A Rubble of Fragments: Disintegration into Panels in Grant Morrison's Comics

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"Can't they see I'm breaking in a thousand places?"
(Morrison, Arkham Asylum 69)

Abstract

While the pages of a comic are divided by panels, there is a sense of unity when these panels can be assembled together to produce something whole. There is a potential in the comic, however, to destabilize this sense of unity, by producing an effect of disrupting their assemblage. This potential is one that can be seen in Grant Morrison's comics, as the writer's characters disintegrate into irreconcilable bits and pieces, by means of a particular use of comic book panels. In this paper, I will draw upon this dimension to the writer's work to demonstrate the way in which this effect is produced. To provide a context for this disintegration, as it is evident in Morrison's work, I will draw upon Jacques Lacan's discussion of the illusory dimension to a sense of unity, as associated with an image of the body, and the potential for the collapse of such a unified image, via its decomposition into irreconcilable bits and pieces that cannot be assembled together to produce something whole. As characters are subject to repeated disintegration in Morrison's comics, it is just as if there were no unified image by which to hold everything together, but only a rubble of irreconcilable parts.

Introduction

1 The pages of a comic are divided up and compartmentalized, resulting in a collection of juxtaposed frames, known as comic book panels. It is the comic book panel, Thierry Groensteen proposes in The System of Comics, which is the component element of the larger text, and the base unit of what he terms the language of comics (19). The foundation of comics, according to Groensteen, is the relational play of the plurality of these independent units, with each panel being linked to the others via different kinds of relations (7, 17, 21). It is by means of each panel's relation to the others that meaning is produced, as the various parts are combined together. Thus, as articulated by Groensteen, despite the discontinuous and intermittent appearance of the comic book page, given its segmentation into panels, a satisfying narrative is, nonetheless, able to be produced, via the pieces being able to be assembled together to produce what is termed "an uninterrupted and intelligible totality" (114). There is a sense of unity when the panels are able to be assembled together, but, as will be demonstrated throughout this paper, there is a potential to use comic book panels in another way. By means of a different use of panels, there is a potential in the comic to destabilize the aforementioned sense of unity, by producing an effect of disrupting this assemblage, via fragmentation into irreconcilable bits and pieces.

2 When the panels on the pages of a comic do not fit together, when something whole cannot be produced via their assemblage, there is a sense, not of unity, but rather, of things falling apart, and corresponding with this, an effect of destabilization. Such an effect can be seen in Grant Morrison's comics, as the writer's characters dissolve into irreconcilable bits and pieces, via their dissection by panels on the pages of the comic; and with characters as discordant fragments scattered across the comic book page, a sense of unity to these characters, likewise, disintegrates. In the writer's work, there is a close association between a sense of unity to characters and an image of their body, and when one breaks down, predominantly, the other follows. The association between the two evokes an aspect of the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan: specifically, the importance of an image of the body to a subject's sense of unity; and in order to provide a context for the fragmentation of characters, as it is recurrently narrativized throughout Morrison's work, I will draw upon Lacan's connection of a sense of unity to an image of the body, together with his discussion of the impact of a breakdown of the former upon the latter. Throughout this paper, I will demonstrate a potential in the comic to use panels in particular ways to produce an effect of disrupting their assemblage, an effect that can be seen in Morrison's work via the disintegration of characters into irreconcilable fragments. In order to do this, I will discuss, firstly, the artifice associated with an image of the body as it appears in the writer's work; secondly, the fracturing of this image along lines inscribed by comic book panels; and finally, the dissolution of this image into irreconcilable bits and pieces that cannot be assembled together to produce something whole. This emphasis on fragmentation is one that recurs throughout the writer's work, and its persistence contributes to the effect of destabilization, as the writer's characters are subject to repeated disintegration at the hands of the writer and the artists producing the comics.

