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Sequential Art and The Cold War: Representations of the Conflict in 1980s Comics Books

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Master in Modern and Contemporary History

Supervisor:
PhD Luís Nuno Rodrigues, Full Professor,
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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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I would like to manifest how much concluding this dissertation means to me, both in a personal level, as well as in an academic level. Entering a master's program was always a fear I had given the dimensions of the dissertation and the work I had to endure. Now, with everything finished, I look back with pride and joy at the work done both in my bachelor and master program. Now, I would like to commemorate the people that aided me throughout my academic journey and life journey.

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not just for me, but for my mother—my memories of her will endure, as will my love. My grandfather Abel is, at the time of me writing, likewise, not in the most favourable conditions. Nevertheless, my love for him matches his for my grandmother to whom he dedicated six decades of marriage and companionship, until her dying breath.

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"Love is the Dance of Eternity" – "Metropolis-Part I: «The Miracle and The Sleeper»", Dream Theater

RESUMO

Com a eleição de Ronald Reagan para a presidência dos EUA em 1980, o paradigma político americano transformou-se. As tensões entre os EUA e a União Soviética, que durante o período da "détente" estariam mais apaziguadas, voltariam a estar intensificadas. Desde a Segunda Guerra Mundial, a banda desenhada representava os eventos e figuras de conflitos e a Guerra Fria não foi exceção. Durante as décadas de 50, 60 e 70, a Guerra Fria ajudou a produzir e influenciar a arte e narrativas de diversas revistas. Porém, com o reacender das hostilidades, a década de 80 trouxe novo material narrativo e artístico que, de certa forma, não se assemelha àquele que se encontrava nas décadas anteriores. As principais questões que orientam esta dissertação centram-se no tema escolhido para a mesma, que pretende compreender as transformações das narrativas e das personagens à luz do tempo e do espaço em que foram produzidas. Para o conseguir, colocamos questões como: como é que os acontecimentos da década de 1980 impactaram as histórias e atitudes das personagens? Como foram retratados os acontecimentos da Guerra Fria na banda desenhada? De que forma as personagens foram representadas à luz da banda desenhada e da época em que foram concebidas?

Palavras-Chave: Guerra-Fria, banda desenhada, década de 80, Estados Unidos da América, União Soviética.

ABSTRACT

With the election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S presidency in 1980, the American political paradigm was transformed. Tension between the USA and the Soviet Union, which during the "détente" period would have been calmer, ended up intensifying once more. Since the Second World War, comic books represented the events and figures of conflicts, with the Cold War being no exception. During the 50s, 60s and 70s, the Cold War helped to produce and influence the art and narratives of several magazines. However, with the rekindling of hostilities, the 80s brought new narrative and artistic material that, in a way, does not resemble what was found in previous decades. The principal questions that drive this dissertation are centred around the theme chosen for the dissertation, which intends to understand the transformations of the narratives and characters in light of the time and space in which they were produced. To achieve this, we'll introduce some questions, such as how events of the 1980s impacted the stories and attitudes of the characters; How Cold War events were portrayed in comic books; In which way were the characters represented in light of the comic books and the time they were conceived.

Keywords: Cold War, comic books, 1980s, United States of America, Soviet Union

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GLOSSARY

ABC American Broadcasting Company

AEC Atomic Energy Commission

ANTA American National Theatre and Academy

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

CAA Conference of American Armies

CBS Columbia Broadcasting System

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

CMAA Comics Magazine Association of America

CND Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

CPUSA Communist Party of the United States of America

DC Detective Comics

DIY Do it Yourself

EC Educational Comics/Entertaining Comics

FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation

HUAC House Un-American Activities Committee

INF Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces

KGB Committee of State Security

MAD Mutual Assured Destruction

MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology

MPLA People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola

NAACP National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NBC National Broadcasting Company

POW Prisoner of War

SALT Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

SDI Strategic Defense Initiative

START Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

TV Television

USA United States of America

US United States

USIA United States Information Agency

VED Victory in Europe Day

VVN Victory in Vietnam

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VOKS All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries

1. INTRODUCTION

With the growing popularity of Superhero movies over the last twenty years starting with *Blade* (1998), taking shape with *X-Men* (2000) coupled with Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002) and reaching its apex with the Marvel Cinematic Universe, superheroes have never been more in the public's conscious. With this being said, the books from which characters and narrative occurrences originate from, still are seen as a niche culture with lots of bad faith surrounding it (Rhoades, 2008). Although characters like Batman, Spider-Man, Superman and Wonder Woman[1] are part of American popular culture, and have been so for many decades, they and other characters reached new heights with the advent of globalization and the production of movies and TV shows about them. With the comic book industry becoming more valuable each passing year, not only in terms of movies, but also in terms of overall book sales[2], it is important to understand the impact that History had on the comic book industry and the creation of characters and narratives. Seen as a type of modern day mythology (Reynolds, 1992), the superhero angle of comic books is brimming with history of how the time and space affected them.

While comic books is the most general agreed upon to describe the books that have images with various types of bubbles to express dialogue, thoughts, etc., the term sequential art was used in the name of this dissertation. The term "sequential art" to describe comic books was introduced by comic artist Will Eisner that described art that followed a sequence in a certain arrangement to convey a graphic storytelling (Eisner, 2008), with most commonly known example of sequential art being comics (McCloud, 1994). With the Cold War being an event encompassing a large majority of the twentieth century, it is no surprise that even culture was affected during that time. One of the cultural aspects that were influenced by the conflict was no doubt comic books. The dissertation is going to involve the analysis of comic books and graphic novels[3] released in the 1980s that convey various themes, ideas and aspects of the Cold War during this decade.

The principal questions that drive this dissertation are centred around the theme chosen for the itself, which intends to understand the transformations of the narratives and characters

[1] While Superhero Comics are the most popular and associated "genre" of comic books, there are many other genres. Superheroes stories can also have many different tones depending on the character, writer and story.
[2] See https://www.comichron.com/yearlycomicssales.html
[3] A graphic novel is essentially a comic book, however most comic books are long form series, while graphic novels are complete stories and books that don't come out in a periodical format.

in light of the time and space in which they were produced. To achieve this, we introduce a few questions, such as: how events of the 1980s impacted the stories and attitudes of the characters; How Cold War events were portrayed in comic books; In which way were the characters represented in light of the comic books and the time they were conceived.

Before entering the literature review, a small methodology section is introduced to explain the research choices. Which comic books were chosen; Where were they read; How was the analysis of the comic books conducted.

To achieve these purposes, the dissertation is divided into two chapters, the literature review and discussion, respectively. Each chapter is divided into multiple subchapters that discussed the given topic it was selected. The literature review first three subchapters briefly discuss how the United States, the Soviet Union and Europe were affected by cultural policies, internally and externally. Each explaining how the policies were implemented at the end of the Second World War, in order for the two dominant Superpowers to achieve a higher degree of influence over the many parts of the globe. After that, three cultural aspects are discussed, those being film, television and music, and how the Cold War had an effect on the mutations that these mediums suffered throughout the end of the Second World War, up until entering the 1980s. The final subchapter of the literature review is entirely dedicated to comic books, further divided into subchapters. Each subchapter of the comic books section is discusses a decade beginning at the 1930s to give a brief overview of the boom that the industry had in this decade. The following subchapters provide an in-depth analysis of the comic book industry from the 1940s through the 1970s, exploring how the Cold War influenced the medium, similar to the examination of film, television, and music in earlier sections. The choice of dividing the comic books section into the given nomenclature for the many periods of comic book history, those being the Golden Age, Silver Age and Bronze Age, were considered, however the division into decades was easier to organize and simpler for a none comic book reader or someone unknowledgeable to the medium and its history to understand.

The discussion section, likewise, is divided in many subchapters. The first section gives a brief overview of who Alan Moore is and his importance for the comic book medium in the 1980s, followed by an explanation of what he desired to do with the, at the time, recently acquired Charleton Comics. After that, a summary of the setting of *Watchmen* and its initial pages and imagery, followed by the discussion of a characters thoughts about President

Truman of the United States. The first real subchapter of the discussion centres on political themes in comic books released in the 1980s. Three examples are discussed: the *Watchmen* mention of a character performing *coups* in South America in the 1970s at the will of the U.S government, resembling real life operations that were sanctioned by it; the relation between the Iran-Contra Affairs and the revamp of the Suicide Squad team in the pages of *Secret Origins* #14 (1987); Batman's struggle with the Soviet mercenary, KGBeast, who tries to undermine American defence efforts in the story arc "Ten Nights of the Beast" in the pages of *Batman* #417 to #420 (1988). The following subchapter revolves around societal representations of the conflict on the pages of *Watchmen*. In particular the psychological effects of Nuclear War and how it is represented in the graphic novel in comparison to what they were in real life. This section is continued by how the punk and women movements are represented in *Watchmen* and how they stand for criticism for Nuclear War. The last subchapter is a character discussion, in particular of two characters of *Watchmen*, Doctor Manhattan and Ozymandias, and two characters from *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman and Superman. This final section intends to discuss how these characters are facets of many aspects of the Cold War. The dissertation ends with a conclusion explaining the findings of the research, answering the research questions and an overall reflection of the dissertation and research.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following chapter aims to explain the methods used to back-up this study. The methods are made clear, as well as the sources and means of data collection, culminating in how the data was fashioned and examined.

2.1 Methods

The study revolves around the analysis and interpretation of comic books in an historical context. Although the use of comic books as a primary source is uncommon, it isn't invalid, and it can be regarded as historical evidence, as seen by the advances of historical perception made by Peter Burke and Ludmilla Jordanova, in the context of Cultural History (Sherif, 2020), making them good objects of analysis that reflect the time and space in which they were produced. Since the dissertation revolves around the interpretation of certain stories related to the Cold War, in light of historical and cultural background, the historical method is considered the most relevant. The stories analyzed and used in the literature review were published in the 1980s and decades prior, respectively by the two biggest publishers of American Comic Books[4] and were chosen based on the narratives, visuals and characters (both personality wise and looks wise) displayed in the books. The limit of books found in the discussion section was selected to be four from DC Comics; therefore many comic books were excluded from this dissertation.

That being said, the books and stories presented in the discussion section were deemed the most relevant with representations of 1980s Cold War. Although each story talks about different topics and tackles the conflict in many perspectives, the communal factor binding them all together is the connection they all have to the antagonism between the West and the East. Given the nature of the study, that being one of both interpretation of narratives and art with historical analysis, it is necessary to be well informed about the sources and its content to then check it against existent historiography made by other historians (Sherif, 2020). By doing so, comic books can be validated and accepted as much as evidence as other primary sources. Utilizing the historical method becomes imperative in this manner due to it being based on cross-referencing the historical fact with the comic book narrative. That is to say, to look for references of actors, events and dates. Of course, that comic books, being narratives, sometimes, based on real events, can have some metaphorical meaning behind them, but that doesn't remove factuality from them. An example is the super-hero team, X-Men. Although

[4] Marvel Comics and DC Comics

mutants, in the comic book sense, are not real, they were used as a metaphor for the social struggles and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s, to fight bigotry and prejudice. White (2014) claims that a metaphorical disposition can be accepted when "a similarity exists between two objects in the face of manifest differences between them". Despite not being a study based upon a qualitative method, a criterion sampling was used as the requisites for selection were predetermined before selection (Patton, 1990), which made the search more focused, ignoring comic books that did not have the Cold War in the forefront or enough symbolism. The reading and analysis were carried out between the months of March and May of 2024 with the assistance of "Marvel Unlimited" and "DC Universe Infinite", two subscription services of both publishers with a digital library containing hundreds of titles published throughout the decades. Only two books were excluded from the use of these services, *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*, which I physically own. Moreover, the Marvel Database[5] and DC Database[6], two digital encyclopaedias for both publishers with hundreds of thousands of articles and images were utilized to facilitate the search of finding the comic books used in this study, as well as to see additional information regarding specific characters, comic issues where they made appearances, publication history and editorial information. These services and databases were chosen due to their convenience and practicality.

2.2 Data Analysis

Close reading holds itself as a valid and prevalent manner to understand comic books and their meaning (Kukkoken, 2013). By paying attention to the way comic panels are written and drawn, the reader begins to notice the appearance of characters, their actions, and their thoughts. This provides clues that the reader can use to deduct what is happening in the page and the events concerning it (Kukkoken, 2013). Dissimilarly to a common book, having speech bubbles lends the reader information on how dialogue or narration is being grasped. If the character is yelling, talking quietly or providing more emphasis to his/her point. This symbiosis, between image and word, provides an interplay that helps us perceive the narrative in a more coherent and meaningful way. Being attentive to any themes or symbolism is likewise imperative in the way they are connected with the narrative, especially when dealing with a subject matter like the Cold War. Just like any book, and given the nature of the dissertation, having the historical and cultural context in which the comic book was created in

[5] See https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Marvel_Database
[6] See https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/DC_Comics_Database

the forefront is essential, since we need to engage with the social and political aspects in which it was created and how it was represented, both visually and textually. Following these ideas, the comic books were read and analyzed in their totality with historiography to cross-reference and corroborate. However, it is important to note that, despite the close reading of the comic books in question, the purpose of the study is to find references of Cold War conflict, either literally or metaphorically.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Cold War Culture in the United States of America

Primarily a political, economic and military struggle, the Cold War provided as much of a cultural and ideological impact as did the other factors (Westad, 2010). Like any war, but particularly the Cold War, the use of images and words—through propaganda, including their design, production, and dissemination—was essential to the forty-year struggle between the United States (West) and the Soviet Union (East) that followed the end of the Second World War (Shaw, 2001). It became crucial for both superpowers, especially the United States, to focus on Western Europe in order to gain an advantage over the Soviets, while also aiding Germany and other countries within the American sphere of influence (Ryan, 2005). Since an all-out armed conflict was deemed undesirable by both superpowers, the U.S. and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) resorted to alternative methods that avoided direct military confrontation, viewing these as more advantageous than a "real" war (Shaw, 2001). With the start of the American-Soviet rivalry, even before the end of the Second World War and beginning of the Cold War, both imagined their animosities on the construction of "narrow" nationalism and "unreasonable" religion (Westad, 2010).

In an effort to gain the upper hand over their Soviet rivals, the United States began distorting the Soviet image and shaping public opinion to portray the American side as more appealing. This strategy leveraged ideology, public diplomacy, and culture to emphasize the Soviet threat and justify continued American involvement in places like Europe (Ryan, 2005). To achieve this, U.S. policymakers began promoting the "American Way of Life" as a model, emphasizing its defiance against other systems of governance, such as left- or right-wing autocracies (Gienow-Hecht, 2004). Intellectuals like Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Louis Hartz believed that the global adoption and dissemination of an enterprise-based culture could promote democratic values, leading to the eradication of fascism, communism, and other undesirable ideologies abroad (Gienow-Hecht, 2004). With propaganda and culture diplomacy being such important tools at the dawn of the Cold War, Hartz proclaimed:

"It is the absence of outright war, or the presence of what we call the «cold war», which makes these orientations plain; for military struggle, as Waldo Frank has somewhere written, is the great simplifier, reducing complicated social issues to the simple lines of the battle chart. Because the current struggle against Communism is in significant part an ideological competition for human loyalties, it has brought into the plainest view America's

psychological pattern. One of the issues it involves is the issue of a social «message» to compete with the appeal of Communism in various parts of the world" (Hartz, 1991, p. 209).

The climate of the Cold War enabled the United States to develop the tools necessary to achieve its objectives and win the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people in Western Europe (Ryan, 2005). Gaining an early advantage in the Cold War was of utmost importance in order to secure a position that would lead to the desired results. George Kennan, director of Policy Planning in the State Department during President Truman's term, argued:

"We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security" (Kennan, 1948).

It was necessary to undermine the Soviet's image in propaganda, whether it be officially or non-officially, to secure "an essential and enduring West based on a series of constructions that facilitated U.S. policy and its integration into European affairs" (Ryan, 2005, p. 56). George Kennan believed this challenge to be one of great importance, and that it could determine the national quality:

"He will rather experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear" (Kennan, 1947).

3.2 Cold War Culture in The Soviet Union

In the Soviet Union, politics and culture had been intertwined since the establishment of the Soviet State in 1917 (Shaw, 2001). Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, believed that the success of Communism stemmed from its ability to intertwine with and significantly disrupt the cultural development of the people (Shaw, 2001). By employing writers, scientists, artists, and other culturally significant figures, the Soviet State began to promote the ideas of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism (Shaw, 2001). Another important aspect was cinema. By 1921, Lenin had already recognized the significant propaganda impact of films, as well as the potential of Soviet diplomacy to undermine other regimes and promote

global revolution (Hazan, 1982). By around 1960, it is estimated that the Soviets were spending upwards of $2 billion on communist propaganda worldwide (Taylor, 2003). In the following years, particularly during the period of the "détente", rather than a decline in worldwide cultural ventures, there was an expansion, especially in sports. By the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union had established sports contacts with sixty-seven countries, with 32,000 Soviet athletes traveling abroad (Shaw, 2001). Sports made about one-third of all Soviet cultural contacts with other nations, making them, as V. Ivonin[7] said, "a valuable means of strengthening friendship and cooperation between young people of various countries" (Hazan, 1982, p. 40).

3.3 Cold War Culture in Europe

At the end of the Second World War, the Cold War facilitated new methods of transferring and trading ideas, values, productions, and reproductions across Europe (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). Recognizing that it would be more advantageous to rely on European cultural norms rather than political ones, the superpowers began to expand their cultural policies in Europe, particularly in Germany (Gienow-Hecht, 2010), since the country was divided between the allies at the end of the War, making the main defeated European nation of the conflict the perfect candidate for the propaganda struggles throughout the second half of the 20th century. Consequently, the Soviets took the cultural initiative more seriously than their transatlantic rival, particularly with regard to the high arts, which the Americans regarded as the domain of the elite (Gienow-Hecht, 2010).

While the Allies were beginning their cultural programs in Germany, Soviet efforts were already taking shape. For example, the Deutsche Theatre in Soviet-controlled territory had already staged about ten productions, including Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* and Molière's *The School for Wives* (Schivelbusch, 1998). Along with these programs, the Soviets exported materials based on the Russian cultural tradition like music, painting, history and performative arts (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). All of these projects were managed by VOKS (the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), which was responsible for sending top Soviet talent abroad and for hosting visiting foreign delegations, theatre companies, and sports teams (Caute, 2003). Over the years, anti-Western propaganda in Europe had an unforeseen effect on the Soviet Union. By combining cultural criticism in theory with practical cultural rapprochement, Eastern European Communist countries began

[7] Vice Chairman of the USSR Committee on Sports

to experience internal pressures, leading regions like Hungary and Poland to establish more contacts with their Western European neighbours (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). As Eastern Bloc countries increased their contact with Western nations, concerns within the Soviet State grew, particularly due to the openness and flow of information among the people traveling between these regions (Magnúsdóttir, 2010). The challenge of reconciling the growing desires of Eastern Bloc territories with the Soviet Union's cultural objectives was a persistent issue. This prompted Soviet policymakers to revise their foreign cultural policy and its relationship with the West (Magnúsdóttir, 2010). According to U.S. estimates, 17,000 foreigners arrived in the Soviet Union on exchange programs, while 39,000 Soviet nationals travelled abroad. By 1953, the number of exchanges had increased to 45,000 (Hixson, 1997).

When it comes to the United States, Europeans embraced American culture with both resistance and admiration. The presence of American soldiers in Europe during the Second World War facilitated the infiltration of American popular culture into the masses more effectively than in previous decades (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). Thus, American culture became more widely adopted in the years following the War. Propaganda showcased the "American Way of Life", demonstrating to policymakers that this approach was key to winning the hearts and minds of Europeans. This was especially true for the French, who, captivated by American films and other media, sought to acquire the same vehicles, accommodations, and appliances used by Americans (McKenzie, 2005). The increased circulation of films began to shape the minds of the youth. While countries like France experienced a rise in film consumption, Italy also felt the impact of the growing dissemination of Hollywood productions. This led to a widening gap in mentalities between rural families and their more urban children (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). While policymakers were primarily involved in developing public information and propaganda, those in the cultural industries also played a crucial role in shaping the opinions and mentalities of both American and foreign audiences (Falk, 2010).

Although there was some resistance to the acceptance of American culture among Europeans, musicians like Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen experienced enthusiastic receptions during their European tours. The European fans expressed their appreciation more vocally compared to American audiences (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). People in the East, especially in East Germany, also embraced American culture, often as a way to criticize their government's policies. Additionally, they participated in a consumption culture that had

developed during the early Cold War years, similar to their Western counterparts (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). With the construction of the Berlin Wall, cultural exchange between East and West Germany faced significant obstacles due to restrictions imposed by both sides. This contributed to increased cultural hostilities between the superpowers and heightened limitations on free speech in the East, where criticizing the government was severely restricted (Poiger, 2004).

However, not all popular culture was restricted. Science fiction gained popularity in both the United States and the Soviet Union, largely due to the achievements of the Space Race. Figures like Neil Armstrong and Yuri Gagarin were celebrated for pushing the boundaries of human exploration (Gienow-Hecht, 2010). This inspired a revolution centred on science and technology in both Western and Eastern countries. Writers like Stanislaw Lem envisioned a future where communist and capitalist ideologies might merge (Major, 2004), contradicting previous Stalinist visions of the future with marvellous creations and access to pure materials to build a perfect society (Gienow-Hecht, 2010).

3.4 Film

With the onset of the Cold War, the climate around Hollywood began to shift. As the baby boom generation grew up, fewer people ventured out to the movies, preferring instead to stay home and listen to the radio or watch television. Additionally, there was an increased interest in other commodities, such as automobiles and household appliances (Fraser, 2005). This shift began to reverse with the realization that an Allied victory would be highly advantageous for the U.S. government, allowing them to use Hollywood to bolster their soft power while consolidating the military hard power (Fraser, 2005). With the Marshall Plan in effect, with its purpose being the "revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist" (Jones, 2018, p. 43), the U.S. government sent their economic aid intertwined with cultural influence, with Hollywood studios receiving $10 million from the European Recovery Plan as direct subsidies (Fraser, 2005). The U.S. diplomatic cinematic efforts began in France, where, despite the Vichy regime's ban on American films during the War, the French film industry had flourished. After the War, French audiences were eager to watch the American films they had been denied access to during the conflict, such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939) (Fraser, 2005). However, American interests were thwarted by the 1945 French election, which saw the Communists and Socialists win with 50 percent of the popular vote. This victory led to

calls for the nationalization of the French film industry, complicating the superpowers efforts (Fraser, 2005).

In the immediate post-war years, American movies were also shown to Soviet audiences, particularly those films recovered by the Red Army as it passed through Berlin and other capitals, gaining access to the archives (Richmond, 2003). These movies underwent a process of subtitling, with credits removed and titles changed, resulting in the producers receiving no recognition or proceeds from their work (Richmond, 2003). These violations of licensing laws and instances of piracy led to the suspension of film sales until 1958, when the "Agreement on Exchanges in Cultural, Technical, and Educational Fields"—commonly known as the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement—was established. This agreement saw both superpowers consent to exchanges in various areas, including film, theatre, and science (Gould-Davies, 2003). In the following years, the Soviets purchased an average of four to five American films annually. One notable film, *The Apartment*, released in 1960, had a significant impact on audiences. Scenes depicting characters heating their dinner, lighting the stove without matches, and opening a fully stocked fridge made Soviet viewers acutely aware of the disparity between the West and the East (Richmond, 2003).

Similar to the U.S., the Soviet Union also received films from France and Italy, which were popular. However, Polish and Czech productions garnered the most attention from Soviet audiences. For example, *Ashes and Diamonds*, directed by Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, was highly praised by Russian political analyst Andrei Piontkovsky (Richmond, 2003). Another opportunity for the public to view foreign productions, particularly American ones, was during the Moscow International Film Festival, which has been held biannually since 1959. However, at many film festivals, movies were not purchased but were illicitly copied and shown to Soviet high society (Richmond, 2003). The selection of foreign films deemed suitable for Soviet audiences was the responsibility of Goskino, the State Committee on Cinematography. This committee was also in charge of censoring the films by dubbing and removing scenes that contained criticisms of Communism or other behaviours disapproved of by the Soviet State, such as homosexuality (Richmond, 2003). Regardless of the tries of the State to censor the films, the overall message of them still reached the minds of the audiences (Richmond, 2003).

By the 1950s, the American film industry found itself suffocated by the negative publicity perpetuated by the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee). Although the HUAC

was established in 1938, it arrived in Hollywood in 1947 to investigate what its Chairman, J. Parnell Thomas, termed a "Red Propaganda Center" (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010). Alongside the efforts of the HUAC, U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy also pursued investigations into socialist or communist sympathies in Hollywood. Although the HUAC found no concrete evidence of Marxist influence, some individuals were blacklisted from the industry. For instance, Kim Hunter, who won an Oscar for her role in the 1951 film *A Streetcar Named Desire*, received no film roles for the next three years (Whitfield, 1996). In this decade (1950s), many movies were made relating to the Korean War (1950-53), mostly exemplifying the relationship between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China and their expansionist ambitions (Lentz, 2003; Shain, 1974).

As political pressure from Senator McCarthy cooled, particularly after his witch-hunt tactics were exposed on national television in 1954, some Hollywood figures began to question the industry's role in the Cold War (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010). Among the critical responses was the film *Storm Center*, directed by Daniel Taradash and released in 1956. Although it had limited commercial impact, it served as a strong rebuttal to Senator McCarthy's crusade (Robbins L. S., 2000). Seeing that their efforts were being resisted, the U.S. government sought other means to strengthen American influence in Hollywood and advance Cold War initiatives during the 1950s. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) secretly financed the British animation studio Halas and Batchelor to produce a film adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in 1954, due to its critical views on totalitarian regimes (Leab, 2007). Established in 1953, the USIA (United States Information Agency) was another organization tasked with promoting the nation's stories in print and visual formats abroad, effectively acting as the country's publicist (Schwenk, 1999). In an effort to enhance the U.S. image, George Stevens Jr.[8], then director of the USIA Motion Picture Service, sought to finance films that showcased American racial diversity and the peaceful nature of nuclear weapons. This was part of the propaganda campaign known as "People's Capitalism" (Osgood, 2006; Schwenk, 1999). The efforts made by the CIA and USIA became succeful when, in 1960, the 1953 William Wyler's picture *Roman Holiday* reached Soviet movie theaters (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010).

On the topic of nuclear weapons, the United States did not have the authority to refuse the screening of Soviet films, in contrast to the Soviet Union (Krukones, 2009). That being said,

[8] Stevens was made director in January 1962

in the first decade and a half of the Cold War, many directors dared not to go against the patriotic, pro-nuclear and anti-communist mentality of the United States (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010). In the 1960s, with new talent entering the industry and events like the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War shaping the decade, along with a relaxation of Hollywood censorship, new themes and subjects began to appear on the big screen. This period highlighted the importance of cooperation between the two superpowers (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010).

