GIVE ME A VIKING FUNERAL: FIGHTINGIDEOLOGY WITH IDEOLOGY IN
THE DYSTOPIA OF V FOR VENDETTA

by

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ABSTRACT

A photograph of the Antarctic landscape is, for many, the only way through which they understand the continent’s existence. Most have never travelled there and for them, photography and other representations of its geography are the only proof that it actually exists. This photograph then becomes the viewer’s only medium by which they experience the Antarctic landscape, and to them it is more real than that which it represents. However, this simulation of such a landscape is not, according to Jean Baudrillard, replacing or even masking reality, but rather it is masking the truth that there is no reality behind the act of simulating—making the image simultaneously recognizable and yet disassociated from its referent. In Jean Baudrillard’s “Simulacra and Simulations” the process by which these simulations can enter into, disguise, and subsequently take over reality is termed the “precession of simulacra.”

It is this conception of reality that I use to demonstrate the power of representation which forms the foundation for control found in dystopian fictions. In this paper, I examine the form which simulacra take in the narrative of Alan Moore’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta* and this work’s relation to the tradition of dystopian fiction in light of these theories. The readers of Moore’s graphic novel are led to grapple with the dichotomy between inside and outside worlds, between nature and enclosure, between the reality and the simulation. The tradition of dystopian fiction indicates that there is no attainable direct experience and no viable escape from the realities produced by totalitarian governments for the very fact that there is no actuality that exists beyond their ideological representations. I argue that, whether fortunately or unfortunately, life cannot be lived outside of the simulated world presented at the heart of dystopian fiction. The essential quality of simulation that enables the actual to exist is that which is inextricably bound to all mediations, discussions, and rebellions concerning the virtual/actual binary. Even the descent into anarchy which V professes to upend the control of the state is itself just another simulation wearing a simulated mask.
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INTRODUCTION

Dystopian fiction in recent years has made a resurgence in popular culture and particularly in young adult fiction (The Hunger Games series, Divergent, etc.), but also in the genre of comics. However, the basic stories remain unchanged. Governments exert control and brave citizens rise up, ultimately to be quelled or to break free. The struggles between physical forces and amorphous value structures like honor, heroism, and freedom persist unfettered. Deception, the main tool of totalitarian governments in these stories, remains a tactic largely to be overcome, its deeper implications brushed aside in the heat of battle or left to rule in dark rooms where truth itself is annihilated.

Regardless, in most of these contemporary works, the ideology of control—or moreover the way in which Marx describes ideology as creating self-perpetuating structures and modes of control over individuals, often falls into the background as a given condition of reality. Such is exemplified in 1984 with the undying rule of Big Brother. Matthew Potolsky writes that, “for Marx, ideology inverts the actual nature of human life-processes, creating the illusion that governments, economic systems or philosophical theories are eternal and inevitable rather than the result of human actions and choices” (Potolsky 137). These systems which are held to be eternal in dystopian fiction are those of the panoptical surveillance state, nascent nationalism, fascism, economic control (be it capitalistic over-consumption or socialist driven scarcity), and pure obedience to the government. The mimetic impulses present in this “given” order of reality and its relation to the body politic in dystopian fiction drives the binary relationships between reality and representation, thought and speech, and the interior and exterior of the dystopian state. In Alan Moore’s graphic novel, V for Vendetta, the ideological modes of
control employed by the state are themselves the antagonistic forces which must be confronted in order to achieve victory. *V for Vendetta* presents itself as the post-modern visual and literary culmination of the ideological underpinnings of utopian and dystopian fiction and that ideology’s specific relation to its own core mimetic aspect. Through Moore’s use of the composite art form of the graphic format, the binary relationships which are present in dystopian fiction take on a new life in visual representation.

Through the medium’s paneled frames and speech bubbles, the discursive methods employed over the previous century by authors writing dystopian fiction culminate and are deconstructed; the devices of the genre are at once laid bare and our understanding of man’s fascination with dystopian fiction and its connection to a seemingly post-authentic world deepened. Where other protagonists have failed—as is the case with *1984*’s Winston Smith being re-educated to love Big Brother, D-503’s lobotomy in *We*, and John the Savage’s hedonism-propelled suicide in *Brave New World*, *V*, the titular character of *V for Vendetta* succeeds in his rebellion because he is a simulacrum—a virtual representation without referent standing inside and outside the work simultaneously, fighting other virtual constructs of the dystopian state as an entirely self-aware entity.

*V for Vendetta* achieves, more so than other self-referential dystopian comics such as Grant Morrison’s *We3* or Warren Ellis’ *Transmetropolitan*, a more deeply layered confrontation with the theoretical issues present in dystopian fiction at large. Specifically because *V* is a character without a single, concrete, origin. He exists only as a man in a mask, there is no alter ego to be revealed or kept secret. His position as a simulacrum in the text, coupled with his moral ambiguity and dedication to anarchy (which is itself a deconstructive force) place him in a privileged position to confront the totalitarian
English state and the ideology which it has established because he approaches the world in which he lives as an ideological force and not simply as a rebel.

In this thesis I argue that utopian fiction is based on an enclosing of spaces from external forces and invaders. These fictional insular societies set the stage for the initial positive reception of the scientific progress of the late 1800s and the hopes for technology’s ability to alleviate all of society’s problems. However, the hopeful reliance on technology in utopian fiction from the late 1800’s is mirrored by the growing technophobia of the modernist movement to transform these once idyllic locales into settings with darker secrets. The birth of the dystopia in the early 20th century at the hands of E.M. Forster in “The Machine Stops,” highlights this fear of technology mediating everyday life. Dystopia inverts, among others, Edward Bellamy’s hopeful technotopia of *Looking Backward*. Building upon a proto-ecocritical drive to return to nature and escape the bonds of technology confront the emerging totalitarian states of the real world, Forster begins the new tradition of characters attempting escape from, rather than infiltrate these states pervaded by technology. Next, I argue that these enclosures and binary relationships which are established around the industrial revolution which Forster finds himself at the close of, and which in the genre of utopia/dystopia are in fact directly tied to Plato’s conception of the mimetic relationship between reality and representation, and furthermore, the relationship between thought and language as Derrida conceives of it. Finally, in my analysis of *V for Vendetta*, I examine the ways in which the formal elements of the graphic novel contribute to these theories and the way in which they reach their culmination in the composite art form of sequential, illustrated storytelling.
UTOPIA TAINTED BY PROGRESS

For centuries, people have told stories of perfect societies and the prospect of their attainability. The desire for a more peaceful world has captivated and driven philosophers, politicians, and writers to visualize the great potential for humankind to live in harmony. These stories have created in the hearts of many a desire to deny current social and political ills and seek respite in imagined civilizations whose intelligence, equanimity, and foresight surpass their own. From Plato’s Republic and his philosopher king and Thomas More’s isolated civilization on the island of Utopia to Sir Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis and Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward, this dream of a better future occupied the minds of ancient and modern thinkers alike. However, these stories have not been without a sense of cynicism as to utopia’s attainability. Utopia is, in the Latin, after all, a word that means “nowhere” and Raphael Hythloday, whose surname translates to “nonsense,” is the character who has seen More’s Utopia and returned to tell the tale.

Near the end of the 19th century, as industrialization began to take over the globe and the machine became the new mark of the civilized state, the cynicism toward attaining utopia grew alongside a burgeoning feeling of disenchantment with the world. Max Weber describes this disenchantment as an “iron cage of reason descending upon the world” (Bennet 4). Jane Bennet, literary critic and author of The Enchantment of Modern Life, expands Weber’s remarks by saying, “[that] depiction of nature and culture as orders no longer capable of inspiring deep attachment [inflects] the self as a creature of loss” (ibid). Bennet goes on to explain this dichotomy between modernity and pre-modernity by saying that,
There was once a time when Nature was purposive, God was active in the details of human affairs, human and other creatures were defined by a preexisting web of relations, social life was characterized by face-to-face relations, and political order took the form of organic community. Then, this pre-modern world gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic state—all of which, combined, disenchant the world. (7)

Industrialization and technology changed how individuals related to each other. The modern factory replaced human labor and turned workers into machine-tenders, babysitters of the behemoths that threatened to eliminate their jobs and deprive their families of food. Feats of technology such as the telegraph and the radio replaced the old ways of communicating, placing machine and science between people forming authentic connections. In addition, like many advancements, these strange new modes of living made people cling more to the familiar past with which they grew up: the familiar becoming that which seems originary.

From this narrative of disenchantment springs a desire to return to Nature and escape from the world of mediated existence. Alf Seegert describes in his essay “Technology and the Fleshly Interface in Forster’s ‘The Machine Stops’: An Ecocritical Appraisal of a One-Hundred Year Old Future”, that “a characteristically modernist nostalgia for presence, a yearning to escape the alienating machinations of society in order to make contact once again with the ‘real’” alienated people from the “techno-utopian optimism” which grew into the literature and culture of the time as technologies such as steam-power and electricity were touted as being the key to easing life’s difficulties (34-35).
The fear of technology which can be seen later in the literature of the turn of the century (e.g. *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, *Dracula*, *The Time Machine*), follows the argument that, “The fear that man himself will be transformed into machine . . . The machine, that is, will become the measure of all things, the model for man to emulate” (Beauchamp 59) or the fear as Seegert describes, that we could become, through “The alienation of . . . [technology],” a “mediated subject so completely divorced from nature that it doesn’t even realize that it is alienated anymore” (34). Such is the case already with the nostalgia for familiar mediations. Letter writing, which is seen as a more authentic form of communication in opposition to the telegraph and now the email and text messages, is still itself a mode of mediated communication between individuals. Pen and paper stand in for words and face to face discourse. The same could be said of eye-glasses, which when compared to a prosthetic leg or arm seem like a commonplace trinket, however, glasses, too, are prosthetic devices which we wear to augment and improve our connection with the world around us—the difference in acceptance then, is not based in technology, but rather in time. Fear of technology is, in many ways, predicated on the fear of the new and the way in which that newness removes us from the familiar technologies which we have already adopted as parts of our everyday lives.