3 To further this point, it is important to note the recurrence of fragmentation throughout the writer's comics cannot be divorced from the work of the comics' artists; however, given the persistence of characters' fragmentation throughout Morrison's sizable body of
Misrecognition in an image

A moment in *The Invisibles* demonstrates a correlation between an image of the body and a sense of unity to characters, as it appears in Morrison's work. It is a moment towards the end of the first volume of the comic book series, a moment in which one of the series' protagonists, Dane, is transfixed by a sense of perfection, one associated with an image in a mirror. To use the words of the character, as he recalls gazing at the mirror image, "I was God, looking at myself in the mirror. I was perfect in eternity" (v1 23.23). A sense of totality, of being perfect in eternity, is experienced via this image in the mirror. This sense, however, as it is accounted in the narrative of the comic, is one that is ultimately fleeting, for it is in the very perfection of this image that its artifice becomes apparent. Reflecting upon this image, he realizes its deception, and to continue using the words of the character accounting the tale, "And that was when I understood the last and greatest cheap conjuring trick of them all. That was when I knew they'd got me" (v1 23.23). In the perfection of this image, there is something that is not quite right. There is something illusory about it. This character is struck by his former sense of recognition in the perfect mirror image as being, rather, a misrecognition. The image, as he now understands it, is something that is alien to him; it is ultimately a trick, a deception conjured up by another. This misrecognition in the presented image, along with the sense of perfection that corresponds with the image, can be seen to set the stage for the fragmentation of characters that recurs throughout Morrison's body of work, as I will continue to demonstrate throughout this paper.

Before continuing, however, this character's misrecognition in the image can be contextualised by drawing upon Lacan's association of an image of the body in a mirror with an illusory sense of unity, as it is introduced in "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." According to Lacan, at a time in which an infant's body is experienced as a jumble of discordant impulses, perceptions and sensations, a body image, such as that in a mirror, offers the infant a sense of unity, a process of identification that he terms the mirror stage. A unified image in the mirror, one that is, importantly, pointed out and acknowledged by another, offers a stark contrast to the infant's bodily experience (92). Despite this contrast, the infant identifies with the image, and assumes it as his or her own, as the newfound sense of unity offered by this image is one that is appealing. The infant's recognition in the image, however, is an error, a misrecognition, as the sense of integration that the image conveys is one that is ultimately illusory (Lacan, 30.5.62). Nonetheless, such an image is a captivating lure, as it provides a container for the chaos of bodily experience; it enables this chaos to be organized into a unity, and it offers something by which to see oneself as whole. In identifying with such an image, however, a discord is ultimately produced, as this alluring sense of unity is one that is in stark contrast with the fragmentary experience of the body. It is such an effect of discord that is produced in Morrison's comics, as characters are fractured via a particular use of panels, in conjunction with a narrative elaboration of this fragmentation.

To return to the previously mentioned moment from *The Invisibles*, in which the character's recognition in an alluring mirror image is ultimately revealed to be a misrecognition, as the image, in its perfection, is found to be illusory, a trick conjured up by another. The lure of such an image is an image that is repeated in Morrison's work, in a tale told in an issue of *Doom Patrol*. In this comic, a character narrates the story of an actress who, like Narcissus, fell in love with an image in a mirror. In this tale, the actress is transfixed by the perfection of the mirror image, and to continue using the words of the comic, "she could imagine NOTHING more beautiful than what she saw in the mirror. Sometimes she would lie on the glass, naked, kissing and licking the beautiful, cold creature until she shuddered in DELIRIUM" (49.9). To the actress, the perfect image in the mirror is a captivating lure, but as the tale continues, her identification with this image, ultimately, provokes an unfortunate end. To continue this tale, as it is told in *Doom Patrol*, drawing upon the words of the comic:

Unfortunately as time passed, her gorgeous mirror lover went away and was replaced by a crudely faked COPY (the stitching seemed AWRY, the lines clumsy and unsure). Brokenhearted and full of FEAR, the actress plotted the MURDER of the mirror. In the end, she used BATTERY ACID, but the mirror's final cruelty was to show her a screeching, deformed face frozen in melting, bubbling glass. (49.9)

Following the destruction of the mirror, it was unable to reflect a unified image, but rather, it displayed strange and smeared bits and pieces in its shattered, irregularly shaped broken shards. The image in the mirror was now comprised of fragmentary and incomplete features, these discordant bits and pieces appearing in stark contrast to the image's former unity. It became apparent, moreover, that this image had a life of its own;[2] it was an independent and autonomous being, and as such, in the comic, it was given its own name, Alias the Blur. This horrifying creature was created via the shattering of the formerly unified image, allegorizing a danger, which Lacan identifies, of sliding back again into the chaos of a fragmentary body ("Some reflections on the ego" 15), given a potential for the disintegration of the unified image. This potential for disintegration can be seen, according to Lacan, in "images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body", which he groups together under the heading "imagos of the fragmented body" ("Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis" 85). Such images appear in dreams, as well as in fantasies ("Some reflections on the ego" 13), and result from the discord between an illusory unified image and the fragmentary experience of the body. The aforementioned tale from *Doom Patrol* narratively elaborates upon such a potential for disintegration, as the perfect mirror image disintegrates into fractured bits and pieces.

