

“A Thought Thinking Itself?”
Post-anarchism in Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles*

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Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles* (1994–2000) tells the tale of a diverse band of anarchist freedom fighters. Morrison’s narrative follows the adventures of a cell within a centuries-old revolutionary organization called the Invisible College. The leader of this cell is King Mob, a bald, pierced fetishist, who resembles Morrison more than a little. Three of King Mob’s fellow “Invisibles” present as women: the cross-dressing Brazilian shaman Lord Fanny, a slightly insane time-travelling redhead called Ragged Robin, and an African-American former cop who calls herself Boy. The cell’s newest recruit is Jack Frost, a foul-mouthed working-class punk from Liverpool. Together these Invisible revolutionaries fight against an interdimensional authoritarian conspiracy called the “Outer Church.” This Outer Church works towards a world in which political, economic and religious institutions unite to create a system of total authority. Meanwhile, the Invisible College works towards the opposite end: a left-libertarian world based upon individual freedom, inclusive diversity, and universal access to the means of happiness (including sex, drugs, and magic). *The Invisibles* can thus be read as an inspirational story of anti-authoritarian rebellion: a strange, beautiful, anarchist fairy tale.

Yet, *The Invisibles* is much more than that. Morrison’s comic is also a post-anarchist cultural artifact. Post-anarchism is a radical form of anarchist theory that first emerged in the 1980s. It draws on twentieth century post-structuralism and post-modernism to extend anarchism’s critical power beyond its traditional targets, capitalism and the state. Post-anarchism develops powerful critiques of the modern philosophies of subjectivity, sexuality, and semiotics. These critiques permit post-anarchism to deploy a sophisticated revolutionary practice, one which is suitable for use under contemporary conditions. This practice is tactical rather than strategic; it contains a post-anarchist protection against the temptations of large-scale strategic action.

The Invisibles articulates several important post-anarchist ideas. The comic advances a major *anarchy of subjectivity*. This anarchy subverts the modern notion of the stable, autonomous individual, replacing that discredited concept with a post-modern model that understands identity as flexible, fluid, and shifting. This anarchy of subjectivity includes an *anarchy of sexuality* which rejects the concept of sexual “normality” and

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emphasizes the liberatory potential of unorthodox sexual subjectivities. Post-anarchism has become known (if not admired) for this interpretive move (Franks, 2007: 130). *The Invisibles* also develops a compelling *anarchy of the symbolic*. The comic warns us of the oppressive power of symbolic language, and shows us how we can resist that power by moving beyond subject-centered language. The ultimate destination of *The Invisibles'* narrative (and of the Invisible revolutionaries who inhabit that narrative) is a purely symbolic realm that has been purged of the language of subjectivity. Morrison calls this realm the Supercontext. The comic examines the era of simulation, a time when life has been thoroughly colonized by the images of the spectacular mass media. The Invisible College uses the techniques of the 1960s Situationists to seize control of simulation and spectacle. Finally, *The Invisibles* develops a post-anarchist critique of dualistic thought. At first Morrison's narrative appears to represent a Manichean struggle between the forces of authority (Outer Church) and those of freedom (Invisible College). Yet the book slowly subverts its own Manichean logic. *The Invisibles* ends up promoting an *ontological anarchy* that rejects all dualisms, merging forces that seem fundamentally opposed into the joyful ontological unity of the Supercontext.

“Let’s do a Comic Together! Let’s Save the World!”: Context and Supercontext

Every superhero team has an origin story. This is the origin of the Invisible College. Grant Morrison grew up in a poor working-class family in Glasgow. Morrison notes that he drew on the anti-authoritarianism that comes from growing up poor to create the Jack Frost character (quoted in Meaney, 2011: 313), so Jack is the second Invisible who looks like Morrison. As a teenager, Morrison read “philosophical” comics about magic like *Doctor Strange* (quoted in Meaney, 2011: 340). By the age of 17, he was writing his own comics, for reasons at least partly political. “I was growing up in Thatcher’s Britain, and I was desperate,” he recalls (quoted in Gunn, 2014: n.p.). In 1988, Morrison was “discovered” by DC Comics, one of the largest American comics publishers. Along with Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman, Morrison was part of the “British Invasion” which took American comics by storm in the 1980s (Hiatt, 2011). Morrison was especially influenced by Moore’s *V for Vendetta*, a post-anarchist political fable (see Call, 2008) that Morrison took as a model for the way comics should be (Meaney, 2010). From 1992 on, Morrison says that he was “really involved” with magic, drugs, and weird sex (quoted in Neighly & Cowe-Spigai, 2003: 231). He started dressing like a woman and doing “insane rituals” (Edwards, 2012: 79); the Invisible Lord Fanny was Morrison, too. While Morrison’s politics remained generally leftist, his model of political activism became increasingly non-traditional (and specifically post-anarchist). “The best thing to do was just take some Ecstasy and dance, and hope that when you came down [...] the Tories would be out,” says Morrison (quoted in Hasted, 1995: 79). In 1993, Morrison took his own advice about political action and dropped Ecstasy with comics artist Jill Thompson, who would do some of the best art for *The Invisibles*. Morrison and Thompson went to a rave and said “Hey, let’s do a comic together! Let’s save the world!” (Morrison quoted in Meaney, 2011: 314).

The Invisibles occupied a very post-anarchist historical moment. Post-anarchism traces its origins to the work of Hakim Bey. In the mid 1980s, Bey introduced the concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), “a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen” (2003 [1985]: 99). Morrison followed Bey’s line of thinking precisely: “I’m not entirely convinced that anarchy as a philosophy is workable, and what *The Invisibles* ultimately deals with is the fact that the human imagination is where freedom is actually contained” (quoted in Hasted, 1995: 82). Speaking about the ideas behind *The Invisibles*, Morrison explicitly invoked the TAZ: “we are owned in certain ways, and we have to find ways to make sort of Temporary Autonomous Zones, as Hakim Bey called it” (quoted in Neighly & Cowe-Spigai, 2003: 38). Interestingly, Bey identified the band or affinity group as the “base unit” of the TAZ (2003 [1985]: 102). For Bey, the band was based on “spiritual affinities” rather than hierarchies, and the band became increasingly important in the “post-Spectacular Society of Simulation” (2003 [1985]: 102). An Invisible cell embodies the band as a model of social organization. Indeed, Bey argued that the greatest strength of the TAZ lay in its *invisibility* (2003 [1985]: 99). The basic premises of Morrison’s “Invisiblism” align perfectly with Bey’s post-anarchism. Morrison’s Invisible revolutionaries routinely take the kind of tactical post-anarchist actions that Bey called for: art-sabotage, ceremonial magic, tantric pornography (2003 [1985]: 58).

