Construction of Place Identity through Fragmentation in

Alan Moore’s Watchmen

Construcción de la identidad a un lugar a través de fragmentación en Alan Moore’s Watchmen

Alexis Reyes Villalobos

alexisreyesv@gmail.com

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile


1 This article is based on the research carried out for the dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA in English Literature and Linguistics from Pontificia Universidad Católica, Chile. (Este artículo está basado en la investigación llevada a cabo de acuerdo a los requerimientos para obtener el grado de Licenciado en Letras, con mención Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile).

2 Licenciado en Letras, con mención en Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas y Periodista, siendo ambos grado académico y título profesional de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

ABSTRACT

Alan Moore’s Watchmen will be used as source material to analyze the idea of identity in regard to urban space. In Watchmen, New York has been portrayed as a doppelgänger of real New York: the general frame of its identity has been used as the outer layer of its fictional version, but some of its inner elements have been reorganized, conceptualized, and radically modified, so as to produce new meaning and an uncanny effect by a process of de-familiarization of the familiar. The inner elements the city
depicted in Watchmen to be analyzed include: their inhabitants, the diverse sub-places and experiences they represent, time and historical background.

Key words
Identity, city, space, place, doppelgänger

RESUMEN
Watchmen de Alan Moore será usado como material de análisis para abordar el tema de la identidad, en relación a los espacios urbanos. En Watchmen, Nueva York ha sido representada como un doppelgänger de la verdadera ciudad de Nueva York: el marco general de su identidad a sido utilizado solo como la capa exterior de su versión ficcional, pero algunos de sus elementos interiores han sido reorganizados, conceptualizados y radicalmente modificados, para así producir nuevos significados y un efecto de extraño a través de un proceso de de-familiarización de lo familiar. Los elementos internos de la ciudad representada en Watchmen incluyen: sus habitantes, los diversos sub-espacios y experiencias que representan, el tiempo y el contexto histórico.

Palabras clave
Identidad, ciudad, espacio, lugar, doppelgänger

In ancient Greece people used to understand the polis as a particular space where their life as citizens took place. In order to become citizens and, consequently, part of the city, each person had to seek to attain certain knowledge. This sort of knowledge was only possible to find within the city. The formative function that the city articulates in the configuration of their inhabitants’ identity is the characteristic that makes one think the city as a “place” instead of a “space” in geographical terms. As previously
stated, the city provides experiences that contribute to shape its people’s identity. It is important to state that this phenomenon does not necessarily produce heterogeneous societies. This is because of the fact that each individual is influenced in different manners by an array of diverse factors that are part of this process. Therefore, within the walls of the city, one might find different and deeper layers where fragmentation is present. Bearing this in mind, would it be possible to find the identity of a city? And if so, what would be its real identity? The sum total of cultural characteristics inherited by means of tradition; the mix of individual identities fragmented but somehow interconnected through a single paradigm; or maybe both? In order to work with the notion of identity in relation to the urban space, Alan Moore’s graphic novel *Watchmen* will be used.

*Watchmen* takes place on a alternate version of Earth’s history. In this parallel world, fictional characters known as superheroes are real but portrayed in a radically different manner than how they used to in classic comic books. They are just ordinary people wearing costumes- they have no powers. Moore conceived this story in a way that it would take familiar old-fashioned superheroes into a completely new realm. This is one of the reasons why it is possible to talk about the deconstruction of the genre. The events depicted on *Watchmen* correlate with the period of time comprehended among the 1940s to 1980s, with a special emphasis placed on the Cold War era. After having won the Vietnam War, The United States is on the verge of a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union. Costume superheroes, whose work used to be legally accepted for decades, have been outlawed by the government. Some of them have retired; others have been working for the government. The story centres on the murder of a well-know former costume hero knew as The Comedian, and the consequences that this event and the geopolitical context produce on the lives of the
inhabitants of New York, whether normal people or costume vigilantes.

New York City, as it is portrayed in *Watchmen*, is a doppelganger of the real City of New York. The general frame of New York’s identity has been used as the outer layer of its fictional version, but some of its inner elements have been reorganized, conceptualized, and radically modified, so as to produce an uncanny effect by a process of defamiliarization of the familiar. The inner elements of the city include: their inhabitants, the diverse sub-places and experiences they represent, as well as the time and context in which the city is portrayed.

In this graphic novel the reader faces characters whose identities are explicitly fragmented in the form of parallel personas. The latter characteristic also applies to the city itself. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to locate the city’s place identity within fragmentation, as opposed to the idea of a hegemonic place identity, generally produced by ideology, coercion and hierarchical powers.

