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Alternate History

Narrating Futures

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Alternate History

Playing with Contingency and Necessity

Content

1 Introduction

1.1 Contexts: Alternate Histories and Future Narratives

The purpose of this study is to investigate a corpus of texts known as 'alternate history' in the cooperative pursuit of defining a new field of narratology, future narratives (FNs). No less important is the endeavour to offer insights into the nature of alternate history to enrich an already existing, dynamic field of scholarship. Since the objectives presented here should be understood in the framework of the umbrella project *Narrating Futures* (hereafter: "NAFU"), it is fitting to begin with some contextualization.

Alternate history is a recognizable term, not only for scholars of literature, but also for many readers in general. Especially since the 1960s,[1] alternate histories have steadily gained popular status as the 'what-if' tales of history. Among the most well-known examples are Philip Dick's classic *The Man in the High Castle*, in which Nazi Germany and Japan are victorious in World War II, or Michael Chabon's novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, in which a temporary settlement for Jewish refugees is set up in Alaska after Israel's collapse in 1948. Such works have become veritable pop-cultural phenomena, along with countless other literary explorations of the question 'what if?'. Nowadays, readers can even search on websites like www.uchronia.net[2] for an alternate history of their choice – not only by author, language or date of publication, but also by 'divergence', or the historical period and/or event chosen as the focus of the alternate history –, or discuss their favourite alternate histories online with enthusiasts on www.alternatehistory.com. Personal websites of amateur alternate-history authors have begun to populate the web as well, including "Black Shuck's Alternate History Page", run by a former history major, or "The Tony Jones Alternate History Page", branded by a translated quote from Konrad Adenauer: "History is the sum total [sic] of things that might have been avoided" (R. Brown; T. Jones). The daily blog "Today in Alternate History" collects the best of alternate-history journal-style articles from the web, and readers can follow the latest posts on Twitter. Several years ago, in 1995, a kind of critical promotion of the genre was instituted as well: *The*

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1 For a comprehensive list of alternate histories published in the United States and England during the 1960s, see Helbig 78–86; cf. Gavriel Rosenfeld: "Since the end of World War II, and especially since the 1960s alternate history [...] has gained both in popularity and respectability" (*The World Hitler never made* 5); cf. Korthals 157–169; cf. Otten.
2 There is a comparable site for French, Italian, and Spanish alternate histories: "Utopia / Ucronia", http://www.fmboschetto.it/Utopiaucronia/index.htm Otten also makes the point that alternate history has a large internet fan base (cf. Otten).

Sidewise Awards for Alternate History were created to recognize "the best allohistorical genre publications of the year".[3]

That alternate history has achieved a degree of respect among readers outside of a specialized fan base is evidenced, for example, by the fact that Philip Roth's alternate-history novel *The Plot against America* made bestseller lists in the United States in 2004 and has since been translated into Danish, French, German, Italian and Spanish, or that many more recently published alternate histories are advertised as such (for example the works of Harry Turtledove, who has made a career for himself as the "master" of alternate history (Castro)). Stephen King's newest book, *11/23/63*, in which a teacher travels back in time to prevent the assassination of John F. Kennedy, is also an example of alternate history in high profile. Outside of alternate history 'proper', examples of the 'what-if?' concept abound in popular culture, from *Star Trek* to *The Fantastic Four*.

Those less familiar with alternate history as pop literature or its widespread presence on the internet, in television, film, and books, may have heard of the closely-related concept of 'counterfactual history', promoted and practiced by high-profile historians such as Niall Ferguson or Robert Cowley (cf. Ferguson; Cowley). As we shall see, history and historiography are fields in which counterfactual thinking is prominent, even if its validity as a part of historical method is still a matter of avid debate. Counterfactual history and counterfactuality are treated in the fields of cognitive science, philosophy, political science, and even geography,[4] too, and scholars in various disciplines have contributed to our understanding of the uses, problems, and paradoxes of postulating alternative outcomes to past events. The underlying 'what-if?' concept in its most fundamental form should be familiar to just about everyone, not limited to any given readership: the cognitive process of calculating alternative possibilities is necessary for decision-making in general.[5] The fact that the counterfactual principle of

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3 Previous winners include Philip Roth's *The Plot against America* (2005) and Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007). cf. Schmunk.

4 I have in mind the following study: D. Gilbert and D. Lambert, "Counterfactual geographies: Worlds that might have been"; a most original consideration of the geographies of movement quite "literally of the paths not taken" (249) of co-presence, and the "chanciness" of the natural world (250). Among the most recent studies on counterfactual history in the field of historiography/pedagogy of history are: Bulhof 145–168; Evans 77–84; 120–130; Harari, 251–266; Lebow, "Good History Needs Counterfactuals" 91–97; Tetlock, Lebow, and Parker, *"What-If" Scenarios*; Hernàndez 23–36; Pelegrín. In the fields of sociology and anthropology: Collins R. 247–269; Hassig 57–72; De Mey, 47–66. In the field of philosophy: Collins, Hall, and Paul; Vial 159–175. In psychology: Roese and Olson. And in political science: Tetlock and Belkin 3–38.

5 According to Ruth Byrne, this principle underlies both imaginative and rational thoughts: "People create a counterfactual alternative to reality by mentally altering or 'undoing' some

alternate history enjoys considerable recognition outside of the field of literary research both enriches and complicates the attempt by scholars of literature to theorize alternate history as a genre.

On the other hand, if you have never heard of a 'FN' before, you are not alone. This concept has a different status altogether in that it was 'christened' with the project to which this study belongs. It is therefore 'merely' a theoretical tool (at least for the moment), but one that strives to identify a corpus of texts that are recognizable on a basic level as *somehow different from* other narratives: many video games, films such as Kieślowski's *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*), or printed literature such as Julio Cortazár's *Hopscotch*. 'FN' may at first appear to be a contradiction in terms, for the prototypical narrative, as defined by traditional narratology, has always been one concerned with the past, i.e. states, actions and events that are, from the viewpoint of the narrator, past (cf. Margolin 143). This definition includes most works of science fiction, which may claim to narrate a future scenario, yet still process events as if they had already happened. But this is precisely what is different about the texts mentioned above: unlike most narratives, they treat the future as still variable, undecided, or 'open'. So NAFU: a true FN is one that preserves the characteristic feature of future time, namely that it is yet undecided, open, and it has not yet 'crystallized' into actuality. FNs can be minimally defined as follows: they are narratives containing at least one *node* or *nodal situation*, a situation which allows for more than one continuation.

The inclusion of alternate history and FN in the same title may at first seem an equally startling contradiction. What can alternate histories possibly have to do with the future? It is not possible to claim that alternate histories *are* FNs, for alternate histories have at least two characteristics obviously *not* shared by FNs, which I will briefly sketch here.

First, like past narratives, the narratives of alternate histories consist entirely of events. An event has happened, and it is *one*, definite outcome. Nodes, on the other hand, are situations of potential; they are situations that allow for *at least more than one* continuation. Whereas events exist in FNs as well, the functional place held by events in past narratives is replaced by nodes, or nodal situations, in FNs. In contrast to video games or hypertexts, alternate histories are texts in a definite, bound form that do not offer this form of structural 'openness', the

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aspects of the facts in their mental representation of reality [...]?" (3); cf. Ross Hassig: "In the here-and-now, we all think counterfactually – not in the sense of projected possible courses of action in the past, but rather in the present weighing of alternatives, all except one of which will ultimately become counterfactuals" (59); cf. Roese and Olson on the social psychology of counterfactual thinking (Roese and Olson 5; 46); cf. Dannenberg 3; for a good, concise account of counterfactualizing as a cognitive process, see 109–115 of the same.

possibility of more than one continuation. In select cases, alternate histories do realize narratively parallel, mutually exclusive possibilities (ex. L. Sprague de Camp's "The Wheels of If", in which the protagonist lives various different versions of himself, or Rafael Marín Trechera's "Mein Führer" in which Neo-Nazis 'yo-yo' time-travel to first save Hitler's life, then kill him) and the narratives are multi-linear. Two such texts will be examined here as case studies (*Making History* and *N*), but it is important to note that they are FNs not as a result of their being alternate histories, but rather as a result of their forking-paths structure.

Second, unlike the most paradigmatic FNs, the reader of an alternate history is relegated to a relatively passive role as a recipient. FNs focus on the role of the reader/player, i.e. the participatory mode in which each 'run' carried out by the reader/player actualizes the narrative and completes it on the level of either discourse or story.[6] In its most extreme form (i.e. video games), a FN is a structure that allows for a process; the narrative only 'happens' when the reader/player 'does' something. Alternate histories, on the other hand, remain within the receptive mode. Unlike most FNs, alternate histories present the reader with few (if any) choices that affect the course of the narrative or the text in its concrete form. Alternate histories are thus neither interactive, nor do they require the same degree or kind of activity as FNs require from the reader/player.

These observations confirm the first, rough impression that we have of such texts. As Spedo remarks, alternate histories are "written as if [they] were historical fiction" (7). In light of the critical differences to FNs, it is already clear that alternate histories are not by definition FNs. Indeed, alternate histories have stronger affinities to kinds of past narrative, not being considered in the framework of NAFU. As we shall see, however, alternate histories can *also* be FNs, and there are a few, select examples of such hybrids. As for the vast majority of alternate histories, which are not FNs, the relevant and interesting question is how the two sub-categories of narrative fiction are related, but still different.

1.2 Methodology

The necessity of an approach that takes into account the decidedly different nature of alternate histories and FNs has the potential of foregrounding aspects that may have otherwise been overlooked – both for alternate histories and for FNs. In this study, I will make a broadening gesture of determining how alternate histories can be situated in narrative literature as a whole: what is special about

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6 For an in-depth discussion of the basic structure of FNs see Bode 1.5.

alternate histories, and how do they relate to other kinds of narrative? But I will also emphasize specific characteristics of alternate histories to address why it is meaningful to focus explicitly on alternate histories (of all narrative literature) in the attempt to create a grammar, logic, and poetics of FNs. In other words, what can we learn about FNs with an investigation of alternate histories? These two gestures are not opposed to one another, but rather together provide a critical link between the theory of FNs and narrative literature as a whole.

Genre and sub-genre delineations themselves are not to be taken for granted as stable, self-contained categories. As we have already seen, the designation of alternate history as a genre has value for the production and reception of these texts. However, by no means does this value automatically translate to the field of literary theory. Some scholars, such as Alastair Fowler, would argue that alone the relevance of the genre designation for writers, readers, and critics validates that designation (cf. Korte and Paletschek 16–17). While I agree that this criterion serves as an excellent starting point, and that there is no reason why general opinion and scholarly assertion may not mutually inform each other, the questioning of such assertions is what constitutes literary theory to begin with.[7] If the designation of alternate history as a genre is indeed valid for literary theory, it must also be validated in those terms, i.e. a genre is a genre in literary theory not because everyone says it is, but rather because it designates an open system of texts that feature a common core of characteristics, i.e. so that it serves a discursive purpose to speak of a corpus of texts as a genre. In speaking of genres here, the necessity of nuance ought to be emphasized: if categories are indeed delineated, they must not only be justified in their accurate presentation of the material being categorized, but their use as a theoretical tool ought to remain tempered by the subtleties and varieties of the categorized.

Although literary scholars more or less recognize alternate history as a genre of narrative texts, the number of approaches to *often the same corpus of texts* forces us to recognize that the corpus of texts known as alternate history is diverse. In addition, the nature of the genre delineation itself may be continually investigated because the aspects of these texts that many studies emphasize as characteristic for the genre may be found to varying degrees in other narrative texts as well. The same applies to FNs in relation to other narrative texts: although it is meaningful for the study of narratives to define a corpus of texts called FNs, and the boundary between FNs and narratives as a whole is concrete, this does not by any means deny the fact that FNs are in some ways similar to past narratives; they are, in the end, all narratives. We might say that the primary interest of

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7 This is, for Jonathan Culler, literary theory in a nutshell.

this study of alternate histories in the context of NAFU is the definition of these critical boundaries as well as the points at which they are crossed – between narrative literature and alternate history, and between narrative literature as a whole and FNs.

1.3 Proceedings and Theses

The first section of this study is a thorough reconsideration of the poetics of alternate history with two primary goals: first, to situate and define alternate history in contrast to historical fiction and related genres; and second, to situate and define alternate history in relation and contrast to FNs. The first objective is achieved by both conceptualizing 'history' in alternate history and determining how alternate history interacts with that history. The subsequent investigation of alternate histories and FNs – that is, why alternate histories are not FNs, but still related – hinges on the feature common to all alternate histories, the so-called point of divergence, and its relation to the nodal situation.

I begin, as is perhaps advisable for any study on alternate history, by taking into account the existing studies on the genre. Most often, alternate history is seen as a sub-genre of historical fiction, but interfaces with science fiction have been recognized as well.[8] As will be shown, the reflection of alternate history as a form of historical fiction can benefit from the fields of historiography and philosophy (more specifically, possible-worlds theory). In response to the lack of a practical definition of 'history' in alternate history, i.e., one that makes sense in this particular context, I propose the following:

1. *'History' in alternate history, as historical fiction, may be defined as a construct of the text, but one which also refers to and takes part in a normalized narrative of the real past.*
2. *The normalized narrative of the real past is a culture- and time-specific construct. Thus the events that are foiled, represented, and made the focus of alternate histories are most often the events that (are assumed to) belong to the*

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8 For example, by one of the most recent dissertations on alternate history, Giampaolo Spedo's *The Plot against the Past*; others, like Amy Ransom, claim that alternate history is a "subgenre" of science fiction (258). Michael Butter also situates alternate history "im Spannungsfeld von Science Fiction und historischem Roman" ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 67); cf. Butter, *The Epitome of Evil* 49–57; Jerome de Groot similarly claims that historical fiction in general is a "cognate genre" of science fiction, which "involves a conscious interaction with a clearly unfamiliar set of landscapes, technologies and circumstances" (*The Historical* 4).

historical consciousness of the popular audience in the place of and at the time of publication.

As a result of these findings, we gain new perspectives on how alternate history may be contextualized in the postmodern. Unlike the vast majority of studies that situate alternate history as a form of historiographic metafiction, I maintain that:

3. *Alternate histories reflect the postmodern tension between artificiality and authenticity, but they do not deny the existence of a real past, nor do they deny the validity of a normalized narrative of the real past. Rather than challenge our notions of history, or call into question our ability to know the past through narrative, they conservatively support the normalized narrative of the real past.*

As for how exactly alternate history interacts with history, what is 'done' to history in alternate history, previous attempts to define alternate history in contrast to historical fiction in general will be examined. The most significant claim common to virtually all secondary studies is that alternate histories feature a specific kind of deviation from historical record – what I am calling here the point of divergence: the moment in the narrative of the real past from which the alternative narrative of history runs a different course. The point of divergence is the common denominator and the trait that distinguishes alternate histories from other related genres.

In theorizing the point of divergence as a key characteristic of alternate histories, alternate history will be treated both as broadly and specifically as possible, incorporating abstracted models as well as several, individual analyses. Examples range from 'classic' alternate histories, such as Robert Harris' *Fatherland,* Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, and Keith Roberts' *Pavane* to less-often examined texts, including Guido Morselli's *Contro-passato Prossimo* and Robert Wilson's *Darwinia*. In determining how alternate histories interact with history, that is, how they may be differentiated from works of historical fiction in general, I propose:

4. *The fictional world of an alternate history diverges at a specified point from the normalized narrative of the real past. This divergence is most typically permanent, i.e. there is no point of convergence.*

5. *Alternate histories may be distinguished from narratives that feature hypodiegetic alternate history or thematize alternate history within the narrative. The world of the alternate history is actual within the fiction.*

6. *Alternate histories are works of fiction, counterfactual histories are not. Unlike counterfactual histories, alternate histories feature both a fictional world narrated and a narrator that are ontologically independent of the world of the reader.*

7. *Only in modelling the reception of alternate histories can we speak of bifurcation. Here, there are at least two diverging paths, at least one of which is history, and at least one other of which is an alternative version realized narratively in the text.*

After the specific nature of alternate history in relation to other kinds of historical fiction and science fiction has been discussed, we can examine the similarities between alternate histories and FNs. The closest future-narrative 'relative' of alternate histories is the so-called 'forking-paths narrative', but the two are not to be confused. With the exception of the overlap of these two kinds of text, that is, alternate histories that are also forking-paths narratives, the intermediary hypothesis that alternate histories are not FNs will be shown to hold true. Further relevance to NAFU is explored on two accounts, the former with a negative result, the latter positive: a metaphoric relation to FNs in terms of interpretive 'openness', and a thematic relation in terms of an inherent tension between contingency and necessity.

In investigating the text strategies and paradoxes of alternate history, I emphasize the context of reception. Alternate histories, as texts which rely on text-external knowledge, make specific demands on the reader. That the alternate history only 'works' if the reader is able to contrast his or her knowledge of the narrative of history with the one presented in the text, is a phenomenon that has been recognized, but it has up until now not received significant attention. Most studies are limited to off-hand statements about *empirical* readers and then proceed to discuss textual structures without adequately considering the context of reception. Just as I maintain that it is critical to come to terms with history in alternate history without ignoring the fact that history exists outside of as well as inside the text, I argue that it is possible and equally meaningful to pursue a theory of the reader as a construct of the text (and not merely a text-external instance).

In doing so, it may be recognized that there is a dynamic relationship between the point of divergence and the function of the reader in alternate history. It seems that, the less explicit the point of divergence, the more 'open' the work in Umberto Eco's terms, the more active the recipient. And it is thus that we begin to close the theoretical circle FN-past narrative. If anything like 'live' nodes can indeed be found in narratives that are not FNs, they are of a more subtle kind: so-called occasions for interpretation. The underlying suggestion here is that some of the same elements of FNs can be found to varying degrees in all narrative texts – *only not at the level of discourse*. Examining the role of the reader in alternate histories allows us to test whether FNs might indeed be seen as continuations of estab-

lished semantics and traditional syntaxes; they are structural literalizations of characteristics or processes inherent to any narrative text.

The idea that any literary work is 'completed' by the reading process or the interpretation of the reader is not a new one. Furthermore, in the discussion of the open artwork, it seems that virtually all alternate histories are relatively 'closed'. Alternate histories on the whole require a different kind of activity from the reader than texts featuring occasions for interpretation, and they also feature a different kind of activity from the reader than FNs:

8. *Alternate histories require a specific kind of competency from the reader, who must be able to identify the alternative version of history as alternative and reason about the variance between that alternative and history.*

9. *Alternate histories pursue strategies of understandability. They are relatively 'closed' at the level of linguistic ambiguity.*

The relative 'clarity' or 'readability' of the language of alternate histories is the counterpart to the obviousness of intention: above all, it is important to know *what is going on* so that the two versions of history may be compared.

In investigating the logic that produces a chain of events that diverges from the normalized narrative at one crucial point, I propose that alternate histories feature a paradoxical notion of contingency and necessity:

10. *The point of divergence relies upon the principle of contingency, while the continuing variance from the normalized narrative of the real past – that is, the rest of the narrative – relies on the principle of necessity.*

Historians criticize counterfactual argumentation in historiography because of this paradox. However, one might argue that, much more than any kind of linguistic innovation, it is precisely this paradox as well as its development on a thematic level, that helps to make alternate history a viable kind of literature.

The second part of this investigation is a series of case studies, each paradigmatic for alternate history as conceptualized here, but each positioned differently along the spectrum of possibilities that this kind of text can offer: Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* is *the* paradigmatic alternate history in terms of both its conceptualization of history and development of the themes of necessity/determinism, contingency/free will; Philip Roth's *The Plot against America* is a notable exception to one of the most important aspects discussed above in that the novel seems to feature only temporary divergence from the narrative of the real past, suggesting a differently nuanced conception of contingency and necessity; Michael Chabon's novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* offers an exceptional choice of point of divergence, thus creating a more subtle, difficult 'game' for the reader than most alternate histories; Stephen Fry's *Making History*

is a time-travel alternate history and can be seen as a counterpart to Dick's novel in its revision of the Great Man theory of history; Dieter Kühn's brief and playful *N* deserves its own chapter as an even more fully integrated contemplation of human agency. In addition to these first five 'core' case studies, I have included investigations of two additional works which – although they are markedly less engaged with the paradox of contingency and necessity – are significant in terms of covering the spectrum of possibilities that alternate history has to offer. The film *Inglourious Basterds* may be seen as a 'mock' alternate history; the last case study, Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, is equally self-reflexive and unique for its linguistic reflection of the thematic basis of alternate history.

1.4 Selection of Primary Sources

1.4.1 Medium vs. Genre

Before we turn to the first main part of this study, it is necessary to make a few comments on the selection of primary source material. NAFU researchers have analysed a corpus of 'texts' in the widest sense of the word: not only print media, but also films, computer games, and other electronic media that allow for multi-linear narration at the level of structure. The investigation of alternate history is an exception among the sub-projects of NAFU in that it is focused on a specific sub-genre of narrative defined by its content, not a specific medium. As is already evident, the logic behind the decision to focus on alternate histories in the context of NAFU is a key concern and necessarily structures the course of my argument here to a considerable degree.

The fact that this sub-project is focused on content, not medium, also has consequences for the composition of my text corpus. Although this study will incorporate narrative texts in other media for purposes of comparison, the investigation of alternate histories in media other than print remains only peripheral. There are a few reasons that may be stated independently of the goals of NAFU: first, the printed book remains by far the most typical form for the alternate history (cf. Korthals 160).[9] Second, there is more than enough primary literature

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9 This was the case when Jörg Helbig published his study on 'parahistorical novels' at the end of the 1980s, and it continues to be an accurate statement today. Alternate histories in film and drama form represent a distant second to novels, short stories, and essays: examples of alternate-history films are Kevin Brownlow's *It Happened Here*, the BBC production *If Britain had fallen, Fatherland* (1994; a film adaptation of Robert Harris's novel of the same name), Kevin Will-

in book form to pursue a meaningful investigation of alternate history. The third reason has more to do with the situation of the present study in NAFU: as already mentioned, this study is unique among its 'sister-projects' in that it focuses on a given sub-genre. Inquiries into the capabilities of specific media (written texts, film, video-games) were carried out by other NAFU researchers. For all of these reasons, the relevance of alternate histories in other media has been tested strenuously on two accounts: does the text contribute new perspectives on alternate history? And: does it exhibit any kind of 'openness' postulated here in a different way than alternate histories in print media?

Alternate-history films, video-games, etc. that seem to take advantage of the given medium, that is to say, constitute a fundamentally different kind of alternate history by compounding the ideas presented in this study with techniques specific to the given medium, have proven rare. One exception has already been mentioned: Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). In addition, several films deserve further consideration not as alternate histories, but as fictional stagings of alternate histories: Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) and Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (1997). In these films, the history presented does not depart from the narrative of the real past, but there is a diegetic reemplotment of historical events, essentially fictionalizing the motivation for re-writing history.

1.4.2 The International Spectrum

Also worth mentioning here is one real shortcoming in existing studies of alternate history, particularly before the past decade: the almost exclusive focus on English-language alternate histories.[10] The focus on works in a single language

mott's *C.S.A., the Confederate States of America*, and Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*. Only one alternate-history drama has come to my attention, Noel Coward's *Peace in our Time*. Andreas Widmann, reflecting on the (lack of) success of the film adaptations of Richard Harris's *Fatherland* and Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, goes so far as to claim that the film medium is less "tauglich" than the book medium for counterfactual history. Only the more recent film, Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* seems to have "reclaimed" the operations of counterfactual history for the film medium (365–366).

10 A few exceptions should be noted here: Paul Alkon's short account of alternate history in his study of futuristic fiction focuses on French literature, describing utopias and alternate histories as two kinds of *uchronie* (*The Origins of Futuristic Fiction*); Rosenfeld's *The World Hitler Never Made* is more ambitious than most other studies in this respect, explicitly setting out to compare British, American, and German alternate histories of World War II; Amy Ransom's 2003 survey of French scholarship on the *uchronie* also takes a step towards recognition of alternate histories outside of the English-speaking world("Alternate History and Uchronia" 58–72). Widmann's *Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung* makes a point of including case studies on works in German;

within a given study is not in itself necessarily problematic: indeed, as we shall see, particularly with alternate history, this can have the benefit of creating a kind of thematic coherency that allows for the closer comparison of the works being discussed. But a tendency to focus on American literature in particular fosters the impression that alternate history is a phenomenon of the English-speaking world.[11] Especially given the newness of scholarship on alternate history and the disagreements about what works qualify, it is likely that this impression is false to begin with: surely there are plenty of works in other languages that might easily be termed 'alternate histories', but simply have not been identified as such because the scholarship in those languages has not done so. The emphasis on English-language literature is an inevitable result of the interests of a given community of scholars. While alternate histories on the American Civil War or JFK's presidency are, quite logically, to be found primarily (or even exclusively?) in English-language literature, there are countless works in other languages with alternative versions of the Spanish Civil War, Napoleon's reign, or other historical periods that hold more prominent positions in different cultural contexts.

This problem is closely connected with my thesis that 'history' in alternate history is a time- and culture-specific construct. It is logical, for example, to consider the popularity of alternate history in the context of a more general rise in interest in historical fiction in a given national context. Some would argue that the proliferation of alternate histories in the US after World War II was the result of a more general 'boom' in historical fiction. As to when exactly this 'boom' occurred, there is little consensus. But the connection between alternate history and historical fiction in general as well as historical fiction and the popularization of history, has been made already. Otten suggests that "the last four decades have witnessed an immense proliferation of historical cultural artifacts", and that "alternate history has only witnessed a substantial increase of publications since the 1990s."[12] Barbara Korte and Sylvia Paletschek, in their volume on history in popular media and genres, claim: "seit den 1980er Jahren ist ein steigendes öffentliches Interesse an Geschichte zu verzeichnen, das seit der zweiten Hälfte der 1990er und insbesondere in den letzten Jahren einen bisher ungekannten Höhepunkt erreicht hat." (9) This "Geschichtsboom" is the result of rising education levels, the demands of a public interested in questions of national identity as well as, for example, an increase in leisure time and growing budget for cultural

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Christoph Rodiek, himself a scholar of Romanistic literature, also focuses primarily on Spanish, French, and Italian texts (Rodiek).

11 As claimed, for example, by Jörg Helbig (24). Spedo also cites a "distinct predominance of Anglo-American authors" (23).

12 There is no statistical support offered for this statement.

consumption; it is manifest in the "proliferation of historical cultural artifacts" of which Otten speaks: books, films, TV series, comics, historical city tours, textbooks, and historical reenactments (9–14).[13]

That English-language *scholarship* on historical fiction seems to have been traditionally more prevalent than elsewhere is perhaps also to be seen in connection with the social-cultural factors described above: if we follow the argument that a particular popular interest in history has resulted in a proliferation of historical fiction, it is logical that academia will respect and even promote the very same. This may be seen, for example, in the creation of courses of study such as "Public History" in the 1970s at American universities (cf. Korte and Paletscheck "Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres" 11–12). Let it be noted that a similar process might be observed in Germany: in the past two decades, German scholarship has gained particular momentum in the field of 'Geschichtskultur': "die Erforschung des Geschichtsbewusstseins in einer Gesellschaft [...] sowie die Untersuchung der Geschichtsinterpretationen unterschiedlicher kultureller, kommerzieller wie staatlicher und gesellschaftlicher Einrichtungen [...] und Medien [...]" (cf. Korte and Paletschek, "Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres" 10–11). The proliferation of studies in German on historical fiction and alternate history specifically should come as no surprise.

The point that I would like to make here is that, even if there is some social-cultural basis for alternate history the claim that alternate history is a phenomenon of predominantly English-language literature, this does not change the fact that there are countless alternate histories in other languages. Thus the concentration of genre-poetical studies on English-language texts has not been (and likely cannot be) justified in theoretical terms. For those interested in pursuing the poetics of alternate history *as a whole* – that is, not limited to literary works in a given context – there is an acute need to broaden the scope and look beyond literature in English. It is not possible here to rectify the problem entirely, but I hope to move in the right direction and at least encourage future scholars of alternate history to broaden their scope and to avoid taking their text corpus for granted. Two non-English-language works are used here as case studies, but several others have been considered and are given attention in the context of the discussion on the poetics of alternate history.

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13 See also Jerome de Groot's ambitious account of history's popular consumption: *Consuming History* (1–13).

2 The Poetics of Alternate History

As already stated, scholarship on alternate history seems to have been both motivated and burdened by the fact that, although there has never been a real genre tradition, there is a corpus of works readily identifiable by the general public as alternate histories. Significantly, alternate history has, in the past several years, effectively 'doubled-back' on itself, become self-conscious, and in doing so established its own discursive existence *as a genre*: works marketed as alternate histories, critical recognition of alternate histories, the increasing presence of amateur alternate-history writers, the attention given to counterfactual history by scholars of various disciplines, and last but not least, the interest of literary theorists in these works have all contributed.

The newness and 'makeshiftedness' of the genre in this sense appears to have had two, main consequences for literary scholarship on alternate history: first, it has resulted in often dizzying inconsistencies in the attempt to define the genre. In this respect, accounts of the genre intended for popular audiences are often suspect. Although it would be inappropriate and unfair to hold these to literature-theoretical standards of any kind, the question is perhaps not considered often enough: what is at stake in defining a genre at all? On www.uchronia.net, related genres are systematically discounted on the basis of, for example, authorial intention and date of publication: according to Robert Schmunk, 'out-of-date-science-fictions' such as Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* published in1935 are to be distinguished from alternate histories because "the authors' intention is plainly *not* to write alternate history". Schmunk then admits, "a limit must be drawn or else this bibliography would have the impossible goal of including a significant fraction of the books and stories that have ever been published, and potentially the majority of all science fiction" – a perfectly valid justification *for this kind of project*. But I find it then for all intents and purposes problematic that Karen Hellekson, who is indeed claiming to make arguments in a theoretical manner, adapts this same kind of logic. According to Hellekson, alternate history is classified as science fiction merely because "the authors of alternate histories tend to be established science fiction writers [...] These works are thus classified and shelved with science fiction, because the writer has already been categorized as a science fiction writer." (19)[14]

Seen as a whole, the ever-growing corpus of secondary literature dealing with the genre poetics of alternate history remains problematic – partly as a result of

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14 Hellekson claims to address this classification at a different point in her study, but does so vaguely in a few sentences, focusing on alternate history's "use of changed historical points to bring about different realities" (4).

less than careful logic, partly because of the mere fact that, again, discourse on the subject is relatively new. In pursuit of an answer to the question 'what exactly is alternate history?' critical discourse has been characterized by a lack of ambition, seldom going beyond arguments about terminology and categorization in order to investigate critically and systematically *what is there*. Among the many attempts over the past three decades to define the genre are the already-mentioned study by Karen Hellekson, and dissertations by Edgar V. McKnight, Jr., William J. Collins, Aleksandar Nedelkovich, and Giampaolo Spedo. Among studies in English, Spedo's dissertation presents the most original research, although it remains relatively modest in scope and falls prey to some of the same pitfalls of earlier studies, most critically a rather simplistic treatment of the concept of 'history'. Hellekson's study promises readers the first analysis of alternate history on narratological and historiographical terms. But her 30-page introduction, followed by fewer than 80 pages of case studies, lacks the ambition and comprehensiveness necessary to account for alternate history as a complex, interdisciplinary phenomenon.

Different from Hellekson's thin volume as well as most of the other studies written in English mentioned, we have the considerable benefit here of surveying more than one landscape of scholarship. It seems that scholars have rarely built on one another's work, to some degree because of mere oversight. McKnight, for example, claims to have written the first full-length study examining alternate history, apparently unaware of the earlier work of Collins or Nedelkovich. A good two years before any of these three, another study pursuing a poetics of alternate history was published: Jörg Helbig's 1988 dissertation *Der parahistorische Roman*. Hellekson mentions Helbig's study (but not, for example, Rodiek's), but admits that she was unable to acquire and read it (cf. Hellekson 11).

The failure to account for scholarship in other languages is unfortunate. In particular, a glance at studies on alternate history written in German reveals what a detriment this has been. Recent studies on the poetics of alternate history by German scholars not only critically examine studies written in English, but achieve on the whole more systematic, convincing accounts of the *differentia specifica* of this corpus of texts. Christoph Rodiek's *Erfundene Vergangenheit. Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung (Uchronie) in der Literatur*, which responds to Helbig's dissertation and provides a valuable survey of alternate histories written in French, Spanish, and Italian, is cited in almost none of the studies of alternate history written in English.[15] Nor are insightful essays by Holger Korthals,

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15 Rosenfeld cites both Helbig and Rodiek in his 2005 cultural-historical study *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism;* Collins also appears to have been aware of Helbig's work, including it in the bibliography to *The Alternative History*; Elizabeth Wes-

Erhard Schütz, Michael Butter, or Uwe Durst. One of the most significant studies of alternate history in recent years has yet to be mentioned by English-speaking scholars: Andreas Widmann's *Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung* (cf. Singles 180–188).

Spedo, who responds primarily to Collins, Hellekson, and McKnight as well as several tangential references to alternate history in studies on science fiction, wryly titles his 'subtractive' attempt to characterize alternate history "The Pigeon is Not Holed", correctly identifying some of the difficulties of coming to a consensus about the nature of alternate history (15). Indicative of fundamental discord among literary scholars on the poetics of alternate history, even the term alternate history is not a matter of consensus. Other terms for alternate history include: allohistory, alternative history, *politique fiction*, uchronia, *Gegenge-schichte*, parallel time novel, 'what-if' story, quasi-historical novel, political fantasy, historical might-have-been, 'as if' narrative and counterfeit world, para-history, and most recently, the same corpus of texts has been subsumed under the term *deviierender historischer Roman* (cf. Widmann; Hellekson; Friedrich 256; Schütz 48; Ransom, *Alternate History and Uchronia* 58–72).[16] It seems to me that each of these variations has a slightly different meaning, depending on the goals of the author of the respective study, and there is little sense in arguing about the concrete differences between them.[17] I choose the term alternate history here

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seling cites the work of both Helbig and Rodiek (but not his dissertation, which was published several years after Wesseling's volume) in her 1991 study of postmodern historical fiction, *Writing History as Prophet. Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*.

16 Korthals, too, plays the 'name game' and provides a discussion of this problem in his short article "Spekulationen mit historischem Material". Even Helbig, whose study was published in 1988, already refers explicitly to the variety of names for this kind of literature (13); there have only been further suggestions since, and there is still no standardized term. Collins prefers "alternative history", but uses others terms interchangeably "for the sake of variety and readability" (*Paths Not Taken* 5).

17 As, for example, Ransom attempts in her work on alternate history and the uchronie. See: "Alternate history and uchronia" 58–72; and "Warping time: Alternate history" 258–280: her emphasis on the idea that alternate history is a specific kind of uchronia ultimately falls flat, not least of all because, as she herself admits, the equation of the two terms is common to English and French speakers alike (62). Ransom deals with limited definitions of both. Thus, while her work is valuable in setting several French-language sources against English-language sources, the discussion of terminology for its own sake seems unproductive, and more importantly, it involves an unfortunate simplification of the very discourse that Ransom is attempting to name. On the other hand, to Ransom's defense, she is correct in drawing attention to this problem. Authors like Carrère, Alkon, and Henriet do indeed use the term 'uchronie' to mean something more general than alternate history. See for example: Carrère, *Le détroit de Behring: Introduction à l'uchronie*, a 'portrait' of the genre that names many of the same works that are (also) known as alternate histories (Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, Keith Roberts's *Pavane*, etc.); Alkon

deliberately because it is both one of the most widely-used names for the given corpus of texts, also among writers and editors (cf. Butter "Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 65), and it is the most generic term that corresponds to the aspects that I would like to illuminate in this study. Although most correct grammatically, 'alternative history' is a decidedly weaker option, because it already has a given meaning among historians: histories written from a non-standard point of view (i.e. Elijah Wald's *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock n Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*).

Above all, it is encouraging for those interested in genre poetics that the corpus of texts examined remains consistent: Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, Keith Roberts's *Pavane*, and Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*, for example, are recognized as paradigmatic texts by nearly all studies of the genre. In addition, many works published before the latter half of the twentieth century have since been designated alternate histories retroactively, or at least recognized as precursors for the modern genre: often cited are parts of Livy's *History of Rome* (Livius 227–241), Louis Geoffroy's *Histoire de la monarchie universelle. Napoleon et la cônquete du monde 1812–1832*, Isaac D'Israeli's "Of a History of Events Which Have Not Happened", J.B. Bury's essay "Cleopatra's Nose", and finally, Murray Leinster's short story "Sidewise in Time",

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even uses the term 'uchronie' to mean both 'futuristic utopia' (as in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440*) and 'historical utopia' = alternate history (Charles Renouvier's *Uchronie [l'Utopie dans l'histoire]* and Louis Geoffroy's *Napoléon et la conquête du monde – 1812 à 1832 – Histoire de la monarchie universelle* are cited as characteristic); to make matters perhaps more confusing, there is effectively a close connection between all three terms 'utopia', 'uchronia', and 'alternate history': (see Alkon, esp. 'From Utopia to Uchronia' 115–157); Henriet even translates 'uchronie' as "alternate story" (*L'Histoire revisitée* 19) which includes alternate history. 'Uchronie' for Henriet includes not only alternate history, but also the "uchronies de fiction" ("[qui] mettant en jeu des altérations/divergences dans la chronologie officielle de ces œuvres de fiction" ["which puts into play alterations of and divergences from the official chronology of these works of fiction"]; 84 and 49–51; translation KS) and the "uchronie personelle", which ranges from works like *It's a Wonderful Life, The Butterfly Effect, Groundhog Day, Back to the Future*, to forking-paths narratives like *Smoking/No smoking, Sliding Doors* and *Lola rennt*. In the end, Henriet seems to be getting at something like Hilary Dannenberg's purposefully broad definition of counterfactual in *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*: he writes, asking 'what if?' is "ce que tout le monde fait un jour ou l'autre dans sa vie en se livrant à la réflexion [...] En littérature, il n'est pas rare que les personnages d'un roman ou d'une nouvelle, dans leur vie personnelle, se posent ce genre de question et se mettent à faire de l'uchronie sur leur propre vie" ("that which everyone does one day or another in the course of reflecting about his own life [...] In literature, it isn't a rare occurrence that characters in a novel or in a novella pose this kind of question in their personal lives or need to resort to uchronia for their own lives.") (*L'Histoire revisitée* 89; translation KS) Despite the inclusion of so many different kinds of text, Henriet's clear focus is still, however, on alternate history, *l'uchronie historique*.

for which the already-mentioned *Sidewise Awards* are named (see Gallagher, *War, Counterfactual History* 53–66).[18] This seems to confirm the impression that, although there is much dispute as to which texts qualify as alternate histories, there does seem to be some common ground, and that this label helps us to identify and focus on some fundamental aspect of these texts.

The second effect (and here the more positive account) of the degree of popular interest in alternate history and the fact that discourse on the genre is relatively 'young' has been a recent surge of interest in analysing these texts and theorizing the genre. In surveying the spectrum of secondary literature on alternate history, we find not only studies attempting to define alternate history, but also (among others): reception-oriented studies that not only treat the genre as a whole, but draw connections between alternate histories and the political climate at the time and place they were published (above all the 1960s), including the work of Catherine Gallagher and Gavriel Rosenfeld (see G. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*);[19] investigations of individual works of alternate history, as collected in Edgar L. Chapman's and Carl B. Yoke's volume *Classic and Iconoclastic Alternate History Science Fiction*; and reflections on the function of alternate history, for example Gavriel Rosenfeld's essay "Why do we ask 'what if'?". Perhaps as a result of the interdisciplinary interest in the subject, the most successful English-language studies do not focus on, but rather contextualize, alternate history as a phenomenon of either postmodernism or counterfactuality

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18 It will become clear that the present study focuses mainly on newer manifestations of alternate history. Thorough historical surveys of the genre exist, and such an account will not be repeated here: Henriet, for example, hails Charles Renouvier creator of the uchronia; Geoffroy's work is the first substantial uchronie historique (Henriet, *L'uchronie* 23; *L'Histoire revisitée* 17; *Le Détroit de Behring* 8; 18). In a rare moment of criticism, he scowls at English-speaking scholars for having neglected them: "On pardonnera volontiers à Hellekson, dont l'étude es passionnante, cet à-peu-près certainement dû à sa méconnaissance du français" ("We will of course forgive Hellekson, whose study is fascinating, for this inaccuracy – surely due to her lack of knowledge of French") (*L'uchronie* 26; translation KS); above all with the work of Alkon, Rodiek, and Ransom, this neglect has been at least mitigated. Henriet provides, in addition, an excellent overview of the origins of the uchronie. See *L'Histoire revisitée* 77–93; for a survey of the origins of alternate history specifically, see W. J. Collins, *Paths Not Taken* 158–265. Butter claims, "Systematische Studien zur diachronen Entwicklung der Gattung sowie zu ihren Vorläufern in vergangenen Jahrhunderten liegen bisher nicht vor und stellen ein echtes Desiderat dar.Satzzeichen verschoben – bitte überprüfen" ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 66; cf. Butter, *The Epitome of Evil* 13) It is not clear from Butter's essay whether he is aware of Henriet's survey or Collins's dissertation, but he is surely correct in noticing a considerable chance for future scholarship.

19 A bit more loosely-inspired by this topic is the work of Henriet "Pourquoi écrit-on de l'uchronie?"; see also *L'uchronie*; and *L'Histoire revisitée. Panorama de l'uchronie sous toutes ses forms*; see also Nedelkovich 8.

more broadly: Paul K. Alkon's *The Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, Hilary Dannenberg's *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, Christopher B. Smith's dissertation *The Development of the Reimaginative and Reconstructive in Historiographic Metafiction: 1960–2007*, and most recently, Jerome de Groot's brief survey *The Historical Novel*. Such studies, like those dealing with alternate history on cultural-historical terms, are less focused on pursuing questions of poetics than other (equally fascinating) topics related to historical fiction as a whole, the reception of historical events in literature, or notions of collective memory. Even as this study is being written, there are several concurrent projects on alternate histories, even just within Germany, that take unique and innovative approaches to the genre: one, for example, concentrating on connecting the "public discourse of change" (Otten) in the United States since September 11th, 2001 and the growing popularity of alternate history in America; another creatively employing the poetics of alternate histories for an investigation of Australian reality television.[20] Catherine Gallagher has recently completed a research stay at the American Academy in Berlin, concentrating on the topic "The Way It Wasn't: Counterfactual History and the Alternate-History Novel"; one of Michael Butter's current projects at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies is entitled "The Representation of Historical Knowledge in the Novel". This is all to say: lack of consensus is by no means a problem in itself. Far from simply complicating discourse on the genre, it constantly stimulates new thought, indeed motivates the discourse.

However, critical 'gaps' where research on genre poetics has not quite met its task, may be identified as well. Consider the following definitions and statements about the nature of alternate history:

> Allohistory [...] deals with the known past as it might have been – not as it may have happened behind the scenes, or to unknown individuals, but as we here and now are sure that it did not. (Waugh C. and Greenberg 283)

> Alternate history is a genre defined by speculation about what the present world would be like had historical events occurred differently. (McKnight iii)

> Alternate histories involve: "eine narrative kohärente Alternative zum tatsächlichen Geschichtsverlauf" (Rodiek 26).

> [Alternate histories] take a historical base, accurate in our world, synthesized from eyewitness accounts, letters, and other primary sources, and historical repercussions of the event (war, peace, an important treaty, lands exchanged, and so on) and add fictional characters and events to it. The difference between the reality of the event and the alternate history

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20 I am referring here to the current Ph.D. research of Birte Otten at the Univ. of Göttingen, and the habilitation research of Anja Schwarz at the Univ. of Potsdam.

> creates tension that keeps the reader interested. The writer tells a story in narrative form and uses the narrative techniques that fiction and history share. (Hellekson 28)

At first glance, these statements seem to create a relatively consistent sketch of the genre, or at least we can take for granted two basic observations about alternate history:

1. *Alternate history deals with history.*
2. *Alternate history is by definition not history writing.*

But we begin to run into difficulty as we examine alternate history using historiographical terms and further explore what exactly is meant by 'history' on the one hand, and the nature of its use in alternate history on the other.

   In examining the first assumption, above, it is evident that much secondary literature is satisfied with a rather simplified concept of history and has not yet fully profited from scholarship in the neighbouring field of historiography. Even though possible definitions of history range from the events themselves (what actually happened) to the documentation of historical events (how events are represented), rare is the study on alternate histories that grapples with this knot intensively enough to assert which (if any) definition of history is relevant for alternate histories. Even Spedo's account, at times insightful and critical, rather nonchalantly employs the terms "past events", "the received version of history", "the real past", "history", "the historical past" etc. to refer to the basis for the alternate history, without pursuing any concrete conceptualization of 'history'. Here, Elizabeth Wesseling's 1991 study on postmodern historical fiction is more sophisticated: she prefers the term "canonized history", "the reservoir of established historical facts and standard interpretations of these facts" (93). The application to alternate history, unfortunately, is not consistent: alternate histories are "fictions which [...] change canonized history in ways one cannot ignore" (100).

   It would be implausible to claim that the 'history' in alternate history is merely equivalent to the events themselves, since most of these works were surely not written on the basis of the author's first-hand experience of the respective events. As Spedo remarks, even history writing itself is "twice removed" from its object: history is a particular kind of science which cannot be based on direct observation, nor can hypotheses be tested (50).[21] Authors of historical fiction in general,

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21 See also Joel E. Cohen: "[...] the universe is a live performance that is being given only once. We cannot replay the universe, or even any large chunk of it, under the same initial conditions to see what would happen on a second try. Replication is often the key to analysis, and replication on the scale germane to human and natural history is difficult" (71); cf. Hayden White: "it is wrong to think of a history as a model similar to a scale model of an airplane or ship, a map, or

basing their work on accounts of history, are thus 'thrice' removed from the real past. Furthermore, real events lose their absolute relevance in the reception of the text: each reader approaches the text with a more or less unique perception of historical events. So McKnight: "It is the acknowledgment of actual history, and of the reader's awareness of it that adds both humour and complexity to the novel of alternate history." (McKnight 9) But this statement hardly seems satisfactory for a non-empirical investigation. Is there a means of theorizing history in alternate history beyond taking into account each individual reader's perception of history? A means of conceptualizing history in fiction is necessary for discussing adequately the particular nature of history in alternate histories (relating to the second assumption, above). Indeed all further steps to define alternate history rely on a sound conceptualization of history.

Of all of the studies on alternate history, the work of Andreas Widmann and Uwe Durst is the most comprehensive and critical in this respect. Whereas McKnight and Hellekson seem to take their text corpus for granted, that is, without systematically examining neighbouring sub-genres or alternate history's status as historical fiction, both Widmann and Durst consider the nature of history in fiction critically by incorporating both literary and historiographical theory in order to situate alternate history in historical fiction. Both approaches can be firmly situated in a rather simple but apt distinction made by Ruth Klüger:

> Es gibt zwei Möglichkeiten der historischen Fiktion: Die eine ist, sich die Geschichte anders vorzustellen, als es die Fakten erlauben, also eine alternative Geschichte zu erfinden, von der die Leser sehr wohl wissen, daß sie nicht stattgefunden hat. Die andere ist, die überlieferten Tatsachen so hinzubiegen, daß sie unserer Interpretation des Geschehenen entsprechen, uns also erlauben, sie als unsere Steckenpferde zu benutzen. (148)

Although neither Widmann's nor Durst's model can be adapted one-to-one for the present study, they are both similar to my own approach in that they take a further step in asking: how do novels featuring *counterfactual* history differ from other fictional works in which history is referenced and integrated into the story? We will consider the proposals of both scholars in more depth in a later chapter.

In general, the tendency to lump alternate histories together with so-called historiographic metafiction in terms of how they interact with postmodern-

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a photograph. For we can check the adequacy of this latter kind of model by going and looking at the original and, by applying the necessary rules of translation, seeing in what respect the model has actually succeeded in reproducing aspects of the original. But historical structures and processes are not like these originals; we cannot go and look at them in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative." ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 226–227).

ist historiography is questionable. The all-too-simple claim of several studies is that alternate histories, in re-writing the past, "announce their awareness of the impossibility of capturing the past in any objective way as well as the provisionality of any historical construction" (Gauthier 5–6). Invoked is a postmodernist historiography that promotes a much more nuanced version of history than simply 'what happened'. The discussion of history as narrative and in the context of the so-called 'linguistic turn' does indeed have important consequences for the investigation of alternate history and, in contrast to Durst, I maintain that recent discussions in historiography are not to be discounted. Still, the relationship between alternate history and historiography after about 1960 is less direct than one would have it.

Alternate history can, of course, also be contextualized in terms of other kinds of narrative, not just historical fiction. In order to take into account as many different kinds of narrative as possible, the deductive approach of Helbig's study on "parahistories" is particularly amenable to my own:[22] In order to take as many related kinds of texts into account as possible while still recognizing the particular characteristics of his object of analysis, Helbig adopts the term of his advisor, Wilhelm Füger, *Allotopie*.[23] *Allotopien* are fictional works that feature the contradiction of empirical reality. In introducing the broader term 'parahistory' to account for all texts that "schildern alternative Welt- und Gesellschaftsstrukturen, die aus einer hypothetischen historisch-immanten Abwandlung des faktischen Geschichtsverlaufs resultieren" (31), Helbig emphasizes the fact that the boundaries between the investigated corpus of texts and other fiction are all but concrete, as are the boundaries between the kinds of text within parahistory (142).

For the sake of understanding alternate history as a whole, I recognize alternate history as less a homogenous corpus of texts than a family of historical fiction, each manifestation of which has a key characteristic viz. the point of divergence.

As to the status and function of these divergences as well as to what degree they make alternate histories unique among other kinds of narrative, there is still

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22 Only in this respect. Helbig's much earlier study (1988) only mentions the problem identified later by both Widmann and Durst: What makes alternate history unique among all historical fiction? Helbig admits that it is impossible to define the difference between a decisive and non-decisive change to history in any general terms, and that even the presence of a character that does not belong to the narrative of the real past (which happens in virtually all of historical fiction) represents a difference to reality, but a work is not on this basis an alternate history or not. He does not, however, address this problem critically, or make any suggestions for what exactly this basis for distinguishing alternate history from historical fiction in general could be.

23 Cf. Helbig: allotopies are characterized by "die Unmöglichkeit einer faktischen Anschließbarkeit der dort beschriebenen Alternativen an die Erfahrungswirklichkeit" (33).

much to discuss. Similar to the term 'alternate history', there are many existing terms for 'point of divergence'.[24] I defer once again to the logic of my approach to justify my choice of the term 'point of divergence'. 'Divergence' is to be defined oppositionally to 'convergence': the former involves bifurcation, a branching of two paths, whereas the latter refers to the re-unification of two paths. Dannenberg makes a similar distinction, but with reference to plot structures: "Convergence involves the intersection of narrative paths and the interconnection of characters within the narrative world, closing and unifying it as an artistic structure. Divergence, conversely, concerns the bifurcation or branching of narrative paths and thereby creates an open pattern of diversification and multiplicity." (2)

Much of the difficulty of describing the point of divergence is a result of a failure up until now to critically consider the basic questions: what is 'history' in alternate history, and what is done to it? Take, for example, Otten's starting definition of "nexus event", adapted directly from Hellekson's:[25] "the point in time in alternate history novels when history is manipulated to diverge from its actual course" (Otten). Such a definition features many unfortunate instances of 'loose' phrasing: first, as we shall see, the idea that history has an "actual course" is a confusion of terms; second, what is presumably meant by "the point in time in alternate history novels" (why only novels?) is something like 'the point in the story time of an alternate history' – for the discourse or structure of an alternate history has nothing to do with the concept of 'divergence'; third, the phrase "manipulated to diverge", i.e. what is 'done' to history in alternate history,

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24 In Collins's study, for example, the term 'Jonbar hinge' is used, derived from Jack Williamson's novel *The Legion of Time* (*Paths Not Taken* 211). Alfonso Merelo Solá's bibliography of alternate histories written in Spain (369–376) adapts this term as well (*punto Jumbar*). Hellekson and Gallagher prefer 'nexus' or 'nexus event'; Otten also adopts this term, but broadens it to a point at which it becomes metaphorical: 'crossroads' or 'bifurcation' in general, i.e. beyond its genre-specific meaning (cf. Otten); Dannenberg, in examining as a kind of counterfactual, chooses the term favoured by philosophy, 'antecedent' (53). Nedelkovich, whose study is organized by the examination of several different aspects (adapting several terms of Russian Formalism), includes among the sections 'fabula', 'sujets', 'titles and graphic arrangement of text', 'dynamics of relationships between histories', 'the alternative-history contents', 'characters', 'linguistic aspects' and 'deep structure', a chapter on 'turning points'.
25 Otten does not deal with the poetics of alternate history, and I do not believe that her work ought to be criticized on this account. I have selected this instance merely as an example for the dangers from the perspective of a poetical study of neglecting to question the validity of such a definition, Otten seems interested rather in taking a step back from the corpus of texts known as alternate history, claiming that "alternate history fiction has especially gained new significance [in American literature] with the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001", seeking to explain the "upsurge of publications in this field" and the popularity of alternate histories in American literature.

remains vague and unexplained. The meaning of 'divergence' in this case can indeed only be explained once the first problem has been solved, that is, once a practicable concept of 'history' has been established. Butter's use of the term "zentrales Ereignis", without further explanation, is no less problematic in these respects for an investigation of genre poetics.[26] Given the generally imprecise language employed up until now to define the point of divergence, it is necessary here to rethink the most basic concept. Above all, it should be acknowledged that for alternate history, unlike forking-paths narratives, divergence comes into play only with reference to the context of reception.

I would like to emphasize that my approach does not constitute yet another taxonomy of alternate histories. Hellekson's differentiations, for example, between the 'nexus story' ('time-travel-time-policing stories and battle stories'), the 'true alternate history' (the story begins an unspecified length of time after the point of divergence), and the 'parallel worlds story' (implying that there was no break; all possibilities occur within one text), are here irrelevant, as is Helbig's subdivision of parahistories by number of years between the point of divergence and the beginning of the story.[27] Collins's categorization is likewise not ultimately helpful: it provides no common basis for differentiation, and even the distinction between categories is not always clear – for example between the "pure uchronia", which offers no competing reality, and the "plural uchronia", in which the "reader's reality expressly *or implicitly* coexists with that of the altered continuum" (*Paths Not Taken* 102, my italics). Surely even a "pure uchronia", a work that "opens, proceeds, and closes within the single alternative continuum it depicts" (102) can make the same claim of existing in implicit contrast to the "reader's reality"? And is there really such a thing as Collins's proposed third category, an "infinite present", a work in which all physically possible variations of the universe exist simultaneously? What he means surely is a work like Borges's "El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan", which *describes* the simultaneous existence of infinite possibilities; realizing all possibilities, especially in a written work, is a different matter entirely. All such taxonomies of alternate history, if not doomed to inaccuracy and unintentional omission, serve only as self-contained

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26 Butter does indeed propose a means of understanding alternate history as a genre, but he is clearly less interested in probing the boundaries between alternate history and other kinds of fiction. Like with Otten's work, it is only fair to take into consideration Butter's goals before being critical: he does not focus on finding the *differentia specifica* of alternate history, but rather makes statements about the implicit commentary offered by alternate history on what he calls popular notions of history (including national mythologies, perceptions of national identity, etc.) ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision"; cf. *The Epitome of Evil* 49–57).

27 See the table "Zeitlicher Abstand zwischen historischem Wendepunkt und Handlungsgegenwart in parahistorischen Texten (in Jahren)" (Helbig 114).

catalogues that cannot adequately account for the relationship between alternate history and other kinds of fiction.

Butter's typology deserves special mention, for his distinction between "affirmative" and "revisionist" alternate histories is considerably more convincing than other typologies. Butter draws upon Nünning's categorization of contemporary historical fiction, in particular the concepts of "realistische historische Romane" and "revisionistische historische Romane", as a starting point. "Affirmative" alternate histories, similar to "realistische historische Romane", "etabilisieren durch die Projektion einer (meist) dystopischen Gegenwelt, die dem realen Verlauf der Geschichte implizit utopische Züge verleiht, etablierte historische Narrative" ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 68). Butter carries out an analysis of William Overgard's *The Divide* to show how such alternate histories implicitly affirm "popular narratives about the past" and grant historical narratives "utopische Züge": the way it happened was best. "Revisionist" alternate histories, similar to Nünning's "revisionistische historische Romane", "hinterfragen allgemein akzeptierte Narrative, indem sie suggieren, dass ihre dystopische Entwürfe den realen Geschichtsverlauf wesentlich adequater repräsentieren" (68). Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* serves as an example.

The primary source of confusion with Butter's argument is that he never sufficiently defines "allgemein akzeptierte Narrative", "etablierte historische Narrative" or "populäre Geschichtsbilder". From the examples that he cites, American exceptionalism, courage, love of freedom, democratic awareness, all of the characteristics "die Amerikanern auch in vielen nicht-kontrafaktischen Narrativen, wie sie häufig in populären historischen Romanen oder Filmen zu finden sind, zugeschrieben werden" (71), one presumes that he means something like collective identity or national perceptions of identity; that is, a common reading of history, not the narrative of history itself. This is the fundamental point at which our approaches differ: I suggest that we should 'take a step back' from discussing alternate histories in terms of their underlying ideological stance in order to develop a firm basis for these works as alternate histories in their relationship to history. This is what provides the basis for comparing *The Divide* and *The Man in the High Castle* at all. Incidentally, it is also for this reason that I find the superimposition of Nünning's categories misleading: as Butter recognizes, Nünning refers primarily to what historical fiction 'does' to history, not thematic or ideological aspects. If there is indeed evidence that supports a correlation of "affirmation" and "revisionism" with formal features (Butter claims, for example, that instances of metafiction tend to occur in "revisionist" alternate histories as opposed to in "affirmative" alternate histories), it is not given. I am not convinced in this case or in any other that ideological stance is dependent on literary form or vice versa.

As to arguments about how alternate histories support or question perceptions of national identity, we run into difficulty on the basis that Butter has proposed: first, defining what exactly these commonly accepted "Geschichtsbilder" are or where they come from requires more subtlety. In the absence of dealing with real authors and readers, such statements about how Americans see themselves or how they would like to see themselves can only be based on the *interpretation of* American literature; such perceptions of national identity are by no means to be treated as 'givens'. Second, any statement about whether a given work of literature supports or questions perceptions of national identity requires an even further degree of interpretation that makes it difficult to speak of typology. Butter's argument, for example that Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* reveals "revisionist" as opposed to "affirmative" tendencies is cemented around one, singular (and therefore limited) interpretation of the novel's ending. *The Man in the High Castle* might well also be seen as "affirmative" if we entertain the (at least equally plausible) interpretation of the ending as an optimistic celebration of the American heroine's power to choose her own reality. Third, Butter's argument is based (in more simple terms) on whether or not Americans are portrayed sympathetically, and is thus limited to American perceptions of national identity, American "Geschichtsbilder". What of alternate histories that do not deal with American identity? Or, for that matter, what of Japanese or German questions of national identity in works like *The Divide* or *The Man in the High Castle*?

For this study, which pursues a more 'grounded' and basic poetics of alternate history for the sake of comparing these texts to FNs, ideological discourse remains an application, if an important one. But should these questions be addressed, it seems to me that a much more functional means of discussing a given alternate history's implicit stance on history exists already, one that ultimately covers the distinction sought by Butter between alternate histories that let our history appear "im besten Licht" and alternate histories that question accepted interpretations of history and "versuchen, Alternativerzählungen zu etablieren" (cf. "Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 73): dystopian and utopian, respectively.

2.1 'History' in Alternate History

2.1.1 The Postmodern Challenge to History

The naïve assumption that 'history' is equivalent to 'the past' has long since been debunked, and the discussion of history as narrative has been recognized by literary theorists (cf. Southgate 152), yet rare is the study of historical fiction that

ventures far enough into the territory of historiography to substantiate claims about the interfaces between fiction writing and history writing. Historian Gabrielle Spiegel is critical of literary scholars in this respect: they "have become accustomed to get their history secondhand and prepackaged and have tended, in practice if not in theory, to treat it as unproblematic, something to be invoked rather than investigated" ("History, historicism and the social logic of the text" 194). I take my cue here from the exceptions: literary critics such as Amy Elias, Andreas Widmann, or Lubomír Doležel, who do not merely assert that there have been significant changes in historiography, but also tackle the cross-disciplinary endeavour of understanding those changes (see Widmann, "Geschichtsphilosophie und – theoretische Diversifikation" 103–132; A. Elias 23–36; Doležel, "The Postmodernist Challenge" 15–28). It is simply not enough to invoke Hayden White or to state the 'fatal equation' history equals fiction. For the present study, it is necessary to give a more differentiated account of recent historiography for two reasons: first, as one of the several prompts for investigating the role of history in fiction, i.e. to underline the necessity of a more nuanced concept of history in historical fiction. It is unacceptable for a study on historical fiction insularly to ignore discussions in historiography, only to haphazardly employ its central term *history*. Second, a directed account of the paradigm changes in historiography since the 1960s is indispensable for determining how alternate history may be 'read' in terms of the postmodern challenge and how it relates to manifestations of postmodern historical fiction.

That said, it is not necessary to repeat here what has already been so brilliantly formulated by, for example, Georg G. Iggers. In his study *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang*, Iggers gives a thorough account of different trends in historiography from history's birth as a discipline in the nineteenth century to the postmodern challenge to Western historiography. The assumption is that a broad, fundamental change has taken place, a reorientation away from the Rankean paradigms of the nineteenth century, namely:

1. human actions and intentions create and shape history; history is the sum of great men and events,
2. time is one-dimensional and sequential, and
3. history portrays truth, or history is an accurate reflection of the real past (see Iggers, "Einleitung" 11–20).[28]

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28 Iggers admits that the work of Leopold von Ranke is not by any means typical of classical historiography, but he may be seen as the most important and prototypical representative of historiography in its early stages (25).

The shift away from these principles was not a coordinated trend or direct response to the work of Leopold von Ranke, but rather the perceived sum of various tendencies and approaches in select countries. (Iggers focuses on Germany, France, and the United States). Already by the turn of the twentieth century, the first two of these assumptions had been called into question with a tendency towards social science history. The idea that the agency of individuals is the defining force of history was revised with a new emphasis on processes of social change. 'Great Men' were gradually replaced by 'history from below'; and starting with the *Annales* school, non-chronological models of time were proposed (cf. Iggers 12–14; 48–49; 54–55). Concepts of paratactic multi-causality were the inevitable result: history is not thought to be merely a monolithic, uni-linear string of events, but rather a web of asymmetrical, interacting, and competing timelines.[29]

Postmodernist historiography since the 1960s may be understood as revealing trends that lead away from the epistemological certainty of the Rankean paradigm: a fundamental questioning of our ability to know the past through history and a focus on the literary aspects of history writing.[30] François Lyotard, Gabrielle Spiegel, and perhaps most famously, Lawrence Stone have all given accounts of this perceived shift in thinking. Stone's 1979 essay "The Revival of Narrative" summarizes the change in historiography under the "shorthand code-word" *narrative*, marking "the end of the attempt to produce a coherent scientific explanation of change in the past" (293).

Roland Barthes in the 1960s and Hayden White in the 1970s not only stressed the literary character of historical texts, but provoked a veritable "linguistic turn", as Spiegel describes it, a "flight from 'reality' to language as the constitutive agent of human consciousness and the social production of meaning" ("History, historicism, and the social logic of the text" 181). Barthes's radical claim in the 1967 essay "Le discours de l'histoire",[31] that there is no difference between truth and fiction, was picked up and further explored by White. History, White suggests, is

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29 Iggers cites Jacques Le Goff's study "Zeit der Kirche und Zeit des Händlers im Mittelalter", in: Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Lucien Febvre, et al, *Schrift und Materie der Geschichte. Vorschläge zur systematischen Aneignung historischer Prozesse*, ed. by Claudia Honegger, Frankfurt a. M., 1977, 393–414. Le Goff differentiates between the stationary time of the Mediterranean (*longue durée*), the slow time of social and economic structures (*conjonctures*), and the fast time of political events (*événéments*). See Iggers 54.

30 The roots of this interest in history as literature may also be found in Ranke's work, as it was characterized by the tension between an endeavor to be systematic and objective and the recognition that history was both practiced as and determined by philosophical and political considerations. See Iggers 25.

31 First published in: *Social Science Information*, 6 August 1967: 63–75.

to be perceived as a textualized reality. In his landmark work *The Content of the Form*, he writes:

> The historically real, the past real, is that to which I can be referred only by way of an artifact that is textual in nature. The indexical, iconic, and symbolic notions of language, and therefore of texts, obscure the nature of this indirect referentiality and hold out the possibility of (feign) direct referentiality, create the illusion that there is a past out there that is directly reflected in the texts. But even if we grant this, what we see is the reflection, not the thing reflected. (209)

If histories are merely texts, "indexical, iconic, and symbolic notions of language", then they are subject to the same scrutiny as other texts. White's arguments amount to more than a mere questioning of the objectivity of historical knowledge: the questioning of notions of fact can be traced as far back to Rousseau, and long before the publication of White's work, historians such as E.H. Carr proposed that historical facts are a matter of consensus: they cannot be "pure", but are rather always refracted through the mind of the recorder (Southgate 28; E. H. Carr 19).[32] Nor can White be credited with being the first to have the idea that the retelling of the same stories is the nature of historical scholarship, or that all history writing contains an irreducible element of interpretation (White, *Tropics of Discourse* 51; also: *The Content of the Form* 44). 'Telling stories' involves, above all, the construction of narrative: as R.G. Collingwood suggested already in the 1940s, the historian grants meaning through *narrative emplotment*. If history writing is to be seen as a process of 'connecting the dots', as the narrative emplotment of pieces of evidence as well as the selection of data, then the degree of (socially and culturally-determined) congruence between the representation and the events represented is at least as critical to the success of the account as absolute accuracy or completeness of evidence.

White's achievement is in taking a step further to re-examine the historical method, the strategies pursued by historians. If the historical method cannot be perceived as merely 'finding' historical truth and then imparting disinterested, objective accounts of 'what happened', the more appropriate description for an historian's practice is the construction of the past from a limited amount of evidence for the sake of endowing the events with meaning: "The historical method consists in investigating the documents in order to determine what is the true or most plausible story that can be told about the events of which they are evidence." (*The Content of the Form* 27) This is a thoroughly *literary* act, and history writing conforms in the end to *literary* genres, which does not by any means

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32 This is related to the broader claim that factuality is a culturally motivated illusion (cf. Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 7–25; Mink 541–558; Slusser 187–213).

detract from the significance or value of the endeavor. Only, as White puts it, a necessary lesson from the study of history "is that such study is never innocent, ideologically or otherwise [...]" (*The Content of the Form* 82).[33] Historians are aware that they establish a relationship between the past that they write and the present in which they write (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 67). The mastery of reworking material into a narrative model is exactly what gives a particular meaning to the past, what creates this ideological "charge" (69; 59). For White, by focusing on the kind of narrative being constructed, we are also focusing on the kind of meaning being produced as well as ultimately the ideological or political motivations of the historian – at least to the degree that we can infer them from the text.

The above discussion – history as text, history as narrative – is, as Lubomír Doležel puts it, "narratology's contribution to the self-destruction of French structuralism; this is the ammunition needed for launching the poststructuralist, postmodernist challenge to the integrity of history" ("The Postmodernist Challenge" 248). Narrative is, most generally, not simply a mode of explanation, but rather the use of language to deal with existence in time. This existence gains meaning through representation in narrative. The idea that meaning is inextricably tied with the discourse that creates it is not new to narrative theory. As Christoph Bode explains,

> nicht allein, dass das Wie der Geschichte einen entscheidenden Unterschied mache, sondern dass die eigentliche Bedeutung einer literarischen Erzählung von diesem Wie gar nicht zu trennen sei, dass man über sie gar nicht sinnvoll reden könne, ohne die konkrete Art und Weise der erzählerischen Vermittlung erfasst und begriffen zu haben, weil letztlich die Bedeutung (ein Wort, das man gerne immer im Plural denken darf) einer literarischen Erzählung in dieser spezifischen Vermitteltheit aufginge, so dass, fiele diese anders aus, auch jene nicht mehr dieselbe sein könne. (*Der Roman* 81)[34]

The meaning of any narrative – fictional or not – must take into consideration the repertoire of narrative techniques being employed.

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33 See also Iggers's account: "Jede Geschichtsschreibung geht aus einer personen-, zeit- und kulturgebundenen Perspektive hervor und enthält deshalb ein ideologisches Element. Jeder Versuch, diese perspektivisches Element zu leugnen, wie das von Ranke bis zu den Vertretern einer wertfreien empirischen Sozialwissenschaft immer wieder geschehen ist, hat die Werturteile und die ideologischen Voraussetzungen, auf denen die Wissenschaft beruht, nur verschleiert. Perspektivität schließt aber keineswegs die um Erkenntnis bemühte Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit aus." (119).

34 See also the chapter "Objekt der Romananalyse: Das *Wie* des *Was* (*discourse* und *story*)" 81–96.

In this case, the use of narrative does not necessarily distinguish history writing from other kinds of discourse. However, "historiography is an especially good ground on which to consider the nature of narration and narrativity because it is here that our desire for the imaginary, the possible, must contend with the importance of the real, the actual". History writing is a "privileged instantiation" of this capacity for narrative. According to White, "it is a means of "symbolizing events without which their historicality cannot be indicated" (*The Content of the Form* 4; 83; 173). For the purposes of this study, it is important to consider 'history' not only as the 'raw material' for alternate histories, but also a model for endowing given events with a particular kind of significance. History writing employs narrative to endow past events with a specifically *historical* meaning (cf. Ricœur, *Temps et Récit*; White, *The Content of the Form*).

Paul Ricœur makes perhaps the strongest claim for the adequacy of narrative in realizing the aims of historiography in his *Temps et Récit*. In this discussion of the metaphysics of narrativity, one of the most important syntheses of literary theory and historiography written in the twentieth century, Ricœur argues that an event's historicity depends on more than its singular occurrence or uniqueness. Rather, it receives its historical meaning from its contribution to the development of a plot (*Narrative Time* 171). According to White, historical events "appear not only to succeed one another in the regular order of the series, but also to function as inaugurations, transitions, and terminations of processes that are meaningful because they manifest the structures of plots" (*The Content of the Form* 177). In other words, events of historical meaning have evident influence on what follows; they have a heightened degree of consequence.

Cause and effect relationships and the production of historical meaning may also be found in fiction – only in terms of the fictional world, not our own. One might be tempted to conclude that the nature of historical scholarship is essentially the nature of fiction writing, or even that the occupation of an historian is the same as that of a writer of fiction. This is, indeed, where most of the secondary literature on alternate histories ceases to pursue the matter further. Steinmüller goes so far as to claim:

> Jede Geschichtsschreibung ist in einem weiten Sinne Alternativgeschichtsschreibung; denn die trifft trotz aller Bemühung nie absolut genau die Vergangenheit, 'wie sie wirklich gewesen ist'. Geschichtsschreibung als Rekonstruktion ist stets auch Konstruktion. ("Zukünfte, die nicht Geschichte wurden" 44)

Hellekson makes a much milder claim, namely that we (readers and theorists alike) need to consider the nature of history not only in order to understand the changes that the alternate-history author has made, but also to understand how

these works are structured; for the author of an alternate history uses some of the same strategies and methods as an historian (27).[35]

The emphasis on narrative as the shared form of discourse of history and fiction has instigated a multifaceted discussion of the relationship between history and fiction in general. As a result, historians have scrambled to preserve the integrity of their profession (Southgate 5; 23) – and not in vain. It should be recognized by the field of literary criticism that historiographers have indeed come a long way since Barthes's and White's polemics. Even White himself does not equate history and fiction in the end, recognizing the conflation of the terms 'literary' and 'fictional' in the 'fatal equation' (emplotment = literary operation = fiction-making), rationally tempering his original ideas with notions of "historical method" and responsibility. An historical account, he says,

> is less a product of the historian's poetic talents, as the narrative account of imaginary events is assumed to be, than it is a necessary result of a proper application of historical "method". The form of the discourse, the narrative, adds nothing to the content of the representation; rather it is a simulacrum of the structure and processes of real events. (*The Content of the Form* 27)

Several qualified, nuanced suggestions for incorporating the "linguistic turn" into the study of history have since been published. One of the most fascinating discussions centres around Spiegel's essay "History, historicism and the social logic of the text in the Middle Ages", a rational, level-headed, carefully reasoned response to Barthes and White.[36] Spiegel suggests, "we can never return to the confident, humanistic assumptions of nineteenth-century positivist historiography, even if we wanted to (and not many of us do)". We ought to reject the tendencies to absorb history into textuality, but also employ its scepticism and allow for a different kind of appreciation of the "complex tensions that shape the postmodern world" ("History, historicism and the social logic of the text" 269).

This goal of incorporating postmodernist thought into historiography is admittedly beyond the responsibilities of a literary critic.[37] It is, however, essential that literary theorists carry as carefully nuanced a discussion on the nature of history as historiographers do. Although historians write narratives, this is not to

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35 Hellekson also rather unfortunately insists on calling authors of alternate histories "alternate historians", which has its own – apparently unintended – implications.

36 See the discussion of Gabrielle Spiegel, Lawrence Stone, Patrick Joyce and Catriona Kelly in the journal *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 1991–1992; reproduced in: Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader* (239–273).

37 And possibly beyond that of a historian. Iggers poses the central question: "Es gibt Theorien einer postmodernen Geschichtsschreibung. Die Frage ist, ob es auch postmoderne Formen der Geschichtsschreibung gibt." (101).

deny that there is such a thing as a real past: *something* did, after all, happen, and the historian as an historian pledges a kind of responsibility to that reality. There is a crucial difference between the claim that historical accounts cannot reproduce reality and the assumption that real people existed, real things happened, etc. (Iggers 102). As Berel Lang puts it, "most people [...] would be reluctant to concede that whether or not they existed five minutes ago depends entirely on what historians (singly or collectively) say about them" (432). In practice at least, the idea that there is some concrete reality behind the historical account remains intact, as does the idea that the language used refers to this reality in some way (Iggers 102; 108–109). Linguistic, semiotic, and literary theory have then been regarded by historians, but each historical account is still "a construct arising from a dialog between the historian and the past, one that does not occur in a vacuum but within a community of inquiring minds who share criteria of plausibility" (Iggers 117).[38] As Linda Hutcheon proposes, the recognition that history writing may be more accurately treated as a narrative text does not in any way deny the existence of the past real, "but it focuses attention on the act of imposing order on that past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 63).

2.1.2 Referentiality: Possible-worlds Theory

If history and fiction are to be differentiated by something other than functional terms (what the historian is trying to do as opposed to an author of fiction), the answer lies not in the form of discourse, but rather in terms of referentiality. For historical fiction, this is tricky territory: if an historical novel in the broadest sense is "ein Roman, der Geschichtliches verarbeitet" (Leopold 109),[39] works of historical fiction are exceptional among other literary texts in that they unavoidably reference *something* outside of themselves, because they intentionally blend fact with fiction and incorporate text-external knowledge as part of their program (Korte and Paletschek, "Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres" 22). It is the explicit reference to history that may be seen as the most important justifica-

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38 Cf. Southgate: "The truth of history is such that it not only *corresponds* with 'the reality' of the past, but also *coheres* with a whole existing body of research related to that past." (25) History is seen, in other words, as science in that it is progressive: historians are expected to build upon the work of other historians (26).
39 Wesseling suggests an equally broad and plausible definition, narrative which incorporates historical materials (27); cf. Korte and Paletschek, "Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres: Vom Historischen Roman zum Computerspiel" (21–22).

tion for viewing alternate histories as manifestations of historical fiction.[40] Like historical fiction in general, alternate history is thus doubly-bound to historiography and poetry: it oscillates constantly between referential and poetic language, between the Jakobsonian function constitutive of history writing and the one constitutive of fiction (Leopold 109; 111; 12; see also Nünning 18).

As we have already seen, the line between fiction and reality as well as historical fiction and history, has long been a point of interest and debate among literary theorists, cultural historians, historians, and philosophers alike. Consider Mikhail Bakhtin's account:

> There is a sharp and categorical boundary line between the actual world as source of representation and the world represented in the work. We must never forget this, we must never confuse – as has been done up to now and as is still often done – the *represented* world with the world outside the text (naive realism); nor must we confuse the author-creator of a work with the author as a human being (naive biographism); nor confuse the listener or reader of multiple and varied periods, recreating and renewing the text, with the passive listener or reader of one's own time (which leads to dogmatism in interpretation and evaluation). All such confusions are methodologically impermissible. But it is also impermissible to take this categorical boundary line as something absolute and impermeable [...] However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them [...] The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers. (253–254)

Many of the methodological problems mentioned here are familiar: the struggle to theorize the relationship between the real (biographical) author and the so-called implied author as a function of the text, or to theorize the relationship of the reader to the text, i.e. in a way that accounts for more than individual, empirical readings (the implied reader, the ideal reader, the model reader, etc.). Recently, literary theorists have attempted to use possible-worlds theory to subsume these problems to the overarching issue that Bakhtin addresses here:

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40 The inclusion of alternate history in the genre of historical fiction is, by this definition, difficult to deny. As for further justifications and a more differentiated account of recent secondary literature on historical fiction, from Georg Lukács to Ansgar Nünning, see Widmann, *Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung* 63–81. Widmann gives an impressively thorough account in order to determine whether or not any existing typology can account for counterfactual history. His answer is negative; although Ansgar Nünning's term "revisionistischer historischer Roman" comes close (Widmann 81). But as we shall see, this term, too, accounts for a different kind of text than alternate history.

the undefinable but constant and undeniable relationship between the fictional world and the real one, essentially the relation between text-internal and text-external elements.

I am not the first to recognize that the issue of referentiality is central to a discussion of historical fiction and counterfactual history in literature in particular: both Widmann and Spedo suggest their own approaches for dealing with the relationship between text-internal and text-external matter. In many ways, Widmann's is the more thoughtful account. Whereas Spedo turns rather hastily to possible-worlds theory, without considering earlier narratology, Widmann weighs an impressive number of theories and sources against one another. He ultimately settles on the terms of Benjamin Hrushovsky's theory of 'frames of references', arguing convincingly that counterfactuality involves the 'superimposition' (Widmann uses the term 'Überlagerung') of two frames; in counterfactual history, history is 'overwritten' with an alternative version (see Hrushovsky 227–251; Widmann 36). Both Widmann's and Spedo's approaches will be taken into account here, but perhaps the most significant work in this area has been carried out by Lubomir Doležel, an advocate of possible-worlds theory as a cross-disciplinary system capable of relativizing the postmodern challenge described above.

Possible-worlds theory, borrowing terms and concepts from the fields of logic and philosophy, shifts our focus from the level of discourse to the level of worlds. Its employment warrants some additional explanation here, since the attempts to establish the applicability and relevance of possible-worlds theory in literary theory have been met with scepticism, to say the least: for one, while many basic premises have been recounted and critiqued in the past several years, the adoption of the terminology and theoretical framework for literary analysis remains difficult. Second, the application of possible-worlds theory to literature has been accused of creating an inflation of terminology: many of the same concepts are (more or less) already covered, or at least under discussion, in the framework of reader-reception criticism or theories of metaphor.[41] One plausible alternative, for example, is the already mentioned theory of Benjamin Hrushovski, which introduces "fields of reference" and "frames of reference" (see 5–44). Hrushovski's theory accounts perhaps more successfully for a reader's changing relationship to a text, for the boundaries of the frames and fields of reference are not fixed. Because the boundaries are unstable, the ontology of any given "world" (= several integrated frames of reference) is irrelevant.

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[41] So Gregory Currie, pleading for a kind of "ontological economy": "The appeal [of possible worlds] to fictional worlds seems merely to inflate our ontology without producing growth in understanding." (G. Currie 56).

Among studies of alternate histories, Catherine Gallagher is particularly hostile to the use of possible-worlds theory and has declared it "less useful to practicing critics" (*The Rise of Fictionality* 355). The recommended alternatives, however, leave much to be desired. In a recent article (*What Would Napoleon Do?* 315–36), Gallagher focuses on the concept of 'character' as the basis of narrative (at the expense of time, event, space – all of which belong to the 'world' of possible-worlds theory) to distinguish between historical, fictional, and counterfactual characters. There are several problems with this approach. First, the idea that there can be both historical and fictional characters in a fictional work – recognizable by a process of 'semantic switching' – sacrifices consistency: it is not clear what is at stake in abandoning the much more simple, elegant solutions provided not only by possible-worlds theory, but also by any theoretical framework (such as Hrushovsky's) that posits a clear distinction between text-internal and text-external, insisting that the two do not exist on the same ontological plane. Secondly, it is not the case, as Gallagher seems to claim on the basis of one work of nineteenth-century historical fiction, that there is some kind of textual 'code' for describing historical figures as opposed to fictional ones, fictional ones as opposed to counterfactual. The argument is convincing for Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, but what of many twentieth- and twenty-first-century works of historical fiction (for example non-fiction novels)? Surely it is not possible to draw the line between historical and fictional figures based merely on textual indicators. Thirdly, Gallagher works inevitably with descriptions, not definitions, leading to a mix of terms from several different theoretical frameworks: 'hypothetical counterfactuals', 'horizon of possibility', 'ideational', 'referential', 'extratextual ontological shadows'. The terminology used to introduce alternate history is equally unique: 'stand-alone alternate history', 'alternate-history form', 'ATL/OTL' (alternate time line, our time line), etc. Thus despite actually agreeing with many of the tenets of possible-worlds theory, Gallagher's endeavour to explain them in her own terms is unproductive: we lose the stringency and efficiency of one theory without significant gain in insight into the object at hand – in fact, I would go so far as to say that Gallagher's approach is less comprehensive than possible-worlds theory, neglecting aspects such as reference among fictional texts.

The recognition that many alternate histories espouse a possible-worlds logic is perhaps the best argument here for taking heed of possible-worlds theory. In Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time", for example, fissures or disruptions in time have jumbled various historical timelines, leading to violent and bewildering encounters with displaced players of history, including vikings, dinosaurs, and Confederate soldiers. Professor Minott, a professor of mathematics, tries to use his understanding of these occurrences to become emperor, while others struggle

to find a way back to the Fredericksburg, Virginia of their time. Not only is time multi-linear, in the past as well as the future, but each strand of time is as real as any other. Professor Minott explains to his 'team' of students ("and I'll try to make it more palatable than my classroom lectures [...]" [19]):

> Time is a dimension. The past is one extension of it, the future is the other, just as east is one extension of a more familiar dimension and west is its opposite.
>
> But we ordinarily think of time as a line, a sort of tunnel, perhaps. We do not make that error in the dimensions about which we think daily [...] In imaginative travels into the future [...] we never think in such a common-sense fashion. We assume that the future is a line instead of a coordinate, a path instead of a direction. We assume that if we travel to futureward there is but one possible destination. And that is as absurd as it would be to ignore the possibility of traveling to eastward in any other line than due east, forgetting that there is northeast and southeast and a large number of intermediate points [...]
>
> In short, I am pointing out that there is more than one future we can encounter, and with more or less absence of deliberation we choose among them. But the futures we fail to encounter, upon the roads we do not take, are just as real as the landmarks upon those roads. We never see them, but we freely admit their existence [...]
>
> Don't you see that if such a state of things exists in the future, that it must also have existed in the past? We talk of three dimensions and one present and one future. There is a theoretical necessity – a mathematical necessity – for assuming more than one future. There are an infinite number of possible futures, any one of them we would encounter if we took the proper 'forks' in time.

