

Killgrave, The Purple Man

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Power is not a means, it is an end. [. . .] The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me?

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 211

Alias: Situating the Purple Man

Killgrave,¹ the Purple Man, first appeared in *Daredevil* # 4 (1964). The powers of this supervillain have never changed in their essentials. A former Yugoslav spy, an accident involving nerve gas caused Killgrave's skin to be tinged a startling shade of purple,² and also gave him the power to make people in his immediate vicinity obey his commands without question. The exact mechanism for transmitting Killgrave's willpower has varied: for example, *Daredevil*'s blindness has on some occasions given him immunity to Killgrave's control. But in more recent years its nature has become convective and contagious: Killgrave's skin exudes particles (pheromones or viruses) that effect obedience. Having had allegiance to a place that no longer exists, in a job that demands dissimulation and deceit, with varying functional attributes depending upon the temporalities of our encounters, and with powers that dissolve the seeming boundaries between self and other, Killgrave accentuates qualities of violence and power to an excessive degree as Foucault's concept of biopower and its role in state violence exemplifies. Killgrave uses threats of violence against third parties in his first appearance, and surrounds himself with mind-controlled bodyguards. He uses his powers to create his own mini-kingdom – on the top floor of the Plaza Hotel – and threatens to make *Daredevil*'s love interest Karen Page jump off the roof. But the explicitly sexual implications of Killgrave's power were not explored in depth during his early appearances. *Daredevil* # 154 (1978) hints obliquely at their potential. Killgrave tells his mind-controlled prisoner Heather Glenn (Matt Murdock's girlfriend) that 'later, perhaps, I will allow you to please me in *other ways*' (*Daredevil* # 154, p. 10).

Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos's *Alias* introduced an entirely new character into the Marvel Universe. Jones is presented as a former superhero with an already complex back story, who has taken the decision to abandon her costume and mask, and to operate instead as a private eye. She still possesses superpowers of strength and flight, but seldom uses them, and appears to find her powers – at least on occasions – difficult to control.³

The Purple Man does not appear until the final story arc of the *Alias* series (issues # 22–28), which reveals details about Jones's origin hitherto withheld. The themes of mind control, violence and sexual abuse which inform the Purple Man story arc read as a culmination of ideas

1 Also, and especially in the Netflix series, spelt 'Kilgrave'.

2 On the value of Kilgrave's purpleness see Brown (2011). On disfigurement of villains see Alaniz (2014).

3 Thus, *Alias* aligns partially with the 'bystander' category of superhero narratives: a characteristic sub-genre in the early 21st century – other examples being Ed Brubaker's *Gotham Central* and Bendis's own *Powers*.

explored in the first 21 issues – as well as being an explanation of the vulnerabilities and trauma which Jones has brought with her into the storyline (see Kaveney, 2007).

After rejecting another investigation, we see Jones playing an answerphone message from a potential client, asking her to investigate the Purple Man. Turning to the next page, four panels depict Jones rushing from the room and (through reader inference) vomiting in the bathroom. Nevertheless, eight pages later – after talking with her friend Carol Danvers (Ms Marvel) – Jones replays the message and takes the case. While Jones’s past history with the Purple Man becomes clearer, the reader does not yet know the exact details.

Jones’s new clients have all had family and friends murdered by the Purple Man. While Killgrave is currently imprisoned, it is not for these specific crimes and Jones comes to understand that her clients desire closure. It is not enough that the Purple Man has been removed from society – they need to understand and come to terms with what has been done to them. Killgrave is introduced via metonymy: his picture is held up to Jessica’s point of view in sequences of vertically-stacked panels. We first encounter Killgrave through Jessica’s eyes, and experience her memories of him in a series of panels inflected by a sense of *déjà vu*, as they repeat panel structures used earlier in the narrative. The sense that violent events are destined to repeat themselves is encoded through the repeated structure and braiding of the panels (Groensteen, 2007, p.147–149), echoing the themes of control and loss of self that the narrative explores.

