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Visualizing Histories and Stories Revisionary Graphic Novels of the 1980s and 1990s

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Der Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über einige der wichtigsten grafischen Romane der 1980er- und 1990er-Jahre, und diskutiert anschließend zwei bedeutende Werke dieser Zeit: Art Spiegelmans Maus und Alan Moores Watchmen. Revisionäre grafische Romane sind sowohl visionär als auch revisionistisch und laden LehrerInnen und SchülerInnen ein, über die Prämissen der historiographischen Arbeit nachzudenken: in Prozessen, die ebenso auf Vorstellungskraft wie Mutmaßungen und Schlussfolgerungen basieren, werden Daten gesammelt und anschließend in einer kohärenten Erzählung als ‚Fakten' präsentiert. Indem sie Bild- und Sprachelemente kombinieren und oft (deren unterschiedlichen ontologischen Status) kontrastieren, fordern uns grafische Romane heraus, unsere herkömmlichen Annahmen über Linearität, Fortschritt, Tradition und Kanonizität zu überdenken und über (die kognitiven Voraussetzungen für)

menschliches Raum- und Zeitempfinden ebenso nachzudenken wie über unsere Veranlagung, kausale Verknüpfungen zu schaffen. Letztere hilft, Kontingenz in kontrollierbare Erzählmuster zu übersetzen, die die Welt für uns erklärbar, sinnhaft und navigierbar machen.

The article gives an overview of some of the most important graphic novels of the 1980s and 1990s, and discusses two seminal works in detail: Art Spiegelman's Maus and Alan Moore's Watchmen. Revisionary graphic novels are both visionary and revisionist, inviting teachers and students to reflect on the premises of the historiographer's task who, through processes of reimagining and conjecture as much as deduction, assembles data that is next presented as 'facts' in a coherent narrative. Graphic novels in particular challenge our received ideas of linearity, progress, tradition, and canonicity. Combining and often sharply contrasting (the different ontological status of) pictorial and linguistic elements, they ask us to reflect on (the cognitive prerequisites for) human spatial and temporal perception and our propensity to create causal connections. Ultimately, stipulating causality creates order out of chaos, turning contingencies into manageable patterns of storytelling that make the world explicable, meaningful and navigable for us.

1. Introduction

The paradigm shift caused by the American school of *New Historicism* not only changed the way academics came to view historiographical processes and their own role in history, but also made an impact on the wave of 1980s and 1990s revisionary graphic novels in GB and the US.[1] This period was the heyday of postmodernism whose foundations had been laid in the preceding decades. In the late 1960s, structuralism

attempted to reduce the author of a piece of writing to a set of textual traces and functions (cf. Barthes 1968, and Foucault 1969). An even more radical form of scepticism, poststructuralism put into doubt the existence of any text-external or concept-independent form of 'world.' Thus, the notion of what constitutes 'facts' about the 'world,' and how 'events' might become 'historical facts,' was seen as refracted through the prism of human language use. Cultural products like the revisionary graphic novels didn't simply try to keep up with theory – the *linguistic turn* was mutually beneficial for the sciences and the arts.

Postmodernist literature's achievements have helped transcend "the illusions of objectivism in the modern social and human sciences," such as the distinction between fact and fiction: "Since facts are themselves linguistic constructions, 'events under a description,' *facts* have no reality outside of language. So while events may have happened, the representation of them as *facts* endows them with all the attributes of literary and even mythic subjects" (White 1999: 312–13, italic original). To some extent, the advent of postmodernism, and the political stance taken by the New Historicists, was a reaction to extreme forms of poststructuralism that were regarded as untenable. "[T]o say that the past is only *known* to us through textual traces is not [...] the same as saying that the past is only textual, as the semiotic idealism of some forms of poststructuralism seems to assert. This ontological reduction is not the point of postmodernism: past events existed empirically, but in epistemological terms we can only know them today through texts. Past events are given *meaning*, not *existence*, by their representation in history" (Hutcheon 2002, 78, italic original). Giving meaning is part and parcel of the process of interpretation, and the revisionary graphic novels of the 1980s and 1990s radically reinterpreted the conventions of their genre, forming artistic investigations into the question: How can history be represented in all its complexity?

