SUPERHEROES AND SHAMANISM: MAGIC AND PARTICIPATION IN THE COMICS OF GRANT MORRISON

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Jeffrey Brown, Advisor

Comic creator Grant Morrison is an adamant practitioner of magic, and in particular, the creation of sigils. A sigil is the infusion of abstract symbols with the goal to make manifest the creator’s particular desire. This thesis will discuss how Grant Morrison infuses his writing with his particular beliefs in an attempt to bridge the gap between fictional stories and reality. Morrison openly discusses the shamanic events in his life and writes about superheroes undertaking similar metaphysical journeys. As Morrison’s magic and the medium of comics allow the reader to become more easily “lost” within a fictional world, the relationship of fiction and the reader becomes increasingly malleable. This relationship of fiction and reality may seem abstract, but the comics support the connection by including the concept of textualization – where the reader associates himself or herself with the protagonist, becoming part of the narrative. The post-structural nature of Morrison’s work allows for a unique relationship between the author, diegetic worlds and readers. The stories become participatory events, engaging the reader and the comic community. Readers participate with his texts on extremely personal and intricate levels, and through their group analysis, they discover new interpretations and secrets within the comic panels. The purpose of Morrison’s comics develops as his relationship with magic grows. Readers experience his early experimentations with creating magical narratives and see them change to constructed
fictional world for readers to journey into, where they are able to take on the heroic qualities of Superman.
I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Don LaCoss. I would not have been able to write this had he not encouraged me to continue my education. Don was one of the first people to introduce me to the comics of Grant Morrison, as well as demonstrate that it was okay to love and discuss these sorts of strange things in an intelligent (and fanatical) fashion.
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INTRODUCTION

Grant Morrison has written superhero comics for over thirty years, and is one of the medium’s most successful writers. As a practicing magician, Morrison brings his spiritual life into the narratives he constructs. Through this shamanic process, his comics develop a greater intent than simple entertainment; he wants fiction to be able to change society. By infusing his narratives with the magical practices of his daily life, he constructs stories where readers have an ability to interact with fiction on a personal level. Through this fictional interaction, readers are able to take on the qualities of iconic superheroes and think critically about both the texts and their lives. Most of Grant Morrison’s writings are concerned with the lives and struggles of superheroes. His comics have consistently impressed me, both as a fan and a scholar, with every new story I read. Each story has freshness, and the artistry is always apparent. His narratives challenge readers and require one to pay attention and think over what is going on in the stories. Over the span of his writing career, he has secured his place as one of the medium’s most successful and popular writers. Yet, he has been regularly ignored in terms of academic importance, as he focuses almost exclusively on superhero narratives. Regardless of the merit of Morrison’s texts on their own, they gain a unique perspective when one takes into count Morrison’s belief in magic and shamanism.

This thesis discusses the comic writer Grant Morrison, a selection of the comics he has produced, and the culture that surrounds these comics. The first chapter focuses on Grant Morrison: his spiritual beliefs; his thoughts on fiction, writing, and comics; and the relationship of his work to readers. Morrison is one of the most highly acclaimed and prolific comic writers currently working, and works almost entirely in the superhero genre. Morrison discusses his writing as a shamanic process, as he has been a practicing magician for several decades, and
integrates much of his magic into his narratives. Because of this direct relationship between Morrison’s beliefs and his profession, his relationship with his work is deeply personal. Morrison often discusses his work as either having been inspired by events and struggles in his life, or how the fictional stories he has written eventually have a direct effect on his own life. This thesis will describe Morrison’s beliefs about his magic and storytelling, discussing them in a comparative manner, and illustrate how Morrison’s conceptual beliefs about magic and his professional job as a writer become increasingly indistinguishable.

Morrison believes that readers can have personal relationships with fiction, beyond the act of enjoyment, expressing that readers can truly interact with fictional worlds and characters in a direct sense. He has often described how he has attempted to remove fictional characters from their world and bring them into our own, which is explored throughout the main body of this thesis. Morrison has discussed his meditative activities and spiritual visitations where he has interacted with prominent dead cultural or religious figures, and has asserted that the process of interacting with fiction is similar, based on these personal experiences outside of time and space. This revelation came to him after a spiritual encounter with extra-dimensional beings that has had a profound impact on his life and writing. He has explained how he has written himself into stories, either directly or indirectly basing characters on himself, and how the fictional events of the characters have come into his own life. He has gone through the same struggles, met the same people and felt the same pain that the fictional characters went through by including himself in the stories and by infusing his narratives with his magic. Because of his opinions about magic and existence, he has stated that fictional interactions are translatable to the greater public.
The relationship of fiction and the reader becomes increasingly malleable as Morrison’s magic and the medium of comics allows the reader to become more easily “lost” within a fictional world. This thesis will discuss the concept of being “lost” in fiction by describing how one is emotionally engaged with the story, in relation to how Morrison believes fictional interaction is possible. Though this relationship of fiction and reality may seem increasingly abstract, this thesis will support this relationship by using contemporary literary theory, neurological studies, and Morrison’s ideas about magic. John Thiem’s discussion of textualization focuses on how narratives are often written based on the idea that readers are supposed to affiliate themselves onto the protagonists. He focuses on the magical realism genre, which often has a nameless protagonist or starts out with a character sitting down and reading, sharing the experience of readers. The narrative implies that this represents the reader, that the reader is supposed to be going on the adventures that the characters are about to partake. This chapter argues for a comparison of magical realism to the fantasy world of superhero comics. Visual narratives help to increase the effect of textualization on readers, allowing readers to impose themselves onto fictional characters. As a genre, magical realism often features fantastical narrative elements, but in a matter-of-fact fashion, similar to the world of comics, therefore connecting Thiem’s ideas to the visual narratives of the superhero.

Thiem bases much of his theory on the ideas of ludic reading, which connect heavily to the concepts associated with cognitive psychology, and focuses on the phenomenon of being “lost” in a story. This idea of being “lost” is culturally prominent, based on some simple assertions: culture has created sets of descriptions in different languages to describe the sensation of being “lost” in reading, and that the brain goes through different cognitive behaviors for certain sets of narratives. Ludic reading suggests that the reader is more able to be “lost” in a
story that is easier to comprehend. This does not imply that a story is in any way hierarchically
organized for its ease in reading, but that readers have deeper personal relationships to works of
fiction that are more easily understood. This connects to the visual narrative style of comics well,
as much of the exposition or description that is present in novels or other forms of writing is
visibly apparent for readers of comic books. The difficulty of comprehension is reduced, as the
reader is presented with the fictional world in a literal and visual way – it is as it appears on
page.

This thesis will connect these ideas to Morrison’s magic practices and narrative
construction in order to illustrate Morrison’s beliefs about fiction and its interactivity with the
reader. This effect on the reader is perhaps most famously recognizable with Heath Ledger’s role
as Joker in The Dark Knight. The rumors surrounding his performance and death help to
illustrate the ways that fiction can interact with reality, emphasizing the possible effects that
fiction can have on readers. Ledger’s creative process included creating a portrayal of a character
based entirely on Morrison’s work. Many people shared stories about Ledger’s reading process,
which has been exposed to be a deeply personal and almost spiritual connection to the character
of Joker, and this connection seems to share similarities with Morrison’s own shamanic
processes. Ledger began adopting practices that can be directly seen in the pages of the comics
or show direct influence from the comics – maintaining a journal of things that the Joker would
find funny, staying in character outside of shooting, developing a sleeping problem, and an
inability separate himself from his characters. The primary texts for analysis will be Arkham
Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth, Batman #663, Grant Morrison’s published guide to
magic, and interviews with both Grant Morrison and Heath Ledger. Ledger serves as a study for
many of the processes that Morrison talks about as possibilities, but with a dangerous outcome to
the possibilities of deeper textual interaction. Morrison may be infamous for his discussion of often-unbelievable stories about how he and his work have directly interacted, but Ledger’s case shows how these practices applied to someone outside of Morrison’s particular system of spiritual beliefs, therefore reinforcing many of Morrison’s hard to believe allegations.

Chapter two focuses on a post-structural textual analysis of Morrison’s short story, *Superman Beyond 3D*, which appeared in single issues and has been collected in the book *Final Crisis*. Where chapter one focused on the concept of the author, chapter two focuses primarily on the text, while maintaining a connection to the ideas of textualization and magical narrative constructions. *Superman Beyond 3D* is unique in several ways, both in subject and in format. Morrison has written very few stories about just Superman and the comic itself is distinct for its use of selective 3D printing to help engage readers with the text. Though Morrison’s stories are often non-linear in construction, the narrative of this particular piece stands out from many of Morrison’s previous works. The story is set across multiple layers of diegetic reality, each further removed from the last, and with multiple interpretations of the concept of Superman as the main characters, and each from their own respective dimensions.

Textualization in this piece occurs on several levels. Morrison removes Superman from the diegesis of his particular world and transports him into outer levels of reality, creating a meta-fictional representation of readers’ engagements with the comics. This is further accomplished by the story’s implementation of 3D glasses and specialized print. The panels become visually separated from their 2D page form as Superman transcends further into levels of the reader’s reality, and readers achieve an extradiegetic bond with Superman. This connects directly to Morrison’s beliefs about interacting with fiction bringing it out into reality, and
Morrison demonstrates this through the comic in a visual sense, as well as in terms of the narrative within the pages of the comic.

The chapter features a discussion of Jacques Derrida’s ideas relating to post-structuralism with an analysis of the story, demonstrating a non-traditional representation of the setting and the Supermen in the ever-changing diegesis. The various representations of Superman imply a diffusion in how the character is defined, and instead emphasize the natural existence of the essence of a Superman in each respecting reality. The characters interact with several diegetic layers and with different interpretations of themselves, demonstrating a lack of totality of the text and the diegesis in terms of each individual character’s reality. The post-structural analysis in this chapter will be representative of the work of Morrison on a whole, and how his writing, when combined with his belief practices, creates a text that readers are able to textualize in a more personal and engaging reading experience. Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of heteroglossic dialogism, the relationship between authors, texts, and readers emphasizes this as a participatory practice based on personal experience and diegetic identifiability. Readers are not just bringing their own lives to the reading experience, but are interacting with the lives of authors, and the diegetic lives of characters.

Chapter three focuses on the effect of Morrison’s work on a group of comic fans as opposed to an individual reader, thereby emphasizing the cultural connections of the mass audience to text and author. This chapter focuses on the fan-created comic event known as the “Hypercrisis” and the comic book discussion community on 4chan.org. Fans began to notice strong connections between Morrison’s work and a greater, overarching story across DC’s history of comics. The Hypercrisis is entirely fan made, and therefore not part of DC’s continuity or the possible published futures of the comics, but the fans continue to create and discuss the
developing Hypercrisis with surprisingly deep analysis and intricate image maps based around sharing the ideas of the group with others.

The Hypercrisis originated within the website 4chan.org, in their “Comics and Cartoons” discussion section. 4chan is particularly notorious for being a web-menace, for creating internet trends and memes, and for its entirely anonymous community. Part of chapter three will focus on defining 4chan.org, and the notions of anonymity in a group setting. What makes this process interesting is that it is developed and maintained entirely by an anonymous Internet group, with limited display time for people to read. No one knows the identity of any other user, or is able to maintain any consistent relationship to other users, and the content is displayed for less than 24 hours before being deleted. Yet, the Hypercrisis has remained a prominent and powerful part of this particular web culture. Much of the community on 4chan’s comic book discussion board is at least aware of it, while many participate actively in discussion and speculations spanning over months of time. The anonymous group has maintained this theoretical event with great consistency and understanding of the texts, the group analysis, and other important aspects relating to Morrison’s work and DC comics. This chapter will implement Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogic heteroglossia in order to further analyze this group-oriented analysis and demonstrate why it is important to connect the audience to a greater understanding of Morrison’s work and the comic book fan culture.

This connection between the fan community and text can also be associated with the textualization of the reader, demonstrating that Morrison’s work maintains an extraordinary importance to the readers, and the group engages with the texts in an astonishingly passionate way. This process also speaks to the post-structural style of Grant Morrison’s work, as the interpretation of content is openly contestable and demonstrates how the unofficial truth is
removed from the institutionalized and diegetic reality of DC comics. This activity does not present a definitive conclusion, as the fans may simply be wrong and other people have different or conflicting ideas about what is going on – their reality of the text removes itself from the official narratives, and from the reality of other participants. The relationship between this community and the superhero comic texts emphasizes Bakhtin’s notion of participative thinking, and demonstrates this happening on a group level. The community is responsible for this analysis, and it is accomplished through the engagement of readers, as opposed to using a theoretical approach.

This type of analysis opens up the canon for comic studies; though Morrison is well respected, he tends to be over-shadowed in the medium, possibly because of his consistent work within the superhero genre. This implies a heightened status of non-superhero comics and the writers involved, and I plan to challenge this hierarchy with this thesis. Independent comics, graphic novels, or darkly deconstructed superheroes are often seen as superior creative works, and because of this, particular texts are given authoritative positions in the comic canon. This often excludes of the superhero genre.

Superhero comics are a storytelling form that comes out weekly in single issues and as a continuing, “incomplete” narrative. Some superhero comics do not fit into a graphic novel form, for example, single-issue stories or stories that take place over multiple books. Older stories tend to take precedence over newer ones, because of the availability of collected works. Some superhero comics fit in the world of “graphic novels” and the term can be easily swapped for “trade paper-backs” in most contexts, but it excludes the idea that a story can be published in single-issue form, and excludes contemporary texts as they are released. This thesis also challenges comic scholarship to keep a strong relationship with more contemporary work, as new
stories are published on a weekly basis. Comic scholarship needs to be considerate of individual issues as well as books, in terms of the importance of format. Many of the texts I will work with are in issue form, instead of collected book form. This implies that the question of format in comic studies needs to be approached with greater care, as a vast section of storytelling and comic culture is ignored because of its collected format. Though the texts in question are currently a few years old, much comic scholarship implies that the acceptability of a text is associated with its age, thereby rejecting recently released comics.

This thesis also explores an ethical quality to Morrison’s work. Reading superhero comics and participating with texts allows for the diegesis, the world and lives of fictional characters, to help develop and change the readers’ lives. If Morrison creates his work to have direct, profound or magical effects on the reader, then it demonstrates an ethical nature to the work that needs emphasis and discussion. The ethics of superheroes serve as a guide for readers, and this important aspect of fiction is emphasized through the ideas of textualization that Morrison has implemented into his writing. Part of this accomplishment is on a diegetic level, through his construction of superhero narratives, and partially in an extradiegetic sense, as he is working deliberately in a genre where ethics and morality exist as the core principles of superheroes. The comics of Grant Morrison serve not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a way for readers to engage fantasy texts on a personal level and to be able to apply these texts to help better their lives.
Grant Morrison has been working in the comic book industry for decades and is noted as one of the medium’s most prolific writers. Throughout his history with writing comics for a number of different publishing companies, he has written stories involving some of the medium’s longest-standing, iconographic characters, he has been responsible for reinvigorating barely remembered heroes, lost to the pages of time, and he has created complex worlds and characters in his original titles. Besides his work in comic writing, Morrison also practices various forms of magic (Morrison 2006b, 9). He has been very public about discussing both his beliefs and his magic. The stories of his supposed alien abductions and seeing the inner-workings of the universe from outside dimensions are common knowledge, and his magical sigil practices are known to fans of his work and members of various counter-cultural groups (Morrison 2006a, 18-21). Often referring to his creative process as “shamanic,” his beliefs are well documented throughout interviews and his published how-to guides for magical practice and are connected directly to his writing (Meaney). On a literary level, Morrison’s creations of the fictional universes of his comics are infused with his particular form of magic practice.

