

8-9-2019

# ***Bleeding into Space: Environmental Violence, Serialized Trauma, and Extradiegetic Space in Brian Wood's Comic *The Massive****

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## **Recommended Citation**

Rozier, Dustin C., "*Bleeding into Space: Environmental Violence, Serialized Trauma, and Extradiegetic Space in Brian Wood's Comic *The Massive**" (2019). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 784.  
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.802>

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*Bleeding into Space:*  
Environmental Violence, Serialized Trauma, and Extradiegetic Space  
in Brian Wood's Comic *The Massive*  
By: Dustin C. Rozier

After first encountering climate politics and policies while researching a graphic text on former French president Jacques Chirac, French cartoonist Philippe Squarzoni, a prominent author engaging with events like the Yugoslavian War and Israel-Palestine conflict, described himself as confronting a problem that "...I couldn't do ... justice in a few pages..." Encouraged by his own ignorance of this grave issue, Squarzoni spent six years working on a part-memoir part-climate change graphic novel where he detailed both the actual science surrounding climate change and his personal experiences facing the overwhelming data. In 2012 the graphic novel *Saison Brune*—translated as "Brown Season" and a clear echo of Rachel Carson's pivotal green movement text *Silent Spring*—won l'Academie Francaise Leon de Rosen Prize, and was later translated and published in the U.S. as *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey Through The Science* (Bernard). Of course, this was far from the first example of politically conscious comics, as mainstream comic artists continuously interacted with political issues throughout various cultural milieus up until the monumental publishing of Art Spiegelman's MAUS, which won a special Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Since then, graphic novels and comic series have garnered serious scholarly attention, constituting a field that began with special issues in scholarly journals and now includes its own academic publications and conferences. Graphic texts consistently appear in many classrooms across a variety of disciplines, such as English, Japanese, and French literature courses, as well as Women's Studies, Black Studies, and other interdisciplinary fields.

At the same time as Philippe Squarzoni was working on *Climate Changed*, American comics author Brian Wood finished his politically charged text *DMZ* with Portland, Oregon-based publisher Vertigo. The text envisioned a second civil war in the United States and the subsequent creation of a Dematerialized Zone in Manhattan. Already working with content fraught with political tensions, Wood then began composing *The Massive*, where he creates a world in which the events Squarzoni detailed in *Climate Changed* have cataclysmically occurred: an environmental collapse of our climate, labeled “The Crash,” resulting in tsunamis, earthquakes, underwater landslides, sea level rises, and general apocalyptic shifts in the world from the drastic environmental change. This comic book series follows the radical environmentalist group “The Ninth Wave” as the remaining crew members of their ship the *Kapital* search for their sister ship *The Massive* in the aftermath of the events they fought tirelessly to prevent. The narrative’s protagonists and creators of The Ninth Wave, Captain Callum Israel, Mag Nagendra, and Mary, all originally hail from postcolonial states before they turned to international mercenary groups and only later became pacifists and environmentalists as they work through their own violent pasts. As they seek *The Massive* throughout the course of the series, the trauma from their previous lives slips into the present and forces them to face their pasts in the wake of an unparalleled ecological disaster.

Because *The Massive* is a comic book series, which consists of serialized issues with both an individual and collective narrative structure, the text must work to both maintain the overall content of the series while telling smaller stories within each issue. In *The Massive*, each issue works to situate the reader within the framework of the story through flashbacks of individual characters and the climate apocalypse, thus concurrently offering graphic images of both the horrifying present and the chilling past. These flashbacks, reflecting both individual and

collective trauma, place the reader in a precarious position in relation to space and its importance within the comic medium. Specifically, the moments of environmental trauma are deliberately emphasized for the reader, as they appear in what Pascal Lefèvre calls “extradiegetic space” which he describes as “...the material space that surrounds the individual panels: not only the whites between the panels, but also the real space in which the reader is located” (160). To utilize this space accordingly, the artists must make effective use of framing in panel compositions, page layouts, bleeds, and stylistic choices, thus working to construct the extradiegetic space in which the reader resides and ultimately making them susceptible to the environmental trauma the text supplies. Therefore, the repetitiveness of the serialized format in *The Massive* not only shows a linear progression of the story but operates like the recurring nature of traumatic events, thus exposing the reader to environmental violence and trauma in a format unparalleled by other mediums and ultimately requiring the reader to produce modes of empathy and agency through the trespassing of the comic into the extradiegetic space of their own world.

