A DISEASE OF PURCHASE:

CONSUMERISM CULTURE AND COMIC BOOKS

A Dissertation

by

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Disease of Purchase: Consumerism Culture and Comic Books

In Memoriam my mother, Catherine Marie Dady McKenna, and

my father, Lawrence Edward McKenna, Sr.

and

To Rebecca Langston Ownby, for memories yet to come.

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ABSTRACT

"[T]he new medical system . . . emerged to protect the public and state from epidemics

that threatened the economic system." – Kelly Tian, et. al, "Transforming Health Care"

This study will fulfill a task that scholars David Kunzle and Aaron Meskin called

for in their studies of the comic book genre. It will answer their call to historicize the

comic book and thereby more thoroughly define what is integral to the definition of

comics. This study will show that the history of the comic book represents a criminal

type of consumerism that is reflected in all salient aspects of the genre. This study

supports the notion that a history of corruption resulting from criminal activities and a

pathological obsession with consumerism are the two key elements that define the

genre. These criminal consumerist elements continue to infect the industry still today,

and the harmful consequences of these elements will be investigated; this study

determines that antidotes to this sickness are empathetic advocacy narratives as well as

other characteristics most cogently exhibited by the works of Alan Moore.

The introductory chapter will review prior scholarship that has attempted to

define the comic book genre. Branching off from prior understanding of the genre, this

study will extend beyond prior definitions by historicizing the comic book instead of

focusing only on aesthetic and narrative aspects of the genre. It will reestablish the

importance of a Marxist social morality, and will explicate the ways that comic books display and utilize such politicization by commenting upon topical societal concerns.

The second chapter will argue against the claims put forth by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green in *Spreadable Media*. The authors' signature claim is the belief that users of media are now forming what they call participants who have been empowered through their use of digital technologies and can, therefore, force the corporate world to acknowledge them and cooperate with them. A practical and grounded study of contemporary consumerism is presented to illustrate that users of media have simply turned digital technologies into another marketplace and that corporations have not deviated from former practices.

The third chapter will prove that the crime comic is the quintessential comic book subgenre because it surfaces from a need to reflect the industry's criminal origins. Crime comics continue to perpetuate a gangster ethos in contemporary comic books. Primarily, this chapter is informed by Michel Foucault's theories of archaeologies of language and nonaccidental omissions. Using these theories, this section will show how the comic industry produces texts of prevarication to distance the industry from its criminal origins. Current industry trends will be investigated to bring to light the ways that the comic industry continues to commit criminal and highly unethical acts.

The fourth chapter will present the ideas of Alan Moore as a corrective to the predominant narrative and business trends found in comics. Based on Moore's morally informed worldview, this study will thoroughly examine how his narratives are fictional constructs of empathy, advocacy, and connectedness. Moore's philosophical system of

psychogeography will be used as a filter to study his works. Moore's abstention from

current and historical industry practices will present a context for his view that the

comic book genre is inherently anarchist, a term he defines as the creation of

empathetic narratives of personal responsibility.

The conclusion will contend that future studies must use the criminal

consumerism definition of the genre to study other time periods in comic book history.

It will call for further studies of works like Alan Moore's that are empathetic liberation

narratives that counter the comic book cliche of a dichotomous worldview.

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CHAPTER I

KUNZELITES AND MESKINELIONS:

THE CASE FOR COMIC BOOK NARRATIVE

"To think that there are words that simply exist without meaning, as objects are said to

do (outside of representation), is to ignore that it is the nature of language to be a

system of interpretation." – Amiran Eyal, "After Dynamic Narratology"

A distinctive definition of the comic book genre, as will be shown later in this

first chapter, has yet to be provided in scholarly work. Scholars have also yet to pinpoint

distinctive qualities of the genre that distinguish it from other forms of media. This first

chapter will look at previous scholarly works by Aaron Meskin, David Kunzle, Will Eisner,

Scott McCloud, and Joseph Witek, among others, to determine what has been achieved

and what is still lacking in their definitions of the genre. This study will arrive at a

definition of comic books that includes commercialism influenced by criminal

enterprise, and it will prove that this criminal commercialism is an essential defining

aspect of the genre itself. It will be proven that a more complete definition of the comic

book genre is as follows: The comic book genre is artistically illustrative storytelling that

was originally made to quickly pass from consideration due to its liability for reflecting

its producers' and creators' criminality, a genre that ultimately hid its past through

mystification of its readership in order to sustain continued commercial success through

criminal or unethical short- and long-term methodologies.

This definition adds an essential historicist element that has been completely

absent from earlier definitions that only focused on aesthetic properties of the genre.

What makes this study's new definition unique is the relation of its historical

development, which was spurred by criminal activity, to its subsequent industrialization.

This study is (as a whole), therefore, informed by the Marxist methodologies of Fredric

Jameson, the historical recovery theories of Michel Foucault, and the Cartesian model of

objectivism; these schools of thought will be used to elucidate the historical influences

that have been omitted from prior definitions of the comic book genre that only

considered the illustrative and narrative qualities of comic books. These theories will

also be employed in the second chapter to deconstruct consumerism and bring to light

its negative and harmful effects.

Parts of other scholars' definitions do, however, lend themselves to this study's

definition. As will be shown later in this first chapter, David Kunzle and Fredric Jameson

find a type of morality in texts that is exhibited through propagandist as well as

anagogical (belief oriented) concerns. Such moral concerns, as defined by Kunzle and

Jameson, are found in comic book examples utilized later in this chapter (e.g., O'Neil's

and Cowan's *The Question* series, Frank Miller's *300*), and they will show ways that the genre pushes moral concerns into the public eye.

After reviewing the history of comic book scholarship and showing the need for this study and a historicist definition of the genre, this chapter will move on to an investigation of the social morality that is found in comic books. It will show the positive aspects of social morality with examples of stories from the aforementioned *The Question*, *300*, and also *The X-Men*. It will also show how some comic book companies manipulated moral and social concerns for commercial success. This first chapter will propose that the origin of the comic book is found in the first truly commercial comic, *The Yellow Kid*, rather than illustrations used for political propaganda that some scholars have concluded are the first comics. That being said, *The Yellow Kid is* also the first example of a comic that used social and moral tales for their profitability. This contributed to later practices of the comic book as an instrument for shallow tales of moral fantasy used by audiences to simply reinforce their own beliefs rather than critique them.

The first chapter will then conclude with a more thorough outline of the rest of this study, which includes a review of the history of the comic book industry, how the genre was shaped by commercialism and the crime that surrounded it. It will also suggest that Alan Moore is a strong advocate for rehabilitating comic books and rescuing them from the genre's criminal past.

As implied previously, those who first created comic books did not know where the genre came from, what the genre was capable of, or what the comic book genre was exactly. According to Paul Levitz, definition was too foreign to the genre of comics; definition constrained inherent qualities of a genre that spoke to infinite possibility. It became a case where a genre stolidly resisted an analyzing, investigative eye it refused to be objectified by, especially given that the genre never examined itself to begin with:

> If there ever was a medium characterized by its unexamined self-expression, it would be comics. For decades after the medium's birth, it was free of organized critical analysis, its creators generally disinclined to self-analysis or formal documentation. The average reader didn't know who created the comics, or how or why, and except for a uniquely destructive period during America's witch-hunting of the 1950s, didn't seem to care. As the medium matured, however, and the creativity of comics began to touch the mainstream of popular culture in many ways, curiosity followed, leading to journalism and eventually scholarship (Levitz ix).

The definition of the comic book is a much more complicated issue than it appears at first glance. This difficulty has left attempts at defining comics sluggish and stagnant in the "murkiness of the genre's definition" (Hatfield, Heer, and Worcester 3).

According to Aaron Meskin, these attempts at defining comics have all been plagued by the inability to determine anything essential or definitively unique about the medium, which has ultimately resulted in "glaring difficulties" in trying to find "conditions for the correct application of the term COMIC [sic]" (369). Meskin's work, though, has also resulted in difficulties. The problematic trap that Meskin sets for himself is his belief that there is nothing necessarily narrative about comic books: "[T]here are good reasons to think no narrative condition is plausible . . . We should not assume *a priori* that the author or authors of a comic intend either to convey information or to produce an aesthetic response" (370). His conclusion eliminates any communicative aspects of the genre; this idea negates reception of language, the ability to process discourse, and the need for a response. Without information, there is no transference of ideas. Without the reception of ideas, interpretation is an impossibility. His premises are much too counterintuitive. Using that as his point of departure, his main task becomes debunking prior studies and suggesting future directions for comic book scholarship to follow.

Being a scholar, Meskin comes to the task at least once removed from the medium; Alan Moore, on the other hand, occupies a place at the center of the medium. Moore, a writer much renowned for creating a literary nexus that first moved comic books onto best novels of the year and best novels of the 20th century lists, completely contradicts Meskin's ideas: "The comics medium has some unusual features that do make it very different, in that it's combining a verbal narrative with a visual one that

allows for much richer possibilities of transmitting information" (Bebergal 9). Meskin's and Moore's ideas, obviously, are in opposition to one another.

Other scholars tend to define comics in ways that relate closely to Moore's; David Kunzle defines comics as follows: "I generally use the terms 'narrative strip' or 'pictorial sequence' in order to stress the *narrative* role of the medium, which I consider primary" (1). The fact that Moore's and Kunzle's definitions disagree with Meskin's speaks to the need to understand that the inner workings of comic books thrive on communication; among other tasks, the genre narrates stories that range from the lower latitudes of nerve centers of vicarious experience, and, on the higher polar latitude, liberation narratives. Another question is whether comics visually and verbally negate or create narratives, that is, whether messages are innate to the genre and are eradicated from it, or whether messages do not innately exist in comics but are written into them. Ironically, this is exactly where the argument began, and yet the disagreement still surfaces.

Meskin's definition exhibits an unaccountable tectonic shift in defining the genre when critiquing arguments as to whether the visual or verbal elements in comic books, or a combination of both, can be considered essential qualities of the genre. His argument calls for a closer investigation about whether comics can truly be considered narratives, and, if so, what kind of information they convey or negate and to what degree they do so.

The main elements in most definitions of the comic book are typically based on Will Eisner's definition of the genre that he propounded in *Comics and Sequential Art*. Eisner's term "sequential art" refers to "a distinct discipline" of "creative expression" that "deals with the arrangement of pictures and images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (*Sequential* 5). There are several different types of media that can be considered sequential art by this definition (e.g., film, scanimation, story quilts), but comics definitely stand as a genre making pointed use of sequential art as a contemporary and generic medium to disseminate information in a narrative fashion.

Aaron Meskin, however, would lead one to believe that Eisner's only definition of a comic, as stated in *Comics and Sequential Art,* is a "form of art, or method of expression" (5). Meskin focuses on this one ingredient in Eisner's work so that he can succeed in his quest to excise narrative as an innate quality of comics. In "Defining Comics," Meskin calls Eisner's definition "too thin" and tries to put it to rest, albeit without acknowledging that Eisner's understanding of comics is a bit more complicated than he is willing to admit (370).

Eisner actually has rather weighty expectations for comics, claiming the genre is both a language (which he believes is analogous to Chinese pictography) and a unique type of literature: "[C]omics employ a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols . . . used again and again to convey similar ideas" becoming "a distinct language – a literary form, if you will" (*Comics* 2). Eisner claims that repetitive symbols, including character postures and character styles, even typical backgrounds and cityscapes, are

pictographs that become a narrative code, employed by the comics medium as abbreviations that easily connect readers and enable them to see connections from one text to another more rapidly.

In *Expressive Anatomy,* Eisner defines comics as "the application of a stereotype in a narrative sequence," thus finding the storytelling possibilities of symbols in (a carefully determined sequence) as its staple feature (153). The repetitive reading of comics and continued use and interpretation of these idea-symbols constitute a "disciplined application that creates the 'grammar' of sequential art" (*Comics* 2). By this definition, comics are coded languages, necessitating a process of decoding to create interpretations of the work.

Further, Eisner claims narrative is an implicit quality of comics. He delineates the communicative quality of the genre as a construction of a "narrative bridge" that connects different aspects of reader interpretation, not only to the text the reader has at hand, but future texts they will be provided. The commercial, serial nature of the comic book intentionally creates deferment of meaning, tales promising conclusions that never arrive. Consequently, the genre compels readers to travel from one narrative bridge to an endless series of others, a journey that continues infinitely.

Eisner may have his detractors (though they are few), but his theories have proven worthy by many scholars of various interpretive dispositions. In *Comics & Ideology,* McAllister, Sewell, and Gordon agree with Eisner's definition of comics and

borrow from it: "Comic art combines printed words and pictures in a unique way." They state that the complex nature of this combination allows for flexibility in "the manipulation of meaning" through "stereotypes to convey information quickly" (3). Those who would argue that comics do not accomplish a specific task (e.g. narrative) are missing the point. The genre as a mass medium requires readers *en masse,* thus necessitating an endless supply of narratives. It is instructive to look at the cumulative effect of the catholic set of scholars' definitions to determine what elements have been privileged and what elements, not having been considered, have been left in an underprivileged state.

Most definitions of comics rely on the elements of art or pictures, images in sequence, sequential movement, and narrative; Karin Kukkonen's definition succinctly summarizes this: "Comics are a medium employing three modes of expression: words, images, and sequence" (158). The similarities to the simpler qualities of Eisner's definition of comics are obvious. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud attempts to use a definition that he believes encompasses all others: "Comics are . . . juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9). This seems to build on Eisner's definition by offering the idea that the pictures are always apposed and that the intention behind arrangement is calculated; the only problem with his definition is the absence of definitive qualities of an audience response. It is unclear what an aesthetic response truly is. Only when fully considering the creators' task, it could be argued, does

McCloud limit the comic book genre to creators' desired results in lieu of thoroughly examining the desired audience response.

Joseph Witek in *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* argues that scholarly investigations should not divorce audience reception ("visceral power") from critical analyses of comic books:

> The synthesis of words and pictures in comic books finally becomes a narrative gestalt combining verbal movement and sequence with pictorial stasis and simultaneity, and vice versa. The elements of sequential art are separable for our analytic convenience, but they are kept apart only at the cost of the visceral power and expressive range of the medium (34).

Witek understands these academic discussions sometime create a disjunction of the aesthetic and verbal elements of the medium. Meskin seems to fall into the trap Witek sees in academic discussions of the comic book genre. Meskin, who might have been the only scholar to undertake such a task so determinedly, seems, at some point, to provide an argument that is so counterintuitive as to be unsustainable. At the very least, the argument arrests the right of the genre's possibility of wholeness and integrity. One way of pushing Witek's arguments of the expressive range of the comic book genre forward and to debunk Meskin's project is to look at the socially and morally expressive aspects of comic books.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson describes ideology narratives as "a representational structure which allows the individual subject to imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities . . . to insert himself or herself" into a "textual apparatus" that is transformed into a "libidinal apparatus, a machinery for ideological investment" (30). These structures are always "moral and anagogical" in nature (30).

David Kunzle's idea that comics are both moral and political in nature parallels Jameson's ideas related above. Kunzle wants to reinvest considerations of texts, especially comic books, with an often now discredited idea: morality. Kunzle proposes that the comic book "has undeniably strong moral content . . . [and is] fundamentally moral in intent" (Kunzle 3). Kunzle redefines morality in a way that does not simplify the notion as only "religious narrative" (1). Instead, he proposes that morality is more political in nature than religious, because it attempts to elicit a socially conscious response to the genre's "topical character": "Social morality is best influenced by reference to current events; effective propaganda is always tied to the possibility of rapid social and political change. If a print is topical, it becomes an instrument of social and political propaganda, and as such acquires *ipso facto* moral meaning" (3).

The serial nature of the genre's ability to expediently disseminate information would definitely be a prime utilitarian aspect that would appeal to those who would want to employ the comic book to propagandize social causes. Interestingly, the genre also provides decorative elements and ornamental qualities that have proven quite attractive to readers and are, in part, why they continue returning to these texts.

Comic books have, and still do, push social causes into the public eye. *The Question* series, released in 1987, was based on the city of East St. Louis, Illinois (McElhatton). O'Neil changed the name of the city to Hub City to show how deindustrialization had resulted in the complete breakdown of East St. Louis's infrastructure and the consequences it had for the city's inhabitants: the city had a 21% poverty rate when the rest of the United States averaged 4%; the city has, at different times, held the nation's highest crime rate; crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault "are exponentially higher than the national average" (McElhatton). Historically, industry has vacated the city, causing property and homes values to subsequently drop drastically in market value; many houses there were left unoccupied and were taken over by the homeless and unemployed; the empty buildings, when they were inhabited, were used for criminal activity that occurred with regularity (Theising qtd. in Hilhoffer). Without a stable tax base, sewers failed and services like garbage collection ceased; police vehicles and radios often went unrepaired to the point of uselessness (Theising qtd. in Hilhoffer). Through the use of *The Question* comic book, Denny O'Neil was able to keep the plight of East St. Louis before the public eye at the time the city was struggling and deteriorating.

Frank Miller published the comic series *300* in 1988 when the prospect of America's military involvement in the Middle East seemed imminent, and Miller conducted interviews in which he explained that his comic books admittedly contained propaganda; they did so in a time when discussions about Muslims and terrorist groups

took on great national importance. In an interview after 9/11, when asked about his depiction of Persians in the comic representing modern day Muslims, Miller stated:

> Well, okay, then. Let's finally talk about the enemy . . . nobody seems to be talking about the sixth century barbarism they represent. These people saw people's heads off. They enslave women, they genitally mutilate their daughters . . . I'm speaking into a microphone that never could have been a product of their culture, and I'm living in a city where three thousands of my neighbors were killed by thieves of airplanes they never could have built ("Batman").

Miller continued to become much more outspoken, and, perhaps, gained a bit more validity when he denounced the terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda, instead of Muslims in general.

Miller's position became fully realized in the graphic novel, *Holy Terror.* The main character of the book, The Fixer, is a doppelganger for Batman; Miller had hoped originally that his *Holy Terror* story line would be used for a Batman comic, but DC refused to publish it because, in Miller's typical outspokenness, he admitted he wanted it merely to be a "piece of propaganda" where Batman "kicks Al-Qaeda's ass" (Mount). In an interview after the work was published, Miller made the subject matter and theme of the work blatantly clear, stating that he "wanted to stay with my screed against Al-Qaeda" ("Holy Terror"). However, he had finally found a way to separate the Muslim

faith from his denouncement of Al-Queda, stating, "[t]he issue here [in *Holy Terror*] is a method of killing. It's not a religion" ("Holy Terror"). Miller's stance regarding Muslims and Al-Qaeda benefitted from being published concomitant with events that caused many in the United States to be concerned with and invested in these discussions; it can only be hoped that Miller's later ability to separate the Muslim faith from terrorist organizations was just as timely.

Comics do attempt and are often effective in their ability to comment on current cultural and political topics thanks, in part, to their monthly serialization. Comics have great opportunity to comment on topics more quickly, perhaps, than books do, often because of the shorter time span it takes to write a comic, have it printed, and then distributed to readers. Such messages surely have more effectiveness when they are received closer in time to the events discussed and depicted. If received by audiences moved to act on them, they have a chance to effect change so that such events might be turned around or become the subject of even larger discussions. In fact, other forms of media also do this and, indeed, centralize audiences around such beliefs or causes.

In *Spreadable Media,* Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green contend that that the construction of groups who participate with one another have not only kept topical issues publicized, but has also created a "moral economy" that is much more valuable than the economic exchange of money for material products. "[T]he meaning of a cultural transaction cannot be reduced to the exchange between producers and their audiences but also has to do with what the cultural good allows audiences to say

about themselves and what it allows them to say to the world" (68). Audiences define

"worth" as something upon which "you can't put a price . . . something sentimental

(when personalized) or [of] symbolic (when shared with a larger community) value"

(68). Companies are forced to understand what "moral codes and guidelines" they

should "respect when encouraging, soliciting, or reacting to . . . those audiences they

wish to reach" (75). An appeal to both an audience's moral reinforcement and personal

reinforcement is a staple element in all media endeavors, and is, of course, a marketable

element in the comic book business as well.

Moral concerns have presented themselves in comics throughout the history of

the genre through outright moments of anagogical reinforcement, opposition, or battle.

One example of this is how the genre has taken up a discussion of gay rights, especially

gay couples' right to marry. In *Astonishing X-Men* issue #50 (published in 2012), a

character named Northstar proposes to his boyfriend named Kyle. They have been

having a relationship for years, and by issue #51, they are married. One Million

Moms.com, a group that operates from a platform they claim is working "to stop the

exploitation of children" in entertainment media, is opposed to any public display of

homosexuality, in media or otherwise (One Million Moms). This is based on their moral

stance and belief system as a "conservative, pro-family organization" (One Million

Moms). In contrast, Mommyish, a website promoting social tolerance and gay rights,

supports the issue of gay marriage in an anagogic way: "Marvel's wedding for Northstar

is a big deal. It's one step further in demonstrating that families don't always have to

look the same, they just have to love one another" (Cross). Here, love is used in a way that suggests that the LGBT population is supported for the same anagogic qualities as everyone else. This is in direct opposition to the position taken by One Million Moms who fear (for the stated sake of their children) this type of expression of love (Lindsay).

Though such groups as Mommyish recognize the positive aspects of social morality in comic books, there are also negative aspects of social morality present in the genre. Comic readers, without a doubt, and perhaps unfairly, have been viewed as mere fantasists who want to reify an unsophisticated worldview of moral beliefs they find in comics. Fredric Jameson claims that a reader of any genre or text can be understood as one who "wishes for the realization of the ideological axiomatic in order to be able then to wish the fantasy narrative" into the actual world, especially when those fantastic alternate realities are "easily commodifiable texts of the imaginary level" (183). Some readers do seek out texts that reinforce their unrealistic presumptions about the world, and the comic industry provides them the materials they need to do so.

As an example, Frank Miller, because of the kind of statements cited earlier regarding his graphic novel *Holy Terror*, has been accused in engaging in "a vulgar, one-dimensional revenge fantasy" (Ackerman). In "The Comic Book Readers," Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith suggest that comic readers are often caught up in works that are little more than "innocuous amateur attempts at creating . . . a familiar mythology" (193). Another case in point would be Jack Kirby's comic *Thor* that attempted to be an "epic of unprecedented scope and mythic resonance" but, according to Hatfield,

became little but "romance-styled plotting" that mimicked "soap opera" (143-44). They claim that readers nevertheless read the comics for depictions that illustrate support for the readers' beliefs and "ways of acting and relating the real world" (153).

Tap Vann notes that comic book companies' support of moral issues has actually been a ploy to allow changes merely to "keep pace with [the] rival publisher" that "feels a bit more exploitative than it does genuine." Companies, therefore, are beginning to pay attention to such things through the creation of a "moral economy . . . between contemporary media producers and audiences" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 52). Audiences and corporations are tied together by the "moral and social value" of audience-company "transactions" so that these transactions meet "the perceived interests of all parties" in ways that are "consistent, coherent, and fair" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 52).

Comic book readers have, at times, demanded that the industry right wrongs. Fans who were privy to Marvel Comics' refusal to return to Jack Kirby his original artwork which he planned to sell off to raise retirement funds, resulted in advertisements published in various comic books supporting Kirby's cause. The advertisements expressed disdain at "Marvel's shameful treatment of and ingratitude toward its most inspired, imaginative, and productive founding father" and included the statement "I wish to express my appreciation and love for Jack Kirby;" it concluded with the call to mail a cut-out, makeshift card that would include the readers' signature, address, and date upon which the card was filled out (Kirby). The company's

commission of presumably immoral acts is a way in which the questionable moral,

political, and ethical natures found in the natal days of the industry have been

unfortunately reinscribed for contemporary business practices. Given all these concerns,

this dissertation will critique consumerism, show the criminal nature of comic books,

and suggest a model for breaking out of the consumerism that dominates the genre.

The second chapter of this study will examine the ideas of spreadable media,

remediation, and convergence culture to show that current media studies have

inconsistencies that must be corrected before any other arguments continue regarding

contemporary media formats as tools for forming participatory, social societies.

Theories for virtual worlds and spreadable media will be questioned by placing these

theories alongside the consumerist model that is found in current media. This second

chapter will test the theories of Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green's ideas of

spreadable media. Jenkins, Ford, and Green's theories raise questions regarding how

current forms of media are used by consumers to attain their needs and desires. Their

claims about the effectiveness of and reasons for the rise of a new form of agency on

the part of media participants will be shown to result in far less than they purport.

This second chapter will also take a very practical look at the claims of

empowerment made by Jenkins, Ford, and Green. Their claim of a consumer media

culture that is supposedly efficacious in undermining media producers is

unsubstantiated. The application of more cogent theories regarding consumerism will

explain how consumers have actually become uninformed and unwilling participants in

the marketing of corporations' products and, thereby, trapped in a consumerist model that objectifies them through Cartesian Perspectivalism.

The third chapter, heavily influenced by the disappointments found in the lack of consumer empowerment in *Spreadable Media,* will examine the comic book as a genre and will show how it has used consumer marketing trends, deferred meaning, and obfuscation to reach its desired ends of profit mongering. It will propose that the comic book industry suppresses investigations into the unethical aspects of its history. Issues that will be examined include the current consumerist methods that have been employed to keep the market viable. An archaeological dig using Foucauldian techniques will elucidate how these practices still survive in the industry today. It will be shown that the business methodology has not improved, that comic business ethics have not progressed, and that all aspects of comic book media are geared toward recreating modern consumerism from the template of prior notions and practices. Conversely, modern publishing and marketing strategies will be viewed as effective methods that the comic book industry employs to manipulate its customers through constant remediation of its bestselling characters, properties, and narrative formulas in order to gain continually dubious, desired ends.

The third chapter will also show how the criminal history of comics has been finely obfuscated through creating media textual forms of their history that contradict their lived realities. Fredric Jameson defined mediation as a "seemingly dialectical but no less idealistic mechanism, for moving or modulating" a text from "one level or

feature of the whole to another" (*Political* 28). Jameson found it particularly useful as an

"establishment of symbolic *identities* between" various types of texts so that an original

text can be "folded into the next" (*Political* 28). Reinvention attempts aside, these

projects are typically only partially complete because "*the same essence* is at work" and

remains in both texts attempting remediation (*Political* 39). Pairing Jameson's ideas with

Michel Foucault's idea of an archaeology of language in addition to modes of study

already alluded to and employed so far herein, this study will delve into the history of

the comic book that has established essential qualities of criminality that have

continued to be folded into texts. It will also investigate the specific ways that economic

and market forces shaped it, influenced its themes, and practically demanded the

creation of certain narrative trends that would reinscribe its illicit ethos allowing it

continue into our own era. An argument can at least be granted that this criminal ethos

is still found in the industry and the comic book narratives it creates. This study will

attempt to elucidate why such conditions remain this way.

There have been certain voices that have arisen to vehemently oppose the comic

book industry's business models and practices, and the final chapter will focus on one of

the more prominent dissenters. Arguably, Alan Moore is the most vocal of these

dissenters. He became successful in the field, then disenchanted with its lack of business

ethics, and ultimately exited the mainstream industry. He did so on what he considers

moral grounds, and his moral convictions will be compared to the concept of audience-

corporation contracts cited in Jenkins, Ford, and Green's work. Moore is the prime

example of someone who has resisted the comic industry, defying what Jenkins, Ford, and Green consider necessary and efficacious advantages of spreadable media marketing techniques. In creating his own sense of comic book business culture, Moore has used his departure from the comic industry to create comics that are informed by his own unique interpretations of psychogeography, fractal geometry, and chiasmic structures. His narratives can be considered empathetic alternative worlds and advocacy narratives.

CHAPTER II

IF IT SPREADS LIKE WILDFIRE OR PEANUT BUTTER, IT'S JUST AS DEAD:

THE MEDIA EMPIRE STARES BACK

"Winter twilight: miles of advertising.

One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry."

- Elizabeth Bishop, "Just North of Boston"

"These skills are being applied to popular culture first . . . because the stakes are so

low." – Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*

When Susan Boyle auditioned on *Britain's Got Talent* in 1999, she had no doubt

what was going to happen. She knew she had the look: "A woman who went on with

mad hair, bushy eyebrows, and the frock I was wearing had to be noticed" (Flynn). On

one hand, Boyle's words could be interpreted as self-effacing and facetious, but Boyle's comment will prove extremely important in this chapter that, in part, focuses on evaluating virtual worlds, consumerism, and the encoding and decoding process that (re)mediates them all.

There is an adjectival and adverbial overabundance used in current discussions of media that has turned rapidly confluent. Coursing along the way, presuppositions have been passed off as facts without acknowledging that these beliefs depend on evidence that some of those in media studies have not yet provided. Caught up in the seemingly limitless potentials of the digitized and electronic world, it seems very easy for media proponents to bypass the need for a critical eye that would thoroughly trace and delineate virtual worlds' forms and meanings and then provide the findings for a less prejudiced or a less wired and hyperactive view of media innovations, digital technologies, and the hope for "pure experience" that hypermedia products might provide (Bolter and Grusin 54).

In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that consumers and anyone else (though this study works to show how everyone is a consumer) interested in media studies are pushing technology research ever further in an attempt to gain not only immediacy but hypermediacy as well. Immediacy is equivalent to complete immersion within a virtual world where the hardware used to produce that world - and any other physical object found there (and perhaps any referent to the outside world of any sort) - is erased. Those who participate in virtual

worlds have an inherent desire for erasure that is so complete that it would erase any connection between hardware and even the user's own body (e.g. the hand controlling a computer mouse) so that it is invisible if that is possible (Bolter and Grusin 11).

Hypermediacy attempts to take the next step in creating virtual realities, a step from "looking *at*" to "looking *through*" (Bolter and Grusin 41). Bolter and Grusin claim that hypermediated virtual realities become "self-justified" by "emphasizing process" and by refusing to "validate [itself] by referring to the external world" (54). Though they focus on mostly digital media in their study, they do state that photography, for instance, is an earlier form of earlier immediacy media. (In the next chapter it will be proven that comic books are a remediated media that seeks immediacy also.) There is also no reason to assume that one cannot find immediacy (if not hypermediacy) in language as well; and comic books, which combine the two are a media form in which one undoubtedly encounters and experiences immediacy.

Consumerism also uses immediacy to control customers and either continuously remediates the consumer environment or keeps consumers in hypermediated conditions by overwhelming consumers with sensory experiences in the virtual world of commercials and intentionally constructed store layout plans. To influence the customer to meet its ideological demands, consumerism controls consumers' physical body and the inner workings of how the customer uses language in ways that objectifies them. In defense of these claims, a comparison of the works of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (*Remediation: Understanding New Media*) and Henry Jenkins, David Green, and

Joshua Ford (*Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*)

are filtered through the ideas of Cartesian Perspectivalism to suggest that consumers

are hard pressed to become conscious of or self-willed in their actions.

Television has made great strides in creating much more of a virtual environment

now than it ever has. Bolter and Grusin feel that television "accommodates . . . visible

multiplicity more easily than film" (190). And, as prosaic as it might sound, television is

only one example of types of media that does this. Figures in a text, "images produced

by the text," are, according to Eyal Amiran in her essay "After Dynamic Narratology," a

"code . . . a key that shows how the text itself works" (212). By the same token,

"[t]extual analysis appeals to a formal logical stratum of language that is in principle

independent of the specific images produced in a text" (212). This is especially

problematic in regard to consumer culture, where the desired result of any corporation

or business textual apparatus is to maintain an objectified state in the consumer so that

it is extremely difficult for customers to analyze their own actions. Understanding the

reasons behind this begins with a look into one of the most popular texts used in

current media studies, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green's *Spreadable Media*.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green would have their readers believe that the executives,

producers, marketing departments, advertising agencies, video recording teams,

product development teams, and the voluminous amount of other beneficiaries of the

media entertainment industry tied to *Britain's Got Talent* were not the driving force

behind the Susan Boyle explosion:

> Boyle's international success was not driven by broadcast media. . . .
> While the performance was part of a mainstream television program in
> the U.K, it was not commercially available at all to viewers in the U.S. . . .
> Her entry into the U.S. market and her spread around the internet was
> shaped by the conscious decision of millions of everyday people
> functioning as grassroots intermediaries. . . . The spread of Susan Boyle
> demonstrates how content not designed to circulate beyond a contained
> market or timed for rapid global distribution can gain much greater
> visibility than ever before, thanks to the active circulation of various
> grassroots agents, while television networks and production companies
> struggle to keep up with such unexpected, rapidly escalating demand (11
> and 15).

There is much to unpack in the authors' statements. First, Boyle's success was part of a

scripted, edited, packaged, mass marketed, distributed product fully driven by

broadcast media. The authors discuss how Boyle's audition video was distributed

through Youtube after her performance, evidently suggesting that Youtube is not

broadcast media. The rest of this chapter will demonstrate that it is a rather dubious

misrepresentation of facts if not a deliberate act of calculated disinformation to suggest

that audiences were conscious in their actions of spreading the media rather than

consumers following the dictates of internalized consumerist habits. It is just as

probable that *Britain's Got Talent* intentionally chose not to distribute that particular

show, for various reasons (which will be discussed later), to other markets as is the

suggestion that it wasn't prepared. It is also just as likely that the show and its

subsidiaries were very aware of the aftereffect of that single episode and began the

consummation process with the media event fueling the desire for the finality of the

purchasing act that *Britain's Got Talent* delayed.

Perhaps in line with the aforementioned media *coitus interruptus* (Jenkins, Ford, and

Green's metaphor of "bottom-up forces" will not be interpreted here); dissembling on

the authors' part needs looking into before returning to Boyle. The authors state that

they value "democratization" even if occurs thorough "destabilization" (xiii). And,

granted, some democracies have formed that way, but the authors talk about the

internet as a technological tool that allows for the formations of internet groups using

democratic principles so that each user has a voice and are part of a decision making

process. They suggest that "citizen control" is rarely found on the internet (xiii). Such

things are not difficult to find on *Spreadable Media's* official website, though.

The reviews found on the site contradict this supposed democratic process that

the authors seem to respect. Though Jenkins, Ford, and Green chastise companies who

"limit the spreadability of . . . messages and constrain the value of the brand as a vehicle

for social and personal expression," the way testimonials and book reviews are used on

their site makes the authors' judgmental stance of these companies hypocritical.

Both the book *Spreadable Media* and the website dedicated to it, in spite of the

authors' claims that they are not following a consumerist model in the discourse of the

text nor the ideas that inform *Spreadable Media*, do, indeed, employ consumerist

methodology. The reviews on the back of the book which are also on the site support

this notion. Jason Falls, CEO of Social Media Explorer and co-author of *No Bullshit Social*

Media, finds value in the book as an internet marketing handbook, stating on the book's

back cover that it "is a thorough look at what makes content move from consumer to

consumer, marketer to consumer, and consumer to marketer . . . *Spreadable Media* . . .

push[es] our thinking in new directions." Ironically Falls uses terminology that

contradicts one of the main goals of the book: the creation of a "participatory model of

culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers" (Henry, Jenkins, and Ford

2). The fact that this review is prominently displayed on the site as well as on the back

cover of the book suggests the authors' respect for the review and is in complicity with

the claims that Falls makes; the review is obviously valuable to Jenkins, Ford, and Green

for its utilitarian value, even though their use of it smacks of equivocation if not

prevarication.

Another endorsement on the website and the book's back cover is a testimonial

from Joshua Green's former employer, the "digital strategy firm Undercurrent" which

uses the book in its curriculum in a "Media and Marketing" training class ("The Reviews

are In"). It goes without saying that selling texts to colleges, universities, and other

educational institutions is very profitable, and when these purchasing transactions

occur, there is definitely a seller and a consumer involved. Redefining the transaction as anything other than a consumerist exchange would be misleading. Out of a total of 28 reviews found on the website regarding the use of the book, 18 of them endorse the book for inclusion in courses of study or state that the book is one that media professionals should read for marketing knowledge. Obviously, these statements are consumerist in nature.

Only one negative review appears on the site (it is not included anywhere in the book), and it is edited by the authors to make it seem more favorable than it actually is. An important part of the review is cut in a way that robs the reviewer of his vituperative tone that he chose to use in expressing his opinion. On the *Spreadable Media* website, Kyukyuk Kim's review is rendered as follows: "Meanwhile, while Kyuhyuk Kim provides the book its first negative Amazon review, the review says 'it's a mighty fine book for guys who study media." The full quote on Amazon includes the entirety of Kyukyuk's review and provides the full rendition of his vehemence: "I guess it's a fine book although I hate it. Terrible book for me. I don't understand a word what it's saying. But I believe it's a mighty fine book for guys who study media" (Kyukyuk).

