Panelling Parallax: The Fearful Symmetry of William Blake and Alan Moore

By Roger Whitson

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William Blake and Alan Moore stand on a precarious precipice in the globalizing capitalist world. Both are rebels, prophets, religious and occultic sages. They fill gaping voids in a secular world that has abandoned its older idols and embraced newer ones in literary figures, comic cult icons, rock and film stars. Blake and Moore are nihilistic revelry, their messages of multiplicity, indeterminacy, spiritual reformation firmly into new markets that promote spending, mass publication and commodification. As figures embedded in the globalizing mechanisms of postmodern capitalism, Blake and Moore form a fearful symmetry where rebellion and visionary transgression indiscriminately intertwined with hip online markets offering everything from autobiographies to action figures and computer games. Blake's poem "The Tyger" and Moore's comic book Watchmen show an awareness of a split between self-image and its commodified dissemination. This split is what Kojin Karatani and Slavoj Žižek call the parallax, a mechanism of capitalism fixing the subject in a loop of intertransgression favoring a growing, elastic market that can accommodate both. Symmetry and parallax reflect one another, their play of continuity and incomprehensible contradictions between the production and consumption of self-image. Moore turns to Blake in the wake of the elastic m
global capitalism, believing that the poet’s dedication to individual vision can help him reestablish a connection to a self underneath the commodified dissemination of his celebrity around the globe.

William Blake's poetry frustrates modern, disciplinary forms of proper identity, yet his appropriation by the market shows its ability to signify and commodify the rebellion occurring in his illuminated poetry. Consequently, he often acts as an artist avant garde artists, but his poetry also finds itself inhabiting spaces far from the printshop of an antinomian, proto-Marxist poet-prophet. Mike Goode, in his recent essay "Blakespotting" recalls a 2003 article of the New Yorker which describes an apartment owned by Donald Trump decorated with proverbs from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. While a majority of Blake critics would argue against the ahistorical invocation of Blake's proverb by such a staunch capitalist, "it is difficult to defend the position that once dislocated from Blake's copperplate and relocated onto the gilded walls of a luxury penthouse, cannot mean what Trump seems to want it to mean here" (Goode 770). Blake's poetry, and its meaning, disseminates throughout the global network of contemporary capitalism, mutating its character almost beyond recognition. This poetry appears on indie t-shirts sporting lines from "The Fly;" in a 2006 movie short on "The Tyger" by Brazilian director Guilherme Marcondes combining puppetry, CGI and photography; and electronic pop music featuring the melodic vocals of British music stars Billy Bragg and Jah Wobble.

There is a Blake Tarot deck, a sect of Sufism dedicated to Blake called the Derwishes, and a church headed by Aethelred Eldrige who engages in daily readings of Milton. Blake's influence is everywhere – from a forthcoming (2007) romance novel by Tracy Chevalier imagining the sex life of William and Catherine to a run in Todd McFarlane's Spawn featuring Urizen as a supervillain. Blake's cult status has transformed to signify dark and daring innovation. In Red Dragon (2002), Blake signifies an occultic "other" that drives the serial killer Francis Dolarhyde to acts of murder and degradation. In Jim Jarmusch's film Dead Man (1995) envisions William Blake reincarnated as a banker who, guided by a pseudo-parody of Native American religiosity, kills white frontiersmen in California. In some depictions, William Blake acts a cultural aura that possesses the modern capitalist subject, perverting its very being with dark rituals...
and madness. But it is Blake's very pliability that makes his poetry so receptive.

Detached from any originary site of production, Blake's proverbs and phrases float in networks of consumption resisting what Goode calls "the idealist abstractions of reader, text, and corpus altogether, in the service of producing formations that cannot be identified or mapped according to existing strategies and technologies" (772). The perversion of the Blakean text denies the idealist foundations upon which most literary criticism depends, and comes to rest, instead, in the realm of capitalism and its celebrity fantasies.

Alan Moore uses this Blakean perversion in the establishment of a celebrity fantasy shared by his many readers. The possession of the capitalist subject by the prophetic persona of "William Blake," becomes an image commodified by the market and sold to mainstream comics and their avid fanboys. Yet he certainly profits from his iconoclastic experiments with comic book form and his celebrated initial departure from DC Comics due to the institution of the mature readers line Vertigo in the late 80s, along with his reluctance to be interviewed demonstrate discontent with the market power mainstream comics and their avid fanboys. Yet he certainly profits from his global capitalism and sacrifice progressive politics for a trademarked identity.