The works of Frank Miller and Alan Moore put in doubt concepts such as vigilantism that were key to the history of white settlement in the American colony (see discussion under 3.). In *Batman: The Killing Joke* the

crime fighter's 'quest for justice' is exposed as a maniacal *folie à deux* contingent on the madness of his gaudy other, the Joker. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* recharges the heterosexual normativity and biopolitics typical of the superhero genre (cf. Boge 2012a) by setting the showdown between the aging protagonist and his eternal antagonist in the Tunnel of Love at a funfair. The pictorial and linguistic information makes us sceptical about the validity of role models representing eternal principles. As changing (sexual) politics, fashion trends and aesthetics come into focus, 'unchanging values' are exposed as historically contingent constructs. Yet reevaluation cannot result in deletion. Illustrator Brian Bolland ironically depicts himself as (fantasizing about) killing the Batman: a futile undertaking. As symbols (perpetually re)inscribed in the canon of imperialist cultural products, these iconic figures need to be reinterpreted from new vantage points, yet they can no longer be erased from the unconscious of global consumerism. In Miller and Moore, water – in the form of puddles, raindrops, and rivers – signifies the tension between linear and cyclical models of history, and between constancy and change in the flow of time. Plutarch's paraphrase of Heraclitus' theory of flux has become a commonplace: you cannot step into the same river twice, meaning "some things stay the same only by changing. One kind of long-lasting material reality exists by virtue of constant turnover in its constituent matter. Here constancy and change are not opposed but inextricably connected. [...] Heraclitus believes in flux [...that] is, paradoxically, a necessary condition of constancy, at least in some cases (and arguably in all)" (Graham 2011). The graphic novels use different forms of signifying systems (linguistic and pictorial) to transform this recognition into self-reflective comments on the premises of the genre's tradition. Each new take on established characters and subjects must take into account its predecessors. Mark Waid's *Kingdom Come* not only cites Superman and Batman's 1930s origin stories (cf. Figure One) but elaborates on the idea proposed by Miller ten years earlier that the characters represent different types of patriotism, resulting in opposed forms of governance – legal coercion and private policing – that can become equally totalitarian and oppressive. Moore's *V for Vendetta*

rewrites world history by depicting an Orwellian dystopia set in late-90s England. In the tradition of political philosophy reaching back to Plato's *Politeia* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the fascistic state, subdivided into 'body parts' with specific functions, signifies the embodiment of the collective. The symbolism created by Moore and Lloyd – the Guy Fawkes mask – has been adopted by Occupy Wall Street protestors, in the Arab Spring, and the Snowden affair.[2] As life imitates art(istic reinterpretations of historical events), fiction traverses the boundaries of the factual, reminding us how closely aligned the real and the imagined are: if it's unthinkable, it cannot be envisaged as an alternate reality, but if it is imaginable it can become real.

2. Contingency, memory and emplotment: Art Spiegelman's Maus

Maus: A Survivor's Tale has been categorized as fiction and non-fiction; the recently published MetaMaus, illustrating the work's conception and production process, is classified as "Graphic Nonfiction/History/Memoir." Initially published in two volumes in 1986 and 1992, *Maus* contains an overt symbolism that learners find easy to identify. Borrowings from the genre of fable result in a food chain where dogs (Americans) fight cats (Nazis/Germans) who exterminate mice (Jews). While standing outside the direct logic of this chain, other nationalities/ethnicities (Britons: fish; Swedes: moose; Poles: pigs) can equally fall prey to predators. At one point (2003: 127) the crossroads that Vladek, the narrator of the embedded narrative, and his wife Anja walk on forms a swastika. Their paths are predetermined, they must follow a preordained direction; captivity seems inevitable. These are also crooked paths: in order to survive, you must resort to criminal means. Earlier, Vladek is shown as being confined by a David star, formed from the ground he stands on and mirrored in the star stitched on his breast (82). What should be a guiding star, offering metaphysical certainty and the safety of belonging to a stable religious community, becomes an omnipresent stigma. In a chapter titled "The Honeymoon," the swastika emblem replaces the full moon like

an oversized searchlight shining over a "Jew free" town (35). At times the use of symbolism may seem simplistic, yet scrutiny reveals that the survivor's tale is complex and layered. This can be explained by the following example.