Though there is no single accepted definition of what it means to be a shaman, Gary Edson generalizes the cultural position as “a mediator between the inspiriting world of myth and
reality” (Edson 7, 10). Edson later extends this idea by quoting Stanley Krippner, stating that shamans were “the world’s first healers, diagnosticians, psychotherapists, religious functionaries, magicians, performing artists, and storytellers…Shamans can be defined as native practitioners who deliberately alter their consciousness in order to obtain knowledge and power from the ‘spirit world’” (Edson 11). Though mostly noted as a “story-teller”, Morrison has been very vocal about his drug use, trance meditation practices and meeting silvery beings of pure information from beyond the 4th-dimension (Salisbury 209-210). After these experiences, Morrison’s focus on the practice and implementation of magic became more concrete in his daily life and his fiction writing.

Though shamanism may be a difficult concept to define completely, a shaman should be thought of as a uniquely endowed individual of various talents and connections to a spiritual world. Shamans are people with great power and understanding, often of a supernatural origin, and who are able to define and use this abstract power in a concrete and human way. They listen to what is unheard, discuss what is unspoken and can teach what is unknown. This represents a very real and important social power in the role of the shaman. The nature of this power is complex, as Edson states, “Shamanic power was believed to come from a supernatural force; however, division of the world into natural and supernatural realms may confuse our understanding of shamanism, which does not make this distinction” (Edson 24). Shamans do not define the spiritual world as “spiritual” or “supernatural,” but simply as another part of their reality. Thus, the power embodied by the shaman also lacks this “spiritual” classification away from reality, so the “magic” of the shaman is seen as natural. The magic is therefore a part of shamans’ and their lives, indistinguishable from their classification as shamans, the same way that the “spiritual” world is indistinguishable from the “natural.” This relationship is further
declared by Edson as one where “shamanism and magic were the same activities, performed by
the same person, and based on the same beliefs” (Edson 48). Magic and shamanism are
inseparable, a part of the same being and same reality, and thus, “magic was viewed as a system
of natural laws that ruled the events of the world” (Edson 34). The shaman, therefore, had unique
access to these rules of natural order, and was able to apply them to life and daily practices. This
application of what is normally seen as “spiritual,” “supernatural,” or “magical” is necessary for
being a shaman, and could be done in a variety of different ways – again, alluding to the above
quote from Krippner – through advice, teaching, healing, dance, performance, and perhaps most
key in terms of Morrison’s application, story-telling.

Though Edson speaks of shamanism in the past tense, many of his definitions and
descriptions easily apply to contemporary settings, particularly when discussing Grant
Morrison’s life and work. Morrison’s beliefs and practices are easier to define than shamanism,
as he has written about them and discussed them publically for some time, though that does not
make them any less abstract or, to the average comic fan, any less strange. Morrison discusses
his earlier works in a pre-magical sense:

Something like Kid Eternity was about magic, and Zenith mentions chaos magic,
that kind of stuff. But they weren’t a magical thing in themselves. All it was, I
was interested in magic and I was throwing references in. Then I started to think
about the potential of comics to actually do magic. I thought I’d do a comic that’s
not just about magic and anarchy, but will actually create them and make them
happen. (Salisbury 210)
Morrison is describing his work as pre- and post-magical objects, something that he attributes to his experience with an “alien” abduction while smoking hash in Katmandu, though Morrison is adamant that it was not a drug hallucination (Salisbury 209-210). Morrison describes the experience as being “surrounded by raw information, swimming through pure data. It was like being in the internet but extending to whatever is outside the four dimensions we’ve got in this universe” (Salisbury 209). In this experience, Morrison met with other beings, described as “like those big blobs you get in rave videos, silvery things with no shape” (Salisbury 209). Morrison is attempting to bridge the abstract with the concrete through translating an untranslatable experience to the interviewer. Though his story may sound absurd to many outside observers, as a shaman, the experiences would seem perfectly natural to him, as he is able to perceive the “spiritual” and “natural” in a single context. Edson describes this part of “knowing” as being instrumental to the world of the shaman, as there is no division between the “seen and unseen, the physical and the metaphysical, or the sacred and the profane” (Edson 7). Edson further notes “that shamans traveled in spirit form to confront the spirits (gods)” (Edson 18). Morrison’s experience is reminiscent of this idea; he states, “basically, it turned out I was one of these things and they told me you’ve managed to get yourself into a state where you can remember the truth, and we’re here to make sure you remember it” (Salisbury 209). Connecting these two ideas, Morrison traveled in an intangible form to confront the spirits. The duality between spiritual and mundane reality has been shattered, in this context, as Morrison embodies the necessary qualifications classifying him as a shaman.

The combination of Morrison’s beliefs, practices and his commercially oriented writing is incredibly important and remarkably similar to the practices of shamanism in historical context. Morrison wants to infuse his comics with magic, to make his comics magical, not just simple
representations of magic. His process for doing so is also part of his belief system. Though Morrison often describes his process and practices as a “technology,” this is indistinguishable from Edson’s description of “natural order” (Morrison 2006b, 9). His most practical application of this technology is through the creation of sigils. Popularized by chaos magicians of the 1980’s, sigils are magically charged symbols that are abstractions of goals, wishes, desires, etc. (Morrison 2006a, 18). You first think of your desire, phrased as a sentence or statement. Then, you remove the vowels and repeating letters of the sentence and get a series of letters. With these letters you create the sigil in its symbolic form, using the letters in an abstract, artistic sense in order to form a symbol that simply looks magical – as there is no way to artistically create a sigil that is more correct than another. The creator must infuse this sigil with thought and purpose (Morrison 2006a, 19). The act of sigil creation embodies some of the key elements to magical practice described by Edson, “magic is described as pseudo-action in that it is a substitute for true action. Magical activity provided a means of ‘proposing’ an alternate action in situations where humankind could not alter the effects of natural or physical phenomenon. …Using magic was a way to change something” (Edson 56). In this context, the magical activity is sigil creation, and the abstract image becomes the proposed alternate action in hope to create change. Edson further describes, “the use of symbols allowed the shaman to evoke two worlds – the sacred and the profane” (Edson 71). The symbols/sigils are thus used as a way for Morrison to maintain his shamanic connection to his ideas of power.

Morrison’s work with sigil magic has gone beyond a singular practice linked with personal development and extends into his comic book writing. This is notable because Morrison deals almost entirely with well-established superheroes that are widely available and recognizable in popular print and media for a mass audience. Morrison’s work with DC’s heroes,
has given readers exposure to not just crime-fighting adventures, in particular the characters and world of *Batman*, but also a creative output for Morrison’s personal beliefs and practices. As a comic writer, he uses his knowledge of magic and his role of shaman to give depth to superheroes and their stories, as well as to spread his ideals throughout popular media. This becomes significant because of readers’ ability to interpret the abstract magical elements in a very comprehensible, accessible, and real way.

He has expanded his practice and belief so that they may be implemented directly into his writing through his creation of what he refers to as “hypersigils.” Morrison defines hypersigils as a practice that “develops the sigil concept beyond the static image and incorporates elements such as characterization, drama, and plot. The hypersigil is a sigil extended through the fourth dimension” (Morrison 2006a, 21). A hypersigil becomes an object with greater life, both in the form of fictional universes and that of a published item, as opposed to a standard sigil, which represents a singular image displayed by the creator. Thus, Morrison believes he can create fictional stories that have a literal effect on reality. He tells stories of adding himself into comics, and the events of the fictionalized representation of the character happening to him in reality (Salisbury 211-213).

Inspired by the work of Aleister Crowley, as well as the Chaos Magicians of the 1980s, Morrison’s individual practice remains unique and in a state of constant development, leading to what Morrison refers to as “Blank Magic” (Babcock 36). These approaches represent a linear development of magic, as Morrison states:

> So Chaos taught me to look past the gods at what was actually happening around me and inside me when I was ‘doing’ magic...Chaos Magic was a kind of
postmodernism for me, it taught me to look at what was actually going on, and to see it shorn from its symbolic content, and then to apply new metaphors of my own…Chaos Magic is a kind of stripping away, taking magic back to the shamnic core of personal experience. (Babcock 36)

Morrison claims to have met various beings ranging from comic character The Flash, musician John Lennon, and Jesus Christ, or, as Morrison suggests, the likeness of these beings representing various conceptual manifestations (Meaney). This suggests, according to Morrison’s particular system of beliefs, that these entities exist simultaneously and congruently, representing the idea that no fictional character, celebrity or religious deity has more importance or correctness than any other. This emphasizes the importance of personal experience, as these abstractions have different meanings to each individual, but through his shamanism, they are all stripped of their heightened metaphors, and become their representations.

This helps to cement Morrison’s application of the term shaman, as Mircea Eliade states, “the presence of a shaminic complex in one region or another does not necessarily mean that the magico-religious life of the corresponding people is crystallized around shamanism…Generally shamanism coexists with other forms of magic and religon” (Eliade 5). In this context, all religion, fiction and reality are centered on the same plane of tangibility, and the shaman’s individuality is more important to the practice than the culture around him or her. Eliade further elaborates that, “the shaman is, among other things, a magician, not every magician can properly be termed a shaman…the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (Eliade 5). This connects Morrison’s description of his own creative process as “shamanic” and his “almost daily occult practices and exploration,” as he partakes in the action of witnessing and communicating with
the various abstractions and imbue his work with his practice of sigil magic (Morrison 2006b, 9). Thus, to Morrison, magic and shamanism “heightened participation,” and are thus represented in his ability to merge his creation of narratives with his practice of magic (Babcock 36). He is participating with his narratives, and encouraging his readers to do the very same, and the “Blank” in Blank Magic alludes to the idea that one can participate with this magic without realizing that one is doing so. For we, as readers, are outside the world to the comics as the “silvery blobs” were as outside to Morrison and our existence.

Though the process that Morrison describes is abstract, there is a concrete connection to literary theory. Textualization, as defined by Jon Thiem, professor emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Colorado State University, in his essay “The Textualization of the Reader,” “takes place when the world of a text literally intrudes into the extratextual or reader’s world” (Thiem 339). The process of being “lost” in a story is very real, and is described as resulting from a truly immersive text in which a reader is completely absorbed. Thiem describes this concept in relation to magical realist literary style, whose metaphorical nature compares well to the visual narrative construction of the comic book. The world of the comic is filled with fantastical plots and super beings that defy the laws of physics and have impossible powers, but are taken on face value as simply existing in that world. The fantasy is banal and a part of daily life. Thiem supports his ideas discussing the English language phrases used to describe this process and effect, as readers often say that they are “lost in a book” or “totally absorbed,” and notes that other languages have similar expressions (Thiem 341). The narratives of magical realism allow this to happen, often through implementing nameless protagonists and dreamlike stories, similar to the abstract identities of a superhero and the plots within a comic.
Further, there is vast psychological pleasure associated with reading, and the process of reading can have profound emotional effects. Victor Nell’s study, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*, uses a scientific approach to look at this psychological connection to reading. Nell describes this “absorbed” reading process as a “trance,” which he sees as being remarkably similar to a dreamlike state, a process he refers to as “ludic reading” (Nell 73). Nell states that, “like dreaming, reading performs the prodigious task of carrying us off to other worlds,” and attributes this mostly, but not exclusively, to fictional work due to its association with pleasurable reading (Nell 2). Nell describes the reading process, beginning with visual perception and working into more complex areas of comprehension and states that “consciousness is a processing bottleneck, and it is the readily comprehended messages that fully engage the receiver’s conscious attention” (Nell 77).

Nell notes that less complex literary works make this process more complete, stating that “the richness of the structure that the ludic reader creates in his head may be inversely proportional to the literary [level] and originality of the reading matter” (Nell 77). The reader’s comprehension is more complete when the text is less literarily and cognitively complex. Nell summarizes this idea by stating that, “the processing demands made by James Joyce may require frequent pauses and regressions, whereas the even pace of Wilbur Smith, and the well-practiced ease with which the reader can imagine his stereotyped characters and settings, may impose a heavier continuous load of attention” (Nell 77).

If the process of ludic reading is greater when the text is simple, does this process increase even more in the case of a visual narrative? Nell argues that when the brain does not have to struggle for comprehension, it is more able to enter the trance of ludic reading, and Thiem would probably argue that this creates an easier process of textualization. If readers do not
need to put increased effort into understanding characters, settings, plots, or even the structures of sentences, then they are able to immerse themselves more fully. The comic’s visual narratives allow this process to continue to a greater potential, as images replace description and plot and allow for even greater comprehension through the reader’s understanding of the illustrated world. One does not need to read about the character leaving a room, or a snow covered mountain, if one can see it visually represented.

Researchers Peter Coppin and Stephen Hockema from the University of Toronto’s Department of Information theorize on the possibility of images to hold information beyond basic visual comprehension. Beyond the evolution of the human brain’s visual comprehension abilities, they theorize that “illustrations and visualizations may evolve to augment our cognition in an era that seems to be growing increasingly interconnected” (Coppin, Hockema 2). This supports Lefèvre’s theoretical idea of reading comics by emphasizing that, “illustrations may be increasingly called upon to help translate complex (often invisible) interconnections into visible form” (Coppin, Hockema 2). Though this may suggest the role of the artist as being more valuable to comic narrative, Morrison did start his comic career working as an illustrator (Salisbury 206). During the process of scriptwriting, he often visualizes elements of the story, and adds accompanying sketches to his scripts for artists to follow (Meaney). Morrison’s writing process is at least partially visual, a fact which may make it easier for artists to translate his ideas on to the page. The textual and visual narrative creation process are not mutually exclusive to Morrison’s work, and he is able to include extradiegetic narrative information into his comics. The theory of comic reading, and the cognitive research associated with it suggest, as Coppin and Hockema state, that one should consider “comics and illustrations as physical phenomena that interact with people, thus causing effects in people” (Coppin, Hockema 3). The theories of
McCloud, Lefèvre, and Coppin and Hockema connect directly to those of Thiem and Nell, as these all relate to Cognitive Load Theory. In such, Coppin and Hockema state that:

The brain is like a machine, with limited capacity working memory…we can explore graphic layouts in comics as a way to reduce cognitive load or to increase mental connections per amount of cognitive load… In comics, prose is located within the image; possibly enabling a learner to make a direct visual connection to prose depicted in a word bubble or adjacent caption. (Coppin, Hockema 7)

In Morrison’s comics, the extradiegetic information, or the prose in the image, isn’t merely visual representations or situations, but Morrison’s magic and sigils.

Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* discusses how comprehension of a visual narrative becomes increasingly cognitively automatic, through a process known as closure, “observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (McCloud 63). He describes this process as the brain completing narrative illustrations through visual comprehension, which allows effortless understanding of the greater idea of the image, and in the instance of comics, the overall story and world in the book. Comic panels are generally physically separated on each page, but while we read, we perceive them as a single narrative flow. The space between panels, what McCloud refers to as “the gutter,” allows the “human imagination [to] take two separate images and transform them into a single idea” (McCloud 66). McCloud argues that the basic nature of comics and the process of reading them represent an absolute form of his idea of closure. If the process of narrative comprehension becomes increasingly effortless because of the images-as-narrative and the brain’s ability to perceive the whole from fragments, then the idea of ludic reading trances, or being lost in a book, would naturally increase because of the very nature
of this medium and the process of reading comics. The nature of the medium allows
textualization to happen more naturally, due in part to its visual narratives.

