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Historical Dissidence: The Temporalities and Radical Possibilities of American Comics

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HISTORICAL DISSIDENCE:

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by

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ABSTRACT

HISTORICAL DISSIDENCE: THE TEMPORALITIES AND
RADICAL POSSIBILITIES OF AMERICAN COMICS

by

Jeremy M. Carnes

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020
Under the Supervision of Professor Jason Puskar

Formal criticism of comics has often focused on the importance of sequence and the filling of gutters with causative logics. Practitioner-theorists like Will Eisner and Scott McCloud have focused on "sequentiality" and "closure" to conceive of how readers connect the disparate panels of a given comic. More contemporary scholars of the form have followed Eisner and McCloud, foregrounding the causative logics that create narrative progression in the comics form. Yet, these approaches implicitly rely on dominant, western logics of temporality in the construction of narrative in comics.

This project considers how comics form actually relies on various temporalities and thus complicates a single, dominant approach to historical consciousness. I argue that comics work as historically dissident cultural productions given the ways comics forms anatomize and even actively question normative western temporality and history. I take a broader approach to form, considering the aesthetic, narrative, and publication elements formally. Such an approach keeps this study from focusing solely on auteur comics or mainstream comics. In fact, I explore these formal elements in comics like Richard McGuire's *Here*, Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Marvel's *The Uncanny X-Men* and *Black Panther*, *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*, and *Red: A Haida Manga*. Because comics are ephemeral pulp and because they

offer fragmented narratives that are often mutated from accepted forms, they rely on a flexible

understanding of how time works, how narratives progress, and what it means to tell a story.

Thus, comics forms actually encourage readers to question their own experiences of western,

imperial, or heteronormative histories.

For Jessica, Dreamy
Codack, and Eila

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"Time cannot be homogenized like milk."

Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (1984)

Introduction:
Telling Time in Comics Forms

Perhaps we can define comics in the same way that Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart defined hard-core pornography: "I know it when I see it."[1] Indeed, practitioners and theorists have gone in circles for years trying to define what a comic is and, more specifically, where the boundary between comics and not-comics lies. In all these discussions, two notions central to the form of comics—time and space—recur. Thus, while we may not agree on a definition of comics, we know it when we see it, and we know that temporality and spatiality are central to the form. Yet those same formal characteristics have, in some instances, been used to read the form as conservative and simplistic, an attitude comics has tried to escape for the better part of their existence.

In his 1972 exploration of comics, "The Myth of Superman," Umberto Eco provided one of the first detailed examinations of temporality in comics. Eco argues that the temporality of Superman comics is diametrically opposed to contemporary discussions of the concept of time. He writes, "the very structure of time falls apart, not in the time *about which* but, rather, in the time *in which the story is told*."[2] Eco argues that the temporality of comics, like Superman, is disconnected from logical considerations of time and that, as an effect, "the reader…loses the notion of temporal progression."[3] As Eco further argues, the stories like those in Superman appear to readers in a "kind of oneiric climate," a dream-like climate that muddles the distinction between the before and the after. For Eco, who draws on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Jean Paul Sartre, and Edmund Husserl, temporality is directly associated with causation. Any

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[1] Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184 (1964), Justice Stewart Concurring.
[2] Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium*, ed. Jeet Heer and Ken Worcester (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2004): 153, author's italics.
[3] Ibid., 155.

understanding of time requires that an individual consider the decisions she must make in order to differentiate the present and the past versions of herself from future ones. Because the causation that connects events is rarely clear in Superman, Eco concludes that they operate with a "confused notion of time."[4]

The continued attention to temporal causation has kept scholars in and beyond comics studies from exploring the radical possibilities of the form. Indeed, Eco's exploration of temporal confusion in comics is a question of the formal constitution of the medium. While Eco is interested in the ways in which the seriality of comic installments complicates an understanding of diegetic time, his reliance on causation and linear temporality mirrors most of the dominant theoretical understandings of the telling of time, even at the level of the comics page. Eco is not alone here; causation and linearity are embedded into the explorations of the form even by authors and critics of comics. For example, practitioner-theorists like Will Eisner and Scott McCloud, whose work I explore more in chapter one, introduced and popularized terminology like "sequentiality" and "closure," respectively.[5] This terminological work introduced a causative relationship between panels and pages. For instance, Eisner explains, "In visual narration the task of the author/artist is to record a continued flow of experience and show it as it may be seen from the reader's eyes. This is done by arbitrarily breaking up the flow of uninterrupted experience into segments of 'frozen' scenes and enclosing them by a frame or panel."[6] For Eisner, temporal narrative at the level of the frame or page relies on a causative connection between the different segmented panels to create narrative cohesion. McCloud makes a similar argument by foregrounding what he calls "closure," the action of the reader filling in the gaps on the page to

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[4] Ibid., 156.
[5] Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).
[6] Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 40.

adequately make sense of the narrative.[7] Even the categorization he introduces to explore

different relationships between panels highlights the importance of causation. Categories like

"moment-to-moment," "action-to-action" or "scene-to-scene" imply linear temporal

progression.[8]

The continued attention to causation has kept scholars in and beyond comics studies from

exploring the radical possibilities of the form across its various iterations, from underground and

auteur comics to mainstream superhero comics. For instance, Charles Hatfield's pivotal work in

comics studies, *Alternative Comics*, considers what he calls "the art of tensions": "comic art is

composed of several kinds of *tension*, in which various ways of reading—various interpretive

options and potentialities—must be played against each other."[9] Within these tensions, Hatfield

argues against seeing comics as an "easy" form by noting the complex relationships between

codes and formal characteristics that make comics work. However, in making this argument,

Hatfield continually returns to issues of closure (taken from McCloud) and the breakdown (from

Robert C. Harvey), noting that a comic exists in fragmented parts in order to be put back together

by the reader.[10] Readers must be able to create closure and thus a causative relationship between

each individual panel and those surrounding it. The tension then exists in the representation of

the individual image and its relationship to other images in the sequence.

Hillary Chute follows a similar line in her explorations of how comics are uniquely suited

to narrate our lives. She argues that the power of comics lies in the use of overlay or palimpsest,

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[7] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 64.

[8] McCloud also introduces the "non-sequitur" panel-to-panel transition as a way to name a relationship that "offers no logical relationship between panels whatsoever!" However, by arguing that even when transitions don't "make 'sense in any traditional way…a relationship of some sort will inevitably develop" McCloud foregrounds the importance of narrative cohesion, privileging specific ways of thinking and telling time, story, and history. Ibid., 70-73.

[9] Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005): 36, author's italics.

[10] Ibid., 41.

which "makes literal the presence of the past by disrupting spatial and temporal conventions."[11] While I agree with Chute's analysis of the palimpsest in comics, I disagree that the use of palimpsest itself disrupts spatial and temporal conventions, because, as I will argue, such disruptions are built into the very foundations of comics forms. Part of the issue, again, lies in the particular approach to the formal elements of comics. In Chute's exploration of the form she writes, "The form is built on the ongoing counterpoint of presence—in frames or panels—and absence, the white space between frames where a reader *projects causality* and that is called the gutter."[12]

While it is true that comics requires a piecing together of the disparate parts in a narrative, and that those disparate parts are often causatively related, I resist centralizing causation in comics given that the form so often embraces other ways of considering temporality. The notion that comics exist for readers to "project causality" into them makes the medium akin to empty receptacles readers fill up with what is missing—namely, western, linear, and causal logics. Thinking of the gutter as an empty space implicitly relies on dominant logics of temporality to fill them. The way comics tell time actually derives from broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Indeed, the form highlights the larger historical and socio-cultural structure that narrativizes time. Examining the ways in which temporality gets narrated can help us perceive the ways in which history itself is driven by context. Culture, religion, race, class, gender, or sexuality, all affect the ways history is told. If we focus primarily on the causative, we inevitably westernize and straighten out the form without considering the implications of such moves. In fact, as I will argue throughout this project, comics consistently employ what I am calling "historical dissidence" in their approaches to temporality and history.

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[11] Hillary Chute, "Comics Form and Narrating Lives," *Profession* (2011): 109.
[12] Ibid., 108, my italics.

Historical Dissidence

Russell West-Pavlov, in his book *Temporalities*, has explained a dominant approach to both time and history:

> We are accustomed to separating out time and the things that occupy it or the events that happen in it. Things are reified and then lodged in a linear-temporal continuum conceived as a measuring rod; events are also reified into segmented cause-effect units. All these processes of segmentation are a correlative of modernity's apogee: namely, the tendency of capitalism to reify, quantify and translate everything, including time itself, into units of exchange under the universal currency of money.[13]

The reification of pieces of time set in a "linear-temporal continuum" is what we call history, a reified linear narrativization of time. And history is often told by those in power, those whose ways of thinking and textual renderings are privileged in the libraries and archives. These histories of the powerful often neglect histories of minoritized or oppressed communities, including them only as they suit understandings of imperial or national power against "barbaric" or "impure" Others.

As Michel Foucault notes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the desire for a continuous, uninterrupted history is rooted in a desire for the "sovereignty of consciousness" and the prerogative of the subject.[14] That is, history becomes amenable to the human subject as "original subject" from which flows "all historical development and all action."[15] Furthermore, continuous history makes the human subject—here a white, straight, cis, male subject—believe that he "will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a

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[13] Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 53.
[14] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 12.
[15] Ibid.

distance *by difference*."[16] Continuous, uninterrupted history exists in the belief that one day, because of natural progression, the deviance of difference will dissipate. This belief is the foundation for what became notions central to the colonial project, like that of the "disappearing Indian."

Yet, as West-Pavlov further notes, "The notion of historical fact cannot be sustained in any simple sense when each link in the historical chain is overlaid by other texts and other renditions of the same event."[17] The privileged "cause-effect units" that come to denote history crumble under sustained consideration or transhistorical comparison. Thus, the reification of that singular history of the powerful loses authority when juxtaposed with multiple temporalities that reflect less dominant sociocultural and economic positions. While it might be true that History is told by the powerful, there are histories that do not align with dominant ideologies which deserve sustained attention as well.

In his book *Metahistory*, Hayden White argues that the conceptualizing of historical works must first organize the elements of the "chronicle" and the "story"—"'primitive elements' in the *historical account*, but both represent processes of selection and arrangement of data from the *unprocessed historical record* in the interest of rendering that record more comprehensible to an *audience* of a particular kind."[18] For White, the process of chronologizing and then narrativizing time is what makes a history, which is always told for a certain audience. History is not a bare list of annual events, but something that explains how events are causally related. White goes on to note that questions like "What does it all add up to?" or "What is the point of it all?" gesture toward "the structure of the *entire set of events* considered as a *completed* story and

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[16] Ibid., my italics.
[17] West-Pavlov, *Temporalities*, 58.
[18] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of 19th Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973): 5.

call for a synoptic judgment of the relationship between a given story and other stories."[19] The

notion of "other stories" or other tellings of time lies at the heart of this project. Tellings of time

other than those that become "History" tend to be overlooked or ignored because they complicate

national narratives of exception or goodness, because they undermine those in power, or because

they fail to properly centralize causative relations. This study will consider each of these notions

throughout.

Given that this study addresses complex histories and temporalities involving

imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, one might be inclined to ask, "why

comics?"[20] Some might deem comics too trivial for such serious business. However, comics has

been especially successful at circumventing and resisting dominant power structures, which

allows nonnormative temporalities to flourish. This is partly due to the fact that comics has long

existed on the margins of the publishing industry, and outside of what many would count as

"respectable" literature.[21] As Jared Gardner writes, "By only sporadically being profitable and

almost never being respectable, comics has been left to develop its own language and its own

unique relationship with readers, often for long periods, with few or no attempts to make the

form respectable."[22] While of course comics has had issues with racist, sexist, and homophobic

content, the medium itself is also a marginalized literature in its own right, even when its content

is complicit with dominant ideologies. Just as many comics are about outcasts and outsiders, so

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[19] Ibid., 7.

[20] Hillary Chute took up just a question in her 2017 publication, which notes: "A hybrid form that can be abstract and surreal, and also immediate and direct, comics is surprisingly versatile—and the fascination comics inspires continues to grow as new vibrant work crops up across a wide range of formats and genres." Hillary Chute, *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017): 30.

[21] For a more detailed exploration of comics and Literature, see Christopher Pizzino, *Arresting Development: Comics at the Boundaries of Literature* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2016).

[22] Jared Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012): ix.

the medium itself can resist dominant ways of thinking, especially by challenging the temporal assumptions that define western narratives.

Furthermore, comics' relationship with temporality is complicated by both social and institutional concerns. Because comics is a popular form of literature associated with mass media, the academy has resisted studying them. This has only begun to change in the last twenty-five years. The differentiation between "Literature" and comics provides some of these new avenues I hope to explore in reformulating temporality through the forms of comics. Whether in mainstream comics or underground comix, and through the superhero eras of the Golden Age (1938-1950), the Silver Age (1956-1970), the Bronze Age (1970-1985), the Modern Age (1985-Present), or the Blue Age (2012-present)[23], comics offers a different way to consider historicization. Dominant approaches to historicization are often embodied in the demarcation of "period," that never ending development-oriented narrative. In American literary studies, this narrative moves from Romanticism to Modernism to Postmodernism to something like Post-Postmodernism, as addressed and problematized by Andrew Hoberek.[24] Yet, this progress-oriented approach has temporally colonized other ways of thinking about time and history, and by looking at comics literary critics and historians may unsettle even the history of more respectable and canonical literature.[25]

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[23] These distinctions on dates are my own, but these are contingent cut-off points that vary depending on the scholar or fan. For more information on the history of superhero comics and the concept of the Ages, see Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003); Chris Gavaler, *Superhero Comics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); and Grant Morrison, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us about Being Human* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011). For more information on the more contemporary notion of the Blue Age, see Adrienne Resha, "The Blue Age of Comic Books," *The Blue Age of Comic Books*, 2017, http://scalar.usc.edu/works/blue-age-of-comic-books/index.

[24] Andrew Hoberek, "Introduction: After Postmodernism," *Twentieth Century Literature* 53, no. 3 (2007): 233–47.

[25] For more on the concept of temporal colonization, see Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham: Duke UP, 2017).

Accordingly, through innovative narrative forms, comics can work as historically dissident cultural productions. That is, comics forms can anatomize and even actively question normative western temporality and history. Using queer, postcolonial, and indigenous approaches, I will argue that comics can both queer and decolonize western, linear versions of history. While comics has not always been a bastion of radical liberation and inclusion, this approach proposes that the form is particularly useful for the stories of marginalized peoples. Comics form can complicate and question a solid, stable approach to western, Euro-American, straight histories. Comics focus on ruptures of time and discontinuities in history.

In using "dissidence," I want to invoke both the strain of political dissent the term carries, here associated with the questioning of normative approaches to time and history, but also the hope that dissent implies as it seeks a more open, egalitarian society. Thus, I do not want to rely only on the negative connotations of the term but hope to evoke its double valance of both pessimism and optimism. In fact, this study will focus on the radical potentialities of the comics form and the ways in which those potentialities have come to positive fruition in terms of complicating a dominant narrative of time and history.

In reading history, we must always remember that the process of historicism is anachronistic itself. We can never approach the past outside of the context of our own present. The ways we decide to tell the story of time—how we tell chronology, to use White's term— always come after the events narrated. Thus, those narrations carry traces of a different context. As Valerie Rohy notes, "If historiography without anachronism is impossible, then resistance to anachronism is resistance not to the other of historicism but to an abject aspect of its own methodology, a projected image of its own atavism."[26] Yet one might equally argue that

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[26] Rohy, "Ahistorical," *GLQ* 12, no. 1 (2006): 69.

anachronism is not a methodological problem in historicism, but rather a way to describe how

readers experience multiple and messy contradictions in time in opposition to the myth of

western history and progress. Like Rohy, Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that in reading a text

there is at once the possibility of understanding and misunderstanding, precisely because of the

context of the reader.[27] Gadamer argues that we can only understand past texts within the

historicity of our own process of understanding. Gadamer notes that the present is both limiting

and enabling, "for it provides the necessary, if fraught, starting point for an engagement with the

past."[28] Each time we engage with the past through the process of historicization, we bring

portions of the present with us in our beliefs and ideologies, which colors the process with

anachronism. Thus, according to West-Pavlov, the question becomes "how to both inhabit *and*

escape our historically specific moment and its attendant prejudices at the moment of engaging

with the past and its textual artefacts."[29] How might we embrace historical rupture in our reading

practices to more radically rethink historicity, development, and progression?

 One approach to reading comics as temporally and culturally "other" appears in Darieck

Scott and Ramzi Fawaz's special issue of *American Literature*, "Queer About Comics." In their

introduction, Scott and Fawaz argue that comics has always been entwined with queer culture,

whether through "alternative mutant kinships of superhero stories (the epitome of queer

worldmaking), the ironic and socially negative narratives of independent comics (the epitome of

queer antinormativity), or the social stigma that makes the medium marginal, juvenile, and

outcast from 'proper' art (the epitome of queer identity)."[30] Scott and Fawaz further emphasize

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[27] Has-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Wiensheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd Rev. Ed. (London: Continuum, 2006) 267.
[28] Ibid.
[29] West-Pavlov, *Temporalities*, 73.
[30] Darieck Scott and Ramzi Fawaz, "Introduction: Queer about Comics," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 197.

three ways comics intersects with queerness as a social and affective force. First, comics is still

associated with childhood, which produces disconnects between readers and normative social life

that then leads to the rise of comics counterpublics. Second, comics can, in effect, represent

anything, and these representations can then be "read as refractions of social and political

possibilities." And third, comics is a sequential narrative of panels that repeat but always with a

difference, which suggests a queer form.[31]

The queerness of comics form that Scott and Fawaz identify corresponds with what I am

calling the historical dissidence of the form. A formal approach to the characteristics of comics

time can help reveal how the medium operates via non-normative temporalities, read through

lenses of gender, sexuality, race, and indigeneity, sometimes separately, but often

simultaneously. Comics carry the potential to question dominant temporalities and, relatedly,

histories. Indeed, the kinds of thematic and formal queering of comics that Scott and Fawaz

identify is actually part of a much broader "dissidence" that includes, but is not solely relegated

to, the queer. That is, foregrounding comics as temporally non-normative allows us to see that

they challenge much more than just sexual norms; in fact they challenge an entire regime of

Eurochronology or chrononormativity that has organized entire cultures for centuries.[32] Comics

forms are thus more broadly "othering," cutting across race, gender, sexuality, and indigeneity.

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[31] Ibid., 200–202.

[32] Eurochonology is borrowed from Eric Hayot, who defines it as "the forms of historical time privileged by modernity at large, which make it very hard to think past the basic structures that keep European patterns of development at the center of history." Chrononormativity follows on the work of Elizabeth Freeman, who defines it as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity." Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012): 6; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010): 3.

Queer, Postcolonial, and Indigenous Temporalities

While reading the forms of comics as queer may seem understandable, the notion that comics are more broadly othering through time is difficult to conceptualize. After all, it is difficult, if not impossible, to think beyond or outside of time. Temporality defines the residents of western societies so comprehensively that thinking beyond time requires difficult escapes from personal and communal identity. Furthermore, historical consciousness is so deeply embedded in dominant social structures that we must not expect the content of comics to be free from it. Associations between comics and radicalness then become rather complex. These theoretical considerations are not wholly new; in fact, scholars in queer, postcolonial, and indigenous studies have considered what it might mean to think time differently for a variety of different reasons.

In queer studies, this turn is clearest in attempts to delineate a theory of queer temporalities evidenced in the work of Elizabeth Freeman, Heather Love, and Carolyn Dinshaw, among others. Queer temporalities and the more recently theorized trans temporalities are "visions of time as asynchronous and non-normative, and thus enabling a community formation, often through 'touches' or 'binds' that connect marginalized peoples across time."[33] Indeed, Freeman argues that queerness itself is temporal difference or asynchrony "experienced as…a means to express or enact ways of being and connecting that have not yet arrived or never will."[34] If we see comics forms as akin to queer forms, following Scott and Fawaz, then comics forms can open beyond the straight histories we have used to define and experience them.

Jordan Stein notes that some of the scholarship in queer temporality "considers how history is transmitted across time," while others seek "historiographic interventions against a

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[33] Leah Devun and Zeb Tortorici, "Trans, Time, and History," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 520.
[34] Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction," *GLQ* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 159.

perceived chrononormativity," and a third vein pays particular attention to "properties of time itself that can organize (or disorganize) event perceptions in queer ways."[35] In particular, queer temporality offers a fruitful starting point in thinking through the markedly non-normative temporal functions of comics that continually question chrononormativity or a dominantly narrated sense of history. In fact, the forms of comics stand apart from these markers of dominance, even when the medium was complexly intertwined within heteronormative and gender normative content.

In a similar vein, postcolonial theorists, most notably Dipesh Chakrabarty and Homi Bhabha, have questioned the dominance of Euro-American historical formations. Chakrabarty has noted that historicism itself—the belief that all of society and culture are historically dependent and that history is the base of human existence—validates colonial rule because it measures the cultural and social difference of the non-West from the West.[36] History, and more broadly temporal experience, has centered the stories of the West as the place where history begins, before it spreads elsewhere. As such, Bhabha argues that "colonialism takes power in the name of history."[37]

One response to the power of colonialism has been to recast history itself, which Chakrabarty does in distinguishing "History 1" and "History 2." According to Chakrabarty, History 1 is "a past posited by capital itself as its precondition."[38] History 2, on the other hand, is composed of "antecedents to capital" that do not necessarily "contribute to the self-reproduction

[35] Jordan Alexander Stein, "American Literary History and Queer Temporalities," *American Literary History* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 864–865.

[36] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000): 7–8.

[37] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 85.

[38] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 63.

of capital."[39] Chakrabarty clarifies that History 2 is not made up of histories alternative to those of capital; it is not a "dialectical Other," but "a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1."[40] History 1 is that seemingly total and tautological story of the structures of oppressive power, of western capital, colonialism, and heteronormativity. Yet, as both Marx and Chakrabarty note, a totalizing history is never total. Histories are multiple. Comics temporalities, and thus histories, are also multiple and encourage us to consider how comics forms contain affordances for exploring these historical multiplicities in dissident ways.

A final strain of thought that courses through this study and informs my readings of temporalities and histories is Indigenous studies, closely related to postcolonial studies. A notable recent development in Indigenous studies is the consideration of multiple Indigenous temporalities, which Mark Rifkin argues deconstructs the power differential between settlers and Indigenous peoples. He notes that dominant views on time and history are based in settler colonial ideologies and must therefore be decolonized. For Rifkin, temporality based in settler colonialism is fundamentally divorced from Indigenous self-determination.[41] Indeed, Indigenous studies deconstructs dominant relationships between temporalities and spatialities, a central formal concern in comics, because Indigenous temporalities cannot be conceived apart from land-based practices. One's relationship to the land in the complex of Indigenous land-based practices necessarily introduces a kink in the paradigm of western temporalities that defines colonial histories.

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[39] Ibid., 63-64.
[40] Ibid., 66.
[41] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*.

These various approaches are primarily concerned with deconstructing forms of dominance that mark the Other as lacking or aberrant by thinking beyond western and straight time. Freeman, Chakrabarty, and Rifkin then move us beyond purely negative critique as they formulate answers to western temporality in the form of "touches" and "History 2," one a form of solidarity and intimacy and the other a counter-history still so difficult to name that we enumerate it as a variant of what it opposes. In a similar way, I argue that comics embody aberrance in their temporal and historical forms. Comics, much like Chakrabarty's "History 2," do not formally operate on totalizing structure or tautology and can thus highlight a new way to bring the temporal concerns of queer, postcolonial, and Indigenous theories together to more broadly question dominant approaches to history. Comics can imagine a counter-order so far outside the norms that it can be hard to recognize, and still harder to accept without denigrating it. In order to piece these various theories together and offer some way to conceptualize this counter-order, it is necessary to highlight the radical possibilities inherent in comics form.

Methodology

Throughout this introduction I have continually invoked comics forms without clarifying my approach to formal criticism. Common formal criticism in comics studies considers features like the panels or frames, the gutter, font, dialogue containers, color use, art style, sequence, and page layout, among others. Indeed, the chapter titles in Scott McCloud's book name many of these same features: "Blood in the Gutter," "Time Frames," and "A Word about Color."[42] The panels and frames are the individual boxes that separate most of the images in a comic and the gutter is usually white space between these panels. The way these appear on the page in

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[42] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

conjunction with the speech bubbles and narration boxes is what most formalist critics call the page layout.

Scholars like Thierry Groensteen argue for a "macro-semiotic" approach that considers these distinct formal features as part of a larger apparatus.[43] Groensteen named this larger apparatus the "spatio-topia" of comics and he named the entirety of relations between panels the "arthrology." He writes, "It is through this collaboration between the arthrology and the spatio-topia that the sequential image is seen as plainly narrative, without necessarily needing any verbal help."[44] On the other hand, scholars like Paul Karasik and Mike Newgarden pare down a single, three-panel comic strip to each bare feature over the course of forty-three painstaking chapters in a micro-semiotic approach quite different from Groensteen.[45] Each chapter considers narrative features like the characters, issues of performance, and the script. However, there are also plenty of chapters that explore the minute formal features like white space, rhythm, balloon placement, and the inked line. All in all, the formal considerations for a word-image medium like comics has, by and large, focused on the visual, considering how the comic looks on the page.

However, even these capacious studies of comics form might leave out important features. Following Caroline Levine, I argue that the forms of comics reach well beyond the aesthetic concerns of the panel, artwork, or breakdowns and include, among other things, issues of publication and narrative flexibility. Thus, the forms of comics include "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference," which requires that we consider more than just the word-image relationship in and across panels and pages.[46]

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[43] Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, trans. By Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson, U of Mississippi P, 2007): 5.
[44] Ibid., 9.
[45] Paul Karasik and Mike Newgarden, *How to Read Nancy: The Elements of Comics in Three Easy Panels* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2017).
[46] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015): 3.

The various forms of comics are then what make a comic particularly recognizable as such, so that you "know it when you see it." As Levine notes, "Form emerges from this perspective as transhistorical, portable, and abstract on the one hand, and material, situated, and political on the other."[47] In what follows, I hope to show that the "transhistorical, portable, and abstract" forms of comics carry the truly radical potentialities of the medium, without overwriting or ignoring the "material, situated, and political" forms that complicate any simple reading of comics as wholly liberating, welcoming, or subversive.

Thus, the four chapters of this dissertation consider the ways nonnormative temporalities are already embedded into the various forms of the comic. This study considers both auteur comics that grew out of the underground movement as well as mainstream superhero comics published by Marvel and DC. All of the comics I consider were published post-1963, after the expansion of Marvel following the success of star creative team Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. However, the study does not progress according to a linear chronology, but rather proceeds thematically and theoretically. I begin with experimental comics to show some of the most common ways that comics forms tell time differently. Having established some of the fundamentals of comics temporality, I then move into mainstream superhero comics where arguments about radical forms become more complex, and where the radical potential of comics forms can be harder to see. Many scholars struggle to consider these comics as operating in ways that are not wholly driven by commercialism, thus the move to consider mainstream comics as somehow radical is a contentious one. I end by considering a growing trend in the world of comics, both auteur and mainstream, Indigenous comics. The production of comics by and about Indigenous communities has been on the rise in recent years with the establishment of presses

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[47] Ibid.

like Native Realities, Inc. and the institution of the Indigenous Comic Con. These comics are deeply entwined with concerns about being a Native person in North America and they contain the most radical temporalities of form in this study.

Chapter one considers more obviously experimental works that complicate the form of the comic at the level of the page. Exploring both Richard McGuire's *Here* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, I examine three central formal features of telling temporality in comics: sequence/series, simultaneity, and retroactive signification. Understanding these features then foregrounds the specific ways that form marks historical dissidence in *Here*, perhaps the most overtly experimental text I examine. The experimental nature of *Here* makes certain features, especially those related to temporality, more visible in the various other comics I explore later in this study, including the other work considered in this chapter, Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Spiegelman extends the nonlinear temporalities evident in *Here* to his more pointed examination of trauma, both personal and national. Spiegelman's use of early comics and pulp ephemera in *In the Shadow of No Towers* tells time in ways that attempt to remedy a much longer history of racism and xenophobia both in early twentieth-century comics and in early twenty-first-century American society.

However, the historical dissidence of nonnormative temporalities is not relegated simply to alternative or auteur comics, as I show in the next two chapters. In chapter two I consider the temporalities of ongoing narratives and of publishing in mainstream comics, focusing specifically on Marvel's *Uncanny X-Men* and *The New Mutants*. Rather than reading mainstream comics as crassly commercial or politically conservative, I consider the queerness of the X-Universe in order to examine the queer temporalities of storylines like "Days of Future Past." The narrative convention of time travel in *Uncanny X-Men* often entails resistance to

heteronormativity. When this trope is broadened to consider the Marvel omniverse, it highlights a queer collectivity that makes connections across time and space. These narrative moves then also help us reconsider elements like retroactive continuity, the introduction of new information to bring previous stories in line with current comics continuity.[48] Retcons are both a narrative and publishing tool that we must understand as more complicated than simple gimmicks. Retcons can actually help us reconsider the very notion of narrativized temporality, history, in comics. In this vein, queer temporalities highlight the concept of contingency following, most famously, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgewick centers reading in contingent formations. In comics, readers can either wholly ignore retcons or focus on the temporal instability of comics narratives because of their common use. Thus, Marvel history is always queer as it diverges from a straight, linear way of telling history specifically through a reliance on contingency.

The third chapter builds on the exploration of queer temporalities in mainstream comics to consider how long-form serialization opens possibilities for dissident approaches to history. Exploring Marvel's *Black Panther*, I contend that long-form comics flexibly rework history through a process I term "retroactive decolonization." Because retroactive continuity allows for a certain contingency in the narrativization of time in mainstream comics, more contemporary writers of series like *Black Panther* can critique colonization and black histories through retconned narratives. Retroactive decolonization names the rewriting, extending, and building of a past that addresses embedded stereotypes introduced by well-meaning creators. Within the forms central to publishing and producing long-form serialized comics, the past, present, and

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[48] One of the most famous retroactive continuities, or retcons, is the resurrection of Superman after his death in nearly year-long, cross-title event *The Death of Superman*. After the apparent death of Superman he returns, explaining that he was, conveniently, in stasis while he was away, healing his injuries from his battle with the genetically-engineered monster, Doomsday. Dan Jurgens (w & a), Karl Kesel (w), Jerry Ordway (w), Louise Simonson (w), Roger Stern (w), Bret Breeding (a), Tom Grummett (a), Jon Bogdanove (a), Jackson Guice (a), et al. *The Death and Return of Superman Omnibus* (Burbank: DC Comics, 2019).

future are much less distinct than one might expect. The radical potentialities of comics like *Black Panther* lie within the instability of time. Temporal frames that collide and fold in on one another complicate colonial archives that propagate racial stereotypes.

My final chapter builds on the previous chapters' discussions of decolonization through an exploration of Indigenous comics like *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*, Volume 1 and *Red: A Haida Manga* by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (Haida). I argue that the comics form offers a radical path for new explorations of temporality from Indigenous "frames of reference." Through an exploration of Wai Chee Dimock's notion of "deep time" and a partner analytic that I am naming "vast place," I consider how both *Moonshot* and *Red* decenter Indigenous ways of knowing and identify them as distinct from colonial ways of knowing. *Moonshot*'s use of science fiction tropes addresses not just the continuation of Indigenous peoples into the future, but also the effect that Indigenous cosmologies have on what it means to think and discuss the future on and beyond Earth. Similarly, *Red* draws on Haida narrative forms to connect indigenous temporalities to indigenous land-based practices.

Throughout this study, I hope to show the ways comics forms, in their very creation and existence, obscure a reading of time and history as "an individual and unique whole...develop[ing] over time."[49] Because comics are ephemeral pulp and because they offer fragmented narratives that are often mutated from accepted forms, they rely on a flexible understanding of how time works, how narratives progress, and what it means to tell a story. In the process, comics forms encourage readers to question their own experiences of western, imperial, or heteronormative history. Although we may know a comic when we see it, we also should recognize that the temporality of comics is always more than what meets the eye.

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[49] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 23.

Thinking Time and History:
Here, *In the Shadow of No Towers*

In the opening of his formative 1989 book *Comic Books as History*, Joseph Witek argues

that the innovators of the medium he explores—Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey

Pekar—"build…on traditional approaches to comics in order to expand the possibilities of the

comic-book medium; this is *history with a difference*."[1] The "difference" Witek examines is

between didactic comics that have been used to teach history and the work of these creators, who

he argues "explore the road not taken by most American comic books."[2] Comics outside the vein

of work by Jackson, Spiegelman, and Pekar have "eschewed history in favor of fantasy,

adventure, and horror," but the historical stories of these creators proves their "thematic and

narrative maturity," which helps account for a surge in interest in comics.[3]

Following Witek, historical and life stories became a commonly trod path in comics

criticism as the field grew throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Indeed, comics like Spiegelman's

Maus, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

continue to be the most heavily researched works in Anglophone comics studies. Almost all

works in comics studies in the past twenty years make at least some passing reference to

historical nonfiction or memoir comics. This study is no exception. In her 2008 *PMLA* article

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[1] Witek's study remains formative as one of the first book-length academic projects on the comics medium. Joseph Witek, *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1989): 4, my italics.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 5. The nonchalant dismissal of mainstream or popular comics is hard to miss. Later Witek writes, "*American Splendor*, *Maus*, and *Comanche Moon* and *Los Tejanos* offer unique opportunities for a narrative analysis of the medium, not because they are better in kind than *Batman* or *Uncle Scrooge*, but because their literary and historical emphases allow access to established lines of critical thought in literature and historiography while they eliminate as variables some of the intriguing but distracting thematic peculiarities of traditional comics: their stylized and inconsequential violence, their deflection of sexuality into sadomasochism and male bonding, their obsession with costumed power figures" (10). At the very least, I consider this dismissal a remissive approach to mainstream comics. I will explore these concerns much more in chapters two and three.

"Comics as Literature?" Hilary Chute argues that "the most important graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories."[4] She introduces in that same article the term "graphic narrative" to divorce these historical and memoir stories from the fictional and fantastic associations embedded in the term "comics."

These moves toward memory and history in comics studies are necessary ones that broadened the field and brought it into the world of academic discourse.[5] They legitimized comics within the academy by distinguishing them from sensational pulp ephemera for kids and teenagers. Comics studies may not have become as established as it is otherwise.[6] However, there is a tendency to focus on the historical and life narratives themselves without offering as much attention to the formal elements of comics, regardless of content. Though this chapter is deeply indebted to work on comics and history, I diverge from most scholars to consider how comics conceive of time in ways contrary to dominant approaches. Using the formally experimental *Here* by Richard McGuire and *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman, I argue that comics forms carry the radical potentiality for historical dissidence through the ways they tell time.

The telling of time, as Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias note, has a history. They explain that modernity is marked by seeing time as something that everyone experiences at the same time, and that time is in service to the capitalist notions of work and goods. They write,

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[4] Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative" *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (2008): 459.
[5] Recent notable books and collections include: Victoria Aarons, *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma, and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2019); Maaheen Ahmed and Benoît Crucifix, eds., *Comics Memory Archives and Styles* (London: Palgrave, 2018); Golnar Nabizadeh, *Representation and Memory in Graphic Novels* (London: Routledge, 2019); Jorge J. Santos, *Graphic Memories of the Civil Rights Movement: Reframing History in Comics* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2019); Utell, Janine, ed.,*The Comics of Alison Bechdel: From the Outside In* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2020).
[6] Of course, there is plenty more that could be done to make comics a part of academic study.

