

Intertextuality
in David Foster Wallace's
"Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"
and John Barth's
"Lost in the Funhouse"

Masterarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades
Master of Arts in Nordamerikastudien

Freie Universität Berlin
John-F.-Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien
Abteilung Literatur

Eingereicht von:

Anke Sharma,
geboren am 29.4.1987

Matrikel-Nr.: 4451845
ankesharma@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Eingereicht am: 13.3.2014

Angefertigt bei:

Erster Gutachter:
Jun.-Prof. Dr. Florian Sedlmeier

Zweiter Gutachter:
Dr. James Dorson

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Intertextuality and Postmodernism	5
2.1 Intertextuality and Influence	5
2.1.1 Saussure, Bakhtin, Kristeva and Barthes	7
a) Ferdinand de Saussure.....	7
b) Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogism, Heteroglossia, Re-accentuation	8
c) Julia Kristeva: Intertextuality, Ambivalence	10
d) Roland Barthes: The (Writerly) Text	12
2.1.2 Harold Bloom: Influence.....	14
2.1.3 Jonathan Culler: Literary Competence, Presupposition.....	17
2.1.4 Linda Hutcheon: Metafiction, Intertextuality and Parody	21
2.2 Postmodernism, Metafiction, Intertextuality in Barth and Wallace’s Criticism.....	24
2.2.1 John Barth	25
2.2.2 David Foster Wallace	28
2.3 A New Sincerity.....	31
3 “Lost in the Funhouse” and “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”	36
3.1 Considering the Title “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”	39
3.2 Writer-Characters.....	41
3.2.1 Ambrose and Mark Nechtr: The Why and How of Storytelling	42
3.2.2 D.L. and Mark Nechtr: A Metafictional Marriage.....	45
3.2.3 Magda and Mark: Postmodernism as Narrative Framework	52
3.3 Irony, Sincerity and Narrative Voice	55
3.3.1 Beyond Self-Referentiality.....	56
3.3.2 Credibility and Narrative Instability.....	57
3.3.3 Metafictional Commentary.....	64
4 Conclusion	68
Appendix	71
Works Cited.....	73

Intertextuality in David Foster Wallace's "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" and John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse"

1 Introduction

David Foster Wallace's early novella "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" (1989), included in *Girl With Curious Hair*, announces itself as partly "written in the margins of John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" (1967),¹ from the collection of the same name (*Curious Hair* verso page). "Westward" thereby explicitly draws attention to its textual memory of "Funhouse." While Wallace takes "Westward" to be in the margins of "Funhouse,"² I would like to move "Westward" to the center of analytical interest.

Barth's short story uses self-referentiality to question the 'How' of communication in fiction. Wallace's metafiction, on the other hand, draws attention to a particular problematic aspect of fiction writing, namely the hierarchical relationship between author and reader, which might seem like a central part of how communication in postmodern fiction operates. Instead of merely ironically re-writing Barth's short story, Wallace's "Westward" proposes a 'metafiction of responsibility' through the narrator and the protagonist Mark Nechtr. As an alternative to Barth's metafiction in "Lost in the Funhouse," a metafiction of responsibility would aim at leveling the hierarchical relationship between narrator and reader that characterizes "Funhouse." This appears to be driven by a moral obligation toward the reader.

Although "Westward" suggests a new approach to metafiction, the novella ultimately concedes that this cannot be put into practice. "Westward" thereby makes the argument that the hierarchical relationship between author-narrator and reader cannot be fully overcome within metafiction. The novella demonstrates that metafiction can thematize the problematic aspect of communication but cannot solve it. This impossibility of overcoming the limitations of metafiction through metafiction is repeatedly problematized in the course of the story, which makes the relationship between "Funhouse" and "Westward" more complex than previous criticism has suggested (e.g. Boswell, McLaughlin).

¹ Abbreviated "Westward" and "Funhouse" hereafter. 1967 is the year of original publication of "Funhouse" in *Atlantic Monthly*. It was then included in the 1968 collection *Lost in the Funhouse*, from which I subsequently quote.

² Wallace also names Cynthia Ozick's "Usurpation (Other People's Stories)" from *Bloodshed and three Novellas* (1976) as a direct influence.

In order to develop this argument, the thesis is organized into four sections. Following this introduction, section 2 will discuss concepts of intertextuality with varying emphases on the role of the text's structure, author, or reader. I believe that approaching "Westward" through the lens of intertextuality approaches which highlight the narrator–reader relationship, and Linda Hutcheon's conception of parody as a subcategory of intertextuality can offer an apt access point to the analysis of "Westward" vis-à-vis "Funhouse."

In transition to the analysis, I discuss John Barth's "Literature of Exhaustion" and "Literature of Replenishment," and David Foster Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram." These theoretical essays discuss the legitimacy and purpose of fiction, the relationship between texts, and the relationship between fiction and society—concerns that draw on theories of intertextuality and are highly visible in "Funhouse" and "Westward."

Then, I briefly look at the concept of "New Sincerity," which a number of critics see as the defining feature of Wallace's work (e.g. Kelly, Konstantinou). New Sincerity refers to a movement in American literature and arts that critics locate around the turn of the 21st century. Sincerity may refer to characters, tone, content or a combination of these.

Before offering my own analysis, I consider what critics have written about the relationship between Barth and Wallace. Robert McLaughlin, for example, writes that "Westward" is Wallace's "fictional patricide" (63) of Barth, but I argue that his analysis fails to account for Wallace's reaffirmation of Barth. Another critic, Nicole Timmer claims that "Westward" is Wallace's "critique *on* metafiction *in the form* of metafiction" (104). This is fundamentally an apt description of the text's function, but Timmer neglects Wallace's outline of an alternative metafiction, which he then shows to be unattainable.

Subsequently, I analyze "Westward" and "Funhouse" in light of the previously discussed theories of intertextuality. Taking a comparative approach, I consider how "Westward" positions itself vis-à-vis "Funhouse." This requires a close reading of both texts that is especially attentive to narrative self-reflexivity. Narrative self-reflexivity concerns the role of language as a means of expression of the internal (thoughts and

feelings) and the external (social world)—in what ways is language a “prison-house”³ and in what ways a tool for communication? Inevitably, this touches upon discussions of Wallace’s status as a member of the “New Sincerity.” These discussions highlight the narrator–reader relationship, like most contemporary approaches to intertextuality. I conclude by situating the findings in context and suggesting possible directions for future research.

2 Intertextuality and Postmodernism

The theoretical framework for the analysis of “Funhouse” and “Westward” draws upon three research areas: First, intertextuality and influence studies, with parody as a subcategory. Second, intertextuality and metafiction as dealt with by John Barth and David Foster Wallace in their criticism. Here, the overarching framework is literary postmodernism. The third subsection discusses post-postmodernism, or the “New Sincerity” in the context of Wallace’s narrative style.

2.1 Intertextuality and Influence

The underlying principle of intertextuality is relationality. As such, intertextuality studies can be seen to have their origins in Ferdinand de Saussure’s systematization of language as a relational system of signs, and the ensuing linguistic turn (Allen 10). The linguistic term refers to a major change in the approach to language, which occurred approximately in the 1960s. Influenced by linguistics and philosophy, literary scholars, generally speaking, changed their view of literature from “container of meaning” to “a space in which a potentially vast number of relations coalesce” (Allen 12). An intertextual view thus excludes the possibility of the text’s inherent meaning. Graham Allen summarizes intertextuality as following: “Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. (. . .) The text becomes the intertext” (1).

Regarding the text as inevitably relational, early theorists of intertextuality aimed to reform the general understanding of a text, under the premise that every text is fundamentally a “mosaic of quotations” (Kristeva 37). Consequently, literary criticism

³ Fredric Jameson’s term from “The Prison-House of Language” (1972). As Mueller-Vollmer and Irmscher point out, the term is an overly strong translation of Nietzsche’s “sprachlichen Zwang” (Mueller-Vollmer and Irmscher 42).

needed to be looked at from a different angle as well. Analyzing the text as intertext undermined preceding accounts of individual artistic originality and genius, and the view of the text as an object best regarded on its own (Hutcheon, *Parody* xiv).

Intertextuality and influence might be viewed as two sides of the same coin. I treat the two as separate terms, however, because theories of influence set themselves apart through the strong roles of aesthetics, the author, and often also through their exclusivity to the Western literary canon. In an attempt to group the various perspectives on intertextuality and influence, I loosely follow the typology Linda Hutcheon establishes in “Literary Borrowing...and Stealing” (1991) into reader- and author-oriented approaches. In addition, I take into account Marko Juvan’s survey *History and Poetics of Intertextuality* (2008). Juvan divides intertextuality into “universal” and “particular” concepts. Universal approaches view intertextuality as a “general quality of texts and literary reception” (Juvan 112). Particular theories, on the other hand, regard texts in their specific social contexts and discourses. According to Juvan, the movement from universal to particular theories relocated universal intertextuality “from its poststructuralist matrix” to specific analytical frameworks investigating the functioning of language, such as structuralism, reader response theories, discourse analysis, Freudian analysis, or New Historicism (112).

I will begin by discussing the reader-oriented, “universal” structuralist, formalist, and poststructuralist approaches of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes.⁴ The second subsection considers Harold Bloom’s author-oriented theory of influence, which draws on psychoanalysis.

Subsequently, I turn to another reader-oriented, “particular” approach, by Jonathan Culler, and Linda Hutcheon’s theory of parody as part of intertextuality, which suggests combining author- and reader-oriented approaches to intertextuality. Bridging intertextuality theory and my reading of “Westward” and “Funhouse, I go on to discuss John Barth’s and David Foster Wallace’s own theoretical writings, which lay out the authors’ notions of narratorial self-consciousness while entering into dialogue with scholarly perceptions of intertextuality.

⁴ None of the approaches discussed here are purely author- or reader-oriented and Hutcheon is certainly aware of this, but according to the dominance of either, one can opt for this classification mostly for reasons of structure and clarity.

2.1.1 Saussure, Bakhtin, Kristeva and Barthes

a) *Ferdinand de Saussure*

The principle of relationality in Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics, or the study of signs, laid the groundwork for present-day linguistics and structural and poststructural theories of intertextuality, among them those of Bakhtin, Kristeva and Barthes discussed further down in this section (Allen 12).⁵ In place of semiotics, Saussure uses the term semiology, which he defines as "a science that studies the life of signs within society" in *Course in General Linguistics* (77).

The sign is made up of two components: the "signifier," or "the sound-image," and the "signified," or "the concept" (Saussure 78). Saussure's choice of these terms is crucial to the understanding of the sign because sound-image and concept do *not* denote the relationship between "a thing and a name" (78). The linguist replaces the principle of fixed referentiality between a word and a clearly definable object in the world (i.e. the name "table" refers to the thing "table") with that of relationality (sound-image "table" relates to concept "table").

While the difference between concept (belonging to the mind) and thing (belonging to the material, verifiable world) is rather obvious, the difference between sound-image and name may not be at first. A sound-image, Saussure writes, is "the psychological imprint of the sound [. . .]. The sound image is sensory, and if I happen to call it 'material,' it is only in that sense and by way of opposing it to the other term, the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract" (78). The term sound-image emphasizes the un-written nature of the sign, showing that the relationship between signifier and signified does not rely on the material (written text) but occurs in the mind alone.

Saussure's definition of the signifier-signified relation rests on the presumption of the sign's arbitrary nature. As Jonathan Culler points out in his study of Saussure, arbitrariness relates not only to the absence of an "intrinsic link between signifier and signified" but also to the arbitrariness of the signifier and the signified on their own, which in turn provides the reason for the relational principle:

⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics can be listed as a second great influence. I do not discuss Peirce here in order to avoid digressions that would take away from rather than add to the focus on intertextuality.

Since there are no fixed universal concepts or fixed universal signifiers, the signified itself is arbitrary, and so is the signifier. We then must ask, as Saussure does, what defines a signifier or a signified, and the answer leads us to a very important principle: both signifier and signified are *purely relational or differential entities*. Because they are arbitrary they are relational. (Culler, *Saussure* 32; emphasis added)

To take the commonly used example of the table from above, the signifier table in itself is unstable and without any independent meaning; it only takes on meaning in relationship to the signified, and to other signs.. The same applies to the signified table; without the signifier “table” (which could also be any other signifier that stands in a commonly defined relationship to it), it assumes no meaning. Ultimately, “the entire mechanism of language” is based on relationships of “purely negative and differential” nature (88–89). Every sign, in other words, is defined in relation to what is *not* and what it is different from. Saussure’s principle of relationality, or differentiability, characterizing language systems, which I have only sketched out here, may be regarded as a forerunner of the formalist, structuralist and poststructuralist theories of intertextuality discussed in the following.

b) Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogism, Heteroglossia, Re-accentuation

Mikhail Bakhtin expands Saussure’s understanding of the sign by presenting language as embedded in the social system, which influences concepts of intertextuality until today—from Julia Kristeva to postmodernist theory (Allen 3, 11), which I discuss below. The concepts of “dialogism” and “heteroglossia,” developed in Bakhtin’s 1934 essay “Discourse in the Novel,”⁶ are critical to his formalist understanding of language and intertextuality. Dialogue, Bakhtin argues, is not only present in the overall structure of language but in the word itself. A word’s internal dialogism is a prerequisite to the word’s meaning in relationship to an object or another word. Bakhtin adopts Saussure’s principle of relationality and expands it from the merely linguistic to the social realm:

The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way [. . .] The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has

⁶ “Discourse in the Novel” was first published in English in 1941.

not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation with any living dialogue. (*Dialogic Imagination* 279–80)

Dialogism thus implies that a signifier forms its own signified not only through opposition within the linguistic system but also through its function in the social context, which is determined by expectations. Unlike Saussure's account of the sign, Bakhtin's dialogism considers both the internal, linguistic and the external, social aspects of language. Dialogism with its positive connotations stands in opposition to "monologism," which is characterized by the "refusal of discourse to acknowledge its relational constitution and its misrecognition of itself as independent and unquestionably authoritative" (Shepherd). As such, monologism is incompatible with the concept of relationality.

Related to dialogism and practically interchangeable with it, Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia," or multi-voicedness, assumes that there is no pure language but that the multiple other voices of language inevitably inform the speaker's voice. This process is impacted by social and regional circumstances. Of all textual forms, Bakhtin argues, the novel best captures heteroglossia. A novel that is characterized by heteroglossia, or the presence of multiple voices in narration, is termed a dialogical novel:⁷ "Once incorporated into the novel, it[heteroglossia] is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 324). The dialogic novel is characterized by a "double-voicedness," which "sinks its roots deep into a fundamental, socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-linguagedness" (325–26).

To Bakhtin, the novel most aptly represents the ever-in-flux nature of language, as spoken, in particular figurative, language serves as a model for the dialogic novel; it "is prefigured in language itself (in authentic metaphors, as well as in myth), in language as a social phenomenon that is becoming in history, socially stratified and weathered in this process of becoming" (*Dialogic Imagination* 326). The narrator's text and the character's text serve as vehicles for multi-voicedness in the novel (Doležel, Schmid, qtd. in Tjupa).

⁷ Bakhtin privileges prose over the epic or lyric, which he views as monologic forms. However, Bakhtin deems not all novels dialogic. He distinguishes between the dialogic and the monologic novel, which suppresses the multiplicity of voices in favor of a unitary ideology. See Clark and Holquist.

Heteroglossia is thus not only an aesthetic but also a sociopolitical phenomenon. Bakhtin predicts a destabilization of language and literature through heteroglossia, which defies the persistent “national myth” of a “unitary, canonic language” (*Dialogic Imagination* 370). The success of the novel negatively correlates to the stability of “verbal-ideological systems” (370); as the novel rises, these systems are increasingly destabilized, leading to an “intensification and intentionalization of speech diversity [. . .], an activity that goes on both within the limits of literary dialect itself and outside it” (370–71). As the last sentence emphasizes, heteroglossia possesses the potential to foster social change via the change of language and thought.

Relating to heteroglossia and the novel, Bakhtin presents the concept of “re-accentuation” (*Dialogic Imagination*). Re-accentuation is a process in which a present literary image is adapted and transformed in either literary or other art form. Bakhtin’s example is Tchaikovsky’s reaccentuation of *Onegin* by re-shaping Pushkin’s novel to an opera (*Dialogic Imagination* 421). Re-accentuation clearly describes a form of intertextuality, characterized by indirect—or rather direct, depending on the reader—reference.⁸ The process of re-accentuation first and foremost relies upon the recognizability of the present image. In this regard, re-accentuation is similar to parody, but the two need to be differentiated from one another, as will be discussed in the subsection on Linda Hutcheon’s theory of intertextuality. Before this, however, I continue with an account of Julia Kristeva’s coinage of the term intertextuality, which directly draws on Bakhtin.

c) Julia Kristeva: *Intertextuality, Ambivalence*

Julia Kristeva first uses the term “intertextuality” in “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (1966), a review of Bakhtin’s and Russian Formalism’s contributions to literary theory and linguistics (Moi 34). From the viewpoint of Kristeva’s editor Toril Moi, “Word, Dialogue and Novel” is an “active dialogue” (35) with Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, which Kristeva extends from word to text, forming her own concept of intertextuality:⁹

⁸ Despite the absence of the term at the time of Bakhtin’s writing. Julia Kristeva introduces the term intertextuality in “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” as discussed below. As Michael Worton and Judith Still point out in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (1990), the ideas inherent to intertextuality can be traced back to Aristotle and Plato (Worton and Still 2), which I cannot do here.

⁹ Bakhtin scholar Valerij Tjupa voices a dissenting opinion. According to him, Kristeva “distorted [Bakhtin’s] ideas significantly” (Tjupa).