Among the films portraying nuclear themes, Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) gained the most notoriety, followed by Sidney Lumet's *Fail-Safe* (1964) (Cull, 2010). Kubrick's film concludes with a series of nuclear explosions showcasing the iconic mushroom clouds, accompanied by Vera Lynn's song "We'll Meet Again". This ironic choice underscores the absurdity of the scenario, as the reality of nuclear war would preclude any possibility of such reunions, a truth understood by the audience at the time (Berend, 2012). In Britain, one of the most notorious works depicting nuclear weapons was Peter Watkins' documentary *The War Game* (1965). The film, which portrayed the effects of a nuclear attack on London, was deemed so intense that the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) refrained from screening it for twenty years. Despite this, it was shown in theatres and won the Oscar for Best Documentary (Cull, 2010). In another divergence with the United States, the Soviet Union did not enjoy the portrayal of nuclear Armageddon considering it a taboo subject, only reserved for the realm of science-fiction[9].

While depictions of nuclear war and related themes were explored in the film industry, another prominent theme was espionage. With the end of the Second World War, the "enemy" simply shifted from Nazi to Soviet in the American perspective and from Nazi to American in the Soviet perspective. The first American film to address this theme was William A. Wellman's *Iron Curtain* (1948), which was a remake of Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), sharing the same writer, Milton Krims (Cull, 2010). While Hollywood's shift in focus was primarily driven by the pursuit of box office success, in the Soviet Union, the emphasis on portraying Americans as the enemy came about as a political directive from the Minister of Cinema, Ivan Bolshakov (Leyda, 1960). The theme of espionage, particularly from a perspective of paranoia, led to the release of films such as Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian*

[9] Explored in films like Andre Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979)

Candidate (1962) (Cull, 2010). In *The Manchurian Candidate*, the story centers on a Korean War veteran who has been 'brainwashed' into becoming a communist agent, inciting widespread panic. This sense of alarm was amplified by the media, which sensationalized the narrative (González & Jacobson, 2006). Two years later, Frankenheimer released the picture *Seven Days in May*, another film centred around Cold War themes of nuclear disarmament, or, in the case of the picture, of stopping nuclear disarmament from happening (Coyne, 2000).

Overseas, the most notorious films depicting the espionage angle of the Cold War were the James Bond films, based on the books and characters created by Ian Fleming. The 007 films have been described as 20th-century folk epics, presenting stylized portrayals of Westerners that fulfil a kind of power fantasy (Brosnan, 1972). One notable difference between the movies and the books that inspired them is that the films are less overtly anti-Soviet compared to Fleming's works. However, they remain saturated with Cold War imagery and themes, despite the producers' claims to the contrary (Woollacott, 1983). The first film in the James Bond Saga, Terrence Young's *Dr. No* (1962), centres around the title character and antagonist in his attempt to divert American missiles from his secret facility in the Caribbean's, a situation not too dissimilar to the Cuban Missile Crisis in the same year. The trend of injecting Cold War themes and commentary continued in other movies in the Saga, such as *From Russia with Love* (1963) and most of the remaining films in the 1960s and continued with movies released in the 1980s, for example *For Your Eyes Only* (1981) and *A View to a Kill* (1985) (Chapman, 1999). Hobsbawm (1995, p. 228) regards the British prevalence on the topic of fictional Cold War espionage, perpetuated by author such as Fleming and John Le Carré as a means of "compensating for their country's decline in the world of real power".

In the 1970s, the Hollywood studios gave attention to even more political conspiracy and paranoia films due to the news about the Watergate Scandal between 1972 and 1974, resulting in movies such as: David Miller's *Executive Action* (1973); Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974) and Robert Aldrich's *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977) (Shaw, 2007). Aldrich's picture, a movie focused on the Vietnam War, was accompanied by other's who felt it was necessary to depict the manner in which the War affected Americans, especially the soldiers (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010). Films like Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1979) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) garnered immense attention for their depictions of the conflict and the psychological toll that the people who participated in

Vietnam underwent (Devine, 1995). That being said, not every picture that was put on the big screens needed to be accompanied by negativity and propaganda. Woody Allen's *Bananas* (1971) brought to theaters a more comedic view of Cold War mentality, depicting a man who becomes interested in South American politics to "spice up his love life" (Shaw & Youngblood, 2010, p. 32).

3.5 Television

The advent of television as a medium reached the masses at the start of the Cold War, particularly with Winston Churchill's speech about the rise of an "iron curtain" in Europe. This period also saw families moving to American suburbs and acquiring commodities like televisions, highlighting a contrast between political tensions and domestic life (Fraser, 2005). The television "seemed to unite without contradiction the descriptive and the proscriptive, the spontaneous and the normative, the fabricated and the real" (Nadel, 2005, p. 146). Entering the 1950s, TV ushered in an hegemonic place for the U.S., mainly granted by the cooperation in the public sector, for instance the Kitchen Debate (1959) involving the, at the time, Vice-President Richard Nixon and Premier Khrushchev, exemplifying that the existence of coloured TV as a victory of the American socioeconomic system over the Soviet Union (Schwoch, 1993). By 1970, the U.S. private sector had successfully shifted Latin America from radio to television, largely through the efforts of the broadcasting and entertainment industries (Schwoch, 1993). This feat was accomplished by actions, such as: ownership of broadcast stations, funding of production companies, changes of legislation, exporting programs, among others (Schiller, 1992; Schwoch, 1993). "In 1949 television was a luxurious indulgence in one out of ten American homes; in 1959, television was essential furniture in nine out of ten American homes" (Doherty, 2003, p. 4).

In the case of the Soviet Union, the real investment in the world of television took place in the 1950s and 1960s (Williams, 2003). "The cutting edge in communications technology, television could provide a potent symbol of Soviet scientific prowess; as an industrial product promising knowledge and pleasure to millions with the flick of a switch, television could stand as an emblem of the socialist «good life» and proof of Soviet competitiveness on the Cold War's home front" (Roth-Ey, 2007, p. 279). In the first full decades of the Cold War, television seemed to have become a staple of the lives of the Soviet people, thanks to the good publicity of the press calling it a socialist marvel (Roth-Ey, 2007). However, the excitement surrounding the new technology, driven by scientists and politicians, was not effectively

communicated to the management, nor was there clear guidance on how television should be utilized (Roth-Ey, 2007). High-ranking politicians, in their efforts to introduce television to their regions, seemed unaware of its propaganda potential. As a result, the task of promoting the Soviet Union was left to the cultural sphere. However, many participants in the arts—such as theatre, literature, and music—expressed their dissatisfaction with the new medium, placing Soviet television in a precarious position (Roth-Ey, 2007).

The Cold War brought to the homes of millions programs of documentaries and discussions, however these did not do justice to the conflict due to non-fiction having more limitations on how the Cold War was demonstrated (MacDonald, 1978). Much of this, like the films, was due to the fact that the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States was a significant part of public consciousness, much like the broader Cold War situation was in the minds of ordinary Americans (Carleton, 1987). A TV show popular during the 1950s was *I Led 3 Lives* (1953-1956), which dealt with an FBI agent posing as member of the Communist Party (Annexe A). Given its popularity, one might assume that the show addressed Cold War issues in a prominent or thoughtful manner; however, this was not the case. The show "offered no explanation of why adult Americans joined the Communist Party. It never honestly discussed the effectiveness of subversion in the United States, nor did it explain the degree to which the CPUSA was infiltrated by other FBI agents" (MacDonald, 1978, p. 5).

Overall, the spy genre was one with the most sought after productions even after the fear of communism being the driving force for the creation of these shows (Frazier, 2024). With the expansion of the genre, it was necessary for it to branch out and evolve into other genres for it to remain relevant (Kackman, 2005). One of the genres that mixed with the spy genre was comedy, through shows such as *I Spy* (1965-1968) and *Get Smart* (1965-1970), representing a more jovial look to the spy genre (Britton, 2004). "These spoofs could be loosely read as reactions against the Cold War stories of the 1950s, albeit while retaining certain stereotypes of evil Russians and Chinese and their cloak-and-dagger intrigue" (Cull, 2010, p. 449). Other shows, like *The Man from UNCLE* (1964-1968) showed the Cold War in a more nuanced perspective with an American and Soviet agent working together.

While the movies of 1950s touched on the paranoia of the Cold War in a variety of genres, including science-fiction, with the titles spoken of above being examples, science-fiction in the television did not have a great impact on Cold War themes. The television

science-fiction landscape was populated by shows based on comic book characters, such as: *The Adventures of Superman*[10] (1952-1958), *Buck Rogers* (1950-1951) and *Flash Gordon* (1954-1955) (Jancovich & Johnston, 2009). The apex of 1950s television was reached with the release of Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) (Jancovich & Johnston, 2009). With Serling in a position of the executive producer role, he could decide which screenplays would be approved to be used for the show, as The Twilight Zone permitted Serling to discuss about contentious themes and ideas, which his early and more down to earth works could not (Buhle & Wagner, 2003). About his beginning projects, Serling commented: "I was not permitted to have Senators discuss any current or pressing problem (…) In retrospect, I probably would have had a much more adult play had I made it science fiction, put it in the year 2057, and peopled the Senate with robots" (Engelhardt, 2007, p. 162). As discussed in the Film Section, the science-fiction genre was utilized by the creators as a means to tell their stories in a manner that would not prove controversial; TV was, likewise, a realm affected by political scrutiny.

During the "Red Scare" and the actions of Senator McCarthy, television was affected differently from the film industry. Unlike movies, which were financed primarily through ticket sales, television was supported by advertisements. Consequently, anti-Communist groups would often boycott shows or programs if a member of the cast, crew, or production staff was blacklisted (Allen & Thompson, 2024). To avoid losing profits or facing further repercussions, sponsors would often respond by demanding the removal of the controversial individual from the program or show they were financing. In cases where the sponsor was associated with a show produced by a network, they would request that the network handle the situation (Allen & Thompson, 2024). In many situations, networks were eager to distance themselves from associations with left-wing perceptions and to establish themselves as anti-communist (Fraser, 2005). Eventually, like the film industry, television began to move beyond the fear and repercussions associated with depicting controversial topics in its programs.

In the news landscape, most organizations were privately owned due to the prevailing economic system in the United States. However, public financing did make its way into news media during ideological battles, as exemplified by the Voice of America, established by the State Department after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Fraser, 2005). In the 1950s, the

[10] Superman was an exception, being the comic book character that was granted cinematic appearances, while other characters were avoided.

U.S. government established its own news agency, Radio Liberty, to compete with the Soviet Union, which already had a dedicated news agency promoting Soviet ideals (Fraser, 2005). With the ability to easily influence public opinion, the news became a strong tool for spreading propaganda. Between 1951 and 1953, the U.S. government sponsored televised demonstrations of three atomic bombs. However, private sponsors refused to associate with these atomic events, and since television was largely financed by advertising, this reluctance made it difficult for networks to generate profit (Allen A., 2022). Advertisers, eager to expand their audience and reach, viewed television as the perfect medium to do so. However, they were cautious, fearing any association with Communism or left-wing ideals (Allen A., 2022).

The drive for profit and higher ratings made TV station owners highly sensitive to public opinion. If any televised content sparked public outrage, it could lead to backlash not only against the station but also against advertisers. (Doherty, 2003). The three presidents of the main TV channels[11] were even present for the detonation of the bombs in 1953 and doing commentary, detailing to the public every event (Allen A., 2022). With the masses witnessing such occasion, the fear, distrust and disdain for the Soviets only grew in the hearts of American people (Doherty, 2003). Knowing that financing was difficult to come by, news networks needed to find a method to create their programs in a way that would benefit the station, making the U.S. government and its desire to handle public opinion, the perfect partner for a give and take relationship (Allen A., 2022). Both agreed that the government would finance programs that the networks had planned; with the condition that the State had a level of influence on the information that it would be presented to the spectators (Bernard, 1999).

Entering the 1960s, the event which gripped most people to their televisions was the Vietnam War. “With the emergence of a televised war, Americans relied on information about the war from the television, and evidence began to cast doubts on the official narrative espoused by policymakers” (Schumacher, 2024, p. 83). Hammond (2009, p. 7), believes that it existed a correlation between the way the War was portrayed by media and the declining support of the public, remarking that “the war in Vietnam was lost on the propaganda front”. Given the technological upgrades with lenses and the new filming techniques that the 1960s brought, it became easier for news networks to accompany the ongoing struggle in Asia, as it was never witnessed before (Steele, 2000). On the account of these advancements, televised

[11] ABC, CBS, NBC

news was the main gateway from which the masses would receive their information about the country and the world (Mallett, 2014). “With the proliferation of televisions, news networks strived to have the most exciting, dramatic, and attractive stories. They competed for the finest reporters, highest-rated equipment, and largest number of viewers. To succeed, they had to do something unprecedented: on-site coverage of the war in Vietnam” (Kratz, 2018). In this moment, the masses, most of the times, were delivered news that would go against the word of the government (Schumacher, 2024).

The 1960s were a defining decade not only for the United States but to the world at large, and it changed how the public viewed lots of subjects. “The Tet offensive in the Vietnam War, the presidential election campaign, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Junior, and Robert F Kennedy, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia were television big stories, each producing memorable images and moments of high drama, assuring them prominent places on newscasts and the visual medium of television by 1968 more than half of the American people relied on television as their principal source of news” (Pach Jr., 1999, p. 29). With the conflict being shown to all of those that had the means to have a television, the United States began to be divided when it boasted itself to a country of unity and community (Schumacher, 2024). Mandelbaum (1982, p. 157), affirms that “if its previous wars had been televised, the United States would not have persevered in fighting them”. In witnessing the horrors of war and graphic content of the wounded and dead, the public began to question if the role of their country was the morally right one. “Regular exposure to the ugly realities of battle is thought to have turned the public against the war” (Mandelbaum, 1982, p. 161). During the peak of the Vietnam War, there were about 600 news reporters in Asia to document and detail what was happening on site, many of whom were killed or captured, leaving even more of a bad image of the conflict and the government actions (Schumacher, 2024).

As public discomfort with the Vietnam War grew, so did the rise of protests demanding an end to the conflict. The discourse surrounding the war eventually gave birth to anti-war movements, which were broadly divided into two factions: the Hawks and the Doves. (Schumacher, 2024). Although both groups were created with Vietnam in mind, the key difference among both was that the Hawks wanted to continue an escalation and effort in the war to end it, while the Doves preferred the conflict to end as soon as possible for the soldiers to return home (Schumacher, 2024). The Hawks believed that those of were against the war

were anti-American or Communist sympathizers, and that the fight had to continue to make a stand against Communism, if not, the risk that it would spread to the rest of the world would be exponential (McCormick, 2000). “Americans protested the war in a number of ways, including public displays of burning draft notices and marching on the U.S. Capitol, raising larger questions about U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and offering powerful messages that the people would rise up against government policies that were unpopular” (Schumacher, 2024, p. 90).

The anti-war movements even acquired methods to utilize the means of TV adverts for their cause, convincing the skeptics of what was happening in Vietnam, with tactics such as claiming that the tax money of the citizens was being used to send men to a senseless war, making people doubt government policy and side with the movements (Schumacher, 2024). The public began to trust more in those that showed what was evidently happening on the frontlines, and, even if it was not the intentional motive, the American people did not enjoy what they were watching (Schumacher, 2024). The power and influence that television had on world events is clear with Mitchell (1984, p. 42) claiming that “with television, we are faced with a form of technology that has the potential not only to inform but also to change the course of events”.

3.6 Music

The power of music is undeniable. It has the capacity to reach and resonate with individuals or entire communities, fostering unity among the masses, a phenomenon that has been occurring since the discovery of music itself. Given this influence, it is no surprise that music became a cultural, political, and diplomatic tool during the Cold War. As the Soviet Union increased its investment in the arts, sending theatre companies, dance groups, and musical organizations abroad in the early 1950s, the United States responded by similarly investing in high-arts cultural diplomacy to counter Soviet influence (Osgood, 2006). Hereupon, the Eisenhower administration searched for tactics to embolden the American culture matters internationally (Rosenberg, 2015). President Eisenhower, himself, saw that the United States were lacking in the department of cultural diplomacy in a letter to his brother, Edgar:

“It is possible that you do not understand how ignorant most of the world is about America and how important it is… that some of the misunderstandings be corrected. One of them involves our cultural standards and artistic tastes. Europeans have been taught that we are a race of materialists, whose only diversions are golf, baseball, football, horse racing, and

an especially brutalized brand of boxing. Our successes are described in terms of automobiles and not in terms of worthwhile cultural works of any kind. Spiritual and intellectual values are deemed to be almost nonexistent in our country" (Osgood, 2006, p. 218).

One of the musical attempts for the United States to gain a victory in the music world was in the dominion of classical compositions, however this attempt was not a guaranteed success (Fosler-Lussier, 2015). Classical music, with its European origins and stronghold, had long been dominated by European composers. Most American composers were either of European descent or had received training in Europe. One notable exception was Leonard Bernstein, whom Robert Schnitzer, coordinator of U.S. cultural presentations through the ANTA (American National Theatre and Academy), referred to as the "answer to our prayers" for being an American-born and trained conductor (Fosler-Lussier, 2015). Bernstein was then tasked with delivering American classical produced music to international levels. This began with New York Philharmonic's and Bernstein going to Latin American in 1958 (Annexe B), where the tour was followed by media and other ordinary people (Rosenberg, 2015). Bernstein became something of a celebrity during his tour, which took place from April to June, due to his charisma and talent as a composer. His growing fame and public appeal helped advance U.S. diplomatic interests by fostering cultural connections and strengthening international relationships (Seldes, 2009).

With charisma and peculiarity being such vital characteristics of the composers (Horowitz, 2005), like Bernstein, the behaviour lent itself for the performance of the orchestra to be more directed onto the person in charge of the orchestra, turning a hall where classical music was performed for the audience to witness something new, to a place where they could see a charismatic maestro leading a familiar piece of music (Gienow-Hecht, 2012). This innovative method to perform an orchestra and composition gave U.S. orchestras notoriety in the beginning years of the Cold War and made them close associates with national cultural programs and State information agencies (Gienow-Hecht, 2012). While the New York Philharmonic tour of 1958 is the most well-known out of State sponsored classical musical tours, it was not the last, but the behaviour of the Bernstein and other State sponsored conductors was cause for major concern, as many would act outside of the standard that the government most desired (Gienow-Hecht, 2012). Bernstein himself was the target for major scrutiny for his support of the socialist cause during the Spanish Civil War, supporting

American enemies during Vietnam and donating to the Black Panther movement (Seldes, 2009).

Similarly, many other countries, whether democratic or authoritarian, sent their local experts in the arts to perform abroad. For example, Germany and the Soviet Union also engaged in cultural touring missions to promote their own artistic talents and influence international audiences (Caute, 2003). Of course, the Soviet Union had been engaged in cultural diplomacy even before the onset of the Cold War. With the beginning of the ideological conflict, this effort intensified, and music and musicians became integral components of Soviet foreign affairs (Mikkonen, 2013). In the 1950s, numerous Soviet musicians visited the West, and many Western musicians also performed in the Soviet Union. Under Khrushchev, who considered the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the West, culture became a powerful tool for the Soviets, used to strengthen diplomatic ties and promote their ideological stance (Mikkonen, 2013). Although the cultural struggle between the two nations was viewed as a means of easing tensions, Khrushchev also saw it as a form of light competition. He believed that the Soviets would ultimately prevail, leading to the triumph of Communism (Roberts, 1999). "One of the most important aims during the Khrushchev era was to expand the foreign ties of the Soviet Union in order to spread knowledge about Soviet achievements and also to impose Soviet truths over any challenging versions that might exist, as in the case of music" (Mikkonen, 2013, p. 153). That being said the ones that were truly victorious in the cultural exchange between the East and West were the people who were able to watch and listen to the performances of the various artists.

Besides classical music, popular music emerged as a potent tool in winning the hearts and minds of the public, and, in this regard, the West had a significant advantage over the East. Although jazz music had been listened to before, it gained renewed popularity in the 1950s, largely due to the efforts of the Voice of America, which broadcasted jazz through a dedicated program. This made jazz an important element of cultural propaganda (Fraser, 2005). The State department saw an opportunity to culturally benefit with the rising popularity of Jazz music, not only in the music perspective, but also on the racial perspective, since Jazz was a genre closely associated with the African-American community (Fosler-Lussier, 2015). In the propaganda front, the Soviets used all of their tools to showcase how unjust the American people were to their African-American compatriots and other type of abuse, while the United

States created propaganda to showcase black culture in a more positive motif (Plummer, 1996).

Initially, the State Department decided to send black musicians who were specialized in the classics to play on foreign tours to end the rumour that the black community did not have access to any type of education, a concern that was on the minds of the world due to the segregation present in many schools (Fosler-Lussier, 2015). However, the Department soon realized that even the classical world, in places like Africa, was somewhat saturated by black performers, such as William Warfield and Philippa Schuyler (Fosler-Lussier, 2015). Seeing an opportunity with the Jazz genre and its growing popularity, the State Department began to endorse black Jazz musicians, like the Dizzy Gillespie tour in 1956 and later Louis Armstrong (Fraser, 2005). The decision to send African-American musicians overseas was not met with universal support. Allen Ellender[12] was not happy with the genre of music his state was exporting claiming: "I say it does more harm than good to send some of this abroad, in my humble judgment" (Mueller, 2016, p. 259); later Ellender continued his remarks by stating that "to send such jazz as Mr. Gillespie, I can assure you that instead of doing goodwill it will do harm and the people will really believe we are barbarians" (Mueller, 2016, p. 259). The words of the Senator were not disconnected from his racial views as the he was known for his positions that privileged racial segregation (Fraser, 2005).

Other types of African-American genres were also popularized in the 1950s, like blues, that was less well received by the general public during the first decades of the twentieth century (Fraser, 2005). With the emergence of the blues in popularity, this genre began to fuse with southern country music to create what would become the rock genre (Buck, Cuthbert, & Robinson, 1991). Rock music gained shape with the 1954 release of Bill Haley and the Comets song "Rock Around the Clock", which inspired other soon to be prominent music figures to endure in the musical world, such as Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis (Fraser, 2005). The popularity of the genre grew massively, especially in the youth, much to the dismay of the parents and the adult community sensing that the genre was everything that parents, especially middle-class, did not want: "It was urban, it was sexual, and most of it was black. As a result, this music was frequently denounced by adults as the «devil's music», as a NAACP strategy for recruiting young whites, or as a communist plot to undermine the moral fibre of the younger generation" (Garofalo & Waksman, 2014, p. 126).

[12] Senator of the State (Louisiana) from which Dizzy Gillespie was from

The movies saw an opportunity to capitalize on the panic that Rock was generating with films being made that impacted the defiant youth, such as *The Wild One* (1953) with Marlon Brando and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) with James Dean (Fraser, 2005). Bill Halley and the Comets even produced a movie about the song "Rock Around the Clock" with the same title which stopped the world, leading to riots in places like Germany and even being banned in the Netherlands, much to the dismay of the Dutch teenagers (Bennett, 2000). With the 1960s arriving, the band that dominated the decade was undoubtedly The Beatles who grew up and were inspired by the music that had been coming from the United States, as were other British teenagers who would be big in the musical world, for instance Jimmy Page, Keith Richards, Mick Jagger etc., who would integrate iconic bands like Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, respectively (Fraser, 2005). While not all bands or artists would touch political issues, many would and create pieces of music associated with events going on around the time, as they would associate themselves with socio-political issues (Bennett, 2000). Songs like "Fortunate Son" by Creedence Clearwater Revival and "Paint it Black" by The Rolling Stones are song closely associated with the Vietnam War, becoming iconic throughout the years. In the context of Vietnam and the numerous counter-culture movements that advocated for the de-escalation of the war and civil rights, music played a crucial role. Artists like Bob Dylan became prominent advocates for the struggles of the masses, and festivals such as Woodstock in 1969 became emblematic of the counter-culture movement (Cull, 2010; Smolko & Joanna, 2021). Given the impact of Western music over the years around the globe, it is safe to assume that western musical production had a bigger impact on the minds of the people.

3.7 Comic Books

In the twilight of the 1930s, the comic book industry, more specifically comic book magazines, exploded in popularity becoming an established popular publishing (Gabilliet, 2010). This event was mainly due to three factors: the emergence of more thematic comic books, an increase in publishers and the eventual creation of the first superhero in 1938 (Gabilliet, 2010). With the growth of publishers from three in 1935 to eighteen in 1939, the number of on-going titles to one in 1934 to more than fifty in 1939 and an increase in releases from three in 1933 to 322 in 1939, it became apparent that the comic book industry would enter a golden age in terms of popularity and adherence (Michael Barrier & Williams, 1982). The industry began to rapidly grow and it only got bigger once the United States entered the Second World War in 1941. "The main factors accounting for this growth were the

rationalization, extension, and, sometimes, creation of distribution channels thanks to Harry Donenfeld[13]; the decreasing reluctance of news dealers, grocers, and pharmacists to carry comic magazines, as well as the retailers' realization that comic books differed from daily newspapers and pulps; the progressive improvement of overall economic conditions in the second half of the 1930s" (Gabilliet, 2010, p. 38).

The creation of Superman, in 1938 (Annexe C), came to change the entire comic book landscape and popular culture in general. It is curious that a character that, while symbolizing many abstract aspects, personifies hope in a time where the world needed it most. Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two Jewish young men from Cleveland, Ohio, Superman faced rejection from many publishers before Harry Donenfeld, who was eager to launch a new DC (Detective Comics) title called *Action Comics*, decided to take on the strip (Wright, 2001). Siegel and Shuster then sold Superman to DC by sum of $130 and sign a contract of copyright ownership of the idea in which the character now belonged to the company, much to the dismay of both the creators, but "well, at least this way we'll see him[14] in print" (Siegel, as cited by, Koble, 1941, p. 73). By being a character rooted in endurance and always seeing bright side of events, Superman was able to appease the minds of those that suffered during a time that there seemed to be no hope due to the economic downturn provoked by the Great Depression.

In a craving for escapism and heroism, President Roosevelt agreed with this concept in 1936, stating: "when the spirit of the people is lower than at any other time during this Depression, it is a splendid thing that just for fifteen cents an American can go to the movies and forget his troubles" (Walker, 2004, p. 185) As Roosevelt began implementing legislation like the New Deal to correct the course of the country and protect the average working class, a similar shift occurred in comic books with, in the words of Wright (2001, p. 24) "superheroes assumed the role of super-New Dealers". The heroes in the pages were fighting a more literal battle of the "war" that Roosevelt government was waging. In her article, Tesa Pribitkin furthers the idea and concept of Superman as a hopeful figure for the time:

"The Superman phenomenon reflected the challenges facing Americans in the 1930s while celebrating the nobility of the common man (…) People could relate to Superman – kids imagined that they could fight the same bad guys presented in comics, and adults dreamt

[13] Founder of Detective Comics Inc. in 1937
[14] Superman

of dealing with the tough social issues in their lives the same way as Superman did (…) By conquering the challenges facing Americans in the 1930s and celebrating the goodness of the common man, Superman came to symbolize the American Way" (Pribitkin).[15]

3.7.1 1940s

The creation and appearance of Superman in *Action Comics* #1 in June 1938 sent shockwaves through the entire comic industry, prompting every publisher to create a hero in Superman's mold. In 1939, a new publisher, All-American Publications, founded by Max Gaines, introduced many iconic characters. Among these were The Flash in *Flash Comics* #1 (1940), Green Lantern in *All-American Comics* #16 (1940), and, most notably, Wonder Woman in *All Star Comics* #8 (1941). However, the one character that carried the most spotlight was Batman, who first appeared in the pages of *Detective Comics* #27 in 1939, created by Bill Finger and Bob Kane. All of these characters were created with the intent to help the common man, much like Superman. However, each possesses unique traits that distinguish them from one another. For instance, Batman is portrayed as more of a crime-fighter, targeting criminal organizations while being pursued by the police, operating outside the formalities of institutional law. As Batman himself states, "If you can't defeat them «inside» the law, you must beat them «outside» of it" (Finger & Kane, 1940, p. 4). Created by psychologist William Moulton Marston, Wonder Woman can be seen in today's light as a character rooted in narratives where "stories often underscored the Victorian assumption that superior female virtues like compassion and empathy were best applied as a restraining influence on aggressive men, not as a means to female self-sufficiency" (Wright, 2001, p. 21). Believed to be a hero entrenched in a man dominated world where she protected women and children, Wonder Woman was actually a character more aligned with traditional gender roles in social work than with contemporary ideas of feminist self-empowerment (Robbins T. , 1996).

