

The Weird History of USAmerican Fascism: A Guide (1979-2019)

PhD in Critical and Cultural Theory

2019

M.C. McGrady

Summary

The future, as ever, can be read in comic books. Foretold by the Dark Age of Comics, the doom that now comes to Earth arrives in the form of self-realizing eschatologies, horrors born out of the rutting between unfettered capitalism and its favorite child, technological hubris. When the Big Two comic book publishers began hiring British and Irish authors en masse over the course of the 1980s, these writers brought with them a critical eye sharpened by the political and economic cruelty of the decade. The victims of the Iron Lady came to the New World and set their sights on the empire of the Teflon President, using superhero stories to explore the ideological weapons deployed in the service of global capitalism. *The Weird History of USAmerican Fascism* tracks the interrelated networks of popular culture and fascism in the United States to demonstrate the degree to which contemporary USAmerican politics embodies the future that the fictional dystopias of the past warned us about. Although the trans-Atlantic political developments of 2016 and their aftermath have sparked a widespread interest in a resurgent Anglophone fascism and its street-level movements – seen most obviously in the loose collection of white supremacists known as the ‘alt-right’ – this interest has been hamstrung by the historical aversion to a serious study of popular and ‘nerd’ culture during the twentieth century. By paying attention to the conceptual and interpersonal networks that emerged from the comic books and videogames of the 1980s, *The Weird History of USAmerican Fascism* fills a critical lacuna in cultural theory while correcting recent oversights in the academic analysis of contemporary fascism, providing an essential guide to the past, present, and future of the bizarre world of USAmerican politics.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Summary | i |
| Contents | ii |
| Notes on Style | iii |
| Prologue | |
| I: The End of the Old World | 1 |
| II: The Ignorant Leading the Uninformed | 8 |
| III: The War for Imaginationland | 13 |
| IV: Your Expert Friend | 21 |
| V: A Guide to Guides | 25 |
| Glossary | |
| & | 32 |
| Ages | 56 |
| Blowback | 70 |
| Bricolage | 74 |
| Bullshit | 81 |
| Comic books | 84 |
| Gawker | 92 |
| Glurge | 95 |
| Golem | 105 |
| Grift | 108 |
| Smarm | 113 |
| Tulpa | 115 |
| Ultra | 121 |
| Weird | 131 |
| Case Study 1: The Kept Weird | 143 |
| Case Study 2: Magical Materialism in USAmerican Politics | 151 |
| Case Study 3: The Real Heroes, or, ACAB | 163 |
| Epilogue | 173 |
| Bibliography | 177 |

Notes on Style

This project is presented in a Chicago style that has been adapted where appropriate. In cases where media do not have specific citation guidelines in the official stylebook (comic books, videogames, social media posts), this project has adopted its own format based on extant best practices. Specifically, the thesis uses the following abbreviations in its citations to refer to the different roles that go into making a comic book: (w) for writer, (p) for penciller, (i) for inker, (a) for artist where the same individual is responsible for pencilling, inking, and/or colouring, (c) for colourist, and (l) for letterer. American English is used except in direct quotations, and single quotation marks (aka ‘inverted commas’) are used with punctuation appearing after the closing mark. When not referring to a specific individual, the singular pronouns they/them are used.

Prologue

I: The End of the Old World

The history offered here focuses on a particular time period (1979-2019) primarily out of narrative convenience. This history must as a matter of course address events and processes that extend beyond 1979, although that year does happen to include enough events of specific interest to mark it as a useful point from which to orient this narrative. At the same time, this text does not offer a singular narrative of the history in question, but rather a hypertextual application of critical historiography to specific topics, arranged alphabetically in the Glossary, which constitutes the bulk of the project. This non-linear historicizing of a particular discourse is in the service of this project's overarching goal, which is (admitting at the outset the difficulty of such a task) overcoming the contemporary resurgence of fascism by equipping readers with the critical tools necessary to resist and dismantle USAmerican fascism's discursive weapons, otherwise known as *myths*. This prologue serves to make clear the stakes of such a project, and convince you, the reader, of my authority to speak on such matters.

Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign (and eventual election) generated in certain circles the widespread sensation that *something has changed*. 'This is not normal' became a rallying cry for stunned white liberals, and the bewilderment at how such events could come to pass – *in the United States of all places* – was regarded in polite society not as an embarrassing admission of one's own ignorance and culpability regarding the logical outcome of a petrophiliac colonial empire dismantling its domestic democratic institutions through neglect and attack, but rather a marker of moral authority, a sign that one has both the ethical chops to recognize the horrors this administration might birth and the kind of faith in the inherent goodness of the United States to imagine that he represents an aberration. This notion, that Trump represents something uniquely awful, is of course for US citizens a comforting myth, as the United States has since its inception always been a horrifying blight, a patriarchal slave state whose national identity is inextricable from the oceans of blood left in its wake.

In this light, 'USAmerica' is used in lieu of the metonymic use of 'America', an abbreviation that equates the country with the whole of two continents, born of a

colonial rhetoric that applies the Monroe Doctrine's implicit assumption that these continents are ultimately subject to the authority of the United States. In this context, 'America' is a myth in the service of USAmerica's imperial violence. Secondly, USAmerican is used in lieu of the shorter USian to emphasize this project's overarching assessment of the United States, which is that *it should not exist*; the clumsiness of the term reflects the degree to which the United States is an imperfect imposition, something distasteful, that should ultimately be discarded.¹ The claim that the Trump administration is 'not normal' is a moral and historical claim, both of which fail to stand up under the kind of investigation this project performs.

This text *presupposes* that the United States government circa 2019 can be intuitively described as fascist, and *argues* that fascism is by 2019 now inherent to the United States, as a consequence of the post-World War II USAmerican empire on the one hand and the ecological disaster it insists on maintaining on the other. That is to say, the text argues that defeating fascism in the United States (at this point) necessarily means an end to the collective political and cultural identity that is 'the United States', alongside other material changes to that land currently under the control of the US empire. As with many of the terms in the Glossary and its use of 'popular culture' throughout, this project uses 'fascism' first and foremost in a colloquial sense, not from a lack of critical rigor, but because the usage that matters most in the fight against fascism is always the vernacular.² While fascism is not in actuality populist, it adopts the terms of popular discourse to justify itself, and it is in this arena that it must be confronted.

At the same time, this project does have a legitimate historical and theoretical basis for describing the United States as fascist in purely descriptive terms (and not

¹ Less crucial, but still relevant, is the way reading the term as a compound of 'USA' and 'merica' brings to mind first the chants that tend to erupt at rallies and campaign events – 'U-S-A! U-S-A!' – and second the kind of affected pronunciation half-seriously applied to expressions of patriotism among (ostensibly) lower-class white USAmericans post-9/11, with 'Merica' sometimes shortened even further to 'Merka'. At least some of the popularity of this affectation can be attributed to the work of Trey Parker and Matt Stone, both in their long-running television series *South Park* and their film *Team America: World Police*, the latter of which features the song 'America, Fuck Yeah', sung in an alt-rock voice that renders 'America' closer to 'Merka'.

² For this reason, the project mostly avoids discussions of 'high' and 'low' culture when discussing 'popular' culture, even as it does take the time to acknowledge historical differences regarding the way certain media have been received. Furthermore, because this project is interested in the weird corners of USAmerican culture, many of the pop culture artefacts it addresses have – in pure numbers – relatively small audiences, even while their specific media (comic books, videogames, etc.) are colloquially understood to be part of 'pop culture'.

merely as an insult aimed a political opponent, for example). Specifically, a brief consideration of the term will demonstrate how the contemporary United States neatly and self-evidently corresponds to most of the features of what Umberto Eco calls 'ur-fascism' in his 1995 essay of the same name, written as a reflection of his own experience of fascism in Italy. In 'Ur-Fascism', Eco describes fascism as a game, with different variations bearing a 'family resemblance' born from their being 'fastened to some archetypal foundations'.³ Recognizing that certain terms (such as Nazism) are historically distinct, Eco nevertheless argues that 'Fascism became an all-purpose term because one can eliminate from a fascist regime one or more features, and it will still be recognizable as fascist'.⁴ Eco identifies fourteen 'features' of 'Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism', any one of which need 'be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it'.⁵ Without considering each of these fourteen features in detail one may note that more than one of them are considered throughout this text. This work provides a scattered look – an executive summary, a national intelligence estimate, an exegesis – at USAmerican fascism, describing how particular cultural artifacts and evolutionary trends express one or more of the features Eco describes.

The first of Eco's features of Ur-Fascism is the *cult of tradition*, which presents as a 'synchronistic' culture in 'there can be no advancement of learning'; instead, 'Truth had been already spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message'.⁶ In the case of the United States, this cult of tradition is immediately obvious in two historically (but not conceptually) distinct places: the popular historiography surrounding the United States' 'Founding Fathers', and the USAmerican superhero's role in the crystallization of popular memory following World War II. The former is the historical antecedent of contemporary glurge, while the latter is the origin of the specific Cop/Troop-as-superhero glurge that is the subject of Case Study 3: The Real Heroes.

The weird fiction cited throughout this text is practically defined by Eco's fifth feature, which concerns the way

³ Umberto Eco, 'Ur-Fascism', *The New York Review of Books*, 1995, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

⁴ Eco, 'Ur-Fascism'.

⁵ Eco, 'Ur-Fascism'.

⁶ Eco, 'Ur-Fascism'.

Ur-Fascism grows up and seeks for consensus by exploiting and exacerbating the natural *fear of difference*. The first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders. Thus Ur-Fascism is racist by definition.⁷

Since its emergence in the early 20th century weird fiction has demonstrated a preoccupation with threats from an ‘outside’ (often rendered in the context of the US American frontier and the specter of miscegenation) and the way this ‘appeal against the intruders’ has shifted in ‘the weird’ is considered in more detail in Case Study 1: The Kept Weird.

When Eco notes in the ninth entry that ‘for Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle’, he brings to mind a number of features central to US American culture. First, with the notion that ‘*life is permanent warfare*’, Ur-Fascism can be seen not only in the so-far endless War on Terror, but also the attendant militarization of the police into forces that see themselves as occupying powers, opposed to a civilian population viewed through the prism of counterinsurgency. The ‘Armageddon complex’ that Eco argues accompanies this view of life as permanent warfare is in the case of the United States frequently literal. Even as Ronald Reagan was careful to point out that his interest in Armageddon was purely ‘philosophical,’ he helped normalize a particular brand of white evangelical apocalypticism that has only accelerated its interest in the end of the world in recent years. When confronted about his interest in Armageddon during a 1984 presidential debate, Reagan remarked that

I think what has been hailed as something I'm supposedly, as President, discussing as principle is the recall of just some philosophical discussions with people who are interested in the same things; and that is the prophecies down through the years, the biblical prophecies of what would portend the coming of Armageddon, and so forth, and the fact that a number of theologians for the last decade or more have believed that this was true, that the prophecies are coming together that portend that. But no one knows whether Armageddon, those prophecies mean that Armageddon is a thousand years away or day after tomorrow. So, I have never seriously warned and said we must plan according to Armageddon.⁸

George W. Bush was not so reticent to ‘plan according to Armageddon,’ as seen when – during his attempt to secure French support for the second US invasion of Iraq – Bush told French President Jacques Chirac that

⁷ Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’.

⁸ ‘October 21, 1984 Debate Transcript’, *Commission on Presidential Debates*, 2016, <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-21-1984-debate-transcript>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

Gog and Magog are at work in the Middle East [...] The biblical prophecies are being fulfilled [...] This confrontation is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase his people's enemies before a New Age begins.⁹

More recently, US Secretary of State (and former head of the CIA) Mike Pompeo has repeatedly discussed 'preparing' for the Rapture as part of his diplomatic and national security responsibilities.¹⁰ While Pompeo's beliefs have been most apparent in his discussions of and with Israel, the often unspoken detail of these beliefs is that they are explicitly genocidal, as the Christian eschatology Pompeo subscribes to includes the eventual extermination of all non-Christians save for a select group of 144,000 Jews (who in this mythology may or may not be Jewish Christians). The links between the US government, white evangelicals, and contemporary fascism are pervasive and fractal, appearing at various levels; in just one example of many, when writing in 2015 about the likelihood that ISIS was a sign 'Christ's coming is near, even at the door', the head pastor of the Harvest megachurch Greg Laurie approvingly cited the Hungarian-American neo-Nazi Sebastian Gorka, who would go on to serve as Deputy Assistant to the President following the 2016 election (although he was ejected from the administration after failing to obtain a security clearance).¹¹ Such links are surprising only inasmuch as they are a norm that often goes unremarked in public discourse regarding US foreign policy.

Eco's tenth and eleventh features of Ur-Fascism concern 'contempt for the weak' and a 'perspective' wherein 'everybody is educated to become a hero'.¹² Eco writes that in Ur-Fascism 'every citizen belongs to the best people of the world, the members of the party are the best among the citizens, every citizen can (or ought to) become a member of the party', a situation that neatly describes the United States, so

⁹ Jean-Claude Maurice, *Si Vous Le Répétez, Je Démentirai* (Paris: Plon, 2009). Andrew Brown, 'Bush, Gog and Magog', *The Guardian*, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2009/aug/10/religion-george-bush>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Mary Sneyd, 'Agog Over Bush's Comments on Gog and Magog', *Cleveland.Com*, 2016, http://www.cleveland.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/08/agog_over_bushs_comments_on_go.html, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹⁰ Edward Wong, 'The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy', *The New York Times*, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹¹ Greg Laurie, 'What in the World is Happening? (#Worldwariii?)', *Harvest*, 2015, <https://harvest.org/resources/gregs-blog/post/what-in-the-world-is-happening-worldwariii/>. Accessed June 25, 2019; Lili Bayer and Larry Cohler-Esses, 'EXCLUSIVE: Nazi-Allied Group Claims Top Trump Aide Sebastian Gorka as Sworn Member', *The Forward*, 2017, <https://forward.com/news/national/366181/exclusive-nazi-allied-group-claims-top-trump-aide-sebastian-gorka-as-sworn/>, Accessed June 24, 2019.

¹² Eco, 'Ur-Fascism'.

long as ‘party’ does not refer to political parties, but rather the ‘state’ party that is the military, police, and attendant corporations, which includes the energy extraction industry.¹³ The contemporary adoption of superheroic imagery by the agents of state violence is not an ironic quirk but a flashing warning sign, because as Eco makes clear ‘the cult of heroism is strictly linked with the cult of death’.¹⁴ This link is the primary focus of Case Study 3: The Real Heroes, which examines the way superhero-themed funerals for children have become a site of celebration for the ‘heroic’ character of the police and military. Such funerals and the press surrounding them are a kind of ritual child sacrifice on an altar dedicated to the veneration of the fascist ideal in the form of the militarized police body, all presented as ‘positive’ via the emotional force of glurge.

Finally, woven throughout this text is the specter of what Eco calls ‘*selective populism*, a qualitative populism, one might say’, wherein ‘the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the Voice of the People’.¹⁵ Writing in 1995, Eco imagined that ‘there is in our future a TV or internet populism’ that might replace the physical expressions of the same in past fascist regimes, and history seems to have born this out. In the United States this qualitative populism is nowhere more evident than in the history of videogames, although there is precedent in the comic book industry as well. For example, in the 1988 Batman story *A Death in the Family*, the second Robin, Jason Todd, was murdered by the Joker following the results of a (real-world) phone poll hosted by DC Comics to determine his fate following a cliff-hanger issue; death was ultimately favored by a vote of 5,343 to 5,271, although when DC re-ran the poll in 2018, voters overwhelmingly chose life.¹⁶ In 2012, when players reacted negatively to the conclusion of the *Mass Effect* trilogy, videogame developer Bioware released a new ending four months later.¹⁷ When the response to a poster for the film adaptation of *Sonic the Hedgehog* was

¹³ In this context one should also note Ronald Reagan’s called ‘11th Commandment’, a folksy conflation of religion and politics that makes for an appropriately fascist appeal to party loyalty: ‘Thou shalt not speak ill of any fellow Republican’. Ronald Wilson Reagan, *An American Life*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 150.

¹⁴ Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’.

¹⁵ Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’.

¹⁶ Cameron Bonomolo, ‘DC Universe Launches Poll Deciding the Fate of the Jason Todd Robin’, *Comic book*, 2018, <https://comicbook.com/dc/2018/11/18/dc-universe-batman-robin-jason-todd-poll-vote-live-die-fate-titans/>, Accessed June 24, 2019.

¹⁷ Evan Narcisse, ‘Free Mass Effect 3: Extended Cut DLC to Give ‘More Closure’ This Summer’, *Kotaku*, 2012, <https://kotaku.com/free-mass-effect-3-extended-cut-dlc-to-give-more-clos-5899373>, Accessed June 24, 2019.

overwhelmingly negative, the director and studio responsible announced that the appearance of the title character would be changed, ostensibly still in time for the film's planned release in November, 2019.¹⁸ Scottish comic writer Grant Morrison writes about precisely this phenomenon in *Supergods*, when he considers the impulses underlying fellow Glaswegian Mark Millar's 2003-2005 comic book *Wanted*. Morrison writes that

Wanted articulated a new myth for the hordes of suddenly cool under-achievers who'd been lionized by the rise of 'nerd culture'. [...] The geeks were in the spotlight [and] could now gang up like the playground toughs they secretly wanted to be and anonymously abuse and threaten professional writers and actors with family commitments and bills to pay. Soon film studios were afraid to move without the approval of the raging Internet masses. They represented only the most minuscule fraction of a percentage of the popular audience that gave a shit, but they were very remarkably, superhumanly angry, like the great head of Oz, and so very persistent that they could easily appear in the imagination as an all-conquering army of mean-spirited, judgmental fogies.¹⁹

The mass mobilization of unhappy white men against their perceived enemies – seen most obviously in the case of Gamergate and its descendants – has been interpreted by corporations across popular culture as 'the Voice of the People', and the abusive labor practices required to respond to such demands is simply one more case of the inherent synergy between fascism and capital.

This selective populism is the illusion of democracy offered by capitalism and weaponized by fascism, and Eco points out that it emerges when, '[h]aving lost their power of delegation, citizens do not act; they are only called on to play the role of the People'.²⁰ The United States has never been a full democracy, and even the degree to which it is a democratic republic is warped by an intentionally unequal franchise as a result of the 1929 Reapportionment Act, which dissolved existing rules for congressional districting and arbitrarily capped the number of representatives in the House at 435. As a result, the vote of an individual in a large state (by population) is literally worth less than the vote of an individual from a smaller state, even before considering the Senate, which gives all states only two votes regardless of population; the roughly 3.5 million residents of Washington DC and Puerto Rico have no voting

¹⁸ Sam Machkovech, 'After Trailer Outcry, Sonic the Hedgehog Director Tells Fans to Expect 'Changes'', *Ars Technica*, 2019, <https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2019/05/after-trailer-outcry-sonic-the-hedgehog-director-tells-fans-to-expect-changes/>, Accessed June 24, 2019.

¹⁹ Grant Morrison, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us about Being Human*, (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011), 363-364.

²⁰ Eco, 'Ur-Fascism'.

power in either house of Congress. To this structural inequality one must add further disenfranchisement, including the stripping of the vote from felons, onerous voter ID requirements, and the closing of polling stations. In general fascists and antifascists agree that the United States is undemocratic; here what matters is that the actually undemocratic statutory structure of the United States government allows fascists to mobilize legitimate grievances ‘*against rotten parliamentary governments*’, a rhetorical feature Eco identifies as symptomatic of Ur-Fascism, in order to blame their favored victims.²¹ The mobilization of such grievances as part of the 2016 election has been the subject of much recent discussion, although as will be seen, these conversations have been sorely lacking in authority and veracity,

II: The Ignorant Leading the Uninformed

In June 2017, publishing house Zer0 Books released Angela Nagle’s *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan And Tumblr To Trump and The Alt-Right*, a text discussing what Nagle describes as a ‘strange vanguard of teenage gamers, pseudonymous swastika-posting anime lovers, ironic South Park conservatives, anti-feminist pranksters, nerdish harassers and meme-making trolls’.²² Early reviews of the book were mostly positive, with philosopher Slavoj Žižek claiming that Nagle provides a ‘much needed cognitive mapping for our predicament’ as – according to writer Amber A’Lee Frost – she is ‘the only [critic] willing to descend into the grimmest of internet grottoes and give us the benefit of her incisive and cool-headed analysis’.²³ *The Los Angeles Review of Books* lauded ‘Nagle’s measured prose’ and ‘her commitment to both context and dialects,’ arguing that ‘[i]t’s a credit to the book’s critical sophistication that both ends of the identity politics spectrum will feel aggrieved by Nagle’s assessment’.²⁴ This critical success was matched with popular sales, as *Kill All Normies* became ‘an explosively best selling book’ for Zer0.²⁵

²¹ Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’.

²² Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies* (Winchester, UK: Zer0 Books, 2017), 2.

²³ ‘Kill All Normies’, Zero-Books.Net, 2017, <http://www.zero-books.net/books/kill-all-normies>, Accessed June 27, 2019.

²⁴ Catherine Liu, ‘Dialectic of Dark Enlightenments: The Alt-Right’s Place in the Culture Industry’, *Los Angeles Review Of Books*, 2017, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/dialectic-of-dark-enlightenments-the-alt-rights-place-in-the-culture-industry/>, Accessed June 27, 2019.

²⁵ Douglas Lain, ‘Our Response to Charles Davis’ Attack on Angela Nagle’, Zero-Books.Net, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180713164327/http://zero-books.net/blogs/zero/our-response-to-charles-davis-attack-on-angela-nagle/>, Accessed June 27, 2019.

Although Nagle has academic training (having completed her PhD on ‘contemporary online anti-feminist movements’ in 2015), *Kill All Normies* was described by Zer0 Books publishing manager Douglas Lain as ‘a short work of cultural criticism, not academic research’, a description offered as an explanation for ‘[t]he absence of footnotes and academic referencing’ throughout.²⁶ The explanation was necessary following a series of posts by the website libcom, first in a Twitter thread and then in two follow-up articles, that accused Nagle of (among other things) plagiarism and errors of fact.²⁷ These critiques led to an article in *The Daily Beast*, which eventually led both Nagle and Zer0 Books to respond to some of these criticisms, including Lain’s explanation of the publisher’s various standards for sourcing.²⁸ While both Nagle and Zer0 Books conceded that the first edition may have suffered from ‘sloppy sourcing’, they primarily focused on the *Daily Beast* article and argued that its author, Charles Davis, manufactured criticism of Nagle due to her ‘publicly criticizing the state department line on Syria’, suggesting that a ‘media pipeline exists’ in order to ‘plagu[e] critics who go off-message politically’.²⁹

Zer0 Books has since deleted both its own response to the controversy and Nagle’s post (though archives of both are still available), and public discourse has largely moved on from the book. Despite *Kill All Normies*’ initially positive reception and subsequent controversy, there is little evidence to suggest it will have any lasting impact on our understanding of the contemporary political moment, and its analysis of its subjects is not so essential that it plays any major role in the remainder of this project. Even the questions raised by libcom and the *Daily Beast*’s critiques are outside the realm of this project’s work.

²⁶ Lain, ‘Our Response to Charles Davis’ Attack on Angela Nagle’.

²⁷ libcom dot org, Twitter Post, May 1, 2018, 3:50 PM, <https://twitter.com/libcomorg/status/991449795838529536>, Accessed June 6, 2019. Mike Harman, ‘Angela Nagle’s Plagiarise Any Nonsense’, Libcom.Org, 2018, <https://libcom.org/blog/angela-nagles-plagiarise-any-nonsense-03052018>, Accessed June 6, 2019. ‘5 Big Problems With Kill All Normies’, Libcom.Org, 2018, <https://libcom.org/blog/5-big-problems-angela-nagle-kill-all-normies-24052018>, Accessed June 6, 2019.

²⁸ Charles Davis, ‘Sloppy Sourcing Plagues ‘Kill All Normies’ Alt-Right Book’, *The Daily Beast*, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/kill-all-citations-sloppy-sourcing-plagues-kill-all-normies-book-on-sjws-and-the-alt-right>, Accessed June 6, 2019. Lain, ‘Our Response to Charles Davis’ Attack on Angela Nagle’. Angela Nagle, ‘Angela Nagle’s Statement Regarding The Daily Beast’, Zero-Books.Net, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180714033537/http://zero-books.net/blogs/zero/angela-nagles-state-regarding-the-daily-beast/>, Accessed June 6, 2019.

²⁹ Lain, ‘Our Response to Charles Davis’ Attack on Angela Nagle’. Nagle, ‘Angela Nagle’s Statement Regarding The Daily Beast’.

However, what *Kill All Normies* does offer is an instructive example of the problematic question of ‘expertise’ in the context of pop cultural objects and actors, as Nagle’s explicit disdain for the subject of her analysis works to undermine her credibility even without considering the errors in fact and attribution that appear throughout. Considering the questions of expertise raised by the book offers a helpful introduction to some of the reasons why this project has been structured as a guide, rather than a more straightforward narrative thesis. Nagle’s disdain for the objects of her attention is most apparent in her discussion of Gamergate, an ongoing harassment campaign that began in 2014, and that from the beginning has been aimed at terrorizing women (with the secondary purpose of bullying videogame developers and publishers, a phenomenon discussed in more detail under the glossary entry for fascism). In *Kill All Normies*, Nagle writes ‘[f]irst, let me be clear on my own position on gaming. If you’re an adult, I think you should probably be investing your emotional energies elsewhere. And that includes feminist gaming, which has always struck me as being as appealing as feminist porn; in other words, not at all’.³⁰ The sentiment itself is not remarkable, and indeed simply recapitulates hoary notions of art and value that by now are so outside the realm of relevance that no one need argue with them; the relevance of such discussions likely died with Roger Ebert, who repeatedly expressed the same reactionary ignorance, albeit in frequently more generous terms.³¹ What matters here is not simply Nagle’s disdain for her chosen object of analysis, but rather the way that this disdain is (in this case) inextricable from a willful ignorance regarding that object. One can quite easily offer useful and incisive commentary on a topic that one views with disgust or contempt, but Nagle does not do so here. Rather, she uses her disinterest in the topic as a justification for her lack of attention to specifics.

The remarkable part of this admission is that Nagle brings it up in the midst of discussing not only specific videogames, but also the wider community of people who play games, making demographic assessments and subsequent cultural assumptions even as she admits to a willful ignorance of the field. Because the book does not hold itself to any sort of critical rigor, these assessments are not merely misguided, but are as close to factually incorrect as something that ignores the possibility of facts could

³⁰ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 21.

³¹ Roger Ebert, ‘Okay, Kids, Play on My Lawn’, *Roger Ebert’s Journal*, 2010, <https://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/okay-kids-play-on-my-lawn>, Accessed June 27, 2019.

be.³² The problem is not merely that Nagle is demonstrably ignorant of what she is writing about, but that this ignorance leads her to uncritically accept the claims made by participants in Gamergate to such a degree that *Kill All Normies* presents as true and objective the decidedly warped view of the videogame industry offered by Gamergaters. Whether Nagle reifies these reactionary beliefs purposely or simply out of ignorance may be left up to her readers, as such a value judgement is not needed to appreciate the problematic results of her work.

These critical failures express themselves in a variety of ways. First, Nagle's account of Gamergate depends on assumptions about videogame players that are simply not true. When writing about the predominantly white, male players associated with Gamergate and their perception of the industry, she claims that

Games marketed to the anti-feminist gamergate audience were more likely to aestheticize war, violence, and technology, while in years preceding gamergate, the market for games directed at women had grown. This was especially so with games like *Candy Crush*, aimed at teenage girls who don't know what *World of Warcraft* is and which obviously offended those who considered themselves real gamers.³³

In these lines Nagle is implicitly recapitulating a binary – between supposedly 'casual' and 'hardcore' gamers – that dissolves under even minor investigation. That Nagle manages to casually reify this binary while failing to acknowledge its fundamentally misogynistic origins is consistent with her larger project.³⁴ While it is certainly the case that there are people who might play 'casual' games like *Candy Crush* while remaining entirely ignorant of texts that expect greater time commitments, Nagle suggests (without evidence) that this population could somehow be so dominant that it might meaningfully affect the lives of those who 'considered themselves real gamers'. Particularly embarrassing is her specific citation of *World of Warcraft*, which has had a

³² For this reason, *Kill All Normies* is mostly *bullshit*, a technical term explicated in the next chapter.

³³ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 21. While Nagle does not capitalize 'Gamergate', this project does in line with the most common usage. The 'gate' suffix stems from the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC, which was the site of the robbery that eventually led to Richard Nixon's resignation from the presidency and gave rise to the adoption of 'gate' as a synonym for 'scandal' in US American discourse. English comedians David Mitchell and Robert Webb parodied this tendency on their show *That Mitchell and Webb Look* in a sketch wherein Webb discusses 'Watergategate'.

³⁴ For an overview of these terms and topics see Erica Kubik, 'From Girlfriend to Gamer: Negotiating Place in the Hardcore/Casual Divide of Online Video Game Communities' (PhD, Bowling Green State University, 2009) and Jussi Kuittinen et al., 'Casual Games Discussion', in *Future Play* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2007), 105-112.

substantial female following during its 15-year history.³⁵ While player demographics have fluctuated (to be expected in a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game, or MMORPG), Nagle's implication that women – and particularly teenage girls – are by default ignorant of or averse to supposedly 'hardcore' games is simply unsupported by any evidence. These are minor points on their own; what matters is not simply that Nagle implies things that are simply not true, but that she does so as a direct result of her lack of expertise in the field, which leads her to become a seamless transmitter for Gamergate's underlying myths. This is not so much cultural criticism as uncritical amplification, which ultimately makes *Kill All Normies* itself complicit in the abuse meted out by Gamergaters.

While videogames are the only specific case where Nagle openly admits to her own lack of expertise, the problems that arise from this lack of meaningful experience with the topics she purports to speak authoritatively on appear in other parts of her analysis. This failure is particularly egregious earlier in the same chapter, when she attempts to use the now widely adopted Guy Fawkes mask as a lodestone for understanding 'the leaderless digital counter-revolution' that is the subject of the chapter. Nagle writes that

In many of the events that were considered part of the leaderless digital revolution narrative [...] the Guy Fawkes mask was adopted as a central symbol. But the online origins of the mask and the politically fungible sensibilities that can be traced back through the mask should have offered a clue that another very different variety of leaderless online movement had potential to brew.³⁶

However, rather than actually tracing the origins of the Guy Fawkes mask, Nagle instead offers a truncated history that simultaneously elides the specifics of the mask's origins as well as its first and arguably most important appearance in the public sphere.

Nagle begins her history of the Guy Fawkes mask late, suggesting that its first meaningful appearance in offline protest came with Occupy Wall Street. She writes that

The Guy Fawkes mask used in the protests in 2011 was a reference to Anonymous, which took its name, leaderless anti-celebrity ethic and networked style from the chaotic anonymous style

³⁵ Mike Schramm, 'Nielsen: WoW Is Most Played Core Game By 25-54 Females', *Engadget*, 2009, <https://www.engadget.com/2009/04/09/nielsen-wow-is-most-played-core-game-by-25-54-females/>, Accessed June 6, 2018.

³⁶ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 11.

of 4chan. V for Vendetta [sic], which the Guy Fawkes mask is taken from, and ‘the Dark Age of comic books’ influenced the aesthetic sensibilities of this broad online culture.³⁷

Putting aside the difficulty of parsing exactly what Nagle means when she uses ‘style’ and ‘aesthetic sensibilities’ – particularly as Nagle’s account does not explain what ‘the Dark Age of comic books’ actually means or reference it again – , this account is flawed because it flat-out ignores the actual history of Anonymous, its adoption of the Guy Fawkes mask, and the first meaningful appearance of both in public sociopolitical discourse, which was *not* the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests but rather the Project Chanology protests targeting the Church of Scientology three years earlier. This oversight is a fairly fundamental error and undermines other features of her analysis, including Nagle’s casual use of the phrase ‘ironic South Park conservatives’.³⁸ As will be seen, the history of Project Chanology is inseparable from the ideological force of *South Park*, and understanding this relationship is an essential component of any reasonable account of contemporary fascism in the United States. Exploring this relationship will help demonstrate the need for a particular kind of research project, authored by a particular kind of expert, namely, a guide.

III: The War for Imaginationland

Understanding the history that Nagle fails to address requires a deep dive into *South Park*, as the show has been on the air for twenty-two years (alongside an Academy-Award nominated film and numerous videogames). While *South Park*’s explicit politics (and those of its viewership) has by now been subject of substantial public and academic discourse, what matters in this context is not those elements and episodes of the show that explicitly address political figures and policies.³⁹ Rather, to actually understand the particular ideology of the contemporary trolls and millennial fascists that have erupted into the public consciousness following the election of Donald Trump in 2016, one needs to examine how *South Park* addresses the power of culture as such, as a material force to be controlled and deployed (often as weapons). This project considers what might be called ‘magical materialism’ across a variety of domains, and *South Park*’s treatment of ‘free speech’ and ‘imagination’ discussed here

³⁷ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 13.

³⁸ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 2.

³⁹ For this reason, the project at hand does not examine in any detail the classification ‘South Park Republican’, which is primarily a term of art for commentators concerned with the ‘horse-race’ of electoral politics, a la the fabled ‘soccer moms’ and ‘Nascar dads’.

can be considered a cousin of the theories explored throughout the remainder of the text, even as it provides a narrative path toward some of my own expertise in these fields.

This examination begins in July 2001 with the first airing of the *South Park* episode 'Super Best Friends'.⁴⁰ A play on *Super Friends*, itself an animated series from the 1970s-80s featuring characters from DC Comics' Justice League of America, 'Super Best Friends' was the first notable instance of *South Park* satirizing the Church of Scientology. In the episode, the magician David Blaine starts a cult known as the Blaintologists, and in order to save his friends from the cult's suicide pact (initiated after the group fails to secure tax-exempt status), *South Park* regular Stan enlists the help of Jesus and the titular Super Best Friends, made up of Muhammad, Buddha, Moses, Joseph Smith, Krishna, Laozi, and a parody of the DC character Aquaman. They are successful, and the day is saved. Despite the episode's references to numerous religious figures, including an on-screen representation of Muhammad, the episode did not generate significant controversy at the time, and would not until a few years later, when the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons characterizing the prophet as a bomb-wielding terrorist.⁴¹

However, before 'Super Best Friends' became relevant once again, *South Park* aired three more religiously-focused episodes that helped set the stage for Project Chanology. The first was 2003's 'All About Mormons', which included a song whose lyrics give an account of Mormonism's founding.⁴² As the song narrates the story of Joseph Smith, the chorus features the cheerful refrain 'Dum dum dum dum', meant to imply that Smith and his followers were themselves 'dumb'. Two years later, *South Park* repeated this process in the episode 'Trapped in the Closet', but instead of Mormonism, the show featured an account of Scientology's beliefs, including a banner on the bottom of the screen exclaiming 'THIS IS WHAT SCIENTOLOGISTS ACTUALLY

⁴⁰ *South Park*, 'Super Best Friends', S5E3, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, July 4, 2001.

⁴¹ 'Prophet Mohammed Cartoons Controversy: Timeline', The Telegraph, 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11341599/Prophet-Muhammad-cartoons-controversy-timeline.html>, Accessed June 27, 2019.

⁴² *South Park*, 'All About Mormons', S7E12, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, November 19, 2003. Although not Mormons themselves, *South Park*'s creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone have a long-demonstrated fascination with the religion, including their Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon*, which won nine Tony Awards in 2011.

BELIEVE'.⁴³ What distinguished 'Trapped in the Closet's account of Scientology from 'All About Mormons's account of Mormonism is that the beliefs of Scientology that *South Park* aired – including an account of Xenu, dictator of the 'Galactic Confederacy' and interstellar mass murderer – are considered by the Church of Scientology to be 'Advanced Technology', hidden from all lower-ranking members who have not yet reached 'Operating Thetan level III' on account of the immediate death that would supposedly befall anyone who learns of the story before ascending through the ranks (a process that requires a not-inconsiderable sum of money).⁴⁴ In anticipation of the Church of Scientology's famously litigious nature, the credits for the episode listed everyone as John or Jane Smith.

This episode did cause controversy, not least of all because it led to the departure of Isaac Hayes, the singer and Scientologist who had voiced the character of Chef since the series' debut. The first episode of the next season featured a Chef voiced by spliced audio from previous episodes and ended with the character's violent death following the revelation he had joined an organized group of pedophiles.⁴⁵ In addition, Comedy Central's decision to replace a subsequent rerun of 'Trapped in the Closet' with a different episode without notice led to sustained criticism from viewers, which – when coupled with Hayes' dramatic departure – was dubbed 'Closetgate'. While the tendency to append 'gate' to anything considered remotely scandalous in USAmerican discourse is common well beyond the subset of the population that would come to participate in Gamergate (and its subsequent spin-off focused on comic book creators, Comicsgate), there is a meaningful link between Closetgate and the resurgent fascism that erupted years later.

Certain viewers' suspicion that Comedy Central had apparently self-censored the rerun of 'Trapped in the Closet' was only exacerbated a few weeks later, as the

⁴³ *South Park*, 'Trapped in the Closet', S9E12, Directed and written by John Smith, Comedy Central, November 16, 2005.

⁴⁴ As the actual theological and/or literary implications of the Xenu story are not under consideration here, a robust explanation of the Church's idiosyncratic discourse (Operating Thetan, Advanced Technology, etc.) will not be attempted. Should this project be destined for publication, such an explanation (including more robust citations) will be necessary, not least of all to preclude lawsuits filed by the Church for copyright infringement, which in the past has been one method to prevent the story from leaking.

⁴⁵ *South Park*, 'The Return of Chef', S10E01, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, March 22, 2006.

two-part 'Cartoon Wars' story arc aired.⁴⁶ These episodes revolved around a fictional episode of the Fox animated series *Family Guy*, in which a representation of Muhammad is scheduled to appear. As the *South Park* character Cartman travels to Los Angeles to stop the episode airing in the hopes of getting *Family Guy* cancelled altogether due to his personal distaste for the series (and not out of any concern for religious sensitivity), other characters debate the ethical limitations of 'free speech', based on a comedic interpretation of *Family Guy's* writing process, in which a group of manatees select a series of seemingly random colored balls in order to 'write' the series' famously non-sequitur jokes. If a single ball is removed from their tank (in this case the ball with 'Muhammad' written on it), then the manatees refuse to work, thus making the show impossible. In the episode Cartman fails in his efforts, but when the fictional *Family Guy* episode with Muhammad appears near the end of the (real) *South Park* episode, Comedy Central opted to censor the image of the prophet, seemingly undermining the political statement made by the show's creators. That Muhammad had appeared without controversy in 'Super Best Friends' only exacerbated some viewers' displeasure with the decision, as it suggested the network's commitment to its employees' expression was entirely conditional. Although 'Cartoon Wars' intentionally distinguished between *South Park* and *Family Guy*, by censoring the image Comedy Central itself was seen to be 'abusing the manatees' in its stable, and in doing so undermining an only partially explicit principle of free expression that permeates *South Park* as a whole.

More than any of *South Park's* satirizing of USAmerican electoral politics or elected officials, 'Cartoon Wars' and its preceding episodes outlines the show's approach to culture, which is at once trivializing and extreme. The notion that everything must be acceptable or else nothing can be is a far cry from any legal notion of free or protected speech, and the implication that the Islamic prohibition on representations of the prophet is itself somehow an unacceptable restriction on the explicitly, intentionally trivial expression of cartoons is a claim not to universal freedom, but rather a demand for universal freedom for particular classes of people. This ostensibly oxymoronic ideology will be familiar to anyone used to internet trolls,

⁴⁶ *South Park*, 'Cartoon Wars Part I', S10E3, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, April 5, 2006. *South Park*, 'Cartoon Wars Part II', S10E4, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, April 12, 2006.

who frequently couch statements that would otherwise be straightforward hate speech or incitements to violence as ‘just a joke’; for example, a recent popular trend is to append the phrase ‘in Minecraft’ (the popular videogame) after an inflammatory statement in order to get around various online platforms’ restrictions on harassment and bullying.⁴⁷ In *Kill All Normies* Nagle repeatedly refers to such discourse as ‘transgression’, but this seems to be a misreading that ignores actual structural imbalances; this is the online vanguard of a cultural hegemony that privileges white, male epistemology over all others (often through the application of violence), so it seems definitionally impossible that it might ‘transgress’ a dominant discourse by reifying that discourse.⁴⁸ Such discourse is only ‘transgressive’ in the loosest, context-free sense of the word, because it depends on a complete misunderstanding of power relations in the Anglophone world; this discourse is always-already ‘punching down’, an act that by definition cannot be transgressive in a society already dependent on exploiting those who are not white men.

While this project disagrees with the understanding of ‘free’ speech and its ethical limitations and obligations offered by *South Park*, it *does* agree with the series’ wider understanding of culture’s materiality, expressed in a three-part story arc that appeared in the season following ‘Cartoon Wars’. The three episodes are sometimes aired together as a made-for-TV movie and are collectively known as ‘Imaginationland’.⁴⁹ In the story, the entirety of the human imagination is a physical place (called Imaginationland) that one may travel to, either by reciting a specific song or by entering through a portal controlled by the United States government (in an intentional allusion to the 1994 film *Stargate*). Having failed to successfully attack the United States for years, terrorists opt instead to attack the country’s imagination by travelling to Imaginationland and destroying the wall that separates the ‘good’ characters from the ‘bad’, thus allowing all the monsters and villains ever imagined to murder the ‘good’ characters and take over.

⁴⁷ Emily Gorcenski, Twitter Post, June 5, 2019, 9:43 PM, <https://twitter.com/EmilyGorcenski/status/1136493829874487296>, Accessed June 6, 2019.

⁴⁸ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 28.

⁴⁹ *South Park*, ‘Imaginationland Episode I’, S11E10, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, October 17, 2007. *South Park*, ‘Imaginationland Episode II’, S11E11, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, October 24, 2007. *South Park*, ‘Imaginationland Episode III’, S11E12, Directed and written by Trey Parker, Comedy Central, October 31, 2007.

The notion of the totality of the human imagination existing as a physical plane or else having some other form of shared materiality is not unique to 'Imaginationland', and indeed appears in a variety of what has been called postmodern fiction; the 'Blazing World' of Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and 'the Source' in DC Comics are just two such examples. However, where many representations of such 'universal' human imagination are limited by copyright, because *South Park* takes full advantages of fair use exemptions for satirical works, Imaginationland combines characters and settings from a wide variety of intellectual properties, including its own; the viewers eventually learn that the most 'evil' characters in all of Imaginationland are the Woodland Critters created by Cartman himself as part of a creative writing assignment in school. Crucially, although 'Imaginationland' maintains some degree of difference between the 'real' world and the human imagination, in terms of materiality (and specifically the propensity for violence) there is no meaningful distinction. In the story's conclusion, even as the characters determine that Imaginationland is not 'real', and thus Cartman loses a bet concerning the existence of leprechauns, at the same time he recognizes that the fact-fiction divide is itself illusory and thus imagines into existence what would have happened had he won the bet.⁵⁰ Whether or not what he imagines is 'real' has no bearing on the negative consequences of that imagination.

Once again *South Park* gives a more general model for certain popular methods of online trolling. In addition to using 'just a joke' or 'in Minecraft' as a way of skirting regulations, one method (particularly popular when harassing women) is to suggest the possibility of an alternate universe wherein some violent action is 'acceptable' rather than make a direct threat. So, for example, instead of threatening to rape someone, a troll might simply exclaim that there exists an alternate universe in which that person has been or is being raped and society has deemed it acceptable. While the intended effect is largely the same, the appeal to the possibility of imagination allows for a slight degree of discursive distance on the part of the assailant. That such discursive attacks can cause actual physiological harm is precisely the point; trolling is an expression of sadism, and its effectiveness comes from the (often-present)

⁵⁰ The bet itself is vulgar so I have opted not to explain it here but I can do so in the viva if anyone would like to know more.

psychopathy of the troll.⁵¹ While psychopathy is often inaccurately described as a lack of empathy as such, it really concerns a lack of *affective* empathy, or the ability to respond ‘appropriately’ to others’ emotions, with an individual’s cognitive empathy – the ability to understand or theorize another’s emotional state – remaining intact. An effective troll understands how a given statement might physiologically affect a target but does not ‘feel bad’ about that effect, and it is in this way trolling can be seen as a straightforward weaponization of discourse in a literal sense; discourse here has violent effects.⁵²

This is the context one consider when regarding the offline protest movements that, in Nagle’s reading, would eventually give rise to what has been called the ‘alt-right’.⁵³ When Project Chanology began in 2008 with an announcement by the loose association of hackers, trolls, and activists known as Anonymous, the movement was not explicitly associated with *South Park*. At the same time, the decision to target Scientology could not have occurred without Closetgate, as the furor over the episode (and the subsequent discourse) helped make the Church of Scientology a more public target, and what made Project Chanology particularly effective was the meeting of online culture with real-life protest.⁵⁴ The remarkable moment of these protests came when the Church of Scientology’s usual countermeasures were entirely ineffective against the always-online mob. Prior to these protests, the Church of Scientology had a reputation for litigiousness and retaliation in response to any perceived threat, whether from the government, reporters, ex-members, or mass-market animated television series. On the street level, this approach to perceived threats meant confronting and recording anyone perceived to be investigating or drawing unwanted

⁵¹ Erin E. Buckels, Paul D. Trapnell and Delroy L. Paulhus, ‘Trolls Just Want to Have Fun’, *Personality and Individual Differences* 67 (2014): 97-102.

⁵² The character Cartman is *South Park*’s troll *par excellence*, and multiple episodes have addressed trolling specifically, but not in a manner that contributes to this project’s understanding of the phenomenon. The more general phenomenon of meaning’s material effects is considered more thoroughly in Case Study 2: Magical Materialism in USAmerican Politics.

⁵³ This term and its variants (such as ‘alt-light’) are not used in any technical sense in this project because they do not make the phenomenon they are applied to any more intelligible. This project considers ‘alt-right’ to be nothing more than an ill-defined stylistic category that does not meaningfully distinguish those using that self-applied label from more ‘mainstream’ rightwing actors, particularly as the category ‘alt-right’ includes individuals explicitly associated with the Republican party.

⁵⁴ Project Chanology also included online denial-of-service attacks mostly performed via the Low-Orbit Ion Cannon (LOIC), a jokily-named open-source application that allows even individuals without substantial programming knowledge to participate in large-scale attacks.

attention to church properties, with the implication that the Church could then seek some sort of further retaliation.

This approach backfired in the face of Project Chanology because the protestors were both happy for the attention and had internalized the sense of power that comes from pseudo-anonymity, exemplified by the Guy Fawkes mask, which had been the adopted symbol of Anonymous since at least 2005, when the film adaptation of the 1982-1987 comic book *V for Vendetta* was released. In the film's climactic scene, a mob of people has adopted the mask used by the anarchist freedom fighter V, demonstrating the potency of the symbol while celebrating the power that comes from surrendering oneself to a mob. In the case of the Scientology protests, the V mask appeared alongside signs featuring popular internet memes, and the power of the attendees came from their insignificance. The online jokes and symbols were a way of short-circuiting the Church of Scientology's usual appeal to authority or financial power, because the protesters made clear that there was nothing the Church could actually do to them, as they lacked any financial or cultural status that could be attacked in return. Their power came from their insignificance and the way they trivialized the event, making their own protests into a joke and thus painting the Church, rather than the protestors, as unreasonable and dangerous.

Project Chanology exemplified the power of weaponized discourse because it dramatized precisely the kind of trolling that continues to prove effective on an individual level. In this context, the adoption of the Guy Fawkes mask by Occupy Wall Street and other subsequent protests represents a kind of turn away from what it first represented, because these protest movements lacked the kind of cultural precision demonstrated by Anonymous in its early iterations, precisely because these early iterations were effectively large-scale trolling efforts. When Nagle claims that 'the online origins of the [Guy Fawkes] mask and the politically fungible sensibilities that can be traced back through the mask should have offered a clue that another very different variety of leaderless online movement had potential to brew', she has it exactly backward.⁵⁵ The 'very different' leaderless online movement she refers to was there from the very start.

⁵⁵ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 11.

IV: Your Expert Friend

As an undergraduate at the University of California Santa Cruz I took part in Project Chanology, attending and documenting the protests at the Church of Scientology's location in San Francisco, and seeing firsthand how the Church's security personnel were powerless in the face of a bunch of internet nerds having a good time. This is only one specific instance where my expertise in the areas covered by this thesis is not just academic, but rather stems from robust personal experience subsequently augmented by the academic labor conducted over the course of this thesis. This is part of why the laudatory reviews given to *Kill All Normies*, published two years into this project, ring so hollow. Even as Nagle was credited with being 'the only [critic] willing to descend into the grimmest of internet grottoes', I was climbing out of those very same cultural hinterlands, with a depth of knowledge that can only come from firsthand experience.⁵⁶ Reading *Kill All Normies* (and indeed, much of the academic discourse following the 2016 US presidential election) brought to mind nothing so much as a line from the 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises*: 'Oh, you think darkness is your ally. But you merely adopted the dark; I was born in it, molded by it'.⁵⁷ This thesis is a critical analysis of particular texts, but it is also *a guide* written by an insider for an academic audience, a discursive map provided by a resident of the fields it examines. If the world of contemporary fascism is a kind of hell, then I might be considered for the role of Virgil.

For this reason, the authority with which I write cannot simply be demonstrated through an appeal to extant work or outside sources, nor can the reader simply take it on faith that I have some extra degree of insight thanks to my biography alone. Furthermore, due to the ephemeral nature of so many online interactions, some of which take place on platforms that no longer even exist, attempting to catalogue my extant experience and expertise prior to the initiation of this project with any systematic precision could only devolve into an absurd form of credentialism that – no matter how much jargon I might conjure – would amount to nothing more than the claim 'I have read many blogs, and posted many memes. For this I am an expert'.

⁵⁶ 'Kill All Normies', Zero-Books.Net, 2017, <http://www.zero-books.net/books/kill-all-normies>, Accessed June 27, 2019.

⁵⁷ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight Rises*, film (United States: Warner Bros., 2012). While this citation would place me in the role of the film's villain and Nagle in the position of Batman, considering the latter's implicit fascism means the comparison is perhaps more apt than might initially appear.

Instead I will simply offer a few more details on my lived experience as it relates to some of the content of this thesis before addressing more specifically the extant 'guides' from which this project draws its inspiration (although not necessarily its topical or generic affiliation).

First, I must admit that I have been a troll, beginning as a child using America Online (AOL) to test the boundaries of branded chat rooms. In my case this meant attempting to be ejected from the Burger King Kid's Club chat room for posting obscenities, beginning with relatively tame euphemisms and escalating in vulgarity until the inevitable banning. A more contemporary version of this is the '*Club Penguin* speedrun', in which players attempted to create a new account for the massively multiplayer online game aimed at children (Disney purchased the game in 2007) and subsequently earn a profanity-based ban for that account as quickly as possible.⁵⁸ While speedrunning began as a competitive playstyle oriented around retro videogames, with players using glitches and exploits to complete notoriously difficult games as quickly as possible, the exploitation of quirks in the online registration and banning process led to *Club Penguin* developing a speedrunning community of its own; before the original iteration of *Club Penguin* was finally shut down on March 30, 2017, the world record time was 37.370 seconds from start to finish.⁵⁹

As a lifelong videogame player, I was also active in early online gaming communities, including Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone, where I regularly played *Age of Empires* and *Jedi Knight*, before transitioning to Steam, where I could be found playing *Counter-Strike*, occasionally falling into the category of players known as 'griefers', a now mostly outmoded term for players that intentionally troll others, often by attacking their own teammates or otherwise disrupting the game by engaging in 'unsportsmanlike' conduct. I have also been a sporadic *World of Warcraft* player over its 15-year history, as well as an early participant in *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, before it transitioned from a subscription model to being 'free-to-play'. I am an independent game designer myself, having created content for the collaborative project *Shadowrun*

⁵⁸ Steven Messner, 'Getting Banned from Club Penguin is Now a Speedrunning Competition', *PC Gamer*, 2017, <https://www.pcgamer.com/uk/getting-banned-from-club-penguin-is-now-a-speedrunning-competition/>, Accessed June 6, 2019.

⁵⁹ 2KRN4U, 'Club Penguin - Banned In 0M 37S 370Ms', *Speedrun.Com*, 2017, <https://www.speedrun.com/cp/run/wzpj2gz>, Accessed June 6, 2019.

Identity (based in the game *Shadowrun Returns*) before developing my own projects in the Unreal Engine.⁶⁰

I list these specific experiences for two reasons. First, to make clear how diametrically opposed I am to a cultural critic like Nagle, who has approached these topics as a proud outsider, and secondly, to make clear to those readers that might be familiar with these texts the specific subcultures to which I have belonged. In the latter case, these details will likely be of little interest to a majority of potential readers but extremely useful information to a particular subset. Although videogames have been around for over four decades now (and comic books even longer), the academic gates that have historically been kept mean that one cannot assume any specific degree of familiarity on the part of the reader in the same way that one might (for example) be able to assume an Anglophone reader will have at least some awareness of Shakespeare. As a guide, one of my responsibilities is determining how much minutia is necessary to include in a given situation, a challenge more fully theorized in the Glossary entry on comic books.

My experience with comic books as a reader and member of a ‘fandom’ is – as with videogames – part of a lifelong engagement, beginning in childhood and continuing to this day. The primary detail of that experience of particular relevance to establishing my rhetorical *ethos* here is the fact that I grew up in Carlsbad, California, in the northern area of San Diego county, and as a result regularly attended San Diego Comic-Con. Although fandom studies and convention culture do not play a major role in this project, I do at least carry with me firsthand experience of the industry’s most prominent annual meeting, including direct observation of Comic-Con’s transition from a relatively cloistered convention to the widely-attended event aimed at a more general audience that it is today.⁶¹

Finally, growing up in North County as part of a conservative Christian family has given me particular insight into the overlapping communities and motivating

⁶⁰ ‘Shadowrun Identity’, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140316055057/http://www.shadowrunidentity.org/>, Accessed June 6, 2019.

