HARTS & Minds

COMICS AND THE CHRONOTOPE: TIME-SPACE RELATIONSHIPS IN TRAUMATIC SEQUENTIAL ART

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Abstract

The comics form demands a readership that is aware of the complex time-space relationships that are at play in each narrative. Unlike film, in which each frame of action displaces the previous one to exist in the same physical space, the comics form allows all of the narrative action to be displayed at once, with each panel inhabiting its own space. The nature of the layout gives a huge amount of responsibility in creating the timescale of the narrative to the reader.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope' is an excellent lens to use when examining the relationship between time and space in comics. On the most basic level, the chronotope is the relationship between time and space that becomes artistically visible in linguistic and literary discourse – something that, as I have already stated, is conveyed at its visual extreme in comics. Bakhtin argues that the chronotopic relationship within the text is crucial to the construction of the narrative as a whole. Though not citing Bakhtin directly, theoretician Thierry Groensteen's work on *spatio-topia* in comics displays strong similarities. He argues that comics is a form dependent on two concepts: 'arthrology'; the relationship between the 'joints' of the panels and how each individual panel relates to those preceding and following it, and *quadrillage*; the precise layout of the page and the movement of the reader's eye across the page. His work, like Bakhtin's, suggests that the relationship between time and space is 'indissoluble' and central to the narrative flow.

This article looks at how this spatio-temporal relationship is affected when dealing with a traumatic narrative. Trauma disrupts the sense of time and personal chronology of those it affects. Indeed, many of the most dramatic and commonly reported symptoms of a traumatic rupture relate to the individual's construction of time, including flashbacks, repetitive nightmares, catatonia (which in effect 'pauses' the individual and removes them from the forward movement of time) and personal response mechanisms (either hyper-vigilance or extreme psychological numbing). I use Freud's theories to construct a definition of trauma and its temporal symptoms in relation to the narrative form.

The crux of this article is this: If the time-space relationship is pivotal to the construction of the comics form, how does it change under the stresses of a traumatic narrative?

Key Words: comics, Bakhtin, Groensteen, chronotopes, Alissa Torres, *The 'Nam*, trauma, Falling Man, Saigon Execution.

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In comics[1], each narrative event occupies its own space on the page and within the book; the specific spatial relationships between panels correspond to (or contrast with) the temporal relationships between narrative events. Though comics is often publically compared to film – most commonly seen in journalistic comics reviews which use filmic terminology instead of the specific terminology of comics – the issue of spatial relationship is the most important distinction between the two. In a film, all information is presented in the same space – we watch the entire sequence of events unfolding on one screen. The physical spatial relationship is lacking. Thus, more so than with a traditional literary text and filmic media, the physicality of the comic is a major factor in its reading. The movement of time mimics the reader's movement through the pages and often the turning of the pages mimics the events within the

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text.[2] Comprehension speed can be increased or slowed at the will of the reader. Considering that comics is able to manipulate temporal awareness in many ways that are not available to any other narrative medium, the contention that comics is a form well-suited to the simultaneous representation of a wide range of themes and topics is correct. This manipulation of temporal awareness is not solely in the hand of the comics artist; it is for the reader to decide how long to take over each panel, each page and even how quickly to turn the pages. Putting this much power over the time-scale of the narrative into the hands of the reader means that not only do they have to work much harder than, for example, a film-goer, but that they will not only perceive, but actively engage with the story differently, giving temporal emphasis to some panels over others and changing reading speeds at different times.

This article takes into consideration the role of the reader and the subsequent manipulation of time in relation to the representation of trauma in comics, using two specific instances of photographic representation in two distinct comics. Each photograph is a candid shot, un-posed and un-manipulated. These photographs are well known; their inclusion in the comic can be seen as an obvious collision of the 'real world' and 'comics world' than simply including the events in a storyline. This analysis is complemented by the similar but independent work of two theorists – Thierry Groensteen's work on 'the spatio-topical system' and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope'. In terms of trauma theory, my theoretical framework is strictly Freudian-based —of which I give a brief overview, outlining the issues that are raised in relation to trauma and temporality— whilst also calling upon Cathy Caruth's work on trauma and literature. Prior to this, however, I wish to clarify my definition of the comics I discuss in this article as 'trauma comics' (more specifically conflict-trauma comics). I classify them thusly for two reasons; first, the plot deals with a traumatic conflict (specifically a military conflict and an act of terrorism), and secondly, the comic's artwork and layout represents the event in such a way as to mimic the symptoms of the traumatic experience for the reader.