The start of the Second World War came to change the way narratives of the characters established in the 1930s and early 1940s. While the United States only declared war on the Axis forces at the end of 1941, many people had already developed a war-time mentality because of mass culture, especially comic books (Gabilliet, 2010). We are able to see references to a wartime mentality in comic books in 1939 with the cover of *Action Comics* #10, where Superman punches a bomber plane and the sentiment to represent America's

[15] The article does not have a date.

enemies at the time, those being the Germans and Japanese, only grew with the start of the War to embolden the minds of the country with a sense of patriotism (Gabilliet, 2010).

Another publisher who was founded a bit late compared to others was Timely Comics, created by Martin Goodman. In the same year[16] Timely was founded they released *Marvel Comics* #1, introducing readers to characters like Human Torch[17] and Namor, the Sub-Mariner. However, the character that would launch Timely Comics with a boost in sales was Captain America. Tasked by Goodman to create a patriotic hero, writer Joe Simon and legendary artist Jack Kirby created Captain America who would appear in *Captain America* #1, released in 1941. About the time in which the character was created, Simon in Rhoades (2008, p. 33) claimed: "The Nazis were a menace, an evil in the world (…) The U.S. hadn't yet entered the war when Jack and I did Captain America, so maybe he was our way at lashing out against the Nazi menace. Evidently, Captain America symbolized, if that's the correct word, the American people's sentiments. When we were producing Captain America, we were outselling Batman, Superman, and all the others". Jack Kirby agreed with his colleague: "The times were very turbulent, very patriotic, and it was time to be an American. So in the world of comic art, we had to develop characters like Captain America. It was a natural thing to do" (Kirby, as cited by Rhoades, 2008 p. 33). The cover of the first issue could not be more evocative of the want to take a stand against America's enemy, especially in the case of Kirby and Simon since both were Jewish, with Captain America punching Adolf Hitler in the face (Annexe D).

Even though *Captain America* #1 was not the issue or title that first took a stand on the war situation, it was the one issue that boosted the industry's change from having petty criminals and enemies of the working men as the villains and concentrating more on war profiteering, spies and overall enemies of democracy (Scott, 2014). As a result of this shift in focus, superhero narratives began to address the war effort, portraying superheroes as fighters against the Axis powers. These stories not only depicted the fictional battles against the Germans and, after 1941, the Japanese, but also reinforced the necessity of defeating these adversaries (Goodrum, 2016). While readers were looking for ways to entertain themselves with comic books, they also looked for ways to escape from the horrors of war, something that became difficult for the writers and artists to adjust, making content that was meant to be

[16] 1939

[17] This Human Torch was an android called Jim Hammond with no relation to the Fantastic Four character aside from his superhero alias

entertainment and propaganda sometimes have blurred line (Scott, 2014). The enemy was portrayed in various manners. Germans often were "effete, aristocratic, and cruel; the Italians incompetent and manipulated by the Germans; the Japanese monkey-like and treacherous" (Scott, 2014, p. 20).

The Japanese were the Axis member that suffered the most "harassment" from the comic book industry. They took on the role of the "yellow peril[18]", incarnating inhuman behaviours, and, like the movies, the comic book industry dramatized the portrayal of the Japanese to the general and popular public making the masses think they were nothing but savages that deserved nothing but an unquestionable defeat (Dower, 1986). In an effort to show and explain how the barbaric and technological backwards Japanese were able to achieve an attack on Pearl Harbor, the comic book creators justified utilizing stories about Japanese spies that were able to deceive the American forces using their "stealth skills": "My countrymen are great imitators, but they cannot invent. Therefore, they shall steal the secret weapons the masterminds of America are building" (Burnley & Fox, 1942, p. 1).

Japanese-Americans also suffered from the harassment and discrimination that wartime provoked (Wright, 2001). In *All-Star Comics* #12, we see a Japanese-American being forced to work with Japanese officials, while claiming that he is still loyal to the U.S. and its ideals: "I was born in America and I love this country…There are many more Japs like me…Unfortunately Imperial Japan has put pressure on us and we've been forced to work against Uncle Sam!" (Burnley & Fox, 1942, p. 30). In spite the Japanese being the one of the focus of attention with dehumanization of the enemy, the Germans were always the priority when it came to their level of threat being characterized as an embodiment of cruelty or people who were deceived by their government leading them to commit wrong doings but at the end able to redeem themselves, something that was not applied to the Japanese (Wright, 2001).

Just like film, television and music, both the military and the government took advantage of the comics medium to influence the masses and achieve their purposes (Scott, 2014). We find the first example of comics appealing to struggles of the soldiers who were fighting in the War in June 1942 with the release of *Yank: The Army Weekly* (McGurn, 2004). The book was made primarily with the purpose of soldiers to object to the conditions they found themselves in during the War. One of the men that saw an opportunity to lodge his grievances was

[18] Racist metaphor that believed East-Asians were dangerous

Sergeant George Baker, by utilizing a character of his own creation name Sad Sack, which was a recurring character throughout the entire run of *Yank*, and acquired by Harvey Comics for public consumption in 1949 (Benton, 1989). Another project aimed more at soldiers, that while not being a comic book, was the cartoon Upfront in the pages of the newspaper Starts and Stripes, featuring the characters Bill and Joe, created by artist Bill Mauldin during his time in Italy for the Invasion of Sicily in 1943 (Scott, 2014). The narrative of cartoon centres on the daily and plodding life of soldiers while they do their chores and the challenges they face during their enrolment (DePastino, 2008).

With the war demanding the need for more man-power, much of the workforce of the comics industry was sent overseas or played a role on the armed forces, primarily in areas of writing and illustrating, which were areas most were familiar (Scott, 2014). Curiously, the creators of Captain America served in the armed forces. Joe Simon worked on True Comics, an unionized weekly comic strip, which told feats of various heroes, at the same time that he worked for the Coast Guard (Scott, 2014). Making use of his artistic skills, he was also tasked with drawing comics exclusively to the military, when joining the Combat Art Corps (Scott, 2014). Jack Kirby was not so fortunate. Unlike many of his colleagues, Kirby did go to the frontlines and experienced combat, until an officer recognized him as the comic book artist and got him drawing maps with roads, structures and other military developments.

In a bigger effort to distribute propaganda, True Comics released an issue where the concept of the Nazi "master race" would be deconstructed by insinuating that it did not make much sense, since the high-ranking members of the Nazi party did not "practice" what they were preaching (Scott, 2014). Even though this particular issue had propagandistic undertones, it did not indulge itself in being too advocating, since it was still a comic for children. The editorial board of the comic even had two children to test their sensibility of what could be appropriate or what they would like to read (Nyberg, 1998), something that would be echoed during the 1950s.

With the end of the Second World War, the comic industry began to shift. With the biggest source of inspiration for the narratives, that being the war, and the army no longer having the need to ship comic books to the soldiers, the market started to take damage (1942). The superhero genre, that was so important during the war and that spawned so many characters, was showing signs of not being able to support the weight of the industry on its own (Wright, 2001). After 1944, no successful superhero character was created and the ones

that were successful before and during the war, died in irrelevance, except for the main DC Comics characters of Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman (Rhoades, 2008; Wright, 2001). It became apparent that comic books had served their purpose in the war effort, leading them to find a new identity (Kelley, 2009).

With soldiers returning from the battlefields all over the world, they witness a new era of prosperity. Men who served their country found themselves with job opportunities, access to higher education through the G.I. Bill[19], and the capacity to lead favourable and comfortable lives (Johnson, 2012). In order for this life style to continue, the masses had to adhere to a certain social order that endorsed that everyone should be the same and that the people had to conform to the societal standards of the time. The Comics also had to adapt to these new standards. The narratives of characters like Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman tried to find a balance of entertainment for the readers, now mostly children, while also being morally correct to the parents. The characters shifted from paragons of justice for the every-man, the fighters of corruption and defenders of patriotism to model citizens who respected and enforced the law (Johnson, 2012). The once heroes that provided social commentary and were advocates of change about the society in which readers were inserted were turned into government agents that wanted conformity (Johnson, 2012; Wright, 2001). This was especially true in comics involving the Dark Knight and his sidekick, Robin, where the character of Batman became more paternalistic to the Boy Wonder, while he became a respectful "son".

While emphasizing the conformity of the time, comics also took a turn into the new opponent that the U.S. had, the Soviet Union and Communism. While the Golden Age of Comics is the most common nomenclature for the late 1940s and early 1950s, another named Age was inserted inside the Golden Age, the Atomic Age. In this inserted age, we can see that many characters, some new, some old, were starting to deal with atomic and nuclear subjects, in particular atomic bombs. In *Action Comics* #101 (1946), we witness Superman helping the military gather footage of an atomic blast, however this event gives the impression of pitting the character against the might of an atomic explosive to make Superman appear obsolete. Captain America[20] started teaching about the evils Communism as an history teacher while also explaining the importance of democracy (Rico & Romita, 1953). William W. Savage, Jr. (1990, p. 14), believed that with the United States now dealing with topics like nuclear

[19] Bill that provided benefits to the returning soldiers of the Second World War
[20] The character of Captain America at the time was not Steve Rogers, but William Burnside.

weapons, it had "abdicated its position of moral leadership by employing the tactics of its enemies, namely the mass obliteration of civilian populations" thus losing any moral superiority it might have, and morality is something integral to a superhero. Wright (2001, p. 72) counterargument Savage, Jr. statement centred on the idea that "in the atom bomb, mighty superheroes like Captain Marvel[21] finally met their match. Here they encountered a danger that could not be conquered or adequately explained away. They would continue to try, but the results—much like the falsely reassuring explanations coming from more official sources—proved to be distorted, contradictory, and ultimately unsatisfying". The challenges and difficulties to approach the topic of the nuclear was a big one for the creatives in the comic industry, given how recent the world of atomic science was to the public, helping in the decrease of young readers interested in the superhero genre (Johnson, 2012), who searched for other genres to entertain themselves.

3.7.2 1950s

Entering the 1950s, much of the problems of the late 1940s persisted. The superhero genre was still suffering from its growing pains of the end of the war, and now it saw other genres and publishers emerging. While not originating during the late 1940s/early 1950s, genres like crime, funny animals, horror, science-fiction, teens, war and western comics, all had their time to shine entering the new decade. Stanley Lieber, most known as Stan Lee, was working at Atlas Comics[22] since the early 1940s and, when it came to the appearance of these new genres, Lee had to say: "we and all the other publishers tried everything we could do to find a formula that would work in the post-war market. All anyone had to do was name a category and we slapped a few comics together in that department" (Rhoades, 2008. p. 47).

Westerns comic books gained notoriety in 1948 with the publishers Fawcett Comics and Dell Comics putting out titles like *Rocky Lane Western* (1949), *Lash LaRue Western* (1949), and *Bill Boyd Western* (1950) (Rhoades, 2008). Charlton Comics launched *Tim McCoy Western Movie Stories* (1949) and *Tex Ritter Western* (1950), with Marvel also trying their luck on the genre with the titles *The Two-Gun Kid* (1948), *Kid Colt* (1948), *Arizona Kid* (1951), *The Trigger Twins* (1951), and *The Rawhide Kid* (1955). Yet, it was Fawcett who dominated the westerns market, selling the most comics about the genre in between 1949 and 1953 (Gabilliet, 2010). Funny Animals saw its popularity with characters like Donald Duck

[21] The character of Captain Marvel was the old name for the today's character Shazam.
[22] Successor of Timely Comics and future Marvel Comics. From here on Timely/Atlas will simply be referred as Marvel for convenience.

that, while appearing in animated form in the 1930s, only got his comic book debut in 1942, published by Western Publications. His popularity in comic form was so that Scrooge McDuck was created in 1947 and given his comic book title in 1952 in the pages of *Uncle Scrooge* #1 (Rhoades, 2008).

Comics centred around the problems and daily lives of teenagers received their popularity mainly through *Archie*, published by Archie Comics, which explored the exploits of Archie Andrews and his friends Jughead, Veronica and Betty (Rhoades, 2008). The book was full of characters that the target audience could enjoy, yet with the twist that none of them behaved as so called teenager, behaving instead in the ideal version that parents and adult figures had of teenagers, or the teenage self that adults wanted around (Wright, 2001). The characters did not drink, smoke, used profanity and always obeyed authority. While being capable of enjoying the narrative and adventures of the characters and have a glance at a safe teen life, teenagers also understood the societal rules that the adults had (Phillips, 1991).

The war genre also received a boost entering the 1950, being very well received commercially in foreign English speaking countries after the Second World War (Rhoades, 2008). In the genre, the main influencer of the success was EC (Educational Comics) founded by Max Gaines. Gaines, who was the founder of All-American Publications[23], created Educational Comics in 1944 and was one of the pioneers in the many genres that gained more following after the general public disinterest in superheroes. Following Max Gaines death in 1947, his son William Gaines managed to take EC Comics to new heights making genre defining titles in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1950, William Gaines rebranded Educational Comics to sport the name Entertaining Comics to help promote the new launches (Buhle & Kitchen, 2009), and with his editor Al Fedstein both searched for methods for their narratives and imagery to shock the public, and since restrictions could only be from the publishers themselves, there was no one to stop them from doing so (Hirsch, 2021). With all this innovation came a good reaction from readers, that made EC Comics a successful brand (Jacobs F. , 1973).

[23]All-American Publications merged with Detective Comics, Inc. in 1946, forming National Comics Publications. In 1961, the publisher changed its name to National Periodical Publications. Despite undergoing several name changes, the company branded itself as "Superman-DC" as early as 1942 and became widely recognized by the public as DC Comics. Eventually, in 1977, the publisher officially adopted the name DC Comics.

In the mist of the Korean War, the FBI was warned by the intelligence corps of the army that certain EC Comics titles had problematic content and that they were accessible to soldiers, both in national territory and foreign territories (Hirsch, 2021). The titles that received most scrutiny were the works of Harvey Kurtzman[24], more specifically the titles *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*, which both involved military subjects (Hirsch, 2021). The discomfort from both organizations was derived from the fact that, since these comic book were accessible to the average civilian and servicemen, they could very well influence both average civilian and servicemen's vision of the wars the United States were engaged in, more specifically, the Korean War and Communism.

Two-Fisted Tales and *Frontline Combat*, in particular, received the blunt of the criticism from the authorities because, while they did evoke patriotic themes, they also showed the dangers and meaninglessness of war, as well as criticising the mistakes that those in command could do (Hirsch, 2021). EC titles that dealt with the subject of war were considered politically inflammatory for the reason that "they tend to discredit the army and undermine troop morale by presenting a picture of the inevitability of personal disaster in combat" (McInerney, 1952, p. 1). While this could be sign of suspicion due to an underlying sympathy to communist ideals, Kurtzman himself denied any connection to them, only seeking to bring a bit of realism into the comics, since some his staff served in the war and had a disingenuous view of it, only wanting to draw inventiveness from their time in the conflict (Buhle & Kitchen, 2009; Hirsch, 2021).

Since the Korean War did not have a clear cut moral compass, unlike the Second World War, "the comics posited different and evolving reasons for the stalemate, much like the politicians and generals" (Scott, 2014, p. 47). The narratives of the titles mostly wanted to emphasize the destructive power of war, instead of bathing in its glory. In a 1952 story in the pages of *Two-Fisted Tails* entitled "Corpse on the Imjin" was released. The narrative centres on an American soldier in the riverside of the Imjin River in Korea, during the war. While he sits, he is attacked by a Korean soldier. Both of them fight and struggle, until they fall inside the shallow waters of the river. In them, the American soldier is able to gain positon on top of his enemy, chocking him to death. After the deed is done, the narrator of the story affirms: "You're tired. Your body is gasping and shaking and weak. And you're ashamed" (Kurtzman, 2012, p. 66). After the American soldier wanders away from the place where he killed the

[24] Kurtzman was the editor of the titles

Korean soldier, the body drifts away with the narrator concluding: “Have pity! Have pity for a dead man! For he is now not rich or poor, right or wrong, bad or good! Don’t hate him. Have pity, for he has lost that most precious possession that we all treasure above everything. He has lost his life!” (Kurtzman, 2012, p. 67).

In the grand scheme of things, genres that really took a beating in the public square were the crime and horror comics, mostly also from EC. Titles like *Crime Suspenstories* and *Shock Suspenstories* for crime and *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Haunt of Fear* and *The Vault of Horror* for the horror genre. It was a fear of the adult community that comic books which had sensitive and disturbing stories and imagery would corrupt the minds of the youth that consumed them, turning them into criminals and hoodlums (Johnson, 2012). The real start of the uproars could be traced to 1948, where students of a Catholic school in Binghamton, New York, under the supervision of school staff and parents, decided to round up a number of comic books and burn them, something akin to Nazi book burnings (Wright, 2001).

Even though the burnings were not confined only to Binghamton and other locations with Catholic schools, the dread of the effect that comic books had on the youth was palpable, due to their early association with illiteracy and antisocial behaviours, becoming a bigger problem when the Cold War began (Wright, 2001). With the growing fear of Communism and comic books, the Catholic community even stated printing comic books of their own volition dramatizing hypothetical scenarios of the Communists assuming command over the United States, for example in the pages of *Is This Tomorrow: America Under Communism*, released in 1947 (Clark, 2009). Another EC title that provoked controversy was *Mad* (1952) that sought to humorize American society for teenage delight, becoming so popular that EC decided to create an in-house satirical comic book (*Panic*) that told a story of a divorced Santa-Claus, that turned the State of Massachusetts into another EC critic (Gabilliet, 2010).

In a *Time Magazine* issue released on the 29th of March 1948, it is possible to read the words of one of the most frivolous figures that fought the growing concern that enveloped comic books. German born psychiatrist, Fredric Wertham believed that the growing numbers of juvenile delinquency were linked with the reading of comic books, especially those of the crime and horror genres. In the Time Magazine issue, Wertham was quoted by saying: “We are getting to the roots of one of the contributing causes of juvenile delinquency (…) You cannot understand present-day juvenile delinquency if you do not take into account the pathogenic and pathoplastic influence of the comic books” (Wertham, as cited by, Matthews,

1948). In response to growing public discontent, cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles began imposing restrictions on, or even outright banning, comic books deemed offensive (Johnson, 2012). Witnessing outside pressures building, a group of publishers decided to regulate themselves by creating the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers Code (1948), in order to protect industrial quality, with little change since no one abided by them (Johnson, 2012). That being said, the outcry did lower its pitch, until the book burnings in Binghamton mentioned above.

In 1954, Fredric Wertham published his book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, where he documents his perspective on comic books and how they are harmful to the youth. Two of the most famous examples in Wertham book were the ones involving the characters of Batman, Robin and Wonder Woman. In Batman, he found that the character could invoke homosexual thoughts among children, for the characters of Batman and Robin "live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler (…) It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together" (Wertham, 1954, p. 160). Released in the same year of the publication of Wertham book, *Batman* #84 had a panel in which Bruce Wayne[25] was in bed with Dick Grayson[26]. In the case of Wonder Woman, Wertham mentioned, that she also had homosexual connotations, being a frightful image for boys and a morbid ideal for girls (Wertham, 1954). Although not mentioning her personally, Wertham also denoted that many characters could have connections and fantasies with bondage due to imagery with men being whipped or being confound within a whip or lasso (Wertham, 1954), a signature Wonder Woman item.

A year prior to the release of *Seduction of the Innocent*, and with the "Red Scare" on full swing, the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency began to conduct hearings about the rising rates of juvenile delinquency, and it did not take long until comic books began to be the main focus of the subcommittee (Hirsch, 2021). The chairman of the subcommittee, Senator Robert Hendrickson had already been suspicious that popular culture could be a reason for the rise in crime committed by minors, due to a big influx of letters sent by concern citizens, with one of the major complains being comic books (Hajdu, 2008). With the growing concern, Senator Hendrickson announced that there would be hearings concerning the matter of comic books in April 1954. The hearings, led by Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, featured prominent figures like Fredric Wertham and William Gaines. Gaines, in particular,

[25] Batman
[26] Robin

was heavily scrutinized, as many of the comic books presented during the hearings as examples of inappropriate content were published by his company, EC Comics. The Executive Director, Richard Clendenen, started to show covers of EC comic books with graphic imagery which shocked the members of the audience. That being said, Clendenen was just on his investigation, for he assured the committee that he "had uncovered no deliberate conspiracy among comic book publishers to corrupt the minds of children. And while he noted scattered allegations of links between the comic book industry and Communists, he dismissed these as nonsense" (Wright, 2001, p. 166). Finding, instead, that the publishers only operated with a monetary mindset in principle.

After Clendenen, Wertham went to testify and continued to insist that the content found inside comics was damaging, something that angered William Gaines who was next to testify. While testifying, Senator Kefauver showed Gaines several EC comic books; one in particular where in the cover of a crime book was an image of a man holding a severed head of a woman in one hand and a bloody axe in another, with the woman's decapitated body in the background (Annexe E), with Kefauver asking Gaines if he thought it was alright to show such imagery (Johnson, 2012). Gaines responded that the book, and all other books that EC produced, were all made in good taste, given the context of the genre in which they were inserted (Johnson, 2012). Gaines and EC were made the scapegoats of the problems and the hearing became a public relations disaster for the comics industry that was forced to adapt to the new situation it found itself in.

With fear that the government would impose hard restrictions on the industry, the industry decided to regulate itself instead. Created in September of 1954 by a conglomerate of publishers, the CMAA (Comics Magazine Association of America) decided to ratify the Comics Code Authority, which was far more detailed and enforceable in comparison to the censorship of the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers Code of 1948 (Goodrum, 2016). Given the new guidelines that comic books had to follow if they wanted to be approved to be sold (Annexe F), Gaines's EC was one of the main victims of comics witch-hunt, with many of the company's titles being cancelled soon after the Code went into effect, with the only comic book of theirs escaping the censorship being *Mad*, changing its format to a black and white magazine, being rendered nulled to the effects of the Code (Gabilliet, 2010). Unfortunately, Gaines and EC were, unfairly, portrayed as the principal culprits that

forced the industry to fall out of grace in the perception of the American people (Jacobs F. , 1973).

After the situation in 1954, the four publishers that formed the CMAA (Archie, DC, Harvey and Marvel) were the ones that the censorship most helped, for they did not fear the changes of the comic code and were open to change (Gabilliet, 2010). Certain genres remained popular, such as war, for the violence in them was believed to not correlate to juvenile delinquency; science-fiction, and the fall of genres, such as horror, brought forth the rise of the mystery genre and monster, which tried to capitalize on the fad of American or Japanese creatures that stormed popular culture in the 1950s[27]. In terms of sales, some quarters of the industry suffered from recessions, yet one that did not suffered was DC, which continued to sell well, especially in characters such as Superman, who saw its popularity rise again, much to the help of the TV show *Adventures of Superman* (1953-1957) (Wright, 2001). As well as staying afloat, DC revolutionized the industry, as it did in 1938. With the Comics Code implementation, so too the superhero genre was revitalized, starting with *Showcase* #4 (1956) which reintroduced readers to The Flash, now with a new alter-ego Barry Allen[28], ushering The Silver Age of Comics (Annexe G). The success of The Flash's revival brought the revival of other Golden Age characters that had been discarded such as Green Lantern (now named Hal Jordan) in *Showcase* #22 (1959) and other characters. Entering the 1960s, the Superhero genre would be the dominant force in the industry (Johnson, 2012).

3.7.3 1960s

With the prospect and beginning of the space race, the comic books started to have a more scientific backdrop to the creation of their characters origins and stories. We have, for example, the origin of Barry Allen as The Flash, who had a collective of chemicals dropping on top of him, while being struck by a lightning bolt. Most notably, Hal Jordan, an Air Force pilot, became the Green Lantern when he discovered the alien Abin-Sur. This encounter provided Jordan with the power ring and lantern, granting him the means to become a superhero with cosmic responsibilities and space-related adventures. The feats of figures like Yuri Gagarin meant that the public were yearning for heroic figures of the time. And with Space becoming such a relevant topic in the minds of the masses, the industry, and especially Marvel Comics, sought to capitalize on the trend.

[27] Some of these works can be read on the anthology series *Monsters Masterworks* (1989), which collected stories published in the 1950s.
[28] The Flash created in 1940 was named Jay Garrick and is considered the Golden Age Flash.

With the Superhero genre flourishing once again, DC Comics were having major success with the revamping of their old characters. To boost their sales, Julius Schwartz, DC's editor at the time and responsible for the revival of past characters, decided to also revamp the superhero team, the Justice Society of America, of the 1940s, now with the name Justice League of America, in the pages of *The Brave and The Bold* #28 (1960), written by Gardner Fox. With figures like Aquaman, Batman, The Flash (Barry Allen), Green Lantern (Hal Jordan), Martian Manhunter, Superman and Wonder Woman, the book and team were a massive hit, selling an average of 335.000 copies per issues in 1961 (Goodrum, 2016). Schwartz though best to change the middle part of the name from society to league for "he felt that society only implies a loose association of individuals, whereas league implies a team of superheroes contributing their individual abilities to a common purpose" (Wright, 2001, p. 185), and because it was a term more familiar to younger readers (Rhoades, 2008).

The publisher who still owned Marvel Comics, Martin Goodman, realized the success that the Justice League of America was having over at DC Comics and tasked Stan Lee to create a competitor at Marvel. As Lee put it in his book *The Origins of Marvel Comics*: "Martin had mentioned that he had noticed one of the titles published by National Comics seemed to be selling better than most. It was a book called The Justice League of America and it was composed of a team of superheroes (…) «If the Justice League is selling» spoke he, «why don't we put out a comic book that features a team of superheroes»" (Lee, 1974, p. 10). With the help of Jack Kirby, who had been freelancing since leaving Marvel in the 1940s and who worked also at DC Comics, Kirby and Lee devised the characters and story of the title that would help Marvel stay afloat in the business and revolutionize the superhero genre, somewhat as Superman did 23 years earlier, *The Fantastic Four*.