The theme of place and identity is highly complex since it embraces a myriad disciplines from psychology to architecture. This wide interdisciplinary diversity makes it extremely hard to arrive to one single absolute definition. Hence, for the purpose of this paper, at this stage, identity will be regarded in general terms as the set of qualities or characteristics that makes an entity definable and recognizable and that distinguishes it from other entities of a different kind. In this regard, identity might be generally analyzed from the point of view of the self. In that case, it will be referred as self identity. Notwithstanding the fact that this term is usually explored in relationship to human beings, the concept of identity can also be extended so as to embrace other sorts of entities such as physical spaces. Edward S. Casey, in his essay “Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World” makes use of geographic and philosophic theories so as to point out the
important difference in meaning when dealing with concepts such as ‘place’ and ‘space’. “I shall presume the importance of the distinction between place and space, taking ‘space’ to be the encompassing volumetric void in which things (including human beings) are positioned and ‘place’ to be the immediate environment of my lived body – an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural.”(683) According to Casey, space is an abstract concept that comprises the physical area where elements are located. In contrast, place is a dimension that is in a way directly related to the self and its physical manifestation. He also mentions that place goes beyond the boundaries of the physical world, comprising other notions that make reference to history and culture. In order to explain the relationship between self and place, Casey quotes Heidegger stating that “place and self are intimately interlocked in the world of concrete work” (684). Taking into consideration what has been previously mentioned, one might state that place and self are related to one another in a particular relationship of interaction. In this line of thought, the nature of this type of interaction seems to affect both agents in a reciprocal manner. For example, urban space, a city, understood as a place, would configure the particular identity of each one of its inhabitants, while on the other hand, each inhabitant might also contribute to the conformation of the identity of their own city. The author considers the physical body as the basic means for this kind of interaction. Casey’s explains that:

The enactive vehicle of being-in-place is the body and its role is to serve as point of departure and as destination. This happens in two ways: as outgoing (the lived body encounters the place-world by going out to meet it) and incoming (the body also bears the traces of the places it has known) ... A body is shaped by the places it has come to know and that have come to it—come to take up residence in it, by a special kind of placial incorporation that is just as crucial to the human
The self as is the interpersonal incorporation so central to classical psychoanalytic theory. The reverse is also true: places are themselves altered by our having been in them (688).

In order to explain this relationship of interaction between spaces, places and self, Casey introduces the concept of ‘habitus’ which represents the connection among the terms previously mentioned. He states that:

Habitus is the mediatrix of place and self ... it serves as a figure of the between: above all, between nature and culture, but also between consciousness and body, self and other, mechanism and teleology, determinism and freedom, even memory and imagination ... habitus is a middle term between place and self—and, in particular, between lived placed and the geographical self. This self constituted by a core of habitudes that incorporate and continue, at both psychical and physical levels, what one has experienced in particular places. A given habitus is always enacted in a particular place and incorporates the features inherent in previous such places, all of which are linked by habitudinal bond (686).

Thus, the process of interaction that ‘habitus’ refers to (the one that occurs between place and self) takes part in the configuration of each entity, and as a consequence of that, it defines certain aspects and characteristics that are taken into account in the construction of a certain sort of identity. Therefore, under this scope, places must be far more than just a “physical places” given the fact that part of them, if not all of them, become permanent elements in the form of characteristics of particular selves. Casey expands on this idea stating that:

Habitus is also meditational in its capacity to bring together the placiality of its ongoing setting and the temporality of its recurrent re-enactment ... whenever the geographical subject is at stake, time and history.
alike have to re-enter geographical consideration. They do so most effectively in the form of habitus, which is as ineluctably temporal as it is placial in its formation and consolidation ... The generativity of habitudinal schemes is at once placial and temporal, and because of this double-sidedness the geographical subject is able to insinuate himself or herself all the more completely into the life-world of ongoing experience (686).

Casey elaborated on the way places are incorporated within self by coining the concept of Tenacity. According to this concept “Places come into us lastingly; once having been in a particular place for any considerable time—or even briefly, if our experience there has been intense—we are forever marked by that place ... the essence of a place can be compressed into a single sensation, which, being reawakened, can bring the place back to us in its full vivacity” (688).

The previous statement makes reference to the idea that the concept of place, as said before, apart from encompassing a physical dimension, also includes a temporal dimension. That is to say, places can be composed by physical space, but also by determined experiences that have occurred and lived by a subject during a certain period of time. These experiences, although being temporary, might become a permanent element in the construction of identity. Casey adds that the latter is one of the characteristics of habitus. He states that:

When I inhabit a place—whether by moving through it or staying in it—I have it in my actional purview. I also hold it by virtue of being in its ambience: first in my body as it holds onto the place by various sensory and kinesthetic means, then in my memory as I ‘hold it in mind.’ This is how the durability of habitus is expressed: by my tenacious holding onto a place so as to prolong what I experience beyond the present moment. In this way, place and self actively collude (687).
In Moore’s graphic novel *Watchmen* one can find several examples of these phenomena. In fact, most of the characters’ identities have been explicitly and radically affected by the places they have interacted to, in this case, specific areas of the city and a particular historical context. *Watchmen* devotes a considerable part of the non-linear narrative to explore the origin of the characters. Through the exploration of the characters’ past and development, the readers also look into the evolution of the socio-political context that is explicitly reflected on the depiction of the city. Furthermore, for the purpose of this paper it is necessary to expand on the context that this graphic novel portrays, bearing in mind that the difficult everyday conditions that diverse areas of the city face are part of a major struggle. The world picture presented in *Watchmen* is embedded in the context of the Cold War. This means that the global power is fragmented in two different and opposite ideologies. On one hand, The United States and on the other hand the USSR. It will be assumed that within each country the group in power, the government, tries to create hegemony throughout society so as to generate cohesion around the ideology they support. In his essay “Place Identity and Copper Mining in Sonora, Mexico” John Harner introduces the idea of place in a similar manner than Casey. He states that “place is a process, continually constructed and transformed. Place is the interaction between extralocal (global) forces, local histories and cultural constructs, and individual human agency” (661). “Place is the location in which people struggle to achieve goals and understand their existence. Through struggle, meaning is built into inanimate objects that give place symbolic significance. This meaning can become a part of social identity—a place-based identity for groups within society. Place and identity are tied together in the sociospatial dialect” (661). The difference between Casey’s ideas about place and Harner’s is that the latter introduces the concept of ‘Hegemony’ as a necessary characteristic for the creation of
what he calls place identity. According to Harner, hegemony is “a process whereby other people and groups come to actively share beliefs in meanings portrayed in the landscape by one faction” (661). That is to say, in order to create place identity, there must be a set of beliefs shared by the group of people that constitutes a place. In other words, there must be a set of characteristics that separate a particular place from others but those characteristics are dictated by a determined group of people. The result of that is hegemony, which is ultimately achieved by means of subordination. The author states that “hegemony is the active belief by subordinate groups in the values that explain their own subordination” (661). In the case of *Watchmen*, the beliefs that build up and maintain place identity, if definable, are obscure, not completely clear, rather fragmented. There are parts of society that share the beliefs of a certain group of people which is in power, but the official ideology does not entirely represent the particular interpretation that every single subject makes of it. Hegemony is built up from some type of subordination. In *Watchmen*, ideological subordination is actually mixed up with fragmentation; therefore, hegemony as such does not really happen in New York City. In the case of the United States, especially in the case of the city of New York, the predominant characteristic is fragmentation, which is opposed to hegemony. In the novel, this fragmentation is explicitly represented by superheroes, the watchmen. They are the symbols of a fragmented society that the government tries to eradicate so as to create hegemony. This group of vigilantes are just symbols of a deeper fragmentation that can be found within the layers of the city. Then, this paper proposes that the identity of the city of New York, as portrayed in *Watchmen*, is fragmentation itself. That is to say, a fragmented city with fragmented characters (even a fragmented global context) - fragmentation within fragmentation.
In order to analyse the layers of fragmentation of the city, it will be necessary to take a look at the characters of *Watchmen*. As an introduction, one can state that they resemble characters that have been previously created. In terms of aesthetics, they dress and look like any other superhero. At first glance, each one of them represents one of the stereotype characters of comic books but deep inside the reader can find important differences that will be discussed forward. This produces an uncanny effect, since the reader faces characters that are expected to be known but which are actually totally unknown. At the very beginning, Moore intended to use characters that were already created but then he realized that new characters might work better for this purpose. In an interview conducted by Jon Cooke, Moore stated "Eventually, I realized that if I wrote the substitute characters well enough, so that they seemed familiar in certain ways, certain aspects of them brought back a kind of generic super-hero resonance or familiarity to the reader, then it might work"

The original idea was to place superheroes in a credible real world. Therefore the classical concept of superhero was deconstructed according to the laws of reality. The interest was placed on real human beings who face social struggles and moral dilemmas instead of fictional beings with superhuman abilities. In his article “Behind the Mask” David Itzkoff from *The New York Times* describes *Watchmen* as: a comic that illustrates how reality can be deadlier to superheroes than Kryptonite ... If we imbue our champions with the weaknesses of ordinary mortals, Moore asks, and confine them to a cosmos where good and evil are subjective notions and right never triumphs over wrong, what's the point of having heroes at all?"Y'know, superheroes are finished," laments a hopeless news vendor who functions as the Greek chorus in "Watchmen." "These days, it's all pirates". (Itzkoff)
The previous quotation indicates the general feeling that, given the post-modern context of *Watchmen*, the era of superheroes has already passed a long time ago. The diversity of ambivalent characters in *Watchmen* gives the reader the chance to perceive the city and the world from very different, sometimes even opposing, points of view. It gives the chance to analyse the story through fragmentation. In this regard Moore stated in an interview conducted on 1988 that "what we wanted to do was show all of these people, warts and all. Show that even the worst of them had something going for them, and even the best of them had their flaws" (Moore).