To understand fully how trauma will be dictated in this work, a direct understanding of Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma from their text *Unclaimed Experience* is the best method by which to investigate the unique ways trauma manifests in the text: “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). In *The Massive*, the traumatic flashbacks of environmental violence appear in over fifteen of the thirty issues, beginning strongly with six instances in the first ten issues, followed by sporadic appearances filtered between individual character flashbacks. These flashbacks regularly distinguish themselves via muted background

colors like sepia, green, and blue, which allows violent images like explosions, gunfire, and blood to alter the tone dramatically. Furthermore, they primarily occur at the beginning of the issues in one to three page scenes, but during multiple instances they appear in the middle of issues, thus corresponding to issue-specific narrative moments and the sporadic nature of traumatic flashbacks.

Addressing trauma in comics specifically, Hillary Chute, a prominent comic theorist, has discussed the ways comics can address traumatic narratives in her article “Comics Form and Narrating Lives”: “Comics can express life stories, especially traumatic ones, powerfully because it makes literal the presence of the past by disrupting spatial and temporal conventions to overlay or palimpsest past and present” (109). Chute consistently maintains that the comic form is an excellent medium to display trauma, drawing on some of the canonical traumatic theory in the field and demonstrating how the comic series works in liaison with these modes of thought. Chute’s argument is strengthened by the insightfulness of Wood and the artists of *The Massive* (who vary between issues) as they work to create a sense of understanding for the reader through trauma by which they can contemplate and empathize with the condition into which the world has evaporated. Formally, this connection with the reader is achieved through scenes of flashbacks during issues where various Crash-related events around the world are visually and verbally explained, focalizing themselves as small narrative moments before or during individual issues. Therefore, through the narrative format by which these moments are displayed, they effectively become traumatic flashbacks to which the reader is forced to bear witness, through their encounter with the text. In these cases, traumatic flashbacks appear at various times throughout the series, generally at the beginning of issues but sometimes in the middle, and their appearances highlight the way in which this type of environmental trauma should affect a reader

who sits in a geo-political moment in which the events of *The Massive* are on the horizon due to the actions of humans during the Anthropocene.

Returning to Caruth, she argues that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). The Crash itself is a direct example of this type of a traumatic event, as both the characters and reader are aware of its beginning, but not the cause, while continuously being plagued by traumatic memories. For the characters, this occurs based upon both their own pasts and their actions within the post-Crash world; but, for the reader, one who exists within the extradiegetic space of the text and the narrative, the traumatic flashbacks centered on environmental violence both pre and post-Crash work to frustrate the space the reader inhabits and further attempts to affect the reader by confronting them with the types of traumatic events which led to this environmental state.

To represent this trauma accordingly in the text, stylistic choices become paramount, along with the acute use of space on the page. Pascal Lefèvre’s argues for the significance of extradiegetic and diegetic space in “The Construction of Space in Comics,” arguing that “[e]ach reader is confronted with a particular extradiegetic space of the comic book itself, with a particular organization of the space on each page, and with a particular representation of the fragmented diegetic space in a series of panels. During his reading process the reader tries to cope with these various aspects of space and to make meaning of it all” (161). Because comics rely so heavily upon the use of space on the page, which differs from mediums like film, prose, and poetry, the writer and artist are capable of creating alternative methods of visualizing via the hybrid word-image medium by which the reader can effectively empathize with the characters

and the narrative. Thus, by not giving the reader a thorough understanding of the Crash from the beginning of *The Massive*, the artists work to deliver a conception of the world in a traumatic framework that replicates the character's own experience via the flashbacks in the text, thus mimicking the same traumatic flashbacks the characters experience.

This conception is done through the framing chosen by the artists, which Lefèvre discusses as a particularly “powerful tool” available to comics artists: “by limiting the scope for the viewer and therefore the available information, the artist can cause a reader to make wrong inferences” (158). This eradicates any vision of an omnipotent reader, one who understands a world which the characters do not, and instead places the reader in a position which resembles the characters where both character and reader have but few moments of clarity beyond their own experiences. To do this, these traumatic moments must differ stylistically from the rest of the text to deliver both narrative impact and to defuse any notions of confusion for the reader upon intercepting these moments. For Lefèvre, this means “A drawer does, of course, a lot more than just deliver depth cues: the style of his drawing is also of paramount importance in the construction of space. A drawer does not only depict something, but expresses in his drawing at the same time a philosophy, a vision: implicit in every drawing style is a visual ontology, i.e., a definition of the real in visual terms (Rawson, 1987: 19)” (159). One method that the artists of *The Massive* employ to facilitate this conception of space is the overlaying of past and present via the panels on the page.

