In "Innovating Superheroes," Alvise Mattozzi charts stylistic changes in superhero comics through the 1970s and 1980s. Tracking formal shifts in narrative in titles like Green Lantern, Doom Patrol, Swamp Thing, *and* Shade, *Mattozzi opens up an often marginalized form to rich semiotic analysis -- breathing life into the dynamic potential of both comic book scholarship and semiotics alike. Lively and insightful, the following piece goes beyond the presumed status of postmodern texts as non-linear and self-reflexive, and looks into the very mechanisms that make these qualities important -- not merely as a cluster of aesthetic choices, but as a language in its own right.*

Innovating Superheroes

Alvise Mattozzi

I. Introduction

<1> Superhero comics have changed. They have passed through a Golden Age and Silver Age, they have been transformed, cancelled, revived, killed, deconstructed, reconstructed, revisited, etc. My aim is to account for part of these changes and show how superhero comics have been innovated. In order to track these changes I chose to compare different versions of a few DC Comics series, such as *Doom Patrol*, *Swamp Thing*, *Shade*, that had been cancelled and then revived and are known to have introduced relevant changes between the earliest and the subsequent versions.

	'40s	'50s	'60s	'70s	'80s	'90s
Green Lantern	_ 1949|	1960|_____	V 1972| 1976|	_____ _ _ _		
Doom Patrol			1963|____1968|		1987|V_V_1995|	
Swamp Thing				972|_1976|	1982| V_V_____ 1996|	
Shade				1977|1978|	1990|V1996|	

Table 1: Timeline of the series chosen as corpus of analysis. The "V"s show a major rupture after which changes take place.

<2> Before tackling the series mentioned, I will also analyze the *Green Lantern* series, known as one of the first series where, at the beginning of the '70s, radical changes were introduced. The Green Lantern is a classic superhero, much more prototypical than, let's say, Robotman (Doom Patrol), Shade or Swamp Thing. These latter are, indeed, more marginal characters in the DC universe and, when they were created, they were, to some extent, already innovative. For this reason, the analysis of the first issues of the *Green Lantern* series accounts for the standard features of the DC Silver Age superhero comics. Changes, variations and innovations will be tracked in relation to these features.

<3> I will carry out a semiotic analysis of a corpus [1] of comics chosen within the mentioned series in order to track changes at the narrative and the discursive level [2], by comparing different versions of the same series.

II. The Green Lantern

<4> Green Lantern [GL] is one of the most important Silver Age [SA] superheroes. He was a Golden Age superhero and was revived in 1960 in the pages of *Showcase* #22, as a consequence of the success of *Flash*, that had been revived a few years earlier. After few appearances in *Showcase*, GL had his own comic book written by J. Broome and drawn by G. Kane and J. Giella. The SA GL is Hal Jordan, a fearless test pilot, chosen to replace a dying space-patrolman. GL is named after the lantern-shaped battery of power that is used to recharge the power ring that gives Hal Jordan "power over everything [...] except what is yellow" (Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993:19).

A. The Silver Age: Green Lantern in action -- The narrative level

<5> Since the first adventures of GL -- who has to stop a stray missile, save extraterrestrials from a flying monster, fight against an "invisible destroyer," etc. -- action appears to be the central feature of the comic book, always represented on the covers, where we can see GL performing in very dynamic posture, often flying and always using his power ring. Even Hal Jordan's identity is bound to action. Indeed his secret identity is revealed by the way he fights: in the story "The Riddle of the Frozen Ghost Town" (*Green Lantern* #2) (Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993:134; 143), Preface, GL's sidekick, realizes that Hal Jordan and GL are the same person by recognizing the same fighting style. Hence, GL is an "action comic." However, "action comics" is not just a title [3], a genre or a marketing category, it is also a discursive program: a systematic articulation of discourse aimed at giving relevance to the narrated action. In order to show how this discursive program works in superhero comics and especially in GL's, I'm going to propose a deeper analysis of GL's first adventures on the basis of the semiotic interpretation of action.
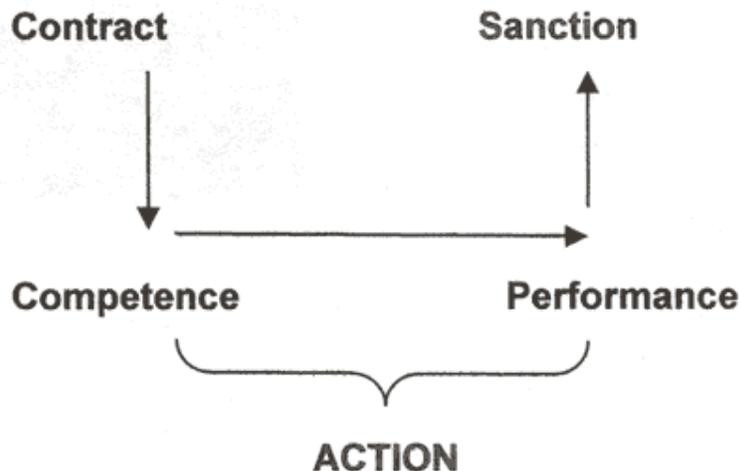

Table 2: The Narrative Scheme (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:203)

<6> According to the Paris School Semiotics (Perron-Collins, 1989) action is part of the Narrative Schema. The Narrative Schema is one of the schemas that A. J. Greimas (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:203) proposed in order to account for the organizing principles of all narrative discourses; it belongs to the Narrative level [4]. At an abstract level, narration is considered a process of conjunction or disjunction with an

Object of value. This process has been divided into four steps: Contract, Competence, Performance, Sanction [Tab. 2]. These four steps describe the interactions between three actants (abstract representations of characters and their functions): the Subject, the Object and the Sender. The Sender assigns to the Subject a quest for an Object and a set of values, coherent with the Object -- this is the Contract. The Subject has to act in order to get in conjunction with the Object: first it has to acquire the right Competence and then it has to perform. Action is, then, considered as the sum of Competence and Performance. Eventually, the Sender, through the Sanction, evaluates the performance of the Subject [5].

figure 1: GL's contract. [From *Showcase*, #22 (1959), now in Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993] © DC Comics.[Note on our use of images].

<7> "Action comics" should, then, focus on the two central steps of the Narrative Schema [6]. In fact, they do so, as shown by the classic GL comics that not only focus on action but on the most pragmatic aspect of

action: Performance. In superhero comics the tale of the origin usually accounts for the first two steps, Contract and Competence [Fig. 1 and 2]. Since Competence is ensured once and for all by the tale of the origin, in the rest of the series it can just be taken for granted, so that the superhero has just to perform. The tale of the origin accounts for the acquisition of (super)powers -- the acquisition of the power ring and the lantern for GL. In superhero comics, then, Competence is manifested by superpowers and Performance is manifested by the use of these superpowers. If we consider a series as a narrative, each adventure is just a performance. If we change point of view and consider a single adventure as a narrative, we can find the four steps nested within the series [Fig. 3]. Still most of the narrative focuses on action.

figure 2: GL acquires competence. [From *Showcase*, #22 (1959), now in Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993] © DC Comics.

B. The discursive level

<8> However, in the GL comics, the entire articulation of discourse is designed to give relevance to action. The discourse, indeed, focalizes on the narrated action that becomes its central element so that the narrated events -- mainly superhero's or villains' actions -- appear to be the only narrative and discursive source: Discursive mediation tends to be erased so that events and actions look like they are narrating themselves. What is then proposed is a neutral narration where any trace of its production is hidden.

figure 3: The Narrative Scheme nested within a story. [From *Showcase*, #23 (1959), now in Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993] © DC Comics.

