continually murdering objects of conflict. Bobby's victimization, then, stems from narrative impositions that limit his agency, a contexualizing of his experience within the hero narrative that lets Bobby choose the method of his death while reinforcing its inevitable conditions, much like the Best Man Fall game. Thus, Bobby's murdershows how the hero narrative is itself violent, which both limits his story, cutting short his participation, and ensures that King Mob can actualize his own desire to "grow up and find [himself] living in a 60's spy series" (Morrison, *Revolution* 34). King Mob's choice to limit Bobby to the role of uniformed guard reinforces how the Invisibles depend on and define "themselves through their enemies, becoming like their enemies, or sustaining their enemies through conflict" (Singer 117). In limiting their narrative, King Mob neither engages with the conditions of his enemy's presence and production in his

personal heroic adventure nor how to effectively reduce their numbers through alternative strategies, relying on war as the dominant metaphorical approach to conflict. Thus, when King Mob kills a man in an intensely violent scene in the second volume, he shoots the enemy in the mouth before saying, "You look like someone with an interesting story to tell" (Morrison, *Counting* 62), and then immediately killing him. By shooting his mouth, King Mob removes the enemy's ability to speak and his subsequent murder ends the character's direct involvement in the story, contextualizing him within a violent heroic struggle whose teleology is the defeat of the enemy, not the betterment of humanity as Morrison's utopic hopes would suggest. As this scene follows both "Best Man Fall" and the condensed version of Lieutenant Lincoln, King Mob's forceful denial of the man's backstory, an act that limits the character's direct narrative significance and potential, only compounds the ruthlessness of his actions, creating a desire to know the victim's history while intensifying the questionable ethics of King Mob's increasing violence. Thus, when Singer argues that King Mob "does not exert control over the text; he represents Morrison's romanticized self-image, but rarely does he direct the story" (106), Singer is ignoring King Mob's negative impact on the potentialities of various players in the series, creating a lack which imposes various strategies to fulfill his own desire, which are reflected in the story's differing use of the comic page.

 King Mob's narrative impositions on Bobby utilizes the formal composition of comics to emphasize his indirect involvement in Bobby's life, deploying comics' unique relationship to time and space to offer a broader context. Scott McCloud argues that comics rely on "spatial juxtaposition" (7) to communicate movement

in time, that comics interpret time spatially by relying on the *gutter*, the "space between the panels" (66). Moreover, the inability for comics to fully show a moving time that mimics an everyday experience must instead offer only frozen representations of time that rely on *closure*: the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (62). To read a comic is to 'fill in' the spaces in between the panels, the gutter, with a perception of the events rather than a conclusive, sustained moment. In regards to "Best Man Fall," Morrison deploys the gutters differently, relying less on the frequently used action-to action panel transitions, which emphasize singular moments in time, and instead uses scene-to-scene transitions that traverse "significant distances of time and space" (71). By using primarily on scene-to-scene transitions, Morrison emphasizes the temporal interpretations of comics. In doing so, "Best Man Fall" focuses on how single panels hold singular moments while the the temporal and physical spaces between generate interpretive possibilities, connections that require the reader's active participation. This differing use of panel transitions therefore displaces interpretive authority onto the reader while emphasizing a temporality to Bobby's previous contextualization as collateral damage.

While Bobby's uniform removes his individuality and thus worth in the eyes of King Mob's Dark Age exceptionalism, King Mob's costume dehumanizes him when put in the broader context of Bobby's life. The guards' uniforms argue a conformity across space, a lack of individuality based on relationships between subjects existing simultaneously in a single panel, while King Mob's own visual iconography persists across scene-to-scene transitions and thus large distances in the plot's time and space. King Mob's mask in particular connects him to

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various negative emotions and conflicts through Bobby's life, placing King Mob in a temporal context over an immediate spatial field. This use of repeated imagery and unique use of gutter transitions juxtapose the short temporal space that King Mob actually directly engages with Bobby against King Mob's presence throughout Bobby's life.   While King Mob's direct involvement is exceptionally short, his indirect presence throughout Bobby's life complicates the relationship between Bobby's narrative limitations and King Mob's self-identification with the feared hero. Bobby is initially framed in repeating panels with other guards in the series' first issue (*fig. 13*) to contextualize him with other guards, using the singular moment represented in the panel to contextualize Bobby's conformity spatially: in these precise moments, he is exactly like the other guards. King Mob in "Best Man Fall," by contrast, is a recurring visual signifier across significant distances of time and space that argue his continual presence throughout in Bobby's life and death, and that King Mob's perceived agency allowed through his insistence on being the story's hero enables him a certain legacy.

Fig. 13. Bobby's panel transitions emphasize his sameness and limit his capacity to move beyond these temporal constrictions, *Say You Want a Revolution*, p. 42, art by Steve Yeowell, 1994.

Bobby's repeated encounters with a gas mask throughout his childhood, one that "mimics the Myrmidons [agents of the Outer Church] as a symbol of fear" (Meaney 64) and King Mob's own mask, collapses the roles of hero and villain into dehumanized objects that both induce and rely on fear. Bobby first encounters the mask in his early childhood, in which Stewie wears it to scare his little brother Bobby, but is quickly related to his parent's violent relationship two panels later (*fig. 14*) through event-to-event transitions that rely on a repeated

image, Bobby lying in bed, and the reader's participation on inferring these moment's connections and significance. Thus, the panel transitions draw strong parallels between Bobby's history and the mask, between his abusive childhood that limits his narrative functions later in life and the very subject that ends his life: King Mob in costume. The mask becomes representative of Bobby's tendency towards violence, his willful induction into certain narratives that reinforce his own agency at the limitation of his ability to resolve conflict, othering those deemed enemies and thus worthy of defeat, much in the same way his killer reinforces Bobby's insignificance.

Fig. 14. The mask is quickly connected to Bobby's abusive parents and an imaginary identification as a hero to his stuffed bear, *Apocalipstick*, p. 93, art by Steve Parkhouse, 1995.

The three panels depicting Bobby's initial encounter with the mask and his promise to protect his bear from harm begin Bobby's othering process and desire to be viewed as capable of ending conflict through violence. The bear represents Bobby's own inabilities and lack of agency: the lifeless facsimile of a living creature is a hyperbolic representation of Bobby's own inability to escape the cycles of abuse that define his life. By promising that he'll "never let anything bad happen to [his bear]" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 93), Bobby claims a position of power through an imaginary identification with a heroic figure. By promising the bear that he will protect him, Bobby is allowing himself to believe he is capable of such protection from his father's abuse, despite the actual target being likely Bobby himself. This displacement is a form of imaginary identification, in which Bobby's desire to escape his father's abuse is seen as possible through an alternately constructed identity: Bobby can view himself as capable because his bear's personality and vulnerability, dependent on the bear's lack of agency, reinforce Bobby's perception as powerful. In doing so, Bobby creates a helpless community that requires his aid because of the community's own vulnerability, much like the superhero, and an enemy that requires defeat. Even when Bobby's mother attempts to show how the mask is just a "daft old mask" (Morrison, *Apocalipstick* 95), Bobby's continual reinforcement of his own power fantasy necessitates the mask's defeat. In the closing moments of "Best Man Fall," however, Bobby rushes into the shed where the mask is housed with a stick to destroy it, only to have the moment transfer to King Mob, who silently guns down Bobby and his fellow guards. The mask, a representation of the fear that

the hero figure is built upon and necessitates, remains othered and undefeated in the issue, instead killing Bobby in the closing pages.

"Best Man Fall" thus highlights how Žižek's interpretation of Lacanian desire, and psychoanalysis in general, relies on the othering process that conditions subjects into singular narratives to justify psychoanalysis' insistence on separation and lack. Throughout the story, Bobby is confronted with an old gas mask that bears a striking resemblance to King Mob's own mask. The mask gives King Mob a temporal legacy, collapsing Bobby's inevitable fate into the liminal space between fate and free will while giving Bobby an other that he continually operates against. Bobby's insistence that the mask is an enemy, a monster that needs destroying despite his mother's insistence otherwise, is indicative of an inability to shift narrative thinking outside the hero ideology, which psychoanalytically also depends on an othering process and singularizing of narratives to justify and perpetuate its own existence. As Deleuze and Guattari insist, psychoanalysis performs a process in which "You weren't born Oedipus, you caused it to grow in yourself; and you aim to get out of it through fantasy, through castration, but this in turn you have caused to grow in Oedipus - namely in yourself: the horrible circle" (*Plateaus* 334). For Bobby and King Mob, the insistence on a particular narrative, the hero's journey, is self-defeating and only operates superficially. Thus, when Bobby finally confronts the mask, Morrison immediately cuts to a silent panel of King Mob murdering him to emphasize the consequences of such a conflict while recognizing that both King Mob and Bobby are forced into specific roles to perpetuate conflict. The divide between the hero and the villain reflects Deleuze and Guattari's argument that "the world has lost

its pivot; the subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence and overdetermination, in an always supplementary dimension to that of its object" (*Plateaus* 6). If the enemy represents an othered object with a limited agency because of the assertion of a specific narrative, than such a quilting of the hero's ideology necessarily denies the possibility of reconciliation or how subjects may be "connected to anything other, and must be" (7). In this capacity, King Mob's own construction of self denies himself agency, despite the illusion otherwise, precisely because of an unwillingness to recognize the similarity and necessity of subjects intermingling for the true goal of *The Invisibles*: to offer itself as a handbook towards Morrison's specific vision of utopia.

Mob. King Mob.

King Mob's identity narcissism, his purposeful identification with a specific narrative and metaphorical landscape, similarly constricts his agency through his refusal to recognize the limitations of the tropes he performs. Specifically, King Mob's own idealization with Hollywood action heroes, which are at once glorified and critiqued by Morrison throughout, emphasize King Mob's own willful imposition of limiting narratives that deny him a multiple perspective for effective resistance to a violent status quo. Throughout the series second volume, King Mob's alignment with the James Bond style hero emphasizes a specific form of narcissism that insists on othering to produce the conditions of the hero's necessity rather than a re-articulation of conflict, a tactic employed by both sides of the Outer Church-Invisibles conflict.

King Mob's identity in the first volume shifts in the series' second, moving from a superhero figure to a more broadly defined Hollywood action hero that is at once glamourous and dangerous, reinforcing the power fantasy of the hero through a differing lens. As Mark Singer argues, King Mob has "*built* his identity around the enemies he battles" (115, my emphasis) and, just as Morrison developed the character on a variety of influences that range from Philip K. Dick novels to the British television show *The Prisoner*, King Mob constructs his own identity along these identical influences. Morrison's continual ego dissolving metafiction with King Mob cites "Jerry Cornelius, the English assassin. [He] wanted the guns and the cars and the girls and the chaos" (Morrison, *Counting* 54) as part of the reason for King Mob's shift in identity. In the construction of his identity, however, King Mob insists on aligning his experience of reality along a singular metaphorical landscape rather than allowing the multiplicity of his own life, especially an empathy with his victims that benefit from the series' own multiple perspective, to interrogate his underlying values. Rather than absorbing various points of view, as Dane's increasingly articulate empathy for the larger concerns these conflicts are working towards, King Mob focuses on the limitation of such perspectives, violently removing these alternate experiences to adhere to a singular viewpoint. King Mob is, however, inherently aware of his impact and cites how his "karma is a bloody minefield," but ultimately decides on retaining his role as a character who "kill[s] the bad guys like they've never been killed before" (Morrison, *Counting* 55). This insistence on his role as murderer is indicative of how the series "overindulges in exploitative sex and violence so it can purge itself by volume's end, an approach that allows Morrison to wallow in

the most brutalizing and objectifying practices of popular culture while he

denounces them- and pick up a few readers along the way" (Singer 115),

recognizing the popularity of King Mob's chosen role while questioning the cost of

its perpetuation. As such, King Mob's insistence on occupying a singular role, to

become singular in a text that is decidedly multiple as a means of resistance to

various authorities, exposes the destructive tendencies of denying reflexivity in

favour of a static experience of reality, one incapable of being truly violent to shift

the conditions of social experience, to move towards the pleasures of the series'

utopia instead of repeating desires *ad nauseum*.

The Invisibles' own power dynamics highlight an underlying anxiety of the

series that King Mob generally operates against: the manipulation and

exploitation of singularizing experience and individuals for the purposes of

perpetuating conflict. The Invisibles cell frequently shifts its internal

responsibilities, basing "their structure around elemental symbolism... [to ensure]

everybody gets a chance to assume each of the elemental roles and all the tasks

and responsibilities that go with it" (Morrison, *Bloody Hell* 39). This changing of

roles emphasizes "the concept of shifting, fluid identity. The characters aren't

assigned roles based on what they're best suited towards; rather, they mold

themselves to fit the role that they are given" (Meaney 118). Such a regular

practice of reorganizing responsibility resists a rigid hierarchy within the group

that could singularize experience and thus establish entrenched power dynamics.

As opposed to the Outer Church, who tries to crown an Archon the King of

England by the end of the series, the Invisibles' self-reflexivity argues against

traditional, fixed governing authoritative structures. Instead, the second volume

of *The Invisibles* allows Morrison the opportunity not only to "refashion his distinctly British literary series into a Hollywood action movie" (Meaney 111), but also refashion the roles of each character to aid in the broader critique of violence and subjectivity, changing the metaphorical landscape of the series by shifting the roles of its key players. Each character's role operates metafictionally throughout the second volume, reframing the metaphorical structure to condemn the first volume's obsessions with superheroics. Thus, the time traveller from the future, Robin, becomes the leader, having knowledge of the consequences of the Invisibles' actions just prior to the apocalypse, while Lord Fanny's shift to fire represents a differing approach to the conflict. Most notably, Boy's shift to the role of spirit, previously held by Dane, is to "galvanize and revitalize the elements around it... to shake you to the very core" (Morrison, *Apocaliptick* 127). Her increasing disapproval of King Mob's methodology, and his insistence on remaining static in his roles, leads her to leave the team entirely, to "[write] her way out" (Neighly 235) of *The Invisibles* by the second volume's conclusion.

Boy's role as spirit offers another approach to the series' central conflict between the Invisibles and the Outer Church that suggests removing oneself from the conflict entirely can itself be an effective mode of resistance. Morrison argues in an interview with Patrick Neighly that "Boy steps out and goes into the world again and brings everything she's learned back into the real world... She's great, but she didn't fit anymore" (Neighly 234). This strategy is less spectacular, yet yields positive results for characters who can leave King Mob's insistence on his role as a hero behind. Boy can move outside the conflict, and the story entirely, by refusing to involve herself in his increasing violence, re-

contextualizing the conflict into a larger narrative with multiple possibilities and alternative strategies. So while her agency as a fictional character is Morrison's justification for her removal from the narrative, her actions are a point of revitalization for the original intentions of both the series and the Invisibles as a rebel group: to change the world, to stop King Mob's masochism, to use the metaphors of Deleuze and Guattari. Such metafictional insistences destabilize Morrison as a central authority and highlight the agency of the his characters, one of whom removes herself from the conflict to attempt a more mundane, less spectacular approach to encouraging Utopia. Boy's role within the series, and her identity as a member of a rebellious group of heroes, effectively removes her from the conflict entirely to demonstrate the need for a reconsideration of the methodologies the Invisibles endorses and the series routinely sensationalizes.

Morrison struggles with the depictions of such sensationalist violences throughout, evident by his increasing concern for the impact it has on the character with whom he is most intimately tied and Boy's voluntary, nonviolent removal from the story represents a destabilizing of the dominating violence with which which Morrison and the series are fascinated. For Morrison to heavily identify with and act out King Mob in real life, to blend their interests together, also insinuates that Morrison's writing of such violence is itself subjective violence, that Morrison is a murderer similar to his creation. Indeed, the serialization of the series, and its repetition of certain plot devices like Bobby Murray and Lieutenant Lincoln point to a delay in utopia, a purposeful holding back that mimics Deleuze and Guattari's masochist body without organs. King

Mob still insists on being a hero, demonstrating the most spectacular inability to shift out of his metaphorical landscape and into a better mode of resistance.

In his interactions with the other Invisibles, King Mob becomes increasingly unwilling to adhere to their fluid dynamic. Despite the Invisibles regularly exchanging roles, King Mob, who begins the series as the leader, refuses to shift his role, leading to conflicts within the group as he tries to assert a stable self. This unwillingness to adhere to the Invisibles fluid power dynamics reinforces his self-perceived exceptionalism, highlighting how his narcissism also limits the agency of his allies and even himself in his construction and imposition of certain narrative expectations. Thus, King Mob's alignment of the experiential landscape, which positions Bobby Murray as a faceless and worthless guard, ignores the relationship that perpetuates the underlying quilted ideological assumptions and, as such, limits the agency of those around him, who are increasingly multiple as the series progresses.