"Mechanical clocks performed an important function. They abstracted time from cyclical, natural, and mythic time such as seasonal cycles, circadian rhythms, and liturgical calendars and related them with 'a continuous succession of constant temporal units,' such as the twenty-four-hour day and the sixty-minute hour. Time became tied to the demands of the workplace."[7] Time became a tool to tell a very specific story, one that focused on certain groups and maintained a larger structural system. And even before time became an instrument of capital, it was consistently narrativized as a tool for colonization, racialization, and other practices of oppression and violence. Both temporality and history are continually utilized to construct a world in a specific light.

However, comics fail to work by the "constant continuous succession of temporal units." Indeed, as I will explore throughout this chapter, the times of comics forms are anything but constant, are often not continuous, and only partially operate through a notion of succession. Time on the comics page is infinitely more difficult, and thus the histories that comics can tell are not marked solely by the narrative itself. Instead, as I note in this chapter and throughout the study, the multiple forms of comics must include aesthetic elements, like those that complicate the visual time on the page, as well as narrative elements that work in conjunction with aesthetics to complicate a straightforward model of time. History does not have to be relayed in ways that are already narrativized for specific ends but can be narrativized in the process of creation and through formal concerns that cut across identity markers and social categories. Indeed, historical dissidence is embedded in comics forms and encourages our questioning of the larger notions of historical continuity and socio-political power.

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[7] Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias, "Introduction," in *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present* (New York: New York UP, 2016): 9; Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).

In this vein, I will first explore the formal characteristics that affect the telling of time in comics, focusing on three main features: sequence/series, simultaneity, and retroactive signification. Each of these three formal characteristics prioritizes different relationships to time and history, even while they operate on the level of the comics page all at once. The first, sequence/series, is by far the most often explored and is used to make sense of linear narrative progression in comics. However, simultaneity and retroactive signification complicate that same approach to linear narrative temporality through a reorientation of the narrative and the telling of time. In order to understand the radical potential of comics, we must first understand how each of these formal characteristics operates in even the most narratively straightforward of comics.

Next, I explore a more experimental comics project in Richard McGuire's 2015 *Here*. McGuire's comic upends normative narrative progression and foregrounds cross-temporal connections in a given space. However, approaching this text through the lens of historical dissidence, which I argue relies on the inherent queerness or otherness of the form of comics, highlights the ways in which the comic's form further destabilizes larger structures of domination, such as colonialism or anthropocentrism.

Finally, I turn to a now canonical name in the world of comics, Art Spiegelman, and his 2004 collection *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Spiegelman's experimental re-telling of his experience during the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center has been explored largely through the vein of trauma studies. However, I will focus on Spiegelman's use of early comics and other pulp ephemera to argue that *No Towers* is itself a metacritical commentary on both comics and history. That is, in a less straightforward way than *Here*, *No Towers* highlights the historical dissidence of comics while also collapsing dominant ways of telling history. Spiegelman shows that, in order to deconstruct large, oppressive structures like the nation or

racism, we must first explore various approaches to the telling of history. He can do so in *No Towers* through a more circuitous approach reliant on the inherent historical dissidence of comics form.

The Formal Characteristics of Comics Time

      In order to adequately explore the various formal techniques in comics used to tell time, I will anchor the discussion in a single example from Winsor McCay's newspaper comic *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. McCay's comic tells of the adventures of Nemo as he enters a dream world each night, going on adventures to see King Morpheus and to explore various fantastical locales with his companions Imp and Flip. The focus on this section will be a strip from September 9, 1907 as Nemo and Imp flee giants and stumble into a cityscape reminiscent of New York (Figure 1). As giants in this city, Nemo and Imp must climb from atop a building as a message flashes on the side of a nearby building announcing a reward for information of the whereabouts of Little Nemo, signed by King Morpheus. Once down the buildings Nemo and Imp go to the nearby river just in time to see Flip, who is fleeing from the giants, running through the city knocking down buildings as he goes. At that time Nemo is awoken by his mother who swore she called to him to wake him multiple times.

      Before moving into an explanation of the three relevant formal characteristics of comics mentioned above, I must first address a foundational formal element of comics as it relates to temporality: the panel itself. Some comics theorists have argued that the panel is a frozen moment in time. However, I align myself with Hannah Miodrag here, who notes that the panel is

not a moment in time, but a compression of multiple moments into a single panel.[8] For example, in the first panel of this strip from *Little Nemo*, Nemo says to Imp, "They are looking for us! We must get down from here!" The duration of those sentences alone makes the panel signify more than a single temporal moment. However, Nemo's declaration only makes sense if we assume that he has read the message being projected on the side of the adjacent building— "Nine trillion dollars for information leading to the where abouts [sic] of Little Nemo. King Morpheus." The panel then actually represents even more specific moments, those that make up the time it takes for Nemo to read the message and then make his claim to Imp.

Most panels in comics work in this way, depicting multiple temporal moments compressed in a single panel. This formal quirk of comics is precisely why the term "frame" does not apply so well as "panel." A frame, in terms of art, often recalls the frames around a painting or the frames in a reel of film. These frames do depict frozen moments in time. While a painting can make one think of the before and after, it is not often the focus of the medium. Further, while film is interested in the before and after, this is only done through a projector which puts all those specific frames in motion. The frames themselves do not depict multiple moments. Thus, in comics, we might instead think of panels as blocks of time compressed together which are made even more lucid in a sequence.

The middle row of panels in this specific *Little Nemo* strip shows Nemo and Imp scaling down various large buildings. Their movement down the building and onto the city street takes place across three images in the center of the page: one of them beginning their descent from the top of a white building, another of them hanging further down on that white building, and a third of them on different city blocks poking their heads around a yellow and red building. According

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[8] Hannah Miodrag, *Comics and Language: Reimagining Critical Discourse on the Form* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2013): 147.

to Barbara Postema[9], comics do not create action but only imply it. The implication of action, that is, the implied movement and the passage of time is clear enough in this example; readers complete these actions by connecting this sequence of images. As practitioner-theorist Will Eisner has noted, the passing of time in comics is told through the use of sequential panels which, once they are set in order, "becomes the criterion by which to judge the illusion of time."[10] The passage of time in the sequence comes here, as is often the case, through the changing details of place and the changing positions of recurring characters.

Figure 1: Little Nemo in Slumberland, *September 9, 1907*

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[9] Barbara Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments* (Rochester: RIT Press, 2013): 58.
[10] Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 26.

Beyond his expansion of Eisner's focus on "sequential art" as a definitional descriptor for comics,[11] Scott McCloud notes that the sequence of comics panels breaks both time and space "offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments."[12] He then draws attention to the gutter, the blank space between the panels, where, he argues, readers fill in a perceived action to make sense of the juxtaposed panels, a process he calls closure (from gestalt psychology). He argues that "closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality." [13] Thus, for McCloud, the gutter becomes a place where readers project causality and create narrative progression.[14]

Using McCloud, we can connect these three panels by noting that between panels two and three Nemo and Imp have successfully climbed from the top of the building and scaled part of the way down that same building. The gap between these panels is relatively close. Nemo and Imp start atop a white building next to an orange building and, in panel three, are halfway down that same white building. This connection is clear because of the continuation of our primary characters and because of the slightly changed surrounding (the top of the white building is no longer visible; both visible buildings are the same colors). Thus, these panels create very little tension in our reading.[15] The relationship between panels three and four is less clear. Suddenly, Nemo and Imp are on the ground but are standing on separate city blocks. The panels then require that we conceptualize why this difference might be given that, in the previous panel, they

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[11] McCloud defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (8). This broad definition of comics allows McCloud to claim comics forebears in Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Bayeux Tapestry, or depictions of the trials of saints from the Middle Ages.

[12] McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 67.

[13] Ibid.

[14] McCloud takes this claim further, noting that even with two seemingly unconnected panels, what he calls a non sequitur transition, the reader tries to read a connection and so create narrative progression. For McCloud, then, it all comes back to creating a narrative progression in comics.

[15] I am borrowing the term tension from Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*.

were climbing down the same side of a building and should have, theoretically, ended up in the same street. The sequential relationship then creates a gap in this panel that we might not be able to fully reconcile, thus creating narrative tension.

It is important to take note here of the difference between sequence and series, which are mutually constitutive notions in discussions of comics form. Both Hatfield and Postema have noted that sequence as it is utilized by Eisner and McCloud is perhaps a misnomer given that a sequence often describes something without gaps. Hatfield argues that what we actually see on the comics page is a series, what he also calls the breakdown, a visual juxtaposition of unconnected images.[16] A sequence then becomes the connected depiction of action across time that the reader creates in the practice of reading a comic, in the practice of closure, we might say. It is important to differentiate between the way that time actually shows up on the pages of comics—fragmented and occasionally unclear—and the ways in which readers might experience comics—as a unified flow of time creating a narrative progression for the characters involved. We might consider this the hermeneutics of comics interpretation.

The differentiation between sequence and series is clearest in our example of the *Little Nemo* strip in between panels three and four. As noted above, the narrative gap between these panels is larger because of the positionality of characters relative to their placement in the previous panel. However, even though this series is unconnected and operates on a larger gap that creates more narrative tension than between, for example, panels two and three, we can still connect these panels cognitively. That is, we can still make sense of a cohesive narrative depicting Nemo and the Imp moving through the city as they try to find their way to the palace.

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[16] Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*, 41.

However, the tension created in this moment shows how comics relationship with sequential time is often messier than some comics studies critics might note.

Temporality in comics is further complicated through a second formal characteristic: simultaneity. Many scholars focus on the importance of sequentiality, often at the expense of simultaneity, which Miodrag argues is "what truly distinguishes comics from other narratives."[17] Simultaneity describes the ability to see multiple temporal moments all at once on the comics page simply because the form focuses on depicting two-dimensional representations of temporal blocks, often enclosed by a border. Thus, in many ways, even the most conservative of comics, like conventional four-panel newspaper strips, constantly complicate linear temporality through their representation of action simultaneously.

While the linear story offered in this *Little Nemo* strip in terms of sequence is relatively straightforward, an eye towards simultaneity makes the sequential reading much more difficult to parse. The page creates what appears to be a single view of a cityscape that is fragmented across the panels. The top of the page shows the tops of the buildings and the bottom of the page shows their bases, the city streets, and the nearby river. Therefore, this specific strip can be read both as a sequence of temporal blocks in panels and as a representation of a single skyline, irrespective of temporality.

Simultaneity is, of course, complicated by the repetition of the primary characters, the changes of which help to also depict that movement of time. Yet, simultaneity also allows us to see various blocks of time on the page all at once. The simultaneity inherent in comics form then creates a formal non-linearity, even in the face of the narrative linear sequence. This strip operates on both linear and nonlinear time. Because the simultaneity of the full page presents us

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[17] Miodrag, *Comics and Language*, 12.

with a representation of a single skyline, we might note the tension created by the appearance of

Flip in the final panel as he demolishes the buildings in his way. He is heading toward Nemo and

Imp we see on the ground in that same panel, but also toward the building the Nemo and Imp in

the first panel are now precariously perched upon. While narrative linearity provides us with one

reading, the inherent simultaneity of the comics page highlights a tension between temporalities

that can deconstruct a singular approach to the medium.

The final formal characteristic of comics central to this study is what many have called

retroactive signification, which focuses on how a panel comes to explain or fill in gaps that

occurred previously in the comic. For instance, in the *Little Nemo* strip we can infer the limited

action between panels two and three because of the colors of both visible buildings. While this

might not register the first time one sees panel three, a simple look back at panel two will fill in

that small gap and relieve the narrative tension. A similar approach can be taken with panels

three and four. The building Nemo is in front of is a similar shade of orange as the building in

both panels two and three. By making these retroactive connections between panels, we might

note that after climbing down to the road, Nemo continued alongside that orange building to look

out onto the street. Making these connections requires that we go back to the previous panels for

context clues, even if unconsciously. After all, our point of view in panel four has shifted to the

other side of the street, making only the corner of the white building Nemo and Imp climbed

down visible over Nemo's head.

Postema notes that the simultaneity and sequentiality of a comic is important for

retroactive signification because, in order to understand and adequately project causality into the

gutter, a reader must take part in "a continual weaving back and forth." Thus, "the reader first

'skips over' the gutter to look at the next panel, and then mentally goes into the gutter to fill in

the actions, events, or transitions that took place in the gap between the panels."[18] The weaving

of retroactive signification relies on temporal instability precisely because the reader must be

consistently moving between the past and the present to make any sense of the narrative. If the

gutter is the location on the page where a reader "projects causality," then retroactive

signification is the process wherein the reader balances between thinking about the sequence and

the simultaneity of the panels to make sense of that causality. The temporality of the narrative

becomes an amalgamation of fragments spread across the temporal register.

The form of comics itself is predicated on the use of gaps or fragments, in time as well as

space. As Jared Gardner explains, comics are grounded in various discontinuities; in "the

passage from one frame to the next, the gutter intervenes, and the message is transformed in

countless ways by the syndicated act of millions of readers filling in the gaps between."[19] The

very concept of the sequence/series requires missing information, thus creating a fragmented

whole. Simultaneity and retroactive signification complicate this even more by highlighting non-

linearity in the form of comics and in the reading of comics, respectively. While these difficulties

are visible in a relatively straightforward comic, like that of *Little Nemo* above, some comics

creators lean into these formal complexities inherent in the comics form. It is to one of these

examples that I turn now: Richard McGuire's *Here*.

Here and the Complication of Dominant Temporalities

Toward the end of Richard McGuire's 2014 *Here*, a comic that layers temporal moments

from across the span of history on a single page, McGuire depicts the meeting between a group

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[18] Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comics*, 66.
[19] Gardner, *Projections*, 27-28.

of Dutch colonists and a group of Indigenous leaders (Figure 2).[20] Over the course of a few

pages, Indigenous leaders give the colonists a gift, a bag of dirt, which prompts one of the

colonists to ask "Is this a joke?" The sentiment is not uncommon given colonial attitudes about

the "primitiveness" and "backwardness" of the Indigenous peoples of North America. The

importance of land within an Indigenous worldview, and the gift of a part of Lenapehoking—the

traditional land of the Lenape—is a gesture of respect, goodwill, and reverence to this place of

their ancestors. Yet, the colonist's question, in effect, highlights the focus on the temporal at the

core of colonialism, which centers on the dichotomy of the modern and civilized against the not-

yet-modern and not-yet-civilized. Indigenous communities become the joke to colonists that

focus on a colonial temporality. Colonial powers rely on notions of progress and, relatedly,

progressive temporality. Time must be both linear and causative, which marks the colonizer as

civilized and the colonized in need of education and progress away from primitivity.

And yet, *Here* does not offer that linearity so desired in western or normative

worldviews, embodied by the colonists themselves. Rather, *Here* eschews linear temporality in

order to think across moments in time. Most of the comic is made up of two-page spreads that

depict the interior corner of a living room in a suburban New Jersey home. Each two-page spread

in *Here* represents the entire visual field—the space that readers can see, framed by the ends of

the pages; the room is represented isometrically, making the spine of the book double as the

actual corner of the room with an equal amount of wall space on either side. However, these

depictions change drastically; throughout the comic the illustrations show that same space

throughout time, from years as diverse as 500,000 BCE to 22,175 AD. Each panel is dated in the

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[20] While the tribal affiliation in this instance is unclear, there are other Indigenous characters appearing throughout *Here* that speak Lenape. Thus, we might assume these leaders are an extension of that Nation. Richard McGuire, *Here* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014).

upper left corner. The comic further obfuscates linear understandings of temporality and history

by superimposing panels from other moments in time, also dated, on top of these host panels.

Thus, one of *Here*'s central concerns, formally, is focused on the ability to represent divergent

moments in time as temporally co-present using comics form. As Thierry Groensteen notes, "In

blurring the chronology, McGuire proposes to the reader a story in pieces, that has neither tail

nor head, and which shies away from any totalization."[21]

Figure 2: Indigenous Leaders and Dutch Colonists in Here

Here foregrounds questions of temporality in comics form. That is, *Here* illustrates the

narrative construction of temporality precisely by ridding, or at least minimizing, narrative from

the text. The lack of sustained narrative draws attention to *Here*'s focus on temporal instability

and the exploration of space throughout time. In many ways, the project of *Here* highlights the

affordances of comics form in terms of spatiality and, specifically, temporality. While comics are

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[21] Groensteen, "Les Lieux Superposes de Richard McGuire," *Urgences* 32 (1991): 96. The translation from the French is my own.

often used to tell stories in normative narrative fashion (progressive, causative)[22], the form's

potential far outweighs this dominant strain.

In *Here*, sequentiality/series defines the introduction to the comic. *Here* opens with one

of these two-page spreads depicting the corner of a house in 2014, the same year the novel was

published (Figure 3)[23]. On this page, the title and McGuire's name appear just above the

fireplace. Opening *Here* this way contextualizes readers within not just the here that we see on

the page, but the now that is the date of the publication. The placement of the title over the

fireplace also introduces the protagonist of this story: the "here" of the title, this space. Upon

turning the page, we see the same room, still in 2014; however, while the room stood empty

before, there are now two bookshelves partially filled next to the fireplace with an open

cardboard box in front of them.[24] The sequence created here tells the possible story of a family

moving into this place, as we, the readers, are similarly invited to do for the story to come.[25] The

action of moving into the house is not what is depicted. Instead, the page turn, here playing the

role of the gutter, asks us to make a relational connection between the panels. However, because

this is only a sequence of two, this transition carries more narrative tension because it can signify

in multiple ways. The particularity of the message in a sequence can often be clarified with more

information.

In the third two-page spread the room has changed from a modern-looking room with a

white ceiling, green walls, and a brown floor in 2014, to a garishly pink-toned room (Figure 4).[26]

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[22] Gardner notes that this was not as dominantly the case in comics before 1930. Prior to that time, comics were often working against a novelistic tradition, an oppositional stance embodied in the non-continuous seriality of something like George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*. Gardner, *Projections*, 26-27.
[23] McGuire, *Here*, n.p.
[24] Ibid., n.p.
[25] This reading focused on the inside/outside binary is also clear on the cover of the book, which is of a window. Looking at the cover, we are positioned as outside the text and thus outside the house. We have to open the book to move within either.
[26] Ibid., n.p.

Each surface of the room, all furniture included, are colored varying hues of pink or maroon. Standing in the center of the room is a white and pink baby playpen. This new page is labeled 1957, bringing the comic back in time 57 years.[27] The comic then depicts scenes in 1942, 2007, and then returns to 1957, where we encounter the first human of the story (Figure 5). A woman, in a dress yet another shade of pink, stands with her back to us asking "Hmm…Now why did I come in here again?" In these six two-page spreads, readers are slowly introduced to how this comic will work; McGuire offers two spreads that sequentially connect, grounding the text in dominant comics narrative techniques, before upending these same techniques by moving the narrative across time while remaining spatially stabilized. Thus, even in the beginning of this comic, as elsewhere throughout the comic, McGuire highlights the multiple ways sequence/series can be mobilized, both as a way of connecting fragmented temporal blocks to create a linear narrative and as a way of showing a temporality that is connected not by linearity, but by the place represented.
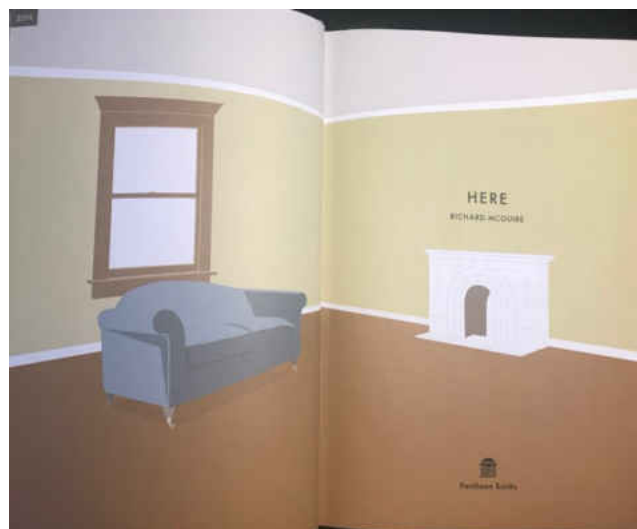
Figure 3: Opening Spread in Here

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[27] Ibid., n.p.

Figure 4: An Early Page in Here

Figure 5: The First Superimposition in Here

Simultaneity on the comics page is a fundamental aspect to the formal experiment of *Here* that, along with sequence/series, complicates dominant approaches to temporality itself. On the sixth two-page spread of *Here* readers first encounter the use of superimposed panels, or insets, and thus, literally, superimposed moments. As Thierry Groensteen notes, "To enclose the panel is to enclose a fragment of space-time belonging to the diegesis."[28] The block of time depicted in the panel is placed in juxtaposition to other temporal blocks on the singular plane of the page. At the same time that readers are introduced to the first human in the narrative, they are also introduced to a black cat from 1999. This panel shows where this cat will be within this visual field 42 years from the time that the woman tries to remember why she came into the room. The difference in these panels is temporal only. The superimposition marks a shared space across time.

On the next page, the background panel is now a bare, frigid forest in the winter months of 1623, before the house was built. Layered onto this image is the now silent woman in a small panel, still labeled 1957, as well as the cat from 1999, though now the cat is licking its paw and is sitting slightly further to the right than it appeared on the previous page, sequentially indicating movement (Figure 6).[29] Indeed, on the following page, the panel of the cat appears once more, but the right half is cut off the side of the page to indicate that the cat is moving beyond the visual field, beyond the "here." In less than ten pages, then, McGuire slowly introduces the way this comic will function, presenting the layering of temporal moments, his assemblage of times, his visualization of the co-presence of moments. Throughout the comic, readers are asked to think about connections across distinct moments in time. *Here* makes clear the importance of simultaneity in comics form, perhaps more so than more conventional uses of

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[28] Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, 40.
[29] McGuire, *Here*, n.p.

the form. Without the fundamental aspect of simultaneity, *Here* could not as adequately function to question a singular temporality.

In *Here*, again, retroactive signification is an even more involved process because the sequence, when there is one, often relies on a page turn to play the part of the gutter. Therefore, in order to notice any perceivable movement in the cat, for instance, one might have to flip back and forth physically in order for any image of the cat to retroactively signify movement. Many of the sequences require some form of retroactive signification to make sense of movement, action, or dialogue. For instance, in the middle of the book is a sequence of a man and woman sitting down to a picnic in 1870. As the woman lays out a blanket, the man sets up his equipment so that he can paint the countryside. In order to perceive motion, the reader must keep in mind previous panels while "reading" the current one for that panel to correctly signify.

Here's representation of co-present moments, a device at once modernist (in the fragmentation of time) and postmodern (in the deconstruction of the grand narrative of historical time) reproduces what Georgina Born describes as "the plural temporalities in operation both in human and nonhuman life and in cultural production."[30] In fact, *Here*'s formal equalization of human and non-human lives is one way we can begin to understand how the comic works against normative conceptions of linear temporality. While we see and read the words of a woman first, it is in conjunction with the black cat from 42 years later. Further, the cat is shown in progressive movement out of the visual field of the comic, while the woman simply disappears from the story when a panel from 1989 is superimposed over where she was on prior pages. However, comics' formal concerns reinforce that we cannot privilege either the woman or the cat. Because

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[30] Georgina Born, "Making Time: Temporality, History, and the Cultural Object," *New Literary History* 46, no. 3 (2015): 365.

these moments are made co-present, we first see a cat and a woman *simultaneously* in the book.[31]

The woman gets the first line of dialogue, while the cat gets the first perceivable movement.

Here formally encourages looking beyond the human as central to the presented narrative.

Figure 6: 1623, 1957, and 1999 Simultaneously in Here

The de-centering of the human is most clearly present throughout *Here* as it often moves

beyond the temporal frames of human history. McGuire engages with the fact that the earth

existed before humanity and will continue after humanity. In de-centering the human, McGuire

more forcefully pushes against conventional ways humans make sense of time and of history.

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[31] Groensteen notes that connections between panels happen in two dimensions: synchronically, relying on "the co-presence of panels on the surface of the same page," and diachronically, "that of the reading" from left to right. Thus, in comics, simultaneity across time is always a concern of the network of the comics page, what Groensteen calls the arthrology. Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, 147.

Even from the start of *Here*, readers cannot rely on diachronic temporal narrative development as conventionally experienced. As Laura Moncion notes, *Here* calls into question our linear narrativization of history,[32] which, for this comic, is both a human creation and a limited viewpoint.[33]

In a similar way, *Here* also works to de-center Euro-American notions of temporality and historical progression, Eurochronology. In another appearance of Indigenous characters, the association between temporal moments is tangled given the multiple ways we can associate the images to make meaning. In one panel, an Indigenous man and a woman are lying on the ground in the forest in 1609. This panel is superimposed on a two-page spread from 1986 which shows a woman and her dog sleeping on the couch as someone rings her doorbell. The Indigenous man, in 1609, says "I heard something."[34] We can read this page in two ways. First, we can contextualize the Indigenous man's declaration and note that there is probably something or someone else in those woods in 1609, maybe even colonizers themselves as Michael Chaney notes.[35] This reading would focus less on simultaneity or sequentiality in an effort to contextualize the panel in its specific historically represented moment. However, we could also decontextualize the moment and read it as a response to the ringing doorbell. This reading would require that we lean into the radical possibilities of the comics form, specifically those wrought by the simultaneity of the panels on the page, which seems to be a focus of McGuire's work overall. Moncion argues that, once we learn that those individuals ringing the doorbell are

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[32] Moncion, "Time Frames: Graphic Narrative and Historiography in Richard McGuire's Here," *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies/Revue D'études Interculturelle de L'image* 7, no. 2 (2016): 200.

[33] Within the larger project of *Here*, there are moments of linear temporal narrativization. However, this does not discount the ways in which the project questions temporal linearity and, if nothing else, further highlights the ways in which humans have become reliant upon the linearity of history.

[34] When Indigenous characters speak, they do so in Lenape, but McGuire has included English translations as subtitles in the panel.

[35] Chaney, *Reading Lessons in Seeing: Mirrors, Masks, and Mazes in the Autobiographical Graphic Novel* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2016): 185.

archaeologists studying the history of this site and of "Native American culture," these moments "are brought into relation, then distanced again as one is deemed historical—that is, an object of professional historical study lifted out of the relational flux of time and fixed along a linear historicist timeline."[36] However, given the other appearances of Indigenous characters, which bring attention to European misunderstandings of Native communities and traditions, *Here* frames the possible decolonization of time. If we center this latter reading, letting comics form operate in the non-normative way it does, Indigenous characters are no longer relegated to the past, to backwardness, to primitiveness, but are communities that exist across temporal moments and beyond the confines of Euro-American colonialism, including the imposition of Euro-American temporalities and historical understandings.

Thus, *Here* foregrounds and makes formally visible, in two ways, the importance of rethinking our relationship to time and to history: by de-centering the human and calling into question dominant understandings of history that tend to ostracize the Other, here the Indigenous Other. *Here*'s focus on de-centering the human further highlights the ways time and history exist beyond the human subject, unable to be contained by the thoughts and powers of humans. *Here*, and even the comic form more broadly, questions a solid, stable approach to western, Euro-American histories. *Here* makes clear that a rethinking of history would necessarily include a rethinking of related oppressive structures. Sustained engagement with another text, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, makes this important point even clearer.

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[36] Moncion, "Time Frames," 209.

Historical Dissidence from Page to Collection

  In the Shadow of No Towers is a 2004 collection composed by Art Spiegelman, the

comics creator infamous for his two-part graphic narrative *Maus* detailing the experiences of his

parents during the Holocaust and his struggles with writing such a story. *No Towers* depicts

Spiegelman's experiences immediately following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade

Center towers, close to where Spiegelman lived and where his daughter went to school. As

Spiegelman notes in the aptly named "The Sky is Falling!" introduction to *No Towers*, "["No

Towers"] was originally going to be a weekly series, but many of the pages took me at least five

weeks to complete, so I missed even my monthly deadlines."[37] "No Towers" was originally

published in both European and American venues between 2001 and 2003, including the German

broadsheet newspaper *Die Zeit*, the size of which, Spiegelman notes, "seemed perfect for

oversized skyscrapers and outsized events."[38] After the publication of each page over the course

of two years, Spiegelman collected them all along with an introduction, an essay about the

importance of early twentieth century comic strips for Spiegelman, and seven plate reproductions

of early twentieth century comics into what become *No Towers*. The collection is printed on

broadsheet sized (9.4 x 14 in.), thick cardboard paper that must be turned on its side to be read.[39]

  In Spiegelman's essay "The Comic Supplement," which separates his own comic strips

from the reproductions of seven early twentieth-century strips that make up the latter half of the

collection, Spiegelman notes that after the 9/11 attacks many individuals found solace in poetry.

Yet, the same forms that helped others work through the trauma did not work for Spiegelman

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[37] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, n.p.
[38] Other publication venues included *The Forward*, *Courrier International*, *The London Review of Book*, *Internazionale*, *The L.A. Weekly*, *The Chicago Weekly*, and *World War Three Illustrated*. Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers, n.p.*
[39] We might think of the form of *No Towers* as itself dissident. It is a physical volume that resists marketing and standard consumption practices by rejecting common sizes and paper type of book publication.

himself. Rather, Spiegelman relied on this "vital, unpretentious ephemera" that he describes as being "made with so much skill and verve but never intended to last past the day they appeared in the newspaper [which] gave them poignancy; they were just right for an end-of-the-world moment."[40] Spiegelman came to rely on these comic strips both personally and artistically. The expected ephemerality of the early twentieth century comic strips becomes a central facet of their poignancy in the context of a trauma more than a century later. As Kristiaan Versluys notes, "the cartoon figures account for a lasting and major disruption in the texture of the tale. They break the horizon of expectation both temporally and stylistically: temporally because they go back a century, and stylistically because they are goofy in a tragic context."[41] Along with the ways these strips work to tell the traumatic story of 9/11, their use in such an anachronistic moment emphasizes their out of placeness. Their appearance in *No Towers* to tell a distinctly twenty-first-century story highlights the malleability of the telling of history and the ways in which comics can formally and stylistically complicate the representation of time. After all, through *No Towers*, Spiegelman makes the, perhaps surprising, claim that comics are themselves history.

Before continuing, it is important to note that central to Spiegelman's oeuvre is the concept of the traumatic, whether in stories of historical familial trauma, as in *Maus*, or personal trauma, as in his strip "Prisoner on Hell Planet" (later included in *Maus*) or other selections from *Breakdowns*. In a 2008 interview, Spiegelman notes of *No Towers:*

"That this was a moment where whatever was going on in my own personal trajectory was like running smack into something way bigger than me, like, in this case, a hundred and ten stories high, that was tumbling down around me, and it did bring my father's and

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[40] Ibid., n.p.
[41] Versluys, "Art Spiegelman's In the Shadow of No Towers: 9-11 and the Representation of Trauma," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006): 991.

mother's experiences to mind. They're not of the same dimension, but inevitably,

because of my background, those things did conflate."[42]

Throughout the collection, there are moments where the mouse representations from *Maus*

reappear as Spiegelman is trying to work out his own understanding of the trauma of his

experience in Manhattan on 9/11. Thus, Spiegelman creates a sort of relational narrative between

the traumas of his past and the traumas of his present; "those things did conflate."

Scholarship on *In the Shadow of No Towers* follows in the wake of trauma studies, often

focusing on the ways Spiegelman represents trauma. For instance, Hillary Chute argues that *No*

Towers "reflects the traumatic temporality Spiegelman experienced after 9/11, in which a

normative, ongoing sense of time stopped or shattered," which she attributes at least partially to

the seriality of the strip appearing at irregular intervals.[43] Similarly, Versluys reads the collection

as an indication of "how Spiegelman interprets history as a concatenation of shocks, as a never-

ending series of wounds that will not heal and keep festering."[44] Others have argued similarly.[45]

Yet, all of these articles focus on how, throughout *No Towers*, language is marked as inadequate

for explaining the traumatic experiences of 9/11. This line of reasoning and reading is neither

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[42] Chute, *Outside the Box: Interviews with Contemporary Cartoonists* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014): 243–244.

[43] Chute, "Temporality and Seriality in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 17, no. 2 (2007): 230.

[44] Versluys, "Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*," 982.

[45] See, Jennifer Cho, "Touching Pasts *In the Shadow of No Towers*: 9/11 and Art Spiegelman's Comix of Memory," in *The Popular Avant-Garde*, ed. Renee M. Silverman (Boston: Brill, 2015); Philip Smith, "Spiegelman Studies Part 2 of 2: *Breakdowns*, *No Towers*, and the Rest of the Canon," *Literature Compass* 12, no. 10 (2015); Chute, *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere*; Laura Beadling, "Race, History, and Intertextuality in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*" in *Graphic History: Essays on Graphic Novels And/As History*, ed. Richar Iadonisi (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); Davida Pines, "History, Memory, and Trauma," in *Drawing from Life*, ed. Jane Tolmie (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2013); Marianne Hirsch, "Editor's Column: Collateral Damage," *PMLA* 119, no. 5 (2004); Martha Kuhlman, "The Traumatic Temporality of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 5 (2007); Lopamudra Basu, "The Graphic Memoir in a State of Exception," in *Drawing from Life*, ed. Jane Tolmie (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2013);Karen Espiritu, "'Putting Grief into Boxes': Trauma and the Crisis of Democracy in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 28, no. 2 (2006); Sven Cvek, *Towering Figures: Reading the 9/11 Archive* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011); Katalin Orbán, "Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*," *Representations* 97, no. 1 (2007).

new nor unexpected. As Chute, among others, notes, Spiegelman brought modernist

experimentation into comics, especially through his use of fractured narratives and traumatic

representations of time.[46] With that modernist experimentation, Spiegelman showed a

preoccupation with the limits of language, specifically as it relates to traumatic experiences of

war, death, and "end of the world moments." In many ways, Spiegelman's use of form in *No*

Towers is like that of Hemingway's *In Our Time* or Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, through

both non-linear temporal narrative or traumatized narrative form.

However, the primary focus on trauma has overlooked some of the other important

moves throughout *No Towers* in formal terms. In what remains of this chapter, I will highlight

some of the ways that the collection foregrounds non-normative temporalities, focusing first on

Spiegelman's own comics and then exploring his inclusion of early comics, which I argue

accentuates many of these questions about dominant frames of time and history. Finally, I will

explore the makeup of the collection as a whole with these questions of form and temporality in

mind. The collection's formal makeup emphasizes Spiegelman's non-normative temporality and

further reconsiders larger oppressive structures like the nation and, relatedly, racism, both of

which tie to but also extend beyond the specific historical moment of 9/11 that is the focus of the

collection.

Spiegelman's reliance on non-normative temporality is clear even from the first

illustration, which includes at least seven different strips of panels that themselves connect

narratively according to dominant, sequential conventions of comics storytelling and some of

which are even given their own subtitles (Figure 7). At the top of this first illustration is "The

New Normal," a four-panel strip showing a family sleeping or watching TV on the couch with a

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[46] Chute, "Temporality and Seriality," 228.

calendar behind them reading "Sept. 10." The second panel shows the same family on "Sept. 11" with cartoonishly fearful looks on their faces, their hair literally standing on end. The final panel depicts them on what we can assume to be another day, though precisely which is unclear because the calendar behind them has been replaced with an American flag. They are now back to calmly watching TV or sleeping, though their hair is still standing on end. The fourth panel on the top of this first illustration is quite different. Set up parallel to the previous panels is an American flag, over which is a superimposed panel positioned at a slant. This panel depicts the burning bones of one of the towers after it has fallen, and the dialogue box reads, "Synopsis: In our last episode, as you might remember, the world ended…"[47] Even in this first row of panels, the collection calls into question linear narrative temporality.

