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Full page insight

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Full page insight: the Apocalyptic Moment in Comics written by Alan Moore

Part of Alan Moore's claim to fame is the way he and the artists collaborating with him have used formal components in comics to circumvent reader expectation and underline thematic content. Most readers of Moore's oeuvre will recall how the infamous Möebius-band scene in *Promethea* #15 turns spatio-temporal relations upside down and potentially keeps the reader stuck in infinity through the use of a double spread (Moore et al. 2001, p. 8–9), or the equally noted scene from *V for Vendetta* (Moore and Lloyd 1990, p.89–93) where the depiction of note sheets as captions measures out a progression in time across the display of various places. The examples of spatio-temporal innovation in Moore's works with various co-creators are many and, as such, his oeuvre proves a fertile ground to go digging for clues about how time and space can be constructed in comics.

This article analyses examples from some of Moore's key works to illuminate how he and his artists specifically employ the spatio-temporal qualities of the formal element of the full page¹ to underline various kinds of apocalyptic content². In looking at full pages from the series *Swamp Thing*, *Watchmen*, *From Hell*, and *Promethea*, I will argue that this specific kind of panel is particularly adept in depicting apocalypses because it conveys a sense of time and space that is similar to that of the apocalypse and thus mimics in its formal qualities a spatio-temporal paradox inherent in this concept of the end of the world. By looking at the way Moore and his collaborators construct various apocalyptic instances, we can add to our understanding of the full page and its spatio-temporal traits.

Panel, page, painting

When the panel is enlarged and turned into a full page, it still retains some of the temporal qualities of the panel, but the weight is tilted towards its momentary effect because both its connection to other panels and the narrative is left out of sight. In comics, smaller panels are usually part of a sequence of panels and what comics theorist Thierry Groensteen calls the ‘iconic solidarity’ (2007, p.18) of the page; they are interlinked as formal elements on the page because of their juxtaposition. Benoît Peeters, with Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, describes the panel as an image that is out of balance, caught between what came before and what comes after (Peeters 1998, p.22). Temporally, the panel embodies a double-quality, which is the present moment in itself, but also the present that is defined by the past and the future.

Art historians have long debated how paintings capture ‘the fruitful moment’ or ‘pregnant moment’. G.E Lessing says: “Since the artist can use but a single moment of ever-changing nature, (...) evidently the most fruitful moment and the most fruitful aspect of that moment must be chosen” (Lessing 2005, p.16). Following Ernst Gombrich, comics theorist Hans Christian Christiansen points to the way comics can make use of a density in the moment and how the position of characters and composition of a panel can incorporate movement into the moment. However, the panel is always part of a sequence and Christiansen underlines how this inscription is different from the classical perception of the pregnant moment in art history (Christiansen 2001, p.73–75). The panel in comics does not have to depict a pregnant moment because it can rely on its fellow panels to help convey meaning and specific temporal traits. The full page, however, is special in that it is both a page and a panel. In many of the full pages described in this article, it is apparent that the full page not only anticipates what comes next, but also makes sense of what came before and thus adds meaning to preceding panels and pages.

But, it also possesses painting-like qualities. If perceived as a painting, the full page is an image removed from its sequence where what came before and what comes after do not affect the full page itself – it is a moment in time extracted from a linear progression.

Sudden swamp

Saga of the Swamp Thing, which Moore began writing in the beginning of the 1980's³ is a relatively early work, but it reveals how the full page is invoked for certain effects that Moore reuses in later works. In the original storyline by Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson the creature from the swamp is a human turned into a plant person. But Moore's reinvention changes the premise of the Swamp Thing and makes him no longer human in origin; instead of a man-plant, he is a conscious swamp. When the creature realizes he is not Alec Holland the scientist, but a plant elemental who thinks he is Alec Holland, his former sense of self comes to an end and he begins a new identity as Swamp Thing (Fig.1) (Moore et al. 1984, p.17–18). In the series this transition and the resulting insight into the divine being he is about to become is underlined by a full page that ends issue 24 “Roots” on page 23. This is where the full page and one of the apocalypses in the series⁴ coincide. But before we look more closely at this page, it is beneficial to look at the effects of some of the preceding full pages in the series to understand how they work spatio-temporally.