A novel potential in the comic to produce an effect of the body in bits and pieces can be seen in another issue of *Doom Patrol*. In the narrative of the comic, the titular protagonists are, quite literally, consumed by an image, as they become trapped inside a
hungry painting known as "The Painting That Ate Paris" (27.20), a painting that physically devours those who behold it. After having been consumed by this painting, they take on the properties of their two dimensional form; as articulated by one character, "I feel weird. It's like I'm kinda flat and unreal" (28.5). The characters, trapped inside this painting, proceed to try to find a way out, and eventually hatch a plan to rupture the painting from within. Ultimately, they are successful, and cause the painting to shatter, along fracture lines that appear very similar to those that distinguish comic book panels. The titular superheroes manage to escape as the painting rips apart, but another group of characters, known as the Brotherhood of Dada, are left inside to fracture along with the image, and in the final pages of the comic, they can been seen breaking up into parts (29.21-22). As illustrated in these final pages, the fragmentary form of the comic can be put to novel use, to produce an effect of an image dissolving into bits and pieces.

**Fragmentation in a comic**

A comic allows novel ways of illustrating the body in bits and pieces, and one such way can be seen in *The Filth*, as an emphasis on the dissection of the page into panels produces an effect of fragmentation. This can be seen during a sequence in which a character named Ned Slade (or, alternately, named Greg Feely) confronts the mysterious Man Green and Man Yellow (9.6-9). Throughout the sequence, this character appears in full-page images, while the entirety of each page is split into panels, and within these panels, images of those that appear within the scene are repeated.

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This division of the page into panels, and the consequent dissection of the character by the panel boundaries that span the length and width of the page produces an effect of fragmentation along these inscribed lines. This effect, moreover, is narratively elaborated upon in the comic, and as he is fractured into bits and pieces by panels, thus disrupting a sense of unity to the character, in the narrative of the comic, he questions just who it is that he actually is; in the words of the character, "I don't know who I am … There seem to be unresolved … questions concerning my identity" (9.8). It is just as if the bits and pieces that result from his division into panels cannot be assembled together to make something whole, but rather, it is as if they remain disjointed bits and pieces. A similar effect of dissection into fragments can also be seen in *Bible John*, as the face of a character is cut up into jigsaw pieces, thus forming an image comprised of dislocated parts, or to use of the words of the comic, one that is "jigsawed together" (57.36). Such a creature of parts recurs throughout Morrison's work, and frequently, this dissection occurs along lines inscribed on the page, lines quite similar to those of comic book panels.

The dissection of characters, as particular to the comic, is narrativized in another issue of *Doom Patrol*. In this issue, the titular protagonists are plagued by scissor wielding villains named the Scissormen, who dismember other characters in the comic using long metal scissors, which appear in place of their hands (20.18-21). As the Scissormen dismember other characters, these characters are cut out of the surrounding image, and what appears in place of where they had been, as illustrated in the comic, is empty white space, just as if the characters had been cut from the page. The cover of this issue of *Doom Patrol* illustrates just this, with cut-out lines featured around the characters, while the accompanying text instructs readers to cut along these lines, as though the comic's characters were cut-out paper dolls. Throughout the comic, as characters are cut out by the Scissormen, thus resulting in holes in the surrounding images, comics of an earlier age are evoked, in which readers were encouraged to cut out coupons from the pages of their comics, resulting in incomplete panels on the flip side of the page, including partial or dismembered characters. Such dismemberment of characters, as illustrated in *Doom Patrol*, demonstrates a novel means of fragmenting characters in a comic, via parts being cut out from the remainder of the page.