Fig. 1. The XKCD web comic: “Isolation” gives us an example of progressive technophobia.
Whereas, technology played a positive role in utopian societies, (as is the case with Edward Bellamy’s view of the year 2000 in *Looking Backward*, with its moving sidewalks, universal credit cards, and live music piped through telephone lines), it takes on a more sinister role in dystopian fiction, reflecting the growing discomfort with technological mediation and becoming a way to relate to disenchantment on a deeper level. *We*, by Russian novelist Yevgeny Zamyatin, is the first dystopian novel which established the style of the genre with which we are most familiar (it having served as direct inspiration for both Huxley and Orwell in their own dystopian works). In *We*, the government literally turns citizens into numerically-ordered “ciphers”, cogs in a larger societal machine. By removing individual identity, regulating sexual encounters, eradicating privacy, and scheduling every aspect of daily life, the government creates a unified, ever-present “We”. The protagonist D-503 exists in a walled city within which he encounters a sub-culture attempting to subvert the harmonious and “mathematically perfect life” within the established order and break free of its omnipresent, technology driven control. In dystopia, it is precisely the technology which was hailed as harmonizing and panacean which has become oppressive and destructive of identity and individuality; fear has taken the utopian ideal of social perfection and extended it to its extreme—perfection at the cost of freedom, or as Zamyatin describes it “The savage state of freedom” exchanged, instead, for “the beneficial yoke of reason” (3).

*Brave New World* which follows on the heels of *We* by roughly ten years, opens with an epigraph from Nicolas Berdiaeff, a Russian religious and political philosopher, which highlights the changing perception in the popular mind of Utopia. The epigraph ends with the lines, “Perhaps a new century will begin, a century in which intellectuals
and the privileged will dream of ways to eliminate utopias and return to a non-utopic society less ‘perfect’ and more free” (Huxley i). This brief quotation establishes the action of *Brave New World* and of Huxley’s own fear: that the Age of Utopia is over and that to continue to seek utopia entails with it a loss, or at least a corrupting, of that harmony and perfection which was hoped for in earlier utopian works. The perspective of the protagonists living within dystopian societies becomes illustrative of the struggle between man and nature, the artificial and the originary, language and pure presence, and most importantly, the uneasy boundaries which lie between all of these.

Through most of the major works in utopian fiction, the reader sees the utopian society as an inaccessible world where its citizenry and culture is only available for both reader and character through unreliable sources, or as a society situated in the future that is only attainable through an element of fantastical time travel (*Looking Backwards, The Time Machine, Woman on the Edge of Time*). Protagonists in utopian fiction are actively seeking utopia. The dominant motif is that the utopian society is one that must be entered into by bold adventurers or stumbled upon when one leaves the bonds of traditional civilization; it can then only be known of by the tales of those who survived the return trip. As already noted, these societies possess a technological prowess which far surpasses that of the world the explorers come from. However, as far removed or advanced as these cultures are, they are isolated from the world around them, their transcendent ways effectively lost to the rest of the world.

The isolated and enclosed space was one with which Sir Thomas More was highly concerned. The literal act of enclosure was an economic practice utilized by English nobility during the 16th century to acquire more land with which to raise sheep and thus
produce more wool. Raphael Hythloday, the returned adventurer in More’s Utopia, says that,

Wherever in the realm finer and therefore more expensive wool is produced, noblemen, gentlemen, and even some abbots, not content with the annual rents and produce which their ancestors were accustomed to derive from their estates, not thinking it sufficient to live idly and comfortably . . . enclose everything as pasture. (Moore 22)

The result of this enclosing was to “turn all habitations and cultivated lands into a wilderness”—that is, to trap and frame nature while exploiting it for its use-value (More 22). Thus, those who worked the land were driven off it with only a small pittance, left to “vigourously starve unless they vigorously steal”, becoming vagrants idly wandering around the country-side, waiting to be picked up and thrown into jail for the simple fact that they could not exist outside of the now enclosed space (More 20). The workers’ only identity outside the enclosure was that of wretch and outcast. According to the system which turned them out, the benefit to the rich justified this increase in crime and poverty in the countryside and shifted the locus of blame to the newly minted criminals, all so that, “one glutton, a dire and insatiable plague to his native country, may join the fields together and enclose thousands of acres within one hedge” (23). This phenomenon, among many other social ills, prompted More’s invective against the English state and his writing of *Utopia*.

The initial cutting up of the land for profit and the benefit of the upper-class controllers of society has evolved from More’s critique of English sheep-rearing into the mode through which all utopian and dystopian societies exist: a space separate from all
the rest of the world which exists for the benefit of the few. The idea of who benefits from the enclosed space has changed as the tradition of utopia/dystopia has evolved, however, the basic concept remains the same. More’s Utopia is described as being a social paradise, where work is only done to sustain goods for the general population. Because of this great abundance of goods, no one is compelled to superfluous work and citizens are encouraged to “devote their time to the freedom and cultivation of the mind” (More 66). Even the economy is based on this communal availability of basic needs, so much so that barter and trade are made obsolete, since “There is plenty of everything and no one need fear that anyone would want to ask for more than he needs” (More 66-68).

As such, the enclosed land extends outward, at first acting to protect and benefit the society as is the case in early utopian fiction where peace and prosperity are unshakable truths. However, this enclosure in turn transforms all literary representations of utopian states that follow More’s account into virtual islands, cut off from all that surrounds them.

*We*, and “The Machine Stops” by E.M. Forster (which preceded *We* by almost twenty years) both adopt the notion of a society separate from the rest of the world as a result of post-apocalyptic events. Isolationism becomes enforced rather than freely adopted and is utilized to contain rather than repel individuals seeking freedom and peace as was the case before. Technology turns from being a panacea to a plague. The rise of the technological progress which was meant to liberate man from his burdens becomes that which enslaves. Dystopia plays into an escapist fantasy—a desire to leave behind technology, and the spaces which that technology pervades, in order to seek out an authentic experience of nature and of fellow humans in a world that has not been
virtualized. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury describes Montag, the protagonist of the story, breaking free of the control of the state and escaping to the wilderness which surrounds the city in which the story takes place “as if [Montag] had left a stage behind and many actors. He was moving from an unreality that was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new” (Bradbury 140). The growing technophobia brought on by the role that machinery plays in factories and in warfare only furthered the gap between technology and man’s conception of it. The potential flaws and failings of the utopian technological ideal are thus based on the growing stigma towards the machine which alienates man from labor and experience even while it lessens his burden. Social engineering and the regimented society which seemed to be the solution to all of civilization’s ills are taken to the extreme in dystopian fiction and shown to be more sinister than supportive.

As Aldous Huxley notes in *Brave New World*, the peace and harmony of utopia is that which is enforced on the citizens of the state; the “secret of happiness and virtue” is “liking what you’ve got to do.” Huxley continues, “All [social] conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny” (16). This social conditioning is the product of eugenic progress in *Brave New World* and is directly influenced by Henry Ford’s drive for factory efficiency, so much so that Ford himself is considered a deity of sorts to the people living in Huxley’s future world. The disconnect between humans and technology then, and really between individuals and society itself, becomes the central conflict for Huxley and dystopian fiction in general during the early 20th century. The enclosed space is inverted and turned into an oppressive rather than harmonious space.
Therefore, a return to a more natural world presents itself as being the key to undoing the harm that the dream of a technologically perfect society has wrought.

The goal, then, is to either overthrow through revolution the world technology has created or escape from it through a physical penetration of the enclosure and a return to the outside world. Detective Finch, in *V for Vendetta* serves the role of the traditional protagonist who is part of the system and whose efforts, albeit initially unintentional in this case, are to escape from the system of which he is a part. His efforts are augmented and perhaps aided by V in his overarching deconstruction. Finch, who is the head of the task force meant to apprehend V for his terrorist actions against Norsefire, England’s ruling party, is eventually driven to question and ultimately break away from the state in part because of his pursuit of V. As we will see later in this thesis, the actions of both characters in *V for Vendetta* are inextricably bound to the drive to combat the binary oppositions present throughout dystopian fiction.

In early dystopian fiction, and perhaps still, the escape to the outside world is only ever a short respite, ending in a necessary return to the enclosure. We see this most clearly in Forster’s “The Machine Stops”. In “The Machine Stops,” Seegert writes, “Forster depicted technology and rationality as joint agents of dissociation, dual threats severing us from nature and from our embodied human integrity. In this respect, Forster was of course extending a British pastoral tradition that lamented lost contact with an earth now assailed by rails, industry, and commerce” (Seegert 34). This lament for lost contact finds its way into the rest of dystopian fiction and forms the motivation for the escape from the enclosure. The Machine Stops follows a woman named Vashti who lives in the society of the Machine. Vashti, who, like all others, lives in a self-contained box
filled with buttons and stops which are extensions of her every want and need. In this womb-like enclosure, each button is connected to an action (e.g. turn on music, extend a bed, connect to another person via screen and microphone). This entirely virtual environment (for even the diurnal nature of humans is contained in artificial day and night) is completed with screens and speakers from which beam all the human interaction that the occupants of the Machine could ever want. Not all is perfect, and conflict arises in the placid, below ground life when Vashti’s son, Kuno, finds a way to return to the “nature” above ground without the sanction of the Machine. By leaving for the surface without the permission of the Machine, Kuno breaks from the dogmatic single-minded directives present in the society and expresses his own individual will to return to a simpler, unmediated life without virtuality and technology.

Vashti begins the story in her honey-comb room with the air constantly circulating and creating a comfortable, enjoyable, and seemingly natural experience. Kuno does not experience this same peaceful encounter with air when he breaches the enclosure of the machine. The air that Kuno confronts is thin to the point that he has no ability to breathe it, possibly due to his extended intercourse with the Machine. Having lost his respirator in the ascent he is left with two choices: symbolically nurse off of the opening through which he climbed since it is the only source of breathable air coming up from the depths of the Machine, or die in his attempt to return to a “natural” state. This scene can be juxtaposed with a similar one from Fahrenheit 451 in which Montag stands breathing in the air of his newly found freedom. Bradbury writes that, “the more [Montag] breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough there to fill him. There would always
be more than enough” (Bradbury 144). The difference in incorporation of air and, by extension, setting, is illustrative of Forster’s fear of never being able to truly escape and of Bradbury’s optimism that the aspiration of returning to nature was ultimately attainable.