Each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. In Bakhtin's work, these two axes, which he calls dialogue and ambivalence, are not clearly distinguished. Yet, what appears as a lack of rigour is in fact an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double. (Kristeva 37; emphasis added)

The axis system Kristeva uses for visualization illustrates the structuralist influence on her thought. It reminds us of Saussure's differentiation between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic axes of selection and combination respectively.¹⁰ Kristeva interprets Bakhtin's dialogism as a concept that "identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality. Confronted with this dialogism, the notion of a 'person-subject of writing' becomes blurred, yielding to that of 'ambivalence of writing'" (Kristeva 39). According to Kristeva, ambivalence is specific to the novel (44). Kristeva agrees with Bakhtin that the text contains multiple voices, but appears to go further in her rejection of the text as a unified expression of the writer's voice.

In order to apply her theory to literary analysis, Kristeva proposes three categories of ambivalent structures: "imitation," "parody," and "hidden interior polemic" (44). Imitation, which Kristeva adopts from Bakhtin's concept of "repetition," is affirmative and accepting rather than critical; it "takes what is imitated (repeated) seriously, claiming and appropriating it without relativizing it. This category of ambivalent words is characterized by the writer's exploitation of another's speech—without running counter to its thought—for his own purposes" (44). Put differently, imitation contains no element of subversion, other than appropriation.

Parody, on the other hand, "introduces a signification opposed to that of the other's word" (Kristeva 44). It is notable that Kristeva does not use the word *original* here—it is "the other's word" which is opposed. The texts and their narrative structures are thereby placed on the same level. What Kristeva omits, however, is the element of repetition in parody, which poses a necessary condition for subversion. As I discuss below, Linda Hutcheon includes repetition in her account of parody.

In addition to affirmative and oppositional modes of ambivalence, Kristeva introduces a third category, "hidden interior polemic." Hidden interior polemic utilizes the narrator's voice as a vehicle for an alternative discourse. Thereby, hidden interior

¹⁰ See Saussure.

polemic expresses the “active (modifying) influence of another's word on the writer's word.”¹¹ It is the writer who 'speaks' but a foreign discourse is constantly present in the speech that it distorts. With this *active* kind of ambivalent word, the other's word is represented by the word of the narrator” (44). Active influence may be found in for example “autobiography, polemical confessions, questions-and-answers and hidden dialogue” (Kristeva 44).

I think it can be argued that all three categories of ambivalent words (imitation, parody, active influence) are also examples of intertextual modes that determine a text's position in relation to others. One can conclude from Kristeva's writings that while a text can be dominated by one mode, such as the parodic, it may also oscillate between repetition, opposition, and subtle distortion, which would render it multivalent.

Like Bakhtin, Kristeva transfers her theories from linguistic to wider social systems. Similar to Bakhtin's conception of heteroglossia as a sociopolitical act, Kristeva deems dialogism, the overarching principle of her concept of intertextuality, relevant beyond the novel. On a larger scale, she argues, “more than binarism, dialogism may well become the basis of our time's intellectual structure” (59). If intellectual structure refers to underlying principles of meaning systems, Kristeva seems to envision that dialogism (ambivalence and dialogue) will eventually replace the principle of opposition, which forms the basis of binarisms. While Kristeva, like Bakhtin, thus focuses on the replacement by singular or binary principles in a text by a multiplicity of voices in her account on intertextuality, Roland Barthes begins to question the self-contained relevance of the voices inside the text. Instead, he grants more space to the role of the reader, who recognizes the text as intertext in the communicative process.

d) Roland Barthes: The (Writerly) Text

In response to Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, Barthes writes that the text is an “irreducible plural” (“Work to Text” 168), opposing the approach of source studies:

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to

¹¹ Kristeva develops “hidden interior polemic” from Bakhtin's notion of double-voicedness in the dialogic novel. A stylistic device comparable to Kristeva's hidden interior polemic is Bakhtin's conception of *skaz*. The main difference to hidden interior polemic is *skaz*'s notable origin in oral narratives and the “intellectual distance between author and narrator” (Schmid).

find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas. (Barthes, “Work to Text” 169)

In “From Work to Text” (1971), Roland Barthes divides fiction into two main categories, which determine how a text is approached. I will focus on the aspects of differentiation that are in my view most relevant to Barth’s and Wallace’s *œuvres*, starting with the most basic differentiation: the work is a static object, while the text is “*experienced only in the activity of production*” (Barthes, “Work to Text” 157).

In the earlier work *S/Z* (1970), a “step-by-step [. . .] decomposition (in the cinematographic sense) of the act of reading” (12) of Balzac’s “Sarrasine” according to five codes,¹² Barthes formulates this difference as the difference between the “readerly” and the “writerly” text. While the readerly text is a “product” and thereby akin to what Barthes calls the “work” later, the writerly text “is *ourselves* writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of language” (*S/Z* 5). The “writerly text,” in which the reader “write[s] [his or her] reading” (*S/Z* 10), can be distinguished from the “readerly text” through interpretation, during which the writerly text reveals itself as “plural” (*S/Z* 5). “To interpret a text,” Barthes writes with reference to Nietzsche is: “not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it” (*S/Z* 5).

Borrowing from semiotics, Barthes claims in “From Work to Text” that the work “functions as a general sign,” which possesses one of “two modes of signification [. . .]: either it is claimed to be evident and the work is then the object of a literal science, of philology, or else it is considered to be secret, ultimate, something to be sought out, and the work then falls under the scope of a hermeneutics, of an interpretation (158).

The text, on the other hand, “practices the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as ‘the first stage of meaning’ but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*” (“Work to Text” 158). Barthes argues that text (unlike the work, which is mainly for

¹² In order to do so, Barthes divides “Sarrasine” into “lexia,” or “units of reading,” each of which should have “at most three or four meanings to be enumerated (*S/Z* 13).

consumption) can be approached through pleasure—it is “bound to *jouissance*, that is to a pleasure without separation” (“Work to Text” 1977, 171).¹³ Kristeva’s description of ambivalence is similar but stays focused on the text, while Barthes clearly attributes an active role to the reader.

Related to this, and perhaps most importantly, the author is no longer privileged¹⁴—no longer the “origin” of the text but rather part of it: “he is inscribed in the novel, like one of his characters, figured in the carpet” and as such “the *I* which writes the text [. . .] is never more than a paper-*I* (Barthes, “Work to Text” 161). Through questioning the sole creator-role of the author, Barthes shifts the focus to the reader-as-author.

In this regard, Barthes’s view of intertextuality is more radical than Bakhtin’s description of heteroglossia, which in a “refracted way” expresses “authorial intentions” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 324). It is more radical insofar as Barthes describes intertextuality as an interaction between texts in which the author remains visible but no longer distinguishable from the other voices in the novel. Freed from the “traditional power and authority of the figure of the ‘author,’” the reader assumes an active role in decoding the text’s meaning(s) (Allen 4).

2.1.2 Harold Bloom: Influence

While accepting the premise of the interrelated nature of texts, literary critic Harold Bloom challenges Barthes’s hypothesis of the “death of the author” and focuses less on the reader than on the process of creation and its underlying psychological currents. Bloom considers the influence of one literary work on another, with a strong emphasis on the psychological underpinnings of the writing process. From these underpinnings, Bloom singles out rivalry, or the sub-conscious desire to experience a “relative triumph in his [the poet’s] involuntary match with the dead,” as the main driving force in artistic creation (*Anxiety* 143). In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), an assessment of Romantic

¹³ In the original 1971 translation, the term *jouissance* gets lost, I am therefore quoting from the 1989 translation here. Both are included in the works cited section.

¹⁴ Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” (1968) essay extensively deals with this change in the author’s role/position.

poetry, he proposes that all poetry¹⁵ results from a modification of a preceding work—which is simultaneously caused by and the cause of anxiety for the present author.

Citing Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and Freud's writings on defense mechanisms as his main influences (*Anxiety* 8), Bloom defines poetic texts as a "psychic battlefield" between two works over the "divinating triumph over oblivion" (*Poetry and Repression* 2). Bloom's central argument is that "the anxiety of influence comes out of a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretation that I call 'poetic misprision'" (*Anxiety* xxiii). "Poetic misprision" is not only present in poetry but inherent to "the agonistic basis of all imaginative literature" (*Anxiety* xxiv). Bloom's use of the adjective "agonistic" denotes the underlying aesthetic competition between past and present writers.

Two battle-like relationships serve as the premises of Bloom's influence theory: First, the conflict of the writer with his own work and second, the conflict between the writer and preceding rival writers. Both of these conflicts are of psychological nature and highlight the role of the individual artist—thereby matching the philosophy of Romanticism. Bloom rejects new historicism and class-, race-, and gender-based literary criticism. Instead, he calls for a return to the primacy of aesthetics.

It often remains opaque in *The Anxiety of Influence* whether or not influence chiefly relies on the relationship between authors. In his most recent work *The Anatomy of Influence* (2011), Bloom rephrases his definition of influence from battlefield to "literary love tempered by defense" (*Anatomy* 14). At the same time, Bloom rejects the reading of this literary love as the love between authors: "Influence anxiety exists between poetry and not persons. Temperament and circumstances determine whether the author *feels* anxiety at whatever level of consciousness. All that matters for interpretation is the revisionary relationship between poems, as manifested in tropes, images, diction, syntax, grammar, metric, poetic stance" (*Anatomy* 6).

In *The Anxiety of Influence*'s central chapter "Clinamen or Poetic Misprision," Bloom suggests the need for a departure from New Criticism, calling for the turn to influence:

Not another new poetics, but a wholly different practical criticism. Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking to 'understand' any single poem as an entity in itself. Let us pursue instead the quest of learning to read any

¹⁵ Bloom focuses exclusively on "strong" Western canonical poets.

poem as its poet's deliberate misinterpretation, *as a poet*, of a precursor poem or of poetry in general. Know each poem by its clinamen and you will 'know' that poem in a way that will not purchase knowledge by the loss of the poem's power. (*Anxiety* 43)

Preceding this "deliberate misinterpretation" is the act of "creative correction," which in turn is a characteristic of "intellectual revisionism" (Bloom, *Anxiety* 28). Influence taken as a subcategory of revisionism follows the path of the "original" up to a certain point but then abruptly breaks with it, while "Heresy tended to change received doctrine by an alteration of balances" or "a change of emphasis" (Bloom, *Anxiety* 29). Influence, on the other hand, leaves the "more particular mark of modern revisionism" during the act of "creative correction" (Bloom, *Anxiety* 29).

In this process, "revisionism follows received doctrine along to a certain point, and then deviates, insisting that a wrong direction was taken at just that point, and no other" (Bloom, *Anxiety* 29). The resulting misinterpretation is a work of art in itself. Bloom argues that influence has been the key process in the development of Western literary tradition of the past few centuries: "The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist" (*Anxiety* 30).

Bloom thereby negates the possibility of non-Western influences upon Western poetry—and vice versa. The stringent history of "fruitful poetic influence" not only neglects non-Western, but also non-canonical works. The network of relationships that Bloom focuses on contains two isolated, Western canonical texts and their authors. Bloom thereby creates another vacuum, a practice that he dismisses in the context of the New Criticism approach of regarding the text without context.

As such, I believe that Bloom's theory is best regarded in its historical position in the context of cultural and literary criticism. Considering the rupture with Semiotics and his turn to psychoanalysis, Bloom deserves credit for creating a stringent, almost self-contained theory. This is at the same time the theory's limitation. As John Hollander points out in his *New York Times* review, Bloom's work is "far from being a handbook of criticism, and remains theoretical in that it makes demands of a critical method without specifying how they are to be met" (Hollander). While this view of theory is hardly one that theorists may aspire to, Hollander is right that Bloom outlines an approach that is not clearly geared at providing tools for literary criticism. Bloom remains most interested in

“the deep structure of poetry, with intentions, impulses, envisionings and desires, rather than with the linguistic surface, which for most of us—poets and critics and readers alike—is all there is to talk about. Bloom alludes, adduces and evokes texts, but never explicates” (Hollander).

In hindsight, Bloom regards *The Anxiety of Influence* as “an attempt to forge a weapon against the gathering storm of ideology that would soon sweep away many of my students” (*Anatomy* 5). Bloom’s anger at the “institutionalized counterculture [that] condemns individuality as archaic and depreciates intellectual values, even in universities (*Anatomy* 5)” is in itself a political statement. Through his writing he not only defends the primacy of aesthetics but also positions himself as a value-conservative member of an intellectual individualism that, in his view, has been pushed into the margins of academia.

Some critics, among them Jonathan Culler as discussed below, criticize Bloom’s focus on psychological forces in his theory of influence, because it neglects Bakhtin, Kristeva and Barthes’s notion of the web of texts, including non-canonical texts. In addition, it neglects the role of the reader,¹⁶ who might be able to detect more than one strong precursor text in a given piece of fiction. The psychological relationship of a work to its strong precursor is assumed to be the driving force of the work when in fact they might be only ascribed afterward.

However many differences there are, Bloom’s theory in some aspects also overlaps with Kristeva’s and Barthes’s understanding of intertextuality. Bloom for example admits that a *clinamen* might in fact be not only the one great precursor but also “poetry in general” (*Anxiety* 43). In allowing for this possibility, Bloom is also closer to Jonathan Culler in his thoughts than Culler himself suggests. As the discussion below shall show, Culler’s theory of intertextuality rejects Bloom’s focus on individualist aesthetics and calls for a different communication model.

2.1.3 Jonathan Culler: Literary Competence, Presupposition

Jonathan Culler wants to “evade”—but not erase—Bloom’s theory of influence with the argument that “his theory bears not on tradition, intertextuality, and presupposition, but on what I shall call ‘application’: the rubbing together of two texts in order to release energy” (“Presupposition” 1387). Culler develops his own approach to intertextuality in

¹⁶ I am referring to the reader other than the critic.

Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature (1975) and the essay “Presupposition and Intertextuality” (1976), with the aim to offer an alternative to the Kristevan concept of intertextuality. Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure’s principle of relationality and Roland Barthes’s understanding of intertextuality as an infinite space in which prior knowledge cannot be traced back to original sources, Culler views “literature as a ‘second-order’ semiotic system that uses language to produce and govern meaning” (Makaryk 171). Within this overarching sign system, Culler sees the writer, text, and reader merely as “inscriptions,” like Barthes. Aiming to expose the mechanism by which meaning is constructed within the literary sign system, Culler searches for “conditions of meaning.” The conditions that let a reader attribute meaning to a text, Culler claims, are the reader’s “enabling assumptions” (Makaryk 171). The assumptions permit the reader, in other words, to systematically approach a text according to learned rules and convictions.

Culler conceptualizes the reader’s enabling assumptions as “literary competence” in *Structuralist Poetics*. Suggesting that Noam Chomsky’s notion of “linguistic competence” might be transferred to literature. Just like a person’s social environment provides him or her with the knowledge of selecting, combining and interpreting signs, it also provides a person with literary competence, a “set of conventions for reading a literary text” (Culler, “Literary Competence” 105). First of all, literary competence enables the reader to approach a text “*as literature*” (“Literary Competence” 105). Among many other factors, the medium of the text, the context of publication and the setting in which it is discussed contribute to the text’s placement into the realm of the literary, as opposed to non-literary text categories such as manuals or law.¹⁷

In “Presupposition and Intertextuality” (1976)¹⁸ Jonathan Culler introduces the notion of “presuppositions,” also adopted from linguistics. Presuppositions are the expectations and beliefs the reader brings to the text from prior experiences, both with literature and outside of it. As such, they form part of Culler’s notion of literary competence. While literary competence highlights the institutional, communal aspects of literary reading practices, the notion of presuppositions tends to center on the individual

¹⁷ Of course these kinds of ‘functional’ texts may also be approached ‘as’ literature, but are by convention not read as such.

¹⁸ Culler’s essay was published in a 1976 *Comparative Literature* issue and later as a chapter of *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (1981).

reader—who, in turn, possesses a certain level of literary competence acquired in processes of socialization.

In *History and Poetics of Intertextuality* (2008), Marko Juvan describes the departure from Kristeva and Barthes's notion of intertextuality to Culler and fellow scholars' in the 1970s as a shift "from general intertextuality to textuality within social discourse" (108), which he also calls "explicit" theories of intertextuality (111)—a term relating to the strive for more concrete and applicable concepts within intertextuality.

Like Kristeva, Culler aims to part with the binarism origin/imitation and emphasizes the constructed nature of the term origin. All origins are artificially constructed in hindsight: "There are no moments of authority and points of origin except those which are retrospectively designated as origins and which, therefore, can be shown to derive from the series for which they are constituted as origin (Culler, *Pursuit of Signs* 117). However, Culler also criticizes parts of Kristeva's approach, warning against reducing intertextuality to the relationship between identifiable texts. In his view, Kristeva demonstrates the tendency toward such a reduction—not in her theoretical work but in concrete examples of intertextuality in *La Révolution du langage poétique*. Culler asserts, "a situation in which one can track down sources with such precision cannot serve as the paradigm for a description of intertextuality" ("Presupposition" 1385).

Despite its evasiveness, retaining the term intertextuality is of relevance to Culler—first of all because it belies the New Criticism view of the text as "autonomous artifact" ("Presupposition 1384). This view ignores interpretational differences by portraying the text as an object which "harmoniously reconciles the possible attitudes towards a given problem" (1384). In other words, because the text is said to contain all possible meanings, differing voices are pushed aside.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, intertextuality "makes one particularly sensitive to the special referentiality of literary works: whenever a work seems to be referring to the world one can argue that this supposed reference is in fact a comment on other texts and postpone the referentiality of the fiction to another moment or another level" (Culler, "Presupposition" 1384). This argument might be taken for negative criticism, but Culler sees it as an opportunity that intertextuality offers, through reminding us of the non-mimetic aspects of literature. The expectation of direct referentiality, or imitation of life, can be rejected, redirected, or postponed via intertextuality. Mimesis then refers not to an imitation of life but rather to the imitation/re-interpretation of other texts. Culler thereby rejects a definition of mimesis as

referentiality to life—when taking into account intertextuality, every referral to the outside world is at the same time a referral to the inside world of fiction.