Tracing Trauma

As this article concentrates on comics that deal with the representation of traumatic experience, it is necessary to understand the complex relationship between trauma and time before engaging in any textual analysis. In many cases, it is one of the most noticeable symptoms of a traumatic rupture that the individual becomes, to use novelist Kurt Vonnegut's term, 'unstuck in time'[3]; their sense of personal chronology is severely disrupted. For Freud, writing in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), this disjunction in personal timekeeping can occur at the very first instant of the traumatic rupture. However, there is a delay – the *complete* psychical effects of the traumatic rupture do not necessarily happen immediately – which he refers to as deferred action.[4] The amount of time that may pass before the trauma's full effect is felt can vary greatly between individuals.[5] However, it remains the case that trauma is, as Caruth contends, a 'break in the mind's experience of time'.[6] Freud suggests that this break is not caused by the quantity of traumatic stimuli, but by the mind's lack of preparedness:

> We may, I think, tentatively venture to regard the common traumatic neurosis as a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli. This would seem to reinstate the old, naïve theory of shock […] and we still attribute importance to the element of fright. It is caused by lack of any preparedness for anxiety.[7]

The protective shield is not engaged in time; the threat to the self is recognised too late. Furthermore, returning to Caruth's original definition of trauma as an event 'experienced too soon […] and therefore unavailable to consciousness', if trauma exists separately from human

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consciousness and comprehension, then it has never been known fully or understood and has therefore not existed *in time*.[8] It is this lack of temporal understanding and direct experience that causes the traumatic rupture and leads to the development of traumatic symptoms. I reiterate my initial point: time − and the fracturing thereof − has an effect on all other symptoms of the rupture. However, before beginning to interweave trauma theory with the comics form, a theoretical basis for comics and time is necessary, as comics and time are intrinsically bound up with issues of physical space.

In *The System of Comics* (2007), Thierry Groensteen posits the 'spatio-topical system' of the comic, which gives much emphasis to the placement of panels in relation to each other. He argues that the basic unit of the comic is the panel. Though it is possible to break down each panel into smaller units, 'for the particular subject that is comics, the operativity of the micro-semiotic is revealed to be, in practice, extremely weak'.[9] Rather, the analysis of comics begins to become possible at the 'level of relations between the units […] the level not of the ropes, but of the knots'. Removing all words and images so the page is pared down to the 'grid' of the frames (a stage of the creation process referred to as *quadrillage*) leaves a framework on which the 'language of the comic is written'.[10] In short, before the addition of image or word to the page, it is already apparent that the positioning of frames is of extreme importance to the creation of the comic.

For Groensteen, there are four main parameters that govern the 'general architecture' of the page. First, the height of each tier of panels should be taken into consideration as 'a tier stands out better if […] its height differs from that of the others on the page'.[11] Similarly, the width of the gutter (the blank space between the panels of the comic) − both horizontal and vertical − has an effect on the overall visual scaffolding. The location of bubbles (speech or thought) can drastically alter the whole page. The convention is that bubbles are placed in the upper part of the panel and 'a different position, if it is anarchic, will scramble the apparatus of the layout'.[12] Such breaking of convention, given the 'anarchic' (I hesitate at this term and prefer 'chaotic') effect it can have on the layout, is common and to be expected in trauma comics. Finally, Groensteen discusses 'the number of panels that make up the tier, in the absolute terms and relative to the quantity of panels that are included in neighbouring tiers'.[13] He argues that tiers containing a lot of panels − or panels of unusual shape − are more likely to be eye-catching and to demand 'narrative interest' than tiers containing two panels of equal size and shape. It is at the level of the tier, rather than just the panel, that true interpretation can begin.