In particular, King Mob is psychically attacked by members of the Outer Church in Philadelphia by a machine that highlights how his own agency is limited by his identity narcissism. Colonel Friday explains that the attack "is a resonator; it amplifies microwave transmissions which we can use to stimulate fight-or-flight responses in the central nervous system of the target. The so-called rational mind fills in and imagines the ultimate enemy in pursuit" (Morrison, *Quimper* 71). As King Mob becomes increasingly paranoid, he invests further into the hero narrative, comparing himself to James Bond (57) and manufacturing bombs to destroy enemies that do not exist. Such an investment, while originating from the enemy's technology, emphasizes King Mob's increasingly

dangerous self-identification and the dependency on fear as his motivating factor, drawing comparisons between his Dark Age heroism and his more recent James Bond style, Hollywood action hero. The resonator manufactures the presence of an enemy, inducing fear in King Mob, and he acts accordingly. Fittingly, as King Mob pursues the enemy, he eventually is confronted with a door that bears his name on the other side (79), indicative of his position within his own narrative. As the hero dependent on escalating violence to justify his own power fantasies, King Mob's eventuality is no different from Bobby Murray: such insistences on increasingly dangerous narratives becomes itself a form of suicide. Robin, despite drawing the position of leader, allows King Mob full control of the situation and as such he becomes increasingly violent and indignant. Rather than considering his position within a power dynamic, he continues to assert his own identity, and the entire Philadelphia experience is a fabrication based on his own fight-or-flight response as well as an insistence on Robin's own inability to operate most effectively. By overpowering the new narrative status quo, one in which Robin's leadership should be changing the team's dynamic, King Mob's aimless pursuit becomes purposefully repetitive, adding to the futility of the team's increasingly drastic measures. Thus, King Mob's identity narcissism limits Robin's own narrative potential within the story, relegating her to follower and a less active member of the story, counter to the fluid power dynamics the team prioritizes.

King Mob's experience in Philadelphia mirrors the process of interpretation, pathologization, and singularizing of reality critiqued in *Anti-Oedipus*, how "no one today can enter an analyst's consulting room without at

least being aware that everything has been *played out* in advance: Oedipus and castration, the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the great lesson of the inadequacy of being or of dispossession" (308). The pathogen, the resonator, is disregarded in favour of a narrative of biological function, the fight-or-flight response in the central nervous system, and in doing so allows King Mob and Robin the opportunity to deny their underlying ideologies in favour of a predictable and easily referenced fixed response: the confrontation with an enemy, the irony of which being King Mob shoots his own name the moment the machine is disabled. This blending of biological function, the fight-or-flight nervous system explanation for the machine's operations, and King Mob's own paranoia and need to kill his opponents mimics Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that "our 'object choice' itself refers to a conjunction of flows of life and of society that this body and this person intercept, receive, and transmit, always within a biological social, and historical field where we are equally immersed or with which we communicate" (*Anti-Oedipus* 293). In locating King Mob's paranoid hero figure within his nervous system, the resonator curiously highlights the social constructions of his desire to kill: his fear is based in the interplay of large aggregates, of social forces that interact with his fear of death and need for power and recognition, the narratives his identity is based upon. In doing so, the interplay between Dane's conflation of fate and free will affects King Mob as well: King Mob's agency is stripped of him, but only to have him perform his usual responses without the context of a real threat. Instead, the threat is inevitably King Mob, his name on the wall, and his ideological constructions and his own desire to be the tragic hero. In fabricating an enemy and running after it with guns and makeshift

bombs, Morrison innoculates his character by addressing the absurdity of his usual choices precisely because the methodology remains identical. King Mob's violence remains, even when decontextualized from actual, physical threats, and is thus proven dangerous down to his very biological functioning.

In confronting his own suicide by gunning down his own name, King Mob is forced to confront his own investment in the hero narrative and the consequences of believing in the figure's inevitable tragedy, of his own disavowal of pleasure in favour of continually reinvesting in desire. This desire to be the hero invests his identity in a confrontation that mirrors Bobby Murray's own violent end, but also Dane's former fascination with violence that is only subjective over truly resistant. As such, King Mob's Philadelphia encounter works in part as an epiphany against his own constructed identity and representation of fictional constructs. As Deleuze and Guattari ask in reference to psychoanalysis' investment in the tragic Oedipus Myth, "Why was mythic and tragic representation accorded such a senseless privilege?" (*Anti-Oedipus* 298). Deleuze and Guattari's use of Henry Miller's reading of *Hamlet* argues that "by retracing the paths to the earlier heroic life... you defeat the very element and quality of the heroic, for the hero never looks backward, nor does he ever doubt his powers" (qtd. in *Anti-Oedipus* 298), mirroring King Mob's subjectively violent engagement with *The Invisibles*' central conflict. The hero's romanticization of himself, according to Miller, offers a potential move away from "this ideational rubbish out of which our world has erected its cultural edifice... being given its poetic immolation, its mythos, *through a kind of writing which*, because it is *of* the disease and therefore *beyond*, clears the ground for fresh superstructures" (qtd.

in *Anti-Oedipus* 298). By confronting his own narrative to a metaphorical and virtual conclusion, King Mob is given an opportunity to move away from such investments. As such, he begins to question the validity of his worldview and metaphorical landscape and expand his reasoning beyond myth and tragedy, as psychoanalysis "treats them [myth and tragedy] as the dreams and fantasies of private man" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 305). Thus, King Mob's investment in the socially constructed mythologies and tropes in the hero figure are connected to his individualism: for King Mob to reproduce the hero, he is able to remain a singular and exceptional subject. However, his confrontation with his fragmented self in the form of attacking his own name highlights the pathology of the hero, the dangers of the hero's narrative and, in doing so, King Mob comes to question his underlying assumptions about his constructed reality. He begins by interrogating the agency of literature, telling Dane, "There's always a big demand for stories, especially at times like these. The end of the world; people want it all explained. What if none of it was real? All this stuff we've been believing since we started this" (Morrison, *Mr. Quimper* 107). King Mob's questioning of reality and the assumptions of the Invisibles' worldview, particularly his inclusion of Dane in 'this stuff *we've* been believing,' speaks to his questioning of the narratives that structure his worldview and the pressure put on literature to provide answers. This questioning of the validity of his experiences, however, is refuted by Dane and Fanny: Dane argues experience, whether virtual or based in a perception of reality, "doesn't matter to me. I don't care if it's all one big mushroom trip, man," while Fanny refutes the notion of reality, subverting reality's authority by proclaiming it "can suck my dick" (108). Dane and Fanny, who have

each undergone Barbelith epiphanies, are disinterested in the authority of a singular, valid, and representable reality and are instead concerned with experiencing its fragmented bases, prioritizing experience over the need for an authority to dictate reality's experience.

As such, the Philadelphia story operates as the inversion and confirmation of the Barbelith epiphany, dependent on King Mob's own preferred metaphorical structure, and reveals both an intensification of narrative and an epiphany past these entrenched narratives, the latter of which comes from an immersion back into reality over an abduction from it. King Mob rejects navigating a multiplicity, such as a body without organs that "intervenes within the process as such for the sole purpose of rejecting any attempt to impose on it any sort of triangulation" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 15). Instead, he is revealed as his own pathogen and his unwillingness to recognize the interconnections between himself and his pursued enemy highlights the insistence on the process of othering and alienation required for his exceptionalism. King Mob continues to insist on his "ultra-aggressive assassin" (Meaney 114) persona and the assassin trope overcompensates "as a reaction against the weakness... [from] the breaking of his mental barriers" (114). To feel power as a hero, King Mob "creates a new, even more brutal persona to guard himself" (114). Thus, his insistence on othering, especially from the enemy with whom he shares a blood bond, is indicative of a limitation on his own perceptions and agency, a refusal of multiplicities that insists on not only the singular roles of his enemies and fellow Invisibles, but King Mob himself. His desire, to be a feared and victorious subject, is a triangulation of narratives that subsist on his

own fear and thus denies him a certain agency afforded in the antiproduction of narratives, the movement between and through various roles that replicates the multiple base of reality. Thus, King Mob's narcissism, his inability to move beyond his own perceptions despite Robin's frequent insistence that "there's nothing" (69), is indicative of how "unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (overcoding)" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Plateaus* 8). King Mob's own intentional overcoding continually oppresses, denying any sort of internal multiplicity; instead, his insistence on a singular narrative denies him the ability to deploy multiplicities in the same capacity as his team and the series itself, instead attempting to align the metaphorical landscape surrounding him to a specific narrative pattern. In doing so, King Mob cannot fully escape the heroic methodology, but also participates in how "the perfect fascist state needs to operate in conditions of perpetual warfare" (Morrison, *Quimper* 62). King Mob's violence is thus not truly revolutionary, but increasingly alienating and reactionary, subjectively destroying while ignoring the Möbius Strip of sides, which question how King Mob's violence continues to simply participate in a violent status quo. King Mob's narcissism operates on a narrative level, limiting the series to repeated expressions of desire that mimic Dane's original perspective, glorifying his unwillingness to move beyond his conflict metaphors and occupy a perspective similar to the alien's who provide epiphanies, which works to draw characters towards pleasure and away from repeated investments in desire.

Finally, King Mob's violence controls the reader's function in the narrative, arguing various perspectives that force readers to confront their own willingness

to enjoy the increasing violence of the series' hero figure. In one such instance, the Invisibles are exposed to an attack that sees each member of the team "generate auto-critique" (Morrison, *Counting* 213), exposing their tropes' underlying anxieties. King Mob's own critique focuses on how "the most pernicious image of all is the anarchist-hero-figure. A creation of commodity culture, he allows us to buy into an inauthentic revolutionary praxis. When's the movie? The hero encourages passive spectating and revolt becomes another product to be consumed" (213). The auto-critique sees each character deconstructed by Morrison, "exposing the ironies inherent in each of them" (Meaney 161). As the series itself is a hypersigil against the forms of violence King Mob most visibly engages in, Morrison's critique highlights the irony of King Mob's own place within the comic: if he remains as he is, readers who endorse his actions are remaining ignorant to the series' overall critique of such modes of resistance. Further, the cover of the issue (*fig. 15*), depicts a variety of images traditionally opposed to King Mob's anarchist-hero-figure, such as "Buy!" and "Consume!" (Morrison, *Counting* 207). Robin's own referring to King Mob as "boss" (207) reinforces the static power dynamic within the Invisibles' fluid structure, instead relegating her to an improper role within the team. King Mob's own phrase, however, appears counter-intuitive to both the other phrases and itself, asking to "Demand the impossible! Overthrow the spectacle!... Disobey all imperatives!" (207). However, King Mob's position as hero is indicative of the reader's passive consumption of such tropes; to endorse King Mob's auto-critique is to similarly consume and obey like the other characters instruct. As hypersigil, the series has imperatives and asks for a revolution that starts with the

consumption of an "ostensibly revolutionary tract published by a major media conglomerate" (Neighly 136), but questions the reader's attempt to relegate the hero figure to that of a traditional hero figure, such as the franchised James Bond or superheroes who depend on open-ended narratives. As King Mob moves towards ontological terrorism, however, these comments become indicative of more effective modes of resistance while questioning the reader's role as passive consumer. As a product of the second volume, however, Morrison critiques the hero trope's consumability as an active participation and encouragement of a violent status quo over an effective mode of violence.

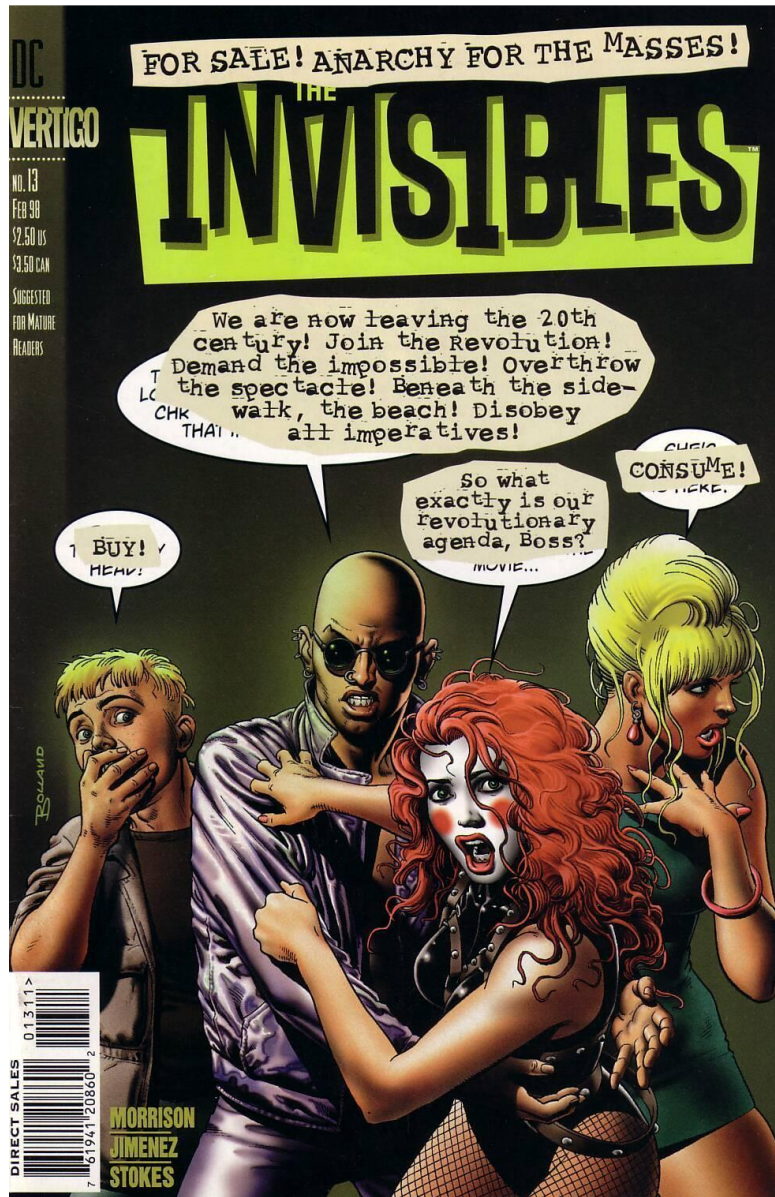*Fig. 15.* Cover showing more auto-critique that appears to juxtapose King Mob's

ideology with his teammates, but instead questions such declarations. Fittingly,

the speech balloons were removed from future collections, *Counting to None*,

207, art by Brian Bolland, 1998.

Indeed, King Mob's violence becomes increasingly repetitive, the second

volume's opening story, "Black Science," is given a sequel near the conclusion,

"Black Science 2" that is indicative of the cyclical violence King Mob inadvertently endorses. As such, the reader's own role in the furthering of ineffective resistances, the proxy of escapism or ineffectual critique of realist assertions on reality, are indicative of a denial of the power of *The Invisibles* as hypersigil, as an active cultural agent rather than ineffective cultural object. King Mob's own movement away from such heroism and into ontological terrorism, discussed in the next chapter, moves *The Invisibles* from these repetitive narratives of empty resistance.

Chapter Three:

"The En-Eh-Mee"

The Invisibles' second volume opens and closes with "Black Science" and

"Black Science 2," two stories that are similarly constructed but with different

climactic endings. The stories share many elements, including being four issues

in length, Mr. Quimper and Colonel Friday as antagonists, and breaking into the

same government facility in Dulce, New Mexico, a fictional American military

base that supposedly houses alien technology. The ending of the second story,

however, juxtaposes King Mob's violent heroics with Fanny's more effective

tactics, which remove both Quimper and Colonel Friday from their roles as

antagonists. The stories' similarities speak to a larger concern of repetition that

undermines King Mob's exciting sensationalism, but also interrogates the more

effective forms of violence present in the series, exposing subjective violences

while offering differing solutions. As such, the roles each Invisible drew at the

beginning of the second volume continue to affect the entire series. Most

notably, King Mob's former role as fire, the Invisible who is most tied to conflict, is

drawn by Lord Fanny, who offers alternative modes of resistance at the climax of

"Black Science 2" and throughout the series.

In the climax of each story, King Mob and Lord Fanny defeat Mr. Quimper

and Colonel Friday, the second volume's primary antagonists, through two

differing strategies. King Mob and his partner Roger predictably shoot and bomb

the facility with the antagonists still inside, shouting, "Rebuild that, you bastards!"

(Morrison, *Bloody Hell* 100) that further antagonizes their enemies. Colonel

Friday and Quimper, however, are both intact at the end of the first "Black

Science" and, instead of defeating them, King Mob and Roger only reinforce the divide between the two sides. Colonel Friday calls the Invisibles' excessive violence, how "they tortured and they blinded and they maimed and they brainwashed...[,] kid stuff" (100) and immediately resolves to "show those bastards" (100), further entrenching his position against his enemies, literally rebuilding the base King Mob taunts him about. In his listing of offences, however, Colonel Friday highlights the excessive violence as well as the effects, such as blindness and brainwashing, that the Invisibles regularly accuse their enemies of doing, particularly in the series' opening conflict in Harmony House. Colonel Friday's ironic condemnation of the Invisibles' behaviour speaks to the larger concerns of the series in general, which continually question the validity and difference between the two forces. Dane inquires about the similarity of both sides early in the series, asking Boy "if nobody knows who's working for who's working for who, how do I know I haven't joined the other side?" (Morrison, *Revolution* 134). Boy only responds with "good question" (134), pointing to how the layers of identity and fluidity in the cells make the assumption of opposing sides near impossible. By the end of the series, a new Invisible tells Sir Miles that "the 'Outer Church' you fear and serve and the 'Invisible College' you want to destroy... [are at the] same address" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 179), breaking the arbitrary divide between the opposing factions. By no longer juxtaposing the two sides of the conflict, the series begins to break down the conceptualization of the conflict in general at its very core: if the Outer Church and Invisibles are indeed at the 'same address,' then the conflict becomes an internal struggle that is inherently a pathogen. Such a pathogen, then, has symptoms of subjective

violence, treated superficially with heroism. Instead, the series ends by

retroactively considering those modes of violence that were most integral to its

optimistic conclusion; namely; Robin's aiding in the development of a timesuit is

proven more important than King Mob's various killing sprees, which dominate

the story less as the series moves away from his privileged bias towards a more

utopian perspective.