>Figure 1. Alan Moore, Stephen Bissette and John Totleben. 1984. ‘Roots’. *Saga of the Swamp Thing* #24, page 23.<

In an earlier full page (Moore and Bissette 1984, p.16) the Swamp Thing raises himself dramatically from the ground he has been rooted in. This full page is composed so that Swamp Thing dominates the page. He dwarfs the woman, Abigail, as frogs and lizards catapult

off his chest from their previously tranquil nesting place. This full page depicts a brief moment -- the depicted action probably only lasts a fraction of a second. It is a moment of surprise for all involved: the reader who has just turned the page, Abigail who is suddenly faced by this big mass of humanoid shrubbery, and Swamp Thing who has taken a step further in his personal transition by breaking free of his voluntary rooted state.

This full page depicts a very short time span, but precisely by being a full page it allows for the reader to study the emerging Swamp Thing carefully, taking however long time they feel the need to. Scholars like Harry Morgan have noted (2003, p.52–53) that in comics there is a very precarious relationship between narrative time and the reader's time and that this relationship has implications for the inherent spatio-temporal qualities of the full page. The temporal qualities of the panel are created in a collaboration between the formal structure of the page, the perception of the reader, and the diegetic action. By using formal elements like the full page to depict specific points in the narrative, artists can create a moment of temporal instability that readers can process whichever way they want.

The moment of Swamp Thing's uprooting depicts a split-second in diegetic time, but by making it a full page, the panel's relationship with the sequence is put in the background. This page depicts the most pregnant moment in the sequence. The movement is captured in a still image that shows the in-between moment of Swamp Thing's transition from part of the landscape to an upright entity. This full page stops the readers in their tracks and allows them time to take in this moss covered, green giant. In this case, the full page relieves a previous suspense, through the means of an instantaneous shock.

The temporality of the full page can also be used in the full page to create a forward-directed suspense, which turns the attention of the reader towards what happens in the

following panel. This suspense building happens when Swamp Thing and the Floronic Man meet up in a Western-like duel amidst ruins shrouded in greenery (Moore et al. 1984, p.4). The full page shows the Floronic man from an angle behind Swamp Thing, and the tension builds as the caption reads: “A terrible silence. A hush before the earthquake.” In this full page, the text emphasizes the anticipation of the panel that comes next, when the reader turns the page. The content of the text makes the reader want to turn the pages to see what comes next, but this excitement can also be prolonged indefinitely. But the text of this full page also underlines the aspect of this scene as a possible prolonged moment of death-like silence, where the scene seems to go on forever. The text and the image working together in making moment stretch out and subtract in that the page can be read quickly as a short silent scene before the real action or as a long-lasting, nerve-wrecking staring contest. It is not a depiction of the fruitful moment in this sequence, but rather it is the moment just before the action begins. It works more like a tableau, that is composed with the characters at rest at either side of the panel, but the text helps the suspense develop. The reader can keep the suspense going on forever by never turning the page or s/he can treat this particular full page as a minuscule temporal stepping stone that only serves to help the reader along for the real action. The full page’s duration is ambiguous and allows for a sense of time that stretches somewhere between an instant and eternity.

The moment

A panel can contain several moments, but even when the panel is concerned with only one moment, it can be difficult to determine its duration. Scott McCloud has noted how it is not always the case that a panel conveys a single moment, but he has also acknowledged that this can sometimes be true (2000a, p. 94–95). McCloud introduces captions and speech balloons as

means to measure how long a scene takes and suggests that the size of panels matter too, but comics are not always as didactic as McCloud's examples suggest. This indeterminacy is central to the way Moore and various artists play games with time and space in comics because it offers ways to break with the straightforward pace of linear reading. In Danish, moment or 'øjeblik' (or in German 'Augenblick') is made up of the syllables 'eye' and 'look'/'gaze'; etymologically it describes the amount of time it takes to look at something. This etymological connotation connects the concept of moment to the act of seeing and highlights its double temporal quality: the moment can last the blink of an eye or be expanded indefinitely as the viewer looks meticulously at something.