The dissection of characters into bits and pieces in a comic can also be seen in *Vimanarama*, but this time, by means of a particular use of inset panels, specifically, smaller panels that appear within a larger one. Within the narrative of this comic, the protagonist's
Following their detachment, as conveyed in the comic, the character's facial features float off in various directions, as he clutches in the air desperately trying to prevent them from getting away. The character, all the while, keeps talking, despite his mouth also being separated in this way, and as it floats away, it emits fragmentary words that are spread out across the page in isolated word balloons. Eventually, this character retrieves his wayward facial features and secures them back on his head; however, in the panels that follow, his face is fragmented yet again, although this time, it is not via lines inscribed by inset panel boundaries, but rather, via lines inscribed by signifiers.

The character is carved up by the words for the various facial features and body parts that had previously been illustrated, with each word appearing similarly shaped to the feature or part that it indicates; and in being cut up by language in this way, as signifiers dissect the body into parts, a sense of unity to the character is compromised. Language, in the work of Lacan, fractures the aforementioned sense of bodily unity, given the fragmentation brought on by the signifier ("In memory of Ernest Jones" 599). As illustrated in this example from *Vimanarama*, the character is fragmented according to lines inscribed by language and as he is broken up in this way, he disappears behind by the various signifiers by which he is comprised. Moreover, in being comprised by various signifiers, he is split, divided between them, and deferred from each to the next. This example illustrates, via the division of this character into a string of words, an alternate means of producing an effect of fragmentation in a comic, one that is made possible by its flexibility in manifesting language.
Following on from the dissection of the aforementioned character's body via the signifiers by which it is comprised, as apparent in *Vimamarama*, in *Flex Mentallo*, another character is also dissected, although this time, it is via bodily organs. As featured in this comic, the containing skin of one character is stretched out into a long, lanky tube, thus relegating his internal organs to the outside of his body (4.16). With his organs no longer enclosed in a unifying container, he is rubble of dislocated parts, organs without a body. This theme of unconstrained organs, moreover, also appears in *Doom Patrol*, and is narrativized in an anecdote in the comic, in which a character reveals a sense of being witness to the vocal musings of his organs, conceived as parts of himself beyond his control. To draw upon the words of the character, as he accounts this tale:

> You remember that dumb feature in *Reader's Digest*? "I'm John's dot-dot-dot," whatever it was. "I am John's prostate," "I am John's kidneys." A different part of the body every month. You remember that? All those goddamn organs yakking and yakking, telling you their stories. Used to scare the living shit out of me. I imagined my own body talking to itself, maybe starting to sing in close harmony … Jesus, I'd wake in a cold sweat, even when I was already awake. (43.10)

As narrativized in this anecdote, the character's body is constituted of wayward bits and pieces, and as a consequence of this, by a sense of disunity; and although these wayward bits and pieces do come together to sing in close harmony, they do so, so to speak, without this character, without being subject to his ostensible agency. Rather, it is he who is subject to them, and he who is at the mercy of their whims. It just is as if his body were not his, as if something or someone else were pulling the strings. Thus, in being dissected into bits and pieces that are ultimately beyond his control, there is a sense that they could not actually be assembled together to produce something whole.

**Irreconcilable bits and pieces**

As has been demonstrated thus far throughout this paper, Morrison's characters are recurrently fragmented into bits and pieces, dissected by means including a particular use of comic book panels, as panels are used to carve up characters on the comic book page. In addition to fragmenting characters in this way, an additional effect is also produced in Morrison's work, by means of these bits and pieces not fitting together, not adding up to something whole. In this third and final section of this paper, I will demonstrate the way in which Morrison's characters disintegrate into irreconcilable bits and pieces, which cannot be assembled together, and coinciding with this, the narrative elaboration of this effect of destabilizing a sense of unity to these characters. A particularly clear example of such an effect can be seen on the cover of one issue of *Flex Mentallo*, as painted by artist Frank Quitely, a cover that replicates a similar image featured within the pages of the comic (4.6), and one that occurs within the context of narrative events. As pictured on the cover, the titular character is split up into a rubble of small panels, but these are panels that do not fit together to form a complete image; rather, they consist of incongruous bits and pieces of this character from various different times and places, along with motifs from the covers of the character's comics.

**Alternative content**

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This effect of fragmentation into incongruous panels also appears in a later issue of *The Invisibles*, although this time, as interpreted by a different artist, Chris Weston.