Lord Fanny's defeat of Quimper and Friday focuses on finally ending the

series' conflicts, not through escalating violence and murder that limits narratives,

but through "dialogue and [a] fight through love" (Meaney 195). Fanny, as the

fire elemental, instead re-articulates the confrontation between Quimper and the

Invisibles along the lines of rescue, releasing Quimper from his entrapment in the

series' reality. Quimper is in actuality one of the alien entities from the Barbelith

epiphanies, a higher dimension who has been "paddling at the edges of human

dreams" (Morrison, *Quimper* 164). Fanny, being unwittingly used in a ritual that

trapped Quimper in the Invisibles' reality, describes the experience and asks

Quimper if "they use our pain to bring you down from the light... into the heavy?

They crushed your poor skinny body into the world of weight and measure" (164).

Quimper frequently breaks out of his three dimensional prison, however,

speaking in backwards letters that suggests at once his resistance to a limited

movement through time and his former place in higher dimensions. King Mob's

own attempt to kill Quimper ignored Quimper's origins and as such, his subjective

violence was easily countered by Quimper's manipulation of the magic mirror, a

liquid chrome substance that is ""the secret of the universe…, the soul on the

outside looking in at the body…, an intelligent hyperdimensional fluid in which our

universe is embedded" (92). Magic mirror is used by Fanny in her magic, but is also the substance Quimper uses to heal himself from King Mob's attacks. By contrast, Fanny defeats Quimper using the magic mirror, not through his elimination, but through his emancipation from the Invisibles' lower dimensions that trap him (*fig. 16*). By using the material that Quimper also uses to heal himself, Quimper's release is emphasized over his defeat, and the absorption of both characters into the magic mirror focuses on the characters' similarities over their differences. While the Invisibles are accused of using the same tactics and weapons as their enemies, Fanny's strategy is used to, as Dane suggests later, "make friends with them until they beg for mercy" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 227). The panel depicting two of Quimper's masks, one worn by Fanny to trick him and the other his own, shows the similarities between the opposing factions. Both sides have characters trapped into narrative expectations and roles necessary for the hero narrative's perpetuation, which uses othering processes for people who occupy the same address.

Fig. 16. Fanny emancipates Mr. Quimper from her reality using Magic Mirror,

Kissing Mr. Quimper, p. 176, art by Chris Weston, 1998.

Indeed, Quimper is not defeated with guns or explosions; instead "the

weapon that Fanny uses to fight Quimper is change" (Meaney 195), a desire to

move past an increasingly repetitive narrative towards actual cultural shifts in

perception and experience, eschewing King Mob's masochism in favour of a

movement beyond the hero figure's desires. In her conversation with Quimper, Fanny describes the necessity of time, how in Quimper's "world there is only ever the ugly caterpillar. Just as in the world above, only the beautiful butterfly exists... Only in the solid world can the ugly caterpillar become the beautiful butterfly" (Morrison, *Quimper* 166). For Quimper, who has been forced into a three-dimensional space that cannot navigate time, his continual existence as a caterpillar is his perceived reality. For Fanny, this model can be deployed to initiate Quimper's own transcendence. Rather than force conflict, Fanny ultimately defeats Quimper through absorption and, as such, changes the perception of effective resistance in the series. Quimper is no longer a threat, a feat that will result in "everyone getting exactly the kind of world they want. Everyone including the enemy" (Morrison, *Revolution* 204), as King Mob observed in the first volume. For Quimper, this utopian world is a movement beyond reality and back into his ultra-dimensional existence, but as the series progresses, King Mob's conceptualization of 'everyone' will be broken down.

Quimper's descent into reality, then, resembles Fredric Jameson's critique of realism: in quantifying certain fictional constructs into a narrow perception of reality forces such constructs into ideological constraints. For Quimper, whose "each step is pain" (Morrison, *Quimper* 158), the trauma induced by his descent into reality places him into the heroic narrative that makes him the antagonist and a corrupted version of his previous self. By melding with Fanny and moving past this reality, he is released from these constraints, whose "constitution or virtual construction as a mirage which is also evidently in some fashion an objective reality" (*Political Unconscious* 153). Quimper's former reality

moved freely through time and the quantifiability of his newfound existence only

serves to further indoctrinate him into such a three-dimensional experience. In

rendering Quimper representable in their reality, the enemy characters mimic

Jameson's critique of realism, which argues:

> "Indeed, as any number of 'definitions' of realism assert… that processing
>
> operation variously called narrative mimesis or realistic representation
>
> has at its historic function the systematic undermining and
>
> demystification, the secular 'decoding,' of those preexisting inherited
>
> traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens" (152).

The Quimper that is representable in three-dimensional space is not the Quimper

as originally intended, and his ascension again into an ultra-dimensional

existence points to two key concepts essential to Morrison's articulation of utopia:

the experience of reality in a mode that eschews a linear progression through

time and the complication of individuality that instead argues for a level of

cohesion beyond heroic desires for exceptionalism and emblematic,

unquestionable good.

Fanny's 'defeat' of Quimper acts in part as a summation of the entire

series: the shifting ideologies surrounding conflict, the nature of the universe, and

the utopic world *The Invisibles* attempts to articulate by going through the final

positive apocalypse are all present in these few panels. More importantly,

Morrison's arguments about the experience of time in reading comics, how

comics represent time spatially, allows *The Invisibles* to be read and reread in

any manner of ways that involve readers in a mimetic experience of Morrison's

utopian perspectives and visions. Thus, this chapter argues that the experience

of Morrison's utopia, which occurs by passing through a positive apocalyptic

event called the Supercontext, is built into the series' formal composition of the

series. Specifically, I will analyze how the modes of resistance revealed to be

most effective by the series' conclusion reinforce certain relationships to

characters, temporality, and experience of layered fictional and autobiographical

constructs that always already involve the reader in a form of the utopia. In doing

so, *The Invisibles* attempts to avoid the crime Jameson accuses most utopian

fiction of: "not tell[ing] a story at all; it describes a mechanism or even a kind of

machine, it furnishes a blueprint rather than lingering upon the kinds of human

relations that might be found in a Utopian condition" (*Seeds* 56). The series does

offer blueprints for the future, being a hypersigil intended to impact reality, but

also provides perspectives and concepts that are indicative of the values and

cultural shifts necessary for the actualization of Morrison's utopia. By analyzing

King Mob's ontological terrorism, I will demonstrate that the disassociation from

subjective violence is the most effective means of being truly violent according to

Žižek, specifically analyzing Fanny and Dane's modes of resistance through the

series as increasingly articulate formulations of ontological terrorism that aids in

the Supercontext's inevitable actualization.

From here, the character of John-a-Dreams, a former Invisible whose

impact in the series requires a four-dimensional, retroactive perspective, will be

used to explain two key objects in *The Invisibles*, time suits and fiction suits, that

are deployed by characters as metafictional commentaries on the reader's

experience. With these 'suits,' readers and characters can operate outside the

series' initial readings and ideological fascinations and move, like Quimper, to a

larger perspective which contextualizes the series' insistence on multiplicity as resistance to hierarchizing authorities. This prioritization of multiplicities and fluidity is eventually used by King Mob to defeat the Outer Church and force humanity into the Supercontext, an event that necessitates an evolution beyond the series' fascinations and relationship to its contemporary media. In all of these representations, however, of a fluid relationship between identity, time, and linguistics, the series, and its construction as a comic, reproduces Morrison's utopian ideal, not in direct plot or story, but in the expected experience in rereading *The Invisibles.* In this experience, the comic itself is within Jameson's definition of a utopian text, which "is mostly nonnarrative and, I would like to say, somehow without a subject-position, although to be sure a tourist-observer flickers through its pages and more than a few anecdotes are disengaged" (*Seeds* 56). As such, *The Invisibles*, as a hypersigil, partially represents the unrepresentable utopia and with it the means to end there.

<p style="text-align:center">"We're All Going to Behave Like Car Ads"</p>

King Mob's shift from James Bond to ontological terrorist comes gradually through *The Invisibles*' third volume as his investments in the series' central conflict move him further from his original conceptions about his role and the nature of the universe. As such, King Mob' terrorist identity represents an attempt to move past the "'total system' view of contemporary society [that] reduces the options of resistance to anarchist gestures, to the sole remaining ultimate protests of the wildcat strike, terrorism, and death" (*Political Unconscious* 91). Since these forms and figures of violence are absorbed into the system that the Invisibles are attempting to disrupt, ontological terrorism must approach

<p style="text-align:center">115</p>

violence as an act of destroying the underlying ideologies that the anarchist hero perpetuates through shallow and ineffective modes of resistance. Instead, King Mob's violence resists what Jameson describes as the anarchist figure's "integration into a synchronic model [that] would seem to empty cultural production of all its antisystemic capacities, and to 'unmask' even the works of an overtly oppositional or political stance as instruments ultimately programmed by the system itself" (91). Indeed, the ideological constructions that perpetuate violence through heroic figures, with their emphasis on othering conflict and individuation over social cohesion and emancipation, are involved in the systemic production of the status quo. King Mob, then, more actively engages with differing forms of violence throughout *The Invisibles*' third volume, which meditates on changing approaches to conflict.

At the end of the second volume, King Mob and Mason Lang, an Invisible bearing similarities to Batman, discuss the idea of Planet Hollywood, that the modes of conflict and a stable reality are becoming less effective means of being violent. Invisible Mason Lang argues that the British Empire "ruled the world with the strength of its naval and military capability… [but] the brilliance of the American Empire was to realize that land armies were obsolete" (Morrison, *Quimper* 103.). Instead, Mason argues that the United States instead exerts control "with light. With the power of illusion… The image rules the world. The hallucination has taken control" (103). Thus, warfare and control has shifted, according to Mason, from military strength to an investment "TV, in comic books and records and movies... especially movies" (Morrison, *Quimper* 201) for their ability to shape opinions and thought. By highlighting film, Mason argues the

importance of media, or symbols and facsimiles, on the functioning and

perception of society. As such, the relationship between reality and symbol is

integrated, even reversed in power, and Mason believes that "the more I looked,

the less real America became. And the less real it became, the stronger it got.

Planet Hollywood" (201). This inversion of power recalls Morrison's discussion

with Animal Man, where he argues that the character's fictional nature, his ability

to be disseminated, collected, and experienced by a multitude of people for a

longer period of time than a human life, makes him "more real" (*Ex Machina* 215)

than Morrison himself. As such, the power of media, the use of light-based forms

of communication, create the conditions of longevity and durability of those

deploying such devices. Indeed, one soldier in *The Invisibles* claims he

suggested that the British government "just send James Bond into Serbia"

(Morrison, *Kingdom* 83). When the suggestion is rejected because James Bond

is a "fictional construct," the soldier argues that "they're the hardest bastards to

kill" (83), pointing to the longevity of the fictional construct's impact and durability.

Ironically, James Bond is a predominant figure that the series attempts to

innoculate its readers against and, tellingly, the ongoing conflict between King

Mob and Sir Miles involves both being described as the English secret agent. At

the end of the second volume, King Mob sheds his James Bond identity,

declaring him "dead" (Morrison, *Quimper* 214) because "anti-personnel

explosives will soon be obsolete, yes. The next war will be fought in virtual

territory. Land's not at stake anymore, information is" (Morrison, *Quimper* 204),

reiterating Mason's thoughts on the American empire. The very next issue,

however, opens with Sir Miles being described as "the original James Bond"

(Morrison, *Kingdom* 11) but also increasingly "an embarrassment. His blood and thunder tactics belong to the Middle Ages" (155). This critique of Sir Miles by his allies highlights the series' anxieties about shifting warfare tactics superficially: instead of addressing the underlying systemic violence that creates their conflict, Mason's critics simply prove how slight shifts simply replicate conflict over actual change. According to Mason, the military industrial complex is concerned with the production of images, in creating a world "where the symbol was more important than the reality. Where the menu was supposed to be better than the meal" and as such those who are "bombing Planet Hollywood... know exactly where the power lies" (Morrison, *Quimper* 200). By moving the conflict metaphor from a reality, weapons-based combat to a virtual, information-based usurpation of symbolic frameworks, Mason is beginning to locate heroism in a differing mode. However, the conflict still revolves around a war, and Mason is excited to know that "by 2012 [he'll] have control of the entire Western military industrial complex" (217). King Mob, having just declared his James Bond identity dead, worries about even an Invisible in such a position, asking Mason, "So we just have to hope you're different from all the other wankers who've had control...?" (217). In questioning Mason's adherence to the conflict, King Mob begins to question the recycling of tropes, the replacement of outmoded figures with similar constructs and, in doing so, destabilizes his own approach to conflict.

King Mob, however, only becomes an ontological terrorist in the series' final issue, and much of the series' final volume continues to critique such replacement forms of conflict. The central story revolves around the Outer Church attempting to crown an Archon as the new King of England, an attack

that is already critiqued as inconsequential before their plot is revealed. Two members of the Outer Church discuss America's contemporary obsession with death, citing how "zombie comic-book heroes are so goddamn popular [is]... just the same way the Victorians loved their tombs and seances and murders. The American Empire is dead and does not know it. Like the [British] Empire before it" (15). Ironically, even as the Outer Church suggests that the British Empire is dead, crowning an Archon the King of England is still attempted and, in doing so, retroactively condemns the repetitive notion of conflict. As Meaney argues, by the third volume, the Invisibles "have already won. We're looking at the future here: the enemy may still exist, but they're essentially powerless" (213).

The conflict remains in part to highlight its pointlessness and, indeed, the Outer Church's scheme and the Invisibles' violent counter-plot ends only when the Archon attempts to possess Dane, the perceived Messiah. In doing so, the Archon is instead possessed by Dane, who claims he "ate him" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 250). The ultimate result is an anti-climax with "not much tension" (Meaney 253): Like Fanny before him, Dane uses the tactics of the enemy to absorb the enemy into himself, a moment that eschews the usual melodrama of a final conflict. Afterwards, Mister 6 declares that "the age of Osiris and Christ is over" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 252), displacing the notion of a singular base for social change, found in both the figure of the monarch and Dane as the sole Messiah responsible for changing the world. The large conflicts between singular characters subsequently ends, save for King Mob's final moment with the final Archon, and Sir Miles ultimately commits suicide, believing himself to be "the last sacrifice... as Judas began the Age, so must I complete it" (252). As King Mob

insisted on certain constructions to perpetuate his heroic ideology, Sir Miles'

insistence on a Messiah narrative forces him to suicide, fulfilling the sacrifice of

guilty party in the Jesus mythology. Sir Miles is killed, therefore, by a limitation of

narrative, a narrowing of narrative possibilities, in an ironically empty gesture to

an age now past and pointless scheme that relies on dead metaphors.

 Instead of dying alone like his blood brother and nemesis, a seriously

injured King Mob is saved by Audrey Murray and subsequently sheds the King

Mob identity, deciding "someone else can have the name and everything that

goes with it" (260). In again abandoning an identity, this time reverting to his

given name, Gideon, King Mob finally moves towards ontological terrorism and

subsequently changes his tactics and modes of resistance to engage with the

underlying ideological constructions that persist after the end of the Age of Osiris

and Christ. Singer argues that Audrey's act of compassion towards King Mob, a

central moment in the series' development away from heroism, "led Morrison to

name Audrey the series' central character [which] also make[s] her a far healthier

role model than King Mob, and one of the many characters who promotes

empathy and mercy over destructive conflict" (115). Of course, Audrey is

unaware that King Mob killed her husband, Bobby Murray from "Best Man Fall"

discussed in the last chapter, in the series first issue. Audrey even gives King

Mob a Tesco bag (Morrison, *Kingdom* 259), an item Tom gives Dane near the

beginning of *The Invisibles* for protection, arguing that weapons and tools have

been used throughout the narrative for less violent progressions in the series.

King Mob's near-death experience and subsequent rescue forces his change in

perspective and ultimately allows him to recognize that "utopian projects are

doomed to fail unless people first address their own desires for domination,

submission, destruction, and all the other impulses that undermine social

progress" (Singer 129). Indeed, one new Invisible, Helga, assesses the series in

its penultimate issue, arguing that "the culture has become addicted to the chaos

it thought it was innoculating itself against... We are becoming your role models,

your heroes. Our lives are your movie" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 261). By arguing

that they are becoming role models, Helga is metafictionally critiquing Morrison's

deployment of violence in the series, calling it an addiction, and subsequently

condemns the characters and his own writing for the tactic. As King Mob

observes earlier, the Invisibles' adventures would "make a great film but I bet we

all end up looking like pricks" (Morrison, *Quimper* 204). When juxtaposed with

Audrey's unwitting compassion towards the man who murdered her husband,

King Mob's violence and identity narcissism is rejected as the ideal.