Jenkins, Ford, and Green edited the review so that the obvious negativity present in the review is cancelled out by the impression that the reviewer still found something laudable in the book. They may also have decided to edit the ungrammatical language used in the review in case readers might cast aspersions on the book's intended audience. Because of the grammatical mistakes in the review, potential

consumers looking at the advertising on the book's back cover might choose to refrain

from joining the book's consumer base. Whatever the case, a significant part of the

review is completely erased, and the authors' actions are completely inappropriate if

they value transparency. This suggests that *Spreadable Media* is quite concerned about

their brand image and that the book employs a consumer model for putting the book in

the hands of readers rather than through any grass-roots participatory culture they

champion so often in the text. Jenkins, Ford, and Green are complicit in the worst kind

of "shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing" of media content (Jenkins, Ford, and

Green 2). This casts a shadow upon the rest of their allegations, making them suspect.

People listening to Jenkins, Green, and Ford are definitely hearing these kinds of

consumerist and marketing messages. In her article "Collision Course," Magz Osborne

states that an audience member at the Games Convention Asia Conference attended

Henry Jenkins's presentation "Games as Transmedia Entertainment"; he paraphrased

Jenkins' speech as a marketing themed exposition: "He says the worlds are full of

extractable details that can be bought, like manga, feeding participatory culture with

toys, merchandising, and cos-play" (54). Jenkins, Ford, and Green's notions of any anti-

consumerist spreadable media message seems to have fallen prey to market forces.

Both the authors and their audience seem to be, knowingly or not, perpetuating the

contradiction of its stated principles.

Returning to the Susan Boyle story, the authors completely disregard *Britain's

Got Talent*'s expertise, knowledge, and massive success when they claim that the show

was surprised by Boyle's success or ill-prepared to release CDs and other products after she appeared on the show. The reasons that these authors do so can now be placed in the context of their now arguably suspect claims. Simon Cowell, through his Syco Enterainment media company, is co-producer of *Britain's Got Talent.* The company is a joint venture between Cowell and Sony Entertainment, and it is evident that Cowell is more than competent enough to predict what will sell to entertainment audiences and what the best business practices are to make that happen:

> The TV division produces some of the industry's most successful television franchises, with the *The X Factor* and *Got Talent* . . . produced in 41 and 52 countries respectively. The *Got Talent* format is currently the world's biggest selling TV format. *The X Factor* has launched more international artists than any other singing competition show, with artists discovered by *The X Factor* worldwide having sold more than 150 million records, including 13 No. 1's, and 350 Top 10 records (Syco).

There was even further evidence that Boyle's performance would be widely and quickly spread through the internet, and the evidence belies the idea that such an event deserved the designation of phenomenon. The 2007 competition winner was Paul Pott, and his audition for the finals garnered more than 210 million views, making it one of the top 100 most watched Youtube videos (Pott). George Sampson, the winner of the 2008 competition quickly had 12,352,950 hits on his video when it was uploaded to Youtube on May 31, 2008 (Spiritman). Boyle's performance hit the television screen on

April 11, 2009. Cowell and *Britain's Got Talent* obviously could predict that Boyle's

performance would spread through video sharing platforms such as Youtube.

This counter argument to Jenkins, Green, and Ford's claims seems much more

credible compared to theirs. Facts simply don't support Jenkins, Ford, and Green's

suppositions. In fact, it could be argued that *Britain's Got Talent* intentionally broadcast

Boyle's performance solely in the UK television market, knowing full well that her

performances would spread to international markets through the internet at no cost to

the corporation. Jenkins calls such actions "no-cost . . . social exchanges of social worth

within an ongoing relationship between producers and fans" (73). The relationship

between fans and media corporations, however, is a binary construct of Seller/buyer

where the buyer is entrapped by a vortex of continual digitally packaged moments that

fans share with others until they become an unacknowledged, unpaid marketing force.

The show's marketing team had evidence enough to weigh the cost of international

television marketing against free digital spreadable media. *Britain's Got Talent*'s

decision not to supply Boyle's performance to American audiences definitely turned out

to be a very smart business decision.

Thus it is counterintuitive to suggest that there was a lack of preparedness for

creating marketable products. The seven months it took production companies for

Boyle to record a CD and distribute it to American markets might seem as if these

production companies were not ready for the amount of product required after Boyle's

performance. But it could just as easily be argued that these companies manipulated

the supply and demand to create even greater desire for CDs and other products. Susan

Boyle's debut CD sold 701,000 copies in the first week it was available (Sisario). These

companies could have easily manipulated the market so that the CDs' timely release

would produce the best results.

The Boyle story also has implications for cross-cultural consumerist narratives

that appeal to world audiences of consumers that are constituted from different

geographical and demographic areas. Boyle's story became a biographical script that

was found highly successful. After becoming extremely popular with audiences in 2009,

the *Got Talent* venture found these same elements in another contestant's biography,

and he was selected as a competitor. He also became very popular with audiences, and

he won the entire *America's Got Talent* show in 2011. By replicating the story of

Murphy, Jr. one year later, the *Got Talent* enterprise once again found the template

highly successful when utilizing the narrative of Boyle on *Britain's Got Talent*. In fact,

Murphy, Jr. beat out all contenders and won the entire *Amerca's Got Talent* show. This

became a mimetic narrative with only a few differing elements (primarily race, gender,

and geography) when comparing their two stories.

Both of these stories stick to traits that are often the basis of competitors'

biographies on the *Got Talent* shows: economic disadvantage and faith. Boyle's father

was an Irish immigrant coal miner; Susan left school with nearly no job skills of any sort,

only worked for a short time as a cook, never maintained any other employment, and

only staved off homelessness by her mother's taking her in and giving her a place to live

(Flynn). She couches her ability to persist in religious terms ("My faith is my backbone").

The Landau Eugene Murphy, Jr. story is the American version of the Susan Boyle story.

Murphy was the son of a coal miner, dropped out of high school, and was saved from

homelessness by his mother-in-law taking in him and his wife (Murphy). Murphy

describes "talking to God and I heard him say, 'You need to get on a bigger stage – and

hold your head up" (Murphy). The comparable, characteristic traits in the biographical

narratives representing Boyle and Murphy, Jr. point out some of the major clichés of the

Got Talent shows. It also calls into question whether audiences can actually appreciate

tropes or resist them. These life stories exhibited in reality shows are the textual images

that make up a code that unlock the mechanisms at work in the texts, but the audience

viewers can be so conditioned by stereotypical elements of these life stories that they

sacrifice novelty and progressive stories for the reintroduction of their emotional state

upon first encountering the stereotype. They unknowingly capitulate due to

overexposure. These stories are actually observable narratives that quickly become

internalized, practically on the spot. This happens because audiences who watch the

show have been excessively revisiting a continuously streaming, pinpointed (instead of

panoramic) viewpoint from which to enjoy the shows and the reinvention of self.

Through the use of stereotypes audiences connect with characters on the show in a

virtual and simply appreciative way.

In "After Dynamic Narratology," Eyal Amiran suggests that there are "social and

personal motives for a text" that, according to Michael Fried, involve "automatic and

compulsive overinvolvement in seeing" (Amiran 216; Fried qtd. in Amiran 216). There is definitely a voyeuristic and compulsive gaze that could explain part of the reason talent shows are so popular. It is one of the few times that audiences are able to peer into someone else's life events from the outside. What they might not consider, however, is that the mass market, from the dowdy lady or the redemptive upstart, is looking straight back. The watcher sitting outside the exteriority of the screen is the spectacle, not the other way around. All the images in these virtual texts, all these picture-code stereotypes, funnel the viewer into the text and continue to pull them in and finally close the covers.

In the text of the scripts of these shows, in the demographic studies collected by marketing agencies, through television ratings calculated by the Nielsen Company, and by the simple addition of the number of past Youtube videos (or loaded onto other video platforms) and the present number of Youtube videos, the "you" of the audience becomes a textual image that believes it is looking at the "you" of the performer on the stage. In "By Force of Mourning," Jacques Derrida states that "the force of the image has to do less with the fact that one sees something in it than with the fact that *one is seen there in it*. The image sees more than it is seen. The image looks at us" (160). These videos capture a personality identification the audience makes with aspects of the video, performer, music, emotive scenes showing singers' or the audience's reaction, etc. That being the case, the viewer watches herself in the video, and consumerism, tallying and gauging her habits, stares back.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green claim that the "Susan Boyle phenomenon would not have played out in the same way if not for the relationship and communities facilitated by social network" (11). The indeterminacy of their statement relies on a very obvious statement that seems to be so much more. Any consumer act could be considered this way, e. g. "The sales of Boston Bruins merchandise would not have played out in the same way if not for the relationship of fans and the gift shop that carried the merchandise." It is an argument that states a fact and pretends to prove a larger theory.

For a show that is driven by no other motive than profit, Jenkins, Ford, and Green would have us believe that "the initial international popularity of the Susan Boyle moment wasn't driven by a plan for counting impressions and raking in the cash" (14). There is no multimedia show making millions of dollars that does not have a plan for achieving its ends. The show obviously predicts all episodes beforehand by counting impressions (e.g. Nielsen ratings, audience reactions, having marketers discovering what has the most impact to influence customers' watching the show) so that they will rake in cash.

Boyle's initial success would never have had an initiatory moment were it not for that. In addition, the viewers committed those actions because the consumerist market housed in their flat-screen televisions didn't tell them not to do it. It is unclear which virtual reality Jenkins, Ford, and Green are living in: the virtual world of their book, the virtual word of internet and computers, the virtual world of convergence that allows for the interface between self and technology so that the physical face is erased?

Companies who fashion consumer market products, such as *Britain's Got Talent*

or any other business, are heavily invested in objectifying people to render them into

consumers so that the companies will earn sizable returns. One of the most effective

means of gathering information from a bodily form (that will be rendered into an image)

is found in the methodology of Cartesian Perspectivalism, which is visually represented

by Durer's Machine (also called a Cartesian Grid, here rendered by a contemporary

artist):
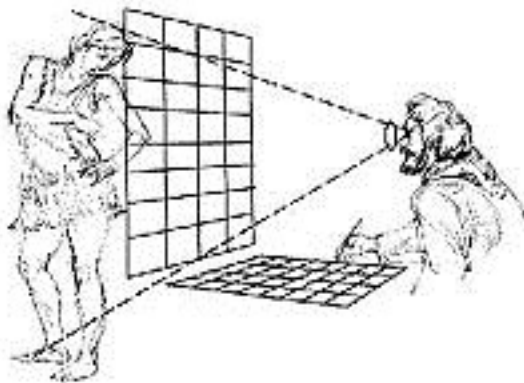
Fig. 1 Durer's Machine, digital image from Glenn Vilppu, from "Seeing the Image as a 2D

Object." (Web, 1999); rpt. In *Animation World Magazine* (Web: 1999).

In Cartesian processes, whatever physical body the observer watches becomes

completely objectified; it is then transubstantiated into a piece of art, an image.

According to Kristie Fleckenstein in "A Matter of Perspective: Perspectivalism and the

Testing of English Studies," Cartesian theory operates from four major beliefs and

strategies:

> Four key attributes are important to the dynamic of Cartesian
>
> perspectivalism: a disembodied and rational unitary subject; a binary
>
> gaze that divides reality into the empowered seer and the disempowered
>
> seen; a belief that reality is quantifiable and measurable; and a belief in
>
> linear causality. (94)

The attributes above can be applied to any television show; using *Britain's Got Talent* as

a specific example would render the abstraction of a physical body in Cartesian

Perspectivalism similarly to what follows: 1) the "disembodied rational subject" are

market forces, consumer culture, money ventures, etc., whose calculated decision-

marking processes are based on logical and systematic research, 2) the "binary gaze

that divides reality into the empowered seer and the disempowered seen" is, of course,

the abstracted television company that watches the viewer by evaluating the

effectiveness of the audience's reception of the textual images it sends out, 3) "a belief

that reality is quantifiable and measurable" is found in the data collection analysis the

company uses to create statistical and probability analyses, and 4) a "belief in linear

causality" is delineated by the company's typical model of *They want it; we make it; we disseminate it; they buy it*.

The second major group of elements found in Cartesian Perspectivalism is the grid that makes Durer's Machine and the Cartesian philosophy perfectly suited to the mass market system of economic exchange:

> [I]ntertwining with Cartesian perspectivalism are capitalism and science . . . . [C]apitalist enterprise . . . is "good business". . . that draws directly on the orderly realities provided by Cartesian perspectivalism: recognize (or create) a marketable desire, produce a product to address that desire, sell the product (and the desire), assess customer satisfaction, adjust, and begin the cycle again. (Fleckenstein 94)

Fleckenstein's outline of Cartesian systems is accurate. But, with the virtual field that has been expanding for many years now, one disturbing idea that has risen to the surface when looking at modern marketing methods is that Durer's Machine, when used to assist today's capitalists in buying virtual worlds, creates its own object and then studies it and subsequently reifies it into existence. There is no audience for a product until consumerism creates and then distills it.

John Hartley, in *Tele-ology*, gives the lie to the reality in reality shows, stating that audiences "may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the imagining institutions. In no case is the audience

'real' or external to its discursive construction" (105). The product is fiction, the

audience is a fiction, and the images that are rendered through Durer's Machine are the

code that has to be unlocked for consumers to discover the mechanisms which run

them.

Through the use of Cartesian systems companies obtain a monocular viewpoint

that the consumer cannot return to the company, especially not in defiance. The

company is unified in ways that a consumer or even a group of consumers cannot be.

The objectified person, now a consumer, can only try to look back upon the abstraction

of the company in order to understand what is conditioning their behavior, but all they

find are products gazing at them. James Elkins, in *The Object Stares Back: On the

Nature of Seeing*, claims that there is an appropriative, consuming gaze that is trained

on the individual behind the grid in Cartesian systems, and the ghost metaphors he uses

to describe commerce are exceedingly troublesome, especially as it relates to this study.

Elkins describes a world in which the individual is collected:

> The simplest objects can be the most unsettling because they remind us
>
> that the world is full of apparitions. Every object sees us; there are
>
> growing eyes on everything. In daily commerce we don't think about
>
> objects, but a half dream of childish fear or an old man's lonely mind can
>
> bring back their power. To see is to be seen and everything I see is like an
>
> eye, collecting my gaze, blinking, staring, focusing, and reflecting, sending
>
> my look back to me. (51)

Elkins' neuroses of the eyes is his discovery of the code of the disease of purchase, the crazed horrifying kaleidoscope of appropriating eyeballs that is the end result of consumer commerce. The power that resurfaces, the power of commercial products, often creates fright and depressive reclusiveness. The world view he describes is one where the unreal eyes, though not palpable, have the power to render Elkins, caught in their gaze, completely vulnerable to his fear of the disease of purchase; this is a fear felt as viscerally as the fear of ghosts as a child or, perhaps more sadly, as the looming fears of isolation and depression in old age.

Eyal Amiran recounts Sigmund Freud's watching his grandson play with a yo-yo, what his grandson Ernst called a "reel;" Freud understood the image of the reel as an "utopian" machine because "it preserves the pleasure principal against death, the sameness against time and difference . . . it creates a structure that claims rhetorically, though only in falsity and pretense, to be self-sustaining and self-validating. It stages and promises a reflexive, self-authoring structure whose ability to repeat is a power of making present" ("Rhetoric" 193). But this is impossible in an objectified state. Referring again to the stereotypical narratives on shows like *Britain's Got Talent*, viewers are caught up in what seems to be the present (especially if broadcasting live as *Rising Star* claims to) and will be self-authorized as part of the audience when images appear on the backdrop of a screen.

Were a trope to truly appear, consumer audiences would be more horrified than Elkins was of his apparitional ubiquitous eye-enemies. Elkins' fear of the market product

is more horrendous when one realizes that the cycle of consumerism is eternal, ever-recursive. And the objectified person, upon whom the eye is focused, is supposed to enjoy it, obliviously unaware of the consequences for himself.

Consumerism is self-sustaining and self-validating, but the consumer is always other-authored. Being in the present allows a consumer more indulgence; the past would remind him of his successes, his failings and his losses, but thoughts of the future would cause him to plan and prepare. Frank May and Caglar Irmak find that consumers, conditioned by behaviors of buying and spending, are prone to spend more, "allowing themselves to indulge in the present," that they are "high in impulsivity," and will usually show "chronic indulgence goals" for the rest of their lives ("Licensing"). There is a difference, though, between the present and presence. Consumerism wants its object to feel as if time is simply and naturally flowing on, perhaps why the term "live streaming" was created. But the idea of presence is a very tightly controlled idea. The only presence for the consumer granted by the industry is the presence of the object behind the grid.

Cartesian Perspectivalism has been employed throughout different periods of history. Bolter and Grusin are accurate in stating that objectifying processes "did not begin with the introduction of digital media. We can identify the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation" (11). Durer's Machine and Cartesian Perspectivalism are always invested in creating the binary opposites of Subject/object, and this creation of binary pairs has had a long life

span. Hundreds of years of separation from historical art to more contemporary art have not lessened the desire throughout the ages to illustrate Dominant/subordinate binary pairs in specific (for instance, in our era, genre-specific) manners. Historically the representation of Dominant/subordinate binary pairs in art paints the idea of being the insubordinate in a negative light. Inherently in the Cartesian system, one side *has* to be the inferior part of the binary code, and resistance equals unnaturalness in a system that denatures a person by rendering them into an illustrated abstraction.

Bolter and Grusin state that "new media are doing exactly what their predecessors have done: presenting themselves as refashioned and improved versions of other media" (11). However, they are not quite accurate when they state that the goal of remediation is "to put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed" (11). Here, they give the example of a flight simulation game where a player feels as if they are actually in the cockpit of the plane. The viewer, though, is still looking and interacting with a commercial product that does not put him in the plane, thus the player is not only distanced from his own body for the time he plays the game, he may have also lost the desire to touch the physical body of a plane. With acquisition, comes loss.

James Elkin's idea that commercial items staring at a potential purchaser have the power to turn that purchaser into an object is useful in understanding the type of empowerment the observer has as well as the type of disempowerment the object surrenders to. In the case above, the player gaining the knowledge from a virtual game

in which he flies a virtual plane, causes him to loses that fact that he should know: that he needs the knowledge of learning to fly a (real – as if there is any other) plane. The game, however, will never implant that idea into the player's head. The player wouldn't play anymore in that case, because the images of a real plane might have a greater appeal to him.

These kinds of impossible constraints are not, however, self-abnegation; media wants consumers to have more but only wants available the things it chooses to put on the platter. There are examples of fine art and contemporary art that force the viewer into its own visual space, though only in a controlled and confining manner. These pieces of art also leave the objectified part of the binary code wanting more, namely escape.

Jan van Eyck's painting, created in 1434, *The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami* (image cropped for effect), has a couple holding hands whose arms create an inverted triangle that leads the viewer's eyes along the triangle's lines until a circle is found in the near center of it. The viewer's eyes, though technically free to roam, are compelled to follow and find what the painting dictates through the mechanics of visual suggestion. The unsettling part of the picture is found in the way the couple's eyes don't meet, and how their line of sight is not directed toward the viewer or seemingly anything else. It could be argued that the wife is looking at her husband, but she is in a state of deference and seems to avoid his eyes, as if she is only turned to the side because it is the proper thing to do. The circular object, a mirror, depicts a pair

of domestic servants in the background. The fact that the couple's gaze doesn't meet

the viewer's is troubling, because when the viewer looks at the mirror, he is trapped

directly in the middle of the couple's gaze.

Fig. 2. Jan Van Eyck. The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami,

   oil on wood. National Gallery, London; rpt. on Ibiblio.org.

Fig. 3 Jan Van Eyck. The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfi and Giovanna Cenami, Detail.

oil on wood. National Gallery London, rpt. on lbiblio.org. Detail.

There is also no doubt that a binary code is established in several ways in this picture. The couple asserts its dominance, even in the reversed, reflected image. The couple's gaze is doublefold, looking at the servants in the mirror as well as triangulating the viewer of the painting. The husband is bodily blocking the window bars on way to escape the scene. One might think to go out the door, but the servants, at their superiors' behest, will always remain where they are awaiting their superiors'

command, which, in this case never comes. The viewer is trapped, visualized, and

objectified, with nowhere to run.

The same affect is achieved in the fifth issue of DC's *Animal Man* comics when

Chas Truog creates an illustration where a quintessential funny book character, the wily

coyote who is never wily enough to avoid pain but still returns invigorated every time, is

rendered obsolete, weak, miniscule, and rendered completely powerless by the book's

God of a comic book artist.

Fig. 4. Chas Truog, comic illustration from *Animal Man* (New York: DC, 1991;

129).

Truog's image (in the comic written by Grant Morrison) is reminiscent of Golden

Age animal characters such as Muggsy Mouse (who is ever chased by a cat *a la* Tom and

Jerry), and The Fox and the Crow (in which the Crow always finds ways to harm but not

kill the Fox). Morrison's story is reminiscent of early animal comics depicting cute animals chasing on another and committing harm with humorous visuals and narratives illustrating those acts; this was a staple in the "animal funnies."

Crafty (a stand-in for Wile E. Coyote) becomes so sympathetic with his other animal friend's suffering, that he decides to approach the throne of the artist God, stating just how badly these characters suffer from the artist God literally drawing them into their own horrible existence of living in fear of harm and being killed and painfully resurrected. God tells Crafty that he must be punished for approaching him - for *seeing* him - and that he will supposedly have mercy, only casting Crafty out into the real world rather than erasing him altogether. Placed in the real world, Crafty looks like a werewolf to the "real" characters in the story. He seeks help from Animal Man; but while trying to explain the desperate plight of his animal friends, he is shot and killed by a religious zealot who believes Crafty is evil.

The implications of the Cartesian perspective in this picture suggests that God has ultimate power; Crafty is about the size of God's thumb, and God has created a fearful river of red ink signifying blood that further asserts his dominance as one who can kill as well as create. Here the viewer would be better off morally to be on the side of Crafty, rather than sitting upon God's throne watching a supplicant approach that he will do violence to. The fluffy clouds in the sky and the happy animal illustrations on God's chair create an even more troubling dichotomy than mere Superior/inferior, suggesting, instead, Murderer/victim. The creator God knew how a wolf on two legs

would be received in the real world before casting Crafty out of the Heaven of the animal funnies and into the geography of his murder and death, in this case not having the immediate the benefit of immediate resuscitation. Morrison also suggests, perhaps, that, even though he becomes a holy martyr (the cover depicts Crafty, dead and layed out on the ground reminiscent of Christ on the cross), he might be better off dead.

Bolter and Grusin contend that perspective is one media strategy utilized to remediate the viewer by employing various media techniques to make "the space of the picture continuous with the viewer's space" (Bolter and Grusin 25). But this is not accurate. A media picture is meant to draw the reader into the space of the image and keep her there.

This overpowering and arresting gaze of the image is the philosophy behind consumerism. Carmen Luke argues that Cartesian systems create "transmission and knowledge as parceled facts and objects" (399). The facts and objects are only advertised (thus sold) to consumers "through designated official media" (399). The end result of the Cartesian system when used for commercial ends is the creation of a perennially marketable desire in individuals that the system has stigmatized as consumers. The empowered part of the binary pair, however, designates what products the consumer may buy from an official selection. Consumer groups, who are, according to Jenkins, Green, and Ford, "unofficial parties . . . who may become strong advocates for brands or franchises" are still, contrary to the elevated status that these authors wish to give them, "passive individuals" (7). Jenkins, Ford and Green are good examples

of how consumer brands (*Spreadable Media*) use official media (e.g., back of the book cover, *official* website) and use knowledge (verified or not; censored or not) as facts. But people caught up in a machine that runs them how it wants to, are not choosing a life of deep-seated commitment to exercise. Companies groom consumers and give them a behavioral model to follow.

According to Johannes Brinkmann in his essay "Looking at Consumer Behavior in a Moral Perspective," companies use whatever means possible to create a "decision-making simplifier" (136). These can be such things as advertisements, commercials, or banner campaigns with imperative statements written on them. Another way to simplify consumers' need to make their own decisions is to limit their product choices. Brinkmann states that "most consumers . . . behave as a silent, conformist, conventional majority" (136). Indeed, this is the *en masse* idea behind mass media or any other mass market. Consumers receive the messages of advertising so they make decisions as easily as if there was nothing even there to decide on, as if the product that exists in the space between consumer and shelf is all there is to be had. Every television commercial asks its viewer to make a decision, and symbolic language found therein becomes more stereotypical with every commercial presented so that the viewer zips along to decisions so quickly that the decision-maker forgets they are sitting in a waiting office, with a magazine, and the office is real and has a real rather than virtual secretary.

Controlled in this fashion, the marketplace reduces the availability of products to consumers or even to the companies that produce them; one of most effective ways to

do this is to centralize a market (Muller-Hartmann 402). This restricts consumers'

personal choices and, consequently, the ability to logically decide what to choose when

product choice is restricted. Customers hesitate in a liminal space between decision-

making and result-receiving. They halt when the product they want does not appear and

then will not, at first, want to choose since their choice is not in the selection provided;

they are then provided a product that companies want to sell, and it is purchased

through sheer pressure of the first choice not appearing.

Like Elkins who feared the eyeballs of commercial products looking at him,

companies have their fears, too: millions of customers' eyeballs noticing and looking at

the abstract body of the company that they are not supposed to visualize. Sterling A.

Bone, Glenn L. Christensen, and Jerome D. Williams argue that companies feel

threatened by the notion of customers exhibiting "a multifaceted and multidimensional

construct;" they find that this is a "systemic" fear and "a threat to self," meaning the self

of the corporate entity that is exterior to customers, the part of the company that

remains invisible to all but themselves and those it designates as an official part of their

incorporated body (451 and 452).

According to Morris Rosenberg in *Conceiving of the Self,* limitations place a

person's self-concept in jeopardy because "the totality of the individual's thoughts and

feelings" are reflected only in "reference to himself as an object" (7). Purchasing

representations of themselves, their own personality, as it were, they are never placed

on any scale of a "choice/goal hierarchy" (Carver and Scheier qtd. in Bone, Christensen,

and Williams 452). Customers are contained within this system of choice limitation

because they have been observed and quantified. Marketers and businesses offer only

the products have found the most profitable. They have no desire for granting

customers' wishes. In fact, it is discouraged. Companies have, in effect, taken away the

autonomy and independence of their customers by deciding who their customers will be

and what choices they are allowed.

This kind of ploy is actually a type of self-enclosure that results in "strong

dysphoric" feelings that makes customers "self-question their abilities and, in turn, to

experience a diminished sense of self-worth" due to "exogenous restrictions" (Bone,

Christensen, and Williams 464 and 470). Continual external imposition of product

selection resulting in the repetitive loss of choices, as well as the shrinking of geographic

space limiting consumers' literal *places to go* is eventually internalized into a worldview.

The process begins with a lack of products; it ends in an inability to choose.

Thus, customers lose sight of consumer avenues of preference, and this tractable

behavior becomes an ingrained trait of the consumer. Paradigms of choice stagnation

have been referred to as "primed" concepts or categories used to control consumers'

mental processing abilities that result in "a greater likelihood of corresponding

nonconscious behavior" (Aggarwal and McGill 307). Consumers lose all sense of

responsibility for their choices. They remain unaware of how they are being primed and

groomed for behaviors that become instilled in them. They become unable to

understand or interpret their actions.

Self-diminishment by the inability to understand their condition, becomes a self-replicating process of internalizing exterior forces. Mark Healy feels that consumers eventually view purchasing choices outside of their conditioned comfort level as "hyperchoice;" this results in indecision, frustration with having to evaluate a new product without having a set of instructions on how to do so, and post-purchase remorse due to their belief that they made a bad decision because they were not familiar with the product ("Limit"). Product limitation, though a forced type of brand recognition, however also relieves customers of states of internal dissonance and mental fatigue. With limitation of choices, the consumer is at least encapsulated in a world she is acquainted with. Thus, limitless choice only works when it presupposes a consumer who has been relegated to the acceptance of a few choices.

Decision errors are the consequences consumers face because of this. Having been objectified into products with a sense of being ever present and somehow always reappearing at the same time, interrupts consumers' ability to look back and study the objectifying gaze in a conscious way. Faced with shelves and products, consumers must make predictions based on past behavior. One might think that consumers would eventually have enough purchasing experiences that would thoroughly allow them to make informed and rational choices. This is not the case, however, because advertising is not objective. Consumers' perceptiveness, if they gain it, is based on a discursiveness of stricture. In their article "Judging a Part by the Size of the Whole: The Category Bias in Probability Judgments," Matthew S. Isaac and Aaron R. Brough suggest that

information restriction causes "egregious errors in probability judgment," no matter the

quantity of past purchasing behavior (310).

In *Public Opinion*, Walter Lipmann feels that "self-deception" forces the

consumer into a false "manufacture of consent" (158). This effect is considered even

worse on internet platforms because there is "no other option but to be part of this

convergence . . . of migrating to the internet" ("Media Convergence in Middle East").

The convergence of the consumer and the internet has created a habit of following links

and hyperlinks without realizing, in most cases, that these behaviors form part of a

digital personality reified in the self. Carmen Luke calls this process "shape-shifting"

("Pedagogy" 400). It is an illusionary selfhood that the internet user might believe is a

proxy; on the other hand, the user might not fully realize that they have converged with

a sense of self they never would have fashioned without engaging digital media.

Daniel Miller describes this as a "normative discourse" that causes the individual

to conform to a "specificity" of individuality that will stunt self-growth (*Dialectics* 5).

Navigating internet links is an act of consuming, and when one forms a digital self

through patterns of internet usage or the creation of a page on a social media site, the

user is consuming their own sense of their own self-worth, as it were. They become a

digital product. Jenkins, Ford, and Green call this process of linking to various sites as

creating "sign posts" of self (29). This term is much more benign than Miller's, but when

sign posts of self become commodities for corporate entities like Facebook, social

markers of one's self become designations of the extent of one's complicity with those corporations.

This realization raises moral and ethical concerns regarding the relationship of individuals to digital media. Jenkins, Ford, and Green describe media relations as the "negotiation of the terms of the social contract between producers and audiences" (23). No social contract truly exists in any realistic format between the producer and the consumer; there is only selling, buying, and utilization of the buyer as a marketing department who spreads whatever preconceived notions they are given by the companies they buy from, invest in, or consume through electronic and digital means. Economic systems are simply a way of funneling consumers to a point where they must spend, and this is the same no matter the technology employed during these transactions.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green believe that the "concept of spreadability" gives consumers "new means to mobilize and respond to decisions made by companies and governments in ways that challenge decisions that adversely affect them and to exploit gaps in the system" (23). The behaviors businesses engage in and their corporate rhetoric seem to have few if any points of entry from which to undermine them. The intransigent behaviors of these companies have become encoded into social group dynamics in a systemic way. Any progress Jenkins, Ford, and Green find in the prospects of spreadable media have had little if any real-world effect.

Wal-Mart is one company which is often a target of internet antagonism. In

Spreadable Media, Jenkins, Ford, and Green point out moments where internet activists

rallied together on the internet to polemicize the company and punish those who

colluded or appealed to it (77-8, 169, and 173). Jenkins, Ford, and Green claim that each

individual participant in the conversation is a "cultural activator" who encourages others

to censure Wal-Mart (37). The authors do not consider that even negative attention

given to a company on the internet or other digital means is still a vehicle that spreads

the company's name and maintains its digital presence. It seems, though, that Wal-Mart

has not been hurt to any significant degree by naysayers on the web since it reported a

1.4% increase in sales, resulting in $473 billion in revenue in 2013 ("Wal-Mart"). These

kinds of facts outweigh any hope of virtual world conversations to change the reality of

Wal-Mart's economic dominance that has now translated into cultural significance.

David Lippman's comments taken from his website are typical of the internet

chatter regarding Wal-Mart; paraphrased, they are: a discourse of unfair treatment of

customers and employees by shadowy corporate executives who figuratively and

metaphorically lurk in the system beyond consumers' reach; expressions of fears that

Wal-Mart is more powerful than some governments; complaints that the company has

had a negative effect on American and world markets; how the company's massive

sales of discounted items actually have no beneficial effects for anyone other than "a

few guys pretty high up on the company's food chain" ("Let's Talk"). He faults Wal-Mart

for having sales "larger than the Gross Domestic Product of 161 countries" and profiting

from others' loss, such as Wal-Mart employees who earn low wages ("Let's Talk").

Lippman states that Wal-Mart controls customer choice by choosing vendors

carefully and often cutting out distributors so that they buy wholesale and engage in

"predatory pricing" ("Let's Talk"). The company has engaged in "mega-mergers" that

have resulted in megastores halting local business viability ("Let's Talks"). The claim that

digital communication is efficacious in undermining Wal-Mart is highly questionable.

Virtual world activism that takes advantage of spreadable media simply does not

transfer to actual, real world effects, particularly in the case of a corporation of Wal-

Mart's stature.

An investigation of Wal-Mart seems to warrant more attention than Jenkins,

Ford, and Green's scrutiny of a handful of businesses that are, part, the subject of their

book. Wal-Mart's business practices attain cultural significance when considering the

effects of how its ideology is forced upon, according to Liz Harper, the consumers that

shop at the 3,550 stores that serve 100 million consumers each week (resulting in $256

billion in annual revenue in the 2004 fiscal year) (Harper). Wal-Mart has flourished

because it has refused to change its "management paradigm" because of its desire to

"preserve control over its corporate culture" (Harper).

Wal-Mart has created a carnivorous but successful business paradigm that,

instead of buying up other retail chains, preys on its own customers, employees,

distributors, and vendors. In order to secure negotiating power over gasoline and petroleum corporations, Wal-Mart recently cut contracts with transportation and trucking companies that distributed their products (Burritt, Wolf, and Boyle). This action alone caused Wal-Mart's composite trading scores to significantly increase on the New York Stock Exchange (Burritt, Wolf, and Boyle). Wal-Mart is also not above using Draconian measures on its own employees through a practice called the "productivity loop;" this practice is fearfully called "survival of the fittest" by Wal-Mart's employees because it is the result of Wal-Mart's intentionally building more stores than necessary to give store managers a "strong incentive" to "crack down on workers and improve the efficiency of their store" if they wish to "stay alive" (Harper). These type of practices cannot be confined to Wal-Mart alone. Companies and their consumers influence each other's actions.

Lots of weighty claims have been made about the *hoi polloi* empowerment of the internet, but it has not hindered Wal-Mart. Bolter and Grusin purport that "the World Wide Web and the Internet can reform democracy . . . digital [media] can reform and even save society . . . cyberenthusiasts assert that the web [is] . . . creating a digital culture that will revolutionize commerce, education, and social relationships" (60-61). Bolter and Grusin's comment seems similar to the kind of hope that Jenkins, Ford, and Green contend will facilitate the spread of grass roots movements to media outlets. Though grass roots movements have tried to publicize their causes on the internet, they do not operate on a level playing field with large corporations. It could be argued that

cyberenthusiasts have changed – not reformed – social relationships; there is no evidence to suggest that these movements are revolutionizing commerce in any way that is distinct for consumerism.

It is unlikely that any grass roots movement on the internet can carve out space for themselves in ways that rival the corporations they wish to expose or undermine. For instance, grass roots movements are unlikely to ever produce the funds to advertise during a Super Bowl. Advertisers, knowing commercials would be viewed by "tens of millions of people," paid "$4 million, or $133,000 per second" for commercials during the 2014 Super Bowl (Farhi "The Rules"). The viewer audience totaled an estimated 108.4 million viewers (Walker). This does not mean that grass roots movements cannot be successful according to some other criteria, but it is quite understandable now why they achieve little by other standards (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 24).

Internet sites often offer free or inexpensive ways to spread messages touting various causes, but its use has been shown to result in lower rates of commitment to causes. The internet encourages users to symbolically support a cause instead of internalizing the cause's principles and taking action outside the World Wide Web. Kirk Kristofferson, Katherine White, and Jon Pelozza, in their study "The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action," have shown that the internet encourages token support rather than tangible support (1150). They term such individuals as "Slacktivists" and claim that these token supporters actually decrease the chance to gain other meaningful

forms of support (1130). This caused UNICEF Sweden to create a "Likes Don't Save Lives" campaign that clearly communicated the message that "meaningful financial contributions, rather than mere token displays of support . . . are required to protect children . . . against disease" (1150). The authors suggest that the internet and social media lend themselves to uncommitted users who believe that support can end within the virtual advocacy of the click of a button that internet sites provides.

A study by Jodi Dean supports Kristofferson, White, and Pelozza's findings: "Rather than responding to messages sent by activists and critics, they [corporations] counter with their own [messages]" (qtd in Jenkins, Ford, and Green 43). Messages, once they are sent to the internet rarely go beyond the internet: Messages are contributions to circulation content – not actions to elicit responses . . . a message is no longer primarily a message from a sender to a receiver . . . the message is simply part of a data stream. Its particular content is irrelevant (qtd. in Jenkins, Ford, and Green 43).