The character’s fragmentation into bits and pieces, which are scattered through time, demonstrates the flexibility of comic book panels: they can be used to produce an effect of spatial fragmentation, as discussed previously in this paper, and in addition, given the spatialization of time on the pages of a comic, they can also be used to produce an effect of temporal fragmentation. This potential to use panels to produce an effect of being splintered through time can also be seen in *Animal Man*, as the titular superhero obtains a time machine, and upon using it, finds himself poured and siphoned, spilling back through time (22.9-10, 20). In producing this effect, his image is duplicated across the page in topsy-turvy upended panels, the consequence of which, to use the words of this character, is that his body "doesn't make sense" (22.9). With his body in disarray in this way, the character loses his physical coherence, and associated with this, as conveyed in the narrative of the comic, the character keeps disappearing from the page, flickering and coming and going (22.12-14). His body, given its comings and goings, can no longer hold him, and no longer functions as stable container.

The body’s function as a container, and an effect of this function breaking down, can also be seen in an issue of *Doom Patrol*, via a character named Cliff Steele (who is otherwise known as Robotman, as he consists of a human brain inside a cyborg body). In the comic, the consciousness of this character is downloaded onto someone else’s computer, unbeknownst to him, thus divorcing him from his body. Throughout the narrative of this comic, we see this character trying to make sense of his disembodied state (58.21), trying to create order where there is none apparent. As conveyed in the comic, this sense making process manifests as
psychotic delusions: he has suspicions that he is actually a robot (suitably enough, given his usual cyborg status), or alternately, suspicions that everyone else is one, suspicions that accompany a sense that there is something very wrong with his body, and alternatively, a sense that there is something very wrong with the world around him. Thus, the character's instability, a consequence of not having a body, becomes transposed onto the world around him. Coinciding with this character's unstable experience of his body and his place in the world, in the narrative of the comic, he has a psychotic break down, during which a talking insect appears and communicates the message, "You're in hell. You must stop trying to pretend you have a human body. You'll stay in hell until you stop pretending you have a human body" (58.15). This instability is, moreover, also transposed into his surroundings, which similarly break down; or to draw upon the words of this character, as he describes it in the comic, "World falling apart, shapes simplifying into geometrical solids, grids …" (58.17). As the world breaks down, black and white shapes are juxtaposed on the page, and in the juxtaposition of these shapes, the outline of a face is visible (Figure 7), and it pleads to the character, "Please help me … I'm a human being" (58.17).

This face, just like the character in question, is one that is without a body (a white, vacant expanse appears where its body would otherwise have been). Without a body to function as a container, something to demarcate an inside from an outside, the distinction between the two becomes unstable; and in this image, an effect of an instability between the two is produced via a breakdown between the character and his surroundings.

The body's function as a container is also narratively elaborated upon in *The Invisibles*, as one character becomes an empty shell, following the emptying out of what this shell had formerly contained. The character in question is one who had recently assumed a new identity, namely, that of Brian Malcolm, but prior to this, the character was named Mister Six. During the course of the comic's narrative events, the character surrenders his new identity, by sacrificing everything that makes Brian who he is (v1 24.9). This is done for the purpose of destroying a massive abscess that is bursting and releasing horrible things (v1 24.6). Preparing for the sacrifice, he stands in the front of this abscess, which can be seen in a previous issue reflecting this character's face in a twisted and distorted way (v1 22.23), and he proceeds to relinquish everything that anchors Brian Malcolm in the world by sacrificing them to this abscess. One by one, the various different things that are associated with this identity are surrendered, bit by bit, the identity of the character is emptied out; and corresponding with this, it gets harder and harder for Brian Malcolm to think coherently (v1 24.9). The signifiers by which he was constituted have all vanished, and without these signifiers, an empty container is all that remains.