Thus, King Mob, now calling himself Gideon, resists through production

over limitation, moving from limiting narratives to using tools of "the en-eh-mee"

(Morrison, *Kingdom* 272), like capitalist consumerism, to resist the ideological

constructions by the explosion of discourses. For the ontological terrorist, the

notion of an enemy is an ideological constraint, one which limits modes of

engagement that can aid in the actualization of utopia. As such, Gideon, instead

of attempting to separate himself from the status quo like a Dark Age superhero,

becomes part of the status quo to resist from within, deploying structural violence

to move towards his utopian visions. Ontological terrorism recognizes, as Helga

argues, that "twenty-first century warfare is about becoming the enemy,

recognizing no fundamental differences in your ideologies, seeing only the

crinkling edges of complexity" (201). Gideon's forms of resistance deploy the tools of the en-eh-mee, a respelling of 'enemy' that spells out the word 'me' to emphasize the constructive relationship between hero and villain, to move the entirety of humanity towards the Supercontext. Gideon instead creates a large media empire called Technoccult and begins making images and products that use the resources of a large media conglomerate to disseminate durable constructs throughout society. Like Fanny, Gideon begins to use the tools of his opponents to productively invade and change the human experience. This approach operates in contrast to his King Mob identity, which continually used increasing violence to limit narratives, and instead productively deploys the similarities in both sides. As such, the resources and programs of the Outer Church, who uses the medium of light to educate and control the population are, in the hands of Gideon, produce facsimiles of the the utopian experience.

Technoccult uses what Morrison calls *viral sigils*: brands and logos used by corporations that are a "condensation, a compressed, symbolic summoning up of the world of desire which the corporation intends to represent" (Morrison, "POP! Magic" 18). Logos and brands, according to Morrison, act as sigils that are "super-breeders. They attack unbranded imaginative space... They breed across clothing, turning people into advertising hoardings" (18). In keeping with Morrison's conceptualization of durable fictional constructs, the super-breeder viral sigil is very powerful and, as such, Gideon's use of corporate sigils is a means of deploying this tactic to ontologically challenge the concepts disseminated through other media conglomerates. Technoccult, then, is a manifestation of Morrison's own suggestion that people investigate corporations

and "learn how to imitate them, steal their successful strategies and use them as your own... Create your own brand, your own logo and see how quickly you can make it spread and interact with other corporate entities" (18). Gideon refers to this strategy as planting "bombs" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 270), which is a fictional account of Morrison's suggestion that "instead of slapping a wad of Semtex between the Happy Meals and the plastic tray, work your way up through the ranks, take over the board of Directors and turn the company into an international laughing stock" (26). In short, in fostering relationships and productively engaging with these entities, we can shift a perspective where The System, the dominant order that forces participation in a perpetual status quo, perhaps "isn't our enemy after all? What if instead it's our playground?" (26). Gideon's ontological terror moves past a divisive and exceptionalist social experience and instead uses the production of texts to influence the society from within. As one of Morrison's characters in *Flex Mentallo*, a comic he wrote alongside *The Invisibles*, argues, "Implicit in the design of any prison is the means of escape" (66). Gideon's strategy, then, is to use the prison itself as a means of moving humanity as a whole towards the Supercontext, much in the same way the series uses various innoculations to aid in changing reality.

Ontological terrorism, then, acts like like Morrison's hypersigil and overtly attempts to invade reality to establish utopia, in part, by providing a durable handbook by producing narratives, both within the series and in our own reality. For Van Alphen, the "crucial function of aesthetic disruptions of understanding consists precisely in triggering efforts to form new signifiers... that the aesthetic enactment of understanding achieves a disassociation or distancing from

conventional assumptions" (xvi). *The Invisibles*' audience are confronted with the assumption that art and reality are separate, and Technoccult's consumers are used by Gideon to demonstrate how fictions can change the ideologies under which society operate. Gideon directly engages with his culture in the production of narratives and personalities, all of which cause a break from the assumptions *The Invisibles*' resists throughout, favouring productions that challenge art's role in society over reflections of society that ultimately render fictions ineffectual. By becoming part of the status quo, Gideon is able to change society from within, challenging assumptions by engaging with citizens more directly over clandestine battles between heroes and villains.

Gideon's ontological terrorism recognizes the collapse of the hero-villain binary and engages with the status quo through production. Using Technoccult, Gideon creates two primary 'bombs' that use capitalism to disseminate a simulacrum of the Supercontext: the video game Gideon calls *The Invisibles* and the MeMePlex, a program that allows its users "access to multiple self-images and potentials, a menu selection of faces, contradictory personas... Multiple Personality Disorder as a lifestyle option" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 270). The video game is a direct contrast to King Mob's tactics, instead exploring the production of narratives over the limitation of tropes into specific categories. Combined with over 300 playable characters, the game is also "different every time" (272), speaking to the production of stories over their limitation. Further, Gideon explains that players "cure themselves of 'The Invisibles' in five minutes by the end... and playing it seems to strengthen the immune system" (272). Gideon's video game recalls Morrison's recurring innoculation motif to metafictionally

suggest that the experience of *The Invisibles*' comic is a process of curing

oneself from its dominant obsessions, namely the problematic deployment of

violence for entertainment. In shedding subjective violence entirely, Gideon

moves from heroic violence, in which a heroic character defeats an entity made

to represent the underlying problems of a society or cultural product, and instead

locates the foundations of "evil politics... in the human psyche and their escape in

the imagination" (Singer 129). As such, Gideon seeks to cure audiences with

"extreme impact environmental immersion" (271), forcing them to repeat and re-

experience their entertainment from multiple perspectives. Gideon's ultimate

goal is that these products will indoctrinate users in preparation for the

Supercontext, the "confronting and integration of 'not self' being" (277), the

collapse of individuality and exceptionalism into a space in which time no longer

exists. Rather than fight, Gideon imagines a variety of narratives to be actively

played out to cure the players of their underlying ideological frameworks that run

counter to the creation of an ideal world.

The MeMePlex takes this concept of interacting through multiplicities

even further, disrupting the notion of a stable, individual identity in how people

experience the everyday. While Gideon's video game explores multiple

characters as a work of fiction that blends into real life, the MeMePlex is a means

by which he can educate audiences about the Supercontext. The MeMePlex's

purpose, explicitly stated in its advertisements, is to "end the notions of territory

and boundary? [sic.] The very concept of the individual, like that of the bounded

nation-state was not designed to survive the last millenium and must be

transcended" (270). Technoccult's program is already successful in shifting the

cultural landscape in the Invisibles' future; as Dane notes, "We didn't have MeMes when I was little. 'Personalities,' we called them" (268), noting the cultural shifts already occurring because of Technoccult.

Dane's own protege argues that a lack of MeMes is "why you had war. You tried to hammer your enemies into shape: you wouldn't understand how you allow them to define the boundaries of your self-sense" (269), disavowing the othering process necessary for conflict between hero figures and their enemies. Singer argues this prioritization of multiple identities and "ability to assume additional personalities allows freedom of action and the expansion of perspective, [yet] the converse is that being limited to just one person limits psychological development" (Singer 131). For a character to remain narcissistic in identity is to limit personal growth, and as one character argues, "'Ego' scaffolding necessary to your development must now be husked before it constricts your growth" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 253). The shedding of exceptionalism, then, becomes a necessity for personal development out of the ego necessary to create a subject that can then move away from such preconceptions, much in the same way Deleuze and Guattari argue that "the multiple *must be made*" (*Plateaus* 6). The ego, the identity narcissist, is part of development, a necessary stage from which to move into the Supercontext, and Gideon's productive resistances deploy this reasoning to change the world around him, showing how "the ego also constricts social development and traps humanity in intersubjective conflict" (Singer 131). Gideon's production of the MeMePlex, then, shifts his culture away from his own previous King Mob conceptualizations, his own development and attempted ego-dissolving, through

a production of multiple discourses that force a larger perspective with multiple, increasingly complex constructs that inevitably shed the definitions imposed upon them. The MeMePlex operates, in part, as training for the Supercontext, which will more definitely remove the concept of individuality from society.

Morrison's own ego-dissolving experiments with various characters in the series inform the conceptualization of the MeMePlex, which suggests identity is less an assertion of a stable subject, capable of being a true self, and more a negotiation of various conditions through a more liquid and multiple experience of a variety of contextual scenarios, each demanding their own versions of self. King Mob himself discusses this in the end of the second volume, arguing that the Invisibles "drew colors from a hat... new personalities, new roles. The rules changed overnight. That's how easy it is to become someone new" (Morrison, *Quimper* 213). One character in particular, Dane's former teacher Mr. 6, already sacrificed an identity to save the Invisibles previously, and is now free to choose "one of [his] favorite personalities" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 19) before the MeMePlex is invented. While King Mob remains in his heroic identity for the majority of the third volume as well, aligning himself with a death-free Bruce Lee iteration, his explanation begins his process of becoming less of an identity narcissist, one who recognizes that the assertion of a stable self comes with certain prioritizations that limit experiences. King Mob uses his own willingness to throw away his gun to challenge Mason to stop thinking about "how big and inescapable the house and the business are and how hard it seems to change any of it" (217). These attachments, in true King Mob fashion, are subsequently blown up with "twenty tons of TNT" (218), pointing to an increased need for

Invisibles to embrace liquidity in the final stretch to the apocalypse. This desire

to change is intensified by the MeMePlex, and Gideon is seen shifting through

multiple costumes, each indicative of his various incarnations throughout *The*

Invisibles, in the span of a few panels (*fig. 17*). The ontological terrorist, is

seems, is inherently multiple, fluid, and operating on an unstable base through

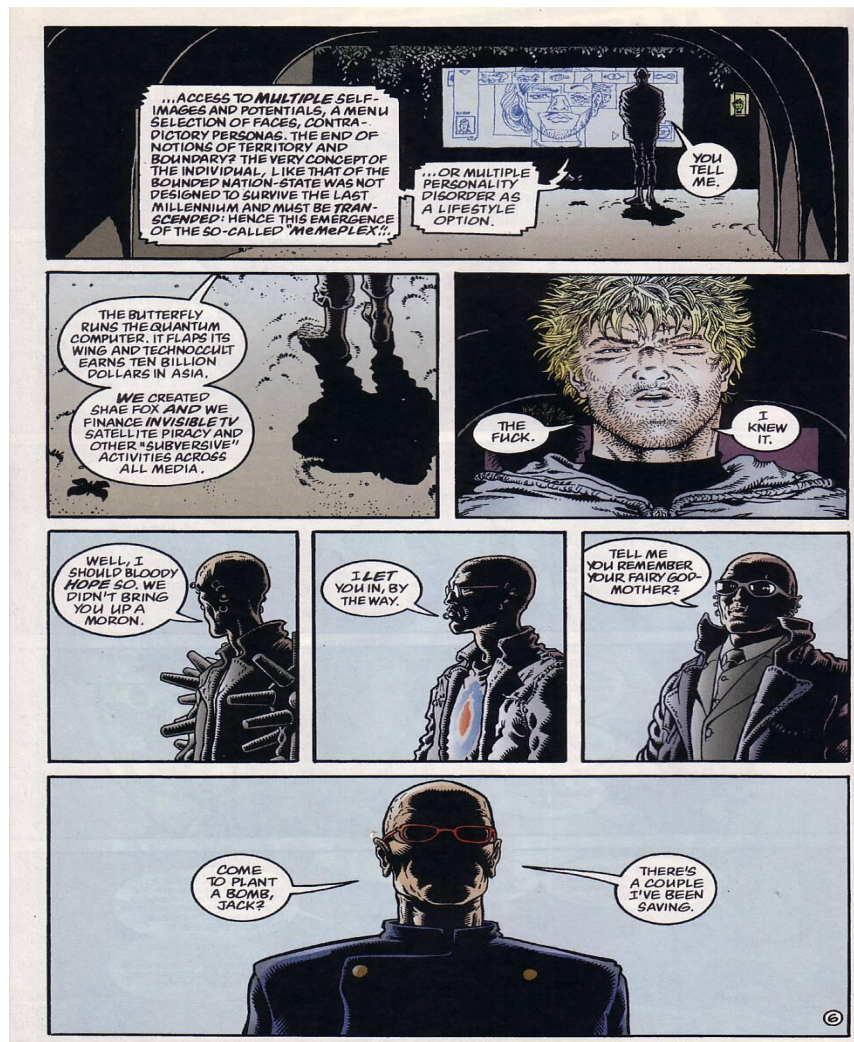which to resist a hierarchizing of experience.

Fig. 17. Gideon changing appearances through a variety of his previous

selves, *The Invisible Kingdom*, p. 270, art by Frank Quitely, 2000.

The character of Gideon Starorzewski, Gideon Stargrave, King Mob, Kirk Morrison, with autobiographical and performative relations with his creator Grant Morrison, is thus an expression of a model of identity that precludes Morrison's own notions of utopia, acting as an example of the disposability of identities for a more preferable navigation of reality's experience. For the relationship between King Mob and Grant Morrison, the character resists not only the notion of a unified reality separate from fiction, but also of a unified subject. Morrison's willingness to enact another character in reality disrupts his own stable identity with a fictional invasion, giving his character agency in reality, but also as an example of Morrison's own experiments with ego-dissolving. This blending of fiction and reality reflects Van Alphen's assertion that art's "agency changes the status of the frame in relation to art. If art 'thinks' and if the viewer is compelled to think with it, then art is not only the object of framing – which, obviously, is also true and important – but it also functions, in turn, as a frame for cultural thought" (xvi). King Mob and Morrison, then, highlight how the experience of reality is unstable, but also that identity itself is similarly dependent on inconsistent multiplicities. After all, if Morrison can that easily change his identity, his actions and thus experience, then how is any identity stable enough to assert itself as a primary mode of experiencing a similarly decentered reality? These modes of resistance, however effective in creating a cultural shift within the series, are still only approximations of Morrison's utopia, a copy of the positive apocalypse that will push these notions of multiplicity towards a shedding of the construction of individuality entirely when the real Supercontext arrives.

<div align="center">"I THEY WE IN AllNOW"</div>

The MeMePlex is at best an approximation of the identity performance that Morrison values in the relationship between subjects as they enter the utopian future, the Supercontext, and suggests identity itself is a malleable and unstable experience. The SuperContext is a positive apocalypse, a moment that occurs on Dec. 21, 2012 in which the notion of individuality gives way to a more cohesive and fluid organism. As the series explains, it is a tool for "the confronting and integration of 'not self' being a necessary stage in the development and the maturing of the larva's [humanity's] self-awareness" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 277). Gideon describes it "like seeing those old magic eye 3-D pictures except with everything. The world turns inside out. You identify with everything in the universe that is not-self and dissolve the existential alienation dilemma in unity. All is one and several is none" (271). The Supercontext, then, sheds humanity's rigid individual identity in favour of a more multiplied and liquid existence which, according to Morrison, is what occurs when the universe is "seen from the perspective all time being simultaneous, the object [the universe] is already complete, and the idea in this higher dimension is to then harvest these things" (Meaney 295).

The actual passing through the Supercontext is, like the Barbelith epiphanies, different for every individual and acts as a final innoculation against the concept of individuality. Morrison admits the process is traumatizing for certain individuals as the Supercontext is "a mass consciousness change... so that basically everyone will start peaking on the acid trip that never ends. 'Individuality' will dissolve and your minds will start to merge into one mass mind, which is likely to seem quite frightening and overwhelming" (Brown). Gideon;s

passing through the Supercontext is the only definite example depicted in *The Invisibles*, in a short comic published outside the series' regular issues called "And We're All Policemen." The short comic is "a hyper-pop, sci-fi world of beautiful women, where he [Gideon] can do anything he wants" (Meaney 282), an overexposure of any underlying individualist fascinations Gideon still holds. In this world, the "media is saturated in a liberal hyper-sexuality, and the authority figures are pompous and absurd" (282), Gideon is a pop star, and "everyone's a paparazzo. Every blue lens blinks like an eye and turns his way" (Morrison, *Counting* 239) that centers all attention and admiration on King Mob. Tellingly, Gideon rejects sexual offers from a variety of characters in favour of a magic mirror-like substance called "pornoplasm:... a programmable sex doll with six gender options, hands-on identikit function and a data storage capacity of 250 billion MB" (234). The pornoplasm morphs to his specifications at will, continually shifting to his requests that are all references to or plays on popular culture tropes like "L.A. porn" and "the nerdiest guy in school transformed by a gifted surgeon's knife into a beautiful, sexy girl" (234).

In the process of losing his individuality, King Mob perceives himself as the ultimate icon who is able to generate and move through a variety of narratives at any given moment. The significance of the constant shifting is treated as inconsequential, however, and Gideon uses a detached ironic distance towards his fame. He tells one fan that his lyrics are simply "taking the piss" (232), for example, while his list of his Lamborghini's various technological advancements ends with "so fucking what?" (234). Gideon's increasing disinterest in his fame and exceptionalism acts as an innoculation against his

underlying desires and, moreover, the overabundance of various word balloons on the page create a feeling of exhaustion and boredom. The passing through the Supercontext, while appearing as Gideon's ultimate fantasy, only ends in a disinterest in such desires, subverting them in favour of what comes after, when, according to Morrison, "time will seem to disappear as we identify with the mitochondria in our cells, instead of identifying with the physical individual carrier 'bodies' we use to expedite the shuffling around of DNA" (Brown). The story ends in Gideon's departure through the Supercontext as "the whole solar system burns to ash in the expanding nova of ten billion simultaneous flashbulbs" (239), a direct link between the speed of light and the end of time, the end of individual colours to a white light.

The Supercontext is thus operating similarly to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari argue identity is multiple and in constant flux, a "map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flights" (*Plateaus* 21). Instead of a unified subject, Deleuze and Guattari argue that "there is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort the object or 'return' in the subject" (8). The subject, then, is in constant flux, rejecting a singular, privileged identity in favour of multiplicities, subjects that are continually in a state of becoming and immediate, replacing an internal-external, self/not-self divide with "types of multiplicities that coexist, interpenetrate, and change places" (36). In doing so, the notion of conflict is shed and instead the experience of reality is radically

shifted to incorporate a higher dimensional perspective that allows time to be navigated similarly to how humans experience space.