Earlier in his text, Groensteen writes, 'the position of a panel in the page corresponds to a particular moment in the unfolding of the story, and also in the process of reading'.[14] This is attested most plainly in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1994). McCloud writes:

> Time can be controlled through the content of panels and the transitions between panels. As unlikely as it seems, the panel shape can make a difference in our perception of time... Ever noticed how the words 'short' or 'long' can refer either to the first dimension or to the fourth? In a medium where time and space merge so completely, the distinction often vanishes.[15]

The relationship to which McCloud alludes is examined at great length in Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope'. Bakhtin writes that 'the essential conjunction of temporal and spatial relationships artistically assimilated into literature shall be called the *chronotopos*', in literal translation 'timespace'. For Bakhtin, as for McCloud, there is an 'indissoluble connection between space and time'.[16] Sue Vice breaks the chronotope into three distinct levels:

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First, as the means by which a text represents history; second, as the relation between images of time and space in the novel, out of which any representation of history must be constructed; and third, as a way of discussing the formal properties of the text itself.[17]

At the most basic level, it would be entirely feasible to look at comics through the lens of the third chronotopic level only – the work as being bound up in space-time connections by the virtue of its form. However, the first chronotopic level is of equal importance in relation to a story based on actual events as will be discussed later in this article. Thus, the historical time of the event and the physical space of the page become inextricably linked – the second level of the chronotope. Furthermore, such events become chronotopic in their own right. For example, '9/11' has taken on a chronotopic meaning as it refers to both the time/date in which the event happened but also the place where it occurred. In this sense, prepositions of time and place often become equivalent – Vonnegut writes that he was 'at Dresden', instead of the more typical 'in Dresden'. This construction only makes sense if we acknowledge that the event is chronotopic – Dresden as a location in both space (city in Eastern Germany) and time (13th to 15th February 1945). In terms of historical events, the chronotope 'provides substantial basis for the showing and depiction of events... thanks to its particular solidification and concretization of the distinguishing marks of time in defined areas of space'.[18]

Bakhtin's chronotope, then, gives us a framework by which 'time [can] thicken [and become] artistically visible [and] space [can become] charged and responsive to the movements of time'.[19] Using this framework gives both comics creators and readers a structure on which to construct both their timescale and their representations of historical events. Traumatic representation, which thrives on atypical temporality and chronological inexactitude, still adheres to Bakhtin's concepts, as there remains a strong link between time and space. A clear example of the chronotope is the road narrative, where the concepts of distance travelled and time passed become inseparable.[20] Vice illustrates this using the example of *Thelma and Louise* and the line 'I'm trying to put some distance between us and the scene of our last goddamn crime!' thus referring to both physical and psychological space.[21] Conversely, in comics released to raise money for 9/11 charities (hereby called 'Charity Comics'), the spatial movement within the comics is limited, keeping all action firmly rooted in the geographical centre of New York City, thus the chronotopic meaning of '9/11' becomes artistically observable. Furthermore, the majority of the comics are set on the exact day. Unlike in a road narrative, there is little movement within the comics, making the chronotope ultimately narrow. When there is very little movement, time appears to stagnate. Bakhtin, referencing a similar chronotope in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, calls this 'thick, sticky time, which oozes in space'.[22] It is this sticky time that the reader encounters throughout many of the traumatic representations within comics. The rupture of representation – the creator's inability to accurately or adequately reproduce the traumatic event – gives rise to clotted or fractured temporality. Traumatic chronology is often presented as broken. One of the more explicit examples of this is Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, in which the protagonist is a time-traveller. In other texts, chronology can be seen as stagnant: the movement of time ceases and seems unable to progress at all. Bendis and Morse's silent comic 'Moment of Silence: A True Story' demonstrates this.[23] The eight-page comic shows seven views of the same man, holding his arm in the same position, with no movement of time whatsoever. None of the other figures in the images move at all, nor do the clouds of rubble and dust: In this comic time is clotted to the point of standstill. Rather than an elongated chronotope that spans much time-space, in this instance the chronotope is very

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short and narrow; the comic creates a chronotope that mimics the freezing of time that is often noted in traumatised individuals.

The first level of the chronotope relates to the text's representation of history and how the chronotope 'serves to assimilate real temporal (in the extreme, historical) reality' into literary texts.[24] This use of the chronotope makes it possible 'to reflect and introduce into the artistic plane […] substantial elements of historical reality'.[25] When an actual (historical) event is incorporated into a text it is chronotopic. As with the creation of the chronotope of Dresden mentioned previously, the inclusion of an event marks it as a particular place in both space and time. However, even in historically based texts there is still an overarching fictionality to them. Though the overarching event is real, the minor events and activities of the text may not be.

