A CLOCK WITHOUT A CRAFTSMAN: The Influence of Time in the World of Watchmen

Hendriks, Lara

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The Influence of Time in the World of *Watchmen*

Lara Hendriks

S1853600

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First Reader: Dr. S. A. Polak

Second Reader: Dr. Y. Horsman

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Introduction

Time is a concept that, in its simplest form, provides a language that every individual is able to speak and understand simultaneously. We have no trouble understanding that one's birth comes before one's death, and that all the moments and encounters of our lives happen in-between. But that does not define what time is. It merely gives a time marker to certain events, when they occurred in an absolute sense, when they occurred relative to other events and how long they lasted. But how time exists, and how it shapes events or is shaped by events, remains open. It says nothing yet of how we experience time, and how that experience relates to the existence of the events. It is in this experience that people might start to feel trapped or shaped by the way in which time is constructed or formulated. One's future can, for example, feel predetermined or even inevitable. This results in a loss of one's self, as there seems to be no way out of the tidings of time. Such anxiety and fear lie at the heart of four different entities that at first glance may seem unrelated: the philosophy of Henri Bergson, the Gothic genre, the narrative of Alan Moore's comic book *Watchmen* (1986) and of its sequel HBO series by the same name. However, all four encapsulate this loss of self that comes with a misunderstanding of the experience of time. And it is in the collaboration of these subjects that polar opposites are unseated, as the world is no longer truly black or white.

Time has been at the centre of philosophical discussion for many centuries. In many instances, time is linked to space, as both are "part of the fundamental stage upon which the events of the world play out" (Callender 1). Therefore, clearly distinguishing one from the other is often a difficult task, as time regulates space and vice versa. French philosopher Henri Bergson points out the danger of such a mix-up. The true experience of time, he argues, is lost when it is only regarded in terms limited to the spatial world. Time therefore has the ability to influence minds, as a spatial understanding of the term creates a loss of self. And such fragmentation seamlessly flows into the Gothic. The Gothic is a genre that excels in the

distortion of time, thus causing its characters to end up feeling disoriented and obsolete. The Gothic world is therefore a place in which boundaries are sought after, causing it to be a genre in which nothing is either completely good or inherently evil. Because the genre succeeds in bringing such nuance to our world, one in which humanity still frequently tends to think of things as either black or white, the Gothic offers room to reconsider those ideals that have made people think the way that they do. Richard J. Hand and Jay McRoy write that the genre "is transformational and revolutionary, and Gothic narratives frequently capitalise upon their audience's simultaneous fear of, and attraction to, social change and rebellion" (2). In other words, the Gothic lends itself to transform the minds of readers and viewers with the stories it is trying to convey. It not only aims to reinvent the world as we know it, but also to take full account of one's past, present and future when trying to accomplish this.

This way of thinking about the influence of both time and the Gothic genre as something that can help express and change common views on society and its institutions, gets even more interesting when pointing its lens at American (popular) culture. Considering tales that can be perceived as classic American Gothic tales, *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon, is perhaps not the first suggestion that jumps to mind. This comic, revolves around an alternate American history, one in which the U.S. has won the Vietnam War due to the rise of superheroes, who were able to change the course of history. Set against the tribulations of the Cold War, the comic questions the true morality of the characters it introduces, while trying to avert the nuclear war that is hanging over their heads. The world on the pages is dark, gritty and gloomy. There are no true heroes, or villains, as the lines between what was once considered good and bad eventually seem to blur. What, exactly, are these heroes willing to do in order to save themselves, their nation and the ideology of the American Dream? The novel revolves around an obsession of time, as the nuclear clock is counting down, and characters are being haunted by their past, present and future selves. Because of this, the heroes in the

novel question their lives: leaving it free to call into doubt whether their notion of saving the world is ultimately the right way. Because who, in the end, really watches the watchmen? This important question, that is posed early on in the comic, is therefore key to unraveling the juxtaposed identities of our superheroes. Such Gothic tendencies, like the entrapment of time and distortion of the self, are all present in *Watchmen*. The narrative is an example of what might happen when someone fails to escape fate, and thus becomes a slave to time.

Studying this comic alone would provide more than sufficient material in considering the place of the superhero within such a Gothic frame. But the relevance of this study has not worn off since the publication of the comic in 1986, and current-day American society seems to be filled with even more questions about defining the true morality of a person, or society. The 2019 HBO series *Watchmen* takes the narrative of the original comic to the 21st century, bringing the importance of the story from paper to screen. The sequel occurs 34 years after the original was set, focusing on both new but also original characters from the comic book. Much more centered around the history of racial violence in the United States, mainly regarding the Tulsa race massacre from 1921, the series presses its finger on issues that (just like the comic) keep contemporary America in a firm grip. Whilst set in different times, and portraying alternate histories of what might have been, the two narratives are in many forms true to dilemmas that have haunted American society and continue to do so to this day.

Superheroes, as represented in both media, cannot always be considered as the ultimate good that are solely purposed to defeat the truly evil. In the world of *Watchmen*, the myth of the ultimate hero gets debunked, as all of the characters constitute their own struggles. In my thesis, I will include both the comic and the HBO series in order to visualize the consequences that the experience of time and the Gothic genre have in the narrative of the characters, causing some to lose their own self, and others to reevaluate their relationship to time. I will combine three prominent works of theory in order to support my analysis, namely Henri Bergson's

theory on time and space, Scott McCloud's analysis of how time works within a graphic narrative and Jason Mittell's arguments on the timely flow within television. All three theories get highlighted in separate chapters. At the core of the theory that informs my analysis is Henri Bergson's philosophy, which I will present in the first chapter. I will analyze his desire to separate time and space, and show how he ultimately concludes that in regarding time spatially, characters might lose their own agency. This chapter will also explore how such a sense of time is directly linked to the Gothic, and how this genre is a place in which such a deterioration of the self is stimulated as well. Alan Moore's *Watchmen* is the central object of study in the second chapter. Scott McCloud's theory on comics will provide the basis for an analysis of time in terms of style, and the chapter will indulge in a close-reading of the characters and their intricate relationship with time. Before diving into this analysis, a point must also be made about the terminology in this research. When addressing Moore's *Watchmen*, I will use the term 'comic' or 'comic book' in order to refer to the medium that it is a part of. *Watchmen* has often been called a 'graphic novel', but since this term is mostly used in order to grant status to a comic series for commercial reasons, this term interferes with the analysis of my research. Therefore, Moore's *Watchmen* will get analyzed based on works that focus on the medium of the comic.

In the final chapter, HBO's *Watchmen* (2019) is analyzed in the same way as the comic book. Jason Mittell's book on tv series will provide the groundwork for the stylistic understanding of the series, and a close-reading of the characters will pinpoint the importance of time within a Gothic narrative. Conclusively, all three Ts will show how both time and the Gothic will cause characters to lose their sense of agency. But if characters are able to challenge this loss, they will eventually get closer to a true experience of time, such as Bergson wishes for humanity to encounter. Time and the Gothic are the forefront of seeking limits, and both

works of *Watchmen* provide characters that are either striken by their entrapment by these two notions, or find strength in this liminality, pushing forward to break through boundaries.

Chapter One: Bergson and the Gothic

Before considering both works of *Watchmen* in terms of space, time, or even spatial time, the most interesting aspects relevant to this study need to be defined, and it should be examined how these relate to one another. *Watchmen*, both the comic and the series, revolves around the concept of time and its relation to space. In the comic book series, the image of a doomsday clock is slowly ticking, engulfed by blood, signaling the impending doom of a nuclear war and the world's approaching to Armageddon. The series, as a continuation of the novel, revolves around the presence of the past, and shows how it continues to influence the present and future of the characters it is showing onscreen. Take, for instance, Dr. Manhattan, one of the most prominent characters in both the novel and the series (who will be discussed further in chapters 2 and 3). As he is the pure embodiment of spatial time and the entanglement of the two terms, this raises the question of how both *Watchmen* works want us to perceive time and space. In order to get a clear grip on these concepts, this study builds on the approach of French philosopher Henri Bergson who provides a way of thinking that inspires discussion of these aspects, whilst also providing us with a way to look at the media that both narratives are settled in.

1.1 Henri Bergson

In his essay *Time and Free Will* (1889), published years before Einstein's theory of relativity, Henri Bergson already responded to the prevailing idea in science about time. Time, in scientific terms, was seen as something that could move at different speeds in relation to something else. Whilst this is, of course, a meaningful approach to the nature of time, Henri Bergson opens up a field of discussion in order to explore what time means to us, both philosophically and psychologically. However much Einstein's explanation suffices to study this entity in a concrete sense, Bergson believes that it can never be fully understood when

viewed from this perspective. Introducing a more metaphysical approach, he attempts to fix the idea that a scientific explanation can be considered right when applying the concept of time to the field of the human mind: a common conception that was, in that time, considered accurate. Time, is therefore in the Bergsonian sense of the word, a condition of thought. Even when removing all that is physical from the material world, there will never be a possibility to get rid of time.

In order to understand where Bergson is coming from, a sidenote should be made to give a sense of the philosophical time that he was a part of. Bergson belonged to the French spiritualism movement, which argued from the 17th century onwards that human experience was something substantial and real: and not something that could be fully captured by the mechanical and necessary laws that scientists focused on. This sense of experience, as described by the spiritualist movement, points to the idea that a person's self is free and unrestricted, and thereby always has an own form of agency. This is in opposition to the spatial and material world, in which spontaneity is something that occurs only in a cause-and-effect sense. Thus, Bergson's circle believes in the argument that this idea of the restricted agency, created within the physical world, is not something that can be applied to the psychological realm. Matter itself is already, in one way or another, an expression of the mind. There is a clear opposition in the spiritualist way of thinking between mind and world, and in Bergson's own work, between time and space.

With respect to time, Bergson notices that there is something amiss when time is regarded in terms of the spatial world, in the way that scientists have argued. When considering time, there is a habit of regarding it in terms that have been derived from space. Think of hours, minutes and seconds: these descriptions originate from a sense where movements in space form the basis for identifying units of time. When the earth revolves around the sun, a movement in space, a day refers to the passing of time that it takes for the earth to complete this movement.

In essence, we therefore "replace our immediate impressions by what we learn from experience and science" (Bergson 54). Bergson exposes that, even when humanity believes that they are directly dealing with the measurement of time, it is simply movements in space that are being considered when thinking about hours or minutes in a day. Thus, "[w]e can distinguish between the qualities of sensations, for example – how they feel to us – but we cannot measure those sensations objectively in the way that we can with things external to us" (Gillies 14). With this in mind, Bergson draws the conclusion that the spatial movements with which time is captured, cannot account for a psychological way to regard time. Because, in essence, this spatial way always supposes that time has already passed. Bergson claims that the concept of an hour is only created once those 60 minutes have passed: if not, the hour cannot be regarded as full or completed. Thus, in a mathematical sense, time has always already occurred or taken place but says nothing about the true experience of time itself.

If we start to focus on the way we, as humans, completely understand and feel the flow of time, new concepts must be introduced, since the spatial world is too limited to project onto the psychological one. Bergson proposes the term duration, or *durée* in his native language, arguing that this accounts for the passing of time. He writes, that "[p]ure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states" (Bergson 100). Hours and minutes are solely space-based elements that provide markers with which time is set, but there needs to be a way to come to grips with the flow (or flux) of time. Bergson sees the past, therefore, as something that is always penetrating the present, as it is impossible in his regard to account for time without considering the past. Bergson's notion of 'duration' is a conceptual tool that should enable us to encapsulate this feeling, grounded in the premise that time is not just a linear movement, something that is isolated, but a flow or a flux of the present that is unmistakably intertwined with the ongoings of the past. The future is, therefore, not yet

determined. As time flows by, we create new forms and instances that become real for us: and it is therefore, that we always have a sense of agency when trying to look towards what might still come. Time in itself "is couplings of the present and the past, but their interrelation is more a plurality than simply a bifurcation, partly because there are many pasts in relation with many presents" (Clarke 170).

Perhaps the most prominent example that Bergson gives in *Time and Free Will* in terms of duration, is in understanding how one might listen to a melody. The notes that we hear are not simply notes we listen to one by one, in a static succession to one another. They are not isolated, but melt into one another to form a larger whole that sounds to us like a song or melody. In this instance, he argues "that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, […] that their totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected" (Bergson 100). It is exactly this that Bergson tries to explain when talking about time: everything is interconnected, and when regarding time spatially, we mistake time as something that can be divided in segments or different parts: whilst it is always the duration as a whole that keeps time moving forward. This is what Bergson calls a qualitative multiplicity. He notes that we need to "distinguish between time as quality and time as quantity, between the multiplicity of juxtaposition and that of interpenetration" (Bergson 75). In a quantitative multiplicity, which is the opposite, time (as mentioned above) is treated as individual elements and requires the intervention of space. Melissa Clarke writes that, in Bergson's terms, "[b]ecause the extensionality of space constitutes a quantitative multiplicity, it denotes differences in degree among its elements. On the other hand, time as a qualitative multiplicity denotes differences in kind" (169). We can thus consider time to be heterogeneous, as opposed to space, which is homogenous. Unlike space, which Bergson considers to be a "homogeneous medium in which conscious states unfold themselves," time is a medium in which those

conscious, heterogeneous states are constantly unfolding (Bergson 98). If we see time only in a spatial way, Bergson fears we will extract time from its pure form of duration, completely linking false spatial properties to a concept that is not supposed to be viewed through this lens.