The Supercontext is also the culmination of the series' thoughts on time, which "is speeding up... actually getting faster" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 279). The series itself already accomplishes this phenomenon in a variety of places, most notably in the condensation of Bobby Murray's "Best Man Fall" story into a single panel for the death of Lieutenant Lincoln (Singer 113), but story arcs also become shorter in the third volume, moving into three-issue stories over the which are four-issue long "Black Science" stories that open and close the second volume. Appropriately, the existence after the Supercontext is called "AllNOW," indicative of the disposal of time from which the utopia springs. Dane experiences a version of the AllNOW in his final epiphany with John-a-Dreams, who explains with similar lettering that "time is soil and for nourish larvae and grown in hard to make understand not soon" (254). Thus, when Robin emerges from the AllNOW to guide Gideon through the Supercontext, her explanation, "I They We in AllNOW" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 284), is in lettering that at once collapses the notion of individuality and linear time (*fig. 18*). The lack of punctuation, which temporally regulates written words, and obscured references to temporal markers, such as the use of "not soon" over a simpler term like "quickly," point to an experience of reality that can no longer grasp time as experienced by three dimensional beings. Instead, the utopic figure exists in a perspective that Jameson articulates in *The Seeds of Time*, in which a utopia transcends history, which "is choice, freedom, and failure all at once, but not death. Utopia is set at a height from which those changes are no longer visible:

even if the Utopia in question is one of absolute change, change is nonetheless viewed from that well-nigh glacial and inhuman standpoint" (123).

What the Supercontext heralds, then, is a fusion of identity and time into a singular object that comes from a perspective that is able to navigate timespace from more dimensional perspectives than the usual navigation of reality, moving towards Quimper's original perspective. The AllNOW is thus an intensification of Gideon's linear and limited expressions through the MeMePlex and *The Invisibles* video game, making these products at once necessary and obsolete. Yet it is Gideon's own Supercontext experience that is at once expansion of perspective and a movement to a different conceptualization of the universe that requires the burning of the old. The Supercontext experience, with its increasing inability to entertain, is in itself always already obsolete and necessary, an idea that extends to the Supercontext's relationship to time and violence.

Fig. 18. Robin appears from the AllNOW with a timeworm, speaking in differing

lettering, *Invisible Kingdom*, p. 284, art by Frank Quitely, 2000.

Gideon's fantasy, however, is only an individual experience and the final

pages of the series' final issue, "Glitterdammerung!," while ending in a fade to

white like Gideon's experience, is populated by people dancing around Dane as

he speaks directly to the reader. Marc Singer expresses anxiety about the

series' treatment of a totalizing utopia, arguing that "the indeterminate, hybrid,

psychologically mobile identities of Morrison's future Invisibles might be just as

harmful to some people, but the final issue only welcomes this transformation - a

reaction typified by the joyous rave Dane joins as the supercontext arrives" (132).

Morrison himself fully admits the Supercontext may be frightening for certain

individuals and these final pages depict a variety of emotions (*fig. 19*), but

Singer's analysis ignores the series' acknowledgement that "there was not one

damned utopia that did not set its foundations in human suffering and pain. It

begins with fancy words but always ends in blood" (Morrison, *Revolution* 127).

The Supercontext, however, is also an ultra-dimensional entity that always

already occurs, and *The Invisibles* moves towards a simultaneous moment

despite characters experiencing it before 2012. Tom o' Bedlam, Dane's first

mentor, for example, exits into the Supercontext through his death, reasoning

"It's getting near time for me to go. I can see my life as one shape" (Morrison,

Revolution 101). Similarly, Edith's death implies her own absorption into the

Supercontext, explained through her "endlessly unfolding and ever present...

She's coming in from the edges, from all round at once" (Morrison, *Kingdom*

173). Death, then, appears to be an exit into the Supercontext; Dane notes after

his final epiphany with John-a-Dreams, a former Invisible who operates outside

time and the notion of opposing sides, that "nobody ever dies" (258). Indeed,

retroactively looking at the series reveals the priority was never King Mob's

escalating violence, but the construction of the time machine Robin uses in the

future, which is assembled primarily by cooperation and nonviolent tactics, like

Dane and Fanny dancing for its power source (Morrison, *Counting* 72-3). While a

broader perspective insulates many of the consequences of subjective violence,

such modes of violence also contribute very little to the overall goals of the

Invisibles' rescue operation.

Fig. 19. A variety of emotions are experienced by those passing into the Supercontext, *The Invisible Kingdom*, p. 285, art by Frank Quitely, 2000.

The series, then, attempts to articulate a position somewhere between the condemnation of sensational violence and the necessity of such violences in actualizing a Utopia, mostly achieved by claims to a larger, four-dimensional perspective that insulates certain characters from the series' own ethics based on their privileged position. This exceptionalism that comes through the privileged utopian perspective reflects Jameson's argument that "the relationship between Utopia and death is an essential one, but not because of any mystical properties of death itself: rather, death is the aftereffect and the sign that the perspective of Utopia has been reached" (*Seeds* 122). Indeed, the series kills characters as it concludes, Roger and Sir Miles in particular, precisely because of their adherence to "to the old order, so [they] too must be cleared away to bring about the new" (Meaney 255). The utopian perspective, according to Jameson, "consists in a great and progressive distance from all individual and existential experience, from individual people, from *characters*" (*Seeds* 122), mirroring the four-dimensional perspective that the Supercontext ushers in. From this great, progressive, and de-individuated perspective, the intersubjective relationships become instrumental and justifiable based on the fluidity of identity and temporal experience that is, unlike the MeMePlex, only accomplished through the experience of utopia.

"Armageddon Can Come Any Time it Wants…

All I Ask is That it Waits Until I've Tried on That Dress"

More appropriate examples for experiencing the Supercontext and the world that exists after are already present in the series through John-a-Dreams, who uses two concepts throughout the narrative to prepare humanity for the Supercontext. John-a-Dreams transcends the Invisibles' conflict when he finds a timesuit, a machine that moves him into this higher dimensional perspective, and subsequently operates throughout the narrative in a variety of guises to aid in the world's progression to the Supercontext. As spirit when he left, John-a-Dreams, perhaps even more radically than Dane, actually operates throughout time in its entirety to shake not only the very foundations of the Invisibles, but humanity as a whole. In doing so, he operates in part as an articulation of the perspective that the aliens have, yet is physically present throughout in a variety of guises. To accomplish this, John-a-Dreams uses two major concepts from the series, the timesuit and fiction suits, which enable him to both replicate the continual shifting of identity and multiplicity, but also operate in a four-dimensional capacity where he can manipulate events towards the series' inevitable conclusion.

The timesuit operates differently from the conventional science fiction trope of a time machine: instead of moving individuals through to various points of time, such as Doc Brown's famous DeLorean in *Back to the Future*, the timesuit transcends time itself, allowing the wearer to see time from a variety of angles, implying that time, like space, is composed of multiple dimensions. As Invisible scientist Takashi, the man who inevitably creates the timesuit, explains, "Think of timespace as a multidimensional self-perfecting system in which everything that has ever, or will ever occur, occurs simultaneously. I believe timespace is a kind of object, a geometrical supersolid" (Morrison, *Counting* 22).

The timesuit works to "jump 'up' from the surface of timespace and see all of history and all of our tomorrow as the single object" (22). Morrison himself describes the machine as "a human body that's been extended... physically, back through time to the first DNA" (Meaney 317). The visual result (*fig. 20*) is an amalgamation of a variety of creatures, a look into "the entire single-human-life organism... crumpled up in time, so it seems to be human, part seems to be crustacean, part seems to be insect or whatever" (Meaney 317). The image of the machine is represented through King Mob's prioritized imposition on the text in the second volume and, as such, adheres in part to his perspective. King Mob may have "feared this extra-dimensional being and consequently perceived it as a creature out of Lovecraft's stories" (Meaney 174), but John-a-Dreams explains to Fanny that "what we found in Philadelphia wasn't the orgy of the insect men. It was a timesuit, lying crumpled and folded at angles you never see a human body from normally. You know me: I had to try it on" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 249). As opposed to King Mob's fear, John-a-Dreams sees something exciting and personally irresistible, viewing the timesuit as a welcome entity that destabilizes King Mob's authority over its representation. The act of wearing the suit is thus always already resisting a hierarchizing authority, instead moving into a temporal multiplicity that continually changes its own representation.

Fig. 20. John-a-Dreams discovers the timesuit, which looks like a timeworm but crumpled into a smaller temporal space, *Kissing Mr. Quimper*, p. 43, art by Chris Weston, 1998.

The timesuit, then, is the ability to witness all of time and space leading up into the Supercontext and such a perspective allows the wearer a larger perspective which enables them to, like the aliens, work in such a manner as to lead humanity towards the Supercontext by playing both sides of the war between the Outer Church and the Invisibles. As such, John-a-Dreams is frequently seen playing chess against himself, manipulating both sides of the board that suggest he is not unlike a dalang, the shadow puppet master who only creates the illusion of a great war. The emphasis on chess plays on a frequent metaphor through the series that compares the events in the series, and the navigation of the various conflicts, as a game, furthering Gideon's metafictional

evaluation of the series and adding another level of possible narrative authority. John-a-Dreams explains that his perspective, given by the timesuit, allows him to "see through the struggle One truly sees it all for what it is. Just a game" (Morrison, *Revolution* 2177). His relationship to reality follows such logic and he argues that every time he plays chess "a different great conflict plays out each time. The international workers' struggle against capitalist exploitation. The evolutionary drive versus the fear of change" (Morrison, *Quimper* 141). In seeing a variety of conflicts, John-a-Dreams is operating like the aliens in Dane's abduction experience, replacing dominant tropes of large conflict narratives while witnessing the same basic result. Despite knowing the outcome, John-a-Dreams plays from a privileged, "4D" (Meaney 255) perspective and, in doing so, can force events towards a particular ideal.

John-a-Dreams navigates these spaces through a variety of identities, some known, like police inspector George Harper, and some heavily implied, such as Quimper, all of which suggest that John-a-Dreams exists simultaneously in every character in every time. Meaney argues that when John-a-Dreams entered the time suit and jumped up from timespace, "the present him died by splintering into infinite pieces, and he gained access to everyone in the universe" and, in doing so, he becomes "essentially God in this universe, going out of it and then creating everything, wearing all the people in it as suits" (255). The character of John-a-Dreams, then, is Gideon's MeMePlex pushed to a conceptual limit: instead of moving in a linear fashion through a variety of MeMes, or personalities, John-a-Dreams traverses time and space in the guises of other characters, "filling in narrative holes that help bring about a desired

ending" (256). The ending, of course, is humanity's passing into the

Supercontext. John-a-Dreams' ability to occupy multiple identities

simultaneously operates under Morrison's conceptualization of a *fiction suit*: an

"avatar, a character that could travel through [fiction]" (Meaney 316). For John-a-

Dreams, the fiction is reality, which from his perspective is simply a game, albeit

one in which "you experience existential dread and loss of identity when a piece

is removed from the board" (Morrison, *Quimper* 136). This feeling of loss is

integral to John-a-Dreams' navigation of reality because, despite his continual

development, occupation, and shedding of a variety of identities, he is not, as

Morrison is careful to distinguish, "pretending to be someone" (Meaney 316) but

occupying such identities with full sincerity. This exploration and development of

identities articulates one of *The Invisibles*' themes of the influence of fiction on

reality, that "everything is real. Even though George Harper is a constructed

persona, it's still possible to live a real life as him" (Meaney 256).

The fiction suit, as a concept, represents an attempt to move past

cynicism, an ironic pretending or use of an avatar that mimics future Invisible

Reynard's critique of Dane's era. In her reading of the nineties, Reynard

describes the period as "the post-ironic when it was embarrassing to have any

convictions but beliefs were mandatory... The Situationist diagnosis was trapped

in the Either/Or Millenium: there's no such thing as 'recuperation,' only feedback'"

(Morrison, *Kingdom* 268). For Reynard, the post-ironic era is indicative of a

certain unwillingness to allow fiction and reality to blend, to allow the experience,

rather than a quantifiable and representable object, to move past an either/or

conceptualization of reality to a both/and fluidity between the fiction-reality divide.

Instead, Reynard believes in the possibility of recuperation and the interplay between subjects over an insistence on their rigidity and divisions that cause only feedback, an indistinguishable and inarticulate confrontation with one's underlying assumptions. Reynard's viewpoint is thus indicative of Gideon's success at approximating the ideological shift that occurs in donning both types of suits.

By articulating a variety of identities through time, John-a-Dreams in part acts like a writer, being able to 'write' the ending he wants, the Supercontext, through direct involvement with the story's key players. As such, Gideon's ontological terrorism, while successful in changing society, is itself an approximation of a better equipped John-a-Dreams, whose terrorism throughout time makes the very concept of resistance null and void. John-a-Dreams instead views the ongoing conflicts as a game, a series of events over which he has exceptional amounts of control with a clear purpose. In this metaphorical framework, John-a-Dreams disposes of a stable identity in favour of a variety of temporal and identitarian structures that epitomize *The Invisibles*' prioritization of multiples as a means of destabilizing a hierarchized experiences of reality.

John-a-Dreams' combination of timesuits and fiction suits emphasizes not only the importance of aesthetics in ontological terrorism, that one must look the part in order to act the part, but the false relationship between individuals and their social surroundings. With these suits, John-a-Dreams fluidly moves through identities and individuals, creating and deploying personalities to better navigate society in ways that suggest the divisions between individuals are also fluid. Such fluidity between individuals suggests social surroundings are permeable,

that the divisions between subjects can be traversed, which is indicative of the

Supercontext's inevitability and ultimate goal. The AllNOW exists as the collapse

of Identity and Difference, like Jameson's argument that "rather, the realm and

the domain of the antinomy as such: something they readily offer to demonstrate

by effortlessly turning into one another at the slightest pretext" (*Seeds* 7). Much

like the opening line of the Beatles' "I am the Walrus," the subject on the other

side of the Supercontext speaks of the interpolation of everyone into the AllNOW:

"I THEY WE" collapses individuality and difference into a series of

interpenetrations instead of an insistence on a self/not-self divide. Such a

concept is visualized in John-a-Dreams' final revelation to Dane (*fig. 21*), in which

Dane sees himself through the lens of a timesuit. This perspective is visualized

as what Morrison calls a *timeworm*: a representation of "all life on Earth as one

organism, like a tree with many branches, tracing back to the first single-celled

organism" (Meaney 257), essentially the timesuit if time wasn't as crumpled.

From this perspective, Dane witnesses the interconnectedness of life from a

higher dimensional perspective, eliminating the concept of an autonomous

individual while still seeing himself as a branch from the timeworm. Robin, when

she emerges from the AllNOW to guide Gideon, is similarly seen with a timeworm

trailing behind her: she must become an individual recognizable to Gideon to aid

in his passing through the Supercontext much in the same way the aliens use

various familiar metaphorical frameworks in their epiphanies.

Fig. 21. Dane sees his own timeworm in his final encounter with John-a-Dreams,

The Invisible Kingdom, p. 254, art by Cameron Stewart, 2003.

The timeworm, which replicates John-a-Dreams' experience of reality

through a variety of times and identities, operates in part as a positive

interpretation of the common usage of schizophrenia as a metaphor for how

contemporary subjects navigate postmodern culture. Fredric Jameson and Jean

Baudrillard both paint the contemporary schizophrenic as a negative reaction to capitalist consumerism, a mode of interaction resulting from the collapse of public and private spaces, which affects information consumption. Both writers are concerned with the "omnipresent visibility of enterprises, brands, social interlocutors and the social virtues of communication" (Baudrillard 129), the disintegration of a private self into a public space and vice versa. For Jameson, this collapse is in part because of the disintegration between cultural production and reception as "we do not, in other words, simply globally receive the outside world as an undifferentiated vision: we are always engaged in using it" (""Postmodernism" 119). The Supercontext, and the experience of it, more fully integrates the public and private, the relationship between individuals. As such, the breakdown of such divisions in favour of a certain homogeneity excludes no one and no longer requires a stable, continual self through time. In such a capacity, the ideal subject in the AllNOW is an articulation of Jameson and Baudrillard's individual articulations of the schizophrenic in postmodernity, but taken positively, revelling in the collapse of public and private spheres and articulating experience in an eternal present.

For Jameson, the "schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence" (119), an approach to fluidity that reveals a certain isolation from a continual experience. The schizophrenic does not interact with time like a 'regular' subject, according to Jameson, and this leads to a certain incoherence, a lack of logical, linear sense from which a subject feels an identity that "depends on our sense of the persistence of the 'I' and the 'me' over time" (119). In these

temporal breakdowns, the transcendence of time, "the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid... [and] is felt as loss, as 'unreality'" (120). Jameson's schizophrenic feels an intensification of experience beyond the "our normally humdrum and familiar surroundings" (12). The AllNOW is similarly beyond the normal everyday, and she admits she "can't describe we a house on wings" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 283), but Jameson prioritizes an experience of a representable and quantifiable experience of reality that is preferable to unreality. In *The Invisibles*, such distinctions only limit the capacity for fiction to inform reality, to break down the division for the actualization of utopia, itself a fictional concept. As such, the ability to move freely between selves is interpreted positively, a movement towards an indescribable existence beyond proper representation.