<9> In order to see how exactly this happens in GL we have to consider how discourse is articulated in comics. Usually, comics articulate their discourse through two devices: Panel and grid; the latter can be considered a panel containing smaller panels. Beside their empirical manifestation, that can vary widely and that can also be absent, these two devices are visualization of the enunciation [7]. According to semiotics, enunciation is a "domain of mediation by which discourse is produced" (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:103). This domain "is logically presupposed by the very existence of the utterance" (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:103). Simplifying, we can say that enunciation is the way representation takes place and it is always presupposed by what is represented, the utterance -- for comics, the image inside the panel. As I said before, in comics there are two main levels of enunciative mediation: the panel and the grid.

<10> As for the panel, we can say that, assumed as enunciative device, it ensures the installation of the image: the rectangle of the panel designates the space where the image can take place. Through the enunciation a time, a space and actors (characters) are projected from a point of view [pov] into the utterance. The panel, indeed, confines a space and a time and it implies a pov. The process of projection of times, spaces and actors in the represented space is known in semiotics as "disengagement" (*debrayage*) (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:87). The reversal process, through which the represented elements tend to get back and render visible the source of the "disengagement" and enunciation itself is called "engagement" (*embrayage*) (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:100). In order to erase or render the least visible and relevant the traces of enunciation, it is necessary to have a maximal disengagement in which no reference is made to the space, the time and actors by which the discourse is produced -- for instance, any reference to the author, narrator or the reader -- nor any reference to the enunciative devices itself -- for instance, letting a character play with the line tracing the panel or with other representative conventions.

figure 4: Action-reaction alternance. [From *Showcase*, #23 (1959), now in Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993] © DC Comics.

<11> In GL, in order to render the discursive mediation of the panel and the grid the least relevant, we see that, in the panel, there is a neutral third person narration in caption and an external point of view on events. The world depicted in the panels -- disengaged -- is completely detached from the contextual world where the comics is produced: it has its own geography (space) and its own chronology (time). As R. Reynolds noted, "intertextual and metatextual continuity create a subsidiary world in which the process of time can be kept under control. While this process does not exactly abolish history from superhero comics, it does divorce the superhero lives from their historical context" (Reynolds, 1993:44). No observer or specific point of observation has to be tracked: the horizon line is usually central in

the panel and is parallel to the horizontal side of the panel. If a specific point of view is shown, it is always determined by the narrated action [Fig. 4]. Even the movements of the observer, from panel to panel, are determined by the narrated action, since they change in order to focus on the action. Indeed, there are no panels without something happening, there are no pure landscapes or descriptions of settings, that would imply just the movement of the observer. Moreover, images and captions are always in accordance, focusing on the same event, so that, no other point of view on the action is showed, objectifying the events. In doing so, a monological discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) is established.

<12> As for the grid, the neutralization of discursive mediation is ensured by using it only to distribute the sequence of actions: The grid has a standard orthogonal 2x3 pattern and all variations on the pattern take place in order to better display action [Fig. 4]. Also rhythm appears to be determined by action, since rhythm is mainly based on the action-reaction alternation [Fig. 4].

C. Action vs. Passion

<13> The action driven articulation of discourse almost entirely leaves out passions [8], emotions. There are, indeed, very few close-ups, that would be the easiest way to show emotions. Passions, emotions, are not just a marginal or omitted element of the superhero narrative: The narrative is constructed in order to explicitly oppose action and passion and, eventually, dismiss passion in favor of action. In the first stories, in between action Hal Jordan/GL is always busy trying to date Carol Ferris, but the need to act draws GL away from his date. Eventually, the love story with Carol Ferris almost completely loses its relevance and action becomes GL's only concern. The love story with Carol Ferris would also create an element of continuity in the series that in the later stories is almost completely lost and replaced by less complex single issue stories, with no real continuity.

<14> The opposition between action and passion is also expressed figuratively through the superhero costume. The costume that "signal[s] that [the character] is now operating in his superhero identity" (Reynolds, 1992:26) is indeed, designed to emphasize the body and the muscles that are the sign of Competence and power to act [9]. At the same time, the costume, through the mask, almost completely covers facial expressions up to the point that the eyes, that are an important part of the face to express emotions and relations to others, are basically blank. Moreover, Hal Jordan is never really psychologically described, except for the fact that he is said to be "fearless" (Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993:19) and, for this reason, chosen to be the GL. As we can see, again, a passion, "fear," is negated and this negation ensures Hal Jordan's acquisition of Competence.

D. The semantic level [10]

<15> The GL narrative develops around a few dichotomies kept rigidly separated. The most prominent and explicit is good/evil [11]. The good/evil dichotomy is figuratively articulated in the narrative through the inner/outer [12] dichotomy: An inner space as a headquarter, a town [13] -- Coast City for GL -- or the Earth, is the place were good is and has to be defended, whereas evil comes from the outside. This strictly dualistic dynamic is the base for what M. Bongco called the "[c]lassic superhero narrative" that "usually start[s] with a disruption of the status quo and proceed[s] to a discovery and eradication of the perpetrator of this disruption" (Bongco, 2000:92) [14]. The superhero

has, then, to restore or defend good in an inner dimension through
another pair of coupled dichotomies action/passion and public/private,
where, as we have already seen, the first terms of the dichotomy are
chosen. All these dichotomies -- good/evil, inner/outer, order/disorder,
action/passion, public/private -- form the axiology of GL's series and
world.

E. Silver Age Comics as Socio-Literature

<16> What I have described is the narrative and discursive articulation
of the SA GL series. This specific articulation, that can be easily
generalized to most, if not all, DC SA superhero series, has been less
lengthily described as "simple and formulaic" (Bongco, 2000:91; Reynolds,
1993:50; see also Eco, 1972) "held together by rapid action of one such
character [...]" (Bongco, 2000:91).

<17> SA superhero comics, then, belong to what Greimas (1990:136) called
socio-literature, that is the mass culture version of ethno-literature
like myths and legends. Greimas thinks that socio-, as ethno-, literature
is characterized by three features:

1. relative non intervention of a narrator in production having a social
vocation, unlike the interest shown for itself and for the implied
reader, by the subject of enunciation of literary texts displaying its
intrusive presence: the instance of enunciation must be concealed and its
manifestations excluded from the text, because they hamper the social
consumption of the products.
2. absence of semantic codes in social texts and related "direction for
the use" of these semantic codes (by semantic codes Greimas means the
production of new association between signs, for the productions of new
meanings, like metaphors).
3. fixed forms and genre.

<18> I will now analyze a later version of the GL and other comics to see
how they departed from this specific narrative and discursive
articulation.

F. *HARD TRAVELING HEROES* -- GREEN LANTERN-GREEN ARROW

<19> At the beginning of the '70s the *Green Lantern* series is assigned to
the D. O'Neil - N. Adams duo. They create what is known as the *Hard
Traveling Heroes* miniseries, aimed at making GL more realistic and
socially relevant, introducing radical changes in the comic book: GL has
to face everyday social problems and having difficulties in dealing with
them is aided by Green Arrow, a Robin Hood-like superhero from the
Justice League of America. One of the most prominent aspects of this
change is the initial setting of the story that is a realistic New York,
not anymore the imaginary Coast City. The realistic look given to the
comic book is well rendered by the art that is much more naturalistic,
mainly thanks to the use of fine shadowing.

figure 5: GL's negative sanction. [From *Green Lantern*, #76, (1970), now in Broome-Kane-Giella, 1993] © DC Comics.

<20> At the narrative level, the most important change is the loss of Competence. As we can see, action is first sanctioned negatively [Fig. 5] and then the hero loses his Competence [Fig. 6; O'Neil-Adams, 1992:13] so that he does not know anymore what to do. GL loses part of his power and eventually he even questions the Contract [Fig. 7].

figure 6: GL's loss of competence. [From *Green Lantern*, #76, (1970), now in O'Neill-Adams, 1992] © DC Comics.