Pascal Lefèvre expands on this idea in his essay “The Construction of Space in Comics,”
in which he describes how the idea of three dimensional space and narrative reality are
interpreted by the audience through the ideas of diegetic and extradiegetic space (Lefèvre 157).
The diegetic space of a comic may refer to the layout of a character’s home, or their direct
environment, while the extradiegetic space refers to the ways that a panel and page are
constructed in relation to the narrative of the overall story. This extradiegetic space can vary
from the ideas of panel order on a particular page to the style of the artist, as Lefèvre states:

> Consequently the form of the drawing does influence the manner the reader will
experience and interpret the image: the viewer cannot look at the object-in-picture
from another point of view than the one the picture offers; he is invited to share
the maker’s mode of seeing, not only in the literal, but also the figurative sense.
(Lefèvre 159)

This refers to visual narratives as being able to hold narrative power in their images outside of
depth cues and visual representations of people, objects and space. The images, their
construction, style and layout on the page hold a narrative power that is inseperable from the
ideas of the story, characters and dialogue of traditional text-based narratives. This can be
extended outside the images, and be included in the page itself, as Lefèvre states, “[the reader] is
conscious of the unseen but virtual space outside the panel borders and to link the fragments
together, the reader is looking for overlaps” (Lefèvre 159). This idea is clearly overlaps with
McCloud’s idea of “the gutter,” and the way the reader links static images into fluid action and
story. The panels and the abstracted space outside of the panels are all narratively important. In a superhero comic, the diegetic and extradiegetic space is allowed to be more fantastical, its entirely fictional world is accepted because “if a comic pretends to be a realistic depiction of our world, the reader will expect a sufficient degree of consistency” (Lefèvre 160). Superhero comics are therefore allowed to break away from the notions of realistic narrative storytelling, in terms of both text and visual narrative. Therefore, the comic medium and superhero genre allow Morrison to include his ideas of magic in the visual narrative of a comic, and for it to be interpreted with a sense of concrete reality. It may not be real to the world of the reader, but it is real to the world of the character, and therefore the medium allows for that reality to be accepted without argument. The narrative space is as visually malleable as it is in terms of creating a fictional universe, and the reader is able to cope with this difference and derive meaning from reading.

The works of Grant Morrison heavily inspired Heath Ledger’s Oscar winning role as Joker in Christopher Nolan’s film *The Dark Knight* (2008); a role that many claim lead to his death (Complex). His accidental death occurred months before the release of the film, adding an eerie element to his performance. While preparing for the role, Ledger focuses on reading comic texts in which the character of Joker was particularly prominent and versions where he was particularly evil. Joker was given startling and demonic life in Morrison’s *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989) and perhaps in one of his most evil forms in a single issue of prose writing in *Batman #663 – The Clown at Midnight* (2007), both works that inspired Ledger’s performance (Vineyard 2008b). Conversely, his co-stars read stories more heavily focused on the character of Batman – stories written by contemporaries Frank Miller and Jeff Loeb, who lack the surrealistic elements of Morrison’s work (Vineyard 2008b). Morrison’s
shamanism and work with magic is embodied in his writing, giving his characters an extra level of complexity. While both being able to write a captivating story, and embed within it a deeper shamanic function, Morrison has been able to conceptualize Joker in radically new and powerful ways. When the character was embodied by Ledger, a fan of Morrison, but perhaps uneducated in his beliefs, proved dangerous. Interviews after the filming of *The Dark Knight* discuss Ledger’s inability to disengage with the character (Lyall). The concept of Joker and his role as a villain has never been more prominent, public or real.

Ledger’s performance has been described as being greater than simply acting out a character from a comic. Charles McNulty, theater critic for the *LA Times*, calls Ledger’s portrayal of Joker as “stunning, frightening, [and a] pathological marvel” (McNulty). McNulty contrasts this performance away from the likes of Judy Garland and Marlon Brando, adding to the challenge of Ledger’s work – to embody a fictional and morally unidentifiable character. McNulty speaks further of the complex nature of Ledger’s work, stating that:

> Ledger’s vocal mannerisms constitute a kind of diagnostic manual. Observe, for instance, the way he hits exaggerated Middle American consonants in the beginning, establishing his character not just as a criminal lunatic but a proverbial American one, a heartland offender run amok. And look how his mania affects the rate at which words pour from his scarred lips, slowing down to a normal clip by the end of Joker’s deadly game… Quite amazing given the temptation to break loose of all mundane restraints, nothing’s overdone. (McNulty)

This emphasis of subtlety to the character implies an extremely thorough embodiment on the part of Ledger, implying that Joker does not simply live in Ledger’s actions but in his consciousness.
and emotions as well. We can see this embodiment clearly on screen, with the actions and words of the character forever preserved on film, but the preparatory work also speaks to the levels of the performance.

In Morrison’s *Arkham Asylum* graphic novel, we see a clear connection between the vocal mannerisms of Ledger and the extradiegetic display of Joker’s dialogue. Throughout the course of the book, the dialogue presents itself in several different visual formats – traditionally speaking, this is seen as voice bubbles or squares, designating thought as opposed to speech. This is drastically different with Joker’s dialogue, as it is not contained within a bubble, nor is it consistent with the font or color of the other characters’ dialogue. It is displayed as a sharp and inconsistent font, almost as if it were hand written on the page or carved onto the diegetic information of the panels. The appearance of the font is violent, not simply in its extreme difference from the other characters’ dialogue, but also due to what appears to be a splattering of blood that highlight various pieces of speech. Unlike a traditional font, there is no consistency between repeated letters. The text is red on top of white, giving the visual appearance of the lettering to have a form of depth, so not only is it not contained in a bubble, but also it is seemingly coming off the page itself. This is radically different from the
other characters in the book and from the traditional display of dialog in comics. This suggests a variety of extradiegetic content, particularly from Joker.

Joker becomes an increasingly extradiegetic element of the story, and this content is comprehended through textualization. McCloud discusses the importance of comprehension in reading comics with the ways that faces trigger responses in people, “the fact that your mind is capable of taking a circle, two dots and a line and turning them into a face is nothing short of incredible…but still more incredible is the fact that you cannot avoid seeing a face here. Your mind won’t let you” (McCloud 31). Coppin and Hockema also discuss the importance of facial recognition in terms of comprehension, noting that:

The identity of other people, facial expression, and where someone is looking, all provide meaningful information and consume large portions of the brain’s processes; whereas language is focused in the left hemisphere, facial expressions are focused on the right hemisphere, along with emotional and expressive processing. (Coppin, Hockema 9, emphasis in original)

Not only is Joker the most visually emotive character in the story, but we hardly see Batman’s face at all – we see a variety of emotions on Joker’s face, but more importantly, we are constantly seeing his face. One cannot help but strive for a further comprehension of Joker, the villain, rather than Batman, the masked hero. Again, this is supported further both by the extradiegetic information and by Coppin and Hockema, as they state, “other experiments show that infants respond more to a face that is talking than one that is not talking” (Coppin, Hockema 8). In Arkham Asylum, Joker’s dialogue is presented without bubbles, or containment on a panel. Therefore, the reader is forced to acknowledge that words are coming out of Joker’s mouth,
rather than reading them contained on an artificial bubble on the page. We read him as speaking, rather than seeing the text trapped within a bubble. Therefore, the reader is resonding and becomes further engaged with Joker, as he is capable of breaking the diegetic space of the comic, and bridge the gap between character and reader.

Joker is not contained within the asylum of the book, as he takes control of it in the course of the story, nor is Joker contained within the world of the comic itself, as we see Ledger grabbing onto a multitude of Joker’s visual characteristics from the book. Ledger latches onto the facial expressiveness of Joker, and comprehends the added weight of the presentation of Joker’s dialogue, as evident by McNulty’s review. Both Jokers wear long, dark purple trench coat as opposed to the traditional suit, and their hair is long and wild. *Arkham Asylum* is visually constructed by artist Dave McKean, who stylistically mixes painting and collage, in order to create a surrealistic visual world. This creates a diegetic doorway, as McKean includes visual elements from the reader’s world with collage, and Morrison pulls fictional elements into the reader’s world with the implementation of his magic in the narrative. The cover of the 15th Anniversary Edition of the book suggests that Joker is transitional between these two
different layers of reality – he is superimposed over the asylum, but underneath elements of McKean’s collage work. So, while Joker exists in the world of the story, he is not contained in the same diegetic ways in the rest of the book. Joker is able to mediate between diegetic space and the reader’s reality. These visual elements of the story, and of Joker in particular, whether diegetic or extradiegetic, create a difficult reading experience, as Lefèvre states, “[the reader] expects – in analogy with daily life – a consistent space, because he tries on the basis of cues (given in the panels) to form a global image of the complete space” (Lefèvre 159). Arkham Asylum and Joker have no consistent diegetic space, and there is no global or complete image. This emphasises McNulty’s description of Ledger’s performance, as the diegetic presentation allows for Ledger to participate in the textualization of Joker and to be absorbed into his performance.

Filming began in April 2007, giving Ledger months to bring his interpretation of Joker to life. To what extent would not be understood until after his death. After which, Grant Morrison became privy to the extremes that Ledger wrestled with in order to become Joker. After the filming, it became known that Ledger had kept a “Joker Diary” in order to help cement the character, something very few people have been given the privilege to read afterwards, however. Morrison was among those few. The journal was kept four months before shooting, demonstrating that Ledger had been going through this process as early as December 2006 (Vineyard 2008a). This is important, as Ledger’s journal kept track of things that would make Joker laugh – including “AIDS, landmines, geniuses suffering irreversible brain damage, brunch and sombreros,” something that Morrison’s Joker did in a stand-alone single issue, Batman #663 - The Clown at Midnight, which came out in March 2007 (Vineyard 2008a). The word-for-word exactness of the content had an effect on Morrison, a man used to strangeness, who stated, “It
gave me this chill.” However, Morrison admits that this issue was unpopular among comic readers, as the story was written completely in prose, with few accompanying images, and was a stand-alone issue between main story arcs in his *Batman* comics (Vineyard 2008a).

This single issue presents several important narrative elements. Instead of being images of diegesis, they are images of emphasis for the narrative. It breaks away from traditional visual narratives, and uses standard prose to tell a story, with illustrations on each page showing the main point of action. We will often see the image before reading the passage, so the image is often be the first place for story. The accompanying images are also quite different from traditional comic book art, done by John Van Fleet, and are still images of three dimensional computer generated art. The art has full dimensionality for the reader to engage and interpret, giving the story’s limited visuals a powerful sense of life. For much of *Batman #663*, Joker’s face is covered in gauze, as he is recovering from a previous beating from Batman.

Ledger refers to the character construction as a, “combination of reading all the comic books I could that were relevant to the script and then just closing my eyes and meditating on it” (Richards). This can be seen as an instance of Ledger’s ludic reading process, as he became more psychologically and emotionally invested in the character of Joker, allowing himself to be affected by the reading. He also admits to locking himself away in a hotel room for a month before shooting, in order to achieve this meditative process, giving the period for character development between mid-March and mid-April. Therefore, it is entirely likely that he bought Morrison’s issue, featuring Joker’s diary, or was given it, though still surprising to Morrison himself. The fact that it was, at the time, the newest story with Joker in print, as comics come out every Wednesday, speaks to the devotion of Ledger in terms of mastering the character.
Ledger also reportedly had great influence in the character make-up for Joker, “the Joker's face paint was reportedly designed by Heath Ledger himself, who used white clown makeup and cosmetics from a drugstore. Once his design was approved, the makeup team was responsible for replicating the look each day for filming (IMDB). However, the film’s facial scarring, permanently extending Joker’s smile, also appears in Morrison’s *The Clown at Midnight* in one of the few images that accompany the text. Though we see Joker throughout the comic, he is confined to a wheelchair, and covered by surgical gauze. The first time we see Joker’s face is well into the issue, and its image takes up nearly the entire page. We see quite clearly the radical facial scaring that Ledger brought from the issue into his own portrayal. Ledger’s infusion of self into the role is reminiscent of Morrison’s inclusion of magic in his narratives.

Regardless of *The Clown at Midnight*’s low sales, it speaks to Morrison’s writing and Ledger’s performance in several hypothetical ways. Ledger either became so entrenched in reading Joker comics that he went to a comic shop in order to continue reading current stories, particularly those being written by Morrison at the time, implying that his performance construction was a lengthy and continually developing process. This suggests a performance construction that moved outside the confines of collected stories and single character interpretations that his co-stars may have picked up. Ledger purposely read multiple Joker-centric stories, and clearly kept Morrison’s work as a central focus preparing for his own
performance. This suggests that Morrison’s character development of Joker was so complete that it became an essential reference point for Ledger’s character development very late in the pre-filming process. Ledger was radically changed the reading Joker stories, so much so that Morrison got chills reading Heath’s journal, partially because the story being widely rejected and quickly forgotten by fans, but also because of Ledger fully textualized Joker for his development of the character. Morrison saw an example of his hypersigils in action, a written character, developed and infused with magic, which had escaped the realms of his writing and into the mind of another. Ledger brought a literal interpretation of a fictional character to life, based primarily around the ideas represented in Morrison’s writing.

Ledger died of an accidental overdose of sleeping pills before the film’s release to the public (Barron). The mysterious nature of his death, the character he was performing, and the fact that the film had yet to be seen by the public all added to a supernatural aura that surrounded his death, his performance, and the film itself. Publications came out with headlines asking, “Did the Joker Kill Heath Ledger?” stating, “evidentially, playing one of the most psychotic super villains of all times can be a harrowing task and even be a factor in the untimely death of Heath Ledger” (Complex). Statements about Ledger’s sleeping patterns quickly spread as rumors, as Ledger told the New York Times in November of 2007, “Last week I probably slept an average of two hours a night. I couldn’t stop thinking. My body was exhausted, and my mind was still going” later stating that taking Ambien, a strong prescription sleeping pill, had no affect (Lyall). People began to wonder about Ledger’s mental state at the time of his portrayal of Joker, and stated that he could not escape the mentality of a “psychopathic, mass-murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy” (Lyall). This is also supported by the idea of Joker’s make-up, as
Ledger stated that it felt like he was not wearing any, as if it was just a natural part of his face, furthering the inescapable embodiment of the character (Jolin).

The implication was present, but no one blatantly stated that the fictional character of Joker had somehow literally killed Ledger. However, they were not discussing it in a wholly figurative sense either. Stories of his life before his death seemed to suggest that Joker haunted Ledger, and the lack of sleep seems to imply that Ledger was having difficulty getting Joker out of his system, affecting him mentally, emotionally, and physically. The press began to discuss ideas of wariness and restlessness surrounding his death, and an article in *Rolling Stone* stated “he couldn’t seem to disengage” (Lipsky). This article further stated that, “Ledger had no formal training, and there’s this to be said for acting school: it teaches you to approach a role as foreign, temporary. Ledger didn’t appear to have that…It didn’t always shut off when a production did.

… On set, Michael Caine said the performance sometimes turned so frightening he forgot his own lines” (Lipsky). There was not just a truly frightening element of Ledger’s Joker presence on set and on film, but there is a strong implication that Ledger’s untrained and informal acting style allowed for a dangerous embodiment of the fictional character.