In the full page moment in the "Roots" issue's final page (Fig.1), there are points that hint at the religious connotations in regards to Swamp Thing from here onwards in the stories to come. It is impossible not to note the reference to Jesus Christ as our hero spreads his arms in a cross-like posture (Rosen 2008, p. 9), with the globe of a red sun acting as a sanctifying halo. This similarity with the Messiah is not only designed to refer to his and the reader's insight into his god-like abilities (Rosen 2008, p.8-9) but also serves as an embrace as Swamp Thing reaches across the panel and the sky while the caption reads "... and meet the sun." The sun brings light as well as enlightenment to this page, but it also symbolizes the transition Swamp Thing has made in his acceptance of his new identity. He is a plant, and as such his life is dependent upon the sun's rays in a very corporeal sense; as Swamp Thing moves further away from being human, he welcomes his primary source of sustenance: the sun. It is in this moment that Swamp Thing lets go of his former identity and fully acknowledges and embraces his new self.

Here, the temporal qualities of the full page are used to expand the moment into a possible eternity. Though this full page is part of a sequence, its ties to the preceding and succeeding panels are not strong. The small caption ties the panel to the preceding panel is part of a longer monologue Swamp Thing is making, and it is broken up in his usual slow and fragmented mode of speech that does not carry a strong sense of causality in this case.

There are temporal qualities that are inherent in the panel and the full page, but these can be emphasized or decreased by the materiality of the comic. As Swamp Thing was serialized and later collected in trade paperbacks, there are several versions of the story that are products of its publication process. In the original single issue version, this full page is on a right hand side, and it has both a caption pointing towards the previous action and an extra-diegetic text announcing “next: The Sleep of Reason” (Moore et al. 1984, p.23), which points towards the series continuation in the following issue. However, in the first trade paperback, the page is moved to a left hand page, which visually obscures the previous action but shows us the next issue beginning on the facing page (Moore et al. 1987, p. 92). Here, the shock of turning the page is greater, but the sense of being caught in the moment is minimized, since the reader can glimpse the following action while taking in the full page. Because this is the final panel in the single issue originally, the reader had to wait for the next issue to get the continuation of the story, but this effect is lessened in the collected edition. Using a full page to end an issue stops the reader more thoroughly and provides a sense of an ending. The full page in question is also the ending panel of a story arc, so the link between this panel and the next is even weaker than is usual between issues in a series. The amorphous temporal quality of the moment in the full page as something in between an instant and eternity is underlined in the panel by its composition. The symmetry furthers the sense of eternity as Swamp Thing is perfectly balanced in the middle

of the panel with groups of trees framing him on each side and the sun right in the middle of the page horizontally. He is smiling with his eyes closed - it is a scene that could go on forever.

Interestingly, the most recent collection of *Saga of the Swamp Thing*'s first book returns to the original page sequence, placing it on a right hand page again (Moore et al. 2011, p. 133). Because the reader has a full view of the preceding page on the left, this full page becomes more tightly associated with what came before, which takes away some of the momentous quality of the page. Perhaps this is why the caption is edited out, since the full page no longer needs an anchoring text to link it with its preceding panel. The sun is still there, but the emphasis the text puts on the event of meeting the sun is left out. The text on the page however retains the extra-diegetic announcement that makes the reader aware of the succeeding issue. In total there are three versions of this full page which all contain elements or have a position in the physical book which can influence the way time and space are perceived. The most recent edition attempts to return to the original page composition, but for some reason the underlining of the sun's importance to Swamp Thing as a character is left out. So, the effect of the full page is clearly dependent upon the physical form of the comic book it appears in, and the insensitivity to this in a reproduction of a comic book in a different format might have some implications for the way the reader perceives the rhythm of the story and especially its spatio-temporal effects⁵. But what makes this serene and calm situation a moment of apocalypse? And why are spatio-temporal conceptions in the apocalypse similar to that of the full page? In the next section, I explicate these claims by focusing on the apocalypse and particularly Moore's interpretation of it.

It is time for an apocalypse.

Moore has noted:

I think the world is just a construction of ideas, and not just the physical structure, but the mental structure, the ideologies that we've erected. That is what I would call the world. Political structures, philosophical structures, ideological frameworks, economies. These are actually imaginary things, and yet that is the framework that we've built our entire world upon. (Rosen 2008, p.2)

Moore's description of how he perceives 'apocalypse' underlines how the concept of the apocalypse has gone through several changes historically, which has been mapped out in various approaches to apocalyptic writing (Rosen 2008, p. xi-xxvi) Post-modern apocalyptic narratives build on previous conceptions, and among these, two main versions of the apocalypse are dominant: 'the Apocalypse' (with a capital A) is specifically religious and elaborately fleshed out in the Book of Revelation, and 'the apocalypse' in its secular use developed later as a general term for 'the End of the World'.