<21> As soon as competence is questioned and lost, discourse becomes more complex. Let us consider the first three panels where the old African-American man questions GL [Fig. 6]:

- there is a movement of the observer that is not driven by action: The movement goes from a worm's eye view to a bird's eye view and back to a worm's eye view. This movement emphasizes the emotional effect of the loss of Competence, focusing on the expression of contempt of the old man and on the expression of powerlessness of Green Lantern;
- the second panel not only emphasizes the expression of the character, but also intensifies the action of the old man, through the invasion of the reader's space and a deceleration (the statement the man is uttering is divided into two panels);
- the old man not only questions Green Lantern's actions but also the very rules and conventions of the genre and of the series, introducing what can be considered a meta-textual comment.

Discourse is, then, changed from a neutral narration focused on action based on "disengagement" procedures, to a more articulated one where "engagements" procedures are relevant - the invasion of the reader's space, the reference to the comics conventions, the autonomy of the pov. But discourse is also changed in order to give relevance to passions. Once Competence and actions are questioned, passion acquires relevance either as narrated emotions of the characters -- often through the use of close-ups -- or as emotional effects induced by the text on the reader.

figure 7: GL questions the contract. [From *Green Lantern*, #80, (1970), now in O'Neill-Adams, 1992] © DC Comics.

<22> The emergence of emotions and the need for the hero to continuously rebuild his competence determines also a change in the pace of the narrative, as we can see in Fig. 6 and 8: In 8, the action is expanded determining a deceleration, before a sudden acceleration. It is also interesting to note that in this version where Competence is lost, action is questioned and passions emerge, GL is able to have a relationship with Carol Ferris (O'Neal-Adams, 1992:172).

figure 8: Expansion, deceleration and acceleration of action. [From *Green Lantern*, #77, (1970), now in O'Neill-Adams, 1992] © DC Comics.

<23> As for the semantic level, the loss of Competence implies a loss of a clear distinction between good and evil. Also the inner/outer dichotomy loses its relevance: GL no longer has a place to defend but he goes around the States and the universe -- that's why he's "Traveling" -- in order to reacquire Competence. The quest for Competence introduces an element of continuity into the series, complexifying the narrative organization. This innovative experiment was not very successful and it did not result in an increase in sales of the GL title, so that the series was cancelled after only a few issues in 1972.

III. The Doom Patrol

<24> Before the *Hard Traveling Heroes* miniseries, the innovative *Doom Patrol* series related, in a less explicit and radical way, the questioning of Competence and the emergence of passions. The *Doom Patrol* series has a long history having been cancelled and revived many times [Tab. 1]. Each time the Doom Patrol has been revived or has been passed to new authors, relevant and innovative changes have been introduced.

A. The Silver Age Doom Patrol

<25> The Doom Patrol [DP] was created in 1963 by A. Drake and B. Premiani for the DC comic book *My Greatest Adventure* that soon became *The Doom Patrol*. The DP is a superhero group whose members, introduced on the comic book cover as "World's Strangest Heroes," are:

- Robotman, an incredibly strong robot with the brain of a former sport car driver;
- Elasti-Girl, a former actress with the power to shrink or expand her

body;
- Negative Man, a former pilot who can cast a flying negative being from his body;
- Niles Caulder, a brilliant wheelchair-bound scientist, known as the Chief, who gathered them all.

Their strangeness and originality does not stem so much from their rather unusual powers, but rather from what caused them: accidents. DP's powers, indeed, are not a gift, but consequences of accidents that irremediably altered their bodies. For this reason they had been rejected by society, since they were considered outcasts, freaks.

figure 9: DP's contract. [From *My Greatest Adventures*, #80 (1963)] © DC Comics.

<26> However, in the comic book, their rejection from society belongs to the past and, except for flashback and side stories telling DP's members' origins, their alienation is not exploited in the narrative. Indeed, relations between the DP and society are good: In the last scene of the first story, which appeared in *My Greatest Adventure* #80, Robotman reads a newspaper commenting on DP's action and concludes "Well, it looks like we've been accepted!" [Fig. 12]. The use of the present perfect tense well represents the just acquired acceptance that, eventually, will not be weakened.

figure 10: DP's competence. [From *My Greatest Adventures*, #80 (1963)] © DC Comics.

<27> Hence, once in a superhero group the members of the DP are not rejected anymore by society. The group, under the leadership of the Chief is, then, the device that allows DP's members to overcome their lacking condition. Indeed, only as a group, working together, they are able to change their curses into superpowers. Along the series, the importance of the united group is often highlighted through the depiction of the four members together cheering for a victory within one panel at the end of most stories.

figure 11: DP's performace. [From *My Greatest Adventures*, #80 (1963)] © DC Comics.

<28> In order to comprehend the narrative relevance of the freakiness of the single members of the DP and that of the united group, I'm going to refer, again, to the Narrative Schema [Tab. 2]. In the first adventure of the DP (*My Greatest Adventure* #80), where the tale of the origin of the group is told, we see the representation of all the steps of the Schema: 1) The Chief, as the Sender, assigns a quest, a mission, to the group -- Contract [Fig. 9]; 2) the three freaks have to acquire Competence by trying to work together [Fig. 10], as a group so that 3) they can perform against the villain -- Performance -- [Fig. 11], so that, 4) their action is positively evaluated by society -- Sanction -- that does not reject them anymore [Fig. 12].

figure 12: DP's sanction. [From *My Greatest Adventures*, #80 (1963)] © DC
Comics.

<29> As we see the group, the ability to work as a group, gives the three
freaks Competence [15] in order to be, and to perform, as superheroes. As
in classic superhero comics, Competence is acquired once and for all, so
that, in the rest of the series, the group has just to keep on
performing, displaying an articulation of discourse very similar to the
one shown in the SA *Green Lantern*: Each issue is an adventure (or two)
and a performance without a strong continuity in between them.

<30> However, after eleven issues, a change occurs: Continuity created
through subplots and stories developed across more than one issue little
by little replace single issue stories. In *Doom Patrol* #91, Mento, an
ally of the DP is introduced and a subplot love story between him and
Elasti-Girl takes over. Along the series there are also two other
subplots: the story of Beast Boy who wants to join the Doom Patrol and
the love story between The Chief and Madam Rouge, a former enemy, former
member of the Brotherhood of Evil. In the last issues of the series, this
last subplot will soon become the main plot in a continuous narrative
that will lead to the death of the Doom Patrol, killed by Madam Rouge and
other villains.

<31> Each of these three characters -- Mento, Beast Boy and Madam Rouge -
- represents a threat to the unity and stability of the group and, hence,
to Competence, since, as I have previously shown, Competence is ensured
by being a group. After issue #91, the *Doom Patrol* series, still focusing
mainly on performance, lets Competence emerge as a relevant element of
the narrative.

<32> The members of the DP are the first superheroes to die. Their death
occurs in the last issue of the first series. Even their death, that is a
remarkably innovative event within the superhero genre, is related to the
dialectic of Competence/Performance: Death, a consequence of the loss of
Competence, occurs as development of a subplot story featuring Madam
Rouge who always threatened the unity and stability of the group. Then,
The Doom Patrol introduces for the first time vulnerable superheroes, and
their vulnerability is a consequence of the mundane source of Competence
-- being a group -- that can be easily threatened. Like in *Green Lantern*,
once competence is somehow questioned, passions, emotions emerge. When
the unity and stability of the group is threatened there is a more

frequent use of close-ups. However, *The Doom Patrol*'s narrative, still set within the classic SA articulation of discourse, often express the tension created by the threat to the group through actions: internal and often violent fights between members of the group or their intruders.

