Since embarking on a career as a professional comic book writer in 1979, Alan Moore has produced an enormous body of critically acclaimed work on a variety of subjects. He has achieved recognition in the form of major industry awards as well as acknowledgment outside of comic book circles with awards such as the Hugo, the Locus, and the Bram Stoker Award. He has worked within the medium's clearly demarcated genres: superhero narratives, horror stories, and dystopian science fiction. He has also stretched boundaries of comics, writing noir expressionism (A Small Killing, with Oscar Zarate [1991]) and work that defies generic classification (the unfinished Big Numbers, Sienkiewicz [1990], about the transformation of an English community by the construction of an American shopping mall). His output ranges from the ridiculous to the sublime: at one end of the spectrum, he wrote and drew a comic strip called Maxwell the Magic Cat in the Northampton Post between 1979 and 1986. At the other end, he wrote Shadowplay -- The Secret Team, illustrated by Sienkiewicz (1989), an exposé detailing the CIA's covert arms dealing and drug smuggling between WW II and the Reagan Administration.

Overall, the quality of his prodigious output, Moore is often referred to as the single best writer in the history of the comic book medium.

If there is a single thematic concern that ties Moore's work together into a coherent oeuvre, it is the transformative power of history and its impact on the present.
it is the recurring question of what history is. In a recent interview supporting the publication of *The Mirror of Love*, a brief, poetic history of same-sex desire, Moore stated that once you have accepted that gay people have a right to exist, then it becomes progressively harder to justify the fact that they don't have the same rights as everybody else, that the same laws should apply to them that apply to everybody else. [...] As with most things in culture, you're going to get this surge of progress which will be met by people digging their heels in. It will be met by fundamentalist objections, which have their basis in trying to turn things back to how they were. I'd suggest that historically, that's not going to happen. That doesn't work. Leaders do not control the tides of history -- they are just surfing them. They do their best to keep on top of them. They do not make the tides -- the history come from a million different vectors: our advancing technology, our advancing worldview. These are the things that actually make a difference to the flow of history, and our leaders try to sit on top of it, and perhaps try to give the impression that they are controlling it, but history's history. Time and tide don't pay much attention to any human leader.[1]

*The Mirror of Love* was first published in 1988 as a means of protesting the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, which had passed legislation in 1986 banning reference to homosexuality by local authorities. *The Mirror of Love* reappears in 2004 at a moment when same-sex marriage rights are the subject of ongoing political struggle in North America. In discussing these events, Moore is fundamentally evincing a calm faith in the emancipating power of human rationality as the engine of historical progress. In this, he aligns himself with a form of English historiography inaugurated by E.H.Carr in his 1961 Cambridge lectures, *What is History?* Carr reasoned against the Whig view of history which sees it as the achieved deeds of "great men" instead argued that progress is the product of economic, industrial and class-based forces. In his own vision of history, Moore even goes so far as to oppose history to political leaders altogether: history here appears to be what happens *despite* the actions of those who claim to represent humanity's interests, as if leaders are opposed to progress but powerless to stop it.

Yet if in interviews Moore gestures towards a hopeful vision of progress, his artistic attitude towards the subject is more pessimistic. In *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* two (illustrated by Kevin O'Neill [2002-03]), Moore presents a playful repetition of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. In Wells's original story, the invading Martians are an evil a
humanity is helpless. Facing imminent destruction, the human race is saved from this massive evil by common bacteria. The Martians are "slain, after all man's device, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth" (311). In Wells' providential view of history, the Martians are an evil that proves to be benevolent: humanity is drawn together and allowed to overcome its petty differences through fear of an outsider, the alien. Moreover, saved as they are by the germs of disease, humans are indebted towards their own suffering itself, which has protected them homeopathically. Human immunity is the result of generations of struggle with illness. "By virtue of this natural selection of our kind we have developed resisting power. [...] By the toll of a billion deaths man has bought his birthright of the earth [...]" remarks the narrator (311). All human suffering has meaning in the grace of God. In Moore's revision of the story, the Martians are secretly destroyed genetically engineered combination of streptococcus and anthrax created Moreau, working for British Intelligence. Of course this germ-bomb also kills a number of human beings in South London. The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, who have unknowingly participated in this mass slaughter by transporting the weapon, are appalled at their actions and dissolve their group. Yet the official history will remain that of H.G. Wells. As I demonstrate in this paper, the point of Moore's revision is not that metaphysical, providential, teleological paradigms of history need only to be demystified by a raw, unsentimental, cynical positivist materialism. Instead I argue that Alan Moore represents history as the contradiction between the two visions of history, one metaphysical, one material. In Wells, God writes the human narrative; in Moore's version, it is humanity that ghostwrites its own story and credits it to God. The to humanity is whether it will script its own history consciously, or allow the narrative to be shaped secretly by leaders and figures of authority who do not necessarily have humanity's best interests in mind. Elsewhere, we shall see that Moore offers a vision of human history in which metaphysics and materiality are identical. This contradictory identity is the meaning of human life. What emerges from an overview of Moore's oeuvre concern less with concrete historical events per se than with the representation of the dialectical contradiction of history itself: it is made by human beings in historical moments, but is also the seemingly transhistorical force that makes and drives humanity...
so it takes on the appearance of an impersonal tide even while this tide remains human agency.

My argument here is that the major works of Moore's career actively pursue the articulation of an historiographic vision, one that is roughly similar to the narrative Moore describes in the interview above, but that in his actual artistic output is a great deal more ambivalent. While Moore in interviews describes history as an unstoppable progressive tide, as inevitably bound to redeem us and improve our lives, in his comic book concerned with how history is made by human beings, with how history happens. Ultimately, he is interested in the question of how it is that human social reality remain historical. This question is also the question: how does human social reality to remain meaningful, or even more pointedly, how does humanity continue meaning? The exploration of this question is Moore's response to the political turn in the Western world. In 1979, the year Moore entered his profession, Margaret Thatcher was elected in Great Britain, and in 1980 Ronald Reagan was elected in the United States of America. Moore uses his comic writing to criticize these controversial, deeply conservative politicians and their regressive social agendas. I suggest that Moore's philosophical in the meaningfulness of humanity as historical is an ongoing critique of conservatism dominating the West, which Moore suggests is guilty of an abandonment of belief in humanity and a subsequent abandonment of an historical vision. Moreover, this abandonment of a hopeful human perspective is also targeted by Moore as a failure within the superhero comic industry, as we shall see.

**Utopia, Pictopia and Historical Amnesia**

In his earliest mainstream comic book ventures in Great Britain, Moore uses the medium to critique the reactionary, close-mindedness of government of the time. In *Captain Britain* (1983) and *V For Vendetta* (1981-88), Moore portrays an England in which society has turned sharply towards fascism: the result is a dystopian time without hope in persecution of minorities is enforced with extreme prejudice. *Captain Britain* alternate England in which superheroes have been systematically eliminated in reactionary witchhunts as a means by which a totalitarian state can maintain rigid control over its populace. Thus superheroes in *Captain Britain* function as general figures for persecuted
minorities in a repressive, intolerant society, much like the X-Men. In *V For Vendetta*, satire is more pointed: the repressive intolerance enshrined by Margaret Thatcher has caused England to veer towards fascism following a limited nuclear exchange. The story follows an anarchistic hero in a Guy Fawkes mask. A victim of British concentration camp experiments, he seeks to systematically destroy the government and liberate others. This use of superhero comics for the purpose of social critique culminated in *Marvelman* (or *Miracleman* as it was called in North America due to legal conflicts with *Marvel* comics), published intermittently between 1982 and 1989. *Marvelman* was created in 1954 by Mick Anglo, as a thinly veiled English counterfeit of Captain Marvel, where the latter transformed into a hero by crying "Shazam!," the former shouted "Kimota!" Moore revived this corny English superhero from the 1950s and placed in him the world, then gradually had Marvelman learn that all his Golden-Age memories of light-hearted four-color superheroics are false. In fact, Marvelman is a product of cold-war scientific experiments drawing on alien technology salvaged from a wrecked UFO. He is an experiment in military technology, and his memories of harmless superheroics are how his creators controlled him. Once he has resolved his personal problems, Marvelman proceeds to take responsibility for the entire human race; capable of creating to his superhuman abilities, he proceeds to do so. He abolishes capitalism, creates a society without scarcity, and gets rid of every biological, chemical and nuclear weapon on the planet. He rids the world of nuclear power plants and nurtures the damaged global ecosphere, while also greening areas of African desert so that they can serve humanity. He legalizes all narcotics, thus ending organized crime. In effect, he liberates humanity from its own shackles. Within a few years, there are no more penitentiaries. In one particularly resonant scene, he explains to the British Parliament his plan to restructure the global economy, and when Margaret Thatcher protests that she will not allow such interference with the market, he quietly makes it clear to her that he is not asking her permission (#16/6). Finally, in order to eliminate the hierarchy between superheroes and humans, a difference that threatens their utopia, Marvelman begins a eugenics programme, providing artificial insemination to any woman who desires it: there will be no gods and humans. Humans will be gods (#16/19). What is most audacious about thi-
simple didacticism of it: this is not a false utopia with hidden flaws, all contains human discontent. The godlike hero solves all deep social contradictions creates a society which need not be radically changed in any way: it is a society without want and therefore a society without war or crime. Moore is not suggesting that social engineering is in fact justified, and as we shall see with Watchmen, he seeks to expose the hubris of such human aspiration. But Marvelman demonstrates that he has earned the right to reshape humanity because he demonstrates that he believes in separates him from Margaret Thatcher, who once famously declared that the thing as society.

Marvelman is only able to create his utopia because of the miracle of the daughter, and he earns the right to create a utopia because of how he interprets this experience. In the most mature and memorable issue of the series, "Birth" (#9 and his mortal wife give birth to their daughter Winter in an unabashedly, visually graphic birthing sequence that shocked many readers. Marvelman mediates experience for the reader: his own life, he explains, has been a series of lies.
about who he was and where he came from, lies which have led to blood and suffering. The birth of Winter is the singular event which, emerging out of madness and lies of Marvelman's life, becomes a truth and redeems it all (13). Blood and violence are redeemed by love and creation. "These are the moments when we declare (15, see Figure 1). We are real, because in such moments of epiphany, humanity appears to be meaningful and hopeful, and therefore is meaningful and hopeful. To be here is to be concrete and true in a Hegelian sense: the concrete true is that which completely understood within a larger context, within some sense of totality. Immediate is still abstract, whereas the concrete true is the historical. Marvelman believes in humanity because he mediates the immediate fact of the child's life into something concrete and real, something historical. The birth of Winter is a miracle and history, inasmuch as her existence actually changes the nature of humanity. She recreates the human race through her presence: humanity is welcomed into a new, enlightened age due to the philosophical wisdom offered to the human race by the alien species called the Warpsmiths (#13/2, 4). Due to the Warpsmiths' thinking, the human race realizes that it already has the technological means to create a perfect global society, a world of instantaneous communication where distance is irrelevant (#13/2). The mediation of Winter's birth is a facet of Moore's abiding historiographic vision: humanity remains historical and meaningful because humanity continues to interpret itself as meaningful. Humanity remains a meaning, an intelligibility. This movement of humanity into the intelligibility of history is indicated by what the Warpsmiths call "intelligent space" (#13/4). Humanity becomes fully conscious.