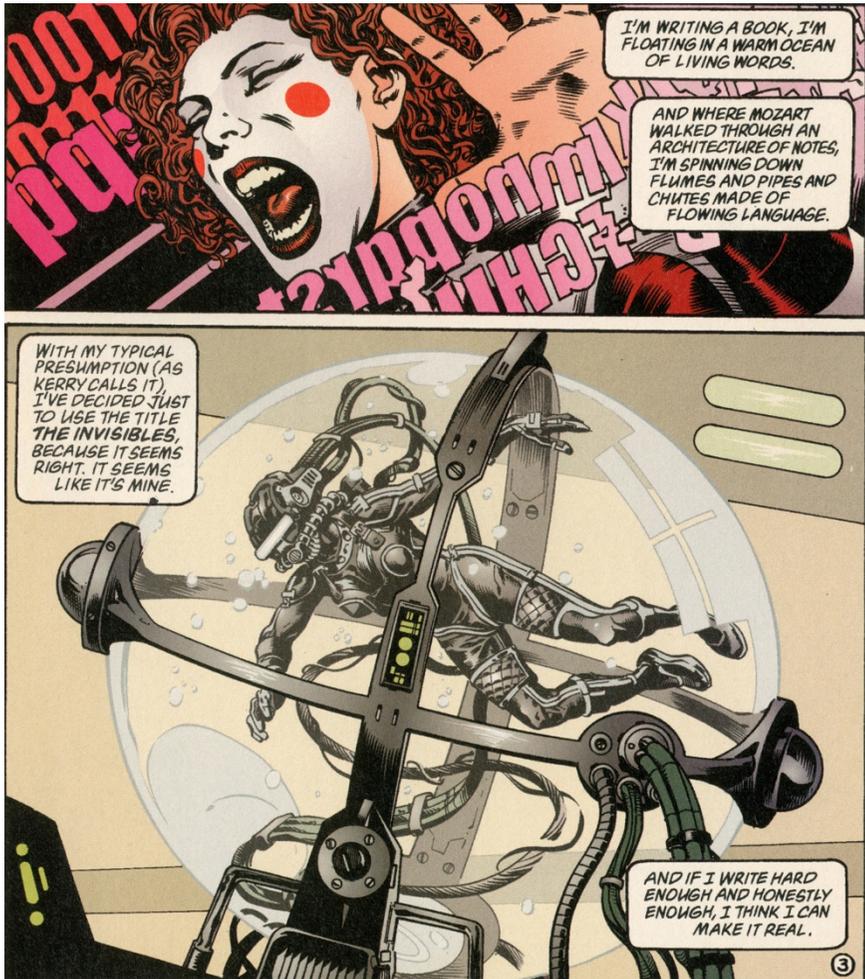
In 1994 (the same year *The Invisibles* debuted), Todd May published *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*. May described “a new type of anarchism” which rejected “subjectivity as a viable source of political action” and refused to view power as solely repressive (1994: 85). *The Invisibles* shares these rejections and refusals. Saul Newman theorized the anarchy of subjectivity (and brought the term “post-anarchism” to academia) in his 2001 book *From Bakunin to Lacan*. Newman suggested that perhaps revolution should be about escaping subjectivity entirely (2001: 67). Newman employed the theories of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to achieve this escape. In the mid-twentieth century, Lacan had postulated that human reality consisted of the Symbolic (the realm of language and culture), the Real (the realm of unrepresentable experience) and the Imaginary (the realm of image and fantasy). Since the Symbolic is the place of the Law, the Symbolic is a major target for post-anarchism (Call, 2011a: 186-7). *The Invisibles* uses the subversive potential of the visual Imaginary to resist the Symbolic; this is an important implication of Morrison’s insight that freedom is located in the imagination. But although the comic undeniably mounts an Imaginary challenge to the Symbolic order, it also shows how the fragmentation of subjectivity can enable a recuperation of the Symbolic.

The anarchy of subjectivity includes a crucial anarchy of sexuality. Newman argues persuasively that the problem of essentialism is *the* political problem of our time (2001: 4). Essentialism is so problematic because it promotes the tyranny of normality (Newman, 2011: 3). Post-anarchism challenges this tyranny by deploying provisional, flexible sexual identities built around alternative sexual practices. Post-anarchist sexuality disrupts essentialist or normalizing forms of sexual identity by endorsing queer and kinky sexualities like LGBTQ, BDSM, fetish, etc (Call, 2011b: 131). These sexualities help to promote post-anarchist ethics and politics (Call,

2011b: 132), e.g. by emphasizing the crucial importance of consent (a fundamental anarchist value). During the 1990s, representations of alternative sexualities like BDSM became increasingly common in American pop culture (Weiss, 2006). This made it easier for Grant Morrison to offer images of revolutionary sexuality in *The Invisibles*. The comic implements post-anarchist sexuality through the fetishism of King Mob, the female dominance of Ragged Robin, and the gay cross-dressing sexuality of Lord Fanny. Morrison says that he “wanted *The Invisibles* to make revolution sexy” (quoted in Neighly & Cowe-Spigai, 2003: 253). To achieve this, he deliberately connected revolutionary politics to the politics of alternative sexuality.

Post-anarchism is centrally concerned with the oppressive power of symbolic language. Many post-anarchists are inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who declare that “language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience” (1987: 76). For them, language is authoritarian. Nor is revolutionary language immune to power. Lacan notes that “the irony of revolutions is that they engender a power that is all the more absolute in its exercise [...] because it is reduced more completely to the words that signify it” (2006: 234). *The Invisibles* represents this irony through the Key drugs, powerful psychoactives, which cause the user to perceive words as the objects they signify. The Key drugs collapse signifier into signified, Symbolic into Real, and so reveal the awful power of language. But *The Invisibles* also represents an important tactic of linguistic liberation. Deleuze and Guattari argue for the revolutionary potential of what they call minor languages, linguistic practices that make dominating languages “minoritarian” (1987: 106). Deleuze and Guattari give women as their main example of a group that speaks minor languages (1987: 106). *The Invisibles* offers the figure of Ragged Robin, a woman author of genre fiction whose minoritarian discourse turns out to be *the narrative of The Invisibles itself*.

By presenting one of its characters as its author, *The Invisibles* argues that there is no fundamental distinction between fiction and reality (Meaney, 2011: 188). Here the comic invokes another major trope of post-anarchism: simulation. Guy Debord and the Situationist International set the stage for the analysis of simulation in the 1960s. Debord defined situationism as “an artistic avant garde” experimenting in “ways for freely constructing everyday life” (Knabb, 2006: 402). The Invisible College is a similar avant garde. Debord called for a revolutionary alteration of culture that would supersede “spectacles separated from life” (Knabb, 2006: 393). In the 1960s – and especially during the revolutionary events of May 1968 – the Situationists launched critical assaults on the Spectacle, on simulation, and on the Symbolic order that made such things possible. They used the *dérive*, “a technique of rapid passage through various ambiances” of psychogeography (Knabb, 2006: 62), in order to make familiar spaces strange. They used *détournement*, “the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble” for revolutionary political purposes (Knabb, 2006: 67). The Invisible College uses both techniques.



“Ragged Robin in the Ganzfeld Tank.”
Art by Chris Weston and Ray Kayssing.

In the 1980s, Jean Baudrillard built upon the work of Debord and the S.I. to create a theory of simulation. Baudrillard argued that the late twentieth century was increasingly a world of simulation, a world in which the distinction between reality and simulation was never clear (if such a distinction existed at all). In the Lacanian model, what we call reality consists of the Real filtered through the Symbolic (Marini, 1992: 46). But in the era of simulation there was *only* the Symbolic. There was no Real for the Symbolic to filter, hence no reality. This era began with the “liquidation of all referentials” (Baudrillard, 1994 [1981]: 2). Baudrillard’s world of pure, non-referential simulation might seem to demonstrate, once again, the inexorable tyranny of the Symbolic. Yet simulation theory offers a surprisingly viable revolutionary tactic, for this theory suggests that radical forces could seize the engines of simulation and use those engines for their own liberatory purposes. This insight provides the Invisible College with its revolutionary practice, which is post-Situationist. The Invisible revolutionaries make tactical use of Spectacle and simulation to advance their post-anarchist agenda. This practice corresponds to the post-Situationism of the contemporary radical philosopher Jacques Rancière, who locates the “emancipation” of the spectator in the recognition that “every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor [...] the spectator of the same story” (Rancière, 2011: 17). Rancière rejects the idea of the “passive” spectator; he views the spectator as an active agent of cultural and political change. Morrison also emphasizes the agency of the spectator. “Embrace the Spectacle,” says Morrison. “Learn how to use it” (quoted in Neighly & Cowe-Spigai: 2003: 253).

Hakim Bey’s 1987 manifesto “Post-Anarchism Anarchy” included a Baudrillardian call to take up the struggle where the Situationists left off in 1968 (Bey, 2003 [1985]: 62). Bey declared that anarchism “comes closest to our understanding of reality, ontology, the nature of being” (Bey, 2003 [1985]: 62). Post-anarchism contains an ontological anarchy, and it has from the beginning. *The Invisibles* implements this anarchy, as when King Mob decides to reject revolutionary violence and “opt for *ontological* terrorism” (Morrison, 2012: 1198). *The Invisibles’* ontological anarchism manifests most clearly in the comic’s rejection of Manichaean dualism. Bey’s ontological anarchy proclaims that anarchy and king are one and the same (Bey, 2003 [1985]: 66). This becomes the message of *The Invisibles*, particularly in its third and final volume (1999-2000). As Nick James argues, Morrison’s ontological terrorism challenges the distinctions between anarchism and authoritarianism to create “a more relevant and less dualistic form of anarchism” (James, 2007: 436): a post-anarchism.