Kojin Karatani's Transcritique seeks to address the incorporation of identity by class struggle as a "transnational movement of workers qua consumers or consumers qua workers" (294). Karatani argues earlier in the text, that a majority of Marxists fail to "grasp the transcritical moment where workers and consumers intersect" (21). Karatani sees the oppression of capitalism embodied in the interplay between workers and consumers. Workers become consumers and consumers become workers. It is not only that workers are not paid what their work is worth that disturbs Karatani. Workers, labor, are alienated from that labor through the mediating function of capital, forced to buy the very product of their own labor. The mediation of production and consumption by capitalism produces a parallax effect, where the alienation of labor confronts them in the moment they purchase that labor.
Karatani further expands his notion of parallax by discussing the invention of photography, saying that initially people "could not help but feel a kind of abhorrence" to the photographic image (2). Photographic images did not seem entirely real, nor line up with anyone's self image. Gradually, as photography became more and more a part of everyday life, the feeling of parallax subsided. It acted as a fiction that governed both the production and the consumption of the self as an image. Photography also marked the beginning of a widespread dissemination of the image. The photograph represents a loss of control over the self image dislodged from the individual seeking to form a unity of perceptions and affects circulating throughout the 19th century world. Walter Benjamin argued that the mechanical reproduction of the image transformed the relationship between a painting and its aura, photography fundamentally changed the character of what Immanuel Kant calls the "transcendental unity of apperception" – the necessary fiction allowing for a self that gathers perceptions into a coherent experience of the world.\footnote{5}

Karatani's analysis of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception locates it not as a metaphysical or transcendent entity, but as a direct confrontation with "the other that we can never take for granted and internalize just on our whim and convenience" (51). The transcendental unity of apperception perceives a unified self as synthetic judgment which unifies all other sense data. Unity operates here as an antimony. The self apprehends itself with apperception, which presupposes a synthetic unity as a fiction structuring the experience of space and time.\footnote{6} This is the irreducible gap that emerges between the production of a self and its consumption, between the apperception of the self and its representation in photographs. Parallax emerges for Karatani as the basic experience of the state in transition between modernism and postmodernism, the state where the framing of the self subjectivity supplants any transcendental image we may have of the self. Subjectivity alienates the self from its transcendental unity with new commodified desires, producing a spectacle that is – in Karatani's words – sublime. The sublime is alienation itself, or "the hoarding drive of capitalism" (Karatani 215).
The sublime intensity of William Blake acts to reestablish Moore's radical sense to produce that self in a celebrity circuit of prophetic anger and postmodern For Moore, Blake represents "the heroism of the imagination," a visionary reestablish "squalid horse toilet" of London with angels and shining spiritual utopias (p. has appeared many times in Moore's work: as a foil to the occultic imperialism of William Gull in From Hell and in numerous epigraphs in V for Vendetta. Moore's performance art piece to Blake called Angel Passage brimming with psychogeographical observations and religious saints on hovercrafts. Blake's place as a redeeming visionary in Moore's work explicitly denies and represses the poet's exploding popular reception. Moore has, as Esther Leslie observed, "rejected the equation of an ignored and impoverished and the all-too celebrated creators of superhero comics" (par. 20). Moore's warning against identifying Blake too closely with comic creators is based upon noticing the very real differences separating the tradesman from current comic artists, who have legions of fans. But this rejection is also symptomatic of Moore's ambivalence with the superhero genre. Blake's visionary experiences gives Moore the alternate reality that the superhero genre promises, but supposedly without all of the popularity of superheroes who, today, prosper in Hollywood multi-million dollar films, as action figures and in video games. Is Blake truly as impoverished today as he was during his life? His numerous, if brief, appearances in films, comics, novels, and music attest to a growing mass interest in the poet. This interest is based upon Blake's marginality; he signifies alienation itself, mixed Spenser's article from The Observer published during the Tate exhibition in 2000: "a glimpse of the fully human, of the transcendent entwined with earthly realities." In this sense, Blake could be read as a superhero – a marginalized, alienated individual, Superman or Batman, who gains power over alienation by acquiring a demi-god status. Superman may have flight, invulnerability and heat vision, Batman may know every fighting style known to humankind and have an innumerable amount of bat-stylized gadgets, but Blake has the imagination.