<33> As for the semantic level, the DP's axiology is still organized on the good/evil and inner/outer dichotomies. The inner term is well represented by the group itself, that has to reject exterior intrusions, by the headquarters, by Midway City and by the United States. Most of the DP's villains come from outside Midway City and the US: The Brotherhood of Evil from Paris, Animal Vegetable Mineral Man from Sweden, Garguax from outer space, Gen. Immortus from another time, but his network is foreign based in cities like Rome, Madrid, Tokyo. In this respect, it is also interesting to notice that their death and all the accidents, causing the body alterations of the members of the DP, happened outside the US.

B. The New Doom Patrol

<34> In 1987 the DP was revived by P. Kubberberg in the wake of the success of X-Men mutant superhero groups. As main characters he used a revived DP he himself created for three issues of *Showcase* ten years earlier: The revived Robotman, A. Desai (Celsius), an Indian woman, J. Clay (Tempest), an African-American man and V. Vostok (Negative Woman), a Russian woman. Desai, who claims to be N. Caulder's wife, is convinced that her husband is still alive and gathers a large mutant team in order to find him.

<35> As we can see already from these few notes the strangeness of the Doom Patrol is no longer based on freak bodies, but on marginal ethnic origin (Indian, Afro-American and Russian) [16]. This is an element of realism and social concern that should characterize the revived series. Other elements of realism are related to the setting -- the headquarters are moved from the imaginary Midway City to a fictional Kansas City, existing people such as President Reagan and historical events such as the Nicaragua civil war are shown - and to the drawing where a more naturalistic rendering is given by the heavy use of shadows.

<36> As for the narrative level, the new stories dwell on Competence showing the complete lack of it. The new formed group is, indeed, not yet competent. Actually, the quest for N. Caulder, the Sender in the first series, represents a quest for Contract -- a clear and common mission and a set of values for the group -- hence a step even further backward in the Narrative Schema [Tab. 2]. Desai, indeed, is never accepted and trusted as a leader. This lack of Contract is visualized by the frequent fights within the group and the lack of Competence is visualized by the inability to defeat villains such as Maddax, Metallo or Animal Vegetable Mineral Man.

figure 13: Passion shown through close-ups of face's features. [From *The Doom Patrol*, #15 (1988)] © DC Comics.

<37> Also in this case, the focus on Competence results in the emergence of passions. Here, where Competence lacks completely, emotions and expression of emotions acquire a much more relevant role. This is highlighted by the frequent use of close-ups and even of close-ups of just part of the face, never used before in the DP series [Fig. 13]. As in *Hard Traveling Heroes*, the introduction of passions results in a different pace of discourse: actions are expanded and often decelerated by the expression of emotions.

<38> As for the semantic level, the lack of Contract hampers the establishment of a clear good/evil dichotomy and the consequent pursuit of good. However, what results very prominent is the difficulty to keep the distinction between inner and outer. The new DP is always trying to establish a new inner space: the new headquarters and the town of Kansas City, but the headquarters is penetrated by Lex Luthor's technologies that sabotage it and the group is violently rejected by Kansas City's citizens.

<39> Another result of these changes is the growth of narrative complexity. In the SA DP the threat to the unity of the group resulted in the creation of subplots and continuity. Here, beside the fact that all stories are set within the DC Universe -- Superman appears once and Lex Luthor is a menacing presence -- basically each character has his/her own story and problems that constitute a subplot that often intertwines with other characters' subplots. All the subplots are inserted within the continuing story of the quest for N. Caulder as well as within other intermediate narratives referred to a specific villain or events that engage the entire DP.

<40> This attempt to create a realistic superhero team failed. First realism was weakened by the replacement of penciller S. Lightle with the much less naturalistic E. Larsen and then the entire team was changed and the series was assigned to G. Morrison who successfully accomplished a much more radical change.

C. The Post-Modern Doom Patrol

<41> G. Morrison started to write the DP's series with issue #19 with a story in four parts called "Crawling from Wreckage," in which he presents the new group. The core of the new group, under the leadership of the retrieved N. Caulder, comprises Robotman, Rebis, a radioactive hermaphrodite with the power of Negative Man, and Crazy Jane, a multi-personality disorder victim, whose sixty-four personalities each

possesses a different superpower. After Robotman has reacquired his Competence, by accepting his condition and, hence, his difference and strangeness, the group can be formed and soon is involved in quite strange adventures dealing with worlds, realities, dimensions, spaces that invade the reality of the DP to end or alter its meaning -- Orqwirth (*Doom Patrol* #21), the painting that ate Paris (*Doom Patrol* #27-28), the Tearoom of Despair (*Doom Patrol* #36), etc.

<42> Except for the beginning, when Robotman is not competent and a few issues when Crazy Jane loses her Competence, Morrison's DP is basically Competent and able to perform and to deal with the worlds and villains it has to face, adventure after adventure. The source of DP's Competence is the strangeness of their members and its acceptance: They can deal with strange events because they are strange.

<43> However, the originality and the innovative strength of Morrison's DP does not belong so much to the narrative level, but rather to the discursive one. Indeed, Morrison's discourse focuses on enunciation, on how discourse itself and narration are produced. The worlds, dimensions, realities, spaces invading DP's reality and the characters who inhabit them are always generated by and through texts: A book generates Orqwirth, Flex Mentallo (*Doom Patrol* #42) is originally the protagonist of a common advertisement appearing in comic books, other places are materialized metaphors, puns or abstractions such as the "Tearoom of Despair." The comic book is, then, a pastiche of existing and imaginary texts: It is full of quotations, parodies, spoofs, swipes [17], *myse-en-abymes*. This process is reproduced within the narrative, as well, since the action that leads the DP to victory is not usually a pragmatic one, but rather cognitive: they have to produce another text in order to overcome the texts produced by, or producing, the villains and their worlds.

<44> Through all this production and reproduction of texts, through all these uttered enunciations (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:105), what is at stake in Morrison's DP is the very semiotic process through which meaning and texts are generated, including DP comics itself. So, difference, as foundation of any semiotic process, becomes a key concept of the series: difference translates, at a more abstract level, the concept, central to the series, of strangeness, embodied by the members of the DP. Meaning is generated through difference. Hence, the mission of the DP is to maintain the balance between meaninglessness created by homologation and normality -- represented by the Men from Nowhere (*Doom Patrol* #36) -- and meaninglessness created by total absurdity -- represented by the Brotherhood of Dada (*Doom Patrol* #26).

<45> Following this interpretation, what emerges is that the source of the DP's Competence relies on its textual history: I've said that the source of DP's competence is its strangeness, but strangeness is a feature of the group since they were marked as strange, since the beginning, by the slogan that was displayed on each cover of the first series: "World's strangest heroes." In the same fashion, the name generates its fate, so that the "Doom" Patrol often has to deal with doomsday, the end of the world, judgment day, and so on.