While the sequence of the first two panels of "The New Normal" set us up to read the text linearly and in a succession of days, the third panel begins to upend those expectations by divorcing the panel from any marker of temporal specificity. The only marker we have is the characters' hair standing on end, which simply tells us this is sometime after the previous panel, with no indication of precisely when. Further, the replacement of the calendar with the American flag highlights the importance of the national narrative instead of calendrical time. National temporality homogenizes experience, especially in the wake of national trauma and the attendant racial fear-mongering around 9/11. Finally, the last panel in this row, given the "synopsis," upends our comprehension of exactly when in the narrative we are through the use of a common generic tool in weeklies or monthlies, especially those involving superheroes. By invoking a "last episode," Spiegelman calls our attention to the fact that there is no "last episode" in this book. Of course, the fact that we begin with the flaming bones of the tower *after* it has already

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[47] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*.

fallen clues us into the temporal instability of the beginning of this comic. Spiegelman motions towards a continuation of a serial sequence that does not exist. The moment of this panel exists in stark contrast with the generic tool of cross-issue continuity it is invoking, and thus prepares us for temporal instability.

Figure 7: The Opening Illustration of In the Shadow of No Towers

While this first example is not one explicitly tied to early comics or pulp ephemera, it does highlight the historical dissidence of the form, which Spiegelman foregrounds in the collection. The use of early comics and other pop culture ephemera further emphasizes the importance of non-normative temporalities throughout the collection. In her exploration of the use of early comic strips in *No Towers*, Nicole Stamant argues that *No Towers* itself becomes a collection, an archive. She notes that Spiegelman has created his own "collaborative text housing two different yet parallel collections."[48] In this argument, she follows Jared Gardner, who writes, "we can see the collection as fundamentally an autobiographical narrative, one told by the arrangement of texts and images from the past to tell a story to the present...the comic form is the ideal space for precisely this kind of collaborative archival work."[49] For Stamant, Spiegelman's creation of a large, sturdy book, which she describes as "architecturally sound," participates in collecting and preserving these ephemera.[50] Yet, Spiegelman's use of comic strips does not work in the autobiographical frame that Gardner describes and to which Stamant ascribes. Instead of reading *No Towers* as a collection of various ephemera "from the past to tell a story *to* the present," we must note that it is a collection of past materials to tell the story *of* the present. In many ways, this approach ties the collection even more explicitly to questions of autobiography. While the difference seems minor, it should reorient our approach to the ways in which these ephemera signify across history. Even while Spiegelman works to tell the story *of* the present, he is continually complicating that present moment through a weaving back and forth in time. As much of the scholarship has noted, the dominant concern of *No Towers* is the story of 9/11, and

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[48]Nicole Stamant, "Collections of 'Old Comic Strips' in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*," *South Central Review* 32, no. 3 (2005): 74.

[49] Jared Gardner, "Archives, Collectors, and the New Media Work of Comics," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006): 801.

[50] Stamant, "Collections of 'Old Comic Strips'," 78.

yet the significations carried through Spiegelman's use of comic strips and pop culture artifacts marks the collection as specifically interested in the story of history, and especially our reliance on progressive, causative history which gives rise to structures like the nation and racism.

Figure 8: "Gott in Himmel!"

The difficulties inherent in the collection are made clearer in the multiple places where Spiegelman integrates the characters of early comics into his own stories about 9/11. The use of one strip in particular, *The Katzenjammer Kids*, blatantly shows how using these comic strip characters in a decontextualized story offers a compounded example of the historical dissidence of comics form. *The Katzenjammer Kids* had one of the longest runs in comics history, beginning in 1897 by creator Rudolph Dirks and finishing in 2006. The strip tells of the antics of Hans and Fritz as they rebel against the authority of Mama Katzenjammer, der Captain, and der Inspector.

However, Spiegelman often uses these characters decontextually. For instance, in the second illustration, Spiegelman describes the morning of the attacks (Figure 8). He and his wife, cartoonist and editor François Mouly, are walking down the block when "they heard the crash behind them."[51] He notes that, while they did not see the plane hit the towers, "He did see the face of the woman heading south...so he and his wife, blasé New Yorkers, deigned to turn around." In this comic strip, Spiegelman focuses one panel directly on the face of the woman that he and François see, giving us their perspective. The woman in the panel is not another "blasé New Yorker" like Spiegelman and Mouly, but Mama Katzenjammer.

Spiegelman's use of Mama Katzenjammer in between two panels, one just before the first plane hit and one of Spiegelman and Mouly's first glance at the smoking tower, highlights the simultaneous practice of decontextualization and contextualization, here through sequentiality. While readers know we are in the context of 9/11, that panel of Mama Katzenjammer looking terrified and shouting "Gott in himmel!" both brings the past into the present and brings the present into the past. This two-way anachronism continues in this illustration as we see the towers perched atop the heads of Hans and Fritz; they become the "Tower Twins." These characters become synonymous with anachrony, embodying the past as present and the present as past. As Spiegelman notes, "I couldn't help it, I started channeling Mama Katzenjammer and the towers started being Tower Twins, the Katzenjammer Kids. And I couldn't understand it, but I couldn't avoid it."[52]

Similarly, in the next illustration, Spiegelman continues to tell the story of himself and Mouly as they try to find their daughter, Nadja, at her high school near the base of the World

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[51] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, 2.
[52] Spiegelman, "Ephemera vs. the Apocalypse," *Indy Magazine*, 2004, http://web.archive.org/web/20080615145704/http://64.23.98.142/indy/autmn_2004/spiegelman_ephemera/index.html.

Trade Center towers. However, halfway through the strip a Topps Gum *Mars Attacks* postcard titled "Washington in Flames" as well as a mock poster of two children in gas masks warning "NYC to Kids: *Don't Breathe*!" are superimposed over the comic itself (Figure 9). These two divergences from the comics medium, and especially divergences focused on media popular in specific moments of time, collapses history in the comic, allowing *No Towers* to reach backwards and pull the past into the present. The Topps Gum card embodies the rise of futuristic science fiction throughout the twentieth century as well as questions surrounding the space race and the charting of unknown territory on the moon. Further, the poster, which the lower comic shows is being held by Spiegelman's mouse persona popularized in *Maus*, is wrapped within concerns of transtemporal warfare. Whether recalling the use of gas masks in World War I, World War II, the Cold War, or during the 9/11 attacks and the "War on Terror," Spiegelman highlights the ways in which certain artifacts speak to concerns across historical moments, thus obscuring any historical specificity, which always gives preference to only one point of view.

By interrupting the sequence with these ephemera, Spiegelman makes the implicit claim that any moment in time is marked by both the past and the future. In much the same way that superimposed panels were important in McGuire's *Here*, the superimposition of the comics panels with these cultural artifacts denotes connections across multiple temporalities and the idea that comics form can, in a process of gathering, complicate a single telling of history through transtemporal connections. Seeing the picture of Washington in flames reminds us of the situation in New York while it covers the personal story of Spiegelman and Mouly. The sequence does not operate in the way we would expect, but through both simultaneity, which highlights all the smoke on the page, and retroactive signification, the superimpositions still tell the story of 9/11 even while they tell the story of various pasts and a science fictional future.

Figure 9: Transhistorical Superimposed Postcards in No Towers

The complexity inherent in the formal characteristics of comics time is also visible in the publication formats Spiegelman recalls throughout *No Towers*. Throughout the collection, Spiegelman metacritically combines two different production schedules popular for early twentieth-century newspaper comics. Each of his illustrations ran as a full-page comic in various publication venues prior to their collection, much like the Sunday comics supplement in

newspapers like the *New York Herald* or *Chicago Tribune*, many of which were also syndicated and ran in multiple venues. Each page of *No Towers* combines the Sunday page and the daily strip publication formats, the two most popular and lasting publication formats for newspaper comics in the first half of the twentieth century.[53] While the publication of the full-page comic mirrors the Sunday pages, the division of the page into separate, though connected, if only tangentially at times, strips recalls the daily strips themselves. By mixing multiple publication formats, Spiegelman uses early comics to collapse our ideas of sequentiality and simultaneity on the single comics page, offering us a page that connects in less clear ways and proposes a circuitous approach to the telling of time, and thus history, in the story of 9/11.

Spiegelman's recalling of the publication formats of early comics is further underlined if we look closely at the appearance of the World Trade Center towers themselves throughout the collection. From the opening through the ending, the towers are continually represented as whole, destroyed, or burning in a weaving of past and present. Rather than the reader weaving back in forth in a process of retroactive signification, the comic itself does so. As readers move through the collection, they are consistently thrown from the past to the present and back again, offering what Chute notes is a visualization of the fracturing of a normative sense of ongoing time.[54] The ability to continually represent the towers in these different stages at different moments comes from the original publication life of the illustrations in broadsheet newspapers, similar to the turn-of-the-century comics Spiegelman pulls from throughout the collection. Many turn-of-the-century newspaper comics did not rely on a continuous narrative structure to make sense of any particular strip. A continuous narrative would have mandated that readers never

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[53] For more information on the publication formats of early newspaper comics, see Pascal Lefèvre, "Newspaper Strips," in *The Routledge Companion to Comics*, ed. Frank Bramlett, Roy T. Cook, and Aaron Meskin (New York: Routledge, 2016).
[54] Chute, "Temporality and Seriality," 228.

miss an installment, which was not realistic and might lead to the cancellation of a strip. Thus, strips were able to tell stories that were connected, were often variations on the same theme, and were accessible regardless of which installment a reader first encountered. David Carrier calls this "narrative without development."[55] *No Towers* itself works in a similar way because of its early life as a serialized comic. The changing depictions of the towers highlights the complexities that newspaper serialization introduces to comics. Many of these comics often stand outside of temporality and only feign at telling a continued linear narrative, which is also true of most of *No Towers* as it balks at a single linear narrative timeline in favor of a nonlinear and non-teleological narrative.

Tending to these publication specificities should then draw our attention to the larger format of the collection of *No Towers*. In collecting the various contents, Spiegelman is placing them in a new publication format and thus a new temporal distribution. After all, if the rise of comics studies on the coattail of the 'graphic novel' makes anything clear, it is that our experience reading newspaper comic strips is not the same as reading a collection of comics in a single, bound book. Distribution signifies. Furthermore, the collection itself tells a different story than the strips appearing in international newspapers after 9/11. When looking at the entire collection, it becomes clear that the formal characteristics of comics time can operate beyond the level of the page, signifying at the level of the entire collection. The sequence of the collection, when viewed simultaneously, makes each piece signify in relation to each other piece in ways particular to this collection.

Within the inside cover of *No Towers*, Spiegelman reproduces the front cover of the turn-of-the-century newspaper *The World*, from September 11, 1901. The headline reads "President's

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[55] David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2000): 96.

Wound Reopened; Slight Change for Worse," referencing the wound of President William McKinley after he was shot by Leon Czolgosz. Superimposed upon this reproduction is the central image of the entire collection, which Spiegelman explains as "The pivotal image from my 9/11 morning—one that didn't get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of my eyelids several years later—was the image of the looming north tower's glowing bones just before it vaporized."[56] Around this image, in large yellow letters, is the title of the book and Spiegelman's own autograph. Following this first page is a two-page essay written by Spiegelman on the occasion of the collection and publication of *No Towers* by Pantheon; the essay is dated February 16, 2004, the same year the book was released, and, as I noted earlier, is called "The Sky Is Falling!" Following the introduction are the ten, broadsheet-sized comics created by Spiegelman himself, each punctuated with the dates of their composition, beginning on September 11, 2001 and continuing through to August 31, 2003. The latter half of the book is made up of what Spiegelman titles "The Comic Supplement." He begins this section of the collection with a two-page essay exploring turn-of-the-century newspaper comics to which he continually clung in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. To close the collection, Spiegelman reproduces seven broadsheet-sized plates of these early twentieth century comics, including titles like *The Kinder Kids*, *Foxy Grandpa*, *Happy Hooligan*, and *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, among others.[57]

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[56] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, n.p.
[57] These comics all relate stories that can be tied to the events or the aftermath of 9/11. These strips include early twentieth century depictions of New York (*The Kin-der-Kids*), fears of war or attack (*The War Scare in Hogan's Alley* and *The Upside-Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo*), questions of national pride (*Foxy Grandpa*), issues of racial tensions (*Happy Hooligan*), and the fear of collapsing buildings (*Little Nemo in Slumberland* and *Bringing Up Father*). The *Little Nemo in Slumberland* strip is the same used earlier in this chapter to explore the formal characteristic of comics time.

Thinking of the collection all at once—the cover of a newspaper in the beginning, followed by an essay reproduced in columns, the main comics pages, and then concluding with the comics supplement—creates a likeness between this collection and turn-of-the-century newspapers. Early twentieth century newspapers often had a similar layout, even if the content was less comics-based. Though Spiegelman focuses on comics throughout this collection, he adequately makes use of specific markers next to those comics to create a sequence that can signify in the world of newspapers and can thus recall the simultaneity in engagement with news that critic Benedict Anderson attributes to the building of nations.

In his influential book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson expands on Walter Benjamin's concept of "homogeneous, empty time." Anderson draws our attention to the development of the novel and the newspaper, which "made it possible to 'think' the nation" because, newspapers for example, created a sense of simultaneity between individuals across the nation, consuming the important national and global information of the day. Further, "empty, homogeneous time" is defined by the calendrical linearity of temporality for the narrative of the nation, which grows out of the day-to-day seemingly simultaneous consumption of daily news through the dissemination of national newspapers.[58] Thus, the nation can now rely on homogenous conceptions of time to craft a narrative of history and progress without having to contend with different conceptions of temporality. By reproducing the newspaper flyleaf and the comics supplement pages, *No Towers* brings us directly into conversation with this nation-building capacity of newspapers.

However, while *No Towers* does ask us to recall turn of the century newspapers, and thus works in conversation with Anderson's theory of "empty, homogeneous time," it does so with an

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[58] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006): 22–36.

eye always toward how comics complicate the argument that print can lead to the formation of a national consciousness. As noted above, the publication of newspaper comics worked along different temporal schemas because of issues like syndication. Further, the comics themselves were not defined by the date on the front of the newspaper, but instead worked outside the dominant frame of linear history. Though Spiegelman highlights newspapers in *No Towers*, his move shows the ways in which the nation is bisected by different temporalities, one linear and causative (as in newspapers), the other fragmented and circuitous (as with comics).

Spiegelman further evinces the ties between newspapers and the specific strain of nationalism following 9/11 in the eighth illustration. In the top strip, Spiegelman represents himself cheering, trying to show enthusiasm for the war that followed 9/11. He explains that he has "consumed 'news' till [his] brain aches" and that "the news confirms that I'm right to feel paranoid. My subconscious is drowning in newspaper headlines."[59] The underlying paranoia was a national focus following the attacks, constructing a singular history that lead to the attack on America by the racially backward, and thus terroristic, Muslim fundamentalists.[60] This same page begins with a depiction of many of the early comics characters being kicked by a turbaned and bearded goat, which is captioned "The blast that disintegrated those lower Manhattan towers also disinterred the ghosts of some Sunday supplement stars born on nearby Park Row about a century earlier. They came back to haunt one denizen of the neighborhood addled by all that's happened since."[61] The simultaneous appearance of these comics characters with the turbaned goat and the discussions of newspaper headlines embodies the multiple temporalities at work for Spiegelman. While newspapers continued to sow daily paranoia and hatred in order to gain

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[59] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, 8.
[60] For an insightful analysis of the construction of Muslim individuals as terrorists, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007).
[61] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, 8.

support for the next action in the war, these characters, in their non-linear way, pulled the past

into the present and vice versa, creating a mélange of history that leads to the questioning of

national identity and the attendant racial distrust.

As Spiegelman himself notes elsewhere, *No Towers* is partially defined by a "kind of

palimpsest of past and present" embodied in the various media he includes.[62] He writes that the

whole project was an attempt to "not let the media images replace what I saw." Thus, *No Towers*

becomes, in part, a project about deconstructing overarching narratives, particularly those tied to

nationalism and racism, by layering temporalities to refute monolithic understandings of these

categories. As Laura Beadling notes, "By memorializing the allegedly permanent towers in

comics, a medium traditionally conceived of as ephemera, Spiegelman offers a meditation on the

changeability of not only the physical world, but also the world of ideas and social constructs,

such as racial and ethnic stereotypes which are also both long lasting yet endlessly evolving and

adapting."[63] Spiegelman shows, in a similar way to the nation, that racist beliefs are reliant upon

a purview of linear historicization. When we rebut linear history using the comics form, racist

ideologies themselves begin to collapse.

Early newspaper comics carry particular racial stereotypes from the time, which is

perhaps most clear in the *Happy Hooligan* strip reproduced at the end of the collection.

Spiegelman uses these racial stereotypes in his reformulation of the early comics to complicate

the various narratives of racism from across temporal periods. For instance, in the eighth

illustration, Spiegelman depicts himself and François as Maggie and Jiggs from the comic strip

Bringing Up Father (Figure 10).[64] *Bringing Up Father* tells the story of Maggie and Jiggs, a

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[62] Spiegelman, "Ephemera vs. the Apocalypse," n.p.
[63] Beadling, "Race, History, and Intertextuality," 47.
[64] Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, 8.

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nouveau riche Irish American couple who struggle with the tension between their working class

Irish American upbringing and the social graces expected given their newfound wealth. In

Spiegelman's rendition, Spiegelman as Jiggs becomes obsessed with conspiracy theories

surrounding the 9/11 attacks, staying up until two a.m. listening to explanations about how "the

pentagon was in on the attack." He continues to watch CNN in bed where an anchor notes that

"An Arab American spokesman claims that no Jews were in the towers that morning," to which

Spiegelman responds, "Bah! The paranoid putz!"[65] The next morning François as Maggie turns

on the radio, which scares the sleeping Spiegelman who, while hanging from the light fixture,

screams "Turn off that *damn* radio, ya terrorist!" to a now bearded and turbaned François.
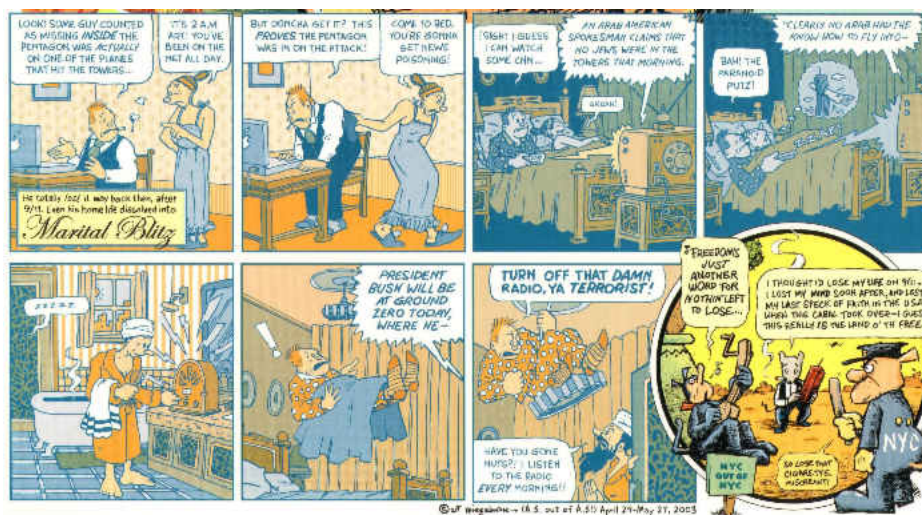
Figure 10: "Martial Blitz" in No Towers

In this strip, Spiegelman shows his own susceptibility to the racist beliefs espoused

through the media and elsewhere in a post-9/11 America. Further, he brings together three

different levels of racial stereotyping—that of the Irish American embodied in his use of

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[65] Ibid.

Bringing Up Father characters; Jews, who, after 9/11, were accused of helping to orchestrate the attack in some circles; and Arab Americans who became the main target for a plethora of vitriolic, pro-American racist attacks. Spiegelman shows how "racism and pernicious stereotypes" may go "virtually unchanged for decades" as well as how they can become a part of the quotidian existence of Americans.[66] After all, Maggie becomes a "terrorist," an extremely racially loaded term post-9/11, simply by turning on the radio in the morning. The sheer absurdity of this strip, embodied most obviously in the conspiracy theories, also marks the racist ideologies as themselves preposterous. The ridiculousness of racism is perhaps most clear given that the punch line common in daily strips like *Bringing Up Father* is marked by racially-tinged language. The racism itself becomes the unbelievable joke. Making simultaneous the various racial stereotypes alongside unbelievable theories of devious machinations foregrounds both how racism becomes historically motivated and how, by drawing non-linear temporal lines, we can further see racist dogma for the farce it is. The conspiracy theories rely on historical understandings of both Jews as nefarious and money-hungry and Arabic peoples as backwards, savage, and heathens. Placing these beliefs implicitly alongside conspiracy theories in a comic ostensibly about Irish Americans rising in class status shows both how racist beliefs are long-lasting and how they are always ludicrous precisely because those stories, much like the conspiracy theories, are someone else's stories centering someone else's ideas.

Broadly, then, comics—which stand between whole and part, time and space, unity and rupture, progression and simultaneity—particularly highlight complex questions surrounding temporality and the ways we think history, to modify Anderson's phrase. The ways in which we have organized the thinking of history has privileged a specific perspective, primarily that of the

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[66] Beadling, "Race, History, and Intertextuality," 49.

white, straight, cis man. Yet, as Rita Felski writes, "Time is not a tidy sequence of partitioned units but a profusion of whirlpools and rapids, eddies and flows, as objects, ideas, images, and texts from different moments swirl, tumble, and collide in ever-changing combinations and constellations."[67] Comics form pushes us to think history by depicting the whirlpools, the rapids, the eddies, and the flows, both on the level of the comics page and on the level of the collection as a whole. This approach can begin to help us think history in ways that contest the hierarchical structures of racial, gendered, or sexual privilege. Thus, one thing is clear, comics forms, content, and relation to historical thinking should not be overlooked any longer.

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[67] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015): 158.

II:
The Queer Status Quo:
Queer Time and Marvel's X-Men Universe

The X-Men were originally created in 1963 by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. According to

Lee, the X-Men were a rough analogy to Civil Rights in America, though the racial metaphor of

the series quickly fell flat in a book populated by an all-white cast.[1] After the book was cancelled

in 1970, Marvel relaunched the series in 1975 with *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 by Len Wein and Dave

Cockrum. The new X-Men were more diverse, more international, and pushed against the

bounds of what a superhero team in the mid-70s looked like.[2] *The Uncanny X-Men* then resumed

following the numbering from the original series. In the first issue of this new series, #94, writer

Chris Claremont took the reins following the plot offered by Len Wein, whose other

commitments required that he give up the book. Claremont remained the writer of *The Uncanny*

X-Men and various spin-offs for the next 17 years (1975-1991), and according to Claremont,

there was one purposeful subtextual motif that coursed throughout the X-Universe: queerness.

In a 2017 appearance at Flamecon, "the world's largest queer comic con,"[3] Claremont

noted that his queer subtext was purposeful to combat the strict oversight of the Comics Code

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[1] Research on X-Men and the mutant metaphor as a racial metaphor is widespread. See Joseph J. Darowski, *X-Men and the Mutant Metaphor: Race and Gender in the Comic Books* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comic Books* (New York: New York UP, 2016); Neil Shyminsky, "Mutant Readers, Reading Mutants: Appropriation, Assimilation, and the X-Men," *International Journal of Comic Art* 8, no. 2 (2006): 387-405; Neil Shyminsky, "Mutation, Racialization, Decimation: The X-Men as White Men" in *Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics*, ed. Sean Guynes and Martin Lund (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2019): 158-173; and Martin Lund, "The Mutant Problem: *X-Men*, Confirmation Bias, and the Methodology of Comics and Identity," *European Journal of Comics Art* 10, no. 2 (2015).

[2] The new team included Scott Summers (Cyclops) as well as Ororo Monroe (Storm), Piotr Rasputin (Colossus), Kurt Wagner (Nightcrawler), Sean Cassidy (Banshee), and John Proudstar (Thunderbird). Jean Grey left the team for a short while but returned quickly.

[3] "About," *FlameCon*, accessed December 19, 2019, https://www.flamecon.org/about/.

Authority.[4] He notes, "The Comics Code tried to restrict everything. But with a certain measure

of visual subtlety and ambiguity you could actually achieve everything you wanted."[5] Indeed,

there is a visual thread of subtextual queer relationships beginning perhaps as early as *The*

Uncanny X-Men #170 (June 1983) between X-Man, Storm, and leader of the Morlocks, Callisto.[6]

Immediately after this issue, Storm also begins a short-lived, yet pivotal, relationship with

Yukio, a Japanese ninja with past ties to Wolverine. Storm's almost one-night-stand relationship

with Yukio, along with some personal realizations she has about her own identity, even sparks a

physical change in Storm's look. She goes from long-haired, spandex-wearing weather goddess

of the African plains to a leather clad, BDSM-inspired, Mohawked leader with no less power or

gravitas. Indeed, the appearance of this punk variation on Storm after two heated, tense

relationships with similarly gender-fluid women directly connects Storm with urban LGBT

subcultures of the 1970s and 80s.

Two of the most obvious subtextual queer relationships are those between Kitty Pryde

and Illyana Rasputin, a space and time-jumping sorceress on the younger X-Men team the New

Mutants, and Kitty Pryde and Rachel Summers, a time and space displaced mutant from the

future. Sigrid Ellis has also explored these subtextually queer relationships in conjunction with

the Comics Code Authority and with the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1986. When Illyana is killed by the Beyonder, a

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[4] The Comics Code Authority (CCA) was a self-imposed regulatory committee on the content of American comics, formed in response to backlash about the violence, gore, crime, and any sexual innuendo in comics up to and throughout the 1950s. For more information on the history of the CCA, see Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation*.
[5] Tom Capon, "The Gay History of the X-Men Proves They're the Queerest Superheroes Ever," *GayStarNews*, November 13, 2018, https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/x-men-queer-gay-history/. Claremont had previously all but confirmed the queer subtext running through the X-Men in the popular podcast *Jay and Miles X-Plain the X-Men*. Jay Edidin and Miles Stokes, hosts, "Unexpected Wonder, with Chris Claremont," *Jay and Miles X-Plain the X-Men* #100 (Podcast), March 13, 2016.
[6] Chris Claremont (w), Paul Smith (p), Bob Wiacek (i), Paul Becton (c), Janine Casey (c), and Tom Orzechowski (l). "Dancin' in the Dark." *The Uncanny X-Men* #170. Marvel Comics, June 1983.

powerful cosmic being of the Marvel Omniverse, her signature soul-sword and armor are automatically passed on to Kitty because of the special bond the girls share.[7] As Ellis notes, when these issues were written, lesbianism was legally and medically classified as a perversion, which meant that Claremont and artist Bill Sienkiewicz could not outwardly confirm a same-sex relationship. However, "they could write it, and draw it, without ever acknowledging that is what they were doing. The relationship, the subtext, the highly sexualized imagery, all these things were presented not as queer kink but as friendship and heroism. The kind of relationship *any* high school girl might have with her best friends."[8] Furthermore, Rachel, much like the punk version of Storm, has an aesthetic that reads as outwardly queer through her short, butch haircut and penchant for leather and punk subculture. As Kitty and Rachel's relationship deepens, they are often seen touching and caressing one another in ways that even married couples are not depicted.[9] Through characters like Storm, Kitty, Illyana, and Rachel, it is clear: "Comics had invisible queers."[10]

While this chapter is not an exploration of the history of queer representation or subtext within the X-Universe, these invisible queers require we consider the various ways queerness is embedded within the larger history of the X-Men and, I argue, mainstream comics more broadly. For now, I use these examples to note that an exploration of subtext encourages us to think past surface-level representations, thus imbuing them with a latent queerness. However, X-Men comics are particularly striking for the way in which queerness is already woven into the very fabric of these worlds, especially at the level of temporality. Following the work of Ramzi

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[7] *New Mutants* #36 and *The Uncanny X-Men* #202.
[8] Sigrid Ellis, "Kitty Queer," *Jay and Miles X-Plain the X-Men*, October 29, 2014, https://www.xplainthexmen.com/2014/10/kitty-queer-by-sigrid-ellis/
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

Fawaz, who argues that the postwar superhero was a figure of radical difference and "a distinctly 'queer' figure," I argue that the queerness of superhero comics is mirrored in the examinations and uses of temporality in comics storytelling and publishing.[11]

The expansive world of mainstream comics is often read as largely in service to one of two interrelated forces: the status quo and commercial profit. The first, which I noted briefly in my introduction, comes from Umberto Eco's theorization of the oneiric climate of comics. Eco argues that mainstream comics maintain a status quo so that the story can continue without end.[12] The diegetic world must have enough change to allow for various narrative paths, but no story or arc will alter the base narrative itself. While Eco's argument is primarily about the narrative representation of a timeless time, it ties into the nature of these comics as a production of the capitalist marketplace created to accumulate as much profit as possible. A story that never ends appeals to the capitalist mentality. Thus, the tendency to expand a line like the X-Men into six to eight (or more) titles per month telling overlapping and interconnecting stories is easily explained via the profit-driven monster of Marvel Comics and the editorial edict to sell more books. This commercial drive also includes a neoliberal focus on expanding representation to include openly gay characters like Northstar and Iceman.

I do not want to discount these obvious, and perhaps dominant, explanations. However, through a consideration of queered time in X-Men comics, I will show the ways in which X-Men subtly contradicts both the narrative status quo as well as a sole goal of commercial profit. This approach more broadly allows for a reframing of the relationship between mainstream comics and real world social and political antecedents; reading mainstream comics in conjunction with the turn toward queer temporal theory refuses a simple rendering of mainstream comics as a

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[11] Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, 22.
[12] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 153.

solely commercial industry, though of course it is, and requires that we explore the nuance at the core of narrative temporality and narrative history in the expanded worlds of Marvel comics. While I am not arguing that the X-Men are anti-commercial, I am arguing that by simply looking at mainstream comics through a lens of commerciality or through a baseline status places these comics within what Sara Ahmed, via Husserl, calls a "sedimented history."[13] Indeed, commerciality has and will always be a part of comics, as is true with most other art forms. However, if we orient ourselves to comics like the X-Men differently and if we consider the ways X-Men comics are oriented to queerness, the possibilities of comics themselves broaden. As Ahmed further notes, "Orientations are binding as they bind objects together. What puts objects near depends on histories, on how things arrive, and on how they gather in their very availability as things to do things with."[14] By exploring the temporality of X-Men, the gathering of narrative pieces, these orientations can reveal new ways of thinking about representation and queerness in comics by centering nonnormative and nonlinear historical narratives.

After a short exploration of queer theory, the turn toward queer temporalities, and the effect of queer theory on comics studies, I turn to the politics of time travel as a way to expand queer relations in place of heteronormativity. Focusing primarily on the two-issue story "Days of Future Past," I show how Chris Claremont and John Byrne forge a narrative through generic moves within popular fantasy that highlight the dystopian in a future of heteronormativity and the hope offered in queered time travel. Ramzi Fawaz defines popular fantasy as the "ways that the tropes and figures of literary fantasy (magic, superhuman ability, time travel, alternative universes, among others) come to organize real-world social and political relations."[15] By basing

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[13] Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology," *GLQ* 12, no. 4 (2006): 552.
[14] Ibid., 558.
[15] Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, 27.

the catalyst of this story in a dystopian future that is rid of all hope for reproductive futurity,

"Days of Future Past" highlights the future that is no future described by Lee Edelman.[16] At the

same time, the story eschews heteronormativity through the time travel trope that sends the aged

Kate Pryde back into her younger body, a popular fantasy version of what Carolyn Dinshaw calls

"touching across time."[17] The heteronormative becomes powerless in the face of a forward

moving time stream. Only queer connections can provide a hope for the future.

These connections embody a more abstract formulation of the term queer through

specific attention to collectivity. "Days of Future Past" offers an example of collectivity on a

micro-level in the mind and body of Kate/Kitty, but the Marvel Omniverse, made up of multiple

alternative timelines and worlds, offers a macro-version. In this section I show that Kitty/Kate

provide a template in the ways their connection "collaps[es] time through affective contact

between marginalized people now and then" to "form community across time"[18] The Marvel

omniverse multiplies this template to the nth degree. These timelines and alternative realities in

the X-Universe create a mainstream comics archive that refuses to submit to heteronormative

logics. Reading the expansive X-Universe as an archive then requires that we contend with

multiplicity and the ways in which that multiplicity is brought into "affective contact." Thus, the

fantasy at the heart of the X-Men line of comics and its moves in and out of dystopian futures

creates a "postdisenchanted temporal perspective," which "opens up to an expansive now but…is

shaped by a critique of teleological linearity."[19] The simultaneity of these many different worlds

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[16] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

[17] Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Chistopher S. Nealon, and Tan Hoang Nguyen, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," *GLQ* 13, no. 2-3, 178.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 185-186.

becomes a way of thinking connection across time and space, what Christopher Nealon has called the "dreamed-of-collectivity."[20]

Finally, I move into a common tactic in comics publishing and storytelling: retroactive continuity. Retroactive continuity names the practice of revisiting previous stories and introducing new pieces of information to change the meaning of that original story. These changes can be minor or quite extensive. Focusing on one of the most pivotal retcons in X-Men history—the resurrection of Jean Grey after her death in 1980—I argue that the retcon, a device most closely associated with superhero comics, is itself embedded within perhaps the most abstract formulation of queerness in the temporal theory of contingency. Rather than reading the retcon solely as a conservative tool for the never-ending milking of a narrative, I consider how retcons center the practices of reading as pivotal in the creation of a narrativized temporality. Thus, I propose thinking of the retcon as an embodiment of contingency, both because readers can often ignore the effects of a retcon, effectively ignoring straight time itself, and because the continual use of retcons means that the narrative is always temporally unstable.

Queer Temporality and Queer Comics Studies

Before I continue, it is important that I clarify terminology. The bulk of this chapter takes a broad meaning of the word queer. Following Jack Halberstam, I use queer to refer "to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time."[21] Queer describes not just non-heterosexual relationships, but also the ways in which narrative and world building is constructed in nonnormative fashion which then opens the queer potentialities of representation. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's words, queer can refer to

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[20] Ibid., 178.
[21] Jack Halberstam. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York UP, 2005), 6.

"the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses

of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made

(or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically."[22] I will focus on these "possbilities, gaps, overlaps,

dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" to explore a queerness that

expansively defines a broad way of interacting with the world, with texts, and with bodies, both

of others and your own, in ways counter to hegemonic societal expectations.