Culler highlights the text's position in a pre-formed expectational space in the form of literary conventions: "the notion of intertextuality names the paradox of linguistic and discursive systems: that utterances or texts are never moments of origin because they depend on the prior existence of codes and conventions, and it is the nature of codes to be always already in existence, to have lost origins" ("Presupposition" 1382). This also means that a text can shape these codes and conventions by entering the discursive space (1382).

Intertextuality includes not only referentiality to prior texts but also expectations regarding the *type* of text within the broad literary texts category: "explicit conventions of a genre, specific presuppositions about what is already known and unknown, more general expectations and interpretive operations, and broad assumptions about the preoccupation and goals of a type of discourse" (Culler, "Presupposition" 1388). The reader also makes these assumptions when merely confronted with an intertextual reference: "Reference to a text implicitly evokes reference to the set of potential meanings stored in the codes of a genre" (Frow 45).

Via the study of presupposition, Culler hopes to evade what one might call the author-trap and the single-precursor-trap. Culler proposes two main approaches to the study of intertextuality, both derived from linguistics: First, the "logical presupposition," which is "to look at the specific presuppositions of a given text, the way in which it produces a pre-text, an intertextual space whose occupants may or may not correspond to other actual texts." Second, the "pragmatic presupposition," which "leads to a poetic which is less interested in the occupants of that intertextual space which makes a work intelligible than in the conventions which underlie that discursive activity or space" ("Presupposition" 1395). Paul Lennon points out that ultimately it is the pragmatic presupposition, unlike the logical presupposition, which "relate[s] the text to other works, genres, and conventions and suggest[s] attitudes that should be adopted, for example that the tale will have a moral, or a happy ending (24).

Culler's conception of presuppositions is noteworthy because it rightly points out the gaps in Kristeva's intertextuality concept. One is related to the vagueness of the concept, which makes it appear generally true for all but slippery when viewing the single case. Another relates to the incongruity between her theoretical and practical approaches to intertextuality.

Culler's approach advances from the source studies trap of singling out one great precursor. It offers a greater awareness of the reading process as a process of communication between texts and between text and reader, through the shift from world-to-text referentiality to text-to-text referentiality.

2.1.4 Linda Hutcheon: Metafiction, Intertextuality and Parody

Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Parody* (1985) and "Literary Borrowing...and Stealing: Plagiarism, Sources, Influences, and Intertexts" (1991) offer an additional development of intertextuality in the context of postmodernism.¹⁹ Labeling parody a characteristically postmodern form of intertextuality, Hutcheon creates a subordinate analytical category to universalist notions of intertextuality, with the aim to combine reader- and author-orientation.²⁰ As discussed above, universal approaches to intertextuality examine the general position of the text as participant in a web of texts and meanings. The focus on parody might run the danger of limiting an intertextual analysis of postmodern literature by suppressing other elements of intertextuality. It is therefore helpful to keep in mind that Hutcheon only discusses one particular aspect of intertextuality in her theory of parody. The particular qualities of parody and their relationship to metafiction do, however, form an important part of my analysis of Barth and Wallace's fiction and therefore the theory of parody provides an apt supplementary basis to the other theories discussed in this section.

In *Theory of Parody*, Hutcheon defines parody as "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking distance rather than similarity" (xii). In irony, Hutcheon detects the "rhetoric miniature" of parody (*Parody* xiv). Parody can both function as reinforcement and possess "transformative power in creating new syntheses" (*Parody* 20). It is always characterized by an inherent "tension between the potentially conservative effect of repetition and the potentially revolutionary impact of difference" (*Parody* xii). In other words, intertextuality simultaneously "undermines and underwrites" previously established "models of authorship and authority" (Smith 222).

¹⁹ For an account of parody and intertextuality in context of historiography and the historical novel, see Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*.

²⁰ For Hutcheon, a distinctive feature of the postmodern as opposed to the modern novel is that it "takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (*Politics of Postmodernism* 1).

Hutcheon arrives at her definition of parody via comparing and contrasting the concept with satire. Satire and parody assume similar positions vis-à-vis their subject (the parodied/satirized text), but to different ends. In comparison to parody, satire “is both moral and social in its focus and ameliorative in its intention. This is not to say, as we shall see, that parody does not have ideological or social implications. Parody can, of course, be used to satirize the reception or even the creation of certain kinds of art” (*Parody* 18). Both forms, Hutcheon argues:

imply critical distancing and therefore value judgments, but satire generally uses the distance to make a negative statement about which is satirized [. . .] In modern parody, however, we have found that no such negative judgment is necessarily suggested in the ironic contrasting of texts. Parodic art both deviates from an aesthetic norm and includes that norm within itself as backgrounded material. Any real attack would be self-destructive. (*Parody* 43–44)

One particular form of the distancing and repeating of “aesthetic norm” is pastiche, which many critics view as characteristic of postmodernism. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls pastiche the “parody of forms” (103). In the context of signifying practices, pastiche occurs: “when one writer repeats another’s structure by one of several means, including a fairly exact repetition of a given narrative or rhetorical structure, filled incongruously with a ludicrous or incongruent context” (103). Gates’s insertion of “incongruously” signals the presence of a moment of irritation, which can only be produced if the given narrative or rhetorical structure is recognized by the reader.

As with pastiche, understanding a text as a parody depends on the existing knowledge of the referent text (Hutcheon, *Parody* xii). The parody *is none* without its referent text. If the referent text is not recognized as such by the reader, the text loses its prescribed form. Even if the text functioned as a self-contained narrative, it would not be a parody, because its status as parody depends not only on a deliberate set-up as such but also on the reception. This process can be visualized through a sender/encoder–receiver/decoder communication model (Hutcheon, *Parody* xiv).

The sender, through her necessarily active part in parody, cannot sufficiently be described as ‘the text’, as the text may *function* in a certain way, but it cannot *intend* to do so. While the concept of intertextuality allows us to largely disregard the author and her intentions, parody “forces us to acknowledge at least an inference of intention and to theorize that inference” (Hutcheon, *Parody* xiv). Hutcheon sees a paradox in the function of imitation in parody. Imitation in parody on the one hand offers a challenge to

“Romantic singularity and capitalist individual ownership,” which Hutcheon cannot fully reconcile with the inferral of the “intending encoder” (*Parody* xiv). The disruptive quality of parody thus is inevitably combined with qualities from Romanticism and capitalism, which glorify the individual. But at the same time, one could argue that the relationship is less paradoxical than it may seem at first, if we presume that capitalism creates a collective consumer identity that goes beyond individual ownership.

Another aspect of parody apart from its dependence upon the encoder is its need of the decoder, who will make sense of the provided cues and thus understand that the parody is indeed a parody. As Hutcheon rightly states, this creates expectations and standards on both sides of the communication model—parody depends on “the competence of the encoder and the skill of the decoder” (*Parody* xvi). The inferral of literary competence (Culler), however, is not the focus of Hutcheon’s model: here it differs from Jonathan Culler’s poetics. It is the intending encoder whose existence is more controversial—understandably so, after the Formalist and New Criticism scholars’ warnings not so much of acknowledging its existence but rather of deducting any analytical results about the text from it.

Hutcheon notes that parody as a subcategory of intertextuality cannot be properly theorized without taking into account what has long been blamed for critical entrapment: intention.²¹ In “Literary Borrowing,” she uses Jonathan Culler’s “discursive space of culture” as a backdrop of her argument that the reader-/author-focused study of intertextuality/influence is not a true divide after all. Nevertheless, Hutcheon admits, particularly the analysis of postmodern self-reflective literature is caught in between authorial intent and effect and the role of the reader: “Metafiction has to posit *authorial* intent—even if only *inferred*—to account for its parodic form, but its overt pointing to the act of reading and to the role of the *reader* places it squarely in the intertextual domain” (“Borrowing” 232).

In summary and comparison to the above-discussed theories of intertextuality, I believe that Hutcheon’s model of parody and intertextuality serves well as an example of a particular concept of intertextuality, which derives from a superordinate understanding of intertextuality. The communication model acknowledges (inferred) intention as well as the reader’s reception of a work. It is doubtful, however, whether the inclusion of

²¹ See Wimsatt and Beardsley.

intention is needed at all, if the reader infers the intention. If so, the reader ‘covers’ the inferral of intention, under the concept of literary competence one can for example assume that the expectations toward a literary genre include the implication of the author’s intention to, for example, write a historical novel or a parody of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

In the analysis of “Westward” and “Funhouse,” I incorporate elements of Hutcheon’s parody and intertextuality accounts. However, it is not my intention to label “Westward” strictly a parody of “Funhouse.” Throughout, I will be referring to a universalist notion of intertextuality as an overall framework. In the following, I turn to Barth’s and Wallace’s own criticism. Both authors directly or indirectly engage in several of the ideas discussed thus far in theorizing postmodernism, metafiction and intertextuality.

2.2 Postmodernism, Metafiction, Intertextuality in Barth and Wallace’s Criticism

Both John Barth and David Foster Wallace formulated ideas about literature and culture in their nonfiction essays—Barth’s essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” has been regarded as a manifesto and initiator of literary postmodernism (e.g. McLaughlin 63; Fitzpatrick, *Obsolescence* 25). Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram” in turn is a blueprint for the cultural criticism which reappears throughout his fiction and nonfiction.

As Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou point out in the editor’s foreword to *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace* (2012), an assembly of scholarly texts and funeral speeches by authors of his generation, the fear of the “intentional fallacy” (Wimsatt and Beardsley) is very present in scholarly work about Wallace (xii–xiii). It is difficult to entirely free oneself of Wallace’s words from nonfiction or interviews when writing about his work. The critic is caught in a paradoxical fear of missing out: “If we insist on treating his fictions as unrelated to his goals and his life, do we risk overlooking the significant continuities (both stylistic and thematic) across his fiction and nonfiction? If we think his biography does matter, do we risk turning his stories into mere symptoms of his experience, eliding or effacing his artistry?” (Cohen and Konstantinou xiii). As much as Cohen and Konstantinou do not want to provide an answer, the inclusion of personal speeches in the collection of essays demonstrates a clear concern for not only David Foster Wallace the writer, but also for David Foster Wallace the person. This publishing decision might partly be owed to considerations of the target group—which is not limited to scholars but includes a large readership and fan base.

Reading Wallace's fiction through his non-fiction becomes most interesting when his stated goals do not correspond with the effects of his fiction. *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* is one of Wallace's earlier works, published two years after his first novel. As such, it is easy to dismiss as a youthful experiment that was doomed to fail, as Wallace himself has done in an interview with Larry McCaffery, saying "I got trapped...just trying to expose the illusions of metafiction the same way metafiction had tried to expose the illusions of the pseudo-unmediated realist fiction that had come before it. It was a horror show. The stuff's a permanent migraine" ("Conversation" 134).

To accept this interpretation, however, means to limit the text to one determined by a technical goal: to succeed metafiction via what McCaffery suggests is "meta-metafiction" (Wallace, "Conversation" 134). As much as the narrator is unreliable, its author is, too. "Westward" first of all is distinctive in its open acknowledgement of a source, which inevitably posits the work as a successor of Barth's "Funhouse." In addition to entering into a multidirectional dialogue with Barth's fiction and the intertextual space beyond, "Westward" engages with Barth's critical ideas, particularly those expressed in "Literature of Exhaustion."

2.2.1 John Barth

"The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) contains John Barth's diagnosis of the "literature of exhausted possibility" (64) and his vision for its replacement. "Exhausted," Barth emphasizes, does not mean that nothing new and original can be produced anymore. However, only a small group of writers, "technically up-to-date artists," as opposed to "technically old-fashioned artists" and "technically up-to-date non-artists" ("Exhaustion" 66), succeeds in writing in an emotional yet imaginative manner in the mid-to-late 20th century.²² Among these "technically up-to-date artists" are Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov and above all Jose Luis Borges, whose *Labyrinths* serves as a metaphor for the possibilities of the novel. These "technically up-to-date artists" are avant-garde thinkers and at the same time write consciously of literary history, which means, "to speak eloquently and memorably to our human hearts and conditions, as the great artists have always done" (67). In arguing so, Barth equates aesthetic value with style and emotional effect.

²² In the introduction to the 1984 edition, Barth points out that the essay has been "misread as one more Death of the Novel or Swan-Song of Literature piece. It isn't" ("Exhaustion" 64).

Another criterion of aesthetic value is the use of irony and imitation. The intent to ironize decides whether imitation is ridiculous or a valid art form, Barth argues. An imitation of Beethoven's symphonies, Barth's example goes, could not be accepted as sincere art today—unless it is ironic. Barth imagines that in this case it might achieve the same importance as Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans. The difference, however, would be that “in the former case [if Beethoven's sixth symphony were published today] a work of art is being reproduced instead of a work of non art [Campbell's soup cans], and the ironic comment would therefore be more directly on the genre and history of the art than the state of the culture” (“Exhaustion” 69).

The creation of value in both cases is not dependent on uniqueness but rather on the recognizability of the reference—whether this reference is made with regard to art or the state of culture. In the case of Warhol's soup cans, however, the reference is twice removed, while Beethoven's symphony is once removed. The mediator between Warhol's silkscreen prints and the state of capitalist mass-production and consumption is the object that comes to symbolize the state of society. Through Warhol's paintings, the object is turned into an icon and thus becomes a text in Roland Barthes's sense.

While satire, in the late 1960s, has lost its effectiveness according to Barth, parodic works can end the exhaustion of literature, not by claiming to invent something original but rather by adding to the discussion concerning the creative process itself (“Exhaustion” 69). For example, Borges's *Pierre Menard's Don Quixote* is a “remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessary of writing original works of literature. His artistic victory is, if you like, that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work” (69–70).

What Barth deems Borges's “artistic victory” (“Exhaustion” 69) is exactly what his own story “Title” (1960)²³ attempts: to grapple with the problems of writing original fiction and thereby overcome the very problem. The three-voiced narrative, which includes a “she,” an “I”-narrator who at times changes to a third-person narrator speaking about a “he” and a “she,” takes on the form of a desperate inner monologue. It begins with, “Beginning: in the middle, past the middle, nearer three-quarters done, waiting for the end. Consider how dreadful so far: passionlessness, abstraction, pro, dis. And it will

²³ “Title” first appeared in the winter 1960 issue of *Yale Review* and was later included in *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968).

get worse. Can we possibly continue?" The narrator repeatedly interrupts himself by commenting on the hopeless state of the narrative, which cannot "fill the blank" because there is no blank left to fill:

Yes, she already said that. And I think. What now. Everything's been said already, over and over; I'm as sick of this as you are; there's nothing to say. Say nothing.
What's new? Nothing. ("Title" 102)

After eight pages, the story ends with a space, which appears to be both a command to the reader to fill in the blank and a way to shift agency from the author-narrator to the reader:

Oh God comma I abhor self-consciousness. I despise what we have come to; I loathe our loathsome loathing, our place our time our situation, our loathsome art, this ditto necessary story. The blank of our lives. It's about over. Let the denouement be soon and unexpected, painless if possible, quick at least, above all soon. Now now! How in the world will it ever ("Title" 110)

This last incomplete sentence resists the urge to impose a full stop and its absence produces the necessary blank, which can be read as the opening and the closing of the narrative. The way out of the "blank" in literature is addressing its own dilemmas:

how an artist may paradoxically turn the felt ultimacies of our time into material and means of his work—paradoxically, because by doing so he transcends what had appeared to be his refutation, in the same way that the mystic who transcends finitude is said to be enabled to live, spiritually and physically, in the finite world. ("Exhaustion" 71)

The principle Barth suggests here is akin to exposure therapy: the overcoming of fears by addressing them. As such, writing becomes not only individually therapeutic but has the potential to collectively heal. This is an expression of a larger cultural current: the debate on the relevance of the novel, which continues in different form until today. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick points out in *Anxiety of Obsolescence* (2006): "the death of the novel is alive and well" (26).²⁴ Relating *Lost in the Funhouse* to "Literature of Exhaustion," Amy Hungerford argues: "Barth's effort at showing us the exhaustion of narrative produces a

²⁴ In the follow-up book *Planned Obsolescence* (2011), Fitzpatrick discusses the influence of the digital, while focusing on television in *Anxiety of Obsolescence* (where she also discusses Wallace's essay, which I turn to below).

kind of new pleasure in narrative. So it is by pointing out and then parodying it that he begins to renew the resources of fiction” (Hungerford).

In the follow-up essay to “Literature of Exhaustion,” “Literature of Replenishment” (1979), Barth aims to define the term postmodernism, which not once appears in “Literature of Exhaustion” (1967), although the essay is discussed under this umbrella term (“Replenishment” 193). Barth argues that it was not the exhaustion of literature in general, but rather the exhaustion of “high Modernism” that he lamented in “Literature of Exhaustion” (“Replenishment” 206). Postmodernism, then, can for Barth only be defined in relation to modernism and premodernism. Without merely rejecting one or both, the “postmodern program” should be “the synthesis or transcension” of “modernist and premodernist modes of writing” (203). The “ideal postmodern writer” for Barth:

has the first half of the century under his belt, but not on his back. Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplicism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naïveté, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-modernist marvels (by my definition) as Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing* or Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*. He may not hope to reach the devotees of James Michener and Irving Wallace—not to mention the great masses of television-addicted non-readers. But he should hope to reach, at least part of the time, beyond [. . .] professional devotees of high art. (“Replenishment” 203)

While this is both a claim for retaining a certain level of exclusivity and for granting better accessibility of fiction, Barth also reinforces the binarism television/fiction, retaining conservative levels of media-hierarchy within culture. Television addiction excludes reading—a view which David Foster Wallace counteracts fourteen years later in his essay “E Unibus Pluram,” claiming that television addiction has much in common with literary postmodernism.