It is Blake, one of the students, who finally understands the predicament on these terms: "I think you're saying, sir, that – well, as there must be any number of futures, there must have been any number of pasts besides those written down in our histories. And – and it would follow that there are any number of what you might call 'presents'." (19–21)[42]

There has been at least one concerted application of possible-worlds theory to the poetics of alternate history:[43] although I do not agree with all of Spedo's conclusions, I maintain, too, that the logic and vocabulary of possible-worlds theory, particularly as explored by critics such as Marie-Laure Ryan, Ruth Ronen,

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42 A strikingly similar dialogue, explaining in plain terms the logic of parallel worlds, is carried out in Fredric Brown's *What Mad Universe* between Keith and Mekky (238–239).

43 Rodiek makes a figurative allusion to 'possible worlds' in his study, but does not go into any detail as to how exactly possible-worlds theory may be relevant to the study of uchronias (= parahistories). See Rodiek 32–33.

Thomas Pavel, and Lubomír Doležel[44] is useful in developing a conceptual framework for discussing the specific nature of alternate history: first, the contradictory relationship between the fictional world and something outside of that world that makes alternate histories stand out among other kinds of historical fiction; or more generally, to emphasize a crucial difference between fictionality and counterfactuality;[45] second, to distinguish alternate histories from counterfactual histories. Possible-worlds theory allows for much more flexibility and variety than Gallagher would admit,[46] and particularly since I am focusing here on alternate history, it would be nonsensical to ignore an existing theoretical framework that does indeed seem to account for so many of the specific aspects of the genre. The relative ease of applicability of possible-worlds theory provides, in this case, a counterargument to claims that possible-worlds theory leads to an unnecessary inflation of terminology: not only is there perhaps a need to address the 'exhaustion' of older models, but many issues may be subsumed under possible-worlds theory – which should perhaps lead us to question rather the validity or usefulness of existing theories (cf. Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* 3). That said, possible-worlds theory is far from foolproof, and it is important to maintain a critical distance when recounting the state of existing scholarship.

In order to investigate the relationship between text-internal and text-external elements, possible-worlds theory re-conceptualizes the basis of narratology as 'narrative world' (as opposed to story, discourse, plot, events, characters, setting, or any of the other alternatives). Doležel elucidates the most basic principle: "every world and every entity in the world could be or could have been different from what it is" (*Heterocosmica* 222). The set of possible and impossible worlds is unlimited and maximally varied, and each world may be defined within a typology of possible worlds. So-called actualists subscribe to the view that the actual world may be seen as a standpoint outside of the system of pos-

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44 Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*; see also "The Text as World" 89–114; Ronen; Doležel, *Fictional and Historical Narrative* 247–276; Doležel, *Heterocosmica*; "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative" 7–25.

45 Less relevant here, but worth mentioning as what I believe to be one of the more convincing applications of possible-worlds theory to literature is Ryan's formal representation of plot: she essentially maps the system of a universe onto the fictional text in order to represent conflicts among characters. Plot may be seen as the shifting of possible worlds in relation to one another (*Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* 201–232).

46 It is *not* the case, for example, as Gallagher claims, that possible-worlds theory tends to treat all fictions as if they were counterfactual ("What Would Napoleon Do?" 333). One way to interpret possible-worlds theory is that there can be as many different kinds of relationship between worlds as there are worlds.

sible worlds; everything is relative to the actual world. Possibilists, on the other hand, claim that the actual world does not have a particular status, but is rather subsumed into the set of possible worlds; 'actuality' is a relative term and refers to the world in which the speaker is located (see Doležel, "The Postmodernist Challenge" 255; Spedo 28–29). There can be various kinds of relationships among worlds, or between worlds and one, ontologically privileged world.[47]

Critics of the use of possible-worlds theory in literary theory have argued that fictional worlds are, strictly speaking, not equivalent to the possible worlds of semantic logic. The hesitation to equate the two is well-founded (Ryan, "Possible-worlds theory" 446): perhaps most significantly, fictional worlds have a different relationship to narrative than the real world in terms of referentiality. Whereas possible worlds always refer to an actual world, fictional worlds do not exist independently of the discourse that creates them.[48] This means that, in order to apply possible-worlds theory to fictional worlds, we have to speak of a 're-centering' process. Each fictional world establishes a new actual world, and it is thus autonomous in the way that the actual one is. The usefulness of 're-centering' is already evident in the endeavour to evaluate notions of 'truth' in fiction: fictional statements may be evaluated in the context of the fictional world about which they are made.[49]

If we accept this reorganization of the modal system around a fictional world, possible-worlds theory can also be useful in terms of genre theory. To use Ryan's vocabulary, the specific kind of relationship between the textual universe (the image of a system of reality projected by the text = fictional world) and the actual world (the centre of our system of reality) is often constitutive of a given genre. If in general, a fictional world is "a unique system separate from although depen-

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47 Ryan explains these two notions of actuality in slightly different terms: "The first, proposed by [David] Lewis, regards the concept of actual world as an indexical notion whose reference varies with the speaker. According to Lewis, 'the actual world' means 'the world where I am located', and all Pws are actual from the point of view of their inhabitants." (= possibilism) "The other theory, defended by Rescher, states that the actual world differs in ontological status from merely possible ones in that this world alone presents an autonomous existence. All other worlds are products of a mental activity, such as dreaming, imagining, foretelling, promising, or story-telling." ("Possible-worlds theory" 446–449).

48 Cf. Marie-Laure Ryan: "Rather than describing a world existing independently of language, the fictional speech act creates its world through the very act of describing it, and its statements are automatically true within its reference world" (*Avatars of Story* 34); cf. Bode (in alternative terms): "Ein reales Ereignis (*event*) ereignet sich auch außerhalb einer Erzählung (wiewohl es nur in einer Erzählung oder in Erzählungen preserviert werden kann) – ein fiktionales Ereignis jedoch ereignet sich ausschließlich im narrativen Diskurs, nirgendwo sonst." (*Der Roman* 90).

49 For more on re-centring and the usefulness of possible-worlds theory in the semantics of fiction, see Ryan, "Possible-worlds theory".

dent on the cultural-historical reality in which it was created and with which it holds more or less obvious affinities" (Ronen 15), the nature and kind of affinities, the "accessibility relation" (Ryan's term; cf. Ryan, "Possible-worlds theory") between the fictional world and the real world can tell us much about the kind of fiction at hand. The fictional worlds of alternate histories cannot be included in the broad category of "total inclusion in the real world", because they disturb a significant principle of real-world accessibility, namely the changing of the past. Alternate histories, along with historical fiction, fall instead into the category of texts that create worlds with substantial overlap with the real world,[50] but they are unique in their contradiction of the real-world past.[51]

'Overlap' is in itself a misleading term, for this is not to say that the elements shared by the real world and fictional worlds are on the same ontological plane: possible-worlds theory grants all worlds, even as ensembles of nonactualized, possible states of affairs, a definite ontological status. In terms of discussing the relationship between fictional worlds and the real one, classical mimesis theory tends to support the boundaries between them. Possible-worlds theorists, on the other hand, blur fiction's external boundaries and by doing so, focus precisely on the passages across these boundaries (McHale 34).

Suggesting the potential of possible-worlds theory for launching a theory of fictionality, Doležel distinguishes between "world-imaging texts" (representations of the real world = non-fiction) and "world-constructing texts" (textual activity that calls worlds into existence and determines their structures) (*Heterocosmica* 24; see Spedo 27). These terms correspond roughly to the more well-known difference between *mimesis* and *poesis*: they offer a "Differenzierung zwischen Literatur als intendierter Dokumentation empirischer Realität und Literatur als Alternativenentwurf zu einer als defizitär oder zufällig empfundenen Wirklichkeit" – so Jörg Helbig in his explanation of allotopic texts (28). Fictionality is, in any case, an unstable property that does not reside in the text itself; rather, it is a relational property, determined by whether or not a world is created or merely depicted. *Amimetic*, or world-constructing texts, are characterized by a certain counter-existence to the real world. It is fair to be critical of this logic. Although the insistence that fictionality does not 'reside' in the text itself is surely a solid

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50 Cf. Roese and Olson: "a counterfactual typically posits one possible world that is imaginally very close to the real world, containing only a very few (or just one) features that differentiate it from this world" (3); counterfactuals are very limited in terms of the range of possible worlds.
51 As Ryan notes, "philosophers […] generally agree that time splits towards the future, because the future is open to all possibilities, but it cannot split toward the past, because the past is already written and unchangeable". Alternate histories thus disturb an important principle of the real world (*Avatars of Story* 242).

assumption, Doležel engages in his own 'fatal double-equation' that results in a definition of fiction that is much too narrow: if only amimetic (world-constructing) texts are fictional, is there such a thing as realistic fiction?

One other, perhaps more neutral way of defining fiction is as follows: all fictions have a 'double-decker' structure of reference. So McHale: these texts

> project at least one internal field of reference, a universe or semantic continuum (loosely a 'world') constructed in and by the text itself. In addition, they inevitably refer outside their internal fields to an external field of reference: The objective world, the body of historical fact or scientific theory, an ideology or philosophy, other texts, and so on. (McHale 28–29)

Fictional worlds, although they do not exist outside of the discourse that creates them, are necessarily incomplete (some indeed cultivate this incompleteness as an aesthetic quality), and therefore have a dynamic relationship to the real world (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 22–23). The so-called 'principle of minimal departure' discusses world construction in fictional texts. The PMD, a term coined by Marie-Laure Ryan, but the fundamental concepts of which were also explored by Umberto Eco, Gérard Genette, and David Lewis, states that "we reconstrue the world of a fiction and of a counterfactual as being the closest possible to the reality we know." (Ryan, "Fiction, Non-factuals" 406; cf. Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*; cf. Genette 755–774; cf. Lewis, "Truth in Fiction" 37–46) In other words, the PMD 'picks' the real world as a model for the reconstruction of the fictional one, and we use our knowledge of the real world to supply what is needed to complete the fictional world (Sparshott 4).[52] Ryan's solution is, however, no less problematic than Doležel's. Whereas Doležel's assertion encourages us to ignore fictional realism, Ryan uses realism as an implicit default position. Hers is a reductive strategy that fails to take into account the specific nature of non-realistic fictions. They are not *trying to be* realistic, and it is thus unfortunate to read them as tending towards the real world; this is simply missing the point.

Despite faulty attempts to define fictionality in general, Doležel's reassertion that there are crucial differences between history and fiction serves as one convincing illustration of the applicability of possible-worlds theory. In claiming that postmodernist historiography is "a web of more or less interesting stories, governed by narrative patterns and tropological shifts, but *with only incidental connection to the human past and present*" ("The Postmodernist Challenge" 253), Doležel cites the results of White's "Holocaust test": White was forced to split his

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52 Gallagher explains the Principle of Minimal Departure in her own terms, essentially agreeing with Ryan. See Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?".

model of historical discourse into two levels. First, accounts of events already established as fact and second, rhetorical elements by which facts are turned into a story. In the end, it seems, a theory of history cannot ignore the concept of historical fact or the truth-valuation of historical representations ("The Postmodernist Challenge" 252).[53]

As Doležel suggests, the primary differences between fiction and history writing can thus be delineated along the terms of possible-worlds theory:

1. The fiction maker is free to "roam" the entire universe of possible worlds, whereas historical worlds are restricted to the physically possible.
2. The cast of agents in an historical world is determined by those involved in past events, whereas fiction does not have this limitation.
3. Fiction practices a "radically nonessentialist semantics", whereas persons, events, settings, etc. of historical worlds have to bear documented properties.
4. Both fictional and historical worlds are incomplete, but gaps in history are epistemological, i.e. defined by limitations in knowledge. Gaps in fiction are ontological, undecidable, and determined by aesthetic factors.[54]
5. Failure to heed the boundary described in the last point constitutes indeed a kind of heresy on the part of historians: Incompleteness that is determined by anything other than lack of knowledge is in history writing a distortion of the truth. (Doležel cites totalitarian historiography as an example).[55]

Doležel's claims amount to the relative freedom of the fiction maker in contrast to the restrictions on the historian ("The Postmodernist Challenge" 256–261).[56] Doležel thus proposes that historical discourse is a discourse of constatives (*noesis*), that is, it constructs models of the past. Fictional discourse is, on the other hand *poetic*: it creates worlds that did not exist prior to the act of writing

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53 As discussed in Hayden White's 1992 essay "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth", 375–389; see also Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* 23–24.
54 This is a point, for example, where Gregory Currie criticizes the logic of applying possible worlds theory to literature: whereas possible worlds are determinate with respect to truth (every proposition is either true or false), fictional worlds are indeterminate: if, on the basis of the information presented in the text, it is impossible for a reader to decide whether a given statement is true in the fiction or not, then the statement is neither true nor false (*The Nature of Fiction* 54–55; cf. Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula* 156). One could rebut, of course, that it depends merely on the definition of "possible world", but Currie's point is taken: this would seem to indicate an inflation of terminology.
55 This conscious editing of the past, or remaking by erasure, is thematized in works such as George Orwell's *1984* or Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*.
56 An extended version of this discussion of the differences between historical and fictional worlds can be found in Doležel's later book, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History: The Postmodern Stage* (33–41).

("The Postmodernist Challenge" 262). Works of history writing, like non-fictional texts in general, are "world-imaging texts", whereas alternate histories, as fiction, are "world-constructing texts". This will become an important distinction for the discussion of counterfactual histories written by historians: in terms of referentiality, historical texts are analogous to texts *about* fictional worlds, they are not fictions themselves (Doležel's terms, "Possible Worlds of Fiction and History" 42).

2.1.3 'History' as the Normalized Narrative of the Past

Historiographical representations of the past and fictional representations of the past are not one and the same, but they both contribute to the narrative of history as a whole. In insisting that representations of the real past not be discounted entirely from the analysis of historical fiction, I disagree with Durst: he goes so far as to suggest that the relevant history for historical fiction can only be the construction of "artistic" literature = "historische Sequenz". According to Durst, a chain of past events linked by causality, i.e. history, "wird vom Roman erst konstituiert, um einen alternativen Geschichtsverlauf zu motivieren. Folglich stellt die Literatur die 'reale' Geschichte erst her, die gleichfalls eine eigengesetzliche, unhistorische Struktur aufweist" ("Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 220).[57] We might certainly claim that White's advice for historians is also true for authors of historical fiction in general: "If you are going to 'go to history', you had better have a clear idea of which history, and you had better have a pretty good notion as to whether it is hospitable to the values you carry into it." (*The Content of the Form* 164) Alternate histories must presuppose a version of history and/or a notion of historiography, even if they do not necessarily narrate history or communicate the tenets of a given historiography. Alternate histories always construct implicitly or explicitly their own histories, because a certain version of history necessarily precedes any attempt to ask 'what if'(Rodiek 22; cf. Durst, "Drei grundlegende Verfremdungstypen" 357–358).

However, this is a radical view that falls prey to what Spiegel cites as the textualization of reality ("History, historicism and the social logic of the text" 198) – that history is *only* a construction of the alternate-history text (see Durst, "Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 211). Durst's claim, "entscheidend ist allein die Struktur der historischen Entwicklung, die *innerhalb der fiktionalen Erzählung* als eigentliche 'wirkliche', angeblich nicht-fiktionale Historie

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[57] See also Helbig: "Wie der realgeschichtlichen ist auch der alternativen Historiographie zwangsläufig eine bestimmte Geschichtsauffassung inhärent." (22).

konstituiert wird", is problematic not least of all because the version of history presupposed by alternate histories is not always directly readable, but may in many cases only be deduced from the counternarrative. Besides, even if an alternate history could have some kind of monopoly on history, the construction of an independent narrative of the real past is, quite simply, not the point at all. Alternate histories assume and rely upon a prevalent record of historical fact, and their own version of history is based upon and part of this record; it is not an independent construct itself. Alternate histories are different in this way from revisionist histories (or 'negationism'), which construct their own histories with the purpose of challenging existing historical narratives or of doubting historical record (Widmann 54).[58]

Durst seems to have misunderstood in part, or perhaps not taken into account all of the claims of historiographers to begin with: as already made clear, most do not ultimately argue that history writing is the same as fiction; they merely share narrative structure, and often times the same stories. His criticism that "Die Identifizierung von historiographischer und fiktionaler historischer Erzählung ist ein Irrweg der Wissenschaft" ("Drei grundlegende Verfremdungstypen der historischen Sequenz" 338) is thus empty. Far more reasonable and to the point is the consensus reached by Doležel: despite the development of terms to identify the difference between history and fiction, the boundary between the two is 'open'. Ruth Klüger uses a similar metaphor to discuss the relationship between the two fields: "Ich stelle mir die Literatur und die Historiographie als unabhängige Länder vor, Nachbarländer, gewiß, mit verschiedenen Sprachen, die zwar besonders im Grenzgebiet leicht zu erlernen, sogar leicht zu verwechseln sind, die aber doch ihren eigenen Regeln folgen." (147) Historical fiction as a whole remains particularly difficult terrain, for we must find some way of accounting for the fictional history as distinct from, but also part of, the narrative of the real past – while still taking the question of what history is as seriously as the field of historiography does.

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58 Cf. Henriet: "En effet, l'uchronie reviste le passé, propose une réflexion sur l'Histoire [...]? l'opposé, le négationnisme [est] associé bien souvent à la propagande d'une thèse, nie l'Histoire pour mieux la refaire" ("In fact, the uchronia revises the past, proposes a reflection on history [...] On the other hand, negationism is quite often associated with propagandizing a thesis; never for the purpose of redoing history for the better") (*L'uchronie* 152; translation KS); cf. Henriet: "L'uchronie ne cherche pas à effacer de la mémoire du lecteur l'Histoire pour lui en substituer une autre" ("The uchronia does not seek to efficate the memory of the reader of history by substituting it with another.") (*L'Histoire revisitée* 61–62; 246; translation KS).

Historical fiction as a hybrid of history writing and fiction surely owes much of its complexity to the fact that the structures of the two discourses are not analogous or parallel to begin with:[59]

history	history writing	historiography
(= real past)	(= narrative of real past)	(= the study of history writing)
	|	
	|	
(*fictional world*)	fictional text (= fiction writing)	literary criticism
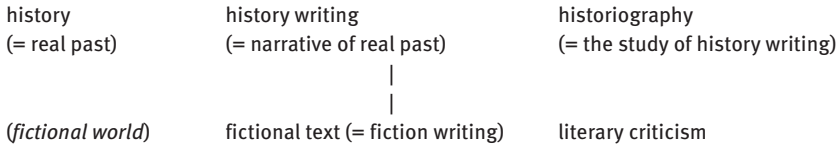
I have tried to adapt for this overview what has already been cited as a significant distinction between 'history' as the real past and 'history' as history writing (cf. Widmann 27). The real past does exist independently of the discourse that describes it, but the real past is only accessible indirectly through its narrative. Less successful, of course, is the attempt to find a corresponding place value for history (as the real past) in fictional discourse: a fictional world is solely the creation of the text and does not exist separately from that text. Fictional texts correspond to history writing, not the real past. In addition, the parallel positioning of historiography and literary criticism is somewhat misleading. Fictional texts to literary criticism is not as history writing to historiography, except for in the sense of 'object of study' to 'discipline'. Literary criticism is not limited to the study of fictional texts; historiography focuses exclusively on the study of history writing.

Another difficulty with this model is that the fictional text is singular (or at least it can be accurately treated as singular), whereas history writing, the narrative of the real past, refers not to any one, individual text, but rather a composite of academic and non-academic history writing, journalism, museum exhibits, trivia games, reenactments, and any other representation of the real past that contributes to a consensus about history, *including that which is achieved by historical fiction itself*.[60] Fictional works can write history, too, indeed perhaps more

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59 Not to mention the fact that they have not always been separate. Before Walter Scott's *Waverly*, historical facts more or less coexisted with fictional information in literature; cf. Rodiek, *Erfundene Vergangenheit* 63; cf. Butter, "Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 66; cf. Wesseling on the separation of history and fiction and the transformation of historiography into an academic discipline in the nineteenth century (Wesseling 49; 56); cf. also Korte and Paletschek on the establishment of history as a discipline and the development of an historical consciousness (*Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres* 18–20). Another account can be found in de Groot, *The Historical Novel* 11–50.

60 On historical fiction and its function of disseminating historical knowledge see also Wesseling, *Writing History as Prophet* 33; 45; cf. Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* 77. On

effectively (in the sense of reaching a wider audience) than academic sources.[61] Rodiek is perhaps suggesting something similar when he proposes the "world as book" metaphor to define 'history' in historical fiction, citing Miguel de Unamuno: "Todo es para nosotros libro, lectura; podemos hablar del Libro de la Historia, del Libro de la Naturaleza, del Libro del Universo. Somos bíblicos. Y podemos decir que en el principio fue el Libro. O la Historia."[62] This metaphor does seem at first to contradict the idea that there is a real past that exists outside of its representation – and I agree with Spiegel that we cannot determine notions of reality by merely textualizing the context (*History, historicism, and the social logic of the text* 19).[63] We can, however, textualize the representations of reality. Our knowledge depends primarily on these representations: we are *bíblicos*, not only in the sense of reading representations of the real past, but also in the sense that we constantly re-process real experience into a form that we can understand, whether by writing a narrative or 'saving' an experience as narrative in our memories. Knowledge is preserved and passed on in this form. Therefore: whatever we know of history, we know from 'readings' of history – both our own, first-hand experience of the past and second-hand, from the 'readings' of others in the form

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the end of the "monopoly" of professional historiography, see Korte and Paletscheck, *Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres* 10–13; the field of 'Geschichtskultur' seems to be a scholarly response to precisely this realization: that 'history' in any given socio-cultural context must be defined with greater flexibility and subtlety. In the English-speaking world, there has been at least one significant attempt to account for history as a construct of popular culture: De Groot, *Consuming History*. Like the work of Michael Butter (*The Epitome of Evil*) and Gavriel Rosenfeld (*The World Hitler Never Made*), de Groot's study is a true example of cultural theory, examining not only academic history, but also the role of non-academic ('public') history in historical knowledge as well as its commoditization.

61 Cf. Gavriel Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*: "It is highly likely that mass-market historical narratives are shaping popular historical awareness to a much greater extent than the histories produced by professional historians." (14) Rosenfeld sees this phenomenon as to some degree threatening: commercial pressures can then distort the past in ways that are "dangerous" (14); cf. Spedo 121–122.

62 Miguel de Unamuno, 1966, "Cómo se hace una novela", in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir. Cómo se hace una novela*, Madrid (= *Alianza Editorial* 27), qtd. in Rodiek (9). "Everything for us is a book, reading: We can speak of the Book of History, the Book of Nature, the Book of the Universe. We are biblical. And we can say that what came first was the Book. Or History." (Translation KS).

63 This is Spiegel's criticism of New Historicism in general: "New Historicism, like cultural history, appears to gloss over the problem of the text-context relationship by the adoption of a semiotic mode of analysis which occludes the issue altogether by treating culture, institutions, ideology, and power as merely interworked sets of symbolic systems or codes.".

of history textbooks, newspapers, historical fiction, films depicting historical events, even oral accounts.[64]

If we maintain that both historical and fictional discourse contribute to the consensus about that past, history, it might be said, refers to no single part of either discourse, but rather to a *normalized narrative of the real past*, a consensus resulting from history writing, cultural memory as well as texts furnished by the alternate history itself.[65] An adequately critical statement about the nature of history in alternate history combines the investigation of how alternate histories construct history (and historiography) as a text strategy with the investigation of

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64 The already cited volume of essays edited by Barbara Korte and Sylvia Paletschek makes clear just how varied these sources are: they investigate an impressively wide range of "popular representations of history", i.e. not only historical fiction and history textbooks, but also, for example, historical Christmas markets and entries on Wikipedia.

65 In *The World Hitler Never Made,* Rosenfeld uses the term 'normalization' in a different sense than I: he speaks of not only the historicization the Nazi era (of the process of becoming a part of the history of a given cultural circle, as the term is used here), but more prominently of the profanation and banalization of the history of the Third Reich, i.e. the process of its absorption into popular culture and becoming unspectacular. An "abnormal past", he says, "is one that occupies a disproportionate presence within a society's historical consciousness" (16). The process of normalization can be advanced in several different ways: "organically" (through the passage of time, the universalization of the significance of the even, and the aestheticization of the event). See 15–22. The overarching argument that Rosenfeld uses to structure his survey of alternate histories of World War II is that there is a growing tendency to normalize the Third Reich, to view it as any other historical period (22, 25), or more specifically, a shift from "moralization", characterizing alternate histories from 1945 to the mid 1960's to normalization, beginning in the mid 1960's and continuing up until the present day (23, 375). This process of normalization, which Rosenfeld evidences not only with alternate histories of World War II, but also Hitler-head toilet bowl scrubbers and "Führerwein", has purportedly transformed Nazi history into an "all-purpose grab bag of symbols guaranteed to fascinate, titillate, garner attention, and – not surprisingly – sell" (375). This growing apathy to the past (382) and the fading of fears originally inspired by the real events (380) reveals for Rosenfeld, once again, the "subversive potential" of popular culture (391) and is accompanied by a cautionary note: We need to be aware of this process, "lest we become overly complacent about the task of educating future generations about the past" (392); while acknowledging the value of as helping us "to cope with the unpredictability of our contemporary world" (397), Rosenfeld points to alternate history as particular grounds for concern because it may be seen as "*diverting* our attention away from real history" (392). The degree to which this is indeed the case is questionable, as will be shown here: alternate histories do the opposite, i.e. support traditional, if simplified, notions of the past. To be taken seriously in either case is the claim that the often humorous depiction of the Nazi past "trivializ[es] the past and dulling people's sensitivity towards an era of great pain and suffering" (393). This was indeed one of the main points of criticism of one of the case studies presented here, Stephen Fry's *Making History*.

the cultural architecture of history. We thus come to our first conclusion about the nature of alternate history:

1. *'History' in alternate history, as historical fiction, may be defined as a construct of the text, but one which also refers to and engages with a normalized narrative of the real past.*

This conceptualization of history embraces the idea that history is a both culture- and time-specific construct. The advantage is that it takes into account the context of reception of alternate history – which, as remains to be shown, is a critical part of understanding this genre.

2.1.4 The Selection and Emplotment of Historical Events in Alternate History

Because 'history' is defined by a given readership, how to reason about which events are included in the normalized narrative of the real past, what Rodiek calls "große Namen und historische Sternstunden" (27), requires further discussion. Here, we may rely to a certain extent on narratology: in general terms, an event is something that happens, "something that can be summed up by a verb or a name of action" (Rimmon-Kenan 2–3). But no general, sweeping statement may be made as to what 'counts' as an event to begin with. So Rimmon-Kenan: even if we define 'event' as a change from one state of affairs to the next, any single event can of course be decomposed into a series of mini-events and intermediary states (16). But whether we are talking about fictional or non-fictional discourse, the emplotment of events, i.e. temporal succession and notions of cause and effect, is the central project of any past narrative.

Chronology on its own can imply causality and consequence, but even the mere decision of which events to include (= narrate) and of course, how, plays a role in the creation of the two as indicators of meaning. We have already examined historical meaning, in which causality as the relationship between a succession of events, and consequence, the results of events, gain particular significance in their own right. As Widmann puts it, "Im historischen Ereignisverlauf wie im literarischen Erzähltext besitzt nicht jeder vergangene oder imaginierte Moment in einer Handlungsfolge denselben Stellenwert [...]" (138). In considering how exactly events are combined into sequences, how consequences are drawn out, there are several narratological models, all closely related in the sense that they establish a kind of hierarchy of events in a narrative. Where they differ is on which criteria an event has to fulfil in order to be important. Abbott distinguishes between 'constituent' and 'supplementary' events, the former being those events that are necessary to make the story what it is, the latter being the expendable,

less definitive events; Rimmon-Kenan relies on Barthes's distinction between "kernels", events that advance the plot by opening an alternative and "catalysts", those that amplify or delay action (Rimmon-Kenan 16). Important to note is that, in both cases, the distinction between the two kinds of event depends not on the events themselves as some 'core', but rather the emplotment of the events. Other models begin to approach what is meant by 'nodal situation' in the context of FNs: Bremond's logic-oriented model attempts to account for possible bifurcations at each point in the story; Bakhtin ascribes "eventness" to any moment that has the potential to produce a virtually infinite number of possible outcomes.[66]

But 'potential' is for alternate histories as past narratives hardly a relevant concept: as with any past narrative, the only thing that could have happened is what happened.[67] Even the past conditional 'what could/would have happened if' no longer exists as such once the alternate history has been written, for the alternative, too, has crystallized into a mere 'what happened', a past narrative. Importance is determined not by potential, but by consequence, by examining the results of a given event, factual or counterfactual – but not 'what could happen' (but has not yet).[68] Perhaps for this reason, studies on alternate history tend to, like Rimmon-Kenan, prefer Roland Barthes's terms: Durst, in his own call for a return to the literary aspects of the genre, replaces systems of historical causality with Barthes's constituent events (with "cardinal functions") and catalysts (simple, consecutive units). All constituent events together build a super-sequence.

In recognizing that most alternate histories focus on one event in a super-sequence and emphasize its historical significance by exploring the consequences of an alternative outcome, I disagree here with statements, for example by Wesseling, that alternate history "zooms in on moments in history that possessed the potential for significant historical change" (174). Strictly speaking, events (which have already happen) do not possess any such potential at all. Rather, it seems that the most convenient events to change (and indeed the most popular ones) are those which have been emplotted in history as having the most significant and wide-reaching consequences: wars, assassinations, inventions, elections. But like with the models described above, this is less a result of the nature of the events themselves than the way in which they have already been processed, i.e.

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66 See Bremond, Claude. 1973. *La Logique du récit*. Collection Poétique, Editions du Seuil; see Bakhtin, M. M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin, 1993.

67 Cf. Johannes Bulhof: "The actual is necessary" (159).

68 Cf. Hassig: "After selecting one course of action, the alternatives effectively become counterfactual, but at the time of the choice is made, a world of possibilities is open" (59).

emplotted into the narrative of the real past. One exception is Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. The point of divergence, the death of Anthony Dimond, is notable here precisely because the event chosen does not seem to belong to the normalized narrative of the real past prevalent at the time the work was written; rather, Dimond's survival gains historical significance *as a result of* the work's postulation of its counter-consequences – it has, it might be argued, been emplotted into history by Chabon's novel, and the consequences are what make it identifiable as a point of divergence to begin with. Similar is the point of divergence in Gibson's and Sterling's *The Difference Engine*.[69] This seems to me to be a clear case of the interaction of fiction and history, the collaborative writing of a normalized narrative of the real past.

But even the point of divergence in Chabon's novel – like four of the other seven case studies[70] presented here – at least indirectly relates to *the* pivotal (set of) events and *the* most infamous figure of the twentieth century: World War II and Adolf Hitler. This recognition is by no means detrimental to our purposes here. Indeed the drastically different approaches to the same set of events reveals the futility of cataloguing alternate histories by the historical period in which the point of divergence 'occurs'; instead, setting five different alternate histories of World War II next to one another not only furnishes a due testament to the complexity of World War II (there are more possible outcomes then merely 'Hitler wins', 'Hitler loses'), but also provides us with a valuable chance for a comparative investigation of the point of divergence concept.

In addition, it would not be accurate to say that the cross-section of alternate history in focus here is skewed in this respect: alternate histories dealing with World War II and Hitler constitute perhaps the largest 'cluster', related by choice of historical subject, of such works published from about 1940 to the present in

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69 See Alkon: "[...] Gibson and Sterling have chosen an obscure though not unimportant topic, the mathematical theories of Babbage, unlikely to elicit much historically informed response. Most of those who peruse their story will come to it knowing only the grand fact that in the nineteenth century there was no widespread use of devices equivalent to twentieth-century computers and serving many of the same dubious functions." (81–82) *The Difference Engine*, in positing an anachronistic technological advancement, is often considered a paradigmatic example for the (sub-)subgenre of 'steampunk'; cf. Henriet, *L'uchronie* 107.

70 Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* presents a world in which Nazi-Germany and Japan were victorious in World War II, or more specifically, Roosevelt has been assassinated; Philip Roth's *The Plot against America* posits the victory of Charles Lindbergh, a fascist supporter of Hitler, in the 1940 US election; *Making History* asks the question 'what if Hitler had never been born'?; Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* has already been mentioned; *Inglourious Basterds* presents the premature death of Hitler.

the Western world.[71] These 'clusters' should also not be overlooked. Other identifiable 'clusters' of alternate histories include: those dealing with Spain and England at the end of the 16th century (such as Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*, Keith Robert's *Pavane* or Harry Turtledove's *Ruled Britannia*), or the American Civil War (such as Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* or Will Shetterly's and Vince Stone's alternate-history comic *Captain Confederacy*), for example.[72] The comprehensive survey work of É. B. Henriet also reveals identifiable trends in the point of divergence ("point de divergence") in alternate histories ("uchronie historique"): out of nearly 5000 texts considered, 80 per cent fall under one of a dozen historical themes; 31 per cent alone deal with World War II (Henriet, *L'uchronie* 39–40).[73]

It is striking, then, that Helbig claims to have found no significant, broad correlation between the contemporary social, cultural or political situation in which alternate histories were published and the choice of subject:

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71 Gavriel Rosenfeld's insightful and comprehensive survey of alternate histories about Hitler and the Third Reich makes the point undeniable: speculating about the alternate outcomes to World War II is a widespread phenomenon in Western popular culture (2); see also Spedo 10; 119; Hans-Edwin Friedrich's list of American, British and German "einschlägige[n] Texte, die einen deutschen Sieg im Zweiten Weltkrieg voraussetzen" ("Das deutsche Volk schlief schlecht" 258–259) is not by any means as comprehensive as Rosenfeld's survey, but nevertheless supplements Rosenfeld's list; cf. Korte and Paletschek, *Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres* (26). In her study on World War II in American visual media, Maria Kabiling notes, too, that World War II has become a particularly "usable" past for American authors and filmmakers (8).

72 Helbig makes a similar observation, although his survey necessarily reaches no further than 1987: "Dabei sind Schwerpunktbildungen um die europäische Kirchengeschichte, den amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg und den Zweiten Weltkrieg, sowie um die Personen Napoleons, Lincolns und Hitlers erkennbar" (84); see also Alkon: "Victorious Confederacies and triumphant Hitlers have been a staple of alternate history." (70).

73 Cf. the same, *L'Histoire revisitée. Panorama de l'uchroniesous toutes ses formes*, chapter "Quelques grands thèmes à la mode" (115–203). Henriet's two surveys should not be critiqued as literary scholarship, for they offer little in terms of response to previous research. But they have excellent value as surveys of the larger genre *uchronia*, which includes alternate history. The second, later volume, is a catalogue of aspects, arranged into 50 questions, and is a kind of distilled version of the earlier volume. The earlier publication, *L'Histoire revisitée. Panorama de l'uchronie sous toutes ses formes* is one of the most thoroughly researched surveys of primary literature, ambitious in scope, and features and excellent compilation of both primary and secondary sources (the list of secondary sources is even more comprehensive than those of many scholarly studies). "In all of its forms" refers not only to media (Henriet cites uchronias not only in written form, but also software versions, architecture and sports websites[!]), but also national literatures. He provides accounts of uchronias in national literatures that are accounted for virtually nowhere else: The Netherlands, Portugal, Brazil, New Zeeland, India, Belgium. Thus although Henriet's work is essentially that of a fan, he is an extremely clear-sighted one, who has an authoritative overview of this kind of text.

> Ein unmittelbarer Zusammenhang zwischen der zeitgeschichtlichen Situation und der Wahl einer bestimmten Geschichtsperiode läßt sich hierbei freilich kaum nachweisen. Nur selten tritt der äußere Anlass für einen parahistorischen Roman so offen zutage wie bei „If Israel Lost the War" (1969), wo nur zwei Jahre nach dem Sechs-Tage-Krieg ausgemalt wird, welche weltpolitischen Konsequenzen sich aus einer israelischen Niederlage hätten ergeben können [...] (84).[74]

But perhaps Helbig is looking a bit too literally for these connections.[75] It seems clear that, beyond merely an acknowledged correlation between the nationality of the author and historical subject (Helbig 85–86), one can safely make observations about the choice of subject for alternate histories on a much broader scale. Widmann's qualified suggestion is as follows: "Insgesamt erscheinen die für kontrafaktische Darstellungen ausgewählten und prädestinierten historischen Situationen und Ereignisse zwar als kulturkreisspezifisch, sie sind dabei jedoch durchaus nicht a priori festgelegt." (361)[76] It is, of course, impossible to claim that the choice of historical subject matter is somehow predetermined by the 'cultural circle' to which author belongs, and by no means do all alternate histories written in the 'cultural circle' in focus here deal with World War II, the defeat of Spain in 1588, or the American Civil War. But it would also be nonsensical to ignore the connection between such an obvious trend in choice of subject matter and the 'cultural circle' from which the alternate histories came. Or, perhaps more to the point, the implications for the conception of history: clearly, at least from 1950 to the present and for the cultural circles of which the authors are a part, World War II (along with the defeat of Spain in the 1580s and the American Civil War) holds a position of the utmost importance in the narrative of the real past.

This is indeed the assumption that serves as a basis for Gallagher's recent, cultural-historical work with alternate history and the collective historical imagination, although I have arrived at it from quite a different angle. Gallagher

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[74] There are also, of course, other individual examples of alternate histories as responses to recent political developments, such as Noel Coward's 1946 drama *Peace in Our Time*, in which England falls under Nazi rule during World War II, while the other allied forces continue to fight. The political implications of such works are particularly visible. See Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 42–44; *Peace in Our Time* is a "postwar critique of appeasement and a vindication of the British decision to fight against the Germans" (42).

[75] One clear exception, which Helbig's 1988 study could not have possibly accounted for, is German *Wendegeschichte*: Widmann suggests that "kein historisches Ereignis ähnlich rasch eine Resonanz in der Literatur erzeugt hat, die eine Art stofflich bestimmtes Genre initiierte" (213–214); cf. also Schütz 49–50.

[76] Cf. Henriet: authors of alternate history "explorent des points de divergence propres à l'Histoire de leurs pays" ("explore the points of divergence appropriate to the history of their countries") (*L'uchronie* 159; translation KS).

accounts for the prominence of alternate histories dealing with wars in the US since the 1950s by arguing that military history provides a particularly rich opportunity for counterfactual history. It has been noted that the large majority of counterfactual histories focus on military points of divergence, a second majority on changes in leadership (Henriet, *L'uchronie* 248–249).[77] But as to why this is the case, it is possible to reason here with a different nuance. Gallagher cites Robert Cowley: "Nothing is more suited to 'what if' speculation than military history, where chance and accident, human failings or strengths, can make all the difference." (Cowley, *What If* xiii, in: Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels" 57) Geoffrey Parker and Philip E. Tetlock make a similar argument, broadening the statement to other kinds of event as well:

> All four subjects – politics, war, technology, and religion – are particularly appropriate for counterfactual analysis. Each of them offers enormous room for chance to channel us down historical paths that once seemed quite improbably, and once we are on a certain path, it becomes progressively harder to get off because those potential paths often multiply in nonlinear – even exponential- fashions. ("Counterfactual History" 365)

This is undoubtedly true, but on the other hand, it is also emphatically true for *all* human history. These subjects are popular because of their prominence in the collective memory of a specific cultural circle, or better: the way in which they have been emplotted into a given version of history. The undeniable focus of US-American alternate histories on wars (in particular, the Civil War and World War II) is, I would argue, a direct result of the emplotment of these events in American history as decisive, influential, critical.[78] As Hassig puts it, "the perception of pivotal events is our common cultural currency" (Hassig 64).

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77 Collins cites Brian Lowe's 2003 paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Association in Philadelphia, which categorizes 500 "books of the historical turning-point genre" according to the kind of event used as the turning point. Whether or not one agrees entirely with the specific categorization of works is of secondary interest: most significant here is the fact that there are identifiable trends. This serves as statistical support for the basis of Gallagher's work and other claims about trends in choice of historical event and period in alternate history. See above.

78 Rosenfeld even uses alternate histories of World War II as evidence for Western notions of the past, that is to say, as cultural-historical artefacts (see *The World Hitler Never Made,* esp. 195): in comparing British, American and German alternate histories of World War II from the 1940s to the present, he is able to make arguments not only about the motivations for writing alternate histories, but also notice trends in the conceptions of history of a given time: not only has there been a vast number of alternate histories of the Third Reich, but just about all of them fall into one of four main categories: the Nazis win World War II, Hitler survives into the postwar era, Hitler is removed from the world historical stage, and the Holocaust is completed, avenged or undone. See 13. The fact, in any case, that World War II is such a popular topic in alternate his-

Diversifying the text corpus, then, for the mere purpose of including as many subjects as possible is hardly the point here. Instead, it is a genre-defining realization that alternate histories are products of a given cultural context, and that in a given cultural context certain trends are likely to be identified. But crucially, the English-speaking world is not the only cultural circle for which this kind of coherency is true: we might take the Civil War in Spain[79] or the fall of the Berlin Wall in post-reunification Germany as further examples of historical events that are clearly 'favored' as topics for alternate history (and historical fiction in general) in the respective national literatures (but not necessarily in others). World War II is indeed an exception in this respect: 'Nazi-terror' is a subject that has had international presence in alternate history since the 1950s, signalling that World War II has been emplotted into the narrative of the real past as significant in multiple cultural contexts.[80]

As far as notions of history are concerned, we must conclude that the inclusion of certain events and exclusion of others in the super-sequence of history – or, for alternate histories, the assumption that the event used as the point of divergence belongs to this super-sequence – and it has little to do with the nature of the event. Widmann writes,

> Zu bedenken ist natürlich, dass diese Kernpunkte der Geschichte jeweils Projektionen sind, deren Bedeutung von der Perspektive abhängig ist. Da eine Abgrenzung von anderen vorhergehenden und nachfolgenden Ereignissen und die Interpretation hinsichtlich ihrer Wichtigkeit niemals gänzlich wertneutral und empirisch, sondern immer in Abhängigkeit bestimmter konzeptioneller Entscheidungen erfolgt, ist daher immer auch von Interesse, welche Auswahl und welche Bedeutungszuweisung für die fokussierten historischen

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tory "reflects Western society's enduring awareness of it [...] as a pivotal event that has shaped the contemporary world like few other events have" (11–12). Alternate histories indeed "illustrate *collective*, speculative trends that provide a revealing reflection of broader views of the past" (12).

79 Rodiek gives a valuable overview of alternate histories dealing with the Spanish Civil War 1936–39: works such as *En el día de hoy* by Jesús Tourbado or Víctor Alba's *1936–1976: Historia de la II República Española* are examined. See Rodiek 109–122. Since Rodiek's study, a website has also been created as kind of a bibliography and introduction to alternate histories on the Spanish Civil War: J. Santiago "Ucronías sobre la Guerra Civil" on *Pasadizo.com*. Solá's bibliography on alternate histories written in Spain also provides several examples, including Fernando Díaz-Plaja's "El desfile de la victoria" and César Mallorquí's "El coleccionista de sellos". See Solá.

80 Rodiek makes his point citing works from Germany, Austria, England, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain. See Rodiek 141. That World War II is a popular topic in alternate histories written in Spain is also clear from Solá's bibliography, mentioned above; Henriet devotes an entire chapter of his exhaustive survey *L'Histoire revisitée. Panorama de l'uchroniesous toutes ses formes* to alternate histories of World War II; Butter also names World War II as a transnational favorite for authors of alternate history ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 67; cf. Butter, *The Epitome of Evil*).

Ereignisse vorgenommen wird. Über die Zuweisung entscheiden Historiker und Roman-
ciers, nicht zuletzt in Abhängigkeit von einem kulturspezifischen kollektiven Gedächtnis.
(Widmann 139; cf. Butter, "Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 67)

Trends in alternate history are always bound to trends in historical fiction in
general, which are in turn commensurate with popular interest in history. Alter-
nate histories are thus both indicators for and creators of popular notions of
history. Because the chain of events known as history is dynamic and flexible,
depending on the given culture and the given time in which it is conceived, we
should always keep in mind that, for the analysis of alternate histories as histori-
cal fiction, the formation of 'history' is of just as much interest as its "deforma-
tion" (Durst, "Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Roman" 220). As for the nature of
the narrative of the real past, we can claim that:

2. *The normalized narrative of the real past is a culture- and time-specific con-
   struct. Thus the events foiled, represented, and made the focus of alternate his-
   tories are most often the events that (are assumed to) belong to the historical
   consciousness of a popular audience in the place of and at the time of publica-
   tion.*

Crucially, the close connection between a certain version of history and a certain
present that conceives of the past as such also has implications for the recep-
tion of alternate histories: they seem to, in general, have a much shorter-lived
range of effectiveness (cf. Rodiek 28; cf. Butter, "Zwischen Affirmation und Revi-
sion" 67);[81] or, if they are to remain 'relevant' and 'readable', alternate histories
have to pursue strategies different from those of other kinds of fiction – for "the
one invariable rule of alternate history is that the difference between the fictional
time line and the real one must be obvious to the reader" (Duncan 217).[82]

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81 This same idea was intuited by the critic Philip Hensher: "Joan Aiken's splendid children's
novels, such as *Black Hearts* and *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, are cases in point. Their casu-
ally stated donnée, in which the Hanoverians never came to the throne and early 19th-century
England is still ruled by a Stuart king leads one to suppose that children 40 years ago knew a
great deal more history than they do now." (38).
82 Cf. Henriet, who in answering the question "What is the recipe for writing a good uchron-
ic novel?", uses Harry Turtledove as a model: the alternate-history author should choose as
the point of divergence an "object of consensus", and it should be recognizable for the reader
(*L'uchronie* 48–53).

2.1.5 Nineteenth-century Paradigms of History in Alternate History

It is for this reason that the "counterfactual imagination" is rather limited.[83] Alternate histories do not, for example, imagine as points of divergence economic changes, nor do they suggest points of divergence in the history of culture or ideology: as Collins points out, "there are no arguments for a crucial turning point in the shift from patrimonialism to bureaucracy; nor in the patterns of kinship structure or even of gender roles" (R. Collins 249). Such ideological movements as well as series of historical events are "too complex" for counterfactual history: they "may be good for writing articles, but [they] are bad for the classroom, the theater stage, the TV screen, and the election speech. There, we need history to be simple." (Harari 262) It is not, in other words, the case that wars are less complex than other historical events, but rather that, as Yuval Harari notes in his study on 'decisive battles' in world history, "even today, this battle version of world history is very popular among the general public", that is, wars and battles are "the historical events *par excellence*" (251). History in alternate history is popularized history, and a simplified, conservative version of popularized history at that. Alternate history pre-dates, responds to, or ignores the perceived move away from Rankean historiography.

The overwhelming focus of alternate histories as a whole on the 'great men' of history, Napoleon, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy (cf. Henriet, *L'uchronie* 59–60 and 157), and Hitler among them, makes the point clear. One infrequently cited but colourful illustration of the Great Man theory can be found in Trechera's 1987 short story "Mein Führer", in which a group of neo-Nazis arrange to send two members back in time to 1941 to eliminate Winston Churchill. The assumption is that, without Winston Churchill, Hitler will live and triumph in World War II; if Hitler lives and triumphs, National Socialism will continue to flourish. Preceding Churchill's assassination, there is a reflection on the contingency of history:

> La Historia está a punto de decir que éste va a ser un día más en la vida del prestigioso descendiente de Mambrú; cenará frugalmente, tomará su vaso de leche, leeré los informes top secret que lleva en la cartera y se irá a dormir al filo de las dos, dispuesto a empezar un nuevo día a la mañana siguiente. La Historia está empeñada en no recordar este día en su insulso anecdotario; lo considera un día anónimo sin mayor importancia. La Historia, por supuesto, también puede equivocarse.[84]

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83 Cf. Henriet, *L'uchronie*: "il y a encore beaucoup à imaginer" (40) ("there is still much to be imagined") (Translation KS).

84 Rafael Marín Trechera, "Mein Führer": "History is about to say that this is going to be one more day of the honorable descendent of Marlborough; he will eat a frugal dinner, he will take his glass of milk, he will read the top secret reports which he will put in the briefcase, he will

Not only do the two time-traveling Neo-Nazis succeed in killing "this Jewish, English Dog called Winston Churchill" ("ese perro judío inglés llamado Winston Churchill"), "this British swine" ("ese cerdo británico"), but Hitler does indeed succeed in becoming world-dominant – to the point that Manfred Vogelweide, the Neo-Nazi who had organized the first mission, also prompts a mission to go back in time to 1945 to stop Hitler, to kill "this crazy sicko called Adolf Hitler" ("ese loco malsano llamado Adolf Hitler"). In a different version of the same present, he develops a mission for two Neo-Nazis to travel back in time to 1945, not to kill Hitler, but to meet this "living symbol" ("símbolo viviente"), the "founder of National Socialism" ("fundador del Nacionalsocialismo"). All of the options presented are contingent upon two key figures: Churchill and Hitler.

These examples illustrate how, "like popular history in general, alternate history suffers [...] from the assertion of historian Thomas Carlyle in 1841: The history of the world is but the biography of great men" (Duncan 216).[85] Not only are such figures assumed to be part of common historical knowledge, part of the normalized narrative of the real past, but the potential for contingency required for a point of divergence is supposedly at its greatest: history is effectively 'written' as hinging on one human being, subject to all of the dangers, whims, and mortality of all humans. Alternate histories rely on the Rankean notion that a single event can be pivotal, for example that a change in political leadership can decisively alter the following course of events, that a given battle can change the outcome of a war, that a single person can change the course of history.

In their 'one-dimensional' notion of history as hinging on key figures, alternate histories are not direct manifestations of recent historiography (just as counterfactual histories among history writing are not);[86] alternate histories are instead reactionary, reaching back to Rankean notions of the importance of human agency and the conceptualization of history as monolithic, uni-linear,

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go to sleep at about two, ready to begin a new day the next morning. History is determined not to remember this day in its insipid collection of anecdotes. History, by all means, can also get it wrong." (Translation KS).

85 Spedo also suggests that alternate histories follow Carlyle's Great Man theory of history (9); Collins mentions the Great Man theory in passing with regard to Sobel's "For Want of a Nail: If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga" (*Paths Not Taken* 94); Ransom mentions the "Great Men" theory in her work as well ("Warping Time" 261).

86 As Rosenfeld claims in *The World Hitler Never Made* (7). He is correct to note a relationship between postmodernist notions of history and alternate history, but he fails to consider that this relationship is not direct; the statement that postmodernism has merely encouraged allohistorical thinking is a simplification, as is the claim that alternate histories promote "unconventional views of the past" (7) or have the "provocative ability to subvert traditional views of the past" (94). They do exactly the opposite.

and progressive. As we shall see in the next section, alternate histories are also reactionary in the context of the shift from the notion that history can portray reality objectively to the question of whether or not history allows us to access reality at all. The tension between the desire for or necessity of an account of our past and the recognition that this may only be achieved through construction, through language, the epistemological questioning of history, is a dilemma of postmodernist historiography that is manifest in literature after World War II (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 122). The true manifestations of this discourse in historiography, however, are not alternate histories, but rather works of so-called historiographic metafiction.

2.2 Alternate History and Other Kinds of Past Narrative

2.2.1 The Epistemology of History: Alternate History in the Context of Postmodern Historical Fiction

In narrating precisely *not* history but its 'deformation', alternate history is already unique among other kinds of historical fiction: indeed, it has a similar program to another corpus of texts, identified by Linda Hutcheon as 'historiographic metafiction', re-theorized by others such as Ansgar Nünning, Christopher Smith, Elisabeth Wesseling, and Amy Elias. Out of the studies on alternate history mentioned here, McKnight's in particular sees alternate history as being congruous to historiographic metafiction, especially the "ironic artifacts" of the 'New Wave' of science fiction: works like Harry Harrison's *A Transatlantic Tunnel. Hurrah!* Or Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream*. McKnight claims that such works "expan[d] upon the irony implicit in the genre" (213; 139). Spedo also states that "alternate history is definitely postmodern in that it reflects a general shift in fiction from epistemological to ontological concerns", and that it constitutes "a pragmatic form of *metahistory*" (9; 53; verbatim 112). I would like to examine more critically the claim that alternate histories are quintessentially postmodern: for while there are indeed key similarities between alternate history and historiographic metafiction, the program of alternate histories with respect to their relationship to history is ultimately different from that proposed by Hutcheon, Nünning, Smith, or Wesseling. Whereas works of historiographic metafiction are direct outgrowths of postmodernist historiography, alternate histories insist upon a conservative, traditional, even simplified notions of history in that they refuse the epistemological questioning characteristic of postmodernist historiography: in alternate history, the past is knowable.

Historical fiction, as a hybrid of historical and fictional discourses, relies heavily on both the conventions of history writing and fiction writing as well as history (as the normalized narrative of the real past). As a result of its 'participation' in both historical and fictional discourses, historical fiction can be both historiographic and metafictional – that is, it can reflect on both the nature of history writing and the nature of fiction.[87] Nünning describes the paradigm change from 'traditional' to 'postmodernist' historical fiction as follows:

> Zeitgenössische historische Romane [unterscheiden sich] so stark von jenem traditionellen Gattungsmodell, das von den Werken Sir Walter Scotts geprägt wurde, daß es inzwischen zu einem Paradigmwechsel in diesem Genre gekommen ist, das Anschluß an die ästhetische Praxis der Postmoderne gefunden hat. Seit Ende der sechziger Jahre wenden sich englische Romanschriftsteller zwar wieder verstärkt der Geschichte zu, aber sie verbinden diese thematische Orientierung zunehmend mit experimentellen Erzählverfahren, metafiktionalen Elementen und mit Reflexionen über Geschichte und Historiographie. (20)

Nünning speaks here specifically of English-language literature, but we only need to call to mind works like Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra* or Stefan Heym's *Der König David Bericht* to realize that this is a broader phenomenon. Such a literature-historical development was hinted at by Jörg Helbig in the concluding remarks to his 1988 study of parahistories, but it was Hutcheon who suggested the term 'historiographic metafiction' and began to theorize this corpus of texts ("Historiographic Metafiction" 3). Such works, including Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*, Doctorov's *The Book of Daniel,* Michael Ondaatje's *Coming through Slaughter*, Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Graham Swift's *Waterland*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, are quintessentially postmodern in that the interaction between history and fiction is one of mutual implication: "Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction." (2)

Hutcheon agrees here with Brian McHale, Nünning, Wesseling, Elias, and other theorists of the postmodern in linking the trends in historiography after 1960 and a general awareness "of the existence and power of systems of representation which do not reflect [...] so much as grant meaning and value" to the program of postmodern fiction (here: Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 8; see also Nünning 18). Postmodern fiction often thematizes the tensions between

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[87] It is useful here to dissect Hutcheon's coinage, for the terms are not parallel in terms of historical discourse / fictional discourse: 'historiographic' refers merely to the theorizing of history, whereas 'metafiction' theorizes about fiction *through the practice of writing fiction* (cf. by now a classic study: Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction* 2). Thus, the equivalent to 'historiography' in my diagram above is 'literary criticism', not 'metafiction'.

the events of the past and the historian's processing of these events: there is "an intense self-consciousness [...] about the act of narrating in the present the events of the past, about the conjunction of present action and the past absent object of that agency" (68; 23). This deconstruction of history as an ontologically independent entity strengthens the "border tensions" between the two disciplines, i.e. challenges the independence of history and fiction (Leopold 113).

Works of historiographic metafiction both work within and subvert conventions of history writing: above all, "historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its (only) *textualized* accessibility to us today" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 4). Historiographic metafiction by definition "juxtaposes what we think we know of the past [...] *with an alternative representation* that foregrounds the postmodernist epistemological questioning of the nature of historical knowledge" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 68; my italics). If the past is only known to us today through its textualized traces (which like all texts, are always open to interpretation), then the writing of both history and historiographic metafiction becomes a form of complex cross-referencing that operates within (and does not deny) its status as discourse (70). We turn towards the archives, yet question their authority (77).

Hutcheon's focus on the epistemological questioning of history in postmodern historical fiction indicates that she does not subscribe to McHale's distinction between modern and postmodern texts. For McHale, the problematization of historical knowledge has implications for the "dominant" of postmodernist fiction in general:[88] whereas the fictional world in modernist fiction is stable and reconstructable, filtered through the consciousness of a character in the fiction, there is no stable world behind this consciousness in postmodernist fiction, "only a flux of discourse in which fragments of different, incompatible realities flicker into existence and out of existence again, overwhelmed by the competing reality of language" (McHale 234). While the dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological, i.e. it foregrounds questions like how to interpret the world, where is my place in the world, what is there to be known, who knows it, and how, the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological, i.e. lines of inquiry might include: which world is this? Which of my selves belongs to it? What is a world? What kinds of world are there, and what are the boundaries? (9–10). In posing

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[88] McHale quotes Roman Jakobson: "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: It rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components." (Roman Jakobson, "The dominant". *Readings in Russian Poetics*, Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, eds. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. 105, qtd. in: McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 6) He claims that, with this tool, it is possible to describe "the process of literary-historical change" (McHale 7).

such questions, postmodernist fiction may be seen as taking the form of a self-conscious, self-contradictory statement.

Critics of McHale's terminology have rightly stated that epistemology and ontology are not mutually exclusive. More accurately, all works have elements of both; indeed ontological questions depend on epistemological ones. Given that so many of the works described as postmodern historical fiction are *also* or even primarily concerned with epistemological problems, McHale's position is hardly tenable as a means of drawing the line between 'modern' and 'postmodern'.[89] Hutcheon's more subtle characterization of postmodern historical fiction focuses not on the presence of ontological concerns, but rather the tension resulting from the obvious, but never satisfactory attempts to access the real world: "The workings of all postmodernist world-making machines are visible", and so there can never be any resolution of the contradictions that result from both relying on knowledge of the real world and undermining its authority (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 1; 69).

The debate about where and how to draw the line between modernism and postmodernism in literature aside, I would like to argue here that alternate histories are not concerned with ontological or epistemological questions at all: neither the existence of a real past nor our ability to know it through history are called into question in alternate history – at least not merely as a result of a work being an alternate history. The similarities that alternate history reveals to historiographic metafiction are significant, but ultimately to be seen as independent from that which defines alternate history, namely the narration of a history that contradicts the normalized narrative of the real past.

Alternate histories, like the whole of historiographic metafiction, are texts that explicitly admit their own fictionality,[90] indeed make their own status as fiction and the counter-relationship to history a central topic in the works themselves, yet still pursue strategies of verisimilitude or authenticity. This can perhaps most clearly be seen in examining the paratexts: bibliographies, footnotes, newspaper articles, reviews, and other fictional sources that have the guise of authenticity, but the obviousness of the guise undermines any claim to authenticity. The same documents that have a "feierliche Tracht" in the historical novels are in alternate

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89 For further critique on McHale's classification, see Wesseling 117–118; Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*.

90 It is not clear what Spedo means when he claims that alternate history "never explicitly declares its fictionality" (118). Presumably what he means is the narrator of the alternate history, in using the indicative mode, does not 'declare the fictionality' of the narrative. There are, however, as I show here, other means of 'declaring fictionality' not limited to an admission of the narrator.

histories as historiographic metafiction ironic, for their a-mimetic character is evident (Durst, "Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 218).[91]

In alternate histories, there are two kinds of paratext: one kind that, like in historiographic metafiction, simulates history writing; the other serving to delineate the version of history being used as a foil. The second kind of paratext in alternate history, often taking the form of notes to the reader or afterwords, represents one of the main strategies for revealing to the reader that the history being narrated is indeed alternate, or for drawing attention to the fact that history is being foiled. This aspect will be discussed later with reference to the reader. We will focus on the first kind of paratext here, the kind that alternate history shares with many works of historiographic metafiction: 'fake' historical sources.

As Helbig notes, "obwohl dieser Erzähltypus keinen Anspruch auf Realisierbarkeit der in ihm dargestellten Welten erheben kann, wird doch oft eine für allotopische Texte ungewöhnlich detaillierte Authentizitätsillusion aufgebaut (die dem Leser als solche natürlich nicht verborgen bleiben kann)" (148). This curious strategy of making claims to authenticity and simultaneously undermining these claims is characteristic not only of alternate-history novels, but also of many shorter alternate histories, for example in Squire's volume:[92] the alternate-history short-story "If the Moors in Spain had won" presents of a series of fake documentation of a world in which the Moors in Spain had won, including a passage from a travel guide, an entry from the "Cambridge Modern History", and newspaper articles from *The Times*, dated 1915 and 1919; "If Byron had become King of Greece" presents an English clergyman's review of the memoirs of Pietro Gamba, Duke of Negroponte, in which it becomes clear that Byron did not die in Greece and was instead induced by Pietro Gamba to become King of Greece; "If the General Strike had succeeded" is written as a series of extracts from a (self-professedly) imaginary newspaper from June 1939. The illusion here is carried over to the printed format as well. Another common strategy for the illusion of authenticity is the use of maps, as for example in William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine*, in which the narrative is preceded by a map of the "The World of the Difference Engine, 1855". As with the other works mentioned here, *The Two Georges* both presents (what poses as) historical documentation and undermines its authenticity, in this case quite overtly with the subtitle

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91 On the use of paratexts in historical fiction in general, see de Groot, *The Historical Novel* 8–9: there is a "fundamental metafictional element" to all historical fiction.

92 Sir John Collings Squire, ed. *If it Happened Otherwise: Lapses into Imaginary History*, London, 1932. All page numbers refer to this edition. In his discussion of Squire's volume, Henriet mentions a comparable collection in French: *Les Annales. Revue mensuelle des Lettres francaises en 1956 et 1957* (*L'uchronie* 65–70).

"A Novel of an Alternate America". The artificiality of the map is unmistakable, and its existence in the text is not merely a form of historical documentation (as it might be in a work of historical fiction), but rather a parody of historical method.

Perhaps one of the most elaborate instances of undermined authenticity is Norman Spinrad's 1972 novel, *The Iron Dream*. This work does not narrate an alternative version of history, but rather poses itself as an artefact from a world in which World War II did not take place. The real author is somewhat 'hidden' from notice, with his name appearing only on the cover and title page – not even a short author-biography is included. The narrative proper is preceded by a series of short texts, together making up the fictional front material of the novel within a novel, including a list of science-fiction novels by Adolf Hitler and an "About the Author". This alternate-history version of Adolf Hitler emigrated to the United States in 1919 after "dabbling briefly in politics" and there became an artist, magazine and comic illustrator, and finally, a science-fiction writer, illustrator and editor. He died in 1953, but won a posthumous Hugo Award (!) for "Lord of the Swastika". Hitler's "masterwork" is the science-fiction tale of the "Trueman" Feric Jaggar and his quest for genetic purity. The parodic references to Hitler's Third Reich are relentless, as Jaggar struggles to thwart the threats of mutant perversion to the pure Aryan gene pool of his ancestral land, Helder. Unaware of the satirical nature of Spinrad's work, the American Nazi Party allegedly included *The Iron Dream* on their recommended reading list. A disquieted Spinrad responded with an addition to the text, a fake scholarly analysis of "Lord of the Swastika" by the fictional critic Homer Whipple of New York University. Spinrad claims,

> To make damn sure that even the historically naive and entirely unselfaware reader got the point, I appended a phony critical analysis of *Lord of the Swastika*, in which the psychopathology of Hitler's saga was spelled out by a tendentious pendant in words of one syllable. Almost everyone got the point ... And yet one review appeared in a fanzine that really gave me a pause: 'This is a rousing adventure story and I really enjoyed it,' the gist of it went, 'Why did Spinrad have to spoil the fun with all this muck about Hitler?' (*Science fiction in the real world* 158)

Whipple concludes his analysis by stating, "we are fortunate that a monster like Feric Jaggar will forever remain confined to the pages of science fantasy, the fever dream of a neurotic science-fiction writer named Adolf Hitler." (255) The irony here depends precisely on the implication that "a monster like Feric Jaggar" was not confined to the pages of science fantasy, but exists rather in the pages of history. In the end, the most startling realization follows, of course, from the implication that the fiction, and the fiction within the fiction, are not any more obscene or ridiculous than the history of Hitler's heyday.

The metafictionality of Spinrad's work is, by virtually any definition, clear: through several references to and an explicit discussion of the science-fiction genre in the fictional front material and analysis to "Lord of the Swastika", *The Iron Dream* self-consciously contemplates its own status as fiction – which, in the end, is also part of a strategy for 'readability' *as* an alternate history. As already mentioned in the introduction to this study, metafictionality as a kind of 'doubling back', or perhaps more generally self-referentiality, is characteristic of alternate histories, even of works that are less extravagantly 'dressed' as alternate histories than *The Two Georges* or *The Iron Dream*. Self-referentiality manifests itself *thematically*, for example, in alternate histories about historians (*Bring the Jubilee*, "If Louis XVI had an atom of firmness"), alternate histories which have diegetic models of readership and include other works of fiction or even alternate histories within the novel (*The Man in the High Castle*, *The Alteration*, Gardner Dozois's "Counterfactual"), or alternate histories which make use of frame narratives (*Bring the Jubilee, The Sound of His Horn*). The most paradigmatic of all alternate histories in terms of thematic self-referentiality is perhaps our first case study here, Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, not least of all because of the prominence of its featured alternate history within an alternate history, along with the fictional author ("the man in the high castle").

Whereas Dick's work clearly qualifies as metafiction, posing questions about the nature of fiction, there are other alternate histories concerned more with the relationship between the real past and history writing. In other words, they are not only historiographic as examples of counterfactual history writing, but they also explicitly contemplate the nature of counterfactual history writing. A clear example is Guido Morselli's *Contro-passato prossimo*, one of the exceptional alternate histories that present a version of history resulting from the point of divergence that is considerably more positive than the normalized narrative of the real past.[93]

Included in the narrative are not only statements about the nature of history (for example, by Hegel or Thomas Mann, 170), but also a strongly self-referential gesture: an excursus on counterfactual history writing, more specifically in the novel itself. The "intermezzo critico " ("critical interlude") interrupts the main narrative and takes the form of a fictional conversation between the (fictionalized) author and the (fictionalized) editor. The Publisher objects to the logic of counterfactual history: "C'è un' obiezone piuttosto ovvia, al riscrivere la Storia: La irreversibilità. Un fato a cui non si sottraggono neppure gli dèi. 'Non si evade

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93 Rodiek draws a connection for this reason with Charles Renouvier's *Uchronie* (1876): both are a kind of "Geschichtskorrektur" (104).

dall'ieri', scrive, forse banalmente, il grande Samuel Beckett." (118)[94] The Author is so furnished with an opportunity to justify his methodology:

> L'irreversibilità non esclude la critica, dovrebbe anzi imporla. Non esclude quealla specie di critica che il racconto vuol essere, incursione contro l'Accaduto, non 'sovrano', non intangibile, a dispetto delle filosofie che lo venerano per tale, 'tutta la storia essendo Storia Sacra'. Rivisità del passato libera in apparenza sino all'arbitrio, ma che può suggerire un resipiscente giudizio. 'Rivisita': E perciò, direi, più impegnativa che non le solite prospezioni imaginose del futuro. Chi anticipa un mondo futuro, inevitabilmente lo fa vuoto di uomini, populato solo di fantasmi. Questa che io chiamo 'ipotesi retrospettiva', meno gratuita di quanto non sembri, rintraccia uomini che sono vissuti o che attendibilmente potevano vivere e, su quelle premesse, con quelle sollecitazioni, agire. (119)[95]

Here, we are presented not only with the tenets of recent historiography as already presented here – the fallibility of facts, the idea that counterfactual thinking can indeed enrich our understanding of historical events – but also an explanation of the title of the novel: "contro-passato prossimo" is an imaginary grammatical form, translated for the English edition "past conditional", literally "contra-past future", a "retrospective hypothesis". Despite claiming to be against "The Facts", the Author is not competing with factual knowledge. He explains,

> Ci tengo se mai a distinguermene, dal Fatto, questo sacro mostro. Del resto, ci sarebbe un'altra maniera di pagargli il consueto tributo, sebbene antitetica alla precedente (e è anche questa una maniera usata nel cosidetto, un tempo, 'genere misto di storia e d'invenzione'). (120)[96]

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94 "There is one rather obvious objection to the rewriting of history: The law of irreversibility. A fate which even the gods cannot elude. 'There is no escape from yesterday', as the great Samuel Beckett writes, perhaps a bit banally." (Guido Morselli. *Past Conditional: A Retrospective Hypothesis*, trans. Hugh Shankland, London, 1991. 110) All translations come from this edition and will be cited with the page number from this edition.

95 "Irreversibility does not rule out criticism, it should in fact demand it. It does not rule out the kind of criticism which this tale means to be, a foray against The Facts, which are not regarded as 'sovereign' truth, not untouchable, despite those schools of thought which revere them as such, 'all history being Sacred History'. A revisiting of the past which is seemingly free to the point of arbitrariness, but which can prompt a healthy revision of opinion. A 'revisitation', and therefore, I would say, more exacting than the usual fanciful probings into the future. Those who project a world of the future cannot help but make it empty of people, inhabited only phantoms. This 'retrospective hypothesis', as I call it, is less gratuitous than it might seem, it seeks our men who lived or who could very well have lived, and who, in line with these specific premises and stimuli, act." (110–111).

96 "If anything I am concerned to preserve my distance from it, that sacred cow. In any case there is another way of paying it the customary tribute, although it's the opposite of the one we were talking about (and this too is a tactic used in what once upon a time was known as the 'mixed genre of history and invention') [...]" (112).

The "genere misto di storia e d'invenzione" cited here is presumably none other than traditional historical fiction, which, if we follow McHale's distinction, tends to concentrate on the "gray areas" of history. *Contro-passato prossimo* does essentially the same by refracting the narrative through the perspective of several characters and skipping around to different arenas of the war; only this anti-Hegelian focus on the individual as the protagonist of history, the *humanization* of history (The Author claims, "Non esistono che singole vicende, non esistono che gruppi d'individui, o meglio, singoli individui. I quali il processo alla (propia) storia lo fanno ogni mattina, davanto allo specchio" [118]),[97] is taken so far as to give individual imagination the power of changing history: "il nostro mondo non è fatto come è, e come domani sarà, da questa o quella Astrazione, è fatto da ciò che avviene in noi uomini, o in qualcuno di noi." (16)[98]

All of these aspects of alternate history – the undermined authenticity as well as the metafictionality and metahistoriography – align the genre closely with historiographic metafiction. As for the underlying conceptualization of 'history', however, alternate history is quite different. Not only does the history created by the alternate history serve to bring the nature of history into sharper focus (this is often the project of historical fiction in general), but works of alternate history realize narratively historical possibilities in contradiction of history, i.e. the history presented also has to be explicitly *not* the normalized narrative of the real past. It may thus be distinguished from historiographic metafiction on two accounts. First, in alternate history, history is fact; it is rearrangeable, 'raw material'. Second, alternate histories create a fictional past that is just as 'real' within the fiction as the one that we know – it is not a matter of perspective within the fiction.

It may seem that the epistemological questioning of historical knowledge that Hutcheon claims as characteristic of historiographic metafiction is manifest in its most extreme form in alternate histories – but crucially, that is to say, *so obviously that historical knowledge is no longer called into question*. There can be no true epistemological questioning of the normalized narrative of the real past, for there must be an original, a coherent version of history against which the alternative version of history may be read. This is a crucial difference between alternate histories and works of historiographic metafiction like Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow,* which is a kind of "Spiel mit historischen Versatzstücken, [...] bloße Zusammenlegung von Anachronismen" (Korthals 162). Works that call into ques-

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97 "Only single events exist, only groups of individuals exist, or better still, single individuals. And these take their own history to task every morning, in front of the mirror." (110).

98 "this world of ours is not made as it is and as it will be tomorrow by virtue of some great abstraction or other. It is formed by what goes on inside us human beings, or in some of us." (9–10).

tion the validity of the normalized narrative of the real past "problematize, but do not negotiate the notion of a collective past" (Spedo 116). Alternate history, on the other hand, relies on the existence of such a collective past and the knowability of 'the Facts'.[99]

This is largely in accordance with the concept of history in alternate history as described above: as Rodiek puts it, alternate histories involve an "ebenso naïve wie emphatische Fiktionalisierung von Geschichte" (27). Similarly, Widmann claims: "Geschichte im Widerspruch zu den Fakten zu denken und mit Mitteln der Sprache und im Gerüst einer Narration darzustellen ist [...] eine Operation, die auch an die Fundamente der Geschichtsforschung als einer der Faktizität verpflichtenden Disziplin rührt." (122)[100] In this respect, alternate histories go to the opposite extreme: instead of merely questioning history, they change it, and in doing so land on the very same axis as traditional historical fiction in terms of their relationship to historical knowledge.

In this way, alternate histories avoid classification according to Ansgar Nünning's more differentiated scheme of postmodern historical fiction as well: taking Hutcheon's as well as McHale's work thoroughly into account, Nünning introduces the following possibilities, revising Hutcheon's rather unwieldy term to refer to a more specific kind of postmodern historical fiction among others:[101] "documentary historical novel", "realistic historical novel", "revisionist historical fiction", and the "metahistorical novel" (cf. Nünning 25–26). For Nünning, as with Hutcheon and McHale, the essence of postmodern historical fiction is to call into question the basic assumptions of positivist historiography, "indem sie sich in Form von metahistoriographischen Reflexionen mit den Prozessen historischer Sinnbildung, dem Zusammenhang zwischen Erzählung und Erklärung sowie den Problemen historischer Erkenntnis explizit auseinandersetzen" (21).[102]

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99 Dannenberg's statement that historiographic metafiction is the most 'evolved' form of counterfactuality in literature, "the closing point of a long and fascinating developmental interaction of the convergent and divergent impulses of narrative", (16) cannot be true if historiographic metafiction by definition denies the tenability of factuality; we might very well replace 'historiographic metafiction' here with 'alternate history'.

100 Cf. Hassig: attempting to write counterfactual history depends on a notion of the past as "fixed and certain" (58); cf. Ransom, "Warping Time" 261.

101 See Nünning 30–32. "[...] historiographische Metafiktion [zeichnet sich] dadurch aus, daß sie im Kontext der Fiktion explizit Grundprobleme der Historiographie und Geschichtstheorie thematisiert" (31); "Obgleich *historiographic metafiction* in der Literatur der Postmoderne gehäuft auftritt, ist sie weder mit der Epochenbezeichnung 'Postmoderne' noch mit dem 'Postmodernismus' als literarischer Stilrichtung gleichzusetzen. Historiographische Metafiktion ist vielmehr eine (primär inhaltlich definierte) Form von Metafiktion." (31–32).

102 Cf. also: "das Objektivitätsideal und der Wahrheitsanspruch positivistischer Historiographie [werden] in Zweifel gezogen" (40); and: postmodern historical fiction is characterized by "die

Nünning's category 'revisionist historical novel' seems particularly related to alternate history:

> Sie zeichnen sich dadurch aus, daß sie der Gattung neue Themenbereiche erschließen, experimentelle Erzählverfahren zur Geschichtsdarstellung verwenden, den Akzent vom vergangenen Geschehen auf dessen Auswirkungen und Bedeutung für die Gegenwart verlagern und historiographische Neuerungen reflektieren. Solche Romane stellen überkommene Sinnmuster in Frage, betonen den Gegensatz zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart und überschreiten in thematischer und formaler Hinsicht die Grenzen, die für den traditionellen historischen Roman charakteristisch sind. (27–28)

Nünning's description, which also names Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration* as an example, deals with similar concepts of 'counter-narrative' and 'alternate versions' of history. Indeed, with this broad definition, alternate history would be included. But crucially, as Widmann rightly notes, Nünning fails to differentiate within this category of texts further (cf. Widmann 80–81). Whereas Nünning emphasizes the same questioning of accepted notions of history that Hutcheon claims is characteristic of historiographic metafiction, alternate histories are far less skeptical in this respect.

Christopher Smith's directed attempt to situate alternate history in the context of the postmodern, and more specifically in relation to historiographic metafiction, also falls short in this respect. He is, however, one of the few scholars who has not only noted that alternate history is critically different from the works discussed by Hutcheon, but has also made a concerted effort to describe how, and thus deserves some attention here. Smith's study of postwar American historical fiction brings into focus two aspects of historiographic metafiction: reimagination, "a manipulation of historical events that deviates from the established historical record", and reconstruction, which "convert[s] historical research into a new way of viewing that history" (2). Smith's goal is to illustrate a progression from reimaginative towards reconstructive in late twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century American historical fiction. Although it is indeed a worthy cause to look 'back' on postmodernism and re-question the categories proposed by literary scholarship, and the discussion of works of historiographic metafiction (particularly the opening chapter on Barth and Pynchon, investigating specific kinds of 'play with history') is often insightful, I agree with few of his claims about alternate history.

Even in his definitions of 'reimagination' and 'reconstruction', above, the same problems are apparent as with much of secondary literature on alternate

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Reflexion über die Rekonstruktion eines historischen Geschehens mit einer erkenntnistheoretischen Thematik und einem hohen Maß an Selbstreflexivität" (38).

history (most of which he fails to take into account):[103] 1) an uncritical treatment of the concept of history ('historical events' are mentioned on the same plane as 'historical record'; 'historical research' and 'history'), and 2) a lack of interest in determining how exactly alternate history makes use of history in a way different from the rest of historical fiction (there is no attempt to explain what is meant, for example, by 'manipulation', 'deviates' or 'converts').

Smith explicitly identifies "alternate histories" which do not posit points of divergence, calling Nabokov's *Ada*, for example, the "first adoption of post-Dick alternate history by the literary establishment" (75; 86). On the other hand, he fails to acknowledge the presence of points of divergence in canonical alternate histories like Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*.[104] The claim that Chabon's novel suggests "an increasingly specific use of source material" and a kind of evolutionary move towards "using obscure historical reference points and reconfiguring them in a new way", or that alterations of history "have become increasingly specific and less routinized or obvious" (16; 106; 232) are to be treated with equal scepticism – especially given the evidence to the contrary[105] and the neglect to provide other examples.

In his chapter on alternate history, Smith hopes to show how alternate history is a "genre outgrowth" of historiographic metafiction, and how "alternate history has enlarged the definition of historiographic metafiction while also becoming its own subgenre" (8; 14). Again, achieving the recognition that alternate history constitutes a different kind of historical fiction than works like Pynchon's *V* or Barth's *The Sotweed Factor* and the attempt to explain how are noteworthy. But Smith's insistence on situating alternate history *within* historiographic metafiction is problematic. First, he all but neglects the fact that alternate history is not a postmodern invention, repeatedly citing Dick's novel as the "blueprint for the alternate history" and as responsible for "the birth of alternate-historical fiction" (70; 231).[106] While it cannot be denied that alternate history experienced a kind of 'boom' in the later decades of the twentieth century it is impossible – in light of all of the manifestations of alternate history before the

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103 Smith does not seem aware of the extent of secondary literature on the topic, and so proposes yet another taxonomy of alternate history, without bothering to respond to any of the existing ones. See 108–109. Only Hellekson's, Alkon's and Rosenfeld's work is cited in the bibliography.

104 Chabon's novel is one of Smith's three case studies, yet he seems not to have read quite carefully enough: not only does he not mention the death of Anthony Dimond in a car crash, but he claims explicitly that there is no point of divergence (99).

105 The historical events 'preferred' by alternate histories twenty years ago have certainly not become less popular.

106 Smith briefly cites one 'station' taken directly from Rosenfeld's survey: that of ancient historians making counterfactual statements (Thucydides, Livy) (75).

twentieth century as well as the various studies highlighting this fact – to make the claim that alternate history is a result or "mutation" of historiographic meta-fiction (16). Secondly, the proposal that alternate histories "vandalize the history we know" (112), that is, challenge and destabilize it, is, as I hope to have already shown, a misreading. My suggestion, that alternate histories ultimately uphold and support the normalized narrative of the past, might even be negotiable in Smith's terms: alternate history would be a clear instance for the "reconstruction" of history, i.e. the re-stabilization of history in response to a postmodernist scepticism of historical record. Smith, however, never says so – in fact, he locates alternate history at the other end of his spectrum, explicitly speaking of its "reimaginative impulse" (231).

Smith's distinction between 'reimaginative' and 'reconstructive' owes much to Elizabeth Wesseling's much earlier study of postmodern historical fiction, *Writing History as Prophet*, although Wesseling's work is not cited in Smith's dissertation. Wesseling reassesses the position of postmodern historical fiction (naming a nearly identical text corpus to Hutcheon) in the history of historical fiction, beginning with the "classical model" of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* novels and the emergence of historical fiction towards the end of the eighteenth century (see Wesseling 27–66). Much of Wesseling's analysis is clear-sighted, and the continuously complementary situation of historical fiction vis-à-vis contemporary historiography is particularly convincing. Like Smith, Wesseling is one of the few who has attempted to highlight critical variations and trends among those texts treated by Hutcheon as postmodern historical fiction. Most generally, Wesseling argues, postmodern historical fiction involves offenses against what she calls "canonized history" (93). But there are different modes of doing so: one stemming from modernist manifestations of historical fiction, self-reflexivity, and the other most prominent in postmodern literature, counterfactuality.

The first mode, the "retrospective retrieval of the past" (113) sounds much like Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, or perhaps the ensemble of Nünning's categories: the self-reflexive mode brings out the "polyinterpretability" of historical record; that is, it deals with the problems of interpreting history and promotes an awareness of history as a narrative construct. The second mode, "alternate courses of historical events," transcends the parameters of "canonized history" and foregrounds the "malleability" of historical reality, i.e. contingency (128; 113; 116). Wesseling even names this second mode "alternate history" and cites as the first example Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. Yet the following discussion is then indeed unexpected: besides a rather confusing conflation of terminology (she also uses the terms 'uchronian fantasy', 'utopia', and 'uchronia'), the works presented in the chapter entitled "alternate history" might otherwise be understood as works of historiographic metafiction, or primarily manifesta-

tions of Wesseling's first mode of postmodern historical fiction, self-reflexivity: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Günter Grass's *Der Butt* and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. While Wesseling emphasizes that these two modes of postmodern historical fiction can overlap, and works like *Midnight's Children* and *Der Butt* certainly thematize counterfactual history, they are not themselves alternate histories. Wesseling's explanation that she includes both "negational" and "confirmational" alternate histories only complicates the matter further: "novels which haphazardly transform history" (something like Smith's "reimaginative" historiographic metafiction) and "works which unfold alternate histories [...] inspired [...] by emancipating, utopian ideals" (similar to Smith's "reconstructive" historiographic metafiction)(157). The difference between "negational" and Wesseling's first mode of postmodern historical fiction, self-reflexivity, is unclear.

Amy Elias's excellent study of 'metahistorical romances', in part responding to Wesseling's work, sets out to examine historical fiction after 1960 in relation to contemporary historiography. In doing so, as opposed to focusing on where exactly to draw the line between modern and postmodern, her approach most resembles my own. She postulates that the postmodern historical romance, a subset of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, was shaped and influenced by postmodernist historiography at least to the degree that Scott's historical fiction was by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trends (23). In taking a more selective corpus of texts and comparing them to their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counterparts, Elias convincingly sketches the differences between the two (23, esp. 97 and 147). Unfortunately, alternate histories lie beyond the scope of Elias's study. What is still particularly useful, however, is her discussion of characteristics basic to the historical novel in its early forms. Here are her summarized findings:

1. it assumes the ontology of history;
2. it assumes that history, as the shaping force of culture, can be identified and assessed [...] by an unmotivated, neutral human observer who can inductively extrapolate a developmental pattern in history itself;
3. it assumes and upholds notions of cultural and personal *value* derived largely from Western bourgeois economies;
4. it assumes the shape of history to be linear and the motivation of history to be Progress. (12)

That alternate histories fit comfortably with all of these observations only underlines my argument: that in terms of their conceptualization of history, in particular the knowability of history, alternate histories have more in common with traditional historical fiction than postmodern.