Although Neil Gaiman, who took over the scripting of Marvelman from Moore, explored the existence of discontent within this new utopia, the fact that Moore completed his own interest in the story with the achievement of a perfect world indicates that the creation of an unambiguous, simple utopia was his ultimate goal: Marvelman as a critique of the very absence of such utopian thinking in the West, particularly in the Conservative Thatcherite government which is pushed gently aside for Marvelman to usher in a new Golden Age.
The publication of *Marvelman* took several years and while it was eventually praised for its fresh perspective on superhero comics, Moore first achieved widespread critical acclaim when he took over the writing of the DC Comics horror title, *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* in 1984, with issue #20. Moore took a recently revived, classic horror comic named Alec Holland who has been transformed into a walking vegetation monster, and invented the central conceit of the book. Moore's Swamp Thing discovers that he is not a man at all, and never was, and therefore has no hope of regaining his humanity. The humanity he remembers having was never his in the first place. Instead, he
plant, the result of the chemical explosion that killed Alec Holland. The plant has consumed and mimicked the consciousness and body of the dead man. The ongoing question then becomes: how do you maintain your humanity when the humanity you remember is just a fiction? How do you create meaning in your life? In issue #22, the Swamp Thing experiences an hallucinatory struggle to hold onto his alienated humanity, figured in the form of the unearthed skeleton of Alec Holland. In the conversation the Swamp Thing holds with Holland's skull, the central concern of Moore's writing is manifested: The skull explains that without him, there would be no point in continuing, your humanity. I'm important. I'm what keeps you going. [...] After all, without me there'd be no point in running, would there?" (#22/19, see Figure 2). The Swamp Thing abandons the skull and surrenders himself to "the green," a vast, global, metaphysical web of vegetation of which he realizes he is a part, but he does not abandon his human consciousness, even after realizing they are imitations. While he becomes an avatar of the forces of vegetable nature on earth, the wisdom he achieves arises from his liminal state between humanity and plant, since he is wholly neither. In issue #24, he confronts a villain named the Floronic Man, a plant-man who wishes to wipe out the human race as a threat to the vegetable world. The Swamp Thing stops him, pointing out that the green world are in fact co-dependent, each producing the gases the other needs to survive. To destroy one is to destroy the other. This liminality, a kind of dialectical logic of inter-dependency between human and vegetable, is key to Swamp Thing's historiographic vision. It is my contention that the basic question of how a human remains human when denied his or her humanity is a nascent aspect of Moore's philosophy of history, concerned with how humanity in general remains meaningful within situations when meaningfulness or humanity is under threat. The Swamp Thing's crisis merely reveals the truth of the human: to be human is to consciously imitate an idea of humanity. To live a meaningful life is make oneself human in an ongoing manner despite dehumanizing situations of necessity.
Swamp Thing, however, remains a horror comic, replete with supernatural gothic monsters, escalating into a storyline in which a force of primordial, cosmic evil is unleashed by a cult of shaman-magicians. The Swamp Thing leads a motley group of demons from hell, magicians and superheroes who attempt to stop this primal dark, an entity which predates the arrival of light and threatens to annihilate every existence, metaphysical and material. Force will not work against it: this darkness wants to know what it is, what evil is. This twist transforms Swamp Thing into a rumination on history. American critic Kenneth Burke argues in *Attitudes Towards History* that if a work of art is to be positioned in relation to an historiographic vision, this will be m
how the work manages in its content the perennial "problem of evil." For Burke "evil" is a catchall term, describing suffering as it is known to humanity in various forms: anguish, injustice, disease, death. In other words, "evil" is another word for necessity, for whatever it is that humans are subject to in their lives that they cannot control but unhappily. In Moore's meditation on the significance of evil, only the Swamp Thing is capable of providing an interpretation that satisfies the primordial darkness: whereas other superheroes such as the Spectre and Dr. Fate, facing down the evil, can only engage in shallow moralizing, describing evil as a force to be conquered, or eliminated, or the name of righteousness, only the Swamp Thing is capable of understanding evil as necessity. The Swamp Thing alone is able to answer the question of the evil, because he is a mixture of nature and civilization. In isolation, neither pole can figure the answer. When the Swamp Thing asks a parliament of trees where evil comes from, they dismiss it as a human concept, unknown to the natural world. Yet the Swamp mixture of human and vegetable, and out of his monstrous heterogeneity comes the answer itself (see Figure 3):

The Black Soil ... is rich in foul decay ... yet glorious life springs from it ... But however dazzling ... the flourishes of life ... in the end ... all decay ... to the same black humus ... perhaps ... perhaps evil .. is the humus ... formed by virtue's decay ... and perhaps ... perhaps it is from ... that dark, sinister loam ... that virtue grows strongest? (#50/35)

Nature and culture, vegetable reality and human morality, must be used to make sense of each other. Good and evil are dialectical contradictions: opposites which are integral of the same ongoing process of renewal. In revealing himself as a dialectical interpreter of reality, the Swamp Thing saves the universe, or rather enables its renewal. After the cosmic struggle ends, "[e]verywhere things look the same, but the feeling ... the feeling is different" (#50/41). Nothing has changed, and everything has changed. Paradoxically, a strange new light has been shed on the inter-relationship between light and darkness, and changed the universe. The Phantom Stranger remarks:

In the heart of darkness, a flower blossoms, enriching the shadows with its promise of hope... In the fields of light, an adder coils, and the radiant tranquility is savor by its sinister presence. Right and wrong, black and white, good and evil ... [...] Never before have I understood how much they depend upon each other.
This is a dialectical vision of evil as the ground of life, as the necessary aspect of an ongoing process of renewal. In the Swamp Thing's act of interpretation we find located the power of transformative recreation, and in this idealization may be found a vision of history: he remakes the world by interpreting it. The world Moore envisions will be one where binary oppositions like light and darkness, good and evil, nature and culture collapse into one another in fleeting moments of utopian identity. These moments of almost utopian optimism are the special reserve of art, and while these moments are outside of history, not a place which we can inhabit, art can nevertheless perform a promise of such impossibility.
Thus *Swamp Thing* is finally a story about how the constant interpretation of creates and constitutes reality itself. Moore's end-of-the-world crisis is in critique of another end-of-the-world crisis which was a major media event while Moore was writing *Swamp Thing*. Moore's refusal of the facile binaries of good and evil serves as a commentary on the foreclosure of hopeful, utopian, historical thinking within the comic book industry itself, a foreclosure most apparent in the r
mini-series *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985-86). *Crisis* was a cynical attempt by DC to effectively erase its own vast, heterogeneous history. Following the idea that new readers were uninterested in the long, rich, complicated history behind DC's superheroes, that young readers were alienated by the confused continuity between golden, silver, and bronze age DC heroes, it was decided that a cosmic crisis would clean things up. In a 12-issue series written by Marv Wolfman and illustrated by George Pérez, *Crisis* was a story in which the DC "multiverse" (a word describing the parallel universes and multiple Earths populating the DC universe) was presented as an accident at the dawn of time that never should have happened in the first place, an error to be corrected by the "crisis." As a result, the multiple histories of DC comics were violently collapsed into a single history, with only a single Superman, a single Superboy, and no Super-Dog at all. Gone forever would be whatever characters DC's editors decided were unappealing to new readers. The death of Supergirl and the Flash were used as major drawing cards for the series, inaugurating later cynical deaths (such as the much-promoted death of Superman) as a means of boosting sales. Moore's contempt for this unimaginative revisionism is evident in *Swamp Thing*, in which the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* is represented as nothing but a small-scale prelude to the *Swamp Thing*'s cosmic showdown with the primordial dark. "Don't worry about this crisis business. It's what comes after that you should be worrying about," remarks supernatural investigator John Constantine (#44/7). The apocalyptic disaster portrayed in *Crisis* is restricted to the material plane. Constantine and the Swamp Thing, it is the coming crisis at the metaphysical level wherein lies the real danger. This playful jab on Moore's part might be taken as little more than a gentle rib at another comic, were it not for the short piece entitled "In Pictopia!" which Moore wrote in 1986. "In Pictopia!" (see Figure 4) represents the universe of comic books and comic strips, of superheroes and funny animals, as a vast metropolis where these fictional characters all cohabit, and where something sinister is happening: characters vanishing mysteriously, or re-appearing in cynically revised forms. Gradually, more and more of Pictopia is vanishing. "Take my advice, buddy, an' keep out of it. This city's changing, and some things just don't fit the continuity no more," remarks a worker driving a bulldozer (140). Soon all that will be left are the industrial smokestacks looming in the distance. Moore's satire is broad and scathing, and leveled directly at the
industry itself. Through the kind of historical revisionism characterized by Crisis on Infinite Earths, comic books are not only abandoning their history, they are abandoning imaginative possibilities, and by implication abandoning hopefulness altogether: a vision of comic book utopia being bulldozed over by corporate cynicism. The resonance of Pictopia with Swamp Thing is in evidence in the most imaginative issue of the series, issue #33. This is a stand-alone story in which the Swamp Thing encounters the denizens of another famous cartoon swamp, the characters from Walt Kelly's classic moment of heterotopian discontinuity, in which characters from different fictional worlds meet in an assertion of the liberating power of the imagination.

Leftist and Marxist critics of culture understand historical amnesia, subject to the logic of '80s capitalism, to be the condition of postmodernity. Fredric Jameson diagnoses postmodern culture as an expression of the logic of late capitalism ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 125). While culture within postmodernity tends to reinforce historical amnesia, Jameson leaves open the question of whether art can resist capitalist logic. Moore's work is an explicit condemnation of the amnesia of consumer capitalism. Moore's work is an explicit condemnation of the amnesia of consumer capitalism. The exploration of the possibility of an honest utopia in Marvelman serves as an explicit challenge to the historical amnesia dominating the West, due simply to the odd narrative turn within the general cynicism of the postmodern moment. Jameson points out that to have an historical sense, to be able to imagine the arrival of the new, implies a sense of the utopian, if not necessarily a concrete vision of utopia ("The Politics of Utopia" 36). As Moore suggests in his work, the loss of sense of the utopian, of the imaginative, and of the historical, consequently threatens the dissolution of the existence of humanity altogether. Moore's critical gaze in the 1980s was focussed on the economic, social and political context of Western society, an informal context of the comic book industry. If, on the one hand, he uses his art to re-enchant social reality with historical meaning and hopeful progressivism, himself as re-enchanting the formal universe of comic books with a liberating spirit, trying to keep Pictopia alive, while imagining the possibilities for utopia
well. Ironically, while Moore has had an enormous influence on the comic book industry, it has been largely as fuel for the bulldozers mowing away Pictopia, for the perpetuation of historical amnesia. This is due to the negative effect of his most famous, frequently read work, *Watchmen* (1986-87), drawn by Dave Gibbons, a revisionist superhero narrative which, due to its incredible success, influenced the cynical turn in late '80s and early '90s comics, but in a manner Moore himself did not intend. *Watchmen*, an unsurpassed revisionist superhero narrative, was a further progression in Moore's historiographic vision, received by the comics industry as an invitation to abandon the past and superheroes into violent, amoral killers as a means of making comics more "realistic" and appealing to new readers.