Relinquishment of identity recurs time and time again in *The Invisibles*, and occupies a prominent place in the narrative of the series. Spanning the entirety of the series, it is initially introduced in the early issues, and is foregrounded in the concluding events of the series, thus functioning as a thread linking things together. Throughout the series, characters undergo a process of disintegration, and not only by means of the panels on the pages of the comic, but additionally, this disintegration is also narratively elaborated upon, via an ongoing discussion of the dissolution of the individual. The latter being, as articulated in the narrative of the comic, an outmoded concept, and one that must be transcended. To draw upon the words of the comic, the "ego" is only scaffolding; it is something that is necessary for development, but it is something that must eventually be husked, as it ultimately constricts growth (v3 2.13). In *The Invisibles*, in lieu of the individual, there is something that is more diffuse, and this diffusion be seen by looking at someone via the correct angle, until you can see something that is "billion-eyed and billion-limbed" (v3 2.13), just as if having been rendered across multiple images. This is illustrated quite clearly in one panel from *The Invisibles*, in which a character's face is simultaneously pictured from multiple different angles, accompanied by the text, "my face is not visible to you in its entirety from here. I can only show you slices" (v3 1.14). This evokes the diffusion of characters across the pages of the
As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, there is a potential in the comic to use panels in particular ways to produce an effect of disrupting their assemblage, and by means of this effect, to destabilize a sense of unity. This potential is one that is illustrated and narratively elaborated upon throughout Morrison's comics, as characters dissolve into irreconcilable fragments, ones that cannot be assembled together to make something whole. This effect is one that reappears throughout the writer's body of work, with characters recurrently subject to fragmentation along lines inscribed via comic book panels, or in addition to this, via signifiers, in conjunction with corresponding narrative elaboration. Building upon this effect of subjecting characters to fragmentation, as it appears in Morrison's work, these resultant bits and pieces are unable to be put back together to make something whole. This is manifest via the absence of a unifying image, one that functions as a container, delineating an inside from an outside, and holding the constituent pieces together. Thus, the dissolution of characters in Morrison's work serves not only to demonstrate a particular effect of disrupting their assemblage, and by means of this effect, to destabilize a sense of unity. This potential is one that reappears throughout this series, and moreover, for that which also reappears throughout Morrison's larger body of work, as the writer and artists recurrently disrupt a sense of unity to characters, by using panels in ways that produce an effect of irreconcilable fragmentation, and correspondingly, by the narrative elaboration of this effect.

**Notes**

[1] Artist Phil Jimenez, referring to his work on *The Invisibles*, identifies a visual quality to Morrison's scripts: "Grant can write a script like nobody's business, and he can draw, so he tends to think visually, which is always just the coolest, to get that from a writer who's thinking in terms of visuals rather than words, which I think is a problem often in comics." Similarly, artist Frank Quitely, also referring to Morrison's *The Invisibles* scripts, likewise draws attention to their visual quality: "he's pretty good at painting pictures with words, so it's always challenging and refreshing trying to translate them" (Neighly and Cowe-Spigai, 137, 215-216).

[2] In the work of Lacan, the body image is something that has an autonomous existence ("Some reflections on the ego" 13), and is ultimately alien to the subject.

[3] Furthermore, in addition to dreams and fantasies, in "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other," Anthony Wilden associates such images with certain forms of schizophrenia and LSD trips and, in addition, literature (174).

[4] Similarly, in another issue of *Doom Patrol*, the theme of being consumed by an image is repeated, as characters are trapped within an illustration in a children's book (31.3).

[5] A similar effect of dissecting a comic book character by means of the panel boundaries that criss-cross the page can also be seen in an issue of *Batman* (668.2-3).

[6] Moreover, consistent with the character's fragmentation, Man Green and Man Yellow identify this predicament to be one that is pervasive, as they say, "The crack runs through everything. And everyone. Without it, we would be perfect, like angels, and as dull" (9.9).

[7] To provide a comparable example, a creature of parts is also evident in *Doom Patrol*, via a character named Rebis, who is covered head to toe in bandages, and who is comprised of bits and pieces of others; or as articulated by another character, "You're a curious creature, aren't you? A thing of parts" (24.16).

[8] The use of cut out lines around characters can also be seen an issue of *Winter's Edge*, in which protagonists from *The Invisibles* are also featured as cut-out paper dolls, each accompanied by a wardrobe of characteristic outfits, complete with foldable tabs on the sides to hold the clothes in place (2.58-63).

[9] Moreover, to provide a clinical context, from a Lacanian perspective, dismemberment of the body according to lines inscribed by language can be seen in conversion symptoms (Verhaeghe 220).
Language manifests the subject, but in doing so, it also reduces it to a signifier, thus petrifying it ("Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis" 207).

In Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function," exoscopically represented organs in dreams, which is one possible manifestation of a fragmented image of the body, is associated with an aggressive disintegration of the individual (78).

