Representing Acts of Violence in Comics

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ROUTLEDGE
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2020
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
CIP data has been applied for.

ISBN: 978-1-138-48453-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-351-05178-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by codeMantra

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Introduction

Nina Mickwitz, Ian Horton and Ian Hague

Violence in Comics

The presence of violence in comics form is now so prevalent and accepted that it tends to go unremarked. Yet violence is a complex affair. Graphic (in both meanings of the word) depictions of fist fights and bodies skewered by swords, riddled by bullets or crushed under falling objects are commonplace in superhero, fantasy and action stories. These kinds of violence differ markedly from the slapstick gag of a thrown brick (as in George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*) or slingshot projectile (prime contenders include Dennis the Menace in *The Beano* and his American namesake, created by Hank Ketcham) hurtling through the air to hit its target, intended or otherwise. Different again are representations of violence in autobiographical and documentary comics, such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, which speak of real-world acts of violence and the contexts from which they emerge.

With their origins in the conference 'Violence in Comics,' organised by Comics Forum in 2014, these two companion volumes, *Contexts of Violence in Comics* and *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics*, have been curated to initiate a nuanced examination of the ways in which violence is evident in comics. Although we do not claim to offer an exhaustive history or a complete survey of the topic, this study strives to provide a broad overview of the ways in which a range of types of violence are presented across different genres, cultures and contexts. In so doing, we hope to offer a foundation for a wide-ranging and considered debate and discussion of violence in comics, and to prompt further discussion and analysis of this vitally important subject.

As violence continues to be a pervasive element in popular culture more generally, as well as in comics, it is intended that the chapters collected together in these two volumes will contribute to wider debates about the contexts in which violence takes place and how acts of violence are represented across the media landscape. This is a multifaceted subject that can be understood in many ways, and we have chosen to consider contexts and representations as two very different major subsections of the topic. By contexts we mean the various sociopolitical and cultural

forces that shape the way violence is presented in comics and impact directly on their production. In contrast when examining representation, we are concerned with the different kinds of violence that take place in comics and in the specific modes of depiction used to show these violent acts.

This book concerns the depiction and representation of violence in comics. Where *Contexts of Violence in Comics* attends to cultural, industry, scholarly and critical contexts as the route to understanding this topic, this volume will present approaches to representation of violent acts, with examples organised thematically. This is, of course, not to say that the authors' treatment of examples will not take into account the contextual factors of these specific instances, but this book will pay particular attention to strategies of representation.

Representing Acts of Violence in Comics

It is important to acknowledge that violence is something that functions on multiple levels. Slavoj Žižek (2008) has directed our attention to an important theoretical distinction that can be drawn between subjective and social violence. Social violence in this instance refers to 'violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the subtler forms of coercion that sustain relations of dominance and exploitation, including the threat of violence' (Žižek 2008, 8). An individual and subjective act of violence may overlap with and be produced by social formations of violence, whereas the latter might not necessarily manifest in singular instances or acts readily recognisable as violent. Acts of violence can thus be understood as incorporating symbolic gestures, violations, abuses and abject atrocities.

The challenges and implications of depicting violence, and especially the visual representation of violent acts, intersect with philosophical enquiries into the ontology of images (Gombrich 1960; Mitchell 1995, 2005; Ranciére 2009) and have generated discussions that range from the historically specific (Haywood 2006; Der Derian 2009) to contemporary debates about documentary witnessing (Guerin and Hallas 2007) through the politics of representation of crime, police brutality, terrorism and war in news media and entertainment (Horeck 2004; Jewkes 2004; Weaver and Carter 2006; Horeck and Kendall 2011; Greer and Reiner 2015) to continued anxieties around effects (see Barker and Petley 2002).

On the whole, concerns about the moral impact of gratuitous depictions of violent acts have moved on from the mid-20th-century moral panics concerning comics (Pumphrey 1954, 55, 64; Wertham 1954) to video games and virtual reality.[1] But we feel that a more sustained and up-to-date examination of how violence features as a persistent theme in comics, both historically and currently, with no signs of

abating, is due. A considerable amount of scholarly attention has been generated around the themes of conflict and trauma in comics, noteworthy recent examples of which include Hillary Chute's (2016) *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*; Harriet E. H. Earle's (2017) *Comics, Trauma, and the New Art of War* to *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma and Memory* (2018), edited by Tatjana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal; Laurike in 't Veld's *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: considering the role of kitsch* (2019) and *Documenting Trauma: Traumatic Pasts, Embodied Histories & Graphic Reportage in Comics* (2019), edited by Dominic Davies and Candida Rifkind. The intersections between such work, innately and closely dealing with questions of violence and its depiction, and the concerns of this volume and its companion *Contexts of Violence in Comics* are evident. However, our aim here has been to consider violence and its representation in comics in fiction as well as factual modes and to examine how violence in comics can take a multitude of forms. Alongside reportage and remembrance comics also regularly represent violence using dramatic and melodramatic registers, and by taking humorous, playful and flippant approaches. This diversity is borne out by the chapters in this volume, and the fact that representation in and of itself can constitute an act of violence only emphasizes representation as an issue that calls for explicit attention.