Many comics that represent conflict include 'actual' information in the artwork, where photographs of the event are spliced into the piece in an attempt to lend an air of accuracy and historical credibility. For the most part, it is assumed that what the camera shows us is unvarnished truth. When speaking of conflict photography, this is generally true, though it is important to add that very few of these photographs were completely un-posed prior to the Vietnam War, which marked the beginning of the war photographer as a 'hands-off' observer. Indeed, many of the key photographs of Vietnam could not have been posed at all due to the singularly shocking nature of their depicted material.[26] What photographs do in this instance is capture an event, person, or place and crystallise it into a single, consumable image. Simone Weil (2003) attests that violence turns anyone subjected to it into a 'thing' – photography does the same.

It is in part due to photography's ability to encapsulate and crystallise that certain images of conflict become 'the image' of that particular event. However, this is not a simple case of picking the 'best' or 'favourite' photograph. Sontag writes:

> Photographs that everyone recognises are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas 'memories' […] What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.[27]

The locked-in picture becomes an icon: the uncaptioned image, endlessly repeated – a stand-alone representation of the event. Furthermore, it becomes a chronotope. The still image of a split-second of an event becomes, in that singular time and place, representative of the event itself. This can be taken into consideration when analysing two famous photographs and their subsequent comics representations: Richard Drew's 'Falling Man' (2001) and Eddie Adams' 'Saigon Execution' (1968). The two events have very different chronotopes – one being spatially narrow and temporally tight, the other being much wider in both time and space. How do these two photographs create and encapsulate the chronotope of conflict and trauma that they represent?

Richard Drew's 'Falling Man'
As a chronotope, '9/11' is very narrow. Not only is the temporal aspect confined, even by its name, to one day (though the aftermath was more extensive) but the spatial aspect has also been narrowed, with many people forgetting that the events of 9/11 also includes attacks in both Pennsylvania and Washington D.C. Rather, the chronotope of 9/11 thus has become crystallised as the events of a specific time and space – mid-morning in New York City on September 11th, 2001. Because of this, many of the most famous photographs of 9/11 are of events that happened during this narrow time-window.

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There are twelve photographs in the series taken by Richard Drew that have been labelled 'The Falling Man' (2001). They were taken at 09:41AM as a man fell from the upper floors of the North Tower. Though there is much speculation, this figure has never been officially identified. This image is one of the most controversial of all those taken on that day, causing *The New York Times* to only print the photograph once due to the barrage of complaints.[28] The photographer himself noted that many people were commenting to him that they found the image 'too disturbing'. The public objection to this image's publication stemmed in part not only from their concern for the victim's family, but also a concern for themselves. The objections were directed at this glimpse of a possible, devastating future through an image of a definite and traumatising present. Several thousand people were in the towers at the time of the impact, with several million people in New York City. For the residents of New York and the US, this photograph acted as a threat of what could happen, what might happen, and what did happen. There are many references to the 'Falling Man' throughout Alissa Torres' 2008 comic *American Widow* in which Torres chronicles the aftermath of 9/11, in which she suffered the loss of her husband, and the ensuing birth of her son in October 2001.

Torres uses a full-page representation of Drew's photograph.[29] However, she picks one of the lesser-known photographs of the series, where the man is falling against the sky rather than the most controversial of the series, in which the man is falling in front of the building. That she chooses to show the figure as a tiny and barely perceptible mark on an otherwise mostly empty page is visually startling. The expanse of white space is vast and void-like, the tiny figure falling parallel to a very basic drawing of a building. The lack of visual information on the page draws the eye to the figure, despite the size, as it appears at first to be a smudge on the page. It is only on realisation of what the mark represents that we understand that this is a rendering of Drew's photograph. This page is not presented as a bleed.[30] Instead, it is kept constrained within a frame to emphasise the photographic nature of the moment paused in time (and, as a chronotope, time-space). It is expedient to note that this photograph captures a fraction of a second. Rather than watching the man falling live or on a video recording, the photograph pauses the moment and elongates the traumatic event, making it appear endless.