Queer time more precisely names the "specific models of temporality that emerge within

postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family,

longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance."[23] We might also, for the purposes of this chapter, include

capitalist profit-driven commerciality on this list.[24] Queer time, according to Halberstam, is "a

way of being in the world' that critiques the "careful social scripts that usher even the most queer

among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity."[25] In the same

way that queer itself is about nonnormative logics, relationships, and organizations, queer time

offers a way to think through nonnormative temporalities that work beyond or outside the

nuclear family, the national community, and the teleology of temporality toward what Carolyn

Dinshaw calls "a history that is not straight."[26]

Queerness and temporality, when brought together, can demonstrate what Elizabeth

Freeman calls "a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference."[27]

Indeed, as Jordan Alexander Stein has shown, the turn toward queer temporalities seeks to

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[22] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 8.
[23] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 6.
[24] I make this note not to argue that queerness or queer time is inherently contradictory to capital accumulation.
There are many examples, especially within a neoliberal capitalist framework, that shows this is not the case.
[25] Dinshaw, et al. "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," 182.
[26] Ibid., 185.
[27] Freeman, "Introduction," 159.

explore the ways that history is diffused across time, how a more nuanced historiography intervenes in a perceived chrononormativity, and how time itself works to "organize (or disorganize) event perceptions in queer ways."[28] In broader terms then, queer temporalities explore the sequentiality of a perceived heteronormativity and the way in which that normativity is resisted, the simultaneity of multiple temporalities in the present or across temporal schemas, and how the practice of retroactive thinking can decenter previously entrenched notions like linear history or the dominance of heterosexuality.[29] Reading queer temporality as a "manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even nonrelationality)" could thus denote an approach to comics that stands in contradistinction to normativity and, relatedly, a sole focus on commercial profit.[30]

More recently, scholars have worked to more concretely bring together queer theory and comics studies beyond the simple exploration of queer representation. As I examined above, Darieck Scott and Ramzi Fawaz have outlined the queerness of comics in their disconnections from normative life, in their representational capacity, and in their serial and visual unpredictability. In comics no single panel nor the alternative kinships represented can signify monolithically.[31] This special issue includes studies of queer comics archives,[32] the queer adorable,[33] queer childhood,[34] and even the possibilities available in the form of comics to

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[28] Stein, "American Literary History and Queer Temporalities," 864-865.
[29] See Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (New York: Cornell UP, 2002) and Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2009).
[30] Freeman, "Introduction," 159.
[31] Scott and Fawaz, "Introduction: Queer about Comics," 200-203.
[32] Margaret Galvan, "'The Lesbian Norman Rockwell': Alison Bechdel and Queer Grassroots Networks," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 407-438.
[33] Jessica Q. Stark, "Nancy and the Queer Adorable in the Serial Comics Form," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 315-345.
[34] Rebecca Wanzo, "The Normative Broken: Melinda Gebbie, Feminist Comix, and Child Sexuality Temporalities," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 347-375.

operate in terms of reparative temporality for the queer body.[35] Indeed, Kate McCullough offers clear connections between comics and the turn toward temporality in queer theory, arguing that "the temporal openings inherent in the comic form itself make possible a queer recasting of time."[36] Furthermore, in the introduction to her special issue of *Feminist Media Histories*, Kathleen McClancy argues, via Hillary Chute, that comics are particularly qualified to question the idea of a unitary history. She argues, "Comics thus become a vector for challenging monolithic histories that have traditionally excluded women, queers, and people of color, presenting the past as perpetually open to revision."[37] These studies make clear within their field-defining work that we can bring together the large and important body of work in queer studies with the bourgeoning world of comics studies to more radically alter not only the ways we think about comics and comics history, but the ways we think about larger structures of temporality and sexuality across media and representations.

By way of example, let us consider Elizabeth Freeman's influential work on queer temporalities, *Time Binds*, which can illuminate the symbiosis of comics studies and queer studies more particularly. In *Time Binds*, Freeman argues that time binds bodies "into a form of mastery" which she calls "chrononormativity, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity."[38] Associating this term with Dana Luciano's chronobiopolitics, "the sexual arrangement of the time of life,"[39] Freeman argues that normative approaches to temporality focus on sequence and the cycle in order to promise both forward

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[35] Kate McCullough, "'The Complexity of Loss Itself': The Comics Form and *Fun Home*'s Queer Reparative Temporality," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 377-405.
[36] Ibid., 378.
[37] Kathleen McClancy, "Editor's Introduction: Comics and History." *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 3 (2018): 2.
[38] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.
[39] Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York UP, 2007): 9.

movement as well as renewal.[40] For Freeman, the repetition built into life, whether in labor, home life, or reproduction itself, assembles bodies to operate within a tight structure of normativity, sexually and otherwise. A conservative reading of mainstream comics, like that offered by Umberto Eco, would associate comics within this same normativizing structure specifically because comics work to construct a sequence of panels to tell a narrative while maintaining a baseline status quo that leaves the narrative devoid of change. The narrative stasis both maintains the status quo of the narrative itself while also encouraging the reader to buy next month's installment. After all, the cycle of the X-Men relies on always having someone or something to fight. However, mainstream comics like *The Uncanny X-Men* offers "a more sensate, sensory historical method" that "can produce new social relations and even new forms of justice" even within a normativizing structure like Eco's oneiric climate or the larger capitalistic commercialism.[41] The generic tropes of popular fantasy essential to X-Men stories centralize superheroic bodies in both visual and affective modes and the stories that come from this series constantly question the notion of a status quo itself through temporal frames. Indeed, as I will show below, while affective connections with other individuals and with other versions of oneself across time and space are common tropes in mainstream comics, they also complicate dominant frames of straight time embodied in heterosexual desire, individuality, and linear progress; these cross-temporal connections highlight the obverse: queer desire, collectivity, and contingent temporalities. The connection of queer theory and comics studies illuminates both some of the problematic nature of (mainstream) comics as well as the ways in which comics can promote liberating orientations.

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[40] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 5.
[41] Ibid., 10.

In January 2013, Marvel Comics released *All-New X-Men* #1 by Brian Michael Bendis and Stuart Immonen.[42] This series tells the story of a group of time-displaced X-Men, specifically the same team that was introduced in *X-Men* #1 in 1963 by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby: Scott Summers (Cyclops), Hank McCoy (Beast), Bobby Drake (Iceman), Warren Worthington III (Angel), and Jean Grey (Marvel Girl).[43] In this story, an older version of Hank McCoy travels back in time to bring the original X-Men to the future in order to hopefully sway an increasingly radical Cyclops from instigating a possible mutant genocide. In perhaps too wishful a desire, the older McCoy hopes to bring the contemporary Cyclops face-to-face with his younger, more optimistic self. McCoy believes the original X-men will "force Scott to face just how far he has fallen and save the mutant population from even further disaster."[44]

After spending time in the future and in relative proximity to their older selves, the original X-Men begin coming into their own personalities in different ways than they do throughout the events of the previous fifty years in X-Men publication history. In *All-New X-Men* #40 (June 2015), Bobby Drake, prodded by Jean Grey, comes out as gay.[45] In *The Uncanny X-Men* #600 (Jan. 2016), which was published seven months later, the young Bobby and Jean confront the older Bobby, who has a history of heterosexual relationships. Because of this, the younger Drake notes, "You can keep doing whatever you want, but I'm stuck here and I think

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[42] Throughout this project, I use the official publication date of the comics in question, even though single issues are released between two to three months prior to their printed publication date.

[43] Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (p), Paul Reinman (i), Sam Rosen (l). "X-Men" *X-Men* #1. Marvel, September 1963.

[44] Brian Michael Bendis (w), Stuart Immonen (p), Wade Von Grawbadger (i), Marte Gracia (c), and Cory Petit (l), *All-New X-Men* #2. Marvel, January 2013.

[45] The politics of a telepathic, straight woman prodding a gay man to tell his own story deserves attention but is beyond the confines of this chapter. Brian Michael Bendis (w), Mahmud Asrar (p & i), Rain Beredo (c), Cory Petit (l), *All-New X-Men* #40. Marvel, June 2015.

I'm going to try to live this my way."[46] The older Drake explains that he had to decide which part

of his life he could live without being persecuted, and his own sexuality was easier to keep

secret. Here, Drake is describing his own intersectional identity as both a mutant and a gay man.

At the level of narrative, Iceman's coming out story retroactively inflects all the

character's appearances up to that moment. The revelation not only that Iceman is gay, but that

he has always been gay, encourages us to read Lee and Kirby's original stories in a different

light. I will explore how contemporary stories can retroactively affect early representations

offered by the original creators in the next chapter. The example of Iceman's sexuality can help

us to consider currently the ways in which the fantastical trope of time travel, especially in the X-

Men, complicates same sex desire as the default. Scholars like Fawaz and Anthony Michael

D'Agostino have explored the queer politics at the heart of the X-Men, yet neither have intently

explored the possibilities within queer temporalities.[47] Though the queer politics of time travel in

Iceman's coming out is a bit heavy-handed, it exists within a larger line of queer politics related

to time travel, perhaps most clearly in the massively influential two-issue story "Days of Future

Past."

"Days of Future Past" follows closely on one of the most highly regarded X-Men stories,

"The Dark Phoenix Saga." After the resounding success of "The Dark Phoenix Saga," Claremont

and Byrne decided to try something a bit different.[48] *The Uncanny X-Men* #141 (Jan. 1981) opens

on a run-down and dilapidated Park Avenue in New York, where a much older version of Kitty

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[46] Brian Michael Bendis (w), Sara Pichelli (a), Mahmud Asrar (a), Sturant Immonen (a), Kris Anka (a), Chris Bachalo (a), David Marquez (a), Frazer Irving (a), Wade von Grawbadger (i), Tim Townsend (i), Mark Irwin (i), Marte Gracia (c), Jason Keith (c), Chris Bachalo (c), Frazer Irving (c). *Uncanny X-Men* #600. Marvel, January 2016.
[47] Fawaz, *The New Mutants*; Anthony Michael D'Agostino, "'Flesh-to-Flesh Contact': Marvel Comics' Rogue and the Queer Feminist Imagination," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018).
[48] For a discussion of the popularity of "The Dark Phoenix Saga" and the turn toward "Days of Future Past" see Sean Howe, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012) and Patrick Meany, *Chris Claremont's X-Men*, (XLrator Media, 2018).

Pryde, who is currently 13-years-old in X-Men continuity, is going to meet the fugitive and outlaw Wolverine. With Wolverine's help, Kitty, who now calls herself Kate, is able to free a group of mutants, including Storm and Colossus, from a mutant labor camp monitored by Sentinels, mutant hunting robots who have largely caused this bleak future. Using the powers of the telepath Rachel, Kate's consciousness is sent back thirty years into the body of teenage Kitty Pryde to warn the X-Men about the impending assassination of senator Robert Kelly, whose death, they believe, sets history on the path toward this dystopic future.

In the following issue, *The Uncanny X-Men* #142 (Feb. 1981), the future team attacks the central hub of the Sentinel forces, the Baxter Building, former home of the Fantastic Four. However, this attack does little but buy Kate time in the past, as each member of the team— Wolverine, Storm, and Colossus—are slain by the Sentinels. Meanwhile, in the past, the X-Men, along with Kate in Kitty's body, rush to Washington D.C. to keep the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants from killing Senator Kelly. After they succeed, Kate leaves Kitty's body and the X-Men return home.

While the trope of the (post)apocalyptic future is commonplace in contemporary narratives, "Days of Future Past" (1981) offers an early example of the doomsday scenario, predating cornerstones of this genre like *Terminator* (1984) and *Blade Runner* (1982). In this world, many of the X-Men and other superpowered heroes have already been killed by the Sentinels, evident in the now iconic cover to *The Uncanny X-Men* #141. On this cover (*Figure 11*) the future Wolverine and Kate Pryde stand in a spotlight in front of a large poster picturing many of the X-Men with labels either reading "Slain" or "Apprehended" across their faces. Early in that same issue, Kate walks in front of a large cemetery with cracked and broken, plain white slabs bearing the names of many X-Men and other superpowered individuals including Ben

Grimm and Johnny Storm of the Fantastic Four. "Days of Future Past" then foregrounds that this story is, as Claremont notes, "the last act of the tragedy," a horrific "paradigm [that] comes out of the Second World War and what happened in Germany."[49]

From the cover and these early panels, Claremont and Byrne make clear the temporal displacement of the narrative. The wisps of grey hair on Wolverine, the lines of aging on Kate's forehead, and the glaring title on the opening splash page (*Figure 12*) make clear that this New York, as it is introduced in the first narration box, is not the New York of earlier issues. The juxtaposition of "future" and "past" in the title demonstrates a marked orientation toward temporality, though the precise orientation is unclear. The narration on the opening page leans into temporal language, with the heavy use of past tense—"*Once upon a time*, it *was* a nice place to live…it *was* one of the swankiest neighborhoods in the city."[50] The utopic, almost fairytale-like past, is put into stark contrast with the story's present, "Now it's a slum, abandoned, derelict, dying—much like the city, the country, the planet around it. Welcome to the 21st Century."

The differentiation between the past (continuity's present) and this present (continuity's possible future) continues throughout both issues of "Days of Future Past" as the story moves back and forth temporally. At every turn, Claremont and Byrne highlight the dystopia of the future and the near utopia of the past, perhaps most markedly in the moment when Kate Pryde,

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[49] Meany, *Chris Claremont's X-Men*.
[50] Chris Claremont (w), John Byrne (w & p), Terry Austin (i), Glynis Wein (c), Tom Orzechowski (l), "Days of Future Past," *The Uncanny X-Men* #141, Marvel, January 1981, n.p., my italics.
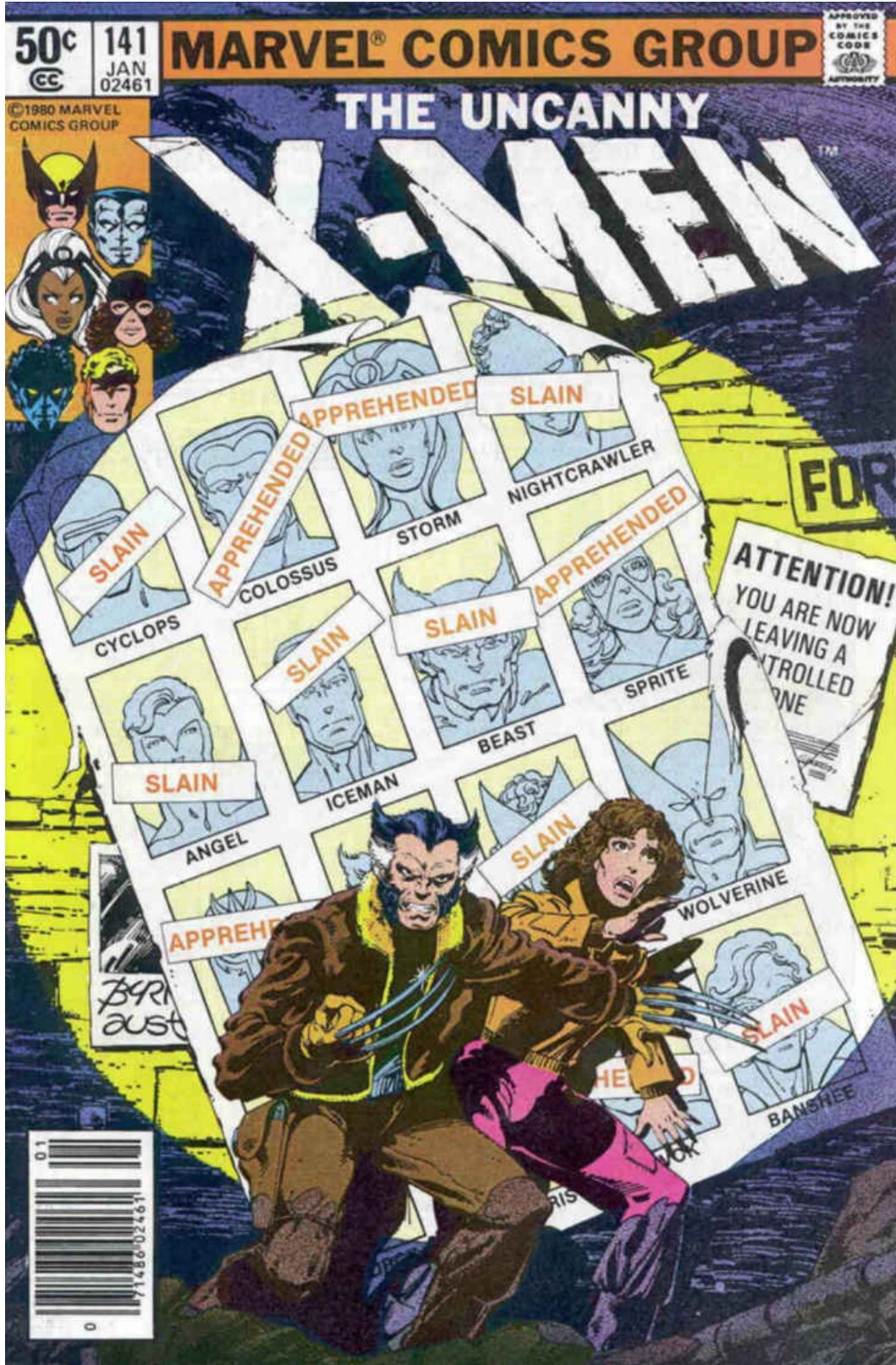
Figure 11: Cover of Uncanny X-Men #141

now inhabiting the young Kitty's body, wakes to see her friend Kurt Wagner (Nightcrawler) now

alive: "Kurt! It's you! Really you!! Alive!!"[51] After she later tells the X-Men the story of the

Sentinels' rise to power she explains, "We fought. We lost. We d-died. And now…seeing you all

alive…oh god, I didn't think it would hurt so much."[52] It is precisely this disparity that begins to

mark the X-Men, and here, mutantcy particularly, as queer.

Figure 12: Opening Splash page of Uncanny X-Men *#141*

[51] Clarmont et al., "Days of Future Past," n.p.
[52] Ibid., n.p.

In his book *No Future*, Lee Edelman argues that all of politics is beholden to a reproductive futurity, which is the notion that "the governing compulsion, the singular imperative, that affords us no meaningful choice is the compulsion to embrace our own futurity in the privileged form of the Child."[53] Indeed, for Edelman, both the decisions we make now and the future itself are only ever thought, can only ever be thought, for the Child, for the hope of a better tomorrow in which the Child can thrive. X-Men has similar themes running throughout as they fight for the betterment of human and mutant relations, for a better tomorrow. Yet, "Days of Future Past" shows us the possibility of no future, a possibility which rests within the tropes of popular fantasy. The quasi-magical powers of the mutants and the narrative of time travel make possible the representation of an Edelmanian-esque no future. In "Days of Future Past" the figure of the mutant has no future; the singular imperative in 2013 New York for a mutant is either simply self-preservation or violent action against the ruling sentinels that will inevitably lead to destruction. While this is of course markedly different from Edelman's theorizations of queer futurity, the antisocial thesis of Edelman's work highlights the antisocial pessimism at the heart of this specific story.

Indeed, in "Days of Future Past," the figure of the child is itself markedly absent. There are no young mutants and Kate even tells Peter Rasputin (Colossus), her husband in this future, "the Sentinels killed my friends and they killed my…my babies."[54] Of course, the lack of reproduction here is not related to an overt sexual queerness, but to a violent genocidal cleansing. Yet, the queer mutanity and alternative kinships at the heart of X-Men marks a resonance between "Days of Future Past" and *No Futures*, if only because "Days of Future Past" offers a glimpse into a future that is not reproductive. In this vein then, "Days of Future Past" as dystopia

[53] Edelman, *No Future*, 15.
[54] Clarmont et al., "Days of Future Past," n.p.

means that this future is queered through alternative mutant kinships that, for Edelman, pine for the reproductive future offered in the figure of the Child.

However, this story is particularly noteworthy because of the way in which the plan to change this future discards heterosexual pairings. Just before lamenting the loss of her babies, Peter asks Kate, "And if we succeed, what will happen to us, to our love? It might cease to exist, along with the Sentinels." Kate responds, "That's a risk we have to take."[55] The story gives us a picture of heterosexual love only to note that heterosexuality is itself just one possibility. By collapsing the past with the future, "Days of Future Past" highlights the ways that popular fantasy in superhero comics, and particularly time travel narratives, can refute heterosexual dominance and desires.

By traveling through time, Kate makes time itself become about both annihilation, through the future she is from, and potentiality, through the past she is trying to change; these two modes of temporal thought—annihilation and potentiality—lie at the heart of Halberstam's understanding of queer time.[56] They note, "The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and…squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand."[57] The possibility of annihilation is itself what provides the potentiality of the now. Edelman similarly reads the future that is no future as full of potentialities. These possibilities, Halberstam notes, include "the potentiality of a life unscripted

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[55] Ibid.

[56] I see a marked connection between Halberstam's use of potentiality and José Esteban Muñoz's. Muñoz differentiates between possibility and potentiality: "Unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense." When I use the term potentiality, I am considering both Halberstam's and Muñoz's definitional work as foundational. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Temporality: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York UP, 2009): 9.

[57] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 2.

by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing."[58] The very act of traveling back in

time sets the power of heteropatriarchy on end, questions the central role of the nuclear family

and reproduction at the center of a temporal worldview, and introduces the potentialities that lie

beyond teleology itself.

Figure 13: Depiction of Kitty as Older Kate's Psyche leaves Her Body

Nowhere is this more clearly and pointedly marked than at the end of "Days of Future

Past" when, as Kate's psyche is being pulled from Kitty's body she "comes face-to-face with

herself as a child…impulsively, she gives herself a kiss…and lets the winds of eternity sweep her

home."[59] This moment offers two readings, both of which center queer relationships. On the one

hand, we can read Kate's kiss as maternal, thus casting reproductive futurism as reproductive

simultaneity where one can only have a child by being one's own child. Queer temporality and

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Chris Claremont (w), John Byrne (w & p), Terry Austin (i), Glynis Wein (c), Tom Orzechowski (l), "Mind Out of Time!" *The Uncanny X-Men* #142, Marvel, February 1981, n.p.

the politics of time travel can thus recast reproduction by reorienting the temporality of reproduction itself, moving away from straight linearity. On the other hand, the choice to deny representing the kiss casts the moment in a shade of eroticism, one which connects the future to the past within the body of young Kitty. Of course, we cannot help but notice that the psyche of Kate itself penetrates the mind and body of young Kitty, marking this connection as something possibly more than maternalism. However, in either reading, it is clear that "Days of Future Past" eschews chronology and teleology and makes history itself dissident through the queer connection across temporal registers within the body of the young Kitty Pryde (*Figure 13*).

Furthermore, this plot device that places the adult Kate within the mind of the younger Kitty's body literally replaces the heterosexual pairing of Kate and Peter for the queer pairing of Kate and Kitty. Through Kate/Kitty, "Days of Future Past" then becomes a story about the queer embodiment of mixed temporalities. The generic tropes of popular fantasy at play here narrativize a relation to history that Carolyn Dinshaw describes as "making relations with the past"[60] or, more specifically, "affective relations across time."[61] The body of thirteen year old Kitty becomes the site for a queer orientation toward temporality and toward possibility. As Margaret Galvan notes, the speculative narrative of "Days of Future Past" frees Kitty from the primarily youthful, "Brat Pack *avant la lettre*" depictions common in her first few appearances.[62] Kitty's youthful visual appearance is joined with the psyche of her older self, highlighting "her survival and leadership role in the future" which "furthers her character's multiplicity while also

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[60] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Going Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, Duke UP, 1999), 11.

[61] Ibid., 2.

[62] Margaret Galvan, "From Kitty to Kat: Kitty Pryde and the Phases of Feminism," in *The Ages of the X-Men*, ed. Joseph J. Darowski (Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2014), 48.

emphasizing her strength and the accompanying viability of her feminist politics."[63] The

affective relations across time within the body of Kitty writes history as dissident.

Collective Kinships and Time in Queer Worlds

These trans-temporal relations are never singular. Even within the seemingly individual

body of Kitty, there is a multiplicity. Thus, Kitty, in the words of Dinshaw, carries "the

perversion within the normative."[64] Kate's psyche as literally out of place and time creates a

perverse multiplicity within the seemingly innocent and normative body of Kitty. Kate/Kitty, as

a perversely normative body, can affect change in history. Her body becomes a stand-in for the

invisible queerness that can only be sensed, in this story, by the mutant powers of Destiny, a

member of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants with the power of precognition. Destiny describes

Kate/Kitty as "an anomaly that strikes to the very heart of the time stream."[65] Thus, time binds

Kate and Kitty together in a speculative story that dares to hope for possibility in the face of no

future at all.[66]

The hope of "Days of Future Past" mirrors that explored by José Esteban Muñoz in his

book *Cruising Utopia*, which stands at relative odds with Edelman. As Muñoz explains, "My

approach to hope as a critical methodology can be best described as a backward glance that

enacts a future vision."[67] Furthermore, Muñoz argues that to think about the hope of queerness,

we must focus on "queerness as collectivity."[68] By removing the dominance of heterosexual

desire and reproductivity and by creating within Kate/Kitty a collectivity that spurs further

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[63] Ibid., 51-52.
[64] Dinshaw, *Going Medieval*, 149.
[65] Claremont et al., "Mind Out of Time!" n.p.
[66] For a discussion of the notion of binds across time, see Freeman, *Time Binds*.
[67] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 4.
[68] Ibid., 11.

mutant kinship in the fight for a futurity worth living, "Days of Future Past" itself encompasses the queer politics of temporality. The collective X-Men and the heterogeneous relations therein—rather than any heterosexual pairing—mark the present, and thus potential future, as queerly utopic. Indeed, though we see Kate leave Kitty's body, we do not see where she goes. By abstaining from depicting a heartfelt reunification of Kate and Peter, the comic leaves us with a queer present that overwrites the dystopian and heteronormative future

Furthermore, at the end of the story, Angel asks "Professor, we saved senator Kelly, Kitty's mind has been returned to her body. Does that mean *we changed* the future?" Xavier responds, "I do not know, Warren. Cliché though it sounds, only time will tell."[69] We are left then with a potential future that, as the comic has shown throughout, is also present. As I've noted above, the comic formally moves between this present and the possible future making the two nearly simultaneous and complicating any clear delineation between past, present, and future. This aesthetic choice is made starkly visible on the opening splash page of *The Uncanny X-Men* #142, where the young body of Kitty Pryde stands at the center of the page, physically straddling 1980, depicted on the left in the showdown of the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants at the United States Senate, and 2013, shown on the right through the attacking Sentinels and the fleeing renegade mutants (*Figure 14*). The white border around Kitty's body even gives her outline a doubled quality that mirrors her inner psyche, where the mind of her older self has taken up residence. The now of this comic is purposefully doubled to obscure any attempt at marking linearity, making this a story about temporal simultaneity.

Even Kate, as she thinks about her comrades in the future, notes, "Wolverine should have freed the others by now—whenever! Whenever 'now' is."[70] Time itself becomes queerly

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[69] Claremont et al., "Mind Out of Time!" n.p., my emphasis.
[70] Ibid., n.p.

oriented as the comic never seems to define a "now" and "then" but simply allows the two temporal registers to coexist simultaneously. In many ways, "Days of Future Past" highlights the queer politics of asynchrony, where "different time frames or temporal systems [collide] in a single moment of *now*."[71] Such an approach to temporality and world building begins to snake through the X-Universe in the shape of proliferating alternative timelines and worlds.

As early as 1977, Marvel began expanding the worlds and timelines with their popular series "What If?" which speculated different outcomes for central storylines across the Marvel universe. This series continued in various volumes throughout the following decades and continues today. Some of the stories central to the "What If?" series include "What If the X-Men had Died on Their First Mission?" (based on *The Uncanny X-Men* #93 and 94), "What If the Phoenix had Not Died?" (based on *The Uncanny X-Men* #137), and "What If the Avengers had Never Been?" (based on *Avengers* #3). The publication of "What If?" became a staple in the Marvel line and the speculative stories offered a different way of thinking about the history and the temporalities of the most popular Marvel books.

"Days of Future Past" began as a possible future at the beginning of the story, yet as X-Men comics moved forward and the larger Marvel universe broadened, the future became an alternate world altogether. Indeed, the destruction of the future became quite doubtful with the introduction of Rachel, the telepath from "Days of Future Past," who travels back in time and becomes a regular member of the X-Men team in the aptly titled "The Past of Future Days" (Aug. 1984).[72] Rachel is one of the first time-displaced characters in the X-Men storylines, though she is far from the last. As Sean Howe notes, the Marvel Universe was seen as infinite.

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[71] Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, Duke UP, 2012), 5.

[72] Chris Claremont (w), John Romita, Jr. (p), Dan Green (i), Glynis Wein (c), and Tom Orzechowski (l). "The Past of Future Days," *The Uncanny X-Men* #184. Marvel Comics, August 1984.

"[T]here could be whole civilizations in every corner of the entire cosmos: as each issue tumbled into the next, picking up momentum, expanding the cast, the grand space opera absorbed forgotten characters and established the relationships between them all."[73]

Figure 14: Opening Splash Page of Uncanny X-Men *#142*

The more that these futures and alternative universes flourished, the more necessary it became to designate them. It began with the designation of Earth-616 in an issue of *Daredevils* written by famed writer Alan Moore. Earth-616 became the main Marvel universe where all the

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[73] Howe, *Marvel Comics*, 72.

central stories were told. As more events unfolded, other designations were born. The "Days of Future Past" universe became Earth-811. The "Age of Apocalypse" world, which was created when Xavier's son, David Haller (Legion), went back in time to assassinate mutant supremacist, Magneto, accidentally killing Xavier instead, became Earth-295.[74] These various worlds came to be known as the Marvel Omniverse. Of course, many of these spinoffs were efforts to introduce a façade of change that would sell more books. All were eventually marked as variations of the dominant Earth-616 universe.

Nevertheless, the Marvel Omniverse opens the possibility of questioning any naturalized concept of time, outside of the oneiric climate or commercial profit goals.[75] There is no possibility of linear time in the Marvel Omniverse, and only rarely is there even the possibility of a represented linear time. Often, the stories in these comics intermingle as characters move in and out of worlds. Thus, the Marvel Omniverse demonstrates that, as Carolyn Dinshaw argues, "time is more heterogeneous than any ordinary measure of time allows."[76] This collection of alternative universes exists in a constant state of "now" as they are shaped and changed in tandem. Marvel, across its many years and many creators, has amassed the "dreamed-of-collectivity" that we might productively think of as a queer archive of universes.

In her theorization of "queer comics archives," Margaret Galvan notes, "they 'challenge traditional conceptions of history' not only through the comics' content but also in how they open up 'material practices' that give us new ways to analyze the documents themselves and

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[74] The designation for many of these worlds comes from the publication date of their first appearance. Thus, "Days of Future Past" which appeared first in 1981 in January (1st month) became Earth-811 and "Age of Apocalypse," which first appeared in 1995 in February became Earth-295. However, this not true of all the designations, some of which seem quite random.

[75] For an exploration of the concept of naturalized time, see Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe;* and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983).

[76] Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now*?, 12.

conceptualize the affiliated histories."[77] An archive of the Marvel Omniverse is not material in the same way that the queer comics archives Galvan explores is, though materiality itself still marks the appearance and proliferation of these worlds in specific comics. Thinking about these alternative universes as an archive of sorts creates a new collectivity of temporalities and relationalities where the normative becomes nearly impossible. Indeed, like Galvan's queer comics archive, the Marvel omniverse archive embodies, both materially and immaterially, the "queerness as collectivity" of Muñoz.[78]

Some creators at Marvel have even worked to codify and archive the various alternative universes in 2005's *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe: Alternative Universes*.[79] The affiliated histories of the various Marvel universes exist on a vertical temporal axis, where all the historical moments are both the present and *not* the present. The X-Universe highlights a broadened queer mutanity then, where the archive of the omniverse allows for cross-species and cross-temporal affective connections with others and with other versions of oneself.

These trans-temporal and trans-universal connections between alternative versions of oneself are clear in the final kiss that adult Kate gives her young counterpart at the end of "Days of Future Past." Broader connections proliferate throughout the X-Men line. For instance, in two issues of *The New Mutants*, the first series that broadened the X-Men Universe beyond the flagship book *The Uncanny X-Men* in 1982, the team travels to alternative universes while fleeing the massively powerful techno-organic alien, Magus. Illyana Rasputin (Magik) can teleport the team away from Magus, but often has only partial control over when and where she

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[77] Margaret Galvan, "'The Lesbian Norman Rockwell',"418.
[78] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.
[79] Jeff Christiansen (w), Sean McQuaid (w), Stuart Vandal (w), Mark O'English (w), Eric J. Moreels (w), Michael Hoskin (w), Bill Lentz (w), Chris Biggs (w), Anthony Flamini (w), Tom Grummett (a), and Morry Hollowell (a). *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe: Alternative Universes*. Marvel Comics, 2005.

teleports. Because of this, half of the team end up in an alternate dystopia known as Earth-8720, and the other half end up in the mutant supremacist future of Earth-87050. In both futures, affective kinships across temporalities affects both the worlds the New Mutants are in and the world in which they belong.

In the opening of *The New Mutants* #48 (Feb. 1987) half of the team—Xi'an Coy Mahn (Karma), Roberto DaCosta (Sunspot), Amara Aquilla (Magma), and Rahne Sinclair (Wolfsbane)—stand in front of a familiar looking poster depicting images of the entire team along with X-Men Wolverine, Colossus, Storm, and Ariel.[80] As in "Days of Future Past," many of these names have labels plastered over them that read "Terminated" (*Figure 15*) After this team is attacked by Sentinels who rule this universe as well, they are rescued by the only remaining living New Mutants, Sam Guthrie (Cannonball) and Dani Moonstar (Mirage).[81] After working to help Dani and Sam save a fellow mutant and a teleporter, Lila Chaney, the issue ends with Dani, Sam, and Lila departing for space, leaving the New Mutants on this dystopian Earth waiting for Illyana to return.

In the nearly fifty issues of *The New Mutants* leading up to this story, a central relationship has been that of Rahne and Dani. Not only did the two become friends early in the series, but when Rahne is transforms into her lupine form she and Dani have a psychic connection. In this future, Dani had to feel the final breaths of Rahne. She tells the universe-displaced Rahne, "I held you in my arms, Rahne, after the sentinels struck you down! I was covered in your blood, I felt the last beat of your heart, 'heard' the last thought from your mind!" (*Figure 16*).[82] The time and universe traveling adventures that make up this arc of *The New*

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[80] Chris Claremon (w), Jackson Guice (p), P. Craig Russell (i), Glynis Oliver (c), Lois Buhalis (l), and Tom Orzechowski (l). "Ashes of the Heart," *The New Mutants* #48. Marvel Comics, 1987.
[81] Conveniently, these are the two character who appear in a different universe in the next issue.
[82] Chris Claremont et al. *The New Mutants* #48.

Mutants brings Dani back in contact with Rahne, an individual to whom Dani's affective connection cannot be overstated. Indeed, as she and Sam prepare to leave the Earth at the end of the issue, she addresses Rahne: "Take care, Rahne. My other self. My heart."[83] *The New Mutants* #48 not only depicts "distinctly queer attachments" that are "grounded in terms of alternative intimacy, kinship, and belonging," but it heightens these queer attachments by eschewing linear chronology through connections across alternative universes.[84]

Figure 15: Opening Splash Page of The New Mutants *#48*

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Scott and Fawaz, "Queer about Comics," 209.

Figure 16: A Confrontation Between Rahne and Dani

The very nature of mainstream comics, and particularly of the X-Men expanded universe, relies on this "open mesh" of queerness that continually refuses teleology and linearity. In classic soap operatic fashion, straight desires are continually undercut, and relationships are continually defined and redefined to create what Fawaz calls "indefinite instability."[85] Instability has come to largely define both the X-Men universe and mainstream superhero comics more broadly. Alternative worlds imbed instability into the very foundation of comics and while some very creative narrative gymnastics does maintain a sort of status quo in characters, the queerness at the heart of comics multiplicity is nevertheless present.