It has been already mentioned that the city, as a place, exerts influence on the conformation of the characters identity. But it was also stated that the city is affected by the characteristic of their inhabitants. In this part of the analysis, the characteristics of three characters of *Watchmen*, Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan and Ozymandias, will be explored so as to provide a number of elements that, although do not completely define a fragmented identity such as the one of the fictional New York, can give certain clues. The analyses of these three different characters will also provide information about how fragmentation is depicted in the novel. Apart from that, the socio-political context in which the story takes place will be also analysed in the light of the characters’ identities.

*Watchmen* displays a wide variety of different characters whose identities are explicitly fragmented in the form of parallel personas. As a consequence, there is external fragmentation in the sense that each character represents different elements of the city, even being related to specific areas, but at the same time, there is internal fragmentation, with the coexistence of two different personas within each character. Each persona also represents distinct sides of the character’s identity. The same occurs with the city’s identity. An example of this is the correlation that manifests between the switch from citizen persona to vigilante persona and the
hours of the day. They are citizens at daylight, watchmen at night. Two different personas for two different cities. During daylight Kovacs is the man who is seen walking around New York carrying a sign that reads "The End Is Nigh," and proclaims the end of the world. At night he becomes Rorschach, an extremely right wing crime fighter who uses unorthodox methods. Ozymandias is a millionaire and model citizen during daylight but at night he is able to kill The Comedian and plot the destruction of an entire city.

Rorschach real name is Walter Joseph Kovacs, the child of a prostitute who has had an extremely hard childhood given the place where he was born and raised. The complete indifference shown by society towards the crimes being committed in the city triggered his transformation into a costume vigilante. He is the only superhero who remains active after being outlawed and he wears a mask that has the shape of ink bolts which he regards as his real face. After a failed attempt to find and rescue a young kidnapped girl before she was murdered his identity definitely broke into two fragmented personas. In order to illustrate the effects that a temporal experience, understood as part of place, can produce in the configuration of the self identity of a character, a passage of Chapter VI will be presented as example. The following sequence takes place in prison. Rorschach, who has been captured by the police, narrates to his psychiatrist the one event that, according to him, finally fragmented his identity into the vigilante persona.

"Something was making noise in the wasteland"
"Attack dogs two German shepherds, fighting over knob of bone. Didn’t seem interested in me"
"Decided not to use rear entrance anyway."
"Went in through front, like respectable visitor"
"Shock of impact ran along my arm. Jet of warmth spattered on chest, like hot faucet."
"It was Kovacs who said ‘mother’ then, muffled under latex. It was Kovacs who closed his eyes."
“It was Rorschach who opened them again” (18-19-20-21).
Alexis Reyes Villalobos. Construction of Place Identity through Fragmentation in Alan Moore’s Watchmen.

"Fifteenth gave no an address. Deceived due to bad neighborhood. Smell of damp plaster and stained mattresses."

"Arrived there at dusk. No lights on in building."

"Something was making noise in wasteland at rear."

"Decided not to enter entrance."
Fig. 1
Alexis Reyes Villalobos. Construction of Place Identity through Fragmentation in Alan Moore’s Watchmen.
Fig. 2
Construction of Place Identity through Fragmentation in Alan Moore’s Watchmen.
Fig. 3
Alexis Reyes Villalobos. Construction of Place Identity through Fragmentation in Alan Moore’s Watchmen.
In this scene, Rorschach, whose identity was already conditioned by the environment in which he grew up, faces a crime scene so terrible that this single event provokes the internal fragmentation of his personality into two different personas, Kovacs, and Rorschach. When narrating the events, the graphic novel provides the necessary visual and narrative elements so as to show that he is able to picture those moments as if they were happening in the present time. That single event, which for the effect of this paper can be considered as a place, has become part of the character. As stated further, Rorschach explains that from that moment his world picture changed, another identity emerged and that can be seen in the way he describes the world and the methods he uses to fight what he thinks is wrong. Casey explains through the concept of ‘inscriptive tenacity’ that places can become part of what people are. “They (places) are in us—indeed, are us—thanks to their incorporation into us by a process of somatisation whose logic is yet to be discovered ... Thanks to the inscriptive tenacity and expressive subjection of the body, places come to be embedded in us; they become part of our very self, our enduring character, what we enact and carry forward.” (688) This “inscriptive tenacity” can be seen in Rorschach’s origin and development. The character is the result of the outgoing subject, the incoming place and the resulting habitus.

In geographical terms, the places that configured Rorschach’s identity are the poorest areas of the City of New York, where people are usually involved in crime, prostitution and other vices. His mother was a prostitute and he never met his father. This hazardous family condition and the permanent state of disrepair of this location crafted Kovacs’ identity from the very beginning. He is an example
of how physical and social place conditions exerted a
tremendous influence on him.