Released in 1961, *The Fantastic Four* came to reinvent the method in which comic book characters were written, for "they had the powers of superheroes, but they didn't act like superheroes. They acted something like monsters—and something like real people" (Jacobs & Jones, 1997, p. 51). Something that distinguished The Fantastic Four from other characters or groups at the time was, for example, the reluctance to wear superhero costumes, for the reason that around the time *The Fantastic Four* was being published, Marvel comics were being distributed by Independent News, who was owned by the parent company that owned DC Comics. With this control, Independent News only permitted Marvel to publish eight titles per month, and it could refuse to distribute any titles that could be a threat to DC Comics (Owen

Likes Comics, 2022). Just like Green Lantern, but on a more similar approach, *The Fantastic Four* represented the public interest in real time events, such as the Space Age, for the origins of the characters that compose The Fantastic Four are directly linked with science and discovery. In the pages of *The Fantastic Four* #1 (Annexe H), we see Dr. Reed Richards convincing his fiancée Susan Storm, her rash and younger brother Johnny Storm and Reed's best friend, Ben Grimm, to go on a rocket ship into Space. In his arrogance, Richards accidentally exposes himself and his friends to cosmic rays that were passing by leading the group to crash-land on Earth. Upon landing, the group realizes that each gained new abilities that changed their bodies in dramatic ways. Reed can now stretch his body like rubber, Susan can become invisible, Johnny can engulf his body in flames and Ben turns into an orange rock-like creature.

Not hiding their identities, they adopted the names Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Girl, Human Torch and The Thing, respectively, and began their adventures, not as traditional superheroes, but as what they were initially, adventurers and explorers, now on a bigger scale. Unlike teams such as The Justice League of America, Lee wanted to connect the characters in ways beyond a group of colleagues and friends, deciding to model the characters as the nuclear family (Genter, 2007). With the concept of the nuclear family being such an attractive piece for character building, Stan Lee utilized the idea for it being "a secure private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world" (May, 2008, p. 1).

Their superhero identities and personalities identify what role they play in the family. Mr. Fantastic often assumes the role of the father, making decisions, planning missions; Susan, a maternal role, in which she gives the team heart and tries to take care of everyone; Johnny, being the younger brother to Susan and who was actually raised by her is characterized by the personification of an hothead teenager who is always getting into trouble; and finally Ben is "the whiniest and most temperamental member, (…) represents the infant of the family, wearing only a pair of blue underwear resembling a diaper" (Genter, 2007, p. 957). The characters bickered with each other, especially the Human Torch and The Thing, something akin to two siblings, making them and future characters created by the company a deviation to what other publishers were doing at the time, concentrating on the more human aspects of the characters (Duncan & Smith, 2009).

In their adventures, the characters of The Fantastic Four encounter many of the so called problems that affected American society during the time in which the first issues of the title

were published. However, after the first eight issues, the title began to deal with Cold War themes and problems in new methods (York, 2012). We see the group encounter the alien species, The Skrulls, shape-shifting creatures that can imitate anyone, prompting The Fantastic Four to stop their plans of world domination (Kirby & Lee, 1961). The comparison to something akin to *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) is unquestionable, both dealing with the fear of paranoia and mistrust between various people, feelings that, as we can see so far, were rampant during the 1950s and 1960s. In a curious note, the movie ends with humanity presumed lost, for the notification to the authorities is given too late. In *The Fantastic Four* #2 (1961), Mr. Fantastic is able to hypnotize the skrull unit stationed on Earth, preventing a full-scale invasion of the species (Kirby & Lee, 1961). This outcome contrasts with the ending of the 1956 movie, demonstrating a more positive outlook on matters and especially gives the idea that American ingenuity and intelligence are aspects that can result in the defeat of the Soviet efforts (York, 2012).

The theme of mind-control or hypnotization is another reoccurring factor is the next issues following issue #2. We are presented to the antagonists Miracle-Man in issue #3, Kurrgo in issue #7 and The Puppet-Master in issue #8, with both having the capacity to deceive and control people. In the vein of films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and other Communist infiltration in film and television, the fear of communist brainwashing made its way to comics as well. The panic that surrounded the idea of brainwashing came from "having cracked the brain's codes, Reds were now believed capable of remodelling [sic] humans at will" (Carruthers, 1998, p. 78). With the concern shifting from communists hiding among Americans to Americans being subverted to communist ideals, the U.S. government made paramount efforts to dissuade left-wing sympathies, both internally and externally (York, 2012). In the case of North Korean forces and Chinese POW's (Prisoners of War), the U.S efforts came in the form of "voluntary repatriation, a novel interpretation of the Geneva Convention on the return of POWs which argued that individuals who chose to go elsewhere did not have to be repatriated" (Young, 1998, p. 52).

In the issues where the villains referenced in the paragraph above make their first appearances, each dealt with different aspects of deception. Miracle-Man is presented as a magician who commits crimes utilizing his abilities, especially his hypnosis knowhow to trick The Fantastic Four (Kirby & Lee, 1961). Kurrgo is capable of emitting a ray which allows him to turn the people against our protagonists (Kirby & Lee, 1962). Finally, The Puppet-

Master uses his gifts to take control of The Thing. When The Thing escapes the command of The Puppet-Master, the villain tries to further his plans, but he is stopped by his step-daughter Alicia. In the struggle, The Puppet-Master falls to his apparent death (Kirby & Lee, 1962). In the first two narratives, the antagonists are defeated by in large part due to the ingenuity and quick thinking of Mr. Fantastic, providing once again the idea of American intellectual superiority, while in issue #8 The Puppet-Master is thwarted by someone who he thought was an ally (Alicia Masters), who realized the role she was playing, deciding to do the morally correct choice. This idea of rebelling against evil could very well be a parallel to how tyrannized individuals could rise up and defeat their communist overlords, with the assistance of the United States (York, 2012).

Finally, we have Doctor Doom, The Fantastic Four's arch-enemy, introduced in issue #5. Although he first appears in issue #5, Doctor Doom's origin is laid bare in the pages of *The Fantastic Four Annual* #2 (1964). The reader finds out that Victor von Doom[29] comes from the fictional European nation of Latveria and is from Roma descent. With his father and mother dead, Victor utilizes his skills to protect his village from the forces of the King of his nation, which attracts the attention of administrators from State University who give him a full-scholarship to go to the United States and study, meeting Reed Richards. Victor clashes with Reed due to his arrogance, which eventually leads him to have a laboratory accident leaving him scarred (Kirby & Lee, 1964). While the exact location of Latveria is not specifically told to the reader, later issues disclose that the nation is located around current day Serbia and Hungary (Porter & Waid, 2003). If that is the location that Lee and Kirby had in mind during the development of the idea of the fictional nation, we cannot be certain; however it gives the reader the impression that Doctor Doom is another figure that represents American fear of Soviet intellect. Coupled this with the notion that both the United States and Soviet Union both experienced exchanged programs with each other, the fact that Victor was granted an opportunity in America is not inaccurate to think about.

Doctor Doom and Mr. Fantastic develop this really good dynamic given their brilliance. While one uses it for his own belief on how the world should be governed and that he is the only one capable of steering the path (Doom), Richards also wants the best for humanity without having the same level of ego as Doom. About the vision in which the scientific community was perceived in post-war U.S., Badash (2003, p. 242) notes: "Praise of science

[29] Doctor Doom's real identity

and scientists soon coincided with doubts, criticism, fear, and even hostility.... From being heroes who ended the war, scientists were almost immediately seen as evil geniuses that created unthinkable horrors: the atomic apocalypse". Beyond from his knowledge of a variety of sciences, Doom also is knowledgeable of magic from an heterogeneity of places, contrasting to Richards who in the first issue builds the rocket to win the Space Race against the Soviets (Kirby & Lee, 1961). "By presenting these character foils, Lee and Kirby, also examine the potential of science to do good or evil, and conclude that it is not the science, but the scientist, that is good or evil" (York, 2012, p. 213).

With The Fantastic Four becoming such a hit with readers, especially new younger readers at the cusp of the 1960s (Wright, 2001), the creative team of Lee and Kirby continued to create and release characters and titles that endure until today, many with Cold War connations. The next title and character created by the duo was The Hulk in the pages of *The Incredible Hulk* #1 (1962). Being an hodgepodge of influences from Robert Louis Stevensons's Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Mary Shelly's Frankenstein (but more specifically the version of Frankenstein from the 1931 film starring Boris Karloff) (Web of Stories – Life Stories of Remarkable People, 2016), The Hulk, and his alter-ego Bruce Banner, came into being thanks to familiar forces of the scientific community. In the first appearance of the character we meet Banner, a scientist working on a bomb filled with gamma radiation in liaison with the United States Army, more specifically General Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross who berates Banner for prolonging the bomb test. Banner warns Ross that what they are dealing with are "powerful forces", however Ross dismisses Banner's worries claiming: "Powerful forces! Bah!! A bomb is a bomb! The trouble with you is you're a milksop! You've got no guts!" (Kirby & Lee, 1962, p. 2). When the countdown to the test begins, Banner notices a teenage boy in the testing area. He goes to Igor Drenkov to abort the test but he does not so, for he is a Soviet spy who wants to see gone one of America's most brilliant minds. When Banner rushes to the location of the teenager, he pushes him into a ditch saving him, but exposing him to gamma radiation, which transforms him into The Hulk.

The Incredible Hulk provides the reader with many themes. The dangers of advancements in science, particularly in the realm of weapons development, were often depicted using grotesque imagery to warn readers about catastrophic outcomes, such as nuclear holocaust. Additionally, this period saw a debate surrounding American masculinity, as the traditional ideals of manhood were challenged by the growing emphasis on the nuclear family and

domestic stability (Genter, 2007). Just like the themes of Shelly's book, which comment on the unethical uses of scientific practice established by the free exchange of information (Rauch, 2001), the protagonist of Shelly's novel conducts his experiments alone. Banner also is protective of his experiments and just like Frankenstein, who critiques the Enlightenment movement and its utilization of reason to surpass human nature (Genter, 2007), so does *The Incredible Hulk*, now with the aggression of The Hulk being representative of the destructive power of science. On The Hulk's perspective on masculinity and how it contrasts with characters like Mr. Fantastic, the character's animalistic half and civilized half represent "the repressed side of man that had vanished with the appearance of organization men like Banner" (Genter, 2007, p. 964). Although the characters that compose The Fantastic Four more closely resemble the typical Cold War family, The Hulk escapes this notion of family by flipping the Shelly's *Frankenstein* moral connotations (Genter, 2007). Shelly's work comes as an assessment of the ideological burdens that disturb the psychology of men to comply with a collection of behaviours that characterize what it means to be a man when it comes to adventure and the acceptance of one's actions (Schoene-Harwood, 2000). An example of this detachment from family responsibilities is Banner's love for General Ross's daughter, Betty Ross. While a character like The Thing is able to surpass his anger and resentment due to his condition and find love in the arms of Alicia Masters, Banner is incapable of having a normal relationship with Betty thanks to The Hulk.

The following year, and after creating characters like Spider-Man in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (1962) and the Marvel Comics version of the Norse God Thor in the pages of *Journey into Mystery* #83 (1962), Lee plotted the story for a new character that would make its debut in *Tales of Suspense* #39 (1963), Iron Man. Among the burst of characters that Marvel's collective of imagination created, Iron Man is, without a doubt, the most overly political of them. "Iron Man was the most ardent of Marvel's Cold Warriors, and over one-third of the stories between 1963 and 1966 pitted him against communist adversaries" (Costello, 2009, p. 63). In his first appearance, we can already witness these aspects. Anthony Stark is a wealthy weapons manufacturer who, during a weapons demonstration in the jungles of Vietnam, is captured by communist forces and critically injured. To survive and escape, Stark is forced to construct an advanced suit of armor that keeps him alive and grants him the ability to break free from captivity (Heck & Lieber, 1963).

Inspired by the likes of Howard Hughes for its inventions and role as an industrialist (Web of Stories – Life Stories of Remarkable People, 2016), Tony Stark represents the connective tissues between entrepreneurs that deal with science and the military industrial complex, even though that the sentiment contradicted the general way of thinking throughout the 1950s, thanks to the Cold War and its perception of the military, science and the State (Genter, 2007). With the beginning of the Cold War, the military and government started to try to control the scientific community, in order to keep them in check, digging through the scientists lives in a number of aspects (Genter, 2007). Iron Man, or in this case Tony Stark, was likewise a victim of this situation, with the government wanting him to fall under its banner to control his inventions, and if he did not give the State his loyalty or collaboration, he could be deemed a Soviet sympathizer. An example of this is Crimson Dynamo[30], one of Iron Man's villains, that tries to undermine the launch of a missile designed by Stark for the U.S. military, causing the government to suspect of Stark's actions and loyalty (Bernstein & Heck, 1963). Among Crimson Dynamo, Iron Man faced many communist or left-wing adjacent characters, like Black Widow, Titanium Man and his arch-enemy The Mandarin, a Chinese anti-capitalist that collaborated with communist regimes, while not being himself a communist. These communist and left-wing agents hoped that by inflicting a defeat on a figure that represents the United States military industrialist might, which also is a figure of American capitalism, that they suffer a "propaganda victory from which America will never recover" (Wright, 2001, p. 222).

The 1960s were essentially characterized by the Comic's Code Authority. While the revival and creation of character in the late 1950s and early 1960s was remarkable, publishers, in this case DC and Marvel, could never escape the guidelines and restrictions that the Code had implemented on the industry. During the burst of creativity of Marvel in the early 1960s their sales doubled, being closely seconded by DC that remained in first place in 1967. That being said the cultural impact of Marvel's characters became a thorn on DC's side (Wright, 2001). Marvel allowed itself to get daring with its characters, while DC characters, especially Batman were close to be cancelled for not adhering to past representations of being a crime fighter, resorting to what was popular at the time, that being science and science-fiction.

The *Batman* TV show released in 1966 staring Adam West as the titular character brought about a new popularity for the character that remained in the popular zeitgeist during some

[30] Crimson Dynamo is a Soviet agent

time (Gabilliet, 2010), however the popularity of the TV show was not sufficient to save the title. The success of the show damaged what Lee and Marvel accomplished, wanting the characters to be taken more seriously and have real human flaws (Wright, 2001). Marvel understood that the world was not black and white, but grey, something that Arnold Drake[31] realized better than his editors (Wright, 2001). While it was not cancelled, the Batman comic book title began to change when artist Neal Adams took reign over the book, who believed that the show made the character a piece of satire and wanted to take it back to its darker and more "realistic" roots (SYFY, 2017). It was apparent to Adams, and many other creators of the industry, that comic books needed to change and address the changing world in which they were living in.

3.7.4 1970s

The start of the 1970s coincided with the beginning of a new comic age, The Bronze Age. Similarly to the start of the Silver Age, and perhaps even harder, it is difficult to pinpoint a single event that ushered the new age, with many options to be drawn. The one that most people associate with the closure of the Silver Age is "The Night Gwen Stacy Died" on the pages of *The Amazing Spider-Man* #121 (1973), other options are the rise in comic book prices from 12 cents to 15 cents in 1969. These two options are refuted by comic book historian, Craig Shutt (2003), who believes that the Spider-Man story happened too late, with mature stories already happening at the start of the decade, and the prices of book going up from 10 cents to 12 cents in 1962 with minimal backlash. The more inclined conclusion would be the retirement of Mort Weisinger of the editorial position of the *Superman* title after the publication of *Superman* #229 (1970) and Jack Kirby leaving Marvel after *The Fantastic Four* #102 (1970) was published (Shutt, 2003). These events happened within a mouth of each other and provoked shockwaves in the comic book community. With Kirby being such a figure at Marvel being the creator of so many iconic characters and his one-hundred issue run of *The Fantastic Four* with Stan Lee, which still is one of the longest runs by two creators ever. In the case of Weisinger, the editorial position was filled by Julius Schwartz that took the character of Superman from a goofier and outrageous perspective and tried to modernize him, abandoning his more 1960s aesthetic (Shutt, 2003).

The Bronze Age and the 1970s can mostly be characterized by a general questioning of authority. With the increased number of people becoming more cynical with matters of the

[31] A writer for DC during this period

Cold War, that sentiment was reflected in comic book with more stories becoming critical of the American government and its role in the Cold War (Costello, 2009). With the Comics Code still very much in effect, the stories were not that much critical of the actions of the United States or the political scandals that plagued the country in the late 1960s or early 1970s. The books started addressing situations such as social problems, especially of an identity nature (Costello, 2009).

Returning to Neal Adams, he was joined with writer Dennis O'Neil to write for the *Green Lantern* title. In an issue, we see the character of Green Lantern rescuing a middle aged man who is being attacked by a group of teenagers. After reprimanding the younglings, Green Arrow appears and criticizes his actions for defending a landlord that does not care for the propriety he owns and did not care for repairing them (Adams & O'Neil, 1970). After a bit of bickering, an elderly black man approaches the duo and questions Green Lantern why he helped governments and peoples of other world, but never bothered to help black people (Adams & O'Neil, 1970). This social commentary found in the work of Adams and O'Neil is poignant, for the reason being that the Silver Age iteration of Green Lantern[32] was created as a figure of authority, in this case a Space police officer with a designated area of Space to oversee. With its creation in a time with a more optimistic and confident view of American progress (Wright, 2001), Julius Schwartz decided to put Adams and O'Neil together on the *Green Lantern*[33] title to see what they could do with the character. The title commented on many issues that affected the world and the United States at the time, for instance racism, pollution, poverty, political misconduct, the treatment of Native-Americans, etc. While bringing Green Lantern's role as an authoritative figure that represented the more moderate to conservative side of society, they transformed Green Arrow as the liberal voice that called his colleague's attention to the problems affecting society, a much different role he had at the start of the characters publication. "Confronted with the sober realization that his Cold War assumptions have been a lie, Green Lantern begins to understand that law and order are less important than truth and justice" (Wright, 2001, p. 227).

While *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* is the most notorious title to put forth the talk about societal problems, other titles were doing so too. Created in 1963 and another Stan Lee and Jack Kirby creation were the X-Men in *X-Men* #1. In this title, we are introduced to mutants,

[32] Hal Jordan
[33] The title had low sales at the time, therefore it was not a big risk

the next step in human evolution, and the efforts of Mutantkind and the X-Men[34] to fight back against human prejudice and discrimination (Kirby & Lee, 1963), becoming the mutants a metaphor for subjects like racism and especially the civil rights movement that accompanied the 1960s. While comparisons to important civil rights figure such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X can be made to the characters of Professor X[35] and Magneto[36], respectively, the comparison is not entirely accurate (Lyubansky, 2008), that being said the book and characters did the job that they were initially set out to do.

Stories that involved drugs and drug use also began to be published that were not approved by the Comics Code. Harry Osborn, a college friend of Peter Parker[37], began to consume drugs in pill form and overdosing (Lee & Kane, 1971; Lee & Kane, 1971; Lee & Kane, 1971). The narrative came about when Stan Lee was approached by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to write a story that involved drugs and their dangers (Rhoades, 2008). The story arc of Harry Osborn's addiction was not approved by the Comics Code, yet they were published anyway garnering critical acclaim leaving Marvel free of consequences for disobedience. Later that year, the rules of the Comics Code started being relaxed, given that a major publisher decided to ignore the rules (Raphael & Spurgeon, 2003).Continuing with *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, the character of Speedy[38] is seen injecting heroin to the shock of both Green Arrow and the reader (Adams & O'Neil, 1971; Adams & O'Neil, 1971). In the cover of issue #85 (Annexe I) of the two part arc, we can see written: "DC attacks youth's greatest problem… drugs"; in the cover of issue #86: "More deadly than the Atom Bomb[39]". Like *The Amazing Spider-Man* story arc, "Snowbirds don't fly"[40] received rave reviews winning the Shazam Award for Best Individual Story at the 1971 Academy of Comic Book Arts Awards (Wright, 2001). Even with the award and other favourable reviews from outlets like The New York Times, Newsweek and The Wall Street Journal (Johnson, 2012), the run was cancelled after thirteen issues due to poor sales[41] (O'Neil, 2007).

[34] The X-Men are mutants themselves
[35] The leader of the X-Men
[36] The X-Men's main antagonist
[37] Spider-Man
[38] Green Arrow's sidekick
[39] Referring to drugs
[40] The name of the two issue story arc that revolved around Speedy's drug use
[41] See https://www.nerdteam30.com/creator-conversations-retro/an-interview-with-denny-oneil-the-author-behind-dcs-socially-conscious-70s

With the laxation of the Code, new titles made their way into the hands of readers, some even were of genres that the Comics Code had a hand in decimating (Rhoades, 2008). Monsters of a more horror-centric nature appeared in comic books during the 1970s. Werewolf by Night debuted in *Marvel Spotlight* #2 (1972), followed by the introduction of the occult-focused character Moon Knight in *Werewolf by Night* #32, in 1975. Ghost Rider followed shortly after, appearing in *Marvel Spotlight* #5 (1972). Another prominent horror title, *Tomb of Dracula*, launched in 1972, featuring a rotating cast of characters hunting the infamous vampire. This series introduced notable characters such as Blade, the vampire hunter, in *Tomb of Dracula* #10 (1973). In the case of Blade, being a black man, we could see many new minority characters being introduced in this decade. The creation of Black Panther in the pages of *The Fantastic Four* #52 (1966) was monumental, being the first black superhero and being published by one of the major publishers (Wright, 2001). Black Panther was followed in 1969 by The Falcon on the pages of *Captain America* #117 (1968).

While Black Panther was the King of an African nation and The Falcon a man of middle class origins, it was needed to portray minority characters in a bigger range. Created during the height of "blaxploitation" films like *Shaft* (1971) and *Super Fly* (1972), Marvel introduced the readers to the character of Luke Cage, a man wrongfully imprisoned that was experienced on and gained super-strength and steel like skin, using it to fight an underworld compose of drugs dealers, violence and white provocation (Goodwin & Tuska, 1972). With a character tackling such issues in white dominated society and that guarded concerns about white society, the decision was made to change the title of the series to Power Man, turning it into a more conventional super-hero title (Wright, 2001). In DC Comics, Black Lighting was conceived in 1977, followed by White-Tiger at Marvel, a prominent Latino character. Native-American's also had their spotlights with Thunderbird making his first appearance in *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 (1975). Inspired by the craze of martial arts movies that stormed cinemas in the early 1970s, Marvel decided to capitalize the fade creating East-Asian characters or with East-Asian influences (Wright, 2001), creating the characters Shang-Shi, Master of Kung Fu on the pages of *Special Marvel Edition* #15 and Iron-Fist on *Marvel Premiere* #15. Out of the many concepts that Marvel produced only these two remained popular after the trend died down (Gabilliet, 2010). DC Comics also entered the trend creating Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter with a less favourable following.

With its tenure in college and being a character that meant a lot to younger readers, Spider-Man, and his title *The Amazing Spider-Man*, utilized the proximity of its readership to communicate about social problems. Similarly to student protests that were happening in Columbia University in 1968, Stan Lee utilized The Amazing Spider-Man to comment on the, at the time, politics that affected the youth (Wright, 2001). In an issue, we can Peter Parker arriving at his college campus and witnessing a student protest fighting against the rehabilitation of an abandoned building into a hotel, when it could be renovated to accommodate for a dormitory for minority students at low-rent (Lee, Mooney, & Romita Sr., 1968).

Due to his nature as a vigilante and his sympathy, Peter can understand the fight of the students, however he prefers to take a moderate position and hear in which position the dean stands on the subject. Peter's college colleagues criticize him for not choosing a side, to which Peter responds: "Anyone can paint a sign, mister! That doesn't make you right!" (Lee, Mooney, & Romita Sr., 1968, p. 9). With that said, Peter feels sympathy for their actions. In issue #70 the story arc of the campus protests concludes with one of its prominent figures talking with the dean and finding out that the plan was always to build affordable beds for students, however the situation was not communicated to the student staff for the dean found it appropriate that "students should be seen and not heard" (Lee, Mooney, & Romita, 1968, p. 9). The prominent figure comes to the realization that his approach toward the dean and the university was overly harsh. It had never occurred to him that the dean's actions might have stemmed from a genuine concern for the well-being of the students. "Superheroes like Spider-Man endorsed liberal solutions to social problems while rejecting the extreme and violent responses of both the left and the right—an ironic position to assume, since superheroes tacitly endorsed violent means to solve problems every time they slugged it out with the bad guys" (Wright, 2001, p. 235).

During a time that the United States still found itself battling in the jungles of Vietnam, heroes that were characterized as paragons of the fight against communism or the virtues of the United States of America also received social commentary. Iron Man, once a feverous fighter of communism and communist agents saw its title and character adopt a more liberal view (Costello, 2009). Villains like Crimson Dynamo started, some might say, devolving as an antagonist, for he turned into a villain for the sake of being a villain, abandoning his political background and ideology (Wright, 2001). In a 1971 issue, Iron Man started speaking

negatively about the conservative government, leading him to enter in an argument with a Senator that accused Stark of being an anarchist, placing him next to a group of young protesters that are "a breed of people (…) who want to destroy the government that made America great" (Conway & Tuska, 1971, p. 10). In the following issues, Iron Man interrupts protest that desires peace, insisting that resorting to violence is counterproductive to achieve peace. One of the protesters rebuttals that it is the only method that those older and in power will understand (Friedrich & Tuska, 1972).

Following this and realizing that he also is part of the problem for his connection to the military industrial complex, Tony Stark decides to terminate his company's weapons and munitions manufactory. Reflecting on his actions as a champion of capitalism and America to contain the spread of communism, he ponders why he and his country were in Vietnam and the role he and his weapons had on the deaths of thousands. When comes to his senses once more he vows to take responsibility of those that died because of his lack of nescience (Mantlo & Tuska, 1975).

4. FRAMING THE COLD WAR: IDEOLOGICAL BATTLES AND SUPERPOWER TENSIONS IN 1980s COMIC BOOK

Having worked on British comic books such as *Doctor Who* and *2000 AD,* Alan Moore paved the way for other British creators to venture into working with U.S. publishers, as he did in the early 1980s. Moore began his work on the comic book *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*, and in this early work for DC Comics, we can see how the perception of the comic book industry was beginning to change. Although several titles in the 1970s had already begun to challenge the Comics Code, *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* was notable for being "the first mainstream comic for decades to consistently not be submitted for approval to the industry regulator, the Comics Code" (Little, 2010, pp. 142-143), due to its subject matter. Moore's sudden popularity made him a household name in the industry, elevating him to a high status. His next work would only solidify his legacy. Following DC Comics acquisition of Charlton Comics in 1983, Moore planned to write a story featuring Charlton-owned characters, such as Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Peacemaker, and The Question.

However, Moore's intentions were halted when DC editorial decided that his narrative would render these characters unusable in the main DC Universe continuity. It was decided by DC's editorial that Moore would use similar characters to achieve his original vision (Proctor, 2021). Consequently, the Charlton Comics characters in Alan Moore's hands became Nite-Owl, Doctor Manhattan, The Comedian, and Rorschach, respectively. *Watchmen* was published as a limited series between 1986 and 1987, initially in individual comic book issues. Later, these issues were compiled into a graphic novel.