With this notion of time, one of Bergson's more important arguments is that, if we see time as an extension of space, one lacks agency to take control of things that can or will happen in the foreseeable future. Bergson claims that, in spatial terms, the future is something that is always, already written, and therefore, an aspect that is unchangeable. Inversely, to feel that one lacks potency is to feel that one cannot affect the future, that it is already, spatially present. In his piece on Bergson, Eric Berlatsky writes that "[a]s Bergson argues, to *feel* that the future is predetermined is to feel a lack of agency, even if that agency "actually" exists according to the precepts of "pure duration" (269). If we believe that all materialistic things are only guided by the rules of the physical, there is no chance that we can truly find freedom, as this has already been established for us. "[B]ut if we hold as fundamental that consciousness is not bound by those physical laws, then we open up the possibility of real freedom," writes Mary Ann Gillies (19). The only existence real to Bergson, is the present, in which a flow of consciousness cannot be blocked or separated. It is this flow or flux that grants us the freedom and agency we need, but, as Bergson argues, we often fail to enact our freedom. There is great risk in viewing time spatially, precisely because it narrows down the path of conscious freedom, we, as individuals can take. He explains this danger as follows:

> Thus understood, free acts are exceptional, even on the part of those who are most given to controlling and reasoning out what they do. It has been pointed out that we generally perceive our own self by refraction through space, that our conscious states crystallize our words, and that our living and concrete self thus gets covered with an outer crust of

> clean-cut physic states, which are separated from one another and consequently fixed (167).

Even though this state of freedom is difficult to come by, we should never fail to try and achieve such a privilege, and try and free ourselves from the entrapments from time regarded spatially.

Thinking back to *Watchmen*, Scott McCloud even names this spatial form of time as one of the key aspects of comic medium in his work *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), which will be discussed further in Chapter 2. This also highlights how Bergson's ideas and notions are highly relevant to this day still, and more than applicable when considering time in different narratives: as a return to one's agency is at the core of his studies. Therefore, in conclusion, it is that "when we impose space on time, and when we resort to symbolic representation that normalizes this imposition to such an extent that it goes unnoticed, we rend inert what is living and thus create the problem of freedom which so preoccupies psychologist and philosophers alike" (Gillies 20).

1.2 Gothic Time

One might not immediately think of the Gothic literary genre when considering spatial time and lack of agency such as Bergson has described. However, in combination with the argument made in both Chapters 2 and 3, it is reasonable to consider that within this genre, there is much room to perform an analysis based on Bergsonian arguments. When we look at Chris Baldick's definition of the Gothic, two prominent themes immediately spring up:

> For the Gothic effect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions

> reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration (xix).

Bergson's definition (and mainly separation) of time and space shows that the Gothic is in Baldick's sense of the genre a place in which we can find the conflict that Bergson describes. Christian W. Schneider explains that Baldick's Gothic terms point to the key elements of the genre. Namely, the essence of "Gothic space is that it is unmappable for those trying to navigate it, filling them with confusion and helplessness" (Schneider 87). Likewise, the temporal element in Gothic tales, such as Baldick describes it, points for Schneider to "a threatening past", but also to a future that might be just as fearful as the past that keeps on infiltrating the present (87). Characters caught up in this situation, are therefore often tied to histories that encapsulate them and, ultimately, can even cause them to lose their sense of self. Baldick's notion of the Gothic provides a link to Bergson, as it highlights the importance of both time and space within the given narrative. Baldick argues that the Gothic genre is a place in which time and space work together, ultimately creating an atmosphere that is undesirable according to Bergsonian ideas. This 'inheritance in time' suggests that time is accounted for: leaving very little room for characters to find their own agency in such a Gothic narrative. It is, as Fred Botting argues, exactly this interplay between time and space that causes "tensions between perception and misperception, understanding and misreading, fancy and realism, [which] provide the condition and problem of gothic texts" (5).

Baldick's definition of the Gothic is clear on time and space's function within the Gothic genre, and therefore signals its significance in accordance with Bergson. However, it still does not give enough indicators as to why the genre is relevant to discuss in line with the world of *Watchmen*: and specifically, how the Gothic can be seen as a fundamental ground for a discussion about the true nature of heroism. Manuel Aguirre argues that the "Gothic can be

said to postulate two zones: on the one hand, the human domain of rationality and intelligible events; on the other hand, the world of the sublime, terrifying, chaotic Numinous which transcends human reason" (3). Such a scene creates the environment in which time and space operate, and highlights the importance of borders within the genre. Most of the time, the Gothic narrative revolves around the movement between or the spilling over of one of these zones into the other (Aguirre, 3). As Allan Lloyd Smith notes, the tendency of the Gothic to investigate such extremes, "implies an investigation of limits" (5). The genre therefore indulges in "opposing aspects within the self," causing "extreme polarities" such as black and white, or evil and good to be at the forefront of what the genre accumulates (Lloyd Smith 5). In its attempt to infer what it means to be a hero, and to establish whether such heroism can always be considered something inherently good, *Watchmen*'s philosophy is precisely what the Gothic genre always investigates.

As such Gothic space is involved in the examination of boundaries and opposing extremes, characters often find themselves trapped in an environment or society that exposes its own liminalities. Jerrold E. Hoggle argues that "[w]ithin this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past […] that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story" (2). It is in this instance that often supernatural occurrences make their way into the story, confronting characters with their traumas of the past. However, a character within a Gothic tale does not necessarily have to be haunted by something that takes on the form of a monster, ghost or other metaphysical entity. Mostly, the contemporary Gothic narratives have become fixated on one's thoughts, desires and obsessions: one's own psyche. This process of self-fragmentation, an important trope within the Gothic genre, is often something that characters within such a narrative experience. The Gothic psyche is therefore also closely linked to trauma, as Steven Bruhm argues that "[t]ime and again the contemporary Gothic presents us with traumatized heroes who have lost

the very psychic structures that allow them access to their own experiences" (269). In this, a link to Bergson is evident, as the Gothic too is a space in which free will and agency has vanished. As limits are being tested and discovered, Gothic narratives center around that which has been lost and needs to be regained. Because within the Gothic, "individual autonomy, unity of soul and ego, and personal investment in will and self-reliance have all been shattered by the forces of the social and the ravages of the unconscious upon the ego in contemporary existence" (Bruhm 269).

The fact that both the Gothic genre and Henri Bergson highlight the importance of agency, or the lack of it, brings the central theme of time back into view. Recounting Bergson, the philosopher argues that this loss of agency occurs once time is experienced in a spatial way, which causes the future to be set. If something is bound by laws of the physical, Bergson believes it to be no longer possible to truly find freedom, as the future becomes something inevitable. This links to the Gothic genre, for in such narratives this spatial experience of time causes fragmentation of the self, which in turn leads to a lack of agency. When considering tangled or traumatic narratives, characters often experience moments that are part of their past as if they are currently reliving them: infiltrating both in their present and their future mindset. Therefore, "with the ravages of the unconscious continually interrupting one's perception of the world, the protagonist of the contemporary Gothic often experiences history as mixed up, reversed, and caught in a simultaneity of past-present-future" (Bruhm 267). This explains Bergson's fear as well, as it causes the future to be completely ruled by that which has already come before. It leaves no room for the character to feel that there is any way out.

This sense of entrapment and loss of self is key in the Gothic genre. It is therefore not illogical to connect this experience to a narrative that revolves around superhero identities. Christian W. Schneider argues that "the moral imperative that compels superheroes to mask themselves and their true identities reflects the typically Gothic notions of the hidden, the

unseen and the repressed" (87). This highlights the fact that most superheroes, and certainly within the world of *Watchmen,* choose to hide their disfigured self behind a mask: most of the time to shy away from their real and pressing issues. By creating an alter ego, an identity is established and lived after, something that is often better than the characters themselves. These shaped identities represent "the [person they] might have been had they not been tempted – by another, or by personal desire – away from the righteous path" (Hughes 126). William Hughes' definition of such a Gothic hero's fascination toward a different identity resounds both within the realm of the Gothic and in that of the superhero. Therefore, Bergson's fear of spatial time is clearly present within the Gothic world, as it causes characters in such a narrative to feel lost and fragmented. Hiding behind another identity, or mask, is often a testimony to this and ultimately results in a loss of self.

Bergson identifies the need for a flow of time in order to provide agency. But if the experience of time is regarded through a spatial lens, the future is already visualized, and in some way inevitable. Therefore, characters lose the agency to influence their own future events, leaving them stuck in time. The Gothic genre is a place that inherits this fearful sense of time as well, creating a space for characters to be trapped in. In order to regain the agency that they lost, characters have to start experiencing time in a Bergsonian manner. Because, Bergson argues, if we do not suppose that there is a penetration of the past into the present, or a coexistence of past and present in every measure of time, we are just going to see time as a linear movement: a discrete, isolable presence, and never get the movement of time. And it is this contested conception of time that often lies at the center of the world of *Watchmen*. As the next chapter will delve into Bergson's understanding of time in accordance with the style of the comic book and the narrative itself, it will show how the Gothic genre provides ground for the story and the characters to feel stuck and lose their free will. But, as the world of *Watchmen*

is never either black, white, good or bad, such loss of agency is never permanent: and discovery of the self is not far beyond our reach.

Chapter Two: Alan Moore's Watchmen

Alan Moore's *Watchmen* can be regarded as the embodiment of the saying 'the title says it all'. The novel revolves around American superheroes who try to keep an eye on humanity, in order to do good and save them from harm. The suggestion of time is already there, hidden in the title, as a watch reminds the living that time is ever passing. Watches and clocks feature prominently in the book, and encapsulate the fear that Bergson described when people tend to see time spatially. Clocks and watches are designed, often by a watchmaker, to make time tick the way that it should. Therefore, there is a sense that time is being controlled: a watchmaker watches his clocks, and some higher power – presumably God – watches how time ticks away on earth. Superheroes, or vigilantes, watch over this clockwork. But *Watchmen* does not regard them as the ultimate saviors to rescue the world from harm: they are themselves complex human beings, as these heroes question whether they are doing any good at all.

The world of *Watchmen* is set in an alternate version of America, one in which the Vietnam war has been won by the Americans, and Nixon is still president. In 1977, an act was passed, titled the Keene Act, prohibiting vigilantes from dressing up in costumes in order to help establish order. This caused the current group of superheroes, named the Watchmen, to retire: only two of them remained in the service of the U.S. government. The novel revolves around the murder of one of these, named The Comedian (or Edward Blake), and the growing fear of a nuclear war that is unfolding between the U.S. and Russia. In trying to discover who was behind the murder of The Comedian, a more intrinsic plot is revealed, which eventually results in the death of millions of people. All retired vigilantes seem to struggle with their current lives, and are aware of the doomsday clock slowly ticking to 12 o'clock, as a war is coming their way. As I will argue, the comic exposes how spatialized time, which is very much present throughout the novel, causes superheroes to lose any form of self-action, uncovering the precise thing that Bergson ultimately warns us about. I will delve deeper into the nature of

time within *Watchmen*, analyzing how the comic form is a medium that revolves around the use of time as a spatial entity. Next to this, I will provide a close-reading of the most important characters in the novel, and how they are part of a Gothic narrative that fits with the perception of time. This leads to suggesting how characters' experience of time within the book causes them either to lose their sense of free will, or to try and break free of the restraint that this dark and glooming world exerts on them.

2.1 Stylistic Spatial Time in *Watchmen*

Comics are in themselves the ultimate manifestation of time regarded spatially. In his work *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), Scott McCloud elaborates on the ways in which comics can be perceived and analyzed. One of the many ways in which these novels are being read, has a lot to do with the process in which a reader converts words and images into a meaningful narrative. An important part of that development is what McCloud calls 'closure'. When reading a comic, we are "observing the parts but perceiving the whole", which causes the reader to connect the panels that are being shown on paper (McCloud 63). Elaborating on this further, he notes that "[c]omic panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (67). Closure can thus work within panels, as well as between them, making the reader fill in the gaps in order to fully comprehend and commit to the story. In this sense, the reader creates a flow of time when reading the panels: continuously creating the story in their head whilst reading fragments of it on paper. Here, the suggestion is made that comics, in their form, are representative of the continual flux of time which Bergson so strongly desires. However, McCloud is quick to note that in comics, time is inevitably always connected with space. Because closure is used in order to understand what is going on, there is a tendency to forget one of the most important icons always present in a

comic: the panels themselves. Lines that form a panel show the reader that certain moments in a narrative are being divided on the basis of time and/or space, but these lines do not produce or generate the duration of the panel itself: the contents shown within the panel contribute to this (McCloud 99). And there are many ways for an author to exemplify the duration of a panel.