For both Forster and Bradbury, human bodies have become extensions of mechanization and the passive objects of consumerism rather than “natural” biological embodiments. “The Machine Stops” and *Fahrenheit 451* deal with bodies being acted upon by technology and the drive to supplant human interaction with virtual representations of interaction—beneath which the attempt to regain communion with nature runs as a constant theme. For Bradbury, the alienation of technology is located in the home. Each house has a large TV room, whose walls are covered with screens constantly beaming soap operas and propaganda to distract from the outside world, literally enclosing its inhabitants in media. Eventually, the line drawn between the two ideological forces of nature and technology become unstable, allowing one to bleed into the other. For, once bodies have entered into a space that is completely dominated by the virtual, embodied physical relationships with other humans and with nature break down. If there is any attempt to breach the virtual/actual divide (i.e. the enclosure), bodies meet with anguish and ultimately with death.

Such is the historical environment and narrative tradition within which *V for Vendetta* is situated and which it attempts to ultimately rise above. The enclosure becomes, as we shall see, visually embodied in the graphic format as panels and speech bubbles—the addition of which deepen the connections between dystopian literature and theories of reality and language. *V*, in dealing with these issues, steps outside of them,
becoming a meta-character who narrates his own movements and who stands both inside and outside the action as it takes place. The philosophical context for which directly follows.

**THEORY: DYSTOPIA INSIDE/OUT**

In *The Republic* Plato conceives of reality in relation to a hierarchical order of truth. Representations of actual objects (e.g. art) stand at the end of the spectrum farthest removed from truth and the real, and are called mimetic. Mimesis, Plato argues, “is a source [of] deception and [of] false representation of reality” (Potolsky 138). Plato’s theory for the structure of reality is best described in the example he gives of three different beds and their respective creators—the ideal bed constructed by God or some supreme entity, a craftsmen’s bed, and a represented bed. The bed that is constructed by God is singular in form and represents the True version of a bed. It is the idea that influences every other construction of a bed, either built, or mimed. The craftsmen’s bed is directly influenced by this idea of a bed and all the varied designs of beds are merely attempts at reaching this ideal. Since actual beds are themselves representations of the ideal form of a bed, and each varies in its construction, it does not represent the singular ideal. The craftsman’s bed cannot be perfect because a bed can be understood as being different from other beds, and no bed that is thus varied can be as perfect as the ideal one created by God. However, it is closer to the reality of what a bed is than the painter’s representation of a bed, because the craftsman is said to use the ideal form as direct inspiration. “A representer,” as Plato puts it, “is capable of making every product there is only because his contact with things is slight and is restricted to how they look” (67). The bed that the artist mimes is a merely a copy of the craftsmen’s bed. The bed that the artist
creates represents the appearance of the bed rather than actual truth of what a bed is since it is recreated only from a particular angle and does not capture the actual nature of what the bed is: the comfort and softness of mattress, the frame, the concreteness of its presence—even if the painting or drawing of the bed appears comfortable and welcoming.

Mimesis is then held to be “merely the shadowy other of truth that only illustrates or reflects something real (Potolsky 3). However, Matthew Potolsky describes Mimesis as having a dual nature in addition to the general conception of its falsity. It is, he suggests, “always double, at once good and bad, natural and unnatural, necessary and dispensable. It is the sincerest form of flattery as well as the trade of pirates and plagiarists, the signal behavior of great artists as well as apes, parrots and children” (3). In a way, mimesis is that which structures all forms of human interaction insofar as language, and moreover experience, is a mimetic function.

According to Derrida, the interiority of speech, i.e. the pneumatological “voice in the head” is the formal and authentic while the exterior mode of expression, i.e. writing, is inauthentic and mediated by the system of signification which structures it. Where dystopia and ideology are concerned, this dichotomy is the myth on which the narration relies for the authority of the enclosure and the one which V upends many times over. In explaining Derrida’s conception of différance, Rivkin and Ryan write that, “Presence cannot exist without being from the very outset caught up in the movement of difference and signification . . . the trace structure whereby one thing depends on others to be what it ‘is’” (259). The distinction that needs to be made about our perception of reality and the language which structures it is that it is, “Not unreal, but [is] a simulacrum, that is to say
never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without
reference or circumference” (Baudrillard 6). In the same way, we see narrators in utopian
and dystopian fiction again and again establish the subjugated position of writing in
relation to presence and speech. In H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine*, the narrator states,
before expounding the story of the Time Traveler, that “In writing it down I feel too
keenly the inadequacy of pen and ink—and above all, my own inadequacy—to express
its quality” (Wells 22). The narrator of *Herland* similarly throws doubt onto his narrative
by saying it is “Written from memory, unfortunately” (1). The communicative powers of
recounting from memory via written word establishes a gulf between reader and subject
matter which is far greater than merely that between listener and storyteller, but rather is
illustrative of the gap between experience and language itself. This distancing aspect of
our communicative power leaves only the ghost of presence, and in essence, regards any
attempt to relate experiences as dealing only in empty signs separate from actual reality
which are reductive and inauthentic.

Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist offers a
way in which to understand how Marxist ideology and language are representational and
all-powerful in dystopian narrative. In Baudrillard’s central text, *Simulacra and
Simulation*, he describes a theory of reality he calls “the precession of simulacra” which
is a process by which a representation of an actuality (or definite perceived reality) takes
the place of that actuality which it represents (169). We see this in the Guy Fawkes mask
itself which has become a cultural phenomenon, replicated again and again in media until
it has become no more than the popular image of the mask, itself becoming a simulation,
subsuming V and *V for Vendetta* as a fully independent mimetic representation.
Baudrillard calls this kind of representation a simulation or a simulacrum (pl. simulacra) and differentiates between the concepts of representation and simulation by saying that, Representation [in Platonic terms] stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real . . . simulation, on the contrary, stems from the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (6)

Or rather, that “Pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (3). Instead the simulacrum “denies the hierarchy of copy and original” and stands alone from any single original, relying on its viewers perception and interpretation rather than rational, objective reality to give it meaning (Potolsky 151).

What this means is that the idea “that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange” is not the case as semiology often claims (Baudrillard 5). Baudrillard argues that there is no meaning behind the sign in the way that Derrida argues. Derrida suggests that, ”The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between signifier and signified, even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two sides of one and the same leaf” (Derrida 307). It is this negation of the simultaneous dual nature of the sign (that of signifier and signified) which buttresses the distinction between ideology and reality, and thus, dystopia and the world outside. Ultimately, the totalitarian state is built upon the apparent unity and coherence
of the ideology presented by those in power and the reality which exists outside of it. It is the representation, the illusion, the ideology of control, which structures and constrains the citizenry. The physical walls which enfold dystopia rest on a foundation more adamantine than green glass, telescreens, or eugenics. Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek says that, “The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive naïveté: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation” (28). The ability of these fictional states to control rests on this naïveté in its citizens.

Ideology is the air we breathe; it inundates every aspect of our lives and our relationships. Referring to the Wachowski’s film *The Matrix*, the simulated reality that is ideology is made concrete in the dichotomy between what Morpheus calls, “the desert of the real” (a direct quotation of Baudrillard) and the world outside the matrix. That Morpheus must show Neo the difference between the two realities while *inside* the simulation makes apparent the ubiquitous presence of simulacra in the world—the real world doesn’t make sense outside of the simulation because nothing, not even “reality”, can truly escape from the signs and symbols of which we use to make sense of the world. In *Brave New World*, there exists a form of cinema exists called “The Feelies”. In these showings of B-movie type, sex-filled dramas—one of which is titled “THREE WEEKS IN A HELICOPTER” with its subtitle being “AN ALL-SUPER-SINGING, SYNTHETIC-TALKING, COLOURED, STEREOSCOPIC FEELY. WITH SYNCHRONIZED SCENT-ORGAN ACCOMPANIMENT” (Huxley 167). In these Feelies, simulated sensations and emotions are piped to the audience via their chairs.
More than an advanced form of smell-o-vision, the audience experiences tastes and touch, arousal and fear, all through electrical impulses directed through their bodies. As characters on the screen exchange kisses, “the facial erogenous zones of the six thousand spectators in the [audience] tingled with almost intolerable galvanic pleasure,” Huxley writes (168). These simulated emotions and experiences are just more examples of ideology made concrete in dystopian fiction. If feelings can be simulated through technological means, in the same way that casinos and hotels pump perfumes through vents to create atmospheres of tropical paradises or decadent riches, then feelings become unhinged from authentic experience and made into simulacra. The feelings of sensual touch lose their origins with body to body connection and are replaced by the sensations themselves, “the metal knobs on the arms of your chair,” are the only necessity to feel the touch of lip or the caress of skin because the referent on which those experiences is based is no longer necessary (167).

What I mean by “the real” or outside world that exists beyond the walls of dystopia comes from the tension within the word “real” itself. The real, Potolsky writes, can have almost diametrically opposed senses,

On the one hand, we often use real in opposition to the false or imaginary. The real is concrete and knowable to the senses. On the other hand, we also use real in opposition to appearances or to self-deceptive convictions. In this case, the real points to underlying or overlooked facts, to truths not apparent in everyday life. The real here is precisely what we cannot know by the senses or through material objects in the world. (Potolsky 95)
As such, we can understand the contextual nature of the real in reference to simulacra, both its sensorial objectivity and its transcendent extra-fictive quality. Baudrillard suggests that simulacra constitute the myths which structure our society and inform the way in which each of us constructs our own subjective realities. It can thus be said that we all “live in a simulacra because we live in our own mental models of reality” (Ryan 34). Žižek strongly suggests that to imagine a difference between the simulacra and the real is to deny the very nature of reality itself. Referring again to The Matrix, Žižek states that,

The choice between the blue and the red pill is not really a choice between illusion and reality. Of course, the matrix is a machine for fictions, but these are fictions which already structure our reality. If you take away from our reality the symbolic fictions that regulate it, you lose reality itself.

Therefore, it’s not that reality and meaning are being usurped, but that the essential quality of simulation which enables the actual to exist is that which is inextricably bound to all mediations, discussions, and rebellions concerning the uneasy binary opposition between virtuality and actuality, the technological and the natural. The simulation is not replacing or even masking reality, but rather it is masking the truth that there is no reality behind the act of simulating—making the image simultaneously recognizable and yet disassociated from all referents.