The narrative takes place in a 1980s United States, where the existence of superheroes has changed and influenced the world and American history. Although vigilantes exist in this universe, the only one with actual supernatural powers is Doctor Manhattan. Before the story begins, we are presented with a page preceding the first chapter that features a drawing of the Doomsday Clock, a clear reminder of the nuclear age and of the Cold War context in which the novel was written and published. The Clock was created by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists as a "design that warns the public about how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making" (Benedict, s.d). Although not seen or used as a prediction for the end of the world, the Clock functions as a metaphor for the dangers facing humanity and the planet. Created at the end of the Second World War, the Clock's hands have been adjusted many times. Notably, the 1980s, like the 1960s, saw multiple

adjustments. However, the 1980s Clock was set closer to midnight due to events such as Ronald Reagan's election as President of the United States, his adoption of tough Soviet containment policies, and the commencement of the Soviet-Afghan War in 1979[42]. The Clock stands at approximately 23h48m before the start of the narrative. Despite not having significant relevance to the plot, the Doomsday Clock serves a similar purpose in the story as it does in real life. Before the beginning of each new chapter, we see the Clock moving closer to midnight with blood pouring downward. While representing the inevitable end of the world, the Clock also conveys to the reader that they are approaching the climax and conclusion of the narrative.

The narrative begins in October 1985. The world of the story teeters on the brink of nuclear war due to high tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, and The Comedian has just been assassinated. The murder is investigated by Rorschach, who believes that everyone is a sinner, a leech, and dirty. His mask, representing a Rorschach test, suggests that he sees morality in black and white. He believes, "Because there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished. Even in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise in this" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 32). Despite his rigid moral code, Rorschach is often biased, sparing individuals from punishment due to personal reasons. For instance, when Silk Spectre accuses The Comedian of rape, he ignores her accusation because he perceives The Comedian as a patriot and views Silk Spectre as a sex worker. In his quest for justice, Rorschach's actions often cause more harm than good. He equates leeches to communists, yet he himself lives at the expense of society and others. Rorschach believes that those he criticizes should emulate individuals like President Truman. His disdain for communists and admiration for Truman's policies reflect his alignment with the ex-President's foreign policy stance.

The end of the Second World War marked the emergence of a new world order where the USA and the USSR emerged as the dominant global superpowers. Each side considered itself destined for ultimate victory. From the U.S. point of view, the conflict began as an effort to contain Soviet expansion, a concern well recognized by the United States, which aimed to assist nations perceived as threatened by Soviet influence. In 1946, the relationship turned sour due to two events that would difficult the reconnection of the former allies: "the Soviet's failure to withdraw their troops from northern Iran in early 1946 (as per the terms of the Tehran Declaration of 1943); Soviet attempts to pressure the Iranian Government into

[42] See https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/timeline/

granting them oil concessions while supposedly fomenting irredentism by Azerbaijani separatists in northern Iran; Soviet efforts to force the Turkish Government into granting them base and transit rights through the Turkish Straits; and, the Soviet Government's rejection of the Baruch plan for international control over nuclear energy and weapons in June 1946" (The Truman Doctrine, 1947). By 1947, the conflict had evolved into an ideological struggle rather than a purely nationalistic one. The American perspective was encapsulated in the Truman Doctrine, which asserted that the United States would intervene to protect the freedoms of those at risk of losing them. "In defining the Cold War as a battle of freedom against totalitarianism, Truman invested the two worlds with ideological content while striking what would be a common refrain about the Cold War as a battle between different ways of life" (Engerman, 2010, p. 36). One example of this was the situation going on in Greece and Turkey in 1947. Both Greece and Turkey were suffering from Soviet and communist provocations[43], and with the U.S assuming Britain's old role as a diplomatic giant, it was necessary to contain Soviet reach into the Mediterranean and possibly the Middle-East (McMahon, 2003). This mentality would be the building block in which American foreign policy would extend its influence throughout the rest of the Cold War.

4.1 Cold War Politics in Comic Books

4.1.1 Latin America Intervention and Operation Condor

Following his investigation of The Comedian's apartment, Rorschach visits the home of his former colleague, Nite-Owl. Daniel Dreiberg, also known as Nite-Owl, is a retired hero, much like the others in the *Watchmen* Universe. In this universe, the public perception of superheroes soured due to Rorschach's extreme methods in dealing with criminals. A police strike swept across the East Coast of the United States, and despite efforts by Nite-Owl and The Comedian to quell the riots, the heroes were held responsible for the ongoing violence and looting. In the political landscape of *Watchmen*, on August 3, 1977, Senator Keene proposed the Keene Act, which outlawed costumed vigilantism. Though Senator Keene's full name is never disclosed, his character may reference David Keene, a political advisor to Vice President Spiro Agnew under President Richard Nixon. Only Doctor Manhattan and The Comedian were exempt from the Keene Act due to their strategic value to the government. In the narrative, Nixon is portrayed as having won a fourth term as President of the United States, facilitated by The Comedian's government-sanctioned assassination of *The*

[43] Greece's right-wing government was in a Civil War with the national communists supported by Communist Yugoslavia, and Turkey was being harassed by the Soviets in the Strait of Gallipoli.

Washington Post journalists who were about to uncover the Watergate Scandal. This, along with the U.S. victory in Vietnam and Nixon's proposal to repeal the 22nd Amendment of the Constitution, enabled him to remain in power throughout the 1970s and into the mid-1980s. Consequently, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan never held office in the *Watchmen* Universe.

The Comedian, acting as a government operative, was assigned numerous missions referenced throughout the book. During Rorschach's visit to Nite-Owl following The Comedian's murder, Dreiberg suggests that the killing may have had political motivations stemming from Blake's[44] involvement in the dismantling of Marxist republics in South America. The mention of American operatives being dispatched to Latin America to overthrow governments that were not aligned with American ideals is one of the many contentious issues stemming from the Cold War, with some examples being given in the following paragraphs.

Following the end of the Second World War, Latin America continued to grapple with the enduring legacy of old colonial systems. A system controlled by the elite exacerbated inequalities, leaving the poor in both rural and urban areas facing dire conditions. Many lived in substandard housing, lacked adequate nutrition and literacy, and had limited opportunities to voice their concerns and grievances. Any signs of revolt were swiftly suppressed. The discontent among the masses, coupled with the rise of nationalist movements in the Third World, fuelled aspirations for autonomy and access to their countries natural resources. In this context, left-wing activism gained momentum (Powaski, 1998). During Eisenhower's presidency, Guatemala initiated socialist reforms, but these were abruptly halted by U.S. intervention, driven by the prevailing anti-communist policies of the time. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 intensified pressure on the USA, which feared the proliferation of leftist ideologies across the continent, especially if embraced by democratically elected leaders, thereby legitimizing such policies.

At the outset of Kennedy's presidency marked a period of eased tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev took actions aimed at potential mutual benefits for their respective nations. However, Kennedy's efforts to improve Soviet-American relations were constrained by his determination to also maintain resilience against the Soviets and communism. Fearing the spread of Cuban-style

[44] Edward Blake is The Comedian's real identity

developments across the American continent, the Kennedy administration proposed the Alliance for Progress. “It was designed to reduce poverty, illiteracy, and disease in the hemisphere, and thereby ameliorate the conditions that encouraged the growth of communism” (Powaski, 1998, p. 178). However, it quickly became apparent that the Alliance for Progress would not resolve the situation in Latin America. While the United States had succeeded in rebuilding Europe, replicating this success in South America proved challenging due to the region’s lack of economic, technical, and democratic infrastructure that had facilitated Europe’s restoration. Moreover, many leaders in South America viewed the American initiative as less desirable than communism, fearing it would diminish their power and influence in their countries.

Regarded as a failure by Kennedy for not living up to its hopes (McMahon, 2010), the Alliance for Progress did not effectively address the region’s problems, leaving it more vulnerable to the spread of communism (Powaski, 1998). To counter Soviet influence without risking nuclear conflict, Kennedy opted for a strategy involving diplomacy, espionage, and anti-guerrilla operations, allowing U.S. activities to proceed in a more natural and efficient manner. These anti-guerrilla operations were global in scope, with Latin America emerging as a primary focus. During President Johnson’s administration, authoritarian forces were actively seeking to overthrow established governments. While not openly endorsing these actions, the President perceived them as potentially advantageous outcomes lacking a clear long-term democratic solution and possibly indefinite in nature (Powaski, 1998).

Fearing the spread of Communism, the USA began bolstering the military capabilities of South American countries. This involved empowering the military to undertake efforts aimed at transforming their respective states and societies, while also working to counteract Marxist ideals (McSherry J. P., 2005). During Nixon’s presidency, discontent over the Vietnam War was rapidly escalating. President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, recognized the necessity for adjustments in U.S. strategies to contain communism. This discontent and the acknowledgement of the need for change culminated in the formulation of the Nixon Doctrine. This doctrine underscored the importance of containing Soviet influence without direct deployment of American ground forces (Schmitz, 2006). In the context of the Third World, the Nixon Doctrine translated into the USA’s readiness to provide equipment and resources to nations vulnerable to leftist uprisings, enabling them to defend their territories autonomously. This often entailed backing right-wing dictators capable of

preserving order and stability, often at odds with left-wing ideologies. It's important to note that in undermining leftist, socialist, and communist regimes, the U.S. policy targeted not only those specific ideologies but also liberal democracies and other alternative systems. While not seen as direct threats by the United States and its South American allies, these more liberal regimes were viewed as potentially subversive because of their ability to challenge the established order (McSherry J. , 2010).

When it came to overthrowing established governments, Operation Condor was the most prevalent exercise designated to disrupt Latin America and its regimes. McSherry (2005, p. 1), describes Operation Condor as "a secret intelligence and operations system created in the 1970s through which the South American military states shared intelligence and seized, tortured, and executed political opponents in one another's territory". Cooperation among South American countries was already established before the existence and implementation of Operation Condor. Their goal was to dismantle and undermine left-wing and Marxist regimes. In 1973, during a meeting of the CAA (Conference of American Armies), General Breno Borges Fortes, the Brazilian Commander of the Armed Forces, recognized that the most effective strategy to counter communism was through collaboration among affected countries. This involved sharing information, exchanging equipment, and providing mutual assistance when necessary. (Abramovici, 2001). In 1974, representatives of the armed forces from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay established rules of cooperation to address cross-border and foreign operations involving exiles. Through these tactics, the collaboration among the participating countries of Operation Condor enabled it to extend its reach across multiple nations (Abramovici, 2001).

The operations often included military agents trained in unconventional methods for managing conflicts and counterterrorism, giving them the capability to use terror tactics against other terrorists. Operation Condor, in particular, focused on targeting exiled leaders of movements or members of left-wing organizations capable of fomenting revolutions. Eliminating these dissidents served to greatly weaken resistance against the military regimes. Counterinsurgency tactics in South America were of critical importance to the United States and its allies. Prioritizing paramilitary groups and intelligence operatives capable of surveilling societies and discerning between potential threats and non-threats allowed Operation Condor to successfully undermine left-wing movements. While these actions were

carried out by the military and various factions, governments often denied direct involvement, tacitly supported by the United States (McSherry J. P., 2005).

Latin America has long been regarded as the United States "backyard" by numerous U.S. Presidents. This designation stems from the region's proximity to American borders and its abundance of natural resources, making it strategically significant to be within the American sphere of influence. As sponsors of forces that primarily targeted left-wing movements, the United States sought to provide Latin American military officers with training at its military bases. These training programs encompassed various tactics, including counterinsurgency strategies, methods of torture, assassination techniques, and ways to intimidate and abduct the family members and associates of prisoners to diminish their resistance (McSherry J. P., 2005).

With this in mind, Nite-Owl's sentence from *Watchmen*: "I heard he'd been working for the government since 77, knocking over Marxist Republics in South America…" could have many interpretations. Given the later context that the graphic novel gives of The Comedian's behaviours and actions in the narrative, a reader without historical knowledge or context might assume that the character was involved in assassination attempts on left-wing figures. However, with historical context, it can be inferred that The Comedian could have been one of the U.S. agents sent to Latin America to train military forces for combating subversion. Although, we have to keep in mind that, since the narrative of *Watchmen* is one of altered historical events, Operation Condor could have not happen in the narrative's universe, despite the sentence suggesting that it could. Events like the Vietnam War, which was preponderant in shaping American response in South America by the utilization of counterinsurgency (McSherry J. P., 2005) tactics in the real world, could have had a lesser effect in the *Watchmen* Universe.

The mention of "Marxist Republics" is also a bit of a generalization, since the party in power in Chile when Pinochet's coup took place was a democratically elected coalition between the Communist, Radical, Socialist and other left-wing parties (Faúndez, 1988). Other countries also had socialist parties in leadership until their eventual downfall. Labelling them as Marxist may falsely suggest to the reader that these Latin American states came into power through a revolution where the proletariat seized control from the bourgeois state, an idea advocated by Marx during the First International in 1871 (Harris, 1992). Since most of the governments obtained power through the elections and democratic processes, the definition of

Marxist does not qualify for the moment. This could also mean that the differences between Marxism, Communism and Socialism are blurred in the *Watchmen* Universe, given the fact that information could be limited, since the United States is not a full blown democratic state. Richard Nixon is indeed serving his fourth term as President, although this remains speculative.

4.1.2 The Iran-Contra Affairs and The Suicide Squad

Another comic book briming in Cold War themes is *Secret Origins* #14 (1987), written by John Ostrander and ilustrated by Luke McDonnell, which explains the relaunch of the Suicide Squad team. The concept of the unit involves recruiting imprisoned criminals to undertake off-the-record missions for the United States government. In exchange for achieving mission objectives and returning alive, the criminals are promised reduced prison sentences as a reward. Given the geopolitics of the Cold War, influencing countries to align with either the United States or the Soviet Union was crucial. This was a principle upheld by both the Democratic and Republican parties, regardless of the sitting President. To achieve this, the United States aimed to exert significant influence over the cultural, political, economic, and social aspects of the countries it sought to persuade. One notorious event during the Reagan administration was the Iran-Contra Affair (Barberio, 2020). Amid the conflict in Nicaragua between the right-wing group known as the Contras and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (commonly known as the Sandinistas), senior members of the American political and strategic sphere plotted to funnel weapons to the Contras (Draper, 1991).

Although funding weaponry to groups is not illegal per se, in this case it was. The Boland Amendment, proposed by Congressman Edward Boland[45] between 1982 and 1984, prohibited the United States from sending more weapons to the Contras through any legislative means (Brink & Jenkins, 1988). Around the time of the Second Boland Amendment, then-Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North was responsible for selling weapons to the Iranian regime to secure the release of a group of American hostages held in Lebanon (Rossinow, 2015). While inflating the price of the weapons, North used the surplus funds from the sales to support the Contras, thereby connecting the two endeavors. Over time, various records of conversations and meetings discussing what would later be known as the Iran-Contra Affair were declassified

[45] Boland was a democrat

for public scrutiny. We can find these documents at the website of Brown University intitled *Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs*[46].

In the document entitled *CIA Covert Operations in Nicaragua* of the 19th of september 1983, President Reagan discusses what operations are to be done in the country: "In cooperation with other governments, provide support, equipment and training assistance to Nicaraguan paramilitary resistance groups as a means to induce the Sandinistas, Cubans and their allies to cease their support to insurgencies in the region" (Reagan, 1983). President Reagan belief that these actions are justified and to the utmost importance for the American efforts in the Cold War are: "US support to paramilitary activities in Nicaragua will terminated at such times as it's verified that: a) the Soviets, Cubans and Sandinistas have ceased providing through Nicaragua arms, training, command and control facilities and other logistical support to military and paramilitary operations in Central America, and (b) the government of Nicaragua is demonstrating a commitment to provide amnesty and nondiscriminatory participation in the Nicaraguan political process by all Nicaraguans" (Reagan, 1983).

Like in the discussion with American intervetion in South America, we can see the patern starting to take shape once again in the U.S. foreign policy of containemnt. Of course that, given the illegal actions that the high-ranking officials were conducting, secrecy would have to be important in order to avoid a scandal of the highest proportions. In another document entitled *Fallback Plan for the Nicaraguan Resistance* of the 16th of March 1985, Lieutenaut Colonel North discusses the strategy to be implemented in case of a needed escape of the Nicaraguan resistence, which he directs to National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane. McFarlane was another personality linked to the eventual scandal. With the fear that Congress might find the scheme and take measures, Colonel North had this to say: "The Congress is unwilling to support release of $14M in USG funds for the purpose of supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua. The FY-86 budget is seriously jeopardized by Congressional action and will require a major effort on the part of the President immediately after the MX vote through mid-July. There will insufficient time or assets available to organize the kind of Administration-wide effort required to achieve an affirmative vote in both Houses on the Nicaraguan resistance program" (North, 1985).

[46] https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/documents.php

In terms of the motives for the secrecy of his and the administration's actions, North justified them with: "Section 8066 of the law (Tab A) expires on October 1, 1985. There are currently $28M requested in the FY-86 intelligence budget for the purpose of supporting paramilitary operations by the Nicaraguan resistance. The current funding relationship which exists between the resistance and its donors is sufficient to purchase arms and munitions between now and October—if additional monies are provided for non-military supplies {e.g., food, clothing, medical items, etc.). The Current donors will have to be convinced of the need to continue their funding for munitions after October 1, 1985. A Commitment for another $25-30M From the donors will be necessary for munitions in 1986 in anticipation that the $28M requested in the intelligence budget is not approved. (…) In lieu of forwarding the report to the Congress required by Section 8066 of PL 98-473, the President would announce on or about April 2 that the American people should contribute funds («...send your check or money order to the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters, Box 1776, Gettysburg, PA...») to support liberty and democracy in the Americas. He would note that the monies raised would be used to support the humanitarian needs of those struggling for freedom against Communist tyranny in Central America. By necessity, the speech must be dramatic and a surprise. It cannot be leaked in advance" (North, 1985).

In another document dated 10th of November 1986, three days before President Reagan's public announcement of the affair, a meeting took place to discuss what would be the actions and words to be had during the press conference. One step was to find a believable justification to present to the public the reason of the selling of weapons to Iran. The reasoning was the following one: "The President said we did not do any trading with the enemy for our hostages. We do need to note that (Khomedi) will be gone someday, and we want better leverage with the new government and with their military. That is why we felt it necessary to give them some small defensive weapons. (…) We are trying to get better relations with Iran, and we can't discuss the details of this publicly without endangering the people we are working through and within Iran. (…) Admiral Poindexter pointed out that we do want a better relationship with Iran" (1986)

Returning to the subject of Cold War themes in comic books, the Iran-Contra Affair is significant in discussions about the origin and relaunch of the Suicide Squad team because the rationale behind the affair and the actions of the U.S and the Reagan administration parallel the justification for a black-ops team. Given that *Secret Origins* #14 was released in May

1987, the American public, and particularly the writer of the issue, John Ostrander, were well aware of the covert practices occurring behind the scenes. The issue revolves around the character of Amanda Waller, created by Ostrander the same year, attempting to persuade President Reagan to authorize the Squad to undertake missions and engage in morally ambiguous actions while denying official U.S involvement. In the words of Waller and President Reagan, a clear parallel can be drawn between the events of the Iran-Contra Scandal and the justifications used to carry out their respective tasks. They utilized arguments in foreign policy where the ends justified the means, often sidestepping democratic solutions and planning (Clabough & Sheffield, 2022), a factor that the issue and consequent *Suicide Squad* issues written by Ostrander revolve much around.

On page 35 of *Secret Origins* #14, Amanda Waller presents her arguments to Reagan in an effort to persuade the President to authorize the Squad. She asserts that she is a person of action and emphasizes that "there are tasks, both domestically and internationally, that need to be accomplished, but for various reasons, the government cannot undertake them" (McDonnell & Ostrander, 1987, p. 35). Another character in the room with President Reagan and Waller is Sarge Steel, who takes a more moralistic stance on the issue of using criminals to solve US problems. Steel believes that eventually someone will divulge their plans, potentially eroding public trust in the government. Steel concludes his thoughts by remarking that while the legality of the team may be questionable but possibly acceptable, the President must consider the ethical and moral implications of authorizing such a team (McDonnell & Ostrander, 1987). During the Cold War, both President Reagan in the comic book and in real life felt the need to act swiftly to gain an advantage, often choosing, with his advisors, to overlook democratic values and ethics in order to effectively address pressing issues facing the Presidency. On page 37, Reagan, as portrayed by Ostrander, even acknowledges that he is a man of action who dislikes waiting for results (McDonnell & Ostrander, 1987). Through the actions of those involved in the Iran-Contra Affair, we can observe how the Cold War influenced the justifications and motivations of new stories and characters. It is not surprising that in the first relaunch of the Suicide Squad in 1987, written by Ostrander, their initial mission was to intervene in the fictional country of Qurac[47] to combat a terrorist group called Jihad, followed by a mission to infiltrate Moscow.

[47] Qurac is somewhat the equivalent to Iran or Iraq in the DC Universe

4.1.3 Batman and the Discussion of the "Star Wars" Program

Given the character's esteemed status in the industry and within the publisher itself, it is not surprising that Batman would be selected to explore Cold War politics in its stories. Although not traditionally associated with political themes or ideas, Batman titles such as *Batman* and *Detective Comics* began to depart from this trend at the onset of the Bronze Age of Comics around the early 1970s[48]. With minimal industry push-back, writers began to craft stories addressing political issues and aimed to introduce a more nuanced approach to narratives that had been constrained during the 1950s and 60s. Around this time, stories like *V for Vendetta, X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*, and various story arcs within individual character's books—such as the "Armor Wars" story arc in *The Invincible Iron Man*—explored topics like the arms race and weapon manufacturing.

Of course, the most renowned comic books released during this time were *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*, which sent shockwaves through the industry, prompting the creation of new nomenclature for comic book eras, thus ushering in the Modern Age. Apart from *The Dark Knight Returns*, other Batman-related stories such as "Son of the Demon", which portrayed eco-terrorism, and "Death in the Family", with glimpses of Middle Eastern tensions, introduced readers to subject matters they might not have been prepared to confront.

One of the most revered stories during this period is "Ten Nights of the Beast", encompassing issues #417 to #420 of the *Batman* title. In it, the public is introduced to the Soviet assassin "Beast", more commonly known by his CIA-given name "KGBeast". The plot of this four-issue story arc revolves around the assassin's arrival in Gotham City to eliminate key figures of the "Star Wars" program residing in the city, aiming to weaken American efforts and national security. At the beginning of issue #417, we are introduced to KGB agent Andrei Yevtushenko, who provides the CIA and Gotham Police Commissioner with a characterization of KGBeast, while Batman and Robin listen covertly. The manner in which KGBeast is characterized by Yevtushenko is particularly interesting. Although neutralizing the "Beast" is also of the KGB interest, for he has gone rogue, he is spoken as a bogeyman by Yevtushenko: "you must realize that the beast is not a normal human (…) he is as strong as four healthy men and able to literally tear a person in two with his bare hands" (Aparo & Starlin, 2018, p. 12).

[48] See chapter 3.7.4.

Even when American and Soviet interests are aligned, a "game of chess" must be played to prevent either side from appearing weak[49]. With the election of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR implemented two significant policies: Glasnost and Perestroika. While the latter aimed to reform the Soviet economy and political system, the former focused on increasing governmental openness and promoting political dialogue, offering a more pluralist vision of opinions and granting the media greater liberties to publicize its stories (Mason, 1988).

Even though General Secretary Gorbachev wanted to implement these ideas, change was difficult. The Soviet choice to divulge information to the West was always a challenging one for Soviet leaders. The most prevalent example is likely the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. When the incident occurred, the natural and right action would have been to inform surrounding territories of the danger; however, the information was not divulged. In May of the same year, the disaster was addressed by Secretary Gorbachev, who claimed that the international press was exaggerating the reports and that it was nothing but lies intended to damage the Soviet Union (Gorbachev, 1986). "Official statements were only released two days after the detection of radiation in Sweden while many Soviet citizens began relying on information received from international contacts who heard a different explanation of Chernobyl through Western news compared to what inhabitants were hearing from the government" (Patel, s.d). While reading the comic book/story arc[50], we can see the reluctance to adopt the Glasnost principle in the words of Agent Yevtushenko. Although KGBeast is someone to be neutralized, it is strange to hear a Soviet agent speak about a rogue KGB agent with such reverence. When considering the Glasnost factor, or lack thereof, it is understandable why Agent Yevtushenko behaves this way. Admitting that the Soviet state has failed in any capacity, especially in front of the CIA and other American authority figures, compromises Soviet integrity and pride, leading to perceptions of weakness.

As discussed previously, the goal of KGBeast's arrival on American soil was to eliminate targets working on the SDI (Strategic Defense Initative) program. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the program never came to fruition. However, concerns about its potential impact in the 1980s were real. Envisioned to prevent ballistic nuclear missile attacks from the Soviet Union, the plan aimed to create lasers and other defensive systems to gain an

[49] In the sense that both Superpowers cannot admit that they failed, if not, the other Superpower could gain the advantage in some regard.
[50] "Ten Nights of the Beast"

upper hand in the Cold War. It is no surprise that the announcement of such a program in 1983 would further deteriorate USA-USSR relations. Soviet criticism consisted of the accusation that the US was jeopardizing the balance reached between the two states by eliminating the means of a successful Soviet retaliation if an American attack ever came first (Podvig, 2017). Seen as a provocation, the SDI program could lead to an imbalance between the two states and destabilize the principle of MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction), potentially leading both the US and USSR into a new arms race. This factor, coupled with an overall disinterest of the Reagan administration in arms talks—such as declining the unratified SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) II and proposing the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with the goal of minimizing the number of weapons in the superpowers' arsenals—heightened tensions during this period (Fisher, 2010).

With the Geneva Summit in 1985 and the Reykjavik Summit in 1986, conversations between the United States and the Soviet Union began to occur. It was in the Soviet interest to maintain a strong opposition to the SDI program, as it would lead to a decrease in missile defense, aligning with the arms reduction agenda that the Soviets supported. Although MAD was a principle under threat, both Reagan and Gorbachev disliked and rejected the idea (Fisher, 2010). President Reagan found the concept despicable and unethical. In an encounter with the Soviet Foreign Affairs Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Reagan had this to say about MAD: "Today, it is uncivilized to say we can only maintain peace by threatening innocent people" (Matlock Jr., 2005, p. 142). With the election of Gorbachev, he too brought some moderation to the debate: "When I saw the monster that we and the United States had created as a result of the arms race, with all its mistakes and accidents with nuclear weapons and nuclear power, when I saw the terrible amount of force that had been amassed, I finally understood what the consequences, including global winter, would be" (Gorbachev, 1998, as cited in Schell, 1998, p. 161-162).

When considering KGBeast as a rogue Soviet assassin, his motive to sabotage the SDI becomes evident. Notably absent from previous discussions is that while KGBeast opposes the Soviet state, he does not answer to it. Agent Yevtushenko reveals that the assassin belonged to a clandestine organization within the KGB known as Hammer. Over the years, Hammer gained strength until its dissolution during General Secretary Gorbachev's tenure (Aparo & Starlin, 2018). In its rogue status, Hammer decided to carry out its final mission, Operation Skywalker, which involved dismantling the SDI program. Agent Yevtushenko

further clarifies that this mission was not sanctioned by the Soviet state (Aparo & Starlin, 2018). The words of Yevtushenko resonate with the actual actions and intentions of the Soviet Union. While the Soviets aimed to halt the SDI program, engaging in a covert operation to undermine American efforts risked escalating tensions between the two nations, an outcome neither desired. Considering Gorbachev's statements and the USSR's actions, it becomes entirely plausible for the CIA and KGB to collaborate in apprehending the "Beast". However, the presence of dissenters opposed to de-escalating tensions between the USA and USSR cannot be discounted, as some may have viewed Gorbachev as weaker than his predecessors.