This is where a tension starts to arise that was hinted at earlier, which McCloud hopes to uncover, as he argues that "[i]n learning to read comics we all learned to perceive time spatially, for in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same" (100). As readers regard a comic, not only do their eyes move through space, but through time as well, as time unfolds at a different rate than time around us. This tension "between time as depicted in comics and time as perceived by the reader" causes an odd transition, during which panels can be read in a few seconds, whilst moments on page can span many minutes, or even millions of years (McCloud 100). Not only is time in itself perceived in different and intricate ways, but it is also undeniably interwoven with space, as McCloud stated as well. The difference with other media such as film or television, is that when reading a comic, "past and future are real and visible […] all around us", highlighting the unique way in which time is incorporated in space (McCloud 104). A reader of a comic is focused on the panel that is in front of them, but they also perceive all the other panels that surround the one that they are currently reading on the page. Therefore, the space of a single page is utilized through time, making it possible to see all moments in just a single glance. Comics are therefore, in themselves, a medium that works in the direct opposite way of what Bergson deems important when experiencing time: as he argues that time regarded spatially will cause an entrapment in which the future is set. When reading a comic book, the reader is able to perceive on just a single page what has happened, what is currently happening, and what is still about to happen: completely spatializing time. McCloud thus illustrates how the medium of comics is unavoidably a means that uses time as a spatial entity.

Through the eyes of both McCloud and Bergson, then, *Watchmen* is stylistically a true embodiment of time regarded through space.

Figure 1.1: Adrian Veidt at Edward Blake's funeral, from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, p. 51.

The comic in itself is brightly colored, and all panels splash off the page. The novel often makes the reader feel like they're watching a film, as some panels transition like a film shot would do: zooming in or out, or cutting to the scene in order to signal a flashback. On a stylistic level, *Watchmen* continually plays with time. Both figure 1.1 and figure 1.2 are an early testimony to this. During Edward Blake's (or The Comedian's) funeral, many of the Watchmen that are gathered experience flashbacks to earlier moments in their lives, most of them linked to an experience they shared with Blake. In figure 1.1, Adrian Veidt (Ozymandias) recounts his first gathering of the Watchmen. Like a camera would do, the panel zooms in on his face, which ultimately results in the last panel transitioning back to a moment belonging in the past: the past penetrating the present, as Bergson would say. This is precisely what McCloud is pointing at when talking about closure, as the reader knows that between the third and the fourth panel a shift takes place, not within the panels, but in-between the white space: and thus signals a difference within the realm of time. The same goes for figure 1.2, as a changeover is signaled by the same posture that Dr. Manhattan is supporting in two different panels. In the second panel of the three shown, Dr. Manhattan is recounting a time during the Vietnam War in which he encountered The Comedian's true nature. Switching back to current time, his stance is the

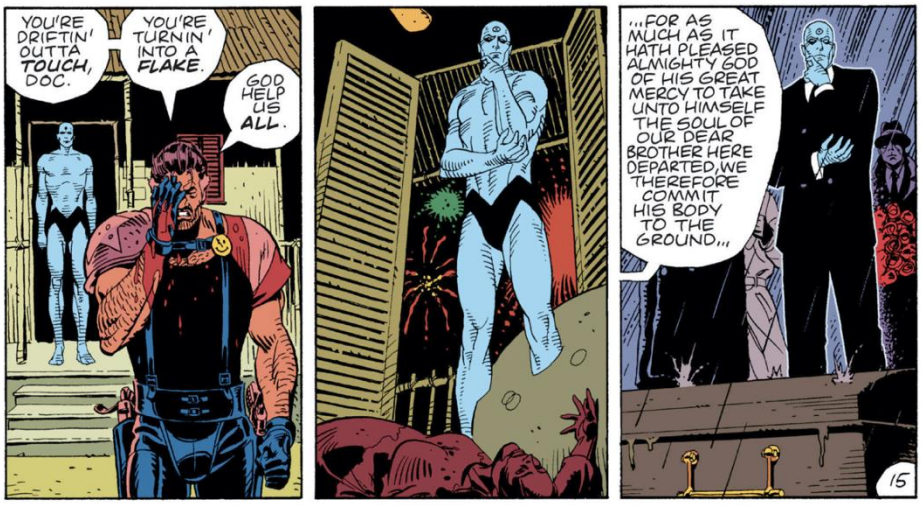

Figure 1.2: Dr. Manhattan recounting an episode with Blake in Vietnam, from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, p. 57.

same, but the reader knows that the present no longer resides in Vietnam. By using the same position that Dr. Manhattan is in, an illusion of time is created, as the story heads back to current day events. In both examples, time is embedded in the space that is given by the author. Because of the panels through which the story is narrated, time is divided and split up, which makes it possible to create a chronology that is the opposite of what Bergson desires. Time is no longer a continuous flow, but something that can intersect multiple, spatial dimensions.

But not only the past gets highlighted and divided up. Figure 1.3 shows that the present can be intersected as well. These panels are an example of what McCloud described as seeing everything all at once when glancing at a comic. Different panels can form one whole, which gives the sense that the reader can look into the future. What is more interesting, however, is the fact that one moment gets displayed in three separate images, creating an interesting tension. Because of the text, the reader knows that the

Figure 1.3: Adrian Veidt, Dr. Manhattan and Dan Dreiberg at Blake's funeral, from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, p. 58.

combination of panels is going through a period of time: the words uttered cannot be said at the same time, but are spoken one after the other. However, the image is static, again hinting at cinematic ways as it feels like a parallel montage. It also suggests that whilst the text may be moving forward in time, the imagery certainly is not. Adrian Veidt, Dr. Manhattan and Dan Dreiberg are standing next to each other at the funeral, whilst listening to the sermon. The separation of the panels lets the readers know that time is passing, since every sentence is followed by another, but when looking across panels, the imagery is one of timelessness: like a photograph. In this, closure can help indicate a passing of time, but the spatiality of the comic as a whole cleverly undermines this notion. *Watchmen* therefore seems to be fully aware of the fact that time within the comic is forever obedient to the spatial form that it is a part of, and is therefore imbedded in a world that Bergson warns about.

Whilst there are many more examples in *Watchmen* that show the passing of time through transitions, borders and even entire pages, there is one element in the novel that is an even bigger testimony to a form of spatial time, which is so characteristically described by McCloud. Entitled "Fearful Symmetry", Chapter V lives up to its name. Not only is it a reference to the William Blake poem printed at the end of the chapter, but it also hints at the hidden symmetry that can be found throughout the pages. The first page of the chapter is mirrored by the last

Figure 1.4: Dan and Laurie's stories are mirrored throughout Chapter V, from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, pp. 154, 163.

page of the chapter, the second page of the chapter is mirrored by the second-to-last page of the chapter, and so on. All pages are symmetrical, one mirroring the other when it comes to the use of color or the exact positioning of the panels. The second half of the chapter is therefore ultimately the reverse narrative of the first part of the chapter. As we know the order of the story from the first half, and which characters get addressed, we also know how the second part of the chapter will follow the same characters or situations, in reverse order. Therefore, there is no escaping the future that this spatiality has constructed. The reader is even able to hold the pages together that are in-between those mirrored pages, to put them side by side: and regard the inevitability of the future.

Some pages have specific panels that mirror the other corresponding panel, as seen in figure 1.4. On page 10 in this chapter, the large middle panel shows Dan looking back at Laurie Juspeczyk, who is starting to leave. On the right side of this panel, Laurie's back is projected in the mirror of the café (a nod to the mirroring happening in the chapter as well), the view that Dan has when turning his head around. On page 19 of this chapter, seen in figure (number), the page that is supposed to correspond with page 10, the middle panel consists, again, of Dan seeing Laurie in the mirror, who is now getting ready for bed. This time, Laurie is positioned in front, whilst Dan is standing in the back: their positioning reversed as to the first panel. Many more examples like this recur throughout this chapter, and some panels are even identical to their counterpart. Time, as one might suggest, is in this case already accounted for. Spatially, the chapter is inevitably planned ahead. Time is unchangeable, as every panel and page is linked to a counterpart that is showing what might come. In the figures mentioned above, the inevitability that resounds throughout *Watchmen*'s story is clearly present on the pages. The chapter's ultimate coming together of this mirrored storyline is in its center, as Adrian Veidt and his assistant get attacked. This is the point where the first part of the chapter flows over into the second part, and the mirroring is enabled. As can be seen in figure 1.5, the large panels

on either side of the page form a whole. Even boundaries between pages are ignored in order to show the coming together of time. Again, time is spatially split up: whilst the reader knows that Veidt's movement is one that takes place in the time span of a few seconds, the intercutting of the two panels across the pages reminds them that time is almost subservient to space. Bergson's desire to perceive time in a durational form is seemingly absent, as the inevitability of such spatial time is not only stylistically evident, but narratively as well.

Figure 1.5: The attack on Veidt in the middle of Chapter V is the moment in which the mirroring of the chapter comes together from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, pp. 158-159.

2.2 The Loss of Time

We have seen that *Watchmen* is, in terms of style, the embodiment of time being regarded as a spatial entity. Thinking back to Bergson's words and warnings on such an understanding of time, his philosophy raises the question of whether the characters are affected by this particular

method. The world of *Watchmen* is a dark one, and it is in this enclosed space that multiple effects start to come together. *Watchmen* might not immediately be regarded as something that fits within the guidelines of the Gothic genre: our first thoughts go to monsters as Frankenstein, or haunted houses filled with ghosts. However, as mentioned in the first chapter, an important aspect of the Gothic is the way in which time and space are handled. As discussed, Chris Baldick's definition of the Gothic genre relies heavily on an environment in which time feels planned, and space almost gets claustrophobic. These elements are very much present in the style of *Watchmen* as discussed above: as time is bound to its spatial limitations, the past, present and future are set on the same page. The literal limitations of space are also visible, as there is no such thing as going outside the boundaries of panels, or even pages. Thus, the style of the comic explicitly conveys its own gothic capacity.

But such a thing cannot only be said about stylistic choices within *Watchmen*. The Gothic is made up of two zones: most of the time these are the normal, humane zone and the supernatural, incomprehensible zone. In finding the boundaries of those zones, something that the Gothic genre is always indulging in, both extremes and liminalities get exposed. In Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, characters are stuck in one of these worlds, causing them to reflect on their own limitations as well: again, what does it mean to be a hero? As all characters struggle with their own entrapment in a world guided by spatial time, Bergson's loss of agency is what appears to be the final destination for many of these American superheroes. In order to draw such a conclusion, it is necessary to analyze the characters who play the largest part in our current story. These include Walter Kovacs (better known as Rorschach), Adrian Veidt, Dan Dreiberg, Laurie Juspeczyk, and Dr. Manhattan. These five characters were all a part of the Watchmen. In addition to this, the heroes that were previously called the Minutemen, a group of vigilantes active before the formation of the Watchmen, are of great importance to the story as well. However, they mostly contribute to the complicated pasts of the characters just named.

They are therefore more relevant to study in relation to said characters, since the comic explores the present state of the (mostly) retired Watchmen. The mentioned heroes are greatly influenced by their own pasts, as a result of the spatial sense of time that the novel and narrative submit them into.

The novel starts off, to put it bluntly, as a murder mystery. Where there is much more going on throughout the novel than just a who-killed-who, the narrative does keep returning to the question of who murdered James Blake: or, as he was better known, The Comedian. Part of one of the first superhero groups, the Minutemen, Blake was a violent man without a real codebook to live his life by. However, he was also a great patriot: giving a glimpse into the irony of what an American superhero is truly supposed to be. Whilst fighting for his country, he was not afraid to murder or torture people that came across his path. His death is what spikes a resurgence of flashbacks, also mentioned earlier in this chapter, and brings us to the first of our characters with a haunting past and legacy.

The first person encountered in the world of *Watchmen*, who is immediately obsessed with finding out how Blake's murder could have happened, is Rorschach: later on, his real name is revealed to be Walter Kovacs. Instead of using his true name Walter as his main identity, like the other Watchmen now do, Rorschach uses his vigilante name as his real persona. His name is true to the Rorschach test, used in psychology. In such a test, patients stare at inkblots and describe to their doctor what it is, exactly, that they're seeing. Rorschach wears a mask that continues to show different blots of such a test, continually changing throughout the story (fig. 1.6). This mask, and the fact that he barely takes it off, is a result of his traumatizing childhood and, therefore, feels like a way of shielding him from the outside world. In his search for Blake's killer, he discovers Adrian Veidt's true plan to kill half the population of New York, in order to save the world.

Figure 1.6: Adrian Veidt at Edward Blake's funera,l from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, p. 20.

Whilst the other Watchmen eventually go along with Veidt's plan to save the world from nuclear destruction, Rorschach is the only one who refuses to budge. He is a true believer of a person being either good or bad, even though he himself often walks the blurry line between these two. Andrew Hoberek argues that the character of Rorschach is a true response to the often-one-sided personalities of superheroes, stating that "Rorschach at once functions as rejection of this model […] and its apotheosis" (49). He is often mentally extremely conflicted, but does believe true punishment must come to those who deserve it. Rorschach reasons that "there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished. Even in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise on this. But there are so many deserving of retribution… and there is so little time" (Moore 32). His mask is a testimony to this as well, as there is no gray area in between the blots that appear on it. But because of the fact that his mask keeps changing, it also hints at his own incapability to be fully committed to either side of the same coin. And when confronted with the many crimes that Blake committed during his seemingly 'patriotic' acts, he turns a blind eye, as service done for the good of the country is always, in a sense, good: even though Blake's actions most of the time were not. Intentionally feeling the need to punish people for their deeds before extracting the true reason for their action is perhaps what best defines Rorschach's lifestyle as a 'hero'. This is also were the novel starts to play with our common notions of considering a masked vigilante as either a villain or a hero. As Rorschach breaks into the house of Moloch, who is openly called a villain,

and attacks him, it raises the question as to who is ultimately the bad guy in this specific situation. It might be that our notion of the 'good guys' is a false one, and that the ones who are called superheroes might be worse or more damaging to society than those we pick as our villains.