Because the flashback scenes of *The Massive* rely so heavily upon style, Lefèvre's argument about artistic choices enlighten the text's method of using traumatic stylistic signatures: “Consequently the form of the drawing does influence the manner the reader will experience and interpret the image: the viewer cannot look at the object-in-picture from another point of view

than the one the picture offers; he is invited to share the maker's mode of seeing, not only in the literal, but also in the figurative sense (Peters, 1981: 14)" (159). Each of these graphic flashbacks of the world in *The Massive* push the reader into the figurative lens of the artists, where they share a vision of a plausible world based upon current trends in human interference in nature. Therefore, the reader both physically and emotionally experiences these scenes while reading, but simultaneously is pushed to question the possibility of these events occurring within their own world. With the acute use of bleeds in these flashbacks, the reader's space, or the extradiegetic space, is infringed upon by the graphic scenes of the comic, working both verbally through the ominous narration in the captions and visually via the visual artistic depictions on the page.

Because *The Massive* centers around what is thought to be a singular environmental tragedy and goes on to depict the world before, during, and after environmental collapse, its representation of environmental violence is arguably more apparent in the text than personal violence. In *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon famously describes climate violence as that which occurs so slowly and nearly invisibly that it becomes virtually unrepresentable, given contemporary society's infatuation with spectacular events. Therefore, much of Nixon's discussion centers around how this environmental violence can be made apparent through art, where he says: "The representational challenges are acute, requiring creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects" (15). However, in the text, *The Ninth Wave* is an internationally famed group for their efforts of ecological preservation, which forced them into a limelight at times for their radical conservation actions. By viewing *The Ninth Wave* as an artistic product of the narrative, we can theorize that, perhaps, if they were able to construct a spectacle around



their radical ecological perseverance then the possibility of visibility per Nixon's argument would be achievable. However, they are only narrative tools, but perhaps in this mode they, or *The Massive* in general, can work to create a sense of representation for environmental violence.

In relation to our current state and outside of the narrative arc of *The Massive*, where various mediums of art are searching for adequate ways to conceive of climate violence and the radical changes brought about by the Anthropocene, the hybrid word and image form of comics offers a new avenue for this work. As Nixon argues, "To intervene representationally requires that we find both the iconic symbols to embody amorphous calamities and the narrative forms to infuse them with dramatic urgency" (15). Because of comics' ability to transcend time in multiple ways via the use of panel composition and page layout during its narrative process, many issues of Wood's *The Massive* work to incorporate past transgressions of humans in the Anthropocene into the current fractious state of reality in which the characters find themselves. The artists utilize their signature traumatic method to display these moments, oftentimes working outside linear time and instead opting to show various time periods, locations, and events without any pattern, thus doubling the cruel reality of traumatic flashbacks.

Specifically, during the twenty-fourth issue titled "Sahara: Crusaders," there is a three page sequence that dictates past offenses of humans during the Anthropocene that first created individual, then overall, environmental collapse. These three pages, the first two consisting of three tiered panels and the last a full splash page, depict several key moments in the history of environmental crisis. The first shows an 1830 European cityscape and the beginning of Industrialization; second, to 1502 on the Guajira Peninsula with conquistadors landing on a beach; third, to 1868 in Wyoming as workers toil over the transcontinental railroad; fourth, to 1946 and a landscape panel of the nuclear testing on the Bikini Atoll; fifth, to 1974 Appalachia

over a coal mine; sixth, a large collection of thumbnails from the 1984 Bhopal incident; and lastly, the seventh is a full bleed page of the abandoned Chernobyl plant in Pripyat, Ukraine in 1986, with a nuclear warning sign in the forefront of the page (130-3, Appendix I). Though this section comes in the beginning of a later issue after various traumatic flashbacks, it demonstrates a similarly fragmented and disjointed temporality, flashing to multiple points in time outside of a traditional chronological order. In doing so, this section displays how the comic medium is not tied to linear time like other mediums and is instead free to utilize the strength of the page to manipulate space in a format which mimics the incoherence in which traumatic repetition operates.

Though these various stylistic choices have thematic consequences, there are some flashbacks that employ all of the conventions at once to maximize the effect of the reader's connection with the climate based trauma in the text. This occurs during the end of the sixth issue titled, "Micronesia," and features multiple points throughout time of Anthropocene influenced violence. This flashback employs three pages of two scenes a piece, each of which utilizes one of the stylistic choices of grayscale, sepia, green, and blue to display human inflected violence upon the Earth (Appendix II). Furthermore, each panel also includes red text detailing specifically what the picture is displaying, beginning with a grayscale image of a group of whalers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century standing around a slain whale on a beach. This gives way to two panels that are framed via the telescope sights of a battleship or submarine, thus showing a view of two scenes of naval warfare during the First and Second World Wars and filtered with a blue hue. The next page carries the same color scheme as the previous panels, but begins with a massive mushroom cloud exploding, along with text eliciting the following dates and locations: "Bikini Atoll, 1946; Montebello Islands, 1952; Christmas Islands, 1958; Novaya