**History as Simultaneity**

In *Swamp Thing* and *Marvelman*, the characters create meaning in their existences with moments of epiphany and insight, exploring fundamental questions of life and death by mediating them through larger contexts. In *Watchmen*, Moore adds another activity of mediation and the interpretation of reality: the concept of *simultaneity* becomes a crucial theme in virtually all of his later, major works. *Watchmen* presents the baroque thesis that in order to understand humanity as a meaningful phenomenon, you must comprehend that time is an illusion and that everything is happening simultaneously. Henceforth in Moore's work, history emerges out of individual epiphanies, illumination and apocalypse through which concrete, singular events find meaningfully located within a sense of simultaneity, a perspective of totality. In these epiphanies a momentary dialectical identity is asserted between the sacred and the profane, between meaning and meaninglessness. Thus, Moore has developed a theory of history as dialectical mediation, which he eventually relates to the formal, stylistic elements of the comic book medium itself, as a kind of aesthetic apocalypse available to the reader.

*Watchmen*'s concerns reach beyond the boundary of superhero comics, and have been missed by its imitators. In *Watchmen*, the problem of history is confronted by the super-powered product of Cold War science gone wrong, the blue-skinned Dr. Manhattan. Manhattan, officially a weapon of deterrence in the hands of the American...
government, triggers a nuclear standoff when he abruptly abandons the human race from Mars, he contemplates the possibility of humanity being utterly extinguished by war. He's not bothered: "All that pain and conflict done with? All that needless suffering at last? No, that doesn't bother me. All those generations of struggle, what purpose ever achieve? All that effort, and what did it ever lead to?" (#9/10). In short, Dr. Manhattan is asking: does mass human labour, the movement of civilizations, have any meaningful content in the end? Does it actually reduce human suffering? Does human history have any meaningful content? Dr. Manhattan is confused about the purpose of human labor, accomplishing nothing, leaving people empty and disillusioned... leaving people broken" (#9/12). He is holding tentatively to the conclusion he articulates in chapter four: "As I come to understand Vietnam and what it implies about the human condition, I also realize that few humans will permit themselves such an understanding" (#4/19). One other person who, it appears, does understand the meaninglessness of human life is the mercenary anti-hero the Comedian, who sees existence as a vast, amoral joke (#4/19). For Dr. Manhattan, from the perspective of Mars, the human race appears to be utterly without significance.
Dr. Manhattan is a privileged voice in *Watchmen* because of the peculiar condition in which he exists. Accidentally caught in quantum field disruption during a Cold War scientific experiment, he finds himself recreated with godlike powers. He lives the past, the present, and the future simultaneously: everything is always happening once for him. He explains: "There is no future. There is no past. [...] Time is such an intricately structured jewel that humans insist on viewing one edge at a time; when the whole design is visible in every facet" (#9/6). Manhattan's condition baffles agency.
free man, but he experiences reality as completely scripted: he describes puppet who can see the strings (#9/5). He lives the contradiction between necessity as an untenable identity. Every moment seems to him both contingent and determined: far from falling into fatalism, he is instead thrown into a philosophical quandary. While he sees everything as preordained (#9/5), he cannot escape the burden of agency, asking "Which of us is responsible? Who makes the world?" (#4/27, see Although Dr. Manhattan is the only character in Watchmen who actually has superhuman powers, his perspective is meant to be a humanly accessible one: it is an acknowledgement of the unresolvable struggle between temporality and totality, between past, future, which is characteristic of dialectical, historical consciousness itself. To be conscious of the presence of the past and the future is to be conscious of the essential incompleteness and insufficiency of the present itself. It is to have a sense of historicity.

It is due to this perspective of simultaneity that Dr. Manhattan is able to mediate on what appears to him as locally meaningless into a moment of epiphany. On Mars, his companion Laurie Jupiter deduces that her father is the aforementioned Comedian, a man notorious for once having raped her mother, Sally Jupiter. Laurie suddenly perceives her own life as a cruel and meaningless joke. Yet Dr. Manhattan, witnessing this, is struck by how is the sheer accident of the unique human life as Laurie's life emerges from the contingency and cruel chaos of the universe. He remarks: "we gaze continually at the world dull in our perceptions, yet seen from another's vantage point, as if new, it may take the breath away" (#9/27). His cosmic perspective on humanity swings from insignificance to total significance, and he suddenly appreciates the meaningful commonplace and concrete: the individual human life in its singularity redeems the mundane meaninglessness of humanity as a whole. Here emerges Moore's most profound and abiding theme: the identity between the sacred and the profane, to be located in such momentary epiphanies, small personal apocalypses of insight which are, for Moore, the substance of history itself. In other words, to continue to be human, for him, is historical: it is to believe in the existence of humanity per se, as a phenomenon meaningful. This is a comprehension of reality which transforms it and the answer to the question "Who makes the world?" When Dr. Manhattan first asks the question
of the peculiar confusion he experiences between agency and determinism: necessity are perspectives we normally hold as being opposed to each other, yet for Manhattan they blur together, giving rise to his question. Until he answers act in humanity's defense. The answer, implicit in Manhattan's act of interpretation, is that humans make the world through their conscious investment in it. Like the Swamp Thing, who saves the universe through the activity of comprehending it, Dr. Manhattan makes the world by finding it meaningful. As a result, he leaves Mars and returns to Earth to prevent nuclear disaster.

Manhattan's sense of totality becomes a recurring idea in Moore's work: he insists that there is a conceivable perspective on human reality from which everything is simultaneous. This vista of totality is hidden from humanity but its conceivability is the guarantee that human life does in fact mean something. However in Watchmen the question of totality is primarily for its totalitarian, fascistic implications. The story is brought to a conclusion by an Übermensch figure named Ozymandias, a self-made billionaire superhero who hatches a scheme for circumventing nuclear armageddon: he creates a fake alien monster and teleports it into New York City, where its orchestrated psychic convulsions kill three million people. He models himself on Alexander the Great, drawing inspiration from the solution to the problem of the Gordian knot: "Unable to unite the world by conquest ... Alexander's method ... I would trick it; frighten it towards salvation with history's greatest practical joke" (#11/24). He cuts the knot, and his plan works: faced with the threat of the cosmic unknown, global humanity predictably huddles together and overcomes it. This resolution resembles the conclusion to The War of the Worlds. Ozymandias is presented as a mortal human who has managed to achieve, through technology, a perspective on history imitating that of Dr. Manhattan. Ozymandias routinely sits before a wall covered with television screens: out of this "cathode mosaic," he gradually watches meaning and coherence emerge, arising from "semiotic chaos" (#11/1). It is "simultaneous input" that allows "subliminal hints of the future to leak through" as an "emergent worldview becomes gradually discernible amidst the media's white noise" (#11/1). From fragments, a glimpse of simultaneity and totality, a perspective which allows Ozymandias to intervene and take control of human history. The cathode mosaic is time, spatialized,
as we shall see, the idea of simultaneity, as the compression of time into space, is one of the characteristic qualities of the condition of postmodernity.

One of the ambiguities of *Watchmen* is that Ozymandias's plan actually works very well. Ozymandias has quite literally written history: he makes of himself an agent of vast, incalculable human suffering, while also authoring the significance of that suffering. He shapes the course of human events in a potentially redemptive direction. There is no question that he is portrayed as effectively a fascist, but the narrative is also concerned with the fact that fascism, based as it is on lies, works very well at ordering and directing human destiny as long as those lies are believed. In the story's conclusion, the members of the disbanded superhero team confront Ozymandias at the South Pole, realize he has achieved his goal, and also realize there is nothing for them to do about it. Manhattan sees no point in revealing the truth about the alien monster: it would render pointless the deaths of three million people.

Ironically, the one character who insists that the truth be told is *Watchmen*’s ambivalent figure, Rorschach, who of all the heroes has refused to retire or work for the American government and has continued to persecute and terrorize the criminal underworld. Rorschach is the most demystified superhero in *Watchmen*. Deranged, amorally violent, sexually repressed, and alienated from humanity, his motives for fighting crime are revealed to be the product of both childhood trauma and a gradual belief in the worthiness of the human race. Rorschach is a vigilante because he hates humanity and sees it as a cesspool of filth, not because he loves it. He has answered the question of the philosophy of history for himself. Having witnessed the worst that humans are capable of, he concludes:

> Looked at sky through smoke heavy with human fat and God was not there. The cold, suffocating dark goes on forever, and we are alone. Live our lives, lacking anything better to do. Devise reason later. Born from oblivion, bear children hellbound as ourselves, go into oblivion. There is nothing else. Existence is random. Has no pattern save what we imagine after staring at it for too long; meaning save what we choose to impose. This rudderless world is not shaped by vague metaphysical forces. It is not God who kills the children, not fate that butchers them or destiny that feeds them to the dogs. It's us. Only us. (#6/26)
For Rorschach, a world where meaning is only imposed by humans is a world with inherent meaning, while Moore's argument is that it is a fallacy to separate meaning from the world in the first place: the world is *made* by the discovery of meaning in it. Rorschach insists that the truth about Ozymandias must be told no matter what the consequences, Dr. Manhattan destroys him. Meanwhile Rorschach's journal, mailed to a reactionary right-wing newspaper, is the final indication from *Watchmen* that the truth will eventually come out. While the logic of Ozymandias's plan is the thinking of the fascist, explicitly borrowed from Hitler, where ends are allowed to justify the most violent of means, Ozymandias is portrayed as honestly benevolent in his thinking: he takes a burden of guilt upon himself and he is willing to do anything to guarantee the survival of humanity. At the same time, he is an intelligent, opportunistic, individualistic capitalist who plans to benefit financially from his scheme through shrewd investment. With irony, *Watchmen's* plot is driven forward by the mysterious death of the Comedian and the search for his murderer: it emerges that the Comedian discovered Ozymandias's plan and had to be killed. The Comedian, the most casually cynical of the heroes, found his cynicism overwhelmed by the scale of Ozymandias's plan. We are left to draw our own conclusions about the ultimate injustice of Ozymandias's scheme: while Ozymandias imitates the perspective on totality practiced by Dr. Manhattan, the difference between them is found in Manhattan's final words to Ozymandias, a warning that "nothing ever ends" (#12/27). But it has not worked out in the end because history has not come to an end. Lacking the mediation which maintains the singularity of the concrete, namely the three million humans, Ozymandias has succumbed to the illusions of the fascist, who thinks that human history can be concluded, simply because one can imagine a total perspective on events. To paraphrase Stalin with irony, the death of one human is a tragedy, the death of three million is a statistic. What Ozymandias lacks is a belief in the meaningfulness of humanity which would restrain him from mass murder.