In Simulacra and Simulations the process by which simulations can enter into, disguise, and subsequently take over reality is termed the “precession of simulacra” (3). This precession acts on actuality by symbolically replacing it in all terms and purposes, resulting in a form of the simulation which is then called a hyperreality (6). Thereby, the
hyperreal is seen, without any competition from the authentic which it represents, as the actual. Again, Žižek responds by saying that it is,

Not just a question of seeing things (that is, social reality) as they 'really are', of throwing away the distorting spectacles of ideology; the main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification. The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence . . . the moment we see it 'as it really is', this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality. That is why we must avoid the simple metaphors of demasking, of throwing away the veils which are supposed to hide the naked reality. (Žižek 28)

As Baudrillard puts it, “It is [simply] a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself” (6). As is the case with V’s “true” identity and what actually lies behind the mask. However, an important question to consider here is posed by Marie-Laure Ryan, author of multiple works on narratology and cyberculture, who asks, “How would we tell the difference between simulation and reality? If we could not do so, would this mean that simulations had become reality—or alternatively, that reality was a simulation?” (32). Baudrillard’s answer, simply, is yes. Baudrillard offers the story of a robbery as an example, saying that,

[If one were to] simulate a robbery in a large store: how [would one] persuade security that it is a simulated robbery? There is no ‘objective’ difference: the gestures [emphasis mine], the signs are the same as for a real robbery, the signs
do not lean to one side or another. To the established order they are always of the order of the real. (20)

As such, we can view the simulation as being inseparable from reality in the same way as the sign is from its signifier and signified. V is the mask and the mask is V; anything which lies beneath simply does not exist. As Ryan says, “There is no place for both the world and its doubles” (29). Only that which is perceived as real is real. Therefore, technology in the dystopian novel is not simply replacing and mediating the way of life, but creating a distinction that does not exist. The goal of escape or revolution which dominates the minds of the protagonists of these works is futile because they are battling illusory demarcations in reality, which are no more than modes of control. The little room above Carrington’s shop in 1984 stands as a prime example of that which appears to be outside the purview of the state, but in actuality, is simply another virtualized space under the watchful gaze of those in power. The same concept is deconstructed in V for Vendetta, when V confronts Bishop Lilliman. The Bishop’s rooms are bugged by the surveillance sector of government, of which V is fully aware. However, he circumvents his being recorded by setting a record on to play near the recording equipment during his confrontation with the bishop, altering the state’s control over a space by exerting his own control over it instead.

The enclosure and technology begin to represent more than just physical aspects of reality in these stories and take on more and more the aspect of ideology and simulation. As Freud writes in Civilization and its Discontents,

[One] regards reality as the sole enemy and as the source of all suffering, with which it is impossible to live, so that one must break off all relations with it if one
is to be in any way happy. The hermit turns his back on the world and will have no truck with it. But one can do more than that; one can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its more unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one’s own wishes.

(18)

Reality with its already disintegrating definition is foregone in favor of a curated space, a civilization which is created to alleviate the pain of existence. It is more effective to create one’s own reality and place it in the stead of a given or actual reality than to try and cope with the iniquities of man, says Freud. It is this drive to escape reality through representation which informs the desire to create the original enclosure of the utopian state and it is the repercussions from living in this state and experiencing it first-hand which engenders the dystopia. Man has become inextricably bound to technology and to the mediations thus created between ourselves and the natural world, to the point where the two have become indistinguishable. Technology, or rather, the representation of technology has entered into the realm of the ideological and the discursive. Technology as a whole, and its sister, scientific progress, stand in for the general mediation between man and the concept of authentic life. We see this especially in “The Machine Stops” and in the dystopian future of The Matrix. Technology becomes, representationally, the enclosure around man. In The Matrix, before Neo can be “birthed” into the world outside the matrix, he must first assimilate his representational form with a broken mirror set alongside him and confront the double representation of himself that it reflects. Here, film offers a unique narrative perspective in the way which special effects and computer generated images coalesce and bleed into the “real” world of the human actors.
Simultaneously as Neo is being subsumed by his image in the mirror, he is also being overtaken by the technology of the editing room and being replaced with CGI. He must enter into, on multiple levels, the virtual embodiment of his own image and the concept of representation itself in order to transcend the bounds of the virtual. We see V’s struggle against virtuality similarly represented in the way he confronts the representations which populate the landscape of future England. The initial targets of his vendetta (and those whom we see him confront in the initial chapter of the story) are those individuals who created him during his time at Larkhill: Prothero, Lilliman, and Surridge. He is a representation fighting against those people who were complicit in his shadowy origins and who were involved with the Larkhill Resettlement Camp where, in flashbacks and memories, V is given form and motive.

Other critics have addressed *V for Vendetta* in terms of sexuality and embodied politics (Comer) using the way in which bodies interact to discern an ethical framework from the genre of the graphic novel. However, this approach ignores the deeper theoretical implications of the graphic medium and its ability to illustrate the philosophical concepts at work within it. I argue that by examining the graphic novel in relation to its representational form we can better understand the literary underpinnings operating at its core. V demonstrates the tension in dystopian fiction between the enclosure and the authentic space fabled to exist outside of it. His character exists as a simulacrum in the text and as such he stands outside of the conception of Marxist ideology controlling thought and experience of culture. He sees through the system because he is at once a product of it and separate from its control. V uses this unique position to deconstruct the symbols around him and, I argue, to tie Derrida’s conception
of language to Baudrillard’s theories of reality and simulation. Through V’s speech-as-simulacra, his self-narration, and the mechanics of the graphic medium itself (speech bubbles, narrative space vs character-aware space, and the sequential images which require the audience to fill in the gaps with meaning of their own), *V for Vendetta* acts to unify and express the tensions which exist between perceptions of the authentic and the mediated.

**ANALYSIS**

**FEARFUL SYMMETRY: THE VENDETTA DECONSTRUCTED**

![Cartoon panels showing a dystopian future with text boxes and imagery representing Norsefire’s England established.]

*Fig. 2. Norsefire’s England established (Moore 9).*

*V for Vendetta* is the story of an enigmatic masked figure who systematically works to destroy Norsefire, the fascist regime controlling England in a post-apocalyptic version of the 1990s. V’s political goal in destroying the totalitarian English government is to throw the country into anarchy, to force the people not into chaos, but into independent self-rule. Furthermore, this vendetta is waged against the individuals who ran Larkhill, an internment camp located just outside London, where, in his vague
origins, V was once a prisoner. After the nuclear war of the ‘80s and Norsefire’s rise to power, those individuals who ran the camp and tortured V and his fellow inmates, were given high-ranking roles in the newly founded government. By attacking these individuals V is not only seeking revenge, but is acting to dismantle and destabilize the government from within. V’s form of guerilla revolution is also waged against the landmarks and historical sites important to English culture. In his war, V destroys Parliament, the Old Bailey, and finally 10 Downing Street in order to undermine and eradicate the symbols which the new government has appropriated and, through appeals to their historical significance, used to legitimize their rule.

The narrative of *V for Vendetta* opens on the fifth of the eleventh, nineteen-ninety-seven, with an image of Jordan Tower, the home of Norsefire’s propaganda department, in the background of the first frame while the self-proclaimed “Voice of Fate” issues declarations of the coming day’s weather (fair skies until 12:07 A.M. when a burst of showers will commence). The Voice of Fate continues to explain the events of the evening and the political goings on of Norsefire. Behind, and concurrent with, these initial events, a sign-post with a placard and a camera come into view in the third panel. The camera is focused on a line of workers leaving a factory. The placard reads, “FOR YOUR PROTECTION”. This first encounter with what we will later learn to be England, establishes the nature of the enclosed state, both through ideological framing as well as technological monitoring. The jagged speech bubbles of the Voice of Fate establish reality while it is being viewed by the reader, creating a sense of narration from within the closed system, the overlap of which we will later examine in closer context in relation
to identifying the locus of narration and the presence of narration itself in the graphic novel.

Four panels into the story, two of the three protagonists are introduced—Evey Hammond in her bedroom and V in his sanctuary of culture, the Shadow Gallery (see fig. 3). A copy of *Utopia* is on the shelf in the foreground of the Shadow Gallery situated next to copies of *Mein Kampf* and *Capital*, and behind V’s vanity, old movie posters wallpaper the rest of the room. This scene runs parallel to one of Evey getting herself ready. The two threads culminate in a side-by-side view of both Evey and V looking at their own reflections in a mirror. Evey, a-down-on-her-luck, initially flat character, has been getting ready in order to go out into the seedy alleys of London in her first attempt to earn money through prostitution. On this first-and-only foray, she meets a group of men who are plainclothes government enforcers known as Fingermen. The Fingermen begin to advance and attempt to misuse their government-sanctioned power to dominate the young Evey, V, however, appears and confronts the would-be abusers in flowery, theatrical fashion.

V makes his entrance in the typical “hero to the rescue” sort of way, but he does so as a character bracketed in references and representations, only words during this initial action being a recitation from Macbeth, which was delivered originally by a wounded captain in Act 1, scene 2. He quotes,

\[
\text{The multiplying villainies of nature} \\
\text{Do swarm upon him—from the Western Isles}
\]

\[
\text{..............................}
\]

\text{And Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,}
Showed like a rebel’s whore. But all’s too weak;
For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like Valour’s minion carv’d out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him. (Macbeth I.2. 13-23)

This self-narration follows him amid the panels and outlines his interaction with the Fingermen. His actions through the course of the panels in which he performs the recitation follow the timing and content of each, mirroring reality and creating a scripted appearance to his actions and behaviors. The scripted nature of his movements, both in the sense of authorial intention and perceived autonomy of character, confuses the locus of motivation and thus illustrates the way in which mediation enters into and guides the narrative itself. It is through this confusion between author and character whereby the meta-narrative provided by V directs his very progress. Self-awareness and the struggle between creator and creation is not uncommon in post-modern and contemporary characters, however, the way in which V melds his awareness to the narrative and the tropes of dystopian fiction create a critical new layer to examine.
As V recites the passage from Macbeth, slipping through the Fingermen, he reaches the words, “Till he faced the slave,” as he comes face to face with Evey. With the line, “Which ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,” tear gas spews from his stump of an arm, the rest of which, being a fake hand, he has left behind with one of the Fingermen who grabs at him. As the narrow alleyway fills with gas, the arm the Fingerman grabbed explodes, killing him in the panel following the one in which we see V and Evey make their escape—leaving V to have literally deconstructed the Finger with his own.