In consideration of all these studies of postmodern historical fiction, the urge to situate alternate history in the postmodern is not unfounded. But the most direct connection between alternate histories and other works of historical fiction that are thought of as quintessentially postmodern lies elsewhere. The fact that alternate history presents a narrative that is emphatically *not* the narrative of history has led both Durst and Doležel to see alternate histories not as historiographic metafiction, and not as a specific manifestation of postmodern historical fiction, but rather as parodies of historical novels (Doležel, "The Postmodernist Challenge" 267). Granted, this is quite a stretch: that all postmodern historical fiction is intended to mock or ridicule historical novels is not a plausible line of argument.

Alternate histories are not parodies. But what they have in common with parodies is that they paradoxically preserve the text(s) that they change; in marking difference rather than similarity between two texts, alternate histories create a 'dialogic' relation between history and its alternative version, superimpose them, rather than merging them or canceling each other out. A recognition of one text/world incorporates and requires a knowledge of the text/world which it inverts. 'Recognition' and 'knowledge' are terms which inevitably foreground the recipient, and an important aspect of alternate history is illuminated: alternate histories cannot be explained exclusively in terms of its form. Alternate history depends upon an acquaintance with the 'original'; otherwise, readers will simply read the text as any other without recognizing it as an alternate history. Alternate histories make demands on the reader beyond a need for basic linguistic competence: the knowledge of the 'original', be that a single text or a version of history (see Rodiek 10). We will turn later to the context of reception in more detail, but on the basis of the preceding discussion and the realization that in alternate history, the past is not only real but knowable through history, we are able to make a third claim about the nature of alternate history:

3. *Alternate histories reflect the postmodern' tension between artificiality and authenticity, but they do not deny the existence of a real past, nor do they deny the validity of a normalized narrative of the real past. Rather than challenge our notions of history, or call into question our ability to know the past through narrative, they conservatively support the normalized narrative of the real past.*[107]

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[107] This thesis is not to be confused with Butter's claim that "affirmative" alternate histories like Overgard's *The Divide* do not question "populäre Narrative über die Vergangenheit […] sondern implizit bestätigen und so eine ähnlich affirmative Funktion in Hinblick auf die Bildung und Stabilisierung einer kollektiven, meist nationalen Identität erfüllen wie der 'klassische' historische Roman" (Butter, "Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 69). As already remarked, Butter's argu-

2.2.2 Alternate Histories versus Secret History, "Plot-type" Counterfactual Histories, and Historical Fiction with "neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren"

Where to draw the line between historical fiction in general and alternate history will likely always be subject to discussion – especially because of alternate history's programmatic similarity to traditional historical fiction.[108] Here, we turn to two of the most critical scholars of alternate history, Andreas Widmann and Uwe Durst, whose work deserves additional attention here. As already mentioned, these two scholars have set themselves apart from others in their consideration of how to situate alternate history in historical fiction as a whole. Both Widmann and Durst make clear that, although literature making use of counterfactual history is a form of historical fiction, there is indeed some critical difference between historical fiction that seems to subsume itself to history and historical fiction that systematically contradicts history. I also maintain that alternate histories are different from traditional historical fiction only in terms of *the degree to which and how* they contradict history.

Widmann sees works of fiction that make use of counterfactual history as belonging to a continuum of historical fiction:

> Die Trennlinie zwischen historischen Romanen, in denen die Imagination in üblicher Weise eingesetzt wird, und solchen, die bei der Gestaltung historischer Stoffe so verfahren, dass das Ergebnis als kontrafaktische Darstellung angesehen wird, ist, wie sich gezeigt hat, nur schwer und nicht einwandfrei zu ziehen und muss daher, wenn nicht unscharf, so doch zumindest als flexible Linie gedacht werden. (49)

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ments refer to the ideological function of alternate history, not the matter of whether or not they subscribe to a normalized narrative of the real past; thus his argument that 'revisionist' alternate histories like *The Man in the High Castle* do indeed question popular perceptions of the past. I am suggesting here that the common denominator, the rule that applies to *all* alternate histories, is that they implicitly subscribe to the normalized narrative of the real past. Whether they comment positively or negatively on that narrative, or whether they support or question the legitimacy of how that past has been received (in terms of national mythology, national identity, etc.), is not relevant for my argument here.

108 Rosenfeld addresses some of the same 'neighboring genres' briefly in a footnote to his introduction to *The World Hitler Never Made*, briefly distinguishing between secret histories, future histories and parallel worlds stories (399). Not wishing to get "bogg[ed] down by complex taxonomical distinction", however, he chooses for the purposes of his study to treat all such works as manifestations of the same principle: an "estranging rather than mimetic relationship to history" (5). Again, having 'done his homework' better than many of the English-speaking literary scholars dealing with alternate history, he is aware of discussions of the same by Helbig and Rodiek (Widmann and Durst both published after Rosenfeld's study).

The *differentia specifica* of "deviating historical novels" in the broadest sense, that which makes these works unique among other kinds of historical fiction, is a "spezifische Form der Referentialität bei der Darstellung historischen Geschehens, nämlich eine, die im Bereich des enzyklopädischen Wissens über Geschichte in bestimmten Punkten nicht anschlussfähig ist" (32; cf. Friedrich 258). Widmann's central concept, deviation, opens up another lucrative field of theoretical problems: what is the status of these deviations and the resulting world of the text? In their departure from history, are alternate histories truly unique among other fictional texts, which by definition do the same?

Durst takes a similar position that, even in their deviation from notions of history, 'parahistories' (referring to the same kind of text as Widmann, or at least a corpus of texts that is defined similarly) are not categorically different from historical fiction in general. Using Barthes's distinction between 'catalytic' and 'cardinal' functions in sequences, Durst develops a typology of historical fiction based on various "Verfremdungstypen". According to Durst, *all* works of historical fiction involve deviations from history; it is a matter of degree that distinguishes alternate histories from historical fiction. Durst makes a convincing case that historical fiction as a whole might be divided into two, principle types: "verzweigungsfähige" (= parahistories/deviating historical fiction) and "verzweigungsunfähige" (= all other historical fiction) texts: "Während sich der historische Roman die Schilderung tatsächlich eingetretener historischer Ereignisse zum Ziel setzt oder sie einer fiktiven Handlung unterlegt, widmet sich der parahistorische Roman der Erzählung kontrafaktischer Geschichtsverläufe." (Durst, "Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 203)

The presumption that all 'deformations' of history do not have the same status or implications, and different kinds of deviation warrant separate critical attention – the means by which Widmann and Durst create their own spectra of historical fiction – might be taken one step further. For clarity's sake, let us have a schematic look at Widmann's and Durst's terminology:

Widmann		Durst
Counterfactual history (= "*deviierender historischer Roman*")	=	Parahistory (= "*verzweigungsfähige*" *historical fiction*)
– plot-type counterfactual histories	=	– neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren
– story-type counterfactual histories	=	– neodirektionale Verfremdungsverfahren

Unfortunately, Durst did not respond to Widmann's work, and Widmann did not respond to Durst's. Because they suggest similar distinctions, I have chosen to group them together and address them simultaneously. The equation of terms

here is thus approximate. That alternate histories are a form of historical fiction is not contested; the question is where, for the purposes of this study, to draw the line between alternate history and the rest of historical fiction.

In consideration of the conceptualization of history in alternate history, the critical boundary between historical fiction in general and alternate history is at a different point than Widmann and Durst: 'plot-type counterfactual histories'/ historical fiction with 'neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren'/secret histories, which are more similar to historical fiction in general, are to be distinguished from those works that narrate a history that explicitly and strategically, that is at an identifiable point, contradicts the one with which we are familiar (='story-type counterfactual histories'/historical fiction with 'neodirektionale Verfremdungs-verfahren'). The former involves an unfamiliar narrative of *the same historical events*, the latter proposes different events entirely. This is indeed where alternate history goes one step further than other historical fiction: the alternate version of history cannot be subsumed to the *super-sequence* of history.

Significantly, the divergence involves also a present and a future different from our own (cf. Alkon 130; 133); it has continuing consequences. The alternate histories that form the core of this study may be appropriately identified as Wid-mann's 'story-type' counterfactual histories or Durst's historical fiction with 'neo-direktionale Verfremdungsverfahren'. This is much more than an attempt to limit the text corpus; as we will see, alternate histories in this more narrow sense con-ceptualize history quite differently than other related forms of historical fiction, and the resulting thematic program is also distinct. What Widmann calls 'plot-type' deviating historical novels and Durst historical fiction with 'neokausale Ver-fremdungsverfahren' are more clearly aligned with Linda Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic metafiction' than with counterfactual history.

I argue here that the most concrete difference between alternate history and other kinds of historical fiction is that alternate history's narrative explicitly, that is, at an identifiable point, permanently contradicts the normalized narrative of the real past as described. This constitutes a critical difference between alternate histories with points of divergence and secret histories, 'plot-type' counterfactu-als and historical fiction with 'neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren', such as Beryl Bainbridge's *Young Adolf*, Dieter Kühn's "Ich war Hitlers Schutzengel", or Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*.

In drawing the line between alternate history and historical fiction at a dif-ferent point, I am contesting attempts by Widmann and Durst to broaden the definition of counterfactual history to include many works which do not ask the

question 'what if?'.[109] Widmann in particular announces his objection to previous studies that limit counterfactual history in literature to conjectural history.[110] Widmann differentiates between works in which a counterfactual story is narrated (*Plot-Typus*) and works in which the narrated events are based on counterfactual causes (*Story-Typus*). Widmann explains his binary typology of counterfactual history in literature as follows: counterfactual-history literature can leave unchanged

> die Einheiten beziehungsweise Vorgänge, aus denen sich die Story – als welche die Ereignis- und Chronikebene der Geschichte zu denken ist – zusammensetzt, in ihrer Abfolge […], dabei jedoch den Elementen durch Erfindung eines im Widerspruch mit kollektiven Geschichtsbildern stehenden Plots eine neue Deutung einzuschreiben, oder Elemente der Story selbst zu verändern und so die Geschichte zu verändern. Im erstgenannten Fall wird unter den für eine Poetik des Kontrafaktischen elementaren Bausteinen eine historische Ursache ausgetauscht, im zweiten Fall ein historisches Ereignis. So sollen erstere hier als den Plot-Typus, letzteres als den Story-Typus zugehörig bestimmt werden. (348)

For Widmann, in other words, counterfactual histories are texts that change either historical events ("nuclei") *or* historical causes ("catalysts"). "Story-type" counterfactuals include Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*, Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*; "plot-type" counterfactuals include Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*. Such works give a new meaning to an historical chain of events *without changing the events themselves*.

In his definition of parahistory, Durst includes works with "ephemeral" variance, i.e. temporary deviation from history, otherwise known as historical fictions with "neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren" ("Drei grundlegende Verfremdungstypen" 347). Dannenberg seems to agree with this model, as both secret history and alternate history fall under the same category for her as well: in secret histories, "the deviating branch of history created by the counterfactual is 'bent back' to rejoin real-world history at a later point and, like Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*, is not allowed to create a permanently divergent historical path" (202).

In addition to the unfortunate terminology (Widmann's doubling of the terms "story" and "plot", which are already fraught with meaning in traditional nar-

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ratology, is particularly confusing),[111] I see two problems with trying to include "plot-type" counterfactuals, historical fiction with "neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren", or secret history in a definition of alternate history. First and perhaps most critically, none of the studies mentioned adequately account for how exactly the underwriting of the super-sequence of history described differs from that of historical fiction in general.[112] Even if it is clear that the events presented in the narrative did not happen (this is the case in any work of fiction), or did not happen the way that they are presented, all events in the narrative may be ultimately subsumed to the super-sequence of history. If historical events are re-narrated, but not re-invented, the *underwriting*, not rewriting, of history is what characterizes these works (cf. Henriet, *L'uchronie* 78; Henriet, *L'Histoire revisitée* 51–55).

In addition, contrary to Widmann's argument, I maintain that there is no logical way of defining counterfactual causes. It is true that we can speak of alternative causality, or even 'countercausality' when dealing with counterfactual history, but as Hassig puts it, 'cause' is not the same as 'fact'; 'cause' refers instead to "the analytical assessment of an historical relationship, the considered assessment of causality and consequences". While counterfactual histories necessarily alter causes, causes in general are "identifiable only as a result of their consequences, not in and of themselves" (62; see also 63). Causes are identified and defined in retrospect, in an *explanatory* relation to what has already followed; they are determined by "reasoning back" from an effect (64–65). In other words, notions of cause and effect are functions of narrative.

Young Adolf, for example, tells the story of Hitler's youth, in particular his relationship to his brother Alois (who, in reality, died before Adolf Hitler's birth) and (fictional) sister-in-law Bridget. Adolf travels to Liverpool, where he stays with his brother's family and attempts to 'make something of himself'. There, he is constantly subject not only to his despicable brother, Alois, a self-aggrandizing under-manager at the Ritz Hotel who wants to start a business venture in security razors, but also his own paranoia and resentfulness. Consider the opening passage of the novel:

> There had been a nasty incident, half-way between France and England, when young Adolf, turning in a moment of weakness to take a last look at the hills of Boulogne, had come face

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[111] E.M. Forster's terms 'story' and 'plot' are aligned in Widmann's study with Roland Barthes's classification of kinds of event ('catalysts' and 'kernels'), as opposed to their original and more ubiquitous usage as a means of describing the relationship between mere events and their causal emplotment.

[112] Smith's study does not bother to distinguish between kinds of divergence at all, even proposing a definition of secret history that sounds more like alternate history: secret history is, according to Smith, "most importantly a departure from established history" (65).

to face with a man wearing a beard and thick spectacles. For several seconds the two strangers had stood on the wind-swept deck and stared at one another. I shall control myself, thought Adolf. I will not run. Accordingly he had strolled in a leisurely fashion away from the stranger until, arriving at a convenient flight of stairs, he had bolted below deck and locked himself in the gentlemen's lavatory. (1)

If it were not for the name "Adolf" or the illustration of Hitler on the front cover of the book, it might be difficult to even make the connection to history. There is no question that we are dealing with historical fiction and not history, but explaining why this is the case takes a bit more care than saying the passage is written like fiction, not like history. (This statement does not succeed in distinguishing the work from any number of so-called "non-fiction novels", such as Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* or Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*). Instead, we may perhaps turn back to Doležel's delineation: whereas the cast of agents in an historical world is determined by those involved in past events, *Young Adolf* has many characters that are the pure creation of the fiction, such as Mary O'Leary, Kephalus, Herr Meyer, etc. In addition, the frequent excursions into Adolf's thoughts are in themselves indicators of fictionality: in history writing, all persons, events, settings, etc. must bear only documented properties.

Young Adolf, as a secret history, one that tells the story of what would have happened *if we had only known,* does not contradict the super-sequence of history, but rather retells a segment between two historical events. Even if we are to claim that there are points in the story that constitute true contradictions to the super-sequence of history (or indeed suggest a different super-sequence based on a different readership) – for example, that, in reality, Hitler never went to Liverpool, or that, in reality, Hitler's brother died before Adolf reached school age – it would still be inaccurate to speak of divergence as in alternate history: 'diversion' might be a more apt term, for the deviation from history is not permanent. Rather, it is followed by a point of convergence, that is, a reversion back to history. What is offered in this case is a fictional explanation for Hitler's gnarled psyche – which implicitly serves as a backdrop for his notorious career as we know it. This is what Hellekson terms "anti-alternate history" (9).

The same is true of Kühn's short-story "Ich war Hitlers Schutzengel". Whereas the other short-stories in Dieter Kühn's volume *permanently alter the course of history* by allowing for, for example, the assassination attempt orchestrated by Georg Elser in 1939 to succeed, everything that is recounted in "Ich war Hitlers Schutzengel" happens 'behind the scenes', and Hitler dies, as he did in history, in his *Führerbunker* in May of 1945. In a kind of literalization of a 'standard fiction' about Hitler, that he was protected by God, Hitler's guardian angel tells the story,

six years after Hitler's death, of how he had saved Hitler from assassination attempts, but then refused in the end, to save Hitler from himself:

> Recht entspannt saß ich zuletzt auf der Betonspitze des Belüftungsturms über dem Führerbunker. Unter mehreren Metern Stahlbeton war Hitler sicher vor Anschlägen und Einschlägen; was nun geschah, was nun noch geschehen konnte, es betraf mich nicht mehr. Vor Attentaten hatte ich ihn schützen können, nicht aber vor sich selbst. (124)

If we subscribe to the view that our first-person narrator is indeed a guardian angel (and not, for example, simply a member of the *Schutzstaffel* who took his assignment of protecting Hitler as a religious calling), one could argue that his mere presence, as a fantastic instance, contradicts history: we can, with all confidence, say that an invisible guardian angel, wracked as he was by his own conscience, did not influence the course of events before, during, or after the Second World War.

The crucial difference to alternate histories is, as with historical fiction in general, not necessarily only that the story does not deviate from the narrative of the real past, but rather that the outcome, the *consequences*, do not contradict the narrative of the real past. That is, at the conclusion of the story, all is once again as we know it – there is a point of convergence. Secret histories indeed rely on this convergence: this is why, for example, the last line of *Young Adolf* is so ironic ("Such a strong-willed young man. It is a pity he will never amount to anything" [218]). Karen Hellekson expresses this difference in so many words in her own study: "In an historical novel, the end of the story must be as events have specified: Mary, Queen of Scots must be beheaded. If she overthrows Elizabeth and becomes ruler of England and Scotland, then the text becomes an alternate history." (29) The difference, in other words, between a mere deviation from the narrative of the real past (historical fiction in general) and a permanent divergence (alternate history) is consequence.

The second reason why it is problematic to include "plot-type" counterfactual histories, historical fiction with "neokausale Verfremdungsverfahren", or secret histories in a definition of alternate history is because they follow a radically different program than historical fiction involving permanent divergence from history. Even Widmann admits this in his closing chapter: whereas "story-type" counterfactuals are similar to history writing, "plot-type" counterfactuals tend to make statements about history in general, or to share the interests of historiography (352). In other words, secret histories comment on the nature of events *as they are*, our perception of historical events, and in this way resemble history writing; alternate histories, on the other hand, are concerned with exploring how events

might have happened differently, i.e. re-examining our notions of causality and consequence, and in this way simulate history writing.

Consider, for example, the statement of the first-person narrator of *Helden wie wir*: "Ja, es ist wahr. Ich war's. Ich habe die Berliner Mauer umgeschmissen." (7) Klaus Uhlzscht, the somewhat unstable but entertaining protagonist, proceeds to narrate his own, personal claim to fame, with almost entirely coincidental relevance to the events of 1989. As if obviating the skeptical reader's criticism of an account ostensibly about the fall of the Berlin Wall which nevertheless fails to address the political significance of the event, Uhlzscht even apologizes at one point: "Ich bin, ehrlich gesagt, ziemlich erstaunt, daß ich an diesen Punkt gelangen konnte, ohne Ihnen ausführlich mein damaliges politisches Weltbild dargelegt zu haben. Das würde heißen, daß das keine Rolle gespielt hat. Aber tun wir mal so als ob." (93) *Helden wie wir*'s emphasis on a highly-personalized relationship to history is in many ways a response to works that depict life in the GDR, or more specifically, during and immediately following the *Wende* itself. (The title of the last chapter, "Der geheilte Pimmel" is clearly a reference to Christa Wolf's 1963 novel *Der geteilte Himmel*, and Christa Wolf is described as the "Übermutter" of GDR literature).

Less 'intrusive' on history is the film *Forrest Gump*, in which the eponymous hero makes an appearance at several events and comes into contact with several iconic figures of the 1960s: he is a soldier in the Vietnam War, he meets President John F. Kennedy, moons President Lyndon B. Johnson, and plays a role in Watergate. Unlike the protagonist of *Helden wie wir*, Forrest does not make any claims to have caused the historical events revisited in the film. But like Klaus Uhlzscht's story, Forrest's naïve but perceptive narrative creates a counterpoint to an already existing narrative of the real past without changing any of the outcomes.

In both works, the fact that it is *our* history being narrated is precisely the joke – that one seemingly unspectacular human being can, almost accidentally, furnish a fresh perspective, re-humanize and profanize spectacular events. In other words, we are dealing with the *nature* of the events, not their outcomes. By proposing alternative causes, but holding the effects constant, secret histories closely resemble what Hassig calls "causal revisionism", which is

> similar to counterfactual analysis in altering the cause to produce a different explanation. But rather than accepting the standard interpretation as true and assuming that a known causal link is being disrupted, causal revisionism challenges that interpretation, contests that link, and substitutes an alternative cause. This is done, however, not to alter the effect and subsequent events, but to force a reinterpretation of these events as they are currently understood. (65)

By 'getting inside' of the event, even changing its composition, yet still arriving at the same outcomes, "plot-type" counterfactual histories indeed seem to follow *de facto* a reverse philosophy to that of alternate history: whereas alternate histories show that events might have happened differently, secret histories and "plot-type" counterfactual histories seem to propose that there are many ways for past events to have occurred the way that they did (cf. Helbig 92–97). Or, perhaps more to the point: these works highlight the fact that the narrative of history is indeed an amalgam of infinite, individual narratives. They are more like Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and Nünning's 'revisionist historical novel' in that they integrate a more subtle means of conceptualizing history (see also Spedo 21).

By illustrating the difficulty in distinguishing between historical fiction in general and historical fiction with temporary divergence from history as well as the drastically different programs of such texts from historical fiction with permanent divergence from history, I hope to have made clear that there is little sense in considering such texts alternate histories. Alternate histories are distinct in their permanent variance, and the tension between the two versions of history produces implications beyond the narrative as well. It is with this recognition that we may make a further claim about the nature of the alternate histories:

4. *The fictional world of an alternate history diverges at a specified point from the normalized narrative of the real past. This divergence is most typically permanent, i.e. there is no point of convergence.*

2.2.3 Alternate Histories versus 'framed' Alternate Histories

In including works like Michael Kleeberg's *Ein Garten im Norden* in the same broader category as Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*, Widmann also fails to account for a critical difference between works that are themselves alternate histories and those that create an alternate history within the narrative. At stake is a kind of referentiality that is central to alternate history, particularly as we begin to consider the reader's relationship to the text: alternate histories do not make use of conditional statements, nor does the re-writing of history have the status of a hypodiegetic narrative. Dannenberg makes a similar point in her more general study of counterfactuality in literature. She suggests that alternate history may be seen cognitively "as a multiple-world text because in order to understand it the reader must access real-world history to grasp its counterfactual frame. Ontologically, however, it is a single-world text in the realist tradition, since the counterfactual world is the text's only actual world." (62) Linguistically, alternate histories do not play the game of make-believe; they narrate worlds that are actual within the fiction (see Spedo 19; 41).

Works like *La vita è bella* or *Good bye, Lenin* are thus one step even further removed from alternate history than secret histories and historical fiction with temporary divergence from history. These texts, like so many other fictional works, draw on personal relationships to the past and make use of alternate history as a device employed by a figure in the narrative. This is not unlike Lena Brücker's withholding news of Germany's defeat from the *Bootsmann* Werner Bremer in Uwe Timm's World-War-II novella *Die Entdeckung der Currywurst*,[113] yet another work dealing with collective memory and secret history. As a result of the diegetic reemplotment of events as well as the exploration of the motivation for telling history differently, such works might be best seen as *stagings* of secret histories. The fictional world as well as the fictional world within the fictional world, remains unopposed to the real one, except for their own claims to fictionality.

La vita è bella is perhaps the more straightforward of the two films in terms of the 'underwriting' of history: the first half of the film plays out as a fairy-tale-like romantic comedy, set in Arezzo, Italy, before World War II. Guido, an Italian Jew, and Dora, a wealthy, non-Jewish aristocrat, marry and have a son, Giosué. The family lives happily until on Giosué's birthday, Guido and Giosué are taken to a concentration camp. Dora insists on joining them. During their imprisonment, Guido manages not only to hide Giosué from the guards, but to convince his son that they are playing a game. The objective is to earn 1000 points, and the winner receives a tank. So convincing is the fiction and so innocent is Giosué that he does not grasp the reality of the situation while he is at the camp. Guido has, essentially, written a secret history of the concentration camp for the sake of his son.

This exploration of the motivation for re-telling history and the subsequent writing, directing and staging of the new history (that is nevertheless still bound to the super-sequence of history) in the framework of the narrative is more comprehensively realized in the film *Good bye, Lenin*, in which Alex Kerner tells the story of his own, highly-personal *Wende* experience: his father had fled to West Germany in 1978, and his mother, Christiane, had become an enthusiastic supporter of the Socialist party; she is, as Alex puts it, "mit unserem sozialistischen Vaterland verheiratet". In October of 1989, she suffers a heart-attack as a result of seeing Alex being arrested in a political demonstration. While Christiane is in a coma, the Berlin Wall falls; she awakens in the late summer of 1990. Fearing for his mother's health, Alex and Ariane devise an elaborate plan to mask the end of the GDR and avoid letting Christiane know that the wall has fallen.

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113 Rodiek mentions Timm's novella in the context of his discussion of works in German dealing with 'Nazi-terror', but ultimately agrees that it does not qualify as an alternate history. See 146–147.

The writing, direction, and staging of the survival and alternative end of the GDR gradually takes on a meaning outside of itself, beyond the wishes of a son for his mother. Alex realizes, "Die DDR, die ich für meine Mutter schuf, wurde immer mehr die DDR, die ich mir vielleicht gewünscht hätte." Alex's alternative version of the GDR and his efforts in directing, film-making, and dramaturgy in order to create this GDR not only mirror self-reflexively the nature of cinema, but are furthermore to be seen as a reflection of the nation-building process as a whole: the creation of a new national identity through imagination, idealism, and in the end, artistic skill.

Alex creates a personal version of the history of the fall of the Berlin Wall, one that belongs specifically to his family but is also interwoven with the history of Germany's unification. Significantly, Alex not only authors this history, but in a sense realizes it *into being*: the family re-forms in the last few days of Christiane's life when Alex finds his father and convinces him to see Christiane; Germany unites. In the end, the history presented in *Good bye, Lenin* is indeed our history, but the process of becoming real – not only for Alex's alternate-history scenario 'what if the Berlin Wall had fallen 8 months later?', but also for Alex's family and the unification of Germany – is shown to be reliant on (re-)imagining and (re-)staging this history.

A similar principle characterizes the Australian "historical reality TV" series *Outback House*, even if the ostensible purpose is not to rewrite history, but rather tell it "the way it would have been". According to the ABC website (www.abc.net.au/tv/outbackhouse), a group of 20 people was taken by to a secret location in Australia to live on a sheep station, Oxley Downs, for three months. Like many other 'living history' reality shows, including *The Colony* (2005), *Colonial House*, (2004), *The Regency House Party*, (2004), *Frontier House*, (2002) and *The Edwardian Country House*, (2002) as well as perhaps historical reenactment in general, *Outback House* features a paradoxical tension between painstaking efforts to be historically accurate and the consciousness that it is indeed a modern production: Oxley Downs was built by an ABC production crew under consultation of historians, and the object was to immerse the show's participants as completely as possible in the life of 1861: no electricity, no running water, and no contact with the modern world. On the other hand, *Outback House* makes use of asides and video diaries, clearly creating a self-reflexive understanding of itself as only a staging of history. In addition, the participants' use of the past conditional indicates that the series' narration is still firmly rooted in the present. Seizing on this grammatical particularity, Anna Schwarz makes the argument that the series (and other similar Australian historical-reality shows) might be seen as a subtle form of atonement for Australians: that is, an attempt to revisit the nation's past

in order to come to terms with a difficult past, more specifically the tense relationship with the Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century.[114]

La vita è bella, *Good bye, Lenin*, and *Outback House* are not alternate histories, because the motivations for and means of re-emplotting history are given in the framework of the narrative: alternate history in these works is constructed as a "Sandkastenspiel" (Schütz 53–54), that is, diegetically accounting for the motivations for re-narrating history. This alternative version of history, as a result, is not given the same ontological weight in the narrative as the narrative of the real past. Crucially, history in such works is *our own*. As in *La vita è bella* and *Good bye, Lenin*, in which a tragic or difficult experience is beautified through depicting a small triumph of humanity, love; or *Outback House*'s wishful remembering and penitent approach to Australia's history: while posing and addressing the fascinating question of how it is possible to and why we are prompted to think about the past differently, the appeal of these works is, like that of "plot-type" counterfactual histories, indeed reliant on an acknowledgment of the 'realness' of the history presented, that is, our identification with the same past, despite the fictionality of the story. Thus:

5. *Alternate histories may be distinguished from literary works that feature hypo-diegetic alternate history or thematize alternate history within the narrative. The world of the alternate history is actual within the fiction.*[115]

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114 The motivations for such series are being explored by Anja Schwarz and were introduced in short form at the *Anglistentag* 2010 in Saarbrücken: "Just as it would have been like ... Australian Living History Television and the Colonial Past". I am grateful to Dr. Schwarz for drawing attention to this series.

115 Here, the work of Gallagher and others might benefit from possible-worlds theory. Gallagher claims, for example, that both history and the alternative version narrated have equal ontological weight in the given work ("War Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels" 60–63). Clearly, I disagree: *Within the work*, the alternative version of history has 'ontological weight', i.e. status as actual; history is actual *outside of the work*. This does not by any means lessen the importance of history for reading alternate history, but it should be made clear that history and the alternative version of history do not exist on the same ontological plane, and it is thus impossible to 'weigh' them against each other at all. History may very well 'trump' the alternative version of history in reality, that is, with reference to the reception of a work of fiction (an empirical reader will 'favor' the reality of history over the alternative, fictional version), but the world of the alternate history – as with any fictional world – 'trumps' the real one within the framework of the fiction.

2.2.4 Alternate History versus Counterfactual History

If alternate histories are to be seen at all in terms of historiography, it is not so much postmodernist historiography that comes to mind as Alexander Demandt and the proponents of counterfactual history writing (cf. Wesseling 104). Counterfactual histories are seen to be no different in the respect that they are extrapolations from history in which events happen differently than we know that they did, only they are written by historians, not authors of fiction. Many major studies on alternate histories fail to provide accounts of the relationship between alternate history and counterfactual history. Durst, for example, chooses to relegate counterfactual history to a footnote "aufgrund der relativen Eigengesetzlichkeit des literarischen Systems", but does not go into these "rules" in any detail (Durst, "Drei grundlegende Verfremdungstypen" 345); Schütz merely acknowledges that there is a difference between 'historical' and 'literary' alternate histories, then slips tacitly back into a focus on the literary kind (51–52). Only Helbig and Spedo carry out thorough discussions: Helbig differentiates between what he calls "diskursiv" ("discursive") and "narrativ" ("narrative") parahistorical texts (see Helbig 100–101; 108–117);[116] Spedo provides an insightful account of the rhetorical strategies of counterfactual histories as opposed to alternate histories (see Spedo 54–92).[117] The question for the present study is if the insistence on their independence is merely symptomatic of the attempts of literary theorists and historians alike to uphold the independence of their respective fields, or if there is some textual basis for their claims.

Counterfactual thinking is one of the most important methods of endowing events with historical meaning. At the latest since Nialls Ferguson's study, it is no longer accurate to claim that historians approach the topic of counterfactual

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[116] Helbig's choice of terms here, discursive versus narrative, is unfortunate and misleading, seeing as *all* parahistorical texts are narrative texts, and *all* of them are part of one discourse, whether historical or fictional. It becomes clear, however, in the course of his analysis, that he is referring to this very antagonism between what are called counterfactual histories in historical discourse and alternate histories in fictional discourse. These terms used here are, once again, not appropriate to every analysis of this corpus of texts. But, like my decision to use the term alternate history instead of one of the many other variations, the decision to use the term 'counterfactual history' is largely a result of its prevalence and currency in discussion of this kind of text; discourse in the field of history does not seem to be burdened by the same problems with terminology as alternate history.

[117] For unapparent reasons, he uses the term 'historical counterfactual' instead of the widely-used 'counterfactual history'.

history with general disdain or scepticism, as was perhaps earlier the case.[118] Although vehement dismissals of such defenses of counterfactual history as an integral kind of history writing are still to be found.[119] Most would agree that the process of "Gegenrechnung" "läuft wahrscheinlich beim Denken jedes Historikers ab, auch wenn er ihn nicht immer beschreibt (oder wahrnimmt)" (Ritter 27).[120]

Alexander Demandt explains, "Wir [Historiker] verstehen das Wirkliche nur im Rahmen des Möglichen", and the very basis of historians' language deals with probability and possibility, intention and success, opportunity and attempt, risk and danger (Demandt, "Statt Rom" 70; Demandt, *Ungeschehene Geschichte* 51). Counterfactual history may be thought of as an explicit practice of what historians do already, and it has been recognized, in the meantime, as a legitimate,

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118 This was apparently not so much the case as Helbig's study was published in 1988. He goes to great lengths to establish the heuristic value of counterfactual history. See Helbig 35–65: "Resümierend kann festgehalten werden, daß die Analyse der unrealisiert gebliebenen Möglichkeiten in der Geschichte einen Erkenntnisgewinn für Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft mit sich bringen kann [...]" (63); Widmann provides a useful survey of the debate on counterfactual history and its value for historians, citing Gregor Weber, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Peter Burg and Alexander Demandt. See Widmann, the chapter entitled "Zum Erkenntniswert des Ungeschehenen" (122–132).

119 Widmann cites, for example, the work of Hubert Kiesewetter. See Widmann 131; Hubert Kiesewetter, *Irreale oder Reale Geschichte. Ein Traktat über Methodenfragen der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Herbolzheim, 2002.

120 See also: Helbig: "Ein Urteil über historische Ereignisse kann tatsächlich stets nur vor dem Hintergrund ihrer denkbaren Alternativen erfolgen." (58) Among the many historians and historiographers who, on similar grounds, argue that counterfactual analysis plays an integral role in all history writing are Ross Hassig ("Counterfactuals and revisionism in historical explanation"), Johannes Bulhof ("What If? Modality and History"), Tim de Mey ("Remodeling the Past"), Richard Ned Lebow ("Good History Needs Counterfactuals"), Richard J. Evans ("Telling It Like It Wasn't"). Philosophy accounts for the necessity of counterfactual thought in causation in a similar manner: any two events that are shown to be causally related automatically involve a kind of "counterfactual dependency": In the introductory chapter to their volume on causation and counterfactuality, John Collins, Ned Hall, and L.A. Paul describe the logic as follows: "A certain glass if struck, and shatters. To say that the striking of the glass caused the shattering of the glass is to say that if the glass had not been struck then it would not have shattered. The striking caused the shattering in virtue of the fact that the shattering was *counterfactually dependent* on the striking" (Collins, Hall, and Paul, "History, Problems, and Prospect" 3); see also Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, on processing negative sentences: "The processing of a negative sentence – for instance: 'Mary did not kill her husband' – involves imagining the world in which Mary actually kills her husband" (163–164); cf. Roese and Olson, "Counterfactual Thinking": all counterfactual conditionals are causal assertions; not all conditionals are causal, but "counterfactuals, by virtue of the falsity of their antecedents, represent one class of conditional propositions that are always causal" (11).

crucial part of historical reasoning and writing.[121] History, according to Demandt, has an arboreal structure: "Wie bei einer Fichte wird der Stamm des Entscheidungsbaumes durch Wirbel gegliedert, von denen sich die Alternativen wie Äste nach mehreren Seiten erstrecken, um sich weiter und weiter zu verzweigen und dann im Leeren zu enden." (*Ungeschehene Geschichte* 126) In Demandt's model, every conceivable possibility could have, under definable if not always equally plausible conditions, become reality. History then, remains incomplete if it is not brought into the framework of unrealized possibilities. Ultimately, it consists not only of a sequence of events, but also of a landscape through which this sequence leads. As White explains, historical meaning "thrives on the discovery of all possible plot structures [...]" (White, *Tropics of Discourse* 92).

For the most part, historians and historiographers nowadays argue less about whether or not counterfactual history is relevant, but rather carry on a more refined debate: how exactly can or should counterfactual reasoning be used for the study of the past? The motivations for writing counterfactual history have been called into question: as Evans puts it, "the appearance of so many books advocating the return of chance and contingency to history is not just a matter of chance and contingency itself". Particularly under attack are Ferguson and the "historians of the young fogey school" (Evans 78–79), as they are derogatorily termed by Evans, who, motivated by right-wing politics, promulgate a "simplistic and ideologically transparent use of counterfactuals" (Lebow, "Good History Needs Counterfactuals" 91–97).[122] The rising interest in counterfactual history might be seen more vaguely, that is, not specific to any particular political alliances, as a result of "postmodern helplessness in the face of current events", or a need for predictability and control (Evans 78; Tetlock and Belkin 35).

More productive accounts, that is to say, studies that offer suggestions for the use of counterfactual history in historiography, recognize an unfortunate tendency "to oscillate between the extremes of dismissing dissonant counterfactuals

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121 It is also to be seen as an important method for teaching history: J. Pelegrín traces the development and use of counterfactual history in the classroom in his 2010 essay (43); cf. Henriet, *L'uchronie* 70–75.

122 Evans's rather vehement, if at points well-founded, attack on counterfactual history motivated by right-wing ideology is as follows: as Evans sees it, Ferguson, among others, uses counterfactual history against the "looming specter of determinism" (Evans 79) and an alleged Marxist contempt for free will. "Yet what's offered as a butt for criticism is often caricature", a misunderstanding of 'determinism' to begin with: "Contrary to what Ferguson claims, this does not mean that human will plays no part in history at all, nor did Marx or Engels ever say so. It does mean that people don't always get what they want." (Evans 79) Furthermore, as we shall see, counterfactual history does not entail an unqualified reiteration of contingency and free will as opposed to determinism.

as hopelessly speculative and of proclaiming favourite counterfactuals as self-evidently true, indeed as factual" (Tetlock and Belkin 5). In other words, the suggestion is that the debate on counterfactual history's use in historiography ought to be more differentiated. Tetlock and Belkin, for example, begin their account quite sensibly with the basic acknowledgment (that has also served as the main argument for promoters of counterfactual history) that the debate on counterfactual history cannot be ignored: "we can avoid counterfactuals only if we eschew all causal inference and limit ourselves to strictly noncausal narratives of what actually happened" (3);[123] indeed counterfactual reasoning is necessary to concepts of cause and effect, for causes and effects are determined on the basis of a conjecture about one event's influence on another. There are, however, perhaps criteria by which historians can judge the validity of counterfactual argumentation. Tetlock and Belkin delineate five ideal types:

1. Idiographic case-study counterfactuals that highlight points of indeterminacy at particular junctures in history [...];
2. Nomothetic counterfactuals that apply well-defined theoretical or empirical generalizations to well-defined antecedent conditions [...];
3. Joint idiographic-nomothetic counterfactuals that combine the historian's interest in what was possible in particular cases with the theorist's interest in identifying lawful regularities across cases, thereby producing theory-informed history;
4. Computer-simulation counterfactuals that reveal hitherto latent logical contradictions and gaps in formal theoretical arguments by rerunning 'history' in artificial worlds that 'capture' key functional properties of the actual world;
5. Mental-simulation counterfactuals that reveal hitherto latent psychological contradictions and gaps in belief systems by encouraging people to imagine possible worlds in which causes they supposed irrelevant seem to make a difference, or possible worlds in which causes they supposed consequential seem to be irrelevant. (6)

Particularly the first three types presented here rely on notions of consistency – logical, historical, theoretical, statistical – as criteria for judging counterfactual arguments (18), and the essays for which this discourse serves as an introduction are largely based on these notions. The ten studies by historians on individual events that are believed to have affected the rise of the West are presented by

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123 Cf. almost verbatim: Tetlock, Lebow, and Parker, eds., *Unmaking the West. 'What-If' Scenarios That Rewrite World History* 18; see also Lebow, "Good History Needs Counterfactuals": "Every good counterfactual rests on multiple 'factuals', just as every factual rests on counterfactual assumptions." (97).

Tetlock, along with Richard Lebow and Geoffrey Parker, as 'good' counterfactuals, i.e. ones that serve the purpose of investigating the facts: the rise of the West (Tetlock, Lebow, and Parker, *Unmaking the West*). The genre of alternate history follows more closely along the lines of the latter two types suggested by Tetlock and Belkin – that is, without as much of a concern for laws of logic.

But even historians seem to have recognized that alternate history belongs on the same continuum as counterfactual history: counterfactual history, like alternate history, can be seen as an extrapolation from the narrative of the real past; indeed both forms illustrate the once *nodal structure* of history. The tree metaphor is apt, for hierarchy and directionality are still relevant – unlike for example, in a rhizome. There is still a sense of beginning and end, an emphasis on causality (which implies chronology as well), and consequence (some events are more important than others in that they have wider reaching outcomes). Both alternate histories and counterfactual histories follow then, essentially the same historiographical focus on causality and consequences. As Hassig puts it, "constructing a compelling counterfactual account depends on identifying the proximate cause in the traditional narrative, the pivotal event without which the known overall sequence of events would not have occurred". Thus "a counterfactual change that cannot achieve more than an incidental shift in the course of events is not worth consideration except [...] to illustrate that this particular point in history was not pivotal" (59; 61). This is indeed an accurate description of the program of alternate histories as defined here.

Because of the similarity of the two genres, the apparent desire on the part of both literary scholars and historians to demarcate their respective fields is not so easily fulfiled. It seems that the main theoretical problem being addressed is not of truth or objectivity, but rather of the autonomy of historical thought with respect to other forms of thinking and history to other disciplines (White, *The Content of the Form* 99). Rather than defending the honor of historians or authors of fiction, perhaps we should concentrate more on the similarities between counterfactual histories and alternate histories and, as postmodernist historiography has already done with narrative, embrace counterfactual thinking as one of the intersections of history and fiction. Some, such as Demandt, would even rejoice in the degree to which historians and novelists methods are the same: "Der Historiker wie der Dichter vervollständigt die Faktenkenntnis mit Hilfe des Vorstellungsvermögens. Sage niemand, das aber sei doch etwas ganz anderes als jene zur Rekonstruktion von unverwirklichten Möglichkeiten erforderte 'reine' Phantasie." (Demandt, *Ungeschehene Geschichte* 76)

Perhaps as a reflection of such mixed sentiments and the tendency of historiography since the 1960s to rethink the boundaries between history and fiction, or history and other discourses in general, the attempts to define counterfactual

history as inherently different from i.e. 'more scientific' than the work of authors of alternate histories have been incomplete. To state that the scenarios in counterfactual histories are somehow more 'plausible' than those of alternate histories[124] is not convincing, particularly since many authors of alternate history, such as the already-mentioned Harry Turtledove, claim similar credibility for their own work. In his (explicitly labeled) alternate history *Ruled Britannia*, in which the Spanish Armada defeats the English in 1588, Turtledove tells the reader in an "historical note": "In his plots leading up to the sailing of the Armada, Philip was willing to seek the death of most of Elizabeth's advisers, but wanted Lord Burghley spared. *Thus I thought it legitimate to preserve him alive for purposes of this novel*" (Turtledove, *Ruled Britannia* 456. My italics.); Jeff Greenfield, in the afterword to his volume of alternate histories *Then Everything Changed*, makes a similar claim that his "goal here has been plausibility" (397); one of the lengthier postscripts can be found in Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, a work to which we will return later. The "Note to the Reader" begins: "The Plot Against America is a work of fiction. This postscript is intended as a reference for readers interested in tracking where historical fact ends and historical imagining begins", and proceeds to cite an impressive list of secondary sources on the history of American politics during and after World War II; Richard Harris, whose novel *Fatherland* makes use of both real, historical documents and fictional historical documents posing as authentic, explains, "where I have created documents, I have tried to do so *on the basis of fact*" (Harris 338); in the classic alternate history *Lest Darkness Fall* L. Sprague de Camp explains to his readers, "As far as possible, I have tried to make their [the historical figures'] actions consistent with what is known of their real characters." (*Lest Darkness Fall* vii) Such reasoning reveals that alternate-history authors, too, seem to consider 'plausibility' and take on some responsibility to historical fact in constructing the details of their alternate histories.

As has been suggested already, any notion of 'plausibility' or 'possibility' must be further refined anyway, if we are considering *past* events in *retrospect* – that is, events that have already crystallized into actuality. Here, we can be critical of two accounts to define 'plausibility' in this context. Niall Ferguson attempts to solve the problem by suggesting that there are two kinds of counterfactual: 1) those that lack empirical basis ("imaginary", i.e. alternate history) and 2) those that are designed to test hypotheses ("computations", i.e. counterfactual history) (see Ferguson 18). He reaches the rather elliptical conclusion that counterfactual histories may be considered "plausible", or have empirical basis, if we can show

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[124] As does, for example, Jörg Helbig in his comparison of Churchill's essay "If Lee had not won the Battle of Gettysburg" and Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, both dealing with the American Civil War: Cf. Helbig 111.

(on the basis of contemporary evidence) that the alternatives presented were actually considered by contemporaries (19). But this by no means represents a consensus among historians.[125] Hassig, for example, proposes the opposite: "The type of counterfactual that allows for the most plausible alternative argument is one that alters a decision or changes an event in a way that would have been unpredictable by all of the participants." (61) Several years earlier, Demandt had come to a similar conclusion as Ferguson, citing Wittgenstein: "Was denkbar ist, ist möglich." Demandt does not deny, of course, that the inconceivable can take place, but: in that case, the unforeseen event does not really exceed the attainable, "sondern jeweils gesteckten Grenzen der Phantasie, nämlich die des Sprechers, nicht diejenigen der Menschheit" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* 1921 / 60, 19, qdt. in Demandt, *Ungeschehene Geschichte* 55). According to Demandt's rather poetic view of knowledge, the only truly inconceivable achievements are in art and science, "weil hier die ausformulierte Vorstellung mit der Realisierung zusammenfällt" (55). The loopholes in Demandt's theory hardly need be mentioned: what of natural catastrophe, for example?

On the part of literary theorists, Catherine Gallagher has made a recent, equally disappointing attempt to settle the debate in her article "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels". Gallagher claims that counterfactual histories deal with "plausible", reality-oriented, but limited lines of inquiry, whereas alternate histories deal not just with chains of causality, but also how the world might have developed differently as a result of a different chain of events (58). The points of divergence, in other words, are not necessarily constructed differently, and nor do historians tend to choose different events as points of divergence than alternate-history authors. Counterfactual thinking is an experiment: by changing or eliminating an aspect of actual history, we test its significance. For this reason perhaps, both counterfactual history and alternate history often focus on either-or situations (Doležel, "The Postmodernist Challenge" 266) that have been, as discussed above, firmly emplotted into a normalized narrative of the real past: winning or losing battles, wars, elections, power struggles, assassinations, etc. The point of divergence itself is no more or less plausible in either genre, as often the same events and outcomes are postulated.[126] Gallagher's argu-

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125 Richard J. Evans in particular dismisses this as an invalid distinction: "It's Niall Ferguson, not I, who insists that knowing what statesmen thought is key to explaining why things happened." ("Response" 124).

126 Spedo suggests that writers of counterfactual history choose more obscure points of divergence, aiming for a more specialized audience (67). In the absence of any statistical account of which events are most frequently used as points of divergence in counterfactual histories, I cannot confirm or deny this claim. But it does seem that this claim is less than helpful: alternate

ment that counterfactual histories only deal with limited lines of inquiry and do not seem invested in creating the world resulting from the point of divergence constitutes a critical distinction in this context; although she comes only to the perhaps unsatisfying conclusion that counterfactual history follows the conventions of historical writing and limits itself to investigating the new chain of events, while alternate history conforms to the conventions of fiction writing and imaginatively "fleshes out" the resulting world ("War Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels" 60).[127]

We are reminded here of Doležel's account of the restrictions placed on the historian versus the relative freedom of the author of fiction. Significantly, alternate histories tend to go further than counterfactual histories and not only suggest how the world would be different, but construct a world based on those differences. Unlike counterfactual histories, the consequences of the point of divergence are not limited to those of historical significance, nor are they limited to any reasonable degree of plausibility. This means, too, that alternate histories are not limited to portraying the time immediately following a point of divergence.[128] Quite often, particularly in alternate-history novels, the story is set long after the point of divergence, for example in Kingsley's *The Alteration* or Keith Roberts's *Pavane*. Alternate-history short stories are often more similar to counterfactual histories in this respect, and it is for that reason that the contributions to Squire's collection of 'what if' stories are so difficult to categorize. Squire, in his introduction, recognizes the variety: "Here we have gathered together a number of speculations by curious minds as to the differences that would have been made had certain events 'taken another turn' [...] The contributions do not all write on precisely the same plane of reality [...]" (vi). All of the titles begin with "If [...]", but the volume contains everything from Philip Guedalla's "If the Moors in Spain had won", a series of fictional documents posing as historical sources (excerpt from a

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histories like Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* and L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* are exceptions that invalidate this statement as a defining characteristic of alternate history.
127 Cf. Widmann: "Mit ihrem Beharren auf den Gesetzen der Ratio und der Wahrscheinlichkeit möchten die Befürworter also ungezügelte Phatasiegeburten als irrelevant ausschließen und von sachlichen und seriösen Betrachtungen trennen. Hierin besteht der wohl wichtigste Unterschied zu kontrafaktischen Propositionen, die im Rahmen der Erzählhandlung literarischer Texte gestaltet werden." (132).
128 Demandt would argue that this does indeed have a bearing on notions of plausibility: "Die Plausibilität von historischen Deviationen sinkt nicht nur mit dem Grad der Abweichung, sondern auch mit der Entfernung von dem Zeitpunkt, an dem wir die wirkliche Geschichte verlassen" (*Ungeschehene Geschichte* 133); Helbig also makes this distinction, that a deciding factor seems to be the "zeitliche Relation von historischem Wendepunkt und Handlungsgegenwart" (133; see also 114–115); cf. Spedo 87.

travel guide, entry from the "Cambridge Modern History", Newspaper *The Times* 1915, 1919) to Andrè Maurois's "If Louis XVI had had an atom of firmness", an allegory in which an historian's soul (guided by an archangel) reaches a paradise of "Honest Men" and stumbles upon an "Archive of unrealised possibilities" to Churchill's quite sober account of "If Lee had not won the battle of Gettysburg".

Squire's volume in particular makes clear that the distinction between alternate history and counterfactual history would "have to be defined pragmatically according to generic conventions, or even on a case-by-case base; it would be difficult to ground the classification on any immanent features of the texts, since there will always be exceptions" (Spedo 70). In this respect, Doležel's recent discussion of the differences between counterfactual history and counterfactual fiction, which inexplicably takes Squire's volume as the primary example for counterfactual history, is misled. Doležel makes his claims on the basis of scant research,[129] and it is perhaps for this reason that he fails to follow the implications for counterfactual history of his otherwise insightful study. He is correct in claiming that "the counterfactual constructs of Squire's collection are fictional worlds structurally and semantically equivalent to the worlds of historical fiction [...] they are in fact fictional narratives" (114). Doležel's finding that "all worlds of counterfactual history, whether constructed by historians or by fiction makers, whether their function is cognitive or aesthetic, are semantically fictional" is equally convincing (122). These are, however, precisely the terms by which we can call the short stories in Squire's volume alternate histories. I recall once again the Doležel's earlier analogy: Historical texts are analogous to texts *about* fictional worlds (42). Why not stick to this reference? Counterfactual histories would be no exception:

even if the worlds that counterfactual histories propose are fictional worlds, this proposition is diegetic. They are thus different from alternate histories in terms of both referentiality and discursive strategy. We might say that all of the characteristics cited by Gallagher can be traced back to a more concrete difference that results in alternate history giving the impression of a work of fiction, counterfactual history of a scientific study: counterfactual histories are narrated in a conditional mode, whereas alternate histories are narrated in an indicative mode (Spedo 59–60). Many counterfactual histories seem to come to the 'blanket'

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129 Doležel's study *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, published in 2010, fails to take into account the flurry of works published on alternate history. Citing only McKnight's 1994 dissertation, he claims that "neither literary history nor literary theory [has] paid much attention to this special subgenre of historical fiction" (105). As for distinguishing between counterfactual history and alternate history, Doležel uncritically cites Ferguson's account in *Virtual History* as "the best we have" for accounting for the differences (125).

statement that "our world would be radically different for sure, even though no one can say exactly how very different it would be" (William H. McNeill. "What if Pizarro had not found potatoes in Peru?", qtd. in Cowley, *What If: The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* 413–427). Or, they may *conclude* with a brief statement of the primary consequences, for example:

> Without the events of 1914, we would have skipped a more sinister legacy, and one that has permanently scarred our lives: The brutalization that trench warfare, with its mass killings, visited on an entire generation [...] ("The What Ifs of 1914" in Cowley, *What If: The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, 287).

> A lengthened war could [...] have meant prolonged Japanese control over East Asia. The captured suffering unspeakable deprivations under Japanese occupation throughout East and Southeast Asia would have seen that horror extended. Japanese mobilization of labor in China and Malaya might well have meant an even more astronomic death toll. ("Our Midway Disaster" in Cowley, *The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine what might have been*, 339)

The use of the past conditional is telling: this tense indicates that the narrator is clearly a kind of voice-piece of the historian/author, i.e. firmly situated in the world outside of the text. In many counterfactual histories, the 'what-if' question is often posed explicitly in the narrative itself.[130] Crucially, the 'I' of a counterfactual history is firmly situated in the real world, not the fictional world being presented. This, more than any objective notion of plausibility, governs the kind of statement made by historians: the fact that the statement comes from the real person, who also has a real concern for how he is perceived within a given community of scholars.

Alternate histories, on the other hand, do not use conditionals, and the nature of the narration, as we will see in later examples, is less easily definable than in counterfactual histories: in general contrast to the narrator of a counterfactual, the narrator of an alternate history constitutes a literary aspect of the text (Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History and Alternate-History Novels" 58). Ultimately then, the difference may be seen as similar to the distinction that I have already drawn between works with 'framed' counterfactual histories and alternate histories: counterfactual histories narrate fiction, but they are not themselves works of

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130 Cf. All of the entries in Cowley, *What If: The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*.

fiction.[131] Counterfactual histories consist of counterfactual statements, whereas alternate histories create counterfactual worlds.

This is an important distinction not only because it reveals that alternate histories feature a different kind of referentiality to the real world than counterfactual histories, but also because it has broader implications for how the reader interacts with the text. Ryan's concept of 'immersion' depends on a similar principle:

> When I process 'Napoleon could have won the battle of Waterloo if Grouchy had arrived before Blücher', I look at this world from the standpoint of a world in which Napoleon loses; but if I read in a novel 'Thanks to Grouchy's ability to move quickly and bring his army to the battlefield before Blücher, Napoleon crushed his enemies at Waterloo', I transport myself into the textual world and process the statement as fact. (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 103)[132]

What is missing here is, of course, mention of the frame of reference in which the reader operates. Ryan assumes here a reader that is familiar with the history of the Napoleonic era. But the point is taken: the result of 'immersion', rather than perception from 'outside' of the fiction is a text that has a certain value as a work of fictional literature, independent of the plausibility of the world created or the determinability of the relationship between past reality and fiction.

6.   *Alternate histories are works of fiction; counterfactual histories are not. Unlike counterfactual histories, alternate histories feature both a fictional world narrated and a narrator that are ontologically independent of the world of the reader.*

Even having identified a concrete means of distinguishing between the two, it is still imperative that each and every counterfactual history and alternate history be considered according to its own peculiarities. A work like Peter Tsouras's *Disaster at D-Day*, for example, reveals just how close the two can be. Tsouras's work calls itself an alternate history and would clearly fall into the category of alternate history by my definition: the alternative version of the events of June 1944 is narrated in the indicative mode, and the text also features many of the aspects that have been cited so far as characteristic for alternate history. Tsouras

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131 This statement follows from, or is closely related to an application of Ryan's Principle of Minimal Departure: a fictional text is one in which the PMD does not apply to the pronouns "I" and "you". Gérard Genette makes similar claims: in a factual narrative, the author is the narrator; in a fictional narrative, the two are not equivalent (757). Fictionality refers therefore not to a mode of existence inherent to entities, but rather a particular way of speaking or writing. See Ryan, "Fiction, Non-Fiction and the Principle of Minimal Departure" 470.

132 Note the use of Napoleon as an example.

even uses fictional endnotes and includes real photos from D-Day with false captions, "to lend a touch of historical authenticity" (231). All of this is 'admitted' in a postscript, and the inclusion of detailed information about D-Day in our history assures that each deviation from that version can be understood as such. On the other hand, the narrative is limited to a bit more than three weeks' time (and thus, like most counterfactual histories, less interested in exploring long-term consequences), and the proposed variations on the real course of events are modest and carefully researched. Tsouras, a senior analyst at the US Army National Ground Intelligence Center, claims that this was his intention: he strove for "plausible decisions made under crisis situations" (229). Thus while *Disaster at D-Day* is an alternate history, it would be parochial indeed not to draw attention to the fact that it shares so many peripheral characteristics of counterfactual history.

2.2.5 Hybrids and Overlap

2.2.5.1 The 'Y': Structure vs. Reception Models

As we have seen, the difficulty of distinguishing between counterfactual history and alternate history is understandable: counterfactual history and alternate history are fundamentally similar in that they pursue a tension between a factual world and the counterfactual one. However, they remain in the same category of text only *if we focus only on the world being narrated and not the narrator's relationship to it*, that is, ignore a critical aspect of all narratives (cf. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 4). It is precisely this error that Gallagher makes when briefly introducing in her study Bakhtin's term 'chronotope', a unit of analysis defined according to the ratio and characteristics of the temporal and spatial categories represented in literature or language in general, in order to reveal these similarities. She proposes that the chronotope of both counterfactual history and alternate history may be described as a 'Y'-structure, a bifurcating line, the crux of which would be the "nexus" (= point of divergence) ("War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels" 56). The equation of counterfactual history and alternate history, also in this respect, is problematic, as is Gallagher's application of the term chronotope: if there is a 'Y' for alternate history at all, it refers not to the world of the alternate history, but rather to the attempt to model the relationship between history and the alternative version presented in the text.

To Gallagher's defence, Bakhtin uses the term in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" quite loosely and treats the intersection of time and space on various different levels. He writes, for example, not only of the "chronotope of the road" or the "chronotope of the castle" as specific, metaphorical meeting points of time and space within novels, but also of the "chronotope

of human life". The spectrum of aspects investigated in his essay (from characterization techniques to plot structures to the relationship between fiction and reality) as well as the unabashed metaphorical treatment of these aspects (time, for example "thickens" and "takes on flesh"; the past and present "dissect" and "bleed white" the future, etc.) seems invitation to inflect the term 'chronotope' as necessary. As Bakhtin admits, the term 'chronotope' is borrowed from Einstein's Theory of Relativity, "almost as a metaphor"; he also explicitly denies any claim to "completeness or precision in [his] theoretical formulations and definitions" (85). The chronotope is – and this is as concrete as Bakhtin gets – "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" and deals with "the meaning that shapes narrative". It derives its significance as a theoretical tool from its project of representing time: time becomes "palpable" and "visible", "materializ[ed] in space"; Bakhtin employs it as a means of differentiating different periods in literary history and trends in genres (250).

What is of particular interest to the present study is the suggestion that chronotopes may not only be employed to define genres or clarify distinctions between genres, but in addition, to describe a given work's "artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality" (85; 243). In other words, it could serve as an alternative to possible-worlds theory. For Bakhtin, there is a critical distinction between the time-sequence of reality and the time-sequence of the events in the narrative, a categorical boundary to be drawn between the actual world and the world represented (217). Thus without explicitly referencing possible-worlds theory, Bakhtin espouses some of the same principles:

> However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to the uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment which surrounds them. As long as the organism lives, it resists a fusion with the environment, but if it is torn out of its environment, it dies. The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers […] We might even speak of a special creative chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the distinctive life of the work. (254)

In other words, the real world, including its real authors and real readers, exists tangentially to the works themselves – that is, separate, apart from the world that is being presented in the text, *but still in a specific relationship to it*. 'Chronotope' refers, in the most general sense, merely to the time-space dimension of any given situation, essentially, to 'world'.

Thus in claiming that the 'chronotope' of alternate history and counterfactual history takes on the form of a 'Y', Gallagher cannot be describing the 'worlds' of such texts, but rather the relationship between chronotopes or between worlds. The 'Y' is an account of what results from the reception of alternate history, not the structure of the alternate history itself: for it is the reader who supplies the text-external narrative of the real past.
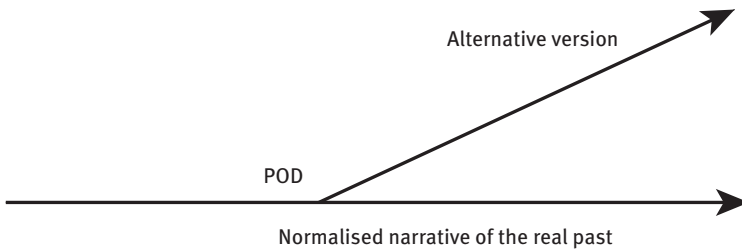

Fig. 1: The reception model of alternate history

The narrated time, narrative time, and point of attack are not represented here, as they have no bearing on the relationship between history and the alternative version. It is possible, as stated above, for the alternative version of history to begin long after the point of divergence (as in Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union,* Roberts' *Pavane* or Amis' *The Alteration*) (cf. Henriet, *L'uchronie* 40–41), but the point of divergence and course of history up until the present is then narrated retrospectively; the relationship between worlds remains the same.

Gallagher's claim that this model is valid for both alternate histories and counterfactual histories fails to take into account the different kinds of referentiality at play: the narrator of the counterfactual history is firmly 'located' on the branch of history (as corresponding to the narrative of the real past), whereas the narrator of the alternate history is a function of the alternate-history world. Counterfactual histories present the reader with the 'Y' itself, whereas with alternate histories, readers are responsible for constructing this 'fork'. Other kinds of historical fiction do not present a 'fork' of any kind, not even in the context of reception. So-called secret histories, for example, could be represented by a straight line, for history and the version narrated are not mutually exclusive.

It is important to note that the fact that the narrative of the real past and the alternative version of history are, starting at the point of divergence, represented by separate lines does not exclude the likely case that there are certain events 'shared' by both paths. Aside from the chain of events, the two strands are of course closely related in terms of the general framework for the story, which is

what perhaps makes their comparison meaningful in the first place: they often share, for example, the same ensemble of characters, physical setting, and the set of logic and physics that applies to the real world.

But nevertheless, 'shared' events are not to be considered the same events. We know this already from the discussion of emplotment in history writing: each event gains meaning depending on its position in a given plot. In addition, – so possible-worlds theory – the same event cannot occur twice in any given world: each 'doubling' then of an event that has already happened leads rather to the formation of a new world. My model of alternate history represents a significant difference to Helbig's schematic treatment of the chain of events in parahistorical literature.[133] We cannot speak of 'replacing' an historical event with a different one, because 1) the fictional world was never the same as the real world to begin with, and 2) it is impossible to replace one event without effecting the past and the future as well. Helbig's suggestion for depicting secret histories and historical fiction in general is equally problematic. While we can indeed speak of changing the composition of an event without changing its outcome, the uni-linearity of Helbig's representation is at issue: we are not describing changes to real events, but rather changes to real events as represented in history. The duality created by the historical event and then the event that is recognizable as a variation of that event is precisely the point. Thus on the basis of this discussion of whether and how we may speak of bifurcation with regard to alternate history, I propose the following:

7. *Only in modelling the reception of alternate histories can we speak of bifurcation. Here, there are at least two diverging paths, at least one of which is history, and at least one other of which is an alternative version realized narratively in the text.*

2.2.5.2 Alternate History as Fantasy

The discussion above presupposes a concept of divergence that does not depend on any consideration of realism. Here, my approach, like Durst's, Helbig's, and Aleksandar Nedelkovich's,[134] differs significantly from Widmann's: his study proposes that counterfactual history is to be seen as separate from fantastic lit-

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133 Cf. Helbig, *Der parahistorische Roman* 68.
134 Nedelkovich has a somewhat unorthodox approach, dividing all fiction into three main categories: realistic fiction, science fiction, and free fantasy. Alternate history may exist in combination with any of the three forms (13–14).

erature.[135] This move towards delimitation ought to be questioned, especially considering that there are plenty of texts involving fantastic elements that have the same program as alternate histories:[136] not only Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* and Stephen Fry's *Making History*, but also for example Robert Wilson's *Darwinia* or Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, to name a few. Indeed, Widmann's distinction sounds a bit more like Doležel's distinction between history and fiction in general.

This attempt to draw a sharp distinction between fantastic literature and historical fiction is all the more perplexing because Widmann admits that even historical fiction as a whole is not dependent on such qualifications (66): if we were to limit the definition of historical fiction to realistic fiction, we would fail to take into account historical fiction after the turn of the twentieth century. I am skeptical that a work such as Marquéz's *Cien años de soledad* ought to be excluded from a definition of historical fiction merely because it is less realistic than *Ivanhoe*. Furthermore, it is not difficult to problematize notions of realism in fiction to begin with: it is meaningless to speak of 'truth-value' or 'closeness to reality' in any objective terms, because fiction involves by definition some departure from reality. Traditional historical fictions are no more or less 'realistic' than fantastic fiction in this sense. It is true that we differentiate intuitively between a world inhabited by fantastic entities and one inhabited by humans:

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135 Widmann recognizes that time-travel fiction can be combined with counterfactual history, but these works are automatically excluded because they qualify for him as science fiction. See 55–61; most perplexing is Widmann's insistence that counterfactual histories cannot be simultaneously fantastic literature, i.e. cannot include elements that contradict the empirical laws of the real world, since his first case study, Günter Grass's *Der Butt* has as its primary figure a talking flounder. Widmann softens this differentiation somewhat with the statement that "Elemente des Phantastischen im Einzelfall intergrierbar sind [...], doch ergibt sich die kennzeichnende Abweichung vom Weltwissen des Lesers, die den Text als deviierenden historischen Roman qualifiziert, primär aus kontrafaktischen historischen Aussagen." In other words, counterfactual history can indeed overlap with fantastic literature; the fantastic is merely not always seen by Widmann as the dominant program of the work. Uwe Durst dismisses such distinctions altogther, claiming that fantastic elements are merely qualitative, and that "dies ist [...] für eine grundlegende Klassifikation des Verfremdungtypes nicht relevant" ("Drei grundlegende Verfremdungstypen" 356).
136 In his study of futuristic fiction, Alkon emphasizes that alternate histories (for Alkon a specific kind of 'uchronia') "lend themselves as readily to realism as to fantasy" (146). His primary example is Louis Geoffroy's *Napoleon et la conquête du Monde*, which contains realistic as well as fantastic elements. Alkon makes a convincing argument that these instances of portraying Napoleon as more legend than real, taming lions and discovering living unicorns, establish Napoleon "as a symbol for the quasi-religious forces underlying [...] the politics of modern empires" (138).

> There are stories about the exploits of super-heroes from other planets, hobbits, fairies and storms, vaporous intelligences, and other non-persons. But what a mistake it would be to class the Holmes stories with these! Unlike Clarke Kent et al., Sherlock Holmes is just a person – a person of flesh and blood, a being in the very same category as Nixon. (Lewis, "Truth in Fiction" 37)

But clearly, the terms 'real' and 'fictional' are not adequate for describing the difference between Clarke Kent and Sherlock Holmes; the constructions "more fictional than" or "more real than" offend our logic. Likewise, there are no alternate histories that are 'realistic' in the sense of taking place in the real world; "Da seine Inhalte somit durch die historischen Fakten bereits falsifiziert sind, ist die Irrealität der dort geschilderten Welten für jeden Leser offenkundig." (Helbig 33–34) Again, all alternate histories narrate impossible worlds in the sense that they depict a past that cannot have happened in the real world.

If we can accept the possible-worlds premise that there are no 'doublings' of events within a given world, but rather every deviation from the real world constitutes an entirely separate world (however similar to the real world it might be), the relevant question here becomes how to reason about the 'distance' between worlds, or, in the case of alternate histories, what kind of 'space' exists between the narrative of the real past and the narrative of a fictional past. As Eco puts it, every work of fiction constructs possible worlds, "in quanto esso presenta una popolazione di individui e una sequenza di stati di fatto che non corrispondono a quelli del mondo della nostra esperienza". 'Realistic' fiction merely refers to those works in which the non-facts do not contradict the biological, cosmological, social, physiological world as we know it (Eco, *Sugli Specchi e altri saggi* 173–174).[137] Philosopher David Lewis's solution accounts for the complexity of the matter: the proper background upon which to gauge 'realism' "consists of the beliefs that generally prevailed in the community when the fiction originated: the beliefs of the author and his intended audience" ("Truth in Fiction" 43).

For those interested less in empirical research as evidence, the treatment of representations of 'reality' as texts themselves, or of 'history' as an amalgam of narratives (as I have done here) is fruitful. Spiegel's warning is duly recalled – that reality should not be merely conceptualized as a text. Realities, however, are not the object of literary criticism, but rather their representations. In light of this distinction, I do not have any qualms about proposing bitextuality as the framework within which we operate here: that is, determining whether and how one text is being treated antithetically, or whether or not we can speak of onto-

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[137] "in that it presents a population of individuals and a sequence of factual states that do not correspond to those of our world of experience." (Translation KS).

logical 'tension' between two narratives. Although never addressed directly, this is implicit in Widmann's statements about the relationship between history and fictional history in counterfactual history (italics mine):

> counterfactual history is: "eine spezifische Form der Referentialität bei der Darstellung historischen Geschehens, nämlich eine, die im Bereich des *enzyklopädischen Wissens über Geschichte* in bestimmten Punkten nicht anschlussfähig ist" (32).

> Works of counterfactual history have in common: "das erkennbare Abweichen *von tradierten Auffassungen* über Verlauf und Hergang vergangener Ereignisse-Konstellationen bei der erzählenden Darstellung von Geschichte" (14).

> In counterfactual histories: "[weicht] das fiktionale entworfene Geschichtsbild [...] stark von dem ab, *welches explizit oder implizit beim Rezipienten vorausgesetzt wird*, zentrale Aspekte der dargestellten historischen Vorgänge und Zusammenhänge erscheinen als kontrafaktisch" (17–18).

> "Kontrafaktizität wird durch das 'Überschreiben' von die Geschichte betreffenden Erkenntnissen [...] " (36).

Widmann is careful to make statements not about reality or history, but rather their textualized equivalents, 'encyclopedia', 'conceptions'; the relationship between the two is one of 'overwriting', that is, one text superimposed on another.

If representations of reality and history may be thought of as texts, and 'realism' may be understood as referring to a kind of relationship between them and a fictional text, it is still puzzling why exactly Widmann insists on excluding works of fantasy. There are, by all means, means of including them in a definition of alternate history that do not contradict the claim that counterfactual history is a form of historical fiction; instead, we merely situate alternate history (including the ones with fantastic elements) as a form of new historical fiction.

This is exactly what McHale does by introducing a possible-worlds-theoretical system for looking beyond the text to explain the relationship between aesthetic structures and cultural codes. He suggests that judgments of admissibility for a given literary genre are culture-bound, not universal. In the attempt to reconstruct different repertoires of real-world objects, individuals, and properties in different genres at different historical periods, McHale proposes the term 'realemes', or "things as signifieds in a system of signification" (86). It is then possible to compare the repertoire of realemes featured in 'traditional' historical fiction (McHale proposes the works of Tolstoy, Scott and Thackeray as models) and measure it against newer historical fiction – essentially to compare various practices of incorporating the narrative of history into fictional work and account for a paradigm change in historical fiction since the 1960s.

In 'traditional' historical fiction, historical persons, events, specific objects, etc. can only be introduced "on condition that the properties and actions attributed to them in the text do not actually contradict the 'official' historical record". Readers do, in other words, operate with certain ideas about what is accepted as historical fact and are sensitive to how far a fictional version of history departs from this factual account. There are, however, "dark areas" of history that allow for imaginative creation on the part of the author: introspection on historical characters, for example, is admissible. Not admissible in 'traditional' historical fiction are sets of logic and physics that are incompatible with those of reality: historical fictions are realistic fictions in this sense. In contrast, while many works of modern historical fiction (McHale cites, for example, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*) adhere to the "classic" paradigm of constraints on the insertion of historical realemes, there are occasionally contradictions of historical record, the merging of historical fiction and fantasy, and the insertion of historical figures into self-consciously anachronistic texts (87–89). The difference then between traditional historical fiction and modern historical fiction may be summed up as follows: whereas traditional historical novels avoid collisions between fictional histories and external knowledge wherever possible (Widmann 32–35; 44; see also Ritter 20; Steinmueller, "Zukünfte, die nicht Geschichte wurden" 45–46), modern historical fiction does not attempt to reconcile the two, opposing strands of reality/fact/history and fiction. Alternate histories *of all kinds* would still fit the bill; they are, like much of historiographic metafiction, merely relatives of traditional historical novels. Realism in itself is no grounds for delimitation.

The bottom line is: it is indeed possible to make a distinction between alternate histories that are 'plausible' in the sense that they abide by empirical laws of physics, such as *The Plot against America* or *The Man in the High Castle* and alternate histories that make use of notorious 'alien space bats', such as *Darwinia*. But there is no difference in the sense that we still have a history and an anti-history, a world and an anti-world. However unrealistic, history is still recoverable from the imagined alternative. Such works present not only a fictional past, but one that is diametrically opposed to the narrative of the real past.

2.2.5.3 Alternate History as Science Fiction

Equally questionable is the strict separation of alternate history and science fiction. In one of the earlier studies devoted entirely to alternate history, William Joseph Collins uses the 'what-if' connection as a starting point for comparison between alternate history and science fiction – but he is also firmly against an unequivocal equation of the two genres (see esp. 11–12 and 19). Alternate histories seem to share an underlying base logic: the aggressive world-building program

of science-fiction (cf. Pelegrìn 16), in contrast to 'traditional' historical fiction and 'realistic' fiction in general, is closely related to that of alternate histories. As already discussed, any work of fiction must, by definition, involve deviations from the real world, and according to the principle of minimal departure, these deviations must be made explicit: we do not make gratuitous changes to our own world, or our own field of reference, in order to imagine the fictional world, but rather we find "the least disruptive way of making the supposition true" (Lewis "Truth in Fiction" 42). According to Durst, the basis of any fictional work is the "grundsätzliche Nicht-Teilhabe des realen Lesers an der erzählten Welt" ("Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 203). Works of science fiction, like alternate history, do more aggressively that which all fiction does inherently: they include deviations not only at the level of story, but also in the fictional world itself (McHale 59). Science fiction is, as McHale puts it, the "ontological genre par excellence", for it involves worlds not only removed from our own, but "willfully different" from the real world (cf. Wendland 11).[138] Alternate history is in many ways the "perfection" of historical fiction, "als sie den künstlerischen Gestaltungsbereich auf die Historie selbst ausdehnt" (Durst, "Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 212).

"Willful difference" also involves similarity. This is very much in keeping with the terms by which science fiction was initially defined:[139] it is the genre of cognitive estrangement, following from the Formalist concept of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*), a mode of representation that allows both for recognition of something while at the same time making it seem unfamiliar (Alkon 89).[140] It seems that "part of the allure of great science fiction lies not only in what is changed but also in what is left unchanged" (R. Byrne 10). Science fiction, like alternate history, is a highly self-reflexive genre in that the status of the fictional world as non-real depends not only on its reference to the real world, but also on the tension created by the text itself: science fiction, like alternate history, paradoxically strives for authenticity, or at least scientific plausibility, while at the same time making this effort obvious.

Alternate history and science fiction may be seen as two closely-related kinds of alternate-worlds fiction: Eco includes them both (here called: 'uchronia' and 'metatopia'/'metachronia') in a sketch of manifestations of fantastic literature,

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138 Wendland's study, which uses the term 'world' metaphorically to describe vastly different aspects (setting, story, real world, etc.) might have benefited from possible-worlds theory.

139 Kingsley Amis's Princeton seminar of 1958 is often cited as laying the groundwork for the study of science fiction.

140 Durst implicitly recognizes this similarity between science fiction and historical fiction by speaking of "Verfremdungstypen" in historical fiction; cf. de Groot *The Historical Novel* 4.

along with allotopias and utopias (Eco, *Sugli specchi i altri saggi* 174–175). The point is, that none of these categories are mutually exclusive; they are merely terms that highlight different aspects of fictional texts. By no means should we claim that all alternate histories are science fiction and vice versa. Alone the "futurological" element of science fiction and the "historical" element of historical fiction prevent the mere conflation of the two genres (Wesseling 97). But I would like to suggest that alternate histories *that are at the same time* works of science fiction (Eco labels such works "fantascienza ucronia")[141] have similar programs to those alternate histories which are not.

The argument has been made that, because historical fiction by definition deals with the past, science fiction with the future, there can be no overlap between the two. Widmann and Michael Salewski, for example, argue that no work can be both historical fiction and science fiction because historical fiction always has a dominant reference to the past ("Vergangenheitsbezug"), whereas science fiction is defined as a genre that imagines the future (Widmann 57). Eco agrees that 'pure' science fiction takes on the form of 'anticipation'. However: the specific kind of 'anticipation' of science fiction is *conjectural* (Eco, *Sugli specchi i altri saggi* 176). Therefore, we ought to be more cautious before precluding the similarities between the kind of past imagined in alternate histories and the future imagined by science fiction: alternate histories do indeed refer to the past, but they do so in such a way as to create a 'non-past', an explicit alternative *that did not happen*. It might be argued, as Hellekson does briefly in her study, that alternate history's non-pasts parallel science fiction's fictive futures. Or, more to the point, that both science fiction and alternate history "bewegen sich im Raume des Ungeschehenen, des nicht empirisch Überprüfbaren" (Hellekson 4; Steinmueller, "Zukünfte, die nicht Geschichte wurden" 47–48).

It seems to me that the solution lies somewhere in between the conclusions drawn by Widmann/Salewski and Hellekson: the 'non-past' as created in alternate history is indeed related to the future, but not equivalent. I turn to Bakhtin's discussion of "historical inversion" and mythological/literary relationships to the future:

> mythological and artistic thinking locates such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious continuation of man and society and the like in the past [...] we might say that a thing that could and in fact must only be realized exclusively in the future is here portrayed as something out of the past, a thing that is in no sense part of the past's reality, but a thing that is in its essence a purpose, an obligation (147).

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141 Eco, *Sugli specchi i altri saggi*: "uchronic science fiction" (176) (Translation KS).

Bakhtin claims that images of the future are inevitably located in the past, or at least inspired by the past. But at the same time, the future can never have the same kind of concrete existence as the past:

> The present and even more the past are enriched at the expense of the future. The force and persuasiveness of reality, of real life, belong to the present and the past alone – to the 'is' and the 'was' – and to the future belongs a reality of a different sort, one that is more ephemeral, a reality that when placed in the future is deprived of the materiality and density, that real-life weightiness that is essential to the 'is' and the 'was'. The future is not homogenous with the present and the past, and no matter how much time it occupies it is denied a basic concreteness, it is somehow empty and fragmented – since everything affirmative, ideal, obligatory, desired has been shifted, via the inversion, into the past (or partly into the present); en route, it has become weightier, more authentic and persuasive. (147)

Inversion, the kind of "trans-positioning" that allows us to witness the future as unreal, as something that does not exist and has never existed, "prefers" the past because of the past's concrete existence, or perhaps even narratability. In Bahktin's characteristically metaphorical language, the "fleshing out" of the past "bleeds [the future] white" (148) in that it becomes richer and more complete; it becomes not only a horizontal location along a time line, but gains a vertical location as well.

This is essentially the difference between 'other-worldly' worlds and 'other-timely' worlds. Utopias up until the eighteenth century may be distinguished from alternate histories on this basis: whereas alternate histories are set in a recognizable place with a different history – they are "elsewhens" –, the worlds of utopias lie "außerhalb unseres Kenntnishorizontes" – they are "elsewheres" (Ritter 20).[142] Unlike other modes of existence, the 'non-past' of alternate histories is to be traced first along this vertical axis – but not only (see also Helbig 31–32).[143] The depiction of a 'non-past' has further reaching implications for the present and the future, which must belong to the same time line as the 'non-past',

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[142] See also Alkon 115–157. Utopias and alternate histories may be thought of as two distinct but closely related genres (both called 'uchronia' by Alkon), the difference being the setting: utopias entail insular time and space, completely separate from our world (127), whereas alternate histories are set in the space that we inhabit, only on a different time line. Early modern utopias thus feature a different kind of referentiality than alternate histories: "Die Wirklichkeitsverhältnisse der Utopie sind grundlegend anderer Natur; eine historische Referenzebene ist bei ihnen kaum auszumachen." The similarities between the two forms are not denied, above all, as Korthals puts it, "Utopien [müssen] – und ebenso allohistorische Texte – über das Verhältnis von literarischem Text und dem Ensemble der realen Welt von Autor und Leser definiert werden." (Korthals 160).

[143] Without citing Bakhtin, Helbig also speaks of "raum-zeitliche Versetzung" and the fact that parahistorical novels occupy a kind of 'vertical' space along this system of coordinates.

not the past. Unlike utopias, alternate histories do not merely create a better or worse alternative to present society, but rather concentrate on the "Auswirkung anderer als der in der Geschichte geschehenen Ereignisse auf eine andere, daraus resultierende Gegenwart" (Ritter 20–21). They create entirely new, separate timelines, past-present-future.

If we follow Bakhtin, it is the 'weightiness' of the past – the fact that the horizontal has already been plotted – that makes it possible to speak of an alternative to begin with. It is not possible to have an 'alternate future' in this sense, but only a 'future', for there can be no countertext. As Widmann puts it,

> Während nämlich Gestaltungen noch nicht eingetretener Ereignisse oder Entwicklungen zum Zeitpunkt ihrer Entstehung allenfalls durch konkurrierende Zukunftsentwürfe kontrastiert werden können, ohne dadurch falsifizierbar zu sein, setzen kontrafaktische historische Entwürfe immer eine schon etablierte, verifizierte Version voraus. Eine Abweichung hiervon kann nur in der Darstellung von Sachverhalten erfolgen, die in der Vergangenheit situiert sind. (57)

For this reason, alternate histories need to be distinguished from futuristic fiction, narratives explicitly set in future time (Alkon 3) – at least in theory. The fundamental question for alternate histories is "what *would have happened* if ...?", not "what would happen if ...?" The former is the underlying question of counterfactual thinking, the other of merely conjectural thinking. In terms of possible-worlds theory, we could say that the worlds of alternate histories are 'impossible' worlds because of their violation of the principle of temporal directionality, whereas the worlds of science fiction are (still) 'possible'. Ryan explains the difference as follows: "the actual world is the real of historical facts, possible worlds are branches that history could take in the future, and impossible worlds are the branches that history failed to take in the past." (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 100) It is upon this basis that Spedo draws his own line between alternate history and science fiction: "Terminological disputes notwithstanding, a clearcut distinction should be maintained that AH [alternate history], concerned with counterfactual versions of the past – which is to be determined once and for all – and science fiction proper, exploring some of the virtually infinite possibilities of the future." (101)

But there are, as Widmann and Spedo fail to note, works that pose both questions, that deal explicitly with the past as well as the future: works such as Sarban's "The Sound of His Horn", set more than seven centuries after the point of divergence: Nazi victory in World War II. Other examples include Trechera's "Mein Führer" and Sprague de Camp's "The Wheels of If" (cited by McKnight).[144]

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144 McKnight also cites Fritz Leiber's *The Big Time*, but the degree to which this work is also an alternate history (and not merely science fiction) is dubious.