<46> The focus on enunciation and on meaning and text production yields a complex articulation of discourse. Enunciation and its mediations are no longer hidden, but rather, they are manifested mainly through uttered enunciations (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:105) and *myse-en-abymes*, self-referential and meta-textual hints and commentaries [18].
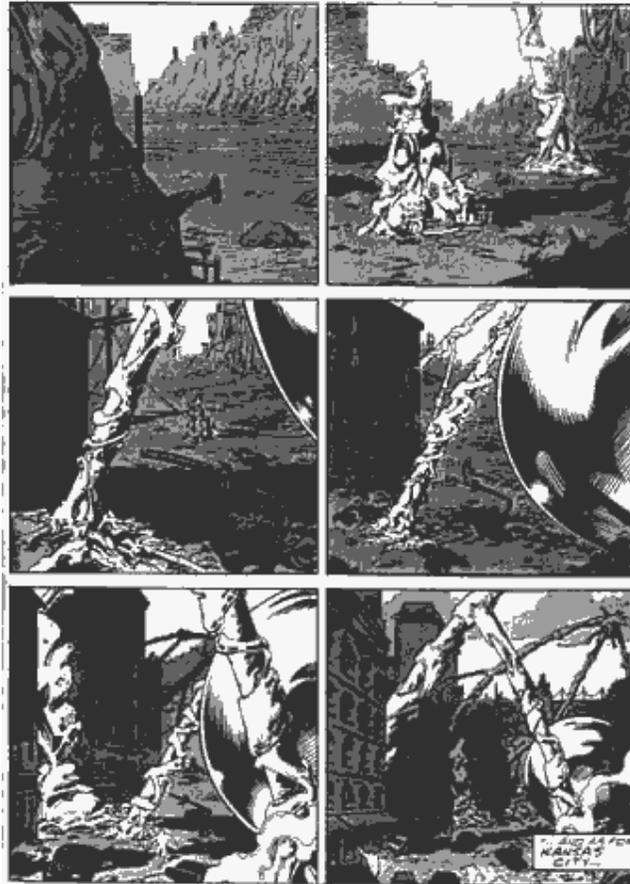
figure 14: Villain's voice and point of view. [From *Doom Patrol*, #27 (1989)] © DC Comics.

<47> The complexity of Morrison's DP discourse is not just determined by the representation of enunciation and meaning production but, also, by the articulation of enunciation itself, through a series of "engagement" (*embrayage*) procedures: First person narration appears often in caption, replacing the more neutral third person narration, not just as the hero's voice and point of view, but also villains' [Fig. 14]. By showing a different point of view on actions, through the disjunction of captions and images, the monological discourse that characterized SA superhero comics is broken, so that the observer implied in the image acquires a certain autonomy from the represented action and its action, its movements, become relevant in themselves. Indeed, for the first time in DP's comics, we find sequences that do not show any action, beside the implied observer's one -- the movement of his gaze [Fig. 15; *Doom Patrol* #27].

figure 15: Observer's gaze. [From *Doom Patrol*, #22 (1989)] © DC Comics.

<48> The centrality of the semiotic process in Morrison's DP narrative
engages directly the semantic level, the deepest level of the production
of meaning according to the Generative Trajectory (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:
n. 2). The good/evil dichotomy is replaced by the meaning/absurdity one.
The inner/outer dichotomy, always related to the good/evil one, is
completely deconstructed. Indeed, in Morrison's DP, since each space is a
text, and each text is a space, each one of them has its inner and outer
dimensions, that can become, as well, new spaces or new texts. Moreover,
all these spaces tend to penetrate reciprocally, making inner and outer
difficult to track. Not fortuitously, the new headquarters of the DP is
established on Danny the Street, also a later member of the group, which
is a sentient, transvestite city block with the power to teleport itself
within other spaces. Everything is played on thin, shifting thresholds as
difference itself. In this sense, the replacement of the good/evil
dichotomy with the meaning/absurdity one is not just a nominal
substitution, but a radical change: Albeit good and evil can also be not
clearly separated or can be blurred, they are fixed position, whereas
difference, and meaning, are always shifting, so that the DP can not rely
too much on previous achievements and settled situations.

<49> The narrative organization of the series becomes much more complex,
too. Single issue stories are almost abandoned, except for a few parodic
stories that break the continuity of the DP's adventures developed across
many issues, stemming as subplots or side stories of previous adventures.

<50> Morrison's version of the DP ends with issue #63 proposing in the
last issues two endings. The first one is a diegetic ending at the same

enunciative level of the rest of the story, where N. Caulder is killed and the DP members retire in another dimension. This first ending discloses the real scheme behind N. Caulder's idea of the DP: everything has been an experiment that he planned since the beginning, since the first accidents occurred to Robotman, Elasti-Girl and Negative Man that he, himself, caused. This new element in the DP's history compels a backward reading of the entire series: N. Caulder is still the Sender, but a deceiving and much more powerful one, that not only gave a quest and a set of values to the DP, but ensured its very existence presenting himself as a sort of meta-Sender. The DP is just an experiment, a creation of N. Caulder and so just another text.

<51> The second ending, too, and in a much more effective way, shows that the DP is just a text, compelling a backward reading of the entire series. This second ending takes place at an upper enunciative level where Jane is a mentally ill person hospitalized in an asylum. All the DP's adventures are just the outcome of her unstable imagination.

<52> Despite the death or retirement of all DP members, the series has been continued by R. Pollack since issue #64 under the Vertigo imprints. She introduced a new line-up under the lead of Robotman and N. Caulder's chopped head without introducing new radical changes and without keeping on with Morrison's discursive complexity. Pollack's version dwells on strangeness stemming from the marginal and oddly assembled features of the characters that are based on a mix of new age concepts derived from paranormality, mysticism, feminism, paganism. The series was soon cancelled with issue #87.

<53> Morrison's version was a successful attempt to reinvent superhero comics without dwelling on the lack of Competence and on realism [19]. This version of the DP, then, enjoys few similarities with the SA DP, despite their relevant differences. Morrison managed to create a plausible narrative based on the textual dimension the series is generated from, as if, disappointed by realistic superheroes, he dwelled to the core on their unavoidable fictional/textual dimension. Indeed, in the post-modern DP, textuality accomplishes what science accomplished in the SA version: making (almost) anything possible.

IV.Swamp Thing

<54> The *Swamp Thing* series was created by L. Wein and B. Wrightson as a spin-off of a horror short story that appeared in *House of Secrets* #92 [HoS]. *Swamp Thing*, then, blends two genres -- horror and superhero comics. It was created at the beginning of the '70s as a new product in the wake of a decrease in sales of comic books and of fear of exhaustion of the superhero genre. However, the first series was cancelled after a few years. It was then revived a few years later with no real success up to the moment it was assigned to A. Moore, who introduced many of the changes that we have seen used in Morrison's DP.

A. Swamp Thing

<55> The first Swamp Thing [ST] story was a single issue story that followed the rule of the horror genre. Horror comics differ from superhero comics:

- they are usually single stories, without any continuity and without recurring characters, except for the narrator, as in EC horrors and in Warren's *Creepy*;
- the narrator mediates between the single horror story and the reader;

- following literary horror, it is not always narrated in third person in caption -- the HoS's ST has complex dialogic dynamics and is narrated in second, first and third person;
- often the narrative is based not on disruption and restoration of order following a linear action-reaction dynamic as in classic superhero comics, but on revenge [20]: a guilty character is submitted, by another character or by fate, to the same or similar -- often worse -- misdeed that he has committed;
- often the story is not told in a linear progression, but through flashbacks, in order to create expectations and mystery.
Just these few features of the horror comics show well the difference with classic superhero narrative. However, I think that what really makes the difference between horror and classic superhero comics is the management of passions. As we have seen, in classic superhero narrative, passions are basically dismissed, whereas the horror genre, since it should represent and induce fear, is strongly bound to passions. In horror comics the revenge dynamic still allows a lot of action, but revenge itself is not just an immediate reaction, but a reaction, often delayed and nourished, generated by the passion of anger (Greimas, 1986). The HoS ST tells, through a complex interplay of points of view, voices and flashbacks, the story of a scientist transformed into the ST after his lab exploded in an attempt by his best friend to murder him out of jealousy. When the ST realizes that his evil friend is trying also to kill the woman they both loved, he kills him.