The illustrational style of the flashbacks (by Spider-Man artist Mark Bagley) is radically different to Gaydos’s work, with panel layouts, pencilling, inking and colouring all taking on a strongly retro feel.⁴ This style is set against the subdued, gritty, and analytical layouts which have carried the story thus far. Through this retro sequence, we learn that Jessica has previously been controlled, dominated and sexually abused by Killgrave, who was also responsible for her attacking her fellow Avengers and the consequent loss of her superhero identity and career. The panel layouts suggest that the violence of the past bleeds into the present, and also controls possible futures: the forces of power work through time as well as space.

While those controlled are unable to break free – normally – they are still aware of their actions. Moreover, they desire them. Under Killgrave’s power, Jones’s loss of individuality implies her reconfiguration according to desires replaced by Killgrave that she experiences as extreme love for him lasting eight months, notwithstanding his unrelenting emotional and verbal abuse. She says to her lover Luke Cage:

JONES

In my *mind* I can’t tell the difference between what he *made* me do or say and what I do or say on my own. (*Alias* # 25, p.16)

Jones is only able to exit from this control through a combination of events that include Killgrave’s boredom with her, and intervention by the X-Men mutant Jean Grey. After exiting Killgrave’s control, Jessica Jones does not return to self, but to a new formation built upon the subjective elements to hand. Some Killgrave-related features remain, as do those that are

⁴ Peppard (2018) interprets this retro feel to be an overt allusion to an earlier, 1970s, era of independent Marvel super-heroines, thus deliberately contrasting the portrayal of empowering and/or feminist super-heroines of two different eras.

developed, highlighted or implanted by Jean Grey as psychological seeds that will serve Jones to overcome Killgrave's influence in any future encounter.

Jones's investigative interview with the Purple Man takes place via video link inside Ryker's Island jail: he is too dangerous to be contacted in any other way. Jones's trepidation is built up gradually – through her conversation with Luke Cage, and her extended arrival at Ryker's island 'Raft' maximum security installation. The latter sequence inexorably draws the reader into Jones's point of view as she walks down the prison corridor to interview her former tormentor, echoing the similar scene between Agent Starling and Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The encounter also further breaks down and disrupts the graphic surface of the narrative, exposing the reader to the multi-layered subtext and harrowing backstory that lie beneath. Killgrave's video close-ups are depicted out-of-focus and partially greyed-out, contrasting with the more heavily-inked and coloured close-ups of Jones. Killgrave violently disrupts the conversation by suggesting that their encounter is really part of a comic book; and one that Killgrave would not bother to 'turn to the end' (*Alias* # 27, p. 2). As readers, we are obliged to observe without taking action, beyond turning the pages. Jessica, however, is ready to challenge Killgrave's reductive and narcissistic view of both ethics and narrative:

JONES

Killgrave, if this is just a comic book . . . and we're all just characters in the comic book if that's your thing here . . . why don't you just *walk* out of here? Just get up and walk out.

PURPLE MAN

I'm not the writer.

(*Alias* # 27, p. 3)

This appears a self-effacing moment for a character centred around control: recognizing the boundaries of his power. But, as ever with Killgrave, he proves not to be as powerless as he states. Holding up his hands, Killgrave frames the image which he sees before him, like a movie director:

PURPLE MAN

Interior shot. Jail. Day . . . tight shot on Jessica. She stares blankly ahead.

(*Alias* # 27, p.3)

Strangely, yet importantly for our argument, Gaydos's artwork immediately obeys Killgrave's instructions. The panel following the image of Killgrave's framing hands does indeed show Jessica in close-up, staring blankly ahead. A fictional character has successfully broken free, and for a moment appears to be determining the form of the narrative in which he exists. As readers, we experience the loss of control that Jones fears. Killgrave has achieved a position condensing power from outside of his world and able, even, to control ours. In so doing, he commits violence to the reader and the text.

Killgrave's power develops a latent violence, one that affects quietly, surreptitiously insinuating itself in the core of our beings as it overwhelms our sense of self control. Once in control he is also able to commit physical and sexual violence. In this scene, violence erupts, bursts through narrative conventions and overpowers us. This is a deep, ontological violence indeed.