The aura of Ledger’s performance displayed a representation that was so real, frightening, and intense that he could not escape the character he had created. His textualization was so complete that he was, for a period of time, Joker, and it killed him. Fox News printed a story about Ledger being advised to seek professional help, and quoted an anonymous source from *The Dark Knight* set, stating that he “refused to speak to anyone out-of-character. If you tried to communicate with him normally instead of the Joker, he would just ignore you” (McKay). Stranger statements began to appear in the press, as Jack Nicholson, the actor to last play Joker before Ledger in Tim Burton’s *Batman* (1989), told reporters, “Well, I warned him”
(Neumaier). Did Nicholson warn Ledger about the dangers of method acting, the dangers of prescription sleeping medications, or the dangers of being Joker? Regardless of the context of this quote, it exists in the lore surrounding the death. These sources, regardless of their credibility in the popular media, help to illuminate a mysterious quality of Ledger’s Joker performance, implying a supernatural aura of Ledger’s interpretation of the fictional Joker, and a warning of the mystical dangers and superstitions associated with performing as Joker in film.

Ledger’s ludic reading and trance meditation with Joker comics speak to Thiem’s process of textualization, being truly affected by a piece of writing, more than simply being engrossed with the reading. The embodiment of the fictional Joker concept as a part of the acting process of character development for film works with a part of Morrison’s particular shamanic belief process; contacting the spirits of a different plane of existence. In an interview from Mark Salisbury’s *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting* (1999), Morrison describes a remarkably similar concurrence of shamanism and textualization, stating that:

> Within a year we’ll see man’s first contact with a fictional reality, seriously. That’s what the magic’s all about. Fiction and reality are going to become interchangeable. It will happen very slowly. One of the things we can do with the comics universe is go into it. I’ve already done it in *Animal Man*, but I went in as myself. I realize now that you can go into any comic or any piece of fiction wearing a Fiction Suit. This is pioneering stuff; we are now astronauts entering fiction as a dimension. I can go into the comics’ world wearing a Superman body and walk around. (Salisbury 213)
Morrison’s idea of going into the fictional dimension as explorers and having contact with the reality of the comics speaks to Ledger’s full immersion with Joker from the comics, and the ideas of him taking Joker out of the comics and into our reality. Morrison speaks of going into fiction as a spirit the same way he interacted with the spirits of a higher dimensional existence. Perhaps Morrison’s earlier mentioned chills in regard to Ledger’s process refer to his silent understanding of Ledger’s interaction with the fictional dimensions created in his own stories, acknowledging Leger to be the first to truly interact with a fictional reality. Jon Thiem warns us of this process in his essay:

On this delicate balance between detachment and identification rests traditional apologia for fiction reading: through it we can experience without having to undergo the suffering and anxiety that actual experience in the extratextual world entails. In a textualization, this balance is upset. The world of the text loses its literal impenetrability. The reader loses that minimal detachment that keeps him or her out of the world of the text. (Thiem 343)

Thiem’s warning about the nature of literature speaks to the process of reading as an important part of the developmental nature of experience, but not as something greater than the actual phenomenon of reading. Though we can gain experience from reading, particularly through the ludic nature of textualization, the experience has the potential to be dangerous. Perhaps Morrison realizes this, and it is why he is very public about his magic practices and how he implements them in his writing techniques, or why he generally chooses the ever-moral world of the superhero for his narratives, believing it is a way of countering the potentially dangerous activity of crossing into and interacting with the fictional world.
Ledger’s performance also broke away from the diegetic space of the film. Brian Azzerello and Lee Bermejo’s graphic novel Joker (2008) was heavily inspired by Ledger’s performance, as evident by the art style’s accuracy in presenting Joker as he was in the film. This shows both the importance of Ledger’s role in the continuum of comic culture, and to the acceptance of the Ledger’s Joker, now able to exist within the timeless world of comics. Ledger clearly desired to bring Joker out from the pages of the comics, and in accomplishing this, we see Ledger being put into the comics themselves, as an authoritative representation of Joker.

Ledger’s version of Joker’s face also found power as an expression of political disenfranchisement over the election of President Barak Obama. Joker’s face was superimposed onto Obama’s, thereby associating the evil of the character with the perceived evil of Obama (Millian). Ledger’s Joker became the image of evil, as opposed to any comic interpretation, showing the extradiiegetic power that his performance was able to achieve.

Heath Ledger’s complete transformation into the fictional villain of DC Comics’ Joker had a noticeable effect on his physical and mental health after the completion of the film’s production, ultimately resulting in his accidental and mythologized death. Ledger’s process of character development was so complete that he read Joker comics constantly, learning more and more about the villain, meditating and infusing the character within himself. The process of textualization allows this to happen on a neurological level, particularly within works of fiction. The literary practice of textualization emphasizes this, demonstrating how a writer explicitly wants to have the reader engage more closely with the narrative and to get them lost in their book. Morrison uses this technique in his writing, particularly with the mixture of literary skill and his belief in shamanism and magic. His comics become what he refers to as hypersigils – when a plot, as opposed to basic wishes or desires, becomes a magical device and represents the
goal of having an effect on reality. Morrison’s intent with fiction is to manipulate it in the same way a spirit or god would manipulate an individual in our own reality, and perhaps Ledger accomplished this by allowing himself to become one with a fictional character, unaware of the eventual outcome. When one plays with true villainy, one must be prepared for the consequences.
TO BE CONTINUED: WHEN SUPERMAN GOES BEYOND THE TEXT

*An event does not in any way imply rapid change; the endurance of a block of marble is an event.* – Alfred Whitehead (Whitehead 310)

Through 2008-2009, DC Comics published Grant Morrison’s event series *Final Crisis.* This series consists of seven full issues of a main story line, stand-alone issues (by Morrison and others) that tie into the main plot, and several inter-connected mini-series (by other DC writers) that bring the event to several of DC’s main comic titles. DC Comics has published multiple *Crisis* titles throughout its history, starting with *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1986), *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time* (1994) and *Identity Crisis* (2004). The *Crisis* series are large-scale stories that take place across the entire DC comic universe and feature the majority of DC’s characters.

Within the narrative of *Final Crisis,* Morrison wrote a two-issue mini-series called *Superman Beyond 3D* (2008-2009). This story was placed into the *Final Crisis* collected publications, forming an integral part of the complete narrative. However, as it was originally published, the story existed in two single issues, and could be read independently of the main story. The differing forms of publication are important in this instance, due to the original issues’ use of selective 3D printing techniques, as certain parts of the story took place in levels of diegetic awareness, and included 3D glasses to accompany the issues for the reader. Once it was collected into the hardcover and softcover book versions of *Final Crisis,* this aspect of the story was eliminated, removing the 3D aspect of the narrative, and forcing the story into a linear order within the main narrative.
As readers open up either of the single issues, the enclosed 3D glasses greet them. The glasses are folded into and stapled between the pages of the comics, and require the reader to remove and assemble them. By doing this, the reader is actively engaging and participating with the text. Where comics are normally collected and left in pristine condition, to read and experience this story properly, you have to destroy part of the issue. The glasses have a print of gold rust on them, sharing a similar aesthetic appearance to Superman’s Cosmic Armor, and symbolizing a connection between readers, who place the glasses on their faces, and Superman’s own transformation. The print on the glasses is also a part of this participation. Not only does it stand as directions for assembly, but also as extradiegetic element of the story, as they state:

We’ll be traveling through Bleed space between the universes, but you’ll need to upgrade to 4-D vision to truly comprehend what you experience. Prepare yourself by wearing these Overvoid Viewers forged from Superman’s own Cosmic Armor. Your ability to see 4-D perspective will develop spontaneously when you need it. It is crucial you cut your Overvoid Viewers out of the placard holder as indicated by the dotted lines, or they won’t function properly. When properly formulated, your Overvoid Viewers should have the green part over your right eye and the red
over the left with the rusted armor facing out toward the page. (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy, 2008)

Because the written text on the glasses references the internal narrative of the comic, the glasses themselves become a textualized element of the story. The glasses exist within the world of the comic, and when you put them on, you share Superman’s perspective. You see the world of the comic in simulated 3D the same way that Superman would see his own universe and the same way that we view our own, as an existence of full dimensionality. This removes a level of diegetic reality between the character and the reader and increasing the engagement between the reader and Superman.

Morrison’s intent with the 3D element in his comic is more than a gimmick. While DC Comics can charge more per issue, and it stands out on store shelves, the 3D element has a stronger purpose to Morrison than mere sales. The textualization of the reader and the implementation of his hypersigils has been a goal of Morrison’s for some time. As discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, John Thiem describes textualization as being “lost in a book,” a pleasurable phenomenon associated with the hobby of reading and imposing yourself onto the characters and story. To Morrison, the concept is much more real. In an interview with Mark Salisbury on comic scriptwriting, Morrison states:

I realize now that you can go into any comic or any piece of fiction wearing a Fiction Suit. This is pioneering stuff, we are now astronauts entering fiction as a dimension. I can go into the comics world wearing a Superman body and walk around and tell them stuff like what’s going to happen on page sixteen if I want. I thought, what if you treated that reality as being its own real autonomous world?
In the same way that those hyperbeings could get me out, can I get anyone out of there? (Salisbury 213)

While it may seem like a particularly odd concept to discuss in an interview, to Morrison it is all too personal. Morrison is connecting his encounter with extra-dimensional beings, and his removal out of his own reality (as described in chapter 1), to the way we view comics. The desire to achieve that same level of interaction is Morrison’s goal in creating his fictions. One should note that this interview was published in 1999 and took place possibly a few years before that. Morrison mentions a “Fiction Suit,” and we see this in *Superman Beyond*, as a representation of the totality of fiction itself, which coincidentally (or perhaps, quite deliberately, if one accepts Superman as the first comic superhero) bears the form of Superman. The reader is also able to wear that very same “Fiction Suit” as embodied by the 3D glasses, and engage in the story as Superman, since when wearing the Cosmic Armor/Fiction Suit, Superman is merely a concept, rather than a specific character. He becomes a metaphor within the diegesis, an abstraction to which we can apply ourselves. We are seeing aspects of the *Superman Beyond* story being discussed here a decade before it was published, alluding to Morrison’s continued and deliberate use of textualization and magic as a form of narrative construction.

While it proves cheaper and easier for DC to publish, as well as presenting the story to readers without requiring special glasses, this elimination of the 3D parts of the story and forced placement in the *Final Crisis* narrative proves damning to the content of *Superman Beyond 3D*. As the world around Superman changes, so must Superman adapt, and his vision is “upgraded” to 4D Vision when he needs to perceive the aspects of what is going on around him that exist outside his normal comprehensive abilities. When this occurs, so too must readers put on their 3D glasses in order to properly perceive and read what is going on in the world of the comic. The
story of *Superman Beyond 3D* takes place between heartbeats of Lois Lane, who was kept alive solely by Superman. Superman is pulled out of time, beyond his current concept of reality. As originally published, this story existed as a part of, but also outside of the main *Final Crisis* arc, the reader is able to read the story as a part of the overarching event, but also not limited to a linear narrative experience. The story of *Superman Beyond* takes place between issues of the main *Final Crisis* series, but in the collected volume of *Final Crisis* the reader is forced to consume this story as a moment between other moments, as opposed to how Superman experiences it, as a moment outside of a moment. Since the story is told partially in 3D, and readers use 3D glasses at the same time that Superman needs to use his special vision, we are supposed to experience this story as Superman is experiencing it as an aspect of his own reality. Thus, when one forces the individual comics into linear story form, and stripped of this 3D, *Superman Beyond* is an incomplete reading experience, though integral to completing the *Final Crisis* story. In order to experience it properly, one must read them as single issues.

This is evidence of an extradiegetic representation of the post-structural nature of Morrison’s work. While *Final Crisis* may represent a singular event, Morrison is reminding us that the “event” is never a single concept with a particular interpretation or meaning. Forcing the two stories of *Final Crisis* and *Superman Beyond* into a singular narrative demands the narratives work together as a single concept. Morrison organized the stories to be independent of each other, working together towards a greater meaning. Morrison rejects this notion of structured storytelling and of comic diegesis. This rejection of structuralism is perhaps most fiercely evident within the writing of post-structuralist Jacques Derrida. As Derrida states, “Therefore one can describe what is peculiar to the structural organization only by taking into account, in the very moment of this description, its past conditions: by omitting to posit the problem of the
transition from one structure to another, by putting history between brackets” (Derrida 286). In this instance, the bracketing of history takes place in the collection of story, which serves as a history of the comic’s universe. Collecting the stories together as a linear unit ruins the meaning of Superman Beyond and forces it into a specific system diegetic time. The structural organization of the collected volume removes the acknowledgement of time and place from the world of the comic, and eliminates the diegetic reality and life of what is being told.

Superman Beyond 3D #1 (October 2008) begins in media res, as we see Superman, adorned in “Cosmic Armor.” He is in an unknown location and under attack by a mysterious foe who is asking Superman what he would like engraved on his tombstone, arrogantly gloating over the failure of Superman to save his love. On the following page, the reader sees Superman, as Clark Kent, in a hospital, “Just a single heartbeat ago…” at the bedside of Lois Lane, who is severely injured (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 2). Within the first two pages, we begin to see the nonlinear narrative that Morrison is known for. We start at the end (or seemingly the end) of the story, and end right back where we started, missing only a heartbeat of time. Clark is greeted by a mysterious woman surrounded by a purple glow, who states her knowledge of his identity. Superman realizes he can no longer hear Lois breathing, not because she has died but because the stranger has stopped time, and she offers Superman his only chance to save Lois’s life. We learn that Superman was the only thing keeping Lois alive, with his “Infra-Red Massage” keeping her heart pumping, not the hospital’s equipment. The stranger states that she has the ability to stop time in “Universe Designate Zero”, or as the reader would know it, in Superman’s diegetic reality. This allows Superman to leave Lois’s bedside, and join the stranger with her team of “the greatest Super-Champions of the Multiverse” (Morrison, Mahnke and
Alamy 2008, 6). Superman joins, pulling open Clark’s shirt, revealing Superman’s costume underneath.

Superman is promised a medicine to save Lois, a substance called “Ultramenstruum,” or simply “Bleed.” This substance is an abstract essence in which the universes of DC comics grow, thereby telling the reader that this stranger recruiting the various Supermen is outside not only the existence of one reality, but also all of the known Multiverse realities. Immediately readers are forced to consider the notion of diegetic existence. Where the Multiverse represents all available fictional DC realities, it literally represents all of DC comics as a single plane of literary possibilities. Superman’s confrontation with the stranger, known eventually as a Monitor of Nil named Zillo Valla, transports Superman outside of the realm of limitations of his universe and they team-up with other Supermen as they travel through the Bleed between universes.

Readers must now not only read and consider the diegetic reality of Superman, but the realities of the other Supermen. The characters are in a level of diegetic reality that observes the multiverse in the same way that readers would observe comics, metaphorically bridging the reader and the narrative. Zillo Valla, in this instance, exists outside of the diegetic space of DC comics, as she exists outside of and is able to perceive all knowledge about the Multiverse. Since Superman is now outside of his diegetic reality, he must also be “upgraded” with 4-D Vision, “to truly comprehend what [he] experience[s]” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 11). So too must the readers, as the narrative switches between traditional print and 3D print.