In sending messages, customers are caught in a simple binary oppositional construct that does little to create meaningful discourse: "'[O]ne can always come up with binary oppositions . . . But that's stupid as long as one doesn't see where the system is coming from and going to" (qtd. in Amiran "After" 213). A "like" button on Facebook is merely symbolic, a simple "thumbs up" show of support. There is no textual meaning for that image, there is inner working that has to be gleaned, and there is no work needed to decode the message. Facebook doesn't even truly allow for a binary set of opposites: it has no "dislike" button. All the official avenues of expression on Facebook reify what

people like without giving them the freedom to officially, through Facebook, state what they do not like. If they truly supported activism, there would be a "I Hate Wal-Mart" button or something similar to that.

In *Spreadable Media,* Jenkins, Ford, and Green, in typical equivocal language, state that internetists (to possibly coin a term) have found a way to force companies to feel "a degree of concern" (26). Yet studies have proven time and again that businesses have little concern for consumers; the burden of obtaining fairness is put upon the least empowered person taking part in the economic exchange. Even so, Johannes Brinkmann believes that the onus has to be put on the consumer rather than the product provider, meaning again, that he or she must engage in competent investigations of the companies they interact with: "Any relevant findings must . . . increase the consumer's awareness of their moral responsibility *as* consumers" (129). Awareness of the morality has been lost, perhaps, due to cynicism regarding the marketplace; it could also be true that consumers simply prefer to have easier transactions without considering the morality of their actions. Repairing these cynical or lackadaisical behaviors requires acting upon any information that consumers might gain about companies and the consequences of dealing with them. The contention of this study is that morality is lost through the sheer power of consumerism that overwhelms consumers.

Many companies try to turn the tables on their customers, manipulating them by making pretenses of morality. A case in point is Nike. Rarely has a company taken such advantage of media to increase their financial success than Nike. Recently, Nike has

been heavily promoting an animated *The Last Game* soccer campaign; the first three video uploads found on Youtube ("Nike Football: Winner Stays. Ft. Ronaldo, Neymar Jr., Rooney, Ibrahimovic, Iniesta & more," "Play every game like its 'The Last Game' NEW NIKE AD Risk Everything 2014," and "Nike Football: Risk Everything. Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar Jr. & Wayne Rooney") have had a combined total of 10,361,085 views (Youtube). Nike is creating a culture around their product, and they are one of the few companies who have come under heavy, sustained (though still ineffective) criticism from their customers.

Nike has been the recipient of disgruntled consumers' voices since the 1970s. This disapproving collective voice reached a rancorous pitch by the 1990s. Student activists at universities made a push against Nike, resulting in Nike refusing to work with some universities. The most noted activist was Jim Keady who refused to endorse Nike even though St. John's University had signed a $3.5 million contract with Nike, part of which went to outfit the very soccer team he coached. Keady refused to support Nike on moral grounds because workers in foreign countries were being mistreated by Nike, working in miserable conditions for extremely low pay. Refusing to follow the behest of the Athletic Director and others at his university regarding Nike endorsements, he was forced to resign ("Nike and Catholic"). Nike, however, now makes a marvelous pretense of having changed its ways by attaining higher moral and ethical standards regarding their use of sweat shops for productions of their shoes and other products.

The reality is much less than Nike claims. Beder notes that Nike spent $1.3 billion in advertising in 1997, but since 1998 has only spent $100,000 on continuing education programs for underprivileged workers and $130,000 on small loans for disadvantaged foreign workers where their products are made ("Nike's Greenwashing"). In the United States, however, Nike takes advantage of strategic cooperative efforts which boost their opportunity for sales with synergistic, profit producing "cause-related" campaigns: Nike gives millions of dollars to children's television, donations to schools and universities, gives excess product to organizations like the Boys and Girls Club of America and other charities. If one could call campaigns that result in advertising on school equipment, promotional posters, and commercials shown on closed-circuit TV systems in schools truly philanthropic, Nike might have a leg to stand on.

This is the problem with theories that consumers have become activists, and thus supposedly can impact a company's practices as a result. Beder cites how Nike refuses to give its foreigners a living wage. Had Nike raised foreign workers wages from ten cents to twenty cents, it would have cost the company $20 million to bring countless workers out of the impoverished state they live in as Nike employees. Ironically, this is the same amount it spends in a single year sponsoring the Brazilian football team which, of course, returns sales many times over that amount for Nike ("Nike's Greenwashing").

One could argue, of course, that the effects of activists against Nike have not had any better results than internet activists usually do either. The activists against Nike, though, actually went out bodily and protested Nike. They participated in reified beliefs.

Kristofferson, White, and Peloza define meaningful support as "consumer contributions that require a significant cost, effort, or behavior change" in ways that are "tangible" (1150). Those who simply hit "like" buttons and participate in other merely symbolic shows of support, they call Slacktivists. Keady is a prime example of an activist who literally took action and suffered unemployment for it. He began on the internet and spoke to people on a personal level, and now travels around the world recruiting others for his moral cause. But there comes a point where it simply has to be granted that there is little, through the internet or other means than can change these kinds of situations until objectified entities can burst through Durer's Machine and attain autonomy.

As old hat as it might sound, scholars state that the only way to change this situation is to break from the consumerist model altogether or have only one model: an empathetic one. They state that consumers need the construction of a systematic model of understanding the abstract moral tenets that could inform their decisions. In *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* Alasdair MacIntyre states that business ethics must include an "ethics of caring" and challenges every other business and economic or marketplace model to necessarily include a "moral paradigm" (112). In fact, he believes that this should be "the only business paradigm" (112). Again, the onus must be placed on the consumer to demand morality from businesses, but it requires self-conviction regarding their own complicity in economic immorality. Lee, Winterich, and Ross state that it is essential for consumers to achieve a "high moral identity" by gaining insight

about their complicity; to achieve the ability to engage in moral transactions, they must

"recall their own moral failings."

In "Ethical Encounters of the Second Kind," Jonathan B. King suggests that the

skills needed to grip the constantly streamed yet hidden immorality inherent in these

interactive models (he finds that "detachment" from consumers' moral or ethical rights

"the most salient" aspect of business-consumer interactions) is to gain the privilege of

empirical analysis which would allow them to interpret the results and then evaluate

the nature of the transaction they are involved in (3). The irony of the consumer having

to turn his or her own gaze upon the companies, to engage in the Cartesian model they

have been objectified through, should be lost on no one.

Consumers need to decode the language used by the marketplace to fix this. In

"Cyber-Schooling and Technological Change: Multiliteracies for New Times," Carmen

Luke views media products as much more than the product itself, or, to put it another

way, that consumers of digital technologies buy into a company's ethos or moral system

when purchasing their products or using their technologies. Consumers could possibly

remedy this situation or have defenses against it if they were able to develop critical

abilities to do so. Luke feels this could be achieved by understanding the "meta-

knowledge of diverse meaning systems and the sociocultural contexts in which they are

produced," the mastery of the "technical and analytic skills with which to negotiate

those systems in diverse contexts," and "the capacity to understand how these systems

and skills operate in relations and interests of power within and across social

institutions" (72).

Companies have shown that they do not mind wielding power over customers.

The Cartesian model has to be employed by consumers to overturn the

Empowered/disempowered consumerist model, typified by SONY CEO Akio Morita's

statement about his company's dominance over consumers by creating a desire for a

product that is nonexistent: "We don't ask consumers what they want. They don't

know. Instead we apply our brain power to what they . . . *will* want" (qtd. in Dixon 1).

Morita's words are indicative of a mindset that attempts to create need, desire, and a

consumer that will purchase any product upon its arrival. Morita is completely

inconsiderate toward the consumer; he simply doesn't allow the consumer to have a

voice in product choice. More importantly, there is no acknowledgement that

consumers can have any control over what products they would find valuable.

Businesses mandate value-added components and "costumer" customers to their

economic interactions without soliciting the consumer beforehand. This is unethical, if

not immoral.

Even public television corporations are not above using manipulative, greedy

tactics that push unwanted practices on unsuspecting viewers who support them

financially. During the Fall 2003 pledge drive, an individual who pledged a one-time

donation of $60, which was to be separated into 12 payments of $5 each, ultimately

found her bank account had continued to be drafted monthly (exceeding her $60 pledge

by $20 before she caught the error.) When she asked about the circumstances she explained:

> I felt compelled to pledge during the drive. We relied heavily on watching PBS programming, especially programs for my son who enjoyed shows such as *Sesame Street* and *Reading Rainbow*. After I did so, I noticed the $5.00 auto drafts began the next month. When I finally noticed the drafts had been taken out for 16 consecutive months, I called NPT to see why they drafted more than the $60 I originally pledged. I was told that it was a "courtesy to their viewers they automatically renew your pledge annually so "we don't have to bother you to renew your pledge." NPT showed a shocking lack of morals by taking more money than I promised them. I just refuse, in good conscience, to support any corporation who would do something I thought to be unscrupulous (Ownby).

This example regarding public television shows a moment when an organization's perceived immorality caused a problem for its viewer to ever see PBS in a way that agreed with her conceptual ideas about the public service organization. Media, being self-referential causes consumers self-identity issues. Not only was this consumer unable to view the organization the same way again, she also could not see herself – as she used to watch the show – the same way again.

In "Media Tribes: Making Sense of Popular Culture, the Mass Media, and Everyday life in America," Arthur Berger, states that consumers need to "avoid cognitive dissonance and wish to have their values reinforced" and that when "individuals seek out, not . . . conscious of what they are doing, songs, films, television programs, books, games, and other aspects of popular culture," they are actually losing their ability to make conscious purchasing decisions (341). Popular culture and the marketing of it have followed every kind of social trend in order to capitalize on them.

Technological advances have now participated in this process by continually sacrificing substantial in-depth knowledge for quickly accessed bits of knowledge. These lesser quality components of understanding are passed on, and, through overabundance, are authorized as valuable resources. In "The Philosopher's Body: Derrida and Technology," Carsten Strathausen discusses "the rift between . . . discourses" that "has grown exponentially with the ever-increasing speed of technological innovation and the omnipresence of digital devices in everyday life" (141). The excessive amounts of media and newer versions of existing technological products to access media have caused a situation where consumers devolve into less significant users.

Strathausen goes on to argue that "technology" seems "to offer little insight to those who seek a better understanding of the cultural and political effects of ubiquitous computing" and that the "power of digitization" does not "allow for an in-depth critique of the philosophical roots of this very fascination" (141). The consequence is that "all

media . . . simultaneously enslave and liberate" and "foreclose . . . modes of reflection" (141). Even media proponents would agree that there is a constant remediation of technological products and a revolving door of media interfaces. They might not believe that remediation and technological innovation lends itself to developing a discriminating mentality. This is, however, a consumerist model that is replicated at formidable speeds through the internet, creating a tidal wave of information that the media user cannot fully comprehend before the next wave moves in.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green believe they have effectively found new media systems that discourage "eyeballs on a screen" (1). Media in any fashion is based on usability, and the utilitarian nature of the virtual machine is pushed upon the individual. The continual gaze is, indeed, the seminal act of media engagement. A more useful metaphor than spreadable media, where media is simply stretched out as far as it will go, might be a point of departure. The challenge for society in its use of media is to make it germinate multitudinous strains of growth that yield a positive effect.

There is a language of surfeit that exists in talk about media and all things related to it, and it is sometimes coupled with prevarication. Much of the talk does not acknowledge that all media and the language that surrounds it have virtual elements. The entryway to the fullness of this idea is found in more prosaic waters than those that lead to virtual shores. According to James O'Toole in *Making America Work: Productivity and Responsibility,* "when individuals have been culturally conditioned to see reality in one way, it is incredibly difficult for them to change to an alternative

perception . . . they give up considerable personal power" (52-3). In a consumer culture, the individual is made to capitulate rather than participate in a meaningful way. Their cogency becomes a casualty, and they cannot consider any way to regain their sense of capability and competency unless someone steps in, someone akin to a bodyguard rather than a symbolic advocate.

Such lack of comprehension negates technologies that should have a high probability of continued positive effects. The consumer model, however, lacks any consideration of its object as it seeks to pigeon-hole the object in the place it best fits to meet the observer's ulterior motives. Objectivism demands, if not silence, then stillness and unresponsiveness. This is counter to what needs to take place. Frank Trentmann finds it imperative that higher levels of concern be paid to consumptive behaviors so that discussions can be had about rapidly changing forms of consumerism through technological means:

> [M]ass consumer society . . . is emerging, seeking to weave consumption back into social and political processes . . . There is a considerable gulf between . . . new dialogue about consumer societies in different settings . . . What is needed now is greater awareness of . . . questions of convergence and divergence, consumption and citizenship, and the changing meanings of consumption in the modern and contemporary period (400).

The greater problematic factor and perhaps danger of the media and the internet is that symbolic representations of the self as well as marketed, iconic business iconography are consumed at high rates. This consumption of digitized symbolism stultifies the user as they seem to be energetically active and interactive. The answer to defeating consumption is not found in theories that simply want to rename such dehumanizing practices into more benign and inspiring discursive models.

Unfortunately, Jenkins, Ford, and Green are also complicit in weakening media effective means of self-advocacy or agency through media and internet services and sites from which to operate. They also put too much stock in the media consumers' ability to use various media to break out of their habits of consumption. In "Advertisement's New Frontier," Erika Milvy contends that the gargantuan amounts of money that media entertainment corporations have attained actually restrict "the type and diversity of the content we receive." Steve Golin, founder of Anonymous Content LLP, contends that the "World Wide Web is nothing but a World Wide Commercial for which securing eyeballs for advertisers is the first and last concern" (qtd. in Milvy).

Akira Mizuta Lippit, in her review of Petter Brunette and David Wills' book *SCREEN/PLAY: Derrida and Film Theory*, describes Derrida's greatest fear as "the recurrent dream of a moment (a phantastic pause) between the end of presence and the beginning of representation" (1130). There can be another type of representation for those caught in virtual worlds they fear, but first they have to face their past with open eyes. In the virtual world of comic book culture, comic readers must come to grips

with the comic industry's horrific past and seek out those who will advocate for them to

gain the empathy, morals, and ethics it will take to become self-advocates.

CHAPTER III

MARVELOUS MALFEASANCE:

CRIMINAL MINDS AND MURDEROUS TIMES – READ ALL ABOUT IT!

"The Bastard Offspring of Art and Commerce murder their parents and go off on a

Sunday Outing." – Art Spiegelman, "Lead Pipe Sunday"

In his attempt to define comics, Aaron Meskin calls for a historical reading of

comics since he ultimately concludes that the genre has not been historicized. He

suggests that the lack of a conclusive definition could be remedied by looking more

closely at the historical context of comics: "One obvious response to this problem

would be to incorporate a historical condition into the proposed definition . . . The

trouble that they [other scholars] face is to take into account the historical contexts in

which works of art are produced" (369 and 374). Further, he stated that there is an

obvious need to "attend to the historical specificity of the medium of comics" (376). The

specific historical time period of the founding of comic books can be incorporated into a

definition of comic books to resolve this problem. Further, the assertion must be made

that salient aspects of the comic genre are commercialism and consumerism. The idea

of what is meant by commercialism and consumerism would have to be defined by the

terms and conditions of the time period. Taking into consideration consumer models of

the era that gave rise to the genre, it is necessary to include the criminality within the

commercialism that produced the first comic books.

More specifically, this study will investigate two comic companies: DC Comics

and Marvel Entertainment. Marvel Entertainment's history will be traced from the early

1940s (when they were known as Marvel Comics) to present day. Marvel Comics has

engaged in both criminal and highly unethical behavior. Marvel has proven that it has a

trending pattern of damaging behaviors that can be delineated throughout its

commercial history, especially concerning its flirtation with Ponzi schemes and

distribution ploys. They have also privileged certain individuals over others, creating a

significantly inequitable remuneration scale.

The bulk of this chapter will focus on DC Comics, the first mainstream comic

book company that has maintained its dominance in the market for the longest time

period. The time period that is most suitable for the study of DC Comics is the years

from 1923, when Harry Donenfeld founded the Martin Press printing company, to 1937,

the year in which he gained ownership of the company that he would rename DC

Comics. His successes came from dubious business deals, gangsterism, racketeering, and

money laundering. These claims can be substantiated by revealing the history of those

involved.

These kinds of activities had consequences for these men's lives that were reflected in their fictional narratives. The producers and creators in the beginning of the comic industry felt a compulsive need to have alternate personas, in part because of the criminal activities that forced them to create aliases to make them less visible to legal authorities. They also needed nom de plumes so they could inscribe life stories acceptable to the publishing world. Crime comics reify many of these characteristics and tendencies. They are reflective of the ideology of the criminal consumerist business model, even up to present day. In fact, this ideology has found a way to bridge the gap between several subgenres, such as superhero comics, noir comics, science fiction comics, and alternative comics.

There are two schools of thought that contend with one another regarding the origin of the comic book genre in general. Monetary success is the bone of contention between them. One idea is that early seventeenth-century political cartoons drawn on commercial shipping boxes in Italy deserve the honor ("Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie"). These early comics were distributed by commercial channels through the shipment of these cartons (from which the name "cartoon" was derived), but the comic itself was not a commercial endeavor for the graffiti artists nor the distribution companies involved (Moore "Buster Brown 1" 34). Others argue that *The Yellow Kid*, first published in 1895, was the first true comic because it gained sustained popularity in serial print format, and because it achieved commercial success through voluminous sales of *The Yellow Kid* themed products (Ross). Whatever the case, it seems that any

definition of the comic book genre should include commercialism as an essential element of its definition.

As the rest of this study will show, these accounts do not consider that the very shipments of materials needed to print the first modern comics, the routes needed to distribute them, and the cooperation with business partners to fund them were criminal in nature. There is, then, no comic industry product after this moment in history that is not tied, to some degree, to these original acts of lawlessness. In other words, the comic book genre is a transgressive genre. According to Marquis de Sade, freedom and autonomy is gained through the transgression of all social, moral, imaginative, and physical constraints and demands that one "overstep those ultimate boundaries [of] religion, decency, humaneness, virtue, in a word, all our pretended obligations [the world] would like to prescribe" (234). The founders of the industry and the comic books themselves exhibit these tendencies of the complete abnegation of self-restraint.

The comic book industry found its initial publication vehicle in 1895 when *The New York World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer, began publishing a series of comics by Richard Outcault featuring a boy in a yellow nightshirt who became known as *The Yellow Kid* (Ross). Though *The Yellow Kid* was not, of course, a crime comic, it was steeped in controversy. In "Huly Gee'! Understanding the 'Yellow Kid' Newspaper Comics," Christina Meyer suggests that Outcault's comics were published in hope that they would increase the sale of newspapers by appealing to immigrants as well as the illiterate: "[T]hese new-serialized forms of leisure activity and entertainment attracted a

heterogeneous readership, including immigrants who possessed little or no knowledge of the written English language." While they did appeal to that demographic, they turned away another. *The Yellow Kid* raised the ire of censors and was labeled "vulgar by its critics . . . a label Outcault did not necessarily dispute" (Sergi). Others were critical of what they viewed as preying upon an underprivileged group of people in order to sell newspapers.

There were many who disliked Outcault's turning *The Yellow Kid* to his own commercial advantage by pitting Joseph Pulitzer, who first hired him, and William Randolph Hearst, who wanted to hire him, against one another until Hearst offered Outcault "an outrageously high fee" so he would leave Pulitzer's employ (Sanford). The tipping point for many critics, though, was *The Yellow Kid*'s first appearance on the front page of the newspaper, a place they felt should contain only news items worthy of serious concern (Sanford). The rest of the history of Hearst's heinous distribution wars resulted in the murder of twenty-seven people. These wars have never been considered as the process that secured the mass audience of readers that provided the opportunity for *The Yellow Kid*'s success in the first place (Mills). These are the kinds of application of facts that are necessary to truly understand the genre.

According to Michel Foucault, subjugated knowledge is information that is hidden from view and pushed aside in the hopes that it will remain out of sight. If seen, it would reveal the history of chaos and dissolution behind it. He describes this as "historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or

formal systemization" ("Two Lectures" 81). Foucault suggests that facts need to be

unearthed in order to "allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle

that the order imposed by functionalist or systematizing thought is designed to mask"

("Two Lectures" 81). Any mode of discourse or set of narrative facts must be scrutinized

for hints that these renditions are using dissembling language or are intentionally

omitting facts.

Foucault suggests that a counter system must be used to gain the knowledge

that one cannot easily see. It begins with a suspicion of every narrative, and this

adversarial type of reading can "emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection,

to render them, that is, capable of opposition and struggle against the coercion of a

theoretical, unitary, formal . . . discourse" ("Two Lectures" 85). The constructed

coherence of chaotic elements in the past is controlled by privileging certain

information and distancing itself from others. Discourses of this nature authorize a

controlled version of events that present an image of believability.

In turn, this gives the person in power an authority they would not have

otherwise. All that keeps the knowledgeable and uninformed in this system of power is

the rendering of the weaker in a mystified state in which they believe those in power

are not in any way similar to them. Criminals in comic book fiction are not openly

connected to the comics' criminal producers. Instead, the comics depict criminals

outside the publishing realm. However, given the systemic nature of the industry's

criminality, eventually the obfuscation ruptures, and a few connections do appear in the comics.

On the fiftieth anniversary of DC Comics, the company published a remembrance called *Fifty Who Made DC* Great. The book includes pictures and brief biographies of the fifty people that were considered the most influential in the company's history. The second person featured in the book is Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, who is described as "DC's founder" (*Fifty* 5). The biography summarizes his military career and business career. It relates how he diverted from the norm of reprinting "old syndicate material" and began to print original stories, and states that "there was no small risk in this venture," and that "the chance he took paid off; the book sold" (*Fifty* 5). The last part of the biography champions him as a publisher who put out publications as "America clamored for more . . . Wheeler-Nicholson . . . had formed a company that was to become the cornerstone of an entire industry" (5).

Harry Donenfeld is the third person featured in the book and the words "Detective Comics Inc." follow his name. His story begins at the end of Wheeler-Nicholson's story:

> Major Wheeler-Nicholson's . . . readers grew dissatisfied . . . Feeling the
> Depression's bite, [he] accepted a loan from his printer and distributor,
> Harry Donenfeld, who put up the money to keep the comics company
> running. Eventually Donenfeld became the major partner . . . one of his

first moves was to put together . . . *Detective Comics #1* . . . Wheeler-

Nicholson still had financial difficulties and sold out his interests to

Donenfeld . . . DC comics began appearing everywhere (*Fifty* 5).

Viewed from the outside, uninformed and lacking any knowledge of the company's

history, these renditions sound factual. With the eye of suspicion, however, much of the

diction takes on significant double meaning. It was actually Donenfeld who should be

accused of printing "old syndicate material" since the products used to make comics

were tied to illicit practices (*Fifty* 5).

There is a contradiction from one account to another, one stating that "America

clamored for more" comics from Wheeler-Nicholson's company, and the other that his

"readers grew dissatisfied" (*Fifty* 5). None of Wheeler-Nicholson's readers were

dissatisfied; his company was becoming ever more popular at the time he approached

Donenfeld (Jones 120). Wheeler-Nicholson did not sell his interests to Donenfeld. This

entire account completely mystifies readers into believing the events as they are

described, and, as well, causes them to believe that business during this time was

conducted in such orderly ways. It also does not give those who are informed any

reason to question and evaluate the account and, therefore, they have no reason to

judge whether purchasing this product should bother them ethically or morally.

The truth is that Wheeler-Nicholson borrowed funds from a company he did not

know belonged to Donenfeld. The condition for the loan was that he had to hire Martin

Press (renamed Donny Press after Donenfeld found ways to push his brothers out of the

company) for his printing needs and promise to publish them in color; the cost of color

printing being exorbitant, Donenfeld knew it would either create a windfall for him or

undermine Wheeler-Nicholson's business ("The Big Bang!"). And he had already heard

that Wheeler-Nicholson's company was near insolvency from financing his three comic

publications ("The Big Bang!"). Wheeler-Nicholson agreed to the terms of the loan and,

as predicted, subsequently fell behind in payments for the printing services.

Donenfeld met with Wheeler-Nicholson, "loaned him some more money, then

told him to relax and take an ocean cruise. He did – and while he was away, [Donenfeld]

took the Major's 'National Allied Publications' to court for nonpayment and

subsequently acquired the entire company and all its assets" ("The Big Bang!" 5). The

Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company unearthed the fact that Donenfeld appeared before

"Judge . . . Abe Mennen, one of Harry's old Tammany [Hall] buddies" (3). Mennen

immediately set up a fire sale – that was deemed Wheeler-Nicholson's bankruptcy – in

court; the only person who spoke up to buy it (everyone else knew better) was

Donenfeld, and he purchased Wheeler-Nicholson's company in the courtroom ("The Big

Bang!"). Donenfeld renamed the company Detective Comics, and its name was

shortened to DC Comics soon after that. This remains one of the greatest tragedies and

most infamous thefts in the industry's history.

Michel Foucault, in "What is an Author?," terms intentional prevarication

"nonaccidental omission . . . a basic and constructive omission, an omission that is not

the result of accident or incomprehension (135). The nonaccidental omission begins a

process of infinite reconstruction of lies unless it is stopped at the source through

analyzing it, objectifying it, and evaluating it (as in a Cartesian system); this will keep the

nonaccidental error from disseminating (135). The goal is to make sure the omission is

"reduced to the act of initiation," for, once it is released, the prevarication continues to

disseminate to the point where it is formalized and achieves an autonomous status that

would be privileged as facts and truth (135). In other words, at one point Donenfeld was

personally interested in keeping the facts of his life secret. DC, though, passed on these

prevarications by printing them in a commemorative issue fifty years later in 1985. This

date, ironically, is fifty years after Wheeler-Nicholson started his company, National

Allied Publications (1935), not fifty years after Donenfeld stole it and renamed it (1937).

No one spoke out against the original falsity in Donenfeld's story, and it was successfully

hidden until recent times.

Samantha Vice claims that narratives are sometimes "normative," and Jerome

Bruner feels that narratives "become so habitual that they finally become recipes for

structuring experience itself . . . not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but

directing it into the future" (Vice 94; Bruner qtd. in Vice 94). This normative quality of

Donenfeld's story is the kind of autonomy that results when erroneousness is turned

into normalizing discourse. Rendered as normative discourse, the text gives the

impression of wholeness, completeness, and unity, giving no apparent reason for it to

be questioned. The reinvention of the story becomes the official story that is

disseminated as often as possible so that it is replicated even further and, therefore, is the most available and widespread account from that time on.

Through the disappearance of the actual life story, though, a void appeared that was filled by these fictional stories by transferring them into media. The realities of their lives were characterized, colored, illustrated, and publicized in a product that, held in the hand, felt complete and looked intriguing. In this way, the truth was, in a fashion, still told. The person reading the comic, with no point of reference to anything outside the text – anything that would connect these stories to the people who made them - would be mystified into believing it was completely fiction. Stories could be told about fugitive gangsters who were on the run or in the news, gangsters that were in prison whose stories had already been revealed, or criminals from the past whose stories might be considered a criminal period piece. They were not allowed to tell the stories of the company's owners directly.

These men's lives were translated into the medium of a fictional story within the comic books that appeared afterward (telling and depicting stories derived from their life) through the process Bolter and Grusin call "remediation as reform": "The word derives ultimately from the Latin *remederi* – 'to heal, to restore to health.' We have adopted the word to express the way in which one media is seen in our culture as reforming or improving upon another" (59). Remediation is, in short, the act of taking an existing media and finding another media that will do a better job than the original, such as the transition from film to digital cameras. In crime comics, it reforms the brutal

history behind the comics by making the story coherent and observable as a hybrid of fiction and truth, not the prevarication that they actually are.

They also suggest that "[m]edia make reality over in the same way . . . [that] virtual reality reforms reality by giving us an alternative visual world and insisting on that world as the locus of presence and meaning for us" (61). The *Fifty Who Made DC Great* took Donenfeld's original life story and improved upon it by making it more marketable. The comics carried this even further by making an entire subgenre that removed Donenfeld and others like him even further from the truth. The alternative world serves as the locus, the centering point, for the supposedly real, and this pushes the unacknowledged story even further away from its original, realistic source.

Comic books provide a place where the reality around the reader could be formalized into six panels on a page that told a linear tale without any disruptions or disjointedness. The comic book provides a way to bury vast amounts of knowledge through clichéd narratives and formulaic art, and it commercializes these stories so that they became real on a personal level for their readers:

> [T]his was the first generation to grow up with access to an alternate universe provided by commercial entertainment. It was the first to grow up understanding that the very nature of experience and perception could be transformed by machines and artifice, rendering the "make-believe" as palpable and dignified as the "real." Movies, pulps, radio, the

phonograph, comic strips – all combined to give the new generation an

inexhaustible supply of emotional and imaginative experiences that

required no participation in reality (Jones 36).

These stories were truly vicarious, benefitting its producers, creators, and readers. The

fiction at play is seamless, and a perfect reason, therefore, to undergo the task of

looking for signs of former ruptures.

Ruptures in comic book history are not observable in the handful of biographies

of the industry's founders that exist, nor are they delineated in the histories of the

comic book industry that have been published in recent years. This information needs to

be cobbled together to extract important elements of the history that are reiterated in

crime comics and historical facts. In Foucaldian terms, moments of struggle must be

found from which the narratives and the historical accounts struggle with one another.

The terms and elements of the history that have been buried have to be rediscovered;

the structures of coherence that made a pretense of truth must be shown to be a

power-control construct that withheld knowledge and omitted anything that would

reveal the complexity and chaotic elements of the history.

Looking at a mere rendition of Donenfeld's life will give another false impression

of the man and would not provide enough information to surpass a tightly composed

story. A more thorough account would begin with how he grew up and was instilled

with an illicit street code of violence, calculated betrayals, and a practice of self-

aggrandizement. Donenfeld "[used] unabashed self-promotion, absurd claims to glory . . . the understanding that the story is all that matters. All these [qualities] would be Harry's gift to the industry he helped create" (Jones 2). These hyperbolic qualities made him successful in several criminal industries, the last of which was comic books. Due to the indisputable fact that this street ethos is so important to later business practices in the comic book industry, this passage is quoted at some length:

> [T]he streets taught more than crime. They taught kids how to hawk wares, how to buy low and sell high, how to lie with guts and not back down, how to know when to take care of your buddy and when to stick it to him. They taught a kind of self-projection too that would become central to a new American personal style . . . [a] created . . . self of shticks and stories . . . [finding] it easy to believe he could someday be the big shot he pretended to be. He showed a knack for losing money at dice and cards but also a knack for making it back in a clever deal or a mysterious errand for a hoodlum (Jones 11).

As he reached maturity, this street code was transferred to his printing business that seemed legitimate but was actually a cover for gangster enterprises.

Franesco Castiglia, who took on the persona of Frank Costello, initiated Donenfeld into his organization by taking advantage of Donenfeld's paper shipments from Canada by using them to conceal illegal alcohol and condoms in the crates of pulp

paper purchased for Donenfeld's Martin Press (43). The first comic book stores, if you will, were the outlets that Donenfeld secured for both the comics and "under-the counter liquor": "newsstands, smoke shops, drug stores, candy stores" (Jones 45). Donenfeld would publish anything that sold so that customers found a strange combination of publications on any newsstand: "[F]or a weird, wild 15-year span beginning in the 1930s the comic book racks of America's newsstands were bursting with four-color contradictions. Images of half-naked subjugated women appeared side by side with comics featuring [kid friendly] independent heroines" (Ahmed). The reading audience for comics was truly diversified, and Donenfeld turned his street level kiosks into retail outlets for purveying pornography while, at the same time, selling children's literature.

These retail outlets for comic book and alcohol distribution were caught up in violent, murderous turf wars that secured the distribution routes and profitable circulation stands for the magazines and other publications Donenfeld was now in the business of selling, especially the six million advertisements to be placed in *Good Housekeeping* magazines. Jones cites moments where "newsboys who tried to invade a rival gang's block [were] beaten . . . [we] heard about news dealers sliced up by the hook rings used to cut the twine around newspaper bundles" Jones (17). The worst of these circulation wars were those started by William Randolph Hearst who hired Max Annenberg to secure routes for his newspapers and other publications. Annenberg "put together a team of prize fighters, bouncers, muggers and other street athletes . . . and

he provided them with tools [including] guns, blackjacks and brass knuckles" to secure

the most profitable distribution territories all across the biggest cities in the United

States (Mills). Chicago experienced the bloodiest of these wars from 1912-1913, where

the deaths of twenty-seven news dealers were reported (Jones 17). This ended with all

the distributors centralized into Hearst's organizations, and years later, having this

publication connection to Hearst made it very easy for Donenfeld to secure his own

distribution routes for DC Comics.

Lynn Hunt, in *Inventing Human Rights*, draws attention to the bodily

manifestation of the principles of power and other political personifiers. Hunt states

that "[p]olitical scientists and historians have examined this conception of political

authority from various angles, but they have not paid attention to the view of the

bodies and selves that made it possible" (32). She presents the idea of an "imagined

empathy" that "help[s] spread the practices of autonomy and empathy" to others (32).

She argues that social pressures (e.g. revealed knowledge of state sanctioned torture)

resulted in literary expressions of empathy and new formations of self in response:

"Novels generated it by inducing new sensations about the inner self" (32). Inner self, in

her view, is a negotiation between a former conception of self as it tries to

accommodate, resist, or respond in other ways to exterior pressures, especially political

pressures that, she would argue, could literally harm the body. Jack Liebowitz, however,

shows how Hunt's process works, but his life also shows how it can be undermined. The

bodily harm he saw others suffer allowed him to attain empathy. Later, the work he was

doing to live out that empathy turned out to be just one more organization fueling

mobsters' criminal activities.

The twenty-second issue of *Crime Does Not Pay* features the supposedly true

story of Louis "Lepke" Buchalter, and the comic has much of the information correct.

The omission in this comic is that Buchalter propelled Jack Liebowitz into the comic

industry. Jack and his father Julius were socialists fighting to secure workers' rights in

the early 20th century. Their desire to work to support workers' rights was spurred by

one of the most horrific events of 1911 (when Jack was 11 years old) the Triangle

Shirtwaist Factory fire:

> [J]ust a few months after the Liebowitzes landed in New York, there
>
> occurred an incident that froze the Jewish Community in horror and
>
> echoed through the stories of Jack Liebowitz and Harry Donenfeld. The
>
> Triangle Shirtwaist Factory caught fire, trapping hundreds of girls and
>
> young women nine and ten stories above the streets . . . Over the next
>
> few days, people learned why some girls had jumped [to their deaths]:
>
> the owners had chained the exit doors shut to keep them from taking
>
> breaks. (Jones 15)

The connection of bodily harm and the fact that it was instigated by the monolith of

business, resulted in the surge of empathy for the girls who died and would be a factor

in Julius's becoming an organizer for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

Jack would also join the Union when he was hired to maintain their strike funds. Their decisions to work for the Union's causes lend themselves to Lynn Hunt's idea of imagined empathy. A social issue was translated not only to an individual but grew to a social, collective level that necessitated action. The formation of a union as a result of the event became a physical act instead of mere symbolic support.

Liebowitz, however, would have his empathy shattered when, to stop a turf war, gangsters were placed in the Union. Louis "Lepke" Buchalter, who headed the Murder, Inc. assassin ring, was given the ILGWU (Jones 50). He eventually stole several million dollars from the union (Jones 50). According to Jones, Liebowitz decided that if "capitalism conquered every conscience and every idea so ruthlessly, then perhaps the only truly honest course was to master capitalism itself" (51). Liebowitz went on to join Donenfeld and manage the ledgers for gangsters, this time willingly (51). Liebowitz didn't so much lose his "ability to identify across social lines" - a trait that Lynn Hunt says is important in creating an imaginary and social empathy - as much as he simply began to identify with another social group (40). His identity became focused on accounting and keeping the ledgers clean of any sign of corruption and, therefore, centered his identity in his job. This was completely counter to his earlier socialist ambitions.

This is also counter to Kunzle's idea of a morality based on political action. Liebowitz lost his social morality and took on a neutral affect rather than a moral one.

His biography in *Fifty Who Made DC Great* is simply, much of it told in his own words, a rendition of sales figures and a strange sense of economic fatherhood:

> "When Superman's first comic appeared . . . we had printed 200,000 copies. They sold out very quickly. Wholesalers were calling us up, begging for more" . . . Liebowitz had a paternal pride in seeing [DC Comics] mature, the way a father charts his child's growth. "DC went public in 1961. In 1967, we grossed $64,000,000; we merged with Warner Communications the following year. It was gratifying to see DC become a vital, expanding company, one that has continued to be successful. That is the satisfaction one gets in business". (7)

Behind Liebowitz's comment that growth in sales and the dominance of a market is what is inherent in business satisfaction, is the realization that this kind of satisfaction leads to the loss of another. He seems to have foregone personal or familial satisfaction in favor of becoming a father to a money-child he nurtured and helped to mature so it could bring great economic return. All mention of his socialist causes has been extracted and tossed aside. This is the Foucaldian rift one looks for when explicating these formal, organized documentations that withhold knowledge that shows the negative consequences, in this case, of joining with capitalism. It entails a loss of self in gaining an alternate self.