Figure One (bottom left): Self-referentiality in Kingdom Come, inset:
title page of Detective Comics #27 (May 1939).
Photo credits: © 1996 DC Comics. Art by Alex Ross. © 1939 DC Comics. Cover art by Bob Kane.
Upper left and right: Auschwitz orchestra, 'time flies' and broken swastika in Maus.
From MAUS II: A SURVIVOR'S TALE/AND HERE MY TROUBLE BEGAN by Art Spiegelman, copyright © 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991 by Art Spiegelman.
Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.]

In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White argues that the task of reconstructing past events and (re)presenting them as 'facts' is contingent on strategies of emplotment

that are common to fiction.[3] What does that mean? In historical narrative, the use of plot helps turn a chronicle into a seemingly more coherent, yet inevitably dramatized and fictionalized sequence of events. Thus, emplotment is a textual strategy used by historians to stipulate causal connections between otherwise disconnected data, aiming to provide the most consistent explanation of the events in question, especially in cases where the 'truth' is no longer available, where it has become impossible to 'know' what 'truly' happened. Faced with the task of using language to decode and encode data, human beings usually opt for the version of events (and strings of words/sentences) that appears most coherent. Put differently, as "story-making animal[s]" (Achebe 2000, 59), humans are suckers for a plot. Many of us feel happier when the stories we're told appear logical and conclusive than when they don't. Otherwise we may begin to wonder if the person whose account we're reading or listening to is a liar, or just confused. A simple experiment lets us put these observations into practice. If you ask your students whether they think the following sequence of events/words is interesting or makes a good story, the majority will reply in the negative:

The king died in 1547. The queen died in 1603.

The reaction is predictable because the sequence is not much of a story. It's a chronicle, giving us, rather arbitrarily, the dates of the deaths of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. We feel we're missing some kind of vital information, but what is it? By slightly modifying our example, we get what is called a minimal narrative:

The king died, and then the queen died of grief.

This is the example E.M. Forster uses in *Aspects of the Novel* (cited in Jahn 2001) to explain plot. Apart from our leaving out the dates, what has changed is that we have created a causal connection between otherwise disparate events. We have added a 'because', answering an imaginary 'why.' In our mind, the formerly disparate elements are linked, and we're eager to learn more about the situation and the persons involved.[4] Adding detail and some Shakespearean sense of drama, the sequence might also read,

When, after protracted pain, King Bernard Stuart finally died in 1603, it broke his wife's heart: In her terrible grief, Elizabeth pulled a dagger from the sheaf hanging from the leather belt around the waist of a servant, and stabbed herself to death right beside her husband's cold body.

Clearly, this is a made up story: for all we know, Elizabeth was never married, and there was no King Bernard Stuart. And yet, we're in the middle of what might be an interesting, albeit undeniably melodramatic, story. It's a what-if scenario that allows us to play with possibilities, inciting further questions that need to be answered. What disease did Bernard Stuart suffer from? Or was he poisoned, perhaps? Why was the servant allowed to carry a dagger, and why was he unable to prevent the suicide? If it were an excerpt from the literary subgenre of historiographic metafiction, our little (pseudo-)historical narrative might continue thus:

Professor Sabbaticus crumpled up the page, capped the fountain pen, and rubbed his aching forehead. Why on earth had he agreed to writing this stupid revisionist history of the British monarchy?

Historiographic metafiction is an overtly self-reflexive form of storytelling in which the use of anti-illusionist techniques, such as the narrator's metafictional commentary, is the rule rather than the exception. Cultural products using metafictional techniques debunk the illusion of uninterrupted narrative flow in a seamless story world. As teaching aids, they alert readers to the relevance of extratextual contexts in the products' creation, and the problems that may arise for the historiographer in (re)constructing (hi)stories. Spiegelman's *Maus* lets the reader participate in the processes of writing the biography/his father's (hi)story, and it is the metafictional elements that save the book from being melodramatic. The right-hand side of Figure One shows a page titled, "Time flies" which is a play on words: the passage of time is embodied in the flies hovering over the pile of corpses that Spiegelman's drawing table is situated on. The historiographer is haunted by images of death and destruction but also in charge of his subject matter. The lights and shadows on the page reveal a refracted symbolism: a broken swastika that registers subconsciously, "made out of the angled black

shadows that define the spotlight on the drawing table" (Spiegelman 2011: 165).