At this point, readers are introduced to the various Supermen from the Multiverse. While the reader has met other characters in the story before now, Superman is narrating an “official” introduction to the readers. He first describes a particularly angry looking version of himself, who is described as, “Ultranman, [Superman’s] counter-part from an antimatter copy of the
Earth—His pursuit of corruption as tireless as my dedication to justice” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 23). This is a character created by Morrison in his original story *JLA: Earth 2* (2000). In the next panel, Captain Marvel, a recognizable DC character, is struggling to control the ship they are traveling in by playing a large harp. In 1940, Captain Marvel was created as a competitor to Superman comics, appearing in Whiz Comics #2 by Fawcett Publications (Smith). The character was later subject to a lawsuit by DC Comics for imitating their Superman character, and eventually bought by DC for their own use (Smith). As the comic states, he is “Captain Marvel of Earth-5: From a simpler, kinder universe than the Marvel family I know back home…” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 23). Therefore, we are supposed to know that this is the original Captain Marvel, existing in his own universe outside of Superman, from the original comic strips, and not the character who has been used in the DC comic canon. We see a Superman speaking German, his “S” symbol reminiscent of the Waffen-SS. He is described as, “Overman, guilt-ridden champion of Earth 10, where Nazis won the Second World War” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 23). The next panel shows us a slender, blue-chrome-skinned man, contemplating the realities around him. This character bears the designation “Air Force Captain Allen Adam, the ‘Quantum Superman’ of Earth 4, in a condensed universe where the laws of physics are different” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 23). This is an allusion to both Dr. Manhattan from Alan Moore’s *Watchmen*, a comic whose world
is supposed to take place in the same (though still fictional) reality as the reader, and the original Captain Atom character originally published by Charleston Comics as a competitor for Superman comics. The original concept for *Watchmen* was to create a story with the Charleston Comics characters, which was eventually purchased by DC Comics, and had not been in publication for some years (Moore, Gibson 413). Dr. Manhattan quickly replaced Captain Atom, as DC Comics intended to use the original characters in other ways. Captain Allen Adam is thus an allusion to the original intent of *Watchmen*, and is from that un-used universe of comics. He keeps the name “Captain Adam” throughout the issue, both as a pun of “Atom” and an allusion to the Charleston Comics character he is supposed to represent. Similar to “Captain Marvel,” a version of Captain Atom now exists in Superman’s reality, but is fundamentally (and diegetically) different from the original characters in their original publications.

Each Superman represents the character and the world in which he lives, as well as a unique and simultaneous continuity that can be compared against the traditional Superman character. In this context, each Superman represents the most iconoclastic hero figure of his specific universe. However, because each universe in the Multiverse has its own version of Superman, no version of Superman in any diegetic context can be associated with an absolute version, regardless of the reader’s association with the traditional Superman character. Though the story focuses on the traditional Superman as the main character, it also highlights the importance of all the others, each on the journey because they are each able to accomplish the impossible in their own specific ways. Each of these characters embodies Derrida’s notion of the center of structures:

Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure,
escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside of it. (Derrida 279)

While the concept of each Superman represents a “center,” each of these centers” is now surrounded by and aware of the others. Therefore, the structural notion of the center, as a “point at which substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible,” breaks down as each of these is made jarringly aware of his own replaceable identity within the Multiverse. Outside of the diegesis of the comic, Superman is a character that has been copied and played with. Captain Marvel and Captain Adam represent literal notions of this, as each were different ways of playing with the concept of Superman from different publishing companies in the past, and several other versions of Superman appear later on in *Final Crisis*. Each of these Supermen is a bricolage of the original, which Derrida defines as “the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined” (Derrida 285). The idea of another Superman-based character borrows from the original and used in new and different ways, each Superman bearing resemblance to the original, but also a stark originality, as Derrida notes that “every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage*” (Derrida 285). Ideas and creations, in this case the various Supermen including Superman, share common points of origin and inspirations as parts of their development. The text becomes intertextual, referencing the historical characters who were built based on Superman, and rejecting the boundaries and limitations of those characters and their diegetic worlds.

The Supermen are traveling across the Multiverse, chased by a craft known as The Echo of Midnight, a ship so large that it exists across multiple universes simultaneously. Morrison shows us this through several panels of the comic, as we see the ship in the sky of a city on one
panel, which is imposed over by another panel with different skyline, but the ship continues seamlessly from one panel to the other. We also see panels of several different comic universes, each with a different fragment of the ship in its unique sky. So, not only is the ship bigger than the diegetic realities of the comic worlds shown on the page, but it also exists beyond the extradiegetic information of the comic itself. Its sheer size is breaking through panels and borders of visual narrative construction. Since the ship is represented diegetically (within the world of the panel) and extradiegetically (outside the world of the panel), the ship becomes larger than the worlds in the text. The worlds in the comic cannot contain the reality of the ship, and each world loses authority within the diegesis.

The Supermen eventually land on the surface of another universe known as Limbo. Upon being greeted by a group of characters, all looking like superheroes, led by a man named Merryman, Superman states, “A superhero once, he says, until the world forgot him and he wound up….nowhere, along with all these others…Is this…is this what happens to us when we die?” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 24). The Supermen run into forgotten aspects of their own worlds and lives, unable to fully comprehend their importance. In this context, Limbo becomes a metaphorical representation of Derrida’s notion of the futility of the conceptualization of totality:

Thus, the relief and design of structures appears more clearly when content, which is the living energy of meaning, is neutralized. Somewhat like the architecture of an uninhabited or deserted city, reduced to its skeleton by some catastrophe of nature or art. A city no longer inhabited, not simply left behind, but haunted by meaning and culture. This state of being haunted, which keeps the city from
returning to nature, is perhaps the general mode of the presence of absence of the thing itself in pure language. (Derrida 5)

Here, Derrida is referring to the structuralist ideal of totality, and Morrison is playing with this concept concerning the nature of comic book continuity. Though Morrison is not necessarily following Derrida’s ideas, both men are responding to postmodernism. The characters are forgotten references, but serve as a form of intertextualization and as a connection of diegetic realities. While the Multiverse represents the abstract notion of the entire history of DC comics, Morrison is keen to remind the reader of the forgotten. The characters living in Limbo represent actual DC comic characters, forgotten to time and the diegetic continuity of the comic world and the knowledge of readers. Once a comic is published, its existence cannot be erased, but it can be written over in terms of diegetic history, and thus, the characters exist in Morrison’s Limbo. They never “died” in text, but were simply forgotten by creators, readers, and the events of DC’s continuity. Thus, they exist outside of the Multiverse, or the perceived notion of totality, and thus, the totality is neutralized as a concept. The characters living in Limbo “haunt” the world of the comic, and prevent the return of Limbo to “nature” – or the continuity of the comic universe.

As they are led further into the world by Merryman, the characters come to the Library of Limbo, a place with only one book that no one is able to read, and we are told that it is a “book with an infinite number of pages, all occupying the same place” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 27). Captain Marvel and Superman lift the book together, and become aware of its contents. The book begins to tell them the origin of the Monitors, the race of people represented earlier by Zillo Valla. It details how the Monitors existed before all else, and perceived a flaw in their perfect existence, and created the Bleed to contain this flaw. After exploration, they discover that the flaw is a “chaotic froth of events! Lives. Deaths. Heroes. Villains. Lovers.
Stories!” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 29). Scared of the chaos of possible events, the Monitors seal the knowledge of this investigation within “divine metals,” which are, unbeknownst to them, formed in the shape of Superman’s iconic visage. We are told in the Book of Limbo that, “the mystery of the silent sentinel haunts Monitors, infects the immaculate intelligence with questions, speculations, pestilential, crawling narratives” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2008, 30). The story unravels and the book is dropped, leaving Captain Marvel in the form of his secret identity, a child named Billy Batson, unable to remember anything about himself. The issue ends mirroring the beginning, with Ultraman standing manically over Superman and Captain Adam.

While Limbo may be a rejection of the concept of totality, the Book of Limbo, in the reality of the comic, embodies that very idea. Yet, Morrison is rejecting that idea of a complete story and seems to be focusing on Derrida’s notion of the “pure book.” As stated by Derrida, “The pure book, the book itself, by virtue of what is most irreplaceable within it, must be the ‘book about nothing’ that Flaubert dreamed of – a gray, negative dream, the origin of the total Book that haunted other imaginations” (Derrida 8). Though the book is represented as one single glowing page, it takes two Supermen to lift it, and becomes something impossible to decipher, as it causes Captain Marvel to revert to his human form with amnesia. Superman, though stunned, is still intact. The Supermen in this story represent the impossible - each with impossible powers and whose narrative purpose is to accomplish the impossible. As Superman Beyond progresses, Superman is able to reject the reality of the Book of Limbo, and defeat the threat that promises to destroy the existence of the Multiverse. Thus, the idea of a full, complete book of knowledge and totality becomes a moot point to the characters and the diegetic reality of the story.
Several months after the release of the first issue, Superman Beyond 3D #2 (March 2008) opens directly where we left off, with Ultraman threatening the rest of the Supermen with the knowledge he’s gained from the Book of Limbo, particularly of the coming of Mandrakk, the god of evil from beyond the Multiverse. They accept this challenge as the ships of Mandrakk, all the size of the Echo of Midnight, attempt to invade and anchor themselves onto Limbo, in order to connect that dimension with the Void. Inspired by the actions of the Supermen, the characters of Limbo take up arms against the invasion, knowing now that their lives and actions still have meaning.

Captain Adam Allen, off panel for much of the story, or shown staring off into the distance, contemplating ideas and muttering to himself, opens his eyes wide and says, “All I had to do was let go. Let go of limits, expectations…and be a new Adam” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2009, 11). We see now multiple Captain Adams, of various sizes, doing different actions, each conscious and different from the others. Several different Adams are seen on panel discussing the events learned from the Book of Limbo, “…a thought robot activated by the tremendous energies unleashed during collisions of fundamental opposing qualities. A new fusion process powered by…‘dualities’? No. There are no dualities. Only symmetries” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2009, 12, 15). Since Superman and Ultraman are matter/anti-matter copies of each other, they have never touched, despite Ultraman’s aggression, as matter cannot touch anti-matter without destruction. The Book of Limbo spoke of the fault in the Monitors’ reality and described this as a great energy that created conflict and events. Captain Adam, aware of this and their location in Limbo – a forgotten space of memory, slams the two characters together, in order to fuse their symmetries, and again create that same conceptual conflict – described by the Monitors as being “stories” that the Monitors have
encased in the Cosmic Armor that looks like Superman. Morrison is rejecting the notion of binary oppositions by fusing these two forces together into an abstract concept, a character embodied with the pure symmetry of conflict (the very idea of which, according to the Monitors, created stories), capable of achieving more than the two separate figures. In doing so, he has bonded the ideologies embodied by the two characters into a “symmetry”, rejecting the structural notion of binaries as definitive truths.

Superman, or a conceptual version of Superman, now awakes in the Cosmic Armor, the armor that is fueled by stories, and filled by Superman, both good and evil. He is now in Nil, world of the Monitors, a place outside the Multiverse, where Superman is able to observe Limbo as a single object. While wearing the armor, Superman’s eyes are green and red, the same colors that the reader would have over each individual eye while wearing the 3D glasses. This alludes to Morrison’s inclusion of textualization, and the reader becoming Superman. The character also breaks diegetic space, as we see Superman’s hand breaking through a panel, and coming out towards the reader in 3D. This is emphasized further down the page by showing Superman’s hand against an empty, white portion of the page. This can be read as the space between panels, or McCloud’s concept of “the gutter”, which has been noticeably increased on this page. [Note: I’ve edited the image with a black border to help emphasize this “gutter” space.]
We see Superman extending his hand beyond this space, as he is no longer limited to the diegetic boundaries (literal, as in the panel space and metaphorical, as in the extent of his power) of the comic. Superman learns that the Monitors, at one point in their existence, were “numberless and faceless, until exposure to the struggles of human life changed their essential nature. Until narratives formed around them, like crystals in solution” (Morrison, Mahnke and Alamy 2009, 22). He learns that the Monitors have been feeding off the life force of the Multiverse, becoming addicted to feeding on the essence of life itself.

We see Mandrakk for the first time, and the reader learns that he is the monster battling Superman on the first page of Superman Beyond 3D #1. The narrative has looped back onto itself, and readers have caught up to the page seen at the beginning of the story. We learn that Mandrakk holds the medicine needed to save Lois Lane’s life. The comic tells us that Mandrakk is a Monitor, corrupt after years of feeding on the Bleed. Zillo Valla attempts to confront him, as Superman lies on the ground of Nil bleeding, and she is killed, and the reader learns that Zillo Valla and Mandrakk were once lovers. Superman recovers during this time, and attacks Mandrakk, causing the monster to fall into the Overvoid, the space outside of Nil, represented by an empty white panel. Again, this white space is reminiscent of the space between comic panels, the extradiegetic space that constitutes the construction of the comic world as a text. Not only is Mandrakk falling off the world of the Monitors, but also falling off the diegetic boarder of the comic panel and into the extradiegetic separation. Superman recovers the Bleed crystal, which he is only able to hold while wearing the giant Cosmic Armor, which is now damaged beyond repair.

Superman stands in the armor, a giant among the Monitors, and is told there is no way to transport the Bleed into his universe. He tells them that he will find a way. Remembering the
threat from Mandrakk, Superman walks to a giant, blank slab of rock, and tells the Monitors
“There’s something about stories…that you should know…Mandrakk asked…what words I’d
have inscribed on my tombstone…Only these…Let them be…a warning…” (Morrison, Mahnke
and Alamy 2009, 30). The Cosmic Armor containing the pure essence of the combined
symmetries of Superman and Ultraman is crumbling to pieces, and the two are sent back to their
appropriate places in Bleed space. Superman rejoins Captain Marvel and Overman to find that
Captain Adam has mysteriously disappeared. The three of them take to destroying Mandrakk’s
remaining ships. We see Ultraman, lost in the wastelands of Limbo, and he is confronted by a
banished Monitor, and infused with the essence of Mandrakk. Ultraman transforms into this
vampiric creature, promising to return to defeat Superman.

The comic changes back to Superman’s diegetic reality, and we return to the familiar
hospital from the beginning of the first issue. Clark Kent kisses Lois Lane, delivering the
medicine to her – the same medicine he was told he would not be able to bring back to his world.
Lois wakes instantly, telling Clark of her dream, and seeing
his tombstone. She asks for a pen to write down all her
thoughts before she forgets, and tells Clark to leave her alone
so that she can get back to work. The reader then turns to the
last page of the comic, and it shows the tombstone from Nil,
on which Superman inscribed his final message to the
Monitors, reading simply “To Be Continued” (Morrison,
Mahnke and Alamy 2009, 38). This inscription comes after
Superman has accomplished the impossible – defeating what
was promised to occur in the Book of Limbo. The Book’s
foretelling of the destruction of the Multiverse was a part of its totality, and Superman defeated that notion of totality. The tombstone’s inscription replaces the Book of Limbo as a source of truth to the Monitors, as well as serving as Morrison’s own stance on the nature of comic narratives. The tombstone becomes Derrida’s notion of the “pure book,” but represented in this instance as the “pure phrase,” or the “phrase about nothing” lacking any totality or completeness, yet forever inspiring the continuation and purpose for life (in the diegesis) and continued narrative construction (from the view of the author). Superman is thus ensuring the future safety of the Multiverse by replacing the Book of Limbo’s “beginning-middle-end” notion of totality, and Morrison is encouraging future writers to embrace the idea of continuing to create stories of Superman and other characters, regardless of how long they have been in print or in what adventures they have already taken part. The story is never complete, particularly in superhero comics, as weekly publications have kept DC creators telling stories of the same characters, with a serialized incompleteness, for decades. This supports Derrida’s purpose of writing, as he states:

To write is not only to know that the Book does not exist and that forever there are books, against which the meaning of a world not conceived by an absolute subject is shattered, before it has even become a unique meaning; nor is it only to know that the non-written and the non-read cannot be relegated to the status of having no basis by the obliging negativity of some dialectic, making us deplore the absence of the Book from under the burden of “too many texts!” (Derrida 10)

Derrida is stating here that the concept of the Book, the absolute totality of meaning and experience, is negated by the idea that stories are constantly being told. Therefore, the Book of Limbo becomes a futile concept, as the stories/lives of the characters in the Multiverse are
constantly refuting the idea of a complete and absolute idea of existence. Thus, they represent the chaotic contrast to the Monitors’ stability, and their constant inspiration for the importance of life, knowledge and experience. The “To Be Continued” thus represents the “non-written” and “non-read,” whereas the stories yet to come of Superman, and others, have the potential to develop and challenge the very essence of Superman. In Superman Beyond, this is represented in a meta-context, as we have multiple Supermen, each with his own diegetic lives and histories, and with their own stories. Each Superman therefore rejects the other as the absolute, and encourages the continuation of each other in terms of narrative continuity. As each character represents the non-written to the other, as they exist outside of diegetic reality, each assures the reader of the rejection of the “absence of the Book,” or the single story of absolute totality. Superman wears the totality of fiction so that the readers can participate with it through Morrison’s use of 3D, and eventually see it destroyed, giving the characters and the readers the new motto at the end of the book.