In contrast to Jameson's argument that temporal breakdowns create distance between schizophrenics and their society, Baudrillard emphasizes the extreme contextuality of information. Baudrillard characterizes the schizophrenic as "obscene prey of the world's obscenity" (133) and emphasizes a lack of agency in dealing with the constant influx and outflow of communication. Interiority and exteriority are complicated as people are now "both receiver and distributor" (128), responsible for both the generation and consumption of information. Public space, now dominated by "gigantic spaces of circulation, ventilation and ephemeral connections," collapse towards private space, which is similarly lost because "the most intimate processes of our life become the virtual feeding ground of the media" (130). Because of the loss of these spaces, the overexposure of communication, what Baudrillard considers the *obscene*, forces

the schizophrenic in this instance to be hyper-contextualized, "in too great a proximity of everything" (132). Morrison's timesuit, however, becomes a positive interpretation of this overwhelming information and, while time is required for characters to learn how to "process this information" (Meaney 257), the Supercontext becomes an idealist, super-heroic articulation of context. The Supercontext, the awareness of all life from a four-dimensional perspective, instead is the means through which utopia is achieved that prioritizes subjects that, like Baudrillard's schizophrenic, "can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror" (Baudrillard 133). For the AllNOW, the desire or necessity to stage oneself as a stable subject is no longer necessary, and the overexposure to information acts as a benefit for moving through the Supercontext, which intensifies cohesion past individuality.

Characters are thus expected to experience reality similarly to Deleuze and Guattari's Wolf-Man, the "severe operation of depersonalization" (*Plateaus* 36), both before and after the Supercontext. The acceptance of multiplicities is key to becoming what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a full body without organs: a body that is "populated by multiplicities" (30), with limits but limitless in potentiality, much like the continual branchings of the timeworm. *A Thousand Plateaus* differentiates between two types of multiplicities, the pack and the masses, and locate the schizophrenic within the former, "on the periphery" (34) where there is a constant threat, like having one's back exposed to nature. The masses, by contrast, have "all the identifications of the individual with the group, the group with the leader, and the leader with the group; be securely embedded

in the mass, get close to the center, never be at the edge except in the line of duty" (34). The mass is closely tied to Mason's own conflict between his perception of freedom and the responsibilities he perceives as inescapable, a position King Mob dramatically eliminates by destroying Mason's mansion. The masses prioritize an adherence to a hierarchy for safety and are thus only threatened in the line of duty, much in the same way that Bobby Murray, King Mob's victim in "Best Man Fall," is rewarded for his injuries and 'heroism' in the Falklands. Instead, the Supercontext is an extreme version of the schizoanalytic argument, that "desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines... The order of desire is the order of *production*; all production is at once desiring production and social production" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 296). When she emerges from the Supercontext, Robin tells Gideon that "they timesuits what are we become in AllNOW" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 284), the fullest synthesis of machines designed to articulate social cohesion, a perspective that allows time and identity to escape a rigid structure that hierarchizes experiences of reality. Instead, the relationship between subjects is constantly fluid and slippery, like the magic mirror that John-a-Dreams states is "condensed timespace" (249), right down to their relationship to language.

As such, the schizophrenic experience is Morrison's utopia, positively interpreting both Jameson and Baudrillard through Deleuze and Guattari's multiplicities: the postmodern explosion of information and breakdowns act instead as innoculations and incremental performances of the AllNOW's dismissal of individuality and temporality. The AllNOW, comprised of subjects that conform to the above articulations of schizophrenics, thus becomes what

Jameson describes as "a Utopia of misfits and oddballs, in which the constraints for uniformization and conformity have been removed,... who, no longer fettered by the constraints of a now oppressive sociality, blossom into the neurotics, compulsives, obsessives, paranoids and schizophrenics, whom our society considers sick but who, in a world of true freedom, may make up the flora and fauna of 'human nature' itself" (S*eeds* 99). The modes of resistance emphasized through the multiplicity of characters' perspectives, their own fluid identities, and the text's own aversion to narrative authority, become the ideal in the AllNOW, collapsing the means and the ends of actualizing Morrison's utopia. Subjects in the AllNOW are inherently multiplied and interconnected in such a capacity that is impossible to represent directly; indeed, how an AllNOW subject articulates within the timeworm perspective subjectively becomes a mental illness, a continual instability which a non-utopian citizen could interpret as threatening or incomprehensible.

As the utopian reality drastically and suddenly changes from the world previously experienced, the consciousness and articulation of such a space appears as a mental illness to an outsider who still operates with ego scaffolding. The differences between utopian and nonutopian subjects is further separated the modes of thinking and existing that change drastically after experiencing reality in higher dimensions. Thus, the dancers at the end of *The Invisibles* have varied emotive responses to the Supercontext: those who fear or resist this mode of thinking must inherently be frightened into its inevitability. Indeed, Morrison agrees the process may require some subjects who are not "already familiar with heavily-altered states… will have to be guided out of hell" (Brown), arguing how

transference into utopia will in itself be a traumatic experience for those left without innoculation towards this shift into a differing consciousness. So while Marc Singer expresses anxiety towards how theorists "have been glib, if not downright euphoric, about prescribing mental disorders as metaphoric models for postmodern identity" (299), he ignores the perspective as existing within a larger metaphorical framework that includes a possibly entirely different subjectivity and consciousness that, from the outside, could appear as a threatening pathology. Jameson himself is unsure if his own formulation of schizophrenia is "clinically accurate; but that doesn't matter either for my purposes" ("Postmodernism" 118). Instead, the schizophrenic is indicative of a breakdown between signifiers and signifieds, an operation that extends *The Invisibles*' idealization of fluidity and reflexivity to language itself.

<center>"Hit Them With Some Vocabulary"</center>

If a fluid model identity model is prioritized in successfully navigating reality, than *The Invisibles*' meditations on the effects of language inform a multiplied approach to the generation and sustaining of that reality experience. Language works on a production level for the comics themselves, every issue of the series begins with a script from Morrison, and the relationship between language and reality is weaponized by each side of the ongoing conflict. For the Outer Church, the alphabet is used to limit the general population's capacity for free thought, but the Invisibles similarly use the Outer Church's secret languages and additional letters to control subjects' actions. A recurring technology in *The Invisibles* is a drug developed by the Outer Church to aid in torturing people for information, called Key 17 in its first iterations, that makes the receiver "unable to

tell the difference between the word describing an object and the object itself" (Morrison, *Entropy* 37). King Mob is given the drug as a means to convince him to reveal the Dane's whereabouts, and is convinced that his captors have infected him with a flesh-eating disease and cut off all his fingers. The drug is subsequently enhanced throughout the series and given a progression of larger numbers, 17, 23, and 64, each intensifying the drug's effects. Key in all its forms, in part, rely on a stable perception of the relationship between the signifier and signified, that a single written word can refer to a single object and, as such, words chosen by King Mob's torturers attempt to limit the multiplicity inherent in language on even the basic level of the homonym. The power of Key, then, lies in the inherent power of language to shape reality, an intensification of how this "total and direct correspondence between sign and referent... examine[s] language's power to shape perception" (Singer 119). But in *The Invisibles*, language does not simply inform perception; instead, "language is capable of *generating* reality" (Wolk 272). This generation informs the relationship between both sides of the series' ongoing conflict and the general population unaware of their 'war.'

Language in *The Invisibles* is always already involved in the production and interpolation into reality and its relationship to subjects is a tool used by both sides to change even the everyday experience, continually producing and enforcing a specific metaphorical landscape for humanity in general. According to Singer, Key 17 is "a nightmarish hypostasis of both the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and of interpolation, the process by which ideological superstructures such as language dictate subjectivities to their own users" (119), yet Key acts as an

intensification of processes already occurring throughout the series. As Tom O'Bedlam notes early in the series, "Cities have their own way of talking to you; catch sight of the reflection of a neon sign and it'll spell out a magic word that summons strange dreams" (Morrison, *Revolution* 83). The landscape of reality is continually informing its experience, according to Tom, once people "who know the secret learn ways to unlock the power in cities. We make a pact with them and they give us gifts in return" (84). For those who do not, however, the unconscious relationship to the city still shapes experiences and acts in part to depict that "reality is literally made of language - but… these mimetic languages are at once confirmations that language structures experience and defiant assertions of its referentiality" (120). The stable relationship that Key relies on, for Singer, is indicative of a problematic relationship *The Invisibles* has to language "in ways that negate the symbolic substitution that poststructuralism presumes is inescapable" (120), assuming that the consensus reality structured through language is consciously created by subjects within the series.

During the same mission in which the Invisibles are attacked with the auto-critique, their opponents, another Invisibles cell, use "the full 64 letters of the alphabet. We have words and concepts for things you aren't even able to imagine in the rudimentary vocabulary of your slave language" (Morrison, *Counting* 214). Such concepts and words are then unleashed on the Invisibles, which weaponize the hidden language to harm them, including one command that is simply "the 'off' switch for human consciousness" (217). Further, the twenty-six letter alphabet is, according to Sir Miles, "the name of a mighty, hidden demon... That name and all the names it generates, were designed to set limits

upon humanity's ability to express abstract thought" (Morrison, *Entropy* 63). The

relationship between the two languages, then, limits thought by limiting

expression; in short, if language is an active participant in the generation of

reality, than a moderated version of language would in turn restrict a subject's

capacity to navigate and help produce a consensus reality. As such, Singer

argues that the secret language is indicative of an essentialist view of language,

a "Chomskian universalist grammar locked deep in the human mind" (121).

However, a conscious awareness of language and the subconscious absorption

of language in the world of the Invisibles are different processes, something

Singer ignores in his assertion that "the languages that shape our experience

derive their meanings only from social convention" (120). In their time travelling

back to the French Revolution, for example, the Invisibles' presence is not

perceived as strange by those around them, who subconsciously "rewrite the

information coming in through the optic nerves so that it [the Invisibles' presence

and strange appearance] makes sense" (Morrison, *Revolution* 158). In doing so,

the series highlights the rewriting of information to fit within a specific

interpretation of reality happens on a subconscious level. Social convention

structures and ignores meaning simultaneously, espousing concepts too far

outside perceptions of reality, a process that in itself becomes dangerous to

certain subjects passing through the Supercontext. In the Invisibles' world,

language is taught in its limited form but the presence of multiple viral sigils and

other visual representations suggests subjects are indoctrinated into a

metaphorical landscape populated by a variety of visual cues that hold

subconscious meanings. As such, the sudden ability for the other Invisibles cell

to "hit them with some vocabulary" (Morrison, *Counting* 214) is not discounting the active participation in the deployment of language, but discussing the means through which visual culture influences the metaphorical structures that contribute to an experience of reality.

Appropriately, King Mob in his heroic identity is concerned with combating the weaponization of language over his own interpolation into its structuring of reality, asking, "How do we fight words?" (214) despite Dane resisting some of the attacks right beside him. During the auto-critique, for example, Dane's response is simply "fuck fuck. Fuck" (213). Meaney argues Dane's reaction is because he "is not hiding who he is; he's evolving his current persona, not putting on a new one" (163), yet this could also speak to his own increased awareness and fluidity at the level of language. He, like Tom, is capable of unlocking the secret power of the cities, using a name, Totep, he sees in a Top of the Pops title screen, stylized as "Top Of ThE Pops" (Morrison, *Entropy* 126), to disable assailants earlier in the series. In his use of language around him, despite not using any of the additional letters of the alphabet, Dane is shown to be more aware of the hidden symbolic framework that structures reality and is thus capable of calling on its implicit power for certain results. As such, his lack of auto-critique is indicative of an effective means of navigating the relationship between signifiers and signifieds, articulating through language a preferable means manifesting an easier reality to navigate. As such, the solid relationship between signifier and signified necessary for Key to be effective is assumed in the attacks with the 64-letter alphabet as well, and Dane's resilience implicitly

must be able to more fluidly navigate or restructure these assumed singular

relationships.

Dane's relationship to language, a navigation through signifiers, reflects

Jameson's own description of schizophrenia, which is "largely developed in the

work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan" ("Postmodernism" 118). For

Jameson, the notion of "psychosis, and more particularly schizophrenia, emerges

from the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and

language" (118) and is "an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous

material signifiers which fail to link up to a coherent sequence" (119). But Dane's

use of new words and resistance to auto-critique speaks less to a schizophrenic

decontextualization and instead an immense contextualization of what Singer

calls the "chaos of of floating signifiers by using a language of subjective

experience" (123). Dane can thus navigate between signifiers along the series'

favouring of multiplicity; a restructuring of a television programme can become a

magical spell as easily as the hidden alphabet can be rendered ineffective

through a reorganizing of its referents. Such an ability to navigate the

foundations of *The Invisibles*' reality gives Dane yet another effective mode of

resistance he cannot articulate and the King Mob identity cannot understand.

Gideon, like Fanny and Dane, relies on the rigid assumptions of the Outer

Church to finally defeat the Outer Church's most powerful Archon, not with a

bang, but with a pop.

The climactic scene in "Glitterdammerung!," the final confrontation

between Gideon and the self-described "King of thizz aeon" (Morrison, *Kingdom*

280), The-King-of-All-Tears, demonstrates the need to not only be fluid in

identity, but also in linguistics, to move less rigidly through the relationships between signifiers and signifieds. The conflict sees Gideon shoot the Archon with a gun he made eleven years previous, a gun that doesn't fire bullets but a flag with the word "POP" written on it (281). The-King-of-All-Tears, dosed with Key 64, subsequently 'pops' into the SuperContext, which "absorbs the King effortlessly, welcoming his quaint ferocity, converting it into narrative" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 281). Gideon's final confrontation before shedding his identities for the SuperContext, the ultimate, super-powered context of a new reality that recognizes the inconsistent multiplicities of experiencing reality, is an act of absorption into the very apocalypse he is ushering in. Rather than othering the enemy, Gideon opposes him nonviolently, operating on the hope of utopia rather than an assertion of power and fear, that even the greatest enemy can be absorbed into the larger, four-dimensional structure. The narration's flippancy towards the Archon as a threat, his 'quaint ferocity,' is indicative of the Supercontext's inevitability and thus indifference towards the Archon's ability to disrupt what is already underway. The Archon himself, however, is defeated not by Gideon's gun, or even the dosing with Key 64, but an inability to move fluidly between signifiers. The word 'pop,' for The-King-of-All-Tears, is the verb 'to pop,' like a bubble, instead of the multitude of other referents the word could mean, such as short for popular, as in pop music.

The-King-of-All-Tears is thus destroyed by his own incapacity to move fluidly through language, indicative of the Outer Church's attempts to limit reality to "absolute meaning" (Singer 122). Indeed, the Outer Church has a sculpture that reads, "This sculpture means total control only" (Morrison, *Bloody Hell* 68),

an art piece that "attempts to dictate and limit its own interpretation" (Singer 122).

Such an approach to language ensures, even though the Archon is also an ultra-

dimensional being, that the Archon is by Gideon's tactic because of an

ideological insistence on the absolute relationship between signifier and signified,

the basic requirement of all of Key's success. Gideon's gun, however, embodies

his ontological terrorist ideals of production and approximation, relying on the

Archon's insistence on a singular, stable linguistic relationship. Before he shoots,

Gideon says, "A bullet in the right place... is no substitute for the real thing"

(Morrison, *Kingdom* 281), collapsing the relationship between bullet and prop flag

gun. A bullet, in actuality, would have been entirely ineffective, but Gideon's

tactic instead uses a long standing argument throughout *The Invisibles*, that the

difference between an experience and the reality of that experience lie in

interpretation. Ultimately, this forces even Gideon's greatest enemy into utopia.

"If I Write Hard Enough and Honestly Enough, I Think I Can Make It Real"

It is here that I would like to conclude by looking at how Morrison's close

affiliation with Gideon lasts until the very end of the series, which itself is

indicative of the reading and rereading *The Invisibles* as a facsimile of the

utopian perspective. Morrison's metafictional experiments are themselves a form

of John-a-Dreams' fiction suits, a willingness to shed and blend identities in order

to better navigate both reality and his own fictional work. As Morrison produces

his narratives in the series, the King Mob identity in turn eliminates narrative

potentials; only with the actual turn to ontological terrorism do Morrison the writer

and Gideon the avatar blend in purpose. *The Invisibles*' construction, like the

MeMePlex and Gideon's video game, acts as an approximation of the utopian perspective, demanding the reader's empathy towards the entire cast of characters over simply various protagonists, an ability to replicate a four dimensional experience and the blending of signifiers and signifieds, all of which are inherent to the comic medium. While Fanny and Gideon are Morrison's own best approximations of John-a-Dreams' fiction suit, he provides readers with another example in Robin, who is one of the many possible creators and narrators of series.