Phillip Wegner suggests that, “Space does for comics what time does for film” (3). The physicality of movement in the visual medium creates a sense of immediacy and simultaneity of space and time by juxtaposing images. While the sequential and wholistic quality of the graphic medium creates a duality in the perception of content. Unlike a painting where everything in the field of view is happening at once, the frames of the comic create shifts in time that can at once be followed linearly and next be seen as an overarching canvas from above. David Carrier, a theorist of comics, suggests that comics utilize “visual syllogisms with an obvious missing premise, which the reader must supply” (25). Time is and isn’t within the graphic novel; the flow of information between panels is only an illusion supplied by the reader.
The actions of the each sequential image can then be broken down and their constituent parts seen as though from an external vantage point. Thus, when V takes on the role of a meta-narrator he becomes reader and actor within the frame of the story, able to see the gaps between the images and move around them, acknowledging their existence and their contribution to the story within which he finds himself. His speech guides him from panel to panel when looking at the text sequentially; however, when seen from the omniscient perspective, V’s speech is prescriptive rather than descriptive—authoritative rather than observational. He, as a meta-narrator, displays an omniscience toward the narrative as a whole, as though he has already read the work in front of us and is already in the process of supplying the missing premises which Carrier describes. The rest of his speech bubbles throughout the graphic novel highlight his superposition within the text. His words and actions are expressed predominately through rhyme, epigrammatic statements, quotes, riddles, etc. Essentially, he is a character made of figurative language who reflects the mediated nature of speech itself and its inability to authentically portray events in their actuality; demonstrating that there is always something in the way of direct expression.

V’s deconstruction of the text within which he finds himself begins with the establishment of his presence as a simulacrum. Potolsky writes that in a mimetic relationship,

Artist and audience share a set of conventions so familiar that neither side recognizes that it is trafficking in conventions rather describing objective reality. The mimetic effects of artwork are produced by a proper ‘match’ between the work and the expectations of its audience. (4)
Therefore, in a system of shared reference, for V’s quotes to be allusions to other works, the other characters in the text would have to understand that V is speaking in quotations. However, that is far from the case. Few, if any, characters notice that V’s words are references to cultural works. In fact, the only time his speech is called into question is when Evey shouts at him asking if his response to her is just another “Bloody Quote,” but only because she has already heard part of the reference while living in the Shadow Gallery with him (223). V’s use of constant quotation regardless of his audience’s complicity in the frame of reference, ties his speech to Baudrillard’s conception of the simulacrum. Potolsky explains that “Simulacra only appear to resemble the original from a specific point of view, and are therefore suspect. The simulacrum copies only the appearance of the original” (151). Baudrillard begins *Simulacra and Simulation* with the following quotation which he attributes to the book of Ecclesiastes, “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (Baudrillard 1). Of course this quotation is nowhere to be found in Ecclesiastes, nor the rest of the Bible for that matter. Rather, it highlights Baudrillard’s argument that simulacra are representations without referents. By falsely attributing the passage to the Bible, Baudrillard cements the power of the simulacrum to mask that to which it supposedly refers. In the same way, V’s speech is surpassingly dense with quotations, so much so that most of what he says is lost to his co-characters, leaving his dialogue to appear to constantly contain references without origin. Effectively, everything he says falls to the simulation.

In *V for Vendetta*, the structure of the government itself engulfs and replaces the very bodies which it governs. The Norsefire regime figuratively tears the human body
apart and reassembles it as an interdependent tool in the form of government agencies, all for the use of the

Fig. 4. The body deconstructed (Moore 15).

party leader, Adam Susan. This separation, representation, and conversion of the body becomes the starting point to view the way in which _V for Vendetta_ extends the concept of enclosure to its citizenry and the way in which V confronts it. The agencies are as follows: The investigative branch is termed the Nose, the agencies of surveillance called the Eye and the Ear, the police force are represented as the Finger, the Mouth is concerned with radio propaganda, and the synecdochal Head represents the inner chamber of the party leader. By creating and naming the government agencies after human body parts, the agency (i.e. will) of actual humans is undermined and made into the structure which surrounds and controls them. This “body politic” demonstrates an unraveling and repurposing of humanity and reflects V’s later deconstruction of same symbols.

Just as the simulacrum is “the reversion and death sentence of every reference,” V is the death sentence of his own origins and history (Baudrillard 6).
The initial vendetta begins with V’s destruction of Parliament on the 5th of November, the anniversary of Guy Fawkes’ attempt at doing the same over 300 years earlier. Afterwards, V begins his vendetta against the high-ranking individuals in the government: Lewis Prothero, Bishop Lilliman, and Doctor Delia Surridge. As V picks off each of these characters, using their trades or vices against themselves, V is effectively destroying his origins and deconstructing his enemies in the same stroke. The readers and Detective Finch (the third of the protagonists in *V for Vendetta* and the man tasked with apprehending V), learn about V’s time at the camp through Doctor Surridge’s diary—the only surviving record of V’s time there and the events leading up to the camps destruction at his hands.

Most importantly, in learning of V’s shadowy origins, the fact is established that the man behind the Guy Fawkes mask is no one; he is a modern Ulyssean Nemo—the no-one who barely embodies what Guy Fawkes represented. The idea of revolution is tied to Fawkes, but the style and execution differ greatly once demolition is removed from the picture. V is, effectually, a perfect simulacrum who has consumed and replaced that which he represents all while leaving no other trace than a mask. What’s beneath the
mask is of no significance. Others wear it just as well. The idea is what is most real: more real even than the space through which he moves and narrates. He, as a simulacrum, is in the position of power in the text and outside of its action. Guy Fawkes could only attempt to blow up Parliament in 1605, V succeeds in doing so because he is Fawkes’ ideology embodied going against the ideology of the state and not merely an individual with gunpowder and a grudge.

Lewis Prothero, who plays the role of the Voice of Fate for the government, is kidnapped by V from a moving train and is placed within a recreation of Larkhill. Through a terrifying vaudevillian-themed simulation of his time helping run Larkhill, V places Prothero face to face with a mirror of the reality of which he was a part. This virtual reconstruction of horror and death drives Prothero insane and renders him mute, effectively silencing Fate. Todd A. Comer writes in his essay, “Unearthing an Embodied Ethics in V for Vendetta,” that

V’s agency amounts to a demonstration of the ‘arbitrary’ link between signifier and signified, and the relational nature of the sign in general. As V destroys one particular meaningful reality, the Voice of Fate is incapable of naturalizing a new meaning. It cannot keep up: there is an ever-widening gap between what had been a naturalized, hence seamless, connection between the Voice’s representation of reality and reality itself. As V continues puncturing this border, the population doubts the government, seeing that reality is open to interpretation and change. Susan states the problem succinctly when Prothero . . . is kidnapped—“he’s taken away the Voice of Fate. How shall I fill the gap it leaves? How shall my country fill the silence?” (Comer 104)
After removing the Voice, V continues to subsume the very order he has been destroying, taking over the Fate computer itself and committing the perfect crime by replacing seamlessly that which has been killed.

Fig. 6. V “conducts” continues his deconstruction, destroying of the Eye and the Ear in the third act of the story (Moore 184).

We see one of the greatest examples of the deconstruction of the “real” and in turn, of V’s enemies, in a scene where V forces the corrupt and pedophilic Bishop Lilliman to ingest a communion wafer which has been laced with cyanide. V asks Bishop Lilliman, who once was a reverend at Larkhill, to explain the concept of the Catholic communion and that of transubstantiation. V forces the Bishop to verify that, "Whatever [the Eucharist] is made of now it will become the body of Christ" (Moore 60).

The nature of the host is itself a simulation which subsumes and stands in for the body of Christ. As a mythological piece of information (in Barthes' terminology) it is a second order semiological motif that is used to cement the arbitrariness of the connection between Christ's body and its ritual consumption in providing salvation. The Ear, in the previous chapter had tuned in, on a seemingly boring evening, to the priest’s chambers
knowing that it would be, as they call it, “Children’s Hour.” When the detectives replay the recording which the Ear has captured, they note that V has put a record on to mask the Ear’s ability to spy, knowing full well the limitations of the system in place. As Ear’s recording begins, panels showing the interaction between V and the priest give background to the dialogue bubbles which constitute the voices on the tape and thus the only account of the interaction accessible to the detectives, the previous chapter having ended just as V begins speaking to Lilliman. This overlaying of “audio” and action puts the reader in a privileged space of seeing into the past through the aural-made-text.

However, this whole scene is grounded in the revealed “true” nature of the Eucharist when Detective Finch, the leading detective trailing V, profoundly and definitively offers his opinion on the matter in the final scene of the chapter. He explains, once the tape has reached its end and the priest has taken his final communion that their pathology reports showed that the host indeed contained cyanide before Lilliman ingested it. He says, in response to these findings, “And you know what? When it reached his abdomen it was still cyanide” (Moore 60-62). The poisoned Eucharist in this scene helps to elucidate Baudrillard's conception of the simulation by placing the nature of God within the enclosure of simulation. Instead of the myth of transubstantiation coming to fulfilment and the body of Christ entering the priest as is the case in the holy ritual, it is perverted and unmasked as simulation when the cyanide filled wafer reaches the priest's stomach and does not change its form.
V killing Lilliman lays bare the simulated nature of the Eucharist's power and its connection with divinity. Baudrillard warns, however, that "It is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them" (Baudrillard 5), and in the priest's death, the simulation is unmasked and thus established as being defined by the negative space it leaves upon discovery. By killing the priest, V destabilizes the religious establishment in England, its ties to the governmental arm, as well as the mythology which lends itself to the church's power to control.

As V destroys and deconstructs more and more of the symbolic structures within the ideological enclosure of the state, the space left for the government to control shrinks considerably. Evey says in her last monologue, “How purposeful was your vendetta;
how benign, almost like surgery … your foes assumed you sought revenge upon their flesh alone, but you did not stop there … you gored their ideology as well” (Moore 260).