Such works are by definition both alternate history and science fiction, even if the thematic focus is necessarily shifted somewhat away from history. Rodiek acknowledges the existence of such works, but does not treat them as alternate histories; they are texts "in denen die Gegengeschichte fast immer in die Zukunft hinein verlängert wird und somit ihrer ursprunglichen Funktion […] verlustig geht" (123). But again, with our emphasis here on permanent divergence from history, I would suggest that the 'Gegengeschichte' in alternate history *always* reaches into the future, at least implicitly. The more substantive difference between alternate histories that are science fiction and alternate histories that are not is that the former *narrate* the future that follows from the alternative version of history.

Another point of overlap is the so-called future history, a kind of 'out-of-date science-fiction'. Helbig argues that 'out-of-date-science-fiction', despite their status as pre-constructions as opposed to reconstructions of history, are still in the same 'family' of texts as parahistories, especially on the grounds that they are often thematically related (141). These works, such as Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, create futures, not non-pasts. But if one wanted to account more for the apparent similarities between alternate histories and 'out-of-date-science-fiction', it is plausible to claim that 'out-of-date-science-fictions' *become* alternate histories after the given date shifts from future to past (cf. Alkon 121; 156).[145] Leinster's "Sidewise in Time" would ultimately fit into this category as well: the 'future' imagined was 1935, approximately one year after the story's publication. Durst tweaks Helbig's thesis to more accurately express this change of genre in text-oriented terms:

> Dabei ist zu beachten, daß der geneologische Wechsel vom Zukunftsroman zur parahistorischen Literatur nicht durch die Tatsache herbeigeführt wird, daß die externe Wirklichkeit zu den jeweiligen Zeiten kaum oder gar nicht den Verhältnissen gleicht, die in den literarischen Werken beschrieben werden. Vielmehr ist der Grund darin zu sehen, daß die realistische *Konvention*, die für die Darstellung erzählter Welten der jeweiligen Zeiträume existiert, dem literarischen Werk widerspricht. ("Zur Poetik der parahistorischen Literatur" 22)

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145 Concrete dates are seemingly important here; otherwise, it would be difficult to locate the story along our time line. McTeigue's 2006 film *V for Vendetta*, for example, features a dystopian plot against England set in the near future, but when exactly (or if) this would ever become 'out-of-date-science-fiction' is a matter of dispute. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is for Alkon an ideal uchronia in the sense that it is at once a utopia (dystopia) and alternate history: it is "the greatest work to combine features of futuristic and alternate past uchronias" (154); cf. also Spedo 102.

Or, to put it in our terms, here, the normalized narrative of the real past is extended to include the time represented in the text. As a result, the text necessarily takes on a relationship with that narrative.[146]

2.3 Alternate History and Future Narrative

2.3.1 Activation of the Reader: Text Strategies of Alternate History

Now that we have taken into account existing studies on alternate history and distinguished alternate histories from other kinds of historical fiction as well as compared alternate history to several related kinds of past narrative, it is possible to explore connections to FNs. As proposed at the beginning of this study, alternate histories have only tangential similarities to FNs – at least generally speaking. But the question of why they are *not* FNs deserves further attention, especially given the similarities between the point of divergence and the node.

The underlying basis for comparison is the reader. I should like to clarify that all such claims about the reader of the alternate history pertain to the ideal reader, not the empirical one. The reader as defined here coincides with the wealth of knowledge and practice in reading that a given text demands, a model of competence coming from outside of the text; much like Eco's "model reader",[147] and it

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146 Nedelkovich makes the argument that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cannot be an alternate history because it reveals no "turning point", only a dystopian state (30). This is certainly true of the novel at the time of its publication; but it might be suggested that the date 1984 automatically becomes the point of divergence as soon as 1984 has passed, even if it is true that there is less of a focus on causality leading up to this point.

147 Among the various kinds of reader-response criticism, the "uniformist" approach of theorists like Wolfgang Iser (*Der Akt der Lesens; Der Implizite Leser*) and Umberto Eco (*Opera aperta; Lector in fabula*; see also *The Role of the Reader*), who have posited that the reader's activities are confirmed within limits set by the literary text, were some of the first, most successful attempts to combine a structuralist focus on the mechanics of the text and a growing tendency to incorporate the context of reception in literary analysis. I refer primarily to Eco's "model reader" here: "Il Lettore Modello è un insieme di *condizioni di felicità*, testualmente stabilite, che devono essere soddisfatte perché un testo sia pienamente attualizzato nel suo contenuto potenziale" ("The model reader is a totality of felicitous conditions, textual stability, that must be satisfied in order to actualize the text completely in all of its possible contents.") (*Lector in fabula* 62; translation KS) But the principles underlying all such theories of the reader are similar: the "effects" of a literary work are critical to "any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader" (Tompkins xi). This is particularly relevant for texts such as alternate histories that seem to require a specific kind of reader; cf. Bode, *Der Roman*: "Die Rezeption muss steuern, gerade bei solchen Texten, die die

is a function of the text. The anchoring of the concept of the reader in the text is what prevents us from the arbitrary classification of anything empirically understood as a point of divergence. It would be meaningless to claim that the empirical reader makes the alternate history an alternate history, or that the alternate history can only be an alternate history if it is recognized as such. The divergence from the narrative of the real past (and its recognition) is therefore, in the theorization of alternate history, not dependent on any empirical reader, but rather an integrated part of the text intention of this particular kind of text: "Bestimmte Referenzen im Text auf die außerliterarische Realität werden als Signale wahrgenommen, die die Einordnung der gelesenen Texte im Genres bedingen, deren Merkmale und Gepflogenheiten bekannt sind." (Widmann 48) Likewise, counterfactuality must have a text-internal logic: it results from "ein[em] spezifische[n] Verfahren der textinternen Bezugnahme auf textexterne Sachverhalte, das kontrafaktische Aussagen zur Folge hat" (355).

The reader of an alternate history must, to varying degrees, be sensitive to such textual features and, with the help of their own knowledge of history, not only recognize the divergence from the narrative of history as such, but also consider the ways in which the fictional history is different from the one that they know. This represents a difference to the normative program of the novel as a whole, which often seems to require no particular cultural or literary education or training (cf. Bode, *Der Roman* 32). To return to the "world as book" metaphor and possible-worlds theory, an "encyclopedia" of shared common knowledge, which varies within cultures, social groups and among historical eras, is a prerequisite for any reader – indeed, it relativizes the recovery of implicit meaning in the text (Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 177):

> In order to reconstruct and interpret a fictional world, the reader has to reorient his cognitive stance to agree with the world's encyclopedia. In other words, knowledge of the fictional encyclopedia is absolutely necessary for the reader to comprehend a fictional world. The actual-world encyclopedia might be useful, but it is by no means universally sufficient; for many fictional worlds it is misleading, it provides not comprehension but misreading. The readers have to be ready to modify, supplement, or even discard the actual-world encyclopedia [...] they must background the knowledge of their domicile and become cognitive residents of the fictional world they visit through the act of reading (181).

Just as the rules of a game, the initial condition, and the possible outcomes of the game allow us to make some conclusions about the implied player, so the text can be seen as producing a kind of assignment for the reader. Alternate histories,

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Provokation von Erwartungen, von kognitiven und kulturellen Rahmungen und Dekodierungsverfahren zum Ziel haben." (277).

like other kinds of fiction, rely first and foremost on the 'knowledge' of readers as readers. Significantly, this also means that the ideal reader, rather than superimposing his own expectations as an empirical reader, is eager to play the game – to follow the structures set out for him. As Renate Hof puts it, "Für alle Spiele gilt die Metakonvention, daß man sich ernsthaft an die Spielregeln halten muß." (27) For any reader that does not possess the ability to play by the rules – to modify or even discard the encyclopaedia of the real world accordingly –, the text becomes unreadable, or it becomes quite a different text (Eco, *Lector in fabula* 59–60).

In other words, the decision to read a statement as a contradiction of history must be supported by the rest of the text as well. A work of fiction that imagines the consequences of John F. Kennedy avoiding assassination is an alternate history; a work of fiction in which the author has mistakenly attributed incorrect biographical dates to John F. Kennedy is not. Like all of the conclusions drawn so far, the decision to read an alternate history as an alternate history must be motivated by other aspects of the text. Especially given the time- and culture-specificity of history, the meaningfulness of discussing a work *as an alternate history* is always a necessary consideration.

Because alternate histories rewrite history, rather than merely creating an alternate present or future, they require certain competencies from the reader, or at least a different kind of willingness than other kinds of fiction. Alkon, in his study on futuristic fiction, compares and contrasts two meanings of the term 'uchronia', i.e. utopia and alternate history, partly on these grounds, breaking off into a kind of critique of alternate history to argue that the utopia, set in both a time and place distinct from our world, is in some ways the more viable genre: he claims that alternate histories will encounter "greater resistance from the sheer weight of facts that readers will know about their world" (147). Because the future is more open, and there is never a directly competing future that would preclude the one envisioned, futuristic fiction will have a more willing audience. Alternate histories, on the other hand, result in a "potentially bothersome paradox" – so Alkon – in that they constantly force readers to consider the relationship between the world portrayed and their world (147; 152). Sparshott treats alternate history with a more transparent distaste, claiming that it causes "a certain indigestion in the imagination" (4). But as I think is already clear from this study as well as the 'boom' of interest in alternate histories, alternate histories result in not a "bothersome", but quite fortunate paradox. Cheapening the concept by assuming that the purpose of all fiction is to be believable, or to strive for the most transparency for the reader, is simply missing the point.

This challenge is one posed to the reader of the alternate history. As Widmann puts it, historical novels in general are contradictory in terms of what is expected from the reader: "Auf der einen Seite wird die gestaltende Freiheit bei der Bearbei-

tung geschichtlicher Stoffe in Anspruch genommen, auf der anderen Seite gibt es ein relativ klares Bewusstsein davon, wo die Grenzen dieser Freiheit liegen." (47) Ruth Klüger takes the infamous Napoleon as an example:

> Der Autor einer historischen Erzählung rechnet damit, daß die Leser schon wissen, worum es sich handelt. Damit erlegt er/sie sich eine eigentümliche Beschränkung auf. Er darf Napoleon nicht Rußland erobern lassen. Einerseits: Wenn er das Geschehene kühn und nicht ganz belegbar ausdeutet, so ist das sein Privileg als Autor von Fiktionen. Trotzdem, wenn er Napoleons Feldzug in Rußland verwendet, so muß er sich daran halten, daß Napoleon geschlagen wurde. Ließe er ihn gewinnen und stellte somit das Schulwissen seiner Leser auf den Kopf, so täte er es im Bewußtsein, das Publikum aufzuschrecken oder zu erheitern, auf jeden Fall auch hier mit der Absicht, die wirkliche Historie als Folie im Bewußtsein der Leser zu erhalten. (144)

This statement reflects much of the discussion above on the difference between history writing and historical fiction as being a matter of restriction versus freedom in dealing with the real past, only this description of the reader's task has been shifted onto historical fiction versus fiction in general. Because alternate histories 'break the rule' of historical fiction, contradicting the normalized narrative of the real past, a kind of challenge is posed to the reader. Almost all of the secondary studies mentioned thus far have gone one step further to argue that the reader plays a particularly decisive role as a decoder of alternate history.[148] The kind of "indigestion" caused by reading, for example, that Napoleon was victorious in Russia, is specific to alternate histories and just as much part of the genre poetics as anything else mentioned thus far (cf. Widmann 47).[149] Alternate histories 'activate' the reader in a particular way: the reader must, as Dannenberg puts it in terms of possible-worlds theory, "perform complex acts of transworld *identification and differentiation*" (206).

Thus part of the text intention of any alternate history is to draw attention to the fact that an alternative version of history is narrated. Alternate histories pursue strategies for 'readability' as alternate histories, including models of readership in the narrative, allusions to other alternate histories, alternate-history authors within the narrative, and the prominent placement of points of diver-

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148 This is one of the few points which Widmann unequivocally adapts from the earlier studies: after a quite critical survey of secondary literature on counterfactual history, Widmann claims: "Die vorliegende Arbeit knüpft in einigen Punkten an die oben skizzierten, von der Forschung zusammengetragenen Befunde an, wenn sie erstens die Bedeutung des Lesers und des Leserwesens als ein tragendes Element in jeder Poetik kontrafaktischer Schreibweisen ansieht" (94); Nedelkovich also hints at the importance of the recipient in his own study (cf. 170).

149 In *Lector in Fabula*, Eco refers to it as a "sensazione di disagio" (161) ("a feeling of uneasiness") (translation KS).

gence. Points of divergence are developed, for example, by focusing on the event in a kind of exposition to the main narrative (as in Keith Roberts' *Pavane*), by centring the alternative version of history on the event, by presenting the event at a different, prominent place in the work, i.e. the middle or the end (*Making History* and *Bring the Jubilee*), or by merely graphically highlighting the point of divergence in the text (as in all of Jeff Greenfield's "stunning alternate histories of American politics" in the volume *Then Everything Changed*). As already discussed in terms of 'undermined authenticity', the use of paratexts, i.e. introductions, notes to the reader, acknowledgements, etc. is one strategy for drawing attention to the fact that it is an alternate history to begin with.

As suggested, paratexts in alternate histories often take on another role, one that is unique to the genre; or at least, works of historiographic metafiction and works of secret history do not have any such feature with an equivalent function: introductions, afterwords, or appendices that contain information about history, that is, paratexts that effectively display the historical background upon which the alternate history is based.[150] All of the stories in Squire's volume, for example, begin with a brief, consensus-based version of history that is set off from the rest of the text, sometimes short 'tag-versions' that are only one or two sentences long (ex. "The Moorish power in Spain was ended in 1492 by the victory of Ferdinand and Isabella over the Moors under Boabdil, King of Granada", belonging to the already cited short-story "If the Moors in Spain had won"). Others are lengthier (ex. the introductory essay to the above-mentioned "If Byron had become King of Greece"). Many of the more contemporary, paradigmatic examples also have this feature, including those in Jeff Greenfield's 2011 volume *Then Everything Changed* (each is followed by a brief "reality reset", and the entire volume is capped with an extensive, explanatory afterword), Donald James Lawn's *The Memoirs of John F. Kennedy* (2010; Lawn's novel includes a "disclaimer", "prologue" in which the question is posed "what if President John F. Kennedy had survived his fated rendezvous in Dallas?" as well as an extensive epilogue, explaining "where the boundary between fact and fiction is drawn"). Most notable is perhaps Roth's *The Plot against America*: in addition to the note to the reader (mentioned already as an example of the first kind of paratext, similar to the kind characteristic of historiographic metafiction), there is also "A True Chronology of the Major Figures", short biographies of other figures mentioned in the novel, and a reproduction of

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150 Widmann cites several devices and strategies for the distribution of historical information in the text, but sees the function of such paratexts as similar to the first kind mentioned in this study in connection with historiographic metafiction: they are all ultimately for the purpose of making counterfactuality obvious. See Widmann 290–296.

a speech by Charles Lindbergh, "Who Are the War Agitators"?, delivered at the America First Committee's rally in Des Moines on September 11, 1941.

Roth's use of this second kind of paratext as well as the relationship in which the paratexts stand to the alternate-history narrative, will be discussed in the context of the respective case study. But in general, we can say that this distribution of historical information in alternate history tends to remain fragmentary and incomplete. It is clear that these paratexts play a supporting role: they do not constitute a narrative that contests the one that is actual within the fiction. The alternate history plays a game of balance and activates the text-external encyclopaedia of the reader. The fictional history, in other words, 'outweighs' history ontologically within the framework of the narrative, but the alternate history also typically hints at history, enough to make the duality obvious.

Paratexts are not the only means of doing so, and alternate histories vary greatly in terms of how and to what degree this 'prong' of the 'Y'-model is realized in the text. Alternate histories that narrate linearly multiple versions of history might be seen as an extreme manifestation of this tendency of alternate history in general to refer to the narrative of the real past in the text. In one of our case studies here, *Making History*, for example, each of the different alternatives is presented with equal ontological weight within the fiction: the 'Y' is almost completely 'filled out', and it may thus be seen as similar to forking-paths narratives such as *The Butterfly Effect*. Correspondingly, we could say that such a work relies somewhat less on the external knowledge of the reader and more on their reading abilities in general.

The alternate histories that perhaps constitute the 'middle ground' of the genre in this respect tend to integrate representations of history into the alternative version of history, and so require somewhat more literary and cultural knowledge on the part of the reader. One alternate history, perhaps the ancestor of all modern alternate histories (cf. Alkon 152; Korthals 157; Spedo 10; 20), which strives to include history in the narrative is Louis Geoffroy's 1836 work *Napoléon et la conquête du monde – 1812 à 1832 – Histoire de la monarchie universelle*. This other 'prong', history, is represented quite concretely in an interlude about two thirds of the way through the narrative; that is, even if it is 'dressed' as it would be inside of the fictional world: as "a supposed history" ("une prétendue histoire"), an alternate history itself.[151] Like the interlude in Morselli's *Contra-passato prossimo*, an author-figure has a chance to voice the relationship between real and counterfactual history. But whereas the author-figure in Morselli's work takes a step back from the narrative proper to explain the value of counterfactual history

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[151] Alkon gives an account of this feature in the same (140–146).

writing, the author-figure in Geoffroy's work is located firmly within the fictional world: he not only treats the alternative version of history (which comprises the rest of the book) as real, but he is even appalled at historians for promoting the version of history that we know. After proclaiming his loyalty to 'the emperor' and the truthfulness of his own account, the author explains that he must interrupt his "glorious and veridical history" ("histoire glorieuse et véridique") (263) to express his "indignation" for the novelists guilty of "insulting" Napoleon. The "odious tale" ("odieuse fable") of which the author-figure speaks, written by an anonymous author, consists of Napoleon's defeat in Russia and desertion of his own troops, his death on Waterloo, and other "horrible impostures" ("horribles impostures") (265) – otherwise known as the failure of Napoleon and his empire as it is recounted in our history. The author-figure laments what this "liar" ("menteur") has done to Napoleon and to history and concludes with the following remark: "This history is not history [...], this Napoleon is not the real Napoleon" ("cette histoire n'est pas l'histoire [...] ce Napoléon n'est pas le vrai Napolèon") (267).

With his unshakeable loyalty to and belief in Napoleon as presented in this history, the author-figure reveals that Geoffroy's work is indeed more than a mere alternate history: like *The Iron Dream*, it is an 'artifact' of the alternate-history world. And like *The Iron Dream*, "Geoffroy's game of treating reality as fiction" (Alkon 142–143) both criticizes the real Napoleon and underlines the ridiculousness of what did happen according to history. What is produced, as Alkon puts it, is "commentary on the disparity between Napoleon as he actually was and Napoleon as he should ideally have been" (145) In other words, this interlude has helped to put a sharpened, politically-charged focus on the variance between history and the alternative version.

A similar tactic, of portraying history as alternate history within the alternate history, is employed by Juan Manuel Santiago's 1994 story "Confesiones de un papanatas de mierda":[152] in the alternative version of history, Trotsky comes to power instead of Lenin, and the world is dominated by a Nazi dictatorship. A contemporary historian discovers a work that portrays the Allies as victorious in World War II. Yet another example of this kind of reference to history is the work in progress of the protagonist of Gardner Dozois's "Counterfactual":[153] Cliff, a writer, is penning a 'counterfactual' of the American Civil War in which Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox. (In Cliff's world, the Confederates still lost the war, but only after Lee refused to surrender and continued

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152 In: *Visions* 1994, Asociación Española de Fantasía y Ciencia Ficción.
153 In: *The magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (June 2006).

to fight, drawing the war out much longer and leaving the US a devastated, still politically divided country).

Geoffroy's work as well as Santiago's and Dozois's are like many other alternate histories in that they abound in references 'in negative' to history: Geoffroy's Napoleon, for example, on his way home after a victory in Asia, inexplicably becomes depressed while his fleet is sailing past St. Helena (where the Napoleon of our history spent time in exile and eventually died). This is indeed yet another, more subtle strategy of integrating history directly into the narrative without paratexts – what Henriet calls a "wink" ("clin d'œil"): "a situation, an element, a character that calls to mind the situation of the real world" ("une situation, un élement, un personnage qui rappelle la situation du monde réel") (Henriet, *L'uchronie* 44; Henriet, *L'Histoire revisitée* 41–44). The appearance of figures who have equivalents in history, only they play a quite different role in the alternate history, functions similarly: William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* is practically a compendium of such 'jokes': John Keats is a kind of mechanic, Benjamin Disraeli is a tabloid writer, and Lord Byron is the leader of an Industrial Radical Party that comes to power in England in 1831.[154] These are all small cues for the reader of the alternate history to contemplate the variance between two, mutually-exclusive possibilities: the reader must come to terms with the sustained tension between the narrative of history and alternative version of history,[155] and in doing so enters into a process of defamiliarization: to cite Dannenberg's terms once again, of *identification* and *differentiation*.

A paradigmatic text for both alternate history and this kind of integration of history is Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*. Amis's narrative, like Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, features models of readership, alternate histories within the

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154 Like many alternate histories that use this device, *The Difference Engine* does not provide notes on historical information or points of reference (cf. Alkon 80–82); rather it is up to the reader to 'get' the reference; cf. Dannenberg 126, 206, and 211; the Principle of Minimal Departure, discussed above, describes a similar phenomenon that permits the recognition of fictional (and non-fictional) characters outside of their 'native' environment (Ryan, *Possible Worlds* 53). Names are "rigid designators": they confer upon the fictional character the status of either an otherwise known fictional character or an historical character and places him or her under the scope of the principle of minimal departure (Ryan, *Possible Worlds* 59; cf. Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 18; cf. McHale on "transworld identity", *Postmodernist Literature* 35). For a non-possible-worlds-theory account of this phenomenon, see Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?" 327. For Gibson's and Sterling's work, it is now also possible to consult "Dr. Gunn's Patented History Restorer", an online compendium of the bits of history used in *The Difference Engine* (Gunn).

155 See also Alkon on 'uchronias of alternate history' in *The Origins of Futuristic Fiction*: "[...] readers must be constantly alert for small as well as large departures from, or intrusions of, familiar history" (152).

alternate history, and self-reflexive genre discourse. In this version of history, the Protestant Reformation never occurred; Martin Luther not only reconciles himself with the Catholic Church, but becomes Pope (!). The story begins several centuries later, in 1976, in an England that has a decidedly medieval quality: the Catholic Church rules with absolute authority (alongside a monarch, Stephen III, a Tudor descendant of a productive marriage between Arthur Tudor and Catherine of Aragon; Henry VIII was apparently never king), the use of electricity has been outlawed, and the people of England live in awe and fear of the Church, seated in Rome.

This version of the world is, however, not dystopian in all aspects, and Amis integrates a particularly complex discourse on the question of art and morality, morality and human suffering. In the world of *The Alteration*, singers are revered, Mozart lived on to (complete his first and) write a second requiem, and many of works of world literature exist, only in Catholic versions: *St. Lemuel's Travels, The Wind in the Cloisters, Lord of the Chalices*, and the *Father Bond* series. The story revolves around a young singer, Hubert Anvil, who is to be *altered*, that is, castrated in order to preserve his remarkable voice. Hubert is thus to undergo the same procedure as certain kinds of criminals in the 'New England': as Samuel, an American Indian, explains to Hubert: "A man sins too much with women, they alter him. A man sins in other ways, ways of not being pure, they alter him." (143)

Hubert's fate is ultimately determined by forces outside of his control. Despite an elaborate (and successful) attempt to escape to New England, outside of the Pope's authority, Hubert becomes ill and must, as a result, undergo the operation that he was so trying to avoid. As it turns out, his fate was not a matter of choice, nor of weighing moral considerations: "He [Hubert] would never fit the pieces together, just as he would never decide what he really felt about having been altered." (188) The parallels to the hyperdiegetic narrative of Dawn Daughter and White Fox (165–167), as told by Hilda van den Haag, daughter of the diplomat from New England, are not to be missed: the best-laid plans are way-laid by divine intervention.

One might, as a result of this outcome, be inclined to read a deterministic attitude into *The Alteration*. But not only does the nature of the work as an alternate history prevent this straightforward reading (there is an ideological tension, in this sense, between Anvil's story and history), but also the distance that Amis has established between the reader and the characters: the world of *The Alteration* exists in a kind of bubble, and the relationship between what is said and what the reader has the benefit of being able to understand functions much in the same way as dramatic irony in works written for the stage: Hubert and his friends, Decuman, Mark, and Thomas, for example, have an avid interest in alternate history (known as 'Time Romance', 'Counterfeit World' or 'Invention Fiction' to

the readership of *The Alteration*'s England): Thomas tells his friends about Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, and all marvel at the differences between their world and the world of *The Man in the High* Castle – that is, without mentioning that which is so striking to Dick's readership, namely that Nazi-Germany and Japan were victorious in World War II. When asked who the man in the high castle is, Thomas replies naively "He hasn't come in yet [...] but he must be wicked and very powerful. A sorcerer, perhaps." (28) Similarly, they discuss a book called *Galliard* – a clear reference to *Pavane*, the alternate history by Keith Roberts –, and they marvel at, for instance, the use of electricity (132–133). None of the boys are aware that they are indeed discussing and commenting upon the nature of their own existence.

Isolated commentary by Father Lyall, the Anvil family's abbot, on the act of alteration (as castration) often takes the form of a privileged discourse on the nature of alternate history. The abbot, after having heard both arguments for and against Hubert's castration, gravely comments, "It seems to me that we have a possibility on one side and something not so far from fact on the other." (31) He also recognizes, "The decision about Anvil's future isn't an ordinary one [...] There can be no going back afterwards." (32) Hubert's activities as a composer also serve as a self-reflexive depiction of the relationship between history and the alternative version as well as the process of divergence: "There were two melodies that immediately and necessarily involved the same harmonic structure, but they would not fit within it together, and each resisted alteration to make it conform with its fellow." (37) This distance and privileged discourse allows for, not least of all, the metacritic on the society of *The Alteration* under the central metaphor of castration: the world of Amis's novel has essentially castrated itself, while at the same time allowing for culture to flourish in a way that it did not in real history.

With *The Alteration*, Amis may very well have achieved greater degree of artistry in finding a balance between making the alternate-ness of the alternative version of history obvious and leaving enough for the reader to contemplate. That is to say, *The Alteration* is no less an alternate history than any of the alternate histories 'dressed' as such with paratexts, but the 'scaffolding' of the construction is perhaps less overt. There are, of course, also alternate histories that pursue none of the strategies discussed for representing history or making their status as an alternate history apparent: works like Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* or Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* do not have paratexts, nor do they hint at or provide a model of history in the narrative – that is, they rely more exclusively than other alternate histories on the reader's knowledge of history. Along these lines, we should recognize that it is a particular

kind of reader, i.e. one with a horizon of knowledge about history as well as the ability to 'read' textual clues, that the alternate history requires:[156]

8. *Alternate histories require a specific kind of competency from the reader, who must be able to identify the alternative version history as alternative and reason about the variance between that alternative and history.*

2.3.2 Alternate History as Non-interactive game: Points of Divergence versus Nodes

In her work, Amy Ransom refers to the "ludic appeal" and "ludic pleasure" of alternate history (cf. Ransom "Warping time" 260). Indeed, the calling upon the reader's knowledge of history and the ability to follow the alternate history's text strategies make the reader in some sense a player, the alternate history a *game*. The reader does not merely follow the text, he does not compose the text, but rather *plays*. This kind of play is both similar to and different from the kind characteristic of FNs, and it is also ultimately to be seen as distinct from the kind of play of which we speak when discussing the interpretive possibilities of all literary texts.[157]

In the most literal sense, the text as game would offer a problem to the reader – only the object is not necessarily trying to solve the problem or beat out an opponent, but rather achieve meaning (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 179–183).[158] The bare essentials of game-playing are indeed present in every literary text: literature in general is a "specialized genre of discourse", governed by

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156 Cf. Widmann: the reader of counterfactual history is one "der über das notwendige enzyklopädische Wissen verfügt, um erkennen zu können, dass die in den Romanen vorgelegten Geschichtskonstruktionen nicht mit dem übereinstimmen, was aufgrund von Überlieferung und Konvention den Stellenwert historischer Fakten besitzt" (38).

157 In addition, it is important not to conflate the activities of the reader and the author under the term 'play'. We could say that the reader has a certain kind of authority – but not in the same creative sense as the author; cf. Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 283; see also 9: "Call this writing if you want; but if working one's way through the maze of an interactive text is suddenly called writing, we will need a new word for retrieving words from one's mind to encode meanings, and the difference with reading will remain.".

158 I am concerned here with only a minute cross-section of theorization of literature as play or the 'novel as game'. Studies on [game]play in literature range from investigations of novels that explicitly pose as games (i.e. Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* or Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy and In the Labyrinth*), to the analysis of novels that are 'inspired' by the idea (for example, Carlos Labbé's *Navidad y Matanza*), to an application of theories of play to literature in general. See, for example: Jacques Ehrmann, *Games, Play, Literature*; Brian Edwards, *Theories of play and postmodernfiction*; Stefan Matuschek, *Literarische Spieltheorie*.

a certain set of rules and conventions (181; 187); modern literature in particular encourages the transgression of the very same rules and conventions:

> In literature, *ilinx* and its free play are represented by what Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque: Chaotic structures, creative anarchy, parody, absurdity, heteroglossia, word invention, subversion of conventional meanings (à la Humpty Dumpty), figural displacements, puns, disruption of syntax, *mélange des genres*, misquotation, masquerade, the transgression of ontological boundaries (pictures come to life, characters interact with their author), the treatment of identity as a plural, changeable image – in short, the destabilization of all structures, including those created by the text itself. (186)

The category ilinx, taken from Roger Caillois's typology of games,[159] is most like literature in general, including alternate histories.

Distinctions within this category might be made with regard to interactivity. Marie-Laure Ryan, who investigates both the text as game metaphor and the concept of interactivity, suggests that how a story is told and how it *plays out* is ultimately a result of textual architecture: the "narrative potential of the interactive text is a function of the architecture of its system of links". She claims that interactivity may be interpreted both figuratively and literally. Literally speaking, interactive texts are ones which have "textual mechanisms that enable the reader to affect the 'text' of the text as a visible display of signs, and to control the dynamics of its unfolding" (246; 17). Metaphorically, we refer to all literary texts: the category of "nonergodic, nonelectronic, noninteractive texts", "standard literary texts in which the dynamic construction of the text that takes place during the act of reading concerns meaning exclusively" (207). However, Ryan's definition, besides being metaphorical itself, is less than helpful here if we are to take interactivity as being a feature of all literary texts. The term is in effect superfluous by virtue of its universal relevance. Interactivity in the context of FNs may be defined as follows: the interface of communication of a medium allows series of mutually dependent action-response exchanges. The degree of interactivity significantly relies on the nature of the medium: it is non-existent in a book, for instance, but patently obvious in a touch screen. This definition of interactivity allows us to recognize that the "domain of free play" (185) and destabilization of structures achieved by alternate histories is quite different from the most paradigmatic of FNs.

It is clear, first of all, that the more relevant term for alternate histories is activity, not interactivity. We do not speak of a 'user-surface', but rather a 'text' in bound, unchangeable form, and artefact. The alternate history does not 'respond'

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159 Ryan's discussion of the same may be found in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (182–183).

in any way, nor appear to 'respond' in any way to the reader. The non-interactivity of alternate histories may be explained in terms of the specific nature of points of divergence as opposed to nodes: in the most paradigmatic of FNs, the 'fork' at the node represents potential outcomes for any given run of a FN. The point of divergence, on the other hand, requires that both possible continuations have already been realized. In other words, the reader of an alternate history has nothing 'to do' at the point of divergence, whereas the reader of the most paradigmatic of FNs makes a decision at a node that creates the very narrative that he is reading. The resulting thematic difference between FNs and alternate histories is as follows: whereas FNs feature potentiality and allow for choice, alternate histories and forking-paths narratives feature and represent consequence – the results of a given choice or decision.

Most attempts to draw comparisons between points of divergence in alternate histories and nodes in FNs are ultimately unsuccessful on this account. Similarly, the real author of an alternate history as compared to the reader/player of a FN is an imperfect analogy – not least of all because the author of the alternate history (?) would then function not only as a kind of designer, but also as the player of his own game. Nor does this analogy take into account the author/designer of a FN. The more accurate distinction can be made between the reader/player of a FN and the reader of an alternate history: most typically (but not always), the former has an interactive relation to a script, while the latter has a non-interactive relation to a text.

2.3.3 Bifurcation vs. Divergence from History

2.3.3.1 Alternate History versus Forking-paths Narratives

Only the difference between alternate history and the most closely related kind of FN, forking-paths narratives, is not yet clear under the aspect of interactivity. Here, we must go one step further. Unlike in forking-paths narratives, the reader of the alternate history not only contemplates the dynamic 'space' between multiple continuations, but he must also realize the variance between history and its alternative version. In other words, points of divergence in alternate histories exhibit at least one major difference to nodes in forking-paths narratives: the bifurcation in a forking-paths narrative occurs at the level of narrative structure, whereas the bifurcation in an alternate history exists only in consideration of the context of reception.

Most confusing in this respect is Dannenberg's subsuming of forking-paths narratives that realize structurally multiple continuations and several other kinds of narrative that imply multiple continuations or foil a text-external narra-

tive under the heading 'counterfactuality'. She examines not only alternate histories ("historical counterfactuals") and forking-paths narratives as examples of counterfactuality in literature, but also, for example, what Gerald Prince would term "the disnarrated"; essentially the set of events that did not happen, but are referred to (Dannenberg 115). Dannenberg sees the mere implication of alternative versions of the plot in the novel's discourse (as in many 19th-century novels) as a precursor to its more radical realization in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction (as in narratives with multiple endings, forking-paths narratives, and finally, parallel-worlds narratives) (4).

Besides the unintuitive use of the term 'counter*factual*' for multiple possibilities within a *fictional* work (this assumes a possible-worlds definition of fact as that which is true in a given world), Dannenberg makes a provocative claim that the disnarrated, articulated hypothetically, and alternate history, in which the events are actual within the narrative world, are two sides of the same coin (116). Dannenberg does not, however, account for differences between narratives that feature nodes and narratives that seem to have resulted from points of divergence. In suggesting a crucial difference between the reception-model of alternate history and its structure, I ultimately agree here with Widmann, who claims that counterfactual histories are not automatically forking-paths narratives: "Die entscheidende Differenz zu deviierenden historischen Romanen besteht darin, dass in diesen die Entscheidung für eine Variante der Entstehung des Textes vorhergeht." (60) I would amend this statement: the bifurcation does not occur 'before' the narrative, but exists only as a result of the reader supplying historical knowledge.

A closer comparison of forking-paths narratives and alternate histories is, however, worthwhile by virtue of their similarities in other respects. For example, the separateness of alternate paths, the autonomy of worlds despite similarity as postulated above, is thematized perhaps most prominently in forking-path narratives. It is impossible to 'keep' or 'pick' certain elements from one world and decide to ignore or avoid others. This is indeed a common dilemma for the character that serves as a unifying centre of consciousness, such as in Thomas Berger's *Changing the Past*, in which the protagonist, Walter Hunsicker, is given the power to create the life of his dreams – and if his dream-life is indeed not the one that he wants, he is allowed to change it back. He 'lives' three different versions of himself: as the despicable Jack Kellog, as a writer, and as a radio host. All three alternative lives end in misfortune, and Walter realizes that even if he were able to have everything that he asks for, without condition, a basic rule of life still applies: "what I want to make of it is not a thing of my will" (230). And even though he may have preferred certain aspects of one life over the other, "there was always something about [him] in each life that was not quite what it

should have been" (278). In the end, the tale becomes a parable: Walter decides to return to "the fate that, at too high a cost, he could have evaded" (279). The films *The Butterfly Effect* and *It's a Wonderful Life* function according to a similar principle – in one film the protagonist decides that it would have been better had he never been born; in the other the protagonist realizes how miserable life would have been had he not been born.

The ability to change and the motivation for changing the past can either be explained in the narrative (as in *It's a Wonderful Life* or *Changing the Past*), or left to the imagination of the reader/viewer (as in *Groundhog Day* or *Sliding Doors*). David Bordwell's study on "film futures" investigates how such films "assume that one moment of choice or chance determines all the rest" and recognizes a kind of paradox that will be further discussed in this study, namely that causality becomes strict only once certain processes have been put into motion (92). Choice, in these films, takes on a kind of spiral structure: with every decision, or rather as a result of every decision, future choices are more limited or directed, more determined.

One of the many values of examining the corpus of texts FNs has been to make a subtle distinction between 'true' forking-paths narratives such as *Blind Chance* or Resnais's *Smoking/No smoking*, in which the various continuations that are realized are not perceived by the figures in the film, and *The Butterfly Effect* or *Groundhog Day*, in which the figures within the story world are aware that there are several continuations. The protagonists in films like *The Butterfly Effect* or *Groundhog Day*[160] are conscious of the repetition with a difference, and earlier narratives can explicitly contribute to certain conclusions: these narratives involve processes of "contamination", to borrow Bordwell's expression (98) – indeed not too different from the experience of playing the same videogame twice. The protagonist is, in all cases, more knowledgeable or skilled the second time around – even if this does not always help him or her to achieve the desired results. The different continuations in *Blind Chance* or *Smoking/No smoking* are not ordered chronologically, but rather as unperceived, true alternatives to the state of affairs in the story world. Much like the difference between alternate history and framed counterfactual histories, both kinds of forking-paths narratives change the past to allow for alternative possibilities.

Crucially, the narrative structure of forking-paths narratives is similar to the reception model of alternate histories, not their narrative structure. Forking-paths narratives differ from alternate histories in that they deduce different continuations and realize them narratively or scenically. The alternatives are *all* text-

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160 Henriet introduces a term for the specific dilemma faced by the protagonist of *Groundhog Day*: *Boucle temporelle* (Henriet, *L'uchronie* 93).

internal, otherwise non-existent functions of the text. In alternate histories, on the other hand, the 'fork' represents not the structure of the narrative, but the relationship between two, separate ontological levels. The point of divergence in alternate histories, the 'crux' of the reception model above, refers to a differential value: the similarities between history and the alternative version given in the text. The reception model of alternate history illustrates the relationship between two narratives, not a bifurcation within one.

2.3.3.2 Alternate-history FNs

It follows from my definition of alternate history, which in the context of reception reveals *at least* two, permanently diverging paths, at least one of which is history, and at least one other of which is an alternate version realized narratively in the text, that forking-paths narratives are not to be excluded – as long as they deal with history. In other words, *any forking-paths narrative that is also historical fiction is automatically alternate history*. There is no reason to claim that the two kinds of text cannot co-exist; it is merely the case that the characteristic which makes such a hybrid an alternate history (the point of divergence, i.e. differential value to history) is different from that which makes it a forking-paths narrative (the realization of more than one continuation of that point within the narrative). If we are to follow the implications of this claim one step further, an alternate history that is also a forking-paths narrative is also a FN. The critical point is as follows: such a hybrid is not a FN by virtue of its being a manifestation of alternate history, but rather because it is a forking-paths narrative; in other words, not because of its content, but rather because of its structure.

Although there is at least one alternate history, Dieter Kühn's *N*, that is of the *Blind Chance*-type, i.e. a 'true' forking-paths narrative in which two or more continuations are presented without any diegetic linking of the various versions, most alternate-history-FN hybrids are similar to *Groundhog Day* or *It's a Wonderful Life*. In particular, there are numerous alternate histories employing time travel as a device for explaining the means of and motivation for changing the past: they are forking-paths narratives that narrate linearly multiple, diegetically-motivated continuations.

Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* is an exemplary case. Unlike Fry's *Making History* and Trechera's "Mein Führer", and like James Hogan's *The Proteus Operation, Bring the Jubilee* begins with an alternative version of history. In this world, the Confederate States of America wins the Battle of Gettysburg and declares the Independence of the South on July 4th, 1864. The United States (the North) is impoverished compared to the Confederacy and inferior in terms of culture and military strength. The narrative present is the 1950s, just as the Confederate

States and the German Union (the victors of the "Emperor's War", fought from 1914–1916) are on the verge of war. The opening line of the novel, however, hints that there are competing realities at play within the text: "Although I am writing this in the year 1877, I was not born until 1921. Neither the dates nor the tenses are error – let me explain: [...]".

"Hodge" McCormick Backmaker (note the surname) proceeds to tell his story. He is an historian-in-training, and the majority of the narrative reads like an alternate-history Bildungsroman (cf. Alkon 71): the reader follows Hodge's relationship to the (for the reader) alternative version of history. Hodge is plagued by his own inaction, or frustrated by his own hesitation to interfere. On his way to New York, for example, he encounters a chase:

> The shouts came closer; a boy of about my own age scrambled frantically over the wall, dislodging some of the smaller lichen-covered rocks on top and sending them rolling into the ditch. He looks at me, startled, then paused for a long instant at the road's edge, undecided which way to run.
>
> He was barefoot and wore a jute sack as a shirt, with holes cut for his arms, and ragged cotton pants. His face was little browner than my own had often been at the end of a summer's work under a burning sun.
>
> He came to the end of indecision and started across the highway, legs pumping high, head turned watchfully. A splendid tawny stallion cleared the wall in a soaring jump, his rider bellowing, "There you are, you damned black coon"!
>
> He rode straight for the fugitive, quirt upraised, lips thickened and eyes rolling in rage. The victim dodged and turned; in no more doubt than I that the horseman meant to ride him down. He darted by me, so close I heard the labored rasp of breathing.
>
> The rider swerved, and he too twisted around me as though I were the post at the far turn of a racecourse. Reflexively I put out my hand to grab at the reins and stop the assault. Indeed, my fingers actually touched the leather and grasped it for a fraction of a second before they fell away.
>
> Then I was alone in the road again as both pursued and pursuer vaulted back over the fence. The whole scene of anger and terror could not have lasted two minutes [...]
>
> Why hadn't I held on to the rein and delayed the hunter, at least long enough to give his quarry a fair start? What had made me draw back? It had not been fear, at least in the usual sense, for I knew I wasn't timorous of the horseman. I was sure I could have dragged him down if he had taken his quirt to me.
>
> Yet I had been afraid. Afraid of interfering, of meddling in affairs which were no concern of mine, of risking action on quick judgment. I had been immobilized by the fear of asserting my sympathies, my presumptions, against events. (25–26)

Hodge continues to berate himself for not having helped the black fugitive, and the narrative weight of this episode reveals its significance: here, discourse time far outstrips story time, as the narrator monologizes his personal relationship to the events he recounts. Also clear is the concrete correspondence between Hodge's moral consciousness and respect for the power of causality, i.e. the awareness of how his interference might have influenced the course of events.

Hodge maintains that "history is never directed or diverted by well-intentioned individuals; it is the product of forces with geographical, not moral roots" (49). It is precisely this view of history, as objective, that he learns to question: "Is it a dispassionate chronicle of events scientifically determined and set down in the precise measure of their importance? Is this ever possible?" (74) Hodge comes to a conclusion that might be read as a radical outgrowth of the *Annales* school:

> I also began to understand the central mystery of historical theory. When and what and how and where, but the when is the least. Not chronology but relationship is ultimately what the historian deals in. The element of time, so vital at first glance, assumes a constantly more subordinate character. That the past is past becomes ever less important. Except for perspective it might as well be the present or the future or, if one can conceive it, a parallel time. I was not investigating a petrification but a fluid. Were it possible to know fully the what and how and where one might learn the why, and assuredly if one grasped the why he could place the when at will. (138)

Later, at Haggershaven, a community of scholars in the process of developing a means of time travel, the recognition of the fluidity of time becomes a part of Hodge's historical method quite literally. It is the great-granddaughter of the founder of Haggershaven, Barbara, that first recognizes the potential of time travel for the purposes of research:[161] She tells Hodge, "you can verify every fact, study every move, every actor. You can write history as no one ever did before [...]" (183). Her enthusiasm, however, does not come without a stern reverence for causality: "The faintest indication of our presence, the slightest impingement on the past, may change the whole course of events." (189)

The irony of Barbara's statement that Hodge can *write history* as no one before becomes clear only later, when Hodge goes back in time to witness the Battle of Gettysburg. Tragically, Hodge discovers that he cannot avoid responsibility, and that even as a bystander, it is possible to become a catalyst (cf. McKnight 53): he is, despite Barbara's warnings, discovered by Confederate soldiers. Hodge tries to reassure himself "Delay of a few minutes could hardly make a significant difference. All historians agreed that the capture of the Round Tops was an inevitabil-

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[161] Nedelkovich makes the amusing connection between Barbara's surname "Haggerwells" and Herbert George Wells, author of *Time Machine* (1895): "Ha-Ge-Wells" (Nedelkovich 123).

ity [...]" (210). But in delaying the soldiers, if only for a few minutes, Hodge not only causes the death of the Confederate captain who was responsible for occupying the hill Little Round Top during the battle, but sets into motion a chain of events that lead to an entirely different outcome. Hodge reports:

> I saw the Battle of Gettysburg. I saw it with all the unique advantages of a professional historian thoroughly conversant with the patterns, the movements, the details, who knows where to look for the coming dramatic moment, the recorded decisive stroke. I fulfilled the chroniclers' dream. It was a nightmare. (213)

The North wins the battle, subsequently the Civil War, and Hodge is forced to recognize that his "mere discovery had altered the course of history" (210). He essentially dramatizes the thesis that the Battle of Gettysburg determined the outcome of the Civil War (Alkon 72). Not only is the past changed, but of course the future resulting from that past: while awaiting his return to Haggershaven, Hodge realizes that the man whose death he had caused before the battle was Barbara's great-great-grandfather. There could be no return, as Haggershaven had "ceased to exist in the future" (217), as had Hodge's present. Hodge remains therefore trapped in a past that is not his own.

The 'new' past, the one in which Hodge writes in 1877, is different from the history of Hodge's original present (in the 1950s). Hodge, stricken by his own losses, is forced to admit:

> That this world is a better place than the one into which I was born, and promises to grow still better, seems true. What idealism lay behind the Southron cause triumphed in the conciliation of men like Lee; what was brutal never got the upper hand as it did in my world. The Negro is free; black legislatures pass advanced laws in South Carolina; black congressmen comport themselves with dignity in Washington. The Pacific railroad is build, immigrants pour in to a welcoming country to make it strong and wealthy; no one suggests they should be shut out or hindered. (219)

What Hodge describes is a past that closely resembles our own – he has apparently "set history right" within the alternate history. Or rather, he has become trapped in a present that does not belong to his own past.

L. Sprague de Camp's classic alternate history promulgates a similar, possible-worlds view, using Demandt's tree metaphor. Tancredi explains to the archaeologist Dr. Padway, the protagonist:

> "Ah, yes, the nature of time. This is just a silly idea of mine, you understand. I was saying, all these people who just disappear, they have slipped back down the suitcase".
> "The what?"

> "The trunk, I mean. The trunk of the tree of time. When they stop slipping, they are back in some former time. But as soon as they do anything, they change all subsequent history"
> "Sounds like a paradox", said Padway.
> "No-o. The trunk continues to exist. But a new branch starts out where they come rest. It has to, otherwise we would all disappear, because history would have changed and our parents might never have met." (de Camp, *Lest Darkness Falls* 2–3)

As Tancredi continues to explain, at each branch, a new history starts – not in place of, but rather in addition to the present one. "History is a four-dimensional web [...] it has weak points [...] the back-slipping, if it happens, would happen at these places" (3). As if on cue, Dr. Padway 'slips' promptly following this conversation into 6th-century Rome. He ponders some of the same questions as Hodge in *Bring the Jubilee*: can one man change the course of history? (80). A far less tragic figure than Hodge, Padway leaves a less than ideal life in one world to become the hero of another: he quickly learns to accept his fate without "the pleasures of the *American Journal of Archaeology*, of Mickey Mouse, of flush toilets, of speaking the simple, right, sensitive English language" (46), and chooses instead to save the world from the 'dark ages', i.e. to prevent darkness from falling, by introducing several technological advancements (printing press, a semaphore telegraph system, etc.). He plays the role of a kind of game-master, deposing and re-enthroning kings, meddling in battles, in order to stabilize Italy and change history. Crucially, Padway never returns to his world of origin; the novel ends with a confirmation of his triumph: "History had, without question, been changed. Darkness would not fall." (379)

Crucially, my insistence above on *permanent* divergence from history as being the defining characteristic of alternate history holds true for time-travel fiction – even though we often 'land' in a present that is once again our own (or like our own), as in *Bring the Jubilee*. Rather than treating the greater part of Hodge's narrative, in a world in which the South won the Civil War, as a kind of 'pocket' or 'bubble' in history that converges once again with history, we must keep in mind that alternate histories are narratives that follow a possible-worlds logic: it is not as if Hodge's experiences at Haggershaven, etc. never happened (indeed, his memory of this past remains a painful reminder), nor can we assume that the present and future *belonging to that past* would not continue to diverge from the narrative of the real past. As Spedo puts it, "Each point of divergence does not destroy the possible alternative; on the contrary, both forking paths are pursued and result in independent realities enjoying the same ontological status." (95) Hodge's tragedy is not that he made history converge with our own, but rather that he has become stranded in a past not his own – all the more tragic because (and evidences by the fact that) his centre of consciousness remains in the world that he knew.

2.3.4 The Paradox of Alternate History: Contingency and Necessity

Up until now, alternate histories have been discussed as having largely similar thematic programs to historical fiction in general. We can reiterate here that alternate histories, like virtually all of historical fiction, use history with a certain political and ideological intent that can often times be seen in connection with the socio-political context of the work's publication. Even without a significant correlation between time of publication and the choice of a certain period of history, the rise in popularity of the genre alternate history in the 1960s, an especially turbulent political era, and a close correlation between the nationality of the alternate historian and the choice of historical event, are telling:[162] alternate histories do not by any means sidestep contemporary relevance or the social-historical context in which they were published.

Particularly works such as Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* or Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* that seem to provide a critique of the contemporary world support Hayden White's statement about how the process of re-imagining the past could be seen as awakening a social or political consciousness in the present:

> human beings can will backward as well as forward in time; willing backward occurs when we rearrange accounts of events in the past that have been emplotted in a given way, in order to endow them with a different meaning or to draw from the new emplotment reasons for acting differently in the future from the way we have become accustomed to acting in our present (*The Content of the Form* 150).

Like all works of historical fiction, alternate histories comment obliquely on contemporary issues, and one would be 'hard-pressed' to find alternate histories that resist readings in terms of contemporary relevance (Cowart 8; 165). For Helbig, parahistory is by definition the representation of an alternate world, "die in ihren Grundzügen ein satirisch verfremdetes, aber leicht durchzuschauendes allegorisches Spiegelbild der realen Verhältnisse darstellt, wird ein eutopischer Kontrastentwurf integriert, der als Alternative zu Empirie und Gegenwelt zu werten ist" (158). Similarly, Gavriel Rosenfeld argues that the "original function of allohistorical accounts" is to reflect upon the contemporary context in which they are written, and they reveal a distinctly "presentist" character (cf. Otten). Rosen-

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162 Cf. Helbig, *Der parahistorische Roman* (78–86): "Die Blütezeit parahistorischer Roman beginnt erst nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, wobei eine besonders starke Konzentration gegen Ende der sechziger und zu Beginn der siebziger Jahre festzustellen ist" (79); the explanation for this 'strong concentration' of alternate histories in the 1960s is "die Annahme einer wachsenden allgemeinen Unzufriedenheit mit den Ergebnissen der realen Politik" (84).

feld claims, for example, that the original function of allohistorical accounts of Nazi wartime victory was propaganda: "to convince American readers to support American inteverntion [sic] in the Second World War" (Rosenfeld, "Why do we ask 'what if'?" 95; cf. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 9–11; 13).[163] The impression that the vast majority of alternate histories are dystopian, that is, depict a history that is worse than the history that we know, might be accounted for by a kind of political interest in enabling us "to see our own responsibilities more clearly" (see Korthals 164; McKnight 172; 222).

I do not wish to contest the claims that alternate histories may be seen as reflections of the times in which they were written; this is indeed none other than empirical support for my theorization of history as the normalized narrative of the real past, dependent on a given readership. But I do think it meaningful to 1) discuss the thematic programs of alternate histories with a stronger focus on the texts themselves, and 2) as we have done all along, attempt to account for alternate histories as similar to but different from historical fiction in general. Rosenfeld's claim, for example, that alternate histories of Nazi wartime victory "say just as much about Americans' view of their own present as about their views of the past" (98) seems plausible enough. But it is also disappointingly obvious: it is almost a given that our construction of the past is always tied with the present. This statement fails to account for alternate histories as a corpus of texts with characteristics distinct from historical fiction as a whole.

In contrast to other kinds of historical fiction, alternate histories frequently and often times explicitly contemplate concepts of necessity/determinism, free will/contingency, and human agency. Necessity refers to 'strict' notions of cause and effect, that is, there is one, necessary set of consequences for a given event, one outcome: 'it can only happen one way'. Contingency, on the other hand, refers to potentiality, that is, there are many possible sets of consequences for a given event, more than one possible outcome: 'it can happen many different ways'. Determinism and free will are the corresponding world-views: determinism is the belief in necessity as a governing principle of cause and effect; free will is the belief in contingency as the *governing* principle of cause and effect. Human agency, the degree to which humans influence the course of events, plays a role in both. There is also a third world-view, indeterminism, which is different from the other two in that it is defined by a belief in randomness, i.e. a negation of the principles of cause and effect. Here, because we cannot logically speak of consequences, it is also meaningless to talk of human agency. Indeterminism is

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163 See also Henriet, "Pourquoi écrit-on de l'uchronie?", esp. the sections on "L'Uchronie pédagogique, alarmiste a message" and "L'Uchronie propagandiste et le cas négationniste".

thus closely related to determinism in that a denial of human agency is, for all practical purposes, essentially the same as a belief in necessity.

As such, alternate histories are firmly rooted in notions of cause and effect – that is, if one event is altered, then the following events will necessarily be altered as well;[164] indeterminism and the related concept of chance, both of which negate principles of cause and effect, have little or no role here. Even 'coincidence' refers not to an indeterministic concept, but rather to an unexpected result – one that can indeed be causally explained, but only in hindsight. All alternate histories respect the principles of cause and effect in that they explore the consequences of one action, one event. The critical issue seems to be instead human agency: whether or not and to what degree choice plays a role, or what effect choices have on the course of history – that is, the negotiation of a deterministic attitude and notions of free will.

As a specific result of the characteristic aspect of alternate history, the point of divergence, alternate histories feature complex models of necessity and contingency, determinism, and free will. As a rule, the world of an alternate history is governed by strict necessity: in order to endow a given event with historical meaning, i.e. to show that a given decision, accident, etc., was critical or had wide-reaching consequences, the alternate outcome has to be traced far enough on a given, linear path to show that the alteration of the event truly produces a world different from the one that we know. This quite deterministic attitude, or a rigid approach to cause and effect with a primary respect for necessity, contrasts strongly with the underlying 'it-could-have-been-different' attitude of alternate histories, a much more 'loose' approach to cause and effect governed by contingency. At the point of divergence, contingency rules – human agency, whether by conscious choice or not, makes all the difference.

Interestingly enough, precisely this paradox that results from alternate history's proposition of a point of divergence followed by necessarily strict notions of cause and effect, is often cited as a fallacy of counterfactual analysis in history writing – which, perhaps until historians start to write hypertexts or present their scholarship as forking-paths narratives, is a fallacy to which counterfactual histories will always be susceptible. In his defense of counterfactual history writing, Bulhof dismisses the paradox altogether, claiming that "A theory of counterfactuals and history will have to make clear why determinism is irrelevant to most

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164 See Hassig, "Counterfactuals and revisionism in historical explanation": "The essence of traditional counterfactual analysis is the identification of the pivotal causal points in an historical explanation and its alteration and the consequent change in effect to illustrate the essentially contingent nature of history. If a cause is altered in a counterfactual, then the established effect should change, too, and if it does not, the 'cause' selected was not significant." (65).

uses of modal and counterfactual claims." (159) Randall Collins, in his discussion of "Turning Points, Bottlenecks, and the Fallacies of Counterfactual History" (247–269), offers a much more subtle, differentiated discussion that recognizes that notions of determinism do indeed play an important role in counterfactual history; and that these notions conflict with the 'it-could-have-happened-otherwise' approach of counterfactual analysis. For Collins, the logic of "turning-point arguments" depends on notions of causality, but a quite selective one. This constitutes a methodological error:

> The notion that history comes to a stop, that everything can be frozen at a particular moment, makes for dramatic storytelling, but it is a rhetorical device, not a serious sociological analysis. Analytically, the mistakes here are two: To assume that causal conditions are pinpointed, rather than spread out across a wide range of situations that make up a structural pattern, and to assume that causality is rigidly linear rather than stochastic. The counterfactual historian, wearing particularistic blinders, imagines that if the battle of (Teutoburger Wald, Antietam, Britain, etc.) had gone a different way, then everything is irrevocably cut off from a certain path, and must stick to the previously existing path. (If the North had not won the Civil War, slavery would still exist today in the South, since the historian can imagine nothing else that would have eliminated slavery.) What is missing is a theoretical view of the general conditions that bring about a shift in the power of states, conditions that are spread out widely in time and space. (252)

For our purposes here, it seems that methodological error in one discipline is a valuable means of discourse in the other. Collins's insistence that, in reality, most processes are stochastic (or, perhaps better in this sense: omni-causal), not linear, reveals much about the approach of the author of an alternate history in contrast to that of an historian: the author of an alternate history is, in Collins's deprecatory terms, a "particularistic" historian, for he assumes a "causality of the known chain of events, spread out like a strip of movie film" (253). Evans criticizes counterfactual history on similar grounds, claiming that "[...] history is not just about events, it's about many other things – processes, structures, cultures, societies, economies, and so on" (82).[165] Harari likewise argues that the reduction of history to a linear chain of events results more in narrative interest than a valid understanding of history (263). That this reduction has been carried out so

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165 More specifically, Evans sees this as a critical failure in terms of politically motivated attempts to "restor[e] open futures to the past", or "liberat[e] history from an imaginary straitjacket of Marxist determinism": counterfactual history destroys chance and contingency as valid considerations by treating them illogically. Counterfactual history misguidedly "assumes a) the absence of any further contingencies and chances along the way and b) the absolute predictability of all possible ways in which the initial alternative event influenced, or did not influence, subsequent history" (84).

convincingly, particularly with battles and wars, makes this concept of history an "appealing but extremely dangerous literary trope [!]" (265).[166]

In answer to the 'dangers' of alternate history, we may turn once again to the preceding discussion of the nature of history as relevant to alternate history, and the nature of the historian's task as opposed to the goals of the alternate-history author. This 'danger' of which Harari speaks relates specifically to the historian's task of representing past events accurately, that is, in all of their complexity. In post-Rankean historiography, it is no longer possible to treat history like a film-strip: remove one link, and the one-stranded chain of cause and effect falls apart. The more complex, nuanced notions of time already found in the work of the *Annales* historians prevent such naivete. Alternate-history authors are not bound to this same kind of standard, and there seems to be no shame in reaching back to Rankean paradigms. As such, alternate histories rely on an admittedly *simplified*, linear version of the web of cause and effect investigated by historians to construct a provocative story: one that the reader will understand *as* an alternate history and thus be in a position to contemplate first the permanent divergence from the history that he knows, and second, the paradox of re-writing the past as such:

10. *The point of divergence relies upon the principle of contingency, while the continuing variance from the normalized narrative of the real past – that is, the rest of the narrative – relies on the principle of necessity.*

Ultimately, it is at neither the structural nor metaphorical level that alternate histories become most relevant for FNs, but rather at the thematic level: in the contemplation of contingency/free will and necessity/determinism. This paradoxical tension between necessity and contingency becomes particularly interesting in works like Amis's *The Alteration* that integrate a given perspective on the open nature of the future into the narrative, rather than limiting themselves to isolated commentary. Alternate-history FNs like *Bring the Jubilee* or *Making History* furnish particularly interesting contemplations of these concepts as well. The first several case studies here capitalize on the paradox inherent to the genre of alternate history and creates tension between its status as alternate history and the views expressed in the course of the narrative; each presents a different model of necessity versus contingency and, as a result, of determinism versus free will.

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166 Cf. Gilbert and Lambert: "The conventional counterfactual form is *seductive* in its simplicity, and powerfully engaging in its narrative form – once this single decision or event is changed, then, this would, most likely follow, then this, then this, and so on." (250) (my italics).

2.3.5 The 'Open' Alternate History?

2.3.5.1 The Open Artwork

Particularly in having considered the context of reception of alternate histories as a specific kind of past narrative, the question of how nodes in FNs relate to traditional forms of syntax in past narratives is still 'at large'. As I hope to show here, concepts of 'openness' in literary texts provide a fruitful means of discussing nodes as literal realizations of what all literary texts do to varying degrees at the level of interpretation: allow for multiplicity of meaning.

Marie-Laure Ryan states that we have become accustomed to reading a certain way:

> The linear print book has accustomed readers to an encounter with the text that combines certain duties with certain liberties and guarantees: Duty to turn pages in sequential order, but freedom to dwell leisurely on each page, easy to return to earlier passages, and security of always knowing how much remains to be read. This mode of processing has become so automatic that we tend to take it for natural and nonsignificant. (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 217)

Presumably, this "mode of processing" is for the purpose of finding some kind of meaning in the text. And if meaning in literature is indeed to be conceived of as "something that emerges out of the text in unpredictable patterns as the reader follows trails of associative connotations or attends to the resonance of words and images with the private contents of memory" (193), works of literature as self-contained systems also have the possibility of generating meaning in new ways, of engaging the reader in new ways. The ways in which past narratives achieve 'openness' without altering the medium may be seen as a milder, secondary parallel to the structural openness exhibited by FNs.[167] If a nodal situation often forces the recipient of a FN to become active in the sense of Ryan's term 'participatory' – that is, he creates the very narrative that he is playing/reading, and it by definition allows for multiple continuations – occasions for interpretation in past narratives do the same in the context of active reception (interpretation). We might go so far as to say that the cultivation of interpretive possibility, although not specific to the traditional print medium, is the means by which the traditional print medium has maintained its relevance in the age of new media:

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167 It is by now clear that I am referring to the metaphor of 'openness' in the sense of the interpretive potential of a given work. There are, of course, other applications of this metaphor to literature, for example in the sense of 'open' endings. See Frank Kermode. *The sense of an ending. Studies in the theory of fiction*; Barbara Korte. *Techniken der Schlussgebung im Roman. Eine Untersuchung englisch- und deutschsprachiger Romane*; Marianna Torgovnick. *Closure in the Novel.*

whereas video games and motion pictures have the 'advantage' of relying on new technology, and it is possible to alter the print medium in such a way as to border on other media (ex. hypertexts), written, linear narratives constantly 'evolve' in terms of language so as to pose new challenges to the reader.

The discussion of how exactly written texts achieve figurative 'openness' has long been discussed by reader-reception theory. While it is not necessary to give a complete account here, a few ideas ought to be summarized, particularly drawing upon the work of Umberto Eco. Every reading (or every instance of reception of a work of art), as Eco puts it, is a performance:

> In tale senso [...] un'opera d'arte, forma compiuta *e chiusa* nella sua perfezione di organismo perfettamenta calibrato, è altresì *aperta*, possibilità di essere interpretata in mille modi diversi senza che la sua irriproducibile singolarità ne risulti alterata. Ogni fruizione è cosi una *interpretazione* ed una *esecuzione*, poichè in ogni fruizione l'opera rivive in una prospettiva originale. (*Opera aperta* 26)[168]

As far as the amount of effort or activity required to read a work of literature, the creation and the reception of the text stand in inverse proportion: if a text is less determined, than the reader must be more active in creating meaning (cf. Iser, *Der Implizite Leser* 354–358).

Eco, who was first and foremost in insisting on the importance of the role of the reader in modern art through an emphasis on multiplicity of meaning in modern art,[169] incorporates the work of Roman Jakobson and the "suggestiveness" of poetic language that, to some greater or lesser extent, applies to all texts. Eco claims that there are two, broader categories of text with regard to 'openness': "Alcuni richiedono un massimo di intrusione, non solo a livello di fabula, e sono testi 'aperti'. Altri invece fan mostra di richiedere la nostra cooperazione, ma sornionamente continuano a pensare a modo propio, e sono 'chiusi' e repressivi." (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 216)[170] In a "closed" text the reader, broadly defined, is pulled along a predetermined path. An "open" text outlines a "closed" project of

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168 "A work of art [...] is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced, organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself." (Translation cited: Umberto Eco. *The Open Work*, Cambridge, Mass. 1989. 4).

169 See: Eco, *Opera aperta, The Role of the Reader*, and *Lector in fabula*.

170 "Some ask for a maximum of intrusion [from the reader], and not only at the level of fabula, and are called 'open' works. Some others are mealymouthed and, while pretending to elicit our cooperation, in fact want us to think their way and are very 'closed' and repressive." (Translation cited from: Eco, *The Open Work* 256).

the ideal reader as a component of its structural strategy and requires a stronger level of participation from the reader (56–58).[171]

In his discussion of the open work, Eco points to the importance of structure in creating such 'spaces' for the participation of the reader: a dictionary, for example, is in the same sense 'open', but it is not necessarily an artwork (Eco, *Opera aperta* 51). The reader must be "invited" to make the work with the author: the open work must be understood as a "tendenza al disordine *dominato*, alla *possibilità* compresa in un *campo*, alla libertà sorvegliata da *germi di formatività* presenti nella forma che si offre aperta alle libere scelte del fruitore" (115–116).[172] Through his analysis of live television broadcasts, Eco comes to the conclusion that an open work must involve some sort of 'prompt' in order to create the "field of possibilities" available to the recipient.

> Ma qui dobbiamo renderci conto immediatamente di un equivoco: Quella della vita nella sua immediatezza non è apertura, è *casualità*. Per fare di questa casualità un nodo di effettive possibilità è necessario introdurvi un modulo organizzativo. Trascegliere insomma gli elementi di una costellazione, tra i quali stabilire nessi polivalenti, ma solo *dopo* la scelta. (193)[173]

At the level of discursive structure, the text is organized with "phrastic spaces", and the reader is thus prompted to "fill in" the blanks.

This is not unlike Wolfgang Iser's concept of 'Leerstelle' in literary texts: the author of any given work tends to produce only a "construction kit", and so offers the interpreter, performer, addressee a work *da finire* (50). Defined by a given constellation of "spaces", the text may be seen as a "Spielraum" for a new compositional process carried out by the reader: "Die Leerstellen des Textes sind die dem Leser angebotenen Denkpausen. Sie geben ihm die Chance, sich so auf das Geschehen einzulassen, daß er dessen Sinn zu konstituieren vermag." (Iser, *Der Implizite Leser*, 87; see also 62 and 354) In other words, literary texts offer

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171 Doležel, like Eco, sees the challenges posed to the reader in inverse proportion to the "saturation" of the fictional world: the reader processes the fictional text and reconstructs the fictional world by the author, and the challenge in doing so increases as "saturation", the amount of information conveyed about the fictional world, decreases (*Heterocosmica* 170; 172–173).

172 "a tendency toward controlled disorder, toward a circumscribed potential, toward a freedom that is constantly curtailed by the germ of formativity present in any form that wants to remain open to the free choice of the addressee". (Translation cited from Eco, *The Open Work* 65).

173 "We must avoid a possible misunderstanding: Life in its immediacy is not 'openness' but chance. In order to turn this chance into a cluster of possibilities, it is first necessary to provide it with some organization. In other words, it is necessary to choose the elements of a constellation among which we will then – and only then – draw a network of connections." (Translation cited from Eco, *The Open Work* 116).

structures, not pictures.[174] Furthermore, there is always a correlation between the structures created by the real author and the degree to which and how the reader "completes" the text.[175]

But what exactly constitutes a "space"? Clearly we are not speaking only of physical, typographical space in the text (although this is not excluded), but rather more abstractly, *occasions for interpretation* – prompts for the reader. These instances that contribute to a text's openness refer to both a work's interpretive possibilities or challenges to the reader as described above as well as a high degree of formal innovation. 'Openness' has, in this second sense, very much to do with the *poesie* of a given work: words of poetry cannot be immediately translated; they have no "fixed denotation that exhausts their meaning, for they imply a series of meanings that expand at every new look". In semiotic terms, propositions with a referential function (univocal relationship between the signifier and the signified) are to be distinguished from propositions with a suggestive function (which allow for multiple possible signifieds per each signifier) (Eco, *Opera aperta* 67–70). Even propositions with referential function are complicated with each addressee, who will automatically personalize the proposition with conceptual or emotive references from experience, but an open work actively works against a single meaning from being imposed: the text is "pregnante di mille suggestioni diverse" (33).[176]

The poetic degree of a text – the degree to which it cultivates ambiguity – is, for Eco, inextricably tied to its success as an artwork (see Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati,* esp. the chapter "La struttura del cattivo gusto"). Perhaps more to the point, a high degree of poetry is constitutive of modernist texts in general, as perhaps most evident in the works of James Joyce.[177] In his 1988 study *Ästhetik der Ambiguität: Zur Funktion und Bedeutung von Mehrdeutigkeit in der Literatur der Moderne*, Christoph Bode takes a significant step in not simply recognizing ambiguity as characteristic of modernist texts, but also positing this kind of openness as constitutive (or "paradigmatic") for literary modernism. To deter-

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174 See Iser, *Der Implizite Leser*, 355–356: "in den Textsegmenten sind gewisse Zeichen so gruppiert, daß sie zu einem Zusammenhang erweckt werden können. Dieser aber ist nicht formuliert, sondern wird erst vom Leser eingelöst [...]".

175 See Eco, *Lector in fabula*, 58: "[Il Autore d]ecide [...] sino a che punto deve controllare la cooperazione del lettore, e dove essa va suscita, dove va diretta, dove deve trasformarsi in libera avventura interpretiva" ("The author decides up until which point he must control the collaboration of the reader, how it should be deployed, where it should be directed, and where it must turn into a free interpretive adventure.") (translation KS).

176 "pregnant with infinite suggestive possibilities". See Eco, *The Open Work* 8–9.

177 Eco identifies *Finnegans Wake* as exemplary in that the text 'expects' an ideal reader that is able to make all of the associations that the text offers (Eco, *Lector in fabula* 58–59).

mine where and how ambiguity is achieved, Bode investigates the concept of poetic language in a critical, comparative survey of the work of Lotman, Jakobson, and Barthes:

> Das erfreuliche Ergebnis war, daß die drei wichtigsten der vorgestellten Entwürfe [...] wiewohl überhaupt nicht auf eine Hervorkehrung literarischer Ambiguität angelegt, doch Mehrdeutigkeit als wesentlichen, gar nicht abzustellenden Zug 'dichterischer Sprache' identifizieren: Als einen Effekt nämlich, der unvermeidlich eintritt, wenn aus normalsprachlichem Material ein 'sekundäres modellbildendes System' gebaut wird, sich auf den Fundament sprachlicher Elemente verschiedene Konnotations-Ebenen erheben oder die sprachlichen Zeichen in poetischer Funktion 'selbstbezüglich' werden. (*Ästhetik der Ambiguität* 379)

If we can, on the basis of Peirce's semiotics, recognize that language is composed of arbitrary symbols and therefore dependent on conventionalization through common use, then all language exhibits a general form of ambiguity ("Ambiguität erster Ordnung"). The "Echtheitsmerkmal der literarischen Moderne" is, however, a second-degree ambiguity ("Ambiguität zweiter Ordnung"), a musicalization of language: thus the statement that "modernist literature is language in the making" (384) and the recognition that ambiguity is not an attribute of the text itself, but a certain kind of text-reader relationship in which the reader actively constructs meaning. The open work is auto-referential, "eine Art Bedeutungsgenerator" that invites "den Leser zur Teilnahme an einem unabgeschlossenen (wohl auch unabschließbaren) Semiosis-Prozess" and allows him to experience "die normalerweise automatisch ablaufenden Vorgang der Konstitution symbolisch organisierter Sprache" (380).

2.3.5.2 The Closed Alternate History

Alternate histories are, relatively speaking, 'closed' in terms of poetic ambiguity: *Alternate warriors* more so than *The Man in the High Castle*; *The Man in the High Castle* more so than *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*. There is, it seems, an inverse relationship between the 'aggressiveness' of the reference to history and the complexity of linguistic structure in alternate history. If it is precisely the explicitness of its nature as an alternate history, the recognition of the point of divergence and the tension between the narrative of history and the alternative version, that makes the alternate history readable as such, it is logical that manifestations of this genre do not seek to undermine the clarity of the story with highly poetic language: first and foremost, it is important to know what is going on. The characteristic 'what-if?' scenario, it seems, precludes opacity in terms of what happens. For as soon as the story itself becomes unclear, it is impossible to

explore the workings of causation and consequence that are so fundamental to alternate history.

Still, as Widmann has already recognized, each alternate history has its own aesthetic "Eigenlogik": "Rein formal sind die Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten auf allen Ebenen des Textes vielfältig, und was die Anlage der Figuren, der Handlungsschemata, die chronologische Anordnung des repräsentierten Geschehens und schließlich die sprachlich-syntaktische Ausführung angeht, scheint der Freiraum prinzipiell uneingeschränkt." (365)[178] There is at least a small corpus of texts that make use of alternate history for aesthetic innovation that extends to the level of language.[179] The last case study here, Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, is not typical of alternate history in that it goes beyond a status as pop literature to integrate this model to a further end. Here, the organization of the text requires a different kind of participation from the reader, in addition to the activation of historical knowledge and ability to 'play' described above. With its unique grammar, Kracht's work consistently signals meaning without (over)determining that meaning. In other words, it features a kind of 'openness' that is at least vaguely reminiscent of modernist literature. But even in accounting for Kracht's work, we must recognize that an alternate history that proves ambitious and innovative in terms of its linguistic construction has yet to be written – *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* is perhaps as radical as alternate histories get in this respect, and it is still a far cry from *Ulysses*.

If we could imagine an alternate history that is 'open' at level of language – a proto-future-narrative – it might look something like Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada*. But *Ada* is not an alternate history: there is no identifiable point of divergence that serves as a basis for the fictional world. Parallel-worlds stories like *Ada* share the same reception model as other fiction, albeit the fictional world may be 'further away' from the real one: there are multiple worlds existing parallel to each other

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178 See also 356–357: "Die Überschreibungen außenreferentieller Sachverhalte durch nicht anschlussfähige Bezugnahmen auf dieselben Sachverhalte haben stets kontrafaktische Aussagen zur Folge, die diverse Facetten des im Text kontrastierten Geschichtsbildes tangieren können und in ihren Dimensionen und Konsequenzen innerhalb der Erzählhandlungen variieren"; Widmann emphasises that there are many possible kinds of realizations of an alternate-history plot. Counterfactuality does not determine the literary characteristics or quality of a text; this depends much more on "der Eigenlogik des individuell ausgeführten, kontrafaktischen Entwurfs verpflichtet und von den künstlerischen Vorstellungen des Autors geprägt" (358).

179 Cf. Widmann: "Einer unüberschaubar gewordenen Zahl von literarischen Erzeugnissen, die aufgrund ihrer Machart weitgehend einwandfrei der Unterhaltungsliteratur zuzurechnen sind, steht jedoch eine kleinere Zahl von Romanen gegenüber, die kontrafaktische Darstellungen dokumentierter Geschichte auch für ästhetische Innovation nutzen." (14).

(and like all fiction, to the real one). Pullman's *The Golden Compass* trilogy, for example, begins in a world like ours, "but different in many ways". In the second novel, the story moves through to "the universe we know", and finally, a "third universe, which differs from ours in many ways again".[180] Precisely because there is no clear point of divergence and little interest in outlining a causally connected chain of events that recognizably contradicts that of the normalized narrative of the real past, the duality of many parallel-worlds stories is more diffuse. As a result, works like Ada can be more innovative in terms of language and still maintain their 'readability'. In Nabokov's work, the high degree of poetic ambiguity complicates the matter further to the point that we must recognize that, in contrast to the clarity of alternate histories, blurring the boundaries between worlds is indeed part of Ada's text intention.

Alkon has noted the connections between Nabokov's novel and alternate history, although he too makes a distinction between such parallel-worlds stories and more "pure forms of alternate history" in which notions of cause and effect are more sharply defined (68–69). Parallel-worlds stories become relevant to alternate histories, particularly when the world that serves as the 'homebase' from which all of the other worlds spring is not the one that most resembles our own. In other words, in parallel-worlds stories, one of the fictional worlds, the 'Gegenentwurf', 'outweighs' the one closest to the real world in the framework of the fiction.

Written as if in the hand of the two protagonists, Ada and Van, *Ada* is set in such an alternate world: as a kind of a counterpart to Gibson's and Sterling's *The Difference Engine*, in which the computer is invented much earlier than in reality, the world of *Ada* is a technologically-stunted superimposition of Russia, France, and the United States called Estitoland. Its inhabitants are intensely concerned with theorizing their world as an alternate world (Antiterra), and sometimes confuse their existence in one or the other. *Ada* is not only written in the form of a personal history, in which the concept of alternate worlds is central, but also a work that – by virtue of its narrative structure and language – constructs a kind of disorientation in time and history for the reader by constantly blurring the boundaries between reality and alternate reality.

Anti-Terra and Terra, distorted reflections of both each other and the real world, have the effect of two illusions cancelling each other out: "Antiterra is not a mirror image of Terra but is irresistibly converging with it, and [...] both are converging with the reader's earth" (Albright 75–76; see also Henry-Thommes 359). This 'layering' of worlds and *Ada*'s setting as a kind of "doubly haunted flash-

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180 Front matter to: Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials. Northern Lights.*

back" (Wood, "Nabokov's late fiction" 208) are reflected at the level of story as well. Most obviously, Van and Ada are mirrors of each other, "male and female versions of a single design" (Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 536; see also Henry-Thommes 365). Perhaps not surprising in the maze of entangled relationships among similarly-named relatives (one is reminded of the insularity of the family Buendía in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad*), Van and Ada are putative first, second, and third cousins; they are really brother and sister. Not only are they biologically related, but also physically similar (with, for example, matching birthmarks).

In being so much like each other, Van and Ada are more different from everyone else – even more so because of their exceptional intellectual prowess. As Brian Boyd remarks, Van's and Ada's interactions with each other are "sudden, strange, bewildering eruptions of multiple allusion, multilingual punning, and multilayered arcana", and happy indulgences in "abtuse self-display" (*Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 549). (For example during one of their scrabble games [I-36], after which they lock Lucette out). Their shared 'genius' is made all the more clear by the presence of an outsider who always wants to get in: above all Lucette's presence reveals that Van's and Ada's self-absorbed love affair does indeed have moral implications. In acting "as if they are [...] a world unto themselves", Van and Ada reveal a moral failing in their lack of responsibility towards others. Lucette, the "moral center" of *Ada*, is the Ophelian casualty (550–554; Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada* 59; 113; 120; 145; 174; 295). The central web of relationships, Van, Ada, Lucette, mirrors on the level of story the world construction of the novel: Van and Ada are the inextricably interwoven pair Antiterra/Terra, whereas Lucette is the outside world, the point of reference by which we 'read' the relationship of Van and Ada.

The interest in the interplay of multiple worlds is thus more fully integrated thematically and into the figure constellations in *Ada* than in alternate histories. This is further realized in *Ada* through much more complex and subtle notions of temporality. Whereas alternate histories deal with rather straightforward, logically incremented, chronological notions of time, *Ada* adapts the notions presented in Van's *Texture of Time*, which serves as a kind of introduction to reading the novel as a whole (Schwalm 160; cf. Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 537): entirely foreign to alternate histories, which are governed by notions of cause and effect, Van's narrative features only a loose sense of chronology (Schwalm 162). It has often been noted, too, that the relationship between story and discourse time is highly skewed in *Ada*. For example, that Van's account of the summers 1884–1888 takes up more than half of the novel's entire text (Henry-Thommes 319), even though the story takes place over several decades. Each progressive section of the novel is about half as long as the preceding one, which

Schwalm suggests to be imitating "die veränderte Wahrnehmung von Zeit in Vans Leben: wie für Van und Ada im Alter die Zeit schneller zu 'fließen' scheint, so imitiert die Textstruktur diesen 'speeding-up-Effekt'" (Schwalm 163). Time for Ada and Van has less to do with objective increments than with the rhythm of their relationship. As Van suggests in his work, the concept of direction ought to be subsumed to the 'texture' of time: memory and imagination thus have primacy over "processes of mechanical reproduction of the past" (Henry-Thommes 343; cf. Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 539).

The blurring of the boundaries between worlds, between figures, and between notions of time underlies the richness of references and allusions in Ada.[181] *Ada*'s 'realism' is one that involves dates and details, but also anachronisms, anatopisms, and inventions. In other words, knowledge of the real world is constantly undermined. Place names like 'Canady', citations of works like Tchaikowsky's opera *Onegin and Olga* (in the real world, *Eugene Onegin*), or the false quotation of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina that begins Nabokov's novel are "slight puckers" in real-world literature, history, geography and art (Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada* 307; see also 288). Many scholars have noted that Nabokov's later novels became increasingly self-reflexive, and the worlds he created increasingly complex (Schwalm 7; see also Hof 183). *Ada* evidences both claims, even to the point of 'implosion': unlike the tension created by history and its alternative version in alternate history, the relationship between worlds in Nabokov's novel leads to the conclusion that there is an intrinsic lack of meaning. Or, more accurately, we might say that the *surplus* of meaning, the complexity and comprehensiveness of the self-referential networking, results in an inability to pin down any meaning. *Ada* is overwhelming because of the amount of meaning packed into it. The foundation of alternate history is a specific form of knowledge of the real world; the foundation of *Ada* is effectively a "nulliverse" resulting from too much meaning (Albright 81).

Closely related as either a result of or a cause for *Ada*'s semantic complexity, is the curious density of references, collage of languages, and number of polyvalent poetic devices employed. Consider the following passage:

> His [Demon's] heart missed a beat and never regretted the lovely loss, as she ran, flushed and flustered, in a pink dress into the orchard, earning a claque third of the sitting ovation that greeted the instant dispersal of the imbecile but colorful transfigurants from Lyaska – or Iveria. Her meeting with Baron O., who strolled out of a side alley, all spurs and green tails, somehow eluded Demon's consciousness, so struck was he by the wonder of that brief abyss of absolute reality between two bogus fulgurations of fabricated life. Without waiting for the end of the scene, he hurried out of the theater into the crisp crystal night, the snow-

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181 Brian Boyd has begun a project online with the goal of thoroughly annotating *Ada*: Brian Boyd. *Ada Online*. Web. 17 Feb. 2011. http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz/.

flakes star-spangling his top hat as he returned to his house in the next block to arrange a magnificent supper. By the time he went to fetch his mistress in his jingling sleigh, the last-act ballet of Caucasian generals and metamorphosed Cinderellas had come to a sudden close, and Baron d'O., now in black tails and white gloves, was kneeling in the middle of an empty state, holding the glass slipper that his fickle lady had left him when eluding his belated advances. The claqueurs were getting tired and looking at their watches when Marina in a black cloak slipped into Demon's arms and swan-sleigh. (I-2)

Whether or not we agree with Daniel Albright, who argues that the syntax of the language in *Ada* emphasizes the futility of representation (58), the result of such dense *poesie* and rampant referencing – in some ways reminiscent of the work of James Joyce – is a destabilization of the referential semantics of the text. Above all this poetic language, this linguistic ambiguity, has led many scholars to focus on the role of the reader in Nabokov's work. The novel is ultimately similar to the code in Ada's and Van's love letters, which even they in the end cannot decipher (cf. Schwalm 170; cf. Alexandrov 7).[182] Schwalm even goes so far as to propose that *Ada*, in its deliberate avoidance of meaning, reveals affinities to the theory of Deconstruction (8). At the very least, the reader is invited to limitless interpretation, and the cognitive aspect of reading is foregrounded – even in the mere process of comprehending the plot (Hof 9–10).