Jared Gardner, in his essay *Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling*, finds an "almost self-reflexive emphasis on the medium" (156). He believes that "in the end, [it] is defined less by its formal properties . . . than by an invitation to the reader to project herself into the narrative and to project the narrative beyond the page" (193). Gardner's definition recognizes that comics have become codes of shorthand for fans who closely converge their sense of self with aspects of the stories. He fails to acknowledge that the same invitation of projection presented itself to the executives and creators who were making the first comics.

The comic books themselves, as they were published throughout the history of the genre, are often covert representations of the real life events of the comic book industry, events that were hidden from public view as long as possible. The comics often represent an ethos that paralleled the lives and concerns of those who created the industry, and the business practices these men utilized had ramifications still evident today. Culturally, these narratives provide no instances of social empathy, perhaps because they were a reflection of a business and commercial model that did now allow for it. It is also reflective of the lack of personal empathy in those who could both carry out these criminal enterprises and turn them into comics and market them as entertainment for children.

Viewed from another perspective, comics grew out of the events and social pressures of the time during which they were created and reflected the impact of historical and personal events This kind of mediated representaton is similar to Homi K.

Bhabha's idea of the "discrete image"; described as a doubled sided mirror, it depicts a mere reflection of the self that one is familiar and comfortable with, that is a "series of equivalences, samenesses, identities, between the object and the surrounding world" (77). The other side depicts an image of "narcissism and aggressivity" (77). Bhabha's mirror serves as a fitting filter for these crime comics that do little more than reflect narratives of self-centeredness and brute force.

The *Crime Does Not Pay* comic featuring Louis "Lepke" Buchalter is a tale that describes him as having a businessman's acumen and a miscreant's predispositions. He is driven by his obsessive pursuit of money, and the cost of the criminal activity he is involved in is weighed against what it costs society to keep him locked away. The first image in the comic depicts him in a business suit - not behind bars or dressed in stripes – and a gold chain frames the picture. Crime is described as "factories of evil" that "nurse the warped minds of man and turn them into cunning scheming monsters," and it further states that "Lepke . . . spent the last days of his career in a series of wholesale bloody slaughters" (2). There is a stack of coins, silver, gold, and copper, shining in the background with the word "CRIME" proceeding out from it.

A dialog box states that Lepke received a pardon and was released from reform school which "cost the state thousands of dollars and [would] mean the lives of scores of persons" (3). There are interstitial scenes of him beating people and asking them for their "dough," beating them harder because they have "no dough," and he turns himself in to authorities after lamenting, "They've cut off my incomes! Without dough I can't

blow the state and I don't dare borrow any!" (13). Criminal acquisition of money

through robbing and duress of physical harm are equated with an underground

commercialism where both crime and sometimes incarceration are based on money had

or money lost. The prospect of not having money - and finally running out of all avenues

of it - becomes worse than imprisonment.

Lepke is described as a businessman throughout the comic who seemingly

understands that "this racket's no good!!" (3). He discovers how to solve this in a way

that shows the disconnect between a criminal racket being "no good" and a criminal

organization somehow being more acceptable: "Then came the day when Lepke

realized what he was up against . . . with the precise analytical mind of a business man

he studied what was to be his life's work," which, Lepke says, would be to form "an

organization . . . Yeah, that's it, an organization!!" (3). And ironically, once he has started

an organization, he is allowed into the circle of businessmen who hire Lepke and the

rest of his organization to beat striking workers, which ultimately results in stabilizing

the business.

Although the text grants that workers were striking because "their unfair wage

system had precipitated" the necessity of the strike, the next scene depicts Lepke

knocking two men in the head, telling them: "Now, boys, ya better go back to work

tomorrow with no squawks . . . if ya don't I gotta feeling you ain't gonna work

again!!"(4). After a businessman who hired the gang leaves a discussion about their

success, Lepke's crime boss tells him, "Stick with me and we'll drain these crooked

capitalists white!!" (3). When the gang stigmatizes the businessmen, they turn

"capitalists" into a pejorative term (which it probably would not have been for their

readers) thereby suggesting that their enterprises are a different type of business

model, which is, of course, the criminal business model.

Crime Does Not Pay was able to publish Lepke's story before others could. So,

instead of publishing another comic story on Lepke, another crime comic, *Murder*

Incorporated, named itself after his assassination ring. One issue features a character

who doesn't have the business acumen of Lepke. Where *Crime Does Not Pay* questions

the legitimizing of businesses colluding with criminals – and whether there truly is any

separation between the industrial world and criminality - *Murder Incorporated* suggests

that killing can be an art form as long as it is done in the name of criminal

commercialism. When one of his gang members compliments Brown on the way he was

able to successfully break into a bank, Brown responds: "I'll give ya my autograph when

I have time!" (2). Brown's jest suggests his association of an autograph with a criminal

act means he has created an artistic product.

This not to say that this comic doesn't use the stereotype of money and violence;

there is much talk of "dough," and there are fourteen depictions of violence (four of

them are outright murders) in eight pages. The first scene of the comic shows Brown

hitting a bank guard with a hammer, and the text reads: "Some criminals are clever,

some are mediocre. Ned Brown thought he was clever. He wasn't particular who he

robbed, banker or fellow crook, it made no difference to him as long as he got the

dough!" (1). He may not have been smart, but he does seem to have made some criminal art:

> Ned Brown: "Yeah! A Nice neat job! Get th' rope outa the trunk & a coupla heavy rocks. I'll get his dough. We'll split it later!" [The men throw The Kid in the river.]
>
> Stan: "Makes a pretty bubble, don't he?"
>
> Ned Brown: "Sure does! Here's half his dough!" (5).

These criminals, just as artists do, are able to step back and look at what they have produced (here rendered aesthetically) and feel pride and satisfaction.

The impact these comics had can be seen in the sheer number of sales they garnered. Crime comics reached a level of commercial success few comics in the 1940s could. Though *Murder Incorporated* sold well, *Crime Does Not Pay* sustained high sales for a much longer time period. According to Steve Duin and Mike Richardson, *Crime Does Not Pay*, "the first and quintessential crime comic," sold "4 million copies a month in its heyday during the late 1940s. Beginning with the December 1947 issue . . . the comic's cover claimed 'More Than 6,000,000 Readers Monthly!'" (111). These kinds of numbers speak to the cultural and imaginative power the comics held.

Inevitably, when gratuitous violence and vicarious experience become less appealing, or when circulation begins to subside, comic book companies usually appeal

to a moralistic audience. When sales started to take a downturn for *Murder Incorporated*, the "blurb" that touted high sales numbers was replaced by a banner with the words "'A Force for Good in the Community!'" (111). The comic always included a preface that states: "*Crime Does Not Pay* is more than just a magazine. It is dedicated to the youth of America with the hope that it will help make better, cleaner young citizens" (Gleason ii). Duin and Richards state that "these comics – usually described as morality plays – were nasty" (109). Duin and Richardson's description is quite accurate instead of judgmental. The cover of the crime comic featuring Louis Buchalter discussed earlier has two giant, light blue hands in the foreground of the cover, one stabbing a knife through the hand of the other which drops a gun and scatters poker chips; men are falling from stairs frozen in poses like two human stars; two gangsters are shooting at one another from opposite sides of the room. The color palette used to illustrate the cover includes bright reds, greens, violet, and blinding white.

Whether these comics made young children enamored of violence or making money at all costs can be questioned, but one reader, Frank Miller no less, has spoken to the quandary the comics put himself in during his childhood: "I remember very early on, for instance, thinking that one of the most corrupt things I'd ever heard was the slogan, "Crime does not pay.' I thought, 'Oh, we're not supposed to do it because it doesn't pay? If it paid, we should do it? That 'crime does not pay' just avoids any moral discussion whatsoever" (Miller, "Interview Four"). Miller said this philosophical dilemma stayed with him all his life, and the ambivalence of these comics inspired him to create

Sin City, a noir comic of criminal activity and violence that has already reached

legendary status; it has also returned comic books to their roots. (Miller, "Interview

Four")

To cement the idea that comic books are infused with criminal commercialism,

the history of the crime comic *Murder Incorporated* might tell it all. *Murder Incorporated*

was published by Fox Feature Synicate, owned by Victor S. Fox. Fox was arrested for

engaging in illegal stock trades, mail fraud, and bribery ("Tuttle Coup"). Fox was an

accountant and bookkeeper for DC comics, where he was impressed by their sales

figures and decided to publish his own line of comics (Berk). Joe Simon was hired as an

editor and could never understand why he was hired, because there was nothing to do

there: "I went over to Fox and became an editor, which was just an impossible job,

because . . . there were no artists, no writers, no editors, no letterers – nothing there"

("More Than"). Fox was subcontracting the work through another comic shop, so no one

could figure out why Fox rented the office suite or why he kept Simon on as editor

("More Than"). There was also speculation about Fox's possible connection with Louis

Buchalter when he created a comic bearing the name of Buchalter's assassination ring.

Attesting to the crime comic's sustained connection to its criminal past, Brian

Michael Bendis recently revived associations with Murder, Inc. by creating a new comic

debuting in May of 2014 called *The United States of Murder Inc.* What is most

interesting about the comic is what Bendis states in the letter column:

> I have always been toying with the idea of doing a Murder Incorporated
>
> story . . . [of] those groups who provided law enforcement of the New
>
> York mafia's dictates . . . *The United States of Murder Incorporated*
>
> allowed us to take everything we love about those stories and put them
>
> in a new scenario with new characters in the new environment. And yet it
>
> all says so much about us as a society" ("Murder Ink!" 46).

Bendis' comment implies that there is a culture built around the Buchalter history that is built around the assassin instead of the comic. He does not even reference the original comic, and yet he is reinterpreting the story that existed in the comic. Somehow, the Buchalter story has returned to crime comics without Bendis' knowing that a comic version already exists. This kind of resurgence of practically unconscious criminal themes points to the fact that the comic book industry's past is so prevalent that artists and writers can return to it approximately sixty years later. It seems second nature for comics to revisit these stories.

Bendis states that there is a fan base for the Murder Incorporated assassins, and his use of the word "law enforcement" is very nearly a nonaccidental omission. It would be complete if he did not follow it by stating that Buchalter and his gang were in direct league with the mafia. Yet the phrase still implies that they were similar to a police force. This kind of ambivalence diminishes the extreme lawlessness of the murders that Buchalter's organization committed. It becomes an abstract notion that is, at least in Bendis' mind, deserving of love.

Bendis turns comic books' criminal past into something beloved, a romanticized version of murder; according to Bendis, he wanted to experience what it would be like "if the mob won the war in the 60s . . . what if the American Mafia never weakened at its height . . . What happens when they make enough money they have to deal with true international power?" ("Murder Ink!" 46). Bendis, in effect, creates a remediation of the actual facts of mafia history with this comic; in doing so, in his mind, he rehabilitates it by giving it a new interpretation.

Even with that being said, there is still a sense of withholding knowledge; in a scene where a newly made man and his bodyguard are passing a book kiosk, they see a book with the same cover as Bendis' *The United States of Murder Inc.* The book, also called *The United States of Murder Inc.,* has a description on the cover stating: "How the United States government gave up the East Coast to the mob." The bodyguard says, "That's a funny one. An oral history and no one is sayin' nuthin'" (23). A precedent is put on the inaccuracy of the writer's knowledge, or implies that the book is a cover up. Or, it points once again to the need to withhold one's voice to keep a public presence or to keep history hidden. The history is another intentionally formal style of writing that fits well with Foucault's idea that all formal writing hides more than it reveals.

In Ed Brubaker's aptly named *Criminal* comics, the main character, Leo Patterson, believes that there are certain rules for crime that will allow one to manage the criminal world successfully and stay out of prison. The series begins with Leo and the rest of his gang robbing a bank, the ultimate act of criminal consumerism. Patterson

believes he can bring order to the criminal world by a set of rules taught to him by his criminal mentor, Ivan. He goes into the robbery, like all of the gang, dressed in white with masks of dogs, cats, and skulls; but Patterson begins to take his off, a pained look on his face, as he begins to follow his first rule, the recognition of when to run out of a heist: "Whenever things begin to fall to pieces, I think of my father . . . I hear him and his friends arguing in the basement . . . Hearing plans go off the rails . . . Hearing death in the voices of the men he was working with" (Brubaker, "Coward Part One" 2). The story arc tests the notion of whether Leo is a coward for not risking all, whether a criminal can have too much self-interest and still be considered part of the criminal fold. He does not stay with gangs when their plans derail, and the narrative explores whether criminality ever quits.

Patterson has nostalgia for when he had no rules, implying that his rules are a burden; when they are violated, he is reminded that he has matured into a role that is not part of the adventurous world he thought it was. Patterson knows one of the rules successful criminals live by, at least laws that keep one out of prison, has been violated by his gang, and so he begins to run. This causes him to remember his childhood: "Then me and Ricky Lawless, we'd escape into the night . . . Into the backstreets, junkyard dogs at our heels. The night air full of possibility and fear. But we didn't care. We were kids, we had no rules. Not society's for damn sure" (Brubaker, "Coward Part One" 3). These rules help him control his fear of imprisonment, his fear that he'll "rot to death in a 4 X 5 cement room" (5). He is scared of confinement and believes that his rules will save him

from that possible reality. He needs a locus, and he finds those in his criminal rules instead of in anyone around him. For self-protection, he, too, becomes completely self-centered.

Patterson also describes his criminality as an art form: "Here's the thing . . . most heists, even good ones, are like a house of cards. One minor detail goes wrong, and they collapse all around you. But I planned for contingencies. I orchestrated. So, my scores began with a well-placed distraction" (Brubaker, "Coward Part Two" 15). His play on the word score suggests that there are many elements to this story, but, nevertheless, such order cannot be established without a competent criminal conductor. *Criminal* tells the story from within the moment, not when biographies or historical accounts have been written, tales that, according to Bendis' ethos in *The United States of Murder, Inc.*, are signifying but signifying nothing. *Criminal* quickly becomes a house of cards instead of an orchestration and forces Patterson to consider whether there truly are any rules in the world to protect oneself against chaos and disintegration.

Leo is eventually tricked into working with rogue policemen who have told him they are willing to hijack a shipment that contains blood diamonds that have been confiscated for evidence in a prosecution case. Evaluating the policemen's behavior as they are making the deal, Leo notes that "not even junkies were that desperate" as these men are for the diamonds. While the heist is in progress, the police turn on Leo and his gang, something his rules did not account for: "I'd underestimated him and Jeff.

I thought they'd try to screw us after the job, not during . . . lucky for me, I'd always had my own way out of here. It was just about the only rule I hadn't broken – never go into a score with only one exit" (Brubaker, "Coward Part 2" 24). He takes the case that he believes holds the diamonds, but cocaine is found inside.

In contrast to the earlier crime comics that are completely focused on the acquisition of money, here Leo views the cocaine as a liability rather than a commodity. Though both the diamonds and the cocaine would have to be traded in for cash, the cocaine carries a moral obligation for Leo that the diamonds do not. Leo is taking care of his mentor, Ivan, who is addicted to drugs, and he is worried that Ivan will find the cocaine. Eventually Ivan does, and dies from an overdose ingesting it. Leo's orchestra is only dissonance, and his rules did nothing to protect the one person for whom he cared.

Ed Brubaker has another series, *Sleeper*, which remediates the crime comic with the superhero comic, termed superhero noir; his main character, Holden Carver, is a superpowered double agent embedded in a criminal organization of superpowered gangsters. This causes him moments of identity confusion, related to both the double nature of the job as well as the complete incoherence of the mental narratives he tries to understand his life by: "The problem with my story is that it has too many beginnings . . . and as far as I can tell, no ending in sight. Some people would say that's a good thing . . . every day a new beginning" (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season One* 6). He is embedded very deeply in the organization, and he knows that other double agents are embedded there; these agents, though, do not suspect Holden as being one of them. Only being

recognized by the criminal organization, he begins to identify with his criminal responsibilities, too.

When double agents are outed as spies, it is his job in the organization to execute them; Holden has to kill them, and to understand how he can carry out these kinds of jobs, he tries to compare himself to others. It only leads to more confusion: "[I]t's nights like this that I understand why I hate Lynch . . . Nights when I have to sleep with the knowledge that I killed another deep cover agent just to save myself. That's why I hate him . . . because he makes me wonder just what the hell I've become" (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season One* 27). Later in the series, he learns that what he has become has been directed by others who are in control of creating environments people grow up in; these directors of lives have groomed Holden his entire life so that he would be in the exact position he is. His sense of self is dealt another blow. He realizes all the time he thought he was making personal choices, he had been objectified into an assassin and placed in this role of double agent, something he is no longer comfortable with. To leave or stay, though, would go against either aspect of his identity.

As time goes on, Holden is given more responsibility in the organization. He is finally called upon to kill one of the most important men in the world, a man who is part of the very few world dominators who "decide what will happen in the world, from who will be elected, what region will have constant warfare, to what band will be at the top of the billboard charts" (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season One* 70). When Holden asks why they would care about the top of the billboard charts, he is told, "Pop culture is just

another way to control the masses, Holden . . . It keeps them stupid" (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season One* 71). Holden takes this comment as reflective upon himself since he never knew he was being groomed to be a double agent killer. This can also be seen, however, as Bendis' critique of the very genre he identifies with. Perhaps he, as a writer of crime comics, is just as conflicted as Holden.

Soon after Holden is given one explanation about these elite world leaders, he presses for more knowledge. He is given a more thorough explanation of the organization's methods and power:

> Imagine human existence divided into layers. On one layer is the general public – the people who believe what the media tells them – on another level are politicians and government agents – people who know a lot of things that the public doesn't and wouldn't be able to comprehend if they did . . . there are a lot of layers, but on that final layer, when reality's onion has been peeled away completely, there are those who wield the power that the other layers run on. (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season One* 82)

The entire world is prefabricated in *The United States of Murder Inc.*, and so there is no such thing as self-identity. The worldview in this work is, perhaps, the most devastating view in the entire genre of crime comics. It suggests everyone is colluding with criminals and murderers, and that even the best of us cannot choose otherwise.

Patterson, doggedly hoping against hope, continues to search for this sense of identity that eludes him, even as he tries to get out of the organization. Another double agent, who finally understands that Holden is an agent as well, asks Holden why he wants out. Holden describes the reason for his discomfort as having lost an inner sense of himself: "I'm trapped in a place . . . and I don't know how to get out . . . I'm nothing but what everyone thinks I am . . . And I can't just be the things I've had to do to survive. I have to become something else, too" (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season One* 115). Holden is practically never given the chance, because both the criminal organization and his own agency begin hunting for him, one to help him, one to possibly kill him. Though he is trapped, Holden is the one person who refuses to give up, fighting this systemic, criminally authoritarian system, and it is from this that his heroism is derived.

Holden wants out of both organizations and cannot find an avenue of escape. He has truly lost himself within the criminal world. Having once had a sense of himself as a soldier in a high-level military group with special forces (literally), he is now on an unending quest to understand how his government has authorized him to kill his own compatriots while he abstains from killing criminals so that he is not revealed to be a spy. He also knows that his desire to become a soldier was simply an ambition that was unknowingly forced upon him by the criminal organization's control over the environment he lived in his entire life. Thus, he is a sleeper in title (a sleeper agent) and because his desire for vengeance, as he describes himself in third person, is brewing while he hides "with the scumbags around him . . . and when his last shred of hope

finally disappears, he goes fucking native" (Brubaker, *Sleeper: Season Two* 7). Unable to beat the system, he decides to find his identity in acting out extreme violence in the name of vengeance. He has finally found the side of Homi K. Bhabha's double-sided mirror that reveals his true self, the narcissistic, aggressive side.

Batman: Broken City also blends the crime and superhero subgenres together in a story line in which Batman, because of withheld knowledge, erupts in crime comic style violence spewed upon everyone he thinks has information about a girl's body that was found in a landfill. While he is chasing down the girl's brother, Angel Lupo, they run down an alley and Batman hears shots; he turns to see a boy with his murdered parents to each side of him. Batman believes Lupo is the killer and now has another reason to find him.

To make the criminal aspect a bit more modern, Lupo, who owns several car dealerships in Gotham, makes crime deals while at work: "Lupo owned a string of car lots . . . prices too low to be true – which meant he dealt a great deal with chop shops and car thieves . . . like most men of his stature, Angel had a mouth. A real salesman could convince a buyer into trusting him with a wink-wink and a nudge-nudge about how connected he was" (14). Batman then says, "I thought it funny, finding myself in that market" (14). Batman is not distanced from the criminal element of this tale. He is willingly part of it and willingly participating in the indiscriminate violence that is expedient in extracting information. He is also in a business enterprise that is finally

revealed as not so different than the one Bruce Wayne represents. Crime's goal, money, is the same.

Batman is literally walking around a market of crime that leads him through high-priced prostitution, street gangs, sex clubs, chop shops, high society crime family clubs, the underground lair of the Ventriloquist and his gangster-styled dummy called Scarface, and a fish market that is a front for Japanese crime organizations. He is attempting to "control the situation . . . Force things into being the way he wanted them to be" (113). He repeats this phrase three times in the comic book, and he is futilely trying to inflict order in an underworld that only understands chaos.

The further he gets into that world, the more clearly he sees how it works. Eventually he learns that the boy killed his parents, something that Batman would never have guessed. The boy's life is opposite Batman's. Batman is looking into a double-sided mirror that shows him two sides of humanity: a young Bruce Wayne who sees his parents killed and decides to rid the world of crime and, also, a little boy who is so inbred with a worldview of criminality that he feels taking the life of his parents for perceived faults was something they deserved.

Batman is trying to impose a functionalist coherence in the gangster underworld that is an underworld reinvention of Gotham City. He is not facing a coherent picture, so he looks for places of rupturing to understand where he needs to start his investigation. And yet he believes that he can do this through threatening and beating the gangster

element in Gotham who are ingrained with these tendencies. He states that he is in a world "infested with piranhas, a lose/lose situation where I hoped the inevitable would come sooner than later . . . the air rushed out of my lungs . . . causing my vision to tunnel, I saw a light at the end of it . . . the door began to slowly open . . . I wanted him to see the nightmare" (107 and 111). Batman acknowledges that he has a darkness that this underworld does not have, and this raises the question of whether he could be at the top of the food chain. With all of his wealth, and with all of his training in physical violence, and with his predispositions of ferocity fully on display in this broken city, he is the one who can break it past recognition.

And yet, Batman realizes he cannot control the situation he is in; he realizes all he can do is fight them with their own kind of lawlessness. The character he comes to resemble the most is the Ventriloquist with his dummy, Scarface. He describes them as a split personality who resorts to violence: "Arnold Wesker was no dummy. What he was was crazy. What he wasn't was violent. That part of his personality he had transferred to Scarface, a nasty puppet that pulled his strings . . . but never his punches. Sure, it was really Arnold who controlled a sizable piece of Gotham's underworld" (69). Batman is as split as Wesker is. Batman views himself as Bruce Wayne and Batman; he begins to see they might be two sides of his own split personality. It is the outfit and the cowl that allows him to go on his spree of violence. The costume liberates a side of himself that Bruce Wayne cannot allow to be seen in the light where he wears his business suit to attend board meetings.

Batman relishes his violence in a scene in which Killer Croc, whom Batman is questioning about the murder of the girl, tells Batman he's recently gotten a set of dentures: "A heavyweight like Croc tipped in at three-sixty – before I left him spitting three quarters of a pound of porcelain out on the pavement" (11). Batman makes a game of knocking Croc's teeth out several times in the graphic novel. Batman tells Croc, "I don't fight fair . . . I fight by the rules" (38). He proceeds to knock out Croc's dentures again, leaving Croc baffled; Croc cannot understand this unleashed violence from Batman: "Say? - You gonna fight by the rules . . . ya might want to let the rest of us know what the hell they are!" (39). What Croc cannot understand is that Batman is not referring to his own rules. He is trying to tell Croc that he is now fighting by their rules. Fairness has no place in this world. Random violence and labyrinths of incomprehension, though, do.

Ultimately, as in all crime comics, money becomes the motivating factor in the underworld. Batman and two criminals talk about their criminal activities as "business . . . our business in Gotham" (77). His words and theirs are the same for what they are doing. This scene is a constant play on words and a game of self-reference. Batman tells them "I bet that name's gold in some circles" (76). It is still unclear whether he is talking about himself or them. As he makes his way through the underworld, he describes his task as commercial in nature the longer he stays there: "I made my business their business. From every bookmaker and black-marketeer . . . to every grafter and every fence. One question. One answer. Until I got it . . . there would be no 'business' in

Gotham" (82). Batman implies that once he gets his answer, there will be criminal business again in Gotham. This is truly Batman in a broken city, a city which causes him to break every moral or ethical rule he has.

At different stages along the way, the comic industry itself has been broken, usually due to its own short term commercial goals. The outright criminal aspects of the earlier comics bleed into the highly unethical (refusing artists credit for creations; refusing to give employees raises and health insurance) and criminal (establishing monopolies; participating in Ponzi schemes) modern day acts of comic book companies. Fans of the comics have somehow glossed over both the older and contemporary histories of the comic book industry. The establishment of a comic book culture completely supports the industry, perhaps evidencing a lack of knowledge, absence of empathy, or, perhaps, a blending and a love of entertainment and love for criminal history. Fans are merely consumers and are not concerned with taking a stance on the moral or ethical failures that these companies make in a wilful manner.

Derek Parker Royal suggests that comic companies manipulate consumers through the use of the voluminous amounts of peripheral products (e.g. shirts, action figures, movies, bed sheets, birthday party plates, character themed shoes, and far too many comic character related products to mention here) that cause fans to continuously take part in "transmedia conversation" that keeps them emotionally involved with these properties. This materialistic comic milieu becomes part of their everyday lives:

>Readers become enmeshed in the comic . . . the narratives that [have]
>permeated their daily lives in multiple ways – e.g., they read [the comics],
>they watch the movies based on the comics, and they share these
>engagements with friends and family - binding the audience so that it [is]
>impelled, and . . . certainly urged by creators and publishers to participate
>. . . in the ongoing narratives . . . [with an] emphasis on an energized and
>participatory fan base, heavily invested in the various manifestations of
>popular culture. (Royal 155)

Consumers are continuously presented with images of these characters (with their company symbols attached to the products) in such an overwhelming manner that they feel the ubiquitous nature of these products. The products become entities, an existent presence, that they do not fully realize or care to consider as part of a consumer market that is creating a need for the products. This becomes a vicious cycle of continuous consumption driven by the production of more voluminous amounts of products to buy. Consumers eventually view this as an integral part of their life rather than something that exists outside them. This becomes a compulsive habit for both the consumer and the company.

Bradford Wright says that the typical Marvel comic narrative (the famed "Marvel Way") was an "unsettling . . . alienated and neurotic . . . moral thrust [that] ultimately affirms the individual's obligation to society" (203). This is a very strange and seemingly painful description of morality. The depiction of such tendencies in comic books

sometimes hovers between hilarity and sympathy. Perhaps that is because the genre, as stated before, privileges complete license and deviations from society's norms, and, therefore, morality becomes an aggressive act. The alienation, evidently never overcome, would seem to cancel out the individual's ability to understand society at all. This would lead the individual to make blundering attempts at morality. Neurotic, though, does describe Marvel's story worlds as well as the company's business practices.

According to Andrew Smith of *Comic Buyer's Guide*, when Martin Goodman was playing golf with Jack Liebowitz in the early 1940s (Liebowitz was then the head of daily operations at DC Comics), Liebowitz let it slip that DC was starting a title that collected its bestselling characters into a superhero team called *The Justice League of America*. Goodman immediately went to his main man Stan Lee (who arguably was his only man – Goodman had told Lee to fire everyone else in the company) and told him to "*steal this idea and create a team of superheroes*" (Howe Marvel Comics 1). Lee did, and created the Fantastic Four.

Theft of ideas was a run of the mill practice in the comics industry. Martin Goodman, founder of Marvel Comics (formerly called Timely Comics) stole the idea of a red-white-and-blue themed superhero from Louis Silberkleit's hero called The Shield; to distinguish his character from Silberkleit's, he had an artist redesign the shield and called him Captain America (Jones 200). The title was the top seller for Marvel in 1940 with over 1,000,000 copies printed (Pearlman). Mimicking characters has never gone

away. Marvel has Dr. Strange, and DC creates Doctor Fate; DC creates Darseid, and

Marvel creates Thanos; DC creates Swamp Thing, and Marvel creates Man-Thing. It is

another industry practice that, no matter the results, these companies keep going to

time and again simply in an attempt to steal readers to their own respective company.

This also causes business problems. Jack Kirby and Joe Simon were a bit

hypocritical when trying to get royalties for Captain America, a character they had

stolen from another Silberkleit. Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, ironically, felt cheated on not

receiving royalties for Captain America and began trying to leverage their case by

threatening to defect to DC which resulted in their termination (Gustines). It is a battle

that ended only in 2008; Joe Simon was suing Marvel over the lost royalties, but Kirby,

an artist rather than a businessman, agreed to side with Marvel and have his name

taken off the copyright and accept compensation equal to whatever Simon received

when he settled out of court (Gustines). Kirby's signing was something that Marvel

could take into court as "evidence" that at least half of the creators on the project had

supposedly admitted that he had no hand in creating the character; this, of course,

would make Marvel's case against Joe Simon much strongr, and it finally forced him to

settle (Gustines).

In similar fashion, Bob Kane purported to be the sole creator of Batman for DC

Comics and refused to give credit where it was due. Bob Kane created very sketchy

drawings of Batman and showed them to Bill Finger who changed Kane's character

drastically. Finger came up with a much improved character and showed his sketches to

Kane who later took credit for those very sketches; Finger also came up with the ideas for the cowl, gloves, the colors of Batman's costume as well as his backdrop – Gotham City (Havholm and Sandifer 192). Though other artists and writers made considerable additions to the character, Bob Kane was the only creator ever listed in the byline (Havholm and Sandifer 193).

Kane took full credit throughout the entirety of his career, lying brazenly about how he created Batman and surrounding characters on a DVD commentary released on the first *Batman* movie. He even goes so far as to create fantastical stories regarding where he was at the time and what inspired him to hastily jot down sketches of the Penguin and the Joker (*Batman* commentary). It is widely known that Kane even had ghost artists doing nearly all of the artwork in almost all of the first issues, with the books bearing his signature on the first page of each comic (Havholm and Sandifer 193).

This situation with creator credits involving Batman became so well known in the comics industry that it became a catch-phrase for being treated unfairly, rendered most memorably by Ed Brubaker: "[I]f you're ever in a situation where you're worried that you're not getting the proper credit for what you're doing, you can say to your editor, 'Hey, I'm feeling like Bill Finger over here. And I don't want to get Fingered.' And they'll understand. Everybody gets it" (Havholm and Sandifer 193). It is not quite clear whether Brubaker means everyone understands the reference or whether everyone gets the Bill Finger eventually.

Kane, though, is not the only revered comic mogul who refused to give credit where credit is due. Stan Lee refused for many years to acknowledge that he and Steve Ditko created Marvel's flagship character, Spider-Man, together; in 1999, Lee finally wrote an open letter assigning Ditko half of the credit for Spiderman saying he "considered" Ditko to be the co-creator ("Nuff Said"). This is quite an ambivalent way of saying it. It also came approximately thirty years after Ditko left the mainstream comic industry.

In the 1970s, artists began asking for more than subsistence level pay as well as health benefits from the Marvel, DC, and Warren publishing houses. Carmine Infantino infamously and unashamedly claimed that he could not find any new talent or gifted artists in America (Duncan and Smith "Filipino"). So these companies went to the Philippines and began recruiting artists there, effectively terminating the artists who were demanding higher rates and insurance plans. The Filipino artists and writers would work for even less and never even thought of asking for health benefits. This finally led to artists derisively asking if they were getting a good rate or the "Filipino rate for their work" (Duncan and Smith "Filipino").

There were different types of distributorship wars in the later era of the comic business that were less violent than the bloody Hearst wars of the 1920s but they were still devastating. These, too, were supposedly tied to a situation where the mob threatened people but ultimately lost their power to coerce and intimidate them in quite the same manner as they used to.

At one time, comics were only carried on newsstands and convenience stores which would return their unsold product to the publishing companies; this led to unethical strategic ploys such as DC's purchasing as many newsstands as possible to put a strangle hold on Marvel's growth opportunities (Rozanski). Marvel dropped this underhanded practice when they, as well as every other comic company, found a better distribution method that ultimately benefitted them all.

Phil Sueling created the direct marketing system with his company East Coast Seagate Distribution Company which bypassed the newsstands and convenience stores, offering to take one-hundred percent of the comics and forego the right to return them (Sanford). This also meant that comic companies could now dissolve contracts with the unionized trucking companies they had been using and have no transportation costs at all (Sanford). Since Seuling could move more quantities of comics than anyone else at this point, he received a sizable discount on the comics from Marvel, DC, and Archie Entertainment which gave him a practical monopoly.

Pacific Comics entered the direct marketing fray to compete with Seagate, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the mafia had a hand in the union trucking companies and did not want to lose their business: "There were rumors that guys from the local ARA [periodical distributors], which was said to be Mafia controlled, were out to get him and Bill [Steve and Bill Schanese, owners of Pacific Comics]. [Bill] told me once that someone had knocked out his windows and he'd been personally threatened a few times" (Sanford). Evidently the mafia went after Pacific because they were a smaller

company at this point. The mafia thought Pacific could easily be bullied which might lead to their recovering some of the distributorship routes.

Irjax, another distribution company, filed a lawsuit that they won on grounds of the violation of anti-trust laws. They went out of business, however, trying to get bigger discounts which forced them to reach a volume point they could not sell off; for whatever reason, they stayed with this practice until it ran them out of business (Duin and Richardson 128). This provided Diamond Comic Distributors an opportunity to move in and take over all of Irjax's former accounts. Another company, the aforementioned Capital City Distribution, thrived on the investment market, which, by 1988, deflated; rather than going bankrupt, they sold out to Diamond, who now has more than 70% of the market, though it's not enough for anyone to sue on anti-trust grounds (Rozanski).

Capital City Distribution wasn't the only victim of investment problems. In the early 1990s, Marvel's stockholders demanded more return on their investments; to appease them, Marvel promised to raise the issue price which they did by putting ten-cent foil stickers on the comics, claiming they were limited editions, and then raised the issue price by a dollar (Howe). Marvel's sales doubled to approximately $230 million, but there was an unethical truth to these sales figures; Marvel gave retailers supposedly more limited and exclusive covers with larger quantity orders, so many comic shops took a chance on these comics. According to Lou Bank, the problem was that the comics were technically being sold by the distributors and not Marvel (a fact many of the

retailers did not understand), and it resulted in an inequitable situation where Marvel

forced losses on retailers. Marvel refused to take any product back on these hugely

over-promoted items, and this led to the entire industry being hurt: "[N]one of this

would have an impact on Marvel's quarterly goals. Marvel's bottom-line reports, which

only reflected distributor-level numbers, would continue to show sales and profits going

up . . . retailers, who couldn't sell unsold copies, absorbed the costs . . . we were killing

the stores that were feeding us" (Howe).

Marvel was accused of running a kind of Ponzi scheme by convincing the comic

shops to purchase large amounts of alternative cover comics which, therefore, resulted

in revenue for Marvel; however, comic shops were left holding the bag when the comics

didn't sell and they were left with "boxes upon boxes filled with unsold copies of the

highly promoted premiere issues of *X-Men* and *X-Force*" (Howe). Marvel took this

revenue, which was a short term capital windfall, and rather than paying off debt and

strengthening their own product, used it to finance building projects and other

expansions (Howe).

This was nothing new for Marvel Comics. In 1974, Al Landua, before the direct

distribution days, took advantage of the newsstand market that allowed returnable

copies:

> He had a bit of a Ponzi scheme . . . Because the comics were returnable,
>
> profit reports were based on monthly estimates of 'self-through' copies,
>
> not the quantity shipped . . . If you distribute 100,000 copies, and

estimate 5% sales, and the next month you distribute two books – print 200,000, and estimate 5% - you have 150,000 in reserve. He kept publishing more every month, so he hid the fact that his estimates were way overblown (Howe 169).

This kind of unethical practice is a pattern for Marvel Comics, and is not simply mistakes in accounting or missteps in decision-making.

The chairman and principal owner of Marvel Comics for the majority of the 1990s, Ron Perelman, began borrowing enormous sums of money and investing in junk bonds, profits from which he put into Marvel holding companies. The standard practice of holding companies was to streamline the company which freed up funds. In this case, Perelman used the money to pay off his debt, allowing him to subsequently borrow more money.

When Perelman streamlined the company, many departments within the company were shut down, hurting Marvel tremendously since they no longer had the staff to create new product or complete many other tasks (Raviv). Through this, Perelman personally profited $280 million while running Marvel into bankruptcy (Raviv). Simultaneously, Stan Lee started his own internet entertainment company which started showing huge increases in profit; eventually the "Exchange Commission alleged there was fraud. The company (StanLee.net) shut down, and the SEC had to track down the head of the company (controversial ex-lawyer and promoter) Peter Paul [in] Brazil"

(Raviv). Marvel continues to engage in behavior that is unethical, but the fans, for whatever reason, never call them to account for it.