V’s targets, both human and architectural were meticulously chosen for their impact on the infrastructure of England and for their impact on the cultural mind of its citizens. V blows up his first target Parliament on the 5th of November, Guy Fawkes Day (Fig. 8). The poem he speaks which overlays the scene is both iconic of the graphic novel and of the history of England which V is assuming in his act of terrorism. His choice of Parliament however, does more than just chip away at the ideological structure of England’s history—it transcends the act of terrorism and enters into the realm of pure spectacle. Parliament is, at this point in England’s history, a defunct structure. It is no longer the home of the governing body nor does it have any other use. The building remains for its iconography and the credence it lends to the power of Adam Susan’s regime. When it is destroyed, Susan says that it was “our oldest symbol of authority” (Moore 16). The symbolic nature of Parliament and its symbolic destruction are what matter to V. In relation to this, Baudrillard says of figurative authority,

[The citizens] cannot be controlled by an order that can only exert itself on the real and the rational, on causes and ends, a referential order that can only reign over the referential, a determined power that can only reign over a determined world, but that cannot do anything against this indefinite recurrence of simulation, against this nebula whose weight no longer obeys the laws of gravitation of the real, power itself ends by being dismantled in this space and becoming a simulation of power. (Baudrillard 21-22)
As Parliament blows up, Evey astonishedly asks if V was responsible and as V responds, fireworks in the shape of a “V” light up the sky and Evey is caught up in the spectacle of seeing of “real fireworks” for the first time (14). The overly grandiose nature of the fireworks added into the fact that Parliament remained in London only as an aged symbol speaks to V’s proclivity for overly dramatic poeticism and his love of the theatrical.

When Evey asks who he is moments after he destroys Parliament, V again breaks into the narrative space, saying, “I’m the king of the twentieth century. I’m the bogeyman. The villain . . . the black sheep of the family” (13), referring directly to the chapter title, “The Villain.” In the final panel of the section, V says to Evey, “There. The overture is finished. Come. We must prepare for the first act” (14). In addition to V’s actions being theatrical, he speaks and acts as though he were in a play, fully aware of his audience sitting in the darkened room just beyond the glare of the stage lights. In his self-aware theatricality, V is usurping power from the government, creating his own kind of control over the narrated space. We see this at the close of the chapter, as the declaration of the Fate computer in the initial panels returns and is realized, fighting against V for its grasp of the narrative space. “It is precisely 12:07 A.M.” the narrative reads, “It begins to rain” and, as prescribed by Fate, it does (14).
This interaction with symbols also extends to speech as well. V enters into what has all the appearances of a dialogue with a statue of Justice above the Old Bailey, the central criminal court of England. In it he is speaking for himself and also responding as “Justice”. This sequence blurs the line of who is speaking through the use of ambiguous bubble tails in many of the panels, making it seem as though it is not actually V apostrophizing but that it is actually Justice speaking back. The speech act, and the simulation of that act by V, breaks down the barrier between reality and representation by juxtaposing two symbols and creating a visual metonymy where V is standing in for, and embodying, the role of Justice. This soliloquizing in front of the statue of Justice could be read as just that, however the graphic shifts between panels and the non-descript dialogue font creates the appearance of simultaneous difference and unity because we see that “V’s Agency amounts to a demonstration of the ‘arbitrary’ link between signifier and signified, and the relational nature of the sign in general” (Comer 104). V’s bubble for himself and justice, blend together and an authentic source for the dialogue is lost in the
disorder. This decentralizing of the locus of speech ties into what Carrier argues is the reverse cogito of comics, “if there is speech, there must exist a speaker” since in “comics dialogue must always be attributed to some character, even if, as in Doonsbury, that character is a politician depicted as a short-fused bomb” (43-4). As such, the appearance of the discourse between the two is made more believable because of the fallibility of speech to convey the origin of a speaker.

Fig. 9. Symbols in dialogue
“The speech balloon is a defining element of the comic” Carrier writes, “it establishes a word/image unity that distinguishes comics from pictures illustrating a text. . . speech balloons, because they are visible to the reader but do not lie within the picture space containing the depicted characters” are therefore able to depict the unseen inner workings of a character’s mind (4). The speech bubble exists in a space of non-interaction, and in a way, delineates the barrier between thought and the expression thereof. The example Carrier gives to as illustration is of being present in a comic yourself, he suggests that, “If you could stand next to Donald Duck in a comic, you would see him, but not the words or thoughts in his speech balloon” (6). As such, the vocal aspect of language is made concrete and textual. As V has narrated his own actions through the text, he also narrates the actions of others, often voicing actions which would occur in a
subsequent panel or more significantly, letting the world around him bleed into the narrative space and describe it for him.

The enclosure is an all-encompassing body of discourse and in their rebellions against it, the protagonists are simply trading signs of the real for signs of the supposed real-itself—that is, trading the mode of signification (i.e. language) for that which it is supposed to represent on a deeper level, as in Plato’s conception of the world of forms above the one in which we live. Their struggle to achieve a more authentic world is merely replacing one symbolic order for another which is equally constructed. The dystopian state is then a reflection of the way in which discourse and language controls and guides everyday actions. *V for Vendetta* is different from the dystopian stories that come before it in this struggle with discourse and the desire to escape in that V is a symbol fighting symbols. He is just as much a representation as the state he fights against. In this lies his ability to win where so many others before him have failed. As I’ve previously mentioned, V systematically confronts and deconstructs other symbolic orders in his rebellion against the state as the narrative progresses (Prothero, Parliament, Lilliman, etc.). Ultimately, V in his vendetta is a middleman—a part of the process of signification responsible for the creation of meaning rather than an outsider grappling with the already established order of signs.

In step with his role in the process of signification, V issues a call to action to the people of England through a broadcast from Jordan Tower, the propaganda center and home of the Voice of Fate (whom V has eliminated at this point of the story). During the broadcast, V plays the role of a boss calling humanity in to a performance review to let them know that they’re being considered for termination. He says he knows that they’ve
never missed a day and acknowledges their contributions to the company (e.g. fire, the wheel, agriculture). However, V says that, despite all of their contributions, it was their fault that all of the terrible managers were elected (the text for these panels is shown over the image first of Adam Susan and then various dictators of the 20th century). V says, “All you had to say was ‘No.’ You have no spine. You have no pride. You are no longer an asset to the company” (114). He continues, however, by giving humanity an option: “You will be granted two years to show me some improvement in your work. If at the end of that time you are still unwilling to make a go of it . . . you’re fired” (Moore 117).

Alongside this incitement against apathy, the action of the speech is made to seem like a live broadcast performed within Jordan Tower and that V has seemingly been trapped within the tower, now ripe for capture. V deepens his identity as a simulation two-fold in this chapter: The break-in is an elaborate ruse to undermine the influence of the government and to simultaneously take out Dascombe, the man in charge of the Voice. The broadcast which was meant to look like live TV was merely a recording, and, while V is simulating his presence in Jordan Tower, he captures and dresses Dascombe in a Guy Fawkes mask and cloak, and places him in the broadcast room, bound and gagged.

When the police enter the broadcast room to take V, they shoot at the restrained Dascombe, their shots ringing out at the appearance of V’s speech bubble declaring the threat of humanity’s severance and Dascombe is killed instead. Here, V reinforces the symbolic order of simulacra replacing reality and substitutes a perfect replica of his own image for his “real” self while at the same time narrating the events taking place in Dascombe’s death. Through the broadcast, V establishes his presence as a replicable
image to the government through Dascombe and in doing so sets up the context of Evey’s eventual takeover.

As Carrier writes, “What in the picture was presented as speech or thoughts becomes, in our space, words. These thoughts are revealed, not to any character within the strip, but only to us viewers who stand outside” (30). V’s narration bleeds into the perceived space of other characters, making it a way of breaking through the barrier between language and reality which Derrida distinguishes in his argument on the interiority of speech versus its exteriority. The speech bubble literally makes Derrida’s “voice in the head” a representation on the page, and thus a part of the exterior mode of expression which is mediated a system of arbitrary signs (307). Carrier continues that, “The balloon words are both inside and outside the picture in the sense that thoughts, said to be ‘inside one’s head,’ do not have any position in space” (40). A blurring of the narrative space occurs when words in the background can be viewed by characters in relation to the speech of another character. This is most apparent when V is telling Evey goodbye as he leaves the Shadow Gallery, knowing that he is going off to confront his end. However, he is doing so in his typical fashion and being indirect, speaking in rhyme and allusion. Evey, in her stubbornness, misses V’s goodbye and demanding clarification, asking “for the page to be turned upside down” so she can read the answers (223) and in her anger, misses a poster on the wall on their course through the shadow gallery which reads, “Farewell, my lovely” (Moore 223).
Fig. 11. “Farewell, my lovely.” V’s words entering the perceived space. (Moore 223). Moreover, in this scene we see highlighted the fact that dystopia and comics reflect the division between speech and writing, of escaping the shackles of the state and the page, and returning to a more ‘natural’ world where language and being are pure and authentic in their expression. V’s words entering into the perceived space is a reflection of his breaking out of the enclosure as a meta-character and of his words literally doing the same, the text itself fighting to be understood by the characters within it when conventional speech fails. The struggle to escape dystopia is ever present in this graphic novel because the tension between the multiple binary oppositions at dystopia’s core are constantly fighting against themselves in the narrative space and in the background of the text itself.
**FATE CONTROLLED**

Concurrent with Adam Susan’s role as leader in the governmental Head, the Fate computer (which provides the Voice with its proclamations) aides in meting out order to the masses. As we see in the opening scenes, the Fate computer simultaneously describes and prescribes reality in a way similar to V’s self-narration, but it does so through the use of mass media. The rain shower which is predicted during the first few panels and the actual shower which begins in the final frame of the chapter is merely a demonstration for the public of the professed control over reality which the government claims to possess in their control of the Fate computer. This illusion of control, since it is merely a symbolic presentation, plays into what Roland Barthes describes in his *Mythologies* as pure spectacle. He describes the spectacle in saying that, “What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself” (Barthes 18). The perception of an act or event is more important than the event itself. The spectacle of a computer which is playing the role of the age old tradition of fate is therefore merely an ironic staging of power drenched in the hubris of a contrived control over nature. Derek Almond, head of the Finger, says of Fate’s radio broadcasts that, “The whole idea is that people think it is Fate talking. It makes Fate appear more human. Gives people confidence” (Moore 17).