Alan Moore uses Blake's imagination as a means to navigate the fearful symmetry of his status as a marginalized, yet also unmistakably popular, comic celebrity. Moore laments his status as a cult-icon of the appropriated British underground in his much publi
against Vertigo comics as his "bastard child" and his recent decision to remove his name from the credits to the movie version of *V for Vendetta*. While he certainly profits from his celebrity, he seems at the same time to hate the fact that he can no longer completely retain his underground persona. Moore yearns to transcend his status as a commodified cult but this very struggle keeps consumers buying his comics. Alan Moore resides in a gap in global capitalist discourse and must, on the one hand, revolt against time and conventions of the comic book, both of which are textual commonplace capitalism that form the comic reader as a modern consumer. On the other hand, his name is enormously profitable in comic markets because of his experimentation and narrative conventions.

Alan Moore’s anxiety over his status as someone who must commodify his radical visionary artist in order to have a distinct audience of fans finds its expression with William Blake. Blake operates much like the modern superhero that Alvaro Aleman argues, signifies "the market fantasy of 'super' access in technological or mystical means" (note 1). He is a suture for the experience of alienation, a mystical prophet promising the end of the gap between production and consumption. Even as Aleman notes that superheroes generally establish stability and capitalist system by eliminating criminals, the mystical and magical quality of Blake’s persona allows Moore to have an elevated access to reality while maintaining his identity as a magician. He praises Blake for "completely believ(ing) and never rail(ing) against God for having given him such a shitty lot in life. Madness plus the courage of your conviction equals magic" (par. 5). Blake is the Moore that Alan Moore could never be – one untainted with hollywood adaptations of his works and millions of fans when the sequel to *Watchmen* will come out. Alan Moore frames his symmetrical relationship with Blake by wishing to inherit his madness and poverty. Fearful symmetry is the forced resolution of parallax between Moore and Blake, the subsumption of the antimony of production and consumption by a violent eradication of difference – which, then, cements Alan Moore’s status as a mystic revolutionary.
Blake's poem "The Tyger," and its fascination with reflection, symmetry and difference serves as the archetype for the disconcordant visionary parallax between the two.

"The Tyger" and Burning Illumination

Blake's "The Tyger" exemplifies the visual and verbal play of difference and symmetry in the form of an irreducible parallax governing consumption and production. It also frames this play by gesturing toward a group of forced resolutions to the antimonies provided in the poem. Critics tend to talk about these forced resolutions by referring to a "subversion" of poetic convention, or its existence as a meta-text. "The Tyger" is a visual/verbal poem that traces the consequences of relieving the tension between the verbal and the visual. Stephen Behrendt argues that "The Tyger" is a meta-text "that partakes of both the verbal and the visual texts, but that is neither the sum of, nor identical of, those two texts" (81). The effect of "The Tyger" is textual, but for Behrendt it becomes more than merely the text on the illuminated page. Behrendt's comments transform the poem into a non-material effect of material forces, a text that exists apart from the material elements displayed on the page. He sees this subversion operating in the interplay between text and image. Behrendt's characterization of "The Tyger" as a textual act is a repression of the parallax of the verbal and visual elements in the poem. To understand Blake's poem as a unified visual/verbal text or a meta-text, one must engage the "fearful symmetry" described by the poem and create a meta-universe where the meaning of the poem can shine forth in all its meta-glory.

Why does "The Tyger" invoke symmetry? The entire composition of Songs of Innocence and Experience follows a symmetrical pattern. Certain poems, like "The Lamb" from Innocence seem to reflect or deflect others, like "The Tyger." Their meaning seems interdependent and meta-textual in much the same way as Behrendt argues that the Blakean illuminated print is meta-textual. This interpretive connection is bolstered by the reference to the Lamb in the poem. "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" the poem asks (20). The answer to this question, if there is one, could determine the entire fate of symmetry in Blake's text. It seems telling that the poem does not answer.