Superman Beyond’s story echoes Morrison’s own shamanic experience as described in chapter 1. Superman is removed from his own reality by a being from beyond his comprehension the same way that Morrison was removed from reality by the silvery beings. Besides being an allusion to Morrison’s own life, this serves a magical purpose for the narrative and the character of Superman, allowing the character to develop in a similar fashion. As Morrison was pulled from his body, and beyond time, he gained knowledge of realities beyond our own, and so too does Superman. Morrison is quick to remind us that Superman is still on the printed page as he states:

I’ve tried to go into their world and to understand what’s going on in the space of the comics, and to try and find a way to make that into a morality, almost, or a
creed, or an aesthetic, that might make sense to someone who has yet to be born with powers beyond those of mortal man. (Babcock 29)

Morrison is stating that his authorial participation in his work is more literal, because of his magic, and that he is attempting to do more with fiction with the help of it. Comics are no longer just fictional stories, but ethical guides for the readers. While the 3D aspects of the story allow the reader to “become” Superman, the narrative of the story serves as a guide for continuing to be Superman.

Here we see Morrison participating in what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as “dialogical contact,” where “the hero is located in a zone of potential conversation with the author” (Bakhtin 45). While Bakhtin is implying that the relationship between the writer and character is based on the experience and the “voices” of the author, Morrison is implementing this on a more personal level. Superman is not simply participating in a diegetic event alluding to Morrison’s own experiences; Morrison is actively trying to evolve the character of Superman through a shamanic trial in the same way that Morrison experienced years earlier, and by proxy, this should have a bearing on the lives of the readers. While Bakhtin states that “the author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with almost no direct language of his own” (Bakhtin 47), Morrison is achieving this with his hypersigils and the intent to bridge the connection between human beings and fictional characters. In doing this, Morrison is creating and writing a character that has a life and struggles, allowing Superman to participate in the life and experiences of the author and to become more easily identifiable to the reader, and allowing readers to impose themselves upon the character.
Though Derrida and Bakhtin come from different traditions of literary analysis, Morrison is using both perspectives in his work. Though Derrida may have been damning the authoritative totality that Structuralism strived to achieve, and Bakhtin strove to analyze the creative form of novels, Bakhtin determined that the novel was a heteroglossic form of narrative. He describes this process as:

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (Bakhtin 263)

The novel becomes a collection of different voices of varying authority, and is composed of several perspectives. The author’s input, the diegetic realities for the characters, and the reader all bring different voices together to form the perspective of the novel, allowing for multiple interpretations of the work. In this context, the world of the comic has specific rules to its diegetic reality. Morrison has been fascinated by the rules of superhero diegesis, and is aware of the special rules of the narrative and how they differ based on the fantasy aspects of the superhero genre. Morrison describes this process:

When you are working in the DC Universe, it’s very different to doing your own work. I’ve always said that it’s an actual place that has depth to it and has its own topography. DC Comics goes back 70 years, with writers and artists adding to this endless recurring story. The characters never grow old and they never die. I might go in there thinking that I’m going to finish a story, but it’s the nature of these
never-ending, never-ageing characters that there’s always a “to be continued.” (Jewell 37-38).

While Morrison’s writing style encompasses many aspects of post-structuralism, Morrison is aware that the diegetic world of the comic has a life of its own and has been in constant construction for over 70 years. While there may be an apparent structure of the comic world, Morrison sees these aspects as malleable, and something that he can bring his own unique voice and experience to, and add a post-structural twist to the lives of the characters by using a heteroglossic dialogic relationship to his writing.

The characters Morrison writes are working within Bakhtin's chronotopes, or “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin 84). While his writing style and creation is post-structuralist, with non-linearity and meta-fictional overtones, he is still constructing a world, which has a set of rules of its own. Rules that we see Superman constantly breaking, as he discovers new realities in the same way that Morrison has in his own life, because of Superman’s ability to accomplish the impossible. Morrison is able to use Bakhtin's system of diegetic consistency, but from a post-structuralist point of view, where the narrative rules are there to be broken. Since the characters are super-human, they are able to achieve this by their ability to embody and accomplish the impossible.

Superman meets diegetic characters as representations of the beings that greeted Morrison during his shamanic encounter. While they are not the silvery blobs described in chapter 1, they are from a reality that sees Superman’s as a complete idea and are able to bestow upon Superman great gifts and knowledge. With the help of textualization and the 3D aspects of
the narrative, Morrison is creating a narrative in which the reader of the story becomes Superman. The dense metaphors of metafiction throughout the comic serve as Morrison’s “hypersigils,” or a magical device in the form of narrative. In this, Morrison is not simply including part of his life in the story, but also creating a shamanic quest for Superman, and through this, giving Superman the ability to transcend the limits of printed pages and for readers to experience their own versions of a shamanic quest while safely reading a comic book. The post-structural nature of the narrative allows these elements to occur more naturally, and allows Morrison to create deeply personal narratives with the help of his practice of magic. The creative elements of Morrison’s comics give the reader a deeper connection to the characters on page, and allow the message of the narrative to have a stronger effect on those who read it.
Artistic production begins with figures in the service of magic. What is important for these figures is that they are present, not that they are seen. The elk depicted by Stone Age man on the walls of his cave is an instrument of magic, and is exhibited to others only coincidentally; what matters is that the spirits see it. – Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 25)

One of the fastest growing and most notorious internet communities is 4chan.org. Hundreds of thousands of users from around the world access the website every day and partake in a variety of group events, activities and discussions, while developing a close-knit community. Unlike more conventionally popular social networking websites like Facebook.com, 4chan users are almost entirely anonymous. Though users may have no idea who others might be, where they are located, their age, race, or gender, the users have created an authentic and social group identity with a deeply complex system of traditions and practices. One of the sub-groups of 4chan occupy the “Comics & Cartoons” board (also known as “/co/”), where they share favorite images, create fan art, develop their own style of collective humor, and have deep discussions over the texts they care about. The members of this group have recently created a fictional comic book event known as “Hypercrisis”, based around the work of Grant Morrison. Through this creative process, the users of the site are developing a complex understanding of their texts, institutionalizing a collective knowledge about fictional stories, developing a future mythology outside of a formal published record, and constructing elaborate image-maps of complex
thought-processes for the greater understanding of the group. The anonymous nature of the group leads to a complex authenticity among the users, giving them a free forum for thoughts, ideas, statements, and interactions. Their anonymous authenticity supports the complexity of the Hypercrisis, as the user-constructed analysis follows a logical progression in development and is unusually intricate, which relates to the consistency of the group, the closeness of the community, and the users’ relationship to their internet environment.

The inclusion of magic within Morrison’s texts emphasizes a hope for change in some regard. His early work with hypersigils and narrative is often regarded as a personal experiment to help Morrison develop personal aspects of his life (Meany). Chapter 1 of this thesis establishes that there is a power to his earlier texts, but not necessarily a greater intent. Chapter 2 demonstrates otherwise, describing how Morrison encourages readers to become Superman. As Morrison develops his work with hypersigils, so too does the purpose of his magic develop beyond his personal life. As readers engage the text of Superman Beyond 3D, Morrison is helping them to become Superman. Though this may only be limited to the time one spends reading that particular comic, the actions and moral strength of Superman help to serve as a guide for the reader in their daily lives. With the Hypercrisis, we see this relationship with texts continued on a communal level and outside the direct reading experience. When applied to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of participative thinking, the community’s in depth activity affirms a lived experience and a development of knowledge. The lessons evident in the plots of comics and character traits can help develop the lives of the readers. Textualization is happening on a different level, as it is the plots and characters that are changing the lives of the readers, as opposed to readers imposing themselves onto the narratives. This is perhaps the ultimate goal of Morrison’s comics, as he states, “These fictions offer a last chance that we could improve
ourselves, turn into our own heroes and, with a single bound, soar high enough to see a way out of our alleged predicament” (Jewell 41).

An Introduction to 4chan:

Christopher Poole, known online as “moot,” started 4chan.org in 2003 (Bilton). The site is an image board, comprised primarily of rapidly updating discussion threads. The code, format, and name of the site are based on an extremely popular Japanese image board known as 2chan (Bilton). Similar to message boards, image boards structure their communication around threads, or single enclosed conversations. To create a thread on an image board, an image must be uploaded along with text by the original poster. Though the original image and the topic are generally related, the text and the image do not necessarily have anything to do with each other, nor does one have any importance over the other, as this process is simply a requirement as a part of the website’s code. 4chan is divided into 6 main sections, Japanese Culture, Interests, Creative, Adult, Other, Misc, each with several sub-categories which make up a specific area of discussion, totaling 48 specific image boards (4chan).

The earliest version of 4chan.org was made public to only 20 users, mainly friends of moot (Bilton). The website has developed considerably and has exploded in popularity; current traffic statistics report 650 million unique page loads and 10.2 million unique users (4chan - Press). The process of communication on 4chan involves individual threads created by users and other users responding to that topic. The more responses that are generated, the more that thread gets bumped to the top of the specific board’s main page. Each area on 4chan lists 10 unique threads per page, and has anywhere from 10-15 active pages, depending on the specific board’s
popularity. Each thread has a limit of 130 images, so length of conversation tends to be limited to the number of images uploaded in the thread, though some conversations continue to new threads when a limit is reached. Regardless of how popular a thread is, each one has a specific lifespan, keeping the conversations active and current. Each thread has a limit to how many times it can be bumped to the top of the page with a new post (4chan – FAQ). Conversations may continue after that, but the page will slowly move to the bottom of the list, and eventually deleted. 4chan’s administrative staff is also able to delete threads based on personal criteria. Currently, 4chan has an average of 800,000 posts in a single day (Bilton). As of March 7, 2011, 4chan has 669,886,012 total posts, 66,557 online users, and 45 gigabytes of content (4chan).

On 4chan, the “Comics & Cartoons” board focuses specifically on Western comics (generally superheroes) and cartoons. This specific board is known as “/co/,” denoting how it appears in the site’s URL – “http://boards.4chan.org/co/”. In contrast, much of 4chan is devoted to Japanese culture, and there is a specific board for Anime and Manga. The board is limited to 150 threads (10 per page, with 15 pages total), and is considered by many of the users to be generally “work safe,” meaning that the discussion is expected to be limited in terms of pornographic or other adult material. This is designated as such visually – the background color on the webpage is blue and boards with that specific color scheme are associated with “work safe” content (4chan – FAQ). The users of /co/ often refer to themselves as “/co/mrades” as each area’s specific community has a collectively agreed upon name for its members. The original source for the name is unknown and the history of the name is unimportant to the community – it is universally accepted.

One of the more noticeable aspects of 4chan, besides the content, is the fact that the vast majority of the users are anonymous and that anonymous posting is not simply popular, but
encouraged. The site’s founder, Christopher Poole, has been one of the more outspoken advocates of the importance of anonymous internet activity, individual privacy, and against the ideology of naturalizing permanent internet identity. As a result of 4chan’s popularity and his public stance on internet privacy, Poole was named one of Time Magazine’s most influential people in 2009 (Raferty). He has participated in TED’s (Technology, Entertainment, Design – a nonprofit group dedicated to “ideas worth spreading”) 2009 conference. In spite of his youth and the notorious nature of his website, Poole has been getting serious attention from major media outlets, not simply for 4chan, but also for his thoughts on anonymous internet usage and its relationship to privacy, identity, and community. During an interview with CNN, Poole stated:

We’ve just moved more and more toward persistent user identity. Your online identity lives in…[several] places now. You’ve got a Twitter, you’ve got a Facebook. I guess you used to have a MySpace. So people are just putting loads of information about themselves in these places, and we’re becoming very comfortable with sharing very intimate details about our life. It’s just everything.

(Sutter)

Poole and the users behind 4chan’s boards reject the notion of a “persistent user identity” and focus on the continuation of an anonymous environment. Poole later expands on this idea by defending 4chan’s anonymous nature, “With the anonymous system, you’ve got a place where people are uninhibited…You’re getting very truthful conversation. And you judge somebody by the content of what they are saying and not their username, not their registration date,” (Sutter). 4chan’s creation of an authentic community is unique in this context, as no one knows anyone else, people can be any age, race, gender, and from any location. One may not interact with any specific person more than once a discussion, nor would one have any knowledge about the
potentially limitless number of board users. Regardless of how limiting this sounds for a community, the users of 4chan definitely do interact, but the process negates the idea of awareness and the importance of the knowledge of the identity of members of a group. The vast majority of participants are anonymous, but occasionally there are members who have set up specific user names. The notion of traditional community consistency is ignored, as specific users have no idea who they are interacting with at any given time or whether or not a particular user is present throughout a single thread or during the entire social experience. Yet, it works.

Poole’s comments allude to a more authentic form of communication in its anonymity, getting users to not only express exactly what is on their minds, but also read others’ unfiltered thoughts. This idea helps to establish the /co/mrades of 4chan as a close-knit internet community. Though the users of 4chan do not know each other, they are actively participating in a social network, and the members of /co/ represent a select group of users who choose to engage in a selective, communal offshoot of the main 4chan page (/b/ - Random). The work-safe environment of /co/ allows people to browse and participate in the threads of the image board more comfortably than some of the extreme or adult areas of 4chan. Because of this, the community can be more consistent in its continued usage. Users have also adopted a slogan to help emphasize the communal relationship of the board, often posting the meme that “/co/ is love,” alluding to the board’s generally positive atmosphere. This intimacy in the environment helps to allow the concept of anonymity work within the community.

On a technical level, 4chan uses a basic bulletin board service (BBS). A similarly programmed system named Shiichan Anonymous BBS (http://wakaba.c3.cx/shii/shiichan) is known more for its statements on anonymous internet activity than for its code. The programmers behind this system state that the anonymous discussion system is better for
fostering content for several reasons. The anonymous philosophy suggests that site registration keeps out good posters, as the process of filling out forms may turn them off. Registration attracts trolls (disruptive users), as there are permanent identities to pester and that anonymity counters vanity. An anonymous system lacks elitism towards specific users, only the actual posts are important (Shiichan Anonymous BBS). This ideology of authentic communication is central to the success of image board sites like 4chan.