By the late 1990s, Morrison could clearly see the influence of his ground-breaking comic book. On television, the original run of *The X-Files* (1993-2002) drew on the same 1990s conspiracy paranoia that fueled *The Invisibles* (Meaney, 2011: 26). Pop culture was becoming increasingly Invisible. “What you got [then] was that whole thing with *Matrix* culture and the super-heroes coming back – *Buffy*, and the whole thing. And suddenly, there was the fetish gear, the short hair,” says Morrison (quoted in Meaney, 2011: 291). In 1999, the Wachowskis (then brothers, later brother and sister, now sisters) released their film *The Matrix*. This film borrowed its theory of simulation, its post-anarchist politics and its fetishistic aesthetic directly from *The Invisibles* (but without crediting Morrison). Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* gave

television its model of the post-anarchist superhero, especially in season four (1999-2000) (Call, 2011a). But post-anarchism first came to pop culture via the comic book. Grant Morrison brought post-anarchism to comics five years before the Wachowskis brought it to film and Whedon brought it to television. And, *The Invisibles* is not only the birthplace of the post-anarchist superhero. It also provides the origin story for a model of collective action that makes sense in the early years of the third millennium: the *post-anarchist superhero team*.

The Invisibles developed several concepts and critiques that would turn out to be central to the long-term project of post-anarchism. First and foremost, the comic articulated a radical critique of essentialism. This was a harbinger of post-anarchism's major critical trajectory. In 2007, Benjamin Franks identified the "rejection of essentialism" as one of post-anarchism's main emphases (Franks, 2007: 128). By 2016, Saul Newman could point to a "new political subject" whose "ontologically anarchic existence [...] is no longer defined by biological essence, vocation, project or destiny" (Newman, 2016: 37). Twenty years after *The Invisibles* modeled an anti-essentialist political subjectivity within the framework of pop culture, Newman found such a subject in the social world. Life had imitated art – or more precisely, "real world" social movements had evolved along with the pop culture artifacts that represented those movements, to the benefit of both.

The Invisibles also anticipated the rejection of strategic thinking and action that would eventually become a defining feature of post-anarchism (Franks, 2007: 134). Morrison's Invisible revolutionaries consistently favored the tactical over the strategic. *The Invisibles* promoted an ontological anarchy which, as Newman argued in 2016, frees action from "strategic rationality" (Newman, 2016: 10). The tactical model of political action which Grant Morrison's Invisible College utilized throughout the late 1990s eventually became the default model for activism in the social world. This model rejected large-scale strategic actions in favor of provisional, local, tactical interventions. This preference for the tactical over the strategic characterized the wide variety of radical new social movements which Richard J. F. Day described in 2005 (Day, 2005). Day examined the anti-globalisation, environmentalist, and indigenous rights movements, direct action groups such as "Reclaim the Streets" and "Food not Bombs," and radical art groups like "Art and Revolution" and "Bread and Puppets" (Day, 2005: 19-31, 39-41). These groups have shown a particular fondness for Situationist tactics such as zero-work and *détournement* (Day, 2005: 20-3). They have also made effective use of the tactical affinity groups and Temporary Autonomous Zones that Hakim Bey advocated (Day, 2005: 35-6). These groups and their tactics have helped to make post-anarchism something more than an abstract intellectual phenomenon. Twenty years ago, the tactical direct action of Grant Morrison's Invisible College gave late twentieth century post-anarchism a cultural reality; today the tactical actions of the new social movements give early twenty-first century post-anarchism a definite *social* reality.

Clearly, *The Invisibles* can help us understand the post-anarchist tradition of which it is a part, but the reverse is also true: the insights of post-anarchism can help us comprehend the subversive political potential of *The Invisibles*, and of comics in

general. Post-anarchism's fascination with the tripartite Lacanian model of reality is especially important here. Prose literature operates within Lacan's Symbolic order; no matter how radical its authors may wish to be, prose language always remains complicit with the Law and with authority. Comics, however, are an image-rich visual medium; as such, they can operate at the level of the Lacanian Imaginary. Imaginary pictures can approach desire and fantasy more closely than Symbolic words can do. Moreover, the Imaginary visuals of comic books reduce the risk that comics will inadvertently reproduce the prohibitions, restrictions and denials that lie at the heart of Symbolic language.

Yet comics participate in the Symbolic too, for they contain words as well as pictures. Comics have traditionally been viewed as a combination of words and images. But Scott McCloud, a respected comic artist and influential comic critic, believes that comics are actually much more than that. In his landmark critical work *Understanding Comics*, McCloud argues that "it's a mistake to see comics as a mere hybrid of the graphic arts and prose fiction" (1993: 92). McCloud views comics as a unique art form which has the power to produce "a kind of magic *only* comics can create" (1993: 92). For McCloud, the power of this "magic" not only exceeds that of prose and graphics considered as individual media; the power of comics is also greater than the sum of their graphic and prose parts. Not only can comics transcend the limits of Symbolic prose and Imaginary visuals; they can even transcend the limits of the prose/graphic combination, to create something truly new.

Tellingly, McCloud emphasizes the unique capabilities of the comics medium by describing comics, in the subtitle of his book, as "the invisible art." McCloud's book was published in 1993, a year before *The Invisibles* began; Morrison's "Invisiblism" bears traces of McCloud's theory of the "invisible art." McCloud argues that comics employ "the whole world of visual iconography [...] and the *invisible* world of symbols and language" (McCloud, 1993: 202-3; emphasis in original). Comics erode the boundaries between visible and invisible (McCloud, 1993: 92), between Symbolic and Imaginary, between writers and artists and readers. Comics permit their readers to partake of a radical new form of subjectivity, one which moves easily between the Symbolic and the Imaginary without becoming trapped in either. While pure prose always runs the risk of degenerating into language's authoritarian, subject-centered form, the ever-present visual aspect of comics effectively mitigates that risk. Comics present the possibility of a libertarian language akin to the "minor languages" of Deleuze and Guattari. The libertarian language of comics can draw upon the power of the image to free the Symbolic from its reactionary commitment to essentialist subjectivities. Read in this light, *The Invisibles* is simply the most explicit example of a post-anarchist possibility that exists throughout the medium of comics.

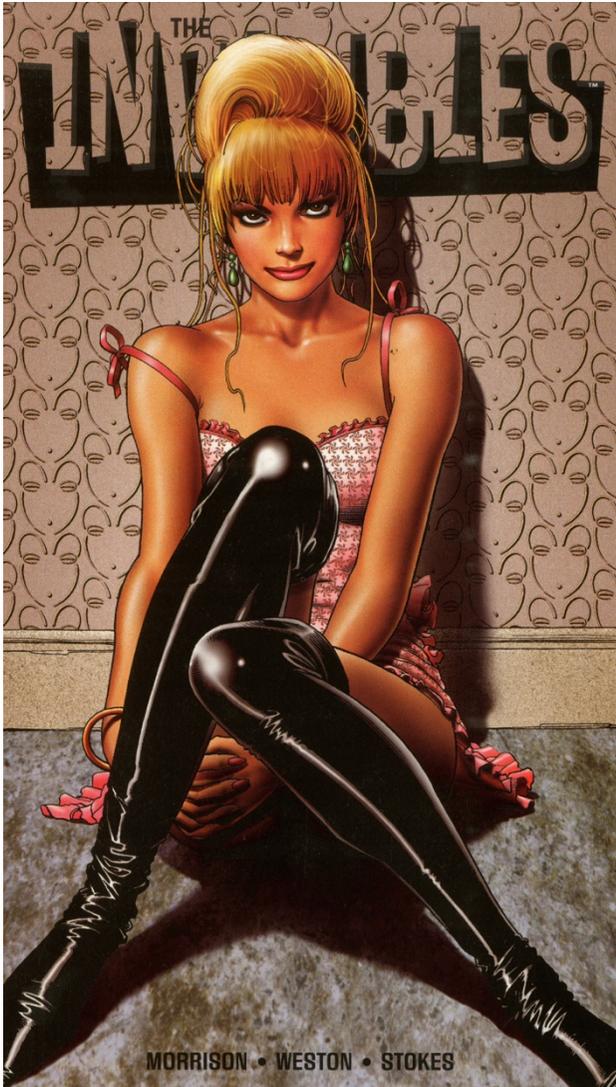
"When Have I Ever Been Myself, Darling?": Post-anarchist Subjectivity in *The Invisibles*