⁶¹ Growing up in North County also gave me an eclectic experience with the materiality of popular culture, as my own high school was the partial basis for a level in the videogame *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater 2* (Hawk himself being a longtime Carlsbad resident). The neighboring Rancho Buena Vista High in Vista, California was also included in the level, and more generally the school and its Longhorn mascot were the inspiration for the Rancho Carne Toros in the 2000 film *Bring It On*.

myths of white evangelicals and the United States military. For twelve years I attended church weekly at North Coast, an Evangelical Free Church of America in Vista, and for nine years I attended Tri-City Christian School in the same city. The 'Tri-City' of the name refers to the cities of Carlsbad, Vista, and Oceanside, with the latter two bordering Camp Pendleton, the largest military installation on the west coast of the United States. Inland and further south one finds Marine Corps Air Station (site of the film *Top Gun*), and Naval Base San Diego, the homeport of the US Navy's Pacific fleet. Although being a white US American means I will never really know the experience of living alongside one of the US military's imperial outposts across the globe, where US soldiers are able to act with impunity thanks to Status of Forces agreements that frequently exempt them from local laws, my childhood and adolescence in North County did teach me the casual violence and bigotry that is a constant companion to the US military, as my weekends were spent dodging drunk Marines whose pastimes often included starting fights downtown and throwing glass bottles at local teenagers from their passing cars.

Although initially relatively small, North Coast Church is now classified as a 'megachurch', with six different campuses spread out across the county. During my time there, I attended church and youth group regularly, went to camp every summer, served on student volunteer teams during the school year, led a weekly Bible study in high school, and took part in 'missionary' trips to Mexico and Czech Republic. In addition to the regular sermons and Bible studies, I researched Christian apologetics and eschatology, with a particular focus on the latter as I grew up during the initial publication of the wildly successful *Left Behind* series of novels.⁶² Furthermore, I regularly took part in my extended family's church events, including the Harvest Crusades, large evangelizing events organized in stadiums across the country by Harvest, another megachurch based in Riverside, California. When I write about Ronald Reagan's interest in the Biblical apocalypse or George W. Bush's insistence that the second Iraq war prefigured the Second Coming of Christ, I do so as someone who has lived these beliefs, and know firsthand the literal power of such imaginings. Although I myself am now an atheist, I – like multiple US presidents – believe that the narrative

⁶² My academic background in literary studies is a direct result of my education in Christian exegesis, which I now consider to be a form of often less-than-rigorous close reading.

force of the (white evangelical) Christian god is immediately evident in the kinetic capability of the US military; we merely disagree on whether this is a good thing.

V: A Guide to Guides

The decision to organize this project as a guide stems from two related considerations. First, my reading of academic (and more general) responses to the election of Donald Trump in 2016 suggested that a critical lacuna existed in Anglophone discourse above and beyond the more specific gaps in knowledge this project was initially designed to fill, requiring a more fundamental reevaluation of what this project had to offer contemporary discourse. What began as an exploration of certain narratological trends in US American comic books written by British authors (a canon closely related to the Dark Age of Comics) became a more urgent consideration of how these cultural milieus contributed to contemporary political developments. In the face of these developments, I realized it would be better to address a wide array of gaps in knowledge across seemingly disparate domains rather than make some small, localized contribution to our understanding of a particular corpus of texts (as might be expected from a straightforward PhD thesis in the general category of literary or cultural theory and criticism), because linking these disparate lacuna together via the more fundamental oversights they seemed to be symptoms of would allow us to confront the contemporary situation from a new perspective, and specifically one not so tied to the sense of disorientation that recent political developments seem to have caused. Rather than accept the ideological position that the crises of contemporary global society are simply too ‘big’ to account for in a project of this scope, I decided to begin from the presumption that human culture might be made intelligible to itself, so long as one was not tied to a particular schema or systematic approach from the outset, as such schemata risk finding themselves overwhelmed by the exceptions to whatever rules an investigation might begin with.

In a general sense this approach is not unheard of, and indeed has been theorized as the ‘inventor’s paradox’ as early as 1945 by the mathematician George Pólya. In his book *How to Solve It*, Pólya describes the paradox – which is really more of a counterintuitive observation than a strict paradox – as follows:

The ambitious plan may have more chances of success. [...] More questions may be easier to answer than just one question. The more comprehensive theorem may be easier to prove, the more general problem may be easier to solve.⁶³

In the case of this project, it became clear that it would be more productive to provide a wide-ranging guide to various discourses related to the popular culture and the contemporary resurgence of fascism in the Anglophone world (presented in the form of a glossary) than attempt to describe in detail the relationship between (for example) a particular comic book published in the 1980s and the online harassment campaigns of today. Simply defining terms and providing some small degree of context for a single comic inevitably spools out into all these different fields, making the work of this seemingly 'small' project practically endless. To use a metaphor: rather than trying to account for the particulars of a single wave, it is easier simply to describe the ocean.

In addition to the questions of scope and scalability discussed above, the decision to emphasize this project's status as a guide was influenced by the recurring appearance of guidebooks in and alongside popular culture, including but not limited to the videogame guidebooks that used to accompany games as narrative and pedagogically crucial paratextual artifacts, the *Dungeon Master's Guide* that debuted near the beginning of this project's historical frame and led to the popularity of role playing games both analog and digital, and perhaps the most famous guide in all of popular culture, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Each of these examples influenced the creation of this guide in some way.

The videogame guides that used to accompany games were in the early decades of the videogame industry not additions to the game but rather essential elements of the overall text. Although by now in-game tutorials that are part of the gameplay experience themselves are commonly used to teach players the game's mechanics, prior to these the more common tendency was to outline specific narrative and mechanical details in printed matter. One such example can be found in the guidebook to the 1979 game *Adventure*, published for the Atari 2600 system. *Adventure's* guidebook is typical of the

⁶³ George Pólya, *How to Solve It* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 121.

genre, as it layers narrative content that serves to fill out the story of the game beyond what is rendered on-screen – ‘an evil magician has stolen the Enchanted Chalice and has hidden it somewhere in the Kingdom’ – on top of more straightforward mechanical instruction: ‘you can move in any of eight directions with the joystick in that direction’.⁶⁴ The dual instruction is important because it directly involves both behavioral instruction and a narrative case for why such behavior should be undertaken. This project operates on the same principle, by instructing the reader in a particular way of reading this project as well as the texts it cites while making the narrative case for why such an epistemological shift is not merely recommended, but necessary. The reader is free to move through this text however they want and with whatever critical tools they arrive with but paying attention to what the guide says will ensure an optimal experience.

This may seem an obvious point, but it is a necessary one, because the project demands different modes of reading throughout. For example, at times a comic book might be a text under consideration as an object, or else it may be cited as a critical theoretical source on its own, cited not as evidence but as argument. At the same time, because I cannot reasonably expect the reader to follow or recall each and every modal switch, the text presented here offers an overabundance of disparate examples so that even without strict adherence to the guide’s instructions for reading a given genre, text, or even subsection of this guide, the reader will still come away with a reasonable approximation of the contemporary world as described by the discourse presented here. With this the project takes a cue from Jorge Luis Borges – a writer who reappears throughout the Glossary – in his introduction to his essay ‘The Nothingness of Personality’. Remarking on the degree to which argumentative structure is perhaps the least remembered element of a text, Borges writes

I have noticed that, in general, the acquiescence conceded by a man in the role of reader to a rigorous dialectical linkage is no more than a slothful inability to gauge the proofs the writer adduces and a vague trust in the latter’s rectitude. But once the book has been closed and the reading has dispersed, little remains in his memory except a more or less arbitrary synthesis of the whole reading. To avoid this evident disadvantage, I will, in the following paragraphs, cast aside all strict and logical schemas, and amass a pile of examples.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Atari, *Adventure: Game Program Instructions* (Sunnyvale: Atari, 1979), 1-2.

⁶⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Nothingness of Personality’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 4.

While this guide by no means looks to imply that its readers might be slothful, it is sympathetic to Borges' decision to 'amass a pile of examples' in order to make the evidence for its points clear without too much reliance on the reader's ability to recall the structural turns of the entire text.

In fact, the organization of the majority of this text's body into a glossary actually encourages the reader to skip around, ignoring a linear route from first page to last and instead following whatever path their curiosity might lead them to. This too is a feature common to many guidebooks, whose function as a reference means that they are designed to be returned to at various points and for different reasons. The reader could opt to begin with the case studies that follow the glossary, and only flipping back to previous pages as need be, or else the text may be read from start to finish with no diversions or skipping ahead. The primary work of this text – or in the parlance of academic regulations, 'the creation and interpretation of new knowledge [...] that extends the discipline' – is the development of a discourse capable of making intelligible the relationship between fascism and contemporary popular culture, but the inception of that discourse in the mind of the reader need not occur in alphabetical order.

The same year *Adventure* was published saw the publication of the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide*, the first edition of a series that would continue to this day (now in its fifth iteration). The most famous tabletop role-playing game, *Dungeons and Dragons* introduced a number of concepts that would eventually become commonplace in videogames, including a number of games cited in this text. While considering the cultural legacy of *Dungeons and Dragons* is beyond the scope of this project, the foreword to the original *Dungeon Master's Guide* does offer some helpful context for understanding the relationship between this text's two portions, the Glossary and the Case Studies. Although the 'game' suggested by this text is perhaps less immediately fun than that supported by the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, that guide nevertheless makes clear the particular relationship between reader and text. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* emphasizes that 'Dungeon Mastering is, above all, a labor of love', described as 'demanding, time-consuming, and certainly not a task to be

undertaken lightly'.⁶⁶ The guide requests 'your imagination', instructing the reader to 'use the written material as your foundation and inspiration, then explore the creative possibilities you have in your own mind to make your game something special'. In the same way this text both provides the reader with the tools necessary to perform the kind of analysis on display while expecting the reader to contribute their own labor to performance of this discourse. The Glossary provides the reader with the tools necessary to perform their own readings of culture according to the discourse developed in this text, and the Case Studies offer examples of what such readings look like in practice. This relationship explains the ratio of prose in this project, as the Glossary represents the vast majority of text, obviating the need for narratively progressive chapters.

Finally, this project takes from Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* two specific narrative impulses. First, although this work is decidedly an academic text, like the fictional *Hitchhiker's Guide* it draws on a knowledge base that has evolved largely outside the confines of academic institutions, as it depends on the extensive annotative work performed by communities of fans and collected in blogs, wikis, and discussions across social media. In the 1979 novel of the same name *The Hitchhiker's Guide* is described as having 'been compiled and recompiled many times over many years and under many different editorships', with 'contributions from countless numbers of travelers and researchers'.⁶⁷ The third book in the series (*Life, The Universe, and Everything*) reveals that the *Guide* has only had four official editors, with the fourth having left on a lunch break and never returned; all editors over the subsequent century were designated 'acting editors' only.⁶⁸ The editors matter less than the countless contributors to the guide, who create entries ranging from one or two words to expansive treatise on a given topic, with the impression given that the book 'contains many passages that simply seemed to its editors like a good idea at the time'.⁶⁹ This project highlights this 'uneven' quality of the Hitchhiker's Guide because it serves as a helpful metaphor for the knowledge base upon which this project is based, even if comic books and videogames are not as far flung from mainstream academic

⁶⁶ Gary Gygax, *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeon Masters Guide*, 1st ed. (TSR Games, 1979), 2.

⁶⁷ Douglas Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide* (New York: Random House, 2005), 53.

⁶⁸ Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*, 53 & 402.

⁶⁹ Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*, 99.

discourse as, for example, the Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters or Infinite Improbability Drives of Adams' science fiction opus.

Because this project examines 'popular' culture, the bulk of the scholarship upon which it relies was written by non-academics and published in non-academic venues, from the fanzines of the twentieth century to the wikis and blogs of the 21st, which form a kind of decentralized, distributed guide to the galaxy of Anglophone comic books, videogames, and their attendant cultural cliques. While some of the texts referenced herein have undoubtedly received academic attention, with comic books, videogames, and online memes being increasingly theorized and formalized within Anglophone academia, because this project is also a history, it cannot rely on these late-to-the-game additions to the corpus of popular Anglophone culture. Instead, it emphasizes the work done by those readers and amateur critics who noticed these texts at the time of their initial publication and put the work in to map the vast worlds and production processes behind the cultural objects that only relatively recently have been recognized as the dominant and domineering forces in Anglophone entertainment. While this project does cite some traditional academic texts, it explicitly rejects the notion that an academic press or affiliation is necessary for a given work to be an appropriate source of theory or criticism, and furthermore, argues that this expectation, whether implicit or explicit, is itself the product of a specifically capitalist impulse with historically determined origins, having no inherent relation to what practices might actually produce good or bad scholarship.

This explicitly combative position regarding certain expectations and historical gatekeeping is the final feature of the project inspired by *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, following from a vignette that appears in *Life, The Universe, and Everything*. Recounting the story of 'Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged', one of the few immortal people in the universe and one of the only not to have been born that way, Wowbagger was uniquely bilious, having 'come to hate [...] the load of serene bastards' able to cope with the experience of infinite life.⁷⁰ Having lived so long Wowbagger 'began to despise the Universe in general, and everybody in it in particular', an experience that led to his recurring role in the *Hitchhiker's Guide* stories,

⁷⁰ Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*, 317.

which can be read as a thematic coda for this project's approach to the world it finds itself in:

he conceived his purpose, the thing that would drive him on, and which, as far as he could see, would drive him on forever. It was this. He would insult the Universe. That is, he would insult everybody in it. Individually, personally, one by one, and (this was the thing he really decided to grit his teeth over) in alphabetical order. When people protested to him, as they sometimes had done, that the plan was not merely misguided but actually impossible because of all the people being born and dying all the time, he would merely fix them with a steely look and say 'A man can dream, can't he?'⁷¹

⁷¹ Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*, 317-318.

Glossary

ℵ

ℵ, which is the first letter of the Semitic alphabets and variously rendered in English as *aleph*, *alef*, or *alif*, is the term adopted by this project to describe its philosophical first principle regarding how meaning works. Two stylistic points: this project adopts the ‘aleph’ spelling in line with Jorge Luis Borges’ usage and does not italicize the term due to its widespread adoption as a loan word in English. In Borges’ short story ‘The Aleph’, the thing of the title is ‘one of the points in space that contains all other points’, and is a useful understanding of how meaning works, as concepts are always-already linked together in the vast web of displacement and signification that is the human superorganism circa 2019.⁷² To experience Borges’s Aleph is to experience an infinite subjectivity: the narrator recounts that he saw ‘each thing’ as ‘infinite things,’ seen ‘from every point in the cosmos’, and he struggles to recount this simultaneity of experience in a language dependent on linearity.⁷³ As a result, the narrator recounts concurrent events in a list of seemingly unrelated moments:

I saw horses with wind-whipped manes on a beach in the Caspian sea at dawn, saw the delicate bones of a hand, saw the survivors of a battle sending postcards, saw a Tarot card in a shop window in Mirzapur, saw the oblique shadows of ferns on the floor of a greenhouse, saw tigers, pistons, bison, tides, and armies[.]⁷⁴

He goes on to describe how he ‘saw my face and my viscera, saw your face, and I felt dizzy, and I wept, because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has ever truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe’.⁷⁵ The experience gives him ‘a sense of infinite veneration, infinite pity’ as the boundaries between individuals are erased in favor of the totality of being.⁷⁶

This project does not aim for anything close to conveying a unity of being among everyone in the universe, not least of all because it has a number of very harsh things to say about specific people. However, it does suggest that Borges’ aleph is a useful metaphor for both the way meaning functions as such and the kind of

⁷² Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Aleph’, *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 280.

⁷³ Borges, ‘The Aleph’, 283.

⁷⁴ Borges, ‘The Aleph’, 283.

⁷⁵ Borges, ‘The Aleph’, 284.

⁷⁶ Borges, ‘The Aleph’, 284.

simultaneous worldview needed to confront the contemporary resurgence of fascism. While this text is a history, the bulk of that history is not presented linearly, but is rather exploded across the entries of this glossary in order to demonstrate conceptual and material links between events and topics that, were they to be organized in a more straightforward manner, would be difficult to articulate. The remainder of this entry spools out some of these linkages in a series of vignettes, separated by a dash (-). This notation appears throughout the remainder of the text, and is a sign that a shift has occurred, sometimes in topic and sometimes in tone, but always with an eye toward the kind of cognitive leaps needed to accomplish the work at hand.⁷⁷ That said, this is the most confusing and least linear entry (befitting its subject matter), as it navigates the tangled webs that link the USAmerican empire to the development of ‘critical theory’.

-

In 1945, researchers from Johns Hopkins University – with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation – performed experiments for the US government, infecting unsuspecting Guatemalans with syphilis, gonorrhea, and other STDs in return for grant money.⁷⁸ Children as young as nine were involved in the experiments, and in one instance ‘a woman from the psychiatric hospital was injected with syphilis, developed skin lesions and wasting, and then had gonorrheal pus from a male subject injected into both of her eyes’.⁷⁹ The University never admitted its role in the experiments until they were uncovered in 2010, and discovery is still ongoing in a lawsuit brought against Johns Hopkins by over 800 victims and their families.⁸⁰

-

After playing an instrumental role early in the United States’ failed attempt to colonize Vietnam, Special Assistant to the President in Charge of National Security McGeorge Bundy left his post to become president of the Ford Foundation, ‘the tax-exempt cream of the vast Ford fortune’ that by 1966 had become one of the Central

⁷⁷ These cognitive leaps are explored further on in this entry.

⁷⁸ Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues, *‘Ethically Impossible’: STD Research in Guatemala From 1946 To 1948* (Washington, D.C.: www.bioethics.gov, 2011), 30-31.

⁷⁹ Oliver Laughland, ‘Guatemalans Deliberately Infected with STDs Sue Johns Hopkins University For \$1Bn’, *The Guardian*, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/apr/02/johns-hopkins-lawsuit-deliberate-std-infections-guatemala>. Accessed June 28, 2019.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Stempel, ‘Johns Hopkins, Bristol-Myers Must Face \$1 Billion Syphilis Infections Suit’, *Reuters*, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-maryland-lawsuit-infections/johns-hopkins-bristol-myers-must-face-1-billion-syphilis-infections-suit-idUSKCN10Y1N3>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

Intelligence Agency's favored money laundering organizations, precisely for the respectable veneer offered by the Foundation's 'charitable' work.⁸¹ Along with other tax-exempt organizations born from the hoarded wealth of US American oligarchs (such as the Rockefeller and Andrew W. Mellon Foundations), the Ford Foundation allowed the CIA to covertly fund cultural projects – including the Congress for Cultural Freedom and *Encounter* magazine – without needing to send money directly to the various agents the Agency placed within the organizations themselves.⁸² Bundy's move to become the Ford Foundation's president was just the latest in such lateral shifts by career national security figures, as the 1950s and 60s had seen the Ford Foundation serve as a revolving door between the CIA and ostensibly 'private' or civilian projects.⁸³

The same year Bundy joined the Ford Foundation as its president, it funded an interdisciplinary symposium entitled 'The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man', which took place from October 18 -21 at Johns Hopkins University.⁸⁴ The symposium was the inaugural event of the University's newly-opened (and now closed) Humanities Center, which itself was the pet project of the University's then-president, Milton S. Eisenhower. The younger brother of US President and WWII general Dwight D. Eisenhower, Milton Eisenhower came to Johns Hopkins in 1956 from Kansas State University, where he had been president since 1943 after resigning from his role overseeing the internment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps the previous year. Despite his apparent distaste for the violent relocation of Japanese Americans and the seizure of their land by white farmers – one of the primary motivations for the internment – Eisenhower was nevertheless a recurring figure in the United States' imperial projects, including a 1958 meeting that helped to legitimize the Nicaraguan dictator Luis Somoza Debayle, who became acting president following the assassination of his father in 1956.⁸⁵ Even as he was president of Johns Hopkins,

⁸¹ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, 2nd ed. (London: Granta Books, 2000), 139.

⁸² Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, 139; Thomas W Braden, 'I'm Glad The CIA Is 'Immoral'', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1967.

⁸³ Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, 139.

⁸⁴ Richard Alan Macksey and Eugenio Donato, *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences Of Man*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), xv.

⁸⁵ A.V. Krebs, 'Bitter Harvest', *Washington Post*, 1992, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1992/02/02/bitter-harvest/c8389b23-884d-43bd-ad34-bf7b11077135>. Accessed June 29, 2019. United States Department of State, *FOREIGN RELATIONS*

Eisenhower worked alongside Bundy as presidential adviser to both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations during the 1960s.

The most famous of the presentations at 'The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man' was Jacques Derrida's paper 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', which mostly discussed Claude Lévi-Strauss' body of work; Lévi-Strauss himself was in attendance but did not present.⁸⁶ The critique of Lévi-Strauss that Derrida debuted there would continue in his book *Of Grammatology*, and was of the genre that would today be recognized as 'concern trolling', or the act of 'disingenuously express[ing] concern about an issue with the intention of undermining or derailing genuine discussion'.⁸⁷ Specifically, Derrida fabricates statements in Lévi-Strauss' work in order to undermine the latter's critique of European and USAmerican colonization in South America.⁸⁸ He accuses Lévi-Strauss of maintaining a false dichotomy between inherently 'good' indigenous people and inherently 'bad' European and USAmerican interlopers, but this dichotomy simply does not exist in the texts Derrida cites, and furthermore, the only time Lévi-Strauss gets close to suggesting such a dichotomy refers to the destruction of the land by colonizers.⁸⁹ Without overstating the historical case too much based on a single example, Derrida's concern-trolling is a perfect example of the degree to which (what might be called) post-structuralist theory finds itself immediately amenable to the hegemonic forces of white supremacist patriarchal imperialism.

One thing Derrida and Lévi-Strauss agree on, at least implicitly, is the *power* of discourse. The basis of Derrida's critique (despite its evidentiary failures) is the recognition that Lévi-Strauss highlights a constant struggle throughout his work, which is the need to critique extant concepts while recognizing their locally useful explanatory value. Derrida narrates Lévi-Strauss' recognition that because the critique

OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, AMERICAN REPUBLICS, VOLUME V. Editorial Note (Washington DC: Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, 2019).

⁸⁶ M.C. McGrady, 'The bricolage of a myth: Re-reading Derrida reading Lévi-Strauss fifty years after', *Word and Text*, 7, December 2017, 236.

⁸⁷ 'Concern troll', Oxford English Dictionary, 2019, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/concern_troll, Accessed June 29, 2019.

⁸⁸ McGrady, 'The bricolage of a myth', 239-241.

⁸⁹ McGrady, 'The bricolage of a myth', 239-241.

of ethnocentrism cannot escape its own discourse, and thus cannot help but reproduce ethnocentrism in whatever form,

whether he wants to or not – and this does not depend on a decision on his part – the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed in denouncing them.⁹⁰

At the same time, even ‘if nobody can escape this necessity, and if no one is therefore responsible for giving in to it, however little, this does not mean that all the ways of giving in to it are of an equal pertinence’.⁹¹ Rather, Derrida argues, ‘the quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigor with which this relationship to the history of metaphysics and to inherited concepts is thought’.⁹² This is the standard by which Derrida evaluates Lévi-Strauss’s work, and most of ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’ concerns itself with the way this tension – ‘the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself’ – plays itself out in Lévi-Strauss’s version of structuralism.⁹³

Derrida never mentions Jorge Luis Borges in ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’, but the latter’s account of the experience of the aleph and Derrida’s account of post-structuralist inquiry are notably similar, as Derrida emphasizes the impossibility of discerning a genuine center of meaning or ‘origin’ of discourse:

The center is at the center of a totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center.⁹⁴

Derrida’s game of constant displacement – wherein the discursive act of criticism is always-already engaged in moving on to the next connected thing, or what Derrida describes in consciously sexist terms as the ‘*seminal* adventure of the trace’ – can bring to mind Borges’ account of the aleph, because although the latter is supposed to reveal the simultaneity of what it describes, the human experience of time renders that simultaneity into a series of discrete images.⁹⁵ Where Derrida writes that ‘the center is not the center’, Borges discusses the difficulty of the Aleph by remarking that

⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, 252.

⁹¹ Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’, 252.

⁹² Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’, 252.

⁹³ Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’, 252.

⁹⁴ Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’, 252.

⁹⁵ McGrady, ‘The bricolage of a myth’, 239-241.

Mystics, faced with the same problem, fall back on symbols: to signify the godhead, one Persian speaks of a bird that somehow is all birds; Alanus de Insulis, of a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere; Ezekiel, of a four-faced angel who at one and the same time moves east and west, north and south.⁹⁶

During the discussion following Derrida's presentation at 'The Sciences of Man' symposium, Richard Macksey suggested that Borges might be someone who could 'join [Derrida's] team in the critique of metaphysics represented by [Derrida's] tentative game-theory', and indeed, Borges' earlier essay 'The Nothingness of Personality' aligns quite neatly with Derrida's account of the mythologized 'center'.⁹⁷ In 'The Nothingness of Personality', Borges attempts to 'tear down the exceptional preeminence now generally awarded to the self,' arguing that 'personality is a mirage maintained by conceit and custom', or simply another center that is not a center.⁹⁸

The fiction of personality combines with a Borgesian aleph in an important story from the Swamp Thing comic books (the swamp monster being an important figure in weird fiction). While the Swamp Thing of the 1980s is most closely associated with English writer Alan Moore's run on the character, for this project the most significant issue came near the end of Moore's run, when US American writer Rick Veitch took over for one issue. In *Saga of the Swamp Thing* (vol. 2) #62, the Swamp Thing (following his adventures during the preceding forty-one issues of Moore's run on the character) has been travelling through space as a wavelength of energy, manifesting himself in whatever organic matter might suit him. As an embodiment of 'the Green,' a plane of magical existence that connects all plants, Swamp Thing can travel and grow himself through any living matter. He eventually finds himself marooned on the corpse of a massive celestial being, where he meets Metron, the explorer-god of the New Gods, a race of divines created by writer and artist Jack Kirby after he left Marvel Comics for DC. Metron is attempting to access the 'Source,' the source of all existence in the DC Universe (which is generally regarded as a realm of pure thought), but his flying 'Mobius Chair' has failed him. Finding their destinies linked, Swamp Thing agrees to help Metron by acting as his chair (as he can grow himself into any shape), and together they set off into the void of space.

⁹⁶ Borges, 'The Aleph', 283.

⁹⁷ Macksey and Donato, *The Structuralist Controversy*, 269.

⁹⁸ Borges, 'The Nothingness of Personality', 4.

They do not find the Source, but rather are 'hoodwinked' with 'an aleph,' which, according to the comic, are 'POINTS FROM WHICH ONE CAN OBSERVE ALL *OTHER POINTS IN TIME AND SPACE*'.⁹⁹ Metron and Swamp Thing are confronted by all of reality, and Metron later recounts his experience with a flurry of images and narration not unlike Borges' account, except in this case Metron and Swamp Thing even see Borges; Metron recalls being 'N A GARRET IN BUENOS AIRES, I SAT TYPING WITH A GENIUS, BLIND TWENTY YEARS'.¹⁰⁰

While Borges' aleph is a point that contains all other points, it only does so in a specific instance, in the moment of seeing. The narrator does not see through time, but rather sees the totality of space at a single point in time. Only twice does Borges' narrator refer to more than one moment in time in his account of the aleph. First he says 'I saw in a rear courtyard on Calle Soler the same tiles I'd seen twenty years before in the entryway of a house in Fray Bentos'.¹⁰¹ Here he is not referring to seeing these tiles at the same time, in both locations; rather, he sees in the aleph tiles he has seen before, in a moment prior to his experience of the aleph. The only other time Borges references seeing something outside his present is near the end of his account, when he describes how he 'saw my face and my viscera, saw your face, and I felt dizzy, and I wept, because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has ever truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe'.¹⁰²

The shift from an aleph that includes all points in space to one that includes all points in space and time is an evolution likely worthy of its own separate investigation, but for this project what matters is the way *Swamp Thing* presents the aleph as a convincing alternative for the unattainable totality of human imagination (rendered here as 'the Source'). Metron and Swamp Thing are 'hoodwinked' by the aleph, but the experience is both life-affirming and depersonalizing, a kind of psychedelic experience attained without the assistance of (for example) hallucinogenic mushrooms. Reading the aleph as a metaphor for meaning as such suggests that to appreciate the function of discourse one must, at least to some small degree, surrender oneself to the totality

⁹⁹ Rick Veitch (w & p), Alfredo Alcalá (i), Tatjana Wood (c), John Costanza (l), 'Wavelength', *Saga of the Swamp Thing* vol. 2 issue #62 (New York: DC Comics, 1987).

¹⁰⁰ Veitch, 'Wavelength'.

¹⁰¹ Borges, 'The Aleph', 284.

¹⁰² Borges, 'The Aleph', 284.

of the human superorganism; in psychoanalytic terms this would mean deprioritizing the ego to better consider the collective being of the superego.¹⁰³

-

Alan Moore would go on to examine an aleph-like experience in the 1986-1987 comic book *Watchmen*, which features two characters with experiences similar to those described above. The first is Dr. Manhattan, a near-omnipotent figure created after a scientist is trapped in his own experiment, who can be in multiple times and places at once. He becomes increasingly alienated from the humans he once knew as he lacks the verbal ability to convey his own ontology, and his aleph-like perception of the universe makes him into something like an alien god. In contrast, the character Adrian Veidt has a hallucinatory experience after ingesting a ball of hashish in the Egyptian desert, after which he finds himself 'WADING THROUGH POWDERED HISTORY' where he hears 'DEAD KINGS WALKING UNDERGROUND', who inspire him to become the superhero Ozymandias, 'THE WORLD'S SMARTEST MAN'.¹⁰⁴ While Veidt's vision is rendered in a single panel, his practice of watching a wall of multiple television screens in order to predict shifts in culture and economics leads to images not unlike Metron's recounting of the aleph in *Saga of the Swamp Thing*. In the comic Veidt explicitly links this practice to William S. Burroughs's 'cut-up' technique rather than the work of Borges, but together with Dr. Manhattan's experience of time and space *Watchmen* seems to reflect many of the same considerations.

-

Veidt's plan to save the world in *Watchmen* involves tricking the United States and Soviet Union into believing that New York City has been attacked by an interdimensional alien not unlike the cosmic horrors described in weird fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft's most famous works. The notion that such an attack would produce an immediate end – or at least temporary suspension – of the Cold War had some minimal basis in this reality, as the desire for a world-unifying alien attack had by then become a mainstay of Ronald Reagan's foreign policy. Since at least 1985, Reagan expressed a desire for precisely the kind of apocalyptic scenario that serves as the climax of *Watchmen*.

¹⁰³ How this understanding of 'super' relates to 'superheroes' is considered in the entry for tulpa.

¹⁰⁴ Alan Moore (w), Dave Gibbons (a), John Higgins (c), 'A Strong and Loving World', *Watchmen* #12, (New York: DC Comics, 1987), 3. Alan Moore (w), Dave Gibbons (a), John Higgins (c), 'Look On My Works, Ye Mighty...', *Watchmen* #11 (New York: DC Comics, 1987), 10.

The earliest known instance of Reagan's desire for an alien attack came in November, 1985, at a summit at Lake Geneva in Switzerland. According to Mikhail Gorbachev, while at the summit, he and Reagan took a walk around the lake when the US president asked his counterpart, 'What would you do if the United States were suddenly attacked by someone from outer space? Would you help us?'.¹⁰⁵ Gorbachev replied that they would, and from then on Reagan repeated his fantasy whenever he could.¹⁰⁶ The next month he elaborated on his reasoning behind the notion in a speech to the assembled students and teachers of a Maryland high school. In the last paragraph of his speech – much of which was spent discussing the Geneva Convention from the year before – Reagan remarked that 'we're all God's children, wherever we may live in the world,' and

if suddenly there was a threat to this world from some other species, from another planet, outside in the universe [then] we'd forget all the little local differences that we have between our countries, and we would find out once and for all that we really are all human beings here on this Earth together.¹⁰⁷

Two years later, at the 42nd session of the United Nations General Assembly, Reagan delivered his fantasy to the widest audience yet. Once again, the aliens only appear at the end of the speech (likely because Reagan's speechwriters would not include it themselves):

Can we and all nations not live in peace? In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all the members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.¹⁰⁸

As Gawker alumnus Alex Pareene points out, during the entirety of the time that Reagan waxed philosophical about the potential for the alien threat 'from some other species' to unite humanity, humanity was actually already suffering from such a threat,

¹⁰⁵ Jimmy Orr, 'Reagan And Gorbachev Agreed to Fight UFOs', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/The-Vote/2009/0424/reagan-and-gorbachev-agreed-to-fight-ufos>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Only 'whenever he could', because apparently his staff was less excited by the potential alien threat than he was and tried to keep him from including it in speeches as much as possible. See Alex Pareene, 'Ronald Reagan Cared More About UFOs Than AIDS', *Salon*, 2011, http://www.salon.com/2011/02/04/reagan_aides_ufos/, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, 'Remarks to the Students and Faculty at Fallston High School in Fallston, Maryland', (Speech, Maryland, 1985).

¹⁰⁸ Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the 42nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York', (Speech, New York, 1987).

in the form of an HIV/AIDS epidemic that killed thousands over more than half a decade before the President acknowledged it.¹⁰⁹

The dissonance between Reagan's interest in an alien invasion and his disinterest in the actual deaths occurring as a direct result of his administration is echoed whenever the notion of 'good' things coming out of mass death or repression is raised. This is the core problem with much recent work in weird philosophy, including but not limited to figures like Mark Fisher, Nick Land, and Donna Haraway. Haraway's 'Chthulucene' in particular embeds within itself the eliminationist rhetoric of over-population under the guise of environmental concern.¹¹⁰ However, a more immediately relevant example comes from WJT Mitchell's lecture 'American Psychosis: Trumpism and the Nightmare of History', in which the Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago (and long-time editor of the UChicago journal *Critical Inquiry*) posed his own version of the world-unifying alien invasion.¹¹¹ Instead of a tentacled monster, however, Mitchell imagines 'an all-powerful alien civilization that comes from outer space to impose rationality on the American populace' while bemoaning the way '[t]he America that Trump wants to return to dropped the atomic bomb on the Japanese and killed millions of people in Vietnam'.

Like Reagan's apparent disinterest in those dying from AIDs, Mitchell conveniently fails to recall that the University of Chicago was itself instrumental in the development of the atomic bomb; when Mitchell describes how Hitler 'was perfectly capable of exploiting German engineering, science, and technology in the most rational ways to murder millions of Jews and conduct a world war', he conveniently fails to mention that the University of Chicago was created from the same Rockefeller fortune that went on to fund eugenics research in 1930s Germany and torture Guatemalans in

¹⁰⁹ Pareene, 'Ronald Reagan Cared More About UFOs Than AIDS'.

¹¹⁰ Sophie Lewis, 'Cthulhu Plays No Role for Me', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 2017, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/05/08/cthulhu-plays-no-role-for-me/>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹¹¹ WJT Mitchell, 'American Psychosis: Trumpism and the Nightmare of History', *Los Angeles Review Of Books*, 2017, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/american-psychosis-trumpism-and-the-nightmare-of-history/>, Accessed June 28, 2019. Mitchell was not entirely unique in his response to Trump's election; the rapper Killer Mike expressed a similar sentiment to Reagan and Mitchell in 2018, when he wrote on Twitter that he was 'Still praying aliens attack us soon so that all humanity will have to join forces and end bias and bigotry to cooperate and survive or die from the death rays of our invaders'. Killer Mike, Twitter Post, May 27, 2018, 6:03 AM, <https://twitter.com/KillerMike/status/1000724233570410498>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

the 1940s and 50s. The University of Chicago was also home to Milton Friedman's Chicago School of Economics and the training of the Chilean 'Chicago Boys,' who, alongside US-trained death squads, were responsible for the torture and murder of Chileans following the CIA-backed coup of 1973 that installed the Pinochet dictatorship; the 'Chile project' that brought these Chilean students to Chicago was funded in part by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Instead, these connections are all part of 'a past, a nightmare of history, from which we are trying to awake', a notion of history entirely at odds with Mitchell's call to 'get at the taproots of the psychosis in racism and capitalism', as if the divorcing of contemporary conditions of privilege (such as tenure and an editorship) from the historical actions of the institution granting them can do anything but obscure those 'taproots'.¹¹² Mitchell's reaction here is emblematic of a particular liberal shock at Donald Trump's election, a kind of bewilderment that is only possible if one is entirely unwilling to engage in even the slightest form of self-ethnography.

Mitchell's bewilderment at Trump's election and his apparent ignorance of his own institution's complicity in such 'nightmares of history' is perhaps not surprising when one recalls that Mitchell was responsible for publishing Nazi apologia in the pages of *Critical Inquiry*, in the form of Derrida's 1988 response to the discovery that his close friend Paul de Man had collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, writing anti-Semitic articles for a Belgian newspaper. Prior to his death in 1983, de Man had kept his anti-Semitic writing a secret, going so far as to lie repeatedly about his past, both in a 1955 letter to a Harvard official and when asked about it by a student 'in the mid-sixties'.¹¹³ When the truth finally came out, Mitchell and the rest of the editors at *Critical Inquiry* decided (for reasons left unsaid in extant texts) that Derrida should be given the chance to defend his friend. According to Derrida in the article that was eventually published, 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War', he

received, in December, the telephone call from *Critical Inquiry* which proposed, singular generosity, that I be the first to speak, when a friendly voice said to me: 'it has to be you, we

¹¹² Mitchell, 'American Psychosis: Trumpism and the Nightmare of History'.

¹¹³ Jon Wiener, 'The Responsibilities of Friendship: Jacques Derrida on Paul De Man's Collaboration', *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (1989), 799, 800.

thought that it was up to you to do this before anyone else,' I believed I had to accept a warm invitation that also resonated like a summons.¹¹⁴

The 'friendly voice' belonged to Francois Meltzer, who confirmed as much in her introduction to the 2013 collection *Signature Derrida*. Meltzer writes, 'full disclosure: the 'friendly voice' was mine, and I still feel oddly guilty that I got Derrida into this mess'.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the ultimate decision had fallen with editor WJT Mitchell, who recalled that 'we discussed the Paul de Man revelations at some length in editorial meetings, and someone was delegated to telephone Derrida,' with the editors ultimately deciding on Meltzer because 'we wanted the call to come from a native Frenc [sic] speaker'.¹¹⁶ Phillipe Desan, one of the editors of the issue, noted that 'Derrida actually sent his contribution in several parts by fax. *Critical Inquiry* received 3-4 batches from him over a week or two,' leaving Desan with the impression that 'this might explain the strange article published. It is as if Derrida does not know how he will end his contribution!'¹¹⁷

In 'the strange article' that Meltzer feels 'oddly guilty' for her role in, Derrida compares not reading de Man's work (as a consequence of the revelations) to the literal Holocaust:

To judge, to condemn the work or the man on the basis of what was a brief episode, to call for closing, that is to say, at least figuratively, for censoring or burning his books is to reproduce the exterminating gesture which one accuses de Man of not having armed himself against sooner with the necessary vigilance.¹¹⁸

As Jon Wiener notes in his response published in *Critical Inquiry* the following year, de Man did not simply fail 'to 'arm himself' against Nazism,' he also 'collaborated with it and made explicitly anti-Semitic statements,' going so far as to write 'that a solution of the Jewish problem that would aim at the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe would not entail, for the literary life of the West, deplorable consequences'.¹¹⁹ Despite this, and despite 'the wound [Derrida] felt' when he first read the article that contained 'the most unquestionable manifestation of an antisemitism as violent as it is

¹¹⁴ Jacques Derrida and Peggy Kamuf, 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul De Man's War', *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 3 (1988), 596.

¹¹⁵ Jacques Derrida and Jay Williams, *Signature Derrida*, intr. Francoise Meltzer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), xix.

¹¹⁶ WJT Mitchell to MC McGrady, 'Past Editors of Critical Inquiry', email, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Phillipe Desan to MC McGrady, 'Past Editors of Critical Inquiry', email, 2017.

¹¹⁸ Derrida, 'Paul de Man's War', 651.

¹¹⁹ Wiener, 'The Responsibilities of Friendship', 798. Quoted in Derrida, 'Paul de Man's War', 623.

stereotyped,' 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War' is – as Desan noted – an attempt to salvage the reputation of a friend at the expense of any ethical standard.

When Derrida died in 2004, he was engaged in an ongoing conflict with the University of California, Irvine over the fate of his archives, promised to the University and its Special Collections department in an agreement under threat from Derrida himself in yet another case of friendship and institutional allegiances overruling any defensible sense of ethics. Derrida's friend and colleague at Irvine, Dragan Kujundzic, had been accused of using 'his position as [a] student's advisor to manipulate her into a series of sexual encounters,' leaving the student feeling 'coerced to engage in sex or risk having her academic career ruined'.¹²⁰ After their third sexual encounter, the student filed a formal complaint, which prompted Derrida to write a letter to UC Irvine Chancellor Ralph J. Cicerone.¹²¹

That Derrida felt compelled to write a letter defending his friend from accusations of sexual harassment is perhaps not surprising, but the extent to which Derrida casually repeats the central myths of rape culture should nevertheless astound the contemporary reader. Derrida's letter, and his colleagues' support of it, is an eerie precursor to what Sara Ahmed described during her own efforts to fight the well-documented culture of sexual harassment and abuse at Goldsmith's a decade later:

[S]taff seemed to use their identity as political radicals to defy rules or conventions. The very regulations that might have helped to protect students were identified by academic staff with management who were then identified as against academic staff (because of their radicalism). This is how: any complaint became identified in advance as a betrayal of a cause. Sexual harassment became: *part of a cause*.¹²²

Thus in one of Derrida's final public acts he used his position and reputation to attack a graduate student for reporting his friend's abuse of power, becoming (or revealing himself as) an agent of hegemonic patriarchal violence at the same time he wore the flayed mask of radical resistance to institutional authority. As with his defense of de

¹²⁰ Roy Rivenburg, 'Were Sex and Punishment Behind Feud for Archives?', *The Los Angeles Times*, 2007, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/25/local/me-derrida25>. Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹²¹ Rivenburg, 'Were Sex and Punishment Behind Feud For Archives?'. Jacques Derrida, 'Derrida Letter to Cicerone', *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2004, <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/Cicerone.html>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹²² Sara Ahmed, 'Resignation Is A Feminist Issue', *Feministkilljoys*, 2016, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/08/27/resignation-is-a-feminist-issue/>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

Man, his letter implicated not only his own warped sense of justice, but that of his colleagues and editors, who chose to align themselves with his statement.

The details of Kujundzic's abuse of power and the ramifications of the University's investigation need not be detailed here, as they have since been more or less laid bare in various news articles. Most important for this history is Derrida's letter, which begins by explaining his decision to intervene in the University's investigation, by stating that 'even though I am not qualified to make a judgment concerning a confidential file [...] I believe it is my duty to bear witness here' to 'the great surprise, worry, and indignation' he felt at finding out his friend was under investigation.¹²³ Derrida offers testimony 'of two sorts: that of *probability* and that of *certitude*'. As for certitude, Derrida claims that because he knew 'Dragan better and longer than anyone at Irvine,' having been acquainted 'for more than twenty years,' he can declare 'him to be absolutely incapable of using or abusing his power with students'.¹²⁴ The reader can decide for their self the wisdom of depending on Derrida's character judgements, considering how long he knew de Man before finding out the truth about his friend's anti-Semitism and dishonesty.

What Derrida offers in terms of probability reveals how little he either understands or cares about the power imbalances between a male professor in an advisory capacity and his students, as he flatly denies the possibility of coercion without violence:

It would seem that the allegations of the plaintiff are unfair and in bad faith (I will not yet say perverse). When there has been neither any coercion or violence brought to bear on her, nor any attack (moreover very improbable!) on the presumed 'innocence' of a 27- or 28-year-old woman, where does she find the grounds, how can she claim to have the right to initiate such a serious procedure and to put in motion such a weighty juridico-academic bureaucracy against a respectable and universally respected professor?¹²⁵

Derrida's demand that the student justify her 'claim to have the right' to file a complaint against 'a respectable and universally respected professor' demonstrates a deep affinity for the hegemonic position of authority Derrida secured over decades of work in the United States. His effort to close ranks in this letter is at least partially explained by his own fear arising from one of the most persistent myths of rape

¹²³ Derrida, 'Derrida Letter to Cicerone'.

¹²⁴ Derrida, 'Derrida Letter to Cicerone'.

¹²⁵ Derrida, 'Derrida Letter to Cicerone'.

culture, that women frequently make false claims out of spite or malice. Derrida explains that while he ‘fully approve[s] the principles of all rules meant to prevent, or even to repress, the kinds of behavior defined in the United States as ‘sexual harassment’’, claiming that ‘[i]n their principle, these laws seem to me just and useful,’ but then he immediately pivots to repeating an easily refutable statement; the reader can decide if it is an intentional lie or just some bullshit:

But everyone knows that, in practice, they can give rise to applications that are abusive, capricious, or even perverse and deceitful—often devastating for the person, reputation, and career of those who are unjustly victimized by frequently malevolent maneuvers and sometimes by judicial errors.¹²⁶

In fact, research indicates that only around 2-10% of sexual assault claims turn out to be false, with the lower end of this spectrum being more likely considering that sexual assault and harassment are frequently underreported (at least partially because of the kind of institutional pressure brought to bear by those in positions of authority interested in defending their friends).¹²⁷ Derrida concludes his letter with a series of threats, though somewhat ironically he claims that ‘[w]hat I am preparing to say to you, I assure you with a solemn oath, constitutes in no way, in my mind, pressure brought to bear on anyone’.¹²⁸ Specifically, Derrida threatened that ‘if the scandalous procedure initiated against Dragan Kujundzic were not to be interrupted or cancelled [...] I would sadly be obliged to put an end, immediately, to *all* my relations with UCI’, including his ongoing contribution of his archives to the university; the issue was not resolved until after his death and a lawsuit, and his archives do now reside at UC Irvine.

Following Derrida’s death, Peggy Kamuf and Geoffrey Bennington, who had been responsible for the oversight of Derrida’s archives, circulated a letter seeking evidence ‘that UC faculty had indeed protested the policy under which Dragan Kujundzic had been incriminated,’ as Derrida ‘indicated in phone conversations with UCI colleagues that evidence of such protest would be a sine qua non for his continued cooperation

¹²⁶ Derrida, ‘Derrida Letter to Cicerone’.

¹²⁷ David Lisak et al., ‘False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis Of Ten Years Of Reported Cases’, *Violence Against Women* 16.12 (2010): 1318-1334. ‘The Criminal Justice System: Statistics’, *Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network*, 2016, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹²⁸ Derrida, ‘Derrida Letter to Cicerone’.

with the archive'.¹²⁹ Curiously, it remains unclear if those colleagues who responded to Kamuf and Bennington were aware of the full contents of Derrida's letter, as the message sent by the two only cited the portion directly related to Derrida's threat to stop cooperating with the University if the investigation was not dropped.¹³⁰ A full copy of Derrida's letter was attached to a note sent by Kamuf to the participants of a Derrida-themed conference that was postponed following the investigation and subsequent application of sanctions to Kujundzic (one of the conference organizers), but the full list of recipients of this note is unclear.

J. Hillis Miller, who wrote a letter reiterating Derrida's position, confirmed that he 'must have read all of Derrida's letter at the time,' but did not have any subsequent opinion on the contents of said letter.¹³¹ Similarly, Judith Butler responded to a request for comment by claiming 'Sorry, I do not have views on this'.¹³² Butler's response is particularly remarkable considering that her own letter engages in precisely the kind of exculpatory discourse that Ahmed highlights in her account of Goldsmith's legacy of sexual harassment; worth noting here is the degree to which UC Berkeley, where Butler teaches, and UC Santa Cruz, a closely aligned school in the UC system, both have their own legacy of rampant sexual harassment and abuse of power that continues to this day.¹³³ In her letter, Butler expresses her concern that the UC system's code of conduct was "overbroad" in the legal sense and because it threatened to punish faculty who engaged in consensual intimate relations with other adults', repeating what Ahmed calls '[o]ne of the mantras that kept being used in relation to university students, 'but they are adults,' as if being of age means they cannot be

¹²⁹ 'UCI Affair', *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2017, <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/UCI%20Affair.html>. Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹³⁰ Peggy Kamuf and Geoffrey Bennington, 'Bennington/Kamuf Message to UC Colleagues', *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2004, <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/GBPKletter.html>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹³¹ J Hillis Miller to MC McGrady, 'Derrida/UC Irvine Letters', email, 2017.

¹³² Judith Butler to MC McGrady, 'Derrida/UC Irvine Letters', email, 2017.

¹³³ Sam Levin, 'UC Berkeley Professor Fired Nearly Two Years After Sexual Harassment Claims Substantiated', *The Guardian*, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/24/sexual-harassment-university-california-berkeley-blake-wentworth>, Accessed June 28, 2019. Sam Levin, 'UC Berkeley Dean In Sexual Harassment Case Keeps Tenure And Avoids Charges', *The Guardian*, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/18/uc-berkeley-sexual-harassment-dean-sujit-choudhry-deal>. Accessed June 28, 2019. 'Top UC Berkeley Professor Accused of Sexual Harassment', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 2017, <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2017/03/23/top-uc-berkeley-professor-accused-of-sexual-harassment/>. Accessed June 28, 2019. Ryan Masters, 'UC Santa Cruz Settles Sexual Assault Case For \$1.15 Million', *Mercurynews.Com*, 2017, <http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/01/uc-santa-cruz-settles-sexual-assault-case-for-1-15-million/>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

abused by those with power'.¹³⁴ With this Butler is merely following Derrida's lead, who tried to emphasize the age of Kujundzic's victim by impugning 'the presumed 'innocence' of a 27- or 28-year-old woman' (despite the fact that she was 25 at the time of the incidents in question).¹³⁵

The purpose of recalling these events here is not merely to tarnish the reputation of one of critical theory's most central figures and his supporters still holding power today (a worthwhile and necessary project in its own right) but to emphasize the degree to which USAmerican academia is and has always been a willful participant in what bell hooks calls 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy', or 'the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation's politics'.¹³⁶ The purpose of this entry is to demonstrate that everything is connected, and everything is *horrible*. However, this realization is not an encouragement to defeatism, but rather a call to arms that can only begin with an honest account of just how complicit one's epistemological background is in the very things one is trying to dismantle.¹³⁷ More aleph stories will demonstrate how a non-linear appreciation for the semiotic web constituting the human superorganism can help with this honest accounting.

Scottish writer Grant Morrison's *Pax Americana* is his own adaptation of the *Watchmen* mythos, a kind of retelling of *Watchmen* using the original characters that *Watchmen* was based on; Moore had originally planned to use characters previously owned by Charlton Comics (which were purchased by DC Comics in 1983), but eventually the editors instructed Moore to create original characters. Thirty years later, DC allowed Morrison to use those former Charlton characters in his story, which features its own analogues to Dr. Manhattan and Ozymandias. However, where in *Watchmen* the characters' aleph-like experiences are entirely separate, in *Pax*

¹³⁴ Judith Butler, 'Butler Response', *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2004, <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/Butler.html>. Accessed June 28, 2019. Ahmed, 'Resignation Is A Feminist Issue'.

¹³⁵ Derrida, 'Derrida Letter to Cicerone'. That Derrida was one of a number of prominent French theorists in the 1970s who signed a petition arguing against age of consent laws somewhat undermines both Butler and Derrida's appeals to legal adulthood as meaningful distinction in the context of power imbalances.

¹³⁶ bell hooks, 'Understanding Patriarchy', *Imagine No Borders*, 2019, <https://imagineborders.org/pdf/zines/UnderstandingPatriarchy.pdf>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹³⁷ This tension is explored further in the entry for bricolage.

Americana they share this experience. Specifically, the Dr. Manhattan analogue Captain Atom uses his ability to see through time and space in order to show the Ozymandias analogue, Harley, how everything in their universe is connected, including Harley's accidental shooting of his own father when he was a child.¹³⁸ Like *Swamp Thing's* aleph and Ozymandias' televisions, Harley's experience is rendered in increasingly smaller and multiplying panels, showing seemingly unrelated scenes that together constitute the whole of reality.¹³⁹ The experience not only frees Harley from the guilt he has been living with, but reveals his eventual death via a plot he himself concocts in order to ensure world peace. In some ways Harley's story in *Pax Americana* is the opposite of Mitchell's account of the 'American Psychosis', because Harley is able to objectively view his own position – of race, class, and political power – and respond accordingly. For his own complicity in a violent world, Harley chooses to orchestrate his own death; this project is nowhere near as dramatic, though it does suggest that those academics most benefitting from their comfortable position in imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy should perhaps reconsider the degree to which their own work sufficiently dismantles the oppressive structures upon which they sit.

-

To analyze such structures in a way that might help destroy them, this project – via its understanding of the literary aleph – takes a 'sky-high' approach to its subject matter, in line with extant best practices for reading such material. These best practices emerge from Morrison's narratological work, which appears throughout his four decades of writing comic books but is featured most prominently in his unofficial DC Comics trilogy – made up of *Seven Soldiers of Victory*, *Final Crisis*, and *Multiversity* – as well as his autobiographical history of the comic book industry, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us about Being Human*. In his work Morrison offers a number of characters that 'read' their own comic book worlds in the same way contemporary crises demand we 'read' the material links of USAmerican politics and culture circa 2019.

¹³⁸ Grant Morrison (w), Frank Quitely (a), Nathan Fairbairn (c), Rob Leigh (l), 'In Which We Burn', *The Multiversity: Pax Americana* #1 (New York: DC Comics, January [November 2014] 2015).

¹³⁹ Morrison, 'In Which We Burn'.

In his book *Grant Morrison: Combining the World of Contemporary Comics*, Marc Singer identifies the characters of Helen ‘Sky-High’ Helligan and The Bride as these model readers, arguing that they ‘propose that we read *Seven Soldiers* holistically as a single narrative connected by its repeating patterns, not as seven separate stories nor as one more conventionally linear narrative structured around unities of setting, character, or action’.¹⁴⁰ However, these are not the only characters that can be seen as ‘model readers’ in *Seven Soldiers*, nor are they the only characters capable of a ‘holistic’ reading of their own stories in Morrison’s work. A closer look at these other characters helps demonstrate how this project approaches its own topic.