Killgrave's dissolution of the boundaries of self and other within the stories, the bleeding into others of his desires that often follow violent expression, and his questioning of the margins of the created form as we have just seen, highlights a power over life itself that we shall discuss in relation to the works of Foucault and Agamben. Power and control mobilised and enacted by the state over life itself, Killgrave's violence and power, and our own participation in the creation of comic violence coalesce to characterise an account of life that exceeds each of these separate discussions. Before we go further into the work of Foucault and Agamben, we shall take another step into the violent nature of Killgrave's power.

The Power of the Purple Man

Unlike many super-villains – such as Magneto, Dr Doom or Lex Luthor for whom violence is a tool to achieve their political purposes – Killgrave does not appear to have any coherent agenda beyond the gratification of his immediate desires. The Purple Man is violent and abusive because he enjoys these things; it is more brutal, and difficult, to recognise that sometimes he is exercising his power for no reason, not even desire, just because he can.⁵ And – because the Purple Man's actions are presented as ends in themselves – there is no end to his violence and abuse: the perpetrator has absolute control over the victim's powerless state.

In this regard, there are parallels with the libertines portrayed by the Marquis de Sade, in both the comic and screen portrayals of Killgrave. The power to control others liberates Bendis's Killgrave in the same sense that Sade's libertines are freed to act out their most violent sexual impulses: though their cunning, their wealth and their position in society. However, while the lengths to which Sade's libertines go to provide a space for their desires to find expression are circumvented in the case of Killgrave: his powers allow him to create miniature communities centred solely on himself and the gratification of his desires. If Sade's libertines secrete themselves away in castles and dungeons far beyond the reach or knowledge of society, Killgrave's powers allow him to create microcosms where he is all powerful both publicly (in restaurants, for example), or in domestic spaces he has invaded. Killgrave has unique agency, as a kind of *auteur*, whose super biopower allows him to concentrate all the force of the modern state in one man, and allow him to live out an existential 'state of exception' (Agamben, 1998).⁶

In his essay 'Coldness and Cruelty' (1989), philosopher Gilles Deleuze examines the characteristics of violence, power, control and education in the writings of Sade and Sacher-Masoch; whose names, via the work of psychologists/psychoanalysts Krafft-Ebing (1906) and Freud (1977), have been identified with what they characterized as 'perversions'. Sade's violence, for example, is meted out in secluded spaces (the chateau of *120 Days of Sodom* [1966] or the bedroom of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* [1965], for example), spaces that designate arenas of power and control in the double sense of characterising the actions that take place there, and of the construction and demarcation of the spaces themselves. The libertines are powerful enough to

5 Rayborn and Keyes (2018, p. 6) make a similar point concerning the nature of Killgrave's villainy.

6 Beckman and Blake (2009, p. 2) note: 'Pier Paolo Pasolini's translation of Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* into the economy of fascism in the 1940s Italy in *Salo* (1975) is explicitly concerned with the dehumanizing and depersonalizing dimension of systematic mass cruelty'.

command the delineation of these spaces within, or apart from, the wider political and socio-cultural milieu, in order to command the actions that take place there.

For Deleuze, the Sadean libertine rationalises and declaims, and then demonstrates his excessive sexual desires, showing that ‘reasoning itself is a form of violence, and that he is on the side of violence, however calm and logical he may be’ (1989, pp. 18–19). This is most strikingly exemplified in the use Sade’s libertines make of political proclamations as digressions in the sexual tableaux: notably, the philosophical pamphlet ‘Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans’, which appears in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Sade, 1965). The sadist, through enacting ‘institutionalized possession’ (Deleuze, 1989, p. 20), localizes the power of the State, Religion and other establishments of order and patriarchy and does so through violent expressions of sexual desire. Thus, Deleuze emphasises that the sadist-victim relationship is one of institutionalized, hierarchical power and asymmetrical pleasure-pain production. This highlights the accentuation of the relations between political power, social, bodily and ontological control, and sexual violence.