However, the opportunity to transcend the immediacy of Ozymandias's perspective offered to the reader. Significantly, the location we are shown at the very moment the alien creature is teleported into New York City is a street corner which recurs...
Watchmen. Among the human beings who die there are characters we have grown to know over the course of the story: a news vendor, a boy who reads comics at the news stand every day, the psychiatrist analyzing Rorschach who becomes traumatized by what the moment they die they are being drawn together by a fight on the corner between two women, former lovers, whose quarrel has escalated into an assault. It is a simple event: human beings, seeing a conflict, are drawn by a basic sense of concern to intervene and help. It is this scene that is interrupted by the arrival of the alien: human beings, managing and resolving, as best they know how, the conflicts which are an essential part of life on Earth. It is this human process which is circumvented and cancelled by Ozymandias's usurping of human agency: they are "making their world" as Dr. Manhattan puts it, showing a basic sense of human compassion, free of prejudice or selfishness, just when Ozymandias decides to make it for them.

Ozymandias's simultaneous "cathode mosaic," his wall of television screens, is a method of prognostication that he claims has an earlier precursor in the shamanistic tradition of divining goat innards. The imagery of the priest-shaman as malign architect of history emerges as a major concern in Moore's 1990s work. In the first chapter of his novel The Voice of the Fire (1996), Moore tells a story set in 4000 BCE about a hapless young nomadic boy who is turned into a human sacrifice by a shaman. The Voice of the Fire takes place in the vicinity of what today is known as Northampton, Moore's birthplace and residence. In each chapter, Moore recounts an incident of human scapegoating, either fictional or historical (such as the burning of women as witches or the institutionalization of the Romantic poet John Clare), implying that human sacrifice is the burning engine of transformation that fuels the western world up to the present day. In the first chapter, the murder of the young nomad is needed in order to give the shaman's sayings strength:

There is a path, off out in dark, all of queer sayings make. It go from edge of world to edge of world, and many sons is come to axe for make of it. May as it is they is set in neath of path, as bone of women set in bridges neath. A path of bones, all bout of world, that bones is make a top for world in low of we. (41-42)

Human sacrifice is the fuel with which the shaman creates a path of sayings that maps the entire world and connect together tribes of settlers. .. It is with this brutal social mapping that all storytelling must contend, as Moore comments in the final chapter of the novel:
History, unendingly revised and reinterpreted, is seen upon examination as a different class of fiction [...]. Still, it is a fiction that we must inhabit. [...] It remains in question is whose map we choose, whether we live within the world’s insistent texts or else replace them with a stronger language of our own. (310)

This activity of choosing is its own form of violent struggle, a rewriting of the old stories, as if Moore understands that in order to change history one must become a part of it and thus engage in a kind of human sacrifice, as much as he would like to imagine some other way. *The Voice of the Fire* begins with a map of the Northampton area, icons indicating the location of each of the chapters. This image of locations arranged simultaneously in space indicates a further development of the concept of simultaneity in Moore’s work. If simultaneity is an experience of time manifested across space, then the ambivalence of simultaneity in *Watchmen*, as a perspective which is, potentially, both humanizing and dehumanizing, relates closely to the logic of late capitalism. The importance of space for postmodernism has been a constant concern of Fredric Jameson in his cultural analyses. Jameson observes that one of the symptoms of the postmodern is a loss of a sense of depth in relation to the temporal ("Regarding Postmodernism" 6). Yet postmodernism is not a monolith, and while Jameson loss of historicity, he also suggests that postmodernism’s popularism and storytelling after the experiments of modernism are potentially emancipatory. Most crucially, it is the very logic of capitalism to transform time into space. This was delineated by Georg Lukács as one of the central principles of the activity of *reification*, gradual rationalization and objectification of human existence by reason (90).

We should note the contradiction that has immediately emerged by relating concept of simultaneity to postmodernism: Moore replicates the logic of reification, internalizing it and making it an operating principle. He embraces simultaneity, the transformation of time into space, as an avenue through which we might create for ourselves a perspective of historicity. Jameson, significantly, neither condemns nor celebrates postmodernism, but sees it simply as a site of struggle, and suggests resistance from *within* the postmodern: "To undo postmodernism homeopathically means to work at dissolving the pastiche by using all the..."
of pastiche itself, to reconquer some genuine historical sense by using the instruments of what I have called substitutes for history" ("Regarding Postmodernism" 17). Such a strategy can only be dialectical and contradictory. Moore is emblematic of the artistic strategies which Jameson envisions for postmodern art, which can respond to the cultural logic of late capitalism not by rejecting its cultural symptoms, but by embracing them and using them against that cultural logic.

There is no hope or idealistic redemption to be found in The Voice of the Fire, of art is not itself hopeless. Its entire logic is homeopathic. Thus as he explains in an interview discussing the process of writing The Voice of Fire, Moore found himself becoming the person he dedicates so much of his writing towards condemning: a shaman: "I didn't realise that by the end of the book I would be a self-styled Northampton shaman."[9] himself as a magician and of his work as acts of magic becomes Moore's attempt to understand the substantial force of the human imagination and its manifestation in art as something actual while not conforming to the dictates of rational binarisms:

Magic to me is about a more dynamic relationship with our own consciousness; a more dynamic way of understanding it; what consciousness is, what though Because thought is the blind spot of science. We cannot talk in terms of Cartesian logic and empirical experiments when you're talking about the mind [...] I was thinking maybe you need a different model of consciousness. I came up with this model and I'm not claiming its new. [...] [I]t's the idea of the Idea Space.[10]

Significantly for our discussion of simultaneity, Moore considers Idea Space space and time: "There's no space and there's no time. It's just as easy for you to think about what you were doing this morning as Victorian street scenes. You can imagine instantly. You can imagine a scene from ten years in the future."[11] Idea Space is the medium through which human consciousness draws connections across space and time, finds meaningfulness in the immediate through its mediation within larger contexts. In other words, Idea Space is a description of what Hegel called totality. Idea Space describes the work of human consciousness as an ongoing activity of meaning making, given substantial shape and reality. The concept reflects the argument I have already made in the first chapter of Watchmen, which is that humanity makes the world through its consciousness, through continuous re-investment of humanity with meaning. While Moore's use of...
"magic" to describe his work is a deliberate flirtation with the metaphysical, this is a rhetorical strategy meant to refuse the easy binary oppositions of "true" and "false," "reality" and "fiction" which are employed to subjugate fiction to a position of insignificance. Moore's point instead is that fiction, like human consciousness, is real, even if it is merely "mimesis" in the Platonic sense of an imitation. As Moore suggests in *Swamp Thing* discovery that one's consciousness is a fraud, an imitation of human consciousness, merely an apprehension that this is all consciousness ever has been: an activity of mimicry. It is real, while not Platonically "true." Fiction is how reality is made, just as the shaman in chapter one of *The Voice of the Fire* both maps the world and makes the world through "sayings."

In light of this discourse on shamanism we can say that in *Watchmen*, Ozymandias makes himself into a shaman-priest and performs an act of social magic when he murders three million people and successfully shapes this sacrifice into an enormous lie: he maps human reality, filling it with a meaning and significance that he dictates and exploits. The question we are left with is: how can humanity afford to continue to embody meaning in the world? How can we continue to think historically when the philosophical concept of history -- as the meaning of life and of human effort -- of some end of human struggle -- seems defunct, irrelevant, and moreover a heinous metanarrative whose uses are primarily totalitarian? As a writer interrogating these questions, Moore gradually grew into the ambivalent position of shaman himself, respecting that he cannot take a position "outside" of the site of struggle if he wishes to effect any change in these meanings. This adoption of the position of shaman becomes reflected in his work through an acknowledgment of his complicity with the narratives that he interrogates. The ambivalence of the shaman-priest's acts of human sacrifice is fully realized in Moore's first major work of the 1990s, *The Architecture of History*.

In Moore's most significant work after *Watchmen*, *From Hell* (1989-1999), drawn by Eddie Campbell, the question of how humanity can continue to embody meaning in the world becomes the question of how humanity becomes a meaning. This investigation of the Jack the Ripper murders represents a subtle and significant shift in attitude: no longer considering the possibility of history, Moore henceforth takes it as actual and explores its structure.
Hell, Moore presents the Ripper to us as Sir William Gull, physician Royal to Queen Victoria. Gull is commanded by the Queen to suppress the evidence of a royal bastard born to Prince Albert Victor. The Ripper's murdered prostitutes are women who know of this secret child and are blackmailing an associate of the Prince. Moore's point in writing the story was not to "solve" the murders, and so he refuses to create suspense, telling us all this from the start. Moore comments in his appendix to the book: "Truth is, this has never been about the murders, not the killer nor his victims. It's about us. About our minds and how we came to mean something through the dance of human minds. In recounting the Ripper murders drawing upon painstakingly researched historical rationalizing each narrative decision and extrapolation in a meticulous appendix in the collected edition, Moore is not primarily interested in whether or not he has what "really happened." Consider his dedication, to the five murdered women: "You your demise: of these things alone we are certain" (ii). While it would be easy to read Hell as an exercise in detective fiction, as "historical documentary," Moore avoids the pitfalls of such hubris. His interest is in how the murders have become history; Ripper as a social phenomenon and as meaning:

In terms of the Whitechapel crimes, we cannot establish a real material physical identity for the being we call Jack the Ripper. Not Gull, not Druitt, not Step and certainly not poor old bloody James Maybrick. Jack the Ripper, in a very real sense, never actually had a physical existence. He was a collage-creature, made from crank letters, hoaxes, and sensational headlines. He exists wholly in Idea Space. [...] If the realm of concept and consciousness is, as I believe it to be the realm of the sacred, then in the crucible of the Whitechapel murders, both killer and victims were in a sense "made holy." ("Correspondence: From Hell," Part 2, 321)

Moore is obviously not suggesting that the murders never happened and that was "nothing more than some Baudrillardian simulacrum," as José Alaniz surmised from the above statement (147). Such logic falls prey to the binary thinking Moore seeks to avoid. In From Hell, he is not interested in the relationship between history and the meaning from history, but in meaning as history, meaning as where humanity cannot but locate itself, with all the ambivalent violence entailed in that act of meaning-making.
And so, Moore portrays the Ripper much like Ozymandias, engaging in deliberate activity of social semiosis. Upon receiving his mission from the Queen, a freemason suffering from the debilitating mental aftereffects of a stroke, decides he is a magician and that the Ripper murders will be what he calls acts of social magic designed to guarantee the stranglehold of patriarchy over female energy. All magic is symbolic, explains, and symbols are how warlocks conquered women (#4/24). Gull comments to his hapless driver: "Sometimes an act of social magic's necessary; man's triumph over woman is insecure, the dust of history not yet settled. Changing times erase the constraints society's irrational, female side. Our workers, lately given votes,

Figure 6. From Hell #8, p. 32. Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell
socialism, talk of rights, riot in Trafalgar square, and won't quit 'til they are shot"

Moore portrays the 1890s as a moment of great historical possibility, an instance of nascent change and progress, of emerging socialism and class-consciousness, which makes it his mission to stifle and suppress. In illustration of this conflict, in chapter eight, Moore creates a startling juxtaposition between the Ripper murdering a woman in an alleyway and a meeting of the International Worker's Education Club happening nearby. Sir William Morris reads a poem, "Love is Enough," and our gaze is focused upon a portrait of Marx hanging on the wall, while in adjacent panels the Ripper's knife cuts the exposed throat of Elizabeth Stride (#8/32, see Figure 6).