Rorschach's past is his main gateway into becoming the kind of vigilante that he is today. Having been abused and bullied by both his mother and other kids, he comes from a place that was void of love. The murder of Kitty Genovese (something that truly happened in real life America), in which Kitty was raped, tortured and eventually murdered without anyone coming to her aid, ultimately convinces Rorschach that humanity is savage, narcissistic and self-centered. As he "made a face that [he] could bear to look at in the mirror," his constructed identity is supposed to shield him from this traumatizing past (Moore 188). This is also why he idolizes Blake's behavior, because he too saw the grim reality of humanity, and had to act on it. Rorschach and Blake "do not do it because it is permitted. [They] do it because [they] have to. [They] do it because [they] are compelled" (Moore 193). Rorschach's encounter with a murderer who killed a girl by feeding her to his dogs fully convinces him that humanity has gone off the rails, embracing Rorschach as his only identity. Nevertheless, there are also moments where Rorschach is humanized, often when seeing children in situations similar to his own youth. The reader is torn over Rorschach's true identity, as glimmers of humanity sometimes still manage to shine through.

However, his spatial view of the past as a period that has traumatized him and shaped his nihilistic views on humanity, causes him to be completely trapped in a world view that will result in his doom. This somber view that Rorschach has of the world is not only comparable to spatialized time, but to the Gothic as well. Schneider notes that "the prototypical Gothic environments express a world-view that is not so much pessimistic as nihilistic," concluding that this is exactly the world that *Watchmen* takes place in, as this setting "drive[s] Rorschach

over the brink, into insanity and extreme nihilism" (89). It is within the boundaries of the Gothic genre and its use of time that Rorschach finally derails. His moralism follows him to his death, as he repeats at the end, that "even in the face of Armageddon," he refuses to let those who have done wrong in his eyes walk freely (Moore 402). Even after Veidt has successfully fulfilled his plan, Rorschach wishes the world to know who was responsible, to fulfill his dream of justice. As Dr. Manhattan stops him from doing so, he relieves himself of his mask, accepting the limitations to this constructed identity to which he clung so tightly. His death is symbolic, because it shows how his future has been inevitable from the beginning of the novel. Because of his traumatic past, and the way in which his 'hero' identity was in every way a method of trying to push away those horrors, Rorschach was completely shaped in time. He lost his agency in becoming someone who was hellbound to bring humanity to justice, and as much as the doomsday clock was ticking for a nuclear war, it was also ticking for his imminent end.

Where Rorschach is *Watchmen*'s embodiment of both a nihilistic and moralist worldview, the complete opposite can be said of Adrian Veidt, also known as Ozymandias. Veidt revealed his true identity after retiring from the crime scene, becoming a successful businessman. As the reader progresses further through the novel, the realization starts to sink in just how much of a mastermind Veidt eventually is. He idolizes Alexander the Great, and sees him as one of the greatest leaders of all time, but recognizes his failure in trying to unite humanity as one. As he sees the impending nuclear war threat between America and Russia continuing to grow, he hatches a scheme, in which he plans to drop a gigantic monster on New York, triggering a planned explosion. According to Veidt, this will create a fear of an alien invasion, ultimately leading the world powers to abandon the war between them in order to unite against this outside threat. However, this is not without cost, as he ends up murdering millions of people in New York to save the rest of the world. Peter Y. Paik suggests that Veidt therefore "justifies his humanitarian act through the perverse ethical framework of an

unavoidable duty to engage in evil" (38). But Veidt's way of thinking is also paradoxical, as he questions what fighting crime truly is: "does it mean upholding the law when a woman shoplifts to feed her children, or does it mean struggling to uncover the ones who, quite legally, have brought about her poverty?" (Moore 389) And not only does his way of thinking infect himself: it has its influence on the other characters as well. Alice Nuttall argues that a Gothic antagonist, which Veidt most certainly is, forces "other characters to engage with Gothic tropes", which leads those characters to "behave in unheroic ways" (70). At the end of *Watchmen*, Laurie, Dan and Dr. Manhattan are all told to keep Veidt's horrific actions to themselves. Influenced by Veidt's fragmented view of the world, the others indulge in keeping such a terrible secret. The Gothic scene of the comic narrative causes its characters to be confronted with their own ideas on good and bad. This again points to the paradox that runs through the entirety of *Watchmen*: can we call Veidt, and the other vigilantes in this novel, either the greatest heroes of all time, or simply monstrous villains?

The fact that Veidt retired from life as a 'hero' indicates his larger plan for the world, as he believes that "the major villains are all dead" (Moore 157). He was tired of fighting single individuals, because they were no longer representatives of the true threats that faced the world. He believes that "[he] only fought the symptoms, leaving the disease itself unchecked" (Moore 367). There are greater issues that need to be solved, issues that endanger the world more than just a single group of people. But this view is the polar opposite of Rorschach's, who is willing to fight every little crime instead of looking at the bigger picture. Veidt is an embodiment of utilitarian methods, in which necessary steps that have to be taken to achieve a better goal are always worthwhile. This again links back to his idol Alexander the Great, who was not afraid of sacrificing people in order to achieve his ultimate goal. Even before Veidt accomplishes his masterplan, he has already murdered his staff in order to cover his tracks. It is in his power to

make the entire United States believe that he is ultimately a saint, whilst secretly trying to save them by killing their own.

This is where the strain of time starts to get a hold on Veidt as well. At the end of the novel, Veidt asks if "[he] did the right thing, didn't [he]? It all worked out in the end", to which Dr. Manhattan replies: "[in] the end? Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends" (Moore 409). It was Veidt's greatest belief that he could shape the future: that by doing things his way, he could bend time to his will, and make sure that the nuclear war that was coming their way could be stopped. However, "Veidt's semblance of agency is false because "nothing *ever* ends," in particular the power politics that Veidt merely reinstates at a different level by founding his new order on genocide" (Hoberek 129). Dr. Manhattan therefore points out to him that the future is not something that has been or can be written. Veidt was so invested in saving the world, that he thought he would be capable of saving the greater good: eventually resulting in world peace. But the future is never certain, and world peace may soon again be falling apart. He uses his vision of Alexander the Great, someone who belongs in the past, in order to try and shape a future that Alexander was never able to realize: but because of this, he loses his own free will by arranging his life to structure a future that is not supposed to be his to structure. Where Rorschach's head is in the past, Veidt's head is in the future, causing them both to entirely lose their present sense of self.

Another man troubled by his past and the bearings of his life as a masked vigilante, is Dan Dreiberg, also known as the Nite Owl. Taking on this name after the first Nite Owl, who belonged to the Minutemen, retired, Dan is seen to be a reverent admirer of this specific superhero identity. It is clear throughout the novel that, even though he retired after the Keene Act, Dan is still longing for his superhero life, and feels somewhat pointless without his costume. Eventually ending up with Laurie after she leaves Dr. Manhattan for him, he finds a kindred spirit that feels restless inside her own body. Still, he recognizes that, "looking back,

it all seems so… well, childish, I guess. Just a schoolkid's fantasy that got out of hand. That's, y'know, with hindsight… on reflection" (Moore 216). But a few pages later, Dan and Laurie put on their suits again, just to feel the excitement that they have been missing the past years. Dan also suffers from sexual impotence when attempting to sleep with Laurie for the first time, signaling his powerlessness to stop the world falling into ruins. His impotence is in stark contrast with Veidt, who is believed to be the image of a true, American hero.

After this encounter, Dan's first reaction is to put on his suit: suggesting that this is something from the past that he feels more confident and less helpless in. It also relieves him of his impotence, signaling that this more exciting life is something he still misses or longs for. As with Rorschach, this constructed identity of the Nite Owl is Dan's way of trying to come to terms with a world that is too dark and intimidating to cope with on his own. There is no need for him to save the world, but he already feels better after saving several people's lives. Again, the Gothic within the *Watchmen* world creates an environment in which Dan loses his sense of self, as "not being master of one's body and soul, is a topic surfacing repeatedly in Gothic texts" (Schneider 87). This fragmentation causes Dan to delve into his heroic past in order to get a grip on the present and future: but ultimately feels hopeless when discovering Veidt's plan to kill millions of people. Even in returning to his former glory, he fails to turn the tide: and life becomes meaningless again. However, it is Laurie who convinces him that life is worth living, not because of the fact that they are able to run around in costumes again, but simply because of the fact that they are alive. It is because of her, and her conversation with Dr. Manhattan, that a shift in enclosure in time and space throughout *Watchmen* slowly starts to occur. Where Rorschach, Veidt and Dan are undeniably trapped, so is Laurie. However, she manages to realize what Bergson has wanted us to hear all along. Instead of surrendering to the spatialized time that both the comic book and the Gothic environment create around her, Laurie discovers a glimpse of the true experience of time.

Laurie Juspeczyk's connection to time, and mainly to her mother's past, is one of the most interesting narratives of the story. Laurie's mother was the first superhero to be known as the Silk Spectre, and was also part of the Minutemen, together with Blake. Laurie eventually becomes the second Silk Spectre, as desired by her own mother, but she ultimately feels that she did not live out her own dream. When the narrative starts, she is in a relationship with Dr. Manhattan. Even though she is not happy in this relationship, because of Dr. Manhattan's inhumane side and his inability to fully comprehend human emotions, the American government uses her to keep their most important weapon satisfied. Eventually, she enters into a relationship with Dan Dreiberg, who was also a member of the Watchmen at the time that she was. Laurie's life is embedded in her past, and she often sees no future and therefore feels stuck in the present. Because of her mother's superhero life, she has this pressure to live up to something that is not hers. Dr. Manhattan even states that Laurie "was forced to retire by the Keene act, but having never really enjoyed the life, she doesn't mind. Her mother is more disappointed than she is" (Moore 133). She is also glad when she hears that Blake got killed, as she states that he attempted to rape her mother. Laurie therefore loses all hope in life and in the future of humanity when finding out that Blake is her real, biological father: a man she has despised her entire life. Her past seems to bear down on her, making her feel as if the future is inevitably written, and therefore doomed. Her sense of agency is lost, as she does not have the power anymore to influence the future, after trying to convince Dr. Manhattan to stop Adrian Veidt from fulfilling his master plan. However, even though Laurie is struggling with the oncoming doom of a war, and the limits of time, it is Dr. Manhattan who convinces her that all human life is worth living, and eventually turns Laurie's view of the world around. He ultimately seems to be the embodiment of a spatial time paradox, and the only one who ultimately truly sees the way that time is supposed to flow.

2.3 The Dr. Manhattan Paradox

The fact that characters become aware of their loss of agency and its relation to time is not something that goes unnoticed in the narrative itself. Dr. Manhattan, or Jon Osterman, is a superhuman, accidentally created after locking himself up in a radiation test chamber. Next to the fact that he is blue, and can transform himself into whatever size he likes, he is the only one out of the Watchmen group that holds true, supernatural powers. But his most important feature is his unique and often excruciating experience of time. For him, time is something that is experienced all at once: whilst he has fled humanity and gone to Mars, both his past and present keep surrounding him (fig. 1.7). Next to this, he is able to take control over space as well, as he can transport himself, or others, at any moment to any place. Therefore, Dr. Manhattan might be Bergson's ultimate nightmare, as past, present and future are all determined and unchangeable. Mark Bernard and James Carter even argue that his whole character "seems to be a metaphor for the art of the graphic novel in and of itself as well as for the graphic novel experience" (20). His experience of time resembles McCloud's description of the comic as a medium that is completely centered around the experience of spatialized time.

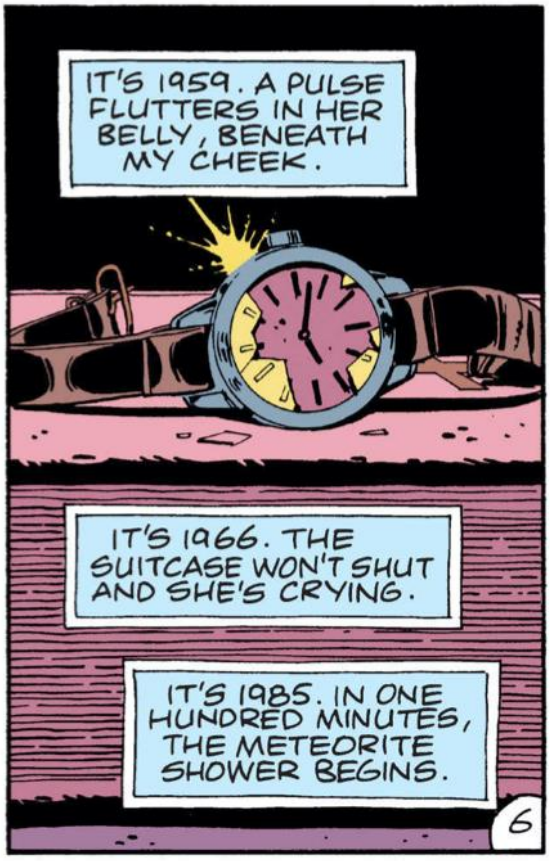

Figure 1.7: Dr. Manhattan provides a glimpse into the way he experiences time simultaneously, from: Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: Warner Books, 1987, p. 51.