2.2.2 David Foster Wallace

Like Barth’s “Literature of Exhaustion,” David Foster Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram – Television and U.S. Fiction” (1993) calls for a new direction in fiction. While Barth’s critique is directed at high modernism, Wallace’s critique aims at postmodernism. Therefore, some critics have voiced that Wallace writing style resembles a post-postmodernist project (Hirt; Giles) or a New Sincerity (Kelly).

Wallace formulates that literary postmodernism coincided with the emergence of mass television and a period in which “mass popular U.S. culture became high art viable

as a collection of symbols and myth . . . The episcopate of this pop-reference movement were the post-Nabokovian black humorists, the metafictionists and assorted franco- and latinophiles only later comprised by ‘postmodern’” (“E Unibus Pluram” 168). Among these, Wallace counts John Barth, singling out the early novels *The End of the Road* (1958) and *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960).

Wallace’s critique of metafiction aims at its core, self-referentiality, which he argues has been adapted from television’s narrative techniques. Wallace believes that the variant of metafiction that emerged in the 1960s, “for its time, was nothing more than a poignant hybrid of its theoretical foe, realism: if realism called it like it saw it, metafiction simply called it like it saw it seeing itself see it. The high-cultural postmodern genre, in other words, was deeply informed by the emergence of television” (“E Unibus Pluram” 161). Both TV and postmodern fiction hinge on “self-conscious irony” (161). And although both “artistic ancestors” of postmodernism like James Joyce or Marcel Duchamp and contemporary fiction writers use pop culture images, they do so with different intention and to different effect (166). While the art of the “ancestors” operates to uncover and challenge hierarchically determined categories, the latter operates “(1) to help create a mood of irony and irreverence, (2) to make us uneasy and so ‘comment’ on the vapidness of U.S. culture, and (3) most important, these days, to be just plain realistic” (166–67). What Wallace thus calls “high-cultural postmodernism” is a continuation of the end by other means. Both realism and 1960s postmodernism suggest a desire for exclusivity, or distancing from popular culture. The means of today is irony; it has become a “cultural norm” that manages “to interdict the *question* without attending to its *content*” simply by saying, “‘How very *banal* to ask what I mean’” (184). The consequence of this refusal to provide a way out of this loop is isolation.

Similarly, Larry McCaffery suggests in an interview with Wallace that “Westward” “impl[ies] that metafiction is a game that only reveals itself, or that can’t share its valence with anything outside itself—like the daily world” (Wallace, “Conversation” 134). Wallace’s response concerns the historical need for metafiction, which gave rise to shallowness when the historical moment had passed:

It [metafiction] helps reveal fiction as a meditated experience. Plus it reminds us that there’s always a recursive component to utterance. This was important, because language’s self-consciousness had always been there, but neither writers nor critics nor readers wanted to be reminded of it. But we ended up seeing why recursion’s dangerous, and maybe why everybody wanted to keep linguistic self-consciousness out of the show. It

gets empty and solipsistic real fast. It spirals in on itself. By the mid-seventies, I think, everything useful about the mode had been exhausted, and the crank-turners had descended. By the eighties it'd become a god awful trap. In "Westward" I got trapped one time just trying to expose the illusions of metafiction the same way metafiction had tried to expose the illusions of the pseudo unmediated realist fiction that came before it. ("Conversation" 134)

Wallace's work demonstrates the combination of language's self-awareness with social and psychological concerns. Lee Konstantinou, on the other hand, maintains that academic definitions of postmodernism always serve as "a cognitive mediator standing between Wallace and his interpretation of postmodernist fiction from the 1960s and 1970s" (88). Accordingly, he argues, Wallace associates both "Lost in the Funhouse" and his own "Westward" with a limitation to "recursion" (Konstantinou 134).

In labeling John Barth—albeit indirectly—one of the "crank-turners" of metafiction, Wallace neglects several important aspects of Barth's critical and fictional works. Barth's appeal for a turn to the problems of fiction writing *through* fiction writing, is not a call for the exclusion of all external subjects. To the contrary, *Funhouse* repeatedly juxtaposes writing-related problems with those of human communication, particularly pertaining to the individual's fear of isolation.²⁵ In congruence with the theoretical aims outlined later in Barth's theoretical essays, "Lost in the Funhouse" is preoccupied with the emancipation from the consciousness of characters in the narrative toward a self-consciousness *of* the narrative.

Wallace takes narrative self-consciousness as a given twenty-six years later. He aptly points out that Barth advocates the self-consciousness of fiction in theory and practice, but disregards that this is not the kind of ironic self-consciousness that Wallace describes as the default mode of television, literature and culture at large in "E Pluribus Unum." In "Post-postmodern Discontent," Robert McLaughlin suggests, "Perhaps the best way to think about postmodern self-referentiality is not as a denial of language and literature's connection to the world but as their self-consciously pointing to themselves trying to point to the world" (57). The comparison with Wallace's "if realism called it like it saw it, metafiction simply called it like it saw it seeing itself see it" ("E Unibus Pluram" 161) reveals that both McLaughlin and Wallace see a certain continuation of the

²⁵ Good examples are especially two other stories from the Ambrose cycle, "Night-Sea Journey" and "Ambrose His Mark", as well as the extremely reduced "Title." The fourth Ambrose-story is "Water-Message."

verisimilitude principle in postmodernism, despite postmodernism's breakdown of realism's fourth wall.

2.3 *A New Sincerity*

The term New Sincerity suggests that literature is preceded by (A) something that is not sincere—which leads to the question whether literature can be insincere or sincere at all—or (B) an 'Old Sincerity' such as the modernist sincerity that can be returned to. Sincerity in its most basic sense refers to "a congruence of avowal and actual feeling," which functions through communication with others (Trilling, qtd. in Kelly 132).²⁶ Sometimes also referred to as post-postmodernism or a third wave of modernism (Boswell), New Sincerity describes a movement in contemporary American culture and literature that is characterized by its tone of sincerity. It is not merely a return to an 'Old Sincerity' as it questions binary oppositions such as "inner" and "outer" or "self" and "other" (Kelly). Furthermore, like postmodernism, New Sincere writing acknowledges the invalidity of text-to-world referentiality. Jonathan Fitzgerald, Stefan Hirt, Adam Kelly, among others, locate David Foster Wallace's works within this movement.

In addition, sincerity suggests the presence of an intention. The 'intender' intends to emotionally connect to the reader under the assumption of a level playing field: The narrator places herself on the level of the reader with the aim—again, the inferral of intention—to communicate a *sincere* view. *Girl With Curious Hair*, and particularly "Westward" demonstrates the way in which sincerity matters not only to the characters but primarily to Wallace's "own narrative persona" (Kelly 142).

The narrator's attempt at conveying a sincere view does not as much refer to the world as it refers to the self and the eternal loop of own behavior and expectations and others' expectations. Wallace's fiction "asks what happens when the anticipation of other's reception of one's outward behavior begins to take priority for the acting self, so that inner states lose their originating causal status and instead become effects of that anticipatory logic" (Kelly 136). In other words, the internalization of others' expectations becomes indistinguishable from one's own motivation. This may be illustrated with an example from deviance theory: the step-by-step internalization of being a 'criminal' after various encounters with the justice, criminal and rehabilitation system. It becomes

²⁶ As opposed to authenticity, which Lionel Trilling, in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971), views not to rest on the element of the other, but rather on the self. See Trilling, Kelly.

unclear to the person whether he or she ‘is’ really a criminal or one has only started to repeatedly act in the way that is expected of someone who has previously deviated from the norms of society, and is expected to carry in him or her the desire to repeatedly do so.

Wallace complicates the notion of sincerity, by portraying characters’ or narrators’ uncertainties about the truthfulness of sincerity itself. Thereby, Wallace questions both the recursive nature of metafiction and the manipulative nature of sincerity as part of a postmodern show concept. The TV show *Late Night with David Letterman* provides the perfect setting for discussing these questions in “My Appearance,” also included in *Girl With Curious Hair*.²⁷ In the short story, a woman who is about to appear on the show is self-conscious about how much to disclose while also fulfilling Letterman’s expectations of simultaneous deprecation and honesty; she is “supposed to make myself look ridiculous” and honest, but she also should avoid being one of those guests who are “sincere-seeming, who think they’re sincere” (Wallace, “My Appearance” 182).

Her friend and television network employee’s advice is: “Act as if you knew from birth that everything is clichéd and hyped and empty and absurd, and that that’s *just* where the fun is.” (183). The woman, who is also the I-narrator, then corrects her initial response, “that’s not the way I am at all” to “that’s not even the way I act when I’m acting,” making clear that she has understood that appearance counts more than the actual feeling (183). Thus, the main character is expected to “appear on the show” in a double sense: being a guest and keeping up appearances while there.

The attribution of sincerity to the narrative persona in texts that often “exaggerate authorial presence” (Waugh 131) differentiates the postmodernist from the modernist sincerity. While modernism aimed at “impersonality,” postmodern texts pursue “Personality, the ironic flaunting of the Teller” (131). This purely ironic telling of the ‘old’ postmodernism does not apply to members of the New Sincerity, its proponents suggest. Instead, the New Sincerity combines irony and sincerity.

One might argue that irony is by default insincere and therefore irreconcilable with sincerity. To the contrary, several critics contend that Wallace supersedes this

²⁷ Since 1993 titled *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Wallace also mentions the show in his interview with Larry McCaffery, as an example of the omnipresence of self-deprecating humor and irony on television. For an analysis of “My Appearance,” see Kirsch.

exclusivity of irony. Marshall Boswell argues that Wallace manages to combine irony and sincerity in an unprecedented way (15). Anthony Scott describes Wallace's style as "meta-ironic" in an article on the New Sincerity in American literature (40, qtd. in Boswell 15). Scott writes that meta-irony means: "to turn irony back on itself, to make his fiction relentlessly conscious of its own self-consciousness, and thus to produce work that will be at once unassailably sophisticated and doggedly down to earth" (40, qtd. in Boswell 15). In a 2009 *New Yorker*-profile of Wallace, D.T. Max writes that by the time of *Infinite Jest*'s publication in 1991, postmodernism and minimalism left "a wide opening for Wallace's opaque sincerity" ("The Unfinished"). Both Boswell and Max seem unconvinced that Wallace's writing is straightforwardly sincere—but nor is its tone merely ironic. It contains both irony and sincerity, according to Boswell, and according to Max, it is a sincerity that is somehow concealed.

Ed Finn postulates in "Becoming Yourself" (2012), an essay about the popular reception of David Foster Wallace's work, that Wallace's writing is "postmodern" in a "historical sense" and thereby closer in style to the 1960s–80s postmodernists than to his actual peers. More importantly in the context of the New Sincerity, he calls it "integral," describing the reading experience as an often-strenuous process toward the discovery of "genuine honesty [. . .] in spite of the postmodern distancing that makes such work necessary" (153). This common reader experience of having to *work* through Wallace's writing in order to be rewarded by a feeling of honest connection is one expressed by many readers (Fitzpatrick, "Infinite Summer")²⁸ and the majority of contributors to the essay collection *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace* (2012). Most of these essays focus on *Infinite Jest* and Wallace's interviews, while neglecting the development from earlier works including *Girl With Curious Hair*.

In the Wallace biography *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* (2012), D.T. Max argues that *Infinite Jest* marks a caesura in the development of Wallace's work. The novel, Max contends, synthesizes Wallace's three stylistic voices: "the playful, comic voice of his Amherst years, passing through his infatuation with postmodernism at Arizona, and ending with the conversion to single-entendre principles of his days in

²⁸ Fitzpatrick notes this in her analysis of the communal reading project and blog "Infinite Summer," included in the collection *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. A similar "social reading" project was initiated by the German publishing company of Wallace's *The Pale King*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

Boston” (*Ghost Story* 159). Although this description of Wallace’s style creates a simplifying linear narrative, I believe there is more truth to it than the more unified views of the above-discussed critics. Although Wallace’s works do not conform to a narrative of linear progression, there are doubtlessly notable differences in narrative tone and overall style between *Girl With Curious Hair* (1989) and later works like *Infinite Jest* (1996) and *The Pale King* (2012). One obviously ‘missing’ stylistic element is the absence of footnotes in *Girl With Curious Hair*.

Advocates for Wallace’s membership—if not leadership—in the New Sincerity often ground their argument in Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram.” Adam Kelly, for example, believes that Wallace’s literary project “ended up even more far reaching than he claimed it would be in that early essay [“E Unibus Pluram”], and [. . .] from *Infinite Jest* onwards it became primarily about returning to literary narrative a concern with sincerity not seen since modernism shifted the ground so fundamentally almost a century before” (133).

In the last passage of “E Unibus Pluram,” Wallace appeals to contemporary writers who defy TV’s—and postmodernism’s—tendency to incorporate and neutralize voices of difference through irony:

The next real literary “rebels” in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of “anti-rebels,” born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue. These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naïve, anachronistic. Maybe that’ll be the point, why they’ll be the next real rebels. Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk things. Risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. The new rebels might be the ones willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the “How banal.” Accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Credulity. Willingness to be suckered by a world of lurkers and starers who fear gaze and ridicule above imprisonment without law. Who knows. Today’s most engaged young fiction does seem to be like some kind of line’s end’s end. I guess that means we all get to draw our own conclusions. Have to. Are you immensely pleased. (192–93)

The final call against the participation in a blasé literary world is simultaneously a statement on Wallace’s own fiction. At the same time, it puts Wallace in a leader position among outsiders. In her discussion of David Foster Wallace and Toni Morrison’s roles in defining contemporary US fiction, Kathleen Fitzpatrick concludes,

“the double-edged notion ‘New White Guys’²⁹ becomes particularly apt, as this group of white male writers imagines itself to have rediscovered affect after its long absence from favor” (*Obsolescence* 217). Fitzpatrick’s criticism takes up the discourse on the alleged crisis of white masculinity in order to argue that postmodernism—and here she does not differentiate between generations or waves—is in fact a “conservative revolution,” which reasserts cultural dominance by “returning to the universalized cultural problems of whiteness, maleness, Americanness” (218). While Fitzpatrick justly highlights an aspect that receives proportionally little attention in the critical discussion on Wallace—perhaps precisely because his class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation are all unmarked categories—she also unjustly reduces the combination of self-awareness sincerity in his writing to a mere demonstration of emotionality.

Whether critics see David Foster Wallace as a singular phenomenon with postmodern techniques and ‘deeper’ subject matter, or a member of a historically new movement in American literature (Kelly), or of a “third wave of modernism” (Boswell 1), or a “conservative revolution” (Fitzpatrick, *Obsolescence* 218): these descriptions all suggest that American literature has changed to a superior form or regressed, both of which is problematic to accept. As Linda Hutcheon rhetorically asks: “The forms of art change, but do they really evolve or get better in any way? (*Parody* 36)³⁰ Hutcheon suggests that it is not the form of literature that has changed but rather the reader’s role:

There has *not* been today an abrupt break, in terms of literary history, between *kinds* of texts, as French criticism of the sixties would have us believe. All texts can be *scriptible* to some extent; the degree and the kind of engagement with a text depends—at least in part—upon the *reader*. In other words, if there has been a break, it has been one in the attitude *of* the reader and *to* the reader—by critics and novelists alike. (“Borrowing” 234)

Such a “change in attitude” also changes the text itself according to an intertextual understanding of the text. Wallace contends, after referencing Barthes and Derrida: “once I’m done with the thing, I’m basically dead, and probably the text’s dead; it becomes simply language, and language lives not just in but ‘through’ the reader. The reader becomes God, for all textual purposes” (“A Conversation” 134). The following section

²⁹ From a *Time* article that falsely attributes the expression to Wallace.

³⁰ Hutcheon in this case refers to the Formalist view of literature, which suggests that parody is a sign of the evolution and betterment of art.

shall among other aspects show in how far the transfer of the creator-role to the reader is realized in Wallace's alteration of "Funhouse."

3 "Lost in the Funhouse" and "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"

After having reviewed theories of intertextuality as well as Barth's and Wallace's views on fiction, I now turn to the representation and realization of these through character portrayal and narrative mode in "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" and "Lost in the Funhouse." Taking "Westward" as a venture point allows for a retrospective assessment of Barth's text, which would of course be impossible vice versa.

After a brief plot overview of "Westward" and "Funhouse" and an account of the title "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way," I focus on character and then narrative voices. Sometimes indistinguishable from one another, they negotiate fictional self-referentiality and principles of fiction writing. The first part of the analysis starts by discussing Mark Nechtr from "Westward" vis-à-vis Ambrose from "Funhouse." I then turn to Nechtr's relationship with his oppositional character Drew-Lynn (D.L.) in "Westward." Finally, I look at the characters Magda and Mark in light of postmodernism as narrative framework.

The ensuing part of the analysis centers in on narrative voice, with an emphasis on narrative reliability, stability, and sincerity. Although Wallace's orientation toward the past may seem obvious to a certain extent, I argue that it is also necessary to consider "Westward" a future-oriented endeavor, which proposes a new direction in metafiction. I conclude that "Westward" functions as an appeal, voiced by Mark Nechtr and the narrator, for a new direction in metafiction, a 'metafiction of responsibility.' As this appeal cannot be realized, the novella ultimately shows metafiction to be incompatible with such a renewal of metafiction.

As mentioned earlier, the verso page of *Girl With Curious Hair* states that "Westward" is "written in the margins of John Barth's 'Lost in the Funhouse.'" On top of its most likely legal necessity, the verso page statement implies one *should* read/have read "Lost in the Funhouse." In addition, categorizing the novella as marginal in the verso page pre-scription plays with the canonical status of "Funhouse" in postmodern literature, which creates various "presuppositions" (Culler), or expectations that the reader brings to the text. No matter whether the reader agrees or disagrees with the

canonization of John Barth's works, the awareness of the label 'canonical' on its own affects the approach to "Westward."³¹

If we regard "Funhouse" and "Westward" as "writerly texts" in Barthes's sense of the term, the awareness of the postmodern canon changes the reader's experience. The novella itself repeatedly reminds us to stay aware by discussing postmodern literary conventions. As John Frow points out, intertextual reference relies on the reader's socialization into literary discourses; the text is inevitably filtered through "the structure of the literary system and by the authority of the literary canon" (45). The thusly-shaped understanding of the text, in turn, alters the text itself.