Zemlya, 1961; Fangataufa Atoll, 1968” (Wood 167-9, II). The destruction of these test sites are not lost on the reader, especially with the decision of the artists to utilize one image to effectively display multiple locations throughout time and space. This shows the anthropocentric lenses of the military and government officials conducting these tests who, as humans, only saw their tests being conducted and instead ignored the authenticity of each individual site they destroyed during their nuclear projects.

The following panel, just below the nuclear destructions at various islands, displays hundreds of dead fish in the ocean following an oil spill, detailed as, “Arabian Gulf Oil Sabotage Kuwait, 1991” (Wood II). At first, the multitude of fish are indistinguishable, but the artists chose to offer another panel floating above which features a zoomed-in image of a deceased fish’s face. Just like the other panels, all of these bleed off of the page, and due to carefully articulated page layout, the reader’s eyes are drawn to this image of the dead fish in the floating panel (II).

From here, the style then shifts to the red hue that is common in many of the flashbacks and displays the “Deepwater Horizon Spill Gulf of Mexico, 2010” (Wood VI). In this scene, the fiery remains of the oil rig are falling into the ocean, thus displaying the horrific display this event had both upon the human lives lost during the disaster and the ecological ramifications of the event. Finally, switching back to the blue hue, is a scene of the “Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster Coastal Japan, 2011” (Wood II). This panel reveals three humans in radioactive suits in the foreground, while in the background a ship that has run aground is tangled in powerlines atop structures and cars. Because this three page sequence commences after a flashback scene of one of the protagonists, Mag, its beginning and ending with bleeding panels moves it away from the past of the protagonist in the text, a fictional character, and instead has the scenes trespass upon

the world of the reader, one who lives in a world where these events occurred and has seen their ramifications both in the past and present.

However, one of the most shocking instances of graphic violence occurs in the opening sequence of “Polaris: Megalodon” as exposition is offered through text and visual representations of environmental violence (Appendix III). It begins with a four-panel page, all appearing horizontally and depicting two man-made and two natural catastrophes from the Crash. The first shows a nuclear detonation near Chile, before moving to a volcanic eruption near Iceland that “destabilized the Mid-Atlantic Ridge”, causing further destruction underwater. Moving to the opposite side of the world is a reference to an earthquake in the South China Sea; compared to the previous two panels, it is relatively stagnant, possibly depicting the aftermath with a large mountain-like structure taking up the panel. In the final panel is an exploding ship, sinking into the ocean, depicting first the “piracy and war” that follow from the lack of social order and the underwater noise pollution that causes such devastating effects to aquatic animals (III).

Throughout the text, organisms in the ocean undergo violent fates, as the massive amount of noise have calamitous effects on animals that rely on echolocation, depicted in the text as through the suffering of various breeds of sharks, whales, and Bluefin. The following page of this issue has a massive panel that bleeds off of the page with a shark opening its mouth wide in what is meant to be pain, with the caption reading, “Bathing the ocean with noise, membrane-shattering noise that circles and re-circles the planet. Endless, painful, murderous noise” (Wood 105, III). Following this bleeding panel is another with scores of what are detailed as Bluefin fish lying dead on a beach in Mauritania, with the following panel detailing dead whales, corpses floating alongside one another and barely distinguishable. Finally, with the only level of color

uses in the sepia-styled panels, is an image of a child playing on a beach, the familiar pail and shovel of sand activities, but instead of water the child is covered in blood that is washing onto the shore and dyeing the sand red (III). Though the majority of these panels have closed off borders, with only the image of the shark bleeding off of the page, the page layout is carefully articulated so the bright red of the blood will pull the reader's eyes towards the panel. Because of the full spread of the comic page, the artists are able to capture the reader's attention with the use of this panel at the bottom right of this scene, consistently pulling their attention towards its violence. Unlike other mediums, this unique ability is possible through the comic medium and amplifies its capability to display these traumatic scenes, which work to push the reader into the world of the Crash.