It is ironic that Dr. Manhattan's father was a watchmaker: someone who lives by the rules of time as governed by space. Like Bergson explains, this simply reduces time to seconds,

minutes or hours, without realizing the flow of time beyond these terms. In a flashback, through which Dr. Manhattan experiences his dad reading the news of the atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima, his father is swallowed up by the promise of the future: something new and exciting. He even invokes time as something spatial, stating that "[p]rofessor Einstein says that time differs from place to place", which leads him to the conclusion that time might not even be true in itself (Moore 113). Stating that "[his] profession is a thing of the past," Jon's father suddenly realizes that "[his] son must have a future" (Moore 113). Sending him to study atom physics at Princeton University, his father has laid the groundwork for his son to become Dr. Manhattan. Even though his father spoke of Einstein, his reaction to the atomic bomb is a guiding step toward the philosophy of Bergson. Time is not something that is written down, as a clock is supposed to show, but can change and reveal new possibilities that open up our futures to us. This is exactly what Dr. Manhattan's father has come to realize, as the atomic bomb is such a groundbreaking upset of the natural order of the world that nothing can be certain anymore. And it is this mindset that paves the way for Dr. Manhattan to enter into view.

Whilst his father already had his doubts about humanity's way of modeling the world to their own needs and understanding, Dr. Manhattan is in himself a mockery of things that people have come to see as 'ordinary'. His simultaneous view of the past, present and future suggests that humanity's perception of time is an illusion. And his supernatural gifts go beyond our own laws of physics. He is as much like a god, if ever there was one. And still, leaving for Mars and pondering about the creation of the universe, Dr. Manhattan seems to discover that there is no such thing as a creator of the world. Even though we are guided by laws, some natural and some created, he comes to the conclusion that "the world is not made. Perhaps nothing is made. Perhaps it simply is, has been, will always be there… A clock without a craftsman" (Moore 138). The earth often feels like a clock, with all its parts coming together in exactly the right way. But Dr. Manhattan realizes that this must mean that, like a clock, a watchmaker is behind

all creation. Instead, because of the horrors that he encountered in Vietnam, he cannot fathom the idea that such a God would let things like this happen on earth. This is where we see the paradox that Dr. Manhattan is trying to uncover, and which gives the first glimpse of a *Watchmen* world in which characters are not trapped in their spatial understanding of time. Even though Dr. Manhattan himself is a manifestation of spatial time, experiencing time as something already written, he realizes that this way of life is not organized by some form higher up.

As mentioned before, Dr. Manhattan is also responsible for implanting this view in Laurie, who comes to realize that being alive is, in itself, more important than being caught in the tidings of spatial time. He explains that "[t]here is no future. There is no past. Do you see? Time is simultaneous, an intricately structured jewel that humans insist on viewing one edge at a time, when the whole design is visible in every facet" (Moore 286). He explains how Laurie perceives time, as something that has already passed or is bound to happen: which causes her to be stuck, and lose her agency. Because she is so caught up in what her past has been, and what a future war might bring, she is unable to see how being alive in itself is a privilege. Dr. Manhattan explains to her that she has to see "the whole continuum, life's pattern or lack of one", in order to comprehend that all human life eventually has meaning (Moore 303). The clockwork castle that Dr. Manhattan built and that represents Laurie's belief that the universe is somehow structured, falls apart. There is no such thing as a past, present, or future that is predestined or predetermined: simply living is good enough. By explaining this to her, Laurie is able to regain some sense of agency because she sees that this mindset will enable her to enjoy time as Bergson believes it should be: as an ever-ongoing flow, free from predetermined moments and actions. Laurie's fragmented sense of self, so evident with the other characters bound by the Gothic rules of *Watchmen*, seems to dissolve. The world is ruled, and has its own

orders that play out *over* time, but are not *bound* by time: anything may change, as Dr. Manhattan sees that humanity just feels too chaotic to have someone ruling everything.

Watchmen not only evokes thinking about the true nature of a hero, but also questions its characters' own morality and beliefs. Schneider makes an accurate summary, as he states that "in *Watchmen*, […] heroes are not in a position of control; they must subject themselves to the rule of time, mercilessly leading them and the rest of humanity towards the apocalypse. In the end, the comic evinces a prototypically Gothic bleakness, expressed thematically as well as formally" (94). As the comic functions as a form in which time is always ruled in a spatial way, characters are quickly trapped in an environment that evokes a loss of self. Such a setting is closely linked to the Gothic genre, which stimulates this fragmentation and causes characters to get lost in time. It is therefore "impossible to say with any certainty whether the costumed adventurers in *Watchmen* are to be considered heroes or villains", as their own ways of judgement are often paradoxical (Paik 27). However, as argued with regard to Dr. Manhattan and Laurie, there is always a chance of self-awareness that will cause characters to break free of this endless cycle. And if Alan Moore's *Watchmen* only hints at such a breakthrough, HBO's *Watchmen* purposefully takes it to another level.

Chapter Three: HBO's *Watchmen*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the original *Watchmen* comic had an entirely new approach in creating a superhero comic. And because of its success, it was clear that the audience was appreciative of this new and innovative way of writing. However, success stories such as this leave both the fans and the public wanting more, as many questions were left unanswered, and many readers' desires unfulfilled. It is no surprise that this causes other writers to feel the need to develop the story even further. Such a continual development of a narrative originating from a comic book is certainly not a new phenomenon, as decades of Spider-Man, Batman and many other adaptations centered around heroes definitively prove. Still, the list of superhero adaptations based on comics keeps on growing, with series such as *Arrow* (2012 – 2020), *The Flash* (2014 -), *Agent Carter* (2015 – 2016), *Gotham* (2014 – 2019), *Daredevil* (2015 – 2018) and *Jessica Jones* (2015 – 2019), airing one after the other. And with the Marvel Cinematic Universe fully committing to mini-series as well, receiving praise for both *WandaVision* (2020) and *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (2021), they also seem to have discovered the success that lies in the adaptation of the comic into a narrative fit for television. Dominik Mieth notes that such adaptations "make the character more accessible for new audiences," as both old and new fans are drawn into a reimaging and broadening of the original storyline (129). The secret lies in the seriality that comics have as well: each new issue builds on the one before, and as with original television, one has to wait for either the next episode or chapter to be released. Therefore, television is able to build on comics' ability to keep the reader wanting more.

Set 34 years after the original events of the comic, HBO's *Watchmen* continues the original story of the graphic narrative in an America that has drastically changed since the time period in which the original story was published. While the story is fictional, the series is based on a real life-event: the Tulsa massacre of 1921, an event relatively unknown in American

history before its inclusion in HBO's *Watchmen.* During this massacre, many African Americans were attacked or killed by white residents, making it one of the most extreme encounters of racial violence in the history of America. In the alternate America of 2019, the story of HBO's *Watchmen* revolves around Angela Abar, a retired cop and secret vigilante called Sister Night, who is a descendant of the Tulsa massacre survivor Will Reeves. In Angela's America, Robert Redford has managed to become president after Richard Nixon. Cellphones and social media do not exist and all cars are electric. The series is structured into nine episodes, and while it continues to tell the story of familiar characters (such as Veidt, Laurie and Dr. Manhattan), it also introduces new characters with their own complicated past and history. As with the comic book, I will first discuss how time and space are used stylistically within the series, also analyzing in detail how HBO's *Watchmen* is self-aware in making use of its own form. This will be a bridge to discussing the Gothic world that the series is a part of, and how this Gothic genre is relevant in accordance with both the narrative and the characters. An analysis of the most important characters of the series, namely Dr. Manhattan, Veidt, Laurie, Looking Glass, Angela and Will, helps to understand how time is constructed and used in this narrative. Again, a bleak continuation of Moore's original world is resounding throughout, but the series also ultimately offers some new form of hope with regard to the entrapment of time and self-fragmentation that is paired with this. Where the comic started off with the notion that one's family is incredibly important in shaping one's future, this series has an even stronger focus on legacy and childhood trauma - and how one's past is not predetermined to influence one's future.

3.1 Serial temporality

As complex as the comics medium might be in relation to its use of time and space, television also seems to create its own language when conveying with these terms. In his book *Complex*

TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling (2015), Jason Mittell elaborates on the ways in which storytelling has significantly changed over the past decades, and how the medium of television has been a large contributor to this specific change. Mittell explicitly explores the status of time in a TV series, focusing on "the importance of temporality in grounding seriality, as viewers and creators alike aim to manage the multiple time frames of narrative past, present and future in making sense of ongoing storyworlds" (26). Mittell argues that time within the world of television works in three different sections, as he speaks of story time, discourse time and narration time. Story time is described by Mittell as the passing of time within the world of the story, which points to the linear progression of the story being told. Simply put, it is the chronological order in which the story plays out, which is almost always bound to our normal conventions of time, perhaps broken only when characters travel through time (Mittell 26). Discourse time is more complicated, as Mittell argues that this points to "the temporal structure and duration of the story as told within a given narrative" (26). Where story time tells us in a linear movement how moments play out, the discourse time recounts the narrative as told within the given narrative. Therefore, it "almost always differs from story time via ellipsis skipping over uneventful moments" (Mittell 26). The discourse time is often thrown off balance due to flashbacks or jumps between moments that belong either to the past, present or future. Often used within whodunnit stories, jumps in time are often used to reveal significant plot points later on in the story in order to build up the mystery. Next to the previously mentioned functions of time within a tv narrative, Mittell also speaks of narration time, which refers to "the temporal framework involved in telling and receiving the story" (Mittell 26). This focuses on the time that it takes for a viewer to watch an episode, season or even entire series (also relevant when reading a comic book). In early television, this was something that the viewer was often not in control of, as the creators of a given show created the length of time that a narration is being told. However, viewers are now more than ever able

to play with this notion of time, because of the growing ability to 'binge-watch' and regulate your own viewing method. Creators have realized as well that they can manipulate their narrative in such a way that viewers are keener to keep on watching: enforcing a culture in which narration time is not as straightforward as it used to be. For the stylistic analysis of HBO's *Watchmen*, it is especially interesting to look at its use of discourse time, as this is the most compelling differences in regard to the spatial time used in the world of comics start to show.

In television, time is often not dependent on the spatial environment that it belongs to, as Mittell argues that "in the process of consuming serialized television, temporal consistency trumps spatial coherence." (270) Series are not bound to the same rules that comics are, as McCloud's theory proved as well. In comics, the reader is able to look both through time and space, viewing an entire page all at once. In television, this is impossible to do. Of course, time is still spatially divided up into episodes or scenes, but the big difference is that the reader is no longer able to see what is either behind or in front of us. All that is shown, is time unfolding on screen before our very own eyes. Coincidentally, Mittell describes something similar to what McCloud has dubbed 'closure'. He states that the time and space between episodes, one where viewers either deliberately wait or are forced to do so, create just as much meaning as the episodes themselves: because "it is these gaps that define the serial experience" (Mittell 27). Even though these gaps grow smaller every year, due to the huge success of streaming platforms that allow the viewer to 'binge-watch', "television in their original broadcast form alternate between episodic installments and mandatory temporal gaps between episodes" (Mittell 27). As with closure, this allows the viewer to fill in the gaps, or speculate further on what they have seen: creating an active involvement from the viewer participating in the creation of the serial world.

Where HBO's *Watchmen* truly differs in form from its predecessor, however, is the transmedia universe that has been created surrounding the series. The original comic, consisting of 12 volumes, ended each chapter with excerpts that gave even more background information on the world. These attached documents include a scientific article written about Dr. Manhattan's superpowers, psychiatric files on Rorschach's childhood, an interview with Veidt for a certain magazine and clippings from Laurie's mother's previous career as superhero. Because of these documents, the reader gets more information about the world that our current narrative is set in. Since there is a 34-year gap between the original comic book and the series, the writers of the show had to account for the time in which presumably many things changed: not only within the world itself, but also in the lives of the characters. The series' storyline (just like the original graphic narrative) does not explicitly allow for much room to describe the alternate reality that the narrative is set in, and therefore this website helps to develop the story even further.

As a result of this, the website "Peteypedia" was created by the writers of the show. In this, several documents and files can be found that account for the years between the comic and the series. In the *Watchmen* universe, these documents are evidence and memos gathered by Agent Dale Petey, who is also a character on the show, and who helps Laurie (or Agent Blake) in tracking down Judd Crawford's murderer. Mittell argues, that such transmedia are "paratexts whose prime goal is to expand the storyworld and to extend narrative engagement with the series and that are not designed primarily to chronicle, reflect on, or promote a program" (Mittell 194). The website is full of different types of texts, that either zoom in on specific characters, objects or even current day American culture. One of the most interesting documents, for example, is an interview with Laurie from 1995, describing how she eventually fell out with Dan and how this caused their relationship to come to an end. The website ultimately ends with a file stating that Petey has been fired, as these documents were

discovered, and a conclusion was drawn that he wasted his time on something else (obsessing over the Watchmen), instead of his policework. There is irony in this, as the viewers who read these documents are hugely invested in the Watchmen world as well: just like the writers of the series are, who created these documents.