The Invisibles understands identity in purely post-modern terms. The members of the comic's Invisible cell occupy a broad range of racial, gender, and sexual identities

(Singer, 2012: 107). This fits with Morrison's aggressive post-modern egalitarianism. "I don't give a fuck what gender you are, or whether you're a worm or a zebra," he declares (quoted in Sneddon, 2012: n.p.). More importantly, members of the Invisible Cell change identities and take on each other's identities. The provisional nature of identity in *The Invisibles* makes it impossible for any character or group to attain permanent authority. As the Invisible revolutionaries modify, subvert, and trade their identities, they limit and undermine their political authority. Ultimately, these Invisible post-anarchists seek to abolish the individual self altogether and elevate humanity into the egoless world of the Supercontext (Singer, 2012: 131). The Supercontext can be read as a progressive social system based on the free swapping of identities (Meaney, 2011: 208). It is a representation of a post-anarchist society, for as Franks points out, post-anarchism is characterized by an emphasis on "changeable social identities" (2007: 134).

The philosophy of Invisiblism is explicitly designed to overcome individual identity. The Invisible College trains new recruits at the Invisible Academy, where instructor Elfayed teaches this: "Understand. There is *no* 'I am.'" (Morrison, 2012: 723). King Mob models the attainment of this teaching. King Mob is of course not a name but a title. During the Gordon Riots of 1780, the graffiti "King Mob" proclaimed the liberation of the inmates of Newgate Prison. In the 1960s, *The King Mob Echo* was a magazine for Situationist pranksters (Meaney, 2011: 314). When the Invisible College's King Mob is captured and tortured by the Outer Church's Sir Miles, he can convincingly claim not to know who King Mob is. "They're some kind of anarchist group from the sixties, aren't they?," says King Mob (Morrison, 2012: 442). So King Mob's "identity" is a radical political practice, and an effective one. He may be a Polish man called Gideon Starorzewski. This name is Anglicized to Gideon Stargrave, who is a character in the comic-within-a-comic that runs throughout *The Invisibles*. Gideon Stargrave was also the title character in an early comic strip that Grant Morrison wrote and drew for *Near Myths* in the late 1970s (Hasted, 1995: 56). Under torture, King Mob claims to be a writer called Kirk Morrison (Morrison, 2012: 441): here the author/character boundary is very thin. King Mob "is" Starorzewski, Stargrave and Morrison in some sense, but since his identity structure features multiple, nested layers of fictionality, he cannot have any fixed or real identity. Thus, King Mob implements the post-anarchist subversion of stable identities.

Lord Fanny models a different kind of subversive identity structure. Fanny was born a boy, and became a girl in order to follow in the footsteps of her female forebears, who had been sorcerers for countless generations (Morrison, 2012: 346-7). This "boygirl" eventually became the powerful shaman Lord Fanny. Fanny's identity is queer (Meaney, 2011: 67, note 15): Morrison's narrative suggests that a person of fixed gender could not have gained the mystic powers that Fanny wields. Only the post-modern androgyny of the boygirl who becomes a shaman could produce that kind of power. Fanny understands the nature of her non-identity: "Myself? When have I ever been myself, darling?" (Morrison, 2012: 336). Fanny's flexible identity



“Lord Fanny (with Mr. Quimper in the wallpaper).”
Art by Brian Bolland.

turns out to be vitally important to the Invisible College's political project. For example, Fanny successfully impersonates her female comrade Ragged Robin, in order to deceive the Outer Church's Mr. Quimper. "Darling ... ever get the feeling you've been had?" she purrs to the defeated Quimper (Morrison, 2012: 1134-5). Performance comes easily to the cross-dressing Fanny.

The organizational structure of an Invisibles cell reflects the flexible, fluid identity structure which is such a basic part of both Invisibilism (Meaney, 2011: 116) and post-anarchism. King Mob explains: "Invisibles cells tend to model their structure around elemental symbolism. We each take on a different role within the group. And every so often, we like to change it around and scramble it up a bit. That way everybody gets a chance to assume each of the elemental roles and all the tasks and responsibilities that go with it" (Morrison, 2012: 695). In this way, the Invisible College avoids the dangers of revolutionary vanguardism. This is a particularly post-anarchist aspect of Invisibilism; as Franks notes, post-anarchism typically repudiates vanguard tactics (2007: 128). Invisibles cells have no permanent leaders. When it's time to change roles, cell members gladly hand their role over to one of their comrades and take on a new one. King Mob is happy to give Robin his leadership role. "Well, at least I don't have to be leader anymore," he remarks (Morrison, 2012: 700). Two years later, the cell members switch roles again. "New personalities, new roles. The rules have changed overnight. That's how easy it is to be somebody new," King Mob assures his ally Mason Lang (Morrison, 2012: 1197). Mason is skeptical: "You can just change who you *are* that easily?" King Mob gives a very post-anarchist response: "I can change what I *do* that easily. It's almost the same thing." King Mob has no fixed identity; he is defined by his actions. If he changes his behavior, he changes who he *is*. In this case he throws away his gun (the symbol of violence which has defined him through the first two volumes of the comic) and opts for ontological terrorism (Morrison, 2012: 1198).

As the Invisible revolutionaries approach the Supercontext which marks the culmination of the comic's narrative, they work tirelessly to overcome all ego-based identities. On the eve of the Supercontext, King Mob watches a video broadcast which proclaims that "the very concept of the individual, like that of the bounded nation-state was not designed to survive the last millennium and must be transcended" (Morrison, 2012: 1466). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the modern nation-state was defined by its boundaries, its territoriality; for them, the nomadic "war machine" exists outside the sovereignty of the state and "prior to its law" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 352). This exteriority recognizes no archon and knows no law: it therefore represents a serious anarchistic threat to the nation-state. Deleuze and Guattari follow Bey in identifying this "outside of States" with "bands, margins, minorities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 360): Invisibles! By connecting the modern notion of the individual to the idea of the bounded nation-state, Morrison suggests that the former is equally vulnerable to the forces of nomadic anarchy. As the narrative of *The Invisibles* reaches its conclusion, its theory of subjectivity becomes explicitly post-modern. "Multiple personality disorder" becomes "a lifestyle option" (Morrison, 2012: 1466). Indeed, it is the preferred option. Douglas Wolk points out that the most enlightened characters in *The Invisibles* all have multiple personalities

(2007: 267). This corresponds precisely to Deleuze's post-modern concept of subjectivity. "Who speaks and acts?," asks Deleuze. "It is always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts" (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977: 206). In the post-modern condition, we are all multiple. The Supercontext beckons: the end of Morrison's narrative marks the beginning of a pure anarchy of subjectivity.