In page 44 of *Batman: The Caped Crusader* Volume I, both Agent Yevtushenko and another CIA agent[51] are seen discussing the SDI program and its efficiency. Yevtushenko remarks that "the astronomical cost of the Star Wars program should discourage its development", (Aparo & Starlin, 2018, p. 44) suggesting that pursuing a new defensive system would inevitably lead to a new arms race, depleting funds that could be better invested elsewhere by both nations. Agent Bundy refutes Yevtushenko refutes with the argument that the SDI program "might be the only way to stop the nuclear buildup (…) making nuclear weapons obsolete may be our only way out" (Aparo & Starlin, 2018, p. 44). The back and forth continues with Yevtushenko doubting Bundy's claims insisting that the program can't guarantee an end to nuclear weapons and that the best solution is one of disarmament (Aparo & Starlin, 2018). Bundy responds by proposing that "if you want disarmament you have to allow on site verification" (Aparo & Starlin, 2018, p. 44); to which Yevtushenko reacts with the notion that CIA agents being on local and with free reign would be preposterous. The conversation ends with both not reaching an agreement.

We see in both arguments the representation of the prevailing ideologies of the respective nations at the time: Reagan's characterization of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and Gorbachev's reluctance to escalate the arms race. The writer of this story arc, Jim Starlin, adeptly captures the mutual distrust between both countries by weaving in events contemporaneous to the publication of the four issues that constitute the "Ten Nights of the Beast" arc. With the release of the four-issue arc in the second trimester of 1988, the INF treaty had already been ratified in June of the same year. While the treaty's ratification coincided with the release of the final issue, the anti-war and anti-nuclear message of the story

[51] Agent Bundy

arc still resonates. It effectively illustrates that despite the disagreements between the two nations regarding armament, a path toward peace and cooperation remained viable.

Besides providing KGBeast's personal background and mission objectives, Yevtushenko also informs the CIA and the others present at the meeting that KGBeast was responsible for missions in Angola and the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Given the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War, it is natural for both superpowers to focus on other countries experiencing political and social instabilities. In the case of "Ten Nights of the Beast", the mention of Soviet intervention in Angola and Egypt is unsurprising. Following the "Carnation Revolution" of 1974 in Portugal, which led to decolonization efforts in Southern Africa, the Soviets seized opportunities to expand their influence, notably in the Angolan War starting in 1975 (Zubok, 2010). Regarding President Sadat, his last months as the head of state of Egypt were turbulent. Facing domestic problems, he suspected that former Egyptian officials were conspiring with the Soviet Union to undermine his presidency (Pace, 1981).

With wars erupting in former European colonies like Angola, the notion of an mercenary being involved in efforts to destabilize the region for Soviet gain is not implausible (Fayemi & Musah, 2000). Following the Angolan Civil War that ensued after Portugal's withdrawal from the territory, the Soviet Union chose to support the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola). With Soviet military assistance to the MPLA and bolstered by Cuban military support also sponsored by the USSR, the Soviets viewed this as advantageous, potentially increasing the number of states aligning with their ideals in the Third World (Njølstad, 2010). When considering President Sadat, the idea of a Soviet assassin carrying out the killing is intriguing but diverges from historical fact, since the Sadat was officialy assassinated by an Egyptian military[52]. Fear of Soviet influence was indeed mounting in the Red Sea region and other parts of the Middle East, prompting some countries in the area to seek closer ties with the USA. President Sadat's increasing distrust of the Soviets, compounded by domestic challenges, ultimately led to his assassination by religious fundamentalists. Nevertheless, it's plausible to consider the indirect influence the Soviet Union may have had in exacerbating political rivalries that contributed to Sadat's assassination. The notion of a covert assassin amidst the geopolitical complexities of the era adds an interesting layer to the historical context.

[52] Khalid al-Islambuli

4.2 Societal Representations in Comic Books

4.2.1 The Psychological Effects of Nuclear War

In *Watchmen*, a pervasive theme explored through both dialogue and imagery is the fear of an imminent nuclear attack, which generates profound anxiety and trepidation among main and supporting characters alike. At the outset of Chapter III, the narrative employs a striking visual motif: the cover prominently features a close-up of a fallout shelter warning sign. The opening page of the chapter then unfolds with a sequence where the viewpoint gradually pulls back from this warning sign across successive panels. This reveals a man in the process of installing the warning sign, situated next to a truck laden with additional signs intended for deployment throughout New York City (Annex J).

In the same page, we see a newspaper vendor discussing his anxieties if the Russians deliver a nuclear attack. In Chapter II, during a meeting in the 1970s with the other members of the *Watchmen*, the Comedian expresses his belief that it doesn't matter what they do in their efforts to combat crime. Sooner or later, nuclear bombs will destroy the entire planet and Ozymandias[53] will be the smartest man[54] on the cinder. This behaviour is mostly due to the cynical view The Comedian possesses. In Chapter V of *Watchmen*, readers encounter a harrowing murder-suicide case where a father tragically kills his two children in front of their mother before ending his own life. This devastating act is motivated by the overwhelming fear of nuclear war that pervades the world of *Watchmen*.

Such fears and anxieties were widespread during the Cold War. While the entire world dreaded the consequences of an attack, whether by the United States or the Soviet Union, it's reasonable to suggest that the populations of these two superpowers likely harboured the greatest fear of a potential nuclear strike, given their central roles in the conflict. Following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, social consciousness grappled with speculation about how the world would be transformed. As psychiatrists sought to comprehend and compare the various public speculations, they began to observe signs that later researchers would delve into when exploring the consequences of living under the threat of nuclear warfare. (Boyer, 1994). Boyer (1994) uses the example of historian Lewis Mumford and his work after the end of the Second World War about the social effects of the atom. In Mumford's essay published in 1947, he delves into scenarios, each more dire than the last,

[53] Ozymandias is Adrian Veidt's costume name
[54] Ozymandias has the nickname, "Smartest man in the world"

regarding the social and psychological repercussions of an inevitable nuclear future. On the first scenario, Mumford supposed a pre-emptive attack on Russia. The 1980s popular culture was heavily influenced by the fear of nuclear war. Songs like Sting's "Russians", with its poignant lyrics "How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer's deadly toy?", and Metallica's "Fight Fire with Fire[55]" reflected the anxieties of the era. In film, James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), while not directly depicting a superpower conflict, presented a dystopian post-nuclear apocalypse that evoked fears of what might happen if nuclear war became a reality. Nicholas Meyer's *The Day After* (1983) offered a chilling portrayal of life in a Kansas town following a nuclear strike.

Although the context differs, with the essay from 1947 reflecting real events and the *Watchmen* universe set in 1985 with altered historical events, the themes and ideas expressed are not dissimilar to those found in the book. We see in the page that the newspaper seller is saying the exact same thing. However, like many individuals consumed by their fears and anxieties, he fails to envision the long-term consequences of his thoughts. The seller resorts to apathy as a coping mechanism, adopting the mentality that a war would benefit him since it could result in increased newspaper sales.

When it comes to fallout, the dangers of radiation were quickly known after the discovery of it. Discovered by the German scientist Wilhelm Konrad Roentgen in 1895, it became rapidly apparent what were the harmful aspects that radiation could have to the public. Only, the people exposed to high amounts of radiation for long exposure started to develop burns and eventual cancers, that would lead to amputations or death (Winkler, 1993). Throughout the first half of the 20th century, new ways to prevent the risk of radiation were implemented and with trial and error, the scientific community was able to perceive what dosage was lethal to humans. The initiation of the Manhattan Project compelled the scientists involved to enhance safety conditions due to the close proximity to radioactive materials inherent in the assignment. Following World War II, and the onset of the race for nuclear weaponry, discussions regarding proliferation entered the public sphere. Tests conducted in the Pacific began to impact wildlife in the waters, while ships within close proximity to or approaching the blast area became victims of fallout, affecting everything it touched. When the testing reached the mainland and fearing consequences, the public made its voice more heard. At first, they were enthusiastic for the prospect of seeing a blast at a long distance, however

[55] "Nuclear warfare shall lay us to rest"

accidents started arousing concerns. Reports of military personnel sustaining eye damage from the flash of nuclear blasts were concealed from the public. Similarly, Dr. Lyle Borst, the chairman of the physics department at the University of Utah, voiced his concerns about radiation, while demanding that his children bathe after playing outside the house (Winkler, 1993).

Over the coming decades, the public encountered numerous depictions of atoms and radioactivity. Films such as *The Blob*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and, notably, *Godzilla* portrayed various aspects of this theme. In the realm of comic books, the most famous representation of radiation is Kryptonite, a fictional substance. Similar to real radioactive materials like Plutonium or Radium, Kryptonite emits rays capable of weakening Superman to the point of vulnerability to conventional Earth weaponry. This parallelism suggests that Kryptonite, like real radioactive substances, causes cellular deterioration when in close proximity. The average citizen, however, experienced more severe impacts on their lives. Fallout from radioactive substances began to manifest in everyday consumer products, sparking confrontations between the public and the AEC (Atomic Energy Commission), supported by the U.S. government. The AEC believed that by manipulating and capitalizing on the public's ignorance regarding fallout, they could pacify even the most ardent critics. However, this strategy failed, and tests were suspended in 1958, with unilateral support from the Soviet Union, which also halted its own tests. In 1961, when testing resumed, it sparked a new wave of discontent (Winkler, 1993).

With this in mind, it became apparent to social scientist that the fear of nuclear war extracted a heavy toll on the mind of people, arguing that nuclear anxiety "has become a persuasive and chronic stressor" (Smith, 1988), especially in the minds of the youth. While *Watchmen* centres on the topic of nuclear fear and anxiety, the youth is not represented in the narrative in a large scale. The only young man followed throughout the narrative is a comic book reader who sits next to the newspaper seller. While he sits beside the seller, they never discuss the world's current stresses. They exchange few words during the duration of the narrative, having their only meaningful conversation in the final pages of Chapter XI, the penultimate chapter. In these pages, the seller panics, lamenting that nobody cares about him and revealing that he took the job as a newspaper seller to connect with people and avoid feeling alone in an uncaring world. The boy is somewhat similar, as he doesn't seek to connect with others. Throughout the book, the old man grows increasingly stressed, yet the

boy never speaks to him, being absorbed in the narrative of the *Tales of the Black Freighter*[56]. In the final pages of Chapter XI, the boy explains that he sits next to the seller while waiting for his family and because the fire hydrant he leans against is warm. The old man asks the boy his name and discovers they share the same name, Bernie. The boy doesn't find this connection particularly meaningful, but in the first six panels of page 23 of Chapter XI, we see the seller's initial fear for the world transform into a moment of happiness upon discovering a bond with the person who stayed beside him until the end.

A study published in 1986, the same year of the start of the publication of *Watchmen*, cared to investigate the mental toll that the nuclear threat had on the minds of Finish teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18. According to the study, 87% of the inquired experienced strong anxiety related to war (Rimpelä & Solantaus, 1986). Yet, boys showed less signs of anxiety when thinking about war than girls, in an estimate of 70% for boys and 41% for girls (Rimpelä & Solantaus, 1986). Despite this study being conducted outside the USA, we can draw some comparisons between how Finnish teenagers reacted to the topic of war and how American teenagers responded to it. Naturally, nuclear fear might have been more prevalent in the minds of U.S. teenagers, given the USA's role as a key player in the Cold War. However, Finland also experienced a significant influx of mental health issues, likely due to its geographical proximity to Russia, which could have posed fallout risks if a nuclear attack had ever occurred on Soviet territory. The study's data suggests that individuals who avoid the subject of nuclear war experience reduced anxiety compared to those who think or talk about it. Furthermore, those who attempt to discuss war in a more "positive" manner do not seem to experience a decrease in their fears and anxieties, indicating that discussions of war and anxiety are closely linked (Rimpelä & Solantaus, 1986).

The boy sitting next to the seller could be categorized as someone who avoids discussing nuclear war. Throughout the narrative, he is engrossed in reading his comic book, and when the opportunity arises to converse with the seller, he chooses not to engage in a conversation about the state of the world. A parallel could be made that the boy uses the comic book as escapism from the world that he is in, similar to people from the 1930s searched for forms of escapism like the cinema, books or even comic books to get away from the problems that plagued the USA and the World after the Great Depression.

[56] The comic book that the boy is reading

A study conducted by American academics and published the same year as the Finnish article somewhat corroborated the suggestion made by the Finnish academics, based now on data from the American people. The article examines three sample groups: nuclear war activists, survivalists, and the general public. The study suggests that activists displayed the most concern about nuclear war, followed by survivalists, who were more worried than the regular public (McGraw & Tyler, 1986). We can observe once again that those engaging in activities or thoughts related to nuclear war are more prone to negative thinking compared to those who largely ignore the subject. This lends further validity to the theory that the boy's decision to ignore the surrounding noise helps him maintain a more "positive" outlook.

Alongside these two characters, other ones perceive their fears and anxieties, or lack of, in different ways. While Laurie Juspeczyk[57] feels safe in the company of Dr. Manhattan[58], she begins to develop a deeper connection with Daniel Dreiberg. Dan confesses to Laurie that he had a nightmare about a nuclear explosion in which both he and Laurie die. He expresses his worry and confusion about the inevitable coming of war, and Laurie empathizes with his feelings. Another notable interaction is between Adrian Veidt and his secretary. During their conversation, they discuss the news of the father who murdered his two children. The secretary remarks that she doesn't understand why people are so scared about a war, as she believes it is unlikely to happen.

When it comes to Laurie and Daniel, both view the prospect of a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union as inevitable. To cope with their feelings of impotence and powerlessness, particularly Daniel's, Laurie persuades him to don their costumes and resume fighting crime after nearly ten years of forced retirement. After rescuing the inhabitants of a burning building, they both feel rejuvenated, experiencing a sense akin to "coming out of the closet" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). In a way, putting on their costumes to fight crime can be seen as their own form of escapism, similar to the boy's reading of comic books. Just as the boy immerses himself in his book to distract from the world around him, Daniel and Laurie suit up again to distract themselves from the harsh realities surrounding them, treating wars and masked killers as "just cases; just problems to be solved." (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 240). It is curious that while the boy is reading a comic book—a format predominantly associated with superhero stories—two characters, Daniel and Laurie, return to their alter-egos of heroism to ignore the world's problems.

[57] Silk Specter real identity
[58] Dr. Manhattan and Laurie are a couple until the middle of Chapter III

The opinion of the secretary is somewhat unlike the other characters opinions. In his study, Newcomb (1986) suggests that women are usually the gender more concerned and pessimistic about nuclear issues. While we are aware of the types of products that Veidt Enterprises produces, such as fashion and consumer goods, it is reasonable to assume that Adrian Veidt has a broad range of interests due to his company's multinational reach. In the *Watchmen* Universe, electric cars were an early invention, thanks to the partnership between Veidt and Dr. Manhattan in creating spark hydrants, which were sold by Veidt Enterprises. Thus, it is not improbable to assume that Veidt has an interest in nuclear energy. The secretary, being exposed to these thoughts, may exhibit a carefree attitude toward war. Those in the nuclear denial mentality, who have contact with nuclear power, whether in weaponry or energy, tend to "minimize the catastrophic results of such actions" (Newcomb, 1986).

In Chapter V, the murder case of the father occurs at a pivotal point in the narrative. After breaking up with Laurie and leaving Earth following a disastrous live interview where reporters bombard him with questions, Dr. Manhattan departs to an unknown location. As the safeguard for the United States, it was assumed he would always be there to protect the country and its citizens against the Soviet Union. His sudden departure, especially under such circumstances, likely left even the previously unworried feeling preoccupied. This situation highlights an overreliance and misplaced confidence in a single individual, demonstrating how one man's faith and hope were entirely dependent on Dr. Manhattan. Although the motives and lengths a person goes to achieve this state can vary, in this context, Dr. Manhattan's abandonment of Earth severely affects the mental state of this man. In Mack's (1989) work, he suggests that many aspects can lead to suicide. Even though he identifies five reasons, three seem applicable to the situation this individual finds himself in: blind obedience to a charismatic leader, surrender to an ideology and fear of takeover by an outside force or fear of suffering, leading to the perception that mass death is acceptable (Mack, 1989).

Regarding the blind obedience to a charismatic leader, we have Nixon, who is in his fourth term as President. While the form of government is never explicitly detailed in the narrative, the overall tone and behaviour of the city and its citizens suggest it is somewhat similar to the real USA. However, the USA in the *Watchmen* Universe appears to be more corrupt and institutionally degraded compared to its real-world counterpart. A democracy where a man can run for office five times indicates significant flaws. Although the details of Nixon's re-elections are not provided, the weak foundations on which the 22nd Amendment

was repealed allow the reader to infer that Nixon's multiple re-elections were likely achieved through democratically questionable means. With this in mind, Dr. Manhattan, while not being a government figure, is certainly used by the government to appease the American public. Therefore, he too could be interpreted as a "charismatic leader" in the eyes of the public. By listening to and placing his confidence in these two men, the father could be manipulated into believing that the decisions made by Nixon and Dr. Manhattan are the only acceptable ones given the circumstances (Mack, 1989).

The second suggestion, surrender to an ideology, is straightforward. Just like in the real world, labels were used to define the Cold War and its participants, representing ways of life or visions for the future of each country, contrary to those of their opponents. Both the United States and the Soviet Union justified their actions based on their ideological needs and necessities. Whether it was about "democracy," "freedom," "socialism," or "communism," each side used these concepts as vehicles to express their moral righteousness against the other (Mack, 1989). With these concepts and beliefs and the frivolous need to surpass the opponent, propaganda was essential to either boost or degrade each side. In the case of the USA, initiatives like the Marshall Plan from an economic perspective and the use of advertising throughout the national territory, Europe, and third-world countries (Sussman, 2021) were employed to persuade and confirm that the American side was superior and more reliable than the Soviet Union. Given that the narrative takes place in the 1980s, with the United States having a somewhat comfortable lead in the Cold War, the father would have lived in a world where American exceptionalism and might were the norm. However, "this polarization leads to a gradual yielding of the individual's conscience, old values, and decision-making process" (Dwyer, 1979).

The fear of takeover by an outside force, which can lead to the idea that suicide is the only acceptable path, is not uncommon. Historical events mirror this sentiment. For example, as the Red Army approached Berlin and other major German cities at the twilight of the Second World War, high-ranking Nazi officials committed suicide alongside their families to avoid Soviet retaliation. It is no surprise that forty years of participation in a conflict with another superpower would instil a deep sense of fear and anticipation in people.

Movies released in the 1980s, such as *Red Dawn* and *Invasion U.S.A.*, perpetuated fear and distrust with plots centred around a Soviet invasion of the United States, further stoking paranoia. The fear of the unknown is a universal human anxiety, and it is understandable that

the public would fear the Soviets while the Soviets would fear the Americans. The notion of military protection could only provide so much reassurance; the existence of nuclear weapons provoked a pervasive sense of dread on both sides.

It is unlikely that movies like *Red Dawn* and *Invasion U.S.A.* existed in the *Watchmen* Universe, given their specific context of production in the real world. However, in the *Watchmen* narrative, the disappearance of Dr. Manhattan from Earth leads to the Soviet Union making advancements into other territories. This prompts the United States to make inflammatory statements that could exacerbate an already tense relationship. Given this context, it is no surprise that the father would state, "there was gonna be war with the Russians." (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 151). Without Dr. Manhattan to safeguard American interests, this man believed that war was inevitable and that there was no point in continuing to live. As seen in some of the situations discussed earlier, stress, anxieties, and fear can cloud people's logic and judgment. To spare his children from the torment and pain of nuclear war, he murdered them to "spare" them from suffering.

On page 151 of *Watchmen*, where we see the case of the father and his children, two police detectives are designated to the case. As they leave the apartment where the murder occurred, one detective comments that the mental breakdown likely stemmed from inspiration by the media (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). The other detective disagrees with his colleague saying that "the media inspire boredom not waking up one Monday morning and butchering your kids" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 151).

The detective's comment about the role of the media in this specific case is poignant. Just like movies, "media coverage of the Cold War between America, its allies, and the Soviet Union served to escalate domestic fear of imminent destruction" (Stafford, 2013). Since the dawn of the Cold War, newspapers and especially television were used to dissuade the public from Communist ideals by instilling a sense of patriotism in the many Americans who consumed these media. News regarding cases of communist sympathy or its influences in media were prevalent. Although policymakers and politicians are the ones in charge of the country's direction and make the final decisions on national security and communist containment, the media also played a significant role in perpetuating the Cold War. Through sensationalized news and propaganda, the media instilled a sense of fear, doom, and paranoia in viewers (Allen A. , 2022).

That being said, the government also played a significant role in the dissemination of anti-communist propaganda, which wouldn't have spread so rapidly without its involvement. While Soviet information and media were state-controlled, American media was owned by corporations that needed sponsors to sustain operations. Early television networks, lacking sufficient finances, needed to produce cheap programs efficiently. Seeing an opportunity, the government provided financial support to these networks, thus gaining control over the information that reached the audience. This arrangement allowed networks to secure funding for their shows and programs, while the government could dictate the level of state interference in the content produced.

The beginning of the Vietnam War marked a shift in how television and the Cold War were perceived by the public. As the first conflict to be extensively televised, the high coverage of the war left many viewers shocked by the images they saw. Technological advancements in the 1960s, coupled with the rapid adoption of television by most American households, made TV the primary source of news for the public. The proliferation of the Vietnam War and earlier conflicts like the Korean War in the 1950s allowed networks to generate their own capital, granting them more independence from government interference. The emergence of private companies acquiring networks further reduced government influence. Reporting directly from Vietnam allowed the media to showcase the conditions faced by the military and the ongoing state of the conflict, despite resistance from censorship authorities. Despite this, and the overall Western support for the United States in Vietnam, the newfound autonomy granted to news outlets "meant policymakers were continually checking to make sure the media was telling the news and stories that went along with the government's narrative" (Allen A. , 2022).

Given the role of media in real life and likely in the *Watchmen* narrative, it is no surprise that it can significantly influence people's minds and perceptions. Although the media or other means of information dissemination cannot force public opinion, they can shape it by selectively presenting specific information. In essence, "the only means of influencing what people think is precisely to control what they think about" (Entman, 1989). The average citizen often lacks a deep understanding of many topics discussed in the news, making news reports a significant influence on public perception. Since the audience typically lacks the knowledge to form set opinions on various people, events, and topics, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. With the rise of cable television in the 1970s and

1980s, consumers were given more viewing options. This increased competition among networks and news channels, prompting them to pursue stories with high drama and scandal, often using sensationalist methods to attract viewers. These developments, combined with the loosening of media control policies under President Reagan, made it increasingly challenging to ensure network accountability (Allen A. , 2022).

When considering the media's role in influencing suicide, particularly in the context of nuclear war and related news, it's possible but not common. One of the detectives investigating the case remarks, "there's gonna be more like this" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 151), implying that more suicides may occur as a result of news about Soviet advancements and the unprecedented escalation of war. The media's impact on suicidal behaviour is often linked to the detailed description of suicide methods and the dramatic or prominent portrayal of such news coverage. (Hawton & Williams, 2002). This, combined with the media's influence on public discourse about nuclear power and related issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), could potentially lead to numerous cases of suicide and self-harm. However, this is not typically the case. Although one might assume, given the context of *Watchmen's* related suicide case, that personal violence linked to nuclear war significantly impacted statistics, this was not the reality at the time the comic book was published. Instead of nuclear war, factors like unemployment and the military participation rate were more predictive of a rise in the suicide rate (Lester, 1992).

Although the narrative of *Watchmen* takes place in a fictional context of 1980s Cold War United States, we must recognize that in real life, issues like the economy and the environment were prioritized over concerns about nuclear war. When questioned about why they did not view nuclear war as a significant issue, many people claimed it was unlikely to happen (Smith, 1988). This, combined with nuclear war and related issues not being prevalent in people's daily lives, caused these topics to be discussed less frequently compared to other problems, despite most people believing them to be of great importance (Schuman, Ludwig, & Krosnick, 1986). We can trace this lack of worry in the 1980s to the numerous attempts by both the United States and the Soviet Union to negotiate and reduce tensions (Smith, 1988). While the first half of the decade was marked by President Reagan's strong stance on Soviet containment, the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary initiated a period of de-escalation. Key events like the Geneva Summit and the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty were pivotal in easing tensions. Despite these efforts, the public still harboured

fears about the Soviet Union, particularly due to concerns that reducing American weaponry could weaken national defence. This led many to question whether having fewer or more nuclear weapons would ultimately trigger a war (Smith, 1988). Overall, the general agreement was that the improvement in relations between the two major forces of the Cold War had a more significant impact on the de-escalation of tensions than the signing of nuclear treaties (Smith, 1988). Even so, the two leaders were congratulated for their efforts.

4.2.2 The Punk and Women's Movement as Criticism to Nuclear War

Throughout the book, we see a gang of men that regularly interact with characters of the story. This gang, known as "Knot Tops", could be this universe's version of skinheads or members of the punk movement. While reading and watching the many panels of *Watchmen*, we are presented twice with the letter "A" graffiti on walls of buildings or in alleyways. Given the context of the book and the way the "Knot Tops" are represented, it is possible to deduce that the "A" represents the anarchist movement. While the reader does not see who painted the graffiti on the walls, page 155 of Chapter V gives a clue. In the penultimate panel we see in the distance a group of "Knot Tops" spraying the wall of a building. We find out in Chapter VI that what was painted was a silhouette of a man and a woman looking closely at each other. The character who comments on the painting says it reminds him of the silhouettes left on the walls of structures in Hiroshima after people were disintegrated. (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). With this clue, it becomes easier to see who the authors of the painted "A" were. While the "Knot Tops" are a metaphor for punks, this movement is not disassociated with the anarchist movement.

With the economic struggles of the 1970s, unemployment rates and inflation rose, leaving many with difficulties, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. The new generation born around or growing up in this decade therefore became disenfranchised with the world around them. While leaving many youngsters with a feeling of hopelessness, the world did not seem to head in any meaningful direction, with urban decay, poverty, and a decline in major jobs, especially in industries in cities like New York and London. Music, especially rock music, once perceived as something good, eventually became seen by the youth as another victim of mainstream record companies, with artists who started by writing songs about freedom and social hypocrisy eventually being manufactured and sold by big corporations. The dissatisfaction with where music was going, coupled with social struggles and feelings of rage and alienation, left many teenagers searching for ways to express their

feelings. Some resorted to crime, while others picked up instruments. “To ignore the obvious connections between the Punk phenomenon and economic and social inequalities in Great Britain would be to deny the validity of the philosophical underpinnings of the movement. Punk in Britain was essentially a movement consisting of underprivileged working-class white youths. Many of them felt their social situation deeply and used the medium of Punk to express their dissatisfaction” (O'Hara, 1999).