W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) and Hans Belting (2005) have each examined the relationship between material images and entities that are as much cultural as they are conceptual. 'Images are neither on the wall (or on the screen) nor in the head alone' (Belting 2005, 302). For Mitchell, this indeterminacy is at the heart of both the power of images and the perceived threat that images pose. When it comes to a subject as integrated into the social fabric and at the same time subject to legal and moral sanction as violence, it hardly seems surprising that, following the reasoning of Mitchell and Belting, material images of violence are equally ubiquitous while also subject to complex meanings and constraints.

The Paradigm of Witnessing

Susan Sontag's (2003) work, despite her particular interest in the photographic image, still offers a useful reference point for setting out concerns explored by some of the authors in this book. Aside from the fact that they predate photographic technologies by more than a decade, Sontag notes that Goya's *Disasters of War* (1810–1820) evokes actual atrocities through synthesis (42). These depictions are understood and accepted as testimonial and therefore not beholden to the strict criteria and expectations in relation to notions of fact and evidence that tend to apply to photographic depictions. This assessment by Sontag can be usefully expanded with the assistance of Paul Ricoeur (2004), who has

examined the paradigm of witness testimony and truth. 'With testimony opens up an epistemological process that departs from declared memory, passes through the archive and documents, and finds its fulfillment [sic] in documentary proof' (Ricoeur 2004, 161). If we understand the key feature of witness testimony as the assertion of the claim 'I was there' (Ricoeur 2004, 163), then some of the comics examined in this collection fit the criteria more easily than others. However, the main focus of these enquiries is how the comics in question deal with representing the acts of violence that they are concerned with, and through these manifold examples and approaches we are hopeful that wider ideas about the strategies, capacities and affordances of comics will emerge.

The ways in which comics are unlike the images that Sontag is concerned with are not reducible to the difference between drawn and lens-derived images. The declaration 'The image as shock and the image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence' (Sontag 2003, 20) relates specifically to the single image. Although it is possible for single images involving acts of violence in comics to stand out and demand closer attention, the sequential structures that they commonly are located within would perhaps be expected to affect the dynamic that Sontag highlights here. Elsewhere, she contends that while photographs can haunt us, '[n] arratives can make us understand' (Sontag 2003, 80). Through their sequential and narrative depictions, comics bring a tendency towards specificity, which presumably has the capacity to act as a corrective to the potential of singular images of violence to circulate as decontextualised fragments.

> Some of the reproaches made against images of atrocity are not different from characterizations of sight itself. Sight is effortless; it requires spatial distance; sight can be turned off (we have lids on our eyes, we do not have doors on our ears). The very qualities that made the ancient Greek philosophers consider sight the most excellent, the noblest of the senses are now associated with a deficit.
>
> (Sontag 2003, 105)

Such a damning view of vision also reverberates through Paul Virilio's assessment of militarised technologies of vision and technocratic visual cultures (1994, 1997). Indeed, Virilio's critique of vision could be applied to comics as well since they seek to control and constrain our vision (in that they show us the fragments they want us to see). But at the same time, the subjective and situated telling, especially prominent in witnessing and testimonial modes in comics, can be figured as a response to a wider cultural concern, voiced by Virilio's contention that machine visions are degrading our perception. Such a reading would seem to correlate with the attention to comics that extend an emphatically hand-drawn aesthetic by a number of critics, but most notably

Hillary Chute (2010, 2016). The extent to which values (and the perceived authenticity) associated with such an emphasis on materiality and idiosyncrasy signify cultural desires, more so than innate qualities, is a topic of ongoing debate.

However, overarching questions also arise regarding the reader positions offered by the various comics work under scrutiny by our authors. In the introduction to their collection *The Image and the Witness: trauma, memory and visual culture* (2007), Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas argue that images, whether drawn by the primary witness who 'was there' or not, make available acts of secondary witnessing. The aim of such visual representations that allow readers to 'see' rather than merely know can often be to elicit emotional engagement. The capacity to simultaneously express subjectivity and observation, and sustain fluidity between internal states and external situations that the drawn images of comics possess would seem well suited for these purposes.

However, even if representations of violent acts invite us to look, they do not necessarily aim to engender moral outrage or present a call to action in order to put a stop to conditions and structures under which violence prevails.