In the comics, we have noted earlier, Killgrave is described as having once been a spy (Lee and Orlando, 1964): an undercover instrument in the secretive production and promotion of state power and violence. Set free from the constraints of any state agenda, Killgrave is able to use his mysterious new powers for his own ends, some are sexual – and all violent. Where Sade’s libertines keep their activities out of the public eye – albeit, we understand, with the complicity of the State and religious authorities – it is Killgrave’s powers that are private, even if their outcomes are not. This illuminates a defining characteristic of heterosexual and patriarchal political coercion, and the implicit violence that sustains it: it is everywhere present, and often invisible. Thus, the public nature of Killgrave’s crimes render them a more telling representation of oppressive patriarchy than even Sade’s libertines. Killgrave hides in plain sight, situating his violence and coercion in public spaces or unremarkable suburbs. The political implications of this are crucial. Killgrave’s power gives him an invincibility that Sade’s libertines or political dictators strive to achieve; to which we will return when dealing with resistance to power.

Both Killgrave and Sade’s libertines tread similar paths through cruelty and control, even if their methods often differ. What unites them is power mediated through violence over biological life by political entities – especially as through state power, expressed by state actors, even as they are cut away from their original political milieus. Therefore, the instances of familiarity between Killgrave and Sadean libertines, that we note just above, need to be viewed less as instances of individualised, monstrous behaviour – and more as examples of the normalization of political, social and sexual violence and coercion. To do this, we will turn to the concepts of biopower and biopolitics, as created by Foucault and developed by Agamben.

Biopower, Biopolitics and the Violence of the State

Foucault’s work shows concern with the relations between bodies and subjects and their production and control through various configurations of the forces and hierarchies of power (e.g. Foucault, 2004 and 2008; Bignall, 2008; Collier, 2009; Crome, 2009). While it can be said that his early work has a particular focus upon systems of bodily discipline (e.g. Deleuze, 1995a, 1995b; Collier, 2009; Crome, 2009), from the introduction to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1998, originally published in 1976) to his death in 1984, Foucault focused more on the politics, economics and cultures of biopower and biopolitics at species and population levels

(Foucault 1990, 1998a, 1998b, 2004, 2008).⁷ In these terms, Killgrave exemplifies the violence undertaken by states, and by those who act for them.

In his short piece outlining 'Biopolitics', John Marks (2006, p. 333) notes the following:

From the 18th century onwards, biological existence is no longer a neutral, unchanging substrate upon which political existence is superimposed. Consequently, a new politics emerges which relates to what it means to be a living species in a living world: biology is drawn into the domain of power and knowledge.

'The concept of biopower,' Keith Crome explains:

designates the operation of power over life. [. . .] With the term 'biopower' Foucault designates the set of mechanisms, techniques and technologies through which the basic biological features of the human species become the object of political strategies in modern Western societies. Biopower is, then, for Foucault the application of power to the human considered as a living being, the application of power to the human taken as a species being. (Crome, 2009, pp. 47, 52.)

Both Crome and Marks, in the quotations above, highlight the sense of biopolitics as an organised deployment of power acting upon humans at levels of both species and population. That is, biology becomes less a neutral substratum upon, or from, which other formations are created, and more an entity that is politically constructed, organised and controlled. Not only, then, is biology 'drawn into the domain of power and knowledge' as Marks states, but is constituted entirely by political power. Life itself becomes a political concern.

This is noted explicitly by Agamben introducing his book *Homo Sacer* (1998), stating '*that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power*' (Agamben, 1998, p. 6; original emphasis). For Agamben, the state can reconstitute the experiences of, what he calls throughout his work, 'bare life' in extreme circumstances by designating the conditions of life as operating under a 'state of exception'. That is, once a state can define as *exceptional* the experiences of life lived within its boundaries, then its powers over life and death increase from those it would exert under 'normal' conditions. In a 'state of exception', a state can redefine citizens as 'bare life' upon whom any measures, however violent, are allowed. Returning once more to biopower, Marks (2006, p. 333) writes:

the Second World War in particular was characterized by two highly significant aspects of biopower, which remain as spectres haunting the construction of viable future global biopolitical structures: the drift to 'total war' pitting population against population, and the elevation of eugenics to a brutally racist state policy.