In a letter that is part of an annex in Chapter VI,
Kovacs reveals some of his feelings towards their parents
while being a child:

My mom told me she threw my dad out because
he was always getting into political arguments
with her because he liked President Truman and
she didn’t. I think perhaps my dad was some sort
of aide to President Truman, because he liked
him so much. Most probably he was out of the
country during the war when I was growing up on
some sort of mission. I think he was the kind of
guy who would fight for his country and what
was right. Maybe he got killed fighting the Nazis
and he’s with God now and that’s how come he
never managed to find me.

I like President Truman, the way Dad would of
wanted me to. He dropped the atom bomb on
Japan and saved millions of lives because if he
hadn’t of, then there would of been a lot more
war than there was and more people would of
been killed. I think it was a good thing to drop the
atomic bomb on Japan.

That is all I have to say about my parents (31).

In the previous example one can notice that the lack of
a paternal figure left an empty space in Kovacs’ personality
when he was a child. As one can noticed, that space was
filled with the political context and the predominant ideology
of the time that impregnated the city and that, in this
particular case, took the form of an imaginary paternal figure.
These ideas might have been manifested on the streets of the
city, by means of propaganda, riots and government agency.
The events on the streets of this period of time are not
explicitly explored, but at least that is what the novel shows
that happens in the 80’s. We see that the city and especially
the area where this character was raised provoked an extremely right-wing world picture in him. This is an example of how the global political ideology has exerted a powerful effect on him.

As previously mentioned, the precarious conditions of this area, where crime predominated, made of Kovacs a violent person. In the essay “Who Watches the Watchmen?: Ideology and ‘Real World’ Superheroes”, Jamie A. Hughes states that “Walter Joseph Kovacs (AKA Rorschach) also shares Ozymandias’ view that society has problems that desperately need correction; however, his vigilante methods are undeniably more stringent than the rest of his compatriots” (551).

Rorschach’s psychiatrist briefly narrates part of his record in the following manner:

“In 1951, he attacked an older child, partially blinding him with a lighted cigarette. He was ten years old.”

“Once his home life had been investigated, he was removed from his mother’s custody and put in to care. Away from her, he seemed to improve.”

“Excelling at school work, Kovacs grew into a bright but unusually quiet child.”

“Even in 1956, when informer of his mother’s brutal murder, he restricted his comments to one word:”

“good” (7-8)

The struggles suffered by Rorschach made of him a strange person and can also explain the reaction towards his mother’s death. Hughes states that:

The mask not only gives the superhero Rorschach his name; it is also a symbol that represents his view of society and justice—both of which he perceives in very black and white terms. For Rorschach, there is good and there is evil. Truth and lies. Like the mask he believes is his true face, there is no gray in his judgment of society, and because society is cruel and merciless, so is he. As Brent Fishbaugh writes, ‘He
joins the fad of costumed crime fighting not for fun, but out of guilt—guilt over what his entire race has become, guilt spawned not just from the events [that] surround Kitty Genovese’s death, but from his own misbegotten upbringing” (552).

Rorschach’s world picture has been formed from the array of places he has interacted with. The negative connotation that these temporal places or experiences have carried seriously affect his perception of the world. Casey states that “the value or virtue of a given habitus resides in the actuality of its enactment, its skillful application—not in its being a solidified deposition of past actions or a mere disposition to future actions. Whenever its antecedent history and subsequent fate, a habitus is something we continually put into action.” (687) Rorschach explicitly brings into action the places and the reconstructed self in the form of his vigilante persona and his attitude towards crime. According to Hughes, there is also fragmentation regarding the way society sees Rorschach. However, the mask Rorschach wears also contains a deeper meaning:

Like an inkblot test, society also sees what it will of itself in Rorschach. Many of the characters in the novel (superhero and normal citizen alike) view him as unclean, disturbing, and somewhat psychotic, but others see him as a powerful vigilante capable of doing great things. For every man Rorschach has killed, he has also rescued a child or stopped a drug dealer, so while some view him as a half-crazed man who cares little for society, the reverse can also be true. Like the Comedian, Rorschach is painfully aware of the state of human affairs, but aside from his attempts to act as judge and jury for the criminals he captures, he can do little to stop the larger pattern of problems he sees (552).

Rorschach represents the dirt in the city, the dark side of the urban space. He was born from the dirt and fights it,
but by doing so, he is also fighting against what created him, against part of his own place identity.