> the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glorious depictions of suffering. Torment, a canonical subject in art, is often represented in painting as a spectacle, something to be watched (or ignored) by other people. The implication is: no, it cannot be stopped – and the mingling of inattentive with attentive onlookers underscores this.
>
> (Sontag 2003, 38)

This concern is not limited to the representation of actual, historical acts of violence but, as will become apparent, also crops up in relation to fiction. The boundary between factual and fictional modes can indeed be both contested and shifting. However, some distinction can nevertheless be made in terms of how factual and fictional representations of violence position readers and viewers. Perhaps the crucial difference is best captured by comparing an invitation to 'see this' with the directive 'imagine this.'

Violent Fictions and Other Symbolic Resources

Fictional depictions of violent acts across different media are pervasive and abundant and, it would seem, accepted and constructed as problematic in almost equal measure. Some representations of violence are unapologetic about the spectacle they offer up because, as Martin Barker's

(1989) seminal analysis argued, the violence is presented within a specific context and address. For instance, whether to deliberately shock, antagonise or subvert social codes of propriety and the pretences these involve, or in order to tackle social and political forms of violence, genres such as horror (see Benshoff 2014) and the Gothic (Monnet 2016) are known to place the corporeal and spectacular violence at their centre. In a perfect illustration of this idea, Chanokporn Chitikamoltham has discussed Thai 'one-baht comics' as a form of vernacular culture, performing a function of 'cultural catharsis' (2014, 46). These comics eschew more rigid restrictions imposed on more respected cultural forms; key factors in their role and the space they are able to offer are constituted by their lowly cultural stature and the genre conventions of horror.

Other genres, such as comedy, also include violence according to their own particular conditions. Slapstick traditions, for example, are familiar in both comics and animation and their lineages reach further back into performance, with both human performers and proxies (such as dolls and marionettes). Comics and animation both employ the expressive, ideational and narrative possibilities of drawing, and the satirical and humorous cartooning that feeds into both forms is, of course, evident in the very nomination of comics. So, it is important to note that drawing (that depicts acts of violence) is not always a carrier of testimony that makes a secondary act of witnessing possible. It can equally be employed to present a spectacle of exaggerated gestures of violence without actual consequence. But such representations are not always as easily accepted as under the guise of comedy.

Cultural critic Henry Giroux (1995) has drawn a distinction between different kinds of cinematic violence[2] that are of interest to our consideration of comics and their engagement with violence in the context of popular visual culture: ritualistic, symbolic and hyperreal depictions. *Ritualistic violence* is the staple fare of Hollywood action films, in the words of Giroux (1995, 301) 'utterly banal, predictable, and often stereotypically masculine, and is pure spectacle in form and superficial in content.' While expressing concern about the impact and (central to his argument, deeply racist) agendas served by the aestheticising of violence, Giroux is clear that blaming media only serves to obscure the systemic social and economic causes that underlie violence in society. In contrast to much media effects discourse he also distinguishes between different kinds of mediated violence in popular entertainment. Thus, *symbolic violence* differs from its ritualistic counterpart as it 'attempts to combine the visceral with the reflective' (ibid, 303) as a means of incorporating elements of social critique. *Hyperreal violence* is the hyperreal celluloid violence that Tarantino exemplifies, combining explicit gore with hefty doses of parody and ironic detachment. This, for Giroux, is a cynical exercise and one that absolves both producers and audiences positioning the violence offered for their consumption in relation to it 'as an

established social practice' (Giroux 1995, 309). While researchers more concerned with actual reception and engagement by readers and audiences (Barker and Petley 2002) are likely to remain unimpressed, Scott Kirsch (2002) has used Giroux's ideas in order to expand a more encompassing notion of spectacular violence. He proposes that the problem with hyperreal violence

> is not, as with ritualistic violence, a total lack of engagement with reality but an over-engagement with, or rather focus on, criminal or street violence at such a narrow and intense scale of resolution that we tend to lose track of all else.
>
> (Kirsch 2002, 37)

While the cinematic experience differs fundamentally to that of reading comics, some of the core questions brought to the fore in these discussions are related to how violence is depicted and presented, and how acts of violence are given context within a system of signification. And such quandaries are precisely what guide the chapters in this collection and their authors' examination of the diverse comics and graphic novels that form its corpus. According to Kirsch, spectacular violence encompasses graphic depictions of violence, the threat of violence and a fascination with it. But, he argues, spectacular, gratuitous and commodified violence nevertheless does not inevitably mean that the representation as a whole is devoid of moral compass. The continued prevalence of violence in popular culture forms and debates concerning it, whether cinematic, in games or in comics, suggest that these are questions that resist easy resolution.

It is also worth remembering that social hierarchies of both people and forms of culture play a considerable role in where and when violence as spectacle is sanctioned and when it is censored (Schechter 2005, 1–14). This might help explain why historically violence in comics has been a contested issue in a way that it would be difficult to imagine in relation to violence in forms that have come to command comparatively high cultural status: for example Shakespeare's plays and the opera. In other words, the ways in which comics are understood as depicting acts of violence, as well as the conventions, means and expectations at their disposal, are clearly part of a wider cultural terrain. Together, the chapters in this book set out a variety of approaches, fact-based as well as fictional, and multifaceted considerations to representing violent acts in comics.