The original meaning of the word 'apocalypse' comes from Greek apokalypsis, 'unveiling', as in the revelation of God's plan (Rosen 2008, p.xiii). This plan includes God's judgment and what comes after: the New Jerusalem, which is the reward for true believers. In post-modern narratives of the apocalypse, 'apocalypse' loses its specific reference to the Christian Apocalypse from the Book of Revelation but re-invents some of its traditional elements, like the judgment of people, the emergence of a New Jerusalem as a new and better world, etc. In some post-modern narratives, the idea of 'apocalypse' as a revelation of a plan, a structure of meaning

to take the place of the current one, is kept and the concrete ending of the world as a physical one is abandoned. Instead, the apocalypse is imagined as a partial destruction or the emergence of a different view of the world. The apocalypse becomes a disruption of the way people think instead of a destruction of the physical world.

It is this version of the apocalypse that Moore expresses in the above quote -- the end of the world as a metaphysical transformation that envisions some sort of New Jerusalem. The new world has to do then with alterations in our perception, how we are able to conceive our world and how we interact with the systems of belief we surround ourselves with. This way of thinking of the world and its dependence upon how the people in it perceive it is central to the various apocalypses Moore choreographs throughout his oeuvre. Some of the apocalypses are more traditional pending apocalypses concerned with the destruction of the planet through a manmade catastrophe, like the possibility of destruction through nuclear war in *Watchmen* or the potential for environmental disaster in *Swamp Thing*. However, the apocalypses that are carried out and actually take place within the narrative in Moore's work are mostly varieties of the re-configuration of the way people think about reality, whether it is about the world in general, the personal world of an individual, or somewhere in between. The apocalypses in Moore's work have not lost all of their religious connotations, but instead of referring to a particular kind of religion, they appear as experiences that convey a kind of divine insight. The apocalypses are played out as illuminations that further the insights of the main protagonists and have a transformative character, but this religious aspect is no longer tied to Christianity's version of the Apocalypse.

In returning to the discussion of *Swamp Thing* it becomes clear that in the secular apocalyptic moment on page 23 in "Roots" (Fig.1), *Swamp Thing* experiences an upending of

his identity and sense of self that is a small subjective apocalypse in a full page moment where his messianic features are foregrounded. In the moment, Swamp Thing makes peace with his existence and briefly reaches an insight into the divine, a potential he will continue to develop for himself as the series moves onwards from this point. As such, the temporal qualities of the full page are here invoked to give it its sense of moment as insight, moment as epiphany, and also to signal the apocalyptic sense of self that the creature experiences⁶. The full page here encompasses the end of an era, a moment in which something is definitely terminated and yet simultaneously promises the continuation of Swamp Thing in an altered incarnation. The moment in the full page is here both singled out as independent and important on its own as well as achieving meaning from the previous panels and the realization that there is more to come. The use of the full page encourages the reader to linger with Swamp Thing as he moves from feeling human to feeling plantlike and essentially as a godlike creature. In the full page the moment can expand its duration and the reader can see in more ways than one.

The reconfiguration of the apocalypse in a secular direction can be seen as a return to the concept of apocalypse as revelation, and it has implications for the temporal traits of the apocalypse. Elizabeth Rosen says about this translation of an old myth into newer narrative strands: “The apocalyptic conception of time is inherently a complicated one, for the story of apocalypse is simultaneously about the ending of everything and yet suggests a time afterward.” (Rosen 2008, p.xxiv). The apocalypse incorporates simultaneously the end of time as we know it, breaking with linear time, and a continuation of time. It is this double-quality of the apocalypse as both inscribed in time and outside of time, as end and beginning in one, that is mirrored in the way the full page constructs time and space. The full page is both stabilising, in the sense that it grounds the narrative progress and allows time to expand and exist outside of linear temporal

progression, and at the same time it is unstabilising because its inscription in a sequence with other panels never lets it rest completely. The complex temporal double-quality of the apocalypse as both end, eternity, and linear is one that the full page is able to negotiate within the structure of the comics because of its formal resemblance.