Dr. Manhattan’s real name is Dr. Jonathan Osterman. He used to be the son of a watchmaker. At that time, he wanted to devote his life to the same task his father performed but as the nuclear crisis escalated, he was persuaded to go to Princeton where he became a PhD in atomic physics. The Dr. Manhattan persona raises when being a member of a nuclear research team at Gila Flats, he conducts a quantum physics experiment that goes horribly wrong, deconstructing Osterman at atomic level, who after a period of time and given the experience gathered as a watchmaker, was able to reconstruct himself into a godlike being. In the world of Watchmen, Dr. Manhattan is the only character who possesses supernatural powers and because of that he might be regarded as the symbol of the global struggle between The United States and The Soviet Union. This is because since he came into action, the balance between both global powers broke in favour of the US. He is described as a human atomic bomb. In the world of Watchmen, President Nixon sent Dr. Manhattan to Vietnam, a war that in the real world The United States lost. In this alternate reality, Dr. Manhattan actions made the Viet Cong surrender in just two months, thus making Vietnam the 51st American state. In Chapter IV, the fictional character of Professor Milton Glass writes a book called ‘Dr. Manhattan: Super-powers and the Superpowers. In the introduction, he describes the state of affairs at a global scale and reports on the consequences that these ideologies produce on the urban space:

It is the oldest ironies that are still the most satisfying: man, when preparing for bloody war, will orate loudly and most eloquently in the name of peace. This dichotomy is not an invention of the twentieth century, yet it is in this century that the most striking examples of the phenomena have appeared ... Currently, no nation on this planet is not involved in some form of
armed struggle, if not against its neighbours then against internal forces. Furthermore, as ever-escalating amounts of money are poured into the pursuit of the specific weapon or conflict that will bring lasting peace, the drain on our economies creates a run-down urban landscapes where crime flourishes and people are concerned less with national security than with the simple personal security needed to stop at the store late at night for a quart of milk without being mugged. The places we struggle so viciously to keep safe are becoming increasingly dangerous. The wars to end wars, the weapons to end wars, these things have failed us. ... Now we have a man to end wars (30).

Glass states that the presence of Manhattan as a godlike American figure has brought consequences on the everyday life of all human beings, but especially on American people who feel more confident about the world having him at their side. “It is as if—with a real live Diety on their side—our leaders have become intoxicated with a heady draught of Omnipotence-by-Association, without realizing just how his very existence has deformed the lives of every living creature on the face of this planet.”(30)

What this paper wants to point out in the case of this character is that the medium, the places, the context, exerted a paramount influence in his creation. But, once being transformed into this godlike being, he has been completely detached from the places that he used to be related to. The places do not interact, neither influences him anymore. It is as if he would have reset his own existence. This is explicitly exemplified in Chapter III, during the scene where he departs to Mars, a sort of void space where there is nothing human to interact with but emptiness.

On the other hand, as it has been stated above, his existence has actually provoked changes on the city and their inhabitants. Dr. Manhattan affects the city producing new technology such as electric cars and spark hydrants. These
elements can be appreciated in the city as portrayed by the artwork of the graphic novel. Glass comments on this, stating that:

The technology that Dr. Manhattan has made possible has changed the way we think about our clothes, our food, our travel. We drive electric cars and travel in leisure and comfort in clean, economical airships. Our entire culture has had to contort itself to accommodate the presence of something more than human, and we have all felt the result of this. The evidence surrounds us, in our everyday lives and on the front p.s of the newspapers we read. One single being has been allowed to change the entire world, pushing it closer to its eventual destruction in the process. The Gods now walk amongst us, affecting the lives of every man, woman and child on the planet in a direct way rather than through mythology and the reassurance of faith. The safety of a whole world rests in the hands of a being far beyond what we understand to be human. ... We are all of us living in the shadow of Manhattan (30).

But this is not a reciprocal relationship; it is just vertical and goes towards a single side. There is no habitus. He is a character that lives in a quantum universe and who perceives time in a non-linear manner, just as if everything, past, present and future, were happening now. This influences the character's perception of human affairs. He appreciates them merely at a subatomic scale as seen in Chapter I "A live body and a dead body contain the same number of particles," he observes. "Structurally, there's no discernible difference" (21).

Ozymandias’ real name is Adrian Veidt. He became a superhero inspired on the figure of Alexander the Great and the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II. He willingly retired from costume adventures so as to devote his time to his own company in which he has successfully merchandised himself
with a popular line of toys and other products inspired on him.
The attitude that Adrian Veidt has towards himself is a characteristic that differs from other characters in the novel. He has a radically different perception of what he is and what he can accomplish. This is particularly evident when contrasted with characters such as Rorschach and Dr. Manhattan. In a fictional interview that is part of the fictional article ‘After the Masquerade’ that can be found in Chapter XI, a journalist called Nova asks Veidt about a plethora of topics. In this interview Veidt reflects part of this unique attitude in a series of statements about himself and the way he thinks about the human race: “you get to be a superhero by believing in the hero within you and summoning him or her forth by an act of will ... Believing in yourself and in your own potential is the first step to realizing that potential ... The means to attain a capability far beyond that of the so-called ordinary person are within reach of everyone, if the desire and their will are strong enough ... Possible for ‘the ordinary person’ Ridiculous. There is no ordinary person” (29-30). As well as Rorschach, Veidt clearly sees the dirt of the city, but he goes beyond, being able to link those events to the major global conflict that has been the ultimate result of a deviant form of society. This can be appreciated when asked about his retirement: “I guess I’ve just reached a point where I’ve started to wonder whether all the grandstanding and fighting individual evils does much good for the world as a whole. Those evils are just symptoms of an overall sickness of the human spirit, and I don’t believe you can cure a disease by suppressing its symptoms.” The importance of Veidt self appreciation is that, in contrast to other characters, he feels completely capable to change a world he does not like in a big scale.