The overall structure of "Westward" and "Funhouse" is determined by another convention, which classically entails expectations of finite progression: the journey. The journey, the essential element of travel and captivity narratives, provides both stories with a framework. In "Funhouse," two major journeys make up the framework: First, the physical journey of the protagonist, 13-year-old Ambrose Mensch, which takes place on Independence Day in an unspecified year during World War II. Ambrose is on the way to Ocean City, Maryland via car, with his parents, brother Peter (15), Uncle Karl, and 14-year-old neighborhood friend Magda. Both Ambrose and Peter are in love with Magda, but only Peter manages to be alone with the girl in the funhouse in the further development of the story, abandoning Ambrose.

A reference to John Dos Passos's high modernist *USA* trilogy in the exposition of "Funhouse," embeds Ambrose's journey into American literary history: "Thrice a year—on Memorial, Independence and Labor Days—the family visits Ocean City for the afternoon and evening. When Ambrose and Peter's father was their age, the excursion was made by train, as mentioned in *The 42nd Parallel* by John Dos Passos" ("Funhouse" 73). Through adding this plot-wise unnecessary information, Barth explicitly places "Funhouse" into an intertextual network.

³¹ Wallace literally started to write "Westward" in the margins of "Funhouse," as the collection of Wallace's materials, which is now accessible in the University of Texas's Harry Ransom Center in Austin, has revealed. It includes a heavily used and annotated copy of *Lost in the Funhouse*, in which Wallace comments on Barth's style: "Talmudic—obsessed w/its own interpretation"—a comment that, as Carrie Frye rightly points out, almost literally repeated in "Westward" (Frye). The narrator interrupts the story with the words: "Again, the preceding generation of crippling self-conscious writers, obsessed with their own interpretation, would mention at this point [...]"("Westward" 269; see below for full quote).

This network is not only literary one but also historical. The remark also locates the event in Ambrose's family history and, on a larger scale, in American history. Overall, the reference heightens the relevance of the car journey, which now takes on metaphorical and mythological qualities. While the critic Barth distances himself from the modernist tradition in "Literature of Exhaustion," the fiction writer Barth creates continuity between modernist and his own writing by evoking Dos Passos. The overarching narrative, one might say, is that of experimental American fiction.

Like "Funhouse," "Westward" is determined by two main journeys. Both journeys in "Westward" revolve around creative writing graduate student Mark Nechtr. In the part of the novella set at the graduate workshop, the characters form a group through their ambition—or journey—to become writers. Scenes from the fiction-writing workshop, taught by a professor with the telling name Ambrose, are connected with a subplot about Mark Nechtr's relationship with fellow student and self-proclaimed postmodernist, Drew-Lynn (D.L.) Eberhardt: "specializing in language poetry and the apocalyptically cryptic Literature of Last Things, in exhaustion in general, and metafiction," who is also "so atheist" ("Westward" 328, 263).³² Mark and D.L.'s relationship grows from utter dislike to a one-night-stand leading to D.L.'s feigned pregnancy and their marriage

A second narrative strand connects Mark and D.L. with new characters related through their past as someone who has "Represented the Product in a McDonald's Commercial" or is involved in the advertising of McDonald's and therefore in the reunion of "Everyone Who Has Ever Represented the Product in a McDonald's Commercial" in Collision, Illinois. At this reunion, the ribbon cutting of the Funhouse disco franchise chain will also occur, in the presence of the initiator Professor Ambrose. The destination in Collision, Illinois, however, is never reached. As Marshall Boswell acutely remarks, Wallace thereby "withholds the actual collision" (113). This evasion of a final confrontation, and the multiple, nestled plot lines make for an episodic, open-ended narrative structure in comparison to which "Funhouse" seems almost linear.

³² The writing workshop story line contains a *mise-en-abyme* in the form of a short story that Mark presents in the writing workshop. This story within the story involves a character named Dave, a "young competitive archer" and his "live-in-lover, named L—" ("Westward" 356). I will expand on this in the course of the analysis.

3.1 Considering the Title “*Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*”

In the context of structure and direction, the novella’s full title: “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way” needs to be examined more closely. Two other ‘texts’ can be considered the novella’s name-givers. Although I will focus on the ‘pre-scribed’ relationship between “Westward” and “Funhouse,” these texts should also be taken into account because they shed light upon the novella’s position in literary and national American history. Furthermore, they provide an insight into the novella’s place within the American history of ideas.

Wallace adopts the title from a painting, which in turn adapted its own title from a written text. In this way, intertextuality becomes intermediality. One might also say that the idea of ‘text’ and ‘intertext’ is expanded beyond the written word. The first ‘text’ is the 1861 painting *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way* by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze,³³ which the US government later commissioned for a mural on a wall inside the US Capitol. A written text, the poem “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Art and Learning in America” (1726) by the Anglo-Irish philosopher and bishop George Berkeley, in turn inspired Leutze; it contains the line “Westward the course of empire takes its way” (21).³⁴

Leutze’s painting shows a group of settlers on a journey. The central male figure is pointing toward an area of light to his left. He visually marks the dividing line between the darkness on the right side of the group and the light, which the group is traveling toward. Native Americans are literally a marginal presence, appearing at the edges of the painting, apart from the white settlers (Smithsonian). Wallace’s references to Leutze’s painting are not as easily detectable as the parallels to Berkeley’s text. Nevertheless, one might note that the destination Collision, Illinois in Wallace’s novella is analogous to the light in Leutze’s painting. We might also assume that all characters in the novella are white travelers, like in Leutze’s painting, simply because it is not specified otherwise. The city’s name, Collision, implies that the light of Leutze’s painting has become destructive and perhaps blinding like the neon light of McDonald’s, which organized the

³³ See appendix, figure 1.

³⁴ See appendix, figure 2 for the full-length poem. The new campus site of the College of California was named Berkeley after him in 1878. Berkeley had attempted but failed to found a missionary college in the mid-18th century (Berkeley Historical Society).

“Reunion of everyone who has ever been in a McDonald’s commercial” (“Westward” 235).

Perhaps more frequently than Leutze’s painting, Berkeley’s six-quatrains poem, has been cited in the context of national cultural identity and the Manifest Destiny concept (e.g. Gorer, Gamble). The poem praises America for her “innocence” and “virtue” (9–10). With these qualities, the colony contrasts “Europe in her decay” (17). Berkeley then calls for and predicts “another golden age” for America, initiated by the “rise of empire and arts” (13–14). The final stanza of the poem looks to America’s future as an expanding empire of its own, in military and dramatic language. The poem’s use of language mirrors Berkeley’s vision of a future “golden age” (13), in which the British Empire will be replaced by the American Empire in a historical five-act-drama (23):

Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The first four acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time’s noblest offspring is the last. (Berkeley 21–24)

Through adopting Leutze and Berkeley’s texts, Wallace embeds the novella into several histories. One is the formation of a ‘national identity’ in America, which requires national education and culture. The creative writing workshop in Wallace’s novella takes up this thought in order to demonstrate that Berkeley’s ancestors have taken a wrong turn through the corruption of formerly liberal arts.

At the same time, the title alludes to the violent history of colonialism and imperialism in America, which overwrites the idea of a Manifest Destiny. In Wallace’s novella, the American Empire continues in the form of global consumerism and the homogenization of art and literature, embodied respectively by the Steelritter Advertising Agency and Professor Ambrose. One historian argues that Berkeley’s poem reinforces “the ancient belief in *translatio imperii* (that is, that empire naturally passes from one successor to the next) and the equally ancient belief in heliotropism (that is, that the movement of empire naturally follows the sun’s path from east to west)” (Gamble 24).³⁵ Accordingly, Wallace’s re-writing of the westward journey can be taken as an ironic comment on the belief in *translatio imperii* and heliotropism. In moving from Maryland

³⁵ For an account on *translatio* and heliotropism in American history, see Bercovitch.

(east) to Illinois (west), the expansion of Steelritter and Professor Ambrose's consumer empire corresponds with the idea of heliotropism.

The analogy to heliotropism is complicated by the fact that the characters, like many unsuccessful settlers, never reach their destination. Although the reader knows that the characters are moving west, whenever a direction occurs, it is never west: "Facing Eastward like this it's almost hard to even look [. . .] your eyes so relaxed and without object they almost roll" ("Westward" 244). When the car has almost reached its destination, it turns North: "Sternberg's voice, shrill and barely controlled: 'We're going North?' 'Pop's going to bring you guys in from the Northeast [. . .] Whole South part of Collision's fucking mobbed'" ("Westward" 314). The fixation on the West, this implies, has been a continuum in US history that has merely changed its shape. In the end, however, the West is a symbolic destination that cannot be reached.

The idea of *translatio imperii* is less obviously present in Wallace's novella. One can possibly transfer it to Wallace's discussion of dominant literary styles and movements through the writing workshop setting. Although this may seem far-fetched, the dominant literary movement of a given time can be seen as an 'empire.' In this vein, the novella's criticism of literary blueprints for aspiring writers can be regarded as a criticism of the *translatio imperii* idea, if it refers to the linear narrative created by the idea of successive 'literary empires.'

3.2 Writer-Characters

To a certain extent, Ambrose from "Funhouse" and Mark Nechtr from "Westward" also grapple with literary empires. In the characters of "Funhouse," Wallace discusses the literary empire of postmodernism. The novella's intertextual references to "Funhouse" are most pronounced in the character names. Some characters are named exactly like "Funhouse" characters, while others only contain allusions. These characters are Professor Ambrose (compared to Ambrose Mensch in "Lost in the Funhouse"), Magda Ambrose Gatz (compared to the fourteen-year-old Magda without a last name in "Funhouse), and Mark Nechtr (*Lost in the Funhouse* also contains a short story titled "Ambrose His Mark"; the last name is perhaps an allusion to Ambrose's nectar). The only character not mentioned here, who also plays a crucial role in "Westward," is D.L. (Drew-Lynn) Eberhardt. This may be attributed to her being an outspokenly postmodernist writer, who emphasizes non-referentiality. Before coming to D.L., however, I focus on Ambrose Mensch and Mark Nechtr.

3.2.1 Ambrose and Mark Nechtr: The Why and How of Storytelling

Both in “Funhouse” and “Westward,” character dialogue and descriptions serve as platforms for the discussion of intertextual and intratextual questions. The differences in the texts’ narrative poetics may be most prominently visible in Ambrose Mensch and Mark Nechtr. Ambrose story opens with the question “For Whom is the funhouse fun?” (“Funhouse” 72), and ends with:

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he’s not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator—though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed. (“Funhouse” 97)

The funhouse thereby provides a narrative framework, as well as an anchor point throughout the story’s plot. Ambrose is the only one who is able and forced to construct elaborate funhouses—or stories—which lovers enjoy without looking behind the scenes. His gift is a curse because he will never be able to participate in the reading-experience of the “regular person” he so badly wants to become (“Funhouse” 97). The short story’s closing sentences leave him wandering around the funhouse, wondering, “will he become a regular person?” and “How long will it last?” (“Funhouse” 97). Replacing “person” by “story” leads to the question whether it is still possible for Ambrose’s story to ‘become a regular story’ if the narrative constantly undermines itself in self-conscious commentary. “How long will it last” can accordingly be related to the concern about the story’s ending and the ‘meta’-concern: can or should a self-conscious narrative ever reach a point of closure?

Ambrose knows that writing, or constructing funhouses, will lead to isolation, as he will be in the funhouse permanently—which the others can enter and leave as they please. “Funhouse” does not offer a solution to Ambrose’s situation, he might not ever grow up to “become a regular person” (“Funhouse” 97).

Barth’s “Title” from *Lost in the Funhouse* contains an adequate description of Ambrose’s dilemma, which likens the writing process to the funhouse: “The only way to get out of a mirror-maze is to close your eyes and hold out your hands. And be carried away by a valiant metaphor, I suppose, like a simile. There’s only one direction to go in. Ugh. We must make something out of nothing. Impossible” (“Title” 111). As opposed to this strive for pure originality, an intertextualist understanding of the writing process would not be “making something out of nothing” (“Title” 111) but rather ‘making something out of the things which are already there.’

While Ambrose must “make something out of nothing” (“Title” 111) without the knowledge of the right means, Mark Nechtr is given the necessary tools for writing, but he doubts if he legitimately *has* a story to be told. Mark Nechtr is: “somebody being taught how but not why to write fiction. (. . .) confused then about what he was even doing at E.C.T.,³⁶ not producing what he was supposed to be producing (“Westward” 237). The ‘production’ of literature is imposed on Mark, who is presented as an artist personality rather than a business person, which is expected of him by the creative writing program, as the substitution of ‘writes’ by ‘produces’ implies.

Mark Nechtr’s struggle is rooted not in his lack of talent or ideas but on his inner conflict on the notion of originality. Why write, if everything has already been written? He wonders, “What if the stories that really stab him are really other people’s stories?”³⁷ What if they’re bullshit? What if he alone isn’t clued into this, and *there’s no way to know?* (“Westward” 323).” As Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva maintain, there *is* no way to know and recognize all texts in a text—Mark however fears that his readers will expose him as a liar by recognizing ‘sources’ that he is not aware of. He thus simultaneously acknowledges and rejects the universalist notion of intertextuality.

Mark’s desire to be original produces a hyper-self-consciousness about any form of intertextuality, which he views as unlawful appropriation. He considers all outside influences on his fiction “a kind of plagiarism, a small usurpation” that undermines the originality of his fiction (“Westward” 356). What others might term inspiration is for Mark Nechtr stealing of sources.

Mark Nechtr’s hyper-self-consciousness humorously inverts the postmodern notion of the absence of originality, while invoking the Modernist mantra, “Make it New!” (Ezra Pound) and the image of the writer as creative rugged individualist. Mark only admits to appropriating the idea for his first workshop story from a newspaper headline with a guilty conscience. His second workshop story about Dave and L—, the story inside the story, is: “one he’ll believe is not his own [. . .] basically a rearranged rip-off of the radio’s ‘People’s Precinct’ episode they’ve heard just now, and of the

³⁶ E.C.T. not only stands for East Chesapeake Trade School but also for electroconvulsive therapy, which Wallace would devote a footnote to in *Infinite Jest* in the context of one character’s major depression.

³⁷ Here, it should be noted that “other people’s stories” also appears in the title of Cynthia Ozick’s “Usurpation (Other People’s stories),” the opening lines of which are fluently incorporated into “Westward,” p. 294 (*Curious Hair* verso page).

whole long, slow, stalled trip in general” (“Westward” 356). In not claiming authorship for any story, Mark admits to the impossibility of his aspiration to create something purely fictional and original. As the narrator comments, “I think what it was was Mark felt guilty, the story being basically just a pastiche of truths and everything” (“Westward” 279).

The re-telling by the narrator, who repeatedly interrupts the “story that isn’t Mark Nechtr’s by Mark Nechtr” with fellow students’ comments, removes the story further from the originality that Mark strives for (“Westward” 356). Incorporated into an otherwise highly colloquial utterance, the expression “pastiche of truths” takes up academic criticism. It combines one of the signpost words of postmodern criticism with the definition of postmodernism as the replacement of one absolute truth by a multiplicity of truths. Ironically, there are no visible traces of any observations Mark makes in his second workshop story.³⁸

For Mark, fiction should not represent ‘truths’, which in his terms is the same as lived experience, but it should rather be a “lie,” meaning not based on any real people or events (“Westward” 356). It can only be distinguished from nonfiction if it does not represent the ‘truth’, and thus Mark disqualifies his own fiction; he sees it as merely a “rip-off” (“Westward” 356), a composition of real life events and already existing narratives. Ultimately, Mark is afraid of being exposed for *not* lying: “That its claim to be a lie will itself be a lie” (“Westward” 356). This narrative trick puts into question several aspects of commonplace definitions of fiction: first, the line between fiction and non-fiction. Mark’s definition of fiction implies via opposition that the defining principle of non-fiction is to *not* lie.

This again leads to a questioning of the term “lie” in regard to representation (“Westward” 356), as all writing is ultimately a selection and combination of form and content that corresponds with a pre-selected narrative blueprint. This blueprint, in turn, is fed by existing conventions. Second, the definition of fiction as a “lie” touches upon the ‘truth-claim’ of fiction (“Westward” 356). Fiction is supposed to contain some kind of deeper truth about life, but it is not to depict ‘true’ events. As Wallace’s often-quoted statement about fiction goes: “Fiction’s about what it is to be a fucking human being”

³⁸ Another pun in “The story that isn’t Mark Nechtr’s by Mark Nechtr” is that it is contained in ‘The story that isn’t Dave Wallace’s by Dave Wallace,’ as the verso page announcement “written in the margins” could also be read.

("Conversation"). Third, Mark's struggle blurs the line between 'original' fiction, 'intertextual' fiction, and plagiarism. Drawing directly from his own experience, the "already read" (Barthes) is a form of plagiarism to Mark. He thereby adheres to an understanding of texts in the sense of source studies, not intertextuality, which posits that all texts are composed of "quotations without inverted commas" (Barthes, "Work to Text" 169). Mark's goal to write fiction that is a "lie" is unattainable, as he also experiences in his own writing process, because fiction cannot escape referentiality ("Westward" 356).