The apocalyptic moment after an apocalypse

The full page also occurs as formal element in connection with an apocalypse in Alan Moore's collaboration with Dave Gibbons in *Watchmen*, but as it will be argued in the following, the impact of the full page is somewhat different here. Apocalyptic imagery permeates this work, but let us focus on the event that the narrative leads towards (the fake invasion of the planet by a giant alien body). Here, the use of the full page immediately strikes the reader as the beginning of issue 12 has six consecutive full pages breaking the hitherto almost rigorous use of the 9-panel grid. Upon further inspection, it becomes clear that this sequence of full pages is an attempt to convey a 360 degree panorama viewed by someone turning on their own axis. The reader will recognize the scenery from the previous issues as the street corner many of the characters regularly pass by. Indeed, most of these characters are present there when disaster strikes, their paths converging at the fatal moment of impact.

>Figure 2. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. 1995. Watchmen. Chapter 12, page 5.<

The devastating images show the result of the catastrophe: the many victims crushed, blood running everywhere, smoke crisscrossing the page, and the fabric of reality being pierced by the monster (See Fig.2) (Moore and Gibbons 1987, p.1–5). It is Adrian Veidt, a.k.a Ozymandias, who orchestrates this apocalypse that kills 3 million people, as an alternative to a nuclear apocalypse. This fake apocalypse is not the kind that destroys the physical world but only a small fraction of it. The apocalyptic event is staged to help deliver the actual apocalypse,

which is a transformation of the way people think about the power structures of world politics. The world is changed in that the Americans and the Russians suddenly see each other as allies instead of enemies because of the appearance of a common adversary that unites them.

Ozymandias' version of an end of the world carries within it a motif of the biblical Apocalypse -- the old world has to perish so that a New Eden can arise instead. The imagined threat of an alien invasion, which is made plausible by the creature in the streets of New York furthers the potential for peace. The full pages are wordless except for small diegetic text snippets which underline the apocalyptic imagery by alluding to the end of the world: "Pale Horse – Krystalnacht" (with reference to the Book of Revelation and the pogrom of Jews on November 9th 1938) , "Utopia (the ruined sign of the Utopia Theater) – *The Day the Earth Stood Still*", and the small question "WAR?".

The beast of this apocalypse is paradoxical, as are the moral consequences of the ending, since the alien that invades the city is both a beast and a divine being that can bring on a New World not founded on the promise of atomic destruction⁷. There is an element of enlightenment when Dr. Manhattan realizes the nature of this catastrophe. As readers, we glimpse in these visual representations of a post-apocalyptic moment the entirety of the grand scale of this experiment and have a brief but brutal realization of the extent of Ozymandias' cruelty disguised as benign intentions.

Dr. Manhattan is the closest thing to an actual deity in *Watchmen* since he possesses a certain amount of omniscience, so his personal enlightenment is also paradoxical, but it is emphasized in the story that Ozymandias has managed to keep the knowledge of the future from Dr. Manhattan in this incident by scrambling his foresight through technological means. Dr. Manhattan is enlightened along with the rest of us as the full pages appear in #12. The use of full

pages in *Watchmen* does rely on the double quality of the moment as a horrible contained moment in time, which in itself allows for life and time to go on. This effect of shock is more prominent because of the use of the 9-panel grid hitherto in the story, which has become the norm and has acted as a kind of visual rhythm that structures the reading. The spatio-temporal qualities of the full pages in connection with the *Watchmen* apocalypse are different from the one in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* because they appear in sequence. One of the purposes of this sequence is a representation of space in the 360 view of ground zero, and through this panorama effect it introduces a more linear temporality as the reader goes from full page to full page in sequence. This suggested experience of turning on one's axis does not have the same effect of a double conception of time as that of a single full page. Looking at the individual full pages, they encompass the moment as both very short and very long in duration, and this is particularly emphasized because of the absence of movement in the individual image. Since everybody is dead, nothing much moves and the stillness of the images enforces the individual full page's sense of time as eternal. The clock on the covers has been moving throughout the story as a doomsday clock showing the proximity to a destruction of the world. There is a movement in time from the cover to the panoramic sequence because the hands on the clock move from just before 12 to 12. This indicates a movement from the moment just before the impact and then clock stands still. Within the full page sequence, there is a suggestion of movements as the images display the space of impact in a circular movement on a vertical axis. The employment of full page here gives the reader a sense of the totality of the destruction but also suggests time stands still while the reader's focalization moves. By making 6 full pages, the moment is emphasized through formal elements, but it is not the same temporal effect as just one full page.