The Structure of This Volume

Section 1: Depiction

Considering the questions outlined earlier in this introduction, depiction itself is a suitable place to begin. It is probably fair to say that some

of the best known endeavours to theorise the formal components and affordances of comics, Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (2007 [1999]) and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993), still remain the touchstone contributions. This is irrespective of the fact that the poetics and formal dynamics of comics have since been elucidated in numerous more specific textual analyses. Such treatments have been prolific in works contributing insights in terms of specific aspects, including text-image relations (Kannenberg 2001), comics temporalities (Bartual 2012; Gunning 2014), spatial construction (Bredehoft 2006; Peeters 2007; Lefèvre 2009; Dittmer 2010), drawing style (Baetens 2011; Gardner 2011), narrative drawing (Grennan 2017) and colour (Baetens 2011).

Unsurprisingly, every chapter in this book engages with issues relating to depiction and representation as encountered in their various case studies of representing acts of violence in comics. In the chapters in the very first section, however, the authors' analytical efforts and critical searchlights are particularly trained on comics creators' strategic uses of formal capacities as they represent violent acts. The authors all undertake close and attentive analyses in order to ascertain how rhetorical means are applied and formal means are utilised in order to construct positions of meaning-making, especially in relation to profoundly traumatic acts of violence. At the same time, the comics under scrutiny in the three chapters in this section represent distinct historical and cultural contexts as well as diversity in terms of approach and genre affiliation.

In the opening chapter, John Miers examines Keiji Nakasawa's *Barefoot Gen*, a semi-autobiographical account of the nuclear assault on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 as well as its aftermath and its consequences for the population on the ground. He observes how momentous geopolitical events are addressed by retaining narrative focus strictly on close and familial interactions, and argues that Nakasawa strategically employs genre conventions of Shõnen manga (a genre largely aimed at teenage boys, within which action, adventure and war are prominent themes) to present a resolutely anti-war message.

Zanne Domoney-Lyttle's chapter takes as its focus the symbolic 'first' murder in the biblical story of Cain's slaughter of his younger brother, Abel. Here the author examines the interpretation and visual exegesis of this story in three very different comics: *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* (2009), Siku's *The Manga Bible* (2009) and *The Goddamned* by Aaron and Guéra (2017). The process demonstrates how their various approaches construe not only significantly differing understandings of the events taking place but implicit understandings about transgression, responsibility and punishment as they relate to this profound act of extreme violence.

The third chapter in this section is by Laurike in 't Veld and explores how Jaxon's story 'Nits Make Lice,' which appeared in a special

issue of the underground magazine *Slow Death* Comix (1976–1977), performs a tricky balancing act between entertainment, educational impulse, political commentary and agitprop confrontation. The author also attends to the magazine's connecting role between an underground tradition revelling in its excesses and the more restrained treatments of collective and personal trauma that have flourished more recently. Of particular relevance to the theme of depiction is the author's concern with 'atrocity-panels' and their function in representing acts of historical violence.

Section 2: Embodiment

The second section in the book is embodiment, a concept that potentially provides a way out from, with reference to the earlier quote by Sontag (2003, 38), the impasse of either consuming suffering bodies as spectacular visions or looking away. Understanding how violence is enacted upon bodies first requires some understanding of bodies that goes beyond essentialist definitions. Citing Foucault's work as an influential contributor to these reconceptualisations of the body, or (underscoring distancing from a universal conception) bodies, Thomas Csordas (1994) has outlined critical contributions that render the notion of bodies as ahistorical, fixed or bounded untenable. As described here, '"the body" has come to be understood as simultaneously subject and object, meaningful and material, individual and social' (Mascia-Lees 2011, 1). The critical category of embodiment responds to the insight that while 'constituted by, and constitutive of, political and economic formations' (ibid, 2), bodies are inseparable from lived experience and prime sites for the contestation of self and identity.

Structural violence, and the violence of war in particular, multiplies the bodies involved and subjected. At such a scale experiential aspects, all-consuming and traumatic for those involved as they may be, become difficult to make comprehensible through acts of communication: for example, representation. To overcome such challenges, one available route is to focus on individual experiences that function through synecdoche—one part standing for a larger collective.

The chapters in this section focus on comics that have opted for a different strategy. Both Laura E. Pearson and Eszter Szép have chosen as their focus comics that remake formal precepts and conventional formats in order to communicate how violent conflict engages social and lived bodies. In doing so they simultaneously draw attention to reading experience as situated, culturally coded and multisensory (Hague 2014): in other words an embodied process.