Adopters of the punk movement often rejected authority and ideals like capitalism, leading them to dislike most popular culture. The punk movement prioritized individualism and the need to be different. By having this individualistic mentality, punk typically does not lend itself to any political ideology, making most punks apolitical. However, since the movement has so many subgenres or divisions, some can have various philosophies that span different political spectrums. One of these subdivisions was the so-called anarcho-punk. Anarchism became a popular political stance for punks during the 1970s, especially with the release of the song “Anarchy in the U.K” by the Sex Pistols in 1976 (Hannon, 2010), despite the band not catering primarily to anarchist ideals. Bands like *Crass* adopted the anarcho-punk aesthetic and mentality more prominently, which consisted, like regular punk, of disrespect for authority with a pacifist and anti-imperialism approach, while also emphasizing issues like the environment, feminism, and other social causes.

In relation to activism within the anarcho-punk movement, the “Stop the City” events of 1983 and 1984, held in the City of London, are often regarded as the most significant. Unlike typical protests, it did not form a march or rally to meet city officials to discuss needs or wants. Instead, participants were encouraged throughout the day to disrupt places and businesses in the economic and political heart of Britain to protest against the financial and military complex that they believed was responsible for poverty and war, especially of a nuclear nature. (Cross, 2016). While the protests were occurring, *Crass* was the leading band in delivering songs concerned about nuclear war and disdain for it, attracting more young supporters to their cause. In fact, in 1984, three singles were in a shared first place on Britain’s charts, evidencing how popular songs about anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiments were at the time. (McKay, 2019). The anarcho-punk division began to conflict with the actual anarchist movement due to their lack of actual violent practices to effect meaningful change. However, both groups agreed to be politically parallel to each other. By taking a big stance when it came to being against authoritarianism, nuclear weapons and a big distrust for

governments (Annex K) by the use of their music, art and protesting, other movements to surface to fight for the same goals.

One other movement was the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. Curiously, both anarcho-punk movements and the Peace Camp are referenced in *Watchmen*. On page 224 of Chapter VII, when Laurie and Daniel are watching the news, we see in the last panel a group of protesters being arrested in a struggle with the police. The rise of peace movements in Western Europe came as the governments and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) agreed to the placement of U.S. missiles on European bases. Of course, decisions like these were made by the ruling governments without involving the opinion of the citizens, making this a point of contention all over Europe, especially in Britain. To protest against these measures and agreements, demonstrations began to appear outside military bases in Europe. Utilizing a nonviolent approach, protesters aimed to make themselves heard around the world about their discontent concerning disarmament and the danger that the placement of missiles in foreign bases would pose (Binard, 2022).

The first camp being occupied in Britain, and the one relevant to the subject at hand, was the Greenham Common Camp in 1981. Many of the women that arrived at Greenham Common, whether for a simple visit or because they genuinely believed in the courage and importance of the work being done at the base, shared a fear and anxiety about nuclear warfare (Cook & Kirk, 1984). Although the movement garnered the support of both men and women, all fighting against nuclear weapons with the backing of the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), it eventually became more women-centric. As the protests started, media attention grew, working both in favour of and against the protesters. Right-wing centric papers and magazines tried to downplay the importance of both the movement and the women participating in it by using derogatory and offensive names to discredit the people protesting peacefully (Binard, 2022). The media both helped and hindered the cause of Greenham. Their intervention brought attention to the movement and its objectives, but, paradoxically, they were also the ones most critical of the women's actions and the protest's motives. Despite the media attention, the movement grew to the point that the police had to get involved to contain the tempers of the protesters. The women thought that, while the police were not part of the industrial-military complex they were fighting against, they soon became a problem of a similar nature. By confronting the Defence Police, who in turn responded to the British

Minister of Defence, the women felt they were fighting against the military (Seller, 1985). The results in Greenham were felt relatively soon.

With the INF Treaty between the USA and the USSR in 1987, it was agreed that the missiles would be removed from the camp, with the last one being removed in 1991. This demonstrates that the protests and the fight of the women at Greenham had some effect on the minds of the leaders involved in the Cold War. We see that in real life both the anarcho-punk movement and the efforts of the women at the military base had an effect on disarmament policies. "In their view, nuclear weapons stood as the limit case of capital, religion, nation, and the (nuclear) family's foundational violence, but not exceptionally so: they were the product of the pervasive and inescapable logic of such macro- and micro-relations" (McKay, 2019, p. 228).

In *Watchmen*, the anarcho-punk movement is represented in a much subtler manner. While we know that the movement was characterized by its use of non-violent methods, we see the members of the "Knot Tops" participating in acts of violence against main characters or secondary characters, like Hollis Mason, who is fatally beaten by the group at the end of Chapter VIII. One of the members of the group even comments about the violence practiced against Mason, stating: "Derf? Derf, what did you do?" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 274), denoting a sense of regret at their actions, even if only slightly. It is easy to assume that while the Knot Tops propagate anarcho-punk ideas, they are really a perversion and misinterpretation of the movement, utilizing only the aesthetics of punk, like the use of black, especially leather jackets, and a DIY (Do it Yourself) type of attitude (Sartwell, 2010). Of course, punk has a variety of subgenres that can appeal to a wide range of political perspectives, including the far-right. The use of black by punks gives the impression that the movement has the inclination to adopt the aesthetics of the U.S's defeated foes. Since the US won the Vietnam War in the *Watchmen* narrative, we see that the Knot Tops adopted Eastern aesthetics. Some of their jackets feature Chinese characters or characters from other Asian languages. Their name, "Knot Tops," is also related to Asian culture. Japanese samurais are characterized by having their hair in a bun, making this another adoption by the group. Therefore, the alteration of history modifies how culture and visuals of the real world are reflected in *Watchmen* and its world-building. While the group could very well follow some anarcho-punk mentality, they mutilate the message, utilizing it only for their own personal needs.

Regarding the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, *Watchmen* utilizes its reference quite briefly. Whereas the "Knot Tops" are a recurring presence, even if small, in the book, the camp is only mentioned to demonstrate that the event is indeed happening within the narrative. The movement likely had the same initial effect in the *Watchmen* Universe as it did in real life, but without the same consequences. Since the U.S. and Soviet Union were not seeking to appease tensions, the missiles in Britain and Europe were probably not removed, allowing the U.S. to prepare for a potential war with the Russians. In the single panel where the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp is referenced, we see the police using violence against the protestors. This indicates that tensions at the camp rose significantly as the superpower rivalry intensified, making an already stressful environment even more desperate.

4.3 Character Discussion

4.3.1 Dr. Manhattan, "The Atomic Man"

A central character in the narrative of *Watchmen* is Dr. Manhattan. Following a transformative incident, Jon Osterman restructures his body and reemerges as an anthropomorphic blue being endowed with limitless power, all due to atomic phenomena. Chapter IV of *Watchmen* is dedicated entirely to Dr. Manhattan. Through his unique perspective of simultaneously perceiving past, present, and future, the reader gains insight into his mind and learns how his role as a mild-mannered physicist became a decisive factor in altering the course of the Cold War. Just like in the real world, the *Watchmen* universe experienced the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, prompting a global quest for a deeper understanding of nuclear power. One of the characters present at the time was a 16-year-old Jonathan Osterman. While not directly involved in the scientific or military efforts, he learned about the utilization of atomic power from his father, a watchmaker. While receiving the news of the bombings, the young Jonathan was practicing the reconstruction of his father's pocket watch, preparing to inherit his father's trade. His father enters the room and declares that their work has become obsolete, urging his son to pursue the study of atomic science instead. The father concludes by saying: "Professor Einstein says that time differs from place to place (…) If time is not true, what purpose have watchmakers (…)" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 133). Jon pursues a career in physics.

Upon arriving at the Gila Flats Military Base in 1959, Jon meets Professor Milton Glass and his future colleague Wally Weaver. The work conducted at Gila Flats revolves around an

intrinsic field experiment, aimed at determining if any forces other than gravity hold matter together. One day, Jon casually returns to the chamber where the test is conducted to retrieve the watch he repaired for his girlfriend. Unaware that the chamber is being prepared for another test in the afternoon, the door closes behind him. Moments later, he is atomically disassembled, leaving nothing behind to bury. In the subsequent months, a figure resembling a body slowly assembles itself, layer by layer. The watch serves as a constant, looming presence throughout the chapter, particularly in its inception. It becomes evident that Osterman reconstructs himself into what would become known as Doctor Manhattan by recalling his father's teachings on rebuilding a watch: "It's simply a matter of reassembling the components in the correct sequence." (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 119).

Following the bombings in Japan, there emerged a heightened interest in radiation and atomic science. The advancements in physics, particularly, played a pivotal role in concluding the Second World War. Breakthroughs in areas such as microwave radars, rockets, and ultimately the development of the atomic bomb, underscored the profound impact of scientific progress on the course of the war. It became evident that a fusion of physics and military endeavours was imperative to attain technological superiority and ensure the security of the United States (Kevles, 1990). To achieve this objective, various programs received support from the federal government, such as the Research and Development department under the auspices of the AEC. Additionally, the Department of Defence received government funding through the National Security Act of 1947, along with the establishment of the National Science Foundation in 1950, aimed at conducting research and facilitating training initiatives (Kevles, 1990). In addition to the pursuit of nuclear-powered weaponry, the state also championed advancements in high-energy particle physics. "The precondition for success in the arms race was seen to be the propagation forward in time, the reproduction and multiplication, of the scientific form of life that had proved so useful in war – technique-oriented physical research, centrally organized around particular material apparatuses and phenomena of potential military significance" (Pickering, 1989, p. 177). These endeavours were conducted under the vigilant oversight of the AEC, which operated with a dual mandate: to enhance national security and to possess a scientific comprehension of the domains in which science was employed for the development of weaponry.

It became evident to certain members of the scientific community that science was being exploited for military gain, with potentially grave consequences. Lee DuBridge, director of

the Radiation Laboratory at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) during the Second World War and later head of the California Institute of Technology, expressed concern, stating: “When science is allowed to exist merely from the crumbs that fall from the table of a weapon development program then science is headed into the stifling atmosphere of «mobilized secrecy» and it is surely doomed even though the crumbs themselves should provide more than adequate nourishment” (Forman, 1987, p. 185). In their conviction that their pursuits were in service of knowledge and possibly humanity, scientists were unwittingly manipulated by the government and military to furnish them with the means to wage wars and resolve conflicts through any means deemed necessary.

In *Watchmen*, we observe that shortly after obtaining a PhD in physics, Jon Osterman secures employment at a military base, a scenario not unlike real-life occurrences. As discussed earlier, this mirrors the manipulation of scientists’ minds by the military to achieve dominance in the pursuit of weaponry hegemony. Given that Osterman’s accident occurs in 1959, marking the birth of what would become Doctor Manhattan, it is reasonable to infer that the events leading up to his presumed demise closely resemble those in our reality. The first test of the Hydrogen Bomb in 1952, coupled with the Soviet Union’s rapid military expansion, compelled the United States to concentrate its expertise and resources towards bolstering its power. Given this context, it’s unsurprising that a young man like Osterman would be appointed to a position in a physics laboratory under the auspices of the US military. However, the experiment being conducted at Gila Flats is inherently nonsensical, as the notion of an intrinsic field centre is a fictional construct. Despite this fantastical element, both in *Watchmen* and to some extent in reality, it underscores the perpetual pursuit of novel strategies to gain an advantage in the Cold War, which remained a paramount concern for the military and government. It is intriguing how Chapter IV is structured to reveal that the chain of events leading to Osterman’s accident stems from his decision to pursue a career in physics. Had it not been for the atomic bombs dropped during World War II, the United States would not have had their protector. In their quest for a weapon, they unwittingly gained a deity.

When Osterman is revealed to the world as this new being, the announcement is made through magazines and TV news. A marketing boy taking pictures of him provides a costume with a headgear featuring a common representation of the atom, which he considers fitting. Osterman, however, deems the symbol meaningless and suggests that the symbol of the

hydrogen atom would be more appropriate. After drawing the symbol on his forehead, the boy proposes the alias "Doctor Manhattan", noting that "the name has been chosen for the ominous associations it will evoke in America's enemies" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 122). With a name linked to the Manhattan Project, it is evident that Osterman became a physical embodiment of the atom bomb. In the subsequent pages, following the conversation with the marketing boy, news panels show an anchor-man declaring, "The superman exists, and he is American" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 123). This is followed by images of Doctor Manhattan demonstrating his military capabilities, such as disassembling weapons and destroying tanks with a single motion of his arm. Naturally, the US government is keen to leverage Osterman to reinforce its global hegemony, particularly since the accident occurred on military grounds.

In Chapter IV, we see glimpses of Doctor Manhattan's intervention in the Vietnam War at the request of President Nixon in 1971. His involvement leads to the war ending within two months, with Vietcong fighters seeking to surrender to Osterman personally. Doctor Manhattan observes, "Their[59] terror of me balanced by an almost religious awe" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 130). Jon Osterman's intervention in the Vietnam War is almost a representation of what would occur if the United States would use atomics during the actual war, as we see Doctor Manhattan being included and discussed in the same terms as a regular nuclear arsenal. In the present, Doctor Manhattan goes to an interview and before going on camera, a government official gives him talking points and tells him what he must refuse or avoid speaking about, like the situation in Afghanistan. Another talking point is the Geneva talks, likely referencing a treaty similar to the INF Treaty. The army intelligence officer informs Osterman, "they[60] can't resume until the soviets agree to exclude you from the agenda" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 88).

As discussed in previous chapters, although Doctor Manhattan is portrayed as a deity and presumed to be all-powerful, it would be easy to assume that his presence is ominous. However, this could not be further from the truth, at least for the American public. Given his attributes and role in the Cold War, Osterman represents a vestige of hope, embodying a functional utopian ideology (Hirsch). With the clock being such an integral piece for the character and the chapter's structure, we can perceive the clock as a metaphor for the universe. The universe, like a clock, has its cogs that work in unison, with all its components

[59] The Vietcong
[60] The Geneva talks

collaborating to create a cohesive whole. This idea of working together contrasts sharply with the overarching political context of the graphic novel, which depicts a divided world. By abandoning the planet, Doctor Manhattan expresses his exhaustion with this world, its people, and being entangled in the complexities of their lives (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). By being compared a God, Doctor Manhattan feels that politics have become meaningless and decides to create a new world on Mars. Although he does not consider himself a god, his design, especially the face, resembles aspects of might and divinity. This resemblance is purposeful, as seen with the statue of the angel on the cover of Chapter II and figures like Ramesses II, aligning with the character "Ozymandias", the Greek name for Ramesses II. At the end of the chapter where Doctor Manhattan leaves Earth, he is depicted sitting on a rock on Mars, accompanied by a biblical passage: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 104). This positions Manhattan as a God-like figure, the Judge. Unlike the politicians on Earth, he is "totally indifferent" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). Though he neither condones nor condemns human actions, he understands them. Similarly, those in power remain indifferent, focused solely on consolidating and maintaining their power and influence.

In Chapter III, after Manhattan leaves the planet, Nixon and his counsellors discuss the possibility of a future Soviet attack. A map of the East Coast of the United States is displayed, covered with radioactive fallout symbols, indicating that the area would be completely annihilated in such an event. Presented with this information, Nixon is informed by one of his men that Mexico would suffer the worst fallout. Nixon responds by stating that the wind is impartial (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). With thoughts of defeat and doubt, Nixon concludes by saying: "Humanity is in the hands of a higher authority than me; let's just hope he's on our side" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 104). Politicians, like the character Rorschach, view the world in a starkly black-and-white manner. They perceive themselves as beacons of morality, hoping that Doctor Manhattan will align with their interests. In contrast, Doctor Manhattan, who is depicted as a god-like figure, remains indifferent to human conflicts, preferring to seek inner fulfilment. This indifference reflects his underlying identity as Jon Osterman, revealing his detachment from worldly squabbles. (Van Ness, 2010).

As discussed above, the integration of Doctor Manhattan into the U.S. military strategy granted the country considerable freedom on the international stage, enabling it to dictate actions to other nations. Through the narrative use of Osterman, the authors comment on how

American foreign policy might evolve if endowed with a being as powerful as Manhattan, and how the United States' legitimacy might be perceived when confronted with armed conflicts (Sheedy). Throughout the graphic novel, we see flashbacks where characters are reading newspapers and it is visible in a number of them titles like: "French withdraw military commitment from NATO" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 51); presenting the idea that military alliances between countries in this world are useless. Strength in numbers is a concept that becomes obsolete given the existence of "god" on the side of the Americans. Another newspaper title states that "Dr. Manhattan «an imperialist weapon» say Russians" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 52), which it is not far from the truth, given the ways the US government exploits Osterman for their own benefit. American overconfidence eventually backfires, as evidenced by the Soviet Union's preparations to advance on Afghanistan and mobilize its army in Eastern Europe. With Doctor Manhattan no longer on Earth, the U.S. no longer presents the same threat it once did. Despite having Doctor Manhattan on their side, the United States remains vulnerable and still faces significant danger from the tensions of the Cold War.

The question of U.S. foreign policy with Doctor Manhattan's involvement is poignant. With Manhattan serving as an allegory for the atomic bomb, it raises the issue of whether it is appropriate for the U.S. government to use such powers to enforce its will upon the world. Although Doctor Manhattan is deity-like, and despite not considering himself a god, he is still bound by and must uphold moral laws. "If Dr. Manhattan himself isn't above the moral law in virtue of his power and intellect, it seems only reasonable to conclude that the United States isn't above the moral law in virtue of the power it inherits from his service" (Robichaud, 2009, p. 14). But should Osterman's personal morality be equated to the morality of the United States? Robichaud (2009) says that personal morality can't be measured in comparison to political morality, as nations and people abide to different moral standards. While Doctor Manhattan is expected to adhere to the same moral standards as everyone else, despite his unique status, the United States does not hold itself to the same standards. The situation becomes more complex when considering Manhattan's role in military applications and his work as a government agent.

It is widely acknowledged that the United States acts as it does because it is not constrained by the conventional rules that apply to other states (Luban, 2004). The United States is often "permitted" to interfere in other states affairs in the name of freedom.

Promoting the rise of democratic states with potential for future economic output are justifications the US can use to bolster its hegemony (Luban, 2004). Additionally, the US's role in other nation's affairs is driven by the simple fact that it can afford such adventurism in foreign territories (Robichaud, 2009). While acting as the world police, the United States often places itself in situations where the dangers of intervention are substantial. However, the potential benefits of such interventions can outweigh the risks that the US takes. Luban (2004) argues that the impact of US intervention in economic or political contexts is a contentious issue, especially when activities beneficial to the US also contribute positively to foreign states.

Given Doctor Manhattan's involvement in national and foreign policy matters, this might be a suggestion that the U.S. would perceive itself as having limitless influence on the international stage, as seen in the Vietnam War. In Manhattan's flashback during the Comedian's funeral, we witness the outcome of American adventurism in other nations: Vietnam is assimilated into American sovereignty, becoming the 51st state. During the celebrations, we see the Comedian commenting on VVN (Victory in Vietnam) Day, likely a reference to Vietnam's real-world holiday of reunification, akin to VED (Victory in Europe Day), which commemorates the defeat and surrender of the German Army during World War Two. With Doctor Manhattan, the U.S. consistently moves closer to achieving its goals and advancing its interests, while potentially improving the living conditions of other states compared to their previous circumstances. However, it is paradoxical to argue that the United States can maintain moral justification for perpetuating war, especially with the "atomic man" on their side. "That's because we think that nations have a certain right to sovereignty – a right to self – determination – that they don't forfeit unless they start committing heinous acts within themselves or start waging war with other nations" (Robichaud, 2009, p. 16). With Doctor Manhattan in the equation, the U.S. is not truly in a high risk/high reward position. His abilities allow him to eliminate obstacles in the path of American interests, thereby removing much of the risk traditionally associated with military endeavours. However, in the absence of risk, the United States lacks a moral foundation on which to justify its actions.

In the graphic novel characters also discuss the role that Doctor Manhattan has during the Cold War. An in universe essay, *Dr. Manhattan: Super-Powers and the Superpowers* (Annex L) written by Professor Milton Glass, the man who welcomed Osterman into Gila Flats, discusses Manhattan and his role during the Cold War. In the essay, Professor Glass reflects

on the profound impact Doctor Manhattan is likely to have or has had on the dynamics of the Cold War. The reader discovers that the quote[61] attributed to the anchor-man announcing Osterman's new abilities actually belongs to Professor Glass, albeit misquoted. Glass's original statement was: "God exists, and he's American" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 142). Glass continues by arguing that the notion of the United States being out of danger is absurd. Despite Manhattan's capabilities as a nuclear deterrent, the professor maintains that peace remains precarious. He cites the example of World War Two, where Soviet forces endured relentless attacks from Nazi Germany. The Soviet people and territory endured immense hardships that surpassed those faced by any other Allied nation. Glass remarks that the idea of the Soviet Union simply capitulating or "showing their belly" to the United States is ludicrous, noting that they faced comparable challenges during the war and still found the will to persevere (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). The existence of Manhattan compelled the Soviet Union to withdraw from situations that could escalate conflict. However, assuming this will always be their course of action is disingenuous and disregards the historical mind-set and background of the Russians.

With the Soviets feeling cornered, the option of MAD becomes viable. Despite Doctor Manhattan minimizing risks for the U.S., he cannot prevent a potential full-scale nuclear attack by the Soviets, as predicted by Nixon's cabinet, resulting in loss of life across numerous cities on the East Coast. The belief that an "atomic man" would guarantee world peace echoes the optimism surrounding the creation of the atom bomb, which was thought to ensure unprecedented prosperity for the world. Similar to both the real world and *Watchmen* Universe, the quest for advanced methods of warfare resulted in the proliferation and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. With Doctor Manhattan, the United States and its leaders became emboldened by Osterman's abilities, believing that they had divine favour on their side. Beyond military and strategic advantages, they also benefited from his capacity to manipulate atoms, pushing technological advancements beyond what was achievable in the 1980s, reminiscent of how atomic power and energy shaped the latter half of the 20th century. And just like the atom bomb, Professor Glass concludes his essay by stating: "We are all of us living in the shadow of Manhattan" (Gibbons & Moore, Watchmen, 2014).

[61] "The Superman exists, and he's American"

4.3.2 Ozymandias and The United States

The climax of the graphic novel revolves around the discovery of the individual who orchestrated the murder of The Comedian and convinced Doctor Manhattan to leave Earth. In their quest for answers, Rorschach and Nite-Owl uncover that Ozymandias is responsible for initiating the events of the narrative. Upon arriving at Veidt's Antarctic base, Rorschach and Nite-Owl confront Ozymandias. A confrontation ensues, culminating in Veidt swiftly prevailing. During moments of pause during the altercation, Ozymandias begins to explain his reasoning. During the meeting where The Comedian calls Veidt "the smartest man in the world" and leaves after burning a map of the United States, Veidt recalls another character named Captain Metropolis[62] saying "someone's got to save the world" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 367).

Ozymandias explains that the world is teetering on the brink of nuclear annihilation, and he believes he alone has the capability and responsibility to save it. Despite claiming not to be a comic book villain, when confronted by Nite-Owl and Rorschach about stopping him, he reveals that his plan was already set in motion before their arrival. As a great admirer of Alexander the Great, he deemed achieving world peace through conventional means impossible and instead orchestrated what he calls "history's greatest practical joke" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 372). Through the help of a number of artists and the creator of the *Tales of the Black Freighter* (which main character is a metaphor for Veidt's actions), Ozymandias creates a psychic squid like monster that is teleported to New York using technology he and Doctor Manhattan developed together. When it arrives, it causes the death of millions of people.

While characters like Rorschach or The Comedian commit reprehensible acts throughout the narrative, Veidt is portrayed as a charismatic and seemingly good man. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons emphasize that individuals who masquerade as heroes often have significant psychological issues. The use of historical figures admired by Ozymandias is poignant. With a messiah and saviour complex, Adrian Veidt sees himself as a modern-day Alexander the Great. Like the Macedonian king, he believes he can enact substantial change, likening the complexities of the Cold War to the Gordian knot (Spanakos, 2009). Just like the Alexander the Great, Veidt believes that the utilization of brute force is the method that will solve the

[62] He arranged the meeting

world's problems, uniting the various countries into concentrating their efforts on a common threat.

In his quest to save the world, Adrian Veidt serves as an allegory for the role the United States played on the international stage during the Cold War. Believing that peace could only be achieved through drastic measures, Ozymandias's words echo those of US General Colin Powell after the Cold War: "America must embrace the responsibility of its power. As the last best hope of Earth, we have no other option but to lead" (Hirsch). Similarly, as the discussion on minimal American risk and great reward with Doctor Manhattan in the foreground continues, the United States in the real-life 1980s also ventured into endeavours that carried potential risks. Even without a walking nuclear bomb on their side, the US aimed to "save the world" by supporting and revitalizing democracies worldwide. While some could perceive this over-commitment as stepping some boundaries, the United States expected to be reward for their efforts (Dobson, 2002). By imitating the intentions of the US government, Ozymandias removed himself from humanity and was absorbed by the collective, becoming something akin to the military industrial complex (Prince, 2011).

One thing Ozymandias failed to grasp is that change must originate from within. His hubris, akin to that of the United States, led him to justify actions and decisions that, despite being perceived as necessary, were ultimately horrific. Consequently, the belief that achieving global peace through mass casualties and the pursuit of a common enemy is misguided, paralleling the flawed approach of US interventions in foreign countries during the Cold War, where solutions were expected to arise from external intervention. And similar to his heroes, Alexander the Great and Rameses II, his realm of peace can only be temporary if the truth is made known given that "the State apparatus (…) may survive political events which affect the possession of State power" (Hughes, 2006). The sentiment that the world's problems are going to fade away with the unity of the planet that Ozymandias possesses is also similar to the words spoken by President Ronald Reagan during the Geneva Summit in 1985: "I couldn't help at one point in our discussions privately with General Secretary Gorbachev, when you stop to think we're all God's children wherever we may live in the world, I couldn't help but say to him: Just think how easy your task and mine might be in these meetings that we held, if suddenly there was a threat to this world from some other species from another planet, outside in the universe. We'd forget all the little local differences that we have

between our countries, and we would find out once and for all that we really are all human beings here on this Earth together" (Miller C. F., 2010, p. 67).

Veidt's philosophy, utilitarianism, argues that the ends justify the means. Typically, heroes adhere strictly to a moral code, distinguishing between right and wrong, good and evil. *Watchmen*, a graphic novel that deconstructs not only the superhero genre but also comic books in general, explores how real-life politics would impact masked vigilantes if they existed. Ozymandias recognizes the complexities of the world he inhabits, viewing it in shades of grey rather than the black-and-white perspective of someone like Rorschach. After years of observation, he chooses what he perceives as the least harmful course of action, akin to selecting the lightest shade of grey. Similarly, the United States conducted its foreign policy in a somewhat utilitarian manner during the Cold War, seeking advantages over the Soviet Union.