The full pages in *Watchmen* are paradoxical because they show the aftermath of a partial destruction of the world, and not as such an apocalypse in the physical sense, but this partial destruction initiates the apocalypse of the minds of people, which Ozymandias has relied on. This is a case of full page apocalypse, but it is complicated by the sequentiality of the full pages, the temporal quality of the full page that resembles the temporality of the apocalypse as described earlier. The temporal quality of the full page that resembles the temporality of the apocalypse is to a certain extent undermined by the attempt to show the surroundings in sequence using full pages. In some ways this *is* an apocalypse in Moore's understanding of the term and it does allow for the transformation of the way the world is perceived, but the means to any success of the apocalyptic transformation are questionable. The apocalypses in Moore's works are always complex and their execution does not only rely on the effect of the full page, but some of the temporal effects of this element can resemble the temporality of the apocalypse no matter how successful it is.

Back to Hell

The success of the diegetic apocalypse in Moore's collaboration with Eddie Campbell, in *From Hell*, is also questionable because its result is not quite as intended by the character attempting to execute it. Obviously this failure is intended by the creators of the work. In *From Hell*, a full page occurs at a time when one of the protagonists arranges the birth of a new century as part of his personal illumination and attempted transcendence into the realm of the gods. As a retelling of the infamous Jack the Ripper killings, *From Hell* also focuses on the motivation of the killer and almost immediately establishes Queen Victoria's personal physician William Gull as the perpetrator. The murders of the prostitutes serve as the ritualistic means to bring Gull's version of a New Jerusalem about, but as the sequence with Gull in the future (Moore and Campbell

1995, p. 20–22) it is doubtful whether this new world is really a better one. When Gull is asked to take care of the problem of some prostitutes blackmailing Queen Victoria's son, he sees this as an opportunity to kill the women as part of a ritual intended to change the future world and deliver himself to divinity. The scene showing his vision into the future makes him realize that the world he envisions is not the one that is coming. This is done through a juxtaposition of images from the future showing office buildings and computers with the image of Gull is wandering around frustrated with the enormous architecture and the life that people live in this future. Significantly Gull gets a glimpse of his New Eden in yet another full page (Moore and Campbell 1994, p. 40) where the dominant futuristic building is further emphasized by Gull's perspective looking from the ground up. Gull's plan is absurd and his failure at making the world better place (as his own vision shows) by slaughtering poor, disempowered women can come as no surprise. It is the ramblings of a mad megalomaniac man, but one of power and connections who is free to misuse this power at will.

It is also debatable whether Gull actually manages to go upwards in his movement, as this birth of a new century is closely linked with a personal divination of Gull in which he hopes to enter Heaven and take up a place among the ancient gods there. There is a sense of failure involved in Gull's project partly because he apparently misses the last victim, Mary Kelly and fails to complete the ritual, and partly because the future he glimpses is so unlike the new and improved century he envisioned. When Mary senses Gull lurking as a ghostlike presence she damns him to Hell, and Gull comments: "and this perplexing vision is the last thing that I see as I become"(Moore and Campbell 1996, p.2 3). In this moment of individual apocalypse, the full page appears. It is time without a frame, entirely white except for the very small writing, "God and then I..." (Moore and Campbell 1996, p. 24). The following page zooms out in consecutive

panels from Gull's eye, and his keeper in the mental asylum announces his death with the ambiguous sentence, "He's gone." (Moore and Campbell 1996, p.26). The full page again marks a passage and an end as well an epiphany. Gull dies and his life ends, but he has high hopes that his murder cycle will entitle him to divinity, granting him eternal life. He's gone -- but where has he gone to? The profane setting in which Gull expires next to the copulating asylum employees might suggest a slightly less divine aspect of his departure. If Jack the Ripper came 'From Hell', and considering Mary's curse "Clear off back to Hell and leave us be!" (Moore and Campbell 1996, p.23), might we not suggest this is where he ends up going?