In "The Tyger," the ferocity of the opening lines is countered by an asymmetric...
Every act of subsumption or repression is countered by a pronounced parallax. The interplay of verbal and visual elements is irreducible and held together only by the necessary fiction of a unified text. The function of the poem, its structure, is highly dependent upon constantly moving beyond the mere textual minutae of the text. Part of the meaning, in fact, depends upon ignoring parts of the text altogether, or seeing them as part of something that is not immediately representable in the lines of the poem. Reading the poem frames the fearful symmetry it describes, but because this symmetry is also tripped by the word "symmetry," "The Tyger's" framing of symmetry symmetrically subverts itself. The framing, furthermore, suggests an uncanny symmetry that directly contradicts all the heart of the word symmetry. "Tyger, Tyger burning bright/In the forests of the night;/What immortal hand or eye/Could frame thy fearful symmetry" (ll. 1-4)? The regularity of the first three lines is broken with the rhythm of the fourth, which introduces a forced rhyme in the word symmetry. Since the presence of the word here disrupts the orderly cadence of the rest of the stanza, the use of this particular word that seems to signify order and the terror that comes with this order actually breaks the order of the poem. The rest of the poem follows the same simple order set up in the first stanza, without the break of the final line. In the final stanza, the order is preserved with the same break. The asymmetries of the poem are reflected in the relationship between the text and the image that accompanies it on the plate. Behrendt, a very asymmetrical tiger, one who is clearly not that ferocious. In fact, this causes Behrendt to comment on the humor of the poem, saying that this ultimately tells us that we should not take this poem very seriously. "[N]either the beast nor the illuminated page is symmetrical: indeed the whole notion of 'fearful symmetry' is almost laughable, given the insistent asymmetry of the page and the absurdly mild aspect of the tiger" (88).
attempts at forming a symmetrical interpretation of the poem. The use of subvert symmetry suggests a parallax effect: symmetry gets invoked by being put under erasure. "The Tyger" marks a transcritical moment, where the production of directly related to its consumption. Symmetry is erased with symmetry. The incoherence of symmetry holds the piece together with its disconcordant rhyme and rhythm.

Moore Symmetry

Alan Moore provides his own analysis of parallax, alienation, and symmetry in the middle of his massive meditation on the limitations of superheroes: the dystopian and "deconstructive" epic *Watchmen.*[10] William Blake's poem appears in chapter five. Titled "Fearful Symmetry," Moore focuses on the nihilistic anti-hero Rorschach and his investigation into the murder of The Comedian, a Vietnam veteran and particularly violent anti-hero. Blake's invocation of fearful symmetry in the poem "The Tyger," becomes a method driving the formal elements of the chapter. The panel sequence has a symmetrical layout. Adrian Vendt, the hero Ozymandias, forms the central panel. On each side, characters, backgrounds, and actions repeat themselves in a symmetrical manner. Doug Atkinson's *Annotated Watchmen* argues that "The entire issue's story pages are a mirror image. Page 1 reflects page 28, page 2 reflects page 27, and so forth; the two-page spread on pages 14-15 is where the "mirror" lies. Each page is a reflection both of layout and content" (V; par. 4). Symmetry frames and uses symmetry as an essential part of the issue's sequence. The main character of the issue, Rorschach, has a mask with inkblots that change according to his mood. Most of the time, these blots are symmetrical. The issue begins with a reflection of a skull formed by two reflecting R's in a dirty pool. This skull is repeated throughout the issue and forms one of a multitude of reflections throughout.
Symmetry is repeated again and again, layered on top of itself, and made to suggest pattern and meaning in the issue. The suggestion of pattern and meaning hollows out the narration of the issue and focuses the attention of the readers on the writing and/or graphing of its temporal sequence. Sequentiality becomes, in this sense, secondary to the suggestion of a "deeper" meaning that can only be achieved by holding sequence in suspension. This deeper meaning, for Donald Ault, is best described by the conjunction of Jacques Lacan's Real and the logic of comic sequence. Comic sequence invokes Lacan, through the interruptions or cuts in the body-space of the page which leave blank spaces between the panels that correspond to (or mark the absence of) events that are assumed to 'between' the panels" (par. 2). The events between the panels are not symbolizable, and the function of sequential art is to produce the illusion of motion through the absence of what cannot be symbolized. The white space cuts through the consistency of the image, separating characters from each other, slicing off body parts, separating one moment from another with rivers of nothingness. Subsequent images become consequent images that "form networks of interrelations from panel to panel, panel to page, and page
thus participate in a symbolic order governed by laws of substitution and
(metaphor and metonymy)" (par. 2). The comic page functions by association:
lines become faces, eyes, characters with identifiable flaws and heroic featur-
suggested and made by skipping from one panel to another, transforming sta-
and poses into characters. The laws of substitution and association cover u-
cannot be seen on the comic page, the motion of single characters operati-
dimensional space, and allow for the suggestion of that motion because of th-
representation.[11]