Helligan is an ‘FBI METAHUMAN SPECIALIST’ whose nickname comes from her particular approach to investigation.¹⁴¹ Helligan explains:

I SEE THINGS FROM A *HIGH ALTITUDE*, METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING. I MAKE STRUCTURED COGNITIVE LEAPS BASED ON LONG-RANGE PATTERN RECOGNITION. I’VE STUDIED *EVERY* CASE FILE. IT’S NOT SO MUCH THE *DETAILS* I DEAL WITH. I’M LOOKING AT THE SATELLITE PICTURE.¹⁴²

Similarly, as an agent of the Super Human Advanced Defense Executive (S.H.A.D.E.), the Bride ‘KEEP[S] SEEING REPEATED *PATTERNS* IN ALL THE INCOMING CRISIS DATA’ just before mentioning Helligan’s report and leaping from a high-flying helicopter.¹⁴³ These details are what lead Singer to identify the characters as model readers.¹⁴⁴

However, in addition to these two, who manage to ‘see’ the threads that tie the story together, the character Zatanna is given the most complex insight into *Seven Soldiers*’ narrative connections, because she alone is able to move between a ‘sky-high’ analysis of the repeated patterns in the story and the important details on which monumental events pivot.

In *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna #1*, literal and stage magician Zatanna Zatara and four others journey into magical realms in order to find her dead father’s books of magic and discover why they have ‘ALL BEEN HAVING THE SAME BAD *DREAMS*’.¹⁴⁵ As

¹⁴⁰ Marc Singer, *Grant Morrison: Combining the Worlds of Contemporary Comics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 226-227.

¹⁴¹ Grant Morrison (w), Simone Bianchi (a), Dave Stewart (c), Rob Leigh (l), ‘The Perfect Knight Returns’, *Seven Soldiers: Shining Knight #3* (New York: DC Comics, August [June] 2005).

¹⁴² Morrison, ‘The Perfect Knight Returns’.

¹⁴³ Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (a), Nathan Eyring (c), Phil Balsman (l), ‘Frankenstein in Fairyland’, *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein #4* (New York: DC Comics, May [April] 2006), 7.

¹⁴⁴ Singer, *Combining the Worlds of Contemporary Comics*, 226-227.

¹⁴⁵ Grant Morrison (w), Ryan Sook (p), Mick Gray (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Jared K. Fletcher (l), ‘Talking Backwards Sdrawkcab Gniklat’, *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna #1* (New York: DC Comics, June [April] 2005).

they travel through various regions of ‘THE *IMAGINAL* WORLD’, they leap from universe to universe as if each plane is a panel in a comic book.¹⁴⁶ Later, when Zatanna meets ‘the Seven Unknown Men’ that control the universe and her own existence as a comic book character is revealed, she reaches ‘OUT THROUGH ALL THIS WEIRD *MACHINERY*, THIS *SCAFFOLDING* STUFF THAT WAS HOLDING ALL OUR *LIVES* TOGETHER’ and touches the fourth wall of the comic page.¹⁴⁷ Finally, in the finale of *Seven Soldiers* Zatanna casts a spell that seems to unite the disparate narrative threads from across the metaseries, and the effects of this spell appear to the reader as a series of panels from previous points in the story, as if Zatanna is throwing them into the timeline like so many playing cards in a magic trick.¹⁴⁸ With this Zatanna successfully links the ‘sky-high’ view of her own reality, given by her journey through the ‘imaginal’ world and meeting the Seven Unknown Men, with single moments throughout *Seven Soldiers*. Zatanna is helped in her efforts by the legendary figure Gwydion, who in this story is a sprite made of ‘*LIVING LANGUAGE*’, who repeatedly refers to itself in terms that recall the aleph:

I have been in many shapes. I have been a narrow blade of a sword. I have been a drop in the air. I have been a shining star. I have been words in a book. I have been a book in the beginning. I have been a light in a lantern a year and a half. I have been a bridge for passing over threescore rivers. I have been confined in the bark of a tree. I have journeyed as an eagle. I have been a boat on the sea. I have been a director in battle. I have been a sword in the hand. I have been a shield in fight. I have been the string of a harp. I have been the seventh letter in an alphabet. I have been enchanted for a year in the foam of water. There is nothing I have not been.¹⁴⁹

Magic in this context is inseparable from discourse – Zatanna’s magic spells are simply words spoken (and printed) backwards – and *Seven Soldiers* implies that mastery over such magic requires moving laterally, treating narrative linearity as a façade to be looked through rather than at.

To emphasize the degree to which Zatanna’s metatextual experience is central to the ideal reading of *Seven Soldiers* (and reality more generally) it is helpful to note

¹⁴⁶ Morrison, ‘Talking Backwards Sdrawkcb Gniklat’.

¹⁴⁷ Grant Morrison (w), Ryan Sook (p), Mick Gray (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Jared K. Fletcher (l), ‘Zor!’, *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna #4* (New York: DC Comics, December [November] 2005).

¹⁴⁸ Grant Morrison (w), J.H. Williams (a), Dave Stewart (c), Todd Klein (l), ‘The Miser’s Coat’, *Seven Soldiers of Victory #1* (New York: DC Comics, December [October] 2006).

¹⁴⁹ Grant Morrison (w), Ryan Sook (p), Mick Gray (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Rob Leigh (l), ‘A Book in the Beginning’, *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna #2* (New York: DC Comics, August [June] 2005). In line with Morrison’s frequent literary allusions, this list also brings to mind *The Tempest*’s Ariel, among other characters. The risk such allusions pose to this project are explored in the entry for comic books.

how this experience is mirrored in two of Morrison's later works, *Final Crisis* and *Multiversity*, that together with *Seven Soldiers* make up a kind of unofficial trilogy examining the DC Comics multiverse. *Final Crisis* is a 2008 crossover series, centered around the 7-issue *Final Crisis* miniseries and the 2-issue *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* tie-in, while *Multiversity* is another metaseries, this time with two book-end issues and seven 'one-shots', each featuring a different universe in the DC multiverse. Morrison called *Multiversity* his 'magnum opus,' the culmination of three decades of work (on and off) for the company, and it ties up a variety of theoretical arguments he has been making over the course of his career.¹⁵⁰

In *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond*, Superman travels 'THROUGH BLEEDSTORM SPACE BETWEEN THE UNIVERSES', an experience that is rendered (similarly to Zatanna's journey through the imaginal world) as moving between flat panels suspended in a three-dimensional space.¹⁵¹ 'BLEED' is described as 'THE UNIVERSAL MEDICINE, THE SECRET SUBSTANCE OF LIFE ITSELF!', and one of its literal meanings refers to bleed in the publishing sense, i.e. the part of a printed page that goes beyond the edge of a trimmed page. This is clear not only when Superman travels through bleedspace, but later in the story when he ascends to 'A HIGHER DIMENSION'.¹⁵² On the way to that higher dimension Superman, like Zatanna, experiences a brush with the universe outside his own as he reaches through a panel and senses the reader:

FROM A DIRECTION THAT HAS NO NAME COMES A SOUND LIKE BREATHING. THE WHOLE CONTINUUM... TREMBLES, AS IF CRADLED. AND THERE'S A PRESENCE. AS IF I COULD REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMETHING IMMENSE BEYOND UNDERSTANDING.¹⁵³

Superman hears the reader's breath and feels them holding his comic book, though only for a moment, in the same way Zatanna reaches out through the scaffolding of her own comic book.

¹⁵⁰ Rich Johnston, 'Grant Morrison Wants to Make a Superhero Out of You', *Bleeding Cool News And Rumors*, 2013, <http://www.bleedingcool.com/2013/05/16/grant-morrison-wants-to-make-a-superhero-out-of-you/>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹⁵¹ Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (p), Christian Alamy, Rodney Ramos, Tom Nguyen, & Walden Wong (i), David Baron (c), 'Superman Beyond', *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* #1 (DC Comics, October [August] 2008).

¹⁵² Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (p), Christian Alamy, Tom Nguyen, Drew Geraci, & Derek Fridolfs (i), David Baron (c), 'To Be Continued', *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* #2 (New York: DC Comics, March [January] 2009).

¹⁵³ Morrison, 'To Be Continued'.

The higher dimension Superman accesses is home to Monitors, 'MASTERS OF THE OVERVOID' who (until the events of *Final Crisis*) exist outside time and space.¹⁵⁴ One of their number, Nix Uotan, is framed for the destruction of an entire universe and cast down to earth to live as a human. When he finally remembers who he is and speaks the name of his love (which also functions as a magic word), he gains the ability to see everything happening throughout the rest of the story, though at first he has trouble processing it all.¹⁵⁵ This ability is rendered in the comic as a sphere of panels around Nix's head through which he can view disparate scenes from across the universe, akin to the cards/panels seen when Zatanna casts the final spell in *Seven Soldiers*, Ozymandias' television screens, or the individual panels of Swamp Thing's aleph.¹⁵⁶ Nix's difficulty processing the incoming information is only a side-effect of his still existing as a human, as by the end of the story he has returned to the higher dimension of the Monitors where 'THERE IS NO LIMIT TO WHAT [HE] CAN DO'.¹⁵⁷

In *Multiversity* this nearly unlimited ability is shared with Allen Adam, also known as Captain Atom, who gains a wide array of abilities in an undisclosed 'U-235 INCIDENT'.¹⁵⁸ He first appears in *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* as one of a number of alternate-universe Supermen, and in *Multiversity* he helps explain the nature of reality to Harley, eventual President of the United States. While participating in an experiment, Captain Atom reads a comic book (specifically *Ultra Comics #1*, another issue of *Multiversity*) and comments on his own relationship to the characters in the comic, in turn making clear his relationship to the reader:

COMPLETE YET ALWAYS BEGINNING AND ENDING. ALWAYS DIFFERENT. THE STORY'S LINEAR, BUT I CAN FLIP THROUGH THE PAGES IN ANY ORDER, ANY DIRECTION. FORWARD IN TIME TO THE CONCLUSION. BACK TO THE OPENING SCENE. THE CHARACTERS REMAIN UNAWARE OF MY SCRUTINY, BUT THEIR THOUGHTS ARE TRANSPARENT, WEIGHTLESS IN LITTLE CLOUDS. THIS IS HOW A 2-DIMENSIONAL CONTINUUM LOOKS TO YOU. IMAGINE HOW YOUR 3-D WORLD APPEARS TO ME.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Morrison, 'Superman Beyond'.

¹⁵⁵ Grant Morrison (w), JG Jones & Carlos Pacheco (p), Marco Rudy & Jesus Merino (i), Alex Sinclair (c), Rob Leigh (l), 'Into Oblivion', *Final Crisis* #5 (New York: DC Comics, December [October] 2008). Grant Morrison (w), JG Jones, Carlos Pacheco, Doug Mahnke, Marco Rudy, Christian Alamy, Jesus Merino (p), Marco Rudy (i), Alex Sinclair & Pete Pantazis (c), Rob Clark Jr. (l), 'How To Murder the Earth', *Final Crisis* #6 (New York: DC Comics, January 2009).

¹⁵⁶ Morrison, 'Into Oblivion'.

¹⁵⁷ Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (p), Doug Mahnke, Tom Nguyen, Drew Geraci, Christian Alamy, Norm Rapmund, Rodney Ramos, Walden Wong (i), Alex Sinclair, Tony Avina, & Pete Pantazis (c), Travis Lanham (l), 'New Heaven, New Earth', *Final Crisis* #7 (New York: DC Comics, March [January] 2009).

¹⁵⁸ Morrison, 'In Which We Burn'.

¹⁵⁹ Morrison, 'In Which We Burn'.

Here Captain Atom reflects on how one can read a comic book while at the same time recognizing his own existence within a comic. Captain Atom's address to the reader should be taken as literally as possible, as it is only the latest in a long line of Morrison's attempts to teach his readers about the reality of fiction, and *Seven Soldiers of Victory* depends on the reader understanding that the characters themselves are alive in a very literal sense.

Morrison's insistence that comic book characters are real and alive goes back as far as his 1990s run on *Animal Man*, where the titular character eventually became aware of his own existence as a comic book superhero and even went on to meet a comic book version of Morrison himself.¹⁶⁰ In *Supergods*, Morrison explains his approach to *Animal Man* and subsequent work with superheroes:

My experiments on *Animal Man* were described by critics as 'metafiction,' or fiction about fiction, and perhaps that was an easy way in for some readers, but I felt that I was onto something more concrete and less rooted in abstraction or theory. The fictional universe I was interacting with was as 'real' as our own [...] I chose to take comic-book characters at face value.¹⁶¹

This meant 'an acknowledgment that anything we could experience was by its nature real and a corresponding rejection of the idea that fiction had to behave like flesh,' such that according to Morrison's understanding of fiction:

There were real superheroes, of course. They did exist. They lived in paper universes, suspended in a pulp continuum where they never aged or died unless it was to be reborn, better than ever, with a new costume. Real superheroes lived on the surface of the second dimension. The real lives of real superheroes could be contained in two hands. They were so real they had lives that were longer than any human life. They were more real than I was. They say most human names and biographies are forgotten after four generations, but even the most obscure Golden Age superhero is likely to have a life and a renown that will last as long as trademarks are revived.¹⁶²

Thus, when Zatanna reaches out to the reader, or Superman hears their breath, or Captain Atom uses the second person, these interactions are literal, immediate, and taking place between organisms, rather than between a reader and a 'text', at least in any sense where 'text' means something inorganic, static, or otherwise not-alive. Within Morrison's theory, 'superhuman' no longer connotes an Übermenschian notion

¹⁶⁰ Grant Morrison (w), Chaz Truog (p), Mark Farmer (i), Tatjana Wood (c), John Costanza (l), 'Deus Ex Machina', *Animal Man* #26, (New York: DC Comics, August 1990).

¹⁶¹ Morrison, *Supergods*, 218-220.

¹⁶² Morrison, *Supergods*, 218-220.

of a superior individual, but rather refers to an organism that exists on a scale above and beyond any individual, a symbiote living alongside the human superorganism, which today faces an existential threat in the form of the United States and its petrophiliac fascist empire. This is a guide to ways of thinking that might help kill that empire by neutralizing its own discursive weapons.

Ages

In the discourse of comic books, Ages are loosely-defined generational (and subsequently stylistic) categories mostly related to the history of superhero comics, beginning with the Golden Age and moving through Silver and Bronze until the 1980s, when the metallic nomenclature gave way to thematic titles, starting with the Dark Age. While the names and historical divisions between the first three Ages are generally accepted, the boundaries of the Dark Age and whatever may have come after it remain unsettled. This project proposes that following the Dark Age, one may – in line with some extant analysis – identify an Heroic Age that extended (roughly) from 1992-2008, followed by the current Age, which could be reasonably described as the Twisted Age; the last of these represents an original contribution to this discourse, though the specific choice of ‘twisted’ is based on some extant cultural criticism. Aside from contributing to comic studies by offering a possible modification to existing schemas for understanding the medium’s history, this entry provides some of the context lacking in *Kill All Normies’* flippant reference to the Dark Age.¹⁶³

-

The earliest known reference to a Golden Age came from an article in *Comic Art* #1, a fanzine created by Don Thompson and Maggie Thompson in 1961. In an article titled ‘Re-Birth’, comic reader and eventual science fiction icon Dick Lupoff wrote about his frustration regarding the lack of academic and archival attention granted to comic books, even as a changing industry suggested a new wave of publications might be on the way. Describing some of the motives behind *Comic Art*, Lupoff remarked that

[B]efore our very eyes a whole branch of popular literature has come and gone and it has drawn hardly a glance from any historian of what we read. Would you believe it, I went to the New York Public Library – yeah, the famous one with the lions in front, one of the world’s biggest – and tried to research some old comics. There’s nothing there! Oh, they have Dr. Wertham’s infamous book and a couple little clippings against censorship from the ACLU. And even a crumbling article, circa 1940, by M.C. Gaines, about how comics are made. But there is not one page, not one word, about what the comics were really like.¹⁶⁴

Lupoff’s impression that comics had come and gone was due in part to the time of his writing, as *Comic Art* #1 was published in the wake of Fredric Wertham’s book *Seduction of the Innocent*, which argued comic books and superheroes were

¹⁶³ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 13.

¹⁶⁴ Dick Lupoff, ‘Re-Birth’, *Comic Art* #1, 1961, <http://www.maggiethompson.com/1970/01/fanzine-library-comic-art-1-spring-1961.html>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

responsible for youth delinquency, as well as the United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, which held hearings on the comic books targeted by Wertham. Following the public backlash against the industry as a result of these developments, the comic book industry instituted a self-censorship regime known as the Comics Code Authority in an attempt to pre-empt government regulation.

In Lupoff's accounting, comic books 'came in the thirties, their Golden Age was in the forties', and 'they declined in the fifties', with the institution of the Comics Code indicating a firm conclusion in most estimations.¹⁶⁵ However, because the Comics Code Authority targeted the most obvious and visibly 'offensive' details of comic books, crime, romance, and horror comics – which had overtaken superheroes in the latter half of the 1940s as the most popular genres – were essentially put out of business, creating the space for the resurgence of superheroes, which Wertham actually saw as the *most* damaging to children, in no small part because he associated superheroes with fascist ideology:

What is the social meaning of these supermen, superwomen, super-lovers, super-boys, supergirls, super-ducks, super-mice, super-magicians, super-safecrackers? [...] Superman (with the big S on his uniform – we should I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.) needs an endless stream of ever new submen, criminals and 'foreign-looking' people not only to justify his existence but even to make it possible.¹⁶⁶

Although Wertham has been frequently pilloried for his analysis of the dangers of comic books, and particularly his homophobic readings of Batman and Wonder Woman, his concern regarding the fascist implications of the superheroic form are not entirely inaccurate. The fact that the Comics Code actually served to rescue superheroes by effectively prohibiting competing genres of comic books only exacerbated the fascist overtones of the genre, as the comics that followed the Code's adoption in what would come to be called the Silver Age were prohibited from (among other things) criticizing the US government in any way. For example, the Code dictated that '[p]olicemen, judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority'.¹⁶⁷ On top of these explicit restrictions, the Code also gave censors the opportunity to exercise their own individual bigotry.

¹⁶⁵ Lupoff, 'Re-Birth',

¹⁶⁶ Fredrich Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1954), 15, 34.

¹⁶⁷ 'The Comics Code Of 1954', *Comic book Legal Defense Fund*, 1954, <http://cblfd.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>, Accessed June 25, 2019.

In his own account of the Comics Code's influence on the industry, contemporary comic book author Saladin Ahmed notes that while Golden Age comic books have a reputation for 'the Superman Age: an era of lily white, squeaky-clean, manly-man heroes punching bank robbers and selling World War II propaganda,' in reality 'the early comic book industry had the shifting, molten surface of a new, unfinished world'.¹⁶⁸ Although the beginning of the Golden Age is almost universally identified with Superman's first appearance in the 1938 *Action Comics* #1, the identification of the Golden Age specifically with superhero comics is something that seems to have occurred after the fact, as the Comics Code helped erase the narrative and creator diversity that briefly flourished in the early years of the US American comic book industry.

While *superheroes* did indeed perpetuate the 'lily-white, squeaky-clean' US American fascist ideal of the mid-century, the early comic book industry was vibrant enough to sustain a much more varied stable of books than popular histories often recognize, even if the racist backbone of the United States remained apparent.¹⁶⁹ According to Ahmed,

For a weird, wild, 15-year span beginning in the late 1930s, the comic book racks of America's newsstands were bursting with four-color contradictions. [...] During the Golden Age, the same newsstand might be selling comics with ape-like, rubberlipped caricatures of black people next to the black-owned and created *All-Negro Comics*. And the same issue of *Funny Pages* might contain both 'savage redskins' and Mantoka, the native superhero who battles 'white man's treachery'.¹⁷⁰

Ahmed's point is not that Golden Age comics were necessarily any more or less 'progressive' than those of today (as the examples he provides demonstrate), but simply that this great variety and potential for representation existed, 'a cacophonous bazaar of stories' that was made impossible following the adoption of the code, not merely because of the specific restrictions in the code but in the way they were individually enforced.¹⁷¹ For example, Ahmed points out the code's administration by Charles F. Murphy, 'a 'specialist in juvenile delinquency' (and a strident racist)' who

¹⁶⁸ Saladin Ahmed, 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics', *Buzzfeed*, 2014, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/saladinahmed/how-the-comics-code-killed-the-golden-age-of-comics>, Accessed June 28, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Ahmed, 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics'.

¹⁷⁰ Ahmed, 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics'.

¹⁷¹ Ahmed, 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics'.

embodied 'a uniquely American puritanical fascism'.¹⁷² In particular, Murphy used the Comics Code rule stating that 'ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible' to exclude practically all people of color from appearing in comic books at all, in one case going so far as to forbid EC Comics from reprinting a story featuring a black astronaut unless they changed the character to white. EC refused to comply and instead reprinted the story without the demanded changes, a decision that ultimately led to the end of the company.¹⁷³

While the transition from age to age occurred over the course of multiple years and as a result of changes in readership, publication standards, and the content of the comic books themselves, for the Golden and Silver Ages it is possible to identify specific comic book issues that, if they are not the defining issue of the age, then they are at least representative of their respective eras. The Golden Age is the easiest to identify with a single comic book, as Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics* #1 represented the dramatic cornerstone of a new genre.¹⁷⁴ A similarly clear starting point for the Silver Age can be found in the 1956 comic *Showcase* #4, which featured the re-introduction of the Flash, a character that had been out of print since 1951. The new Flash was a reimagining of the character, so while the name and basic concept were kept, the character's alter ego and biography were changed, 'updating' the out of print character for a new (and old) audience.

Crucially, the two Flashes were related narratively in addition to their publication/corporate relationship; in the world of the second Flash, Barry Allen, the adventures of the first Flash, Jay Garrick, were collected in comic books, written in that world (and ours) by Gardner Fox. After receiving his super-speed powers in an accident, Allen decides to adopt the name Flash in honor of the Golden Age character.¹⁷⁵ However, in the 1961 story 'Flash of Two Worlds!', both Flashes were revealed to be living in adjacent universes, each vibrating at different speeds. By

¹⁷² Ahmed, 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics'.

¹⁷³ Ahmed, 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics'.

¹⁷⁴ The era prior to the emergence of superhero comics in the late 1930s, which included the 'proto-comics' like Famous Funnies and the Yellow Kid, has by some been retroactively named the 'Platinum Age', though this retroactive naming is not particularly useful, particularly because this supposed 'Age' bears none of the continuity of style, genre, or publishing convention that characterizes the other ages.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Kanigher (w), Carmine Infantino (p), Joe Kubert (i), 'Mystery of the Human Thunderbolt!', *Showcase*, vol. 1, #4 (New York: DC Comics, October 1956).

adjusting his own vibration, Allen accidentally makes his way to Garrick's world, thus opening up the multiverse that would eventually give rise to Morrison's *Multiversity*, as well as the Justice Society/Justice League cross-over stories that in 1965 would lead to the Silver Age's naming.

In 1961 Lupoff only considered the re-emergence of superheroes like the Flash as a 'minor renaissance,' but by 1965 this resurgence had exploded into the Silver Age, the logical step in the sequence begun by Lupoff's original essay in *Comic Art* #1. The official step into the Silver Age was initiated by another fan, this time in the letters column of *Justice League of America* #42. Writing in reference to the story 'Crisis on Earth-A,' which saw the formerly-out-of-print Justice Society of America teaming up with the Justice League (thanks to the multiversal travel first made possible by the two Flashes), fan Scott Taylor claimed that 'If you guys keep bringing back heroes from the *Golden Age*, people 20 years from now will be calling this decade the *Silver Sixties!*'.¹⁷⁶ This helped establish the trend of metal Ages, and eventually the Silver Age gave way to the Bronze as publishers were increasingly willing to push the boundaries of the Comics Code. The Bronze Age was characterized by more 'adult' themes making their way into comics in the 1970s, and notable stories from this era include Dennis 'Denny' O'Neil's 'No Evil Shall Escape My Sight!' and 'Snowbirds Don't Fly', which included frank discussions of racism and drug abuse (respectively).¹⁷⁷

The progression to 'Bronze' after the Silver and Golden Ages is sometimes attributed to the progression of Olympic medals or the Greek and Roman Ages of Man, but the most illuminating comparison is to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. In the dream, a statue representing successive kingdoms has a golden head, a silver torso, bronze thighs, iron legs, and iron and clay feet, all of which are eventually destroyed. While perhaps only a particular subset of readers would suggest that the content of successive comic book ages is of universally lower quality than that which preceded them, the notion of this history rumbling headlong toward some collapse is nevertheless embedded within the successive naming of these ages. This process is not entirely distinct from the USAmerican notion of successive generations, including the

¹⁷⁶ Scott Taylor 'JLA Mail Room', *Justice League of America*, vol. 1, #42 (New York: National Periodical Publications, Inc. [DC Comics], February 1966 [December 1965]).

¹⁷⁷ Specific Bronze Age comics are examined in more detail under the entries for golem and tulpa.

Lost, Silent, and Greatest Generations, which gave way to Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials or Generation Y, and finally Generation Z, the cohort coming of age in an era of mass extinction and environmental collapse.

This apocalypticism inherent to the comic book ages can be seen most clearly in the uncertain naming of what followed the Bronze Age, a question considered in Morrison's 1998 *Flash* story 'Still Life in the Fast Lane'. In the story, two generations of the Flash discuss the development of comic book ages, albeit from within a world where costumed superheroes are their co-workers and friends. Jay Garrick and Wally West (the third Flash, and nephew to Barry Allen), discuss the changing of their own community in a not-at-all veiled account of comic book history. Garrick notes how by 1998, 'people want heroes again,' after years of wanting 'someone with claws and a telescopic sight on their team,' and suggests that 'the music industry turns on its head every eleven years, the political pendulum swings every fifteen'.¹⁷⁸ West responds that 'according to Jones and Jacobs,' 'heroic ages' – or comic book ages – last twenty years: 'The Golden Age lasted until 1955, the Silver Age lasted until 1975, but the Dark Age only just ended in '95. That's why it's still too early to say what this new age is even going to be called yet'.¹⁷⁹ The characters speak of 'heroic ages' as they relate to the changes in their in-narrative world, but the 'Jones and Jacobs' that West cites are comic book historians, famous for their book *The Comic book Heroes*, which was first published in 1985 and revised in 1996.

This history skips a Bronze Age, instead moving straight from the Silver to 'Dark' Age, in keeping with the 20-year cycle. While Morrison seems to agree with Jones and Jacobs' theory of relatively stable comic book age cycles in *The Flash* (and somewhat in *Supergods*), the history of comic books presented in *Ultra Comics*, an issue of *Multiversity*, complicates this picture.¹⁸⁰ The history of comics in *Ultra Comics* is divided into four panels, and while the Golden and Silver Ages are easily recognizable, it is unclear precisely what the next two panels represent. The caption describes 'Golden Age to Modern Inclusive,' which is equally inconclusive, as it leaves unsaid

¹⁷⁸ Grant Morrison (w) & Mark Millar (w), Paul Ryan (p), John Nyberg (i), 'Still Life in the Fast Lane', *The Flash*, vol. 2, #134 (New York: DC Comics, February 1998).

¹⁷⁹ Morrison & Millar (w), 'Still Life in the Fast Lane'.

¹⁸⁰ Grant Morrison (w), Dough Mahnke (p), Christian Alamy, Mark Irwin, Keith Champagne, Jaime Mendoza (i), David Baron & Gabe Eltaeb (c), Steve Wands (l), 'Ultra Comics Lives!', *The Multiversity: Ultra Comics #1* (New York: DC Comics, May [March] 2015).

whether the last panel is 'Modern,' or if this is some age prior to the present narrative time of the comic.

Interestingly, if Morrison is including a Bronze Age in his *Ultra Comics* history, then he chooses to cite a moment in comic book history usually associated with the definitive end of the Bronze Age, and indeed, the end of the larger continuity of the metal-themed ages. The panel (possibly) corresponding to a Bronze Age features an image reproducing (with Ultra in lieu of Superman) the cover to *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was an attempt to 'streamline' DC Comics' narrative continuity by combining its multiverse into a single coherent narrative, wherein, for example, there would no longer be a need to explain how Batman, an ostensibly human male, might have maintained his physical fitness if he really had been fighting crime since 1939. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was a monumental turning point in comic book publishing history, and Morrison's citation of it here, either as the end of the Bronze Age or beginning of the Dark Age, is a testament to that.

-

Although *Crisis on Infinite Earths* represented an important turning point in the publication of the DC Comics multiverse, the two comic books most often identified as the source (or peak) of the Dark Age are Moore's *Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, books whose prominence has led one 'comics scholar' to claim that 'all superhero comics today live in the shadow of [these] two towering monoliths that changed the face of the superhero'.¹⁸¹ While this interpretation undoubtedly obscures wider shifts in the industry, both Moore and Miller are conscious of their undeniable influence. When asked in 2001 if he felt any regret about the legacy of *Watchmen*, Moore responded:

To a degree. [...] I think that what a lot of people saw when they read *Watchmen* was a high degree of violence, a bleaker and more pessimistic political perspective, perhaps a bit more sex, more swearing. And to some degree there has been, in the 15 years since *Watchmen*, an awful lot of the comics field devoted to these very grim, pessimistic, nasty, violent stories which kind of use *Watchmen* to validate what are, in effect, often just some very nasty stories that don't have a lot to recommend them.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Sean Carney, 'The Function of the Superhero at the Present Time', *Iowa Journal Of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005), 100.

¹⁸² Tasha Robinson, 'Alan Moore', *AV Club*, 2001, <https://www.avclub.com/alan-moore-1798208192>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

Similarly, in 2017 when promoting a sequel to *The Dark Knight Returns* and a prequel to his comic book *300*, Miller relayed an anecdote regarding this legacy, although as will be seen some of the details may be exaggerated. In response to a question about 'that darkness and grit' Miller supposedly 'brought into that [superhero] genre,' Miller replied:

I joked about that with Alan Moore. He had done *Watchmen*, and I had done *Dark Knight*. A whole bunch of gloomy superhero comics were coming out and then we started seeing gloomy superhero movies. I said, Alan, we've ruined everything. Nobody's having any fun. He went, you're right, Frank.¹⁸³

What makes Miller's anecdote seem doubtful despite its general agreement with Moore's assessment is the fact that Moore seems to view Miller with contempt, so the kind of casual conversation the latter describes seems unlikely. Specifically, in 2011 Moore responded to Miller's criticism of the Occupy movement, in which Miller had called the protestors 'thieves and rapists', an outburst in line with his longstanding reactionary politics.¹⁸⁴ When asked about it, Moore made clear that he 'and Frank Miller have diametrically opposing views upon all sorts of things, but certainly upon the Occupy movement'.¹⁸⁵ Moore described Miller as

someone whose work I've barely looked at for the past twenty years. I thought the *Sin City* stuff was unreconstructed misogyny, *300* appeared to be wildly ahistoric, homophobic and just completely misguided. I think that there has probably been a rather unpleasant sensibility apparent in Frank Miller's work for quite a long time.¹⁸⁶

If Moore ever did agree with Miller about their respective influence on the comic book industry, it seems they likely have wildly different interpretations as to the outcome of that influence. This dramatic distinction between the 'twin pillars' of the Dark Age makes *Kill All Normies'* mention of the era all the more remarkable, because it combines the political sensibilities of 'diametrically opposing' writers into a single, mystified cultural category. Furthermore, it obscures the actual legacy of the Dark Age of comics in the

¹⁸³ Mike Fleming Jr., 'Frank Miller on Why Superhero Movies Are Better Than Ever – The Comic-Con Interview', *Deadline*, 2017, <http://deadline.com/2017/07/frank-miller-interview-superhero-movies-wolverine-sin-city-batman-xerxes-1202133625/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹⁸⁴ Karen McVeigh, 'Screenwriter Frank Miller Calls Occupy Protesters 'Thieves and Rapists'', *The Guardian*, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/nov/14/frank-miller-occupy-movement-rant>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹⁸⁵ 'The Honest Alan Moore Interview – Part 2: The Occupy Movement, Frank Miller, and Politics', *Honest Publishing*, 2011, <https://www.honestpublishing.com/news/the-honest-alan-moore-interview-part-2-the-occupy-movement-frank-miller-and-politics/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ 'The Honest Alan Moore Interview – Part 2: The Occupy Movement, Frank Miller, and Politics'.

context of contemporary USAmerican fascism, which has more to do with Miller's output than Moore's.

That the Guy Fawkes popularized by *V for Vendetta* was adopted by some participants in the Occupy movement seems appropriate given Moore's views on the subject, as he described Occupy as

just ordinary people reclaiming rights which should always have been theirs. [...] It's a completely justified howl of moral outrage and it seems to be handled in a very intelligent, non-violent way, which is probably another reason why Frank Miller would be less than pleased with it. I'm sure if it had been a bunch of young, sociopathic vigilantes with Batman make-up on their faces, he'd be more in favour of it.¹⁸⁷

However, Moore's respect for the Occupy movement and the association of the Guy Fawkes mask with leftist politics is *not* the most powerful legacy of the Dark Age. Rather, when considering how the Dark Age relates to contemporary geopolitics one must look to Zack Snyder, who not only directed the film adaptation of *Watchmen*, but also directed the adaptation of Miller's *300* before incorporating elements of *The Dark Knight Returns* into his film *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. In many ways Snyder represents Moore's worst possible reader, attracted to 'grim, pessimistic, nasty, violent stories' while lacking the curiosity or critical thinking Moore might hope for from his audience.

For example, when promoting the then-upcoming *Watchmen* film in 2008, Snyder remarked that

I had a buddy who tried getting me into 'normal' comic books, but I was all like, 'No one is having sex or killing each other. This isn't really doing it for me'. I was a little broken, that way. So when *Watchmen* came along, I was, 'This is more my scene'.¹⁸⁸

During the same interview, Snyder responded to the suggestion that Christopher Nolan's Batman films were 'grim and gritty' by saying

Everyone says that about [Christopher Nolan's] [Batman Begins](#). 'Batman's dark'. I'm like, okay, 'No, Batman's cool'. He gets to go to a Tibetan monastery and be trained by ninjas. Okay? I want to do that. But he doesn't, like, get raped in prison. That could happen in my movie. If you want to talk about dark, that's how that would go.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ 'The Honest Alan Moore Interview – Part 2: The Occupy Movement, Frank Miller, and Politics'.

¹⁸⁸ Jeff Jensen, 'Watchmen: A Chat with Director Zack Snyder', *Entertainment Weekly*, 2008, <https://ew.com/article/2008/07/17/watchmen-chat-director-zack-snyder/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Jensen, 'Watchmen': A Chat With Director Zack Snyder'.

That Snyder's comic book movies (and particularly *300*) helped define a particular fascist ideal is unsurprising given comments like these, and even if '[i]t would be a pretty big stretch to blame *300* for Donald Trump or whatever, [...] the movie really did lionize the heroic white warriors fighting to repel the endless dark-skinned hordes'.¹⁹⁰

The villains of Morrison's *The Multiversity* are called The Gentry, servants of The Empty Hand, a long-running motif in DC Comics whose arguably most notable appearance came in *Swamp Thing* #50 which here serves as a shifting author-audience stand-in, with a particular emphasis on the violence of capitalism. The Gentry appear individually across the different titles of *The Multiversity* metaseries and as a group in each book-end issue, *The Multiversity* #1-2. In *The Mastermen*, the Multiversity title based in a world where Superman's analogue is Overman, 'guilt-ridden champion of Earth-10, where Nazis won the Second World War', the member of the Gentry that appears is Lord Broken, 'a great vacant building –its timbers cracking, the moulding rotten. The floorboards crumbling underfoot... yet still alive with some malevolent emptiness' that appears to Overman in his dreams.¹⁹¹ In an interview, Morrison noted that at his simplest Lord Broken represents a 'kind of villain archetype taken to the limit,' with 'Lord Broken [as] the madhouse, Arkham Asylum taken it to the limit,' while at the same time embodying the 'forces of nihilism and anti-human hatred, ignorance and greed and stupidity that I see every day'.¹⁹² With his appearance in *The Mastermen*, the 'madhouse' Lord Broken represents both 'the evil house of questionable foundation that Overman has built, that is the modern Nazi society of the year 2016,' as well as the Big Two publishing houses of the comic book industry, which Morrison (reasonably) suggests have been complicit in the resurgence of contemporary fascism.

¹⁹⁰ Tom Breihan, 'Zack Snyder's 300 Presaged the Howling Fascism of the Alt-Right', AV Club, 2017, <https://film.avclub.com/zack-snyder-s-300-presaged-the-howling-fascism-of-the-a-1798265082>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

¹⁹¹ Grant Morrison (w), Jim Lee (p), Scott Williams (i), 'Splendour Falls', *The Multiversity: The Mastermen*, (New York: DC Comics, April [February] 2015). Morrison, 'Superman Beyond'.

¹⁹² Matt Wilson, 'Digging Deep Into 'The Multiversity' With Grant Morrison', *Comics Alliance*, 2015, <http://comicsalliance.com/The-Multiversity-interview-grant-morrison/>, accessed June 30, 2019. One might also note the possible association of Lord Broken to Lord Byron, one of many examples of Morrison tying his critique of contemporary capitalism to the legacy of Anglophone literature. This is explored further in the entries on comic books and the weird.

From the first panel of *The Mastermen* it is clear Morrison intends to investigate the superheroes' historical association with fascism, both as symbols of USAmerican dominance or extra-legal defenders of the oppressed. The comic opens with Adolf Hitler straining at stool while reading a Superman comic book; the cover of the comic book he is reading is not from a real Superman comic, but as David Uzumeri points out, it references two important covers in comic book history: *Captain America* #1 by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, which showed the titular hero punching Hitler a year before the United States actually entered World War II, and *Superman* #17 by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel (with a cover by Fred Ray), which featured Superman forcefully handling racist caricatures of Hitler and Hideki Tojo.¹⁹³

Kirby's own position regarding Nazis is well known; in one interview, he remarked that 'the only real politics I knew was that if a guy liked Hitler, I'd beat the stuffing out of him and that would be it'.¹⁹⁴ He was regularly threatened in calls and letters by American Nazis for his work on *Captain America*, and this experience likely informed elements of Michael Chabon's narrative in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*.¹⁹⁵ Despite this history, by 2017 Captain America had become a fascist in the pages of Nick Spencer's *Secret Empire*, which saw Kirby's Nazi-puncher revealed to be a sleeper agent of Hydra. Spencer himself diverged from Kirby's own position, repeatedly decrying the 'vigilante violence' of anti-fascists punching Nazis and other white supremacists as they have attempted to make themselves a more prominent feature of USAmerican life in the wake of the United States' first openly-eugenicist president.¹⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly, Spencer's run on *Captain America* has since become associated with white supremacy's most recent upswing in the US, thanks to the appearance of a Hydra shirt worn by one of the white nationalists that massed in

¹⁹³ David Uzumeri, 'The *The Multiversity* Annotations, Part 7: *The Mastermen*', *Comics Alliance*, 2015, <http://comicsalliance.com/the-The-Multiversity-annotations-part-7/>, accessed June 30, 2019. Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, *Captain America Comics*, #1, (New York: Timely Comics/Marvel Comics, 1941 [Dec. 20, 1940]). Jerry Siegel (w), Joe Shuster (a), John Sikela (i), Fred Ray (c), 'Man or Superman?', *Superman*, #17 (New York: DC Comics, 1942).

¹⁹⁴ Gary Groth, 'Jack Kirby Interview', *The Comics Journal*, 2011, <http://www.tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/5/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

¹⁹⁵ Arturo Garcia, 'Would Captain America's Co-Creator Punch Nazis?', *Snopes*, 2017, <http://www.snopes.com/2017/01/24/captain-americas-co-creator-punch-nazis/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

¹⁹⁶ Emily Gaudette, 'Fans Want 'Captain America' Writer Gone After He Defends Actual Nazi', *Inverse*, 2017, <https://www.inverse.com/article/26752-hydra-captain-america-richard-spencer-getting-punched-alt-right-nazi-sympathizer-nick-spencer>, accessed June 30, 2019.

Charlottesville, Virginia, prior to James Fields' vehicular attack on counter-protestors there.¹⁹⁷

In this project's understanding of the comic book ages, Zach Snyder's work would be considered part of the Twisted Age, a period beginning roughly in 2008 following an interregnum this project has called the Heroic Age, after a 2010 promotional event by Marvel Comics that can be seen as an after-the-fact appellation, the kind of corporate branding that only appears once more organic trends have been assimilated and streamlined. In this timeline, the Heroic Age extends roughly from 1992, with the 'Death of Superman' storyline serving as a (slightly arbitrary) starting point and the spate of superhero movies, comic book crossovers, and adoption of superhero imagery by political figures in 2008 representing the end.¹⁹⁸ In the history Morrison offers in *Supergods* 9/11 represents an important shift, but this project diverges from that account, seeing the comic book reactions to 9/11 not as a shift in the Heroic Age but rather a catalyst that only heightened its already-existing impulse toward glurge.¹⁹⁹ However, this project's account of the Heroic Age is intentionally hazy and not very prescriptive, because its real interests lie with the Twisted Age.²⁰⁰

The choice of 'twisted' comes from two loosely related cultural moments. First, it is a reference to commentary on 2016 film *Suicide Squad*, which exists in the shared universe of Snyder's films for DC. Specifically, the Joker, played in the film by Jared Leto, was repeatedly described by Gawker writers Eve Peyser and Hudson Hongo as a kind of comically terrible avatar for contemporary culture, 'a suburban Hot Topic manager's idea of edginess', 'not 'twisted' but it is insanely 'tWiStEd''.²⁰¹ Their use of 'twisted' to describe *Suicide Squad* links to a wider understanding of the term that

¹⁹⁷ Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, 'Why Comics Fans Are Horrified—And Unsurprised—Marvel's Hydra Shirt Showed Up In Charlottesville', *The Daily Dot*, 2017, <https://www.dailydot.com/parsec/hydra-shirt-nazi-charlottesville/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

¹⁹⁸ The adoption of superhero imagery by political figures and state actors is analyzed more closely in Case Studies 2 & 3.

¹⁹⁹ Some of the repercussions of 9/11 on comic books are explored further in the entry on glurge.

²⁰⁰ Debates over the finer details of these historical and stylistic divisions are useful work for scholars more directly aligned with 'comics studies', a field this project frequently brushes up against but does not self-identify as.

²⁰¹ Eve Peyser, 'Jared Leto Is the Joker We Deserve', *Vice*, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/9k8ne5/jared-letto-is-the-joker-we-deserve, Accessed June 29, 2019. Hudson Hongo, 'Suicide Squad: The Extended Cut Is the Movie 2016 Deserves', *io9*, 2016, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/suicide-squad-the-extended-cut-is-the-movie-2016-deser-1789198779>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

connotes not simply a degree of anti-social behavior or aesthetic, but rather a kind of painfully self-conscious desire to appear anti-social, not far off from Snyder's own description of himself as 'a little broken' due to his interest in widely popular media.²⁰²

In this context, the Twisted Age can be seen as the Dark Age repeated as farce, a phenomenon embodied by one example from the work of weird Twitter personality dril:

the judge orders me to take off my anonymous v mask & im wearing the joker makeup underneath it. everyone in the courtroom groans at my shit²⁰³

dril's reference to the courtroom speaks to the more ominous undercurrents of the Twisted Age, even beyond the Trump administration's connections to *Suicide Squad* via Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's executive producing credit on the film.

Specifically, 'twisted' can also be a reference to *My Twisted World*, the biography and manifesto written by Elliot Rodger prior to his 2014 shooting spree that left seven people dead (including himself).²⁰⁴ The mix of self-aggrandizement and self-pity that suffuses Rodger's writing is emblematic of 'the twisted' more generally, and it speaks to the kind of affected anti-social persona that Nagle misidentifies as 'transgression' in *Kill All Normies*. The Twisted Age is characterized by hegemonic violence adopting the role of outsider, and it is no coincidence that Donald Trump is a kind of farcical homunculus performing an imitation of Dark Age president Ronald Reagan, as he is a

²⁰² The reader should note that identifying the contemporary era as the Twisted Age should not be taken as a criticism of every comic book produced in this era; rather, this Age is 'twisted' in the same way that particular texts came to define previous eras despite those texts often representing divergences from their contemporaries. Aside from *Suicide Squad*, this project considers the following to be defining texts of the current Age, although again, these claims are not made with the force of one claiming the authority of a 'comics scholar', particularly as some of these fall outside the time frame ascribed to the Age: Grant Morrison's *Batman* (and particularly *Batman and Robin*), Scott Snyder's *Dark Nights: Metal*, DC Comics' 'Young Animal' imprint, Marvel Comics' *Ultimate Comics*, and Nick Spencer's *Secret Empire*. Aside from these comic books, the saturation of comic book movies itself can be considered a constituent feature of the Age.

²⁰³ dril, Twitter Post, March 9, 2015, 7:30 PM, <https://twitter.com/dril/status/575121631846227968>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁰⁴ Elliot Rodger, *MY TWISTED WORLD*, Document Cloud, 2014, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1173808-elliott-rodger-manifesto.html>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

billionaire television star pretending toward 'outsider' status even as he embodies the racism and sexism that has defined the United States since its inception as a patriarchal slave state.

Blowback

As a term related to USAmerican actions abroad, 'blowback' first appeared in a 1954 'clandestine service historical paper' titled 'Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran', which was written by Donald Wilber, architect of the 1953 coup that overthrew the democratically-elected prime minister of Iran.²⁰⁵ With the help of the British government, the United States orchestrated the coup in response to Mosaddegh's efforts to nationalize Iran's oil industry, which until then had been controlled by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the organization that would go on to become British Petroleum. As James Risen noted when the CIA account was first leaked to *The New York Times* in 2000 (before its release by the CIA in 2013), Wilber was particularly careful to note the possibility of blowback precisely because the CIA saw the Iranian coup as a model for future projects.²⁰⁶ The CIA would indeed go on to orchestrate multiple coups against foreign leaders, frequently in order to secure the financial interests of USAmerican companies or else undermine incipient democratic movements that threatened capitalism more generally.²⁰⁷ One recent notable example is the 2009 military coup in Honduras, which succeeded thanks to then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's work to legitimize the military's actions and prevent the return of the democratically-elected president.²⁰⁸ That Clinton admitted as much in her book *Hard Choices* speaks to the degree to which 'hard choices' in the discourse of the USAmerican empire exclusively means choices that result in the murder of people that threaten the hegemony of the United States' ruling class, a theme that recurs throughout this text.²⁰⁹

In the introduction to his 2000 book *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, former CIA consultant Chalmers Johnson writes that his 'intention in

²⁰⁵ United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953* (Washington, DC, 1954).

²⁰⁶ James Risen, 'WORD FOR WORD/ABC's OF COUPS; Oh, What a Fine Plot We Hatched. (And Here's What to do the Next Time).', *The New York Times*, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/18/weekinreview/word-for-word-abc-s-coups-oh-what-fine-plot-we-hatched-here-s-what-next-time.html>, Accessed June 24, 2019.

²⁰⁷ J. Dana Stuster, 'Mapped: The 7 Governments the U.S. Has Overthrown', *Foreign Policy*, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/20/mapped-the-7-governments-the-u-s-has-overthrown/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁰⁸ Stephen Zunes, 'The U.S. Role in The Honduras Coup And Subsequent Violence', *The Huffington Post*, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-us-role-in-the-honduras-coup-and-subsequent-violence_b_5766c7ebe4b0092652d7a138, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁰⁹ Zunes, 'The U.S. Role in The Honduras Coup And Subsequent Violence'.

writing [*Blowback*] was to warn my fellow Americans about the nature and conduct of U.S. foreign policy over the previous half-century,' arguing that 'many aspects of what the American government had done around the world virtually invited retaliatory attacks from nations and peoples on the receiving end'.²¹⁰ Johnson points out that 'actions that generate blowback are normally kept totally secret from the American public and from most of their representatives in Congress,' and because of this ignorance, 'when innocent civilians become victims of a retaliatory strike, they are at first unable to put it in context or understand the sequence of events that led up to it'.²¹¹

Blowback was not particularly well-received in the United States upon its initial publication; reviewing the book in the September/October 2000 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, eventual Bush administration official Philip Zelikow wrote that '*Blowback* reads like a comic book', suggesting that Johnson's account of the US American empire and its history of covert actions and international bases was hyperbolic, failing to 'give America credit for anything that has gone right'.²¹² However, the attacks of September 11, 2001 soon proved to be a horrifyingly perfect example of blowback. In an introduction appended to a subsequent edition, Johnson notes that the attacks

descend in a direct line from events in 1979, the year in which the CIA, with full presidential authority, began carrying out its largest ever clandestine operation—the secret arming of Afghan freedom fighters (mujahideen) to wage a proxy war against the Soviet Union[.]²¹³

The CIA funding began in July of 1979 as an explicit attempt to draw the Soviet Union into Afghanistan, despite popular histories suggesting that the funding only began in 1980, in response to the Soviet invasion on December 24th, 1979.²¹⁴ While the CIA provided funds and weaponry to the fighters that would eventually become the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the US military presence in Saudi Arabia following the first Gulf War also contributed to the blowback that was 9/11, as the United States' habit of keeping troops and bases in regions it has fought wars even after their ostensible finish

²¹⁰ Chalmers Johnson, 'Introduction', *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences Of American Empire*, Kindle edition (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2004).

²¹¹ Johnson, 'Introduction', *Blowback*.

²¹² Philip Zelikow, 'Blowback: The Costs And Consequences Of American Empire', *Foreign Affairs*, 2000, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2000-09-01/blowback-costs-and-consequences-american-empire>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²¹³ Johnson, 'Introduction', *Blowback*.

²¹⁴ Johnson, 'Introduction', *Blowback*.

only increased resentment.²¹⁵ This last detail was repeatedly cited by Osama bin Laden as one of the reasons for the 9/11 attacks, despite attempts by the US government to mystify al-Qaeda's motives with rhetoric suggesting that the attacks occurred simply because 'they hate our freedoms'.²¹⁶

Covert actions of the sort carried out by the CIA are not the only cause of blowback, and the bulk of Johnson's analysis does not concern covert actions in the strictest sense, but rather the sprawling network of bases that the United States maintains abroad. While the existence of most of these bases is not 'secret', their existence and material impact are facts largely absent from USAmerican discourse, and most USAmericans remain ignorant of their own imperial footprint. These bases are what make the United States an empire, because

After all, we now station over half a million U.S. troops, spies, contractors, dependents, and others on more than 737 military bases spread around the world. These bases are located in more than 130 countries, many of them presided over by dictatorial regimes that have given their citizens no say in the decision to let us in.²¹⁷

Even in those parts of the world where the United States is not 'officially' engaged in some sort of armed conflict, the maintenance of this network of bases itself represents a form of imperial violence. At the conclusion of the *Sorrows of Empire*, the second book of Johnson's 'inadvertent' *Blowback* trilogy, Johnson notes that

it is difficult to imagine how Congress, much like the Roman senate in the last days of the republic, could be brought back to life and cleansed of its endemic corruption. Failing such a reform, Nemesis, the goddess of retribution and vengeance, the punisher of pride and hubris, waits impatiently for her meeting with us.²¹⁸

Johnson titled the last book in the trilogy *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*, and although four years later he would publish *Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope*, his diagnosis of the empire's ills left little room for hope. The final book was published just a few months before his death in November, 2010, and he did not live to see whether the future he warned of came to pass. Writing in July, 2009, halfway through the first year of Barack Obama's presidency, Johnson warned of

²¹⁵ Johnson, 'Introduction', *Blowback*.

²¹⁶ Johnson, 'Introduction', *Blowback*.

²¹⁷ Chalmers Johnson, 'Prologue', *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*, Kindle edition (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2006). The scope of the USAmerican empire across the globe and the ways that empire is kept from public discussion are explored in more detail under the glossary entry for glurge.

²¹⁸ Chalmers Johnson, 'The Sorrows of Empire', *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, Kindle edition (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2004).

our long-standing reliance on imperialism and militarism in our relations with other countries and the vast, potentially ruinous global empire of bases that goes with it. The failure to begin to deal with our bloated military establishment and the profligate use of it in missions for which it is hopelessly inappropriate will, sooner rather than later, condemn the United States to a devastating trio of consequences: imperial overstretch, perpetual war, and insolvency, leading to a likely collapse[.]²¹⁹

Obama would go on to accelerate and expand the United States' imperial decline, launching his own global drone war while giving a polite face to mass murder and the further acceleration of global environmental collapse thanks to the US military's massive consumption of fossil fuels.²²⁰

-

This project is concerned with blowback of a sort slightly different from (but not entirely unrelated to) the blowback that concerned Johnson in the last decade of his life. This text works to explain a form of *cultural blowback*, born from the inattention paid to certain corners of popular culture in the 20th and 21st centuries. Responding to the sense of bewilderment expressed in the wake of political developments in the US and UK during 2016 and afterward, this project offers a guide to some of the developments over the last four decades that, like the CIA's covert actions in 1979, help to explain the violent resurgence of fascism today.

²¹⁹ Chalmers Johnson, 'Dismantling the Empire', *Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope*, Kindle edition (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2009).

²²⁰ The dissonance between Obama's public persona and his role as overseer of the US American imperial project is explored in Case Studies 2 & 3.

Bricolage

While this project does occasionally engage in literary criticism of the sort usually found in the Humanities, that mode is subordinate to its explicitly teleological approach to discourse, which can be summed up in the term *bricolage*, a French term left unitalicized from here on account of its status as a loan word in English. As a noun the term denotes a particular activity or the result of that activity that is more or less akin to do-it-yourself (DIY), but with the occasionally negative connotations of being slapdash or ‘makeshift’. Notably, the verb *bricoler* is frequently translated into English as ‘to tinker’, the latter sometimes being a slur for Irish travelers, though this is less common than the more explicitly racist USAmerican English term *nigger-rigged*, an adaptation of *jerry-rigged*, which itself is a combination of the terms *jury-rigged* and *jerry-built*, with only the latter originally having the connotation of low-quality. Although it existed earlier, bricolage entered the discourse of ‘theory’ when it was discussed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *The Savage Mind*, a discussion subsequently expanded by Gerard Genette and Jacques Derrida.

For Lévi-Strauss, bricolage describes the operative strictures of myth, which Lévi-Strauss contrasts with Western modes of ‘scientific’ thought; where the *bricoleur* is ‘someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman’, according to Lévi-Strauss the ‘engineer’ is someone who designs a tool from scratch and fit for purpose.²²¹ Describing bricolage, Lévi-Strauss writes that

There still exists among ourselves an activity which on the technical plane gives us quite a good understanding of what a science we prefer to call ‘prior’ rather than ‘primitive’, could have been on the plane of speculation. This is what is commonly called ‘bricolage’ in French. [...] The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogenous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual ‘bricolage’ – which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two.²²²

According to Lévi-Strauss, the *bricoleur* ‘is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks’ and drawing on tools that ‘are specialized up to a point, sufficiently for the ‘bricoleur’ not to need the equipment and knowledge of all trades and professions,

²²¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) 16-17.