Maus pits subjective memories against official histories. When Vladek's account is at odds with historical veracity, as in the orchestra scene (Spiegelman 2003: 214; cf. Figure One upper left), Art leaves the question unresolved. His father's story blots out the seemingly more objective canonical data, yet does so only partially and only after some time has elapsed for the reader to dwell on the 'official' account. We can still catch a partial glimpse of the instruments peeping out over the heads of the Auschwitz inmates, whose daily parade at once signals the linear march of time and cyclicality. Thus, history, time, and memory intersect and blot out yet also complement and cause one another. History becomes tangible as a form of collective memory that, as a particular type of storytelling, can be revised and overwritten by competing strands of narrative, as in a palimpsest.[5] Both history and memory serve psychological functions: "History's collective nature sets it apart from memory [...] Historical awareness implies group activity. [...] Just as memory validates personal identity, history perpetuates collective self-awareness. [...] Indeed, the enterprise of history is crucial to social preservation. [...] Collective statements about the past help to conserve existing arrangements, and the diffusion of all manner of history, whether fact or fable, fosters the feeling of belonging to coherent, stable, and durable institutions" (Lowenthal 1997: 213–14). The last part of the quotation indicates that fictitious accounts too help foster "the feeling of belonging to coherent, stable, and durable institutions", and Spiegelman, who recalls attending a Holocaust conference in LA in 1988, is clearly aware of the responsibility artists have in this respect: "I was part of a Theodor Adorno-inspired 'Can there be art after the Holocaust?' panel with a couple of historians and Harry Mulisch [...who] as a novelist [...] felt he couldn't deal with what happened in Auschwitz because it was too indescribable – that it's best left to the [...] historians of the world. There were a lot of historians on the panel and in the audience, and they were happy with Mulisch's answer, but I took it as a personal challenge. I felt we need both artists and historians. I tried to explain that one has to use

the information and give shape to it in order to help people understand what happened – that historians, in fact, do that as much as any artist – but that history was far too important to leave solely to historians" (Spiegelman 2011: 100). It is important to note that the author's emotional involvement in his father's (hi)story – he draws himself as attending therapy – need not be seen as a disadvantage. Maintaining 'professional detachment,' 'impartiality,' and 'objectivity' may just be what the historiographer ought *not* to do: "History should not be value-free [...] but should have as part of its task a moral reckoning with the past and a celebration of a particular political standpoint" (Fulbrook 1997, 178).

3. History, closure and the challenge of simultaneity: Alan Moore's Watchmen

Set in a totalitarian America at the time of the Cold War conflict, *Watchmen* challenges our craving for coherence and the transformation of distinct concepts into single ideas. The graphic novel is replete with allusions to American history, but gives us a radical revisionist reconstruction rather than a mimetic representation of the topics. Vigilantism, common in superhero narratives, is historically rooted in frontier conflicts. Outlawed by the Keene Act, the guardians of law and order in *Watchmen* have become violent perpetrators who act as an extension of the totalitarian state's reach (cf. Boge 2012b). An embedded narrative, a tale within the tale called *Tales of the Black Freighter*, constantly interweaves with the main storyline. In its tone of voice and drawing style, the pirate story is cheap and sensationalist; its 'printing quality' is made to look inferior to that of other layers of narrative. This piece of pulp fiction constantly reminds the reader of extratextual aspects such as a text's materiality and mode of production. Yet, on the level of content, the Black Freighter story also connects different temporal layers, and regional/ national histories to events on a global scale. From 1767 "until about 1900," historical vigilance committees, set up by white settler elites in the US targeted "outlaws" and other "alienated and marginalized elements" of the lower strata of society that were seen as threatening "the brittle social

fabric" in a "frontier society where social bonds were fragile and weak [...]. Fearing the takeover of newly settled areas by such alienated elements, vigilante or 'Regulator' movements responded with vigour against groups of horse thieves, robbers, counterfeiters, arsonists, murderers, slave stealers, and land pirates in areas such as East Texas in the 1830s, Northern and Southern Illinois in the 1840s, and Northern Indiana in the 1850s [...]" (Johnston 1992: 12–14).