Even so, technology is progressing at an ever-accelerating pace, and by early next century I would hesitate to predict any limitations upon what we might
be capable of. I would say without hesitation that a new world is within our grasp, filled with unimaginable experiences and possibilities, if only we want it badly enough. Not a utopia... I don’t believe that any specie could continue to grow and keep from stagnation without some adversity... but a society with a more human basis, where the problems that beset us are at least new problems (29-30).

This is in contrast to Rorschach, who probably does not know how to do it or maybe, as well as Dr. Manhattan, to improve human world is something that does not interest him. The following text was taken from the “After the Masquerade.” Here, Veidt refers to the differences that exist among he, Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach, in terms of their worldview.

VEIDT: John? Right-wing? (Laughs) If there’s one thing in this cosmos that that man isn’t capable of doing it’s having a political bias. Believe me... you have to meet him to understand. I mean, which do you prefer, red ants or black ants?
NOVA: Uh...? Well, I don’t have any particular preference...
VEIDT: Exactly. Well, imagine how Jon feels.
VEIDT: Rorschach, I don’t know very well. I believe he’s a man of great integrity, but he seems to see the world in very black and white, Manichean terms. I personally believe that to be an intellectual limitation. (29-30)

Veidt perceives fragmentation as a negative element in the world. According to him, fragmentation has lead humanity in to a deviant course that will eventual cause its own destruction. Within fragmentation he can find several sides of the same society, fragments that do not share his ultimate project. Fragmentation affects the probabilities of fulfilling his plan for humanity, therefore he is willing to get rid of fragmentation and construct hegemony. In the same
interview he states that “I believe there are some people who really do want, if only subconsciously an end to the world. They want to be spared the responsibilities of maintaining that world, to be spared the effort of imagination needed to realize such a future. And of course, there are other people who want very much to live. I see twentieth century society as a sort of race between enlightenment and extinction.” Veidt attempts to destroy fragmentation and through the novel he does in fact destroy the symbols of fragmentation.

In the same manner that the government outlawed the vigilantes, Veidt wants to destroy or at least restrict the activity of the superheroes, which are symbols of fragmentation and unpredictable in their actions. In addition, Veidt’s master plan involves the destruction of New York City. This is one of the most important events in regard to this paper given the fact that the city represents the major symbol of fragmentation. The destruction of New York is the first step into his ultimate plan to create global hegemony.

By destroying the political and ideological fragmentation of the world that is divided in two different poles he can achieve the hegemony that the government’s powers of coercion failed to do. This is to get rid of all type of fragmentation, achieving global hegemony as well as internal hegemony. He must destroy the fragmented world so as to reconstruct it as an hegemonic world. Veidt manifest his desire for a new world when stating that “I don’t mind being the smartest man in the world. I just wish it wasn’t this one” (29-30)

Regarding Hegemony, Harner states that “Hegemony operates through a whole variety of institutions and organizations in civil society, and functions through intellectual and moral leadership, rather than domination and coercion” (Harner, 661). Stating Gramsci, the author points out that in the context of hegemony, there is a group that leads the thought of the rest of the people “Gramsci distinguished between the use of force or coercion to obtain allegiance and the voluntary acceptance of a subordinate
position. The latter is hegemony, the dominance obtained by consent rather than force of one class or group over others ... A reversal of hegemony, or counterhegemony, is therefore needed prior to revolution and liberation of the working class” (Harner, 662) This is what Veidt has understood and it is also the reason why he believes that his efforts will succeed where the government or global powers have failed.

At the end of the novel in Chapter XII, the reader sees that the entire world has come up to hegemony. The differences in terms of ideology between The United States and The Soviet Union have been left behind after the destruction of the New York City and the imminent threat of an alien invasion. This new state of hegemony is reflected in the urban space by means of the artwork of the graphic novel, which in previous chapters used to show messages of protest and discontent, fear, menace, all in all, fragmentation. In the city depicted after the cataclysm, one can see that the walls show messages of unity and hegemony such as “One world, One accord” and in the background the image of a construction site that on its walls one can read “Pyramid Construction” in reference to Veidt’s success and “New Deal” in reference to the new global order artificially imposed (31).