From the very beginning of From Hell, we are presented with a discourse about history: the story opens with an argument in 1923 about whether or not the achievements of the Russian Revolution prove Marx's thesis about the inevitability of socialism. For Detective Abberline, the revolution is clearly a failure and a mistake due to the strife and poverty suffered by Russians in the six years since the revolution. Abberline grew up in a working class family and is confident that the working class, in England anyway, have no interest in revolution. For professional psychic Robert Lees, the survival of the revolution despite the hardships suffered proves Marx's point: socialism is human destiny. The argument is one they cannot consciously solve between them, but they solve it for the reader, indirectly, over the course of their conversation. Lees confesses here that his entire career as a psychic is a fraud, and that when he claimed to be seeing visions of the Whitechapel murderer back in 1888 he was making it up. Abberline points out that, nevertheless, everything Lees said happened: "It was all true." Lees agrees: "I made it all up and it all came true anyway. That's the funny part" (prologue, 5). We can relate this revelation to the argument about the Russian Revolution, as a means of solving the contradiction between necessity and contingency that divides Lees and Abberline. Lees tells lies, fictions that are nevertheless true. The difficulty of Marx's dialectical materialism for rationalized thinking is that Marxism specifically denies easy binarisms such as true/false, seeing them instead as dialectically interrelated, as aspects of a single process. In 1922, George Lukács wrote History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, he argued for the necessity of the revolution and the self-liberation of the class
Thus Lees's question of necessity or inevitability is dialectically complicated by the refusal of metaphysical alibis, since history must now be understood at all times to arise out of human activity itself and never from an abstract "elsewhere." Lees has answered his question with the revelation of his "false" prophecies, which nevertheless proved to be necessary, much as revolution is a prophecy that, fictional it is in the abstract, creates itself as true in its realization. As Timothy Bewes eloquently: "history is not the discovery of truth, but its generation; not the reflection of truth, but its revelation -- which consists not of the unveiling but the production of truth. The present needs to be viewed dialectically contemplatively, with a methodological insistence on the immediate as embedded in a wider totality, rather than as the summation and end-point of history" (175). Revolution is a meaning, written by human activity, that makes the world. It is an interpretation of human reality, if you will, that is also a making of human reality. Therefore Marxism makes for the "inevitability" of socialism as a metaphysical destiny that awaits the human race as its redemptive end, makes no guarantee of success or victory. "[T]he historical process will come to fruition in our deeds and through our deeds" Lukács insists, a process only by being achieved (43). Unlike Lukács, who finally posits that the material of history is found only in the proletariat masses, and who rejects Hegel's theory that history is expressed through the consciousness of philosophers, Moore suggests that his more collectively diffuse forms of social semiosis, neither wholly materialist abstract and metaphysical, but an aspired-to identity between the two. In this, Moore resists the metaphysical fallacy to which Lukács succumbs, which is to imagine the working class as the earthly manifestation of Hegel's Geist: the identical subject-object of history. Instead, in From Hell Moore shows us what from Lukács's perspective is perhaps more appropriately called the failure of history, in as much as the Ripper emerges as a figure working to consciously suppress the revolutionary spirit of socialism. In the description of lies that nevertheless become truth, Lees describes the central theme of From Hell, how fiction is constitutive of history, how the two are identical.
In *From Hell*, Sir William Gull emerges as a sinister philosopher and architect who achieves this perspective through a vista of simultaneity and totality reminiscent of that of Dr. Manhattan, Gull expounds the idea that all time is akin to "all times co-exist in the stupendous whole of eternity" (#2/14). This surmise that history itself has an architecture (#2/15), that it is a simultaneous structure and that Freemasons have been its architects. The architectural work of Nicholas Hawksmoor, in particular Christ Church, Spitalfields, figures prominently in *From Hell* by manifesting this simultaneity and structuring the narrative. Gull demonstrates a postmodern understanding that space is the realm of political struggle.
architecture, necessity itself is compressed; human suffering as experienced transformed into space, creating "a dynamo of blood and history" (#4/27, see Christ Church, located in Whitechapel, is such a rendering of history's empowerment by human suffering. Despite its historical setting, From Hell's concerns are distinctly postmodern, suggesting that Hawksmoor's work as it stands a symptom of the postmodern compression and transformation of time into space. The transformation of time into space is a symptom of the logic of late capitalism, the reification of traditional meanings which provides the ground for articulating a new sense of humanity. The Victorian situation in the 1880s is portrayed by Moore for the emergence of advanced capitalism. In From Hell, the condition of post delivered through the Ripper's crimes.
Like Ozymandias and like the shaman in *The Voice of the Fire* William Gull makes himself an architect of history, murdering women in acts of social magic, magic which is the narrative as the material substance of history itself. At a crucial moment, midst of mutilating a victim's corpse, experiences a vision of a late twen skyscraper rising before him (#8/40, see Figure 8). This is not an hallucin moment of non-realism in which Gull's magic actually gives him access to the future. However this vision is also understood by Gull as the creation of that which Gull eventually realizes that through his crimes, he has played "midwife" to the modern world. "It is beginning, Netley. Only just beginning. For better or worse, t
century. I have delivered it," the Victorian gentleman and man of science remarks to his driver (#10/33). Subsequent visions merely confirm this as a fact within the reality of Hell: in the story's conclusion, Gull dies, transcends his flesh and through an act of magic becomes the transhistorical meaning and energy that courses beneath the skin of history, an eternal, godlike force of fire (#14/10-11). He becomes a wave, an influence, free of time, unshackled from temporality. In other words he is deified, both through his own deeds, and through humanity's collective obsession with those deeds. He becomes part of the collective meaning of the human race.

The history that Gull creates in From Hell is clearly not the revolutionary history envisioned by Marxism. In as much as Gull's magic is composed of conscious acts of pure revenge in the service of rationality, conservatism and especially Christianity, it is best thought of as ressentiment in the Nietzschean sense. Ressentiment describes the repression and asceticism characteristic of the restrictive self-denial, the "bad conscience" of the orthodox Christian religion. Nietzsche saw human history as little more than the depreciation of the affirmatory will to life by the elevation of weakness to a position of virtue. As Gilles Deleuze argues in Nietzsche and Philosophy, the instinct to revenge, for Nietzsche, the force called history itself, a universal motor of nihilism leaving the human race a repressed husk (34-35). Gull, describing his deeds as an attempt to suppress the so-called instinctive and irrational, a deliberately contradictory project to yoke and control Dionysiac, "female" powers of the unconscious through subjection to Apollonian reason (#4/23), is from a Nietzschean perspective an enemy of life, an agent of ressentiment, creating a crippled, self-denied humanity. This appears to be something Gull himself realizes too late, as, during one of his visions of the future, he app twenty-first-century office and realizes what he has created through his acts of condemnation of the condition of postmodernity sounds, ironically enough, highly Nietzschean (#10/22). When he reveals to his driver his belief that he has delivered a bleak, lifeless twentieth century, Gull indicates his understanding that he has allowed triumph of ressentiment to drain the soul from the human race. He has succeeded in writing history, but the project of the "Dionysiac Architects" (#4/23), which Gull pc
glorious contradiction between reason and the unconscious, seems to have lost its productive contradictions in the modern world, leaving a shell of reason without the motor of unconscious drive, producing an "ugly English future" (#14/19). He has manufactured a condition of postmodernity, the reification of human reality that leaves rationalized.

At the end of *From Hell*, Sir William Gull transcends into the realm of the sacred, not because he is a good person, but because the human race has sent him there, through its obsession with the Ripper murders. "The Gods exist in our minds. Therefore they are real," Gull explains earlier (#4/18). He becomes a god, though not shown that his last intended victim, in Moore's version of events, actually Ireland and gave birth to four little girls named after her murdered friends. Marie Kelly has secretly fled London after finding another woman mutilated beyond recognition. It is a small, grim glimpse of possibility, that "nothing is ever over," that Gull's condition has been no more final than was Ozymandias's. But the deification of Gull is also a indictment of storytelling as complicit in Gull's crimes, since storytelling participates in the perpetuation of the meaning of the Ripper murders. As a writer of fiction, Moore is not free from that violence. As he remarks concerning the writing of *From Hell*: "For my concerned with cutting into and examining the still-warm corpse of history itself. In some of my chilliest moments I suspect that this was [the Ripper's] foremost preoccupation, albeit in pursuit of different ends" (*From Hell*, back cover). They are both architects of history, with different goals in mind. In a coda story to *From Hell* called "I Keep Coming Back," Moore implicates himself in the murders through the very activity of writing about them, as if the murders themselves and the meanings they have come to embody cannot be separated from one another. The most Moore, as a shaman himself, is able to do, is the same stories with a slight sense of difference, hoping to produce a different meaning out of the same repeated acts of sacrifice. This difference may amount to little more than rendering taut and visible the contradiction of the "Dionysiac Architects," with the sense that the contradiction contains historical possibilities that were lost through the triumph of ressentiment.