²²² Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 16-17.

but not enough for each of them to only have only one definite and determinate use'.²²³

In 'Sign, Structure, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', Derrida describes bricolage as the discourse of Lévi-Strauss's method, explaining that this approach consists of 'conserving in the field of empirical discovery all these old concepts, while at the same time exposing here and there their limits, treating them as tools which can still be of use'.²²⁴ Derrida notes that while Lévi-Strauss is 'more or less explicit' when making these locally teleological choices, if one accepts Lévi-Strauss's account of bricolage, then it quickly becomes clear that 'the analysis of *bricolage* could 'be applied almost word for word' to criticism', and indeed, all discourse.²²⁵ According to Derrida

The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the bricoleur, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. [...] The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of bricolage is therefore a theological idea; and since Lévi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that bricolage is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the bricoleur.²²⁶

Thus, if all discourse is already bricolage and it is impossible to develop a genuinely novel discourse, then the purpose of pointing out this project's identification with the term is to admit its own limitations. Although this project dismisses most of Derrida's reading of Lévi-Strauss as concern trolling, it is nevertheless the case that Derrida accurately points out the central tension of Lévi-Strauss' work, and in fact the tension in the work of any cultural critic aware of the discourse-limited field from which they might draw inspiration. The glossary of terms that make up most of this project are not new words; they are simply existing words used in new ways.

-

Although Derrida's critique is more reactionary than radical, his understanding of the tension between critiquing a discourse and reproducing it maps onto a more direct account of this struggle given by Audre Lorde in her 1979 presentation 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', given at the Second Sex conference on feminist theory in New York. In her speech, Lorde reflected on the

²²³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 17-18.

²²⁴ Derrida, 'Sign, Structure, and Play', 254.

²²⁵ Derrida, 'Sign, Structure, and Play', 256. Here Derrida is citing Gerard Genette's reading of Lévi-Strauss.

²²⁶ Derrida, 'Sign, Structure, and Play', 225.

conference's representative failures, and particularly 'the absence of any consideration of lesbian consciousness or the consciousness of Third World women', as 'it is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences'.²²⁷ Lorde argues that genuinely radical theory depends on

learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.²²⁸

With this Lorde offers another iteration of the same struggle within critical theory while recognizing the actual differences in power and position that discourse includes, something Derrida consistently fails to do.

This same struggle can be seen in the work of Theodor Adorno and Fredric Jameson, who likewise offer more immediately relevant considerations of discourse and power in the context of USAmerican fascism. In Adorno's analysis of 'the notion of culture as ideology' in *Minima Moralia*, he writes that

[f]or meaning, as we know, is not independent of genesis, and it is easy to discern, in everything that cloaks or mediates the material, the trace of insincerity, sentimentality, indeed, precisely a concealed and doubly poisonous interest.²²⁹

Similarly, in his essay 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' Jameson suggests that

works of mass culture cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well: they cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of content as a fantasy bribe to the public about to be so manipulated.²³⁰

In both Jameson's and Adorno's case the recognition that what is 'implicitly or explicitly Utopian' or an 'anticipation of a nobler condition' can never be free of 'the existing order' or 'the barbarism that culture is reproached with furthering indirectly' is not a reason to discard popular culture as a site of potentially liberatory work.²³¹

Instead, as Adorno points out,

To identify culture solely with lies is more fateful than ever, now that the former is really becoming totally absorbed by the latter, and eagerly invites such identification in order to compromise every opposing thought. [...] in face of the lie of the commodity world, even the lie

²²⁷ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2008), 110-1.

²²⁸ Lorde, 112.

²²⁹ Theodor W Adorno and E. F. N Jephcott, *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso, 2005), 43-44.

²³⁰ Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia In Mass Culture', *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979): 144.

²³¹ Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia', 144. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 44.

that denounces it becomes a corrective. That culture so far has failed is no justification for furthering its failure.²³²

This project does not read any sort of fatalism in Adorno's, Lorde's, or Jameson's work, and does not resign itself to the repetition *ad nauseum* of a given text's 'problematic' qualities. Rather, it sees in Lorde's account of the master's tools, Adorno's discussion of 'culture as ideology', and Jameson's understanding of the utopian 'bribe' the demand for an honest account of one's own bricolage, with an attendant ruthlessness when it comes to the teleology with which this project approaches its texts and targets.

Such an understanding of discourse has two stylistic (and subsequently rhetorical) implications. First, it explains the conscious decision by this text to arrange itself in a series of glossary entries, case studies, and vignettes that together form a 'guide', rather than adopt a more straightforward structure common to a PhD thesis in the wider category of the Humanities. Put simply, such a traditional structure is insufficient for the task at hand and is arguably insufficient for discussing *any* contemporary culture. The advent of hyperlinks makes traditional citation practices (and particularly any reference to 'further reading') always-already inadequate, and the trans-medial qualities of most 'intellectual properties' makes any reading specifically rooted to an extant theory or school of thought preemptively diminished. Even the popularity of terms like 'interdisciplinary' cannot help but reify the institutional power of 'disciplines' in a world where the broader experience of the bricoleur is what is actually called for. In this light, this project can be seen as the actualization of something imagined by Sara Ahmed when she completed her PhD at this very same School in this very same PhD program. Writing in her book *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed remarks that

When I was doing my PhD, I was told I had to give my love to this or that male theorist, to follow him, not necessarily as an explicit command but through an apparently gentle but increasingly insistent questioning: Are you a Derridean; no, so are you a Lacanian; no, oh, okay, are you a Deleuzian; no, then what? If not, then what? Maybe my answer should have been: if not, then not!²³³

²³² Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 44-45.

²³³ Sara Ahmed, 'Introduction', *Living a Feminist Life*, Kindle Edition (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

The second implication of this project's approach to bricolage – which is in fact a specific example of the rejected standards discussed above – is the degree to which this project depends on quotations as a part of its argument and not merely as evidence for that argument. In practice this appears as block-quotes that are not accompanied by whatever length (in words) of 'analysis' that might usually be expected, and as a narrative and argumentative mode, this stylistic choice echoes comic books themselves, and particularly the role of the bleed in reading. This project demands more from the reader than a more straightforward academic project, and it does so because the project's subject matter demands as much.²³⁴ At the same time, the decision to more directly and extensively incorporate extant text into this project's prose has at least one antecedent in critical theory, found in Friedrich Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.

While analyzing what he argues are the defining media of (at the very least) the twentieth century, Kittler sometimes embeds whole short stories in a chapter, offering analysis but letting the texts themselves stand as a statement in line with the book's larger historical account. Kittler describes this use of extant stories to account for contemporary realities by suggesting

How that which is written in no book came to pass may still be for books to record. Pushed to their margins even obsolete media become sensitive enough to register the signs and clues of a situation. Then [...] patterns and moires emerge: myths, fictions of science, oracles... [...] such stories [...] show how the novelty of technological media inscribed itself into the paper of old books.²³⁵

The technological media under discussion in this project is the cyborganistic milieu of life in the United States circa 2019, and the 'old books' are comics, whose panels, pages, and bleed prefigured the narrative logic of the glass rectangles that occupy so much human sensory labor, or the videogame guides that explained the grammars of action through which users interface with those rectangles. This thesis is itself an old book, an obsolete medium hoping (however naively) to do anything to or with a technological landscape so beyond its material ability to convey. Like Lévi-Strauss' 'mythologicals' before it, this text is itself a 'fiction of science', produced within an

²³⁴ With this the project maintains the radical notion that the prose of a PhD thesis might have some worth beyond securing a degree for the author.

²³⁵ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) xl.

institution whose very existence represents the imposition of the insufficient category 'science' onto what should be regarded as magic.

Rejecting 'science' as a sufficient category, this project makes a conscious distinction between its narratological work and much extant work in the field (before and after the term 'narratology' came into popularity). Specifically, this project rejects the impulse toward taxonomy that has characterized narratology since at least Vladimir Propp's 1928 book *Morphology of the Folktale*, which analyzed Russian folktales 'according to the function of its dramatis personae', of which Propp identifies thirty-one different functions.²³⁶ Lévi-Strauss is perhaps the writer most associated with this search for discrete units of meaning – though this impulse toward seeking out discrete divisions should not be viewed as perfectly congruent with 'structuralism' – and his discussion of the mytheme as a 'gross constituent unit' of mythical thought as well as his use of binary pairs to analyze myth in *Structural Anthropology* might be considered the 'classical' expression of this tendency.²³⁷ Despite being sometimes identified as a 'post-structuralist' literary critic, Roland Barthes repeats this tendency in his book *S/Z*, which, in lieu of discrete units of meaning argues for 'five major codes under which all the textual signifiers can be grouped'.²³⁸

More recently, videogame theorist Ian Bogost wrote an entire book called *Unit Operations*, which argues that 'unit operations are modes of meaning-making that privilege discrete, disconnected actions over deterministic, progressive systems', and like Barthes, Bogost is primarily interested in function, writing that 'unit operations privilege function over context'.²³⁹ For Bogost, analyzing a given text (whether that be prose or videogames) with unit operations in mind shifts one's thinking so that instead of looking for 'a fundamental or universal order that an agent might 'discover'' – a characterization that could reasonably be applied to much mid-century narratological thought – the critic can see what kind of complex systems emerge from the interaction between these '*discrete, material* things in the world'.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. by Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 20.

²³⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural study of myth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 68 (270) 1955, 428–444.

²³⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), 19.

²³⁹ Ian Bogost, *Unit Operations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 4.

²⁴⁰ Bogost, *Unit Operations*, 5, 8.

While this project begins from the presumption that meaning is a material thing in the world, it – like Derrida in ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’ and Borges in ‘El Aleph’ and ‘The Nothingness of Personality’ – rejects the possibility of convincingly establishing that a given center of attention is actually ‘discrete’.²⁴¹ Furthermore, this project presumes that this impulse is itself a constituent feature of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, as the move to taxonomize totality in this way is precisely the work necessary to maintain these hierarchies. This is not to suggest that analysis or critique somehow ‘diminishes’ the magic of a given text, as if mystification is essential to a text’s potency; such an approach to discourse is in actuality a desire for the bliss of ignorance and could be accurately described as glurge. Instead, this project is arguing that meaning (aka magic) works according to the illusion of discrete categories, and that because imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy depends on the maintenance of specific illusions in this regard, this project’s participation in the taxonomizing impulse common to narratology would represent an unacceptable degree of complicity in the structures it looks to dismantle.

Instead this project attempts to ‘create’ a narratological discourse sufficient for the tasks at hand, recognizing that the bricoleur does not truly create, but merely adapts extant means to achieve localized ends. This is why the scope of this project’s goals are small even though the breadth of its topical attention is broad; this project does not make a large contribution to a single field, but rather many small contributions to many fields, embodying the ‘workmanlike’ characterization of bricolage in the context of specific conceptual lacuna within and across different corners of the Humanities and social sciences. The glossary performs this work most explicitly by identifying specific topics of prominence within the larger project’s discourse, but each case study also addresses a specific need in a more precise domain. Case Study 1: *The Kept Weird* makes up for gaps in recent scholarship concerning weird fiction – and particularly Mark Fisher’s book *The Weird and the Eerie* – by highlighting the role of comic books and the slogans of ‘weird’ cities in the United States, while Case Study 2: *Magical Materialism in US American Politics* examines the irrelevance of a fact-fiction divide in contemporary culture. Finally, Case Study 3: *The Real Heroes* examines the fine point of the state’s application of violence in the form

²⁴¹ To this list one could add Borges’ stories ‘The Library of Babel’ and ‘The Book of Sand’, both of which imagine discursive infinities.

of 'heroic' police forces. Taken as a whole the project is a modest contribution to the understanding of the contemporary political environment of the United States, and as a result its contributions are not intended to nor need to be durable, which is to say the obsolescence of this project will only accelerate with each passing year. For this reason, its terms are not prescriptive, and the authority with which this project speaks on its topics is not derived from the totality of its argument but rather the local applicability of its discursive solutions.

Bullshit

Bullshit is one of a number of 'shit' terms in English, with each term connoting slightly different meanings depending on the animal in question. In addition to bullshit, one might also describe something as horseshit, chickenshit, dogshit, apeshit, or batshit. In colloquial discourse, batshit and apeshit both connote a degree of mania or unrestrained anger – as seen in the phrases 'batshit crazy' or 'going apeshit' –, while chickenshit refers to cowardice and dogshit connotes something of poor quality. Bullshit and horseshit have almost identical definitions, and unlike the others have a moderately more complex meaning requiring some degree of discussion.

Bullshit was first explicated in detail in 1986 by philosopher Harry Frankfurt in his essay (and later book) 'On Bullshit'.²⁴² Frankfurt notes that bullshit evolved from terms like 'humbug,' 'bull session,' and 'shooting the bull,' and refers to a particular rhetorical mode that, while often untrue, is not exactly the same as lying. Instead bullshit is a kind of discursive dodge wherein the truth value of statements matters less than their effectiveness in achieving the speaker's goal, whatever that may be. Frankfurt explains that where a liar attempts to hide their own knowledge of the truth, the bullshitter attempts to hide their own indifference to the truth:

His eye is not on the facts at all, as the eyes of the honest man and of the liar are, except insofar as they may be pertinent to his interest in getting away with what he says. He does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose.²⁴³

Frankfurt notes that 'bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are', because while '[s]omeone who lies and someone who tells the truth are playing on opposite sides, so to speak, in the same game' inasmuch as both must recognize the truth in order to either state it or knowingly deny it, 'the bullshitter ignores these demands altogether', making it impossible to meaningfully refute bullshit.²⁴⁴ In this way even engaging with bullshit as if it is lies falls into the bullshitter's game.

Bullshit covers a broad swath of discourse and can appear in a number of contexts, and this project examines smarm and glurge, two sub-sets of bullshit that are an important way that USAmerican fascism reifies support for its military and police. However, one must note that bullshit is not unique to the United States, and in fact

²⁴² Harry Frankfurt, 'On Bullshit', *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6, no. 2 (1986): 81–100.

²⁴³ Frankfurt, 'On Bullshit', 97.

²⁴⁴ Frankfurt, 'On Bullshit', 98.

has been recognized as an integral part of fascist – or at the very least anti-Semitic – thought since at least 1944, albeit rendered in slightly different terms. Specifically, in his essay ‘Anti-Semite and Jew’ (*‘Réflexions sur la question juive’*), Jean-Paul Sartre notes that a constituent part of anti-Semitic discourse is absurdity, and that this absurdity operates in its favor. Sartre warns his readers to

Never believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge. But they are amusing themselves, for it is their adversary who is obliged to use words responsibly, since he believes in words. The anti-Semites have the right to play. They even like to play with discourse for, by giving ridiculous reasons, they discredit the seriousness of their interlocutors. They delight in acting in bad faith, since they seek not to persuade by sound argument but to intimidate and disconcert.²⁴⁵

Contemporary cases of this abound, with perhaps the most common being white nationalists’ use of the ‘OK’ hand gesture to simultaneously signify their affiliation with white supremacy *and* embarrass anyone ridiculous enough to suggest that such a widely used and innocuous symbol could be directly related to white supremacy.²⁴⁶ The practice has been repeated with a variety of symbols and memes, and follows the same pattern: white supremacists adopt seemingly innocuous symbols in order to associate those symbols with white supremacy, before ridiculing those who subsequently identify those symbols with white supremacy for ‘falling for the joke’, thus demonstrating the ignorance and credulous naivete of anti-racists.²⁴⁷ For this reason, it is important to recognize that fascism cannot ultimately be overcome through discourse or debate, because at its core fascism (and its constituent elements, including racism, patriarchy, and capitalism) is bullshit, and fascists benefit from the presumption of good faith. This is why the demand for debate is a common feature of fascists in public discourse; agreeing to debate bullshit always-already benefits the bullshitter.

²⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite And Jew*, trans. by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1976) 13.

²⁴⁶ David Neiwart, ‘Is That an OK Sign? A White Power Symbol? Or Just a Right-Wing Troll?’, *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/09/18/ok-sign-white-power-symbol-or-just-right-wing-troll>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁴⁷ Matt Bors, ‘Clowning Around’, *The Nib*, 2019, <https://thenib.com/clowning-around>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

Comic books

The texts cited most frequently throughout this project are comic books, a term this project uses in the strictest sense to mean the serialized paperback magazines published in the United States, with superheroes being a particularly prominent genre within the medium. While conscious of ongoing discussions of comic books' prehistory and specific terms like graphic novel and collected edition, this project avoids such conversations for the sake of brevity; it does use 'comic books' and 'comics' interchangeably, conscious that the latter category is broader and includes the former. There are two details that matter for this project's use of comic books: first, the unique difficulties posed by the discussion of characters that have been in uninterrupted publication for over eighty years, and second, the temptation toward arcana brought on by the vast multiverses of superhero comics.

The difficulty of discussing characters that have been in constant publication across a variety of media was helpfully articulated by a comic creator in the form of a dialogue:

Me: Oh boy, I sure do love [CHARACTER X.]

Someone: Is there a run you would recommend?

Me: No. My love is based entirely on 19 nonconsecutive pages, 30-odd unrelated panels, and five scenes from three different animated shows, all of which is spread across a sixty year period.²⁴⁸

This difficulty is why this project avoids offering any specific readings of individual characters, as doing so is a fool's errand; the publication history of USAmerican superheroes means that finding a counterpoint to any given 'definitive' description of a particular character is annoyingly easy. As with myth, certain characters have certain features that tend to show up in most instances of the character but tracking these traits and their variations in any detail is precisely the kind of narratological work this project rejects as unhelpful (and likely harmful at this particular moment in history).

As with the larger structure of this text requiring some extra degree of imaginative labor on the part of the reader, the subject matter of this project requires an extra degree of trust on the part of the reader, because for the sake of expediency it skips over the process of establishing its *ethos* through a more straightforward literature review. In addition, it does not include any images of the comic books it cites

²⁴⁸ Max the comics guy who does comics about comics, Twitter Post, January 25, 2019, 9:09 AM, <https://twitter.com/amadcartoonist/status/1088846317034516480>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

despite sometimes referring to their visual features, because experience has shown that such images are in fact *too powerful* for inclusion here. While one can cite the text of a comic with relative ease and the reader can well enough stay focused on the task at hand, the inclusion of images too frequently tempts the reader toward considering any one of countless tangents upon which the investigation might embark. This is not a criticism of any imagined readers, but rather an acknowledgement of the potency of the medium, and the semiotic density that can be contained by a single panel or page.

In addition to the knowledge bestowed by experience from presenting this work at conferences and review panels, the decision to strictly limit what features of a given comic come under discussion is also informed by the comics themselves, and specifically by a conversation between Batman and his archnemesis, the Joker. In *Batman* #680, the sixth issue of Grant Morrison's *Batman R.I.P.* storyline titled 'The Thin White Duke of Death', Batman confronts the Joker after having spent multiple issues trying to understand the interior life of his longtime foe, finally learning the significance of the Joker's latest patterns of behavior that place an emphasis on the colors black and red. In the very first pages of *Batman R.I.P.* Batman visits the Joker in his cell at Arkham Asylum, and during the conversation the Joker deals a 'dead man's hand', made up of red eights and black aces with a joker as the fifth card.²⁴⁹ From this point on, Batman, in his capacity as 'the world's greatest detective', attempts to discern the hidden meaning of the hand dealt:

I HAVE TWO CUSTOMIZED CRAY MAINFRAMES RUNNING SIMULTANEOUSLY, ANALYZING EVERY SCRAP OF DATA, LOOKING FOR A PATTERN I KNOW IS THERE. YOU KNOW, LIKE THE DEAD MAN'S HAND THE JOKER DEALT ME WHEN I WENT TO ARKHAM ASYLUM TO ASK HIM ABOUT THE BLACK GLOVE? TWO 8s, TWO ACES, RIGHT? WHAT'S THE 8th LETTER OF THE ALPHABET? THEN THINK 8s... AND AS. TWO RED, TWO BLACK. AND EACH CARD HAS A SPECIFIC FORTUNE-TELLING SIGNIFICANCE AND A WHOLE RANGE OF NUMEROLOGICAL AND QABALISTIC CORRESPONDENCES BEFORE WE EVEN GET TO COLOR SYMBOLISM AND FOLKLORE. AND I DON'T KNOW ALL THIS STUFF, IF I MISS A TWIST, IF I CAN'T 'MATCH WITS' WITH ANY ONE OF A DOZEN DEEPLY DISTURBED, BRILLIANT SADISTS, SOMEONE COULD DIE.²⁵⁰

When Batman finally has the opportunity to confront the Joker again and learn the significance of the hand and larger red and black motif, the Joker laughs at the hero's insistence on overinvolved analysis:

²⁴⁹ Grant Morrison & Geoff Johns (w), George Perez (p), Scott Koblish (i), Alex Sinclair (c), Nick J. Napolitano (l), 'Let There Be Lightning', *DC Universe* #0 (New York: DC Comics, June 2008).

²⁵⁰ Grant Morrison (w), Tony S. Daniel (p), Sandu Florea (i), Guy Major (c), Jared K. Fletcher (l), 'Batman R.I.P. – Batman in the Underworld', *Batman* vol. 1 #677 (New York: DC Comics, July 2008).

you think it all breaks down into symbolism and structures and hints and *clues*
no, batman, that's just *wikipedia*²⁵¹

The joke here is twofold. In the first case, the Joker is accurately critiquing Batman, whose insistence on finding 'symbolism and structures and hints and clues' led him to overlook the obvious inspiration for the Joker's red and black motif, which turns out to be the color of the floor tiles in his cell.²⁵² At the same time, Morrison's well-known penchant for metatextual clues and foreshadowing means that while the Joker makes a good point here, on the whole one cannot disregard the various references and allusions that abound in Morrison's work.

At the same time, the Joker makes clear that there are no hard and fast rules for determining which references matter, which allusions lead somewhere useful, and which hints are more than red herrings. The 'dead man's hand' is a reference to – according to popular folklore – the hand held by James Butler 'Wild Bill' Hickock when he was shot in the back while sitting at a poker table, and the title 'The Thin White Duke of Death' references both David Bowie's 1975/1975 Thin White Duke persona as well as issue #663 of *Batman*, in which the Joker undergoes his own transition into 'the Clown at Midnight, his latest reinvention', one of any number of various 'superpersonas' he has existed as over the course of his publication history.²⁵³ These metatextual references matter little here, other than to demonstrate how the density of Morrison's metatextual references means there is no shortage of references that might be explored or explained without any promise of relevance for the task at hand. While Morrison's work represents an extreme example of comic books' tendency toward arcana, it is a good example of why this project simultaneously references comics so frequently while restricting how much of them are available to the reader.

-

Morrison is part of a much larger wave of English, Scottish, and Northern Irish writers hired by US American comic book companies over the course of the 1980s, and although this wave brought with it obvious allusions to a 'British invasion', this project primarily regards them as part of what might be called the *Hellblazer* canon, after the

²⁵¹ Grant Morrison (w), Tony S. Daniel (p), Sandu Florea (i), Guy Major (c), Randy Gentile (l), 'Batman R.I.P. – The Thin White Duke of Death', *Batman* vol. 1 #680 (New York: DC Comics, October 2008).

²⁵² Morrison, 'The Thin White Duke of Death'.

²⁵³ Grant Morrison (w), John Van Fleet (a), Todd Klein (l), 'The Clown at Midnight', *Batman* vol. 1 #663 (New York: DC Comics, April 2007).

long-running DC Comics title that so many of these writers worked on. The main character of *Hellblazer*, John Constantine, is a Liverpudlian magician that first appeared in the pages of *Swamp Thing* during Alan Moore's tenure before receiving his own title, originally written by Jamie Delano. Over time *Hellblazer* was written by (among others) Grant Morrison, Garth Ennis, Warren Ellis, and Mike Carey, all of whom are cited throughout this text. To this list one may add Mark Millar, who although never wrote *Hellblazer*, did submit a script for the first issue before Delano's work was chosen instead. In many ways contemporary Anglophone culture represents the world the *Hellblazer* writers made, as their work has by now been adapted across media. Just to name a few examples, one may note that Morrison, Ennis, and Carey all have ongoing TV series based on their work (*Happy*, *Preacher*, and *Lucifer*, respectively), and Ellis recently wrote the animated *Castlevania* series; some of Moore's many film adaptations are discussed in the entry on the comic book ages.²⁵⁴

While this project suggests that it is useful to consider the collective output of these authors in the context of a '*Hellblazer* canon', one should nevertheless be careful not to identify them too immediately with Alan Moore or to suggest that they are all inextricably indebted to his work on *Swamp Thing*, because to do so would be to take sides in an ongoing feud among some of the most prominent names in the comic book industry. Specifically, Moore has repeatedly criticized other comic book authors for seemingly appropriating ideas from his work, even as Morrison – in a 1990 column – accused Moore of taking major plot points for some of his most famous works from the 1978 novel *Superfolks*.²⁵⁵ Their mutual animosity has continued for decades, and Morrison in particular has taken the opportunity to criticize Moore's legacy throughout his own comic book work. Recalling some of the features of this feud are helpful for articulating some of the shared impulses of the *Hellblazer* canon, and particularly the role of the tulpa in their work.

²⁵⁴ This is only a miniscule list of the myriad projects associated with former *Hellblazer* writers, and a comprehensive account of the wider *Hellblazer* canon and their influence on contemporary culture is a project that does not yet exist but represents a fecund avenue for future research.

²⁵⁵ Pádraig Méalóid, 'Alan Moore and Superfolks Part 3: The Strange Case of Grant Morrison and Alan Moore', *The Beat*, 2012, <https://www.comicsbeat.com/alan-moore-and-superfolks-part-3-the-strange-case-of-grant-morrison-and-alan-moore/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

To begin, it is important to note that this project has already likely fallen foul of Moore's own stated desires regarding his own work in the context of Morrison's critiques and imitations (such as *Pax Americana*, which is an explicit and intentional retelling of *Watchmen*). In a 2014 interview, Moore described Morrison as

someone who I didn't want anywhere near me, and who I could never have any reason to notice or take an interest in if he wasn't, metaphorically speaking, continually masturbating on my doorstep. [...] To be brutally honest, I'd prefer it if [...] admirers of Grant Morrison's work would please stop reading mine, as I don't think it fair that my respect and affection for my own readership should be compromised in any way by people that I largely believe to be shallow and indiscriminating. [...] This may seem like a disproportionate response, but for thirty years I have had to patiently endure the craven and bitchy hostility of someone who, when I bother to think of him at all, I think of as a Scottish tribute band.²⁵⁶

While Morrison has tended to speak of Moore in rather less colorful terms, he is no less critical of the other author, simultaneously blaming him for the Dark Age while suggesting that Moore's assessment of his own influence is self-aggrandizing.

Responding to a different Moore interview in 2012, Morrison insists that

If Alan Moore had never come along [the Hellblazer writers] we would all still have written and drawn our comics. We published our own fanzines, and small press outlets were popping up everywhere. *2000 AD* was at a peak. Marvel UK was in a period of expansion and innovation.[...] DC would have found all of us, with or without Alan Moore, who seems curiously unable or unwilling to acknowledge that he was part of a spontaneous movement not its driving force or sole font of creativity.²⁵⁷

Although he has not developed the same combative relationship to Moore as Morrison, Northern Irish writer Garth Ennis largely concurs with Morrison's account, remarking in a 1997 interview that

in the early 80s American comics were suffering a bit of a malaise, especially at DC -- the American writers and artists had basically grown up reading nothing but their own comics [...] But DC needed some fresh blood, so they sent Karen Berger [eventual editor of Hellblazer] and a couple of people over to England with a big chequebook, just to sign up every writer and artist in sight, and most of them were working for *2000 AD*. [...] Everyone knew that DC were reading it, so if you were any good at all in *2000 AD*, or any of its companion publications like *Crisis* or *Revolver*, it was a safe bet it would end up under the DC noses.²⁵⁸

Moore's grudge with Morrison goes beyond questions of literary legacies, however, because both writers also consider themselves chaos magicians, with Moore believing

²⁵⁶ Pádraig Ó Méalóid, 'Last Alan Moore Interview?', *Slovobooks*, 2014, <https://slovobooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/09/last-alan-moore-interview/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁵⁷ Laura Sneddon, 'The Strange Case of Grant Morrison And Alan Moore, As Told By Grant Morrison', *The Beat*, 2012, <http://www.comicsbeat.com/the-strange-case-of-grant-morrison-and-alan-moore-as-told-by-grant-morrison/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁵⁸ David Carroll, 'Trail Blazers', *Tabula Rasa*, 1997, <http://www.tabularasa.info/AusComics/Hellblazers.html>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

Morrison only became one in an attempt to imitate him, stating that he ‘could only marvel when the customary several months after I’d announced my own entry into occultism [...] in January, 1994, Grant Morrison apparently had his own mystical vision and decided that he too would become a magician’.²⁵⁹ Moore claimed to have had a transformative vision in January 1994, whereas in *Supergods*, Morrison recalls performing his own magical ritual in February 1994, which resulted in a transformative vision in Kathmandu in ‘spring that year’.²⁶⁰ However, Morrison sarcastically responded to Moore’s declaration of magical originality by noting that he could easily ‘start by pointing out how various interviews in which I talked about my practice of Chaos Magic during the 1980s and early ’90s *clearly* played into Alan Moore’s decision to declare himself a magician’.²⁶¹

Aside from being a comically overwrought feud between two extremely successful authors, this magicians’ battle is important because it ties into their respective approaches to narrative, and Morrison’s account of narrative violence in particular. When remarking on the ‘reality’ of comic book characters (seen in the entry for X) in *Supergods*, Morrison discusses how

The fictional universe I was interacting with was as ‘real’ as our own, and as I began to think of the DC universe as a place, it occurred to me that there were two ways to approach it: as a missionary or as an anthropologist. I chose to see some writers as missionaries who attempted to impose their own values and preconceptions on cultures they considered inferior—in this case, that of the superheroes. Missionaries liked to humiliate the natives by pointing out their gauche customs and colorfully frank traditional dress. They bullied defenseless fantasy characters into leather trench coats and nervous breakdowns and left formerly carefree fictional communities in a state of crushing self-doubt and dereliction. Anthropologists, on the other hand, surrendered themselves to foreign cultures. They weren’t afraid to go native or look foolish. They came and they departed with respect and in the interests of mutual understanding. Naturally, I wanted to be an anthropologist.²⁶²

Later Morrison explicitly identifies Moore with the missionary, stating that he ‘wanted the superhero to face up to us—to challenge the zealous missionary work of Moore and his successors, who had inflicted real-world tortures and judgments upon the ethereal, paper-thin constructs of unfettered imagination’.²⁶³ While this comparison appears while Morrison is writing about his work on *Animal Man*, it also explains a key narrative in *Seven Soldiers of Victory*.

²⁵⁹ Ó Méalóid, ‘Last Alan Moore Interview?’.

²⁶⁰ Morrison, *Supergods*, 260.

²⁶¹ Sneddon, ‘The Strange Case of Grant Morrison and Alan Moore, As Told By Grant Morrison’.

²⁶² Morrison, *Supergods*, 218.

²⁶³ Morrison, *Supergods*, 219.

Specifically, Morrison links *Seven Soldiers'* wider critique of appropriation (discussed more thoroughly in the entry on weird) to the Dark Age and Moore's work on *Swamp Thing* in particular. Moore first introduced Hellblazer lead John Constantine in issue #37 of *Swamp Thing*, in which the magician and con man enlists the swamp monster in a fight against some coming evil. The climax of this story arc occurs in issue #50, wherein Constantine has assembled a group of the DC universe's most important magicians and sorcerers in their effort to save reality, and among these are Giovanni Zatarra and his daughter Zatanna. Giovanni is one of the oldest characters in terms of publication, having first appeared in *Action Comics* #1, the comic that inaugurated the Golden Age and also saw the first appearance of Superman. Giovanni dies in *Swamp Thing* #50, consumed by the overwhelming power of the great evil's gaze as he protects his daughter Zatanna. He is burned away entirely during the course of a séance, leaving nothing behind but his magician's top hat. This death scene is mirrored in *Seven Soldiers*, which sees an inversion; in this case, Zatanna is the only survivor of her trip to the 'imaginal world', and all her companions are consumed. The rest of Zatanna's arc concerns her coming to terms with her father's death.²⁶⁴

However, Morrison goes further than just this reference to *Swamp Thing* #50 by including a Moore stand-in that Zatanna literally fights. In *Seven Soldiers*, the fates of the characters are written by 'time tailors,' extra-dimensional beings who not coincidentally bear a passing resemblance to Morrison himself.²⁶⁵ The primary villain of *Seven Soldiers* and the figure responsible for introducing a race of all-consuming evil fairies into the DC multiverse is Zor, a time tailor who 'went rogue' and unleashed dangerous, bad ideas into the world. This rogue time tailor is differentiated from the rest – who, like Morrison, are completely bald – by his beard, indicative of Moore's well-known (at least to comic readers) hair and beard. Zor is presented as a malevolent force from outside the world of comics, come to take what was once positive and hopeful and turn it bleak, dreary, and exhausted. Zatanna eventually defeats him with the help of the Seven Unknown Men, editors and writers working to undo Moore's influence in the comic industry.

²⁶⁴ Morrison, 'Talking Backwards Sdrawkcab Gniklat'.

²⁶⁵ These 'Seven Unknown Men' are only the latest in a line of Morrison stand-ins, beginning with the 'paper version' of himself that appeared in his final two issues of *Animal Man*. Morrison, *Supergods*, 219.

By including versions of himself and Moore into his work, Morrison simultaneously uses the comics to comment on the industry while creating new characters within those comics. Morrison insists that comic book characters have their own ontology and autonomy on a scale beyond that of any individual human (even as they exist in a symbiotic relationship with humans), so by extending his feud with Moore into comics themselves he looks to harness the power of narrative to correct what he sees as past sins. Whether Morrison can ever be truly successful in these efforts remains an open question, particularly as his work is always already constrained by the dictates of corporate branding, but the case of *Seven Soldiers* does help dramatize some of the narratological questions that define this project's approach to the power of discourse.

Gawker

Gawker was a website founded in 2003 by Nick Denton and Elizabeth Spiers, and was shut down in 2016 as a result of a lawsuit filed by the professional wrestler Hulk Hogan, who was secretly funded by billionaire Peter Thiel out of revenge for Gawker's earlier publicizing of Thiel's (already public) homosexuality at a time when he was attempting to secure money for his hedge fund from investors in Saudi Arabia.²⁶⁶ If one's character can be judged by their enemies, then Thiel's antagonism is a testament to Gawker's work. A creator of Paypal alongside Elon Musk, Thiel would go on to help fund Facebook before transitioning to his role as a bloodthirsty supervillain. (This characterization is not an exaggeration, given Thiel's interest in harvesting the blood of young people for transfusions so that he might conquer 'the ideology of the inevitability of the death of every individual' and live forever.²⁶⁷) Thiel's surveillance company Palantir – named after the magical seeing stones in *Lord of the Rings* – contracts with state and civic governments to conduct mass surveillance via data-mining practices that remain largely shrouded to the public, although documents obtained via a Freedom of Information Act request indicate that the company is certainly complicit in the Trump administration's ongoing genocide of migrants to the United States.²⁶⁸ In addition to Palantir's work with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Thiel started the virtual and augmented reality company Anduril – after a sword from Lord of Ring whose name means 'flame of the west' – alongside Palmer Luckey, the creator of the Oculus Rift virtual reality rig, with the intention of developing military and police applications of VR/AR technology.²⁶⁹ Aside from his

²⁶⁶ Tom Scocca, 'Gawker Was Murdered by Gaslight', Gawker, 2016, <https://Gawker.com/Gawker-was-murdered-by-gaslight-1785456581>, Accessed June 24, 2019. Nick Denton, 'An Open Letter to Peter Thiel', Gawker, 2016, <https://Gawker.com/an-open-letter-to-peter-thiel-1778991227>, Accessed June 24, 2019.

²⁶⁷ Maya Kosoff, 'Peter Thiel Wants to Inject Himself With Young People's Blood', *Vanity Fair*, 2016, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/08/peter-thiel-wants-to-inject-himself-with-young-peoples-blood>, Accessed June 29, 2019. George Packer, 'No Death, No Taxes', *The New Yorker*, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/11/28/no-death-no-taxes>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁶⁸ Peter Waldman, Lizette Chapman and Jordan Robertson, 'Palantir Knows Everything About You', *Bloomberg*, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-palantir-peter-thiel/>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Manish Singh, 'Palantir's Software Was Used for Deportations, Documents Show', *Techcrunch*, 2019, <https://techcrunch.com/2019/05/03/palantirs-software-was-used-for-deportations-documents-show/>, Accessed June 29, 2019. In line with Thiel's status as an 'evil nerd', Palantir's two main products are named Gotham and Metropolis, after the major cities in DC Comics' multiverse.

²⁶⁹ Steven Levy, 'Inside Anduril, Palmer Luckey's Bid to Build a Border Wall', *WIRED*, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/palmer-luckey-anduril-border-wall/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

contributions to the world of videogames, Luckey had previously gained notoriety in 2016 after the Daily Beast uncovered his multi-million dollar support for pro-Trump social media manipulation during the 2016 election, funneled through a ‘social welfare non-profit’ whose mission included making the case that ‘shitposting is powerful and meme magic is real’.²⁷⁰ Following the revelations he was pushed out of Facebook, which had recently acquired Oculus, but just a few months later he had been hired by Thiel.

While Gawker’s demise speaks to long-standing problems with journalism in the United States and the power of vindictive oligarchs to determine the limits of free discourse, Gawker has been given an entry in this glossary not simply because of the ongoing implications of its ‘murder by gaslight’, but rather due to the important role a number of its alumni play throughout in this text.²⁷¹ Specifically, Tom Scocca’s analysis of snark and smarm are the basis for this project’s original contributions to the understanding of glurge, contributions that would be impossible without Adam Weinstein’s experience with military culture, from online memes to the evolution of military aesthetics in recent history.²⁷² Similarly, Alex Pareene’s analysis of US American politics are an important feature of the entry on grift.²⁷³ Eve Peyser and Hudson Hongo’s discussions of the film *Suicide Squad* are the basis for the suggestion of a Twisted Age of Comics.²⁷⁴ Finally, although not frequently cited in the final text of this project, Ashley Feinberg’s investigative journalism – from uncovering the secret Twitter account of former FBI director James Comey to releasing the neo-Nazi website *The Daily Stormer’s* style and recruitment guide – has been a crucial resource in this

²⁷⁰ Gideon Resnick, ‘Palmer Luckey: The Facebook Near-Billionaire Secretly Funding Trump’s Meme Machine’, *The Daily Beast*, 2016, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/palmer-luckey-the-facebook-near-billionaire-secretly-funding-trumps-meme-machine>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁷¹ Scocca, ‘Gawker Was Murdered By Gaslight’.

²⁷² Tom Scocca, ‘On Smarm’, Gawker, 2013, <https://Gawker.com/on-smarm-1476594977>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Adam Weinstein, ‘“Marine Todd” Is an Awesomely Stupid Right-Wing Meme That Got Hijacked’, *Gawker*, 2014, <https://Gawker.com/marine-todd-is-an-awesomely-stupid-right-wing-meme-th-1555109402>, Accessed June 20, 2019. Adrian Bonenberger and Adam Weinstein, ‘The Sum of All Beards’, *The New Republic*, 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/154033/american-beards-military-culture>, Accessed June 20, 2019.

²⁷³ Alex Pareene, ‘The Long, Lucrative Right-Wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World’s Face’, *Splinter*, 2017, <https://splinternews.com/the-long-lucrative-right-wing-grift-is-blowing-up-in-t-1793944216>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Alex Pareene, ‘Whatever Happened to Honest Graft?’, *Splinter*, 2018, <https://splinternews.com/whatever-happened-to-honest-graft-1822938108>, Accessed June 20, 2019.

²⁷⁴ Eve Peyser, ‘Suicide Squad Sets Box Office Record Because We Don’t Deserve Better Movies’, io9, 2016, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/suicide-squad-sets-box-office-record-because-we-dont-de-1784950994>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Peyser, ‘Jared Leto Is the Joker We Deserve’. Hongo, ‘Suicide Squad: The Extended Cut is the Movie 2016 Deserves’.

study of contemporary fascism.²⁷⁵ This project frequently straddles a line between academic inquiry and journalistic reporting, and while the academic background of this text is evident in the theorists cited throughout this project, integrity demands that Gawker's legacy be recognized explicitly here, beyond what might be inferred from the citations of the disparate publications where these writers now have their bylines.

²⁷⁵ Ashley Feinberg, 'This Is Almost Certainly James Comey's Twitter Account', *Gizmodo*, 2017, <https://gizmodo.com/this-is-almost-certainly-james-comey-s-twitter-account-1793843641>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Ashley Feinberg, 'This Is the Daily Stormer's Playbook', *The Huffington Post*, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide_n_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2, Accessed June 29, 2019.

Glurge

Glurge was first defined by the fact-checking site Snopes, and its original usage was limited to the chain e-mails that made up the bulk of Snopes' content. Named by Patricia Chapin, one of Snopes' readers, in this context glurge is described as 'inspirational (and supposedly 'true') tales, ones that often conceal much darker meanings than the uplifting moral lessons they purport to offer or undermines their messages by fabricating and distorting historical fact in the guise of offering a 'true story.'²⁷⁶ The term was meant to evoke the sound of vomiting (or dry-heaving). Taxonomically, glurge is a form of smarm, which is itself a kind of bullshit.

While glurge was identified and defined in the era of e-mail, the phenomenon is much older. Any number of virtue books would fit this description, and glurgy folk legends surrounding USAmerican political figures abound, such as the story of George Washington chopping down a cherry tree. The earliest known version of this particular tale is recounted by the organization that maintains Washington's former slave plantation, Mount Vernon, as a historical site:

In the original story, when Washington was six years old he received a hatchet as a gift and damaged his father's cherry tree. When his father discovered what he had done, he became angry and confronted him. Young George bravely said, 'I cannot tell a lie...I did cut it with my hatchet.' Washington's father embraced him and rejoiced that his son's honesty was worth more than a thousand trees.²⁷⁷

The story was invented by biographer and grifter Mason Locke Weems in 1806, seven years after Washington's death by bloodletting.²⁷⁸ Weems intended to sell his version of Washington's life in order 'to show that his unparalleled rise and elevation were due to his Great Virtues,' suggesting Weems considered untruths in the service of the 'Great Virtue' of truth entirely acceptable.²⁷⁹

Glurge, like bullshit, need not be false, and one such example of 'true' glurge can be found in a more recent presidential story, this time featuring a post-9/11

²⁷⁶ 'Glurge Gallery Archive', *Snopes*, 2019, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/category/glurge-gallery/>, Accessed June 20, 2019.

²⁷⁷ 'Cherry Tree Myth', *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 2019, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/cherry-tree-myth/>, Accessed June 20, 2019.

²⁷⁸ 'The Death of George Washington', *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 2019, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/the-death-of-george-washington>, Accessed June 20, 2019.

²⁷⁹ Mason Locke Weems to Mathew Carey, January 12, 1800, in Paul Leicester Ford, *Mason Locke Weems: His Works, His Ways: A Bibliography Left Unfinished*, 3 vols. (New York: Plimpton Press, 1929), 2: 8-9.

George W. Bush. The story, which began circulating online in late 2001, recounts Bush visiting Brian Birdwell in the hospital after Birdwell had been injured when American Airlines Flight 77 was flown into the Pentagon on September 11th. After speaking to Birdwell, Bush saluted him in an inversion of military protocol; usually a lower-ranking member of the military salutes a superior and holds the salute until the superior returns it, but in this case, Bush initiated the salute and waited until Birdwell returned it.

While the facts of the story are true, their recounting online in forwarded and copied messages (also known as *copypastas*) is intended to emphasize the emotional weight of the story, which itself depends on the presupposition that the military, the US military, the president, soldiers, or the Pentagon are themselves inherently virtuous or laudable. For example, what was relayed above in a single sentence requires many more in one example offered by Snopes:

The President then walked in, stood by Brian's bedside, asked Brian how he was doing, told him that he was very proud of them both and that they were his heroes. The President then saluted Brian. Now, at this point in time, Brian is bandaged up pretty well. His hands are burned very badly as well as the back of him from the head down. His movements were very restricted. Upon seeing the President saluting him, Brian began to slowly return the salute, taking, from the accounts so far, about 15-20 seconds to get his hand up to his head. During all of this, 15-20 seconds, President Bush never moved, never dropped his salute. The President dropped his salute only when Brian was finished with his, and then gave Mel a huge hug for what also probably seemed like an eternity. Pray for our leadership. Thank God for what we are, have, and will be.²⁸⁰

This account unintentionally reveals that the actions intended to demonstrate Bush's respect for the US military involved the further imposition of suffering on the victim by forcing him to salute despite his injuries. This irony is useful for understanding the dangerous implications of glurge in the service of empire, because it demonstrates how ostensibly 'virtuous' displays of 'service' or subordination on the part of powerful state agents in fact only serve to reinforce their power and the hierarchies that support them.

Glurge is one of the dominant rhetorical modes underpinning US American discourse regarding its own empire, partially because the effectiveness of glurge remains regardless of the 'truth' of a given narrative; considering one 'fictional' and one 'real' story helps explicate this phenomenon. A well-known example of the former

²⁸⁰ David Mikkelson, 'FACT CHECK: Bush Salutes Birdwell', *Snopes*, 2007, <https://www.snopes.com/glurge/birdwell.asp>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

from the last two decades is the story of 'Marine Todd', the earliest confirmed case of which circulated in 2004, though more generic versions existed prior to this in an oral tradition.²⁸¹ The story combines aggressive militarism with a story in the USAmerican evangelical tradition that at the very least the author of this thesis was told numerous times during the 1990s, and which encapsulates a number of far-right anxieties in a potent bit of glurge:

A Marine was taking college classes between his deployments to Afghanistan. One of his courses had a professor that was an atheist and a member of the ACLU.

One day the professor shocked everyone by walking into class, looking up and stating 'God, if you are real, I want you to come down and knock me off this platform, I will give you 15 minutes.'

Several minutes tick by in silence, when the 15 min. time almost expired the Marine gets up from his seat, approaches the professor and punched him in the face knocking him off the platform and out cold. The Marine simply went back to his seat.

The professor came to, visibly shaken and asked the Marine, 'What the heck did you do that for?!'

The Marine said, 'God was busy protecting America's military who are out protecting your right to say stupid shit like that, so he sent me to fill in.'²⁸²

The atheist professor who is a member of the American Civil Liberties Union encapsulates a number of stereotypes the USAmerican right depends on to paint academia as a bastion of leftist thought (despite all evidence to the contrary). The Marine's final line is also an adaptation of another imperial adage that frequently appears in glurge and is used to cover the cognitive dissonance required to claim a Christianity that abandons any notion of pacifism: 'I believe that forgiving [terrorists] is God's function. Our job is simply to arrange the meeting'.²⁸³ The notion that the USAmerican military protects the limits of speech and expression outlined in the first amendment to the Constitution is a well-trod assumption of much USAmerican political discourse, taken as such a given that evidence in support of this claim is rarely provided despite the unlikelihood that any US military action in the last 75 years has benefitted or protected the exercise of free speech in the United States.

The basic setup, of the professor challenging his class to prove the Christian god

²⁸¹Weinstein, "'Marine Todd' Is an Awesomely Stupid Right-Wing Meme That Got Hijacked".

²⁸²Don Caldwell, 'Marine Todd', *Know Your Meme*, 2014, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/marine-todd>, Accessed June 20, 2019.

²⁸³David Mikkelson, 'FACT CHECK: Norman Schwarzkopf Forgiveness', *Snopes*, 2007, <https://www.snopes.com/military/norman.asp>, Accessed June 20, 2019. Although this quote was inaccurately attributed to General Norman Schwarzkopf in copypastas that first appeared in 2001, Schwarzkopf later repeated a version of the quote in 2003, one indication of the flimsy boundaries between fact and fiction in the case of glurge.

exists, is an earlier form of the story common in white evangelical circles, though often without the climactic violence; in these cases, the professor will merely challenge the Christian god to keep a piece of chalk from breaking when he drops it, an event that occurs every time the challenge is posed until a Christian student stands up and affirms his own faith, at which point the chalk dramatically hits the professor's shoe, rolling harmlessly away and revealing the subtlety with which the Christian god proves his own existence. This simpler version of the story was the basis for the film *God's Not Dead*, though in the film the philosophy professor in question requires students to sign a declaration stating 'God is dead' in order to pass.²⁸⁴

Beyond the networks of chain emails and internet comments that spread USAmerican glurge online, the US military spends millions of dollars to ensure that public events feature the military in a flattering and especially glurgy light by offering professional sports leagues money to put on

patriotic tributes at professional football, baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer games. These paid tributes included on-field color guard, enlistment and reenlistment ceremonies, performances of the national anthem, full-field flag details, ceremonial first pitches and puck drops. The National Guard paid teams for the 'opportunity' to sponsor military appreciation nights and to recognize its birthday. It paid the Buffalo Bills to sponsor its Salute to the Service game. DOD even paid teams for the 'opportunity' to perform surprise welcome home promotions for troops returning from deployments and to recognize wounded warriors.²⁸⁵

The 'surprise' reunions proved especially effective, but in 2015 the degree to which these displays of emotion were stage-managed by the agents of empire became clear when Rams cheerleader Candance Ruocco Valentine had a 'surprise' reunion with her husband, August Valentine, a first lieutenant in the Marines.²⁸⁶ Although presented to the live audience (and in subsequent news report) as an impromptu reunion, the event was in fact organized and stage-managed by the entire family alongside the US Marines. Ruocco Valentine's mother, Katherine Ruocco, was running for political office at the time, her husband August was part of the wealthy Busch family; Ruocco Valentine herself was revealed to be a US Marine whose debut performance as a Rams

²⁸⁴ Harold Cronk, *God's Not Dead*, film (Pure Flix Entertainment, 2014).

²⁸⁵ John McCain and Jeff Flake, *Tackling Paid Patriotism Oversight Report* (Washington DC: US Senate, 2015), 6.

²⁸⁶ Tom Ley, 'Surprise Military Reunions at NFL Games Reach Peak Bullshit', *Deadspin*, 2015, <https://deadspin.com/surprise-military-reunions-at-nfl-games-reach-peak-bull-1727940877>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

cheerleader happened to be at the exact same game in which she was 'surprised' by the sudden return of her military husband.²⁸⁷

To dismiss the Ruocco Valentine affair as 'propaganda' is to misunderstand its purpose in the same way that describing Marine Todd as 'fiction' is to apply an irrelevant category. Imperial glurge is primarily an emotional exercise, and the arena in which its force applies is not one in which factual accuracy is a priority. Instead, the power of glurge is the power of myth, inasmuch as both work to integrate individual emotional experience into seemingly fundamental frameworks of knowledge. Glurge works to help its target audiences feel that their worldview is morally correct, and therefore the falsifiable beliefs that underline that worldview must by default be factually true.

Anyone attempting to understand how fundamental glurge is to the maintenance of the US empire benefits from a consideration of the literary iteration of this phenomenon in the form of the 'airport thriller' often found on the best-seller shelves of bookstores in airports and train stations (often Hudson Booksellers in the USA or WHSmith in the UK). Though by no means the only genre of popular media suffused with imperial glurge, the 'airport thriller' – loosely defined here (and used in accordance with its colloquial appearances) as those popular books concerned with war, espionage, and 'national security', in contrast to detective stories and murder mysteries, which tend toward specific urban settings rather than the global stage on which the United States imposes its violent will – is particularly informative on the topic of glurge because of the way it offers ostensibly factual details as a means of supporting its mostly bullshit accounts of geopolitics, which are subsequently sold in the militarized contexts that depend on that bullshit for their continued justification. Furthermore, the proximity of these novels and short stories to actual members of the US military and political class is immediate. In one notorious case, Ronald Reagan read Tom Clancy's thriller *Red Storm Rising* when preparing to meet with Mikhail Gorbachev for a 1986 summit in Reykjavik, and afterward encouraged Margaret Thatcher to read

²⁸⁷ Ley, 'Surprise Military Reunions'.

it as well, believing the novel 'gave an excellent picture of the Soviet Union's intentions and strategy', according to a memo recounting the conversation.²⁸⁸

The idea that these novels might contain useful insights into geopolitics is due in part to the context of their reading, as the aesthetic experience of the airport (particularly following the increased security theater following 9/11) is designed to prime a particular kind of reader to identify himself with the 'national security' and surveillance state. Specifically, airports in the United States and United Kingdom are places where white male privilege is, if not heightened, then is at the very least dramatized, as the process of 'going through' the security line generates different degrees of anxiety and interpellation depending on the degree to which one's body is statistically likely to be the victim of state violence. Rather than anticipate the likelihood of sexual assault or 'random' screenings based on one's gender, skin color, or religious affiliation, the white male passenger can instead identify with the security apparatus, an identification that the airport thriller encourages through reading.

As a genre, the geopolitical thriller is perfectly suited for the reading environment offered by air travel. Airports are a space designed to manage the application of anxiety as individuals are processed, one by one, through a ritual of state and corporate power. After stripping oneself of earthly belongings, the traveler is reborn through the cleansing portal of state violence, whether via metal detectors, full-body scanner, or pat-downs, before being birther anew into the sensory overload of the Duty-Free section, a maze of commodities to reduce anxiety through the comforting routine of buying things.