3.2.2 D.L. and Mark Nechtr: A Metafictional Marriage

After a comparison of the writer-protagonists of "Lost in the Funhouse" and "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way," I now turn to the writing workshop of "Westward." Marshall Boswell aptly terms "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" "quite literally a piece of 'workshop fiction'" (*Ghost Story* 103). The workshop not only relates to the setting, but also major themes and style, which can be unified under the umbrella of self-legitimization. Within the writing workshop, the protagonist-antagonist relationship between Mark Nechtr and D.L. serves as a platform for the discussion of the legitimacy of fiction writing.

Mark Nechtr and Drew-Lynn (D.L.) Eberhardt function as blueprints of maximalism and postmodernism respectively ("Westward" 267). The caricature-like, sketched D.L. personifies the Frankenstein monster of postmodernist metafictional literature since "Funhouse." Through D.L.'s counterpart Mark Nechtr, "Westward" suggests that a fruitful reinterpretation of metafiction can be possible.

I want to argue that they serve as blueprints of 'the postmodernist' and 'the maximalist' project respectively. Their writing is a forum for debating the aims of fiction. The reader is steered into liking Mark Nechtr and disliking D.L. from the first sentence on:

Though Drew-Lynn Eberhardt produced much, and Mark Nechtr did not, Mark was loved by us all in the East Chesapeake Tradeschool Writing Program that first year, and D.L. was not. I can explain this. D.L. was severely thin, thin in a way that suggested not delicacy but a kind of stinginess about how much of herself she'd extend to the space around her. Thin the way mean nuns are thin. (. . .) she had a fatal taste for: (1) polyester; (2) pantsuits; (3) *lime green*.

Vs. Mark Nechtr, who was one of those late-adolescent chosen who radiate the kind of careless health so complete it's sickening. Ate poorly, last slept well long before the Colts went West, had no regimen; however

strongly built, well-proportioned, thick-necked, dark. Healthy. Strong.
 (This was back when these qualities revealed things about people [. . .].)
 (“Westward” 233)

D.L. and Mark Nechtr are thereby set up as a pair of opposites, who will in the course of the novella become an unlikely couple. If the two are read as narratives, D.L.’s productivity is a negative attribute because it suggests a correlation between quantity and quality: what is *produced*—not written—can only be of questionable artistic quality. D.L.’s thinness and taste in clothes are prescribed as signs of her flawed character – a thin story suggests a lack of depth and polyester suggests the association with the mass market. From this presumption follows another, frequently reproduced in the critical context: mass-market production is incompatible with ‘quality’ literature. If Mark in turn is read as a narrative, it is integral, strong and, as the comment in parentheses makes sure to add, does not rely on—narrative—tricks to keep up this image. As the reader is assured: “And there is something trustworthy about Mark Nechtr. Like, if he promises to do something, you know the only way it won’t get done is if he just can’t do it” (“Westward” 279).

Nechtr is central to the story because he is interested not only in being a “technically up-to-date non artist” (Barth, “Exhaustion” 66) like D.L., whom he later marries. Instead, he wants to be an artist whose stories emotionally affect the reader. His personality and ambition is contrasted with D.L.’s blind following of Professor Ambrose in a humorous, blatant reference to *Lost in the Funhouse*:

She idolized Professor Ambrose with a passion, but in a greedy and self-serving way that probably turned Ambrose himself off right from the very first workshop, when she brought a conspicuously battered copy of *Lost in the Funhouse* for him to autograph—at East Chesapeake Trade something One Did Not Do. Was thus, for our interpretative purposes, a sycophant, an ass-kisser.

Also because she actually went around calling herself a postmodernist. No matter where you are, you Don’t Do This. (“Westward” 234)

The two capital(ized) Don’ts at East Chesapeake Trade³⁹ both relate to postmodernism-gone-wrong. The first relates to the heightening of the author’s role toward celebrity-

³⁹ The name of the college alludes to Barth’s home state, Maryland, which appears as the setting of many of his novels and short stories. At the same time, it implies the program’s focus on teaching practical skills, since it is very improbably offered at a trade school instead of at a liberal arts college or university. This alone imposes a value statement on creative writing programs.

status and the second to the impossibility of anyone who has ever been called a postmodernist to label oneself one. This again pokes fun at John Barth, who adheres to this unwritten rule when he speaks of himself as one of the “alleged practitioners” of postmodernism in “Literature of Replenishment” (194).

D.L.’s fiction experiments without affect, while Mark’s affects and he is criticized when he experiments with surrealism.⁴⁰ The standards are different for the two, and this expresses the despair to find an in-between manner of writing fiction: literature that affects *and* experiments *and* defies the illusions of classical realism. This refusal to delve deeply into one character’s experience is a rejection of modernism, but at the same time a parody of postmodernism.

Self-labeled postmodernist D.L., unlike Mark Nechtr, not once laments the ‘unoriginality’ of thought and text. D.L. rather embraces it, admiring Professor Ambrose precisely for the ability to re-pack and sell others’ words as his own—in the advertising and in the literature business. As Ambrose advises his students,

Basically what you’re doing when you’re writing fiction is telling a lie, he tells those of us in the seminar; and the psychology of reading dictates that we’re willing to buy only what coheres, on some gut level, with what we already believe. (“Westward” 360)

This also means that you can only sell what has already been written before, so the only form of marketable writing is a form of re-writing. The narrator predicts that D.L. will also make this connection between literature and advertising in the future. This in turn will give her the ability to be successful in the advertising industry, which like fiction is based on “telling a lie” (“Westward” 360) to confirm the consumer’s worldview:

Drew-Lynn will, in time, *become* J.D. Steelritter Advertising, and discover that the key to all ingenious and effective and original advertising is not the compelled creation of all-new jingles and images, but the simple arrangement of old words and older pictures into relationships the consumer already believes are true. (“Westward” 354)

Both Professor Ambrose and D.L.’s attitude represent a Barthesian understanding of intertextuality, according to which tracing thoughts back to their sources is to fall into the “myth of filiation” (Barthes, “Work to Text” 169). But D.L. is a much overdrawn personification of this understanding, and of postmodernism at large, composing a “twenty-page poem that’s *all* punctuation” and opening her first workshop-story with:

⁴⁰ See section 3.2.2. on surrealism.

“Nouns verbed by, adverbially adjectival” (“Westward” 251; 234). D.L. demonstrates that an overly “technically up-to-date” (Barth, “Exhaustion” 66) style prevents the reader’s emotional engagement.

The meta-narrative voice therefore vouches for Mark Nechtr’s style over D.L.’s. Contrary to the meta-narrative commentary of “Funhouse,” the narrator in “Westward” mostly comments on fiction in general—not the current narrative process. For instance, the only story Mark Nechtr writes for the workshop before presenting the story about Dave is introduced as following:

Though, not to take sides, but sometimes things *do* happen. Even in reality. In real realism. It’s a myth that truth is stranger than fiction. Actually they’re about equally strange. The strangest stories tend, in a way, to *happen*. Take for example the single solitary piece Mark Nechtr has thus far been able to produce for discussion in Dr. Ambrose’s graduate workshop at East Chesapeake Trade. Its conceit is lifted and carried off right out of a banner headline in the Baltimore *Sun*. Nothing as richly ambiguous as FIRM DOCTORS TELEPHONE POLES, but a simple MURDER-SUICIDE IN DOWNTOWN ELEVATOR BAFFLES AUTHORITIES. (“Westward” 277)

The casual assertion, “not to take sides” forms the introduction to precisely that, a ‘taking sides’ on the relationship between the world and fiction (“Westward” 277). It is not the event itself that Mark adapts but rather an already mediated version of it, in the form of an article headline aimed at increasing the sales of the newspaper. Mark’s story thereby does not spring from the strangeness of “truth” per se but its “happen[ing]” is the result of a process, which links the murder, the newspaper headline (‘nonfiction’), Mark’s reading process and the writing of a story categorized as fiction. In the end, it is no longer reconstructable where the story begins, and whether or not it is stranger than the event it is based upon.

Mark Nechtr and D.L. are, as I have suggested, presented as different blueprints of fiction. They exemplify different ways of writing and understanding fiction, its purpose and aims. After a one-night-stand, they get married because Mark feels responsible for the unborn child that D.L. supposedly carries. Despite his family and friends’ opposition, he marries his “one-time unloved lover” (“Westward” 238). During the trip to Collision, D.L. is supposedly “close to the third trimester, though the way D.L. carries herself you’d never know it was that far” (“Westward” 238). It is never clarified whether D.L. actually believes in her own pregnancy or is pretending from the beginning. D.L.’s behavior corresponds to what Mark thinks about metafiction:

...metafiction is untrue, as a lover. It cannot betray. It can only reveal. Itself is its only object. It's the act of lonely solipsist's self-love, a night-light on the black fifth wall of being a subject, a face in a crowd. It's lovers not being lovers. Kissing their own spine. Fucking themselves. ("Westward" 333)

"Westward" attempts to break with the self-obsessive qualities of metafiction that Mark criticizes here. Although it is written in the metafictional mode, the novella also focuses on reflections about contemporary society. This corresponds with Robert McLaughlin's description of postmodernism as a combination of social commentary and self-reflection. Self-reflection, McLaughlin says, is incorporated not only "for the sake of wordplay" but also as an expression of "skepticism toward narrative as a meaning-providing structure" (57). Most importantly with regard to Wallace's notion of postmodernism in "Westward" McLaughlin argues that the self-involvement of fiction "does not as a rule abjure literature's potential to intervene in the social world" (57). Wallace thus seeks to add a reflection of the social world to the self-referential function of metafiction.

D.L.'s feigned pregnancy functions as an analogy to metafiction insofar as both are 'fruitless.' One of the many hints that D.L. might be pretending is the car rental employee's opinion about D.L.: "If ever a person has looked infertile" ("Westward" 276). Magda Ambrose-Gatz later reveals to Mark that D.L. is "infertile; she cannot produce" ("Westward" 350). Magda's synonym for the ability to have children matches the synonym for writing throughout the novella: to produce. The revelation that she "cannot produce" revises the opening sentence about her ability as a writer: "Through Drew-Lynn Eberhardt produced much [. . .]" ("Westward" 233). Transferred to a metaphorical level, the infertility of D.L. can be interpreted as the inability to write anything at all—which is counteracted by the first sentence—or as her inability to write something 'alive' and engaging, which resonates with the reader emotionally.

The fertility image is familiar from Barth's short story "Title" from *Lost in the Funhouse*, in which the author-narrator⁴¹ despairs over the story's lack of progress: "This last-resort idea, it's dead in the womb, excuse the figure. A false pregnancy, excuse the figure. God damn me though if that's entirely my fault. Acknowledge your complicity" (Barth, "Title" 107). The reader is thus given part of the responsibility of creating a text, an idea present in poststructuralist conceptions of intertextuality and in reader-response criticism.

⁴¹ The author-character who is also acting as a narrator.

Similarly, “Westward” appeals to the reader to expand the reader’s share of responsibility. The figure is akin to Baudrillard’s notion of the empty sign; the referent is present, while the referred to is absent. This creates an infinite loop of self-referentiality—the sign can only refer to itself. In Barth’s “Title,” this leads to despair and the situation of the narrator who has “narrated himself into a corner . . . and because his position is absurd he calls the world absurd” (“Title” 109). The last sentence of the story ends with a blank space: “How in the world will it ever ”—which the reader has to fill in (“Title” 110). In “Funhouse”, it leads to the unwilling acceptance that there is no way out of the funhouse or the self-referentiality of language.

The false pregnancy is D.L.’s, and thereby metafiction’s, empty promise of a “little miracle” (“Westward” 238), which ultimately leads to commercial success, like advertising and television.⁴² Consequently, the postmodernist D.L. in a future scenario assumes the CEO position of J.D. Steelritter Advertising, the agency of McDonald’s and the Funhouse disco chain.

At various points during the car ride J.D. Steelritter and Mark Nechtr discuss Professor Ambrose’s work, and particularly “that *For Whom* story.” Professor Ambrose reveals thirty pages into the story that he is both author and character in it: “Yes, he, Ambrose, the author, *is* a character in and the object of the seminal *Lost in the Funhouse*; but he is not the main character, the hero or subject, since fictionists who tell the truth aren’t able to use real names” (“Westward” 261). J.D. and D.L. call the stories difficult, self-involved, and desperate for attention: “un-get-throughable,” and D.L. adds: “Indulgent. Cerebral but infantile. Masturbatory. A sort of look-Dad-no-hands quality (...) Liked the concept. Did *not* like the story. Do not like stories about stories” and ultimately calls “that *For Whom* story”: “the story that does not love” (“Westward” 329–31).

J.D. and D.L. leave open what a loving story might look like, whereas Mark Nechtr provides suggestions for improving the narrative strategy in his expansion of their commentary. Nechtr believes that the Funhouse—and thereby metafiction—may be effectively employed as a narrative device, but in a way that makes the reader part of a ‘romantic relationship’:

⁴² See also the earlier discussion of “E Unibus Pluram.”

not by using the Funhouse as the kind of symbol you can take or leave standing there. Not by putting the poor characters in one, or by pretending the poor writer's in one, wandering around. The way to make a story a Funhouse is to put the story itself in one. For a lover. Make the reader a lover, who wants to be inside. Then do him. Pretend the whole thing's like love. Walk arm in arm with the mark though the grinning happy door. Shove. Get back out before the happy jaws meet tight. Reader's inside the whole thing. Not at all as expected. (...) Except the Exit would never be out of sight. (...) It would take an architect who could hate enough to feel enough to love enough to perpetrate the kind of special cruelty only real lovers can inflict. ("Westward" 331–32)

The strategy that Mark Nechtr suggests is based on the writer's ("architect's") love for the reader, which also includes cruel and misleading behavior. Most importantly, the reader is given agency—she or he can exit the Funhouse (the self-reflexive story) at any time or merely enjoy the 'inside' narrative, which is complete in itself, without having to look at the mirrors (the added fictional self-consciousness). But before the reader can assume agency, she or he must accept the deception. No meta-narrative, Nechtr thereby suggests, can function without a deception of the reader, who has to be lured into the Funhouse at the beginning. The image of the romantic relationship between reader and narrator reoccurs as a closing point of the narrative, when the reader is assured: "You are loved" ("Westward" 373).

The criticism of "Lost in the Funhouse" is that his story is forceful and intrusive but at the same time does not leave enough responsibility to the reader. "Westward" expresses that in "Funhouse," the reader is forced to stay on the meta-narrative level, because the plot is so deeply interwoven with it. There is no option to 'just enjoy' the inside of the funhouse, the purely fictional 'show' that does not constantly reflect on itself. If, on the other hand, the reader is seduced and voluntarily enters the Funhouse, she or he will end up realizing, Nechtr predicts, that "each 'technique' is, really, just a reflective surface that betrays what it pretends to reveal" ("Westward" 331). The exit, which the protagonist of "Lost in the Funhouse" "may have ceased to search" ("Funhouse" 96), would have to be in the reader's plain sight in Nechtr's story: "never be out of sight. It'd be brightly, lewdly lit. The Egress would be clearly marked, and straight ahead, and not even all that far. It would be the stuff the place is *made* of that would make it Fun" ("Westward" 331). This criticism and suggestions for narrative improvement cannot be followed by an improvement of "Funhouse" because the metafictional mode imposes limitations, the novella proposes. "Westward" does,

however, re-allocate the value of fiction from the self-referential to the referential function, as the next section shall show.

3.2.3 Magda and Mark: Postmodernism as Narrative Framework

While the narrative structure of “Westward” invokes Barth’s metafiction, the plot level connects narrative concerns with sociocultural criticism, which is in accordance with Fredric Jameson’s “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Capitalism.” Jameson’s argument that contemporary culture expresses much about the functioning of the current form of capitalism, surfaces blatantly in the “Reunion of everyone who has ever been in a McDonald’s commercial” (“Westward” 235) and the Funhouse franchise. Nicole Timmer aptly observes that “Westward” uses “postmodern ideas and assumptions” to “frame a cultural setting and cultural practices including the practice of constructing a sense of self” (Timmer 104).

The framework that Wallace builds from theoretical notions of postmodernism also applies to the realm of communication, or the absence thereof. I believe that the following scene from the prematurely ended journey is an apt example of the characters’ severed connection:

Mark and Magda both look at the field and scarecrow and all-business Illinois rain like people who are deprived. Magda feels an overwhelming—and completely nonoracular—compulsion to talk to somebody. Mark, a born listener, right from day one, feels nothing at all. (“Westward” 346)

Magda’s “compulsion to talk to somebody” (“Westward” 346) describes no more than a strong need for attention rather than her interest in Mark. It is left open what the two might be deprived of—and whether they are truly deprived or just “look like people who are” (“Westward” 346). Instead of a connection, the characters are left to feel the “empty solipsist’s self-love” of metafiction or Mark’s emptiness of “nothing at all” that also appears in novels like *American Psycho* (“Westward” 333). In an earlier narrative intrusion, we already learn about Mark’s emotional incapacities. The interruption stands out because it is inserted fluently into the text and the author-narrator explicitly presents herself as an “I-narrator” by pointing out that it is “me” who reveals:

In a related development, Mark Nechtr is now revealed by me to have professionally diagnosed emotional problems. He’s actually been in and out of places, something that would astonish the kids at E.C.T. who value and love him. It’s not that Mark’s emotions are disordered or troubled, but that he is troubled in relation to them. That’s why he usually appears cool,

neutrally cheery. When he has emotions, it's like he's denied access to them. He doesn't ever feel in possession of his emotions. When he has them, they feel far from him; he feels disembodied, other. Except when he shoots, he very rarely feels anything at all. And when he is shooting [. . .] he stands somewhere outside himself, eyewitness to his own joy. I.e. either he doesn't *feel* anything, or *he* doesn't feel anything. ("Westward" 303)

This character description of Mark as separated from his own emotions is at the same time a description of Ambrose's experience in the funhouse. Ambrose feels like he is standing outside of himself, becoming a third-person observer of his own feelings: "he heard his mind take notes upon the scene: This is what they call passion. I am experiencing it ("Funhouse" 84). Magda in "Funhouse" is in fact, as the narrator reveals, a complex character. However, the narrative cannot let this surface because her narrative role is the female object, which complements the male subject:

Magda Ambrose-Gatz's predicament is the obverse, and way more noble and tragic. And but *no one can ever know this*. Because where Mark's makeup is that of a subject, Magda's own character—female, and precontemporary—is that of an object. ("Westward" 303)

When compared with Magda's character description in "Funhouse," it is almost impossible to not interpret this passage as a critique of the fact that Barth's Magda is mostly described in terms of her outer appearance and not her utterances, thoughts or feelings: "she was remarkably well developed for her age" ("Funhouse" 83) is her key attribute which is repeated throughout the story.⁴³ To a degree, Wallace inverts Barth's character description when Magda, in fact a complex character, sees that Mark's character is really simple. Magda has the ability to see the future and 'read' people. In the end, "she knows that in truth Mark is just a radically *simple* person, wildly noncomplex, one of the very few men she's read for who's exhaustively describable in fewer than three adjectives" (355).

