

Post-post-modern Joker

– arbitrary identity in *Arkham Asylum*

Grant Morrison and Dave MacKean's *Arkham Asylum* (1989) is a best selling comic book often described as both pretentious and lame, both with complex symbolism and trivial ideas. My presentation analyses how this comic uses media specific characteristics (like balloons, breakdowns, captions and panels) to reveal the complicated nature of sanity, the horrible consequences of semiotic misinterpretation and the possibility of an arbitrary identity as the ideal subject of the 21st century. Through a close reading of a few scenes in *Arkham Asylum* I will argue that the medium of comics in its juxtaposition of images and text here manages to convey a very complex notion of identity to the reader. The ability to negotiate language and read signs becomes crucial to the mental well-being of the characters, and the decoding involved in the narrative becomes parallel to that of the reader's interpretation of the story. In the setting of the superhero comic, the battle between Batman and the Joker is endless, but *Arkham Asylum* at least in moments has valuable insights to offer on the condition of the post-modern superhero and with him identity in general.

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