<56> Beside the action, the narrative -- that does not really follow the revenge dynamics, even though, in the end, the villain is killed -- relies on passions. Love, that in superhero comics would hamper action, here is the source of all actions: A. Holland, the scientist is almost killed because of jealousy, a passion of love (Greimas-Fontanille, 1993), he reacts and kills his friend, again because of love. In the last scene, ST has a sad and melancholic expression, because he knows that he will never be able to be loved again by his former wife who repelled him not even realizing the monster was her first husband. However, the real interest and fascination of the story relies on the complex articulation of pov and voices that render the monster mysterious for the characters and for the reader, as well, up to the last panels when his previous identity is revealed to the reader.

<57> Once a superhero series, ST looses many of the features of the HoS ST: the tale of the origin is linear and completely dismisses the love-jealousy plot for a more traditional (in superhero comics) one about criminals desiring A. Holland's formula; his wife dies; the body of the ST is no longer so monstrous and shapeless: muscles, a sign of his outstanding strength, are highlighted.

figure 16: ST's solitude. [From *Swamp Thing*, #1(1972)] © DC Comics.

<58> Even if love loses its relevance in the superhero series, passions
continue to be relevant. Like the DP, ST's superpowers are the
consequences of an accident. They are considered a lack and a curse that
alienate ST from society, but contrary to what happens to the DP, ST is
not competent enough to recover what he lacks -- his human body -- and
get back to society, as we can see in Fig. 16. So, after he is abducted,
he is forced to wander, looking for a community where he can settle. The
impossibility of recovering the first lack generates a passional
reaction, similar to the one he had in the first short story: He is a sad
and melancholic character. Even though the ST series is still an action
comics where the hero in each adventure has to fight against other
monsters, passions have a relevant role: it's only through passions that

he can express his humanity. However, actions are never fully accomplished and, in each adventure, order is not completely reestablished: There is always some innocent person who dies because of ST, showing, again, a somewhat lacking competence. As in *Hard Traveling Heroes*, actions and passions intertwine: in order to show passions, close-ups and expansions of actions occur quite often [Fig. 16 and 17].

figure 17: Expansion of action. [From *Swamp Thing*, #1(1972)] © DC Comics.

<59> As for the semantic level, the good/evil dichotomy is questioned: ST is often considered evil by the humans as are other monsters that he, at the beginning, fights and then tries to help, often failing. The series

introduces the being/appearing dichotomy (Greimas-Courtés, 1982: 9) that modulates the good/evil one: what often appears to be evil is actually good. As in *Hard Traveling Heroes* an unclear distinction between good and evil is in relation to a lack of a clear articulation of inner and outer spaces: ST does not have an inner place to defend, so he is forced to wander around looking for one. The narrative organization is quite classic, presenting one issue stories, even if inserted in the continuous quest for humanity and for the swamp to which ST tries to get back.

B. *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*

figure 18: Floronic Man's defeat and despair. [From *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*, #25 (1984), now in Moore-Bissette-Totleben, 1987] © DC Comics.

<60> In 1982, ST is revived in a series called *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*. The first nineteen issues dwell on the previous series, even though action, related to the attempt to capture ST, acquires a much more relevant role, loosing the originality of the first series. From issue #20 on, the series is assigned to A. Moore for the stories and S. Bissette and J. Totleben for drawings. Moore introduces a new lack, that questions ST's Competence and represents a sort of new origin: The ST is not really a human that became a monster, but a vegetable that acquired some human features. In order to be able to act again, ST has to accept his new condition and bury what is left of the body of the human he though he was. In his first adventure, once competent again, ST has to defeat the Floronic Man who is using nature against humanity. ST is the only one able to deal with him and even the JLA is not competent enough to face the situation (Moore-Bissette-Totleben, 1987:72-78).

figure 19: Love and passion between Abigail and ST. [From *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*, #34 (1985), now in Moore *et al.*, ii, 1990] © DC Comics.

<61> In the rest of the story, ST is not willing to accept his Contract -- to accept his mission as interface between humanity and nature -- and just wants to retire into the swamp with Abigail, his human love. ST is, then, a penitent hero, whose quest is changed into finding a suitable replacement for himself that can carry on his previously assigned quest. Moore's ST, reintroducing love as central element and questioning radically not just Competence, but the Contract, lets passions become as relevant as actions -- and sometimes even more relevant: passions, the expression of emotions, are not just a way to enhance actions, to change their pace and render them more effective, but a central element that articulates the entire narrative. When the Floronic Man is defeated, not by a pragmatic act, but a cognitive one -- through a speech, an

explication -- his reaction is emotional and he shows his despair [Fig. 18]; an entire issue, when Abigail reveals her love for the ST [Fig. 19], is completely driven by passions.

figure 20: Abigail's vision. [From *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*, #34 (1985), now in Moore *et al.*, ii, 1990] © DC Comics.

<62> The relevance assigned to passions in this version of the ST affects also the discursive level. Neutrality and objectivity, used in classic superhero comics, are completely dismissed. Enunciation is, then, manifested in the text. The narrator emerges in first person narration in captions, used to express not just the protagonist's thought but the villain's too. First person in caption breaks the agreement between word and images, letting more than one point of view contribute to the narration, instituting a dialogical discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). Even the point of view implied in the images is not always external, disengaged (*debrayé*), but can be taken on by one of the characters [Fig. 20]. Probably for the first time in mainstream comics [21], the relevance assigned to passion affects substantially the grid, that completely loses the neutrality of the 2x3 orthogonal pattern, in order to contribute to the whole emotional effect [Fig. 21].

figure 21: Grid's deconstruction. [From *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*, #24 (1984), now in now in Moore-Bissette-Totleben, 1987] © DC Comics.

<63> As for the semantic level, Moore's ST rearticulates completely the classic superhero's axiology, first by questioning the value of action in itself, then by replacing the good/evil dichotomy with the nature/culture one with the aim of finding an equilibrium between the two terms. The inner/outer dichotomy loses its relevance, even if it is still possible to notice ST's willingness to develop and to nurture, rather than defend, a passional space, not as concrete and fixed as a town, for Abigail and himself [22].

<64> The narrative organization is much more complex than the previous ST series, with stories developing as stories in more parts within a substantial continuity; interrupted by just few single issues story [23].

V. Shade -- the Changing Man

<65> The first version of Shade was created by S. Ditko in 1977 and presented as a blend of superhero and science fiction genres, but really mixing many genres at once -- there are elements of crime as well as fantasy comics. It lasted only eight issues that constitute a miniseries. More than ten years later the character was revived by P. Milligan who kept just few elements of the original Shade to insert him in a complex, non-genre bound, narrative quite common for the Vertigo line [24], under which imprint the comics was eventually published.

A. Ditko's Shade

figure 22: Shade. [From *Shade -- The Changing Man*, #1 (1977)] © DC Comics.

<67> Shade is a secret agent from the Meta dimension who, after being framed and convicted, escapes to the Earth dimension. Thanks to the M-Vest he wears, he has the (super)power to alter reality. The Story takes place half on Earth, as a blend of crime and science fiction genres and half on Meta, as a story of treason and conspiracy. Apart from the visual effects created by the M-Vest that expands actions and alters faces turning them into caricatures within basically naturalistic drawings [Fig. 22], *Shade* is not particularly innovative. At the narrative and discursive level it keeps the conventions of the classic superhero comics, except for the fact that it appears as a continuing miniseries.

B. Milligan's Shade

<68> In the 1990 series, Shade's real body with the vest is caught in the Area of Madness, between Earth and Meta, but he materializes himself into the body of a serial killer while the latter is on the electric chair. While Shade is on a quest to reacquire his body and escape the Area of Madness to get back to the Meta dimension, he has to manage his relations with the serial killer who haunts him, with Kathy, daughter of two victims of the serial killer, and with her (girl)friend, and at the same time he has to fight against perturbations of the Earth dimension.