Reading Moore's issue through the question provoked by Blake in "The Tyger"
characterization even further. Blake's suggestion that symmetry is forced, writ-
of asymmetrical elements is translated by Moore into a formal style that directly
in the graphing of the issue's sequence. To see the symmetrical layout of the i-
to shift consciousness away from the content of the issue. Noticing the lay-
takes a second reading of the issue or reading outside annotations that
relationship between Blake's poem and the issue proper. The diegetic world
book, its temporality and history, is sacrificed to a second reading in the search
formal symmetrical structure. The balance of the structure might lend a
euphoric feeling, a revelatory moment that would seem to make all the element
come into a clearer focus. This revelation comes at the expense of the moving
living continuity cut up, vivisected, into individual images that now participate
symmetrical structure. Paying attention to the overall picture of the indivi-
means ignoring the diegetic world the comic inhabits. Temporality and
become impossible and absences no longer suggest movement, they only indi-
dieces in a larger symmetrical puzzle. Symmetry is fearful precisely because it e-
absolute annihilation of the diegetic world of the comic. Its people and pl
colors and backgrounds whose comparison indicates whether or not symmetrical.
The formal violence of Moore's text is reflected in the final scene of the issue where the violent hero Rorschach is unmasked. Rorschach spends the majority of the issue intimidating reformed criminals. He had also been known as a particularly violent hero, sometimes killing his enemies in the name of justice and balance. At the end of the issue, Rorschach's true face is revealed, its childish innocence reflecting the cartoony tiger in Blake's print. While kicking and punching him, the police capturing Rorschach scream in glee "[w]ho is he? This ugly little zero is the terror of the underworld[…]and we're gonna him up with them. It's karma, man. Everything evens out eventually. Everything balances" (Moore and Gibbons V; 28). Moore shows this belief in symmetry and karma as a desire for violence and restoring a sense of balance and meaning to history. Rorschach's violence, like the violence of the police in the final scene, indicates a belief in the reality and redemptive meaning of time and history. It is the vacillation between the violence of a metaphysical history and the violence of writing that interests Moore, and it is also this vacillation that brings in the haunting aura of William Blake. As Blake's words echo on the final issue, and as Blake's Tyger (reincarnated as Rorschach) is beaten into submission, Blake's uncanny aura permeates this issue. It slips in between the absent panels and the characters who do not realize that they are merely ink blots on a reproduced page.
Fearful symmetry frames, in *Watchmen*, the moment the characters in his story don't realize, the printed nature of their existence. In this sense, Blake's question "did he who made the Lamb, make thee" gains a new significance. Blake made both...
the Lamb, wrote both of them into existence, and imposed their alienation from one another as a fundamental mechanism unifying the disperate worlds of *Innocence* and *Experience*. The making of the Tyger and the Lamb foregrounds their being as part of a complex production engineered by Blake: the relief etching that, according to Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi, "combined the printmaker with 'the Painter and the Poet'" (2). Blake's dual role as a painter and a poet and their – sometimes fraught – combination is reflected on the surface of the relief etch, reflecting the fearful symmetrical symbiosis of *Innocence* and *Experience*. This combination is never a strict synthesis. It emerges unevenly: some of Blake's prints echo the words inscribed on the page, some are wildly different from whatever verse appears. What is visually fascinating about Blake's illuminations is the various parallaxes they embody. Opposites directly confront the reader who must suture them together in order to produce a meta-textual meaning that combines images with verse, fictionally transcending the minute particularity of the material artifact. This weaving is violent as it can only be achieved by effacing and destroying the material separation of different poems in favor of producing a single unifying meaning that the various characters and images signify.

Likewise, all of the violence of *Watchmen* is authorized and performed by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons as a necessary element in the production of the universe the characters inhabit. Formally, this violence takes the form of the logic of the comic panel, the ripping apart of images from one another in order to produce the visionary effect of motion and action. The physical violence inflicted by and towards Rorschach moves the plot forward and makes reading the comic more visceral or real. Violence is a formal quality of a visual framing that provides for the cohesion of the diegetic world. This cohesion is born out of the annihilation of the materiality of the text in favor of the sutured world the text signifies.