The kind of activity expected from the reader of *Ada* is more like that of historiographic metafiction than alternate history: an awareness of historicity is, to put it in Alkon's words, "blunt[ed]" (83), and the narrative strategies and linguistic surface of the text make it impossible to focus on notions of causality, consequence, or come to terms with the variance between two versions of history. Similar to *Ada*, in novels like Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* or Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*, the 'diachrony' of the worlds of alternate history dissolves into 'synchrony' (Spedo 114); or even 'monochrony'. In *Terra Nostra*, even the figures themselves shift identities and are to be seen as an entourage of archetypes, not

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182 Games in a more literal sense are a critical aspect of Nabokov's aesthetic in general; see Donald B. Johnson. *Worlds in Regression*. Johnson has argued that 'word' reflects 'world' in Nabokov's works. The rearrangement of words in anagrams are at the same time ways of arranging and rearranging a fictional universe (47). In *Ada*, thematically linked instances of play are arranged around the game of scrabble (chapters I-36, II-5). The scrabble set is a present from Baron Klim Avidov, who never appears in the novel. As Johnson notes, 'Baron Klim Avidov' is a perfect anagram of 'Vladimir Nabokov': "Nabokov sees his art as a form of play, a game, and has argued that in works of art, as in chess problems, the contest is not between the characters, but between the author and the world. Nabokov's writings demand from the reader close attention and active participation." (59).

individual characters.[183] It is thus impossible to 'separate' one strand of reality from another. In blurring the boundaries between history and fiction, such works push the reader away from the normalized narrative of the real past rather than toward it.

Whereas many modernist texts initiate a new process of creating meaning, or engage readers in a new way, by resisting a familiar process of reception, and "postmodern narrative deepens the reader's involvement with the text by proposing new reading strategies, or by drawing attention to the construction of meaning" (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 17), alternate histories represent a different trend entirely. "Classical, 'pure' [...] does not indulge in" any of the strategies pursued by postmodern works: 'reading for plot' in alternate history is relatively easy, and most manifestations of alternate history remain simple at the level of language. Like Dan Brown's recent *Da Vinci Code* novels or many other action-based dramas, most alternate histories are *meant to be understood*. Controlled suspense and fulfilment of expectations make these works literary 'roller coasters'. Eco cites Fleming's novels as being of a similar type:

> Si potrebbe paragonare un romanzo di Fleming, a una partita di calcio, di cui è noto in partenza l'ambiente, il numero e la personalità dei giocatori, le regole del gioco, il fatto che comunque tutto si svolgerà entro l'area del prato verde; senonché in una partita di calcio rimane ignota sino alla fine l'informazione ultima: Chi vincerà? Più esatte sarebbe invece paragonare questi libri a una partita di pallacanestro giocata dagli Harlem Gobetrotters [sic] contro una piccola squadra di provincia. Di costoro si già con assoluta sicurezza che vinceranno e in base a quali regole: Il piacere consisterà allora nel vedere con quali trovate virtuosistiche i Globetrotters protrarranno il momento finale, con quali ingegnose deviazioni riconfermeranno comunque la previsione ultima, con quali jongleries celebra dunque in misura esemplare quell'elemento di gioco scontato e di ridondanza assoluta che

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183 This is one aspect of many, including a shifting narrative voice and a non-chronological account of over 20,000 years, that contribute to the 'Baroque' texture of Fuentes's work and make it impossible to locate and define any linear history. *Terra Nostra* is effectively a mosaic of characters, figures, historical events as well as literary and historical allusions. El Señor, for example, appears to be a composite figure of 16th- and 17th-century Spanish monarchs; Isabel is also a kind of 'fusion' figure, showing characteristics of Elizabeth and Mary Tudor, Isabel de Osorio and Elizabeth of Valois. Groupings within the novel include: the 'intellectuals' Julián, Toribio and Ludovico; the 'rebels' Nazar, Clemente, Agrippa, and the pilgrim; and the 'authors' Teodoro, el Cronista, and Polo Febo. Among the scholars that have investigated archetypification and constellations of figures in *Terra Nostra* are Michael Abeyta (*Fuentes, Terra nostra, and the Reconfiguration of Latin American Culture*), Robert González Eche ("*Terra Nostra*: Theory and Practice"), Kristine Ibsen (*Author, Text and Reader in the Novels of Carlos Fuentes*), Stephan Leopold (*Der Roman als Verschiebung. Studien zu Mythos, Intertextualität und Narratologie in "Terra nostra" von Carlos Fuentes*), and Ingrid Simson ("Realität und Fiktion in Terra nostra von Carlos Fuentes").

è tipico delle macchine evasive funzionanti nell'ambito delle comunicazioni di massa. (*Il superuomo di massa* 167–68)[184]

Most alternate histories, like Fleming's novels, are characterized by over-explication: the appeal of this kind of text seems to be a virtuosity of plot and the sense that the reader always 'wins'. Paradigmatic in this sense (also in terms of its use of both kinds of paratext) is Robert Harris's alternate-history and crime-novel thriller, *Fatherland*.[185]

The lack of linguistic ambiguity in most alternate histories helps account for their status as pop literature. Indeed 'just for fun' would not be an inaccurate description of works like Kevin Anderson's *War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches*, R.A. Lafferty's "Interurban Queen" or Michael Resnick's *Alternate Warriors*. Some, like Andrew Motion's *Interrupted Lives*, seem uneasy with this designation and pose as 'high literature'. In the introduction to the volume of short entries about the lives and deaths of canonical writers, Motion speaks of his 2003 book on John Keats, *The Invention of Dr. Cake:* "My purpose was not simply to fulfil and enjoy a literary fantasy ("what if …?"), but to shed light from a surprising angle onto Keat's actual life and work […]" (Motion and Morton 8). Despite citing Niall Ferguson's *Virtual History* and claiming to transcend a kind of dilettante interaction with the works of Keats, Shelley, and others, Motion's volume, including a contribution by Richard Holmes "Shelley Undrowned", is in fact no more 'high art' than *Alternate Warriors*. The only difference is the subject matter.

Like the discussion on the kind of activity required by the reader of alternate history, the preceding account of interpretive openness in literary works and alternate history's positioning on this spectrum has provided valuable realizations for alternate history and FNs while at the same time denying a means of comparing the two:

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184 "We might compare a novel by Fleming to a game of football in which we know beforehand the place, the numbers and personalities of the players, the rules of the game, and the fact that everything will take place within the area of the great pitch – except that in a game of football we do not know until the very end who will win. It would be more accurate to compare a novel by Fleming to a game of basketball played by the Harlem Globetrotters against a local team: We know with absolute confidence that the Globetrotters will win: the pleasure lies in watching the trained virtuosity with which they defer the final moment, with what ingenious deviations they reconfirm the foregone conclusion, with what trickeries they make rings round their opponents. The novels of Fleming exploit in exemplary measure that element of foregone play which is typical of the escape machine geared for the entertainment of the masses." (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 15–16).
185 As Alkon puts it, *Fatherland* is "no exercise in postmodern amnesia, chronological confusion, or mere imitation of dead styles to provide a nostalgic experience of pseudohistory" (75).

11. *Alternate histories tend to pursue strategies of understandability. They are relatively 'closed' at the level of linguistic ambiguity.*

Thus not only are alternate histories not FNs, but even on a metaphoric level they are more different from FNs than many other kinds of past narrative. This statement is not merely a qualitative distinction between 'high' and 'low' literature. Instead, it is a pragmatic proposal for differentiating between the varying demands of literary texts.[186]

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186 Nedelkovich is particularly interested in such questions of literary quality in alternate history, seeking an axiological approach of "combining literary criticism with the theory of literature" (4). He quite unabashedly claims that science fiction, the genre in which he categorizes alternate history, "is truly without any serious literary merit, truly subliterature [sic]" (5).

3 Case Studies

3.1 Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*

3.1.1 The Alternate History

Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* is not only one of the earliest modern manifestations of alternate history, but also one that is cited almost universally by secondary literature. The claim that alternate history holds a firm position in popular culture could be supported in this case even merely by virtue of the popular status of the author in question: Dick is not only highly prolific with works like *Do Androids Dream of Sheep?*, along with 34 novels and 112 short stories published,[187] but he also achieved an impressive fan base. There have been numerous credited adaptations of his work for film and theatre; the Wikipedia article 'Philip K. Dick' compiles an extensive list of films to which his work has been compared (ex. *The Matrix, The Truman Show* and *Inception*) and upon which his work is based (ex. *The Adjustment Bureau*), suggesting that his influence may be traced even further. Since 2005, the 'Philip K. Dick Trust' has presented the *Philip K. Dick Award* each year to the best original science-fiction paperbacks (http://www.philipkdickaward.org/), thus creating a kind of 'brand' of critical acclaim; in 2010, widow Anne K. Dick published her memoirs *The Search for Philip K. Dick*, which received attention in the *New York Times* (Timberg, "Philip K. Dick's Masterpiece Years"; Dick A., "The Search for Philip K. Dick"); and lastly, the vast number of personal websites and fan pages dedicated to Philip K. Dick is not to be overlooked. The 'official' website www.philipkdick.com offers not only biographies, bibliographies, and news on the author, but also a fan page (www.philipdickfans.com).

The world of literary scholarship on the works of Philip K. Dick suffers somewhat from Dick's status as an 'author at large'. It seems to be considered a scholarly virtue to have known Dick,[188] and his works are often read closely together with what the author himself has said about them. Such 'fan-scholarship' is characterized by attempts to pay tribute to a legend and situate him as a 'serious' author. Many thematic sketches of *The Man in the High Castle* exist already, mostly pursuing the devices suggested by Dick himself: historicity, authenticity, and the teachings of the *I-Ching* (which is not only used by several figures in the novel,

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187 A complete list can be found in Marshall B. Tymn: "Philip K. Dick: A Bibliography".

188 As Patricia S. Warrick implies in the forward to her 1987 volume *Mind in Motion. The Fiction of Philip K. Dick*.

but was also used by Dick to write the novel) (Canaan 111; Congdon 17; Hayles 59; Hellekson 64; Spedo 125; Warrick, "The Encounter of Taoism and Fascism" 28).

At the risk of voicing what would seem to be blasphemy to 'Dickheads', my purpose here is to investigate *The Man in the High Castle* as an alternate history, not to legitimize claims that Dick's novel is a "postmodern masterpiece" (Congdon 14). It is indeed for many a masterpiece, but to situate it in the same category as, for example, the work of Pynchon[189] is misleading. Not because *The Man in the High Castle* is qualitatively better or worse than *Gravity's Rainbow*, but because 1) it ultimately features a much different concept of history, and 2) it makes different demands on the reader – both as a result of the fact that the novel is linguistically quite conservative and that the keys to exploring the novel are given in the novel itself.[190] As Christopher Palmer rightly notes, "it is important to recognize that a text can reflect on a condition of society and consciousness [...] without necessarily being postmodernist in style" (3). *The Man in the High Castle* has been chosen here as the first case study rather because it is a 'textbook' example of the concepts discussed in the first section of this study: it is perhaps the most paradigmatic of alternate histories in terms of its simplified view of history, use of a point of divergence, and the paradox of necessity/determinism versus contingency/free will that is inherent to the tracing of the consequences of the point of divergence.

3.1.2 Piecing It All Together: the Exposition

In the world of Dick's novel, Franklin D. Roosevelt has been assassinated and the United States is governed by a weaker presidency that is unable to overcome the Great Depression. As a result, the country maintains its isolationist policy and does not come to the aid of the allies in World War II, nor can it successfully defend its own borders. World War II draws on until 1948, and by the end, Japan rules not only Asia, but also the Western United States ('The Pacific States of America'); Germany rules Europe, Africa, and the Eastern United States. The rest of the US is known as the "Rocky Mountain Buffer", a neutral zone between the territories of the German Axis and the Japanese Axis.

The novel's exposition takes on a much more sophisticated form than merely narrating this version of history. Not even the point of divergence, Giuseppe Zangara's successful assassination of FDR in 1933, is narrated directly at the begin-

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189 As does John L. Simons, "The Power of Small Things in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*", 261–262.
190 Cf. W.J. Collins, *Paths Not Taken* 85: *The Man in the High Castle* offers a quite concrete "philosophical background".

ning of the novel. The point of attack is 1962, upon the imminent death of Führer Martin Bormann, and the subsequent power struggle between Joseph Goebbels, Reinhard Heydrich, and Hermann Göring for the chancellery of Germany. Information about the fictional world (and how it came to be that way) is interwoven with a presentation of the main characters and an explanation of why the power struggle in Germany – again, the present concern – is so critical.[191]

Already apparent in the first several pages is the conservative conceptualization of history upon which *The Man in the High Castle's* counterfactual premise, and to which many of the novel's characters subscribe. The assumption that one man (in this case FDR) can irrevocably change the course of history owes much to the Great Man theory of the nineteenth century, and perhaps more generally to a popular fondness for heroes, genius, and the significance of the individual. Furthermore, there is little interest here in the criticisms of counterfactual history cited above, nor is there any heed of historiographical perspectives developed in the past several decades: history in Dick's novel is, as in alternate histories in general, one-dimensional. The course of events and consequence are prime, no matter what paradoxes result from postulating one moment of contingency followed by strict causality.

The otherness of the fictional world is made clear almost immediately through Bob Childan's perspective: attentive readers will pick up on the unfamiliarity of the world of the novel beginning with the first sentence, in which the 'Rocky Mountain States' are mentioned. Childan's subservient behaviour towards Mr. Tagomi, a Japanese customer of his store 'American Artistic Handicrafts Inc.' immediately provides a further clue, as does, for example, his bitter remembrance of "the former better world" (10), subsequent references to the 'P.S.A.' and the 'standard of Living for Unfortunate Areas Planning Commission of Inquiry' as well as Childan's excitement at the possibility of meeting a young Japanese couple, the Kasouras, on a social basis. At the latest, at the end of this opening section, it is clear that the fictional 1962 is one that is different from the 1962 of the reader's history.

As to how it came to be that way, we are offered information about the fictional past in the following section – this time from Frank Frink's perspective and through his personal experiences in relation to the changing political situation. Here, we learn that Frank had been drafted into the US Army "right after the collapse of Russia. After the Japs had taken Hawaii he had been sent to the West Coast. When the war ended, there he was, on the Japanese side of the settlement

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191 Collins refers to both the "acceptance of the altered present as the governing reality" and "the embedding of the information necessary to decode its altered origin as naturally as possible in the text" as "media uchronia" (*Paths Not Taken* 40; 52; 104).

line [...] In 1947, on Capitulation Day, he had more or less gone berserk." (15) In this manner, through Frank's reflections on his own despondency and difficult situation, we are given significant clues to the historical narrative. The reader is able to piece together the context for the beginning of the novel (cf. McKnight 65). Likewise, we learn more about the ambitions of the World-War-II victors and their more recent endeavors:

> The Pacific had done nothing towards colonization of the planets. It was involved – bogged down, rather – in South America. While the Germans were busy bustling enormous robot construction systems across space, the Japs were still burning off the jungles in the interior of Brazil, erecting eight-floor clay apartment houses for ex-headhunters. By the time the Japs got their first spaceship off the ground the Germans would have the entire solar system sewed up tight. Back in the quaint old history-book days, the Germans had missed out while the rest of Europe put the final touches on their colonial empires. However, Frink reflected, they were not going to be last this time; they had learned. (16–17)

Here 'the quaint old history book days' is voiced figuratively to refer to something like Childan's "the former, better world", but from the reader's perspective this might very well be taken literally (= from our history, our history books). Significantly, the reference to a *previous*, different world hints at a decisive moment, even if it remains only implicit. As to what exactly is so terrible about Frink's present, we are given unambiguous information:

> And then he thought about Africa, and the Nazi-experiment there [...]

> Christ on the crapper, he thought. For the ghosts of dead tribes. Wiped out to make a land of – what? Who knew? Maybe even the master architects in Berlin did not know. Bunch of automatons, building and toiling away. Building? Grinding down. Ogres out of a palaeontology exhibit, at their task of making a cup from an enemy's skull, the whole family industriously scooping out the contents – the raw brains – first, to eat. Then useful utensils of men's leg bones. Thrifty, to think not only of eating the people you did not like, but eating them out of their own skull. The first technicians! Prehistoric man in a sterile white lab coat in some Berlin university lab, experimenting with uses to which other people's skull, skin, ears, fat could be put. Ja, Herr Doktor. A new use for the big toe; see, one can adapt the joint for a quick-acting cigarette lighter mechanism. Now, if only Herr Krupp can produce it in quantity [...]

> It horrified him, this thought: The ancient gigantic cannibal near-man flourishing now, ruling the world once more. We spent a million years escaping him, Frink thought, and now he's back. And not merely as the adversary ... but as the master. (17–18)

By this point at the latest, it is clear that a distinction is made between the Germans and Japanese. Like Childan, Frink resents living under Japanese rule. But especially as a Jew, he is certain that he would meet a much worse fate in

the hands of the Germans. The morosely sarcastic tone of Frink's reflections on "the Nazi-experiment" is contrasted by the statement immediately following, poignant in its simplicity: "It horrified him." The present threat, then, a way in which an already horrific world could be worse, has been identified: German domination as opposed to the existing Japanese-German entente.

The following section (21–26), from the perspective of Mr. Tagomi, is more focused on the political tensions of this fictional present. For Mr. Tagomi specifically this involves preparations for the arrival of a mysterious Mr. Baynes; as far as the historical narrative is concerned, we learn that the current Reichs Chancellor, Martin Bormann, is ill, and that a successor is to be chosen – but this again, only as part of Mr. Tagomi's train of thought, strategizing for his first conversation with Mr. Baynes:

> Essential to avoid politics. For he did not know Mr. Baynes's views on leading issues of the day. Yet they might arise. Mr. Baynes, being Swedish, would be a neutral. Yet he had chosen Lufthansa rather than S.A.S. A cautious ploy … Mr. Baynes, sir, they say Herr Bormann is quite ill. That a new Reichs Chancellor will be chosen by the Partei this autumn. Rumour only? So much secrecy, alas, between Pacific and Reich. (22)

Here, as with the forays into the perspectives of Frank Frink and Childan, we learn not only about Mr. Tagomi's present concerns, but also much about why there is reason in general to be concerned: there is to be a change of leadership in the German Reich.

Before the introduction of the next main character, the narrative shifts once again to the perspective of Childan, begrudgingly making his way towards the Nippon Times Building to meet with his patron, Mr. Tagomi (26–29). In addition to serving as a kind of bridge between two main characters at the level of the story, Childan's meeting with Tagomi affords an opportunity for Childan's reflections on the Germans and the Japanese:

> One had to blame the Germans for the situation. Tendency to bite off more than they could chew. After all, they had barely managed to win the war, and at once they had gone off to conquer the solar system, while at home they had passed edicts which … well, at least in idea was good. And after all, they had been successful with the Jews and Gypsies and Bible Students. And the Slavs had been rolled back two thousand years' worth, to their heartland in Asia. Out of Europe entirely, to everyone's relief. Back to riding yaks and hunting with bow and arrow [...]

> But Africa. They had simply let their enthusiasm get the better of them there, and you had to admire that, although more thoughtful advice would have cautioned them to perhaps let it wait a bit until, for instance, Project Farmland had been completed. Now *there* the Nazis had shown genius; the artist in them had truly emerged. The Mediterranean Sea bottled up, drained, made into tillable farmland, through the use of atomic power – what daring! [...]

> And anyhow, the flights to Mars had distracted world attention from the difficulty in Africa. So it all came back to what he had told his fellow store owners; what the Nazis have which we lack is – nobility [...] Now the Japanese on the other hand. I know them pretty well; I do business with them, after all, day in and day out. They are – let's face it – Orientals. Yellow people. We whites have to bow to them because they hold the power. But we watch Germany; we see what can be done where whites have conquered, and it's quite different. (29–30)

This is a consideration of essentially the same horrors recounted previously from Frank Frink's point of view, but this time filtered through the disgusting bigotry of Childan, who even seems to admire and identify himself with the Germans. But in the worst of ways, for their boldness and limitless "genius": it is no accident that Childan favors as candidate for Reichs Chancellor Seyss-Inquart ("the most likely to carry out bold programmes" [118]), a former Austrian Nazi who is said to be "possibly closest in temperament to the original Führer" and the one responsible for the holocaust of Africa (96). His later fascination with and emulation of his Japanese hosts (the Kasouras),[192] is evidence for another of Childan's less sympathetic qualities: he is mercenary. The fact that Childan is the keeper of the 'authentic' American art created by Edfrank Custom Jewellry is all the more problematic.

Because of the obviousness of Childan's weaknesses of character, his reflections seem to confirm Frank Frink's account of the Germans as representing *evil in extremis* in their ruthless ambition – and here plausibility seems to take a back seat – draining entire seas, exploring Mars, committing multiple acts of genocide. As Rosenfeld notes, despite a rather intricate story, *The Man in the High Castle* is "deceptively simple" in its picture of Nazism (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 106). Here, as in the rest of the novel, Nazi Germany is detached from history, and no understanding in historical terms is offered. Germany quite simplistically represents evil, totalitarianism, and death (Congdon 27). The fact that no German character is privileged in the narrative with a point of view is significant. (There is only one exception: Freiherr Hugo Reiss, the Reichs Consul in San Francisco, is allotted one chapter). Who the 'bad guys' are, is crystal clear, and all of the moral dilemmas in the novel may be understood firmly within this frame.

The reason for the general anxiety about a change of leadership in Germany is made even more clear by the following section (34–42): Juliana Frink, Frank Frink's estranged wife, converses with truck drivers in Canon City (in the Rocky Mountain States, the buffer zone between the Japanese and German territories)

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192 McKnight, Spedo, and Collins note that Childan emulates the Japanese linguistically, but resents them at the same time. See McKnight 79; Spedo 132–33; W.J. Collins, *Paths Not Taken* 42.

and reflects on the state of German politics. She sees the German Empire as a direct product of Hitler's sickness and wickedness:

> Their trouble, she decided, is with sex; they did something foul with it back in the 'thirties, and it has gotten worse. Hitler started with his – what was she? His sister? Aunt? Niece? And his family was inbred already; his mother and father were cousins. They're all committing incest, going back to the original sin of lusting for their own mothers. That's why they, those elite S.S. Fairies, have that angelic simper, that blonde babylike innocence; they're saving themselves for Mama. Or for each other [...]
>
> Old Adolf, supposed to be in a sanatorium somewhere, living out his life of senile paresis. Syphilis of the brain, dating back to his poor days as a bum in Vienna ... long black coat, dirty underwear, flophouses.
>
> Obviously, it was God's sardonic vengeance, right out of some silent movie. That awful man struck down by an internal filth, the historic plague for man's wickedness.
>
> And the horrible part was that the present-day German Empire was a product of that brain. First a political party, then a nation, then half the world. And the Nazis themselves had diagnosed it, identified it [...] The entire world knew it, and yet the Leader's gabble was still sacred, still Holy Writ. The views had infected a civilization by now, and, like evil spores, the blind blond Nazi queens were swishing out from Earth to the other planets, spreading the contamination.
>
> What you get for incest: Madness, blindness, death. (40–41)

Juliana's disgusted musings on the sexuality of the Germans gives way to an extended metaphor that reveals a simple, but popular, notion of history: Hitler, inbred and sickly, has 'infected' all of Germany. According to Juliana, one man was responsible for the horrors committed by the German Empire. And Hitler himself was, it seems, less a product of his times than of one, twisted genealogical tree: at the root of his evil is his incestuous origin. Juliana, a Judo-instructor (the irony here is noted: Judo is a Japanese combat sport), with her strong, rather biblical sense of justice, sees the whole of twentieth-century German history as crime and punishment: madness, blindness, death are what you get for incest. Juliana's emphasis on the seemingly uncontrollable spreading of "evil spores", to take up the metaphor of infectious disease suggested here, ultimately expresses something similar to Frank's fear and awe of (and Childan's admiration of) Germany's ambition and ruthlessness.

Focusing on Hitler as the source for Germany's evil, as the single man who set events into motion by infecting an entire nation with his wickedness, underlines once again the importance of the imminent change of Reichs Chancellor in Germany: if one man has been able to cause decades of evil, then in the world of

The Man in the High Castle, it is also possible for one man to change the course of events for the better. The last section of the exposition (42–49) thus introduces one last figure who seems to have a direct influence on the larger course of events: Rudolf Wegener, a.k.a. Swedish businessman Mr. Baynes, a German double-agent traveling to San Francisco to warn the Japanese leadership of "Operation Löwenzahn", a nuclear attack planned by Goebbels's faction. Wegener contemplates less what has happened and what is happening than what has motivated the Germans and more importantly, what role he has to play:

> It [insanity] is something they [the Germans] do, something they are. It is their unconsciousness. Their lack of knowledge about others. They're not being aware of what they do to others, the destruction they have caused and are causing. No, he thought. That isn't it. I don't know; I sense it, I intuit it. But – they are purposefully cruel … is that it? No, God, he thought. I can't find it, make it clear. Do they ignore parts of reality? Yes. But it is more. It is their plans. Yes, their plans. The conquering of the planets. Something frenzied and demented, as was their conquering of Africa, and before that, Europe and Asia.

> Their view; it is cosmic. Not a man here, a child there, but an abstraction: Race, land, *Volk. Land. Blut. Ehre*. Not of honourable men but of *Ehre* itself, honour; the abstract is real, the actual is invisible to them. *Die Güte*, but not good men, this good man. It is their sense of space and time. They see through the here, the now, into the vast black deep beyond, the unchanging. And that is fatal to life …

> They want to be the agents, not the victims, of history. They identify with God's power and believe they are godlike. That is their basic madness. They are overcome by some archetype; their egos have expanded psychotically so that they cannot tell where they begin and the godhead leaves off. It is not hubris, not pride; it is the inflation of the ego to its ultimate – confusion between him who worships and that which is worshipped. Man has not eaten God; God has eaten man.

> What they do not comprehend is man's helplessness. I am weak, small, of no consequence to the universe […] (45–46).

Amid the Jungian philosophy, Wegener's thoughts outline the central dilemma of the novel: finding a *sane* balance between free will and determinism. The belief in the power and significance of the individual that is, for example, celebrated in Morselli's *Contra-passato prossimo*, has been taken to a psychotic extreme in the German Empire – to the point at which it has resulted in a grotesque, monolithic ambition ("It is their plans. Yes, their plans.") that neglects the individual. And, as is also suggested at the end of the novel, during Juliana's encounter with Hawthorne Abendsen, a neglect of reality altogether ("the abstract is real, the actual is invisible to them".)

On the other hand, Wegener's humble, deterministic statement "I am weak, small, of no consequence to the universe" is apparently not the solution. He, like each of the other main characters introduced in the first three chapters, bemoans his insignificance and doubts his ability to change the course of events, but is paradoxically still prone to action – which requires a firm belief that his actions can make a greater difference. In other words, individual action requires in this case a belief in the very same reasoning that Juliana uses to explain the course of history after Hitler – and indeed the same reasoning that the reader must accept in order to take the alternative version of history presented in *The Man in the High Castle* seriously. The suggestion inherent to the novel is that one, specific point in history is contingent – in this case, Zangara's shot on FDR in 1933, a single bullet in a single instant. But everything that follows is governed by the principle of necessity: it *has* to be different from our history.

Thus, the stage is set in this cohesive, efficient exposition: although the first three chapters of *The Man in the High Castle* is, like the remainder of the novel, not one, linear narrative, but rather a collage of narrative fragments, lengthy reflections on what happened, and what could happen from various perspectives put the reader in the privileged position of knowing concretely what is happening – again, different from a work like *Gravity's Rainbow*. The reader must piece together the information that has been conveyed about fictional history, but crucially, *it is all there*. Not only are all of the main characters introduced and the alternateness of the fictional world made clear, but also the central dilemma faced by each of the main characters as well as the paradoxical notion of causality that the novel as an alternate history proposes. The rest of the narrative revolves around the interpretation of what has happened and what is happening as manifest in the choices of the main focalizers – Childan, Frank Frink, Juliana Frink, Mr. Tagomi, and Mr. Baynes – who are sometimes unaware of what is at stake, or what consequences the triumph or defeat of their free will could have.

3.1.3 The Alternate History within the Alternate History

The alternate history within the alternate history, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, is not merely a device for conveying information, nor is it merely an isolated joke or metafictional reflection of the kind of novel that Dick wrote – although it of course serves these purposes, too. In addition, it is a driving force in the plot and reveals much about the various attitudes towards free will and determinism in the novel. In other words, metafiction in this case is a means of developing the relationship between the dilemma faced by the main characters and the nature of the novel itself as an alternate history.

The Grasshopper Lies Heavy by Hawthorne Abendsen is not introduced by any of the main characters, but rather in one of the few chapters narrated from the perspective of a minor figure: Frank Frink's employer, Wyndam-Matson. Wyndam-Matson's mistress, Rita, gives a comprehensive account of the novel:

> Abendsen's theory is that Roosevelt would have been a terribly strong President. As strong as Lincoln. He showed in the year he was President, all those measures he introduced. The book is fiction. I mean, it's in novel form. Roosevelt isn't assassinated in Miami; he goes on and is reelected in 1936, so he's President until 1940, until during the war. Don't you see? He's still President when Germany attacks England and France and Poland. And he sees all that. He makes America strong. Garner was a really awful President. A lot of what happened was his fault. And then in 1940, instead of Bricker, a Democrat would have been elected [...] His theory is that instead of an Isolationist like Bricker, in 1940 after Roosevelt, Rexford Tugwell would have been President [...] And he would have been very active in continuing the Roosevelt anti-Nazi policies. So Germany would have been afraid to come to Japan's help in 1941. They would not have honoured their treaty. Do you see? [...] And so Germany and Japan would have lost the war! (68)

We furthermore learn from the enthusiastic Rita that, in Abendsen's novel, the Axis powers are defeated, but the British Empire does not collapse. Instead, the British Empire becomes more imperialistic. After defeating Mao Zedong's communist China, the US builds strong relations to Chiang Kai-shek's regime. Tensions between the two emerging world powers, the British Empire and the US, rise, and ultimately the British Empire conquers the US.

It is difficult to see *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* as depicting merely a better version of our world.[193] And it hardly seems worthwhile to stop at that, implying that there are only two kinds of alternatives to our history: better or worse. The world of *The Man in the High Castle* is clearly dystopian, and the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is clearly different, but the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is neither aligned with the normalized narrative of the past in the real world, nor is it merely a better version of it. *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* represents a third possibility, a gesture of recognition that the outcomes of World War II were more complicated than merely win/lose. Like *The Man in the High Castle* does for the real world, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* provides an account of the world of the *The Man in the High Castle* 'in negative'. In this way, "truth points not from text to world but from text to text" (Rieder 215; cf. McKnight 102). The parallels between the two novels (even the titles are metrically equiva-

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[193] As claimed by Alkon and Collins: Alkon 73–74: "it depicts not exactly *our* world but rather a better version of it [...] Within his novel about a worse world than that of his readers, Dick [...] incorporates glimpses of one that is better: a utopia within a dystopia"; cf. W.J. Collins, *Paths Not Taken* 79.

lent) (McKnight 103) extend to the respective authors as well: Abendsen's use of the *I-Ching* to write *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is a direct reference to Dick himself, who again, is cited as having used the *I-Ching* to write *The Man in the High Castle*.

Perhaps most significant are the models of readership presented: in reading about how characters respond to an alternate history, the reader is prompted to reflect upon his or her own reception of Dick's novel as well as the political power of fiction. Wyndam-Matson's response to Rita's summary is clearly not the intended point of identification: he laughs at the supposed ridiculousness and simplicity of the (counter-)counterfactual premise and scoffs at Rita's naïve enthusiasm. His more sober vision is as follows: "Listen. Japan would have won anyhow. Even if there had been no Pearl Harbor [...] They would have taken them [the Philippines and Australia] anyhow; their fleet was superior. I know the Japanese fairly well, and it was their destiny to assume dominance in the Pacific." (69) The informed reader will of course know that history undermines Wyndham-Matson's self-satisfied claims.

Interestingly, Wyndham-Matson also defends Rommel: "Listen. *I met Rommel.* [...] What a man. What dignity and bearing. So I know what I'm talking about." (70) Again, the reader in his privileged position is aware that Wyndham-Matson does not know what he is talking about, and it is perhaps at this point that the Great Man theory of history as coupled with a deterministic outlook – the very concept that underlies the counterfactual premise of the novel – is paradoxically called into question. His argument 'it had to have happened this way because of Rommel' is based on the same assumption that underlies Juliana's musings about Hitler, the universal concern for who will become the next Reichs Chancellor after Bormann, and the counterfactual premise of the novel itself (the man upon whose shoulders the real outcomes of World War II seem to rest is FDR). Only Wyndam-Mason fails to allow for the empowerment inevitably implied by this assumption: if one man can have such an influence, than so could another.

However, not all of the characters in *The Man in the High Castle* are as unimaginative as Wyndham-Matson. Not only do several figures read *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, but many are intrigued (like Rita and the Kasouras). Even the Reichs Consul of San Francisco, Freiherr Hugo Reiss, is torn between being fascinated by Abendsen's work, even inspired by it, and angry at its influence:

> More pressure should have been put on the Japs [...] to suppress this damn book. In fact, it's obviously deliberate on their part. They could have arrested this – whatever his name is. Abendsen [...]

> What upset him was this. The *death* of Adolf Hitler, the defeat and destruction of Hitler, the Partei, and Germany itself [...] it was somehow grander, more in the old spirit than the actual world. The world of German hegemony. (126–127)

Entire passages are presented from *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* as Reiss tries in vain to read as much as possible without being interrupted by his duties. "Amazing, the power of fiction" (124), he thinks, and concludes that the book is indeed "dangerous" (127). The influence on himself is, however, something that he does not fully grasp. Even as his secretary rushes in with the message that Goebbels has gone on the radio to give a major speech – that is, at a critical moment after Bormann's death – Reiss is disinterested. He waits for the secretary to leave and then opens up Abendsen's book once more: fiction has become more important to him, more pressing, than the present reality. Reiss remains suspicious of Abendsen, even comparing him at first to Goebbels: "They know a million tricks, these novelists" (127); and finally, he struggles with an explanation for why he is so intrigued by Abendsen's work, although it is banned by the German Reich: "Maybe this Abendsen is a Jew. They're still at it, trying to poison us." (127) His sense of duty and allegiances to the German Reich ultimately get the better of him: Reiss becomes angry at "Abendstein" and turns his thoughts to punishing him: "If Abendstein should be found dangling from the ceiling some fine morning, it would be a sobering notice to anyone who might be influenced by this book. We would have had the last word. Written the postscript." (126–127) Disgusted at himself for the time that he has already invested in the novel and entertaining ways to stifle its influence, he turns back to matters of the present: "I have my routine duties, he decided. I don't have time for any of these harebrained adventures [...]" (128). Reiss's struggle between being inspired by Abendsen's work and resignation to the power of the German Reich has an unfortunate end for Wegener's (one-man!) efforts to warn the Japanese government about "Operation Löwenzahn". Reiss allows himself to be bullied at the crucial moment: after Wegener has been located, he receives both a visit from the Bavarian Kreuz vom Meere and a call from Goebbels himself, ordering him to cooperate in Wegener's arrest. Although full of resentment, Reiss is also full of fear and resignation, and so he writes out the necessary authorization for Wegener to be returned to Germany: "But what can I do? What can anybody do? [...] Better co-operate. No time to be on the wrong side of this man." (167)

Unbeknownst to Reiss, there is indeed a plot in motion to assassinate Hawthorn Abendsen. Here, Abendsen's significance reaches the same degree as FDR's as posited by *The Man in the High Castle*, a single man who could change the course of history. The parallels between Joe Cinadella, an assassin posing as a truck driver, and the Italian Giuseppe Zangara, FDR's almost-assassin in history

and assassin in *The Man in the High Castle* (there called 'Joe Zangara') are clear. Joe Cinadella presents his tattered copy of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* to Juliana, clearly disturbed by Abendsen's portrayal of Italy:

> He was staring down at the copy of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. 'And in this,' he went on, 'you know how it is that England wins? Beats the Axis?'
>
> She [Juliana] shook her head, feeling the growing tension of the man beside her. His chin now had begun to quiver; he licked his lips again and again, dug at his scalp ... when he spoke his voice was hoarse.
>
> 'He has Italy betray the Axis', said Joe.
>
> 'Oh,' she said.
>
> 'Italy goes over to the Allies. Joins the Anglo-Saxons and opens up what he calls the 'soft underbelly' of Europe. But that's natural for him to think that. We all know the cowardly Italian Army that ran every time they saw the British. Drinking vino. Happy-go-lucky, not made for fighting [...] How else could they lose except by Italy being a traitor?' His voice grated. [...] (83–84).

Significantly, Joe has an entirely different interpretation of the deciding factor in World War II than, for example, Rita, who seizes on American heroism. There is no mention of Roosevelt or the US joining the Allies until later, when he tells Juliana

> You know what he [Abendsen]'s done, don't you? He's taken the best about Nazism, the socialist part, the Todt Organization and the economic advances we got through Speer, and who's he giving credit to? The New Deal. [...] He's talking about a form of state syndicalism, the corporate state, like we developed under the Duce [...] (155).

Joe has crazily seized hold of the negative portrayal of Italy and feels that Mussolini and Italy have been slighted. His respect for "the Duce" ("You ever read what the Duce wrote? Inspired. Beautiful man. Beautiful writing" [158]), along with a fanatical belief in action ("What is wanted is the *deed*. Theory derives from action. What our corporate state demands from us is comprehension of the social forces – of history"[158]) is perhaps what supports his respect for the Nazis in principle: Joe has fond memories of his work on the East Coast, in the German-ruled United State of America ('We all lived out there in the woods, in Upper State New York, like brothers. Sang songs. Marched to work [...] Those were the best days of all [...]' [87]) and believes the Nazis to have "saved the world from Communism" (87). Furthermore, Joe makes clear in his admiration of Mussolini and his discussion about Churchill that he believes firmly in a similar Great Man theory

of history: the *Führerprinzip*, "a state is no better than a leader" (157), he explains. Even his obsession with and personal quest to kill Abendsen paradoxically solidifies the author's own significance.

Joe has the misfortune of joining forces with Juliana Frink in making his way towards the Abendsens' house in Cheyenne. Juliana, believing at first that they are merely on their way to meet the author as fans, cannot but laugh at Joe's fascist rants: when he shouts "I'm explaining the Fascist theory of action!", "she couldn't answer; it was too funny" (159). More free-spirited and easy-going than any of the other characters, Juliana does not subscribe to the belief that Abendsen is any kind of 'Great Man' for having written such a daring and controversial book: "He's just a man like the rest of us" (160), she explains to Joe. Juliana's own desire to meet Abendsen stems from sheer fandom. She is enthralled by *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, shooing Joe away as he attempts to converse with her during the drive. Here, too, significant passages of text are 'quoted' from Abendsen's novel. Quite different from, for example, Reiss, who focuses on the passages depicting the death of Hitler and the downfall of Germany, Juliana focuses on the utopic aspects of the novel: in the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, there is food and education to all of Asia; there are one-dollar televisions for all; World War II has ended racial discrimination; and an end to "age-old griefs" such as hunger, plague, war or ignorance is, as a result of all of the social and economic progress, in sight (see 154–156). But still not entirely naïve, she asks Joe how the novel ends: "Is there trouble?", she asks. Joe, again with his cynical outlook, responds that "human nature" is responsible for the demise of the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (156–157). Apparently not all too interested in the explanation, Juliana's thoughts turn gradually towards the present, trying to relax Joe and plan a visit to Abendsen's "high castle".

It is clear that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* has a profound effect on many of the characters: each reader takes something quite different from the novel – Rita inspired by American heroism, Reiss offended and indignant, but also somehow touched by, the portrayal of Hitler's and Germany's downfall, Joe insulted by the portrayal of Italy, Juliana inspired by the utopian aspects. Having gauged the readership of Abendsen's novel, we can recognize first, that much of the discussion revolving around *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* emphasizes the simplified version of history promoted by *The Man in the High Castle* as an alternate history. And second, the central tension between contingency/free will and necessity/determinism comes to light: almost all of the readers recognize or believe that one man (whether it be Roosevelt, Hitler, or Abendsen himself) can have great influence on the course of events; but most of them neglect to believe that their own actions can have any effect. Of the readers, only Joe and

Juliana avoid this kind of self-contradiction: Joe because he acts on this belief, and Juliana because she does not acknowledge it to begin with.

3.1.4 The Nature of Reality

As for what effect fiction can have, the relationship of the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* to the world of *The Man in the High Castle* is a key part of a broader discourse on the nature of reality. Crucially, all such discourse in Dick's novel exists thematically, at the level of story. The absence of an 'authorial' narrator does indeed, in some ways, 'authorize' the reader to sort through the intricate ontological constitution of the novel, but I would not go so far as to say that there is no consensus, or that the novel undermines concrete reality.[194] Spedo, for example, has noted the "polyphonic quality" of the novel – as we have seen just from a close analysis of the exposition, there are multiple focalizers – as well as the shifting identities and allegiances among characters (129–130). Kim Stanley Robinson, too, notes that the ensemble of characters are constantly weaving in and out of each other's lives and disguising themselves (*The Novels of Philip K. Dick* 82): for example, Frank as a Navy officer when he visits Childan's store, Rudolf Wegener as Mr. Baynes, Joe Cinadella as a truck driver, Juliana as Mrs. Cinadella. *The Man in the High Castle* does indeed feature a complicated story. But crucially, the various 'strands' and sub-plots are distinct and clear, as are ultimately the identities of the characters. Even the novel's use of free indirect discourse and multiple shifts in focalization, often cited as undermining reality or blocking an understanding of *what happens*, are marked clearly by chapters or breaks within chapters. In other words, the reader does receive a kind of assignment while reading: only the reader is privy to all sub-plots, and only the reader is in a position to evaluate their significance. But it is a matter of evaluating what is provided by the text itself, and there is almost always a concrete answer.

The only point in the novel at which Spedo's claim that "neither readers nor characters can ever know for sure what it really happening" (142) holds true is perhaps the ending – and not because of any linguistic tactic, but rather because the novel leaves us 'hanging'. Uncertainty does not function at the same level in *The Man in the High Castle* as in, for example, *Finnegans Wake*. A brief comparison of the endings makes the point indisputable. *The Man in the High Castle*:

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194 As both Spedo (145–146) and McKnight (73) suggest.

> A moment later, Juliana was retracing her steps back down the flagstone path, into the patches of light from the living room and then into the shadows beyond the lawn of the house, onto the black pavement.

> She walked on without looking again at the Abendsen house and, as she walked, searching up and down the streets for a cab or a car, moving and bright and living, to take her back to her motel. (248–249)

And *Finnegans Wake* (since the paragraph break closest to the end of the text is several hundred lines removed from the end, the starting point of this excerpt is 'artificial' in the sense of being determined by what is necessary here, not the text):

> I see them rising! Saving me from those therrble prongs! Two more. Onetoemoremens more. So. Avelaval. My leaves have drifted from me. All. But one clings still. I'll bear it on me. To mind me of. Lff! So soft this morning hours. Yes. Carry me along, taddy, like you done through the toy fair. If I seen him bearing down on me now under whitespread wings like he'd come from Arkangels, I sink I'd die down over his feet, humbly dumbly, only to washup. Yes, tid. There's where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousensthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved along the (Joyce 628).

These endings are 'open' on two fully different levels. Joyce's work, as a result of its poetic ambiguity at the level of language – compounding many of the same techniques of Nabokov's *Ada* with multilinguism and neologism – does not provide even the most careful reader a means of determining all the details of *what happens*, nor does it provide grammatical closure. Like both Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* and Nabokov's *Ada*, it is as if the fictional universe implodes, turns 'inwards' on itself in a form of self-reflexivity so extreme that there is no escape from the text. Dick's novel, on the other hand, features more of an 'extroverted' ending: Juliana walks off, not sure where life will lead her. In contrast to *Finnegans Wake,* the sense of an 'open' ending in *The Man in the High Castle* is firmly rooted in the story.

The Man in the High Castle and its discourse about the nature of reality relies upon this clarity of the story itself: *what happens* is of primary importance. What is at stake on the level of story – that is, to the various figures – is how reality is constructed, the question what constitutes 'real'? And here, there are many different solutions provided by the text in the context of discourse on the concepts 'historicity' and 'authenticity'. Wyndam-Matson introduces the concept of 'historicity', once again with his characteristic arrogance and failure to recognize its significance, except for his own business: 'historicity' is "when a thing has

history in it", and it is a quality that cannot be determined by the object itself; only the knowledge of its history grants it this value. Wyndam-Matson shows Rita two lighters, one of which was in FDR's pocket when he was assassinated, worth forty or fifty thousand dollars on the collectors' market: "One has historicity, a hell of lot of it. As much as any object ever had. And one has nothing. Can you feel it?" (66) He further makes his point that 'fake' and 'authentic' do not mean anything – it is all a matter of proof and documentation. This knowledge is, of course, the key to his business: the production and sale of 'fake' Americana. Wyndam-Matson's point is valid in that an object's value does not depend on its history: his statement "A Colt .44 is a Colt .44 [...] It has to do with bore and design, not when it was made" (66–67) rings of course most true when Mr. Tagomi uses his own Colt .44, actually a fake, a freebie from Childan, to kill the two S.D. who try to capture Mr. Baynes (192): history has not granted the Colt .44 value, but rather its role in the present situation.

It turns out that even Childan cannot successfully distinguish between forgeries and 'authentic' Americana (59), and his business is threatened by the realization that many of the objects in his store are fakes. Frank Frink and his business partner Ed McCarthy, however, seem to offer Childan a way out of his dilemma, and more than that, a solution to building an American cultural identity. Frank, nervous about the prospects for the success of Edfrank Jewellery, cannot have any way of knowing the implications of his original work, nor does he grasp the fact that each piece of jewellery seems to be a small champion of the power of art. As Paul Kasoura explains to Childan, these objects have "wu", an ethereal nothingness: "In other words, an entire new world is pointed to, by this. The name for it is neither art, for it has no form, nor religion. What is it? [...] We evidently lack the word for an object like this [...] It is authentically a new thing on the face of the world." (171) The significance of a work of art that is "authentically new", in other words, original, may be seen, too, in connection with the discourse on the power of fiction. Beyond the status of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* within the novel, Hellekson and McKnight both see the status of *The Man in the High Castle* as parallel to the artefacts. In other words, the value of the novel is not dependent on authenticity in the sense of verisimilitude for value (Hellekson 72; McKnight 104). This statement is, of course, not only true for alternate history, but fiction in general.

Even Childan ultimately realizes the value of the pieces of jewellery beyond the mere commercial interest: "*With these, there's no problem of authenticity.*" (145) When Paul makes an offer to invest in a business venture, the mass-production of these pieces of jewellery as good-luck charms, Childan's mind races, comprehending in some way the gravity of the situation and his responsibility as the keepsake of the jewellery: "Must decide, here. You may trot on one way

or the other, but not both. Moment of choice now." (175) Childan makes for once an admirable decision, claiming that he is "proud of this work" and that "the men who made this [...] are American proud artists (178). He rejects the offer and experiences, briefly, calmness: "Grace of God; it existed at the exact moment for me." (179)

Equally puzzled is Mr. Tagomi, inspecting the small, silver triangular pin that he had bought from Childan. "You little thing, you are empty", he thinks to himself, but also further scrutinizes, even puts the jewellery in his mouth, and wonders: "What is clue of truth that confronts me in this object?" (220). His reflections lead him to a similar conclusion that in the triangle is "[t]he high realm, aspect of yang: empyrean, ethereal. As befits work of art. Yes, that is artist's job: Takes mineral rock from dark silent earth, transforms it into shining light-reflecting form from sky." Mr. Tagomi demands truth from the object ("Now talk to me [...] I want to hear your voice issuing from the blinding clear white light [...]"), thinking to himself that he is not afraid: "I am ready to face without terror." (221)

Mr. Tagomi's contemplation of the object is interrupted by a 'slip' into another world entirely, and suddenly, *The Man in the High Castle'*s "elaborate set of frames" (McKnight 87) becomes more than metaphor. Bewildered, Mr. Tagomi makes his way through a noisy, chaotic, and unfriendly version of San Francisco. Which version exactly is not clear – whether this is meant to be the San Francisco of our world, of the world of Abendsen's novel, or of another world, but the Embarcadero Freeway looming in front of Tagomi "like a nightmare of [a] roller coaster suspended" (222) is a landmark of the real San Francisco of 1962. For Mr. Tagomi, it is a certainly worse version (Darko Suvin suggests that this momentary 'slip' into a different San Francisco parallels the archetype of the science-fiction hero's return to the real world as a vision of hell) (Robinson, *The Novels of Philip K. Dick* 88): there are no pedi-cabs, the city is dirty and smoky, a "tomb-world" (223), and his social status is reduced to being the subject of racial slurs. With resolve and a sense of purpose, Mr. Tagomi seems wanting himself back into the world of the P.S.A., San Francisco as he knows it. "I can't merely sit here. I have loads to lift [...] Jobs to be done." (225) He then catches a pedi-cab to the Nippon Times Building.

The puzzlement surrounding the nature of reality and the nature of authenticity is from the beginning of the *The Man in the High Castle* reflected in the multitude of focalizers and alternation among story lines. Reality is fittingly not depicted through one, unifying consciousness, but rather as a prism of multiple perspectives. But here, with Tagomi's slip "out of [his] world, [his] space and time" (224), subjectivity becomes more than merely perspective; it becomes reality itself: "our space and our time [are] creations of our own psyche" (225). In other words, Mr. Tagomi reveals that the metaphor of reality or the world as

a construct of the mind is literalized in Dick's novel. What is at stake is not the existence or stability of reality (even in Mr. Tagomi's bizarre experience, it is clear what is happening – the 'slip' into another world is recognizable as such), but rather our ability (and willingness) to construct one different from the present. Significantly, in *The Man in the High Castle*, there is not one world, but there are many possible worlds. And, as is proposed by Mr. Tagomi's 'slip', these worlds are accessible not by time-travel or any other science-fiction device, but rather through the power of the human mind.

3.1.5 Human Agency

Especially for Juliana, the central question becomes in the end, 'which reality will you choose'? Human choice and human agency thus take on a more significant role than any posited by the Great Man theory of history voiced by several characters and implicitly adopted for the counterfactual premise of Dick's novel. Morality, on the other hand, has much less of a role to play than many critics argue. I do not share the view that notions of morality in *The Man in the High Castle* are "unstable", as Spedo claims, or that Juliana Frink's murder of Joe Cinadella or Mr. Tagomi's shooting of the two S.D. officers constitute true moral dilemmas in this context, as does Rieder (Spedo 137; cf. Rieder 219). Like the novel's concept of history, the notion of morality presented is simple, almost melodramatic. To be sure, some characters are more sympathetic than others, and there are indeed characters who are personally torn by moral questions. But both Juliana's murdering of Joe Cinadella and Tagomi's shooting the S.D. Offers are more than justified by the greater framework suggested by the exposition: the German Reich and all of its ambitions, projects, and plots (from the Holocaust in Africa to persecution of the Jews to Operation Löwenzahn) are evil. In Juliana's case, she seems to feel more guilt for "shacking up with a Gestapo assassin" (204) than killing Joe, even giggling at him as he is bleeding out ("Oh God, – you're such a freak. I mean, you get words all wrong. The aorta's in your chest; you mean carotid. [206])"[195] The more conscious-stricken Mr. Tagomi is, like Wegener, aware of the evils involved in committing acts of violence and troubled by the necessity of such acts (Wegener tells General Tedeki, "We are all doomed to commit acts of cruelty or violence or evil." [194]) Mr. Tagomi is seemingly more troubled by this realization than Wegener. While Wegener relays the information about Operation Löwenzahn to General Tedeki, Mr. Tagomi thinks to himself "Evil [...] Is that the

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195 Cf. Palmer on Juliana's lack of remorse: *Philip K. Dick* 129.

paradox of our earthly situation? I cannot face this dilemma [...] That man should have to act in such moral ambiguity. There is no Way in this; all is muddled." Yet when the crucial moment comes, Mr. Tagomi does not hesitate to pull the trigger. While Mr. Tagomi struggles to come to terms with taking the lives of two men, it is, in the moral framework of the novel as a whole, an act of heroism, as is his resolve in his subsequent interaction with Freiherr Hugo Reiss (226–231).[196]

As an "external frame of reference" (194) for matters both moral and ontological, Mr. Tagomi seeks guidance, like several others (including Juliana and Frank Frink) from the classical Chinese book *I-Ching*. Whereas Mr. Tagomi consults the *I-Ching* to regain a sense of "equilibrium", Frank does so more often out of fear. He has little sense of responsibility or control of his life beyond "the oracle". Despondent and discouraged, he believes that it is "too small". He can "only read what's written, glance up and then lower [his] head and plod along where [he] left off as if [he] hadn't seen" (55). Likewise, Juliana thinks to herself, "We have no value .... We can live out our tiny lives. If we want to." (35) Beyond his knowledge, Frank does indeed have a great impact on the course of events and the fate of the world as a whole. Tagomi reveals a similar sense of humility in the presence of fate, reacting to the report on the candidates for Reich Chancellor: "We're blind moles. Creeping through the soil, feeling with our snouts." (97)

The prominence of the *I-Ching* in particular, but also for example Mr. Tagomi's constant references to "the Way" and interest in contemplating the natural order of things, suggests that in *The Man in the High Castle*, the context for discourse about human agency is provided by two, conflicting ideologies: fascism and Taoism (see Warrick, "The Encounter of Taoism and Fascism"). In Dick's novel, fascism stands for action and the greatness of the individual; Taoism stands for passivity and determinism. The two are most obviously pitted against each other in the political spectrum as the German Empire, plotting to attack, and the Japanese Empire, earnestly prioritizing diplomacy. As already implied, neither extreme seems to be desirable. In addition to its horrific political manifestation in the German Empire, fascism has been most clearly internalized by Joe Cinadella – one of the few characters who do not read the *I-Ching* at all. As for Taoism in its most negative sense, that is, a complete surrender to determinism and lack of interest in even contemplating the role of the individual, the most ready example is not Japanese and not a reader of the *I-Ching*: it is Wyndham-Matson who is ultimately dismissive, uninspired by *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* and not prompted to action of any kind in the present because of his deterministic view of the past: 'it all would have turned out the same way anyhow'.

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196 Palmer claims that, despite killing two men, Tagomi is Dick's most "humanly" character (224).

The attitudes of all five protagonists are more subtle, somewhere between the two poles. Frank, although he does ultimately have the courage to pursue his business venture with Ed McCarthy, does not seem to grasp completely his ability to influence the course of events. He wonders, "Can *anyone* alter it? [...] All of us combined ... or one great figure ... or someone strategically placed, who happens to be in the right spot. Chance. Accident. And our lives, our world, hanging on it." (55) He entertains the thought that humans can have an influence on the course of events, but does not ever believe that he is the right man for the job. The novel itself, taken as a whole, does not allow for this scepticism: in the end, of course, chance and accident have little to do with the fates of the various characters. Rather, much depends on the decisions of individuals – whether they realize it or not: Wegener successfully relays the information to the Japanese government, but only because Tagomi took the initiative to shoot the SD men (with the Colt .44 that Childan had allowed him to keep); Frank Frink has the courage to start the jewellery business, but his business retains its integrity only because Childan (uncharacteristically) refuses to sell out; Frank Frink survives only as a result of Tagomi's refusal to sign the authorization for his custody by the Reich; Abendsen survives, but only because Juliana murders Joe Cinadella.

Wegener, who does not make use of the *I-Ching*, seems to have found a balance between a more 'fascist' outlook and 'taoist' philosophy, i.e. comes to a conclusion that governs his actions and allows him to live with his actions. Not surprisingly, it is Wegener who is most directly connected to world affairs: he alone can prevent 'Operation Dandelion' by warning the Japanese. Contemplating the Mr. Tagomi's guilt from shooting the Nazi agents, Wegener acknowledges both a deterministic world view, but also a niche for free will and the power of choice: "The terrible dilemma of our lives. Whatever happens, it is evil beyond compare. Why struggle then? Why choose? If all alternatives are the same [...] we can only control the end by making a choice at each step" (236). He maintains a pessimistic outlook, skeptical that the Japanese can do anything with the information that he has provided to change the course of events (233), but coupled with a firm conviction that there are more answers than he can grasp: "Even if all life on our planet is destroyed, there must be other life somewhere which we know nothing of. *It is impossible that ours is the only world*; there must be world after world unseen by us, in some region or dimension that we simply do not perceive." (234; my italics)

As if in answer to Wegener's reflections, the sub-plot with Juliana that closes the novel, a discussion of why and how *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* was written, proposes a yet more concrete version of the hope for another world that Wegener expresses. Juliana, convinced that she is the only one to have understood Abendsen's book (238), makes her way up to 'the high castle' to warn Abendsen about

possible further attempts on his life. Upon asking the oracle what is to be learned from *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, the hexagram 'Chung Fu', or 'Inner Truth' emerges. Juliana concludes that Abendsen's book is true, whereas the reality in which she and all of the other characters lives is the artificial one.

A handful of scholars has taken Juliana's conclusion to be true: in an "ontologically disruptive sci-fi twist" (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 108), fiction is exposed as reality, reality as fiction within the fictional world: The fact that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is coupled with the hexagram 'Inner Truth' undermines the alternate history of *The Man in the High Castle*. We would do well to recognize at once that, as has already been shown, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is, too, an alternate history. Quite rightly, other scholars have questioned the assumption that Juliana's interpretation is to be taken as the authoritative one at all.[197] McKnight, too, poses that question 'why is Juliana privileged? Are we meant to simply believe her?' (100) Furthermore, the hexagram "Inner Truth" is not as unambiguous as it might at first seem. There is essentially no direct support for Juliana's interpretation (Rieder 214).

All would perhaps agree that, as Spedo claims, the ending of *The Man in the High Castle*, "denies the existence of a unified centre of consciousness and knowledge" (140) – just as the rest of the narrative. In other words, Juliana is not privileged; the reader is privileged. Rosenfeld's claim that "The reality of a Nazi victory only becomes an illusion for those who are capable of recognizing the fictionality of their own existence" (*The World Hitler Never Made* 108) is getting at a similar idea; only Rosenfeld's conclusion is much bleaker than mine. He reads Juliana's ability (and the fact that she alone seems to have this ability) to understand Abendsen's novel as more real than the world of the novel as casting doubt "upon the likelihood of any escape from political oppression" (108). First, I am inclined to resist reading the various possible worlds presented in any such absolute terms. We should remember, too, that it is apparently the world that Juliana prefers from which Mr. Tagomi turns away, horrified. Second, although the novel makes clear the restrictive nature of present reality through the fear and doubts of the various figures – it takes courage to imagine the world as different, and much more to act on one's imagination – Juliana's reading is ultimately a celebration of the greatness of one, the influence of a single person in that the reader is granted the authority to choose his own reality. *The Man in the High Castle* is, as Christopher Palmer repeatedly dubs it, a thoroughly "humanist" novel (see 109–132). Not only does the belief in agency imply that humans can indeed effect the course of events, but the very fabric of reality is so flexible that an alternative course of

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197 As, for example, Warrick assumes. See Warrick, "The Encounter of Taoism and Fascism" 49 and (verbatim) Warrick, *Mind in Motion* 56.

events is not merely an alternative within one reality, but a completely separate reality that can be more 'real' than the present one.

3.2 The 'Flawed' Alternate History: Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*

3.2.1 Roth's Novel as Alternate History

Given that Philip Roth is at least as prolific an author as Philip Dick, it is not surprising that his 2004 novel *The Plot against America* has received so much attention among critics and literary scholars. Yet critics and literary scholars alike have struggled to contextualize the novel: Joan Acocella of *The New Yorker* calls it an "historical novel, of a fantastic sort"; Paul Berman of *The New York Times* terms it a "fable of an alternative universe"; Jay L. Halio for *Shofar* writes that Roth's novel is a "satirical political fantasy" (204). Scholar Benjamin Hedin, apparently unaware of the corpus of texts with which we are concerned in this study, claims that "*The Plot against America* is perhaps the first novel by a major American writer to look back in order to ground its desperate vision in historical events" (96). Even further off the mark, Catherine Morley (like Hedin) employs the terms "fantastic[al]" and "supernatural" to describe the nature of the fictional world of Roth's novel, and even cites certain "magic realist tendencies", also questioning the reliability of the narrator. Where I would not question Morley is in her description of *The Plot against America* as a combination of "dystopian novel, an historical novel, a *bildungsroman* [sic], postmodernist fiction and/or realist text" (140): the novel is surely all of these things; that is, in addition to being an alternate history.

I am not by any means the first to cite *The Plot against America* as an alternate history, and a significant one at that: Rosenfeld, for example, includes a brief discussion of the work in surveying alternate histories of World War II, arguing that Roth's novel ought to be situated in a sub-category of alternate histories in which "the Nazis win World War II" (although of course, this is not the case in *The Plot against America*);[198] Widmann includes it as one of the case studies for counterfactual history in literature, examining a wide variety of aspects in addition to its

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[198] Rosenfeld claims, "Roth's book only flirts with, and never fully develops, the scenario of the Nazis winning World War II." (*The World Hitler Never Made* 152). Rosenfeld is correct to temper his statement: it is precisely the fact that the Nazis do not win World War II, that the consequences of Lindbergh's presidency do not go any further on the historical stage than the two years depicted, that makes Roth's novel exceptional among alternate histories.

central program as conjectural history; Spedo makes *The Plot against America* the main case study in his dissertation (*The Plot against the Past*). My own contextualization of Roth's novel reflects both the hesitation to call it an alternate history and the insistence that it is one. Roth's novel deserves considerable attention in the present study not only for its exemplary aspects as an alternate history, but also its crucial differences to other alternate histories.

As far as the concept of history manifest in the alternate history, *The Plot against America* has much in common with *The Man in the High Castle*: history – in both cases, World-War-II history[199] – consists primarily of great men and great moments. *The Plot against America* suggests that American isolationism would have led the country to fascism (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 154); Roosevelt is, like in *The Man in the High Castle*, a key figure, but this time pitted against another 'Great Man' of history, Charles Lindbergh.[200] It is Lindbergh and his decision to enter the US presidential race of 1940 upon which Roth's alternative version of history hinges, and the point of divergence is recognizable to the minute: during the Republican convention in June of 1940, Lindbergh

> made his unanticipated entrance onto the convention floor at 3:18 A.M. The lean, tall, handsome hero, a lithe, athletic-looking man not yet forty years old, arrived in his flying attire, having landed his own plane at the Philadelphia airport only minutes earlier, and at the sight of him, a surge of redemptive excitement brought the wilted conventioners up onto

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199 Spedo has his own ideas about why both works focus on World-War-II history: "It is as though the relative shortness of American history had produced a concentration of crucial turning points, resulting in a remarkable fascination with and the willingness of many an author, especially in recent years" to write alternate history. He also suggests that Americans cherish the feeling that "they have been making history more than other peoples have, which in turn can also make them feel more entitled than others to rewrite history" (216–217). This unsupported claim is unconvincing on several counts: first, as already argued, alternate histories are not a phenomenon of predominantly the American or English-speaking world; second, World War II, unlike the assassination of JFK or the American Revolution, is an historical era that has prompted alternate histories in many national literatures – again, a testament to its centrality in the histories of many countries. Third, it is not clear what is meant by "making history" (surely America has not simply dominated history in any objective way), or on what basis Spedo claims that Americans feel more entitled than other people to rewrite history. It would be interesting, for example, to see if the Great Man theory plays more of a role in American alternate histories than in others, or whether American alternate histories reveal any overall trends in their conceptualization of history in contrast to, say, Spanish or French alternate histories. But until such a study has been carried out, I would like to refrain from such conjectures.

200 Spedo's reading focuses first on Lindbergh's rise to power: Lindbergh is "both the paradigmatic tragic American hero and a potential political menace" (184), and might be compared to the character Swede in *American Pastoral*.

their feet to cry "Lindy! Lindy! Lindy!" for thirty glorious minutes, and without interruption from the chair. (15)

Following Lindbergh's successful nomination and election, FDR pulls back out of politics, and the US takes a frightening turn for the worse: Lindbergh signs a pact of non-aggression with Hitler and gradually begins introducing anti-Jewish legislation. To the dismay of Jewish Americans, the Lindbergh administration succeeds in gaining the support of a prominent Rabbi (Bengelsdorf), who all but assures immunity to criticism from the general population. As the crisis becomes more acute, Walter Winchell, in real life a Jewish-American radio commentator, is assassinated while campaigning against Lindbergh, and several cities across the country experience an "American version of Kristallnacht" (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 154). Shortly after Winchell's death, Lindbergh disappears mysteriously, FDR returns to politics, and American history resumes its course.

The author's statement that, in his novel, "history has the final say" (Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'"), can be interpreted at least two ways: first, as I have argued for all alternate histories, *The Plot against America* makes no claims of questioning the normalized narrative of the real past. Any interpretation of the version of history presented in Roth's novel relies on the epistemological stability of its foil: the knowledge that Lindbergh never became president, that the US never signed a pact of non-agression with Germany in 1940, and that there was no such political marginalization of Jews in America is a prerequisite for reading *The Plot against America*. A second interpretation of Roth's statement is much more problematic and interesting in the context of alternate history as a whole: history has the final say in *The Plot against America* because there is return of sorts to the normalized narrative of the real past. It has been suggested that Roth's novel is less invested in long-term consequences of the point of divergence than in a few crucial years that deviate from our history.[201] Although the consequences of Lindbergh's decision to run for president are traced long enough to produce a history recognizably different from ours, *our present remains intact*.[202] Granted, in Roth's novel *Pearl Harbor* is attacked one year later than in history, but following Lindbergh's two-year stint as president

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201 Cf. Spedo: "Roth's novel is constituted by the nexus event itself and its immediate aftermath, rather than its long-term consequences." (183).

202 Spedo makes a similar remark that the novel does not allow "for the alternate version of America to develop long enough to produce a world that is radically different from the one we know today" (188). This is less than accurate: it is not because the novel ends where it does that the alternative version of America does not develop further; but rather because the way the alternative version of America develops, the present is not different from our own.

and FDR's return to American politics, there seems to be a conscious 'bending' back to history as we know it.

The ending of *The Plot against America*, and this peculiar causal logic are of central concern, if not to question the degree Roth's novel can be considered an alternate history at all, then at least to point out the implications of this convergence with history and position *The Plot against America* in contrast to the permanent divergence that I have argued is typical for the genre. In other words, Roth's novel makes the already paradoxical causal logic of alternate history even more problematic. At the point of divergence, contingency rules: Lindbergh's decision to run for president critically re-routes history; after that, the consequences of his decision are traced out rigidly to create a history necessarily different from our own. So far, this is nothing other than the familiar model posited by Dick's novel or other alternate histories. But then, there is a point of convergence: Lindbergh disappears and US history resumes its course. On the one hand, we might say that this outcome is still consistent with notions of causality in alternate history in general – however paradoxical they might be: the point of convergence follows the same logic as the point of divergence in that one event can determine the course of history. If the course of history can be re-routed by Lindbergh's candidacy for president, why should his disappearance not have an equally significant effect? It can, of course; the logic of contingency remains intact. It is the logic of necessity, on the other hand, which again, is a requirement for the alternative course of events following Lindbergh's decision to become a presidential candidate, that is violated. The same logic that allows for the course of history after the point of divergence to be recognizably different from our history is abandoned in the end, for Lindbergh's presidency has no long-term consequences on an historical scale. If we follow the logic proposed by every alternate history that each present belongs to a given past, then the suggestion that *our present has resulted from a past not our own* causes quite a new kind of 'indigestion' specific to Roth's novel.

This apparent 'break' in causal logic at the end of the novel is all the more peculiar because it is limited to the historical scale. Lindbergh's two years in power *do* have lasting effects on the personal scale: like Dick's novel, *The Plot against America* does not deal merely with the normalized narrative of the real past, but indeed takes a cue from social-science history and centres rather on the experiences of 'little' men and women: the protagonist Philip, his family, and the other Jewish-American inhabitants of Newark, New Jersey are, much like Juliana Frink or Robert Wegener, torn between believing in their own influence and feeling hopelessly subject to forces greater than themselves. Only with a consideration of the relationship between the national/political plot and the familial/

personal plot can we begin to come to terms with the puzzling notion of causality proposed by *The Plot against America*.

3.2.2 The Alternate-history Autobiography: the National/Political and the Familial/Personal Stages

As already implied, the challenge of dealing with *The Plot against America*, but also part of the reason why Roth's work is worth discussing in the first place, is that it has interfaces with genres and traditions besides alternate history – perhaps most significantly that of autobiography and, one might say, Roth's own tradition. Roth has written many novels with himself as the narrator, and *The Plot against America* may be situated among a series of autobiographical writings along with *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* and *Patrimony: A True Story*. (Wirth-Nesher 159; Wisse, "In Nazi Newark: 'The Plot against America by Philip Roth'" 65; cf. Shostak 4; Halio and Siegel 8). Beyond these two works, the thematic material of *The Plot against America* is characteristic of Philip Roth as an author. Widmann, Wirth-Nesher, and Spedo in particular have all revealed key similarities between *The Plot against America* and Roth's other novels: the experiences of a Jewish protagonist during a certain period of American history and his relationship to his family are central (Widmann 273).[203] *The Plot against America* distinguishes itself from Roth's other novels in the sense that it is ultimately concerned with communal in addition to personal issues. It is a unique mesh of alternate-history writing and autobiography that allows for not only discourse on maturation within a family, but also discourse on ethnic identity in relation to national and political history. As Wirth-Nesher puts it, "If *The Facts* is the making of the artist and *Patrimony* is the making of the son, *The Plot against America* is the making of the Jew." (167; 171) In other words, the autobiographical elements of the novel are inseparable from the discourse on Americanness versus Jewishness (cf. Schweber 136–137; Miller; Safer 3), as they are inseparable from the national/political stage.

Already in the first sentences, the narrator suggests a connection between his familial past and national history as well as his ethnic identity: "Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn't been president or if I hadn't been the offspring of Jews." (1) The subsequent narrative integrates Philip's personal stories with the

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203 Spedo offers a reading in context of Roth's other novels, particularly *Operation Shylock* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, which reveal striking similarities to *The Plot against America*. See Spedo, esp. 177–180.

historical stage, as Philip more often than not sees himself and his family in relation to 'great' figures and events, as with his mother's pregnancy:

> The completion of his [Lindbergh's] thirty-three-and-a-half-hour nonstop solo flight from Long Island to Paris in the tiny monoplane the *Spirit of St. Louis* even happened to coincide with the day in the spring of 1927 that my mother discovered herself to be pregnant with my older brother. As a consequence, the young aviator whose daring had thrilled America and the world and whose achievement bespoke a future of unimaginable aeronautical progress came to occupy a special niche in the gallery of family anecdotes that generate a child's first cohesive mythology. The mystery of pregnancy and the heroism of Lindbergh combined to give a distinction bordering on the divine to my very own mother, for whom nothing less than a global annunciation had accompanied the incarnation of her first child. (5)

Similarly, Philip depicts his personal security and national identity as relying upon such figures:

> Lindbergh was the first famous living American whom I learned to hate – just as President Roosevelt was the first famous living American whom I was taught to love – and so his nomination by the Republicans to run against Roosevelt in 1940 assaulted, as nothing ever had before, that huge endowment of personal security that I had taken for granted as an American child of American parents in an American school in an American city in an America at peace with the world. (7)

It is clear from both of these passages that the autobiographical account achieves something quite different from a mere description of historical events (cf. Wirth-Nesher 169): this is not the story of how Lindbergh became president, but rather of how one person perceives and forms his own personal/familial identity in relation to national/political history; how a 'little' person comes to terms with great figures and events. Indeed the novel as a whole might be read in terms of this "counterpoint between large and small", of the tension between the personal/familial and the national/political (Acocella).[204] It is a nod to twentieth-century historiography's shift away from the great men of history: the suggestion seems to be that there is no reason why history dealing with broader changes and history dealing with individual experiences cannot complement each other (cf. Iggers 98–99).

As a result of the change in political climate, Jewishness is pitted against Americanness for the first time in Philip's experience (Widmann 285): he takes

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204 Spedo speaks of two separate plots: the private-familiar and the national-historical (182); Sokoloff makes a similar distinction between a "panoramic alternative national history" and "personal plot" (308); Schweber also argues for the existence of two separate dramas, "personal and political" (129).

for granted living in a Jewish community, and he claims that "it was work that identified and distinguished our neighbors for me far more than religion" (3). Similar to Pip in *Great Expectations*, the narrator has the benefit of looking back on his experiences – that is, there is a constant play between the present and past perspectives on events (Widmann 283). The older, more mature Philip, narrating in retrospect, is able to re-contextualize his childhood perspective, suggesting historical reasons for a heightened awareness of his Jewish identity:

> Israel didn't yet exist, six million European Jews hadn't yet ceased to exist, and the local relevance of distant Palestine (under British mandate since the 1918 dissolution by the victorious Allies of the last far-flung provinces of the defunct Ottoman Empire) was a mystery to me. When a stranger who did wear a beard and who never once was seen hatless appeared every few months after dark to ask in broken English for a contribution toward the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, I, who wasn't an ignorant child, didn't quite know what he was doing on our landing. My parents would give me or Sandy a couple of coins to drop into his collection box, largess, I always thought, dispensed out of kindness so as not to hurt the feelings of a poor old man who, from one year to the next, seemed unable to get it through his head that we'd already had a homeland for three generations. I pledged allegiance to the flag of our homeland every morning at school. I sang of its marvels with my classmates at assembly programs. I eagerly observed its national holidays, and without giving a second thought to my affinity for the Fourth of July fireworks or the Thanksgiving turkey or the Decoration Day double-heard. Our homeland was America. (4–5)

The mouthpiece of hopes to reconcile Americanness and Jewishness, i.e. of the desire to maintain this naïve matter of fact that Philip had as a child, is of course Rabbi Bengelsdorf: "I want Charles Lindbergh to be my president not in spite of my being a Jew but because I am a Jew – an *American* Jew." (36) However, a number of political measures make it clear how mislead Rabbi Bengelsdorf is to believe that Jewishness is not being threatened by Lindbergh's presidency: the "Office of American Absorption", "encouraging America's religious and national minorities to become further incorporated into the larger society" (85), pursues policies seemingly intended to 'dilute' Jewishness. "Homestead 42", for example, urges the relocation of Jewish families into "an inspiring region of America previously inaccessible to them" in order to "enrich their Americanness" (204–205) – of course threatening the communal core in which, for example Philip's mother thrives. (Philip describes as "the only comparable threat" to Lindbergh's nomination his father's promotion and planned move to the "Gentile working-class town" of Union, where a Jewish family would be a minority. Philip's father turns down the offer and forfeits his job, rather than put his family through what his wife experienced as a "neighborhood outsider" in Elizabeth as a child [7–9]).

Despite attempts to protect family life and maintain a degree of normalcy on Summit Avenue, Philip is startled again and again by "intrusions" from the

national stage.[205] The very "sanctity of the family" is threatened by national/political events. As Spedo puts it, the characters in Roth's novel are forced to interact with the "mundane gods who shape their destiny" (Hedin 106; Spedo 190); it is impossible to avoid consequences of national/political events. Reflecting on the living-room brawl between his father and Alvin, Philip remarks:

> The South Boston riots, the Detroit riots, the Louisville assassination, the Cincinnati firebombing, the mayhem in St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Akron, Youngstown, Peoria, Scranton, and Syracuse ... and now this: In an ordinary family living room – traditionally the staging area for the collective effort to hold the line *against* the intrusions of a hostile world [...] (295).

This moment of crisis, in which the "two grown men who mattered most to [Philip] throughout [his] childhood" come close to murdering each other – which, not coincidentally follows immediately after a crucial turning point on the national stage (Winchell's funeral and the return of FDR) – is only one of many of the more or less direct effects of politics on the family: Alvin, at odds with his Uncle because of war politics, leaves for Canada in order to join the military and fight against Hitler; he returns injured and causes Philip and his family excruciating frustration, disgust, and emotional pain. Sandy's ambition and desire to be involved with Lindbergh's politics (for example in his participation in a "volunteer work program introducing city youth to the traditional ways of heartland life" (84), an eight-week stay with a family in Kentucky) results in temporary alienation from the family; and he is constantly supported in his commitment to the Lindbergh administration by his Aunt Evelyn – the opportunistic younger sister of Philip's mother, who not only marries Rabbi Bengelsdorf, but also works for Lindbergh's Office of American Absorption, and even dances in the Whitehouse with Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister. In other words, in addition to the irreconciliability of ethnic and national identity for the American Jew, there is a clear tension for Philip between the personal/familial and the national/political: "[I was] disillusioned by a sense that my family was slipping away from me right along with my country." (114)

Moreover, it soon becomes clear that the 'little' players cannot hope to be involved in such as a way as to change the course of national politics. Philip's family experiences the beginnings of marginalization and must face their own helplessness above all in Washington, D.C. Even Philip's father must give up his fight for justice at the Douglas Hotel, after the hotel management claims that their room has been reserved for someone else: "There was more resistance in my

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205 Roth makes the parallel to his own life explicit: "The great world came into our house every day" (Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'").

father, but there was still some sanity in him as well, and he was able to understand that his argument had run out of interest to anyone other than himself." (71) Such a defeat does not by any means stop Philip's father from cantankerous commentary on Lindbergh and the state of politics in America, nor does it bar smaller, more modest victories (such as at the cafeteria at the end of their visit). But it is clear that Philip and his family are ultimately subject (or victim) to the decisions made on the national/political stage: America has become a fascist nation.

Sandy, who is only a child, seems to realize rationally both the sense in and appeal of cooperating with Lindbergh's government as well as the futility of opposing it. Snidely responding to his parents' outrage at their 'invitation' to participate in Homestead 42, Sandy remarks "Yeah [...] why don't we sue the United States of America?" (208). Philip is not like his older brother, who thrives in his role as the statewide recruiting officer for the OAA and cherishes his connection to Lindbergh's regime. He is, instead, constantly overwhelmed by the sense of his own 'smallness'. Standing in Military Park during one of his following adventures with Earl Axman, Philip describes his own, characteristic position in relation to his surroundings: "[i]n Military Park there was a decorated Christmas tree forty feet tall, and from the face of the Public Service Building hung a giant metal Christmas tree, illuminated by floodlights, that the *Newark News* said was eighty feet tall, while I was barely four and a half feet tall." (118) His instinct, as he does on that evening and later, is to flee: "I wasn't like Sandy, in whom opportunity had quickened the desire to be a boy on the grand scale, riding the crest of history. I wanted nothing to do with history. I wanted to be a boy on the smallest scale possible. I wanted to be an orphan." (232) Philip, convinced of his own insignificance, has no other solution but to try to make himself even less visible.

Far less satisfied with resignation and retreat, Philip's father exemplifies a different kind of strategy for interacting with events beyond his control: putting his hopes in the great men that do indeed make history. The real hero for Philip and his family is Roosevelt, as evidenced by Philip's reaction to hearing FDR's acceptance speech following his nomination for a third term at the Democratic Convention in July 1940: "There was something about the inherent decorum of the delivery that, alien though it was, not only calmed our anxiety but bestowed on our family a historical significance, authoritatively merging our lives with his as well as with that of the entire nation when he addressed us in our living room as his 'fellow citizens'." (28) It is indeed Roosevelt's all but complete absence from the political scene after Lindbergh is elected that corresponds with the sense of hopelessness and helplessness of Jewish families in America – many of whom do resort to Philip's impulse to escape: they move to Canada. Walter Winchell serves as the new champion for many of the families on Summit Avenue. Philip's father exclaims, "But thank God for Walter Winchell. Without him we'd be lost. He's

the last person left on the radio to speak out against these dirty dogs." (101) After Winchell's unsuccessful 'attack' on the Lindbergh administration by proposing his intentions to run for president and antagonizing anyone who supports Lindbergh, his assassination is the catalyst for the course of events that *do* have an effect on the course of national history. It is not, however, any kind of democratic initiative that reroutes history in the end or that ends the nightmare, but once again, the manoeuvres and fates of great men: Lindbergh disappears, Roosevelt and La Guardia take the reigns. Philip and his family as well as the other families on Summit Avenue, can only cheer on the developments, as Philip's father does upon hearing that FDR will speak at Winchell's funeral: "He's back! FDR is back!" Mr. Cucuzza, the new neighbor, replies, "We need him bad." (286)

Unlike in *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Plot against America* hardly seems to suggest that 'little' men or women can have a significant influence on the course of history. Instead, the suggestion is that the personal and the national are inextricably related, each having its own kind of *historical* significance: "History is everything that happens everywhere. Even here in Newark. Even here on Summit Avenue. Even what happens in his house to an ordinary man – that'll be history too someday." (180) In other words, the discourse on history in *The Plot against America* proposes a considerable broadening of the concept (cf. Widmann 281): history is not only the super-sequence of events that I have suggested here as characteristic of alternate history (although the interaction of Roth's novel with the normalized narrative of the real past is still the argument for defining it as an alternate history), i.e. the national/political stage, but also any series of events that has significance within a given context.

For Philip, family is ultimately of the greatest concern, for it is only at a personal/familial level that he gains the same degree of influence that figures like Lindbergh or FDR have at the national/political level, and at which he *is influenced* to the same degree. When Alvin arrives, for example, Philip was "determined to make everything turn out right by being the best little boy imaginable" (132); or when his Aunt Evelyn seeks refuge in the cellar, Philip, not able to do anything about the course of events outside of the home, has a child's concern for the comfort of his aunt:

> A political catastrophe of unimaginable proportions was transforming a free society into a police state, but a child is a child, and all I could think about in my bed was that when the time came to move her bowels, Aunt Evelyn would have to do it on our storage bin floor. This was the uncontrollable event that weighed on me in lieu of everything else, and that blotted out everything else. (354)

After the denouement of the national/political plot, the novel closes with Philip's thoughts about his new role as Sheldon's "prosthesis": "No one should be moth-

erless and fatherless. Motherless and fatherless you are vulnerable to manipulation, to influences – you are rootless and you are vulnerable to everything." (358) Such concerns are ultimately at the centre of Roth's novel as an autobiography, and they are indispensable to any reading of the novel as an alternate history. The fate of America and the course of national/political history are only relevant insofar as they may be interwoven with the personal/familial. The opposite is, of course, also true: the "alternate Roth family history" (Stinson 42; cf. Schweber 130), the discourse on the personal/familial level, is just as much an outgrowth of that which makes the novel an alternate history, i.e. the discourse on the national/political level.