Under Harner’s scope, hegemony represents identity of a place and it implies that fragmentation produces lack of identity. The previous assumption could be refused when hegemony is taken to an extreme. This is the case of the new type of hegemonic society that, in the context of Watchmen, emerges from the ruins of New York. In order to comment on the idea of lack of identity due to extreme hegemony I will refer to William Gibson’s article Disneyland with the Death Penalty. In this article, Gibson was asked to describe and comment on the city state of Singapore for Wired magazine. Singapore is a city state that throughout its history has been constantly invaded and dominated by more powerful empires or nations due to its strategic importance for trading. These
series of invasions gave different shapes to Singapore’s identity till the end of World War II, when it gained its independence from the British Empire. Instead of tracking back its original identity and to produce a reinterpretation of the fragmented identity of its colonial era, the government of the independent city-state decided to erase everything and start Singapore from scratch “the physical past here has almost entirely vanished”(1). This is something that resembles Veidt’s plan to reset global order through the destruction of New York. The intended totally new identity of Singapore, boosted by the amazing development of its economy, according to Gibson is a debatable one given the fact that it looks so perfect that it is just not real. “There was no dirt whatsoever; no muss, no furred fractal edge to things ... the organic, florid as ever in the tropics, had been gardened into brilliant green, and all-too-perfect examples of itself. Only the clouds were feathered with chaos” (1). All the fragmentation has been replaced by an extreme hegemony. This process of erasing the identity that previously existed in order to impose a new one which is considered as better is something that happens in Watchmen. The superheroes, icons of the ideological fragmentation that existed within the city, are erased in one way or another, as well as the dirt of Singapore, in order to avoid their interference in the new global structure of hegemony that has been artificially created. In that way, fragmentation allows the existence of diversity and authentic or original manifestations, whether with positive or negative connotations. Gibson states that if Singapore’s new identity succeeds it will prove that “it is possible to flourish through the active repression of free expression. They will have proven that information does not necessarily want to be free” (7). This sort of city might be the result of Ozymandias’ project. He has eliminated diversity and fragmentation so as to create a hegemonic place that has lost its original identity, which is fragmentation itself, in an
attempt to find a new and, according to him better identity within hegemony.

There are other points of view in regard to the theme of place identity that might also contribute to the understanding of fragmentation in *Watchmen*. The Dutch architectural theorist Rem Koolhaas, in his book *S, M, L, XL*, takes a different angle on this regard and radically states that places must leave identity behind. For him, the concept of identity applied to a particular place makes it to resist renewal and free expression.

Identity is like a mousetrap in which more and more have to share the original bait, and which, on closer inspection, may have been empty for centuries. The stronger the identity, the more it imprisons, the more resists expansion, interpretation, renewal, contradiction. Identity becomes like a lighthouse—fixed, over determined: it can change its position or the pattern it emits only at the cost of destabilizing navigation. (Paris can only become more Parisian—it is already on its own way becoming hyper-Paris, a polished caricature. There are exceptions: London—its only identity a lack of clear identity, is perpetually becoming less London, more open, less static.) (Koolhaas, 1248).

Under this scope, if there is going to be a concept such as place identity, this should be something moveable, something that should change through the time. Therefore, a kind of identity purely based on fragmentation should be favoured instead of hegemony, since it breaks fixed ideas that have been taken as part of a fixed identity. Therefore, to have no identity might be a new form of identity. One that detached from the concept of hegemony favours fragmentation and free expression in the form of innovation. A similar kind of lack of fixed identity is the sort of identity that this paper has found in New York City as depicted by *Watchmen*. A place that interacts with the subject in a chaotic fashion that makes one think it as a non-place, but due to the
function that fulfils in the conformation its inhabitants’ identities, although fragmented, offers a new arena for the understanding of place in literary works. From this alternative point of view, fragmentation allows changes in terms of ideologies, social structures, behaviours, etc, that through diversity can expand in the form of trends followed during some periods of time but that fragmentation itself can reduce in order to trigger new changes. The problem is that this sort of identity cannot be identified with a fixed shape but just with a temporal approximation of the place observed. In the case of Watchmen, one has observed in a non-linear, fragmented, narration different layers of a fragmented identity that is situated under the influence of global ideologies. In this way, the ideas or ideologies portrayed in the Cold War New York, as well as the characteristics of the city, represented by specific characters, are not fixed elements and might change or even disappear through the time in an natural manner thanks to fragmentation, without the explicit intervention of a specific agent, such as Ozymandias, and a master plan that reorganizes and redefines everything. Taking into consideration what has been previously stated, this phenomenon will not necessarily mean that the identity of the place has been lost, because fragmentation itself has modified it. Therefore, the latter is the only concept that this paper considerers as fully satisfactory when referring to the identity of the urban space in Watchmen.
List of Works Cited

Eno, Vicent, Csawza, El “Alan Moore interview, 1988”