Annihilation, violence, destruction – all of these are products of framing. They bring back the strangeness of the parallax. Parallax is most often described as a displacement that causes the subject to understand how changes in perspective transform what is viewed. It is, in Kantian terminology, the Copernican Revolution – the moment people realize that perception is directly related to perspective. The stars, galaxies, planets
do not revolve around a stable earth, rather, our understanding of planetary objects derives from our placement on an object endlessly revolving around a sun revolving, in turn, around galaxies and universes. Slavoj Žižek complicates this concept even further by relating it to materialism. Materialism, for Žižek, includes the blind spot of the subject, it is "the reflexive twist by means of which I myself am included in the picture constituted by reality" (Parallax 17). I bear "witness to my 'material existence'" by placing myself both inside and outside the picture (Parallax 17). The viewing of the fearful symmetry writes Moore into the comic, he scripts and David Gibbons illustrates. The small quotation from Blake's "The Tyger" thus makes the very symmetry that materially writes Moore back into the comic. Moore ceases to be a real person, if he ever was one, and instead marks a moment between the production of his self as a lived experience (i.e. the sense that we produce ourselves by living through what we consider to be a life) and the consumption of his image by readers who notice his style in the comic book. Alan Moore, writing himself into the narrative, constitutes a materialist "blind spot," and he is included in his own picture by being his own written trace. He is both inside and outside the comic narrative. The fearful symmetry is thus made and – consequently – redoubles onto Moore who writes himself into the ambivalence of global capital by making himself an absent recorded picture, an aura haunting the characters who seek a deeper underlying meaning that will erase their feeling of alienation.

The irony of this desire reveals itself in the formal dimensions of Moore's comic. Police officers, newspaper merchants, even the heroes themselves all search endlessly that will reveal the killer of the Comedian and bring meaning to the seemingly random acts of violence punctuating the entire series. Simultaneously, the characters feel separated from one another – nuclear war threatens the survival of the human race. Everyone end of the world nears, and no one knows how to stop the build up to global catastrophe. Ozymandias, self-proclaimed perfect human being, develops a plan to bio-engineer an alien-like creature, teleport it into the middle of New York, and kill millions of people. He hopes that this will force people to develop a sense of unity against a common extraterrestrial enemy. The characters conceive of this unity in relation to an absent
deeper pattern that will reveal the killer and the alien race whose difference arises from the fear that forces people to see the need for finding a commonality.

If there is any pattern at all, it lies on the most fundamental surface of the symmetrical pattern of panels. At its deepest level, meaning in Watchmen floats to this surface and shows the underlying meaning to be merely empty form. The deep symmetry of Moore's comic must be made by disrupting the diegetic world the characters inhabit until only the empty skeleton of the symmetry remains. Violence, destruction, formal and literal annihilation bring the characters together on a series of comic pages that are reprinted again and again – in the original run of the series, in the first edition graphic novel, in subsequent editions, the 1987 hardcover, and the 2005 Absolute Watchmen edition. The printing run of each edition edges into the millions. Each time readers glance at the symmetry of an issue of the series quoting William Blake's "The Tyger" revealing a symmetrical layout, they reenact these deaths, ripping apart the diegetic world of the comic, suturing it back together again, framing the fearful symmetry of their narcissistic fantasies. The sheer popularity of the comic insures the continual publication and distribution of the series across the world. "Time" called the comic one of the Top 100 Novels of all time, modules for the DC role-playing game based on the series have been published, and the looming promise of a film adaptation promises a different kind of diegetic interplay: the cinematic.
Alan Moore's grave face, his primordial visage graces the back of *Watchmen* looking prophet from the wilderness. His eyes pierce the surface boundary of the photo directly at us. This piercing gaze is amplified by the beard and hair descending into nothingness, gazing into the darkness of his fictional world. Other larger photos show Moore sporting a black jumpsuit with boots, multiple rings on each finger of his bony strange occultic pose known only to worshipers of the Roman snake god Glycon. He poses, each time, for the camera, each time seeing the photograph as a means to distribute a singularly intense public image. Alan Moore has nostalgia for comics, sure, but to suggest that his stories emerge from a messianic rupture in time. His company ABC comics, the publisher of *Promethea* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* him "almost mystically," as a memory of a Golden Age before the advent (Pappu 2; par. 5). Moore is convinced that such stories are also the only viable...
In 2002, Trina Robbins enhanced a sketch of "Alan Moore's closet" for the publication of the homage book to Alan Moore, *Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman*. Moore wears the uniform of his early hero Marvelman, but alternate cut out costumes are also provided. Robbins appended parodic instructions telling the viewer to "cut carefully around Alan's beard, slide outfits under" if they wanted a "perfect fit." Alan Moore has been reduced to a set of costumes, each supplanting the earlier version of Moore, each generating a new take on the same image: Alan Moore stands as a prophet, holyman, occultist superhero – complete with cloaks, tights, masks, even a metal corset. With some cutting and fitting – specifically by sheering off his prophetic persona – Moore magically transforms into his characters. Moore cannot control his popular reception any more than William Blake can. He moves into and out of his own writing, becoming Marvelman, the Promethea, the V he depicts on the comic page. All distinction between "real" Alan Moore and the Alan Moore on Robbin's illustration breaks down: the intertextual web of referentiality, becoming his own written trace – a fictionalized character no longer under his own control but one that spreads and disseminates into the myriad of different blogs, motion pictures, comic books, and biographies that discuss him.