Laura A. Pearson's chapter explores multiple sites of cultural and ecological violence in *Red: A Haida Manga*. On the surface, this is the tragic coming of age tale of the eponymous protagonist, Red. Yet the

story and its presentation eschew the naturalism that would identify it as a representative individual narrative. *Red* is instead an allegory about the destructive power of fear and its cost to individuals, communities and the environment. Originally composed as a composite mural of what creator Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas terms 'Haida Manga' and subsequently reconstructed as a graphic novel, *Red* is an embodiment of transcultural narrative. Pearson's analysis shows how *Red*'s formal innovation and intertextuality combines storytelling techniques associated with the Pacific Northwest and critical commentary indicting anthropocentric structures of domination and war that are both historic and ongoing.

Eszter Szép's chapter examines another work that uses unconventional formal means to communicate the violence of war. Joe Sacco's *The Great War* narrates the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, in a series of seamlessly interwoven wordless images. Twenty-four-feet long, the work is folded into twenty-four plates and requires the reader to adapt her/his physical and embodied engagement with it accordingly. For Szép this format establishes an awareness of the situatedness and vulnerability of the reader's own body, creating a vital connection based on vulnerability between the reader and the bodies represented by Sacco's painstaking and detailed drawing.

Section 3: Humour

Recent scholarship has often privileged autobiographical, testimonial and documentary approaches, such as Sacco's, as prime sites where the representation of violence and critical reflection on the violence of representation intersect (Adams 2008; Rifkind 2008; Chute 2016). Taking on 'serious' topics has played a part in comics' being taken more seriously, and this validation in part undergirded the swell of critical attention (in mainstream media and academe alike) to such comics. Notably less attention has been awarded to comics that are funny—whether daft, deadpan or exponents of slapstick gags. Even critics in established and respected fields such as sociology (Lockyer and Pickering 2008) and art history (Diack 2012) have felt it necessary to defend humour as a worthwhile subject of study. 'Topics considered light or ephemeral, playful or derisive, have generally been seen as aesthetically problematic in their unseriousness and have therefore been rejected as antithetical' (Diack 2012 75). This judgement also describes some of the challenges faced by Comics Studies, carving out a space with variable institutional support. It is perhaps small wonder that comics scholars have yet to explore this seemingly obvious aspect of comics in a more concerted way. That humour is a crucial element in caricature and satire alike has been recognised in some important work on comics histories (Berger 1970; Kunzle 1983; Sabin 2014). Yet the complex means and

uses of humour in diverse genres of comics, contemporary as well as historical, offer rich opportunities for further exploration, and we are pleased to present a section looking at the intersection of humour and violence in comics.

Although much effort has been made to establish that comics are not just for children, we should remember that children nevertheless constitute an important demographic, with titles aimed squarely at young readers. Christopher J. Thompson's chapter turns attention to Dennis the Menace, a leading character in the longest-running British comics periodical for children, *The Beano* (1938). Grounding his analysis in historical debates around violence in comics, the author proceeds to unpack power relations between children and adults in the comic. He proposes that play (involving both humour and violence) here offers a vital resource and space for not just challenging authority but more profoundly subverting it.

The second chapter in this section explores how humour provides a strategic means in comics to tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence. Nicola Streeten applies theories of humour in order to understand a range of different approaches, selected to represent a wide spectrum of acts and behaviour that constitute this category. The chosen texts in this chapter all feature female protagonists, and the analysis probes the strategies taken by creators in relation to complex issues of long-term repercussions, victimhood and agency as well as their decisions to steer clear of explicit depictions. Drawing, as it does significantly, on theories of humour in its analysis of gendered and sexual violence, this chapter bridges the concerns of this section and the next.

Section 4: Gendered Violence

The pervasiveness of sexual violence, whether as a deliberate tactic of military aggression or insidiously concealed in the everyday of domestic and workplace contexts, is both a highly topical issue and a long-standing one. And while the comics in Nicola Streeten's chapter deliberately eschew such depictions, visual representation of sexual violence is commonplace across popular culture forms. Such imagery raises contentious issues of voyeuristic pleasures, the production and reproduction of rape culture (Horeck 2004; Projansky 2001), and thus the idea mentioned earlier of acts of representation *as* enacted violence. Moreover, depictions of sexual violence have historically been used to serve ideological agendas, as exemplified by colonialist imagery and sexualised racism (Bhattacharyya 2008). Orientalist tropes passed as standard fare in many adventure comics of the early and mid-20th century, from threats posed to white protagonists by tribes of 'savages' to exoticist depictions of sheiks and harems. Such cultural imaginaries are stubbornly persistent, as highlighted by, for example, Craig Thompson's graphic novel *Habibi*.