While Adrian Veidt is considered the antagonist of the narrative, he isn't the villain, in the traditional sense of the word. Aside his megalomania, which is a common characteristic of comic book villains, he justifies his actions by stating that he will bring a new dawn so bright that people will reject evil in their hearts (Gibbons & Moore, 2014). One could assume that what he says is truthful; however, upon realizing that his goal of uniting the world was successful, he points his arms upwards and lets out a joyful "I did it" (Gibbons & Moore, 2014, p. 401). Afterwards, he begins to plan how this new world will be governed with him creating a utopian society. By implementing a philosophy that some have to die or sacrifice their comfort for the betterment of others, Veidt forgets that those that had to lose their lives also are deserving of being treated with fairness. That being said, the millions who perished with the creature attack, in order, for the Cold War to end also were deserving of respect and dignity. Similar to Ozymandias, the United States based its Cold War-era politics on seeking methods to achieve its goals, methods that some might consider immoral. Like Ozymandias's plan, American interventions in strategically important regions were seen as advantageous, albeit temporarily. Justifications of taking the "right" actions or fighting for freedom in foreign lands often boiled down to personal or national interests, employing violent methods and fearmongering tactics.

By emulating the methods used by the United States, Ozymandias becomes akin to what the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche proposed as an Übermensch — a person who rises above the common man. In the context of Watchmen, the character that epitomizes this

transcendence above humanity is immediately thought to be Doctor Manhattan. He literally rebuilds himself into something beyond humanity. As the most powerful figure, he is also the most subservient within the narrative. When the government instructs him to become a crime fighter and intervene in Vietnam, he complies. His transformation is accidental rather than a choice. While Doctor Manhattan is superhuman, he does not fit Nietzsche's concept of an Übermensch because his actions are dictated by others, and his elevation beyond humanity was not of his own volition. It is true that in the end he finally makes his own choices to try and stop Veidt's plan, however he decides the plan to go through when he hears Ozymandias reasoning and that the plan worked. After killing Rorschach for he would reveal Adrian's plan to the world, Osterman decides to leave the planet to create new life, but this factor does not consist of Nietzsche principles as the Übermensch is someone "who creates a way of life and affirms it despite all mortal limitations" (Keeping, 2009, p. 57).

Of all the characters present in *Watchmen*, Ozymandias is the one that best represents what Nietzsche meant with Übermensch. In the pages between chapters, we are given context on the origins of Adrian Veidt. He can read in these pages that he inherited a great some of money from the passing of his parents. With the possibility to whatever he wanted with the money, he decides to give it away and start from nothing. After this, Adrian decides to travel around the world in search of knowledge and ways to improve his skills, both mentally and physically to reach peak human capabilities. "Of all of the characters, he gives the strongest impression of having ordered his body and mind into an «artistic plan»" (Keeping, 2009, p. 57). In trying to create a new world as the likes of Alexander the Great, Ozymandias wishes to grant this new creation of his a new purpose, and while he the concept of the Übermensch deconstructs the conventional ideas of morality, it also can lead to the adoption of new ways of thinking, in the case of Adrian Veidt, utilitarianism.

By matching Ozymandias's words and the actions of the United States, we can ultimately realize that his justifications are similar to the ones employed by the Americans in order to launch wars on countless territories (Hirsch). By having a hand in world politics and affairs, the ideals of the United States are given patterns that "assumes a reality in the global arena [and] plunges poor (so called) underdeveloped countries in a cycle that ensure that they go from one humanitarian crisis to another, from one dictator to the other, and from one military coup to the next" (Asadi, 2011, p. 66). With this line of reasoning regarding international meddling by the United States, it becomes clear that their approach, much like Ozymandias's,

could cause more harm than good. This line of reasoning could very much be a reading that author of *Watchmen*, Alan Moore, does.

4.3.3 Batman and Superman as facets of the Cold War in *The Dark Knight Returns*

Released around the same time as *Watchmen*, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* explores many of the same concepts and ideas, prompting comparisons between the two works by their respective creators. Like *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns* is set outside the regular continuity of its universe. In Miller's narrative, we encounter a retired Bruce Wayne who has been inactive as Batman for ten years. The graphic novel is set in the 1980s, a period marked by the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. While the main plotline focuses on Bruce Wayne's return to his Batman persona to reclaim control of Gotham City from a gang called The Mutants, *The Dark Knight Returns* also depicts Batman confronting forces that were once allies, including the police and, on a larger scale, the US government.

In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman is depicted as a vigilante, a characterization that aligns with his portrayal in modern media, particularly with the shift towards more realistic aspects introduced during the 1970s and 80s. Within the narrative, the government is unable to control Gotham City, and the police are equally ineffective in maintaining order. The responsibility then falls back on Batman to protect the city and its citizens after years of reluctance and fear of repercussions. After days of intervention in the criminal world, some citizens begin to praise Batman's crime-fighting efforts, while others fear that he is just another maniac on the streets, like The Mutant gang, infringing on people's freedoms (Miller F. , 2016). Although the character of Batman is aware that his actions are criticized by both the state and the citizens of Gotham City, he continues to practice vigilantism because he understands that his show of force and authority is effective. To contain these regressions, the American government sends Superman to talk to and deter Batman from further acts of vigilantism and disobedience.

Just like in *Watchmen*, where characters such as The Comedian use their roles as government agents to deploy acts of violence without immediate repercussions, in *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman also employs violence to enact what he perceives as justice. One of the messages that *Watchmen* writer Alan Moore wanted to convey to readers is the belief that superhero fantasies possess a fascist undertone: "The «superhero dream» is a dangerous thing,

because essentially it's fascism" (Moore, 2023). In Moore's thinking, people who ignore laws to execute their own sense of justice or morality with violence are fascists. While Moore's writings are more in tune with this philosophy, especially in other works such as *V for Vendetta*, Frank Miller does not shy away from putting his perspective on the pages of *The Dark Knight Returns*. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, a particular moment where the reader is exposed to this reasoning is during an interview in which a man responds to a reporter asking what he thinks of Batman. The man expresses approval of Batman's methods, noting that Batman deals with those the police do not. He concludes with, "hope he goes after the homos next (Miller F. , 2016, p. 45). It is possible that Frank Miller does not entirely agree with the philosophy that superheroes inherently possess a fascist nature, as Moore suggests. Instead, Miller may be bringing to light the aspects of vigilantism that could lead a character like Batman to be perceived as fascist.

The character of Superman in the narrative is portrayed as the government's pet and, in a sense, a form of legitimate authority (Sheedy). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Superman serves a similar thematic purpose as Doctor Manhattan does in *Watchmen*, particularly in reflecting on the role of superheroes in American foreign policy during the Cold War era. In the story's subplot, tensions escalate between the United States and the Soviet Union over the fictional Caribbean island of Corto Maltese. While the United States has military forces stationed on and around the island, it chooses to deploy Superman as its primary combat force to prevent Soviet advancements and secure dominance in the engagement.

The reader isn't explicitly given the reason for the conflict over Corto Maltese, but it is strongly implied that the altercation serves as a parallel to real-world Cold War events (Lopes, 2019). The US President in this story, closely resembling the figure of Ronald Reagan, even utters words similar to those Nixon speaks when Doctor Manhattan leaves the planet at the end of Chapter III of *Watchmen*: "We've got God on our side… or the best next thing, anyways" (Miller F. , 2016, p. 119); talking about Superman and his role in the conflict. Likewise, regarding the role Doctor Manhattan played in the narrative and themes of Watchmen, Superman becomes an allegory for American military might. When Soviet forces abandon Corto Maltese, a nuclear missile is launched to target the island, the American soldiers and military assets. Superman quickly deals with the missile, akin to his role in the Strategic Defense Initiative; however, both he and part of the American territory suffer from the explosion. In doing so, it becomes clear to the reader that Miller is utilizing the figure of

Superman as a commentary on the arms-race between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War (Sheedy). This is appropriate, in the context of the story to utilize an American Icon to propagate such message, since Superman is often depicted as a symbol of America.

With Superman, the talk about Nietzsche Übermensch returns. The meaning of Übermensch, is closely translated to "superman" or "over-person", and with this concept he wondered what humanity could evolve to and what the greatest human look like. In Nietzsche's conception, the Übermensch would be someone who is willing to undertake actions that might be considered evil by conventional standards, even if those actions serve a higher purpose or their own self-defined values. This figure would be capable of forging their own path without being constrained by societal norms or morality, thereby experiencing a solitary existence yet possessing the resilience to withstand criticism and scrutiny. Believing in a Godless existence, evidenced with quotes such as: "There have been two great narcotics in European civilization: Christianity and alcohol"; "The Christian resolution to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad". While disliking religion, he understood its importance. By ignoring God and faith, Man had to search for values and morals that come from a "superman", someone who can transcend the rule of God. Even though he has absolute power, like Doctor Manhattan, Superman chooses to uphold the law, evidenced by the quote that became synonymous with the character "Truth, Justice and the American way", popularized by Richard Donner's 1978 picture, *Superman – The Movie*.

So, if Nietzsche description of Übermensch also does not apply to Superman, who does it apply to? Like Ozymandias, we find similarities in the character of Lex Luthor, Superman's bitter rival. Similarly to Adrian Veidt, Luthor presents himself in comics as a man aware of his knowledge and power, making him a gentle figure, most of the times. He does not have the necessity to show his strength to those around for he knows he is, like Ozymandias, the smartest man alive, carving his own values by disliking Superman, rejecting God in a Nietzsche sensibility. In contrast to Ozymandias, Luthor and Nietzsche ideals, Superman more closely resembles the teachings of another German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant "claimed that the morally right actions are those that conform to the categorical imperative — they're the actions that treat people as ends in themselves and not merely as means" (Robichaud, 2009, p. 9). To the German philosopher, morality is a constant and we must do actions based on good will, ignoring other aspect like intelligence, strength or happiness, for they can be used for evil (Loftis, 2009). It becomes interesting to realize that the ideas of Kant

and Nietzsche are really opposed to one another, as are the values of Superman and Lex Luthor (Ozymandias), respectively.

In addition to representing America's military might, Superman also offers a perspective on environmental awareness (Lopes, 2019). A well-known fact among followers of Superman lore or comic book readers in general is that one of the sources of his immense strength and powers derives from solar radiation. When the Man of Steel prevented the Soviet missile attack on the island of Corto Maltese, clouds appeared in the sky. In a weakened state and unable to regain his strength because the sun was obstructed by the massive number of clouds formed by the nuclear explosion, Superman finds himself unable to fly above the clouds and reach solar light. He pleads to the Earth itself to be kind and forgiving to him and to the entire human race: "you have every reason to be outraged, Mother Earth… you have given them… everything… they are tiny and stupid and vicious…but please… listen to them…" (Miller F. , 2016, p. 174). Therefore he chooses to syphon the solar energy of the plant life of the Earth to regain his vitality, akin to photosynthesis (Annex M) "Superman, like humanity, was ultimately able to survive, but only at the expense of further ecological sacrifice" (Lopes, 2019, p. 18). As an alien who came to Earth and adopted our customs, particularly the need to be kind and thoughtful, Superman's involvement in something so destructive goes against his principles as a character. However, it is well known that *The Dark Knight Returns* serves not only as a deconstruction of the Batman character but also of the character of Superman.

5. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Cold War impacted the lives of millions during the forty years that it took place, changing the consuming methods of the masses in terms of culture, food, products etc. Popular culture, including films, television shows, literature was significantly influenced by the mentalities of those affected by the Cold War, aiming to portray the politics, societies, and ideologies of a divided world. Comic books were no different. As cultural objects, the narratives, characters and overall themes were likewise influenced by the time and space in which they were produced, at the same time that creative teams working at any given title injected their own way of perceiving the world around them.

With the research aiming to understand the transformations of the narratives and characters in light of the time and space they were produced, it is possible to understand that 1980s comic books were became an evolution of the what started to happen in the 1960s and further more in the 1970s. The rise of social and political conscious stories growing due to an overall cynicism forming around the United States due to the political events sweeping the nation like Vietnam and the Watergate Scandal, made people more questionable of their government. Entering the 1980s, creators wanted to explore darker subject matters and make more social and political commentary about the world around and portray the characters in more nuanced and grey perspectives, in comparison to the 1970s. *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* are perfect examples of this shift, especially since they were the works that marked the beginning of the Modern Age of Comics[63], due to their influence on the comic book industry, exploring the problematic psychology of their narrative's characters.

Events such as the mention of military operations in Latin America being sanctioned by the U.S government in *Watchmen* are spoken of simply as a type of topical reference; however when he analyse the historical background behind this we find that it is true. Nevertheless, since *Watchmen* constitutes a reality of altered historical events, military projects like Operation Condor may have had different outcomes or effects in the world of the graphic novel. In the realm of the Iran-Contra Affairs and the utilization of KGBeast as a means to show American fear of the Soviet Union, we can see that both events (Iran-Contra Affairs and the SDI program) are being employed to comment on situations that were plaguing the United States at the time.

[63] Just like the previous Ages, it is difficult to attribute a singular event to creation of new nomenclature. Nevertheless it is agreed upon the majority of comic book historians that the release of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* are the beginning of the Modern Age.

By utilizing the Suicide Squad as a metaphor for the Iran-Contra Affairs, John Ostrander could bring to light the lack of morals and scruples of the American government and digest it to an audience that could be unaware of the case. In the case of the "Ten Nights of the Beast", the utilization of KGBeast to perpetuate American anxieties about the Soviet Union is poignant and can probably be accurate, since the majority of the U.S population did not have much positive feedback about their country's rival. However, the employment of both Agent Bundy and Agent Yevtushenko as a means to discuss the different perspectives surrounding nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence is a good method used by Jim Starlin to bring nuance both to the debate and to personification of Soviet characters in the comic's medium.

In the societal views of the Cold War in the 1980s, both examples come from *Watchmen*. In terms of the psychological effects that Nuclear War has on the characters of the graphic novel, we can witness that a large majority are under high stress due to the level of danger that the Cold War poses in the context of the novel. Unlike real events, the presence of Doctor Manhattan is both a symbol of fear and calmness for he poses a threat to the Soviet Union and eases the hearts of a percentage of the American population. When he leaves Earth, the level of fear in the United States rises and Soviet boldness grows. In the punk and women's movements as criticism to Nuclear War, both aspects are not in the forefront of the novel, yet they can show how the movements are perceived. The Greenham Peace Camp movement seems accurate in the novel in comparison to what it was in real life, even though it is only showed in a panel, while the punk movement is personified by the "Knot Tops". Although they resemble punks with some aesthetics originating from the altered history of Watchmen, they only indulge in the practices and looks of the real life movement, without partaking in any actual societal and political messaging that the punk movement defended in real life.

The character discussion section surrounding the two characters from *Watchmen* (Doctor Manhattan and Ozymandias) and Batman and Superman from *The Dark Knight Returns* centres around how each represent factors of the Cold War. Doctor Manhattan, being a walking atomic bomb and nuclear deterrent, is a commentary on the nuclear arsenal of both superpowers. While yes he does has his allegiance to the United States, but his detachment from humanity and human affairs places him as a force of nature, uncaring about what outcome prevails surrounding the Cold War. Ozymandias, as the mastermind behind the assassination plot of The Comedian and the death of millions, fails to deduce that his actions are merely temporary due to the methods he used to achieve peace among the superpowers.

Personifying the United States and somewhat the Soviet Union, Ozymandias takes action to assure outcomes that he deems as necessary or advantageous to him. In the case of Batman and Superman, both, like the *Watchmen* characters, comment on the Cold War. Batman can be assumed that takes on the personification of those that were discontent with Reagan's policies. He criticizes Superman, who takes the side of the American government, for not taking a stand while watching the United States and the world heading towards a crisis. In their final confrontation, Batman weakens Superman through the use of Kryptonite, something akin to Batman claiming that Superman/government are weak due to their policies and choices.

In light of the of the objective of this dissertation, which was to understand how comic book narratives and characters represented the Cold War in the 1980s, it is possible to deduce that just like any other cultural aspect, comic books produced in this time reflected the problems, worries and events of the people that lived through them. By being inspired by the world around them, creators were able to comment on the issues, much like the decades prior to the 1980s, for comic books were, in large majority of their history, socially and politically conscious pieces of art that reflected on the times and peoples. While none of this is ground-breaking, the large catalogue of comic books produced in the 1980s can show to readers different aspects on how to Cold War was represented by a myriad of creators.

Other comic books of the decade, such as Daredevil's "Born Again" story arc in the pages of *Daredevil* #227--#233, introducing Nuke, a veteran of the Vietnam War who has the American flag tattooed on his face can be investigated to learn more about how American patriotism and the treatment of veterans was in the 1980s. The DC Comics team Checkmate, also create in-universe by the woman that relaunch the Suicide Squad team, Amanda Waller, can shine more light how American interests were represented in comic books. The *Suicide Squad* title from Ostrander, following the release of *Secret Origins* #14 can also be used for further research.

While the dissertation successfully achieved its intended goals, it is important to acknowledge the limitations encountered. A broader selection of comic books could have been analysed to provide a more comprehensive overview of the various issues and representations of the Cold War during the 1980s. Research bias is also a factor to take in consideration. Although the research was conduct with the use of historical documentation, different people and readers can have different interpretations of what the many pages of

comic books represent. Comic books, just like any piece of art, are subjective. The mere factor of time and the page limitation for the dissertation was also a challenge for there are many more subjects to talk about that deserve consideration. Comic books, as both pieces of entertainment and objects of historical source, provide ample opportunities to be dissected for historical analysis of the time they were created. As such, the continuation of the investigation of characters and stories of these literary and artistic formats is imperative to better understand the times and their importance as pieces of history.

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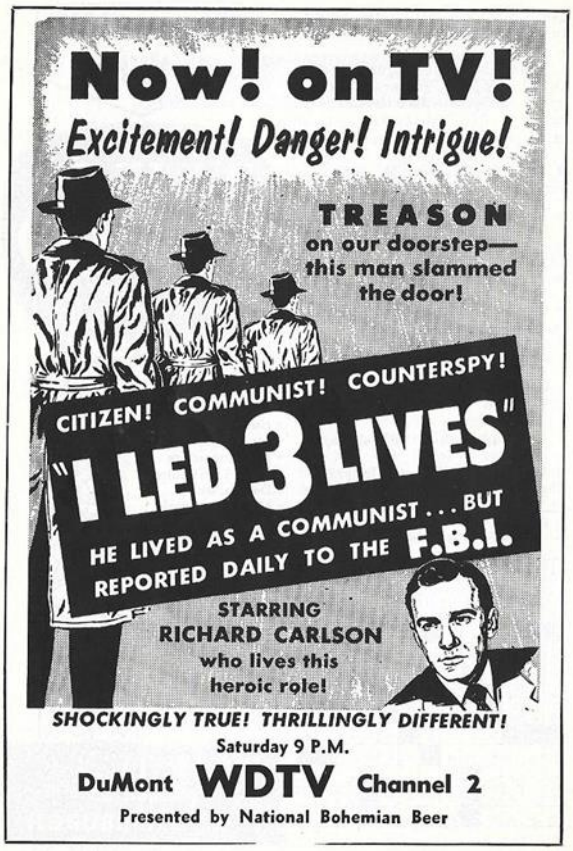
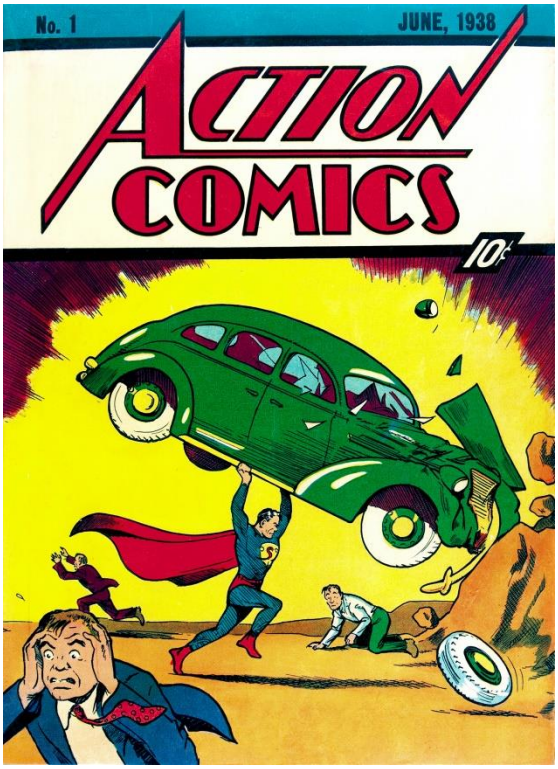
ANNEXES

A. Poster of the TV show *I Led 3 Lives* (1953-1956)



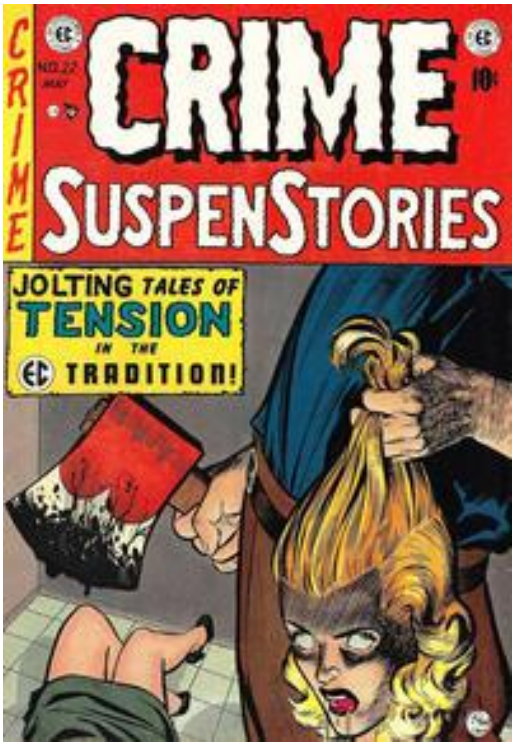
B. Leonard Bernstein accompanied by Peruvian musicians while on the 1958 tour. Source: New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archive: https://archives.nyphil.org/

C. *Action Comics* #1, June 1938. Taken from:
https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Action_Comics_Vol_1_1



***D. Captain America* #1, March 1941. Taken from: Grand Comics Database**
https://www.comics.org/issue/1313/

E. *Crime Suspensestories* #22 (1954). Taken from: Grand Comics Database
https://www.comics.org/issue/11216/



F. Comic Book guidelines of the 1954 Comics Code. Taken from:
https://cbldf.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/

General standards—Part A

(1) Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

(2) No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

(3) Policemen, judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

(4) If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.

(5) Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.

(6) In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

(7) Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gunplay, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.

(8) No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown.

(9) Instances of law-enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged.

(10) The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnaper. The criminal or the kidnaper must be punished in every case.

(11) The letters of the word "crime" on a comics-magazine cover shall never be appreciably greater in dimension than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on a cover.

(12) Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or subtitles shall be exercised.

General standards—Part B

(1) No comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title.

(2) All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

(3) All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

(4) Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.

(5) Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.

General standards—Part C

All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the code, and are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited. Dialogue

(1) Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.

(2) Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken.

(3) Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and, wherever possible, good grammar shall be employed.

Religion

(1) Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Costume

(1) Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.

(2) Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

(3) All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.

(4) Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities. NOTE.—It should be recognized that all prohibitions dealing with costume, dialog, or artwork applies as specifically to the cover of a comic magazine as they do to the contents.

Marriage and sex

(1) Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.

(2) Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

(3) Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered. A sympathetic understanding of the problems of love is not a license for morbid distortion.

(4) The treatment of live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.

(5) Passion or romantic interest shall never be treated in such a way as to stimulate the lower and baser emotions.

(6) Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.

(7) Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.

CODE FOR ADVERTISING MATTER

These regulations are applicable to all magazines published by members of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. Good taste shall be the guiding principle in the acceptance of advertising.

(1) Liquor and tobacco advertising is not acceptable.

(2) Advertisement of sex or sex instruction books are unacceptable.

(3) The sale of picture postcards, "pinups," "art studies," or any other reproduction of nude or seminude figures is prohibited.

(4) Advertising for the sale of knives or realistic gun facsimiles is prohibited.

(5) Advertising for the sale of fireworks is prohibited.

(6) Advertising dealing with the sale of gambling equipment or printed matter dealing with gambling shall not be accepted.

(7) Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.

(8) To the best of his ability, each publisher shall ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to fact and avoid misrepresentation.

(9) Advertisement of medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature are to be rejected. Advertisements for medical, health, or toiletry products endorsed by the American Medical Association, or the American Dental Association, shall be deemed acceptable if they conform with all other conditions of the Advertising Code.

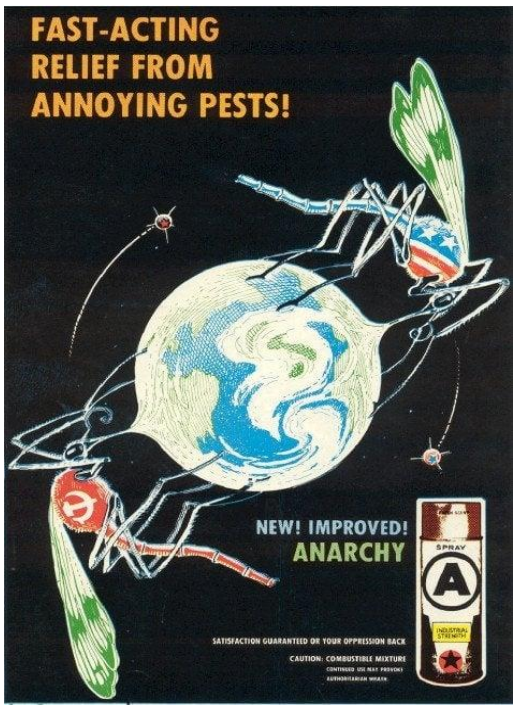
G. *Showcase* #4 (1956). Taken from: Grand Comics Database
https://www.comics.org/issue/13042/**.**

H. *Fantastic Four* #1 (1961). Taken from: Grand Comics Database
https://www.comics.org/issue/16556/

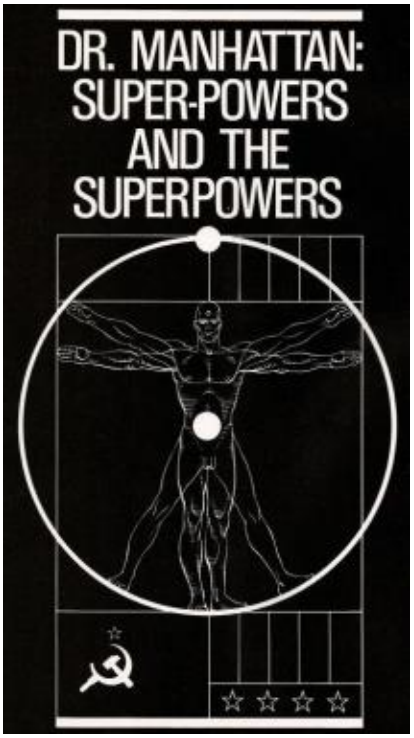
I. *Green Lantern* Vol. II #85 (1971). Taken from:
https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Green_Lantern_Vol_2_85

J. First Page of Chapter III. Gibbons Dave, Moore, Alan. *Watchmen*. Taken from https://viewcomiconline.com/watchmen-issue-3/

K. Anti-US, Anti-USSR Anarchist Poster.



L. Cover of Professor Glass's Essay. Taken from: https://watchmen.fandom.com/wiki/Dr._Manhattan:_Super-Powers_and_the_Superpowers.



M. Miller, Frank. *The Dark Knight Returns*. DC Comics, 26.