While William Blake possesses the capitalist subject, the capitalist subject possesses Alan Moore – Alan Moore becomes William Blake – and one cannot tell if the capitalist being perverted or if the capitalist subject is dominating everything: transforming and commodifying mysticism, superheroics and prophecy in a flourish of postmodern monetary exchange. Who made the Tyger? Who made William Blake, or Alan Moore – transcendent unity of apperception? All are fearful symmetrical reflections of the sublime. All contribute to, pound away at, and fracture the sublime network that is contemporary...
global capital.

Notes

[1] Parallax, which will be discussed more fully later on in the paper, is developed by Karatani in *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*. In his review of the book, published in *New Left Review*, Žižek explains the parallax by reference to class and pork:

In today's English, 'pig' refers to the animals with which farmers deal, while 'pork' is the meat we consume. The class dimension is clear here; 'pig' is the old Saxon word, since Saxons were the underprivileged farmers, while 'pork' comes from the French *porque*, used by the privileged Norman conquerors who mostly consumed the pigs raised by farmers. This duality, signaling the gap that separates production from consumption, is a case of what, in his formidable *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, Kojin Karatani refers to as the 'parallax' dimension. (121)

Žižek develops the notion of parallax in his book *The Parallax View*, but ultimately rejects Karatani's Kantian reading in favor of a Hegelian emphasis on the difference of with itself.


[3] Most recently, Moore depicted so-called "perversion" in the *Lost Girls* collection, that featured the sexual fantasies of Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*, Wendy from *Alice in Wonderland*.

[4] In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*'s Jeff Jensen, Moore remarks:

Celebrity was nothing I enjoyed, and it prompted me to become the mumbling recluse I am. When I started writing comics, "comics writer" was the most obscure job in the world! If I wanted to be a celebrity, I would have become a moody English screen actor. (4)

The irony here is, of course, that Moore is speaking to *Entertainment Weekly*, a national if not international publication, about not wanting celebrity.

[5] It is important to Kant, and to Karatani, to differentiate between the transcendent and the transcendental. For Karatani, the transcendental "seeks to cast light on the structure that precedes and shapes experience" (1). Kant uses the transcendental apperception to introduce the problem of universality to his epistemological sy
unity of apperception assumes a unified structure through which perceptions are filtered, processed, and stored. It provides a self looking at itself that organizes particular impressions into a whole. This whole is *transcendental*, it emerges for Kant as a not an ontological actuality. Universality cannot, in Karatani’s words, exist "if not for a certain leap" (100).

[6] Justin Clemens, in *The Romanticism of Contemporary Theory*, addresses the "I" in Kant by arguing that it "[c]annot be a unified or unifying force if one [i.e. these determinations in their common sense signification], but is rather a primorally bifurcated and paradoxical non-entity which sutures two ontologically incommensurable registers of Being. And yet these registers must somehow coincide" (51). Karatani’s intervention would argue against the inevitable "suture" of the transcendental apperception which, like in the difference between transcendent and transcendental, cannot act simply to unify experience but must remain a problem that occurs within Karatani’s "certain leap."