The full page in which Gull 'becomes God' is significantly empty of visual content. The empty white page can be interpreted as a representation of a near-death experience kind of light, God's light. If the full page is not an actual representation, it symbolizes an existential emptiness or void that empties out Gull's claim that he becomes God, the annulment of his utterance. The full page's special temporal effect is outside of time and inscribed in linear time simultaneously. The effect of eternity is underlined by the lack of visual content that effectively blocks the reader's ability to anchor this moment in time and space. The full page slows down the reading pace, breaks the borders of the comic by being frameless, and points towards eternity and the divine. On the other the hand, the text does urge the reader onwards with the promise of "and then I..." which suggests a continuation. Gull dies, so when turning the page, this is revealed to the reader, who in retrospect can conclude that the ellipses did not indicate a further sentence. This little text bit however points forward and links this full page with the following in a way a finished sentence wouldn't have.

Gull's attempt at creating a new world for a new century does not happen in the way he had hoped. Whether this is due to a flaw in his execution of the plan or can be attributed

to the general megalomaniac aspect of his aspirations is not important here. In the moment of his personal apocalypse the full page is used because of its ambiguous temporal qualities of a moment, which is both part of and not. This is a full page moment in as well as outside of linear time, somewhere along the way to eternal bliss, eternal damnation, or plain atemporal, blank nothingness.

Picture perfect apocalypse

The apocalyptic moment is more positive in the series *Promethea*, which Moore created with artist J. H. Williams III, and not surprisingly, it occurs in a full page. Protagonist Sophie Banks is guided by former incarnations of her alter ego Promethea through a tour de force of acquiring knowledge. Eventually, she is pointed towards the goal of her journey: her role as the midwife of the apocalypse. In *Promethea*, Sophie's enlightenment and education in magic and myth serves as a way to prepare her for the end of the world. As it turns out, the end of the world in series is an illustration of the Moore quote mentioned earlier. Moore uses Promethea as an incarnation of the concept of apocalypse as a change of beliefs, "Political structures, philosophical structures, ideological frameworks, economies". This apocalypse changes the way characters in the story think about themselves and the world and relies heavily on the imaginative impact of the collective forces of several people. At the reader level, Moore intends the reader to realize the potential of an apocalypse of this kind that changing the ideological structures through imaginative force can change the world. When the apocalypse does happen, Sophie Banks stops being the embodiment of imagination and ceases to be Promethea as the old world ends and a new world begins. This world physically looks different, which is underlined by a change in the

drawing style and appearance of captions, but it also feels different for its inhabitants because their changed world view is what caused the transformation.

>Figure 3. Alan Moore, J.H. Williams III and Mick Gray. 2005. *Promethea*: Book 5, page 130<

The full page apocalypse in *Promethea* is one of explicit optimism (Fig.3). At the verge of the apocalypse, the division between represented and representational world starts breaking down as the borders between the diegetic action and the extra-diegetic action is traversed a number of times. *Promethea* speaks directly to the reader (Moore 2004, p. 21) in a metaleptic crosscutting which also includes a visual representation of the reader on the pages of the book (Moore et al. 2004, p. 22). Near the end, the writer and artist actually appear within the story's reality, highlights the relationship between their creating imagination and their imagined creation (Moore et al. 2004, p.23). When the apocalypse happens in a full page, the globe of the Earth is floating in space on a backdrop of a giant sun with a face on it (Fig.3) (Moore et al. 2004, p. 24). Despite the confusion of the previous pages with meta-textual occurrences that blur the border between the diegetic and extra-diegetic world, these pages of meta-textual disruption which precedes the apocalypse full page are kept in the 9-panel grid. The moment of enlightenment is reserved for the full page, and the continuation of the story after the apocalypse happens in the next issue. This full page is overtly didactic, as the previous panel's text is "Now there is light" (Moore et al. 2004, p.23), a reference to Genesis and the creation of the world that suggests that the world comes full circle and begins anew. Like most of the full pages discussed in this article, this apocalyptic full page has very limited verbal text. The eternal quality of the full page is weighing in as the light of the smiley-faced sun illuminates the physical world of the

planet. As the extra diegetic text proclaims “Next: the radiant, heavenly city”, the narrative goes on, but this moment is prolonged because this pictogram apocalypse happens in the full page.