These previous readings operated to display both non-human and Anthropocene violence through the signature stylistic choices of the authors, along with appearing as traumatic flashbacks throughout the text. However, though they occurred intermittently in the text and displayed some of the greatest examples of graphic representation of environmental violence, they still operated within the entire textual framework of traumatic flashbacks which begins in the initial issues of *The Massive*. The first actual instance of the issue-opening repetition that occurs throughout the text appears in the middle of the first issue, "Landfall: Kamchatka." An opening panel informs the reader of the environmental catastrophes that forced the world to succumb to its current state: three pages with three-tiered panels each display islands that have disappeared in the South Pacific, cargo ships overturning from waves in the Atlantic, perpetual oil rig fires off the coast of California, mass suicides of bluefin tuna on the Coast of Mauritania, terrorist attacks on Manila fish markets, and culminating in *The Ninth Wave's* viewing of Antarctic ice tumbling into the ocean (Appendix IV). These panels utilize a sepia overlay which

appears throughout the text when discussing past events, thus setting a signature tone reminiscent of a haziness in memory recollection. However, each panel also bleeds off of the page into the extradiegetic space of the reader, once again performing the inevitable extension of the trauma of the text into the world of the reader.

For example, the second flashback that occurs in the series is in the second issue titled “Landfall: HK” and it overlays past and present superbly in the beginning and end of the scene. The first two panels consist of the protagonist Callum Israel reaching for light switches to go silent as they are being stalked by a pirate vessel and, as he hits the switches, the scene dissolves into a flashback that discusses the collapse of global magnetic fields and the subsequent raining down of geomagnetic storms and satellites. Each panel is a red, hazy color that displays the destruction of these past events as the captions narrate how ships sank due to water pressure changes and the Suez canal flowed back into the sea, leaving ships stranded in the sand. The scene ends with a return to the present and an image of the *Kapital* sitting silently in a sea of fog, waiting patiently (Appendix V). By juxtaposing this flashback with actions in the present, and coincidentally the thematic flipping of light switches, the scene pushes the reader outside of the narrative present and gives them a second traumatic flashback of the events that occurred in the world surrounding the Crash. Furthermore, each of these flashback panels effectively bleed off of the sides of the pages, thus running into the extradiegetic space in which the reader resides (Wood 41-2, V). This is analogous with the majority of the flashbacks from the text, thus causing these traumatic moments to run into the world of the reader and cause a correlative reckoning with their own actions within a world fraught with climate tensions and catastrophe.

As the events of the Crash are detailed throughout the text, the sepia overlay is one style employed to discuss the tragedies that occur—whether they are to the oceans or land, humans or

animals, on earth or in space. At the end of this same issue is another flashback, one of the few times that a flashback occurs at the end of a text, but the scene uses the same sepia overlay that shows *The Ninth Wave* moving into the port of Hong Kong shortly after the Crash occurs. At first glance, the middle panel displays multiple dead orcas floating in front of the ship, while the caption boxes say, “The **sound** ...The earthquakes, the landslides, the tsunamis. Underwater shockwaves would have ruptured their eardrums, damaged their critical systems. A colony of whales gone instantly deaf and mad with pain...” (Wood 9, Appendix IV; emphasis in original). This moment in the text introduces nonhuman trauma experienced by other species that fall prey to the climate catastrophe created by the Anthropocene, thus paving the way for other instances of animal violence in the text in attempts of triggering responses from the reader.

The third sequence of flashbacks introduce the third type of style used, which is that of a dark green filter, and also introduces a new pattern of appearances in the issues. Previously, the flashbacks occurred at the beginning and end of individual issues, but in the third issue, “Unalaska,” a flashback scene appears without context at the beginning of the issue, along with another flicker in the middle, again without context. Both scenes engage with events happening around the world during the Crash and utilize a dark green background, which cause the blacks and reds in the scenes to pulse with vitality. The first panel displays a volcano erupting in Greenland, before moving to birds collapsing from the sky in Italy, and ending on an ominous view of New York City, where an electrical blackout along with the Eastern seaboard has precipitated economic chaos (Appendix VI). As if the traumatic flashback scene never occurred, the issue then moves into its normal narrative, where the characters are impervious to the flashback as a narrative construct; instead, the flashback exists solely for the reader.

Furthermore, each of the panels bleed off of the page into the extradiegetic space in which the reader exists, much like nearly all of the traumatic flashbacks that occur throughout the text.