Soon after the event, Torres believed her husband, Eddie, to have jumped. She writes 'you said, "Fuck it, I'm out of here"'. And that was that'.[31] However, at no point does the text substantiate this claim. That said, it is a recurring motif throughout, coming to represent the tragedy of the event and the desperate decisions that had to be made: to jump or not to jump. On the page before the 'Falling Man' image, Torres writes, 'The Medical Examiner said it took you 18 seconds to fall. What were you thinking?'[32] This is a complex comment. Is the Medical Examiner definitely talking about Eddie or is he speaking in general? When Torres asks 'what were you thinking?' does she mean in the sense of 'what on earth was going through your head to make you do that?' Or, more literally, 'what was going through your mind as you fell?' The meaning is left ambiguous. Regardless of whether Eddie is the Falling Man or not, the inclusion of the image keeps the chronotope of 9/11 firmly centred on this one place and this one time.

Torres' comic uses Drew's image to represent an aspect of her story that she did not witness. The death of her husband is of huge importance to the narrative but she is unable (and presumably unwilling) to imagine what may have happened, so she appropriates Drew's image to assist her. Torres' trauma differs from a more typical understanding in that it is an event that does not happen *to* her, and yet still affects her. This indirectness raises issues when considered in the light of Freud's theories on trauma. Freud concentrates on the experience of the individual to whom the traumatic event happens directly; he describes and analyses this rupture as it occurs from the time of the event onwards. Is it feasible to apply this same framework to Torres' case? To discount her from the Freudian sense of 'trauma' suggests that

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she does not go through a 'real' traumatic experience – something that is virtually impossible to argue. Rather, though the majority of the event unfolds for her through the media, the impact is no less real and no less damaging. Therefore, whereas Freud writes of trauma as an attack on the mind's preparedness, something we typically assume to happen to the traumatised individual directly, in Torres' case this rupture occurs when she is affected by an event that did not directly happen to her. Furthermore, she is forced to repeat the event over and over in her applications for welfare assistance and during media interviews. The shock of being affected by an event for which she was absent – and compelled to experience it repeatedly – acts as the mental attack that Freud suggests. It is because of her absence, and the imagined horrors that it creates, which causes her to return to Drew's image, and the simplistic and symbolic representation it conveys. The pared down image, with very little detail, jars with the image that Torres has created in her mind; the plainness of the image allows the readers to recreate Torres' imagined conflict for themselves.

Eddie Adams' 'Saigon Execution'

Unlike the chronotope of 9/11, which is concentrated on specific area of 16 acres and within a time of (less than) 24 hours, the chronotope of the Vietnam War is wider, although temporally difficult to define. This difficulty of timeframe is due mainly to the transition period in the mid-1950s, during which the French forces left (signalling the end of the First Indochina War) and American forces moved in. Historically, the official dates of the Vietnam War are generally accepted as November 1, 1955 to April 30, 1975. Similarly, the spatial boundaries of the conflict do not correspond entirely to the name, as the conflict spread into Laos and Cambodia. This aside, the spatial and temporal parameters of the Vietnam chronotope are considerably wider than that of 9/11.

It is undoubtedly true that very few Vietnam War photographs were posed by the photographer; however, it is possible that many of these shots were composed by non-journalistic participants. Eddie Adams' world famous (and Pulitzer Prize-winning) photograph 'Saigon Execution', taken in February 1968, shows the chief of the South Vietnamese national police, Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, shooting a Vietcong suspect in a street in Saigon. The photographer's claim that he did not pose this image has been widely accepted. However, Adams asserts that:

> …it was staged – by General Loan, who had led the prisoner out to the street where journalists had gathered; he would not have carried out the summary execution there had they not been available to witness it.[33]

Adams' photograph captures the moment of the impact of the bullet at point blank range. The prisoner's face is turned to the side in a grimace but he has not yet begun to fall. The General's arm is still outstretched. Of this, his most famous photograph, Adams is recorded as saying:

> They walked down to the street corner. We were taking pictures. He turned out to be a Viet Cong lieutenant. And out of nowhere came this guy [General Loan] who we didn't know. I was about five feet away and he pulled out his pistol, shot him [the VC prisoner] in the head and walked by us and said, "They killed many of my men and many of our people." I kept making pictures.[34]

This photograph became one of the most important images of the Anti-War Movement, adopted as a representation of the excesses and injustices of war, although Adams disagrees

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with this, stating that he saw it as a more accurate representation of the unfathomable decisions one is required to make during wartime.