Gender certainly figures as an important factor and consideration in depictions of sexual violence. However, gendered violence is not reducible to sexual violence. When considering gender in this, as in many other contexts, it is useful to note the, by now well-established, argument that gender is far from biological, intrinsic or 'natural' but 'a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practice' (Haraway 1991, 155). Following Judith Butler (1990) we can elaborate this social practice in terms of performative means and ritualistic and everyday differentiations and identifications. The deconstruction of gender fundamentally questions and upturns the notion of gender as natural or inevitable and has opened up important discursive spaces. Yet this does not lessen the meaning of gender as structural and symbolic or its profound impact in terms of lived experience. Highly pertinent to the topic at hand is Karen Boyle's (2004) observation that cultural attitudes to violence are themselves highly gendered. The chapters on this, the concluding section of the book, elaborate notions of gender and gendered violence in a variety of ways, taking in a breadth of material that covers mid-1980s Alan Moore, 21st-century post-apocalyptic fantasy-horror and Marvel's superhero multiverse. Each chapter contributes to a nuanced understanding of how fiction can allow pressing societal issues to be brought into critical focus.

The first chapter in this section is Maggie Gray's exploration of gender and violence in *The Ballad of Halo Jones*. Gray locates Alan Moore's comic strip, which originally featured in *2000AD* (1984–1986), and its eponymous heroine in the feminist discourse of its time. She argues that Moore sought to challenge the limited repertoire and stereotypically two-dimensional female characters that were dominant, both in mainstream comics and *2000AD*, at that time. The strip thus offers not just a female protagonist but a distinctly female perspective. The *Halo Jones* serial uses critical estrangement, an instrument that is well established in science fiction genres, and Gray's reading traces themes such as structural violence in the everyday, the violence of poverty, symbolic and gendered violence, and military and political structures of violence inherent to colonial expansion.

Following on from this, Joseph Willis analyses the way in which the roles of black female characters are constructed in the post-apocalyptic worlds of *Y: The Last Man* and *The Walking Dead*. Willis's chapter argues that these characters, as they draw on particular racialised and gendered sociopolitical histories, become sites of particular resistance and struggle. Yet the exposition of their bodies made into powerful instruments with an enhanced capacity for violence is fraught with tension. In Willis's reading these black female bodies become fighting machines employed to ensure the survival of other, and predominantly white and male, survivors. This suggests that while they are embodiments of opposition and action, they are ultimately cast as disposable.

Richard Reynolds and Jamie Brassett complete the collection with their chapter 'Killgrave: the purple man.' Killgrave is the mind controlling Marvel supervillain who first appeared in *Daredevil* in 1964 but has more recently resurfaced in the comic book series *Alias* and the 2015 Netflix show *Jessica Jones.* Standing apart from other supervillains due to his lack of ulterior aims or agenda, the authors propose that Killgrave's violations are motivated only by his own desire for control over his victims. In order to bring to light the workings and meanings that Killgrave encompasses, the chapter first connects him with the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), the French libertine philosopher and writer known for dismissing moral and social constraints, and advocating the pleasures of domination over others. Using Gilles Deleuze's discussion of Sade then provides a bridge to notions of institutional power control, allowing the discussion to locate Killgrave in relation to Foucault's notion of biopower and biopolitical violence.

The chapters in this book thus engage with the representation of acts of violence in a range of comics genres and formats. The approaches of the authors are equally varied. In some chapters the significance of specific sociopolitical and historical contexts is particularly acutely brought into view. In others, and signalling a plurality of perspectives and scholarly concerns, a variety of theoretical frameworks are employed to develop analysis of examples. Such strident multiplicity perfectly underscores the editorial intentions of this contribution. Alongside its companion volume *Contexts of Violence in Comics* and in its own right, we hope that this collection convincingly demonstrates the relationship between comics and violence as one of nuance and complexity.

Notes

1 For a more detailed account of events leading up to the setting up of the Comics Code Authority, as an instrument of self-regulation and censorship by the US comics industry in 1954, see the introduction to *Contexts of Violence in Comics* (2019).
2 That Giroux offers his analysis of cultures of violence in connection with an analysis of Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994) makes it all the more fitting, considering this the graphic depictions of violence in Tarantino's films tend to be characterized as 'cartoonish.'
1 Genesis 4:4. Unless otherwise stated, any biblical text or passages that are referred to are taken from Robert Alter's translation of Genesis (Alter 1996). I use Alter's version as his commentary is one of the more academically rigorous and is well accepted within the field of biblical studies.
2 Alter notes that textually, the only reason for God to have chosen Abel's offering over Cain's is because Abel brought the very best of his flock to God.
3 For example, Genesis 27, which is the story of Jacob usurping his older brother Esau to gain the blessing of his father, Isaac. See also the character of David in 1 Samuel as another example of this intertextual theme in the Hebrew Bible.