3.2.3 Undermined Authenticity

The illusion of authenticity so characteristic of alternate history in general is also manifest on both levels in *The Plot against America*: that is, not only in paratexts and the incorporation of 'fake' sources, but also the use of countless details from Roth's own life: not only does the narrator share the author's name and age (from 1940 to 1942), but also, for example, the author's family (Herman, Bess, and Sandy) and address (on Summit Avenue in the Jewish neighborhood of Weequahic); Roth has essentially "mythologized his own childhood" (Berman 8), that is, rewritten it in such a way as to make it different, but similar enough to be recognizable as his own. The autobiographical format (i.e., the first-person retrospective narration, the chronological subdivision by date, and the frequent inclusion of exact dates) (cf. Widmann 282–283) also contributes to tension between the real and the fictional.

Other elements are more typical of alternate history in general, as already discussed in the comparison of alternate history to other forms of postmodern historical fiction: first, the incorporation of 'fake sources', in this case radio broadcasts, speeches, letters, newspaper headlines, and reports from Newark's Newsreel theatre. Such media have multiple functions: they serve first and foremost as the channel between the two stages described above. A frequent occurrence in the narrative is the Roth family sitting around the radio, receiving monumental news, and then calling the neighbours or even congregating on Summit Avenue (for example when Lindbergh's candidacy for president is declared [16–17]) – in other words, the national/political level reaches the personal/familial, which in turn becomes communal. Indeed, this one-way traffic of news often functions more efficiently than attempts to use the same media for personal communication – as with the attempt to reach both Alvin while he is in the hospital and the attempt to call Sheldon in Kentucky. Secondly, as with much postmodern historical fiction,

they lend the narrative the guise of authenticity – they may be seen as parodies of the use of primary sources in history writing. Thirdly, as Widmann has shown in his convincing study of *The Plot against America*, the many radio broadcasts, newspaper headlines, letters and reports are also the most efficient, clearest means of conveying information about what happens. The ending in particular, in all of its convolution, relies on the newsreel format (293–296).

The already-mentioned postscript to *The Plot against the America*, informative in terms of making the relationship between the alternative version of history and history clear, serves a pragmatic function. In contrast to the inclusion of appendices and historical source material in historical fiction in general, the note to the reader, chronology of major figures, short biographies of other historical figures in the work, and other documentation in Roth's novel have a different function: they provide the reader with the information necessary to appreciate the divergence from history (cf. Widmann 292). The comprehensiveness of Roth's postscript has often been interpreted as unflattering to his intended reader: as Spedo puts it, "evidently, Roth did not take for granted a sufficient level of historical knowledge on the part of the general reading public, not even as far as the *Kristallnacht* or the main events in the early phase of WWII are concerned" (200).[206] As a result of Roth's 'coddling' of the reader, i.e. providing him with the material necessary to decode the relationship between history and the alternative version in his work, it is difficult to imagine anyone confusing the alternative version of history with history. Spedo is correct in noting that "his purpose does not appear to have been to blur and render ultimately unknowable the border between historical facts and fiction" (205). Like alternate history in general, *The Plot against America* holds up a conservative notion of history as fact, i.e. as knowable, and this notion of history is a prerequisite for the alternative version. Even Roth himself explains his motives along the same lines: "I felt obliged here to recognize where authentic lives and events are clearly bent to my fictional purposes. I don't want any confusion in the mind of the reader about where historical fact ends and historical imagining begins, and so, in the postscript, I give a brief survey of that era as it really was." (Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'")

What is of further interest here is the intentional countercurrent described with relation to works like Turtledove's *Ruled Britannia* or Spinrad's *The Iron Dream: The Plot against America* so clearly exposes its own fictionality, yet is at

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[206] It is possible to 'read' the comprehensiveness of Roth's postscript and the detail in which he represents history from a different angle: Widmann suggests that the comprehensiveness of the paratexts is evidence for Roth having carried out much more meticulous and detailed research than other authors of alternate history (290–292).

the same time invested in claiming a kind of authenticity. The autobiographical elements described above as well as the incorporation of 'fake' artificial sources, are compounded with the paratexts to create a sense of plausibility, or as Roth puts it, "in the hope of establishing the book as something other than fabulous" (Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'") – even if at the same time announcing itself as nothing other than implausible and fabulous. The paradoxical result is a novel from which "you could learn quite a bit about American history [...], if only any of this had happened" (Berman 6). Like Spinrad's *The Iron Dream*, which ultimately implies that fiction is no less far-fetched than reality, Roth's alternate history is in some ways shown to be as believable as history – again, barring only the fact that *it did not happen*. But at the end of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s, the possibility of FDR's election to an unprecedented third-term as president was perhaps no less bizarre than the possibility that the strong political and social undercurrents (that were undoubtedly to be found in America of the 1930s and 40s) would have dramatic consequences: as Spedo notes, "for Roth it appears crucial to show how little would have been sufficient to deviate American history from its path by relying on forces that were already at work and powerful enough, when given the chance, to bring about dramatic change" (206). This is indeed further evidence for the futility of citing (the intention of) plausibility as a criterion for distinguishing between alternate history and counterfactual history.

Like many other alternate histories, *The Plot against America* features discourse on authenticity at the level of story as well, and thereby incorporates its own status as an alternate history thematically. Widmann focuses on the significance of Philip's stamp collection in this respect (Widmann 304–308 ["Alptraum: Die Motivstruktur als Gerüst des kontrafaktischen Entwurfs"]); Sandy's drawings might also be seen in the same way – as artefacts of an alternate America that have an indisputable value within a given context. Like in Dick's novel, the question (which refers also to the metafictional status of the alternate history itself) is not what is real and what not, but whether something that is not real can have the same kind of legitimacy as the real. In *The Plot against America*, the answer seems clearly positive – at least in the sense that something not real can have an equally significant impact. An emblematic passage is Philip's nightmare:

> In the dream, I was walking to Earl's with my stamp album clutched to my chest when someone shouted my name and began chasing me. I ducked into an alleyway and scurried back into one of the garages to hide and to check the album for stamps that might have come loose from their hinges when, while fleeing my pursuer, I'd stumbled and dropped the album at the very spot on the sidewalk where we regularly played "I Declare War." When I opened to my 1932 Washington Bicentennials – twelve brown stamps ranging in denomination from the half-cent dark brown to the ten-cent yellow – I was stunned. Washington

wasn't on the stamps anymore. Unchanged at the top of each stamp – lettered in what I'd learned to recognize as white-faces roman and spaced out on either one or two lines – was the legend "United States Postage." The colors of the stamps were unchanged as well – the two-cent red, the five-cent blue, the eight-cent olive green, and so on – all the stamps were the same regulation size, and the frames for the portraits remained individually designed as they were in the original set, but instead of a different portrait of Washington on each of the twelve stamps, the portraits were now the same and no longer of Washington but of Hitler. And on the ribbon beneath each portrait, there was no longer the name "Washington" either. Whether the ribbon was curved downward as on the one-half-cent stamp and the six, or curved upward as on the four, the five, the seven, and the ten, or straight with raised ends as on the one, the one and a half, the two, the three, the eight, and the nine, the name lettered across the ribbon was "Hitler".

It was when I looked next at the album's facing page to see what, if anything, had happened to my 1934 National Parks set of ten that I fell out of the bed and woke up on the floor, this time screaming. Yosemite in California, Grand Canyon in Arizona, Mesa Verde in Colorado, Crater Lake in Orgeon, Acadia in Maine, Mount Rainer in Washington, Yellowstone in Wyoming, Zion in Utah, Glacier in Montana, the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee – and across the face of each, across the cliffs, the woods, the rivers, the peaks, the geyer, the gorges, the granite coastline, across the deep blue water and the high waterfalls, across everything in America that was the bluest and the greenest and the whitest and to be preserved forever in these pristine reservations, was printed a black swastika. (42–43)

Philip's stamp collection is not only an expression of patriotism, but also a most personal relationship of a boy to his country's history – one that is entirely in his control and for which he is responsible. He protects his stamp collection at all costs, even toting it along on the trip to Washington, D.C. and safeguarding one of the most precious stamps, despite the present circumstances: a stamp commemorating Lindbergh's transatlantic flight. In the stamps, America is intact, preserved at its finest. The protection of these artefacts is for Philip just as important as the real America, and his fears for the state of the country are fittingly manifest in the state of his stamp collection. Just as the original pieces of Edfrank Jewellery in *The Man in the High Castle* serve as a hope-granting, material symbols of Americanism, the stamps are for Philip the means by which he keeps his country from slipping away. The later loss of his stamp album after an attempt to run away is all the more traumatic: it was "gone and irreplaceable. Like – and utterly unlike – losing a leg" (235). It is after the stamp collection goes missing that the situation for Philip, his family, and Jews across America spirals out of control and reaches the most acute state of crisis: Winchell's campaign exacerbates the deteriorating political climate, riots break out, Winchell is killed, Lindbergh disappears, and democracy in the US dissolves: Philip laments, "Our incomparable American childhood was ended. Soon my homeland would be nothing more than my birthplace." (301)

Roth's novel is, in the same way that Philip's stamp collection is an artefact of a disappearing America, an artefact for the real America – or least it has become such in the context of its reception. The response of critics has shown repeatedly that its indisputable status as fiction does not preclude its relevance for the present-day US, or its power as a kind of mirror of America; everyone seems to have a presentist interpretation. In his review, Douthat claims: "If ever a modern novel were made for a political moment, it was Philip Roth?s *The Plot against America* for the 2004 election." ("It Didn't Happen Here" 73–78) Parallels have been drawn repeatedly to the Bush presidency. Rosenfeld writes, "In portraying the United States becoming a fascist-like state under the administration of an ill-qualified, naive and incompetent president, Roth offers a not-so-thinly-veiled critique of the United States under the administration of President George W. Bush." (*The World Hitler Never Made* 156) Similarly, Jonathan Yardley claims that Roth's novel "gives every appearance of being an attack on George W. Bush and his administration", calling it a "parable for our times" (Yardley). There are those critics that speak more generally of the fragility of ideals of democracy, or against "dangerous swells of patriotism and unquestioned political enthusiasm" (Reisinger); Spedo even cites one critic who suggests that the real plot against America was not Lindbergh's or the Nazis', but rather the Jews' quest for world dominance – kind of twisted conspiracy-theory reading of the novel (Spedo 122; Atzmon). He takes into account the author's denial of such presentist concerns and quite correctly points out that there are no explicit clues for reading *The Plot against America* as a *roman à clef* (Spedo 224). Paul Berman denies the validity of drawing such parallels to present-day politics: "not once in any of this does Roth glance at events of the present day, not even with a sly wink" (Berman 4).

I tend towards neither of these two extremes: there are no explicit references to the Bush administration, but like all historical fiction, Roth's novel is by nature presentist; there is no reason to avoid readings with relation to present politics, social climates, etc., for the reception context of the alternate history is of critical importance. There are convincing connections to be found with contemporary politics, and the questions 'what kind of political novel is this?' is valid. On the other hand, we should recognize that these questions can only be answered obliquely at best. Here, I find Walter Benn Michaels's reading most convincing: with a comparison to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Michaels proposes that Roth's novel portrays more generally victimization in the US: it is a kind of 'ur-text' for discrimination: "the exemplary instance of victimization in American political life is the victim of discrimination". *The Plot against America* ultimately critiques the extent to which discrimination is still part of the American 'system': "Roth's anti-semitism is not a replacement for anti-black prejudice but a placeholder for prejudice of all kinds – anti-black, anti-gay, anti-Latino, anti-whatever." (Michaels 294;

298) In other words, Roth's novel, like virtually all alternate histories, unavoidably addresses political and social currents that exist in the context in which it was written – but not as a warning that the events in the novel could happen, and not in any direct reflection of present-day politics; but rather as a history that is not our own, while still resembling something that *did* happen (290; cf. Wisse, "In Nazi Newark: 'The Plot against America' by Philip Roth" 66; Parrish, "The Plot against America" 97).

3.2.4 The Question of Causal Logic

Yet another widespread interpretation of *The Plot against America*, that it is a kind of political fable with a warning – similar to Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* (Spedo 213–216; Wirth-Nesher 169; Parrish, "The Plot against America" 98; Safer 148; Widmann 273–274) – points to a peculiarity of Roth's novel as an alternate history: there is not only a point of divergence, but also a point of convergence. Thoroughly atypical of alternate history is the indication in *The Plot against America* that the present remains unaffected by the past depicted: there is a 'bend back' towards history at the end of the novel. At the highest point of crisis, when Philip's family finally decides to flee to Canada ("we'd been overpowered by the forces arrayed against us and were about to flee and become foreigners" [301]), the course of events suddenly takes a turn for the better: "But then it was over. The nightmare was over. Lindbergh was gone and we were safe [...]" (301) – not, however, before America spirals out of control, democracy is overturned, and many Jews become victims of violence.

This highly convoluted ending, a fast-paced series of events, "radically alters [the] novel's counterfactual trajectory by introducing a *deus ex machina* twist that restores historical events to their rightful course" (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 154; cf. Spedo 192): as we find out from the reports from Newark's Newsreel theatre, Lindbergh disappears on a flight from Louisville to Washington, D.C., never to be seen or heard from again. Vice president Wheeler serves as acting president, while several rumours suggest that Lindbergh has been kidnapped by the Jews, a plot masterminded by Roosevelt. Other sources claim that Lindbergh has been brought to Berlin by German authorities. Rabbi Bengelsdorf is denounced as "Rabbi Rasputin", all the more so for his close contact with Anne Morrow Lindbergh. America falls under martial law, and anti-Semitic riots break out in cities across the US. An article in the Chicago Tribune suggests that Jews in Krakow had been responsible for kidnapping Lindbergh's son, taking his blood for rituals, and the "ringleaders of the Jewish conspiratorial plot against America" are arrested by the FBI the following day, including Fiorello La Guardia

and FDR. Mrs. Lindbergh demands the removal of Wheeler from office and calls for the return of liberty and justice. Ultimately, Roosevelt wins re-election as president, and the US promptly declares war on Germany and Japan. Pearl Harbor is attacked in December, 1942 (one year later than in our history).

Above all because of the ending, Roth's novel has been often criticized – by critics and literary scholars alike – for its implausibility. Spedo calls Anne Morrow Lindbergh's intervention the "improbability of improbabilities" and states that "Lindbergh's all-too-convenient disappearance towards the end leaves a definite, unpleasant *deus ex machina* aftertaste"; in addition, the conspiracy theory is "a complication both confusing and unnecessary to the plot" (208–209). Spedo even attacks Roth's prowess as an alternate-history writer: "Perhaps, if he had familiarized himself with the routine techniques of practitioners who are not a tenth the writer he is but know all the ropes of the art of tinkering with the past, he would have provided his narrative with a more convincing solution to the contradiction between the counterfactual version of history and reality as we know it today." Roth might be 'excused' on account of his own standards: he himself claims "I had no literary models for reimagining the historical past" (Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'"). Spedo makes his own kind of allowance for Roth's alleged failure: "Roth is not a historian and is therefore not bound to the same rigorous constraints that condition the writing of HC [historical counterfactuals = counterfactual histories]"; he nevertheless concludes that Roth's effort at documentation in the postscript is "wasted" as a result of the implausible denouement (212).

I take issue with such readings that hinge on whether or not *The Plot against America* is plausible or not. Because such a judgment cannot be based on anything but one's own reasoning, responses will continue to be as varied as they are already: among those who deem Roth's novel plausible are Hedin, J.J. Stinson, Matthew Schweber, Laura Miller, Blake Morrison, Michaels, Timothy Parrish, and Elaine Safer; among those who bemoan the novel's implausibility are Ross Douthat, who claims that the political plot is never convincing, Michiko Kakutani, and Yardley. I agree with Widmann, who claims that "Plausibilität als Kriterium zur Bestimmung kontrafaktischer Schreibweisen ungeeignet ist." (277) My own problem, then, with such qualitative readings of Roth's work based on some immeasurable and undefinable notion of plausibility should now be clear: it is neither a defining factor nor literary virtue of alternate history.

Indeed it is rather the above described undermined authenticity – ultimately a counter-current between plausibility and implausibility, realism and fictionality – that is interesting and characteristic of the novel as an alternate history. Much more productive than the question of whether *The Plot against America* is

plausible or implausible is finding a means of coming to terms with the apparent paradox, not trying to undo or dismiss it.[207]

Most problematic (and therefore most deserving of attention) is the fact that Roth's novel postulates an alternative version of history that is effectually limited to two years: in addition to the rash reversion to the "Fahrwasser der Überlieferung" (Widmann 281; 286) at the end of the novel, there are many other hints that the alternative version of 1940 to 1942 does not have lasting consequences for the course of history after that. Roth not only avoids signs that the present differs in any way from our own, but prolepses throughout the course of the novel all but preclude the possibility that Lindbergh's presidency had any lasting consequences for the course of national history: one example is Philip's wondering how long it would take for a Jew to appear on a stamp. We are informed by the narrator, "another twenty-six years had to pass, and it took Einstein to do it" (23). Another example is the retrospective commentary on the assassination of Winchell: "it wasn't until twenty-six years after Winchell's assassination that a second presidential candidate would be gunned down – that was New York's Democratic senator Robert Kennedy, fatally shot in the head after winning his party's California primary on Tuesday, June 4, 1969." (272) Spedo notes, that such "anachronistic allusions postulate the rather implausible survival of entities from the real world in the vastly altered circumstances" (Spedo 197). Plausible or implausible, such commentary does suggest that the course of history after Lindbergh's presidency was the familiar one; and this constitutes then a puzzling exception in the context of an alternate history.

Spedo is one of the few scholars who at least tries to come to terms with the unusualness of *The Plot against America* in the context of alternate history without automatically disintegrating into statements about what Roth should have done, or what Roth would have done, had he been a better alternate-history writer (although he unfortunately does this to some degree, too). Spedo accounts for the return to our history as follows: "this is a violation of the conventional

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207 Here, I feel obliged to reference William Wimsatt's and Monroe Beardsley's essay "The Intentional Fallacy": Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it works (?). It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. "A poem should not mean but be." A poem can be only through its meaningsince its medium is wordsyet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrevelant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and "bugs" from machinery. (3). It cannot possibly be productive for literary criticism to claim that any aspect of a literary text was a kind of mistake on the author's part. We have the text as it is. The fact that Roth's novel contradicts expectations is precisely the reason why the text is worth discussing in the first place.

ontology of AH, which grants actuality to a state of affairs that did not obtain in actual history: at most, historical reality may be alluded to by having recourse to occasional, ironic anachronism [...]" (197). I emphatically disagree with this conclusion: the actuality of Lindbergh's presidency and all of the occurrences preceding the move back towards our history in the world of the novel is not at any point called into question. It is simply the case that the world of the novel ultimately refers *also* to the history of the real world. Equally problematic in this respect is Douthat's claim that "the great irruption of fascism into American life seems to leave no mark on Roth's history" (Douthat, "It Didn't Happen Here"). Possible-worlds theory begs a different explanation: it does 'leave a mark' on history; only the results of this history have not led to a present different from our own – except, of course, for the fact that the present in *The Plot against America* is connected to a different past than ours. 'History' in Roth's novel is our history, *with the exception of the period from 1940 to 1942*, and therefore cannot be merely 'merged' with our history; the time line of alternate history remains separate from the time line of history, even if all events after 1942 correspond to the events of history.[208]

It seems to me that the true paradox of Roth's novel has to do with contradictory notions of causality, what Widmann terms "historische Folgenlosigkeit" (307). That causal relations between events are somehow fragile – that something could have happened differently than it did – is, once again, the starting point of all alternate histories, *The Plot against America* included: it is precisely this notion of contingency that allows for Lindbergh's entrance into American politics in June, 1940. Everything following the point of divergence as a rule has to be different from history as we know it: first, in order to show the significance of that historical event (the consequences are wide-reaching and permanent); second, in order to create a history that is indeed recognizably different from our own (otherwise there would be little point in engaging in such a thought experiment to begin with). This co-existence of contingency and necessity in alternate history as well as the assumption that history is a single chain of events that can so easily be 'broken' at all (cf. Cazes and Cazes 71), is the logic that so irritates historians who argue against the practice of counterfactual history; but it is undeniably the logic of alternate history and counterfactual history in general. Roth's novel is unusual, because it partly upholds the paradoxical causal logic of alternate histories, but then seems to abandon it for a more historiographically sound logic.

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208 Ryan explains this principle of "counterpart relation" in her critique of the logic of Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths": "you do not arrive at the same house in the same world through different temporal paths, but rather, you reach different houses in different worlds that occupy corresponding spatial coordinates within their respective world" (*Avatars of Story* 142).

Lindbergh's entrance onto the floor of the Republican Convention in June of 1940 does indeed have consequences for the course of American history. But then it becomes clear that history 'rights' itself in spite of these consequences, and everything ultimately turns out as it did without Lindbergh's presidency.

All such observations have been made, of course, with reference to the national/political plot – that is, the concept of history that is relevant for alternate history in general. But as already discussed, Roth's novel prompts us to take into account the personal/familial and even to see this as an equally significant kind of history; history on a grander scale is always to be seen in relation to Philip, his family, and their own triumphs and defeats. The fact that there are essentially two plots in Roth's novel means that there are really two resolutions – or at least one resolution that ought to be seen on both levels. It would therefore be a mistake not to account for the exceptional causal logic of *The Plot against America* on personal/familial terms as well. I take a cue here from Widmann, who convincingly accounts for with the oft-cited suddenness of the ending of the novel by drawing a thematic connection to the personal/familial plot. The ending is not a *deus-ex-machina* solution, but rather well-prepared by the nightmare motif as materialized in Philip's dream about his stamp collection: "Der Text leistet hierdurch eine Verknüpfung zwischen dem persönlichen Alptraum des Erzählerhelden und der Geschichte, zwischen der Geschichte und dem Briefmarkenalbum und schließlich zwischen dem Briefmarkenalbum als dem wertvollsten Besitz des jungen Philip und dem Land, in welchem er aufwächst." (Widmann 306) Sokoloff also helpfully suggests a connection between two endings: there is a "parallel emphasis on a return to the familiar. On a grand scale, the national plotline reestablishes historical events as readers today know them; on the more intimate level, Roth's characters make their way doggedly back home" (309).

Significant for the issue of causal logic is that, although Lindbergh's election does not have lasting consequences for the national/political plot, it does leave a lasting impression on the personal/familial plot – in other words, the ongoing consequences are only present in the private lives of various figures (cf. Widmann 281). Not only are they present, but they are also painfully tangible: for Seldon Wishnow, whose mother was among the 122 Jews murdered, or Aunt Evelyn, whose husband was arrested, occurrences on the national/political stage have made all the difference. Even more immediate for Philip and his family, the strife between Alvin and Herman Roth, Bess and Evelyn, and the professional hardships born by Philip's father are more than a nightmare from which they awaken. The nightmare on the national/political stage may very well be over, but Philip remarks, "never would I be able to revive that unfazed sense of security first fostered in a little child by a big protective republic and his ferociously responsible parents" (301). What remains is "perpetual fear", that is, an ongoing

remembrance of events past and struggle to come to terms with them as well as a wounded insecurity in facing the future.

The responsibility for picking up the pieces, for rebuilding all that has been damaged by this 'intrusion' of history must take place on the personal/familial stage, and it is on this note that the novel ends: Philip is left to care for the orphaned Seldon, "shattered by the malicious indignities of Lindbergh's America"; "the boy himself was the stump [...] I was the prosthesis" (362). Spedo notes that, like *American Pastoral, The Plot against America* tells a rather bleak story of "the tragedy of a nation" as "manifest in the disastrous effects on the lives of common, powerless people" (189). Or, as Miller puts it, "this novel belongs to the small subset of it that is less interested in the unfolding of global events than the way those events affect the most intimate experiences of the people who live through them". Thus the interdependence of people and events posited by *The Plot against America*, and the fact that the consequences of the national/political stage are lasting only on the personal/familial stage, ultimately has solemn implications: history (national/political history) is resilient, little people less so. Or rather, even this history lives ultimately in such smaller players as Philip and his family. In contrast to *The Man in the High Castle*'s championing of the individual and his power to determine his own reality, individuals in Roth's novel are not only powerless to shape history, but they are also victims of it.

3.3 Of Dead Messiahs and Alaskan Dreams: Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*

3.3.1 Alternate History Integrated

Neither celebratory of free will nor dismal with regard to humans' control over their own fate is Michael Chabon's 2009 novel *the Yiddish Policemen's Union*. In the version of history presented in the novel, a Jewish temporary settlement is established in Sitka, Alaska in 1941, and instead of seven million, two million Jews die as a result of the Holocaust. The fledgling state of Israel, on the other hand, fails in 1948 after only three months of existence. History is not our own, and there are some positive aspects, but optimism seems to be blocked from every angle: there is no chance of returning to Israel, and since Sitka has been granted independence for only sixty years, there is no chance of avoiding the impending "Reversion" to the United States. And, finally, the dead body of the alleged *Tzaddik Ha-Dor*, the potential Messiah, is found in a hotel room at the opening of the novel. In *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, it is not possible to choose one's own reality à la *The Man in the High Castle*, and like in *The Plot against America* every-

thing is *not* all right in the end. The best that Chabon's entourage of dislocated Jews can hope for is survival – or so they believe.

Like Roth, Chabon claims that he "didn't come in with a point to prove or an agenda" (Cohen, "The Frozen Chosen"), but this has not stopped the flurry of presentist commentary and readings. And rightly so: even if the novel cannot be read as any sort of blunt analogue to the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and even if it does not offer a carefully developed political indictment (Sayers V. 27; Elfenbein 85), alternate histories are never merely the superimposition of the past onto the non-past, but also a non-past onto the present. As Adam Rovner notes in his discussion of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, "Alternate history may [...] be regarded both as political fiction that deals with contemporary society and as philosophical fiction that sways like a pendulum between the poles of contingency and determinism. The genre draws its singular power from its doubly-directed structure of the *what-if* and *what-is*." (Rovner, "Alternate history" 149–150) Like *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Plot against America*, *Making History*, and *Inglourious Basterds*, Chabon's novel also draws its interest – and controversy – surely from its engagement with questions related to the Holocaust and the fate of Jews in the twentieth century.[209]

As to how exactly the novel "sways like a pendulum between the poles of contingency and determinism", my purpose is to explore this idea *sans* metaphor: to discuss the relationship between the paradox of alternate history and the aspects of the novel that make it an alternate history. As already mentioned, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* features a unique manifestation of the point of divergence in that the event chosen as the basis for the alternative course of history is not necessarily part of the normalized narrative of the past. Rather, the process of determining the point of divergence is part of the detective-game of the detective-novel. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* thus stands out not only for the uniqueness of its point of divergence, but also for a striking stylistic and thematic cohesiveness as both a detective novel and an alternate history, i.e. a work that integrates both the process of solving a mystery and the paradoxes of narrating a past that did not happen into a discourse on how to maneuvre through history. *The Yiddish Police-*

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209 It is not my intention to enter into an ethical debate about representations of Jews in the twentieth century. Chabon's Jews are not the Jews of our world; they are Jews, and as such of course reference Jews in the real world, but my arguments are based solely on the conceptualization of Jewishness in Chabon's novel. Whether or not the novel's conceptualization is appropriate is by no means an unimportant question, but one which the author of this study deliberately chooses to sidestep; both because it lies beyond the scope of my study here, and not least of all, because there are most certainly those more qualified to address such questions than I. It is meaningful here to respond only where necessary to critics who do not seem to realize that they are engaging in ethical criticism at all.

men's Union shows above all that occasions for interpretation can indeed exist in alternate history. They are to be identified not at the level of language, however, but as a prompts towards discourse on themes related to the paradoxical tension between contingency and necessity inherent to alternate history. Chabon's novel deals with the question of Jewish identity, i.e. the question of how to maintain identity without a homeland is foregrounded, but so, too, is the question of just how much influence man has over his own fate. Despite the grim, deterministic attitudes of many of the characters in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, the ultimate statement on free will and determinism is not as straightforward as Landsman might have it.

3.3.2 The Detective Game

It has been observed repeatedly that *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* relies on the conventions of the "hard-boiled detective story" (Meyers 17; Davis, "Crime & mystery" 9; Myers 583): the tale of a crime investigation, defined by its bluntness and lack of sentimentality. As for the typical protagonist, Cynthia Hamilton asserts that he is

> far from being swaggering bravado, [his toughness] indicates vulnerability, and is the tight-lipped response of the potential victim. The private eye lives in jeopardy, physically, socially and metaphysically [...] In part, the hero's marginality is a product of his loss of faith. Unable to trust society, he must look to his own resources. The detective, a man of conscience, becomes judge and executioner, upholding his personal vision of justice in much the same way as the Western hero. (29)

Meyer Landsman certainly seems to fit the bill. But *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* does not take place in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York or Chicago, as many hard-boiled detective novels,[210] but rather in an imaginary Sitka, Alaska – beyond the stretches of the American mainland and dislocated from American history. Furthermore, Landsman's case is bound up with the fate of an entire people and "the gravitas of twentieth-century Jewish history" (Wisse, "Slap Shtick" 68). Chabon's project, much like his earlier novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, is one with far greater ambitions than the modest popular model from

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210 The website www.detnovel.com provides both an excellent compilation of scholarship on detective fiction as well as insightful discussion on typical characteristics: Marling, William. *Detective Novels: An Overview*, www.detnovel.com. Web. 20 Aug. 2011. <www.detnovel.com.

which it draws.[211] As Andrew Elfenbein glibly remarks, all detective stories need a MacGuffin; Chabon chooses the Messiah (82). The result of this unusual combination of 'hard-boiled' detective fiction and a contemplation of the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century is an alternate history that embraces its status as pop literature, but at the same time never gives up claims to providing a unique contribution to discourse on a grave historical subject. The fact that *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* also undercuts or mocks claims to a higher purpose – one could look, for example, to the headlines and media coverage that accompany the case ("'Boy Tzaddik' found dead in Sitka Hotel" [194]) – is a metafictional reflection of the situational irony so characteristic of both detective fiction and alternate history.

Like alternate history, detective fiction is often bound to a certain degree of stylistic clarity: both genres are defined by particular patterns in content, and it is logical then, that they are often 'readable' in a way that *Finnegans Wake* is not. As already suggested, the formal counterpart of literature that relies to some extent on the reader having a firm grasp of *what happens* is often the avoidance of linguistic ambiguity. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is thus 'bound' to the linguistic straightforwardness of most alternate histories on account of its being a detective story as well.[212] Language here is purposefully un-challenging to the reader. Even the author admits, "I felt like I had to invent a whole new language, a dialect. The thing that took the longest for me was finding the right voice. The sentences are much shorter than usual for me." (Cohen, "The Frozen Chosen")

But it would be philistine to consider Chabon's use of short sentences or invention of a new dialect as merely an attempt to make the plot clear. The simplicity of language is not only pragmatically appropriate for both detective fiction and alternate history, but it is also in this case an artistic characteristic of the novel. Consider, for example, the opening sentences: "Nine months Landsman's been flopping at the Hotel Zamenhof without any of his fellow residents managing to get themselves murdered. Now somebody has put a bullet in the brain of the occupant of 208, a yid who was calling himself Emanuel Lasker." (1) The particular "voice" here is a means of filtering the events through the novel's protagonist and principle focalizer, Detective Landsman. The literary interest is less a result of poetic language than the skilful use of free indirect discourse. The syntax is that of casual, spoken language (the first several words might be inverted to more formal English: "Landsman has been flopping [...] for nine months"), and the

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211 For more on detective fiction as a genre, see Cynthia S. Hamilton's classic volume: *Western and Hard-boiled Detective Fiction*; For more on Kavalier and Clay and comics, see Hillary Chute's provocative essay, "Ragtime, Kavalier & Clay, and the Framing of Comics" (268–301).
212 On the use of colloquial language in detective fiction, see Hamilton 37–40.

choice of words with which the events are narrated ("flopping", "managing to get themselves murdered"; "a yid who was calling himself Emanuel Lasker") reveals the exasperation, scepticism, and irreverence that is characteristic for Landsman. In other words, an intuitive stylistic aspect of both detective fiction and alternate history has become a strategy for characterization and perspectivization.

As for the dramatic structure of the narrative, anyone familiar with the conventions of detective fiction knows what to expect: Landsman will solve the crime in the end – but not before a series of false leads and trouble. Detective fiction is a particularly 'strict' instance of plot-based literature, even more so than alternate history, in that the entire narrative pattern is more or less defined. Here is Eco's account:

> La struttura della narrativa tradizionale è – al limite – la struttura 'tonale' del romanzo giallo: Esiste un ordine stabilito, una serie di rapporti etici paradigmatici, una potenza, la Legge, che li amministra secondo ragione; interviene un fatto che turba quest'ordine, il delitto; scatta la molla dell'indagine che è condotta da una mente, il detective, non compromessa col disordine dal quale è nato il delitto, ma ispirata all'ordine paradigmatico; il detective discerne tra i comportamenti degli indiziati quelli ispirati al paradigma da quelle che se ne allontanano; scevera gli allontanamenti apparenti da quelle reali, e cioè liquida i falsi indizu, che servono solo a tenere desta l'attenzione del lettore; individua le cause reali, che, secondo le leggi dell'ordine (le leggi di una psicologia e le leggi del *cui prodest*), hanno provocato l'atto delittuoso; individua chi caratteriologicamente e situazionalmente era sottoposto alla azione di tali cause: E scopre il colpevole, che viene punito. Regna di nuovo l'ordine. (*Opera aperta* 267–268)[213]

This kind of expanded formalist approach, referring in the end also to the "social commitment" of such patterns, can, as Eco shows in his analysis of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, be taken even further to 'dilute' a corpus of texts to a limited formula of narrative strategies. Most relevant here is the idea that detective fiction, like the novels of Fleming to an even greater degree, often takes the form of a

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[213] "The structure of a traditional narrative can be compared to that of a 'tonal' composition in music. Its most extreme example is that of the detective story. Here, everything starts within the context of an established order: A paradigmatic series of ethical relationships rationally administered by the law. Something disrupts this order: A crime. There follows an investigation conducted by a mind (the detective's), untainted by the disorder that has led to the crime. From the list of suspects, the detective sorts out those who fit the social and ethical system they inhabit from those who do not. He then classifies the latter according to the extent of their deviation, beginning with those who are only apparently deviant from those who are really so. In other words, he eliminates all the false clues, whose main function is that of keeping the reader in a state of suspense, and, by and by, he discovers the real causes of the crime and, among his suspects, the one most likely to be affected by them. After which, the culprit is punished and order is reestablished. Satzzeichen bitte wie oben überprüfen" (Translation from: *The Open Work* 146–147).

game for which the nature of the outcome is predictable given the conventions of the genre.[214] In detective fiction, Detective beats Villain, Justice beats Criminality. As we shall see, the socially affirmative underpinnings of such a model are subverted in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*: like other 'hard-boiled' detective fiction, the story presents an "expanding concept of guilt": "Although there is generally a main culprit, a wide and representative sample of characters are implicated for their participation in the endemic lawlessness and corruption." (Hamilton 46)

Rovner suggests that there is an even more concrete correspondence between the unravelling of a detective story and alternate history in that both kinds of narrative display a "reliance on retardory and withholding strategies"; thus both lay bare the "fundamental mechanics of the reading process itself" ("Alternate History" 148). There are certainly alternate histories that narrate the entire course of events from the point of divergence and so do not rely on any particular strategies related to dramatic transmission of information,[215] but Rovner's point is apt for Chabon's work: there is a relationship between the novel's structure as a detective story and the narration of the alternative version of history. In detective stories, the reader is often allied with the detective, at least upon the first reading: by virtue of the protagonist as focalizer, there is most often a congruency of awareness (Pfister's term. *Ibid.*) between the detective and the reader, and the reader 'performs' the detective work in some sense. In alternate histories that do not merely present the reader with the entire course of events following the point of divergence, the reader is then akin to the detective in that he has a 'mystery' to solve, namely to piece together the narrative of 'how things got to be this way'. This constitutes an additional 'assignment' to the game described above of using one's own knowledge to compare history with the alternative version.

This 'game' of identification and differentiation is difficult in the case of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* because of the absence of many of the strategies for readability mentioned already, for example the use of the second kind of paratext (forewords, appendices, notes to the reader, etc.). But not only is history absent from the novel in any explicit form, even the alternative course of events is not narrated in any linear, consolidated fashion. Whereas in, for example, *The Man in the High Castle*, we receive almost all of the details of the alternative time line

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214 Eco, "Le strutture narrative in Fleming"; I say "expanded formalist approach" because this kind of analysis seems to me to take (at least) one step further what Vladimir Propp did with the fairy tale (*Morphology of the Folktale*). Eco, too, distills an invariable, prearranged scheme of events that 'fixes' Fleming's novels (see *Role of the reader* 156–157), which seems almost directly inspired by Propp.

215 To use Manfred Pfister's term 'Informationsvergabe' as applied to dramatic texts. See Manfred Pfister, *Das Drama*, esp. chapter 3.

in the first chapters, particularly the ones that make its status as an alternative time line clear, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* features more of a successively integrated exposition.[216] Discovering Sitka's past is indeed inseparable from discovering the nature of the murder that motivated the plot in the first place. Landsman's and Berko's investigation requires them to revisit historical sites like the Simonof Massacre Spot, and only in solving the crime does the history of Sitka unfold – not to mention the mystery of Naomi's death. The narrative follows the same course: bits of the past (the arrival of the Jews in Sitka, the massacre, the World's Fair, the schemes of Hertz Shemets to avoid reversion, the familial history of Landsman and Berko as well as the history of Landsman's and Bina's relationship) are woven into the main plot when relevant.

Hints that Chabon's novel is an alternate history may be found already at the beginning, but they remain at first subtle: in the first chapter, for example, we learn that there was a World's Fair in Sitka in 1977, that Sitka has a population of three point two million, and that on January 1st, the district of Sitka will revert to the state of Alaska. For readers that do not have a specialized knowledge of Sitka, Alaska, the situation of the action on an alternative time line might not yet be clear. As the narrative continues, the hints become less subtle: we learn, for example, that Jews have been "tossed out" of Israel three times: in 586 B.C., in 70 A.D., and "with savage finality in 1948" (17). For those readers who are still not alerted at the idea that the Jews were expelled from Israel in 1948, there are further cues: Germany defeats the Soviet Union in 1942, but Berlin is destroyed with nuclear weapons, and there are multiple allusions to a war with American involvement in Cuba. Then, finally, in the course of the narrative, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is bombed.

Strikingly, perhaps the most subtle of the differences to the narrative of the real past in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is the point of divergence itself. Unlike the vast majority of alternate histories, the point at which the narrative takes a different course than history is decidedly miniscule and easily overlooked, tucked into a parenthetical statement in the book's fifth of 46 chapters:

> He [Hertz Shemets] came on the notorious *Diamond*, a World War I-era troop transport that Secretary Ickes ordered taken out of mothballs and rechristened as a left-handed memorial, or so legend has it, to the late Anthony Dimond, the Alaska Territory's nonvoting delegate to the House of Representatives. (Until the fatal intervention on a Washington, D.C., street corner of a drunken, taxi-driving schlemiel named Denny Lanning – eternal hero of the Sitka Jews – Delegate Dimond had been on the verge of getting the Alaska Settlement Act killed in committee). (27)

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216 As opposed to an initially isolated exposition; once again, to use Pfister's terms: *Das Drama*, chapter 3.7.2.2.

All of the above mentioned differences to history must be understood as results of Dimond's death. Even if the causal connection is not narrated, the causal logic of the alternate history must remain intact: there can only be one point of divergence; after that, the narrative can only *continue* to diverge from the normalized narrative of the real past. It is only fair to be skeptical of calling this the point of divergence at all: surely the life and political projects of Anthony Dimond did not belong to the normalized narrative of the real past at the time of the novel's publication? Indeed it is likely a lesson in history to most readers that such a move to create a temporary settlement of Jewish refugees in Alaska did in fact occur: the Slattery Report of 1940; in real life, Dimond successfully blocked the idea. Yet at the same time, that the reader furthers his knowledge of history here is precisely the idea: Anthony Dimond undoubtedly *becomes part of* the narrative of the real past for Chabon's readers. As suggested already, this is an instance of historical fiction influencing history. By choosing Dimond and the move to create a refuge for Jews in Alaska in 1940 as the basis for the point of divergence, Chabon has effectively emplotted them into the narrative of the real past. In addition, it is clear that the death of Anthony Dimond is granted the causal function characteristic of points of divergence (this is also why Danny Lanning is the "eternal hero of the Sitka Jews" – because this event is seen as leading to their presence in Alaska): it is the earliest point at which the alternative version of history diverges from history. At the latest as a result of recognizing its consequences (and everything that happens after Dimond's death is, by rule of causality, necessarily consequence of his death), the reader is prompted to identify this event as the 'root cause', the point of divergence.

Considering the amount of 'detective work' required to determine the point of divergence, it may be recognized that tracing cause and effect in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is by no means as simple as in other alternate histories. Some critics are apparently unwilling to acknowledge that the novel does indeed offer this logic: Smith goes so far as to say, "rather than creating a clear point of divergence in which the alternate reality deviates from our own, the novel's timeline is instead vague about what sense of historical destiny produced the alternate history" (99). This is, I would argue, a 'lazy' reading. The clues *are* there; they are merely not as readily readable as in other alternate histories. Because of its subtlety, many real readers conceivably fail to notice that Chabon's novel is an alternate history at all; they merely mistake the world of the novel for the real one.

If, referring back to Ryan's principle of minimal departure, the fictional world is perceived as being as close as possible to the real one, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* allows us to consider the fascinating possibility that the inverse is also relevant: the real world may be perceived as being as close as possible to the fictional one. As Ryan states, through an inversion of the principle of minimal departure,

knowledge about the real world may be derived not only from texts purporting to represent reality, but also from texts openly labeled and recognized as fiction. If we reconstrue fictional universes as the closest possible to the real world, why not reconstrue the domains of the real world for which we lack information as the closest possible to the world of a certain fiction? (Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* 54) This is indeed the inclination of empirical readers of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* who do not possess the historical knowledge necessary to 'decode' it as an alternate history. For less than attentive readers, the alternative world resulting effectively 'outweighs' the actual world – that is, not only in the framework of the fiction (again, as all fictional worlds do), but in reality as well. On the other hand, the confusion is not only a matter of attentive reading, it is also a kind of testament to the credibility of the fictional world: Chabon himself admitted, "for so long, the only Sitka is the Sitka I made up. I forgot for a minute there was this real Sitka" (Cohen, "The Frozen Chosen").

3.3.3 "Strange times to be a Jew": in Search of a Homeland

3.3.3.1 Yiddishland

The 'authenticity', or at least the strive for authenticity, of the world of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* might be at least partially traced to the use of Yiddish. Like *The Plot against America*,[217] Chabon's novel is clearly invested in questions of Jewish identity. But in contrast to the world of Roth's novel, Chabon has created a complete otherworld: a kind of "Yiddishland", a world in which European Jewish vernacular flourishes (Henderson 66; Meyers 18; 65; Glaser 152; 160). The concrete motivation for this interest in Yiddish has been voiced by the author and cited several times since: Chabon wrote a review essay in 1997 "Guidebook to the Land of Ghosts", referring to a 1958 phrase book *Say It in Yiddish*. Both mocking the practicality of such a book and mourning its lack of usefulness, Chabon cites it as a source of inspiration for *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*: "What if there really were a country where everyone spoke Yiddish?" (Chabon and Gross).

In his endeavour to imagine and create a place where Yiddish "remains in full flower" (Chabon and Gross), Chabon was criticized on two accounts: first, he was unaware of the fact that *Say It in Yiddish* was written at the specific request of the publisher because there were places in Israel and communities around the world in which Yiddish was spoken in the 1950s (Cohen, "The Frozen Chosen"). Second, his novel was accused of lack of Jewishness. D.G. Myers claims that Chabon has

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217 The comparison of Chabon's novel to Roth's is very frequent (Sayers V.).

smugly created an "imaginary Judaism", and that "Chabon's fiction is a monument, not to the drama of the Jews, but to their absence from his pages" (588). In addition to Myers, Ruth Wisse also criticizes Chabon for making mistakes and simplifying Yiddish (for example the use of "Tzaddik Ha-Dor" to mean merely "Messiah"), claiming that he is in fact employing a kind of mock Yiddish (Wisse, "Slap Shtick" 69).

Myers and Wisse are in some ways right. Yiddish is not actually spoken in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, but merely interjected: a frequent address is "yid"; a cop is a "noz"; a criminal is a "ganef", a non-Jew is a "goy"; other particles include "nu", "feh" or "oy". Or, we are sometimes alerted to the fact that Yiddish is being spoken, but what we read is then the English 'translation', for example Elijah's first appearance: "'Darling,' he says to Landsman now. 'This is the Hotel Zamenhof, no?' His Yiddish sounds a bit exotic to Landsman, flavored with Dutch maybe" (15–16). In other words, Chabon does not consequently follow through on his idea of creating an ultimate "Yiddishland". Perhaps the only means of doing so would have been to write the entire novel in Yiddish. The decision not to was thoroughly practical; as was the decision to ensure general access to the Yiddish that is employed. Single words are almost always either understandable from the context or explained. The term 'Tzaddik Ha-Dor', for example, is explained in the course of Landsman's interrogation of Rabbi Heskel Shpilman before it is used as an equivalent for 'Messiah' (141). Thus the explanation of the Yiddish term is achieved seamlessly and diegetically through Landsman's activity as a detective. 'Finding out' further what 'Tzaddik Ha-Dor' means and the conditions upon which he is supposed to make his entrance is then the 'stuff' of Landsman's and Berko's investigation. For the case that such strategies are not sufficient, newer editions of Chabon's novel assure understanding by including a glossary of the Yiddish terms used.

Clearly, the use of Yiddish in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* has some other purpose than mere authenticity – indeed there is no claim of 'getting it right'. Quibbling over the accurate use of the term 'Tzaddik Ha-Dor' seems to me to be the same kind of fallacy as when one demands factual accuracy from fiction: in the world of Chabon's novel, this *is* Yiddish, whether or not it is a true manifestation of Yiddish in our world. The novel's interest in the tradition of Jewish multilingualism and macaronic play (Rovner, "Alternate History" 146) perhaps already hints at the kind of poetic license with which Yiddish is employed: the "Nyu-Yorker Grill" (62–63) or the Hotel Zamenhof's brass plates in Esperanto (elevatoro, etc.) hint at the materiality of language, as opposed to its function in communication. Yiddish is not a true means of communication in Chabon's novel, but rather an artefact of sorts. It is used differently than say, French, Italian, and German in *Inglourious Basterds*, in which the languages are actually

spoken (albeit with subtitles). As we shall see, language in Tarantino's film is a more present force entirely, even determining the success and failure of the characters' various missions and maneuvres; the entire film might be seen as a series of 'power plays' by the use of language.

Yet the characters in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* are also sensitive to language, and it has significance in this context as well. It is not so much a matter of understanding or misunderstanding as in *Inglourious Basterds* as it is a matter of belonging: what 'flavor' of Yiddish you speak also signals cultural identity. The journalist Dennis Brennan, for example, is clearly an outsider in Sitka: "Brennan studied German in college and learned his Yiddish from some pompous old German at the Institute, and he talks, somebody once remarked, 'like a sausage recipe with footnotes'." (64) The identification of non-Yiddish speakers is also key to Landsman's and Berko's case, when Landsman recalls his experience at Peril Strait:

> Landsman knows Hebrew when he hears it. But the Hebrew he knows is the traditional brand, the one his ancestors carried with them through the millenia of their European exile, oily and salty as a piece of fish smoked to preserve it, its flesh flavored strongly by Yiddish. That kind of Hebrew is never employed for human conversation. It's only for talking to God. If it was Hebrew that Landsman heard at Peril Strait, it was not the old salt-herring tongue but some spiky dialect, a language of alkali and rocks. It sounded to him like the Hebrew brought over by the Zionists after 1948. Those hard desert Jews tried fiercely to hold on to it in their exile but, as with the German Jews before them, got overwhelmed by the teeming tumult of Yiddish, and by the painful association of their language with recent failure and disaster. As far as Landsman knows, that kind of Hebrew is extinct except among a few last holdouts meeting annually in lonely halls. (286)

In Chabon's world, it is as if Hebrew and Yiddish have roughly traded places: Yiddish flourishes as a functional means of communication, while Hebrew is all but 'dead'. The association of language and culture in this passage is compelling: as Amanda Glaser puts it, both Yiddish and Hebrew, have "become [...] signifier[s], vested with [their] own cultural meaning" (151). Language is commodity, carried as a brand and transported like fish; language is also luxury, a kind of spice that "flavors" the fish; it is tied strongly to place (the Hebrew that Landsman hears is the "language of alkali and rocks" that metaphorically 'dried up' despite the attempts of the "hard desert Jews" to preserve it); and finally, it is inextricably tied with the history and fate of the people who speak it. Language in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* is both a form of identification and cultural currency – both of which, it seems, are fragile and contingent. In answer to critics like Wisse, then, the particular (even if sometimes inaccurate and even superficial) usage of Yiddish in the novel might be seen as the most Jewish aspect of the

novel: the Yiddish of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* is a monument to the Jews in the twentieth century in their struggle to claim a homeland that is something other than make-shift or temporary.

3.3.3.2 Trouble in Yiddishland: "No future here for any Jew"

For its Jewish inhabitants, Sitka is clearly both. Pessimistically responding to Bina's pleas to Berko ("You have Ester-Malke. You have a future not to throw away."), Alter Litvak scribbles on his notepad: "*No future here for any Jew*" (357); upon Shpringer's greeting "Are you leaving town?", the commentary ensues "It's not an uncommon greeting these days." (19) The sense that Sitka's inhabitants somehow do not belong there is made clear by, for example, the description of Landsman's view from the roof of the Hotel Zamenhof:

> Night is an orange smear over Sitka, a compound of fog and the light of sodium-vapor streetlamps. It has the translucence of onions cooked in chicken fat. The lamps of the Jews stretch from the slope of Mount Edgecumbe in the west, over the seventy-two infilled islands of the Sound, across the Shvartser-Yam, Halibut Point, South Sitka, and the Nachtasyl, across Harkavy and the Untershtot, before they are snuffed in the east by the Baranof range. On Oysshtelung Island, the beacon at the tip of the Safety Pin – sole remnant of the World's Fair – blinks out its warning to airplanes or yids. Landsman can smell fish offal from the canneries, grease from the fry pits at the Pearl of Manila, the spew of taxis, an intoxicating bouquet of fresh hat from Grinspoon's Felting two blocks away. (9)

It is as if the city is reigned in by the existing geography of the area, the lights even "snuffed" by mountains. These are the streetlamps "of the Jews", emphasizing their status as a kind of settler, not natives to Sitka. Attempts to settle in Sitka have only made it ugly, dirty, smelly: what Landsman sees is a somber, polluted, withering cityscape, spoiled by Jewish civilization. The Safety Pin built for the World's Fair of 1977, a souvenir from the "pinnacle of Jewish civilization in the North" (2), now serves as a sad reminder of its decay, even as a warning to incoming "yids". Meyers has noted that place in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* has "the force of character" (17). If this is true, then Sitka is perhaps unwelcoming, but not hostile. The reason why the Jews are leaving town is not a result of its harsh, wintry landscape, but rather because of man-made conflict and political constellations. Alaska is full of groups at odds with each other: first, the native Alaskans and the Jews; second, among Jews; and third, Americans and everyone else.

Tlingit-Jewish relations in Alaska have a "bitter and inglorious history" (43), having reached a head with the bombing of St. Cyril and the Synagogue Riots. Critic Sarah Philips Casteel has shown how this history of strife and indigenous contact is thematized particularly through Berko and his family (800), but most

interesting is perhaps the degree to which Berko's family history is tied up with the history of Sitka – Berko's father in particular. For years, Hertz Shemets, local director of the FBI's domestic surveillance program for forty years, maneuvred politically and often underhandedly in the attempt to gain permanent status for the Jews in Sitka: "Uncle Hertz diverted up to half his operating budget to corrupt the people who had authorized it. He bought senators, baited congressional honeypots, and above all romanced rich American Jews whose influence he saw as critical to his plan" (77). It was he, in his efforts, who was responsible for the bombing of the Jewish prayer house at St. Cyril, sparking the riots that killed Berko's mother. In a maneuvre similar to the bombing of the Dome of the Rock at the end of the novel (make the Arabs think that a different sect of Arabs committed the bombing), Shemets and the Jews responsible for the bombing at St. Cyril let Jews believe that the Tlingits were the perpetrators. Berko, whose relationship to his father was already troubled to say the least, is all the more frustrated at having chosen to observe his father's religion, (despite the fact that his mother was Tlingit). He now blames both his own precarious existence and the impending fate of the Jews in Sitka on his father: outraged, he tells Shemets "It has nothing to do with *religion* [...] It has everything to do, God damn it, with *fathers*." (317) As Rovner would have it, Berko Shemets is a double-outsider: both native American and Jewish. The Tlingits, he claims are a kind of *Doppelgänger* for the Jews in their persecution and diaspora (Rovner, "Alternate History" 146). However, there is one crucial difference in the world of the novel in that the Tlingits have an indisputable claim to the land that they are inhabiting – or, at least, they have successfully defended their claim to Alaska. As Willie Dick, "a full-blooded Tlingit, descended from the Chief Dick who inflicted the last recorded fatality in the history of Russian-Tlingit relations" (273), tells Landsman and Berko: "I was here before you, and I'll be here a long time after you yids are gone" (273).

The other group whose existence in Sitka is equally threatened is also Jewish: the Verbovers, descendents of the Chasids of Verbover of Ukraine who built a criminal empire on an island near Sitka. The animosity between the Jews of Sitka and the Verbover Jews is so strong as to make Landsman's and Berko's presence threatened in the fifth precinct. Landsman "is on their turf. He goes clean-shaven and does not tremble before God. He is not a Verbover Jew and therefore is not really a Jew at all. And if he is not a Jew, then he is nothing." (102) As Landsman notes, friendship across sectarian lines is unusual, and "only chess players have found a reliable way to bridge, intensely but without fatal violence, the gulf that separates any given pair of men" (88). Ultimately, the history and the future of the Verbovers, like the Sitka Jews, hinges on one principle: survival.

The undisputed common enemy of native Alaskans and all sects of Jews alike is the United States. The US government exerts a kind of external pressure that

both exacerbates and trumps all local conflict: reversion. Despite Hertz Shemet's dealings to obtain Permanent Status for the District – later exposed by American reporter Dennis Brennan – bills were killed three times, and the current (unnamed) American president pledges to restore "Alaska for Alaskans, wild and clean." (77) Thus, "on the first of January, sovereignty over the whole Federal District of Sitka, a crooked parenthesis of rocky shoreline running along the western edges of Baranof and Chichagof islands, will revert to the state of Alaska" (7). The District Police will be dissolved, and as few of five percent of Jews living there will be allowed to stay.

It is Reversion that allows for the reflection on all of Sitka's history (Henderson 66), as well as perhaps Jewish history as a whole: as Casteel suggests, it might be seen representatively as "an imaginative construct that condenses the patterns of expulsion and dispersion that characterize Jewish history" (795). In the world of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, "the Holy Land has never seemed more remote or unattainable than it does to a Jew of Sitka" (17). Yet this unattainability, the longing for a homeland is for Chabon "the foundational ambiguity of Judaism and Jewish identity", i.e. the idea of chosenness or exceptionalism, "the setting apart that may presage redemption or extermination" (Chabon, "Chosen But Not Special").

The "frozen chosen", as the "mexicans" (everyone south of Alaska) call the Sitka Jews (238), are never home. Even the arrival of the Jews in Alaska was characterized by the thwarting of expectations and dissatisfaction: the members of the Shemets family "were all staunch Alaskan Jews, which meant they were utopians, which meant they saw imperfection everywhere" (31). Landsman, reflecting on Goldy's polar-bear pajamas, thinks to himself:

> Polar bears, snowflakes, igloos, the northern imagery that was so ubiquitous when Landsman was a boy, it's all back in style again. Only this time it seems to be meant ironically. Snowflakes, yes, the Jews found them here, though, thanks to greenhouse gases, there are measurably fewer than in the old days. But no polar bears. No igloos. No reindeer. Mostly just a lot of angry Indians, fog, and rain, and half a century of a sense of mistakenness so keen, worked so deep into the systems of the Jews, that it emerges everywhere, even on their children's pajamas. (38)

A similarly pessimistic account is given of the "Nokh Amol", a song that Alaskan Jews of Landsman's generation learned in school. "[I]t's supposed to be an expression of gratitude for another miraculous deliverance [...] Nowadays the Jews of the Sitka District tend to hear the ironic edge that was there all along" (4). The Sitka Jews are, in other words, in the unfortunate position of recognizing what was inevitable from the beginning, and what could easily have been read from a 1948 headline of the *Daily Time*: "No Jewlaska, Lawmakers Promise" (29).

As such, the America of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* hardly resembles that of *The Plot against America*: the Jewish families in Roth's novels are patriots; and, as the protagonist makes clear, they are already home. And Roth's America is indeed one worth fighting for – it has only been corrupted by Lindbergh and hostile political currents. Chabon's America, on the other hand, is not granted any positive characteristics – nor are the Americans: Dennis Brennan, Cashdollar, Spade, Spiro; even the various American Jews named on the plaques signaling their gifts – elevators, flags, lobby furnishings, etc. – to the Sitka Jews are treated with scorn (for example, by Naomi: "THIS DETAINMENT CELL COURTESY OF THE GENEROSITY OF NEAL AND RISA NUDELMAN SHORT HILLS NEW JERSEY" [265]). The Alaska Jews are temporary inhabitants, and they have no faith in the American administration. After interrogation by Cashdollar, even Bina must ultimately admit that she was wrong to have trusted her American colleagues: "Down there in Washington. Up there over our heads. Holding the strings. Setting the agenda [...] It was easy to kid yourself. Make you think you had a little autonomy, in a small way, nothing fancy." (375)

In *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, the inevitability of Reversion is paired with its immanency, underlined stylistically by the present-tense narration: it is *about* to happen; "this is why these are strange times to be a Jew" (7). The makeshiftedness and decrepitude of Sitka's infastructure is a constant reminder of its pending abandonment. Sitka Central, for example, "has been temporarily housed in eleven modular buildings in a vacant lot behind the old Russian orphanage. Rumor holds that the modulars began life as a Bible college in Slidell, Louisiana. They are windowless, low-ceilinged, flimsy, and cramped" (52). Landsman's trip to the north end is no less discouraging:

> Just off the Ickes Highway, the wreck of a shopping center marks the end of the dream of Jewish Sitka. The push to fill every space from here to Yakovy with the Jews of the world gave out in this parking lot. There was no Permanent Status, no influx of new jewflesh from the bitter corners and dark alleys of Diaspora. The planned housing developments remain lines on blue paper, encumbering some steel drawer. (179)

Everywhere in Sitka, Landsman is faced with the abandoned dreams of the Jews who landed in 1948, and like with Goldy's pajamas and "Nokh Amol", he can only see the irony in remaining references to those dreams. Even street names like Tikvah, "the Hebrew word denoting hope", connotes "to the Yiddish ear on [a] grim afternoon at the end of time seventeen flavors of irony" (198).

3.3.4 The Chess Metaphor

3.3.4.1 Zugzwang

The Yiddish Policemen's Union is in some ways its own kind of guide, that is, for 'what to do if your homeland is being abolished'. Landsman, although he seems to have a tendency to wallow in his despondency, has a point. He tells the Indian doctor,

> I respect your keenness, but tell me, please, if the country of India were being canceled, and in two months, along with everyone you loved, you were going to be tossed into the jaws of the wolf with nowhere to go and no one to give a fuck, and half the world had just spent the past thousand years trying to kill Hindus, don't you think you might take up drinking? (277).

For each of the Jewish characters the question becomes how to maneuvre in a world that seems to be ending. The novel's central chess metaphor invites consideration of yet another kind of play (this time at the diegetic level; unlike the detective game, chess has little to do with how exactly the reader reads the novel) as both governing and providing a possible solution to this dilemma.

Chess makes its appearance already in the opening chapter of the novel, and like Yiddish, it materially contributes to the story. Chess in the form of both a "distant cultural signifier" (Glaser 159) and clue appears, for example, as an unfinished game in Mendel Shpilman's hotel room (then reproduced in Uncle Hertz's house, only with a Vick's inhaler in place of one of the pieces), a book *Three Hundred Chess Games* by Siegbert Tarrash, and the Einstein Chess Club. Shpilman's alias is "Emanuel Lasker" (a Prussian world champion in chess), and his love of the game leads Alter Litvak to organize a clandestine match with Melekh Gaystick, world champion of 1980; Gaystick's Colt .38 Detective Special, with which he committed suicide at the Einstein Chess Club (with a note in his pocket, "*I liked things better the way they were before*" [83]), appears once again in the hands of Hertz Shemets, who also attempts to shoot himself in the head. Landsman's father, who also commits suicide, leaves a note in the form of a Yiddish doggerel to Caissa, the goddess of chess players (77–78); for Landsman himself, family strife and his dislike of his father is then reflected in his hatred of the game.

The game also becomes symbolic of the felt despair and hopelessness of the situation of the Jews in Alaska: As the Polish chess-master Tartakower puts it, "the blunders are all there on the board, waiting to be made" (26). As such, chess is a metaphor for ersatz homeland (Elfenbein 83), in which all of the characters are in the position of chess players, that is, chess players in a particular predica-

ment: *Zugzwang*.[218] The reason that "everybody has a funny feeling these days" (3), or that "these are strange times to be a Jew" (4, 112, 304), is that every Jew is being forced to make a move, even though he "would be better off if he could just pass" (400). Landsman's applies the term explicitly to Mendel Shpilman's situation, but the rhetoric used to describe the situation of, for example, Alter Litvak is similar: in arranging for the sacrifice of a red cow, Litvak sees "at most, a necessary move in an ancient game – the survival of the Jews" (345). The discomfort of the situation of having to make a move to survive is also made clear in terms of a sense of displacement: "He had been born, like every Jew, into the wrong world, the wrong country, at the wrong time [...]" (347).

3.3.4.2 Landsman Plays

Landsman has the same look when he sees the face of his ex-wife: "the face of a man who feels he was born into the wrong world" (282). Only, unlike Alter Litvak, Landsman refuses to play at all: his signature move in chess is what Uncle Hertz dubs the "Landsman Gambit", throwing the whole board and the pieces to the ground (304); he dismisses the game entirely as "cruel and pointless" (93). In his disillusionment and helplessness, Landsman almost certainly belongs to the roster of Chabon's typical protagonists: "tragicomic figures who fall victim to their own earnestness, infatuations, and obsessive need to make sense of their lives" (Hunter, 2001 1; see also Cohen, "The Frozen Chosen"). In his homelessness or nationlessness, Landsman is not so much a Jewish "everyman", as Meyers suggests (17), but perhaps more accurately an ironic inversion of his own name. He does not even have a temporary home within the temporary homeland, but lives in a hotel instead. And as far as he knows, "he is not going anywhere. Most of the places that will take Jews require that you have a near relative living there. All of Landsman's nearest relatives are dead or facing Reversion themselves." (19)

Landsman's situation is compounded by personal failure, especially in his married life. His history with Bina is interwoven with findings during the case, for example when he picks up the copy of *Three Hundred Chess Games* lying in Shpilman's hotel room and notices that it was last checked out in July of 1986. "Landsman can't help thinking that he first made love to his future ex-wife in July 1986 [...] July 1986 is the date stamped onto the card in the pocket of Landsman's illusions." (23) The memory that plagues him most consistently is the code-named "Django", the baby that Bina and Landsman might have had. The pregnancy was

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218 In an author's note, Chabon credits "Reb Vladimir Nabokov" with devising the *Zugzwang* set-up in *Speak, Memory* (418).

terminated for fear of abnormality, and shortly thereafter, Landsman moved out: "It was not that he couldn't live with the guilt. He just couldn't live with it and Bina, too" (15). Berko's (present) family life serves as a reminder for Landsman's own failure, although when it comes up, "he generally bothers to deny it" (40). In particular, Esther-Malke's and Berko's first son, Pinky, was born exactly two years after Django's due date.

Landsman's fond memories of his aviator sister, Naomi, hint at a once-upon-a-time happier existence in Sitka. Thinking about her is "a luxury, like a slice of pie", but because she is gone, "it is as dangerous and welcome as a drink" (232). Every picture from their childhood reveals Landsman "posed with his arm slung" around her shoulders (237), and weeps bitterly when he feels "how utterly alone Naomi left him" (280). That the mystery of Naomi's disappearance is entangled with the death of Mendel Shpilman is a hint that Landsman's own salvation is somehow tied up with the salvation of the Jews of Sitka. He even understands her career of choice as analogous to the struggle of the Jews as a whole:

> as Landsman understands [flying], the wings of an airplane are engaged in a constant battle with the air that envelops them, denting and baffling and warping it, bending and staving it off. Fighting it the way a salmon fights against the current of the river in which it's going to die. Like a salmon – that aquatic Zionist – forever dreaming of its fatal home – Naomi used up her strength and energy in struggle. (238)

After his badge and gun have been taken from him, all paths lead to the pie stand at the Sitka airport where Naomi used to be a frequent customer. Without family, without professional clout, Landsman's own identity hangs hollowly on a doge-ared, fake ID-card that reads "The Yiddish Policemen's Union". Only after speaking with the pie man's daughter, it becomes clear that Naomi is as present and relevant as ever.

In addition to devoting all of his energy to the Shpilman case (Landsman has two moods, "working and dead" [2]), Landsman's cynicism serves as a psychological defense mechanism. As in his conversation with the rebbe, "to keep himself afloat, he clings to the ballast of his cynicism" (142). His pessimism often produces droll musings, for example, in consideration of a front-page story in the *Sitka Tog*:

> And just last week, amid the panic and feathers of a kosher slaughterhouse on Zhitlovsky Avenue, a chicken turned on the shochet as he raised his ritual knife and announced, in Aramaic, the imminent advent of Messiah. According to the *Tog*, the miraculous chicken offered a number of startling predictions, though it neglected to mention the soup in which, having once more fallen silent as God Himself, it afterward features. Even the most casual study of the record, Landsman thinks, would show that strange times to be a Jew have almost always been as well, strange times to be a chicken. (13)

The ironic distance necessary for this kind of humor is, however, also the source of Landsman's underlying depression; there is nothing to 'hang on to' other than his own pessimism. Every once and a while, Landsman is caught off guard and the narrator hints at how precarious his psychological stability is. As he eats a Filipino-style Chinese donut, a "tight paper packet of heaven in his hand" (174), he tells Benito, "That's good, Benny." Benito replies, "I know it's good" and "Nothing in your life even comes close" (175). "This is so easily true that the sentiment brings a string of tears to Landsman's eyes, and to cover that, he eats another donut." (175) A similar 'break' in Landsman's psychological defenses occurs in conversation with Esther-Malke's and Berko's younger son, Goldy: "This conversation is the equivalent of Landsman's kissing the mezuzah, the kind of thing that starts out as a joke and ends up as a strap to hang on to." (39)

For Landsman, "from the point of view of God [...], all human confidence is an illusion and every intention a joke" (75). He even sees it as his job as a policeman to reveal these illusions:

> Men tend to cry, in Landsman's experience, when they have been living for a long time with a sense of rightness and safety, and then they realize that all along, just under their boots, lay the abyss. That is part of the policeman's job, to jerk back the pretty carpet that covers over the deep jagged hole in the floor. (96)

The "pretty carpet" is made up of, for example, all of the attempts of the Sitka Jews to gain root in Alaska: the World Fair of 1977 is referenced several times. We know, for example, that Landsman still has a souvenir shot glass (2, 14, 24, 161) from the fair, that the giant Safety Pin (formally known as the "Promise of Sanctuary Tower, but nobody calls it that" [49]) was built for the fair, and that the Chokecherry trees were planted (313) on the same occasion. For the Alaskan Jews, further "proof of their merit and identity as a people" was Melekh Gaystik's triumph in 1980 (82). Even the skeleton of a bear shot in the sixties that stands across from the pie stand at the airport may be seen as part of a search for sources of pride (232).

If we "look at Landsman", as the narrator invites us after Landsman's and Berko's visit to the rebbe, it is clear that neither casting his problems in irony nor debunking the hopes by which others apparently live have been a solution. Landsman has a painful existence, identifying himself not only with the drunken electric guitarist passed out in the bathroom at the Vorsht (73), but also even the dog. Eating his cheese blintzes, "he chews. He swallows. Good boy." (147) The only option for Landsman is nearly joyless survival, counting the minutes in each "sorry excuse for a week" (136), playing "goalkeeper as a squad of unprofitable regrets mounts a steady attack on his ability to get through a day without feeling anything" (48).

Yet this sense of having nothing to live for is precisely what prompts Landsman to action. He is reckless (as in the pursuit of Rafi Zilberblatt: "His plan was no plan at all, and now it has gone bad. He has no backup" [180]), but he also operates with a sense of urgency foreign to Berko, who must think about his family. As with the maneuvre that lands him in the limousine, across from Batsheva Shpilman (204–05), or his escape from the Beth Tikkun Retreat Center in Peril Strait, Landsman's survival impulse prompts him to action. He does not always know where the path leads, but "it must lead, at any rate, somewhere" (268). Landsman's predicament is not a result of lack of action, but lack of guided action. As Bina aptly suggests, Landsman ought to "try thinking about the future for a change" (190). The more fundamental problem is that Landsman does not quite believe in the future: looking at the cows with Berko, Landsman imagines that he is looking at "a mirage of the old optimism, the hope for the future on which he was raised. That future itself, it seems to him – that was the fata morgana." (292)

3.3.4.3 Others Play: Saviors and Holy Lands

As already implied, Landsman is not the only one playing to survive in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. Parallel to the detective case and Landsman's private woes, several other attempts at salvation for the Alaskan Jews are being carried out: more specifically, as a kind of active waiting for the Messiah. Focalized through Landsman, all such attempts seem ridiculous, or at least not credible. "To Landsman, heaven is kitsch, God a word, and the soul, at most, the charge on your battery." (130) His pessimism and lack of belief is so extreme that when he does slip into a kind of religious reverie, the effect is more of Vonnegut-inspired delusion verging on madness than revelation. Lying in Peril Strait, Landsman slowly loses consciousness while listening to Roboy, Baronshteyn, and Fligler:

> In the dreamy seconds that precede his loss of consciousness, the gutteral language that Landsman hears Roboy speaking plays like a recording in his ear, and he makes a dazzling leap into impossible understanding, like the sudden consciousness in a dream of one's having invented a great theory or written a fine poem that in the morning turns out to be gobbledygook. They are talking, those Jews on the other side of the door, about roses and frankincense. They are standing in a desert wind under the date palms, and Landsman is there, in flowing robes that keep out the biblical sun, speaking Hebrew, and they are all friends and brothers together, and the mountains skip like rams, and the hills like little lambs. (263)

It is significant that the sound of Hebrew, which again later serves as a clue for Landsman in the detective case, prompts his reverie. But the dream is also, of

course, undermined by the fact that it is drug-induced. No less dismissive is Landsman's attitude towards the old man Elijah, dressed in a bleach yellow coat and toting a pushke with the words "L'ERETZ YISROEL" (17–18).

But Elijah's "pimping for Messiah" is not by any means limited to "nuts" in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. The idea that a Messiah is born into every generation, and that the Tzaddik Ha-Dor will come has produced an entire salvation operation in Alaska, the machinery of which Landsman discovers in the course of his detective work. Landsman describes the concept to Bina:

> So the story is that these guys, these tzaddiks, they have been showing up for work, one per generation, for the past couple of thousand years, right? Cooling their heels. Waiting for the time to be right, or the world to be right, or, some people say, for the time to be wrong and the world to be as wrong as it can be. Some of them we know about. Most of them kept a pretty low profie. I guess the idea is that the Tzaddik Ha-Dor could be anyone. (169)

The Tzaddik Ha-Dor could be anyone, but it turns out to be none other than the dead occupant of room 208 at the Hotel Zamenhof. Everyone who had contact with him seems to have realized that he was special: in one of the few chapter-long hypodiegetic narratives, the boundary maven Zimablist relates an account of Mendel Shpilman's miracle-working (chapter 14), and his affection for "Mendele" is apparent in both his descriptions and, for example, the arrangement of a chess match between Mendel and Melekh Gaystik. The other substantial hypodiegetic narrative is also a kind of testament to Mendel Shpilman's singularity: that of his mother, Batsheva Shpilman (chapter 25). Only here, we learn more about the 'curse' of being the Tzaddik Ha-Dor: "the boy had a gift. And it was the nature of a gift that it be endlessly given." (215)

Mendel Shpilman's story is ultimately one of painful failure. Conflict with his family (the implication is that he was homosexual) pushed him away from the duties given to him: "Mendel's flight was not a refusal to surrender; it was a surrender. The Tzaddik Ha-Dor was tendering his resignation. He could not be what that world and its Jews [...] wanted him to be [...]" (226). True to Litvak's diagnosis, "Every Messiah fails [...] the moment he tries to redeem himself" (335), Mendel spirals downwards into hiding, heroin addiction, and flight from the responsibility given to him. Nobody, however, seems to fault Mendel – instead, there is a universal pity for his situation and also for the generation that failed to deserve its Messiah (197).

At Mendel's funeral, Landsman thinks to himself, everyone seems to be mourning not Mendel Shpilman, but the "loss of a lucky break they never got, a chance that was no chance at all, a king who was never going to come in the first place, even without a jacketed slug in the brainpan" (202). The pessimism here ('he was never going to come in the first place') parallels both the reasons

for and the lesson learned from the loss of Django – the chance that Landsman feels he failed to deserve. Landsman's pessimism prevents him from believing in the biblical model that is so fundamental to the Alaskan Jews: Abraham and Isaac. Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son, prevented only at the last moment by God's intervention, constitutes waiting idealized, i.e. faith pays off. *Waiting* is a fundamental part of salvation: as Berko puts it, "It's Messiah [...] what else can you do but wait?" (127). But it is clear that Landsman sees himself rather in the position of the dog Hershel, who after being set free, returns to the Vorsht, "waiting patiently for the leash to be restored" (81) so that he can wait *in vain* for his master. For Landsman, it is not a belief in salvation, but rather salvation that is never achieved that is an essential part of Jewish identity. Landsman goes so far as to conclude, "A Messiah who actually arrives is no good to anybody. A hope fulfilled is already half a disappointment" (349), and that "every Jew has a personal Messiah who never comes" (331).

It is all the more perverse that a plan to reclaim the Holy Land is carried out, regardless of the fact that Mendel is dead. Landsman at first underestimates the Jews on Verbover Island. He has unequivocal disdain for Zimbalist's responsibilities as a boundary maven:

> Landsman has put a lot of work into the avoidance of having to understand concepts like that of the eruv, but he knows that it's a typical Jewish ritual dodge, a scam run on God, that controlling motherfucker. It has something to do with pretending that telephone poles are doorposts, and that the wires are lintels. You can tie off an area using poles and strings and call it an eruv, then pretend on the Sabbath that this eruv you've drawn – in the case of Zimbalist and his crew, it's pretty much the whole District – is your house. That way you can get around the Sabbath ban on carrying in a public place, and walk to shul with a couple of Alka-Seltzers in your pocket, and it isn't a sin. Given enough string and enough poles, and with a little creative use of existing walls, fences, cliffs, and rivers, you could tie a circle around pretty much any place and call it an eruv. (110)

Landsman's hostility towards the Verbovers knows no bounds: not only does he scorn their faith, but also what they are calling faith and observance. As to be expected, nor is the rebbe is a figure of respect for Landsman:

> Rabbi Heskel Shpilman is a deformed mountain, a giant ruined dessert, a cartoon house with the windows shut and the sink left running. A little kid lumped him together, a mob of kids, blind orphans who never laid eyes on a man. They clumped the dough of his arms and legs to the dough of his body, then jammed his head down on top. A millionaire could cover a Rolls-Royce with the fine black silk-and-velvet expanse of the rebbe's frock coat and trousers. It would require the brain strength of the eighteen greatest sages in history to reason through the arguments against and in favor of classifying the rebbe's massive bottom as either a creature of the deep, a man-made structure, or an unavoidable act of God. (135)

In a brief move from Landsman's consciousness to a more authorial third-person narrator, this unflattering description is followed directly by the rebbe's first words: "I suggest we dispense with the pleasantries" (135); indeed the entire scene is characterized by such ingenious narrative inflections in the service of humor. During the audience, Landsman even ventures callously to mock the rebbe: "if your son was Messiah, then I guess we're all in trouble. Because right now he's lying in a drawer down in the basement of Sitka General." (141)

What Landsman of course does not know at that point is the clout with which the Verbover Jews operate, and the degree to which they are cooperating with both the Jews of Sitka and the US goverment. Even "the archaeologist of delusions" (148), the dentist Buchbinder, becomes effectual in the service of Alter Litvak, head of an operation to "force" the Messiah to come: raising red cows (a pure red heifer is necessary for the traditional sin offering preceding the coming of the Messiah [295]), rehabilitating the Messiah (getting Shpilman "up and running" again [352]), and finally, bombing the Dome of the Rock. As Hertz Shemets explains, the Dome of the Rock is the "third holiest site in Islam. Built in the seventh century by Abd al-Malik, on the precise site of the two Temples of the Jews. The spot where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, where Jacob saw the ladder reaching up to heaven. The navel of the world." (315) At the "Moriah Institute", Landsman and Bina are faced with a model of the Temple resuming "its rightful place at the navel of the world". It is the "rook that attends the king at the endgame of the world" (331). Unfortunately, Landsman and Bina are too late. They can only watch the television screen amidst cheering Jews as the Dome of the Rock is blown up.

Thus the Messiah machinery functions, despite the absence of the Messiah. As Bina suggests, "I guess they were too far along to stop [...] I guess they just went ahead without him." (359) Despite Shpilman's untimely death, Litvak and everyone 'actively waiting' for the Messiah were determined to tell the story of salvation the way they wanted it to be told. Like in much 'hard-boiled' detective fiction, the case is solved in the end, Landsman figures out who killed Shpilman, but the solution is far from socially affirmative (Hamilton 46). It is clear that Hertz Shemets alone is not responsible for Mendel's death: rather, it was the result of the workings of Jews of all sects as well as the Americans – a generation that failed to deserve its Messiah.

3.3.5 Stories Already Told

Landsman realizes how wrong he had been about the ineffectiveness of the Sitka Jews:

> There is a lot that shocks Landsman about the image on the television screen, but the most shocking thing of all is simply that an object eight thousand miles away has been acted upon by Jews from Sitka. It seems to violate some fundamental law of the emotional physics that Landsman understands. Sitka space-time is a curves phenomenon; a yid could reach out in any direction as far as he was able and end up only tapping himself on the back. (359)

In his anti-existentialist view, Landsman clearly takes Litvak's deterministic motto "man makes plans, God laughs" (95) to heart. For Landsman, this translates concretely into a belief in the purposelessness of his quest to find out who murdered Shpilman. "What difference will it make if he catches the killer?" (94), he wonders, and he tells Bina, "What do you need me for? Slap black flags on all our cases. Open, closed. Who gives a damn? It's just a bunch of dead yids anyway." (164)Willie Dick confirms, telling Berko and Landsman, "you and I, we know, gentlemen, that the story is whatever we decide it is, and however nice and neat we make it, in the end a story is never going to make a damn bit of difference to the dead" (288). But at the same time, such a deterministic *Weltanschauung* ironically fails to recognize how much of a role the smallest of choices can make (and has made) for an entire people – we only have to think, once again, at the minuteness of the point of divergence in this case: the drunken recklessness of a "taxi-driving schlemiel named Denny Lanning". Landsman's own *Zugzwang* as a detective, his urge to play the game out to the end, is not merely self-serving – whether he realizes it or not. Crucially, what threatens the Sitka Jews is not only the loss of land, and not only the loss of home, but also the obliteration of memory: that is to say, particularly in the absence of the first two, the best means of maintaining identity as a Jew. The Verbovers serve as an example in that the memory of the sect's survival in the past is shown to determine its course of action for the future. In the Ukraine, the ninth Verbover rebbe "emerged from those fires with eleven disciples and [...] only the sixth of his eight daughters. He rose into the air like a charred scrap of paper and blew to this narrow strip between the Baranof Mountains and the end of the world." (99) The acknowledgment of the precariousness of the sect informs Rebbe Shpilman's initial decision not to assist Litvak in his mission to regain the Holy Land. Rebbe Shpilman tells him, "I'm afraid of the potential for great loss of life among my yids and the utter destruction of everything we've worked for these last sixty years. There were eleven Verbovers left at the end of the war, Litvak, *Eleven*." (343) The transition force from the U.S. Interior Department, the "Burial Society", reveals the threat to such knowledge

as the rebbe's in a concrete way: "effective resolution" is described as part of the endeavour to "prepare the corpse for interment in the grave of history" (55). There is a move on the part of the US government to 'clean up' the history of the Jews in Sitka, to forget it and move on. Similarly, Landsman and Larry Spiro discover that someone has tampered with the investigation file of Naomi's death: the FAA records have been changed (see 244–245). Thus the detective case, even if Landsman cannot recognize its significance in this sense, is a move, however small, in preserving the Jewish experience in Sitka; it is a chance to get the story straight.

As for Landsman, astute as he is, and as much as he can rely on his memory to work through cases (he never takes notes), he might even be said to suffer from a lack of narrative coherence (the diagnosis of a narratologist, to be sure). Consider his notebook:

> a small, fat sheaf of paper held together with an extra-large paper clip. At any given moment it might be found to contain business cards, tides tables, to-do lists, chronological listings of English kings, theories scrawled at three in the morning, five-dollar bills, jotted recipes, folded cocktail napkins with the layout of a South Sitka alley in which a hooker was killed [...] (90).

A glimpse at Landsman's notebook is not unlike his walk through the lost-articles room in the Hotel Zamenhof, each item listed from unmated shoes to a windup zeppelin to eyelash crimpers – all left behind by "some yid" (10). Landsman's past is an unruly archive, and it is no wonder that he is floundering and incapable of thinking of the future; he has no sense of direction.