In the final issue of "Black Science 2," Robin is seen using a combination of drugs and futuristic technology to write her own version of *The Invisibles*, which may be a novel written by Sir Miles in 1960 about an Invisibles cell in the twenties (Morrison, *Kingdom* 88). Using two tabs of sky, a drug that "simulates alien contact... or it is alien contact" (Morrison, *Counting* 216) and a "state-of-the-art liquid logic processors... in the Ganzfeldt Tank" (Morrison, *Quimper* 154), Robin writes her own version of *The Invisibles* (*fig. 22*). For Robin, the Ganzfeldt Tank is "floating in a warm ocean of words... Spinning down flumes and pipes and chutes made of flowing language" (155) and allows her to insert herself into her narrative in a more immersive way, changing and editing as she navigates the story. The result, however, is Robin's literal insertion into the story, in part due to a time machine and her own actualizing of her fiction into reality. As Gideon explains, "Robin read a story called 'The Invisibles' and wrote herself a part in it until she realized it was all real" (Morrison, *Quimper* 202). Moreover, Robin's fiction suit saw her adopt a certain identity that justified her presence, having a "nervous breakdown to fulfill a neurotic 'writer' archetype" (178) to be

absorbed into the narrative. Her codename, Ragged Robin, bears further

absorption into the narrative: besides giving her a superhero nickname like the

rest of the cell, she is necessarily the character who introduces herself to Dane

as, "I'm Ragged Robin. I'm nuts" (Morrison, *Counting* 45) to fulfill certain

expectations of both the inevitability of her time travel mission, but also of the

story she is writing. As such, Robin may at first appear as the authority within the

story, having knowledge of the future and possibly writing it into existence, but

the story remains out of her control.

Fig. 22. Robin floating in the Ganzfeldt Tank, *The Invisible Kingdom*, p. 275, art by Frank Quitely, 2000.

Robin's presence in the story, then, is physical evidence that, in the reality of *The Invisibles*, "writing literally makes the world" (Wolk 273) but still resists authority. She, like every other character, is subject to Dane's collapse of fate and free will, and is expected to make certain events occur for the actualization of

the Supercontext in her mission from the future. As she argues before she

travels back in time, "It had to be me because it was me" (Morrison, *Counting*

45), speaking to the inevitability of her mission's success but also her mandatory

courses of action when she travels back in time. As Meaney argues, "Just

because some people already know Robin's choices doesn't mean that the act of

choosing them isn't valid" (137). Some events, however, are outside her control.

In the second attack on the Dulce facility, Robin says from the Ganzfeldt Tank

that she does not "want Jolly Roger to get shot" (Morrison, *Quimper* 161), yet

Roger's clothes remain blood-stained. Roger's wound speaks to her limitations

in controlling the story, but also confirm her suspicions that "if I write myself in, I'll

never get out" (173). Robin's anxiety, however, ignores a major conflict in the

series between fiction and reality, mimicking Morrison's early metafictional

experiments in *Animal Man*. Robin sees herself as descending into a fictional

reality, but the status of *The Invisibles* is the actualization of fictional constructs

into reality. As such, Robin's descent is in actuality a blending: she cannot

escape or remove herself from the story. Indeed, in the series' closing moments,

Robin's language in the Tank starts to lose its vowels and she claims her friend

Kerry "says m sck bhnd th eys n dsnt blv shs prt f ths stry 2" (Morrison, *Kingdom*

275). Kerry's linking of Robin to mental illness, her being sick behind the eyes, is

discredited by Kerry's own assertion that she is not present in the story, despite

evidence of the contrary. Kerry, then, is unable to perceive Robin's own impact

on her reality, the interpolation into an actualized reality that comes through a

combination of technology and the act of writing. That interpolation, however,

assumes the narrative itself has agency, making Morrison's hypersigil a success within the series itself.

<div align="center">"It's Not Symbolism, It's Reality"</div>

The Invisibles, as a hypersigil, is thus an approximation of Robin's own experience as her absorption into the narrative and subsequent journey through the Supercontext mimics the anticipated result of *The Invisibles*' presence and influence in contemporary culture. The purpose of Morrison's ritual, his 'charging' of his writing and metafictional experiments into a text that enacts its own agency on the writer, audience, and reality, is to aid in the arrival of his envisioned utopia. The fiction suit is thus a means for readers to enter into *The Invisibles*, an encouragement to participate much like in Gideon's video game, where "you can play any of 300 characters, some more immersive than others" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 271). Using this metaphor of the video game, the series asks the reader to reread the text. Gideon, in reference to the video game, says that "if you don't get it the first time, you have to keep running it" (272), speaking to the series' opening line "And so we return and begin again" (Morrison, *Revolution* 8). Gideon's video game, then, is a metaphor for the experience of reading *The Invisibles* through a variety of fiction suits and identities within the series, to explore the narrative from a variety of avatars, playable characters, in a similar mode as a video game.

This conflation of video game and reading experience speaks to a fluid relationship to identity expected of audiences in their reading and rereading of the text, mimicking the Supercontext's loss of individuality. The narrative perspective conforms to specific characters' outlooks throughout the series, such

as King Mob's takeover of the second volume for a greater focus on sensational violence, but the act of rereading offers a variety of competing metaphorical structures in the story. The reader is at various points in the series, for example, given a first-person perspective from John-a-Dreams, who in this specific instance claims to be blind but perceive his surroundings regardless (Morrison, *Quimper* 143). Such an unusual effect in comics, which are often drawn from third-person perspectives, most closely provides the reader with a John-a-Dreams "suit, experiencing things from his perspective and being treated like him" (Meaney 180).

Yet in video games, first-person perspectives and multiple identities are used frequently to more abstractly involve players in the gaming and characters' experiences, a tactic Morrison appropriates in connecting *The Invisibles*' comic book series to *The Invisibles* video game.   A fluid interpretation of identities, in relation to games and game avatars, can highlight how temporary identities allow a space for the productive informing across a fiction-reality binary. Indeed, the multiple 'playable characters' in *The Invisibles* expect audiences to quickly associate and disassociate with a variety of perspectives continually. In doing so, a rereading of the comic series reflects Gideon's claims that his game is "different every time" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 272), exposing an expectation that various other perspectives will be inevitably considered in a reengagement with the text. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the conditions under which an unconscious is produced are an "indefinite move toward and away from zero, which does not at all express lack but rather the positivity of the full body as support and prop" (31). This movement can be mapped onto the production of

multiplicities that match the MeMePlex, which allows users to vary according to how the body is supported or deployed as a prop for movement through scenarios. The body, or audience in the act of reading,or gamer, or MeMePlex user, is expected to support multiple identities and is constantly under certain positive conditions, constraints that at once allow and disallow expression that, in turn, contextualize identities. If identities are continually produced and in constant motion, than the notion of avatars, be it through a fiction suit, fluid identity models, or gaming perspectives, offers the capacity for moving through a variety of contexts. Thus, the rereading of *The Invisibles* expects readers to realize the underlying values of the utopian subject because of a mimickry of their ability to freely and actively shed identities, taking the utopian's four-dimensional perspective to retroactively analyze the series. With an awareness of and affinity to the story's ultimate goal, the AllNOW, readers can move through the text, just as the Supercontext always already happens throughout the series; a rereading causes the audience to replicate this utopian perspective and become active participants the representation of that ideological viewpoint. For the comic series, the awareness of the narrative allows audiences to prioritize certain characters throughout, which allows a greater empathy for those previously left uninterrogated, ignored and more critical of past fascinations and romanticizations of certain characters' ideologies and methodologies. The repetitive and ineffective nature of King Mob's violence, for example, is countered by Fanny and Dane's more integral and effective use of dance to acquire the Hand of Glory for the timesuit, only possible through an awareness of what becomes important in saving humanity over destroying the Outer Church.

The reader, then, is expected to identify with individual characters and hold perspectives like John-a-Dreams, who sees the 'game' from a four-dimensional perspective that is inherent in the comic medium's construction. As Wolk observes:

> "Comics are sequences of images that are neither continuous (like the 'complete body') nor simultaneous. They include the spatial representations and temporal abstractions of images, directed by the temporal representation and spatial abstractions of language. They are, in short, an ideal medium for dividing the reader's consciousness into multiple subjectivities" (269-70).

John-a-Dreams is an example of this relationship between time and space, being able to navigate identities, space, and time freely, an example of "the becomings, infinitives, and intensities of a multiplied and depersonalized individual" (Deleuze and Guattari 38) that resists narcissistic attempts to become the General over the story's metaphorical landscape. Experiencing *The Invisibles* again is thus an exercise in the continual shedding and absorption of a variety of characters and perspectives, to insert oneself into the story and becoming, according to Singer, a "transparent figure for its own reading experience, acknowledging its potential for immersion and encouraging readers to become active participants" (107). This approach to fictional identities can also highlight how identities are contextual and dependent on an underlying 'code' or ideology in reality. As power attempts to unify and hierarchize, then an articulation of multiplicities across fiction and reality can instead destabilize this unifying power, rendering ideologies visible and thus more easily managed or discarded. Appropriately,

The Invisibles uses comics' relationship to time and space to show differing visual representations of sideways glances at its own reality, a means through which Morrison can visually depict the both the series' and its reality's underlying codes.

In keeping with comics' own visual nature and constant shifts in perspective, it is inevitable that the series should depict events and spaces that cannot normally be seen. Multiple characters can navigate the spaces between worlds in the series cosmological make-up of overlapping universes.   John-a-Dreams, in his final epiphany to Dane, claims they are "walking behind the walls of time and the world you know. At right angles to it" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 252). King Mob explains his own view of the universes through a variety of metafictional devices that rely on comics as well (*fig. 23*), linking the formal makeup of the medium to differing and seemingly impossible ways to negotiate overlapping and dimensionally askew perspectives into reality. Further, when John-a-Dreams reveals a more complete version of himself to Colonel Friday, he begins to look like a comic within the panel (*fig. 24*). These instances highlight how comics can actively participate in the reader's perception of various realities and concepts, how "vision must be *decentered* to see and understand complex constructs; standard stereoptic vision won't do" (Wolk 266). Wolk argues this relationship between comics and decentered vision, much in the way the series itself purposefully and continually decentres narrative authority, is indicative of the "billion-eyed and billion-limbed, the worm-cast that you leave in time... [that is] your complete body, not its section" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 253). Thus, the comic at once allows a certain visual representation of a variety of perspectives, but can

also move audiences through time in a unique fashion, much like John-a-Dreams appears to Colonel Friday in four-dimensions by replicating a comic book.
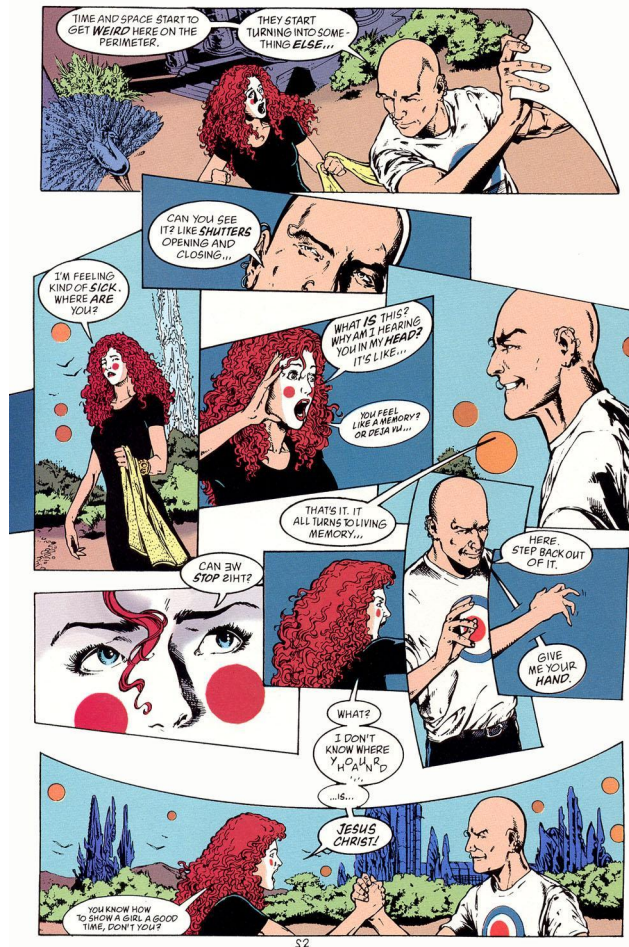

Fig. 23. King Mob explains the nature of the universe using the medium of comics, *Counting to None*, p. 53, art by Phil Jimenez, 1997.

Fig. 24. John-a-Dreams reveals his four-dimensional self, which looks like a comic book, *Kissing Mr. Quimper*, p. 119, art by Chris Weston, 1998.

Morrison uses comics' unique relationship between time and space to mimic the utopian, four-dimensional perspective allowed by the timesuit, which moves its wearers outside of time. In his explanation of time travel, Takashi asks, "Where is the past? Where is the future? Undeniably, they exist, but why can't you point to them?" (Morrison, *Counting* 22), a concept that is easy for a comic reader, who can literally point to Takashi's past and future on the very page he is speaking. As such, reading a comic is like reading time for those in the timesuit, able to move through and select pages and panels that represent singular moments in a story's sequence of events. As Morrison argues, "To find

out what higher dimensions might look like, all we have to do is study the

relationship between our 3-D world and the 2-D comics. A 4-D creature would

look 'down' on us through our walls, our clothes, even our skeletons" (*Supergods*

116). According to this viewpoint, readers can control time precisely because

"we can stop on page 12 and look back to page 5" (117), much like the timesuit

enables a sideways glance into time as itself a multidimensional object. Further,

Morrison argues that "as comics readers gazing down from a higher dimension

perpendicular to the page surface, we *can* actually peer inside characters'

thoughts" (116). The position of the reader, then, is always already occupying

the unique perspective to time, space, and dimensional rifts present in *The*

Invisibles, replicating the right angle perspectives John-a-Dreams shows to

Dane. The act of reading, then, generates for the audience a facsimile of the

idealized experience of the utopian subject, the AllNOW character who can move

freely through time, space, and identity, disrupting through multiplicity the variety

of competing truths that are presented, none of which can be taken as the

singular, authoritative, and absolute truth in *The Invisibles*' reality or the one it

continually attempts to invade.

        As comics are constructed with sequences of panels to communicate

narratives, the reader's ability to control time through space replicates the

schizophrenic experience. Jameson's assertion that schizophrenia is found in

the breakdown between signifiers, which in turn leads to alienation and a

continual present, is explicitly expected in rereading *The Invisibles*. In relation to

comics, the arrangement of panels on the page is similar to how "we read the

whole sentence, and it is from the interrelationship of its words or signifiers that a

more global meaning - now called a 'meaning effect' - is derived" (Jameson, "Postmodernism" 119). Comics similarly rely on a variety of interrelationships, including word and image and the relationship between panels as discussed in the second chapter. For the reader of *The Invisibles*, however, the breakdown between signifiers, between the temporal interpretation of space on the comic page, can be easily undone or given less significance in a rereading of the text. The reader, already moving at will through multiple identities, perspectives, and times, can thus disassociate and relocate at will, reading in an eternal present that is also free of the anticipation of the series' conclusion because it has already been experienced. As such, the series, as an attempt to replicate the utopian perspective and experience, demands a schizophrenic experience from the reader, with a certain agency allowed through a four-dimensional perspective. In doing so, the reader becomes a facsimile of Gideon's own ontological terrorist tactics, actively involved in the production of narratives that are still only approximations of the utopian experience, but an experience that replicates a certain strangeness or alienation from the pre-utopian reading perspective.

As such, the experience of reading *The Invisibles* is merely a facsimile of the utopian perspective, an attempt to represent the relationship between reading, rereading, and the production of culture through active, fictional constructs that enact a certain agency over the experience of reality. Morrison's association with Gideon includes his failure to fully experience and disseminate the AllNOW before it occurs, both within the comic and out in reality. As a utopian text, *The Invisibles* differs in how it offers the utopian experience, or at least in its attempt to represent its ideal world. The result, like Gideon's

MeMePlex, is a simulacrum of the utopian perspective and experience: its actualization remains an ongoing project, a replication on a page designed to disseminate through the culture. A hypersigil, after all, is not the event itself, but a metafictional experiment in the modes through which fiction and ideas can contribute to the inconsistent multiplicities of reality's experience. Singer argues that the fact that *The Invisibles* is published by AOL Time Warner, its revolutionary ideas and resistances make it unclear on "who is exploiting whom" (133). For Singer, the revolution is "so complementary with transformations in global capitalism - that is poses no threat to Time Warner, only revenue streams" (133). However, such an analysis forgoes the use of Time Warner's resources for the dissemination of the series, for its maximum exposure in the world, a necessary step according to Gideon's newfound approach to resistance. For the Invisibles, using and being used by capitalism is the same thing, a means and ends towards the inevitable utopia, reliant on the mediums and modes available yet increasingly reflexive and fluid in the ability for these modes to hierarchize, to become the General over their metaphorical and ideological landscapes. As such, the revolution towards social cohesion, the loss of individuality, requires certain structures to be shed, continually and fluidly, with varying levels of intensities, to use the words of Deleuze and Guattari. Or better yet, in the words of Dane at the series' conclusion: "Here I am; put here, come here. No difference, same thing. Nothing ends that isn't something else starting" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 285).

Conclusion:

"So I've Said My Bit and It's Your Go Now"

As of writing this, Grant Morrison is completing his seven year run on the Batman franchise that has culminated in Bruce Wayne using his capitalist origins to form Batman, Inc., a worldwide syndicate that fights crime internationally. The arc bears striking resemblances to *The Invisibles*: Bruce Wayne moves into a differing form of crime fighting that embraces the global corporatism of his contemporary world, yet he still fights villains in an almost tireless cycle of violence. Batman's embracing of an international corporate structure to crime fighting seems like a logical extension of his origins as the inheritor of a billion dollar fortune and heir to WayneCorp, itself a multinational corporation. Batman/Bruce Wayne, like KingMob/Gideon, appears to be using the tools of the 'en-eh-mee' to fight crime, yet Batman's fight never seems to engage on an ontological level, destabilizing Morrison's idealized terrorism.