The spatialization of time on the pages of the comic is discussed by Scott McCloud in Understanding Comics, and is illustrated as McCloud's stand-in, as pictured in one particular panel on a page, points to the surrounding panels and proclaims, "Both past and future are real and visible all around us!" (104).

An effect of fragmenting space and time can be seen in Final Crisis, as the page shreds into dislocated panels, which serves to isolate characters by trapping them within their boundaries (7.16); additionally, in Doom Patrol, another character can also be seen fractured through time, via an effect that is produced by means of shards of mirrors that show only the past (37.19).

To continue this theme, in The Invisibles, time travel also has an effect on the body of Ragged Robin, who, in being split by panels as she is fragmented in time, declares "I must look … monstrous …" (v2 21.15-16).

Like Cliff, the reader is not aware of the reason for this character's disassociation from his body until the concluding pages of the comic.

Such an attribution of a character's bodily disintegration onto the world outside is also evident in the narrative example from The Invisibles discussed in the previous paragraph. Ragged Robin, upon fragmenting into dislocated panels as a consequence of time travel, also sees such fragmentation in the world around her, as articulated by this character as she reflects upon this fragmentation, "I saw … everything coming apart" (v2 6.18).

A breakdown between a distinction between an inside and an outside is apparent in paranoia, as discussed in Lacan's "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," via the subject's discordance being attributed to all living things (90).

To provide a clinical context, from a Lacanian perspective, for the loss of the function of the body as a container, Andrew Lewis, in "The Stabilization of Ego Identifications in Psychosis," associates this with the psychotic fragmentation characteristic of schizophrenia (67).

From a Lacanian perspective, as discussed by Paul Verhaeghe in On Being Normal and Other Disorders, the subject is constituted by various signifiers that are held together by means of an empty shell, or bodily container, that stems from the identification that takes place in the mirror stage (273).

In the narrative of The Invisibles, this transcendency of the individual paves the way to what is termed the MeMePLEX, defined as "access to multiple self-images and potentials, a menu selection of faces, contradictory personas … or multiple personality disorder as a lifestyle option" (v3 1.6).

Additionally, for a similarly diffuse image of a character, see pages 19-20 of The Invisibles vol. 3 #1.

In The Invisibles, this can also be seen as characters shed their names just like a snake sheds its skin, thus forgoing the fixed place that a name designates (v1 8.24; v3 1.2).

To point out a parallel with a narrative event in Doom Patrol, in this comic, one character also encounters an absence when he gazes into a mirror; however, it is an absence of a different kind. To elaborate, in the narrative of the comic, the character explains an unusual symptom with which he is afflicted: "You must excuse my mask—I suffer from a rather unusual disease. Such is the nature of my condition that were I to see any reflection of my naked face, I would immediately cease to exist." (27.11). Thus, recognition in an image that appears in a mirror serves to completely efface the character, as in confronting such an image, he ceases to exist.

As mentioned previously in this paper, an experience of unity is associated with a sense of recognition in a complete image in a mirror, one that is externally imposed and pointed out by another (Verhaeghe 218-219); while the absence of such a bodily image can have repercussions with respect to a subject's sense of unity, and is associated with a sense of fragmenting into parts.

Works Cited


On paper, Grant Morrison and Rag Morales’ Action Comics should have been a slam dunk. The title was announced as part of DC’s “new 52” relaunch, a resetting of the comic book giant’s continuity beginning in September 2011. From the rubble… To be fair, Morrison’s arc is very meticulously set-up, with hints and nods teased across the entirety of the run. The “little man” (subsequently revealed to be Vyndktvx) appears in the first pages of the run; he even makes reference to a “deal”, setting up the run’s recurring arc words. Morrison does not even restrict himself to coopting mainstream comic book continuity, taking the opportunity afforded by the reboot to slip in nods towards all manner of other classic stories. With Grant Morrison’s mind-blowingly epic seven year run on Batman recently coming to a close, I thought now may be a good time to talk about a few of his other works – those that are even freakier, more surrealistic and more fetishistic than his regular mainstream superhero output. Morrison’s Hitler is clearly insane and his mind fragments more and more as our story plows onward until we are left with him heading towards Germany to become ‘famous’. Some of the panels in this story are just so beyond what anyone else is doing with the medium that it still manages to impress and astound even after reading the story multiple times – seeing these images over and over does not dilute their power in the slightest, it only enriches their power through revealing new bits and hidden textures.