Given the objective of this thesis, there are multiple reasons why this transmedia storytelling contributes to my research. Firstly, it helps us understand what kind of an America our characters are living in today, and how the country has changed over the last decades. And secondly, for us to study the agency of characters, their past is important to take into consideration: as Bergson has argued that the present is always, in some way, penetrated by the past. The "Peteypedia" provides the viewer with information that otherwise might not have been included in the series, and creates an active attitude required by said viewer in order to start comprehending the world that the series is showing us.

Interesting to consider in this transmedia context as well, is Alan Moore's reverent distaste for any sort of adaptation considering his own work. "My book is a comic book. Not a movie, not a novel. A comic book," Moore has stated, continuing that "it's been made in a certain way, and designed to be read a certain way." (Epstein) Therefore, adapting something that belongs in the world of comics feels wrong to Moore, as such a different medium supports alternate rules and regulations. Damon Lindelof, creator of the HBO series, recognizes Moore's opinion, stating that "there is no version of *Watchmen* I could make that would please him. Not only that, but there's no version of *Watchmen* I could make that he would ever watch." (Epstein) Lindelof himself is a big fan of the original work, and thus felt conflicted in adapting something that will never get approved of by its author. However, in strict terms, the HBO series cannot be seen as an adaptation of the original work. Thomas Johnson argues that "Lindelof updates *Watchmen*," stating that the original *Watchmen* text is used as original source, and that the series transforms it in a way that is fitting in a new setting and environment

(398). Therefore, Lindelof seems to do exactly what Moore wants as he does not adapt the original *Watchmen* story, but takes it as a basis for a whole new story situated within the world of television with old recognizable characteristics.

3.2 Time as a Narration Method in HBO's Watchmen

Circling back, time in tv series is of course spatially still tied to episodes that consist of 60 minutes. However, as stated earlier, the biggest difference with the comic genre is that the viewer is never able to look to the past, present and future all at once. Of course, one could see a flashback, or get fast forwarded to a later moment in time: but stylistically, the inevitability of the future is much less present than on a comics page. The viewer sees and experiences the scene or moment that is shown, and cannot look any further than what the screen projects. HBO's *Watchmen* is a testimony to a series that often feels like a puzzle, or a clock, in which the viewer is required to put all the pieces together. This is mainly due to the fact that time, in a narrative sense, is all over the place. As with the novel, the first episode starts off like a murder mystery, as the Chief of Tulsa Police Department gets found hanging from a tree. From here on out, the series revolves around questions, and attempts to get answers to them. The series is structured in a non-linear way, using different blocks of time to tell the story, which ultimately all seem to overlap and come together. Viewers are fed only bits of information, and with all kinds of stories interweaving, some questions only get answered in the very last of the episodes. However, the most important thing about HBO's *Watchmen* is not what is going to happen, but mainly what has happened before. The series uses different stylistic techniques in order to highlight this importance of the past: and mainly, to stress from whose point of view something gets told.

Because of the series' non-linear structure, time keeps taking surprising turns. Consider, for instance, the fact that Adrian Veidt has been on earth, frozen into a statue, ever since the first episode. This is something the viewer could not eventually have known since the episodes before this revelation show Veidt trying to find a way out of a 'paradise' called Europa. Hints are given that these scenes do not match up with the Tulsa timeline, but the expectation is created that Veidt's search for freedom is happening at the same time as Angela's storyline plays out. Another example of a confusion within the discourse narrative can be seen in the eighth episode, which centers around the romantic relationship that Angela has, or has had, with Dr. Manhattan. In this episode, it is revealed that Angela's husband Cal has been Dr. Manhattan all along, hiding in plain sight on earth. The episode tells the story of how they meet in Vietnam, how they fall in love, and how Dr. Manhattan eventually ends up in Cal's body. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Dr. Manhattan experiences time on another level than other humans do. For him, the past, present and future are happening all at the same time. This is where a link can be drawn to the show's structure, as the episode consists of memories that are jumped through. It feels irregular, even chaotic at times. The entire episode is out of order, but ultimately keeps returning back to the

Figure 2.1: Angela inserting and retrieving the device that made Dr. Manhattan forget who he was, from: "A God Walks into Abar." *Watchmen*, written by Jeff Jensen and Damon Lindelof, directed by Nicole Kassell, Home Box Office, 2019.

scene in which Angela and Dr. Manhattan first meet in a Vietnamese bar. Jumping from scene to scene, flashbacks of Dr. Manhattan's life before his heroic days are shown, and later on the future that he and Angela will have gets narrated as well, as he already knows what is about to take place. But Damon Lindelof, creator and writer of the show, states that this structure was implemented on purpose, because "we want to teach [the audience] how Dr. Manhattan experiences time" (Mazin). This causes the viewer to realize that Dr. Manhattan does not necessarily experience the 'now': because everything that has ever happened in his life is always a part of his present. This is also why, when shown how Angela puts the device in his head that will make him suppress his powers and lose his experience of time in order to live a normal life, the next shot is again of Angela, holding the device she just pulled out (fig. 2.1). The series shows it from Dr. Manhattan's point of view: as he has no recollection of the last ten years, these two scenes are consecutive, because this is all that he remembers. In this sense, time is being used stylistically in order to grant the viewer an understanding of Dr. Manhattan's interconnected timeline.

Figure 2.2: Will changes into Angela as the camera turns around, from: "This Extraordinary Being." *Watchmen*, written by Cord Jefferson and Damon Lindelof, directed by Stephen Williams, Home Box Office, 2019.

HBO's *Watchmen* sees time as something that can offer a new perspective, or point of view, as shown in the Dr. Manhattan episode. A more significant use of the flow of time interweaving both the past and the present can be seen in the sixth episode. In this episode, Angela has

swallowed her grandfather Will Reeves' nostalgia pills. These pills function as bottled-up memories, and taking them causes someone to relive their happiest moments: because, as Laurie states, "who wants to live in the moment when you can live in the past?" ("This Extraordinary Being" 04:52) But since Angela took someone else's pills, something that is strictly advised against, she almost overdoses, and experiences how Will became Hooded Justice who was one of the first Minutemen. The entire episode consists of memories in the form of flashbacks, and the colors have been toned down to black and white. Because Angela is experiencing the memories, the episode plays with time. This feverish dream eventually starts to blur the lines between the subject and the observer. In figure 2.2, Will talks to a man reading a comic, when suddenly he gets thumped by the man that he just thought he put away in jail. There is a long one-shot in this instance, in which the camera is firstly focused on Will. When the man walks past and touches Will's shoulder, the camera follows him in order to show his face. However, when the camera returns to show Will's surprised face, where he was standing, Angela has now taken his place, carrying his uniform and baffled look. Reminiscent of the cleverness used in the comic as well, this illustrates how both persons are slowly becoming one (which will be discussed further later in the chapter), with Angela processing the trauma that Will has gone through. Because of the one-takes that are used throughout this episode, time is constantly being pushed forward: causing the viewer to be continuously in the moment. This overlapping of shared histories is also evident in figure 2.3, where Will has put on white

Figure 2.3: Will's reflection in the mirror shows Angela's face, from "This Extraordinary Being." *Watchmen*, written by Cord Jefferson and Damon Lindelof, directed by Stephen Williams, Home Box Office, 2019.

make-up around his eyes, in order to shield anyone from thinking that there is a black man behind the mask that he wears. When his wife holds up a mirror for him to see his face, a reflection of Angela is shown: again, blurring the boundaries of time. As further analysis will show, this is the episode in which Angela truly starts to understand her own legacy, and the pain and trauma that not only her family, but an entire generation suffered from. The way in which the past is flowing over into the present, indicates the stylistic possibilities that time has within a tv series. These examples showcase how time is free from space, as the present is ever flowing, and the future is never set.

3.3 Freed from Time

Familiar faces appear in HBO's *Watchmen*, but also new and interesting characters offer a glimpse into their dealings with time. The comic book, through its form, was a representation of time regarded spatially, already creating an environment in which characters lost their sense of agency. Thinking back to Bergson, time as something spatial causes characters to no longer hold any self-control, as the future feels predetermined and unavoidable. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the format of a tv series opens up the floor when thinking about time. Bergson wished for humanity to move toward an understanding of time that he called duration, an ongoing flow of the present that would eventually lead to the future remaining undecided: and therefore, grant people to regain their ability to shape that which was yet to come. In the comic, almost none of the characters regard time in such a way that they can fully regain or claim their own agency. Even though both Dr. Manhattan and Laurie flirt with this understanding of letting one's past infiltrate one's present to regain self-control, they never fully surrender to such a thought. The personas previously encountered still experience time in such a way that they cannot and will not be able to regain their own self. However, the

characters introduced in the series seem to offer hope for a new understanding of time: again, highlighting the importance of the lessons that time can and still will teach us.

As noted in both the first and second chapter, such tidings of time resound within the world of the Gothic as well. In the comic, both the style and the narrative of the comic served as representatives for spatialized time, causing the characters inside such a story to lose their sense of self and undergo a process of self-fragmentation that is so inherently linked to the Gothic. As discussed, time in the series is not as trapped as it was in the comic: creating a situation in which this Gothic outlook is not necessarily created by the style of the series itself. However, this does not mean that the series cannot be considered a Gothic narrative. As argued, the Gothic is a place in which superheroes feel the need to hide their identities and loss of self behind a mask, in order to create an identity that is better and stronger than they will ever be (Schneider 86). And interestingly enough, the series also indulges in what it means to be good or bad, and the difficult gray zone in-between. Television itself is also representative of the fragmented narrative often so important in Gothic stories. Lenora Ledown notes that "in the Gothic, stories are interrupted by other stories," and that is precisely what also characterizes HBO's *Watchmen.* The entire story is never directly shown, and the viewer is left to puzzle with the timeline as multiple stories keep intersecting through different episodes. And again, time causes the characters to feel trapped in this Gothic environment, even more so highlighting the fact that masks are only superficial objects that seem to hide the true hauntings of the past behind them.

Even though Dr. Manhattan is the true embodiment of spatial time, his narrative in the comic already showed his paradoxical relationship to his own being. Experiencing the past, present and future all at once causes him to feel like he has no influence on future events. At the end of the graphic narrative, Dr. Manhattan leaves earth to create life elsewhere, as his conversation with Laurie has led him to believe that humanity might not be hopeless after all

– therefore, he ventures out to create a life of his own. In the series, which continues on from this narrative, Dr. Manhattan creates a man and a woman (who resemble people from his past) on a planet called Europa. Paralleling the story of Genesis, Dr. Manhattan's purpose is to conceive something better than humans: beings who are simply kind and gentle, in a new Garden of Eden. However, this perfect paradise that he has created eventually also starts to bore him just like humanity once did. He returns to earth again in order to meet Angela with whom he falls in love. In order to be with her, Veidt gives him a device that blocks and suppresses his power and memories, so that he can become more human and forget his true, god-like nature.

In all of this lies again the paradox discussed earlier in the second chapter. Dr. Manhattan is a being that exists based on the notion that time is spatial. But even so, as in his conversation with Laurie in the comic, he realizes that his experience of time as something simultaneous is not supposed to hinder him from being alive. Even though Dr. Manhattan knows that his relationship with Angela will end badly, as he can see how the future plays out, he concedes to still live life as it was intended for him. He even argues, that "by definition, don't all relationships end in tragedy?" ("A God Walks into Abar" 55:58) In this conversation with Angela, both already know what their future is going to look like, and are left with no agency to change it. In Bergsonian terms, this is the ultimate example of time within a spatial entity: this simultaneous experience of time causes Dr. Manhattan to lose his ability to influence the future. But it has to be noted that even though this relationship will ultimately result in his own death, he still chooses to be a part of it. And whether this is because he has no say in choosing the future or whether he finally, truly perceives human life as something wonderful, will still remain just as paradoxical as his character was in the original narrative of the comic. Dr. Manhattan is therefore a product of spatial time, but also wishes to experience

true duration in its utmost Bergsonian form - even though he would never truly be able to do so.

Not only Dr. Manhattan stays true to the narrative that was coined already in the comic book. When Adrian Veidt is also reintroduced in the series, his world and even persona are shrouded in mystery for the first few episodes. Currently residing in something that looks and feels like a paradise (later on called by the name Europa), Veidt's life seems almost close to perfection. Two living servants, Philips and Crookshanks, take care of him, provide him with everything that he could wish for. Slowly, but gradually, the series starts to explain how and why Veidt ended up here. Before he was sent to this utopia, Veidt was still on earth, continuing to rain down small squids in order to keep everyone afraid and prevent a new and devastating war. He is also personally responsible for the election of Robert Redford as the next president after Nixon. Convincing Redford to keep his murder of three million people a secret, Veidt still holds on to the illusion that the world can yet be turned into some sort of paradise. This indicates the way in which his mindset has not changed, but progressively worsened after the events of the comic. However, because the world does not know the truth about Veidt's plan that 'saved the world', he is forgotten and ignored, causing him to be left completely alone and angry with humanity. He explains these feelings to Dr. Manhattan, saying: "I saved the world from nuclear Armageddon, Jon. Aside from you and a select few, nobody knows. My plans for a great future… ignored" ("A God Walks into Abar" 32:35). Again, Veidt continues to be obsessed with the idea of creating a peaceful paradise, but humanity keeps interfering with his plans.