4 Spatio-topical code refers to the arrangement of panels on the page, which may include the size, shape and position of panels, incrustation, spaces between panels and the page itself as a single unit, and the exterior space, which outlines the panels, and which Groensteen refers to as the 'hyperframe' (Groensteen 2007, 30).
5 Miller calls this sequential links (Miller 2007, 88) and it is similar to Groensteen's concept of 'restrained arthrology' (Groensteen 2007, 103–43). Restricted arthrology/sequential links refer to the overarching story within a comic book which is divided into 'discontinuous units which are aligned sequentially, articulated by syntagmatic links' (Miller 2007, 88). For Miller, coherent progression of the narrative is contingent upon the proper use of elements including interframe space, framing, angle of vision, composition and use of colour.
6 Tressage refers to braiding or weaving, reflecting the idea that "panels may relate to each other through links which are woven throughout a [comic]" (Miller 2007, 95). Groensteen refers to it as '[...] braiding is a supplementary relation that is never indispensable to the conduct and intelligibility of the story', (Groensteen 2007, 146). Repetition is key in both visual and textual elements of the story which tie together themes, patterns and stories and provide depth to the narrative.
7 Clearly, the term 'word-for-word' is problematic in terms of biblical adaptations, as evidenced in the list of sources R. Crumb notes influenced his work. The number of texts he uses suggests there is no such thing as an original text—which, in terms of the Hebrew Bible, is correct—but his choice of language draws attention to history of translating and interpreting the Bible, and that his version is another translation in the tradition of biblical interpretation. I discuss this further in my PhD thesis (Domoney-Lyttle 2017, 6–7).
8 Crumb suggested that his image of God was influenced by his own father who was a military man, as well as Charlton Heston, and a dream he had in which God revealed himself to Crumb (Arnold 2005).
9 For example, see the roundtable discussion in: The Hooded Utilitarian, 'Slow-Rolling Genesis Index.' Accessed 7 February 2016. www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2010/08/crumbs-limited-literalism/.
10 Groensteen's understanding of the multistage multiframe is that the page itself constitutes a single unit with the narrative of the comic book (hyperframe) but that other units of information—strips, panels, double-page spreads and the comic book as a whole—are multiframes. Multistage multiframes are 'systems of panel proliferation that are increasingly inclusive,' and 'the multiframe is the sum of the frames that compose a given comic' which include the sum of the hyperframes within each comic book (Groensteen 2007, 30–31).
11 Space for marginalia in Bibles (space around text to allow readers to make notes on the content) is a well-established tradition. In comics, the gutter offers a similar space to margins in the Bible, which allows for the possibility for gutters to perform the same function as margins within Bibles, whether Crumb purposefully created these spaces for that reason or not. With thanks to Dr Ian Hague for this comment.
12 The perifield, or périchamp, is a term introduced by Benoît Peeters which describes how each panel is read with other panels in visual periphery. Therefore, panels are not read alone, but along with neighbouring panels.
13 Crumb discusses this further in the introduction to *Genesis, Illustrated*.
14 The image could be either of a club or an animal thigh bone such as a sheep. If the latter, this would link the image to Abel the shepherd, being the keeper of sheep so killed with his own fruitfulness in the eyes of God. With thanks to Dr Ian Horton for this comment.

15 For varied perspectives on theological readings of the Cain and Abel story, see, for example, Gerhard von Rad (1972), David J. Clines & Philip R. Davies (1998) and Claus Westermann (1994).

1 Witek notes that Jackson 'owes much to the visual style of horror established in the E.C. Comics' (1989, 70). The visceral quality of the attacks on the victims' bodies and the mutilation of body parts certainly echo some of the stylistic features of E.C. Comics—the visual emphasis on maimed, disfigured and aberrant bodies—but it also channels other pre-Code horror publishers like Harvey Publications' *Black Cat Mystery Comics, Chamber of Chills* and *Tomb of Terror.*

2 The story 'The Savage Within,' part two of Jackson's three-part series on the Spanish Missions in Texas and published in 1990 in Fantagraphics' *Graphic Story Monthly*, features a few atrocity panels that are reminiscent of 'Nits Make Lice.' The fictional character of Yoyo Pintado, a native Pajalache, murders his wife and children in a gruesome manner after discovering her infidelity. Jackson does not eschew showing the horrific mutilation of the woman's body, and one panel depicting a priest stepping on the woman's severed breast echoes the panels of the Colorado regiment holding up severed genitals as war trophies.

3 In an e-mail conversation (March 2018), Melinda Gebbie notes that the final panel—an idea of co-author Prosper T.—shows 'the perennial obscenity of the lowest human drive - that of the destruction of life.'

4 Irons addresses this literal divide between spectacle and didacticism in the first panel of the strip at the top of the page, where a skull head offers readers, or the 'sex and violence freaks,' the option to skip the 'dry, informative, educational-type comic strips' (n.p.) in favour of the animal cartoon.