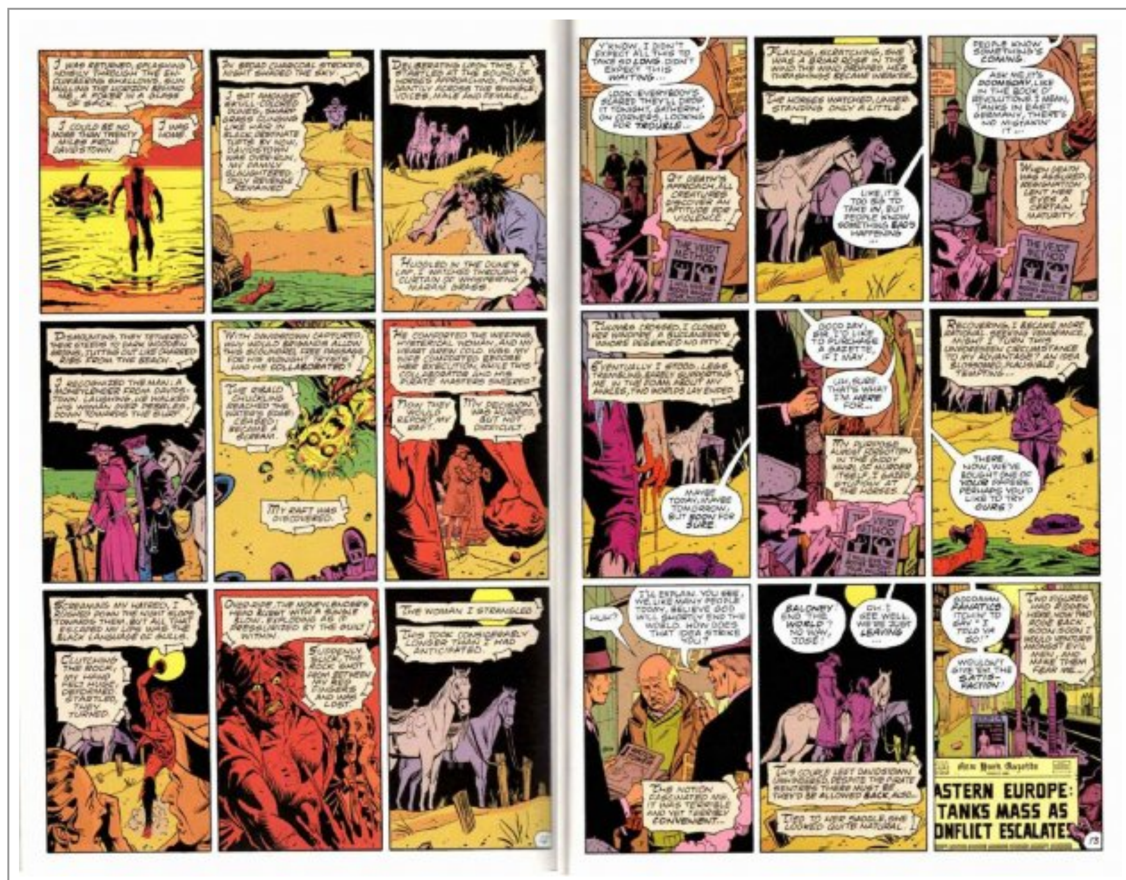

Figure Two: Examples of embedded and matrix narratives in Watchmen (chapter X, pp. 12–13).

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The protagonist in the *Tales of the Black Freighter* is shipwrecked off the US coast (cf. Figure Two, page 12, panels 1–3). In a sudden outbreak of violence (panels 6–9) the pitiable survivor figure and "wretched refuse" (cf. E. Lazarus's poem New Colossus, plaque on the Statue of Liberty) that would be welcomed to the New World is transformed into a monstrous murderer, horse thief, and land pirate. The reference to "pirate sentries" in panel 8 on page 13 is repeated in panel 4 on page 23 (cf. Figure Three), where the depiction of historical lynch mob justice (cf. Arellano 2012) makes the informed reader aware of the thematic implications for the main plot: is the 'justice' meted out by the vigilant super-'heroes' in 1980s America as wilful and unjust as that witnessed in the subtext? Unlike cliffs, beaches form parts of shorelines that humans coming from the sea can use to enter a land mass. Beaches are therefore zones of potential intercultural contact and conflict (cf. Brewster 2003), and in the last panel of page 13 the frontier violence on the beach is both mirrored and contrasted with a conflict on distant shores that is all too close to home (America) as it threatens to escalate in nuclear disaster. Narratologically speaking, this piece of information is on the same level as the Black Freighter story: it is a newspaper headline that is only partly readable for us, but, like a historian interpreting his data, we infer the missing letters. The headline is printed in bold terms, making it no less sensationalist and 'cheap' than the Black Freighter tale. The newspaper article makes us wonder how the concepts of vengeance and retaliation might be connected. It is read by one of the minor characters in the main storyline, who has more information than we do: he gets a fuller picture of the situation in Eastern Europe than us. In the same panel, in the right-hand corner, we can see the person reading the pirate comics: both readers share the same plain of (un)reality – after all, we're reading a comic book whose layers are equally fictitious for us. Watchmen continually forces the reader's focus to shift. We find it difficult to tell which storyline is truly relevant, which piece of pictorial or linguistic information needs processing first, and what can be disregarded. It thus challenges a simplistic prioritization and selective amplification of information common to political slogans and commercial advertising – examples of