Jonathan Franzen remarks that Wallace's fiction is marked by the "near-perfect absence [. . .] of ordinary love. (. . .) What we get instead, are characters keeping their heartless compulsions secret from those who love them; characters scheming to *appear* loving or to prove to themselves that what feels like love is really just disguised self-interest; or at most, characters directing an abstract or spiritual love toward somebody

⁴³ Additionally, the repetition of this phrase ironizes conventional character descriptions of 'blossoming' teenage girls (Hungerford).

profoundly repellent [. . .]” (Franzen). The relationships in “Westward,” do indeed not qualify as “ordinary love,” but rather as self-involved projections. One example is the relationship between Dave and L— in Mark’s story inside the story. Dave “loves his lover,” but he feels that “not he, but rather her desire to be loved, to be beloved, is what gives L—’s life its direction and meaning” (358). In the end, Dave gives in to solipsism, “the view or theory that only the self really exists or can be known” (“Solipsism”).⁴⁴

Keeping in mind the criticism of the “story that does not love” (“Westward” 331), the character-relationships in “Westward” can also be transferred to the communication between narrator and reader via fiction. “Westward” laments the timeless inevitability of solipsism as a default condition—a condition determined by nature, which can never be fully nurtured away. The comments on solipsism are a tool to connect to the readership, so solipsism paradoxically becomes a narrative pathway toward empathy. At the same time, solipsism is regarded as morally despicable, as it prevents reaching a state of true empathy. As default condition, self-centeredness is not a value term. It is rather turned into a morally despicable condition by society’s standards. As his graduation speech at Kenyon College makes clear, Wallace does not view humans as inherently social beings. Rather, socialization is for Wallace a process of *overcoming* one’s natural condition of self-centeredness:

Everything in my own immediate experience supports my deep belief that I am the absolute center of the universe; the realest, most vivid and import person in existence. We rarely think about this sort of natural, basic self-centeredness because it’s so socially repulsive. But it’s pretty much the same for all of us. It is our default setting, hard-wired into your boards at birth. (“This Is Water,” qtd. in Hirt 33)

The question thus is not whether the individual can prevent solipsism—to which the answer would be no—but rather whether one can develop empathy instead of narcissism from this starting point. “Westward” posits that empathy can be learned, and that fiction is a means to further this learning process. However, this can only happen if fiction can escape its narcissism.

“Westward” depicts the characters’ attempts to overcome solipsism through collective consumerism. The novella satirizes the equation of ‘buying = being’, the

⁴⁴ This reflects Hal Incandenza’s experience in *Infinite Jest* (Hirt). In *The Pale King*, solipsism is even more strongly personified in the boy whose goal it is to one day kiss all parts of his own body—the ultimate physical expression of solipsism.

empty gratification through consumption, in the red-thread image of the “Reunion of everyone who has ever been in a McDonald’s commercial” (“Westward” 235). Accordingly, J.D. Steelritter’s love for deep-fried roses is not only a personal addiction but can be extended to a cultural phenomenon. The fried roses are a perverted variant of Gertrude Stein’s “A rose is a rose is a rose,” juxtaposing the self-awareness of language with art’s ingestion into mass consumerism. The critique of excess thus applies both to self-reflexivity and consumption.

3.3 Irony, Sincerity and Narrative Voice

Both “Westward” and “Funhouse” are deeply self-concerned stories, but their focus differs insofar as “Lost in the Funhouse” is fundamentally concerned with the ‘How’ of storytelling, particularly narrative progression and the internal coherence of Ambrose’s story, while “Westward” focuses on the ‘Why’ of storytelling through its portrayal of the writer-characters and its narrative interruptions.

More precisely, Barth’s narrator expresses the concern: How can Ambrose’s story be told adequately, can the plot be driven forward if the narrative is ever-elusive and seems to escape its own progression. Through protagonist Ambrose and the meta-narrative voice, it attempts to counteract a “Literature of Exhaustion,” a stand-still of a literature that looks back instead of forward, or merely parodies in a way that leaves the reader emotionally uninvolved. Instead of putting into question the entire need for telling Ambrose’s story, Barth’s meta-narrative engages with the difficulties of conveying it.

This encourages identification with the narrator, who becomes an ally of the reader by supporting the forward movement of the plot but also communicating difficulties in doing so. Not the legitimacy of the story as a whole is jeopardized but its conveyance to the reader. Metafiction offers a tool to voice this concern.

While the fundamental necessity of telling Ambrose’s ‘original’ story is clear, the narrator of “Westward” doubts these fundamental assumptions, evoking the questions: Wherein lies a story’s legitimacy? What should be the aims of writing fiction and metafiction? Is fiction supposed to be right, true, or truthful,⁴⁵ and if so in relation to what, if semblance to the ‘real’ is no longer a point of reference?

While “Funhouse” is thus primarily concerned with its own fictionality, “Westward” discusses different notions of originality and re-writing through the platform

⁴⁵ In the sense of Jürgen Habermas’s distinction between the three terms.

of the writing workshop, ironic references to “Funhouse” and the overall discussion of metafiction. The solution that “Westward” presents, however, is not a dismissal of the metafictional mode at large but rather a new form of metafiction that relies not on the deception of the reader, but rather on a narrator–reader relationship that grants agency to the reader. The proposal, however, cannot be put into ‘narrative action’ because the framework provided by metafiction itself prevents this breaking out.

3.3.1 Beyond Self-Referentiality

“Westward” links intertextual and intratextual concerns in the form of social-cultural commentary, with an emphasis of fiction’s referentiality to the “really real” (“Westward” 267). This particularly regards the position of fiction as a product between academia and the market economy. Similarly, Anthony Oliver Scott describes the essence of the novella as: “at once a scabrous satire on the academic authority of the *ci-devant* avant-garde and a virtuoso compendium of tried and true avant-garde techniques” (“Panic” 3). The argumentative line that “Westward” attempts to defeat the avant-garde with its own weapons is also inherent in the label “meta-metafiction” (Wallace, “Conversation” 134). Scott’s opinion differs from McCaffery’s insofar as he views “Westward” not merely as a parody of a certain narrative style, but rather as a satire of academia in the late 1980s. The “avant-garde techniques” then are not merely tools for parodying other texts but rather aimed at satire, which differs from parody in that it directly comments on the world *outside* of fiction.⁴⁶

James Wood, on the other hand, writes that Wallace’s style is “evasive of reality while borrowing from realism itself” (2). Wood argues in “Human, All Too Inhuman”⁴⁷ that Wallace forms part of a “culture of permanent storytelling” and terms the corresponding narrative style “hysterical realism” (1). Wood mentions the example of *Infinite Jest*, but I think that the critique can be transferred to “Westward.” “Hysterical realism” denotes a critique of metafiction in the form of exaggerated realism. According to Wood, narrative depth is lost over form and speed: “Inseparable from this culture of permanent storytelling is the pursuit of vitality at all costs. Indeed, vitality is storytelling, as far as these books are concerned” (1). Hysterical realists thus do not abrogate but rather feed on “conventions of realism,” which are:

⁴⁶ See section 2.1.4 for the distinction between parody and satire.

⁴⁷ Formally a review of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*.

exhausted, and overworked. Appropriately, then, objections are not made at the level of verisimilitude, but at the level of morality: this style of writing is not to be faulted because it lacks reality—the usual charge against botched realism—but because it seems evasive of reality while borrowing from realism itself. It is not a cock-up, but a cover-up.
(Wood 2)

Wood's attack on the ground of morality draws on the same argumentative basis as the notion of sincerity, while arguing the contrary. Both claims rest on the presumption that postmodern narratives should be judged primarily according to ethical standards.

Lee Konstantinou also argues from a perspective of ethics, but diverges from the view that Wallace parodies, imitates or satirizes. Instead, he writes that "Westward" is essentially a novella of "post-irony." Post-irony is characterized by "an effort to decouple the academic and cultural association between metafictional form and ironic knowingness and cynicism"—unlike metairony, which merely makes fiction "relentlessly conscious of its own self-consciousness" (Konstantinou 90). The most important aspect of post-irony is, I believe, the relationship between narrator and reader. A crucial difference between post-irony and meta-irony seems to be the dissolution of the hierarchical relationship, and a movement from the lecturing narrator toward an alliance between narrator and reader that is based on a relationship of sincerity. Post-irony, however, is a rather deceptive term with regard to "Westward," since it suggests that irony is left behind—which the stabs at "Funhouse" and consumer culture prove wrong.

While Scott's, Wood's and Konstantinou's assessments offer significant access points to "Westward" and "Funhouse" with regard to narrative self-awareness, verisimilitude and cultural critique, they seem to overlook the novella's strife for superseding its obsession with intertextual references and self-consciousness by commenting on American society of the 1980s. As much as postmodernism "exerts a kind of gravitylike force on Mark" ("Westward" 293), irony and self-consciousness exert their "force" on the novella. At the same time, "Westward" depicts fiction a concrete product in the marketplace of the "really real" world ("Westward" 267). In how far the narrative strategy of "Funhouse" diverges from this will be investigated in the following.

3.3.2 Credibility and Narrative Instability

Verisimilitude, as a principle of realism, is discussed in "Funhouse" in various narrative interruptions. The narrative commentary of "Funhouse" at first emphasizes basic principles of verisimilitude while pushing the plot development forward. Barth criticizes realism through an exaggeration of realist devices, such as semblance to reality. To

illustrate, the first narrative interruption states: “*the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America*” (Barth, “Funhouse” 72). Here, as in other interruptions, the interruption is separated from the rest of the sentence through italics. When taken as ironic, the added explanation of the meaning of Independence Day increases the distance between the narrated events and the reader. On the other hand, the interruption adds believable information that is consistent with historical facts outside the narrative. The explanation of Independence Day thus paradoxically both embeds the story into the social world in a traditionally realist manner and estranges the reader.⁴⁸ While the narrative hence at the very beginning appears to follow the principles of mimesis and verisimilitude, the narrator’s ironic insertion at this point signals that these expectations cannot be fulfilled.

When a term is over-explained as if it were not a familiar reference, the principle of verisimilitude, which rests on the probability of fictional events in the world, is questioned. Scratching at the surface of a major principle of realism foreshadows the direction that Barth would later take in his criticism—a first step beyond the exhausted mode of realist narration, in the form of a reflection on fictional principles within fiction. “Funhouse” takes a traditionally realist device, exaggerates it, and thereby renders it strange.

From early on, the narrator questions the story’s credibility: “Is it likely, does it violate the verisimilitude, that a thirteen-year-old boy could make such a sophisticated observation?” (“Funhouse” 73). A similar narrative comment follows when Ambrose is inside the funhouse:

In the maze two important things happened. First, our hero found a name-coin someone else had lost or discarded [. . .]. Second, as he wondered at the endless replication of his image in the mirrors, second, as he *lost himself in the reflection* that the necessity for an observer makes perfect observation impossible, better make him eighteen at least, yet that would render other things unlikely, he heard Peter and Magda chuckling somewhere together in the maze. (“Funhouse” 94)

The observation that lacks a clear attribution to Ambrose (“the necessity for an observer makes perfect observation impossible”) is put into question by the doubtful voice that wants to revise Ambrose’s age (fourteen) to eighteen, because presumably a fourteen-

⁴⁸ Independence Day is altered to “Interdependence Day” in *Infinite Jest* (1996), producing another irritation.

year old may not render this kind of philosophical conclusion from seeing himself in the mirror. The principle of verisimilitude is thus negotiated when the meta-narrative voice realizes that “that would render other things unlikely.” It is left unsaid what these “other things” are. This gap is left open for the reader, who may remember or return to the expositional description of Ambrose. This included several ‘markers’ of his age, such as the high voice. In the end, the overarching principle of intra-narrative coherence is prioritized over the concern over verisimilitude.

Throughout the story, as Amy Hungerford aptly maintains, these renegotiations of narrative principles demonstrate Ambrose’s loosening grip: “he wants to be able to use Freitag’s Triangle to prop up what has become an uncontrollable narrative and give it a shape” (Hungerford). While I agree with Hungerford’s overall notion of failing narrative control, I think it is helpful to attempt at a distinction between character focalization and narrative voice. The remarks that demonstrate full awareness of storytelling conventions differ considerably from Ambrose’s voice and character description and are unlikely to mirror Ambrose’s perception and knowledge.

The exposition already presents an example of this. Here, the narrator points attention to the fact that the dialogue is only re-mediated, although quotation marks are used: “Ambrose’s mother teased the boys for letting Magda win, insinuating that ‘somebody [had] a girlfriend’” (“Funhouse” 76). This is neither free indirect discourse nor direct speech. Free indirect discourse would omit the quotation marks and the clear attribution to the speaker, and direct speech would leave the verb in its original form, i.e. “Magda’s mother said: ‘somebody has a girlfriend.’” As it is, the form undermines fictional principles, resembling a scholarly citation rather than fictional character speech.

Narrative commentary that can be more easily identified as such, through clear separation from the plot, appears in the form of textbook-like insertions, such as: “The action of conventional dramatic narrative may be represented by a diagram called Freitag’s Triangle [Freitag’s Triangle here] or more accurately by a variant of that diagram [varied Freitag’s Triangle here]” (“Funhouse” 95). In comparison to the prior quote, the narrative distance to Ambrose is more clearly visible, due to the absence of attributional markers, such as ‘on his telling.’

While this may at first not seem very different from “hysterical realism” in Wood’s sense, there is a fundamental difference, which can be located in the element of estrangement. Wood argues that “hysterical realism” takes up realist devices without questioning them (1). Adapting realist devices is a sign of the impulse that drives the

“culture of permanent storytelling”: to merely tell stories rather than reflect upon telling (Wood 2).

“Westward,” however, is not the right match for “hysterical realism” (Wood) either. In a treatise on the resurrection of minimalism in the form of “New Realism,” the narrator in “Westward” praises the literary movement for exposing metafiction’s “gratuitous cleverness, jazzing around, self-indulgence, no-hands-ism” (“Westward” 266). After a detour into the plot revolving around the journey to Collision, the narrator endorses “New Realism” on the grounds of its ability to represent the “really real”:

Besides, New Realism, being young, and realistic, is pretty slow, too. Ask Ambrose. Ask Mark; he’s checked it out. It diverges, in its slowness, from the really real only in its extreme economy [. . .], its grim proximity to its own horizon. It’s some of the most heartbreaking stuff available at any fine bookseller’s anywhere. I’d check it out. (“Westward” 267)

The “slow” of New Realism counteracts the definition of hysterical realism (Wood), which underscores narrative speed above all. Another term for hysterical realism, as Laura Miller suggests, is maximalism. Maximalist novels like those of David Foster Wallace “are big, they’re full of information, ideas, and stylistic riffs; they have eventful plots that transpire on what’s often called a ‘broad social canvas’; they experiment with form and voice; they’re overtly (or perhaps just overly) smart. Or at least that’s what they’re supposed to be like” (Miller).

These attributes stand in contrast to the “extreme economy” of New Realism, which indicates its synonymy with minimalism. John Barth refers to minimalism as realism’s “kissing cousin” in a 1986 New York Times article about the resurfacing of minimalism in the 1970s and 80s American short story, “in particular the kind of terse, oblique, realistic or hyperrealistic, slightly plotted, extrospective, cool-surfaced fiction associated in the last 5 to 10 years with such excellent writers as Frederick Barthelme, Ann Beattie, Raymond Carver, Bobbie Ann Mason, James Robison [sic], Mary Robison and Tobias Wolff, and both praised and damned under such labels as ‘K-Mart realism,’ ‘hick chic,’ ‘Diet-Pepsi minimalism’ and ‘post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue-collar neo-early-Hemingwayism’” (“About Minimalism”). While minimalism might refer to content, form or both, the overarching principle here is “less is more” (Barth, “About Minimalism”). Barth contrasts minimalism with the “maximalism” of Walt Whitman or Gabriel Garcia Marquez, without condemning either.