Furthermore, stories like "Days of Future Past" become central tropes in the X-Men line of comics; various futures and alternative worlds recur throughout the X-Universe. These

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[85] Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, 18.

alternative worlds and timelines work in a similar way to what Elizabeth Freeman has explored

in the politics of synchrony. These worlds and timelines "move in concert *against* that system

[the oneiric climate, here] while simultaneously producing other social forms."[86] Alternative

worlds at the very least complicate a status quo if only because they make visible in the popular

fantasy of comics the social reality that a status quo is defined by orientation. Thinking of

superhero comics as arbiters of a straight, cis, male, white, and conservative status quo makes

them so.[87] But thinking of superhero comics from within queer potentialities and understandings

of alternative universes and timelines divorces the genre from the dominance of

heteronormativity. In fact, these potentialities center both multiplicity and difference, which are

often ignored within a heteropatriarchical framework.

Queerness, Contingency, and Retroactivity

  In *The Uncanny X-Men* #137 (Sept. 1980), Chris Claremont and John Byrne concluded

"The Dark Phoenix Saga," a story that began with the transformation of Jean Grey into Phoenix

back in *The Uncanny X-Men* #101 (Oct. 1976).[88] "The Dark Phoenix Saga" tells the story of how

Jean Grey was seduced by the psychic meddling of Jason Wyngarde (Mastermind) and fell prey

to the powers of the Phoenix Force, the powerful cosmic entity living inside her. Once the

Phoenix Force takes control of Jean's body, she becomes the Dark Phoenix. As she travels the

galaxy, she ingests a star, thus destroying a nearby inhabited planet. For this, she is captured and

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[86] Elizabeth Freeman, "Synchronic/Anachronic," in *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*, eds. Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias (New York: New York UP, 2016), 139.

[87] I do not, of course, want to discount this approach too much. There is, within superhero comics, a vein of white supremacy and male dominance that, while resisted by various creators, is nonetheless a reality of the industry and the medium.

[88] Chris Claremont (w), John Byrne (w & p), Terry Austin (i), Glynis Wein (c), and Tom Orzechowski (l). "The Fate of the Phoenix!" *The Uncanny X-Men* #137. Marvel Comics, September 1980 and Chris Claremont (w), Dave Cockrum (p), Frank Chiaramonte (i), Bonnie Wilford (c), and John Costanza (l). "Like a Phoenix, from the Ashes." *The Uncanny X-Men* #101. Marvel Comics, October 1976.

put on trial by the intergalactic Shi'ar empire. Professor Xavier, familiar with Shi'ar customs, demands trial by combat. This pivotal saga in the X-Men history ends with a battle between the X-Men and the Shi'ar imperial guard. The X-Men are gradually incapacitated until only Jean Grey and her lover, Scott Summers (Cyclops), remain. However, Jean, who is currently in control of the Phoenix Force, feels that control waning. In an effort to keep herself from becoming the Dark Phoenix again, she turns a weapon on herself, ridding the universe of the threat.

At the time of Jean's death, *The Uncanny X-Men* was Marvel's flagship comic, outselling all the other Marvel monthlies by a wide margin. The editor at the time, Jim Shooter, reportedly told Chris Claremont that if Jean were killed, she would stay dead. However, in classic corporate comic book fashion, Shooter went back on his word when Bob Layton and Jackson Guice came up with an idea to reunite the original five X-Men—Scott Summers (Cyclops), Warren Worthington (Angel), Bobby Drake (Iceman), Hank McCoy (Beast), Jean Grey (Marvel Girl)— in a new X-Men book titled *X-Factor*. However, in order to return Jean from the dead, the team had to come up with an explanation that exonerated her from the genocidal crimes of the Dark Phoenix. This story played out, not in X-Men books, but in *The Avengers* #263 (Jan. 1986) and *Fantastic Four* #286 (Jan. 1986).

In these two stories the Avengers find a cocoon-like structure at the bottom of Jamaica Bay after some criminals crash their plane there.[89] The cocoon seems to be sending up a large amount of psychic energy that pushes back anyone who approaches. After reaching out to what seems like a sentient being within the cocoon, the Avengers are able to get it back to Avengers

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[89] Roger Stern (w), John Buscma (b), Tom Palmer (f), Jim Novak (l), ad Christies Scheele (c). "What Lurks Below?" *The Avengers* #263. Marvel Comics, January 1986.

mansion where Reed Richard (Mister Fantastic) begins researching the cocoon and is able to break through the barrier, revealing the living body of Jean Grey.

In a remarkable bit of narrative gymnastics, it is revealed that the Jean Grey that returned as the Phoenix way back in *The Uncanny X-Men* #101 was not the real Jean Grey. In that story, as the X-Men are returning from space, Jean forces the other X-Men to enter the safety hold of the spaceship as she manually flies back to Earth while simultaneously trying to hold off the unrelenting cosmic rays at the center of a solar flare.[90] After the crash landing, the Phoenix rises out of the waters of Jamaica Bay. *Fantastic Four* #286 reveals that the Jean Grey/Phoenix that came back after that re-entry was not Jean Grey herself. Instead, as Captain America explains, the cosmic entity known as the Phoenix Force "had duplicated you down to the last atom of your structure. It had imitated the patterns of your brain-waves so precisely that even a trained mind-reader could not have recognized what it was."[91] Thus, the Phoenix was a duplicate Jean Grey playing the role until the real Jean Grey could heal in the cocoon.

The resurrection of Jean Grey is achieved through a tool commonly used in long-form comics narratives, especially those told by multiple creators, the retcon or retroactive continuity. In his book *Retcon Game*, Andrew Friedenthal defines the retcon as the "revisiting of past stories, told in previous installments of a long-form narrative, and adding a new piece of information to that older story, literally rewriting the past."[92] In order to bring Jean Grey back from the dead without blame for the genocidal actions of the Phoenix, the creators introduced a

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[90] Claremont, et al. "Like a Phoenix, from the Ashes."

[91] Chris Clarmont (w), John Byrne (w & p), Jackson Guice (p), Terry Austin (i), Glynis Oliver (c), John Workman (l), "Like a Phoenix!" *Fantastic Four* #286, Marvel, January 1986, 29.

[92] Andrew J. Friedenthal, *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America* (Jackson, U of Mississippi P, 2017), 6.

detail that separated the two characters which, in turn, retroactively shapes the story world of the X-Men from *The Uncanny X-Men* #101, published ten years previously.

Many have argued that retroactive continuity is a tool to placate the conservative comics fans and to create the possibility of a never-ending story that can continually be milked for corporate gain. For instance, Friedenthal writes, "Ultimately, superhero readers are fearful of anything that creates too much change to the mythology that they grew up reading, which they cling to nostalgically, and the resultant conservative impulse to embrace the traditional rather than the experimental is one of the hallmarks of continuity, retroactive or otherwise."[93] The reading of narrative functions like retcons as conservative mirrors Eco's own argument that superhero comics create an oneiric climate "where what has happened before and what has happened after appears extremely hazy."[94]

More recently, Marc Singer has defended Eco's oneiric climate and, by association, a reading of comics as mired in a conservative narrative project. In response to Henry Jenkins argument that certain crossovers and multiply aligned stories in mainstream comics are "transforming the rules of the genre,"[95] Singer argues that the difference is "of duration and self-conscious attention rather than kind."[96] For Singer, the very backbone of continuity in mainstream comics is Eco's oneiric climate, where "worlds are destroyed and reborn, continuities are purged and restored, and the only constant change is the certainty that any character eventually will be returned in their most popular and durable form." For Singer, "the

[93] Ibid., 41.
[94] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 153.
[95] Sam Ford and Henry Jenkins, "Managing Multiplicity in Superhero Comics: An Interview with Henry Jenkins," in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT UP, 2009): 306.
[96] Marc Singer, *Breaking the Frames: Populism and Presitige in Comics Studies* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2018): 42.

dream" of the oneiric climate, of nostalgia, and of the never-ending comics narrative "always wins in the end."[97]

Indeed, in many ways this is the exact function of the retcon. Jean Grey's own story personifies this most clearly. The retcon separating Jean from the Phoenix had to happen because without it Jean, the central innocent female in X-Men books since their inception in 1963, would be irrevocably tainted. The moral imperative for a superhero, especially one defined by Golden or Silver Age standards, requires little to no complication in their own moral conceit.[98] Resurrecting and re-centering a character that had committed planetary genocide had to be addressed. Shooter, Layton, and Guice did address the issue with little to no worries about how their decisions would affect the gender politics of the X-Men writ large.[99]

However, while this conservative bent is certainly one way to read continuity and retcons in the X-Universe, approaching them with an eye toward queer temporality opens new potentialities, not just for our understandings of time in comics but also for our theorizations of queer temporalities more broadly. Indeed, the retcon, much like the comic book multiverse, is at its core a proliferation of the possible. Retcons, when explored through a different vein, center

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[97] Ibid., 57.

[98] The Golden Age begins with the publication of *Action Comics* #1 in 1938, which includes the first appearance of Superman. The Silver Age begins, roughly, with the publication of *Showcase* #4 in 1956, which introduced a new version of DC's Flash. In many ways, the Golden and Silver ages of comics focus on the moral certitude and fiber of superheroes. Without it, they would not be the moral paragons that we could look up to. Jean Grey and the rest of the X-Men were introduced in what is considered the Silver Age, and this thread of non-ambiguous moral identity is a thread throughout many of their earliest appearances.

[99] While it is beyond the purview of this chapter, it is important to note that the desire to remove culpability from Jean, while also mired in problematic moral concerns about the identity of the American superhero, is embedded within a straight, nuclear familial ideology. Shooter, Layton, and Guice feel the need to protect this woman and to explain away her possible guilt and this mar on her own straight-laced personality while also divorcing her from the power of a cosmic entity capable of destroying all life.

the reader rather than the comic or even the multinational corporation. Retcons deconstruct

dominant modes of historiography and can even work toward liberationist futures.[100]

Friedenthal, in defining retcons, also spends time categorizing three separate approaches

to the practice of retroactive continuity itself. He names these reinterpretation—a less definitive

change that leaves room for readers to determine historical canonicity—reinscription—a more

concrete change to the work's meaning and canon—and revision—where older works are altered

through editorial and publication changes to the material text.[101] While these terms are useful in

working through categorizing the different approaches to long-form narrative, they also embody

a central problem in the efforts to define such slippery terminology, especially in terms of

temporality, narratological or otherwise. These categories privilege the move to develop a

straight time, a developmental chronology, that many understand to be the purpose of narrative

and history and thus of time itself.

An approach to retcons like Friedenthal's mirrors Valerie Rohy's discussion of linear

history: "Going back in memory, we build a history that anticipates what is to come, a history

that will in time forget its own retrospective construction and assume the naturalized status of

linear temporality."[102] While the goal of retroactive continuity within the corporate world of the

comics industry is often to create a linear narrative, the very process of retrospection and

retroactivity requires a more thorough exploration. As Rohy further explains, homosexuality and

queerness itself was "made to figure the corruption of history" which violates the edicts of

straight time.[103] Simply through the practice of retroactive continuity, of physically corrupting

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[100] Retroactive continuity, as is perhaps clear in my discussion, is not unlike the move in Critical Race Theory toward revisionist history, which centers the voices of those marginalized in historical narratives. I explore this much more in the next chapter.
[101] Friedenthal, *Retcon Game*, 7-8.
[102] Valerie Rohy, "Ahistorical," 68.
[103] Ibid.

the assumed straight line of temporality and history, comics are themselves a form of queer temporal production.

Where this leads us to, then, is the realization that retroactive continuity relies on contingency, especially in how we approach retroactive changes to long-form comics narratives. While the reading of retroactivity as conservative mirrors a paranoid reading that Sedgwick has marked as "closely tied to the notion of the inevitable," retroactive continuity is attuned alternatively to a practice of queer reading tied "exquisitely to a heartbeat of contingency."[104] Precisely because comics are long-form narrative and because of the complex interweaving of multiple series in the X-Universe, readers can choose to reside in a contingency that focuses on the Claremont and Byrne story in *The Uncanny X-Men* #137 and ignore the resurrection of Jean Grey altogether. Friedenthal's definitions require a retcon to fundamentally change the canon and the meaning of story worlds like the X-Men. These definitions rely both on a completionist bent in comics, a bent that comics readers do not always have. Furthermore, they assume that there is in fact a "complete" narrative the Marvel corporation is trying to tell. Yet those "complete" narratives are never "complete" and the linearity they often try to create is anything but linear.

Contingency in this vein makes commercialism and queerness unlikely bedfellows. Indeed, the tendency to eschew straight time and provide a story that may never end and never has a clear conception of *when* the story is stands in stark contradiction to the dominant, straight, and western way of thinking about time, narrative, and history. While the reasons behind this contradiction continues to bolster an unequal system of capitalistic commercialism, we must

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[104] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, Duke UP, 2003), 147.

nevertheless note that the queerness of contingency stands in the heart of mainstream comics production. In Sedgwick's words, "Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn could have happened differently from the way it actually did."[105] No moment in mainstream comics exists outside of the larger concerns of Marvel's omniversal narrative, thus no storyline ever becomes a part of "sedimented history." All temporalities are constantly in flux to the narrative of the omniverse, which is fundamentally a narrative about the connection of heroes across times and places. What, then, is more queer than finding hope in the possibility that the past, and thus the present and future, can happen differently?

It is possible to see how retcons open the potentialities in comics temporality beyond just ignoring the completionist nature of retcons. In fact, contingency is the nature of mainstream comics, especially those that take place within a shared universe. The plethora of creators, characters, and editors working within this shared world mean that retroactive changes are inevitable. At any given moment mainstream characters can be killed, resurrected, revealed as imposters, or even introduced within comics as having always existed.[106] The potential directions of mainstream comics exist because of the long-form and joint narrative production of the medium that requires we always foreground a queer reading practice of contingency. Comics can

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[105] Ibid., 146.

[106] In fact, Marvel focused a line-wide event on such a story with *Secret Invasion* in 2008, which focused on a secretive, long-term invasion of earth by the shapeshifting aliens, the Skrulls. Many superheroes were proven to have been replaced, leading to retcons of entire arcs in their self-titled books that defined them not as the superhero in that moment, but as a Skrull in disguise. In another infamous retcon, creative team Paul Jenkins and Jae Lee introduced Sentry, a supremely powerful superhero with "the power of one million exploding suns." Sentry was introduced in *Sentry* #1 (2000) but was retconned to have always existed within the Marvel universe. With the introduction of the character, it was revealed that the entire universe's memories of Sentry, including Sentry's own, were removed by the Sentry's archnemesis, the Void. Jenkins and Lee created a plethora of costumes and adventures for Sentry across the decades and even introduced a fabricated publication history of Sentry stories that included imaginary authors.

then be seen as a medium that is comfortable with flux, change, contingency—with queerness—

even beyond the representational. The temporalities of comics are themselves queerly oriented,

simultaneously to temporalities of social norms and temporalities of reading practices.

III:
"Conjuring My Own Mythology":
Reorientation, Retroactive Decolonization and Marvel's *Black Panther*

"Power to the people! Seize the time!"
— Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense[1]

"Again, depending on who was writing it, 'cause you know, until the past twenty years, everyone who was writing was white. So whether the depiction was something I embraced or rejected, it's still white people writing."
-Reginald Hudlin (film producer and comic book writer)[2]

Since just shortly after the character's introduction in 1966, readers and critics have either

tried to connect or argued for the differentiation between Marvel's *Black Panther* and the Black

Panther Party. The early sparks of the Black Panther Party have been traced back to 1966 and the

Lowndes County Freedom Organization, primarily formed to fight for Black citizens' rights to

vote in Lowndes County, Alabama. The Black Panther Party for Self Defense was founded

shortly after in October of 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's Black Panther burst, with much bravado, into the pages of one of

Marvel's flagship titles *Fantastic Four* #52 in July of 1966. In her study on the use of panther

imagery in relation to Black liberation movements, Crystal Am Nelson explains, "While it would

be conjecture to suggest that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby ran in the same circles as SNCC [Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] and RAM [Radical Action Movement], they were clearly

aware of what was happening with the movement at the time, especially given the media

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[1] Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1970).
[2] Jonathan Gayles, *White Scripts and Black Supermen* (California Newsreel, 2012).

attention it was receiving."[3] At the very least then, we might note that Lee and Kirby were influenced by Black liberation movements in the US, like the Black Panther Party.

However, this chapter is less interested in defending an incontrovertible connection between the Black Panther Party and Marvel's *Black Panther*. Rather, this chapter will explore how the long form, serialized narrative production of many mainstream comics across many years by many creators opens possibilities for decolonial and liberatory work. Focusing on Marvel's *Black Panther*, I argue that the specific medium of serialized mainstream comics, even as it works to create a sense of linearity, can address temporality more broadly writ so as to complicate that linearity and redress colonial attitudes embedded in both the characters and timeline. In this way, more contemporary creators of Black Panther actually adhere to Bobby Seale's mantra, "Seize the Time," which became the title for his book on the history of the Black Panther Party. Seale argues that actions are what "let them know that in this time, in our time, we must seize our right to live, and we must seize our right to survive…We know that as a people we must seize our time."[4] The ability of contemporary black creators of *Black Panther* to seize the time using serial comics form means they in fact seize the past, present, and future of the character and of the Afro-diasporic representation and hopes the series carries.

The story world of the *Black Panther*, stretching back to the character's first appearance in *Fantastic Four* #52, is one of possibilities relying on a central question: What if there were an African country that was never colonized? The series foregrounds the creative potentialities inherent in the project of speculation. Rather than picturing a modernity directly descended from the West, what Dilip Gaonkar calls an "alternative modernity" which still manages to centralize

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[3] Crystal Am Nelson, "And They Started Sayin' 'Black Power!,'" *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 3 (2018): 32. The SNCC and RAM were two other groups influenced by the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and related to what became the Black Panther Party.
[4] Seale, *Seize the Time*.

Euro-American modernity, "*Black Panther* indulges the desires of people of African descent to envision ourselves in an alternative relation to modernity."[5] Thus, the *Black Panther* mythos embodies what Kodwo Eshun calls a "chronopolitical intervention," an act that affects one's perception of ideologies surrounding race, nationality, ethnicity, and sexuality.[6]

Black Panther and Wakanda, through their generic placement in speculative fiction, subvert, if sometimes not particularly successfully, many assumptions underlying western coloniality. As andré carrington notes, "The critique of the present on which the story of Black Panther is predicated is a refusal to internalize contradictions between colonizer and colonized, men and women, medieval and modern, and lords and vassals."[7] Wakanda, the fictional nation in the heart of Africa, is a speculative country that prospers beyond colonial relations because the ravages of Euro-American colonialism did not directly affect the land, people, or culture.[8] Indeed, the speculation of Wakanda becomes a stand in for a speculative look at the power of blackness itself. Wakanda is a utopian fantasy that eschews Eurochronological understandings of communities around the globe. European and American colonialism have marked Indigenous peoples across the world, including Africa, as backward, savage, or primitive. Yet, because Wakanda has stood apart from the "progression" of Euro-American colonialism, it offers, in even its most simplistic of renderings, a picture of untouched Indigenous African life and land. As carrington notes, Wakanda "represents a fantasy collectively authored by a social formation as a means of addressing the unmet needs of our particular historical circumstances."[9] Black

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[5] Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), 1–2; andré carrington, "Desiring Blackness: A Queer Orientation to Marvel's Black Panther, 1998–2016," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 244.

[6] Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 292.

[7] carrington, "Desiring Blackness" 234.

[8] It is of course important to remember the irony: the very creation of Wakanda comes at the hands of two white men who, while well-intentioned, embedded many colonial stereotypes about African peoples and communities within their creation of the nation.

[9] carrington, "Desiring Blackness" 244.

Panther as a franchise is particularly suited to conversations of identity and temporality in comics not only because of the particular ways Wakanda is temporally located, but also because of how the comic brings together concerns of Africa with those of the black diaspora within this temporal no man's land. Indeed, Wakanda is a land that we might argue begins to embody both queer time and un-colonialized time.

Given the ways in which *Black Panther* and Wakanda foreground decolonial possibilities, scholars have made associations between the series and afrofuturism. Mark Dery, who coined the term, defines afrofuturism as "Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future."[10] Afrofuturism's relation with *Black Panther* is perhaps clearer given Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones's explanation of astro-blackness, a subset of afrofuturistic art: "a person's black state of consciousness, released from the confining and crippling slave or colonial mentality, becomes aware of the multitude and varied possibilities and probabilities within the universe."[11] The very premise of *Black Panther* relies on thinking outside "a slave or colonial mentality" in order for either the Panther mythos or Wakanda to exist in contemporary times. *Black Panther* then becomes a "counter memory" in Eshun's words, one that takes the focus of history away from western colonialism and builds upon what might be possible outside imperial history. In fact, it encourages the recovery and

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[10] Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham: Duke UP, 1994), 180.
[11] Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones, eds., *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), vii.

remembrance of practices in colonized locales, like those throughout Africa, that defied colonial understandings of the world and centered non-western practices of relationality and being.[12]

However, it is important to note that, while a move away from slave or colonial mentalities might be a goal in the long narrative of *Black Panther*, it did not necessarily begin that way. The creation of Black Panther and Wakanda by Lee and Kirby was mired in problematic ideas about Africa and blackness. Thus, while their creation turned on speculation and possibility, Lee and Kirby struggled to divorce their ideas of blackness from structures of slavery and colonialism. It would be easy to write off a character like the Black Panther as a creation rising out of the recesses of white guilt, providing a fictional look into the possibilities of blackness divorced from oppressive structures without actually making change in the world. However, such an approach would both overvalue the origins of the creation of T'Challa and Wakanda and would fail to account for the long-form narrative production of comics across multiple decades and multiple iterations told by multiple creative teams. While Lee and Kirby created the character in 1966 and Kirby even returned to write and draw the character from 1977-1979, the entire *Black Panther* mythos has been built by a variety of other writers and artists, including Don McGregor, Rich Buckler, Billy Graham (the first black artist to draw the series), Christopher Priest (the first black writer of the series), Reginald Hudlin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Brian Stelfreeze, Roxane Gay, Nnedi Okorafor, and countless others. Throughout this chapter, I will explore the effect long-form serialization of mainstream comics has on a franchise like *Black Panther*. Indeed, the serialization of mainstream comics is unlike that of any other medium. I argue that the production of serial comics opens the door for more contemporary creators to play with history and time in very specific ways and thus create what we might call a retroactive

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[12] For a detailed exploration of some of these practices as they relate to Black Panther, see carrington, "Desiring Blackness."

decolonization of characters previously entrenched in colonial tropes.[13] As may be apparent,

retroactive decolonization extends from the common mainstream comic book trope of the retcon,

or retroactive continuity, as explored in the previous chapter. In Andrew Friedenthal's

estimation, the work of the retcon is like that of historical revisionism. Retroactive

decolonization works along similar lines of course, but specifically rewrites, extends, or builds a

past for characters that begins to deconstruct some of the stereotypical foundations upon which

they were built. It can be a rewriting of the past but can also simply be the telling of a story, of a

built environment and relationality with others and with the land, that was not present in the

original telling.

We might look at the work of seminal black studies and postcolonial studies author

Frantz Fanon to consider the ways in which history and decolonization work, especially in

something like comics. In the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon notes that his

study is grounded in temporality. He writes, "Every human problem cries out to be considered on

the basis of time, the ideal being that the present always serves to build the future."[14] He later

continues, "The future must be a construction supported by man in the present. This future

edifice is linked to the present insofar as I consider the present something to be overtaken."[15]

While on the surface, Fanon's argument can read like a call for a continuation of progressive-

oriented historiography, the notion that the "present is something to be overtaken" can alternately

serve as a call for afrofuturist work in the vein of *Black Panther*. Overtaking the present does not

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[13] This work follows, theoretically, on that of Leah Misemer who, in her 2018 presentation at the Comics Studies Society Conference asked, "What if we tell comics history by starting with web comics and looking back?" While I am asking a slightly different question, such an approach to the historicization of comics and to historicization in general that values retroactive thinking for the benefit of the past, present and future suggests new tactics in combating rampant colonialism, sexism, racism, and Euro-American centrism in and beyond comics studies.
[14] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xvi.
[15] Ibid., xvii.

have to come, necessarily, in the passage of time, but in the speculation of possible futures, and therefore presents and pasts. As Fanon argues at the opening of *Wretched of the Earth*, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously a program of complete disorder."[16] And also "decolonization…is a historical process."[17] In this moment then, Fanon gives voice to the idea that decolonization must operate in the messiness of temporality and history, rather than simply operating linearly or teleologically. Indeed, in order to be a "history-making force" decolonization must champion temporal disorder. An approach to the postcolonial or the de-colonial requires rethinking temporality as itself a form of colonialism.

In her article exploring the long history of the *Black Panther*, scholar Rebecca Wanzo argues that the recent film adaptation evinces a "slow decolonization of the Black Panther," a process that works "to decenter the white perspective from the construction of the character."[18] Wanzo's notion of a long or slow decolonization of Black Panther is foundational to the concept of retroactive decolonization. As Wanzo explains, piecing apart the history of the Black Panther circles around the question of "the relationship between representation and politics" and the changing representation of this franchise "illustrates an epic struggle to make a 'real' Black character out of something that was a white fantasy of blackness."[19] While Wanzo is specifically interested in the progressive changes in representations of the Black Panther's world, I want to explore a slightly finer point to think about how retroactivity not only partakes in Wanzo's long decolonization, but can retroactively decolonize white fantasy itself.

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[16] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Rebecca Wanzo, "And All Our Past Decades Have Seen Revolutions: The Long Decolonization of Black Panther," *The Black Scholar*, 2018, https://www.theblackscholar.org/past-decades-seen-revolutions-long-decolonization-black-panther-rebecca-wanzo/.
[19] Ibid.

This chapter will explore three ways *Black Panther* stories utilize the common trope of retroactivity in serial comics to question the central focus on Euro-American history, both within and beyond the world of the comic. Retroactivity becomes a way to "contest the colonial archive" and, especially in the futuristic story world of Black Panther, intervenes in the 'expected' future that follows from that colonial archive.[20] Retroactive decolonization, like afrofuturism, is geared toward "the proleptic as much as the retrospective."[21] Thus, in what follows, we might argue for the association of retroactive decolonization with Ismael Reed's concept of necromancy, which he describes as "us[ing] the past to explain the present and to prophesize to the future."[22] Of course, as will become clear throughout the chapter, the past, present, and future are not particularly stable in mainstream comics, which is precisely what produces much of the revolutionary potential in the medium.

First, I will explore the use of a particular imaginary story in Don McGregor and Billy Graham's run on *Jungle Action*, the unfortunately titled series that housed Black Panther's first solo adventures beginning in 1972. This specific issue, *Jungle Action* #22, asks the question, What if the Black Panther was around to help recently freed slaves in the aftermath of the Civil War? Imagining this possibility gives Monica Lynn, a main character and love interest for T'Challa at the time, a specific sort of power over the story of the past. While Monica's speculation does not change what happened to Caleb, the former slave at the center of the story, it does undermine the white-centered narrative that places black lives like Caleb's on the violent

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[20] Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," 288.
[21] Ibid, 289.
[22] Qtd. in Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text* 71, no. 2 (2002): 7.

margins of history. It represents Monica, in her words, "conjuring [her] own mythology" that she can then use to shape the future without it being already overdetermined by white imperialism.[23]

Second, I will examine how more contemporary, Black writers pushed against white creators, especially Lee and Kirby, and the origin story of Black Panther and Wakanda. Using work by Stephen Best and Frantz Fanon, I argue that a move beyond origin stories done by white creators can broaden the representational potential of a series like *Black Panther* and is a move particularly suited to the world of mainstream American comics. Leveraging the narrative production of serial comics and their common tropes, more contemporary, Black writers call into question the origins of T'Challa while they also construct a more nuanced narrative that complicates Wakanda's internal political, social, and religious structures as well as its relationship to the outside world. By both broadening and deepening the global and political connections of both the Black Panther and Wakanda, contemporary creators like Ta-Nehisi Coates, Evan Narcisse, and Brian Stelfreeze show an Africa intimately related to, affected by, and affecting global politics. In this way, *Black Panther* becomes a marker for Black power stemming from both Africa and the African diaspora, a power that highlights, in carrington's words, "a history…that is more desirable than those that have been written."[24]

Finally, I will expand upon the previous two sections by highlighting the ways in which Black creators have begun to build a deep past into the story of Wakanda and the mythos of the *Black Panther*. By broadening that past beyond what is offered in Lee and Kirby or any of McGregor's stories, black creators are utilizing retroactivity to combat common colonial ideologies about Africa as outside history or without a past. Indeed, the past of Wakanda

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[23] Don McGregor (w), Billy Graham (p), Rich Buckler (p), Bob McLeod (i), J. Mooney (i), I. Watanabe (l), H. Paley (c). "Death Riders on the Horizon," *Jungle Action* #22. Marvel, July 1976.
[24] carrington, "Desiring Blackness" 244.

becomes embedded with pieces representing an array of African cultures and nations.

Retroactivity then, again, becomes a way of using the relationship between mainstream comics and time to break down colonial stereotypes both within the diegetic and the nondiegetic world. These creators are then able to experiment by "seizing the time" and "conjuring [their] own mythology" of both the past and the future, which are not beholden to whiteness as the series was before.

Reorienting American History

In July of 1976, as part of his "Panther vs. the Klan" storyline in the pages of *Jungle Action*, Don McGregor penned what is often referred to as an imaginary story with artists Billy Graham and Rich Buckler. According to Marc Singer, imaginary stories were popularized during the Mort Weisinger era of Superman (1940s-1960s[25]) and are "speculative pieces that imagine definitive endings for Superman, but only for one issue."[26] That is, imaginary stories tell one ending of a character that exists within Eco's "oneiric climate," that unchanging stability across the decades that maintains the status quo required for the uninterrupted and easily accessible serial publication of comic books.[27] Yet, while Eco and Singer read these imaginary stories, and comics in general, through the frame of conservatism, imaginary stories highlight distinct progressivist possibilities tied to the form, publication, and culture of comic books broadly writ. In many ways, imaginary stories give voice to historical possibilities in these fictional worlds. They give voice to what could happen at the end of a narrative that, beyond these stories, will

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[25] The exact dates for Wisinger's editorship over Superman are difficult to pin down because DC was often inconsistent with their crediting practices.

[26] Marc Singer, *Breaking the Frames: Populism and Prestige in Comics Studies* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2019), 39.

[27] Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2004), 146–64.

seemingly never end. Common imaginary stories envisage possible futures, like the work explored in the previous chapter on queer temporality and futurity.

However, McGregor, Graham, and Buckler's story works in a slightly different way. Rather than a futuristic speculation based on what could happen, they weave a reformulation of the past and a glance into what *could have* happened. In this story, T'Challa (Black Panther), king of the fictional African country of Wakanda, and Monica Lynn, T'Challa's love interest, listen as Monica's mother tells the story of Caleb, Monica's ancestor and a former slave freed at the close of the Civil War. As Monica's mother tells her tale of Caleb, Monica herself contemplates a markedly different saga. In Monica's reformulation of Caleb's story, the Black Panther is there to help aid Caleb as he is threatened by members of the Klan, ignored by Washington politicians, and nearly dragged to his death.[28] Thus, McGregor, Graham, and Buckler's tale aligns with Lisa Yaszek's understanding that afrofuturism begins to highlight "Afrodiasporic histories" which "insist both on the authenticity of the black subject's experience in Western history and the way this experience embodies the dislocation felt by many modern peoples."[29]

The issue takes on a point-counterpoint formal layout, first showing Mrs. Lynne's version of the tale followed by the same scene Monica imagines into existence, with the added benefit of the Black Panther as champion for Caleb. Each of these pages are positioned as two-page spreads with Mrs. Lynne's version on the left page and Monica's on the right. The panel composition on each spread is similar between the two pages without being exactly the same. While the panels in Mrs. Lynne's story are framed by straight lines that come to signify an air of "truth" or "reality,"

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[28] McGregor, et al. "Death Riders on the Horizon," *Jungle Action* #22.

[29] Lisa Yaszek, "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future," *Socialism and Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2006): 47.

Monica's are outlined by wavy lines that signify the tale as "untrue" or a "dream." Finally, in Mrs. Lynne's story, Caleb is depicted as an older, thin, frail man who carries the weight of his former slavery in his very body. However, in Monica's rendition, Caleb is larger, stronger, and seemingly less burdened by his past torments.

In one noteworthy spread (Figure 17), both pages begin with a long, thin panel taking up the width of the entire page, each depicting a close-up of Mrs. Lynne's and Monica's eyes, respectively. On the first page, Mrs. Lynne says, "They rode right up to Caleb—and he was mighty scared." Caleb is approached by men dressed in torn and bloodied confederate uniforms and a man in a red robe and KKK-like hood claiming to be the ghosts of confederate soldiers following their leader, the Soul Strangler. They've come to kill Caleb for going to the Loyal League offices.[30] On the following page, Monica thinks, "They rode right up to the Panther—and he faced them, defiance in his amber eyes." The porousness between these two narratives is clear here, where some of the Soul Strangler's dialogue is repeated verbatim. Yet, in Monica's rendition the Black Panther continues to best the Soul Strangler and his men.[31] Indeed, in T'Challa's defiance of the Soul Strangler, an embodiment of white nationalism and supremacy, the Black Panther makes visible a form of militant resistance popular in the 1970s through the workings of the Black Panther Party in the US, and he does so while being consistently grounded in Africa itself. While it might be tempting to read this moment as an attempt at a utopic refashioning of the past, it also, through a transtemporal fusing of the past, present, and future, recalls the real stories of black resistance throughout history. Thus, this imaginary story becomes a tool to highlight a revisionist history, which Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic define as

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[30] The Loyal Leagues were an offshoot of the Union Leagues, somewhat secretive men's clubs that rose during the Civil War to champion pro-union policies, including the freeing of black slaves. The Loyal Leagues often focused on working class issues.
[31] McGregor, et al. "Death Riders on the Horizon," *Jungle Action* #22.

history that "examines America's historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minority experiences."[32] Indeed, slaves before, during, and after the Civil War resisted the power of American white supremacy, a truth which McGregor, Graham, and Buckler highlight through their own revisionist imaginary story.
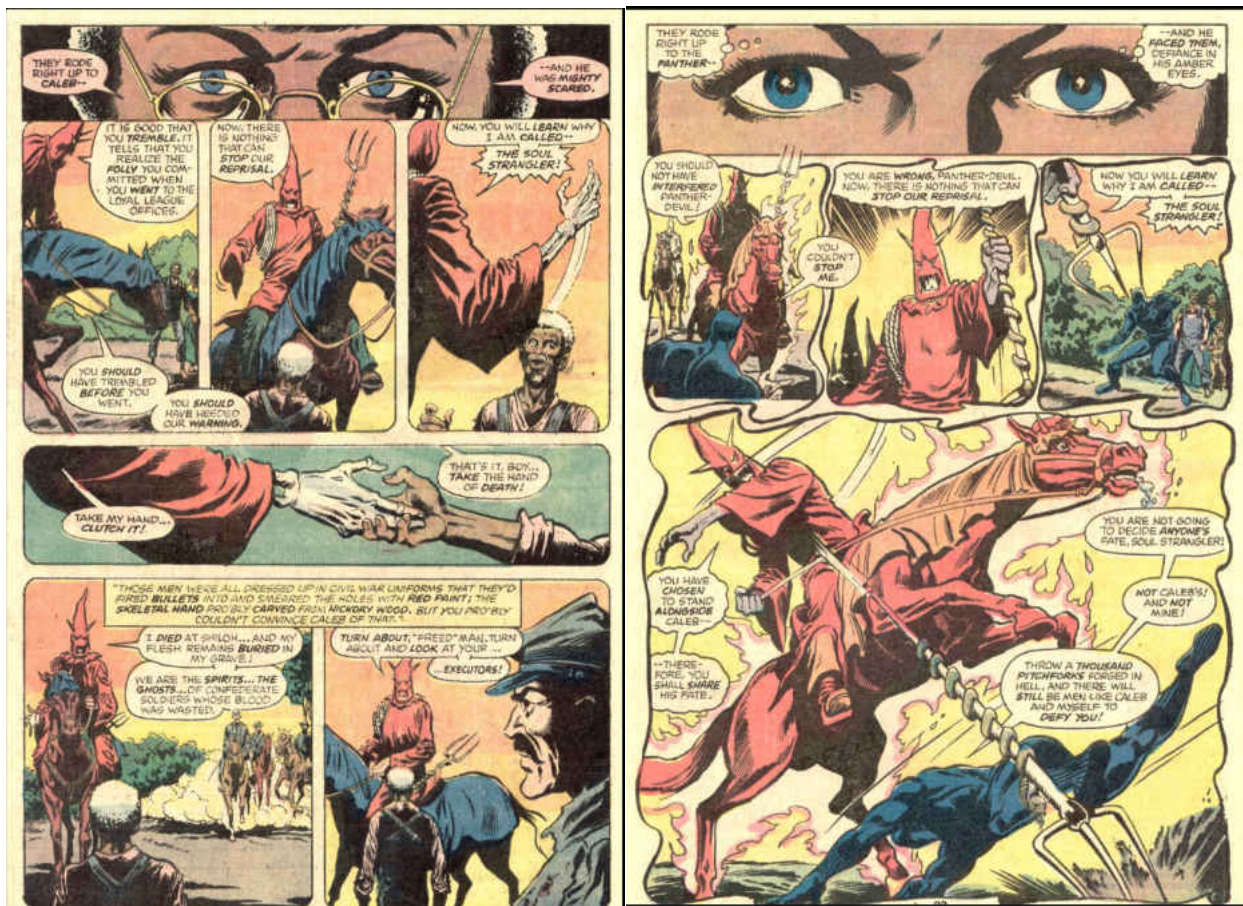

Figure 17: Jungle Action #22

Furthermore, opening each of these specific pages with the intense gaze of two black women born and raised in the American south gives gravity to their respective versions of the

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[32] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York UP, 2012), 24.

tale. They both almost dare the reader to disagree with them. And while we instinctively know there is "truth" in Mrs. Lynne's tale, by the end of the issue, Monica's version carries its own weighty "truth," not in what did happen, but within the possibility of what could have happened.