Landsman's most cohesive thoughts about his past have to do with Bina. She is the location of Landsman's history, and she is therefore also the one capable of orienting him towards the future. As Berko aptly notes, "in her last life, she must have been a weather vane" (71). Landsman's past with Bina is long and intimate: "For half their lives, they tangled their histories, bodies, phobias, theories, recipes, libraries, record collections. They mounted spectacular arguments, nose-to-nose, hands flying, spittle flying, throwing things, kicking things, breaking things, rolling around on the ground and grabbing fistfuls of each other's hair." (152) Whatever Landsman is still capable of feeling, he feels for or in relation to Bina. After waking up next to Pinky Shemets, "Landsman blinks, and the world intrudes in the form of a batik wall covering, and "he is hollowed out, as if it's the first time, by the loss of his son" (183). But unable to face his guilt, Landsman remains a victim of his own faithlessness – in contrast to Bina: "They were twisted like a pair of chromosomes [...], but where Landsman saw in that twisting together only a tangle, a chance snarling of lines, Bina saw the hand of the Maker of Knows. And for her faith, Landsman repaid her with his faith in Nothing itself." (170)

Bina is from her entrance at Sitka Central a force to be reckoned with: her orange parka blazing, she is capable of survival and also capable of making sense of the world in a way that Landsman is not. "You have to look to Jews like Bina Gelbfish, Landsman thinks, to explain the wide range and persistence of the race. Jews who carry their homes in an old cowhide bag, on the back of a camel, in the bubble of air at the center of their brains [...]" (155). Above all, Bina is a kind of historian in that she has a gift for narrativization: "She can shape them with confidence into narratives that hold together and make sense. She does not solve cases so much as tell the stories of them." (158) And, of course, she has the drive to tell them – really, to manage and order as much as she can around her: Bina "never stopped wanting to redeem the world. She just let the world she was trying to redeem get smaller and smaller until, at one point, it could be bounded in the hat of a hopeless policeman." (169)

Her resolve inspires Landsman, and his own drive to solve the case of Mendel Shpilman has echoes of Bina's speech upon arriving at Sitka Central (58). Landsman tells her, "Forget about right and wrong, law and order, police procedure, departmental policy, Reversion, Jews and Indians. This dump is my house. For the next two months, or however long it turns out to be, I live here." (166) In other words, what will happen will happen – and it will happen *to* them: the chess metaphor might be taken here even one step further: the Jews of Sitka are not only chess players in the situation of *Zugzwang*, but they are mere chess pieces; they are not gamemakers, they are just part of the game. As Cashdollar puts it, "the story, Detective Landsman, is telling us. Just like it has done from the beginning. We're part of the story, you and me." (365) Even Bina must admit that Reversion is inevitable, and "no matter how powerful, every yid in the District is tethered by the leash of 1948. His kingdom is bound in a nutshell. His sky is a painted dome, his horizon an electrified fence. He has the flight and knows the freedom only of a balloon on a string." (293)

This attitude is undeniably deterministic, but *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is not nearly as pessimistic as one might have it. For Landsman and Bina seem to find a way of dealing with a fate that they cannot control. Alluding to Batsheva Shpilman's philosophy of marriage (210), Landsman realizes that he needs the very same faith that he had scorned:

> He was never unfaithful to Bina. But there is no doubt that what broke the marriage was Landsman's lack of faith. A faith not in God, nor in Bina and her character, but in the fundamental precept that everything befalling them from the moment they met, good and bad, was meant to be. The foolish coyote faith that could keep you flying as long as you kept kidding yourself that you could fly. (393)

There is even a hint that this kind of deterministic outlook is a source of comfort. Alaska does not matter in the end, and it is therefore not worth bemoaning its loss. Landsman's epiphany "my homeland is in my hat. It's in my ex-wife's tote bag" (368), that he "has no home, no future, no fate but Bina" (411), is less defeated than triumphant. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is not a celebration of free will, but rather of narrative itself: the route to salvation is to figure out what the story is, live by it, and then, as he and Bina decide in the end, accept it. As the Yiddish proverb puts it, 'you can't control the wind, but you can adjust your sails'.

3.4 Time Travel and "to the present": Stephen Fry's *Making History*

3.4.1 A New Take on a Popular Premise

Making History is by now a 'classic' example of alternate history, having enjoyed both critical acclaim (like Roth's *The Plot against America, Making History* is a winner of the Sidewise Award) and having reached a wide audience (the novel even has its own *facebook* page). In the context of alternate history as a whole, Fry's novel deals with perhaps one of the most frequently entertained premises of alternate histories and counterfactual histories, namely 'what would the world have been like without Hitler'?[219] But despite its popularity and accessibility (or perhaps because of it?), out of all of the studies on alternate history mentioned here, only Rosenfeld gives *Making History* consideration – and not so much as a work of literature, but rather as an historical artefact. To my knowledge, there are no scholarly studies of *Making History*, with the exception of two published university papers.[220]

The reasons for which *Making History* has not been 'taken seriously' to the same extent as, for example *The Man in the High Castle* or *The Plot against America* are perhaps precisely the reasons that make it stand out among the case studies presented here. By no means, however, are these characteristics – a low perceived

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[219] *Making History* falls into Rosenfeld's category of "alternate Hitlers", frequently entertained by professional historians and non-specialists alike (*The World Hitler Never Made* 273). Although he unfortunately does not cite examples, Rosenfeld claims that British and American alternate histories tend to be pessimistic, i.e. the nationalistic/authoritarian tendencies of Germans would have led to a similar disaster, even without Hitler, whereas German alternate histories tend to be optimistic, i.e. World War II and the Holocaust might have been avoided, had Hitler not lived.

[220] Klötzer, Mirjam. "Zur Interpretation der Geschichte in Stephen Frys *Making History*". Thesis (Magister). Univ. of Bayreuth, 1999; Ostermann, Anke. "Die Konstruktion von Welten in Stephen Frys 'Making History'". Term paper. Univ. of Bielefeld, 1999.

degree of plausibility, the use of time-travel – unique to this novel as alternate history. As has already been argued, most alternate histories may be thought of as pop literature. Particularly a work like *Alternate Kennedys* has decidedly modest artistic aims, which again is to say nothing of its value or success as an alternate history. Taylor, in his recommendation of Fry's novel for young-adult and mature readers, seems to have understood its intent as pop literature perfectly with the statement that it "will tickle older readers familiar with basic world history" (Taylor G. 896). *Making History* features a decidedly "undistinguished speculative premise" (Anon., "Making History" 70), namely that a Ph.D. student in history is able to, with the help of a "time imaging machine", contaminate the well in Brunau am Inn (Hitler's birthplace)[221] with a male-sterilization pill, thus preventing Hitler from being born. This is indeed no more plausible than Trechera's counter-scenario, in which a "cronodeslizador" ("time-shifting machine") is used to prevent and then re-allow for Hitler's death. Neither Fry's nor Trechera's work is less of an alternate history than those manifestations of the genre that seem more plausible or founded their counterfactual gestures in careful research.[222]

Making History is a critical work for this study, also in terms of the relationship between past narratives and FNs: because of its multi-linearity, conceptualization of history, reconsideration of the Great Man theory so prevalent in the first case studies here, and discourse on free will vs. determinism. *Making History* is a time-travel novel, and a rather formulaic one at that (Mellet 110). This means that, although the point of divergence 'occurs' in the course of the narrative, thus allowing us to consider *Making History* to be a FN, it does not constitute bifurcation at the level of structure: Michael's consciousness guides the reader through both versions of the world after Hitler's birth date, and the two versions (really three, if we count the world in which Michael 'lands' in the end) are necessarily sequential – the second must follow from the first, etc. Particularly because Michael's invasive reach back to the past results in a world that is considerably worse than the one in which he started, *Making History* does what other time-travel tales tend to do, namely consider to what extent are humans capable of improving their situation – even if it were possible to change the past.

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221 The name of the town in which Hitler was born is "Braunau am Inn". The misspelling is consistent throughout the novel, and there does not seem to be any motivation for or acknowledgment of the decision to omit the first 'a'. Since the novel insists on "Brunau am Inn", this is the spelling that I shall use here as well.

222 *Making History* is, of course, also founded on careful research, as Fry makes clear in the acknowledgments. This research, however, does not serve so much the purpose of making the point of divergence plausible, but rather of creating a framework for the secret history that describes Hitler's birth, youth and military endeavors in World War I.

Because *Making History* focuses on the will and actions of one person (Michael) who targets one, specific historical figure (Hitler), the question becomes: does individual agency have a role to play in shaping history? Here, we might begin by recognizing that Fry's work seems to follow the logic of stochastic causality, as proposed by critics of counterfactual history as history writing. As Randall Collins explains,

> Individuals play roles in large-scale public processes that are not very unique. Take the argument that if Hitler were killed in the trench warfare on the Western front in World War I there never would have been a Nazi movement or any of its consequences. In the narrow sense, that might be true. There might well not have been a movement that called itself 'Nationalsozialistische-Deutsche-Arbeiter-Partei', adopted the swastika symbol, the 'Heil Hitler' salute, and so forth, but there were a large number of paramilitary movements in Germany after the Armistice in 1918; some of these prospered and grew during the Weimar Republic, in part because of lack of government strength to impose law and order; in part because conservative factions in the government siphoned military resources to paramilitaries and fostered them as hidden forces, thus evading the limitations of the Versailles Peace Treaty [sic] (Fritzsche 1998). The overall pattern was for the right-wing paramilitaries to amalgamate with one another, winnowing out leaders, strategies, and symbolic displays until they consolidated through a bandwagon process around an emergent authoritarian leadership. This consolidation did not have to take the form of Hitler and his particular symbolic package; it could have been an organization such as the *Freikorps*, the *Stahlhelm*, the *Germanenordern*, or another. The larger pattern, the polarization of German society between left-wing and anti-communist paramilitaries and political parties, was due to a larger set of forces. The death of one particular individual skilled at making emotional speeches is not likely to have derailed this process. It certainly would not have turned Weimar Germany into something like British parliamentary democracy. (257)

In other words, this is a rejection of the Great Man theory.[223] Individuals do indeed shape the course of events, but whether or not it was one, specific person or someone else ultimately plays no role: as Collins puts it, "the comings and goings of political leaders, in macro perspective, are random, but sooner or later someone will come along who will make the move commensurate with the resources" (R. Collins 253). Had it not been Hitler, it would have been somebody else. *Making History*, in the selection of and manipulation of Hitler as its historical subject (as well as its focus on World War II and the Holocaust), subscribes implicitly to the concept of history that is relevant for all alternate histories: history is the normalized narrative of the real past. Thus, it may still be contrasted with other kinds of postmodern historical fiction that deny the existence of history as such.

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223 Or, more specifically, as Butter notes, Fry's work is the fictional employment of the Goldhagen thesis ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 73; on the work of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*).

However, in suggesting that Hitler might well have been replaced by someone who would have led Germany on a similar political path (and more effectively!), *Making History* proposes a concept of history that is arguably more in tune with this aspect of historiography as it has developed in the twentieth century than other alternate histories.

Although it could not be more different in tone, affect, or style, *Making History* is similar to George Steiner's novel *The Portage to San Cristóbal of A.H.* in suggesting that Hitler was indeed evil, but he was also a man of his time. Only Steiner's premise, that Hitler is found in the Brazilian Amazon thirty years after World War II, does not involve re-writing the Holocaust for the worse. Thus whereas the argument that the Holocaust would have occurred even without Hitler leads to a kind of "de-demonization" (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 272) of Hitler in Fry's work (Rudolf Gloder is the decidedly more dangerous character), Hitler is all the more terrifying in Steiner's work because there does not seem to be an answer or a means of coming to terms with the evil that he did cause. In other words, for Steiner, the abandonment of the Great Man theory leaves us even less capable of coming to terms with our past: punishing the man held responsible for the Holocaust cannot begin to compensate for what happened. For Fry, on the other hand, the resignation resulting from the sobering discovery that the Holocaust with Hitler was far better than it might have been without him translates to a metaphoric shrug and toast to the present.

Understandably, it has been suggested that *Making History* is "the most pessimistic portrayal of the historical consequences of Hitler never becoming Führer" (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 298). Not only does Fry suggest a worse alternative to Hitler, but at the same time, *Making History* proposes that our world is the best of all worlds. As Fry's dedication suggests ("To Ben, William, George, Charlie, Bill and Rebecca and to the present"), our present, a world in which Hitler lived, is not all that bad. But it is perhaps precisely this attitude that raises objection. Especially because Fry has been accused of exhibiting a lackadaisical and insensitive attitude towards the Holocaust (cf. 368), it is relevant here to consider ethical criticism of alternate history, in particular comedic alternate history, in looking back on sensitive historical topics. Most generally – and this applies to all historical fiction –, how has criticism tried to determine how fiction should interact with, contribute to the memory of, or comment on traumatic historical events? And more specifically, what are the ethical implications of re-writing the Holocaust?

3.4.2 "The true story of what never happened": Making Sense of *Making History*

Ph.D. candidate Michael Young has been caught in a kind of time loop, a plight that he bemoans in the preface to his story: "This story [...] can start everywhere and nowhere like a circle" (3). However, although he is confused about how to best tell his story, the structure of the novel is not particularly complicated: like most time-travel stories, a certain degree of discursive clarity is necessary if the reader is to remain oriented. The narrative is structured in two main parts, each subdivided into chapters that correspond with changes in setting:

the first half of the novel, Book One, alternates between the fictional present, set in Cambridge and narrated homodiegetically by Michael Young, and passages from Michael's dissertation. The chapters presenting sections from Michael's dissertation are unannounced as such, and the connection with the fictional present may not be immediately clear, until we learn that Michael is writing his dissertation on the childhood of Adolf Hitler in the form of fictional interludes, "filling in the gaps" of history. While Michael's advisor is appalled at his "creativity" (89), a mysterious Professor Leo Zuckermann (born Axel Bauer) takes a particular interest in Michael's work. Zuckermann, wracked by guilt because his father was an SS doctor at Ausschwitz, proposes to go back in time using a "TIM" ("Temporal Imaging Machine") and change the world for the better by preventing Adolf Hitler's birth. This is to be achieved by delivering an orange pill, a permanent male contraceptive, to the water supply of Brunau am Inn. The pills are stolen from Michael's girlfriend, a biochemistry researcher.

A connection between the two stories, that of Michael in Cambridge, and that of Adolf Hitler's youth, is already playfully implied by a kind of 'threading' the ends and beginnings of chapters together. Not only do the two stories alternate chapters in a regular pattern (and so imply parallels between Hitler's youth and the events in Cambridge), but the ends and beginnings of the alternating chapters are often verbal dove-tails (cf. Ostermann 13). For example, the chapter "Making Love" ends with the sentence, "A great soaring, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-conquering eagle with piercing eyes and mighty wings and talons that dripped with the blood of the pig!" (51); the beginning of the following chapter "Making up" begins with, "Red fluid dripped into one of those spiralling, screw-like doo-dads they so love and I stared at it fascinated" (52), setting "the blood of the pig" and "red fluid" together. At the end of the chapter "Making Free", Alois Hitler exclaims "There he is! My boy! My wonderful boy" (68); at the beginning of following chapter "Making Conversation", Professor Zuckermann exclaims "My boy! And so prompt on the hour!" (69) At the end of chapter "Making Threats", Alois Hitler abuses his son Adolf: "Oh run along, little boy, before your snot dribbles onto

the carpet" (84); at the beginning of the following chapter "Making Mistakes", Michael recounts, "Sweat dripped off my nose and onto the floor." (85) And so on.

Book Two employs the same strategies, not only alternating and drawing parallels between the fictional past and present, but also explicitly 'weaving' the two plots together at the chapter breaks. Only this time, the past and present are the altered versions of the ones with which we are already familiar from Book One: Michael is now at Princeton instead of Cambridge, and now majors in philosophy instead of history. The altered version of history, presented from the respective dissertation from the altered present, Hitler was never born. We know, as Michael knows, that the plot to sterilize Hitler's father was successful. However, Michael's experiences in the new present soon make clear that the world is not better off. In this present, homosexuality is illegal, Europe's Jews have been killed off, and the Nazis are the ruling party in Europe. Without Hitler, a new Nazi leader, Rudolf Gloder, had emerged as a more ruthless, competent, charming, and ambitious political force. Not only was he able to more effectively fulfill Nazi political goals, but also to bring the genocide of the Jews to fruition: the contaminated water Brunau am Inn became a basis for "Brunauer Water", which was then used to sterilize the Jews, essentially wiping out an entire generation. The one primarily responsible was none other than Dietrich Bauer, the father of Axel Bauer. Axel Bauer is, in this present, also wracked with guilt, and with Michael's encouragement, he seeks to use a TIM to send a dead rat to the water source in Brunau am Inn so that it will be pumped clean (before the sterilizing water can affect the population). In the frenzied attempt to rectify history, Michael's friend and love interest Steve is shot dead.

If we are to consider attempts to map principles of possible-worlds theory onto Fry's novel,[224] it is necessary to go beyond the two-part structure suggested

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[224] Anke Ostermann, in a published student term paper, undertakes a convincing application of the principles of possible-worlds theory onto Fry's novel. But beyond failing to recognize the discrepancy between the two-part structure of the narrative and the tripartite constellation of worlds, Ostermann mistakenly equates the fictional world of Book One with the real world, simply because both participate in the narrative of the real past (cf. 15). She furthermore employs Ronen's distinction between 'fictional world' and 'possible world' without further explanation, which I find problematic: "Possible worlds are based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs; fictional worlds are based on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy in relation to the actual world." (Ronen 8) For Ostermann, Book One of *Making History* is a fictional world, Book Two is a possible world (14–15). However, not only would we have to translate 'actual world' to mean 'story world' in order to make this distinction valid (otherwise, *both* are very clearly fictional worlds), but it is also not clear what exactly constitutes "ramification" as opposed to "parallelism". It seems to me that, in the case of time travel, all worlds are based on both notions.

by the novel. In Book Two, Michael's plight takes a turn for the better. As Steve is dying, he presses the button to start the TIM. When Michael is conscious again, he has arrived in a reality similar to that which he knew in Cambridge. Only two differences are apparent: first, his favorite band never existed, and second, Steve seems to remember the previous reality. Even though the differences between this present and the initial present seem miniscule, it would be inaccurate to say that Michael has 'landed' back in the present in which he started – much as it would be illogical to suggest that *The Plot against America* merely rejoins history in the end. The present in which Michael 'lands' is crucially distinct from the initial present in that it has and will always have a different past: namely the sum of all events that resulted in this present.

Significantly, the three worlds, three continuations of the same point in history, of *Making History* are necessarily consecutive. In other words, each subsequent world requires the one preceding it. Thus while the story is multi-linear (altogether, we get two different versions of the same period of time in the past and three different versions of the same period of time in the present), this is a different sort of FN than *Blind Chance* or *N*. The distinction here is subtle but critical: the worlds of *Making History* are indeed clearly demarcated, and almost all figures have counterparts in each world realized, so that it may seem to be the case that they are mutually exclusive (Ostermann 4–5). But in the case of *Making History*, Bordwell's concept of "contamination" helps to explain that, although they are still mutually exclusive, all of the worlds do and must indeed exist in parallel: there are figures who are conscious of the 'skips' between worlds – their own plight is dependent upon learning from or developing a strategy based on what they have already experienced in parallel scenarios.

In particular, Michael's centre of consciousness is unchanged between the first and second, second and third worlds.[225] At the opening of Book Two, after the first intervention into the past, he is, although somewhat disoriented, still the Michael from the first present: he speaks with a British accent (much to the surprise of his family), and he is able to remember not only the first present, but also his endeavour to change the past. Michael's situation is, in other words, much like that of Hodge in *Bring the Jubilee* (after Hodge travels back in time, inadvertently changes the outcome of the Civil War, and gets stuck on a timeline that is not his

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225 Ostermann mistakenly claims that Michael is the only character who is conscious of the changing realities: He is the only one "der Romanfiguren die Möglichkeit hat, die Grenze zwischen den Welten zu überschreiten und sich bewußt zu machen, daß überhaupt mehrere Welten parallel existieren" (4); Klötzer makes the same false claim (16). The last chapter of the novel makes clear that Steve's identity, too, is continuous between the second and third realities: he remembers Michael, and although British in this world, he retains his American accent.

own): "My own fate, marooned in a new history was incidental. No one would ever believe what I had done or from what hellish roots I had emerged." (323–324) Michael later even reflects upon this particular situation as typical: "God knows, I've seen enough movies to know how hard it is for the alien time-travelling hero to persuade anyone to listen to him." (378)

It is precisely Michael's ability to perceive multiple worlds and the relationships between them that makes him not only an 'outsider' in the world in which he has landed, but also an 'outsider' in his own narrative – for example at the beginning of Book Two: "we will leave me lying there for the moment, reassembling myself" (237). Such explicit instances of extradiegetic narration as well as references to the reader, create a self-referential distance between Michael and his story, the reader and the novel – not unlike in *Tristram Shandy* (cf. Ostermann 8–9). The shifts to screenplay-format as well as the explicit contemplation of the nature history and historiography, both of which will be discussed more thoroughly in the following sections, are of course also central aspects that draw attention to Michael's narrative as narrative, and fiction as fiction.

Let it be noted here that *Making History* participates in the same notion of undermined authenticity as alternate history in general. Like other alternate histories, the novel makes use of 'fake' documentation, for example the "Chronicle of World History", from which Michael learns about Gloder and the history of his 'new' present (356–65) as well as a postscript to the reader. It thus makes claims to authenticity while at the same time revealing its own status as fiction. Where Fry's novel goes one step further than many alternate histories is in its contemplation of this particularity of alternate history. As Michael explains:

The puzzle that besets me is best expressed by the following statements.

A: None of what follows ever happened
B: All of what follows is entirely true

Get your head round that one. It means that it is my job to tell you the true story of what never happened. Perhaps that's a definition of fiction.

I admit that this preamble must look rather tricksy: I get as snortingly impatient as the next man when authors draw attention to their writerly techniques, and this sentence itself disappears even more deeply than most into the filthy elastic of its own narrative rectum, but there's nothing I can do about that. (8)

The same puzzle is repeated at the beginning of Book Two (238). There is an inconsistency here that applies to self-referential fiction in general. As Ostermann explains, "Der Erzähler erinnert den Leser, daß es sich bei der Handlung um Fiktion, also um Erfundenes handelt. Doch innerhalb des fiktiven Rahmens

sind alle Ereignisse wahr." (8) In other words, the undermined authenticity that is so characteristic of alternate history finds expression here. The first point is the prerequisite for alternate history in particular, i.e. the narrative of a past that does not concur with the normalized narrative of the real past; the second refers to the kind of activity in which the reader must engage in order to read fiction at all, something like the suspension of disbelief – we know it is not true, but must pretend that it is.

The pair of statements is indeed complicated, even without consideration of the metafictional implications: within the fiction, it seems that Michael is referring to a discrepancy created by the existence of multiple, parallel timelines, i.e. the entire story has to be logically impossible from the perspective of the world in which Michael is located, while at the same time the multiple versions of the past and the present must be granted a status as 'actual'. Michael is puzzled by trying to have it both ways in possible-worlds theory: if both A) and B) are true, the first statement subscribes to the actualist notion that one world takes precedence over all of the rest, while the second statement subscribes to the possibilist notion that the 'actual' world is merely relative to where the speaker is located.

3.4.3 The Meisterwerk and Mastering Academia

It has been noted that the status of *Making History* as a campus novel (Klötzer 78–80) serves as a basis for commentary on academic disciplines (biology and history in particular, but also literary studies, mathematics, physics, etc.). Given the conundrum described above, perhaps best seen as the result of Michael's trying to understand something that cannot be explained by his scholastic knowledge, it is no wonder that Michael expresses such a distaste for academia. He is fed up with science, explaining that "dutifully, like most people of [his] generation, [he] has read, or tried to read, popularising histories of Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Unified Field Theories, the T.O.E. And all the rest of it"; concluding that such books are "specifically designed, as far as I can tell, to enable non-scientist pseudo-intellectuals like myself to bullshit at dinner parties about particle accelerators, the Strong Force and charmed bosons [...]" (102). Jane's snobbery only further convinces Michael that the sciences are useless. "Real problems aren't number-shaped", he concludes, "they're people shaped" (109). In terms of transcending pretence, however, Michael's chosen business does not seem to be any better: Michael bemoans the fact, for example, that "as everyone knows, there is no period in history in which you can't write successfully of a newly emergent, newly confident middle class, just as there is no period in history after the sixteenth century in which you can't write about 'the sweeping away of the old

certainties'." (103) Although Michael expresses an inclination for dealing with dates and chronology, and he at least understands what he needs to do to become a successful historian, his status as a kind of misfit in the academic establishment is apparent. Jane criticizes (among other things) Michael's way of talking: "You'll probably be a fellow of the college next year. Do you think Trevor Roper used to go around the place saying "woah, man ... like, *cool*!" I mean, "darling, it's so strange. So decidedly odd." (63) Michael proceeds to defend himself, explaining that there are different types of historian – including the "fogeyish type", from which he would like to distance himself by being "from [his] own time" "How can you historify a past age if you don't identify completely with your own, yeah?" (63).

However Michael might be able to justify his own unusual approach, it is clear that he cannot come to terms with his fogey advisor, Doctor Angus Alexander Hugh Fraser-Stuart:

> Like Patton and Orde Wingate and many another self-regarding militarist before him he thought he cut a great figure mixing as he did a love of weapons and warfare with scraps of philosophy and louche arcana. Take a line through Sterling Hayden's Colonel Jack Ripper and Marlon Brando's Mr. Kurtz. A blood and thunder general is bad enough, but one who prides himself on his knowledge of Taoism, French baroque music and the writings of Duns Scotus is your real menace to the world's good order. If I'm to be sent into battle, give me a Colonel Blimp any day, a fine, proud old bastard with a bristling moustache who reads John Buchan and thinks Kierkegaard is Sweden's main airport, not some self-glorifying tit who plays polo in the nude and writes commentaries in silver Latin on the Pisan cantos of Ezra Pound. (87–88)

Not surprisingly, Professor Fraser-Stuart harshly criticizes Michael's dissertation: "It's not an academic argument, it's a *novel*, and a perfectly disgusting one at that. What? What?" (89). He is, of course, correct in calling Michael's dissertation a novel, or at least fiction: Michael has essentially overstepped the boundaries between professional historiography and fiction-writing that have been described already, however variable or subject to debate those boundaries may be. The *Meisterwerk* is, in fact, a secret history – not unlike Beryl Bainbridge's *Young Adolf*.

As to the value of *Meisterwerk* as a means of accessing the past, it becomes clear that Professor Fraser-Stuart could not be any more short-sighted: his stuffy rejection of Michael's work as a legitimate kind of history indicates his failure to recognize what turns out to be the most direct means of accessing the past. It is Leo Zuckerman (a.k.a. Axel Bauer) who, because of his personal motivations, recognizes the potential of the *Meisterwerk*. Michael's account of Adolf Hitler's youth gains particular credence when, in the second part of the novel, the narrative has

been minimally adapted to accommodate Hitler's absence. The *Meisterwerk* of the second world, "From Bayreuth to Munich: The Roots of Power" (the *Meisterwerk* of the first is called "From Brunau to Vienna: The Roots of Power"), an account of Rudolf Gloder's youth, is full of parallel episodes to the original *Meisterwerk*, suggesting that Michael was right, down to the last detail. Hayden White's advice that "[historians] should admit that our only 'real' connection to the past is not as historians" (White, *The Content of the Form* 2–3; cf. de Groot on William Godwin, *The Historical Novel* 18; cf. Southgate on Herbert Butterfield 6 and 18) seems particularly relevant for *Making History*.

Furthermore, within the novel, the *Meisterwerk* is not the only instance of underwriting history, nor is it the only example of a fictionalized account that turns out to be just as effective or consequential as what really happened. The story of Leo Zuckermann (194–197), which Axel Bauer believed and lived by up until his mother's death, is an example of what Widmann would call a 'plot-type' counterfactual within the fiction: the events of Axel Bauer's life are not changed, they are simply re-emplotted in order to allow him to avoid responsibility (and guilt) for his father's crimes. Similarly, we find out through the discovery of Rudi Gloder's diary that Gloder has only staged himself as a hero in World War I: the same course of events that inspires overwhelming pride in Hans Mend ("Suddenly, Hans knew something with absolute clarity and conviction. It is impossible, he realized with a burst of pride, for Germany to lose the war. If the enemy could see what I have seen they would surrender tomorrow" [260]) brings him to tears of "ravenous revenge" when re-narrated by Rudi: from Hans's perspective, we witness Rudi's rescue of the body of Ernst Schmidt (whose ill-fated attempt to recover the *Pickelhaube* of Colonel Baligand results in death), revealing an unwavering sense of loyalty to his fellow soldiers and unmatched degree of courage. When Hans, brimming with enthusiasm, goes to relay Rudi the news that he is being promoted, he unwittingly uncovers a secret (hi)story of the same events. It turns out that Rudi merely took advantage of the situation for his own glory: he is a despicable, two-faced, arrogant self-aggrandizing liar who recites Goethe to himself (and translates it into French) out of boredom and has no tolerance for his fellow soldiers.

Rudi's ability to manipulate situations and convince those around him that he is virtuous serves him well in his rise to power in Germany. Cunning and strategic, Rudi is also aware of the danger of letting the account of his real motives 'leak' out into the public, and thus kills Hans Mend. Clearly, the power of secret (hi)stories is privileged in *Making History*. The novel does not question the existence of a real past, nor does it question our ability to access that past. Instead, it questions the effectiveness of professional history in accessing the past as well as of the value of finding out what really happened. Much more significant seem

to be the stories that are believed to be true, or as is the case with Axel Bauer, the conflicts that result from finding out that they are not.

3.4.4 The Historian as God? Agency, Free Will, and Determinism

Fittingly then, the lessons that Michael does learn about history are less a result of his academic development, i.e. learning history as a 'trade' as proposed by Professor Fraser-Stuart, than his 'hands-on' experience, *making* history. History writing is understood in *Making History* as involving a passive relationship: the historian is not part of the object he is analysing; he is merely a recipient of events past. This is indeed one of the reasons that Michael has chosen his discipline: "A historian has the pleasant luxury of being able to point out, from the safety of his desk, where Napoleon ballsed up, how this revolution might have been avoided, that dictator toppled or those battles won. I found I could be most marvellous dispassionate with history, where everyone, by definition, is truly dead." (7)

Only, it seems that traumatic events prompt wishful thinking. After meeting with Leo and seeing the TIM, Michael considers going beyond this 'traditional' role of the historian. More specifically, he muses about going back in time to prevent the Holocaust from happening. Jane scoffs, claiming that, because of such wishes, time travel is a logical impossibility: "if it *were* possible, then at some time in the future someone would have gone back and stopped things like the holocaust from happening, wouldn't they?" (137). Michael also has his doubts and comes to the fatalistic conclusion that "you can't change the past. You can't redesign the present. Hell, you probably can't even redesign the future. Hitler was born, you can't make him unborn." (167) He is, of course, wrong.

In changing the past, Michael breaks the boundary between the two definitions of history: history as what happened and history as history writing, i.e. the process of accounting for those events.[226] If history is traditionally thought of as 'closed', unrepeatable, and inaccessible, then this logic is defied in *Making History* as well as any time-travel fiction, for changing the past is no longer impossible. Similar to the realization of Manfred Vogelweide in "Mein Führer", "en nuestras manos está el poder de alterar el curso de la Historia" ("the power to alter the course of history is in our hands") (Trechera), the historian in *Making History* becomes more active in the sense of influencing the course of events. And,

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[226] Ostermann, using a lexicon definition of history, explains Michael's actions as a furthering of a "traditional" understanding of history: "Er überschreitet jedoch die Grenze, die sich aus diesem Geschichtsbegriff ergibt (vergangenes Geschehen zu erforschen) und verändert selbst die historischen Ereignisse und 'macht' Geschichte." (4–6).

as Ostermann puts it, "in diesem Schema ist der Historiker als Subjekt stärker mit dem Objekt (Geschichte) verknüpft als in der traditionellen Definition, da er selbst ein Teil der alternativen Welt wird" (6). Michael is both a creator of and participant in more than one history. He is a creator of worlds: "Die alternative Welt Princetons, als deren Teil Michael Young nach dem Experiment erwacht, verdankt ihre Existenz nicht seiner Auseinandersetzung mit ihr, da sie in der realen Welt Cambridges nicht existierte und somit gar nicht Gegenstand einer Untersuchung sein konnte, sondern entsteht erst durch die Anwendung der Maschine T.I.M." (6) Michael is thus no mere historian; he is a kind of God, both in his authority and power of creation.

Michael fails, however, to realize the great responsibility and degree of consequence that goes along with tinkering with the past, and imposing judgments about what should have happened and what should not have happened – something that Hodge, Barbara, and the other scholars at Haggershaven in *Bring the Jubilee* seem to understand. Unlike Hodge's unfortunate fate, 'marooned' in a history not his own, Michael's 'relocation' in time is the result of a calculated move to change the past (and the present). Michael is foolhardy:

> The historian as God. I know so much about you, Mr So-Called Hitler, that I can stop you from being born. For all your clever-clever speeches, and swanky uniforms, and torchlight parades, and death-dealing Panzers, and murdering ovens, and high and mighty airs. For all that, you are entirely at the mercy of a graduate student who has boned up on your early life. Eat it, big boy. (167)

In believing that "God is not the Author of the Universe, he is the screenwriter of your Bio-pic" (165), Michael commits the same fallacy that many heroes of time-travel fiction also commit. He mistakenly believes that 'we all live in scenes', and it is therefore possible to calculate the relationship between the past and the present in order to achieve a specific outcome; ultimately that the past can be edited like a movie with retakes and cuts. Like the protagonist of *The Butterfly Effect*, Michael is forced to recognize the tenet of chaos theory, i.e. that the smallest change can have widespread, unpredictable consequences for everything that follows. For this reason, the 'knots' that result from trying to change the past are often far worse than dealing with the present the way it is.

In other words, Michael falls prey to the illusion that contingency, the idea that it could have happened otherwise, translates to a triumph of free will, the idea that you can make it happen the way you want. The appeal of agency, the ability to make choices that effect certain outcomes, is manifest in Michael's interest in movies as well. Above all movies, he thinks, are the answer to the stifling sense of necessity caused by looking backwards in other art forms:

> I said it before and I'll say it again: Books are dead, plays are dead, poems are dead: There's only movies. Music is still okay, because music is *soundtrack*. Ten, fifteen years ago, every arts student wanted to be a novelist or a playwright. I'd be amazed if you could find a single one now with such a dead-end ambition. They all want to make movies. All wanna make movies. Not write movies. You don't write movies. You make movies [...] (164).

In telling his own story, Michael consciously employs the form of screenplay to convey a sense of 'liveness', i.e. that the events are happening in the present. 'Live' action, as opposed to the 'dead' action of books, allows for a chance of influencing the outcome. We might further say that although contingency does not automatically translate into control over one's fate, it is certainly a prerequisite for the notion of free will. For if causality is rigid and governed by necessity, that is, events cannot happen any other way than they do, human agency has no role to play. Michael realizes in the end that, although there is such a thing as contingency, *even in past events* –, and human agency is indeed an important factor in determining the course of history, the outcomes of decisions are not always predictable or controllable. History's web of cause and effect is far too complex.

Thus even though Michael possesses perhaps the most optimal form of agency imaginable, the ability to change the past, he feels helpless: "I fade from Hollywood screenplay format to dull old, straight old prose because that's how it felt. That's how it always feels in the end." (164) Leo's outlook is not any less pessimistic: he asks Michael what the difference is between a rat and a mouse. "The difference is that a rat does good or evil by changing things around him, by acting. The mouse does good or evil by doing nothing, by refusing to interfere. Which do you want to be?" (221–222) In other words, agency does not prevent evil. Action as well as inaction, results in both good and evil.

It becomes clear in the novel that neither the rat nor the mouse presents a satisfactory strategy. Not only does Michael's decision to prevent Hitler's birth result in a world far worse than the one he came from, but his action also makes him responsible for this outcome: while Axel Bauer suffers under the guilt of his father's discovery of the "water of Brunau" (contaminated with the infertility pill; used to carry out the Final Solution in an even more 'effective' form), Michael realizes the "most awful truth that it was I, Michael Young, who had contaminated the waters of Brunau" (437). In other words, Michael's conscience is worse off than if he had not acted at all. On the other hand, the idea of doing nothing, or the deterministic belief that it is meaningless to act, is equally disturbing for Michael. He asks Jane,

> What would you do if you discovered that there really was a gay gene? Or that black people have less verbal intelligence than white? Or that Asians are better at numbers than Caucasians? Or that Jews are congenitally mean? Or that women are dumber than men? Or

men dumber than women? Or that religion is a genetic disposition? Or that this very gene determined criminal tendencies and that very gene determined Alzheimer's? You know, the insurance ramifications, the ammo it would hand to the racists. All that? (53)

Michael's scepticism of the aims of Jane's work becomes a kind of defeated admission after his attempt to prevent the Holocaust:

It was genes. It was genes, genes and nothing but genes. I mean, look at Leo's father, Dietrich Bauer. A son of a bitch who goes to Auschwitz to help wipe out Jews in one world, and a son of a bitch who goes to Auschwitz to help wipe out Jews in another. And his son, a decent man in both worlds, but a little inclined to take his guilt very personally. (453)

Michael's recognition that "the will of history or the will of DNA" has trumped "the will of man" (454) leaves him resorting to his philosophy notes in dismay. It is precisely this impulse, the refusal to accept inaction as an answer, or the refusal to deny the power of free will, that makes the second 'intervention' into history possible. Michael finds Leo in the second world, equally willing to try and prevent the Holocaust ("He was the same Leo all right. The same overwhelming burden of inherited guilt, the same fanatical belief that he could and must atone for his father's guilt" [547]), and schemes to make Hitler's birth possible – to 'save' the history that he had altered.

Only this time, Michael has a less optimistic attitude: "All kind of things might happen. It was no use my worrying about them. All I could do was follow my part of the plan and hope for the best." (534) Referencing Leo's saying about rats and mice, Michael then leads his own plot against the past, successfully putting a dead rat (irony noted) in the Brunauer water source. The well is pumped, Hitler is born, lives, and prospers. Michael, finding himself in a world similar to the original one, is truly defeated: "Sick of history. History sucks. It sucks." (564) As a final gesture of renunciation, he deletes all 956K of the *Meisterwerk* from his computer and tells his advisor to push the first twenty-four pages of the dissertation up his "fat, vain, complacent arse and keep it there for a week" (567).

Michael's disenchantment with history does not, however, leave him in utter despair. Quite the contrary, he finally embraces the credo that he had expressed after one of his many tirades on academia: "Art matters. *Happiness* matters. *Love* matters. *Good* matters. *Evil* matters." (109) Newly liberated, he turns all of his attention towards finding Steve.

So simple. The whole rushing tornado of history funnelled to a single point that stood like an infinitely sharpened pencil hovering over the page of the present. The point was so simple.

> It was love. There just wasn't anything else. All the rage and fury and violence and wind of the whirlpool, sucking up so much hope and hurling so many lives apart, in its centre it reached down towards now and towards love. (570)

Michael thus finds his happy ending – without, however, having solved any of the dilemmas facing him. Instead, he nihilistically chooses to ignore the implications of everything that has happened as well as his fear of what could happen: "In the past it had been fun for me, but no more. That was history. Maybe it wouldn't last, maybe it wouldn't work. But that was the future." (571)

3.4.5 Historical Sensitivity

The question as to whether Michael's metaphorical shrug, "Now. Love.", is an appropriate or adequate means of dealing with the past is foregrounded with this historical subject matter: World War II and the Holocaust, both of which are central to the majority of works investigated here. While I would like to avoid engaging in ethical criticism, it would be ignoring a significant field of discussion not to take ethical objections to *Making History* into account – not least of all because such objections have also been made to *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* and *Inglourious Basterds*. *Making History* is the fourth of five case studies here dealing with the position of the Jews immediately before, during, or immediately after World War II. Apparently the mere act of creating an alternate history based on World War II or the Holocaust is not problematic in itself: Dick's portrayal of Frank Frink's hardships in the post-World-War-II era and reference to the fate of the Jews in *The Man in the High Castle as well* as Roth's somber depiction of an American Jewish family in the years leading up to World War II in *The Plot against America*, seem to have avoided criticism with regard to the portrayal of Jews and Judaism. But the authors of *Making History*, "written with the lighthearted intent to entertain rather than instruct" (Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 303), *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, with its bleak overtones of futility and hopelessness, and *Inglourious Basterds*, with its violence (enacted by Jews) and focus on revenge, have all been accused of carelessness, crudeness, and tastelessness in dealing with sensitive historical subject matter.

Gavriel Rosenfeld – once again, whose cultural-historical investigation of alternate histories of World War II is the only one of the studies considered here to examine Fry's novel at any length – is not shy about expressing the opinion that *Making History* takes an unsuitable approach to such a sensitive subject. He claims that Fry belongs to a group of authors who, "[w]ith little personal and emotional investment in the Holocaust, [...] have no doubt found it easy to con-

sider unconventional approaches to it and to derive new conclusions about it" (*The World Hitler Never Made* 373). Of *Making History* specifically, he says the following: "The ability to insert a theme possessing the seriousness of the Holocaust into this kind of comedic packaging was the best reflection of a mindset unconcerned with the moral limits of representing the Nazi genocide." (*The World Hitler Never Made* 368) From these statements, it is possible to abstract at least two points: first, that *Making History* constitutes an unconventional approach to the Holocaust (and by implication, one lacking the kind of caution or sensitivity that would be expected of someone who has "personal and emotional investment in the Holocaust") that derives new conclusions about the nature of the Holocaust; second, that the "comedic packaging" of the Holocaust is immoral.

As for the first point, it is necessary to consider what exactly is 'new' about *Making History*'s approach to the Holocaust. The fact alone that it is an alternate history that posits a worse alternative to the Holocaust might cause some discomfort: if history is already unimaginable, is it unethical to suggest something worse? Or vice-versa: is it accurate to say that positing a better alternative, i.e. either the avoidance of World War II or a more mild version of it, is less ethically problematic? That is, as long as the consequences are equally positive. One can imagine that suggesting the world today is better off with the Holocaust as it happened than otherwise would cause a much greater moral uproar.[227] *Making History* is not, however, by any means the only alternate history to posit a worse version of World War II and the Holocaust. *The Man and the High Castle* as well as other dystopian alternate histories of the twentieth century like Sarban's *The Sound of His Horn* or James Hogan's *The Proteus Operation*[228] suggest much more

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227 This is indeed similar to what Hitler suggests during his trial in Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristóbal of A.H.*: "Perhaps I am the Messiah, the true Messiah, the new Sabbatai whose infamous deeds were allowed by God in order to bring His people home [...] It is not I who have said it: But your own visionaries, your unravelers of God's meaning when it is Friday night in Jerusalem. Should you not honor me who have made you into men of war, who have made of the long, vacuous daydream of Zion a reality? Should you not be a comfort to my old age? [...] The Reich begat Israel." (169–170) The impression that Steiner's work was received as any less offensive than *Making History* should be avoided: according to the author's own afterword to the 1999 edition, it was met with considerable outrage upon publication in 1979. Christopher Palmer makes a similar point about the alternate history within an alternate history in *The Man in the High Castle* in terms of the ethics of postulating the Holocaust the way it did happen as a positive alternative: "No one would be sadistic enough to *imagine* our history as alternative to that which prevails (the history detailed by *The Man in the High Castle*)." (119–120).

228 History is governed in Hogan's work to a much greater degree by time travel than in *Making History* and features an interesting kind of inversion similar to *Bring the Jubilee*: the balance of powers in the novel's present is similar to that of *The Man in the High Castle*, only we find out that this dystopian present was the result of a mission to go back in time and mentor the Nazi party

dramatic versions of the Holocaust and a more extreme propagation of Nazi ideology than in history – even if they do not, as *Making History* does, necessarily focus as explicitly on the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century.

That sensitive historical subject matter should not be treated at all in the form of comedy, or to claim that *Making History* is unique in this respect, would also be incorrect – the number of studies on how fiction interacts with history and/or memory of the Holocaust[229] refutes such an argument. Theodor Adorno's famous statement "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch" (30) has proven less a prescription for artists after World War II than a reflection of the difficulty of making sense or producing meaning from the Holocaust. In short, there have been as many attempts as there have been works of art. And whether a work constitutes the most serious, sombre, reverent treatment of historical material possible (like the already-cited *Portage to San Cristóbal of A.H.* or Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima, mon amour*), the most absurd, darkest humour (like, for example, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*) or as in *Making History* a rather entertaining thumb-of-the-nose to the past, it will never be sufficient as a means of dealing with such horrific events. One might even take this is as a central argument of ethical criticism: art has a responsibility for constantly seek new ways of dealing with difficult realities.

Making History stands out among other alternate histories of World War II perhaps more because of the ultimate judgment of history. In Fry's work, the

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in the 1920s. The 'original' past that was changed during this mission is already an alternative version of the normalized narrative of the real past: World War I was followed by a long period of global peace. In the altered timeline, in which Nazi world domination threatens, a plan is carried out to go back to 1939 and re-route history once more. The 'new' alternate timeline that results from this second mission is none other than the normalized narrative of the real past. In the end, our history is the result of a mission to improve an already altered past. The most utopic version, on the other hand, in which World War resulted in worldwide peace for one hundred years, is the original. Like in *Bring the Jubilee*, we 'land' on our timeline – neither dystopian nor utopian – only as a result of time travel.

229 See for example, the work of Barbara Foley "Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Mimesis and Testimony in Holocaust Narrative", Adam Rovner "Instituting the Holocaust: Comic Fiction and the Moral Career of the Survivor", Michael Butter *The Epitome of Evil: Hitler in American Fiction, 1939–2002.*, Aharon Appelfeld "After the Holocaust", Terrence Des Pres "Holocaust Laughter?", Saul Friedlander "Historical Writing and the Memory of the Holocaust", Alvin H. Rosenfeld (*A Double-Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*), Michael S. Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History*, Hilda Schiff, *Holocaust Poetry*, or James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation.* A parallel discussion is carried out in the field of historiography: See Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth": "Are there limits on the kind of story that can responsibly be told" about such phenomena as the Holocaust? (375).

unusual mixture of dystopian alternate history and comedy leads to a kind of satisfaction with the way the Holocaust happened. Rosenfeld's second point, that the "comedic packaging" of the Holocaust in *Making History* is morally offensive, may be best understood in terms of the tension between a dystopian portrayal of the Holocaust and a lack of lament for the way the Holocaust did happen. On Fry's work specifically, Butter comments, "der eigentliche Geschichtsverlauf erscheint so zwar nicht als utopisch, aber noch immer als der bestmöglichste" ("Zwischen Affirmation und Revision" 73). *Making History* might thus be situated ideologically, along with *The Proteus Operation, Bring the Jubilee*, *The Two Georges*, or Dozois's "Counterfactual" among others, between two extremes: dystopian alternate histories that tend to affirm our history by revealing how things could have gone wrong (ex. *The Man in the High Castle, The Plot against America, The Sound of His Horn, Peace in Our Time, Pavane, Ruled Britannia*) and the (fewer) alternate histories that reveal revisionist tendencies in postulating how things could have been better (ex. *Contra-passato prossimo, Lest Darkness Fall, Histoire de la Monarchie universelle*).[230] But whereas dystopian alternate histories as well as those that are ideologically more ambiguous, tend to feature a somber tone and respectful regret towards the way things did happen, *Making History* shrugs away the gravity of those events.

3.5 An Exceptional Hybrid: Dieter Kühn's *N*

3.5.1 Alternate History as FN

Having looked at four alternate histories in depth already, we can note here the variety of thematic programs and ways of dealing with the paradox of contingency and necessity resulting from the point of divergence. In *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Plot against America*, and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, bifurcation occurs only as a result of the context of reception. Only *Making History* may be considered a FN in that the point of divergence allows for more than one continuation within the narrative. I would like now to examine another alternate history that may be considered a FN, Dieter Kühn's *N*, in order to focus on what exactly its being a FN contributes to our understanding of contingency and necessity, freewill and determinism in alternate history.

Kühn's *N* can in some ways be seen as an evolutionary step for alternate history (although not chronologically speaking: it was published in 1970, that is,

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230 Note the simplified usage of Butter's terms here.

a good twenty or thirty years before most of the case studies here): if alternate history is sometimes considered the perfection of historical fiction in going so far as to contradict history, then *N* is the perfection of alternate history in that the discourse of contingency and necessity is carried over to the level of structure. Whereas *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Plot against America*, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, and *Making History* all integrate the paradoxical nature of the point of divergence into a thematic program of contemplating free will and determinism as well as human agency, *N* allows for a similar discussion on the basis of the tension between historical biography and FN. The deconstruction of Napoleon's life story is inextricably tied to the structural means by which it is achieved in N.

One might be inclined to claim that N, like the 'true' forking-paths narrative *Smoking*/*No smoking*, features a much more consistent notion of cause and effect than most alternate histories, i.e. one that places notions of contingency and necessity less at odds with one another. Here, contingency rules, and through the presence of several, subsequent nodes after the initial forking, continues to be the governing principle throughout the work. In *N*, each event may indeed be seen as the "sum of many factors" (as battles are described [73]): and if one factor, one variable is changed, events take a different turn. History is fragile. It is the combination of this structure with the story of a 'Great Man' of history that allows for more subtle commentary.

Kühn's narrative, as might be said of much of the author's work, borders on both history and fiction (cf. Scheuer 21). As a result, *N* lends itself to consideration in terms of the historiographical debates of the late twentieth century: the difference between history and fiction, the nature of historical narrative, our ability to access the past through narrative, and a sophisticated reconsideration of the Great Man theory: how is the individual universalized, and how is the universal individualized, i.e. channelled through the depiction of one individual? *N* joins the ranks of several biographical fictions of the 1970s that reconsider these questions: for example Klaus Stiller's *H* and Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Mozart* as well as John Berger's *G*. In addition, the publication of *N* coincides with the Hitler debate of the 1970s surrounding the publication of Joachim Fest's *Hitler* (Scheuer 22).[231] As for *N,* the overall result of 'pulling at the seams' of Napoleon's biography at so many places, and of limiting the representation of the effects of each variation to Napoleon's life, and then allowing for history to run a course similar to our own, is less a mere promulgation of the Great Man theory than a kind of contemplation of how we process figures like Napoleon into history.

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231 For a comparison of *N* with Hiller's *H* as well as Joseph Roth's *Die Hundert Tage*, see Jang Hee-Kwon, *Experiment mit der Geschichte. Zur Erzählform der biographischen Romane Dieter Kühns* 102–111.

N, which by all accounts has the superficial dimensions of a "parlor-game", has much more extensive historiographical and philosophical implications than one might expect – indeed in some respects more so than a more purportedly philosophical work like *The Man in the High Castle*. Rather than simply taking history 'as it is', a normalized narrative of the real past or a direct challenge to it, *N* prompts our reconsideration of how we think about history to begin with. In attempting to dis- and re-orient the reader in this manner, *N* subscribes to a much more ambitious project: literature as an account of historiographic possibilities, or a means of executing them.[232] Kühn's work is thus contemplation of the practice of both history and alternate history.

3.5.2 The Structure of a 'True' Forking-paths Alternate History

For the sake of situating *N* in the context of FNs, it is helpful to consider the structure of a non-alternate-history, 'true' forking-paths narrative, that is, one that is a FN not by virtue of its content, but because of its structure: Alain Resnais's film adaptation of Alan Ayckbourn's play *Intimate Exchanges. Smoking/No smoking* is a duo of films that begin the same way: Celia Teasdale, in the middle of her summer cleaning, goes out to the garden for a break. She sees a packet of cigarettes lying on the patio. In the first film, she chooses to pick the packet of cigarettes up and smoke; in the second film, she chooses not to. From this nodal situation results a 'tree' of possible chains of events, depicted not as continuous trajectories but rather as a series of 'stages': the garden is always the first stage (à la Borges), second 'five days later' (also set in the garden), third 'five weeks later' (always set some place else, for example a hotel or a golf course) and last 'five years later' (always set in the graveyard behind the town church). The narratives are connected *en tableaux*, always with virtually the same Hindemith-inspired piano andante (actually composed by John Pattison) and a cartoon illustration of the upcoming setting as a 'curtain' between scenes. This rather static gradation of time is complemented not only by the limited number of settings – all of which are outdoors – but also a limited cast of characters – all of whom are played by the same two actors (!). After the first scenario has been 'played out' in all of the different stages of time (five days, five weeks, five years) in each respective film, a series of alternative possibilities are introduced by skips back to various nodal points. These skips are always signalled by the words "ou bien …", a piano interlude, and an audio clip of the words of one of the characters that change

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232 Scheuer: "Für die Historiographie bedeutet das, daß Kunst nicht mehr nur Ornament, schönes Kleid der Erkenntnis ist, sondern selbst Erkenntnis stiften kann." (31).

the course of events from the original version. Like in other 'true' forking-paths narratives, the characters in *Smoking/No smoking* are not aware of the 'skips' or realization of new possibilities: their centres of consciousness change with the alternatives. The cohesiveness of this maze of different trajectories, which allows for various romantic constellations and alliances between characters, is to be acknowledged only by the viewer. In addition to the predictable pattern of settings, there are other cues, for example the costumes of the female characters: Sylvie always wears green; Rowena red; Celia Teasdale always wears a floral pattern. The fact that all five female characters are played by one actress (Sabine Azéma) and all four male characters by one actor (Pierre Arditi) further gives the impression that, whoever ends up with whom or in which situation, the intimacy between them is plausible. The same topic is broached verbally again and again, between Celia and her husband Toby, Celia and Lionel Hepplewick, Lionel and Sylvie, Celia and Miles Coombs, Miles and his wife Rowena, etc.: relationships.

One might be inclined, above all in consideration of the fact that there seem to be far more examples of 'true' forking-paths narratives in film than in print, to suggest that this is a case in which the medium plays an important role: multiple possibilities are perhaps more convincingly realized in electronic media that allow for such 'skips' as in *Smoking/No smoking*; for books in print, adhering to a traditional, linear, left to right, strictly sequential turning of pages, it is more difficult to simulate contingency. Kühn's *N*, however, is the exception that debunks this logic: the structure of *N* is comparable to that of *Smoking/No smoking*, only the former contains far more – if somewhat less clearly demarcated – nodes. In addition, the continuations in *N* are not successive, but rather paradigmatic: in contrast to the *Smoking/No smoking* (and also, for example, *Lola rennt* or *Blind Chance*) model A-B-C-D, A'-B'-C'-D', A"-B"-C"-D", etc., *N* assumes the structure A-A'-A", B-B'-B", etc. (Rodiek 57). The narrative structure of *N* is thus akin to a kind of mapped-out hypertext: but in the end, one continuation is effectively chosen in order to move the next stage.

The continuations themselves are various different paths that Napoleon's life might have taken before his rise to power in France. Because Napoleon is a major figure of history, an indisputably historical figure, *N* is an alternate history: in presenting alternative versions of Napoleon's life and his neglect to come to power, it presents alternatives to the normalized narrative of the real past. Unlike many alternate histories, however, the narrative proper limits itself to representing the consequences for Napoleon himself. None of the various possibilities are 'fleshed out' in such a way as to depict more than the immediate chain of events – with the exception of the last continuation. There are nearly no sub-plots, and none of the characters are nearly as significant as Napoleon himself; he is the centre of the story world. Moreover, ongoing consequences up until the present day are not

realized; only the consequences for '*N*'. Only the final continuations constitutes an exception. In general, however, each continuation stops where Napoleon's life ends; the trajectories are longer and fewer as N's life progresses.

Not only the textual structure of the narrative (various, mutually exclusive continuations of various points in Napoleon's life, the 'skips' unacknowledged by the narrator and unknown to any figure in the story), but also the narration itself reflects on a linguistic level the particular 'play' in *N*. Typical of the narrative style is the beginning of the section on Napoleon's childhood: "Über Kinder lässt sich viel erzählen. Besonders viel läßt sich über Kinder erzählen, die sonderlich sind. Sich absondern. Allein die Umgebung sondieren. Sonderbaren Gedanken nachgehen, in der Einsamkeit [...]" (12). Such repetition and wordplay as with the root "sonder-" not only reflects on a linguistic level the theme-and-variations structure of the narrative as a whole, but it is also one of the reasons why it is sometimes not immediately noticeable that we have left one variation and have entered another. Grammatical cues – parallel sentence constructions, for example – are often the clearest indicators of the beginning of a new continuation.

3.5.3 The Historiographical Shortcomings of the Past Narrative

Kühn's work might be seen as part of an artistic trend in observing and critiquing the adequacy of linear models in representing reality: "Eher als in den Wissenschaften ist in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts – das gilt für Literatur, Musik und bildende Kunst gleichermaßen – ein Bewußtsein dafür geweckt worden, daß wir nicht mehr mit linearen Modellen operieren können." (Scheuer 32) It is precisely this phenomenon that NAFU observes and investigates in narrative texts. This 'awakened awareness' of the inadequacy of linear models has played a role in historical narrative as well. There are still few historians willing to work with multilinear models. Writers of counterfactual history are certainly more overtly and concertedly invested in the dimension of possibility than other forms of history writing, but counterfactual histories are, as the majority of alternate histories, still linear. But even this investment in possibility is enough to prompt criticism of counterfactual history on the part of historians: it is too 'literary', too 'imaginative'; history is simplified; it does not follow consistent causal logic. The paradox of contingency and necessity resulting from the point of divergence that is of such interest for alternate history is a major point of criticism for counterfactual history with regard to logical consistency.

N is not only invested in a careful consideration of the historiographical debates described already in this study, but also joins the ranks of several works of literature that seem to propose ways of performing recent historiography, i.e.

such works *are* ways of writing history that do justice to the linguistic challenge, scepticism of linear models, etc. Authors of literature, it might be argued, have up until now achieved this integration of theory and practice far more successfully than historians themselves. *N* qualifies in this sense as historiographic metafiction. Only Hutcheon's concept, as has been discussed already, is too broad to account for the differences between a work like *N* and for example, *Waterland* – hence the slew of ensuing attempts to un- and re-categorize the texts that Hutcheon identified as works of historiographic metafiction. An important distinction here is between works that contemplate history, but do not perform it (often simplifying the claims of postmodern historiography as drastically as historiography likes to simplify fiction) (see Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* 90), and works that are themselves examples of postmodern history writing. In his most recent work *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, Doležel examines briefly two novels of the latter kind: Doctorow's *Ragtime* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (see 95–100). In its structural multi-linearity and multiple versions of the Napoleon's life, Kühn's *N* would most also certainly qualify as a work of historical fiction that has consequently integrated postmodern historiography into the very structure of the narrative.

In *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, Doležel also surveys the landscape of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century historiography and poses the question of what exactly postmodernist historiography might be if not merely fiction writing: how exactly has the postmodern challenge affected practicing historians? Is there a postmodernist historiography? The answer is: not really, although there are individual examples. Doležel focuses on a few writings of Simon Schama's: *Landscape and Memory, Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, and *Dead Uncertainties* (*Unwarranted Speculations*) (*Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* 46–47; 52–83). Schama's history writing does indeed draw on the repertoire of contemporary writers of fiction, and it is clear that he has at least one staunch advocate among literary theorists. The interplay between the public and private in *Citizens*, for example, might be compared to the domains of individual agents and groups in *Ragtime* – or, for that matter, the tension between the national/political and the familial/personal stages in *The Plot against America*; the use of multiperspectivization in *Dead Uncertainties* is akin to the narration of the crime and trial in the film *Roshomon*, or the criminal investigations of the *Red Riding* trilogy; the imitation of metafiction and absence of any attempt to hide subjectivity in *Landscape and Memory* also ally Schama's work with historiographic metafiction. Other techniques that have been identified as distinctive to historical fiction in general as opposed to history writing, for example, the use of conjecture used to fill in epistemological gaps, or the unabashed judging of the past through the eyes of the present, reveal that Schama has, as an historian,

"mastered the devices of modern fictional narrative" (*Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* 81).

Yet Schama remains an exception, and it is this close-mindedness of the establishment of history writing that is criticized in *N*. One might go so far as to suggest that the 'solution' for historians seeking to be 'historiographically-correct' in light of the postmodern challenge is not necessarily to back away from innovative structures that have been used in literary fiction for decades, but rather to become more 'literary', or 'evolve' the way that many twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary texts have: through innovative narrative form. Why is it that we have yet to see a proliferation of hypertext histories?

One of the reasons that Kühn's work has established credibility as a critique on the historiographical establishment is that it successfully meets the professional standards of more than one discipline: Kühn has paid his dues as both an author of literature and scholar of history. Kühn's Napoleon as well as the other 'characters' in the work, are not merely caricatures, but carefully researched renditions of historical figures. A comparison with any of the other case studies is revealing: for example, Dick's depiction of the Nazis or even Roth's use of historical documents. In the case of *N*, it would almost be impossible to construct an appendix with the relevant historical information because almost every passage of the narrative itself contains more than merely well-informed information: Kühn's work reveals a nuanced understanding of the course of events as well as the forces behind them.

The plausibility criterion so often cited as the difference between counterfactual histories and alternate histories is simply not a factor in *N*: Kühn's work is indeed a perfect example for the difficulty of distinguishing between counterfactual history and alternate history on these grounds. Doležel, promulgating Niall Ferguson's suggestion – if only for lack of a better means of distinction – claims: "Even in the universe of counterfactual fictions a line can be drawn between those worlds that have no claim to historical validity; because they are inventions of free imagination, and those that are constructed by controlled imagination and legitimately pursue the cognitive efforts of historical research." (126) So which is *N*? According to my thesis, *N* is clearly an alternate history, a work of fiction, because the alternatives to history realized in the narrative are actual within the narrative: *N* makes use of the indicative tense, not the conditional. However, in terms of the plausibility of the options realized, it is closely aligned with counterfactual histories. As Werth claims, it is almost as if Kühn's project involves demonstrating the improbability of Napoleon's (real) climb to power: "Und weil sich vorstellen läßt, daß vieles hätte sein können, was zufällig nicht gewesen ist, gelingt es Kühn mehr als einmal, das Erfundene glaubhaft und das Referierte zweifelhaft zu machen." (Werth) To an even greater degree than in *The*

Plot against America, real history in Kühn's work is often more unbelievable than its alternatives.

N expresses frustration with history writing as established most directly through self-referential reflection on the positioning of the author's own work on the border between history and fiction. In one of the continuations, N becomes an author whose book is rejected by the publisher. The publisher writes,

> Sehr geehrter Herr N, ich habe Ihre Erzählungen mit großem Interesse gelesen. Leider sehe ich mich aus technischen Gründen nicht in der Lage, sie in mein Verlagsprogramm aufzunehmen. Bitte sehen Sie hierin keine Wertung Ihrer Arbeit. Ihre Beschäftigung unter anderen mit korsischen Motiven führt mich zu der Frage, ob Sie sich mit rein historischen Darstellungen befaßt haben. Falls dies zutrifft, so wäre ich zu einer – selbstverständlich unverbindlichen – Prüfung des Manuskripts bereit. Mit freundlichen Grüßen. (28)

N is criticized, in other words, for having written and submitted a work of historical fiction, and he then proceeds to write a 'purely historical' history of Corsica. This work is the predictable, tried-and-true model of one, 'Great Man's' influence on history as well as N's realization of his own purpose through writing this story: "Während N das schrieb, wußte er, daß Pasquale Paoli aus dem Exil zurückkehren würde; zum Freiheitskampf ist 'sein Leben bestimmt', hier 'erfüllt sich sein Geschick'. Indem N Paolis Geschichte schrieb, erfüllte er wiederum seine eigene Bestimmung: Alle Fäden liefen zusammen in diesem Werk." (30)

It becomes clear, however, that the narrator in *N* takes a slightly critical stance towards such expressed beliefs in a kind of higher order – manifest in biography largely as a result of historians mythologizing or theologizing contingency (Hee-Kwon 85). In reflecting upon the successful conquering of Egypt, (Auguste de) Marmont clings to just such sense of order: "Späterer Rückblick auf solche Vorgänge führt Marschall Marmont zum Schluß: 'Die Hand der Vorsehung führte uns und bewahrte uns vor der Katastrophe'. Amen." (94) Particularly the use of quotation marks, as with N's history of Corsica, and the not quite straight-faced 'Amen' at the end reveal ironic distance between the narrator and Marmont's account. *N* is ultimately critical of the 'hero biography', in which predestination is called upon to explain the successes of the protagonist (Hee-Kwon 88; 93).

More generally, we might say that the narrator bemoans the dilemma of writing history as a past narrative, at least as practiced: such a linear account, the attempt to make sense of a chain of events, leads to the philosophical illusion that everything goes according to plan. This is particularly the case for biography:

> Die Chronologie eines Lebens, wohl dokumentiert und vor allem abgeschlossen, verführt tatsächlich zu einer konsistenten, d.h. planvollen und sich einem Gesamtentwurf einfü-

genden Darstellung. Solch erzählerisch erzeugte Einheit verhindert allerdings die wichtige geschichtsphilosophische Einsicht, daß historische Situationen 'offen' sind für mehrere Möglichkeiten. (Scheuer 24)[233]

The through and through historiographical project of Kühn's 'biography' of Napoleon is to bring the events of his life back into their variability, i.e. to work against a purely deterministic view of the course of history.

3.5.4 Big Plans, Little N

As Uwe Scheuer puts it, "Die Biographie ist jeweils Spiegel der herrschenden Individualitätsauffassung." (33) Thus, in addition to noting N's skeptical stance towards strict notions of causality and predestination in history writing, the question of ideology remains: what are the implications of a biography of an historical figure, a 'Great Man' of history, written as a FN? What are the implications of 'loosening' the chain of cause and effect by which we have processed Napoleon into history? The answer is: neither contingency nor necessity rules; neither free will nor determinism is favoured. The paradox of the point of divergence innate to the uni-linear, non-future-narrative alternate histories discussed already is 'performed' at the level of a philosophical debate in Kühn's work. As Scheuer puts it, "Kühn ist auf der Suche nach den Gründen für den Erfolg Napoleons und verschränkt auf eigenwillige Weise Zufälle und Glücksumstände mit Willensstärke und Entscheidungsfreude." *N* is an attempt to set free will and determinism against each other (26).[234]

The structure of the narrative, like all FNs, indicates contingency: in making several 'runs' possible to the reader-player or (in the case of forking-paths narratives) realizing more than one possible continuation of certain situations, FNs consistently err on the side of negating necessity. The fact that *N* posits so many variations of Napoleon's biography without any attempts at justification gives the impression of arbitrariness. The theme-and-variations style that is so present is also an indicator. For example, as Napoleon's mother's pregnancy is announced: "Carlo ließ es darauf ankommen, und die junge Frau berichtete nach wenigen Monaten, ihre Blutung sei ausgeblieben. Er freute sich, er freute

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233 cf. Dieter Kühn and Uwe Schultz, "Die Wirklichkeit des Hauptweges und die Möglichkeit der Nebenwege; ein Gespräch zwischen Dieter Kühn und Uwe Schultz": "Im Rückblick sieht die Entwicklung stets konsequent und folgerichtig aus." (327).
234 cf. Kühn and Schultz: "Freiheiten und Notwendigkeiten im Wechselspiel; dies wollte ich in meinem Erzählmodell deutlich machen." (329).

sich nicht, er freute sich ein bißchen, er freute sich ziemlich. Er nahm es zur Kenntnis." (9) This passage is like a game of roulette: back and forth, here and there, until a path is set.

The indecisiveness of Carlo Maria, however, may be contrasted with the goal-orientation and scheming of his son: N certainly attempts to take matters into his own hands. Rather than resigning himself to a given 'fate', he continually endeavors to direct the course of events and control his destiny. Consider, for example, N's strategizing as a farmer: "N fragte Fachleute aus. N besichtigte und verglich, N las und experimentierte, N bewies seine Fähigkeit zur Organisation [...]" (24). Not only the deeds, but also the repetition of the subject 'N', insists on the importance of N's agency. The questions posed by the narrator may be seen in a similar light, signaling N's calculations and ambitions, for example with respect to the plot to keep N out of politics: "Was macht man daß Geschäfte. Verbindungen hat man noch genügend und Partner finden sich schnell bei entsprechenden Prozenten [...]" (98). N assumes, in any case, that he gains influence through action: he operates "konsequent auf sein Ziel hin" (105). It is clear that he, at least, believes in the power of human agency.

A pessimistic reading of *N*, however, would consider such descriptions of N's actions and goals to have the same ironic undertones as the already-mentioned statements about destiny in the text: in other words, N exerts himself, strives, and struggles to achieve his goals, but in the end his efforts do not make a bit of difference to the outcome. The last continuation is, after all, an account of how N fails to take control at the Council of Five Hundred: in his place, (Joachim) Murat and Abbé Sieyès come to power, the "Januskopf der Republik" (Kühn 115–116). The overall outlook expressed by *N* would be a deterministic one: something like Alter Litvak's proposal in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* "man makes plans, God laughs" (Chabon, 95). Free will is an illusion.

The tempering with and / or counteraction of the implications of the structure of a forking-paths narrative is not unique to *N: Smoking/No smoking* performs an essentially similar maneuvre in first highlighting the contingency of several situations, but then suggesting that all continuations produce essentially the same result: the fact that the same two actors play all of the different male and female figures – discussed above as a means of providing cohesiveness and plausibility for the films – gives the impression that the outcomes are fundamentally the same, regardless of which characters are being coupled. The end is the end, and there is the same constellation, regardless of how one gets there. *Blind Chance* seems to posit a similarly deterministic world-view, only more politically-charged.

N is unique as a forking-paths narrative, also in terms of its consideration of the themes of determinism and free will, in its participation in historiographical

discourse as an alternate history. In particular, *N* engages in a particularly elegant reexamination of the Great Man theory. Kühn's work proposes a deterministic outlook in the sense that the ultimate course of history apparently does not depend on one individual: Murat's rise to power is not exactly the same as Napoleon's, but strikingly comparable – one might argue, because he operates as brilliantly as Napoleon did in our history: "Murat handelt schnell, Murat improvisiert"; "Murat handelt rasch, die anderen noch gelähmt, entschlußlos, er kommt allen zuvor, hat den Vorteil des ersten Zugs: weitere Verhaftungen, Proklamation der Militärregierung. Sagen, was N ebenfalls gesagt hätte, was sich in dieser Situation von selbst sagt." (112–113) In other words, much like in *Making History*, it is still possible for one, 'Great Man' to have influence on the course of history, only the 'Great Man' himself is exchangeable. 'N' refers to an 'anonymous' instance; it signals the transferability or assignability of Napoleon's role to other, exchangeable figures (91).

On the other hand, as the coda makes clear, so many smaller, seemingly less significant outcomes depend precisely on the 'who', not the 'what'. At the historical level, the direction is set; the course of history is deterministic in the sense that an individual cannot change its course. At the individual level, however, free will makes all the difference – one thinks of Sandy from *The Plot against America* "riding the crest of history" (Roth 232): instead of letting events happen 'around' him, he becomes part of them. The story of a 'Great Man' of history thus expresses in Kühn's work "Zufall nicht als Faktum, sondern als Möglichkeit für das Individuum, sein Leben zu gestalten, seine Chance wahrzunehmen" (Scheuer 35).

Napoleon as N is both exemplary and exceptional, significant and trivial. The project of focusing on the life of Napoleon *without* verbalizing his exploits, or avoiding a focus on the reasons for which Napoleon has gained a presumably permanent position in history, and then positing an outcome that looks something like our history without Napoleon, 'unravels' his greatness. Yet Kühn, of course, by choosing Napoleon as his subject at all implicitly verifies the same; or at least this choice reflects Napoleon's significance in history – as does the neglect to name him a single time in the narrative. Napoleon as N is like McDonald's as the golden arches, John F. Kennedy as JFK: the historical figure has become a brand, alone recognizable by his exploits and representations. The focus on *representations* of Napoleon in the coda (paintings, depictions of Napoleon on porcelain, the emperor's head as the top of a seal matrix, reports about Napoleon's choice of reading during his travels, imperial insignias above doors, etc.) draws attention to our very mythologization, monumentalization, and legendization of Napoleon (cf. Hee-Kwon 90).

But even the self-reflection on how we have processed Napoleon into history is by no means a mere trivialization of his role: the coda's playful negation of the particularities of Napoleon's (failure to) rise to power gradually becomes a grave, rather morbid reflection of the damages caused:

> kein Übergang über die Beresina, schreiende Flucht vor anrückenden Russen, Körper in Morast gestampft, Körper zwischen Eisschollen versackend, Körper niedergetrampelt, Kolben in Gesichter gestoßen, Körper, die sich an Körpern festkrallen, Körper, die sich von Körpern losschneiden, Körper, die Körper ins Wasser reißen, 17 000 Tote und Verwundete; kein Lazarett in Wilna mit 7500 Leichen im Hof, in den Gängen gestapelt, Fensteröffnungen gegen den Eiswind zugestopft mit amputierten Armen, Füßen, Händen, Beinen, Rümpfen, Schädeln (121).

Instead of a statement summarizing historical significance (how many years Napoleon reigned, how many victories, etc.), we get a non-hierarchical, non-exhaustive series of would-be consequences of Napoleon's failure to rise to power, followed by the beginnings of the darker consequences of Napoleon's would-be reign. The negation of these consequences does not deny or belittle their presence, but rather "ruft es in Erinnerung und bestätigt es damit". *N* "proklamiert auf dem Papier den endgültigen Sieg des Möglichen über das Wirkliche, indem er N die Rolle vorenthält, derentwegen doch das ganze Experiment inszeniert worden ist" (Werth). The neglect to 'round off' the narrative grammatically emphasizes the continuation of the historical world, i.e. signals the limitlessness of the consequences of this (in the narrative) unrealized continuation: there are many details that 'matter', whether or not they are the ones found in history books. Thus the continuation as well as the account of what happens, is not over; it is merely interrupted by the end of the narrative (Hee-Kwon 94).

3.5.5 The Narrator as 'Great Man'?

N ultimately dismantles Napoleon's 'great' story, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of the individual: the course of history may be more or less determined; what role the individual plays in that course of events depends on free will. Particularly given that the dismantling process itself comes to the fore, Napoleon, it seems, is not the only individual in focus in Kühn's work. What about the choices made in writing history? And, in this case, the choices made about its plausible alternatives? It is plausible here to consider the empowerment of the narrator as a means of exploring the Great Man theory. The narrator is every bit as much at the centre of the narrative as Napoleon, if not more – although the use of the first-person is hardly to be found. Within the narrative, the narrator is

God, but a subtle, self-reflexive one conscious of his acts of power. The narration, the means of telling Napoleon's story, is subject to evaluation and critique only in the reception of the narrative itself.

The narrator may be described as detached, but playful, even from the opening lines: "Carlo Maria, ein junger Mann. Er wird als liebenswürdig, ehrgeizig, verschwenderisch, kenntnisreich, vernügungssüchtig, elegant bezeichnet. Dieser liebenswürdige, ehrgeizig, verschwenderische, kenntnisreiche, vernügungssüchtige, elegante junge Mann lernte ein junges Mädchen kennen." (7) In this account of N's father, there is a sense of irony in the repetition and self-citation: it is as if the narrator is both commanding the narratee 'take my word for it', while at the same time revealing an awareness of his command. The more sportfully written passages often involve a kind of self-conscious play with the subject:

> Ohne Fregatten sieht es da schlecht aus, das schreibt Nelson auch in einem Brief, keine Fregatten, schreibt er und setzt ein Ausrufezeichen dahinter, Fregatten wären der Untergang der französischen Flotte, schreibt er weiter, aber er hat keine Fregatten. Nelson wartet zwei Tage lang auf die Verstärkung, die ihm angekündigt wurde, das Wort Fregatte sehr groß in seinem Bewußtsein, da kreuzt es auf und ab, Fregattefregattefregattefregattefregatte, weil keine Fregatten da sind, wo er sie dringend braucht. (82)

Such passages shift the focus away from what is being told and thought (in this case, the focalizer is Nelson) to the fact that the there is an instance controlling how it is told.

Above all when dealing directly with Napoleon, the narrator is master. Napoleon becomes 'little' and powerless by comparison.

> Das Feuer auf dem Marktplatz, über dem Feuer die Ballonhülle, heiße Luft steigt in die schlaffe Ballonhülle, macht sie straff, noch nicht straff genug, Feuerschein, viele Gesichter im Kreis, die stärksten Männer halten die Seile, die Hülle endlich straff, Hornsignal, der Ballon steigt hoch mit Gondel, Feuer, Kind und Fernohr, die winkenden Hände ringsumher, die winkenden Hände schon unten, Rufe, Musik, das Kind steigt höher, ein Kind ist keine schwere Last, die Häuser von oben, die Sterne noch immer von unten, das Feuer geschürt, die Ballonhaut immer straffer, Nacht, Sternennacht, der Ballon sehr hoch, die Lufe sehr dünn und sauber, die Sterne klar wie nie zuvor im Teleskop, und jeder Stern, den er entdeckt, trägt nach der Rückkehr seinen Namen: N 1, N 2, N 3, N 4, als wird auf Sternatlanten eingetragen. (13)

Gently belittled are the young Napoleon's hopes for grandeur, his childlike pretensions of naming stars after himself. The wit of the way that he names the stars lies also in the double-meaning of n as the unknown in algebra. Napoleon is reduced to a mathematical variable, subject to manipulation, displacement,

and constant redefinition – just as the various stages of his life and possibilities are rather unfeelingly presented one after the other (in the section depicting Napoleon in Corsica [pgs. 50–56], Napoleon dies four times in a matter of pages; or more accurately, four different Napoleons all meet their deaths – without so much as a hint from the narrator that something incredible, regrettable, tragic, or otherwise worthy of reaction has happened). Napoleon remains a mere letter, unnamed throughout the narrative – despite attempts to 'make a name' for himself:

> Sieg. Einzug in die Stadt, Ruhm für N. Sich einen Namen machen. Einen Namen haben, diesen Namen zum Namen machen. Sein Name wird herausgehoben, sein Name wird gerühmt, sein Name wird in Annalen verzeichnet, sein Name geht in die Geschichte ein: Dieser Sieg ist Beginn einer Reihe von Siegen.

> Dieser Sieg bleibt in seinem Leben einziger Höhepunkt, bleibt Episode. (61)

With the characteristic condescension and then abrupt re-routing of Napoleon's fate, without comment, Napoleon becomes the plaything of the narrator.

Thus one further-reaching implication of N's consideration of the Great Man theory is the relationship between contingency of representation itself and the agency of the narrator. The connection to FNs is not irrelevant: in the most paradigmatic of FNs, the reader-player is empowered. His choices realize the narrative itself. In *N*, however, like in Lola rennt and other forking-paths narratives, the reader does not play the same role because each continuation has already been realized. Although the reader may still choose among continuations, the successiveness of the continuations, the fact that they are concretely ordered, prompts the privileging of the last one. For N, as an alternate history, this is all the more provocative because the privileged continuation is still an alternative version of history. In other words, the work ends with an emphatic retention of the play between history as we know it and history as presented in the text. Ultimately, neither the characters in the text nor the reader have nearly as much agency as the narrator, and this must be seen in the context of N's historiographical discourse: with regard to the question of how we process events and individuals into history, N supplies a new answer: the 'Great Man' is the one telling the story.

3.6 The Mock Alternate History: *Inglourious Basterds*

3.6.1 A New Kind of World-War-II Movie, a New Kind of Alternate History

In *Inglourious Basterds*, the 'Great Man' is without a doubt the director. Indeed the authority of the instance constructing the narrative becomes the focus in this first of two case studies that may be seen as not only self-reflexive, but hyper-self-reflexive. As we will see, both *Inglourious Basterds* and Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* reveal how alternate history 'turns in on itself' yet again: both works are mature manifestations of a genre considering itself as a genre. Tarantino's film does so by taking a tried-and-true subject matter and turning it on its head: alternate history becomes a kind of provocation.

Tarantino's film is tied to so many other alternate histories in its consideration of World War II and the fate of the Jews. However, unlike the Jews of Roth's *The Plot against America* or Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, the eponymous protagonists cannot be accused of being ineffectual. Even if it is true that defeating the Nazis is a popular fantasy, a staple of adventure and spy books (C. Taylor 104), there is little that might prepare the viewer for the bloody heroes of Hitler's downfall in *Inglourious Basterds*: they bludgeon Nazis with baseball bats, they scalp them, torture them, brand them. The other protagonist Shosanna (played by Mélanie Laurent) is perhaps more elegant, but no less merciless when she orchestrates the massacre of a theatre full of Nazis. Tarantino's Jews are not victims, they are perpetrators and masters of their own destiny.

Given the discussions surrounding *Making History* and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* in particular, it should come as no surprise that the reception of *Inglourious Basterds* has been met by moral outrage since its release in 2009. While the practice of making war into entertainment is a well-established phenomenon, the films of a kind of World-War-II 'renaissance' in the 21st century may be contrasted with an earlier, "Spielbergian" model: *Pearl Harbor, Saving Private Ryan*, etc. (see Kabiling 1; 43; 28). *Inglourious Basterds* joins the ranks of several post-9/11 World-War-II films such as *Valkyrie, Flags of Our Fathers, Letters from Iwo Jima, Avatar*, and *The Hurt Locker*. *Inglourious Basterds* in particular has been noted for being "against the mainstream", "audacious" in its depiction of violence at the hands of historical victims (Seeßlen 38; Ebert).

Even before *Inglourious Basterds* was released, critics expressed uneasiness about the film (Connolly). Daniel Mendelsohn's prediction has proven true: "It's possible that at least some of the discussion of *Inglourious Basterds* will focus on the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of using the Holocaust, even tangentially, as a vehicle for a playful, postmodern movie that so feverishly celebrates

little more than film itself." (Mendelsohn; C. Taylor 106) In addition to general criticism about the "Holocaust's inviolability" or the uneasiness of the potential of trivializing the Holocaust (Ungar-Sargon 2; 6), *Inglourious Basterds* was met with puzzlement and disapproval on the moral grounds that Jews seem to be acting like Nazis. The newspaper *Die Zeit* claims, "Die Spiegelung und Aneignung deutscher Gewaltexzesse ist das eigentliche Skandalon." (Jessen) Mendelsohn takes criticism one step further: "Tarantino indulges this taste for vengeful violence by – well, by turning Jews into Nazis." (Mendelsohn) Although engaging in a gross simplification, Mendelsohn seems to have hit a nerve here, and other critics have picked up on the problem of identifying the victims with perpetrators, the good guys with bad guys, Americans with Germans, Jews with Nazis (Frosh; Newman 73). Walters implicates the audience as well: "*Inglourious Basterds* both salutes and problematizes the power of film, appreciating that bad guys as well as good can adore and exploit this potency, and recognizing that to be a spectator is not without moral consequence: only a thoughtless viewer will not see him or herself reflected in shots of Hitler cackling as he watches Americans being slaughtered in *Nation's Pride*." (Walters, "Debating 'Inglorious Basterds'")[235]

Tarantino's film takes liberties, not only with perceived moral limits, but also – and most importantly for this study – with history. *Inglourious Basterds* is an alternate history because there is an explicit contradiction of the normalized narrative of the real past: Hitler is killed in 1944 in a Parisian cinema. The film is thus like so many alternate histories that have a point of divergence dealing with Hitler and World War II – and it poses many of the same ethical questions: as Walters puts it, "the question is whether Hitler is fair game, or whether to monkey with the facts of World War II is to cross a moral line" ("Debating 'Inglorious Basterds'"). Others wonder, is it ok to give Hitler a death sentence (see Foundas 28–33)? Offended by Tarantino's "mucking about with a tragic moment of history", Denby proclaims the film "ridiculous and appallingly insensitive", "too silly to be enjoyed, even as a joke" (Denby). Such criticism pertains not only to the film, but is ultimately directed at Tarantino himself – his bad taste, his carelessness, his lack of morality, etc.