which can be found in the text itself, often by studying the panels closely. One strategy used to achieve this effect on the reader is the juxtaposition of sequentiality and simultaneity in ways that are unique to a medium, such as comics, combining narrative and pictorial elements.

Figure Three (clockwise from upper left): Vigilante lynching, Krystalnacht concert,
Martian (sur)face in Watchmen.
Photo credits: © 1986 DC Comics. Watchmen and all related characters and elements
are trademarks of and © DC Comics. Smiley Logo: ™ The Smiley Company.
© 2009 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved.

While we're reading page 12 of chapter X (Figure Two), our mind is bent on reading part of the story someone else is reading. Put differently, we're 'inside' the comic (the *Black Freighter tale*) that is read by a minor unnamed character in the comic (Watchmen) that we think we're reading. For the moment, this embedded narrative constitutes 'absolute reality' for

us before this illusion is shattered by the intrusion of a different layer of (un)reality: A speech bubble in the first panel on p.13 'intrudes' into the Black Freighter story. It belongs to the newsvendor, and its content is unrelated to what has gone before. Or is it? What we also see in the same panel is one of the newsvendor's regular customers smoking and reading the Black Freighter comics. We realize that our mental representation and his were conflated on page 12: we saw and read just what he saw and read, no more or less. For that duration, he was our perceptual anchor and vantage point, but now we see its limitations. Other than in a strictly sequential narrative, where every part of the story would be presented one piece at a time, one after another, the mental representation of the customer character reading the Black Freighter story does not end with the intrusion of the new layer of narrative (the reality he is situated in) at the top of page 13. In *Watchmen*, the moment of transition between different layers of graphic narration is always ambiguous. What happens in those panels situated at such transition points can be interpreted as *simultaneously* taking place in or referring to each respective layer of (un)reality. The neat idea that it is in "the limbo of the gutter" – the white space between two comics panels – that "human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (McCloud 1993, 67, italic deleted) to achieve plot coherence is rendered problematic. Page 12 ends with captions in which the protagonist of the Black Freighter story narrates that "this took considerably longer than I had anticipated." Panel 1 on the next page shows a speech bubble that at first glance seems to continue this line of thought ("Y'know, I didn't expect all this to take so long...") but in fact belongs to a different speaker situated in a different layer of 'reality' whose reference point isn't the strangling of a woman but the vague fear of atomic annihilation. Over the course of page 13, the two layers of narrative continue zooming into and out of focus. The bottom of page 13 is again ambiguous: "Two figures had ridden here, now two rode back" on the one hand refers to the cyclists that can be seen approaching in panels 1 and 3, purchasing a magazine in panels 5 and 7, and receding into the background in the last panel on page 13. This event takes place on the plane of 'reality' of the newsvendor and his

customers. Yet the sentence can also be read as an explication of an earlier sequence of events taking place in the embedded narrative of the pirate story where we see two horse riders approaching. The activities of riding a bike and riding a horse seemingly become connected through the polysemy of the verb. 'Seemingly' is the crucial word in this context. It is our innate sense of plot that lets us make these connections. As in our example of the king and queen's deaths, the sequences of events aren't logically connected – nor can they be: they take place in different eras and places.