The Invisibles also models an anarchy of sexuality that presents consensual dominance/submission (DS) and fetishism as ethical practices. The emphasis on consent means that the sexual politics of Invisiblism are anarchistic. The Marquis de Sade appears in the comic as an eighteenth century member of the Invisible College. Sade summarizes problematic power concisely: "Authority and submission. There's civilization for you" (Morrison, 2012: 196). Sade, of course, is a radical critic of this "civilization," built as it is on authoritarian principles. Transplanted to the late twentieth century, Sade tours a club dedicated to the sexuality that bears his name, S&M (Morrison, 2012: 211). While the Marquis admires this "brave new world," he also recognizes the danger inherent in the exchange of power. "People are afraid to grow up and take responsibility for their lives. They want a mummy, a daddy, a teacher to punish them and tell them where and when to pee" (Morrison, 2012: 211). Here Sade is describing what the Frankfurt School called the authoritarian personality. This mentality is the psychological basis for fascism and other hierarchical political systems. It manifests in the figures of the father, the teacher, the judge and the governess: "Domination. Submission. Britannia in buckled leathers and spiked heels" (Morrison, 2012: 129). This is the oppressive kind of DS: the kind that is woven into the psychological and institutional fabric of society. Sir Miles shares this kind of DS with Miss Dwyer, a demonic representative of the Outer Church. Miles knows what Dwyer is: a "corpse-goddess stinking of death and lust" (Morrison, 2012: 480). Yet he cannot resist her. Miss Dwyer reminds Miles of his place in the hierarchy. "Get down on your knees," she commands, and he obeys instantly (Morrison, 2012: 471). "You're forgetting that little word . . .," she tells him. He whispers (in small letters) "Mistress." This is fascist, statist submission; Dwyer *is* Britannia in buckled leather, the strict governess enforcing the existing social and political order.

Yet, *The Invisibles* contrasts this reprehensible authoritarian DS with a very different kind, one that is ethical and erotic. The comic is centrally concerned with what the Invisible Mister Six calls "the correct use of power" (Morrison, 2012: 618). Its concerns about power are thus aligned with those of both anarchism and DS. Fetishism signifies power in *The Invisibles*, but the comic makes it clear that this power and the symbols that signify it are available to anyone. Despite his ruthless interrogation techniques, Sir Miles cannot positively identify King Mob, because "any number of men [. . .] involved in the 'fetish' subculture" would match his description (Morrison, 2012: 446). Here power's signifiers are detached from any particular person, and so King Mob can conceal his identity from Sir Miles. The sign of power is arbitrary, and the members of the Invisible cell make effective political use of this structuralist insight. When the cell members trade roles, King Mob gives the signifiers of power to Robin. The change in leadership is signified by a costume change. "Bad



“Robin’s fetish gear signifies her new leadership role.”

Art by Phil Jimenez and John Stokes.

luck, love,” King Mob tells Robin. “You get to wear the leather” (Morrison, 2012: 700). The next panel occupies a full page. Phil Jimenez (probably the best of *The Invisibles* artists) places Robin in the foreground, in a black leather bodysuit, studded leather harness, fishnet stockings, and black boots (Morrison, 2012: 701). Jack stares open-mouthed as this newly minted fetish goddess lays out the plan. “Work it, baby,” says Fanny. Robin’s leather fetish gear signifies her temporary assumption of the role of team leader. In that role she wields considerable power, but this temporary power was assigned to her by the role-switching lottery, to which all consented. The comic legitimizes Robin’s consensual power by eroticizing it. She becomes a Mistress, but unlike Miss Dwyer, her power is ethical.

About halfway through *The Invisibles’* narrative, the Outer Church’s Mr. Quimper takes control of Ragged Robin’s mind. This plotline gives *The Invisibles* a chance to contrast the Invisible College’s consensual DS with the Outer Church’s authoritarian dominance. Naked on top of King Mob, Robin wonders if she is the right person to handle the responsibility of being leader. “Sometimes you just want to be told what to do, you know?” (Morrison, 2012: 841). But that is just the Quimper talking. Quimper has become the policeman in Robin’s head, the psychological source of her submission to authority. As Quimper’s control increases, the nature of his power becomes clear. Robin plays strange games with King Mob in bed. “I’ve been a rebellious, insubordinate girl: you’d better turn me into a mindless, state-controlled robot before I cause any more trouble” (Morrison, 2012: 1009). This, of course, is precisely what Quimper has done to her. (It’s also a parody of what authoritarianism tries to do to everybody.) Robin’s comrades will not let Quimper’s statist brainwashing stand. Fanny discovers Quimper’s presence in Robin’s mind and liberates her from his control.

In the end, Robin turns out to be the most powerful Invisible. She is the one who brings on the Supercontext, by traveling through time. Robin returns from her time travels to find King Mob, moments before the advent of the Supercontext. “I’m ready to play with the grown-ups,” says King Mob (Morrison, 2012: 1480). His relationship with Robin has allowed him to grow up and take responsibility: he has overcome the authoritarian psychology Sade described previously. Sade could well say of Robin what he says of the twentieth century Invisible revolutionary Helga: “the women of this century embody so many of the strengths I dreamed of” (Morrison, 2012: 1317).

“Welcome to the *Word!*” The Advent of the Post-anarchist Symbolic

The Invisibles’ strongest post-anarchist element is its theory of language. Morrison’s understanding of language is structuralist. For him, “language makes things slippery. Language is allusive, it changes shape, it can be anything” (quoted in Meaney, 2011: 283). This corresponds to Ferdinand de Saussure’s thesis of the arbitrary sign. For Morrison, as for Saussure, there are no necessary connections between signifiers (language that names things) and signifieds (things that language names). In Lacanian terms, *The Invisibles* considers the elusive, mysterious relationship between the

Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The comic's most radical thought experiments consider the ways in which one of Lacan's orders might overwhelm, supersede, and consume the others. The Outer Church pursues a strategic elimination of the distinction between signifier and signified. They would see the Symbolic collapse through the Imaginary and into the Real. Their ultimate objective is a nightmarish world in which interpretation, language and thought itself are impossible. The Invisible College, on the other hand, collapses signifier and signified tactically and temporarily, to preserve the overall freedom of signification that the arbitrary sign provides. The comic presents the Invisible College's tactical assaults on oppressive forms of symbolic language as viable means for preserving freedom through signification. While Marc Singer argues that the larger project of *The Invisibles* is to transcend symbolic communication entirely (2012: 118), I argue the opposite. The ultimate agenda of Morrison's Invisible revolutionaries is to liberate signification by bringing on the purely Symbolic world of the Supercontext. Ironically, they use the Imaginary and the Real tactically in order to achieve this.

In the realm of the Outer Church, "things are stripped of all meaning, all significance, all association but that which is determined by Control" (Morrison, 2012: 720). Signification is impossible here; signifier and signified are one, and the comic presents this as a profoundly authoritarian environment. Quimper summarizes the reality of the Outer Church: in this place "what is, is. Nothing is open to interpretation" (Morrison, 2012: 1117). In this horrific world, there is only the Real; the Symbolic, which is the realm of interpretation, does not exist. The Outer Church also seeks to eliminate signification in *our* world: "things will be made whole and unambiguous" (Morrison, 2012: 1418). The revolutionaries of the Invisible College will fight to the death to prevent this apocalypse of the Symbolic order.

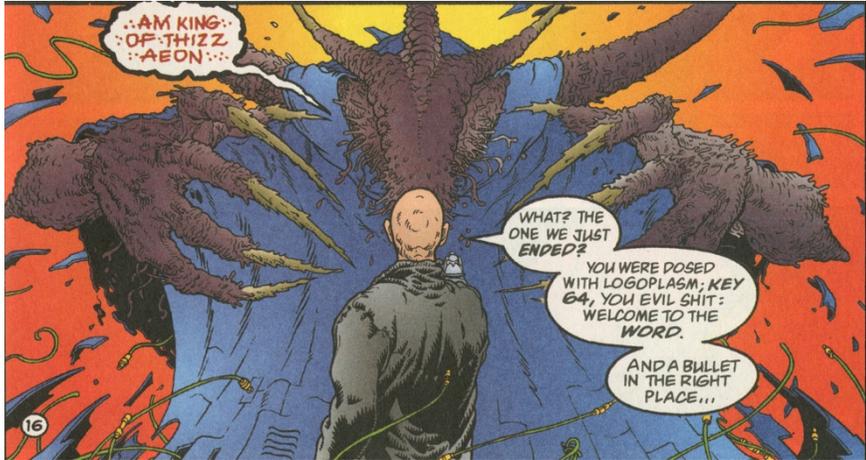
The Invisible College uses the Imaginary to good effect against the Outer Church, particularly as they work to subvert Quimper's control over Robin's mind. "I want to obey," says Robin, naked beneath King Mob. The image of Quimper looks on from the hotel room's mirror (Morrison, 2012: 1009). This suggests the Lacanian mirror stage, that powerfully Imaginary time when the subject identifies with an image and forms an ego. Here Robin appears to be identifying with the image of the authoritarian Quimper as he becomes her ego. She gazes into the mirror above her make-up table, removes the white "Raggedy Ann" makeup that constitutes her as Ragged Robin, and gazes into the mirror again. The reader sees the reflected image of the "natural" Robin, but she sees Quimper: in the next panel, she puts on a Quimper mask. "Uncanny, darling," says Fanny when she first sees Robin in the mask (Morrison, 2012: 1101). This encourages us to pursue a psychoanalytic reading. Quimper confirms this reading when he reveals that he has been using "the sick, suppressed memory of first betrayal" to control Robin: a memory of incestuous sex with her father (Morrison, 2012: 1131). It seems that Quimper has found a way to keep Robin trapped in this situation forever, and thus ensure that she never hears what Lacan called the Name-of-the-Father, the prohibition of incest. Without that Name, without the repression of incestuous desire, Robin could never enter the Symbolic. But this is where Quimper learns that the mirror image of himself that he has been gazing at is actually not Robin but Lord Fanny. Fanny gives the punch line:

“Robin was never abused by her father. The memory was a fake” (Morrison, 2012: 1140). The mirror works both ways. Quimper has identified with the false Imaginary image of the incestuous Robin. So, in fact it is Quimper who can never leave the Oedipal situation, Quimper who can never leave the mirror stage, Quimper who is denied entry into the Symbolic. Robin and her comrades have won this Imaginary battle.

The shamans of the Invisible College use magical tactics to preserve the Symbolic while disrupting its oppressive aspects. Morrison says that anyone who is interested in language will come to magic eventually (quoted in Gunn, 2014: n.p.). Lord Fanny knows “the secret common language of shamans – that language whose words do not describe things but *are* things” (Morrison, 2012: 399). In this magical language, signifier and signified are one and the same. Hakim Bey calls this language sorcery, “the manipulation of symbols (which are also things)” (Bey, 2003 [1985]: 22). The vocabulary of sorcery is “both real & unreal” (Bey, 2003 [1985]: 22). The sorcerer’s language is simultaneously Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, which is why it is so powerful and so dangerous. The Real aspect of such a language might overwhelm its other aspects. Magic could thus inadvertently advance the agenda of the Outer Church. But there is no risk that Fanny’s magic will produce a permanent crisis of the Symbolic order. She is too unreal herself, and she signifies too many different things: boygirl, sheman, shaman, Invisible.

Both the Invisible College and the Outer Church use the “Key” drugs, powerful psychedelics that make the user “unable to tell the difference between the word describing an object and the object itself” (Morrison, 2012: 465). These drugs eliminate the distinction between signifier and signified, forcing language to take on an unnatural referentiality. Marc Singer reads the Key drugs as “defiant assertions” of language’s referentiality (2012: 120), but I argue that they have the opposite effect. These drugs are the exception that proves the rule. The bizarrely referential language that they create only serves to highlight the *non*-referentiality of ordinary language. To be blunt, it takes hardcore hallucinogens to make signifier equivalent to signified. Sir Miles doses King Mob with Key 17 during his interrogation. Luckily King Mob, like Fanny, is many people signifying many things: Miles can force him into the Real, but he cannot keep him there.

Towards the end of *The Invisibles*’ narrative, the Outer Church conspires to bring the King Archon into our world. The King Archon is the deity that the Outer Church worships; it is the apotheosis of authoritarianism. The King Archon is the ultimate monster of the Real; its arrival would spell the disastrous death of the Symbolic. Sir Miles plans to use Jack Frost as the Archon’s host body, but Jack’s comrade Jolly Roger shoots Miles with Key 23. Miles’ temporary exit from the Symbolic order gives Jack the opportunity to consume the Archon (Morrison, 2012: 1446). “I ate him,” says Jack. The words seem strangely anticlimactic, but it makes sense that the victory over the Real would be expressed in a simple Symbolic sentence: subject verb object, and the Real returns to the Other Side, where it belongs.



“King Mob defeats the King Archon by shooting a signifier.”
Art by Frank Quitely and John Stokes.”

As King Mob prepares to enter the Supercontext, he confronts the King Archon one last time. Two Kings face each other; the fate of the Symbolic hangs in the balance. “You were dosed with logoplasm; Key 64, you evil shit,” says King Mob (Morrison, 2012: 1476). “Welcome to the *word*. And a bullet in the right place . . . is no substitute for the *real* thing” (Morrison, 2012: 1476-7). King Mob fires his gun, which emits no bullet, but only a red flag with the word “POP” in yellow. King Mob has fired a signifier; Key 64 makes it the Real thing. The Archon vanishes. Morrison narrates the King Archon’s defeat in a text box: “[t]he Supercontext absorbs the king effortlessly, welcoming his quaint ferocity, converting it to narrative” (Morrison, 2012: 1477). The Supercontext turns out to be a narrative zone, a Symbolic realm, a world of pure language. Thanks to the anarchy of subjectivity, this Symbolic world can promise liberation: the Supercontext is language uncontaminated by ego. “Who is speaking?” asks Morrison, now at his most Deleuzian. “Whose voice is this speaking in your head and reminding you that freedom is free?” (Morrison, 2012: 1477). The voice is no one’s, for the Supercontext is speech without speaker. This speech offers freedom of the post-anarchist sort: freedom from the tyranny of symbol linked to subject. On the last page of *The Invisibles*, Jack quotes Elfayed: “We made gods and jailers because we felt small and ashamed and alone” (Morrison, 2012: 1482). Here at the end, Elfayed and Jack name the traditional enemies of anarchism: religion and the state. They show how those foes have used the Symbolic to oppress us, and they point to a way out: “We let them try us and judge us and, like sheep to slaughter, we allowed ourselves to be . . . sentenced. See! Now! Our sentence is up” (Morrison, 2012: 1482). The series ends with these last four words, big, bold, and black. Then everything fades to white. This is the revenge of the Symbolic: language expands until it encompasses everything. The Symbolic consumes both the Real and the Imaginary (for there is no image in that final white panel). But this is a Symbolic purged of subjectivity and thus liberated from the tyranny of subject-centered language. Like the Invisibilism that spawned it, the Supercontext is a self-realizing discourse, “a thought thinking itself” (Morrison, 2012: 1367).

Marc Singer suggests that “the Invisibles seek to bypass both the tyranny of absolute correspondence and the chaos of floating signifiers by using a language of subjective experience” (2012: 123). He is almost right. The Invisibles certainly resist the Outer Church’s attempt to create a permanent equation between signifier and signified. They also reject linguistic chaos. There are no floating signifiers in the Supercontext, for there is no reality above which such signifiers might float. But the Invisibles do not follow the path of the subjective. Their path leads to the dissolution of subjectivity in the rarefied Symbolic realm of the Supercontext. Singer suggests that Jack’s final words move from the Symbolic to the Imaginary to the Real in a kind of “Lacanian regression” (Singer, 2012: 126), but I maintain that the ultimate destination of *The Invisibles’* narrative is the Symbolic itself. Douglas Wolk points out that at the end of *The Invisibles*, words replace drawings; in the final panels, Wolk notes, “the sign we see is generated directly by the written representation of language” (2007: 277). The Supercontext is the Symbolic in its most immediate form.

Ragged Robin’s writing offers us another example of subjectless language that expands to incorporate everything, including the Real. Robin comes from the future;

in her future world, she drifts in a language-processing “Ganzfeldt Tank,” writing a book called *The Invisibles*. As Meaney notes, Robin’s experience in the tank represents Morrison’s concept of the “fiction suit,” a device that allows a writer to enter a fictional universe (Meaney, 2011: 190). Indeed, Morrison says that *The Invisibles* “became the fiction suit concept” (quoted in Meaney, 2011: 302). Morrison used the idea of the fiction suit to enter the narrative as King Mob (also as Jack and Fanny). Robin uses it to write herself into the comic we are reading.