A Note on Methodology:

Because of the anonymous nature of the site and the limited lifespan of content, 4chan is admittedly difficult to research. Content is constantly updating and disappearing and a newly posted thread could fall back into the pages of a specific area within a few seconds. Due to the nature of this research, I am focusing on archived threads as opposed to active content. These thread archives were created by members of the community. Though many popular threads from 4chan are stored on the third-party site 4chanarchive.org, the main Hypercrisis discussions are stored in user-made thread archives. These are accessible by using 4chan’s own search engine. 4chan’s search has specific limitations, however. Searchable content is based entirely on collecting links to third-party content hosts, such as Rapidshare.com, Mediafire.com or Megaupload.com that have been posted in a thread somewhere on the site. These sites allow any user to upload files of various sizes and have them stored online to link to other users. 4chan users take advantage of this service in full and link to thousands of files a day on the various boards, generating a link archive searchable through 4chan. Currently there are eight downloadable links for “Hypercrisis” (http://rs.4chan.org/?s=hypercrisis), including a collection
of the original three discussions which I am using for research. The threads I am using, titled “Morrison Theory 1, 2, and 3”, were linked at various times throughout the months of daily discussion, which I saved for my own reading. They are archived together at “http://www.megaupload.com/?d=rsanlbpb”. These core threads became /co/’s Hypercrisis theory and were originally posted on 4chan on 11-28-09, 11-29-09 and 12-01-09, respectively. Each thread started at roughly 3:00am and lasted anywhere from noon to 4pm, which is considerably longer than most threads on 4chan.

For the sake of quoting, I will be using post numbers instead of names (unless otherwise noted) and refer to the number of the thread I am using. Due to the complexity of the content involved, I have chosen to include a select set of images, though much of the created content is quite large in terms of image dimensions, and is difficult to crop down to the limited size of a document page. I have also chosen to speak as little about the actual comics presented throughout (besides necessary explanations), in order to focus on the community processes represented on /co/, allowing users to speak for themselves rather than focusing on the authoritative voice of the comics. Though it may seem necessary to have an unusually strong background in comics, I am focusing more on the development of the ideas as opposed to explaining what comics the /co/mrades are discussing. If the images, events, characters, or concepts are confusing, I believe that it speaks to the nature of the complexity of the event and to the strength of the group.

Besides the complex understanding of comic books, these threads are massive in terms of original content, as the threads I use for research (the first three general discussions) total 172 printable pages. With seven more threads available to download, though, that number could increase exponentially. This speaks to the nature of the group, as the specific community is
responsible for the existence of this content, and not 4chan itself, and has taken great pride in its
discussions. A collective group of users must submit a thread to save on 4chanarchive, or wait
for a thread to come to an end, and save it for further use. In a general sense, the group
determines which of their discussions are important, and what to share with others throughout
the life of the site.

The Hypercrisis:

What exactly is DC’s Hypercrisis? In terms of an
institutional definition from DC Comics, it does not exist.
Grant Morrison proposed an original idea to DC, which
was ultimately rejected (Brady). His plan was to create a
very large-scale event happening over the entirety of
DC’s universe of comics. This would have been much
like Final Crisis, but a plot spanning over the entirety of
DC’s comics, rather than just a limited series. This idea
was never approved, as bureaucratically speaking,
Morrison would have taken over an entire company’s publications, rather than simply getting his
own special book to write. Therefore, original plot ideas exist only in rumor and vague interview
segments.

This is where /co/ comes in. In November of 2009, members of /co/ began noticing
specific events from various Grant Morrison comics, mainly from his DC event series Final
Crisis (2008), his story arc Batman: R.I.P. (Batman issues #676-681, 2008), and his current
Batman and Robin (2009) series and how they were beginning to coincide with each other and other comics. Ironically, Final Crisis was originally frowned upon by the /co/ collective for being meaningless in the grand-scheme of the DC universe. Morrison has also commented on the poor reception of fans, but found acceptance a few years later, after more of his comics developed from the event (Meany). Months after the completion of Final Crisis, it has become one of the main sources of research by the /co/mrades for their group theory discussion. Though Morrison has explained that Hypercrisis has lived on in his other work, he has never mentioned where, to what extent, or to what end.

This constructed continuity of seemingly unrelated comics appears to be a primary goal of Morrison’s work. When interviewed in 2010 in Comic Heroes magazine, Morrison stated that:

The way it works is that everything I’ve done since I came back to DC is all tied together. The end of the Batman run ties directly into some stuff that I did when I took over writing the book in 2006. I’ve tried to connect it all together, so hopefully it will all tie up as one big story which says everything I have to say about the character. (Jewell 37)

Though he seems to be referring only to his work with Batman, there is a slight implication that Morrison is trying to create the entire run of Batman comics into one continuous story, covering over 700 issues since 1940. However, Morrison admitted this nearly a year after the members of /co/ began to notice this trend on their own, and on a much larger scale.

What the Hypercrisis represents on /co/ is not just a textual analysis, but also a participatory event – a group dialogic relationship with the comics. Mikhail Bakhtin defines this relationship with texts as reading in which one “interrogates [the text], eavesdrops on it, but also
ridicules it, parodically exaggerates it and so forth” (Bakhtin 1981, 46). Due to the visual narrative of comics, this is happening with printed words and the comic’s art, the language of the comics. Bakhtin describes the language of novels as being “inseparable from images of various world views and from the living beings who are their agents – people who think, talk and act in a setting that is social and historically concrete” (Bakhtin 1981, 49). Unlike novels, where the diegesis is represented only by the text and the heteroglossic dialogism between author, text and reader, comics allow the reader to actually see the world of the text, and strengthen the dialogic participation with it. Therefore, not only is the reader having a “conversation” with the language (the text), but also the art. The users of /co/ are connecting vague passages, panels, quotes, ideas, etc., across various books, and trying to discover a hidden meaning and to learn the possible future of the comics they love as well as establish a communal continuity and understanding of DC comics, focused on Morrison’s stories and their interactions with the DC universe.

The /co/mrades are creating a theoretical mythology for the DC universe that is completely unrelated to the actual published narratives at DC, and may or may not represent what will actually happen in the future of these comics. This affirms Derrida’s idea of a lack of totality of knowledge. In his discussion of the “center”, the fixed point of Being, in terms of knowledge, Derrida states:

It was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that there was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. (Derrida 280)
The participants do not care if they are right, as “rightness” has no purpose to the discussion. They are having fun sharing ideas, and developing their own concept of knowledge, a constantly in-flux discussion and analysis with infinite possibility. They are putting together a very large puzzle, which may or may not have any specific solution. Whether or not this supposed grand idea is diegetically “real” in the comic world, formally planned for publication by DC creators and editors, or that the future comics will have eventual plots related to the /co/ established Hypercrisis is irrelevant to the actual process of community participation that is happening at the site.

There are several processes going on in these threads. The main community processes include active participation – people analyzing texts, piecing together clues, discussing ideas, and asking questions, among other things. There is also a level of passive participation – people mostly talking about how cool various ideas are, expressing amazement, confusion, and other emotions over what is going on in the thread. This passive participation is generally supplemental and associated with what are known on /co/ as “reaction images.” These are basic images, from a variety of sources, of characters’ faces when they express specific emotions, and are used to convey the reactions of the user posting them. Within the first thread, we see images of characters’ faces in wide-eyed stares, shock, sarcastic smiles, heads exploding in amazement, wide-mouthed grins, characters surrounded by question marks, and characters high on drugs. Each of these posts tends to highlight the conversation rather than add to it. The third process is trolling: these are users who are trying to end or sidetrack the conversation on the thread, disrupt it in any way possible, aggravate other users, or simply to be annoying, often by making fun of Morrison, his beliefs or the comics he writes. Trolling is quite common on 4chan, but the fact that there is a limited amount of trolling in these threads also speaks to the power of the
community and to the relationship of those participating, as /co/ is working together in this process with limited distraction.

The majority of posts are of the first two types, and focus on active rather than passive participation. This idea of necessary group participation supports the comparative lack of unrelated or unnecessary images in these threads. For example, in the first Hypercrisis thread, there are 253 posts and only 59 images. As 4chan is an image board, there is a tradition of uploading an image with nearly every post. The fact that this ratio is so small alludes to more discussion and less sharing of amusing image macros and memes. There are up to 149 other conversations going on at /co/ at any time, and the fact that these threads get to roughly 300 posts and last for several hours speaks to their importance to the community. It is easy to say that there is a collective focus on the Hypercrisis when discussed on /co/.

The first Hypercrisis thread, originally titled “Morrison Theory 1,” began with a post by one of the self-identified /co/mrades known as “Friendly Neighborhood English Major,” which is both a comic book pun and associates his posts with his identity as an academic, or at least someone who reads comics in more than a casual way. It is hard to separate the idea that someone with a moniker among anonymous users started an idea that united so many, giving added weight to the assumed identity, but then again, no one really knows who is behind said moniker – even the identifiable members have a layer of anonymity. The first post is simply to help clarify a question that many users have had about Batman, and why he was not around during a specific comic event. This later developed into ideas about Batman and how he, supposedly, died. The idea of his death was later developed into the standard thought about how he has been sent back in time, and how he is manipulating the current events from the past. Other general theories include the purpose of Batman’s clones and the importance of Batman’s
psychological torture; the true identity of The Black Glove; who Darksied is possessing and how his Omega Sanction weapon works; Nekron’s power source; the importance of cave drawings; the possible connection between a universal monitor and a herald of the Indigo Lanterns, and others. [Note: Again, many of these theories will not necessarily make sense, and in the context of this essay, they are not supposed to. Their purpose here is to highlight the complexity of group discussion on /co/, rather than to be accessible to the reader of this thesis.]

The range of ideas pondered within the first thread highlights the complexity of material that is being discussed. These thoughts are coming from several different sources: Final Crisis (2008), Blackest Night (2009), Blackest Night: Batman (2009), Batman & Robin (2009), Batman: R.I.P. (2008), Batman: Last Rights (2008), 52 (2006, 2007), Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader? (2009), Death of the New Gods (2009), and DC Universe #0 (2008). Though this is simply the first batch of discussions, these texts remain some of the core materials for analysis, focusing heavily on Final Crisis and how it interacts with the larger continuity of the DC universe. Over the next several months, this reading list increased in size and complexity, becoming “required reading” for the community and serving as a group-constructed continuity to the DC comic universe.

Immediately this demonstrates several things about the group on /co/. This first set of comics range from 2006-2009, so there is a heavy emphasis on contemporary media and supporting the industry – the users on /co/ are fans, foremost. Secondly, as post number 13000226 states, “I…I think I need to re-read Final Crisis,” there is an implied communal competency with the texts in question. Users assume others will have more than just casually read a comic. The members are encouraging others to process the content in a critical way and play with the ideas in continuity. Not living up to the standard of critical analysis on /co/ can be
dangerous, post number 1300844 states, “Good god. You guys have an amazing ability to invent stuff from nothing. To totally invent story lines that aren’t there. To create connections in order to save Morrison’s shit from being irrelevant trash.” Though this can be interpreted simply as trolling other users, the user in question also is stating that some users chose to read comics for enjoyment. This post is in response to post number 1300862, “When this all turns out to be true, your face is going to be so red.” This user is stating that not only is he or she having fun with the texts, but he or she is also representing a collective belief that they are onto something big.

Where the first thread represents a deep textual analysis of contemporary comics, drawing basic connections between works, and developing ideas, the second thread starts something far more complex. The first post in the second Hypercrisis thread involves a compiled image of 10 panels from two different comic series, and comparing symbols and dialogue in Batman and Green Lantern comics in order to create connections between two seemingly unrelated characters and stories into one larger narrative. This bricolage of panels becomes a reoccurring trend throughout the Hypercrisis discussions. This is continued later on in the thread with an image discussing the source of power for an evil character (Darkseid) by compiling an image from three different comic series, all alluding to what has come to be known as “The Forever Pit.”

This process of image-map creation continues throughout all newer threads, and gets increasingly more elaborate. One image focuses on the diary entries of a therapist in Grant Morrison’s *Arkham Asylum: Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989), which describes a specific patient. The user applies Freudian psychoanalysis to help establish a greater understanding of the history of events in Morrison’s work, and how they connect to other books. Another user
connects the appearances of a minor character in Batman comics, General Slaycroft, who has appeared only in three minor stories: *Robin Dies at Dawn* (1963), *Batman: Venom* (1991), and *Batman #673* (2008). Based just on this image, it opens up 45 years of comic history to be considered for interpretation, and collects the appearances and pertinent information surrounding this seemingly forgettable Army general and his relationship to the purpose of the greater narrative. However, this interpretation is beginning to imply that Morrison is attempting to establish the entirety of DC’s comics as a single story, and not just those related to Batman, as stated above.

Another trend in the second Hypercrisis thread is a connection to other literary works. A user points out the cryptic slogan of a character, "Vengeance Arms Against His Red Right Hand," connecting this idea between different books he has appeared in and the overall message of vengeance that is prevalent with so many DC characters. Other users expand on this, as connections to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* enter the discussion. These literary allusions lead to a greater understanding of the overall tone of specific characters. Post number 13021733 states:

This allusion gives us some insights into the mindset of the Red Hood. In addition to the reference to the Penitente Brotherhood, it suggests that the character may
have a god-complex--or, at the very least, a belief in divine justification for his violent acts in a manner that's not dissimilar to the crusades of the middle ages.

Here the user is connecting the tone and allegories in Milton’s work not just to a single character, but also to a greater sense of characterization throughout DC’s comics.

Other users further expand this process of literary connections as the identity of a new masked character, Oberon Sexton (who refers to himself as a gravedigger), is discussed using references to Shakespeare. To quote a user created image, “Oberon – King of the Faries. Sexton – a church groundskeeper. A clown who is also a sexton and a gravedigger appears in the play Hamlet.” This connects the idea that Joker (The Clown Prince of Crime) is Oberon Sexton. The fact that Joker was later revealed to be Oberon Sexton in Morrison’s Batman and Robin comic series demonstrates that these details are significant and thoughtfully planned out, as opposed to simple coincidence.

Beyond this, specific users also make literary connections to Morrison’s own work. Users have pointed out that Morrison uses repeating images, literary techniques, and plot structures throughout his work, and post number 13021475 discusses the importance of a minor character being discussed, “Although not DCU [DC comic Universe] related, he is kind of analogous to
Tom O’Bedlam from *The Invisibles.*” As this process of group discovery and discussion develops across multiple threads over multiple days, it grows increasingly elaborate. The process of understanding takes on new levels, by using user-constructed images, connecting comics to literary tropes, and by including an increasingly large pool of texts to discuss and analyze.

In Hypercrisis thread 3, something new developed. Included in this thread is a completely original image detailing the levels of power and control over the entirety of DC’s comic universe. This connects Neil Gaiman’s Endless characters (characters based on universal ideas), to the spectrum of Lantern groups (which is a recent event in the DC universe, constructed by writer Geoff Johns - each Lantern group representing a different core emotion), and the Seven Soldiers of Victory (an obscure 1940’s super team that was revamped by Grant Morrison for an event in 2005). This is significant because we see people drawing a greater collective understanding of the structures of abstract power within the fictional universe based on three entirely unrelated comic series by three entirely different creators as well as the creation of original media in order to help explain events. There is also a stronger focus on more conceptual artistic elements within the comics, as people are analyzing symbols, icons, scars, cave paintings, tattoos, and other diegetic markers relevant to the characters and narratives. Another image being
discussed connects the abstract ideas of the importance of historical shamanistic imagery to the iconography of DC’s superheroes.