Figure 18: Jungle Action #22's Ending

While Monica's story—a story of possibilities—takes the bulk of the final page, the first panel in the final row (Figure 18) brings us back to the question of truth and plays a stark warning against too much optimism. This panel shows half of Mrs. Lynne's face as she calls Monica out from her daydream. The background of the panel shows the Georgia sunset framing the silhouette of a tree, a hanging body, and a crying woman on her knees. The "real" version of the past—embodied in the lynching of Caleb—cannot be overwritten, even in the end. And while Mrs. Lynne's story is the last visual referent depicted of these two tales, Monica gets some of the final words of the issue as she enters the house with T'Challa. She notes, "I was conjuring my own mythology. How about that? Didn't you notice? Everything's so much simpler in fantasy. People can be such clear-cut symbols, know what I mean?...Guess I'm just one of those people, T'Challa—who can't take that much reality—but can't close their eyes to it either."[33] Given

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[33] McGregor, et al. "Death Riders on the Horizon," *Jungle Action* #22.

these lines, it might be easy to simply read this issue as a one-off that does little but depict a placeholder imaginary story while deadlines for an issue that will further the plot are met. However, the possibilities in rewriting and refashioning stories, and here American history itself, seems particularly important within the mythos of Black Panther and within contexts like slavery, colonialism, violence, genocide, and racism.

While it is true that imaginary stories, especially those popularized by Mort Weisinger in Superman comics, do little to actually disrupt the oneiric climate of the comics medium, it is also true that imaginary stories can make possible a reorientation of the present to the past and the future. This is precisely what we see in *Jungle Action #22*. Monica refuses to let either the past or the present be overdetermined by the legacies of slavery. Instead she begins to rethink the past and divorce herself from what she calls "reality" to imagine a new relationship between blackness, violence, and power. While it does not bring the characters out of that moment in Marvel comics history, one that continues with actual battles in the 1970s between Black Panther and the KKK, it does make explicit the various ways rethinking the past can help to reorient one to the present and the future. While McGregor's run on *Jungle Action* is still rife with colonial understandings of African and black identity, he does begin, in this specific issue, to explore how *Black Panther* as a mainstream comic series can utilize medium and genre-specific tools to stage a chronopolitical intervention and to question some founding colonial beliefs deeply embedded in the world of mainstream comics. This work continues in an even wider and more subversive way with the introduction of more black creators working on the story of Black Panther and the development of Wakanda.

Revisiting Origins

In his seminal work *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon makes a risky claim: "a Black man is not a man." He continues, "There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge."[34] This 'zone' is identity steeped in the non-personhood of blackness predicated on a colonial society that places white personhood at the center. Indeed, the colonial imaginary relies upon making this zone infertile, which dislodges any ability to combat power structures, be they physical, social, psychological, or a mixture thereof. As Fanon later argues, the creation of this inferiority complex is ascribed as a double process: economic dispossession and epidermalization.[35] By first stripping economic access in an expanding global society based on capital accumulation, coloniality makes inferiority tangible. By then tying that inferiority to skin color, coloniality makes that inferiority visible, bodily, and felt.

Dwayne McDuffie, an acclaimed black writer for companies like Marvel, DC, and his co-founded Milestone Comics, notes this process of dehumanization in mainstream comics: "My problem—and I'll speak as a writer now—with writing a black character in either the Marvel or DC universe is that he is not a man. He is a symbol."[36] Issues of race in comics, much like those of gender or sexuality, come to mark certain companies as having a progressive liberal multicultural agenda, most clearly evidenced in a lack of sustained engagement with contemporaneous and contextual racial issues. Oftentimes, blackness marks a character as worthy simply by virtue of the diversity introduced to the comics line, which itself highlights the

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[34] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.
[35] Ibid., xiv–xv.
[36] Qtd. in Tony Norman, "Milestone," *Comics Journal*, no. 160 (1993): 68.

dehumanizing of blackness by way symbolism. Specifically, *Black Panther* has a complex

relationship with the ways in which creators have engaged with "contemporaneous and

contextual racial issues." The series both embodies the liberatory possibilities proponents of

afrofuturism explore while it also relies on colonial tropes; it has a complex history that both

aligns and clashes with all these ideologies.

Even the first appearance of Black Panther and Wakanda in the *Fantastic Four* is

noteworthy given the complex interweaving of advanced and fantastic technological wonders,

superpowers, and personal and interpersonal dynamics of a makeshift family.[37] The *Fantastic

Four*, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1961 when Lee was on the verge of completely

quitting comics, is the story of four humans given supernatural powers when exposed to cosmic

rays in space. In the following years, Lee and Kirby would weave tales of adventure that showed

the Fantastic Four meeting their lasting nemesis, Doctor Doom, along with various galactic

entities like the Watcher, Silver Surfer, and Galactus. In the midst of each of these encounters,

Lee and Kirby told stories of people both blessed and cursed with these powers as they tried to

make sense of their new place in the world.[38] Given the centrality of technological advancement,

primarily through Mr. Fantastic's scientific work, as well as the conflict with potential cosmic

consequences, the choice to depict Marvel's first African superhero in these pages merits

attention.[39]

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[37] For a detailed history of the rise and importance of Marvel comics, including the creation of the *Fantastic Four*, see Howe, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*. For a detailed exploration of the complex family dynamics and the queer potentialities of the series, see Fawaz, *The New Mutants*.

[38] The most prominent example appears in *Fantastic Four* #51 (June 1966) that explores The Thing's own difficulties with his metamorphosed appearance. The issue was aptly titled "This Man…This Monster!"

[39] Black characters had appeared in comics and there was even an African superhero in a non-mainstream publication. *All Negro Comics*, published in 1947, included a character named Lion Man. The parallels between Lion Man and Black Panther are also hard to miss, from the African animal inspired names to their central missions, the protection of specific minerals in their respective African countries.

In *Fantastic Four* #52 (July 1966) the Fantastic Four, along with Johnny Storm's (Human Torch) college roommate Wyatt Wingfoot, are lured onto a futuristic flying ship that carries them into the heart of Africa.[40] However, this country, the fictional Wakanda, is not the dark heart of the continent popularized in western, colonial renderings, but one of extreme technological advancement and prosperity. Shortly after setting foot in Wakanda, the Fantastic Four are attacked by the Black Panther himself. Using his supreme tactical intelligence and his heightened senses, the Black Panther separates each of the members of the team and uses individualized traps to incapacitate them. It is only because of the non-superpowered Wyatt Wingfoot that the Fantastic Four escape their traps and face down the Black Panther, the chieftain of the Wakandas.

In the following issue, the Black Panther explains that he wanted to test himself against the most formidable superheroes in the world to see if he was ready to seek revenge against Ulysses Klaw.[41] Klaw, a European imperialist, came into Wakanda ten years before the Fantastic Four searching for the extremely valuable mineral, vibranium, on which the technology and much of the culture of Wakanda depends. In the course of this invasion, Klaw orders the former chieftain, T'Chaka, killed. In his grief over witnessing the death of his father, the young T'Challa uses one of Klaw's own weapons, a sound blaster, against him, destroying his hand and forcing the invaders to retreat. As fate would have it, exactly ten years later, Klaw returns, flanked by physical manifestations of sound shaped like giant beasts. However, the Fantastic Four and Black Panther together are too much for Klaw, who retreats inside his sound transformer, which transmutes his body into pure sound energy.

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[40] Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (p), Joe Sinnott (i), Sam Rosen (l). "The Black Panther!" *Fantastic Four* #52. Marvel, July 1966.
[41] Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (p), Joe Sinnott (i), Artie Simek (l). "The Way It Began…!" *Fantastic Four* #53. Marvel, August 1966.

In the course of these two issues, there is a focus on constructing an African country that contradicts most stereotypical notions of the continent. At the opening of issue #53, after T'Challa has befriended the Fantastic Four, we see the heroes on a stage with T'Challa and Wyatt Wingfoot as the Wakandans begin "the Dance of Friendship" while garbed in traditional cultural regalia (Figure 19).[42] Fawaz notes that while this moment is steeped in stereotypes of African "primitiveness" it continually subverts those stereotypes through the placement of the Panther as physically above the white heroes and through Mr. Fantastic's admission that Wakanda is technologically superior to the West. Indeed, even the Fantastic Four's Ben Grimm (The Thing) voices his own confusion over the mélange of "modern technology with the so-called natural or premodern world of African tribal culture."[43] Grimm explains, "I still don't get it! They tossed a bunch'a science-fiction gizmos at us that Doc Doom would'a been proud of usin'! And now they're actin' like they're all charged up on account'a just inventin' the wheel!"[44] Wakanda offers what Grimm and the rest of the Fantastic Four read as a particular marriage of pre-modern, tribal culture with an advanced, extremely modern understanding and use of technology. As such, Lee and Kirby use the confusion of the Fantastic Four to highlight the ways in which stereotypes have become embedded in our understanding of the world, in our understanding of what a "modern" culture can possibly be or look like. For all its stereotypical fumbles, the strength of the introduction of Black Panther and Wakanda in the *Fantastic Four* lies in the subversion of the traditional/modern binary, or the savage/civilized binary, that has remained a fundamental motivation and justification for global colonialism and Euro-American imperialism.

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[42] The regalia represented here is problematic at best. Lee, et al. "The Way it Began…!" *Fantastic Four* #53.
[43] Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, 117.
[44] Lee, et al. "The Way it Began…!" *Fantastic Four* #53.

Figure 19: The Opening of Fantastic Four #53 (1966)

However, even as the Black Panther mythos undercuts so many of the underlying

assumptions about Indigenous African communities and blackness, these early appearances are

still steeped in problematic and stereotypical representational politics. The first appearance of

Black Panther in the pages of Lee and Kirby's *Fantastic Four* gives us a character so focused on

revenge that he brings the Fantastic Four to Wakanda so that he can try to take them all on to

prove he is worthy to fight his nemesis, Ulysses Klaw. Even in a warrior culture like that of

Wakanda, Black Panther only finds his worth to face down Euro-American colonial

encroachment through the American superhero team. While this placement is of course dictated by his appearance in the *Fantastic Four* book, it highlights the centrality of whiteness, even in introducing a black character and an African country. Once Klaw attacks, the Panther is primarily relegated to fighting the animal sound creations of Klaw, a trope which we can also see in Don McGregor's run on *Jungle Action*, where Black Panther fights various creatures including a crocodile, pterodactyl, and rhinoceros. As Wanzo has argued of this character, black representation is often used as a tool of white supremacy, here in the continued marking of T'Challa as 'savage' or 'primitive,' and implicitly hierarchizing whiteness and blackness.[45]

While it is not the goal of this chapter to outline the complex representational politics of Wakanda, a cursory glance at them helps to clarify the ways in which the character and the series cannot be cast in wholly positive or wholly negative terms. However, these highly stereotypical representations in the origins of the Black Panther and Wakanda make clear that the origins of characters, especially minority characters, can often be overvalued in comics scholarship. Yet, more recent iterations of the character and the world show that these first versions by Lee and Kirby do not, should not, overdetermine our understanding of T'Challa, Wakanda, or any of the characters that appear throughout the book.

In his article, "'Introducing the Sensational Black Panther!' *Fantastic Four* #52-53, the Cold War, and Marvel's Imagined Africa," Martin Lund argues that placing the introduction of the Black Panther into a contemporary Cold War context shows that the character was born out of fear of what the decolonization of Africa could mean for American interests in the Cold War. He continues, "It also shows how Black Panther is used to rhetorically alleviate those fears by

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[45] Wanzo, "And All Our Past Decades Have Seen Revolutions."

'proving' that the new African nation-states would align themselves with the West."[46] In an

historically contextualized argument, Lund's points usefully outline the ways popular culture

engages with larger geopolitical questions. However, Lund, in making his argument, takes issue

with the ways some scholars conduct comics scholarship, pointing specifically to American and

Black Studies scholar Adilifu Nama. Lund notes that Nama's effort to link the "Black Panther to

colonialism and the 'Third World,'…reads the source material selectively and evinces a

confirmation bias common in scholarship on comics and identity; the positive reading ultimately

rests on being decontextualized and dehistoricized through the absence of the FF and Lee and

Kirby."[47] Indeed, Nama argues, even through the problems that he clearly recognizes in the

Black Panther mythos, that "the Black Panther not only symbolized a politically provocative and

wildly imaginative convergence of African tradition with advanced technology, but he also stood

as a progressive racial symbol and anti-colonialist critique of the economic exploitation of

Africa."[48] In effect, the Black Panther re-imagined third-world political independence.[49]

While Lund's arguments are useful, they rely on an historicism that continually returns to

the primary origin of the character and does little to account for the changes characters and

locales like Black Panther and Wakanda go through via various creators and iterations, as is

common in superhero comics. This is clear in his argument that Nama's positive reading of the

character is both "decontextualized and dehistoricized" because Nama does not give enough

attention to the *Fantastic Four* or Lee and Kirby. While this critique may be true, Nama's own

positive reading can be further bolstered not by Lee and Kirby's problematic introduction of the

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[46] Martin Lund, "'Introducing the Sensational Black Panther!' Fantastic Four #52–53, the Cold War, and Marvel's Imagined Africa," *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 6, no. 1 (2016): n.p.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Adilifu Nama, *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2011), 42.
[49] Ibid, 43.

character, but through the reimaginings, returns, and broadenings of the *Black Panther* mythos at the hands of black creators. In reading the character through the lens of retroactive decolonization, it devalues, or at least shifts focus away from, the first appearance of the character, to explore what the character's origins might look like in the hands of black creators. In fact, such a decontextualized, or perhaps recontextualized, and dehistoricized reading of the origins of a character like the Black Panther fall specifically within the purview of mainstream comics. While Eco reads these superhero comics as existing within the unchanging "oneiric climate," retroactive decolonization shows that a focus on the origins of a character, even if they have already been related before, do not necessitate an unchanging status-quo. Indeed, the stories by the black creators who later wrote Black Panther work actively to upend that status quo.

Stephen Best's work in his book *None Like Us* further elucidates this particular way of reading historicity in the Black Panther mythos. Here Best explores the relationship between blackness, aesthetics, and history. He introduces a concept he calls "melancholy historicism," which is focused on "the recovery of a 'we' at the point of 'our' violent origin."[50] That is, for Best, melancholy historicism focuses, in black studies, primarily on slavery as the violent origin that leads to the building of a collective identity of blackness. In fact, Best notes, much of the work in Black studies (Africana Studies, African American Studies, etc.) rests on a recovery imperative "in which recovery from the slave past rests on a recovery of it." Slavery and colonialism become not just the structure from which blackness should be liberated, but structures that begin to define blackness because "history consists in the taking possession of such grievous experience and archival loss."[51] The search for a "lost or absent black culture" is substituted for an exploration of a violent "origin."

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[50] Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, and Aesthetic Life* (Durham: Duke UP, 2018), 13.
[51] Ibid., 15.

While Best notes that melancholy historicism has been useful, he further argues that

scholars must begin to see beyond this approach because framing "history in this way preserves

faith in the lost object as a counterpoint to the past's irrevocability. The injury of slavery

engenders a loss that requires abundant recompense, which is never (can never be) achieved."[52]

While I do not want to draw a direct similarity here, Best's notion of melancholic historicism

shows that a reliance on the violent origin embodied in stereotypical renderings of characters like

Black Panther, while important to note, actually end up caging work that comes after as always

in relation to an overvalued, stereotypical past. In fact, such an approach overvalues the

importance of creators like Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, whose character, in more recent iterations,

has obfuscated or perhaps completely turned against the focus on liberal multiculturalism that

stains these original comics pages.

A notable example of this revision appears in Reginald Hudlin's run on *Black Panther*

beginning in 2005. At the opening of this series, Hudlin and artist John Romita Jr. present the

long history of Wakanda as an isolationist nation. The first arc of Hudlin and Romita Jr.s run,

titled "Who is the Black Panther?," is as interested in beginning to answer that titular question as

it is "What is Wakanda?" It is in Hudlin's run that we first begin to see the deep ties between the

African nation, the African land, and the chieftain of Wakanda, T'Challa. After detailing

Wakanda's past defensive strategies against would-be invaders in the 5th century (Figure 20) and

the 19th century,[53] Hudlin and Romita, Jr. tell the story of T'Challa, including the assassination

of his father, T'Chaka, and his rise to power. The assassination of T'Chaka is of particular

interest because Hudlin retcons the previous agreed upon story of Ulysses Klaw killing T'Chaka

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[52] Ibid., 16.
[53] Reginald Hudlin (w), John Romita, Jr. (p), Klaus Johnson (i), Dean White (c), Chris Eliopoulos (l). "Who Is The Black Panther? Part One" *Black Panther* #1. Marvel, April 2005.

during an invasion of Wakanda. However, in *Black Panther* #3 (2005) Klaw, as a point-of-view

character, tells the story of Wakanda being invited to a global economic conference wherein the

nations of the world would work to purchase the resources within Wakanda. He notes, "Third

world countries aren't normally invited to the real meetings like this. That's what the UN is

for—a place for the powerless to whine about the white men."[54] Yet, in this flashback, T'Chaka

shows that he and Wakanda are anything but weak (Figure 21). In his refusal to sell Wakanda's

resources and scientific advancements, T'Chaka explains, "You could have made half these

breakthroughs yourself, but there's too much money to be made in misery. Why cure a disease

when people pay for medicine?…I understand your frustration in dealing with a black man who

can't be bought with a truck full of guns, a plane load of blondes, and a swiss bank account."[55]

After taking his leave from the meeting, Klaw infiltrates T'Chaka's quarters and kills him and

his oldest son before being shot twice in the arm by the young T'Challa and fleeing.

While the bare bones of this retelling do echo the original version—a money-hungry

white man kills a powerful black king for a priceless mineral before having his arm severely

wounded by the king's son and heir to the throne—the status quo is anything but static. By

rewriting Wakanda into the global political and economic spheres and by depicting T'Chaka as

no stranger to the colonial tendencies of western powers, Hudlin counters the status quo. While

the Lee and Kirby version of Black Panther traffics in stereotypical representations of Africa,

Hudlin begins to rework those stereotypes, highlighting the blackness of the characters and the

locale. Thus, Hudlin and Romita, Jr., more than Lee and Kirby, re-imagine third-world political

independence while also writing both T'Chaka and Wakanda as less naively isolationist and

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[54] Reginald Hudlin (w), John Romita, Jr. (p), Klaus Johnson (i), Dean White (c), Randy Gentile (l). "Who Is The Black Panther? Part Three" *Black Panther* #3. Marvel, June 2005.
[55] Hudlin, et al. "Who Is The Black Panther? Part Three" *Black Panther* #3.

more direct in their refusal to bend or bow to western colonial powers. Indeed, the black

characters of Wakanda read as infinitely more capable in Hudlin and Romita, Jr.'s version, all of

which becomes possible not just through a retcon, but also through a reformulation of how

blackness, Africanness, and Indigeneity operate throughout the world of the Black Panther and

Wakanda.

Figure 20: Visiting the Past in Hudlin's Black Panther #1 (2005)

Figure 21: T'Chaka Showing the Power of Wakanda

However, retroactive decolonization does not necessarily rely on a complete retcon of a past story. A recent prominent version of retroactive decolonization comes in Evan Narcisse, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Paul Renaud, and Stéphane Paitrau's 2018 mini-series *Rise of the Black Panther*. This series retells the original version of the death of T'Chaka and expands upon the early years of T'Challa's reign in Wakanda as Black Panther. Narcisse, Coates, Renaud, and Paitrau return

to the original death of T'Chaka, making Wakanda an isolationist nation once more through

T'Chaka's reign. They likewise place the decision to open Wakanda to the wider world within

Figure 22: Placing Black Panther within the 1960s Marvel Universe

T'Challa's hands. The series also only briefly mentions the events that comprise Black Panther's

first appearance in the *Fantastic Four* and contextualizes that connection with some of the most

famous moments in other Marvel comics including the Fantastic Four versus Galactus[56], Thor

versus the Stone Men from Saturn[57], and the X-Men versus Magneto (Figure 22).[58] This comic

then couches Wakanda within the broader Marvel universe of the 1960s and within broader

socioeconomic, geopolitical, and transnational relations, which effectively decenters the Lee and

Kirby version of Black Panther and Wakanda. This broadening requires both the characters in

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[56] Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (p), Jow Sinnott (i), Artie Simek (l). "The Coming of Galactus!" *Fantastic Four* #48. Marvel, March 1966.
[57] Stan Lee (w), Larry Lieber (w), Jack Kirby (p), Joe Sinnott (i), Artie Simek (l). "Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn" *Journey Into Mystery* #83. Marvel, August 1962.
[58] Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (p), Paul Reinman (i), Sam Rosen (l). "X-Men" *X-Men* #1. Marvel, September 1963.

the series and the readers of the series to contend with the larger history of colonization,

especially in Africa, and Wakanda's previous policies to remain hidden from the outside world

which, in some ways, necessitated the nation ignoring the atrocities of colonialism facing other

African peoples. Indeed, the move away from re-presenting the stories in any sustained way or

from re-using panels from the original isssues, both common tropes in mainstream comics,

highlights this push to disconnect this retroactive telling of T'Challa's story from the work of

many white creators, Lee and Kirby specifically.

This move continues in issue #5 when T'Challa learns of a half-brother named Jakarra,

who originally appeared in Jack Kirby's run of *Black Panther* (1977-1979).[59] Jakarra, like in

Kirby's run, exposes himself to raw vibranium which metamorphoses his body into a monstrous

creature (Figure 23). However, in Narcisse's retelling, the Black Panther quickly incapacitates

Jakarra before he is able to cause the destruction he does in Kirby's original telling.[60] It is worth

noting here that the Black Panther is present in Wakanda and thus able to dispose of Jakarra

quickly, while in Kirby's tale the Black Panther was trying to make it back to Wakanda after

working with the collector Mr. Little in an adventure to find both the golden frogs of Solomon's

Temple and the Water Skin of Life held in a city of Ancient samurai. With an eye toward

retroactive decolonization, we can see then the important change here from a king who, shortly

after his reign begins, leaves to work with the Avengers, to a king who is present as he ushers

Wakanda into a new and important moment in global relationships.

A melancholy historicist approach might then read *Rise of the Black Panther* as an

example of a text that works toward too utopic ends, and that, because it does not write out Lee

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[59] Jack Kirby (w & p), Mike Royer (i & l), Sam Kato (c). "A Cup of Youth" *Black Panther* #6. Marvel, November 1977.
[60] Evan Narcisse (w), Javier Pina (p & i), Edgar Salazar (p & i), Stephane Paitreau (c), Keith Champagne (c), Joe Sabino (l). "Power Show" *Rise of the Black Panther* #5. Marvel, July 2018.

and Kirby's original story of the character, is still situated within the same concerns about African and Cold War politics. Instead, I argue that stories like *Rise of the Black Panther* are examples of comics that can help us radically rethink not just the representations of individual characters, like T'Challa, but the questions of historical process and contextulization itself. By purposefully recontextualizing T'Challa's origins without rewriting the character's first appearance, the creators of *Rise of the Black Panther* show an approach to history that relies on revisionism and always questions the "truth" of the past. The fact that origins can be retconned, revisited, and broadened within the narrative and publication schema of mainstream comics highlights the ways in which comics themselves can begin to help us ask different questions about the process of historicization.

Figure 23: Jakarra from Rise of the Black Panther #5 (2018)

Recovering Wakanda's "Deep Past"

In his article "Orientalism Reconsidered," Edward Said notes that a central legacy of Orientalism[61] is the notion that human history can be understood as "possessing a complex, but coherent unity."[62] He continues:

> So far as Orientalism in particular and the European knowledge of other societies in general have been concerned, historicism meant that the one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or was observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West. What was neither observed by Europe nor documented by it was therefore "lost" until, at some later date, it too could be incorporated by the new sciences of anthropology, political economics, and linguistics.[63]

Colonial mentality reads the entire world as either a part of western history or not yet a part of western history. Becoming a part of western history is inevitable. Until such a time, all non-westernized places were seen as a temporal abyss, an idea made clear in Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* where he notes that Africa is "no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit...What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped, Spirit still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of history."[64] While Black Panther and Wakanda combat such colonial attitudes about the world via speculative fiction, the character's first appearance in *Fantastic Four* #52 and #53 do little to contradict the notion of an unhistorical Africa.

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[61] In his seminal postcolonial work *Orientalism* Said writes that Orientalism began in the late eighteenth century and "can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

[62] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, no. 1 (1985): 101.

[63] Ibid., 101.

[64] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Ontario: Batoche Books, 1956), 117.

Beginning with Lee and Kirby and continuing through various other creators like McGregor and Peter Gillis, Black Panther highlighted the specific history of T'Challa without any sustained exploration of the history or cultural practices of Wakanda itself. Thus, these early issues of Black Panther stories become exemplars of the notion that "African history was for the most part seen as the history of Europeans in Africa."[65] Readers are only offered the story of Wakanda from the moment the Fantastic Four travel to the country, with very little explanation of the past outside of the origins of T'Challa himself, which also correspond with the European Klaw invading Africa. Even a science fiction story like that of Black Panther relies upon such colonial renderings of Africa because, to construe Africa in any other way would necessitate revisiting the justifications of European colonialism on the continent. Even a fictional setting located within Africa is created within this complex web of colonial renderings and mentalities.

Furthermore, the early stories of Black Panther mirror the beginnings of African historiography itself. According to Bethwell A. Ogot, a Kenyan historian, African historiographers challenged the imperial historiography of the West beginning in the 1950s with what is now referred to as the New African Historiography, which was tied closely to the growth of national liberation movements in the continent.[66] Alongside the New African Historiography was a new sociology of development popularized in W.W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth*, which defined economic well-being by a likeness to Western development.[67] As Ogot notes, "This 'modernization theory' had its counterpart in a liberal historiography which interpreted the whole of African history in a developmental perspective."[68] In *Fantastic Four* all

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[65] Bethwell A Ogot, "African Historiography: From Colonial Historiography to UNESCO's General History of Africa," *Groniek*, no. 122 (1993): 71.

[66] Ibid., 71.

[67] W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

[68] Ogot, "African Historiography," 72.

of the characters discuss the importance of Wakanda in terms of technological advancement and development; even when that development is ahead of American technology, as Mr. Fantastic notes, it is still being assessed in its relationship to western technological development. Both the New African Historiography and Rostow's theories of economic development place the future of Africa next to the present of the West. Likewise, the history of Wakanda as a technologically advanced society is only made intelligible through its relationship to western understandings of technology.

It is only with the decline of the liberal and nationalist version of African history that African historians begin to move away from western imperial historiographies. Similarly, when the Black Panther mythos moved into the hands of black creators, there was, as I have noted above, a move to divest the character and the location from stereotypical renderings by some white creators. Of particular note here is the formulation of a deep Wakandan past that began with Reginald Hudlin and matured with Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze. Even from the opening of Hudlin and Romita Jr.'s run, they prioritized depicting Wakanda's past as an unconquered nation (as in Figure 20). Neither other African tribal communities nor the arms of Euro-American colonizers could impose themselves on the Wakandan people.

Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze take these moves first introduced by Hudlin and Romita Jr. even further, most notably in their creation of the Djalia in their 2016 *Black Panther* run. The Djalia, the plane of Wakandan memory that brings together the past, present, and future of Wakanda, is depicted as a utopia within a utopia. In the second issue of Coates and Stelfreeze's run we see Shuri, T'Challa's sister first introduced in Hudlin's run in the mid-2000s, traveling and exploring this plane with a griot, a wandering African spirit and storyteller, that has

taken on the form of the queen mother, Ramonda (Figure 24).[69] Shuri's body is currently in stasis

after a run-in with Thanos and his Black Order in Jonathan Hickman's mega-event *Infinity*.

While T'Challa tries to find a way to reanimate Shuri, she is learning of the deep past of

Wakanda. According to the griot, the Djalia is "the plane of ancient memory. All of it is here. All

of the triumph and tragedy of your people."[70]

Figure 24: The Djalia

[69] Ta-Nehisi Coates (w), Brian Stelfreeze (a), Laura Martin (c), Joe Sabino (l). "A Nation Under Our Feet, Part Two" *Black Panther* #2. Marvel, July 2016.

[70] Ta-Nehisi Coates (w), Brian Stelfreeze (a), Laura Martin (c), Joe Sabino (l). "A Nation Under Our Feet, Part Three" *Black Panther* #3. Marvel, August 2016.

While the Djalia and Wakanda can be read as examples of afrofuturism, what sets these creations apart is their ability to address was Dery calls afrofuturism's "troubling antinomy": "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?"[71] Coates and Stelfreeze seem to argue through their creation of the Djalia that, while a past may be difficult to verify, for the African diaspora it does not infringe upon one's ability to imagine that past and thus the possible presents and futures that extend from it. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the most important differences between earlier versions of *Black Panther* and more contemporary ones: a futuristic society like Wakanda would not, could not exist without a deep and central engagement with the past, with tradition, with ancestry. Thus, Coates and Stelfreeze's *Black Panther* highlights the central ability of comics to "seize the time," giving not just control of the present and the future to black creators, but also the past. By making use of mainstream comics' proclivity toward retroactivity when necessary, Coates and Stelfreeze are able to break ties between the *Black Panther* mythos and larger colonial tropes that come to define even texts with decolonial, or at least anticolonial, aspirations.

In the fifth issue of Coates and Stelfreeze's run, Shuri begins training with the griot in the Djalia, learning of the deep past of Wakanda. The griot tells her of Adowa, an ancient Wakandan duchy (Figure 25).[72] It is important to note that she first outlines the existence of Adowa and the rest of Wakanda for generations, noting the strength of the hunters and fame of their crafters. However, she explains, "In the eighth vicennial of Alkebulan's elder age, shortly before King Sakura's rising, strangers arrived in the court of Adowa demanding tribute."[73] These strangers

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[71] Dery, "Black to the Future," 180.
[72] Ta-Nehisi Coates (w), Chris Sprouse (p) Karl Story (i), Laura Martin (c), Joe Sabino (l). "A Nation Under Our Feet, Part Five" *Black Panther* #5. Marvel, October 2016.
[73] Coates, et al. "A Nation Under Our Feet, Part Five" *Black Panther* #5.

mirror western, Euro-American colonial forces, believing in the power of the soldier and the rights afforded them from waging successful battles and wars. In response, the griot explains that the Duke of Adowa "resolved to melt into his nation, return to the essence, and become one with his people."[74] When the strangers returned, they found barren villages and an empty court. But when the strangers went into the forest to begin to gather the fruits off which Adowa lived, they were hunted. They were slaughtered no matter where they went in Adowa. The griot notes, "The entire land had risen against them."[75]

Figure 25: Shuri Learning about Adowa in the Djalia

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

The griot, through explanations of the Djalia and the stories of the past, emphasizes that the power lies in being Indigenous Africans, Indigenous Wakandans. Ties to the land, the place, of Wakanda, go back further than anyone in Shuri's time can remember. And it is precisely from within that deep temporal relationship with this land that the Wakandans draw their power. The griot further associates Wakandan power with practice: "Either you are a nation, or you are nothing."[76] Memory, the land, and the people are all interconnected in a deep web. Thus, it becomes important to contend with Wakandan indigeneity itself, a rootedness to the land and place of Wakanda from which they derive their communal understanding. It is through Shuri's journey into the Djalia that she begins to see the difference between nationalism and isolationism, that latter of which was a practice so common before T'Challa's rise to the throne. The griot appears to be explaining to Shuri a nationalism ingrained more in one's relationship to the land and its memory than to any amorphous idea of national pride attached to the name Wakanda. She is able to show Shuri the very basis of what Glen Sean Coulthard calls an Indigenous community's grounded normativity, which he defines as "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time."[77]

The griot's story points to not only the importance of the nation and the land, but the larger decolonial work made possible through the retroactive inclusion of the Djalia into the Black Panther mythos. The Djalia introduces a larger, more land or place-based spiritual foundation to the nation of Wakanda, a nation of Indigenous Africans. The importance of place

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White* Masks, 13.

and land as tied to indigeneity cannot be overstated and in fact, according to Eve Tuck and K.

Wayne Yang, lies at the heart of decolonization.[78] Retroactively introducing the Djalia and

centering land and memory in an Indigenous African epistemology affects the entire *Black*

Panther timeline, broadening the story beyond a simple speculation on the possibilities

engendered from an uncolonialized locale.

Figure 26: T'Challa on History

Furthermore, the Djalia more completely disassociates Wakandan culture and society

from concerns of materialism, capitalism, and consumerism. As the griot explains to Shuri what

the Djalia is, it notes, "You have been told that the might of your country is in its wonderful

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[78] K. Wayne Yang and Eve Tuck, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

inventions, in its circuits and weaponry. This is the mastery of things. But Wakanda was great

before it had things and its secrets are older than any vaunted metal."[79] Here, the griot pushes

against the longer, more entrenched story of Wakanda as a nation that garners its worth and

importance from vibranium, the precious and nearly-indestructible metal that is mined only

within Wakanda. Instead, the griot emphasizes that Wakanda existed before and beyond the great

vibranium mound. Coates and Stelfreeze, in decoupling the long history of Wakanda from

vibranium, are able to decouple the origin of the *Black Panther* mythos from both a capitalistic,

extraction-based understanding of place embedded in colonial worldviews as well as Lee and

Kirby's origin of the character and nation, steeped in colonial stereotype. The Djalia becomes a

way to rethink the relationship between past, present, and future. The introduction is so

important that Ryan Coogler included a version of the Djalia in the 2018 *Black Panther* film.