What is curious about Morrison's writing of *Batman* is less his movements with the titular hero and more the spectre that has always haunted Morrison's utopian visions made manifest in *The Invisibles*' conclusion: the Joker. While the Joker, like his nemesis, has no actual superpowers, Morrison diagnosed him in the late eighties with "some kind of super-sanity… a brilliant new modification of human perception" (Morrison, *Arkham* 40). According to the Joker's psychoanalyst, the Clown Prince of Crime "has no control over the sensory information he receives from the outside world. He can only cope with the chaotic barrage of input by going with the flow… He has no real personality. He

creates himself everyday" (40-1). Morrison explains in his annotations on this early work that this notion of super-sanity "haunted me for years and eventually developed into my theories of multiple personality complexes as the next stage in human consciousness development" (151). Indeed, the relationship between the Joker's psychosis and *The Invisibles*' fluid identity models is near-identical: the Joker is "a dangerous application of the MeMePlex, providing a necessary if chilling correction to Morrison's earlier suggestion in *The Invisibles* that multiple personality disorder could serve as a model for political and existential liberation" (Singer 274). The Joker, then, is Morrison's ontological terrorism interpreted from Jameson and Baudrillard's apocalyptic approaches of schizophrenia and postmodernism without the utopian optimism, a reflexive reminder that even such idealisms can be converted from liberation to "an endless cycle of self-annihilating violence" (Morrison, *Batman* 663.16). But the Joker, it seems, is not the supervillain *for* the Supercontext, the utopia's anti-utopia, but is the supervillain *as* the Supercontext, reflecting how a dystopia is "generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character" (Jameson, *Seeds* 55-6). The Joker is the result of the Supercontext being placed back into the heroic ideology, twisted into the ultimate supervillain that must be destroyed by a stabilizing force that can condition it into appropriate modes of conflict. In the case of *Batman*, the Joker's inevitable defeat through serialized violence generally ends in the Joker re-entering Arkham Asylum, a psychiatric hospital that necessarily fails to rehabilitate the Joker. Any attempts to stop the Joker at the level of his super-sanity are bound to fail, as they do in *The Dark Knight Returns*, and as such his return represents the failure of both his rehabilitation

and the serialized narrative's responsibility to recreate itself, like the Joker, at

regular intervals. The recurring themes in *Batman*, and the necessity of

perpetual conflict, for Morrison, is evidence that "nothing can change the genre's

conventions or ideologies" (Singer 180). But if the Joker is continually creating

himself everyday, living in a decontextualized and eternal present, Morrison's

treatment of the Caped Crusader, the Dark Knight, the Bat-Man is an attempt at

once to create and reject cohesion out of the hero's own varied, schizo

publication history.

Created in 1937, Batman has a long and varied history that sees the

character moving through periods of noirish crime stories, campy replications of

the Adam West television show, science fiction, and the Batman I discussed in

Chapter One (Singer 268). Most approaches to this history are selective,

choosing to ignore large portions to tell a story within a larger framework that

balances this enormous past with a manageable story that can also appeal to

unfamiliar readers. Mark Singer argues that Morrison's run on Batman, however,

is a fusion of "every story in his protagonist's seventy-year history" (268), causing

the tone to fluctuate "wildly from storyline to storyline, issue to issue, sometimes

page to page" (270). At some points, Batman is a "globe-trotting love god," for

example, before moving back into the "psychological manipulation" (270) that

dominated his stories after *The Dark Knight Returns*. This movement through

Batman's history, even at a metafictional level, relates an underlying anxiety

within the character himself: despite attempting to be a stable identity, Batman is

always already multiple. Morrison's attempt to reintegrate "Batman into a

healthy, sane character with a single, all-encompassing history" (Singer 275) is

an impossible feat, the character is too complex with too long of a history to be able to synthesize all of his past. The Joker himself mocks such an attempt, telling Batman that "you think that it all breaks down into symbolism and structure and hints and clues" (Morrison, *Batman* 680.18), because to assimilate all his own identities is to deny their disparity and his own articulation through them. In short, the Joker mocks both Morrison and Batman's goals in the narrative itself, metafictionally providing a villain for the protagonist, writer, and audience.

The Joker, then, is Batman's and Morrison's own obscenity in Baudrillard's definition, "where the most intimate processes of our life become the virtual feeding ground of the media… just like the sexual close-up in a porno film" (130). The Joker is Batman's unsolvable multiplicity and indeed, Morrison has the Joker name his previous phases that mock Batman's own publication history, like "the Satire Years…, Camp, and New Homicidal" (Morrison, *Batman* 663.16), before moving into a "new skeleton, new gravity, new rules… The Thin White Duke of Death" (663.18). This easy shifting between roles and insistence on multiplicity is the zeroing in on Batman, *Batman*, and Morrison's history and approaches to history. Within the confines of the heroic ideology, Morrison writes his own critique of his previous notions of utopia, self-reflexively arguing how multiplicity can itself be co-opted into a conflict paradigm while being used by both sides, one fully aware of the inconsistent multitudes, the other actively attempting to singularize reality. The Joker's obscenity exposes Batman's underlying identity shifts that are actively ignored or denied by creators and Batman, but much of Morrison's run is about the inescapable past, how the chaos of a varied history does not insulate characters from certain

consequences. Most notably, Morrison introduces Damian, Batman's son that "had long been erased from DC continuity until Morrison took over" (Singer 304), a character who is "not so different" (272) from his father, reminding the hero of his repetitive nature and the consequences of his own history. This history, like the serialized nature of the comics themselves, is doomed to repetition and reproduction indebted to legacy, much like Damian's twin allegiances to his father's superheroics and his mother's criminal empire, the League of Shadows.

Batman and the Joker are also forever locked into "familiar patterns of interaction, to elicit familiar chains of response" (663.21), the weight of their history inescapable and creating their present and future. The Joker admits he enjoys this cyclical violence, asserting, "I could never kill you… Where would the act be without my straight man?" (663.21). For all their shifting identities, Batman and Joker are still unable to ontologically engage with their conflict because, as the Joker says, "The real joke is your stubborn, bone deep conviction that somehow, somewhere, all of this makes sense" (680.15). Of course, any attempt to synthesize seventy years of serialized stories into a cohesive whole is impossible. Batman's own history is a culmination and literalization of reality's inconsistent multitudes, and the character continually struggles with hierarchizing his base into a cohesive and desired experience of reality that affirms his ideological constructions.

The Invisibles ended in 2000 and more than one writer has noted the impact the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 had on both comics and Morrison's own writings. Patrick Meaney notes that "the Day-Glo optimism of *The Invisibles* and *Flex Mentallo* is replaced by the overwhelming confusion and

trauma of *The Filth* and *Final Crisis*" (283), two series that came out after the attacks. Even if the thesis statement of *The Filth* is to take "shit… and spread it on your flowers" (Morrison 308-9), the Utopian ideals of multiplicity and interactions between fiction and reality are carefully tempered in the new political and social climate Morrison sees emerge from 9/11. Taken further, my project would look at Morrison's career after 2001, analyzing how superhero comics continue to struggle with the Dark Age after 9/11, which saw a resurgence in Cold War binaries that combined conflicts against abstract concepts with racialized others, while revisiting Geoff Klock's revisionism as we move further away from 2001. Morrison's continual involvement in the superhero genre, and shedding of his King Mob identity in favour of a more corporate pop superstar, would provide a unique lens into the shifts in culture since 2001, especially as our temporal distance from the attacks increases and superheroes have begun to fill theatres around the world. While the Joker acts as Morrison's antithesis, a continually obscene reminder of his own optimism, Morrison's output since 9/11 would provide another articulation of the innoculation strategy, with the Joker perhaps innoculating against Morrison's problematic utopian ideologies, a self-reflexive critique that reformulates and resists a quilting of *The Invisibles*' hypersigil into a newly dangerous status quo.

In many respects, Morrison's post-9/11 writings engage with a historicity of influence that does not shed various genres and tropes, as he continually performed in *The Invisibles*, but attempt to amalgamate these moments into a narrative that is digestible yet still powerful. As he argues in *Supergods*, there is "no more potent image of this union of real and imaginary than the terrorist

attacks on the World Trade Center" (Morrison 345). Morrison explains the events in relation to the symbolism of tarot cards, noting that the Moon card is "flanked by two pylons… [that] represent the door that separates the world of fantasy from material reality" (345). The towers, for Morrison, symbolize how when "real life become more like a story, stories must pay the price of this exchange by becoming more real and allowing the rules of the material world to impinge on their insubstantial memories" (345). The representations of the Twin Towers falling, a continual theme in popular culture "from the moment the towers were completed in 1973," was evidence that "the idea that events that have already occurred in the future might influence the past may not be entirely far-fetched" (346). Morrison's reading of 9/11 acts like a timesuit, that the future necessarily impacts the past, but also that fiction and reality are linked together: one cannot change without the other morphing as well. Fiction and reality are intrinsically linked, and Morrison's reading of 9/11 changes the temporal perspective to look at how the past, present, and future only compound the interactions between fiction and experiences of reality. Thus, Morrison's attempts to create a healthier superhero through Batman's confrontation with his own unstable past changes the AllNOW's movement away from time. If Batman can only resolve his past by embracing its inconsistencies, then the AllNOW is similarly indebted to the past and how time necessarily impacts the future. As one character in *The Invisibles* remarks, "The future's firing bits of itself into the past. More things from the future impact with the present all the time. Soon you won't be able to tell 'em apart" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 21).

Such a reading of time's relation to fiction and reality recalls Jameson's critique of development of capitalism in "its postmodern moment" (*Seeds* 25). For Jameson, "sheer speculation, as something like the triumph of spirit over matter, the liberation of the form of value from any of its former concrete or earthly content, now reigns supreme and devastates" (25). Interpretations of the future already inform the daily experience; indeed, "the fate of whole strata of the population and sometimes whole countries can be decided by the 'solipsistic' speculative dance of capital" (Žižek, *Violence* 12). The anticipation of future capital, it's "self-propelling metaphysical dance… provides the key to real-life developments and catastrophes. Therein lies the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism" (12). Gideon's ontological terror and, with it, an insistence on multiple personalities and collapsing of time, a state of becoming and already become on the very level of identity, never shies away from its own inherent violence, but this violence can itself create perpetual sameness under the guise of progress, a feeling of going nowhere fast. As such, Morrison's meditations on 9/11 and his own attempts in *Batman* to critique the comic's underlying ideologies are part of a self-reflexive imperfect facsimile of a perfect system.

A utopia, even as an approximation, must therefore be continually reflexive and self-involved, always already a state of becoming, whether that state is a timeworm in the AllNOW that is forcibly and definitively divorced from the past from which it grew, or a state of speculative becoming. The heroic ideology has become the dominant summer blockbuster, reinforcing the hero's necessity in hard times and moving against such idealism in its repetitive victories. The 2012 film *Marvel's The Avengers* uses this logic, with a secret

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agent arguing that Captain America's relevance is directly related to disaster, that with "everything that's happening, the things that are about to come to light, people might just need a little old fashioned" (Whedon). Captain America, literally a relic from the Second World War, becomes a necessity in contemporary America, an anachronistic reinvestment in the hero as honourable and the subjective violence that perpetuates rather than engages with underlying ideologies. The exceptionalism of Dark Age heroics, it seems, is now a justification for nationalized violence that insists on enemies and divisions over social cohesion. Captain America stands as an assertion that the past, not the future, is what should save humanity from its present disasters. As such, Mister 6's observation that "there is no enemy" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 18) has been replaced with the age old heroic quest. Morrison's most recent work on *Action Comics*, by contrast, sees a young Superman struggling with his own commodification, how his rescuing of people from a burning building and subsequent aid in rebuilding, for example, will only increase the house prices in the neighbourhood, driving out lower income families (11.4-5). Even for the most exceptional of heroes, the all powerful sun god Superman, the taking up and disseminating of his identity, presence, and visual iconography are beyond his control. The hero is always already out of his own hands and Morrison's own utopian visions are subjected to the very processes Gideon's ontological terrorism claims to use, exploit, and perpetuate. Controlling how a product is taken up is an impossible task, much like the Outer Church's sculpture that wishes to limit its own interpretation, the inversion of *The Invisibles*' own destabilizing of any narrative authority.

How Morrison's ontological terrorism is integrated or disavowed after 9/11 could speak to the place of the comic as an informative medium. Comics, as discussed, possess the ability to represent space, time, and decentered perspectives that could continually interrogate how society operates, and seeing how these processes are used, exploited, and perpetuated in Morrison's later work could inform a reading of the post-9/11 culture as a reinvestment in Dark Age tropes. Much of Morrison's work, especially *The Filth* and his work on the Batman franchise actively attempt to innoculate against the cynicism and grim and gritty realism of television shows like *The Wire*, films like *The Dark Knight*, and in the recent reboot of the DC Universe, which also saw a reinvestment in the excessive violence and problematic sexuality of the Dark Age. Yet his work is also placed into a much larger continuity, at once more durable due to its larger dissemination but also subject to retroactive continuity revisions, decontextualization, and outside influence. The multiplicity of the outside influences on Morrison's texts are, in short, a source of anxiety, despite his use of the Joker to argue that the text as a whole will not make sense if deeply engaged with. Utopian texts are always already outside the author's control and perhaps even an open acknowledgement of such processes is insufficient in bringing about specific change.

The final page of *The Invisibles* (*fig. 25*) has Dane talking directly to the reader and his infamous speech ends with "We allowed ourselves to be… sentenced. See! Now! Our Sentence is up" (Morrison, *Kingdom* 286). The page ends with a zooming in on the word *up*, eventually depicting only the white background of the page, a nod to Dane's passing into the Supercontext, but also

a collapsing of word and image. The page, however, begins with "I've said my bit and it's your go now… so while you're thinking about it, think about this" (286). Dane uses the second person to speak to the reader, but then switches into third person plural. The sentence, both as a punishment and as a linguistic structure, are finished, Dane's reality has moved on and a rereading of the text operates as a facsimile of what that end entails. But for those left, Morrison included, our sentence has not finished. What worked for *The Invisibles* is only a handbook, a hypersigil that itself may need to be shed in a progression towards our own utopias, Supercontexts, and AllNOWs. Our sentence, is far from up.
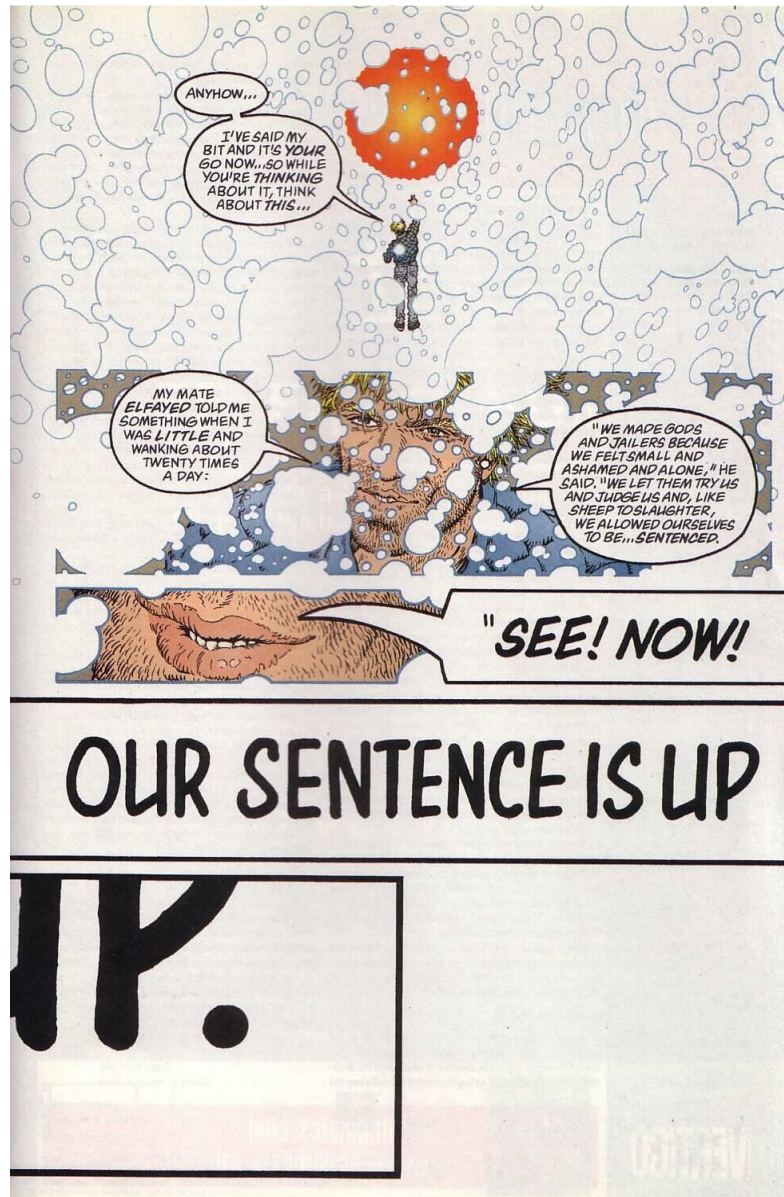
Fig. 25. The final page of *The Invisibles* and Dane's speech addressed

directly to the reader, which ends with a collapse of word and image, *The*

Invisible Kingdom, pg. 286, art by Frank Quitely, 2000.

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