<69> In the first issues he has to fight against a "stream of madness" that is altering Earth's reality introducing elements of recent American history into the present. At the beginning, he is not completely competent to fight the "stream," then he acquires an unstable Competence in order to reject it.
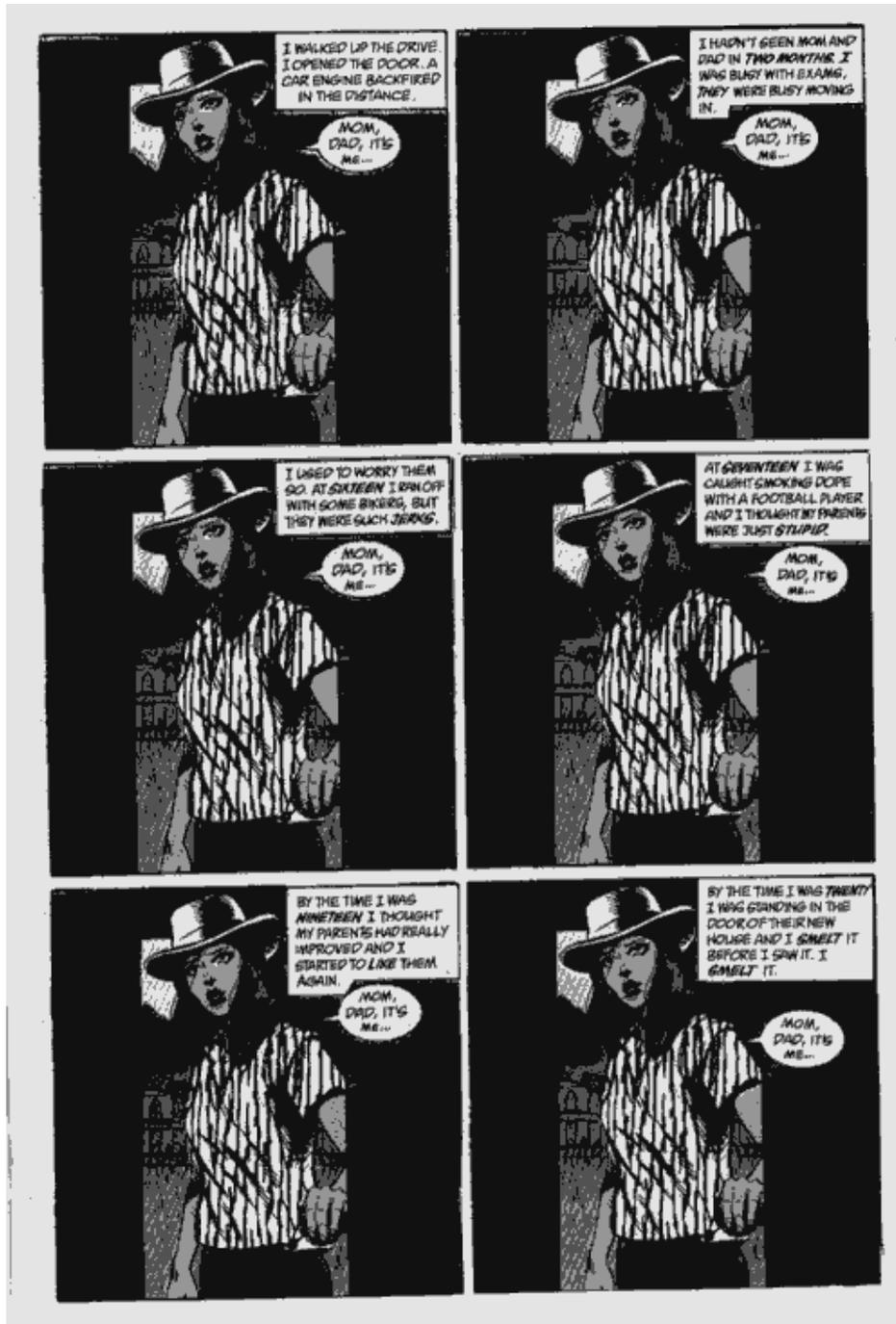
figure 23: Schism between panel's pov and caption's pov. [From *Shade -- The Changing Man*, #3 (1990)] © DC Comics.

<70> Relationships -- with the serial killer, with Kathy and her girlfriend -- are a central feature of the story that, besides influencing Competence, yield a complex range of passions: Shade has to be accepted by Kathy when he still looks like the killer of her parents, then a love story between the two begins, complicated by the reappearance of the serial killer and then by Kathy's girlfriend, with whom a lesbian love story eventually occurs. All this network of relations, dimensions, realities is very well rendered by the complexity of discourse. First person narration in caption is always used and different characters can narrate events within the same story, so that a complete detachment

between the point of view of the image and that of the captions occurs, as in Fig. 23. In this sequence, action is completely dismissed and what we see represented is the development of an emotional reaction. Just as characters can narrate and take over enunciation, so too does the "stream of madness" that not only alters the narrated reality, but also the way things are narrated -- discourse [Fig. 24]. Shade, then, more than a clash of actions, displays a clash of voices, perspective and points of view, through which emotions are expressed. This version of Shade, marginalizing the narrated action, departs radically from the classic superhero narrative.

figure 24: Discourse's deconstruction. [From *Shade -- The Changing Man*, #2 (1990)] © DC Comics.

VI. Conclusions

<71> According to the interpretation I proposed, changes took place in superhero comics thanks to the questioning of action that was, and in many cases is, their central -- and almost only -- focus. More precisely, I showed that action lost part of its relevance once the Competence of the superhero has been questioned. At a more figurative level, this backward step on the Narrative Schema meant the questioning of superpowers, superheroes' vulnerability and, eventually, their death.

<72> The consequences of this backward move did not affect just the narrative level, but the entire articulation of discourse of superhero comics opening them, little by little, to many features that, before, would have been rejected or marginalized by their action driven discursive program: -

- passions, for characters and readers, alike;
- a more complex articulation of discourse -- from monologic discourse based on disengagement procedures to a polyphony of points of view and levels of enunciation;
- a more modulated rhythm -- from a dualistic rhythm based on the action-reaction dynamics to a plurality of rhythms based on accelerations and decelerations;

- a more nuanced set of semantic dichotomies;
- a more complex narrative organization -- from series based on single issue stories without a real continuity to a complex hank of plots and subplots nested within a stratified continuity regarding the series and stories developed in several parts across various issues.

<73> The process I described also affected the figure of the superhero undergoing innovation. Often the reacquisition of Competence -- as happens for Robotman in Morrison's DP, for ST and for Shade -- is considered a new origin [25] in which a marginal element of the previous series -- strangeness for the DP, ST's relation to nature and madness for Shade -- becomes a central element influencing the entire narrative. However, this analysis is not a history of how superhero comics changed nor a history of how innovation occurs in comics. Rather, it is a preliminary survey that, thanks to the comparison of different versions of series that were already considered innovative and were known to have introduced ruptures, allows us to track major changes and to outline a possible process of innovation.

<74> In order to write a history of the changes undergone by superhero comics it should be necessary to consider a larger corpus, chosen according to historical concerns. But still, even though my corpus was rather small and chosen in order to more easily track changes, I think that some of the results of my analysis can be generalized in reference to most of DC superhero comics and probably to the entire genre.

<75> If we consider, for instance, Batman, we see that his power, hence his Competence, has often been questioned: the reacquisition of Competence is the underlying theme of *Dark Night Returns* (Miller-Varley, 1986); *The Killing Joke* (Moore-Bolland, 1988) deals with Batman and Joker's reciprocal Competence to defeat one another. In *Arkham Asylum* (Morrison-McKean, 1989) Batman's Competence is tested at a psychological level. A similar questioning of Competence, of Batman's power, occurs in the miniseries *Knightfall* (Moench *et al.*, 2000) [26]. As for Superman, since *Man of Steel* (Byrne-Giordano, 1988), more relevance has been given to passions, considering also that Superman is able to have a relationship with Lois Lane. The questioning of Competence has occurred in a radical way with the death of Superman [27].