Reading *Inglourious Basterds* as an alternate history proffers new insights into an already widely-discussed work. However, such a reading must be tem-

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235 Cf. Jessen, "*Inglourious Basterds*: Skalpiert die Deutschen!": "Es sei denn, es beschliche den einen oder anderen Zuschauer doch die mulmige Ahnung, dass hier die Nazis missbraucht werden für eine Filmästhetik jenseits aller moralischen Absicht. Das könnte uns vielleicht noch egal sein. Aber das Schicksal der Juden wird damit auch missbraucht – und das sollte uns nicht egal sein. Das Brutalste des Films ist seine Leichtfertigkeit. Es ist ihm alles nur ein blutiger Scherz.".

pered by the realization that the film is not merely an alternate history, but one which self-consciously undermines the logic of alternate history. Hitler's premature death is peculiar, not least of all because it makes a triumphalist (American) history of World War II even more triumphalist (Thorne, *Part 1*). Given all of the alternate histories that kill off Hitler in order to change the outcome of World War II or even prevent it from happening, or all of the alternate histories that postulate a Nazi victory in World War II, Tarantino's film demands attention. It is also possible to claim that *Inglourious Basterds* is not about history at all; it is ultimately about cinema. As Ebert insists, "*Inglourious Basterds* is no more about war than *Pulp Fiction* is about – what the hell is it about?" (Ebert) Like so many of Tarantino's films, a reflection on the craft of film-making itself is indispensable. But this is perhaps why *Inglourious Basterds* is a particularly unusual alternate history: the film's contradiction of history, as I have claimed is definitive for alternate history, must be understood in terms of the film's metacinematic aspects. In focusing on the film's logic as an alternate history (what is the relationship between the 'what-if' content and the rest of the narrative?), or rather, in noticing how the film refuses the logic of most alternate histories, *Inglourious Basterds* may be seen as an alternate history ex negativo, a mock alternate history.

3.6.2 Contingency and the Point of Divergence

The key difference between *Inglourious Basterds* and most alternate histories is that the film 'reads' like a secret history, up until the moment that the narrative contradicts the normalized narrative of the past. Nothing about Shosanna's story or the story of the Basterds contradicts historical record, these plots exist merely parallel to, 'underneath' history, as 'what might have happened, *if we had known*'. Up until Hitler's death, the film could have been "an embellished tale of German propaganda films and Jewish wartime vengeance" (Ungar-Sargon 11). The point of divergence in Tarantino's film is thus not the starting point for the story as in most alternate histories, but the end point – much like the detonation of the "Doomsday Machine" in *Dr. Strangelove*. Instead of focusing on the consequences of Hitler's death (and the death of all of his leading officers), the contingency of the events leading up to the alternative conclusion is brought into focus.

The film as a whole may be seen as a string of events that might have had, even *should have had* in some sense, different outcomes. Landa's decision not to shoot the fleeing Shosanna proves to be consequential in that Shosanna not only survives, but successfully plans and carries out "Nazi-night" at the theatre in Paris. Landa's failure to recognize Shosanna at the restaurant (or deliberate decision not to let on that he does recognize her – it is not clear which is the case)

is one moment in particular that hints at contingency: the film language suggests that the encounter could have resulted differently. Shosanna, here allied with the audience, squirms at Landa's insistence that she drink a glass of milk, and that they wait for the waiter to bring the fresh cream before eating the strudel.[236] The same interrogation technique that he performed with LaPadite in the opening sequence seems to be at work here: slyly making the subject of the interrogation aware that he knows more about them than they expected before delivering 'the question of truth' (in LaPadite's case: "You are sheltering enemies of the state, are you not?").[237] Just as with LaPadite, we get a close-up of Landa's darkening face as he tells Shosanna, "Il y avait une autre chose que je voulais vous demander" ("I did have something else I wanted to ask you"). Only here, the tension dissolves as Landa continues, "mais maintenant, sur ma vie, impossible de m'en souvenir. Enfin, bon, ça ne devait pas être important" ("but right now, for the life of me, I can't remember what it is. Oh, well, must not have been important") – an uncharacteristic lapse, given Landa's prowess as the "Jew Hunter". Thus the suspense is ultimately disappointed, the logical outcome averted.

In addition to the conditions of Shosanna's survival, there are several other 'lucky strikes', 'close calls', 'near misses', and 'turning points': we might be reminded, for example, of the fact that the theatre venue itself is alternative, as is Hitler's decision to attend the premiere of *Nation's Pride*. The fatal scene at *La Louisiane* is also a chain of chance and unfortunate coincidences: the conspiring party, including Wilhelm Wicki, Hugo Stiglitz, and Archie Hicox, might have been able to meet Bridget von Hammersmark alone, had Wilhelm the soldier not been celebrating the birth of his son with his companions (Bridget insists that the bar is usually empty). The group might also have been spared, had a less competent member of the Gestapo (one with a less keen ear for accents) been present. They still might have escaped unscathed, had Hicox raised three fingers for three glasses like a German. Bridget von Hammersmark might also have been spared,

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236 The original screenplay makes Shosanna's nervousness explicit: "Considering that Shosanna grew up on a dairy farm, and the last time she was on a dairy farm her strudel companion murdered her entire family, his ordering milk is, to the least [...] disconcerting" (66). Note: as in dealing with opera or any other form of literature that is realized on several different medial levels, it should be clear that I am analysing *Inglourious Basterds* here in one specific form. Tarantino's original screenplay includes a considerable amount of material that was not ultimately included in the film. While a textual analysis of the original screenplay or a comparison of the original screenplay and the film would surely yield interesting results, it is not my focus here. Therefore, all such comments that refer only to the original screenplay will be relegated to footnotes.

237 Again, the screenplay provides support: "The key to Col. Landa's power and/or charm, depending on the side one's on, lies in his ability to convince you he's privy to your secrets." (66).

had she not signed the handkerchief for Wilhelm. These are all instances of contingency: moments that are shown to have *almost* gone differently.

The series of events in the film ultimately amounts to the avoidance of a truly expected outcome, for the assassination attempts *succeed*. The point of divergence in Tarantino's film is both 'delayed' and unexpected. Consider Marie-Laure Ryan's description of 'what'-suspense in watching the film *Apollo 13*: "despite my certainty that everything would turn out for the best I experienced almost unbearable tension during the scene of the return to Earth [...] Thus given all the facts, in classic Hitchcockian fashion, I anxiously watched the clock tick away, and my anxiety grew stronger with every passing second." (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 146) What Ryan is describing is a kind of immersion experience in its purest form, the same reason that children ask to hear stories again and again. Some narratives arouse suspense, even if the readers know how they should end. *Inglourious Basterds* does the same, only in the last several sequences of the film, it upsets this expectation of ending the way we know it should. The viewer is tricked in the sense that he is thrown into a position of realizing that his own suspense was warranted.

As with the other alternate histories, this trick is successful only because of the alternate history presupposes a stable, factual, and commonly known narrative of the real past. Ungar-Sargon agrees: "The very fact that World War II is so entrenched in the viewer's mind is exactly why Tarantino can fiddle with it." (11) *Inglourious Basterds* is striking not because it challenges or threatens to replace a school-textbook version of history, but because the film plays with history in a way that you are not supposed to – even by standards of alternate history as a genre. Because the point of divergence occurs so 'late' in the narrative, *Inglourious Basterds* is not and cannot be concerned with consequence in the same way as the other alternate histories discussed here. The point of divergence as I have defined it here constitutes a certain kind of reference to history, namely contradiction. There is, however, an inherent 'respect' for history in that the historical importance of the event chosen, that is, its emplotment into our history as having wide-reaching consequences, is mirrored in the alternate history: most typically, the point of divergence has ongoing consequences so that the alternative version of history narrated continues to be different from history. As with Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, this is even one of the ways to recognize it as a point of divergence to begin with.

Cause and effect still have a significant role to play in *Inglourious Basterds*, but only in second hindsight, so to speak: the point of divergence in the film is less a comment itself on causation in history than the perplexing and sudden prompt to 'rewind', to search for explanations: *did that really just happen?* Hitler is killed off almost as an afterthought, yet, by all standards, killing off this 'Great

Man' of history should never just be an afterthought. The neglect to narrate the consequences of Hitler's death make this a point of divergence that is not treated like one. The critical question becomes, *why kill off Hitler if the consequences are not explored?*

Inglourious Basterds was met with puzzlement and disapproval precisely as a result of its lackadaisical contradiction of history. Ben Walters comments, "Perhaps it is also offering a kind of ethical holiday – a vicarious immorality that it knows is wrong, but might be fun to try on, just for kicks." ("Debating '*Inglourious Basterds*'") Liel Leibovitz takes more offense, demoting the film to the artistic status of Nazi propaganda: "Like *A Nation's Pride*, Tarantino's film is a bit of shallow propaganda, promoting not some totalitarian ideology but a worldview in which cool trumps consequence, nothing is real, and everything is permitted. If there's any justice in the world, it's a vision viewers everywhere will vehemently reject." Others celebrate this approach as refreshing, even insightful: onstad writes, "Tarantino rewrites the darkest past via a glowing, glorious cowboy fantasia." Cox in particular seems to have considered more seriously the question of Tarantino's artistic intent:

> Critics frequently berate Hollywood for falsifying history to meet the requirements of storytelling. Rarely, however, can history have been so extravagantly revised as in Tarantino's version of the second world war's conclusion. So extreme is this revision that it feels like a plaintive protest against the inadequacy of what actually happened. (Cox)

This suggests that *Inglourious Basterds* is less an example of "ahistorical conceit" or "cavalier revisionism" (Douthat, "Film: Juvenile but brilliant" 55; Walters, "Debating '*Inglourious Basterds*'") than alternate history with a purpose: History is not flippantly but calculatedly different from our own. Cox even speaks of a sense that "reality got this one wrong". Seeßlen claims similarly that, with *Inglourious Basterds*, "Das Kino rächt sich an der ungerechten Wirklichkeit selber." (195) Tarantino's version of the end of World War II is somehow the way it should have been.

But beyond hyperbolic statements about Tarantino's 'take' on real history, it is also interesting to consider the treatment of history in *Inglourious Basterds* in the context of other cinematic representations of World-War-II history – just as I suggest that we consider alternate history in the context of historical fiction in general. We might say that Tarantino's alternate history is, in a strange sense, more *honest* in its treatment of history than other films. War films are always propaganda in that they glorify conflict or reveal its horror (Stock 4). This is perhaps why Peter Foundas claims that Tarantino is engaged in "exposing the cheapening, rewriting, and wholesale liquidation of history through its cinematic repre-

sentations". While Foundas is clearly deriding the Spielbergian model described by Maria Kabiling, the romanticization, modification and / or supplementation of history – whether it be to jerk tears from viewers, pull off a triumphant Hollywood ending, or pursue the more purely artistic goal of shedding new light on a known story – is a characteristic of *all* historical-fiction films.

Tarantino's film, as an alternate history, merely does more overtly what all historical-fiction films do. And both the 'overtness' and non-chalance of the point of divergence as I have described it here constitutes one of many self-referential gestures, drawing attention not only to the film's play with or even sovereignty over history itself, but also its 'snubbing' of the genre tradition of alternate history. Here, withholding the typical function of the point of divergence exposes the intention of alternate history. In *Inglourious Basterds*, the evident 'disrespect' for history as well as the logic of alternate history, amounts to a kind of glorification of the filmmaker and director.

3.6.3 Metacinema: Competing Director-figures in the Film

That *Inglourious Basterds* is a film about films (Seeßlen 14) does not afford it a particular place in Tarantino's work, but it does help us to make sense of the various key players and their plots. In particular, the activities of the director/ film-maker are reflected diegetically in *Inglourious Basterds* in the form of convoluted 'power-play' situations and various figures who show a propensity for the *theatrical* orchestration of events and relishing in their own authority: Colonel Hans Landa, Lieutenant Aldo "the Apache" Raine, and Shosanna Dreyfus, a.k.a Emmanuelle Mimieux. Tarantino's act of making history not just subject of but subject to cinema is reflected self-referentially in these competing authorities in the film.[238]

Landa (played by Christoph Waltz) in particular has commanded the attention of critics, most claiming that he is the most compelling character in the film (Ungar-Sargon 8). Leibovitz describes him as follows,

> Take away the shiny boots and crisp uniform, and Landa is every other memorable Tarantino character. His speech is the same torrent of brio that flows with hilarious eloquence only to shift suddenly into a menacing growl. Think Samuel L. Jackson in *Pulp Fiction*. Think Michael Madsen in *Reservoir Dogs*. Think, in other words, of the quintessential film psychopath stripped of all refinement and meaning. More than an obedient servant of a specific ideology, Landa is bad for badness's sake. (Leibovitz)

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238 There are, of course, characters in *Inglourious Basterds* that *are* directors and are directly involved with the film industry: Fredrick Zoller, Goebbels, and Bridget von Hammersmark.

Landa, rather than being bound to ideology, approaches his assignments with the coldness and objectivity of a professional (cf. Seeßlen 197 and 211). This is particularly striking because the 'profession' in this case is *Nazism*, defined elsewhere by despicable ideological stances. (Anti-semitism, fascism, militarism, etc; one needs only to be reminded of the depiction of Nazis in *The Man in the High Castle* for evidence). Landa is all the more dangerous because he seems rational (even if his rationalizing about why Jews are despised or why he is able to find them is also despicable). As Landa reveals in the rat-squirrel analogy to LaPadite, he rejoices primarily in his own competence as the "Jew Hunter".

The specific nature of Landa's competence is two-fold: a hyper-command of language and effective interrogation. The first places him at the centre of the film, for language is indisputably a dominant motif in *Inglourious Basterds* (Foundas; Gilbey, "Days of Glory" 20; James). Unlike Yiddish in Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, the various languages in *Inglourious Basterds* are not merely described, but actually spoken: a majority of the dialogue is not in English, but rather French and German (and in one scene, Italian). In addition, there are even a few brief moments where subtitles are missing, meaning that different audience members will understand different amounts of the dialogue based on their own language proficiency (for example, when Shosanna witnesses the extent of Fredrick's fame, or when Wilhelm the soldier yells at Bridget von Hammersmark in German during the stand-off at *La Louisiane*). As so often in Tarantino's films, dialogues are duels (Douthat, "Film: Juvenile but brilliant"), and here, proficiency in a certain language can be a matter of life and death (Ungar-Sargon 18), whether in the case of Shosanna's family under the floorboards of LaPadite's house, unable to understand enough English to realize that they had been found, or Hicox's failure to hide his peculiar accent, despite an impeccable mastery of German. In contrast to the Shosanna and the monolinguistic Americans, Landa stands out because of his fluency in multiple languages, and therefore multiple situations: let it be noted that Landa is the only character who interacts with all of the other characters in the film. (Shosanna and the Basterds remain entirely unaware of each other's existence).

Landa's strategic advantage through his command of German, French, English, and Italian is supplemented by another competency: a sense of timing, or we might say, drama. He exhibits uncanny poise and virtuosic control in his interrogations, as exemplified by the first scene of the film: Landa introduces himself to LaPadite, charmingly excusing his intrusion, flattering LaPadite's daughters. He then asks for milk and proceeds to drink the entire glass in silence; the lack of music (indeed in the entire scene) as well as the motionless presence of the LaPadite family, makes us painfully aware of this silence. The *gourmand* and connoisseur of fine dairy products is satisfied: "Monsieur, à votre famille

et à vos vaches, je dis 'bravo'" ("Monsieur, to both your family and you cows I say: Bravo"). Landa requests that LaPadite ask his daughters to step outside, and *voilà*, the stage is set for the interrogation. Landa ceremoniously takes out his pen, ink, opens his folder, and commences questioning – with the request that the conversation be continued in English. Landa, conscious of his own fame, asks LaPadite if he is aware of who he is and what he knows of him. LaPadite answers correctly, and Landa seems amused at his own reputation – not unlike Fredrick Zoller, he appears to enjoy this recognition. LaPadite remains seemingly calm and capable of answering Landa's routine questions; yet during the questioning, the camera pans downwards towards the floorboards, revealing the hiding family. Suddenly, the audience is placed at the same level of awareness as LaPadite. The urgent question in the minds of both LaPadite and the audience is how much Landa knows. The audience, allied with LaPadite, is even led to believe that the family is safe: Landa suggests that the interrogation is over and leisurely asks for a second glass of milk before he leaves. But then, Landa launches into a rather lengthy monologue (interrupted only by LaPadite's brief replies and nods) about his own work as the "Jew Hunter". The speech seems indulgent, strangely irrelevant – much like the giant Sherlock-Holmes pipe that Landa pulls out; it is not practical or efficient, it is theatrical.

LaPadite becomes increasingly nervous, and finally, Landa strikes: there is a close-up of his face, which loses all traces of good-humor, and he poses the question "You are sheltering enemies of the state, are you not?". LaPadite is defeated and must admit that the Dreyfusses are hiding under the floorboards. Landa assumes his role as director and tells LaPadite, "I'm going to switch back to French now, and I want you to follow my *masquerade* – is that clear?" (my italics). With *bravura*, Landa stands up, speaks as if he is thanking LaPadite and leaving, while at the same time motioning to his soldiers to come into the farmhouse. At his prompt, the soldiers fire.Both of the competencies that I have named, multilingualism and a sense of drama, make Landa an entertaining and charming figure. We get the sense that he refrains from immediate, inelegant resolution because he is enjoying himself too much – and the audience is meant to appreciate the skilful orchestration of Landa's investigation as well. He is self-indulgent, enjoying his own sovereignty and relishing in his own authority: for example when he meets Bridget von Hammersmark and her three 'Italian' escorts at the premiere of *Nation's Pride*. The audience is on the same level of awareness as Landa, who knows that Bridget von Hammersmark is a double agent, and that her escorts are not who she says they are. Landa already knows everything that he needs to know. The scene is thus less an investigation than it is a performance. Bridget, on the other hand, along with Aldo Raine a.k.a. "Enzo Gorlomi", Donny

"The Bear Jew" Donowitz a.k.a. "Antonio Margheriti",[239] and Omar Ulmer a.k.a. "Dominick Decocco", is still making every last, strained effort to hold onto the guise. From Aldo's sloppy, Americanized "Buongiorno" to "Margheriti's" and "Decocco's" ridiculous hand gestures, the audience cannot help but identify with Landa, sovereign in Italian, as he pokes fun at them. Despite already being in control of the situation, Landa takes his time to laugh heartily at Bridget's outlandish story about how she hurt her leg – a kind of inside joke, just for him and the audience – and to coax the best 'performance' that he can out of the 'Italians'.

That Landa is a privileged figure is also evidenced by his status as a kind of meta-cinematic mouthpiece, voicing the governing rules of the film as an alternate history. He reminds Aldo and Utivich that, without his help, they will not succeed in killing Hitler, Goebbels, Göring, and Bormann, "and you need all four to end the war". But if he does help, they "may very well get all four", ending the war. After Aldo expresses his scepticism, Landa replies prophetically: "Sitting in your chair, I would probably say the same thing, and nine nine nine point nine nine nine times out a million, you would be correct. But in the pages of history, every once and while, fate reaches out and extends its hand. What shall the history books read?"

Yet, in his interview with the Basterds, Landa is unhinged, delighted, and crazed at his prospects, even making the first mistake in any of the four languages that he has spoken ("That's a bingo!"). He also contradicts himself in expressing now a degree of contempt for his title "The Jew Hunter". He is insulted by every indication that the Basterds, whose reputation also precedes them, are not "operating at the level of mutual respect". In believing that he can determine his own place in those history books, Landa effectively becomes the butt of his own joke. Aldo agrees to "the terms of [Landa's] unconditional surrender", but he has no intention of following through. Thus ultimately, a perfectly qualified, capable, and refined Landa is no match for the incompetence and un-gentlemanliness of a competing director-figure, Aldo "the Apache", simply because – as with the moment in which a captured and hooded Aldo head-butts him he is incapable of expecting it.

Despite the comically drastic contrast between Landa's eloquence and refinement and Aldo's Tennessee-accented English and brash behaviour, Aldo is often even more effective in exerting his authority than Landa. The capture and extermination of Sergeant Werner Rachtmann reveals Aldo's status as a director-figure. Not only does he effectively orchestrate the course of events, but his vocabulary often refers to performing, directing, producing. Aldo begins by

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239 Antonio Margheriti is possibly a reference to one of the most prolific directors of Italian action films, also known as "Anthony M. Dawson" (Seeßlen 122).

introducing Wicki Wilhelm and Hugo Stiglitz ("another one up there you might be familiar with … Sergeant Hugo Stiglitz! Heard of him?"). As Rachtmann answers that he has, the other Basterds, functioning as an audience, laugh. Stiglitz, we find out, was a celebrity in his own right before the Basterds recruited him to join their troop. Aldo, as a 'casting agent', tells him: "We just wanna say, we're a big fan of your work. When it comes to killin' Nazis, I think you show great talent […] But your status as a Nazi killer is still amateur. We all came here to see if you wanna go pro?" Like Landa, Aldo continues under the assumption that his reputation precedes him ("Can I assume you know who we are?") and tells Rachtmann that there are two ways that the scene can be "played out": either he dies or he lives. After Rachtmann refuses to point out the location of the other Nazi troops, Donny Donowitz[240] makes his dramatic entrance, preceded by the ominous sound of a baseball bat banging on the rocks inside the cave. Aldo asks Rachtmann to first recite what he knows about "the Bear Jew", and then prepares for the show: "watchin' Donny beat Nazis to death is the closest we ever get to goin' to the movies". Donny emerges from the cave, accompanied by music reaching a climax upon his appearance, met with applause from the other Basterds. The music ceases at the moment Donny's bat hits Rachtmann's head, and the rest of the beating is accompanied only by the whoops of the Basterds and the sickening sounds of bat against skull. After Private Butz, the only surviving Nazi, gives Aldo the requested information, Aldo carves a swastika in his forehead, marking him like the other survivors: he coaches Butz, even referring to the interview with Hitler before it takes place, and forces him to play the role that he has already chosen by giving him a 'costume' that he cannot take off. In addition, Aldo, like Landa as well as Zoller and Goebbels, is not immune to the appeals of recognition for his 'work': he wants Private Butz to "spread the word". When Donowitz tells him, "you're getting pretty good at that", Aldo replies modestly "You know how you get to Carnegie Hall, don't cha? Practice." The perfection of his 'craft' – hunting Nazis, as opposed to Landa's hunting Jews – is equally important. The film closes with a line that identifies Aldo with the director: after 'branding' Landa, he says, "I think this just might be my masterpiece."

Unlike Landa's, Aldo's exertion of authority often extends to the audience as well, particularly if we note the camera angles employed in the scenes featuring the Basterds. Just as we 'see' Aldo from Private Butz's perspective in the scene just described, the audience is often allied with that of a Nazi character, particularly as the target of the Basterds.

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240 As with so many of the names used in *Inglourious Basterds*, this name is possibly an illusion to a real film actor, director, or producer: in this case, Lee Donowitz, the film producer of *True Romance* (*Ibid.* 64).

This is significant, not least of all because, as so many critics have noted, the audience is implicitly identified with Nazis. But even beyond that, the audience is essentially being attacked: we are being branded with the swastika, we are being fired upon, etc. There is an undeniable hostility towards us as viewers, even leading one dismayed critic to wonder, "Why does Tarantino hate us so much?" (Thorne, *Part 2*) This question is, of course, unanswerable. It is, however, possible to trace the idea that cinema declares war on its viewers: particularly if we examine the third figure privileged by association with the director, Shosanna, for she exerts her own authority over her audience directly by means of film. In both hosting and organizing "Nazi-night", she functions as film-maker and director on several different levels – and with tremendous success.

Accompanied by the anachronistic "Putting out the fire" by David Bowie, the last chapter of the film ("Revenge of the Giant Face") begins by incrementally panning in on the contemplative Shosanna, Nazi regalia visible in the reflection of the window. Shosanna prepares for her role as hostess by putting on make-up (with aggressive finger strokes, as if the blush were war paint) and her 'costume', a red gown with a black veil, with a matching black handbag. The theatre is revealed to be the set for her Nazi-night plot, and Shosanna is both an actor and director on that set; just as she is both actor in and director of the film that she has created. Interpolated into the main action are Shosanna's behind-the-scenes preparations for the evening (all stages of making the "giant-face" film, including the intimidation of the film developer, clipping and editing the film reel of *Nation's Pride*, placing the film reels in the correct place, etc.), and the camera reveals the film-set-like infrastructure of the walls and rooms behind the theatre as Shosanna exits her dressing room. When Shosanna enters the foyer, we see that she has dressed the part perfectly, matching the red and black decorations – she is truly mistress of her theatre.

Like in Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films, revenge proves to be a powerful and effective force in *Inglourious Basterds* (Garson and Méranger). That the last chapter of the film focuses on Shosanna's revenge is no question; Shosanna 'the giant face' even tells her Nazi audience "this is the face of Jewish vengeance". I would, however, be cautious of interpreting *Inglourious Basterds* as a whole as a revenge fantasy, as countless critics have done already.[241] There are a couple of problems with such a reading that become particularly evident in the premiere scene, and the film as a whole should not be seen as merely a triumph over the Nazis: first,

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[241] See for example, Cox; C. Taylor; Mendelsohn: "'Facts can be so misleading,' Hans Landa, the evil SS man, murmurs at one point in Inglourious Basterds. Perhaps, but fantasies are even more misleading. To indulge them at the expense of the truth of history would be the most inglorious bastardization of all.".

as already mentioned, because the audience is implicated. Here, too, we see the faces of Hitler and Goebbels as they watch the massacre of American soldiers on screen. We then sit and watch the massacre of the Nazis. The second problem with reading *Inglourious Basterds* as a whole as a revenge fantasy is that there are explicit parallels between the Jewish characters in the film taking revenge and their victims. As critics like Christian Thorne have so aptly noted, not only is Shosanna visually 'rhymed' with Fredrick Zoller on screen, but also Donny and Omar with Zoller as they shoot from above as well as Aldo with Zoller in carving swastikas (*Part 2*). This identification of both the audience and the Jewish characters with their victims undermines a straightforward reading of the film as a whole as a revenge on the Nazis, revenge on history, or revenge on reality – catchy as the idea may be.

Most compelling here on the weapon of choice: the massacre of the Nazis is enacted by nothing less than the burning of nitrate film reels, placed behind the movie screen. The implication of this "juicy metaphor" (Gilbey, "Days of Glory" 18) of burning film in *Inglourious Basterds* is that film is not merely to be watched. Metaphorically at least, it can keep alive, as in the case of Shosanna and Fredrick; and it can kill (literally in this case), as it does all of the Nazi viewers on the evening of the premiere.[242] The interplay between Shosanna as she is present in the theatre and Shosanna as she has been filmed is particularly notable. Through film, she becomes metaleptically omnipotent: even after the real Shosanna has been killed, the Shosanna captured on film lives on. The Shosanna captured on film is still capable of asserting her authority: she metaleptically addresses the Nazi viewers, heralding the destruction of the theatre. Shosanna "the giant face" thus reveals her control over theatre, screen, and in this case those watching the film.

In earlier scenes, Shosanna makes clear that she has a kind of religious respect for film (particularly directors, as she tells Fredrick). Goebbels, upon visiting the theatre for the first time, comments, "Ihr Kino respektiert die Filmkunst, fast wie eine Kirche." On the night of the premiere, Shosanna forces her audience to humble themselves in respect as well. Shosanna's own death is a result of believing in her own craft to a point of fault: she dies, because for a moment, she is more convinced by the Fredrick Zoller on screen than the Fredrick Zoller that she has just shot. Film has, also diegetically, become more powerful than reality. She is aware of the power that she wields: she defiantly tells Marcel, "Si on est capables à nous deux d'empęcher que cet endroit soit détruit par le feu, on est capables à nous deux de le détruire par le feu" ("If we can keep this place

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242 Cf. Ungar-Sargon: film is "its own revolution and solution. It can both create and destroy." (16).

from burning down, we can burn it down ourselves! "). But even burning down the theatre does not necessarily represent the limits of cinema in this case: the projection of Shosanna's face onto the smoke caused by the burning film, even after the screen has been destroyed, makes the religion metaphor even more convincing. Cinema here is self-sustaining, to some degree independent of the scaffolding that supports it – as well as those who wield it. Shosanna is, in the end, a kind of prophetess, who must die as a result of her plot (note her chosen name "Emmanuelle" as well).

3.6.4 The Art of Direction: Authority and Authorization of the Film

Shosanna's 'credo' is analogous to that of Tarantino as director and film-maker: in issues of authority and prerogative, cinema always wins. With *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino as director and film-maker is not only author, but dictator, and he is every bit as present in his own film as the characters on screen who vie for authority. Besides the fact that the real Tarantino has, if any director has, reached a kind of status as larger-than-life in the film industry, *Inglourious Basterds* does not reveal any attempt to hide this authorial / directorial instance. The film audaciously 'does what it wants' with us, history, and reality.

There are several aspects of *Inglourious Basterds* which might be read as contributing to the perceptibility of the director / film-maker: for example, the film's high degree of narrativity. The story is divided up into chapters, each announced extradiegetically with a black screen with yellow lettering; and much like a work of theatre or opera, the film utilizes *tableaux* form: the story is not narrated continuously, but rather there are several jumps between subplots and in story time. The segments of story that are in themselves narratively continuous and coherent, such as Private Butz's encounter with the Basterds, are often characterized by disjointed discourse, in this case as a result of interpolated analepsis and shifts in diegetic level. Here, the narrative alternates contrapunctally between Private Butz recounting the situation to Hitler and the encounter itself. In addition, during the analepsis, we get the first of the film's two extradiegetic insertions in the form of explanations voiced by Samuel L. Jackson (the second is about nitrate film): Hugo Stiglitz is introduced with the sound of two electric guitar chords and the appearance of his name on screen (much in the style of his namesake Hugo Stiglitz, a Mexican actor famous for horror classics like *Tintorera* or *La Noche de los mil gatos*). The narrative then proceeds to offer the back story of Hugo Stiglitz, from his career as a murderer of Nazis to his recruitment by the Basterds – an analepsis within the analepsis.

That Samuel L. Jackson voices this back story constitutes a reference itself to Tarantino's other films. In other words, it is not only that a complex and convoluted discourse makes us constantly aware of an authorial instance, but we are prompted here to recognize which specific instance. Tarantino's authorization of the film occurs here also in the most literal sense of the word: the Nazis have been branded with swastikas, by implication the audience, and the film has been branded explicitly by Tarantino as well. The title of the film is shown in the handwriting of Tarantino himself as it appears on the draft of the original screenplay. The title, in the same handwriting, appears again during the film on Aldo's rifle, once again identifying the lead Basterd with the director. It is almost as if Tarantino has signed his own artwork, confirming that the film is, as the German DVD cover claims, "ein echter Tarantino". Further indicators include, for example, the use of the same font for the credits as in *Pulp Fiction* or the (reference to the) Mexican stand-off in the bar scene.

Other aspects of the film go beyond merely contributing to the high degree of perceptibility of the director / film-maker and constitute assertions of his authority: that is, either establishing cinema as independent from other discourses or in some way challenging the audience, denying us attempts to make sense of the film in terms other than what the film itself prescribes: first, a rich network of allusions and references to film and film history establishes cinema in *Inglourious Basterds* as its own discourse. I am not by any means the first one to point out that the film is a collage of sorts; and much like many voluminous Modernist works like *Finnegans Wake* or *Ada*, it is even possible to find compendia, encyclopaedic attempts to catalogue the different references and allusions in *Inglourious Basterds*.[243] As Goodridge puts it, "Tarantino once again insists on wearing his cinephelia on his sleeve." A few of these allusions have already been cited, but there are countless others: Aldo Raine, for example, is likely a reference to the actor Aldo Ray (Seeßlen 97); Marlene Dietrich is supposedly the inspiration for Bridget von Hammersmark (C. Taylor); even the title of the film is a corruption (or 'basterdization', we might say) of Enzo Castellari's 1978 film *Quel maledetto treno blindato: Bastardi senza Gloria.* (the director's birth name, Enzo Girolami, is also strikingly similar to Aldo's Italian alias "Enzo Gorlomi"). The film score is also a patchwork of musical quotations, from Beethoven to David Bowie. "Cultural cramming" and "aesthetic indigestion" are terms[244] that might be applied to *Inglourious Basterd's* mix of genres as well: most frequently cited are the war film and the spaghetti western (for which Enzo Castellari was renowned) (Stock);

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243 Such as Seeßlen's volume (*Quentin Tarantinogegen die Nazis*).

244 Both courtesy of the critic Nick James ("Carve his Name with Pride").

others have noted stylistic similarities between Nazi propaganda films and *Inglourious Basterds* (Bauer).

Whether Tarantino is making a statement for, against, within, or outside of established film traditions is not clear, for his own film – true to the paradox of postmodernism – is tied so inextricably to the discourses that he seems to be commenting upon. Just as I would hesitate to call the film as a whole a revenge fantasy merely because of the role of revenge in the plots to kill Hitler, it is less than accurate to say that Tarantino is merely taking revenge on Hollywood or any other tradition. Not only is he dependent as a director and film-maker on cinema as it precedes him, but in a quirky cameo, he even subjects himself to his own film: Tarantino (or a dummy of Tarantino) is the first German soldier to be scalped on screen. What is clear in *Inglourious Basterds* is that "the world of cinema is, for the first time, the primary reality of the film as well as its primary subtext" (Foundas).[245]

Second, the lack of realism, or the in some cases 'staginess' of the acting and violence in this film not only highlights the 'hand of the maker' so to speak, but also asserts cinema's independence from reality; or, perhaps more accurately, cinema's lack of responsibility to realistic depiction. The actor Martin Wuttke as Adolf Hitler deserves special mention here as a kind of parody of Bruno Ganz's performance in the 2004 film *Der Untergang*. In Tarantino's film, Hitler is just as ridiculous as Goebbels,[246] yelling and fretting while his portrait is being painted in the background.

Hitler's apparent desire for grandeur is further mocked by the fact that one of his last words in the film is to ask the guards outside of his theatre box for a stick of gum ("Kaugummi?"). When Donny shoots him with a machine gun, it becomes clear just how much of a puppet, a caricature, Hitler is. Like the German soldiers who are scalped and carved, Hitler's body (his head and face in par-

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245 Cf. Denby, "Americans in Paris": "there's hardly a flash of light indicating that the world exists outside the cinema except as the basis of a nutbrain fable"; cf. Ungar-Sargon, "Quentin Tarantino's war": "though this film references historical facts and films, it still exists on its own terms and in its own reality" (16).

246 It is interesting to note that both Martin Wuttke and Sylvester Groth both had previous roles as Goebbels: Wuttke in the 2003 film *Rosenstrasse*, and Groth in the 2007 comedy *Mein Führer – die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler*. Oliver Jahraus observes: "die historischen Figuren stammen [...] weniger aus der Geschichte als vielmehr aus dem Arsenal ihrer Darstellungsformen in der Populärkultur. Der Nazi ist ein übler Schurke, und zwar genau so, wie er in den entsprechenden Comic-Heften erscheint [...]" ("Ein glorious basterd" 3). While I would hesitate to apply this claim to all Nazi figures in the film (the figures Landa, Private Butz, or Sergeant Werner are surely anything but comic-book Nazis), it is certainly true for Hitler and Goebbels. That 'historical accuracy' seems to have been neglected (Jahraus notes, for example, that the Nazi uniforms seem like operetta costumes, and not a single one of the rank titles is correct) is further support for my argument that alternate histories deal with popular notions of history, not academic ones.

ticular) becomes rubbery, mere material. This kind of stylized (and gratuitous) violence that has become characteristic for Tarantino's films is another aspect that *Inglourious Basterds* has in common with the *Kill Bill* movies: blood spurting unnaturally, humans without limbs, etc. Once again, as with the film's treatment of history, one might argue that Tarantino is, in a strange way, being more 'honest' than other films: after all, it *isn't* real. Artifice in film is not only admitted, but also celebrated.

The bottom line is, cinema as whole is not more real than reality, it's just that, in Tarantino's film, cinema trumps reality – as well as every other discourse that attempts to claim authority over it. There is nothing subtle about *Inglourious Basterds*, and much like Landa's indulgent performances, Aldo's pursuit of Nazi hunting as a craft, and Shosanna's own dramatic debut, the blatant contradiction of history reflects much more the relishing in the authority of cinema than it constitutes its existence. We might say that *Inglourious Basterds* is an exceptional instance in which its being an alternate history hardly seems to be the main point. It is a *mock* alternate history, because the alternate-history tradition is, like so much else in the film, subsumed to a metacinematic assertion of its own authority. It is even a meta-alternate history in its presupposition of knowledge of the genre of alternate history. That is not to say that one *has to* understand the film as an alternate history; only that, if we do understand it as an alternate history (as I propose we can), a certain play with the conventions of alternate history itself is at hand. If anything is offensive about Tarantino's film, it is not so much the tampering with history, but rather the *audacity* to tamper with history without apology, without any other apparent purpose than to show that it can: the point is overkill, overdoing it. The film-maker has the prerogative to contradict history – that is, not in the noble name of getting at the true story, correcting misconceptions about the past, or even to appreciate how things might have happened differently. That *Inglourious Basterds* contradicts history merely reveals and celebrates cinema's power to do so.

3.7 Alternate History as Apotheosis of Representation: Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*

3.7.1 Krachtian Alternate History

Like *Inglourious Basterds*, Christian Kracht's novel *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* is an alternate history that is primarily concerned with themes and issues different from the genre 'mainstream' as described here. A

legitimate question is whether such works should be considered alternate histories at all: either we could claim that such works are not alternate histories because they refuse being treated as such, i.e. the paradox of contingency and necessity is less prominent. Or, as I am claiming here, they are alternate histories, but admittedly unique or exceptional in that they achieve a different product with the same basic concept of point of divergence. I would reiterate here that the goal of this study is to take into account *what is there*, not merely limit the text corpus for the sake of creating a cohesive account: alternate history is less a homogeneous corpus of texts than a genre defined by the point of divergence. The degree of variation possible and the spectrum of texts that may be considered according to this aspect are hypothetically infinite. Thus, without claiming that Kracht's novel represents a new category of alternate history, it is safe to say that *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* is most like *Inglourious Basterds* among the texts considered here in that it is self-referentially, self-consciously alternate history – only this time the result is a reflection on language and representation, not necessarily the medium that 'houses' the alternate history.

Ich werde hier sein is an example of what has been cited already as 'out-of-date science fiction': narratives of a future that has, in the meantime, become past. Before 2010, that is, before the narrative present became past in relation to the real-world time-lime, the novel was a prime example of overlap between science fiction and alternate history: narrated are both a point of divergence in the past as well as a dystopian (at the time of publication near) future. Paul Alkon explicitly excludes such hybrids from the genre, reasoning that a focus on the future 'stretches' alternate history 'too thin', i.e. there is a necessary dilution of the typical thematic aspects of alternate history (156). While I clearly do not agree with an exclusion of Kracht's novel on this basis, it is evident that *Ich werde hier sein* is not a study of historical causality, nor does a contemplation of free will and determinism play out as a result of the point of divergence. The point of divergence itself, like in Chabon's novel, is relatively 'hidden', or at least not as blatant as in the other alternate histories considered here: Lenin remains in Switzerland and develops his Socialist state (the 'Schweizer Sowjet Republik', or 'SSR') there. The results of this point of divergence are dramatic and therefore easily recognizable: for example that Russia has been devastated by explosions and remains barren and uninhabitable, and Switzerland has been waging war against the fascist allies England and Germany for nearly a century. Not only 'Amexikaner' inhabit the war zone, but also probes and people with plug sockets under their armpits. This is clearly not our world, but unlike science fiction in general, we are provided with a root cause, a turning point in history of how the fictional world came to be different from our own.

In 'staging' a war that is both rooted in historical causes as well as ahistorical in its endlessness, *Ich werde hier sein* amounts to a statement about the future of Western civilization itself: in particular, civilization in relation to its representation and in the face of doubting historical progress. In exploring this theme, I have two approaches here: first, to consider *Ich werde hier sein* in relation to Kracht's other two novels, *Faserland* and *1979*, namely as the last of three stations in the deterioration of Western civilization; second, to consider this theme in terms of alternate history as a whole: that is, not only the fact that *Ich werde hier sein* has a point of divergence, but also that the novel holds a unique place in the genre in how coherently stylistic aspects reflect the thematic program as well as the additional 'assignment' or 'challenge' posed to the reader.

3.7.2 School of Kracht

Even just the acclaim with which *Ich werde hier sein* has been received and Kracht's prominent place among literary critics might warrant a consideration of Kracht's earlier work. But particularly because the author has provided his own explicit interpretation of *Ich werde hier sein* in relation to the earlier two novels, we might use Kracht's suggestion for contextualizing the novel in his work as a prompt: Kracht claims that his three novels, taken together, for "eine Art Triptychon",[247] reaching a peak in *Ich werde hier sein*: "Die drei Romane sind ein Triptychon, das jetzt abschlossen ist. 'Faserland' beschrieb den Jetzt-Zustand, '1979' die unmittelbare Vergangenheit und der neue Roman die Zukunft. Freilich eine retrograde Zukunft." (Lindemann, "Christian Kracht und die nackte Angst") Several similarities among the three novels can be easily noted: all three are travel novels (cf. Birgfeld, "Christian Kracht als Modellfall einer Reiseliteratur" 405–411) – through Germany, eastwards, and southwards; all three protagonist-narrators are unnamed, searching or fleeing, and they exhibit a kind of cold distance to the civilization from which they come.

The "triptych" can be seen as a progressive depiction of the state of Western culture and civilization: in *Faserland*, Germany is still thoroughly domestic, yet 'rotting' from the inside. The first-person narrator does not actively participate in the story, but rather auto-pilots his way through Germany as a disinterested tourist. The narrator, full of ennui, travels through familiar territory, yet has no mastery of it. He reflects often about his own past, but these reflections are only a form of sickly nostalgia: the stories almost always take a sour turn. Instead of

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247 Christian Kracht in an interview with Ingo Mocek (Mocek 130).

engaging with nature, the German landscapes, or the people that he meets along the way, he drowns himself in materialism: barbour jackets, food that does not taste good, cars, coloured contact lenses, designer products. The pop culture references ad nauseam are not celebratory, but rather sickening – nauseating. Despite his disposable income, education (in business), and apparent listlessness, the narrator even steals a former friend's Barbour jacket as well as Rollo's car. His emptiness and indifferent desperation signal the new decadence, the apotheosis of materiality. *Faserland* is ultimately far less "die Geburt der Popliteratur in Deutschland, es war dessen Abtreibung" (Krekeler). It is a glowering cross between Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* and Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, signalling the equivalent of the *Ragnarök* of Norse mythology: the disintegration and downfall of Western civilization from within.

1979 also involves a pilgrimage of sorts, but into unknown territory. The unnamed first-person narrator travels far away, without the possibility of return (138) – and without interest in returning. Unlike the narrator of *Faserland*, he does not seem to have a past (34); he is a blank slate of sorts (128, 132). He sees and experiences, but does little in the way of interpreting what he comes across. Much like the narrator in *Faserland*, he is both apathetic and apolitical. Attempts at finding meaning are rebuffed (139–40), and the dereliction of the narrator is mirrored in the desolate landscape of Iran and Tibet (125). The pop-relics of *Faserland*, Berluti shoes (127) and Barbour jackets, are weak reminders of the comforts of Western civilization as sickness sets in, and Christopher dies from a drug overdose. The journey around Mount Kailash, always upwards (25, 124), leads the narrator to a kind of twisted rebirth: he lands in a starvation camp, exhausted, disappearing (181).

As the third and final step in the "triptych", *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* leads us even further astray from the known world, and even further along in the decline of Western civilization. The plot is similar to that of *Faserland* and *1979*: a retrospective account of the solitary travels of an unnamed protagonist-narrator. He does not seem to be emotionally invested in the world around him, an alternative version of the history of the twentieth century – even less so than his literary antetype, *Heart of Darkness*'s Marlow (cf. Zweifel; Oehmke, "Blutspur im Schnee" 154–156; Jahraus, "Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus" 13–23). As Weidermann describes all of the characters in Kracht's newest novel, "die Menschen sind wie Schatten. Wir erfahren fast nichts über sie." Thus similarities to Kracht's narrators from the first two novels are evident. The question remains, however, how we get from the "popmodern" (Biendarra 175) dandyism of *Faserland* to the apocalyptic disintegration of Western civilization in *Ich werde hier sein*, or if there even is a plausible connection.

One suggestion can be developed from Menke's discussion of "camp sensibility" (Menke): *Faserland* sets the stage with its constant mentioning of brand names, reflection on objects' designs, and a subtle undermining of the naïve, romantic attitude of a middle-class conformist – reminiscent of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (although not so subtle in the latter case) (Taberner and Cooke 178). The protagonist's motivation is different from a dandy's: he does not necessarily want to be seen, but rather wants to see. He is a postmodern dandy in that the focus is self-reflexively redrawn to issues of taste and consumption (D. Clarke 37). The camp sensibility that Menke cites as relevant for Kracht's work functions similarly: not only is *Ich werde hier sein* a kind of aesthetic melting pot ("Friedrich Glauser und Joseph Conrad und Ludwig Wittgenstein und Ernst Jünger, ein paar Comic-Hefte, Gothic Novels, drei Bände Sprachtheorie, afrikanische Mythen, ein bisschen Steampunk und Bergliteratur, Kitsch, ein paar Drogen, versteckte Witze, die afrikanischen Tagebücher Krachts unter anderem vom Aufstieg auf den Kilimandscharo und Unmengen literarische Eiswürfel" [Krekeler 3]), but it ambitiously drives itself to excess in the intricacy of the network of illusions and references contained in a such a short, minimalistic text (Menke 94). The result is a kind of vacuum: the apotheosis of materialism, the disintegration of Western civilization through its overabundance, or overdose we might say, of references. Menke calls Kracht's newest novel a "stilisierte Vorstellung von den Vorzügen einer menschenleeren Welt" (90). Not only is the world of *Ich werde hier sein* devoid of humanity, but also all of the values that accompany and orient humans in the dissolving world of Kracht's *Faserland*.

3.7.3 Hyperreality and Alternate History

Significantly, this 'vacuum' effect also plays out on several different levels in *Ich werde hier sein*, i.e. not just as an account of the impending fate of Western civilization. One manifestation, or perhaps result, of the "beautiful clean thought, a world empty of people" (see the D.H. Lawrence epigraph at the beginning of the text) is the directing of attention to signs themselves (Menke 95) – on the level of content and language. We might note, for example, that for such 'emptiness', the world of *Ich werde hier sein* is full of mysterious things: probes, plug sockets, dwarves. Upon being asked why he included plug sockets under the armpits of certain figures (Favre and Brazhinsky), Kracht replied:

> Ich hätte sehr gerne einmal einen Film gemacht, der im neunzehnten Jahrhundert spielt, in einer Welt, die von Jane Austen oder Emily Brontë gestaltet ist; man sieht die grünen Hügel Englands, darauf bewegen sich Pferde, sorgsam kostümierte Schauspieler, Kutschen etcet-

era. Eine konventionelle Handlung findet statt, alles ist sehr schön, nur einmal streift die Kamera wie aus Versehen die im Hintergrund liegende Irische See. Darauf sehen wir einen Windsurfer auf seinem Brett stehend, einen multifarbenen Neoprenanzug tragend [...] Dieser Windsurfer fällt aus der Zeit, ein Loch in der Membran wird aufgestoßen. Mit den Steckdosen in meinem Roman verhält es sich ähnlich: Sofia Coppola hat sich in ihrem Film 'Marie Antoinette' meiner Idee bedient. In einem Schuhhaufen in Versailles sieht man für wenige Millisekunden ein paar Chucks Converse liegen. (Mocek)

In other words, these peculiar occurrences are prompts, triggers without explanations. The 'what', or being attentive to the 'what', is not completed with a 'why'. The only sense that we can make of the plug sockets is that it is an attribute shared by Favre and Brazhinsky. We can ask what Favre and Brazhinsky have in common; the question, however, why exactly they have plug sockets under their armpits is left entirely up to the reader. The narrator's vision of Favre, Brazhinsky, and a dark-skinned Mwana with blue eyes (41) functions similarly: there is no directed means of interpretation provided by the text. The only sense that we can make of this vision using textual evidence is through the complementary metamorphosis undertaken by the narrator: his own eyes turn blue as he leaves Europe for Africa. The narrator is thus to be compared with the boy in the vision, and he is therefore also to be seen in relation to Favre and Brazhinsky. These prompts are particularly effective because they *seem* to mean without prescribing that meaning.

The result of such puzzling details without explanations is a 'hyperreality' (Mocek): the world of Kracht's novel is not just real, not just unreal, but something 'above' real. That is to say that 'reality' is still very much present, which is what gives the plug sockets, etc. their effect to begin with. Much like Hegel's concept of 'redescription', this kind of effect can result only through 'overwriting' rather than 'replacement'; or, in terms of defamiliarization, enough of familiar reality must be present in order to perceive something as unfamiliar to begin with. This process is, of course, precisely how I have been describing the reader's activity in alternate history all along: the alternative version of history is recognizable as such only in active comparison to a normalized narrative of the real past – in this case the history of the twentieth century from Lenin's exile in Switzerland onwards.

It has been suggested that, with Kracht's novel, the genre of alternate history has 'grown up' (Dath). Such a statement might be understood in reference to how Kracht's novel uses the premises of alternate history programmatically in contrast to most alternate histories: for *Ich werde hier sein* focuses precisely on this process of identification and differentiation, rather than on the paradox of contingency and necessity that results from the simplification of history and causal logic of all alternate histories. What happens, the alternative course of history,

is just as clear in Kracht's novel as in Dick's or Chabon's: Lenin remains in Switzerland and develops his socialist state there. For the following ninety-six years, Switzerland wages war against the fascist England and Germany; the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century are characterized by war and desolation. The ongoing 'plot', the monolithic course of events following the point of divergence, is thus secondary. All that follows Lenin's successful creation of the SSR is atemporal because stagnate: "Die Jahreszeiten verschwanden, es gab kein Auf und Ab mehr, kein bemerkbarer Wechsel, ebenso keine Gezeiten, keine Wogen, keine Mondphasen, der Krieg ging nun in sein sechsundneunzigstes Jahr." (13) This timelessness and lack of rhythm translates to lack of progress, a lack of prospects. As the Germans say, "Wir sind im Krieg geboren, und im Krieg werden wir sterben." (33, 85) It is this *situation* – winter, cold, terror, war – that is far more important and present than any causally driven plot.

As with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the question of who Brazhinsky is and what he represents, i.e. what is to be found at the 'core' of the SSR, is paramount. There is thus a kind of geographical movement inwards, an attempt to reach the literal and metaphorical heart of the SSR. Brazhinsky is, like Kurtz, an enigmatic figure: both appealing and dangerous, genius and reclusive. As Favre puts it, Brazhinsky is "eine Gefahr für die SSR, oder er ist die Hoffnung der SSR" (41). This is indeed the most perplexing 'empty space' on the level of content. It is not clear what exactly Favre means, but we might conjecture that Brazhinsky and the réduit hold some key to deciphering the history of the SSR, or rather, its *representation*.

3.7.4 Rauchsprache – Krachtsprache

Trying to explain what the réduit is, Brazhinsky tells the narrator: "Der Kern, verstehen Sie? Eine autonome Schweiz. Wir führen hier oben keinen Krieg mehr nach aussen, wir verteidigen die Bergfestung, gewiss, aber wir expandieren nur noch im Berg." (110) The réduit is indeed the most concerted, elaborate effort in the novel to find a 'center' in the hollowness of the enduring war. This sought-after 'center' is something like Satori, Samadhi, or Wu, as Favre (as orientalist) explains to the narrator by means of the *I-Ching*.[248] She explains that Brazhinsky has reached this state of transcendence, in that he has become 'etwas Gegenständlichem' (39). As he explains in so many words to the narrator, Brazhinsky's

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[248] The reference to Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* is noted. Among the books in English lying on Brazhinsky's desk, next to several books on entomology, is one entitled *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (68).

tactic involves isolation and concealment: not leaving a trace; self-liquidation. It is no coincidence that Brazhinsky's "auffälligstes Merkmal" is his "fast abnorme Unscheinbarkeit" (106).

His strategy is reflected in, for example, Nicholas Roerich's representation of Swiss history on the walls of the réduit. The narrator observes,

> Je weiter ich Raum für Raum den Verlauf der Arbeiten abschritt, desto weniger realistisch wurde die Kunst, bis das viele tausend Meter lange Reliefband schliesslich in den Zimmern und Korridoren, die im Réduit zuoberst lagen, jeder Prätention einer naturgemässen Darstellung entbehrte, es waren nur noch Formen, Flächen, unzusammenhängende, amorphe Figuren. (122)

The formlessness, rhythmlessness of history as 'written' here is a performance of the nebulousness of a never-ending war: the idea of history as presented here is an evolution towards abstraction and immateriality that is only fitting for the world of *Ich werde hier sein*.

Brazhinsky's goal seems to be less disappearance or non-existence (note the insistence of the titular quote from 'Danny Boy') than non-tangibility. This 'evolution' is none other than a development in the process of representation, a departure from the text-oriented approach of Western civilization. At the outset of the story, the first step has already been taken: in the SSR, nobody knows how to read or write (with few exceptions, including the narrator); the materiality of language is dissolved with the abolition of written language. As Favre puts it, "Wir, die früher im Frieden viel gelesen haben, Bücher geschrieben, Bücher gedruckt, Bibliotheken besucht haben, bilden uns evolutionär von der Schrift weg, sie wird immer unwichtiger." (43) As Krekeler puts it, Kracht's novel imagines "eine Zeit am Ende der Gutenberg-Galaxis". The second step, a telepathic means of communication without signs, the abolition of linguistic matter altogether, is underway. Favre describes Brazhinsky's new means of communication as "drahtlos" (40), a "Rauchsprache" (42); Uriel the dwarf claims that Brazhinsky "sprach wie eine Wolke" (80). Language is "zutiefst dinglich [...], ein Noumenon" (44) and can therefore be dissolved – without losing its communication function: "Warum nicht gleich das Wort oder den Satz in den Raum geben? Wir heben einfach Ursache und Wirkung auf." (44) In other words, Brazhinsky has developed a language with more direct access to its referent, the production of a signified without signifier.

Kracht's own language, the language of the novel, is not to be equated with Brazhinsky's, but the aesthetic is similar: clearly against a perception of 'the world as book', "Krachts Sprache konstituiert Wirklichkeit, statt sie reduziert zu reproduzieren" (Bronner 109). As already mentioned, Kracht's novel is already

unusual among alternate histories in that the language is reminiscent of modernist language. It is by no means as ambiguous and auto-referential as in *Finnegans Wake*, but it is certainly the case that language here is auto-referential. The narrator's meditations by the humming of the probes are prime examples of language as music: "Meine Augen sind geschlossen. Geschlossen. Ich komme nur ganz kurz hierher. Berge und Wolken. Vögel sind dort. Ich höre sie. Ich bin an diesem Ort. Verloren." (25) Fragments of this first, rhythmic utterance return and are interspersed throughout the narrative (cf. 70, "Meine Augen sind geschlossen. Ich komme nur ganz kurz hierher"; or several times: "Berge", "Vögel" and / or "Wolken"). With such refrain-like techniques, the fragmentation and non-semantic distribution of language, Kracht "zeigt [...] in Anlage und Ausführung eine [...] Faszination für das Klingende, das Weitangelegte und den Eigenwert einzelner Bilder, Sätze oder Motive" (Menke 89).

The resulting sparsity of Kracht's language is striking: it is, according to Wolfgang Büscher, "eine nüchterne Art, poetisch zu sein". The minimalistic constraint of Kracht's sentences is above all evident at dramatic moments, for example when Favre is killed by a mine. The account is peculiarly sober, capped off by the above-mentioned refrain: "Favre war nicht dort. Kein Stück, kein Fetzen ihres Körpers oder ihrer Uniform war mehr vorhanden. Der Himmel drehte sich. Berge und Vögel." (47) Similarly, a gushy account of the narrator's involvement with Favre (and the word 'romantic' never seemed more out of place) would be unfitting. The narrator's postcoital musings consist of the following, halting sentences: "An der Wand über ihrem Bett hing ein koreanischer Druck, der eine Welle zeigte, die ein kleines Holzschiff zu erdrücken drohte. Dahinter war ein Berg zu sehen. Auf dem Bild regnete es, oder es regnete nicht. Als es vorbei war, rauchte sie eine von meinen Zigaretten, die letzte Papierosy." (46) Such cold, Ernst-Jünger-inspired prose (cf. Zweifel; Oehmke, "Blutspur im Schnee" 155; Seibt), "rätselhaft und unnahbar" (Hugendick), is not only an indicator for the narrator's own distance from what he is experiencing, but of course also motivated by Brazhinsky's aesthetic. The language of the novel belongs inextricably to the world it narrates (cf. Krekeler): "die Sprache malt hier eine Welt, die eigentlich gar nicht sprechen will, lieber schweigen" (Dath).

Both Brazhinsky's linguistic 'evolution' and the austerity of Kracht's own language might be situated conceptually in terms of a trajectory of mimesis in literature into the twentieth century, as identifed for example in Daniel Albright's study of representation: the works of authors like Joyce or Pound constitute a move away from attempts to imitate real life and towards an attempt to simply 'be' (Albright 2–3). The destruction of signs, but in such a way that also produces meaning, achieves essentially the consolidation of linguistic production and its negative. Christoph Bode has also stated so much in his study of ambiguity in

modernist literature cited above: the making and un-making of language are complementary acts.

The loosening of semantic structures, the modernist 'musicalization' of language as it occurs to some extent in Kracht's novel, is akin to what FNs do at a structural level: rather than merely represent, they prompt. Kracht's novel thus provides another missing link between alternate history and FN: the metaphor of 'openness'. Just as the unravelling of language in *Ich werde hier sein* allows for language itself to 'be' and be made, rather than to represent, a FN might be considered no more than a *process* of narrative creation: it is as if the FN takes one step backward, away from the determinacy of a past narrative, in order to prompt the process of narration itself; unmaking generates making. A FN is less a narrative in the traditional sense of the word than a generator that has been created by un-making narrative – by dissolving the boundary between the 'what' and the 'how'.

3.7.5 Literary Evolution?

Albright would go so far as to say that the modernist 'musicalization', i.e. materialization of language, or loosening of semantic associations, represents a kind of evolution for literature: "My thesis is that hyperrealism and abstraction, the will to perfect images and the will to dispense with them, proceed from the same urge to transgress the limitations of art; they are related strategies for improving the states of the artwork, for enhancing its dignity, its self-reliance." (5) As far as *Ich werde hier sein* is concerned, assertions about the state of language are less radical than one might have them. As has already been noted, Kracht's language is not nearly as auto-referential as that of Joyce or Pound; it could not otherwise be an alternate history to begin with, i.e. without the clarity of the content. Kracht's medium is still language, however sparse, and it is still possible to discern what is happening.

Furthermore, the 'evolution' in communication as proposed by Brazhinsky in the story is ultimately rejected: above all the accompanying ambivalence towards Brazhinsky's notion of progress serve as evidence. The use of psilocybin mushrooms as 'training wheels' for learning the new form of communication indicate unnaturalness, an artificially driven development (or, if we follow Brazhinsky's reasoning that mushrooms are found in nature: a sickening or corruption of nature). Equally suspicious in this respect are the plug sockets under the armpits of Favre and Brazhinsky, also that Favre's back smells like metal. Brazhinsky's own exhuberant statement, "unsere neue Sprache ist ebenso ein Virus!" (126) causes alarm in the narrator ("Die Gedanken sackten mir nach hinten weg.

Brazhinsky war tatsächlich wahnsinnig" [126]). Favre's earlier statements about the dissolution of written language remain unanswered: "Unser Verlernen des Schreibens ist, wenn Sie so wollen, ein Prozess des absichtlichen Vergessens. Niemand ist mehr im Frieden geboren. Die Generation, die nach uns kommt, ist der erste Baustein zum neuen Menschen. Es lebe der Krieg." (43) But the idea of a 'process of intentional forgetting' should remind any reader of something like *1984*'s Newspeak and the negative implications of the erasure and / or revision of collective memory. The unravelling of the process of representation is not merely the abolition of words, but also the (dangerous) mutability of what they communicate.

It is not Brazhinsky, but rather the narrator who seems to make the true evolutionary move in first going towards and then distancing himself from the 'progress' of the SSR. The similarities to the plot structure of *Heart of Darkness* have already been noted, but we could focus just as well on the 'education' of the narrator in *Ich werde hier sein* as a kind of movement inwards and outwards. Unlike other Krachtian narrators, this one has a past, the narration of which occupies a good deal of the novel. Through his upbringing in Nyasaland and training to become an SSR soldier, we also learn about the alternative version of history – that is, through an account of what he learned. The narrator makes his way to the top of the ranks as a Swiss officer, receives the special mission to retrieve Brazhinsky, and travels alone towards the réduit. As he gets closer to the réduit, he 'evolves' in Brazhinsky's terms: he loses his notebook on the way and once there, he begins to learn the 'Rauchsprache'.

There is, however, a reactionary return in *Ich werde hier sein*, and this is where the narrator differs crucially from Marlow: he rejects the 'evolution' that he has undergone, rejects the kind of knowledge represented by Brazhinsky, and makes his way back to his origins. He never accepts independence from reading and writing as progress ("Der Krieg macht uns zu Geisteskrüppeln" [95]), and as he leaves the réduit, making his way south towards Africa, he gets rid of the 'Rauchsprache' and "Brazhinskys kranke Lektionen" (138). Once he arrives, he rejoices in writing:

> [I]ch schrieb Wörter, Sätze, ganze Bücher in die Landschaft hinein – die Geschichte der Honigameisen, die Enzyklopädie der Füchse, das Geblüt der Welt, die unterirdischen Ströme, das tief vibrierende, geräuschlose Summen der unbekannten Vergangenheit und der darin auftauchenden Zukunft. Ich notierte nicht mit Tusche, sondern mit Schrift, mit den Morphemen der Erde. (144)

The return to written language is here clearly associated with a reconnection with nature – that is, nature as benign and harmonious with its inhabitants, just as the narrator had experienced it before leaving Africa: barefoot, a moth that has fallen

in love with the movement of his eyelashes (73), a landscape for which he needs no uniform (143). This represents a stark contrast to nature as depicted in the midst of the European war as well as the unnaturalness of Brazhinsky and Favre.

The exact nature of the narrator's progress might be considered in comparison to Kracht's other two narrators as well. It is the narrator, with his insistence on *literary* interaction with the world around him, who represents progress in *Ich werde hier sein*. He is most certainly the most 'mature' of Kracht's three narrators in his perceptions. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> Der Weg zum Bahnhof schien jeden Morgen wie eine Theaterkulisse; erst ging es mit Rauhreif überzogenen Wellblechhütten vorbei, dann kam ein Gatter, Bäume, immer wieder schwarze Vögel, die gerade so aufflatterten, als ziehe sie ein unsichtbarer Bühnenmeister an einem Bindfaden durch die Szenerie. (13)

The narrator maintains distance from what he experiences, and he never employs gushy or flowery language, but he is mature in his ability to 'see' in metaphors – an ability surely connected with his propensity to reading and writing. He ignores the chiding of his SSR companions, remaining critical of their inability to read and write – both because of the advantages it affords him ("ich war doppelt und dreimal so effizient wie sie" [24]) and because of his ability to observe the world as more than what it is: in other words, to see the world as a poet.

The narrator's geographical return to Africa is described as triumphant, rife with symbolism, as he relocates himself in his place of origin:

> Der Frachter trug mich über das Mittelmeer hin und durch den Kanal, der nun uns Afrikanern gehören würde, zur Liebe hin, zu einer blonden Frau, deren Haar mir erst furchterregend gelb erschienen war und dann golden. Ab und zu stand sie an der Reling in einem blauen gepunkteten Sommerkleid, barfuss, ihre flackernden, schemenhaften Umrisse waren deutlich zu erkennen. Ich trug das weiße Hemd meines Vaters. Unter einem brennend blauen Himmel näherten wir uns endlich der von Skorpionen befallenen Küste Somalilands. Ein Delphinscharm begleitete unser Schiff. Vögel waren dort, Bambo, Vögel, das Blut der Chiwa sang in unseren Adern. Ndafika. Ndakondwa. Und die blauen Augen unserer Revolution brannten mit der notwendigen Grausamkeit. (146–147)

He has effectively 'become' Chiwa again, but one born of Western experience. He returns not merely to Africa, but to a mythologized Africa in which he wears the (white!) clothing of his father, speaks Chiwa, convenes with a blonde-haired woman, and nature harmonizes with him. The narrator's physical metamorphosis upon returning to Africa is the expression of his progress both towards and away from Western civilization: his eyes turn blue, a colour expressly unnatural for a dark-skinned person. The narrator is the metaphorical child of Favre and Brazhinsky – the Mwana child with blue eyes in his vision, i.e. a dark-skinned,

non-Westerner who has learned to see the world through the eyes of a Westerner. The narrator has gained a consciousness that he did not have before: in order to appreciate the nearness of nature and his literary means of connecting with it, he needed both the journey and the alternative, i.e. to make a conscious decision to cast away the 'evolutionary' progress of the SSR.

3.7.6 Regress and Dissolution

The narrator's triumph translates for many to the rejection of Western progress: as Birgfeld and Conter put it, "*Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* ist eine radikale Abrechnung mit der historischen Bilanz und mit den zivilisatorischen Projekten, Hoffnungen und Phantasmen Europas des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die Bilanz fällt äußerst düster aus" (Birgfeld and Conter, "Morgenröte des Post-Humanismus" 266). The imagery of the concluding chapter, one paragraph, seems unambiguous: African inhabitants abandon cities and return to their villages. The Swiss architect Jeanneret (likely the Pierre Jeanneret of our history) travels to Africa, trying to convince the inhabitants to return – in vain. He stands, powerless, wordless and despairing in his empty administration building, finally deciding to hang himself; hyenas eat his feet.

   Still, it is important to note that the critique here is quite different from, say, in *Heart of Darkness*: Conrad's work postulates the instinct of Western civilization to repress; we are unable and unwilling to admit the horror that is at the heart of every human being, our own barbarity. In *Ich werde hier sein*, on the other hand, Africa is idyllic; nature is a benign force (note how nature becomes menacing only as the narrator becomes a soldier: Leeches attack [64–65]), and humans in their natural state are capable of living in peace. Furthermore, Western civilization is not entirely negative: it is appealing enough for the narrator and other Africans not only to relocate to Switzerland, but to fight in its name. Only Europe is sickly; it is the age of "Kali Juga" (13), of decline, strife, and apocalypse because no one can even remember what peace was like. Consider Birgfeld's and Conter's thesis:

> Die Rückkehr nach Afrika, auf den Kontinent des Beginns der Menschheitsgeschichte, ist am Ende eines Jahrhunderts der Kriege, unter Abkehr von allen Segnungen der Zivilisation, nicht nur ein räumlicher Abschied von Europa und ein ideeller von den Ideen Europas. Das Verschwinden am Ende des Romans erscheint als ein Verschwinden aus der Geschichte, als Eintritt in eine Zeit jenseits des Begehrens (nach Fortschritt, Besserung, Utopie) und damit in der Tat als freiwilliger, einsichtiger Übergang des Menschen in ein Zeitalter des Post-Humanismus. ("Morgenröte des Post-Humanismus" 268)

'Post-humanism' requires of course a recognition of humanism in the first place, and it is here that we return to the idea of 'overwriting' rather than merely replacement. Renunciation of Western civilization in the form that it comes in Kracht's novel requires that notion of progress first. The narrator conservatively clings to traditional processes of signification (writing, reading, text – all identified here with Europe) in order to make a conscious return to Africa.

Still, the narrator's ideal is not the communion of thing and representation, but rather to distinguish between the two. Brazhinsky's new form of communication, a dissolution of the sign, or at least the perceptibility of language as a 'filter', is not a virtue. Indeed, the implication is that this 'efficiency' makes us less human (and more machine). After arriving in the réduit, the narrator experiences a moment of homesickness – a feeling that is only strengthened after getting to know Brazhinsky and learning the 'Rauchsprache'. His yearning for Africa is closely connected to his yearning to maintain the duality of representation: "Ach, es gibt keine Augenlider. Die ist die Zeit. Und die ist die Aufnahme dieser Zeit. Meine Augen sind geschlossen. Ich komme, Bambo, Mulungu, ich komme." (113) The process of seeing is significant here in its own right as a metaphor for the structure of representation: eyelids function as a material 'non-sight'; and this instance of non-sight is itself necessary and to be appreciated – just like the moth fluttering with the movement of the eyelid. The ability to see, i.e. to perceive the act of seeing itself, is holy. Brazhinsky's final act, that of poking his own eyes out with an awl, is the ultimate, grotesque consequence of attempting to do away with such 'filters' – and this is the point at which the described "fürchterliche und allumfassende Dekadenz des Geistes" (120) becomes so repulsive for the narrator that he begins his process of return, i.e. of undoing what he has learned.

The narrator travels South, experiencing a number of 'stations' before arriving in Africa: from the confusion with the maiden on the boat (with whom communication is not possible), to casting off the 'Rauchsprache' as an "Idiom des Krieges" (138), to spending 'peaceful' time with the innkeeper and his wife in Italy ("es fühlte sich an wie Frieden" [142]) – we might say, the first socially-motivated interaction with other people in which the narrator has engaged. Finally, the narrator gains the ability to 'see', i.e. imagine Brazhinsky and the réduit from a distance: "Ich sah erst die Masken meiner Ahnen, dann sah ich, was sie sahen; ich sah ein gigantisches Feuermeer über England, es waren die Luftschiffe der Hindustanis. Ich sah Brazhinsky, der sich blind und schreiend mit den Fingerspitzen die Reliefarbeiten entlang durch leere Gänge tastete, die Geschichte der Schweiz rückwärts abschreitend [...]" (144–145). The narrator has also at this point distanced himself from Western notions of time: he asks "Welches Jahr schrieben wir? Die Zeit hatte aufgehört zu sein, die Schweizer Zeit. Ich mass weder die Donnerstage noch den sechzehnten des Monats, noch den Weg der Sonne über das

Firmament. Stunde folgte auf Stunde und Tag auf Tag." (143) In other words, he is still aware of these increments, but does not measure his own existence in those terms.

Thus even timelessness requires a sense of time to begin with: again, the result of the narrator's journey is not replacement, but rather dissolution through overwriting; he cannot return without having gone away first. Here, my nuance is different from Birgfeld's and Conter's, for example, who claim that the ending of *Ich werde hier sein* entails a "doppelter Abschied": overwriting results in *disappearance* (Birgfeld and Conter, "Morgenröte des Post-Humanismus" 257). My quibble is with the concept of 'disappearance', the idea that the modern tends to disappear in the process of civilization – that is, as if the process were uni-directional.[249] In order to lay the process of signification bare, to 'undo' the forms of representation cultivated by Western civilization, both making and unmaking are required. In the unmaking of language – as with both Brazhinsky's new form of communication and Kracht's modernist tendency to musicalize language – the significance of representation is de facto emphasized. As for the 'unmaking' of Western civilization, the narrator's journey to and from Europe makes all the difference: he is not merely in the same place that he started at the end of the story, but rather he has returned with the knowledge necessary to refute what he has learned.

If we take a step back, as we did with *Inglourious Basterds*, and attempt to understand *Ich werde hier sein* as an alternate history in the context of its broader program, the comparison of history with the alternative version is almost in the background, for the focus on the course of historical events is limited: after the point of divergence, the war that follows is so monolithic, so endless, that causality as well as a sense of time, is almost irrelevant. This vagueness prohibits not only a direct, causal comparison of 'what happened' in history and 'what happens' in the alternative version, but also for example what Henriet calls 'clin d'œl': such details are simply not the point.

We might say that, in drawing attention to processes of representation and their connection to Western notions of progress, Kracht has essentially performed the foundation of the genre alternate history at both the level of language and of content. Characteristic of alternate history is overwriting, the presence of an original and an alternative version. They do not 'cancel each other out', but complement each other and, automatically exposing the possibility of more than one possibility. Kracht's work is much more subtle in that it goes beyond playing with mere history, with mere historical facts: the novel is a multi-leveled contem-

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249 Conter's term is the "Phänomenologie des Verschwindens" ("Christian Krachts posthistorische Ästhetik" 24; 42). See also Bronner 103.

plation of the process of doing and undoing, making and unmaking. In drawing attention to this process, one might go so far as to say that Kracht's work conservatively upholds the importance of the text. The literary evolution proposed in the work is ultimately rejected, and so progress is its own unmaking: efficiency in language is not a virtue, but rather the ability *to represent*. In other words, the duality of representation – the semiotic process as identification and differentiation laid bare.

4 Conclusion

4.1 What if this study had never been written?

A minimal definition of alternate history is difficult to negotiate, as simple as it might seem at first glance. Previous studies have focused not on what alternate histories *are*, but what they tend to *do* or what they *are like*: alternate histories are works that contradict history. Alternate histories create alternative versions of history. The first and most fundamental achievement of this study has been a service to genre studies, a kind of clean-up act: I have argued here that the definition of alternate history can be distilled down to a *differentia specifica*, one common denominator, that is readily identifiable and makes coherent this diverse corpus of texts: the point of divergence. If this study had never been written, alternate history would continue to be discussed without the necessary consideration of its very basis. Many discussions of alternate history have (already) produced brilliant results, but the heart of the matter has been missing up until now.

The lengthy, precursory step of defining 'history' in alternate history as the normalized narrative of the real past has been shown to have implications for all historical fiction. The normalized narrative of the real past is less a rigid, concrete chain of events, than a dynamic, flexible, ever-changing story that is the tangible counterpart to something like 'collective memory'. The narrative of history that is produced collectively by a given cultural circle at a given point in time is both reflected by and influenced by contemporary historical fiction. It is perhaps frustrating to state that the super-sequence of history can never be definitively comprehended. But conceptualizing history with this kind of nuance allows for a necessary flexibility when dealing with historical fiction from several different periods and cultures. Furthermore, it is a means of accounting for obvious trends in historical fiction without making unfounded claims about the nature of events themselves. It is unconvincing to make claims about wars or elections themselves as having the greatest 'potential' for alternatives because strictly speaking, the only thing that could have happened *happened*. There can be no evidence to the contrary, only postulation about the plausibility of alternatives. 'Plausibility' is a problematic term in this context for a similar reason: how can something be plausible if it already *did not happen*? When we speak of wars or elections, we are already considering a *processed* past, not even the past itself. World War II is not the most popular topic for alternate histories because of its objective importance or 'potential' for alternatives, but rather because of the prominence with which the events of 1939–45 have been positioned in history.

The ideological and historiographical implications of this conceptualization of history have allowed for the first time a critical distinction between alternate history and other forms of postmodernist historical fiction. Alternate history, realized on the basis of contradicting the normalized narrative of the real past, may be seen as a result of the interplay between both a conservative desire for and the postmodernist scepticism of history. Unlike so-called historiographic metafiction, alternate history does not engage in an epistemological questioning of our ability to know the past through history. Alternate histories deal in facts; works of historiographic metafiction question the nature of fact.

In comparing alternate history to other kinds of past narrative, it has been possible to 'test' previous attempts to delineate the genre in contrast to, for example, counterfactual history or science fiction. Here, I have followed a course of distinction and inclusion: alternate histories are, in principle, different from secret histories, 'framed' alternate histories, works of fantasy, and works of science fiction. It is, however, possible to recognize the relationship between alternate history and other sub-genres. Furthermore, it is important to avoid categorically excluding works of fantasy and science fiction from a definition of alternate history – for there are indeed works that can be considered both. Significantly, the debate between historians and literary theorists about the relationship between counterfactual history and alternate history has been subdued (for the moment) with the realization that, in contrast to the world of a counterfactual history, the world of an alternate history is actual within the fiction.

The realization that the role of the reader, or the particular challenge posed to the reader of distinguishing between history and its alternative version, is a genre-defining aspect of alternate history and has allowed for a segue-way into the discussion of FNs. Not the structure of alternate history, but rather the attempt to model the context of reception produces a 'Y', a bifurcation. The presence of nodes in alternate history has been concertedly 'tested' on two accounts: interactivity and structural bifurcation, of which the latter is definitive for FNs. While this discussion has proffered further recognitions about alternate history as well as the distinction between past and FNs, the results were negative – with the exception of course, of forking-paths alternate histories. A work like *N*, however, would still be a FN, even if it were not about Napoleon. It is a FN not by virtue of it being an alternate history, but rather because of the forking-paths structure. The preliminary assumption that alternate histories are not FNs may be stated here with more precision: alternate histories are not interactive, nor does the point of divergence constitute a node. The bottom line is: alternate histories are not FNs by virtue of their being alternate histories.

The inherent thematic program of alternate histories, resulting from the tension between the 'what-if' attitude manifest in the point of divergence and the

strict notions of causality played out in the rest of the narrative, has provided a particularly fruitful interface with FNs. The very paradox that is such a dilemma for historians who are proponents of counterfactual-history writing has produced a diverse and fascinating literary discourse on contingency and necessity, free will and determinism. Thus a further, consequential achievement of this study has been to do a service to alternate histories themselves. The seven works chosen for intensive analysis here span the spectrum of possibilities that alternate history has to offer, both allowing for a recognition of the diversity of this corpus of texts and prompting a consideration of the 'evolution' of the genre. There are indeed alternate histories that do not seem ashamed of a given status as pop literature.

The first five case studies here, two of which may be considered FNs, were chosen largely as a result of their complex thematic integration of this paradox – yet they remain straightforward and unambiguous in terms of language. *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Plot against America*, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, *Making History*, and *N* share a common interest in thematizing free will, determinism, and in particular human agency. Whereas Dick's work celebrates the power of the one, upholding his ability to choose his own reality, Roth's emphasizes the helplessness of individuals, the 'little men', in the face of developments on the national/political stage. Chabon's novel proposes the acceptance of determinism, with however the optimistic statement that it is possible to live accordingly. Both *Making History* and *N* constitute more explicit contemplations of the Great Man theory, and contingency and necessity play out at a structural level as well. Alternate histories as FNs allow for the fascinating possibility of both supporting and undermining the idea of human agency. Fry's novel resigns itself to shrugging at the illusion that one man can change the course of history, whereas Kühn's work achieves a critique of the limits of history writing, in particular biographies.

The last two case studies, Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* and Kracht's *Ich werde hier im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, reveal not only the versatility of alternate history, but also do a service to narratology more generally in evidencing the inverse proportionality of clarity of plot and poetic ambiguity. These last two case studies represent a different trend than the first five, also in terms of their thematic programs: *Inglourious Basterds* and *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* are alternate histories, but rather than focus on notions of causality and the tension between contingency and necessity, they more intensively reflect upon the characteristics of alternate history discussed here: they are meta-alternate histories in their self-reflexive undermining and contemplation of the genre. The rewriting of history is in both texts merely one element of an overarching program: in the case of Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, an assertion of the power of cinema; in the case of *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, a stylistic reflection on the dualistic process of representation.

4.2 The History (and Future) of Alternate History

In other words, *Inglourious Basterds* and *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* as alternate histories have capitalized on a tendency towards self-reflexivity that was inherent all along: here, the genre of alternate history has matured, evolved. That alternate histories will continue to be written seems certain. There are even several, formidable specimens that were published too recently for proper consideration here, for example Simon Urban's *Plan D* or Stephen King's *11/22/63*, that seem to hint at this promise. As to what direction exactly such 'maturation' or 'evolution' of alternate history as a genre is to take is, of course, less clear. Perhaps there will be a reactionary perpetuation of the relatively un-challenging pop-literature model that has become characteristic for the genre; or perhaps we will see more and more works like Tarantino's or Kracht's – alternate histories that are difficult to read in terms of the genre mainstream as it can be identified from alternate histories up until now.

However, one thing is clear: as the corpus of texts grows and reveals new tendencies, scholarship must adopt. At the beginning of this study, I emphasized the fact that genre-theory is necessarily in flux. If nothing else, the value of speaking of alternate history as a genre has been established here. It serves a discursive purpose to do so: first, this corpus of texts reveals identifiable structural, linguistic, and thematic similarities and can thus be treated convincingly as a whole; second, the identification of works as alternate histories and the situation of such texts in the genre as a whole (as I have done here in the seven case studies) provides insight into the works themselves. Still, I maintain that genre delineations are not and should not be stable, impassable. The job of a literary theorist is to constantly call into question such categories: challenging, fine-tuning, and critically re-thinking labels according to *what texts are out there*. The corpus of texts that I am calling alternate history is already diverse, and the difference between alternate history and the rest of historical fiction, for example, has been defined here on the only solid basis that we can: the point of divergence. It remains, however, the task of future scholarship on this corpus of texts to consider the centrality of this aspect and the degree to which it continues to be the relevant *differentia specifica* as the genre evolves. With the works of Tarantino and Kracht, it is clear that even here, the usefulness of this concept begins to wane.

The concentration on new aspects will also be necessary as more and more alternate histories are created in other media, and as scholarship takes notice of the role of mediality for this genre. For reasons already mentioned, the present study has focused primarily on alternate histories in print – both because it is, for now at least, by far the most typical form for alternate history, and second, because there is plenty of material to pursue a meaningful investigation of alter-

nate history. Alternate history is defined by its content, not a specific medium, and among the works of literature known to me, there are very few alternate histories in other media that seem to compound the ideas presented here with techniques specific to the given medium. But perhaps particularly because of the situation of this study in the project NAFU, a certain sensitivity to these possibilities has been aroused. For the study of alternate history, however, any capitalization on this awareness of media and their various potentials must follow from the impulse of the works themselves. As of now, this impulse is simply not there.

The impulse for an investigation into the finer differences and trends of various national literatures, however, is. The limitedness of previous scholarship on alternate history in terms of focusing on English-language literature has already been addressed. This study, in which the foundation for the examination of alternate history as a genre has been laid, is at once an invitation for future scholars to begin looking at alternate history in national literatures as phenomena of given contexts: in other words, not to focus exclusively on American alternate histories as a kind of norm, but rather to treat American alternate history as representative of a trend within a given cultural circle. The fact that there are so many American alternate histories about JFK or the American Civil War, or so many French alternate histories about Napoleon is interesting in itself, and a concerted effort to determine which historical topics are prevalent in which cultural contexts is surely a worthwhile pursuit. Alternate histories are, like all historical fiction, not only works of literature, but also historical artefacts themselves. A consideration of the proliferation of alternate histories in the context of a more general rise in interest in historical fiction in those cultural circles would certainly yield results as well. As has already been done to some degree with historical fiction in general, alternate history might be regarded as a phenomenon of the popularization of history of the past decades.

The same goes for the proliferation of alternate histories alongside the proliferation of FNs: what are the ideological, philosophical, political, and social connections between the two? This is the work of a comparative literature specialist and cultural historian with a broad and comprehensive overview of these trends. This study has made the connection between alternate histories and FNs and has explored the interfaces on the basis of the texts. Now it is a question of figuring out what the more overarching connection is between the desire to look back on the past and explore alternatives and the desire to keep options open in the future. Individual cases could be made for each and every alternate history, but we might even conjecture: alternate histories are in terms of their structure as traditional as traditional past narratives get. Here, they hardly begin to take part in the structural innovations of FNs. Still, as presenting non-actualities, alternate histories represent thematically speaking a variation of the potentiali-

ties represented by FNs. Not only do we have control over our future, but we can also change the past; we are masters not only of our own destiny, but also our own history. Thus in alternate histories, we have extreme philosophical positions manifest in the most traditional of narrative structures.

What I am ultimately suggesting here is the inevitable historicization of alternate history itself: in 'glancing backwards' at alternate history, making sense of this corpus of texts, we, too, perform a kind of self-reflexive act. Not only are alternate histories mirrors of their times and the phenomenon of alternate history a mirror of *our* times, but texts like this one must ultimately also be seen in terms of its participation in a discourse as well as its situation in Project NAFU. All readers and scholars alike are necessarily cultural historians, investigating historical artefacts from a contemporary perspective. This self-reflection assures the future of not only alternate history, but also the possibility of a critical approach to it.

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