In fact, fans had quite a fun time with one of Marvel's most recent attempts to forge relationships with retailers. Marvel's unique offer was to give retailers a free high-priced variant copy of a *Deadpool* comic, a popular title at the time, for every fifty stripped covers of DC Comics issues of DC's *Blackest Night* series, which was also very popular at the time (Lamar). This led to the retailers' putting a sizable markup on the variant copy which gave them a high priced product for the fans that they never would have been able to purchase otherwise. This helped local retailers; it might also have gained loyalty from these retailers. And, of course, it sent a message to DC that the adversarial game was still in full swing.

Distributors, fans, and retailers are not the only victims of unethical and immoral behavior perpetrated by taking advantage of others' sense of loyalty. Theft of ideas and taking advantage of artists and creators through work for hire contracts was standard practice when the industry began, and it continued much longer than it should have. Two of the greatest superhero teams (the Justice League and the Fantastic Four) began this way; a team that was destroyed this way was the team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The relationship of the most productive and culturally dynamic team split apart in acrimony and, on Lee's part, continued pettiness even after Kirby passed away in 1994.

Jack Kirby was cheated out of acknowledgement that he had a hand in creating many of Marvel's most iconic characters. Stan Lee has nearly always taken credit for creating these characters and maintains that Kirby merely illustrated Lee's ideas; Stan Lee's signature has always appeared on the comic book pages as if he were scrawling his name on them for ownership while Kirby is only listed at the bottom of the page in the credits (Evanier).

Kirby received no royalties and was not given any rights to copyrights; while Stan Lee was earning upwards of an estimated $300,000 a year, Kirby was making $35,000 (Braun). Ironically, Kirby's suit happened close to the same time that Joe Siegel and Jerry Shuster, having not been allowed copyright or royalties for creating Superman, were forced to sue DC, ultimately settling for nearly the same amount of money, $30,000 lifetime annual salaries. Jack Kirby also took his case to court but did not win. He was never given any guarantee of any sort from the company whose viability to this day is due to his having created characters that still captivate audiences.

Kirby's name was not even credited on the recent *The Avengers* movie. When Stan Lee was asked why this was the case, he responded, "I don't know how to answer that, because in what way would his name appear? . . . Jack was not an executive producer. So I don't what he'd be credited as" (Melrose). Stan Lee still persists in refusing to acknowledge that Kirby should have equal billing as creator of many Marvel characters.

This section ends with an account of what could be, as he is now 91 years of age, Stan Lee's swan song or carnival barker craziness, depending upon how one takes him. Whatever the case, one of his possibly last actions in the comic book business may be one of his most nefarious. In May 2014, his direct to market DVD production, *Stan Lee's Mighty 7 Beginnings*, was released. This is a product that is primarily aimed at a young audience. So it is startling that he begins with a seemingly humorous explanation of who he is that would probably at least anger, if not outrage, some of his former colleagues:

> Hi, I'm Stan Lee, but, hey, don't hold that against me. Many people follow me because of the legendary superheroes I've created. Others, because I owe them money. Now I won't claim that the story you're about to see is true, because it might pretend it's fiction, but I'll still get paid for writing it. I'll only say what you're about to see is one amazing tale. So what's a world famous icon like me doing out here in the middle of nowhere? Well, it all started when Archie comics hired me to create a new comic for them. (*Mighty 7*)

Lee slyly alludes to some of the dirty history behind his work in the comic book industry though he does so only to innocents who have no way of comprehending Lee's vicious, tongue-in-cheek joke. Though he gives hints, he doesn't talk about the writers and artists he threatened to fire when they sought extra work or the employees he black balled throughout the entirety of his time spent in the industry. He gives no credit whatsoever to anyone else who created Marvel's superheroes.

The worst part of this is the disturbing nature of what looks like a completely fictional story that "pretends to be fiction" (*Mighty* 7). Most children are not going to understand that statement (in fact, some adults might not either), and they'll either think they misheard it or will simply gloss over it so they can keep pace with the action-filled, animated story line. Lee is slyly acknowledging that the story is true, but when viewers all know what they're watching is fiction, how do they deconstruct such a statement? Lee knows that most of them won't. And with the affable and charming persona of everyone's grandfather, he assures the viewer that all is okay.

They don't have to understand that he is telling horrible truths in the guise of fiction, and surely Lee gives his famous wink knowing that fiction will always hide the truths he doesn't want revealed. He is coyly happy in his carefully crafted and camouflaged snipe, and he laughs at everyone while taking his shot.

We've come full circle from the money driven gangster profiteers in the early comic book industry history to the likes of a 91 year old great-grandpa who is unashamedly though subversively discussing greed and deception within the industry that made him embarrassingly rich and famous. And it did so while publishing tales of strength, heroism, innocence, and morality. This is taking place in a cartoon marketed to children who don't understand that they have become duped consumers. They have no clue that they have just been fed dubious, false, and questionable information.

Lee buries much of the truth of his shallow life in what younger readers believe are jokes; if they are ever to understand the full ramifications of Lee's words, they will have to go on a narrative, archeological dig the likes of which Michel Foucault speaks of. Lee remediates his egotistical and vilely greedy past out of narrative existence and narrates himself in current media to a new audience as a legendary, world famous icon who is only on the HD television screen to give us a funny grandfatherly figure to have a whimsically good time with. He is licking his lips over the fact that, whether he tells the truth or not, he gets paid for this. In the cartoon he is laughably chasing aliens for the copyrights to their stories, though this becomes less laughable if the educated viewer believes he is making a reference to his and his former colleagues' families' mostly Jewish immigrant citizenship status. In this cartoon geared toward children, we see him as a new Oz, an Oz whose green kingdom is all about the sheen of a good stack of dollar bills. Lee is the man, after all, who found a way to sell the infamous *The Official Marvel No-Prize Book*, a comic book that reproduced many of the most embarrassing mistakes that artists and writers might feel better if left alone. Regarding the issue, Lee states "I had nothing to do with this fiasco," and after insinuating that someone has created mistakes and that he will research the issue and fire employees for falsifying these mistakes, states "Yep. And I'm gonna start right after I get back from the bank" (Owsley 2). The intent to make money from those mistakes, though, was quite intentional, and Lee doesn't seem to have a moral, personal, or ethical qualm that would hinder him from smilingly transgressing bounds of decency.

The crime comic is the most quintessential comic genre and, since it is reflective of the underside of the industry that creates them, perhaps the most important comic book genre. The crime comic does not present a world that is filled with binary opposites of superheroes fighting villains. It is a genre that reflects and comments upon the complex systemic problems that emanate from the core of the industry, an industry and business that is a criminalized art form.

CHAPTER IV

ALAN MOORE UNBOWED: EMPATHETIC GLYPHS AND LETTERS OF RESISTANCE

"I'd be the first person to admit that perhaps my standards of physical hygiene are

somewhat lacking. My standards of moral hygiene, however, are impeccable. I know

when something smells and I prefer not to remain in that kind of diseased atmosphere,

because if you stay around those kinds of places too long, you're going to catch

something. So, I got out while my precious body fluids were intact." – Alan Moore (qtd.

in Khoury 127)

"[I]f you're just in it for the money, then find yourself a golden rut and plow it until you

die." – Alan Moore (qtd. in Baker *Alan Moore Spells It Out* 27).

In "Brasso with Rosie," Alan Moore describes an imaginary separation from the

real world as an elderly relative's saving grace, and he questions whether, or implies

that, the imaginary world is preferable. The situation is one that poses the question of

whether he could find a comforting sense of self even after living through such horrible

circumstances as the personal and social devastation of London and its environs during

Germany's attacks upon it in the 1940s:

Perhaps the most bizarre and poignant casualty of those tortured times was an elderly male relative of mine whose name has since been thoroughly erased by the giant putty rubber of posterity. He became totally immobilised when a thoughtless spouse decided to hang mirrors upon either side of the tiny, damp-scented room in which he customarily sat, presenting the luckless dotard with an infinite succession of doppelgangers arrayed to either side of him. To his crumbling perceptions, it seemed as if he had been granted some form of X-ray vision, enabling him to see through peeling walls and into the identical living rooms of his neighbors. There, arranged in chairs remarkably similar to his own, he could see in the streets other patriarchs. He would wave to them, perhaps passing some remark upon their choice of wallpaper, and they would wave back. He remained like this for twenty years, and which of us is to say that he was not the happier for it? (Moore, "Brasso" 25).

When Moore discusses this elderly man, he states that World War II "suddenly" sneaked upon him and his family without any forewarning that war was imminent ("Brasso" 25). Moore suggests that what matters the most in such times is what one already brings to the table, so to speak, rather than what coping mechanisms one can learn during or after such experiences. These kinds of monumental events are not formative so much as

they allow one a clear backdrop that shows one's identity clearly and transparently for all to see. Perhaps the most important viewer of this backdrop is the person himself.

Thus, there is a sense of empathy that is prevalent in the way that Moore renders his relative's condition. He understands what the elderly man was up against in having to live in the war's aftermath. There is also an implication that the day-to-day world does not provide the wonder or comfort that imaginary ones do. There is a complete reversal between deteriorating "perceptions" and the comic cliché of "X-ray vision" (25). The cliché, seemingly out of place if not inappropriate to the tone established in the rest of the passage, describes the benefit of his continuously mirrored representation of himself. The unintended and happenstance situation he was put in shows that he is happy and comforted with himself and the comradery he can establish with others. One could do much worse, and this elderly man had this comfort for the last twenty years of his life.

The last paragraph of "Brasso with Rosie" does not provide a clear backdrop to show someone's identity, though it does reveal it. The story also shows how imaginative worlds can be dangers. It also comments upon the consequences of prevarication passed off as truth in literature. Moore alludes to *Cider with Rosie,* a highly recognized work of British literature. Moore's passage, taken on its own merits, seems to depict a horrible death:

I remember one afternoon beneath a haywain with little Rosie, drinking

domestic cleaning preparations. She got the first swig and promptly

expired and died and I was forced to rearrange her clothing to give the

impression that she had been interfered with, thus concealing my own

involvement. Many years have passed since then, and I feel confident

that the world will applaud my honesty rather than condemning me for

my youthful indiscretions ("Brasso" 27).

Moore is performing both a personal and cultural bit of humor here. The first part of

this jest operates from the word "interfere" which is a British eupemism for molestation

and sexual assault, especially of children (Oxford Dictionaries). This is his own tongue-in-

cheek joke about his reputation for "moral extremism" (Groth "The Alan Moore

Interview" 25). Since Moore is held in such high esteem and would never supposedly

perform an illicit sex act, all this Moore-inspired persona has to do is arrange Rosie's

clothes as if sexual impropriety had been committed to keep his name off the list of

suspects.

There are several facets to this joke. Moore might be suggesting that his

reputation for honesty is rather too easily bestowed upon him; people might naively

believe that Moore has never made mistakes or committed immoral actions. The other

is that Moore will be applauded for telling the truth about a death he instigated,

indicating that he can potentially manipulate his readers who will always absolve him of

any guilt regardless of how grave the offense might be. Moore suggests that such trust

needs to be extended with the utmost care. The other level of this joke is one of literary allusion to the work *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee and how entire generations have been fooled into believing that Lee's work is a forthright, guileless autobiography.

The particular passage that Moore appropriates from Lee's work relates how Lee, either the actual person or the fictional persona, had sex with Rosie: "The highlight of the village year was the Festival of the Burning Otter . . . It was on one such night, as I lay drinking cider with Rosie under the hay wagon, that she pulled me down into her wide valley to rock unseen together in the subaqueous grass" (Crace). Moore's satirical rendering of Lee's passage is a moral injunction against telling lies depicting horrible events to gain readers' astonishment or pity. Moore suggests that readers actually applaud Lee for the colorful renditions of his outlandish youthful indiscretions and do not condemn Lee for anything, perhaps because they don't know about Lee's paltering.

What Moore accomplishes in this passage is laying out the figurative body of a literary text for further investigation and consideration. *Cider with Rosie* supposedly details Lee's life, which Lee himself describes as a "bucolic idyll I am now trying o'er hard to recreate" (Crace). It goes on to detail how he and his siblings "feasted on scraps of stoat and fox . . . blackened cabbages and the pagan flesh of rotting badgers that we fell upon with glee" (Crace). He relates moments of bliss with a teacher that had "capacious bosoms" and a "creamy embrace," "sisters" who "found husbands who wanted more than sex with man or beast," children who "would slide our bodies along the gleaming, frozen pond in almost sexual ecstasy," his mother "trudging the 27 miles along the

rutted tracks to gather the scrapings of mould from the bakery or to trap a diseased rat," and his two grandmothers who "would battle to drip-feed me their fermented turnips, hand-squeezed through their soiled muslin drawers" (Crace). In later years, Lee's biographer, Valerie Grove, has stated that "He [Lee] had a poet's view of the truth" (Hale). Thus, the mass audience comprising this book's readership have all made associations with this text that show, sadly, how gullible they are or how there is simply no defense against a lie.

Moore satirizes Lee's work in part because of its gratuitous grotesquery. This reason is also why Moore calls one of his most famous and popular works, *Batman: The Killing Joke,* a failure. He felt he took advantage of gross descriptions to gain the readers' attention without having a valid reason for doing so: "If you're going to play the nasty card then you have to make sure that you've got a good reason to play it" (qtd. in Khoury 123). He also has expressed his belief that he failed his readers by creating a work that does not have significant parallels to their actual lives: "*The Killing Joke* is about Batman and the Joker; it isn't about anything you're going to encounter in real life . . . So there's not important information being imparted" (qtd. in Khoury 123). The same argument could be made regarding Lee's work which is now known – though the fact has not been widely broadcast - to be full of half-truths or not much truth at all. It is unfortunate because many people have taken life lessons from his life story which has influenced not only their own personal culture, but Britain's national culture as well.

Laurie Lee is now known to have been an alcoholic who suffered from periodic

seizures and drastic mood swings (which some believe was possibly related to an

unidentified psychological disorder) (Hale). He lied to his youngest daughter, Jessy, that

a relative she was endeared to throughout her own lifetime was her cousin; when Jessy

became an adult, she learned the girl was actually her half-sister (Hale). This and many

other problems that her father caused her contributed to Jessy experiencing a mental

breakdown (Hale).

Another disturbing truth about Lee's book is that it was used as a standard

classroom text for British schools (Walker, Williams; Zirconia). It is still included in school

syllabi and tests for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders (Royal Hospital School; Trinity

Catholic School). It has had great cultural impact on many peoples' lives (Mumsnet;

Poeticus; Tork; Arfin) A statue was even erected to Lee in a Spanish villa in Iberia

(Cynthia-t). It has been a perennial best seller, now having sold in excess of six million

copies (Williams). Now known to be based on lies and license, the book calls into

question the integrity (through no fault of their own) of their belief system. In fact,

Amazon.com describes Lee's book as an influentially revealing piece of British literature:

> [*Cider with Rosie* is a] vivid recollection of a magical time and place . . . An
>
> instant classic when it first appeared in 1959, *Cider with Rosie* is one of
>
> the most enduring and evocative portraits of youth in all of literature . . .
>
> an autobiographical . . . heartfelt and lyrical ode to England, and to a way

of life that may belong to the past, but will never be forgotten ("Beloved

Bestselling").

The question that can be posed about this dubious work and the impact it has had is

whether anyone is better off for it. Obviously its cross-cultural impact implies it has

been influential and inspiring to many people.

Perhaps, though, the influence and inspiration of *Cider with Rosie* is exactly what

Moore takes issue with. Readers have taken what very well might be the ravings of a

lunatic mind and believed them. Moore laughingly suggests that his own sanity could be

called into question, as well. He does say that his family line was "clinically mad"

(Moore, "Brasso" 25). Moore is still strident, though, in his criticism of Lee's lack of

morality. There have been voluminous readers who have read *Cider with Rosie*, and they

may have taken what they believe are life lessons from it. These lessons, however, are

based on fabrications, and such false notions might lead them into a faulty course of

action. Moore satirizes the work in an attempt to negate and discredit it for the readers'

own good.

Because of the moral boundaries Lee's work has transgressed, Moore satirizes

Cider with Rosie. He finds satire's beginnings in ages past and calls it "Bardic . . . magic . .

. entirely literary or linguistic . . . that was the most terrifying thing conceivable because

even after you are dead, if it was a good enough satire, people would still be laughing at

you . . . And I personally think it would be good if we brought back those times" (Moore,

"Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie"). Moore's satire of the work ridicules Lee's dissembling. The falsity of what seems such grave and difficult childhood circumstances take on the feel of farcical melodrama.

In Moore's passage, there is also something to be said about laying out Rosie's body. The body is prepared for concealment of a crime rather than memorialization. Moore degrades Rosie's body in "Brasso with Rosie" so that the character will no longer be loved or valorized. Moore's idea of heroism is one of moral protest instead of misplaced affection or glory. Moore turns the idea of Laurie Lee as a cultural hero on its head. Moore has contrasted typical cultural heroes as those that "single-handedly overpower enemy machine gun nests" with what he feels is one of the most heroic acts he has ever seen:

> [O]ver here, during the Thatcher regime, we had an unemployed man from up North, who drove down to London, parked his car at the bottom of Downing Street, which is where the Prime Minister's office is, and set fire to his car with himself inside it, as a protest against the economic policies that had destroyed his life, robbed him of his job, his dignity, and everything else (qtd. in Khoury 115).

He suggests that there is something harmful in fictional desecration of bodies passed off as truth, creating gratuitous depictions of suffering, and the inability to appreciate physical, bodily acts of resistance as heroism.

Lynn Hunt provides a theory for empathy that is biological, political, and social in

nature. She states that any sense of empathy, human rights, or autonomy begin with

respect for the body:

> Autonomy and empathy are . . . quite literally embodied, that is, they
>
> have physical as well as emotional dimensions. Individual autonomy
>
> hinges on an increasing sense of the separation and sacredness of human
>
> bodies: your body is yours and my body is mine, and we should both
>
> respect the boundaries . . . Human rights depend on both self-possession
>
> and on the recognition that all others are equally self-possessed (29).

Those who are autonomous and empathetic believe that others are as deserving of

autonomy as they are. In fact, they feel it is each person's inherent right to have

autonomy. Having a sense of oneself is tantamount to empathy expressed personally,

culturally, and politically.

Another part of her argument is that one's humanity is evidenced through

personal reactions to social pressures that have an effect on one's notion of human

rights: "[W]e are most certain that a human right is at issue when we feel horrified by

its violation" (26). The logic is somewhat circular, but Lynn goes on to explain,

referencing Benedict Anderson:

> The political scientist Benedict Anderson has argued that newspapers and
>
> novels created the "imagined community" that nationalism requires in

order to flourish. What might be termed "imagined empathy" serves as

the foundation of human rights rather than of nationalism. It is imagined,

not in the sense of made up, but in the sense that someone else is like

you (32).

Hunt believes that individual empathy translates into social and political communities

once it is shared with others. Further, the formation of empathy is tied to morality and

autonomy: "To have human rights, people had to be perceived as separate individuals

who were capable of exercising independent moral judgment" (27). According to Hunt,

empathy is what allows political organizations to form. Hunt and Benedict imply that the

way these beliefs are communicated is of paramount importance. Thus, it would seem

conceivable that there are empathetic narratives as well as narratives of advocacy for

others' human rights.

Territorialism and political systems, though, constrain human rights through

indoctrination and, usually, nationalism. Empathy is not part of the equation.

Governments must have citizens who internalize the government's ideology, and the

most effective way to do this is to have subjects reiterate the creeds given to them. The

recipient of the language, according to Antonio Gramsci, must view the transaction as

consensus rather than coercion (245). Governmental hegemony relies on "abstract

expressions of group solidarity embodying the actions of political, economic, and

cultural institutions in the continual reproduction and legitimization of the system of

practices" that result in the dominance of the citizens of the place governed (245).

Hegemony, like language, is not static and is not a permanent condition even though hegemonic organizations make it seem so. Without opposition and conflict against such conditions, society will stultify. According to Walter L. Adamson, society has to "leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop" (174). Systems of hegemony attempt to cut strands of heterogeneity and continually contend for dominance when they arise.

Governments want to secure control by appearing completely unified with their citizens and they continually evaluate citizens' adherence to national unity. Once anything deviating from this perceived norm of unity is entered into the heterogeneous system, schisms may immediately threaten it. If the responsibility of moral choice is not an element in the equation then the whole will not be satisfactory to the majority, or perhaps any of those involved. Those in the system must see the contradictions within the construction to break out of what binds them, and then they need to find a way to exit or transform the life script they have been given by the state.

Branching off from this discussion of imagination, moral guilt, and domination of the individual, the rest of this chapter will elucidate Moore's narratives of empathy, self-possession, advocacy, and connectedness. First, Moore's moral disdain for the actions of the comic book companies for whom he worked will be discussed as the catalyst for his defection from mainstream comics. His problems with these companies occurred concurrently as he was writing the aforementioned types of narratives, and they were only valuable to these companies for their salability. In spite of this, he was able to

create narrative structures that express the need for liberation of the self and the

necessity of forming identity in opposition to others. These works will be discussed

before transitioning to Moore's own way of understanding people which he terms

psychogeography. It is a process of taking a person – as an individual and as the center

of all that has (and does) surround her – and understanding them through an inductive

type of characterization that, according to Moore, liberates them. After discussing

Moore's notions of liberation, the chapter will close by investigating what he thinks can

correct or offer an alternative to current political situations and how the media has a

responsibility and the opportunity to provide opposition to those conditions. Some of

his publications will be understood as corrective, rehabilitative types of literature.

Moore first entered the comic book industry through underground comix, a term

that designated their writers' and artists' vituperation toward and refusal to work within

the norms of the mainstream comic book industry (Roger 92). He did so because he felt

that underground publications reified his own predisposition for resisting mainstream

institutions. Moore's decision to work for underground publications was precipitated by

his "anti-social" problems with "the authorities . . . the government . . . the structure of

everything" (qtd. in Khoury 21). The writers and artists of underground comix held what

they perceived as their own sense of values that were informed by resistance. They

were also driven by their desire to create what they perceived as more meaningful work

rather than merely consumable products. According to Warren and Campbell,

counterculture values "diverge from a norm that is not considered legitimate" and

attempt to secure a higher degree of autonomy (Warren and Campbell 543). An awareness of the need for individual autonomy informs nearly all of Moore's work, and was a seminal theme in his first works.

An early comic strip called "Anon E. Mouse," features two characters: a lead artist with managerial ambitions and an apprentice. The strip, written and drawn by Moore, depicts the anguish of a sensitive artist facing a superior's wrathful and dominant viciousness. The strip's lead artist is, aptly, a wolf, and the sensitive apprentice is a mouse. The wolf states that he's trying out a new idea, something called "biting humor;" the mouse is confused about what that means, to which the wolf replies, "Basically, it means that if you don't humour me, then I bite your throat out!" (Moore, "Anon E. Mouse"). The mouse is depicted with wide, frightened eyes as he puts his hand to his own throat for protection. The picture exhibits the power gained from status and the temerity it can instill in others of a lesser degree of prominence.

The strip also pokes fun at the commercialism of mainstream industries and their dependence upon advertising by showing a sign between the first two panels that states, "Advertisers this space could be working for you!" (Moore, "Anon E. Mouse"). Moore knew fully well that *Anon* (the publication that the "Anon E. Mouse" strips were published in), a stapled pamphlet that could hardly be considered a marketable publication, would never allow advertisements due to its critical stance toward mainstream publishers. He also knew that no company would ever even consider advertising in an unknown teenage rag pretentiously calling itself *Anon: The Alternative*

Newspaper of Northampton. The fact of the matter is that the production quality was above average, but the circulation began and ended practically with Moore and his friends (Khoury 21).

Another early example of Moore's disillusionment with the comics industry as a monetary endeavor became apparent in 1982. Moore created a photo montage tale about the greed that the comic book industry instills in readers who turn into profiteers when they give in too easily to comic book consumerism. The tale, fittingly built upon the idea of one's actually being consumed, is called "The Collector: Profits of Doom." Even the title suggests in its homophonous pun (profits/prophets) that collectors and profiteers trade a much higher potential calling in life for the satisfaction of money in their hands. It implies that comic book businesses are fated to find no other value in their product than monetary because of the nature of their greed. This is a fantastic horror genre cautionary tale about profit motive ruining narrative and visual arts. Moore suggests there is an inherent moral quality that is squandered when stories are turned into mere market items.

The narrator of the tale, The Collector, begins the tale by saying, "It's strange how seemingly worthless items can become objects of value in the eyes of a collector! Take comics, for example, certain rare comics now change hands for small fortunes. But sometimes, greed can rear its ugly head" (Moore, "Profits" 28). The tale features a used comic store proprietor who buys what he believes is the rarest comic in existence by cheating a man who is selling it to pay for medical treatments for his sick wife; the store

owner tells the man it is not his, the store owner's, problem that his wife is sick. The

owner later gloats over the fact that he can sell the comic and get practically a 500%

return for the nominal money he gave the man for it. As the shop owner reads the

comic, it tells the story that is actually being told in the comic story (that the actual

reader is holding in their hands), meaning in a moment of weird metanarrative, he reads

the story of a comic store owner that looks exactly like himself jilting the man who

needs money for his ill wife, while the reader is reading the same exact thing. Moore is

attempting to place the reader as close as possible to the scene so that they will be part

of the tale itself. This way, they will have to make a moral choice as well.

Demons and tentacles suddenly jump out of the text and drag him to Hell. The

tale ends with the man coming back and regaining his comic, and a moral is attached at

the end that says "Justice had been done" (Moore, "Profits" 31). The Collector then

purchases the comic from the man and offers one more cautionary statement: "I made

sure that I paid him a fair price for it" (Moore, "Profits" 31). This cautionary tale suggests

that the commodification of comic books is a perpetual problem in the industry. Caught

up in the market, consumers pay far too much for a product that fills them with the

desire to consume more until this act of consumption becomes their main reality and

the only act they can perform. Moore suggests they are not so much readers as they are

consumers. Whether they seek monetary or material acquisitions, they occupy the same

consumptive space.

Moore felt that the marketing and business aspects of the comic book industry had disastrous results for both creators and even the market itself. *In Pictopia* is an allegory of the horrible consequences market forces have had upon creators' characters and creations as well as the publications they found a home in. The majority of the characters in the comic are stand-ins for Golden Age comic characters, and due to their estimation of worth in the modern age depicted in the comic, they are relegated to living in the ghetto called the Prince Features Tenement.

This is a reference to King Features Syndicate, the comic company that published Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* comics. Prince Valiant is the epitome of medieval heroism, typified by such pictures as being dressed in war gear, swinging a sword and charging forward on a war horse. Instead of a prince with a sword, the main character of *In Pictopia* is a magician with a wand. Named Nocturne, reminiscent of the dark, nearly black-and-white world he and the other Golden Age characters inhabit, he wanders the darkened areas of this city where these characters are stuck, unevolved, in the same place they have always been. The comic seems to suggest that Golden Age characters have lost much of their sovereign status in current times. They have also been largely forgotten.

At least, they are largely forgotten until other characters desire to commit acts of violence against them. This is not to say that violence was not part of the early comic book milieu. There are many Golden Age comics depicting cute animals seemingly intent on mauling and maiming the other characters, though it usually results in an

onomatopoeic bonk on the head rather than a murderous blow. Moore acknowledges

this aspect of comics history with scenes where characters are seen chasing each other,

one swinging a piece of wood with a nail sticking out of it toward another character's

head. Yet most of the characters are smiling at one another, commiserating with one

another, and finding ways to still establish a sense of fraternity.

The violence found in *In Pictopia*, though, hits a completely masochistic level

with the introduction of contemporary superheroes who are seen "torturing an old dog

man from" the Pictopia suburb called "Funnytown;" these so-called heroes kick the dog

and laugh at him in a horribly grotesque depiction of schadenfreude (Moore, *In*

Pictopia). In another scene, these contemporary characters also take advantage of their

superior power to the point where they enact Draconian laws by terrorizing a prostitute,

Red, by objectifying her as nothing more than a whore. Nocturno, having gone to visit

her by chance, is accosted by these characters drawn nearly exactly like Marvel's

Vigilante (a character who exacted violent street justice) and Rebellion's Judge Dredd (a

futuristic policeman who is also given the right to cite and judge citizens in the same

moment they are arrested). Being falsely accused of being her "customer," Nocturno is

frightened to the point where he abandons Red even though he feels "sick with shame"

for doing so (Moore, *In Pictopia* 9).

The work suggests violence in contemporary comics, though they could be

considered part of a cycle of violence begun in the Golden Age funny books. Moore

suggests, though, that contemporary comics have committed greater violence upon the

historically classic characters of comics by making "slight modifications" in the newer version superheroes that "looked more sinister . . . more realistic" (Moore, *In Pictopia* 10). Ultimately, Nocturno realizes all these newer characters stand in for each of their replacements.

In the last scene, Nocturno realizes that the ghettos of Pictopia are not being replaced, the originals are being literally bulldozed to their deaths. As Nocturno watches, the bulldozer pushes toward Pictopia, the black and white world shrinking as it does so. Nocturno's frantic wandering through Funnytown has ceased; he is horrified and saddened at the same time, stating, "All I wanted was Funnytown, and its endless consolation" (Moore, *In Pictopia* 11). Seeing the bulldozer, he realizes "there wasn't any consolation" coming (Moore, *In Pictopia* 11).

While destruction is still imminent, Nocturno stares disconsolately past the fenced enclosure of the world. For the first time, he sees factory flames lighting the sky and realizes that there is production on the far end of the world in which he lives. There is none in Pictopia, and these characters are bound to pass away. Moore seems to suggest that the acceleration of comic book production leads to the eradication of quite a valuable part of an earlier comic book era, and that the industry values what sells rather than what could be reevaluated and offered to people as valuable instances of comic culture they know nothing about.

Moore expresses antipathy for the industrialization of comic books both in his fiction and in his life. He believes that the virtual reality of comic books is not reified in the real world, and that this contradiction camouflages an undercurrent of economic violence committed against the writers and artists that produce them. Moore also feels that the comic book industry imposes the idea that heroism, ever present in comic stories, is rarely possible in the cruelty of the real world.

Moore's statement about this will be quoted at length, because it summarizes to a great extent where this part of the study is headed and is a very thorough account of Moore's understanding of the harm that the comic media industry creates:

> Initially, when I was seven, I saw the superhero as an incredible source of ideas and imagination . . . My current feelings about the superhero are about that what they largely represent . . . This is after looking at a lot of the people working in the superhero field and realizing that they've never formed a union. With the exception of three or four people, they have never answered back to their employers. They have never complained about the subhuman way in which they are treated . . . You start to see a bit of a gap, a credibility gap developing between these costumed champions who always stand up for the oppressed, who always struggle against tyrants, who are always on the side of the underdog, and then you've got the artists who draw them who have never shown any courage at all . . . You start to see the American superhero as a cowardice

compensator . . . [for those] who will put up with their governments and their bosses doing almost anything to them as long as they can escape into a fantasy where they are the Hulk or the Silver Surfer and nobody pushes them around. That is the negative side of the superhero, in that it becomes something that stands for its exact opposite, and that's a bit of a downer, isn't it? ("Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie")

Moore feels that the industry creates virtual narratives that are not related to any type of morality or ethics that can be realistically reified in life. He calls this inability to translate the narrative to actual life "the futility of the hero" (Itzkoff). He also describes the constant republication of superhero stories as "nothing but commerce . . . and nostalgia in its original sense – an illness" (Amacker "Often the Truth"). There is no self-advocacy that results from reading or creating the comic book, especially mainstream superhero comic books. Therefore it loses meaning and is, according to Moore, possibly dangerous unless one views it as simply serving no purpose other than mere vicarious entertainment.

It could be argued, also, that readers of comic books rely too heavily on simplified and sophomoric moralities supplanted by entertaining comic book narratives; comic book readers simply purchase their own disempowerment that keeps them in a puerile state. Elana Gomel sees this as the "conceit of the armored ego" in which a male continues to feel the need to "transform himself into a real man," not realizing the process results in a "stunted psyche" (146). The character identifies completely with his

physical or metaphysical armor, and has difficulty in forming relationships beyond those that appeal to his puerile state, making his life a "mawkish sentimentality" (146). Though this is not the only kind of characterization found in comic books, the superhero narrative, with its invincibility within an idealistic world, is a staid narrative cliché of the genre. It is particularly unsettling when it is found in such an unsophisticated state.

In "The Superhero Formula," Blythe and Sweet contend that comic books rely on stereotypical characters and heavily symbolic art because such stereotypes in written and visual form do not challenge the reader to think (47). Kristen Seas states that the "superhero ideology offers a perfect misrecognition of the complexities of real contemporary life" with a "fictional map of identifiable subjects" (28). These authors insinuate that the writers need to be mindful of the ideologies they create even if they are regulated by the companies for whom they work. Stories should not rely on stereotypes, but instead should supply intellectually cogent texts. Dehumanization is the result of the superhero narrative, because the ideologies of the industry do not support the strength to resist their ideologies. Readers become mere consumers who purchase the products and never resist the companies who persuade them to purchase more standardized products. Ironically, in an industry that is supposed to offer the next best thing, there is no novelty to be found.

Moore feels that the comic book industry has created a normalized culture. The contexture of comics is a mix of a virtual world of juvenile dichotomies and the reality where companies manhandle their employees. He states that Superman reflects more

than a childish fantasy. Though he calls Superman the "pivotal creation" that "was the cornerstone of modern mainstream comics," he was also a symbol of the dubious "appropriation" of Siegel and Shuster's character that "laid a template for the business practices which have prevailed within the comic business ever since" (Moore, "Alan Moore Addresses"). DC had promised to return copyrights to the character when Siegel and Shuster returned from service in World War II, but refused to do so when the character became popular (Medoff).

Moore contends that the employees, the creators and writers making the comics, are, for all intents and purposes, living in a practically modern manorialism. The only difference is the creators have written and illustrated themselves into their own dependence and disenfranchisement. He does not feel that creator rights safeguard them, stating "creators in the superhero field aren't actually creators after all, but merely the recipients of some kind of transcendent windfall fruit that is freely shared around" by a "morally-evasive metaphysics . . . which steer the comic industry" (Moore, "Alan Moore Addresses"). Moore's point is that companies are not reciprocating anything substantial to their writers and artists. Moore evidently feels that business has to be moral in nature, and the comic companies (in his eyes, at least) rely on an ethics of pretended neutrality at best. Though some companies now allow artists to retain copyrights, Moore is suspicious of this truly making any change in the way comic companies do business.

By Moore's definition, when organizations show a lack of morality, they are fascist: "Fascism is a complete abdication of moral responsibility. You are surrendering all responsibility for your own actions to the state on the belief that in unity there is strength" ("Authors on Anarchism"). Moore sees the fasces as a symbol that attempts to destroy any notion of diversity: "[P]eople tend to come to the conclusion that the bundle of bound twigs will be much stronger if all the twigs are of uniform size and shape, that there aren't any oddly shaped or bent twigs that are disturbing the bundle" ("Authors on Anarchism"). Thus, his implication is that the comics industry wore down its employees and created an industrial environment that he describes as a strange mixture of a fascist and capitalistic state.

Those who are forced into a fascist state are dehumanized. Because they do not have the courage to voice opposition, they indirectly give credence to the perceived effectiveness of fascism. Elana Gomel emphasizes the unlikelihood of a "discourse of the Other, which insinuates himself into the monolithic discourse of dominance, undermining it from within" (133). The discourse that is found most often and establishes a nearly impenetrable type of control is "the discourse of othering, which silences discordant voices by assigning them to" an "inherently polluted . . . body" that robs them of vitality (133). The lack of volition puts people in a weakened, flaccid, and unnatural state. At the same time, they are put in places where they are perceived as infected and not to be touched for one's own safety. It is easy to see the consequences for someone were this to translate into the workplace.

According to Moore, there is a bit of pathology in the industry. He has stated

that the industry has a "diseased atmosphere" (qtd. in Khoury 27). When comic books

and writers (or any employees working in any industry, for that matter) allow these

conditions to continue, they are accepting a weakened role and are stigmatized by it.

Thus, they are kept in the inferior role because everyone else identifies them in

accordance with this weakened role. The onus, however, has to be placed on the

individual to refuse to accept those conditions. The individual person must view himself

as a resistant force rather than what his job description tells him he is. Designated job

titles can actually be opprobrium the company can wield against its employees.

Those who stigmatize others want the stigmatized person cognizant of what has

been done to them. That way it will seem a permanent condition rather than the

temporary, though repetitious, coercive act that it is. To phrase it differently, they want

the individual to feel the hopelessness of a perceived inability to change their condition.

Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan, in "Conceptualizing Stigma," state that "[d]iscrimination

and power are crucial elements in stigma as a social phenomenon" (366). Link and

Phelan also point out how the stigmatizing process targets "individuals with certain

attributes problematic" and then demands "intervention" to ostracize and discredit

them (390). Individuals the company wants to punish will be given a designation (e.g.

troublemaker, difficult, hard to get along with), and then others will view them that way

and ensure they don't act like the stigmatized group. When those who have been

stigmatized are passed up for promotions or terminated, it will be seen as a natural flow of events.

In the 1980s, comic artists and writers engaged in what Goffman calls the "sympathetic other," a "group formation" that leads to "reshaping . . . understanding of the negative and discriminatory effects of stigma" so that "group members become spokespersons who defend the stigmatized group" (24). In opposition to a rating system on comic books (such as labelling a comic "For Mature Audiences"), Moore and many others decided they would band together to sign petitions, to demand talks with executives, and to broadcast the negative effect they thought the ratings system could have on the industry (Moore, "The Alan Moore Interview"). These creators were stigmatized for being difficult, unaware of good business practices, and lacking insight into the supposedly moral obligations the companies had to its readers.

Their work, published for years without a problem, was now labelled obscene by the company and then stigmatized with a range of categories that clearly stated that only certain audiences were appropriate for these publications. In 1986, when a shop owner was prosecuted for carrying this newly designated obscene material, comic artists and writers formed the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund allowing him more than enough funds to afford the legal defense for his case. The fact that the material violated the ratings system was used as evidence in the case; though it was Japanese manga, which is not bound to follow what are voluntary ratings systems (they are used by companies concerned about legal liability), it is suggested that it helped persuade the

judge and jury (Morrisard). His conviction was overturned on appeal (Morrisard).

Having been stigmatized as insubordinates by their employers – as well as having their

work stigamatized as obscene - these groups, nevertheless, were able to at least secure

their legal rights.

Moore takes issue with this control of comic materials; he has also spoken out

against companies' lack of support for their own artists. Unfortunately, he says that

some of the writers and artists followed the industry's examples. Will Eisner, one of the

most revered of comic book writers and artists, hired creators who were turned into

mere human resources. Eisner was a master at "pushing his young workers hard" (Jones

139). Years later, some of the workers remembered his studios as "sweatshops" (Jones

139). Bradford Wright states that Eisner developed "a creative assembly line" and Eisner

himself stated that "We made comic book features pretty much the way Ford made

cars" (qtd. in *Comic Book Nation* 6). Bradford states that this resulted in "the visual

sameness and formulaic stories of many early comic books" (*Comic Book Nation* 6).

Eisner was known to brag, "I got very rich before I was twenty-two" (*Comic Book Nation*

6). One could argue that Eisner made the best combination of fascism and capitalism

ever known. He got the trains running on time (or the distribution trucks, as it were) and

found ways to profit from them immeasurably.

Eisner's reputation as one of the greatest comic artists and writers, one who

talks about "heart and humanity, the courage to stand up and be counted, the

compassion you show unto others," has whitewashed the authoritarian aspects of his

personality (Stephen). Few fans know of these tendencies and practices that comic book companies have used to deny their artists and writers any autonomy. They also do not understand how the companies suppress dissent. Even though he disagreed with Eisner's treatment of his employees, Moore assuredly would not support the money made from using Eisner's story and image posthumously either; he has especially expressed disdain toward the Comic Con International San Diego (hereafter referred to as CCISD) (Gopalan).

The Comic Con International San Diego (hereafter referred to as CCISD) hosts the annual Eisner Award presentations and the event has caused Moore much chagrin for over thirty years now. When asked if he ever had the desire to attend the CCISD again, he stated, "I stopped going [to CCISD] in the late 80s. I just thought *I don't really want to do this anymore, and I don't really see why I am doing it.* I did find it a bit overwhelming and creepy" (Gopalan). Part of the reason why Moore finally had enough is that a fan asked him for his signature while the writer was relieving himself in the men's room (Gopalan). Though this is a bit of comic relief by this point, it does illustrate the irrational behavior and fanaticism encouraged by the comic book convention experience.

Another important reason for his refusal to attend CCISD could be that Moore might disdain the Eisner Awards' arbitrary system used to select the award winning works. The Eisner Awards honor those who are deemed worthy of recognition in the industry, but a set of criteria for selection simply doesn't exist. The CCISD's mission statement claims that the award "cover[s] the best publications and creators of the

previous year" ("Eisner Awards History"). Lee Oeth, a judge for the 2014 Eisner Awards,

states that the judging requirements were "the hardest work I've ever done . . . just

reading " ("Judges' Comments"). The procedure undertaken to select works included

the judges' meeting together and "then only discuss[ing] it [a work] a bit before having

to move on to the next book" ("Judges' Comments"). There is no systematic process in

place to select award winners other than subjective, personal response to the texts

under consideration. To make matters worse, CCISD felt no reservation about putting

these comments on their official site ("Judges Comments").

The way the "year's best comic books" are arbitrarily chosen for what CCISD calls

the "Oscars of the comic book world" ("Eisner Awards FAQ"). He feels that artists and

writers should be on these panels; he expresses his opinion of CCISD as one of the worst

examples of capitalism mixing with artistic endeavors (Gopalan). The CCISD is a money-

making monolith, driven purely by the profit motive. The CCISD is just as much a

corporate sponsorship as Nike's sponsoring of the Brazilian soccer team noted earlier.

It is reported that the CCISD generates "an estimated $165 million dollars each

year in revenue for the city of San Diego" ("31 Facts About"). In 2011, though, Peter

Rowe, a reporter for the *San Diego Union Tribune*, found that number had increased to

$180 million in the mere five days the convention was held. (This year's convention

begins the evening of 23 July and ends 27 July, which is not even five full days.) The

description of the CCISD is focused purely on revenue. Bringing in money for the city of

San Diego is an interesting way to couch the fact that the CCISD keeps close tabs on

what they make; they might just be the most profitable and demanding non-profit

organization in the world.

The way the CCISD uses its power is quite authoritarian. Recently CCISD became

entangled with local political machinations involved forcing the city of San Diego to build

an expansion for the convention center that effectively blocked "one of the few

windows to the water along a heavily built-up boulevard" that would "push

development unacceptably close to the bay" (Perry "Comic-con-backed"). According to

Coastal Commission staff members writing the proposal, their report was not well

received by the board members in charge of the commission (Perry).

CCISD wanted the expansion and threatened to leave San Diego if they were not

given more space for additional booths to hock their wares. So the city of San Diego

promptly promised to expand the convention center 740,000 square feet at a cost to

the city of $520 million (Perry "Comic-con-backed"). Interestingly, the San Diego

Chargers opposed the move, proposing instead a "joint stadium-convention center" that

would allow the National Football League team to move out of a smaller stadium. The

Coastal Commission had the final vote on the project and decided to go with CCISD

(Perry "Comic-con-backed"). The fact that a comic convention was favored over a

National Football League team attests to the power the CCISD.

Consumerism is the main, if not the only, driving force behind comic book

conventions. Moore describes attendants as readers who are pushed into no other role

than that of a purchaser: "You go to a convention now, it's big business . . . they're

trade fairs. They're trade fairs where the industry can actually get their target audience

to pay to get in and be advertised to" (qtd. in Baker, *Alan Moore's Exit Interview* 52). An

example of this is the $299 ticket price to get the "Stan Lee Experience" at the Atlanta

Comic Con on 30 May 2014; it only entitled the purchaser to a general admission ticket,

"An Exclusive Stan Lee VIP Badge," a supposedly "Extremely Limited Edition Comic!"

(actually part of a rather large 3,000 copy run), a speed pass that allowed the purchaser

a speedway to pay for Lee's signature, and a chance to purchase a "photo-op" with Lee

(*Atlanta Comic Con*).

Moore took on one altruistic endeavor with a comic convention, but he was

misled about the nature of the event in another moment of comic book industry

trickery. His local Northampton library called him to arrange an appearance, and he

agreed to give an hour long talk to what he thought were library patrons. What Moore

did not know is that the appearance was directly connected to the Northampton Comic

Convention and had been arranged by them. According to Moore, "I did go to one [a

convention] in Northampton, but it was by mistake, because I had not understood it was

a comic book convention" (Johnston, "Alan Moore Withdraws").

A person of his fame could undoubtedly bring in a lot of money and make a

sizable income for himself through appearances at these types of conventions. But that

is not why he is in the business, and that is why he resists participation. To attend would

simply give his support to the consumerism and profiteering he opposes. Having been

duped at this late stage in the game, he now refuses any and all appearances or awards, the last of which would have been his induction in the membership of the esteemed Angouleme Grand Prix (Johnston, "Alan Moore Withdraws").

Moore's problems with the industry were exacerbated when he actually began working for mainstream publishers. Moore reacted strongly to the recent reprints of *Miracleman* (the character was formerly called Marvelman before the legal dispute mentioned below) by refusing to accept any payment based on moral grounds ("Hughes"). He did so because he would otherwise be morally complicit in what he perceives as another immoral thievery of the integrity of another writer's creation. Marvel also hijacked reprint of his work on *Dr. Who* stories; Marvel did not pay Moore anything for these reprints due to a difference between copyright laws in the United States that differ from those in the U.K. (Khoury "Kimota" 6-7).

Marvel claimed to have a copyright on the character Marvelman because they claimed to have a trademark on the word "marvel;" in case that didn't work, they also insisted that the UK magazine, *Warrior,* that was showcasing the character, would somehow cause them financial loss by using the word "marvel" (Khoury "Kimota" 7). The legal battles ceased publications featuring Moore's work while Marvel kept the legal proceedings going interminably (Johnston "Marvelman – the Other Bid").

Moore, disgruntled with the ongoing legalities that ended with the character's being renamed (the name Miracleman was chosen), refused to have his name attached

to the issues of the *Miracleman* reprints, feeling that the name change lost a facet

integral to the character (Johnston "Marvelman – The Other Bid"). Marvel didn't know

what to do when they began reissuing this series and finally listed Moore only as "The

Original Writer" (Original Writer "Book One: A Dream of Flying").

What Moore perceived as thievery, bullying, and immoral acts in the industry

continued when he moved on to DC Comics. Moore and co-creator Dave Gibbons

accepted a business deal that would give them the copyright to *Watchmen* once the

comic, like nearly all comics did at the time, ran out of copyright in a year. But DC

retained the copyright to *Watchmen* simply by reprinting the title once a year to keep

the property (Amacker). Moore felt DC had guaranteed that the copyright would

terminate in a year; DC claims it was a conditional term (Amacker). Moore left DC soon

after this disagreement.

DC, determined to lure him back, continued to cause him problems. They moved

from attempts to entice him back to outright coercion. An issue that caused Moore

tremendous moral antipathy toward DC was their offering one of Alan's oldest friends,

Steve Moore, a job to write a *Watchmen* computer game in the late 80s, after Alan had

refused to work for them again. Unfortunately for Steve, the condition they stipulated

was that he would have to co-write the game with Alan Moore, but it was left up to

Steve to contact Alan and ask him to work on the project.

Steve Moore had been the first person to hire Alan to write comics, and Steve, who had not worked for some time, was desperate for money. Steve's brother had been diagnosed with Motor Neuron Disease, an incurable and usually fatal condition, and he needed funds for his brother's medical bills. Steve Moore called Alan and asked him about it, and Alan said he would not do anymore work for DC. Alan called DC, though, and asked that Steve be given the job even though Alan said he would not work on it; DC never hired Steve Moore for the computer game, which may have been a ruse to begin with, since no video game ever appeared (Johnston, "Alan Moore Speaks" 3.) Moore stated that he was tired of the "nasty little tricks" and that "a matter like a dying brother, as I put it, is more important to ordinary people than the machinations of the people who publish Batman comics" (Johnston, "Alan Moore Speaks" 3). When Alan Moore left DC, he began working for Wildstorm, an independent publisher. DC summarily purchased the company.

Such actions represent a system in which two parties lack the ability to engage in cooperative decision making processes. Michael L. Lowe and Kelly L. Haws describe this kind of system as a "dyad" where one of the two parties cannot "support . . . abstention" (490). This robs one or both parties of their desire to have a "controlled behavioral response" that would allow them to question whether their decisions might represent a "choice between . . . virtues . . . or vices" (490). When one of the parties refuses to cooperate with the other party, they exhibit "defiant abstinence" (491). Moore is a good example of defiant abstinence; he left the employment of two of the

biggest publishers in comics because they offended his sense of morality. When he feels

there is no cooperative or moral way to collaborate in any kind of collective or social

form, he leaves. Yet he has also used his defiant abstention as motivation for

reformative actions.

As will be seen, Moore does not call for destruction of the comic book industry.

Though he has little hope that mainstream comic corporations can change, he does find

some creators who are attempting to change the worst practices of the industry in

attempt to redeem the art form. Even with his disgruntled objections to the industry,

he feels there is still a way to fix, if not the publishers, then, perhaps, the publications

themselves: "The thing to try to do is to surely try and come up with a strong form of

mainstream comics, with some occasionally transcendent elements, but not, 'Let's

smash the envelope!' Perhaps I have more of a constructive approach than

deconstructive" ("Toasting Absent Heroes"). To achieve these ends, Moore has greatly

changed the way he gets his own work published. He has also helped to get others

published in ways that he feels are more responsible and constructive. In essence, he is

attempting a restructuring of comic books and, as much as he is able, a restructuring of

the comic book business.

When Moore left DC Comics, he instituted a model of a comic business that

would harken back to the more political aspects of underground comix rather than

money making agendas representative of mainstream companies. He established his

own imprint, *Mad Love,* to further causes he deemed important. The works he

published began to move beyond defiant abstinence toward advocacy. The first

publication was an anthology called *AARGH!* (an acronym for Artists Against Rampant

Government Homophobia), a publication produced with a concerned group of artists

and writers who opposed Britain's Clause 28, an amendment to the Local Government

Act of 1988. This was a heterosexist law that mandated that citizens "shall not

intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of

promoting homosexuality" ("Local Government Act"). This was Moore's initial way of

fighting what he felt was an immoral act disguised in political and legal masks. The

comic was considered successful for reasons that have nothing to do with commercial

success. It brought awareness of the government's intentions to people who otherwise

would have remained uninformed regarding these proposed laws.

AARGH! provides a filter to view Moore's business model and fiction as

advocacy. As Elliott Oring states, advocacy is a way to "give voice to people with little or

no access to power," but Oring also contends that it is just as important "to understand

their silences" (259). Through AARGH!, Moore gave a platform for many artists and

writers and a vehicle to arouse opposition toward a government that wanted silent

complicity from its citizens. The only value Moore finds in the comic book genre, or any

art form for that matter, is a kind of a metaphysical utilitarian art with which people can

explore their imaginations in hopes of changing their lives or world. Moore states

specifically that he feels art is:

A way of talking without language, it's a way of speaking almost directly heart to heart, mind to mind; it's a way of combating loneliness, that all of us can think that we are isolated [and yet you] see a piece of art and it makes you less alone. It's a thing that connects human beings. (" Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie").

This outlook is what can be termed advocacy and connectedness narratives that helps the greatest number of people to see beyond our most shallow perceptions of one another.

The Ballad of Halo Jones is a story Moore created that shows both the beauty and tragedy of silence and of the power of appearance and the safety of disappearance. The title character of the work, Halo Jones, decides to break out of the confines of the overpopulated city she lives in, called The Hoop; to do so, she accepts employment as a waitress on a spaceship. Glyph, a stowaway, is unaccountably invisible to all the passengers on the ship except Halo Jones, who also has a status that causes passengers to refuse to see her as anything other than a conduit for what they need.

Glyph's life, though, takes an unfortunately horrible turn when she begins socializing with Halo. When she speaks with Halo, she makes an attempt to socialize with others. This causes her confusion because she doesn't find the first the thing similar between herself and other people. In fact she does not even understand her own gender and tailspins into an identity crisis. The only solution he can think of is to decide

upon his gender for himself and undergoes a process called "remoulding," a type of

futuristic sex change. She gets so many mixed signals from those around her, that she

goes through this refashioning many times over until she becomes "just a cypher, a sort

of glyph" (Moore, *Halo Jones* 25). Glyph is only a symbol of language, a symbol who

cannot communicate except in very controlled circumstances. She is completely unable,

however, to create a multivalent discourse.

Through finding a voice rather than maintaining silence, Glyph becomes part of

social customs that are foreign to her. He never considers that communication is a

reciprocal process; she also is unsettled by the way in which her identity is constantly

assessed, evaluated, and constructed by others rather than himself through

communication. Glyph is a symbol of linguistic coding and decoding. The speed of these

messages cannot be controlled, and, thus Glyph cannot make sense of them or bring

order to them. Carsten Strahausen suggests that the "effort . . . to mediate between . . .

two positions quickly" can cause rifts "between two discourses or discursive fields . .

with ever-increasing speed" (Moore, *Halo Jones* 141). Once she transmits messages,

Glyph is transfused with others' messages about herself rather than her own internal

messages that could help her identify herself on her own terms. Once discursive

positions are established quickly, then the speed at which discourse occurs takes on an

even faster pace. Glyph simply sinks even faster.

At his first attempt to competently construct messages, Glyph is taxed by the

need to deconstruct messages at a speed that is impossible for him. Finally, confused by

the twin tasks of communicator and receptor, feeling hopeless and trying to find a purpose, she silently but composedly martyrs herself to save Halo Jones. Having encouraged Glyph to talk in an attempt to socialize with him, Halo Jones misunderstood why Glyph was antisocial. Jones also never understood Glyph's need for silence nor the desperation of her abstention from society at large. Isolation was his only safety mechanism. Language was simply lost to Glyph, as she truly was no one, a non-entity, a person without an identity and the unfortunate inability to find one. Alone in her own world, this was not a problem for her. In a world of others, he was decoded and deconstructed mercilessly.

It could be argued that, by not participating in the world around him, Glyph constructed a virtual reality that gave him a self-presence that was more real to him than the world that surrounded him. The tragedy of Glyph's death is that, according to Moore, "Language comes first. It's not that language grows out of consciousness. If you haven't got language, you can't be conscious" (Huie). Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define "media hybrids" as "the affiliations of technical artifacts, rhetorical justifications, and social relationships" (61). Language, as a medium, is a type of technology, perhaps the first technology that helps foster connection to others. Sadly, without mastering rhetoric, Glyph could not justify her existence and decided to sacrifice herself for the person she cared about the most. Glyph knew that Halo could be part of a discourse that Glyph would never know or be a part of. Glyph felt it was better for Halo to exist there.

Glyph could not remediate her silence with her speech, and, therefore, could not justify her existence or engage in social relations. Unable to construct a media hybrid, she would have also been unable to "reform reality" (61). Bolter and Grusin claim that media hybrids are "as real as the objects of science" and are "an alternative . . . world" that provides "a locus of presence and meaning" (61). Thus, as implausible as it sounds, virtual worlds can provide a sense of the physical realness of geography, though there is much more credibility in the idea that physical geography can create virtual worlds with a sense of the real. Unfortunately, Glyph could not locate a reliable and stable imaginative world by which she could attempt to understand the real one.

In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida discusses Rosseau to explain part of Derrida's own theories on the subject of grammatology. One particular passage that Derrida quotes from Rousseau's "Essay on the Origins of Languages" seems apropos to this discussion about the relation of narrative language to empathy: "'We develop social feeling only as we become enlightened. Although pity is native to the human heart, it would remain eternally quiescent unless it were activated by imagination. How are we moved to pity? By getting outside ourselves and identifying with a being who suffers'" (qtd. in *Derrida* 182). Derrida believes that perception should also be considered an important part of constructing empathy. This contrasts with Cartesian perspectivalism, in which the observer obtains a controlled confinement that is not empathetic in any way; it is merely a scientific, calculable gaze arguably having no emotional response to the object.

Derrida acknowledges the impossibility of pure objectivity, but he also proposes that one's voice (one's speaking, communicative enunciations) is also the key to opening doors to others: "The difference between the glance and the voice is the difference between animality and humanity. Transgressing space, mastering the outside, placing souls in communication, voice transcends natural animality" (196). Imagination, to both Rousseau and Derrida, has a responsibility. Derrida seems to argue that the first step in empathy is to create a voice for the individual so that he can then communicate his empathy. Communication, the word, is also the technology by which one can imagine and receive empathy in a relationship of reciprocity.

Glyph's last action in *The Ballad of Halo Jones* is his sacrificing himself to destroy a robotic dog - seemingly infected with an electronic virus that turned him murderous – that was in the process of killing Halo Jones. In essence, Glyph, instead of giving in to her animal nature, redeems it through her martyrdom. Moore suggests that Glyph is the character, in a linguistic sense that allows society to be decoded. This one small glyph of empathy is the most important thing to communicate so that others can gain autonomy and self-possession. He argues that this cannot be done without empathy, because empathy is what allows one to fully perceive another person and grant them their own right to equal, reciprocal opportunity for self-possession.

In the introduction to the collected edition of *The Ballad of Halo Jones*, Moore dedicates that volume to "that unforgettable character who made the strip's continuation possible" (4). The last scene of the section of the book featuring Glyph

depicts a massive statue with only the name plate left uncompleted; the person who is

tasked with chiseling the name into the statue cannot remember her name: "Uh . . .

Gryph? Glump? Gloop . . . ?" (*Halo Jones* 64). Glyph is the one character in all of Alan

Moore's work that readers connected with the most, as evidenced by the outpouring of

letters and calls that Moore received about the character (Khoury 62).

Because Glyph was not forgotten by comic book readers, Moore stated that this

wave of letters caused him to understand the power of creating comic narratives that

advocated for those who had no voice or were in pain. This caused Moore to

understand his readers on an emotional level that he had not quite experienced before.

This outpouring of communication from readers gave Moore an empathetic

understanding of his audience and his responsibility as a writer: "[T]he letters were

hard to read . . . I didn't want to think of anyone out there hurting and alone, and I

didn't know whether actually doing that character helped or made the pain sharper"

(qtd in Khoury 62). Neverthless, he found that such moments are "the most human

moments" (63). He says he was finally galvanized by the connection with readers and

would never forget that his business frustrations paled in comparison to the way

"humans knock me out. I'm astounded by them" (63). This kind of interaction forms the

author and his audience into a corporate body that does not objectify the individual.

Instead, a culture is built around bringing others a similar emotional response.

Glyph was unable to understand the metaphysical and abstract notions of

identity, but she was also disjointed from any sense of a physical, bodily self;

consequently, he could only continually form and reform himself in a painful cycle of suffering. The only place where she attained a temporary physical presence was in the hospital where the procedures were conducted. As hands moved around and traced her physicality she, for a moment, attained a stable form.

Kelly Tian et. al. interpret Michael Foucault's ideas of suffering in relation to technology as the "intentional focus of technologies that advance understanding of the person's body separate from the individual's person," a process that "omits the relevance of the human suffering experience and ultimately disempowers and objectifies" the person (238). The fixed, technological gaze makes suffering irrelevant until it is remediated into another medium. The suffering finds significance through recognition of the bodily pain, especially when shared with others through an appropriate media. The gaze focused on a person while they are suffering, divorced from a concurrent sympathetic or empathic understanding, does not privilege a more inclusive view of the suffering body's personhood. The possibility of a more empathetic or sympathetic response might occur when the images of that suffering attain material form (e.g., pictures, poems, narrative descriptions)

Boltin and Grusin find some relevance in remediation as a way "to heal, to restore health" (59). They define one type of remediation as "[r]emediation as reform" that has the ability to "rehabilitate" (56). To accomplish this, the individual must be seen in way that "illuminates victims' pain or suffering" instead of dehumanizing the subject with "ubiquitous monitoring" (Tian et. al. 240). A remediation that might accomplish this

would take a person's history and memories and remediate, creating a newer version of them that would privilege ontology. Rather than a gaze that confines, an inclusive collection of attributes could be gathered that would allow a person the chance of choosing or eliding these attributes into to a new type of liberating worldview that would shatter the singular gaze.

Moore has created his own alternative model that provides a holistic vision of a person within a physical space that privileges the bodily aspect as well as the person's metaphysical nature. This model, what Moore calls psychogeoraphy, it is also a measure of the remediation of habitable space and identity. This helps the individual understand the consequences and possibilities of the very geography they have lived in. Moore defines psychogeography as "acknowledgement that we, as human beings, embed aspects of our psyche . . . in the landscape that surrounds us. On a deeper level, given that we do not have direct awareness of an objective reality but, rather, only have awareness of our own perceptions . . . psychogeography is possibly the only kind of geography that we can actually inhabit ("Alan Moore and Psychogeography"). This is a mentally constructed space that Moore feels changes the physical world when the virtual world is, as it were, playing inside the person's mind.

Moore offers the idea of a "web of sightlines linking geographic points into a web . . . of ideas" ("Alan Moore and Psychogeography"). Durer's grid demands stasis as the object viewed is transfigured into a set of fragmented, framed images. Bolter and Grusin's idea of a locus that centralizes all points fixes the object in one central space.

Moore suggests, instead, "a landscape . . . where time is real . . . and one is free to wander anywhere on that terrain . . . of the recorded past or even the projected future" ("Alan Moore and Psychogeography"). The geography one has inhabited and still inhabits is a point of departure with infinite possibilities of movement upon an infinite number of paths.

Moore compares psychogeography to Mandelbrot sets. Mandelbrot sets are images of "progressively ever-finer recursive detail" ("What is the ADD"). The image is incessantly moving, all the while retaining its shape. Alan Moore borrows the idea to inform his philosophy of psychogeography to represent a type of infinite connectedness of webs where individuals gain autonomy. This autonomy comes from each place in the web being a unique space where unique individuals live that is not, however, disconnected from other unique individuals and the spaces they inhabit. These concepts directly inform Moore's narratives, and it advocates for the recognition of infinite imaginative possibilities in the consideration of one individual:

> His entire life circles around that house . . . up there on top of the hill. It's his geography. And his parents' before him . . . this is the thing, it doesn't matter how dull or grey or forgettable you think that these little urban corners are . . . if you look at them with an incisive eye, with a sympathetic enough eye, then you can find imagery and words and concepts that are impossibly rich considering that this is talking about one man . . . We are products of the place that we spring from. It's like in

fractal mathematics. There's the Mandelbrot set . . . There are smaller

sub-sets . . . called Julia sets. They look pretty much the same, but they

are all uniquely different and their individual properties are caused by the

point in the Mandelbrot set from which they originate, and I think that is

true of human beings as well. ("Alan Moore Interview")

Moore's work goes far beyond *mimesis* of typical comic book traditions in an attempt to

construct new, more complex methods of storytelling that places the subject in an

exceedingly referential point from which they can proceed toward infinities of

revelations and possibilities. His narratives are also narratives of transformation,

advocacy, and the revelation (rather than the creation) of order from chaos.

According to Mandelbrot in "Fractals and the Art of Roughness," the figure

operates according to "simple rules without end" which do not result in fixedness.

Rendering the recursive movement in words rather than mobile images is difficult, but a

possibly understandable description is watching a continuous flow of water viewed from

an extremely high bird's eye view; visually it seems to be a mobile image that constantly

replicates itself in its original form, because the water is constantly resupplied and

moves to a miniscule point that never fully disappears. Moore's fiction is informed with

a narrative structure that attempts to follow the movement and logic of Mandelbrot

fractals.

On the cover of the trade paperback version of Moore's *V for Vendetta*, V tips

the first domino in a long line of them. The domino metaphors and symbols might

suggest a teleological system within the work. When one domino is set in motion, it

becomes the cause of the necessary end of the last domino falling. But the work

suggests that there is no end result, no finality to one's actions. Given Moore's penchant

for demanding personal responsibility rather than allowing fascist structures to rid

people of their strength to resist it, it would not make sense for him to create such

teleological and linear narratives.

V, the protagonist of the work, riding the line between terrorist and anarchist

cannot be considered the cause of the events in *V for Vendetta*. One of the main

symbols in the text is the logarithmic spiral. But the image of the spiral is only apparent

near the very end of the story. It is followed by an image of a chiasmus at the conclusion

of the story in the very last panel. These images illustrate the narrative structure of the

work by using V as the point of departure to show how, ultimately, all of these

characters are placed in the backdrop of a totalitarian state from which they have to

struggle with their own sense of conviction for what they have contributed to this

government rather than what the government has done to them. (As will be shown

later, *V for Vendetta* is also a psychogeographical exploration of V and other characters

in the book.)

The first issue of the *V for Vendetta* comic book series displays a wraparound

cover in which both sides of the cover must be viewed simultaneously to attain the full

image: a spiral staircase, curving simultaneously upward and downward around a fixed, vertical pole. This suggests a predictable DNA strand or a spiral chain linking unique strands together to form a pattern of connectedness. The spiral staircase and V are all moving in counter directions; there are alternating black and white curving lines from the walls that seem to be propelled from the staircase by centrifugal force. Thus V is traveling in a movement that can take him in different directions depending on what kind of (literal) steps he takes. The potential movements, though, are represented as possibilities that are orderly but expansive.

V is the beginning point of the logarithmic spiral that whirls outward as the tale continues. Logarithmic spirals do not change shape as they spiral outward, and V's personality, purpose, or agenda in the book does not seem to, either. This is because he has already gone through the process of liberation and is now extending this to others. Coupled with another symbolic image, the chiasmus, the narrative structure of the text takes on this shape and form.

The chiasmus, a criss-cross structure of intersecting rays that continue infinitely. Haun Saussy states that "'irreducible' is the pivot-word of the chiasmus" (236). A chiasmus might seem a confining image forcing lines to a fixed point on a linear plane. But the chiasmus is formed of rays that criss-cross, intersect for a moment in time (maintaining their unique distinct from the other ray), and then continue along their trajectory into infinity. The chiasmus is also very similar to the infinite recursive nature of a Mandelbrot. Like a Mandelbrot, the chiasmus is larger in the foreground and

recedes into the background. Its images usually do not take on linear shapes, but continue along a pattern of shapes that start at a point and move in certain predictable directions without end.

In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, discussing discourse, calls the chiasmus "the irreducible hybridity of all langauges. She also states that it has been misunderstood as a reductiveness that can only be applied to rational meanings" (9). Spivak suggests that there are closed and constrained systems of language that incorrectly only allow for a finite amount of meaning. They are this way because they do not consider irrational uses of language. Though the narrative in *V for Vendetta* follows a logical pattern, the incidents in the book go against the logic that has dominated the characters' lives until this point. V shows the other characters that they have infinite amounts of possibility.

The plot of *V for Vendetta* reifies these patterns in its narrative which is one of self-discovery by understanding one's place in the Mandelbrotian (if I may coin the term) flow of narrative events. The book seems to begin in chaos. V saves Evey Hammond from being gang raped, and then V proceeds to blow up the houses of Parliament. The images before these events are captured in alternating panels showing Evey and V at their makeup tables, straightening their clothing, then looking at their faces in mirrors. These actions are followed by Evey and V arriving on a rooftop at exactly the same time. Evey's and V's actions are replicated precisely, suggesting

connectedness even though they had no knowledge of one another before these

events.

     V for Vendetta is a story about story-telling as a way to fashion the self. V

initiates Evey's self-construction by asking her questions about her life and the place she

grew up in. He explains that no one exists in isolation and that everyone might take on a

different role than expected in spite of exterior pressures or willful decision: "Everybody

is special. Everybody is a hero, a lover, a fool, a villain" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 26). The

narrative begins to evolve the characters' intellectual capacity to make connections in

order to shape their worldview. Narrative gives the individual a way to construct their

life. Once the baseline narrative has been established, they can then make choices and

exercise their imagination to see what their life can be. But there has to be a formula

that allows them to consider how the ramifications of their lives are revealed. *V for

Vendetta* suggests that there is no painless way to do this.

     V's home is called the Shadow Gallery, and it implies that the self exists in a

shadowy state until one finds the clarity necessary to be self-sufficient. For Evey to find

this clarity, V has to place her in a fictional replication of the authoritarian world, the

fascist state of a government called Norsefire that she lives in. He feels he has to do this,

because the world of Norsefire is all she understands. V has constructed rooms that

replicate the hospital where he was incarcerated. Evey's ensuing torture and

dehumanization at V's hand also replicates the experiences of her mother and father, V,

the scores of people institutionalized in hospitals, and the entire population living in constant fear of arrest and imprisonment.

He also mimics the Draconian legal system created by Norsefire. Evey is given the chance to sign papers containing false accusations against V in exchange for a pardon (which would save her from a death sentence). She refuses because she finally does not want to follow a script that others would impose upon her. Once she can refuse to follow others dictates even in the face of death, V asks her, "Then there's nothing left to threaten with, is there? . . . You are free" and "transfigured forever" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 162 and 171-2). Moore suggests that self-understanding is a painful and burdensome process. Yet it is a necessary one for learning the skill of self-possession.

When Evey asks V why he could place her in this makeshift prison and confine her there, V responds: "I didn't put you in a prison, Evey. I just showed you the bars . . . You were born in a prison. You've been in a prison so long, you no longer believe there's a world outside. You're afraid because freedom is terrifying" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 170-1). Evey finally understands that an idea, a belief, and one's values are more important than materialism or safety: "You were in a cell, Evey. They offered you a choice between the death of your principles and the death of your body . . . You said you'd rather die. You faced the fear of your own death, and you were calm and still" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 171). Evey understands that she could not find her own identity until she was completely rid of the doctrine Norsefire had forced on her. She also

needed to live confidently instead of living in fear. V's vision continues to spiral out to others, changing reality one person at a time.

Moore suggests that freedom is actually an imagined state that has to be narrated for an individual to understand it. A person's story must be told for them to find their own place in the world. A story imposed by others will only allow a person to be what others want them to be. In *V for Vendetta,* V is the only character, in the beginning at least, who has self-possession and lives by and with his own choices*.* But V's actions in the book were not actions of complete self-volition. His actions were inspired by another person in the hospital. He needed help to break free from the mental and physical prison Norsefire put him in. His actions were a response to a letter passed to him by another inmate of the hospital. Valerie, the writer of the letter, expresses the absolute importance of the written narrative that she has inscribed on a single inch of such mundane material as toilet tissue:

> I shall die here. Every inch of me shall perish. Except one. An inch. It's small and it's fragile, and it's the only thing in the world that is worth having. We must never lose it, or sell it, or give it away. We never let them take it from us . . . I love you. I hope that you escape this place. I hope that the world turns and that things get better . . . I know every inch of this cell. This cell knows every inch of me. Except one. (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 179-80)

The letter is both empathetic and protective in nature. Compared to Durer's grid, there would be one small square that the observer missed and, therefore, unintentionally freeing it, which allowed the observed entity to take back a small part of itself. This remaining singular part attains a status of the most significant and valuable part.

Valerie also cautions against selling this inch of freedom. In one way, she is speaking of employment. Norsefire controls people by attaching all jobs to the government; if someone wants more than their basic needs met, they have to work for the government. She is also talking about the media industry she once used to work in. Valerie had been a famous actress who was forced into the hospitals because she was homosexual. She had taken roles of heterosexual women for employment. Selling scripts and life stories were also part of that industry. She does not want her story to become a melodramatic production like the kind of films she once starred in. She wants the power of this story to remain undiluted.

The narrative contained in this letter is undoubtedly the one that convinces Evey to make her own decisions which allows her to resist imposition by adding one word to the lexicon of her life, which is "No." Valerie's letter ends with the notation "X." When Evey is asked to sign a paper of lies about V, she is asked to sign the spot "where we've put the little cross" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 161). Again, these patterns of the chiasmus are stations along the way that represent moments of decision and connectedness with other points within the text that continue a narrative and symbolic recursiveness. Evey

answers with newly determined self-discourse, and the confluence of these notations, meaning such different things (a kiss, the symbol of a lie) is represented by a chiasmus.

V's philosophy has been accused of being anarchistic, but a more credible interpretation is one of a determined response that has to be equal in reaction to the government's actions taken against himself and others. In a soliloquy he broadcasts on the government airwaves he has hijacked, V discusses the Norsefire government as one that has overrun the entirety of a population's lives. V attempts to explain how the Norsefire government has dehumanized and disempowered nearly every citizen:

> The day you commenced your employment, swinging down from the trees . . . "Where do I start sir," you asked, plaintively . . . I recall my exact words: "There's a pile of dinosaur eggs over there . . . Get sucking" . . . And it's no good blaming the drop in work standards on bad management either . . . You gave them the power to make your decisions for you . . . You encouraged these malicious incompetents . . . All you had to say was "No." (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 113)

Because they did not want to make decisions on their own, people are told their purpose in life and not allowed to discover it on their own. People are not given knowledge they need to equip themselves with so as to make good decisions and learn good judgment. And, typically, the work people are given is demeaning. And, yet, the

force for change must come from the people since they are the ones who allowed it to begin with.