Then, just as the narrative of the issue continues along its prescribed path, another flashback appears in the middle of the issue. This follows the same stylistic choices of the green hue, but begins with a panel that details a nuclear explosion of a British submarine in the Strait of Magellan (VI). The explosion is in bright reds and white, which clash against the green background while a green helicopter flies in the foreground of the panel. Directly below this, the last panel of the flashback depicts what is presumed to be three child soldiers in Africa standing and staring towards the reader in the panel. The caption discusses the water shortages in sub-Saharan Africa, observing that “[w]here once ‘conflict diamonds’ fueled bitter wars, a mere five liters of clean water now provides enough incentive to level a village” (Wood 10, VI). Only one of the children’s eyes are completely visible, staring into the reader with a cold, blank stare. The middle child has half of his face hidden by a ball cap, with one eye peering violently towards the reader, while the child on the far left of the panel has eyes that are shadowed, but is brandishing his Ak-47 assault rifle in the foreground of the panel. The appearance of a flashback such as this in the middle of the issue, propels the reader away from a narrative of relatively safe protagonists and plummets them into the conditions of the world in the text. Because it only occurs as one page in the middle of the issue, its jarring appearance mimics a traumatic flicker that interrupts the linear temporality of the issue’s narrative. Effectively, this works to traumatize the reader with the ecological and physical violence around the world that the characters in the text are not always prey to, but instead the reader must carry through their own reading experience.

One key intervention made by this text is its global perspective, which refuses to be constrained by Western or Global North approaches to environmental violence. In *Postcolonial*



*Witnessing*, Stef Craps critiques the Eurocentrism of canonical trauma theory and retheorizes in relation to postcolonial thought. As Craps observes,

Remarkably, however, the founding texts of the field (including Caruth's own work) largely fail to live up to this promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement. They fail on at least four counts: they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between the metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. (2)

Craps also argues for the significance in this context of other literary mediums for representing trauma and the challenges of bearing witness. In this way, he echoes Hillary Chute's theorizing about the medium, along with other comic scholars.

*The Massive*'s foregrounding of postcolonial characters and spaces similarly complicates Eurocentric and anthropocentric perspectives on trauma. Three of the characters in this text are from former postcolonial states and, because of this, perhaps their processes of experiencing trauma differ. For example, one central protagonist named Mag is from Sri Lanka and fought in the civil war as a young soldier and at one point suffers a flashback from where he was nearly drowned by Western oil workers. Callum, the central protagonist, is a white American raised in a diplomatic family in Bangladesh, thus constituting the most intriguing case of a postcolonial experience. But the discussion by Craps is more pertinent in the sense that the Crash was a

*global* catastrophe, and the triage applied by the nations attempting to mend the state of control likely originate out of the powerful Western nations and their means of dealing with the trauma experienced by citizens of Earth (Craps 22-23).

Not only does the text display various traumatic flickers of postcolonial nations in the same hues as they use to represent the West, occasionally grayscale or green hues are employed to either amplify or de-amplify these scenes. In two key instances of flashbacks, postcolonial nations are shown to be developing new modes of living that are combatted by traditional western forms of government. There are many examples of non-Western regions throughout the text, such as a newly established dock city in a flooded Hong Kong, the black markets of Mogadishu, and the female led water convoys in Saudi Arabia. However, the most important of these regions, Moksha Station, is both a cultural reaction to trauma and an experiment in a new state of order. Once the *Kapital* moves into the Indian Ocean, they come across what is an experiment in “post-Crash human social utopia” as “a small group of political refugees, engineers, and roughnecks from the Indian subcontinent commandeer a mobile drilling rig and declare themselves a sovereign body” which eventually becomes “Moksha Station.” (Wood 16, Appendix VII). This, in effect, becomes the reversal of the neoliberal corporations that have exploited this region of the world for profit, as the members of this region reclaim liberty and create a new nation out of the rigs that were left by the companies during the Crash. This leads into a fascinating employment of the comic form, as the artists utilize the description that Sumon, the director of Moksha Station, offers about the meaning of the word “Moksha” in captions that overlay panels of previous traumatic violence to the region. The first panel displays flooding in India, followed by civil disputes in Pakistan and then a mass migration on foot from Myanmar. Then Sumon details the effects of the Crash, where oil poisoned the waters and air of

the region, before detailing how the rigs were moved together by a merchant navy to assemble Moksha station. These panels are in a green tint, like other flashbacks, where the red of explosions and fire sharply contrast the characters in the panels, the land, and the sea (VII). Moksha station is a product of, and a response to, the human and environmental disasters that accompanied the Crash.

Another instance where non-Western states take back control of their areas features in a brief page layout in the issue “Polaris: ‘Breaker’” when the *Kapital* makes its way towards war-torn Central and South America (Appendix VIII). In a flashback scene that describes the environmental violence, the first panel offers an image of a decimated forest from the clearcutting in “The Amazonia River Basin” region (VIII). Immediately following this is a local whose back is turned towards the reader, displaying an AK-47 and looking upwards towards the trees. The following two panels describe how many have left the post-Crash violence by creating vast tree villages suspended high in the rainforest, which is elegantly detailed in the final panel. These people are described as reintegrating a tribe lifestyle that is rooted in their culture, rather than attempting to exist within the post-Crash world, with a horrific example of the wars over the deep-water ports of Peru integrated into the issue. This page shows helicopters flying over a burning port city and saboteurs being shot by armed guards aboard ships when attempting to plant explosives (VIII).