Because of its temporal quality of moment and its iconic depiction of the apocalypse, the Promethean apocalypse becomes symbolic as it is both part of a narrative, but also incarnates the concept of apocalypse as a revelation of the mind and a possibility for grand changes. As with Swamp Thing, the composition of this full page provides a sense of balanced tranquility and the apocalypse stands out as a moment of indefinite length.

Conclusion:

When the full page is used to depict an apocalypse it is useful not only because it has the spatio-temporal qualities of a large panel, but also because of its enhanced sense of acting out a moment. The apocalypses in Moore’s works are concerned with transformation, and they all incorporate a temporal quality that is two-fold as part of linear time and as embedded in eternity. This temporal quality is mirrored in the full page, which is part of a sequence but qua filling out the entire page also encourages a sense of eternity, a sense of being stuck in the moment. The moment, the 'øjeblik', is elastic, spanning from the blink of an eye to infinity.

The kind of temporal sensibility that is required in connection with the apocalypse is paradoxical in its simultaneous expression of an end of time and its continuation. The full page expresses the same temporal qualities as it is both part of a continued timeline of succeeding panels as well as stopping time to dwell on an aspect or a situation that is thus prolonged and halts the reader’s, and hence the narrative’s, progress. But the full page is part of a sequence. It is not only a lonely autonomous image and this means time will continue to take us to new world that succeeds the apocalypse. The effect of the full page is all the more poignant when it breaks a

long established traditional 9-panel grid, as is the case in many of Moore's works⁸, and the effect of the full page can be emphasized depending on its position on the physical pages.

The apocalypses in Alan Moore's works with various collaborators all draw on the visual quality of the full page because they need to create a moment in which the linear progression and the element of eternity is combined in order to convey the special temporality of the apocalypse. But it is equally important that this moment can be severed from its progression and expanded to make room for the insight that is essential to the way Moore thinks of apocalypse as a point of transformation, whether of one's self or of the imagined world. The full page can visualize the moment, and the moment is very visual. It is a time for insight and its temporal qualities reach over the border of diegetic action into the reader's reality and measures out the time it takes to decode the page, the time it takes to look.

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¹ In talking about 'full pages', I refer to a page where the panel takes up the entirety of the page sometimes (but not necessarily) encircled by a frame. This may sometimes be referred to as a 'splash' page or a 'full page panel'

(Duncan and Smith 2009, p.319). A ‘splash’ page is sometimes used in comic books to refer to the title page with the credits. A ‘full page’ should be distinguished from a spread which spreads across two adjoining pages.

² Alan Moore’s temporal experiments are present from the very beginning of his authorship and are influenced by both historical and contemporary Science Fiction in a number of ways, particularly when it comes to formal experiments, non-linear time as well as time travel and inner travels (Gray 2010, p.47+106). The apocalypse is also a concept that is frequently used in Science Fiction narratives.

³ Moore’s run on the series with artist Stephen Bissette lasted from #20 to #64.

⁴ As Elizabeth Rosen has noted, there are four different apocalypses in *Swamp Thing* (2008, p.5).

⁵ As Scott McCloud points to in his concept of “the infinite canvas”, web-comics can alter the way the traditional divisions between panels in comics are constructed (McCloud, 2000b, p.122), and the effect of the full page can be different in this other physical format.

⁶ Moore’s inspiration for sources about alternative conceptions of time and the circumvention of the self and ones own perspective through exploring an inner space includes Science Fiction writers like Michael Moorcock and Philip K. Dick (Gray 2010, p.47) whose gnostic experience of VALIS was later published as a book in 1981 and contains elements of personal apocalypse. The experience of a complicated spatio-temporal construction and the possibility of radically upending your own conceptions of reality also stems from Moore’s experience with mind expanding drugs like LSD (Gray 2010, p.40–41+197). A very vivid depiction of an LSD trip is realized on a spread in Moore and Kevin O’Neill’s *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: 1969* where it conveys an altered experience of reality and time.

⁷ The complex nature of this scene has been discussed in length by for instance Peter Paik (2010, p.23–69).

⁸ The momentary effect of the panel is, as Thierry Groensteen was kind enough to point out to me, more obvious when the full page is situated at a left hand page, because the effect of surprise is enlarged as the reader turns the page and takes in the panel as entire page.