This 'elevation of eugenics' to a state policy for Agamben allows the state to design and manage death camps as exceptional contexts for the implementation of violence upon 'bare life' that would not be countenanced in relation to life at other times, or in other spaces. The same is true, Agamben argues (1998), for countries, prisons or other organisations in states of emergency.

In a way we have glimpsed similar places of cruelty and violence implemented as exceptional spaces by Sadean libertines, notably the chateau in *120 Days of Sodom*. And while we have noticed

⁷ See also: Deleuze (1995a, 1995b, 2001) on control and Agamben (1998) on biopolitics.

that Killgrave bears some resemblance to a Sadean libertine, and even develops what Agamben might call a 'state of exception' of his own rooms populated by those over whom he has control – Heather Glenn and Jessica Jones, for example – his power also penetrates the everyday world. Killgrave's ability to pinpoint the forces of his power deep into the psyche of his victims, and supplant their desire with his own, is an act of state-level biopolitical violence, albeit condensed and targeted through one man only. The state of exception, and the violence that it inflicts on biological life, becomes the essence of all possible relationships with Killgrave; and so characterises his being. We have mentioned already Killgrave's comic origin as a product, and subversive agent, of the Yugoslav state, by the time we encounter him in the *Alias* series, he has become a loose fragment of a former state, who nevertheless contains the condensed possibilities of the violence that any state can impose. Killgrave's superpower, then, is to gather in an intensified, compressed, excessive way the violence of the biopolitical state into, and as, himself.⁸ While this origin is not used in the TV series, it is interesting that Killgrave's power here is described as being virally transmitted, following brutal experiments performed on him as a child by scientist parents. Killgrave's biological force, directed through his powers, allows him to control both individuals and groups; there is an occasion when Jessica and her friends worry that he might 'overload' and affect a wider population, like some biological weapon. Here we can see the biopower effects as noted by both Foucault and Agamben operating fully. And, just as Foucault discusses biopower over biological populations (2008), we see the same happening with Killgrave. He can focus upon individuals – obsessing about Jessica Jones, for example – or larger groups (customers in a restaurant, say). Of key significance is the exceptional biological, insidious and violent deployment of power from Killgrave onto and through his victims.

Participating In and Resisting Biopower

Because Killgrave is portrayed at liberty in far more extended narrative sequences in the TV series than in the comic⁹, the audience becomes closely acquainted with the systems of power and violence (threatened or actual) which control the micro-communities over which he reigns. When Killgrave is prevented by a solemn promise to Jessica Jones that he will not use his powers on her in return for her spending time in his home, Killgrave betrays the spirit of the agreement by using his powers instead to threaten the couple he is using as his servants and housekeepers. If Jessica leaves and doesn't return, Killgrave will compel them to cut their own throats. On another occasion, the Purple Man coerces his own father to continue working on the enhancement of Killgrave's powers despite being overcome by exhaustion, by compelling his father to move his finger inch-by-inch towards the rotating blades of a food blender. These tangential routes to control are important as they highlight even further the Foucauldian biopower intensified through Killgrave. Even if direct control is not available, the violence remains and the responsibility the intended victim feels for the distributed violence becomes more personalized. That is, power over violence is transferred to another victim.

⁸ Issues of surveillance, control and biopower are worth noting here, as Killgrave operates as a living technology of biopower whose surveillance exceeds the use of cameras. On issues of surveillance and biopower, see Smith (2016) and French and Smith (2016).

⁹ The Purple Man is the chief antagonist of Jessica Jones: Season One (USA: Netflix, 2015). In Season Two he appears only in Jones's hallucinations or flashbacks.