Though there is both a postcolonial and neo-liberal irony in the example of Moksha station, where people stricken by violence in India, Pakistan, and Myanmar come together to reclaim an oil rig, the example in South America displays one of new hope while portraying alternative modes to representing and healing trauma. Craps’ discussion of Western based trauma inadvertently addresses a central theme in *The Massive*, which is the correlation between a single

event and an ongoing crisis in trauma theory. Craps says, “Cultural trauma theory continues to adhere to the tradition event-based model of trauma, according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event” (31). Up until the final volume of *The Massive*, both the characters and readers are led to believe the Crash was a singular event and the continuance of this environmental destruction, while utilizing the same methodic traumatic triggers as the rest of the text, continues the infringement upon the reader’s extradiegetic space.

The opening issue of the fifth volume titled “Ragnarök: Part One” begins with a page of a storm over the ocean, before a second panel where The Statue of Liberty is submerged alongside the skyline of Manhattan. The caption boxes offer this alternative present of the Crash as a singular event, as they say “It’s generally accepted that the year of the Crash began on January fourth with a lethal storm laying waste to the Cook Island chain. And that it ended in late November with the global economic crash, capping the end of eleven months of environmental havoc. That is what is accepted. This is what people believe: the Crash was a yearlong event” (Wood 7, Appendix IX). Once the reader turns the page, they are confronted with a full page spread of a massive rock lifting itself out of the ocean, with a caption box in the top left corner simply stating, “It wasn’t” (Wood 8, IX). As the reader continues into this issue, they learn that the Crash was not a singular event, and instead is continuously occurring.

Here, Nixon’s concept of slow violence once again becomes vivid: because the Crash is an environmental-based catastrophe happening throughout time, his concept of slow violence is pushed to the forefront in two key modes. The first, that environmental violence happening on a global, catastrophic scale can be brought from its neglected space of being recognized by people, but secondly, and even more importantly, that environmental violence occurring at this scale and speed continuously become more important in a collapsing world. What this does for the reader

is makes them reconcile with their own space in a world of climate change, while carrying with them into the final issues the traumatic flashbacks that have occurred throughout the text, now happening simultaneously in the narrative present.

The same traumatic indicators used throughout the text are now employed in these final issues where the violence is happening in the narrative present as opposed to its past, thus creating a heightened sense of trauma for the reader due to the immediate occurrence of events and the modes of representation which the reader has become accustomed to throughout the series. In the issue “Ragnarök: Part One” the previous panels of Earth and the ocean are sharply contrasted with images of space, a juxtaposition that portrays the vast effects of the Crash, and satellites plummet to Earth as a result of a change in the Earth’s gravitational pull (Appendix X). In the first panel, all styled with a red overlay that depicts Earth as a mass of chaos, satellites tumble into the atmosphere. These are shown in closer detail in the second panel, with an image of North and Central America, followed by the final panel that depicts a satellite bursting into flames as it enters the atmosphere.

Though the images in these panels are important, the captions offer a more detailed account of the effects of these satellites crashing on Earth, as the scope of the panels is from outside the Earth’s atmosphere looking inwards. Yet, in the final page of this issue’s opening sequence, a full splash page is utilized to describe the fiery chaos of the satellites raining down onto an urban area. Captions are placed throughout the page in an arcing motion downwards towards the bottom-right, which follows the path of the satellites that are portrayed plummeting into houses and fields. The red style is continued on this page to describe what is likely the chaos of the collisions and the explosions, with this color, like many of the other colors used in the beginning

sequences of the issues, giving the opening pages the memory like juxtaposition to the rest of the narrative styles (X).

The issue “Ragnarök: Part Five” begins with four pages, or two spreads, of environmental disasters that are occurring to the earth a year after the Crash (Appendix XI-II). The first two pages begin with three panels on each page that are in tiers, taking up the entire page with a black background, which could symbolize the graveness of the situation and the place it is situated within the psyche. Each of the panels have coordinates and locations listed in the top left corner in yellow letters, adding an officialness and displaying the ability of the comic’s scope to branch out of the normal narrative lens.