As discussion develops, the analysis becomes increasingly more abstract. Moving away from theoretical plot points, the /co/mrades focus on deconstructing an entire fictional religion within DC comics, which focuses around the unholy *Bible of Crime*. Through this, the users analyze the conceptual nature of evil in this fictional universe of DC’s 75+ years of published texts, how it has developed through these events unleashed by Grant Morrison, and what it means to the future development of DC’s comics. This has less to do with analyzing texts and more to do with critical thought on the concept of intertextual-universal realities and beliefs within the diegesis. To demonstrate this, I will paraphrase posts 15210837, 15211030, and 15211044, all main ideas by a single user:

Now this is meta, so I can’t find quotes to back it up…but I think Morrison is trying to fold the New Gods and the demons of Earth into a single “thing.” *Final Crisis* killed the concept of death, and Darksied may have pulled the non-Apocolips demons into the Forever Pit with him – the Forever Pit either replacing or becoming one with Hell. If the Forever Pit merged with Hell….becoming the physical underpinning for the metaphor (so to speak) or one of the associated realms (DC Hell has multiple dub-annexes…almost dimensions unto themselves) I could buy that passing unnoticed. Given that Darksied was in the process of being transformed into an IDEA when he fell, you could argue that any aspect of supreme evil in the DCU could be called an aspect of Darksied – it is entirely fair to call him “The Devil.”
The user created ideas are growing collectively more abstract, and yet the group manages to explain these concepts to each other succinctly, and continues to connect them to the texts in discussion.

One user begins to tie in the beliefs of Morrison, a practicing magician, to the Hypercrisis. In Hypercrisis thread 3, post 15221279 suggests, “You’ll realize that just like QEWEQ [a sentient micro-universe] is a Thelematic model for the DCU, the DCU is a Thelemic model for OUR universe, and Grant is trying to change the nature of the Human experience of the Universe – instilling a ‘Silver Age’ attitude in the whole human race.” Though this idea seems entirely absurd to those unfamiliar with Morrison’s work and beliefs, the user is actually referencing ideas that Morrison has spoken about publically. Morrison has stated that, through the process of infusing his writing with his magic, he can change reality based on the fictional stories he creates, bringing fiction into our reality (Metzger). This develops the Hypercrisis process outside the world of the texts, as participants are now gathering ideas about the creators and connecting them to the readers’ universe.

/Co/’s current theories surround the return of Bruce Wayne, and have begun to connect him with both The Phantom Stranger and Orion of the New Gods. This theory is backed up both by iconography and by thematic analysis, linking Batman and his relationship with the Dr. Hurt/“Thomas
Wayne” character of Batman: R.I.P. with the relationship between Darksied and his son Orion, as well as the universal-games-theory, in which it is noted that several main DC characters are seen playing simple games (cards, chess, etc.). The results of these issues may not be revealed in the comics for years to come, if ever.

The Hypercrisis represents an important communal activity for /co/, but also highlights Bakhtin’s notion of participative thinking. Bakhtin describes this as being a thought process that “predominates in all great systems of philosophy, either consciously and distinctly (especially in the Middle Ages) or in an unconscious and masked form (in the systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries)” (Bakhtin 1993, 8). Participative thinking encourages a deeper form of personal engagement, allowing one to be “committed, involved, concerned, or interested thinking” (Bakhtin 1993, 86). The /co/mrades are participating with their text in a deeply intense manner and are not just creating a random topic of discussion, but also are encouraging thinking about what they like, and continuing to participate with their texts in the future. This is happening on an individual level, allowing users to think about the various comics and the Hypercrisis as it develops, but also demonstrates a form of group participative thinking, where an entire community is engaging these texts. Because of this, we see the immense complexity that has developed over months of thought. This participative thought applies to all future texts, as the comics of Morrison have unlocked the potential of this community. Though not blatantly corresponding to Thiem’s ideas of textualization, participative thinking encourages a deeply personal relationship with texts in order to expand upon one’s own personal knowledge. In a sense, thinking and applying the texts to one’s own life in order “to be an answerable participant from within oneself, to affirm one’s compellent, actual non-alibi in Being” (Bakhtin 1993, 49). The texts are connecting to parts of readers’ lives and helping to increase a sense of personal
awareness and knowledge. The users of /co/ seem to be embracing this idea, as post 15221279 in Hypercrisis thread three states “Grant is trying to change the nature of Human experience of the Universe – instilling a “Silver Age” attitude in the whole Human race.” The user is discussing how reading these comics, and participating with them is Morrison’s ultimate goal, so that the readers are able to take the characters, adventures and morals and learn and develop as people from these fictional characters, and to change society for the better based on the lives of these superheroes. Though the readers are not becoming superheroes, they are allowing the characters to help change them for the better, and thus the ideas of textualization can apply, as they are bringing the ideas and narratives of these comics into their own lives in a profoundly personal level.

This process of communal in-depth multi-text analysis and discussion started in late November 2009, and has spawned eight “officially” titled and archived Hypercrisis threads of various different topics, approaches and ideas, with the most recent major thread archived on April 24, 2010. The “official” total discussion so far includes a total of 2,458 posts and 577 images related to active discussion, passive discussion, or trolling. Minor Hypercrisis threads are posted continually, helping to summarize major theories from previous threads, to help other members catch up on newer ideas, and continue general discussion. These threads tend to lack any archives, as they are not drastically new. These generally coincide with the release of a new comic by Morrison. This suggests that the users have caught up with Morrison’s previous works, and wait for newly published comics to help expand their discussions. The Hypercrisis discussion has recently moved to a Facebook group called “Hypercrisis,” but it currently only has 71 members – perhaps speaking to the unwillingness for 4chan users to move away from an
anonymous discussion environment, and their unwillingness to move this group-created theory away from the original community.

One could argue that the groups on 4chan should not be considered a traditional community because their anonymity negates a provable consistency, but the existence of the Hypercrisis discussion suggests otherwise. Without in-group consistency, there is little chance that something so elaborately constructed and positively supported by /co/ could flourish for such a long time. The users have an authenticity in their collective, complex collaboration surrounding these comics. The group members believe that they are uncovering the truth as to what will happen in DC’s future comics, but will any of it happen in print? Are any of their thoughts valid or in actual development at DC? It is arguable that /co/ does not care. The /co/mrades are enjoying the process and having fun with the rest of the group members. They can back up their claims through an incredible series of discussions, user-made image maps of analysis, and an immense knowledge of the past events in DC comics. They are constructing their own future mythology based on the past 70 years of DC’s library by focusing their collective analysis around a series of core texts, almost entirely written by one man – Grant Morrison. Because of him and his comics, they participate in a playful activity, furthering their group identity through a collective project, as well as participating in a critical analysis of the texts that they love. The group of unrelated individuals establishes its own required reading list of comics that members should be familiar with, and constructing a collective knowledge about these texts to be developed, discussed, and played with for the future. This serves as an important communal activity, and because of that, it strengthens the group bond of /co/ and helps to develop the communal identity.
4chan’s /co/ board serves as a way of looking at how a particular community engages with Morrison’s comics. These texts have opened up a new and important way of reading and thinking about what has been read. It is Morrison’s goal with fiction to help change and improve the lives of readers. With the help of his magical narrative construction, readers can more easily participate with his texts. It is no surprise to see that the Hypercrisis is based on the entire body of Morrison’s superhero canon and how it relates to the history of DC’s publications. He is doing it on purpose. The progress of intent with Morrison’s comics is noticeable, as it changes from experimenting with magic to using that magic for a greater purpose. One can observe 4chan’s Hypercrisis and witness how Bakhtin’s participative thinking is developing the lives of the users. Though this is a single aspect of it, the Hypercrisis allows this way of thinking to be applied to all aspects of one’s life. Though the readers will not soon develop the ability to fly, the ethics of these superhero icons will help change their lives. Participation with fiction is required to make this happen, and Morrison is accomplishing this with his work.
CONCLUSIONS

It is also the office of criticism to promote literature’s immediacy, concreteness, vitality, and affective richness, and so to assert the claims of literature as a way of understanding human life that is superior to that of philosophy. - Geoffrey Harpham (Harpham IX)

One needs only to dip his or her toe into comic scholarship to notice the preferred texts that academics have established as a canon. Non-fiction, memoir, biography, and political events, often published through independent companies, tend to serve as the approved body of texts. Superhero comics are often glossed over due to the economic dominance of DC and Marvel. Their association with low-culture and adolescence often create a false impression of creative bankruptcy. Because of this, superhero comic readers are often perceived to be less sophisticated. Scholarship about superhero comics tends to analyze the superhero, as opposed to the creators, genre, the texts or the fans. Superhero comics that do gain acceptability are often decades old with darkly metaphorical plots, and are studied ad nauseam. New comics are published consistently every Wednesday and often reflect the current events and politics as they are released. However, there is still a consistent focus on texts from the 1980s. Part of the comic book culture is the continual economic support of the medium. Frequent visits to comic shops help fans and scholars stay current with the medium. Unless a text is an established part of the academic canon, it is left to the waysides of non-serious fandom and discredited. Rather than dismissing the superhero comic genre as low culture, the intent of this thesis is to further
establish the social significance of the genre and the culture around it, both within and outside normal literary and cultural parameters.

There is a noticeable development in Morrison’s work; one can see it change from simply talking about magic to becoming magical narratives, serving a personal end for Morrison, and eventually to bring about change with his own readership. Morrison’s implementation of magic, when combined with the comic medium, allows textualization to occur, allowing the readers to have deeper relationships with the texts that they love. Morrison writes about superheroes because he wants readers to strive to become their own superheroes, and these narratives serve as an ethical guide to help achieve this. The superheroes and their adventures provide opportunities for the readers to apply the comics towards the development of their own lives.

Much of what this thesis discusses is applicable to superhero comics on a whole, but Grant Morrison is doing something special. He has written stories that fans have woven into the entire history of DC comics, giving decades-old stories new life and energy. His magic is, I think, the key. Though his belief in magic is something that one might too-easily disregard, he believes in it very passionately, and it is important to his writing. When one hears him speak about the changes in his life, it is hard not to trust him about the possibilities and potential. It is clear that Morrison cares very deeply about superhero comics, and plans his fiction very carefully, sometimes over incredible lengths of time. Each narrative element is in its right place, and serves a special purpose. Morrison gives superheroes incredible social importance, with the possibility to enact positive change in readers. Morrison wants to encourage readers to interact with his superhero stories, and helps to provide this opportunity due to the exceptional storytelling power of visual narratives.
Though *Arkham Asylum* was a great economic success for Morrison, it stands out as his darkest story in tone. Inspired by the genre-bending and fatalistic superhero stories of his contemporaries, Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* and Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Arkham Asylum* was Morrison’s attempt to continue the popular trend of deconstructing the superhero. Though Morrison does not regret writing the book, he does reject the tone of the time that inspired it (Jewell 41). Instead of focusing on the “depictions of storybook characters growing old or disillusioned,” he strives to write superheroes that accomplish the impossible because of their abilities, not feel cursed by them. His superheroes are icons that do not change, but instead represent timeless concepts, constantly struggling and overcoming, in order to remind us of our own ability to do so. The medium of comics, and the fantastical genre of superheroes makes this possible, as it allows for the readers to participate closely with the texts, and gives Morrison a “freedom [that] is rare in commercial writing” (Jewell 43).

There is a heteroglossic relationship between the author, the diegesis of the text, and the readers. Morrison brings his unique life experiences and his magic into the narratives, and the characters develop from this, pushing the limitations of their diegetic reality. Through textualization and participative thinking, readers are able to become part of the world of the comic, and these narratives allow readers to grow. Morrison discusses how superheroes “serve a universal function as simple hieroglyphic representations of particular persistent or eternal human feelings” (Jewell 40), and no matter how impossible these characters may be, readers are able to identify with them and their worlds.

Perhaps the anonymous message poster in chapter 3 was closest to the main point of Morrison’s Hypercrisis when he stated that the purpose of these comics was “instilling a ‘Silver Age’ attitude in the whole human race.” However, there may be more to it than that. The opening
quote of this conclusion states that the reading of fiction can tell readers more about society and themselves than can philosophy. Though fiction is not real, it is truthful, and a reflection of reality. Its believability is not as important as its accuracy. It shows possibility rather than what has already occurred. This unique illumination helps readers to create meaningful relationships with something that only existed in print, creating these spaces of participative thinking and allowing textualization to occur.

By instilling the Silver Age into readers, these stories are a way to help readers act more like superheroes, by serving as a source of ethical wisdom and courage. Readers could ask themselves “What Would Superman Do?” and have full examples of exactly that at their disposal. Beyond this, Morrison seems to be yearning for something even greater. There is a constant reoccurring theme of interaction with these heroes and fictional spaces. With Morrison, it is often hard to tell just when he is being metaphorical and when he is being literal. Perhaps more than simply getting readers to act more like superheroes in a moral context, he is trying to create actual superheroes from his readers. As he states, “superheroes are one of the few ideas about the future that we’ve got left in a world obsessed with catastrophic climate change and the imminent, well-deserved end of us all” (Jewell 41). In this context, Morrison seems to be defiantly challenging the end of the world, much like Superman in any number of comics. Morrison believes that a change is necessary to help the rest of the planet, and is inciting it through what he does best, writing comics. Therefore, perhaps Morrison does not simply desire readers to be superheroes in a metaphorical sense, but in a literal sense. This seems to be the case, as Morrison has stated:

There’s something about the superman idea that’s pushing itself closer and closer to reality, to the real life material workaday world that we can touch… Now it’s
everywhere, and it’s become the common currency of culture… They want to be

*in here* with us… So I think if we’ve created something in our heads that’s so
beautiful and so strong and so moral that it can solve all our problems with
justice, intelligence and discrimination, then why don’t we use it? (Babcock 29)

What if Morrison is trying to give readers actual super powers? A recent study suggests that, after engaging in ethical behavior, such as donating to charity, participants were able to lift heavier weights for longer periods of time (Rettner). Geoffrey Harpham’s quote at the start of this conclusion states that reading fiction can serve as its own ethical behavior. When that fiction’s explicit intent is to instigate a positive change in readers, perhaps Morrison’s goal is less metaphorical than one would initially believe. Perhaps he is trying to spark the evolution of humanity that took place in diegetic space of superhero comics 80 years ago.

It is clear that Morrison is not wholly concerned for the entertainment of a mass audience. His comics have purpose. It is not just the fact that he writes about superheroes, giving his stories an ethical slant, but he creates texts that allow the readers to think and apply these seemingly impossible fictional characters and events to their own lives. Textualization serves as an output for readers, as it allows people to get lost in other worlds and in other peoples’ lives. Superheroes accomplish the impossible on a weekly basis. Morrison is reminding us that we can also achieve all those tasks in our lives that we deem impossible. Superhero comics are a reflection of the readers’ world, and serve a constant reminder that people are worth saving, no matter what evil may haunt them. Morrison is sending his characters on these shamanic trials, in hope to develop them into greater fictional beings, allowing for a heteroglossic wealth of knowledge. The mass-production of these stories allows for those trials and learned truths to become participative
events, where individuals and communities share a development of knowledge and self through the heroic actions of others.
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Chapter 2:


Chapter 3:


