Continuity in Comic Books and Comic Book Continuity:
Serialized US-American Comic Books of the 1980s

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1.   Narratives of Change: Introduction

Sometimes change befalls an era from more than one source at once. Comic books in North America had barely celebrated their fiftieth anniversary when several publications unsettled and rearranged the comic book world. Before the mid-1980s, superheroes had not been recognized as the meaningful cultural product they constitute. But these publications heralded a new age of unprecedented maturity and refinement. What followed were other comic books that, in the wake of these watershed narratives, earmarked the 1980s as an era of transition. When we consider the period's publications and their discussion in fan and academic circles, there is little dispute as to which titles were most seminal as stimuli for these cataclysmic transformations: *Maus* (1980-1991),[1] *Watchmen* (1986-1987) and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (*TDKR*, 1986), it is generally agreed, are the works that initiated a significant change in attitude towards comic books. To this trinity, one could legitimately add the momentous *Sandman* (1989-1996), which not so much provoked as substantiated the revolution.

Released about a quarter of a decade ago, all of these have since become decisive elements of (literary) culture. Yet while *Watchmen*, *TDKR* and *Sandman* can by and large be argued to constitute mainstream comic books and to fit the superhero genre, *Maus*, by writer and artist[2] Art Spiegelman, is firmly rooted in the underground. For all its literary merits, among them winning the Pulitzer Prize – *Maus* will not be considered for my argument due to its position outside of the mainstream comic book industry. The remaining three series, by contrast, represent the mainstream superhero comic book even if they simultaneously subvert it.

It would be impudent to say there were only these four titles that bred the new era. In a veritable onslaught of revamps, original characters of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were reinterpreted during the 1980s, often starting with a whole new series.

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[1]   A word on cover dates: In mainstream comic books, cover dates are a complicated matter. The date on an issue's cover is not necessarily the date of publication. Over the decades, there have been changes to the number of months between the cover date and the comic book's actual release, but as a rule, the cover date follows the release date by two months (Levitz, *75 Years* 516). To ensure consistency, it is the cover date that is indicated wherever necessary in this thesis, unless otherwise indicated.

[2]   The majority of North American comic books are produced collaboratively. The production process commences with the *writer*, who comes up with a script which needs to be approved of by the *editor* before it is passed on to the *penciller*, who renders the pictures in pencil. The work is again assessed by the editor before it is received by the person responsible for speech bubbles and text – the *letterer*. Next, the *inker* "translates the graphite drawings of the penciller into reproducible black lines by adding a variety of textures, shading, and depth" (Bender and Gaiman 251) and sends it on to the *colorist*, who adds the colors. Finally, a cover is added and the comic book is sent off to print. In order to abridge the procedure of naming each artistically involved individual and because jobs are often shared, I will subsume the positions of penciller and inker under the heading of artist.

British writer Alan Moore's retelling of the *Saga of the Swamp Thing* (#20-171, October 1984-October 1996)[3] was not only innovative in its choice of protagonist, it was also the first mainstream comic book that entirely renounced the Comics Code (Thill) installed in 1954.[4] Scottish writer Grant Morrison's eco-critical *Animal Man* was a "brilliant and metatextual romp" (#1-26, September 1988-August 1990, 234) and similar things have been said of British writer Peter Milligan and Chris Bachalo's reconception of *Shade: The Changing Man* (#1-70, July 1990-April 1996. Other revisionist works include but are not limited to Milligan's *Enigma* (#1-8, March-October 1993); *Hellblazer*, which was created by Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and Jamie Delano, continued by a number of prestigious writers and renamed *Constantine* very recently (#1-300, January 1988-April 2013); and the somewhat absurd characters of *Doom Patrol* whom Morrison nevertheless managed to infuse with three-dimensionality (#19-63, February 1989-January 1993, Cowsill et al. 239).[5]

Considering this representative list of works that deconstructed and reinvented established characters or introduced dazzling original ones, it is striking to see that many of the authors in charge were not American. Indeed, the influx of critically and commercially successful British writers and artists in the last two decades of the twentieth century is often called "the British invasion" (Sabin, *Comics* 171). Widely read, culturally detached and largely unimpressed by the restrictions of the Comics Code, they invested US-American comic books with a hitherto peerless literary complexity and rendered the familiar superhero more convincing and meaningful.[6] Thus was ushered in the Revisionist Age of comic books, also known as the Dark Age (Levitz, *75 Years* 558; Voger) or Modern Age (Overstreet 1028; *Comic Vine*).

There is no consensus as to the proper designation and points of transition, but, generalizing broadly, comic book history can be divided into five eras: The Golden, Silver, Bronze, Dark/Modern/Revisionist and Digital Age.[7] The advent of Superman in June 1938 was harbinger to the Golden Age, which is generally agreed to have endured until the resurrection of the Flash in 1956. This marked the beginning of

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3   Citations of comics lean on the "Citation Guide" by Allen Ellis. In addition, an effort is made to reproduce text in comics as truthfully and accurately as possible. This means that the typographical nature of the comic books in question, i.e., font, emphasis, italics as well as higher and lower case letters are depicted in the manner they appear on the comics page.
4   cf. 2.2.1.
5   Another character who underwent significant modifications, amongst others by Alan Moore in the 1980s and Neil Gaiman in the 1990s, was Marvelman, later renamed Miracleman. With a publication history that is as long as it is complicated, it would lend itself well to a deconstructivist approach.
6   cf. Petersen 168.
7   Paul Levitz precedes this catalogue with yet another category, the Stone Age, which encompassed everything up to 1938 (*75 Years* 558). cf. 2.2.1. for a more detailed account of the comic book's history.

the Silver Age, characterized by its numerous reboots as well as the fact that origin stories and superheroes' powers tended to have scientific rather than magical roots (Cowsill et al. 80). The Bronze Age lasted roughly from the 1970s until the mid-1980s and saw the rise of darker characters and more socially relevant plotlines. It also witnessed the upsurge of alternative comics as a result of the loosening of the Comics Code. These were – and still are – at the forefront of a development in comics that has since stimulated profound modifications in the ways comics are received and valued (Hatfield xi). The British invasion mentioned above is often cited as the event that launched the Revisionist Age. Apart from suffusing US-American comic books with literary sophistication, memorable refurbishments of characters and a genuinely revisionist streak, it brought a corrosive re-examination of established notions and, thus, even more somber tales. It was supplanted around the year 2000 by the Digital Age. This final category is distinguished by the ceaseless adaptation of comic book substance into various media – one of the main consequences of long-term Continuity, as we will see – and a new attitude toward comic book Continuity.

This typology will be helpful for a number of the chapters that follow. By virtue of this thesis' focus on the serialized US-American comic books of the 1980s, my primary interest lies in the revisionist agenda. The origins of Continuity, however, are firmly rooted in the Silver Age, whereas its intricate machinations, which also form a major part of this work, extend well into the Digital Age.

❖ *Watchmen*

Watchmen is the product of collaborative work by writer Alan Moore, illustrator and letterer Dave Gibbons, colorist John Higgins and editors Len Wein and Barbara Kesel. Originally published in the form of a mini-series of twelve monthly comic books at DC Comics[8] between September 1986 and October 1987, it was collected into a graphic novel in 1987 and has remained in print ever since. In 2005, *Absolute Watchmen* was released. It repackaged the series with recolored images, reproductions of original drawings as well as comments by the creators and it was printed in larger format on expensive, high-quality paper. Neither the comic books nor the graphic novel include advertising or letter columns, which is quite unprecedented in comic book history but opened fresh pathways for other approaches, i.e., what I call intermediate chapters that complement the main story as form (mediality) and as content is concerned.

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8   DC Comics is sometimes also referred to merely by initials: DC.

Gibbons's meticulous artwork and attention to detail coupled with Moore's "ability to interweave a tapestry of plots and subplots, to balance the use of words with imagery to tell the story, and to designate intricate fades back and forth in time using layout" (M. Smith, "Auteur" 184) not to mention the intricacy of the plot, the three-dimensionality of the characters and their moral dilemmas all play their part in the creation of this graphic novel. Roger Sabin described it to be "structured like a Chinese puzzle" (*Adult Comics* 88). Hence *Watchmen* has sustained academic and popular acclaim for years: Not only has it been hailed as a masterpiece of graphic storytelling, it has also been acclaimed a tour de force of *any* storytelling, as favorable reviews, inclusion in best-seller lists, decoration with numerous awards[9] and ranking among canonical novels[10] go to show.

Moore had initially planned to work with superheroes belonging to the DC Multiverse, but upon reading the plot proposal, DC Comics editor Dick Giordano discovered that these superheroes would wind up narratively exhausted (Hudsick 12-13). This was a risk he was not willing to take and Moore was instructed to conceive of a group of superhero archetypes that allowed for recognition and identification even if they were previously unknown characters. Accordingly, Nite Owl, Silk Spectre, Dr. Manhattan, the Comedian, Ozymandias and Rorschach were based on and replaced Blue Beetle, Nightshade, Captain Atom, the Peacemaker, Peter Cannon-Thunderbolt and the Question (fig. 1) respectively.[11]
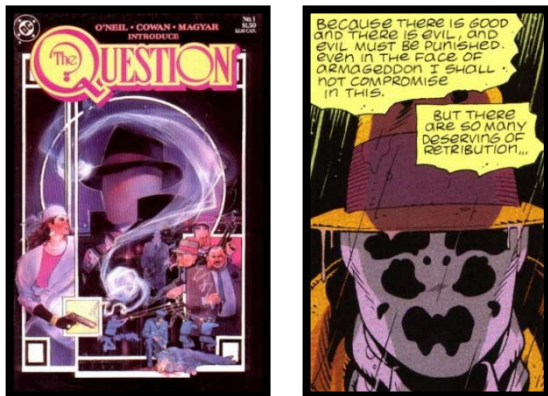
Fig. 1:
Charlton Comics' The Question (*The Question* #1, February 1987) and *Watchmen*'s Rorschach (*Watchmen* #1, 24/6). The latter's diary entry already foreshadows his end.

As the environment of the narrative was concerned, Moore did not want it to coincide with the larger DC world, as becomes apparent from the specification he sent to Giordano with his proposal:

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9   e.g., three Jack Kirby Awards in 1987, Hugo Award in 1988, several Will Eisner awards in 1988.

10   In 2005, *TIME* Magazine's Richard Lacayo and Lev Grossman positioned *Watchmen* among the *All-TIME 100 Novels*. It was the only graphic novel to be included.

11   All details on the modeling of the *Watchmen* characters on the Charlton heroes and the deliberation behind their recognizability to fans are contained in Walter Hudsick's "Reassembling the Components in the Correct Sequence: Why You Shouldn't Read *Watchmen* First", esp. 9-14.

> We'll start from the outside of the concept and work inwards, beginning with the world that these characters inhabit. For a start, as I said over the phone, I think we should not even think for a moment which Earth this thing is set on, and make no attempt to tie it in with regular D. C. continuity.
> (Levitz, *75 Years* 598)

Thus, as one of the particulars surrounding *Watchmen*, it was established that while the graphic novel was to be published by DC, there was to be no connection to DC Continuity.

Content-wise, *Watchmen* is a towering example of how Anglophone popular culture reacted to the events of the Cold war era with anti-Soviet jargon, military buildup and nuclear threat, which also abounded during the Reagan presidency and caused millions of Americans to feel an expansion of the threat of nuclear war during the early 1980s (Boyer et al. 663). The fictional world sketched in *Watchmen* thus closely mirrors the US during the mid-1980s. The main difference,[12] however, is the existence of self-styled superheroes – ordinary women and men who for one reason or another have chosen to adopt an alter ego identity, complete with name and costume, and to roam the streets fighting crime.

While such a cluster of bizarre superhero travesties[13] and comparable plot twists may be quite common these days even in mainstream comic books, they were new and unusual in the mid-1980s. Although it is the inversion of the superhero that is usually invoked as the predominant and decisive attribute of this narrative, I believe there is another, generally overlooked aspect to it. For all of *Watchmen*'s revisionism, the series also confirms our ideas of the superhero as we are confronted with individuals who rise above the rest of society by exhibiting unusual abilities and strength – though not superpowers – that allow them to successfully quell riots, free people from prison and defeat gangs of muggers, all while outnumbered. Dreiberg and Juspeczyk, etc. take it upon themselves – and are able to – rescue people from burning buildings, a feat that ordinary people would not accomplish. Perhaps it is this appeal to the classic superhero tradition in combination with the revisionism deeply ingrained in *Watchmen* that makes this graphic novel so enduringly popular with new and seasoned readers alike. And indeed, the consistent interest in the graphic novel even a quarter of a century later is proof that the story has retained its relevance.[14]

While the first narrative of *Watchmen* is set in 1985 New York, it includes repeated analepses to the 1940s and the 1960s. "Although the remembered content is located

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12 Doug Atkinson in his minute annotations has taken great care to compile a comprehensive list of the many differences between our 1985 reality and that of *Watchmen*.
13 For a thorough scrutiny of some of these characters, cf. Van Ness 108-118 and 149-169.
14 Since 9/11, the notion of numerous New Yorkers being killed by an outside force has been sadly reflected in reality. cf. Rehak for a discussion of the difficulty of staging *Watchmen* after 9/11.

in the past, its recollection unfolds in the present, crucially involving interpretive as well as constructive processes" (Horstkotte/Pedri 343). Such active reader reception is exacted not only by the graphic novel's ambitious plot but also by its intricate structure. Visually, *Watchmen* is characterized by the classic nine-panel grid and derivations thereof which provided storytellers with the possibility of juxtaposition and controlled pacing (Gibbons/Kidd/Essl, chapter "Beginnings" n.p.), the use of carefully deployed subdued secondary rather than bright primary colors, appealing artwork and a glut of details in the background.

❖ *The Sandman*

The momentous comic book series *The Sandman* by writer Neil Gaiman and various artists was published in 75 installments between January 1989 and March 1996 by DC Comics.[15] It was the second DC series of that name. There had been a Sandman character created by Gardner Fox and Bert Christman in the late 1930s, whose reboot by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in 1974 had resulted in a series called *The Sandman*.[16] In 1987, Gaiman was asked him to construct an all-new Sandman for DC Comics.

Although it seems that 7 years is quite a long time for the telling of this tale, it becomes clear while reading that all of Morpheus's actions are carefully orchestrated and that even the apparently most inconsequential issue contributes in one way or another to the completion of this unfailingly consistent graphic novel. Gaiman structured the 75 episodes – or ca. 2000 pages – according to a distinctive principle: There are longer story arcs, sometimes six, sometimes thirteen episodes long, which are interspersed with what could be termed collections of short stories. Many of the longer story arcs, in turn, are also interrupted by a single short story. Accordingly, the graphic novel's composition is as follows:

1. *Preludes & Nocturnes* (*P&N*): #1-8, January 1989-August 1989
2. *The Doll's House* (*TDH*): #8-16, September 1989-June 1990
3. **Dream Country* (*DC*): #17-20, July 1990-October 1990
4. *Season of Mists* (*SoM*): #21-28, December 1990-July 1991
5. *A Game of You* (*AGoY*): #32-37, November 1991-May 1992
6. **Fables & Reflections* (*F&R*): #29-31, August 1991-October 1991, #38-40, June 1992-August 1992, #50, June 1993
7. *Brief Lives* (*BL*): #41-49, September 1992-May
8. **Worlds' End* (*WE*): #51-56, July 1993-December 1993

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15 There seems to be something inherently conducive to narration in the figure of the Sandman: The fictional world of Marvel Comics is also home to a character named the Sandman, a shapeshifting villain.

16 cf. *The Sandman by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby.*

9. *The Kindly Ones* (*TKO*): #57-69, February 1994-July 1995, *Vertigo Jam* #1
10. *The Wake* (*TW*): #70-75, August 1995-March 1996
* Collections of short stories

It is important to underline that although these categories (story arc, short story collection) are certainly applicable as described, they are also implemented in highly individualized ways. For instance, the separate tales belonging to the short story collection 3 "Worlds' End" are strongly concatenated in that they are all anecdotes, fables or accounts told by a varying group of people who are temporarily trapped in an inn due to a storm raging outside. Thus, they are not only linked by means of their formal, i.e., hypodiegetic (and sometimes hypo-hypodiegetic) nature, but also by means of the characters that keep reappearing throughout the collection.

The longer story arcs (*P&N, TDH, SoM, AGoY, BL, TKO* and *TW*) feature strong, meaningful relations between individual episodes. Each issue depends on the preceding as well as on the subsequent one. By contrast, the short story collections (*DC, F&R* and *WE*) consist of largely independent narratives. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Gaiman not only oscillated between longer story arcs and collections of short stories but that he further embedded single short stories in almost all longer story arcs.

As stringently as all elements of *Sandman* work towards the conclusion, as flexible is the nature of its art since Gaiman collaborated with a great many different pencillers and inkers throughout the run of the title. Over the years, he worked with Sam Kieth, Mike Dringenberg, Charles Vess, Dick Giordano, Bryan Talbot, Jill Thompson, and Marc Hempel, amongst numerous others. Gaiman was mindful to modify his writing according to the respective artist's individual strength to the extent that he would only commence scripting once he knew who was going to provide the illustrations (Bender/Gaiman 6-7). This multi-artist approach created an ample array of artistic styles, ranging from the rather conventional, established comic book look (e.g., Jones or Doran) to the realist (e.g., Zulli) all the way to the heavily stylized (e.g., Hempel).

As previous DC history is concerned, *Sandman* was from the very beginning envisioned to be an integral part of DC Continuity. In the draft Gaiman sent to the editors at DC in 1987, he stated that "[*Sandman*] takes place in the DC Universe. I've created a few new characters . . . For the rest I've had a wonderful time grabbing DC Characters and shoving them into my storyline" (*Absolute Sandman* I, 546). Gaiman's mix of pre-existing characters living in DC's fictional universe and freshly created ones is as interesting as it is unusual and will be subject to analysis in 4.4. and 5.3.

The most recent development with respect to *Sandman* is the publication of *Sandman Omnibus*, a hardcover collection of issues #1-37 plus the "Sandman Special" in late August 2013. The present year will also see the publication of a yet-untitled mini-series providing "[t]he story of what had happened to Morpheus to allow him to be so easily captured in THE SANDMAN #1, and why he was returned from far away, exhausted beyond imagining, and dressed for war" (*Vertigo Comics*).

The graphic novel's protagonist is Dream, also called Morpheus, a datelessly old member of the Endless, "a family of incredibly powerful entities who exist because mortals, gods, demons, and aliens across the cosmos *believe* they exist" (Dougall, *DC Comics* 115). Dream, who rules the realm of the Dreaming, the open-ended, ever-changing fantastic place dreamers come to while asleep, "violates all the rules about what makes a character popular in the super-hero-dominated comics industry. [...] Rather than being muscular, cheery, and colorful, he's thin, humorless, and perpetually dressed in black" (Bender/Gaiman xi-xii). True to his name, Morpheus – derived from Greek μορφη (morphe) denoting "shape" – his appearance is not fixed but determined by the person who perceives him and his or her system of belief, persuasion, intention, background, etc. However, he remains steadily recognizable by means of his idiosyncratic speech bubble: It is black, with a jagged outline and a white sans serif.[17]

Being very well-read and highly competent in all sorts of myths, it does not come as a surprise that Gaiman dipped his tale deeply in classical Greek, Roman, Norse, Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese, Middle Eastern and Native American folklore and mythology, both contemporary and historical. *Sandman* also makes profuse reference to the Bible, Western literature and popular culture (fig. 2). "For good measure, he has mixed in literary and historical figures from Rome, China, the Elizabethan age, and 19th- and 20th-century America and England as well as many recognizable figures from the DC Universe" (Klinger 15).

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17 In fact, most of the principal characters in the *Sandman* are invested with a very distinct typography that serves as a trademark for their speech bubbles: Delirium's, unevenly outlined, filled out colorfully and containing a crooked font accentuates her haphazard state of mind as well as her function; Matthew the raven has a speech bubble whose outline and font are angular, disorderly and overlapping, invoking the idea of sticks thrown on the ground, which makes it easy for the reader to imagine his voice as rough and abrasive, very similar to the crowing of ravens; Bast, an Egyptian goddess, expresses herself by means of letters mimicking hieroglyphics, etc. Altogether, the main letterer on *Sandman*, Todd Klein, employed approximately fifty distinctive styles of speech bubbles and fonts throughout the run of the series (McCabe 194).

Fig. 2:
Norse deities Odin and Loki in *Sandman* (# 63, 6/1-2 and #24, 3/1-2).

Gaiman's more traditional novels, too, are witnesses to this expertise that made him a substantial part of the British invasion in North American comic books of the 1980s and 1990s.[18]

Sandman may well be the one of my three primary sources that has received most scholarly attention. Not only have there been numerous analyses of the many facets that *Sandman* has to offer, but Gaiman himself also seems to be a favorite with interviewers, as publications like Wagner et al.'s *Prince of Stories*, Bender/Gaiman's *Sandman Companion*, Alisa Kwitney's *Sandman: King of Dreams* as well as his being booked out for years to come go to show.

❖ *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

DC Comics published Frank Miller's approach to Batman as a four-part mini-series in February (#1: "The Dark Knight Returns"), April (#2: "The Dark Knight Triumphant"), May (#3: "Hunt the Dark Knight") and June 1986 (#4: "The Dark Knight Falls"). The first issue's title has since been used for the entire series. *TDKR* was written and pencilled by Miller, inked by Klaus Janson, colored by Lynn Varley, lettered by John Costanza and edited by Dick Giordano and Dennis O'Neil. Set outside of the canon that is Continuity, it only marginally connects to previous history, narrates events that did not permanently alter Continuity and introduces characters that were thought to exist separately from the established versions. Retrospectively, *TDKR* and its related titles were declared to take place on Earth-31 (Dougall, *DC Comics* 21).

It tells "[t]he grim story of personal psychosis, cultural deterioration, political neo-fascism and social angst" (Parsons 66). Even though it was enthusiastically received by critics and fans alike, it also evoked some negative criticism as the

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18 e.g., *Anansi Boys*, which traces the lives of the offspring of the African trickster God Anansi, or *American Gods*, with Old Norse deity Odin as Wednesday and the Technical Boy as the new god of computers, television and the Internet and its references to Ragnarok.

antisocial standards which at times appear to be deconstructed are simultaneously validated and perpetuated (C. Smith). As far as the protagonist is concerned, the graphic novel delivers an alternative version of the Batman; one in which he is neither depicted as the revenge-driven solitary rogue of the 1940s nor the campy, colorful and righteous vigilante as portrayed by Adam West in the 1960s television series. Instead, Miller interpreted him as an ageing, wary, unruly sociopath.

Visually, the story makes ample use of dialogue and panels of various sizes. Another recognizable stylistic element of *TDKR* is Batman's incessant internal observation of his surroundings and his own physical state, especially during fights. One of the most striking elements in Miller's graphic novel is the way in which it handles the notion of ageing, as Kaveney observes (147). Since the setting is not the conventional fictional world of DC but an alternative reality with reduced consequences for Continuity, the characters were allowed to mature considerably, grow wrinkles and lose their hair. This is rendered especially noticeable in comparison to the common mainstream superhero comic book, where, usually heroes simply do not grow significantly older.[19] However, it is in juxtaposition to the youthful Carrie, who adopts Robin's costume, and the sprightly evil characterized by the teenage mutant gang that terrorizes Gotham that the pathos of ageing in *TDKR* becomes most conspicuous.

Now that we have reviewed the three main primary sources in some detail, let us turn to the attributes that they have in common. All of them function equally well as series and as finished works.[20] In other words: They can be read in installments, with each episode making sense as a story and a work of art on its own, but they can also be enjoyed as graphic novels, as repetition is kept to a minimum and knowledge of previous issues is not stringently required. Furthermore, they all share the property of utmost creative freedom. That is to say, DC Comics granted Moore, Gaiman and Miller extraordinary liberties that prior creative teams could only dream of. It is further remarkable that they are all heavily meta-textual: *Watchmen* with regard to the comic book medium, the superhero genre and drawing style;[21] *Sandman* with its foray into hypodiegetic narratives that feature hypodiegetic narratives that feature hypodiegetic narratives; and *TDKR* with its revision of the classic Batman story. And finally, all of them are smart, moving, entertaining and powerful narratives. They

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19 Reasons are expounded in Umberto Eco's "The Myth of Superman", which represents the core of one of the sub-chapters in 4.3.
20 That a good serial need not necessarily make a good novel and that, "[c]onversely, a good novel may make a poor serial" is impressively shown by Hatfield in the last chapter of his *Alternative Comics* (161).
21 cf. my inquiry into meta-referentiality and self-reflexivity in 3.1.5.

ultimately propagate a customary form of storytelling that recipients feel at ease with by virtue of their employment of unprecedented yet strangely familiar plots, the entire range of the meaning of spandex suits and the subversion thereof, and outrageous as well as appealing characters. It might just be this very ambivalence that qualifies these graphic novels worthy of close scrutiny.

These three main primary sources will constitute the focus of the succeeding chapters. In order to discuss their relevance for continuity, continuity in comic books and comic book Continuity, the following section provides the theoretical framework they will later be embedded in. This means that I elaborate on the different meanings the term continuity assumes under different circumstances, starting with continuity in everyday speech and moving on to continuity in film before I focus on continuity in series and settle on comic book Continuity.

1.1. Seriality, Continuity, Continuity in Comic Books and Comic Book Continuity

Serialized narratives have captured audiences since the *"Iliad"*, *"Beowulf"* and *Arabian Nights*. The temporal postponement of a story's continuation has since lost none of its appeal: Listeners, viewers and readers have been following – and still follow – serialized narratives all over the globe, at various times, in numerous media. One of these media of serial storytelling is the comic book. Since the early 1930s, this form of publication began captivating audiences by means of suspense and suspension. With regard to narrative content, it attracts readers by providing enthralling tales and with regard to form, it spellbinds them by offering only a piece of the story before introducing another pause. With each new installment constituting yet another suspended solution, a story may – at least theoretically – be continued ad infinitum. Hence seriality is a defining quality of the vast comic book narrative. Another one – and one that is also derived from the narrative's very serial nature – is the intricate structure of comic book Continuity.[22] This is an intriguing facet of most serialized US-American mainstream comic books which will constitute the center of this thesis.

The term continuity can be used to talk about biology, mathematics, electricity, ethnography, geography, game theory as well as those fields relevant for us such as comics studies. In everyday speech, it denotes permanence, consistency and connection. The first entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* declares it as "[t]he state

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22 I will address it as Continuity with a capital C, in order to work out the contrast to the more basic continuity.

or quality of being uninterrupted in extent or substance, of having no interstices or breaks", as an "uninterrupted connection of parts", and as synonymous with "connectedness, unbrokenness" ("Continuity"). In keeping with references to nature's law of continuity, which maintains that changes happen continually and without leaps, all entries focus on ceaselessness, permanence and steadiness. Without this very basic notion of constancy, narrative would become impossible: Characters would be rendered unrecognizable, events undecipherable, locations unfamiliar, motivations unintelligible, actions incomprehensible, relationships inexplicable, contexts unfathomable and causalities unidentifiable. Even a very short tale only makes sense if a minimum of the above listed components are continuous. For example, a character named Mr. White in the first sentence cannot change his name to Mrs. Black in the second, at least not without plausible explanation. As soon as the alteration is elucidated, it becomes stable and, hence, logical. In avant-garde art, discontinuity is often employed as a means of alienating the audience, thus forcing it to assume a self-reflexive and critical view of what is portrayed. These works rarely embody an encompassing narrative, even if individual parts may tell a story. For the intelligible narrative, continuity is almost on a par with language: It forms such a basic prerequisite – narrative is interveined if not completely suffused by it – that it is often omitted from definitions.

Differently so, when it comes to film studies, where the term continuity emerges habitually. Here, it denotes the smooth concatenation of shots that were, conceivably, filmed out of sequence. More precisely, it is "the unique methodology by which a story is dramatized on film" (P. Miller 5) in order to "create a smooth flow from shot to shot" (K. Thompson 262). In other words, film continuity is the "maintenance of consistency or a continuous flow of action in successive shots or scenes of a cinema or television film" ("Continuity"). In the fledgling days of film, there used to be only one camera in use to record action, but when multiple cameras came to be used on film sets, keeping up continuity was rendered more complex. The script supervisor/continuity supervisor (American English) or "the Continuity" (British English) (Werners 9) ascertains that a hat cocked to the left in the preceding shot will still be cocked to the left in the following one.

When making a film with narrative potential, the goal is to produce coherence despite the discrepancy between the nonlinear order in which scenes are committed to film and the chronological order in which they are shown on the one hand, and the incongruity between the time it takes to capture a scene and the time the scene will eventually inhabit in the film, on the other. As far as the former is concerned, Pat Miller states that for economic reasons, "all sequences that take place in a given locale

– no matter when they occur in the time frame of the story – are scheduled to be performed and filmed concurrently" (5). This can give rise to complications due to the fact that the elapse of narrated time needs to be taken into account: The time it takes to capture a shot in most cases supersedes its eventual future duration in the film, a fact with which directors of, say, stage plays do not have to struggle. Shooting scenes out of order poses a problem for the upkeep of continuity inasmuch as clocks keep ticking, shadows keep growing longer and cigarettes keep burning even when the camera is not rolling (Werners 32, 101).

Having outlined continuity in its basic form and in the way it is employed in film production and film studies, I would now like to move on to continuity in series. The desired consistency from one shot or scene to the next can be likened to the continuity found in serialized works, where it describes the consistency from one episode or issue to the next. In addition, film continuity is a basic prerequisite for the production of series, as "weekly television shows are usually shot *back to back*" (P. Miller 160), meaning that shows are filmed continuously, without any breaks. The term as it is used by recipients of series and scholars of seriality is based on the ideally flawless stringing together of individual shots adumbrated above, but undergoes extensions in two directions: Firstly, instead of the continuity errors discussed above, all components of a medium constitute the object of examination. This means that, nowadays, not only matters of how a collar can mysteriously open, close and open again within a couple of shots are debated, but also issues like the logics of plot and speech, geographical details or background features (Packard, "Homerische Intentionen" 168). Secondly, as a compensating alternative to the predominantly negative act of pointing out continuity errors, recipients have begun to bring into prominence intertexts, successful references to and dexterous resumptions of details from earlier episodes and other facets of culture (168). With this extended signification, continuity refers to "the entirety of those elements, which establish intertextual references between the individual episodes of a series, with the intention of strengthening their internal correlation in the perception of recipients and to heighten their recognition value" (168).[23] This definition serves as a signpost of how continuity has further evolved in the comics industry, but this will be the topic of a later chapter.

In the attempt to make as few continuity errors as possible, producers usually have a 'show bible', also known as the 'series bible' or 'story bible', which records

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23 My translation: "die Gesamtheit derjenigen Elemente, die intertextuelle Bezüge zwischen den einzelnen Episoden einer Serie herstellen und damit ihre inneren Zusammenhang in der Wahrnehmung der Rezipienten stärken und den Wiedererkennungswert erhöhen sollen."

detailed information about characters, settings, history etc. of a series.[24] Needless to say, the maintenance of such a bible forms the foundation on which continuous film narrative can blossom. The series bible of the science-fiction epic *Battlestar Galactica*, which ran from 2004-2009, is widely championed to be one of the most extensively maintained bibles. Small wonder, then, that the series' homepage should list a very useful definition of the series bible:

> A series bible is a guidebook written by the creator(s) of a TV show so that all writers will know the general outline of the show; it contains the backstories of the characters and outlines the in-series universe. Typically, it contains information that might not actually be revealed to the audience until later, but is known to the writers from the start, so they won't make any conflicting new stories.
> (Beaudoin et al.)

Of course, such a bible is nothing but a very elaborate version of a script supervisor's notes. Yet rather than merely recording details that bridge the transition from one shot or scene to its successor, like camera angle or actor posture, the series bible also scrupulously documents all facets of the "in-series universe", that is, the world which is erected by the series' inventors and that encompasses all of the episodes within a series.

Series bibles, especially very comprehensive ones, may also serve as vessels of information for recipients, exceeding their original function of providing a means of continuity surveillance for the script supervisor. Since most recipients cannot be expected to have been exposed to all episodes pertaining to a series, orientation about characters, relationships between them and context as well as explanations concerning earlier events and actions combine into the bible. That said, only a small fraction of a series' audience is inquisitive enough and disposed to expend time and effort on the perusal of such a bible. Interestingly, a common series bible never contains extra, that is, additional data that could not be obtained from absorbing the series and all series are designed to function as standalone features, that is to say, it does not necessitate the supplementary reading of a series bible in order to be intelligible. Conclusively, those recipients who scrutinize the details available on their series do not do so for reasons of completing their serial knowledge or to discover previously unfamiliar facts, but merely out of interest and in order to strengthen their comprehension of the series. This engagement with the serial for interest's sake is a

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24 In order to become a member of the *Writers Guild of America*, applicants can chose from a number of options. One of them is to write a "long-term story projection, which is defined for this purpose as a bible, for a specified term, on an existing, five times per week non-prime time serial; [or a] Bible for any television serial or primetime miniseries of at least four hours" (Mazin et al.).

notion of immense importance for the establishment of serial knowledge or serial competence.

As Eco has pointed out in his 1985 essay, recipients derive pleasure from "foreseen and awaited reappearance" ("Innovation" 162) meaning that character traits, behavior, looks, habits and quirks, way of speech, gestures, etc. constitute an essential part of what we enjoy about a series. Repetitive elements in characters afford satisfaction as "the readers continuously recover, point by point, what they already know, and what they want to know again" (164). We do not consume series because we want to be surprised, but first and foremost because we want to rediscover the already-familiar, the previously-known. Characters like Lieutenant Columbo of the eponymous series are well-loved because we enjoy how, for the n-th time, the protagonist asks for a match, returns after having bid good-bye with the phrase "Just one more thing…" and, in the end, manages to get to the bottom of the crime brilliantly despite his scatterbrained appearance. In Frank Kelleter's words, we enjoy these characters explicitly as serial characters whom we encounter again and again with the same, only minimally altered qualities ("Populäre Serialität" 12).

In a similar vein, we take pleasure in the series as a whole because we have memorized its schematic structure by heart: We delight in each instance in which we witness the murder at the outset of the installment and then follow Columbo in his quest to track down the culprit in an inversion of the classical whodunit. But even with series that have a more serial than episodic stance and do not follow a rigid formula with each installment, we are satisfied to find that characters behave according to our expectations.[25] Now, when we consume an episode of any series for the first time, part of that pleasure is forestalled as we are not yet familiar with the series' idiosyncrasies and characters' behavioral patterns. It is only upon viewing, reading or listening to further installments that paradigms emerge.

These musings should have made evident that continuity is a broad phenomenon that finds foothold in many disciplines. Equipped with this knowledge of the concept of continuity in connection with film studies and serial publication, let us turn to the inspection of the phenomenon in that medium of popular culture that is at the center of this analysis: the comic book. Employed with regard to comic books, continuity is a heavily loaded term. In a nutshell, it describes the internal logic, history of stories or canon of a company's publications. It is premised on the serial release of comic books, which allows for complex correlations between titles, individual issue and

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25 Only recently, "The Killing", a new crime series on AMC had to be cancelled despite otherwise very favorable critical and popular reception due to overwhelmingly negative audience response because the show had failed to reveal the murderer (Nussbaum, "Clue" 78).

fictional characters. Their serial nature further encourages interaction as it provides the gap during which feedback can be given and reacted to. Such a sketch is necessarily cursory but the details on continuity, i.e., how it all began, what it encompasses, how it is upheld and by whom, and how it postulates seriality will be analyzed in chapter 4.

Concerning the serialized comic books of the 1980s, *continuity in comic books* – this is the basic kind – and *comic book Continuity* – the canonical kind – prove to be most important. However, we seem to know very little about either of them. My contribution to the field is the attempt to fill this gap. Therefore, this thesis not only contains an analysis of how continuity is engaged in comic books in order to generate works of exceptional stringency, it also includes an investigation into the mechanisms of continuity-as-canon: Continuity. Research on the history and the specific mechanisms that engender Continuity as well as the implications and consequences of an all-encompassing structure like Continuity has long been neglected. Guided by the epistemological interest in the potential repercussions on producers and receivers of the functioning principles of serialized narratives such as Gaiman's *Sandman*, I hope to provide compelling and convincing insights into the extraordinary popular culture phenomenon of Continuity.

1.2. Chapter Synopsis

Chapter 2 will be dedicated to the serialized comic book. Serialization and the US-American comic book will be scrutinized with regard to their history, etymology and defining characteristics. Long-running series pose different challenges from standalone fictions for authors, production companies and readers, yet they match in their conception of convincing characters, interesting locations, memorable events and situations, compelling plot construction, believable action of and interaction between characters. With this in mind, a theoretical analysis of seriality as well as an effort to map out the differences between series that operate with standalone episodes and those that institute intricately connected ones has been conducted. From here, I proceed to the comic book, one of many forms of serialized literature. Apart from the comic book's history, which is as little-known as it is intriguing, the subchapter attempts to chart the medial characteristics of the comic book and the graphic novel respectively. With this chapter in particular, I wish to illustrate that research on comic books is not only legitimate but necessary for a thorough awareness of popular culture's products influence.

It is often argued that *Watchmen* is exceptional, but the claim has never been made with regard to its rigorous continuity. In Chapter 3, the notion of continuity-as-consistency will be harnessed for the discussion of this graphic novel. While the peeling back of the layers of something as elementary as continuity may seem trite or predictable, this chapter will reveal that it can surface on many levels and in unexpected places. What the morpheme is to language, the comics panel can be argued to be to comics storytelling: the smallest unit. Commencing with this basic entity, I will explain how not only panel content but especially the speech bubble – and by extension the caption box, the thought bubble and the motion line – can function metonymically.

Watchmen further uses perspective, graphic matches, color and what I term 'overlapping text' to create continuity in the sequence of panels. When it comes to the comics page, Benoît Peeters's typology of the decorative, conventional (in the sense of 'established' rather than 'uninspired'), rhetoric and productive page arrangement was found to be most valuable. Next, the continuous properties of the twelve *Watchmen* episodes are examined by means of such elements as the title page and the epilogues. The chapter's final section treats features that keep emerging throughout the graphic novel such as the smiley badge with its signature bloodstain, work-intrinsically designed speech bubbles and caption boxes, the intermediate chapters that evoke various other media and the doomsday clock which can not only be found at each chapter's end in the form of an iconic summary of the world's apocalyptic state, but also throughout the story, as intradiegetic element. In addition, there is a detailed description of the meta-level that is so deeply ingrained in *Watchmen*: Self-Reflexivity can be found in character utterances, the depiction of comic books-within-the comic book as well as numerous other instances.

Chapter 4 then delves into that facet of the term continuity that denotes a publisher's canon. It sketches the history and development of comic book Continuity starting with the interepisodic reference that is frequently part and parcel of serial narratives and often leads to the establishment of the serial universe. Comic book characteristics such as the crossover, the fictional Uni- and Multiverse, the origin story and the reincarnation of characters are key factors of this chapter. Since serial narratives attract fandom and comic books lend themselves particularly well to the exchange between producers and consumers, aspects such as the identity-establishing power of fandom are investigated. When fans shed their roles as passive costumers and resume the parts of significant co-authors, this implies not only a shift in the relationship between storyteller and audience but also a shift in the balance of power between experienced and inexperienced recipients. The sub-chapter

on the exclusivity of fandom, hence, attempts to outline the dynamics of elitism in comic book culture. Since Continuity is a phenomenon that often surprises non-comic book readers, a large portion of the chapter has been devoted to examples and a definition is provided. Throughout chapter 4, I argue that it requires immersion into the comic book discourse, acquaintance with the medium's peculiarities and prolonged contact with several series to become skilled at Continuity. In order to make my point, I have devised a typology of the various extents to which one can be able to decipher references within comic books. Therefore, this final sub-chapter focuses on different kinds of literacies, cumulating in comic book literacy – or expertise in comic book Continuity – and includes a close reading of a selection of scenes from the *Sandman.*

Chapter 5 builds upon the definition of Continuity provided in chapter 4, advancing such terms as 'retcon' and 'reboot'. It is explained how each of these narrative devices function, how and when they are deployed, what different classes there are and how they vary from each other. In order to illustrate how retcons can be exploited in primary sources, a number of examples from the *Sandman* are introduced. This rather theoretical part is followed by a discussion of the two kinds of comic book historiography that can be identified. 5.3.1. and 5.3.2. delineate the history of the Sandman according to the two principles I have termed *annotative* and *synoptic.*

Chapter 6, finally, gathers the findings from the previous chapters. My chief finding – that due to the propensity of comic book lore to be adapted into other media, Continuity erodes – will be elaborated on before a tentative outlook on the comic book is provided.

Since I am a literary scientist by training and comic books are an interstitial form that contains not only pictures but most often also text, the method of investigation will first and foremost be classic literary analysis, i.e., close-reading and formal textual analysis. But since this thesis is inherently interdisciplinary in that it concentrates on the ways in which seriality functions in the popular culture medium of comic books, an amalgamation of methods is employed: Comics studies, media studies, cultural studies, sociology, studies concerned with the combination of text and picture, i.e., intermediality studies and visual studies will also receive a fair share of attention even though my theoretical approach remains firmly rooted in literary studies. Throughout my dissertation, I will further harness narratological approaches in order to probe the mechanisms of storytelling in serialized comic books.

2. Serialization and the US-American Comic Book

Andy Warhol, the artist perhaps most often associated with serial art,[1] was a fervent promoter of seriality for its ability to reproduce what is already known. He felt that repetition caused evaporation of meaning and vacancy – processes he found desirable in art (Straumann, "exactly" 85-87). His repetitive depictions of emotionally charged images like suicides and death-chairs therefore acquire an aesthetic status similar to that of his soup cans so that the meaningful difference is simply depleted (Straumann, "Seriality" 13-14). But he also found an egalitarian component in the sameness of the repeated unit:

> You can see a billboard for Tab and think: Nancy Regan drinks tab, Gloria Vanderbilt drinks Tab. Jackie Onassis drinks Tab, and just think, you can drink Tab too. Tab is Tab and no matter how rich you are, you can't get a better one than the homeless woman on the corner is drinking. All the Tabs are the same. And all the Tabs are good. Nancy Regan knows it, Gloria Vanderbilt knows it, Jackie Onassis knows it, Katharine Hepburn knows it, the baglady knows it, and you know it.
> (Warhol 22)

According to Warhol, thus, even massproduced seriality is not something to be frowned at. Much rather, he vouches for the liberating effect seriality can have.[2] Apart from the democratic end, however, the average customer of serialized works of art perhaps takes a different approach.

The practice of serialization has been a steady element in Western literature since the nineteenth century. Contrary to common knowledge, most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works of the Western canon were not published as finalized works all at once, but part-issued over a period of time. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for instance, was published serially before it was collected into a book, as were George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Mark

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1 Here is a selection of those artists most often mentioned with respect to serialized art: Impressionist painter Claude Monet created a series of images depicting haystacks. The objects of focus differ on the account of lighting and size but are largely the same so that the paintings share a strong resemblance. Concept artist On Kawara's *Today* Series, started in 1966, comprises paintings that shows only the date of the day. Roy Lichtenstein's renown stems not only from his paint-sized representations of comics panels and their inherent comment on the gender roles portrayed by comics (Whiting 17), but also from the repetitive way in which this is done.
2 Barbara Straumann contests this. She claims that the seemingly endless repetition of one and the same element does not simply cumulate in the recipient's distancing but that the process is at once paradox as well as much more complex than asserted by Warhol ("exactly" 87).

Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, just to name a few.[3]

Even in this current age of multi-mediality, serialization is everywhere. To quote just a few interesting examples, Tom Wolfe's wonderfully satiric *Bonfire of the Vanities* was serialized in 27 installments in *Rolling Stone Magazine* in the 1980s, Stephen King's *The Green Mile* appeared in six parts in 1996 before it was published in its entirety and Michael Chabon's *Gentlemen of the Road* was published in 15 parts in the New York Times in 2007. Serialization permeates our daily routine, we find it in the works that shape our contemporary culture and it is part of the things that surround us. Seriality can be read as a "principle of action"[4] (Faulstich 51), that is, something that gives shape to our lives. We tend not to be aware of this yet our choice of employment, clothing, residence, furnishing, transport, sexual intercourse, friendship, nourishment, etc. is explicitly serial as it generates indispensable order and familiarity (50-51). Seriality is also at play when speeches and parades are held, courtroom proceedings are followed, and festivities, both secular and religious, are organized. In advertising, too, serialization is important as the recognition factor is imperative for product revenue. Most palpably, however, seriality is part of our lives when it comes to the products that shape our culture. This includes not only works of art but also assembly line products.

In general, an understanding of serialization is often associated with mechanical repetition and mass production.[5] And indeed, in industrial reproduction, duplication is a prerequisite: All units must be identical, uniform and interchangeable while non-conform items are rejected. Such homogeneity – though essentially impossible as each reiteration generates a new unit with unique characteristics, even if they are minimally different from their predecessors – may be default in manufacturing processes, but is often interpreted as formulaic and therefore trivial, superficial and valueless when applied to works of art. As far as art and entertainment are concerned, repetition, reproduction and reiteration are often identified as opposites of innovation, authenticity and originality. Hence serialized works are often denigrated as inferior.

That said, they often show enormous potential to evolve over time. The advantage of the series (apart from the larger scope) is that the narrative can change and adapt. Things that work can be expanded, those that do not discarded (mostly quietly, but

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3   The most insightful works on the Victorian serial are Hughes/Lund, Johanningmeier, C. Martin, Law, Lund, Vann. More generally, cf. also Dennis and Hayward.
4   My translation: "Handlungsprinzip".
5   cf. also the entries in the *OED* on "Serial", "Seriality" and "Series".

sometimes also with explanations). New things can be tried out because they need to be tried out or because the success of the series allows for experimentation without the risk of alienation the audience (Parkin, "Truths" 15).

Understanding seriality helps us to grasp the relationships between the part and the whole, the installment and the work at large, the instance and the context. It challenges the established, familiar and traditional with elements of surprise and novelty. As the theory chapter will illustrate, repetition without innovation is impossible.[6]

2.1. Seriality: Theoretical Approaches

Two influential scholars, Umberto Eco and Gilles Deleuze, have independently of one another arrived at comparable theories of seriality, both involving the notion of reiteration. Even though their approaches differ in method, scope and implementation, the following assumption pervades both theories: Seriality is irretrievably interwoven with and cannot function without the concepts of repetition *and* variation.

❖ *Gilles Deleuze and Umberto Eco*

In his extensive philosophically wrought and tightly woven work *Différence et Répétition* from 1968, Deleuze places the concept of the complex, always already different repetition in the center. He postulates that repetition without difference is impossible: "[N]o two grains of dust are absolutely identical, no two hands have the same distinctive points, no two typewriters have the same strike, no two revolvers score their bullets in the same manner" (26). It does not matter whether something is reproduced, reiterated, duplicated, retold or imitated, the end product is always and without exception at variance from the original, no matter how minimally. "To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent" (1). Thus, there is no such thing as absolute repetition; there is only repetition with a difference. While some products of repetition may actually achieve an air of sameness, as in the case of most mechanical reproductions, it is the human mind that will always perceive and identify variation: "Novelty then passes to the mind which represents itself: because the mind has a memory or acquires habits, it is capable of forming concepts in general and of drawing

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6   cf. also Kelleter, "Populäre Serialität" 11.

something new, of subtracting something new from the repetition that it contemplates" (14).

Eco's likeness of approach is hinted at by means of his title "Innovation and Repetition" (1985). His article is essentially geared towards the resolution of the differences "between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics", as not only the subtitle informs us. Eco's stance is that there has been a quite radical shift in the perception of aesthetics from modernity to post-modernity. As the modern criterion for artistic value was originality, serious works of art were expected to present something in an unanticipated manner: "The pleasurable repetition of an already known pattern was considered, by modern theories of art, typical of Crafts – not of Art – and of industry" (161).[7] Since modernist aesthetics deemed innovation more important than anything else, a "popular song, a TV commercial, a comic strip, a detective novel, a Western movie were seen as more or less successful tokens of a given model or type" (162) and thus as aesthetically less relevant, even if the patterns of redundancy and repetition they adhere to produce enjoyment. The writer of a detective novel, for instance, "plays upon a continuous series of connotations […] to such an extent that their reappearance in each story is an essential condition of its reading pleasure" (162). However, with the dawn of the post-modern epoch, which Eco refers to as "the era of repetition" (166), reiteration has become a decisive factor to the extent that "iteration and repetition seem to dominate the whole world of artistic creativity" (166). Post-modernist aesthetics thus views modernism's attitude towards iteration and repetition from an entirely different angle.

Repetition is of high importance for Eco's argument, as it is intimately linked to serialization. He defines seriality as "a very wide category or, of one wants, as another term for repetitive art" (166). He concedes that reduplication can generate two almost identical things which he terms "'replicas' of the same 'type'" (167).[8] This, however, is not the sort of repetition that Eco is interested in. Instead, he focuses on the reiterative element in the series and how pleasure is related to it. In connection with all post-modern forms of seriality, Eco points out that

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7   cf. Petersen 56.
8   This is to say that a freshly purchased tube of toothpaste promises to be the same as, though not identical to the one just used up. This (apparent) identity plays a significant role for the stability of our environment and contributes to our peace of mind (Winkler 38-39). But while a replica may fulfill a functional need just as well as its relative, there is no such thing as absolute uniformity (Eco, "Innovation" 166-167).

> every work aesthetically 'well done' is endowed with two characteristics: (1) It must achieve a dialectic between order and novelty – in other words, between scheme and innovation; (2) This dialectic must be perceived by the consumer, who must not only grasp the contents of the message, but also the way in which the message transmits those contents.
> (173/174)

He claims that the recipient of any serialized work enjoys, in fact, the recurrence of an unaltered narrative scheme, not, as she believes the installment's newness (168). Eco resumes this idea at a later point of his article when the recipients of the series and their source of enjoyment are somewhat diversified. He alleges that

> every text presupposes and constructs always a double Model Reader (let us say, a naïve and a 'smart' one). The former [...] is the victim of the strategies of the author who will lead him little by little along a series of previsions and expectations; the latter evaluates the work as an aesthetic product and enjoys the strategies implemented in order to produce a model reader of the first level. This second-level reader is the one who enjoys the seriality of the series, not so much for the return of the same thing (that the ingenuous reader believed was different) but for the strategy of the variations; in other words, he enjoys the way in which the same story is worked over to appear to be different.
> (174)

This first, naïve addressee is satisfied because he was able to foretell the events of the story. He does not, Eco points out, scrutinize the rather obvious structure of the installment and detect its adherence to a pattern that has proven successful with recipients. He prefers the vision of himself as able to guess the ending correctly despite the (seemingly) intricate plot (168).

John G. Cawelti, one of the first scholars to gain academic decorum with his research in the domain of popular culture, agrees with Eco when he writes that adults often show an "interest in certain types of stories which have highly predictable structures that guarantee the fulfillment of conventional expectations" (1). Also Knut Hickethier is convinced that the primary motivation for a prolonged interest in the series is that frustration of anticipation and speculation is often sidestepped ("Serie" 398). Predictability, thus, is one of the key prerequisites for the success of popular series with that part of the audience that consists of so called naïve readers. The adherence to the formula is of such enormous importance that novelty, to a certain extent, becomes negligible: "[O]riginality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it" (Warshow 85). This means that without a minimum of recognizable structures, the naïve reader

cannot find pleasure in a series. Indeed, exhilarating as the unknown may be, most of us find comfort in the recurrence of the familiar.[9]

The second, the 'smart' readers are satisfied because they identify and appreciate the revision of and innovation in an established structure. I agree with media scholar Jason Mittell, who says that we "watch these shows not just to get swept away in a realistic narrative world (although that certainly can happen) but also to watch the gears at work, marveling at the craft" ("Narrative" 35). According to Eco, 'smart' readers enter into an explicit contract with the serialized work, one that challenges them "to acknowledge the innovative aspects of the text" ("Innovation" 175) and to disregard the more trite and clichéd aspects of the work. Needless to say, the more sophisticated series promote this gratification in variation with more ease than trivial series (174).

As Eco states explicitly, the double model reader combines the naïve and the 'smart' reader in one and the same person (168). At times, the narrative impedes this reader's alertness to exhausted formulas; at times, it offers sufficient novelty. Accordingly, sometimes, this double model reader can beguile herself into believing that it is her shrewdness enabling her to correctly guess the ending. Sometimes she succeeds in delimiting the established structures, but has to make concession that these can nevertheless be invested with uniqueness through the employment of a certain angle or fresh approach. The apparent discordance is, according to Harry Berger, inherent in the nature of humankind:

> Man has two primal needs. First is a need for order, peace, and security, for protecting against the terror or confusion of life, for a familiar and predictable world, and for a life which is happily more of the same [...] But the second primal impulse is contrary to the first: man positively needs anxiety and uncertainty, thrives on confusion and risk, wants trouble, tension, jeopardy, novelty, mystery, would be lost without enemies, is sometimes happiest when most miserable.
> (35)

For all its generalizing quality, Berger's assertion nevertheless demonstrates how the demand for stability and familiarity can and does co-exist with an ardent desire for variation from routine.

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9   Cawelti and Eco concur that our affinity for well-known narratives is not something that is only acquired with adulthood, but that it is already established in infancy: "How often a child rejects a new story, preferring to hear one he has already been told a hundred times"? Cawelti asks (1). Similarly, Eco observes that "[t]he series in this sense responds to the infantile need of hearing again always the same story, of being consoled by the 'return of the identical,' superficially disguised" ("Innovation" 168) (cf. also Faulstich 49).

Ultimately, it is the reader's decision as to which approach toward a narrative is taken, i.e., whether to ingest a narrative as naïve or 'smart' reader: "[E]ven the most banal narrative product allows the reader to become, by an autonomous decision, a critical reader, able to recognize the innovative strategies" (Eco, "Innovation" 174-175). Of course, over-the-top hackneyed stories will have difficulty being paired with a 'smart' recipient, although – as Deleuze does not tire of pointing out – even the most iterative creation will involve a minimum of originality that sets it apart from its kind. Hence innovation is crucial in both cases, albeit for different reasons: While the naïve reader thinks herself inventive, the 'smart' one values genuine novelty, even if it is novelty within an established framework. Thus, Eco agrees with Deleuze that "seriality and repetition are not opposed to innovation" ("Innovation" 175).

❖ *Cawelti's Formulaic Fiction*

To define the reiterative structure often found in popular literature, Cawelti suggested the term "formula". In his readable work *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance. Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, he claimed that "a literary formula is a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works" (5). More specifically, this means that whereas the distinct works may feature unknown characters, unfamiliar settings, unheard-of images and themes, etc., they are always reminiscent of one archetypal story or another. Alternatively, if one aspect of a serialized work is continuously employed, the narratives pertaining to this series will also be considered formulaic. Winsor McKay's Nemo for instance, the protagonist of the early twentieth-century comic book strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, is usually awakened from a dream in the last panel as he falls out of bed and Ignatz, the antagonistic mouse in George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, hardly ever fails to throw his brick at Krazy.

Underlying structures remain intact and may be discernible even if they are adapted to suit tastes of various cultures or eras. For instance, the resemblance of the courageous cowboy and the gallant knight are hard to overlook and their affiliation with the heroic adventure is not a coincidence (Cawelti 37). But, as Hickethier warns, the bare repetition of customary patterns is not advisable ("Das Beste" 88). In order for the distinct work to be of quality and interest to a larger audience, it must feature some innovative traits that make it unique and different from its peers, yet these traits need to eventually add up to make the work part of the formula (Cawelti 10). A perfect case in point is, again, Herriman's artistic masterpiece *Krazy Kat*: In the triangular relationship between Krazy the cat, Ignatz the mouse

and Officer Pupp the dog, each character persistently follows his or her own motivations but remains oblivious to the futility and ludicrousness of their endeavors. In the upshot, "the farce is endlessly repeated, each iteration a new variant on the absurd theme" (Petersen 109). Therefore, with Cawelti, too, the notion of repetition and variation as attributes inherent in serialized works is stressed, even though Cawelti's corpus is popular rather than serialized fiction. I do not consider this a contradiction, as serialization is virtually constitutional in popular fiction: Unresolved episodes as well as completed narratives are usually part of an encompassing series. The institution of any formula, to include that notion in the equation, cannot take place without serialization, as a single work by itself cannot establish an entire genre.[10]

Certain formulas, so Cawelti, are highly prolific. The crime narrative, the detective stories, the Western and the social melodrama are among the best-selling formulas in the popular fiction of recent decades. In comic books, for example, the formula that relates the story of a scientist contaminated by an accident taking place during research and subsequently turned into a creature with superpowers was widely employed during the 1960s, bringing forth such seminal characters as Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, Dr. Strange, Thor and the Fantastic Four (Petersen 163).[11] The scientist-cum-superhero formula was so prolific because the metamorphosis did not turn every aspect of the contaminated individual invulnerable. On the contrary, all of these were in constant distrust of their newly acquired powers and thus remained accessible to the average adolescent reader (163).[12]

Of course, prolific formulas run the risk of becoming somewhat trite and obvious. What then, one wonders, is the appeal of formulaic storytelling to writers and publishers as well as readers? As concerns the audience, it has already been extensively commented on the pleasure that can be derived from reiterative structures, be it more superficially, as with the naïve reader, or somewhat more profound, as with the sophisticated recipient. For authors, the employment of a formula means they "do[…] not have to make as many difficult artistic decisions as a novelist working without a formula. Thus, formulaic creators tend to be extremely prolific" (Cawelti 9). The same is true for publishers, for whom the bedrock of

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10 The concept of the genre, as Cawelti points out, is often obfuscated with the notion of the formula. Since they are very similar and often denote the same thing, however, he finds this neither remarkable nor objectionable (6).

11 Comic books have a long history of superheroes owing their powers to scientific experiments gone awry. Stan Lee's Fantastic Four in 1960 (subjected to cosmic rays during a scientific mission in outer space), his Hulk in 1962 (exposure to the explosion of a gamma bomb) and his Spider-Man also in 1962 (bitten by a radioactive spider) came to serve as templates for a slew of new "troubled characters ambivalent about their powers" (Sabin, *Comics* 49). cf. also Hoppeler/Rippl, "Narrating Radioactivity".

12 cf. also Hoppeler/Rippl, "Narrating Radioactivity".

efficiency and ample profit in publishing popular fiction is beyond question a formula (9). With economic interests operating as premise for writing and publishing, the tendency towards standardization and homogenization is practically inevitable if not foreseeable. Unsurprisingly, the phenomenon is not new but was already in place during the Victorian era, as John Sutherland observes:

> Once an author had made his name he would experience the surrounding urge for stability as an insidious coercion to turn out recurrent bestsellers according to a proven successful formula. The model in most publishing minds was Scott's 'Waverley Novels'. Given a bestseller, a publisher's instinct was to use it as the foundation to set up a series of 'Vanity Fair Novels', 'Pickwick Paper Novels', 'Barchester Novels' on the same lines. (*Victorian Novelists* 76)

Based on the success of his work, the writer, Victorian or contemporary, is oftentimes asked to deliver a fresh supply of an established commodity (77). Remaining in the Victorian age for a brief while, the audience also tried to decipher the formula which made Scott's, Thackeray's and Dickens's serials so enormously appealing and successful. Without a copyright in intellectual property in place, many an aspiring novelist more or less candidly endeavored to reproduce what was thought to be the active ingredient (Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction* 91). The results were "soundalike names and lookalike plots" (93) but sales often fell short of those achieved by the big names in the field.

We have slowly moved from a theoretical to a historical description of seriality. Before a definition of the milestones of the series' history can be attempted, let us consider some of its attributes and specific characteristics. The following represents an effort to clear the thicket surrounding the terms related to serialization, especially the terms 'serial' and 'procedural'.

2.1.1. An Attempt to Capture the Nature of the Series

Seriality is a research field that has enjoyed a great upsurge in recent years. One of the reasons is certainly the ubiquity of the quality television series and its unprecedented and lasting success. In Europe, it is also due to a large research group in Göttingen, Germany, which has been conducting analyses of popular seriality with a threefold epistemological interest: narration, history and distinction.[13] Before these contributions to the academic landscape studies of seriality focused mainly the

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13 This thesis has grown out of a doctoral project that is an associated project of the DFG unit.

Victorian novel[14] or on television series.[15] During the last decade or so, fresh, innovative takes on seriality in its totality have poured onto the market. These titles include but are not limited to Christine Blättler's "Überlegungen zu Serialität als ästhetischem Begriff" (2003); Günter Giesenfeld's edited work on *Endlose Geschichten. Serialität in den Medien* (1994); Frank Kelleter's collection on *Populäre Serialität: Narration – Evolution – Distinktion. Zum seriellen Erzählen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (2013); Christine Mielke's *Zyklisch-serielle Narration. Erzähltes Erzählen von 1001 Nacht bis zur TV-Serie* (2003); and Stephan Packard's "Homerische Intentionen. Notizen über Continuity in populären Serien" (2004). The following represents the endeavor to collect noteworthy definitions of contemporary seriality from some of these valuable contributions.

❖ *Definition*

Robert C. Allen defines serialization as

> the organization of the narrative and narration around the enforced and regular suspension of both textual display and reading activity [that] produces a very different mode of reader engagement and reader pleasure than we experience with non-serials.
> ("Introduction" 17)

He touches upon some of the most substantial elements of seriality that are often excluded from definitions. First and foremost, I wish to draw attention to his claims that the series requires distinct kinds of reception methods and that it creates a very particular experience. This idiosyncrasy inherent in the reception can already be observed at the point of serial production. Clearly, one "cannot tell the same type of story on the stage and in writing, during conversation and in thousand-page novel, in a two-hour movie and in a TV serial that runs for many years" (Ryan 356) because "[i]n any medium, one major creative factor is the length or scale of the individual art work. A novel is not a stretched-out short story, and a sonnet is not a long limerick" (K. Thompson 40). The contemporary series, therefore, is not merely a segmented narrative, but, ideally, a narrative whose breakdown is fashioned according to the requirements of the story.

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14 e.g. Feltes; Hayward; Hughes/Lund; Law; Lund; Neuschäfer et al.; Payne; Radway; Sutherland, "Chips", *Victorian Fiction* and *Victorian Novelists* and Vann.

15 e.g., Allen, *To be Continued...*; Allrath/Gymnich; Ang; Bleicher; Creeber; Giddings/Selby; Hickethier, *Fernsehserie* and "Das Beste"; Nelson; Oltean; Schneider; R. Thompson and Türschmann.

Another significant factor that Allen touches upon is the pause. Like Roger Hagedorn, who says that "[e]pisodicity is *the* crucial trait which distinguishes the serial [...] from the 'classic' narrative text" (28), most definitions include a mention of the narrative disruption. However, according to Allen, it is much more than a regularly occurring hiatus during which both presentation as well as reception are halted: It is imposed, so to speak forced upon the recipient. The audience cannot itself determine when to halt the story and when to resume it; it is the production side that governs this domain. So far so good. But Allen also states that it is "the producer of the narrative [who] determines not only how and when the narration of the story stops and starts, but also how and when the reader's engagement with the text stops and starts" ("Introduction" 1). While the first statement is certainly valid, the second, that the audience is only committed to the serial as long as the installment lasts and that no engagement takes place during the producer-induced break, I would contest. Musing on the last chapter and speculating on the one to come is promoted by the pause. This means that recipients keep ruminating on the serial in between installments. With the next dosage of one's favorite characters a week, fourteen days or even a month away, readers often seek solace in the re-reading or re-viewing of installments in order to reduce waiting time. Repeated attention to an episode can infuse it with significance that transcends the understanding of the text yielded by a single reading. Characters may gain attributes otherwise not discernible and events may be invested with meaning previously unrecognized. This process is augmented by the exchange and discussion of opinions and reading experiences amongst other consumers.

A highly expedient example is Herman Melville's bipartite *Bartleby the Scrivener*. If the text is absorbed as an entity, i.e., without knowledge of the existence and whereabouts of a gap, Bartleby's history seems to abide by a linear trajectory towards a tragic end. The very same story suggests two stages of development, but only if read in installments. In the first part, Bartleby appears to be a fairly stagnant character who exhibits a few unusual quirks and eccentricities but who does not greatly develop. It is only at the beginning of the second installment that the scrivener's odd behavior seems to take a turn for the worse and that his ultimate doom becomes apparent.

Neither of these two facets – differing reader engagement for series and the impact of the interval between episode – are mentioned in Jennifer Hayward's approximation to the series. It contains, however, a whole catalogue of attributes often found to be formative of the series. She describes the series as

an ongoing narrative released in successive parts. In addition to these defining qualities, serial narratives share elements that might be termed, after Wittgenstein, 'family resemblances.' These include refusal of closure; intertwined subplots; large casts of characters (incorporating a diverse range of age, gender, class, and, increasingly, race representation to attract a similarly diverse audience); interaction with current political, social, or cultural issues; dependence on profit; and acknowledgment of audience response. (3)

In this definition, we encounter several new elements. Some, like the "intertwined subplots" are not necessarily part of the series that employs more or less autonomous installments. Others, for instance the "refusal of closure" or the "dependence on profit" are innate to all series. Quite striking is the prominent reference to the diversified cast which, it seems, is mostly a trait of the new quality television series.

Such a broad definition is counterbalanced by the likes of this, by Linda Hughes and Michael Lund: "a continuing story over an extended time with enforced interruptions" (2). While the serial can certainly be reduced to these ten words, it leaves ample space to include works that are not usually perceived as serials. Lund concedes that already "the qualities of a familiar narrator and a returning set of characters might allow a number of unexpected works to be considered serials" (38) and that a "sequel issued in a single volume might even be considered the second in a two-part serial" (38). Hickethier takes a similar stance when he observes as the series' defining principle its being composed of several units ("Serie" 398; *Fernsehserie* 8) and the consequent implication that "in a radical understanding, the shortest series commences with a set of two parts"[16] (8).

An entirely different approach is taken by yet another German scholar, Christine Blättler. At the outset, she records that the German use of the term *Serie* is much less broad than that of the English *series*, which includes the German *Reihe* (503). In order to properly discuss seriality, so Blättler, its context needs to be clarified. Her central argument is derived from the distinction between the production, presentation and reception of seriality. The production of seriality can manifest itself in many different forms. In ritualistic practices, certain words and phrases, gestures and items need to be repeated in order to be effective; in art, the creation of a cluster of similar works, e.g., Monet's haystacks, can be interpreted as the attempt to capture the diversity inherent in one motif; and in industrial manufacture, a large number of quasi-identical artifacts can be made (whereby digressions are considered erroneous) (503-505). Concerning the last factor, Hartmut Winkler has called attention to the fact that seriality has become the prevalent form in the production of goods and that

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16   My translation: "radikal verstanden fängt die kleinste Serie bereits bei einer Folge von zwei Teilen an".

without the principle of seriality, industrial mass manufacturing of commodities would simply be unthinkable (38).

The presentation of seriality is independent of the production of seriality. Even certain irregular elements may appear as interrelated and correlative when they are presented as constituents of a series, as exhibitions in museums vividly demonstrate (505-506). The reception of seriality depends on which side of the various dichotomies that it brings forth it is thought to be located: Seriality may be neat and systematic or disorderly; it may appear as a whole or as a collection of pieces; it may appear continuous, even if the parts are discontinuous, or disrupted (510-512). Altogether, I consider Blättler's argument a valuable one in that it sheds light on the web of the numerous functions of seriality. It is important to identify whether a work is produced serially, presented serially or received serially. In the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe's serially produced and presented *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for instance, the work's contemporaries received it as a serialized work. A modern audience, however, receives the work as a whole, i.e., non-serially. The difficulty with Blättler's argument is that the presentation and reception aspects are hard to disentangle: If a work is presented serially, will it not almost automatically be received as such? In other words, if *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is presented as a serial, what other possibility does an audience have than to receive it serially? Blättler's definition is reminiscent of Hagedorn's approach, which declares "the production and distribution of fragmented narrative in a mass medium that is consumed at regular intervals" as an essential feature of the series (27). A final resolution of this question cannot and will not be attempted here, but the notion that various categories of seriality can be discerned will accompany us through this analysis.

It needs to be taken into consideration that most of the definitions gathered here exhibit a tendency towards the literary. Admittedly, a purely technical definition of seriality might aptly describe industrial manufacture but most likely miss the point when it comes to the subject of this analysis. While I certainly agree that continuation and refusal of closure are paramount, I also believe that some of the notions that have remained unmentioned – like the cliffhanger[17] or the series' propensity towards popular culture – need to be included in order for this working definition to be sufficiently extensive. At the same time, elements like consistency of cast are negligible as some publications clearly discernible as series feature different characters with each episode. Mindful of these observations, I attempt to offer a broad

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17   The cliffhanger is implemented to conjure suspense which is supposed to bring the recipient back to the narrative after the pause. For the cliffhanger in television, cf. Dimaggio 44-45; E. Smith 100 and K. Thompson 42-43.

definition of seriality: *Seriality denotes the continuous arrangement of similar narratives in succession which are interrupted by intrinsically productive intervals (they may offer interim resolutions, invite feedback and thus allow for interaction) and which by virtue of refusal of closure aim at potential endlessness.*

Furthermore, they often affect the reception of the preceding as well as the subsequent episode, provide a site for cliff-hangers, and make events and the largely continuous cast appear in a different light depending on the current events taking place in the extradiegetic world. In addition, each episode is intrinsically a commercial for what's to come so that seriality must be visualized as a concept that is often employed for economic reasons (Altick 259-280; Brooks 147). Hence the phenomenon's close association with popular culture.

❖ *Serial or Procedural?*

In the following I will attempt to bring light into the darkness encompassing the myriad of denominations that exist for the various forms of seriality. Sara Jones suggests the term "episodic series" for cases when "each episode is self-contained and storylines do not continue across episodes" (527). The reduced sovereignty in installments stringently results in heightened recognizability of setting and cast. Also called "procedural" by Mittell ("Narrative" 29), each episode consists of a more or less concluded narrative. It is characterized by plot closure at the end of each installment and thus "accommodate[s] an almost random presentation" (31). To describe this phenomenon, Hickethier created the *"Bonanza*-model"[18] which is typified by consistency in cast and, more importantly, interchangeability of episodes, meaning that intertextuality, recognition effect and the recovery of the initial state are constitutive ("Das Beste" 83-84). In this model, the construction of the individual episode resembles that of the 'Freytag triangle': Exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement so that the status quo is reinstalled at the end of each episode (Hickethier, 83-85; Freytag). This finds expression in the procedural's employment of the aptly-named "'monster-of-the-week'" (Mittell, "Narrative" 33), the hero's adversary who disrupts the peace at the outset of the episode and is usually defeated at the end. As its name suggests, the monster of the week's mission is to propel the installment's plot forward without impinging too much on the larger structure of the overall narrative. In episodic series like *CSI*, the monster of the week is the murderer while in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the monster of the week is just that: a monster. Good examples of the episodic/procedural format in general are

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18 My translation: "das Modell *Bonanza*".

detective series like *Sherlock Holmes*, *Nero Wolfe* or *Columbo*, all of which make use of formulas that remains largely the same throughout their run.[19]

Not quite in opposition, for the boundary between the procedural and the serial is porous, but at least in competition stands the serial. The "serial form" (S. Jones 527) employs open-endedness and ongoing storylines, best comparable to the style of the soap opera where each episode at once derives from its antecedent and determines its successor. In this case, "each instalment [sic] of a serial is part of a continuing narrative that is not concluded until the end of the series" which "prioritize[s] enigma over resolution until the concluding installment" (S. Jones 527). In accord, Hickethier's "*Saga-model*"[20] is characterized by continuity and chronological progression ("Das Beste" 85). The particular episodes are reliant on one another in that each subsequent installment builds on the previous one and that each presupposes the events of the next one. Observing this connectedness, Allen attests the procedural complexly interrelated and large character communities ("Introduction" 18) as well as forestallment of "final ideological or moral closure" due to the postponement of resolution (21). He further distinguishes two kinds of serials. First, the closed serial communicates the fact that a resolution will eventually take place from the very beginning and the conclusion is heavily promoted, like in the example of the telenovela (18/23). And second, by contrast, open serials are "predicated upon the impossibility of ultimate closure" and consequently neither work towards nor convey a potential ending (18). In a similar vein, Christine Geraghty in her article on "The Continuous Serial", labels as "serial" what Allen calls the open serial and as "series" what he terms the closed serial (11).

What has so far been called serial, is titled "novelistic" by television Ryan McGee in his online treatise that asks "Did *The Sopranos* Do More Harm than Good? HBO and the Decline of the Episode". According to McGee, the mob drama *The Sopranos* single-handedly remodeled the traditional US-American television series[21] because they set a new standard by focusing on longer story arcs and undermining the stand-alone episode. He differentiates discrete building blocks in a series, namely episodes, which contain rewards for the viewer at their respective conclusion, and installments, which are merely "equal slices of an overall story" that unfold as components in a larger entity rather than attend upon the individual episode. Under McGee's terms, it appears, season spines, i.e., narratives that permeate entire seasons, are nearly always

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19   cf. discussions of all three series in Eco "Innovation".
20   My translation: "*Saga-Modell*".
21   cf. Nussbaum's critical stance towards the often-encountered view that *The Sopranos* single-handedly "releas[ed] the latent ambition of television, and launch[ed] us all into a golden age" ("Difficult Women" 64).

a disadvantage for a series. If a producer attempts to generate cohesion between procedural episodes that surpasses consistency in cast and formula, this will only dilute the "sturdy-if-bland lather/rinse/repeat episode structure", rather than add a further dimension. While I disagree with his treatment of a new kind of series, one that accentuates longer story arcs and seasons, as a collection of installments that is devoid of pleasures and rewards unless viewed until the end, it is an interesting point he raises. It draws attention to a shift in modern television series that is clearly from the episodic towards the serial, or "novelistic".[22] He refers to the series as novelistic when it takes a "patient approach that reward[s] sustained viewing". Put differently, series not only suffer from the employment of the serial format, they are also much less likely to offer satisfaction to the viewer. I agree with Mittell that it might be difficult for a viewer to become immediately immersed in such a series, but I object to the notion that nothing is to be gained from viewing individual parts of a serial/novelistic series. I would further dispute McGee's somewhat judgmental and prescriptive attitude towards what he seems to perceive as a replacement for the television format of the past.

Yet another tactic of discussing different serial phenomena is assumed by Christine Mielke in her expansive work *Zyklisch-serielle Narration*. She makes a prominent distinction between 'cycle' and 'series'. According to her, 'cycle' refers to a chain of quasi-autonomous,[23] regularly recurring works that are contiguous as regards content. The pivotal attribute is its temporal structure, which is shaped by repetition and regularity (40). "If concluded stories that are kept together only by a frame functioning also as allocator of a specific topic are told within a frame narrative in recurring similar and regular succession, we are dealing with a cyclic narrative"[24] (46). Hence the connection between individual installments may be quite arbitrary, apart from the frame narrative, which holds everything together. It is a logical consequence that the episodes are more or less randomly exchangeable. In contrast to the cycle, the 'series' is not indissolubly invested with uniformity, its components

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22 If the metaphor that borrows from literature used by McGee was continued logically, the individual installments of this new kind of series should be called chapters rather than installments, so Mittell in his Blog reaction to McGee's article ("No").

23 Robert Petersen, who is not a seriality but a comics scholar, also makes use of the term "cyclic narratives" (16). Interestingly, his understanding of the term is also one of autonomy and independence. To him, cyclic narratives are narratives where the "individual frames do not have a causal relationship" (16). The context, however, of Petersen's "multiple-frame narratives" (16), however, is an entirely different one.

24 My translation: "Werden innerhalb einer Rahmenhandlung in immer wiederkehrend ähnlicher und regelmässiger Abfolge abgeschlossene Geschichten erzählt, die nur durch die Rahmung zusammengehalten und von dort aus auch einem bestimmten Thema beigeordnet werden, so handelt es sich um zyklisches Erzählen".

are more contingent upon each other (46) and there is a "missing temporal component"[25] (41).

Depending on the form of publication, some works are more homogeneously cyclical than others. The kind of narrative that constitutes works like *The Arabian Nights* presupposes two audiences due to its framed narrative structure: one fictional and one real. This type of work is definitely cyclical as far as the fictional recipient, who absorbs the story at the same time every day, is concerned. However, it can be serial as well when the audience who is at liberty to decide when to read and when not to, is involved (47-48). In other words, the story as such may be termed cyclical on the basis of its regular reception, but the published, material book can also be viewed as serial. This case is quite analogous to that of television series, where broadcasting at regular, predetermined moments in time accounts for reception being consistently cyclical. Of course, television series can be recorded or bought 'in bulk'; the viewer can then watch selected excerpts or the whole thing at arbitrary times with random intervals or no break at all. Thus, contrary to what Mielke asserts (cf. 49), it can be said that, regardless of seriality or cyclicity of content, reception takes place in a way that is intended, by writers, publishers and program directors, to be cyclical, but that can almost effortlessly be surpassed by individuals should they chose to.

By comparison,

> narration is serial as long as a story has not been assembled and concluded to a causal and logical whole and seems to be narratively invested with interminableness. But if content-related closure of the story is effected, the narrative corresponds to a cycle.[26]
> (47)

Due to their quasi-independence, the cycle's components allow for the transformation of the subject matter to another level (42/47). The series' pieces do not render this ascension possible as autonomy is inhibited and closure curtailed. Apart from differences in the two crucial aspects of temporality and closure, Mielke concedes that the 'cycle' and the 'series' are not mutually exclusive and that each may very well accommodate certain elements of the respective other (44).

Though Mielke argues her case convincingly,[27] her use of the term 'cycle' is a bit problematic as is imperatively suggests cyclicity, which denotes not only regularity and orderliness, but also a movement that is directed back to the outset, where it

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25 My translation: "fehlende[n] temporale[n] Komponente".
26 My translation: "Seriell ist das Erzählen, solange eine Geschichte noch nicht zu einem Ganzen kausal-logisch gefügt und beendet wurde und sie narrative auf Endlosigkeit angelegt scheint. Erfolgt ein inhaltlicher Abschluss der Geschichte, so entspricht das Erzählen jedoch einem Zyklus".
27 cf. esp. 47 and 48.

may or may not commence anew.[28] The return to the status quo upon the serial installment's conclusion also features a strong cyclical note, but this is not what Mielke means. She does not define the individual episode as cyclical – though it would lend itself very well to the description – but the narrative in its totality. As very few whole narratives return, as a matter of fact, to their point of origin, the heavy overtone of the term 'cycle' is somewhat misleading.

I hope to have shown that there appears to be somewhat of a consensus that series consisting of self-sufficient installments whose order can be reshuffled should be categorized as *episodic* or *procedural* whereas series based upon installments that are determined by one another and whose cross-episode developments require stability with regard to order should be grouped as *serial*.

❖ *The Flexi-Narrative*

Each serial installment faces the dilemma of communicating with the lay and the experienced audience at once. The individual episode risks both, the lay reader's amazement about unexplained hostilities and mysterious affections as well as the veteran audience's bewilderment about the characters' propensity to recapitulate their personal history again and again (Packard, "Homerische Intentionen" 170). It has already been mentioned that episodic or procedural and serial forms of narratives may not always be clearly distinct. In fact, some of the most successful recent television series make use of a model that finds a sort of middle ground between a series of self-contained episodes and one whose teleological momentum is aimed, if at all, towards potential infinity.

The idiosyncratic combination of independent and on-going storylines has been labeled "flexi-narrative" (24) by Robin Nelson in her monograph titled *TV Drama in Transition*. According to her, this hybrid form offers interim closure by concluding one of the numerous narrative strands "whilst perpetually deferring the final satisfaction of ultimate closure overall" (23). By simultaneously bringing the smaller story arc of the episode to an end and maintaining the overall story involving the regular characters, the flexi-narrative "avoids deterring those potential viewers who may not watch a serial if they sense they might have lost out on something crucial to understanding by missing the previous episode" (34). Comic book editor Dennis O'Neil has called the method of having several subplots run parallel and promoting the next one once one has come to a conclusion "the Levitz-paradigm", after Paul Levitz, the writer and editor who promoted this technique already in the 1970s (100f.).

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28   cf. Berns 12.

In addition, the flexi-narrative allows for more nuanced character development, narratological flexibility and sophisticated stories than what has been labeled as episodic series, procedural, Bonanza-model, cycle or closed narrative.

What Nelson calls the flexi-narrative is identified as "narrative complexity" by Mittell ("Narrative" 29). The term describes exactly the same phenomenon, namely the reconception of series as a combination of episodic/procedural installments and serial ones instead of the traditional distinction between the two (29f.). Narratively complex series typically feature episodic storylines alongside multi-episode arcs (32). The greatest appeal of the format that has developed during the last twenty-five years is nearly self-evident: While maximizing the pleasure of the regular viewer who appreciates the continuance of plot and recognizability of the habitual cast, it remains attractive to the occasional recipient who seeks short-term satisfaction within the individual episode but does not plan on viewing the series on a regular basis. The "intricate and sophisticated layers of plot and subplot narrative levels which gradually enhance character and narrative density beyond the scope of the single 'closed narrative'" create the "multi-dimensional narrative structure" of the flexi-narrative (Creeber 15). Hickethier, too, sees the double-structure of self-contained as well as contingent episodes as one of the modern series' defining elements ("Das Beste" 89).

The flexi-narrative is mainly found on television. Its storylines move at variable speeds. Typically, the self-contained narrative that will end within the episode progresses briskly, events stretching over several installments proceed slightly slower and long plotlines are propelled forward only a little bit each time they emerge (K. Thompson 63). But the flexi-narrative also finds employment in other contemporary serialized forms like novels, comic books or films.

Mittell's view of narrative complexity focuses on the seriality of the phenomenon but also takes into account other narratological factors. Apart from defining narrative complexity as "oscillat[ing] between long-term arc storytelling and stand-alone episodes" ("Narrative" 33), Mittell further lists unconventionality (30), self-consciousness (34) and, perhaps most importantly, the double pleasure derived from observing the "operational aesthetic" (35) inherent in such series. The audience simultaneously enjoys the diegetic world *and* the dexterity with which it was constructed. This clearly smacks of Eco's "'smart' addressee" ("Innovation" 175), even though Mittell does not offer the connection. In "Innovation and Repetition", Eco argues that each serial text presupposes a "double Model Reader" (174) consisting of a naïve and a smart recipient. The naïve and the smart reader both thrill at the story being related but the smart reader only also marvels at and appreciates the manner

in which the story is being told (174-175). Whereas Eco maintains that the double model reader is constructed by the *serialized* text insofar as the naïve recipient falls victim to the author's strategies of making the audience believe that each episode is different and the smart reader enjoys the tactics that bring forth the naïve reader (174), Mittell merely focuses on the complexity of the narrative that produces twofold delight, but which may or may not be serialized. In fact, he uses several examples of non-serial storytelling (cf. Mittell, "Narrative" 31).

The term 'flexi-narrative' has neither made a lasting impression on seriality scholars nor has it established a permanent place in the vocabulary usually employed to converse about series since Nelson's work was published in 1997. Generally, the narratively complex story's double-structure seems to simply be taken for granted nowadays. I propose to follow Mittell and to use the term *episodic* for any installment or series of installments that is characterized by its autonomy and the term *serial* for any installment or series of installments that is recognizable by its dependence on its predecessors and successors. Now, even though Nelson's term of the flexi-narrative has not, to date, found secure footing in academic discourses on seriality, I will nonetheless promote this term due to its descriptive nature which appears nearly intuitive. Thus, serial narratives in which ultimate closure is refused, but interim resolution warrants temporary satisfaction to an indeterminately tantalized audience will be called flexi-narratives.

2.2. The US-American Comic Book

While many comics theoreticians feel the compulsion to justify comics as their object of investigation, I will take the stance that comics are not in need of any such vindication. The incessant quest to gain approval for a medium that has recently entered its second century of existence seems especially superfluous considering its persistent popularity and still increasing appeal to academic interest. Ole Frahm attributes this need for justification to the attacks the comics medium has been object to ever since it came into existence (201), while Dietrich Grünewald claims that the major handicap of comics is their having been perceived as a mass medium from the very outset (79). What began with the readership's disunited views on newspaper comic strips in 1895 – the date of the first-published comic strip *The Yellow Kid* by Richard F. Outcault – climaxed with Frederic Wertham's 1955 diatribe on the detrimental effects of comics – such as their being a hindrance to a child's literacy (89), their creation of "an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit" (118) and their contribution to juvenile delinquency (148) – and the subsequent implementation of the Comics Code

Authority, which is the self-censorship adopted by the besieged comic book publishers (Walker, *The Comics before 1945* 78f.). Packard correctly observes that "it seems as though the intention to enhance the status of comics through the inclusion of established works of the fine arts prevails (as does the intention to valorize comics research)"[29] (68). As a result, there is hardly a comprehensive work on comics that does not attempt to promote comics as a descendant of cave paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphics or medieval illustrated manuscripts.[30] I believe that the existence of genealogical associations is not an absolute necessity for an informed comics science. Much rather, comics can benefit from the

> change of heart in literary studies, especially from their reorientation concerning domains of cultural studies, which have gained momentum in the last decades and in whose trajectory media of popular culture, like comics, have become of increased interest for intermedially and interdisciplinarily invested analyses[31].
> (Stein/Ditschke/Kroucheva, "Birth of a Notion" 8)

This reorientation is also acknowledged by Tof Eklund (212), Nicole Mahne (44), Martin Schüwer (1 ff.) and Stephanie Hoppeler, Lukas Etter and Gabriele Rippl (54). Although progress has moved excruciatingly slowly for decades, comics are now not only enjoying increasing interest but also increased respect. While many scholars and theorists are still reluctant to involve comics in literary discourse, I feel that comics can be argued to have by now securely established themselves as a legitimate object of academic concern which is no longer reliant on scholarly justification.

As with many a well-known phenomenon, most people have a more or less clear idea of what comics entail, like sequential images or the combination of text and image.[32] Yet laying down the parameters of definition proves exponentially more

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29 My translation: "[H]ier scheint häufig die Absicht eine Rolle zu spielen, Comics durch die Einbeziehung etablierter Werke der bildenden Kunst [...] aufzuwerten (und damit freilich auch die Forschung über Comics zu nobilitieren)".

30 For example Knigge; Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip* and *The History*; McCloud, *Understanding* 10ff.; Platthaus 15; Sabin, *Comics* 1, 9 and 13ff.; Walker, *The Comics before 1945* 6ff.; Wolk 29; only to name a few. As a matter of fact, not only comics scholars exhibit this tendency. It can also be observed in those interested in the mechanisms of serials, as Hayward points out: "[I]t is both sad and fascinating to see just how often apologists for mass serials in many media invoke the holy ghost of Dickens in order to acquire a bit of respectability by association" (87).

31 My translation: "Sinneswandel in der Literaturwissenschaft, insbesondere von ihrer kulturwissenschaftlichen Neuorientierung, die in den letzten Jahrzehnten an Fahrt gewonnen hat und im Zuge derer populärkulturelle Medien wie Comics von gesteigertem Interesse für intermedial und interdisziplinär angelegte Untersuchungen geworden ist".

32 The notion of hybridity in comics is not confined to the medium's constitution. Comics' mongrel status has also been identified in the discrepancy between package and content, i.e., the conflict that arises from the crossover of juvenile content (superheroes) with adult overtones (mature themes) (cf. Hatfield 8, and Sabin, *Comics* 160) as well as in the attitudes towards comics, which range(d) from nostalgic, sentimental transfiguration to cautious acceptance (bearing hope that comics were, at worst, hearty entertainment, and, at best, educationally valuable) to downright

difficult. I understand the term 'comics' as descriptive of a number of things, amongst them comic books and graphic novels. These vary not only with respect to the way they are conceived and produced, but also with respect to the way they are received and consumed. Pascal Lefèvre pointed out that format "influences the total concept of [a] comic", that it can "stimulate different manners of consuming" (98). Hence comic books and graphic novels are not merely differently packaged units but also diverge on levels other than format as well.

Before delving into the fascinating and little-known history of the US-American comic book and its sibling, the graphic novel, there will be a section treating the most influential works on comics. It does so employing a pronounced spotlight on the comic book.

❖ *Current State of Research*

One of the characteristics of comics scholarship is that both popular and academic inputs have been created to comment on primary sources. It is important to note that, while most publications related to comics studies have been written by academic scholars, a sizeable number of works by popular scholars, i.e., authors without the respective university training, have also been made available. It is often the case that popular scholars are first and foremost comics writers and/or artists and, thus, have the advantage of being experts in the field of comics production. At the same time, there are shortcomings to this approach. Sometimes, works by popular scholars like Will Eisner, Scott McCloud or Robert C. Harvey show a distinct lack of critical distance and/or negligent deployment of critical terminology.[33] However, since their expertise is not so much based the scholarly debate surrounding comics as on the production process, their works are of equal value to an outline of the debate surrounding comics.

Works about comics have been published in various countries and numerous languages. It would be impossible as well as futile to endeavor a charting of all traditions. Therefore, I will largely restrict myself to publications from the most prolific traditions in the field, namely those from US-America, the UK, Germany, Belgium and France. The

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rejection based on the assumption that comics were a product of vulgar, sensationalist capitalism (cf. Sabin, *Comics* 78). Furthermore, comics are hybrid in that they are mostly products of collaborative efforts, i.e., the creative team in most mainstream comics usually consists of the writer, artist, inker, penciller and editor.

33 e.g., McCloud's use of the term "icon" to denote "ANY IMAGE USED TO REPRESENT A A [sic] PERSON, PLACE, THING OR IDEA" (*Understanding* 27/2), does not correspond to any definition of the expression used in scholarly semiotics. Similarly, his deliberate circumvention of the term "symbol" ("A BIT TOO LOADED FOR ME", 27/3) is a practice that aggravates attempts to integrate his work into one line with the works of academic scholars.

first surge of comics research followed the flourishing of comic books in the 1930s. Reflecting the popular body of thought of comics as a threat to textual literacy in children, school curricula and 'true' art, the initial output of theory was inherently political in topic and polemical in mode, but "they reflect the first kindling of academic interest in comic art" (Hatfield 34).[34] Apart from publications denouncing comics as a detriment to culture, literacy and virtue, there were a few solitary works that stood out from the crowd. Martin Sheridan's *Comics and Their Creators* (1942) focuses entirely on comics strips and opts for an author-oriented approach while Coulton Waugh's *The Comics* (1947) takes into account comic books and chooses a contextual approach. Among the first seminal academic monographs on comics is David Kunzle's 1973 *The Early Comic Strip*, which defines comics by the use of sequences of separate images (2ff.). Kunzle's volume triggered many debates as to whether it were primarily sequential images or the combination of text and image that defined comics. The 1970s also saw a slackening in the vilification of comics so that the ensuing shift in the overall attitude towards comics resulted in cautious enthusiasm. Consequently, the growing awareness that comics possessed potential as a tool for instruction was increasingly mirrored in the upsurge of educational comics for the classroom and as a means to narrate stories that did not lag behind traditional literature in originality, subtlety and sophistication (Hatfield 35).

In 1985, comic book writer and artist Eisner published *Comics and Sequential Art*, a seminal work due to its innovative approach to a poetics of comics.[35] Despite its somewhat unsystematic style, it is a pioneer work on which many later works are based. It managed to gradually convince people of the serious aesthetic nature of comics, a notion that was further cemented by the publication of sophisticated graphic novels like Miller's *TDKR* and Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1986 and Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen* in 1986/1987. As far as complexity and innovation of attitude were concerned, these works raised the bar for all works that were to follow. In conjunction with similarly ambitious works that were created in the 1980s and 1990s in the wake of these 'Big Three', they constitute the basis for a new comics science devoted to the scrutiny of the manner and the topics in which these they operated.

Contrary to Frahm's claim that "[a] comics science does not exist"[36] (201), a substantial number of academic publications on comics have been poured onto the market in the last decades. 1991 was the year that saw the publication of Benoît

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34 For details on early comics theory, see Lent, Nyberg, Petersen and Sabin, *Comics.*
35 Eisner published two more works with a similar stance in 1996 (*Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*) and 2005 (*Expressive Anatomy for Comics and Narrative*).
36 My translation: "Eine Comicwissenschaft existiert nicht".

Peeters's *Case Planche Récit*, a work that initiated scholarly discussion centering around the sequentiality and immediacy of the comics page, albeit almost exclusively in French-speaking academia.[37] Despite his Belgian background, Peeters did not restrict his primary sources to the Bande Dessinée, but examined the interaction between the entire page and the individual panel in US-American and British comics as well.[38]

While there is disagreement on almost every other aspect of comics, most scholars agree that the most ground-breaking and widely-received work on comics was published in 1993: McCloud's *Understanding Comics* helped to shape not only Comics Studies as an academic field, but also recipients' perceptions of comics. He is often given credit for being the first to have observed that comics are not a genre but a medium (Klinger 12).[39] In the history of comics, it was one of the first modern non-fiction works that considerably spurred the expansion of the genre. Tof Eklund notes:

> Written entirely as a comic book, McCloud's *Understanding Comics* is something of a sea-change. It takes Eisner's definition of comics as 'sequential art' and founds a theory on that definition, making the 'gutter' or space between panels the single most important element in any comic.
> (210)

Subtitled *The Invisible Art*, it was the first publication to claim that the recipients' participation, i.e., their ability to bridge the gap between two static panels, or what McCloud calls "*CLOSURE*" (63/1), was the foundation for a successful reading of comics. Furthermore, McCloud is most often cited when the topic is panel transition, for he has compiled a list of six different methods in which panels can be bridged (74ff.).

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37 Generally, nearly all French texts experienced difficulty being popularly received in North America (Schüwer 16).
38 Peeters's theory of page arrangement and the interdependence between layout and plot is subject to discussion in 3.1.3.
39 I very much agree with McCloud on this point. As pertains the definition of the term 'medium', I follow Irina Rajewsky (*Intermedialität* 7 and "Intermediality" 52) and Werner Wolf (e.g., "Intermedialität" 164f.) who describe it as a means of communication or expression that a) employs one or several channels for the sending and receiving of messages and b) does so by using one or more semiotic systems. Their characterization allows for the essentially *hybrid* medium of comics (cf. Cuccolini; Harvey, "Aesthetics", *The Art of the Comic Book* and *The Art of the Funnies*; Horn; McCloud, *Understanding*) to still be understood as an independent medium. Both Rajewsky (*Intermedialität* 15) and Wolf ("Intermedialität" 164) underline the fact that a medium that is effectively constituted by two or more media can, and in most cases will, modify its status to that of a self-contained medium. As a result, finding a medium that does not coexist with another medium can be challenging: Novels not seldomly contain pictures (e.g., Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* 155, 198, etc.), television shows and movies almost always include sound, audio books feature illustrated covers, songs often consist of music and text, theater performances may include music or a television set, etc. The bottom line is that what Rippl calls "media purism" (34) is not a concept that is likely to yield the best possible results in intermediality studies. Rather, media – be they originally 'pure' or hybrid in form – complement each other, for every medium has its proficiencies and impotencies. W. J. T. Mitchell takes this to its logical extreme when he states that "all media are mixed media" (95).

Also in 1993, Sabin's *Adult Comics,* was published. It examines the origins of "comic[s] with a mature bent" (3), thus further contributing to the extensive dissemination of comics to grown-ups. Harvey, like Eisner and McCloud, is not an academic but a professional creator of comics. In his two books *The Art of the Funnies* (1994) and *The Art of the Comic Book* (1996) he focuses on the aesthetic history of the comic strip and the comic book respectively, but, unfortunately, largely neglects the influence of alternative comics on the mainstream productions he discusses.

Towards the end of the century, another work was released in French: Thierry Groensteen's *Système de la Bande Déssinée* (1999) mainly explores questions of narration and the artistic interplay between verbal and visual art. His work is all the more valuable for the various expressions he has coined, like the spatio-topical system, which is the arrangement of the panel on the page, or the concept of arthrology, i.e., how the individual elements on the comics page accrue meaning based on the way they are related.

The turn of the century and the first years of the twenty-first century "witnessed a redoubling of the volume and the scope of Comics Studies" (Eklund 211). Hatfield's *Alternative Comics* (2005) ponders one of the products of the underground movement: alternative comics. It is an extremely well-written account of the influence the countercultural products had on mainstream comics. It argues that alternative comics have been neglected in most comic book histories and seeks to adjust this imbalance. He also introduces the distinction between long-form and short-form comics and in his last chapter provides interesting observations on the serialization of the graphic novel. Sabin's *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels* (2006) contains a comprehensive history of underground comics, so-called comix.[40] It begins with its early predecessors, the Tijuana Bibles of the 1920s, progresses to the comix boom that lasted from 1968 to 1975 and concludes with the revival of alternative comics and their coming of age as of the 1980s. In 2008 Schüwer published his comprehensive dissertation *Wie Comics erzählen,* in which he probes deeply into narratology and very systematically addresses issues of language and writing, motion, space, body and time. Not as comprehensive and at times repetitive is Jakob F. Dittmar's 2008 *Comic-Analyse.* What makes his work worthwhile, however, is his convincing argumentation that currents and trends in society are reflected in the comics of the respective time (51). *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels* by Petersen (2011) is, apart from a few minor inconsistencies, exactly what its subtitle *A History*

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40 Other monographs that mull over comix include Joseph Witek's *Comic Books as History* (1988); Patrick Rosencranz's *Rebel Visions* (2002) and Roger Sabin's *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels* (2006).

of Graphic Narratives promises: A very comprehensive and highly recommendable account of the various manifestations of the graphic narrative across time and cultures.[41]

Most of these works concentrate on comics as a medium. The ones that treat the sub-category of comic books exclusively are far and few between. Of these, some condense their focal point to e.g., Batman[42] or Sandman.[43] But some do attempt to pin down the comic book in its generality. Of these, Richard Reynold's *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (1994) is not only one of the earliest but also, perhaps, the most informative. His model of the superhero as myth is as convincing as it is current. *Comic Book Culture* by Matthew Pustz (1999) is a formidable overview of the practices of a highly specialized culture that is often derided. Its depiction of fans' customs of reception, collection and even production thrives from an exceptional inside point of view. Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation* (2001) is a useful and exhaustive synopsis of comic books' cultural history, tracing the ups and downs of the comic book from the 1930s until today. *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* by Geoff Klock (2002) attempts a new reading of the comic book era that followed the Silver Age. It is his declared goal to forego the terms usually employed to describe that "third movement" (2). The result is a pronounced focus on the works usually referred to as revisionist. Stephen Krensky reflects on the ways in which comic books have shaped US-American (pop) culture in his rather descriptive *Comic Book Century* (2008). Roz Kaveney's work *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders in Comics and Films* (2008) straddles the middle ground between scholarly and popular scholarship. It is critical in its analysis yet it tends to lose itself in descriptive passages of primary sources, in which – it has to be conceded – the author is impressively erudite. As pertains early comic books, Greg Sadowski's introduction to *Supermen! The First Wave of Comic Book Heroes 1936-1941* (2009) is enormously helpful.

Further proof that Comics Studies are expanding is the National Association of Comics Art Educators (NACAE), which was established by the cartoonist James Sturm in 2002 and which endorses the launch of comics programs in schools and universities, as well as the quickly growing libraries of some universities[44] and the

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41 cf. my review of this monograph in the review section of the website of the comics research society ComFor.

42 e.g., Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, *The Many Lives of Batman*, 1991 or Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked*, 2005 and *Hunting the Dark Knight*, 2012.

43 e.g., Bender/Gaiman, *The Sandman Companion*, 1999; Joe Sanders, ed., *The Sandman Papers*, 2006; the special issue of *ImageTexT* on Gaiman, edited by Philip Sandifer and Tof Eklund, 2004 or Klinger, *The Annotated Sandman*, 2011.

44 e.g., Michigan State University, Bowling Green State University, Ohio and the University of California, Riverside.

introduction of Master courses or doctoral programmes in Comics Studies at others.[45] Finally, a myriad of conferences on the topic of comics, e.g., the *Comic-Con International* in San Diego, first held in 1970, the *Comics Arts Conference* in San Diego, first held in 1992 and the *Conference on Comics and Graphic Novels* in Gainesville, Florida, first held in 2002 assemble professionals, scholars and critics of the comics medium. Thus, "both in the university and beyond, Comics Studies has developed, often despite prejudice and in unexpected ways, and shows every sign of continuing to do so" (Eklund 212).

2.2.1. Comic Books and Graphic Novels: A Definition

The precursors of comic books and graphic novels are comic strips. In 1895, the US-American artist Richard F. Outcault sold his contribution, the "Yellow Kid"[46] to Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* (Walker, *The Comics since 1945* 7). The regularly appearing strip set the standards for the scores of other strips that in consequence mushroomed around the turn of the century in newspapers. Since then, the comic strip – for obvious reasons also called newspaper strip – has not drastically altered its shape: It is a syndicated feature in daily or weekly newspapers that typically consists of one or more panels. It is usually humorous in nature,[47] features a largely continuous cast and is – by nature of newspapers' target group, directed at a mainly adult audience. As space in newspapers is limited and costly, producers of comic strips are required to adhere to the rigidly structured weekday (usually three to four panels) or Sunday strip formats (up to twelve panels) (Watterson 14). What is more, in comic strip conception, writer and artist are usually one and the same person, who is called the "cartoonist" (as opposed to the comics writer or comics artist). Cartoonists are mostly employed by one of the many syndicates[48] who then sell the strip to newspapers. Due to the cornucopia of comic strips produced, the inflexibility of daily deadlines and the fact that newspapers are willing to swap strips at the whim of their recipients, the comic strip industry is characterized by a high level of labor turnover, with the exception of the most popular strips like *Blondie* or *Peanuts*, which have enjoyed a fixed spot for decades (Watterson 6).

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45 e.g., University of Dundee, Scotland and University of Florida.
46 So-called for the newspapers' incipient use of colors – yellow for the kid's nightshirt – and the publication's proximity to 'yellow journalism', the label given to the sort of sensational newspaper that printed Outcault's creations.
47 Interestingly, some of the critically most highly acclaimed comic strips were not or only partially committed to humor, e.g., Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* or George Herriman's *Krazy Kat.*
48 e.g., King Features, United Media, Universal Press, Tribune Media Services, Creators, etc.

The denomination "comic book" is a misnomer since a comic book is not a book at all,[49] but a low-cost magazine printed on comparably inexpensive paper: "[C]omic books aren't made to last" (Shaviro 3-4). Formally, comic books are entirely dissimilar from comic strips. They are thin magazines, usually sized approximately 17.5 x 26 cm[50] and habitually consist of ca. 24 pages. Commonly, they are distributed in specialty stores or newsstands, but most comic books are sold via subscription. Very generally, and this is important for the distinction between comics and comic books, it is "not just any publication consisting mostly of comics, but specifically the standard-format comics magazine as developed for the US-newsstand market in the early 1930s and formularized by the early 1940s" (Hatfield 8). Content-wise, if a comic book follows more than one story, it comprises installments of several narratives, most of which are continuous, that is to say, serially published.

Comic books rose out of the convergence of a flourishing popular fiction market on the one hand, and of the custom to collect newspapers comic strip reprints in books, on the other (Petersen 133). They were originally intended as promotional gifts for the workers of non-entertainment industries (oil companies, shoe, milk, magnesia manufacturers, etc.). In fact, the very first standard-sized comic book, *Funnies on Parade*, published by Eastern Color Printing in 1933, was distributed by soap manufacturer Procter and Gamble (Wright 3; Sadowski 186). It was a compilation of previously published comic strips, quizzes and jokes which had attained the later-to-become default format "by shrinking a full-page tabloid strip fifty precent [sic] and by binding together tabloid-sized sheets folded in half" (186). The entrepreneurial genius behind this idea was Max M. C. Gaines, who, seeing that the giveaways were highly popular, also came up with the suggestion to sell them on newsstands (Levitz, *75 Years* 10). Their immense success, mainly due to wide distribution resulting from handing-down[51] and from inexpensive costs – the first non-complementary comic books were sold at 10 cents apiece (Levitz, "Introduction" ix) – made these publications' potential commercial value apparent (Gordon 130).

Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, the founder of National Allied Publications which was to become DC Comics, pioneered *New Fun* in February 1935. It was the very first comic book containing original material only (Petersen 139-140) and also the first one

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49 Klinger defines the comic book as "a comic in book form" (11), which is incorrect.
50 These idiosyncratic dimensions are derived from the tabloid format of which they constitute 50%.
51 In the 1940s, publishers estimated that each comic book passed through five pairs of hands before it ended on the waste paper pile or, less frequently, in a collection (Wright 31). This is a near-complete continuation of the rush on penny dreadfuls in the nineteenth century, which were also passed on amongst friends and families (K. Carpenter 9).

to carry advertising (Wright 17). By 1936, comic book-formatting had been standardized and all-new material was being invested in. By increment, original comic books began to replace collections of recycled strips (Sadowski 18; Levitz, *75 Years* 15).

Regarding content, a shift occurred in the late 1930s from humor and satire to the adventures and mysteries of the likes of Dr. Mystic,[52] the Flame or Marvelo (Klinger 12). In March 1937, the title *Detective Comics* further paved the way for today's comic books in that it introduced the first all-new comic book focused on one particular topic (Cowsill et al. 17).

Keeping in mind that comic books became popular during the last years of the Great Depression, it is not surprising that comic book manufacturers placed the emphasis on quantity, rather than quality of output in order to achieve the highest possible revenue. In order to accomplish rapid production and wide distribution, the work done in the creative studios, so called 'sweatshops' in which most early comic books were manufactured, was performed collaboratively. Eisner, who ran one such shop in the late 1930s, said: "I would write and design the characters, somebody else would pencil them in, somebody else would ink, somebody else would letter" (Gold/Yronwode 76). The ensuing assembly-line production quickly became the routine and has, to a great extent, remained the standard form of production in the industry until today. The goal of these sweatshops was not the creation of works fraught with novelty or originality, but the furnishing of new material for the insatiable press. The massive popularization of the comic book, it follows, led to "the stultification of the form as a mode of personal expression" (Arnold 13).

Petersen summarizes that "artists could keep their jobs so long as they could keep up with the huge volume of work" (140). In conjunction with the lack of copyright, the comparatively meagre recompense and time pressure, artists were hardly given a chance to develop genuinely original material, that is, to study live models or do research (Petersen 140; Wright 40). Correspondingly, writers and artists were employed according to availability, not prowess, and storylines were recycled rather than innovatively contrived.[53] Cawelti speaks of the "literary formula" (5)[54] which

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52 This title related the adventures of an enigmatic detective, whose ally Zator was "comic books's first flying caped figure". Intriguingly, he was "the earliest published precursor to [Jerry] Siegel and [Joe] Shuster's 'Superman', versions of which they had been pitching to newspapers since 1933" (Sadowski 186).

53 Naturally, there are exceptions to this rule. Eisner, who occupied not only the role of writer and artist, but also that of publisher, was adamant what the quality of the comics produced under his command was concerned. For detailed history and statements by Eisner, cf. Sadowski.

54 The literary formula is subjected to scrutiny in 2.1.

provides a means for the rapid and efficient production of new works. Once
familiar with the outlines of the formula, the writer who devotes himself to
this sort of creation does not have to make as many difficult artistic decisions
as a novelist working without a formula.
(Cawelti 9)

Borrowing terminology from Cawelti and applying it to the comic book genre, Wright
proposes the term "comic book formulas" (xv), which, through the multiplication of a
narrative, allowed for a maximum of income with a minimum of variation. Thus,
comic books' mercenary status as consumer commodity and product of mass culture
was often used as one of the main arguments against them (Hatfield 9).[55] The fact
that most comic book publishers came from the pulp[56] magazine industry of the late
nineteenth and early twentieth century did not exactly antagonize these tendencies.
Hayward records that "manufacture of fiction implied – and still implies – absence of
artistic value" (Hayward 25).[57] While many a comics scholar has emphasized the
artistic and literary value of some comic books in order to validate their object of study
as worthy of academic evaluation, it needs to be conceded that, as mentioned above,
"the vast majority of comic books produced over the years has amounted to junk
culture cranked out by an anonymous creator who had little more than a paycheck on
their mind" (Wright xiv). Wright goes on to explain that

[t]o classify comic books as 'junk,' however, is not to put them down or imply
that they have nothing to say. On the contrary, their perennial lowbrow status
has allowed them to develop and thrive outside of the critical, aesthetic, and
commercial criteria expected of more 'mature' media.
(xiv)

Comic books can thus be acknowledged as a complementary rather than a clashing
or conflicting part of culture. It has already been commented on that other media,
too, have to bear the weight of those instances that are less aesthetically adept but
which usually constitute the prime percentage of output. This is true for cinema,
television and traditional literature, just to name a few. However, the tendency to
dismiss the entire array of effort made in one medium because of the main body's

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55 Already during the Victorian era, writers, illustrators, editors and publishers of serialized fiction aced a
panoply of accusations. The serial was said to exhibit a deficiency when it came to artistic value and
cultural significance, to be morally objectionable in content, to thrust unwholesome knowledge upon
innocent citizens, to harbor addictive potential and the prospect of undue physical and emotional
excitement, to illegitimately challenge the boundaries between fiction and reality and, in direct relation
to this, to disrupt the previously undisturbed rhythm of everyday life through the hazard of the serial
habit (Hayward 25-38).

56   They were thus dubbed as they were printed on very cheap paper made from wood pulp (Wright 2).

57   This notion is discussed in great detail by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their work titled
Dialectic of Enlightenment on the one hand, and by Walter Benjamin in his study on *The Work of Art
in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* on the other.

penchant for certain deficiencies is more difficult to detect in the more established media.

Even though comic books were initiated as a mass medium – and, indeed, are often still referred to as such – they have continuously retreated from that realm and begun to lead more of a wallflower life. Since their halcyon days in the 1940s, they have slowly slid if not into obscurity, then at least into a realm frequented almost exclusively by confirmed comic book fans. Comic books have not been at the center of popular culture for a long time, which is due to three main reasons. Firstly, the rise of television and computers afforded alternative forms of entertainment. The second factor conducive of the relegation of comic books is the lack of appeal to new recipients.[58] One of the essential attributes of comic books is intertextuality: The vast majority of comic books are interconnected by virtue of Continuity.[59] As a result, the casual comic book recipient is the exception, while the rule is constituted by the fan-consumer, who is highly proficient in comic book literacy.[60] Pustz assesses that "[w]ithout expertise in this language, an expertise that many fans have internalized, comic books can prove to be difficult reading for the uninitiated" (115). "Literacy" and "language", to be clear, refer not only to the way comics are read in general, i.e., left to right, top to bottom, etc., but first and foremost to the "knowledge about a huge body of texts with stories, information, characters, and even genres" (124). Such knowledge allows for the deciphering of intertextual references, which are ubiquitous in comic books.

The third reason resides in the public campaigns for comic book censorship in the late 1940s and 1950s and the subsequent surrender of comic book publishers to the suppressive Comics Code of 1954, which was the equivalent of an affirmation that comic books were indeed unsafe entertainment and necessitated monitoring (Hatfield 11). Despite the following rickety but continuous shift of comic books from mass culture product to "niche medium" (11), the stigma attached to comic books has scarcely diminished. Also the fact that comic books are serially published in weekly or monthly installments accounts for the frequently formulaic structure (repetitive elements, iterative narration, cliffhangers, etc.) often perceived as a negative trait.[61] It has to be specified that the reception of comic books as described above is largely characteristic for Great Britain and the United States. Serially

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58 I call this the 'exclusivity of comic book fandom' and discuss it subsequently as part of 4.3.
59 This is the focus of chapters 4 and 5.
60 cf. 4.4.
61 Early serialized works by e.g., Dickens or Trollope have also been criticized in this vein: lack of artistic value, distribution of unwholesome knowledge, disturbance of everyday life, addictive potential and detrimental effects on the recipient in general (Hayward 25-38).

published comics units have a different production and reception history in Europe and in Japan.[62]

Content-wise, it is the superhero genre that is not only authoritative and profitable, but also the longest-lasting in contemporary US-American comic books. Despite there being a larger radius of topics than in comic strips which are chiefly humorous, comic books dedicated to Superman and his ilk tend to attract the better part of recipients. It makes for an interesting observation that the superhero genre is the most lucrative one in the comic book business. Leaving aside for a moment the notion of stories about women and men in tights as a vessel for escapist musings, one is bound to take notice of the unlikely connection of a medium characterized by the juxtaposition of *static* images with the dynamics traditionally inherent in superhero narratives. The association of the US-American comic book with superheroes has become so deeply imprinted on the collective conscience of the public that it is has become very difficult to imagine a world where comic books did not feature men and women in tights (Petersen 133). In the following, the circumstances and events responsible for this idiosyncracy inherent the comics medium will be explored.

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62   European comic books, also known as Bandes Dessinées, were first partially published in magazines, and later republished as individual stories in albums (the European quasi-equivalent of the graphic novel), which were distributed in bookstores alongside traditional novels (Sabin, *Comics* 218). As far as the reception of Bandes Dessinées is concerned, the notion of ignominy that pervades British and US-American comic books was never an issue. This is mainly due to three facts: One, they prefer a superior quality in printing techniques and paper; two, they were never conceptualized to appeal exclusively to teenagers and, thus, contained more mature storytelling from the very outset; and three, the economizing of the creative act, as often undertaken in the US-comic book market, is mostly the exception here, which is often interpreted as a sign of value and quality. While I would not go so far as Sabin, who claims that European comics "are accepted as an art form on a par with novels, movies and television" (217), they have certainly experienced greater acceptance by the general public than was granted to British and US-American comic books.
Manga, Japanese comics, have a similarly long history as European and US-American comics. Due to the prompt adoption of Chinese print technology, a vibrant popular print culture existed as early as the eighth century (Petersen 37). It was only in the 1920s, however, after Western caricature magazine had been introduced into Asia in the late nineteenth century, that the Japanese commenced the production of newspaper comics and graphic narratives geared towards younger readers (126-129). Today, manga are produced in much the same fashion as US-American comic books, although there are some minor differences, which are of no relevance here, apart from the fact that they, like their European cousin, are sold in bookstores rather than newsstands. The reason for which manga have been, and still are, so enormously successful is that their scope of topic is exceptionally plentiful. They treat not only science fiction, but range "from splatter horror to mah-jong; surreal comedy to wok cookery; and martial arts to art appreciation" (Sabin, *Comics* 228).

❖ *A Brief History of the Comic Book*[63]

In the opening decade of the twentieth century, the Baroness Emmuska Orczy formulated a concept by creating the very first crime-fighting hero with a secret identity: The ostensibly dull Percy Blakeney lived through daring adventures as the Scarlet Pimpernel. All later disguised vigilantes were to be, deliberately or not, modeled after this early example. The 1930s were the years of the Great Depression in North America and it appears that means of escaping one's bleak circumstances, even if only for a while, were readily embraced. Accordingly, science fiction in pulp novels and film was in high demand, as illustrated by the surprise hit of 1933, *King Kong*, by directors Merian C. Cooper und Ernest B. Schoedsack.

The incipient superhero craze of the late 1930s – often referred to as the Golden Age of comic books – was instigated by teenagers Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who sold their creation Superman to National Allied Publications (later to become DC Comics)[64] in 1938.[65] Their concept of the Über-Mensch was, for all its innovative aptitude, not a new phenomenon. The pulp magazines of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s had brought forth a number of characters like Tarzan, the Phantom and Doc Savage who – popularized through the media channels of magazines, radio and film – functioned as prototypes of the new superheroes (Petersen 134). The adolescent readership immediately embraced the Man of Steel. The rawness of the drawings distanced it from the adult world and the superhero's disguise as the embodiment of clumsy incompetence allowed for self-recognition (141). Besides, the element of escapism, which has already been touched upon, must have been an important factor playing into the popularity of superhero fiction for young adults. As a result, Superman was given his own comic book in May 1939. He was the first character to receive such an exclusive platform. Sales soared and more or less well disguised clones of Superman began to populate other publishers' comic books (Wright 9). Characters like Batman (*Detective Comics* #27, May 1939) and Wonder Woman (*All Star Comics* #8, December-January 1941) also came to share the comic book stage.

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63 I will here refrain from outlining the history of comics, which – depending on whom one want to give credence – goes back to the seventeenth century, the Middle Ages or the ancient Egyptians. For a most comprehensive account of US-American and British comics' history, cf. Petersen; Sabin, *Comics*; and B. Walker, *The Comics before 1945* and *The Comics since 1945*.

64 The history of DC Comics is as intricate as that of its publications. Fron National Allied Publication, National Comics and National Periodical Publications, it eventually became DC Comics. Although the DC logo had been on the cover for years and the company had been referred to as DC for a long time, it was only in 1977 that DC became the official name for the company (Cowsill et al 172).

65 Before Superman became the archetypal superhero, he was conceptualized as a bald-headed villain who, drinking a potion that rendered him nearly invincible, appeared in "The Reign of the Super-man", Siegel's fanzine titled *Science Fiction* in 1933 (Friedell 80; G. Jones 82-120).

Typically, individual episodes of superhero comic books were procedural rather than serial and, thus, scarcely linked to other episodes or series (Jenkins, "Just Men" 20). They were connected, however, by means of their fictional worlds. As the first superhero team in comic books, the Justice Society of America launched the notion of characters' sharing a common reality in 1940 (fig. 7).[66]
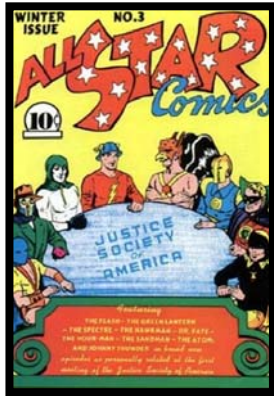
Fig. 3:
The issue that introduced the first superhero team
(*All Star Comics* #3, Winter 1940/1941).

The superheroes that were brought together as the JSA were Atom (Al Pratt), Sandman I (Wesley Dodds), the Spectre (Jim Corrigan), the Flash (Jay Garrick), Hawkman (Carter Hall), Dr. Fate (Kent Nelson), Green Lantern (Alan Scott) and Hourman (Rex Tyler).[67] The incentive to have characters pay visits to other characters' titles was mainly economic: It was speculated that the audience of *Action Comics* could be tapped into to create a bigger readership for, say, *Flash Comics*. The conjecture proved true and revenues soared.

During World War II, many a superhero fought in a representation of the war alongside the Allies and superhero comic book sales kept rising. After the War, however, with fascism defeated and the goals of peace, a recovered economy and general wealth achieved, superheroes seemed out of work and confronted with comparatively menial tasks (Wright 59; Hudsick 18). Other comic book genres like crime, horror, teen humor, jungle and romance picked up where Superman and his peers had ceased to create satisfactory revenue.[68] Especially the horror comics by EC Comics under William Gaines were notable for their gruesome and creepy comic books. The violence exhibited in some of the crime and horror titles alarmed parents, teachers and guardians of traditional culture who commenced rallying against comic books (Wright 86). The movement's unofficial spokesperson, Dr. Fredric Wertham[69]

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66   More details will follow in chapter 4.
67   From left to right in fig. 3.
68   In fact, only the triumvirate of archetypes Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman remained in print throughout the war years.
69   Wertham had earned a medical degree in 1921 and was, at various times senior psychiatrist at a New York hospital, director of the Psychiatric Clinic at Queens Hospital Center and raiser of the LaFargue Clinic in Harlem, which offered affordable psychiatric services to the lower classes (Wright

was to become the comic book industry's most abhorred character. Interestingly, Wertham's denunciation of comic books was not restricted to horror and crime comics, but, arguing that they constituted a threat to the wholesomeness of US-American culture, included the romance and funny animal genres (Petersen 161).

Why many people, with Wertham leading the way, chose to pillory comics is difficult to comprehend, especially given that there were much more grievous social issues like poverty, racism or war that would have required attention (160). What is more, "teenage crime barely increased. But male teenagers sporting black-leather motorcycle jackets, their hair slicked into 'ducktails,' aroused adult alarm" (Boyer et al. 601). Adam Gopnik may have identified part of the answer in his *New Yorker* article on how fledgling media are received pessimistically by at least a portion of society. He laconically summarizes one of the twentieth century's attitudes towards new media thus: "[W]hatever media kids favor will be identified as the cause of our stupidity" (129). Perhaps the hostilities against the comic book were rooted in the medium's novelty, rather than the actual content.

The onerous Comics Code[70] which forbade the depiction of practically everything pertaining to daily life was established in September 1954.[71] It followed the publication of Wertham's sensational and effectively titled *Seduction of the Innocent* and his concomitant crusade against comics as ostensible creators of "an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit" (118), as catalysts of juvenile delinquency (148) and as contributors to textual illiteracy in children (89).[72] Furthermore, Wertham and his peers[73] reviled "words that are not words" (144), i.e., onomatopoeic expressions and quasi-phonological speech[74] and dismissed the verbal component of comics as

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92-93). It was perhaps due to his extensive learning, prestigious positions and charitable treatment of the poor that his claims regarding comic books were taken as an act of social altruism. For more details on Wertham's life, cf. Wright 92ff.

70 More comprehensive accounts of the Code's history and implications, but with varying emphasis on the legitimation of either the comic book industry or its opponents, can be found in Beaty; Hajdu; Nyberg; Sabin, *Comics* and Wright.

71 For details on the Senate hearings and proceedings cf. Coville.

72 Dr. Louis Berg, a New York psychiatrist in 1942 claimed that listening to radio soap operas had similar effects, amongst them emotional distortion and gastrointestinal disorders (Allen, "Introduction" 5).

73 Author Sterling North, for instance, claimed in 1940 that comic books were "[b]adly drawn, badly written and badly printed – a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems – the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of color; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder makes the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout US-America must band together to break the 'comic' magazines" (Krensky 27). Similarly, in 1947 novelist Marya Mannes assessed comic books as representing an addiction, "the absence of thought" and "the greatest intellectual narcotic on the market" (20).

74 Ironically, it was one of the critically most acclaimed works – George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* was consumed by Gertrude Stein, e. e. Cummings and T. S. Eliot – that made use of a playful vernacular. Its popularity among the modernists was at least partially due to their fascination with the volatility

negligible on account that the teenage recipients paid no heed to them but focused entirely on the pictorial element (Hatfield 34).[75] On another front, Wertham claimed that comic books lacked verisimilitude (because superheroes defied the laws of gravity) and that they were utterly devoid of artistic value (drawings, printing technique and colors all were supposedly substandard) (Petersen 161). These claims of Wertham's – imbued in a conspiracy rhetoric reminiscent of the tone often employed in the Cold War scare – were corroborated by avowedly appalling illustrations taken, out of context, from undisclosed comic books (Wright 95/162). "By singling out comic books as the greatest among many contributing factors to juvenile delinquency, Wertham offered parents a highly visible scapegoat to explain what adults regarded as disturbing changes in youth behavior" (96) even though statistics did not sustain the pervasive claims that teenager delinquency was on the rise (Petersen 160; Wright 88). As more than ninety percent of the US-American youth read comic books, it was not surprising that juvenile delinquents were consumers of comic books. What Wertham could not account for, were the millions of adolescents whose behavior was irreproachable (96).

His long-lasting crusade culminated in the Senate committee hearings[76] from April to June 1954 and the subsequent formation of the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) by the besieged comic book publishers. The CMAA devised the Comics Code, which was implemented by the Comics Code Authority (CCA) as an instrument of self-censorship[77] *before* the Senate Subcommittee published its findings[78] on comic books' influence (Wright 171-174). This was tantamount to the desperate attempt to circumvent government censorship (Nyberg 83f.) and to signal a societal sense of responsibility. Interestingly, it was ultimately industry surrender,

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and idiosyncrasy of language, which can also be observed in modernist works like *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce and *Tender Buttons* by Stein.

75 A further constituent of the controversy around comic books was the realization that images, when exploited by sinister forces had the capacity to do substantial harm, as Nazi propaganda had shown (Wright 87).

76 The details of the Senate committee hearings titled *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency* can be viewed online (Coville). For a full account of the Code's rules, see the appendix in Park. Further information on Wertham and his publications was recently made available by the Library of Congress and are published on the website of the *German Society for Comics Studies (ComFor)*.

77 Quasi-self-censorship, albeit on an entirely different level, had already been undertaken in 1941, when National Periodical Publications (later to become DC Comics) established an Editorial Advisory Board consisting of teachers, pedagogues and Boy Scout leaders. The Board's formation may have been proposed to ensure moral wholesomeness in comic books, but it was certainly also intended to enhance the publisher's image (Wright 34). Later, in 1948, when the controversy around comic books had further developed, a dozen publishers reluctantly formed the Association of Comic Magazine Publishers (ACMP). It was modeled after Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code and assigned seals of approval only to those comic books that met the highly restrictive conditions (Wright 103). For several reasons, the precursor to the Comics Code of 1954 became increasingly meaningless to the point where it was evidently defunct in 1950 (Wright 104).

78 These were announced in February 1955, well after the implementation of the Code, and proved to be far more tentative than anticipated (Wright 174).

not official measure that wreaked havoc with the comics business (McCloud, *Reinventing* 92). In fact, ruling out certain elements or genres would have signified an infringement of the US-Constitution's first amendment which proclaims freedom of speech and freedom of press.[79] Congress was thus hobbled but most comic publishers felt that the creation and consent to the Code might win them the public's favor (86f.). In a notable twist of fate, what Wertham had tried to avoid, namely the censorship of individual genres was implemented in place of the more drastic suggestion that he had aimed for: that of prohibiting the vending of all comics, irrespective of their romantic, funny or gruesome content, to anyone under sixteen (Petersen 161).

Henceforth, comic books needed to wear the seal of the Comics Code Authority (fig. 4) on the cover in order to be published in the mainstream industry and to be considered at least rudimentarily acceptable.

Fig. 4:
The CCA's seal of approval (Cowsill et al. 74).

Due to the Code's austere morals and subsequent embargo on anything even remotely associated with swearing, crime, sexuality, corruption, drug abuse, domestic violence, deviant behavior in general, etc., "comic books now championed without criticism US-American institutions, authority figures, and middle-class mores. The alternatives simply disappeared" (Wright 176). As fantastic fiction allowed for slightly more leeway within the confines of the oppressive Code than other genres, comic book publishers once again turned to superhero narratives, focusing on Code-approved, out-of-this-world scenarios. A result of this rather superficial approach, coupled with the fact that the Code aimed at rendering comic books readable for adolescents, was that the association of comic books with children's literature was further substantiated.

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79 With regard to the first amendment, Wertham ventured to suggest that while adults should be free to read what they chose, this liberty should not extend to reading material for children (Wright 97).

Meanwhile, the respective company-wide canons were expanded by virtue of Continuity, the comic book phenomenon that stipulated more or less complete stringency in all publications. As superheroes often crossed over into one another's titles, DC Comics's joint universe became more and more crowded, to the point where it became increasingly difficult – even for long-term consumers of comic books – to keep track.[80] To make a complicated structure even more confusing, 1956 saw the first reincarnation of a superhero. Due to insufficient sales, the Flash, also known as Jay Garrick since his inception in 1940, was rebooted to become the second Flash alias Barry Allen. Henceforth, in what is called the Silver Age of comic books, two versions of the Flash dwelled in the DC Universe. This incisive event is often hailed as the beginning of the Silver Age of comic books. Apart from various characters' reboots, it also presented the doubtful, ambivalent superhero – best personified by Marvel's Fantastic Four, the Hulk and Spider-Man.[81]

It was from this scenario that a comics subculture grew. In the 1960s, a movement developed whose aim it was to counter mainstream publications by breaking taboos and to confront the decades of the Code's ridiculous norms (Hatfield 163). 'Underground comics' or 'comix' explicitly positioned themselves outside of the Code's stipulations and did not heed its restrictive rules but subverted them vigorously. It was a "medium of personal expression and unrestrained passion" (Rosencranz 14). Robert Crumb, Harvey Kurtzman, Gilbert Shelton and others' favorite topics were drugs, sex, violence and politics, e.g., the anti-war and suffragette movement. Since mainstream publishers would not touch these works, comix writers and artists were compelled to self-publish. This did not represent a grievance as most would have been loath to have their work published in the manner of mainstream comics anyway. The advent of the photocopy machine allowed for considerably faster, better-quality and cheaper multiplying of a work and thus solved at least part of the underground's publication quandary (Petersen 210). The flourishing hippie sub-culture of the 1960s operated as a further partner in crime in the circulation of self-published underground comics by offering a venue for sale in head shops (211).[82] For

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80 cf. my description of the concept of Continuity, the Multiverse and the first reboot of a superhero in 4.1. and 4.2.

81 All of these were created by Stan Lee in the early 1960s: *The Fantastic Four* #1 (November 1961, with Jack Kirby), *The Incredible Hulk* #1 (May 1962, with Jack Kirby), *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (August 1962, with Steve Ditko). At Marvel, the emotional and moral ambiguity of the struggling superhero soon became default: While all of these new superheroes were individuals, as many a fan would argue, they exclusively functioned according to the core formula of "troubled characters ambivalent about their powers" (Sabin, *Comics* 49). With the late 1950s and early 1960s being a time of upheaval and the Cold War, it is not surprising that the period from 1961-1964 brought forth such a large number of very similar superheroes who struck a nerve (Hoppeler/Rippl, "Narrating Radioactivity").

82 Head shops sold music, posters, clothing, drug paraphernalia, etc.

obvious reasons, comix hardly ever reached a wider audience. Still, their influence on mainstream comics cannot be underestimated, which is seen, for instance, in the eventual revision of the Code and the establishment of quasi-alternative imprints by the mainstream comics publishing industry, like DC's Vertigo.

It was only in the late 1960s when the Code's shackles first began to strain that social issues once again gained currency in mainstream comic books (Hudsick 19). Its influence finally began to fade following the adjustments of its policy in 1971 and 1989 (Nyberg 170ff.), which was due to the underground's subversive activities, the odd mainstream artist who published unsanctioned comic books and the advent of the direct sales routine. The Code's value systems, however, had already been so deeply engraved in the comic book industry that publishers seemed to find it difficult to break free of the habits it had become accustomed to as "[t]he Code's stipulations became intuitive generic expectations, understood by creators and audience alike, rather than a set of imposed requirements" (Kidder 61f.). Still, creators and audiences alike were fed up with the Code's restrictions, however self-imposed, and invested in active rebellion of anything Code-related. It helped that many former comic book readers who had witnessed Wertham's witchhunt and grew up to become comic book writers sought retributive justice by pushing the diminishing boundaries even further (Cowsill et al. 74).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the underground comics industry had begun to weaken. Comix suffered from negative publicity, especially by the right-wing press and campaigns that elicited rulings of obscenity and lawsuits (Sabin, *Comics* 116). In addition, the venues in which most comix had been sold – the headshops – were shut down based on allegations of their detrimental influence on society, or, at the very least, discontinued to stock the more corrosively questioning titles, of their own accord as they could not meet the expenses of being prosecuted (117). The result of this retreat, "a revolution simply deflated into a lifestyle" (Spiegelman, "Raw Nerves" 5), however, was not solely a collapse of underground comics; it also eradicated the qualitatively hollow and superficial titles, which again paved the way for more valuable work. What is more, humor comix as well as serious output spotlighting political concerns like the women's and gay liberation movement, the Vietnam war or nuclear power gained momentum (Sabin, *Comics* 118-126). All this spurred the development of alternative comics, a new sort of title that grew out of comix in the 1970s and 1980s.

What is often referred to as the Bronze Age of comic books lasted roughly from the 1970s until the mid-1980s. It is characterized by the loosening of the Code which made it possible to introduce darker, more ambiguous characters and to address

topics of social relevance. It also saw the rise of the above-mentioned new kind of comic book literature: alternative comics. As a continuation of the underground works of the 1960s, they shared traits like publication in small quantities, specialized audiences, alliance of writer, artist, colorist, editor, etc. in one person, dismissal of the comforting formula fictions of the mainstream, multifarious drawing styles, experimental topics and socially relevant discourses. They were, however, not so much driven by the active subversion of the Code but principally aimed to provide an alternative to formulaic mainstream comic book storytelling (Hatfield 152). Due to their often autobiographic nature and the combination of writer and artist in one person,[83] they habitually include candid self-assessments (152-163). In addition to their hybrid nature as comics,

> [a]lternative comics, coming as they do out of a marginalized subculture, uneasily straddle two different attitudes about comic art: one, that the form is at its best an underground art, teasing and outraging bourgeois society from a gutter-level position of economic hopelessness and (paradoxically) unchecked artistic freedom; two, that the form needs and deserves cultural legitimatization [sic] as a means of artistic expression. (That would include academic legitimization.) Alternative comics waver between these two positions – between punk and the curator, so to speak.
> (Hatfield xi-xii)

This new tendency towards a less caustic treatment of taboos in comics was fed by the fact that Hippiedom, the subculture that had been if not constituent, then at the very least intimately associated with comic books, was dying due to a number of reasons. The original impetus behind the counterculture, the Vietnam War, came to a close in 1975; harder and more potentially lethal drugs like heroin, destroying many a comix creator, replaced marijuana; and punk subculture, which despite its shared goals of anti-establishment views and personal freedom took a stance that differed entirely from the hippie subculture, became the new spiritual attitude of choice (Sabin, *Comics* 126). In this climate, comix writers and artists were required to adjust their approach: They could either turn towards the new alternative scene or they could assume a part in the creation of US-American mainstream comic books.

Such new ways of storytelling did not go unnoticed by the mainstream comic book industry. Fuelled by the Code's slow abandonment and the inspiration drawn from underground and alternative comics, the Revisionist Age brought forth works like *Watchmen* or *Batman: TDKR*. Sometimes also called the Dark (Levitz, *75 Years* 558; Voger) or Modern Age (Overstreet 1028; *Comic Vine*) for its authors' and writers'

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83 e.g., Linda Barry, Daniel Clowes, Bros. Fernandez, Jason Lutes, Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware.

reconception of the established superhero in light of which even the angst-ridden doubter of the Silver Age seemed like Boy Scouts, the Revisionist Age was an era of more sophisticated storylines and three-dimensional characters.[84] The 1980s and 1990s were further shaped by an influx of British writers and artists who, literally studied, culturally aloof and indifferent a propos the Code's few remaining restrictions translated the familiar superhero into something more meaningful, and thus endowed US-American comic books with an unprecedented literary complexity.

When the Revisionist Age was supplanted by the Digital Age around the year 2000, this was represented first and foremost by facts relating to the publishing market and not so much by comic book content. More precisely, the primary feature of the comic book age we now live in is its unremitting adaptation of comic book characters and stories into various media. More than ever, the superhero has become a transmedia[85] phenomenon and when superheroes have their stories told in television series, computer games, novels, comic books, etc. simultaneously and without effective impingement on each other, there is not only an increase of character variations but also an erosion of Continuity.[86]

❖ *The Graphic Novel*

The term 'graphic novel' can describe many things. As Hatfield observes, it can be "a novel, a collection of interrelated or thematically similar stories, a memoir, a travelogue or journal, a history, a series of vignettes or lyrical observations, an episode from a longer work – you name it" (5). Yet if one were to ask comics artist Joseph Campbell, he might reply that the term "is used simply as a synonym for comic books" (13). I would rather say that the term is often evoked to denote a *compendium* of comic books. As the above chapter has illustrated, comic books are thin magazines printed on inexpensive paper with poor color quality. When a number of these are collected, recolored, reprinted on glossy paper and equipped with quality, often hardcover binding, they are called graphic novels. It is for this reason that a work like *Watchmen* can be referred to as a collection of comic books and a graphic novel at once (fig. 5). In fact, readers who do not usually read comics and who happen to pick up works like *Watchmen* or *Batman: TDKR* are often surprised to learn that the graphic novel was first serially published in the form of comic books.

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84 cf. my non-definite list of revisionist works in the introduction.

85 With regard to transmediality, I also follow Rajewsky, who defines transmediality as "the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media" ("Intermediality" 46).

86 The proliferation of superhero lore in various media and the erosion of Continuity will further be discussed in chapter 5 and in this thesis' conclusion.
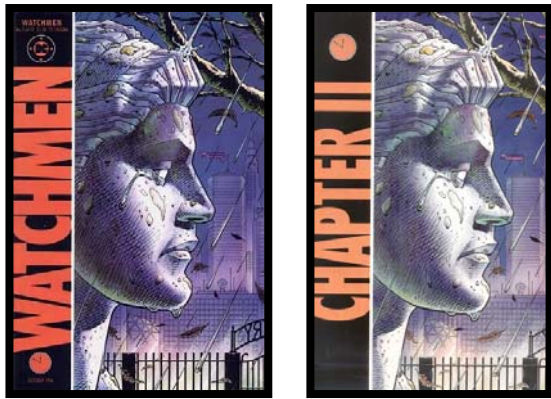
Fig. 5:
The second installment of *Watchmen* as published as a comic book in October 1986 (left) and as a chapter of the graphic novel published in 1987 (right).

However, to add to the mystification surrounding the term, the high-quality reprint of comic books can also point to the trade paperback. Even though the label emphasizes tradability, this is practically irrelevant to collections of comic books like trade paperbacks and graphic novels, but an important factor in the comic book business. After having experimented with several formats that allowed the offering of their best work for continuing sale, DC launched this publication format which gleaned previously serialized works as well as mini- and maxi-series in the 1980s (Levitz, *75 Years* 563-564). Publishers coined the term to describe a compilation of previously-published, serialized material in book-form. If there is a difference between the graphic novel and the trade paperback, it is the former's inclusion of additional previously-unpublished material like sketches and author comments as well as the latter's being – indeed – most often a paper- rather than a hardback.

Campbell might also answer that a graphic novel is "a comic-book narrative that is equivalent in form and dimensions to the prose novel" (13). And indeed, the term can describe works that dispense with the notion of recollection altogether. In this case, 'graphic novel' means an original narrative reminiscent of the novel for its length and complexity. A good example is Craig Thompson's *Blankets*, which is also subtitled "an illustrated novel".

In addition, the denomination graphic novel can have a less material undercurrent, as when it simply refers to a graphic narrative.[87] In fact, the expression 'graphic narrative' is often used by scholars nowadays. This use of the term defines vast narratives such as Superman or Batman. It is often unavailable in its totality, if only for its sheer expansiveness, as these stories have been published for decades.

The distinct appearance of the graphic novel as a result of the enhanced publication method in conjunction with its denomination's reference to traditional

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87   Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven in 2006 proposed the replacement of 'graphic novel' by the term 'graphic narrative'. Details will be discussed presently.

literature opened the doors of libraries and bookstores: Comic books in the shape of graphic novels were no longer unwelcome guests. As McCloud observes:

> [s]lick white paper and a square binding are no guarantee of literary merit, and great ideas can as easily be scrawled on cocktail napkins -- but in moving from periodical to book, an implicit claim of permanent worth was being made [...] Periodicals have traditionally carried with them the connotation of disposability; of temporary worth -- while books brought the promise of something more.
> (Reinventing 29/2-5)

Still, until the mid-1980s, they were a far cry from 'novels' as they are usually recognized – it was only with the publication of the Big Three, i.e., *Maus*, *Watchmen* and *Batman: TDKR* that the graphic novel really became airborne.

As the graphic novel comprises several different meanings, it displays a wider scope than the comic book as subject matter is concerned: Satire, news coverage, bildungsroman, fantasy, war reports, travelogues, picaresque narratives, murder mystery, historical fiction, political manifestos are only a few of the narrative options available to comic book writers and artists.

The term 'graphic novel' was coined by Richard Kyle in 1964 (Withrow/Danner 14) and popularized by Will Eisner, who used it to promote his 1979 book-length work *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories: A Graphic Novel*.[88] Interestingly, this work of Eisner's was a collection of short stories rather than a novel , but it was already suffused by the spirit of sophistication as it was consciously aimed at a wider audience – one that transcended the smallish circle of teenage boys who had so far constituted the largest part of comic books' recipients. The term 'graphic novel' did not find much further use until the 1980s, when the Revisionist Age introduced more sophisticated stories that seemed to merit being put on a par with the traditional novel. Gibbons remembers that around the time when *Watchmen* was created, i.e., the mid-1980s: "The term graphic novel was shiny new and, frankly, considered a little pretentious by industry insiders" (Gibbons/Kidd/Essl 237). In a similar vein, Campbell notes that "most of the important 'graphic novelists' refuse to use the term under any conditions" (13). Nevertheless, the label gained stature and circulation henceforth.

Since then, many a scholar has mused over the term's advantageous connection to established literature, its descriptive potential and its constrictive effect. Without delving into the exhaustive particulars of the decade-long debate about sense and

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88 The late Eisner had been a pioneer in more ways than this. During an interview with the *Baltimore Sun* conducted in the 1940s, he put comics on a par with literature and art. This was not well received, not even by his fellow cartoonists, who thought of comics as a means of communication and not an art form (McCloud, *Reinventing* 26f.).

non-sense of the expression graphic novel, let us make a note of the fact that nearly all arguments in renunciation of the term have to do with the connotative power of the expression. First and foremost, due to its connection to the traditional novel, it presupposes fictionality, which in turn is – at least partially – incompatible with certain genres of the graphic novel, like history, journalism or autobiography.[89] For this very reason, Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven in their 2006 introduction to the graphic narrative special of *Modern Fiction Studies* suggested the substitution of 'graphic novel' by the term "graphic narrative" (767), thus placing the focus on the form's narrative potential.

For several reasons, the expression graphic novel is possibly one of the most-contested in the circles of comics scholars, critics and creators. For one, the denomination is, quite evidently, intended to establish a link to the high-brow literary product of the novel. It is rudimentarily ironic that the prose novel, now being alluded to in the attempt to upgrade comics – or to at least show that there is a connection to a product of literary value – shares the comics' history of being beheld as a disreputable and vulgar creation of its time. Secondly, the term that would in fact suit the format best, namely comic book, is already in use referring to something that, peculiarly, is neither comic nor a book. In the third place, as shown above, the expression signifies several potentially opposing things. Any expression designating contrasting objects is bound to meet with reactions ranging from confusion to irritation.

❖ *Interim Conclusion*

Most of the manifestations of the forms of comics discussed above are essentially produced by bringing ink onto paper. There are, however, other options to make comics available to the larger public. Webcomics are not an additional, separate category but a vehicule to depict all kinds of comics. They are, in Harry Pross's sense, tertiary media in that they are consituted by the necessity of technical means in the processes of production and reception (9). In other words, the computer, tablet or smart phone is a prerequisite for webcomics to be consumed. By contrast, comic strips, comic books and graphic novels are first and foremost secondary media, where technical appliances are necessary for production. Webcomics are thus able to depict all three on a computer screen. Their form, while constituted by a myriad of ones and

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[89] I by no means want to suggest that historical, journalistic or autobiographical accounts are stringently truthful and without a notion of fictionality, but, by definition, these genres at least attempt a straightforward rendering of what is and was perceived as reality.

zeros in meaningful arrangement, is far more malleable than the traditional ink-on-paper version. "In a *digital environment* there's no reason a *500 panel story* can't be told **vertically** – / – or *horizontally* [...] In a *digital environment*, comics can take virtually any *size* and *shape*" (McCloud, *Reinventing* 223/5). But webcomics' variation does not stop with their manner of display, they also differ from each other as well as from traditionally produced comics in terms of the way they narrate and the way they make use of computer and Internet potential. They may take the form of click-through comics, where each click fetches a new panel, strip or page, they may offer interactive choices to the recipient or and they may include animation, which is often accompanied by sound.

After a theoretical outline of the most pertinent and influential theories of seriality, we have seen that the procedural, the serial and the flexi-narrative all have porous boundaries that allow contemporary series to move back and forth between the categories. Next, the striking fact that the serial history of many works of the Victorian age has over time been obscured was discussed in detail before the history of the series was examined. The modern-day series, it was observed, is often tantamount with the quality television series. Nevertheless, the other popular contemporary medium that exists mostly within the realm of seriality – the US-American comic book – has been scrutinized for its defining features as well as its history. I hope to have shown that with its rich history steeped in profit-making procedures and scandal but also in intermittent extreme popularity, the comic book is a popular culture product that offers a new approach to perceiving history and culture.

3. Continuity: A Multifaceted Phenomenon

> There is no future. There is no past. Do you see? Time is simultaneous, an intricately structured jewel that humans insist on viewing one edge at a time, when the whole design is visible in every facet.
> (Dr. Manhattan in *Watchmen* #9, 27/3)

3.1. The Case of Alan Moore's *Watchmen*

What if a work of graphic fiction was described to contain several narratives that not only ran interlaced and alternating with each other but also incessantly and reciprocally provided pictorial and verbal comments on the respective other; intermediate chapters that consisted of a visual rendition that was delimited in relation to the main text as well as in relation to its fellow intermediate chapters; disrupted narratives whose individual elements appeared strewn across one or more installments; subplots that were characterized by their interception and successive repartition to specific positions on consecutive pages with barely related narratives separating them; and extended flash-backs into pasts differing in recency and focus, just to name a few of the properties of *Watchmen*? Or "TO DISTILL SO *SPECIFIC* A FORM FROM THAT CHAOS OF *IMPROBABILITY*" to use Dr. Manhattan's words (#9, 27/1). The reader could not be blamed for developing the idea of an incoherent, discontiuous and unintelligible graphic narrative, to say the least. *Watchmen* is none of the above despite the inclusion of every single one of the aforementioned features which bear ample potential to impede a comprehensible reading. Rather, writer Alan Moore and illustrator Dave Gibbons have succeeded in constructing a work whose intricate and cyclical multilayering operates not as an obstacle to be overcome but as a quintessential attribute. In an interview, Moore relates how the idea for the highly complex structure of *Watchmen* germinated:

> Well the thing is, with *Watchmen*, what we tried to do was give it a truly kind of crystalline structure, where it's like this kind of jewel with hundreds and hundreds of facets and almost each of the facets is commenting on all of the other facets and you can kind of look at the jewel through any of the facets and still get a coherent reading.
> (Kavanagh)

The consolidation of "hundreds and hundreds of facets" that all provide subtexts for and annotate one another is a demanding task that requires concise coordination. I would like to propose the thesis that the coordination of these "facets" is provided by

the employment of continuity, in the larger sense of connection, consistency and stability.[1] Indeed, continuity can be traced throughout *Watchmen*, as it is utilized to assist the recipients' understanding in otherwise obscure transitions of space and time. Continuity can be found on all levels of the graphic novel: Within the individual panel, within short and long sequences, on the (double) page, within the episode, between installments, from issue to issue and in regular as well as irregular occurrences within the work as a whole. It also emanates outwards, e.g., from the graphic narrative to its adaptation on film. The phenomenon of an omnipresent continuity seems to be rather isolated among comics, for there is not, to my knowledge, a major Anglophone graphic narrative that is as stringently and unconditionally continuous as *Watchmen*. It is possibly for this reason that no previous research exploring continuity in *Watchmen* has been conducted to date.

❖ *The Current State of Research*

Considering how successful *Watchmen* was when it was first published in the 1980s[2] and how favorable it is being received to this day, it is not surprising that quite some work has been done on the topic. Even though *Watchmen* is given ample space in works that are engaged in the theory or practice of the comics medium in general, like Groensteen, Klock, Reynolds, Sabin or Schüwer, etc., the topic of continuity in *Watchmen* has so far escaped scholarly attention. Many publications, especially the more recent ones, are concerned with the 2009 film adaption by Zack Snyder (e.g., Manivannan; Rehak; Petrovic; Moulthrop, "Watchmen") and various media teem with interviews, videos and websites of Alan Moore.[3] Book-length works on the comics writer include Bill Baker's *Alan Moore Spells it out* (2005); George Khoury et al's *Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore* (2008); Lance Parkin's *Alan Moore: The Essential Guide to the Creator of Watchmen, From Hell and V for Vendetta* (2009); and *Alan Moore: Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003), edited by Gary Spencer Millidge and smoky man, all of which are characterized by a hagiographic slant. Annalisa Di Liddo's *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel* (2009) and Todd A. Comer and Joseph Michael Sommer's edited collection of essays titled *Sexual Ideology in the Works of Alan Moore* (2012) take a more critical position, as does Elizabeth K.

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1   The more specific meaning of continuity, i.e., comic book Continuity, will be subject to analysis in 4.
2   For early reviews and newspaper reactions to the graphic novel, cf. Van Ness 8-15.
3   Most notably, *The Mindscape of Alan Moore* (2005) by DeZ Vylenz who directed the documentary with Moore's approval and active participation.

Rosen's article on apocalypse in Moore's works (2008). In addition, there are online annotations for many of his works.[4]

Scholarly publications that focus solely on *Watchmen* are few and far between. Monographs are Karin Kukkonnen's *Neue Perspektiven auf die Superhelden* (2008), which employs Bachtin's theory of polyphony as a starting point to probe deeply into the ambivalent superhero and Sara J. Van Ness's *Watchmen as Literature* (2010), which, true to its title, takes the route of literary criticism in the attempt to "bridge[…] the gap between the scholarly and popular" (4) and to cater to fans as well as academics. Most recently, Hans-Joachim Backe published *Under the Hood: Die Verweisstruktur der Watchmen*. His systematic study focuses on the mini-series' intertextuality and intermediality by examining the references evoked by titles and, by extension, epilogues, or what he calls mottoes (14). Amongst other matters, he also takes into account the graphic novel's treatment of politics, religion or the question of divinity, the press, gender discourses and the relationship between mothers and daughters. Furthermore, there are two essay collections, namely *Watchmen and Philosophy: A Rorschach Test* (2009), edited by Mark White, which ponders the graphic novel from a theoretical philosophical point of view and includes essays on ethics, morals, politics and ideology; and *Minutes to Midnight: Twelve Essays on Watchmen*, edited by Richard Bensam, whose contributions touch upon such topics as music and symmetry in *Watchmen*.

Apart from these, work has been done on trauma (Ball Blake, 2013), the notion of time and progress (Carney, 2006), ideology and ethics (J. Hughes, 2006), nostalgia in superhero comics in general as well as in *Watchmen* (Rosen, "Nostalgia", 2006), political perspectives (Wolf-Meyer, 2003), double entendre (J. Lewis, 2001) and on the depiction of space and time employing cubist and futurist principles (Bernard and Carter, 2010). According to the latter, many a sequence in Moore's work lends itself to contemplation from several angles, spatial as well as temporal, and recipients can find themselves simultaneously in the past, future and present, which is their very own reality.

Not a scholarly text but a comprehensive compilation of previously unpublished material of and about *Watchmen* and a report on the details of the series' nascency is Dave Gibbons, Chip Kidd and Mike Essl's *Watching the Watchmen* (2008). A similar compilation is Clay Enos's *Watchmen: Portraits*, which reproduces photographs of the film's main characters (2009). Peter Aperlo also published two works on the film – *Watchmen: The Official Film Companion* and *Watchmen: The Art of the Film* (both

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4   The ones on *Watchmen* I am aware of include: Atkinson, Beckett and Moulthrop.

2009). All four were published during the wait for *Watchmen,* the motion picture. What is certain is that the film gave the graphic novel another jolt in terms of interest and market sales numbers.[5] Many of the above works, too, were published as part of the film's aftermath.

3.1.1. More than Just One Pregnant Moment:[6] Continuity within the Panel

A panel is the comics' smallest formal entity. It is the vessel that contains the story, although the panel itself may also contribute narratively, for instance when the panel outline is indicative of a dream.[7] What is the difference between a comics panel and a photograph? Apart from the very specific semantics that delineate them (photographs have long been viewed as representative of reality), one could say, generalizing, that a photograph depicts one moment in time while a panel's duration may exceed that time span, sometimes by far. A photograph is able to reproduce merely one single instant; it is a representation of the very moment in which the shutter release is pressed. Accordingly, comics that combine photographs with text to tell a story often appear to suffer from an underlying tension which arises out of the limited compatibility of elements that are temporally instantaneous[8] – like photographs – and unfolding over time – like the text included. The assigned language often exceeds the instant depicted and this incongruity may pose a problem for reception. Similarly, when comics combine photorealistic images, that is, images characterized by a major artistic effort to reproduce realistically, with text, the synthesis of image and word in the reception process may be encumbered (Schüwer 346).

By inversion of argument, this implies that a more abstract or conceptual style can be reconciled with text more easily. And indeed, as soon as the image becomes more stylized, it gains the ability to depict more than one specific moment which delivers it from the awkwardness sometimes inherent in comics employing

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5   Van Ness reveals that *Watchmen* climbed to the top of sales ranks at BarnessandNoble.com and at Amazon following the release of the film's trailer in 2008 (20). DC Comics followed suit with increased print numbers (Romanelli).

6   "fruchtbarer Moment": Lessing coined this term to describe the condensation of the immediate past and the immediate future into one climactic moment, which allows the widest range for the recipient's imagination (Lessing 24).

7   For an example of how the panel can be functionalized, cf. Groensteen, who identified six functions of the panel, which include closure (cf. McCloud, *Understanding* 63f.), separation, rhythmization, structuring, expression and narrative emphasis (Groensteen 39-57). Interestingly, he calls the panel "the frame" (39), borrowing from cinema terminology.

8   Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his 1766 study on the aesthetics of illusion titled *Laokoon* has commented extensively on the topic of temporality in painting and poetry; image and text. His approach, however, treats the reception process while the instantaneous temporality of photography discussed here refers exclusively to the origination process of the photograph.

photographs or photorealistic pictures. The exaggerated or understated image, thus, can easily be interpreted to stretch beyond a mere instant (348; Barker 8). Günther Dammann neatly demonstrates this in his examination of an early Batman comic strip by Bob Kane (93-94). He identifies the parameters which enable the capture of a longer time slot within a panel: 1) The synchronization of succession, which results in a summary of several instances; 2) the rhetorics of metonymy, or synechdoche, to be more precise, concentrating on one aspect which is understood to represent the whole; 3) the use of comic-specific motion signs; and 4) the absorption of spoken text as character speech (93).

By virtue of these parameters, several actions can be fused into one image: Commissioner Gordon is shown to simultaneously end a phone call, turn towards Bruce Wayne and address him while Bruce Wayne's lighting of his pipe does not represent merely one precise moment but is rather a synechdochal image, condensing the protracted situation of smoking a pipe (93-95). As a result, even though a panel seems to depict only one "pregnant moment", it may well be the encapsulation of several events that succeed each other in time. When a series of images is reduced to one panel, it is not only time that is abbreviated, but also space (Eisner, *Comics* 39). A couple climbing into a car can thus also signify the approach towards the car, the opening of the door, the starting of the engine, the driving away and other potential actions. This implies that the act of "MENTALLY COMPLETING THAT WHICH IS *INCOMPLETE* BASED ON *PAST EXPERIENCE*" – termed "***CLOSURE***" by McCloud (*Understanding* 63) – does not happen exclusively in the gutter, i.e., between panels, but also within panel limits. And this embodiment of a longer time span within a panel is accepted unhesitatingly by the comics reader.[9]

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9   Sometimes the comparison is made between comics and film, whereby it is claimed that both consist of individual frames that collaborate to tell a story. With the above argument in mind, one of the most fundamental differences between the two media becomes apparent: Filmstills are records of a fraction of a second while a comic panel can correspond to a longer period of time.
   The argument undergirding the ostensible kinship between comics and film is mainly derived from the fact that both media narrate visually and from the affinity of the discrete comics panel to the individual film image in a row of 24 other pictures constituting a film second. But there are numerous circumstances rendering the apparent likeness invalid. Firstly, film is a primarily passive form of visual communication while comics are an active one. Film is a mechanically-paced medium: the viewer is not in command of velocity or order, with the possible exception of the recorded film, which can be paused, rewound or played at an altered tempo. Comics, by contrast, "are not mere visual displays that encourage inert spectatorship but rather texts that require a recipient's active engagement and collaboration in making meaning" (Hatfield 33). The notion of comics' narrativity, i.e., the recipients' ability to fashion sense into static images in sequence, has already been touched upon but the comics recipient also adopts an active stance in that they can ponder on a single panel, sequence or page for any chosen period of time. They can also read the work in question out of order or leaf back and forth at will. Secondly, while in film, the shots are aligned linearly, in comics, the panels are arranged in linear sequence and on the page. Thus, as Pascal Lefèvre puts it "comics are much more a spatial medium than film, with the different spatial relationships between elements in and across panels cueing readers to trace out the multiple time-lines at work in a given narrative" (26). Thirdly, film and comics by no means require the employment of the same senses. Whereas film makes use of visual images, sound,

❖ *The Metonymous Comics Panel*

There are various ways in which one solitary panel can relate a series of events or depict a number of moments.

> In contrast to photography, the individual comic panel does not inevitably depict isolated moments, but synchronizes events with varied temporal dimension into one static moment. [...] The temporal expansion is particularly transparent in panels containing several consecutive fragments of dialogue.[10] (Mahne 51)

The temporal amplification becomes especially evident in panels containing one or more speech bubbles. In such a case, the recipients' reading of the delineation of time is based on the idea of the "commonality of human experience" (Eisner, *Comics* 38), on their experience with conversations, on their presupposition that codes of behavior are adhered to, e.g., that the characters will not exclusively speak simultaneously or that there are reactions to actions, and on their assumption that the comics' temporal reality is the same as their own (McCloud, *Understanding* 100/116). Assuming that speech bubbles are to be read as successive in time according to their position within the panel,[11] readers thus determine the approximate duration of the image. In narratological terms, the story time of the picture is adapted to the story time of the dialogue. The following example (fig. 6) illustrates how Moore and Gibbons decided to depict a conversation:

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and sometimes text, comics are an exclusively visual medium. If sounds, emotions or sense perceptions are evoked, this is accomplished by visual means entirely. Harvey even attempts to launch the argument that because comics are a purely visual medium, they are more prosperous than film in creating a "seamless optical experience" (108). While this may be stretching the point a bit far, it brings us to our fourth point, namely that in film, merely one image appears on the screen at once while in comics, the images remain accessible to the recipient, or "in praesentia" (Groensteen 18). Even if the human eye cannot discern the individual instant, the fact remains that filmic images are not juxtaposed but shown in sequence, each one eclipsing its precedent. Partially recycling the above argument, the reading of comics is an act less controlled by the preconditions of the medium, i.e., the number of images shown per second, but more by the simultaneous availability of all panels on one page.

10 My translation: "Im Vergleich zur Fotografie bildet das einzelne Comic-Bild nicht zwangsläufig isolierte Augenblicke ab, sondern synchronisiert Ereignisse mit unterschiedlicher zeitlicher Ausdehnung auf einen statischen Moment. [...] Speziell bei Panels mit mehreren aneinander anschliessenden Dialogteilen wird die zeitliche Ausdehnung transparent".

11 McCloud observes that in comics "EACH FIGURE IS ARRANGED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT IN THE SEQUENCE WE WILL 'READ' THEM, EACH OCCUPYING A DISTINCT TIME SLOT" (*Understanding* 97). Of course, the convention of reading left to right and top to bottom is only true for comics originating in Western culture; Japanese or Middle Eastern comics are read from right to left.

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Fig. 6:
The metonymic quality of the
speech bubble (#9, 20/1-3).[12]

For instance, the third panel above summarizes the man on the right's listening to his conversational partner's speech, his awareness that such talk is not meant for other ears, his realization that Laurie is approaching, his subsequent advisory "SHH", the cautionary gesture of his left hand, his physical rotation towards her, his greeting of Laurie's as well as the lighting of his cigarette (20/3). But the most telling constituent for the estimation of the individual panel's time frame is the speech bubble: The time allotted to the utterances is deciphered by the reader to add up to the total time span of the panel. Thus, gathering from the stretch of time that is depicted by the co-existence and successivity of the speech bubbles, the recipient does not conceive of the pictorial content as a distinct moment, but as a fusion of moments, amounting to the approximate stretch of time it takes to utter the content of the speech bubbles. However, there are cases in which panels containing text encapsulate only one very specific moment. This is achieved by a caption box's explicit referral to the instantaneousness of the picture.[13] For example, when the sudden entrance of a character is coupled with a caption box containing the words "He was having supper, when…", the text clearly refers to the momentary nature of the picture which can thus be argued to be most similar to a photograph.

It is slightly more difficult to assign a plausible time span to a panel containing one or more thought bubbles, as it is impossible to assess a thought's duration. The thought bubble's temporality, unlike that of the speech bubble, cannot be proven to be congruent with the panel's story time, for there is no indication as to the speed at which people's thoughts unfold. However, it is reasonable to presume that recipients will use their knowledge about the duration of utterances as a starting point from

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12 Alternatively, Moore and Gibbons could have chosen to use a separate panel for each figure and utterance, but such a proceeding tends to distort flow and would most likely have been harmful to the rhythm of the narrative in this specific example. The reason for which I show three panels here, despite this episode's being concerned with the individual panel, is that each panel by itself serves as an excellent example.

13 This functions only with caption boxes as they represent the voice from the off. This argument will be readopted presently.

which the approximate time span a thought bubble occupies can be derived. In other words, recipients create an analogy between the duration of a speech bubble and the one of a thought bubble because they both feature written text in similar shape. Caption boxes, too, refuse the straightforward assignment of an estimated time span. Cinematographically speaking, they represent voices from the off and, as such, their function is, more often than not, the offering of a comment on a panel. Therefore, the story time of a caption box cannot be applied to a panel as smoothly as the story time of a speech bubble. Lastly, sound effects function in the same manner as speech bubbles: They enter the intradiegetic world, even if only on an acoustic level, and are interpreted to take up a certain time span which is then applied to the panel.

There are panels where no text is provided for the reader to be used as a scale on which the elapse of time can be measured. These textless panels can have very different effects: Either the picture evokes the impression of a moment in time, as is the case in action-oriented panels, or it is perceived to have a timeless quality when a panel contains no action or characters at all. Even though silent[14] panels are to be treated somewhat differently from their text-encompassing counterparts, they do not undermine the continuity within the panel – on the contrary: In a silent panel packed with action, the movements are often distilled to show Lessing's pregnant moment, rather than just one static image that is arbitrarily isolated from the sequence of movements. According to findings from psychology of sports, it is the "turning point"[15] (Schüwer 43) of a movement that gleans the preceding and succeeding fragments of a motion into what is perceived as a dynamic movement. Thus, the comics illustrator is faced with the challenge of locating the turning point within an action in order to evoke the impression of continuous movement.

Temporality is also indicated by the use of the "*MOTION LINE*"[16] (McCloud, *Understanding* 110), which, by means of metonymy, condenses several stages of a movement into one graphic symbol (Balzer/Dieck 49). These typically indicate such phenomena as the swing of a fist, the ricocheting of a bullet, great velocity or the

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14 I use the term "silent" to denote 'devoid of speech or thought bubbles, caption boxes and sound effects'. Obviously, a panel can contain sound without it being explicitly accounted for by the visual aids mentioned above.

15 My translation: "Wendepunkt".

16 Motion lines are also known as "action lines" (Dittmar 88), "hites" (M. Walker, *Backstage* 28), "zip-ribbons" (McCloud, *Understanding* 111) or "speed lines" (Sabin, *Adult Comics* 5).

monumental leap of an action hero,[17] and are located on the extradiegetic level.[18] In mature graphic narratives, motion lines are seldomly employed, as is the case in *Watchmen.* Instead, Moore and Gibbons play with the replacement of motion lines by intradiegetic elements like blood or water.

Fig. 7:
The intradiegetic motion line (#5, 14/4 and 15/1. This panel is divided by the middle of the double-page, hence the traversing line, cf. fig. 33.)

Fig. 7 illustrates how the blow issued by Ozymandias and the downward fall of his adversary are indicated by a trail of blood, which is a clever and not unusual way to abdicate the service of motion lines. The effect, however, remains the same: A series of continuous movements are distilled into one moment.

As mentioned above, there are panels that are devoid of both text and perceptible motion. In such cases, "WHEN THE **CONTENT** OF A SILENT PANEL OFFERS NO CLUES AS TO ITS **DURATION**, IT CAN ALSO PRODUCE A SENSE OF *TIMELESSNESS*" (McCloud, *Understanding* 102). The plausible assignation of a certain time segment is thwarted by the evoked atemporality. This sort of panel is characterized by the union and disentangleability of several moments, years or millenia as Fig. 8 illustrates.

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17 There are other ways of depicting motion, which are not necessarily restricted to comics: The multiplication of images in the wake of the moving object, the decomposition of a movement into its elements, e.g., Marcel Duchamp's 1912 Cubist/Futurist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2,* or the positioning of the reader into the driver's seat, i.e., the moving object stands still while the background seems to be in motion (McCloud, *Understanding* 108ff.).

18 There are exceptions to this rule, for example when a car quickly gains velocity, it can result in clouds of dust, or if a character is drenched in water, he may produce something like motion lines on an intradiegetic level as well.

Fig. 8:
Temporal attribution an implausibility
(#9, 28/3).

Presented with a dark night sky replete with stars and nothing else, the story time of this panel might be understood to consist of anything between a mere fragment of a second and a light year.

As has been shown, the story time determined by dialogue or movements and the unidentified story time of silent panels without noticeable activity can have an enormous influence on the interpretation of the duration of a seemingly static panel. A comics panel, thus, may capture a whole set of moments either by virtue of the inclusion of text or by virtue of the exact opposite, the complete absence of text. As a result, continuity clearly begins not in the sequence, but within the panel. The majority of panels in *Watchmen* would serve as examples to prove the hypothesis that a singular panel can already be continuous in itself. Or, in McCloud's words: "JUST AS A SINGLE PANEL CAN REPRESENT A *SPAN* OF TIME THROUGH *SOUND*--/--SO TOO CAN A SINGLE PANEL REPRESENT A SPAN OF TIME THROUGH *PICTURES*" (*Understanding* 110/8-9).

3.1.2. "THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A SEQUENCE OF ONE":[19] Continuity within the Sequence

It has already been established that continuity begins before individual panels are juxtaposed; it commences on the very basic level of the discrete panel. As soon as successive panels are strung together, they begin to interact and create dynamics that can hardly be generated by one panel alone. Sequence is here employed to describe anything between a duo of panels, a strip, which is the first horizontal row of panels on a page, and a chain of several panels. One of the characteristics and essential constituents of comics sequences is their segmentation into panels by the so-called "*GUTTER*" (McCloud, *Understanding* 66). By virtue of the gutter, comics are

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19 McCloud, *Understanding* 20, emphasis S. H.

full of enticing blank spaces, in both space and time, for readers to decorate in our minds. [...] The job of the cartoonist, in any case, is to make the reader do most of the imaginative work of moving from panel to panel through the narrative, but to make that work as engaging as possible.
(Wolk 133)

What is meant by this? The space between panels – sometimes delineated by no more than a thin line, sometimes hardly existent at all but fulfilling its function nevertheless – is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it constitutes the site where comics writers and illustrators run the largest risk of losing their reader's interest, for, as Moore is acutely aware, "the transitions between scenes are the weak points" (Moore/Burrows 17). This is especially valid for transitions that occur between pages, i.e., from the last panel on one page and the first panel on the next. On the other hand, the gutter is a necessity made virtue. It is where most of the reader-involvement takes place. Although this may sound contradictory, it is perfectly sensible: As not every aspect of a situation can be shown, comics sequences spell out only a fraction of the total sum of possible panels and readers are required to deduce "missing" information based on memory, common sense and the assumption of an essential commonality of human experience. It is between panels that this knowledge is applied, as movements, actions and transformations take place here (Schüwer 272). Thus, on a very basic level, Will Eisner has shown that readers infer that a character has a fully functional set of legs, even though the panel ends at hip level (*Comics* 42-43).

On a more sophisticated level, incited by the juxtaposition of the individual panels and the presence of the gutter, readers transform separate images into a coherent, continuous whole. Hereby, they will automatically choose the scenario that is implicitly manifest: A raised fist in the first panel and a cry in the second will most likely be converted into a scenario involving an assault.[20] This phenomenon is called "narrativity on the part of the recipient"[21] by Wolf ("Problem" 95) and "*CLOSURE*" by McCloud (*Understanding* 63). It is the ability to fill in the narrative gaps which, ideally, if the crucial moments are provided, requires hardly any conscious effort on part of the reader. Conversely, the choice of panel content is suboptimal if a sequence appears disjointed or even incoherent, panel transitions remain unfathomable and meaning can only be gathered after deliberate reflection. And while it need hardly be mentioned that contemplation and the lingering on a panel or panel transition may well be desired and that some writers and artists withhold obvious readings on

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20   Some comics writers toy with their reader's imagination by introducing a sequence of images that seems to suggest a certain reading, only to nullify it subsequently. Chris Ware is notorious for this.
21   My translation: "rezipientenseitige Narrativierung".

purpose,[22] forcing readers to ponder alternative between-panel occurrences or to pursue unconventional paths on the page, awkward or clumsy transitions seldom trigger additional inspection but merely bewilderment and disorientation.

But coherence alone is not the only incentive driving comic book artists and writers and, in fact, illustrators of fiction. In general, they also aim for the audience's suspension of disbelief, their immersion into the tale. As Moore states: "If a transition is handled incorrectly, what it does is to bring the reader up short against the fact that he or she is reading a story" (Moore/Burrows 16). Therefore, whether a story is able to cast its spell on its readers is not just dependent on the content of the story but also very much on the way in which the story is told. In comics, this entails the manner in which the rupture between panels is overcome.

To bridge the gap occasioned by the gutter, the segments can be strung together in different ways. McCloud has offered a categorization of these types of transitions according to the level of reader-involvement they demand.

(1) Moment-to-moment transitions require very little supplementation by the recipient, as the temporal distance between panels is minimal.

(2) Action-to-action transitions can cover a longer time span, but the sequence shows the same object or character, which makes this transition easily decipherable.

(3) Subject-to-subject transitions are based on the depiction of miscellaneous elements belonging to a chain of events or actions. The involvement of the recipient higher than in (1) and (2).

(4) Scene-to-scene transitions carry the reader across substantial temporal and spatial distances and thus necessitate sophisticated inferential abilities.

(5) Aspect-to-aspect transitions are characterized by a wandering gaze. The recipient is confronted with different vantage points and details from the same scene. It is left to the reader to construe the individual images as part of an often atemporal scene.

(6) Non-sequitur transitions consist of panels that are not related in any obviously logical way (70ff). However, due to the recipient's efforts to create coherence, even this type of transition can be rendered meaningful in some way or another. The relationship established between the apparently incoherently joint parts would not be inherent in the comics but derived from the personal experience and knowledge of the recipient, thus varying from person to person. Most comics employ a combination of the first five of these categories. As a rule, the less similarity between panels, the more challenging the transition, the more involvement – narrativity – is necessary on

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22 Again, Chris Ware's unconventional storytelling, which is characterized by disruptive narrative maneuvers like unusual changes in viewer perspective, insertion of apparently contextless panels or ambivalent panel chronology, comes to mind.

the part of the reader. The chain of associations breaks when a sensible connection between panels is no longer conceivable. Still, it is possible that one minute reference suffices to render a large gap plausible and to establish continuity (Hein 56f.).

Such references, be they minute or massive in proportion, will be called linking agents. A linking agent aids readers' composition of continuity and belongs to what Moore calls a "repertoire of tricks and devices with which to bridge the credibility gap that a change in scene represents" (17). It is not restricted to form, but can also operate on the content-level and possesses the ability to establish links between places, be it in the temporal or spatial sense (Mahne 67). *Watchmen* not only entails most of the linking agents commonly deployed by comics artists – continuous perspective, character recurrence, graphic matches, etc. – it also makes use of other, less ordinary methods like overlapping text to fill the blanks created by its seemingly fragmented way of storytelling mentioned in this chapter's introduction. Douglas Wolk observes that "*every* scene shift in the book […] is marked by some kind of verbal or visual connection between the end of one scene with the beginning of the next" (238). In the following, these connections will be examined in detail.

❖ *Perspective*

Visual continuity is essential in comics. Without it, characters and backgrounds would not be recognizable and a narrative's coherence would be confused. Comics illustrators can rely on the reader's ability to identify similarity in order to build bridges between panels. Still, the audience's immersion into the story can further be supported by the provision of visual props that help the reader's passage across the gutter. When perspective is altered from one panel to the next in *Watchmen*, it is sometimes adjusted steadily, in a progressive movement, at times it is shifted erratically, in what appears like random bouncing about a particular space. Both compel readers to produce coherence, albeit to varying extents. One common method for the achievement of spatial coherence is inclusion: Portions of the surrounding are incorporated in the neighboring panel to generate spatial affiliation by means of overlap (Mahne 67). The opening and the closing page of the first installment of *Watchmen* illustrate how inclusion can be employed to ensure the connection between panels:

Fig. 9:
The very first page in *Watchmen* (#1, 1/1-7).

Each panel of fig. 9 is characterized by the complete entailment of the contents of the preceeding panel as the observer's range of vision is continually broadened through an upward movement.[23] At the outset, there is a close-up on a detail – the smiley button – which remains the center of attention as the recorded segment becomes larger and larger until it is no longer visible. The line of vision remains unaltered as the focalizer withdraws geographically. This creates a strong link between the individual panels and synthesizes them into a continuous sequence.

While this procedure in its stable orientation and steady focus is quite transparent and involves little effort on part of the reader, more sophisticated deductive faculty is required when the point of view is modified more drastically. In Film Studies, continuity editing is a technique that warrants spatial, temporal and logical consistency. Also called "conventional dramaturgy" (284) by Bordwell and Thompson, continuity editing has become "the dominant editing style throughout Western film history" (262). One of its rules of thumb is that all shots taken from within one half (180 degrees) of the possible full 360 degrees from which actors can potentially be filmed, can readily be combined (Werners 154-157). If shots in which the axis separating the two half-circles is suddenly transgressed are concatenated, coherence suffers (P. Miller 100; Werners 158-160). In the following example from *Watchmen*, the reader is given no fewer than seven points of view within one page.

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23 This continuous move away from focus is referred to as zoom. In fact, a significant portion of the vocabulary used by comics writers to indicate the sort of movement they have in mind is borrowed from cinematography. Moore admits: "I talk in terms of close-ups, long shots, zooms and pans" (Moore/Burrows 3).
As pertains this example, the opposite movement, where the zoom is towards a detail, instead of away from it, and where every panel already contains what will be subject of the following panel, is also possible (cf. #1, 26/1-7).
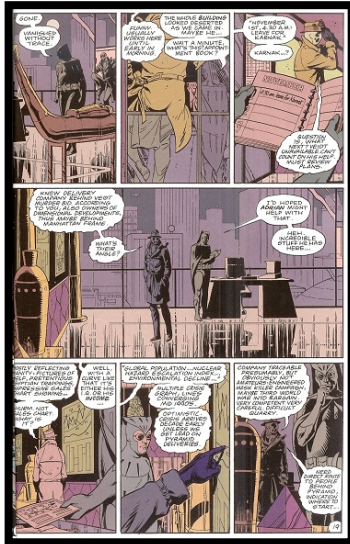
Fig. 10:
Changing perspective (#10, 19/1-7).

We are confronted with images from outside Ozymandias's office (2), with Nite Owl's point of view (3), with three different vantage points on the two perpetrators (1, 4, 7) and with three "half-subjective images"[24] (3, 5, 6) – two in which readers are with Nite Owl (3, 5) and one in which they are with Rorschach (6). Seeing that the rule of cinematic continuity is violently transgressed in this sequence, it is remarkable that what appears as a rampant variation of perspective can still be gathered into a logical sequence. The absorption of actual discontinuity in the reception process can only be warranted if the array of panels features an outstandingly strong cohesion (Schüwer 180), like color, dialogue or recurring paraphernalia. Appropriately, the continuity in this sequence is not so much due to the plausible transition from one panel to the next as to the logical implementation of dialogue between two unchanging characters and the consequential use of color. Without dialogue that is intercepted or ended and without a deviation in tone, readers are likely to assume that no change in scenery has taken place. The conception of this sequence as depicting a continuous space rather than different venues at different times is further augmented by the insertion of certain recurring details like the miniature pyramid and the vase in panels 4, 5 and 7. Thus, the reader's inference abilities to assemble a continuous sequence out of individual panels can be relied on even if a variety of viewpoints are strung together, provided the panels are linked in some minimal way, be it by the means of perspective, color, dialogue or items within the diegesis that promote the construction of continuity.

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24 The term "semisubjective image" was coined by Jean Mitry (214f.) and taken up by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema I* (72f.). The semi-subjective image in comics achieves what internal focalization or free indirect speech achieves in traditional fiction, namely the co-perception *with* a character through the inclusion of the focalizer within the frame. Basically, readers 'look' over a character's shoulder; they are *with* the character and thus, events are conveyed as mediated through that character rather than expressed without intervention, however subtle.

What has been said about changes in point of view also applies to alterations in scene, i.e., changes of location and time. If readers are expected to see continuity between neighboring panels relating the events of different venues, they need to be supplied with references, analogies or parallels like character recurrence that facilitate the reception process. *Watchmen* goes to great lengths to avoid providing indications of tense and place verbally. Instead, the simplest and most frequently utilized way to support readers' meaning-making processes when changes of scenery are involved is the incorporation of the character last shown in one scene into the opening panel of a new one. The inclusion of e.g., Dr. Malcolm Long into two adjacent panels permits a smooth transition from one scene to the next, even if the transition occurs across a page break.

Another means by which two entirely disparate locations or time zones can be linked is the graphic match. "A *graphic match* comes about when two panels that depict completely different segments of the narrated world but resemble each other in detail are juxtaposed"[25] (Schüwer 292). Such a visual rhyme simplifies the reception process by showing characters in analogous activities or postures in adjacent panels. Hence a change of place is often supported by parallels in the images' composition (Mahne 69f.) This pictorial synchronicity can operate as a linking agent between two scenarios: From one panel to the next, menus become newspapers (#5, 11/9 and 12/1); glasses become dumbbells (#9, 10/6 and 10/7); and a dead servant covered in snow becomes a body floating in the water (#11, 12/7 and 13/1). To list all examples would mean to list nearly all instances in which the end of the page coincides with the end of a scene[26] and where the visual similarity that supports a smooth reading flow can be found.

Accordingly, the following examples constitute merely a fraction of the graphic matches in panels divided by a page break: While the first panel is situated at the botton-right of one page, the second one is located at the top-left of the following one.

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25 My translation: "Ein *graphic match* kommt zustande, wenn zwei Panels aneinander montiert werden, die zwar ganz unterschiedliche Ausschnitte der erzählten Welt zeigen, grafisch einander aber bis in die Einzelheiten hinein aufgreifen".

26 In fact, many such shifts take place across pages in *Watchmen*. Moore states that the rupture inherent between pages can be made meaningful as a measure to endow the narrative with a rhythm: "[T]he reader's action in turning the page becomes the beat in which I change scene" (Moore/Burrows 17).

Fig. 11:
The graphic match across page borders (#5, 20/6 and 21/1).

The panel on the left of fig. 11 is part of the hypodiegetic narrative, rendered and colored in a style that evokes the characteristically grainy quality of inexpensively made weekly comic books, depicting a shipwrecked man hanging on to a raft for life while the other belongs to the first narrative[27] which is illustrated and colored more conscientiously and which shows a newsvendor drawing a protective cover over his merchandise. Even though the panels could hardly be more disparate, there is an unmistakable likeness in posture. In what Bernard and Carter call a "virtuoso bridging of space and time" (13), details like the arrangements of the folds in the characters' clothing, the rung-like quality of the raft and the newsstand and even the direction of the raft's wake and the fall of the rain also add to the visual resemblance.

A highly obvious link between two scenes is established in the following example (fig. 12):
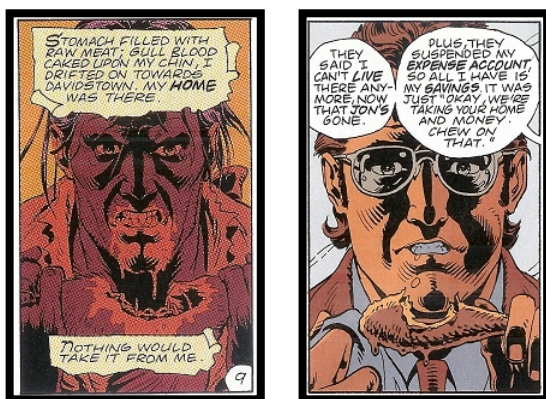
Fig.12:
From savage to mild-mannered (#5, 9/6 and 10/1).

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27   Since there are many intersecting levels of time in *Watchmen*, I will follow Gérard Genette to make transparent which level is being analyzed. "We will henceforth call the temporal level of narrative with respect to which anachrony is defined as such, 'first narrative'" (*Narrative Discourse* 48). In our case, the first narrative is the present tense in *Watchmen*, dating exactly from 12 October until 2 November 1985. From this starting point, all references to the past – or flashbacks – are referred to as analepses. While Genette makes further distinctions between external and internal, homodiegetic and heterodiegetic analepsis, only one specific form is of relevance for my purpose: The completing analepsis "comprises the retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative (the narrative is thus organized by temporary omissions and more or less belated reparations)" (51). Or, to cite Manfred Jahn, an analepsis is "[t]he presentation of events that have occurred before the current story-NOW" (N 5.2.1). The relation between first narrative and analepsis will be of considerable importance in the successive chapters.

The parallels between these two panels is so flamboyant that a direct juxtaposition, i.e., placing them on the same page would likely be overkill. Both the castaway and Dan Dreiberg are positioned at approximately the same height within the panel, both are facing the reader while eating and the mouths' attitude, the hands' position and what they are eating are similar. By virtue of this striking correspondence, the contrast becomes palpable: The seaman's savage devouring of the uncooked bird and his fierce stare let Dan's actually normal manner of eating a chicken leg appear somewhat stilted and overly formal. With a sequence of panels this graphically analogous, their distribution across a page break might be necessary in order to avoid the effect of drawing explicit attention to the graphic match as linking agent and to thus make the reader alert to the narrative techniques employed.

Sometimes, however, exactly this distribution is refrained from. Since Moore and Gibbons's work is largely achronologically structured, there are numerous journeys into the past which need to be made recognizable as such. A side-by-side exposition of similarity can support the understanding that a large leap in time and space is taking place. Hence if not only location, but also two points in time need to be connected, a graphic match is often employed to indicate analepsis. According to Genette, "[e]very anachrony constitutes, with respect to the narrative into which it is inserted – onto which it is grafted – a narrative that is temporally second, subordinate to the first" (*Narrative Discourse* 48). In *Watchmen*, there are several such narratives, several different pasts which are grafted onto the first narrative. The result is a continuous jumping back and forth between these realities. Figs. 17 and 18 respectively illustrate the beginning and end of such a flashback:

Fig. 13: Time travel (#2, 12/3-4).
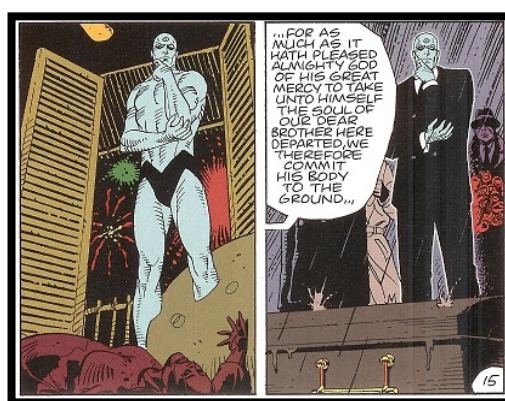
Fig. 14: Anti-cipation (#2, 15/7-8).

The graphic match is especially evident in fig. 13, as the figure of Dr. Manhattan, filling the majority of the panel, remains precisely the same, apart from what little apparel is visible. The most distinct discrepancy between the 1985 present (#2, 12/3) and the 1971 past (12/4) is to be detected in the background and even that is afforded

via a softened transition as the blast of fireworks that issues from the flowers and the rain is already announced in the first panel by the raindrop bearing resemblance to one of the fireworks' individual sparks.

In fig. 14, it is again Dr. Manhattan's posture that stays unaltered, but the fore- and background have been modified. This time, the fireworks are re-substituted by flowers, thereby recollecting the beginning of the analepsis.[28] What further enhances this graphic match is the Vietnamese woman lying motionless on the floor after having been shot: Her body takes up the exact space that Edward Blake's body within its coffin occupies in the 1985 panel (15/8).[29] By means of such continuities, "the historic is able to manifest itself with facility in the present" (Bernard/Carter 15). In both cases, the graphic match is employed as a linking agent to provide a means for the recipient to become aware of connections and establish continuity between scenes that are not located on the same spatial and temporal level.

❖ *Color*

We have already seen that an unvarying color scheme can support the reading of a sequence with heterogeneous points of view as continuous. Color can also serve as a linking agent when the events of two independent venues or times are to be conjoined. Moore states, although he is not specifically referring to fig. 15 below, that "the simple continuity of the color red could probably be enough to carry the reader successfully over the transition" (Moore/Burrows 17). The following excerpt from *Watchmen*'s second issue is a paradigm of color operating as linking agent.

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28 Hypothetically, this repetition could also be termed a graphic match, except that the two elements are not arranged to immediately succeed each other. This phenomenon – a graphic match whose parts are distributed over several pages – Schüwer terms an "intratextual palimpsest" (my translation: "intratextuelles Palimpsest" 243). This notion will be returned to later in this analysis.

29 One can detect a certain irony accomodated in this graphic match when the fact is taken into consideration that it was the Comedian who murdered the woman.

Fig. 15:
The color red as linking agent (#2, 28/1-6).

The first two panels portray Blake's involuntary plunge from his apartment window from the point of view a bystander on the street below might have. Blake's body describes a continuous move towards the observer/camera until the reader is confronted with a panel held entirely in red (28/3). Foregoing the depiction of the grisly details that can be inferred to happen in panel three, the implication of the redness in its totality is, of course, blood. When the observer's point of view is slowly detached from the imminence of the red, it is to reveal a bouquet of crimson roses at Blake's gravesite (28/4-6), an image we are already familiar with. The audience is thus introduced to a further continuity-building narrative strategy that consists of the magnification of an item to the point where said item has been condensed to an abstract color which is subsequently revealed to be an aspect of another setting (Mahne 69). This technique of zooming in and out of an object and its color may serve to smoothen the transition from one place or time to another.

While this instance bears witness to the more noticeable manner in which color can be employed as a linking agent, there are also passages of higher subtlety. The following example (fig. 16) elucidates how a change in setting can be deduced from a slight variation in hue:

Fig. 16:
The color schemes of California and New York (#8, 1/1-9).

The two characters speaking on the phone are either not shown in full or not depicted at all, but presented mainly via their surroundings. Since "SALLY" and "HOLLIS" (#8, 1/1) share a common history as Minutemen, it is not always evident whose environment is being shown.[30] There are, however, some clues as to whom the panels can be attributed. Apart from glimpses of the speakers and details in the dialogue that aid identification, the award dedicated to Nite Owl (1/1) refers as clearly to Hollis Mason as the female vigilante's costume (1/4) or the Tijuana Bible (1/6) point to Sally Juspeczyk. In addition to the assumption derived from real life that the speakers take turns talking, the reader's attempt to identify the respective settings is aided by the distribution of color: Odd panels are characterized by the preponderance of a bluish hue and are on the whole darker (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) than their even counterparts, which bear the mark of a yellowish layer (2, 4, 6, 8). It becomes clear that the lighter panels can be attributed to the reality of Sally in her California retirement home, while the darker ones are part of Hollis's life. The time difference between New York and California is three hours, accounting for the difference in lighting. Made use of in this way, color can operate as a convenient linking agent between disparate realities that have been intertwined to produce an alternating structure.

❖ *Overlapping Text*

While the linking agents examined so far – characters, graphic matches and color – reside exclusively in the realm of the intradiegetic, text, which is recurrently used as linking agent in *Watchmen,* can also be situated on the extradiegetic level. In some

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30 For instance, the work by Hollis Mason *Under the Hood* (#8, 1/5) or the photograph of the Minutemen (1/6) could be standing in either room, as, in fact, the latter does.

cases, the text contained in one panel causes the contents of an adjacent panel to appear in a different light, triggering a sort of polyphonic effect. "[T]he juxtaposition of a visual narrative with a seemingly disconnected verbal narrative in such a way that a third meaning is obtained when the visual and the verbal elements of each panel are put together" (J. Lewis 140) is a technique used throughout *Watchmen*. In an interview, Moore explains that "[a] picture can be set against text ironically, or it can be used to support the text, or it can be completely disjointed from the text – which forces the reader into looking at the scene in a new way" (Wiater/Bissette 163). Each one of these varieties is adopted in Moore and Gibbons's work.

For example, the last utterance of the scene that is set in Sally Juspeczyk's retirement home (fig. 17) is her daughter Laurie's "ITˈS **DEAD**. **EXTINGUISHED**" (#2, 2/9), which clearly refers to the cigarette she had to relinquish in compliance with her mother's implicit request. As, the opening panel of the following scene shows the Comedian's funeral, the utterance undergoes a redirection and re-emerges as a reference to the deceased, creating a comment on the otherwise silent situation.

Fig. 17:
Overlapping text connects different venues (#2, 2/9-3/1).

Granted, not all text can, or should, be read as a reference to the panels following it, and not all situations can, or should, be viewed in the light of the text preceding it, but there are instances in *Watchmen* where the creators have constructed connections that are too delightful and significant in their creation of semantic thrust to be shrugged off as coincidental.

Moore uses the expression "overlapping or coincidental dialogue" (Moore/Burrows 17) to describe the phenomenon of text not only pointing to the next scene but actually spilling into it.[31] Mahne and Schüwer also use the term "dialogue" (56; 469f.), borrowed from Moore, noncritically. Strictly speaking, 'dialogue' is not the correct term, as not only verbal exchange, but also single utterances, thoughts or parts of internal monologue are inserted

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31 In *Watchmen*, the overlap does not violate the visual divide, i.e., the gutter, as the text is always entirely incorporated into a panel. The sort of overlap that seems to disrupt panel borders, often to part of action comic books, cannot be found in *Watchmen*.

into the panel that is devoid of the source of the text. "Coincidental", though referring to simultaneity, bears the connotation of randomness and chance, but the interaction of text and picture is very deliberate, which is why I will refrain from the use of this term as well. In the following, the adjective 'overlapping' coupled with the term 'text' or the respective designation of the text that overlaps will be employed.

Generally speaking, text can be said to overlap when it is part of a panel that does not contain the source of the text. It is, in Horstkotte and Pedri's words, "a kind of verbal-visual enjambement" (345). Characterized as a text-picture relationship called the "*PARALLEL* COMBINATION[…]" (*Understanding* 154) by McCloud,[32] "WORDS AND PICTURES SEEM TO FOLLOW VERY DIFFERENT COURSES--WITHOUT *INTERSECTING*" (154) or even appear "WILDLY *INCONGRUOUS*" (158). It is important to note that McCloud uses the phrase "seem to". If the object of analysis is reduced to an individual panel featuring overlapping text, then the relationship between text and picture, indeed, hardly becomes lucent. Yet, if a sequence of panels is examined, the ostensible detachment is often quickly revoked – text and picture only *seem* to function separately[33] but are inherently connected in ways that are to be explored in this section. The appearance of low connectivity prompts readers to mobilize their more sophisticated inference abilities in the active reception process in order to allow for an interpretation of the overlapping text as an integral part of the panel. In this way, the comics reader is ceaselessly engaged in the struggle of fashioning sense into what may appear as irreconcilable means of narration (Hoppeler/Etter/Rippl 69). Ultimately, then, the concept of overlapping text not only facilitates the recipient's efforts to create coherence between differing temporal and spatial venues, but is further capable of drawing attention to semantic associations between them (Mahne 60).

Overlapping text in *Watchmen* is quite far-ranging in terms of the diegetic levels it involves: It is used as a linking agent between the present and the past of one plot, between different plots occurring contemporaneously, between different plots occurring with a delay in time, and between the main plot and an embedded narrative.[34] The content of a panel displays either the diegetic present, past or future,

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32 McCloud has developed a cluster of designations for the various ways in which text and pictures can interact. For reasons of space, the other six combinations cannot be elaborated on here.

33 cf. Hoppeler/Etter/Rippl: "[U]nter Miteinbezug des Kontexts können Zusammenhänge erfasst werden, die zuvor nicht ersichtlich waren. Die genuin parallele Kombination, d.h. die Zusammenführung von Bild und semantisch unpassendem Text, die auch bei eingehender Betrachtung keine Zusammenhänge preisgibt, findet sich in Comics selten" (69). This is further proof of the readers' 'narrativity', or ability to fathom connections between starkly distinct units.

34 The denominations conceived of for narratives-within-narratives are numerous: If we follow Genette, a narrative that is enclosed within another narrative is a "metanarrative" (*Narrative Discourse* 228). Using comics' style, he depicts the variant narrative levels thus:

while the overlapping text relates to the images either analeptically, proleptically or simultaneously. In any case, the text remains fixed to the present time of another plot (Mahne 56). To be more specific, the main plot of *Watchmen* – the 1985 present – is interlaced with scenes and/or text from the past ranging from the 1940s to the Vietnam War (analeptic relation), scenes and/or text from a different location in the same present time (simultaneous relation) and scenes and/or text from the pirate comic *Tales of the Black Freighter*,[35] which constitutes a hypodiegetic narrative within the diegesis.

In narratological terms, the overlapping text performs a metalepsis, i.e., a "contamination of levels in a hierarchical structure" (Pier 303). In this case at hand – as in literature in general – this is a transgression of narrative planes. In other words, the boundaries separating the distinct story levels that represent different ontological layers are trespassed. We will see that this is not a one-way process in *Watchmen*, but that it takes place in several directions. The mise-en-abyme of the comic book within the comic book alone does not yet qualify as metalepsis, but the referencing of one narrative level, i.e., the hypodiegetic comic book of the *Tales of the Black Freighter*, in another, i.e., the comic book *Watchmen*, does.

In *Watchmen*, there are three different concrete ways in which overlapping text helps to overcome spatial and temporal divergence. In the first case, a continuous sequence of images which conveys the events of one plot and which may or may not contain text of its own is superimposed with overlapping text derived from another place or time. Expressed in a more schematic manner, a diegetically continuous string of panels containing reality *A* with or without text from the same, which would
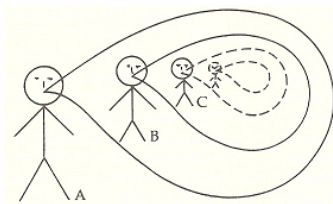
A is an extradiegetic narrator while B is at the same time an intradiegetic character and an intradiegetic narrator of the "metadiegetic narrative about a metadiegetic character C" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 85). For the same phenomenon Mieke Bal and Eve Tavor prefer the term "hyponarrative" (53), for the reason that the prefix 'meta-' signifies "narrative *on* the narrative" (41), instead of "narrative *in* the narrative" (42), while Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan primarily uses the denomination "third degree" (95) narrative but generally agrees with Bal and Tavor, that 'hypo-' is the more adequate prefix to describe inclusion than 'meta-' (Jahn N 2.4.5).
The most prominent example of a hypodiegetic narrative in *Watchmen* is the comic book "Marooned" which is part of the *Tales of the Black Freighter*. It tells the gruesome story of a shipwrecked man who commits atrocities while under the errant impression of doing the right thing. Parallels to Adrian Veidt are not coincidental.

35 The title is derived from the English translation of Berthold Brecht's and Kurt Weill's *Dreigroschenoper* (Kavanagh). The song "Pirate Jenny" (original German title: "Seeräuber Jenny") describes the incoming buccaneer's ship as "the black freighter". It was chosen by Moore, a great fan of Brecht's, who further used the character of Pirate Jenny in his later publication *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (Sanderson).

be labelled *a*, also contains text from an alternate setting, i.e., *b*. Secondly, two temporally and/or spatially differing plots are displayed alternately in every other panel, while text from one place or time spills into the other one, which has no text of its own. Or, while *A* and *B* take turns, one of them does not contain text, so that only *a* or *b* is part of both *A* and *B*. If we assume that *a* is part of both scenarios, then it only functions as overlapping text in every other panel, namely those depicting *B*. We will see that the overlapping text could, more often than not, be believably argued to have as well originated with one of the characters in the scene into which the text leaks. Lastly, the alternation between two plots is identical with the one just described, but text is allowed to flow both ways. In other words, *A* and *B* alternate and contain both *a* and *b*. In this case, the attribution of inherent text is much less ambiguous and leaves less leeway for interpretation.

The following (fig. 18) illustrates the first case: Text that is affiliated with the hypodiegetic *Black Freighter* comic book (*b*) seeps into the panels containing the 1985 present (*A*) exclusively:
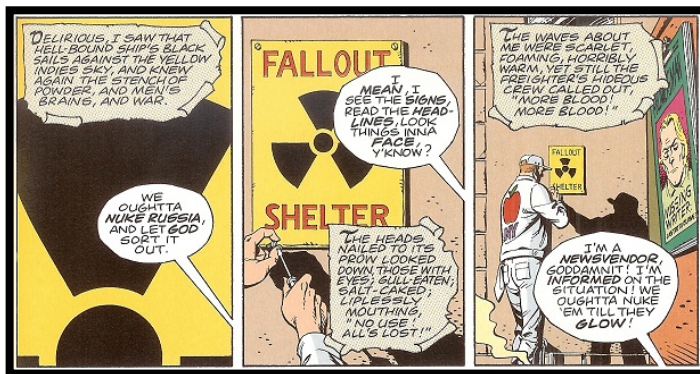
Fig. 18:
Overlapping text connects diegetic levels (#3, 1/1-3).

Apart from the parchment-style caption box, which evidently has an iconic component, no pictures assignable to the pirate comic enter the present. The effect of the overlapping text's insertion, nevertheless, is striking. For instance, the pirate comics' narrator's "BLACK SAILS AGAINST THE YELLOW INDIES SKY" (#3, 1/1) unmistakably relates to the high-contrast colors of the fallout-shelter poster of which the reader is shown a close-up, while the comment on "WAR" from the hypodiegesis plays with the connotations of such a notice (1/1). As a further example, the pitiless cry for "MORE BLOOD! MORE BLOOD!" (1/3) is mirrored in its desire for vengeance in the newsvendor's exclamation "WE OUGHTA NUKE 'EM TILL THEY GLOW!" (1/3) and both gain an eerie twist when correlated with the international radiation symbol. Support of and comment on the image, thus, is not only procured from the corresponding text but also, and perhaps even more significantly, from the diegetically distinct narrative.

Remarks of explicatory nature can often be found in sequences consisting of two narrative strands (*A* and *B*) that take the stage alternately but share only one text source (*a* or *b*). Fig. 19 is part of a sequence in which two narratives take place in the same location – Blake's apartment building. There is the murder narrative in red[36] and the police's homicide investigation in yellowish panels. Whether the red panels are the fleshed out visuals of the detectives' musings on the murder or whether they constitute the past remains elusive until issue #2 where the key scenes from several analepses are juxtaposed. By including the details of Blake's murder – here still subject to speculation – amongst other views of the past, its ontological status moves from possible to tangible. Hence the panels held in red constitute the past, while the other panels describe the main plot, which is set in the present and which is the sole source of text in this sequence.

Fig. 19:
Conjecture or analepsis? (#1, 3/4-7).

In panel 5, the investigators' conjecture that Blake had to have been thrown against and, ultimately, out of the window functions as substantiation of the image which shows Blake draped over his assassin's shoulder moments before his fall to his death. This kind of mutual support between action and overlapping text is prevalent in *Watchmen*. The last image (3/7) illustrates a different form of collaboration, one that produces irony. We observe Blake in the very moment of being flung out of the window – shards of glass framing the initial stage of his fall, face contorted in terror, smiley button coming loose – and it is implicitly manifest that there is no plausible scenario in which he will not eventually hit the ground. Not only is this unspoken certitude

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36 Time and again, these red-tinted panels relating Blake's murder resurface in the series (#2, 26/3-28/2 and #11, 24-26) and, accordingly, in this thesis (cf. fig. 22 and fig. 27). With each reappearance, their content remains largely the same, but context, ontological status, juxtaposition and focalization are altered (for a thorough analysis of the latter in *Watchmen* and in these red sequences in particular, cf. Horstkotte/Pedri).

amplified by the lift operator's utterance "GROUND FLOOR COMIN' UP" (3/7), it is also invested with a sardonic irony: The overlapping text could also be the murderer's derisive remark about Blake's imminent fate.

A sequence like the one in red, containing extrinsic text only, gains a detached, even somewhat lofty and splendid air by virtue of its relative silence. It gives the impression of moving in slow motion.[37] This is, of course, due to the fact that a textless panel's duration cannot be weighed with certainty.[38] The phenomenon is also observable in sequences that involve juxtaposed plots that are temporally simultaneous but spatially diverse. Such sequences are noticeably often part of issue #3 in *Watchmen*.

The panels on the left-hand side of fig. 20 (14/1, 3 and 5) depict a talk show during which Dr. Manhattan is exposed to allegations of having caused cancer in several people (*A*). The right-hand side (14/2, 4 and 6) discloses the contemporaneously unfolding story (*B*) of how Laurie Juspeczyk and Dan Dreiberg become engaged in a fistfight with a gang of thugs. *A* as well as *B* only contain text from the talk show narrative (*a*).

Fig. 20:
Borrowing text (#3, 14/1-6).

The first instance of overlapping text is a question, actually raised by a journalist but appearing in a caption box and surrounded by inverted commas in the contemporaneous plot. "AM I STARTING TO MAKE YOU FEEL *UNCOMFORTABLE*?" (#3, 14/1) is actually the extension of the questioning that has been directed at Dr. Manhattan

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37 It is scarcely a coincidence that Zack Snyder in his adaptation of this scene in *Watchmen* chose to show the key moments of Blake's murder, i.e., the ones singled out and steeped in red in the graphic novel, as islands of slow motion (the rest of the scene happens in real time). The impression of grandeur, despite the dreadful nature of the action, is further augmented by the soundtrack, which consists of Nat King Cole's 1951 "Unforgettable", which features a dominant orchestral element.

38 cf. 3.1.1.

but is easily integrated into panel 2, where it seems to convert into a query phrased by Laurie. Her aggressive and invasive body language as well as her mimic, which consists of an angry expression and a mouth opened as if for speaking, both support such a reading. Deducible from the textual and pictorial contents of panel 3, the statement in the following panel (14/4), "…BECAUSE FROM WHERE *I'M* STANDING, IT'S STARTING TO LOOK PRETTY *CONCLUSIVE*" (14/4), does not refer to an actual place in the talk show room but to the point of view, i.e., the opinion of the journalist. This distinction is important, since in panel 5 it is a physical position that the utterance refers to. It is no longer an intradiegetic character who seems to usurp the overlapping text as her own, but a narrator whose identity remains unclear except that it is part of the intradiegetic narrative, as the choice of first person narrative, the reference to the point of view as well as the point of view itself indicate. The statement's validity for both scenarios is supported by the fact that Dan and Laurie seem to have successfully defeated their attackers. Panel 5 shows an agent of army intelligence, Mr. Forbes, who puts an end to the interview. His words being discharged into the last panel are "…BUT THE SHOW'S OVER" (14/6). The overlapping text befits the panel's content showing Laurie and Dan victorious and the thugs overpowered. There is a distinct form of irony inherent in the pairing of this utterance with this image,[39] since the street skirmish, anything but staged, was an authentic struggle between two opposing parties. The expression is often used for bystanders gawking at a crime or accident. Accordingly, the point of view from which the action is documented in panel 6 could be that of a bystander looking out his or her window. Moore may well have had an instance of overlapping text like this in mind when he stated that pictures could be contrasted to create irony (Wiater/Bissette 163).

These instances have exemplified how continuity between two separately existing realities can be generated by one of the plots providing text for the other, textless narrative. Without the overlapping text, the relation between the two scenarios might not only be obscure, but the continuity between them would be missing as well. As has been stated in the introduction, continuity is not a prerequisite for the lucidity of interlaced narratives, but it can, as examples have shown, add a supplementary level that provides for interesting readings.

Yet overlapping text not only appears as a comment from another place or time, without the first narrative being intercepted by it, or as a linking agent between two

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39 Probably the most striking example of irony being created by an unconventional pairing of text and image can be found in #7 (14/2-15/8). In it, we watch Laurie and Dan become intimate on the couch while the television broadcasts an athletic performance by Ozymandias. The irony arises out of the contrast between the lovers', particularly Dan's, ineptitude and Ozymandias's skill and the comments offered by the television-show's host.

places or times, which are alternatingly present but of which only one is equipped with a primary soundtrack while the other one is the beneficiary of the overlapping text. Overlapping text can also assume the part of mediating between two plots that are alternated while at the same time establishing a connection to the text from that alternate reality. Expressed in a more schematic manner, plot *A* contains text that is derived from it (*a*) as well as text from an alternate setting (*b*), while plot *B* features text that has its origin in that reality (*b*) plus text from the alternate setting (*a*). In the former case, *b* is labeled overlapping text, in the latter, it is *a*. This function of overlapping text differs from the examples already discussed in that the connections not only exist between text and picture, but also between text and text, as the following example (fig. 21) illustrates:

Fig. 21:
Exchanging text (#8, 3/4-6).

While the pirate comics sometimes appears as part of the intradiegetic narrative by merely being present, comparable to, say, the cigarette in the hands of the youth or a sign in the background, it acquires the status of a full-fledged narrative in those cases where overlapping text spills from one reality into another. In addition to what has been said above, the plot in panel 4 and 6 will be called *A*, with the text belonging to it constituted by the parchment-style caption box (*a*), and the overlapping text (*b*) which is contained in the speech bubble. Panel 5 is home to plot *B* with the speech bubbles being part of it (*b*), while the overlapping text (a) is present on what appears like parchment. In panel 4, we witness the connections that are launched between *A* and *b*, between *a* and *b* and between *A*, *a* and *b*.[40]

The newsvendor's fond musing on his anniversary with a woman who is no longer around – we are not sure whether she has left or died – foreshadows that the woman depicted, too, will soon be gone. Such a prospect is advanced by virtue of her farewell gesture and her face being cast in half-shade. Also the association between the two

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40 Although the strongest connection arises out of the the combination of *A* and *a*, this will not be contemplated here, as it constitutes as strong a link as any panel with image and corresponding text.

textual elements of panel 4 (*a* and *b*) is also quite striking. Were it not for the difference in iconographic design, the contents of speech bubble and caption box could be read as one character's continuous utterance: The subject remains the same (a female) and the notion of remembrance is continued ("SHE'S ALWAYS ON MY MIND" and "I REMEMBER HER", 3/4). If we now consider how all three elements – image *A*, corresponding text *a* and overlapping text *b* – interact, we soon realize that the anticipation already looming in the combination of image and overlapping text is boosted by the question "DEAD?" posed by plot *A*'s narrator.[41]

Another method that creates continuity within the sequence is the collage. The term was first coined by the modernists who used it to describe the process and result of gluing things to a surface so the parts form a new whole. When Moore and Gibbons juxtapose panels on a page that have neither temporal nor spatial connection except that they all convey an incident from Edward Blake's life, we can speak of a collage (fig. 22). Such is the case in #2, 26/3-28/2.

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41   Whenever the intradiegetic comic book's images take up entire panels of *Watchmen*, the overlapping text from the first narrative is not, as is the case in all other cases of overlapping text, equipped with inverted commas and enclosed in a caption box but contained in a speech bubble that points to the off. Such a practice is certainly not coincidental and is further discussed in 3.1.5.

Fig. 22:
A collage of Blake's life (#2, 26/4-28/2).

The sequence functions as collage in that it evokes a comprehensive image of Blake's past, albeit no gluing was involved in its conception. In these three pages are condensed the key scenes from the analepses relating Blake's appalling deeds as well as his dismal end that have been recounted throughout #2. The superimposition of continuous text – musings in Rorschach's journal on the burden of being a costumed crime-fighter – supports the reception of this motley array of panels as a coherent sequence. Hence this collage is not only continuous as pertains color (red) and focus (Blake), it is also a distillation and continuation of #2's various analepses. Furthermore, in the tried and tested Moore way, the overlaid text matches and/or comments on the events depicted in the panels.[42]

Such are the ways in which the readers' continuous interest as well as their ability to construct continuity within *Watchmen* can be procured. Most often, Moore as a writer reverts to the ruse of using the page break as a point of transition:

> One thing I tend to do which eases the transition and is sometimes all that's needed to accomplish a good transition is to write in basic units of a single page, so that the reader's action in turning the page becomes the beat in which I change scene without disturbing the rhythm of the story. (Moore/Burrows 17)

Indeed, most pages end with the last scenario of a sequence of events and begin with the opening scenario of a new one. As has been shown, there are cases where page breaks are made more fluent by the employment of graphic matches and continuous appearances of characters, but it seems as though these are not imperatively necessary for a transition from one scene to another. Moore also concedes that

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42 cf. Bernard/Carter (13f.) for a discussion of "innovative bridgings of the space-time continuum" in this sequence (16).

> [t]he transition doesn't always have to be smooth. If you're skillful enough you can sometimes manage a very abrupt transition with such style that no one will notice any break in flow until the moment has passed and [the readers] are safely absorbed in the next scene within the story.
> (17)

Thus, writers and illustrators have the option of setting their trust in their abilities to capture their audience and keep them in suspense just long enough to overlook minor inconsistencies or abrupt changes of scene.[43] They can benefit from the reader's willingness to create a relation, even between seemingly unrelated scenarios. As has been discussed in the introductory section of this chapter, the "narrativity on the part of the recipient"[44] (Wolf, "Problem" 95) can be taken as a quasi-constant, provided readers feel minimally supported by the narrative.

3.1.3. The Tableau as Superpanel:[45] Continuity within the Page

Juxtaposed panels, we have seen, narrate by virtue of being received successively with the inclusion of the gutter. Once one or several sequences of panels fill a page, they constitute the tableau, i.e., the whole page which can further be received in a more absolute mode, that is to say, grasped in its entirety. Based on the co-presence of panels and page, comics lend themselves to a plurivectoral as well as a monovectoral reading (Groensteen 147). Hence comics are quite unique in that they narrate, spatially speaking, synchronically as well as diachronically.

The question of the potential mutual exclusiveness of successivity and coexistence is present, famously, at the core of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1766 book-length study on the aesthetics of illusion *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*. Based on the medial differences between text (poetry) and image (painting), Lessing challenged Horace's maxim that poetry is like painting: "ut pictura poesis" (6). Lessing assigned to poetry the ability to relate temporally and to depict consecutive actions while he considered painting a spatial art (including sculpture) apt to depict simultaneously existing bodies and other entities (115-116), but unable to show more than one pregnant moment in time (24). When mulling over an image,

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43   There are artists whose work is characterized by their attempts to exhaust the reader's willingness to create continuity between panels. Transitions are deliberately difficult to follow, and still, in most cases, the reader will succeed in establishing a relation. Ware's *Acme Novelty Library* is a work that is full of such transitions.

44   My translation: "rezipientenseitige Narrativierung".

45   Groensteen coined the term "hyperframe" to denote the outline containing all panels on a page (30) and Eisner calls the tableau a "meta-panel" (*Comics* 63), which suggests the insertion of a panel within a panel, rather than the simultaneity of the entire page. Here, the term superpanel is used to describe the totality of all panels on a page.

so Lessing, several parts can be perceived at once but the coexistence of things cannot be effectively translated into text, given the consecutive nature of language (125).

Furthermore, the listener (or reader) of a poem is unable to hear (or look at) several expressions at once as they unfold over time, be it in spoken or written language (125). One factor omitted in *Laokoon* is the text that approaches the image by simulating iconicity, like figure or pattern poetry in which words are assembled to a shape which mirrors the poem's content. Featuring a strong connection between the iconic and the symbolic, such a technopaegnion requires a back and forth between the reading of words and the looking at the image (Plotke). Examples are "The Mouse's Tale" in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (36) or George Herbert's "Easter Wings" (Ferguson 331).[46] Just as technopaegnia depend on the reader's simultaneous reception of the words in succession and the image they elicit, the comics page can gain much when its audience manages to perceive both the serialized panels and the total image they add up to on the page.

Belgian comics writer and theorist Benoît Peeters believes that "at every moment, comics consist of a tension between the sequence and the tableau. The sequence, containing the image in its continuity, tends to lead us to browse over it. The tableau, isolating the image, allows us to linger"[47] (39). The tension, Peeters postulates, arises not out of the concurrence of succession and coexistence but out of their respective conditions of reception. Because the sequentialized panels nudge readers ever forward to the following frame and the tableau invites dwelling on, the audience is confronted with the task of absorbing both the panels' consecutive, linear array in sequence in a step-by-step manner as well as the page with its arrangement of the individual panels forming the entity of the page. This "double temporality"[48] (39) is one of the characteristics of comics. They thus bring together what Lessing rigorously separated into spatiality (image) and temporality (text). More specifically: If the comics page corresponds to spatial art, as it depicts several different moments in time simultaneously, and the linear sequence of panels is likened to the successive nature of poetry, or text in general, then comics is the medium that debunks Lessing's model.[49]

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46 For a vast range of figure poetry from Ancient Greek to Scandinavian and Chinese cf. Dick Higgins's *Pattern Poetry* (1987).

47 My translation: "[J]e dirai que la bande dessinée repose, à chaque instant, sur une tension entre le récit et le tableau. Le récit qui, englobant l'image dans une continuité, tend à nous faire glisser sur elle. Le tableau qui, l'isolant, permet qu'on s'y arrête".

48 My translation: "double temporalité".

49 Lessing's views have been challenged by scholars such as Rippl, who pointed out that some paintings and sculptures follow similar discursive structures as poetry, as they, too, demand an extended period of time for the reception process (37). Moreover, phenomena like technopaegnia or certain kinds of onomatopoeia cannot be fully reconciled with Lessing's views as the division between word and image is not always clear-cut. In the former, text is arranged in a way that alludes to the poem's content, in the latter, words can be rendered in a manner that reflects the word's

Simultaneity and succession, hence, are possible within one medium (Hoppeler/Etter/Rippl 63). Or, to quote Cuccolini: Comics are "temporal as well as spatial art"[50] (67).

Invested with this highly medium-specific double temporality, comics have a fascinating resource at their disposal which can either be employed to attract the readers' gaze to the tableau or to guide them onward across the panel sequence. Either one, page or sequence, always dominates. Peeters has engineered a helpful vocabulary that categorizes the correlations thus generated (fig. 23).

	Independence between récit and tableau	Interdependence between récit and tableau
Récit Dominates	Conventional	Rhetoric
Tableau Dominates	Decorative	Productive

Fig. 23:   Peeters's Table (41).[51]

Peeters coined the term "tableau" (39) to refer to the comics page in its entirety and to be contrasted with the "récit" (Peeters 39). While tableau translates roughly into 'layout', which is exactly what Peeters describes, the terminology of récit is imprecise and unsatisfactory, as Schüwer correctly remarks (210). "Récit" can signify anything from narration or plot to sequence and can thus entail a content-oriented or formal element. For a clarification of this quandary, let us turn to narratology. Genette's term "récit" in the original French version of his work about narrative discourse is translated into English as "narrative" (*Narrative Discourse* 25). It is used to describe "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events" (25). It further refers to the lesser-known meaning of "the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse" (25). While both denotations are incorporated in Peeters's use of the term, it becomes clear in the course of reading his work that what he contrasts to the encompassing entity of the tableau in order to establish the governing formal factor is neither plot nor narrative, but definitely sequence. Plot – the other shade of meaning inherent in récit – however, is what Peeters discusses when he examines the in(ter)dependence between récit and tableau. To pigeonhole page design according to the in(ter)dependence between layout and plot is to ponder correlations between form and content.[52]

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content, e.g., the sound words 'drip', used to describe a leaking faucet being shaped like drops of water. On the topic of such textual images or iconic words, cf. Hoppeler ("Kollaboration").
50 My translation: "Zeit- als auch Raumkunst".
51 My translation.
52 Schüwer further remarks that the analysis of in(ter)dependency between sequence – that other récit – and tableau is superfluous in that they evidently always depend on one another (212).

In order to accommodate these specifications, Peeters's table has been modified to show unequivocally the exact nuance of the meaning of récit. Fig. 24 allows for the distinction of the formal relation on the page, namely, the authority of either sequence or tableau (far left column), and the relation between form and content, i.e., the correlative in(ter)dependence of tableau and plot respectively (top right row).

		Relation between form and content	
		Independence between plot and tableau	Interdependence between plot and tableau
Relation between the formal aspects on the page[53]	Sequence dominates	**Conventional/ Regular**	**Rhetoric**
	Tableau dominates	**Decorative**	**Productive**

Fig. 24: Peeters's Table, modified.[54]

 ❖ *The Decorative Tableau*

For page designs characterized by no direct interaction between form and content, Peeters suggests the terms "conventional/regular" and "decorative". The latter is functionalized when the tableau constitutes the determining factor. Peeters declares the necessity of the page's singularity in demarcation of all other layouts and the will to surprise as one of the attributes of this model (47). Most often, it is the adornment of the gutter or an artistic display of other sorts related to the tableau that defines the decorative layout. No example in *Watchmen* can be given, as neither the gutter nor the frame surrounding the regular grid feature an artistic display of sorts. There are, however, numerous instances for the conventional layout.

 ❖ *The Conventional Tableau*

When the independence of form and content is retained but the sequence becomes the constitutive force, Peeters speaks of the "conventional" or "regular" utilization. In what he calls a "neutral" (42) approach to page design, the layout appears as a predetermined principle to which the plot is aligned, as is the case with most newspaper comic strips. The regular tableau has a vanishing effect in that it almost fully retreats behind the plot, allowing the reader to concentrate on minor differences

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53 If there was any uncertainty about whether the predominant element was the sequence or the tableau, a simple rule-of-thumb exists: If the panels have the same effect viewed only successively – like a flip-book – and without considering the tableau, it is the sequence that dominates. If the effect is a different one, the tableau dominates.
54 Translation and emphasis S. H.

between panels (44). It is therefore not surprising that the tableau is dominated by the sequence. Moore and Gibbons chose such a regular layout according to traditional comic book conventions. In most cases, the tableau is compartmentalized into nine panels of equal dimensions.[55] Adhereing to this geometric construction, they stripped the layout from its dominance and allowed the sequence to govern the page. The effect, Gibbons observed in an interview, is one of a surrounding structure that vacates the stage for the narrative ("Kieselsteine" 30). Sometimes, the utmost emphasis is placed on the plot by means of not only invariability in layout but also monotony of fore- or background.

Upon becoming conscious of Ozymandias's plan to sacrifice the lives of many New Yorkers for the inducement of peace negotiations between the nuclear weapon wielding nations, the Comedian, being at the end of his wits, breaks into the home of his retired enemy Edgar Jacobi, also known as Moloch the Mystic, to give free reign to his tears and lament his violent past.
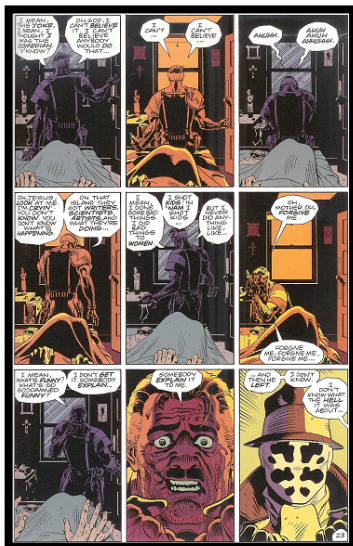

Fig. 25:
Emphasizing details by means of unvarying panel content (#2, 22/1-9).

Fig. 25 illustrates how the recipient's attention is principally drawn to minor alterations within the panels: The Comedian's remarks, actions, movements, gestures but also the change of lighting and color in Jacobi's room caused by the incessant blinking of an outside neon sign and the switch from the flashback (#2, 22/1-8) to the present (9) are certain to capture the audience's attention.[56] The magnitude of the Comedian's

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55 Deviations from the 3x3 grid belong to the realm of the rhetoric layout which will be discussed presently.

56 Referring to a visually monotonous page in Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell*, Schüwer has impressively shown that there is the eventuality of the unchanging grid's compromization of the recipient's focus on the plot. When a panel with minimal alterations apart from text is retained for longer stretches, the recipient is bound to take notice of the page's medial reality (222). In such a case, the regular layout is no longer subjected to the plot but emancipates itself from it (221-222).

discovery and the value of this information for Rorschach's investigations of the former's murder, substantiate the focus on detail and especially the spoken text.

❖ *The Rhetoric Tableau*

When the sequence retains its dominance, as discussed in the conventional or regular function, but form and content engage in interaction, Peeters speaks of a rhetorically functionalized layout. The page is dependent on the plot and serves to accommodate its requirements for "the dimension of the panel is inflected according to the action that is described"[57] (49). In comic, vertically stretched panels typically accommodate leaps while horizontal panel expansion supports the embedding of level action and panoramic views. In addition to this spatial quality, a broadened frame may also encompass a temporal component. McCloud has further demonstrated how in comics, time is perceived spatially. That is to say, the content of wide panels is perceived as unfolding over longer periods of time than the content of narrow panels and longer panels without borders can strike readers as timeless (*Understanding* 101-102). But a frame's elasticity does not stop there. It can further be molded to support all sorts of actions. Although there is no absolute correspondence, jagged outlines, for instance, tend to contain strong emotions or loud noise and wavelike panel borders usually indicate a dream, a flight of fancy or a flashback.[58] In the rhetoric function, which pervades most comics, the employment of such techniques emphasizes the sequence and correlates content with form, plot with layout.

The rigid nine-panel grid in *Watchmen* is occasionally abandoned to make room for wider or taller, or, less often, smaller panels, which adhere to the 3x3 layout in that "[e]very image is a single or a multiple of the individual panel" (Dittmar 124). While this allows for a very large number of different page designs,[59] it is still confining in that round or jagged panels, for instance, are not possible. Modifications of the classic nine-panel grid are undertaken to incorporate the cityscape (#1, 14/1), close-ups (#4, 5/4), the fantastic nature of a journey on Mars (#9, 10/1), or the last, frantic

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This page from *Watchmen*, however, while repetitive, bears sufficient variation to forego the conjuring of a self-referential effect.

57   My translation: "la dimension de la case se plie à l'action qui est décrite".

58   For further examples cf. Eisner (*Comics* 44ff.).

59   If all page layouts are derived from the nine-panel grid and consist of multiples or singles of the basic panel, no fewer than 1434 alternatives become possible. (I am greatly indebted to Dragan Milic and Cindy-Jane Armbruster, who provided me with this figure. To arrive at this result, the line between each panel can be thought of as a switch, which can either be off or on. If a switch is on, say the one between panels 1 and 2, then panels 1 and 2 are joined. With each switch having 2 possible states and there being 12 switches, combinatorics tells us that there are 2^{12} possible combinations. However, this number includes multiple counts of the same solution, i.e., there are several combinations which all result in the same panel constellation. In order to arrive at the correct number, they had to tackle the problem numerically, with a computer program).

moments in the lives of Ozymandias's victims (#11, 28/1-12). In all these cases, we can only assume that the layout or sequence was constructed based on the requirements of the plot because it does make sense to depict these specific actions, events and details in these explicitly altered panels. Nevertheless,

> [t]he productive form [...] and the rhetoric form [...] represent the poles of a gradual scale. At one, the "productive", end, the tableau generates the plot [...]. At the other, "rhetoric" end of the scale, the tableau is motivated by the plot. In between lie those cases, for which it cannot be simply decided, whether the depicted plot determines the tableau or vice versa.[60]
> (Schüwer 229)

In consequence, the recipient has no way of knowing whether the content has shaped the individual panels and arranged them in sequence (rhetoric function) or whether the layout was determined before the images filled the panels (productive function). Unless, of course, the same layout is used repeatedly: The productive tableau can only be unerringly identified when it reoccurs (226), otherwise it may well be rhetoric.

❖ *The Productive Tableau*

For this other form of interaction between form and content, the productive tableau, the parameters set by the layout affect the plot. Comics creators first conceive of the panels' arrangement on the page to only subsequently complete them with images. The tableau is productive in that it produces the images to complement the layout (Peeters 53). *Watchmen* makes use of the productive layout for example in #3 (fig. 26).

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60 My translation: "Die produktive Form [...] und die rhetorische Form [...] bilden die Extrempositionen einer graduellen Skala. An deren einem, 'produktiven' Ende generiert das Tableau die Handlung [...]. Am anderen, 'rhetorischen' Ende der Skala wird das Tableau seinerseits durch die Handlung motiviert. Dazwischen liegen jene Fälle, in denen sich nicht ohne weiteres entscheiden lässt, ob die gezeigte Handlung das Tableau bestimmt oder das Tableau die Handlung".

Fig. 26: The productive layout across several pages (#3, 11-16).

Across six pages, the plot is inscribed into a preconceived page layout. The panels that would in the 3x3 grid correspond to panels 2/3, 4/5, and 8/9 are combined so that on the left, from top to bottom, a panel sequence short-long-short relates the main plot and on the right, again from top to bottom, a panel sequence long-short-long narrates the sub plot. Each plot complements the other not only in terms of panel size but also, as we have seen in 3.1.2, as regards content, by means of overlapping text.[61]

However helpful Peeters's coordination may be, there are cases that elude easy categorization. The dominance of either sequence or tableau may remain disputable, or a page may be at once rhetorically *and* productively harnessed, i.e., it may give equal footing to the sequence and the tableau or it may consist of a pre-conceived layout that not only generates but also champions the plot,[62] or it may be simply be unclear whether there is a correlative relationship between content and form. #1, 4 (fig. 27) is an example of many of these. Two detectives engage in a discussion of their murder case while leaving the building from which the victim had been thrown. In an extension of fig. 19, which was examined in the context of overlapping text, we are presented with two alternating narrative strands, the yellowish panels depicting the present tense (4/1, 3, 5, 7-8) and the reddish ones relating the murder scenario (2, 4, 6).

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61 There are at least two other episodes that make use of the productive layout, which will be discussed in the chapter that pertains to continuity within the installment (3.1.4.).
62 cf. Schüwer 230.

Fig. 27:
Spatial connection of red panels produces meaning (#1, 4/1-8).

Viewed separately and consecutively, the red panels depict Blake's fall by virtue of dialogue and visually in the form of a flashback. It is only upon regarding the page as a whole that a supplementary spatial connection becomes apparent: Panels 2, 4 and 6 are parts of a sustained image within the tableau. Eliminating for the time being the presence and intervention of the other panels, we realize that the composition of skyscrapers is continuous, the buildings stretch from one panel into the next, with an unadulterated point of view. Even Blake's repeated appearance, though inflected by his relentless fall towards death, which is a prerequisite for the understanding of the action if read strictly sequentially, does not mitigate the simultaneous appreciation of the page as a whole. Panels' 2, 4 and 6 coalescence into a coherent entity before the backdrop of the page can also be received sequentially and thus is a perfect model of the double temporality expounded by Peeters.

Let us now return to the issue of mapping this specific page according to Peeters. Fig. 27 shows a conventional layout in that it is independent of the plot and favors the sequence. The plot's autonomy is most clearly expressed in the fact that the archetypal nine-panel grid, with the exception of panels 5 and 6 that are connected, has been adhered to and that panels 4 and 6 – which could have been linked (unlike 2 and 4, or 2 and 6) – remain separated by means of the gutter. It is this self-reliance of individual panels that could have but have *not* been connected that gives the sequence dominance over the tableau. This neutral way of depicting action lets the reader focus on the plot, rather than the formal features of the page. At the same time, the page is employed rhetorically by the combination of a correlation between form and content and the preponderance of the sequence. We are faced with the rhetoric function when visual effects attend and adapt to the narrative's requirements (Peeters 50). Even though the gutter separates them, panels 2, 4 and 6 actually form

the continuous image of Blake's fall. Sequential dominion is established as red- and yellowish-hued panel sequences enunciate that there are two distinct plots at play and as the two narrative strands take turns narrating and engage in interaction by virtue of the overlapping text, which creates meaning beyond simple juxtaposition. "Expressiveness", one of the defining features of the rhetoric function according to Peeters (41), is granted by the concurrence of two discrete narratives rather than the more common modification of panels.

To make matters even more intricate, fig. 27 could also be argued to display a productive layout insofar as form and content depend on one another and the tableau operates as dominating organization principle. Panels belonging to the murder-narrative (2, 4, 6) are arranged to offer additional meaning when read simultaneously, as part of the overall tableau: Blake's fall is depicted on a continuous background that stretches across the page diagonally. Sequential reception also allows for a correct understanding of the events, yet it is when viewed in total that the page delivers additional meaning. What is more, with this page as with the majority of others, *Watchmen* adheres to the 3x3 grid or minor derivations from it which conjures up the notion of the pre-conceived layout that is productive insofar as it helps generate and shape the plot.

Conclusively, Moore and Gibbons have chosen to adhere to three of Peeters's four categories: Every page in *Watchmen* is either a perfect example or a slight modification of the basic nine-panel grid, stretching some panels to encompass two, three or more panel slots. Of those modifications, panel shapes are adapted according to the requirements of the plot. Most commonly, hence, layouts are either conventional/regular and rhetoric. We have seen that the distinction between them is not always easy and can sometimes be subject to debate. The productive layout, also, can be found a handful of times. It is necessary to observe that the crucial aspect of the productive tableau in *Watchmen* is not so much the dominance of the tableau over the sequence as the pre-conception of the layout. Especially in comparison to comics that employ a wider range of different page conceptions, *Watchmen* is an epitome of continuity that is created by the sustained use of the classic page grid or variations thereof.

3.1.4. What Goes on between Page 1 and Page 28? Continuity within the Installment[63]

Previous chapters have taken stock of the construction of continuity within the individual panel and within the sequence. We have seen that discrete panels may contain more than the mere instant depicted at first sight due to their ability to metonymize action and dialogue. This fusion of several moments into one is what allows comics to elect one single image that will then stand for an expanded period of time. As for continuity within the sequence, uniformity of characters, unwavering color coding, graphic matches or overlapping text may help to establish links between panels. When arranged to fill a page, panels may not only convey meaning through their sequentiality but also by means of their specific display. Certain subtleties of content only become accessible upon the reception of the page as an entity. But the comprehensive production and maintenance of continuity does not stop there. An exceptional array of continuity-forming instances can also be located between the two respective ends of each of the twelve *Watchmen* episodes.

One of the main differences between comics and film – the medium it is most often equated with – is their capacity, respectively incapacity, to let the recipient browse: Whereas comics invite audiences to skip back and forth not just between panels but also between pages or even chapters,[64] film has more forward thrust as previous moments or scenes cannot be returned to.[65] It is comics' potential to navigate backwards and forwards through pages that embodies the bedrock for the notion of the "trace"[66] as introduced by art historian Fritz Breithaupt (37ff.). He believes that

> [n]early every component of an image can qualify as a trace. [...] When it appears for the first time, it has no particular meaning. [...] Only when the trace emerges for the second time, its appearance gains significance retrospectively. Only with its second appearance can a trace be designated as such. And it is only in retrospective that the second image reveals what was already visible in the first one.[67]
> (37f.)

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63 The distinction between continuity within an installment and continuity within the entire work may not always be simple as it is obvious that things that reoccur within the installment can also be argued to re-emerge within the work as a whole. Nevertheless, each episode seems to be partial to certain objects, ideas or characters which will be at the center of my analysis.

64 Even most webcomics allow for achronological perusal.

65 The exception is when film is viewed on a data carrier that allows for the rewinding and rewatching of segments, like DVD.

66 My translation: "Indiz".

67 My translation: "Nahezu jeder Bestandteil eines Bildes kann als Indiz qualifizieren [...] Wenn das Indiz das erste Mal erscheint, hat es keine besondere Bedeutung. [...] Erst wenn das Indiz das zweite Mal auftritt, erhält sein erstes Auftreten rückwirkend Bedeutsamkeit. Erst im zweiten Auftreten des Indizes kann dieses als solches bestimmt werden. Und erst nachträglich wird im zweiten Bild deutlich, was im ersten bereits zu sehen war".

This statement is validated when we consider any panel on any page in *Watchmen*: There might be a character voicing a guess, a newspaper caption or an individual's gesture that seems innocent enough – until we take into account another panel containing the affirmation of that conjecture, a newsworthy event or the replication of a certain gesture. This is when the first trace becomes invested with meaning. More specifically, being presented with new characters, readers have little chance to determine whether they are just a one-offs, background characters to disappear without further ado, or whether they may be promoted to more prominent figures or even leading characters. Possibly the best example is the red-haired man holding a sign alerting the public to the world's ostensibly imminent doom: He initially appears on the very first page of *Watchmen* (#1, 3) but only becomes a trace when he makes another appearance a couple of pages later (4/5, 7-8). Readers are required to identify the sign (4/5) and later the man (4/7-8) in order for the trace to become noticeable.[68] The matter of noticeability can be quite intricate, especially when the first and the following parts of a trace are scattered and few and far between. When this is the case, readers' hindsight is crucial, otherwise a trace only becomes obvious or significant when viewed in the light of its doubles, that is, when the graphic novel is read over again. Hereby, many elements that are not considered particularly noteworthy upon their first appearance, prove themselves to operate as a sort of prolepsis, anticipating future events (Kukkonen 66). Such traces are numerous and can be tracked throughout *Watchmen*. Indeed, I would argue that very few other graphic narratives exhibit such an immense density regarding traces. Accordingly, the concept will accompany us through the subsequent chapters.

Formally, ten out of twelve installments are composed of 28 continuously numbered pages; the first comprises 26, the twelfth 32 pages. Every issue is endowed with a title page, consisting of an issue number indication, a small clock and a page-sized image; a title, which appears within the first six pages of the respective number; approximately 28 pages of narrative; and a short, annotative epilogue consisting of one or two sentences from sources as various as songs, poems or the Bible. Some relations between these components can be found in every installment and create continuity through the entire work, while others are restricted to the individual episode. Between the end of the narrative proper and the next episode are located what I call *intermediate chapters* (IC). Nearly all of these are composed of a different

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68 Given that he is the very first person to appear in the first installment and given that he reappears after such a short interval, readers may already become alert to this characters' magnitude. And indeed, it is revealed in #5 (28/7) that he is, in fact, the vigilante known as Rorschach whose actions will, ultimately, determine whether Ozymandias's plot to save the world from a nuclear showdown is successful.

form of text, such as prose excerpts from fictional books, interviews or scientific treatises, and the depiction of the doomsday clock, to be found at the very end of the respective intermediate chapter. They will become relevant in the section concerned with continuity throughout the series, i.e., 3.1.5. In the following, different ways of creating continuity within the installments of *Watchmen* will be analyzed and categorized according to their function rather than according to the issue to which they belong.

❖ *"Pretty as a Picture"*:[69] *The Title Page*

Continuity within the episode commences with the very first image: the title page. It constitutes the first appearance of a trace that will reappear at least once in the installment. Unlike title pages of the common, action-oriented, serially published comic book, the title pages of *Watchmen* are not intended for the creation of suspense but for the appeal to people who do not regularly purchase comics (Gaiman, "Ein Tor" 11). The conventional action comic book's title page shows the inversion of a desirable situation, that is to say, the hero is helplessly captured and at the mercy of the villain. More often than not, the circumstances on the title page turn out to be either a dream or part of a parallel universe, rendering the link between the situation on the title page and the comic book's story rather unfathomable. In the attempt to allure readers by means of the title page, the comics writer and illustrator often stretch the connection between story and title image to absurdity. Instead of resorting to this established discontinuity, Moore and Gibbons built a bridge between the title page and the succeeding panel by establishing a visual relationship between them.

The opening panel of each episode shows the object that is also on its title page, but either provided with text, depicted from a different angle or zoomed out on in order to take into account the larger context. In Genette's terms, a paratextual element – the title page – is turned into an integral part of the text (*Paratexts* 1). In two separate interviews, Moore states that they tried to play hide and seek in *Watchmen*, for instance on the covers, where only details are shown (Stewart, "Synchronität" 21), and that it was Gibbons's idea to exclude humans from the covers and focus on details instead (Eno/Csawza). The following example illustrates Moore's statement:

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69 #2, 1/1, cf. fig. 28.

Fig. 28:
Continuing the title page (#2, title page and 1/1).[70]

Only the second panel of fig. 28 reveals what the title page depicts in detail: A statue on a graveyard that is the site of Edward Blake's funeral. There is a strong continuity from title page to the first panel of the opening page even though the differences are abundant like the quality of the drawing, attention to detail, choice of color palette, etc. Thus, the object on the title page does not stall at the state of an incipient trace which is not followed up but becomes a full-fledged, meaningful trace.

In issues #10 and 12, the trace of the title page operates as introductory agent, i.e., to get the plot started. These two splash panel[71] objects – depicting a radar screen and a blood-stained clock respectively – do not achieve much more than the inauguration of the episode as they are not repeated within the installments. By contrast, the graveyard figure of #2, the first Nite Owl's golden statue titled "In gratitude" of installment #8 and the almost all-encompassing whiteness of snow on the title page of episode #11 are elements that disappear after the first page, only to re-emerge at the very end of the episode. Sculpture, statue and snow are functionalized as framing devices. Each of these episodes thus seems to be brought to an interim conclusion, even if the story is far from completed. The most prolific manner in which the object from the title page metamorphoses into a continuous trace is when it becomes a theme. This is the case in all remaining issues (#1, 3-7 and 9).

While their common denominator is the continuous presence of the object introduced on the title page, there are various ways in which these thematically repeated occurrences take place. The object can be an intradiegetic part of the story, that is to say, it is shown, for instance, in the hands of a character or in the background of a scene. Let us deliberate on #6 as an example. The splash panel of the title page shows a card with the idiosyncratic black-on-white pattern of the

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70 Panel 1/1 would also serve as an excellent example of how the image within a panel can influence the reception of overlapping text. cf. 3.1.2.
71 A splash panel is one that takes up the entire page or double page.

Rorschach inkblot test, which maintains a powerful position as trace throughout this part (fig. 29):
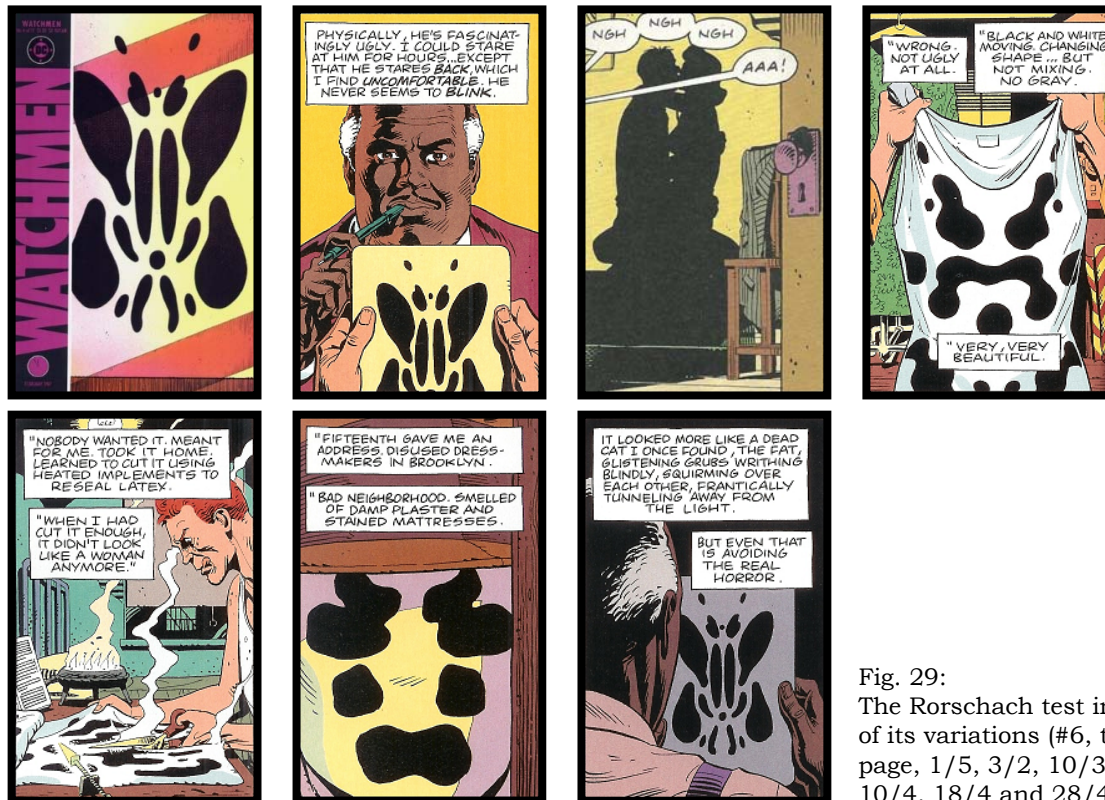

Fig. 29:
The Rorschach test in some of its variations (#6, title page, 1/5, 3/2, 10/3, 10/4, 18/4 and 28/4).

Embodied in the form of the Rorschach test itself, the shadow of a couple in embrace, a piece of fabric or the vigilante's mask, the design of the test always filters through. Whether the confrontation with the theme takes place frontally or more laterally, it always constitutes a major part of the panel by virtue of its stark monochrome contrast. And these are just the most prominent images mirroring the title page – altogether there are at least 60 (out of 234) panels that reflect the Rorschach test card in some way or another. This means that the percentage of the continuity-building panels is at least 25%. Such an uncompromising repetition of the title page's image is rare, in *Watchmen* and in comics in general, as constant projection of one visual element would most likely tire readers and jeopardize their patience. Accordingly, other *Watchmen* installments that elevate the title page image to full-fledged theme feature reproductions of the image in question in a slightly less obvious but at least as stringently continuous way.

Episode #7, for instance, is all about vision. Ironically, it starts out with a detail on both the title page and the opening panel that at first sight poses a challenge to cognition (fig. 30). Only when replicated and zoomed out on in the subsequent panel (1/2), it reveals its nature, namely the left glass of Nite Owl's goggles that are part of his costume and the reflection of his owlship therein.
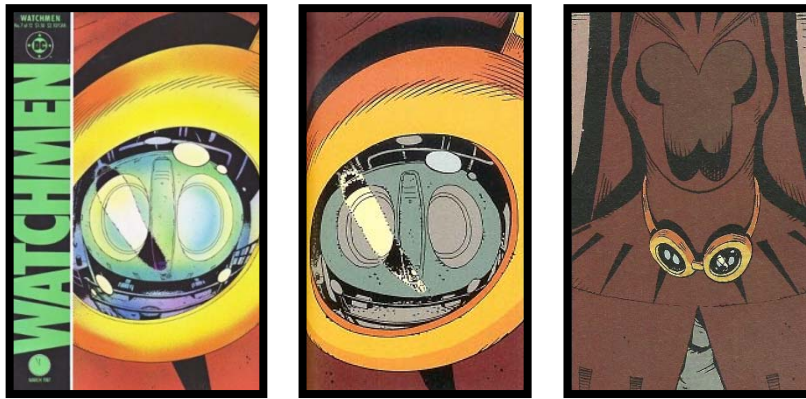
112

Fig. 30:
The trace (#7, title page, 1/1-2).

We see the owlcraft "Archie" reflected on the shiny surface and there is a streak across it which stems from Laurie's wiping her finger across the glass.[72] The idea of clearing one's view, respectively, having one's view cleared as well as the notions of reflection in the sense of imitation and mirroring and of viewing and spectatorship in general echo throughout the installment. The following (fig. 31) is merely a selection of images that support such a reading.
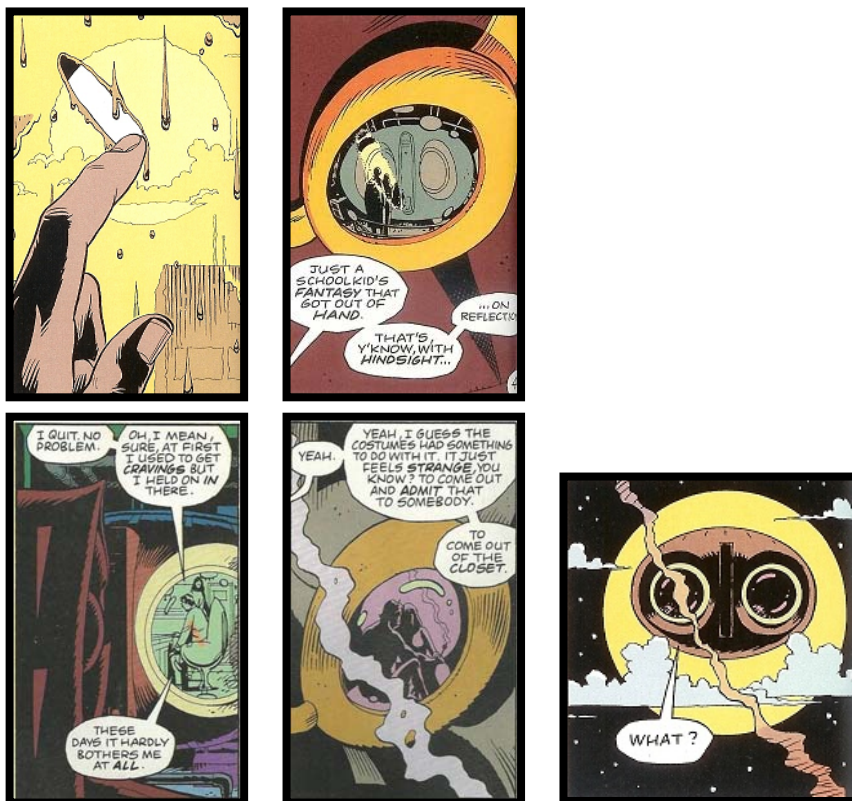
Fig. 31:
Clearing one's vision, reflection and spectatorship
(#7, 18/3, 4/9, 7/3,[73] 28/4 and 28/9).

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72 The resemblance to the smiley badge with the blood stain is not a coincidence and will be a matter to be discussed in 3.1.5.
73 This panel competently illustrates Mitry's notion of the "semisubjective image" (214f.): We are presented with a point of view that is almost, but not exactly that of Nite Owl's costume. The audience is *with* the spectator, which is why we are able to see part of the costume, which we would not if the perspective were entirely subjective.

Dan's finger leaves a bright spot on a blind window (18/3), the protagonists' likeness can be seen as reflected in the goggles' shiny surface (4/9 and 28/4) and the audience's perspective has at times a slightly voyeuristic tinge as it seems to observe stealthily (7/3).

The theme is furthered through the depiction of Laurie's, and later Dan's, vision through Nite Owl's goggles from a subjective point of view (9/9-10/1, 19/2, 5, 21/4), the lovers' watching of television (11/7ff.), surveillance screens (23/2) as well as the concession that "THESE DAYS, I FEEL LIKE SOMETHING'S WATCHING MY EVERY MOVE" (10/9). Furthermore, obscured vision is reproduced by such details as steam from a coffee cup rising into Dan's face (12/6) or cigarette smoke wafting across goggles (28/4). By contrast, the notion of a clarified image is inherent in such mundane acts as the polishing of glasses (9/5, 13/1-3) or in Archie's windows being washed (22/2), in the protagonists' conversation about the past which has a revelatory effect (4/6-10/9), in Laurie's realization that Dan is actually a good-looking man (fittingly, she finds this out because he has his glasses removed to clean them, 13/3-5), in the exact positioning of Dan and Laurie's reflection into the goggles' only clear spot (4/9) or in such statements as "…EVERYTHING WAS CLEAR AS DAY" (10/9).

To top off a decidedly saturated episode, the very last image evokes not only the owlship with the mark across one of its windows from the issue's title page but also the smiley badge with the bloody stain from the graphic novel's cover. The aircraft's hovering in front of a yellow full moon is positioned so that its windows function as the smiley's eyes while clouds reproduce the upturned corners of the mouth and rising smoke substitutes the red blot (28/9).

Such faithful devotion to the theme put forth by the title page is also part of #9 which introduces a technique of establishing continuity from the title page to the narrative by way of interlacing a series of panels with absolutely minimal variations of the title page image into the main plot. A conversation that ensues after Dr. Manhattan has teleported Laurie to Mars forms the red thread of the narrative. Since #9 is the part of the series dedicated to Laurie, there are several voyages into her past that wind up bringing an important facet of her life to the light. Both first narrative as well as analepses are interspersed by images of an open bottle of the perfume named *Nostalgia* (by Adrian Veidt)[74] in motion, spilling liquid at it rotates through the empty air. The very first instance of this trace is implemented on the title page. At first, the link between the individual portrayals of the travelling flacon and the narrative at large remains obscure, apart from the fact that each analepsis contains

74 For a interesting line of approach to Moore and Gibbons's interleaving of text and picture with regard to the leitmotiv of this perfume, cf. Backe 38-39 and 128ff.

either the spilling of liquid and/or the breaking of glass, i.e., the assumed outcome of a glass bottle in motion.

Upon being prompted to recollect her earliest memory, Laurie recalls an incident from her childhood during which she overhears her mother and her partner engage in a dispute concerning Sally's relationship with Edward Blake after his attempt to rape her. As a child, Laurie admires her mother's Silk Spectre costume and a snow globe that ends up being shattered, spilling its contents on the ground (#9, 6/7-8/4). The second flashback reveals Laurie's interaction with several of her mother's crime-fighting friends in 1962, among them Byron Lewis also known as Mothman, who, driven to alcoholism and mental instability by the anxiety accompanied with being a flying hero,[75] drops a glass of water to the ground (10/7-12/8). Next is the account of how Laurie first met the Comedian following the hapless meeting of the Crimebusters in April 1966. Laurie's naivete, her mother's rage, anxiety and determination to prohibit any contact between the two, and the Comedian's unwonted helplessness all have a part in this retrospective which ends with Sally in tears (14/4-16/7). The last of Laurie's flashbacks cuts to November 1973. During a banquet held in honor of Blake, Laurie gets drunk and publicly confronts the guest of honor with the revelation made in Hollis Mason's biography *Under the Hood* that he attempted to rape Silk Spectre in 1940. In the last panel, she throws a glass of Scotch into his face (19/4-21/4). While the breaking snow globe (8/4) and the glass filled with water dropped by ex-superhero Byron (12/8) immediately succeed the depiction of the tumbling glass vessel, Sally's tears (16/7) and the spilling of Scotch into Blake's face (21/4) directly precede it.

Even upon completion of the last flashback, the relevance of the interlaced series of perfume images remains obscure, but not for long. When, in a tour de force of juxtaposing meaningful scraps of utterances and images from the past, the collected weight and significance of all those memories comes rushing to Laurie at once (23/1-9), she is compelled to face the fact that Blake, eventually forgiven for his violation of Silk Spectre, was her father (24/4). In her blind fury, she hurls the bottle of perfume that she carried in her handbag at the glass structure erected by Dr. Manhattan (24/4). The subsequent panels depict the bottle's continuing trajectory, but this one differs from the ones preceding it in that it is for the first time intradiegetically embedded into the main narrative (27/5-7). Upon colliding with the glass construction, the perfume container is shattered and the liquid is spilt (24/7). Only now does it become clear that the images of the spinning flacon were not, in fact, part

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75 The issue is probed deeper into in *Before Watchmen: Minutemen* (#1-6).

of a separate narrative but proleptic glances of Laurie's outraged action.[76] When viewed in sequence, the closely related images reveal a sort of slow motion[77] spinning movement of the flacon (fig. 32):
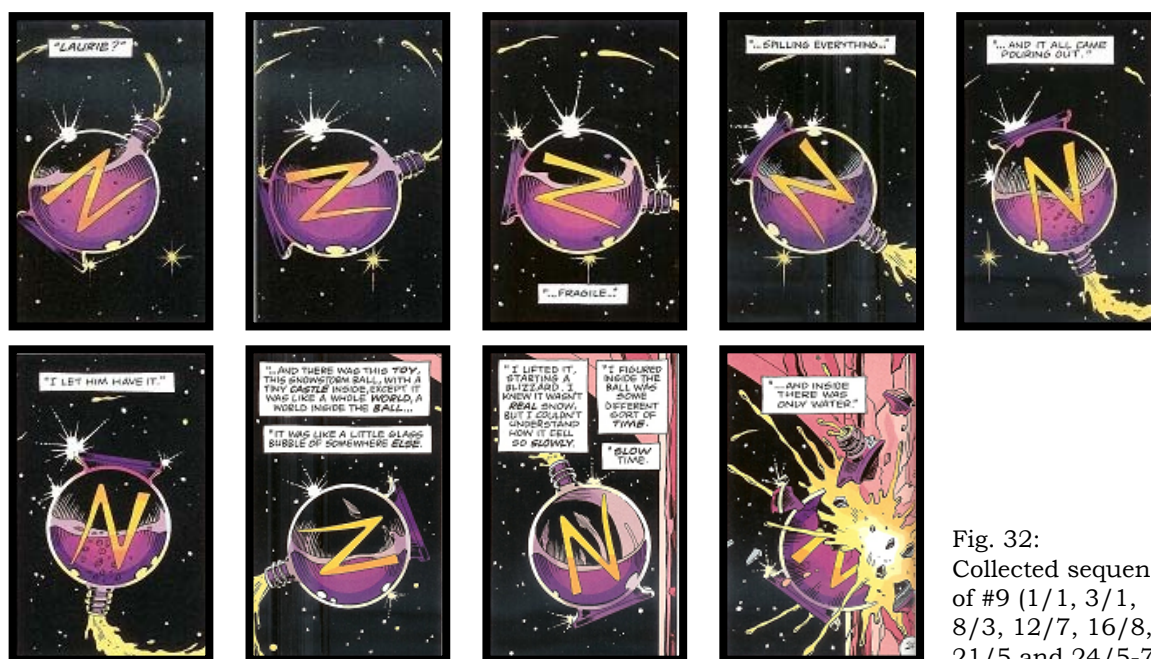

Fig. 32: Collected sequence of #9 (1/1, 3/1, 8/3, 12/7, 16/8, 21/5 and 24/5-7).

The bottle's exact 360 degree revolution (cf. first and last panel of fig. 32) that is dispersed across the episode actually takes place within very few seconds, namely the time that is required for the vessel to pass from Laurie's hand to Dr. Manhattan's glass edifice.

The prospective visualization of the perfume's trajectory serves as anticipation of the most emotional moment in the narrative. In hindsight, everything in episode #9 builds towards this split second and the disclosure connected to it. Hence continuity is achieved not only by adherence to a theme – in this case the metaphorical shattering of illusions and leaking of truth which is amplified by the literal breaking of glass and spilling of liquid – but also by the anticipative protraction of the issue's pivotal scene. Exemplified by the smashing of the perfume *Nostalgia* into pieces, any sort of wistful longing for the past, should Laurie have been harboring any such feelings, is destroyed in this moment.

If the notion of individual images woven into the narrative without an immediately deducible objective seems familiar, it is because this particular method of working

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76   A similar effect can be achieved in television or film when what is first taken for extradiegetic music becomes part of the diegetic world. This metaleptic play is often employed for comic effect, but not here.

77   The impression of slowly elapsing time is aroused by the intervals at which the respective panels are placed within the narrative and from the minor progress the spinning bottle makes. The latter is indicated by the bottle's "passage across the fixed stars" (Gibbons/Kidd/Essl, chpt. IX n.p.).

towards a crucial moment in the narrative is also employed in the configuration of the doomsday clock incrementally approaching midnight in the intermediate chapters of *Watchmen*. Conclusively, even though the narrative is interrupted by analepses and fragments of parts of the story are dispersed across the installment, continuity is warranted by means of the title page image's extension into the narrative and the unremitting work towards the key scene.

Continuity within the episode relies to a very large extent on the title page and to the rigorous adherence to the theme it proposes. Some episodes neglect the reiteration of the title page trace more or less until the very last panel, while others stay faithful to the theme put forth by it. The scope of links ranges from the simple transition of title page to the next panel to the construction of frames to complex associations between the first narrative and several sub plots that only become manifest upon contemplation and close observation. However, there are other means of constructing continuity within the installment.

❖ *Titles and Epilogues*

In their treatise of the title's structure and functions, Genette and Bernard Crampé write that the purpose of the contemporary title is "designation", "indication" and "seduction of the public" (709). They examine text-only works, but their theory can be expanded to include comics as well. "Designation", so Genette and Crampé, is the most important of the three functions and refers to the naming or identification of a work, which need not necessarily be indicative of the work's subject matter. We will see, however, that titles in *Watchmen* are mainly content-related. Each issue of *Watchmen* features a title page that consists of an enlarged image and the vertical indication of the graphic narrative's title, e.g., "WATCHMEN", alongside publication date and price as well as a less generic title that appears within the first six pages of the narrative, e.g., "THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH" (#3, 1). "Indication" describes the title's reference to form and/or content. "WATCHMEN" is an indication of the form while "THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH" is an indication of the content. "[S]eduction of the public", finally, denotes the title's objective to appeal to its intended audience and, in the case of comics, can be argued to be as much the role of the title page's pictorial elements as that of the title. Admittedly, the continuity between title and content is not a phenomenon that is specific to *Watchmen*, for it is part of many works of art and most *Watchmen* titles first and foremost perform the conventional task of naming their respective issues. For instance, the title allotted to #4 – "WATCHMAKER" designates the history of Dr. Manhattan, the earlier Jon Osterman, whose father was a watchmaker and into whose shoes he

was going to step. Similarly, #6 is titled "THE ABYSS GAZES ALSO"[78] and is an indication of how Dr. Malcolm Long finds himself increasingly engrossed by Walter Kovacs's dark aura. This psychological abyss is reflected in contentual details like his estrangement from his wife but also formally as the episode grows gradually darker to conclude with a black panel.

An even more explicit indication of form is "FEARFUL SYMMETRY", the title of #5[79] which, in addition to referring to the strictly palindromatic nature of Rorschach's mask, is eponymous for the selection of layout, cast, location, props, color scheme and diegetic levels Moore and Gibbons made for said installment.[80] The first page is matched by the last, the second by the penultimate, etc. until pages 14 and 15 which constitute the core at which the two continually approaching halves culminates in one large panel that runs across the page break (fig. 33). Leafing outward of the center on pages 14 and 15 in both directions, we come to realize that the matching pages mirror each in various ways.

For instance, if Rorschach is the focalizer and autodiegetic narrator of page 11, he is also the focalizer and autodiegetic narrator of the corresponding page 18; scenes taking place in Moloch's apartment herald and end the installment; a poster of Buddha or the Rumrunner neon sign can be found on the analogous pages 6 resp. 7 resp. and 22 resp. 23; the first and last two pages feature an identical alternation in blueish and reddish hue (1, 2 and 27, 28); whenever the first half of the installment focuses on the hypodiegetic narrative of the Black Freighter, the second half also concentrates on the comic book within the comic book (e.g., 12 and 17, 9 and 20); etc. At the very center, loyalty to symmetry is even taken one step further:

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78 Contextualized, this title reads "Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you" (#6, 28/9). Most sources give a slightly different wording of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietsche's statement: "He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee" (146).

79 In view of Moore's penchant for consistency as, for example, inherent in his rendering of a dystopian Britain in *V for Vendetta* which, entirely true to its name, features characters named V and Evey, commences each episode with a title beginning with the letter V, lets the protagonist recite highly alliterative, V-heavy speeches, etc., it is highly unlikely to be a coincidence that #5 with its symmetric visual appearance was chosen for this kind of feat. As a side note, the logo of Veidt products also contains a V and can be found in such details as Bernie's shoes (#3, 1/1), Mason's television (17/8), hairspray (#5, 25/6), Veidt's cufflinks (13/1), medicine (#6, 13/2), etc., an omnipresence foretelling Veidt's significance for every character, that will find a sad climax in #11.

80 Backe also discusses this chapter in much detail (66-73).

Fig. 33:
Fearful symmetry (#5, 14-15/1-7).

While the above examples prove the symmetry of the respective pages, fig. 33 demonstrates unconditional fidelity to equilibrium not just in terms of layout but also as far as panel composition is concerned. In cinematographic terms, after a long shot of Adrian Veidt and the attacker in panel 1, there is a zoom out to admit more background information in panel 2 before a medium shot in panel 3. This motion towards and away from the center of action is mirrored in panels 5, 6 and 7, which form the equivalents of panels 1, 2 and 3. Panel 4, finally, embodies not just the middle of the page but also the middle of the episode.[81] Further graphic equivalence is exposed in details like the basin that appears at the bottom of panels 2 and 6, Veidt's spatial positioning within all panels and, most noticeably, the large letter "V" that shapes the background in the large middle panel. Returning to what was said about the productive panel layout in 3.1.3., it becomes clear that at least the second half of #5 adheres to it. Even if the layout of page 1 is constructed to match the story (rhetorical layout), page 28 needs to mirror the layout of page 1 if the issue's specific trait is to be in perfect symmetry.

Some palindromatic details found their way into #5 by coincidence: At the site of the murder of two children by the hand of their Hippie father who wanted to "SPARE THE LITTLE ONES" (7/2) the nuclear war he was convinced would soon break out, a poster by the 1960s rockband The Grateful Dead can be seen in the background (7/6). Gibbons chose the perfectly symmetrical art by Rick Griffin in order to reflect the issue's perfect balance. Only then did he discover that the album's title was the palindrome *Aoxomoxoa*, which shares the episode's mirror structure (Gaiman, "Ein

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81 Moore and Gibbons would presumably also have made it the center of their work, but with an even number of issues, this was not possible.

Tor" 12). To summarize, the trace instigated by the title is followed up by a vast range of palindromes in #5.

At this point, let us make a brief digression from the continuity within the episode, to focus on the striking fact that Moore and Gibbons not only conceived of a continuous equilibrium for #5, but also structured each installment symmetrically by framing it with a matching title and epilogue as well as a small doomsday clock next to the issue indication and another miniature clock below the epilogue. What is more, the entire work functions according to the principle of symmetry: Half of the installments are concerned with action and move the plot forward, whereas the other six episodes are dedicated to the protagonists' origins and alert the recipient to events in the past. Apart from the plot-focused issues inaugurating and ending *Watchmen*, the former also constitute every other installment, alternating with the biography-focused episodes. Rather than simply alternating the two kinds of episodes from beginning to end, Moore and Gibbons decided to begin with the alteration at both ends – geographically speaking – of the story, producing the mirror-like structure that is echoed in the symmetry of #5.

Titles can thus correlate with content *and* format, but what about the epilogues located at the very end of each issue? Consisting of a sentence or two from sources such as poetry, prose literature or music,[82] they are typically annotative in character. Despite the distance that separates the title, referring to the circumstances within the episode, and the epilogue, functioning as an annotation or comment, they are inherently linked. At the beginning of each installment stands an excerpt from the epilogue which in the course of the narrative is constantly imbued with new meaning, until the end of the installment, when the excerpt resumes its place within its original context. The title, hence, becomes a trace at the very latest upon the encounter of the epilogue.

Concerning subject matter, the relation between title and content is similar to that one between epilogue and content, except that the former is proleptic while the latter is analeptic and more comprehensive. For instance, the title of #2, "ABSENT FRIENDS", is programmatical for the setting of Blake's funeral as, on the one hand, his memorial service is attended only by a handful of people (Dr. Manhattan, Adrian Veidt, Dan Dreiberg, Edward Jacobi and very few others) while relatives, friends, etc. are missing. On the other hand, the title inevitably evokes Blake's irreversible absence. The funeral

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82   Specifically, these are excerpts from Genesis and the Book of Job, poems by William Blake, Eleanor Farjeon and Percy Bysshe Shelley, treatises or essays by Albert Einstein, C. J. Jung and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and quotes taken from songs by Bob Dylan, Nat King Cole, Elvis Costello and John Cole.

ceremony functions as a catalyst for a number of analepses into the glorious as well as not so glorious past of the Comedian from different perspectives,[83] explaining why his burial is not overflowing with brokenhearted friends.

So far, the title's task seems to fulfil merely the conventional task of naming. Only once the epilogue is taken into account does the larger context of the title reveal itself: It is part of a song by Elvis Costello titled "The Comedians". On top of the obvious reference to Blake's alter ego, it also calls to mind the humor and absurdity of grown men and women dressing up to fight crime. There are also numerous allusions to comedy throughout the episode, such as Sally's comment that Blake "ALWAYS THOUGHT HE'D GET THE LAST LAUGH" (3/4), the Comedian's sardonic remark following the failed meeting of the Crimebusters "SEE YOU IN THE *FUNNY PAPERS*" (11/5), or Rorschach's telling of a joke (27/3-7). Attentive readers who spot and connect these instances immediately may not be surprised by the epilogue but read it as a logical conclusion to the episode. Just as likely, however, the audience will not discern the connection and additional continuity spawned by retroaction[84] right away and will need to return to the installment in order to appreciate the continuity between content and epilogue. Put differently, the association that commenced with the title and was applied to the content comes full circle with the encounter of the epilogue, where it starts anew.

Keeping in mind what has been stated about frames in *Watchmen* so far, it should not come as a surprise that Moore and Gibbons not only provided title and matching epilogue for each episode but also enclosed the narrative as a whole by a title and epilogue that are intimately related. The overarching title *Watchmen* is, in fact, an excerpt from the translated quote "Who watches the Watchmen" ("Quis custodiet ipsos custodies?") by Juvenal in his *Satires*, as the very last page of the collected graphic novel informs us. The structure of teaser-installment-epilogue is thus expanded to teaser-graphic novel-epilogue.

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83 Sally Juspeczyk remembers the Comedian's attempt to rape her (4/7-8/1), Adrian Veidt thinks back to the failed meeting of the Crimebusters in the 1960s (9/4-11/7), Dr. Manhattan recalls a particularly shocking scene from the time when he and the Comedian were in Vietnam and the latter ended up shooting a girl he had impregnated and who, having been spurned, slashed a broken bottle across his face which explains the origin of the scar on his face (12/4-15/7), Dan Dreiberg summons a riot during which the Comedian exhibited his trademark cynicism (16/4-18/8) and Edgar Jacobi relates how he woke up one night to find Blake sitting on his bed, crying, drinking and talking to himself (21/9-23/8). Rorschach, finally, does not indulge in reminiscence, but contemplates the collection of key scenes from Blake's past coupled with the murder scene which results in a mosaic that paints a vivid image of Blake's objectionable character (26/4-28/2).

84 Retroactive continuity will be treated in chapter 5.

In 3.1.3., the productive page layout as coined by Peeters was introduced. A layout's productive (as opposed to decorative, conventional/regular or rhetoric) functionalization is based on the interdependence between plot and tableau and the latter's dominance over the sequence (Peeters 41, 53ff.). According to Peeters, the layout is productive in that it produces the narrative, meaning that the arrangement of the panels on the page precedes their attribution of content (53). By virtue of this reiteration, also a formal element like layout can become a trace. In what follows, I will discuss such productive page design as an element that generates continuity within the issue rather than in the sequence as it carries implications for the entire run of #8.

The following example (fig. 34), which clusters six consecutive pages,[85] confronts the reader with six different plots that run largely simultaneously. Plot one depicts the premises of the *New Frontiersman*, a conservative tabloid indulging in the exploits of the hooded heroes, where the editor Hector Godfrey and his inept assistant Seymour prepare another sensationalist publication (10/1-6). Plot two involves the surrealist artist Hira Manish painting what is hidden under the tarpaulin in the background and what is reminiscent of female genitalia in conversation with the comics writer Max Shea. Both are under the impression of being part of a filmmaking crew producing a film under highly secretive circumstances (11/1-6). Plot three shows Mason's preparation of a jack-o-lantern for Halloween. While his actions occupy most of the panel space, the television running in the background provides information on a variety of opinions about masked adventurers (12/1-6). Plot four is concerned with Bernard the newsstand owner and his customers Derf the Knot Top, Derf's girlfriend, Joey the taxi driver, Bernie the comics lover and the newspaper delivery man discussing the latest developments in the issue of costumed vigilantehood and the riot in the prison Rorschach is detained in (13/1-6). Plot five is located in the same prison during the riot. Despite various convicts' wish to exact vengeance on Rorschach, who is responsible for their being under arrest, it is Big Figure and his henchmen who attempt to breach the bars separating Rorschach from them (14/1-6 and 15/1-6). Plot six, finally, features Dan and Laurie performing preparatory actions before heading to the New York State Penitentiary to free Rorschach.

Let us, for the time being, neglect the content details of these various narratives and focus instead on the ways in which they are distributed across the pages. Each page is divided into two unequal parts: The top two thirds consist of a sub plot told

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85   cf. also Backe 29-30.

by means of six panels of equal size arranged in two rows while the lower third of the page comprises but one panel the breadth of three smaller ones which relates the main plot. Plots one through five each occupy six panels in the upper part of the page while plot six takes place in the elongated panel at the bottom.
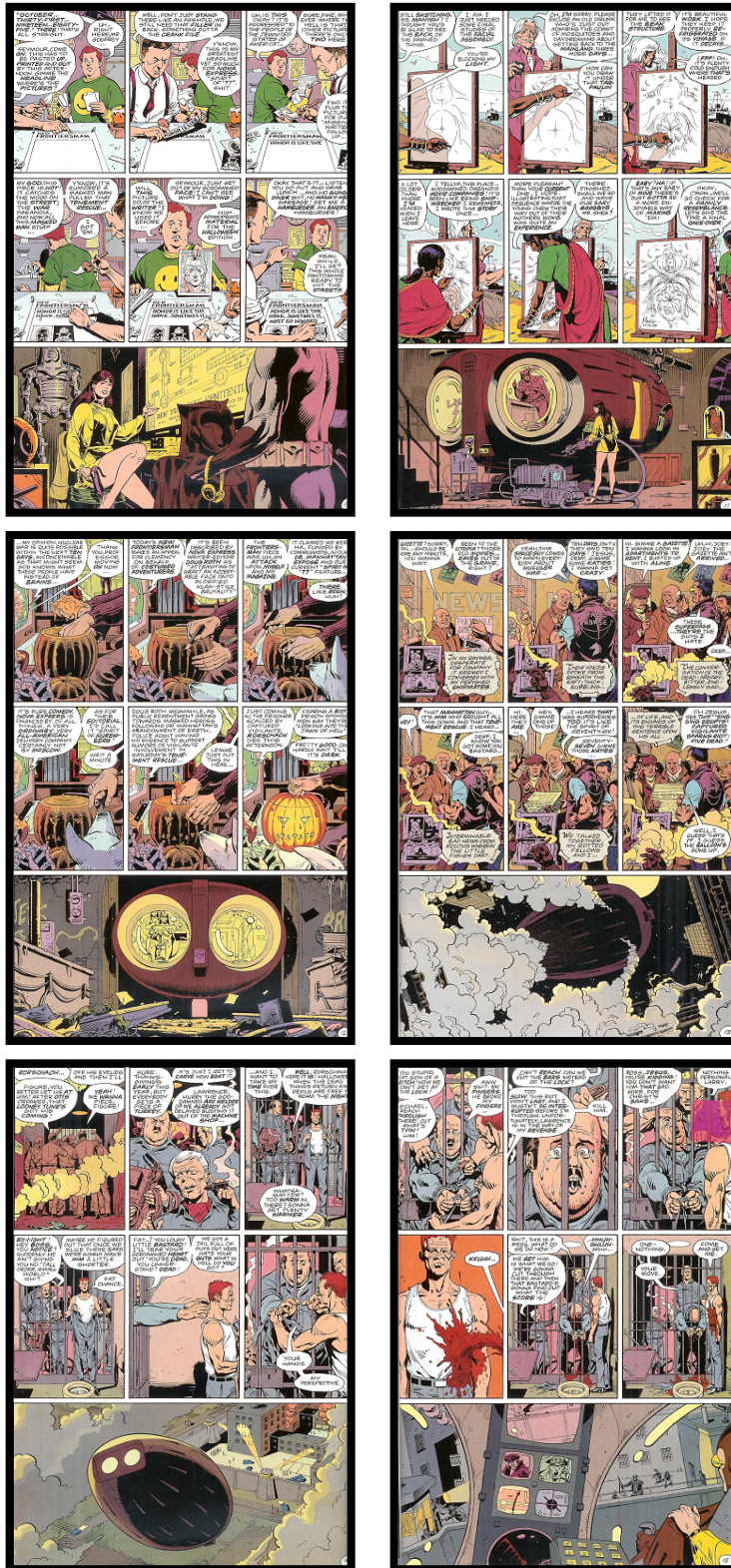

Fig. 34:
Simultaneously running main- and subplots (#8, 10-15).

Plots one to five take place within very little time – story time approaches discourse time – but plot six is stretched out temporally. From the first to the last panel of this plot (10/7-15/7), readers follow a much longer period of time which is also indicated by means of panel size.

McCloud has impressively demonstrated that panel dimension can affect the perception of elapsed time so that a longer panel is interpreted as taking up more time (*Understanding* 100-102). Similarly, a staccato array of shorter panels, especially in comparison to a broader one, supports the reading of a sequence as taking place within a short time frame. In fact, if we look a little closer, we discover that the main plot at the bottom is devoid of text while the sub plots contain lots of text. Drawing on the analysis of continuity within the panel of 3.1.1., the textlessness augments the feeling of passing time, similar to a montage sequence in film.

Two ways of reading this sequence are possible. Firstly, the recipient can read as usual, top to bottom, left to right, page by page. In this case, the reception of the main plot is interrupted by the individual sub plots. There is a chance, in this reading, that the continuity inherent in the bottom narrative goes unnoticed. Secondly, the attentive recipient can contemplate the lower third of each page in relation to its equivalents on the neighboring pages, realizing that they assemble into a continuous narrative (fig. 35).

Fig. 35:
Main plot only
(#7, 10-15).

This second approach requires elaborate coordination abilities by the reader.[86] Not only is the narrative flow disrupted by the insertion of the sub plots that are not continued beyond the page (apart from the last one), the main plot also leaps from place to place and is devoid of text, demanding a high level of reader participation. As each page opens with a new venue and new characters, readers need to negotiate their way through this sequence juggling no less than six plots. Under these circumstances, it cannot be taken for granted that coherence is established. But apparently Moore and Gibbons believe the recipient to be able to fashion sense into the dismembered narrative, even if leafing back and forth is necessary. As a result, continuity functions as a sort of supplementary gratification for the recipient who is able to detect it.

As I have shown, the creators of *Watchmen* have taken multiple approaches to establish continuity within the individual episodes, with the continuity coming from title page, title and layout forming the largest portion. But the devices for creating continuity have not yet been exhausted. For instance, the first page of #1 is characterized by the implied observer's incessant withdrawal from the incipient focus, the smiley badge. The exact same gradual move away from the badge is repeated on the last page of the same issue (figs. 40 and 41).
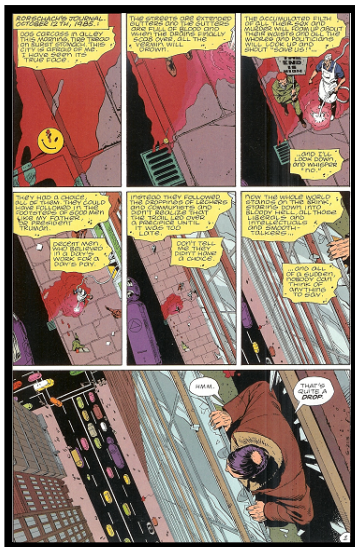
Fig. 36:
Zooming out (#1, 1/1-7).
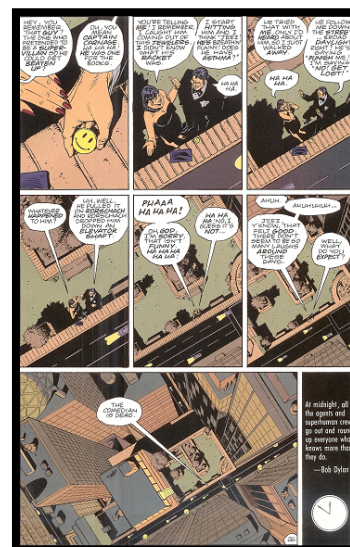
Fig. 37:
#1, 28/1-8.

Identical layout, point of view and visual departure from the center of attention enclose the installment in addition to the elements of title and epithet, and title page and last panel respectively. But there are further analogies such as the position and size of the smiley badge in the first panel and the parallel correspondence of the angular lines of the road, sidewalk, balcony balustrade, skyscrapers (both fig. 36 and

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86   cf. Schüwer 169.

41) and plant containers (fig. 37). The continuity erected by such a narrative and visual loop accounts for an unusually high connectivity between beginning and end of the episode.

Schüwer uses the term "intratextual palimpsest"[87] (243) to describe the idea of discrete moments within a text establishing links between one another despite being set far apart in the narrative (243). In the vein of a trace, fig. 36 is imbued with additional meaning that is not available at first sight, but becomes manifest only upon the reception of fig. 37. The latter may trigger the recipient's memory of a similar instance earlier in the narrative, but browsing back is required in order to confirm the affinity. The intertextual palimpsest is basically identical with the graphic match[88] save for the fact that its components may appear within larger stretches of the episode instead of alongside each other.[89] A successful re-implementation of a page or image depends on the readers' cognitive abilities and their willingness to occasionally turn the pages backwards. Hence the comics medium is tailor-made for devices such as the intratextual palimpsest: "[Y]ou can stare at the page for as long as you want and check back to see if this line of dialogue really does echo something four pages earlier, whether this picture is really the same as that one, and wonder if there is some connection there" (Eno/Czawza).

Moore and Gibbons have resorted to extraordinary means to ensure continuity within the individual installments of their work. It starts with the title page that is functionalized as provider of an image which is repeated throughout the episode, like the Rorschach test of episode #6, as jump-start for a series of related images that relate to the title page, like the Nite Owl goggles of #7, or as the beginning of an interwoven narrative, like the perfume bottle of #9. It continues to the title and the closely associated epilogue that allow the content of the respective installment to be viewed in different contexts before moving on to the subsumption of various plots on a number of subsequent pages whose continuity is dependent on the rigorously reiterated, i.e., productive layout. Finally, with the symmetry and analogy of images and pages – *Watchmen* affords a vast abundance of continuity-establishing instances. The ones pertaining to particular episodes have been discussed here while the ones with implications for the entire work will be analyzed in the following section.

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87   My translation: "intratextuelles Palimpsest".
88   cf. 3.1.2.
89   Further examples are #5, 3/4 and 23/6.

3.1.5. From Cover to Cover: Continuity across the Series

Distinguishing continuity that emanates from the installment and continuity that belongs to the work as a whole is not always easy. The examples discussed above, comprising title page, titles, epilogues, layout, etc. could largely be situated within the episode, but the following discussion will show that there are similar instances that manifest themselves throughout *Watchmen*. We have seen that in a series of pages containing sundry pieces of various plots, continuity is created by means of the repetitive layout as put forth by Peeters.[90] A sequence in #11 highlights the importance of the productive layout and the faithful assignation of continued plots to the established slot on the page. Fig. 38 shows how the division of the productive tableau, again, is two thirds versus one third. In this case, the main plot – the physical fight between Rorschach, Nite Owl and Ozymandias and the subsequent explanation of the latter's plan – claim the top two thirds of four consecutive pages. Yet, instead of 'only' being interrupted by the sub plot in the lower third, it is further interlaced with analepses conveying the key moments that lead to Blake's death via the red-tinted panels that are already familiar from earlier issues. The bottom panels function synoptically as form and content are concerned: The usual three panels per row are condensed into one and the location that is depicted constitutes the meeting ground for several individual narratives that have permeated much of the graphic novel. This multiplicity of events is reflected in the diversity of perspective, which is also a continuation of previous scenes in which the camera seems to rotate among characters.[91]

More specifically, this means that readers face a plethora of scenes even though the sub plots take place in only one location – an intersection in New York City: There are Joey and her lover Aline arguing as a result of which Joey physically attacks Aline, Dr. Malcolm Long and his estranged wife Gloria trying to find a solution for their disintegrating marriage, the newsvendor Bernard engaging in one of his habitual tirades, Bernie reading his comic book, officers Fine and Bourquin in a police car, a young man illegally selling watches on the street, Derf exiting a concert and Joey's boss Milo and his brother, the Gordian Knot company employee who fixed the lock Rorschach broke at Dan's house, meeting in front of the taxi depot. All of these characters witness Joey assaulting Aline and come to her rescue in the wide last panel of each page.

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90   cf. 3.1.3.
91   e.g., 6/1, 3, 5, 7; 9/1-8; 13/6 and 8; 20/1-8; and 23/6-9.

Fig. 38:
Converging subplots (#11, 24-27).

Again, only the top two thirds of the page include text, but this time, there is overlapping text that foreshadows the impending disaster. "… AN END TO *FIGHTING*" (24/7) relates to Ozymandias's plan to scare the USA and the Soviet Union into peace negotiations; "THE BRUTAL WORLD HE'D *RELISHED* WOULD SIMPLY CEASE TO *BE*" (25/7) not only refers to the violence exhibited by Joey but also prefigures the imminent explosion; and "IN *EXTINCTION*" (25/7) is the unambiguous allusion to the character's fate. Further details in the background support the apocalyptic mood: The Utopia is screening a film titled "The Day the Earth Stood Still" (24/7), Bernard has a newspaper tucked under his arm whose headline reads "**WAR?**" (25/7), there is an advertisement for Mmeltdown [sic] candy (26/7), and the full moon (as well as the diffused light of the street lamp) is an unconcealed continuation of the yellow clock disclosing that Ozymandias's sinister scheme has been already carried out (27/3).

Up to this point, readers are likely to interpret the plots running in the upper and lower part of pages 24-27 as taking place simultaneously. However, it is revealed that

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the plot happening in the bottom panels has, in fact, an analeptic relation to the main plot, meaning that all of the events depicted do not occur contemporaneously but already took place "THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES AGO" (27/1). This frustration of expectation is one of the most interesting narrative devices employed by Moore. After training readers to infer simultaneity from sections designed similarly to fig. 38, he thwarts their learning process by implementing atemporality.[92]

Apart from this narrative digression, fig. 38 is mainly of interest for the inquiry into how, on the basis of the consolidation of several plots in one short sequence, continuity is constructed within the entire series of *Watchmen*. One answer is for storytellers to pull the narrative strands running through *Watchmen* together. While the pursuit of closure, which is the ultimate objective of such a step, is no extraordinary feat and can often be witnessed towards the end of a text, the way in which it is accomplished by Moore is quite unique. Rather than merely bringing each plot to the point where an overarching action affects all, regardless of their location, he has all recurring minor characters – no character that has appeared more than once is missing from this scene – physically congregate in one spot. The final entanglement of their lives takes place very literally. It is certainly no coincidence that the communal encounter is situated in a place where roads/paths intersect: at a traffic junction. One can almost see the threads of the meticulously set up plots that have spiraled through the narrative up to this point being gathered and condensed into a tangle in these large bottom panels. Needless to say, the characters' collective death works as a poignant climax to their ultimately intersecting lives.

In the first six pages of the last *Watchmen* episode, then, the audience faces the announced annihilation in page-sized panels. Each of the characters can be found somewhere among the debris, but that is not all. Other traces that have consistently been strewn across the narrative can also be found amongst the wreckage: the smiley badge and its signature blood stain, Rorschach test cards, a *Nostalgia* perfume bottle, the poster with the international radiation symbol, the *Tales of the Black Freighter* comic book, Gunga Diners, concert posters for Pale Horse and Kristallnacht, (ads for) the movie theater Utopia, the Gordian Knot lock company car, the newspaper stand and the newspaper title page asking "**WAR?**", Mmeltdown (sic) candy, the graffiti of lovers' silhouettes, the phrase *Who watches the Watchmen?*, Promethean Taxi company (sign), the Institute for Extraspatial Studies, advertisement for the Veidt Method, spark hydrants, and, of course, numerous watches and clocks. Some of these are

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92 Of course, the presumption that spatially simultaneous plots are also temporally simultaneous is not rooted in *Watchmen* but in comics generally, which only further enhances the element of surprise in this deviation from tradition.

conspicuous enough so as to have merited scrutiny as themes of entire installments while others have remained in the background. But all of them have promoted continuity according to the principle of reappearance much in the manner of the above characters. Wolk observes that Moore "took advantage of Dave Gibbons' […] willingness to draw, as Moore put it 'whatever absurd amount of detail you should ask for, however ludicrous and impractical'" (234). The resulting profusion of minutiae is one of the narrative's most intriguing aspects and it contributes significantly to the construction of continuity:

> [I]t's possible to have tiny events going on unimportantly in the foreground or the background of a picture, seemingly with no relevance to the main story but providing the reader with a subliminal reinforcement of the ideas being discussed in the actual narrative. The reader does not have to notice these elements consciously in order to be affected by them […] All of these incidental details, while unimportant in themselves, add a sort of extra resonance to the things being said in the frame, increasing the story's sense of reverberation. (Moore/Burrows 41f.)

What Moore prefers to call "resonance" and "reverberation" is the product of the abundant traces which provide reader guidance, reassurance and, most engagingly, gratification for the attentive audience. It is difficult to determine which traces resonate most perceptibly as all of them contribute to the creation of a distinct present tense, i.e., the story time of the first narrative which is 12 October until 2 November 1985. Nor is it necessary to develop a hierarchy. Much rather, I would like to mention some of the features' specific form of contribution.

There are such understated elements like the advertising pages of the comic book *The Tales of the Black Freighter* that promote "THE VEIDT METHOD" and promise superhuman powers (e.g., #3, 25/5; #10, 13/1, 3, 5; IC #10; or #12, 6). This advertisement has a highly metafictional note as it is familiar from comic books that play with readers' desire to be like their superpowered protagonists. But in a world in which ordinary citizens dress in costume to fight crime and in which a superhuman really does exist, such claims appear in a different light. Finally, the advertisement's proclamation that "I WILL GIVE YOU BODIES BEYOND YOUR WILDEST IMAGININGS" (#12, 6) rings miserably true in view of the masses of corpses left by Ozymandias's 'method' to arrange for peace.

Similarly confined to the background but nonetheless powerful is the question about the control of vigilantes – *Who watches the Watchmen?* (e.g., #1, 9/7; #2, 18/5; #3, 11/6; #8, 1/9.). Sprayed on walls and never completed but always falling short of its ending, it keeps posing a question readers should also ask themselves: What

are self-appointed leaders such as Ozymandias capable of when given free reign?[93] Other traces like the Hiroshima lovers (the graffiti of the shadow of a couple in embrace as though left by the effect of an atomic bomb, e.g., #5, 11/9; #6, 16/6; #12, 5) and the radiation symbol (e.g., #3, title page, #5, 12/1; #6, 16/5; #10, 22/7) emphasize the notion of impending nuclear disaster and accentuate the overall dark mood of the narrative.

Most of these traces are part of the background but there is one object that keeps assuming center stage, at least as regards panel composition: Sweet Chariot sugar cubes, which Dan Dreiberg purchases in bulk, while Rorschach is repeatedly shown pilfering, unwrapping and eating them (fig. 39). Moore points out that, for all their reticence, the sugar cube scenes form a narrative strand that is independent from the rest and, for attentive readers, stretches across the entire story (Stewart, "Synchronität" 22).

93 This trace has repercussions also outside of *Watchmen*: In Mark Waid and Alex Ross's mini-series Kingdom Come, it can be seen as a graffiti in the background of issue #1 (17/2).
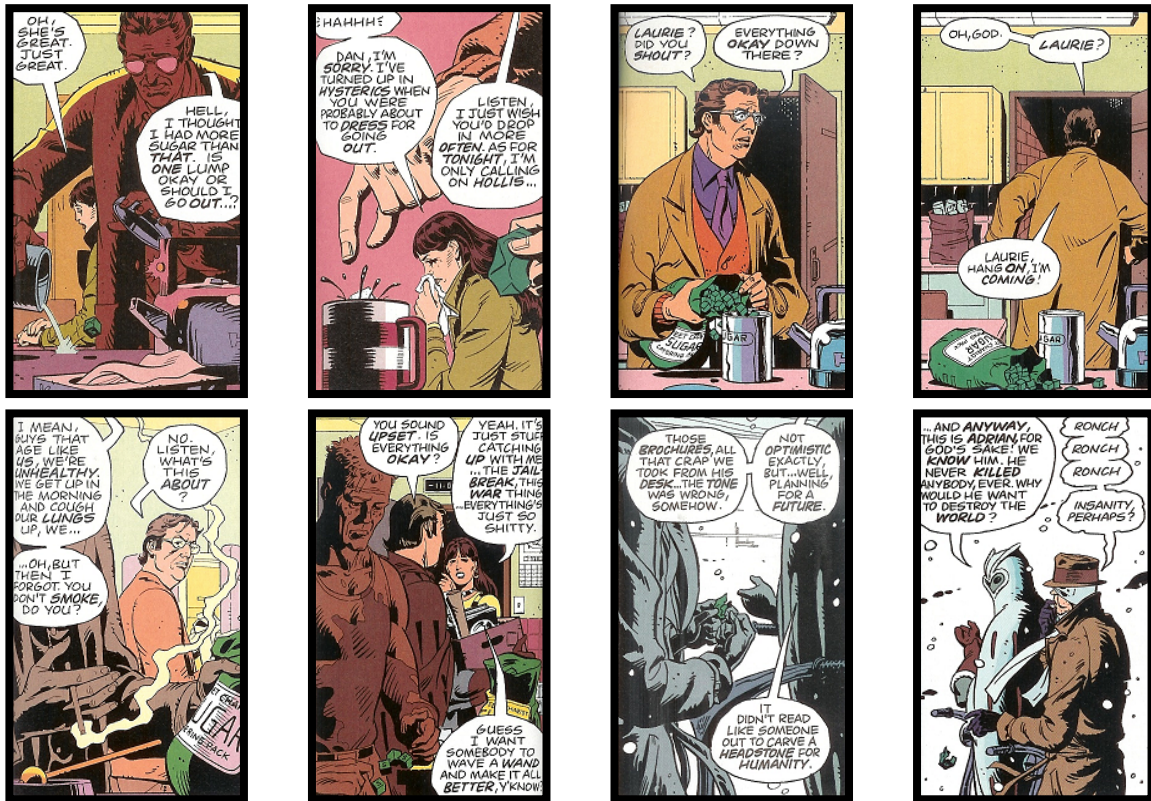
Fig. 39: The sugar cube plot (#1, 11/5; 11/6; 21/6; 21/7; 23/2; #3, 8/4; 9/8; 3/1; 3/3; #8, 9/1; 22/3; #11, 3/3 and 3/4).

The sugar cubes are almost always a component of the foreground yet they are not automatically at the focus of the recipient's attention – the conversation usually usurps that part. Apart from these pictorial representations, the sugar cubes are mentioned in Walter Kovac's arrest protocol. Among the contents of his pockets were "5 individually wrapped cubes 'Sweet Chariot' chewing sugar" (IC #6). The subplot reaches its end with a panel that deviates from the pattern (fig. 40):

Fig. 40:
The conclusion of the sugar cube plot (#11, 3/7).

Although the sugar cube wrapper is, again, at the very front, there is no verbal exchange whatsoever. Nite Owl and Rorschach are fading into the white surroundings, leaving barely anything to center one's attention on except the piece

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of green wrapping paper. By placing such a heavy focus on a trace only at the conclusion of its repeated appearance, Moore and Gibbons achieve two goals: On the one hand, they recompense conscientious readers for their efforts, on the other hand, they prompt the audience to read the graphic narrative anew in search of preceding instances.

❖ *Corrupted Innocence: The Smiley*

Without question the loudest echo is issued by the brutally ironic smiley badge and its eye-catching blood stain, which has acquired trademark status for *Watchmen.* Not only are they the central features of the graphic novel's cover and kick off the first issue (fig. 41), declensions of badge and stain also materialize in various shapesthroughout the work. The wide gamut of the trope's appearance taking place on different levels and with different degrees of obviousness is the focus of what follows.
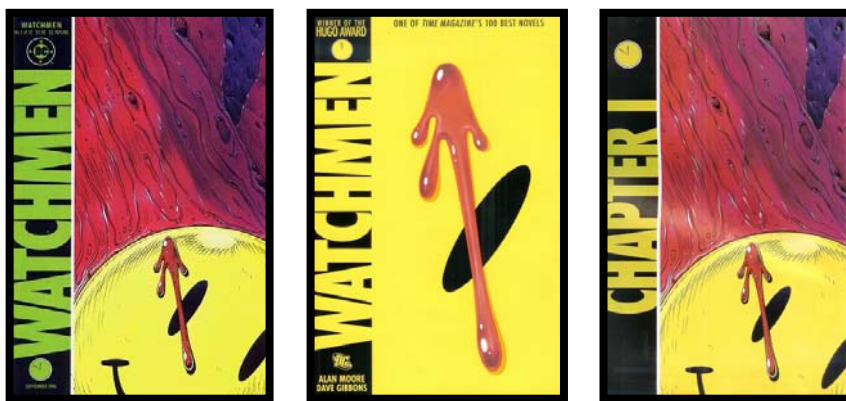
Fig. 41:
Title page of the first comic book issue, graphic novel front cover and title page of chapter #1.

Moore stated in an interview that the smiley face was discovered by behavioral psychology to be the smallest possible abstraction to trigger a baby's smile. Accordingly, he used it as "a symbol of complete innocence" but by "[p]utting a blood splash over the eye change[d] its meaning" (Eno/Csawza). The origin of the badge's corruption – like many an important detail – is disclosed via analepsis (fig. 42):
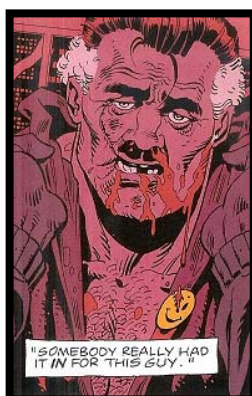
Fig. 42:
The stain's origin (#1, 3/3).

From a number of analepses, it can be deduced that the pin-on smiley is worn by both sides of the persona, the Comedian and Edward Blake.[94] Thus, when Blake is heinously beaten before being thrown through his living room window, it is attached to his robe (fig. 42). Blood from his cheek drops onto the badge he is wearing on his right[95] lapel, leaving the familiar mark. It is important to note that the button is worn on the right-hand side and that the blood is spilt across the smiley's left eye. This combination of facts is quoted a number of times throughout *Watchmen*:

Fig. 43: #2, 14/7.

Fig. 44: #4, 19/6.

Fig. 45: #9, 21/4.

Fig. 46: #2, 7/6.

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94 Whence the Comedian retrieved the smiley badge is not disclosed in *Watchmen*. (Although this information is provided via retcon in *Before Watchmen*: *Silk Spectre* #3, 22/2-6): He obtains it from his daughter Laurie who is going through a phase of Hippiedom, which is fittingly represented by the icon.) Only this much is reliably confirmed by the text: As a member of the Minutemen in the 1940s, he wore a yellow outfit with a belt whose feature was a purple Greek-style smiling mask, both of which he abandoned later. (Reynolds points out that "[c]ostume is more than a disguise: it functions as a sign for the inward process of character development" (29). Considering this axiom, it is not surprising that the Comedian's costume grows darker and more morbid as the years pass by, echoing his increasingly bleak and nihilistic outlook on life.) 1971 is the earliest point in time the Comedian is depicted with the familiar badge, attached to his black leather getup. "Looking to lighten the effect" (Gibbons/Kidd/Essl, chpt. I n.p.) of his dark outfit, Gibbons equipped the Comedian's uniform with the yellow icon. Backe further detects parallels in the Comedian and the second Silk Spectre's – his daughter's – crime-fighting outfit (35).

95 Directions are always given from the reader's perspective.

Fig. 47:
#5, 15/4.

In fig. 43, the girl he impregnated during the Vietnam War in 1971 slashes Blake's cheek with a broken bottle. The blood from the wound drops onto the badge, marking it with the well-known arrow. Fig. 48 shows how a drop of Blake's sweat lands – barely visible as it is partly concealed by the caption box – on the exact point of the pin where fourteen years later his own blood will hit. In fig. 45, a trickle of the glass of Scotch that is emptied into his face flies across the left eye of the smiley badge. But even without the Comedian's emblem in place, his blood seems to consequently reach the mark: When he is physically made accountable for his attempt to rape the Silk Spectre, Blake's bloody nose stains the exact spot of his costume that will constitute the position of the badge as of 1971 (fig. 46). Yet another example that evokes the smiley and its stain can be found in fig. 47, which depicts a yellow rose worn by Veidt on his right lapel being sullied by blood. Although figs. 43-47 occur after fig. 42 in the series, they actually precede Blake's murder and thus anticipate the drop of blood falling onto the button.

This last example leads us to the group of the badge's 'look-alikes', i.e., the images that are strongly reminiscent of the symbol including its stain. Without actually depicting the yellow, black and red sign, all of the following examples mirror the simple aesthetics of the smiley – two dots for eyes, a curved line for a mouth, and a blur across the upper left-hand side for the blood stain. The first example coincides with the most obvious reproduction of the heavily charged smiley (fig. 48):
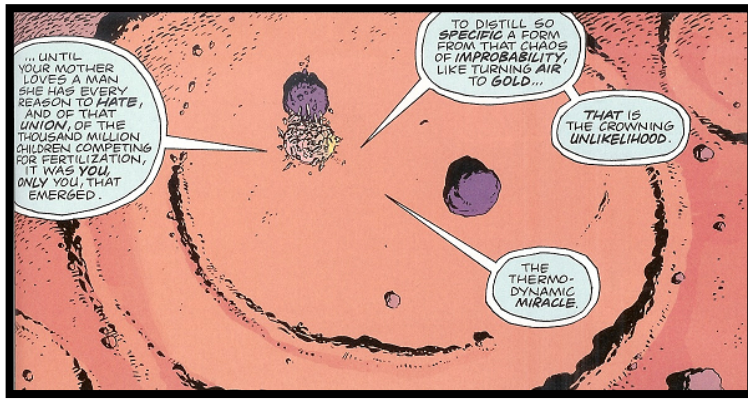
Fig. 48:
The Galle Crater on Mars as depicted by Gibbons (#9, 27/1, above) and the real thing (European Space Agency, left).

Contriving a topography of Mars that is powerfully recollective of the blood-stained smiley might seem like a smart and unusual idea on the part of the creators but the shape depicted here has a firm footing in the real world. "Galle Crater" is the name given to the "impact crater located on the eastern rim of the Argyre Planitia[96] impact basin" (European Space Agency). Moore and Gibbons stumbled across the satellite pictures of the crater "informally known as the happy face crater" during their research about what the surface of Mars should look like (Gibbons/Kidd/Essl, chpt. IX n.p.). The eyes, mouth and round shape are furnished by Mars itself, Moore and Gibbons's only addition was the speck below the smiley's left eye, which came to be composed of the debris left by the implosion of Dr. Manhattan's glass construction. Improbable as it may seem, the most blatant reproduction of the tarnished smiley badge is at the same time the only one based on scientific facts of the extradiegetic realm.

It comes as no surprise that there are less obvious emulations of the smiley face which require greater attentiveness on the part of the recipient as well as the willingness to seek out those instances of what Gibbons calls "sneaking in that smiley face motif again" (chpt. VII n.p.).

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96   cf. landing site of Dr. Manhattan's glass construction: #9, 22/1.
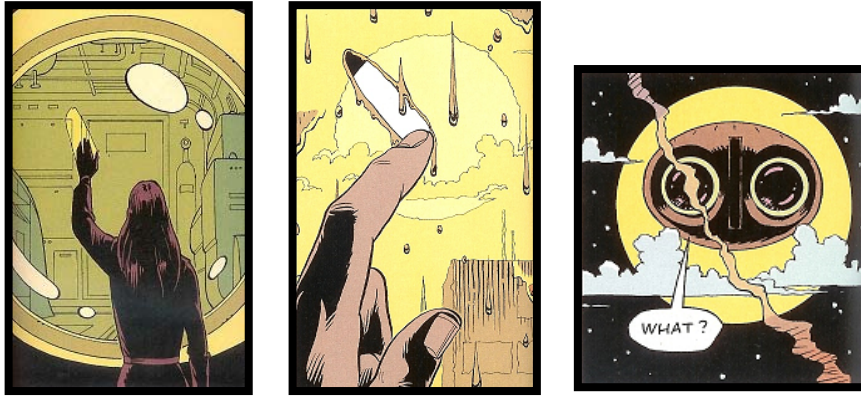
Fig. 49:
The smiley face
(#7, 1/7, 18/3 and
28/9).

The examples in fig. 49 have already played a role in the analysis of continuity within the installment and how a title page image can ripple through an episode. Here, in #7, 1/7 the smiley's right eye is evoked by a round shape within the aircraft while the left eye would be concealed under the mark Laurie leaves with her hand. The upturned mouth is implied by the reflections on Archie's windows. The middle panel depicts the round shape of the moon with two rain drops standing in for the smiley's eyes and a conspicuously-shaped cloud where its mouth would be. Dreiberg's finger does what Laurie's hand did in the preceding panel: It reproduces the stain (18/3). This task is assumed by smoke in 28/9, which wafts across Archie's left window. Again, it is the full moon's yellow roundness[97] that elicits the notion of the smiley's spherical attribute. With Archie's windows figuring as eyes and clouds for a mouth, the look-alike is complete.

The following are further examples of mirror images of the heavily loaded signifier (fig. 50).

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97 The moon's rotundity is also a continuous, if possibly flawed feature of *Watchmen*: Even though story time stretches from 12 October until 2 November 1985 the moon does not change shape but remains in a state of complete fullness.
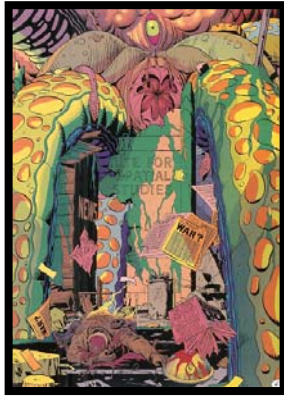
Fig. 50:
Where is the smiley?
(#10, title page; #12, 24/5, 6/1 and 6/1 close-up).

On the title page of #10, the eyes are imitated by two yellow lines culminating in dots where the smiley's eyes would be located, the mouth is indicated by a curved reflection of light on the lower part of the radar's screen and the scanning beam marks the trajectory of the blood stain. A similar reproduction can be found in the panel on the right which shows the aftermath of Rorschach's death by the hand of Dr. Manhattan (#12, 24/5). The stubborn vigilante's vaporized blood wafts across the round, brightly lit opening, across an abandoned vehicle of Dreiberg's and an icicle, which operate as substitutes for the smiley's eyes. The mouth is alluded to by a pile-up of snow on the sides of the entry into Ozymandias's lair. Another, rather obvious quotation of the smiley including blood stain can be found in the spark hydrant's[98] plug in 6/1. While the discovery of these traces is at the very least aided by the color yellow and/or the round shape, there are cases where the revelation is rendered slightly more complex, as the following examples (fig. 51) illustrate.

Fig. 51:
Hinting at the smiley badge (#8, 12/6; #5, 7/1; #11, 26/2).

#8, 12/6 shows Hollis Mason carving a Jack-o-Lantern: There is the rudimentarily round shape, two eyes, a mouth as well as a chunk of pumpkin flesh dangling from the left eye that evokes the bloody mark. The round, yellow sun in the poster of #5, 7/1 may be reminiscent of the smiley, but eyes and mouth are missing.

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98   In the *Watchmen*-reality, the presence of Dr. Manhattan has allowed for new technologies as a result of which cars are charged at regular intervals at so-called spark hydrants.

Instead, even material quality, namely blood, is imitated when a blotch of gore runs across the Buddha's left eye and the upper left-hand side of the sun. In a flashback panel, it is Veidt's non-smiling face that operates as a reproduction of the smiley face (#11, 26/2). Since it is Blake's blood that is spattered in trademark shape across Veidt's left eye, the analogy is rendered even stronger.

Moving further away from the most obvious case of smiley badge duplication, we come across some traces that blend into the background with ease and only betray the reproduction of the cover page image upon closer inspection.
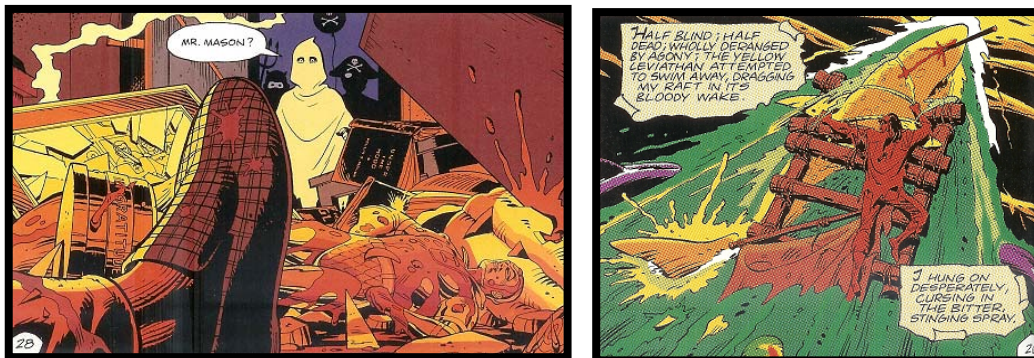
Fig. 52: The bloody mark (#8, 28/7 and #5, 20/6).

In #8, 28/7, which captures the pandemonium left by Mason's murderers, the recurrent photograph of the Minutemen in a shattered frame was doused with Mason's blood, resulting in a stain across Nite Owl's face, that is, his left eye to be exact (fig. 52). In the hypodiegetic narrative of *The Tales of the Black Freighter*, a spear was driven into the shark's eye (#5, 20/6). The nod to the smiley badge becomes apparent when the assailant refers to his victim as "YELLOW LEVIATHAN" – a rare choice of color to characterize a shark.

Moore conceded that not all traces were included on purpose (Eno/Csawza), but this fact does not alter the impact of the continuity generated by them. Sure enough, there are other instances that imitate the theme of the bloodied smiley pin,[99] among them references that omit the badge and focus on the red mark instead. The stain's distinctive outline has also acquired fame of its own and can be recognized without the yellow smiley's larger context.

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99   e.g., #2, title page; #5, 8/1; #9, 8/4; #12, 30/6.
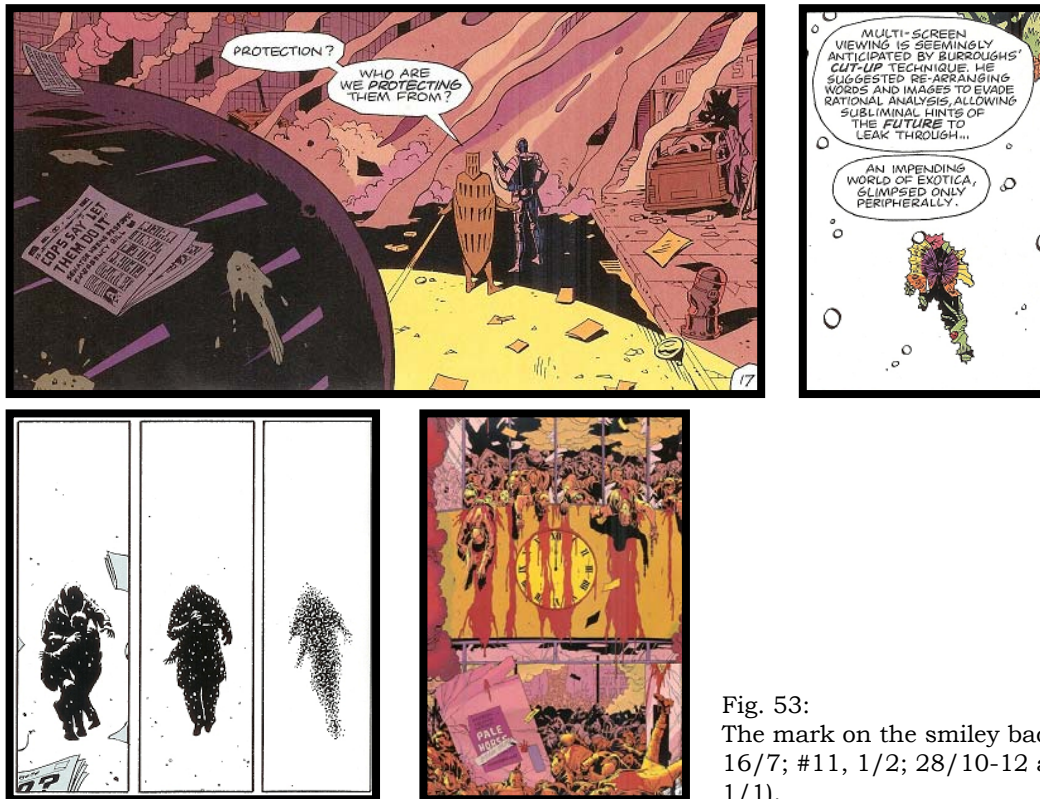
Fig. 53:
The mark on the smiley badge (#2, 16/7; #11, 1/2; 28/10-12 and #12, 1/1).

Nite Owl and the Comedian are pelted with various objects from the angry mob and one of the different spots on Archie replicates the badge's blood stain (#2, 16/7). The second example shows a snowless patch in Veidt's vivarium that copies the familiar outline (#11, 1/2) and the exact same shape is evoked when Bernard the newspaper vendor and Bernie the comic book aficionado embrace during the final explosion (#11, 28/10-12). In #12, 1/1, there is blood above the concert poster that bears a strong resemblance to the famous mark (fig. 53).

Just as the red smear can function as reference to the smiley badge motif without the yellow face, the latter can also function as trace without the corruption of the mark. The button's round shape triggers the image of a clock owing to the fact that the initial point of the stain is the perfect center of the smiley. In fact, if the image on the cover is turned by a few degrees to the left so that eyes and mouth are levelled, badge and stain come to resemble a clock with a hand pointing approximately to twelve minutes before any hour. Certainly not accidental, hence, is the similarity to the doomsday clock, which appears at the end of every intermediate chapter, starting out at 11:48 and moving one minute closer to midnight with every episode.

Conversely, illustrations of timekeeping devices recall the smiley: More often than not, watches and clocks in *Watchmen* are yellow and they show a time that is close

to 12 o'clock.[100] There are at least nineteen such instances. Below is a random selection (fig. 54):

Fig. 54:
Clocks in *Watchmen*
(#1, 9/3; #4, 18/6; #6, 13/7; #10, 22/3; #11, 18/9).

But there are also other images that evoke the yellow round shape, such as the full moon (#1, 5/81; #7, 18/3 and 28/7-9; #10, 4/4; #11, 27/3); the television channel logo (#3, 11/3), the radiation symbol (#3, 23/2-6 and 27/4-6), Dr. Manhattan's symbol (e.g., #4, 12/5-6), Janey Slater's earrings (e.g., #4, 16/8), the emblem of Veidt products (#5, 8/1-9; #10, 17/1; #11, 11/5), coffee pots (#6, 12/1-3), the diffused light of streetlamps and flashlights (#1, 4/6 and 6/4; #6, 22/1-3; #11, 9/3 and 24/7), the *Nostalgia* perfume bottle (e.g., throughout #9); the entry to Ozymandias's arctic hideout (#11, 14/6; #12, 13/5 and 24/5), the spotlight in which he finds himself upon the successful execution of his scheme (#12, 19/7), and his miniature solar system (#12, 26-27).

While every single implicit and explicit depiction of the smiley badge is characterized by a distortion of sorts – a substitution of the actual thing, an unusual point of view, an extreme close-up, etc. – the very last panel in *Watchmen* is the only one that reflects the smiley badge and its stain in its full glory (fig. 55):

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100 e.g., #1, 9/3; #2, 7/9; #4, 18/6 and 24/4; #5, 11/1; #6, 13/7; #9, 1/4; #10, 22/3 and 24/2; #11, 18/9 and 27/2.

Fig. 55:
The fate of the world in Seymour's hands (#12, 32/7).

Seymour has clumsily spilt ketchup on his shirt. When he turns towards us in order to select a filler for an empty slot in the *New Frontiersman* – a choice that might upset the recently established equilibrium between the USA and the Soviet Union and thus render Veidt's elaborate hoax ineffectual – the icon that has accompanied us throughout the graphic novel finally smiles at us directly (fig. 55). When we recollect the various symmetrical frames Moore and Gibbons have constructed, it becomes plain that only an image mirroring the opening panel could qualify as content of the last panel. The continuous reiteration of the smiley badge ultimately culminates in this frontal perspective, which reverberates with the great number of previous traces. Observant readers who have been seeking out these echoes find rich reward in this concluding panel and, as with the sugar cubes, others might be induced to return to the narrative in order to discover earlier instances of the smiley.

❖ *Speech Bubbles and Caption Boxes*

All of the continuity-building traces discussed so far have in common their intradiegetic nature. There is, however, an element contributing to making *Watchmen* so densely cohesive that is only liminally intradiegetic, namely the speech bubble. Liminally, because a speech bubble is not actually part of the diegesis, like, say, a perfume bottle, but neither is it outside of it, like the caption box.[101] Whereas the volatile element of sound is perceivable by characters, the actual vessel of the speech bubble as such is not.[102] In the endeavor to capture sound and make it visible to the audience, comics creators may infuse speech bubbles with idiosyncrasy so as to

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101 Speech bubbles not only straddle the border between the intra- and extratextual, but also the one between the iconic and the symbolic: While they are certainly symbolic in nature – outlines are often adapted in the attempt to reflect the mode of sound transmission – since there is an arbitrary relationship between, say, a jagged outline and the notion of high volume, their origin lies in the realm of the iconic, i.e., puffs of breath that become visible in cold weather. cf. for instance McCloud (*Understanding* 134) or Eisner (*Comics* 26f.).

102 For comic reasons, diegetic borders can be violated. Such metaleptic instances occur when, e.g., a character hits her head on a speech bubble.

attribute them to specific characters and to underline their manner of expression. Interestingly, readers are required to decode speech bubbles with distinct features by self-initiative as "analogies exist for the art of bubbles, but no original precedent"[103] (Holländer 123). In the case of *Watchmen*, Dr. Manhattan's speech bubbles are accentuated by such work-intrinsic custom-design (fig. 56).

Fig. 56:
Dr. Manhattan's idiosyncracies (#4, 11/9).

Before the nuclear accident that caused Jon Osterman's metamorphosis into the omnipotent being Dr. Manhattan, his speech was contained within the same vessel as all the other characters'. Once he gains superpowers, his utterances and thoughts come to be filled in with the color blue, which mirrors his physical appearance,[104] with only a weak white line surrounding it.

As Dr. Manhattan perceives of past, present and future as continuous and co-existent (cf. fig. 56) and can decide about the disintegration or assembly of matter by the motion of a finger, he certainly is not restricted to the speech bubble as a means of expression. It is therefore plausible that he is the only character in *Watchmen* furnished with something like a thought bubble that visually resembles a caption box (cf. fig. 56). By disclosing musings, it functions similarly to Rorschach's journal, the contents of which appear in a form that is reminiscent of torn-out pieces of withered, yellowing paper strewn with inkblots (fig. 57):

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103 My translation: "Für die Blasenkunst gibt es zwar Analogien, aber keine Präzedenzfälle".

104 It seems to be no coincidence that Dr. Manhattan and his speech bubbles turn blue after the nuclear accident. Other graphic narratives that revolve around radioactive materials, e.g., Lauren Redniss's biography of Marie and Pierre Curie titled *Radioactive*, make use of the association of the color blue with the luminosity and power of elements like radium. cf. also Hoppeler/Rippl, "Narrating Radioactivity".

Fig. 57:
Rorschach's journal (#1, 1/1).

It only makes sense that as a person of flawed hygiene, Rorschach should have his somber rumination conveyed via such decay. What is more, the journal's inkblots elicit the eponymous Rorschach test and the writing, which employs lower-case vowels but capitalized consonants, further sets him apart.

Rorschach's speech bubbles are a phenomenon in their own right. They evolve as Rorschach's convictions about the world's innate corruption grow stronger. In 1966, the form of his speech bubbles and the style of writing therein are still identical to that of the other characters (fig. 58, #2, 10/5).

Fig. 58:
The graphic representation of the evolvement of Rorschach's speech pattern
(#2, 10/5; #5, 28/6 and 28/7).

However, after several years of fighting crime as well as the traumatic encounter with and eventual murder of the bestial rapist and murderer of a little girl in 1975 (#6, 17-

21),[105] Rorschach's speech bubbles have acquired their trademark jagged contour (fig. 58, #5, 28/6). At the same time, he commences to speak in the staccato style that becomes typical for him – reducing his utterances to a minimum of words and dropping most article. It is intriguing that it is only Rorschach but not his alter ego Walter Kovacs whose speech bubbles exhibit the uneven outline. As soon as the mask is removed from his face, the form of his speech bubbles is altered to match everyone else's (fig. 58, 28/7). In keeping with his conviction that the mask constitutes his face rather than the implement it might be to another crime-fighter, part of Rorschach's essence – his style of expression – is stripped off with the mask. This extraordinary attention to contentual and formal detail, which has already been highlighted in other contexts, may neither be constitutive nor glaringly obvious yet undoubtedly plays a role in the thorough construction of continuity in *Watchmen*.

So far, my analysis of continuity across the series has focused on irregularly appearing features like individual characters, the smiley badge or the work-intrinsic speech bubble, yet *Watchmen* also comprises a number of stringently regularly occurring elements. Intermediate chapters, the doomsday clock, epilogues, title pages and titles are the constituents that form an essential part of each issue. To be sure, the statement that continuity is built by the regular resurfacing of certain items is not in itself striking, as it could only *not* be made for a very small percentage of literary output. Much rather, continuity is effected by means of these items' interconnectedness and their links to the main narrative.

❖ *Intermediate Chapters*

Serialized US-American mainstream comic books usually contain advertisement as well as so-called letter pages whose purpose is to provide a forum for readers to impart their opinion or ask questions which are occasionally reacted to by editors, writers, artists, etc. In the 1980s when the Internet as a medium for exchange was still in its infancy, the letter page was constitutive for the conversation between producers and recipients. Yet the makers of *Watchmen* chose to omit it in favor of what I call the intermediate chapters (IC).[106] Also, due to the story's game-changing nature, it proved to be difficult to find advertisers. Turning a necessity into a virtue,

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105 This specific sequence is conventionally referred to as 'Rorschach Episode'. Its paramount importance is twofold: Firstly, the entire sequence is devoid of text, requiring recipients to mobilize all of their inference abilities. Secondly, as mentioned above, it is the event that ultimately transformed Rorschach into the ruthless vigilante with the black-and-white view of the world and distaste for compromise which will ultimately be his and, potentially, all of humanity's downfall.

106 Letters are usually printed four issues in retrospect. For a twelve-episode series, this would mean that issues 1-4 would not contain a letter page and that the letters pertaining to episodes 9-12 would never see print.

DC Comics decided to forego advertising as well and to supply additional material by means of the intermediate chapters (Amaya). Thus, most episodes of *Watchmen* span at least 26 pages of the sequential text-picture combination conventionally referred to as comics and one intermediate chapter.[107] Moore and Gibbons replenished issues #1 through #11 with diverse material related to the main text and volunteering supplementary information which aims at the construction of what editor Len Wein called "the back-story" (Amaya), i.e., the larger context of the characters' lives, convictions and actions. Accordingly, most intermediate chapters relate the general history of the masked vigilantes, some with focus on an individual, and elucidate the characters' position in the *Watchmen* society.[108] Others afford details about the context of the hypodiegetic pirate comic *Tales of the Black Freighter* (IC #5) or contain the unobtrusive impartation of pieces to the puzzle that is Ozymandias's plan, e.g., the role of the missing scientists and artists (IC #5 and IC #8). Many intermediate chapters share a solid link to the episodes proper in that they are full of traces continued from or leading to the installments: They refer to sugar cubes (IC #6), *Nostalgia* perfume (IC #6, #10 and #11), the hypodiegetic comic book (IC #5), owls (IC #7), etc.

As far as form is concerned, the intermediate chapters feature reproductions of various media. Emphasis needs to be put on *reproductions*, as, strictly speaking, there is nothing but ink on paper: Only one medium is present, namely comics. When one medium attempts to emulate another, Rajewsky speaks of "intermedial references" ("Intermediality" 50).[109] These occur when one medial product establishes a reference to another medium or semiotic system that is perceived as distinct (53). Thereby, the absence of the medium that the medial product refers to is a decisive element. In other words, elements and/or structures of another medium are imitated and, as far as possible, reproduced using the means available to the medium that

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107 There is no intermediate chapter appended to installment #12. Instead, the supplementary pages are absorbed by the first narrative, stretching the last installment to 32 pages of comics-style narrative.

108 IC #2 discloses Edward Blake/the Comedian's life and death, IC #4 relates the story of Jon Osterman/Dr. Manhattan, IC #6 explains Walter Kovacs/Rorschach's strong black-and-white attitude, IC V#7 elucidates the reasons of Dan Dreiberg/Nite Owl's obsession with nocturnal birds, IC #9 illustrates Sally Juspeczyk/Silk Spectre's perspectives on motherhood, fame and crime-fighting, and IC #10 and IC #11 shed light on Adrian Veidt/Ozymandias's enterprise as well as his history and motivation.

109 Interestingly, the scope of intermedial references, moderate in the first four intermediate chapters, becomes much more multifarious as of IC #5.

emulates.[110] Phenomena like ekphrasis[111] or the musicalization of film are examples of intermedial references involving at the very least the media text, image and sound (Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* 17). Joachim Paech and Jens Schröter argue that any medium can be subject to quoting when they speak of "the simulatability of any expression of a medium's features"[112] (10). Accordingly, *Watchmen*'s intermediate chapters simulate newspaper articles and clippings, scientific treatises, interviews, photographs, handwritten notes, expertises, arrest protocols, letters, calendars, business cards, drawings, and even adhesive tape and paper clips. In their motley array of references and examination of different kinds of mediality, including their own as well as that of the graphic novel at large, the intermediate chapters share a strongly metafictional quality. For this reason, it is worth dwelling a little on the notion of metafictionality in *Watchmen*.[113]

❖ *Self-Referentiality and Self-Reflexivity: The Meta-Level in Watchmen*

Metafiction indicates the capacity of fiction to "reflect on its own framing and assumptions" (O'Donnell 301). It is, therefore, a technique that very often leads to the destabilization of illusion (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 221). In comics, this is often achieved through the alteration of style. When such a change occurs, the readers' attention is attracted to the artifice of the drawing and/or writing, causing a disruption of illusion and the relocation of recipients to a meta-level where they take notice of the graphic dimension (Schüwer 374). The audience's immersion into the narrative is not deferred as long as there is no or only little stylistic deviation in the metafictional element. Jan Baetens and Pascal Lefèvre call this "visual absorption"[114] (66). However, the recipients' attention is explicitly called to the material whose design

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110 In comics, the quotation of other media was uncommon practice in the 1980s, whereas today, many writers and illustrators base their works on intermedial references. Gaiman and Dave McKean are famous for their profuse application of intermedial references in such works as *Signal to Noise* and *Mr. Punch: The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy*, as is Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz's *Elektra: Assassin*, which makes use of oil paintings and collage.

111 This is the representation of a representation, or as Rippl defines it, what accrues from the mental image that is brought forth by the act of reception (276).

112 My translation: "die Simulierbarkeit jeder Form medialer Eigenschaften".

113 In a different context, it would be worth examining the following quote by Parkin on the metafictional pleasures offered and accepted in series in more detail: "Doctor Who, like Bond, can get away with endlessly recasting the lead actor. Bond's producers originally planned to explain Bond's change of appearance by saying he'd had plastic surgery, but in the end decided to make a joke of it. When a beautiful woman, whom Bond had been fighting to protect, steals his car and drives off, leaving him alone at the start of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), Bond notes that 'this never happened to the other fella.' The entire audience is in on a joke that makes no sense within the narrative – they know this is the debut of a new actor, Lazenby, who replaced (briefly, as it turned out) Connery in the role. This raises an important factor: if audiences remain entertained by a running series, they will understand and forgive even the most blatant changes, perhaps particularly if they feel they are invited to laugh it off" ("Truths" 18).

114 My translation: "absorption visuelle".

departs from the one used in the first narrative. The intermediate chapters in *Watchmen* are a prime example of how readers are regularly and methodically confronted with the fact that they are consuming a work of (graphic) fiction. Especially IC #5[115] is a treasure chest for anyone seeking metafictional instances. The intermedial reference's metafictional potential is exploited by such elements as the reproduction of a faded photograph showing Joe Orlando[116] or the paper clip that seems to fasten a piece of paper to the top of the spoof article. But the destabilization of illusion can also be achieved by self-reference. Accordingly, "*Watchmen* is full of look-at-me-I'm-a-comic-book devices" (Wolk 242).

Several phrases could be interpreted to apply to *Watchmen*, instead of referring to the meta-comics of IC #5 exclusively. For example: The sentence "stories are recounted as small, self-contained tales within the larger narrative that frames them" is a candid reference to the comic book-within-the-comic book while the comment about "the writer […] harassing the artist with impossibly detailed panel descriptions and endless carping requests for revisions of artwork already drawn" (IC #5) hints at Moore's habit of meticulously planning all aspects of a page before passing it on to the illustrator. This conspicuous referentiality to the hypodiegetic narrative is also part of the other installments.

Conventionally, a work that features references to its own fictionality is termed meta-referential. Wolf elaborates that it can further be self-reflexive when it "serves the cognitive function of 'reflecting' on issues that directly or indirectly concern the work or text in question" (*Musicalization* 48). Therefore, if a work not only comments but also ruminates on its own configuration, it can be said to be self-reflexive instead of merely meta-referential. Many such references to and depictions of different kinds of comics are counted among *Watchmen*.

1) The most obvious metafictional element in *Watchmen* – a mise-en-abyme – is also the one most frequently encountered. The *Tales of the Black Freighter*, so the

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115 The crux of this intermediate chapter is that it is composed of fictional information as well as non-fictional facts. (By now, it must have become clear that anything less elaborate and intricate would not satisfy the standards set by the storytellers). While the comic books series *Tales of the Black Freighter* is invented, as are its writer, Max Shea (one of the artists employed by Veidt in his scheme to design a creature outlandish-looking enough to pass for an alien organism) and later illustrator, Walt Feinberg. Joe Orlando, by contrast, is not a fictitious person, even though his activity as comics illustrator of the first nine issues is completely imaginary. Moore chose Orlando because he believed that if DC Comics, the publishing company of *Watchmen*, were successful in promoting pirate comics, they would have chosen him as illustrator (Stewart, "Synchronität" 21). Accordingly, Orlando provided a drawing for the intermediate chapter that imitates the style of the hypediegetic series, while all other artwork is done by Gibbons. For the experienced comic book reader, the discovery of such playful detail is part of the reading pleasure.

116 Monika Schmitz-Emans in her article "Photos im Comic" has scrutinized the different mechanisms at play when comics make intermedial references to photographs.

meta-comic book's series' name, is a pirate story read by Bernie, a young Afro-American resident of New York. Self-referentiality can be embedded in the metacomics' content when the hypotext operates as subtext by establishing implicit or explicit references to the first narrative. As part of the intradiegetic world, the issue titled "Marooned" makes appearances in episodes #3, 5, 8, 10 and 11 and is present as an intradiegetic object in Bernie's hands (cf. fig. 59) if it does not annex entire panels.

Fig. 59:
Self-reflexivity in #8 (13).

Between the first narrative and the hypodiegetic comic book, there are some parallels in the composition of the page (the wide bottom panel) and in the content (the character in the upper left-hand panel and Joey in the fourth panel show the same expression), but the most interesting aspect is that Bernie's view of his comic book reflects the readers' perspective of *Watchmen*. Self-reflexivity is writ large as conscientious readers may use the analogy of reader and character as a starting point to mull over Bernie's ultimate fate and what this might imply for the audience (that faced highly recognizable political hostilities in 1986/1987 and the hazard of nuclear war as a result of the military buildup of the Cold War).

When the meta-comic book appropriates whole panels, its particular visual attributes aid the differentiation between the first and the hypodiegetic narrative.[117] Stylistic deviation is necessary as the reading and understanding of two interlaced plots would otherwise become a tedious task. Since there are no mentionable disparities as regards the depiction of the characters,[118] the distinctive look created by their respective coloring technique is essential.

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117 Backe considers the stylistic differences between the two diegetic levels minimal (17ff.).

118 Both are drawn in what Brian Walker identifies as the "five-finger" (*The Comics since 1945* 13) method, which normally finds employment in adventure and soap opera strips and depicts characters in a realistic style (13-14). In contrast to the five-finger approach, there is the "big-foot

Fig. 60:
The Tales of the Black Freighter (#3, 2/4-5).

The clearly visible Ben Day dots[119] in "Marooned" (fig. 60, #3, 2/5) not only set the hypodiegetic narrative apart, but also evoke the early days of comic book production which knew only this kind of grainy coloring. As many an aspect of the *Tales* – parchment-style caption boxes, speech bubbles, separate panels or whole sequences – is plaited into the first narrative and induces a polyphonic effect, the two narratives provide constant meta-comment on one another. Gibbons conveys that Moore built a whole allegorical tale, i.e., the pirate comics, into the frame story (Gibbons/Kidd/Essl, chpt. "Beginnings" n.p.). For instance, just like Ozymandias, the misguided sailor "hopes to stave off disaster by using the dead bodies of his former comrades as a means of reaching his goal" (Reynolds 111). Both end up sacrificing – intentionally or not – the lives of innocent people. "HOW HAD I REACHED THIS APPALLING POSITION WITH LOVE, ONLY LOVE, AS MY GUIDE?" (#11, 9/9) – this question posed by the castaway might as well be expressed by Ozymandias, had he any qualms about the righteousness of his deeds. Then again, there is a trace of tentativeness in his question to Dr. Manhattan "I DID THE RIGHT THING, DIDN'T I?" (#12, 27/4). In the closing sequence of "Marooned", the condemned sailor acknowledges his personal doom by forsaking himself to the dreadful crew of the Black Freighter (#11, 13/4-9). This occurrence is alluded to by Veidt after the New York carnage: "WELL, I DREAM, ABOUT SWIMMING TOWARDS A HIDEOUS… NO. NEVER MIND." (#12, 27/1). This confession establishes a highly noticeable self-reflexivity – of Ozymandias's and in *Watchmen*.

2) Self-reference and self-reflexivity in *Watchmen* can also transcend the comment on itself and bring forth links to comics as a medium instead. One such example of

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method, in which the characters have oversized feet, noses, and heads [and which] is typical of most humor strips" (13) and the "semi-straight school [which] bridges the gap between big-foot and five-finger. Semi-straight characters can have large heads, with realistic bodies, and big feet" (14). cf. also M. Walker. Obviously, the neat, uncompromising allocation of a work to one of these categories is hardly ever possible.

119 So-called Ben Day dots were employed by the newspaper industry to color their illustrations. Their typically crude appearance gained fame especially thanks to artist Roy Lichtenstein who frequently quoted the comics medium in his works.

the recipient's attention being emphatically channeled towards comics in general can be found in the depiction of the Tijuana Bible. These "cheerfully pornographic and downright illegal" booklets have been around since the 1920s (Spiegelman, "Raw Nerves" 5), starring celebrities and film stars but mainly comic book heroes and heroines.[120]

One of these artifacts is depicted in #2, where Sally Juspeczyk presents a Tijuana Bible she has been bestowed by a devoted admirer, to her daughter. She herself, or rather her younger self of the 1940, is the protagonist of such a bible. While the metafictional element is constituted by the mere reference to and/or presence of the artifact, it is the debate about the same between mother and daughter that delivers the self-reflexive moment (fig. 61).
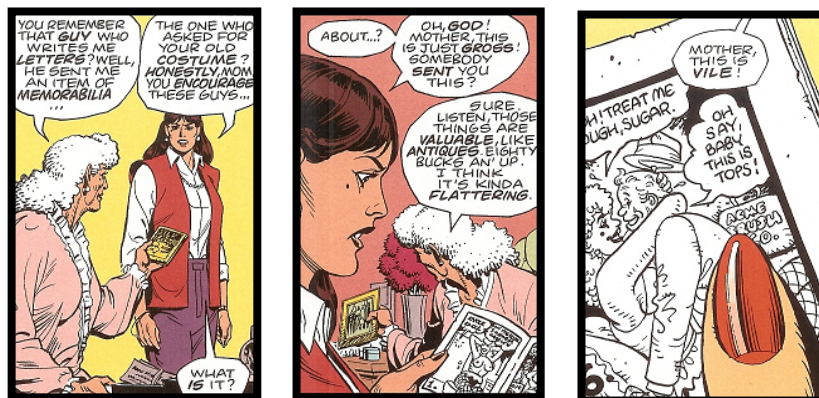

Fig. 61:
The Tijuana Bible
(#2, 4/2, 4/4 and 8/2).

Laurie finds the Tijuana Bible "JUST GROSS" (#2, 4/4) and "VILE" (8/2) and she wonders how her mother "CAN STAND BEING DEGRADED LIKE THIS" (8/3), whereas Sally argues it to be "AN ITEM OF MEMORABILIA" (4/2), "VALUABLE, LIKE ANTIQUES" (4/4) and considers her starring role "KINDA FLATTERING" (4/4). These two opposed positions represent the opinions about comics in general: Some people share Laurie's opinion, believing comics to be morally hazardous; others follow Sally's more benevolent view. Of course, the cue to the booklet's value echoes the comic book's collectible quality. Thus, *Watchmen* not only refers to its own mediality through the Tijuana Bible but also stages the discussion about comics' status through the personified opinions of Laurie and Sally.

As object within the diegesis, the booklet appears several times in *Watchmen*, although only two panels reflect its comics style clearly (cf. 4/4 and 8/2). In these

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120 Usually consisting of eight pages of poor quality ink on inexpensive paper, not much is known about them historically – like print numbers, identities of artists or whereabouts of the sites of print – apart from the fact that they were inferior to a postcard in size, neither produced in Tijuana, nor bearing resemblance to the Bible. In the early 1920s, they began to surface and prospered throughout the Depression years before their popularity began to abate after WWII (Spiegelman, "Those Dirty Little Comics" 7). It is widely believed that "the Tijuana Bibles were the first real comic books in America to do more than merely reprint old newspaper strips, predating by five or ten years the format we've now come to think of as comics" (5).

two instances, the recipient is presented with several characteristics of comics: panel frames, speech bubbles and simplified depiction.[121] The Tijuana Bible employs a slightly less realistic style,[122] as especially the faces of the two characters in 8/2 suggest. Items like the hat that hovers just above the man's head and the sweat beads surrounding his face are indications of his agitation and belong to the sort of sign that has not found its way into *Watchmen*. Many comics feature such symbolic abstractions of mental or physical states,[123] but, as with many writers and illustrators of more sophisticated graphic narratives, Moore and Gibbons have avoided such symbols completely. Their appearance in the meta-comics is a nod to the comics medium in general and to those comics making use of such symbols on a regular basis in particular. Further disparities between *Watchmen* and the Tijuana Bible are color – the former uses a wide range of colors, while the latter is monochromatic, calling to attention its inexpensive production process – and the lettering style: The letters of the first narrative almost resembles a computer's typeset whereas the meta-comics' lettering is distinctly more playful. In fact, it is this playfulness that separates *Watchmen* from the Tijuana Bible. Thus, the exhaustively detailed technique used in *Watchmen* that contrasts with the method used in the Tijuana Bible is exactly the impetus needed for the recipient's awareness of the meta-level discussed above.

3) In addition to echoes of the debate concerning the comics medium, there are also less charged comments alluding to the comics medium in general. Following the thwarted meeting of the crimebusters in 1975, the Comedian can be seen leaving the venue in question while uttering the parting words "SEE YOU IN THE *FUNNY PAPERS*" (#2, 11/5). The funny papers, or funnies, are those pages in a newspaper dedicated to comic strips.[124] The Comedian's remark conveys his view of his fellow vigilantes and himself as entertaining and colorful, the main attributes of most newspaper comic strips. Similarly, the intradiegetic comic book read by Bernie – already a metafictional element – is referred to as a "*FUNNY BOOK*" (#3, 22/7). Also, *Action Comics* is mentioned in IC #1, the Rockefeller Miliary Research Center features a logo heavily reminiscent

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121 "Amplification through simplification" is what McCloud calls the method of depiction whereby a realistic image is abstracted to the point where only essential meaning remains (*Understanding* 30). In this process, the comics illustrator focuses on the emphasis of defining details.

122 The less realistic an image in comics, the more things it can be said to describe, e.g., a stylized depiction of a dog could be interpreted to describe more dogs than a realistic account could. Hence cartoony characters are especially suitable for identification (Schüwer 379). For the realistic design of *Watchmen*, this implies reader detachment rather than self-recognition. This is in tune with the distancing effect of the work's metafictionality.

123 e.g., small clouds above one's head to indicate anger or vexation, motions lines to depict velocity or sudden movement, or crosses in one's eyes to represent death. While many of them – like the drops of sweat – may originally have been iconic, they have crossed the divide into the realm of the symbolic, which is readily identifiable by the similarity of their status to the symbolic letters of the alphabet and their cultural limitation.

124 cf. also 2.2.1.; Petersen 95f. and B. Walker, *The Comics before 1945*.

of Superman's insignia and Ozymandias refers to himself as "NOT A REPUBLIC *SERIAL VILLAIN*" who would "EXPLAIN [HIS] *MASTERSTROKE* IF THERE REMAINED THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE OF [NITE OWL] AFFECTING ITS *OUTCOME*" (#11, 27/1), a reference not only towards the Republic movie company that produced and distributed serials from the 1930s to the 1950s, but also towards the stereotypically foolish comic book crooks whose sinister plans are often thwarted because they boast about their ideas while not yet realized.[125]

4) Finally, the choice of the superhero trope for the plot of *Watchmen* has a few implications itself. Especially in the United States, the superhero genre is and has been mostly prolific ever since Siegel and Shuster created Superman in 1938.[126] If Ozymandias and his fellow costumed heroes were as morally 'pure' and unambiguously benevolent as Superman and his peers are (most of the time), *Watchmen* would simply be another superhero story. But "[n]one [of the heroes] become superheroes to avenge their dead parents, eradicate tyranny, or bestow justice on the world" (J. Hughes 550). With a plot that is resistant to straightforward summarizing and characters who defy the simple allocation to either good or evil, the significance of the inclusion of superheroes becomes colossal. Indeed, every *Watchmen* hero is – without exception – a subversion of the common masked vigilante[127] and can be read as a metafictional comment on the ideal type of the superhero. *Because* the *Watchmen* protagonists are atypical heroes, they function as meta-referential and self-reflexive elements that draw attention to the conventions of the superhero genre. That said, several characteristics can be found that relate more or less openly to famous superheroes: Nite Owl's name, costume and underground refuge are reminiscent of Batman, the Comedian's use of the US-American flag is a nod to Captain America (Klock 77), Ozymandias's businessman/vigilante double life also reminds us of Batman while his arctic getaway repeats Superman's Fortress of Solitude and Bubastis replaces Krypto (Di Liddo 55-56).

While this inventory of self-referential and self-reflexive moments in *Watchmen* covers all comics-related instances, we should not forget that Moore also installed

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125 This remark is further striking as it upends the concept of the cliffhanger: Even though issue #11 ends suspensefully, there is nothing the protagonists can do to prevent the catastrophe as it is already a matter of fact. As the last installment comes after the story's climax, it bears resemblance to an epilogue in the classic sense of the word (Backe 104).

126 Sales were low during the later 1940s and 1950s as an indirect result of WWII but picked up again with the implementation of the Comics Code, which encumbered realistic storytelling in comic books – a circumstance that cleared the way once again for superhero comics with their roots in the fantastic. For more details cf. 2.2.1.; Nyberg; Petersen 133ff; and Wright 154ff.

127 I have already commented on a facet of *Watchmen* that is often overlooked in the introduction: Despite its revisionist stance, the graphic narrative also endorses the traditional superhero by way of its inclusion of characters that feature abilities that transcend those of the common man or woman. They are not superpowered, but they are still able to handle situations others could not. In this way, I argue, *Watchmen* is not only the inversion of the superhero narrative, but at the same time a confirmation.

numerous allusions to non-comics works as well. An incomprehensive list includes Edward Blake alias the Comedian, whose name evokes his namesake William Blake, who was the author of the 1794 poem "The Tyger", from which the title and epilogue of #5 were borrowed; Hollis Mason's unusual middle name; Wordsworth;[128] Rorschach's journal – a book – which not only initiates and concludes the narrative but also affords an ironic take on the mediality and materiality of *Watchmen* as it is depicted as an intradiegetic object, i.e., a closed and unread book about to be opened and perused in the very last panel; the title of the intermediate chapter, "A MAN ON FIFTEEN DEAD MEN'S CHESTS" (IC #5), which is an inversion of the sea shanty used in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island* and which, in perfect unison with the hypodiegetic narrative, is a pirate story, etc.[129] To round off this catalogue, let me point out the following ironic juxtaposition of text and image: In #3, 17/9, Bernard's remarks on life in general that: "I BET THERE'S ALL *KINDA* STUFF WE NEVER *NOTICE*…" while inconspicuously as relegated to the background of the panel, Walter Kovacs is rummaging through a trash can.

Conclusively, it is not surprising to find Gibbons describe the series as "a comic about comics"[130] (Stewart, "Kieselsteine" 33). In their utilization of numerous metafictional components, the creators of *Watchmen* apparently did not aim for an optimal suspension of disbelief but deliberately draw attention to the work's medial qualities. By means of references to comics in general, comics' value, real-life comics authors and literature as well as the specific work in question, *Watchmen* creates an intriguing meta-level that encompasses the entire graphic narrative. This fact is difficult to ignore and harbors ample potential for reader gratification.

❖ *The Doomsday Clock*

Following this deviation from the discussion of continuity-building elements that occur regularly in order to scrutinize metafictionality, self-referentiality and self-reflexivity in *Watchmen*, let us return to another factor that surfaces on a regular basis: the doomsday clock. Taken from real life, the "Doomsday Clock conveys how close humanity is to catastrophic destruction – the figurative midnight" (Kennette). The "Doomsday Clock Overview" in the *Bulletin of the Academic Scientists* attests that from 1984 to 1988, humanity was on the brink of annihilation – the clock was set at three

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128 There is subtle irony in the fact that Blake as the "Comedian is the mad Blake to Hollis Mason (Nite Owl)'s mild Wordsworth" (Moulthrop, *Watching the Detectives*, notes on #2).

129 The original lyrics sung by the captain are: "Fifteen men on the dead man's chest – Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum! Drink and the devil had done for the rest – Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!" (6f.).

130 My translation: "eine Comic über Comics".

minutes to midnight – due to the circumstance that "U.S.-Soviet relations reach their iciest point in decades. Dialogue between the two superpowers virtually stops" (Kennette). This device is adopted by Moore and Gibbons: Each intermediate chapter closes with a splash panel featuring the doomsday clock which, in addition to the forward motion of the minute hand, depicts blood flowing from the top of the page towards the clock until it is almost completely covered (fig. 62).

Fig. 62: Doomsday clocks (ends of issues #1-12).

In the *Watchmen* reality, the 1985 doomsday clock points to five minutes to midnight, as the reader can gather from the *New York Gazette* headline that reads "NUCLEAR DOOMSDAY CLOCK STANDS AT FIVE TO TWELVE WARN EXPERTS" (#1, 18/4). In IC #1, the clock's hands show 11:48 and with each appearance, the minute hand moves closer to midnight. The downward flowing blood amplifies the effect of dread the clock's relentless inching towards midnight already provokes. Such evenly repetitive depiction of one motif coupled with minimal change engenders continuity not only from one intermediate chapter to the next but also between the first narrative and the concluding page of each intermediate chapter.

Whereas the doomsday clock of the intermediate chapters is definitely linked to the plot nearing its disastrous end – upon the effectual execution of Ozymandias's scheme, the clock comes to be almost completely blanketed in blood, indicating the obliteration of millions – it still functions largely independently of the intradiegetic doomsday clock. However, the final stages of the IC doomsday clock (IC #11 and 12) are mirrored within the diegesis, namely on the title page of episode #12 and in the splash panel on the first page (fig. 63):

Fig. 63:
The doomsday clock becomes intradiegetic
(#12, title page and 1/1).

Through egregious detail, we learn that countless New Yorkers have been killed (#12, 1-6). At the very center of the mayhem is a large, yellow clock covered in blood and whose hands indicate midnight. The blood streaming across the face of the clock is no longer figurative as in the images of the doomsday clock in the intermediate chapters but the blood of the people who lost their lives. When the extradiegetic doomsday clock of the intermediate chapters becomes one with the clock within the diegesis, the audience is once again presented with the phenomenon of congregated narrative strands that has already been discussed regarding characters and reappearing items like the smiley badge. That is to say that the first narrative which has incrementally been approaching eradication and the series of doomsday clocks at the end of the intermediate chapters which, also, have been nearing midnight, converge in the end, not only as the position of the hands is concerned but also with regard to narrative levels. In other words, continuity between narrative levels is established by the doomsday clock in that its periodical comeback in the intermediate chapters finds its climax not in the extradiegetic realm it has been part of, but inside the diegesis.

In addition, the doomsday clock advances continuity by making further appearances outside of the diegesis. It has already been shown that Moore and Gibbons go to great lengths to construct frames – around scenes, installments and the work as a whole. In a similar vein, a small clock with a time identical to the one shown by the doomsday clock at the end of the following intermediate chapter appears on the title page below the issue number indication (fig. 64, title page). And there is another miniature doomsday clock to be found in the panel of the ultimate page of each installment, as a neighbor to the epilogue (#1, 28/8).

Fig. 64:
The omnipresent reminder of imminent disaster (#1, title page, title page excerpt and #1, 28/8).

By means of such strict regularity, *Watchmen*'s episodes as well as its intermediate chapters unfailingly open and close with the image of the doomsday clock. The use of this

> basic elliptical structure, where elements at the beginning of the story mirror events which are to happen at the end, or where a particular phrase or a particular image will be used at the beginning and the end, acting as bookends to give the story that takes place in between a sense of neatness and unity
> (Moore/Burrows 15)

is a method Moore is known for.[131]

But the pervasiveness of the doomsday clock does not stop at the formation of framing structures that provide guidance through reliability. There are also numerous instances where the clock appears as an object within the diegesis. Since many of these instances have already been subject to scrutiny in relation to the clock's resemblance to the smiley badge, I will refrain from mentioning them again here. Suffice it to say that, while the time on these alarm clocks, wristwatches and wall clocks does not always correspond to the time of the doomsday clock immediately appended to that particular issue, they always convey a time that is reminiscent of the doomsday clock in that the hands linger close to midnight. The continuous use of the doomsday clock outside of as well as within the diegesis turns it into a theme that looms ominously in *Watchmen,* perpetually reminding the recipient by the relentless forward movement of the hands that doom is inexorably approaching.

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131 It also surfaces on the inside of both the graphic novel's front and back covers. In very large letterering, W, A, T, C and parts of an H are stretched across the two pages immediately following the front cover, while the remainder of the letter H, alongside M, E and N expands over the two pages directly preceeding the reverse side of the graphic novel. This is the largest frame Moore and Gibbons conceived of, though there is one nearly as encompassing which, in addition, surrounds the story in two ways: The narrative opens in the first panel and closes in the last one with the smiley and its signature stain as well as Rorschach's journal.

It was mentioned in this chapter's introduction that in theory, a work like *Watchmen* whose structure was complex and obfuscating, also due to its anachronistic rendering, would in all likelihood not succeed in bringing forth a coherent narrative. It would not be surprising if the reaction to an account of the series' elaborate structure would be lack of understanding and failure to imagine such a work. In practice, however, *Watchmen* features a continuity which surpasses that of other graphic narratives of similar standing by a wide margin and which pervades the work on every level.

It has been shown that continuity in *Watchmen* begins within the discrete panel, which is not conventionally presumed to be continuous in itself. The interaction of speech bubbles, the display of motion as well as the complete omittance of speech serve as contributions to the reading of a panel as depicting more than one static moment in time and space. Within the sequence, the comics writer and illustrator can build on the audience's ability to create coherence despite – or because of – the gutter that disconnects the individual images, but at the same time risks losing their interest in these sites of transition. Continuity is one way to keep readers interested and is designed by the consistent use of linking agents like characters, color, graphic matches and overlapping text. On the level of the page, continuity is established through the consistent employment of a slightly modifiable nine-panel grid as well as the adherence to the rhetoric, conventional and productive layouts as outlined by Peeters. The title page is paramount in importance for the institution of continuity within the episode, as it constitutes the initial trace that is, firstly, continued on the inaugurative panel of the opening page, and secondly, either used as one half of a frame, which is complemented at the end of the installment, or as a recurring theme. In the latter case, the title page object is characterized by constant re-emergence throughout the issue in question. The written title, on the other hand, is constituted by an excerpt from the epilogue and is found within the first few pages of an episode and may or may not be continuous with the visual characteristics, like e.g., symmetry, of an issue. Without the larger context, readers may not be able to grasp the connection between title and the narrative immediately, but by the end of the installment, the continuity between title and epilogue, title and narrative and epilogue and narrative has usually become clear.

The so-termed intermediate chapters disrupt the continuity of the narrative in terms of medial constitution but establish continuity in that they fill the gaps in the reader's knowledge about the protagonists, their histories and their reception in the

Watchmen society. This means that, on a formal level, the intermediate chapters are continuous by virtue of their consistent use of intermedial references; on the content level, they are continuous through the revelation of the history and motivation of the main character. Metafictional elements like hypodiegetic narratives, depictions of Tijuana Bibles or comic books, characters' verbal references to comic strips, or the allusion to various other media in the intermediate chapters by means of intermedial references account for the series' consistent self-reflexivity. By the means of phenomena such as the doomsday clock, the framing constructs around individual episodes, intermediate chapters as well as the entire work have been discussed. The analysis of both salient and inconspicuous irregular traces has yielded the insight that the continuous presence of traces ultimately leads to the point of climax where they all converge: The last depiction of any recurrent trace – e.g., the smiley face or the sugar cubes – summarizes all earlier appearances. In very general terms, one could say that *Watchmen* generates a strong sense of regularity and consistency by way of employing various frames around sequences, installments, intermediate chapters, and/or even the work in its entirety. My thesis of continuity being used to construct coherence in a largely non-linearly structured narrative has thus been emphatically affirmed.

But the analysis does not have to end here. The celluloid version of *Watchmen* provides further substance for the examination of continuity with regard to its contents. It is not my intention to delve into a juxtaposition of text and motion picture, to produce a value judgement on the success of the adaptation, or to open a discussion on whether such an iconic work should be converted into film in the first place – a debate that is omnipresent in exchanges among fans and which is usually of highly polemic nature;[132] such approaches would require a different framework. Instead, the following will briefly sketch the strings of continuity that connect graphic novel and film.

In 2009, director Zack Snyder completed the adaptation of the series after several years in "development hell" (D. Hughes 8) and its having been stigmatized as unfilmable.[133] It was categorized thus due to formal factors, i.e., the hypodiegetic

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132 Moore is notoriously known for leading the way for all those vehemently opposed to the adaptation of his graphic novel. As it was communicated that the film would finally be made, he said that he would "be spitting venom all over it" (Boucher). Gibbons, by contrast, gave his blessing by providing drawings of the pirate comic which were used as props in the film (Aperlo, *Watchmen. The Film Companion* 23 and 137).

133 David Hughes catalogues the numerous attempts to turn *Watchmen* into a film in *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made* (2001, 144-151). Even though the material eventually overcame all obstacles, the graphic novel's inclusion in Hughes's catalogue emphasizes its intractability towards adaptation. For details on the eventual making of the movie, cf. also Aperlo's *Watchmen. The Film Companion.*

narrative and the work's analeptic propensity, both of which pose considerable obstacles for smooth storytelling in film, and due to its richness of specific items and its intricacy as far as content is concerned. Snyder overcame the former obstacle by outsourcing the *Tales of the Black Freigher* narrative completely and by making it available as a direct-to-video animated feature on a separate DVD.[134] Analepses were largely circumnavigated by aligning events chronologically. Contentual complexity as well as details galore were dealt with by means of inclusion. Snyder attempted to do justice to the work's affluence of details by incorporating a good number of them into the film.

This is one of the places where the graphic novel-to-film continuity is most palpable: Songs cited in the panels or in the epilogues are employed as soundtrack,[135] Rorschach's diary entries were converted – largely verbatim – into voice-over, objects from the original work that did not find their way into the film proper were ingeniously incorporated into the heavily packed title sequence. It is for this reason that pieces of writing interested in the cinematic adaptation have pointed out the film's "attention to even the smallest details" (Aperlo, *Watchmen. The Film Companion* 23), its "absolute fidelity" (Rehak 155), its "obsessive devotion to the visual components" and "overly faithful frame-by-frame recreation" (Manivannan), and its being "slavishly true to its source" (Rehak 157). In what often approaches mimesis, Snyder achieved a most striking continuity by transferring panel contents directly into the film frame. Time and time again, "key panels from the comic are reproduced with apparently obsessive precision" so that "general design and visual texture are remarkably faithful to the graphic novel" (Moulthrop, "Watchmen"). Point of view, color, background, character position, etc. are often so much like the original that it feels like the graphic narrative has come to life. Whether or not this is a good thing aesthetically or technically is open for debate, but it is certain that the creators of the movie have succeeded in faithfully adapting the source material in a way that creates a strong affiliation between *Watchmen*, the graphic novel and *Watchmen*, the motion picture.[136]

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134 This DVD also includes the contents of the autobiographical work by Hollis Mason *Under the Hood*, represented through the intermediate chapters #1-3 in the graphic narrative, in the form of an interview with Stephen McHattie, the actor playing Mason.

135 e.g., "Desolation Row" (#1, 26/8, epilogue), "Ride of the Valkyries" (IC #1), "Unforgettable" (#7, 13/8-14/1), "You're my Thrill" (#7, 25/7-26/7), "All along the Watchtower" (#10, 28/8, epilogue), etc. For a thorough discussion of Music in *Watchmen*, see Backe (50-51) and Borsellino.
More subtle continuity is inherent in the choice of "Control Voice" and "The Outer Limits Theme" from the television series *The Outer Limits*. When the writing of *Watchmen* had progressed to #10, Moore came to realize that the story reproduced the plot of the episode "The Architects of Fear" from the fantasy television series from the 1960s. He did not alter the plot but included a "belated nod" to the series in #12, 28/2 (Jensen).

136 There are also numerous deviations from the original story, most notably the role of Dr. Manhattan, which is much enlarged in the film. In the latter, Ozymandias arranges for the superhuman to be perceived as the threat which scares world powers into peace negotiations while the series casts

At the time of writing, DC Comics was in the process of publishing a collection of mini-series intimately related to *Watchmen*. *Before Watchmen* is a feat of gigantic proportions, including ten titles that are dedicated to the disclosure of events that lead up to the original *Watchmen*. In their joint function as prequels, all of these mini-series flesh out, complement or amend Moore and Gibbons's story in one way or another. Needless to point out that a strong continuity is inherent in all of them, be it e.g., through the resumption of props, such as the sign board reading "THE END IS NIGH" (*Before Watchmen: Nite Owl* #4); by means of the recollection of tropes, like the smiley's round shape (e.g., *Before Watchmen: Minutemen*, on the first page of each issue); as far as layout is concerned, as in the accommodation of the nine-panel grid (*Before Watchmen: Silk Spectre*), etc. Since many of these instances can also be considered as retcons, they will be subject to analysis in chapter 5. For the time being, let us register that continuity in *Watchmen* is not only directed inward where it finds expression in the panel, the sequence, the episode and the work as a whole. It also emanates outward, towards other media as well as backwards in time, onward to a realm that had not been covered by the original work.

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him as merely the source for the weapon of mass destruction. If the hoax is discovered (via Rorschach's journal), it matters whether people believe there to be an omnipotent being who could destroy their world at the flick of his wrist or whether they realize he was just a puppet in a grand scheme. The implication, of course, is that truce based on the former would be much more stable, rendering "Moore's ending [...] at least potentially less hopeful than Snyder and company's" (Moulthrop, "Watchmen").

4. "The past isn't what it used to be":[1] Continuity as Idiosyncrasy of Serialized US-American Comic Books?

> The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered.
> (T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" 1286)

The preceding chapters have focused on different kinds of continuity in various media. We have seen that continuity is a term that is employed in everyday speech, where it describes stability and connection; in film making, where it is used for the smooth and flawless concatenation of shots that were most likely filmed out of sequence; and in serially published works, where is denotes the sum of those factors that institute intertextual references between a series's particular episodes. Commonly, this is as far as scholars will go in analyzing continuity. Consequently, there has been no encompassing academic treatise of the concept of what I will address as Continuity with a capital C, in order to carve out a contrast to the continuity discussed so far.

Corporate universe, canon, mythology, narrative cosmos, compilation of series, backstory, comic book history, publisher's network, intratextuality, unfolding text, archive, internal logic, "*hyperdiegesis*" (Hills 137) or "the largest narrative construction[...] in human history" (Kaveney 25) – all of these are terms that could be used to describe Continuity. How it was established, what it entails, how it is maintained and by whom will be subject to analysis in this chapter. More precisely, there will be an outline of the few available definitions followed by an attempt at defining Continuity before I provide a historical abstract delineating how Continuity came to be established, what it encompasses and how it presupposes seriality.

4.1. Defining Comic Book Continuity

Continuity is one of the most contended topics amongst fans of popular culture series. But while chats and fora teem with discussions of which manifestations of characters and which storylines should be considered part of Continuity, there is very little serious and valid treatment of the concept as such, mainly because a grasp of

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1   Subtitle of the website *The Unauthorized Chronology of the DC Universe* (C. Miller).

it is so taken for granted amongst fans that a definition apparently seems superfluous. This dearth of definitions, regrettably, extends into academia. To my knowledge, there are only a handful of scholars who have attempted to define Continuity, many of whom appear do so en passant.

Matthew Wolf-Meyer, for instance, makes a key connection to the recipient's significance: "[C]ontinuity is a vital part of comic books, and relies upon the imagination and memory of its readership to retain fluency in storylines, and often very discrete subplots" (500). For all its generality, it omits the weighty aspect of the network, which constitutes a basic feature of Continuity. In the terms of media scholar Henry Jenkins, Continuity "operates not just within any individual book but also across all of the books by a particular publisher so that people talk about the DC and Marvel universe" ("Just Men" 21). This network grows out of the shift from self-contained stories to an interconnected narrative world that functions on the premise of seriality (21). Also Richard Reynolds elicits the notion of the specific publisher's universe: According to him, Continuity as "intertextuality, forming in total the 'Marvel Universe' and 'DC Universe'" (38) focuses on the heavily linked episodes and series of the narrative universe. He further remarks that Continuity is "something malleable, and constantly in the process of being shaped by the collective forces of artists, writers, editors, and even the critical voices of the fans" (47). He thus does justice to the element of joint productive forces behind the phenomenon. In addition, Reynolds also records the non-historicity of Continuity which "doesn't move forward at any set pace" (44). The effect is that Continuity functions as a realm of temporal limbo, or to quote Eco, "an oneiric climate" ("Myth" 114). By suppressing the natural flow of time, Continuity constitutes a "strategy through which superhero texts most clearly operate as myths […] the contemplation of the unity being more important than any suspense engendered over the outcome" (Reynolds 45). Despite its elusiveness, this vital temporal component is largely overlooked in definitions of Continuity.

Reynolds emphasizes Continuity's sophistication in comparison to serial continuity as familiar from other media: "[A]s practiced by the two major superhero publishers, continuity is of an order of complexity beyond anything to which the television audience has become accustomed" (38). Despite this intricacy, the ideal fan can envisage an ideal DC "metatext: a summation of all existing texts plus all the gaps which those texts have left unspecified" (43). But it must remain ideal and indefinite for no fan can possibly consume every DC publication pertaining to

Continuity[2] and because new additions are made to Continuity every month (43). Due to Continuity's unstable and perpetually unsettled nature, "[a]ny definitive metatextual resolution is therefore indefinitely postponed […] until some future date when superhero texts cease to be published" (43). Like in Pierre Bourdieu's field, where every position is relative to and depends on all other positions and where every addition can modify the structure of the field (*The Field* 30-32), Continuity, too, is potentially subject to transformation with each publication. And even if a new release joins rather than alters Continuity, "[t]he more comics published, the more continuity there is to cohere" (Reynolds 38).

According to Simon Locke "continuity refers to the coherence and consistency between stories involving one particular character" (31). But when we ponder the *Star Trek* universe, for example, it becomes clear that Continuity does not revolve around individual characters. Locke also overlooks the crucial temporal dimension. Continuity did not grow overnight but developed over a period of time, based on the seriality of the product. The temporal component is included in Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin's somewhat diffuse delineation of Continuity as "decades of accreted published story lines" ("Introduction" 6). However, this approach, while generally too broad for my understanding, fails to mention that some "published story lines" are denied entry into the consecrated realm of Continuity. It also overlooks the authorial component, i.e., the notion of the authority behind the concept.

Situated somewhere between a scholarly and a fan definition is the one by comic book writer and editor Dennis O'Neil: Continuity "is concerned with the relationships of hundreds of characters and events and a vast chronology that encompasses past, present, and future" (116). While already more specific and inclusive of the temporal factor, it still neglects notion of an agency, though this is far from unified, from which all publications emanate. All of these definitions fail to mention seriality as a prerequisite and burgeoning mediality as an option of Continuity. Another matter are definitions by practitioners of Continuity, i.e., authors, editors, producers, etc. Kate Orman, a writer of *Doctor Who* novels, provides the authorial point of view when she says that she asks herself "'[W]hat should I try not to contradict?'" (Cornell/Orman 36), a very practical question whose answer equals Continuity.

Hence taking into account authority, intricacy, canonicity, mediality, seriality and temporality, I venture to define Continuity as *the result of characters, events, plots and circumstances, both contemporary and historical, forming a complex entity that may stretch across several media and that has a tendency to aim at being consistent*

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2   "though some come closer than one has any right to expect", Reynolds adds tongue in cheek (43).

and contentually coherent within a realm encompassing a range of an author's, director's, publisher's, etc. serialized publications.

❖ *Canonicity*

One of the implications of such a definition is that Continuity denotes canonicity. More specifically, the eclectic nature of Continuity, i.e., the appointment of a specific portion among a larger whole, suggests Continuity's congruence with the phenomenon of the canon. Storylines are deemed proper and valid, and thus part of the official domain, as long as they are congruent with established Continuity. By contrast, Continuity-defying lore is denied entry to the canon. Yet if it was this simple, the concept would not provoke such heated debates. Due to the constant re-writing and retrospective adaptation of narratives,[3] some formerly canonical storylines may be rendered obsolete, provided the new storyline harbors better potential to convince recipients and to furnish future narratives. In anthologies of comic book output such as *The Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe*, issues resting on unsound footing are identified with the remark "[Continuity questionable]" and apocryphal storylines are tagged with the label "[Note: no longer in continuity]". The wording of the latter indicates that while the episode in question once belonged to Continuity, it does so no longer. It is this moving in and out of the authoritative sphere that supplies one analogy to the Western canon.

Another one is its unofficial status. Of course, synopses and overviews of as well as digital and analog guidebooks to Continuity can be created on the basis that overarching storylines's canonical status is usually agreed upon. Comic book editors are also employed to ascertain adherence to Continuity and O'Neil even attests that at larger companies, there is usually someone assuming the unofficial position nicknamed "continuity cop"[4] who can settle Continuity questions based to his or her encyclopedic memory of the universe (116). However, the endeavor to pin down canonicity becomes a matter of delicacy as soon as one inspects more branched-out narratives. Not even the publishing companies venture so far as to settle the canonical condition of each issue, storyline or character's variation, purposely allowing for interpretative latitude. In other words, within the larger framework of a mostly agreed upon Continuity, the innumerable storylines inhabiting a publishing company's

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3   cf. chapter 5 on retroactive Continuity.
4   With a self-derisive touch, Keith Giffen and Robert Loren Fleming even created the DC character Jonni DC, an intradiegetic 'Continuity Cop', with a body modeled after the old DC Comics emblem (*Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe*). Ironically, the *Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe* includes the following note: "The canonical status of Jonni DC is highly debatable! (and that's being generous!!)".

universe may be attributed to the canon at the audience's pleasure and convenience: To each his or her own Continuity. Now, with myriads of diverging conceptions of what Continuity comprises and what it excludes and with an authority who tacitly refuses to grant explicit solutions, the unofficial canonicity or apocryphalness of DC Continuity approaches that of the Western canon.

❖ *The Continuity Guide*

Let us for a moment dwell on the notion of the Continuity guide. Understandably, a convoluted structure like DC Comics Continuity necessarily carries instructive material in its wake. Such directories come either in the form of printed books, e.g., *The DC Comics Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Characters of the DC Universe* or as digital repositories, e.g., *The DC Comics Database* on *Wikia* or individual entries on *Wikipedia*. As Continuity is subjected to change at least monthly, if not weekly, it is remarkable that such information is conveyed via channels other than digital ones. The implication is obvious: Digital archives allow for immediate, ceaseless and relatively uncomplicated editing of encyclopedic Continuity data. Especially since the re-introduction of the weekly comic book (e.g., Johns et al., *52*), this has become increasingly advantageous. Plus, there is relying on the diligence of fans to update digital archives as soon as the latest installment of a title is released, i.e., *Wikipedia* is always up to date.

Printed volumes, however, are much more inert by virtue of their publication form which requires the expense of a new, revised edition that then needs to be made available in book form. It is especially intriguing, then, to come across such apparently oxymoronic adjectives as "definitive" in the title of a printed Continuity guidebook. On that score, Reynolds points out that a publisher's universe is never ultimately defined as long as new texts keep being published. "In the meantime, new texts must be made sense of within continuity, or discarded as non-canonical" (43). Hence one can but assume the declaration of definiteness to be a reaction to the audience's yearning for a conclusive capture of the status quo, rather than the earnest effort to finalize the history of the DC universe. Brooker sums up as follows: "Metaphorically, its ideal medium is not stone tablets, but Wikipedia" (*Hunting* 158). A case in point can be made by reference to the series *Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe*, originally created by Len Wein, Marv Wolfman and Robert Greenberger. It debuted in March 1985, ran for 26 episodes and ended in April 1987. Essentially an encyclopedia in comic book form, it alphabetically listed the DC Universe's characters, places, etc. It is an interesting instance as it began just *before*

the limited series *Crisis on Infinite Earths* by Marv Wolfman and George Perez, which fundamentally altered the state of DC's world and, therefore, DC Continuity.[5] This meant that the earlier installments portrayed pre-*Crisis* versions of the characters, while those episodes published following the finale of *Crisis* depicted the post-*Crisis* state of things. For instance, both the first Flash and Supergirl died during *Crisis*, yet the former's death was not mentioned since *Who's Who* #8 (fig. 65) preceded his death in *Crisis* #8 (fig. 66).

Fig. 65:
No account of the Flash's death in *Who's Who* #8 (October 1985, cover page).

Fig. 66:
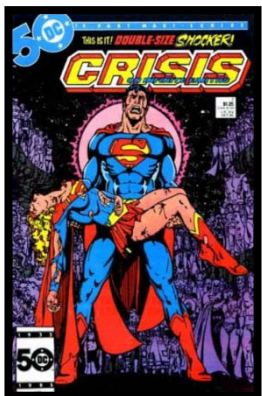The Flash's death in *Crisis* #8 (November 1985, cover page).

Fig. 67:
Supergirl's death in *Crisis* #7 (October 1985, cover page).

Fig. 68:
Explanation of Supergirl's death in *Who's Who* #22 (December 1986, 25).

Supergirl's demise in *Crisis* #7 (fig. 67), however, preceded the *Who's Who* issue focusing on the letter 'S' (fig. 68) and is thus described.[6] This goes to show that even works specifically created in order to provide the audience with information regarding a publisher's Continuity are subject to change at the whim of a monthly publication.

The relevance of the concept of the canon for Continuity has been made clear, but there are another notions Continuity shares strong links with: It is not unheard of that Continuity is likened to mythology or history. The proximity to mythology is obvious, what with the abundance of heroes populating the universe, and the term history also makes sense in that Continuity is nothing but an accumulation of events over the years, except that not all events come to be included in Continuity. Hence

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5   This seminal mini-series will be subjected to scrutiny in 4.2.
6   For a more detailed description of this phenomenon, cf. the *Wikipedia* entry on "Who's Who in the DC Universe".

Continuity could be described as a cross between canon and history, meaning that it involves only a part of the possible output it could include and that it is often characterized by a longstanding record.

Equipped with a definition and principal understanding of Continuity, let us now examine the historical, cultural, economic, editorial, social and individual forces at play in the establishment and development of Continuity. Due to its figuring at the center of my definition of Continuity, seriality will provide the starting point for the following analysis.

❖ *From Interepisodic Reference to Serial Universe*

Seriality has been identified as one of the pillars on which Continuity rests. Without serial publication, no serial universes could develop and without serial universes, no Continuity. With regard to the series, Eco has pointed out that recipients derive pleasure from "foreseen and awaited reappearance" ("Innovation" 162), meaning that character traits, behavior, looks, habits and quirks, way of speech, gestures, etc. constitute an essential part of what we enjoy about a series. Repetitive elements in characters afford satisfaction as "the readers continuously recover, point by point, what they already know, and what they want to know again" (164). We do not consume series because we want to be surprised, but first and foremost because we want to rediscover the already-familiar, the previously-known. Characters like Lieutenant Columbo of the eponymous series are well-loved because we enjoy how, for the n-th time, the protagonist asks for a match, returns after having bid good-bye with the phrase "Just one more thing…" and, in the end, manages to get to the bottom of the crime brilliantly despite his scatterbrained appearance. In a similar vein, we take pleasure in the series as a whole because we have memorized its schematic structure by heart: We delight in each instance in which we witness the murder at the outset of the installment and then follow Columbo in his quest to track down the culprit in an inversion of the classical whodunit. But even with series that have a more serial than episodic stance and do not follow a rigid formula we are satisfied to find that characters behave according to our expectations.

Now, when we consume an episode of any series for the first time, part of that pleasure is forestalled as we are not yet familiar with the series's idiosyncrasies and characters's patterns. It is only upon viewing, reading or listening to further installments that paradigms emerge. The longer readers have been following their favorite series, the more intimate the understanding of its characters will grow because every release of a new episode not only adds layers of meaning to characters, but also

functions as a vehicle of consolidating their persona. Hence regular recipients practice their knowledge with each new episode. Serial expertise, one could say, is a prerequisite for self-reflexive rumination and annotation of the serial.

We have seen that series very often rely on their audience's willingness to accrue extensive acquaintance with more than just one episode in order to create interconnected serial worlds. (While this applies to all kinds of series – television, computer game, cinema, traditional literature, etc., I will focus on comic books). The accumulated knowledge serves as a basis for the decoding and understanding of what I term *interepisodic references*. This expression has been coined in analogy to intertextual and intermedial references which describe the quotation of one text in another and of one medium in another respectively.

An interepisodic reference takes place when in one installment implicit or explicit allusion to an earlier (or, in more intricate cases and only retrospectively detectable) later episode is made. What is thus created is a *serial universe*. It consists of the entirety of the individual episodes that in a more or less direct manner allude to one another and which, as a consequence, become connected in complex ways and need to cohere. Reynolds calls this diachronic serial continuity (38/41) and Matt Hills refers to it as "*hyperdiegesis*" (137).[7] The series grows denser and more entangled with each new episode that makes use of interepisodic references. A long-term focus and a high degree of dedication are necessary in order to achieve an overview of such a serial universe (Kelleter, "Serienhelden" 74). Tendentially, episodic or procedural series[8] produce more open serial universes with rather autonomous individual episodes whereas serials generate closely webbed serial worlds consisting of installments that are as dependent on their precursor as they are significant for their successor. This implies that recipients who are not acquainted with the series's history are at a disadvantage when it comes to detecting and decoding interepisodic references, especially in the case of the serial. Needless to point out that serial universes can be erected in any medium. But media that allow for direct comparison between installments, i.e., comic books rather than television, however, are more challenging for storytellers, as inconsistencies are more easily detectable.

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7   Hills's definition of hyperdiegesis ("the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension", 137) could also describe Continuity, although he seems to exclusively employ it for the analysis of the serial narrative.
8   The differences between episodic/procedural series and serials have been unfolded in 2.1.1.

Parkin, disliking the disparaging terms 'franchise' and 'sharecropping'[9] for continuing narratives, uses the term "unfolding text" ("Truths" 13; based on the title of the first academic treatise on *Doctor Who* by Tulloch and Alvarado). The idea behind this term is that longstanding series unfold gradually: Their narrative corpus becomes more intricate and sophisticated with each telling while every era is set apart by the signature of successive production teams, an "'authorial' presence" (Tulloch/Alvarado 132). Parkin defines the unfolding text as "fiction based around a common character, set of characters, or location that has had some form of serial publication" ("Truths" 13). Though there are exceptions, like Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* or Joan K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (13), it seldom consists of only one series and is usually written by many authors. It is therefore tantamount with the media universe or what William Proctor calls "the matrix" ("Beginning"). Also noteworthy is its profound metafictionality (Parkin, "Truths" 14) and its historicity, for already Arthurian legend, or Biblical myth for that matter, is an unfolding text (22). They are further characterized by their entailment of a recognizable core concept, their extension over longer periods of time and their adaptability (22). The latter in traditional literature has induced readers and publishers to occasionally think of them as unfolding texts as well. A novel by Jane Austen can bring forth tie-ins[10] like television series, DVD boxes, spin-offs, merchandise, etc. that all contribute to the overarching structure (23). Some such bodies of texts feature a familiar style and format, a fixed setting and a regular cast, and individual episodes are conceived of by a small team of authors and directors, e.g., *Star Trek*; while others do not have a "house style", e.g., *Doctor Who* (15). Such an unfolding text often features strong links between the stories it encompasses which makes for a strong internal continuity. "Megaseries" is the term O'Neil employs to describe the phenomenon of a narrative that stretches across more than one title (104). Superman or Doctor Who stories are "megaseries".

❖ *From Serial Universe to Continuity*

Let us now imagine several of these serial universes, no matter what kind, linked together. When there are series that correlate with other series, protagonists of

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9   This is the creation of authorized additions to a series when the original author is unavailable or unwilling to narrate further (Williams 27). As a rule, payment is poor, the author is relatively unknown and the rights to the sharecropped works do not stay with the author (Williams 27-28).

10 A tie-in is a authorized media product (DVD, video game, television series, website, comic book, etc.) premised on a source (novel, film, comic book, etc.) that is distributed with the intention of maximizing the original's exposure across other media and to thus make it visible to other audiences.

discrete series that visit each other, events that take place in one series but whose consequences can be felt in another, we speak of the intratextual phenomenon called Continuity. Tight Continuity dictates that an event taking place within one series does not simply cease to reverberate when the individual installment has come to a conclusion, but that alterations remain factual both within that series and in at least some of the other series issued by that author, director, publisher, etc. We will see that, hereby, it is largely irrelevant whether the series are of the same medium or not. But Continuity entails more than the mere interlinking of the media universe. It is based on the majority of installments that compose several series *as well as* the relations between these series.

Here is a practical example: What is now *Sandman*'s second issue of the *Season of Mysts* story arc (#22, January 1991), Gaiman had originally planned to be the first one. However, editor Karen Berger informed him that "there'll be some political turmoil going on in hell that month in another DC title, *The Demon*; Lucifer can't quit hell until the following month" (Bender/Gaiman 99). So Gaiman conceived of an extra installment (#21, December 1990) to solve the dilemma. Continuity is, in other words, internal consistency. Accordingly, Reynolds has expressed the concept of Continuity in the structuralist terms coined by Ferdinand de Saussure: "continuity is the *langue* in which each particular story is an utterance" (45).

Maybe this becomes more lucid with the example of how Continuity is shaped in the unfolding text of *Star Trek*. It was launched in 1966 with the television series *Star Trek* which ran until 1969 and was retrospectively complemented with the specification *The Original Series*. From this, several series with the same title branched out into *The Animated Series* (1973-1974), *The Next Generation* (1987-1994), *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999), *Voyager* (1995-2001) and *Enterprise* (2001-2005). There were also twelve cinematic renderings between 1979 and 2013, most of which starred the cast from the series. All of these are part of the *Star Trek* universe and contribute to its Continuity, as do, though to a lesser extent, numerous novels, comics and games. For instance in *Star Trek*: *Deep Space Nine*

> writers often refer to elements of one episode in subsequent ones and, even more significantly, link eposides [sic] with characters and events from the original *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series, the effect of which is to create a sense of fictional space, history, and character development that is far more sophisticated and intricate than that of classic series programming.
> (Hagedorn 39)

The pleasure inherent in the effect of recognition forms an essential part of the gratification recipients draw from such a network of series. At the same time, producers and distributors profit from fans' multiple dedication: Customers of one series are likely to respond to the pull exerted by another series. Or, as Kaveney phrases it: "Crossover narrative threads, which start in one of a house's titles and continue over the months in several others, are an effective way of compelling readers to spend more money" (30). Hence as is the case with seriality as such, the erection of narrative universes is often spurred by economic interests.

Thus, one of the most conspicuous attributes of such an expansive structure is its proliferation in several media. Most unfolding texts that employ Continuity allow for additions and amendments from its medium of origin as well as other media. For instance, in 1992, Joss Whedon wrote the script for the movie *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which was a mediocre financial and critical success. The television series of the same name (1997-2003) but with a decidedly darker twist first aired in 1997 and was an immediate hit. At least six video games, one trading card game, several comics and graphic novels, and innumerable novels, including novelizations of episodes were created in the wake of the show's success, as was a spin-off series titled *Angel* (1999-2004), after one of the protagonists. Both series are set in the same fictional universe that is crowded with vampires, goblins and demons and that is referred to as the Buffyverse by fans and creator. Interestingly, some novels were written by Whedon himself, other he endorsed, making them a canonical part contributing to the Buffyverse. The term has further been popularized by way of a publication titled *The Physics of the Buffyverse* by Jennifer Ouellette.

Similarly, serialized medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* featured a character named Addison Montgomery, a neonatal surgeon, who had attracted a strong fanbase and thus bore ample potential as the protagonist of a spin-off series. Consequently, in an extended episode that served as backdoor pilot – the industry term for an installment of an existing series or a cinematic feature centering on a secondary character in order to test its stand-alone potential[11] – for *Private Practice*, Montgomery was shown to leave the setting of the parent series, Seattle Grace Hospital, and to start a business of her own in Los Angeles. When several characters of the planned series were part of the pilot, the Shonda Rhimes universe was created. It was further augmented by the novel *Grey's Anatomy: Notes from the Nurse's Station* (2007) and *Grey's Anatomy: The Video Game* (2009).

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11 Backdoor pilots, which are often not advertised as such in case of ill success, have been part of series like *The Cosby Show*, spinning off into *A Different World* or *The Golden Girls*, which was the parent series to *Empty Nest*.

Such universe-building strategies can also be observed on a smaller level. The author Michael Chabon, for instance, has created a character named August Van Zorn who makes repeated appearances in his works. In a metafictional twist, Van Zorn is claimed to be the pen name of writer Albert Vetch. Chabon's *Wonder Boys* begins thus "The first real writer I ever knew was a man who did all of his work under the name of August Van Zorn. [...] His real name was Albert Vetch, and his field, I believe, was Blake" (3). In 1999, Van Zorn is also listed as Chabon's pen name when he appears as the author of "In the Black Mill", a short story from the *Werewolves in Their Youth* collection. An extensive list of publications purportedly written by Van Zorn was set up online by Chabon but the Website is now defunct. The same Website contained leads to another fictional character of Chabon's – Leon Chaim Bach – a writer and literary scholar whose field of study included Van Zorn's work and who was mentioned as editor of Van Zorn's short story compilation *The Abominations of Plunkettsburg*, which is as obviously a play on the title of Chabon's novel *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, as Bach's full name is an anagram of Chabon's full name. To add to the completeness of his small universe, Chabon set up the August Van Zorn Prize in 2004, which awarded the weirdest short story (E. Henderson 253). While Chabon's universe is less encompassing than others as the diversity of media involved is concerned, it is all the more elaborate, stringently consistent and stretching across several ontological levels.

The Buffyverse, the *Grey's Anatomy* franchise, as well as Chabon's oeuvre – their shared seriality not coincidental as we will see – share a functionalizing of Continuity that is by far surpassed in scope by the US-American comic book. This is the medium most intricately involved with and shaped by Continuity. What follows is a historical and theoretical account of the forces and dynamics involved in the construction of Continuity. Hereby, I will employ the example of DC Comics, with the occasional foray into other publishers's histories.

4.2. Once Upon A Time:
How Continuity Came to Be Established in US-American Comic Books

The role of the publishing company in the establishment of Continuity is not to be underestimated as it was involved in all of the crucial interventions that led to the relentless enclosure of narratives within an encompassing universe. In the incipient days of the comic book as we know it, i.e., the 1930s,[12] publishers institutionalized

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12 cf. 2.2.1. for a detailed historical account of comic books in US-America.

creators's surrender of copyrights.[13] Since then it has been customary for writers and artists to transfer the rights to their intellectual property to the company upon being employed, though there has been a clear tendency to abandon this practice.[14] As most prominent example, Siegel and Shuster sold their copyright to what was to become DC Comics for $130 in 1938. What may today seem like inordinate readiness to sign over ideas was spurred by the fact that during the fledgling days of comic books, the esteem in which they were held was very low. The results were twofold: On the one hand, comic book authors and artists often withheld their names from publications or employed pseudonyms so that even though many of the characters who came to life in the late 1930s are well-known all over the world, their creators often are not. On the other hand, they often thought of themselves as fortunate to convert work on such a low-brow medium into pay, especially against the backdrop of the recession-plagued era and the widespread scarcity of employment, that they readily accepted even the most ludicrous job conditions. Consequently, the most iconic comic book characters belong not to their creators, but to the company who first employed the individuals who invented them.

Robert Fiore, columnist at *The Comics Journal*, coined a striking analogy between the practice of large comic book publishing businesses and what he calls "the creative socialism of Marvel and DC":

> Under the benevolent state which controls the means of production the intellectual property becomes a common pool from which the comrades draw from (and draw) to recombine or revise from each according to their abilities to each according to their incentive arrangements. That these socialist states are actually divisions of two of the largest corporations in the world is ironic, but unlike a true socialist state you're allowed to leave whenever you want.

Without copyright issues to worry about or exorbitant royalties to pay, characters could be utilized to whatever means the company deigned proper. In the vast majority of cases, this included having other authors and artists continue a character's story. As the comic book industry gave preference to quantity over quality, assigning company-owned characters to ever-changing creative teams was, and still is,

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13 cf. Kelleter/Stein; Sabin, *Comics* 167; Petersen 105-106 and Wright 7.
14 Needless to say, the notion of intellectual property has come a long way since the 1930s. Writer-artists like Dave Sim have made a point of self-publishing in order to retain full command of their creation, comic book companies have either allowed creators to keep the copyright or they have made allowance for their say in what happens with their characters, and many a writer and artist, among them Siegel and Shuster as creators of Superman have made more or less successful attempts at retrieving the rights to their creations (cf. e.g., Friedell). Digital reporting teems with articles on the lawsuit. For a description of the legal history, cf. e.g., Busch, Cieply, Dean, Heer, and Packard, "Copyright", etc.

customary.[15] With characters no longer anchored to one writer or artist, their stories could potentially be continued ad infinitum. In Parkins's words, "[a]s a series becomes a long-running one, often the involvement of the original creators diminishes, and the weight of internal history [i.e., Continuity] and audience expectation begins to affect the stories themselves" ("Truths" 13).

❖ *Crossing Over*

Such was the point of departure for Continuity. In the early 1940s comic book head writer Gardner Fox at All-American Comics conceived of what Levitz calls "one of the biggest ideas in super-hero history" (*75 Years* 56): the crossover.[16] He made the decision to gather nine protagonists – some of the most admired superheroes of the time belonging to two associated, though discrete publishing companies[17] – as the first superhero team in comics. The third installment of All-American's *All Star Comics* (Winter 1940/1941) introduced the Justice Society of America (fig. 69).
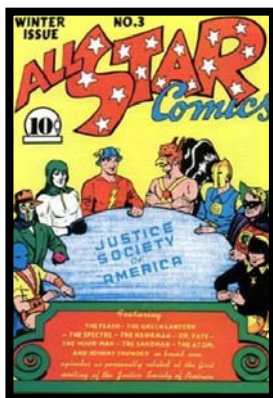
Fig. 69:
The issue that started it all (*All Star Comics* #3, Winter 1940/1941).

The superheroes that were brought together as the JSA were Atom (Al Pratt), Sandman I (Wesley Dodds), the Spectre (Jim Corrigan), the Flash (Jay Garrick), Hawkman (Carter Hall), Dr. Fate (Kent Nelson), Green Lantern (Alan Scott) and

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15 On continuing an author's work after his death, Kristin Thompson writes that it "used to be the case that the death of an author usually meant that no sequel would be written to his or her works. Perhaps the early Holmes stories created by other authors after Conan Doyle's death were the first indication [sic] of a change. Certainly by now the death of an author creates less of an impediment to sequels than it used to. [...] Indeed, the willingness of modern authors to rework or extend the writings of their predecessors may stem from the fact that so many narratives in film and especially television are the work of writing teams. The association of a famous title with a single author perhaps no longer seems as sacred as it once did" (103).

16 Matthew Smith in his article on Superman argues that it was Stan Lee at Marvel Comics in the 1960s who opened the gates to Continuity by having the Fantastic Four guest-star in Spider-Man's title ("'Triangle Era'" 156). However, the temporal distance between Fox's Justice Society of America and Lee's team-up clearly distributes the roles of instigator and emulator.

17 All-American Publications was associated with National Periodical Publications, later to become DC Comics, until it was absorbed by the former in 1944.

Hourman (Rex Tyler).[18] In order to acquaint readers with this multitude of heroes, each member of the team first told a significant event from his career, thus introducing not only themselves but also their creator's art style (Cowsill et al. 33).

The idea is as brilliant as it is straightforward: Collect a few superheroes in one comic book series or have them pay visits to one another's title which might lead to readers's brand loyalty to all, instead of just one of them.[19] The economic advantage of Continuity, hence, is obvious.[20] Dedicated readers of the Flash, it was surmised, might also become interested in and buy the Green Lantern's comic book if the two co-fought crime from time to time. The assumed success of cross-promotion proved true and revenues soared. Wolfman, the writer of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* is quoted to have said that "[t]he JSA single-handedly changed everything in comics" (Levitz, *75 Years* 383).[21]

If we dwell on the notion of the crossover for an instant, we come to realize that it is a phenomenon firmly rooted in seriality. It could be characterized as the event during which two or more individuals of discrete origin temporarily share a common setting. In a successful crossover, characters must be attributable to differing origins, which means that a crossover involving all new characters is not possible: Those who have not yet been introduced or established within a specific work cannot be recognized as having a certain background. Therefore, crossover characters need to have made at least one previous appearance in a distinct work. In other words, serial appearance, even if it is only twice, is a prerequisite for crossover. While incentives behind the connection of several characters or even whole titles may be artistic, it is safe to say that economic interests dominate by far. This is corroborated by the fact that most crossovers happen in series that share an authority, like writer, production company or network channel.[22]

In the majority of cases, the crossover's purpose is the expansion of one series's paying customers by tapping into the audience of another one or the promotion of a

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18 From left to right in fig. 69.
19 Indeed, most comic book consumers do not just read one individual comic book per month but usually follow several titles. The choice of reading material may, for example, be based on character, writer and/or artist. For more on the comic book audience, including numbers, cf. Parsons.
20 The concept of cross-promotion was made use of in the comic book trade as early as 1938 when *Superman* #1 was published with advertising for *Action Comics* and the newspaper strip featuring Superman (Cowsill et al. 25). Similarly, early comic book titles never concentrated on only one protagonist: Even if the series was called *Flash Comics*, it could also include stories about Hawkman or the Sandman.
21 Interestingly, despite its omnipresence in several titles across decades, the JSA was only given its own comic book title in 1999.
22 Intercompany crossovers are only instigated when the total revenue promises to satisfy the expectations of both businesses involved. An example is the co-publication by DC and Marvel *Superman and Spider-Man* (July 1981). Usually, these are set outside of Continuity.

relatively new work.[23] If such an interlude occurs in traditional literary writing, it is most often the case that a character from an earlier work makes an appearance in a later one, though the two may have little else in common. Examples are Kurt Vonnegut's character Kilgore Trout, who surfaces in most of his works, and the above mentioned August Van Zorn. Yet crossovers are unquestionably most popular in comic books. As is the custom in this medium, simple visits or shared experiences like a power outage are hardly branded as crossover events, since they belong to business as usual. However, when a shared storyline affects several or most of a publisher's titles in the common universe, this is publicized as a 'crossover event'.

Finally, a word about crossover reception: The audience must acknowledge a crossover in order for it to be successful. This does not mean that the crossover is befuddling to recipients who do not recognize a character's origin to be another series, but merely that, as is the case with intertextual references, there is always the chance of it going unnoticed. To the knowledgeable recipient, however, the allusion can be a source of enjoyment.

Returning to the superhero team-up, the idea of joint superhero comic books creating further sustained interest in other superheroes was just one of the implications of the advent of the Justice Society of America. Another one was the intricate structure that was being nurtured. After all, significant actions and events would no longer only remain part of the history of one, but two or more comic books. Coherence stipulated that the interweaving and integration of narrative strands did not bring forth contradictory narratives but that repercussions of actions and events would be reflected in all comic books involved. In practice, this meant that if the Atom co-fought a villain with Dr. Fate in a mountainous area in a comic book published in April 1943, he could not be depicted fighting another villain by himself on the beach in another publication of the same month, unless a convincing explanation was offered. Soon, an elaborate web of superhero narratives was installed that was rendered more tangled and labyrinthine each new episode. Even though it arose from

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23 In television, side-by-side broadcasting slots may already kick off audience proliferation but how a favorable point of departure can further be mined for clientele is exemplified by the following example: *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003), its protagonist a spin-off character of the eponymous Archie comic book series herself, appeared in the similarly conceptualized sitcoms *Boy Meets World*, *You Wish* and *Teen Angel* in only one night. The four series, all produced by ABC and aired back to back as the kid-friendly Friday-night program block, shared a common storyline on the evening of 7 November 1997. Such crossover events are usually heavily advertised as 'event nights', as was "Blackout Thursday" (3 November 1994), the crossover event on NBC's "Must See TV", the lineup of four Thursday evening Manhattan-set sitcoms during the 1990s. When Jamie (*Mad About You*) triggers a citywide power failure, this causes Chandler (*Friends*) to get stuck in a bank foyer and Jack (*Madman of the People*) to be mistaken for a post-blackout plunderer. As a side-note, "Must See TV" also included *Seinfeld* which, despite its usual willingness to conceive of solid ties between storylines, did not participate in the crossover.

mainly economic interests, Continuity is an organic structure that was constructed successively and carefully over time. What appeared to occasional readers as obscure narratives replete with incomprehensible hints, inexplicable motifs and unaccounted-for relationships was a source of serial pleasure for the seasoned fans, i.e., those who were able to keep track of the intricately entwined narratives and the thus established Continuity.

❖ *The Multiverse*

In the 1940s, crossovers were hugely popular and Continuity met with enthusiasm. For sound economic reasons and motivated by narrative flexibility, the connection of the individual character and the individual comic book with most of the cast and most of the comic books by one publisher respectively soon became default. As of 1940, therefore, superheroes merrily bounced from comic book to comic book as various authors and artists continued to create narratives for superheroes which were followed mainly by a dedicated audience, rather than occasional readers. Following World War II, superheroes's popularity plummeted,[24] causing the industry to seek attractive alternatives to their somewhat dated characters. Following three failed attempts at launching a comic book named *Showcase*, editor Julius Schwartz advocated the reboot of one of comic books's most beloved characters, the Flash (Schelly 202).

Since his incipient days in 1940, the first Flash alias Jay Garrick had been known as the "scarlet speedster" for his talent to move at astonishing tempo (Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 124). In 1956, the second incarnation of the Flash alias Barry Allen appeared on the comic book stage. The reboot was acknowledged without much confusion[25] and the DC universe from now on housed two versions of the Flash (fig. 70).

Fig. 70:
The first and the second Scarlet Speedster
(*Flash Comics* #1, January 1940 and
Showcase #4, October 1956).

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24   cf. 2.2.1. on comic book history.
25   Interestingly, it seems that the fans's understanding was not shared by the very superhero it concerned: "HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY CLAIM TO BE THE FLASH, BARRY ALLEN – WHEN I – JAY GARRICK – AM THE FLASH – AND HAVE BEEN SO FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS?!" (Flash #123, cf. fig. 71).

This was an equally seminal event as the introduction of the JSA. Firstly, it proved that comic book fans were able to cope with several homonymous characters. Their distinction by name, appearance, origin story and history, powers, relations, etc. was a matter of juggling scores of details but could apparently be presumed to be mastered. Secondly, it induced the relaunch and reinvention of other already-existent superheroes.[26] By way of reboot, defunct or badly selling creatures were unearthed and outfitted with a fresh appearance with the intent to render them more appealing to readers, while already popular characters were submitted to an overhaul in order to make them appear more seasonable and reflective of the zeitgeist.[27]

What is remarkable about the reinvention of this second generation is that it did not drain the originals of their powers (Levitz, *75 Years* 636). These sometimes conflicting reincarnations of one character now lived in one collective space. Committed fans began to wonder how these doppelganger were compatible and whether a revised version of a character did not refute the older one's authenticity. In the attempt to justify the co-existence of multiple re-embodiments of one character, parallel worlds were designed to allocate them to differing spatio-temporal realms. "The Flash of Two Worlds" (fig. 71) was a story from the comic book *Flash* #123 (September 1961) in which two versions of one character met for the first time. Thus, it was the comic book to introduce the notion of multiple realities, or the *Multiverse*.

Fig. 71:
Worlds collide in "The Flash of Two Worlds"
(*Flash* #123, September 1961, *DC Wikia*).

The announcement "A SPECTACULAR STORY THAT IS SURE TO BECOME A CLASSIC!" proved true in the end.

Again, Schwartz was instrumental in constructing a concept that would come to be adopted as the comic book trade standard: The Multiverse "enabled DC's entire stable of characters to exist within the same spatio-temporal environment" (Proctor, "Beginning"). Deduced from cosmology, the term had originated with William James

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26 e.g., Wonder Woman in *Wonder Woman* #98 (May 1958) or Green Lantern in *Showcase* #22 (October 1959).

27 For a detailed account of the reboots the character of the Sandman underwent, see 5.3.

in 1895 ("Multiverse") where the notion of homogeneity and unity was dismissed, just as it is rejected in comic book jargon. One of the few academic definitions of the comic book Multiverse is offered by Kidder: "A multiverse is a collection of individual universes that are, in some pseudo-scientific or magical way, connected to each other" (68). More succinctly, Proctor calls it a "nexus of infinite parallel worlds" ("Beginning"). The definition offered on *DC Wikia* explains that "[t]he Multiverse consists of multiple versions of the universe existing in the same physical space, but separated from each other by their vibrational resonances". Somewhat confusingly, this entirety of all DC Earths is at once called the Multiverse *and* the DC Universe, often abbreviated as DCU.

In addition to providing a separate playground for the characters of companies acquired by DC,[28] the Multiverse enabled characters to remain fixed in their age: Golden Age characters, by now firmly middle-aged, were allowed to exist in semi-retired state on one Earth while their younger counterparts could go on fighting evil on another Earth (Reynolds 44). Greater storytelling flexibility was achieved by the extradition of cosmic twins and alien characters to parallel universes, subsequently named Earth-2,[29] Earth-3, and so forth: "If a story or character did not make sense in light of what had happened before, it was explained away as happening on a different Earth" (S. Carpenter 281).

Conveniently, most alternative worlds functioned outside of the established Continuity which allowed storytellers to develop characters largely independently and to conceive of all kinds of tales without running the risk of challenging Continuity (Schwartz/Thomsen 92). Then again, the new characters and worlds also required coherence, which resulted in the formation of a separate Continuity for them. In addition, the temptation to cross over Golden and Silver Age versions of one character was just too great, which resulted in the Multiverse being drawn into the realm of Continuity as well. Also tales that were once firmly set out of Continuity were absorbed by the Multiverse so that e.g., the setting of Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* retroactively became Earth-31. This means that, even though each Earth subsisted largely independently of the other Earths, it still followed a Continuity of its own – a Continuity within Continuity.

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28 e.g., Blue Beetle from Charlton Comics (1983, this group of characters served as staple for the *Watchmen* characters), Captain Marvel from Fawcett Comics (1991), or WildC.A.T.S. from Wildstorm Comics (1998), etc.

29 There is little to no consistency let alone consent on how to spell these different Earths. There have been attempts to standardize their spelling (e.g., Earth-14 or Earth-Fourteen), but each established tradition was quickly revoked by the next reboot. I will use numerals when referring to the Earths of the DC Multiverse.

To make matters even more complicated, there are differing versions of the Multiverse. *DC Wikia* summarizes the history of the DCU as follows:

> 1. The Original Multiverse was created as the result of interference in the Big Bang by Krona.[30] It was destroyed by the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. 2. An Interregnum Multiverse was created by Alexander Luthor during *Infinite Crisis*. 3. After the events of *Infinite Crisis*, the remaining Earths created collapsed back together, combining historical remnants to form one New Earth. However, the single universe was too small to contain the energy inside it and it began replicating -- into 52 identical Universes, the 52 Multiverse. 4. Following an additional alteration to the world's make-up, the worlds reset again as The New 52.[31]

As a result, there are several Multiverses, respectively several Earth-1s, Earth-2s, etc.[32] Even experienced readers felt overwhelmed by not only by the intricacy of year-long Continuity, but also by the difficulty to distinguish the various versions of characters, earths and eras.

❖ *Casting Off the Fetters of Continuity*

Storytelling possibilities would be severely impaired if every publication adhered to the conditions stipulated by Continuity. In the attempt to escape the increasing complexity of Continuity and the constraints it imposed, comic book producers have been extremely inventive over the years. One solution was to apply a hitherto unused idea on an existing character which, ideally, led to fresh interpretations of characters. So the readership was confronted with outrageous scenarios that were incompatible with Continuity – like individuals behaving out of character or losing a fight against an evil adversary – only to revoke everything by declaring that it had all been a dream or hallucination. An alternative to dreamlike speculation was offered in the 1960s by DC editor Mort Weisinger who occasionally indulged the audience with what he titled "Imaginary Stories"[33] (Levitz, *75 Years* 251). The two differ ontologically: The former eventually turns out to not have happened at all while 'Imaginary Stories' were

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30   This explanation is a synoptic account and thus attempts to disguise editorial decisions by masking them as diegetic circumstances (cf. 5.3.2.).

31   *DC Wikia* ("Multiverse") and *Wikipedia* ("List of DC Multiverses") both make a comprehensive inventory of the different Multiverses: There is the original, pre-*Crisis* Multiverse (ca. 1961-1985, home to such Earths as Earth-C-Minus or Earth-9602); the 52, i.e., post-*Infinite Crisis* and *52* Multiverse (ca. 2006-2012, consisting of exactly 52 Earths) and the latest, i.e., *The New 52* Multiverse, also known as the DCnU (since 2012, following the *Flashpoint* storyarc and preceding the reboot of DC's entire line).

32   By referring to "Cine-Earth 1" and "Cine-Earth 2", Proctor, who analyzes reboots in film, has appropriated this method to explain the different realities depicted in the numerous Batman-films ("Ctl-Alt-Delete").

33   The story of how Alan Moore pointedly asked "This is an IMAGINARY STORY... Aren't they all?" (*Superman* #423, 1986), has achieved nearly canonical status within the fan community.

canonical at least unto themselves. In them, Superman wed his paramour Lois Lane or was a sibling to his arch-nemesis Lex Luthor (251). These were tales that did not cohere with Continuity, its character consistency, chronology or general logic, and whose events did not have any lasting effect on Continuity at large. By virtue of the label, these 'Imaginary Stories' were signaled to be apocryphal. As these narratives enjoyed enormous popularity, DC designed the *Elseworlds* imprint in 1989. Superseding the 'Imaginary Stories', these publications were intended to put a new spin on archetypal characters (Rogers). They did so successfully with Batman becoming a vampire, Superman dressing up as Santa Claus and, perhaps most notably, Mark Waid and Alex Ross's *Kingdom Come*, in which Batman becomes godfather to Superman and Wonder Woman's child.[34]

Around 2005, DC terminated the publication of *Elseworlds* storylines. At the same time, they created *All-Star*,[35] yet another imprint which functioned outside of Continuity and ran until 2008. Its main objective was the construction of highly iconic characters (Rogers) modeled on tried and tested superheroes like Superman or Wonder Woman. As the imprint's name suggests, it included sophisticated storylines by the most acclaimed contemporary writers and artists. It could be enjoyed by recipients ignorant of Continuity but also harbored potential for fans who could derive pleasure from comparing apocryphal storylines with original ones. The concept is being used to this day, though not always with a clear label pronouncing the tale to occur out of Continuity.[36]

Yet another tactic of temporarily breaking Continuity shackles is the *Just Imagine Stan Lee's …* line. Lee, long-term employee of Marvel Comics and creator of such archetypal heroes as Spider-Man or the Hulk, was lured to DC Comics for the creation of a set of one-shots of entirely new characters between 2001 and 2002. Though Lee's reimagined superheroes explicitly draw on Superman, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, etc., they are only tangentially alike. Interesting for my purpose is his reshaping of the Sandman character. The very first Sandman alias Wesley Dodds,[37] created by Allen Bert Christman and Gardner Fox in 1940, was a gas-gun wielding vigilante in a pinstripe suit and a fedora hat (fig. 72). He was recast by Lee as an

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34 Originally, also *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, the 2001-2002 three-issue sequel to *TDKR* was released featuring the *Elseworlds* logo.
35 Not to be confused with *All Star Comics*, the DC title from the 1940s.
36 This tendency towards what seems to be a presumption of the audience's decreasing need for guidance has been observed by Walter Jon Williams with regard to fantasy novels: While early fantasy writers like J. R. R. Tolkien nearly always included some form of description, i.e., maps of their fictional worlds, more recent authors of fantasy fiction have abolished this kind of framing explanation almost entirely (25). The audience, apparently comfortably familiar with genre tropes needs neither maps nor history (Williams 25).
37 To be introduced in much detail in 5.3.1.

astronaut called Larry Wilton. His origin story centers on a space mission during which Wilton is catapulted into a sort of dream realm and becomes the Sandman after contact with a green mist (fig. 73).

Fig. 72:
The Golden Age
Sandman (Cover Page).

Fig. 73:
Just Imagine Stan
Lee's Sandman (19).

The discrepancies between these two homonymous characters are palpable merely by looking at their appearances, but they also differ in terms of their motivation, sphere of action and attitude, just to name a few. Despite the series's limited success, it was an accomplishment in that it provided at least temporary relief of DC's narrative tapestry that had become cluttered beyond measure.

An alternative method of undoing Continuity chains consists of new material rendering narratives that were firmly integrated into Continuity, sometimes for decades, redundant or problematical. Occasionally, such narratives simply fall out of the canon. This is when they are furnished with tags like "[Continuity questionable]" or "[Note: no longer in continuity]" (*Unofficial Guide*). Habitually, however, non-correspondance is accounted for by means of explanation, like in the case of Neil Gaiman's version of the Sandman whose absence from the DC Universe until 1989 is rationalized by declaring that he only just escaped from the imprisonment by an occult spell that had been confining him as of 1916 (*Sandman* #1, January 1989).[38] More often than not, these explanations come in the shape of retcons, i.e., retrospective Continuity, where Continuity is adapted in hindsight.[39]

But reinventing Continuity, or at least portions thereof, helps not only to extend the limits Continuity places on stories, it also serves to make storylines more

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38 Detailed accounts Lof the differing versions of the Sandman are provided in 5.3.
39 Details in 5.1.

accessible to a lay audience. Indeed, customer alienation is one of the main problems convoluted Continuity poses. Many attempts have been made, and still are made to untangle the nearly impenetrable web of decade-old narratives for inexperienced readers. As will be shown, this can take the shape of company-wide 'simplifying'[40] events like *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

❖ *Dissolving Interdependence: Ways of Purging Convoluted Continuity*

The above examples have illustrated the ingenuity with which Continuity constraints have been loosened or entirely escaped. Equally resourceful are the attempts that have been made to streamline Continuity. By the mid-1980s, after exactly 50 years of accumulated DC Continuity, during which barely differing versions of characters had proliferated necessitating a plethora of parallel worlds by means of which non-contradictory characters and storylines could be indulged in, writer Wolfman was asked to contrive of a way to plausibly rid the DC Universe of the concept of the Multiverse and to thus "simplify the DC universe for new readers" by "bring[ing] DC back to an easy-to-read beginning before endless continuity took over" (Wolfman, "Introduction" n.p.).[41] The goal, thus, was to bring about one single Continuity. In the twelve-issue *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (April 1985-March 1986), comprising all of DC's most popular characters, redundant worlds collapsed and doppelganger were killed until nothing remained of the convoluted Multiverse but one single universe.

Around the same time that *Crisis* #1 was published (April 1985), DC Comics also released the new 24-part series *Who's Who: The Definitive Directory to the DC Universe*, intended to put in plain words the complex Continuity. In August 1985, writer and editor Len Wein noted in the letter pages that "one of the purposes of WHO'S WHO[42] and its companion mag, CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, is to help clarify and redefine our Universe" (#6, n.p.).[43] This hugely important event – DC Continuity is to this day habitually split into pre- and post-*Crisis* eras – was followed

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40 This is placed within inverted commas as none of the happenings arranged with painstaking precision intended to purge Continuity effectively reduced it, but actually caused further complications as there now existed pre- and post-event Continuities. The split into pre- and post-*Crisis* epochs has long been institutionalized and contitutes a central part of fan-jargon.

41 Marvel Comics, whose main characters had originated in the 1960s and whose Continuity in 1985 was not nearly as complicated as DC's, was ambitious a rival enough to further spur DC's ambitions to simplify Continuity (Levitz, *75 Years* 560).

42 It is custom at DC Comics to capitalize titles in the letter pages and the editorial.

43 This clarification, notabene, was not only for the benefit of the audience, but also for that of storytellers.

by the mini-series *History of the DC Universe* (1986) which chronicled the events of *Crisis* in order to determine what belonged to Continuity and what did not.[44]

In the time that followed, the fused history imposed by *Crisis* slowly dissolved as many of the events carefully orchestrated were revoked: Dead superheroes were restored to life and the universe once again burgeoned into the Multiverse. The latter occurred in a sequel to *Crisis*: From 2005-2006 *Infinite Crisis* (Johns) took place, which was not merely a series but an event, consisting of the eponymous limited seven-issue series, several lead-ups[45] and tie-ins,[46] plot elements that were strewn across numerous other publications before, during and following the mini-series,[47] the release of a new official DC logo[48] and the subsequent cancellation of some titles, the introduction of others as well as the renaming of at least four series.[49]

The most unusual feat connected to *Infinite Crisis*, however, was the collective event *One Year Later*. After the tight universe-wide Continuity of the crossover event, DC wanted to give readers a chance to start afresh (Darius, *Everything* 50). "Some heroes changed costumes, others identitites or locations, and almost all debuted in changed situations that left old readers on the same footing as new ones" (50). In the attempt to purge Continuity, DC asked all its creative teams to conclude running storylines by the same time (S. Carpenter 280) so that during the following month, all Continuity-abiding comic books could be moved forward one year into the future. The gap occasioned was filled by the weekly comic book *52* (Johns et al., May 2006-May 2007) which reestablished the Multiverse but limited it, appropriately enough, to 52 universes, instituting a middle ground between the innumerable pre-*Crisis* universes and the single post-*Crisis* universe.

In 2009, the introductory text to the entry on "Alternate Earths" in the updated edition of the *DC Comics Encyclopedia* read:

> Once there were an infinite number of universes – until a being called the Anti-Monitor annihilated all except five, and the surviving heroes collapsed those five into one. Yet this single, merged universe would not hold. The Multiverse burst forth again when Alexander Luthor, brilliant scientist from a

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44 Similar explanatory mini-series have been issued following or during the publication of storylines containing amendments to the multiverse, e.g., "History of the DCU" during *52* (2006, #2-11) or *History of the Multiverse* during *Countdown to Final Crisis* (2007, #49-38).

45 e.g., *DC Countdown* #1 (30 March 2005) was the official start of the *Infinite Crisis* storyline, which in turn launched a four-issue DC special as well as four six-issue mini-series, each with its individual tie-in, that were collectively referred to as *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* (2005).

46 e.g., an audiobook of the novelization of *Infinite Crisis* was released by GraphicAudio.

47 Many of the aforementioned titles featured a note on the last pages saying "TO BE CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE **DC UNIVERSE**" (Darius, *Everything* 7).

48 The 'spin' replaced the 'bullet', as DC's sales of products requiring a three-dimensional logo (video games, films) became more profitable (Darius, *Everything* 17).

49 e.g., *Batgirl* was terminated, *Blue Beetle* was launched and *Hawkman* was titled *Hawkgirl* (Darius, *Everything* 50-51).

reality the Anti-Minitor had wiped out, initiated the Infinite Crisis by constructing a tuning fork that replicated the existing universe fifty-one times. At first, these 52 parallel universes looked identical, until the Venusian worm Mister Mind retroactively altered their histories during a rampage through space-time. The 52 realities are separated from one another by Source Walls that bound each universe; behind the Source Walls lies the Bleed, which allows certain individuals to make passage from one universe to the next. [...] 'New Earth' – the first world among the 52 – is the Multiverse's cornerstone. The destruction of New Earth would trigger a chain reaction that would destroy the Multiverse.
(Dougall 20)[50]

As explained, New Earth is the bedrock on which all other universes, worlds, realities, etc. are modeled and on which they depend. Other realities include Earth-3, where good and evil are inverted, Earth-19, which features a nineteenth-century Batman, Earth-26, home to anthropomorphic cartoon animals or Earth-31, which was the setting for Miller's *Batman: TDKR* 20-22). To be sure, more amendments have been made to the conception of the DCU since 2009, though this need not concern us here. Needless to say, the radically restructuring events of *Crisis* and *Infinite Crisis* did not grow organically but were superimpositions, albeit ones deemed necessary as the burden of years's worth of interweaved and interdependent narrative was felt to take its toll.

These attempts to either simplify, modify or explain DC Continuity have been outlined in order to demonstrate their intricate nature. It should be noted that to the recipient who is not part of the comic book culture and who did not experience these crossover events at first hand, it would be nearly impossible to retrace their highly complex publication history without the help of *Wikipedia*, *The Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe*, *DC Wikia*, etc. and such explanatory works as *Understanding Infinite Crisis* (Darius, *Everything*).[51] And this pertains only to the publication record; content has not even been touched upon (although Darius, etc. would be of further assistance here). Wright, in his *Comic Book Nation*, endorses this by stating that "[t]he average thirteen-year-old displays more knowledge about the topic [comic books] than the average professor of history, even a professor of cultural history" (xii). What I mean to emphasize is the point that a thorough understanding of DC Continuity – or any Continuity for that matter – cannot be mastered by a weekend's dedication to the sources but that it takes complete immersion into the comic book discourse, familiarity with the medium's idiosyncrasies and extended exposure to numerous series.

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50 This is what I call a synoptic account. For a definition of the term and a synoptic account of the Sandman character, refer to 5.3.2.
51 Julian Darius not only specifies matters of publication and content of *Infinite Crisis*, but also provides, at the end, an massive catalogue of available collections which goes to show that even such an apparently straightforward question like 'What to read to have read *Infinite Crisis*?' can be difficult to answer.

❖ *Origin Stories*

Another way of illustrating the intricacy of Continuity is to dissect origin stories, which are an integral part of superhero comic books. In a nutshell, they reveal how characters, good or evil, originated.[52] The fact that it is possible to identify one origin story for each character goes to show that there is a firm understanding of what belongs to Continuity. In a section titled "characters" on their web page, DC Comics portrays the current origin story of the most popular characters in a short prose narrative. Before *The New 52*, which rebooted most of DC's titles and started them anew at #1 in 2011, most characters's origin stories were outlined by a short two-page comic. This illustrates that even the narrative that defines a character may be subject to change. In a way, therefore, many characters have more than one origin story in the course of their lives. This is mainly due to the fact that narratives of provenance enjoy high popularity with new and established audiences alike: New readers are provided with an essential piece of information about a character while seasoned readers are given an innovative account of their favorite characters's background.

Changes in characters's back-story, as origins are sometimes called, hardly ever alter the essence but consist of minor modifications that reflect the passage of time. Batman, for example, who has had his origin story retold several times[53] morphed from a dark, mysterious and intimidating because deviating from the colorful norm Golden Age crime-fighter, complete with sidekick, to a lighter variety of himself invested in science-fiction during the Silver Age, only to be reinterpreted as a grittier and darker version of himself in the 1980s and 1990s.[54] However, it was in the "years since the publication of Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* [that we] have seen the greatest array of character transmutations and violations of heretofore sacrosanct

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52 This usually entails the characters's motivation (e.g., protection of the innocent, retribution of injustice, sense of duty, etc.) to align themselves ideologically and the narrative of the attainment of powers. These abilities may be self-acquired (e.g., Nite Owl), received by coincidence or accident (e.g., The Flash), bestowed by others (e.g., Wolverine) or the character may have been born with them (e.g., Superman. Ditschke and Anhut 151. cf. also Kaveney 4-14). In most cases, a traumatic event takes place that unleashes the powers and provides the impetus to put them to use: Superman escaped the explosion of his home planet by being sent to Earth as an infant where he was adopted by a loving couple, Batman witnessed his parent's murder by a street thug, the Flash attained his powers from being struck by lightning, etc. Together with Gabriele Rippl, I have commented on the role of scientific mishap resulting in superpowered being in many of these origin stories in a forthcoming article titled "Narrating Radioactivity: Representations of Nuclear Disasters and Precarious Lives in Anglophone Comic Books and Graphic Novels".

53 The latest version of his origin story, by Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo, was advertised at the time of writing on the DC website with the slogan: "THE EPIC ORIGIN OF THE DARK KNIGHT … AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE".

54 cf. Brooker, *Hunting* and *Batman Unmasked*; Collins; Darius, *Improving*; Parsons and Pearson/Uricchio, "I'm Not Fooled" and "Notes". Also Superman's origin varied: Although laid out in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938 and elaborated on in *Superman* #1 one year later, his array of abilities only included flight as of *Action Comics* #13 (Cowsill et al. 20, 25).

canonicity" (Pearson/Uricchio, "I'm Not Fooled" 184). This means that even a recognizable character like Batman can undergo numerous revisions and that his persona can consist of several similar as well as significantly different reincarnations of himself. A newer version sometimes renders an older one defunct, but it may also be that versions that have at one point been canonical co-exist. That such inconsistency mystifies comic book novices is not surprising, but it is remarkable that most comic book fans are able to juggle such proliferation.

As we will presently see, the role of these fans is not to be underestimated. Due to their tremendous activity, their vociferous endeavor to see their understanding of a character adhered to and their enormous knowledge, the adherence to Continuity is warranted. Further reasons for the maintenance of such an unstable structure as Continuity are discussed with regard to comic books's paradoxical treatment of time and the significance of fandom.

4.3. The Complementary Dynamics of Seriality and Fandom

It has already been touched upon in the chapter that defined comics, that the production of meaning is not exclusively up to the actual producers, i.e., writer, artist, letterer, colorist, editor, etc., but that the reader participates in the production of meaning. Comics require what Wolf calls "narrativity" ("Das Problem" 95): the ability to make sense of static images and to condense them into a fluent narrative. However, it is not only in the production of meaning that the recipient takes a share. Particularly in comic book fandom, it is quite common to conceive of oneself as a producer as well.

The bedrock for fans's involvement is the serial format, which we have seen to form one of the key principles on which Continuity rests. Superhero comic books's triumphant inauguration and the subsequent establishment of Continuity was only possible because there was a growing fan base to purchase comic books month after month, to scrutinize both individual characters's and the entire universe's consistency and to provide feedback. On a very basic level, it is the hiatus between installments that enables such fan activity. This is not to say that completed works cannot attract fandom. But the discursive practices involving exchange and interaction often encountered in popular culture are engendered and fostered by works's serial nature. It follows that fan response is bound to fall on receptive ground when there are immediate follow-up episodes in which to implement useful suggestions. To this effect, fans often exploit the break between episodes in order to provide criticism, advice or praise to the creators, comment on the occurrences of the

last installment and muse about the events of the next one, and to connect with other fans: "[S]erials encourage viewers to extend the pleasure of watching to the pleasures of talking about what they watch" (Allen, "Introduction" 4).

Andreas Hepp provides a useful typology for the distinction of different kinds of recipients ranging from the "novice" and the "tourist" to the "buff" and the "freak"[55] (232).[56] The first can be found at the periphery of fan culture and is, strictly speaking, not a fan while the second straddles the bridge from the ordinary recipient to the intermittent member of a fan culture (232). The group of tourists is comprised of by individuals who have developed an interest in a specific genre or series, which is consumed on a regular basis, occasionally read additional information and irregularly communicate with other fans (233). The buffs are characterized by their ongoing attention to one or more series and their active participation in the fan culture. They are familiar with favored reception practices, have established an elaborate knowledge of their preferred serials which is enhanced by the habitual reading of fanzines, reviews and letter pages, and exhibit tendencies to collect objects that are connected to their serial of choice (233).[57] The last group, the freaks, are very similar to the buffs, except in their productivity: Freaks do not merely consume fanzines and attend conventions, they publish and organize them (233). In what follows, the range of action and influence of these different kinds of fans will be examined.

❖ *The Identity-Establishing Functions of Fandom*

Fandom functions according to much the same rules as other communities. The members have a clear understanding of their society and the boundaries that delimit it. Although they may be marginalized by official culture, announcing oneself as a fan

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55 The term is certainly not coincidental in its association with the odd: The more expert fans reveal themselves to be, the more weird or obsessive they are generally thought to be. As Kaveney – herself a long-time comic book fan – observes, the field "has a significant following of the anti-social and awkward" (24).

56 The long-held notion of fandom as stigma and the fan as fanatic (true to the term's origin), deviant, deficient, other, etc. has been deconstructed in recent publications on fandom (e.g., Allen, "Introduction"; Hills; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; L. Lewis, "Introduction"; Moores and especially Jenson). Most laconically, Jenson has asked: "What if we describe the loyalties that scholars feel to academic disciplines rather than to team sports, and attendance at scholarly conferences, rather than Who concerts and soccer matches? What if we describe opera buffs and operas? Antique collectors and auctions? Trout fisherman and angling contests? Gardeners and horticulture shows? Do the assumptions about inadequacy, deviance and danger still apply? I think not" (19). (For an exceptionally comprehensive account of fandom scholarship, cf. Gray/Sandvoss/Harrington).

57 Mark Rodgers divides comic book fans into three groups: "collectors, who value comics primarily as commodity objects; readers, who use comics as a consumable; and reader-savers who consume as well as collect comics. Both collectors and reader-savers often fall into one of the two overlapping categories: completists and investor/valuationists. Completists seek to own every issue of a title or every comic from a particular creator or publisher. Valuationists are interested in comics primarily because of their perceived value in the marketplace, which is a function of scarcity. These categories are exclusive and completism often drives scarcity" (153).

can have an identity-establishing effect (Pustz 20). In Benedict Anderson's terms, fandom is an "imagined community" (6-7). At the same time, their activity only concerns part of their lives, i.e., that part which is dedicated to leisure and consumption. Consequently, they could also be described as "lifestyle enclaves", as "[t]hey involve only a segment of each individual, [... and] are segmental socially in that they include only those with a common lifestyle, the different, those with other lifestyles, [...] are irrelevant or even invisible in terms of one's own lifestyle enclave" (Bellah 72). Their rules and standards, habits and practices are highly specific and differ from those of the larger society they are embedded in, even if that is where they are derived from.

Following Bourdieu, fandom – this non-dominant group within society – could be described as a sub-field within the field of cultural production: It is a limited social space that is shaped by particular customs and norms and in which an incessant struggle for symbolic capital takes place (*Field* 29-51). Hepp's freak fans are the ones who hold most symbolic capital in Bourdieu's terms. John Fiske has impressively shown Bourdieu's model's usefulness to explain how fandom functions as "shadow cultural economy" (30): There is the replication of channels of legitimation (31), of formal institutions (33) and of practices like collecting (47), accumulation of knowledge (42) as well as social distinction and discrimination (30-37), but they are always warped echoes of official culture.[58] For instance, both cultures invest in collections, but while collecting in official culture tends to be exclusive (a few fine objects), it is inclusive (as many objects as possible) in fan culture (43-44).[59] Also

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58 For more on how Bourdieu's model can be applied to fandom, cf. Hills 47-49.
59 Comic-book publishers have grown expert at exploiting this rather unabashedly. Individual issues of a series are released as comic books, sometimes with variant covers, and then collected as graphic novels, first as trade paperbacks on better quality paper and with softcover binding, and then as 'absolute' or 'ultimate' editions, usually in a larger format, on expensive, glossy paper, with hardcover binding, in slipcase boxes, recolored and containing previously unseen material and original artwork. In this way, audiences purchase the same material more than once. To just name one recent example, collectors of the new series *Before Watchmen* aiming for completeness need to buy all installments of each of the mini-series (e.g., *Before Watchmen: Comedian*, 6 issues or *Before Watchmen: Dollar Bill*, one-shot), which amounts to at least 36 comic books. In addition to the comic books featuring the 'regular cover' ($3.39), there is also the 'incentive variant cover' ($12.75-$170) as well as the 'combo pack with polybag' ($4.24) for each installment. The plastic bag protects the comic book and includes a code for a digital copy, which can only be retrieved when the plastic is opened, i.e., when the value of the comic book enclosed is corrupted. For this reason, many collectors buy two of these, one for perusal and one for the collection. Once the course of publishing the individual comic books has been completed, trade paperbacks subsuming two series each (Minutemen/Silk Spectre, Ozymandias/Crimson Corsair, etc.) will be made available (at the time of writing, they can be pre-ordered on *Amazon* and will appear in July 2013). It is also highly likely that there will eventually be an 'Ultimate' or 'Absolute' edition, containing all series as well as additional material. In a resourceful attempt to encourage those customers intent on only buying one series to purchase the others as well, DC Comics has included a double-page installment of *The Curse of the Crimson Corsair* (modeled on the *Tales of the Black Freighter* in *Watchmen*) in each of the comic books so that the tale can only be read in completion by access to all installments belonging to *Before Watchmen*.

when it comes to knowledge, popular culture mirrors official culture: Those with the most detailed expertise, i.e., freaks, gain status within the group. This corresponds to Kaveney's "geek aesthetic" (25). But while "[t]extual knowledge is used for discrimination in the dominant habitus [it is used] for participation in the popular" (Fiske 43).

It is this practice of active participation in which fan culture most acutely deviates from official culture. Out of the belief in the superiority of one's knowledge of a character or series, the desire to belong to an (imagined) community, and the conviction that the consumption of a series should make sense economically, fans become very involved. Fiske lists "*semiotic productivity*", which serves social meaning-making purposes (37); "*enunciative productivity*", which consists of making one's fandom visible to others (37-38); and most importantly, "*textual productivity*", which includes the fabrication and circulation of texts by fans (39). The production of texts based on one's object of fandom presupposes a notion of oneself as co-owner of said object. Fans construct this sense of co-possession out of the idea that the object of admiration owes its stardom to them (40) and that their extended investment – financially, temporally, emotionally – should ultimately pay off.[60] This mindset is especially prevalent in series fandom. By way of long-term consumption of a series, fans often feel that they know the characters better than, say, a scriptwriter who has only recently joined the production team.[61] Pustz observes that "[i]f they perceive characters as being misused or misrepresented, fans often become angry and will not hesitate to share these feelings with creators" (71). On this basis, fans not only become very active in the production of feedback (buffs and freaks) but also in the manufacture of fan fiction and fanzines (freaks).

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60 In fact, it seems that fans's conception of themselves as "customers, not devotees, [...] who expect prompt, consistent service" (L. Miller 33), has been cemented in the recent model of fandom, as the example of George R. R. Martin's fan community has shown: Having taken longer than anticipated – and, unfortunately, communicated – to finish the next installments of his fantasy epos *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-present), Martin has been subjected to invective not only on his own blog, but also on websites set up especially for the purpose of attacking the author. As Miller correctly observes: "This is an astonishing amount of effort to devote to denouncing the author of books one professes to love" (36).

61 In *Batman Unmasked*, Brooker quotes Jeff Shain – evidently a very dedicated fan with a clear notion of Batman's essence – attack on Joel Schumacher, following the latter's much-scorned *Batman Forever* in 1995 and *Batman & Robin* in 1997: "This isn't a fucking joke! Batman isn't some two-bit circus freak like your bearded lady of a mother! He is the essence of gothic darkness, a man ripped between reality and fantasy, teetering on the brink of insanity with only his partner and butler and his mission to keep him from going crazy! Did you capture any of these elements? Of course not" (306).

Feedback is provided by sending comments, criticism, suggestions or praise to publishers. The comic book industry has a long history of publishing such contributions: Already in the early 1940s, it was realized that giving fans a voice had the effect of receiving valuable feedback[62] and of gratifying them by evoking the impression that they were being taken seriously.[63] Later, in the 1950s, readers were offered a platform to express themselves in the letter pages.[64]

Most famously, DC implied democracy by asking readers to vote on the fate of Batman's sidekick Robin. After the first Robin, Dick Grayson, had become Nightwing, his successor, Jason Todd, took over (*Detective Comics* #526, September 1983). Readers never warmed to the new associate so that in 1988, DC decided to ask the audience whether or not Todd should be killed. In 1986, Miller's *Batman: TDKR* had offered a version of Batman without Jason Todd as Robin that, despite or due to its non-canonical status, had been highly successful. Possibly inspired by this, a 1-900 number was provided for fans and by a majority of 5,343 to 5,271, Todd's demise was determined (Eason). He was subsequently killed by the Joker in the storyline "A Death in the Family" (*Batman* #426-429, December 1988-January 1989). Both the vote and the storyline received broad media attention in the mainstream press.[65]

In the era of the Internet, of course, such interaction takes place mostly online. Accordingly, the social exchange between installments has burgeoned. Platforms for audiences's reactions and communication[66] are no longer restricted to letter columns and face-to-face conversation, but have grown to include chats, fora and blogs. In such a virtual environment, exchange is lively, uninhibited and largely free of hierarchical strictures. And producers are aware that they depend upon recipient approval and that it may be wise to heed their lavishly provided advice. Paul Levitz, the former president of DC Comics and a comic book writer by trade, has confirmed in a personal interview that fan feedback can affect writers: If they learn that their readership finds a story transparent and predictable, adjustments can be made between installments (Etter/Hoppeler). Similarly, letters are used as tools for

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62 O'Neil in an interview referred to fan response as "informal sampling" (Pearson/Uricchio, "Notes" 21).

63 In the editor's letter of *All Star Comics*, readers were invited to indicate (via mail-in coupon) which characters they liked to become part of the series (Cowsill et al. 32).

64 cf. e.g., Brooker's case study of "Batman lettercolumns" of 1966 in *Batman Unmasked* (254-260).

65 Chapter Two of *The Many Lives of The Batman* by Uricchio/Pearson consists of an interview with O'Neil, the editor of Batman during the late 1980s and provides insights into the voting process.

66 Letter columns used to constitute one of limited options fans had for getting or staying in touch. With *Sandman* being published before fan activity was relegated to the digital sphere, many a request for pen friendship can be found in its letter pages (e.g., John Barwell, *Sandman* #43; Michael Newman, *Sandman* #58; Patrick P. Jones, *Sandman* # 62, etc.)

evaluating shows, as television executive Perry Simon reveals (Sabal 185). And since the audience's wishes may have a lasting effect on authors, the demarcation line that defines producers's and consumers's ambits becomes blurred (Hoppeler/Rippl, "Continuity" 370). In fact, it is one of the most striking features of contemporary fandom that the hegemony of the text is overcome by the audience's participatory practices. Hayward notes that "[b]y involving a community of readers in collaboratively interpreting and to some degree shaping a text, serials incorporate a space for critique and thus defuse the text's coercive power" (31). By acknowledging their economic authority – no consumers, no financial return – Parkin even attributes "ultimate power" to the audience ("Truths" 19).

As mentioned earlier, fans, i.e., freaks, can also be involved in the production of fan fiction (unauthorized narratives written by fans which center on characters by another author) and fanzines (non-professional publications by fans for fans). The former, defined by the *OED* as "fiction, usually fantasy or science fiction, written by a fan rather than a professional author, esp. that based on already existing characters from a television series, book, film etc.", dates back as early as 1944 ("Fan Fiction"). This definition is somewhat flawed in that it opposes the fan and the professional; as though a person could not be a skilled and practiced writer and a fan at the same time. Hence I understand fan fiction as a narrative, written by a dedicated person, that adds to an existing corpus but which usually does not enter the canon, or Continuity.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that some works that have yielded critical and commercial success are, in fact, fan fiction: Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution* is a further installment of the Sherlock Holmes series and Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* adds to the Superman saga. At the same time, since creative teams more often than not are composed of people who have followed earlier storylines as dedicated fans, most comic books can be argued to constitute fan fiction.

Readily available on the internet on such platforms as fanfiction.net or archiveofourown.org, fan fiction caters to those who want to know more about characters they already know and provides hours of entertainment free of charge (Arcement). The production of fan fiction, inversely, yields no pay but offers a chance to remedy perceived flaws in the original (Arcement). In other words, fan fiction fills gaps: temporal ones, between installments, and/or thematic ones, left unexplored in the commercially produced material. Most productive are voids in Continuity: "[M]uch as nature abhors a vacuum, comic book fans abhor holes in continuity" (Dittmer 42). These blank spaces may be filled with the resurrection of deceased or the murder of detested characters as well as romantic and/or sexual relationships between

protagonists.[67] Fans who sneak "under the metaphoric fence to exploit 'gaps' in the texts" (Parkin, "Truths" 20) are called "textual poachers" by Jenkins following Michel de Certeau (*Textual Poachers* 24). Texts that due to their openness attract and permit audience productivity are what Fiske calls "producerly" (42). Fanzines, therefore, not only break down barriers between consumer and creator, as fan fiction does, but further collapse the differentiation between readers and producers, editors and publishers. Even more so as many fans commenced their career in the comic book business as contributors to fanzines (Pustz 46). By actively contributing to the serial universe and Continuity, writers of fan fiction and producers of fanzines operate as creative agents, not just passive vessels.

Jenkins equates the active transgression of boundaries between popular and canonical texts – fans dedicate their interest to works of merit and triviality alike – to one of the identifying elements of fan culture: "Fans speak of 'artists' where others can see only commercial hacks, of transcendent meanings where others find only banalities, of 'quality and innovation' where other see only formula and convention" (*Textual Poachers* 17). The detachment and suspicion towards intense emotion usually exhibited by bourgeois aesthetics (Bourdieu, "Aristocracy" 237) is opposed by fans's close engagement with their object of interest (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 60).[68] But also the way in which these limits are challenged is constitutive. Departing from the habitus of official culture, fans pillage mass culture by the appropriation and declension of texts in order to subvert authorial meaning and to manufacture their own interpretations. The process of playful pilfering and rewriting results in the continuous expansion of the narrative universe (155), albeit non-canonical. Hence by repairing unsatisfactory storylines, dismissing disappointing plot turns and completing character history, fan culture actively shapes the text according to its desire.

But what exactly do fans do that debunks total authorial control? Jenkins lists ten ways in which fans rewrite: They recontextualize (explanations for character history, conduct and psychology are fashioned), expand the series's timeline (characters's history is replenished), refocalize (marginal characters move to the fore), realign morally (good and evil are inverted), shift genres (e.g., from science fiction to romance or crime), cross over (boundaries between individual texts/series are

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67 In fan argot, a narrative that alters the sexual orientation of one or more characters to allow for relations between same-sex characters is called 'slash', for the custom of applying a slash (/) between two characters's names in order to indicate a homoerotic relationship. The term 'femslash' is used for the equivalent between females. cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 185-222. The genre is enormously popular: "On AO3, as of 17 October 2012, 'roughly four in nine' works were categorised as M/M", meaning male/male (Arcement).
68 cf. also Jenson: "'good' affinities are expressed in a subdued, undisruptive manner, while 'bad' affinities (fandom) are expressed in dramatic and disruptive ways" (20).

obscured), dislocate characters (manipulation of characters's identities and situations), personalize (gaps between fans's world and fictional space are dismantled) and eroticize (non-existent and undercurrent sexual subplots are substantiated) (162-177). The appeal of such practices is the creation of cultural artifacts and that poachers "get to keep what they take" (223), but also empowerment. The comparatively powerless fandom takes initiative to alter a text and to petition with producers to draw attention to its own interests.

To sum up, fandom constitutes a subcultural community of practice, entails a particular mode of reception, functions as interpretive community, encourages viewer activism, makes its voice heard by commercial producers, reacts to blank spaces in a narrative by offering supplements and additions, and produces its very own cultural artifacts and thus deconstructs the separating line between consumers and producers (1-2, 277-280). Or, more simply, "fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, spectators who also participate" (Jenkins, "Strangers" 208).

❖ *"We have been here a long time":*[69] *The Exclusivity of Comic Book Fandom*

Comic book fandom is generally regarded as one of the most active fandoms. This is not merely due to the many channels of interaction available but also to the fact that the discovery and understanding of inter- and intratextual as well as inter- and intramedial references constitutes a large portion of the pleasure inherent in consuming a series (Hoppeler/Rippl, "Continuity" 370).[70] In other words, fans enjoy being able to refer to their vast storage of texts. Chabon referred to this as "the unexpected usefulness of unlikely knowledge" (*Maps* 81). Based on Hepp's classification, the tourist, the buff and the freak all meet the requirements for the identification of such references. Their specialized knowledge eventuates in the capability to reflect, provide in-depth feedback and comment on a title and in the faculty to understand clues and jokes whereas novices remain ignorant to them. The loyal recipient is "rewarded by the text in that her knowledge of the large and complex community of characters and their histories enables her to produce subtle and nuanced readings" while to a lay audience, the single episode "appears to be so much pointless talk among undistinguishable characters about events of maddeningly indeterminable significance" (Allen, "Introduction" 8). With regard to *Sandman*, the expert audience, unlike the uninitiated reader, knows that Morpheus is not the first

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69 Long-term fan Marc S. Edelstein in the letter page of *Sandman* #59.
70 cf. 4.4. for a thorough account of the different kinds of literacies involved in comic book reception.

Sandman, but that at least two characters of this name have existed in the DC Universe before him.[71]

It comes as no surprise, then, that the comic book industry has recognized in the small group of customers who are dedicated, erudite and practiced experts in their field their most loyal customers. Pustz notes that

> [m]ost mainstream publishers seem to have ceased trying to expand their audience to nonfans, instead focusing their energies on tapping their current recipientship even deeper than in the past. As a result, companies such as Marvel and DC do not need to worry about alienating a more casual comic book reading audience because, in many ways, no such audience exists. Consequently, vast numbers of comics address recipients as fans.
> (112)

As Parkins confirms, catering and advertising to this small group can prove highly lucrative as even a modestly successful series can "justify lavish DVD box sets, high-end replica props, glossy official magazines, and ranges of novels" ("Truths" 21). This clientele is outspoken about the kind of narrative they prefer and which protagonists they favor. *Sandman* recipient Randy Meyer, for instance, "would like to see The Creeper, Man-Bat, Superman, or Dove" appear in the pages of the *Sandman* (*Sandman* #24, letter page). Similarly, Carey Martin recommends that "if there is one character in the DC Universe – in which, need I add, the Sandman has been firmly established – who is guaranteed to have fascinating dreams, Mr. Wayne is the one" (*Sandman* #13, letter page) and Colin Whatley wonders whether it "[w]ouldn't [...] be neat if Deadman made a guest appearance?" (*Sandman* #14, letter page).

Such resolute requests are also voiced with regard to Continuity. The tide of objections and suggestions never seems to ebb and there seems to be constant confusion as to the canonicity of certain storylines. This is why editors often take the opportunity to sort out Continuity issues in the letter page or digital platforms of interaction. In the *Batman* #442 letter page – titled "Batsignals" – the editor declared that

> [...] the tale told in BATMAN: THE KILLING JOKE is NOT the definitive origin of the Joker. It's simply one of many POSSIBLE origins. [...] Since it is set about 20 years in the future, BATMAN: THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS is also NOT considered to be part of normal continuity. It is a POSSIBLE future for Batman, one which may or may not happen.
> (Pearson/Uricchio, "I'm Not Fooled" 192)

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71   This may lead to certain expectations: Letter writers Kenrick Ou and Jason Thompson both assumed *Sandman* was about a costumed crime-fighter (*Sandman* #34, letter page and *Sandman* #35, letter page respectively).

This editorial statement illustrates fans's bewilderment with the glut of inconsistent storylines and their attempts to grasp the difference between the canonical and the apocryphal.

Nonetheless, recipients have not always had the opportunity to be dogmatic about character and/or about Continuity. In the comic book's early years up until the advent of the direct market, there was no method to ensure one had access to all stories. Consequently, fans did not busy themselves with as much zeal with Continuity. In addition, the industry assumed a total readership turnover every couple of years (Pearson/Uricchio, "Notes" 30; "I'm Not Fooled" 192). This meant that they did not feel that Continuity had to be consistent over several years. A lot has changed since then: Comic book readers persevere, are more diligent in their reading and more knowledgeable as Continuity is concerned.

In order to gratify this fastidious audience, comic books often contain the sort of material – indications of Continuity, insider jokes, parody, self-referentiality, allusions to earlier storylines, events, actions, etc.[72] – that functions as a barrier to non-comic book readers. In other words, strict adherence and multiple reference to Continuity both incites fans to purchase regular installments but also keeps prospective fans at bay. Some series function on the very premise that there is an expert fandom who can retrieve decades of stories from memory.[73] This is the starting point for such comments as "Please bring back more old and nearly forgotten characters in the pages of SANDMAN" (Brent L. Wilkins, *Sandman* #56, letter page) and "I'm really enjoying Neil [Gaiman]'s knack of taking obscure comic book characters and weaving stories around them" (Neil Ahlquist, *Sandman* #29, letter page). In order to take pleasure in this "knack", readers need to recognize nearly forgotten characters like Element Girl or Lyta Hall. Hence even marginal characters may get a chance to charm trained readers. In *Sandman* #40, a character named Cain inquires: "But can you keep a secret? Are you sure you wouldn't prefer a mystery?" (9/3). This hints at the EC horror publications that Cain and his brother Abel hosted as of the late 1960s: *The House of Mystery* and *The House of Secrets* respectively. Knowledgeable readers might get a thrill out of understanding the

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72 There have even been secret messages: In the issue "Week 37" of the weekly series *52* that ultimately reinstalled the DC Multiverse, Dan DiDio infused his column "DC Nation" with a message that spelled out using the first letter of every third word. The message read: "the secret of fifty-two is that the multiverse still exists".

73 Most famously, perhaps, the dense interlocking of four Superman series in the 1990s: *Superman, Action Comics, The Adventures of Superman* and *Superman: The Man of Steel* all contributed to the seamlessness of the Superman saga while the best-selling "The Death of Superman" storyline stretched across all four titles plus the quarterly *Superman: The Man of Tomorrow* (M. Smith, "Triangle Era" 157-160). Readers who wanted to enjoy the complete story were required to read all pertinent installments.

reference, but new readers will not understand the story any less for not being able to discern the characters's background.

As the pleasure of understanding these hints is unattainable by casual readers, they are alienated from the comic book (Pustz 23). The estrangement is increased by the proximity of professionals and fans: Since comic book fans stand fair chances of becoming producers while writers as well as artists "continue to identify as fans […] these fannish writers and artists fill their stories with content that is about comic books" which supports the curtailing of comic book audiences to readers already in possession of the specific knowledge addressed (Pustz 109).[74] Without exhaustive acquaintance with Continuity, in fact, how is a writer, artist, editor, etc. supposed to know what scenarios and depictions are allowed? And where would such understanding come from if not from an extended period of consuming comic books? Accordingly, contrary to assertions found in many definitions, the comic book is not a popular but a niche medium, catering to a small, expert audience. In this inward-oriented cycle, it is difficult to determine whether the virtually non-existent non-fan audience stems from this focus on fans or whether the concentration on fans is the result of a fickle and hard to please lay audience. It is noteworthy, however, that the problem of obstructed accessibility already presents itself to newcomers to any series, independently of content and medium, but is further aggravated by the added complexity of Continuity. Hence new recipients not only need to get acquainted with the serial history of a narrative, but also have to familiarize themselves with at least a share of Continuity (Hoppeler/Rippl, "Continuity" 8). What is more, with regard to Continuity, they need to become accustomed to its realizations in the narrative as well as to the very concept of Continuity as constitutive of multiple writers's and artists's work.

But access is not only impeded by publishers, but also by producers's and especially recipients's active and voluntary isolation. The general attitude towards comic book culture is one of disdain and mockery. And since fans conceive of themselves as an exclusive sub-culture whose collective interests and activities shelter them from criticism from outside and thus function as means of establishing identity (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 23),[75] this results, somewhat paradoxically, not

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74 In his biography, *Man of Two Worlds*, Julius Schwartz bares his thoughts on being a comic book creator as well as a fan (e.g., 203).

75 In one noteworthy case, reader Jim Dawson provoked a discussion in the letter column of the *Sandman* series by writing a diatribe on the immature, verbose and redundant nature of letters written by fans (#22). In response, assistant editor Tom Peyer wrote: "It hasn't occurred to me to view letter columns as an embarrassing holdover from the days when comics were just for kids. I don't want to turn this letters page into a letters page about letters pages, but I'd like to know how the rest of you feel" (#22, letter page). In the letter column of #26, finally, Peyer informed readers that "[a] lot of you responded to the suggestion in #22's lettercol that lettercols themselves are childish and obsolete. Every single one of you disagreed with the suggestion, which was graciously

in fans's desire to be integrated into official culture but in a turning inward. Hence fans are often all too willing to "defend the medium/industry/hobby against those threatening it or attempting to promote it among non-readers" (Pustz 71).[76] This, of course, advances texts dependent on an expansive knowledge of Continuity – "the raw material for the interactive glue that holds comic book culture together" (134) – rather than texts that are approachable by newcomers. The exclusivity of comic book culture, therefore, comes not last from within. It is, for example, championed by Levitz in the foreword of the *DC Comics Encyclopedia*: "One of the world's great pleasures is secret knowledge. […] Commit […] arcane facts to memory, and you can speak a private language open only to you and other worthies who have approached this with equal dedication" (Dougall n.p.). Correspondingly, Hatfield describes contemporary comic book culture as "a highly specialized if thinly populated consumer culture, one that holds tightly to a romanticized position of marginality" (xii). It is not difficult to envision that this may engender an idiosyncratic form of elitism.

In keeping with what has been said by Fiske regarding the operation of fan culture as a parallel economy by reproducing official culture with an element of distortion (30-47), comic book fans mimic the very condescension and ridicule they themselves are subjected to. On the one hand, many fans perceive the boundaries between fandom and non-fandom very clearly and are aware that they populate the lower ranks of this hierarchy. On the other hand, fans also discriminate against other fans, mostly on the basis of expertise or years of experience. More precisely, veteran and/or highly active fans like the buff and the freak often feel more justified than relative newcomers; to assess an installment, to suggest turns of events or, on a more basic level, in their entire conduct as fans. To phrase it with Bourdieu: Knowledge of Continuity is the cultural capital of comic book culture.

Quite often, the motive driving such discriminatory practice is nostalgia. Meaning, as Darius meditates, that "[n]ew readers are unlikely to care about the return of the original Superman after 20 years" (*Everything* 44). Fans have invested time, money and emotion into a series, they have followed the characters for decades and they "apprais[e] both themselves and the authors on their mastery of past events and the web of character relationships within any given franchise" (Jenkins, "Just Men" 20). Consequently, they assume an air of superiority towards new customers. This

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recanted by its originator. Most of you cited the *sense of community* that can result among the readers, as well as the feedback these columns provide for the creators" (emphasis S. H.).

76   Such protective instincts are not reduced to the antisocial recluse: When DC announced its intention to publish *Before Watchmen*, a series of prequels to *Watchmen* in 2012, the novelist Jonathan Lethem confessed to have felt "'an instinctive, protective scorn' of any effort to revisit Watchmen" (Itzkoff). cf. also Pustz 155.

perceived entitlement is communicated openly. For example, *Sandman* reader Cris T. Halverson betrays the long-term audience's idea of itself as worthy of special treats in the form of hints at Continuity: "One last thanks for the little things, the inside connections that only we dedicated ones get (we deserve it, yes?)" (*Sandman* #32, letter page).[77] While this comment omits the denigration of novice comic book fandom, the following one by Marc S. Edelstein makes an explicit point of it.

> It seems every letter begins with the classic 'I never used to read comics, but last week my --- (enter beneficent acquaintance here) gave me issue numbers 3, 293, 621 and I blah blah blah blah.' I know who you are, *you newcomer pretenders* to the throne. *You're the kind of people who used to make fun of me* when I read Monsters on the Prowl and The Unexpected in the '70s, Daredevil, X-Men, and SWAMP THING in the '80s, and the WATCHMEN/DARK KNIGHT/SANDMAN style of superior talespinning of the last eight years or so. [...] Do any of you read any others [comic books]? Some of us read comics for one reason – we like comics. *We have been here a long time.*
> (*Sandman* #59, letter page, emphasis S. H.)

Edelstein obviously uses the letter column to settle a score with what he perceives as a homogenous group of pretentious newcomers to the comic book medium. His sardonic tone, the direct address of what he understands as his adversaries and his subsequent dissociation from them by sarcastically referring to himself and his peers as "our secret little club of comic-book lovers" (*Sandman* #59, letter page) all corroborate the idea of elitism sketched above. His letter was followed up by the remark "Thank you, Mark Edelstein!" by Rebecca Hendrickson in the letter page of *Sandman* #64.

Such diatribe naturally did not go unanswered. In the letter page in one of the following issues, fellow reader Sanna Edwards replied:

> Mark S. Edelstein's letter typified the attitude that is oh, so common among ardent comic readers. They whine about how they were made fun of by everyone because of their comic-reading habits – yet they are now so *hostile against others appreciating them.* [...] There are many reasons why people don't start reading comics at age 5 (that, it seems, is the age that all professional comic readers started) other than pure snobbism. Sometimes we just never had the opportunity. [...] no one I knew read comics, and when I was old enough to realize the concept of 'adult comics' it was *nearly impossible to get into* them. Yes, I'm afraid the fact is that comic reading is *highly inaccessible.* All the titles you're interested in are up to number 71 or something and if they are indeed interesting, then back issues about as easy to find (and as cheap) as platinum [sic]. Unless, of course, some kindred spirit generously lends you their numbers 3, 293, 621... [...] But, Mark, *you and*

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77 Another form of elitism is often exhibited by the *Comics Journal* under editor Gary Groth. Although it occasionally does so with a self-reflexive air, it more often than not attacks mainstream comics, applying standards that the bulk of publications cannot meet (Pustz 97-98).

your type make me feel as if somehow I'm not worthy or I can't appreciate it properly because this is the first real comic I've ever read. Yes, you've been here a long time, I respect you for that, but please don't judge me because I haven't. (*Sandman* #64, letter page, emphasis S. H.)

Edwards's letter touches upon all of the predicaments faced by a new recipient: Fans's hostility towards newcomers to a title, series's inaccessibility due to their intricate employment of Continuity, the difficulty of obtaining individual installments and the arrogance and condescension of some experienced readers. Even more vivid if somewhat melodramatic is Joie Martin's appeal in the letter page of *Sandman* #69: "[P]lease don't crucify me because I have not been a reader for very long". These reactions confirm the multifarious notion of a marginalized sub-culture that reacts to scorn by advancing its self-involvement while at the same time countering approval from outside with an idiosyncratic form of self-importance.

❖ *The Dissolution of Time in Continuity: Umberto Eco's "Myth of Superman"*

One of the criticisms most often aimed at proponents of Continuity is that the stringent concordance of countless characters, events, plots and circumstances within a certain setting may inhibit creative storytelling. Indeed, in order for characters to be recognizable, they need to remain in a more or less fixed state. This puts a limit on the number of possible permutations so that it can become increasingly challenging to produce original ideas for a series, especially if it should be plausible and compelling (Parkin, "Truths" 16). Most famously, Umberto Eco commented on this phenomenon in his 1962[78] article on "The Myth of Superman". In it, he claims that due to "the narrative structure through which the myth is offered daily or weekly to the public" (108), i.e., the serialized comic book, the superhero needs to be suspended in temporal limbo. With each accomplishment, Superman

> has made a gesture which is inscribed in his past and which weighs on his future. He has taken a step toward death, he has gotten older, if only by an hour; his storehouse of personal experiences has irreversibly enlarged. *To act*, then, for Superman, as for any other character (or for each of us), means to 'consume' himself.
> (111)

If Superman takes a step towards death with each installment, this implies that he would very soon arrive at a point where he would no longer function as a believable character: Having been in, say, his early twenties when he was first given his own

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78   The Italian original was published in 1962, whereas the English translation by Natalie Chilton was released only in 1979.

comic book in 1939, Superman would today fight mad scientists as an old man of more than 90 years, and Batman and Wonder Woman would not be significantly younger. Logically, Superman would eventually have to undergo the ultimate consumption – death. Even though this would be the most plausible and verisimilar course of events, it is also a publisher's nightmare to lose a profitable character. Perhaps it is for this reason that superheroes, despite their physical activity, have a tendency to remain passive until called upon to act by the ruthlessness of a villain (Reynolds 50-51). What is more, following the adventures of an antiquated superhero is probably not what the audience seeks in the first place, as the ability to relate to characters is one of its most fundamental requirements. Since superheroes cannot mature according to the laws of the reader's world, and, as Eco points out, as "Superman cannot 'consume' himself, since a myth is 'inconsumable'" ("Myth" 111), measures have to be taken to prevent this inevitable march towards death.

The solution, it seems apparent, is to have the hero *not* consume himself. Without Superman accomplishing things, however, what narratives can be told? No noteworthy changes could be wrought: Superman could not marry Lois Lane, nor could he kill Lex Luthor or have a child. On this basis, the pool of potential tales would very soon be drained. To avoid this and to still cater to the desires of an audience that requires to be entertained, stories are told that take place outside of Continuity, in the vein of the 'Imaginary Stories' described above. Or the stories describe a narrative loop and return to the status quo, resulting in each episode setting out from much the same point, largely disregarding previous events (117). Those stories that do take part within Continuity are carefully selected, as they bring the superheroes closer to death.

Such iteration is inherent in many serialized popular narratives, from Sherlock Holmes to James Bond to Superman, and it is, to a certain extent, what we as recipients derive pleasure from. We not only appreciate the novelty of an episode but also revel in its repetitiveness: "[R]eaders continuously recover, point by point, what they already know" (Eco, "Innovation" 164). Presuming the audience's acceptance and enjoyment of recurrent narrative schemes, comic book storytellers can obviate the dilemma of the aging characters and their inevitable progression toward death by having them repeatedly relive their past (168). Characters, then, are not followed along the chronology of their lives, but incessantly rediscovered at various stages of their lives, the consequence of which is that characters have tremendous pasts but little future (168-169). As a result, superheroes have histories that, for them, reach back only a couple of years but for the readership may extend over decades (Wolf-Meyer 499-500).

This "dissolution of time"[79] – referenced in the Italian original's title – is tantamount with the evaporation of the time between installments (Eco, "Myth" 114):
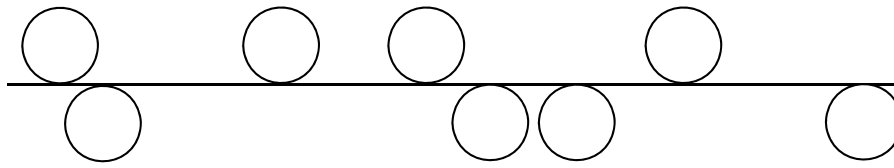
"The stories develop in a kind of oneiric climate – of which the reader is not aware at all – where what has happened before and what has happened after appear extremely hazy" (114). Additions to a character's life, and with it to Continuity, can thus take place at any point of a narrative. In fact, flashbacks and travels into the past are quite common in the comic book business. To simplify, it is helpful to think of Continuity as a more or less straight line[80] and of the new installments as loops that, bubble-like, attach themselves to all sides.[81]

These narrative loops enable comic book characters to develop within a safe environment – one that does not promote their erosion, or "step towards death" (111). For the comic book universe, this implies potentially endless additions to Continuity, as most characters keep on existing well past their 'expiry date'. Hence while the principle of the hindrance of consumption allows for the conceivable infinite continuation of a character's stories, it also substantially and permanently complicates Continuity by continually appending to characters's pasts.

❖ *Interim Conclusion*

This chapter has so far been dedicated to the delineation of Continuity whose history was subsequently discussed with regard to the publisher's and fan's role. It has been remarked upon that taking up comic book reading can be an arduous matter. The reason behind this is first and foremost its seriality as any serially produced title harbors potential to thwart first attempts at finding entry into the narrative. There is, however, also the issue of Continuity which hampers newcomers's access to the comic book medium. Last but not least, because comic book culture is sometimes derided, it often exhibits discriminatory behavior towards novices maintained and

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79 "dissolozione del tempo".
80 The abstracted representation of the reboot, by contrast, would require a broken line, or at least a sizable kink in the curve.
81 Needless to say, such a visualization – useful as it may be – is in no way able to faithfully represent Continuity with all its supplements, revisions and obliterations.

bolstered by the industry's gratification of their most loyal audience. Behind the attacks and the message of 'We were here all along' stands the drive to the community's self-preservation.

In the following chapter, the sometimes staggering amounts of detail that can be mobilized anytime by long-term fans will be examined. I will do so beginning with the most basic skill-set a recipient can acquire and then work my way towards the most specialized kind of knowledge centering on Continuity. As examples, I will focus mainly on Gaiman's *Sandman.*

4.4. Do You Speak Comics?
Comic Book Literacy as Asset for the Reception of *Sandman*

Highly specialized knowledge has the potential to astound. This also applies to the expertise shown by comic book fans when it comes to Continuity. Investigating online and analogue sources, I have often been startled by the extraordinary amount of information fans are able to recall and quote in minute detail. There seems to be such a phenomenon as Continuity-literacy, which is the result of extended exposure to comic books and which serves as the basis for fan-fan and fan-author interaction. In the following, I argue that Continuity-literacy is based on other, more general kinds of literacies and that the meaning of a text is not only text-inherent but is also produced by individual readers and their personal storage of texts. An apple will most likely be recognized by most audiences as a biblical reference, an allusion to Ishmael will be identified by most people interested in nineteenth-century US-American literature while a hint at Superman will be detected by most comic book aficionados. This implies that certain quotations function on a cognitive level, necessitating specific knowledge or literacy. The aim of this section, then, is the deployment of a model that seeks to catalogue various kinds of literacies[82] that grow increasingly specialized. Each will be introduced by means of a general description, followed by examples from various series with a specific focus on the *Sandman.*

Needless to say, these categories's boundaries can fluctuate and certain literacies can move across them depending on perspective. In addition, there are, of course, various degrees to which one can be literate in, say literature or comic books. The scope reaches from surface acquaintance with some elements of the respective category to an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of most facets of the same.

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82 The term 'literacy' has been chosen in accordance with how the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, namely "[i]n extended use (usually with modifying word). The ability to 'read' a specified subject or medium; *competence or knowledge in a particular area*" ("Literacy", emphasis S. H.).

❖ *World Literacy*

1) *World Literacy* describes readers's knowledge of the world. This entails a very basic understanding of what it means to be human. The knowledge in this category is, at least in theory, common to all humankind. The *Sandman* comic books adhere to most common principles of the world: laws of gravity apply, water is wet, people eat, talk, dream, meddle, fight, love, tell stories, etc.

❖ *Cultural Literacy*

2) *Cultural Literacy* includes acquaintance with the tradition, ethics, customs, rituals, language, mythologies, morals, etc. of one's environment. A conscious understanding of these is not necessarily a requirement for the possession of cultural literacy as the correct deciphering of particular deeds, utterances, idioms, registers, gestures, facial expressions, etc. can also happen unconsciously. Naturally, one is most literate in one's own culture and can be quite ignorant of others. Good examples of cultural literacy is when a person understands the meaning of raised eyebrows, the significance of the expression 'Yes' and the action required when confronted with a red light at an intersection.

In "Brief Lives: Chapter 1", a participant at a fetish party relates that "… WHEN I TOLD HIM THE NEWS ABOUT FREDDIE HE SAID, 'OH. ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST" (*Sandman* #41, 9/5). This clearly refers to Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of the English rock band Queen of the 1970s and 1980s who had passed away a mere nine months prior to the publication of this installment. The quotation of the song title "Another One Bites the Dust" (*Sandman* #41), one of Queen's bestselling singles, is another easily decipherable quotation for a culturally literate audience. A further cultural reference that may be familiar to most US-Americans is the one to "THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD" (*Sandman* #35, 18/2), which is a phrase derived from the 1939 film adaptation *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* of the 1900 novel written by Lyman Frank Baum and illustrated by William Wallace Denslow.[83] In the *Sandman*, this famous road appears either as an explicit statement (#35, 18/2) or in the form of a wordless representation of the cinematic image (#15, 15/6). While *The Wonderful Wizard* is firmly rooted and highly popular already with young children in US-American culture, it belongs to the lesser known imports into European culture and might therefore not be as readily recognized by a European audience when alluded to in the *Sandman*. Of course, this reference could also be argued to be of the literary kind, but the novel's contents have

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83 In the text of the novel, the phrase "the yellow brick road" does not appear as such. It was only through the movie that the expression was popularized.

surpassed the boundaries of literature and have seeped into US-American culture to the extent that even people who have never read the book still recognize the connections.

❖ *Literary Literacy*

3) *Literary Literacy* is the familiarity with literary works. Literary history, authors, circumstantial knowledge, but also plots, settings, events, characters, utterances, rhythms and rhymes in poetry and even entire verbatim quotations may be part of this form of literacy. If a narrative centers on brother killing brother and taking the widow for a wife, a literary literate person would immediately recognize this to be the underlying structure of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Literary references abound in *The Sandman*. As an avid reader from a very young age, Gaiman consumed all kinds of literature, fiction and non-fiction alike, which constitutes the bedrock for his firm embedding of the *Sandman* tale in literary history. Since the quotations from literature are so numerous, a catalogue of the most impressive ones has been collected below.

The title of *Sandman* #7, "Sound and Fury", is heavily reminiscent of modernist writer William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*; "NEVERMORE" (*Sandman* #22, 2/5) refers to Edgar Allen Poe's famous poem "The Raven" and is, fittingly, uttered by Matthew the raven; "A Tale of Two Cities" is the title of *Sandman* #51 *and* of Dickens's 1895 serialized novel, thus it not only alludes to the narrative but to the form of publication the two stories have in common;[84] the verbatim quotation of an excerpt from *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by the Victorian novelist and playwright Baroness Emma Orczy, offered in *Sandman* #25 (7/1-2),[85] touches upon the subject of hooded vigilantism, of which the Scarlet Pimpernel alias Sir Percy Blakeney was the first literary example; and there are several instances, pictorial as well as textual, where the English writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton is evoked. In *Sandman* #28, there is an excerpt from a work Chesterton might have dreamt titled "The Man Who Was October", a nod towards his novella *The Man Who Was Thursday* (24/4). And there are repeated

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84 Dickens's literature was essential in propelling serialized storytelling forward. Nearly all of his works, including *A Tale of Two Cities*, were successfully serialized, just like most comic books.

85 "She looked through the tattered curtain, across at the handsome face of her husband, in whose lazy blue eyes, and behind whose inane smile she could now so plainly see the strength, energy and resourcefulness – which had caused the Scarlet Pimpernel to be reverenced and trusted by his followers".

appearances by a portly man closely resembling Chesterton who is a peculiar but lovable character[86] aptly named Gilbert.[87]

But by far the most striking way in which Gaiman provokes literary literacy is with the library of dreams (fig. 74): It contains "NOVELS THEIR AUTHORS NEVER **WROTE**, OR NEVER **FINISHED**, EXCEPT IN DREAMS" (*Sandman* #22, 2/2). To underline this, the reader is confronted with shelves full of works that may ring familiar but which do not have firm footing in the real literary world.
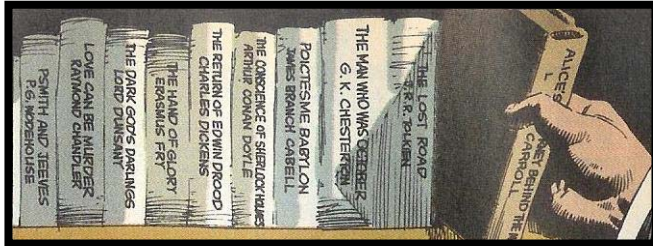

Fig. 74:
The library of dreams
(*Sandman* #22, 2/2, excerpt).

Examples are Dickens's *The Return of Edwin Drood*, Doyle's *The Conscience of Sherlock Holmes*, Raymond Chandler's *Love Can Be Murder* and, as mentioned above, Chesterton's *The Man Who Was October*. The literary literate audience will immediately recognize the author's name on the spines but might take a moment to realize that these works are part of the fictionality of the *Sandman* story.

❖ *Comics Literacy*

4) *Comics Literacy* is the proficiency in the language of comics. Without it, certain conventions used in comics like panel order or symbolic elements as representatives of emotional or physical states can be difficult to interpret. In comics, the custom of reading from left to right and top to bottom was only established during the beginning of the twentieth century. Before that, artists like Winsor McKay habitually numbered panels to provide reading directions (Pustz 115). Similarly, certain symbols used in comics had to grow into the meaning they are commonly associated with today.

Symbols are signs that are anchored in arbitrariness and that denote their object by convention whereas icons bear an inherent resemblance to their object. Comics sometimes deconstruct this distinction.[88] Letters, which are usually thought of as

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86 Gilbert is more than just a human being, he is also a place within the Dreaming called Fiddler's Green. In the *Sandman* tradition, this is simply a place of serenity and peace but in common mythology, it is the place of the afterlife for the seafaring man, "a sailor's Elysium" ("Fiddler's Green"). The reason he is sometimes depicted roaming the earth as a human is that he escaped from the Dreaming during Dream's long imprisonment.

87 e.g., *Sandman* #11, 13/5; *Sandman* #15, 24/6; or *Sandman* #70, 19/2-6.

88 I have commented on pictures that can be read and words that can be looked at elsewhere ("Kollaboration"). cf. also Ewert, esp. 72; Saraceni and Varnum/Gibbons.

purely symbolic signs, can acquire iconic facets, for instance when water drops seem to emanate from the word 'splash'.[89] By contrast, a light bulb above a character's head has come to indicate an idea, losing the metaphorical component along the way. But there are other elements that require comics literacy to be identified: References to other comics, names of characters, styles, layouts, colors, etc.

Similar to the allusions to literature in general just demonstrated, references to various elements of comics also suffuse *Sandman*. On the one hand, conventions are employed that are derived from the comics tradition. Examples are the distinct panel outline that indicates that a dream is taking place (*Sandman* #22, 16/2-18/5); the heart that emanates from Delirium's lips signifying a kiss and the Wyvern's bespiraled eyes which bespeak enjoyment of the same (fig. 75). Similarly, when Matthew, who has a specific speech bubble outline, color and font, mimics Morpheus, this is shown by the insertion of the latter's visual speech pattern (white writing on black background) into the former's (fig. 76).

Fig. 75: The comics sign (*Sandman* #42, 12/3).

Fig. 76: Matthew mimics Morpheus (*Sandman* #71, 24/5-6).

The reader identifies the inserted speech bubble as belonging to someone else, which is supported by Barnabas's compliment in the following panel saying "Sounded just *like* him" (24/6). On the other hand, comics literacy is also required when titles, characters, styles, layouts, colors, etc. are quoted. These are plentiful in *Sandman*: One example is the Cuckoo stating that "PATHETIC, BESPECTACLED, REJECTED PERRY PORTER IS SECRETLY *THE AMAZING SPIDER*" and that "GAWKY, BESPECTACLED, UNLOVED CLINT CLARKE IS REALLY

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89 Eisner's *Spirit*-series goes one step further and incorporates such iconic word constructions into its title pages. The protagonist is then allowed to wander among the letters that constitute his name.

HYPERMAN' (*Sandman* #36, 4/7). It is obvious to the comics literate reader that she means Peter Parker alias Spiderman and Clark Kent alias Superman, not just because of the familiar-sounding names, but also due to the accurate description of their physical appearance.

Likewise, no comics literate audience will fail to see a connection when an entire page is arranged to reproduce a layout that is characteristic of *Little Nemo in Slumberland* by the modernist comic strip creator Winsor McCay (fig. 77).

Fig. 77:
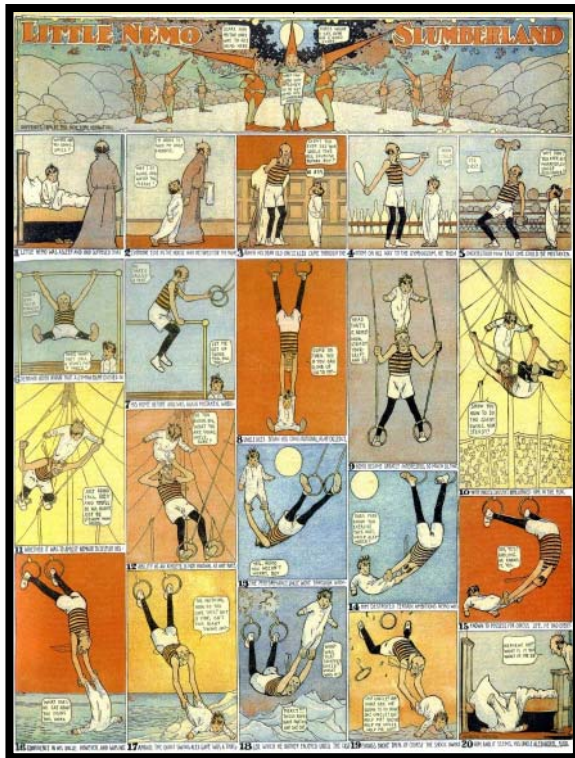Quoting McKay in *Sandman* #11 (4/1-11).

Fig. 78:
McKay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (2 April 1906, 1).

Note how the panel layout clearly reproduces McKay's signature style, including the stairlike arrangement of panels (figs. 77 and 78). It is further noteworthy that this same page also visually quotes style, panel numbering, plot and even the pun from McKay's strip. Nearly all episodes of *Little Nemo* commence with an enjoyable dream of Nemo's which becomes increasingly exciting and/or upsetting and conclude with Nemo falling out of bed as a result of his riotous dreams and with his parents commenting on the noise created in the process. In the *Sandman* quote, the development is mirrored very accurately: The child Jed dreams of a pleasant action (flying) which grows increasingly alarming (he starts to fall) and ends with him lying on the floor and being addressed by his legal guardians. In this case, the reproval is not the loving kind the comics literate recipient remembers from Nemo's adventures, but the cruel and harsh shout of Jed's malicious and abusive uncle Barnaby or aunt Clarice who tolerate him merely for the money they receive for 'fostering' him.

A comparable, if somewhat less obvious example of a comic book referring to another comic book can be found when in "Lost Hearts" (*Sandman* #16, 7/3-6), television screens are depicted in a way that is heavily reminiscent of the manner in which they are drawn in another groundbreaking comic book series of the mid-1980s, namely Miller's *Batman: TDKR* (figs. 83 and 84).[90]

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90 For more on the individual panel and layout in *TDKR* cf. Collins 172-176.

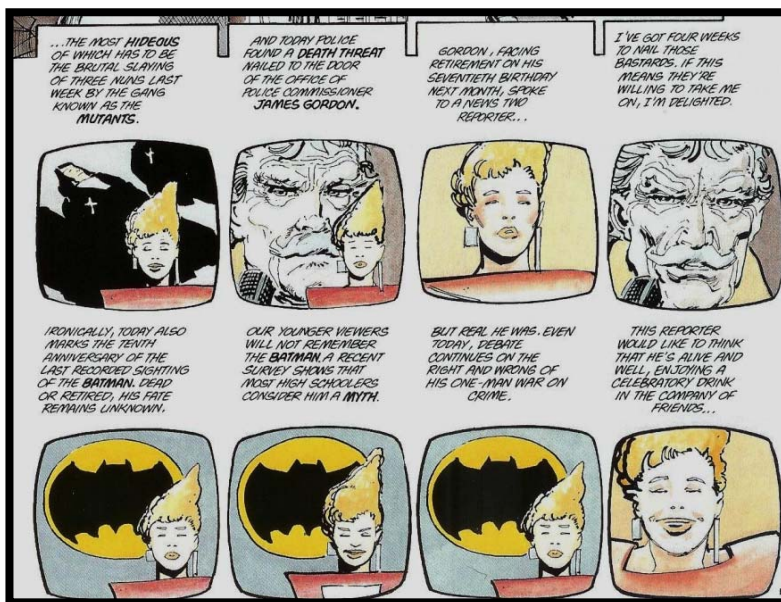Fig. 79: Quoting Miller in *Sandman* #6 (7/3-6).

Fig. 80: Miller's *TDKR* (#1, 11/4-11).

Not only are the rounded edges of the quadrangles that stand for television screens nearly identical in these two pages of *Sandman* and *TDKR*, the connection also pertains content. The four screens and even more so the speech bubbles in *Sandman* are obviously intended to reproduce the melodramatic tone of a daytime soap opera while many screens in *TDKR*, not just the ones shown in fig. 80, show sensational and theatrical contents, especially as pertains the presentation by the anchors. Arguably, many comic books during that period – or any other period for that matter – might have employed similarly shaped and arranged depictions of television screens, but their overabundance in *TDKR* may just have raised recipients's awareness of the custom, which in turn resulted in the recognition of highly similar screens in *Sandman* by a comics literate audience. "Lost Hearts" was published a mere four months after the first issue of *TDKR*, which renders the possibility of Gaiman inserting a visual quote into his series as well as a high recognition quotient quite plausible.

5) *Serial Literacy*[91] can be achieved only after at least two episodes of a series have been consumed. It is the sort of competence that follows from extended attentive exposure to a series. If the series is a procedural with largely autonomous episodes, an understanding of the series may only require scant serial literacy but if a serial featuring heavily linked installments is concerned, serial knowledge may need to be vast and encyclopedic. Apart from these differences, each new episode expands and solidifies a regular recipient's corpus of knowledge about a specific series. Pleasure is derived from decoding allusions to earlier episodes just as curiosity is aroused when hints are placed pointing to future storylines.

One contemporary television series that has mastered a cornucopia of references both analeptic and proleptic, and which has brought forth an audience that is eager and able to decipher these allusions, is the contemporary US-American television series *How I Met Your Mother* (*HIMYM*, Thomas/Carter). Serial literacy is required, for instance, when the protagonist Ted Mosby speaks of 'the pineapple incident' without providing further explanation. The incident in question was the focus of an earlier episode (season 1, episode 10) and in order to understand the remark, viewers need to be familiar with that specific episode. More often than not, episodes of *HIMYM* are suffused with flashbacks that enrich the overall tale with anecdotes from the past. In fact, the very premise of the series is that it consists of a flashback. The title *How I Met Your Mother* references the frame of the series which consists of future-Ted relating the events that led up to his meeting his future wife – albeit with a phenomenal lack of focus – to his daughter and son. But episodes also feature scenes containing teasers to future storylines like Ted entering the bar wearing a dress without any previous explanation whatsoever saying "OK! Now we're even!" which is commented by the voice-over narrator ("future-Ted") with "Yeah, that's the ending to a whole other story" (Thomas/Carter, season 6, episode 11). Scarce as they may be in series and difficult as they are to detect upon first consumption, teasers of storylines yet to come are an unmistakable indication of a thoroughly thought through and well-planned series. Otherwise, enigmatic hints of prospective storylines would simply not be possible.

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91 Strictly speaking, serial literacy is located on a slightly different level than the other literacies as it is concerned with the form in which contents are presented. In a way, it encompasses comic book literacy (category 6) as serial publishing remains industry standard with comic books. As Continuity is heavily indebted to seriality, however, I have chosen to add it as category 5 because it is certainly entailed in comic book literacy.

In a comic book title that runs for more than seven years, consists of 75 installments and that adds up to more than 2000 pages when collected into a graphic novel, there is a lot to be said about the level of serial literacy required to keep track of events. Curiously, Gaiman and his peers managed to spin a web of intricately connected episodes while remaining intriguingly readable, even for occasional readers. One of the reasons for this is the elaborate structure Gaiman opted for. The series consists of ten story arcs that are made up of longer and shorter narratives.

1. *Preludes & Nocturnes* (*P&N*): #1-8, January 1989-August 1989
2. *The Doll's House* (*TDH*): #8-16, September 1989-June 1990
3. **Dream Country* (*DC*): #17-20, July 1990-October 1990
4. *Season of Mists* (*SoM*): #21-28, December 1990-July 1991
5. *A Game of You* (*AGoY*): #32-37, November 1991-May 1992
6. **Fables & Reflections* (*F&R*): #29-31, August 1991-October 1991, #38-40, June 1992-August 1992, #50, June 1993
7. *Brief Lives* (*BL*): #41-49, September 1992-May
8. **Worlds' End* (*WE*): #51-56, July 1993-December 1993
9. *The Kindly Ones* (*TKO*): #57-69, February 1994-July 1995, *Vertigo Jam* #1
10. *The Wake* (*TW*): #70-75, August 1995-March 1996
* Collections of short stories

The longer ones (*P&N, TDH, SoM, AGoY, BL, TKO* and *TW*) are characterized by strong and meaningful relations between the individual episodes within the story arc. Picking up a single issue would most probably result in disorientation and bewilderment in the recipient. By contrast, the shorter narratives (*DC, F&R* and *WE*) are quasi graphic short stories: stand-alone features that hardly transgress the individual comic book installment's boundaries and are easily understandable and enjoyable, even to the unaccustomed audience. Examples for these short narratives are all of the installments in the story arcs *DC, F&R* and *WE,* but also individual episodes like "Men of Good Fortune" in *TDH* or "Season of Mists: Episode 4" in *SoM.* In fact, upon closer inspection, one realizes that Gaiman not only alternated longer story arcs with collections of short stories, he also embedded single short stories in nearly all longer story arcs. Inversely, all short stories, whether collected or inserted into a story arc, appear autonomous and largely isolated from the *Sandman*-story as a whole. It is only upon re-reading the entire graphic novel that one encounters elements that unmistakably connect the two kinds. In the following, some examples will be provided for these different types of ties.

In "Lost Hearts", Rose Walker, the protagonist of the *TDH*-story arc, remembers her friend: "A year ago my best friend died. Her name was Judy. She was killed -- or perhaps she killed herself -- in some kind of massacre, in a small-town diner" (*Sandman* #16, 18/2). To a serially literate audience, the allusion is obvious,

especially since the issue containing the bloodbath here referred to, "24 Hours" (*Sandman* #6),[92] is likely the most disconcerting and bloody one in the entire graphic novel. In "24 Hours", nothing points to the fact that Judy will be set apart from the other victims of the massacre in a future episode by being actively remembered by her friend Rose. All of the casualties are introduced one way or another, including Judy, about whom we gather, amongst other things, that she is waiting for her girlfriend Donna (2/6) with whom she has had a fight and that she has a friend named Rose whom she calls from the diner to inquire about Donna's whereabouts (7/2). When in "Lost Hearts" we read Rose's comment that "She [Judy] phoned me on the day she died" (18/3), we are reminded of the young woman and her relationship troubles, provided we have committed this fact to memory as only a serially literate audience might. Gaiman plants a further nod towards "24 Hours" by including a newspaper clipping with the caption "**SIX SLAIN IN DINER OF DEATH RIDDLE**" (18/8) to a) aid serially literate recipients's memory and to b) provide additional background information for occasional readers.

Cues in *Sandman* are not restricted to the analeptic kind: Proleptic glances can also be found although they do not abound. In one panel of "Season of Mists: Episode 6" (*Sandman* #27, 20/1), we see a collection of peculiar objects that function as links to earlier as well as later episodes (fig. 81).

Fig. 81:
The Sandman's treasure chest (*Sandman* #27, 20/1).

In the course of the series, it will become clear that the chest contains a compilation of curiosities and valuables that have ideational value for Dream: objects that need to be safeguarded, items that might be of use in the future, things he was trusted to safekeep, gifts, etc. To start with, the object being lowered into the chest is the demon

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92 "Lost Hearts" was published exactly a year after "24 Hours". This is one of many indications in *Sandman* for a fascinating comic book phenomenon: Real time equals comic book time, unless otherwise noted. I will return to this exceptionality when discussing synoptic vs. annotative accounts (cf. chapter 5.3.).

Azazel who was captured in a glass prison because he rejected his host's hospitality and attempted to harm him. Elaborate serial knowledge is not necessary for the identification of the glass jar with its peculiar content as it was part and parcel of the storyline of "Season of Mists: Episode 6" thus far; all that is needed is acquaintance with the installment.

Retrospectively familiar is the skull on the left side. It will be recognized by serially literate recipients to belong to the nightmare called the Corinthian, whose characteristic feature is his lack of eyes which is compensated for by two additional mouths. Dream uncreated him because of his aberrant behavior in "Collectors" (*Sandman* #14, 34/4-35/5). It will again become instrumental when a new, unblemished version of the Corinthian is created in *Sandman* #57 because his services are wanted.

As for glances into the series's future, the bottled city constitutes a hint at the extraordinary episode titled "Ramadan" (*Sandman* #50). It tells the story of a wise Caliph who rules over the city of Baghdad which in this issue's alternative history is a wealthy, glorious citadel full of wonders and magic. In the attempt to preserve the city's magnificence, the Caliph strikes a bargain with Dream: The latter is presented with the city in return for his promise that it will endure forever (fig. 82).
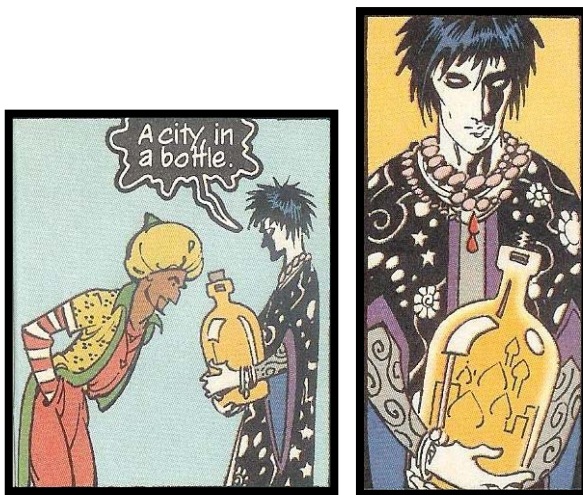
Fig. 82:
The award-winning "Ramadan"
(*Sandman* #50, 31/1 and 31/10).

"A city in a bottle" (31/1, fig. 82) is not something one comes across regularly, so an audience faithful to the series will be able to establish the link between the two instances, provided the chest filled with curiosities from earlier episodes will be remembered. There is another occasion in which a bottled city appears, not visually in the form of an object, but as part of an utterance by Dream: "I spent over eighty years in a glass bottle, like a genie … or a city" (*Sandman* #67, 6/7). This remark will probably be quite meaningless to the audience unaware of the events in "Ramadan", but to a serially literate readership, it will be a gratifying discovery.

The pocket watch at the bottom of the panel is slightly less noticeable and might therefore have faded into oblivion by the time its story is unfolded more than two years later in "The Golden Boy"[93] (*Sandman* #54). Prez Rickard, the character developed by Joe Simon in 1973 who came to be the first teenage President of the United States, did not grow to be one of DC's most popular characters. Nevertheless, or maybe exactly because of this, he was resurrected by Gaiman, who has a penchant for obscure characters, for this specific episode. Towards the end, we witness how Prez, who is continuously associated with time, timekeeping and, therefore, watches, presents a valuable of his – a pocket watch – to Morpheus before disappearing (fig. 83).

Fig. 83:
"The Golden Boy" (*Sandman* #54, 24/1-2).

With the object being of a commonplace nature, it would not be surprising if even a serially knowledgeable audience could not make the connection between the pocket watch that is given as a present in "The Golden Boy" and the one inconspicuously sitting in a chest 27 episodes earlier (fig. 81). However, upon rereading the series, the strange assortment contained in the chest shown in *Sandman* #27 will certainly register with recipients as a collection of objects already encountered.

The most striking visual reference to the chest and possibly the one most likely to be recognized by serially literate recipients is situated in *Sandman* #60 (20/3-4, fig. 84).

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93 Probably not coincidentally, Sandy Hawkins, the first Sandman's boy sidekick, also went under the pseudonym of 'The Golden Boy'.

Fig. 84:
The series's return to the treasure chest
(*Sandman* #60, 20/3-4).

Panel 3 depicts Morpheus opening up the chest that looks familiar from *Sandman* #27, published 33 episodes earlier, and panel 4 also reveals well-known contents: a bottled demon, a bottled city, a pocket watch and, most importantly in this instance, the Corinthian's skull with mouths where eye sockets would normally be located. While the reproduction of individual items from Dream's treasure chest might lack sufficient strength to evoke the panel depicted in *Sandman* #27, especially prospectively, the near-identical representation of the box can be assumed to be easily identified by an audience that is acquainted with the series as a whole.

❖ *Comic Book Literacy*

6) *Comic Book Literacy* describes one's competence in comic book Continuity. Comic book literate audiences are proficient in the detection and deciphering of cues pointing to Continuity and only such a thorough understanding of storylines and characters and their canonicity allow for comic book literacy.

Indications to Continuity abound in *Sandman*. However, while the Sandman-character, by virtue of being a founding member of the Justice Society of America, has always been a fixed part of the DC Universe, Gaiman's work can be argued to be located on the margins of Continuity. This is not to say that his characters, events, stories, etc. bear no relation to established DC Continuity. On the contrary, there are several instances that link the world of Gaiman's *Sandman* to such archetypes as Superman and Batman. Much rather, the series's non-central positioning within Continuity stems from the employment of little known or nearly forgotten characters as well as the high level of subtlety employed when referring to elements of Continuity.

There is also the occasional foray into recapitulation, offering Continuity lore to the audience that is potentially unaware of a character's being steeped in history and to readers in need of a reminder. For instance, in *Sandman* #57, recipients are

presented with Lyta's past by way of her prospective employer's reading from her portfolio (19/7-20/3). As we will see, similar recapitulations, albeit with a focus on their origin stories, are expounded of Mister Miracle or Element Girl.

In the very first issue of *Sandman,* we are confronted with a mysterious "'SLEEPY SICKNESS'" ("Sleep of the Just", 14/4), a puzzling somnolence that affects people across the globe. The reason behind it is Dream's inadvertent imprisonment by a spell spoken by an occultist intended to capture Death. The captors become aware of the mix-up but refuse to liberate Morpheus in the hope of procuring a benefit from their hapless victim. Due to Dream's captivity, which causes a vacuum in the universe (*Sandman* #1, 18/4), a man named Wesley Dodds feels compelled to become active as a nocturnal vigilante (18/5, fig. 85).

Fig. 85:
Morpheus as Dodds's inspiration
(*Sandman* #1, 18/4-6).

While the name may not ring a bell with the occasional comic book consumer, it will most likely be recognized by someone proficient in comic books. Dodds is the alter ego of the very first Sandman that ever existed in the DC Universe. Created by Gardner Fox and Bert Christman in 1939, this warden of justice roamed the streets dressed in a suit and wearing a gas mask that protected him from the gas he employed to sedate evildoers. Already in the early 1940s, this original version of the Sandman faded into oblivion, partly because of an unsuccessful reboot as a brawny, caped, colorful second version of the Sandman. Even though Dodds is the first Sandman as pertains publication history, he is retconned to have been inspired by the much older Morpheus, or rather, his absence, in Gaiman's *Sandman.*[94]

What follows is a catalogue of the allusions to DC Continuity that are rather easily recognized by a comic book literate audience. In "… Dream A Little Dream of Me"

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94 For a detailed discussion of different approaches to the various reincarnations of the Sandman and their respective origin stories, histories, lives, motivations, relationships, etc. cf. chapters 5.3.1. and 5.3.2.

(*Sandman* #3), the antihero John Constantine popularized by the comic book series *Hellblazer* is introduced step by step (fig. 86): In 3/6 we see a man with a cigarette and a brown trench coat.

Fig. 86:
John Constantine (*Sandman* #3, 3/6).

Just as Superman can be identified by his costume, these paraphernalia point unmistakably to the occult detective. Especially the chain-smoking, which is not something encountered very often in comic books, makes comic book literate audiences take notice. In 4/3, we learn that his first name is John and in 5/4, he is finally addressed by a variant of his full name "JOHN **CONSTANTEEN**". He makes another guest appearance at Dream's wake in *Sandman* #69 (22/2).

"Passengers" (*Sandman* #5) features Scott Free alias Mister Miracle and J'Onn J'Onzz alias the Martian Manhunter. After witnessing a nightmare of an unnamed man (5/1-8/3), the audience learns that the dreamer is in "A BEDROOM IN THE J.L.I. EMBASSY IN MANHATTAN. A LONG WAY FROM APOKOLIPS" (8/4). By means of these hints – the terrifying dream resembling Scott Free's origin story, references to the Justice League International where Free is a member and to Apokolips, the place where Free grew up in an orphanage ran by the cruel Granny Goodness – Scott Free alias Mister Miracle is circumscribed.

Fig. 87:
The Martian Manhunter and Mister Miracle (*Sandman* #5, 14/2-3).

When he is addressed as "SCOTT" (fig. 87), doubts regarding the dreamer's identity are dispelled. The case is slightly different with the Martian Manhunter who is effortlessly

recognizable by means of his popularity and distinctive outward manifestation: He has a green complexion and red eyes. Nevertheless, further clues are offered. He wears a night robe embroidered with the letters JLI (14/2) and is addressed by his peculiarly spelt first name "J'ONN" (14/3) by Free.

In *Sandman* #26 we encounter another popular superhero of the Golden Age (15/1). Hawkman used to fight crime in the Justice Society of America, where the first Sandman, Dodds was also a member.

Fig. 88:
Hawkman and Sandman I (*Sandman* #26, 15/1).

Both are shown in fig. 88 together. But the connection does not end there. Incidentally, Hawkman is also Hector Hall's father and, therefore, the paternal grandfather of the future Dream King Daniel.

One single panel from *Sandman* #71 (fig. 89) serves as an exquisite example of different levels of comic book literacy (22/1). In it, we are not only confronted with DC's oldest and most iconic characters, Superman and Batman, but also by the Martian Manhunter who had already made an appearance at the beginning of the series in *Sandman* #5.

Fig. 89:
Cameo appearances by Superman, Batman and the Martian Manhunter at Morpheus's wake (*Sandman* #71, 22/1).

While Batman is easily recognizable by way of costume, the Martian Manhunter, on the right, is already a more complex case. Given that he had surfaced in the series before, he might be familiar to readers loyal to the series even if they are unaware of DC Continuity. As far as Superman is concerned, a reader able to read the forelock and the glasses on the man on the left as symbols for Clark Kent, Superman's alter ego, is already quite literate. Only an earnestly diligent fan, however, would possess the sort of expertise to decipher the dreams mentioned by Kent: "THE DREAMS WHERE I'M A NEWSREADER. OR THE ONE WHERE I'VE GOT AN ANT'S HEAD. OR WHERE I'M A *GORILLA*. ONCE I DREAMED I HAD THIS WEIRD VIRUS AND I HAD TO KEEP GOING FORWARD IN TIME" (*Sandman* #71, 22-1). David Goldfarb observes in his online *Annotated Sandman* (co-written with Greg Morrow) that

> [i]n the 1970s, Superman's secret identity was a TV news anchorman rather than a newspaper reporter. The story where Superman got an ant's head was Action Comics #296 ["The Invasion of the Super-Ants", January 1963], and where he became a gorilla was possibly Action [Comics] #218 ["The Super-Ape from Krypton", July 1956],[95] and where he had to fly forwards in time was possibly Action [Comics] #387 ["Even A Superman Dies!", July 1970].
> (Issue 71: "In Which a Wake is Held", Page 22 panel 1)

Not only do these stories date back at least 40 years, they are also no longer considered valid elements in Continuity. Extensive knowledge of Continuity is already quite cumbersome to achieve, but acquaintance with out-of-Continuity storylines from decade-old comic books even more so. Although this panel depicts very popular superheroes of the DC Universe, the recognition of the storylines touched upon by Kent requires impressive faculties in the field of comic book literacy.

Having contemplated a few of the more readily distinguishable comic book characters, let us now turn to the myriads of instances in which stranger creatures are presented to the reader. One noteworthy case is portrayed in the short story "Façade" (*Sandman* #20). In it, a yet-unknown woman introduces her story in a first-person narrative which does not reveal much, except that she seems to suffer from depression and agoraphobia. During a phone call, she is addressed as "RAINIE" (2/3). The first palpable visual hint as to her identity is provided in the second panel of the third page (fig. 90):

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95 It is one of the signs for comic books's value as witnesses of a certain time period and their significance for cultural science that stories about gorillas came to abound in the mid-1950s. This was due to the study of apes that had been pushed during earlier decades and cumulated in an "intelligent-gorilla craze" (Cowsill et al. 71) flourishing in the USA and bringing forth several comic book stories about gorillas.

Fig. 90:
The suicidal superhero (*Sandman* #20, 3/2).

We see a female figure, sitting and smoking. Her chest displays scalelike skin of two differing colors, as do her hands. Her face is masklike (indeed, it is a mask, we later learn) and her hair is of a greenish hue. Only highly knowledgeable readers of DC comic books like Morrow or Goldfarb could identify this creature as

> Urania "Rainie" Blackwell, who first appeared in *Metamorpho* #10 (1967). She was an agent with an unnamed US intelligence service who volunteered to expose herself to the radiations of the meteor that formed part of the "Orb of Ra". These radiations had earlier transformed Rex Mason into the superhero Metamorpho. Subsequently, Blackwell took the sobriquet "Element Girl". Both Metamorpho and Element Girl had the ability to transform their bodies into any chemical element or compound found in the human body, and to transform into any shape. As a side effect of their powers, their bodies became non-human in color and composition.
> (Issue 20: "Facade", Page 1)

We learn that Element Girl is an obscure character who never experienced overwhelming popularity with readers. Gaiman even referred to her as the "old DC character called Element Girl, who nobody remembers any more" (Hibbs). To that effect, less conversant readers will only be able to trace the character to the DC Universe once the name "URANIA BLACKWELL" (5/1) is dropped and the effort is made to look it up.

The audience familiar with the character, however, will appreciate the mention of the "COMPANY" (2/8, 3/1, 3/5, 6/2, etc.) denoting the "unnamed US intelligence service" (Morrow/Goldfarb), to being "STILL ACTIVE" (5/4) referring to working as a superhero, to Rex Mason alias Metamorpho (6/4),[96] to Element Girl's origin story (6-7), to her ability to transform her body into different elements (8/1-3), her full-body appearance (13/6, 15/4) and her inability to end her own life (18/1-7). Especially

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96 cf. "Metamorpho" in Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 232.

attentive recipients might also detect the self-reflexive quality in Death's remark that "YOU PEOPLE **ALWAYS** HOLD ONTO OLD IDENTITIES, OLD FACES AND MASKS, LONG AFTER THEY'VE SERVED THEIR PURPOSE. BUT YOU'VE **GOT** TO LEARN TO THROW THINGS AWAY EVENTUALLY" (17/1). This could, of course, be read as a comment to reactionary fans who feel Continuity should stay as it is and that superheroes's identities should not be replaced, just as masks – a metonymical way of referring to costumes – should not be discarded by way of new additions to Continuity.[97]

Gaiman generally exhibits a penchant for providing platforms for characters of the DC Universe long vanished from the popular radar. Further examples are the already mentioned brothers Cain and Abel who, in a derivation of the biblical siblings, are stuck in an endless cycle of murder and resurrection in the *Sandman* series. Readers accustomed to DC Continuity are aware of the fact that Cain and Able were the presenters of the comic book anthology series *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets* respectively, which ran from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. While their roles as hosts of the two *House* series had been pruned to introducing and commenting on the tales contained in the installment, they are given more room and significance in *Sandman*. In consequence, not only their mere resurfacing as characters in their own right, but also the numerous quotations of their earlier occupations might please the established audience. Reflections of their previous careers can be discovered in the title of the episode in which they first appear – "Imperfect Hosts" (*Sandman* #2), in their function as Dream's temporary landlords in the "HOUSE OF **MYSTERY**" (*Sandman* #2, 4/4) after his escape from Burgess's control and in their roles as storytellers in *Sandman* #40. In addition, long-time audiences might appreciate the Corinthian's remark "PLEASE CORRECT ME IF I MISREMEMBER, FRIEND CAIN, BUT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT YOUR STORIES ARE MYSTERIES, NOT SECRETS" (*Sandman* #67, 3/2) and that Gaiman retroactively instituted the Sandman to have offered the storytelling job to Abel in the first place: "I'd give you a little house, and a job. You'd get to tell stories" (*Sandman* #40, 19/4).

Other characters that have been obscure or nearly forgotten, but belong to DC Continuity all the same and that are brought to the fore by Gaiman include Gregory the gargoyle (*Sandman* #2 and #40), Etrigan the demon, Agony and Ecstacy (#4), Granny Goodness and the villain named Scarecrow (#5), Brute and Glob (#10-12), Bizarro (#32), Prez Rickard (#53), and Phantom Stranger and Dr. Occult (#69), just to name a few. The bringing into play of major as well as minor characters of the DC

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97 The case of Urania Blackwell was part of a paper I gave on "Continuity, Fandom and Seriality in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*" at the *Joint International Conference on Graphic Novels, Bande Dessinées and Comics* in Manchester, 5-8 July 2011.

Universe did not go unnoticed by the audience. Christopher Wood in the letter page of *Sandman* #41 wrote that many characters "seem to have a history, either in comics or out, giving them rich, believable substance".

Of course Gaiman not only takes from Continuity, but also adds to it. Mervyn Pumpkinhead, Cluracan and Nuala, the Corinthian, Mazikeen, Choronzon and numerous others originated in *Sandman,* as did Lady Johanna Constantine who was created as an ancestor of John Constantine's (*Sandman* #13).[98] Also the protagonists, the Endless, were constructed especially for this series, with the exception of Destiny. He had already been part of the DC Universe since August 1972 when he was introduced as the host of *Weird Mystery Tales* (*DC Wikia*).

Although it has already been mentioned, it cannot be overemphasized that all of the references discussed here, especially in this last category, fulfill two functions simultaneously. Firstly, they offer gratification to experienced fans. Discovery, decoding and comparison of Continuity as well as new additions to and modifications and thereof can be sources of pleasure. Secondly, untrained recipients are not, ideally, puzzled by them. On the one hand, this is because the narrative also functions without intimate knowledge of the DC Universe. On the other hand, this is due to the fact that most of the clues are so understated and unobtrusive that a novice comic book reader will not detect them in the first place.

The parallels to seriality are striking: The individual installment must remain intelligible to the Continuity amateur *and* the newcomer to the series. At the same time, it must provide incentive to continue consumption for the Continuity expert *and* the veteran of the series. Hence whereas producers of most series need 'only' write episodes that satisfy new and practiced audiences, comic book storytellers are obliged to conceive of narratives that cater to recipients proficient and inexperienced in Continuity on top of that. Or, to quote one the principles Chabon has drawn for comic book authors in his highly readable *Maps and Legends*:

> Let's tell stories that, over time, build up an intricate, involved, involving mythology that is also accessible and comprehensible at any point of entry. The intricacy, the accretion of lore over time, should be both inventive and familiar, founded in old mythologies and fears but fully reinterpreted, reimagined.
> (81)[99]

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98 "The Constantine family history seems to be expanding", M. E. Tyrell noted in the letter page of *Sandman* #18.

99 Although Chabon coined this and three other storytelling principles first and foremost for the writers of children's comic books, this one certainly applies to all writers of serial comic books with their usage of seriality and Continuity.

There remains the issue of the comic book industry's intended audience to be clarified. It was said that comic books are often tailored specifically to a small fan base. Yet it was also remarked that comic books often bend over backwards in the attempt to accommodate inexperienced as well as expert audiences. This finds expression in the manner Continuity is handled: If no changes are implemented, no new readers will come to the title and the established audience may, with time, fade away but if changes are put into action, the latter recipients might be frustrated and leave the title even faster, O'Neil explains (117). The dilemma, according to O'Neil, is resolved as follows:

> Where I work [DC], we believe that, in the end, people will always respond to a strong story, though they may initially resist it. So we let the changes happen when we feel they're desirable. Such decisions are always based on educated guesses, and it is possible that we could be wrong. Taking these kinds of chances is part of what an editor gets paid to do.
> (117)

That said, jumping on board remains arduous even with the help of Continuity-simplifying devices: The new title remains saturated with decades of Continuity and presupposed knowledge even as it tries to detach itself from it.

The dialectic between the stasis of the status quo and the dynamic thrust of desirable new material, i.e., changes in Continuity corresponds to the perpetual tug-of-war between economic and creative impulses. Whereas the adherence to the actual state of events in Continuity – difficult as that may be to fashion, what with monthly or weekly additions to it – certainly makes sense, it would be simplistic to say that the implementation of changes is solely linked to artistic innovation. Retcons, reboots and other changes, it will be shown, may very well spring from financial impetus.

❖ *Recent Tendencies in DC's Continuity*

We have seen that comic book writers and artists are, with a few exceptions, not granted the freedom to let their characters run rampant. Much rather, it is a prerequisite for them to keep track of the events experienced and the changes undergone by a character and to produce narratives that are in sync with decade-long Continuity. Even with the help of Continuity-cops, editors and attentive fans, this seems like a gargantuan task for any newcomer to a title, considering the enormous output of comic books today as well as the medium's long history. In fact, sometimes even publishers seem to lose track of their output. With regard to *Infinite Crisis*, Darius remarks that "DC repeatedly claimed to have a chart that showed

where every character was and when, but this was never provided to the public, leaving many to doubt the company really knew what it was doing" (*Everything* 58).

The proliferation within one publisher seems to become more and more of a problem for Continuity purists, who prefer their Continuity streamlined and free of contradictions. There is an additional concept that has not yet been mentioned but which, paradoxically, at once augments and reduces the intricacy inherent in Continuity: the concept of *Hypertime*. The concept was introduced between 1988 and 1990 in the series *Animal Man* by Morrison[100] and named as well as promoted by Waid in *The Kingdom* in 1999 (Ndalianis, "Enter" 280). It is "the overarching and interconnected web of timelines and realities" (*DC Wikia*) which is employed to account for any discrepancy within Continuity.

Though related to the notion of Continuity, it does not attempt to canonize some storylines while declaring others invalid but functions on the premise that all stories ever told share the same status of authenticity and legitimacy. Since it acknowledges even characters, storylines, worlds and realities that have disappeared from the Continuity radar, it "allow[s] every comic story [...] to be part of a larger-scale mega-continuity" (Offenberger). A story making use of Hypertime does not operate on the basis that a character consists of only the current version, but that a collection of incarnations remains always inscribed. This means that embarrassing[101] and/or contradicting storylines possess equal staying power in a character's history as those generally agreed to represent the 'real' or the essential[102] version. By taking into account all storylines, it expands Continuity, but by abolishing the effort to weed out contradictions and ambiguities, it mitigates daunting canonicity. Possibly because it repudiated the singular reality insisted upon by DC, it was never fully embraced by DC publishers.

Recently, however, comic book writers have increasingly exhibited a tendency to employ Hypertime.[103] Most prominently, perhaps, the authors of the rebooted *Action Comics* by Morrison and the somewhat overhauled *Batman* by Snyder – both are part of *The New 52* – have employed the concept. With *The New 52*, DC Comics has once

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100 Morrison may just be the most active advocate of breaking with Continuity there currently is. In an interview, he said: "I think it's simply this: that the time has come to wave goodbye to history. Until the day the publishers allow characters to grow old, die and be replaced, there can be no real use of 'continuity.' Otherwise, allow characters to simply go on forever with no pretense towards real time and under the full understanding that this is an imaginary world made by generations of workers" (Lien-Cooper).

101 With regard to Batman, these would be the gaudy realization of the 1960s.

102 To again use Batman's example, the grim and somber Batman that originated with Miller's *TDKR* is usually thought to best represent Batman's core. This is corroborated by the invective turned loose following the carnivalesque film adaptations by Schumacher in the mid-1990s. (cf. Brooker, *Batman Unmasked* 294-307).

103 Brooker in his latest work *Hunting the Dark Knight* provides a thorough account of Morrison's treatment of Batman using the concept of Hypertime, though he does not mention the phenomenon by name (162-177).

more demonstrated its infatuation with the number 52: Following the crossover story arc *Flashpoint* (May-September 2011), which lead the audience into the relaunch, 52 superhero titles were reset at #1 in September 2011 (cover-dated November 2011).[104] The reboot of most of the DCU, which became the DC new Universe, or DCnU, caused, amongst other things, the end of the original 73-year run of *Action Comics* with issue #994 in October 2011. In addition, the rise of the superhero in the DCnU is depicted to be a modern phenomenon and not one of the late 1930s. With these changes, the tradition begun with *Crisis* has reached its interim peak. Since the intervals between total reboots have become shorter and shorter since the mid-1980s, there is reason to believe that the next overhaul is just around the corner.

❖ *Interim Conclusion*

In the comic book industry, a concept like Continuity that severely narrows writers's and artists's creative leeway, stipulates detailed familiarity with past storylines from editors, demands extensive knowledge from the seasoned audience as well as generous willingness to ignore enigmatic references by occasional recipients is not flinched at. Nor are such narrative fireworks as wiping slates clean and pretending decades of history did not take place,[105] moving most events within Continuity a whole year forward,[106] or brazenly declaring certain storylines defunct considered unusual. An audience who is willing to accept such traditionally unconventional storytelling devices can be assumed to further be able and ready to allow for the multiplication of narrative contents.

"[S]ince the 1980s, comic book characters and stories have migrated with increased velocity into films, television, and video games" (Ndalianis, "Why Comic Books?" 113). As transmedia phenomena, they have become mutable personas. In 1991, Pearson and Uricchio wrote that "the contradiction amongst them [e.g., simultaneously existing Batmen] may threaten both the integrity of the commodity form and the coherence of the fans's lived experience" ("I'm Not Fooled" 184). While the demand for unity in Continuity is being voiced to this day, it is also evident that attempts to streamline Continuity have become less frenetic. Pearson and Uricchio's apprehension that the proliferation of comic book lore poses a problem for the genuine nature of the character and for readers is characteristic of the view of

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104 Included in the revamp resulting in *The New 52* are such long-running titles as *Detective Comics*, which was home to the first appearance of the Batman in 1939 as well as younger series such as *Teen Titans*, *Batwoman* or *Swamp Thing*.
105 cf. e.g., *The New 52*.
106 cf. *One Year Later*.

Continuity during the 1990s. What followed was a shift towards accepting multiplicity. Characters have existed in various editions at least since the reboot of the Flash in 1956 but it was only towards the end of the century that an acceptance of diverse, indeed contradictory versions of one character emerged that went beyond the individual. The transition seems to have seeped into academia as well, for there is not a trace of a complaint about conflicting variants in either of four publications on Batman in 1998 (Somigli), 1999 (Brooker, "Batman"), 2005 (Brooker, *Batman Unmasked*) and 2012 (Brooker, *Hunting*).

Following this transition, recent times have seen a general inclination towards a slackening of the Continuity-paradigm. Ever since DC editor Mort Weisinger opened the gates to a relaxed or suspended Continuity by his "Imaginary Stories" in the 1960s, there have been attempts to bypass the constraints of a convoluted background. There were two main reasons for this: First and foremost, new readers should be given a point of entry, and secondly, also accustomed readers struggled to keep up with all the intricacies posed by a long and complicated history and occasionally tired of keeping track of the long-winded Continuity. One consequence of this is that DC created the *Elseworlds*, *All-Star* and *Just Imagine Stan Lee's …* line, whose common attribute is their telling of narratives that are located outside of the canon. But whereas these series are unequivocally identifiable as out-of-Continuity by virtue of their labels, the latest development in comic book publishing is an erosion of Continuity which is neither explicitly mentioned on the cover nor widely perceived to pose a dilemma, except maybe with hard-boiled Continuity enthusiasts.

While media like television, cinema and radio into which comic book contents are adapted have been omnipresent almost from the very outset, it is the simultaneity and ubiquity of comic book substance in television series, movies, video games, music and even advertising,[107] but also in novels[108] and theme park rides[109] that buttresses the multimedial thriving of superhero lore. For example, the story of Batman commenced in 1939 and has since branched into all sorts of media: "The Dark Knights's identity[110] has fluctuated over time and across media as multiple authors and fan communities competed over his definition" (Pearson/Uricchio, "I'm Not Fooled" 183). The numerous stories woven around this one single character are now all but impossible to organize, classify and arrange into a consistent narrative. In addition the Supermen already

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107 e.g., breakfast cereals and credit cards.
108 e.g., Jonatham Lethem, *The Fortress of Solitude* or Kevin J. Anderson, *Enemies and Allies: The Dark Knight Meets the Man of Steel*.
109 Superman: Tower of Power in Six Flags over Texas.
110 It is unclear whether the not quite consistent multiplicity inherent in "Dark Knights's identity" is intentional or whether it is a spelling error and should read either "Dark Knights's identities" or "Dark Knight's identity".

existing within the Multiverse, each medium seems to have its own version of Super*man* so that there are Super*men* rather than a singular and unified version of the character. These adaptations co-exist with only minimal intrusion into one another's realms. Kristin Thompson points out that especially series television, with its penchant for spinning out large numbers of narratives, has fostered the tendency towards multiplicity (105). The simultaneous existence of a character in numerous media results in what she calls the "dispersal of narrative" (102).

So instead of erecting a necessarily random hierarchy by claiming that one interpretation is more authentic or authoritative than another, the various media involved each shape the superhero according to their distinct needs and possibilities. In other words, the variation in mediality allows for the different texts to function separately, within their own continuum. The different Supermen become "locked in a dialogic parallel" (R. Berger 96). From the production side, this means that storytellers no longer attempt to fine-tune Continuity to their medium of choice. To again quote Thompson, "the notion of firm and permanent closure to any given narrative has loosened across media" (105). The result is a multiplicity of vantage points, an apparently infinite heteroglossia, endless remediation, a palimpsest of superheroes.

The audience is able to enjoy multiple adaptations of the same character, each with a different conception of his or her relationships, experiences, morals, etc. The separate texts, easily distinguished by fans, can thus be enjoyed in isolation from their source material. Hence "[t]oday, comics have entered a period where principles of multiplicity are felt at least as powerfully as those of continuity" (Jenkins, "Just Men" 20-21). This is corroborated by some of the entries in the discussion centering on Continuity in the comic book series *Batman Inc.* by Morrison and Chris Burnham that is part of *The New 52*: "Continuity be damned", "Hypertime!!!!" or "[P]ick what you want to include, whether it's new or old, and ignore the bits you don't want to intrude on your story" (Johnston).

Additionally, fans not only influence Continuity by way of fan fiction, but seem to be gaining interest in the opportunities deconstructed, that is, Continuity-reduced storytelling offers, as the lack of collective outrage on the erosion of Continuity suggests. Parkin observes that "[w]e are long past the point where the protagonist of all these adventures can be the same individual, but the audience understands and accepts it" ("Truths" 16). Entirely in accord with the postmodern axiom of celebrating fragmentation instead of lamenting the loss of stability, US-American superhero comic book culture seems to have arrived in the twenty-first century where it can defy Continuity without label, explanation or excuse and rejoice in the multiplicity inherent in characters like the Sandman.

5. "No eponymous character ever stays dead in comics":[1] How Retcons and Reboots Alter Comic Book Realities

> Is it just me, or is DC's continuity just as convoluted and confusing as ever?
> (Reader Lewis Call in the letter page of DC's *Who's Who*, December 1986)

In the preceding chapter, comic book Continuity was defined as *the result of characters, events, plots and circumstances, both contemporary and historical, forming a complex entity that may stretch across several media and that has a tendency to aim at being consistent and contentually coherent within a realm encompassing a range of an author's, director's, publisher's, etc. serialized publications*. It is a cross-breed between a company-internal canon and a publisher's age-old history. Comic book Continuity was established when in 1942, comic book writer Gardner Fox decided to bring some of the most popular comic books heroes together as the Justice Society of America. This soon resulted in a web of comic book hero narratives which became more entangled with each new episode. Only hard-boiled fans were able to keep track of the intricately entwined narratives and revolted when events took place that did not fit in with established Continuity. To this day, every new comic book installment not only sets the frame for the ones to come but also has repercussions for the ones already published, thus influencing seemingly fixed history. Additions come plain and straightforward as part of the newly released episode. But changes are implemented either by way of *retcon* or *reboot*. As these narrative devices have an enormous influence on Continuity and because an understanding of them is necessary in order to understand the mechanics of serial comic book storytelling, the following sections will focus first on retcons and then on reboots.

5.1. The Retcon: History, Etymology and Definition

Retcons modify history. Since the concept is often foreign to non-comic book recipients, let me commence with an example from Klock's unsurpassable *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*:

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1   Levitz, *75 Years* 456.

> When Batman takes a rifle shot to the chest, which any reader assumes would kill him instantly, it reveals metal shielding. Batman says, 'Why do you think I wear a target on my chest – can't armor my head,' and with that one line, a thirty-year mystery dissolves as every reader runs mentally through previous stories, understanding that plate as *having always been there*.
> (30, emphasis S. H.)

This is an excellent example of how retcons work as it introduces us to the notion of changing history to make things appear as *always having been a certain way*. With this crucial bit of information accompanying us along the way, let us now delve into the history, etymology and definition of the retcon.

The expression was first mentioned in print in a book titled *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* by author Frank Elgin Tupper in 1974. Tupper writes that "Pannenberg's conception of retroactive Continuity ultimately means that history flows fundamentally from the future into the past" (100). The underlying notion of the future's categorical importance for the shaping of the past is an essential ingredient of comic book storytelling. In the following decade comic book writer Roy Thomas in the letter page of *All-Star Squadron* #20 wrote that "we like to think that an enthusiastic ALL-STAR booster at one of Adam Malin's Creation Conventions in San Diego[2] came up with the best name for it a few months back: 'Retroactive Continuity'. Has kind of a ring to it, don't you think?". Since Thomas draws explicit attention to fandom as the source of the term, it is highly probable that it had been in use before 1983. As for the abbreviated version of the term, apparently it was Damian Cugely who coined the mot-valise 'retcon' in a 1988 *UseNet* post, which, unfortunately, is no longer available. He later referred to himself as "the originator of the word 'retcon'" in a post titled "Original Meaning of RETroactive Continuity" on a discussion forum on *Googlegroups.*

As a linguistic entity, retcon is a complicated case, not so much as origin is concerned but with respect to usage. Etymologically and linguistically speaking, retcon is an amalgamation or a blend of the words 'retroactive' and 'Continuity'. It can function as verb – the act of changing Continuity is called retconning – and as noun. As such, the term is invested with two shades of meaning: Retcon can either be the discrete instance, the individual manifestation resulting in a single retconned event, or it can refer to retroactive Continuity as a whole. The former is usually accompanied by an article (a/the retcon) whereas the latter customarily stands on its own.

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2   Adam Malin is the co-founder of *Creation Entertainment*, a company that organizes conventions focusing on sci-fi, fantasy and horror television series and films.

Academic approaches to retcons are extremely rare. The phenomenon at once shares and derives its nonexistence within the boundaries of scholarly treatment with and from Continuity. The narrow range of scholars who do touch upon the subject of Continuity,[3] however marginally, largely neglect to provide definitions of retroactive Continuity. While the concept is mentioned mostly in connection with examples, its characterization suffers the same fate as Continuity's, namely being disregarded, glossed over, or, at best, being mentioned in passing. To this effect, my definition of the retcon will draw on the few academic descriptions available and on the definitions on online commentary sites, the likes of *Wikipedia* or personal blogs.[4]

In her fan-scholarly[5] *Superheroes!*, Kavaney provides the following explanation: "When the assumed past of a comic or some other franchise is changed in order to make sense of current continuity, this retroactive continuity is standardly referred to as a retcon" (23). Here, we are introduced to the notions of mediality and retrospective changes to an existing network as well as to the reason for which a retcon may be deployed: meaning-making. A similar definition is offered by Kidder in his dissertation on metacomics. According to him, the retcon "refers to retroactively changing the history of a character or narrative. In retcon, events occur that indicate that a previous version of the narrative is no longer accurate" (65). With regard to the nullification of previous Continuity outlined in Kidder's second sentence, Brooker's approach is essentially congruent, even if reverting to a somewhat darker and curter tone. His retcon "represses a previous truth, and rewrites not just the present but the historical past" (*Hunting* 158). So far, we have a consensus that retcons rewrite previous Continuity.

The one scholar engaging himself at least partially in the study of the retcon is Proctor. As his focus is on the reboot, he delineates the retcon with regard to the former as "alter[ing] element of a series' chronology without collapsing the narrative continuum altogether – i.e., it does not 'begin again'" ("Ctl-Alt-Delete"). While Proctor is certainly correct in his emphasis of the narrative continuum remaining somewhat intact, the modification that takes place is by no means reduced to chronology. His implication that only a series' chronology is altered by the retcon is too shortsighted. To be fair, in the same article, he surmises that the retcon "alters details in the continuum for the purposes of story" ("Ctl-Alt-Delete").

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3   e.g., Locke, Reynolds, Wolf-Meyer, etc.
4   It goes without saying that retcon definitions abound on the Web. I have chosen the ones most useful for my purpose, ignoring the surplus of unsatisfactory or objectionable entries.
5   Kaveney's book is a prime example of the work that could not have been written without the expansive comic book literacy of a dedicated fan. It becomes clear on the very first page and is corroborated time and again throughout the text that she possesses a vast Continuity knowledge which could only have been accumulated during decades of exposure to comic books.

At the end of Proctor's article on the website of *Sequart Research and Literacy Organiziation* which is dedicated to the "advancing [of] comics as art", he poses the question how his readers would interpret the devices of "textual revisionism". The deluge of comments ensuing comprises A. David Lewis's explanation that "retcon implies a change being made while acknowledging the history to date". It can only be assumed that by "acknowledging" Lewis means 'being aware of', rather than 'validating' or 'respecting' since the retcon – as agreed upon above – very much consists of disrupting Continuity. However, it could also refer to an aspect of retcon that has so far been ignored: the notion of acknowledging Continuity by justifying the changes wrought.

In *Superheroes* Reynolds assumes that breaches with previous storylines *as well as* the concealment or disguise of these breaches are presuppositions for a retcon to take place: The integrity of a narrative needs to be saved by "conjuring up an explanation which smoothes over the faux-pas and restores Continuity" (39). The term "faux-pas" is rather ill-chosen as it implies an *inadvertent* violation of Continuity rather than the deliberate act that it often is. However, Reynolds recognizes one of the retcon's chief attributes, namely its attempt to iron out the wrinkles it caused in the fabric that is Continuity. It is remarkable that a narrative tool such as the retcon should consist of introducing change and the simultaneous effort to mitigate the passage into the newly established Continuity.

An alternative typology for comic book revisionist techniques is offered by Wandtke in the introduction to his edited volume. He suggests four different sorts of revisionism: Additive, fundamental, conceptual and critical. "Additive revisionism" consists of minor modifications like a character's new ability ("Introduction" 15-16). "Fundamental revisionism" is distinct from the former in that the rewriting does not necessarily follow a logical path as "major changes which signal a departure from what has been presented before in a specific superhero narrative" are constitutive (17). This takes place, for instance, when a new writer takes over a title, when new storylines impinge on older ones or when new readings are promoted (18). The "conceptual revision" is an extension of the fundamental revision. It reworks not the individual character but the superhero as concept, e.g., the doubtful and angst-ridden superheroes of the 1960s (19-20). The last of these overlapping categories is called "critical revisionism" for it is the sort of rewriting triggered by academic as well as fan criticism (22-23). An illustrious example is superheroes' turn towards sanitized versions of themselves following the regulative effects of the Comics Code instigated by Wertham in 1954. Useful as this typology may be, it neither defines the retcon,

nor has it taken root in the essays that follow Wandtke's introduction to the volume or in critical comic book discourse at large.

Having considered the few scholarly attempts at outlining the retcon, let us now move to the more prolific field of the fan/recipient definition. In an article on the website of the British conservative newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* Sam Lieth defines retconning in a nutshell as "making retrospective Continuity alterations".[6] In the online *Double-Tongued Dictionary*, which "records undocumented or under-documented words from the fringes of English […] that are absent from, or are poorly covered in, mainstream dictionaries", to retcon is "to retroactively revise (a plot, storyline, character, event, history, etc.), usu. by reinterpreting past events, or by theorizing how the present would be different if past events had not happened or had happened differently" ("Retcon"). Likewise Eric Alfred Burns, creator and principal writer of the comics commentary website *Websnark*, who explains retcon as "taking the Continuity of [a] storyline and retroactively changing part of it so things didn't happen the way they happened". His phrasing draws attention to the fact that comic book storytellers quite often twist their tales so as to claim that events did not take place as they had hitherto been thought to have taken place, but that, actually, everything was quite different.

All of these definitions omit one of the chief characteristics of the retcon, namely that it mainly occurs in serialized works. It can be found in all types of serial storytelling: on television (in soap operas,[7] crime procedurals, medical dramas, sitcoms, etc.), in film (in sequels and prequels), on the radio (in audio plays), in fiction (in successive works by one author) and in other media like video games. Previous history only needs to be changed by means of retcon when there is no option to alter the respective facts before they see print. In narratives that are distributed only upon completion, action in the form of retcon is neither sensible nor necessitated, as Gordon Dahlquist points out referring to Victorian serialization: "Trollope made a point of completing his novels before they were serialized, so he didn't have to worry about revisions". For illustration's sake, let us imagine an author who has almost finished

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6 This is also the definition entered on *Wikipedia* under "Retroactive Continuity" (Wales/Sanger).

7 I disagree with Allen who says that "the critic attempting to 'read' an episode of a soap opera comes to a story already years in the telling, and one that will be *unaltered by anything occurring in that episode*. Put in semiotic terminology, US daytime soap operas trade an investment in syntagmatic determinacy (the eventual direction of the overall plot line) for one in paradigmatic complexity (how any particular event affects the complex network of character relationships)" ("Introduction" 7-8, emphasis S. H.). The established backstory of soap operas can – as in other serial narratives – most definitely be altered by significant events in a new installment. In fact, it is commonplace in soap operas for characters to suddenly come by previously unknown siblings, children or parents, or for the purportedly dead to reappear (cf. Mumford). It is noteworthy that Allen states just that a couple of pages later: "Events in a daytime soap are less determinant and irreversible than they are in other forms of narrative, and identity, indeed ontology itself, is more mutable" (19).

her novel when in the last chapter she decides to switch the hair color of her heroine from black to red. Needless to say, she will not make recourse to the retcon as long as she can make the necessary changes in the manuscript before it is printed. In serialized works, however, installments are published periodically and mostly before the end of the story is envisioned. Thus perpetuated in print or on celluloid, retrospective modifications can only be made via retcon. Hayward identifies the employment of retcons, albeit without referring to it by this name:

> Dramatic plot reversals retrospectively rewrite months of narrative, forcing audiences to acknowledge that all perspectives are partial, colored by place and context, and that we must seek knowledge of all points of view [i.e., all installments] before making judgments. Serials also share distinctive (and much derided) narrative tropes: sudden returns from the dead, doubles, long-lost relatives, marginal or grotesque characters, fatal illness, dramatic accidents, romantic triangles, grim secrets, dramatic character transformations. (4)

Of course, she concedes, all of these "narrative tropes" can also be located in non-serialized fiction, but they tend to emerge more often where retconning is undertaken (4).

❖ *The Retcon in Non-Serialized Works*

Hence serialization is, if not exactly a core prerequisite then at least a highly conducive factor for retroactive Continuity. The exceptions that warrant this cautious restriction are limited in number. Although they are rather uncommon, there are instances in which non-serialized works make use of retcon. Most of the time, the story is plotted in a way to lead the recipient astray only to revoke previously made and often implicit allegations by means of retcon. For instance, the 1999 film by M. Night Shyamalan *The Sixth Sense* offers a plot turn by means of disclosure which modifies everything that had taken place so far. The narrative is arranged to lead the viewer to believe that the protagonist, Dr. Malcolm Crowe, is an ordinary person of flesh and blood. It is only in one of the final scenes that he is revealed to have been killed in the opening scene and that all his exploits were those of a dead man unaware of his ontological state. This discovery provides a retcon for the entire narrative. Another example of a retcon in unserialized works is the story that ends with the

sentence '... and then s/he woke up'.[8] With this paragon of retcons, everything told prior to waking up is nullified and rendered inconsequential.[9]

While in these instances the retcon features as a narrative device that enables the plot to be inverted, causing significant stimulation and, hence, pleasure in the audience, one could also imagine cases in which retcons are employed for reasons of lack of time, financial stringency or ideology. In practice, a film maker may decide against the retake of earlier shot scenes, even if they have not aired yet just like a writer who is given the option to revise an earlier version in a later edition may chose not to. These motives also apply to serialized works, as the example of the *Wonder Woman* film adaptation (Cramer) illustrates. In the pilot of 1975, Wonder Woman's sister, who later constitutes an important element of her life, is not mentioned at all. Clearly, in the comic book source material, the addition of the sister in later episodes was a retcon. The question that remains unresolved here is why the filmmakers did not gloss over the retcon and include a hint of the sister in the pilot so as to make her subsequent introduction to the story more believable and inconspicuous as a retcon. At least two options propose themselves, one financial and one ideological: The filmmakers may have been required to await the success of the pilot before they were given the green light for the filming of the episodes following it or they may have wished to remain as close as possible to the structure of the comic book source material, which, surely, would have been appreciated by many comic book fans.

❖ *The Retcon as Prequel: Before Watchmen*

Yet another example of a retcon is the prequel, a neologism first used by Anthony Boucher in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1985 consisting of the prefix *pre-* and *-quel* from *sequel* ("Prequel"). It contributes to the overall shape of a narrative, but this is also true for the sequel. What renders the prequel so interesting for an analysis of retroactive Continuity is that it often alters storylines or introduces fresh material in a way that establishes new parameters for the conception of the narrative as a whole.

As counterpart to the sequel, whose release date and narrated events both come after an already existing work, the prequel is distributed in succession to a previously published work but its time setting is an earlier one. It complements a work by

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8   One example is Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, although Alice's adventures certainly lead the reader to assume that the events are taking place in a dream, which is also implied in the opening paragraph (17).

9   True to comic books' often surprising candor about their perceived flaws, the narrator of *Wonder Woman* #300 states that "*AN EMBARRASSING NUMBER OF FANTASY STORIES OVER THE YEARS HAVE ENDED WITH A LINE SUCH AS, 'BUT IT WAS MERELY A DREAM*" (37/1).

disclosing the facts, occurrences and circumstances that eventually led to the events detailed in the original work. Prequels are most often employed where the original plot has come to a more or less definitive end by, let's say, the demise of the protagonist. If an immensely popular narrative cannot be further appended to, producers turn to prequels as these offer an alternative way of continuing the narrative material's commercial exploitation. By returning to the distant past, it provides the backdrop, a 'how it all came to be'-factor that is appreciated by fans. It is often the case that by methodically inserting references, quotations and allusion, prequels capitalize on their audience's thorough knowledge of the original. Prequels carry subtitles like 'The Beginning', 'Origins' or 'Year One'[10] to indicate their anterior narrative placement even though they are the second or third of a title.

As a recent example, DC Comics announced a series of prequels titled *Before Watchmen* on 1 February 2012. On their website, they revealed that "seven inter-connected prequel mini-series will build on the foundation of the original WATCHMEN".

Fig. 91:
The Comedian on the covers of *Minutemen* #2 and *Ozymandias* #3.

Before Watchmen hit stores in early summer 2012 (fig. 91) and consists of the following prequels to Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen*:

- *Rorschach*, four issues, by Brian Azzarello and Lee Bermejo
- *Minutemen*, six issues, by writer/artist Darwyn Cooke
- *Comedian*, six issues, by Azzarello and J. G. Jones
- *Dr. Manhattan*, four issues, by J. Michael Straczynski and Adam Hughes
- *Nite Owl*, four issues, by Straczynski and Andy and Joe Kubert
- *Ozymandias*, six issues, by Len Wein and Jae Lee
- *Silk Spectre*, four issues, by Darwyn Cooke and Amanda Conner
- *Moloch*, two issues, by Straczynski and Eduardo Risso[11]

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10 e.g., *Batman Begins* (Nolan), *X-Men Origins*: *Wolferine* (Hood) or *Batman: Year One* (Miller/Mazzucchelli).

11 The one-shot *Dollar Bill* and the two-issue mini-series *Moloch* were not originally part of the *Before Watchmen* franchise. Instead, an epilogue which was later abandoned had been planned.

- *Dollar Bill,* one issue, by Wein and Steve Rude
- *Curse of the Crimson Corsair,* by Wein and John Higgins.

The *Curse of the Crimson Corsair* will run through the entire project while each week, a new issue of one of the leading characters of the original series will be published.

Moore renounced any involvement with DC Comics long ago so that his scathing reaction to the announcement of *Before Watchmen* comes as no surprise.[12] There is, however, prudent endorsement by Gibbons (Itzkoff). Yet the controversy extends beyond writers and artists: Fans disagree as well. The glut of comments on 3 February 2012 on DC Comics's *Facebook* site where the collection of prequels was officially announced ranges from "Great idea. Can't wait to see this" (Chris Cummins) and "Coolness!" (Sola Deshay) to "Down with this sort of thing" (Chris Brown) and "it's ok to essentially re-write the history of Moores [sic] universe? Sorry. Not buying it" (Matt Janosko). As is usually the case when Continuity-issues are involved, fans exhibit a strong tendency to quarrel. There is the camp of 'story purists' who believe that original narratives should not be meddled with in opposition to the supporters of 'anything goes' approving of the indeterminacy of a forever changeable tale, as well as every viewpoint in between.

This excursion has shown that the employment of retcons is neither restricted to serialized works nor to comic books. The existence of retcons in non-serialized works on the one hand, and in serialized works in other narrative forms like film, television and fiction on the other, prove that they are extremely useful narrative devices for the expansion of the storytelling canvas.

❖ *Characteristics of Retcons*

One of the aims of a retcon is that events are understood not so much as having changed than as having always existed according to the new Continuity.[13] In the mid-1980s, after exactly 50 years of piled-up DC Continuity, the mini-series *Crisis on Infinite Earths*[14] by writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Perez was advertised with the intriguing slogan

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12 He appears to be at ease when it comes to appropriating other writers' inventions, after all, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* recasts a number of literary characters, among them Jules Verne's Captain Nemo, Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Bram Stoker's Mina Harker and H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain, just to name a few. However, given that comic books are mostly collaboratively produced, not just when tasks like writing, drawing, inking, lettering, editing, etc. are involved, but also as characters or entire series are concerned, and given the fact that for the *Watchmen* protagonists, Moore had borrowed heavily from previously created Charlton Comics-characters, it seems a little presumptuous that he should object to the "'completely shameless'" (Moore in an interview with *New York Times*'s Dave Itzkoff) modification of his 'creations' by others.

13 cf. my discussion of Gaiman's "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" in 5.1.

14 cf. more details on *Crisis* in 4.1. and 4.2.

"Worlds will live. Worlds will die. And the universe will never be the same" (Wolfman n.p.). This seminal work is generally agreed to constitute the first attempt at a company-wide retcon.[15] Towards the end of *Crisis*, after many worlds have been annihilated and several heroes have died, Robin states in what amounts to a highly self-reflexive comment, that "THE OTHERS DIDN'T DIE … ON THIS EARTH THEY JUST NEVER WERE" (#11, February 1986, 22/5, fig. 92).

Fig. 92:
Robin and Batman explain it all in *Crisis on Infinite Earths*
(#11, February 1986, 22/5).

The massive retcon that *Crisis* constitutes thus refuses to acknowledge its shifting reality but professes its purportedly memory-free new validity. What the retcon attempts, therefore, is the establishment of a new intradiegetic ontology: It claims for the latest circumstances to always have been such and such a way.

In addition to the introduction of a new situation, the retcon also incorporates a sort of redeeming quality. This is to say that it is not the mere alteration that constitutes the retcon, but that it includes the absorption of the new narrative into established Continuity, i.e., the ironing out of the bumps and creases that the revision has caused. This is one of the major differences between the retcon and the reboot: Whereas the latter alters history without so much as a stab at an explanation, the retcon always tries to rationalize the change. Various ways exist by means of which a modification can be tried to be more or less seamlessly integrated into established Continuity. Perhaps the easiest way of accounting for mysterious (re-)appearances, baffling changes in character and inexplicable conflicts of chronology is to pronounce that the events previously depicted had happened in a parallel reality or that they were part of a dream. Eco in his article "The Myth of Superman", highlights the idiosyncratic case of Supergirl:

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15   It has also been called a reboot, though I would argue against that since measures were taken to reconcile the new version of the Multiverse, i.e., the Universe with established history. I will return to the reboot in connection with *Crisis* presently.

At a certain point, Supergirl appears on the scene. She is Superman's cousin, and she, too, escaped from the destruction of Krypton. All of the events concerning Superman are retold in one way or another in order to account for the presence of this new character (who has hitherto not been mentioned, because, it is explained, she has lived in disguise in a girls' school, awaiting puberty, at which time she could come out into the world; the narrator goes back in time to tell in how many and in which cases she, of whom nothing was said, participated during those many adventures where we saw Superman alone involved. (114)

By means of this fairly evident and often-discussed retcon – though it is never identified by this designation – the audience is lead to believe that Supergirl had been part of her cousin's exploits from the very beginning and that she had merely remained unseen for her own protection. This goes to show that the effort to account for an inexplicable situation is just as much a constituent of retcon as the breach in Continuity that engendered the mystery in the first place. If the later takes place without the former, we can speak of a glitch or error in Continuity.

Another distinct feature of the retcon is its highly subjective nature. Whether recipients discover retcons and how they are perceived depends heavily on the recipient. Readers who are familiar with Continuity will be able to unambiguously identify retcons as retrospective changes in the narrative. If a retcon remains unrecognized, it is either due to the audience's lack of Continuity knowledge or it is done with subtlety and extraordinary skill. If minor adjustments are deftly done so that they can be incorporated into Continuity without being noticed, the amendment is interpreted to have been a planned plot point all along. Similar to intertexts, some audiences may detect a retcon while it may remain invisible to others. Undoubtedly, turbulent stories with a multitude of plot twists are better suited for such an accommodation of retcons rather than orderly and predictable ones.

Also serial features with their extended run time are very well suited for the inclusion of retcons. Since they constitute turns in a narrative that were not envisaged from the beginning, they are, in fact most often found in series. It comes as no surprise that comic books are full of retcons since characters' histories are written and drawn by an assemblage of authors and artists who take over and pass on titles, sometimes within short periods of time. For this reason, they are hardly ever outlined past the immediate future. What is more, the superhero's past by virtue of its sometimes ancient history is often quite replete so that sometimes one of the only ways of telling an original tale is to employ a retcon. It is a fact that superheroes, for danger of consuming themselves, cannot venture into the future very far. To

compensate for this, they are equipped with an enormous past, which continues to inflate with each installment (Eco, "Innovation" 168-169).[16]

Yet even if many an author only engages with a character for a limited time, there may be cases in which drastic changes, like the death of a superhero, have induced writers to construct ideal conditions for prospective generations in the story they are telling. A story with little leeway will make retconning deceased superheroes back into life much harder than a story that contains hidden loopholes. Comparable to the ending of certain feature films which leave it open whether the protagonist has survived or not, flexible narratives allow for heroes to be brought back in a potential sequel. One such back door exit was installed by Marv Wolfman when he created *Crisis*: "*Did we have to kill the Barry Allen Flash?* We always liked Barry, so when we were asked to kill him we planted a secret plot device in the story that could bring him back if someone wanted to. Don't look for it; you won't find it" ("Introduction" 7). It goes without saying that these 'escape hatches' are commonly well-concealed in order to preserve suspense. In addition, most writers abhor the idea of a successor undoing their narrative which leads them to disguise their secret plot schemes quite deftly.

Such ultimately consequence-free demise is, of course, often the fabric jokes are made of. Petersen observes that "[t]he seemingly revolving door between this world and the afterlife has many incredulous fans mocking stories that concern a character's death" (171). It is not without reason that a *Wikipedia* entry on "Comic Book Death" exists. Neither does it come as a surprise that there is such an expression as "comic book death" which, implying not only a character's death but already including his or her return, illustrates the superhero death's reduced permanence and significance. Consequently, the resurrection of a superhero supposedly killed after a heroic battle is perhaps the most ridiculed and most hackneyed example of a retcon.

❖ *Different Types of Retcons*

Various forms of retcons exist. The most expansive discussion can be found in Burns's blog entry on *Websnark*. He suggests five types of retcons and categorizes them according to their impact on Continuity. Although Burns does not specify this, the borders of his categories are definitely to be conceived of as porous since the distinctive elements often allow for the classification of one retcon into more than one category.

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16   On that score, cf. my discussion of Eco's thoughts in 4.3.

The first kind of retcon identified by Burns, called the "Lost Tale", is the most straightforward one. Following it, it "turns out there was more to the story than we saw the first time around". Its aim is to insert certain plotlines without actively interfering with Continuity. Strictly speaking, this is not a retcon: It does not change Continuity, though it adds to it. If this, too, were called a retcon, every installment to any series that involves the accumulation of history would qualify as a retcon. In the understanding of most fans, however, adding to the backstory without altering Continuity does not meet the criteria for a retcon.

Category 2 is essentially a gentle form of retelling. It differs from 1 in that it gives new twists to already familiar narratives. In category 3, breaches in established Continuity are points of the agenda. It revises large parts of previous stories, often explaining that those accounts were somehow flawed or even "wrong". Burns calls this "story surgery". There is no discernible difference between Category 3 and Category 4 apart from the fact that the latter is often "mandated editorially". With most retcons, however, it is difficult for the audience to isolate the authority behind them.

Finally, what Burns pigeonholes as Category 5 is usually termed a 'reboot', as it is "[t]he retcon that completely starts everything over. [...] It starts from the very beginning, wiping clean all Continuity so new readers can jump right in". It would be a challenge to settle this as a form of retcon with the definition that has been laid down. The reason is this: The reboot does not endeavor to piece together the Continuity it has wreaked havoc with. While the reboot can be seen as the most extreme form of breaking with past storylines, it does not fulfill that second part of the bargain, namely the smoothing out of the bumps it has created. In opposition to the retcon, the reboot erases nearly all prior history, thus providing a pristine fundament for the writing of a new story. Needless to say, the demarcation line between retcon and reboot is an erratic one.[17] It remains to be analyzed, now, why retcons are installed in the first place.

❖ *Why Retcon?*

Retcons – or "storytelling pyrotechnics" ("Narrative Complexity" 36), as the phenomenon of the insertion of incisive turns in plot and characterization is called by Mittell – rewrite fictional history. Each new installment harbors potential to overthrow any previously erected Continuity, regardless of its seniority. With the retcon not being an absolutely reliable method of providing a completely sealed

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17 In order to further an understanding of the basic contrast between reboot and retcon, the reboot of the character the Flash will be briefly sketched in 5.2.

Continuity and harboring the inherent potential to confuse or alienate readers, one wonders why they are turned to at all. Kidder identifies both the retcon and the reboot as "corporate practices" which are employed by publishers to boost sales (66). Indeed, the ensuing analysis of the whys and wherefores of the retcon's utilization will show that, even though there certainly is artistic incentive, most motives are ultimately driven by the industry's efforts to sell comic books.

1) One of the chief motives for deploying retcons is, as should have become obvious, the *streamlining of Continuity*. Retcons enable storytellers to explain away Continuity errors within the fictional universe. On the one hand, inconsistencies may arise from the very retcons that then try to explain them away. On the other hand, contradictions may also have sprung from another source, like a reboot or negligent storytelling. To rationalize such ambiguities is perhaps the retcon's main purpose.

2) As we will see in the chapter on why reboots are deployed, keeping superheroes up-to-date is a strong incentive in the comic book trade. In a somewhat paradoxical vein, *comic book heroes should not change too much* lest readers feel they can no longer relate to them. In particular, if superheroes aged according to the laws of the real world, many of them would either be very old or dead at the time of writing. Though they could successfully be portrayed as being able to retain their superpowers, grey-haired and saggy-faced people in spandex can safely be assumed not to generate the most satisfactory of profits. As far as fans are willing to stretch their imagination to accommodate flying humanoid creatures in colorful costumes, it is hardly malleable enough to provide room for a 76-year-old Superman who looks the part. Blogger lucastds (sic) replying to Burns's post on *Websnark* summarizes publishers' options:

> [e]ither we trade in the Joker for a younger villian with less history (maybe a protege of the Joker, even), or we continue pretending that the Joker never ages, or that he is replaced through a retcon with a 'new' Joker with a different name and backstory.

Captain America provides a suitable example: Having already been in his twenties before he disappeared from the surface in the late 1940s, the granting of an explanation why he had not aged when he reappeared in the mid-1960s was imperative. The answer was a retcon that consisted of the disclosure that Captain America had been frozen in a block of ice which had curbed the aging process until he was unthawed in March 1964 (*The Avengers* #4).

The notion of the ageing superhero is treated in much detail in Eco's "The Myth of Superman".[18] With the example of Superman, Eco describes how any accomplishment that is made by any character within any comic book narrative, something has been added to her or his past and thus brought her or him closer to death. One solution to this narrative dilemma is to have the "narrator pick[...] up the strand of the event again and again, as if he had forgotten to say something and wanted to add details to what had already been said" (114). Even though Eco does not make use of the terms retcon here, what is described is most definitely a mechanism inherent in retconning.

3) Retcons can also be *a source of pleasure* if realized "diegetically consistent [...], narratively engaging, and emotionally honest to the characters and relationships" (Mittell, "Narrative Complexity" 36). Mittell employs examples from various television series in order to support his argument that

> audiences take pleasure not only in the diegetic twists but also in the exceptional storytelling techniques needed to pull off such machinations – we thrill both, at the stories being told and at the way in which their telling breaks [...] conventions.
> (36)

Eco makes an analogous argument with the introduction of the "double Model Reader", which is presupposed and created by every serial text ("Innovation" 174). This reader is a naïve and a smart reader at once: The former is victim to the writer's tactics and conceives of the work as chiefly semantically important. If we are naïve readers of series, "[w]e are satisfied because we find again what we had expected, but we do not attribute this happy result to the obviousness of the narrative structure, but to our own presumed capacities to make forecasts" (168). The smart reader, by contrast, is interested in the work as aesthetic product. He or she appreciates the author's choice of strategy that frustrates expectations, or "the way in which the same story is worked over to appear to be different" (174). Hence the smart reader is able to see the narrative gears at work and can thus observe the eventual production of the naïve reader.

What Eco and Mittell discuss in serial works can also be applied to retcons: Different kinds of recipients appreciate narrative gimmicks for different reasons. Naturally, the enjoyment of plot twists with consequences for Continuity relies to a large extent on the audience's ability to detect them, which implies, as mentioned earlier, that it is mostly the seasoned audience who derives enjoyment from deftly

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18 For more details, cf. 4.3.

employed Continuity shifts. Compared with this, inexperienced readers will not detect retcons in the first place as they lack Continuity knowledge and thus the ability to juxtapose new and old stories.

Then again, comic book literates are not only more likely to notice retcons, they are also more liable to take issue with them when poorly executed. New readers may neither perceive nor object to retcons, since they have not (yet) become involved, emotionally or economically. But fans tend to deprecate hackneyed retcons for their blunt modification of Continuity. What is more, retcons require a revision of the knowledge one has been amassing in what may be years or even decades of faithful comic book purchase and diligent comic book study. In Burns's words, a retcon "deliberately breaks the emotional investment [...] fans have in [the] core product". In spite of this, when a retcon is executed ingenuously and imaginatively, most fans marvel at the writer's and artist's prowess rather than fret about the possible implications for their Continuity competence. In addition, mastering an overview of retcons and reboots also sets Continuity-savvy people apart from non-fans.

4) Finally, there is hardly an artist or writer who is not compelled by the *prospect of designing a fresh character*. In the exceedingly convoluted habitat that is the DC Multiverse it has become gradually more challenging to institute new characters without upsetting established Continuity. There is the option of constructing heroes and worlds that operate outside of Continuity, but more often than not, for reasons expounded in the previous chapter, stories that connect to Continuity tend to attract more producers. Adding a new creation to a time-honored and expansive structure like DC Continuity is hardly feasible without deploying retcons that impart explanations for the newly introduced character's relationship to already familiar characters.[19]

A formidable example can be found in the origin story of Gaiman's *Sandman*. In 1987, following a longer exchange, DC editor Karen Berger asked Gaiman whether he would be interested in designing a new version of the DC character Sandman. The offer was premised on the fact that only the name be retained. He created Dream, or Morpheus of the Endless, "an immortal being of vast power" (Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 295) and inserted him into DC Continuity. The question was: How to answer for the fact that Morpheus had not surfaced in any DC comic book despite being such a powerful entity? Gaiman spun his creation's story so that Dream was captured by an occult spell in 1916 and remained imprisoned until 1988. This not only provided an explanation for Morpheus's absence but also served as a retcon for

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19   e.g., Supergirl's appearing on the DC stage as Superman's cousin in *Action Comics* #252 (May 1959). cf. Eco's account of the retcon that introduced her in "Myth" (114).

the first Sandman's motivation to take up crime-fighting. Because nature abhors a vacuum, it is explained in *Sandman* #1, Dodds is invested with some of Morpheus's spirit and feels compelled to become active as a nocturnal vigilante (fig. 93).

Fig. 93:
How Morpheus was retconned to have been the inspiration for Sandman I (*Sandman* #1, January 1989, 18/4-6).

It says in the first panel that "THE UNIVERSE KNOWS SOMEONE IS MISSING AND SLOWLY IT ATTEMPTS TO REPLACE HIM. WESLEY DODDS'S NIGHTMARES HAVE STOPPED SINCE HE STARTED GOING OUT AT NIGHT". With regard to publication date, Dodds featured 50 years before Morpheus but in an account that incorporates this retcon, Morpheus had already existed for aeons and served as Dodds's inspiration for his vigilante alias.[20]

While the outlining of an entirely novel character may signify the utmost freedom within the rather narrow confines of a publisher's universe, there is nonetheless considerable latitude also in the continuation of a superhero. Each writer is free to move within the boundaries dictated by Continuity and policed by the publisher and the fans. Comic book writers and artists have risen to fame in recent decades: Their storytelling and drawing styles are recognized by fans and some have carved out niches for themselves from which they pour forth their idiosyncratic techniques.[21] It is thus possible for writers and artists to imprint their personal mark on the superhero whose story they are assigned to and tell for a certain period of time. As a result, differing versions of characters are often referred to via the name of the writer or artist, e.g., the Sandman as he was seen by writer Roy Thomas is referred to as 'The Roy Thomas Sandman' just as the Sandman shaped by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon is called 'The Kirby and Simon Sandman'.

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20 For a more detailed discussion of histories that either demarcate or gloss over retcons, see the following chapter.
21 e.g., Miller's neo-noir style as best exemplified in his series *Sin City*.

We have seen that different issues come into effect with retcons, that there are different kinds of retcon and that they can be incorporated into narratives for various reasons, most of which are in the end connected to economic factors. All motivation not just for employing retcons, but also for employing them skillfully, can be traced back to one basic axiom: Storylines need to remain interesting in order to sell well.

❖ *Interim Conclusion*

We speak of retroactive Continuity when retrospective alterations to Continuity are made. By doing so, its affect upon previous history ranges from marginal to decisive. As any revision devoid of proper explanation will be severely criticized by fans, it is in the publisher's and writer's interest to render them as smooth and unobtrusive as possible. Hence retcons are seldom performed without appropriate validation. In concrete terms: Series sometimes introduce characters, plot turns, personality traits, etc. that are at odds with the history so far. The incongruence of the addition may not simply be accepted as a new twist of narrative – though sometimes also this is possible – but require an explanation. This is often done by justifying a development intradiegetically, meaning that changes of the narrative so far are explained within the story. Hence the very premise of the retcon is that it amends past Continuity: It retells what has already been conveyed through an earlier account. This presupposes seriality, though there are individual non-serialized works that make use of the retcon for the purpose of the story. Thus, retcon can be defined as comprising *the retelling of any element of a serialized story or character and his or her past or present, usually in the comic book medium, and the effort to account for the changes wrought*. This definition constitutes the bedrock for the following close-reading section of retconning in Gaiman's *Sandman*.

❖ *"If you bring me back to life, my death will have no meaning":*[22]
The Self-Reflexive Retcon in Sandman

Comic books often feature metafictional or even self-reflexive elements.[23] Already in the 1940s and 1950s, comic book characters were not above breaking the fourth wall or pointing to and ruminating about themselves. Also contemporary titles like *Animal Man* regularly feature fights against giant erasers or the direct address of the reader. It is quite rare, however, that an author candidly touches upon the topic of retroactive Continuity and the process of retconning. Gaiman's approach to retcons is at once

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22 Gilbert's reaction to Daniel's offer to recreate him in *Sandman* #70 (20/1).
23 For details, cf. 3.1.5.

traditional and exceptional. On the one hand, he applies retcons quite conventionally, namely in order to revise parts of a previously instituted history. The above explanations have shown how prior DC Continuity was amended so as to correspond to his new rendering of the Sandman character. On the other hand, he thematizes the industry's employment of retcons by drawing attention to them in a manner that is rather uncommon.

One example of the highly self-reflexive use of retcons in Gaiman's *Sandman* is the unmaking or remaking of characters. In "Collectors", Morpheus confronts one of his creations that has gone astray: The Corinthian, a "nightmare created to be the darkness, and the fear of darkness in every human heart" (*Sandman* #14, 33/4) in the guise of human but with mouths where his eyes should be, is accused of having misused his powers. Instead of allowing the errant being to return to the Dreaming to reassume his duties as a nightmare, Morpheus uncreates him (35/1-5). All that remains of the Corinthian is a tiny skull with three mouths replete with teeth.[24] While there are issues following *Sandman* #14 in which the Corinthian features as a character, they only show him before he was unmade – by means of analepsis.[25]

It is only in *Sandman* #57 that he is depicted *after* having been uncreated, namely when he is being reconstructed by Dream. Verbosely, which is very atypical for him, Morpheus explains to Matthew the Raven why he is making another Corinthian. The first version of the nightmare had been intended to be "the dark mirror of humanity" (13/6) but "the gulf between conception and execution is wide, and many things can happen on the way" (14/3), meaning that there had been an incongruence between idea and realization. Thus, to enhance and develop an earlier version is why the Corinthian is being re-created. This clearly smacks of retcon. After all, what retcons are used for is first and foremost the overhaul, revival and/or reparation of characters. With the incorporation of an un- and later recreated character into the *Sandman* diegesis, a highly self-reflexive factor is added to the series. Obviously, this practice draws attention not only to *Sandman* as a comic book, but to industry conventions as a whole.

Similar instances, can be found towards the end of the *Sandman* epic when characters like Abel, Mervin Pumpkinhead and Fiddler's Green alias Gilbert are first killed and later (mostly) restored to existence by the new dream king Daniel. Whereas Abel and Mervin seem to perceive of their renaissance as a mildly pleasant surprise and as imperative necessity respectively, Gilbert objects to being returned to life. During the very process of revivification, Gilbert says to Daniel: "IF YOU BRING ME BACK TO LIFE, MY DEATH WILL HAVE NO MEANING" (*Sandman* #70, 20/1). This reflects comic book practices. If a comic

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24 This detail was significant for the discussion of serial literacy in 4.4.
25 e.g., *Sandman* #44 or *Sandman* #47.

book issue, a series or the Multiverse as a whole is felt to benefit from the presence of a deceased character, he or she is simply revived.[26] Ensuing from the comic book trade custom that "[n]o eponymous character ever stays dead in comics" (Levitz, *75 Years*, 560), the death of a superhero is usually understood as a matter of preliminarity. Proctor even argues that

> [d]eath in the comic-book universe is rarely a permanent affair. Superman, Batman, Supergirl, the Flash and Captain America, to name a few, have all died and been miraculously resurrected through some quirk of ratiocination. Death and rebirth are common features of the superhero hyperdiegesis. ("Regeneration" 7)

Accordingly, a character's demise, while certainly a source of distress to the devoted reader, is by no means of the same permanent finality usually found in non-serial narrative. While this phenomenon regularly occasions caustic remarks by critics, it is embraced and cherished as one of the industry's trademark idiosyncracies by fans. Usually, it takes a more or less elaborate retcon to explain why the character is not dead despite all earlier indications to the contrary, Gaiman discards such practices in this case and opts for a solution that is as ingenuous as it is self-reflexive.

Sandman #56 contains yet another approach to and comment on the retcon. It is the last issue of the *Worlds' End* story arc that has been running for six months. In the opening chapter, we are introduced to Brant Tucker and Charlene Mooney, who, after having been involved in a car accident (*Sandman* #51, 1-4), find refuge in the Worlds' End Inn (6/6). The inn's residents are all stranded due to a storm that will transpire to be a reality shift occasioned by Dream's death. To pass the time, they take turns relating stories, which gives rise to the story arc's intricate hypodiegetic narrative structure.[27] By the end of the storm, Charlene decides to remain at the inn and Brant returns to his own reality. We learn that all occurrences in the *Worlds' End* story arc have been narrated by Brant to a barkeeper (*Sandman* #56, 23/1).[28] Most bizarrely, however, we discover that "THERE NEVER WAS A CHARLENE MOONEY" (23/4). All evidence to her ever having existed, along with all indications of the accident, their stay at the inn and the storytelling gatherings seem to have been erased. The analogy to comic book retcon is as striking as it is obvious: In order to reasonably account for her staying in the Dreaming, Gaiman has revised reality accordingly. Rather than

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26   To a lesser extent, this can also be observed in long-running television series, especially soap operas.

27   In fact, there are not only several hypodiegetic narratives that run, so to speak, parallely, but also further hypodiegetic levels that branch out from them. In the case of "Cerements" (*Sandman* #55), at least four diegetic levels can be identified: Gaiman narrates how Petrefax tells his story which includes one of its protagonists (Hermas) relate a story about his youth which in turn contains the telling of a tale by a character (Mistress Veltis).

28   This raises the number of diegetic levels in "Cerements", described above, to five.

conceiving of elaborate, difficult to believe justifications, he merely decided to take the path of the classic retcon where old Continuity is declared obsolete. The case is synonymous with Robin's statement towards the end of *Crisis*, "ON THIS EARTH THEY JUST NEVER WERE" (#11, 22/5).[29]

In addition to the improbability and complexity of this story arc, Gaiman concludes with the female barkeeper asking "HAS IT EVER OCCURRED TO YOU THAT MAYBE YOU *IMAGINED* THE WHOLE *THING?* THE *BAR?* THE *STORIES?* YOUR *WOMAN?*" (*Sandman* #56, 23/5). All of the things the barkeeper makes inquiries about are also part of the reality in which the questions are posed. This implies that even the very situation Brant – and, by extension, the audience – assumes to be his own authentic reality may actually derive from yet another ontological level. Brant believes that everything was a dream or a figment of his imagination, but this may also be true of the self-same state of affairs he views as his reality. By situating both, the Brant of his own narrative as well as the Brant who purportedly relates the story in equivalent contexts – the inn and the bar – Gaiman challenges our notions of narrative levels and storytellers' ontology over and over again.

As a last example of how Gaiman thematizes retcons within *Sandman*, let us consider "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" (*Sandman* #18). It tells the story of a kitten who encounters, by way of nocturnal wandering with fellow cats, a peripatetic Siamese apparently famous amongst her kind and hears her tale.[30] The Siamese used to be "IN THE THRALL OF HUMAN BEINGS, LIVING IN THEIR WORLD: *PLAYTHING, POSSESSION* AND *TOY*" (7/1). When she bore the litter of kittens of a homeless tomcat, her owner took them away and drowned them. Grief-striken, she had a dream that took her to the "CAT OF DREAMS", apparently the Sandman in the shape of what he looks like to felines (11/3). Upon explaining that she sought from him revelation and understanding, she learns that reality used to look differently:

> MANY, MANY SEASONS AGO, CATS TRULY RULED THIS WORLD. WE WERE LARGER THEN, AND THIS WHOLE WORLD WAS CREATED FOR OUR PLEASURE. WE ROAMED IT AS WE WOULD, TAKING WHAT WE WANTED. IN THOSE TIMES HUMANS WERE TINY CREATURES, NO LARGER THAN WE ARE NOW. AND THE HUMANS WOULD GROOM US, AND FEED US, AND PET US. [...] THEN A HUMAN AROSE AMONGST THEM. [...] AND THE HUMAN HAD A DREAM, AND AN INSPIRATION. AND IT WALKED AMONGST ITS FELLOWS, AND IT TOLD THEM ... *DREAM! DREAMS SHAPE* THE *WORLD*. DREAMS CREATE THE WORLD ANEW, *EVERY* NIGHT. [...] ONE NIGHT, ENOUGH OF THEM DREAMED. [...] AND THE NEXT DAY, THINGS CHANGED. HUMANS WERE HUGE, AND CATS WERE TINY. HUMANS WERE THE DOMINANT SPECIES.
> (15/5-18/4)

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29   cf. fig. 92.
30   As so often in Gaiman, the metafictional element is prevalent.

To the dreaming cat's question as to whether the humans had simply "DREAMED THE WORLD INTO THE FORM IT IS NOW?" (19/2), the Sandman replies "Not exactly. They dreamed the world so it ALWAYS WAS the way it is now, little one. There never WAS a world of high cat-ladies and cat-lords. They changed the universe from the beginning of all things, until the end of time" (19/2-3).

Again, we encounter the notion of the retconned reality as the only valid reality and of the previous condition as 'having never been'. The humans in this hypodiegetic narrative achieved what many a comics writer aims for: the perfect retcon. It completely alters Continuity but does not leave any trace of previous history because it is nullified. Things have not changed; they are argued to have been this way all along. The only evidence that remains is a tale, a legend, a myth, that is told by one cat as all others are ignorant of it, just like the humans were ignorant before they were invoked to alter their reality by dreaming of an alternative one.

These analyses of metafictional instances with regard to the retcon in *Sandman* have hopefully helped to shed some light on the retcon being made the subject of intradiegetic treatment in comic books. Also, the very premise of the retcon – a modification of previously established Continuity with the attempt to account for the changes effected – should also have been further clarified. Thematically, the following section will diverge from the retcon only slightly, as the other form of narrative gimmick sometimes employed in comic books – the reboot – will be at the center of attention.

5.2. "We are making Superman unique all over again":[31] The Reboot

In the foregoing chapter, the narrative device that modifies Continuity while attempting to smooth over the ripples the alteration has left was considered. This portion of the chapter will be dedicated to the retcon's sibling, the reboot. We will see that it is a more candid and uncompromising form of change, one that often requires if not an act of violence, then at least a resolution to upend Continuity, long-term editorial planning, creative forces and a willing audience. This portion of my thesis will first sketch the Flash as first example of a reboot before proceeding to outline a definition and catalogue the qualities and different varieties of reboots.

❖ *A History of the Reboot: The Flash*

The first reboot in comic book history took place in October 1956 (*Showcase* #4) when the Flash was invested with a new biography, costume and powers. Jay Garrick alias

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31 Editor Robert Greenberger in the letter pages of DC's *Who's Who* (#22, December 1986).

the Flash – so-called for his ability to run at incredible speed – had fought crime since January 1940 (Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 124). When superheroes' popularity declined steeply after World War II, the Flash's adventures were discontinued. Until Barry Allen, a police chemist, morphed into a new version of the Flash – Flash II – due to a chemical experiment gone awry.[32]

Fig. 94:
The first and the second Flash
(*Flash Comics* #1, January 1940, cover page and *Showcase* #4, October 1956, cover page).

The old-fashioned Golden Age Flash (fig. 94, left) was overhauled by being outfitted with a new costume, slightly different powers, a variation in name as well as a fresh origin story, resulting in the more modern Silver Age Flash (fig. 94, right). In 1956, however, these labels were not yet in use so that readers were simply confronted with the reboot of a character who was accepted without much vexation. The DC Universe was henceforth populated by two versions of the Flash.

More reboots followed during which dated or badly selling characters were equipped with a fresh look to make them more compelling for the audience. As time passed, major superheroes like Superman, Wonder Woman and Batman but also lesser characters like Hawkman and the Sandman were replicated and henceforth lived side-by-side in the DC Universe. With *The Flash* #123 (September 1961), aptly titled "The Flash of Two Worlds", the concept of the Multiverse was born. In 1985 the time had apparently come that the entire DC Universe was in need of a relaunch which took the form of the already-discussed *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. The 12-issue mini-series constituted the first reboot which concentrated on the entire DCU instead of on discrete individuals.

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32 By relating that Barry Allen was an avid comic book reader and admirer of Jay Garrick's (Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 124), Flash II's creators Robert Kanigher and Carmine Infantino even inserted a metafictional element.

Due to wide-ranging academic neglect, the debate surrounding the reboot predominantly takes place in fora and chats. However, as stated before, Proctor is one scholar who has been focusing his attention on the reboot. In his many publications on the subject, he variously defines the reboot as "a removal or nullification of history in order to 'begin again' from 'year one' without any requirement of canonical knowledge of previous incarnations" ("Ctl-Alt-Delete"); as "reset[ting] the hardware and, hopefully, restor[ing] the unit to optimum functionality" ("Regenerating" 5); and as "provid[ing] an opportunity to resuscitate, recycle and regenerate 'damaged' franchises by returning to recognizable and iconic product range rather than original, untested material" ("Beginning"). Let us use his circumscriptions as a basis to discuss the reboot's essential attributes.

According to the *OED*, the term *reboot* is derived from computing science where it denotes a restart, possibly following a "power failure or malfunction" ("Reboot"). With regard to comic books, it is used with a similar meaning, as Proctor shows. It involves a significant turn in the narrative's trajectory, one that results in a usually completely new product. Ideally, the "canonical knowledge of previous incarnations" mentioned by Proctor – my 'comic book literacy' – is no longer necessary after a reboot. Hence it constitutes a method of purging Continuity in order to make comic books more accessible to newcomers. This stands in contrast to Proctor's statement that the reboot resumes to function as "recognizable and iconic product" rather than "original, untested material". In my opinion, the reboot does the exact opposite: It abandons longstanding Continuity by creating a new one.[33] It can do so with regard to all Continuity, a series or an individual superhero. If merely a character is rebooted, it usually involves a new costume, origin story and/or changed superpowers. For example, when the Sandman underwent a reboot in 1941, his suit, fedora and gas mask were traded for a yellow-and-purple suit which was felt to be a more effective outfit.[34] Likewise Wonder Woman, who was furnished with a new wardrobe in the late 1960s (fig. 95).

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33 It is certainly possible that some reboots aim at restoring an earlier version, especially if a character is felt to have gone astray. For instance, the reboot *Batman Begins* by Christopher Nolan that signified a nullification of the narrative told by Schumacher's *Batman Forever* and *Batman and Robin* meant a return to "recognizable and iconic product" (Proctor, "Beginning"). It did so by reinstalling the dark and gritty Batman of the 1980s and invalidating what was generally conceived of as a grotesque version of the Batman.

34 For more details cf. 5.3.1. and 5.3.2.

Fig. 95:
The new and rejuvenated Wonder Woman (Cowsill et al. 131).

By reflecting current tastes and trends, her new look was assured to connect her to her readership and to make her more accessible.

Rebooting an entire series entails more changes. The very title of the series may be altered, its numbering may start anew, the very basics of the characters may be changed, as may their origin stories. The ultimate reboot, finally, is the Continuity reboot. It typically stretches across several if not most titles, is communicated as an 'event' and radically alters the history of the Uni- or Multiverse. Within DC's publications, a mini-series containing the word 'Crisis' is guaranteed to contain an event with far-reaching consequences, usually in the form of a reboot.[35]

The most recent reboot at DC is dubbed *The New 52*.[36] Although DC Comics takes care not to call it a reboot, several characters underwent a revamping process and some origin stories were refurbished.[37] In this emerging DC new Universe, or DCnU, the rise of the superhero is a contemporary phenomenon, not one of the late 1930s. Precipitating such massive changes in Continuity, this event received widespread media attention. For all its innovation in the fictional world, *The New 52* also caused alterations in the publishing format. Many titles were cancelled – among them *Action Comics*, running since 1938, whose last issue was numbered #904. The new titles all started at #1, fresh series were started so that the total of publications in the event added up to 52, and digital and analog versions are now simultaneously released.

All of these kinds of reboots differ from retcons most radically in that they usually do not attempt to fabricate any sort of connection between previous stories and the

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35   e.g., the original *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time!*, *Infinite Crisis*, and *Final Crisis*.
36   The number 52 has a tradition in DC Comics: From May 2006 to May 2007, a weekly (usually comic books appear on a monthly basis) comic book titled *52* was published that followed the conclusion of the seven-issue limited series *Infinite Crisis* (December 2005-June 2006), which in turn was the sequel to the 1985 *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. *52* reinstalled many of the worlds that had been obliterated in *Crisis*, thus heralding the rebirth of and the new age of the Multiverse (*Comics Encyclopedia* 306).
37   Superman, for instance, is rebooted in the reset of *Action Comics* by Morrison but Batman is merely subjected to some invigorating changes, some – like the removal of Batgirl – resulting in retcons, by Snyder.

new, reset version. While retcons endeavor to soften the passage from the previous to the latest Continuity within the narrative, reboots make no such efforts as they clearly take a lesser interest in sustaining Continuity. By not even attempting to conceal that matters are being revised, reboots are much more frank about their purpose and hence automatically have a more metafictional stance. "The regenerative aspects of the reboot are consciously invoked within the diegesis that signifies that 'change is happening'" (Proctor, "Beginning"). That said, history is full of counter-examples. In *Crisis*, the reboot consisted of the collapse of the chaotic mess called the Multiverse that had been piled up by degrees and had come to be incoherently structured. The entire point of *Crisis* was to explain the reduction of the multitude of Earths to one coherent one, as well as the disappearance of some characters.[38] Put differently, some characters as well as a panoply of Earths were retconned out of existence. What I mean to say is that when we take into account that the retcon was above defined as a narrative device that alters Continuity yet tries to justify changes, and that the reboot was described as a method of annulling a previous history that usually omitted the attempt to rationalize the break, it becomes clear that a reboot making explanatory gestures should actually be referred to as a retcon. However, earth-shattering breaks in Continuity are usually referred to as reboots, despite their involvement of some sort of explanation, however underemphasized. These endeavors to explain the reboot within the diegesis, demonstrate that the boundary separating the retcon and the reboot is a blurred one.

Finally, a word about the clean slate reboots are often claimed to provide. It has to be emphasized that it may be possible to eradicate Continuity, revamp history, facelift characters and restart series without justification, leaving fictional characters without recollection of earlier events. But a similar erasure of memory is not feasible with readers, especially veteran fans. The audience will remember earlier editions of Continuity, accounts of origin stories and versions of characters, even if these have been razed from the fictional universe's collective memory. Since characters exist not only on the comic book page but live in the minds of the audience, the conceit that pressing the reboot button completely and utterly obliterates former Continuity is rendered implausible.[39]

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38 e.g., the Barry Allen/Silver Age Flash, Supergirl, Aquagirl, Earth-2's Green Arrow and Earth-1's Wonder Woman.
39 cf. Proctor, "Beginning".

❖ *Why Reboot?*

Whether rebooting a character, title or entire Multiverse, the implication remains the same: The holistic reimagining of an existing entity entails considerable editorial and authorial labor. Furthermore, audiences, having a tendency to prefer everything connected to Continuity to stay as they are, are likely to object to massive narrative overhauls. This begs the question of *why reboot?*

1) *Gaining the favors of a new readership*[40] is one of the major reasons for which reboots are instated. Continuity often presents itself as an inscrutable web of piled-up details to the casual reader. Reboots help to clear the view and thus promote easy access into a long-running series. With regard to DC's most recent blanket reboot *The New 52*, editor-in-chief Bob Harras says in the promotional video on DC's homepage: "It is a great opportunity for readers who aren't familiar with the characters to jump on board, to come join the party that is the DC Universe". This may sound like a magnificent prospect for inexperienced readers looking for a way into comic books and, indeed, rebooted titles do facilitate entry. However, the multilayered structure that was accumulated over the years is far from being cleared completely. In addition to Continuity, comic books' seriality poses a further impediment for the newcomer's access. As for the experienced readership, established Continuity remains vivid in their minds, which, ideally for the publisher, allows them to derive pleasure from being able to compare their vast reservoir of Continuity knowledge to the rebooted edition. For this reason, the countless varieties of Continuity all remain available so as to form a narrative palimpsest.

2) As important as new readers may be for comic book publishers, the latter rely mainly on the spending power of their established readership. Consequently, comic book substance needs to *remain attractive* to long-term readers. To keep characters that have populated the DC Universe for 50, 60 or 70 years interesting, reboots are sometimes deemed necessary. In the promotional video to *The New 52*, writer Grant Morrison says that "things that may have seemed stale or boring are suddenly being revitalized and plugged in to feelings that people are having right now".

Characters' history, relationships, personality traits, costume design, etc. all would have to remain faithful to the way they were first conceived by the 'original' writer and artist if no extensive revisions were made use of. This would keep characters from adapting to the standards, values and fashions of the decades they

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40 That this is indeed one of the big publishing companies' aims is displayed by a *Facebook* status message from 29 November 2010 in which DC Comics posted the following question: "How about helping out new readers? Recommend good starting points, collections or graphic novels to your fellow DC Comics fans here". The post garnered 385 replies within 12 hours.

are bound to wander through by virtue of their protracted lives but also from being shaped by the multitude of writers and artists assigned to them during this time. It comes as no surprise, thus, that the collaborative factor that is default in the conception and production of comic books is invoked as "what keeps these fictional universes current and relevant"[41] (M. Hughes). Without accommodation, characters and their storylines would eventually become uninteresting, old fashioned and even embarrassing.[42] No readership can be expected to follow outdated characters who seem to cling stubbornly to their once-established and not-to-be-changed identities.

Apart from Batman, probably the most illustrative (and also most notorious) example of a character having undergone major shifts in attitude and motivation is Captain America. Created by Jack Kirby in 1941, this superhero was a decidedly patriotic persona. He accounted for large revenues in the 1940s and 1950s but came to be interpreted as jingoistic or even racist from the 1960s onward. An overhaul of Captain America's parochial attitude towards minorities was made and he was literally brought back to life as a far more liberal and open-minded hero (Wandtke, "Introduction" 17).

3) Another incentive to install reboots is the *sea change in audience profile* of the last twenty-five years. The target audience of the fledgling days of comic books was children and adolescents, mostly male. Comic books' expansion of scope –piloted by *Watchmen*, *TDKR*, *Sandman*, etc. and picked up by other publications – caused substantial demographic change in the readership. Since roughly the 1980s, mainstream comic books have also been picked up by women, people who have outgrown puberty, people who had not read comics before and people who had not read mainstream comic books before. Characters were adapted to this diversified audience by means of retcons.

Amongst other things, this analysis has hopefully illustrated that the reboot is mainly deployed in order to better access the comic book audience. Like the retcon, though a good deal more so, it is motivated by financial reasons. To once again quote Proctor: The reboot "can be an economic decision to re-invigorate, revitalise and, crucially, re-monetize the brand/property in order to extend its commercial life-span" ("Beginning").

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41   Quote by *The New 52*'s co-publishers Dan Didio and Jim Lee.
42   Most comic book fans will immediately point to the campy Batman of the 1960 television series when asked about awkward characters within Continuity.

❖ *Interim Conclusion*

The main objectives behind the resetting of any element of Continuity, most often a character, are to overhaul old fashioned elements and to provide entry-points for new readers. Thus, reboots are not only more economically motivated than retcons, they are also more straightforwardly so. It is for this reason that reboots are often felt to be done carelessly and taken offense with by fans. At least, the dedicated audience might argue, retcons value the reader sufficiently to fashion explanations for Continuity adjustments, however arbitrary they may seem. Others again might make the claim that the reboot is the more sincere variant due to its abolition of pretense. Whether the reboot's lack of effort to mitigate breaks in Continuity is valued for its frankness and integrity or disdained for its indifference, the fact remains that the retcon is decidedly more creative it its attempts of accommodation. Having established the distinct characteristics of retcons and reboots, it has to be stressed again that, quite often, the boundaries are unclear: Retcons may fail to provide sufficient bridges while reboots may try to connect to pre-established Continuity.

5.3. The Retconned Sandman: Versions of the Sandman in the DC Universe

The last chapter was dedicated to the outline of the Continuity-altering means of retcon and reboot. While principally defining characteristics of these narrative devices were discussed, an analysis of the methods used to trace them have so far been postponed. This chapter will show how the history of a comic book character like the Sandman can be structured following to two differing principles. They can relate comic book history what I call either *annotatively* or *synoptically*.

The *annotative* account traces the series' chronology with regard to publication dates. It narrates by commencing at the outset, with an entity's earliest appearance and follows its trajectory through real time. This means that retcons are recognized and drawn attention to as such. In this manner, publication date is relevant beyond its habitual correspondence to fictional time:[43] Annotative accounts can only be said to be chronological with reference to publication history. This is due to the fact that additions to any part of an entity's story can be made at any point in time, e.g., the *All-Star Squadron*, a group of superheroes active during WWII, was created in the early 1980s and retroactively affixed to DC Continuity as of September 1981. Since the annotative history follows real time, it remains stable even when retcons or

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43 Unless otherwise noted, the date of a comic book's publication is usually understood to be the date of the fictional universe.

reboots are thrust upon Continuity. In contrast to the synoptic account which can be utterly upended by merely one revolutionary episode, the only change necessary here is the appendage of the storyline in question to the catalogue of storylines so far. This kind of account pays heed to the hither and thither of characters, realities, etc. and thus skips back and forth in fictional time. In most cases, hence, the annotative account features a distinctly staccato style. Works like *DC Comics Year by Year*, dedicated to record all DC-related events chronologically and drawing attention to significant shifts within the diegesis as well as to extradiegetic details, are annotative accounts.

The *synoptic* account, by contrast, follows the chronology of the fictional universe. Characters' stories are told sequentially, following a story from its fictional beginning and absorbing all later alterations so as to form a chronological tale. Additions, retcons, reboots, etc. are swallowed by or sculpted into the overall narrative. This means that the fictional world's chronology is followed, heedless of the publication date and/or order of the individual issues. In the synoptic approach, retcons and reboots are considered not as later additions, but as part of the overall narrative. What it attempts, thus, is an encompassing view of everything that has taken place so far which it accomplishes by the diligent glossing over of retroactive modifications. By virtue of this effort, it constitutes a snapshot of one exact moment in time. Consequently, any of the installments added from this point forth, especially one containing a retcon or a reboot, may change matters, rendering the description so far inaccurate or wholly obsolete.[44] Any synoptic account could, in theory, be subjected to updates on a monthly, or even weekly basis, depending on the periodicity of the series. For instance, the synoptic history of the DC Multiverse needed to be completely rewritten following the mini-series *Crisis* as pivotal changes in Continuity were introduced. As for style, a synoptic history is a narrative, customarily distinguished by fluidity and seamlessness. Comics encyclopedias like the *DC Comics Encyclopedia* and the epilogue to *Crisis*, *History of the DC Universe* employ this standard (fig. 96).

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44 I have already commented on the idiosyncrasy of such histories not only being printed (digital archives, of course, would be much simpler to adjust) but further being designated as 'definitive' guides in 4.1.

	Annotative Account	**Synoptic Account**
Chronology	Real time/Publication date	Fictional time
Retcons and reboots	Remain identifiable	Dissolved by narrative
Stability	Revisions do not alter the overall account	Revisions require rewriting
Style	Staccato, bullet-point	Narrative
Sources	*DC Comics Year by Year; The Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe.*[45]	*The DC Comics Encyclopedia; The Vertigo Encyclopedia; History of the DC Universe; DC Wikia; Who's Who; The Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe.*

Fig. 96: The annotative and the synoptic account.

These two methods of narrating comic book history are available. Nearly all superhero biographies are synoptic, treating retcons and reboots as if they had been part of the storyline all along. To once again return to the case of Supergirl: Although it was only in 1959 that she was retconned into DC Continuity, her entry in the *DC Comics Encyclopedia* claims that she has been part of it since the dawn of time (Dougall, 338-339). While synoptic stories make for more lucid reading, the absorption of later modifications impede the discernment of retcons and reboots as their agency tends not to be acknowledged explicitly. Accordingly, it can be nearly impossible to retrace a character's 'original' story[46] without access to the original comic books.

Since the Sandman character is an exquisite example of how annotative and synoptic history can differ, both will be dwelt on in detail. Naturally, as publication history also hinges on content matters, the categories sometimes overlap. Whereas publication dates are much more directly relevant for the annotative account, but merely a matter of interest for the synoptic account, they are provided by means of footnotes in the latter. In order to distinguish the various incarnations of the Sandman, they will be numbered according to their chronological appearance in real time. The table below is intended to provide orientation among the different articulations of the Sandman (fig. 97).

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45 The online *Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe* is listed in both columns as it typically provides a synoptic account first (full sentences structured into paragraphs) and then proceeds to catalogue the comic books in which a character appeared in chronological order (bullet-points), pointing out flashback issues or installments where Continuity is doubtful or no longer applicable.

46 At one point during the writing of this thesis, the attempt was made to sketch the history of Supergirl, which is so clearly elucidated in Eco's "Myth of Superman" (114). Despite my best efforts, however, I have been unable to spell out an annotative account. Like most superheroes, Supergirl not only exists in at least half a dozen reincarnations (Kara Zor-El, Matrix, Supergirl Pre-Crisis, Linda Danvers, Power Girl, etc.), of which to extract the 'original' was already a challenge; she has also been part of the DC Universe since May 1959 (*Action Comics* #252), which means that innumerable stories have been told involving her. Most famously, she was killed in the Continuity-clearing *Crisis on Infinite Earths* but has since come back to life as further versions of herself. (It is subject to conjecture how Eco mobilized this information. I like to think that only an avid reader would be able to provide such an unambiguous characterization).