The first panel has four cyclones colliding over what is described as Western Europe, despite land not being visible. The next panel is the eruption of Mt. Fuji in Japan. The third is what seems to be levees breaking into the ocean in Hong Kong, which is also a location the characters travel to in the text. The following page moves to a tidal wave about to crash into India and a few people are drawn faceless and fleeing from the waves in the middle of the panel. After this is a burning in a rainforest in Siberia, followed by rain and water covering what is detailed as the Western Sahara. All of these are visible in the full page spread location and the scope of the panels continuously moves in and out in a zooming fashion to display the events (XI). The next page begins with an indicator of North America with multiple mushroom clouds, a likely indicator of nuclear explosions, or at least massive bombs. This is a man-made destruction unlike the previous panels, though obviously spurred by the environmental events. Next is a building collapsing into the Black Sea, followed by another zoom out shot of central and south America covered in water and broken into several landmasses. The following page, which brings the reader back into the narrative scope is instead two tiers of three panels, unlike the previous three

tiers of one panel each. Each of these panels depict a satellite image of various landmasses, to include Qatar, Finland, Manhattan, Incheon, and Great Britain, all encountering both water and what appears to be ice colliding into landmasses. The final panel returns to the more familiar style of the narrative, depicting a boat in the ocean with a caption that says “Don’t Move” which is a command shouted to the characters from a place outside the panel (Wood 119, XII). All of these panels bring the reader through the chaos that is occurring simultaneously in the text, with the command in the caption box also bleeding into the space of the reader, along with the graphic images. The command “Don’t Move” is addressed to characters in the text and is an excellent use of the page layout and panel composition to bring the scene through various spaces and times, but this command also interrupts the extradiegetic space of the reader, displaying the incredible abilities of the hybrid word and image form in pushing both literal and figurative boundaries of representation.

What *The Massive* has done up to this point in the text is create a new mode for trauma representation in which the reader becomes culpable in the creation of the world that the characters inhabit. Because of the reader’s own place within a world of climate change, the traumatic flashbacks act as warnings of a possible outcome to the Anthropocene. But, because of the cultural background in which comics was, and oftentimes still is, considered a lower artform, the positioning of this text within discussions of climate change, trauma theory, and artistic depictions of environmental violence and trauma are still susceptible to doubt. This reflects the potential of comics to offer a different perspective on the representation of trauma. Craps cites Luckhurst’s critique of “trauma theory’s sole focus on anti-narrative texts,” pointing out that “the crisis of representation caused by trauma generates narrative *possibility* just as much as narrative *impossibility*. Beyond the narrow canon of high-brow, avant-garde texts, he reminds us, ‘a wide

diversity of high, middle and low cultural forms have provided a repertoire of compelling ways to articulate that apparently paradoxical thing, the trauma narrative' (Luckhurst 83)" (Craps 41). Not only does this tie into the comments by Hillary Chute and their reference to how memoir and autobiographical comics were discussing trauma in ways other texts were not, it also illuminates how *The Massive* is a text that offers "narrative possibility" because it is centered around a narrative that is plausible, but preventable. The artists' choices to render the world of the characters into traumatic awakenings for the reader grant hope and, instead of the bleeding into extradiegetic space as means of traumatizing, these moments can offer agency to a reader to act against environmental violence in their own world.

Often when trauma is depicted in art, the text functions as a mode of coping, understanding, and sharing. But it also begs the question of whether experiencing another's trauma in art can grant the viewer a mode of empathy which may deter or prevent further trauma from occurring. Because the comic series *The Massive* details a representation of trauma in fiction, outside of the past of traditional autobiographies or memoirs, perhaps it offers instead a possibility of viewing ecological violence and trauma in a mode which can be prevented, unlike traditional narrative employments of trauma. In this way, the text instills trauma in a mode not necessarily meant to frighten the reader, but instead working to show simultaneously how the comic medium can represent this type of violence and trauma alongside granting the ability of a reader to act upon the events of the text that bled into the extradiegetic space of their world. In turn, this compels the scholarship of contemporary comics, environmental, and trauma theories to ask what effects texts can and should produce in a reader, and whether possibilities of action and change are possible through artistic experience. Craps references the theorist Karyn Ball who "...has argued in relation to the United States context, 'If trauma studies might be said to have a



political and ethical task it would be to continue to move beyond the iconic logic of the ‘unprecedented’ [associated with the Holocaust] and to employ the strategy of comparison in order to forge links among traumatic histories that would raise Americans’ historical consciousness and promote their sense of civic responsibility” (15). In closing, this requires trauma studies to address the possibility of a variety of new media offering alternative avenues of trauma representation, alongside granting empathy and agency to readers. By addressing the unique capabilities of a medium like comics, trauma studies can uniquely position itself to reassess its platform of representational studies and look for more methods of inquiry, engagement, and responsibility from readers.

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