<76> Beside the relevance given to Competence, all the mentioned comics display, to some extent, all the features of innovated superhero comics -- a more complex articulation of discourse, a more modulated rhythm, etc. [28] -- showing how these changes have affected the entire DC Universe.

<77> In order to write a history of innovation in comics, innovation should be considered a social process. It is, then, necessary to broaden the analysis to other texts and to the social processes that inform and that interact with texts. For instance, in order to fully understand innovation it should be necessary to consider underground comics that in six years -- between 1967 and 1973 -- achieved basically all the innovations that superhero comics achieved in fifteen years. Indeed, the innovative superhero comics I considered for this analysis were all cancelled after few issues -- from around forty of the first DP to the eight issues of the first Shade -- and they were able to get established and to fully develop only during the '80s within a new comics market and distribution system, partially inaugurated by the underground comics [29].

Notes

[1] See References. [^]

[2] The French-Lithuanian semiotician A. J. Greimas considered a text as the manifestation of a generative process, represented through the Generative Trajectory (Greimas-Courtés, 1982:130-132). In the Generative Trajectory there are two main levels, the Narrative one, also called, Semio-Narrative Structures, that is the deepest and the starting point of the Trajectory, and the Discursive level, also called Discursive Structures, less deep, through which spaces, times and characters are generated. [^]

[3] Needless to remember that Superman's first appearance occurred in 1938 in the comic book called *Action Comics*. [^]

[4] See note 2. [^]

[5] An early version of this schema is critically discussed by P. Ricoeur in his *Time and Narrative* Vol. 2 (Ricoeur, 1990:44). [^]

[6] For an excellent use of the Narrative Schema in order to analyze a comics see Floch (1997). [^]

[7] A frame of a painting can be considered a visualization of the enunciation, too. The frame mainly divides and mediates between the represented space and the space where the representation takes place. [^]

[8] Semiotics considers passions not as opposed to reason, but to action: Passion is the point of view of the one who undergoes the action (Fontanille-Greimas, 1993; Fabbri, 1998:26). [^]

[9] "Because of the acrobatic stances of the heroes, it was convenient to draw them in tights which did not encumber the emphasis on the muscles and anatomy in general" (Bongco, 2000:104). [^]

[10] The semantic level, within the Generative Trajectory, is a sub-level of the Narrative level (see note 2). [^]

[11] GL oath says: "In the brightest day, in the blackest night no evil shall escape my sight! Let those who worship evil's might beware of my power -- Green Lantern's light!" [^]

[12] See also Eco (1972). [^]

[13] As Bongco noted, "the disruption takes place in closed hierarchical communities -- a 'named' and identifiable, albeit imaginary, locale like Metropolis and Gotham City" (Bongco, 2000:92). [^]

[14] See also Reynolds (1993:51). [^]

[15] Indeed, in issue #114 of *The Doom Patrol* after an internal quarrel the Chief leaves. Even though the three freaks are still together, without the Chief they are unable to defeat a villain, until the Chief comes back. [^]

[16] This is clearly a radical change from the SA DP where only the villains would come from outside the WASP American culture, whereas in the 1987 DP the core of the group, except for Robotman, comes from outside the WASP culture. If freakiness had a narrative relevance in the

SA DP, as we have seen, here the various ethnic origins of the superheroes do not play almost any major narrative role. [^]

[17] A few examples: in the story of the painting that hate Paris (*Doom Patrol* #27-28) many of the settings are drawn as citation of a specific painting or style; one ally of the DP, Willoughby Kipling, is a parody of *Swamp Thing*'s and *Hellblazer*'s character John Constantine; in one single issue story (*Doom Patrol* # 53) the DP is depicted as the Marvel superhero group Fantastic Four. [^]

[18] Morrison developed the *Animal Man* series in a similar fashion; for an analysis of this comic book see Bossard (2000). [^]

[19] In various interviews, Morrison often expressed his lack of interest toward deconstructed and hyper-realistic superheroes in the wake of F. Miller's heroes. His DP could be considered a first example, albeit *sui generic*, of revisited superheroes that emerged a few years later. [^]

[20] Crime comics enjoy a similar dynamic see Rogers (1997) for a description. [^]

[21] One exception could be N. Adams' *Deadman*. [^]

[22] The use of hallucinogen tuber grown on ST's back has, indeed, the aim of visualizing this passional space -- emotional landscape (Bjork)? -- to Abigail and to the reader [Fig. 20]. [^]

[23] As in Morrison's DP, interruptions of continuity are used for ironic stories that parody and pay homage to other texts such as the one where ST meets a Pogo-like character (Moore *et al*., 1990:141). [^]

[24] The Vertigo line was created by DC in order to gather all those comics that were using and dwelling on the changes tested in DP and ST that, indeed, were included in the line. [^]

[25] Not fortuitously, the Marvel miniseries, written by F. Miller, that depicts a not Competent Daredevil who reacquires Competence, is called *Born Again*. [^]

[26] It is interesting to notice that the more Batman's Competence is questioned, the more the tale of the origin, which accounts for the hero's acquisition of competence, is retold and reenacted. [^]

[27] The story of the death of Superman presents just a fight displayed on splash-pages. What is interesting is that both the bodies of Superman and his antagonist have exaggerated muscles, that we have said are usually a sign of the hero's power and, hence, Competence to act. However, both the bodies suffer and this suffering is mainly expressed by the contortions of the bodies. The body in itself, then, becomes a place for the expression of passions, besides action. In my opinion embodied passions are an element to be considered in order to comprehend the proliferation of muscles that superheroes have undergone in the last twenty years (see also Bukatman, 1994, and for a more general approach and methodological insight into bodies and passions see Calabrese, 1991). [^]

[28] Just as an example we can consider *Dark Night Returns* (Miller-Varley, 1986) where even the standard 2x3 grid is replaced by a 4x4 grid that allows a more effective expansion of the action and a wider range of

rhythms. It is interesting to notice that from the beginning, the 4x4 grid organizes the rhythm of television broadcasting and the tale of the origin, two themes that have a great relevance in Miller's graphic novel. [^]

[29] The influence of underground on the innovative mainstream comics is well attested by a few interviews presented in *Comic Book Rebels* (Water-Bissette, 1993). The latter is a book that S. Bissette, one of the authors of *Swamp Thing* (Moore-Bissette-Totleben, 1987; Moore *et al.*, 1990) edited. In his introduction, he himself says that *Zap*, the Robert Crumb comics, "changed [his] life forever." As for the new distribution system related to direct sales and specialty stores, the independent cartoonist L. Marder says: "The comic book stores grew out of the former "head shops"" (Water-Bissette, 1993:19). As for storytelling, the underground cartoonist L. Marrs says: "Yes. Our kind of personal storytelling, the inclusion of mundane, everyday matters even into fantasy storytelling has crept its way into the mainstream. Alan Moore, for instance, has talked about how inspired he was by the work that we've done. In Animal Man, I can see a lot of the presence of that attitude in comics." (Water-Bissette, 1993:65). And the very same A. Moore confirms: "It wasn't until the underground movement started to point creators into different directions that you started to get the comic book renaissance -- for want of a better word -- that happened in the Eighties " (Water-Bissette, 1993:164). [^]

Corpus

[**A note about images:** The images which are a crucial element of Mottazzi's argument have been reproduced for educational purposes, in black and white, and at substantially lower quality than their originals. If anyone would like these images removed from the site, please contact us at editors@reconstruction.ws.][^]

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