Sandman Version	Alter Ego	Costume	Weapons	Bodily Dimenions	Base of Operation
I	Wesley Dodds	suit, fedora, gas mask	gas gun, wirepoon gun	180 cm 78 kg	New York City
II	Wesley Dodds	yellow-and-purple leotard		175 cm 66 kg	New York City
III	Garrett Sanford	yellow-and-red leotard	supersonic whistle, sand (tranquilizer)	185 cm 80 kg	Dream Dimension
IV	Hector Hall	yellow-and-red leotard	supersonic whistle, sand (tranquilizer)	183 cm 83 kg	Dream Dimension
V	Dream, Morpheus	black garb, helm	sand, ruby (until #7)	not applicable	The Dreaming
VI	Daniel	white garb	sand	not applicable	The Dreaming
VII	Sanderson Hawkins	black trenchcoat, fedora, mask, gloves	gas weapons, wirepoon gun	180 cm 73 kg	New York City
VIII	Kieran Marshall	gas mask	gas gun	not specified	Afghanistan

Fig. 97: The different versions of the Sandman.

5.3.1. The Sandman: An Annotative Account

❖ *The Sandman's Origins in the Pulps of the Early Twentieth Century*

The first quarter of the twentieth century saw an upsurge of pulp novels on the North American literature market. The pulp heroes' names were more diversified than their appearance, equipment, motives and lifestyle, which is to say that there were certain archetypes which most characters seemed to be modeled after. This did not significantly change when comic books began to flourish in the mid-1930s: The heroes that populated comic book pages were often very similar to their pulp predecessors as well as to each other, at least in the incipient days of the comic book.

There is no consensus or certainty about this, but the blueprint after which the first Sandman – also known as the Golden Age Sandman, or Sandman I, as he will be referred to henceforth – was fashioned most likely was the Gray Seal, the Shadow and/or the Spider as each of these featured attributes that also formed part of Dodds's/Sandman I's appearance and character (Amash 5). All of them were wealthy playboys and undertook their escapades under the protective cloak of an assumed identity. In accordance with the latter two, the Sandman was not only enamored with a girl who functioned as his sidekick, he also wore "snap-brim hats and capes, fought racketeers and other criminals, and enjoyed shaky relationships with the law enforcement" (6). Like the Gray Seal, Sandman I left behind a calling card of sorts,

but whereas the former was in the habit of depositing a gray diamond paper seal, Sandman I left behind a handful of sand at the scene of his exploits (6).

Sandman I's weapon of choice may have been an emulation of the gas guns used by pulp mystery men like Li Shoon, Crimson Clown, the Black Star, the Green Hornet and Secret Agent X (6) but according to Peter Coogan, it derived from the Crimson Clown and the Black Star (28). The analogies to the pulps are not coincidental: One of the alleged creators of the Dodds/Sandman character, writer Gardner Fox, was a dedicated follower of the pulps and famous for his devotion and comprehensive knowledge of them (Amash 5). Although it was the artist Allen Bert Christman, working under the pseudonym of Larry Dean, who established the name and the essentials of Sandman I, Fox's involvement in the creation of the character was crucial (5).

There are two comic books which feature the very first appearance of the character named the Sandman: *New York World's Fair Comics* #1 and *Adventure Comics* #40. Though this may seem odd, it is a fact that it is not ultimately determined which of the two can legitimately claim the Sandman's very first manifestation (fig. 98).

Fig. 98:
The first appearance of the Sandman either in *Adventure Comics* #40 (July 1939) or *New York World's Fair Comics* #1[47] (April 1939).

New York World's Fair Comics #1 and *Adventure Comics* #40 came out in April 1939 and July 1939 respectively. The former was produced first, rendering *New York World's Fair Comics* #1 first in market appearance but second in production, which is the source of the discrepancy (Amash 5; Cowsill et al. 25; Gentner 62-63). Be that as it may, it can be safely concluded that the introduction of Dodds and his alter ego into the DC Universe took place in 1939.

Sandman I's adventures were then featured in the titles *All-Star Comics* and *Adventure Comics*, both of which assembled several independent stories that told the exploits of characters such as the Flash or Green Lantern. In *All-Star Comics* #3

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47 This is one of the examples of the actuality that can be found in series: Audiences living in the USA in the spring of 1939 most likely understood and appreciated the reference to current events like the World's Fair.

(Winter 1940/41) however, Fox brought the most important costumed characters – Atom, Sandman I, the Spectre, the Flash, Hawkman, Doctor Fate, Green Lantern and Hourman – together in one encompassing narrative. The advent of the Justice Society of America is not only of utmost relevance for the establishment of Continuity,[48] it also shaped the future of the hero here focused on, the first Sandman. Henceforth, Sandman I fought injustice alongside his contemporary superheroes as one of the founding members of the Justice Society of America.

❖ *Unleashing Change: The Sandman's First Overhauls as of the 1940s*

After approximately two years of crime-fighting in this style – in the meantime, Superman had made his debut as costumed superhero – Dodds's appearance was found to be old-fashioned. No wonder, when all around him, heavily muscled men in tight, colorful suits waged war against evil with their young sidekicks – Green Lantern had Doiby Dickles, Superman had Jimmy Olsen, Batman had Robin, etc. So storytellers devised for Dodds's girlfriend Dian Belmont to design a new costume[49] that was more compliant with his peers' and for Sanderson Hawkins, Belmont's nephew, to become Dodds's ward and crime-fighting associate as Sandy the Golden Boy. *Adventure Comics* #69 (December 1941) featured both the introduction of the new costume Belmont had invented for her vigilante boyfriend and the advancement of Sandy to the status of the Sandman's partner (Kooiman). Simultaneously, Dodds's height, weight and hair color shifted to complement his new appearance (fig. 99).[50] Thus was ushered in the era of Sandman II.

Height:	5'11" (later 5'9")
Weight:	172 lbs. (later 145 lbs.)
Eyes:	Brown
Hair:	Brown, later Grey

Fig. 99:
The issue in which the Sandman's first costume change was explained retroactively: *Star-Spangled Comics* #1 and Dodds variable data (*Unofficial Guide*).

It should not come as a surprise that in retrospective additions to the Sandman's tale one can find the occasional slip-up concerning his attire: To quote just one example,

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48 The details are discussed in 4.2.
49 Explanatory details were provided much later, in *All-Star Squadron* #18, February 1983 and *Star-Spangled* #1, May 1999, cf. fig. 99 left).
50 He went from 180 cm to 175 cm in height and from 78 kg to 66 kg in weight.

JSA: *Strange Adventures* #1, cover dated October 2004 but retroactively adding to the Sandman's story of spring 1945, mistakenly shows him wearing his old costume, i.e., trenchcoat and gas mask (Kooiman).

That Sandman I debuted before the superhero genre had been fully established, that he very much adhered to the formula of the pulp's mystery men and that he was later outfitted with standard superhero attire shows that DC considered superheroism best signaled by a tight, colorful costume[51] and that Sandman I needed updating (Coogan 28). The general consensus seems to be that what was intended as an upgrade of the original Sandman turned out to be an unappealing and bland replica of Batman (Evanier 304; J. Morrow 7). Despite the attempt to overhaul Sandman II's appearance in order to make him more seasonable, the character was largely overshadowed by the more potent, more colorful and less generic superheroes of his time.

In April 1942 (*Adventure Comics* #72), the faltering Sandman feature was passed from writer Mort Weisinger and artist Paul Norris to Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, both of whom worked on it as writers as well as artists.[52] As John Morrow writes in the 2009 introduction to *The Sandman by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby*, "[s]uddenly, the Sandman was back on the cover of ADVENTURE COMICS" (7). In fact, Sandman II was on the covers of all *Adventure Comics* from #74 (May 1942) through #102 (February 1946), with the single exception of #79, which featured the Martian Manhunter (8). This was not least because Simon and Kirby had previously been thrilling readers at Timely Comics, later to become Marvel Comics (Cowsill et al. 41).

As of July 1942 (*Adventure Comics* #76), Sandman II's costume was further enhanced – the mask was extended down to mid-chest and the cape that had occasionally been part of the trappings was lost (fig. 100) – rendering it entirely in sync with the "that era's gaudy sea of tights" (J. Morrow 7).

Fig. 100:
Sandman II and Sandy the Golden Boy
(*Adventure Comics* #90, February/March 1944, cover page).

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51 Indeed, Coogan argues that costume is "the strongest marker of the superhero genre" (28) and Reynolds agrees (26).
52 For a thorough catalogue of the work Simon and Kirby did on the Sandman II character, not merely as writers and artists, but also as cover artists, cf. *The Sandman by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby*.

Unfortunately, with Simon and Kirby both serving in World War II and with the downward surge in the popularity of superhero narratives after the war,[53] Sandman II was just one of many characters to slip into oblivion. Until October 1974, when *Justice Leage of America* #113 told the story that retroactively gave the reasons why the Sandman had disappeared for several decades. It was explained that Dodds had accidentally turned Sandy into a monster while experimenting with a silicoid gun. Dodds was depicted to have imprisoned Sandy in his basement to keep him from harming others while he terminated his career as Sandman II in order to find an antidote. "Overcome with guilt, Sandman had destroyed his purple and gold costume, which had constantly reminded him of Sandy's plight" (*DC Wikia*). These explanations were used to account for the sudden and prolonged absence of Sandman II as well as for his later resumption of his earlier costume in series such as the 1980's *All-Star Squadron* and the 1993-1999 *Sandman Mystery Theater*.

Luckily for the Sandman character, obscurity was only temporary. In winter 1974, he was resurrected for good by his co-creators Simon and Kirby. In what was originally intended as a one-shot but was extended to a six issue-series due to enormous demand,[54] the Sandman – often referred to as 'the Simon/Kirby-Sandman' – was rebooted in the eponymous comic book: Sandman III reemerged not exactly as he had been seen last, but as a modified version, complete with an altered, yellow-and-red costume, not one but two sidekicks in the form of Brute and Glob, as well as changed bodily dimensions.[55] He was also furnished with a particular task: The safekeeping of a kid named Jed's dreams (fig. 101).

Fig. 101:
The new appearance of the Sandman in his third incarnation
(*Sandman* #4, September 1975, cover page).

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53 The reasons behind this decline are expounded in 2.2.1.

54 *Sandman* #1 ended with a caption box asking "THERE ARE MILLIONS OF STORIES IN THE STRANGE UNEXPLAINED WORLD OF YOUR DREAM --- AND THE SANDMAN KNOWS ALL OF THEM. WOULD YOU LIKE TO READ MORE? WRITE! THE SANDMAN, NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS - 75 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA NEW YORK, N.Y. 10019" (19/9).

55 After having slimmed down in his change from Sandman I to Sandman II, he once again grew bigger during his transition from Sandman II to Sandman III: He went from 66 kg to 80 kg and from 175 cm to 185 cm (*Unofficial Guide*).

As of the second installment (May 1975), Michael Fleischer was appointed writer of the feature, with Ernie Chan and Jack Kirby doing the artwork for issues #2-3 and #4-6 respectively (*DC Wikia*). A concluding installment, i.e., #7 was planned for the mini-series, but the final adventure by Fleischer and Kirby in which Sandman III cooperates with Santa Clause was only published in March 1882 in *The Best of DC* #22.

Also in late 1974, *Justice League of America* #113 (October 1974) resumed Sandy's tale. The story revealed that his monstrous condition, which had prompted Dodds to keep him incarcerated for several decades, had abated and that he was capable of once again fighting evil alongside Sandman I. The unaccountability of the silicoid gun accident was employed to justify the fact that Sandy, despite having been detained for several decades, was still in his twenties when finally released.

In a 1981 addition to 1940s wartime comic book narrative,[56] Sandman I was a regular guest in the comic book *All-Star Squadron* as he called himself a member of the group as of #4 (December 1981). He fought crime in his original costume – suit and gasmask. Meanwhile, Sandman III was retroactively christened Dr. Garrett Sanford and his motivation for living in the Dream Dimension and fighting nightmares, which had been left open for speculation by Kirby and Simon, was retrospectively explained to have been a scientific experiment gone awry in February 1983 (*Wonder Woman* #300, 26-29). It is notable that Sandman III appeared only in nine comic books.[57]

Only a couple of years later, Thomas and various artists created a storyline that portrayed the apparent death of a superhero named Hector Hall alias the Silver Scarab (*Infinity Inc.* #44, November 1987, 24/7-25/1).[58] This became relevant half a year later when "AN *INTRUDER*, DRESSED IN SOME WEIRD RED-AND-GOLD OUTFIT" was seen standing over a superhero named Hippolyta Trevor,[59] Hall's girlfriend, while she slept (*Infinity Inc.* #49,

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56 The comic book series *All-Star Squadron* (#1, September 1981-#67, March 1987) is a formidable example of a large retcon, as it rewrites established DC history: Roy Thomas and his team arranged for the plot to take place during the World War II, even though it was written in the 1980s. Many a storyline from the 1940s and 1950s was revised by this series.

57 *Sandman* #1 (Winter 1974), *Sandman* #2 (April/May 1975), *Sandman* #3 (June/July 1975), *Sandman* #4 (August/September 1975), *Sandman* #5 (October/November 1975), *Sandman* #6 (December 1975/January 1976), *Best of DC* #22 (March 1982), *Wonder Woman* #300 (February 1983) and *Justice League of America Annual* #1 (1983).

58 Hall is a very interesting phenomenon as he has, so far, taken on three different superhero aliases: First that of the Silver Scarab, then that of the Sandman and most recently that of Doctor Fate. His example goes to show that comic book character logic functions in two ways: Several characters can share one superhero alias and one character can impersonate various superheroes. In a similarly complicated Continuity twist, Sandy the Golden Boy is shown wearing Sanford's Sandman costume when he is part of Superman's army in the out-of-Continuity tale *Kingdom Come*.

59 Lyta (Hippolyta Trevor Hall alias Fury II) has her history unfolded in the scant disguise of a portfolio being read out by her prospective employer in *Sandman* #57: "WELL, YOU WERE BORN SOMETIME AROUND 1960. MOTHER WAS THE GREEK-BORN SUPERHEROINE WHO CALLED HERSELF THE FURY. NO MENTION HERE OF WHO YOUR FATHER WAS. AS AN INFANT YOU WERE ENTRUSTED TO A VIRGINIAN COUPLE, THE TREVORS. THEY FORMALLY ADOPTED YOU ABOUT FIVE YEARS LATER, WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT THAT, WHEREEVER YOUR MOTHER HAD GONE, SHE WASN'T

April 1988, 5/3). This incarnation of the Sandman is commonly known as 'the Roy Thomas-Sandman'. Infinity Inc.'s collected efforts exposed the perpetrator to be the Sandman, yet when Sanford's name was mentioned, it was said that this was someone else (17/1-6). The puzzle was solved when the mysterious Sandman was captured and revealed to be no other than the late Hall (24-27, fig. 102).

Fig. 102:
Hall has replaced Sanford and become Sandman IV
(*Infinity Inc.* #49, April 1988, 27).

Why Hall substituted Sanford remains unclear. There is no certainty about this, but it appears as though Hall was thought to be better suited as Sandman. To account for Sanford's abrupt absence, in an analepsis, he was explained to have "GO[NE] BANANAS - AND JUST PLAIN LIE[D] DOWN AND DIE[D]" (*Infinity Inc.* #50, 10/1). The same flashback also explained that when Hall was killed, a curse had caused only his corporeal existence to be terminated while everything that had made up his person to be cast into the Dream Dimension until rescued by Brute and Glob (9/1-3, fig. 103).

COMING BACK. YOUR CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARD WAS A KID CALLED HECTOR HALL. YOU FOLLOWED HIM TO UCLA, THEN THE TWO OF YOU WORKED AS PART OF ONE OF THOSE HERO GROUPS FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS. YOU ALSO CALLED YOURSELF THE FURY. YOU WERE ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED. HECTOR HALL DIED IN 1987, LEAVING YOU PREGNANT. YOU MARRIED HIM IN EARLY 1988. [...] THEN YOU VANISHED FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS. REAPPEARED A FEW YEARS BACK, STILL PREGNANT. NO MORE HECTOR. HAD A BABY--" (February 1994, 19/7-20/3). Though elaborate, this hardly does justice to her intricate history, which involves a relation to the Furies, who will ultimately harness her to bring down Morpheus in Sandman, and several reincarnations she shared with her mother (*Wikia; Unofficial Guide; Who's Who*, October 1985, 28). As we will see, later in Gaiman's *Sandman*, Lyta will play a major role.

Fig. 103:
Hall becomes the Sandman IV (*Infinity Inc.* #50, May 1988, 9).

In the same episode, Hall asked Lyta to marry him and brought her to live with him in the Dream Dimension (43/5-11). Since Hall was a different person than Sanford, the Sandman underwent physical changes with regard to weight, height, hair and eye color but not as far as the costume was concerned.[60]

❖ *Enter Morpheus: The Late 1980s*

This is the point in the annotative history where Gaiman's Sandman enters the stage in *Sandman* #1 (January 1989). Sandman V is as far removed from any of the Sandmen I through IV as is possibly conceivable. In contrast to his chronological forerunners, Dream is an "immortal being of vast power; able to summon sleep and conjure dreams, from wistful fantasies to fevered nightmares" (Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 295). When a new character enters the DC Universe, justifications are usually in order as to his or her relative place within it. With minor characters, explanations are negligible but with an all-powerful being like Dream, it is unlikely that he could have existed for all of DC Comics's history and have gone unnoticed. Introducing him without accounting for his history or biographical details would most certainly have triggered innumerable raised eyebrows and deluges of skeptical letters by unconvinced readers. For this reason, Gaiman had to forge Dream's history around the already-existing tenets of DC Continuity. In consequence, *Sandman* #1 does not start with Morpheus's origin story, but with his return to the Dreaming. Gaiman's solution was to have Morpheus imprisoned from 10 June 1916,[61] i.e.,

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60 Hall was shorter (183 cm) but slightly heavier (83 kg) than Sanford and his eyes were blue and his hair blond, not brown (*Unofficial Guide*).

61 In a much-anticipated mini-series retcon, Gaiman will tell the tale of how "what had happened to Morpheus to allow him to be so easily captured in THE SANDMAN #1" (*Vertigo Comics*). This is, of course, nothing if not an elaborate retcon.

before DC history had commenced, until 14 September 1988, which was shortly before the publication date of the first *Sandman* issue (January 1989).

Useful as Morpheus's confinement was to explain why he had not featured in DC history thus far, it served yet another purpose: By means of a retcon, Morpheus is shown to have functioned as the inspiration for Dodds, or Sandman I (fig. 104).

Fig. 104:
How Morpheus was retroactively constituted as Dodds's motivation to become the first Sandman (*Sandman* #1, 18/4-6).

The nightmares Dodds had been experiencing receded since he decided to become Sandman I, it is explained, as the universe was seeking compensation for an absence. Morpheus, or rather, his forced absence, is specified as the inspiration for Sandman I's crime-fighting exploits. Even though Sandman V was created decades after Sandman I, this retrospective justification for Dodds's nightly pursuits demonstrates precisely what sort of modifications retcons are implemented for. Before this retcon, Dodds's motive for taking up crime was quoted to have been due to a feeling of his that "his life lacked direction" in issue #20 of DC's *Who's Who* line (October 1986, 3).

But Gaiman did not restrict his comic book's links to established DC Continuity to the connection between Sandman V and Sandman I. He also fabricated a number of other contiguities. Sandman II does not figure in Gaiman's narrative, but Sandmen III and IV do. They constitute successful attempts to render the relation between the comic book and Continuity as convincing, stringently logical and chronologically accurate as possible.

In an interview, Gaiman communicated his motivation for including not only earlier versions of the Sandman, but obscure characters in general:

I was also playing a game with myself, that I used occasionally to play, taking the stupidest characters, the worst, the characters that not only don't work, but never worked, and try to find out what is interesting about this character. How can I make this character work? What is the interesting bit? Let's start with this, and go forward. I played this game with the 70's Sandman. Terrible character, and all that, but there was something actually interesting about a character who lives in your dreams. That's where he lives. I was thinking that might make for an interesting graphic novel. Me and Dave doing a Sandman graphic novel. Throw out all the 70's continuity and do something else.
(Hibbs)

By "[t]hrow[ing] out all the 70's continuity", new events and circumstances concerning most of the Sandmen I through IV were retrospectively fabricated, that is, retconned so as to bear some correlation to Morpheus. This especially concerned facts related to questions of origin, decisive turns or demise, as the following section will illustrate.

The advent of Sandman V impinged on most of the previous Sandmen's motivations and histories, in fact it altered their very essence, especially in the case of Sandmen III and IV. In a massive retcon, the Dream Dimension as first introduced in the history of Sandman III (*Sandman* #1, Winter 1974) was invoked to be nothing but a fragment of the Dreaming, created by Brute and Glob inside Jed's mind in order to command their own Sandman. Hence Brute and Glob were stripped of their function as official sidekicks and recast as Dream's renegade nightmares with megalomaniac ambitions. Consequently, the Sandmen III and IV were explained to be merely puppets of Morpheus's minions (*Sandman* #12, January 1990). Just as Dodds was retconned to have been compelled to undertake crime-busting due to Dream's absence, Brute and Glob were now reasoned to have been the very source of Sanford's and Hall's activity as superheroes in the Dream Dimension. To convey the order in which things took place according to the new Continuity, Gaiman had Glob explain how he and Brute went about:

YOU WERE WAY OUT OF THE PICTURE, LORD. SO WE THOUGHT, HELL, YOU'D OBVIOUSLY BE AWAY FOR A WHILE, PERHAPS FOR A REAL *LONG* WHILE, SO WE COULD MAYBE MAKE OUR *OWN* DREAM KING. ONE *WE'D* BE RUNNING.../WE HID IN THE KID'S [Jed Walker's] DREAMS, AND WALLED IT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE DREAMING. THEN WE BEGAN TO MAKE A SANDMAN. FIRST MORTAL WE USED, GARRETT SANFORD, HE CRACKED UP, KILLED HIMSELF. COULDN'T TAKE THE STRAIN./WE THOUGHT, OKAY, NEXT TIME, WE GET SOMEONE WHO'S DEAD TO START WITH. / SO WE HOOKED THE BOZO [i.e., Hall] TOLD HIM HE WAS THE NEW SANDMAN, AND HE BROUGHT HIS WIFE ALONG.
(*Sandman* #12, 20/3-6).

Such intradiegetic enlightenment served to warm the reader to the new Continuity. Although Gaiman's changes apply mainly to Hall as Sandman IV, they are also of consequence for Sanford as Sandman III.

This retcon of large ontological consequence clearly diminishes the Sandmen III and IV's valor, achievement and sincerity and turns them into dummies: While Sandman IV as constructed by Simon and Kirby (*Sandman* #1, Winter 1974) and continued by Fleischer and Chan (*Sandman* #2, May 1975; #3, July 1975), and Fleischer and Kirby (*Sandman* #4, September 1975; #5, November 1975; #6, January 1976) was a traditional Silver Age hero, he was invested with a somewhat ludicrous air by Gaiman. Hall was no longer an imposing figure but had become the parody of a superhero. By retcon, Hall's status is altered from self-appointed and independent superhero functioning, speaking and appearing entirely within the vogue of the period, to manipulated puppet invested with a certain ridicule. This derision is first and foremost tangible when Brute says to Glob: "I'M BEGINNING TO THINK WE SHOULD HAVE STUCK WITH THE LAST ONE. HALL'S EVEN DUMBER THAN SANFORD WAS" (*Sandman* #12, 7/4). But the lampoon is also inherent in the manner in which Sandman IV, by way of costume also representing Sandman III, appears in Gaiman's *Sandman* (fig. 105):

Fig. 105: Encounter between two Sandmen (*Sandman* #12, 16/4 and 5).

The effusive, over-confident demeanor, the stilted speech pattern, the equipment as well as the facial expressions combine to outline a caricature. The "ULTRA-SONIC WHISTLE" here referred to by Hall is a device that would have meant no irony in the Silver Age context, but to the recipients of a quasi-alternative 1990s comic book like *Sandman,* such gadgets appeared ridiculous.

Concession needs to be made that if Sandman IV were to appear in a different context, like in a comic book dedicated to his exploits exclusively or in the company of superheroes of similar appearance and behavior, he most certainly would not make for such a garish exaggeration of a vigilante. But due to direct juxtaposition, Hall becomes the exact counterpart to Morpheus, a particularly solemn and dignified character with a dark, somber costume, a highly formal register and unimpeachable manners who exhibits not the slightest inclination towards the physical dashing back

and forth in traditional superhero fashion. In brief, it is the juxtaposition of Sandman IV to Sandman V that renders the former farcical.

Despite this repetition with an attitude, however, Gaiman did not alter the character beyond recognition. On the contrary, many details were carefully adopted from the 1970s and 1980s Sandmen so that costume, dwelling, affiliations and relatives, sidekicks and equipment remained basically unchanged, as fig. 106 illustrates.

Fig. 106: The 'original' Sandman IV in 1974 (*Sandman* #1, 3/1, left) and Gaiman's rendering of the same character (*Sandman* #12, 2/1, right).

Consequently, Hall's quasi-dead status was also adopted. He was among the characters whom Gaiman killed off in his series – alongside Element Girl – since it was "unseemly for the dead to walk the earth" (*Sandman* #12, 21/4). Lyta, at last freed from the suspended life she had been leading in the confines of the Dream Dimension, is set up to ultimately play a significant role in the conception of Sandman VI as well as Morpheus's death.

In Gaiman's *Sandman*, not only previously inconclusive or unexplained plot turns like Dodds commencing vigilantism, Sanford committing suicide, Hall becoming Sandman IV, etc. are accounted for by means of retcon. By the same modus operandi, loose plot threads are picked up and tied together to construct a coherent web of stories. A complete list of similar instances would be lengthy, as there are many points of contact between the *Sandman* series and DC Continuity, but not very conclusive. Hence a selection of retcons that are remarkable in their achievement, creativity or scope are offered instead:

In *Sandman* #12 (23/5), the baby fathered by Hall was claimed as his own by Sandman V as it had gestated in dreams. The modification of Continuity that recast the Dream Dimension in which Hector and Lyta Hall had lived in anticipation of their baby being born as a sealed-off part of the Dreaming set the stage for the child to one day become Morpheus's successor as ruler of the Dreaming. We meet Daniel again

as a toddler in *Sandman* #40 (August 1992) and as he has his mortality burnt away by Puck and Loki in *Sandman* #59 (April 1994).

As of *Sandman* #10 (November 1989), Jed, the kid whose dreams were frequented and protected by Sandmen III and IV, accrued an existence and family outside of his dreams. In the Kirby and Simon stories, Jed was little more than a vessel to whom the nightmares the Sandmen fought were ascribed. In the Kirby/Simon *Sandman* #5 (November 1975), Jed's grandfather, whom he lived with, died and he was taken in by his cruel aunt Clarice and uncle Barnaby. Under the tyrannical control of his uncle, aunt and cousins, Jed led a cinderella life doing chores. His story would probably have frayed out here, had it not been adopted by Gaiman. By retcon, Jed was invested with more significance as a human being when his sufferings and escapist dreams commenced to express more about him. Jed was endowed with a last name (Walker) and a loving family (sister Rose, grandmother Unity Kinkaid) who embark to free him from the cellar in which he was kept in the *Doll's House* story arc (*Sandman* #10-16, November 1989-June 1990).

Sandman #5 (May 1989) revealed that J'onn J'onzz alias the Martian Manhunter, who had been a member of the Justice League for decades, worshipped Dream as a deity. In keeping with the Martians's "innate fear of fire" (*DC Wikia*), J'onn's perception of "LORD L'ZORIL" (14/4) was as a free-floating black skull amidst flames.

"Façade" (*Sandman* #20, October 1990) was entirely dedicated to Element Girl alias Urania Blackwell, the obscure DC character who was created in 1967 but never experienced overwhelming popularity with readers.[62] Conceptionalized to complement Metamorpho, she made a few appearances in the late 1960s[63] before vanishing from the surface. Gaiman once referred to her as the "old DC character called Element Girl, who nobody remembers any more" (Hibbs). She was resurrected approximately 30 years later, in one of the graphic short stories by Gaiman in which she was finally relieved from her miserable and isolated existence. "Rainie", as Element Girl was christened in *Sandman*, was redrafted as a solitary creature whose indestructibility stood in the way of her giving up her dismal and unhappy life. When Element Girl was first created, she was, of course, far from being the lonesome, agoraphobic, suicidal wretch she had become according to Gaiman. The manner in which she was depicted, however, seems if not the most probable, then at least a very plausible result of her accidental transformation. Gaiman repeated her origin story to two effects: On the one hand, the unknowledgeable reader was familiarized with the historicity of the character; on the other hand, the involuntary

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62 cf. also my analysis of this short story's relevance for comic book literacy in 4.4.
63 e.g., *Metamorpho* #10 (February 1967); *Metamorpho* #17 (April 1968), etc.

transformation of human to superhero was credited with having laid the ground for her current despair.

These are just some of the retcons Gaiman employed to root his series within the larger structure of DC Continuity. By addition and retcon, the comic book developments of the 1940s through to the 1980s were recalled and embedded into the new, official history of the Sandman character so that between 1989 and 1996, the story of the different Sandman characters was mainly propelled forward by Gaiman's comic book.

❖ *The Return of Sandman I: The 1990s*

In *Sandman* #49 (May 1993, 5/1-2), following a long and baffling odyssey with his sister Delirium in the *Brief Lives* story arc (*Sandman* #41-49, September 1992-May 1993), Morpheus provided the head of his son Orpheus with the final rest he had been seeking since November 1991 (*Sandman Special: The Song of Orpheus*). In this retelling of the Greek myth, Orpheus – the son of the muse Calliope[64] and Morpheus – lost his wife to the underworld before being decapitated by the Bacchante. Dream refused to mercy-kill his son's head despite his pleadings. This will become important later on.

Following his mentioning in Gaiman's series, Sandman I alias Dodds was officially resurrected from narrative limbo to once again become active as a vigiliante when Vertigo launched the monthly title *Sandman Mystery Theatre* (#1-70, April 1993-February 1999). Written by Matt Wagner and Steven T. Seagle and principally drawn by Guy Davis, the series' distinguishing attribute was its neo-noir style and evocation of the early twentieth-century pulp narrative that the character had originally sprung from. It retroactively added to Sandman I's crime-fighting and private history, expanding on Belmont's role not only as Dodds's lover but also as his sidekick.[65] It further toned down the colors used during the 1940s, replaced the cape by a trenchcoat and introduced the round spectacles that he displayed from then on (fig. 107).

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64 Featured as protagonist in *Sandman* #17 (July 1990).
65 e.g., #45-48, December 1996-March 1997 and #69, January 1999.
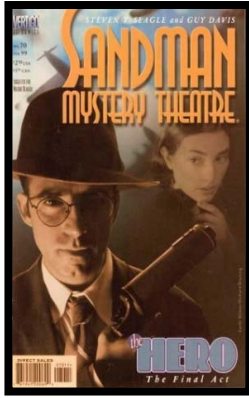
Fig. 107:
Dodds with spectacles in the final episode of *Sandman Mystery Theatre* #70 (February 1999, cover page).
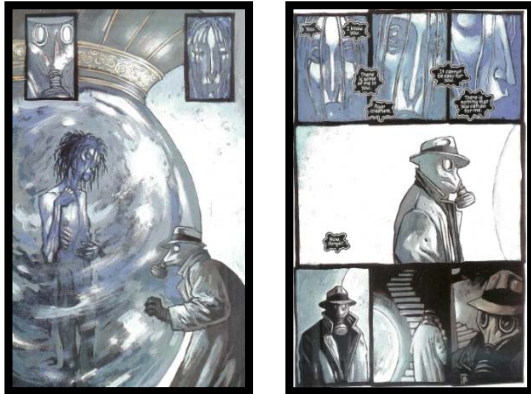

Fig. 108:
Morpheus and Dodds meet for the first and only time.

In addition, a most significant retcon was instituted in the one-shot *Sandman Midnight Theatre* (Gaiman/Wagner/Christiansen) featuring Dodds as Sandman I in an adventure that supposedly took place in 1939 (July 1995, n.p.). By depicting an encounter between Dream and Dodds (fig. 1082), it further corroborated the retroactively induced premise that Dream had been Dodds's inspiration, which had been instituted in the opening pages of the *Sandman* series in 1989. The only face-to-face meeting between these two versions of the Sandman took place in one of Dodds's dreams that were haunted by the imprisoned Morpheus and verified that some of Dream's essence had indeed seeped into Dodds during the former's captivity. According to the new Continuity, "[t]here is some of [Morpheus] in [Dodds]" (*Sandman Midnight Theatre,* n.p.) causing Dodds to experience a moment of epiphany in which he realizes "WHY HE GOES OUT AT NIGHT".

The same one-shot comic book also included scenes with Morpheus as focalizer that are visually heavily reminiscent of the scenes in *Sandman* #1 that depicted Dreams's point of view (fig. 109).

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Fig. 109:
Morpheus's view from the glass dome in which he is kept captive in *Sandman* #1 (12) and in *Sandman Midnight Theatre* (n.p).

The panels depict Dream's vision as if through a fish-eye lens which, of course, is what his view must have been like from the convex glass dome that contained him. By adopting this distinct perspective and elaborating on Dream's experiences while in confinement, *Sandman Midnight Theatre* represented not only a continuation but also an affirmation of the narrative so far.

July 1995 also saw the death of Morpheus in *Sandman* #69 (10/3-5) and Daniel's rise to king of the Dreaming as Sandman VI (22).[66] At Dream's funeral in *Sandman* #72 (November 1995), Dodds made a cameo appearance and spoke about meeting "THE DEAD GENTLEMAN" only once, referring to the encounter specified above (11/1, cf. fig. 110).
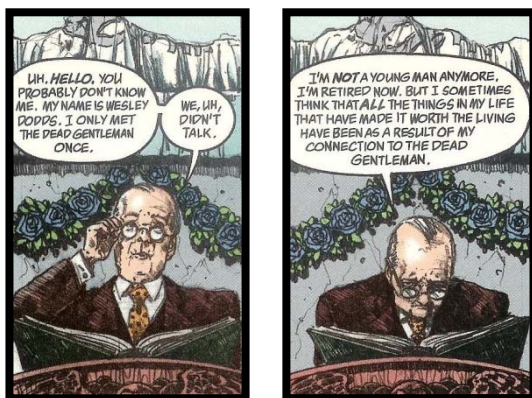
Fig. 110:
Dodds eulogizes Dream at his wake (*Sandman* #72, November 1995, 11/1 and 3).

The series had been conceived as a finite one from the very beginning and so ended after nearly a decade with issue #75 (March 1996). This, however, was not the end of the Sandman.

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66 Sandman V's wake constituted half the story arc of *The Wake* (#70-75, August 1995-March 1996).

Between 1993 and 2007, a flood of *Sandman* spin-offs were published by DC Comics.[67] Some focused on the protagonist (*Sandman Mystery Theatre*) and his siblings (e.g., *Endless Nights*; *Destiny: A Chronicle of Deaths Foretold*; *Death: The High Cost of Living*[68]), others pursued the lives of minor characters (e.g., *Petrefax*; *The Corinthian*, *The Furies*, etc.) or places (*The Dreaming*). What most of these had in common was that they made more or less pertinent additions[69] to Continuity and thus contributed to Sandman mythology.

The penultimate Sandman – Daniel alias Dream – has made several appearances in *Sandman* spin-off titles and other series connected to the DC Universe,[70] sometimes even on the cover (fig. 111).
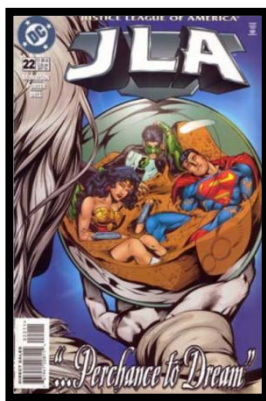
Fig. 111:
Daniel on the cover of *JLA* #22 (September 1998).

In a story that substantiated his character as distinctly more compassionate than his predecessor, Daniel offered asylum to the souls of his parents Lyta and Hector Hall, who would otherwise have been trapped in hell due to some hideous machinations by the Spectre (*JSA* #80, February 2006, n.p.).
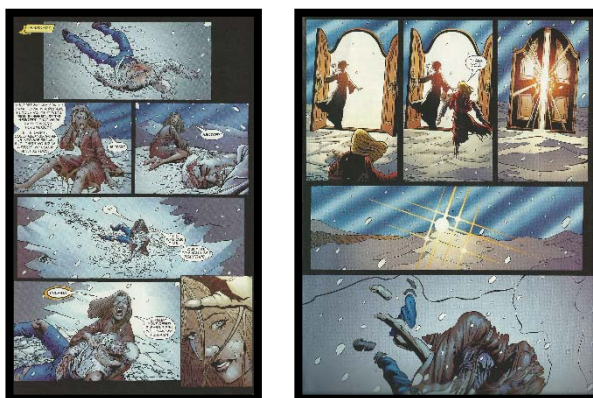

Fig. 112:
Daniel saves his parents from hell by inviting them to the Dreaming
(*JSA* #80, February 2006, n.p.).

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67 These are too numerous to be quoted here. cf. Appendix B: *Sandman* Spin-Off Series.
68 The *Vertigo Encyclopedia* gives detailed accounts of Death, Destiny and their spin-offs (54-57).
69 Of course, the further development of Merv Pumpkinhead's tale will never achieve the same impact as any expansion of Death's story.
70 e.g., *JLA* #23 (October 1998), *JSA* #59 (May 2004) and *JSA* #63 (September 2004).

Their bodies were last seen laying dead in the snow (fig. 112).

In the interim, Sandy the Golden Boy – no longer a boy yet not aged according to the laws of nature – changed his name to Sand and Dodds committed suicide in order to prevent vital information from falling into the wrong hands (*Justice Society of America* #1, August 1999). With Dodds's history of being a founding member of the JSA, it was only fitting that several new and original JSA members were present during his funeral (fig. 113).

Fig. 113:
Dodds's funeral
(*JSA* #1, August 1999).

In the time that followed, Sand proved to be affiliated with several different superhero groups and made appearances first and foremost in the title *JSA*. In #64 (October 2004), the society had to fight for their team-mate Sand on two fronts: beneath the Earth and in the the Dreaming where Brute and Glob were manipulating his mind. This was especially trying for fellow team mate Doctor Fate, i.e., the former Sandman IV and Fury, i.e., Lyta Hall since they have a firsthand experience of the wicked powers of these nightmares. In the end, Sand's body and mind were unified once more and he returned to his colleagues (*Unofficial Guide*). Some installments also retroactively changed his history. In *JSA* #68-72 (February-June 2005), for example, he time traveled to 1951 to interact with Sandman I.

It was only in 2007, however, that Sand officially became the Sandman's penultimate incarnation. The cover of the first issue of a new title, *Justice Society of America* #1, written by Geoff Johns, with art by Dale Eaglesham and published in February 2007, visually reproduced the cover of *All Star Comics* #3, the episode that first introduced the Justice Society of America in the winter of 1941/1942 (fig. 114).

Fig. 114:
The Justice Society of America in the 1940s and in the aughts (*All Star Comics* #3, Winter 1940/1941, cover page and *Justice Society of America* #1, February 2007, cover page).

Both comic books depicted a round table that was surrounded by the group's members. Just as Sandman I once sat on the left with his arm resting on the table, Sanderson Hawkins now sat as Sandman VII. As of this issue, he wore a black trench coat, a fedora, gloves and a mask that was a composite of the masks worn by himself, Sand and the Sandmen I and V (fig. 115).

Fig. 115:
Sanderson Hawkins as Sandman VII (*DC Wikia*).

Another – and so far last – addition to the lineup of Sandmen was made in 2007 by way of the five-issue series *Sandman Mystery Theatre: Sleep of Reason*. In #1 (February 2007), it was revealed that a part of Morpheus's essence that had inhabited Dodds's living existence and had mainly streamed into Sand upon Dodds's demise had also been attracted to war photographer Kieran Marshall. When he was ambushed by terrorists, Morpheus's/Dodds's legacy took possession of him by virtue of the gas mask and gas gun Dodds had left behind during an earlier visit to Afghanistan (fig. 116). Thus invested with hitherto unknown powers, Marshall managed to free himself.

Fig. 116:
Marshall with the gas gun left behind by Sandman I (*Sandman Mystery Theatre: Sleep of Reason* #1, February 2007, n.p.).

Therefore, it came that Marshall was the eighth, and to date last, reincarnation of the Sandman character.

At the time of writing, the most recent addition to the Sandman myth has not yet been published: A yet-untitled mini-series with art by J. H. Williams III is intended to fill a gap in Gaiman's *Sandman* tale. 25 years after the release of the first installment, in what represents a classic retcon, Gaiman returns to Morpheus's tale in order to expand on "[t]he story of what had happened to Morpheus to allow him to be so easily captured in THE SANDMAN #1, and why he was returned from far away, exhausted beyond imagining, and dressed for war" (*Vertigo Comics*). Though the *Sandman* tale, like any serial comic book, bears the potential to be expanded and modified with every new issue published, there appears to be no new Sandman in concoction at the moment.

5.3.2. The Sandman: A Synoptic Account

❖ *Before the Beginning of Time: Dream of the Endless*

Before the dawn of time, the Endless were born: Destiny, Death, Dream, Desire and Despair as twins, Destruction, and Delight, who later became Delirium. They are a family of extraordinarily powerful beings who are not superheroes or gods[71] but "servants of the living": They "exist because they [the living] know, deep in their hearts, that [they] exist. When the last living thing has left this universe, then [their] task will be done" (*Sandman* #16, 23/2-3). Billions of years ago, Dream, or Morpheus, came into existence when the first sentient creature capable of dreaming materialized in the universe (*DC Wikia*).

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71 Both editions of the *DC Comics Encyclopedia* (2006 and 2009) list Dream's status as "Hero" (265 and 295), whereas those of his siblings who received a separate entry, Destiny and Death, are stated as "[i]napplicable" (90/87 and 100/97), which seems to be the more adequate denomination.

He is the ruler of the Dreaming, the place where all dreams are made and dreamt and "where all minds are linked" (Dougall, *DC Comics Encyclopedia* 115).

His appearance is dependent on the beholder: He is feline if the focalizer is a cat[72] and if the viewer considers him a deity, he is depicted as an entity of flames.[73] He remains recognizable, however, by virtue of his idiosyncratic speech bubble,[74] his serious disposition and his garb which remains black with a few minor alterations throughout the series. Morpheus lives through eternity watching over humanity as it dreams, visits other planes, delights and despairs when a new love enters and leaves his life (Alianora, Nada, Calliope) and builds up a friendship with Hob Gadling, the man who refuses to die and becomes Dream's only quasi-mortal friend. He also interacts with his son Orpheus, William Shakespeare, Lady Johanna Constantine, who is an ancestor of John's, and Joshua Norton, the only emperor of the United States before he is erroneously ensnared by Roderick Burgess and his Order of the Ancient Mysteries on 10 June 1916.

Although the intention had been to capture Death, Roderick, and after his demise his son Alex, refused to release Dream. Altogether, Morpheus was to remain imprisoned for 72 years. In order to compensate for Dream's absence, that is, the vacuum which nature abhors[75] and which needed to be filled, "[t]he universe, in an attempt to right itself, put a bit of Dream's soul into Wesley Dodds" (*DC Wikia*), a rich financier based in New York City. From his glass prison, Morpheus's spirit visited Dodds's dreams in 1939, telling him "[t]here is some of me in you" (*Sandman Midnight Theatre*, July 1995, n.p., fig. 117) and causing him to experience prophetic nightmares that were only allayed once he became active as a crime-fighter who "PUTS EVIL PEOPLE TO SLEEP WITH GAS, THEN SPRINKLES SAND ON THEM" (*Sandman* #1, January 1989, 18/5).
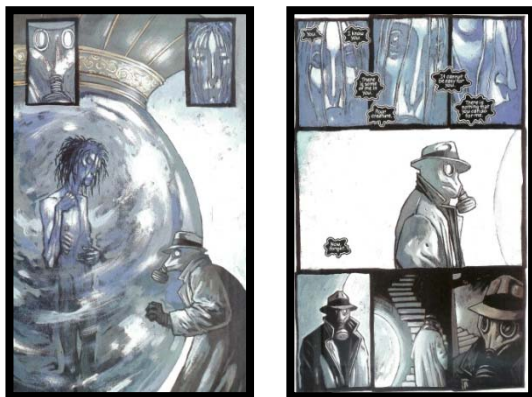

Fig. 117:
Morpheus and Dodds meet for the first and only time (*Sandman Midnight Theatre*, July 1995, n.p.).

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72 e.g., Sandman #18.
73 e.g., Sandman #5.
74 cf. 3.1.5. for my investigation into speech bubbles.
75 In the proposal for the *Sandman* series sent to Berger, the editor of DC's imprint Vertigo in 1987, Gaiman quotes Baruch Spinoza: "In his [Morpheus's] absence, Nature (which abhors a vacuum), created other Sandmen" (published in *The Absolute Sandman*, Vol. 1, 547).

Following these dreams, "WESLEY DODDS KNOWS EVERYTHING, FOR A MOMENT, IN HIS DREAM. KNOWS WHO HE IS. KNOWS WHO THE OLD MAN KEEPS IMPRISONED BENEATH HIS HOUSE. KNOWS WHO WESLEY DODDS IS, AND WHY HE GOES OUT AT NIGHT". In this way, Morpheus's absence created the first vigilante Sandman.

❖ *Dodds, Sanford and Hall: Sandmen I-IV*

Dodds alias Sandman I was a rather traditional crime-fighter clad in a business suit that is orange in the beginning but became green as of the fifth installment, a purple cape, a fedora and gloves. He was equipped with a gas mask that not only protected him from the gas he discharged from his gas gun to sedate delinquents, but also constituted the source of his power (*Sandman Mystery Theatre*: *Sleep of Reason* I-V, February-June 2007, especially IV, May 2007, fig. 118).
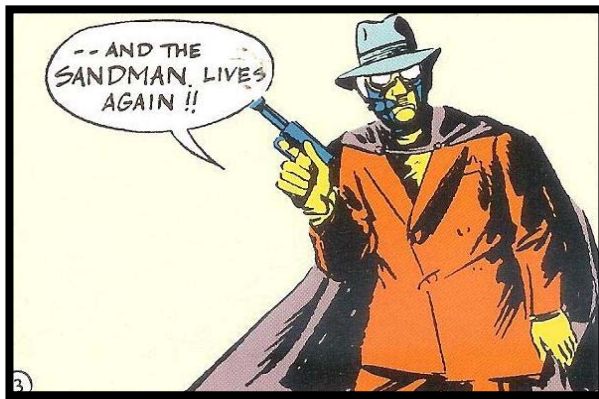

Fig. 118:
Gardner Fox and Allen Bert Christman's Sandman (*New York World's Fair Comics* #1, April 1939, 3/7).

After bringing criminals to justice and restoring order, he left "THE CALLING CARD OF THE SANDMAN - TINY GRAINS OF SAND" (*Adventure Comics* #45, December 1939, in *The Golden Age Sandman*, 61/3). His first major case consisted of capturing a criminal called the Tarantula (*Adventure Comics* #40, July 1939).

In 1941, Dodds's partner Belmont, who sometimes functioned as his sidekick[76] and who was aware of his secret existence as a masked vigilante (*Sandman Mystery Theater* #21, December 1994-#24, March 1995) was killed by a Nazi agent while wearing the original costume (*All-Star Squadron* #18, February 1983; *Who's Who*, October 1986, 3).[77] In her honor, Dodds donned the new yellow and purple costume she had designed for Sandman I, lost the gas mask, miraculously hardened his muscles, changed his girth and height, and altered his eye color from brown to grey (*Adventure Comics* #69, December 1941; *Star-Spangled* #1, May 1999; *Unofficial*

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76   e.g., *Adventure Comics* #56, November 1940 or *Sandman Mystery Theater* #45-48, December 1996-March 1997 and #69, January 1999.
77   She was retconned into life a short while later (Kooiman).

Guide). Furthermore, he received help in the shape of Sandy Hawkins, the Golden Boy, who was Belmont's nephew and Dodds's ward (*Adventure Comics* #69, December 1941, fig. 119). This latter version was referred to as Sandman II.

Fig. 119:
Sandy as Dodds's sidekick (*Adventure Comics* #72, March 1942, 1 (excerpt) and *World's Finest* #6, Summer 1942, 1).

Thus freshly attired and supported, Dodds continued his exploits against crime in the established fashion. In 1947, he experimented with new weapon technology and inadvertently turned Sandy into a silicone-based monster (*Justice League of America* #113, October 1947). For many decades, Sandy was kept imprisoned and sedated while Dodds searched for a treatment. This task and his impaired health due to a heart attack lead Sandman II to retire from most superhero activity. He seldom went out adventuring and if he did, he donned his original costume. He had thrown out his yellow-and-purple costume because it grievously reminded him of Sandy's accident. The Sandman character only resurfaced in 1974 (*Sandman* #1, winter 1974), in a different costume and in altered contexts (fig. 120).
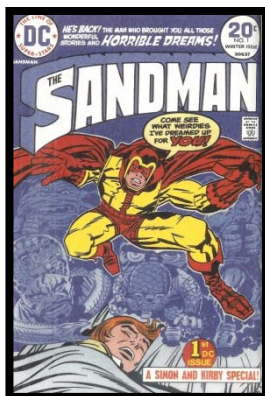

Fig. 120:
Sanford as Sandman III (*Sandman* #1, 1974, cover page).

As Sandman III, Sanford dressed in a costume quite similar to that of Sandman II, namely an intensely colored, tight-fitting suit with a cape, though this time, it was yellow and red. Apart from the costume, however, Sandman III did not have much in common with his predecessor. He believed himself to have been assigned to "*OPERATION SANDMAN*" (*Wonder Woman* #300, February 1983, 27/3), during which he became trapped in the Dream Dimension. Left with no other choice, as he was henceforth only able to exit the

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Dream Dimension for one hour per day, he made the Dream Dome his base of operation (*Who's Who*, October 1986, 4). He chose the name Sandman "AFTER BOTH THE PROJECT AND AN OLD *COMIC BOOK HERO*" (*Wonder Woman* #300, 29/4).

His goal was not so much justice in general but first and foremost the safekeeping of dreamers, which presupposed mainly the aversion of nightmares. People's dreams were monitored by means of the Universal Dream Monitor, which was the equivalent of any surveillance apparatus consisting of countless screens displaying different angles and locations. As for equipment, Sandman III no longer had a gas gun, but a hypnosonic or supersonic whistle that functioned at once as a summons for help by his sidekicks Brute and Glob and as a sedative. Also, the sand he carried with him was no longer employed as a calling card, but as a tranquilizer as well.

In reality, however, Brute and Glob, two nightmares gone astray upon Morpheus's entrapment, had created a corner in Jed's dreams – Sanford's Dream Dimension – where they lived and where they brought Sanford with the goal to create a surrogate king for the Dreaming whom they would be in charge of (*Sandman* #11, 24/1, December 1989; #12, January 1990, 20/3). Even though Sandman III was relatively free within the Dream Dimension, Brute and Glob were the ones to pull the strings. The loneliness of the Dream Dimension and the lack of companionship wreaked havoc on Sanford's mind and slowly corroded his sanity until he ended up committing suicide in May 1988 (*Infinity Inc.* #50, May 1988).

Also in 1974, Sandy Hawkins escaped from the prison Dodds had created to contain his monstrous form only to be discovered not to be evil after all (*Justice League of America* #113, October 1974). Thus, the captive state that he had been in for several decades was finally terminated. Finding himself unaged and in the possession of superpowers far exceeding those of his mentor, Sandy resumed crime-fighting alongside Sandman I, the Justice League of America and the Justice Society of America (*DC Comics Presents* #47, July 1982) and adopted the name Sand (*Justice Society of America* #1, August 1999, fig. 121).

Fig. 121:
Sanderson Hawkins, formerly Sandy the Golden Boy, as Sand
(*Justice Society of America* #1, August 1999, 3/2).

With Dream still in captivity and with Brute and Glob resolved in their aspiration to create a Sandman of their own in order to seize control of the Dream realm, Hall was recruited as Sandman IV. He had been fighting crime as the Silver Scarab and a member of Infinity Inc. when he was killed (*Infinity Inc.* #42, September 1987). As the son of Hawkman I alias Carter Hall and Shiera Sanders Hall alias Hawkgirl I, Hall inherited their power of reincarnation so that when he died, it was only his corporeal existence that was terminated while his consciousness wandered into the Dream Dimension. There, he drifted through the Dream Stream until picked up by Brute and Glob (*Infinity Inc.* #50, May 1988, 9/5). Following in Sanford's footsteps, Hall became the unsuspecting hostage while they played the role of his sidekicks (*Unofficial Guide*). The context of the previous Sandman remained in place: Hall was allowed to leave the confines of the Dream Dimension for an hour per day, which he spent visiting his pregnant girlfriend[78] Hippolyta Hall, also called Lyta, before they married and he brought her into his realm (*Infinity Inc.* #50, May 1988, 43/5-11). He also sported precisely the same costume as Sandman III, which he wore until Morpheus finally freed himself from captivity in 1988.

❖ *Morpheus's Return: Sandmen V-VII*

Hungry, naked and weak due to the lack of his tools – his ruby, his pouch of sand and his helm – Dream, or Sandman V, embarked on a mission to retrieve them. Once they were either destroyed or restored to his possession, he sought to rebuild his realm, the Dreaming, which had become utterly dilapidated during his absence. To achieve this, he reclaimed the dreams and nightmares that had departed without permission, Brute and Glob amongst them.

In early 1990 – Lyta had been pregnant for at least two years (cf. #12, 4/2) – Sandman V breached the barriers his two sordid subjects had erected in Jed's mind. When Hall as Sandman IV asked them about the creature who was in the process of entering, they lied to him: "IT'S CALLED, *UH …/ THE NIGHTMARE MONSTER*. IT'S A TERRIBLE CREATURE FROM THE, *UH*, UNDER - *ID*. ONE OF YOUR HEREDITARY FOES" (*Sandman* #12, January 1990, 2/2-3). Morpheus called Hall "LITTLE GHOST" (14/6) upon encountering him for the first time and broke into peals of laughter (one of the rare cases in which he overtly exhibits joy) when the latter claimed to be the Sandman. Once the blockade in Jed's psyche was dismantled, several significant things took place: Jed fled from his malicious relatives' house, Brute and Glob were punished and Hall was restored to his rightful place among the dead. But most importantly, Dream set Lyta free after informing her that the child

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78 Her pregnancy had been revealed *in Infinity Inc.* #42, September 1987.

she had been carrying had gestated in dreams and thus belonged to him: "One day I will come for it" (23/5). With this, the history of Hall as Sandman IV was terminated.

Morpheus went on to free a former lover from Hell, to seek out his brother Destruction who had forsaken his realm and to attract the fury of the Kindly Ones by giving the head of his son Orpheus his much-desired final rest. By killing his own blood, Dream subjected himself to the devastation of his realm, many of its inhabitants and, in the end, himself. Lyta, distraught by her son Daniel's disappearance, was manipulated by the Furies as a weapon against Morpheus (Kooiman). Although concepts cannot die, personifications of them can, and so Sandman V last appeared when he was taken by his sister, Death (*Sandman* #69, July 1995, 10-11). During his wake, a retired Dodds stated: "I ONLY MET THE DEAD GENTLEMAN ONCE. WE, UH, DIDN'T TALK. […] SOMETIMES I THINK THAT *ALL* THE THINGS IN MY LIFE THAT HAVE MADE IT WORTH THE LIVING HAVE BEEN AS A RESULT OF MY CONNECTION TO THE DEAD GENTLEMAN" (*Sandman* #72, November 1995, 11/1 and 3, fig. 122).
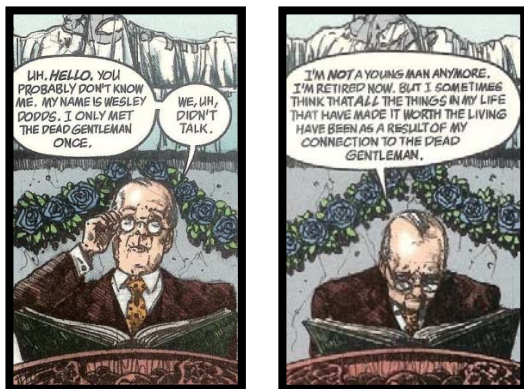

Fig. 122:
Dodds eulogizes Dream at his wake
(*Sandman* #72, November 1995, 11/1 and 3).

Though he seems not to be fully aware of this, Dodds's motivation to become a crime-fighter had indeed been due to a connection to the deceased: Some of Dream's essence had seeped into Dodds, invoking him to compensate for his involuntary absence. The singular time Dodds refers to was when Morpheus was a prisoner of Burgess's and visited Dodds's dream in 1939 (*Sandman Midnight Theatre*, September 1995, n.p.).

Meanwhile, Daniel Hall, son of Hector and Lyta Hall, was born.[79] After being kidnapped by trickster figures Puck and Loki (*Sandman* #57, February 1994), he had his mortality burned away in a fire (*Sandman* #59, April 1994). Unfettered by all things human, Daniel supplanted Morpheus, becoming Sandman VI and the second Dream of the Endless (*Sandman* #69, July 1995). Even though Daniel is Morpheus's reincarnation and resembles him in most aspects, the differences are also striking, especially to the devoted reader who has come to know Morpheus's character in much

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79   Though not depicted in the Sandman pages, it must have taken place somewhere between *Sandman* #12, January 1990 and *Sandman* #22, January 1991.

detail. The first Dream was of a brooding, stubborn and sometimes rather cruel disposition, while Daniel emergeed as a more gentle yet solemn personality. As far as their physical appearance is concerned, they would look identical were it not for the inversion of color: While Morpheus was garbed in black, Daniel's apparel is entirely white, which is mirrored in their speech bubbles (fig. 123).

Fig. 123:
Morpheus as Sandman V and Daniel as Sandman VI (*Sandman* #68, May 1995, 4/2, left and *Sandman* #69, June 1995, 22/6, right).

Ever since he entered the Dreaming, Daniel as Sandman VI has not left it.

In 1997, Dodds, after suffering several more heart attacks, spent his time travelling with his companion Belmont in Afghanistan where she was kidnapped (*Sandman Mystery Theatre: Sleep of Reason* I, February 2007). Donning the gas mask, Sandman I was able to save Belmont (*Sandman Mystery Theatre: Sleep of Reason* IV, May 2007). Before they left Jalalabad, Dodds bid his mask – and by extension Morpheus – goodbye:

> I KNOW I NEVER CHOSE MY PATH. THE DREAMS CHOSE FOR *ME*. AND I KNOW THEY WEREN'T *MY* DREAMS. THEY WERE *YOURS*. I COULD HAVE BEEN *A* *THOUSAND* THINGS BUT YOU MADE ME A *NIGHTMARE* […] BUT I WANTED TO THANK YOU ONCE BEFORE I DIE -- WHOEVER YOU ARE. WHATEVER YOU ARE. 'WHEN A WORLD CAN TURN THIS DARK … SOMETIMES IT TAKES *A* *NIGHTMARE* TO KEEP THE DREAMS *ALIVE'*.
> (*Sandman Mystery Theatre: Sleep of Reason* V, June 2007, n.p.)

The mask that had made up at least a part of the Sandman's power was left behind in a chest in Jalalabad. Following Belmont's cancer death in 1997 (*JSA Secret Files*

and Origins #1, August 1999), Sandman I tried to fight the villain Mordru in 1999 in Tibet, but realized that he had become too fragile and, making a prophetic dream relating his impending death come true, threw himself off a cliff to prevent his adversary from learning valuable information from him (*JSA Secret Files and Origins* #1, August 1999). Before he died, he said that the part of Morpheus's essence which, in 1939, had inspired him to become Sandman I was now reassigned to Sand, who henceforth experienced the same prophetic dreams Dodds used to have.

In 2004, after saving the world from a devastating earthquake, Sand's consciousness was cast into that fragment of the Dreaming that was once the habitat of Sandmen III and IV and temporarily assumed the role of the late Sanford until he was rescued by his fellow JSA-members (*JSA* #1, May 2003). Shortly after this event, Sand adopted a costume similar to that of the very first Sandman – he now wore a mask that was a combination of his old mask, Sandman I's gas mask, and Dream's helmet – and thus became Sandman VII (*Justice Society of America* #1, February 2007).

In the Afghanistan of 2007, war reporter Kieran Marshall found himself a captive of terrorists. Using an antique gas gun and gas mask he discovered in a chest (cf. fig. 124, panel 2) and acting upon a strange power – Dodds's legacy – that seized him, he was able to escape (*Sandman Mystery Theatre*: *Sleep of Reason* I, February 2007). He used the mask's power to take revenge on the war-lord Masad.

Fig. 124:
Dodds (Sandman I) in panel 1 and Marshall (Sandman VII) in panel 4 wearing the powerful Sandman mask
(*Sandman Mystery Theatre*: *Sleep of Reason* III, April 2007, n.p.).

By donning the mask, Marshall took up the role of Sandman VIII (fig. 124, panel 4). What became of the mask following Marshall's return home is left unresolved.

By sketching these two accounts of the Sandman characters, I hope to have illustrated the differences in the possible approaches to comic book history. Due to the various reconceptualizations the Sandman was subjected to, he represents an excellent example of the retconned superhero. As we have seen, he not only underwent physical and costume adaptation to better suit his time and, he also experienced what it meant

to slide in and out of obscurity and have his alter ago changed. Most significantly, however, the Sandman character was also subjected to a complete overhaul where only his name as retained. Such extensive overhaul is rather exceptional, even within the singularly indulgent fictional world of comic books.

5.4.   The Remediated Comic Book Character

In serialized US-American mainstream comic books, superheroes are not only subjected to reboots and retcons in the manner outlined above. They also undergo substantial modifications by way of remediation. In this "process of appropriation" (Bolter/Grusin, "Remediation" 314),[80] comic book characters are usurped by other media which seek to further exploit already successful material. This "'repurposing': to take a 'property' from one medium and re-use it in another" often entails a redefinition of the source material (339). This means that stories are stretched out, events developed, sometimes beyond recognition, and identities are multiplied. As a result, Superman may come to exist as yet another version of the traditionally dutiful Man of Steel, as a pastiched/parodied reincarnation and as an insecure teenager, as the following example will illustrate.

In the academic discourse, it is usually Superman's example that is adduced to illustrate how superhero identity is expanded.[81] Already in the 1950s and 1960s, additions made to the myth surrounding Superman – details about his alter ego, his workplace and his ability to fly – originated not always in his ancestral medium of the comic book but in radio serials and television series. Indeed, his very origin and his superpowers underwent considerable change coming from media other than the one that had introduced him. Quite recently, the man of steel was present in at least three media – beside the comic book: In cinema (Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns* of 2006), in advertisement (American Express short film commercials starring "The Adventures of Seinfeld and Superman" of 2003/2004),[82] and in television (the *Smallville* series ran from 2001-2011, Gough/Millar). Each of these was home to a version of Superman that differed not only from the comic book model but also from other reincarnations. For instance: The television series departs from all established

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80   Even though Jay David Bolder and Richard Grusin focus on the remediation of "old", analog media by the "new", digital media ("Remediation" 339) and do not touch upon comic books as either source medium nor as medium that appropriates, their notion of "hypermediacy" (*Remediation* 5), i.e., multiplicity, is very useful for my purpose.

81   The reason, of course, being Superman's long history. cf. Darowski; Ndalianis, "Enter"; M. Smith, "Triangle Era"; and Wandtke, "Introduction".

82   These two commercials – heavily metafictional, full of atypical characterization on the part of Superman (not Jerry Seinfeld) and, frankly, hilarious – are still available online.

Continuity to such an extent so as to portray Clark Kent and Lex Luthor if not as friends,[83] then at least as friendly acquaintances. Despite its deviation from the comic book template, this narrative gains significantly with a substantial expertise of Superman's character and history. At the same time, it also obliges the recipient to leave behind preconceived notions about characters and storylines in order to be able to take pleasure in the retelling, rather than to be confused or even enraged about the deconstruction of familiar knowledge.

For a long time, storytellers and publishers have tried to keep the proliferation of comic book substance at bay for reasons of clarity and comprehensibility. In Bolter and Grusin's words: "Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of its mediation" (*Remediation* 5). Yet the industry also depends on financial success. The outsourcing of comic book matter to various media of popular culture, i.e., remediation, is one of the pillars of such success. In a time when recipients have simultaneous access to several media, cross-promotion seems to be a safe way not only of distributing material more widely but also of tapping into new audiences.

As a result, differing versions of characters have been created in differing media: Computer game Batman is not the same as children's animated series Batman who again differs from breakfast cereal Batman and the comic book Batman by Frank Miller. Hence different superhero versions in different media function in different realms, though they sporadically intersect. Ever since comic book lore has begun to fuel stories in media other than comic books, but especially since the 1980s which saw an increased migration of characters into various media, superheroes have become mutable personas. This was further promoted by the increased use of Hypertime, the concept that takes into account *all* stories told about a character, including potentially conflicting manifestations. It is no longer just Continuity that is authoritative for a character's 'essence'. Even storylines that function outside of Continuity – it has been shown – can thus impinge on the canon.

Since the intertextual map of one character encompasses not only computer games, animated television series, breakfast cereals but also motion pictures, advertising, television series, novels, plays, audiobooks, comic strips, animations, toys, other merchandise and, most notably, comic books, myriads of distinct manifestations have come to exist. In addition to the multiplicity of character incarnations already at play within comic books as part of Continuity, there has been

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83 Actually, in *Adventure Comics* #271 (April 1960), Luthor's origin story was told. Readers learned that as an adolescent, Luthor was one of the biggest fans of Superboy (Superman's teenage incarnation) before a lab accident in combination with Superman's super-breath caused him to lose his hair. "Forever follicly challenged and mentally unhinged", Luthor was from this moment on bent on destroying his former friend (Cowsill et al. 99).

a tendency towards heteroglossia due to the variety in media as well. Since it is impossible to contain the cacophony of Supermen, Batmen and Wonder Women within the near limitless media landscape, producers have ceased to falter from adjusting Continuity 'facts' to suit their medium. This generates a narrative canvas so vast that Continuity appears diminutive by comparison.

The task of keeping Continuity consistent is Herculean already within the medium of comic books; to maintain Continuity across several media is virtually impossible. Consequently, today's superhero is a mosaic or montage of a multiplicity of reincarnations, rendering competing discourses daily fare. By becoming a transmedia phenomenon, superheroes have transcended Continuity and reached multiplicity. Double- or triplenatured superheroes have hardly ever been isolated cases, but their further burgeoning has led to a narrative plane peopled with seemingly infinite rearticulations of characters. Such popular culture characters become modern-day myths in the sense that they belong to everyone. And entirely in keeping with the ample scope myths allow within their boundaries is the wealth of narrativizations of one character that are at once contradictory and congruent. Characters thus have many faces, live through many adventures, maybe even have many names – just remember Morpheus, Dream, Kai'ckul, Oneiros, etc.

What can be observed to take place is not diffusion in the sense that the individual's character's power is destabilized or weakened, but dissemination in the sense of enriched proliferation: Like some starfish's limbs that can regrow into a whole new starfish. After all, the case for adaptation – the term often employed for the description of a character's passage from one medium into another – is difficult to make when there is no original Batman or Sandman in a single literary work but several decades of accumulated stories.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

> So instead of lamenting the end of unmediated experience, I will celebrate it, revel in the simultaneous living of an experience and its dozen or so echoes in art and media, the echoes making the experience not cheaper but richer, aha! Being that much more layered, the depth luxurious, not soul-sucking or numbing but edifying, ramifying.
> (Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* 270)

Continuity functions on multiple levels. In comic books, it denotes a publisher's canon while in film, it refers to the method that allows for scenes that were filmed out of order to be strung together so as to result in a coherent whole. Similarly, serial continuity is based on the interlacing of numerous episodes which ultimately produces the serial universe. The very bedrock for these different kinds of continuity is always the core concept of permanence, consistency and uninterruptedness. To find such phenomena in comics is actually more than a little surprising: What with the segmentation of narrative into panels, the depiction of action by means of static, metonymic moments and the publication of a work by means of serialized, individual installments, it is astounding that serialized graphic narratives like *Watchmen*, *TDKR* or *Sandman* still manage to appear homogenous and rather quite seamless.

Amongst other things, we have seen that there are numerous elements that contribute to the establishment of a stringent continuity in *Watchmen*. There is, however, one level of continuity that cannot be found in Moore and Gibbons's work, namely comic book Continuity. Though rigorously continuous on a number of different levels like the panel, the page or the installment, *Watchmen* functions entirely out of Continuity. It is set in its very own realm that is neither influenced by Continuity nor does it impinge on it. By contrast, Miller's *TDKR* is a series that, while officially functioning outside of Continuity, still has considerable influence on the audience's conception of Continuity. Since Batman is a character that exists in several articulations within and outside of Continuity, there is no distinct limit to or manifest consensus about what is canonical and what is not.

Of the three primary sources here focused on, most contiguity with Continuity can be observed in Gaiman's *Sandman*. The comic book teems with original characters that are dexterously inserted into DC Continuity, but there are just as many instances in which established characters are reappropriated to have their stories developed, altered or terminated. Based on notions of authority, intricacy, canonicity, mediality,

seriality and temporality, Continuity has been outlined as a phenomenon inherent in most serialized US-American superhero comic books. It encompasses a certain range of a publisher's or creator's publications and could be described as a blend of canon, history and intratextuality. As an extension of serial continuity, which is formed on the fundament of some, most or even all of a series' episodes, Continuity stipulates coherence and concurrence between several discrete series. It thus constitutes an intricate network of characters, events, circumstances, stories, etc. that is regularly and continually supplemented as well as modified by new installments.

Of course, such a dense arrangement of narratives is not easily interpreted. It takes years of devoted recipientship, i.e., unwavering interest, consequent perusal of the latest issues, a memory for Continuity details, but also monetary means to purchase at least a share of the monthly or even weekly output of serialized US-American mainstream comic books. One-time readers are at a double disadvantage: Not only do they have to face the potentially lengthy and long-winded serial history of a narrative, but they also have to get past obstacles posed by Continuity. Moreover, although an enormously complex and seemingly limitless structure itself, Continuity's amplitude is dwarfed by the narrative plane that comprises multitudinous media.

Generally, audiences appear willing to accept the appropriation of comic book substance by several media at once and its proliferation into seemingly endless variations of what was never a unity to begin with. In fact, in this era of the rearticulated superhero when mountains of fan feedback influence storytelling, fanfiction finds every crevice and niche in a narrative before proceeding to close these perceived gaps outside of copyright laws and interactive computer games allow for the player's participation in determining the character's path, the notion of Continuity as a canonical entity becomes rather obscure. Character conformity has to be bid goodbye as fidelity cannot be achieved in view of such an abundance of stories. In keeping with the eras of the comic book, one could call this the Prolific, the Decentralized or the Spectral – in the sense of 'comprising a wide spectrum' – Age.

Audience memory cannot be reset as characters, titles or multiverses can so that recipients will remember storylines even if they are declared as defunct. The information that can be retrieved is never wiped out simply because the narrative universe is streamlined. In the audience's mental storage, canonical and apocryphal stories run side by side. What difference does it make when yet another ramification is added to the vast narrative structure already in effect? None, Dave Eggers would agree. Let me conclude with his suggestions that we "revel in the simultaneous living of an experience and its dozen or so echoes in art and media, the echoes making the experience not cheaper but richer, aha!" (270).

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Appendix

A.   *Sandman*: An Overview

#	Title	Cover Date	Collection / Trade Paperback	*Absolute Sandman*	Artists (Penciller and Inker)
1	Sleep of the Just	January 1989	*P&N*	1	Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg
2	Imperfect Hosts	February 1989	*P&N*	1	Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg
3	Dream a Little Dream of Me	March 1989	*P&N*	1	Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg
4	A Hope in Hell	April 1989	*P&N*	1	Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg
5	Passengers	May 1989	*P&N*	1	Sam Kieth and Malcolm Jones I
6	24 Hours	June 1989	*P&N*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
7	Sound and Fury	July 1989	*P&N*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
8	The Sound of Her Wings	August 1989	*P&N*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
9	Tales in the Sand	September 1989	*TDH*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
10	The Doll's House	November 1989	*TDH*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
11	Moving In	December 1989	*TDH*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
12	Playing House	January 1990	*TDH*	1	Chris Bachalo and Malcolm Jones III
13	Men of Good Fortune	February 1990	*TDH*	1	Michael Zulli and Steve Parkhouse
14	Collectors	March 1990	*TDH*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
15	Into the Night	April 1990	*TDH*	1	Mike Dringenberg (with the help of Sam Keith) and Malcolm Jones III
16	Lost Hearts	June 1990	*TDH*	1	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
17	Calliope	July 1990	*DC*	1	Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III
18	A Dream of a Thousand Cats	August 1990	*DC*	1	Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III
19	A Midsummer Night's Dream	September 1990	*DC*	1	Charles Vess (both)
20	Façade	October 1990	*DC*	1	Colleen Doran and Malcolm Jones III
21	Season of Mists: Episode 0: Prologue	December 1990	*SoM*	2	Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III
22	Season of Mists: Episode 1	January 1991	*SoM*	2	Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III
23	Season of Mists: Season of Mists: Episode 2	February 1991	*SoM*	2	Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III
24	Season of Mists: Episode 3	March 1991	*SoM*	2	Kelley Jones and P. Craig Russell
25	Season of Mists: Episode 4	April 1991	*SoM*	2	Matt Wagner and Malcolm Jones III

26	Season of Mists: Episode 5	May 1991	*SoM*	2	Kelley Jones and George Pratt
27	Season of Mists: Episode 6	June 1991	*SoM*	2	Kelley Jones and Dick Giordano
28	Season of Mists: Episode ∞: Epilogue	July 1991	*SoM*	2	Mike Dringenberg and George Pratt
29	Distant Mirrors – Thermidor	August 1991	*F&R*	2	Stan Woch and Dick Giordano
30	Distant Mirrors – August	September 1991	*F&R*	2	Bryan Talbot and Stan Woch
31	Distant Mirrors – Three Septembers and a January	October 1991	*F&R*	2	Shawn McManus (both)
32	Slaughter on Fifth Avenue	November 1991	*AGoY*	2	Shawn McManus (both)
	The Song of Orpheus – Chapter 1	November 1991	*Sandman Special* #1		Bryan Talbot and Marc Buckingham
	The Song of Orpheus – Chapter 2	November 1991	*Sandman Special* #1		Bryan Talbot and Marc Buckingham
	The Song of Orpheus – Chapter 4	November 1991	*Sandman Special* #1		Bryan Talbot and Marc Buckingham
	The Song of Orpheus – Chapter 4	November 1991	*Sandman Special* #1		Bryan Talbot and Marc Buckingham
33	Lullabies of Broadway	December 1991	*AGoY*	2	Shawn McManus (both)
34	Bad Moon Rising	January 1992	*AGoY*	2	Colleen Doran and George Pratt/Dick Giordano
35	Beginning to See the Light	February 1992	*AGoY*	2	Shawn McManus (both)
36	Over the Sea to Sky	April 1992	*AGoY*	2	Shawn McManus/Brian Talbot and Shawn McManus and Stan Woch
37	I Woke up and One of Us Was Crying	May 1992	*AGoY*	2	Shawn McManus (both)
38	Convergence – The Hunt	June 1992	*F&R*	2	Duncan Eagleson and Vince Locke
39	Convergence – Soft Places	July 1992	*F&R*	2	John Watkiss (both)
40	Convergence – The Parliament of Rooks	August 1992	*F&R*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
41	Brief Lives: Chapter 1	September 1992	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
42	Brief Lives: Chapter 2	October 1992	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
43	Brief Lives: Chapter 3	November 1992	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
44	Brief Lives: Chapter 4	December 1992	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
45	Brief Lives: Chapter 5	January 1993	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
46	Brief Lives: Chapter 6	February 1993	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
47	Brief Lives: Chapter 7	March 1993	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke/Dick Giordano
48	Brief Lives: Chapter 8	April 1993	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
49	Brief Lives: Chapter 9	May 1993	*BL*	3	Jill Thompson and Vince Locke
50	Distant Mirrors – Ramadan	June 1993	*F&R*	3	P. Craig Russell
51	A Tale of Two Cities	July 1993	*WE*	3	Alec Stevens/Bryan Talbot and Alec Stevens/Mark Buckingham

52	Cluracan's Tale	August 1993	*WE*	3	John Watkiss/Bryan Talbot and John Watkiss/Mark Buckingham
53	Hob's Leviathan	September 1993	*WE*	3	Michael Zulli/Bryan Talbot and Dick Giordano/Mark Buckingham
54	The Golden Boy	October 1993	*WE*	3	Michael Allred/Bryan Talbot and Michael Allred/Mark Buckingham
55	Cerements	November 1993	*WE*	3	Shea Anton Pensa/Bryan Talbot and Vince Locke/Mark Buckingham
56	Worlds' End	December 1993	*WE*	3	Gary Amaro/Bryan Talbot and Dick Giordano/Steve Leialoha/Tony Harris/Mark Buckingham/Bryan Talbot
	The Castle	January 1994	Vertigo Jam 1	4	Kevin Nowlan (both)
57	The Kindly Ones: 1	February 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel (both)
58	The Kindly Ones: 2	March 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and D'Israeli
59	The Kindly Ones: 3	April 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and D'Israeli
60	The Kindly Ones: 4	June 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and D'Israeli
61	The Kindly Ones: 5	July 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and Marc Hempel/D'Israeli
62	The Kindly Ones: 6	August 1994	*TKO*	4	Glyn Dillon/Charles Vess/Dean Ornston and Glyn Dillon/Charles Vess/D'Israeli
63	The Kindly Ones: 7	September 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel (both)
64	The Kindly Ones: 8	November 1994	*TKO*	4	Teddy Christiansen (both)
65	The Kindly Ones: 9	December 1994	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and Richard Case/Marc Hempel
66	The Kindly Ones: 10	January 1995	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and Richard Case
67	The Kindly Ones: 11	February 1995	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel and Richard Case
68	The Kindly Ones: 12	May 1995	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel/Richard Case and Richard Case
69	The Kindly Ones: 13	July 1995	*TKO*	4	Marc Hempel (both)
70	Chapter 1, Which Occurs in the Wake of What Has Gone Before	August 1995	*TW*	4	Michael Zulli No inker (only pencils and color)
71	Chapter 2, In Which a Wake is Held	September 1995	*TW*	4	Michael Zulli No inker (only pencils and color)
72	Chapter 3, In Which We Wake	November 1995	*TW*	4	Michael Zulli No inker (only pencils and color)
73	An Epilogue, Sunday Mourning	December 1995	*TW*	4	Michael Zulli No inker (only pencils and color)
74	Exiles	January 1996	*TW*	4	No penciller (done entirely in ink) Jon J Muth
75	The Tempest	March 1996	*TW*	4	Charles Vess

1. *Preludes & Nocturnes* (*P&N*): #1-8, January 1989-August 1989
2. *The Doll's House* (*TDH*): #8-16, September 1989-June 1990
3. **Dream Country* (*DC*): #17-20, July 1990-October 1990
4. *Season of Mists* (*SoM*): #21-28, December 1990-July 1991
5. *A Game of You* (*AGoY*): #32-37, November 1991-May 1992
6. **Fables & Reflections* (*F&R*): #29-31, August 1991-October 1991, #38-40, June 1992-August 1992, #50, June 1993
7. *Brief Lives* (*BL*): #41-49, September 1992-May
8. **Worlds' End* (*WE*): #51-56, July 1993-December 1993
9. *The Kindly Ones* (*TKO*): #57-69, February 1994-July 1995, *Vertigo Jam* #1
10. *The Wake* (*TW*): #70-75, August 1995-March 1996

* Collections of short stories

B. *Sandman* Spin-Off Series (all published by Vertigo)

Title	Writer/s	Artist/s	Start	No. of issues
Dream Hunters	Neil Gaiman	Yoshitaka Amano	1999	1
Endless Nights	Neil Gaiman	various	2003	1
The Dreaming	Various	various	June 1996	60
Lucifer	Mike Carey	Various	June 2000	75
The Sandman: Sandman Mystery Theatre	Various, also N G. for *Sandman Midnight Theatre*	various	April 1993	70
Destiny: A Chronicle of Deaths Foretold	Alisa Kwitney	various	Nov. 1997	3
The Little Endless Storybook	Jill Thompson	Jill Thompson	2001	1
Death: The High Cost of Living	Neil Gaiman	various	March 1993 (- May 1993)	3
Death: The Time of Your Life	Neil Gaiman	various	April 1996 (- June 1996)	3
Death: At Death's Door	Jill Thompson	Jill Thompson	2003	1
Sandman Presents: Petrefax	Mike Carey, N. G. consultant	Steve Lialoha	March 2000 (- June 2000)	4
Sandman Presents: The Corinthian	Darko Macan	Danijel Zezelj	Dec. 2000 (- Feb. 2002)	3
Sandman Presents: Bast	Caitlin R. Kiernan	Joe Bennett	March 2003 (- May 2003)	3
Sandman Presents: The Thessaliad	Bill Willingham	Shawn McManus	March 2002 (- June 2002)	4
Sandman Presents: The Furies	Mike Carey, N. G. consultant	John Bolton	2002	1
Sandman Presents: Love Street	Peter Hogan, N. G. consultant	Michael Zulli, Vince Locke	July 1999 (- Sept. 1999)	3
Sandman Presents: Merv Pumpkinhead, Agent of Dream	Bill Willingham, N. G. consultant	Mark Buckingham, John Stokes	2000	1
Sandman Presents: Taller Tales[1]	Bill Willingham	various	2003	1
Sandman Presents: Thessaly, Witch for Hire	Bill Willingham	Shawn McManus	April 2004 (- July 2004)	4
Sandman Presents: The Dead Boy Detectives	Ed Brubaker	Bryan Talbot, Steve Leialoha	August 2001 (- Nov. 2001)	4
Sandman Presents: Everything you always wanted to know about dreams…but were afraid to ask	Bill Willingham, N. G. consultant	Various	July 2001	1

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1   Collection of Bill Willingham's writings in *The Sandman Presents* line.