By broadening the *Black Panther* mythos using retroactivity and the introduction of

Wakandan-specific spiritual and memorial locales like the Djalia, many of these creators reorient

the relationship between black identity and history in *Black Panther*. In the third issue of *Rise of*

the Black Panther, T'Challa notes, in inner monologue, "History happened to me once. I didn't

like it. After being buffeted by winds of tragedy, I resolved to be the one who makes history"

(Figure 26).[80] The first part of this narration appears in a panel that depicts an AI controlled plane

carrying a delegation of United Nations representatives into Wakanda, in much the same way

that a plane brought the Fantastic Four into Wakanda back in 1966. The second half of the

narration appears in a panel showing T'Challa and some tribal council members watching the

approaching plane. This new iteration of Black Panther and the surrounding culture, nation, and

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[79] Coates, et al. "A Nation Under Our Feet, Part Three" *Black Panther* #3.

[80] Evan Narcisse (w), Paul Renaud (p & i), Stephane Paitreau (c), Joe Sabino (l). "Mr. Follow Follow" *Rise of the Black Panther* #3. Marvel, May 2018.

mythos complicates the origin of the character. As Rebecca Wanzo argues, this is another step in the line of the long decolonization of the Black Panther.[81] However, it is not only a move toward the future decolonization of the series, but a move to rewrite, rethink, and complicate the origins to take the defining of this nation, this culture, and these people out of the hands of colonial-minded creators. Black creators on this series—Ta-Nehisi Coates, Evan Narcisse, Brian Stelfreeze, Roxane Gay, Nnedi Okorafore, and many others—strive to be the ones to make Wakandan history, rather than simply introduce another shell of a black country for the sake of representation.

Viewing comics according to dominant frames of historicism and history will often lead to an argument that comics, especially mainstream comics, are not and perhaps cannot be radical, as scholars like Lund and Singer note.[82] Of course, both of these scholars still note the importance of studying comics, radical or not. However, the specific form and production of comics offers a different way to think about history through the ways mainstream comics rework temporality using retroactive telling, retelling, and continuity. There are definitive ways in which contemporary creators can thwart, and even begin decolonizing, these stories. After all, if decolonization is an embodied practice that must rework societies from the ground up, as many scholars in Indigenous studies argue, then perhaps the first thing we must do is rework the current ways we approach history and historicization to think through multiple histories and various futures for us all.

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[81] Wanzo, "And All Our Past Decades Have Seen Revolutions."
[82] Lund, "'Introducing the Sensational Black Panther!'"; Singer, *Breaking the Frames*.

IV:
Deep Time, Vast Place, and the
Affordances of Indigenous Comics

In his now widely cited article "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" Patrick Wolfe notes that settler colonialism is all about land. He writes, "Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element."[1] If the end goal, the prize, of the settler colonial project is land—as I would agree it is—then I would argue that settler colonialism's specific, irreducible practice is based in temporality, operating through a temporal identification. This identification tries to define multiple groups of people who for ease of language we call Indigenous, primarily by ignoring their own cosmologies, ontologies, and self-understandings. By relying on a western notion of temporality as progress-oriented, settler colonialism works against Indigenous self-determination and first marks Indigenous communities as temporally 'out of place.' This process then provides multiple paths toward the occupation of the land that, through western, "Enlightened" rationality, leaves behind settler guilt that is tied to the practices of colonization. Indeed, colonial guilt and grossly violent actions can, in a settler frame, get left behind in the same ways that Indigenous peoples themselves are already "behind." As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui argues, we must then see colonialism as a structure, which "exposes the fact that colonialism cannot be relegated to the past" much like Indigenous peoples cannot be relegated to the past.[2]

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[1] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no.4 (2006): 388. My first sentence also comes from Wolfe's piece, where he writes that "Settler colonialism is a structure, not an event."
[2] J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "'A Structure, Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (2016): n.p.

In his 2019 book *Our History Is the Future*, Nick Estes, writing specifically about prophecies of black snakes (oil pipelines) in Indigenous territories, describes some of the ways in which the settler notion of temporality is at odds with Indigenous ones. He writes

> For the Oceti Sakowin, prophecies like the Black Snake are revolutionary theory, a way to help us think about our relationship to the land, to other humans and other-than-humans, and to history and time. How does one relate to the past? Settler narratives use a linear conception of time to distance themselves from the horrific crimes committed against Indigenous peoples and the land. This includes celebrating bogus origin stories like Thanksgiving. But Indigenous notions of time consider the present to be structured entirely by our past and our ancestors. There is no separation between past and present, meaning that an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of our past. Our history is the future. Concepts such as Mni Wiconi (water is life) may be new to some, but like the nation of people the concept belongs to, Mni Wiconi predates and continues to exist in spite of white supremacist empires like the United States.[3]

Indigenous temporality then is not about linearity; for Estes, linearity is a repressive way to consider temporality. There is a complex interplay between the past, present, and future that makes each more difficult to coherently and purposefully distinguish from the other. The importance of land or, more specifically, what Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson would call "grounded normativity, cannot be overstated within this complex.[4] As Simpson notes in her own work, Indigenous temporality is not dissected into a tripartite past, present, and future. She notes, "The future is here in the form of the practices of the present, in

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[3] Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019), 14-15.
[4] Coulthard, *Red Skins White Masks*, 13.

which the past is also here influencing."[5] For Simpson, Indigenous temporalities operate within a continuity of communal, land-based practices and understandings that co-constitute relationships with both space and time.

Indigenous orientations toward temporality are precisely what Mark Rifkin addresses in his book *Beyond Settler Time*. Rifkin notes that attending to Native conceptions of temporality means purposefully thinking past settler temporalities and the "needs, claims, and norms" associated with colonial visions.[6] In opposition to a shared time, where we all experience temporality collectively, Rifkin, following scientific theories of relativity and Indigenous anti-colonial scholarship, suggests thinking through time in terms of "frames of reference." In Rifkin's view, "a notion of temporal frames of reference can provide ways that Native and non-native trajectories…might be distinguished without resorting to a notion of shared time (almost always skewed toward non-native framings), thereby opening up room conceptually for the expression of varied forms of temporal sovereignty."[7]

Following the work of these many scholars, this chapter will build on the previous work of this project to argue that comics forms offer new avenues for exploring temporality from an Indigenous "frame of reference." Comics, generally in a different way, is also caught up within considerations of time and space, and relations therein. From McCloud's definitions of comics as "juxtaposed pictorial images in a deliberate sequence" to Groensteen's exploration of the spatio-topia of comics and through more contemporary studies like Miodrag's examination of the interplay between language, comics, and the language of comics, time and space are central to

[5] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2017), 213.
[6] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 4.
[7] Ibid., 30.

our thinking about the way the medium works.[8] Comics forms are particularly unique because they combine and complicate the relationship between both spatiality and temporality. Spatiality, specifically land, and temporality are inseparable in an Indigenous worldview. Comics offers a particular and pointed mix of both space and time, detailing a form that can literally put into play "frames of reference" through the frames (or panels) that make up the comics themselves. Thus, the forms of comics offer certain affordances to Indigenous creators as they create stories that deconstruct entrenched histories and worldviews of white settler societies. Indeed, Indigenous comics offer the most radical example of historical dissidence I have explored thus far precisely because they are not only working to deepen issues of temporality and spatiality but also because, through that work, they are calling into question larger structures of settler dominance and continued Indigenous oppression.

Will Eisner has famously argued that the use of panels "indicates the duration of the event. Indeed, it effectively 'tells' time. The magnitude of time elapsed is not expressed by the panel per se…" but "the fusing of symbols, images, and balloons makes the statement."[9] (26). Thus, for Eisner, one of the ways time is told throughout a comic is with panels, across which artists can depict temporal movement. Yet, in a different vein, Groensteen notes that panels, "situated relationally, are, necessarily, placed in relation to space and operate on a share of space."[10] For Groensteen, panels also help to demarcate the place of the narrative. Together Eisner and Groensteen indicate the ways in which the formal pieces of comics (panels, balloons, images) work together to create a story in both space and time. In fact, spatiality and temporality

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[8] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*; Groensteen, *The System of Comics*; Miodrag, *Comics and Language*.
[9] Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 26.
[10] Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, 21.

are central concerns for all of comics storytelling, which is what makes exploring Indigenous conceptions of space and place so complex when reading Indigenous comics.

Indigenous comics and creators have grown in popularity in the past ten years, gaining notoriety with collections like Matt Dembicki's edited collection *Trickster: Native American Tales*, published in 2010. *Trickster* was not the first Indigenous comic but was early in the flood of publications that ran throughout the 2010s including works like Gord Hill's *500 Years of Resistance*, Arigon Starr's *SuperIndian*, and the multiple volumes of *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*. Publishers have begun focusing more pointedly on Indigenous comics including Native Realities Press and HighWater Press, an imprint of Portage and Main Press in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. With the influx in publications of Indigenous comics, the fan community increased as well, leading to the first Indigenous Comic Con in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2016 as well as the opening of Red Planet Books and Comics, an Indigenous-focused comic shop in Albuquerque, in 2017.

This growth in Indigenous comics publication and fan communities merits attention. I want to explore the ways in which comics provide a particular way of interacting with Indigenous cosmologies and ways of knowing the world. This chapter will open by exploring how comics depict both space and time through what Wai Chee Dimock calls "deep time" and what I am calling "vast place." Deep time and vast place offer analytics for thinking not just about how comics depict Indigenous knowledge, but how Indigenous ways of knowing are markedly different from colonial ways of knowing and that this distinction is about a fundamental difference in understandings of time and space and the relationships between humans and other-than-humans.[11]

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[11] In many Indigenous languages, like Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe), words are marked as either animate or inanimate. What is seen as living in Indigenous epistemologies is much broader than in Western ones. For instance,

After outlining the central concepts of deep time and vast place, I turn then to *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*, Volume 1. Published in 2015 by Alternative Histories, Inc. *Moonshot* collects voices from across both Canada and the United States to explore Indigenous storytelling in comics form. Throughout this section, I explore how both science fiction tropes and aesthetics combine with or complicate traditional stories from various tribal traditions to center Indigenous conceptions of space and time and the relations between humans and other-than-humans throughout the vast cosmos. The combination of these two storytelling practices, which scholars like Grace Dillon argue have always been entwined, call into question the settler conception of linear temporality that relegates Indigenous communities to the past and exploits their existence in order to dispossess them of their land. Indigenous sf particularly opens the narrative to consider connections across time and space within an Indigenous orientation.

Finally, I turn to Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's *Red: A Haida Manga* which breaks down the dichotomy of comics and art while it also formally centers Haida art practices to draw a distinction between linearity and simultaneity. By telling us a story of the past that is not quite past, present, or future, Yahgulanaas shows us the artificiality of these distinctions and the ways in which Indigenous communities, like the Haida peoples, conceive of temporality in different, perhaps more complex, ways. Thus, I argue that *Red* offers what Rifkin has called "an indigenous orientation to temporality" through the way Yahgulanaas plays with the forms of comics itself.[12] This orientation is not, in fact cannot be, couched solely in a discussion of temporality, but requires a simultaneous consideration of space, specifically of Haida lands and waterways.

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the word for "rock," *asin*, is animate. So, rocks and stones are seen as animate. Similarly, when discussing living beings and other-than-humans in this chapter, I am following this wider view of the animacy of beings than what is offered in settler conceptions.

[12] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2.

Deep Time and Vast Place

Wai Chee Dimock's book *Through Other Continents* explores the importance of

considering literature across the annals of time, including those times beyond the frame of

human reference. She calls the attention to these long frames of reference "deep time." She

argues that what deep time "highlights is a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and

recessional with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of

relations, a densely interactive fabric."[13] Thinking in terms of deep time opens the possibility of

thinking across the past, present, and future, simultaneously considering each. While individuals

or communities do not cease mattering as important relations, they become pointedly important

in the larger web of the cosmos across deep time. As Dimock notes, "Scale enlargement along

the temporal axis changes our very sense of connectedness among human beings."[14] In many

ways, Dimock's theorization recasts what both Estes and Simpson describe as Indigenous ways

of thinking about temporality. Indigenous ontologies have, since time immemorial, been imbued

with an eye toward deep time, which then shapes the interrelations between humans, other-than-

humans, and land/waters.[15]

As Rifkin shows, to discuss the temporal frames of reference in Indigenous communities,

we must consider the background of those communities and their particular relationships with

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[13] Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 3-4.
[14] Ibid., 5.
[15] I am using land/waters with a slash between to note the difference of land and water, while also highlighting the inextricable relation between the two. Such a complex interrelation is clear given the ways in which land and water together make up the landscape on which indigenous communities live. If "Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific irreducible element" and, as Craig Womack (Creek-Cherokee) argues "a landless Indian Literature is no Indian Literature at all," we must think about the complex relations between land and water that create territoriality and thus have central baring on settler colonial relations and Indigenous literature more broadly writ. Craig Womack, *Art as Criticism, Story as Performance: Reflections on Native Literary Aesthetics* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2009).

the land.[16] Indigenous communities' relationships to the land stretch since time immemorial; these relationships markedly affect Indigenous conceptions of temporality. I will consider place more fully in a moment, but I mention it here to outline the ways in which Indigenous temporalities have always considered deep time through their connections to place and their communal orientations to the world. And while I want to note that Indigenous frames of temporal reference are markedly different because of these backgrounds, the notion of continuity is not completely divorced from Indigenous temporalities. Indeed, we must consider what Joanne Barker calls the "cultures and identities that are conflicted, messy, uneven, modern, technological, and mixed."[17] There is no one way to think about Indigenous frames of reference to temporality, but there is room to consider how these frames of reference embody some of the tenets of deep time in a markedly different way than settler colonial frames of reference. As Rifkin notes, "Attending to story as a constitutive element of perception emphasizes the variability and changeability of Native experiences while also addressing the ongoing (re)construction of collective frames of reference, suggesting less the transmission of static narratives than active and ongoing dynamics of perceptual (re)orientation."[18] Indigenous communities are consistently orienting and reorienting themselves because of continued settler colonialism. Thus, to consider Indigenous communities in any responsible and sustained way means that we must acknowledge and actively consider that flux.

In conjunction with deep time, the relations between land/waters, humans, and other-than-humans is constelled through what I am calling "vast place." In this iteration, vast place is focused on stories that, in their vastness, lean into cosmic significance, that reach beyond the

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[16] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 33-34.
[17] Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 223.
[18] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 34.

local, national, or even global. However, vast place is about more than showing stories that reach beyond specific locales, but also relies on those stories of cosmic significance providing meaning in and across various local, national, and global contexts. In theorizing vast place, I follow geographer Tim Cresswell who writes that "the most straightforward definition of place [is] a meaningful location" and that "place is also a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world."[19] All places rely on connections between land/water, humans, and other-than-humans and are thus imbued with a specific meaning and importance. Local understandings of these connections rely on cosmic ones, and vice versa.

The concept of vast place is deeply indebted to Coulthard's notion of "grounded normativity," which I defined above and which has been taken up by Indigenous scholars including Simpson and Brian Yazzie Burkhart.[20] Indigenous practices of anti-colonial resistance have always centered on questions of land because land has been and continues to be the central element of settler colonial dominance. Vast place, like deep time, encompasses a wide view of place, seeing its importance as not relegated to a subset of specific lands, but embedded in all lands and places across and beyond this planet and into the cosmos. Vast place stretches Coulthard's account that, "Place is a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others; and sometimes these relational practices and forms of knowledge guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place."[21] Vast place pushes toward a decolonial view of the local, national, global, and cosmic by pushing against settler conceptions of place as conquerable, ownable, or controllable.

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[19] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7, 11.
[20] See Brian Yazzie Burkhart, "The Groundedness of Normativity or Indigenous Normativity Through Land," in *Comparative Metaethics: Neglected Perspectives on the Foundations of Morality*, ed. Colin Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2019).
[21] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks*, 61.

In previous work, most notably Vine Deloria Jr.'s *God Is Red*, scholars have argued that a fundamental difference between Indigenous and settler views center on questions of land versus those of temporality. According to Deloria, Indigenous communities describe their lands— places—"as having the highest possible meaning," while settlers, because of movement from one place to another, mark history—time—"in the best possible light."[22] While in many ways this fundamental difference is of paramount importance, I want to argue that the importance of both place and time cannot be so easily codified. Indeed, even Deloria realizes that, through a focus on place, temporality remains markedly important for various Indigenous communities. In discussing the importance of sacred spaces to various Indigenous religions, Deloria writes, "But it would seem likely that whereas religions that are spatially determined can create a sense of sacred time that originates in the specific location, it is exceedingly difficult for a religion, once bound to history, to incorporate sacred places into its doctrines. Space generates time, but time has little relationship to space."[23] The relationship to specific lands for Indigenous communities is actually what allows for a more comprehensive view of time that refuses settler colonialism and western temporalities.

Furthermore, as is implicit in Deloria's writing, the long history of settler colonialism, here especially in North America, has meant that many Indigenous communities have been removed from their ancestral territories. These various removals have then displaced Indigenous spiritual beliefs from the lands where they garner meaning. Folding Indigenous tribes within the progress-oriented temporality of settler colonialism inevitably leads to divorcing them from their ancestral land/waters. Because of this, it is clear that while space does generate time, time is still

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[22] Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1992), 61.
[23] Ibid., 70. One marked issue with Deloria's discussion of time and place is that he often elides differences in the concepts of space and place. For my purposes, I consider all his uses of space as related to the definition of place by Tim Cresswell offered above.

quite important for defining and understanding one's relationship to land. Indeed, the spatial

inflection of temporality for Indigenous communities is precisely what sets it apart from settler

notions of temporality

The complex constellations of vast place and deep time can be encapsulated in a single

term in some languages. For example, in the Indigenous North American language

Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe), the term might be rendered *giizhodibaa'iganeg*.[24] While this word

literally means "heat time," it describes the notion of a core energy that exists beyond place and

time, a kind of presence within nothingness—within the place before place and the time before

time—an accounting of the core energy of the cosmos.[25] Such a presence, which is embodied in

the anomaly and connection of all things, lies at the center of a collection like *Moonshot*.

Language comes together with visual representation in the comics medium to depict

understandings of land/water, human, and other-than-human interconnections on all levels.

Before moving on to the example of *Moonshot*, we might first return to the Indigenous

characters floating through the pages of Richard McGuire's *Here*, which I explored in chapter

one. The example of McGuire's story highlights, especially in the context of this chapter on

comics by and about Indigenous communities, the focus on deep time at the expense of a

consideration of vast place. Indeed, the space of *Here* is almost claustrophobically small. While

the Indigenous characters in *Here* begin to push against western temporality, as I show in that

chapter, the construction of the text around a particular and local space does not account for as

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[24] My thanks to Dr. Margaret Noodin for helping me to puzzle through the pieces of this term and develop an understanding of how one Indigenous language can represent the interconnections between time, space, living beings, and land/waters.

[25] It is important to note that I am not using the Anishinaabe term *giizhodibaa'iganag* as a broad overwriting of specific concepts arising from other Indigenous communities and languages. Rather, I am using a single term to name this complex relation of space and time as they constitute the nexus of human, other-than-human, and land/waters as centrally important for Indigenous worldviews, especially as constructed in comics. The complexities embodied in such terminology provide a simpler way to discuss a complex interrelation of multiple concepts that are, in many ways, inextricable.

many of the radical possibilities within comics to unsettle western, imperialistic ways of thinking. Comics like *Moonshot* and *Red* highlight the spatial within the temporal to fundamentally reorient connections between time and space in comics forms.

Ways of Seeing Connections

In their forward to Thomas M. Norton-Smith's (Shawnee) *The Dance of Person and Place*, editors Agnes B. Curry and Anne Waters (Seminole/Choctaw/Chickasaw/Cherokee) write:

> It [Their edited series, "Living Indigenous Philosophies"] is about a hope that documenting some thoughts and ideas about the ways worlds are, and how humans live in those worlds, might enable us to realize the vastness from which our ideas are born, and immeasurable openness to which we may turn for our creativity. It is about opening the life of our voices to the immense task that lies before us, as human, and as beings in the world, to reach for the horizon of our new worlds.[26]

Curry and Waters give voice to a wide envisioning of indigenous being, which focuses on the interrelatedness of place, time, and Indigenous epistemologies. *Moonshot* is emblematic of this same envisioning, precisely because it highlights dynamic and fluid representations of native communities that reach across time and space to make sense of "the ways worlds are, and how humans live in those worlds."

Scholars like Susan Bernardin have argued that comics specifically offer a form for Indigenous writers to "affirm dynamic relationships between indigenous pasts and futures."[27]

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[26] Thomas M. Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), xv.
[27] Susan Bernardin, "Future Pasts: Comics, Graphic Novels, and Digital Media," in *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 480.

Bernardin writes, "In refusing rigid boundaries between literary and visual arts, they [comics] also re-animate relationships with visual and sequential storytelling practices that stretch back millennia."[28] In stretching through time, Indigenous comics storytelling practices also stretch through space given the spatial inflection of Indigenous approaches to temporality. Tying this with Scott and Fawaz's notion that comics can represent anything by virtue of their composition as drawn artistic practice, Indigenous comics become a medium for the radical reformulation of temporality and spatiality broadly writ.[29] Indeed, the form becomes a way of rethinking the relationality of all things and of deconstructing broad colonial assumptions about Indigenous communities that have circulated since the dawn of colonization.

These moves are particularly clear in Toronto, Canada-based publisher Alternate History Comics' groundbreaking *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*, Volume 1.[30] The collection includes work by Indigenous artists and writers like Arigon Starr (Kickapoo), Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe/Métis/Irish), Richard Van Camp (Tłı̨chǫ), Jay & Joel Odjick (Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg), and Michael Sheyashe (Caddo), among many others. The project was funded through Kickstarter and received $74,792 from 1,569 backers.[31] Information on Kickstarter notes that the collection includes tales "From traditional stories to exciting new visions of the future." *Moonshot* provided one of the most concerted efforts to centralize Indigenous voices and epistemologies as they extend outwards from the stories being told. One of the primary moves of the collection that considers the correlation between deep time and vast

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Scott and Fawaz, 201.
[30] Hope Nicholson, ed. *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: Alternate History Comics, 2016).
[31] Alternative History Comics, Inc., "Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection," *Kickstarter*, Accessed May 23, 2018, https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1350078939/moonshot-the-indigenous-comics-collection.

place, or the entwined spatial and temporal, is the continued return to stories of Indigenous science fiction (sf) and Indigenous futurity.

Relations across space and time have been a central facet in the development sf, and this holds true for Indigenous sf as well. In the introduction to her anthology *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* Grace Dillon notes that Indigenous science fiction "change[s] the parameters of [the genre of] sf" broadly.[32] While sf is constantly changing, and has been for some time, the stories that have solidified the genre are entrenched in western conceptions of time, space, and being. Yet, the very nature of science fiction makes it a genre malleable to a variety of ontologies and understandings of the universe at large. Indigenous sf writers can play with character or setting and can "stretch boundaries" to represent Indigenous conceptions of time, space, and relationality in a way that "foundational" sf cannot. Rather than depicting yet another colonial expansion onto a distant planet inhabited by "simple" or "primitive" beings, Indigenous sf can represent the continuity of indigeneity itself. By representing indigeneity as existing beyond the colonial past and beyond the frontier, Indigenous sf stretches colonial understandings of time and space. As Dillon notes, Indigenous sf "returns us to ourselves by encouraging Native writers to write about Native conditions in Native-centered worlds liberated by the imagination."[33]

Many of the stories in *Moonshot* could be categorized as Indigenous sf. They each, following tribally-specific traditions, use the genre of sf to represent various Indigenous orientations to *giizhodibaa'iagneg*. Whether through retellings of traditional stories in a futuristic setting, through highlighting the continued importance of stories themselves across time and

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[32] Grace Dillon, ed., *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2012), 3.
[33] Ibid., 11.

space, or through using aesthetic representation to call attention to the importance of our understanding of connections between living beings and land/waters, the stories in *Moonshot* are able to stretch the boundaries of the genre in order to make room for a wider understanding of orientations to time, space, and relationality. In many ways, these stories aid authors in "recover[ing] the Native space of the past, to bring it to the attention of contemporary readers, and to build better futures."[34]

For instance, in Arigon Starr and David Cutler's (Qalipu Mi'kmaq) story "Ue-Pucase: Water Master," Starr and Cutler make use of sf to set a retelling of the Muskogee-Creek story "The Young Man Who Turned into a Snake" in the distant future where two Muskogee-Creek men travel to find the old Creek home world.[35] After failing to follow off-world protocol and eating a can of Spam, one of the young men becomes a snake, the water master. The other takes him to a lake and brings his grandmother to visit him. The water master then takes her with him underwater and they do not return.

While it would be possible in the realm of sf to explain why the transformation happened, perhaps through radiation soaked up in the food on the now uninhabited Earth, the point of the story is not to explain but to warn. The stories of the elders, Muskogee-Creek elders in this tradition, point out specific ways in which individuals are not to interact with other human or other than human beings. Failing to respect these warnings produces specific consequences. Issues of relationality are so central to the story of "Ue-Pucase" that they shape both the beginning and the ending. Warnings like "no off-world food" highlight specific ways Indigenous communities relate to the larger cosmos, but those relations do not break down when the protocols are not followed. The consequence, the transformation of the young man into a snake,

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[34] Ibid., 4.

[35] Nicholson, *Moonshot*, 66-72.

changes his relation to the world around him. He becomes an other than human being that remains important in the interaction between all things.

The form of the comic for this story, and some of the others that follow, allows for a particular visualization of Native survivance in a stream of temporality divorced from coloniality. Even in the first image of the story (Figure 27), the ship orbits the Earth as Buck and Chi-Bonnee return to the "ancient home world." By depicting Indigenous characters in a futuristic scenario of spaceships and off-Earth living, the comic foregrounds a narrative contradictory to the teleological one of settler colonialism that relies on the disappearance or death of Indigenous communities. The notions of "off-world" living and revisiting the Creek home world envision a vast place that entwines a future in conjunction with sf genre tropes and a past defined by traditional storytelling practices that continually reach beyond any single temporal confine.

After Chi-Bonnee eats the can of Spam, he has a dream of his grandmother, Ida, praising him for the gift of Spam he brought her before she draws attention to his tail, a snake tail which forms the bottom half of his body where his legs once were (Figure 28). The gutters around the panels of the dream are not black, as elsewhere in the story, but green and gold and take on the aesthetic quality of Indigenous artistic practices like beading. The colors also mirror the green and gold body of the snake Chi-Bonnee becomes. Yet, even more interesting is the way these specific gutters, which invoke ancient practices of Indigenous art, set apart the dream sequence that happens in a house that could exist on any reservation on Earth. Thus, while this story foregrounds notions of futurity and science fiction, the form of the comic continually breaks down a linear path forward to that futurity through visual markers specific to indigeneity and Indigenous life as it exists across spaces and times. Indeed, even as this narrative is futuristic, the

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story it recalls is much more ancient and exists, as this story makes clear, within the spatial

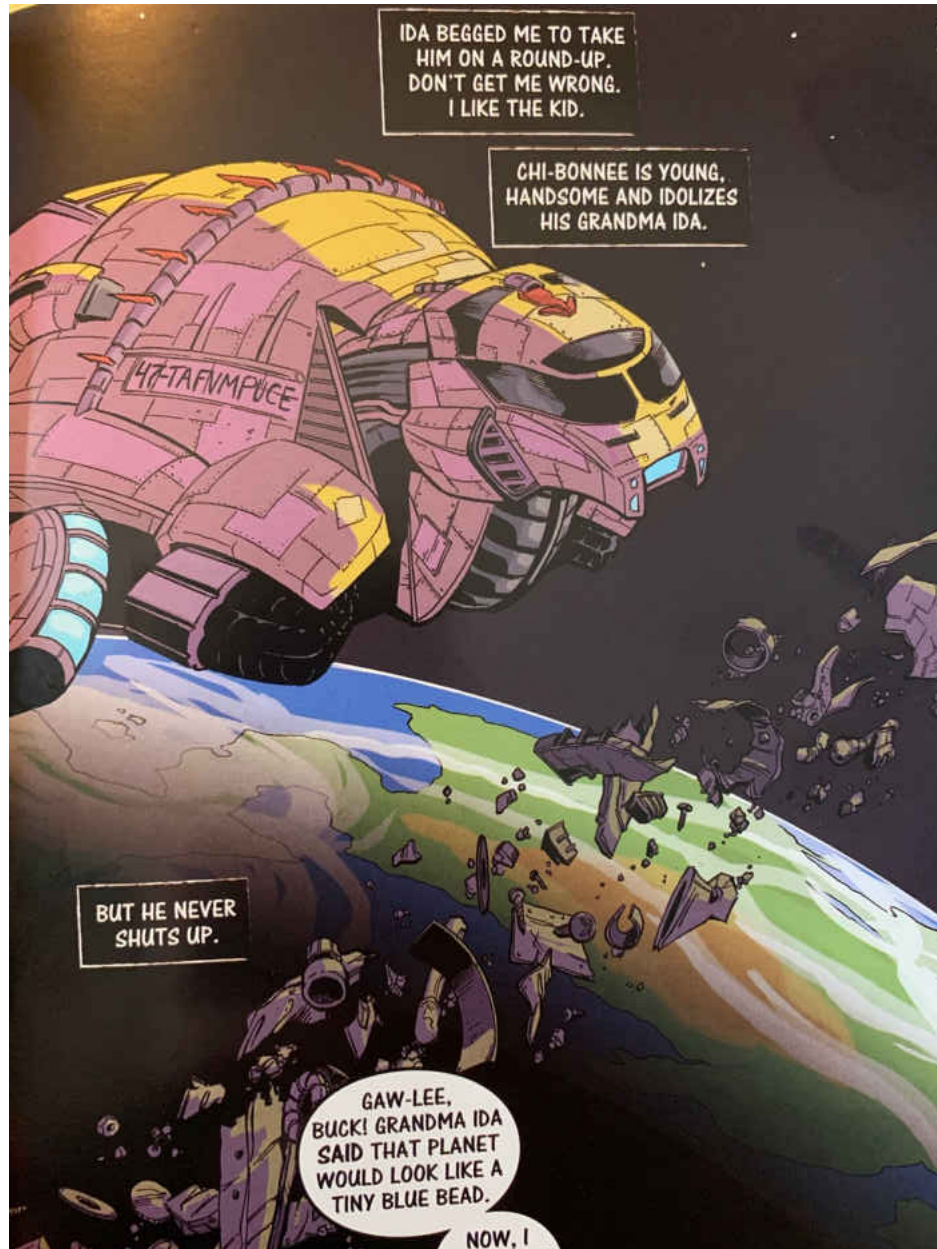frames of traditional Creek homelands, or here the home world.

Figure 27: Visiting the Cree Home World in "Ue-Pucase: Water Master"

At the close of the story, the remaining young man tells readers, "He took her under the water. They never came back. I'm just an old junker. Who would believe me? I'm telling you now—those old stories are true. The Creek home world is real. So is Ue-Pucase, the water master. He's a friend of mine."[36] While this story focuses on the proper way to live out relations between all things, it also becomes a way to show the importance of traditional stories across times and spaces. As stated above, this version of "Ue-Pucase" is based on a traditional Muskogee-Creek story. In that original story, the two young men are hunters that are not to eat eggs they find on the riverbank. This version of the story shows that the warnings do not stop being important when the Earth becomes uninhabitable. Beyond the Earth and beyond the contemporary moment, these stories are a part of time immemorial and write the relationship between all things in the vast cosmos.

Similar to the story of "Ue-Pucase" are the stories "Ayanisach," by Todd Houseman (Cree) and Ben Shannon, and "Strike and Bolt" by Michael Sheyahshe and George Freeman. "Ayanisach," which is the Cree word for "He who tells stories of the past," shows a grandmother and her grandson as he tells her the story she once taught him about their people.[37] In a veiled analogy for colonialism in North America, the young man tells of the coming of the dispectors (Figure 29), machines who "ate everything they could find" with the help of their machines called rippers.[38] He closes the story by telling of the Chief Maskwa, who led the resistance against the dispectors and drove them from the planet. Upon completing the story, he realizes that his grandmother has died. He goes on to join a gathering of others and begins the story of

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[36] Ibid., 72.
[37] Ibid., 131-138.
[38] Ibid., 134.

their people for them. In the final panel of the story we see that they are at the base of a ruined, post-apocalyptic Big Ben in London.

Figure 28: Chi-Bonnee's Dream in "Ue-Pucase: Water Master"

Within the collection, "Ayanisach" is one of the clearest examples of juxtaposing a settler orientation to the world and an Indigenous one. The analogy of settlers to the dispectors highlights the bifurcated ways of thinking common in settler colonial orientations through the name "dispectors" itself. The dispectors mark western rationality rooted in rigid binaristic, two-

sided thinking: then and now, here and there, civilized and savage, powerful and weak. Indeed, even the panels in Figure 29 show a rigid, binary framing with an equal size and a roughly symmetrical placement of the text. Finally, the dispectors are themselves considered in a dualistic fashion; their societies are made up of the dispectors themselves and the rippers that complete their colonial, extractive work for them.

Thus, through an approach to Indigenous sf, which Dillon argues is "a well-established movement that has been overlooked for years," the dispectors come to represent an abstraction of settler colonialism itself.[39] In McCloud's terms, cartooning is about abstraction, which does not mean "eliminating details" as much as "focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't."[40] Using sf in comics form, Houseman and Shannon create icons of settler colonialism. The dispectors come to represent the core tenets of settler colonialism, focusing primarily on a binaristic approach to rationalization and the utilization of land for materialistic and capital gain.

Figure 29: The Dispectors from "Ayanisach"

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[39] Grace Dillon, "Global Indigenous Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3 (2012): 377.
[40] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 30.

Yet, as the story plays out, the continued existence of a people is not marked by wealth or the capitalistic gain found in land, but by knowing and repeating their place in the relationality of all things. As such, it is the dispectors, not Indigenous peoples, who are no longer on the Earth. As Houseman and Shannon note in their introduction to the story, "Storytelling in the oral tradition is an important part of indigenous cultures" that "helps communities stay connected with their past, and preserve their culture for the future. This is a story that is set in a future that may be, or a present that might have been."[41] This story, along with many others in Moonshot, carries importance across times and spaces and even possible alternative histories. The use of sf and the comics medium encourages an Indigenous orientation to the relationality of all things to, as the original inhabitants of turtle island did, "[live] in harmony with mother earth."[42]

Throughout *Moonshot*, the use of Indigenous sf pairs with a consideration of traditional stories across various tribal contexts in order to consider the vastness of place and the deepness of time. Indeed, even the title of the collection, taken from a song by Plans Cree singer and songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie, calls to mind both space travel but also the importance of a cosmological understanding of our relations with one another and with various other-than-humans. The title track of Sainte-Marie's eighth studio album, "Moonshot," focuses on both time and space, highlighting the ways in which settler conceptions fail to grasp how indigeneity complicates dominant ideologies of spatiality and temporality.[43] In the refrain, which opens the song, Sainte-Marie sings:

> Off into outer space you go my friends
> We wish you bon voyage
> And when you get there we will welcome you again
> And still you'll wonder at it all

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[41] Nicholson, *Moonshot*, 131.
[42] Ibid., 133.
[43] Buffy Sainte-Marie, "Moonshot," recorded in 1972, track 6 on *Moonshot*, Vanguard Records.