However, in contrast to the tobacco, alcohol, and cosmetics that make up the bulk of the Duty-Free commodities, the military or spy thriller extends rather than distracts from the anxiety induced by the security apparatus. Such novels manage this anxiety by placing a particular kind of reader in a position of mastery over the security state and its perceived threats. The reason gun models, ship numbers, and officer ranks must be delineated with precision in such novels is not because their intended readers might actually notice when a detail is factually wrong, but because readers

²⁸⁸ Cahal Milmo, 'Reagan 'Prepared for Cold War Meeting By Reading Tom Clancy Book'', *The Independent*, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/ronald-reagan-prepared-for-historic-cold-war-meeting-by-reading-tom-clancy-thriller-a6790036.html>. The reader should note that this summit took place a year after Reagan had secured Gorbachev's assistance in the event that extraterrestrials attacked the Earth, as discussed in the entry for *ℵ*.

must feel as if they would be expected to notice such an error. The act of reading then becomes a multi-layered performance intended to trick the reader into thinking they have gained some insight into global affairs by implying that this factual precision regarding the individual tools of empire is exactly congruent with a systematic analysis of that empire and its role in the world. When noting the factual and theoretical errors in popular historian Jared Diamond's ostensibly non-fiction book *Upheaval: Turning Points for Nations in Crisis*, Anand Giridharadas describes this general phenomenon, remarking that

'Upheaval' belongs to the genre of 30,000-foot books, which sell an explanation of everything. I travel often and see them a lot: at airport bookstores, where Steven Pinker and Yuval Noah Harari (both of whom blurbed 'Upheaval') and Diamond, of course, deserve permanent shelves; and in the air, where I've noticed that a pretty disproportionate fraction of readers who read in the quiet of 30,000 feet have a preference for writers who write from the viewpoint of 30,000 feet.²⁸⁹

In airport thrillers, the 'explanation of everything' offered 'from the viewpoint of 30,000 feet' is precisely that viewpoint offered by agents of the US empire, where the US military is almost universally morally correct, save for careerists and those naïve enough to believe that the US military is not universally morally correct and thus requires some degree of civilian oversight.

The way glurge is wielded in the explicit service of empire can be seen in a speech delivered on November 13, 2010, by Marine Corps Lieutenant General (and eventual Secretary of Homeland Security and Chief of Staff for the Trump administration) John Kelly. Speaking four days after his own son died as part of the United States' occupation of Afghanistan, Kelly exclaimed that

America's warriors have never lost faith in their mission, or doubted the correctness of their cause. They face dangers everyday that their countrymen safe and comfortable this night cannot imagine. But this has always been the case in all the wars our military have been sent to fight. Not to build empires, or enslave peoples, but to free those held in the grip of tyrants while at the same time protecting our nation, its citizens, and our shared values. And, ladies and gentlemen, think about this, the only territory we as a people have ever asked for from any nation we have fought alongside, or against, since our founding, the entire extent of our

²⁸⁹ Anand Giridharadas, 'What to Do When You're a Country in Crisis', *The New York Times*, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/books/review/upheaval-jared-diamond.html>, accessed June 30, 2019.

overseas empire, is a few hundred acres of land for the 24 American cemeteries scattered around the globe.²⁹⁰

A few key features of Kelly's glurge stand out, and although the purpose of such glurge is not to convince any of its audience of its factual accuracy, one cannot discuss glurge without discussing it in terms of its relationship to reality. First, Kelly's claim that 'America's warriors have never lost faith in their mission, or doubted the correctness of their cause' is obviously false. Examples abound throughout US American history, but in this context one need only cite the case of Pat Tillman, the former professional football player who joined the US Army following September 11, 2001, but became increasingly opposed to the US empire during his time in Afghanistan.²⁹¹ At the beginning of his time in the US military Tillman would have embodied precisely the kind of 'warrior' Kelly lauded in his 2010 speech. Speaking of those who joined the US military in response to 9/11, Kelly describes how they

joined the unbroken ranks of American heroes after that fateful day not for money, or promises of bonuses or travel to exotic liberty ports, but for one reason and one reason alone; because of the terrible assault on our way of life by men they knew must be killed and extremist ideology that must be destroyed. A plastic flag in their car window was not their response to the murderous assault on our country. No, their response was a commitment to protect the nation swearing an oath to their God to do so, to their deaths.²⁹²

However, contrary to Kelly's insistence that these 'heroes' have never doubted; the correctness of their cause', almost immediately upon his initial deployment to Iraq Tillman became disgusted with what he considered to be an illegal war, and his opposition to the 'War on Terror' only increased over time.²⁹³ When Tillman was eventually shot to death by other US soldiers in Afghanistan, the US military lied to his family and the public about his cause of death, covering up not only its own responsibility for his death but the pointed critiques he had made of the institution prior to his death.²⁹⁴

Throughout his speech, Kelly repeatedly contrasts members of the military with a civilian population regarded with contempt. This population 'cannot imagine' the

²⁹⁰John Kelly, 'Speech at Semper Fi Society of St. Louis', (speech, St. Louis, November 13, 2010), *American Thinker*, https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2010/12/an_extraordinary_speech.html, Accessed June 21, 2019.

²⁹¹Ryan Devereaux, 'The NFL, the Military, And the Hijacking Of Pat Tillman's Story', *The Intercept*, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/09/28/pat-tillman-nfl-protest-death-army-disgrace/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

²⁹²Kelly, 'Speech at Semper Fi Society', 2010.

²⁹³Devereaux, 'The NFL, the Military, And the Hijacking Of Pat Tillman's Story'.

²⁹⁴Devereaux, 'The NFL, the Military, And the Hijacking Of Pat Tillman's Story'.

experience of soldiers, a supposed lack of imagination that means they are disqualified from criticizing the military at all. Kelly complains about the lack of public celebration of the military, instead remarking that

Yes, we are at war, and are winning, but you wouldn't know it because successes go unreported, and only when something does go sufficiently or is sufficiently controversial, it is highlighted by the media elite that then sets up the 'know it all' chattering class to offer their endless criticism. These self-proclaimed experts always seem to know better-but have never themselves been in the arena.²⁹⁵

Kelly contrasts members of the military with 'yet another generation of materialistic, consumeristic and self-absorbed young people', contrasted with soldiers that 'know the real strength of a platoon, a battalion, or a country that is not worshiping at the altar of diversity', which he describes as 'an unruly gaggle of 'hyphenated' or 'multi-cultural individuals.'"²⁹⁶ Kelly's fascist contempt for anyone not in the military is emblematic of a distinction between the agents of state violence and their victims that is explored in detail in Case Study 3: The Real Heroes, but it is an important feature to note here because this distinction is one of the most important and consistent features of USAmerican imperial glurge.

The last key feature of Kelly's glurge that must be highlighted is the way it works to mystify the existence of the USAmerican empire. When Kelly claims that 'the entire extent of our overseas empire' consists of 'a few hundred acres of land for the 24 American cemeteries scattered around the globe', he is relying on a technicality that since its inception was designed to hide the USAmerican empire from public scrutiny. While it may be the case that the United States only 'asked' for the land on which its cemeteries sit, it maintains over seven hundred military bases across the planet, made possible through Status of Forces Agreements arranged (or imposed) on those countries the United States has fought alongside or against since World War II.²⁹⁷ According to the US Department of Defense's Fiscal Year 2018 *Base Structure Report*,

²⁹⁵ Kelly, 'Speech at Semper Fi Society', 2010.

²⁹⁶ Kelly, 'Speech at Semper Fi Society', 2010.

²⁹⁷ This estimate of the United States' total number of bases is undoubtedly low, given the amount of 'black sites' whose number is not publicly available.

DoD is still one of the Federal government's larger holders of real estate managing a global real property portfolio that consists of over 585,000 facilities (buildings, structures, and linear structures), located on 4,775 sites worldwide and covering approximately 26.9 million acres.²⁹⁸

Although the 2018 Base Structure Report highlights an 'increased focus on reducing the federal government's real estate footprint' supposedly resulting in 'a reduction of over 11 million square feet through disposal, consolidation, lease termination or demolition', the 2018 report actually indicates an increased overall footprint, expanding from 24.9 million acres in 2014 to the 26.9 cited above.²⁹⁹

In the context of USAmerican glurge, these millions of acres across the globe are simply not considered an empire. Instead, if they are considered at all, they are treated as temporary, ephemeral spaces as if their being a 'base' or 'camp' implies that they are not meaningfully material impositions on the land or local populace. Thus, a defining feature of the USAmerican empire is a mostly maintained taboo on acknowledging that it is in fact an empire, while at the same time declaring that the US military is the strongest, most capable fighting force in the world. While this makes speeches like Kelly's exercises in absurdity, this is precisely the kind of absurdity that Eco describes in 'Ur-Fascism' when he remarks that

followers must feel humiliated by the ostentatious wealth and force of their enemies. [...] However, the followers must be convinced that they can overwhelm the enemies. Thus, by a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak. Fascist governments are condemned to lose wars because they are constitutionally incapable of objectively evaluating the force of the enemy.³⁰⁰

By refusing to acknowledge the existence of the empire, functionaries of USAmerican fascism – including not only the military, police, and political figures, but corporate media – are able to describe victims of USAmerican militarism as 'aggressors' without having to explain why – for example – the US military maintains a presence near the Strait of Hormuz. Imperial glurge simply presupposes the global presence of the US military while refusing the possibility that such a presence might represent an imposition of any sort.

²⁹⁸ Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Infrastructure, *Base Structure Report FY 2018 Baseline* (Washington DC, 2018), 2.

²⁹⁹ Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Infrastructure, *Base Structure Report FY 2015 Baseline* (Washington DC, 2015), 2.

³⁰⁰ Eco, 'Ur-Fascism'.

Golem

In Jewish folklore, the golem can be traced back to accounts of Adam's creation in the Talmud but is most commonly associated with Jews living in Prague during the 1500s. The golem is a kind of homunculus created from mud (or dust) and given life through magic, with a popular variant revolving around the letter א. According to this version of the story, the golem awakens when the word אמת [*emet*], meaning truth, is written into the clay of a golem's forehead. Should the golem become uncontrollable and violent, as happens in many versions of the tale, the א can be wiped away so that אמת [*emet*] becomes מת [*met*], meaning death, which renders the creature inert. By now it is not uncommon to describe the golem as one of a number of precursors to the USAmerican superhero, an understandable link given the predominantly Jewish-American creators that defined the early ages of the comic book industry. That said, one particular cluster of writers and editors working in the 1970s are responsible for bringing the golem into mainstream comic book discourse and ultimately giving rise to the comic book eschatology seen in the Dark Age of Comics.

The earliest prominent reference to the golem in USAmerican comic books came in the December 1970 comic book *The Incredible Hulk* #134, written by Roy Thomas. Here the golem itself does not appear, but instead the Hulk, a super-strong brute and alter-ego of mild-mannered scientist Bruce Banner, is mistaken for the golem when he appears in the fictional Eastern European country of Morvania, where the people are oppressed by 'the iron-willed dictator Draxon'.³⁰¹ Although initially unconvinced by the villagers' pleas to act as their legendary defender, the Hulk eventually has a change of heart and destroys Draxon and his armies.

Four years after Roy Thomas wrote the golem into *The Incredible Hulk*, he edited Len Wein's work on the anthology series *Strange Tales*, which featured an actual golem in a mainstream comic for the first time in issue #174. Called 'There Walks the Golem!', the comic introduces the Golem (capitalized here due to its being the character's proper 'superhero name') according to the Prague narrative, with the creature wandering the world fighting injustice after its defense of Prague's Jewish citizens until it finally comes to rest in the desert. The Golem is eventually discovered centuries later by Professor Abraham Adamson and his research team. Eventually,

³⁰¹ Roy Thomas (w), Herb Trimpe (a), 'Among Us Walks...The Golem', *The Incredible Hulk*, vol. 1, #134 (New York: Magazine Management Co. [Marvel Comics Group], Dec. 1970).

Professor Adamson is shot, and his team kidnapped (including his nephew), but as he is dying, he crawls to the immobile Golem, pleading for some power to save his family. Believing he has failed, Adamson cries a single tear, which falls on the foot of the Golem, 'and, in that instant, the life of Abraham Adamson comes to an end – while the life of the creature called Golem comes to a new beginning'.³⁰²

The Golem's means of animation in *Strange Tales* #174 is not especially remarkable – death giving life to the avenging entity is a well-worn trope, particularly in comic books – but the reader and editorial response to that means of animation is interesting. *Strange Tales* #176, which featured reader letters related to issue #174, includes an important exchange between a reader and the editors.³⁰³ Reader Don Vaughn writes that

Len Wein's script was good, but it contained one serious flaw. According to Jewish legend, to bring the Golem to life, the word 'emeth,' which means 'truth,' must be written on its forehead. To stop a golem, the first letter must be erased, leaving 'meth,' which means 'he is dead'. Another legend says that a special amulet must be placed around the Golem's neck. To stop said Golem, simply remove the amulet. The script contained neither of these life-giving formulas. [...] Before I leave, I have one question. Did anyone staff see 'Der Golem,' [...] before you produced this story?

The editors respond by remarking that

We wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that editor Roy Thomas or scripter Len Wein was familiar with the film you mentioned, as both are monster-movie buffs of the first magnitude, but their inspiration for this series was drawn from the original legend, not from any filmic incarnation of the Golem. As for the methods of bringing the Golem to life that you cited... being the swell-headed bozos that we are, we decided to alter the legend (which by definition, of course, is alterable; legends are not fact) to suit our own purposes.

While the editors explained the justification for their change to the legend in *Strange Tales* #176, they also began the last *Strange Tales* Golem story with a re-telling of the aleph-oriented version of the legend, simultaneously justifying their 'legends are variable' response while gesturing toward the importance of the '16th century Yiddish legend' that made the golem famous.

The exchange between Vaughn and the editors seems to be referenced in Grant Morrison's *Seven Soldiers of Victory*. In *Seven Soldiers*, the character Jake Jordan applies to become the in-house superhero for the tabloid the *Manhattan Guardian*,

³⁰² Len Wein (w), John Buscema (p), Jim Mooney (i), 'There Walks the Golem!', *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, #174 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, Jun. 1974).

³⁰³ Mike Friedrich (w), Tony De Zuniga (a), 'Black Crossing', *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, #176 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, Oct. 1974).

and part of the application process involves getting past a rampaging golem. In an apparent reference to the letters section of *Strange Tales* #176, Jake immediately knows how to defeat it, remarking 'THAT'S... NUMBER TEN IN THE MOVIE MONSTERS...TRADING CARD SERIES,' before wiping the life-giving aleph off the Golem's forehead per the *emet/met* version of the legend.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Grant Morrison (w), Cameron Stewart (a), 'Pirates of Manhattan', *Seven Soldiers: Guardian*, vol. 1, #1 (New York: DC Comics, May 2005).

Grift

Grift – coming from graft, in the sense of political corruption – in USAmerican discourse refers to a kind of swindle or confidence trick, occasionally even connoting a degree of entertainment value due to a particular grift’s ‘shtick’, the latter (Yiddish) word entering USAmerican discourse in the 20th century through vaudeville and professional wrestling.³⁰⁵ Where graft represents a formal corruption of political institutions – popularly associated with Tammany Hall in USAmerican history but better represented by the contemporary lobbying industry – grift is something done on the personal level, and the grifter should be seen as a kind of itinerant performer (even if network communication technology effectively collapses certain kinds of space). Notable examples of this mold in fiction include: the weavers in ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’; The Duke and the King in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; what Twain accuses Benjamin Franklin of when writing about the latter’s autobiography; the USAmerican characters in Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Canterville Ghost’; the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*; *Death of a Salesman*; *Glengarry Glen Ross*; the comic book character Glorious Godfrey; *The Simpsons* episode ‘Marge vs. the Monorail’; and Carl Weathers’ self-parody in *Arrested Development*. USAmerican actor and director Robert Redford has made something of a career celebrating the charismatic grifter, beginning with the 1973 film *The Sting* and continuing with ‘The Secret Sneakers Trilogy’ consisting of *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *Sneakers* (1992), and *Spy Game* (2001).³⁰⁶ The latter three indicate the degree to which the character of the charismatic spy (particularly in USAmerican media) can be seen as another iteration of the grifter, albeit one coopted to service the state instead of purely personal interests.

-

Donald Trump is unequivocally a grifter, a label that can be applied even without any moral judgement simply due to its factual accuracy. In addition to the abundant business ventures that can unequivocally be described as scams, he has even

³⁰⁵ In professional wrestling, the collective performance of each wrestler’s shtick – including their various rivalries and alliances – as if they are real is called ‘kayfabe’ (the origin of the term is disputed), and the term has also been applied to the practice of two-party politics. Parliamentary rules that prohibit members of Congress from impugning the motives of a political opponent – i.e. acknowledging that another member is likely acting in bad faith – are rules against ‘breaking kayfabe’.

³⁰⁶ Brian Salisbury, ‘Espionage-A-Trois: The Secret Sneakers Trilogy’, *Film School Rejects*, 2017, <https://filmschoolrejects.com/espionage-a-trois-the-secret-sneakers-trilogy-c89cf48ed75e/>, Accessed June 23, 2019.

repeatedly appeared in-character as himself during professional wrestling events.³⁰⁷ However, like many features of his presidency, he is merely a more dramatic example of wider trends in the corruption of US American political life, a phenomenon examined in detail by Gawker writer Alex Pareene.

Pareene notes that grifters and graft in the United States have had a curious history, because the neoliberal hollowing out of the United States government means that while graft and corruption continue apace, the ancillary benefits corrupt politicians once offered to their constituents rarely appear.³⁰⁸ Where in the past ‘Tammany Hall was as corrupt as its reputation, but it also built things, like most of upper Manhattan’, contemporary US American politics is defined by naked corruption (in a colloquial sense) that, because much of this corruption has been made legal, lets politicians act in their own material interests without even the pretense that they are materially benefiting their constituents.³⁰⁹ That left-of-center politicians are frequently attacked for supporting any form of welfare or government benefit – from food aid to healthcare – as if such benefits are a way of ‘buying votes’ is a testament to this shift, as the notion that a politician might do something to benefit their constituents in order to be reelected is itself framed as a kind of corruption. Put simply, the very basic expectation that a politician might be responsive to democratic pressure is presented as a fault, with the idealized alternative being a kind of personally corrupt paternalism, wherein a politician personally benefits themselves while advocating restraint and austerity for the public. According to Pareene, ‘[t]he result has been [...] a national looting, and one that the looters have convinced themselves is made up entirely of above-board business dealings totally consistent with ethical governance’.³¹⁰ In this context Trump’s own national looting, from the fees he charges the US government when he stays at his own properties to the exorbitant expenditures of his Cabinet officials, is not an aberration but rather the logical outcome, remarkable only for

³⁰⁷ ‘Donald Trump’, *World Wrestling Entertainment*, 2019, <https://www.wwe.com/superstars/donald-trump>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Listing all of Trump’s scams here is an effort not worth the space it would take; his grifts are obvious and abundant to anyone not in thrall to his political project and listing them here will do nothing to convince those already insistent on his upstanding qualities.

³⁰⁸ Pareene, ‘Whatever Happened to Honest Graft?’.

³⁰⁹ Pareene, ‘Whatever Happened to Honest Graft?’.

³¹⁰ Pareene, ‘Whatever Happened to Honest Graft?’.

Trump's own personal incompetence when it comes to pretending to care about ethics.³¹¹

Where Trump does represent a meaningful divergence in US American politics concerns a particular grift unique to conservative politics, or what Pareene describes as 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift' that began (more or less) with the Reagan administration. This grift has been the primary project of conservative politics in the United States, and operated on two tracks, with distinct cultural output aimed at specific classes of US American conservatives:

For years, the conservative movement peddled one set of talking points to the rabble, while its elites consumed a more grounded and reality-based media. The rubes listened to talk radio, read right-wing blogs, watched Fox News [and] were fed apocalyptic paranoia about threats to their liberty, racial hysteria about the generalized menace posed by various groups of brown people, and hysterical lies about the criminal misdeeds of various Democratic politicians. The people in charge, meanwhile, read *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Weekly Standard*, and they tended to have a better grasp of political reality, as when those sources deceived their readers, it was mostly unintentionally, with comforting fantasies about the efficacy of conservative policies.³¹²

Crucially, alongside the 'apocalyptic paranoia' produced by 'popular' conservative media, consumers of this media were also targets of

the real engine of the right-wing propaganda machine: companies selling newly patented drugs designed to treat the various conditions of old age, authors of dubious investing newsletters, sellers of survival seeds, hawkers of poorly written conservative books, and a whole array of similar con artists and ethically compromised corporations and financial institutions.³¹³

While conservative policies in the United States (whether Republican or Democratic) have always targeted minorities for violence and economic discrimination, the wider conservative project simultaneously feeds on its own underclass of consumers, primarily targeting 'trusting retirees, with a bit of disposable income, and a natural inclination to hate modernity and change—an inclination that could be heightened, radicalized, and exploited'.³¹⁴ In the United States Fox News has become synonymous with precisely this kind of exploitation, leading to an entire genre of life-writing

³¹¹ Curt Devine, 'Defense Department Charged \$300,000 at Trump Properties Since 2017', *CNN*, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/10/politics/defense-department-300000-at-trump-properties/index.html>, Accessed June 29, 2019. Alex Lubben, 'How Much Trump's Cabinet Has Spent on Flights, Security, and Office Décor', *VICE News*, 2018, https://news.vice.com/en_ca/article/mb58xq/how-much-trumps-cabinet-has-spent-on-flights-security-and-office-decor, Accessed June 29, 2019.

³¹² Pareene, 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World's Face'.

³¹³ Pareene, 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World's Face'.

³¹⁴ Pareene, 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World's Face'.

describing the way the television network has contributed to the breakdown of families.³¹⁵ Crucially, the destructive effects of such media are not merely the racist, sexist, imperialist pap that constitutes the on-air content, but the way this media offers up its own audience to advertisers and con artists: '[y]ou might start out signing up for a Fox email list or one from the president then quickly find your email being sold far and wide to increasingly less reputable charlatans'.³¹⁶

While tragic, this process is by now decades old. What has changed in recent years is the make-up of the Republican party itself, which is increasingly populated by the very people who would once only have been seen as marks for the 'elites' of the conservative movement. Where once the leaders of the US American right maintained a distinction between the bullshit they used to support a rabidly capitalist ideology at odds with the best interests of their base, decades of feeding that base reactionary media upended the carefully balanced relationship of exploitation. As a result,

First, Republicans realized they'd radicalized their base to a point where nothing they did in power could satisfy their most fervent constituents. Then—in a much more consequential development—a large portion of the Republican Congressional caucus became people who themselves consume garbage conservative media, and nothing else.³¹⁷

Trump is the epitome of this phenomenon, 'a confused old man who believes what the TV tells him', because he is someone whose worldview has been almost entirely shaped by Fox News over the last two decades.³¹⁸ While he is obviously a racist and serial sexual predator, these were parts of his character well before the ascendance of conservative media in the United States. Now, inasmuch as there is a 'Trump doctrine', it is simply the ideological stylebook of Fox News filtered through the brain of a self-deluded grifter likely suffering from pre-dementia.³¹⁹ Because Trump himself became the main topic of discussion on Fox following his election, the United States now finds itself in an accelerating spiral of bullshit and graft. As Pareene notes, 'Trump sold

³¹⁵ Luke O'Neil, 'What I've Learned from People Whose Loved Ones Were Transformed by Fox News', *New York Magazine*, 2019, <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/04/i-gathered-stories-of-people-transformed-by-fox-news.html>, Accessed June 29, 2019. I no longer speak to my own grandfather because over the last decade he stopped speaking to me about anything other than his belief that climate change was a hoax, as evidenced by Al Gore's wealth and the fact that soda is 'carbonated', or else to repeat some version of the 'Marine Todd' story discussed under the entry for glurge.

³¹⁶ O'Neil, 'What I've Learned from People Whose Loved Ones Were Transformed by Fox News'.

³¹⁷ Pareene, 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World's Face'.

³¹⁸ Pareene, 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World's Face'.

³¹⁹ S.V. Date, 'Tim Apple. Oranges. German Dad. Mental Health Experts Warn That Trump Is in Decline', *The Huffington Post*, 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/trump-mental-health-pre-dementia_n_5ca51ea2e4b0409b0ec32806, Accessed June 29, 2019.

bullshit for so long that he seemed to begin to believe in the bullshit himself. And once the product was literally him, how could he *not* believe in it?³²⁰

³²⁰ Pareene, 'The Long, Lucrative Right-wing Grift Is Blowing Up in the World's Face'.

Smarm

According to Gawker editor Tom Scocca, ‘smarm should be understood as a type of bullshit’ related to the performance of virtue and civility, a concept explicated in his essay ‘On Smarm’.³²¹ Although Scocca’s essay was immediately prompted by the editor of BuzzFeed’s books section announcing that he would not publish negative book reviews, it was a response to a more pervasive sensibility in US American cultural criticism, ‘that we are living, to our disadvantage, in an age of snark—that the problem of our times is a thing called ‘snark’’.³²² Though rarely defined clearly by anyone using it in a derogatory sense, snark is generally taken to mean some degree of ‘nastiness and snideness’, an air of unnecessary meanness or unwarranted cynicism, that in the mind of (for example) BuzzFeed’s book editor, film critic David Denby, and author Dave Eggers seems to pervade contemporary discourse.³²³ In its heyday Gawker was regularly accused of undue snark, and the glee with which major media organizations described the publication’s demise often suggested that it was a fair comeuppance for its ‘bad manners’.³²⁴ However, Scocca demonstrates that far from being the defining feature of the age, snark is merely the appropriate response to a world suffused with smarm.

Describing smarm in contemporary discourse as ‘a sort of unarticulated philosophy’, Scocca notes that

Snark is often conflated with cynicism, which is a troublesome misreading. Snark may speak in cynical terms about a cynical world, but it is not cynicism itself. It is a theory of cynicism. The practice of cynicism is smarm.³²⁵

The reason snark is conflated with cynicism (rather than smarm) is that smarm uses the performance of sincerity and ‘an assumption of the forms of seriousness, of virtue, of constructiveness, without the substance’ in order to hide its aim, thus presenting itself as the victim of snark rather than an instigating action.³²⁶ Smarm is the voice that asks ‘[w]hy [...] can't everyone just be nicer?’, and the word itself goes

³²¹ Scocca, ‘On Smarm’.

³²² Scocca, ‘On Smarm’.

³²³ Scocca, ‘On Smarm’.

³²⁴ Scocca, ‘Gawker Was Murdered by Gaslight’.

³²⁵ Scocca, ‘On Smarm’.

³²⁶ Scocca, ‘On Smarm’.

back to the older ‘smalm,’ meaning to smooth something down with grease—and by extension to be unctuous or flattering, or smug. Smarm aspires to smother opposition or criticism, to cover everything over with an artificial, oily gloss.³²⁷

As Scocca notes, this makes smarm a form of bullshit, because it is dishonest about its motives.³²⁸ The purpose of smarm is not actually to improve the quality of discourse, or even to make anyone ‘happy’, but rather to dismiss criticism without addressing the substance of a given critique. ‘Tone-policing’ – or attempting to derail a discussion by criticizing the tone of an argument rather than its content – is a form of smarm, and one may note that smarm is precisely the kind of bullshit that would disapprove of using the word bullshit.

For this reason, most appeals to ‘civility’ in discourse (and especially political discourse) are smarm, because such civility only ever benefits those in power. A widely shared Tumblr post articulated this phenomenon in a different way, using the discourse of ‘respect’:

Sometimes people use ‘respect’ to mean ‘treating someone like a person’ and sometimes they use ‘respect’ to mean ‘treating someone like an authority’ and sometimes people who are used to being treated like an authority say ‘if you won’t respect me I won’t respect you’ and they mean ‘if you won’t treat me like an authority I won’t treat you like a person’³²⁹

In this sense one can see how ‘respectability politics’ is yet one more instance of smarm as it operates in the political sphere, because it serves to cover up structural racism via deference to a hegemonic white culture, as if conforming to white standards for dress, speech, and political protest will somehow erase the material barriers maintained by white supremacy in the United States.³³⁰ If Donald Trump is a president defined by bullshit in its raw form, then Barack Obama was the president of smarm, who used his ‘uplifting’ and ‘inspirational’ biography to cover up both past abuses and his own administration’s imperial violence. His decision to ‘look forward’ rather than

³²⁷ Scocca, ‘On Smarm’.

³²⁸ If smarm is a subset of bullshit, then glurge can be described as the narrative form of smarm (with the latter being a sensibility or aesthetic). The boundaries between these terms are hazy, and it may be the case that glurge is primarily differentiated by the degree to which it specifically focuses on religion, the police, or the military, while smarm can appear in more generic forms.

³²⁹ Autistic Abby, Tumblr Post,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150404010354/http://stimmyabby.tumblr.com/post/115216522824/sometimes-people-use-respect-to-mean-treating>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

³³⁰ Fredrick Harris, ‘The Rise of Respectability Politics’, *Dissent Magazine*, 2014,

<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-respectability-politics>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

prosecute Bush-era war criminals and torturers is just one case of smarm's deadly consequences.³³¹

³³¹ Adam Serwer, 'Obama's Legacy Of Impunity For Torture', *The Atlantic*, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/obamas-legacy-of-impunity-for-torture/555578/>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

Tulpa

Tulpa is a term appropriated from Tibetan Buddhism that has appeared in a variety of Anglophone media over the last decade, from Grant Morrison's *Action Comics* to David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return*, and in its simplest form refers to a living idea, a narrative so powerful that it manifests materially (often in the form of an individual). In the half-serious world of memetic magic, the election of Donald Trump was interpreted as the arrival of a kind of tulpa, summoned with the power of a 'hypersigil':

Sigils are believed to allow one's project to enter the realm of reality. But as years passed, a question appeared: what about memes? As collective entities, created by the will of thousands around a single thought, repeated and refined, it was the utmost sigil. And 'hypersigil' some said. [...] the cult of Kek is exactly that: an hypersigil created by 4chan, using several tenets of chaos magick such as the creation of a tulpa, a magic monster created by one's mind to exist in our dimension. As the memetic warfare went on, all the rage and hopes of the Trump army created those powerful tools of collective will, making them circulate on the web, gathering attention and the wrath of millions. And clearly: it worked.³³²

Without debating how much of an actual influence these far-right shitposters had on Trump's election (particularly given that he lost the popular vote), one may note that this belief in the power of belief is deeply indebted to the *Hellblazer* canon discussed in the entry on comic books, and represents a particular understanding of narrative that does not differentiate between fact and fiction, going so far as to treat subjectivity itself as a kind of emergent narrative.

The most obvious example of the tulpa in the *Hellblazer* canon is Mike Carey's *The Unwritten*, in which an author literally writes a son (and eventual Messiah) into existence; the character is referred to as a tulpa throughout. However, for this project a more relevant example comes in Grant Morrison's *Action Comics*, which presents (a version of) Superman as a tulpa. In *Action Comics* #9, Morrison offers a kind of mythologized retelling of Superman's creation by artist and writer (respectively) Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel. In this alternate-universe version of Superman's origin, Morrison abstracts the history of Schuster and Siegel's exploitation by their publisher, making the Superman figure into a tulpa – 'A SOLID THOUGHT. AN IDEA WITH OWN INDEPENDENT LIFE' – created through the focusing of human thought via a fantastical

³³² 'Meme Magic Is Real, You Guys', *Tryangle*, 2016, <https://medium.com/tryangle-magazine/meme-magic-is-real-you-guys-16a497fc45b3>, Accessed June 29, 2019. 'Meme magic' refers to a phrase made popular by Palmer Luckey, as discussed in the entry on Gawker.

machine.³³³ In this version of the story, Superman's creators name him 'after Nietzsche and George Bernard Shaw,' in reference to Shaw's 1903 play *Man and Superman*.³³⁴ However, after their initial creation, which 'LIVED FOR TWENTY-FIVE GLORIOUS MINUTES [...] ARTICULAT[ING] A CODE OF ETHICS SO PURE AND SIMPLE AND GOOD' its creators all weep (before forgetting the entirety of these ethics ten minutes later), they sign over the rights to their concept in exchange for corporate funding.³³⁵ Following the deal the project's new corporate owners

HAD 500 EXPERTS LINED UP THINKING IN HARMONY TO STREAMLINE THE SUPERMAN BRAND FOR MAXIMUM CROSS-SPECTRUM, WIDE PLATFORM APPEAL. THEY BUILT A VIOLENT, TROUBLED, FACELESS ANTI-HERO, CONCEALING A TRAGIC SECRET LIFE, A GLOBAL MARKETING ICON.³³⁶

This 'SuperDoomsday' – named after the character that killed Superman in the 1992 'Death of Superman' story arc – rampages across the multiverse, killing (and sometimes even eating) alternate versions of Superman until he is finally stopped by the Superman of Earth-23. This tulpa is a parody of Dark Age stereotypes, but Morrison also uses it to address the fascist label aimed at the character since the days of Fredric Wertham. When the Superman of Earth-23 teams up with his version of the supervillain Lex Luthor to defeat SuperDoomsday, Luthor takes the chance to exclaim 'ALL MY ADULT LIFE I'VE DREAMED OF A MOMENT LIKE THIS. YOU'RE THE RAW ESSENCE, THE BEAST IN SUPERMAN! THE SMUG FASCIST BULLY BOY I SAW THERE ALL ALONG!' ³³⁷

The tulpa of *Action Comics* is in line with Morrison's wider view of comic book characters, which is that they are themselves living things whose material form are the comic books themselves and the biological network of symbiotic creators and readers that perpetuate them. SuperDoomsday represents what can go wrong when such living ideas are directed to serve fascist ideals, like a golem transformed from a defender of the weak to an agent of oppression, but because he is an over-the-top caricature of Dark Age media, he lacks some of the nuance that appears in other

³³³ Grant Morrison (w), Gene Ha (a), 'The Curse of Superman', *Action Comics*, vol. 2, #9 (New York: DC Comics, July 2012).

³³⁴ This is also a reference to the fact that Schuster and Siegel's creation was itself named after Nietzsche and Shaw, albeit at a time when their Superman was intended to be an Aryan villain in the vein of the mad scientist; eventually the character changed but the name remained.

³³⁵ Morrison, 'The Curse of Superman'.

³³⁶ Morrison, 'The Curse of Superman'.

³³⁷ Morrison, 'The Curse of Superman'.

treatments of the same ideas in Morrison's work, and particularly the character of Ultra, who appears in *Multiversity*.

In *Multiversity*, 'Ultra Comics' is at once the name of the comic book that exists in this universe as well as the main character of that comic, whose existence includes the 'real'-world comic book as a constituent part of its being. The character Ultra Comics, who goes by Ultra for short, introduces himself to the reader by describing the materiality of his being in the form of the comic book:

I HEAR YOU LOUD AND CLEAR. INCREDIBLE! MY BODY – MADE FROM CELLULOSE PULP, SALT WATER, AND CARBON. TITANIUM DIOXIDE, WAX EMULSION, FORMALDEHYDE. MY SKIN OF WATER GLYCOL, IRON BLUE, AZO PIGMENTS. THE STAPLES OF MY SPINE!³³⁸

The Ultra that appears in the pages of *Ultra Comics* can be described as 'a generic comic book hero with blond hair and good teeth. One of hundreds,' in a call-back to Morrison's earlier work on the equally metatextual *Animal Man*.³³⁹ Although he is not explicitly called a tulpa in the comic, Ultra is 'AN IDEA SO POWERFUL, IT BELIEVES IT'S ALIVE', which prompts a Cartesian crisis in the character, who asks 'SO I'M NOT REALLY ALIVE? BUT I... I CAN HEAR MYSELF THINKING. I COULD SWEAR I'M ALIVE...'.³⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the comic makes clear that Ultra is at the very least as real as his readers, as Ultra recounts his experience 'bonding' with everyone reading the comic:

WE'RE ALL HERE TOGETHER. DEFYING TIME SPACE AND REASON AS ONE BEING WITH MANY MINDS, CONCENTRATED HERE AND NOW! [...] STRANGE. MY ACCENT IS AMERICAN WITH A LITTLE CANADIAN AND BRITISH TOO. AND A DOZEN OR MORE INTERNATIONAL INFLECTIONS. THE VOICE OF A GIRL, THE VOICE OF A BOY. ALL DIFFERENT OPINIONS.³⁴¹

In these scenes, Ultra is interacting with every reader at every point in time, an experience akin to Zatanna's when she meets the Seven Unknown Men in *Seven Soldiers of Victory* and feels 'EYES, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF EYES, IN DIFFERENT TIMES AND PLACES, ALL CONVERGING' on her.³⁴² Because Ultra is specifically designed to be fully conscious of his relationship to the humans reading him, he acknowledges their shared participation in the fictional superorganism, whereas Zatanna retains her sense of individuality even as she is aware of the readers' presence.

³³⁸ Morrison, 'Ultra Comics Lives!'.
³³⁹ Morrison, 'Deus Ex Machina'.
³⁴⁰ Morrison, 'Ultra Comics Lives!', 13.
³⁴¹ Morrison, 'Ultra Comics Lives!', 16-17.
³⁴² Morrison, 'Zor!', 18.

Even before Ultra questions his own reality, Ultra Comics challenges the reader to differentiate between the reality of their own ontology and that of the comics' characters, as a narrator introduces the story by remarking

NOW THAT YOU'VE CHOSEN TO STAY AND TAKE PART IN OUR LITTLE EXPERIMENT, YOU MAY BE WONDERING HOW MUCH OF WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE IS – REAL. WELL, WONDER NO MORE. SURE, I'M JUST A PEN AND INK REPRESENTATION, BUT I'M REAL ENOUGH FOR YOU TO HEAR MY VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD, RIGHT?³⁴³

These questions work to simultaneously defend the 'reality' of the comic book characters while deprioritizing the reader's own sense of a coherent self, in line with Jorge Luis Borges' insistence that 'personality is a mirage maintained by conceit and custom'.³⁴⁴ In this light, the human individual is itself a tulpa, an idea that has convinced itself that it is 'alive' in a coherent, irreducible sense. The tulpa of Carey's *Unwritten* makes a similar claim when addressing his own audience, remarking that

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT YOURSELF – ABOUT YOUR REAL, TRUE SELF – IT'S NOT THE FACE IN THE MIRROR THAT COMES INTO YOUR MIND, IT'S THE STORY OF YOU. HOW YOU GOT HERE. WHERE YOU'RE GOING. ALL THE MOMENTS THAT MAKE YOU WHO YOU ARE.³⁴⁵

There is even a basis for this in what might be called 'classical' narratological theory, as seen in Jerome Bruner's essay 'The Narrative Construction of Reality'. Bruner argues that

We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative-stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by his conglomerate of prosthetic devices, colleagues, and mentors. Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve 'verisimilitude.' Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and 'narrative necessity' rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness[.]³⁴⁶

This recognition that individual experience (and thus 'personhood') is a function of narrative (and thus discourse) can be unsettling, and indeed, one of the fundamental anxieties of weird fiction is the deprioritizing of white male ontology. Furthermore, it suggests that 'individuals' are both shaped by their environment and capable of change to such extreme degrees that the notion of 'personal responsibility' becomes impossibly contradictory, particularly when one recognizes the degree to which all

³⁴³ Morrison, 'Ultra Comics Lives!'.

³⁴⁴ Borges, 'The Nothingness of Personality'.

³⁴⁵ Mike Carey, *The Unwritten*, vol. 7 (New York: DC Comics, 2013), 95.

³⁴⁶ Jerome Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1991), pp. 4-5.

humans are always-already caught up in the human superorganism. Everyone is responsible for the narrating of their own existence and everyone is complicit in each other's stories. A fundamental myth of fascism is that (a) Man can stand alone atop history, and the idealized masculinity so popular in Twisted Age media attempts to materialize a coherent, non-narrative ontology in the human form.

While the notion that identity is a fiction maintained through discourse can easily lend itself to glurgy affirmative thinking of the sort that suggests (for example) 'if you can dream it you can do it!', in practice the material limits on human imagination and action work to shape people into monsters, a process that practically defines the figure of the USAmerican swamp creature. During the same time period that Roy Thomas and Len Wein were working on the Golem in *Strange Tales*, they both had a hand in creating important evolutions of the lumbering swamp monster that would eventually become *Swamp Thing* (leading, in turn, to the *Hellblazer* canon).

While the swamp monster's most famous iterations are those created by Thomas and Wein in the Bronze Age of Comic books, the swamp monster motif first appears in USAmerican popular culture in the 1940 Theodore Sturgeon short story 'IT!', published in the weird fiction magazine *Unknown*.³⁴⁷ In Sturgeon's story, the swamp monster is formed when Roger Kirk, the grandfather of a wealthy eccentric named Thaddeus Kirk, 'died and sank into the forest floor where the hot molds builded around his skeleton and emerged – a monster'.³⁴⁸ The creature that emerges is a kind of blank slate, morally neutral but curious to the point of unintentional violence. It is a kind of reverse golem that produces the same result; instead of the mud being given life through human intervention, the swamp creature is born from the mud giving life to dead human remains, as Roger's skeletal structure provides a trellis for some new identity to form.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Theodore Sturgeon, 'It!', *Unknown*, ed. by John W. Campbell (New York: Street & Smith, Aug. 1940).

³⁴⁸ Sturgeon, 'It!', 117.

³⁴⁹ This process is not unlike Morrison's account of how human lives evolve in physical space, as seen in issue #679 of *Batman*. While hallucinating as the Batman of Zur-En-Arrh, a 'back-up' identity Batman developed should his mind ever be attacked, he speaks with a gargoyle who asks

YOU EVER SEE THE GRIDS? TAKES SLOW-VISION TO SEE THE GRIDS [...] HANG AROUND FOR YEARS, YOU GET TO SEE THE LAYOUT. PEOPLE MAKE THE CITY AND THE CITY MAKES THE PEOPLE. SEE HOW LIVES GROW AROUND THE GRIDS LIKE VINES ON A TRELIS.

'It!' was followed in 1942 by The Heap, who appeared for the first time in the comic book *Air Fighters* #3. Rather than growing out of a US American swamp, The Heap appears in a swamp in Nazi-occupied Poland, born from the bones of a German flying ace who crashed during WWI. Though morally neutral like the creature from 'It!', The Heap eventually becomes a quasi-hero, primarily because his circumstances meant he almost exclusively murdered Nazis, making him an early anti-fascist icon.

In May of 1971, Thomas and Gerry Conway introduced the character Man-Thing in the pages of the Marvel Comics anthology *Savage Tales*, and the creature is born in a similar manner to its literary ancestors.³⁵⁰ Then just two months later In July of 1971, Wein introduced the character Swamp Thing in the pages of *House of Secrets* for DC Comics.³⁵¹ At the time Wein happened to be Conway's roommate, and the similarities between the characters did not go unremarked; however, as both characters were clearly in the same vein as 'It!' and The Heap, neither Marvel nor DC pursued any sort of copyright action. Wein then went on to write a script for the second issue to feature Marvel's Man-Thing, but this story was never published. Then in 1972, Wein reintroduced the character of Swamp Thing with his own ongoing series, origin story, and human alter-ego.³⁵² Eventually Conway (and others) would take over writing duties from Wein before it was cancelled in 1976, only to be revived again in 1982. During this latter period Wein (in his capacity as editor) eventually gave the writing duties to Alan Moore, who successfully revamped the title.

Although Batman here is not aware of his own existence as a comic book character, he nevertheless recognizes the fragility of personality, and because he must prepare for every eventuality, he has already created an alternative persona should his 'real' personality come undone. Grant Morrison, 'Miracle On Crime Alley', *Batman* #679 (New York: DC Comics, 2008).

³⁵⁰ Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway (w), Gray Morrow (a), '...Man-Thing!', *Savage Tales*, vol. 1, #1 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, May 1971).

³⁵¹ Len Wein (w), Bernie Wrightson (a), 'Swamp Thing', *House of Secrets*, vol. 1, #92 (New York: DC Comics, Jul. 1971).

³⁵² Len Wein (w), Bernie Wrightson (a), 'Dark Genesis', *Swamp Thing*, ed. by Joe Orlando, vol. 1, #1 (New York: DC Comics, Nov. 1972).

Ultra

Critical theory (and particularly narratology) has long suffered from the impulse to pretend that one can easily differentiate between a text and the reader, as if the latter is not a constituent part of the emergent cyborganistic construct that occurs whenever a human performs meaning.³⁵³ Even as Jacques Derrida inaugurated a mode of 'post-structuralism' that suggested the impossibility of determining a static 'center' of analysis, narratologists attempted to maintain the possibility of narrative distinctions, with Gerard Genette offering the classical articulation of this problem in his book *Narrative Discourse*. In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette describes three diegetic levels in order to differentiate between different layers of narration: the extra-diegetic, intra-diegetic (which can also simply be called diegetic), and meta-diegetic. The difficulty hidden in this formulation is only hinted at in Genette's text, when he recognizes his application of 'meta' differs from its regular usage. Genette states that one may

define this difference in level by saying that any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed.³⁵⁴

To describe Genette's levels and explain why they are not particularly useful, it will be helpful to use another trope from classical narratology, the story of the king dying.

The king died. This is a narrative. In certain narratological theories this would not count as an example of narrative, the belief being that because it does not describe a movement in time but rather a static point, it is somehow less than a 'true' narrative, which would include a passage of time. An example of this would be 'the king died and then the queen died'. In this latter case, the queen's death is positioned after the king's death, clearly demonstrating a passage in time. However, even the earlier sentence must include time in order to be meaningful; 'the king died' is nothing without the notion of life and a movement between life and death, such that time is presupposed by this sentence. In Derridean terms, 'the king died' is a center that is not a center, because even a cursory examination forces one to chase the constant displacement of meaning that occurs when considering the relationship between kings and their

³⁵³ This construct is exemplified by the comic book character Ultra Comics, discussed in the entry for tulpa.

³⁵⁴ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 228.

context, the movement from life to death, etc.

At any rate, in Genette's formulation 'the king died' is at the diegetic level, as this is the narrative or text. If the narrative is extended to 'The queen said, 'the king died'', then the level of diegesis includes a narrative within itself, and Genette would call the level of this narrative meta-diegetic. For Genette, while the world of the queen speaking is the level of diegesis, the world of the queen's speech is the level of meta-diegesis. This is an inversion of how meta- is used in any other formulation, and Genette recognizes as much:

The prefix meta- obviously connotes here, as in 'metalanguage,' the transition to the second degree: the metanarrative is a narrative within a narrative, the metadiegesis is the universe of this second narrative, as the diegesis (according to a now widespread usage) designates the universe of the first narrative. We must admit, however, that this term functions in a way opposite to that of its model in logic and linguistics: metalanguage is a language in which one speaks of another language, so metanarrative should be the first narrative, within which one would tell a second narrative. But it seemed to me that it was better to keep the simplest and most common designation for the first degree, and thus reverse the direction of interlocking. Naturally, the eventual third degree will be a meta-metanarrative, with its meta-metadiegesis, etc.³⁵⁵

The error of Genette's formulation is two-fold, though the solution can be found in Genette's description of the relationship between these diegetic levels. Genette notes that 'these terms (metadiegetic, etc.) designate, not individuals, but relative situations and functions'.³⁵⁶ In other words, these terms do not refer to actual, specific levels, but rather the relative position of a level in regard to another. Thus, the prefixes extra- and intra- are inaccurate, because they refer to *inside* and *outside*, when the topic of discussion is entirely concerned with what is inside the narrative, even if diegesis represents the imaginary world 'outside' the parts of that world actualized in the narrative. While one can differentiate between diegetic levels within a narrative, one diegesis is only ever outside another in a localized sense, as all are contained or referenced within the narrative.

Thus, it might be more accurate to replace extra- and intra- here with ultra- and infra-, because Genette seems to really be talking about the degree to which these things are *above* or *below* – rather than inside or outside – whatever diegetic level is taken as the organizing referent. Using ultradiegetic and infradiegetic to describe either end of the diegetic spectrum allows one to speak intelligibly about diegetic levels.

³⁵⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 228.

³⁵⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 229.

Thus, one could say that in ‘the queen said, ‘the king died’’, the queen's speech is ultradiegetic in relation to the diegesis of the narrative of the king's death. At the same time, the queen's speech is itself *infradiegetic* to the diegesis of the whole narrative. Finally, one can say that the discussion of this narrative is both ultradiegetic and metadiegetic to the diegesis of the narrative, because it imagines a diegesis about diegesis. Changing Genette's formulation of extra-diegetic and intra-diegetic to ultra and infra allows meta to settle back into its usual arrangement rather than the inverted linkage that exists in Genette's construction, banishing the specter of having to follow an unproductive infinite regression into meta-meta-diegesis, etc.

As a consequence, extra-diegetic would more accurately refer to the world of the reader, and intra-diegetic to the world of the text, with extra-narrative being the narrative of the reader's reading and intra-narrative being the narrative supplied by the text. However, this formulation revives the specter of infinitely appending meta to narrative, and there are more useful terms already in use to describe such a relationship. Instead, the terms *embedded* and *emergent* narrative can be adopted to talk about the relationship between the narrative of a text and the narrative of the reading of the text. This construction is helpful because it keeps the narrative, the imaginary surface level, as the asymptote from which the other two narratives expand. If ultra- and infra- are adjectives whose meaning infinitely stretches toward the highest and lowest levels of narration in a text, then emergent and embedded are adjectives whose meaning stretches infinitely away from the empty center of the narrative, the precise, entirely imaginary point where reader and text engage.

-

In the discourse of comic book superheroes, ‘meta’ is sometimes used in stories as a replacement for ‘super’, such that (for example) Agent Helligan in *Seven Soldiers of Victory* is said to specialize in ‘metahumans’, rather than the more comic book-y sounding ‘superhuman’. This project prefers superhuman and superhero precisely because of their relationship to ‘superorganism’, a term generally used to refer to eusocial animals (such as bees and ants) but which can be reasonably applied to humans circa 2019. The main difference between species unproblematically considered eusocial and humans is that where the former have genetically determined social

castes, humans do not.³⁵⁷ However, when one considers the culturally determined castes obvious throughout human society (organized intersectionally by race, gender, class, etc.) then the distinction between genetically determined social roles and those enforced via (the violence of) culture is largely irrelevant. This is not to say that those roles cannot change, but rather that hegemonic culture depends on enforcing those roles via all manner of structural inequality that persists across generations; gender pay disparities and the racial wealth gap in the United States are just two examples of such intergenerational inequality.

The understanding of narrative adopted by this project considers narrative as such to constitute the ontological miasma of the human superorganism, an interpretation that simultaneously considers the notion of 'objective' reality to be a fiction while denying the utility of a fact-fiction divide except for in local circumstances. In philosophical terms, this means that this project's account of the human superorganism supports the notion of 'hyperstition' while considering the notion of 'hyperobjects' to be a silly discursive dodge not worth the time it would take to refute it.³⁵⁸ In short, 'hyperstition' – a combination of 'hyper' and 'superstition' – refers to the potency of ideas, ignoring the question of truth content and instead focusing on their material effect.³⁵⁹ In this way hyperstition is closely related to the idea of a tulpa, and discussions of hyperstition frequently invoke sigils and memes in an effort to describe the concept.

However, this project differs from most proponents of hyperstition in two ways. First, it rejects the possibility of an 'outside' so fundamental to notions of the weird (in both fiction and philosophy) and considered by philosopher Nick Land to be an essential feature of hyperstition's work in the world, because this 'outside' still depends on a prioritizing of individual subjectivity that – as the discussion of tulpa indicates – is not sustainable under any notion of narrative that is honest about its

³⁵⁷ Nicola Plowes, 'An Introduction to Eusociality', *Nature*, 2010, <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/an-introduction-to-eusociality-15788128>, Accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁵⁸ Delphi Carstens, 'Hyperstition', *Maggie Roberts*, 2010, <http://merliquify.com/blog/articles/hyperstition/#.XRgTM-hKhVI>, accessed June 30, 2019. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

³⁵⁹ Carstens, 'Hyperstition'.

mutually-constitutive qualities. Second, this project explicitly rejects the self-applied ‘renegade’ quality of Land and his cohorts, considering it to represent precisely the kind of embarrassing affectation that characterizes the Twisted Age.³⁶⁰ In their efforts to distinguish their work from ‘mainstream’ philosophy, Land and others associated with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit participate in a mode of self-aggrandizement that in contemporary discourse is best described as edgelord philosophy.³⁶¹ Theirs is a political project that has occasionally offered useful terms but as a whole represents another instance of white male subjectivity pretending toward transgression, and one need not legitimize their self-flattery to acknowledge the relevance of (some of) their ideas.

One reason hyperstition is worth discussing here is because it ties contemporary discussions of how meaning works in the world to some of the historical theory cited throughout this work, via Derrida’s reading of Lévi-Strauss in ‘Sign, Structure, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ (which also appears in the entries for \aleph and bricolage). Specifically, Derrida cites a portion of Lévi-Strauss’ *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* in which Lévi-Strauss considers the Oceanic concept of ‘mana’ as it appears in Mauss’ *A General Theory of Magic* as the basis for his own critique of Lévi-Strauss’ method. However, this project will not trace the role of mana in anthropological discourse, because as Alex Golub and Jon Peterson note, ‘tracing the diffusion of mana is difficult because there are multiple lines of influence, and teasing them apart would require a close analysis of the biographies of dozens of people’.³⁶² Such a study is beyond the scope of this entry, but it is nevertheless useful to consider mana’s contemporary use in Anglophone culture, because it simultaneously operates as a better-known analogue of hyperstition while offering an example of how meaning’s materiality is emphasized via capitalism’s interest in it.

To the contemporary Anglophone reader, mana is likely best known for the way it has been appropriated into videogames, following its appearance in Larry Niven’s

³⁶⁰ Carstens, ‘Hyperstition’.

³⁶¹ ‘Edgelord’, Urban Dictionary, 2015, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=edgelord>, accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁶² Alex Golub and Jon Peterson, ‘How Mana Left the Pacific and Became A Videogame Mechanic’, *New Mana: transformations of a classic concept in Pacific languages and cultures* (Australia: Australian National University Press, 2016) 309.