In addition, Moore complicates the presented humanness of Fate by creating a romantic relationship between Adam Susan and the computer itself.
Even love has fallen into the clutches of the simulation. As Heath and Potter argue,

The world that we live in is not real. Consumer capitalism has taken every
authentic human experience, transformed it into a commodity and then sold it
back to us through advertising and the mass media. Thus every part of human life
has been drawn into ‘the spectacle,’ which itself is nothing but a system of
symbols and representations, governed by its own internal logic (33).

The spectacle is not meant to leave us fulfilled, but rather to purge us of the emotions
being simulated so that we can reenter society content and cathartic. V, as the simulation,
feeds Adam Susan the message of love to control him using that which he values, taking
as revenge that which Susan loves. Potolsky says of the spectacle that “We are happy in
the theater only when we and others suffer” (73). He writes, quoting Augustine, that
“‘The audience is not called upon to offer help but only to feel sorrow, and the more they
are pained the more they applaud the author’” He continues, saying that “Spectacles
transform the emotions, making pain a source of pleasure and rendering ethical feelings a
matter of aesthetic enjoyment” (ibid). Susan’s love then, is not love in its “real” sense,
but rather a means of transferring stunted emotions onto a non-living object in order to purge himself of his feelings of impotency, leaving behind only the spectacle of a man turned into a cuckold, in love with a computer console.

V’s definitive act as a simulacrum is in his role as a character outside the text, the apex of which is reached when it is revealed that he has had access to the Fate computer since the program’s inception. In his speech to Evey when he reveals a console identical to Susan’s in the Shadow Gallery, V says that taking over Fate is revenge for Susan taking “Justice”, perverting and corrupting her—referring both to the statue he communed with earlier in the narrative and the allegorical corruption of Justice. This final takeover of a symbolic structure within the government is V’s ultimate act of retribution and deconstruction. He becomes the wielder of Fate itself, both symbolically and physically, almost a mirror image of Adam Susan, if you would, replacing Susan’s ideology with his own, and wielding the system which he has been working to tear apart from the beginning. During the early stages of the story, he is shown to be able to respond to any change in the government’s plans and to adapt accordingly. In his takeover of Fate, we as readers see that it is because of his privileged position wielding Fate. Thus, his position as being outside the text and his ability to respond and act as though he were aware of the opposition’s plan is grounded in the narrative. This meta-position is mirrored in the graphic format as well.
Fig. 13. V takes over Fate (Moore 201).
The overarching demonstration of V’s presence above the narrative space can be found in the section breaks between books of the complete graphic novel. In each of three scenes, V is in various stages of readying a line of dominos; finally being flicked by V’s hand in the break between the end of book 2 and the beginning of book 3. The dominos fall within the actual narrative space when V show Evey the room with his own Fate computer and allows Susan to know of his role as puppet master. The nature of the frame in the graphic novel creates a space which simultaneously focuses the gaze of the reader and excludes everything which lies outside of it, so that the graphic format constrains as much as the ideology within the narrative. Potolsky writes that “The idea of the fourth wall makes the stage into a mimetic copy of the world, but this copy is as much the collective illusion of the actors and the audience as it is a quality of the spectacle itself”
Thus, V breaking out of the enclosed space of the narrative and his presence between the books renders V as omniscient, a perspective wherein the identities of character and reader are blurred and combined within V and made into the simulation. Thus, V symbolically breaks from the enclosure narrative, however, unlike Finch; he never breaks from the enclosure of the state in the pages of the story. Finch, almost ironically, is the only character to achieve this long sought after freedom and is whom I will address presently.

**THE “REAL” PROTAGONIST**

Detective Finch, who is in opposition to V for the entire graphic novel, can be read as the traditional protagonist in the style of Winston Smith of *1984* or Montag from *Fahrenheit 451*. In the same way as these other protagonists, Finch is converted from his initial dogmatic beliefs concerning the state near the beginning of the novel. He falls away from his allegiance to the government as V destroys more and more of London. In a way, V working against the government in his symbolic revolution makes it possible for Finch to escape in the end. However, the last thing which pushes Finch toward his freedom is Larkhill. For the characters in the story, specifically Detective Finch, Larkhill is another puzzle piece in the ever-spreading canvas that is the investigation and eventual encounter with V. In his growing obsession with V, Finch decides to journey to the dilapidated remnants of Larkhill in order to “get inside [V’s] head.”

In this respect, his journey outside of London mirrors similar journeys in each of the other dystopian works I’ve examined. All of the locations external to the central city in these dystopian worlds offer a form of authentic experience in their respective novels. In *1984*, it’s the golden-country that Winston Smith tries to run away to with Julia; *Brave
New World has savage, undeveloped America to embody that which is authentic; We by Zamyatin, has the old house and the wilderness beyond the walls of the One State; Fahrenheit 451 has the river and the forest where the human books dwell. All of these locations provide what is lacking to those people living within the physical or representational walls of the totalitarian state. However, in V for Vendetta, escape is only attained through the use of mind-altering drugs and then, only after perception has broken down. In other dystopian fiction, only the physical barrier is broken between inside and outside, leaving the more “natural” world accessible only to those who can overcome by force the will of the state. Even when the external, physical barriers are breached between the enclosure and the outside world an authentic, unmediated life is still beyond the grasp of those seeking. The protagonists of these other works are still under the ideological control of the state—thus the act of breaching the enclosure remains a taboo rather than a reclaiming of a free space as is the case in V for Vendetta.

Fig. 15. Finch’s symbolic rebirth (Moore 216).
The drugs which Finch takes allow him to experience a glimpse of the authentic because his very perception of reality is being broken down as he enters Larkhill. Finch enters into a haunting reality, a replaying of V’s experience in Larkhill and exits on the other side, in a sense, reborn. He leaves the confines of Larkhill, moving through the same brick wall we see in the flashbacks to V’s time there, and as with V, follows in his footsteps, leaving the camp behind. He exits, ripping his clothes off, shouting, “La Voie . . La Verite . . La Vie” (Moore 216) these words are Jesus’ own, when he says to Thomas “I am the way, the truth and the life”. The choice to render them in French being to retain the repetitive “V” and follow the pattern of “V” words throughout the work in chapter titles and V’s speech. The significance of Christ’s words here cements V’s influence over reality and language, expanding V’s status as a simulacrum and giving him the ability to subsume and replace even Christian ideology (Moore 216). In the final pages of the graphic novel, Finch finally leaves London for good, walking alone down the M1, off into nothingness. This final panel of the graphic novel leaves the reader hopeful that after the events of the story the enclosure can be breached and freedom attained. Finch escapes, his ties to the government broken, the goal of so many other characters from so many different novels perhaps finally within his grasp.
THE NOSTALGIA INSTINCT AND FREEDOM

In *Brave New World* the naïveté which Žižek mentions as part of the “divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation [of it]” is seen in the Feelies which captivate and offer false catharsis to their viewers. Citizens are kept in a state of unthinking, passionate, distraction in order to remove the moral ambiguity and human depth from their daily lives. As Mustapha Mond, one of the World Controllers in Huxley’s novel says “Of course [Othello’s better than those Feelies,] that’s the price we have to pay for stability. You’ve got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art” (Huxley 220). High art, or rather, the beautiful, as Kant describes it, is “that which, without concepts, is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction” (430). It is therefore seen as the progenitor of introspection in *Brave New World* and, as Mond continues, “The world is not the same as Othello’s world. You can’t make flivvers without steel—and you can’t make tragedies without social instability. The world’s stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get” (Huxley 220). If people were to like high art and introspection, not only would there be no market for the new and ultra-disposable, but for the old stories and characters
to exist, the world would need to regain the understanding of what it’s like to suffer—and in doing so, possibly be made aware of the falsehoods which surround their existence and allow them to perceive their environment as it truly is. Oscar Wilde describes how the public, “are continually asking Art to be popular,” rather than to be beautiful, which is the driving force behind Mond’s speech. Wilde continues, saying that the public wants art “to please their want of taste, to flatter their absurd vanity, to tell them what they have been told before, to show them what they ought to be tired of seeing, to amuse them when they feel heavy after eating too much, and to distract their thoughts when they are wearied of their own stupidity” (142). The drive of the mass public for easily consumable art is what makes the states control of culture such an easy thing in dystopian literature.

With no discernable past as referent, (since the beautiful relies on history for the source of its struggle and introspection) reality is completely mutable and art is without context. Most importantly, keeping people in this state of vacuous self-identity, the nostalgia instinct is controlled and eradicated in all but the most extreme cases. Mond explains that, “We haven’t any use for old things here . . . especially when they’re beautiful. Beauty’s attractive, and we don’t want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like new ones” (Huxley 219). Therefore, the new is no longer beautiful, by Kant’s standard, the new is simply distraction and entertainment.
Through a reversal of the platonic ideal, high art in dystopian fiction becomes that which can truly reconnect man to the past and thus to authenticity. In its essence, V’s longing for and hoarding of art is a repurposing of the mediation used for control. Wilde says in “The Decay of Lying” that, “What Art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out . . . it is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have had no art at all” and in taking a direct stand against nature, he says, "Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place" (163). This response to the binary relationship between art and nature and its role in disenchantment, supplements the drive to reconnect with Nature and the nostalgic past. We see this in *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *V for Vendetta* which share the concept of art being the core of reconnection with the past.
For *V for Vendetta* the site of reconnection through the artistic medium is found in V’s home, the Shadow Gallery, the last bastion of culture in Norsefire’s England. It is an underground warehouse of treasures lost to fascism and destroyed by totalitarianism. The Gallery houses countless volumes, records, paintings, and movie posters. Evey’s response to first seeing the V’s home is similar to the response to high art in *Brave New World*. She says, “It’s unbelievable! All of these paintings and books…I didn’t even know there were (original emphasis) things like this” (18). V responds by saying, “You couldn’t be expected to know. They have eradicated culture…tossed it away like a fistful of dead roses” (ibid). The method of controlling culture then lies in the realm of easily digestible art, the consumable soap opera or the readily available dime novel or, most importantly, in propaganda. All of these fall into the category of mass produced art, and act in the same way as soma (The drug of choice in *Brave New World*, which puts its users into a docile and pliable state) does, becoming a means to ensure social stability, because, as Mond says, if introspection is made impossible through distraction, then the people will do whatever they are told to do being otherwise unable to question their existence. Through hypnopaedic slogans such as, “Hug me till you drug me, honey; / Kiss till I’m in a coma: / Hug me, honey, snuggly bunny; / Love’s as good as soma” (Huxley 166) and the Feelies, commercial art fulfills the role of “vicarious experience and faked sensations” necessary to provide the illusion of culture and connection (Greenberg 10), thus keeping the people content and controllable.