Eventually, it is revealed that Dr. Manhattan sent him there as a favor, as Veidt gave him a device that would enable him to become more human and suppress his powers in order to be with Angela. Because Veidt feels so hopeless and run down with humanity, he asks Dr. Manhattan to send him to Europa, in order to reside in his own paradise. Ultimately, this does

not turn out the way he wants to, as Philip and Crookshanks have no identity or purpose in this place: causing his desire to return to earth. This is where it becomes evident that Veidt has not changed his ways in the last decades. In order to get a message back to his daughter, Lady Trieu, he catapults the multiple bodies of Philips and Crookshanks into space. Later on, he uses the deceased bodies to spell out a 'save me daughter' message, visible through a telescope ("See How They Fly" 08:42). This hints at the incredible lengths that he would go through in order to get what he wants, or to fulfill his view of the world. It is also interesting to take into consideration, that at several moments the suggestion is made that everything that was happening or had already happened in Europa was eventually one big play, completely directed by Veidt himself. This is portrayed, for example, in the trial that Veidt has to sit through after trying to leave Europa, in which Crookshanks quickly winks at him, as if they are both in on the joke and the rest is not. And when Veidt kills the Game Warden, a version of Philips who tries to stop Veidt escaping from Europa, the Warden ultimately asks him why Veidt made him wear a mask. Veidt replies dubiously, saying that "masks make men cruel," and "having a worthy adversary, helped keep me sane. You put on a hell of a show" ("See How They Fly 15:28). Again, the suggestion is made that Veidt was creating drama and excitement in Europa simply for his own gain. This also indicates how Veidt has no remorse when innocent people have to die in order for his pride to thrive.

There is almost a god-like stature that Veidt has appropriated, or even claimed. He quite literally creates life by scooping babies out of a pond and turning them into full grown human beings. All the people in Europa give off the sense that they are his to command. However, when he is put on trial for breaking the rules and trying to leave this wretched place, there is a stark contrast between two disconnected images. One of those is the way in which Veidt sees himself, and the other is the way in which he is perceived by others. Whilst Veidt believes himself to be quasi-god, above the ordinary people that surround him, the judge literally does

not rank him higher than pigs. This desire to be a god is an important element in the series, as other characters such as Senator Keene and Lady Trieu are both eager to inherit Dr. Manhattan's powers in order to become something more than simply human. But the series indicates that this godliness that Veidt, Keene and Lady Trieu are after, is not necessarily about obtaining supernatural abilities or saving the world from catastrophe. It has to do with the experience of time: as Dr. Manhattan's narrative indicates that he values his past, present and future with Angela much more than his ability to save the world. Therefore, Veidt is on the complete opposite side of this understanding, because even though he has always had the unfulfillable desire to turn the world into a place that would be like heaven on earth, he is never able to truly do that. And when he gets the opportunity in Europa, he gets bored by the inhumanity of it all. Still, shaping the future is all that he has ever dreamt of doing, and in his conviction that everything would work out the way he wanted to, he was shut off even further from humanity than he was at the end of the comic. Therefore, he still does not coincide with Bergson's wish to regard time non-spatially, as with his narrative in the comic book. Veidt's incredible desire to shape the future for both himself and the rest of the world has not changed. As Dr. Manhattan told him, "nothing ever ends," and even though Veidt saves the world again, there is no predetermining the future of the universe (Moore 409). As he finally gets arrested by Laurie at the end of the series, his ultimate doom comes down on him: attempting to influence the future will only ever go so far, as time is not something that can be bend to one's will.

Of the original *Watchmen*, Veidt was not the only one who eventually ended up more alone than ever. As the "Peteypedia" tells us, Laurie and Dan eventually broke up. Both of them also got arrested, after violating the Keene act that prohibited vigilantism, with Dan still serving time in jail. Whilst he does not make an appearance in the series, Laurie certainly does. She has struck up a deal with the FBI, in which she is allowed to go free, as long as she works

for the FBI's anti-vigilante force, at which "[she is] their top vigilante hunter" ("See How They Fly" 42:34). Laurie's storyline has completely switched around from the one in the comic. Where she was first considered to be a hero, she is now someone who hunts heroes down. When she is introduced in the series, it becomes clear that she has changed her last name into Blake, which was her father's last name. Throughout the series, resemblances between her and The Comedian start to arise, as she thinks many things are just a joke, or resorts to laughing hysterically during absurd moments. She is also burned by her past: she can no longer be with Dan, she still has to keep Veidt's mass-murder a secret, and believes that Dr. Manhattan ultimately abandoned her. Laurie is left alone, without love or friends, and caught up in a job that she has to do in order to stay out of jail. Where the end of the comic book suggested that Dr. Manhattan showed her how precious human life can be, the Laurie encountered in HBO's *Watchmen* regards humanity and her past as somethings that has, rejected her – and caused her to end up alone.

However, her switch to cynicism (something mastered by the Comedian as well), hides Laurie's true feelings: hinting at her Gothic desire that is still grounded in the past. She is nostalgic towards her relationship with Dr. Manhattan, and perhaps even still loves him. Laurie uses special phone dials to send messages to him, and shows true emotion when she finally sees him again. Not only seeing Dr. Manhattan causes her to take a step back into her past, but she is also clearly moved when she sees and recognizes Dan's old spaceship. The series suggests that Laurie desires a time that is long gone, and still regards the past as something wonderful. Laurie's character remains somewhat of a paradox. At the end of the series, she and Wade arrest Veidt for dropping his squid on New York. This indicates that she is eager to look toward a future in which she is not held back by secrets from the past, secrets that keep her at bay. On the other hand, the ending does not give more insight into whether this change will truly bring about a completely different Laurie as well. Where Schneider argues that in the

comic “Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan and Ozymandias go beyond traditional superhero types and resemble the archetypal Gothic villain […]: arrogant, contemptuous of human beings, bad-tempered, overbearing, cold, ruthless and emotionless”, Laurie sometimes seems to move into Rorschach’s slot (90). Never knowing what it is that she is after, exactly, she gives off on other people around her. When captured by Cyclops, she even states that she’s “tired of all the silliness”, and doesn’t care whatever it is that is going to threaten the world this time (“An Almost Religious Awe” 35:33). Like at the end of the graphic narrative, she remains somewhere in between. Skeptical of the past and the future, she refuses to divulge into either one, still ending up completely alone. Never truly reclaiming her own free will and self-control, she remains stuck in nostalgia as she does not let her past escape her completely.

3.4 Trauma and Legacy

As noted, the series tells the story of characters previously encountered in the comic, but also introduces characters who are new to this universe. The main subject that runs through the core of the series, as stated by creator Damon Lindelof, is legacy: and thus, the past continuously spilling over into the present. Legacy has always been an important aspect of the *Watchmen* story, as the original story narrated how Laurie and Dan had to carry the burden of continuing a name that previously belonged to someone else. This sense of legacy is also interwoven with Bergson’s understanding of time, as he desires that time is experienced as an ongoing flow of the present, in which the past is always visible as well. Therefore, the series dives deep into a great exploration of how the past continues into the present. The effects of the events that were a part of the comic are still visible, and carry over into the lives of the characters in the series. Not only did Veidt’s giant monster kill three million people, it also caused millions of others to suffer traumatic experiences for the rest of their lives. However, HBO’s *Watchmen* not only explores trauma on a personal level: it also focusses on genetic trauma. This is mostly explored

through the character of Wade Tilman, whose life revolves around the trauma that he has incurred after the planned squid attack on New York City. And the idea of one's legacy is discovered as well: what did you inherit from your parents, their parents before them, and so on? HBO's *Watchmen* suggests that it is only when one fully understand the events of the past that their family went through or experienced, that someone is truly able to understand themselves. This understanding of the past continuing into the present is greatly embodied by Angela Abar, and her grandfather Will Reeves. Both eventually ventured into the vigilante life, and hid their identity from the outside world. It is in the exploration of Will's past experiences, that Angela is finally able to see and accept her own traumatic experiences, and see why she chooses to hide behind a mask. It is as Laurie states to her (after finding out that Angela is an orphan), saying that "people who wear masks are driven by trauma. They're obsessed with justice because of some injustice they suffered, usually when they were kids. Ergo, mask. It hides the pain" ("If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own" 28:01).

As mentioned, the idea of genetic trauma is mainly represented in the series by a new character called Wade Tilman, who goes by the name Looking Glass when in costume. During the night Veidt dropped the squid on New York, a young Wade was in the city as a Jehovah's witness, trying to evangelize the crowd at a carnival in the city. However, he gets seduced by a girl who takes him into a hall of mirrors, a pinnacle moment in Wade's life in which he gives in to something he considers to be a sin. But the girl betrays him, running off with his clothes and leaving him naked surrounded by visions of himself in the mirrors. And as if it could not get any worse, this is also the moment when the squid hits New York. Protected by the hall of mirrors, Wade survives, but three million people inside the city do not, eventually causing Wade to be traumatized for the rest of his life. When we meet Wade in the alternate 2019 of HBO's *Watchmen,* he has designed his life around the fear of another squid attack. His home is practically a bunker, weaponized with an alarm that goes off when there is a chance of squids

falling out of the sky. He runs a support group for survivors of the attack, in which he and others talk about their shared traumatic experiences. And his marriage stranded because he was no longer able to fully place his trust in someone, after being betrayed in his youth by the girl in the hall of mirrors. Like Angela, Wade is also a police officer for the Tulsa police department. Wade eventually becomes a vigilante as well, calling himself Looking Glass, and wearing a mask that resembles a mirror like fabric. Ironically, as a boy he was unable to detect deception in other people: and now that is his prime strength when trying to catch a bad guy. His reflexive mask is also part of this past trauma, as Laurie points out that once cops were allowed to wear masks, "you had an excuse to wrap your entire head in Reflectatine" ("Little Fear of Lighting" 13:30). Ultimately, Laurie reasons that this would give Wade "guaranteed protection from psychic blasts" ("Little Fear of Lighting" 13:38). Even sown within his clothing, Wade never leaves his home without some sort of protection, as he still fears that there is a larger threat still out there.

When regarding Wade's traumatic experience, one term that is often important in Gothic tales seems to fully inhabit the fear that Wade has such a hard time letting go of: namely, the spectre. Andrew Smith argues that "the spectre is an absent presence, a liminal being that inhabits and gives shape to many of the figurations of trauma that characterise the Gothic" (147). In Gothic narratives, such a spectre is often linked to the appearance of a ghost or some other supernatural entity. For Wade, the spectre that keeps haunting him, is the squid that Veidt dropped on New York. Making this into a Gothic narrative, Wade's repetitive nature in warding off the squid by installing an alarm and continually wearing a mask to protect himself, represents the Freudian need to "reclaim past traumas in order to lay them to rest" (Smith 148). Many Gothic tales center themselves around such a confrontation with a spectre, as it is ultimately the desire to overcome the trauma that is keeping characters from experiencing their

future. But, as will be discussed further, Wade eventually gets confronted with his trauma: causing him to go where Rorschach could not.

The similarities between him and Rorschach are striking, as both have an extremely paranoid perspective on the world caused by traumatic experiences in their youth. Wade is also one of the few characters who constantly seems to keep his mask on, even when he is alone in his own home. However, where Rorschach saw the world solely in black and white, and good and bad, Wade simply chooses to see the world exactly the way it is. This is evident in his choice to work with the police, and to not view every woman as a horrible being, much like Rorschach did. Everything changes when Wade discovers the truth about what truly happened on the night of the squid attack. He learns from Senator Keene, that the entire attack was a hoax, created by Adrian Veidt. Wade's understanding of the world comes crashing down on him, as he realizes that all that he has feared and built his life around, is simply nonexistent. It is also ironic that Wade is a master in uncovering lies when others tell them, but was not able to discover the biggest lie of them all: the one right in front of him. Everything that happened to him, was ultimately pointless and his truth was a lie. Wade was traumatized by his past, and in such a way that he started to fear both the present and the future. He was not able to let go of the squid attack that caused him to lose trust in people. Much like Rorschach, Wade lived according to the past, and now discovers that even his past was ultimately not true in itself.

However, the biggest difference of all when linking Wade to Rorschach, is his own turnaround in the acceptance of the past. In a way that reminds us of Bergson, he warns that regarding the past, present and future as separate entities within time will cause people to lose a sense of duration: time as a flux in which the past is always penetrating the present. This is exactly where Rorschach and Wade choose different paths. Rorschach, as discussed in the second chapter, is stuck in this notion of the past that he is never able to incorporate it into his present. This causes him to lose his self-control, and to be able to have any influence on the

way in which his future will play out. Wade, however, gets confronted with the lies that shaped his view of the past: causing him to see through the façade that has kept him imprisoned all these years. He gets confronted with the fact that his past is not something to be kept at bay or create a fearful present. Once accepted that everything was a lie, he confronts Veidt and arrests him with Laurie's help. In doing so, he allows for his past to influence his present in a positive way. Rorschach was stuck in a spatially constructed past, causing his future to be already determined and inevitable. Wade, however, recognizes duration as Bergson would like us to do, as he breaks free of the hold that the past has over him. And not only is this a Bergsonian desire, but one of the Gothic world as well, as he is able to overcome the spectre that keeps haunting him in his mind. At the end of the last episode, he is no longer wearing his mask of mirrors or even his cap in which he has sown this 'protective' material. Confronting Veidt grants him the freedom to step out of this constructed past, accepting it into his present, and taking back his free will to open himself up to the future.