Standing naked in the desert with King Mob, Robin talks about the writing experience. “It turned out there *was* no author. Or maybe the author was *me*” (Morrison, 2012: 1177). The author of *The Invisibles* may be Robin, or Grant Morrison, or no one at all, or the reader of *The Invisibles*. Morrison says that a fangirl sent him the idea: “*what if Ragged Robin wrote the whole thing?*” (quoted in Neighly & Cowe-Spigai, 2003: 252). As Singer notes, *The Invisibles* shifts authorial control from Morrison to the characters and ultimately to the readers (2012: 106). Robin recognizes the danger of the fiction suit: “I’m scared if I write myself in, I’ll never get out. They’ll find me trapped here in my own words” (Morrison, 2012: 1157). But the fiction suit also offers a more liberatory possibility. It can make fictional language real. “If I write hard enough and honestly enough, I think I can make it real,” Robin decides. She understands that a highly concentrated Symbolic narrative can overwhelm the Real to become real itself. When Robin’s friend Kerry tells her that she is putting too much symbolism into the story, Robin insists that “it’s not symbolism, it’s reality” (Morrison, 2012: 1147). Her language has erupted out of the Symbolic order, consuming and replacing the Real.

“It’s All Symbolic”: Simulation, Spectacle and Symbol in *The Invisibles*

As the narrative of *The Invisibles* unfolds, the Symbolic gradually overtakes and displaces the Real. Thus, the comic’s characters enter the realm of simulation. In this realm, the signs of the real are substituted for the real itself (Baudrillard, 1994 [1981]: 2). Language may once have pretended to represent reality. But at the end of the twentieth century, “simulation envelop[ed] the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 1994 [1981]: 6). Representational language gave way to a language that is its own beginning, ending and referent. This language of simulation dominates the latter part of *The Invisibles*’ narrative: it is the liberated language of the Symbolic Supercontext.

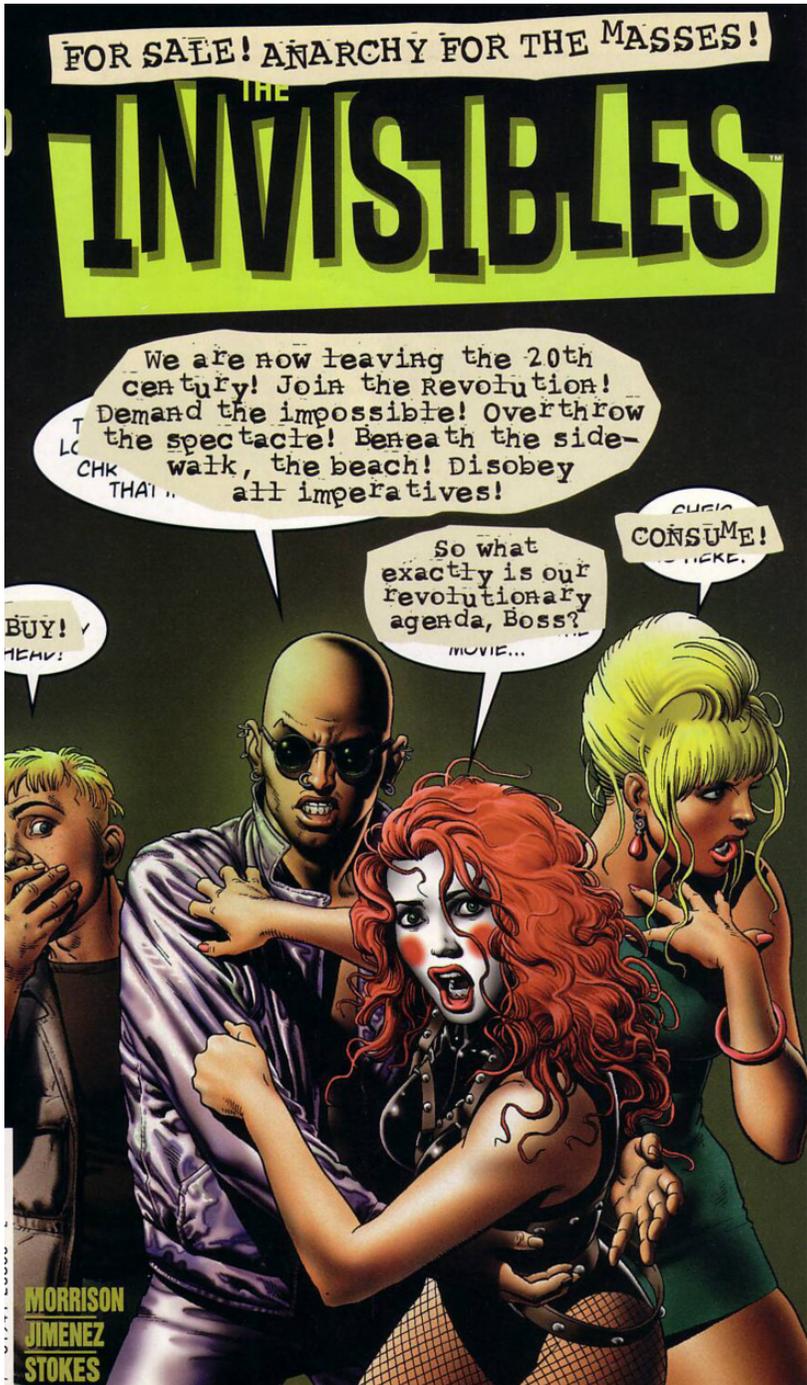
The Invisible revolutionaries gradually become aware of the simulated nature of their environment, and they become comfortable in that environment. Gazing at the horrific image of an Archon of the Outer Church, Jack says “it’s like something out of a film, like a computer simulation” (Morrison, 2012: 592). Jack begins to understand that he lives in a world where the simulation is real. He turns on the TV: “Is ‘Xena’ on anywhere? I gotta get a bit of fucking *realism* into my life” (Morrison, 2012: 949). Jack also understands that the level of simulation is increasing over time. “The world gets more like Disneyland every day, and it’s the same the other way round” (Morrison, 2012: 1239). Here Jack becomes a mouthpiece for Baudrillard,

who saw Disneyland as a perfect model of simulation (Baudrillard, 1994 [1981]: 12). King Mob is a bit more uneasy about simulation. “It’s like a stupid film. The whole thing . . . I don’t know what’s real anymore” (Morrison, 2012: 1064). Robin gives him the hard truth: “maybe *none* of it’s real.” King Mob shares his concerns with Jack: “what would you do if none of it was *real*, Jack?” (Morrison, 2012: 1091). Jack is delightfully unconcerned. “Don’t matter to me. I don’t care if it’s all one big magic mushroom trip, man. My head’s been right around the fucking block. I’m *bigger* than I was” (Morrison, 2012: 1092). Jack has discovered the secret power of simulation. If he embraces simulation rather than fighting it, then his life becomes deeper and richer and more interesting. He can become whatever he wants to be. King Mob finally comes to accept and cherish the reality of simulation. “The world’s getting more like *us* every day,” he observes. “It’s everything I ever hoped for. *Everything* is real” (Morrison, 2012: 1265). King Mob has recognized the power of pure simulation. Once the simulation becomes reality, those who have learned to live in the realm of simulacra can effect real political change there. Thus, Baudrillard argues that “it is in this tactical universe of the simulacrum that one will need to fight” (Baudrillard, 1994 [1981]: 152). This fits with the post-anarchist practice of the Invisible College, which prefers the tactical to the strategic.

Eventually the Invisible revolutionaries learn that they are living “in a world where the symbol [is] more important than the reality” (Morrison, 2012: 1184). Once they understand that the Symbolic has displaced the Real, it does not take them long to realize that they can control the Symbolic. In a world where the symbol is real, the ability to manipulate the symbol is equivalent to the power to change reality. Television may indeed “create the illusion we mistake for reality,” but, as King Mob realizes, “those same effective weapons are at our disposal” (Morrison, 2012: 1233). The Invisibles can seize the engines of simulation and use them for revolutionary purposes, e.g. by broadcasting “Invisible TV” (Morrison, 2012: 1217).