[7] The sublime, for Kant, is the negative pleasure derived from the disconnection of an experience of overwhelming immensity and the paltry attempt of our cognition that immensity into our individual conception of totality. Karatani sees this as explanation for the appearance of surplus value in Marx’s *Capital*. The sublime pleasure of negativity, arising from displeasure. He quotes from Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, where Kant argues that one should refrain from excess "not with the Stocial intention of complete abstinence, but with the refined Epicurean intention of having in view an ever-growing pleasure" (qtd 215). The seeker of sublime experience, thus, a masochist or – in Marx’s terms – "the 'rational miser,' insatiably looking for the pleasure of sustaining and expanding the right of direct exchangeability rather than actual consumption" (215).

[8] An article in the March 16, 2006 issue of the *New York Times* quoted Moore calling the movie "rubbish." He also claimed that the "mainstream comic book industry – particularly DC Comics, the American publisher of "Watchmen" and "V for Vendetta" – [...] the properties he created, and the American film business,[...] has distorted his writing beyond recognition" (par. 3).

[9] Jason Tondro articulates a very similar relationship between Moore and Blake. Moore is attracted to Blake’s "power to transform the banal society of his surroundings into a more heavenly, cosmically good environment. This is the path Alan Moore is trying to walk today, and William Blake laid the cobblestones" (392). While I see Tondro’s take on the relationship as ultimately lacking in fundamental Marxist and psychoanalytic contours, his essay lays much of the groundwork of my current work and includes a transcript of *Angel Passage* essential to any scholar who wishes to grapple with Moore's provocative and complicated poem describing the life and afterlife of William Blake.

[10] I am flirting with redundancy to mention that the word "deconstructive" is ubiquitous than Blake’s proverbial poetry. Frequently, reviewers will state that "deconstructs the superhero genre." The list of references to deconstruction in
Watchmen are too numerous to mention here, despite the fact that Moore never cites Derrida in any of his comics. For example, Jeff Jensen, writing for Entertainment Weekly the 10th anniversary of the publication of Watchmen calls it "a radical deconstruction of superhero archetypes" (par. 3). The automatic identification of Moore's text with "deconstruction" would necessitate a project analyzing the proliferation of the term throughout popular and academic culture.

Without going into an extended diatribe on Lacan's Real, I must mention that neither I nor Donald Ault mean to argue that the white space of the comic page symbolizes Lacan's Real. There is no mimetic correlation between my characterization of comic panel layout and a stable idea one can call "Lacan's Real." In a recent conversation, Ault suggested that the white space could suggest the Real "if it – being movement – could happen on the page which the interruption by the Real prevents/gestures toward the 'realization of'."

I must mention the contrast between Blake who solely participated in all stages of his poetry's production and Moore who frequently uses other artists, inkers, and companies to produce his work. Alan Moore is famous for writing mammoth scripts to direct the artists through a given panel layout. Eddie Campbell remarked in his speech at the 2001 Wil Eisner convention that when Alan Moore begins a comic project he sends you all his reference material. When I first got the big packet for From Hell, he sent all this wonderful reference material: two books, there was a pile script. The script was endless. I could write my own script in half the time it takes to read Alan's. By the end of the project, though, you get your pages through the fax one at a time because he was doing something else. His mind's on other things, so they're coming through one at a time. Dave Gibbons once told me that at the end of Watchmen, he was sending the pages down by taxi. Two pages at a time in the backseat of a Taxi all the way from Northampton, which is fifty pounds one way. It's a one hundred pound taxi ride, two pages, two at a time. Of course, we have fax machines now. (par. 7)

Donald Ault remarked to me that the "division (asymmetry) between verbal and visual artists (i.e., Moore and his various illustrators) produces singular narratives, while singular authority produces multiplicity." For me, the issue is different. The various artists add different nuances to the market identity of Alan Moore. Ironically, much of the criticism and fan reaction to Moore's work fail to take into consideration his collaboration with the artists that help him to produce his work. Moore, furthermore, attempts to use the mammoth script Campbell mentions above as a means to describe precisely the vision he wants other artists to produce for him. The combination of the control Moore achieves through his scripts and the inability of fans to adequately attribute the work done by the artist produces the "singular narrative" of Alan Moore's market identity as an auteur-author. This narrative is also applicable to Blake, if we (as critics often do) see him as a singular character or figure producing poetic and prophetic revelations of multiplicity. It is much more interesting, and productive, to consider Blake (and Moore) as a collectivity of fans, critics, authors, and artists whose multiplicity adds to the innovation of the au
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