1969 short story 'Not Long Before the End,' where mana is used to denote a finite resource from which a warlock draws his magical ability. In the story, mana is a feature of the natural environment, and the exercise of magical power consumes or expends mana such that a particular location can be entirely drained. This use of the term eventually made its way to tabletop roleplaying games and then their videogame counterparts, where it refers to a kind of quantifiable magical power (usually paired with an equivalent resource indicating health). In this sense, videogame mana is itself a kind of unit of meaning a la the myriad narratological terms that are discussed in the entry for bricolage, because it is literally a unit of magical power, or discourse (in the form of a spell) turned into quanta.³⁶³

In their analysis of videogame mana Golub and Peterson note that in the long process of mana's appropriation into Anglophone culture,

Games added a new and most demanding phase to the process. Once gamers embrace a concept like mana, they must eliminate ambiguities and reduce the idea to a formal construct which can be quantified and systemised. The requirements of gamers differ in this fundamental way from that of novelists or anthropologists, who can embrace ambiguity and uncertainty about the nature of mana. Games must be fair, predictable and capable of simulation, which necessitates the concretisation of a concept like mana into something suitable for the ecosystem of a fantastic game world.³⁶⁴

However, this same process has proven true not just in the context of 'a fantastic game world', but also in the wider world of contemporary capitalism, which theorist Jodi Dean argues is defined by the exploitation of meaning as such. In her book *The Communist Horizon*, Dean notes that contemporary capitalism (which she specifically calls 'communicative capitalism')

seizes, privatizes, and attempts to monetize the social substance. It doesn't depend on the commodity-thing. It directly exploits the social relation at the heart of value. Social relations don't have to take the fantastic form of the commodity to generate value for capitalism. Via networked, personalized communication and information technologies, capitalism has found a more straightforward way to appropriate value.³⁶⁵

In the same way that games required that mana be streamlined to accommodate predictable systems, communicative capitalism depends on streamlining creative output (or what is made by those laborers sometimes referred to as 'content creators') so that it can be filtered on a massive scale, making it easier for the most profitable

³⁶³ Golub and Peterson, 'How Mana Left the Pacific and Became A Videogame Mechanic', 310.

³⁶⁴ Golub and Peterson, 'How Mana Left the Pacific and Became A Videogame Mechanic', 337.

³⁶⁵ Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso Books, 2012) 129.

ideas to be found and replicated. Dean points out that communicative capitalism depends on what she calls 'network exploitation', or the exploitation of complex networks via the expropriation of 'the common', as opposed to 'classical' capitalism, which depended on the expropriation of value from the commons.³⁶⁶ Explaining the distinction, Dean writes that

The commons is finite and characterized by scarcity. In contrast, the common is infinite and characterized by surplus. The common thus designates and takes the place of human labor power (Marx's source of value), now reconceived in the broadest possible terms of the potential of creativity, thought, knowledge, and communication themselves always plural, open, and productive.³⁶⁷

The capitalist exploitation of the common thus depends on extracting from it the 'top' products, based on

a powerlaw distribution of links. The item in first place or at the top of a given network has twice as many links as the item in second place, which has more than the one in third and so on, such that there is very little difference among those at the bottom but massive differences between top and bottom. So lots of novels are written. Few are published. Fewer are sold. A very few become bestsellers. Or lots of articles are written. Few are read. The same four are cited by everybody. The idea appears in popular media as the 80/20 rule, the winner-take-all or winner-take-most economy of the new economy, and the 'long tail.' [...] Such exploitation contributes to the expropriation of opportunities for income and paid labour, as in the collapse of print journalism and academic presses.³⁶⁸

In these situations, the number of links in the network, AKA what determines the value of a given item, is precisely that characteristic described by hyperstition (or mana, depending on how far one wishes to push the boundaries of these terms). That is to say, because communicative capitalism extracts value from the most 'successful' ideas with 'success' defined only by their position in a network, what matters is the potency of a given idea and not (for example) its truth value or even usefulness to a given consumer. With this Dean's analysis helps explain the notion of something being published for 'hate clicks', i.e. the publication of intentionally inflammatory material intended solely to increase 'engagement' as measured by the number of online clickthroughs. That this mode of capitalism is particularly amenable to fascist bullshit is evident in the way the election of Donald Trump has been extremely lucrative for corporate media, who benefit from the 'engagement' created as a result of the

³⁶⁶ Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 135-139.

³⁶⁷ Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 134-135.

³⁶⁸ Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 137-139.

president's penchant for televised drama, which often consists of his decrying those very same organizations.³⁶⁹

It is important to note that the hyperstitious 'meme magic' underpinning contemporary fascist thought need not only work in one direction, and in fact such narrative weapons can be turned against those very same fascists. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of white supremacist Richard Spencer, who was punched in the face while trying to explain fascists' adoption of Pepe the Frog, the 'hypersigil' described at the beginning of the entry on tulpa. The way direct anti-fascist action can become something more powerful than a single punch is articulated in a stand-up set by comedian Aamer Rahman. Reflecting on white liberals' handwringing over the ethics of such anti-fascist action, Rahman relates how

Richard Spencer was being interviewed and in the interview he was asked about his Pepe the Frog badge. So he was trying to explain a meme, and then out of nowhere, a hero came along and punched him in the face, instantly turning *him* into a meme. It was like casting a spell. And then every white liberal came out of the woodwork going 'Mmmmmmm...I don't know... I don't know if that's what we should be doing... Should we really be applauding someone for punching a Nazi? Is that how we want to have political conversations? Shouldn't we hear people out? If you punch a Nazi, does that make you as bad as one? You know what we should do with Nazis? We should debate them and we should defeat them in the marketplace of ideas'. I don't really know where that is. I would like to defeat Nazis on planet Earth first, and then after we eradicate them here, you can fight them in the marketplace of ideas, fucking Narnia, Mordor, whatever imaginary realm it is that you think Nazis can be constructively debated in, go for it, right?³⁷⁰

Crucially, even as Rahman rejects the possibility of defeating fascism via discourse alone, he recognizes that the potency of the Spencer punch came not simply from the force of a fist impacting his face, but the way that act was transmitted, becoming a powerful cultural object in its own right. A more recent phenomenon in a similar vein is the anti-fascist milkshake, which gets its potency not simply from the inconvenience caused by having cold dairy products splatter all over one's face, but the public

³⁶⁹ David Bloom, 'Love It or Hate It, The Trump Show Has Been Very Good For Media Business', *Forbes*, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dbloom/2018/11/05/happy-election-season-media-donald-trump-has-been-very-good-for-you/#78235cb33abd>, accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁷⁰ Aamer Rahman, Twitter Post, November 6, 2017, 1:11 PM, https://twitter.com/aamer_rahman/status/927644648893399040, accessed June 30, 2019.

humiliation it brings to figures whose ideology insists on stoicism and ‘serious’ masculinity.³⁷¹

-

The reader will likely not be surprised to learn that the United States government has long sought to harness the kinetic capability of ideas, including but not limited to Project MKUltra, the CIA’s attempts at mind control during the Cold War (the weird television series *Stranger Things* is recent treatment of MKUltra in popular media). More recently, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) funded a number of projects related to the study of narrative’s effects, looking for

innovative research proposals in the areas of (1) quantitative analysis of narratives, (2) understanding the effects narratives have on human psychology and its affiliated neurobiology, and (3) modeling, simulating, and sensing – especially in stand-off modalities – these narrative influences. [...] Narratives exert a powerful influence on human thoughts and behavior. They consolidate memory, shape emotions, cue heuristics and biases in judgment, influence in-group/out-group distinctions, and may affect the fundamental contents of personal identity. It comes as no surprise that because of these influences stories are important in security contexts[.]³⁷²

Although this thesis originally planned to include a quantitative analysis of narrative in the interest of making certain trends in comic books more intelligible, such a ‘digital Humanities’ approach was eventually rejected in light of how easily such work is co-opted into the United States’ imperial project (even if one does not take funding from organizations like DARPA). The challenge for this work and indeed all ongoing research into the power of stories is how one might produce novel insights while including safeguards to ensure that those insights are not weaponized in the service of USAmerican fascism. The answer to this challenge remains uncertain, but at the very least this project has endeavored to make its contempt for fascists and their enablers clear, such that whatever minimal insights it might contribute to contemporary discourse (academic and otherwise) will be inextricable from an explicitly anti-fascist praxis.

³⁷¹ Kim Kelly, ‘How to Make the Perfect Milkshake for Throwing at Fascists’, *Vice*, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/xwn4zd/how-to-make-the-perfect-milkshake-for-throwing-at-fascists, accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁷² Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, *Broad Agency Announcement: Narrative Networks*, 2011, 5.

Weird

Weird is understood here to refer to a multifaceted genre that gains its name from the 'weird fiction' that emerged transnationally in the first half of the twentieth century, but which transcends literary boundaries to encompass the 'kept weird' cities of Austin, Santa Cruz, and Portland, as well as the loose assortment of mostly-leftist writers and artists referred to as 'weird Twitter'. This project calls itself a 'weird history' because it engages the wider weird on multiple levels; it is at once a history of the literary weird as it evolved in the United States and a history that is itself weird, intending to do the same kind of unsettling work as weird fiction, albeit in an anti-colonial way that reverses the defining features of the earliest genre works. As much as 'the weird' of the title describes the genre of this thesis itself, the text is a weirding of the genre of the PhD, a formal experimentation in structure and scale.³⁷³

'The weird' is transnational in nature but deeply rooted in the pulp fiction of the United States, emerging in the 19th century but only receiving a particular name in the first half of the twentieth.³⁷⁴ While the weird overlaps with horror in general, it represents a distinct evolution from the Gothic, as it is the result of Gothic sensibilities transplanted onto the land of the United States. This change represents a fundamental shift, as the relationship between writer and setting in the United States – as a result of the inescapable fact of colonization -- is fundamentally different than that between the writer and setting in Europe, such that it would be inaccurate to label any fiction about or in the United States 'Gothic', including the oft-discussed 'Southern Gothic'.

The early contours of the USAmerican weird can be found in the Declaration of Independence's list of 'repeated injuries and usurpations' committed by England's King George III. When the Declaration accuses the king of dissolving 'Representatives Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people', it not only adopts the still-common patriarchal metonymic use of 'people' to mean 'white male land owners', but with the term 'manly firmness' prefigures the more euphemistic 'broad shoulders' preferred by contemporary white male

³⁷³ One may also note that this 'weirding' of the text is done to some degree with David Lynch's *Dune* in mind, which adapted the 'weirding way' of Frank Herbert's novel into a method by which certain words have the power to kill, a notion at the heart of this project's interest in the United States' fascist culture.

³⁷⁴ Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer, *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (New York: Tor Books, 2012), 5-6.

USAmerican politicians when discussing geopolitics.³⁷⁵ With this the ontological center of what would become the United States is marked out, white men whose claim to a gendered power is always already defined by the anxious need to exclaim that power. Against this is set not only King George, but also ‘the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions’. With this the basic features of the USAmerican weird are set, as the privileged position of white men is threatened by an inhuman other that defies epistemological limits and emerges from outside the bounds of civilization or meaning.

Two examples from the primordial stages of weird fiction make clear how these themes developed alongside the expanding USAmerican frontier, at least until the genocide of indigenous people in the United States shifted from expansionary military operations to ‘internal’ police functions. The first is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story ‘Young Goodman Brown’, published in the April 1835 issue of *The New-England Magazine* but set in 17th century Salem Village, as a young Puritan journeys to meet a mysterious figure in the forest at night. As Goodman Brown takes ‘a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest’, the landscape outside the village is immediately tied to a teeming, unknowable threat:

It was all as lonely as could be ; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead ; so that, with lonely footsteps, he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude. ‘There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree,’ said Goodman Brown, to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him, as he added, ‘What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!’³⁷⁶

When the devil does appear in the form of Brown’s travelling companion, he announces his own participation in the expansion of the frontier, remarking that

I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that’s no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem. And it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip’s war.³⁷⁷

Here the devil does not refute Brown’s impression that the forest holds some unknowable horror, but rather points out that the horror is Brown’s own complicity in

³⁷⁵ Janell Ross, ‘Mike Pence on broad shoulders, strength and leadership’, *The Washington Post*, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/06/mike-pence-on-broad-shoulders-strength-and-leadership>, accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁷⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, ‘Young Goodman Brown’, *The New-England Magazine*, April 1835, 250.

³⁷⁷ Hawthorne, ‘Young Goodman Brown’, 251.

colonization, rather than the indigenous victims of that intrusion. The devil goes on to reveal his association with all of New England, claiming that '[t]he deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the selectmen, of divers town, make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interests. The governor and I, too – but these are state-secrets'.³⁷⁸ One can easily extend these associations to the United States more widely by noting the specific act the devil accuses Brown's father of, as both the first US American president George Washington and his great-grandfather John Washington were given the nickname 'Conotocarious' by the Iroquois, which translates to 'town taker', 'burner of towns', or 'devourer of villages'.³⁷⁹

The second example is Ambrose Bierce's 1897 short story 'The Eyes of the Panther', which looks back favorably at the early days of US American colonization even as it expresses the colonial anxieties of miscegenation and racialized cuckoldry in the form of a panther. The equivalent of Hawthorne's Goodman Brown is Bierce's Charles Marlowe, who is

of the class, now extinct in this country, of woodmen pioneers—men who found their most acceptable surroundings in sylvan solitudes that stretched along the eastern slope of the Mississippi Valley, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. For more than a hundred years these men pushed ever westward, generation after generation, with rifle and ax, reclaiming from Nature and her savage children here and there an isolated acreage for the plow, no sooner reclaimed than surrendered to their less venturesome but more thrifty successors.³⁸⁰

Here the effects of colonization on the landscape are evident, as the relationship of white men to the forest and its 'savage children' reflects the expansionary assumptions of Manifest Destiny; where once Goodman Brown journeyed into a forest beyond the village-bound limits of white male hegemony, in Bierce's story colonizers are *reclaiming* a landscape that has been usurped by Nature and its indigenous inhabitants. To position Nature as an unnatural imposition on white men's 'acreage' reflects the oxymoronic logic of white settler identity, which must frame the resistance to invasion as an initializing violence rather than a response to the initial violence of invasion.

³⁷⁸ Hawthorne, 'Young Goodman Brown', 251.

³⁷⁹ 'Conotocarious', *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 2018, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/conotocarious/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁸⁰ Ambrose Bierce, 'The Eyes of the Panther', *The San Francisco Examiner*, 1897.

The racialized threat of sexual violence and cuckoldry appears in the form of a panther that terrorizes Marlowe's wife and child (unnamed except for the titles 'the wife' and 'Baby'). In the story, the panther never attacks but rather keeps Marlowe's wife cowering 'in absolute silence', with 'the moments growing to hours, to years, to ages' as she gradually smothers her baby.³⁸¹ Three months after the event she dies in childbirth, though this child – named Irene – grows up to be 'young, blonde, graceful' with eyes described as 'gray-green, long and narrow, with an expression defying analysis. One could only know that they were disquieting. Cleopatra may have had such eyes'.³⁸² Despite the three-month gestation that complicates a literal reading, the panther in the story cannot help but appear as an allusion to the perceived threat of miscegenation and racialized sexual violence, particularly as the story's pre-Civil War setting allows for the possibility that the panther represents an even more complex racialized threat in the form of the maroon communities made up of runaway slaves and indigenous people. This fear eventually leads to Irene's death, as a rejected suitor shoots her in the night when he apparently mistakes her for a panther, making clear the degree to which white men's fear of racialized sexual violence is directly tied to their own violence against women.

In the 2016 book *The Weird and the Eerie* cultural critic Mark Fisher rejects the notion that Hawthorne or Bierce might be considered part of the weird, comparing them unfavorably in this regard to H.P. Lovecraft and writing that 'any discussion of weird fiction must begin with Lovecraft', who wrote for the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*.³⁸³ Instead, Fisher considers Hawthorne and Bierce to be 'Gothic novelists' whose work lacks 'Lovecraft's emphasis on the materiality of the anomalous entities in his stories'.³⁸⁴ Fisher's expulsion of Hawthorne and Bierce from the catalogue of weird fiction does not by any means indicate a widely-accepted boundary for the genre, but the way he focuses on Lovecraft is instructive for appreciating how thoroughly the anxieties that permeate 'Young Goodman Brown' and 'The Eyes of the Panther' characterize the USAmerican weird.

³⁸¹ Bierce, 'The Eyes of the Panther'.

³⁸² Bierce, 'The Eyes of the Panther'.

³⁸³ Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 16-18.

³⁸⁴ Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 18.

Although Fisher points out ‘the supreme significance of Lovecraft setting so many of his stories in New England’ while writing many of them in the first person, he never actually connects Lovecraft’s autobiographical geography to the content of his work in any detail.³⁸⁵ This oversight is remarkable because even a cursory consideration would highlight the degree to which Lovecraft’s work reflects the same racial and gender ideology as his precursors, but Fisher proceeds without mentioning Lovecraft’s well-documented racism even as he remarks on the degree to which Lovecraft’s stories ‘are obsessively fixated on the question of the outside: an outside that breaks through in encounters with anomalous entities from the deep past, in altered states of consciousness, in bizarre twists in the structure of time’.³⁸⁶ Fisher’s oversight is only compounded by readings of *The Weird and the Eerie* that present this dehistoricizing lacuna as a sign of intellectual independence rather than a straightforward lack of the necessary context:

One may pause on the political use of the weird (though perhaps not the eerie) that is found in Fisher’s text. This is not to say he advocates a politics of the weird, but that there are certain aesthetic and affective themes which cannot but eventually be translated, willfully or not, into the political register. While much ado has been made of Lovecraft’s fascism and racism, this has not stopped those who revile his work from banking on his aesthetic-political power. [...] Such strategies may perturb the ideological purity of some Leftists, a purity which often results in a paranoia that equates explaining with justifying, engagement with promotion. But these equations are forms of defensive panic which prefer preaching to the choir rather than productively disagreeing.³⁸⁷

Such a reading is remarkable because it misses the rather obvious point that addressing Lovecraft’s racism makes his work (and thus the weird) more intelligible, not less. This much was suggested by William Hutson of the experimental rap group clipping., who remarked during an interview to promote their ‘Afrofuturist, dystopian concept album’ *Splendor & Misery* that

H. P. Lovecraft’s cosmic pessimism is only terrifying if you’re a straight white man and you thought you were the center of the universe anyway. To anyone else – and this is why his racism comes into it – finding out that you’re not the most important thing in the universe is a relief. I think it’s interesting that his characters go mad when they figure out that humanity doesn’t matter. It’s only terrifying if you ever thought you were important, if everything in society has propped you up as the dominant category.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 19-20.

³⁸⁶ Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 19.

³⁸⁷ Benjamin Graham Woodard, ‘The Weird and the Eerie’, *Textual Practice* 31, 6, (2017), 1182.

³⁸⁸ Todd Burns, ‘clipping. on Afrofuturism, Fast Rapping and Sound Design’, *RBMA*, 2016, <http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2016/09/clipping-interview>, accessed June 30, 2019.

Even Jorge Luis Borges' tribute story dedicated to Lovecraft, 'There Are More Things', highlights the anthropocentrism at the heart of what purports to be focused on the 'outside' or otherwise completely alien:

Let me explain: In order to truly see a thing, one must first understand it. An armchair implies the human body, its joints and members; scissors, the act of cutting. What can be told from a lamp, or an automobile? The savage cannot really perceive the missionary's Bible; the passenger does not see the same ships' rigging as the crew. If we truly saw the universe, perhaps we would understand it. None of the insensate forms I saw that night corresponded to the human figure or any conceivable use. They inspired horror and revulsion.³⁸⁹

The horror in the story comes precisely from these things being for something other than the narrator's use, and the strange objects he encounters only inspire revulsion because of his own ontological self-centeredness.

Fisher's understanding of the weird is also seriously lacking because like much critical theory, he almost entirely ignores comic books. *The Weird and the Eerie* makes mention of comic books only once, when it notes during a discussion of how 'Lovecraft's stories are full of thresholds between worlds [...], Gateways and portals routinely feature in the deeply Lovecraftian stories of the Marvel Comics character Doctor Strange'.³⁹⁰ Similarly, the introductory essay to a 2017 issue of *Textual Practice* concerned with weird fiction mentions comic books only once, when it claims that following the death of H.P. Lovecraft in 1937,

the weird then sank lower into the twilight territory of horror comics, with titles like *Weird Chills*, *Weird Horrors*, *Weird Science*, *Weird Tales of the Future*, a boom that began in 1949 and was abruptly curtailed by a moral panic and self-censorship in 1954

suggesting that comic books' relationship to the weird can be summed up in those five years.³⁹¹ In both the 'Foreweird' and Introduction to *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, a 'stun-your-enemies huge' collection 'covering over a century's worth of fiction', comic books are not mentioned at all.³⁹² One possible reason for this lingering oversight is an overemphasis on the word 'weird', which does not account for comic books' often audacious relationship with copyright law as it

³⁸⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, 'There Are More Things', in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998) 441.

³⁹⁰ Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 28.

³⁹¹ Roger Luckhurst, 'The weird: a dis/orientation', *Textual Practice* 31, 6, (2017), 1044.

³⁹² VanderMeer and VanderMeer, *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, 1-15.

relates to the use of synonyms. *The Weird and the Eerie* almost touches on this lexical shift when it cites Doctor Strange, who first appeared in the comic book *Strange Tales*, a title that began publication in 1951 and went on to feature some of the most important comic book writers and artists of the 20th century (as seen in the entries for golem and tulpa).

These oversights are unfortunate but not surprising, given the degree to which comic books were simply ignored for much of their history (something Lupoff laments when he first described the Golden Age). For example, while it is understandable that Walter Benjamin never discussed comic books, it is remarkable that his by-now widely-read essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' is not always taught alongside comic book theory, considering how fully the existence of comic books obviate many of the observations he made in 1936.³⁹³ Less understandable is Theodor Adorno's apparent ignorance of comic books, considering that he lived in the United States during the Golden Age and wrote about other industries intimately related to comic books, such as the burgeoning field of cartoons and animation.³⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida made no mention of comic books throughout his prolific career, although by now his work has been adapted into more than one graphic adaptation.³⁹⁵ In his essay 'Rhetoric of the Image' Roland Barthes discusses *fumetto*, the Italian term for speech balloons or bubbles in comics, but this only emphasizes the paucity of scholarly attention given to North American comic books in the 20th century in contrast to French and Belgian *bande dessinées* or Italian *fumetti*.³⁹⁶ To his credit media theorist Marshall McLuhan was well aware of the importance of comic books, discussing the character of Superman in his 1951 book *The Mechanical Bride*, and later dedicating a chapter of *Understanding Media* to the general category of 'comics', though this had the unfortunate (and common) effect of conflating newspaper comic strips with serialized comic books. Scott McCloud's 1993 book *Understanding Comics*:

³⁹³ Kailyn Kent, 'Comics and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *The Hooded Utilitarian*, 2012, <http://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2012/07/comics-and-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

³⁹⁴ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 2016), 106-110.

³⁹⁵ Jim Powell, *Derrida for Beginners* (Cork: Red Wheel Weiser, 2007). Jim Powell, *Deconstruction for Beginners* (Cork: Red Wheel Weiser, 2008). Jeff Collins, *Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide* (Icon Books LTD, 2014).

³⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Rhétorique De L'image', *Communications* 4 (1964): 43.

The Invisible Art, represents the beginning of a formal field of 'comic book theory', and acknowledges McLuhan's contributions while going well beyond them.³⁹⁷

While comic studies have now been accepted into academia, complete with their own conferences, journals, and degree-granting programs, the field remains a patchwork of practitioners all not-quite fitting into extant theories and practices, all of which remain always-already insufficient due to their having evolved absent a meaningful understanding of comic books. That is to say, there is a comic-shaped hole in the Humanities that seemingly can never be filled, and the 'interdisciplinarity' of the field is more akin to being universally misfit. For this reason, this project places little emphasis on exploring what a contemporary study of comics might reveal about extant theory, and instead considers how a better understanding of comic books might rewrite cultural criticism's understanding of the 20th century and beyond. This approach is especially relevant in the context of *Seven Soldiers'* critique of genre, as the comic book offers an important analysis of weird fiction missing from extant analyses of the genre.

-

In the texts that occupy this project, one of the better explanations of the USAmerican weird's relationship to contemporary fascism can be found in *Seven Soldiers of Victory*, and specifically the character of Frankenstein's monster as he appears in the comic. In the comic, Grant Morrison uses Frankenstein's monster to consider the evolution, adaptation, and appropriation of stories across historical, geographical, and generic boundaries. In Morrison's version of the character, the monster discovers the source of his undeath in the character of Melmoth, an immortal villain based on Charles Maturin's 1820 novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*. While Shelley leaves the key to the monster's creation ambiguous, in *Seven Soldiers* his life comes from an infusion of Melmoth's blood. Melmoth himself is the last king of the Sheeda (Morrison's version of the mythical *sídhe*) and a time-travelling parasite pillaging past civilizations to feed the last descendants of humanity. The relationship between Frankenstein, Melmoth, and pre-Christian myth is the through-line of *Seven Soldiers'* critical history of genre, which tracks the problematic ancestry of the European Gothic as it gives way to a distinctly USAmerican Weird in the pages of comic books.

³⁹⁷ Kevin Brooks, 'More 'Seriously Visible' Reading: McCloud, McLuhan, and the Visual Language of *The Medium Is The Massage*', *College Composition And Communication* 61, no. 1 (2009): 221.

Here the monster is both a link to past stories and critique of their appropriation under the contemporary conditions of literary production, as the revived character fights against the same forces of appropriation and adaptation that gave him life. As Morrison's Frankenstein replaces lost limbs with parts lifted from fresh corpses, the monster's role in *Seven Soldiers* reveals how comic books' incorporation of extant genres into Weird fiction depends on a similar tension between ghoulish appropriation and creative rejuvenation. By analyzing *Seven Soldiers'* Frankenstein in light of these metatextual relationships, the essay reveals Morrison's underlying critique of literary genre under capitalism.

Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein follows Victor Frankenstein's monster who, following the events of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel, adopts his creator's name and travels to the United States. Over the course of four issues, the monster now-named-Frankenstein destroys an infestation of mind-controlling fairies, travels to Mars to free a group of enslaved children, confronts the ultimate source of his own undeath in the form of the immortal Melmoth, and finally helps to defeat an invasion from the future made up of humanity's final descendants in the form of the Sheeda, a parasitic civilization that – because of their time-travelling – give rise to the Gaelic mythology of the *sídhe* – in *Seven Soldiers of Victory* the Sheeda's spoken language is rendered in the Ogham script of Old Irish – and the Middle Welsh poem *Preiddeu Annwfn* (or *The Spoils of Annwn*).³⁹⁸ In addition to these direct references to Irish folklore, Welsh poetry, and British Gothic novels, each issue reflects famous horror tropes of the twentieth century, thus linking the evolution of the wider European Gothic to the development of B-movie horror and 'the weird' in USAmerican culture.

The first obvious allusion to USAmerican horror media in Frankenstein's story comes in issue #1 of *Frankenstein*, which is called 'Uglyhead' and features an attack at a high school prom with a treatment of teen popularity reminiscent of the 1974/1976 novel and film *Carrie*.³⁹⁹ The title of the next issue, 'Red Zombies', ties Frankenstein more closely to the saturation of USAmerican horror across media with oblique allusions to the famously monster-themed horror punk band the Misfits, whose iconic

³⁹⁸ Grant Morrison (w), Simone Bianci (a), Dave Stewart (c), Rob Leigh (l), 'The Last Stand of Don Vincenzo', *Seven Soldiers: Shining Knight* #2 (New York: DC Comics, October [August] 2005). Morrison, 'The Miser's Coat'.

³⁹⁹ Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (a), John Kalisz (c), Phil Balsman (l), 'Uglyhead', *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein* #1, (New York: DC Comics, January 2006 [November 16, 2005]).

logo is a skull appropriated from the 1946 film serial *Crimson Ghost*. The 'red zombies' of *Frankenstein #2* are 'TATTERED MACROPHAGES, LEFT UNDISTURBED' in the ancient gold mines of Mars as 'METAMOPHIC GRAVE PROTECTORS, PROGRAMMED TO DEVOUR ALL PROFANE LIVING FLESH. AND LEAVE NOT A TRACE', not unlike the 'Astro Zombies' described on the Misfits' first full-length album, who have the 'Prime directive, exterminate [,] The whole human race'.⁴⁰⁰ The Misfits song is a reference to the 1968 film *The Astro-Zombies*, which itself has its own thematic connection to the story of Frankenstein; in the film, a mad scientist creates the zombies of the title from the body parts of the dead. *Frankenstein #3* contains the most direct connections to USAmerican horror tropes in the entire series, because although it has the rather innocuous title 'The Water', the issue sees Frankenstein reunited with The Bride, based on the 1935 film *The Bride of Frankenstein*. While fighting rabid farm animals contaminated by a bioengineered weapon, The Bride even goes so far as to make an explicit reference to the 1988 horror film *Slaughterhouse Rock*, cementing *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein's* position as a commentary on the relationship between 19th century Gothic fiction and the related genres that emerged in the United States in the 20th century.⁴⁰¹

Only issue #4, 'Frankenstein in Fairyland' does not obviously tie itself to extant horror media, but this is because the comic serves to link Frankenstein's prior adventures with the overarching historical and genre criticism of *Seven Soldiers*, as the Gothic-turned-pulp monster travels through time to confront the metaphorical and literal endpoint of the very processes of appropriation that characterize the Gothic-to-pulp transition. Up until this issue, Frankenstein is presented as a character out of time, ill-fitting his newfound historical moment and always out of sync with others in the present, including The Bride, who tells him that 'YOU WERE NEVER MY TYPE. [...] EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY, FRANKIE'.⁴⁰² However, in issue #4, Frankenstein must fight Neh-Buh-Loh, the Sheeda queen's 'hunter' (in another of *Seven Soldiers'* references to folktales), who succeeds in severing Frankenstein's right

⁴⁰⁰ Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (a), John Kalisz (c), Phil Balsman (l), 'Red Zombies', *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein #2* (New York: DC Comics, March [January] 2006). Misfits, 'Astro Zombies', *Walk Among Us*, 1982.

⁴⁰¹ Grant Morrison (w), Doug Mahnke (a), John Kalisz (c), Phil Balsman (l), 'The Water', *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein #3*, (New York: DC Comics, April 2006).

⁴⁰² Morrison, 'The Water'.

arm.⁴⁰³ After their battle, leader of S.H.A.D.E. Father Time instructs Frankenstein to head toward the location of the Sheeda's time machine, casually adding that the organization will 'ASSASSINATE A PROMINENT *BODYBUILDER*' to replace the arm Frankenstein has lost.⁴⁰⁴

This moment recalls a scene from 'Red Zombies' in which Frankenstein's 'father' Melmoth – having lost a limb in an earlier fight with Klarion the Witchboy, another of his descendants – takes a severed arm from the corpse of a child slave who dies in a mine collapse on Mars.⁴⁰⁵ At the time, Melmoth's appropriation of the limb is played visually for comedic effect, and it prefigures the limbs that will go flying once Frankenstein attacks with sword and pickaxe the rest of the men who 'CHOSE TO PROFIT FROM SLAVERY'.⁴⁰⁶ Here, Frankenstein is an avenging angel who dispatches a whole cadre of capitalists, punishing them for the way they appropriate the labor and literal bodies of workers. Two issues later, however, Frankenstein has become the beneficiary of the same kind of murderous appropriation, and he makes this transition seemingly without recognizing the irony.

Even as he imagines himself to be free from Melmoth's influence, he finds himself repeating the same processes that led to his own creation. That he receives his new arm while working for S.H.A.D.E. only emphasizes his transition toward exploitation and appropriation, because on top of the lexical relation between S.H.A.D.E. and Sheeda, Father Time himself describes the Sheeda as 'NOT *FAIRIES*, NOT *ALIENS*. *THEY'RE US... ONE BILLION YEARS FROM TODAY!*'⁴⁰⁷ In order to sustain themselves 'ON A RANSACKED PLANET EARTH' where 'THE SURGING SEAS HAVE BOILED AWAY' and 'THE CONTINENTS LIE SUFFOCATED BELOW A CRACKLING SHROUD OF VAMPIRIC BLACK FLOWERS THAT THRIVE ON ANCIENT, BLOOD-RED STARSHINE AND TOXIC FLUOROCARBONS', the Sheeda search for infrared emissions indicating that a civilization has reached 'ITS PEAK', at which point 'THERE COMES A TIME OF *HARVEST*', after which the Sheeda 'LEAVE JUST ENOUGH [humans] TO SEED THE PASTURE FOR THE *NEXT HARROWING*'.⁴⁰⁸ Father Time's description of the Sheeda as

⁴⁰³ Morrison, 'Frankenstein in Fairyland'.

⁴⁰⁴ Morrison, 'Frankenstein in Fairyland'.

⁴⁰⁵ Morrison, 'Red Zombies'.

⁴⁰⁶ Morrison, 'Red Zombies'.

⁴⁰⁷ Morrison, 'The Miser's Coat'.

⁴⁰⁸ Morrison, 'Frankenstein in Fairyland'. Morrison, 'The Perfect Knight Returns'.

'us' works on multiple levels, as it applies literally to S.H.A.D.E., whose harvesting of body parts for their own purposes prefigures Melmoth's actions (since time travel technically means that for Melmoth, he steals the arm after Frankenstein gets his new one) as well as humans in general, whose unchecked capitalist expansion is shown to destroy the earth, transforming it into a ransacked shell.

This wider interpretation of 'us' is essential because it links Frankenstein's rejuvenation through violence to not only the humans of the DC Multiverse but the humans of *this* world. Recalling Morrison's oft-stated belief that fictional characters are 'real' and 'alive' makes Morrison's use of Frankenstein itself problematic, because by adopting this character from the past Morrison implicates himself in a kind of time-travelling resource extraction à la the Sheeda, but this time the resource is fiction itself. Furthermore, the reader is made complicit in these very same processes because the act of reading itself reinforces the narrative. Just as the character Ultra Comics is given life by the collective will of the reader, so too is Frankenstein reborn through the violence on the page and the violence implied by his inclusion in the comic at all. With this, *Seven Soldiers of Victory* uses Frankenstein to offer a critical history of genre fiction as it transitions from the Gothic to the weird, suggesting that capitalist industrialization over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries has produced a fictional ecosystem defined by violent appropriation. In this context, the weird is precisely that unsettling truth about the violence inherent to the United States, rendered as kind of revulsion whenever the white male subject is forced to confront his own complicity in that violence.

Case Study 1: The Kept Weird

Frankenstein's first issue in *Seven Soldiers* sees him at a high school in 'northwest', chosen by the titular Uglyhead to be site of a Sheeda infestation because of its statistically high rate of teen suicide.⁴⁰⁹ Frankenstein's emergence in the northwest United States in the contemporary era ties his appearance in *Seven Soldiers* to another facet of the USAmerican weird awaiting consideration by extant scholarship, because 'northwest' in this context brings with it a possible link to Portland, Oregon, site of the 'Keep Portland Weird' slogan and one of at least three cities associated with the phrase. The contemporary scholarly attention given to weird fiction has yet to account for the genre's relationship to other appearances of the weird in USAmerican English, and particularly the emergence of the slogan 'Keep [City] Weird' beginning in the early 21st century.⁴¹⁰ For example, although the slogan is mentioned in the first sentence of the 'Foreweird' to *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, this potential connection is not explored beyond the shared term.⁴¹¹ When the kept weird slogan has been considered in an academic context, no connection to weird fiction is raised.⁴¹²

The 'Keep [City] Weird' slogan first appeared in Austin, Texas sometime prior to July 2000, and was coined by local librarian and professor Red Wassenich.⁴¹³ Wassenich happened upon the phrase after donating to a local radio show; when asked why he decided to donate, he explained that the show 'helps keep Austin weird'.⁴¹⁴ He and his wife began selling bumper stickers with the phrase and donating their proceeds to charity, but almost immediately the phrase turned from a sign of civic contribution to conspicuous consumption as an apparel company copyrighted the

⁴⁰⁹ Morrison, 'Uglyhead'.

⁴¹⁰ Jim Yardley, 'A Slogan Battle Keeps Austin Weird', *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/08/us/austin-journal-a-slogan-battle-keeps-austin-weird.html>, accessed June 30, 2019. Jason Hoppin, 'Keep Santa Cruz Weird': Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?', *The Mercury News*, 2013, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2013/03/16/keep-santa-cruz-weird-has-offbeat-branding-effort-gone-too-far/>, accessed June 30, 2019. Sam Roberts, 'Vera Katz, Mayor Who Oversaw Portland's Flowering, Dies At 84', *The New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/obituaries/vera-katz-mayor-who-oversaw-portlands-flowering-dies-at-84.html>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴¹¹ Michael Moorcock, *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, 1.

⁴¹² Joshua Long, *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁴¹³ Yardley, 'A Slogan Battle Keeps Austin Weird'.

⁴¹⁴ Yardley, 'A Slogan Battle Keeps Austin Weird'.

phrase, leading to a series of ongoing legal disputes.⁴¹⁵ In a post titled “Keep Austin Weird’ – Buy More Stuff’, the original coiners reflected on ‘the boring irony of the entire ‘movement’ being co-opted by corporate interests, as the initial deployment of the phrase was ‘a small attempt to counter Austin’s descent into rampant commercialism and over-development’.⁴¹⁶ The rapid inversion of the slogan’s intent demonstrates the degree to which ‘the weird’ of a city like Austin has become a kind of ‘kept’ weird, as that which might have once been inimical to the normative forces of capitalist commodification is transformed into a countercultural mask for those very same forces. The success of ‘Keep Austin Weird’ as a commercial and civic branding effort soon spread to other cities with extant reputations for counterculture, and within a few years both Santa Cruz, California and Portland, Oregon had their own ‘kept weird’ initiatives.⁴¹⁷ In Santa Cruz, the phrase was popularized by the County Board of Supervisors Chairman Neal Coonerty, and in Portland the initiative was helped along by Vera Katz, who was mayor of the city from 1993 to 2005.⁴¹⁸

In the case of all three cities, the weird is shorthand for counterculture, liberal politics, and the notion of a safe haven, a sociopolitical space kept distinct from its surroundings, which are considered to be more conservative, mainstream, or otherwise not weird. Austin is of course situated within the notoriously conservative state of Texas, Santa Cruz (despite its proximity to San Francisco) neighbors more conservative areas like Carmel, Big Sur, and the San Joaquin valley, and Portland is one of a handful of larger, liberal cities in the greater Pacific Northwest, itself the target of the Northwest Territorial Imperative, a white supremacist plan for the development of an ethnonationalist splinter state. (The perception of these cities as ‘weird’ due to their politics and local culture is the fine point of how the word functions colloquially in USAmerican English, and more recent developments indicate the degree to which the

⁴¹⁵ Yardley, ‘A Slogan Battle Keeps Austin Weird’. Sarah Thurmond, ‘Grudge Match: Keep Austin Weird Trademark Holders vs. Keep Austin Weird Fest Organizers’, *Austin Monthly*, 2017, <https://www.austinmonthly.com/AM/November-2017/Grudge-Match-Keep-Austin-Weird-Trademark-Holders-vs-Keep-Austin-Weird-Fest-Organizers/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴¹⁶ ‘Keep Austin Weird’, *keep austin weird*, 2018, <http://www.KeepAustinWeird.com/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴¹⁷ Hoppin, ‘Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?’. Roberts, ‘Vera Katz, Mayor Who Oversaw Portland’s Flowering, Dies At 84’.

⁴¹⁸ Hoppin, ‘Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?’. Roberts, ‘Vera Katz, Mayor Who Oversaw Portland’s Flowering, Dies At 84’.

term is precisely politicized; the loosely-affiliated artists, satirists, and stand-up comedians associated with 'weird Twitter' is one such example).⁴¹⁹

Crucially, when cities frame 'the weird' as a point of (commercialized) pride, they are simultaneously diminishing the perceived threat posed by countercultures while at the same time commodifying these same countercultures. For example, that Santa Cruz's weird has been fully co-opted by corporate interests was made clear by Kevin Cornell, vice president of a software company who responded to the question of whether Santa Cruz's weird had gone 'too far' by remarking that 'unfortunately, it's attracted the dangerous part of weird as well as the good stuff'.⁴²⁰ For Cornell 'the dangerous part of the weird' means 'beaches closed due to needles' and 'a homeless camper' living on his property, but he imagines that the city can still benefit from 'the good stuff' so long as it enforces semiotic boundaries: 'I don't think weird is the problem if we define it as what we want it to be. It's the definition and the rules you wrap around it [...] We don't have any containment (now), we just run around saying we're weird'.⁴²¹ That 'the weird' might now be defined by 'the rules you wrap around it' emphasizes the degree to which the kept weird represents the capitalist co-option of what might have previously been considered radical or threatening.

In a way the adoption of the 'Keep [City] Weird' slogan performs precisely the opposite action the phrase implies, as the slogan appears at those points when a city's unique character has begun the process of smoothing away any features that might upset the sensitivities of bourgeois liberalism or the friendly capitalism it embraces. Thus, the kept weird is truly kept in the sense of a transactional relationship, wherein ostensibly fringe identities are allowed within the bounds of civic culture so long as they can be made safe, sanitized for normative consumption. At the same time, because of their reputation for the weird (and the political inclinations that implies), these kept weird cities have in recent years become the targets of reactionary violence explicitly tied to popular culture that emerged from the literary weird, suggesting that the kept weird of Austin, Santa Cruz, and Portland might also have some important kinship to this literary history.

⁴¹⁹ John Herrman and Katie Notopoulos, 'Weird Twitter: The Oral History', *Buzzfeed*, 2013, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jwherrman/weird-twitter-the-oral-history>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴²⁰ Hoppin, 'Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?'

⁴²¹ Hoppin, 'Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?'

-

The 1987 film *The Lost Boys* was filmed in Santa Cruz but takes place in the fictional town of Santa Carla, and it served to cement particular features of the town's reputation for the weird. In particular, the film connects Santa Cruz's reputation for counterculture and violence – including a four-year period that saw multiple serial killers operating in the area – to the Dark Age of Comic books.⁴²² In one of its earliest scenes the film repeats the lexical shift from 'weird' to 'strange' seen in the entry on weird, as brothers Michael and Sam arrive in Santa Carla for the first time while a cover of The Doors' 'People Are Strange' plays.⁴²³ From there the connection to weird fiction only grows, as Sam befriends the Frog Brothers, two other teenagers whose parents own the local comic book store, and who offer Sam advice for battling vampires drawn directly from their comics. Scenes at the comic shop were filmed at Santa Cruz's real-life Atlantis Fantasyworld (before the location was destroyed by an earthquake in 1989), and the shop's role in the film became a recurring selling point for the town following its reopening at a new location.⁴²⁴

-

On March 20th, 2018, one day before Mark Anthony Conditt killed himself in the suicide bombing outside Austin, Texas that ended his 19-day spree, the Associated Press published an article asking, 'Can Austin stay weird despite the bombs that keep exploding?'.⁴²⁵ Published even before the bomber's identity was known and his association with an extremist evangelical Christian organization revealed, the article suggested that the weird of Austin might be the very reason for the bombs in the first place:

The blasts have sent a deep chill through a hipster city known for warm weather, live music, barbeque and, above all, not taking itself too seriously. Could all that make Austin, whose

⁴²² Katie Dowd, "Murder capital of the world': The terrifying years when multiple serial killers stalked Santa Cruz', *SFGate*, 2018, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/santa-cruz-kemper-mullin-frazier-murders-12841990.php>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴²³ For example, the role of *Strange Tales* in the evolution of the swamp monster, as seen in the entry for tulpa.

⁴²⁴ 'Atlantis Fantasyworld', *Atlantisfantasyworld.com*, <http://www.atlantisfantasyworld.com/lostboys.htm>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴²⁵ Will Weissert and Jim Vertuno, 'Austin bombings put chill in city known for keeping it light', *AP News*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180320220348/https://apnews.com/19bb53fd62cc454ebff9330fa5f225df/Can-Austin-stay-weird-despite-the-bombs-that-keep-exploding>, accessed June 30, 2019.

population and economy are booming, whose politics are liberal and whose diversity is rich more likely to be targeted?⁴²⁶

Before he died, Conditt – who was not from Austin, but rather the more conservative neighboring town of Pflugerville – recorded a 25-minute video discussing the bombings, but police declined to release the recording and have only given summary statements regarding its contents, with the Austin Police Chief Brian Manley describing the video as ‘the outcry of a very challenged young man talking about challenges in his personal life that led him to this point’.⁴²⁷ Nevertheless, Conditt’s time in an evangelical home-schooling program and the survivalist group Righteous Invasion of Truth (RIOT), as well as his political writings opposing women’s bodily autonomy and homosexuality suggest he was quite clearly aligned with precisely that same reactionary white male ontology that characterizes an aversion to the weird in fiction.⁴²⁸

In 2013 a similar connection between violence and the civic weird appeared in a local newspaper article about Santa Cruz, California, asking if the ‘offbeat branding effort [has] gone too far?’ following the deaths of two police officers, the first in the city’s history.⁴²⁹ While the article suggests that the deaths could be tied to efforts to ‘Keep Santa Cruz Weird’, floating the notion that ‘the city has gone too far nurturing its offbeat reputation, trading order for chaos, and becoming an asylum for the troubled and the wicked’, the identity of the killer belies this easy connection between the weird and violence.⁴³⁰ The killer was Jeremy Goulet, a former United States Marine and US Army helicopter pilot that prior to his double murder had been court-martialed for multiple counts of rape and arrested multiple times for privacy invasion, attempted

⁴²⁶ Weissert & Vertuno, ‘Austin bombings put chill in city known for keeping it light’. Tasneem Nashrulla and Amber Jamieson, ‘Here’s What We Know About The Austin Package Bomber’, *Buzzfeed News*, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tasneemnashrulla/austin-bombing-suspect-mark-anthony-conditt#.mw2ZLpkag>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴²⁷ Manny Fernandez, Stephanie Saul, and Jack Healy, ‘Who Is Mark Conditt, the Suspected Austin Serial Bomber?’, *The New York Times*, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/us/mark-anthony-conditt-austin-bomber.html>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴²⁸ Nashrulla and Jamieson, ‘Here’s What We Know About The Austin Package Bomber’.

⁴²⁹ Hoppin, ‘Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?’. Jessica Pasko and J. M. Brown, ‘Two Santa Cruz police officers, suspect shot and killed’, *The Mercury News*, 2013, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2013/02/26/two-santa-cruz-police-officers-suspect-shot-and-killed/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴³⁰ Hoppin, ‘Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?’.

murder, assault, and drunk and disorderly conduct.⁴³¹ Far from being a member of the ‘freaks, hippies, surf rats, pothead programmers, environmental hardliners, lefties, cultists, druggies, punks and dropouts’ associated with the Santa Cruz weird, Goulet was a stereotypical picture of white male violence, not an aberration but the norm.

Perhaps because Portland is situated in the Pacific Northwest, where white supremacists have a long-stated goal of establishing an ethnonationalist enclave, recent eruptions of violence there have at least led to slightly more nuanced accounts of the relationship of this violence to the city’s particular version of the kept weird. Specifically, Portland-based expert on white supremacy Randy Blazak has reflected on the relationship between white supremacist violence and a city that prides itself on making space for outsiders, suggesting that

The nature of Portland is we foster those at the margins. This is 'Keep Portland Weird' political science version. We like the people who aren't identified with mainstream business as usual life, whether that's in music or fashion or politics. We have a lot of anarchists in the city. We also have a healthy dose of extremist libertarians. There is this celebration of the people at the margins. Sometimes, we get the people we don't like at the fringe, as well as those we do like.⁴³²

However, even Blazak’s more nuanced suggestion that a ‘celebration of the people at the margins’ might allow space for reactionary white male violence to fester is belied somewhat by the degree to which this violence is not at the fringe, but rather (as always) represents the violent maintenance of a particular notion of white USAmerican identity. For example, the far-right group Patriot Prayer is led by Joey Gibson, who in 2018 was the Republican candidate for a state senate seat in neighboring Washington.⁴³³ Gibson seems to have explicitly targeted Portland precisely because of the degree to which it appears weird, writing in advance of a planned rally that

⁴³¹ ‘Timeline: The troubled history of Jeremy Goulet leading to shooting of two Santa Cruz Police officers’, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 2013, <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2013/03/01/timeline-the-troubled-history-of-jeremy-goulet-leading-to-shooting-of-two-santa-cruz-police-officers/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴³² Casey Parks, ‘Oregon White Supremacist Expert Explains the Changing Landscape of Hate Groups’, *The Oregonian*, 2017, https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2017/06/oregon_white_supremacist_exper.html, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴³³ The Grouch, ‘In Portland, Patriot Prayer & Proud Boys Want Immigrants Heads ‘Smashed Into the Concrete;’ Gave Nazi Salutes While Screaming Racial Slurs’, *It's Going Down News*. 2018, <https://itsgoingdown.org/in-portland-patriot-prayer-gave-nazi-salutes-while-screaming-racial-slurs/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

[T]he stench-covered and liberal-occupied streets of Portland will be CLEANSED.
CLEANSED, I say.

The streets will be flowing with freedom, and the air will be filled with patriotism. And fear will have no place in our midst...Recourse will be swift, for those who wish to oppress our freedoms...And the hands of Justice shall smite them with a vengeance heretofore unknown to these ne'er-do-wells. Join me, Patriots...let the memories and struggles of our Founding Fathers not be in vain.⁴³⁴

More recently, Republican members of the Oregon legislature fled the state to prevent Democratic representatives (who hold a supermajority) from securing the quorum necessary to pass a cap-and-trade bill aimed at combatting the climate crisis. When the governor threatened to have police bring the absent senators back (a move in line with Oregon law), Republican senators threatened violence; in one case a senator claimed that 'If you send the State Police to get me, Hell's coming to visit you personally', telling the police directly that they should 'send bachelors and come heavily armed'.⁴³⁵ The governor eventually caved and Democrats in the legislature pulled the bill rather than push the issue.

That this sort of apocalyptic rhetoric might be tied to actual violence can be seen in the case of Jeremy Christian, another Patriot Prayer member who murdered two people after they tried to stop him from assaulting two teenage girls on a Portland train.⁴³⁶ As Kazak notes, the murders committed by Christian were (as in the case of Goulet) not an aberration but rather the expected outcome of ongoing processes:

What is interesting about Jeremy Christian is how many people of color were not surprised. It's a violent manifestation of the things that happen every day in Portland, the gentrification of people of color right out of the city. This is just the latest chapter of Oregon as white man's land. It goes back before the formation of the state. The Oregon Land Donation Act was for white settlers only. There are different manifestations of that, whether it's the Constitution in 1895, or the dominance of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s or the skinheads in the 1980s or gentrification in the 2000s.⁴³⁷

Crucially, the 'gentrification in the 2000s' that Kazak refers to is inextricable from the kept weird of the city, as the popularity of the 'Keep Portland Weird' slogan was a prominent feature of the city's 21st-century 'metamorphosis into a pedestrian-friendly

⁴³⁴ The Grouch, 'In Portland, Patriot Prayer & Proud Boys Want Immigrants Heads 'Smashed Into the Concrete''.

⁴³⁵ Tim Dickinson, 'Runaway Senators, Militias and Koch Money: What the Hell Just Happened in Oregon?', *Rolling Stone*, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/oregon-climate-battle-gop-walkout-violence-852643/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴³⁶ Parks, 'Oregon White Supremacist Expert Explains the Changing Landscape of Hate Groups'. The Grouch, 'In Portland, Patriot Prayer & Proud Boys Want Immigrants Heads 'Smashed Into the Concrete''.

⁴³⁷ Parks, 'Oregon White Supremacist Expert Explains the Changing Landscape of Hate Groups'.

city that embraced mass transit, environmentalism and other facets of progressive urban planning' that (despite their rosy terms) are part and parcel of white liberal gentrification.⁴³⁸

Without psychologizing the phenomenon beyond the scope and skill of this project, one may note that at least some of the apparent contempt that contemporary fascists seem to hold for the kept weird cities of the United States is the degree to which they represent both a seeming betrayal of white heteronormative hegemony – inasmuch as the white liberals of these cities might be called 'traitors' to their race and class by fascists – and a kind of envy at the cultural cachet offered by the label of counterculture. While this project has rejected the term 'alt-right' due to the way it mystifies the actual political affiliations of the people that have self-applied it, it is nevertheless worth recognizing the desire to be recognized as special or 'alternative' inherent in the term. While contemporary fascists are fond of using 'snowflake' as an insult for liberals and leftists – a shortened version of the phrase 'special snowflake' – in practice it is fascists themselves that have demonstrated a sincere desire to stand out, to be recognized, and to be regarded as exceptional. Often when anti-fascists come into open conflict with those marching in the streets of the kept weird cities, they do so as a 'black bloc', whose whole purpose is to obscure the identity and individuality of its members. In this way the experience of the kept weird indicates one of the many inherent contradictions of USAmerican fascism, which demands homogeneity in race and gender while at the same time inculcating in its adherents a constant struggle for an exceptional identity.

⁴³⁸ Roberts, 'Vera Katz, Mayor Who Oversaw Portland's Flowering, Dies At 84'.

Case Study 2: Magical Materialism in USAmerican Politics

CNBC MODERATOR JOHN HARWOOD: Mr. Trump, you've done very well in this campaign so far by promising to build a wall and make another country pay for it.

DONALD TRUMP: Right.

HARWOOD: Send 11 million people out of the country. Cut taxes \$10 trillion without increasing the deficit.

TRUMP: Right.

HARWOOD: And make Americans better off because your greatness would replace the stupidity and incompetence of others.

TRUMP: That's right.

HARWOOD: Let's be honest. [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER] Is this a comic book version of a presidential campaign?⁴³⁹

Although Trump denied that his was a comic book campaign, his campaign and subsequent administration are the apotheosis of the Twisted Age, and embody USAmerican fascism's trolling-as-praxis, visible in everything from the public performance of the presidency to the superhero symbolism adopted by agents of the state. Trump is easy to meme for the same reasons he seems like a comic book character, and even before 2016 Trump had appeared in comic books, with Trump Tower first appearing in a 1988 issue of *Iron Man*; a comic book version of Trump himself was later chastised in a 2009 issue of *New Avengers*, after his limousine blocks an ambulance.⁴⁴⁰ (That Trump Tower is a source of admiration in 1988 but Trump himself is portrayed negatively two decades later perhaps speaks to both the changing reception of the man himself and the changing sensibilities of comic books over the ages.) Closer to the election, in March of 2016 Damien Walter noted in *The Guardian* the parallels between Trump and the presidential candidates of Warren Ellis' sixty-issue comic book series *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002).⁴⁴¹ Walter compared Trump to 'The Beast,' the sitting president of Ellis' dystopian satire, 'a physically imposing bully and "strongman" leader who appeals to the authoritarian streak in those he rules over'.⁴⁴² Even more than The Beast, however, Trump actually resembles *Transmetropolitan's* far right candidate, Bob Heller, whose campaign rallies feature a

⁴³⁹ CNBC *Republican Primary Debate*, video (Boulder, CO: CNBC, 2015).