In the scene that follows, superhero Nite Owl almost strangles a suspect when he and Rorschach follow a red herring. This creates a moral dilemma that lets us recall the need for the historian's "moral reckoning with the past" and unflinching "celebration of a particular political standpoint" (Fulbrook): lynching and strangling may be extreme results of taking the law into your own hands, but isn't that a 'good thing,' perhaps, so long as it targets 'bad' people? Clearly, the couple murdered in the Black Freighter story were 'innocent' and 'undeserving' of meeting a violent end, but how about the ponytailed suspect who is a fan of the right-wing rock band Pale Horse? As the doomsday clock strikes midnight at the beginning of the apocalyptic chapter XII, many carefully interwoven strands of (hi)story are starting to reveal an intricate picture: The supporting act for Pale Horse's Madison Square Garden concert is called Krystalnacht, an overt reference to the *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) on the night of November 9–10, 1938. The concert ends in heaps of broken glass and corpses (Figure Three). The scene visualizes the outcome of the extremist politics of former Watchman Adrian Veidt who, drawing conclusions from utilitarian premises, kills millions to save billions. On the next pages, history and philosophy are run into Greek mythology and consumerism when amidst the rubble an advertisement announces "Promethean cab company: Bringing light to the world" – an ironic allusion to the futility of giving to "man all the arts and sciences as well as the means of survival" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The writing on a toppled bus refers to the "Gordian Knot" that was untied by the future conqueror of Asia, Alexander the Great – role model of the fascistic Veidt.

The knot symbolizes the reading process and the challenge it poses for anyone trying to disentangle the intertwined strands of histories and stories.

Like all literature worth reading, the revisionary graphic novels of the 1980s and 1990s ask us to be empathic, to imagine what the world looks like from someone else's viewpoint. At times, this gets us on a slippery slope where we may find good reason for rejecting the other's worldview. Yet the endeavour is worth the effort, for the experience may transform us. In *Watchmen*, after an episode set on Mars, we think we can detect a gigantic smiley on the surface of the Red Planet (Figure Three) – but is it really there or just an impression 'forced on us' by our perception of the many smileys dispersed throughout the book? As the image fades from view, the superhuman Dr Manhattan narrates: "We gaze continually at the world and it grows dull in our perceptions. Yet seen from another's vantage point, as if new, it may still take the breath away" (chapter IX, p. 27).

Notes

[1] On revisionary (superhero) narratives, cf. Klock 2002. German editions of all the graphic novels discussed in this article are available from online bookstores. In some cases the publishers have retained the English title despite the content being in German. Hence: *Watchmen* (Panini Manga und Comic Verlag,); *V wie Vendetta* (Panini, 2007); *Batman: Die Rückkehr des dunklen Ritters* (Panini); *Batman: The Killing Joke* (Panini); *Die vollständige Maus* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008); *Kingdom Come – Die Apokalypse* (Carlsen Verlag, 1997).

[2] In an interview with the Guardian, Moore says that "it feels like a character I created 30 years ago has somehow escaped the realm of fiction." (http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/27/alan-moore-v-vendetta-mask-protest. Cf. also http://theweek.com/article/index/245685/a-brief-history-of-the-guy-fawkes-mask)

[3] Kevin F. Hilliard of Oxford and Vicki Rea of Lehigh University provide accessible overviews of White's theory of emplotment that come in handy

when teaching the principles of 'meta-history' to students. Cf. http://users.ox.ac.uk/~spet0201/lectures/histlink/whiteho.html and http://www.lehigh.edu/~ineng/syll/syll-metahistory.html .

[4] Seymour Chatman thinks that a chronicle is hard to write since readers will attempt to interpret it as some kind of story: "[...T]he interesting thing is that our minds inveterately seek structure, and they will provide it if necessary. Unless otherwise instructed, readers will tend to assume that even 'The king died and the queen died' presents a causal link, that the king's death has something to do with the queen's. We do so in the same spirit in which we seek coherence in the visual field, that is, we are inherently disposed to turn raw sensation into perception. [...] A narrative without a plot is a logical impossibility" (Chatman 1978, 126)

[5] The palimpsest, found at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palimpsest_of_Street_Posters_-_Pondicherry_-_India.JPG, can be used to illustrate the principle. The legend reads, "Palimpsest of street posters in Pondicherry (Puducherry), India. July 2008. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first post-independence Prime Minister, described his country as 'an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously'."

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