We see a similar form of violence emerge through threats to third parties in the final issue of the Bendis-Gaydos *Alias*. The Purple Man wants to attract the attention of the Avengers, in order to force a violent confrontation between them and Jessica Jones. He walks outside into a busy New York thoroughfare and uses his powers to take control of passers-by:

PURPLE MAN

. . . It takes so *much* nowadays to get you little superheroes off your angst-ridden asses.

You've really got to put on a show.

You hear that drones?! I NEED A SHOW! Everyone beat up the person on your left until that person is dead!!

(*Alias* # 28)

The crowd immediately start to bludgeon each other, and before long the Avengers appear. The word 'show' links this scene to the confrontation between Jones and Killgrave in the floating prison, when Killgrave presented himself as a movie director (*Alias* # 27). We readers can all stand accused of being seekers after sensation, and in that regard we all collaborate with perpetrators of violence, such as Killgrave. We participate in, even *need* someone like Killgrave to make the stories we read, or those we watch, exciting. If there is a sense in which we, readers/viewers, create Killgrave to satisfy our own violent fantasies, then we are reciprocally constituted in that creation; just as Sade's libertines justify their freedom and powerful positions through the subjugation of others. Killgrave demands mindless violence and our own world becomes constituted as one where this demand is validated.

A similar scene of public violence is used as the denouement of *Marvels' Jessica Jones*, series one. The location is changed to a dockside, where Killgrave is preparing to depart overseas. He is confronted by Jessica Jones. As the innocent bystanders, under Killgrave's control, begin to beat each other to death, Jessica pretends that she too is under the Purple Man's power, allowing him to believe that she will let him take her own sister hostage. But this is really a ruse that allows her to approach Killgrave close enough to lay hands on him. In this case, Killgrave becomes undermined by his own confidence in the potency of his abilities. For Foucault, such a moment of resistance can be articulated in terms of siding with life, as Deleuze notes in his book *Foucault* (1988, p. 76). So, while life is the focus of biopower, at many levels (species, population and even individuated bodies), it obviously works as the locus for resistance to power too. When Jessica and her sister become 'bait' to trap/attack Killgrave, then their own status as 'bare life' becomes a point of leverage against the violent abuser.¹⁰

The theme of violence as a necessary tool versus violence as an end (and a pleasure) in itself is thrown into relief in this climactic action. Jones disposes of the Purple Man in one swift action, lifting him up and breaking his neck. After all the long-drawn-out threats of torture and deferred violence, Jones's action – in its clinical dexterity – acquires its own moral and ethical economy. Jones's act is also an act of rebellion against patriarchal biopower. Killgrave has been shown as

10 Aleah Kiley and Zak Roman offer a similar reading of Jessica Jones's resistance to Killgrave's violent patriarchal powers (Kiley and Roman, 2018, p. 54). Justin Wigard also arrives at a similar conclusion (Wigard, 2018, p. 231).

far too dangerous to be kept in captivity, and thus the narrative brings the viewer to the point where we become willing participants in, and consumers of, vigilante justice. But this violence is quick, clean and cathartic, and Jessica Jones does not take pleasure in it or make it a spectacle.

The equivalent scene in *Alias* #28 allows the reader to participate in a similar spectacle of righteous justice. But instead of a simple neck-breaking manoeuvre, Jones hurls the Purple Man bodily into the air. Killgrave is smashed against a yellow cab, and blood spurts from his mouth. ‘Wow’ ejaculates Captain America, whom Killgrave had been provoking Jessica to attack. ‘Fuckin’ mother- !!’ shouts Jones, as she picks up Killgrave a second time and hurls him onto the sidewalk, seemingly killing him.¹¹

We, readers and viewers, require acts that place us on the side of life. On the whole – unless we share a supervillain’s sociopathic tendencies – we locate ourselves with the heroine. Jessica Jones is a subversive figure, a Private Investigator prowling the underbelly of New York City. No longer, in *Alias*, part of superhero establishment, living in Avengers Mansion alongside government organizations like S.H.I.E.L.D. Gaydos’s darkly expressionistic artwork helps us locate ourselves always in Jessica’s visceral realm of ‘bare life’. Not only is this the world that is overpowered by Killgrave, but also demarcated by more conventional hierarchies of power and control that go beyond even him. While both our reading and viewing require an imaginative construction of the work with which we are engaging, there is a sense in which the comics require this of us to a greater extent. The reader has to move their attention from panel to panel, spending time to work out the narrative direction, turn the pages and dwell on images as may be necessary (Pitkethly, 2009). With Jessica Jones – *Alias* and the Netflix series – the final violence, redemptive though it may be and on the side of life rather than power it may be too, remains ours.