Not only is the importance of a personal past highlighted in the series. The inaccuracy of history itself is also brought to light. Through American Hero Story, a tv series that gets aired within the narrative of HBO's *Watchmen*, the sensationalism that America is often fond of gets played out. The series explores the origin stories of masked vigilantes, with the second season focusing on Hooded Justice, the man who inspired the coming together of the Minutemen. But as stated by Agent Dale Petey, who holds a PhD in history, "that show is garbage. It's full of historical inaccuracies" ("If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own" 29:01). American Hero Story deliberately melodramatizes the story of Hooded Justice, only showing superhero action and ignoring the person behind the mask. And where American Hero Story portrays Hooded Justice fighting a man in a grocery store, the true narrative of that fight was Will Reeves, a black man, fighting the Ku Klux Klan. This conveys an image how

America, as a nation, has always misunderstood the real story of Hooded Justice and with it, many other stories of African Americans as well.

This links to the discussion of good and bad, one that was so evident in the comic and is one of the main themes in the series as well. But there is something that clearly differentiates the series from the novel when unpacking a nihilistic worldview (so evidently embodied by Rorschach): and that is how HBO's *Watchmen* specifically belongs to the American Gothic genre. Like all Gothic stories, HBO's *Watchmen* is imbedded in the past: not only with regard to the characters, but the culture that they live in as well. Where the comic had a strong focus on the political and nuclear war that was holding America in its grip at the time of writing, the series is more concerned with the history of racial violence and acts of racism that are key to American history. Teresa A. Goddu argues that "American authors turn to the Gothic mode in order to disclose the ghostly origins of the nation as issuing from the oppressive social structure of slavery" (63). Where the comic did not touch on America's racial history, the story of Angela and Will in the series is a representative of such an American Gothic tale. Because, where the comic claimed that the lines between good and bad have become too blurry to distinguish, the series seems to choose a clearer path. The morality of the characters is often still not something that can belong to either one of these categories, but the series is clear in its point of view on racial violence. The white supremacist groups that have emerged are, in any case, bad: and what Will is trying to do is therefore ultimately good. Therefore, it takes a much clearer stand than the comic has done with regard to the racial violence in American history.

Will, who lost his home and family in the Tulsa Race Massacre, ends up as a cop in New York in 1938. However, during this time, the police are both corrupt and racist, almost murdering Will by hanging him from a tree, simply because of the color of his skin. The noose that is used to tie him to the tree, becomes his symbol: as he turns his traumatic experience into his vigilante identity. Creating a costume and hood, symbolized by the rope around his neck,

Will became the first American superhero named Hooded Justice. Will uses white make-up under his cap to cover his dark skin, which is again a testimony to the racist mindset that America was (and often still is) supporting. Just like the comic turns the ideal concept of the superhero on its head, so does the series. The first true American superhero, Hooded Justice, did not wear a suit simply to look the part. Will had to actively hide his own identity in order to prevent other people from harming him, and those around him.

Even though Laurie, Veidt and Looking Glass all play their own important part within the narrative of the series, the main protagonist of the story is Angela Abar. At the start of the first episode, Angela is living in Tulsa with her husband Cal and her three (adopted) children. She retired as a cop, after she and other members of the Tulsa Police Department were attacked by the extremist white supremacy group the Seventh Kavalry on the 24th of December in 2016 (later to be known as "The White Night"). After this incident, a policy was implemented that allowed the police to wear masks in order to avoid recognition of their own identity. But even though Angela is claiming in public that she has retired from her police days, it is soon revealed that she still secretly works alongside the Tulsa P. D., donning the identity of Sister Night. She and her husband Cal (Dr. Manhattan) are friends with Tulsa Chief of Police Judd Crawford and his wife, and she finds herself in shock when Crawford is murdered by Will Reeves. Will, whom Angela meets when she finds Judd's body, is Angela's grandfather: a fact that Angela is at first not too keen to believe, just as Will's claim that he murdered Chief Crawford. Born in Vietnam, where many African Americans moved after it became a state, Angela's parents were killed in a terrorist attack. This causes her to be bewildered when meeting Will, never knowing that she even had a grandfather. By taking a DNA test that proves Will's story to be true, Angela sets out to discover the legacy of her family. Like Will, Angela also chooses to hide behind a mask in order to shield her own personal traumas from the past.

Once Angela meets Will, her history opens up to her. Will tells her that "[he] wanted to show [her] where [she] came from", and that she is therefore part of his legacy ("Martial Feats of Comanche Horsemanship" 50:31). As previously mentioned, by swallowing all of his nostalgia pills, Angela fully experiences his transformation into Hooded Justice. Angela ultimately learns that the legacy she inherited, was that of a Tulsa Race Massacre survivor, and the first American vigilante. Will shows Angela how her past is always a part of her present. By killing Judd Crawford, who eventually turns out to be a member of the white supremacy group Cyclops, Will ultimately receives the justice he has been waiting for his entire life. Before Will kills Chief Crawford, he asks him why he kept his granddad's Klu Klux Klan robe in his closet, to which Crawford responds that "[he] has a right to keep it. It's [his] legacy" ("This Extraordinary Being" 54:50). Will then asks him, "if you're so proud of your legacy, why do you hide it?" ("This Extraordinary Being" 55:02) Here, the series deliberately portrays America's history of slavery as something bad and inexcusable. This also circles back to Will's ultimate recognition that his mask never truly helped him overcome the traumatic experiences in his past. This is the lesson that he tries to teach Angela as well. In showing her his own past, which is also her legacy, he can guide her to understand that shying away from your past by taking on another identity (much like Rorschach ultimately tried and failed to do), will not lead to an acceptance of your own traumas. In the last episode, Will explains this to Angela, stating that it is not anger that you feel when you put on your mask: "it [is] fear and hurt" ("See How They Fly" 54:05). He continues, saying that "you can't heal under a mask, Angela. Wounds need air" ("See How They Fly" 54:20). Not only does he refer to his own history, but America's past as well. This explains how Will has accepted and incorporated his past into his present, leaving the future yet to be undecided.

Will's journey to acceptance greatly resembles that of Angela, who was traumatized in her youth by her parents' death. Admiring a movie called Sister Night, in which a black nun

goes undercover as a masked vigilante, Angela had the desire to hide behind a mask since her very youth. Will idolized Bass Reeves, the first black deputy U.S. Marshal who was incorporated into movies as well. Both saw someone that looked like them, and was able to fend for themselves. Both Will and Angela eventually took on the names of these heroes, since these characters made such impressions on them in their childhood. Angela's Sister Night can be seen as a reincarnation of Will's Hooded Justice: as Will's trauma and pain is ultimately also a part of Angela's legacy. It is in these things, and in Will passing on his history, that Angela is able to fully regain her agency. Both her own past and Will's past have found their way into the present: just as Bergson's description of duration desires us to do. But it also again shows the workings of an American Gothic tale, as "the Gothic becomes the mode through which to speak what often remains unspeakable within the American national narrative – the crime of slavery" (Goddu 63). Instead of regarding the past as something separate, something that leaves her both angry and frustrated within the present, it gets incorporated. This grants her the ability to regain control over her future. By getting to know Will, and her family's history, Angela gains an understanding both of her own legacy, and that of racial America: allowing her to fully experience the flux of time. Her future is no longer set or determined, like it was within her relationship with Dr. Manhattan.

HBO's *Watchmen'*s is a continuation of the legacy that Alan Moore created when writing the comic. Both old and new characters get reintroduced into the world, a place as dark and gloomy as ever. The structure of the series lends itself to a less spatialized form of time than the structure of a comic would support, creating an environment more open to the Bergsonian flux of time. As some characters still choose to hang on to their old ways, the series' strength lies in the examination of America's racial history, and the forgotten narratives that are hidden within this. HBO's *Watchmen* is therefore explicitly reminiscent of the American Gothic genre, as it exposes a shared America trauma that needs to be discussed in order for it

to heal. Both Angela and Will are representatives of this shared trauma, as Angela realizes that by learning a story, one is able to overcome it. Therefore, the past is not something that is supposed to hold anyone back: rather, as Bergson argues, the past needs to be used in order to understand the present, so that characters regain the agency to influence their future. Ultimately, where Dr. Manhattan started to gain this awareness in the comic, Angela embodies it through the stories of Will. It is therefore fitting that the series ends with the suggestion that Angela has inherited Dr. Manhattan's powers: as her foot hovers above the water of the pool, suggesting that she might be able to put it on the surface without sinking to the bottom, the screen cuts to black before the resolution of this moment is shown. But the suggestion is there, and it hints at the god-like abilities that were discussed previously in this chapter. Because having the abilities of a God, or the abilities of Dr. Manhattan, implies that one understands the proper flow of time. If Angela has truly inherited Dr. Manhattan's powers, she is the one who sees time the way that it is supposed to be: as an ever-continuing flow of duration.

Conclusion

As argued in this thesis, the world of *Watchmen* is in all its elements imbedded in the world of time. In my previous chapters, I have argued that the experience of time and the Gothic genre have great effect on the characters in *Watchmen*'s universe, causing some to lose any sense of agency, while others discover a new relationship to the concept of time. Henri Bergson believed that time should be regarded separately from space: in his opinion, the two are too often inextricably linked. This mixing of time and space also coincides with a loss of agency, Bergson argues. Indeed, a spatial conception of time causes the future to be seen as something fixed, which can make someone feel like they lack any power to influence how it is an outcome of the past. This is also relevant in accordance with the Gothic genre, as the Gothic highlights how the seeking of limits within the world of *Watchmen* brings about a self-fragmentation evident in the characters. However, regarding time separately from space would be an important condition for enabling them to regain their agency. In its comic book form, *Watchmen* channels the spatiality of time within its structure, as the panels and page layouts are designed to give off the sense that this Gothic dystopian world is dark and grim. With regard to the characters, many of them also inhabit this sense of time, feeling that they are powerless to influence their own and humanity's future or that they get trapped in the illusion that the future is something to be reshaped. Dr. Manhattan seems to be the only character in the novel who understands how time is to be experienced. Paradoxically, he is the true embodiment of spatial time: which makes his realization all the more incoherent and difficult to fulfill.

The comic and the series overlap in a number of ways, not only in characters, but in the themes that are addressed as well. The dismantling of the ultimate American superhero is at the heart of both works. Masks are something to hide one's faults behind and escape reality, and do not function as a prop to enhance one's heroic status. In addition, the only character that has supernatural powers, Dr. Manhattan, is trapped in the comic by his own inhumanity: and

even suppresses his abilities in the series in order to live a more humane life. Both works seem to suggest that the ideal version of a hero that would save the world from extreme evil no longer exists. And even when granted abilities that go beyond the boundaries of the humane, such powers are not the solution to saving the world or living a peaceful life. Sacrifices made by these 'heroes', such as Veidt shows in both works, expose the fact that no human being is completely good or ultimately evil. Both works of *Watchmen* also keep posing the question if ends justify means. Veidt certainly seems to hold on to the notion that this is the case, both in the book and the series, as he believes that saving humanity justifies all cruelty. However, actions have consequences, and the series shows how Wade suffers from a trauma that was ultimately caused by Veidt's actions. Dr. Manhattan also keeps suggesting that, even in trying to save humanity, good ends never remain unchanged, so how could they provide a firm basis for Veidt's crimes? It does not matter how often Veidt tries to save the world: it does not have a lasting end. This ideal world, in which superheroes save the day and their heroic actions are without a negative consequence, is a place that both *Watchmen* works deem to be non-existent. But it is not only in the similarities between the two stories, but also in the differences, that *Watchmen* finds a new meaning in our current era.

The series provides an entirely new take on the original story. The biggest difference is the incorporation of the story into the truly American Gothic genre. Where the comic mainly focused on the nuclear war that America was trying to prevent, the series delves into a deeper cultural understanding of the country and especially of the racist violence that is a part of America's history. Traumas do not simply rule the lives of characters: they get shown, and room is created in order for characters to heal. Whilst the original characters from the comic remain stuck in their old, spatial way of time, newly introduced characters get the opportunity to learn from their legacy. And in this respect, they do better than the heroes before them. In this sense, Moore's *Watchmen* is a timely lesson to the characters in the series. Because in

HBO's *Watchmen*, characters realize that traumas from the past do not have to regulate one's future. As Bergson argued, the present is always permeated by moments from the past, something that is explicitly not the same as one's past becoming one's present. Because if the past is always visible in the present, and not fully hijacking it, characters are able to learn from it. It is this process of learning that Will eventually teaches Angela, in order to show her that even though heroes might think they are able to rule time, it is ultimately the acceptance of our legacy that will help in shaping the future.

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