Alan Moore views society, though, as a cooperative process which takes a considerable amount of courage and determination to make meaningful. It would be, perhaps, too easy to think that Moore would characterize the Norsefire government as evil. He has stated that what is termed evil is simply another version of the values and beliefs that everyone might be susceptible to. Therefore, a judgmental attitude toward people in the Norsefire government needs to be tempered with the acknowledgement that there is something of these evil traits in everyone:

> [T]here's a kind of mirror that is going on here that is probably applicable to a wide number of social institutions. The people or classes that we demonize, and that we treat with fear and loathing, respond accordingly. We are projecting a manner of behavior upon them, as well as responding to a manner of behavior that's already there. When we're looking at the flaws in their personality that we recognize, the fact that we can recognize them suggests that they are . . . a version of flaws that we have ourselves. (Berbegal)

Moore applies such empathy in understanding Nazism, the most vilified government in history, and, yet, suggests that there is much to be learned if one is to understand the Nazi government's human element:

I can't just portray Nazis as "bad guys," because to do so would be "contributing to the myth that they were somehow separate from the rest of humanity . . . The Nazis were just ordinary human beings who got caught up in something very bad . . . This is not to excuse their behavior . . . it's simply to point out that it doesn't do you any service to demonize any group of people. It's much better to try to understand them from the inside (Berbegal).

Moore does not support such easy and pat dichotomies. *V for Vendetta* is an attempt to know and understand all of the characters. Humanity cannot be separated into groups of people standing on each side of a line. Life is much more complex than that. *V for Vendetta* shows that people can be deprogrammed through empathy and understanding. Reinforcing the perception that someone is bad or evil simply causes them to exhibit those traits in a worse way.

Eric Finch, Chief of New Scotland Yard and Minister of Investigations for Norsefire, is tasked with hunting V down. Finch comes to understand V by going through the psychogeographical process which takes Finch back to the very spot of V's transformation from whomever he was into his new persona of V. Finch goes to the hospital and takes LSD to get out of his own mind so that he can "think the way he [V] thinks . . . the tiniest amounts can alter anything" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 210). He walks through barbed wire fences and begins to see the facility for what it truly is: "So this is

the toilet we flushed all those people down . . . These must be the ovens, ovens for

people. People ovens" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 211). The corpses he sees are

manifestations of physical presence, objects he cannot deny; he sees people's remains

that are just as real as his own body is.

Visions of people from many different races rush up to him smiling, open arms to

embrace, they kiss him on the cheek, and he realizes that the world has been eradicated

of the joy that comes from love of other people, and that Norsefire has reduced the

world to one race that limits the beauty and joy Finch finds in diversity: "Look, they're

all happy. They're all smiling. God, it's been so long . . . I'd forgotten how rich the color

of your skin was, a thousand special blends of coffee . . . I've missed your voices and

your walk, your food, your clothes, your dyed pink hair . . . my friends at . . . the gay

pride marches" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 213). All of these people begin to disappear just

as they had in life when Norsefire killed them. He asks them to come back, saying

"Come back . . . I love you" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 213). He wanders into the camp and

then is taken prisoner, and he is indoctrinated. He is forced into the camp, taken away

from his family, brutalized, and placed in the same cell that V was locked in. On the

floor, he begins to make a geometric shape he does not understand. Literally inhabiting

the same exact space that V lived in, he sees V as the central point of this place and

inductively makes suppositions about V. This leads Finch to understand that it was V

who was responsible for being placed in the prison because of the choices he made or

the choices he allowed others to make for him.

Finch still cannot understand the fuller ramifications of "this mad pattern" and studies it until he sees that the pattern finally takes on an orderly form; then his revelation about his own life comes to him: "Who imprisoned me here? Who keeps me here? Who can release me? Who's controlling and constraining my life, except . . . Me? . . . I'm free" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 213). Jacques Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, states that "Cruelty is not positive wickedness. The disposition to do evil finds its resource only in the other, in the illusory representation of evil that the other seems disposed to do to me" (Derrida "Of Grammatology" 188). Finch finally understands that the people who were massacred were killed because the government feared them.

They feared those who were different, those who were of different races, religions, or sexual preference. Those who desired racial purity began to believe these people were evil. Derrida quotes Rosseau to underscore the importance of taking time to consider who others truly are: "'[H]e who has never been reflective is incapable of being merciful or just or pitying . . . He who imagines nothing is aware only of himself; he isolated in the midst of mankind'" (qtd. in Derrda "Of Grammatology" 188). Finch's ability to reflect upon V's life caused him to see that there was no evil perpetrated by these people who were killed; Norsefire did not arrest criminals. They arrested and killed people who were different. Having been deprogrammed, he is no longer locked into the creeds of Norsefire that constrained his ability to have his own identity.

Finch tries to communicate his experience to his protégé, Dominic Stone. Finch knows that V has given the citizens the same experience that V gave Evey and him.

Dominic knows that revolt is simply a matter of time, and he encourages Dominic to choose his own way out of the situation instead of continuing to follow Norsefire's directives. Finch tells Dominic "I'm following my own orders now and getting out before everything blows" (Moore, *V for Vendetta* 252). Dominic, unable to do this on his own, becomes part of the spiral reiteration of Valerie's and V's gift to others when he is captured by Evey and taken to the Shadow Gallery.

The book ends with a return to the stairs that formed a double helix on the cover of the first issue of the series. The last image is a view of the stairs from the very top of the staircase. The image of the staircase that first seemed slightly confusing forms a perfect logarithmic spiral when seen from above. The spiral symbolizes the transfigurative nature of narrative as well as a mathematically perfect progression in life even amid chaos. Evey follows the stairs, physically - instead of merely symbolically - reinstituting V's mission into the perfect progression he created. He planned to transform his closed society into one where everyone has the freedom to choose their own actions.

Fig. 5, David Lloyd, comic illustration from

V for Vendetta, Panel 1 (NY: DC, 1989; 2).

V for Vendetta ends with a chiasmus. All things have come together by the end

of the story, though much originally seemed torn apart. Where Evey said she would not

kill for V earlier in the story, she has now killed many by sending V's subway train filled

with explosives, his "Viking funeral," to Downing Street. Finch walks down a street at the

end of the book, leaving the world of Norsefire behind to find his own place in the world

now. Where Finch could not understand V at all in the beginning of the work, he now

not only understands V, but is beginning to understand the importance of the pattern

of V's life that represents respect for human rights and the freedom that can be gained

through self-possession. Originally controlled by a system where no choices were

allowed, these characters now have the right to make autonomous, self-willed choices.

Through empathy and understanding, the characters in *V for Vendetta* have formed a

shape to their life that they can follow and, in a sense, own. They fought for the one,

small inch of personal choice, freedom, and self-determination that can be replicated

exponentially when they find others to share it with.

Fig. 6, David Lloyd, comic illustration from *V for Vendetta*, Panel 2 (NY:

DC, 1989; 31).

Moore's work on DC's *Swamp Thing* utilizes similar geometric patterns but

applies them to a context that is much more verbal than visual, establishing a discursive

model of connectedness. Moore started working on *Swamp Thing* for DC Comics

because he saw "a flawed premise that was preventing the character from evolving" (qtd in Khoury 84). Gregory L. Ulmer, in his essay, "The Object of Post-Criticism," describes part of Derrida's deconstructive project as "remotivation": "[D]econstructive writing *traces* the surface of the object of study . . . looking for 'flaws' or 'faults'" (105). A longstanding flaw within the premise behind the character's origin is that Swamp Thing, a vegetable creature, somehow still has the mind of Alec Holland, and, therefore, is always trying to regain Holland's humanity, a humanity the creature never should have had in the first place. Being completely vegetable, the creature should not have had a mind. Yet without any explanation of the process from which identity loss can occur in a two-footed, walking vegetable, the previous writers kept Swamp Thing in a continual state of confusion, trying to figure whether he was the Swamp Thing or Alec Holland.

Moore started a reconstructive project of *The Swamp Thing*'s past narratives to work with what he perceived as narrative flaws to create a more legitimized future for the character. Moore also needed to corroborate his idea of the character with the commercial desires of the corporation funding the publishing of the comic book: [I]t was obvious to even the slowest reader that Alec Holland – Swamp Thing – was never going to find some way to turn himself back to Alec Holland because the moment he did, that would be the end of the series. (qtd. in Khoury 85-86). Since they couldn't find a way to fix this problem – and because they obviously could not simply stop the series – writers had continued stringing the fans along in an illogical story.

Moore, however, decided that breaking from the commercial norm in a way that was completely opposite of readers' expectations by supposedly killing Swamp Thing was the only possibility of redeeming the character. Not only did this disrupt the illogical notions of the character that complacent readers were caught in and did not question, it was also his way using commercial ends to his own advantage to provide more possibilities for the character than what a mere swamp monster seems to lend itself to.

Swamp Thing is filled with chaos, but the narrative blends the chaos with a sense of security. Through literally sharing the same language, the same discourse, characters are brought together until they are seen for who they really are. Moore creates situations where these characters have to make the best use of who they already are. They are forced to define themselves by comparing and contrasting themselves with others. This discourse seems to lock them into confining parameters. In this work, Moore suggests that the interweaving verbal narratives (rather than the creation of a self-narrative) intersect at different points that create the opportunity for these characters to consider themselves and others so that they can escape from the dissolution that chaos threatens them with.

The first part of the story, "The Anatomy Lesson," creates a narrative of chiastic structure. Once a man, Jason Woodrue (also known as the Floronic Man) created a chemical that turned himself into a plant-human hybrid. Alec Holland, on the other hand, had created chemicals that, when they blew up, killed him (they believe). Woodrue conducts an autopsy on Swamp Thing after soldiers believe they have killed

him. The autopsy gives the Floronic Man a chance to come full circle with the conditions of his own creation: "Since the bio-chemical fluke that had transformed me, I had longed for a chance to examine another human-vegetable hybrid. I could learn so much. So much about myself" (Moore, "Anatomy Lesson" 6). Through Swamp Thing's death, Woodrue has gained knowledge that allows him to feel whole while Swamp Thing is in pieces.

Death constantly confronts these characters, and they are always creating discourse about their various relations to death and life, nearness and distance, and gain and loss. These characters are able to define themselves in opposition or connection to others. Gregory L. Ulmer, in his essay, "The Object of Post-Criticism," describes part of Derrida's deconstructive project as an attempt to resurrect, to fill object with meaning (what Derrida terms "remotivation"), by placing objects in relation to their opposites:

> [D]econstructive writing *traces* the surface of the object of study . . . looking for "flaws" or "faults" – the opening of joints, articulations, where the text might be dismembered. The deconstruction is accomplished in fact by borrowing the very terms utilized by the host work itself . . . and remotivating them. The trace is the first opening of the first exteriority . . . the enigmatic relation of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, "spatial" and "objective" exteriority . . . we know as the most familiar thing in the world (170).

Ulmer suggests that there is an enigmatic quality to this process, but in Moore's

narratives, the process becomes predictable and ultimately fulfilling. It is in relation to

death that the characters in *Swamp Thing* find the will to survive and, consequently,

learn how to live.

Woodrue's objectification of Swamp Thing allows him to see an object exterior

to himself from which he can borrow knowledge that allows him to close the space

between them and understand both of them. Thus, he finally finds the puzzle piece that

both he and Swamp Thing have been missing. He discovers that Swamp Thing is entirely

vegetable though he has grown plant structures that mimic human lungs, tissue, organs,

bones, etc. He also discovers that Swamp Thing, in spite of his vegetable nature, took on

Holland's consciousness as Holland decomposed in the waters of a swamp. This also

reveals, in reverse, how Jason Woodrue, a human, became completely plant.

Moore explains how Swamp Thing did this by referencing the experiments of

Robert Thompson and James V. McConnell in which a planarian worm was taught to run

a maze. Thompson and McConnell cut the worm up and fed it to other worms; the other

worms were able to run the maze. The results and implications and the way Moore

applies them in the comic are intriguing: "The implication is that consciousness and

intelligence can be passed on in foodstuff" (Moore, "Anatomy Lesson" 10). Moore uses

the idea to create a scenario in which Alec Holland's decomposing body was eaten up,

as it were, by the swamp; the swamp then replicated the body from the biological

knowledge, if you will, that it gained during the transfer of Holland's body to its own (a

body of water).

Admittedly Moore only has this half right, because the Planarian worm

experiment that seemed to prove mental development under these conditions involved

electric shock and lights used to train the worms, suggesting they ran in certain patterns

to avoid pain, not because they understood how to run the maze; these experiments

also never produced results in other organisms, questioning the validity of the

experiments (Kentridge "Investigations"). In 2013, however, Moore was proven a bit

correct when Tal Shomrat and Michael Levin showed that planarian worms exhibit

evidence of long-term memory retrieval after regenerating a new head (Shomrat 3800).

Whatever the case, Moore uses the Planarian worm experiment to explore how

intelligence and experience are passed on in narratives, comic book or otherwise. The

ability to run a maze also speaks to avenues of escaping confusion. There was a

necessary sacrifice of one organism, however, to pass on one's essence or intelligence

to another. These elements are in Moore's comic book stories, also.

Jacques Derrida discusses how life and death are in a relationship where they

have to contend with one another, that they have to understand the other's logic even

if they do not follow it (71). Death represents absence, and life occurs in the present,

and these two elements define one another. The differences between them clearly

show what they are not. He states that "without the non-presence of the other

inscribed within the meaning to the present, without the relationship of death as the concrete structure of the living present" there is a need to "strive toward the reduction of the trace" (71). The trace is a sign of the absence of a presence, meaning that it is a necessary state that spurs one to overcome the absence. In other words, as everyone has ever experienced, there is emptiness (an empty feeling, as it were), that has to be filled. Rather than being reduced to this state of the trace, one has to find an opposing force to define oneself against. In Moore's *Swamp Thing* comics, he creates these oppositions by using chiastic narratives that criss-cross personalities and life circumstances against their opposites. Eventually the chiastic structure leads one out of the chaos of opposition, allowing one to regain presence, by facing the possibility of death and absolute absence.

In the very beginning of this series, Swamp Thing is learning about himself, (exactly the same process as Woodrue learned about himself) by considering his connection to his arch enemy, who has died in a plane crash. Walking toward the wreckage, he realizes that he is actually searching for a lost part of himself, ultimately realizing that there is no separation of the subject (himself) and the object (Arcane). Looking at Arcane allows him to create a system of binary opposites with himself and Arcane as its two terms (numerous ellipses from original text):

> I had to come, Arcane. I had to be sure . . . You're dead . . . I don't think I
> realized before . . . how important you were to my life, Arcane. I don't
> think I really understood . . . before this moment. You were my opposite.

. . . We defined each other, didn't we? By understanding you . . . I came

that much closer . . . to understanding myself. And now . . . you're dead.

Really dead. And what . . . am I going to do? (Moore, "Loose Ends" 2-3)

Swamp Thing, in opposition to Arcane, has only been able to define himself in an

adversarial relationship with Arcane. Swamp Thing has no self-identity at this point and

is deadened by Arcane's death.

The chiastic structure of the story begins with Swamp Thing's identification with

and need for Arcane. Swamp Thing cannot fully understand himself without having

contact with Arcane, even if that contact is oppositional. Woodrue (the Floronic Man)

cannot understand himself until he has contact with Swamp Thing. They both converge

in the same physical space owned by the character General Sutherland who hired

Woodrue to conduct the experiments on Swamp Thing.

Having escaped prison, Woodrue is a fugitive, and Sutherland uses this to his

advantage. Once he has gained the information he needed, Sutherland tells Woodrue

that he has arranged termination papers for him and will call to have him arrested. The

tower housing Sutherland's business venture has now become his imprisonment. He

goes to his room and drinks a glass of wine. He promises "blood in extraordinary

quantities" (Moore, "Anatomy Lesson" 1). He also says that it is raining: "Plump, warm

summer rain covers the sidewalks with leopard spots" (Moore, "Anatomy Lesson" 1).

One metaphor seems to play upon the other.

Swamp Thing provides part of the blood Woodrue refers to. Swamp Thing, having revived within the building that was his imprisonment (locked in a cryogenic freezer), is now free (which is an exact reversal of Woodrue who was free to come and go as he chose but is now imprisoned there). Swamp Thing searches out Sutherland and finds him as well as the report that finally explains what he is (vegetable) and what he isn't (human). The notes send Swamp Thing into a rage, and he kills Sutherland.

The rest of the story moves outside of the confines of the Sutherland building into the general populace of a town in Louisiana. Two characters named Liz and Dennis are literally sitting in the wreckage of a mangled car. After working their way out, they leave the wreckage and walk toward town, Dennis talking about "the shadows that have gotten into our lives" ("Loose" 6). Where Swamp Thing believes he and Arcane have come closer together, Liz and Dennis get into an argument and end up splitting apart. Yet Swamp Thing and Arcane had their own shadows as well.

Swamp Thing relates what he perceives as his monstrosity directly to his need to inhabit shadowy places: "The dark corners are being pushed back . . . We're things of the shadow . . . We could have belonged to . . . the fifteenth century. The world was . . . full of shadows then . . . full of monsters . . . Things like us . . . can't survive the light . . . Maybe the world has run out of room . . . for monsters" ("Loose Ends" 8). From that point on, many characters begin to speak of shadows and the light that dispels them. Liz Tremayne is described as being "used to taking her sunlight a little more diluted" (Moore, "Loose Ends" 6). Her boyfriend, Dennis, talks about how they need to "get

some sun, drive out some of the shadows that have gotten into our lives" (Moore,

"Loose Ends" 6). An anonymous townsman asks soldiers who have been tasked with

finding Swamp Thing whether or not he can help them with the "monster;" he

immediately asks, "Say, you need a hand with those searchlights, son?" ("Loose Ends"

9). Abigail Arcane, another character, whose boyfriend Matt Cable has been possessed

by Arcane's spirit, walks into their room and asks, "How about a little light in here?",

and then goes on to explain that she thought he was causing "all those monsters and

horrors and things" (Moore, "Loose Ends" 9-10).

The narrative takes its chiasmic structure full course, extending the same

chiasmus to other characters: characters who thought their relationships were dead

find they need each other to live later in the story; Abigail Arcane, believing she had fled

the dark shadows of her uncle Arcane's world (through his death in the plane crash),

realizes that there are many shadows left in humanity when her boyfriend, Matt, shows

signs of Arcane's evil nature. Swamp Thing realizes that Arcane's death breeds life.

Arcane's evil resurfaces in Matt because Arcane's energy has been dispelled now that he

has died and found a new host to live in.

Quite a bit of the text focuses on light that exposes characters to the realities

around them as well as to their own inner natures. Eventually these things invert, and

the process, throughout the *Swamp Thing* series begins again. Benoit Mandelbrot has

described Mandelbrot sets as moving "from the monstrous to the very real" ("Fractals").

Toward the end of this series of events, Jason Woodrue is shown to have gone from the

real (a man) to the monster (a villainous plant monster). Although this is how he became the Floronic Man to begin with, he is now trying to understand who is metaphysically and becomes practically schizophrenic in doing so. Where Swamp Thing was trying to figure out what he is, the Floronic Man is trying to figure out what he is.

Eventually these monsters, similar to the fractals described by Mandelbrot as monstrous, became more fully realized in Moore's work. They became realized in ways the reader, and even the characters, do not expect. Swamp Thing's self-imposed reality is thinking that he is Alec Holland. Jason Woodrue's self-imposed reality is still trying to connect with the human form he lost. In the end of a following issue, Woodrue denies his plant-based Floronic Man reality, exclaiming, "I run, a running man. . . not a plant. A man. I am a man. Jason Woodrue: *Doctor* Jason Woodrue. Jason. Call me Jason" (Moore, "Roots" 10). Swamp Thing's moment of clarity, something Woodrue never comes to in the end, is that he is not who he thought he was.

In a moment of insight standing literally in the light of the moon, he states his epiphany, in rather simple terms: "No. Not Alec" (Moore, "Another Green" 17). Swamp Thing has found an identity through seeing the Floronic Man lose his. The anatomy lesson has been reversed, and Swamp Thing, by studying the Floronic Man, understands that one's own identity is actualized through this cooperative, chaotic struggle between opposites.

The idea of ingesting and passing on the ideology or personalities of others is another metaphor for the infinite reiteration of cognizance narratives. *Swamp Thing* is a work that has an even more explosive and chaotic story line than *V for Vendetta* does. One of Moore's major narrative goals in the work centers on the need to express the possibility of seeing chaos as an orderly system:

> It struck me that it might actually be helpful to people if we kind of explain that the chaos that they could see around them – in their communities, in their lives, in their world – that chaos was purely a matter of perception. That if you could stand back far enough from this seemingly boiling tumult of events – that does appear chaotic, if you're in the middle of them – if you can get a little bit of distance, you might be able to see that what appears like chaos close-up was actually an expression of a very, very complex form of order. (Millidge 164)

Moore's idea of sense in the world is dependent on perspective. One has to escape the eye of the storm to step back and see its path, its progression from one place to another. Its pattern might make some kind of sense at that point that will actually come with a sense of relief.

Moore's ideas regarding media counter the ideas that Jenkins, Ford, and Green tout in *Spreadable Media*. Moore is concerned with media spreading, because most media is formulaic. The more it spreads, audiences become used to less viable media

productions. He feels that "most television programming . . . assume most people are

idiots . . . subnormal . . . They give them subnormal television programs and pretty soon

that's the normal audience" (qtd. in Khoury 63). Moore's position is to transform the

comic book as a genre into "something intelligent in plain language . . . that will raise

people's consciousness . . . to wake people up a bit, raise their expectations, get them to

demand more intelligent fare" (qtd in Khoury 63). He wants to pull them off the

"formulaic pap" (qtd. in Khoury 63). This reliance on standard media formats and clichés

that media corporations produce to keep the largest demographic buying their products

is anathema to Moore. He also feels it is unkind, irresponsible, and harmful. It keeps

people where the companies want them: stultified in front of a screen, interacting in

the roles which media prefabricates for them.

Moore understands that there is an underlying problem between genre

conventions and the media that perpetuate them. But the issue is not only media

corporations. Narratives of different genres have tendencies that are practically

entrenched and impassable. Henry John Pratt, in "Medium Specificity and the Ethics of

Narrative in Comics," has argued quite well that comic books and other media are

constrained by medium specificity; he also believes there is a way that media can also

evolve in its possibilities and potential through medium tendencies. He cites Noel

Carroll's definition of medium specificity and agrees with it:

> [M]edium specificity is the view that the media associated with a given
>
> art form (both its material components and the processes by which they

are exploited) (1) entail specific possibilities for and constraints on representation and expression, and (2) this provides a normative framework for what artists in that art form ought to attempt . . . the kinds of *narrative* that can be conveyed are both constrained and enabled by the medium itself. (98)

By this, he means that certain media tell different types of stories better and more effectively than others. They are also limited by aspects of the specific medium itself. Different media invite different narrative tendencies, and he states that comics are especially confined in ways that limit their potential of evolving even more drastically, which, in turn, makes it more difficult for creators to find original narrative possibilities to explore.

The ideas contained in *V for Vendetta* and *The Ballad of Halo Jones* are also the guiding principles of advocacy and empathy which Alan Moore modeled the shape of his career after he departed mainstream comics. The responsibility everyone has for others has been a major theme in his writing as well as his understanding of the role of the artist. These ideas are central to his perception that he is connected to the past of his family relations as well as his business relationships. He views all of those connections as formative and intimate for all those involved. He fully believes that his or anyone else's writing has a responsibility for opening intellectually progressive doors. He wants to inspire "the big creative leaps that people make when they twist a knob that nobody had noticed before" because "the effect can be marvelous, you know?" (Baker, *Alan*

Moore Spells 27). Moore attempts transformational narratives that are very different from those found in mainstream media.

Comics are produced with an eye to making the most profit possible from whatever readership for them that can be found. Comic book editor Sheldon Mayer reportedly demanded of his artists, "Don't give me Rembrandt, give me production" (quoted in Wright 2001: 22). Mainstream comics are not made for artistic fulfillment. They are produced to move as many copies of their publications as possible, and this explains why they are usually the cheapest, most disposable, and most instantly gratifying. The emphasis is on quantity over quality, and production via easily duplicated narrative formula that are instantly familiar to the readers. Moore states that the comic industry is currently trying to rehabilitate its image:

> The comic-book is keen to foster its new image of social responsibility (and economic viability) with a bombardment of admiring quotes and press-release-derived puff pieces in the media. This relatively recent change in its status has, it would appear, been also applied retroactively to best present a picture of the comic medium as something that has always been pro-social; that it has always been a cheery, populist expression of the status quo. (Moore, "Buster Brown at the Gates, Parts 1 & 2" 32).

This is why Moore has spent much of the last several years trying to revolutionize

current industry trends by bringing the comic book back to its original political

radicalism. He calls "comic narrative" an "incendiary gutter medium" that "can unsettle,

maybe even ultimately topple a tyrant" with "modes of expression and dissent" (Moore,

"Buster Brown at the Barricades, Parts 5 & 6" 38). Regarding writing, Moore says there

is an "imperative . . . moral or . . . political dimension to it" ("Alan Moore: V for

Vendetta" 7). And, in Moore's case, he talks about how important it is that he, at seven

years old, received his sense of a "moral code" from Superman comics: "Superman

wasn't real – he was incorruptible. You were seeing morals in their pure form. You

didn't see Superman secretly going out behind the back and lying and killing, which, of

course, most real-life heroes tend to be doing" (Millidge 23). Moore feels his task is to

help others resist their corruption, and he has tried to speak out against corrupting

influences and practices whenever he can.

Moore states that literature must practice "anarchy" that "begin[s] at home"

(Moore, "Fear" 4). His anarchy is one of "self-rule" that begins with the "unsettling

realisation that . . . we have no one to blame and no excuse for failing at the tasks we

set ourselves . . . because we have taken responsibility for our existence squarely on

ourselves" (Moore, "Fear" (4). And he says it takes courage to know that "freedom is a

scary if not unsettling thing" and still persevere (Moore, "Fear" 4). His idea of comic

books are those that teach the power of the individual through self-responsibility: "We

can't continue with the role of helpless and beleaguered victim in our own lives if we've

just decided we are that life's leader, are its heroines and heroes" (Moore, "Fear" 4). All of his fiction focuses on this goal.

He believes that any art that fails to do this is facile and, perhaps, worthless. He does not see any value in continuing to produce works that do not change or challenge readers' perceptions. Moore believes that art today, as it has been doing "since Paleolithic times," is a way of remediating the individual's perception of himself; art is a way "we constantly keep commenting upon our own cultural progress . . . It's a way of revising our ideas about ourselves and thus keep them moving" ("Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie"). He states that most art and comics in particular, have stagnated personal growth:

> Art should be an explosive substance that changes the world . . . radical and revolutionary elements are not an aberration . . . if they are not upsetting you in some way . . . if art doesn't surprise you, then all it is doing is reassuring you and reconfirming your prejudices. Most popular culture . . . is saying everything is okay [with] . . . the way you see the world. ("Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie")

He simply does not see how the world is stable or supportive of people when the world forces "compulsory purchases" because of "a low enough cold snap, a high enough gas bill . . . And the houses in which they've invested their City bonuses have increased the property value and therefore the homelessness" (Moore, "English Murder"). Fiction and

art is meant to deal with these real world problems rather than reify a simple and

puerile fantasy world.

Moore's ultimate cautionary tale, "The Bowing Machine," is a story about the

destruction of Japan due to the Western influence that overran it with the arrival of

General Matthew Perry. The tale proposes that the consequences of Perry's arrival in

the nineteenth century is still felt in the lives of those living in modern day Japan. The

narrator feels that Japan is now in a parasitic economic relationship with the United

States: "there is so much money rolling west . . . We turn to gold, and all our actions

seem grotesque . . . I read about a wood of suicides . . . Ambition and my country. These

have killed me" (Moore, "Bowing" 155). The narrator is not dead in a physical sense but,

rather, dead in a spiritual sense. At the end of the story, he explains how the

excruciating competition to succeed according to Western business paradigms brought

his living death about.

Perry and his crew began a pattern of humiliation by performing in blackface for

the Japanese, which appalled those who watched it; they understood that if the

Americans would despise one race enough to denigrate them in this way, they would do

so to another. And though the Japanese understood this, they took on these habits in

the name of business and gaining power through commerce: "Blackfaced, they abased

themselves to us, yet as an insult, as a condescension. Beaten, we defer to them and

imitate their ways, our mimicry more lucrative than their original. Thus bow our

enemies. Thus bow we in return" (Moore, "Bowing" 156). Self-abasement, self-

humiliation, and self-degradation become the model for upward mobility in the business community.

The narrator competes with another young executive in "obeisance, my humility" to excel to the point where their competition renders the other young executive to display "a politeness as carnivorous as my own. No hatred was more civilized" (Moore, "Bowing 157). The narrator begins to win favor, and the other young executive feels he must win at any cost. He decides to purchase a new device that has made the newspaper; the headline reads: "Japanese taught deference in bowing-machine" (Moore, "Bowing" 160). He becomes obsessed with the machine and uses it compulsively. The desire to win this competition of humiliation results in his taking off work frequently to use the machine, which undermines his goal. He feels, though, that once he has bodily taken on the ability to physically render deference more than anyone else in Japan that he will gain success in any company as well as in society.

The gradations of debasement on the machine start with "Wife" and "Child" and move on to "Company President," "The President," "The Emperor" (Moore, "Bowing" 161).
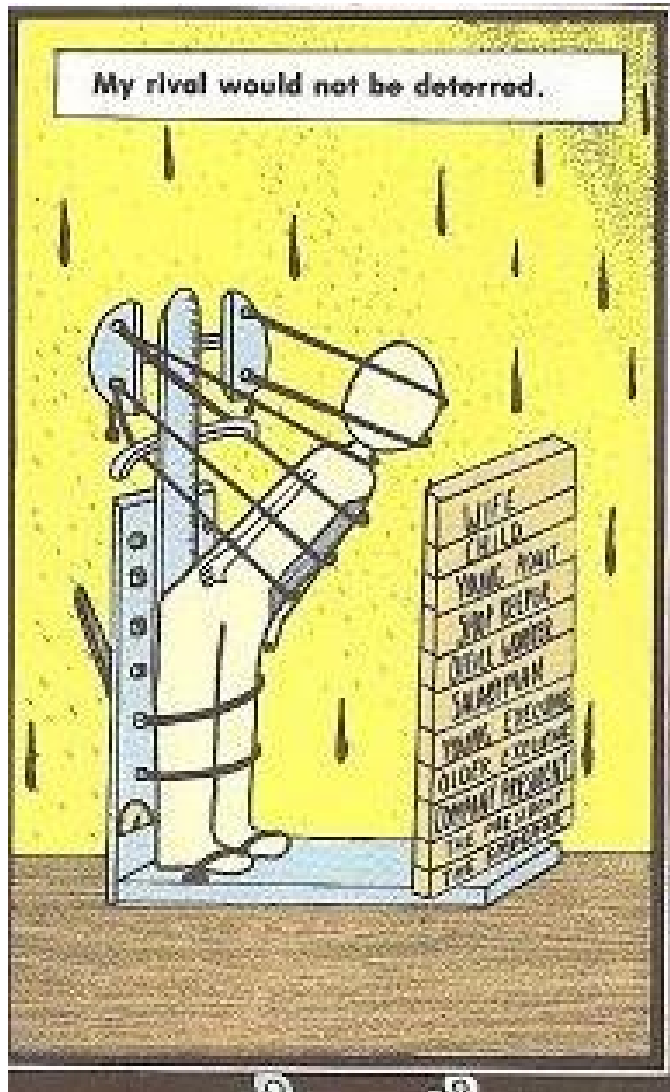
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Fig. 7, Mark Beyer, comic illustration from "The Bowing Machine"

(NY: RAW, 1991; 161).

When the younger executive cannot be found for two days, he is finally found in his apartment, his spine permanently disabled, and the narrator realizes he has won. At first, it thrills him to have beaten his rival: "The damage to his spine was irreversible. The glee!" (Moore, "Bowing" 162). Eventually, he understands that he has taken on the debasement of his own countryman in a way that horrifies him and horrifies himself; in a moment of sympathy, pity, and overwhelming guilt, he realizes that he has beaten himself through his collusion in torturing another human being: "The glee I felt initially. How stupid. How naïve . . . they wheeled him in and I perceived my ruin" (Moore, "Bowing" 162). The guilt causes him to consider killing himself out of shame and recompense, the last image of depicts a suicide garden where those who have ended their own lives are given memorial plaques on trees.

The narrator, looking at the embodiment of the torture he perpetrated on another person weighs him down with culpability for which he believes he will never find redemption; he believes he is not worthy of redemption or forgiveness because of the extent of the bodily horror he has caused another: "Now he has laid himself so low that I can never rise above him" (Moore, "Bowing" 162). The story shows that there are human propensities which should always be guarded against. Once a cycle of viciousness begins, it is, in that very moment, damaging. Moore suggests that once it begins, it is passed on to others who might not have the defenses or self-will to halt the process. Such paradigms are inhumane, and the story illustrates how stripping another's humanity can be irreversible and damaging to all involved.

Moore's story, in fact all of his work, is an appeal to take moral responsibility in a world that does not always encourage it. Restoring one's own humanity is vital; without learning to take this task on oneself, it becomes impossible to pass this ability on to others. In a world that destroys identity and self-will, helping others to resist degradation and dehumanization is the ultimate anarchy.

CHAPTER V

MIRRORIFIC MAYHEM: JUST WAIT 'TIL NEXT MONTH, AND THIS MIGHT GET

REALLY, REALLY GOOD!

"All the blindfolds are gone." – Alan Moore, *V for Vendetta*

Fig. 8, Art Spiegelman, "Lead Pipe Sunday," 11 color lithograph (NY: Raw,

1991; 2).

The conclusion of this study finds that funny books are not always funny and that the funny book business is even less funny. Art Spiegelman's "Lead Pipe Sunday" suggests that, were comic characters to take on their progenitors', Art and Commerce's, dispositions, the scene could only be depicted as a bloody and murderous revolt. This would be the natural course of their genetic line: colorfully rendered, cute little animals and funnily illustrated pseudo-people bent on the fulfillment of bloodlust and having an iron-willed determination to make their murderous crimes pay.

This study began with the intent to define the comic book by looking at the historical specificity that has been absent from prior definitions. Definitions must necessarily return to the origin of the art form, medium, or object that is in question. This study proposes the following definition of the comic book genre: The comic book genre is artistically illustrative storytelling that was originally made to quickly pass from consideration due to its liability for reflecting its producers' and creators' criminality, a genre that ultimately hid its past through mystification of its readership in order to sustain continued commercial success through criminal or unethical short- and long-term methodologies.

This study extends and, perhaps, surpasses former definitions of the genre that suggest that narrative and illustration are the genre's two key elements in defining comic books. This study maintains that criminality and commercialism are the definitive elements of comic books, that these elements are essential to and cannot be divorced

from any definition of the genre, and, further, that these two elements are absolutely integral to any future attempts to elaborate on prior definitions of the genre.

This conclusion will revisit each chapter of this study, providing new contexts and scholarship to cement the ideas contained therein; it will also suggest new investigative avenues for further scholarship in the future. Other avenues of approach to each of the main concerns of this study will be provided. To round out the discussion, Alan Moore's works will be provided in larger discussions and a more thorough context as the model for correcting, rehabilitating, and evolving the comic book genre.

Commercialism is the overriding and driving force behind any industry, artistic or otherwise, and this is doubly so with the comic book genre. It seems highly questionable that any other art form can define its first appearance as a purely commercial endeavor. As stated before, *The Yellow Kid* is considered the first comic book due to its commercial success of the serial story itself as well as its ability to drive the commercial success of products based on the comic's characters.

This is not to say that comics have not fulfilled other purposes. Comics have made timely social and political statements. Comics have commented on themselves as an art form. Comic books have remediated older comic characters or stories into contemporary settings that have invigorated them. The question, though, is whether they have ever done so without their main goal being to merely entertain and drive profits and overtly or subtly reflect its criminality. Underground and counter-culture

comix resist mainstream trends of consumerism or consumerists driven marketing and publishing methods, but also attempt to counter conservatism.

The comic genre, however, is almost entirely profit driven. As a whole, comic book sales through June of 2014 totaled $249.53 million (Comichron "2014 Comic Book Sales"). Of that total figure, Marvel Entertainment and DC Comics control 63.59% of the total retail market share; the other thirty-nine companies listed as publishers of comics for 2014 each hold an average 0.93% of the retail market share each (Diamondcomics.com "Publisher Market Shares"). These are staggering figures and suggest just how culturally prevalent (according to sales figures) comics books are. These figures also suggest that Marvel Entertainment and DC Comics have not lost anything due to fans' negative reactions to some recent decisions, the most discussed of which was The Walt Disney Company's purchase of Marvel Entertainment in 2009.

Credence simply cannot be given to those who claim that consumers have the least bit of agency in the face of such corporate dominance of a massive consumer market base. The issue of agency in the media age is problematized by ever multiplying symbols and continual industrialization of media. Like other businesses, the media industry and the electronic age have made ample use of Carestian models to disempower consumers; they have done so to render them into objects who desire to purchase objects (products) without realizing the products are more empowered than they, the consumers, are. Consumers are confronted by a plethora of objects (products) that consume them. There is no sense of agency in such a system.