Final Remarks

Anna Peppard (forthcoming, 2018), writing on *Alias*, states that:

this storyline importantly foregrounds gender-based physical and psychological abuse as a problem that extends well beyond the purview of individual, outrageous villains; this storyline instead presents this abuse as a society-wide as well as an institutionalized problem, perpetrated – or at the very least abetted – by government-sanctioned heroes whom Jessica had viewed as idols and friends.

Peppard argues that the Purple Man’s abuse of Jessica Jones is merely a localized and more extreme version of the mechanisms of power and control employed by male superheroes, on behalf of the social order that they embody and defend, to control superheroines and other female characters. In reading the Jessica Jones/Purple Man as a feminist text (though the product of male auteurs), Peppard contextualizes Jones’s final turning of the tables as a cathartic act of female empowerment.¹²

11 Unfortunately, for this seductive reading of the scene, the Purple Man was to return in *New Thunderbolts* Volume 1 #10.

12 Lillian Céspedes González goes further, arguing that Jones’ empowerment represents a significant mainstreaming of a wider fan and geek culture, giving a voice to all those on the ‘stigmatized fringes of society’ (Céspedes

Yet any act of redemptive violence must be ‘read’ differently in the context of a comic, and the ontological difference between comic book violence and screen violence becomes clear when we are given specific page/screen analogues to compare. The reader commits the violence themselves in the comics medium, through their articulation of the panel breakdown. As an antagonist, the Purple Man becomes a roving embodiment of the biopowers of the patriarchal state and its institutions. His superpowers render visible the violent mechanisms which enforce this power – mechanisms which normally remain hidden. By situating within a supervillain, a form of power that so resembles the control of individuals by the state, both graphic novel and TV series give the reader textual permission to participate in a violent overthrow of whatever institutional powers they deem to oppress them. Yet our closer involvement with Jones’s retributive actions make these seem more justified in the comic than in the TV series. The Purple Man’s destruction on the page is more brutal and more lingering than on screen. Retributive violence in comics is supremely seductive, proceeding as it does under the reader’s direct control and articulation. It is the spatial separation of the panels that makes willing vigilantes of us all.

Beckman and Blake (2009, p. 2), writing of the philosophical relations between sadism and masochism, power and violence, note that it:

is perhaps significant for the question of gender and the configurations of sadism/masochism that both of these films,¹³ as one critic [Noyes, 1997] has put it, end with ‘the triumphant communal laughter of women’.

It would seem appropriate, then, even in a piece about the violence of Killgrave, that these last words should be with Jessica Jones who, while she may not be full of laughter, is nonetheless triumphant. Yet, we must remember, that at the same time as Jessica regains agency and the power to act in the face of an invisible, though all-pervading, power – which we have characterised in terms the power of the state over life condensed into Killgrave – so do we. ‘But when power in this way takes life as its aim or object,’ Deleuze writes in *Foucault*, ‘then resistance to power already puts itself on the side of life, and turns life against power’ (Deleuze, 1988, p. 76). We may well regard Jessica’s overcoming of Killgrave as life’s resisting power, which may be all that any of us who have experienced biopolitical violence can do: to be on the side of life itself.

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González, 2018, p. 78). Eva Thury, contrastingly, characterizes both Jones and Killgrave as tricksters (Thury, 2016, p. 6).

13 These films are: Robert Van Ackeren’s *Woman in Flames* (1983) and Monika Treut’s and Elfie Mikesch’s *Seduction: Cruel Woman* (1985); see: Beckman and Blake (2009, p. 2).

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