**History as Comic Books**
Significantly, the place Gull goes is seen again, in Moore’s recently concluded series Promethea, the epigraph for which could well be Gull’s statement "the Gods exist in our minds. Therefore they are real." Promethea is about a young woman who realizes the incarnation of the human imagination: as the latest of many Prometheas existed throughout history, she is a god, and she goes on a journey of enlightenment in order to understand who and what she is. It is with Promethea that Moore interrogates the conjunction of the substance of history with the form of comic books as sequential visual art, and suggests that the perspective of simultaneity essential to a historical perspective is embodied in comic book form. This conceit is an intervention into the philosophical discourse surrounding questions of history, would suggest, is from an Enlightenment perspective associated with reason and ultimately with the symbolic order of language itself, as Lacan would have it, rather than with the realm of the mimetic, the iconic, or the visual. Even in Hegel’s post-Enlightenment philosophy, historical consciousness appears in abstract thought, in the escape from representation into imageless truth. The domains of history, reason and progress are understood to inhabit the realm of abstract symbolic mimetic iconography. This is a truism in the semiology of both Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. In Course in General Linguistics, Saussure writes, "Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is characteristic" (68). Peirce, who considered social semiosis to be the constitutive substance of human reality and human consciousness, also elevated the abstract linguistic symbol to the status of privileged sign, arguing that it was through abstract symbols reason, and thus human progress, manifested itself:

Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icon symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of mixed nature; the symbol-parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. Omne symbolum de symbolo. A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows. Such words as force, wealth, marriage, bear for us very different meanings from those they bore barbarous ancestors. (19)
And as French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan extrapolates from semiotic logic, visual illustration bears too much of a resemblance to the activity of mimicry to fully inhabit what he calls the symbolic order, the realm of abstract thought (see *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 105-19). Mimetic drawings are supposed to be primitive and simplistic, and telling a story with pictures little more than scrawling cave paintings, one step above the acts of masquerade and mimicry practiced by animals. Abstract, symbolic thinking, the preserve of language, is where full consciousness, humanity, and history are assumed to reside. For Hegel, poetry was the form of philosophy due to the abstractness of the linguistic medium. For Moore to make pictures do something they are not supposed to do. But this in itself is an important historical task. When Marxist philosopher of history Walter Benjamin presented his theory of "dialectical images," he was describing a contradiction: the intimation of change, transformation and the unfinished new within something static and unchanging. He was also trying to suggest that the moment of the dialectic came not in movement progress, because, unimpeded, change is really just more of the same. "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit] " (261). The dialectic comes in the interruption of the movement of time, not in the movement itself. History erupts in the fleeting lightning flash where continuity is ground to a halt and real change is glimpsed as a possibility, Benjamin called the moment of Jetztzeit, or Now-Time.

Such a dialectical, post-Enlightenment vision of history seems appropriate to Moore's work, which is so deeply critical of concepts of naive progress, and envisions the movement forward as springing out of disastrous failure and regression. Peter Szondi called this historical vision a "New Enlightenment" (52), an attempt to rescue the Enlightenment from its own rationality and from the mythologization of its telos. Szondi sees this New Enlightenment as one taken up by Max Horkheimer, Adorno and Ernst Bloch, who attack the basic premises of Enlightenment with the hope of saving Enlightenment from its own mythologization of history: where others see progress, he shows us violence.
sacrifice, scapegoating, bloodshed, totalitarianism and fascism. For him, human history is myth, or in other words fascist ideology. But at the same time where others see the simplistic, ideological thinking of generic comic book visual storytelling, Moore sees instead a site within which to intervene and pry open a new historical vision. He interrupts expectations of form, and also interrupts expectations of these images.

New Enlightenment is an appropriate way to describe the dramatic arc of Promethea's story. It follows Sophie Bangs as she discovers that she is the latest of many in Promethea, and then goes on a journey of Enlightenment, learning about magic through the various paths of the Kabbalah, up through imagination and rationality, to conscious awakening. In issue #15, Promethea and one of her older incarnations travel through the realm of Hod, the mercurial space of language, magic and intellect. Along the way, they ruminate on the significance of meaning-making, affirming understanding of the manifestation of consciousness within the abstraction of semiosis. "I suppose communication is how minds reveal themselves. Language gives a shape to the splendours of the intellect," Promethea observes (#15/4). Moreover, they confirm the connection of semiosis to a sense of historicity: "Language, it shapes consciousness, how we put ideas together. Even our concepts of time. Before we had command of language, we couldn't record events in the past" (#15/5). Without language, we have no history, in the sense that we cannot reason and thus cannot think historically. But Promethea draws this conclusion after noticing some Egyptian hieroglyphs, and she comments: "I guess that telling stories with pictures is the first kind of written Probably that's why Promethea's mostly appeared in comic books this last century. Gods used to be in tapestries, but now they're in strips" (#15/5). This gesture is ahistorical, overlooking the fact that hieroglyphs are not mimetic icons but arbitrary signs. The connection is a playful reminder that we should look for history in the places we might least expect it: Promethea is a story about comic books as history.
A little later on in her journey Promethea arrives at the highest possible human Kabbalistic system, where humanity touches divinity, where the transitory and the eternal connect. This is the realm of transcendental symbol, where the Ripper has been deified, the place where humans and Gods can overlap, the realm of beauty and truth golden and eternal, a space of presence and perfect forms, of angels, and of meaning. It is the realm of the symbolic order, what a philosopher might think of as the telos of the historical process. Yet Promethea learns quickly that this space of perfection is inhabited by decay when she notices Osiris, the Egyptian ruler of the underworld, symbols of death and rot. "It's profane," she remarks, and then wonders if this point: perhaps it means that "the profane is kinda sacred too" (#17/19). Turning this revelation we are confronted by the crucifixion of Christ, in a remarkable, wordless...
image by J.H. Williams III, that springs upon us unexpectedly and dominates the eye (#17/20, see Figure 9). The Prometheas are moved to tears by the profanity of this vision of Golgotha — they see the highest point of humanity reduced to a state of abjection, murdered like a dog. From this vision of Golgotha they learn the same thing Walter Benjamin did in *German Tragic Drama*, where he observed that Golgotha is the allegory of a point where transcendence and materiality, sacred and profane, become indistinguishable from one another. This exploration of the dialectical identity between the sacred and the profane becomes a recurring concern in *Promethea*, signalling its importance in understanding of the simultaneity of Idea Space as a location where meaning and meaninglessness can no longer be separated from one another. In this sense, it over metaphysical thinking altogether, in as much as metaphysics is essentially a belief that meaning and materiality are not the same thing. This is what is most dialectical in Moore's sense of history: it is a substance both sacred and profane. Terry Eagleton describes the phenomenological effect of the crucifixion of Christ as a fundamentally historical rhythm: "a classically tragic rhythm could then become the source of renewed political meaning of this rhythm which matters" (37). The political meaning of this rhythm is history, the wresting of freedom from necessity, hope from hopelessness, the discovery of the sacred within the profane. As they weep before the hill of skulls, Promethea's guardian angel remarks: "Even down here, at the lowest Auschwitz ass-end of what humans are, and what humans do ... our highest point is still here with us. There's light. Always remember that. There's light at the bottom." This final point is the salient one: as we move towards the highest point in the narrative of the movement of allegory itself, we are cautioned never to lose an essentially Benjaminian, melancholic, downward gaze: to find light, don't ascend, but descend, find the sacred in the profane, hope in hopelessness, redemption in darkness. This moment warns of what is to come. At the end of her journey Promethea achieves Enlightenment — she arrives at a place so holy it is terrifying, and has a vision of Mystery as Revelation of Babalon (#21/13, see Figure 10), and realizes that this is she, and that Babalon is also the Madonna (#21/18-19). Promethea is both the madonna and the whore, because of the identity of the sacred and the profane, and herald to the end of the world. As the imagination, the motor of meaning, Promethea is dialectical epiphany, the
The apocalypse which takes place in *Promethea* is the simultaneity, the fulfillment of history, that Moore has promised in *Watchmen* and *From Promethea* is the fulfillment of the promise implicit in all of Moore’s work, and that with *Promethea’s* conclusion Moore has declared he will retire from commercial comics. With *Promethea* Moore is arguing that comic books tell history. Moore has given spoken word performances, deeply poetic, lyrical works filled with striking imagery. They have been illustrated as comics by his collaborator Eddie and these texts serve as useful symbolic keys for his mainstream comic books *Caul* (performed 1995, illustrated 1999) and *Snakes & Ladders* (performed 1999, illustrated 2001) originated as site-specific performances which, like his novel *The Voice* demonstrate a postmodern consciousness of the politics of space and pl
importance of the claiming of this place in a kind of psychic cartography. Both pieces self-consciously begin their narratives in the immediate time and place of their performance, then move back in time, excavating the history that looms beneath the performance itself, before mediating the immediate material of space and history into thematic concerns about the problem of human meaningfulness.

In *The Birth Caul*, for example, Moore engages in a playful Romantic vision of human birth as a gradual forgetting of the absolute. In our modern, rationalized, commodified world, we exist in a reified state, having lost something essential to us, and Moore's performance piece presents itself as a shamanic ritual centred upon a birth caul found amongst his effects shortly after her death. The caul is a totem of what is lost in our fall into a fantasy of a pre-symbolic identity. It "documents a personal Atlantis, dreamtime" (1). It is a promise of a return to lost origins, to be born wearing it is an initiation into "a sect of trappist embryos who dream the absolute" (10). This lost truth is presented with a critical distance: The Birth Caul is a shamanic rite which follows the lead of the totemic caul back through time. This takes the narrative through history, past pre-history, only to arrive at "The cold white page," complete with "Page the corner (47). *The Birth Caul* also suggests that the vision of simultaneity is available to humans as newborn infants, who do not recognize the separation of past, present, and future. For them, all is now, but this is something the conformity of society thieves from us. In *Snakes & Ladders*, Moore offers a solution to this contradiction: simultaneity can be momentarily recaptured in aesthetic experience itself. He tells the history of individual apocalypse: the movement of consciousness into knowledge of itself in the form of a woman, Promethea again, figured here as Mystery. *Ladders* presents a theory of art as the experience of this process of revelatory apocalypse: the aesthetic emerges from the wedding of imagination and will into a vision of absolute truth (34). It touches the universal, "the eerie sense that there is just one of us" is also an apocalyptic vision of collective humanity where we are each other and it is now forever (37), where space and time fold into each other and collapse into here and now in a grand simultaneity (40). This is envisioned as a city of the imagination, where exists in miniature and where the sacred and the profane are the same thing.
truth (43), and is accessible to us in personal apocalypse, moments where we descend into an abyss of self and are crucified, yet find redemption within the depths, “light at the bottom,” as with the crucifixion of Christ in Promethea, and thus achieve personal resurrection.

Hegel called such a dark night of the soul "tarrying with the negative." Snakes & Ladders thus tells the story of an inner Enlightenment that allows individuals to find moments where we descend into an abyss of self and are crucified, yet find redemption within the depths, “light at the bottom,” as with the crucifixion of Christ in Promethea, and thus achieve personal resurrection.

This apocalyptic vision of collective humanity within the experience of the vision of anagogy, as Northrop Frye puts it in Anatomy of Criticism:

In the anagogic phase, literature imitates the total dream of man, and so in the thought of a human mind which is at the circumference and not at the center of its reality. [...] When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate.

It was Fredric Jameson, in The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, who amended Frye's vision of anagogy, politicizing it as a vision of collective social revolution. From a political perspective, anagogy is the necessary utopian intimation of collective humanity's self-liberation, the utopian redemption of all human history. Anagogy is thus another casualty to the condition of postmodernity, and art is the possibility of the recovery of this perspective.