In terms of the graphic medium, art as reconnection is brought to bear on the reader at a level which hints at the inescapability of mediated existence with disregard for any placating or enlightening quality art may possess. Phillip E. Wegner, the author of
multiple works of criticism on the graphic novel says in his theory of comics that, “Comic characters are presented as occupying spatial and temporal locations distinct from other such characters and belonging to an underlying world that exists independent of the panels in which the characters appear—an alternative universe whose ‘real’ dimension seems to depend on events that have been cut out or are occurring between the panels” (1). There always exists a disconnect from the “reality” of the comic world and the appearance thereof. We, as readers, only experience the world in panels frozen in space. However, according to Wegner, this gap in signification is just as much a disconnect from reality as the disconnect brought on in the feeling of disenchantment. Virtuality can then be seen as the perception of the loss of and longing for authentic connection with reality. The gap in signification marks more than the perceived quality of existence and hints at the fact that reality is ultimately inaccessible outside of the process of signification. The graphic novel thus holds within it the unattainable enchantment which is sought after by those seeking reconnection with the authentic. However, to reiterate Žižek, “the moment we see it 'as it really is', this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of . . . naked reality” (28).
EVEY TAKES OVER: SIMULACRA AND REPLICABILITY

In the closing scenes of *V for Vendetta* the protagonist is shown speaking to Finch’s old partner, Stone.

All the appearances of the protagonist, V, are there. The traditional font style is used to denote his speech. However, at this point in the narrative, V as we met him at the beginning of the text is dead. The person behind the mask is now his apprentice, Evey. However, who is behind the mask, as we have seen, is a moot point, or rather it is for those within the narrative of *V for Vendetta*. In V’s last words to Evey he addresses her as Eve, a name which he repeats multiple times suggesting that he seems to savor it and its relation to her position progenitor of his image and her taking over for him when he’s gone. His last words are,

Eve, listen carefully. [Finch,] The one I waited for has called, and now I have not long . . . This country is not saved . . . do not think that . . . but all its old beliefs have come to rubble, and from rubble may we build . . . that is their task: to rule
themselves; their lives and loves and land … with this achieved, then let them talk of salvation. Without it, they are surely carrion. (245)

We never see V’s appearance beneath the Guy Fawkes mask; the only images of him without the mask are shown as black outlines, either surrounded by fire (as seen in the panels depicting his origins) or when he is first introduced to the reader as he walks to his dressing table. Our perception of him is unchanged from when we are first introduced to him. The simulation that is V remains unbroken after his death as is the reality which he embodies. The reality, or rather the perception of V remains the same because the simulation remains the same—we are only aware of the “new” V’s identity because, as readers, we entered into and were a part of the process of signification along with Evey. The character’s mortality isn’t as important as the meaning which he embodies. His last words to Finch after Finch shoots him are, “There, did you think to kill me? There’s no flesh or blood within this cloak to kill. There’s only an idea . . . ideas are bulletproof” (Moore 236). In reality, there is no uniquely distinguishing fact or feature about V, there is no essential self beneath the mask. He is a character who is cloaked in history as much as shadow. The mask he wears, that of the visage of Guy Fawkes, is as much a simulation, a representation of revolution as V, the one under the mask and the one who gives it shape simultaneously embody and define it—a example of the sign in its totality. “His representation and his body embody, if you will, an enormous gap in signification” (Comer 104). However, neither is anything without the other in the same way the sign has no meaning without both of its constituent parts.

V says to Evey before he dies, “You must discover whose face lies behind this mask. But you must never know my face” (245). Evey rejoins later in the chapter, in
deep consideration of unmasking her teacher, “If I take off that mask, something will go away forever, be diminished because whoever you are isn’t as big as the idea of you” (Moore 250). V is a reflection of all that he comes into contact with and ultimately, the reflection rubs off on those around him. When Evey sits down in front of V’s dressing stand in the Shadow Gallery after realizing the importance of V’s anonymous identity and resolving to leave him masked, a slow close-up on her face in a mirror occurs until the reflection takes over the frame, only her lips and cheeks remain visible, at which point she smiles wide directly reflecting the smile of the Guy Fawkes mask.

Baudrillard claims that, “The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible” (19). Thus, if the real is no longer that by which
everything is judged, two possibilities emerge which impact the construction and quality of dystopian fiction: there will arise a group who will use this tenuous quality to control reality, and/or there will arise a group which will struggle to reclaim an easy definition of that which is authentic and that which is not. Such is the case in Baudrillard’s analogy of a robbery and the effacement of a definite reality in regard to V’s identity. There remains no ‘objective’ difference: the gesture of staging a robbery, because there is no confusion in the perception of the act. As is the case with V, all that matters is the appearance of the thing (20).

Evey enters into the simulation when she puts on the mask (a final step which exists away from the eyes of the reader). The movie version of V for Vendetta directed by James McTeigue, falls short in its depiction of Evey’s take over in this regard because of the way in which it enlists the entire populace of Norsefire’s London in taking on the visage of Guy Fawkes in the same moment that Evey takes over. The saturation of the image of V saps the image of its power as a simulation due to its ubiquity. While the replications expose the fact that the symbol is open for appropriation and consumption (which does fall into Baudrillard’s conception of simulacra), Evey becoming V highlights the lack of truth in simulation. If there is more than one V, then it is surely apparent that there is no original V. However, Evey’s takeover in the graphic novel has more impact in semiological terms in that her replacement of V is 1:1 and not part of a cycle of replication. While everyone can potentially be V the question is never ‘which one is the real one?’ when it is only Evey doing the replacing because there is no appearance of difference brought about by number. There is no gap in signification between what V represents and who or what is embodying that appearance in the case of the graphic
novel. Whereas, in the movie version, the focus is on the replicability of V and on the ability of the symbol to proliferate itself.

The “real” or “original” V’s final act against the government occurs after his death. He says to Evey in his dying breaths, “The Victoria line is blocked…twixt Whitehall and St. James. Give me a Viking Funeral” (245). The reference to the intersection of Whitehall and St. James is the location of 10 Downing Street, the seat of the British Prime Minister and the last symbolic order V had planned to destroy before his death. He becomes the final weapon against the state; his body and the ideology which he represented are launched in one final effort to make the English citizens reclaim their country. Evey loads him into a subway car filled with explosives and his favorite roses and then sends him on his way to Valhalla (ibid). “The age of killers is no more” she says as she does it, echoing V’s own declaration of the same from earlier in the story.
CONCLUSION

For dystopian fiction, the space outside of the frame is that which contains the possibility of freedom. In the graphic novel, it is the gutter between the panel, the gap in signification, which contains its own kind of freedom. The only character to fulfill the impetus to return to nature and to do so within the narrative frame of *V for Vendetta* is Detective Finch, who after “killing” V, decides that he doesn’t belong in society anymore and chooses instead to live his life on his own terms, outside the purview of the structure...
of which he was once part. Finch breaks through the enclosure in the end, but only after doing so mentally, perhaps as a preliminary weakening of the boundary between reality and his perception of it. After being reborn at Larkhill and later killing V—innocent of his failure to destroy V completely, he leaves, walking down an empty highway leading out of London. V says to Evey in a flashback that, “Anarchy wears two faces, both creator and destroyer. Thus destroyers topple empires, make a canvas of clean rubble where creators then can build a better world” (248). Evey adds to that by saying, “I will not lead them, but I’ll help them build, help them create where I’ll not help them kill. The age of killers is no more. They have no place within our better world” (Moore 248-60).

*V for Vendetta* has spawned an entire subculture of anarchy-fueled internet activism, at the forefront of which is the online hacktivist group, Anonymous. These individuals wear the Guy Fawkes mask and profess anonymity as their strongest asset in the fight against government censure and monitoring of the internet. Their adoption of the Guy Fawkes mask can be neatly described by Roman Mars, the voice of the podcast *99 Percent Invisible*. He says in an episode on the internet group Anonymous, “People just seemed to intuitively know that you can play around with these things and draw on the power of them but make them your own. And in making them your own, you’re doing it in a way that rebounds back to the original images and makes them even stronger” (Mars). Anonymous has taken hold of the replicability that is the image of V and adopted it as their own way of fighting back against corruption while at the same time creating lasting forms of activism (their protest against the Church of Scientology, for example). Mars continues by noting how easy it is that, “You can make the images your
own and be one of them, or use it for your own purposes and have nothing to do with Anonymous at all. No one will know the difference (my emphasis). And these icons, and Anonymous, will live on” (Mars). It’s not about the image of V himself or even what V stands for within the graphic novel which matters. V exists as a simulacrum and as such can be reproduced endlessly for any means by anyone. To echo Baudrillard, the only thing that is true is simulacrum.

*V for Vendetta* not only typifies the genre of the dystopian novel, but augments and modifies it by utilizing the influence of the graphic medium to transcend the bounds of literature and create within it a multi-layered text that is able to tackle deeply critical aspects of literary theory in new and exciting way. The complexity of the graphic medium is something worth notice, deserving closer study for its own sake and for its brilliance in the execution of literary forms in a visual medium. *V for Vendetta* and dystopian fiction in general, offer a better understanding of how humans relate to the rise in technological ubiquity and the perceived need to return to authentic "nature," and how we conduct ourselves in relation to the need for the authentic. V’s success as a symbolic entity in relation to the narrative of the story sets the work apart by tying post-modern cynicism together with the hope for reconnection, allowing for a form of social commentary that more aptly reflects our current sentiments toward technology, mediation, and governments. As such, if we can better understand our relationship to representations, we can better understand how we create these virtualities and how they, in turn, shape our existence and our societies.
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