The 1980s Marvel comics series *The 'Nam*, written and illustrated by Vietnam veterans Doug Murray and Mike Golden, is careful to follow a rigid temporal structure which mimics the standard US Army tour of duty of 366 days in the theatre of war. This allows the writers of the series to place the characters into actual historical events without causing disruption to the comic's timescale (provided the characters do not try to intervene) and gives the creative team more flexibility as to what they can include in terms of actual landmark events throughout the conflict. In *The 'Nam #24* the story arc involves the Tet Offensive and the moment of Adams' photograph.[35]

The issue, which ends with a full-page image, is not presented as a bleed as seen in Torres' representation of the 'Falling Man'. This is a double-frame image – two images presented one inside the other. The camera lens serves as an inner frame for the restaging of Adams' photograph, reflected in vivid colour. This is a major change from the original, which was originally presented in black and white. The bold colours here are typical of the mainstream style to which *The 'Nam* vigorously subscribes.[36] The outer frame shows the camera itself being held by, we assume, Adams, though we see so little of his face. The image appears cramped – both hands are visible as they hold the camera tightly. Adams' mouth is open as he speaks, suggesting an expression of shock. The name of the camera brand is clearly displayed, not only for realism's sake (the brand would be visible on the camera, of course) but also to remind us that without technology pioneered by this brand, Leica, this type of photo-journalism would not be possible; it is only because of technological developments made by this brand that photographers had the equipment to take photographs in a split second without fiddly preparation.

The speech bubble in this frame gives rise to questions of terminology. Adams shouts, 'Holy..! Suu, keep shooting! Just keep shooting!'[37] But is it to Suu that Adams aims the command to 'keep shooting'? 'Shoot' as a photographic term is first noted in the 1890s. This is the same time that another firearms term, 'snap shot', also entered photographic discourse. The movement of these two terms from one distinct discourse to another may be coincidental, but it does show an awareness of the camera's ability to take something of its target, as a weapon might. If this is inverted, it suggests that Adams is not talking to Suu but to General Loan, in which the words have a decidedly different meaning. 'Shooting a prisoner,' in its double context here, makes for good photographs – award winning ones in Adams' case, supporting a popular maxim of the American press in that 'if it bleeds, it leads'. The image and the speech give no indication as to which reading is intended, thus it is for the reader to decide for themselves.

The use of the double-frame is not something that is common in comics, as this format shifts the reader's focus. We are not only watching the events take place but we are also watching the watchers. Not only are we given the action, but also the reaction. For a readership who was not present at this event and has no idea what it must have felt like to be there, the shifting focus allows us to understand the position of the observers. Adams is evidently shocked and fascinated by this event and the reader is prompted to feel likewise. However, the meta-narrative is called to attention here. The reader is reminded, through the frame of the camera's lens, that what we are seeing is mediated by someone, in the case of this image, by Adams; in the case of the wider text, by Murray and Golden. Not only are we given unique insight in order to draw us towards the traumatic experience captured here, both on film and paper, but we are also reminded of the mediated nature of everything we see.

This image is metaleptical.[38] Metalepsis involves the interplay of two or more narrative levels and the double-frame allows for this to occur. If Adams is the creator of the image-event then he sits at the extradiegetic level; that is, he is in the position of the image's

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narrator. This is attested to by the fact that Adams' hands and camera frame the image as a whole and thus create the double-frame within the main frame. The image-event itself – the action within the narrative – exists at the metadiegetic level, whereby there is something 'bigger than the picture'. Adams, as photographer, is creating the story, choosing how to frame it and take it at the precise moment of his choice. The photograph itself, as encapsulated in the camera's lens, is the story being told. Thus the collision of extradiegetic and metadiegetic narratives creates metalepsis. Traumatic ruptures are, as I have previously mentioned, often characterised by fractured or clotted temporal experiences – the temporal shifts that are at play in a metaleptical image therefore mimic these experiences. Similarly, these multiple viewpoints mimic an 'out-of-body' style break with reality that can occur in a traumatised individual, thus the effects combine to imitate the destabilisation of a traumatic rupture.