From one perspective, Moore's vision of art as truth is too romantic to be a viable intervention into the postmodern situation. It is a critique of reification, of the fragmentation and rationalization of humanity in late capitalism, which deliberate mysticism as a means of "escaping" reification into a sense of the absolute or totality which is presented merely as something lost to
Moore seems to mourn nostalgically for an anagogic experience that art can magically conjure for us, rather than engaging with the reified ground of postmodernism as raw material from which to create meaning. Such an attitude is more modernist in that it imagines art can render itself autonomous, indifferent to the social, and countering its effects. This theory of art lacks the sense of the homeopathic: mourning happens at the level of content, while at the level of form comic books are emblematic of everything that is reified within postmodernity. Comic books are mass-produced, a depthless and popular form, inherently disposable culture, and typically reified at the level of content due to the prominence of stereotypes and other such compartmentalized thought.

*Promethea* houses an awareness of these issues and a sense that the means of countering the condition of postmodernity is not by rejecting it but by inhabiting it fully as a process of passing through it. Comic books become a site of negotiation in this process. In the first scene, we first meet Sophie Bangs as she and fellow University student Stacia Van de Veer argue about the merits of their respective term paper projects. While Sophie is researching the obscure historical figure of Promethea, Stacia is writing about a ubiquitous postmodern comic book character called the Weeping Gorilla. The Weeping Gorilla is presented as a cliché about postmodern art, a reification of reification itself: this character is not a commercial icon which is meaningless, plotless and everywhere, appearing on billboards all over New York. The Weeping Gorilla is the commodification of human thought and emotion: every time it appears in the narrative, a thought bubble appears above its head containing phrases such as "Modern life makes me feel so alone!" or "I guess change." It is the emblem of the culture of the commodity. Stacia is fascinated by the Weeping Gorilla because it is, apparently, pointless and thus amusing, demanding no emotional or human investment from her. Yet when they later encounter the Weeping Gorilla in its pure symbolic form within the "immateria," a plane where imaginary figures reside, they are struck by the full emotional force of this symbol, free of irony and the reified content of the Weeping Gorilla's thoughts becomes a sincere emotional investment for Stacia: "I know. And I understand what he means now. He isn't funny. He isn't f-funny at all. He's us! He's us, and he can't stop c-crying..." The Weeping
In *Promethea* the anagogic vision of simultaneity, the promise of everything happening at once, is fulfilled and offered directly to the reader of the comic book, or rather, we are prompted to recognize that we have had this vision of totality literally at our fingertips all along. When Promethea causes the end of history, the apocalypse, everything happens at once for characters in the story. In issue #28, a character is literally cut free from the narrative and floats above it in a state of infancy and simultaneity, nude but for a diaper: beneath her are the simultaneous panels of the comic book itself (#28/10-11, Figure 11). She is experiencing everything at once in a vast vision of comic book totality. This is anagogy, but it is mass-produced anagogy. Here is where content becomes images recall Scott McCloud's thesis in *Understanding Comics* that in comic books, time is a function of space, much like William Gull's architecture of history. McCloud suggests that the comic book is a landscape of past and future co-existing with the given moment, that being whichever panel we happen to focus upon (104). If as an aesthetic object, the comic book can be understood to function as a sundial of history, then its form may be read much the way Dr. Manhattan reads the simultaneity of time: as a multifaceted jewel, even when we only see one facet. The reader of *Promethea* is being offered the vision of totality from whence meaning emerges, in an aesthetic apocalypse wherein the reader, and the characters are all consumed and redeemed by Promethea's story, and will live together in a city of the imagination where all of history simultaneously exists miniature. It is a vision of simultaneity arising out of the fragments of comic book form rather than in a rejection of them. If we can politicize McCloud's thesis about comic book form, then we may suggest that comics are emblematic of reification itself: time, a qualitative experience, is rendered into spatial terms in comics, thus quantified and rationalized. Yet at the same time, the narrative storytelling form of comic books promises the *Aufhebung* of those reified fragments, the possibility of both cancelling and preserving...
Promethea concludes with literal Revelation. The importance of a vision of the Day of Judgment to an historical attitude is articulated by British historian E.H. Carr in *History?* Carr argues that in order to have a vision of history as progress, one must have a sense of the absolute, of some total goal towards which humanity is moving. Yet careful to avoid the pitfall of totalitarian thinking, and his sense of the absolute is compatible with Moore's vision of simultaneity:

The absolute in history is not something in the past from which we start; it is something in the present, since all present thinking is necessarily relative. It is something still incomplete and in process of becoming -- something in the future towards which we move, which begins to take shape only as we move towards it and in the light of which, as we move forward, we gradually shape our
interpretation of the past. This is the secular truth behind the religious myth that the meaning of history will be revealed in the Day of Judgment. (121)

In *Promethea*'s representation of the Day of Judgment, the comic book's aesthetic is here offered as a utopian redemption through personal apocalypse. This is an intervention, an introduction of anagogy into a reified form of consumer culture, reflected in the stylistic flourishes which characterize *Promethea*'s artwork. *Promethea* is distinguished by a fair amount of formal experimentation such as polyptychs, in which moving figures are reproduced over a continuous background, and the frequent elimination of gutters, inviting us to grasp a series of images as a whole. These all gesture towards images of simultaneity and totality. One telling example is this moebius strip image (#15/8-9, see Figure 12) which literally requires the reader to turn the page in order to continue the narrative, since the characters are caught in an enclosed repetitive dialogue without beginning or ending.

**Figure 12.** *Promethea* #15, p. 8 - 9. Alan Moore, J.H. Williams III, Mick Gray and Jeromy Co
Yet lest we conclude that this is a turn towards the formally aesthetic, we should note that the apocalypse happening in *Promethea* in 2004 is presented as revisiting upon New York of the catastrophe of September 11, 2001:

> We all looked up to blinding spectacle, said holy this or holy that, so it was terrible blue day again, but night now, with two towering absences more visible and more heavy than the gone mere solids raised before, our captured rooks, with curling in on that same dreadful, beautiful elliptic, New York's gaudy hot-ass fabulous apocalyptic angel spirit, three years gone, entered again into her city. (#28/1)

Promethea is the terrifying holiness, the sense of meaningfulness, that becomes infused in moments of human history and renders them historical: "She ran across the sky like brilliant paint whereafter everything we touched came away wet yellow, sticky blue, clothes spoiled with fresh thought" (#28/6). Promethea is *significance*, infused into human reality itself, and J.H. Williams portrays this meaningfulness through montages of New York as a global cityscape: towers and buildings from a variety of different architectural situations around the world are placed next to each other and colored with glowing pastels. Moreover, the visual representation of the apocalypse as the arrival of meaningfulness is figured in the comic as a rolling wave of vibrant color that spreads from New York and engulfs the planet: it is history portrayed as an unstoppable tide washing over humans and transforming them in its wake. As they are caught up in the spreading wave, the characters are transformed from inked and flat-colored into lushly painted figures, given greater depth and dimensionality. The major power blackout of August 2003 is figured as another emergence of Promethea. It is described as a moment of simultaneity and anagogy: "Then New York dimmed to shadow sixty deep where thousands tramped the bridge or hung from creaking tailboards on a crawling, manpiled truck so it felt like Bombay, like Tijuana, as if all the cities of the Earth were made one simultaneous place," and which made "our six billion seem a family of five" (#28/15).

The events following September 11, 2001 are portrayed as moments of collective and epiphany, but which quickly returned to mundane reality: "Suddenly exactly who we were, for better or worse, and then the President announced more troops were needed in Iraq" (#28/18). Moore wants to remind us that the act of mass murder which was September 11th has also become the raw material for modern shamans to...
acts of social magic: we have our own Ozymandias, our own sinister architects. Moore reproduces in *Promethea* the overt politicizing gestures which characterized his work in the 1980s. Moore also relates *Promethea* to the ensuing invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in an allegorical narrative resembling Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone*. Moore portrays the historical conflict between Christianity and Islam as an internal division within herself. He offers a story of two Prometheas, one serving Christ and one serving Allah, each ignorant of the other's existence: "And so the spirit of Promethea was divided in herself, and did not know it" (#24/9). This culminates in the Crusades, and the encounter of two righteous defenders of their monotheisms in 1097, at Antioch, where they destroy each other, and the Promethea spirit reunites. Moore's allegory would be indirect enough if not for the concluding lines of this narrative: "And the planes hit the buildings. And the smartbomb hit the mosque. The tanks roll over a demolished settlement. The pretty student in the shopping precinct gets exactly halfway through her last defiant prayer" (#24/18). The conflicts between America and the Islamic people of the Middle East, between Palestinians and Israelis, are mediated by Moore as Promethea, divided against herself. Much as Hegel read *Antigone* as a story of the Absolute Spirit divided against itself in the substance of Antigone and Creon, who are doomed to a conflict between family and state that resolves itself in their mutual destruction, Moore points out that these monotheistic religions arise from a common root, which is quite simply the human imagination itself. These gestures, which deliberately ruin Moore's allegory, draw us down to earth, so to speak, must be understood as blunt gestures of politicization and didactic limitations on our interpretations of a highly abstract narrative of the Day of Judgment. When the apocalypse begins we are offered a series of renderings of the tarot, intertextual gestures towards the significance of the symbolism unfurling in the narrative. One particularly resonant image presents the card called The Chariot as a photomontage of the Kennedy motorcade, moments before JFK was shot: next to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis sits not the President, but an enormous grail-chalice (#29/18-19, see Figure 13) is simultaneously an allegorization of history, and a politicization of Moore's infamous "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century," as Dorrit (181), are figured here as a moment of revelatory apocalypse. Promethea is how historical events become the substance of history itself. She is how humanity becomes meaningful.
Hegel called the absolute the Absolute Spirit; in Moore it is the human imagination which is always privileged in *Promethea* as able to transcend the oppositions thinking. As we have seen, as Promethea moves towards the end of her allegorical journey of enlightenment she arrives in a series of mental planes where identities are struck between opposites. Popular deconstruction tends to valorize such collapsing of opposites, which it borrows from traditional dialectical thought, but in Moore fundamentally ambivalent nature of the identity between opposites for human thought is addressed on more than one occasion. If history is a substance which is both metaphysical and material, meaningful and meaningless, simultaneously sacred and profane, violence inherent in this substance must be acknowledged. And this is something Moore does in *Promethea*, when the Prometheas arrive at the realm of Taboo. This source of all existence, the metaphoric "birth" of the universe. "All existence. The moment it begins. The moment it ends. I love you. Godsex. It's all godsex. It's so pure, and
it's ... what's that word? The word that means sacred and profane?" (#22/13). The word is taboo, and this word heralds in a two-page image that was censored by DC comic book appeared in single issue form: "Pan and Selene. The myth, where he although ... it's almost like she wanted that. Like he had to" (#22/16. see fig.vision of libidinal history, of the origin of creation as a cosmic rape: as profane as sacred, it is an act of "godsex." It is the orgasm at the origin which is the dialectic between meaning and meaninglessness within history. Moore repeats the apocalypse proper: the current mayor of New York, former porn-star Uv Baskerville, who suffers from a multiple personality disorder. Their carnal celebration culminates in Baskerville sprouting many heads, and Cascade demanding that "£$%& me! £$%& me, you filth, you animal! £$%& me until I hurt until I bleed until I scream like twenty thousand burning cities!" (#30/13). The result of their sex act explosion of energy that escalates the ongoing apocalypse into a nation-wide catastrophic.