1 Acknowledgements for research support and suggestions for chapter development are due to the editors of the present volume as well as to the research supporters listed in my biography. I would also point interested readers to Rob Nixon's theorisations of 'Slow Violence,' an influential concept I became familiar with early on in my studies of the Environmental Humanities (See, for example, his *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2011).

2 See http://mny.ca/en for more on MNY's work with 'Haida Manga.'

3 To maintain typographical consistency, I have not reproduced *Red*'s all-caps typeset, but I have retained original boldface and italics where possible. Slashes (/) indicate breaks between word bubbles.

4 See the cover image in colour at http://mny.ca/en/work/14/RED.

5 See also Yahgulanaas's recent sequel *The War of the Blink* (2017).

6 For further discussion on the 'not-so-funny animal,' c.f. Pearson 2018.

7 Emberley links her concept of the 'defamiliar' to 'the indigenous uncanny' and Gerald Vizenor's idea of 'survivance' (2015, 215). These terms and ideas—although there is no space here to examine them more closely—are applicable to Yahgulanaas's text.

8 For a reproduction of this image, see www.geist.com/downloads/737/download/MNY-Red.jpg?cb=eff75239bda673fde13c9abdf7522c10.

1 DC Thomson comics typically went on sale on Mondays with the following Saturday's date, meaning that this issue would have hit the shelves on or around 12 March 1951. These are a crucial few days as, in perhaps one of the greatest coincidences in comics' history, a newspaper comic strip created by Hank Ketcham with the same title appeared in the United States on 12 March 1951. This strip is generally known as *Dennis* when on the shores of the United Kingdom.

1 However, since Crumb's comics can be classified as pornographic, a gendered double standard is still evident, which it is not my intention to condone.

2 Billig claims this assumption exists within some psychological theories, which he does not specify.

3 Indeed I suggest that even the love of interpersonal relationships is quantified in material terms in the West.
4 Eleven women attended the first meeting of the Wimmen's Comix Collective in Berkeley, California, USA. The collective published *Wimmen's Comix no. 1* (Robbins 1999, 91).
1 The 1978 Women's Liberation Conference divided acrimoniously over the issue of male violence, one of several fault lines emerging within the movement between and within radical, socialist and liberal strands.
2 Flynn's more substantive point regards the way this ordinariness is racially marked as white, although the strip featured a higher number of non-white characters than many contemporaneous mainstream comics.
1 Also, and especially in the Netflix series, spelt 'Kilgrave.'
2 On the value of Kilgrave's purpleness see Brown (2011). On disfigurement of villains see Alaniz (2014).
3 Thus, *Alias* aligns partially with the 'bystander' category of superhero narratives: a characteristic subgenre in the early 21st century—other examples being Ed Brubaker's *Gotham Central* and Bendis's own *Powers*.
4 Peppard (2018) interprets this retro feel to be an overt allusion to an earlier, 1970s, era of independent Marvel superheroines, thus deliberately contrasting the portrayal of empowering and/or feminist superheroines of two different eras.
5 Rayborn and Keyes (2018, 6) make a similar point concerning the nature of Killgrave's villainy.
6 Beckman and Blake (2009, 2) note: 'Pier Paolo Pasolini's translation of Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* into the economy of fascism in the 1940s Italy in Salo (1975) is explicitly concerned with the dehumanizing and depersonalizing dimension of systematic mass cruelty.'
7 See also Deleuze (1995a, 1995b, 2001) on control and Agamben (1998) on biopolitics.
8 Issues of surveillance, control and biopower are worth noting here, as Killgrave operates as a living technology of biopower whose surveillance exceeds the use of cameras. On issues of surveillance and biopower, see Smith (2016) and French and Smith (2016).
9 The Purple Man is the chief antagonist of *Jessica Jones* Season One (USA: Netflix, 2015). In Season Two, he appears only in Jones's hallucinations or flashbacks.
10 Aleah Kiley and Zak Roman offer a similar reading of Jessica Jones's resistance to Killgrave's violent patriarchal powers (Kiley and Roman, 2018, 54). Justin Wigard also arrives at a similar conclusion (Wigard, 2018, 231).
11 Unfortunately, for this seductive reading of the scene, the Purple Man was to return in *New Thunderbolts* Volume 1 #10.
12 Lillian Céspedes González goes further, arguing that Jones's empowerment represents a significant mainstreaming of a wider fan and geek culture, giving a voice to all those on the 'stigmatized fringes of society' (Céspedes González 2018, 78). Eva Thury, contrastingly, characterises both Jones and Killgrave as tricksters (Thury 2016, 6).
13 These films are Robert Van Ackeren's *Woman in Flames* (1983) and Monika Treut's and Elfie Mikesh's *Seduction: Cruel Woman* (1985); see Beckman and Blake (2009, 2).

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