Nick James is quite right to suggest that the Invisible College’s “anarchist project is the endeavor to dominate the Spectacle” (2007: 447). Mason Lang – perhaps the most media savvy Invisible – says that, “the *image* rules the world. The hallucination has taken control” (Morrison, 2012: 1087). Mason understands that he and his fellow Invisibles live in a world of spectacle and simulation. He also understands that they must develop a political practice suitable for such a world. “How do we take control of the hallucination?” he demands. King Mob’s reply explicitly positions the politics of Invisiblism as Situationist: “Mason, you, me and Guy Debord can carry on this conversation some other day” (Morrison, 2012: 1088).

The Invisible College employs Situationist methods throughout the narrative. Jack first learns about Invisiblism by going on a Situationist *dérive* through London: “drifting aimlessly through the city, making it new and strange” (Morrison, 2012: 72). The most important Situationist tactic in *The Invisibles* is *détournement*, the remixing of cultural signs to produce radically different political effects. Interestingly, the Situationist René Viénet recommended the *détournement* of comics as a way of



“Brian Bolland's cover for *The Invisibles* volume 2, number 13.”

“restoring to comics their content and importance” (Knabb, 2006: 275). While the *détournement* of high art may undermine that art’s importance, *détournement* of pop culture artifacts like comics can have the opposite effect. Ironically, *détournement* of *The Invisibles* increases the power of the comic’s post-anarchist message. Brian Bolland’s cover for *The Invisibles* volume 2, number 13 features word balloons detoured in a blurry, uneven typewriter font, just as they would have been in Paris in the 1960s. King Mob issues Situationist slogans: “Overthrow the Spectacle! Beneath the sidewalk, the beach!” (Morrison, 2012: 961). In this story, a rival Invisibles cell forces King Mob’s cell to generate “auto-critique” and detourn their own speech. *Détournement* forces King Mob and his comrades into a brutally honest discursive environment. “My tits sell anarchy,” says Ragged Robin (Morrison, 2012: 967). “The most pernicious image of all is the anarchist hero figure,” declares King Mob. “A creation of commodity culture, he allows us to buy into an inauthentic simulation of revolutionary praxis” (Morrison, 2012: 967). Fanny’s speech is perhaps the most devastating: “the transvestite, far from being a rebellious or transgressive figure, actually serves the status quo by validating stereotypical images of femininity” (Morrison, 2012: 968). This Situationist auto-critique serves an important political purpose. It ensures that the discourse of Invisiblism will not become totalizing or totalitarian. As James notes, Invisible anarchism goes well beyond orthodox anarchism to reject “*all* authority, including the rejection by the anarchist of anarchist ideology itself” (James 2007: 441). This implies, of course, that the Invisible revolutionaries must also reject the authority of Situationism, and indeed they do. The final issue of the comic declares that “the Situationist diagnosis was trapped in the Either/Or Millenium” (Morrison, 2012: 1464). Even a revolutionary praxis as radical as Situationism could not escape from the rigid binary thinking that characterized the twentieth century. The political practice of Invisiblism must therefore become post-Situationist.

The narrative of *The Invisibles* tends towards a radical critique of binary thinking that culminates in an assault on all dualistic philosophies. As Meaney notes, one of the comic’s central ideas is “that Manichaeism is an illusion” (2011: 13). Jack uses a post-anarchist tactic against dualism: he mocks the Manichaeism. Satan appears in the comic as an agent of the Outer Church. When Satan asks if Jack knows what Manichaeism means, Jack (who *does* know; Morrison, 2012: 606) replies, “yeah, it’s somebody from Manchester” (Morrison, 2012: 1125). Satan asks a question that recurs throughout *The Invisibles*: “which side are you on?” (Morrison, 2012: 1127). Jack’s humor renders the very concept of a vast struggle between radically opposed worldviews absurd: “I’m on the side that’s got *butter* on it, I am” (Morrison, 2012: 1127). Other enlightened Invisibles share this skepticism about dualistic conflicts between good and evil. Helga interrogates Sir Miles: “The ‘Outer Church’ you fear and serve and the ‘Invisible College’ you want to destroy? *Same address*, Sir Miles” (Morrison, 2012: 1375). At the Invisible Academy, Mister Six reveals the great lie behind the Manichaeism worldview. “We are not at war. There is no enemy. This is a rescue operation” (Morrison, 2012: 1213). Here the comic presents one of the major insights of post-anarchism: “that there is no central political struggle” (Franks, 2007: 135). The Outer Church seeks the annihilation of opposites, which it hopes to achieve through the manifestation of the King Archon (Morrison, 2012: 1396). But

Invisible revolutionaries like Helga understand that “twenty-first century warfare is about *becoming* the enemy, recognizing no fundamental differences in your ideologies” (Morrison, 2012: 1397). The Invisible revolutionaries seek to merge with their so-called enemies. The Invisible policeman George Harper speaks of “merging opposites; the sun and moon, the good guys and the bad guys. It’s all symbolic” (Morrison, 2012: 1402). It is an apt choice of words. The ultimate destination of *The Invisibles*’ narrative is a Symbolic realm where language loses its dualisms, a place without I/you, us/them, good/evil, anarchy/authority. This place is the Supercontext. “Up for a spot of ontological terror?,” the man formerly known as King Mob asks Helga in the comic’s penultimate issue. “The name’s *Gideon*, by the way” (Morrison, 2012: 1457). Gideon has abandoned the name King Mob. He will not need this subjectivity, or any other, when he enters the Supercontext.

Since its inception, post-anarchism has challenged the “binary, Manichaean opposition” between society and the state which Newman views as characteristic of nineteenth century revolutionary anarchism (Newman, 2001: 36) (and which I view as characterizing *some* anarchisms of that period). *The Invisibles* embodies this post-anarchist challenge to Manichaeism by first presenting a classic struggle between authoritarians and left-libertarians – and then slowly, steadily subverting that struggle. Grant Morrison represents this subversion through the Supercontext, a post-binary environment which dissolves all dialectical dualisms. The Supercontext also represents the victory of a very specific sort of Symbolic, one which has been purged of egoism, essentialism, and the languages which underwrite such subjectivities. The Supercontext thus offers a possible escape from what Fredric Jameson famously called “the prison-house of language” (Jameson 1972). By the time Morrison’s Invisible revolutionaries enter the Supercontext, they have learned the major lessons of post-anarchism. They understand that Symbolic language can be a powerful authoritarian force. But they also understand that they can counter language’s authoritarian tendencies by leaving their egos behind and embracing the dissolution of their selves. Thus, they discover the irony that lies at the heart of post-anarchism: the post-modern proliferation of multiple intersecting identities means that an effective libertarian philosophy begins, ironically, where unitary individual subjectivity ends.

As they take advantage of this irony, Morrison’s Invisible revolutionaries develop and deploy a very post-anarchist political practice. Like the post-anarchist activists whom they represent and inspire, Morrison’s Invisibles consistently reject revolutionary vanguardism and large-scale strategic action in favor of small-scale, localized, tactical practices. By rejecting the strategic and embracing the tactical, Morrison aligns his work with that of post-structuralist political activists. Foucault and Deleuze, for example, advocated “localized counter-responses, skirmishes, active and occasionally preventive defenses,” arguing that such tactics could effectively challenge centralized, hierarchical power without reproducing such power’s forms (1977: 212). The emphasis on the tactical also aligns *The Invisibles* with the post-anarchist heirs of post-structuralism in the new social movements. *The Invisibles* thus provides both a sophisticated post-anarchist theory and a theoretically informed tactical practice. At the tail end of the twentieth century, Grant Morrison’s

Invisible College offered a post-anarchist political philosophy which would allow revolutionaries to understand the social and political conditions of the early twenty-first century, and a set of radical tactical practices which they could use to change those conditions. *The Invisibles* occupies a pivotal place in the history of post-anarchism: after the early theoretical experiments of Hakim Bey, before the emergence of a viable post-anarchist political practice in the early years of the third millennium. *The Invisibles* is thus an important bridge between the theory of post-anarchism and its practice.

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