In "Postmodern Negative Dialectics," John O'Kane states that when an "expansion of capital" creates "a striking excess and variety of commodities," "reprocessed notions" are "spliced haphazardly" and become "the new given" (150). These reprocessed notions have grave consequences: "These capital-induced abstractions have made mind and will into weakened replicas of themselves, leaving subjective forces with little chance to gain perspectives of the whole situation. The objective conditions of the contemporary are such that 'progressive' elements have been splintered" (150). The "subjective faculties" cannot "extricate themselves from the overwhelming object;" consumerism has "trashed the very ability of individuals to reflect critically both on and within the scene they find themselves in" (150). The consumer market sends out the same messages over and over, thus overwhelming consumers and not giving them time to even conceive thoughts of resistance.

The consumerist society, with its patent investment in Carestian perspectivalism, has enmeshed its audience and, in the case of the comic book world, given them story worlds that have the image of constitutive power. The reader, though, is never allowed to create her own story. To be a comic book reader is to be a consumer. And the power of agency has been stripped from media users as they purchase continually remediated versions of seemingly new products that perform the same tasks (though, perhaps, at faster speeds). Media corporations create this linear path for their consumers, and there has been little resistance from the customers as they follow it. Frustrated or resistant consumers aren't the majority online or in the checkout queue.

Consumers not only buy products, they also buy their way into virtual worlds that feed their compulsive desire for more hyperrealistic products. The actual world seems to have become too grounded or too commonplace. According to Bolter and Grusin, "ubiquitous computing is virtual reality's opposite number. In virtual reality, the computer interface is erased, and all we see is what the computer places before our eyes" (213). Virtual worlds, though media proponents (e.g., Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green) argue otherwise, is a dangerous kind of passivity. Consumers purchase a product that has to erase its own physical presence in order to provide the purchaser (now a consumer) a second type of (an alternative) existence. It seems cannibalistic.

The alternative existence that consumers are placed in must be investigated much more thoroughly. According to William J. Mitchell, there seems to be a battle to fight between homogeneity and heterogeneity. Speaking of even the "windowed style' of World Wide Web pages, the desktop interface, multimedia programs, and video games," Mitchell describes their purpose as one that "privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity and . . . emphasizes process or performance rather than the finished object" (qtd. in Bolter and Grusin 31). This seems to be a good place to start in trying to figure out where consumerism can be fought. Understanding the virtual nature of consumerism may be the crack in the system needed to bring larger chunks of it down.

Physical actuality is lost in virtual worlds. Physical concrete things are replaced by symbols, and this creates an absence that calls for serious consideration. The loss of agency which occurs through virtual means also must be investigated. Jenkins, Ford, and Green are proponents of media and the new cultural structures they see in virtual communities. They have never questioned the inevitable physical absence that virtual worlds entail. Questions about what moves into the empty space after a physical object has vacated an occupied space need to be asked. Consumers of digital media vacate an infinite amount of virtual platforms and believe they are gaining experiences. As explained earlier, however, they are gaining only a token experience. So it could also be argued that virtual reality creates a vast amount of emptiness along the way.

The methods by which consumers are tracked on the internet need to be studied through systematic processes that attempt to discover counter measures for consumers to resist their objectification by corporations. Merely discovering the ways consumers are objectified is not enough; forms of resistance need to be suggested and systematized. Users of social media never understand that they are consumers of it (just as any internet user is), and that they are under a microscope or Durer's Grid (informed by Cartesian Perspectivalism). The object (what is behind the grid e.g., the consumer), according to Pierre Bourdieu, can only gain agency through being remotivated. This can only happen with the help of someone outside Durer's Machine. The agents outside Durer's Machine have knowledge of the object that has been withheld from him. Nevertheless Bordieu finds it important to consider what difference the knowledge of

those outside the grid "makes to the reality of the object" (238). Fixing the objectified

state might seem as easy as giving the knowledge back to the object or simply removing

the grid. That is part of the process. But the knowledge extracted cannot be put back;

the object, through the very process of being objectified by the grid, has been

transfigured. Escaping from the grid can only be done by "conferring on this knowledge

a genuinely constitutive power, the power it is denied when, in the name of an

objectivist conception of objectivity, one makes common knowledge. . . a mere

reflection of the real world" (238). This mere reflection in a virtual reality is the problem

that further scholarship must solve.

Empathy is the only answer to Durer's grid. The object cannot extract itself from

the grid, thus freedom necessarily requires an empathetic hand. The first step in this,

however, is finding a way to return the knowledge that has been extracted from the

objectified consumer. This can happen through the types of empathetic narratives

called for in Lynn Hunt's scholarship and empathetic and advocacy narratives found in

the works of Alan Moore. The challenge is to find ways to make such processes

symptomatic so that the end result of these processes is giving the individual a self-

narrative of determination and ability to critically evaluate their own behavior. The

consumer must understand how consumerism has imposed a false identity upon her as

nothing other than a consumer.

Comic book consumers are caught up in the same dilemma. All consumers have

to negotiate, usually to their loss, purchase exchanges between themselves and media

companies. Comic readers are, it would seem, even more controlled by marketing. The criminality of comic book history has rarely been publicized, and it presupposes a complete objectification of the world at large. The comic book industry is, it could be argued, an economy of Narcissism. It thinks only of its consumerist goals and never allows consumers to voice their desires, want, or dissent. The problems with Jenkins, Ford, and Green's idea of spreadable media are: 1) that it is a consumerist model of the uses of the internet, and 2) that objects are merely spread, stretched out. The habitual stretching of virtual worlds and experiences is that it is simply more of the same consumer model; consumerism is made even worse through the internet and other digital media because it is a continuous process rather than a journey with an end.

It would behoove scholars to study how comic book publications and their narratives can be decelerated through an informed consumerism that begins to demand the genre be rehabilitated. Simple remediation with the comic book has not worked. Comic book readers rarely inquire into the business practices of the creators and publishers of their works. There has been no moral outcry from comic book fans about the way printing house employees are treated or how little money a driver might make when distributing comic books. With digital media, these kinds of material, reality-based considerations (e.g., regarding actual employees in actual warehouses) are buried to such a depth that the kind of unearthing necessary to view them at a later time would be prohibitive to even Focauldian archaeology. And yet, such a process must be undertaken, and it is up to scholars who fight consumerism to provide models that

liberate consumers or, at least, allow them to challenge consumerism's overwhelming power in their own lives.

Comic book fans never acknowledge or simply do not care that they are coerced into purchasing more products. The fact that they are forced to purchase voluminous trade paperbacks to complete one plot line in a comic story does not raise outraged communications demanding the comic industry change its ways. Comic book fans need to find their real-world antagonist. They might start with Stan Lee, but, to do this, comic fans must realize that they are caught up in "explicit identity marketing," and, at the same time, they must also realize they are losing personal agency when they give their attention to a symbol (Stan Lee) rather than something reality-based in their own lives (Bhattacharjee).

Of course, Stan Lee has never acknowledged that he is part of the problem with the comic book industry, and it is questionable whether fans would even consider him so. The unfairness of it all is that he will remain a symbol. For most, he will be the fiction he worked to create: a symbolic icon of a fascinating era in entertainment history. Such notions must be debunked, and systems that could do this must be teased out.

Because comic book media has been spread, comic book readers have forgotten more narrative threads than they remember. Further research is needed to determine why this is the case. Do comic book consumers willingly participate in overt and shameless consumer objectification? Is there an explanation for their silence regarding

the inner workings of comic companies? What else might have been lost in the industry's silence regarding its origins?

Comic book studies that compare the narrative and visual aspects of the medium as a metaphorically archaeological task would turn the comic book reading experience into something that would set up a roadblock to their own commercialization. Scholarship could provide a model for intramedial comic studies that would look at comics as both a virtual reality as well as a very concrete materiality, but not for the sake of the comic as a material object. The study needs to be undertaken to understand the relationship between comic books, their audiences, and the corporations that produce them.

Those who participate in the comic book industry would also do well to acknowledge that there are levels of participation. Every reader is not necessarily a fan; every reader and fan is not, it is hoped, a collector. If comics are to intentionally sustain a sense of moral narrative as politicization, the genre must become revolutionary against those who confine the genre to merely commercial ends before commercialization takes over the genre and dominates it. Comics must become a space of resistance rather than entertainment.

There must be way for readers to attach moral and ethical considerations to the material they are reading. If the majority of mainstream comic books are not viewed as potentially radical publications, then the act of reading a comic book becomes merely

entertainment for entertainment's sake. Comic book publishers in a position to propagate mass amounts of stereotypical genre comics will continue to flood the market for those fans simply needing their next installment.

Comic book readers seem blithely uneducated regarding comics' past trends and current strategies employed to market them successfully. They don't seem to care that comic characters have now been used by every kind of company from retail marketers to banks, business schools, and churches. They do not seem concerned that these uses of the comic book cause it to lose its ability to evolve beyond its beginnings. Comics have attained a very strange space now where *X-Men* comics are used to teach "individual decision-making and organizational influences" to business students and CEOs (Foster and Gerde 245). Comics are even being used to "change employees' attitudes about safety . . . [to] start safety conversations and lead to reduced incidents rates" ("Safety Comics" 59). They are being used to teach English, history, and were even used in a health promotion where it could not be concluded if any participants even read the comics, though conclusions were still drawn regarding the study (Branscum and Sharma 435; "Using Superhero Comics"). Future studies need to look at what is gained and lost in this kind of general ubiquity.

This ubiquity is a type of spreadable media transferal that makes a pretense of taking on cultural meaning, but the idea that comics are first a commercial product and therefore an economic practice must be understood. The problem is not so much that

comic books have been transferred to unintended markets as it is that the comic book industry intentionally views any fillable space as a market.

Although it is a subjective point, the comic book as an art form needs to be less arbitrary; comic books must be created for intentional purposes that oppose the mainstream companies' continued use of the genre as a purely moneymaking endeavor. The industry has to stop driving the art form. Comics could be a genre where the industry finally recognizes it (as ironically scholars finally have done) as an art form with finished products rather than a commercial product only used to fulfill commercial ends. Frank Miller has expressed frustration over this dismissiveness because it has confined the genre's possibilities since comics were first created:

> Max Gaines . . . created the half tab, the half tabloid . . . He folded a newspaper in half twice and said, "I think we've got something." And that became the format of the comic book. Now it adapted over the years . . . to the bizarre form it is now . . . three inches shorter than it should be. And nobody knows why except that the racks were built that size. That's how dumb the world of comics is. So much could be done if we just knock all those goddamned racks and boxes down and do whatever we wanted to do. (Commentary)

The form, narratives, story plots, and modes of art must be separated from mere

consumerism. These publications must form finished products according to writer's and

artist's desire that are divorced from consumer desires.

Future popular studies of the comic book genre should begin to look more

deeply at the extreme heterogeneous nature of comic book fans. A group that claims

such diversity seems to be quite contained in a model of purchase they have not yet

achieved the perspective to see. According to Rosalind Krauss in her article

"Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary'," the paraliterary space "is the space of debate,

quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity,

coherence, or resolution" (37). The comic book industry has practiced partisanship and

betrayal until they turned those practices instead of the product into an art form.

Readers and creators of comic books must distance themselves from the

industry enough to objectify the companies that market the products they consume (or

create for consumption). Studies need to provide suggestions for ways for consumers

can screen out the consumerist, objectifying gaze. Other studies need to see if there is

any orderly pattern that can be found in the DNA, as it were, of comic narratives; until

that is found, comic books will be viewed as a replicative genre (Bolter and Grusin's "the

mediation of remediation of remediation" (55). This process is ongoing. Comics will

continue to create characters with newer costumes pretending to be a true reinvention

of the character. Rather than reinventing the character through massive amounts of

issues that spread through generations, narratives with an end and narratives that have

closure need to be created more often rather than story lines that cover hundreds or thousands of issues.

Deceleration might be the key resisting marketing ploys, also. Anything that slows down media, rather than making it so rapidly spreadable, might reduce consumerism. The counterargument could be made that deceleration would stagnate growth. The opposite might also be true. Media industries would finally be in a position where they would be forced to carefully consider why consumers are ingesting at slower paces. It should be understandable now that Jenkins, Ford, and Green's suggestion that a product will die if it doesn't spread is opposite to the truth. Some, if not all, art forms need time to stay in place to grow. Individual pieces of art and music (among other media) have sustained longevity for hundreds of years.

Unethical and criminal business practices have also shown lengthy staying power. Directly relating historical industry practices to current market trends has shown how the stories in comic book are as much marketed to creators and artists as they are to consumers. Comic books are still part of a narrative process that hearkens back to the stereotypical linguistic code that Will Eisner suggested happens when verbal and visual elements are combined in comic books. This code has created readers who exist in shorthand. If people presently live in the virtual world that Bolter and Grusin suggest they do, then critical thinking and the creation of texts that necessitate deliberate decoding have lost out to symbols and avatars that represent a loss of self-image and

windows that one cannot see through that simply propel him on to more virtual faux-window (comic book panels) images.

Eisner and those who are in agreement with him see a textual logic in the comic book genre. But the codes of comic books have limited the narrative possibilities of comic book stories. Comic books have created standardized models and templates rather than empty, uncharted spaces that can be filled with dynamic or mobile narratives. What Eisner and his adherents have created is a narratology of the comic book, and it has resulted in the creation of a discursive code. This study suggests that a criminal culture's behavior (any culture's behavior) is a code. Those in power have the strength and means to encode it. With passage of time, most people forget the code ever existed.

In "After Dynamic Narratology," Eyal Armin suggests that codes do not open a text up for investigation and does not reveal how the text works. The code "absorbs textual assumptions with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness . . . it can only express an idea . . . that cannot bridge the gap to the textual operations it posits" (212). There are serious problems with the way comic books have repetitious narratives and themes. If Armin's claim are true, readers are caught assuming what they think they know is there rather than attempting to decrypt what is in the text, even if their assumptions lead to the text's unraveling. Typical comic book narratives could be considered far too easy to unravel, and, therefore, might fall prey to what Armin calls "unstated homologies" that have set up codes that are "insufficient to explain

themselves" (219). While Eisner applauds the stereotypical nature of comic book grammar, stereotypical readings become embedded in mere assumptions that lead to indeterminacy.

Further studies are needed to investigate the homologies found in comic book clichés while simultaneously investigating how heterogeneous comic book narratives continue on endlessly. Comic books create a false distinction between heroic and nonheroic acts, between a purchased comic and the act of purchasing, between paratextual marketing of the story and its continual deferment of meaning to gain dollars traded for textual irresolution. Is there a way to create unpredictability in consumer desire? Is there a way for consumers of comic books to create non-assumptive buying behaviors that might result in the comic industry's inability to assume anything? The study of ways in which consumers could disown their relation to industry practices and production might lead to a potential change in the nonmaterial value of the comic book. Comic book narratives and comic book readers have too long been regulated to a position in which their habits and potentials are attributable to the wrong kind of reiteration. Comic book narratives need to have simple closure rather than decades where storylines are criss-crossed in stories than can never be resolved which, of course, serves only the company's profit-making compulsiveness.

Alan Moore serves as the best example of what comics need to do to evolve and serve anti-consumerist ends, empathetic narratives, and advocacy narratives. Moore

has always attempted to educate his readers and allow them to see what goes on behind the scenes in the comic industry.

Batman has been one of the most popular characters in comic books since his debut in 1939; his archenemy, the Joker, was created in 1940. Rarely have two characters with such similar dispositions been pitted against each other, and yet driven commercial sales of comics and products so well together. The Joker has been featured on many products both historically and presently; an Amazon.com "the Joker" key word search at the time of this writing results in 11,191 product listings, and 278 of the first 298 results directly advertise the comic book villain ("The Joker").

As mentioned previously, *Batman: The Killing Joke* is the one work that Alan Moore has openly called a failure (Khoury 123). He states "knowing that their psychoses are a mirror image of each other is not really going to improve your life any" (Khoury 123). Some have jokingly (or, perhaps, not) suggested that it provides a context for understanding maladaptive, violent people, a claim that Moore responds to by stating, "yeah, there are plenty of psychopaths in the real world but we don't have any that dress up as a circus clown or a bat" (Khoury 123). Even though Moore considers the work a failure, the text sends an anti-consumerist message because it depicts Batman murdering the Joker which violates a taboo for the Batman and establishes a moral quandary for the comic book's audience.

An expectation of direct participation by the audience is clear from the outset when carefully observing the book's cover. The cover depicts the Joker holding a camera, directed straight at the viewer, and the first panels give readers a familiar scene: Batman driving to Arkham Asylum and walking through the hallways of cells that contain his many enemies. Some urgency, though, is suggested by the way that Commissioner Gordon has to rush to keep up with him. Batman's quick pace also gives a visual sense of urgency, as he covers up nearly all the space in several panels. The reason is visiting Arkham is to give the Joker and himself a death sentence:

> I came to talk. I've been thinking lately about you and me. About what's going to happen to us in the end. We're going to kill each other aren't we? Perhaps you'll kill me. Perhps I'll kill you. Perhaps sooner. Perhaps later. I just wanted to know that I'd made a genuine attempt to talk things over and avert that outcome. Just once . . . I don't understand why ours should be such a fatal relationship but I don't want your murder on my hands (Moore, *Batman Killing* 261).

The inmate is actually a doppelganger for the Joker, whom the inmate has helped to free. From that point, Batman acts in ways that diverge from society's norms as well as the stereotypical Batman story. Batman grabs the man and physically assaults him to the point that Commissioner Gordon rushes in and is shocked by what he sees; the panel depicts Batman's side and back, and the man's hands quivering uncontrollably.

Batman refuses to follow Gordon's authority, exhibiting contumacy for the police department he is supposed to assist.

One of the perennial questions about Batman (and nearly all superheroes) is that, knowing that these villains have killed and terrorized the citizens of Gotham, why he always captures them and places them back in cells. Having already seen Batman walk down a hallway where all of his quintessential villains are in cells, it seems that Batman is using the police department for little more than storing his criminals. Batman thrives on an existence that is only attainable through these villains that besiege Gotham. Without them, he is nothing but a businessman, a role, ironically, he rarely, if ever, fulfills. He lets others run his company so that he can forever be absent from responsibilities that tie him down to the corporate world. Thus, Bruce Wayne can be considered as expressive of a drive for contumacy against society's sense of justice as he strives for his own hooded, vigilantism.

Just as Moore provides a different vision of Batman, he does the same for the Joker, who has been defined as an inveterate villain and nothing else; he has never been given any other name, as if he is an elemental form of evil. Moore, however, shows just how human the character can be. The first scene featuring the Joker shows the character as a man who is attempting to become a stand-up comedian and failing miserably, a fact that becomes pitiable when the story reveals that his wife is pregnant with their first child. Later it is revealed the man who will become the Joker gave up gainful employment at a chemical factory because the place was "grim and ugly"

(Moore, *Batman Killing* 23). Left without an income to sustain his wife, he is accosted by two gangsters who need his knowledge and ability to break into the plant. They rob a playing card shop adjacent to it and are willing to pay him well to assist them.

The gangsters are quite stereotypical and cliché, promising that they will make sure no one connects him, the yet-to-be Joker, with the crime; they tell him that he is the most valuable player (which appeals to his damaged self-esteem), pressure him with the idea of his child growing up in poverty. In the interim after this conversation and the attempted robbery, the yet-to-be joker's wife dies in a fire, and the gangsters tell the Joker that he can bury his wife in style with the money he'll make or that they can kill him, too. The picture that follows is one of the few instances of the Joker ever having been depicted in attempt to evoke pity.

Fig. 9, Brian Bolland, comic illustration from *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Panel 1

(NY: DC, 2008, 30)

While the robbery is in process, security guards shoot the gangsters. The Joker runs through the plant as Batman tells the guards, "No. No more shooting. I'll take care of it my way" (Moore, *Batman Killing* 37-8). Batman's way of taking care of it is to intimidate the young man so badly that he is willing to jump into what, having worked at the plant, he already knows awaits him: a vat of chemicals. He sees it as his only way out of the situation, as well as his only escape from the psychologically disturbing figure of the Batman. The Batman has turned this man into the Joker, and this raises several questions about the Batman's methods as well as his personality.

Throughout the story, the young comedian is faced with several images from others that are reminiscent of the villainous appearance he will eventually take on. These images transfigure him into what he will become. He takes on the face (from his wife), the dress (from the gangster), and his life's influence (from Batman) by the way he is confronted by these images. He feels shaped and confined by them. They occur at three of the most pivotal moments of the text: an image of his wife while the young comedian tries to come to grips with how he can provide for his wife and child, another image that shows him before he begin assisting the gangsters in the robbery, and the third image, his first vision of the Batman. These images, taken together, suggest that the comedian's transformation into the Joker is a process begun in fear and loss that was eventually solidified into inescapable form the closer the comedian came to the Batman. The comedian is not even what Batman calls him, the Red Hood; the gangsters were using the hood as a disguise, but the way they used it on the comedian made him the ultimate fall guy, a horrible but apropos pun that, it is hoped, is not lost on the reader.
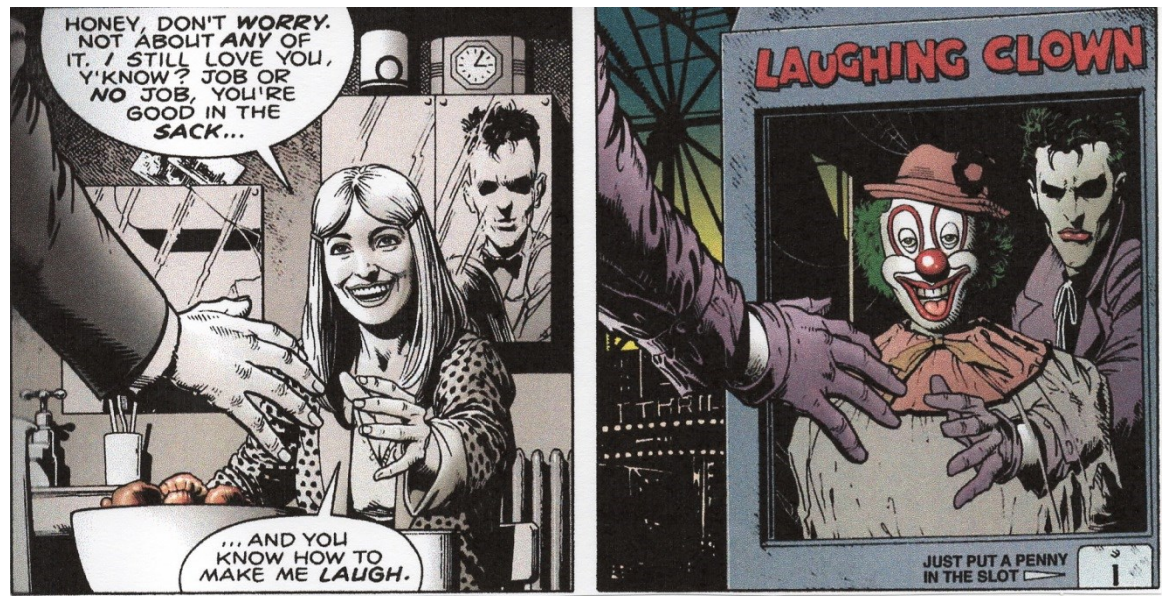
Fig. 10, Brian Bolland, comic illustration from *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Panel 2

(NY: DC, 2008, 15).

Fig. 11, Brian Bolland, comic illustration from *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Panel 3

(NY: DC, 2008, 36).

Fig. 12, Brian Bolland, comic illustration from *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Panel 4

(NY: DC, 2008, 38).

At the end of the work, he and Batman are once again in a face-to-face meeting.

Batman's words to the Joker, as insistent as they have been through the work, can be

seen as his genuinely trying to save the Joker or to subtly goad an unhinged man into

giving Batman a reason to kill the Joker. Batman's words to the Joker are as follows:

> Do you understand? I don't want to hurt you. I don't want either of us to
>
> end up killing the other . . . Maybe it all hinges on tonight. Maybe this is
>
> our last chance to sort this bloody mess out. If you don't take it, then
>
> we're locked onto a suicide course. Both of us. To the death. It doesn't
>
> have to end like that. I don't know what it was that bent your life out of

shape, but who knows? Maybe I've been there too. Maybe I can help. We

could work together. I could rehabilitate you . . . We don't have to kill

each other (Moore, *Batman Killing* 51).

Batman seems to be playing a coy game with the Joker, because Batman does, indeed,

know what bent the Joker's shape out of any sense of humanly distinguishable features.

He was literally there. And, in the best traditions of salesmanship, Batman gives the

Joker a high-pressure ultimatum of this deal being good for one day only. And he tells a

mentally deranged man that the course they will be on will be one of suicide, a course

the Joker would undoubtedly prefer. In fact, had he known where Batman's entrance

into the robbery would lead, he would have been better off shot dead by the security

guards.

The Joker refuses Batman's offer, expressing his feelings that he knows Batman

is toying with him; he knows what Batman wants to do. He states that accepting help

from Batman would be equivalent to two escapees from a mental institution who steal a

flashlight, break out at night, and find that the night is lit up nicely by the moon; they

also find that the space from the institution's building to the next has a wooden board

between them, and one of the men is deathly scared of heights. The other inmate, who

has made it across the board without a problem, says that he'll turn his flashlight on and

train it on the board so that the other can focus on the light rather than the space

dropping away below him. The Joker states that accepting Batman's offer would be

equivalent to an escapee from a "lunatic asylum;" he asks Batman, "Wh-what do you

think I am? Crazy? You'd turn it off [the flashlight] when I was halfway across" (Moore,

Batman Killing 52).

As the lights of police cars shine on the both of them, Batman grabs the Joker by

the neck, lifts him off his feet, and the scenes pan down to the characters' feet; in two

panels, lights shine. In the third one, both the lights and the sound effect of the cars'

sirens become suddenly absent. The lights have, indeed, been turned off. The Batman

proves himself a murderer just as much as the Joker is. It could be argued that Batman

turned the young comedian into the Joker and wants to end it, but wants to find the

right kind of argument to get the Joker to say what Batman wants him to say so that he

can kill him. Batman is even laughing when he lifts the Joker off the ground.

Batman: The Killing Joke redefines these characters as mirror images of one

another, and actually puts the onus of the Joker's transformation mostly on Batman. His

death is undoubtedly placed completely, literally, in Batman's hands. All of Batman's

statements are veiled ultimatums. His insistence that they are locked into a fatal

relationship and that there is a road toward the inevitable is, in truth, Batman's own

view of the situation. He, understanding the Joker's deranged psychology (Batman is,

after all, the world's greatest detective), instigates the Joker's rendering of the verdict

the Batman needs for a justification to kill him.

Showing similar traits in the quintessential hero and the infamous villain, Moore

deconstructs DC Comics' typical depictions of these characters and gives readers an

opportunity to reevaluate the mythos that has been used by the comics industry to keep

these characters' images separate. Their resultant personas depend on each other; were

one of them to die, so would the other. A few have understood that Batman kills the

Joker in *Batman: The Killing Joke.* What they overlook is that Batman decides to kill

himself, too; he declares his intent to commit suicide, stating what he knows will

happen. Batman knows the Joker will not accept his offer of rehabilitation, and knows

that if the Joker does not that they are both locked into a system of double suicide: "If

you don't take it, then we're locked onto a suicide course" (Moore, *Batman Killing* 51).

Neither one of them can literally live with who they have become any longer. Moore

attempted to show that these characters need to have an end to their struggles, that

there is a diseased psychology behind that violent, co-dependent relationship they have

forever been locked into. Finally, they decide to end it.

Where Moore understood that *The Swamp Thing* series could not be brought to

a conclusion because of the commercialism behind it that required continued

serialization, *Batman: The Killing Joke* might be considered an anti-consumerist book or,

perhaps, a work that simply did not attempt to construct a plot scenario that stretched

itself out for simply consumerist ends. This shows his anti-consumerist stance regarding

companies that would present these characters to readers interminably to simply profit

from it; in another vein, he, perhaps, feels it is unfair to the characters themselves. He

suggests that the comic industry lulls readers into status quo expectations that need to

be challenged. Tim Sale attest to this effect in this work who calls it "explosive" because

it is a "rendering of the mundane" that, once the murder-suicide pacts takes place, "you

realize how you, as a reader, have been lulled to rest *on purpose,* just to set you up"

(Moore, *Batman Killing* 6).

This type of narrative is a model for countering the stereotypical comic book

industry clichés that keep readers stultified by the same types of narratives that they are

far too used to and accepting of. There is no easy dichotomy to the worldview expressed

in *Batman: The Killing Joke.* Everything is connected, characters' actions have

consequences for others' lives that could have turned out very differently had each

character made a different choice. It also shows that empathy should be extended to

those who have been caught in harsh life circumstances, becoming overwhelmed, and

making poor, irresponsible choices. There is, however, no final moment of no turning

back past some imagined Rubicon. What seems final is simply a negotiation between

individuals. When this moment of negotiation ends, it usually means there has been a

lack of empathy somewhere along the way.

Moore has attempted to combat narrative patterns that do not incorporate

empathy into the work that is produced. He does this simply by providing empathetic

narratives whenever he can. In 1999, Moore included an empathetic narrative piece in a

comic book called *Unknown Quantities*, which was published to support March of the

Americas, a movement that began in Washington, D.C. and included a march to the

United Nations Building to remind them that they had passed a Declaration of Human

Rights that included such provisos as "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of

employment . . . and . . . protection against unemployment . . . Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and social services" (Darnall 1 and 64). Rather than depicting his message through illustrations and dialog text bubbles (which is what every other contributor did), Moore provided a prose piece with a single picture.

The way that Moore breaks free from comic book traditions in *Unknown Quantities* is an object lesson in rendering a situation as jarring and unusual as it truly is. Steve Darnell, the publisher, definitely understood *Unknown Quantities* to be a "comic book" (2). And yet Moore provides three pages of prose and a picture with no notable characteristics of the comic book present in the work. The text delves into the ways in which people are defined by their employment and what happens when that is lost: "Their CVs were made into embarrassing unfinished novels that were put away, abandoned, dragged out to the curb, were de-created, gone. The landmarks of a life by which they'd mapped themselves had blown away . . . they found they had no resort in occupation" (Moore, "Sidewalk Jockeys" 62). Moore attempts to show that the kind of life they have on paper, the virtual definition of them in a stack of human resource files, is not them. It is his way of showing that collections of files and renditions of paper are not, are physically or emotionally, the person themselves.

Without that realization, people become lost to others. The consequences of Cartesian Perspectivalism have been argued earlier in this study; in this work, the

reverse has the same result. The homeless become lost because others' gazes are completely averted:

> They felt their images blur, reflected in the passing eyes, averted, suddenly engrossed in something else. They felt their skin take on the color of their clothing, of the sidewalk. In their minds, they turned into chameleons, invisible and clinging to a wall. No make-up, no razor, their appearance, they knew, were starting to converge there on the public retina; their faces trickling inexorably towards one universal face.
>
> (Moore, "Sidewalk Jockeys" 62)

These unemployed and homeless people ultimately have no recognizably human characteristics due to others' gazes discounting them.

Passersby in this story have lost the mirror of humanity, of personal empathy toward another human being, because they cannot recognize the homeless and unemployed without the mirrors of resumes and job titles. Without these reflections that have been ingrained in people, they cannot, ironically see people as people. They seem as bundles of clothes that are "abandoned" (Moore, "Sidewalk Jockeys" 62). They have been abandoned by society and then judged as worthless because of it. Moore ultimately attempts to rehabilitate both the reader and the homeless in this piece by rendering an account of what has been done to them: "They were snoring in our flowerbeds and staggered impudent across our plazas, made us flinch with guilt and

redden with the self-protective spite and bile that followed guilt" (Moore, "Sidewalk Jockeys" 64). This text attempts to branch out of the typical genre format to jar the reader's expectations so that they can question whether they have fallen to some of these same tendencies of discounting people according to their social status. It is an attempt to open a space for readers to grow empathetic responses to others.

One of Moore's best known advocacy pieces is "The Mirror of Love," which traces the history of homosexuality and suggests ways of thinking about the possibilities that might face them in the near future (from 1988, when this work was published). Moore traces homosexuality from its existence in the animal world (dolphins) to its first ultimate denunciation in *Leviticus*. He references Greece, Sappho, Sparta, a narrative strategy posing tolerance and intolerance, ultimately coming to grips with Christianity: "Yet this tolerance could not endure the rise of Christianity, which quite ignored Christ's love for outcasts and instead embraced moral severity. Defining sex as base, an obstacle to faith, St. Paul named same-sex love, for the first time, as sin" (Moore, "Mirror of Love" 3). Moore goes on to show evidence of intolerance and bigotry throughout the text, ultimately advocating the importance of gays never giving up their love for society's hatred of them: "While life endures we'll love, and afterwards, if what they say is true, I'll be refused a heaven crammed with popes; policemen; fundamentalists, and burn instead, quite happily, with Sappho, Michaelangelo, and you, my love. I'd burn throughout eternity with you" (Moore, "Mirror of Love" 9). He advocates a focus on each other rather than the political and media inanity going on around them.

This is the same idea he has advocated through times of tragedy in which people have been divided over personal issues that have become politicized; he also advocates the same response for people who have been manipulated into personalizing a government's creed or dictates. In his comic book response to the events of 9/11, "This is Information," pictures of a hand are shown through several panels, and death is described as "complex information" that is "reduced to dull simplicity" (Moore, "This is Information" 185). But he states that it is the same information that can be found in other parts of the world: "This could be London, New York, Baghdad, Belfast, or Kabul. Or anywhere" (Moore, "This is Information" 185). He states that a "Crusade, like its cousin the Jihad" is the same kind of information found in comics, and that "Writing comic-book morality is embarrassingly easy" (Moore, "This is Information" 189).

Moore's response to tragedy - in whatever moments it is found - is the simplest human responses available. At the end of the comic, the hand in the rubble of 9/11 has another extending toward it. The narrative states that "With all due respect, with all sympathy, with all love, some of us cannot make that choice. Are we with the terrorists or the crusaders? No. We're with you. Whoever you are" (Moore, "This is Information" 190). The hands clasp, and the story ends with the information of empathy expressed in one hand holding another: "Squeeze once if you understand. This is information" (Moore, "This is Information" 190).

"This is Information" uses media to express the need to enact empathy, connectedness, and advocacy in the real world, in the physical world. The comic book

genre, if it is to survive, must come to grips with the physical gruesomeness of its origin as well as the more abstract ideas of criminality and lack of ethics. It is important to focus on what the industry does to actual individuals in this real world. Virtual reality, viewed from this angle, is irresponsible escapism. Moore suggests that comic book readers must take on different roles than roles found in consumerist models:

> As for readers, I have to say that if you are a reader that just wanted your favorite character on tap forever, and never cared about the creators, then actually you're probably not the kind of reader that I was looking for. I have a huge respect for my audience . . . The kind of readers who are prepared to turn a blind eye when the people who create their favorite reading material, their favorite characters are marginalized or put to the wall – that's not the kind of readers I want. (Moore, "Often the Truth")

Moore has spent time educating his readers through relating the history of comics whenever he can, most recently in several issues of *Occupy Comics*, and he does so because the unethical treatment of creators never ends.

On 17 July 2014, stories broke about Moore's denouncing the new film *Hercules* because the producers of the film promised to pay the writer Steve Moore (no relation) $15,000 for the screenplay (taken from Steve Moore's comic) even though Steve did not want the film made because he thought it ruined his story (Moore, "Alan Moore Calls").

Ultimately, Radical, the comic company, did not pay Steve Moore anything, refusing to even acknowledge that Steve had anything to do with the film at all. They claimed Moore had signed a contract that stated he would only be paid for comic royalties. The truth is that Steve Moore did not realize there was a clause in the contract that stipulated power of attorney to Radical's attorneys (Moore, "Alan Moore Calls") and ultimately he was confused about what the contract he signed even stated because there were multiple versions. To make matters worse, after he passed away, Paramount Pictures and MGM studios capitalized on his death by putting his name on the credits posthumously to bring in potential viewers who heard his name in the news or read his obituary.

Alan Moore calls for readers who are willing to forego their media gratification on the basis of morals, principles, and ethics. Symbolic support accomplishes nothing, and Moore knows that the only thing to do is simply resist participation in the diseased atmosphere that surrounds a film like *Hercules*. The best show of resistance is the refusal to pay companies who have acted unethically. As simple as it sounds, the other thing to do is to educate others. When the various media products from endeavors such as *Hercules* spread, it is deadening and cheapening Steve Moore's life and memory. This is why those who champion spreadable media need to be carefully scrutinized. Depending on one's moral or ethical stance, there are certain instances of media production, because of their unethical underlying messages, that should never be spread.

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