⁴⁴⁰ David Michelinie and Bob Layton (w), Mark Bright (p), Bob Layton (i), Nelson Yomtov (c), Janice Chiang (l), 'Stark Wars, Chapter III: The Last Mandroid', *Iron Man*, vol. 1, #227, (New York: Marvel Comics, February 1988). Brian Michael Bendis (w), Billy Tan and Michael Gaydos (p), Matt Banning and Michael Gaydos (i), Justin Ponsor (c), Richard Starkings and Albert Deschesne (l), 'Secret Invasion (Part 8)', *New Avengers* #47 (New York: DC Comics, January 2009).

⁴⁴¹ Damien Walter, 'Transmetropolitan: The 90s Comic That's Bang Up-To-Date on Donald Trump', *The Guardian*, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/mar/07/transpolitan-90s-comic-donald-trump-transmetropolitan-warren-ellis>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁴² Walter, 'Transmetropolitan'.

‘mass of hating, hard-on voices degenerate[ing] into a weird animal mix,’ and whose speeches are not far off from Trump’s own bombast.⁴⁴³ In speech and even appearance, the villains of Ellis’ bleak future seem to have raged off the comic page and into the real world, as the images of Heller’s campaign rallies, complete with attendees wearing Nazi inspired fashion, is eerily similar to the red-faced fans that fill arenas to see Trump speak.⁴⁴⁴

Trump’s own discussions of ‘strength’ are uncomfortably reminiscent of Ellis’ Heller. Where Trump exclaims that ‘People want strength [...] We’re going to be so vigilant. We’re going to be so careful. We’re going to be so tough and so mean and so nasty,’ Heller rallies his base with equally authoritarian rhetoric:

YOU KNOW IT. YOU’RE AMERICANS. YOU KNOW NATURE CAN’T STAND THE JOINING OF THE STRONG AND THE WEAK. NATURE DOESN’T DESIRE IT. AND AMERICANS DON’T DESIRE ANYTHING UNNATURAL. NOT REAL AMERICANS. AND AMERICAN IS FOR AMERICANS.⁴⁴⁵

It should be no wonder that in the 2016 election, the best predictive factor indicating support for Trump was authoritarian attitudes and racial anxiety.⁴⁴⁶

Transmetropolitan also includes a close enough analogy to his 2016 opponent, Hillary Clinton, though as Walter notes, this analogy – nicknamed ‘The Smiler’ – is more directly tied to former President Bill Clinton and his British counterpart, Tony Blair. Walter describes The Smiler as ‘all of our worst fears about our political elite,’ and Ellis gives him phrases lifted from Blair’s own campaign and analogous to President Clinton’s ‘triangulation’: ‘A THIRD WAY. TAKING THE BEST FROM CONSERVATISM AND LIBERALS’.⁴⁴⁷ The Smiler represents an empty vessel of neoliberalism, referring to the voting masses as ‘the new scum’ and assassinating his own political director in order to drum up sympathy votes.⁴⁴⁸ The Smiler embodies the

⁴⁴³ Warren Ellis (w), Darick Robertson (p), Rodney Ramos (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Clem Robins (l), ‘Year of the Bastard, Part 3: Smile’, *Transmetropolitan*, #15 (New York: DC Comics, November [September] 1998).

⁴⁴⁴ Ellis, ‘Year of the Bastard, Part 3: Smile’. AP Images, *Supporters Cheer Prior To An Address by Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump During a Campaign Stop at The Tsongas Center in Lowell, Mass.*, 2016, <http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/GOP-2016-Trump/be8dbf2850d04213995ad5d254704dfc/54/0>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁴⁵ Ben Schreckinger, ‘Trump Pumps Siege Mentality in Iowa’, *POLITICO*, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/trump-iowa-siege-mentality-216455>, accessed June 30, 2019. Ellis, ‘Year of the Bastard, Part 3: Smile’.

⁴⁴⁶ Matthew MacWilliams, ‘The One Weird Trait That Predicts Whether You’re a Trump Supporter’, *POLITICO Magazine*, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-2016-authoritarian-213533>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁴⁷ Walter, ‘Transmetropolitan’. Ellis, ‘Year of the Bastard, Part 3: Smile’.

⁴⁴⁸ Ellis, ‘Year of the Bastard, Part 3: Smile’.

empty cynicism of Blair's 'third way' and Clinton's 'triangulation,' and his sociopathic rise makes him the perfect neo-liberal homunculus, a vessel for capitalism so perfect that if he did not already exist, the invisible hand of the market would have created him.⁴⁴⁹

Transmetropolitan is only one obvious link between contemporary American politics and the world of comic books, as American presidents and politicians have been appearing alongside superheroes and villains practically since the medium's inception. As mentioned earlier, Trump himself has appeared in comic books, as befitting his public persona as a vaudevillian heel, and in April of 2016 he was reimagined as an alternate-universe villain named M.O.D.A.A.K. (Mental Organism Designed As America's King), a characterization that took care to mock his well-documented obsession with proving the reasonable size of his hands.⁴⁵⁰ Following the election, Trump became the basis for a range of comic books, though most from publishers other than Marvel and DC. In particular, the independent publisher Antarctic Press has been responsible for a number of Trump-themed comics, a fact not missed by critics of the company's decision (since reversed) to publish the Comicsgate-affiliated work *Jawbreaker*.

Trump's obsession with his hands stems from *Spy* magazine, where then-editor (and current editor of *Vanity Fair*) Graydon Carter took to calling him a 'short-fingered vulgarian'.⁴⁵¹ According to Carter:

That was more than a quarter of a century ago. To this day, I receive the occasional envelope from Trump. There is always a photo of him—generally a tear sheet from a magazine. On all of them he has circled his hand in gold Sharpie in a valiant effort to highlight the length of his fingers.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ More recently, the Democratic primary candidate and mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Pete Buttigieg has been compared to The Smiler more than once, both due to his physical appearance and his professional biography, which includes time in US Naval intelligence and a stint at the notorious public relations consulting firm McKinsey & Company. Esther Wang, 'Pete Buttigieg', *Jezebel*, 2019, <https://theslot.jezebel.com/i-spent-a-week-interrogating-my-dislike-of-pete-buttigi-1835247553>, accessed June 30, 2019. Al Lewis, 'Is Global Consulting Giant Mckinsey Evil?', *Marketwatch*, 2013, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/is-global-consulting-giant-mckinsey-evil-2013-09-25>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁵⁰ A 'heel', in wrestling terms, refers to a villainous character the audience is supposed to 'love to hate'. The heel is opposed to the 'face', the handsome, upstanding hero of the melodrama. Jason Latour (w), Chris Visions (i), Jim Campbell (c), Clayton Cowles (l), 'Captain America', *Spider-Gwen Annual*, #1, (New York: Marvel Comics, August [June] 2016).

⁴⁵¹ Graydon Carter, 'Steel Traps and Short Fingers', *Vanity Fair*, 2015, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/10/graydon-carter-donald-trump>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁵² Carter, 'Steel Traps and Short Fingers'.

Trump continued this practice at least until at 2015, when his fingers eventually became the subject of ridicule by his primary opponents. He seemed to confirm that his obsession was a result of his fallacious belief that hand size corresponds to penis size when he said (in reference to Marco Rubio, and while lying about past mockery of his hands):

And as far as -- and I have to say this, I have to say this. He hit my hands. Nobody has ever hit my hands. I have never heard of this. Look at those hands. Are they small hands? And he referred to my hands, if they are small, something else must be small. I guarantee you there is no problem. I guarantee.⁴⁵³

Trump's obsession with his image and perceived slights against it is indicative of the degree to which that image, and indeed, seemingly his own self-image, is a piece of fiction perhaps more divergent from reality than most. Trump's particular myth of himself is born in large part by the book *The Art of the Deal*, and the degree to which he considers himself a 'self-made man' of the business world helps explain his contemporary function as the avatar of USAmerican conservative ideology, a tulpa made entirely of bullshit. Tony Schwartz, the ghost-writer of *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, has recently expressed deep regret for his role in creating the public image of Trump as a successful, 'straight-talking' businessman, suggesting that Trump has so fully adopted the fictional persona created for the book that he now believes he wrote it himself.⁴⁵⁴

-

While Trump is easy enough to mock and seems to represent a world where categories of fact and fiction have been erased in favor of the Twisted Age's emphasis on performance and the power of stories (regardless of their factual accuracy), the absurdity of his presidential persona is actually just the logical evolution of a trend that was always part of presidential politicking but which saw an important shift during the 2008 campaign. In 'The Theory of Infantile Citizenship,' Lauren Berlant examines the 'pilgrimage to Washington' in American media, explaining her theory with an episode of the cartoon sitcom *The Simpsons* titled 'Mr Lisa Goes to Washington' (in reference

⁴⁵³ 'The Fox News GOP Debate Transcript, Annotated', *Washington Post*, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/03/the-fox-news-gop-debate-transcript-annotated/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁵⁴ Jane Mayer, 'Donald Trump's Ghostwriter Tells All', *The New Yorker*, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/25/donald-trumps-ghostwriter-tells-all>, accessed June 30, 2019.

to another 'pilgrimage to Washington' narrative, the Jimmy Stewart film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*). Berlant argues that 'to live fully both the ordinariness and the sublimity of national identity, one must be capable not just of imagining, but of managing being American,' and she uses 'Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington' to demonstrate how this 'managing being American' must vacillate between an infantile citizenship and a 'cynical practical citizenship' in an attempt to transcend both.⁴⁵⁵

For Berlant, the infantile citizen represents both the backbone of national identity and the myth that threatens to undermine this identity. On the one hand, the naïve, infantile faith in 'the state's commitment to representing the best interests of ordinary people [...] vitalizes a person's patriotic and practical attachment to the nation and to other citizens,' but at the same time, it is precisely this naïve faith that 'citizen adults have learned to "forget" [...] in order to be politically happy and economically functional'.⁴⁵⁶ Infantile citizenship cannot survive the pilgrimage to Washington, because it is here that the symbolic order of the United States, embodied by its monuments, seals, colors, and museums, gives way to the harsh reality of the state itself and the degree to which it abandons 'the best interests of ordinary people'.

Berlant argues that 'the *ur*-infantile citizen narrative is [...] the presidential autobiography,' whose 'most vital instantiation [...] appears cinematically every four years at political nominating conventions, where a candidate establishes the value of his "character"'.⁴⁵⁷ The nominating convention itself has become a less central point in this process, because in the 21st century the nomination has likely already been secured by the time the convention comes around. However, the figure of the infantile presidential protagonist of history remains central to USAmerican politics, and since 2008 has been deeply tied to superheroic imagery, as the classical symbols of the United States have been increasingly supplanted by superheroes and their symbols. In this light, the Twisted Age of USAmerican comic books and politics is one and the same, defined by a kind of magical materialism that transmutes infantile glurge into political will.

⁴⁵⁵ Lauren Gail Berlant, 'The Theory of Infantile Citizenship', *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 25, 48.

⁴⁵⁶ Berlant, 'The Theory of Infantile Citizenship', 28-29.

⁴⁵⁷ Berlant, 'The Theory of Infantile Citizenship', 37.

Antarctic Press did not start its political coverage with titles like *Tremendous Trump: A Man-Child Covfefe* or *Trump vs. Time Lincoln*, and the glut of political comics that accompanied the 2016 election would not have appeared in this form without the precedent set eight years earlier. In 2008, Antarctic Press published comic book biographies of McCain and Obama (with the latter leaning heavily on racist tropes associated with Obama's family history and childhood). More prominently, that same year also saw *DC Universe Decisions*, a 2008 mini-series written by Bill Willingham and Judd Winick, as well as the first appearance of Calvin Ellis, the Superman of Earth-23 and president of that universe's United States; the character was explicitly based on Obama.⁴⁵⁸

In *DC Universe Decisions*, the Justice League of America attempt to protect four presidential nominees from an assassin with the ability to transfer his consciousness between unsuspecting members of the public. Although each of the political candidates has obvious Earth-1218 analogues in terms of appearance and ostensible political party alignment, the comic is notable for the absence of an Obama doppelganger. Instead his part in the campaign is played by Martin Suarez, whose appearance and politics is closest to Arizona Congressman Raul Grijalva or Illinois politician Jesus 'Chuy' Garcia, as both are known for their prominent moustaches, the only notable feature of Obama's replacement in *DC Universe Decisions*.⁴⁵⁹ The first candidate introduced, Kate McClellan, is also the one most closely resembling a real political figure, as she is almost a direct caricature of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.⁴⁶⁰ Aside from the visual similarity, however, the comic does not reveal further connections between McClellan and Rice, possibly because it would be difficult to imagine on what platform Rice (or her analogue) might have been able to run for the Republican nomination.

While Rice has frequently been floated as a potential Republican candidate since her time in the Bush administration, the electoral realities of the Republican

⁴⁵⁸ Judd Winick and Bill Willingham (w), Howard Porter (p), Wayne Faucher (i), Alex Bleyaert (c), Travis Lanham (l), *DC Universe Decisions* (New York: DC Comics, December, 2008).

⁴⁵⁹ Both politicians are included here, because although Suarez bears a greater physical resemblance to Garcia, at the time of the comic book's publication Garcia was not widely known outside Illinois, while Grijalva had a national profile. It was not until Garcia challenged Rahm Emmanuel, President Obama's former chief of staff, for the mayorship of Chicago that the media brought him to the attention of the wider public. Willingham and Winick, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

⁴⁶⁰ Willingham and Winick, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

Party make it unlikely that a black woman might win the nomination of a party now almost exclusively devoted to white supremacy. The Republican Party is often (accurately) characterized as the party of old white men, and their 2008 offerings maintained this trend; of the twelve individuals to offer their names for the nomination, eleven were white men. The only outlier was Alan Keyes, a black man who was the first in the Republican Party's sequence of token black candidates (followed by Herman Cain in 2012 and Ben Carson in 2016). On the Democratic side, of the 10 candidates running, eight were white men, but the frontrunners were Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, a white woman and black man. It may on the surface appear unfair to label Keyes a 'token' minority while suggesting that Clinton and Obama were not, but in the context of the Republican Party's history and policies, it is clear that their role was to simultaneously shield the party from accusations of systemic or outright racism while reinforcing the fallacious notion that state welfare primarily supports people of color, and furthermore, that the Democratic Party supports welfare in order to simultaneously court black voters and keep them dependent on the state. This notion was popularized by Reagan's deployment of the 'welfare queen' trope, and black Republicans frequently implore people of color to 'leave the Democratic plantation' (although the use of 'plantation' in political discourse is not limited to Republicans).⁴⁶¹ More recently, fascist apologist Candace Owens has spearheaded a 'Blexit' campaign intended to draw black voters away from the Democratic party, recapitulating the basic ideas of 'Democratic plantation' rhetoric in contemporary discourse.⁴⁶²

Following McClellan's Condoleezza Rice analogue, the next candidate to appear in *DC Universe Decisions* is the Democrat Davis Brewster, and while his actual political positions are not outlined, he is variously described as 'A RADICAL LEFTWING NUT' with 'CONTROVERSIAL STANDS ON MANY ISSUES,' and 'THE REAL GREEN CANDIDATE' whose 'PROGRAMS WILL LIFT MILLIONS OUT OF POVERTY AND DESPAIR'.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ Kevin Williamson, 'The Plantation Theory', *National Review*, 2013, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/354265/plantation-theory-kevin-d-williamson>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁶² Dana Milbank, 'Candace Owens's Presence Turned A Serious Inquiry into A Farce', *The Washington Post*, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/candace-owenss-presence-turned-a-serious-inquiry-into-a-farce/2019/04/09/8e2976be-5b09-11e9-a00e-050dc7b82693_story.html, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁶³ Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

Interestingly, of the four candidates Brewster is the only one portrayed in a less-than-noble light, as the candidate himself comes off as shallow and opportunistic in his behind-the-scenes conversations, spending millions of dollars on 'OVERPRICED GUNSLINGERS' and embracing the support of the superhero Green Arrow simply because it polls better.⁴⁶⁴ For these reasons, it seems likely that Brewster is intended as a caricature of John Edwards, the famously-preening former Senator whose own campaign for the 2008 Democratic nomination was undercut when it was revealed he had spent \$800 of campaign funds on two haircuts for himself, even before tabloid reporting uncovered further campaign funds used to pay a videographer with whom he had been having an affair, all while his wife was dying of cancer.⁴⁶⁵ Brewster is contrasted with Martin Suarez, 'THE MORE MODERATE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE,' who, like McClellan, is not shown to hold any particular political convictions aside from what might be presumed due to his party affiliation.⁴⁶⁶

In contrast, John McCain's comic book analogue, Republican Bob Ridgeway, delivers an extended monologue to an enraptured Wonder Woman as he attempts to convince the superhero to endorse his campaign. He supports 'A STRONG MILITARY THAT FIGHTS FOR FREEDOM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD,' and, in contrast to the 'LEFT-WING NUT' Brewster, is described as having 'A STRONG MORAL COMPASS AND A WILLINGNESS TO MAKE THE HARD DECISIONS'.⁴⁶⁷ These characterizations are the euphemisms of choice for the imperial project of neo-conservatism, particularly as 'the hard decisions' almost universally mean the decision to kill an ethnic or religious minority in a country far from the United States, as seen in the entry on glurge.

Although as a non-citizen and diplomatic envoy of the Amazons Wonder Woman cannot formally endorse anyone, she agrees to state that she and Ridgeway 'share values' after he gives a passionate defense of US imperialism via precisely the same kind of glurge John Kelly used in 2010 to promote his own fascist valuation of soldiers above all others:

WE AREN'T A NATION OF WARRIORS, FIRST AND FOREMOST – AND NEVER BY CHOICE. WE'RE FARMERS AND SHOP OWNERS AND DESIGNERS AND TRUCK DRIVERS AND EVERYTHING ELSE.

⁴⁶⁴ Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

⁴⁶⁵ Christopher Beam, 'What Kind of Haircut Did John Edwards Get for \$400?', *Slate*, 2007, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2007/04/the_400_haircut.html, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁶⁶ Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

⁴⁶⁷ Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

BUT WE STEP UP WHEN WE'RE CALLED TO DUTY. ALWAYS. NO MATTER HOW SOFT WE MAY SEEM AT TIMES. THAT'S THE AMERICA YOU SHOULD KNOW AND LOVE LIKE I DO, HESITANT TO GO TO WAR, BUT A TERRIBLE ADVERSARY AND A STEADFAST ALLY ONCE WE DO. AND THEN ALWAYS COMPASSIONATE TO THOSE WE DEFEAT.⁴⁶⁸

McCain's own career belies Ridgeway's lecture, as McCain did in fact volunteer for the Vietnam War and was a vocal supporter of every potential military engagement that arose during his time in the United States Senate; up to his death in 2018 he even refused to call Vietnamese people anything but 'gook'.⁴⁶⁹

While Obama did not appear in *DC Universe Decisions*, his stated comic book fandom coupled with an iconic image of the then-Senator posing in front of a Superman statue located in Metropolis, Illinois, lent themselves to inclusion in comics.⁴⁷⁰ In the final issue of his 2008 miniseries *Final Crisis*, Grant Morrison introduced an alternate-universe version of Superman modelled on the newly-elected Barack Obama, Calvin Ellis. By then Obama had already been outed as a comic book fan, revealing that he collected Spider-Man and Conan the Barbarian comics, and had already appeared in an issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man* by the time *Final Crisis #7* was published.⁴⁷¹ *Final Crisis #7* was published on January 28th, eight days after his inauguration, and only weeks after the incoming President appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man #583*, alongside Senator John McCain and soon-to-be Vice President Joe Biden.

At first glance Morrison's President Superman might seem to be a counterpoint to Berlant's theory, as Ellis has seemingly managed to integrate not only his identity as a citizen, but also as an alien, into his performance as part of the Washingtonian drama. However, Ellis' world is not simply an analogue of the 'main' DC universe with a black president, because the entire Justice League has had their skin changed from black to white, suggesting that Earth-23 is one in which black people are somehow not

⁴⁶⁸ Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

⁴⁶⁹ C.W Nevius et al, 'McCain Criticized For Slur / He Says He'll Keep Using Term For Ex-Captors In Vietnam', *SFGate*, 2000, <http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/McCain-Criticized-for-Slur-He-says-he-ll-keep-3304741.php>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁷⁰ Office of Senator Barack Obama, *Senator Barack Obama Poses In Front Of Superman Statue In Metropolis, Illinois*, 2006, <http://www.seattlepi.com/lifestyle/slideshow/Kitchy-statues-7354/photo-808642.php>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁷¹ Jon Swaine, 'Barack Obama: The 50 Facts You Might Not Know', *The Telegraph*, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/3401168/Barack-Obama-The-50-facts-you-might-not-know.html>, accessed June 30, 2019.

a minority in the United States. Thus, despite the glurgy implication that Ellis' presidency (and role as Superman) represents some kind of meaningful progress for black USAmericans, the remarkable part of President Superman is that Superman is president, not that he is black. This is particularly remarkable because Morrison's decision to make Superman president directly contradicts the stated ideals of the white, 'regular' Superman from *DC Universe Decisions*.

In *DC Universe Decisions*, the 'main' Superman speaks to the press after apprehending the villain, intending to answer the series' running question of who Superman votes for. His speech neatly demonstrates what comics scholar Sean Carney means when he says that superheroes 'serve humanity while dehumanizing humanity through that service':

I DO HAVE A CHOICE. THERE IS *ONE* AMONG THESE FOUR FINE ELECTED OFFICIALS WHO I BELIEVE WILL *BEST* LEAD THIS NATION. BUT IT WOULD BE *UNCONSCIOUS* FOR ME TO SHARE THAT WITH YOU. [...] FOR US TO INVOLVE OURSELVES IN THIS ELECTION – IN ANY ELECTION – BETRAYS *YOU* WHOM WE HAVE DEDICATED OURSELVES TO SERVE AND PROTECT. THERE IS AN UNSPOKEN COVENANT BETWEEN YOU AND US. YOU ALLOW US TO SERVE OUTSIDE THE LAWS OF ANY LAND. OUR ACTIONS ARE GOVERNED BY *NO ONE*. [...] YOU UNDERSTAND, AND HAVE ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD, THAT OUR MISSION IS TO PROTECT NOT ONLY THIS *NATION* BUT THIS *WORLD*... AND ALL THE WORLDS BEYOND THE STARS. WE ANSWER TO NO ONE... THEREFORE... *WE DO NOT GOVERN*. WE ARE HEROES. AND WE SERVE. THE PRIVILEGE OF CHOOSING WHO WILL LEAD YOU IS, I BELIEVE, A SACRED RIGHT. ONE THAT SHOULD FOREVER REMAIN UNMOLESTED.⁴⁷²

The implications of the 'unspoken covenant' that Superman outlines neatly undermines the sanctimony with which he discusses the electoral system, because the fact that humanity is 'served' by near-omnipotent figures like Superman reveals the degree to which the choice offered by an election is entirely constrained by forces above and beyond that election. Superman's 'objectivity' simultaneously legitimizes political discourse while demonstrating the impossibility of political praxis, in the same way that superheroes more generally (according to Carney's analysis) undermine the imagined coherence of human subjectivity while offering an other against which this subjectivity might be reified.

While Superman reveals the pitiful fantasy of the American electoral system in a world governed by forces well beyond the scope of that system, in the final pages of *DC Universe Decisions*, Clark Kent returns to the naïve faith of the infantile citizen.

⁴⁷² Carney, 'The Function of The Superhero at the Present Time'. Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

Explaining his decision not to tell his wife, Lois Lane, who he is voting for, he says that 'WHEN I WALK IN THERE, I WALK IN ALONE. AS *CLARK KENT*. AS A VOTER. ONE CITIZEN DOING HIS DUTY. I'M AN IMMIGRANT. THIS IS MY ADOPTED PLANET. AND *THIS* IS MY ADOPTED LAND. I DON'T LIKE TO MAKE SPORT OF IT'.⁴⁷³ While his sanctimony remains, the reason given here for his secrecy is simpler, and is based on the nearly-religious faith of the infantile citizen in the state. Here, Superman's dual identity allows him to simultaneously maintain his infantile citizenship as Clark Kent while recognizing the cynical political reality of voting in a world with superheroes, and in doing so, he displaces the anxiety and despair one might otherwise feel in the face of ideology's unceasing pressure.

The association of presidents (and other political figures) with superheroes and other pop culture icons has increasingly become a way for USAmerican citizens to participate in electoral politics as 'serious' actors without being forced to confront the anti-democratic structures that actually determine political outcomes in the United States. The association of superheroes – as the product of a collective imagination – with elected presidents may seem to demonstrate a form of hyperstitious synergy, as both apparently reflect the power of collective belief, but normalizing the association of elected officials with superheroes has only made it easier to associate every feature of the state with such heroes, including those people and institutions that work to undermine democracy at every turn. This dangerous tendency is the subject of the final case study, but one may note here Obama's own participation in this process beyond his comic book appearances when he took part in the Batkid affair, in which the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Department of Homeland Security staged an elaborate performance of militarized police power.⁴⁷⁴ While the event was ostensibly an opportunity for five-year-old Miles Scott to live out his dream of being a superhero, in reality it was a massive opportunity for the San Francisco police and Department of Homeland Security to orchestrate the shut-down of huge swaths of the city with the kind of security theater that usually only accompanies a terrorist attack. The

⁴⁷³ Winick & Willingham, *DC Universe: Decisions*.

⁴⁷⁴ 'Batkid' Takes on Joker, Penguin and Riddler in San Francisco', *CBS*, 2013, <https://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2013/11/15/san-francisco-turning-into-gotham-city-for-batkid-make-a-wish-event/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

lighthearted display of support for a cancer-stricken child was just a bit of media-friendly glurge covering up the dystopian reality of contemporary life under the USAmerican empire.

Case Study 3: The Real Heroes, or, ACAB

To begin, the 1979 Iranian Revolution that overthrew the US-backed Shah resulted in the disastrous Operation Eagle Claw (in which the US Army Delta Force failed to rescue US American hostages while losing multiple helicopters and eight soldiers), the fallout from which eventually led to the creation of the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in 1987, a streamlining of the US military's various special operations that today have become one of the primary methods of US imperialism. The rise of the airport thriller during this same period is directly tied to the evolution of the US military and intelligence services, as an increasing focus on individual 'special operators' offered ample grist for fictionalized accounts of heroic violence. The dramatic expansion of these special forces as part of the War on Terror means that their number 'has more than doubled since 9/11, from 33,000 to 70,000', leading to a vibrant mercenary industry made up of former US military and sanctioned by the United States and its intelligence agencies.⁴⁷⁵ The celebration of these special forces in US American media has become an important feature of fascist aesthetics in the United States, as the beards and 'tacticool' appearance associated with such actors has been adopted by police, militias and street gangs such as the Proud Boys or Oath Keepers, and '[e]ven that most American of fictional G.I.s, the idealistic Steve Rogers, [who] returns from a depressive self-exile in *Avengers: Infinity War* with a sexy beard that says 'Captain America has seen some shit.'⁴⁷⁶

The practice of calling the police 'pigs' seemed to have originated in the 19th century, and its continued use today represents an important element of radical praxis, in the same way that class traitors who work while others are on strike should be called 'scabs'.⁴⁷⁷ Insulting the agents of racist, patriarchal violence is always a good thing, and the only potentially problematic feature of using 'pig' to mean 'police' is that it is an insult to pigs, which demonstrate a degree of self-awareness and

⁴⁷⁵ Aram Roston, 'A Middle East Monarchy Hired American Ex-Soldiers to Kill Its Political Enemies. This Could Be the Future Of War', *Buzzfeed*, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/aramroston/mercenaries-assassination-us-yemen-uae-spear-golan-dahlan>, Accessed June 29, 2019.

⁴⁷⁶ Bonenberger and Weinstein, 'The Sum of All Beards'.

⁴⁷⁷ One should note that in the strictest sense the police are not themselves class traitors, because they do not belong to the working class, despite the vast power of their 'unions' in the United States; instead, these unions are fascist fraternities that serve the police only to the extent that they are the embodiment of state violence, and not in their capacity as laborers.

compassion for other sentient beings uncommon to any human police. That the police deserve no respect is precisely why the state (and by extension, hegemonic culture) has such a vested interest in demanding respect via careful control over public discourse.

In this context, the 9/11 attacks were a wonderful opportunity for the acceleration of state violence in discourse and action, as they helped to popularize a discursive weapon that has proved extremely effective in the years to follow, namely, the term ‘first responder’. The term has existed in US American discourse since at least the 1970s as a result of the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, which was created following a 1966 National Academy of Sciences study regarding ‘the neglected epidemic of accidental injury’ in the United States.⁴⁷⁸ Initially, the term only referred to medical technicians (including firefighters), but over time the definition expanded to include police who – while often technically being one of the first groups to respond to an incident – serve an exactly opposite role to that of medical professionals. The flattening effect of ‘first responders’ presents the (frequently racist) violence *inherent* to the police as a kind of anti-violence. That the police sometimes provide medical care is irrelevant, because such care is incidental; abolishing the police would not abolish EMTs.

The absurdity of the ‘first responders’ conflation becomes apparent when those responders are, for example, a SWAT team that has been called as part of an attempted murder plot. The practice of ‘swatting’ involves making a false emergency call regarding an intended target (often claiming the target is armed or has taken hostages), with the intention of initiating an armed police response that will at the very least traumatize the victim and in many cases will result in the police executing someone based on the false information. When such an attempt was made against David Hogg, a well-known survivor of the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting, the *Washington Examiner* reported that ‘first responders’ had been called, when in fact those ‘first responders’ were a heavily armed SWAT team that stormed his house looking for someone with a weapon.⁴⁷⁹ *The Washington Examiner’s*

⁴⁷⁸ ‘The History of The National Registry And EMS In The United States’, *National Registry Of EMTs*, 2019, <https://www.nremt.org/rwd/public/document/history>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁷⁹ Patrick Monahan, Twitter Post, June 5th, 2018, 9:55 AM, <https://twitter.com/pattymo/status/1004043973973901312>, accessed June 26, 2019.

'conservative' self-identification undoubtedly explains its particular choice of phrase, but such a rhetorical move is only possible in an environment that privileges a discursive shielding of police violence.⁴⁸⁰

Understanding the contemporary cultural position held by the police and military in the United States means realizing that 9/11 should primarily be seen as a wildly successful multimedia campaign whose roll-out was executed by al-Qaeda but was subsequently renewed for multiple seasons by the United States government. The post-9/11 glurge about politicians, police, and the military represents one of the key features of this ongoing terror campaign by the United States, and much of it began with the earliest comic book reactions to the attacks. In *Supergods* Morrison highlights the apparent absurdity of some of these reactions when he writes that

The disorientation of the time was captured by a single giddy moment wherein Marvel's ultimate evil dictator cum terrorist supervillain Doctor Doom arrived on the scene at Ground Zero only to be moved to tears by the devastation. This was the 'World's Greatest Super-Villain' who had himself attacked New York on numerous occasions. Doctor Doom was exactly the sort of bastard who would have armed al-Qaeda with death rays and killer robots if he thought for one second it would piss off the hated Reed Richards and the rest of his mortal enemies in the Fantastic Four, but here he was sobbing with the best of them.⁴⁸¹

'Ground Zero' became the site of frequent jingoistic performances, with perhaps the most notable being President Bush's speech on September 14th, 2001, where he stood surrounded by firefighters, builders, and other rescue workers while promising revenge, that 'the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon'.⁴⁸² Considering the extent of Bush's later war crimes, Dr. Doom's appearance is no more absurd than Bush's own expression of grief at the blowback for USAmerica's decades of imperialism abroad.

As noted earlier, George W. Bush was both the source of and star in a large amount of glurge post-9/11, as his fondness for military intervention and play-acting meant that he was in frequent proximity to what would eventually come to be known as 'the real heroes' in any number of e-mails, headlines, and social media posts. This

⁴⁸⁰ See also the phrase 'officer involved shooting', a term meant to mystify cases in which the police have shot somebody; the term first became popular in the 1980s. Alex Pareene, 'Stop Saying 'Officer-Involved Shootings'', *The Dish*, 2014, <http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/09/02/stop-saying-officer-involved-shootings/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁸¹ Morrison, *Supergods*, 347.

⁴⁸² George W. Bush, 'George W. Bush at Ground Zero - September 14, 2001', *Youtube*, 2001, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4BkzuV0LYE>, accessed June 30, 2019.

notion, that the functionally heterogeneous group of people known as ‘first responders’ represent the best and most noble of US American society, was also the ideological coda of Mark Millar’s 2006-2007 comic *Civil War*. In the final issue of the series, as Captain America fights Iron Man due to the latter’s participation in a program of superhuman registration and incarceration, the former soldier is tackled by a multicultural group of ‘first responders’.⁴⁸³ Finding himself on the wrong side of a conflict with the avatars of post-9/11 US American goodness, Captain America gives up.

-

On April 28th, 2017 (aka ‘National Superhero Day’, a celebration initiated by Marvel Comics in 1995) the official Twitter account for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) tweeted photos of its agents with the statement ‘Superheroes don’t always wear capes. Happy #NationalSuperHeroDay to the men & women of ICE who protect and serve our nation everyday’.⁴⁸⁴ The online response to the suggestion that secret police and concentration camp guards might be ‘superheroes’ was predictably contemptuous, but the sentiment expressed by ICE was by no means new. That the organization’s social media team felt comfortable making such a statement is a testament to how closely the figure of the superhero has come to be associated with the police and military, an association that finds its purest and cruelest expression in the publicized superhero funeral for dead children.

-

The image of a dead child is a popular symbol in glurge of all sorts and is frequently held up as ‘powerful’ in misguided attempts to shame those with actual power into halting their own violent behavior. There is little evidence to suggest this is an actually effective rhetorical strategy, and the recent refugee crises in Europe and the Americas are a testament to this. The widespread publication of a photo depicting the drowned corpse of three-year-old Alan Kurdi on a Turkish beach failed to make Europe reevaluate its racist immigration laws or the inherent violence of its borders, just as the recent publication of a photo depicting the drowned corpses of a father and daughter on the banks of the Rio Grande has had no effect on those responsible for

⁴⁸³ Mark Millar (w), Steve McNiven (p), Dexter Vines et al (i), Morry Hollowell (c), *Civil War*, 7, (New York: Marvel Comics, 2007).

⁴⁸⁴ ICE, Twitter Post, April 28, 2017, 10:49 AM, <https://twitter.com/icegov/status/858015345747087360>, Accessed June 26, 2019.

the United States' genocidal policies. At best, images such as these result in a brief uptick in donations to 'charitable' organizations and public displays of affective empathy, but no meaningful material changes.⁴⁸⁵

The appeal to the power of a dead child is an appeal to the assumed power of emotional manipulation without an actual analysis of power as such, and should be regarded as a ghoulish form of absurdity, such as when US Senator Kamala Harris suggested the way to convince Republican lawmakers to support gun control would be to lock them in a room with autopsy photos of children killed in a mass shooting.⁴⁸⁶ In fact, images of dead children often only work in the service of the powerful, as the child operates 'as a sort of cultural technology of perpetuation (through the guise of futurity) of racism, sexism, etc. 'The child' becomes the political actor through which we are expected to resist change in order to protect 'tradition''.⁴⁸⁷ In this light, images of dead refugees disseminated by publications that otherwise fail to confront their own complicity in hegemonic oppression only reinforce the ideology that treats these deaths as *deserved*; a drowned corpse on a border only reinforces the effectiveness of a moat.

As a general case the superhero funeral for children on its own would not be part of this same phenomenon were it not for the conflation of 'first responders' with superheroes, which frequently results in police, soldiers, and in one particular case, a former military contractor, dressed as superheroes appearing as pallbearers and professional grieverers at such funerals. By now the superhero-themed funeral is an established genre, complete with specialist funeral homes, coffin-makers, and trend pieces, but the earliest publicized instance came in 2010 with the death of six-year-old

⁴⁸⁵ Paul Slovic et al., 'Iconic Photographs and the Ebb and Flow of Empathic Response to Humanitarian Disasters', *Proceedings Of The National Academy Of Sciences* 114, no. 4 (2017): 640-644. 'Study: What Was the Impact of the Iconic Photo of the Syrian Boy?', *National Public Radio*, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/01/13/509650251/study-what-was-the-impact-of-the-iconic-photo-of-the-syrian-boy>, accessed June 26, 2019.

⁴⁸⁶ Isaac Stanley-Becker, 'Kamala Harris: Gun Control Requires 'A Locked Room' With 'Autopsy Photographs of Those Babies'', *The Washington Post*, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/01/29/kamala-harris-gun-control-requires-locked-room-with-autopsy-photographs-those-babies/>.

⁴⁸⁷ Flavia Dzodan, Twitter Post, October 4, 2018. 1:26 AM, <https://twitter.com/redlightvoices/status/1047764857683156992>, accessed June 26, 2019.

Isaiah Alonso from t-cell lymphoma, who was buried in ‘his favorite Batman costume’ at a funeral attended by similarly dressed mourners.⁴⁸⁸

Alonso grew up in Kentucky, the son of Vinnie and Cheryl Alonso, both retired members of the US Army and employed at the US Army Human Resources Command based at Fort Knox.⁴⁸⁹ Hardin County, which includes Fort Knox as well as nearby Elizabethtown – where the non-profit Isaiah Alonso Foundation, which ‘raises awareness’ of childhood cancer and distributes grants to families, is now based – is home to multiple Superfund sites, out of ‘thousands of contaminated sites [that] exist nationally due to hazardous waste being dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed [...] includ[ing] manufacturing facilities, processing plants, landfills and mining sites’.⁴⁹⁰ In line with existing data on environmental contaminants, 2017 research has demonstrated that proximity to Superfund sites in Kentucky specifically is associated with incidences of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma like t-cell lymphoma, and this is on top of more recently-released Department of Defense data revealing drinking water contaminated by chemicals linked to NHL at a number of US military installations due to their presence in a widely used fire retardant (although in this latter study the water at Fort Knox itself was not tested).⁴⁹¹ While it is impossible to link the cancer that killed Alonso with this environmental contamination, highlighting this context is important because the glurgy literature surrounding the funerals of children like Alonso work to cover up this context, erasing systemic problems in favor of ‘inspirational’ stories.

Two years after Isaiah’s funeral and the creation of his namesake foundation, a former military contractor in West Virginia named John Buckland received divine inspiration:

Buckland said every time he watched the evening news, there were stories about drugs and violence. He wanted to do something to help but didn’t know what he could do. Then, on Sept.

⁴⁸⁸ Sue Axelrod, ‘The Superhero Behind Isaiah Alonso Foundation’, *Jason’s Spina Bifida Journey*, 2011, <https://jbournesblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/26/the-superhero-behind-isaiah-alonso-foundation/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁸⁹ Axelrod, ‘The Superhero Behind Isaiah Alonso Foundation’. ‘About Us’, *The Isaiah Alonso Foundation*, 2012, http://www.isaiahalonsofoundation.org/page/about_us, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁹⁰ ‘What Is Superfund?’, US EPA, 2019, <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/what-superfund>, accessed June 29, 2019.

⁴⁹¹ W. Brent Webber and Ramona Stone, ‘Incidence Of Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma And Residential Proximity To Superfund Sites In Kentucky’, *National Environmental Health Association* 801 (2017): 22-29. Department of Defense, ‘Addressing Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) And Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA)’ (Washington DC, 2018).

4, 2012, he was awakened in the middle of a night by what he believes was a message from God. 'The idea hit me at 2:30 in the morning,' Buckland said. 'Two words kept coming through. 'Be Batman'. 'To this day I believe God planted the idea in my mind'.⁴⁹²

After purchasing a Batman costume, Buckland began his career as a public performer, but his work blurs the line between for-profit performance and 'charitable' work. Expanding his project to include other performers, in 2013 he registered Heroes 4 Higher LLC, a for-profit company revolving around his appearances. Finally, in 2018 Buckland became the principal officer of the non-profit H4H Foundation (not to be confused with the UK pro-military organization Help4Heroes), which is registered to the same residential address as Heroes4Higher LLC, complicating what was previously a straightforward gift by adding a layer of charitable tax exemption.⁴⁹³ In 2017, Buckland met the president, and he continues to work with law enforcement to organize school assemblies and public appearances.⁴⁹⁴ In a similar case, Texas police officer Damon Cole regularly dresses up as a superhero to make appearances with dying children, frequently using such events as an opportunity to develop his own career as a social media 'influencer'.⁴⁹⁵ While he was already a member of the Fort Worth-based organization Heroes, Cops, and Kids, whose stated goal 'is to enhance the quality of life of children and young adults by developing effective relationships between children and positive role models', Cole gained an international reputation when he attended the 2016 funeral of five-year-old Joshua Garcia dressed as Spider-Man.⁴⁹⁶

The notion of the first responder is already a cloying maneuver in the service of the state, but when this mutable figure of the state's power over life and death is performed in the actual procession of a child's funeral in the colors of the superhero, it performs the state's favorite myth of itself. In the pathetic form of the middle-aged cop's paunch struggling against the cheap synthetic of a mass-market Spider-Man

⁴⁹² Zack Harold, 'Adults help bring popular characters to life', *West Virginia Gazette*, 2014, <http://www.wvgazette.com/article/20141104/DM06/141109689#sthash.tdIM3hhr.dpuf>, accessed June 29, 2019.

⁴⁹³ Heroes 4 Higher, 2019, <http://www.h4h.us/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁹⁴ John Buckland, 'Honored to Be Chosen to Welcome the President', Youtube, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rauglym1u4M>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁹⁵ 'The Truth About Damon Cole', *Facebook*, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/thetruthaboutdamoncole/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁹⁶ 'HEROES, COPS AND KIDS', *Heroescopsandkids.Org*, 2019, <http://www.heroescopsandkids.org/>, accessed June 30, 2019. Valerie Edwards, 'Police Officer Attends Child's Funeral Dressed as Spider-Man', *The Daily Mail*, 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3542704/Police-officer-attends-five-year-old-s-funeral-dressed-Spider-Man-hero-s-send-off.html>, accessed June 30, 2019.

costume, one sees the truth of the US American empire in all its glory and horror. Such performances are glurge precisely because they use the (in general) good done by supporting a grieving family in order to valorize the police themselves. One might understandably be inclined to consider this critique of the practice a kind of unnecessary cruelty, a heartless criticism of someone doing their best for suffering people, but such a response would be smarm in the service of state power legitimized by an emotional appeal via the specter of dead children.⁴⁹⁷

-

The obverse of the police officer dressing as a superhero to attend the bedside and graveyard of children is the police officer adorned in militarized 'tactical' outfits adorned with superhero symbols integrated into the fascist flags proclaiming that 'Blue Lives Matter'. While police in the United States have long prided themselves on being agents of death, as seen in the precinct pins and challenge coins that feature the same kind of skull imagery as military units, since the widespread Black Lives Matter protests against the arbitrary public executions of black people by the police, police in the United States have dramatically increased the frequency and quality of the fascist regalia they wear.⁴⁹⁸ The Blue Lives Matter flag is a variation of the US American flag rendered in black and grey, except for a single blue stripe signifying the 'thin blue line', i.e. the line between order and chaos that the police supposedly maintain, according to fascist notions of society that view civilian populations as an inherent threat to the only 'true' citizens, the police (and military).

The flag is frequently paired with a skull design popularized by the Marvel Comics character The Punisher, noted for his love of (frequently gory) extrajudicial killing.⁴⁹⁹ Despite one department being publicly chastised for featuring the skull on

⁴⁹⁷ Even when people like Buckland or Cole simply dress as superheroes to visit children with cancer in a hospital they do harm, because framing cancer as a 'fight' or 'battle', which is the inevitable result of associating superhero imagery with these dying children, is contrary to best practices and can actually serve to further stigmatize those with cancer, particularly when individuals are seen to have 'lost' a fight. Kate Granger, 'Having Cancer Is Not A Fight or A Battle', *The Guardian*, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/apr/25/having-cancer-not-fight-or-battle>, accessed June 30, 2019. Pedro Gallardo, 'Fighting' Breast Cancer Rhetoric: The Role of The War Metaphor In Breast Cancer Patient Narrative', *Stanford Journal Of Public Health* 7, no. (2018): 51-56.

⁴⁹⁸ 'NYPD Challenge Coins', *Research And Destroy New York*, 2018, <https://researchdestroy.com/nypd-challenge-coins.pdf>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁴⁹⁹ Beth Elderkin, 'Kentucky Police Remove Punisher Logo from Cop Cars After People Rightfully Point Out He's a Murderer', *io9*, 2017, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/kentucky-police-remove-punisher-logo-from-cop-cars-afte-1792720736>, accessed June 30, 2019.

their cars, the imagery has spread to such a degree that The Punisher's creator Jerry Conway has explicitly condemned the practice. In a recent interview, he remarked that he finds it

disturbing whenever I see authority figures embracing Punisher iconography because the Punisher represents a failure of the Justice system. He's supposed to indict the collapse of social moral authority and the reality some people can't depend on institutions like the police or the military to act in a just and capable way. [...] In a way, it's as offensive as putting a Confederate flag on a government building.⁵⁰⁰

In Solvay, New York, the police department defended its decision to include the imagery on all its vehicles even after public opposition by declaring that

There is clearly a war on police and the criminal element attempting to infiltrate and destroy our communities, lifestyles and quality of living requiring men and women willing to stand up to evil and protect the good of society.⁵⁰¹

This siege mentality is not only a constituent feature of Ur-Fascism in general, but also part of a concerted effort to make the police a protected class in the United States while making it easier for them to violently quell public protest. Since 2016, police unions in the United States have given rhetorical and financial support to anti-protest bills in at least eight different states, including laws that would make it legal for drivers to murder protestors blocking a roadway.⁵⁰² In 2018 the House of Representatives passed the Protect and Serve Act of 2018, which would make assaulting a police officer a federal crime, in addition to whatever penalties the states apply; the Senate version, which is still in committee, would make assaulting an officer a federal hate crime, formally enshrining police as a protected class of citizen all their own.⁵⁰³ While there are not yet laws codifying 'contempt of cop' as a crime,

⁵⁰⁰ Dana Forsythe, 'Punisher Creator Gerry Conway: Cops Using the Skull Logo Are Like People Using the Confederate Flag', *SYFY WIRE*, 2019, <https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/punisher-creator-gerry-conway-cops-using-the-skull-logo-are-like-people-using-the>, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁵⁰¹ Charley Hannagan, 'Solvay Police: Punisher Decals Stay; They Show 'We Will Stand Between Good and Evil'', *Syracuse.Com*, 2017, https://www.syracuse.com/news/2017/04/central_new_york_police_punisher_decal_shows_we_will_stand_between_good_and_evil.html, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁵⁰² Dakin Andone, 'States That Have Introduced Bills to Protect Drivers Who Run Over Protesters', *CNN*, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/18/us/legislation-protects-drivers-injure-protesters/index.html>, accessed June 30, 2019. Simon Davis-Cohen and Sarah Lazare, 'Law Enforcement Has Quietly Backed Anti-Protest Bills In At Least 8 States Since Trump's Election', *In These Times*, 2019, http://inthesetimes.com/features/police_anti-protest_laws_trump.html, accessed June 30, 2019.

⁵⁰³ Natasha Lennard, 'Call Congress's 'Blue Lives Matter' Bills What They Are: Another Attack on Black Lives', *The Intercept*, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/19/blue-lives-matter-bill-police-brutality/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

USAmerican culture is rapidly accelerating toward just such a reality, due in no small part to the now decades-long treatment of police as 'the real heroes' of society.

Epilogue

As of this writing, Donald Trump is still President of the United States, although the House of Representatives has opened an impeachment investigation into his behavior before and during his time in office. Each week sees a new ‘constitutional crisis’ regarding whatever long-standing but rarely tested law he has flaunted, and these pressures on the brittle fiction of US American democracy just happen to be the latest in a long series of events since this project began that might be called ‘historical’. The same year Donald Trump was elected to the presidency saw the United Kingdom vote to leave the European Union, the Oceti Sakowin – or Seven Council Fires, representing the seven tribes of the Lakota people – meet for the first time in over a hundred years to fight the Dakota Access pipeline, and the Chicago Cubs win the World Series for the first time since 1908, breaking the fabled ‘billy goat curse’ that began in 1945 when a fan was ejected from Wrigley Field on account of his pet goat’s smell putting off other spectators. Even the Twisted Age seems to be carrying on apace (or reaching its apotheosis), with the Joker receiving a film of his very own and adaptations of the Hellblazer canon’s work appearing regularly in the form of ‘prestige’ television (with Amazon’s *The Boys* and HBO’s *Watchmen* being just two such examples).

The geopolitical import of these events may vary depending on the reader’s personal interests, but at the very least one can appreciate that Trump and his administration are without a doubt exceptional in the history of the United States for a whole host of reasons, although in every case, these are exceptions of degree, rather than kind. The times are *not* ‘not normal’ in the sense of the phrase’s popularity immediately following Trump’s election, but neither are they mundane, free from the sort of global political rumblings that might be called ‘world historical’. Rather, in the words of weird Twitter account Horse ebooks, these days it seems that ‘Everything happens so much’.⁵⁰⁴ Even as the shock of the last few years has worn off, disorientation is no longer a divergence from some stable understanding of history; rather, the moment seems to demand a kind of hypertextual ontology, a state of being defined only by its instability. How one plans for a future in this present remains to be seen.

⁵⁰⁴ Horse ebooks, Twitter post, June 28, 2012, 9:23 PM, https://twitter.com/horse_ebooks/status/218439593240956928?lang=en, accessed October 22, 2019.

This project began in January 2015 as a warning about the likely acceleration of the United States' repressive policies as the collapse of its global empire – itself the inevitable result of imperial overreach – led to an expansion of its domestic police state, all of which was made possible by a deadly combination of historical ignorance and technological hubris. It was meant to be a warning about the state of global politics and a lament for the fate of the Anglophone Humanities, hoping to prevent a further slide toward authoritarianism and recover the potential of leftist narrative inquiry from the complacency and complicity that had come to define narratology in the 21st-century. Drawing on an eclectic mix of anthropology, literary theory, unauthorized intelligence products, and popular culture, the project would be an accessible, irascible manifesto aimed directly at those people and institutions most responsible for the horrors of the Anthropocene and the disproportionate violence it has inflicted on people of color.

In this regard, the project was doomed from the start. Some of this failure was simply due to historical circumstance and a certain paucity of cynicism on my part. I simply thought there would be more time and imagined that the resurgence of fascism now seen in the Anglophone world would not have erupted until at least the first term of a Democratic president elected in 2016. I failed to predict both the incompetence of the Clinton political dynasty and the pervasive ignorance, racism, and imperial nostalgia of the English and Welsh publics, who voted to make their decimated empire even more of a global backwater. Nevertheless, despite how much my failures of imagination may have weighed on the evolution of this text, the intervening years have also seen signs of hope. Trump is historically unpopular and likely headed to electoral defeat (although his impeachment is less of a certainty on account of the Republican-controlled Senate), and as of this writing Brexit has been delayed three times, with the same number of prime ministers having found it hanging on their legacies like an albatross around their necks. This text, once destined to be a jeremiad aimed at the future, may yet become a history of the bad times soon too pass. However, if these pages have revealed anything, it is the degree to which the absurdities of today have deep roots in the last century of culture and politics. Even as the Trump administration is rapidly collapsing under the weight of its metastasizing grafts and fascism is seeing itself beat back across the globe by generations united to save themselves from the Anthropocentric apocalypse, it is incumbent upon those

opposed to these forces that we do not trick ourselves into thinking that a single electoral victory or widely-attended march might mean the end of the deep structures that nurtured them in the first place.

In the time between this project's initiation and its completion, a number of guides and 'explainers' have appeared, with *Kill All Normies* being only the first in a wave. For example, in 2018 the weird Twitter-adjacent podcast Chapo Trap House published *The Chapo Guide to Revolution: A Manifesto Against Logic, Facts, and Reason*, a satirical guide about 'the 'secret' history of the world, politics, media, and everything in-between that THEY don't want you to know', and Hillary Clinton's autobiographical account of her 2016 campaign's failure was literally called *What Happened*.⁵⁰⁵ This work is not in precisely the same genre as those, because while it is (like them) a kind of history claiming to explain the contemporary geopolitical situation, this text hopes for at least some greater degree of longevity.

Although I have been careful to note that the individual terms and overarching discourse presented here are not strictly prescriptive, recognizing as I do the limitations of the bricoleur's craft, even in its obsolescence this project can be an important historical marker, a point of tangent from which any number of newly understood fields might emerge. This project draws on a vast array of media, specialties, and stores of formal knowledge, but its goal is that the sometimes disjointed quality of the work I have produced here is a characterization that only appears that way from a perspective rooted in the epistemologies that existed prior to this work, but which are now impossible given the new borders of understanding these pages have carried us toward. When future scholars look back on this text, I hope that they see it not as a repudiation of what came before, but rather as the beginning of *something*, like the frantic shuttle of a loom weaving disparate threads together into some future tapestry that I have yet to imagine. At the same time, despite the pride that comes with authorship, I do not (yet) have such hubris as to identify the way of thinking offered here with any singular term, but my wish is that the exegesis of the different terms offered by my Glossary themselves become avenues for future research, either as part of a holistic discourse that views this text as a model, or else as the grist for a kind of reclamatory work. I have borrowed many tools from many

⁵⁰⁵ Chapo Trap House, 2018, <https://chapotraphouse.com/>, accessed June 30, 2019.

intellectual workshops, and even if I am not so lucky as to inaugurate one of my own I look forward to what those more established fields – literature, history, politics, cultural criticism – do with the concepts I have taken and twisted here.

Bibliography

- Adams, Douglas. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Random House, 2005.
- Adorno, Theodor and E. F. N Jephcott. *Minima Moralia*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso, 2016.
- Ahmed, Saladin. 'How Censors Killed the Weird, Experimental, Progressive Golden Age of Comics'. *Buzzfeed*, 2014. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/saladinahmed/how-the-comics-code-killed-the-golden-age-ofcomics>. Accessed June 28, 2019.
- Ahmed, Sara. 'Resignation is a Feminist Issue'. *Feministkilljoys*, 2016. <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/08/27/resignation-is-a-feminist-issue/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Andone, Dakin. 'States that Have Introduced Bills to Protect Drivers Who Run Over Protesters'. *CNN*, 2017. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/18/us/legislation-protects-drivers-injure-protesters/index.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss Remembered*. Radio. NPR, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120066035>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- AP Images. *Supporters Cheer Prior To An Address by Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump During a Campaign Stop at The Tsongas Center in Lowell, Mass.*. 2016. <http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/GOP-2016-Trump/be8dbf2850d04213995ad5d254704dfc/54/0>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- 'Atlantis Fantasyworld'. *Atlantisfantasyworld.com*. <http://www.atlantisfantasyworld.com/lostboys.htm>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Atari. *Adventure: Game Program Instructions*. Sunnyvale: Atari, 1979.
- Autistic Abby. Tumblr Post. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150404010354/http://stimmyabby.tumblr.com/post/115216522824/sometimes-people-use-respect-to-mean-treating>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Axelrod, Sue. 'The Superhero Behind Isaiah Alonso Foundation'. *Jason's Spina Bifida Journey*, 2011. <https://jbournesblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/26/the-superhero-behind-isaiah-alonso-foundation/>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Baker-Whitelaw, Gavia. 'Why Comics Fans Are Horrified—and Unsurprised—

Marvel's Hydra Shirt Showed Up in Charlottesville'. *The Daily Dot*, 2017.
<https://www.dailydot.com/parsec/hydra-shirt-nazi-charlottesville/>.
Accessed June 30, 2019.