Moving away from the individual experience of trauma, the temporal aspect of this photograph's chronotope is narrow – only the split second of the camera shutter's movement to capture the image – and this in turn narrows the spatial aspect. However, the overarching chronotope of Vietnam encompasses a broad spatio-temporal area that this photograph does not condense. What it does do, however, is to allow an actual and intensely iconic event to be represented in *The 'Nam* to act as a foothold for readers, rooting the text in its historical context and giving validation to its accuracy. Thus, the inclusion of this photograph has a different function within this text in contrast to Torres' representation of 'Falling Man'. Whereas Torres' personal history and the unknown final acts of her husband is inextricably tied to the photograph, 'Saigon Execution' ties a whole cast of characters to a wider conflict, though not necessarily to the specific event photographed.

A photograph relies on an audience – one does not typically take a photograph of something to then hide it away. The displaying of a photograph in a public place (be it a physical display in an exhibition or a reproduction in the media) moves the image into the public sphere. An event that had previously been viewed by a limited number of people can be (almost instantly) viewed by millions of people internationally, despite having little or no direct link to the photographed event or person whatsoever. Publication, in a sense, removes the historical and narrative context. However, a photograph can act as a bridge between the public and private spheres. What is, at its basic level, a photograph of a man being shot becomes symbolic of a much wider conflict in the act of viewing. The various perspectives of the event – victim, photographer, shooter, witness – create a traumatic experience that is multi-layered. In these representations of conflict, traumatic temporality, which can be both fractured and frozen, unites all viewers in the static moment of the photograph; time becomes collective and connecting.

This creation of a collective traumatic time is not strictly metaleptical. Though the image-narrative begins to exist on a separate narrative level to the event itself by the fact it becomes a representative image of a much wider event, the collective trauma that arises from it pauses time. Temporality becomes both cohesive and coagulated. The image is a freeze-frame on the event. In this respect, photographic representations of conflict span the public and private spheres to create a traumatic chronotope that is, paradoxically, both sticky and fractured, disconnecting and reconnecting.

For Art Spiegelman, one of the key aspects of comics is:

> ...the fact that moments in time are juxtaposed. In a story that is trying to make chronological and coherent the incomprehensible, the juxtaposing of past and present insists that past and present are always present – one does not displace the other the way it happens in film.[39]

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Comics, then, is a form in which time cannot move in typical chronological patterns by the very nature of its form. Whereas in film the viewer sees one period of time at once, in comics the reader can see all panels on the page (or double page spread) simultaneously. This fact alone alters the way in which comics as a form works on a temporal level. Spiegelman goes on to define comics as 'an essentialised form of diagramming a narrative movement through time'.[40] This definition speaks to the creative (and in most cases reductive) process that goes into the creation of each narrative arc and panel, the selection and construction of each moment and its relationship to those around it, trimming away all but what is necessary. Applying the filter of traumatic representation to a form with an already atypical relationship to time exacerbates the existing temporal issues. As this article discusses, issues of temporality and personal chronology are crucial factors in the development of a traumatic neurosis. For many sufferers of a traumatic rupture the chronological disruption is the most debilitating and obvious of the symptoms that are experienced. This disruption is also one of the easiest to represent in the comics form due to its grammatical thread – the transitions and movement of time across the gutters. Therefore, the recreation of the trauma for the reader is further exacerbated by the fact that so much of the construction of the narrative's chronology is dependent on the reader.

Notes

[1] It is important to note here that 'comics' is typically used as a singular abstract noun (as 'politics' is) to refer to the entire form or industry. Hence I talk about 'the comics form' or 'comics creators'. This is usually employed to avoid the unintentional consequences of using the adjective 'comic', which implies comedic content. By this definition, then, 'comics is' is a grammatically allowable construction and a widely accepted term when discussing the form. However, 'comic' is used as a singular concrete noun to refer to a comic book, for example.