The narrator of the song addresses unknown individuals by wishing them good luck on their journey into space. Coming three years after the Apollo 11 moon landing, the song is likely a reference to the culmination of the infamous "Space Race" between the United States and the USSR. However, after immediately wishing these "friends" well, the same narrator notes that they will be "welcome[d]…again" in space. In this way, Sainte-Marie places Indigenous communities, who are a central concern in much of her music, in outer space prior to both global powers. In "Moonshot," reaching outer space is not necessarily a bodily experience, but one that relies on a spiritual connection with the creator and with the cosmos. Indeed, according to Sainte-Marie's website, "Moonshot" was "written after a conversation with Christian scholars who didn't realize that Indigenous people had already been in contact with the Creator before the Europeans conquered them."[44]

Sainte-Marie further dissects settler ontology by denying a simple, causative association between the past and the present. Rather, Sainte-Marie simultaneously depicts how indigenous voices are not solely marked as existing in the past, "enshrined in some great hourglass…entombed in some great English class," and establishes settlers as "primitive" themselves in the figure of the anthropologist who "spoke in a language oh so primitive, that he made sense to me." By, above, marking Indigenous communities as futuristic in their relationship to the cosmos and here marking settlers as "primitive," Sainte-Marie repudiates notions of linear temporality or of progress. Rather, the relationships between past, present, and future are demarcated through Indigenous orientations to both spatiality and temporality, which champions Indigenous self-determination and ontologies over settler ones. The conjoining of sf

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[44] Buffy Sainte-Marie, "*Moonshot* (1972)," *Buffy Sainte-Marie*, accessed December 16, 2019, http://buffysainte-marie.com/?page_id=771.

tropes and aesthetics with traditional tales, as is central in both "Ue-Pucase" and "Ayanisach,"

continues throughout the collection in various ways and to different ends.

One of the most striking examples and embodiments of *giizhodibaa'iganeg*—this conflux

of energies in the cosmic and the local, the human and the other than human, the land and the

waters across time—in *Moonshot* arises in Elizabeth La Pensée (Anishinaabe) and Gregory

Chomichuk's story "The Observing." This story is of Haida origin and is told across the Pacific

Northwest. It recounts when the star people came to observe a hunt and thus mixes tropes of

Indigenous sf with a concern for traditional stories, much like in "Ue-Pucase."[45] The introduction

to the story notes the use of Indigenous steampunk, an aesthetic subset of Indigenous sf,

specifically mobilized to introduce the Star People and their technology (Figure 30). The

introduction to the story states, "Indigenous steampunk is about recognizing water as in, around,

and through all."[46] Steampunk, which is used to re-envision past times with the inclusion of

steam technology, has often been set in Victorian or western times. However, as LaPensée has

noted elsewhere, steampunk "overlooks Native…representations and forms of technology and

aesthetics that did exist."[47] As "The Observing" shows, the basis of steampunk in indigeneity

means that the steampunk will look quite different precisely because of the central concern of

land/waters. Thus, water, rather than steam, becomes the notable aesthetic marker of Indigenous

steampunk.

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[45] Ibid., 73-78.
[46] Ibid., 73.
[47] Elizabeth LaPensée, "Native Steampunk," *AbTec: Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace*, published Sept. 18,2009, http://www.abtec.org/blog/?p=352.

Figure 30: Steampunk Aesthetic in "The Observing"

"The Observing" is also of specific interest because of the lack of dialogue or linguistic

storytelling at all. The visuals are the story. As such, the visuals push readers to face the animate

beings from the stars that are situated in relation to local communities as being constituted by a

land/water complex. In the final panel, the star people soar away from the surprised hunter into

the sky. While, as the introduction to the story notes, "how these beings come to observe us from

their place of origin is protected knowledge," this comic version notes that a relationality exists

between the human hunters and the star people. "The Observing" helps us to realize that

language is not necessary to represent connection. Visualizing connections has been central to

communities across times and places. These connections become central in a story like "The

Observing," where individuals from across the cosmos embody the highly important and

fundamentally local understanding that "water is in, around, and through all." The relationship between the hunter and the star people becomes representative of the knowledge that water is life, locally, globally, and even across the cosmos. This central tenet, often discussed in current battles over pipelines and Indigenous land rights, built the foundation of Indigenous communities since time immemorial and will remain that foundation for all communities throughout time and space.

Various other stories like "The Observing" call attention to *giizhodibaa'iganeg* by weaving together traditional tales with Indigenous sf aesthetics and storytelling tropes. One story, "Ochek" depicts an understanding of cosmic bodies, specifically constellations, and the ways that they constitute a Cree understanding of "what is above" being mirrored in "what is below." "Ochek" tells the story of the lynx who travelled to the highest point in creation and stole warmth from the sky people to end the seemingly endless winter. While trying to escape the sky people, Ochek is shot and killed. He is immortalized in the constellation of the Big Dipper.[48]

The sharp, angular aesthetic of "Ochek" mirrors other artistic work throughout the collection, all of which creates what we might call a cosmic aesthetic that collapses the difference between the galactic and the pointedly local.[49] The jagged and distorted bodies of the sky people seem almost robotic while also appearing similar, in an almost ethereal form, to the star people in "The Observing." While the story considers the ecology of the local through the broad metaphors of "warmth" and the "endless winter," it does so with an eye toward the comic

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[48] Nicholson, *Moonshot*, 22-31.

[49] This is particularly true of artwork by Stephen Gladue (Métis) included throughout the collection. His images, like "Northern Crow" are made up of small geometrical particles placed in relation to one another on black backgrounds. The connections between his minute fractals are what create the images central to each of his pieces. The aesthetic of the fractals, in a similar way to the angular aesthetic of "Ochek," seems to recall the stars spread across the night sky. For a more detailed exploration of these and other artistic pieces throughout *Moonshot* that are not, themselves, comics, see Jeremy M. Carnes, "Deep Time and Vast Place: Visualizing Land/Water Relations Across Time and Space in *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*," in *Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia*, edited by Frederick Luis Aldama (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2020).

as always affecting the local and, by depicting the lynx stealing some of the "warmth" from the world of the sky people, the local always affecting the cosmic. The comic form then allows for a specific kind of depiction of these relations across time and space that complicate any settler notion of the same.

Similarly, "Coyote and the Pebbles" accounts for an understanding of constellations through complex relationships between humans, nonhumans, and land/waters. In this story, all the animals are invited by the creator to craft images in the sky using stones from the beds of lakes and rivers across the land. Coyote, who was running later than everyone else, realizes after gathering his rocks that there is only one place left in the sky for him to create his picture. As he moves toward the place he falls and his stones scatter across the sky, ruining everyone else's images. This short comic shows, again, the ways in which land/waters become foundational for an understanding of *giizhodibaa'iganeg*, the cosmic energy the constitutes interrelations in all things.

It is particularly important in this story that Coyote gathers "sparkling pebbles" from both the land and the water and that these same pebbles constitute the relationships between the nonhumans featured in the story and the humans that exist beyond it. Indeed, in the moment when Coyote drops his stones, the comic specifically shows the small root that sends him sprawling, sends his stones from the local lakes and rivers flying, and leads to a astronomical "chain reaction" that causes "everyone's artwork to explode" (Figure 31).[50] The space of the extremely local, again, collides with the space of the interplanetary, creating connections that affect the life ways of all things across various temporalities. While the story seems to coincide with sf tropes and visuals, the conclusion draws more specific relational and epistemological

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[50] Nicholson, *Moonshot*, 42.

connections between Indigenous communities and, here, the coyote himself. As the story

concludes:

> Tonight you might hear Coyote howling across the lake, in the field, or somewhere in the
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> distance. You see, the night creatures are still upset with him, and will not let him join
>
> any of their celebrations. Know that Coyote is speaking to the great mystery, asking for
>
> another chance for the night creatures to draw their portraits again. And as you listen to
>
> Coyote, look up. Look above the tree tops, the mountains, the clouds, and moon…and
>
> you can see the pebbles Coyote scattered. We call these pebbles…stars.[51]

Figure 31: Coyote's Fall in "Coyote and the Pebbles"

In both "Ochek" and "Coyote and the Pebbles," stories are used to demonstrate

Indigenous understandings of the universe. Each story offers explanations for why things are the

way they are—why we have stars, why Coyote howls, why the Big Dipper exists, why it is not

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[51]Ibid., 46.

always winter—and these explanations rely on *giizhodibaa'iganeg*, the relation of all things across time and space. From the hero of the lynx to the problematic Coyote, from the sky people to the great mystery, from the beds of the waters to the stars in the sky, Indigenous stories make sense of creation through relationality. These comics make those relations visible.

The connections between the cosmos and tribally-specific practices of storytelling are built into the structure of *Moonshot* itself. In his afterword to *Moonshot*, the President of Alternative History Comics, Andy Stanleigh, discusses the creation of the collection noting that "we ended up with 13 stories. Perhaps this was also serendipity."[52] He elaborates by quoting Elizabeth LaPensée: "Many Native Americans share the knowledge of the thirteen moons on a turtle's back. There are thirteen large segments which represent the thirteen moons which make up the lunar year. Every group of Native Americans has names for the thirteen moons and there are stories to go with each new moon."[53] The number of stories in this collection carries with it a specific weight in many Indigenous traditions, but in all those traditions it is just as important to think about how the pieces make up the whole. The comics based in Indigenous traditional storytelling link with Indigenous sf and sf aesthetics to bring the association of these stories with lunar cycles closer. Thus, the very core of the collection requires that we consider what it might mean to connect stories to the cosmos, link specific places to far-flung reaches throughout the galaxy, and intertwine the past, present, and future in an Indigenous reimaging of spatiality and temporality. These concerns are visible in the moon, the segments on a turtle's back, and the Indigenous communities that consider the connections of all things.

Thus, throughout *Moonshot*, Indigenous creators centralize what we can now think of as sf genre tropes, storytelling forms, and aesthetics to consider both the temporal and the spatial of

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[52] Nicholson, *Moonshot*, 158.
[53] Ibid.

Indigenous cosmologies and ways of thinking. The visualizations in these comics are what highlight the ways these stories can think beyond any one specific community and point out how these complex relations of human, other than human, and land/water constitute each other in complex relations of deep time and vast place in the cosmos. However, a comic must not necessarily consider sf tropes or aesthetics in order to consider the vastness of place and deepness of time in an Indigenous worldview. In the next section I move beyond *Moonshot* to consider an extremely different work in Indigenous comics that, in its own specific and complex way, continues to speak to the interconnections of all things across time and place even as it focuses on a very specific place: Haida Gwaii.

The Aesthetics of Haida Gwaii Across Time and Space

  Red: A Haida Manga, created by Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, tells the story of a Haida man who becomes obsessed with thoughts of revenge after his sister is taken by some "raiders." Eventually he becomes a leader in his community and begins making decisions based on his desire for retribution. He stockpiles weapons and even meets a builder that helps him build various contraptions, most notably a hallowed out wooden whale that can rise and dive much like a submarine. Eventually Red finds his sister, but she now has a child and is married. Red ends up killing her husband, thinking that he is forcing his sister into a relationship. Red then comes face-to-face with envoys of the village his brother-in-law is from, who demand repayment for the life he took. Red's village refuses to give him up, despite his many mistakes. To avoid further war, Red commits suicide.[54]

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[54] Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga* (Vancouver: D & M Publishers, 2009).

The artistic style of the narrative of *Red* mixes both Haida art and manga. As Richard Harrison explains, Haida manga is "Yahgulanaas's term for a form that blends traditional Haida visual representations of the kind painted or carved into wooden masks, stand-alone sculptures, and reliefs, with the dynamics of the manga that Yahgulanaas first saw when he was a guide for Japanese tourists visiting Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands)."[55] Manga was then a form tied specifically to the pacific world and was formally different from western comics. Yahgulanaas explains, "I was attracted to manga because it is not part of a colonial tradition…and it is not linked to the colonization of our country."[56] Haida manga works to join Haida cultural and artistic memory with aesthetic features like brush strokes and body depictions prevalent in Japanese manga. Such a move, Yahgulanaas argues, visually and aesthetically divorces the comic, and thus Haida cultural memory, from the ravages of western settler colonialism.

However, one of the specific formal characteristics that makes *Red* unique is the way the gutters—that space between the panels—is operationalized. In many Western comics, the gutter is a white space often defined by the straight lines and right angles of the surrounding panels. In *Red*, the gutter is filled in black (a formline) and, rather than precise angles, flows in curving lines which have been likened to water and the paths of blood throughout the human body.[57] While in most Western comics, the gutter is important in that readers fill in the action between the panels, in *Red* the formline both offers a space for the narrative connection of panels while also operating in the story itself, interacting with the characters. For instance, early on in the

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[55] Richard Harrison, "Seeing and Nothingness: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Haida Manga, and a Critique of the Gutter," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 43, no. 1 (2016): 52.
[56] Nicola Levell, *Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas: The Seriousness of Play* (London: Black Dog Press, 2016).
[57] Harrison, "Seeing and Nothingness," 56; Miriam Brown Spiers, "Creating a Haida Manga: The Formline of Social Responsibility in *Red*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 3 (2014): 46.

comic, the formline becomes the side of a boat and the limbs and branches on trees, which

characters are consistently touching and using. The black formline becomes a part of the world.

Thus, the "empty space" of the gutter is anything but empty. As Katherine Kelp-Stebbins argues,

the grid, upon which these empty gutters rely, "presupposes the orderability and knowability of

all space, and as such, it has served as the technical underpinning for imperial expansion."[58] The

gutter, much like Indigenous peoples themselves, carry a presence within the narrative that does

not easily work within McCloud's notions of closure.[59] Instead of a present absence, which relies

on the blankness of the gutter to push readers into closure, these formlines operate primarily

within a form of presence, noting then that what seems ignorable is, in fact, what shapes our

world and relations.

Figure 32: The Formline as Actant in Red

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[58] Katherine Kelp-Stebbins, "Reading Spaces: The Politics of Page Layout," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comic Book Studies*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019), n.p.
[59] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 63-67.

Figure 33: The Mural Version of Red: A Haida Manga

Yahgulanaas has himself likened the gutter to the colonial ideology of Terra Nullius.[60] Terra Nullius is a settler colonial ideology that considers the land empty and available for settlement. The land becomes a space on which settlers can imagine their own lives unfolding with no thought given to the Indigenous communities who have lived with the land for millenia. Similarly, the gutters in a comic, according to some scholars like McCloud, beg to be filled in with the story that is not represented. In this way, the depictions within the panels come to define everything else in the world. Rather than thinking that there is nothing outside or beyond oneself or beyond the immediate situations of the panel, Yahgulanaas begins to mark the importance of all things by filling in the gutters. These filled formlines leave less room for our notions of what belongs there, especially since they quickly become active in the story, primarily as land/water formations. As I've noted above, the formlines become present in the story taking on the role of tree branches, but they also become the ground on which people lie[61] and even the surface of the

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[60] Michael Yahgulanaas, "Michael Yahgulanaas – Red: A Haida Manga," Uploaded October 14, 2010, Vancouver, British Columbia, 46:14, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBbLiEqUZ-g.

[61] Yahgulanaas, *Red*, 8.

roiling ocean (Figure 32).[62] At every turn, the formlines are becoming literal parts of the land,

making up Haida Gwaii itself, the homelands and water ways of the Haida people.[63]

Furthermore, the formline as a whole creates an image of three interlocking figures

(Figure 33), which Yahgulanaas has described as "a representation of nourishing wealth. It has

animal/human like attributes or more precisely structures but it is misleading or settling for too

little to describe it as an animal icon."[64] These structures are clearest in a version of the mural

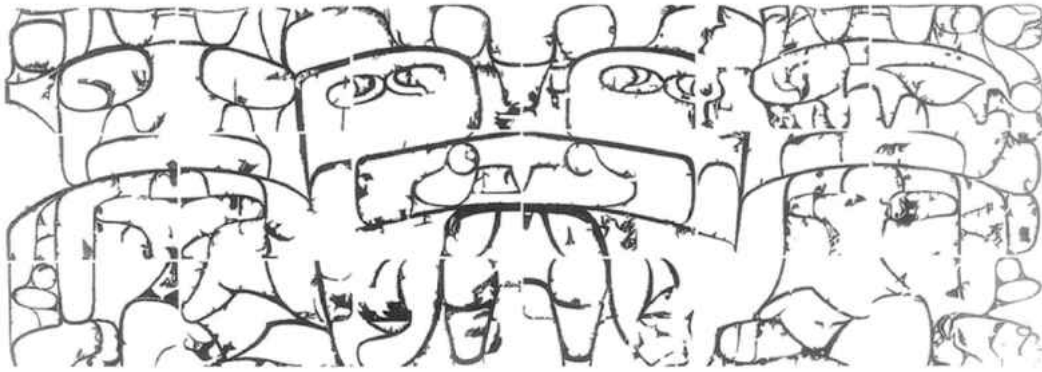created by Richard Harrison's student, Jamie Witham, where she removed the narrative from

Figure 34: The Formline of Red, Without the Inner Narrative--created by Jamie Witham

within the larger image of the formline (Figure 34).[65] This misleading or unclear structure is an

example of what Bill Holm has called the "expansive design" of Haida art, where "an animal is

distorted, split, or rearranged to fit into a given space, but the identity of the essential body parts

is apparent and to some extent their anatomical relationship to one another is maintained."[66] This

is true too of the formline, where we can clearly see some intertwined forms that, alone, do not

clearly represent any singular human or other-than-human being specifically. By keeping the

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[62] Ibid., 3

[63] Ibid., 20, 26, and 28.

[64] Quoted in Brown Spiers, "Created a Haida Manga," 59n1.

[65] Harrison, "Seeing and Nothingness," 56-57.

[66] Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1965), 12.

formline mural from too closely resembling any one human or other-than-human, it becomes an icon for a wider array of beings and thus for a wider array of relations that literally envelop the narrative as a whole. The narrative then, which relies on the formline to work, shows the necessity of relationships between humans, other-than-humans, and land. As Miriam Brown Spiers has written, "Haida art relies on sensitivity to the available space, which means the artist must…be aware of the relationship between the Haida people and their land, including the other creatures that live on that land."[67] For Yahgulanaas, keeping in mind one's relationship to the land/waters and the living beings across the cosmos means making specific use of the space of the page, the artistic canvas.

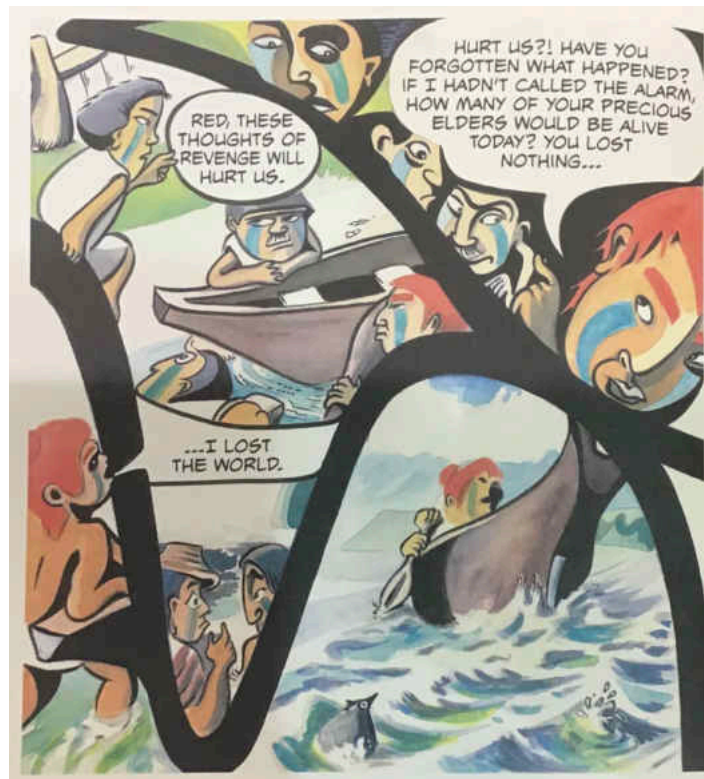*Figure 35: From Red: A Discussion on Revenge*

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[67] Brown Spiers, "Creating a Haida Manga," 43. The importance of the formline in terms of space and issues of page layout have also been explored by Katherine Kelp-Stebbins and Richard Harrison.

Yet, the formline also operates on a temporal level that has received less attention. The formline first operates similar to the western gutter, giving space for us to connect the images and text that are represented. However, by filling those spaces in and making them a continual active presence in the story, Yahgulanaas draws our attention to the ways in which an Indigenous, here Haida, orientation to temporality is markedly different from a western one. The individual panels of the story play with our expectations using these formlines. For instance, one page shortly after Red's sister is taken complicates a linear top-to-bottom, left-to-right, western way of reading (Figure 35).[68] We begin reading in the upper panel where the woman says, "Red, these thoughts of revenge will hurt us." The panels to the right however seem to exist outside of temporal specificity, showing only closeups of the individuals around Red as he complains about the elders in the village. Red continues, "You lost nothing...I lost the world." With this final speech bubble, Red straddles the various temporal moments here across panels. His words create narrative progression, but they literally interact with a panel we already read, creating a sense of temporal crossing not uncommon in Haida art.

This temporal rearrangement continues on the next page when Red meets the builder. As he approaches, the tails of the speech bubbles make any straight reading of the meeting nearly impossible (Figure 36).[69] We would first be inclined to read the panel on the right hand of the page, following the eyeline of Red, which leads us to the formline that turns and begins to flow downward. Yet, the builder's words begin in the panel at the bottom of the page, with the tail of his speech bubble pointing there. The end of his words on this page point back to that panel in the middle right of the page. Temporality refuses to flow in a straight line throughout this comic,

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[68] Yahgulanaas, *Red*, 34.
[69] Ibid., 35.

even as it tells a narrative that seems itself linear. While these moments are small and specific indications of this temporal orientation, the entire mural broadens these concerns.

Figure 36: Finding a Stranded Builder in Red

Yahgulanaas has explained that this comic was first made as a mural and was later deconstructed to publish in book form. Yet, he consistently encourages readers to take the book apart, cut it up, and create their own mural from the pages. The temporal narrative that the book form helps to create does not and should not define this comic, which works outside of these linear temporal frames. Yahgulanaas's entire mural then makes the story of Red and his community exist simultaneously, across an expanse where past, present, and future comingle and are connected through that continuous formline giving shape to the larger figures of the piece.

Red then confounds a sole focus on sequentiality as the central mode of temporal representation in comics, as Kelp-Stebbins astutely explores. Instead, Yahgulanaas champions a simultaneity, not just of the page, but of the work as a whole.

This mixture of forms, of media, that combines temporalities and spatialities begins to highlight deep time. Yahgulanaas has noted that the formline itself is beyond the narrative as much as it is a part of it. It both has to do with the narrative and yet has nothing to do with the narrative or its many characters. This same idea also encompasses vast place, that spatial pairing with Dimock's deep time. Yahgulanaas has himself motioned toward these larger relations of local, global, or cosmic significance when discussing these formlines. In a talk at the University of British Columbia he explains:

> It seems to me a more honest way of depicting the world by filling up the time space dividers and not pretending they're white, empty, vacant spaces…the formline that exists outside the moment is a continuous element to itself. It has presence and it has purpose that has nothing to do with us. That we are relatively unimportant to the things that are happening around us. Outside this room there are a lot of lives going on, there are stars being born and falling apart in different parts of the universe.[70]

Indeed, simply looking at the full mural of *Red* shows the complete lack of white space. There is no room to write over the Haida ways of seeing and knowing their world, and thus no room for writing over the consequent relationship between temporality and spatiality that drives a narrative like *Red*. The formline then broadens this entire artwork to think beyond western, imperialistic notions of space and time. *Red* requires that we think beyond the specific, in fact connecting the various levels of lifeways and pathways.

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[70] Yahgulanaas, "Michael Yahgulanaas."

Thinking in terms of just the page for this comic leaves out much of the complex political

concerns of Indigenous ontologies and cosmologies at work in *Red*. But if we indulge this for a

moment, we could perhaps relate the page layouts of *Red* to Benoit Peeters notion of a

"rhetorical" layout, wherein "the panel and the page are no longer autonomous elements; they

are subordinated to a narrative which their primary function is to serve."[71] Yet, the problem that

such a relation introduces is one of definition itself. Peeters assumes a singular narrative that is

linear and teleological in some sense. But the very form of *Red* lies in its moving in and out of

narratives, moments, and times that cut across each other. There is no one narrative that the

panels rhetorically serve. Such a notion actually contradicts Indigenous rhetorics more broadly,

because the world of these stories are consistently existing across narratives, ontologies, and

cosmologies.

Through this complex weaving of temporalities and spaces, *Red* becomes an example of

what Nick Estes calls Indigenous resistance, which he explains, "draws from a long history,

projecting itself backward and forward in time."[72] He continues, "While traditional historians

merely interpret the past, radical Indigenous historians and Indigenous knowledge-keepers aim to

change the colonial present, and to imagine a decolonial future by reconnecting to our

Indigenous places and histories. For this to occur, those suppressed practices must make a crack

in history."[73] *Red* tells a true story of the Haida people that Yahgulanaas uses to think about

issues of interpersonal relations, relations to the land and other-than-human beings, but also to

issues of temporal and spatial orientation. Yahgulanaas then gives us an example of art that

changes the colonial present through an exploration of the past in a form that combines concerns

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[71] Benoît Peeters, "Four Conceptions of the Page," trans. Jesse Cohn, *ImageText* 3, no. 3 (2007): para. 13.
[72] Estes, *Our History*, 18.
[73] Ibid.

of spatiality and temporality. And while the story itself is a story of the past, the form and the re-orientations within a Haida worldview that Yahgulanaas explores is itself the work of cracking a history that keeps Indigenous communities relegated to the past. Formally, then, *Red* is able to imagine a decolonial future specifically through "reconnecting to our Indigenous places and histories."

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I have tried to consider some ways in which the forms of comics are more radical than we have noted in scholarly explorations of the medium. There is a tendency in comics studies to drive a wedge between the different realms of comics production: underground comix, auteur comics, and mainstream comics. Part of the goal of this project is to reconsider those divisions. Though they are important to contemplate for various historical or social reasons, the forms of comics cut across these divisions, encouraging us to examine what the form is actually capable of doing in more densely theoretical terms.

The chapters in this study also work together to consider how comics forms are changing. As much as I argue that the forms of comics have always been radical, especially in terms of temporality, as the medium continues to expand and is taken up by a variety of creators, it is continually pushing against the boundaries of radical thought. Comics by queer creators and creators of color through the various realms of production are broadening what it means to think and tell stories in comics forms. It is for this reason that this project gradually works through queer, black, and indigenous comics production; marginalized creators are changing the face of the medium and pushing it to do things it has never done before.

However, this project is only a starting point; there are many ways forward that will broaden and extend this work. For instance, work like that by African futurist Nnedi Okorafor will push us beyond considering only the relationship of America and Africa in temporal forms of comics. We must also examine comics and temporality beyond the Anglophone or Euro-American centric world. Creators like Marcelo d'Salete are exploring issues of slavery and indigeneity in Brazil. Similarly, various publishing venues throughout Africa, like YouNeek

Studios and Vortex, complicate any standard notions of comics storytelling in the various genres. The temporalities of comics forms in these global contexts can extend our considerations of comics forms even further beyond dominant notions of time or history.

Furthermore, web-based comics and the affordances offered by digital technologies is continually changing and morphing the way temporality works in comics. With the further advent of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, scholars will have to consider the impact these delivery methods have on our experience of comics time. The ability to swipe through images of the various panels fundamentally affects issues of sequence, simultaneity, and retroactive signification and thus affects that way that comics on these platforms tell time to readers.

It is certainly true that there is much more for us to explore in the world of comics. And it is also true that the medium of comics, no matter how much history has derided it, has more to tell us about the world and about the institutions we rely on. As Spiegelman notes in *No Towers*, "nothing has a shorter shelf-life than angry caricatures of politicians, and I'd often harbored notions of working for posterity—notions that seemed absurd after being reminded how ephemeral even skyscrapers and democratic institutions are."[1] While everything else may fall down or change around us, the forms that we pour our energies and lives into will continue. They deserve our attention and meticulous care. After all, these forms that we love are the same ones that can help us reconsider the ways we have built this world, and how we might do so more equitably as we move into the future.

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[1] Spiegelman, *No Towers*, n.p.

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Yang, K. Wayne, and Eve Tuck. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization:

Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

Yaszek, Lisa. "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future." *Socialism and

Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2006): 41–60.

Jeremy M. Carnes

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Education

Ph.D.   English – Literature and Cultural Theory, Additional Emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition
> University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2020 expected
> Dissertation: *Historical Dissidence: The Temporalities and Radical Possibilities of American Comics*

M.A.   English Literature
> Ball State University, May 2014.

B.A.   English Literature and Classical Languages (Ancient Greek)
> Ball State University, May 2012.

Academic Appointments

Adjunct Instructor of English, University of Central Florida (Beginning 01/2020)
> ENC 1101: Composition I (Spring 2020)

Adjunct Instructor of English, Rollins College (08/2019—Present)
> English 140: Writing about Comics (Fall 2019); Writing about Science Fiction (Spring 2020)
> English 280: Writing in the Liberal Arts (Spring 2020)

Adjunct Instructor of English, University of South Carolina-Sumter (8/2019—Present)
> English 101 (Online): Critical Reading and Composition (Fall 2019)

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (08/2014—05/2018)
> English 101: Introduction to College Writing (Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015, & Fall 2017)
> English 102: College Writing and Research (Spring 2016, Summer 2017, & Fall 2018)
> English 276: Introduction to American Indian Literature (Fall 2018)

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Ball State University (08/2012—05/2014)
> English 103: Rhetoric and Writing (Spring 2013)
> English 104: Composing Research (Fall 2013 & Spring 2014)
> Intensive English Institute 113: Level 1 Reading (Summer 2013)
> Intensive English Institute 123: Level 2 Reading (Summer 2013)

Publications

Edited Collections
- Carnes, Jeremy M., Margaret Galvan, and Nicholas E. Miller, editors. *Futures of Cartoons Past: The Cultural Politics of X-Men: The Animated Series.* University Press of Mississippi. Advance Contract.

Peer Reviewed Articles and Book Chapters

- Carnes, Jeremy M. "'The Original Enchantment': Whiteness, Indigeneity, and Representational Logics in *The New Mutants*." *Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics*. Eds. Sean Guynes and Martin Lund. The Ohio State University Press. January 2020.

- Carnes, Jeremy M. "Deep Time and Vast Place: Visualizing Land/Water Relations Across Time and Space in *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*." *Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia*. Ed. Frederick Aldama. University Press of Mississippi. June 2020.

- Carnes, Jeremy M. "Shades of Red: Indigeneity and Representation in Timothy Truman's *Scout* Saga." *The Other 1980s: Reframing Comics' Critical Decade*. Eds. Brian Cremins and Brannon Costello. Louisiana State University Press. Forthcoming.

- Carnes, Jeremy. "'She thinks of the color of her skin, and of Chicago streets': The Cityscape and Native American Identity in the Poetry of Joy Harjo," *Studies in the Humanities* December 2015 Vol. 42.

Presentations
- "The When and Where of Haida Art: Time and Place in Michael Yahgulanaas's *Red: A Haida Manga*." Modern Language Association, January 9-12, 2020. Panel Organizer.
- "Re-Whitening the X-Men: Transmedia Storytelling and *X-Men: The Animated Series*." University of Florida Conference on Comics, April 12-14, 2019.
- "Back to Black: Reorienting Colonial Progress Narratives Through *Black Panther*." *International Comic Arts Forum*, April 4-6, 2019.
- "Refusing the Colonial Politics of Historicization: Indigenous Critical Theory and the Reformulation of Literary History." *Native American Literature Symposium*, March 7-9, 2019.
- "Beyond Mere Historicism: Comics and the Formulation of Transhistoric Reading." *Comics Studies Society Annual Conference*, August 9-11, 2018.
- "Giizhodibaa'iganeg: Indigenous Land/Water Lifeways in Comics Form." *International Comic Arts Forum*, November 2-4, 2017.
- "Transhistoric Reading: Graphic Narrative and the Question of History." *Pop Culture Association*, April 12-15, 2017.
- "A Wide Re-Envisioning of Indigenous Land/Waters: The Case of Indigenous Comics." *Native American Literature Symposium*, March 2-4, 2017.
- "'The Stereotype is a Fact of Life': Race, Iconography, and Stereotypes in American Comics." *International Comic Arts Forum*, April 14-16, 2016.
- "The Politics of Distraction: Arthur C. Parker, the *Quarterly Journal for the Society of American Indians*, and the Maintenance of the Settler Colonial State" *Native American Literature Symposium*, March 16-19, 2016.

- "Re-Examining the Great Divide (Again): Superman Comics, *The Partisan Review*, and Jewish American Identity," *Modernist Studies Association*, November 6-9, 2014. Panel Organizer.
- "Racial and Universal: Internationalism, The Harlem Renaissance, and *The Seven Arts*," *Northeast Modern Language Association*, April 3-6, 2014.
- "Conversations on Race and Ethnicity in the First-Year Composition Classroom," *Conference on College Composition and Communication,* March 19-22, 2014.
- "Collusion and Collision: The Borderlands of Residence Life and the Public Work of the Composition Classroom," *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, March 13-16, 2013.
- "'A tissue of very often contradictory things': Identity and Masculinity in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*," *The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900*, February 21-23, 2013.

Reviews
- Review of *There, There* by Tommy Orange and *Where the Dead Sit Talking* by Brandon Hobson. *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 31.1.
- Review of *Terra Nullius* by Claire G. Coleman. *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*. Published Online, https://www.sf-foundation.org/carnes-coleman.
- Review of *Alan Moore: Out from the Underground* by Maggie Gray. *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society* 3.1.
- Review of *The Queerness of Native American Literature* by Lisa Tatonetti. *The American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 39.4.
- Review of *Prudence: A Novel* by David Treuer. *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 27.2.

Honors and Awards
- Advanced Opportunity Fellowship, UWM Graduate School 2018-2020
- Teaching Excellence Award, UWM English Department, 2018
- James A. Sappenfield Fellowship, UWM English Department, 2016
- Newberry Library Consortium in Native American and Indigenous Studies, Participant, 2015.
- Chancellor's Award, UWM English Department, 2014.
- Francis Mayhew Rippy Scholarship, Ball State English Department, 2013.

Professional Activities, Affiliations, and Service
- Fiction Review Editor, Science Fiction Research Association Review, 2020-Present
- Web Editor, Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures, 2017-Present
- Book Review Editor, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 2020-Present
- Book Review Editorial Assistant, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 2017-2020
- Web Editor, Comics Studies Society Graduate Student Caucus, 2017-Present
- Chair, *Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference*, 2017
- Teaching Mentor, UW-Milwaukee Writing Program, 2016-2018

- Graduate Student Representative, *National Endowment for the Humanities Next Generation Planning Grant*, 2016-2017.
- Co-Chair, *Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference*, 2016
- Web Editor, *cream city review*, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014-2018
- Anti-Racism Working Group, Ball State University, 2013-2014
- Co-Chair, *Practical Criticism Midwest*, Ball State University, 2013

Professional Memberships
- Comics Studies Society (CSS)
- Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures (ASAIL)
- Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA)
- Modern Language Association (MLA)