Barker, Michael. 'Why the CIA Cares About Marxism'. *Www.Counterpunch.Org*, 2017.
<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/06/15/why-the-cia-cares-about-marxism/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Barthes, Roland. 'Rhétorique De L'image'. *Communications* 4, 1964: 40-51.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Trans. by Richard Miller. New York: Hill & Wang, 1974.

'Batkid' Takes on Joker, Penguin and Riddler in San Francisco', CBS, 2013,
<https://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2013/11/15/san-francisco-turning-into-gotham-city-for-batkid-make-a-wish-event/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Bayer, Lili, and Larry Cohler-Esses. 'EXCLUSIVE: Nazi-Allied Group Claims Top Trump Aide Sebastian Gorka as Sworn Member'. *The Forward*, 2017.
<https://forward.com/news/national/366181/exclusive-nazi-allied-group-claims-top-trump-aide-sebastian-gorka-as-sworn/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Beam, Christopher. 'What Kind of Haircut Did John Edwards Get for \$400?'. *Slate*, 2007.
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2007/04/the_400_haircut.html. Accessed June 30, 2019..

Belkin, Douglas. 'Why the University of Chicago Opposes 'Trigger Warnings''. *WSJ*, 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-the-university-of-chicago-opposes-trigger-warnings-1487646602>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Bendis, Brian Michael (w), Billy Tan and Michael Gaydos (p), Matt Banning and Michael Gaydos (i), Justin Ponsor (c), Richard Starkings and Albert Deschesne (l). 'Secret Invasion (Part 8)'. *New Avengers* #47. New York: DC Comics, January 2009.

Berlant, Lauren Gail. 'The Theory of Infantile Citizenship'. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

Bierce, Ambrose. 'The Eyes of the Panther'. *The San Francisco Examiner*, 1897.

Bierce, Ambrose. *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*'. *Weird Fiction Review*, 2018.
<http://weirdfictionreview.com/2014/03/an-inhabitant-of-carcosa/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Bloom, David. 'Love it or Hate it, the Trump Show has been Very Good for Media

- Business'. *Forbes*, 2018.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dbloom/2018/11/05/happy-election-season-media-donald-trump-has-been-very-good-for-you/#78235cb33abd>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Bogost, Ian. *Unit Operations*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.
- Bonenberger, Adrian, and Adam Weinstein. 'The Sum of All Beards'. *The New Republic*, 2019. https://newrepublic.com/article/154033/american-beards-military-culture?utm_content=buffer3c949. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Bonomolo, Cameron. 'DC Universe Launches Poll Deciding the Fate of the Jason Todd Robin'. *DC*, 2018. <https://comicbook.com/dc/2018/11/18/dc-universe-batman-robin-jason-todd-poll-vote-live-die-fate-titans/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Selected Non-Fictions*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.
- Bors, Matt. 'Clowning Around'. *The Nib*, 2019. <https://thenib.com/clowning-around>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Braden, Thomas W. 'I'm Glad the CIA is 'Immoral''. *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1967.
- Breihan, Tom. 'Zack Snyder's 300 Presaged the Howling Fascism of the Alt-Right'. *AV Club*, 2017. <https://film.avclub.com/zack-snyder-s-300-presaged-the-howling-fascism-of-the-a-1798265082>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Brooks, Kevin. 'More 'Seriously Visible' Reading: McCloud, McLuhan, and the Visual Language of *The Medium Is The Massage*'. *College Composition And Communication* 61, no. 1, 2009.
- Brown, Andrew. 'Bush, Gog and Magog'. *The Guardian*, 2009.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2009/aug/10/religion-george-bush>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Bruner, Jerome. 'The Narrative Construction Of Reality'. *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991): 1-21.
- Buckels, Erin E., Paul D. Trapnell, and Delroy L. Paulhus. 'Trolls Just Want to Have Fun'. *Personality And Individual Differences* 67 (2014): 97-102.
- Buckland, John. 'Honored to Be Chosen to Welcome the President'. *Youtube*, 2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rauglym1u4M>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Burns, Todd. 'clipping. on Afrofuturism, Fast Rapping and Sound Design'. *RBMA Daily*, 2016. <http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2016/09/clipping-interview>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Bush, George W. 'George W. Bush at Ground Zero - September 14, 2001'. *Youtube*, 2001. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4BkzuV0LYE>. Accessed June 30, 2019.

Butler, Judith. 'Derrida/UC Irvine Letters'. Email, 2017.

Butler, Judith. 'Butler Response'. *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2004. <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/Butler.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Caldwell, Don. 'Marine Todd'. *Know Your Meme*, 2014. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/marine-todd>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Carey, Mike. *The Unwritten*, vol. 7. New York: DC Comics, 2013.

Carney, Sean. 'The Function of the Superhero at the Present Time'. *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 100-117.

Carroll, David. 'Trail Blazers'. *Tabula Rasa*, 1997. <http://www.tabularasa.info/AusComics/Hellblazers.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Carroll, T. *Weird Fiction: A Primer*. Literary Hub, 2015. <https://lithub.com/weird-fiction-a-primer/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Carstens, Delphi. 'Hyperstition'. *Maggie Roberts*, 2010. <http://merliquify.com/blog/articles/hyperstition/#.XRgTM-hKhVI>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Carter, Graydon. 'Steel Traps and Short Fingers'. *Vanity Fair*, 2015. <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/10/graydon-carter-donald-trump>. Accessed June 30, 2019.

Central Intelligence Agency. *France: Defection of the Leftist Intellectuals*. Washington, D.C.: Office of European Analysis, 1985.

'Cherry Tree Myth'. *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 2019. <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/cherry-tree-myth/>. Accessed June 20, 2019.

'Club Penguin - Banned In OM 37S 370Ms'. *Speedrun.Com*, 2017. <https://www.speedrun.com/cp/run/wzpj2gz>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

CNBC Republican Primary Debate. Video. Boulder, CO: CNBC, 2015.

Cole, Diane. 'Study: What Was the Impact of the Iconic Photo of the Syrian Boy?'. *National Public Radio*, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/01/13/509650251/study->

- what-was-the-impact-of-the-iconic-photo-of-the-syrian-boy. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Collins, Jeff. *Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide*. Icon Books LTD, 2014.
- 'The Comics Code of 1954'. *Comic book Legal Defense Fund*, 1954. <http://cblfd.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Chapo Trap House*, 2018. <https://chapotraphouse.com/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Concern troll'. Oxford English Dictionary, 2019. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/concern_troll. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'The Criminal Justice System: Statistics | RAINN'. *Rainn.Org*, 2016. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Cronk, Harold. *God's Not Dead*. Film. Pure Flix Entertainment, 2014.
- Date, S.V. 'Tim Apple. Oranges. German Dad. Mental Health Experts Warn that Trump is in Decline'. *The Huffington Post*, 2019. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/trump-mental-health-pre-dementia_n_5ca51ea2e4b0409b0ec32806. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Davis-Cohen, Simon, and Sarah Lazare. 'Law Enforcement Has Quietly Backed Anti-Protest Bills in at Least 8 States Since Trump's Election'. *In These Times*, 2019. http://inthesetimes.com/features/police_anti-protest_laws_trump.html. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Dean, Jodi. *The Communist Horizon*. London: Verso Books, 2012.
- 'The Death of George Washington'. *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 2019. <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/the-death-of-george-washington>. Accessed June 20, 2019.
- Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. *Broad Agency Announcement Narrative Networks*, 2011.
- 'Definition of FIRST RESPONDER'. *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/first%20responder>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Denton, Nick. 'An Open Letter to Peter Thiel'. *Gawker*, 2016. <https://Gawker.com/an-open-letter-to-peter-thiel-1778991227>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Department of Defense. 'Addressing Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) And

- Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA)'. Washington DC, 2018.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Sign, Structure, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'.
In *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, 147-165. Richard Alan Macksey and Eugenio Donato, 2nd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Of Grammatology*. 3rd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Peggy Kamuf. 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul De Man's War'. *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 3 (1988): 590-652.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Derrida Letter to Cicerone'. *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2004.
<http://www.jacques-derrida.org/Cicerone.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Derrida, Jacques and Jay Williams. *Signature Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Desan, Phillipe. 'Past Editors of Critical Inquiry'. Email, 2017.
- Devereaux, Ryan. 'The NFL, The Military, And The Hijacking Of Pat Tillman's Story'. *The Intercept*, 2017. <https://theintercept.com/2017/09/28/pat-tillman-nfl-protest-death-army-disgrace/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Devine, Curt. 'Defense Department Charged \$300,000 At Trump Properties Since 2017'. *CNN*, 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/10/politics/defense-department-300000-at-trump-properties/index.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Dickinson, Tim. 'Runaway Senators, Militias and Koch Money: What the Hell Just Happened in Oregon?'. *Rolling Stone*, 2019.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/oregon-climate-battle-gop-walkout-violence-852643/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Donald Trump'. *World Wrestling Entertainment*, 2019.
<https://www.wwe.com/superstars/donald-trump>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Dowd, Katie. "'Murder Capital of the World': The Terrifying Years When Multiple Serial Killers Stalked Santa Cruz". *SFGate*. 2018.
<https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/santa-cruz-kemper-mullin-frazier-murders-12841990.php>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- dril. Twitter Post, March 9, 2015, 7:30 PM.
<https://twitter.com/dril/status/575121631846227968>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Dzodan, Flavia. Twitter Post. October 4, 2018. 1:26 AM.

- <https://twitter.com/redlightvoices/status/1047764857683156992>. Accessed June 26, 2019.
- Ebert, Roger. 'Okay, Kids, Play on My Lawn'. *Roger Ebert's Journal*, 2010.
<https://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/okay-kids-play-on-my-lawn>.
Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Eco, Umberto. 'Ur-Fascism'. *The New York Review of Books*, 1995.
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Edgelord'. *Urban Dictionary*, 2015.
<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=edgelord>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Edwards, Valerie. 'Police Officer Attends Child's Funeral Dressed as Spider-Man'. *The Daily Mail*, 2016. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3542704/Police-officer-attends-five-year-old-s-funeral-dressed-Spider-Man-hero-s-send-off.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Elderkin, Beth. 'Kentucky Police Remove Punisher Logo from Cop Cars After People Rightfully Point Out He's a Murderer'. *io9*, 2017.
<https://io9.gizmodo.com/kentucky-police-remove-punisher-logo-from-cop-cars-afte-1792720736>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Ellis, Warren (w), Darick Robertson (p), Rodney Ramos (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Clem Robins (l). 'Year of the Bastard, Part 3: Smile'. *Transmetropolitan*, #15. New York: DC Comics, November [September] 1998.
- Feinberg, Ashley. 'This is Almost Certainly James Comey's Twitter Account'. *Gizmodo*, 2017. <https://gizmodo.com/this-is-almost-certainly-james-comey-s-twitter-account-1793843641>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Feinberg, Ashley. 'This is the Daily Stormer's Playbook'. *The Huffington Post*, 2017.
https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide_n_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Fernandez, M., Saul, S. and Healy, J. (2018). 'Who Is Mark Conditt, the Suspected Austin Serial Bomber?'. *The New York Times*, 2018,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/us/mark-anthony-conditt-austin-bomber.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Fisher, Mark. *The Weird and the Eerie*. London: Repeater Books, 2016.

- Fleming Jr., Mike. 'Frank Miller on Why Superhero Movies are Better Than Ever – The Comic-Con Interview'. *Deadline*, 2017. <http://deadline.com/2017/07/frank-miller-interview-superhero-movies-wolverine-sin-city-batman-xerxes-1202133625/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Forsythe, Dana. 'Punisher Creator Gerry Conway: Cops Using the Skull Logo are Like People Using the Confederate Flag'. *SYFY WIRE*, 2019. <https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/punisher-creator-gerry-conway-cops-using-the-skull-logo-are-like-people-using-the>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 'On Bullshit'. *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6, no. 2 (1986): 81–100.
- Friedrich, Mike (w), Tony De Zuniga (a). 'Black Crossing'. *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, #176. New York: Marvel Comics Group, Oct. 1974.
- 'The Fox News GOP Debate Transcript, Annotated'. *Washington Post*, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/03/the-fox-news-gop-debate-transcript-annotated/>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Gallardo, Pedro. "'Fighting' Breast Cancer Rhetoric: The Role of the War Metaphor in Breast Cancer Patient Narrative". *Stanford Journal Of Public Health* 7, no. (2018): 51-56.
- Garcia, Arturo. 'Would Captain America's Co-Creator Punch Nazis?'. *Snopes*, 2017. <http://www.snopes.com/2017/01/24/captain-americas-co-creator-punch-nazis/>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Gaudette, Emily. 'Fans Want 'Captain America' Writer Gone After He Defends Actual Nazi'. *Inverse*, 2017. <https://www.inverse.com/article/26752-hydra-captain-america-richard-spencer-getting-punched-alt-right-nazi-sympathizer-nick-spencer>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- George Washington's Mount Vernon. 2018. *Conotocarious*. <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/conotocarious/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Giridharadas, Anand. 'What to do When You're a Country in Crisis'. *The New York Times*, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/books/review/upheaval-jared-diamond.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Glurge Gallery Archive'. *Snopes*, 2019. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/category/glurge-gallery/>. Accessed June 20, 2019.

- Golub, Alex and Jon Peterson. 'How Mana Left the Pacific and Became A Videogame Mechanic'. In *New Mana: transformations of a classic concept in Pacific languages and cultures*. Australia: Australian National University Press, 2016.
- Gorcenski, Emily. Twitter Post, June 5, 2019, 9:43 PM.
<https://twitter.com/EmilyGorcenski/status/1136493829874487296>. Accessed June 6, 2019.
- The Grouch. 'In Portland, Patriot Prayer & Proud Boys Want Immigrants Heads 'Smashed into the Concrete;' Gave Nazi Salutes While Screaming Racial Slurs'. *It's Going Down News*. 2018. <https://itsgoingdown.org/in-portland-patriot-prayer-gave-nazi-salutes-while-screaming-racial-slurs/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Granger, Kate. 'Having Cancer is Not a Fight or a Battle'. *The Guardian*, 2014.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/apr/25/having-cancer-not-fight-or-battle>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Groth, Gary. 'Jack Kirby Interview'. *The Comics Journal*, 2011. <http://www.tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/5/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'HEROES, COPS AND KIDS'. *Heroescopsandkids.Org*, 2019.
<http://www.heroescopsandkids.org/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Gygax, Gary. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeon Masters Guide*. 1st ed. TSR Games, 1979.
- Hannagan, Charley. 'Solvay Police: Punisher Decals Stay; They Show 'We Will Stand Between Good and Evil''. *Syracuse.Com*, 2017.
https://www.syracuse.com/news/2017/04/central_new_york_police_punisher_decal_shows_we_will_stand_between_good_and_evil.html. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Harold, Zack. 'Adults help bring popular characters to life'. *West Virginia Gazette*, 2014.
<http://www.wvgazetteemail.com/article/20141104/DM06/141109689#sthash.tDIM3hr.dpuf>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Harris, Fredrick. 'The Rise of Respectability Politics'. *Dissent Magazine*, 2014.
<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-respectability-politics>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. 'Young Goodman Brown'. *The New-England Magazine*. 1835.
Heroes 4 Higher. 2019. <http://www.h4h.us/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

- 'The History Of The National Registry And EMS In The United States'. *National Registry Of Emts*, 2019. <https://www.nremt.org/rwd/public/document/history>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Hillis Miller, J. 'Hillis Miller Response'. *Jacques-Derrida.Org*. 2004. <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/Hillis.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Hillis Miller, J. 'Derrida/UC Irvine Letters'. Email, 2017.
- 'History of the Center'. *Humctr.Jhu.Edu*, 2017. <http://humctr.jhu.edu/history/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Herrman, John, and Katie Notopoulos. 'Weird Twitter: The Oral History'. *Buzzfeed*, 2013. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jwherrman/weird-twitter-the-oral-history>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'The Honest Alan Moore Interview – Part 2: The Occupy Movement, Frank Miller, and Politics'. *Honest Publishing*, 2011. <https://www.honestpublishing.com/news/the-honest-alan-moore-interview-part-2-the-occupy-movement-frank-miller-and-politics/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Hongo, Hudson. 'Suicide Squad: The Extended Cut is the Movie 2016 Deserves'. *Io9*, 2016. <https://io9.gizmodo.com/suicide-squad-the-extended-cut-is-the-movie-2016-deser-1789198779-de-1784950994>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Hoppin, Jason. "Keep Santa Cruz Weird': Has Offbeat Branding Effort Gone Too Far?'. *The Mercury News* 2013. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2013/03/16/keep-santa-cruz-weird-has-offbeat-branding-effort-gone-too-far/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- hooks, bell. 'Understanding Patriarchy'. *Imagine No Borders*, 2019. <https://imagineborders.org/pdf/zines/UnderstandingPatriarchy.pdf>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Horse ebooks. Twitter post. June 28, 2012, 9:23 PM. https://twitter.com/horse_ebooks/status/218439593240956928?lang=en. Accessed October 22, 2019.
- ICE. Twitter Post. April 28, 2017, 10:49 AM. <https://twitter.com/icegov/status/858015345747087360>. Accessed June 26, 2019.
- Jameson, Fredric. 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture'. *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979):

130-148.

- Jensen, Jeff. "Watchmen': A Chat with Director Zack Snyder'. *Entertainment Weekly*, 2008. <https://ew.com/article/2008/07/17/watchmen-chat-director-zack-snyder/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Jones, Josh. 'The CIA Assesses the Power of French Post-Modern Philosophers: Read A Newly Declassified CIA Report From 1985'. *Open Culture*, 2017. <http://www.openculture.com/2017/06/the-cia-assesses-the-power-of-french-post-modern-philosophers-read-a-newly-declassified-cia-report-from-1985.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Johnson, Chalmers. *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*. Ebook. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004.
- Johnson, Chalmers. *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*. Kindle edition. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2004.
- Johnson, Chalmers. *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*. Kindle edition. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2006.
- Johnson, Chalmers. *Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope*. Kindle edition. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2009.
- Johnston, Rich. 'Grant Morrison Wants to Make a Superhero Out of You'. *Bleeding Cool News and Rumors*, 2013. <http://www.bleedingcool.com/2013/05/16/grant-morrison-wants-to-make-a-superhero-out-of-you/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Johnston, Rich. 'Dead Gunman Inspired by V for Vendetta'. *Bleeding Cool News and Rumors*, 2010. <https://www.bleedingcool.com/2010/12/14/gunman-sprayed-v-for-vendetta-symbol-then-shot-dead/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Kamuf, Peggy, and Geoffrey Bennington. 'Bennington/Kamuf Message to UC Colleagues'. *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2004. <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/GBPKletter.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Kandell, Jonathan. 'Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies At 74'. *The New York Times*, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/10/obituaries/jacques-derrida-abstruse-theorist-dies-at-74.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Kanigher, Robert (w), Carmine Infantino (p), Joe Kubert (i). 'Mystery of the Human Thunderbolt!'. *Showcase*, vol. 1, #4. New York: DC Comics, October 1956.
- Keep Austin Weird. *keep austin weird.*, 2018. <http://www.keepaustinweird.com/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

- Kelly, John. 'Speech at Semper Fi Society of St. Louis'. Speech, St. Louis, November 13, 2010. *American Thinker*.
https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2010/12/an_extraordinary_speech.html. Accessed June 21, 2019.
- Kelly, Kim. 'How to Make the Perfect Milkshake for Throwing at Fascists'. *Vice*, 2019.
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/xwn4zd/how-to-make-the-perfect-milkshake-for-throwing-at-fascists. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Kent, Kailyn. 'Comics and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. *The Hooded Utilitarian*, 2012. <http://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2012/07/comics-and-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction/>. accessed June 30, 2019.
- Killer Mike. Twitter Post, May 27, 2018, 6:03 AM.
<https://twitter.com/KillerMike/status/1000724233570410498>. Accessed June 28, 2019.
- Kirby, Jack and Joe Simon. *Captain America Comics #1*. New York: Timely Comics/Marvel Comics, 1941 [Dec. 20, 1940].
- Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Kossoff, Maya. 'Peter Thiel Wants to Inject Himself With Young People's Blood'. *Vanity Fair*, 2016. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/08/peter-thiel-wants-to-inject-himself-with-young-peoples-blood>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Krebs, A.V. 'Bitter Harvest'. *Washington Post*, 1992.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1992/02/02/bitter-harvest/c8389b23-884d-43bd-ad34-bf7b11077135>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Kubik, Erica. 'From Girlfriend to Gamer: Negotiating Place in the Hardcore/Casual Divide of Online Video Game Communities'. PhD, Bowling Green State University, 2009.
- Kuittinen, Jussi, Annakaisa Kultima, Johannes Niemelä, and Janne Paavilainen. 'Casual Games Discussion'. In *Future Play*, 105-112. New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2007.
- Latour, Jason (w), Chris Visions (i), Jim Campbell (c), Clayton Cowles (l). 'Captain America'. *Spider-Gwen Annual*, #1. New York: Marvel Comics, August [June] 2016.
- Laughland, Oliver. 'Guatemalans Deliberately Infected With STDs Sue Johns Hopkins

- University for \$1Bn'. *The Guardian*, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/apr/02/johns-hopkins-lawsuit-deliberate-std-infections-guatemala>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Laurie, Greg. 'What in the World is Happening? (#Worldwariii?)'. *Harvest*, 2015. <https://harvest.org/resources/gregs-blog/post/what-in-the-world-is-happening-worldwariii/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Lennard, Natasha. 'Call Congress' 'Blue Lives Matter' Bills What They Are: Another Attack on Black Lives'. *The Intercept*, 2019. <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/19/blue-lives-matter-bill-police-brutality/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 'The Structural study of myth'. *Journal of American Folklore*, 68 (270) 1955: 428–444.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Trans. John Russell. New York: Criterion Books, 1961.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.
- Levin, Sam. 'UC Berkeley Dean in Sexual Harassment Case Keeps Tenure and Avoids Charges'. *The Guardian*, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/18/uc-berkeley-sexual-harassment-dean-sujit-choudhry-deal>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Levin, Sam. 'UC Berkeley Professor Fired Nearly Two Years After Sexual Harassment Claims Substantiated'. *The Guardian*, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/24/sexual-harassment-university-california-berkeley-blake-wentworth>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Levy, Steven. 'Inside Anduril, Palmer Luckey's Bid to Build a Border Wall'. *WIRED*, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/story/palmer-luckey-anduril-border-wall/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Lewis, Al. 'Is Global Consulting Giant Mckinsey Evil?'. *Marketwatch*, 2013. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/is-global-consulting-giant-mckinsey-evil-2013-09-25>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Lewis, Sophie. 'Cthulhu Plays No Role for Me'. *Viewpoint Magazine*, 2017. <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/05/08/cthulhu-plays-no-role-for-me/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Ley, Tom. 'Surprise Military Reunions at NFL Games Reach Peak Bullshit'. *Deadspin*,

2015. <https://deadspin.com/surprise-military-reunions-at-nfl-games-reach-peak-bull-1727940877>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Lisak, David, Lori Gardinier, Sarah C. Nicksa, and Ashley M. Cote. 'False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases'. *Violence Against Women* 16, no. 12 (2010): 1318-1334.
- Long, Joshua. *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2008.
- Lubben, Alex. 'How Much Trump's Cabinet has Spent on Flights, Security, and Office Décor'. *VICE News*, 2018. https://news.vice.com/en_ca/article/mb58xq/how-much-trumps-cabinet-has-spent-on-flights-security-and-office-decor. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Luckhurst, Roger. 'The weird: a dis/orientation'. *Textual Practice*, 31(6), (2017): 1041-1061.
- Lupoff, Dick. 'Re-Birth'. *Comic Art*, 1961.
<http://www.maggiethompson.com/1970/01/fanzine-library-comic-art-1-spring-1961.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Machkovech, Sam. 'After Trailer Outcry, Sonic the Hedgehog Director Tells Fans to Expect 'Changes''. *Ars Technica*, 2019.
<https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2019/05/after-trailer-outcry-sonic-the-hedgehog-director-tells-fans-to-expect-changes/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Macksey, Richard Alan, and Eugenio Donato. *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*. 2nd ed. (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).
- MacWilliams, Matthew. 'The One Weird Trait That Predicts Whether You're a Trump Supporter'. *POLITICO Magazine*, 2016.
<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-2016-authoritarian-213533>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Masters, Ryan. 'UC Santa Cruz Settles Sexual Assault Case for \$1.15 Million'. *Mercurynews.Com*, 2017.
<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/01/uc-santa-cruz-settles-sexual-assault-case-for-1-15-million/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Max the comics guy who does comics about comics. Twitter Post. January 25, 2019,

- 9:09 AM. <https://twitter.com/amadcartoonist/status/1088846317034516480>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Maurice, Jean-Claude. *Si Vous Le Répétez, Je Démentirai*. Paris: Plon, 2009.
- Mayer, Jane. 'Donald Trump's Ghostwriter Tells All'. *The New Yorker*, 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/25/donald-trumps-ghostwriter-tells-all>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- McCain, John, and Jeff Flake. *Tackling Paid Patriotism Oversight Report*. Washington DC: US Senate, 2015.
- McGrady, M.C. 'The bricolage of a myth: Re-reading Derrida reading Lévi-Strauss fifty years after'. *Word and Text*, 7, December 2017: 235-242.
- McVeigh, Karen. 'Screenwriter Frank Miller Calls Occupy Protesters 'Thieves and Rapists''. *The Guardian*, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/nov/14/frank-miller-occupy-movement-rant>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Méalóid, Pádraig. 'Alan Moore and Superfolks Part 3: The Strange Case of Grant Morrison and Alan Moore'. *The Beat*, 2012. <https://www.comicsbeat.com/alan-moore-and-superfolks-part-3-the-strange-case-of-grant-morrison-and-alan-moore/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Méalóid, Pádraig. 'Last Alan Moore Interview?'. *Slovobooks*, 2014. <https://slovobooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/09/last-alan-moore-interview/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Meme Magic Is Real, You Guys'. *Tryangle*, 2016. <https://medium.com/tryangle-magazine/meme-magic-is-real-you-guys-16a497fc45b3>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Michelinie, David and Bob Layton (w), Mark Bright (p), Bob Layton (i), Nelson Yomtov (c), Janice Chiang (l). 'Stark Wars, Chapter III: The Last Mandroid'. *Iron Man*, vol. 1, #227. New York: Marvel Comics, February 1988.
- Mitchell, WJT. 'Past Editors of Critical Inquiry'. Email, 2017.
- Mitchell, WJT 'American Psychosis: Trumpism and the Nightmare of History'. *Los Angeles Review Of Books*, 2017. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/american-psychosis-trumpism-and-the-nightmare-of-history/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Milbank, Dana. 'Candace Owens's Presence Turned a Serious Inquiry into a Farce'. *The*

- Washington Post*, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/candace-owenss-presence-turned-a-serious-inquiry-into-a-farce/2019/04/09/8e2976be-5b09-11e9-a00e-050dc7b82693_story.html. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Millar, Mark (w), Steve McNiven (p), Dexter Vines et al (i), Morry Hollowell (c). *Civil War*, #7. New York: Marvel Comics, 2007.
- Messner, Steven. 'Getting Banned from Club Penguin is Now a Speedrunning Competition'. *PC Gamer*, 2017. <https://www.pcgamer.com/uk/getting-banned-from-club-penguin-is-now-a-speedrunning-competition/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Mikkelson, David. 'FACT CHECK: Bush Salutes Birdwell'. *Snopes.Com*, 2007. <https://www.snopes.com/glurge/birdwell.asp>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Mikkelson, David. 'FACT CHECK: Norman Schwarzkopf Forgiveness'. *Snopes.Com*, 2007. <https://www.snopes.com/military/norman.asp>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Milmo, Cahal. 'Reagan 'Prepared for Cold War Meeting by Reading Tom Clancy Book''. *The Independent*, 2015. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/ronald-reagan-prepared-for-historic-cold-war-meeting-by-reading-tom-clancy-thriller-a6790036.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Misfits. 'Astro Zombies'. *Walk Among Us*. 1982.
- Monahan, Patrick. Twitter Post. June 5th, 2018, 9:55 AM. <https://twitter.com/pattymo/status/1004043973973901312>. Accessed June 26, 2019.
- Moore, Alan (w), Dave Gibbons (a), John Higgins (c). 'Look On My Works, Ye Mighty...'. *Watchmen* #11. New York: DC Comics, 1987.
- Moore, Alan (w), Dave Gibbons (a), John Higgins (c). 'A Strong and Loving World'. *Watchmen* #12. New York: DC Comics, 1987.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Chaz Truog (p), Mark Farmer (i), Tatjana Wood (c), John Costanza (l). 'Deus Ex Machina'. *Animal Man* #26. New York: DC Comics, August 1990.
- Morrison, Grant (w) & Mark Millar (w), Paul Ryan (p), John Nyberg (i). 'Still Life in the Fast Lane'. *The Flash*, vol. 2, #134. New York: DC Comics, February 1998.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Ryan Sook (p), Mick Gray (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Jared K. Fletcher (l). 'Talking Backwards Sdrawkcab Gniklat'. *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna* #1. New York: DC Comics, June [April] 2005.

Morrison, Grant (w), Simone Bianchi (a), Dave Stewart (c), Rob Leigh (l). 'The Perfect Knight Returns'. *Seven Soldiers: Shining Knight* #3. New York: DC Comics, August [June] 2005.

Morrison, Grant (w), Ryan Sook (p), Mick Gray (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Rob Leigh (l). 'A Book in the Beginning'. *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna* #2. New York: DC Comics, August [June] 2005.

Morrison, Grant (w), Simone Bianchi (a), Dave Stewart (c), Rob Leigh (l). 'The Last Stand of Don Vincenzo'. *Seven Soldiers: Shining Knight* #2. New York: DC Comics, October [August] 2005.

Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (a), John Kalisz (c), Phil Balsman (l). 'Uglyhead'. *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein* #1. New York: DC Comics, January 2006 [November 16, 2005].

Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (a), John Kalisz (c), Phil Balsman (l). 'Red Zombies'. *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein* #2 (New York: DC Comics, March [January] 2006).

Morrison, Grant (w), Ryan Sook (p), Mick Gray (i), Nathan Eyring (c), Jared K. Fletcher (l). 'Zor!'. *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna* #4. New York: DC Comics, December [November] 2005.

Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (a), Nathan Eyring (c), Phil Balsman (l). 'Frankenstein in Fairyland'. *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein* #4. New York: DC Comics, May [April] 2006.

Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (a), John Kalisz (c), Phil Balsman (l). 'The Water'. *Seven Soldiers: Frankenstein* #3. New York: DC Comics, April 2006.

Morrison, Grant (w), J.H. Williams (a), Dave Stewart (c), Todd Klein (l). 'The Miser's Coat'. *Seven Soldiers of Victory* #1. New York: DC Comics, December [October] 2006.

Morrison, Grant (w), John Van Fleet (a), Todd Klein (l). 'The Clown at Midnight'. *Batman* vol. 1 #663. New York: DC Comics, April 2007.

Morrison, Grant & Geoff Johns (w), George Perez (p), Scott Koblish (i), Alex Sinclair (c), Nick J. Napolitano (l). 'Let There Be Lightning'. *DC Universe* #0. New York: DC Comics, June 2008.

Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (p), Christian Alamy, Rodney Ramos, Tom Nguyen,

- & Walden Wong (i), David Baron (c). 'Superman Beyond'. *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* #1. DC Comics, October [August] 2008.
- Morrison, Grant (w), JG Jones & Carlos Pacheco (p), Marco Rudy & Jesus Merino (i), Alex Sinclair (c), Rob Leigh (l). 'Into Oblivion'. *Final Crisis* #5. New York: DC Comics, December [October] 2008).
- Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (p), Christian Alamy, Tom Nguyen, Drew Geraci, & Derek Fridolfs (i), David Baron (c). 'To Be Continued'. *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond* #2. New York: DC Comics, March [January] 2009.
- Morrison, Grant (w), JG Jones, Carlos Pacheco, Doug Mahnke, Marco Rudy, Christian Alamy, Jesus Merino (p), Marco Rudy (i), Alex Sinclair & Pete Pantazis (c), Rob Clark Jr. (l). 'How To Murder the Earth'. *Final Crisis* #6. New York: DC Comics, January 2009.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Doug Mahnke (p), Doug Mahnke, Tom Nguyen, Drew Geraci, Christian Alamy, Norm Rapmund, Rodney Ramos, Walden Wong (i), Alex Sinclair, Tony Avina, & Pete Pantazis (c), Travis Lanham (l). 'New Heaven, New Earth'. *Final Crisis* #7 New York: DC Comics, March [January] 2009.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Tony S. Daniel (p), Sandu Florea (i), Guy Major (c), Jared K. Fletcher (l). 'Batman R.I.P. – Batman in the Underworld'. *Batman* vol. 1 #677. New York: DC Comics, July 2008.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Tony S. Daniel (p), Sandu Florea (i), Guy Major (c), Randy Gentile (l). 'Batman R.I.P. – The Thin White Duke of Death'. *Batman* vol. 1 #680. New York: DC Comics, October 2008.
- Morrison, Grant. 'Miracle on Crime Alley'. *Batman* #679. New York: DC Comics, 2008.
- Morrison, Grant. *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us about Being Human*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Gene Ha (a). 'The Curse of Superman'. *Action Comics*, vol. 2, #9. New York: DC Comics, July 2012.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Frank Quitely (a), Nathan Fairbairn (c), Rob Leigh (l). 'In Which We Burn'. *The Multiversity: Pax Americana* #1. New York: DC Comics, January [November 2014] 2015.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Dough Mahnke (p), Christian Alamy, Mark Irwin, Keith

- Champagne, Jaime Mendoza (i), David Baron & Gabe Eltaeb (c), Steve Wands (l). 'Ultra Comics Lives!'. *The Multiversity: Ultra Comics #1*. New York: DC Comics, May [March] 2015.
- Morrison, Grant (w), Jim Lee (p), Scott Williams (i). 'Splendour Falls'. *The Multiversity: The Mastermen*. New York: DC Comics, April [February] 2015.
- Nashrulla, T. and Jamieson, A. *Here's What We Know About the Austin Package Bomber*. [online] BuzzFeed News, 2018.
<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tasneemnashrulla/austin-bombing-suspect-mark-anthony-conditt#.mw2ZLpkag>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Neiwart, David. 'Is That An OK Sign? A White Power Symbol? Or Just A Right-Wing Troll?'. *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2018.
<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/09/18/ok-sign-white-power-symbol-or-just-right-wing-troll>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Nolan, Christopher. *The Dark Knight Rises*. Film. United States: Warner Bros., 2012.
- Narcisse, Evan. 'Free Mass Effect 3: Extended Cut DLC To Give 'More Closure' This Summer'. *Kotaku*, 2012. <https://kotaku.com/free-mass-effect-3-extended-cut-dlc-to-give-more-clos-5899373>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Nevius, C.W. et al. 'McCain Criticized For Slur / He Says He'll Keep Using Term For Ex-Captors In Vietnam'. *SFGate*, 2000.
<http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/McCain-Criticized-for-Slur-He-says-he-ll-keep-3304741.php>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- 'NYPD Challenge Coins'. *Research and Destroy New York*, 2018.
<https://researchdestroy.com/nypd-challenge-coins.pdf>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'October 21, 1984 Debate Transcript'. *Commission on Presidential Debates*, 2016.
<http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-21-1984-debate-transcript>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Infrastructure. *Base Structure Report FY 2018 Baseline*. Washington DC, 2018.
- Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Infrastructure. *Base Structure Report FY 2015 Baseline*. Washington DC, 2015.
- Office of Senator Barack Obama. *Senator Barack Obama Poses In Front Of Superman*

Statue In Metropolis, Illinois. 2006.

<http://www.seattlepi.com/lifestyle/slideshow/Kitchy-statues-7354/photo-808642.php>. Accessed June 30, 2019.

O'Neil, Luke. 'What I've Learned from People Whose Loved Ones Were Transformed by Fox News'. *New York Magazine*, 2019.

<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/04/i-gathered-stories-of-people-transformed-by-fox-news.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Orr, Jimmy. 'Reagan And Gorbachev Agreed to Fight UFOs'. *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2009. <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/The-Vote/2009/0424/reagan-and-gorbachev-agreed-to-fight-ufos>. Accessed June 28, 2019.

Packer, George. 'No Death, No Taxes'. *The New Yorker*, 2011.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/11/28/no-death-no-taxes>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Pareene, Alex. 'Ronald Reagan Cared More About UFOs Than AIDS'. *Salon*, 2011.

http://www.salon.com/2011/02/04/reagan_aides_ufos/. Accessed June 28, 2019.

Pareene, Alex. 'Stop Saying 'Officer-Involved Shootings''. *The Dish*, 2014.

<http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/09/02/stop-saying-officer-involved-shootings/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Pareene, Alex. 'The Long, Lucrative Right-Wing Grift is Blowing Up in the World's Face'. *Splinter*, 2017. <https://splinternews.com/the-long-lucrative-right-wing-grift-is-blowing-up-in-t-1793944216>.

Pareene, Alex. 'Whatever Happened to Honest Graft?'. *Splinter*, 2018.

<https://splinternews.com/whatever-happened-to-honest-graft-1822938108?> Accessed June 29, 2019.

Parks, Casey. 'Oregon White Supremacist Expert Explains the Changing Landscape of Hate Groups'. *The Oregonian*. 2017.

https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2017/06/oregon_white_supremacist_exper.html. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Pasko, Jessica and Brown, J M. 'Two Santa Cruz Police Officers, Suspect Shot and

- Killed'. *The Mercury News*. 2013.
<https://www.mercurynews.com/2013/02/26/two-santa-cruz-police-officers-suspect-shot-and-killed/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Peyser, Eve. 'Suicide Squad Sets Box Office Record Because We Don't Deserve Better Movies'. *io9*, 2016. <https://io9.gizmodo.com/suicide-squad-sets-box-office-record-because-we-dont>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Peyser, Eve. 'Jared Leto is the Joker We Deserve'. *Vice*, 2018.
https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/9k8ne5/jared-letto-is-the-joker-we-deserve. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Robinson, Tasha. 'Alan Moore'. *AV Club*, 2001. <https://www.avclub.com/alan-moore-1798208192>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Plowes, Nicola. 'An Introduction to Eusociality'. *Nature*, 2010.
<https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/an-introduction-to-eusociality-15788128>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Pólya, George. *How To Solve It*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945.
- Powell, Jim. *Derrida for Beginners*. Cork: Red Wheel Weiser, 2007.
- Powell, Jim. *Deconstruction for Beginners*. Cork: Red Wheel Weiser, 2008.
- Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. '*Ethically Impossible*': *STD Research in Guatemala From 1946 To 1948*. Washington, D.C.:
www.bioethics.gov, 2011. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Prophet Mohammed Cartoons Controversy: Timeline'. *The Telegraph*, 2010.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11341599/Prophet-Muhammad-cartoons-controversy-timeline.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. by Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.
- Rahman, Aamer. Twitter Post. November 6, 2017, 1:11 PM.
https://twitter.com/aamer_rahman/status/927644648893399040. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Reagan, Ronald. 'Address to the 42nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York'. Speech, New York, 1987.
- Reagan, Ronald. *An American Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.
- Reagan, Ronald. 'Remarks to the Students and Faculty at Fallston High School in Fallston, Maryland'. Speech, Maryland, 1985.

- Resnick, Gideon. 'Palmer Luckey: The Facebook Near-Billionaire Secretly Funding Trump's Meme Machine'. *The Daily Beast*, 2016.
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/palmer-luckey-the-facebook-near-billionaire-secretly-funding-trumps-meme-machine>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Risen, James. 'WORD FOR WORD/ABC's OF COUPS; Oh, What a Fine Plot We Hatched. (And Here's What to do the Next Time)'. *The New York Times*, 2000.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/18/weekinreview/word-for-word-abc-s-coups-oh-what-fine-plot-we-hatched-here-s-what-next-time.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Rivenburg, Roy. 'Were Sex and Punishment Behind Feud for Archives?'. *Latimes*, 2007.
<http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/25/local/me-derrida25>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Robinett, Warren. *Adventure*. Atari 2600.
https://atariage.com/manual_page.php?SystemID=2600&SoftwareLabelID=1&maxPages=8¤tPage=1: Atari, 1979. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Roberts, Sam. 'Vera Katz, Mayor Who Oversaw Portland's Flowering, Dies At 84', *The New York Times*, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/obituaries/vera-katz-mayor-who-oversaw-portlands-flowering-dies-at-84.html>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Rockhill, Gabriel. 'The CIA Reads French Theory: On the Intellectual Labor of Dismantling the Cultural Left - The Philosophical Salon'. *The Philosophical Salon*, 2017. <http://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-reads-french-theory-on-the-intellectual-labor-of-dismantling-the-cultural-left/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Rodger, Elliot. 'MY TWISTED WORLD'. *Document Cloud*, 2014.
<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1173808-elliott-rodger-manifesto.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Ross, Janell. *Mike Pence on broad shoulders, strength and leadership*. *Washington Post*, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/06/mike-pence-on-broad-shoulders-strength-and-leadership>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Roston, Aram, and Joel Anderson. 'The Moneyman Behind the Alt-Right'. *Buzzfeed*, 2017. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/aramroston/hes-spent-almost-20-years-funding-the-racist-right-it>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

- Roston, Aram. 'A Middle East Monarchy Hired American Ex-Soldiers to Kill its Political Enemies. This Could be the Future of War'. *Buzzfeed*, 2018.
<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/aramroston/mercenaries-assassination-us-yemen-uae-spear-golan-dahlan>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Salmon, Peter. 'Derrida Vs. The Rationalists'. *Newhumanist.Org.Uk*, 2017.
<https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/5143/derrida-vs-the-rationalists>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Salisbury, Brian. 'Espionage-A-Trois: The Secret Sneakers Trilogy'. *Film School Rejects*, 2017. <https://filmschoolrejects.com/espionage-a-trois-the-secret-sneakers-trilogy-c89cf48ed75e/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite And Jew / Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Schramm, Mike. 'Nielsen: WoW is Most Played Core Game by 25-54 Females'. *Engadget*, 2009. <https://www.engadget.com/2009/04/09/nielsen-wow-is-most-played-core-game-by-25-54-females/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Schreckinger, Ben. 'Trump Pumps Siege Mentality In Iowa'. *POLITICO*, 2016.
<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/trump-iowa-siege-mentality-216455>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Scocca, Tom. 'On Smarm'. *Gawker*, 2013. <https://Gawker.com/on-smarm-1476594977>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Scocca, Tom. 'Gawker was Murdered by Gaslight'. *Gawker*, 2016.
<https://Gawker.com/Gawker-was-murdered-by-gaslight-1785456581>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Serwer, Adam. 'Obama's Legacy of Impunity for Torture'. *The Atlantic*, 2018.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/obamas-legacy-of-impunity-for-torture/555578/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Shadowrun Identity', 2013.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140316055057/http://www.shadowrunidentity.org/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Siegel, Jerry (w), Joe Shuster (a), John Sikela (i), Fred Ray (c). 'Man or Superman?'. *Superman #17*. New York: DC Comics, 1942.
- Singer, Marc. *Grant Morrison: Combining the Worlds of Contemporary Comics*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

- Singh, Manish. 'Palantir's Software was Used for Deportations, Documents Show'. *Techcrunch*, 2019. <https://techcrunch.com/2019/05/03/palantirs-software-was-used-for-deportations-documents-show/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Slovic, Paul, Daniel Västfjäll, Arvid Erlandsson, and Robin Gregory. 'Iconic Photographs and the Ebb and Flow of Empathic Response to Humanitarian Disasters'. *Proceedings of The National Academy Of Sciences* 114, no. 4 (2017): 640-644.
- Sneddon, Laura. 'The Strange Case of Grant Morrison and Alan Moore, as Told by Grant Morrison'. *The Beat*, 2012. <http://www.comicsbeat.com/the-strange-case-of-grant-morrison-and-alan-moore-as-told-by-grant-morrison/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Sneyd, Mary. 'Agog Over Bush's Comments on Gog and Magog'. *Cleveland.Com*, 2016. http://www.cleveland.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/08/agog_over_bushs_comments_on_go.html. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- South Park*. 'Super Best Friends'. S5E3. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, July 4, 2001.
- South Park*. 'All About Mormons'. S7E12. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, November 19, 2003.
- South Park*. 'Trapped in the Closet'. S9E12. Directed and written by John Smith. Comedy Central, November 16, 2005.
- South Park*. 'The Return of Chef'. S10E01. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, March 22, 2006.
- South Park*. 'Cartoon Wars Part I'. S10E3. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, April 5, 2006.
- South Park*. 'Cartoon Wars Part II'. S10E4. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, April 12, 2006.
- South Park*. 'Imaginationland Episode I'. S11E10. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, October 17, 2007.
- South Park*. 'Imaginationland Episode II'. S11E11. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, October 24, 2007.
- South Park*. 'Imaginationland Episode III'. S11E12. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, October 31, 2007.

- South Park*. 'You're Getting Old'. S15E7. Directed and written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central, June 8, 2011.
- Stanley-Becker, Isaac. 'Kamala Harris: Gun Control Requires 'A Locked Room' With 'Autopsy Photographs of Those Babies''. *The Washington Post*, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/01/29/kamala-harris-gun-control-requires-locked-room-with-autopsy-photographs-those-babies/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Stempel, Jonathan. 'Johns Hopkins, Bristol-Myers Must Face \$1 Billion Syphilis Infections Suit'. *Reuters*, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-maryland-lawsuit-infections/johns-hopkins-bristol-myers-must-face-1-billion-syphilis-infections-suit-idUSKCN1OY1N3>. Accessed June 28, 2019.
- Stonor Saunders, Frances. *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. 2nd ed. London: Granta Books, 2000.
- Sturgeon, Theodore. 'It!'. *Unknown*, ed. by John W. Campbell. New York: Street & Smith, Aug. 1940.
- Stripling, Jack. 'UF Hired Professor Unaware of His Past'. *Gainesville Sun*, 2007. <http://www.gainesville.com/news/20070318/uf-hired-professor-unaware-of-his-past>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Stripling, Jack. 'Former Chairman Leaves Department'. *Gainesville Sun*, 2007. <http://www.gainesville.com/news/20070523/former-chairman-leaves-department>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'The Structuralist Controversy and its Legacy 1966 Anniversary Conference'. *Humctr.Jhu.Edu*, 2017. http://humctr.jhu.edu/events/1966_Anniversary. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Stuster, J. Dana. 'Mapped: The 7 Governments the U.S. Has Overthrown'. *Foreign Policy*, 2013. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/20/mapped-the-7-governments-the-u-s-has-overthrown/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Swaine, Jon. 'Barack Obama: The 50 Facts You Might Not Know'. *The Telegraph*, 2008. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/3401168/Barack-Obama-The-50-facts-you-might-not-know.html>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Taylor, Scott 'JLA Mail Room'. *Justice League of America* vol. 1, #42. New York: National Periodical Publications, Inc. [DC Comics], February 1966 [December 1965].
- 'Timeline: The Troubled History of Jeremy Goulet Leading to shooting of two Santa

- Cruz Police officers'. *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 2013.
<https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2013/03/01/timeline-the-troubled-history-of-jeremy-goulet-leading-to-shooting-of-two-santa-cruz-police-officers/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Thomas, Roy (w), Herb Trimpe (a). 'Among Us Walks...The Golem'. *The Incredible Hulk*, vol. 1, #134. New York: Magazine Management Co. [Marvel Comics Group], Dec. 1970.
- Thomas, Roy and Gerry Conway (w), Gray Morrow (a). '...Man-Thing!'. *Savage Tales*, vol. 1, #1. New York: Marvel Comics Group, May 1971.
- Thurmond, Sarah. 'Grudge Match: Keep Austin Weird Trademark Holders vs. Keep Austin Weird Fest Organizers'. *Austin Monthly*. 2017.
<https://www.austinmonthly.com/AM/November-2017/Grudge-Match-Keep-Austin-Weird-Trademark-Holders-vs-Keep-Austin-Weird-Fest-Organizers/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Top UC Berkeley Professor Accused of Sexual Harassment'. *Sanfrancisco.Cbslocal.Com*, 2017. <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2017/03/23/top-uc-berkeley-professor-accused-of-sexual-harassment/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'The Truth About Damon Cole'. *Facebook*, 2019.
<https://www.facebook.com/thetruthaboutdamoncole/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Uzumeri, David. 'The *The Multiversity* Annotations, Part 7: *The Mastermen*'. *Comics Alliance*, 2015. <http://comicsalliance.com/the-The-Multiversity-annotations-part-7/>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Wang, Esther. 'Pete Buttigieg'. *Jezebel*, 2019. <https://theslot.jezebel.com/i-spent-a-week-interrogating-my-dislike-of-pete-buttigi-1835247553>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'UCI Affair'. *Jacques-Derrida.Org*, 2017. <http://www.jacques-derrida.org/UCI%20Affair.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- United States Central Intelligence Agency. *Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952- August 1953*. Washington, DC, 1954.
- VanderMeer, A. and VanderMeer, J. (2012). *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*. New York: Tor Books.
- Veitch, Rick (w & p), Alfredo Alcalá (i), Tatjana Wood (c), John Costanza (l).

- 'Wavelength'. *Saga of the Swamp Thing* vol. 2 issue #62. New York: DC Comics, 1987.
- Waldman, Peter, Lizette Chapman, and Jordan Robertson. 'Palantir Knows Everything About You'. *Bloomberg*, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-palantir-peter-thiel/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Walter, Damien. 'Transmetropolitan: The 90S Comic That's Bang Up-To-Date on Donald Trump'. *The Guardian*, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/mar/07/transpolitan-90s-comic-donald-trump-transmetropolitan-warren-ellis>, accessed June 30, 2019.
- Webber, W. Brent and Ramona Stone. 'Incidence of Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma and Residential Proximity To Superfund Sites In Kentucky'. *National Environmental Health Association* 801 (2017): 22-29.
- Weems, Mason Locke to Mathew Carey. 'January 12, 1800'. In Paul Leicester Ford, *Mason Locke Weems: His Works, His Ways: A Bibliography Left Unfinished*. 3 vols. New York: Plimpton Press, 1929.
- Weissert, W. and Vertuno, J. *Austin bombings put chill in city known for keeping it light*. AP News, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180320220348/https://apnews.com/19bb53fd62cc454ebff9330fa5f225df/Can-Austin-stay-weird-despite-the-bombs-that-keep-exploding>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Wein, Len (w), John Buscema (p), Jim Mooney (i). 'There Walks the Golem!'. *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, #174. New York: Marvel Comics Group, Jun. 1974.
- Wein, Len (w), Bernie Wrightson (a). 'Swamp Thing'. *House of Secrets*, vol. 1, #92. New York: DC Comics, Jul. 1971.
- Wein, Len (w), Bernie Wrightson (a). 'Dark Genesis'. *Swamp Thing*, vol. 1, #1. New York: DC Comics, Nov. 1972.
- Weinstein, Adam. "'Marine Todd' is an Awesomely Stupid Right-Wing Meme that Got Hijacked". *Gawker*, 2014. <https://Gawker.com/marine-todd-is-an-awesomely-stupid-right-wing-meme-th-1555109402>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- 'Wellek Lecture Series | UCI Critical Theory'. *Humanities.Uci.Edu*, 2017. <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/critical/programs/wellek.php>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

- Wertham, Fredrich. *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1954.
- ‘What Is Superfund?’. US EPA, 2019. <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/what-superfund>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- ‘Why the CIA Loved French New Left Philosophy, and Why They Were Wrong | Spy Culture’. *Spy Culture*, 2017. <http://www.spyculture.com/cia-loved-french-new-left-philosophy/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Wiener, Jon. ‘The Responsibilities of Friendship: Jacques Derrida on Paul De Man’s Collaboration’. *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (1989): 797-803.
- Williamson, Kevin. ‘The Plantation Theory’. *National Review*, 2013. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/354265/plantation-theory-kevin-d-williamson>. Accessed June 30, 2019.
- Wilson, Matt. ‘Digging Deep Into ‘*The Multiversity*’ With Grant Morrison’. *Comics Alliance*, 2015. http://comicsalliance.com/The_Multiversity-interview-grant-morrison/, accessed June 30, 2019.
- Winick, Judd and Bill Willingham (w), Howard Porter (p), Wayne Faucher (i), Alex Bleyaert (c), Travis Lanham (l). *DC Universe Decisions*. New York: DC Comics, December, 2008.
- Wong, Edward. ‘The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy’. *The New York Times*, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Wood, Graeme. ‘Richard Spencer Was My High-School Classmate’. *The Atlantic*, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/06/his-kampf/524505/>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Woodard, Benjamin Graham. ‘The Weird and the Eerie’. *Textual Practice* 31, 6, (2017): 1181-1183.
- Yardley, Jim. ‘Austin Journal; A Slogan Battle Keeps Austin Weird’. *The New York Times*, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/08/us/austin-journal-a-slogan-battle-keeps-austin-weird.html>. Accessed June 29, 2019.
- Zelikow, Philip. ‘Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire’. *Foreign*

Affairs, 2000. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2000-09-01/blowback-costs-and-consequences-american-empire>. Accessed June 29, 2019.

Zunes, Stephen. 'The U.S. Role in the Honduras Coup and Subsequent Violence'. *The Huffington Post*, 2016. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-us-role-in-the-honduras-coup-and-subsequent-violence_b_5766c7ebe4b0092652d7a138. Accessed June 29, 2019.