[2] One of the most striking examples of this technique can be seen in 'Unreal', part of an anthology published to raise money for 9/11 charities (2002). The first page shows Superman using his powers to stop a space shuttle from crashing into a satellite. However, on the second page, according to Smith and Goodrum, 'we see that the first page is metadiagetic; it is a Superman comic held by a child being carried from the burning WTC by a fireman' (Smith and Goodrum, 2011: 322). Page 1 shows us only a superhero comic; this page on its own is unremarkable. Page 2 zooms out from the pages of the boy's comic, making the panel transitions jarring and uncomfortable. It is presented in such a way as to necessitate the reader to turn the page in order to complete the narrative. Put crudely, in this context the page turn creates the 'punch line'. The punch line of the second page destabilises our reading, mimicking the traumatic rupture.

[3] Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughter-house Five* (London: Vintage, 1991).

[4] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* (London: Vintage, 2002) p. 68.

[5] Perhaps the most extreme disruption of personal time that can occur in the wake of a traumatic event is catatonia, in which the individual experiences an extreme loss of motor skills. Some catatonic patients hold rigid poses for hours at a time, as if they are paused. However, this does not occur in all traumatised individuals. Some studies suggest that it affects less than 2% of patients, however, these statistics are debateable (FDA, 2010).

[6] Cathy, Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 61.

[7] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 31.

[8] Cathy, Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* p. 4.

[9] Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 5.

[10] Groensteen, *The System of Comics,* p. 28.

[11] Groensteen, *The System of Comics,* p. 63.

[12] Groensteen, *The System of Comics,* p.63

[13] Groensteen, *The System of Comics,* p.63

[14] Groensteen, *The System of Comics,* p. 35.

[15] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), pp. 101-2.

[16] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel: From the Greek Novel to Modern Fiction'. *Journal of Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature,* 3 (1978), p. 493.

[17] Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 201-2.

[18] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel', p. 521.

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[19] Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel', p. 493.

[20] Bakhtin uses the example of the Greek 'novel of ordeal' (including *Aethiopica*, *Clitophon and Leucippe* and *Ephesiaca*) to show how the road forms the basic structure of the novel (1978: 495). He writes that as 'the action of the plot unfolds against a broad geographical background', movement of time and space becomes inextricably linked and, thus, the novel's structure is formed entirely around this spatial movement (1978: 500).

[21] Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin,* p. 214.

[22] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel', p. 523.

[23] Brian Michael Bendis, and Scott Morse. 'Moment of Silence: A True Story'. *A Moment of Silence* (New York: Marvel, 2002), pp. 30-6.

[24] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel', p. 493.

[25] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Forms of Time and the Chronotopos in the Novel', p. 523.

[26] Consider Huynh Cong 'Nick' Ut's photograph of children, burned by Napalm, running naked down the street.

[27] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 76-7.

[28] According to *The New York Times* archives in 2003.

[29] Alissa Torres, *American Widow* (New York: Villard, 2008), p. 197.

[30] When the images fill an entire page to the edge without a border, it is called a 'bleed'.

[31] Torres. *American Widow,* p. 46.

[32] Torres. *American Widow,* p. 196.

[33] Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others,* p. 53.

[34] Eddie Adams, *Saigon Execution*. Photograph (Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1968).

[35] Doug Murray, and Mike Golden, *The 'Nam Volume 3* (New York: Marvel, 2011), p. 93.

[36] 'Mainstream' is a term used to refer to comics from publishers such as DC, Marvel and Dark Horse. They are usually, but not always, concerned with superheroes.

[37] 'Suu' is in reference to Vo Suu, a fellow photographer.

[38] Metalepsis is a somewhat complex term, primarily used by Gérard Genette in his work *Narrative Discourse* (1972). Genette proposes that narrative occurs in levels. The main plot of the story occurs at the extradiegetic level; the events within the story are intradiegetic. An embedded narrative, for example a character telling a story within the body of the main narrative, sits at the metadiegetic level. According to Genette, metalepsis is a method of playing with variations in narrative level in order to create an effect of illusion or disquietude.

[39] Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* (New York: Pantheon, 2011), p. 165.

[40] Spiegelman. *MetaMaus,* p. 168.

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Biography

Harriet Earle is a PhD candidate at Keele University, under the supervision of Dr James Peacock. Her research focuses on traumatic representation and conflict in American comics published since the end of the Vietnam War. She is especially interested in the comics form and artistic techniques – and how the form demands a new way of reading that can assist the author in their recreation of trauma.