Figure 14. *Promethea* #22, p. 16.
The attempt to explore the consequences and the possibilities of a dialectic and hate, sex and rape, as a substantial historical force, reminds me of an element of *Watchmen* that continues to trouble readers. As discussed, Dr. Manhattan's personal epiphany, in which he rediscovers the singular meaningfulness of humanity due to its sheer accidental quality, arises as a result of witnessing Laurie Jupiter's realization of her own: she is the daughter of a man who is notorious for once having raped her mother. The truth that eventually emerges is that Sally Jupiter eventually fell in love with the Comedian, despite hating him. Once more we are presented with a seemingly heinous, misogynistic logic: one that conflates sex and rape. This is the logic of the rapist, justifying his own actions. Yet this is not what Dr. Manhattan learns from the revelation; it returns meaning to humanity for him:

> Thermodynamic miracles ... events with odds against so astronomical they're effectively impossible, like oxygen spontaneously becoming gold. I long to observe such a thing. And yet, in each human coupling, a thousand million sperm vie for a single egg. Multiply those odds by countless generations, against the odds of your ancestors being alive; meeting; siring this precise son; that exact daughter. For your mother loves a man she has every reason to hate, and of that union, of the thousand million children competing for fertilization, it was you, only you, that emerged. (#9/26-27)

It is not that Sally Jupiter subconsciously wanted the assault and therefore fell in love with her rapist. It is not that her apparent *hate* was in fact *love*. Rather, to understand the situation we must think in contradictions: her love and hate for the Comedian were irreconcilable; her hate was not simply love in disguised form. Both emotions were not compatible. They are aspects of a real contradiction, and out of the co-existence of contradictions arises the impossible yet true miracle: the resolution of these contradictions in the new human life, the identity of opposites that are still irreconcilable with one another. Like the thermodynamic miracle, it is something impossible for the rational mind which cannot conceive of both poles of a contradiction as true. Impossible yet real, just as the realm of taboo is the identity of the sacred and the profane, the incompatible opposites are rendered identical. As taboo, Promethea is effective which is inconceivable for the rational mind. An encounter with her is overtly Oedipal: "you're like the horniest thing I've ever seen, and ... and I feel like I'm talking with my Mom"
She is an emancipatory rendering of the violation of the incest taboo, so as to render clear its truth: incest, the will to endogamy, is the experience from which humans are severed by their humanity.

Lacan theorized the imagined end of human desire as the impossible experience of jouissance, from the French word jouir, to enjoy. Jouissance is the idea that human desire seeks to lead us towards a small personal apocalypse. The theory of jouissance in order for civilization to function, there must be a limit to human pleasure: that impossible extra-pleasure we deny ourselves by virtue of being historical, civilized human beings. It is enjoyment beyond pleasure, and therefore the intimation of it for the human must always be both desirable and threatening: much like the contradiction of Moore's "godsex." As the imaginative limit of desire, jouissance is analogous to anagogy. For a human being, jouissance is the experience of pleasure that is indistinguishable from suffering, and jouissance is often characterized by an alienated imperative to enjoy oneself: of course, there is nothing less pleasurable than being commanded to enjoy oneself. Within Lacanian thinking, jouissance functions in the concept of the absolute in the quotation from E.H. Carr above. In Promethea, redemption in apocalypse is represented as the realization of jouissance, the fulfillment of the realm of libidinal taboo. When Promethea witnesses Pan raping Selene, crowned by a chalice with a dove about to enter it. When the apocalypse happens, humanity experiences Revelation as an overly libidinized state of being, a situation is heralded by a wand entering a chalice, a piece of over-determined Kabbalistic symbolism. This is an apocalypse of desire, the fulfillment of anagogy in the full term. It is both intensely desirable and deeply terrifying at the same time.
This dramatization of *jouissance* ultimately creates a conjunction between narratives of personal history, insight and epiphany which I have explored, and the mediation of those individual apocalypses into a larger, collective space of history in his work. For Moore, libidinal history is both individual and collective at the same time, which returns us to the book which began this essay, *The Mirror of Love*, a short history of same-sex desire, a lyrical, first-person portrayal of the redeeming historical power of erotic love, which ends quite apocalyptically: "While life endures we'll love, / and afterwards, / if what
they say is true, / I'll be refused a Heaven / crammed with popes, / policemen, / fundamentalists, / and burn instead, / quite happily, / with Sappho, Michel you, my love. / I'd burn throughout eternity / with you" (80). It is productive of The Mirror of Love to a short piece Moore wrote the next year, called Lust: A Pornography (1989). The narration of Lust describes, in graphic detail and from a male perspective, an aggressive seduction/rape of a woman, while the visual imagery of the story portrays a nuclear escalation between America and the Soviet Union which ends with the destruction of the Earth, a figurative rape which the male narrator experiences as a successful sexual conquest (see Figure 15). There is nothing redeeming about this apocalypse: it is the result of the profane power of history without any sense of the sacred. Here, meaninglessness inherits the earth in a triumph of ressentiment. It is inconceivable to us, somewhere between The Mirror of Love and Lust: A Pornography. As jouissance, Janus-faced force, alternately a drive of redemption and damnation, of salvation and loss.

Thus the logic of history is contradictory. In its ideal imagined state, history is an identity between the sacred and the profane, but humanity within the historical process experiences history as the gap or distance between the two: history as incomplete, as not-yet fulfilled. Any human perspective on redeemed history can only see it as a substance which is both sacred and profane (what would this be? It is inconceivable to us, and we can only call it taboo), but as the identity between what are, for us, opposites. Thus our perspective on fulfilled history will always be imperfect and fraught, will always see it as a threat of some kind, as a danger to human reality as it stands now because it is so alien to our consciousnesses.

Yet Moore offers comic books as playful intimations of such transcendent perspectives. In effect, Moore is trying to keep Pictopia from being bulldozed over. When it appeared in 1986, its effect was to spawn imitators who were content to do little more than cynically demythologize mainstream comic books. When Moore, after a brief foray into independent publishing in the late '80s, returned to superhero comics in the 1990s, he rejected the cynical treatment of this subject matter, of which his own previous work was necessarily a part:
I suppose with things like the ABC work, with *Supreme*, with 1963, it was kind of an attempt to say, "Look, you know, get over *Watchmen*, get over the 1980s." It have to be depressing, miserable grimness from now until the end of time. Only a bloody comic. It wasn't a jail sentence. That was the thing I most regret about *Watchmen*: That something I saw as a very exciting celebratory thing to become a kind of hair shirt that the super-hero had to wear forever after -- yeah, super-heroes from now on, they've all got to be miserable and doom. And if they've got to be psychopathic as well, so much the better. That was what me and Dave intended. (Khoury 120)

Moore's work in the twenty-first century, while continuing to explore the themes begun in the 1980s and 1990s, does so with an eye towards maintaining the imaginative possibilities of comic books, of enriching the particular fun inherent in the form and no doubt why Moore is the consummate collaborator: he writes out of a love and for its history, and with an appreciation of the strengths of every artist who works, tailoring his scripts to their particular styles of illustration. I suggest, finally, that it is in the pleasure, in the fun of comics that Moore sees its most liberating, utopian possibilities. The representation of Pictopia is a vast metropolis where a character who has ever existed still lives: the sides of buildings are a simultaneous comic book panels stretching as far as the eye can see. Pictopia bears an interesting resemblance to the multifaceted jewel of time, the simultaneity described by Dr. Manhattan, and the Radiant, Heavenly City where Promethea takes us at the conclusion of her tale. Pictopia is utopia, the place we are offered small glimpses of in every panel of Moore's work.

Notes


[3] Throughout this paper I cite individual issue numbers and page numbers (#issue number/page number) of comic books, whenever possible, even when the material is readily available in collected form. This citational method allows readers using both individual issues and collected editions to access the citations with equal ease. Note here that the comics quoted in this essay often lack pagination, either in individual issues or collected editions.
He continued to write the book until 1987, and during this time it was drawn by John Totleben, Steve Bissette and Rick Veitch.

As we shall see, the figure of the shaman becomes a recurring villain for Moore, since a shaman is essentially a figure who claims to mediate between humanity and some spirit world, while in fact puppeting humanity for his own ends. In this, the shaman is a trope for the political leaders who are often the object of Moore's scorn.

"In Pictopia!" is reprinted in The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore by George Khoury.

In How to Read Superhero Comics and Why, Geoff Klock points out that Moore's famous Superman story called "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?" is also a rejection of Crisis on Infinite Earth's revisionism. Declaring itself an "imaginary story," which need not be determined to fit into the official Superman continuity, Moore points out that they are all imaginary stories. The mistake of revisionism is in determining which stories are "true" and others "false." This binary thinking abandons the essential liberty of fiction to imagine alternate worlds. Klock also notes that in the mini-series Moore's nostalgic take on the silver age of Marvel superheroes, we are given a brief glimpse of the Aleph, a point from which all the universes of all comic books are simultaneously visible. In 1963 issue number six, pages 20-21, we see several windows into the fictional worlds of numerous comic book creators, such as Scott McCloud, Eddie Campbell, Miller, Dave Sim, Steven Bissette and Michael T. Gilbert. See Klock 22-24.

The interrelationship between freedom and necessity is a ongoing theme for Moore. In Marvelman, for example, the superheroes debate their project in social engineering. In the face of criticism from liberals who claim that the heroes are interfering in human destiny and taking away humanity's free will, comes the reply, "Bullshit. You see some little kid about to drink Clorox, you take away his free will or he ain't gonna get no destiny." (#16/9). This doesn't end the debate between the superheroes but it represents the refusal, Moore's writing, to rigidly oppose such concepts. In this crudely phrased response the point is nevertheless lucid: destiny and free will are aspects of a single process of life. In Vendetta, the terrorist in a Guy Fawkes mask engages in consciousness-raising by convincing people they have been captured and imprisoned: it is when they are dehumanized and placed in a cage that humans learn of freedom's necessity (260). As a result they become conscious of the oppressiveness of their society and resolve to reject it.

In a playful extrapolation on the theory of comic book simultaneity, consider issue #4 of Alan Moore's Tomorrow Stories in which boy-inventor Jack B. Quick turns back time to the point where he retreats past earlier issues of the comic, and finally back to a point where there are no panel borders and he can talk to himself in the adjacent panels: "I'm in some sort of timeless state, where there are no dividing lines between the individual..."
me! Look! There I am again down there! Hi, Jack! How's things?" (#4/26). The scene could serve as an illustration of McCloud's thesis on the identity of space and time in comic form. [13]

The historical importance of *Lust: A Pornography* for Moore personally is indicated by his request that it be reprinted in George Khoury's *The Extraordinary Works of*.

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