Wallace, on the other hand, laments the infiltration of creative writing

departments by New Realism in the critical essay “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young” (1988). Wallace argues that New Realism, which he calls “ultraminimalism,” is an integral part of Creative Writing Programs’ curricula, which destroy the diversity of writing styles and instead produce a homogenous mass of ultraminimalist writers: “The larger issue is whether Creative Writing Programs⁴⁹ and their grinding, story-every-three-weeks assembly line could, eventually, lower all standards, precipitate a broad-level literary mediocrity, fictional equivalents of what Donald Hall calls ‘The McPoem’” (“Fictional”).⁵⁰

This is in accordance with the emphasis on the similarity of New Realism to the “really real” (“Westward” 267). This emphasis confirms the value of verisimilitude. At the same time, the expression implicitly contests the postmodern notion that there is no objective reality or truth. However, it no longer suffices to say “real,” because “real” can—at this point in time—no longer be uncritically accepted. The signal words “really,” “true” and “fact” are strategically placed throughout the novella into passages that reveal the text’s fictionality. An interruption, about the absence of an interruption, thus notes:

At this point somebody like Dr. C— Ambrose would probably interrupt to observe that it seems as though a pretty long time has passed since his last interruption (. . .) But it seems almost like too little of true import has been going on to irritatingly interrupt [. . .] Except but now some things really do start to go on. (“Westward” 286)

The workshop fiction of Mark Nechtr is also a platform for the discussion of verisimilitude and other principles of fiction. Although the story within the story is not a self-conscious narrative, paradoxically, the *mise-en-abyme* becomes part of the outer story’s self-consciousness—through the interruptions that comment on the story’s reception in the workshop. The *mise-en-abyme*, Mark’s story about Dave lays out the recursiveness of metafiction when taken to a high, and potentially very confusing, level. This ‘inner story’ is written by a character in the ‘outer story,’ who is a writer: Mark Nechtr. The inner story is also written about a character with the same first name—Dave—as the outermost story’s author, David (Dave) Foster Wallace. It breaks with

⁴⁹ Wallace consciously capitalizes Creative Writing Programs, as he points out in a footnote, because they “understand themselves to be capitalized. Trust me on this.” (“Fictional Futures”).

⁵⁰ In conjunction with the use of McDonald’s in “Westward,” this comment reveals another intertextual layer.

several principles of the writing workshop, including the principle of verisimilitude, which Mark goes against in a rather absurd way. After the protagonist has wounded his young girlfriend, she dies not of the injuries but “rather . . . *old age*. A collective ‘?!?’ greets this move of Mark’s” (“Westward” 360).

Professor Ambrose scolds Nechtr, basing his argument not on narrative logic but rather on the market value of Mark’s fiction, which is thereby compromised. Professor Ambrose, whom Anthony Scott calls “a thinly disguised (that is, a blatantly obvious) rendering of Barth” (4), tells Nechtr:

Do some very simple cost-benefit analyses, Ambrose advises Nechtr, rubbing the red commas his glasses have imposed on his orange nose’s bridge: Why compromise the tale’s carefully crafted heart-felt feel and charming emotional realism with a sudden, gratuitous, and worst of all *symbolic* bit of surrealism like this? (“Westward” 360)

As the quotation above shows, the workshop renders the “culture of permanent storytelling” (Wood) into a *business* of permanent storytelling. “Heart-felt feel” in Professor Ambrose’s sense is not much more than a marketing technique. The selling point is the believability of a feigned emotion. This confirms Wallace’s complication of sincerity, which he most explicitly demonstrates in “My Appearance,” as discussed above (cf. Kirsch, Kelly). Surrealism severely undermines the appearance of sincerity according to Ambrose’s terms. This can also be taken as a token of respect for Barth, as his works including “Funhouse” contain a fair bit of what may be termed symbolic surrealism.

The funhouse is the central example of a surrealist symbol.⁵¹ Part of the section titled “HOW THE CENTRAL ILLINOIS TOWN OF COLLISION CAME TO BE INCORPORATED” repeats the opening questioning of “Funhouse,” then overwrites it with an alternative that pokes fun at the antetype. Simultaneously, it sets up expectations for the further plot development:

For whom is the Funhouse a house? Maybe for liars, creative types, campaigners, tree surgeons having at the great Saxon tree. For Tom Sternberg, the Funhouse is less a place of fear and confusion than (grimace) an idea, an ever-distant telos his arrival at which will represent

⁵¹ The juxtaposition of funhouse and surrealism may allude to Salvador Dalí’s “Dream of Venus,” an installation in form of a funhouse exhibited at the 1939 World Fair. For an architectural study of this work, see Schaffner.

the revealed transformation of a present we stomach by looking beyond.
A present comprised by that fear *of* confusion. (“Westward” 259)

The narrative instability in this passage is produced by the ambivalence between an attack on postmodernism on moral grounds—it is empty self-involvement—and the reliance on its techniques in order to create a “technically up-to-date” (Barth, “Exhaustion” 66) and emotionally affective narrative. In addition, the narrator paints a portrait of a disillusioned generation. D.T. Max suggests that the novella is the first among Wallace’s works to make the connection between media and a certain numbness. Quoting from *Infinite Jest*’s lament of the loss of the ability to “carefully choose what to love,” Max argues that “Westward” is the first among Wallace’s work to “universalize his neurosis” (*Ghost Story* 94).

In this vein, the “lovers” (“Funhouse” 72) are replaced with “liars, creative types” (“Westward” 259) and the like, and the concrete “place of fear and confusion” (“Funhouse” 72; “Westward” 259) is replaced with an abstraction: “(grimace) an idea” (“Westward” 259). The parenthesized “grimace” changes the function of the literal-to-metaphorical-level transfer from rhetorical device to sharp, self-conscious irony. Here the reasoning behind the consistent capitalization of Funhouse becomes obvious, which implies that Barth’s funhouse is contrived and assigns itself significance. The nonfiction equivalent to Funhouse is Wallace’s capitalization of Creative Writing Programs in the previously mentioned essay “Fictional Futures,” in which he reasons in a footnote: “These words are capitalized because they understand themselves to be capitalized. Trust me on this” (“Fictional” 9).

The term “ever-distant telos” is interchangeable with utopia. Inherent in the definition of utopia is the impossibility of reaching it; thus the promise of (narrative) arrival is a dishonest one. The very definition of the place as an “ever-distant telos” excludes the possibility of a future arrival. Wallace’s re-writing of the funhouse from a “place of fear” (“Funhouse”) to a no-place, an “ever-distant telos,” is also a re-interpretation of the purpose of storytelling. The instability of language and communication are accepted as working conditions, but at the end, “Westward” proposes an alternative set of principles for fiction writing. This theoretical impulse remains unrealizable because it is de-stabilized by metafiction itself. Therefore, the ‘inside’ plot of “Westward” has to be incongruent with the principles that the ‘outside’ narrative commentary lays out for it.

3.3.3 Metafictional Commentary

The merging of character voice and metafictional commentary increases as “Lost in the Funhouse” progresses. One increasingly cannot be sure of what is the character’s perception and what the narrator’s or whether the two have merged into one. This is partly owed to free indirect discourse and the absence of quotation marks or personal attributes. For example, in the following comment, internal focalization (Ambrose) is indistinguishable from the narrator’s metafictional commentary, “Its [Ambrose’s life story’s] principal events, on this telling, would appear to have been A, B, C, and D” (“Funhouse” 96). With these comments, the narrator increasingly dilutes the initial narrative promise of creating an “illusion of reality” (73). This is another confirmation of progressive narrative loss of control in what was initially supposedly meant to be a realist narrative, but it also shows the relevance of control on the meta-narrative level.

Paradoxically, the progressive loss of control over the narrative demonstrates a great degree of control on a meta-narrative level—if one changes the narrative standards. According to realist principles, this may be a ‘failed’ narrative, but according to the principles of metafiction, it succeeds in demonstrating its own fictionality and the artificiality of a perfect closed narrative.

The narrative voice in “Westward” modifies the concern over fictional principles and turns it into a questioning of metafiction. Nicole Timmer’s description of “Westward” as a “critique *on* metafiction *in the form* of metafiction” (104) seems like a more adequate description for this than Larry McCaffery’s “meta-metafiction” (Wallace, “Conversation”). The second term suggests that fiction can endlessly reflect the reflection on itself, which can then again be reflected upon, and so on. This additional meta-level would suggest a sort of hyper-self-consciousness that provides an additional insight—something which “Westward” does not demonstrate.

However, while both texts may formally be labeled metafiction, Wallace’s form of metafiction differs from Barth’s use metafiction not only through its critical attitude toward self-reflexivity. In form, Wallace’s use of metafiction is an exaggerated, one might say deliberately obnoxious, version of Barth’s. In tone, “Westward” makes use of narrative voice that is other- rather than self-oriented. The main aim of the narrative interruptions is to convince the reader that self-reflexivity is a reader-unfriendly endeavor. For example, the Freitag Triangle is mentioned in a snarky remark on metafictional plot interruptions:

Again, the preceding generation of cripplingly self-conscious writers, obsessed with their own interpretation, would mention at this point, just as we're possibly getting somewhere, that the story isn't getting anywhere, isn't progressing in the seamless Freitagian upswing we should have scaled by this, mss. p. 35, time. They'd trust, though, à la their hierophant C—— Ambrose, that this explicit internal acknowledgment of their failure to start the show would release them somehow from the obligation to start the show. Or that it might, in some recursive and above all ingenious way, represent the very movement it professes to deny. ("Westward" 269)

As described here, the narrator senses a betrayal of the reader in metafiction, as it is only a substitution for, or evasion of, narrative development. The Greek term "hierophant"⁵² used to describe Ambrose poses a stylistic exception to the otherwise highly colloquial section—alluding to *Lost in the Funhouse's* Greek mythology-inspired stories "Menelaiad" and "Anonymiad"—which already are acts of re-writing.

Narrative interruptions are a major common characteristic of Barth and Wallace's texts. Kasia Boddy contends, that the narrator thereby "informs his readers (and teachers) that his story won't be bound by the conventions of the realist workshop and instead aligns himself with the *locus classicus* of metafiction, "Lost in the Funhouse" (32). While Boddy rightly draws attention to the reaffirmative function of the intrusions, I believe that her argument can be built upon insofar as "Westward" uses stylistically different interruptions to challenge the self-referential style that "Funhouse" employs.

One may begin with the formal characteristics of the interruptions, which "Westward" calls "intrusive" ("Westward" 264). While Barth inserts the narrative comments fluently into the text, Wallace explicitly marks off narrative commentary by beginning a new section that mostly have headlines. These are bold, capitalized, and thereby seem to scream at the reader: "A REALLY BLATANT AND INTRUSIVE INTERRUPTION"—in an arguably humorous caricature of Barth's metafictional markers ("Westward" 264).

Moreover, the narrator in "Westward" is less reliable than the one in "Funhouse," deceiving its readers by promising the "FINAL INTERRUPTION" (331) several times, only to add another, titled "I LIED: THREE REASONS WHY THE ABOVE WAS NOT REALLY AN INTERRUPTION, BECAUSE THIS ISN'T THE SORT OF FICTION

⁵² "Noun; a person, esp. a priest in ancient Greece, who interprets sacred mysteries or esoteric principles. (...) ORIGIN late 17th cent.: via late Latin from Greek hierophantēs, from hieros 'sacred' + phainein 'show, reveal'" ("Hierophant").

THAT CAN BE INTERRUPTED, BECAUSE IT'S NOT FICTION, BUT REAL AND TRUE AND *RIGHT NOW*" (334)—followed by "ACTUALLY PROBABLY NOT THE LAST INTRUSIVE INTERRUPTION" (346). The final interruption then is not explicitly announced as one but appears in the same form: "FOREGROUND THAT INTRUDES BUT'S REALLY TOO TINY TO EVEN SEE: PROPOSITIONS ABOUT A LOVER" (353) Of course the form of the heading contradicts its content, since nothing about it is too tiny to see.

Apart from functioning as narrative breaks and markers of fictionality, the intrusions also question established principles of fiction, above all the "propositions" included in the headline of the interruption just cited. The narrator in "Funhouse" discusses the proposition on an abstract level first, defining it in abstract terms before employing it. In these definitions of narrative tools, the 'objective,' descriptive tone contributes to the distance between narrator and reader:

The description of physical appearance and mannerisms is one of several standard methods of characterization used by writers of fiction. It is also important to "keep the senses operating,; when a detail from one of the five senses, say visual, is "crossed" with a detail from another, say auditory, the reader's imagination is oriented to the scene, perhaps unconsciously. ("Funhouse" 73–74)

This distance between narrator and reader, one might argue, is also a form of hierarchy, in which the superior narrator didactically passes knowledge on to the reader. This is an abstract introduction to concrete propositions in the exposition of Ambrose's narrative. While the abstract definition before is concise and controlled, the narrator struggles with putting it into practice: "To say that Ambrose's and Peter's mother was pretty is to accomplish nothing; *the reader may acknowledge the proposition, but his imagination is not engaged*" ("Funhouse" 75; emphasis added). Ambrose's father is described as following: "The boy's father is difficult to describe; no particular feature of his appearance or manner stood out. He wore glasses and was principal of a T— County grade school" (75).

The explicit "propositions" in "Westward" caricature the aims of the propositions in "Funhouse"; the narrator admits sheer indifference toward the reader's imagination. The right principle to follow, the narrator tells the reader, is that of narrative economy:

All that may have seemed like a digression from this background, and as of now a prolix and confusing one, and I'll say that I'm sorry, and that I am acutely aware of the fact that our time together is valuable. Honest. So,

conscious of the need to get economically to business, here are some plain, true, unengaging propositions *I'll ask you to just acknowledge*. (“Westward” 235; emphasis added)

Within his excuse, the narrator infers the reader’s expectations of narrative speed and a clear plot line. The insertion of “honest” and “true” establishes a claim for authenticity. A follow-up interruption reminds the reader to abandon any false expectations of imaginative literature:

OK true, that as all both too quick and too slow, for background—both intrusive and sketchy. But please, whether *your imagination’s engaged or not, please just acknowledge the propositions*, is all. Because time is *severely limited*, and *whatever might be important lies ahead*. (238; first emphasis added)

The logic of the narrative follows the logic of economy, the narrator suggests, so time is money. The story is delivered upon the reader’s investment, so the narrator must present a satisfying solution to the narrative problem as quickly as possible. The communication model of literature that focuses on sender–message–receiver thereby becomes an economic model with the elements producer–product–consumer.

Unlike Barth’s narrator, who is often speechless at her own narrative failures, Wallace’s narrator willingly and wordily exposes several breaches of the contract, for example in the portrayal of Magda’s voice: “(This is all a summary, a what’s the word a synopsis, and admittedly not in Magda’s real voice, which cannot be done justice by me)” (349). After another passage, the narrator reminds the reader, “(Again, I feel an obligation to say that this is synopsis, and not true to a voice I’m afraid I just can’t do)” (352). In place of direct explanations, “Lost in the Funhouse” increasingly fails to attribute the voice to either character or narrator, revises its own statements, or leaves sentences unfinished. Overall, the ‘loud’ and bold declarations of narrative failures in “Westward” are equivalent to the ‘silent’ blank spaces of “Lost in the Funhouse.” Both are an expression of narrative inadequacy.

Paradoxically, the declared inauthenticity of representation in “Westward” renders the narrative voice more authentic. The fact that the narrator “feel[s] an obligation” toward the reader reveals his or her ethical standard of truthfulness, or sincerity (“Westward” 352). The narrative voice places a strong emphasis on moral “obligation” toward the reader, while constantly measuring itself against “Funhouse” (“Westward” 352). Sincerity is not based on the believability of the characters but rather on the narrator’s confessions. These confessions concern the impossibility of ‘true’

representation. Paradoxically, the narrator becomes more reliable by disclosing his unreliability. In this regard, the narrative comments confirm: “metafiction is untrue, as a lover. It cannot betray. It can only reveal” (“Westward” 333). The impossibility of betrayal is given by the fact that intact narrative illusion was never part of the meta-fictional contract.

“Westward” makes sure to assert that it is not metafiction, and thereby confirms that it actually is. As “A REALLY BLATANT AND INTRUSIVE INTERRUPTION” states: “As mentioned before—and if this were a piece of metafiction, which it’s NOT, the exact number of typeset lines between this reference and the prenominate referent would very probably be mentioned, which would be a princely pain in the ass, not to mention cocky [. . .]” (266). This is exemplary for the functioning of narrative interruptions in “Westward.” They ask: what would metafiction do? —only to assert that this is not a metafictional story and will, thus, not employ the same technical devices. Meanwhile, the reader finds her- or himself in the middle of self-referential commentary. The narrator asserts reliability while his ‘actions,’ such as the false promises of the “FINAL INTERRUPTION” (“Westward” 331) prove this wrong.

The additional layers provided here are similar to Barth’s project in “Funhouse”—exposing the functioning of a certain narrative style through explaining and imitating them with ironical distance. But Wallace’s novella does not entirely reject metafiction. As Nicole Timmer points out, “Westward” is more than a mere “corrective” to Barth’s fiction. Instead, she argues, the novella “lay[s] out a new poetics” (104). While Timmer is correct in pointing to the simplification of “Westward” as a pure rejection of Barth’s fiction, I believe that a “new poetics” is an overly enthusiastic expression for the novella’s project. While Wallace’s later fiction might more aptly fit this direction, “Westward” stops at a sketch that remains incoherent with the narrative strategy. The novella itself does not deliver the ‘metafiction of responsibility’ it endorses but rather provides the theoretical impulse for such a fiction.

4 Conclusion

Critics have interpreted “Westward” as a “fictional patricide” (Boswell) of Barth’s “Funhouse,” in which metafiction poses a way to express narrative uncertainty about the ‘adequate’ way in which to tell a story. However, this reading neglects elements of renewal, repetition and reaffirmation, elements that point to a more complex

relationship between “Westward” and “Funhouse.” While the concept of literary influence, which Boswell and other critics seem to apply, would suggest that “Westward” is a consequence or rival of Barth’s text, theories of intertextuality can broaden the understanding of “Westward” because they let us consider the text as element of a network, in which the author, the reader and uncountable other literary and non-literary texts apart from “Funhouse” are inscribed.

I have argued that one should view “Westward” as an attempt at a particular kind of parody of “Funhouse,” a parody in which Wallace applies metafiction and intertextual references in order to rephrase Barth’s question of the ‘How’ of fiction writing to the more fundamental question of the ‘Why’ of fiction writing. Wallace questions the narrator’s control of the reader in a hierarchical relationship but then shows that a renewal of metafictional literature cannot be realized within the limits of metafiction.

Written twenty-two years after “Lost in the Funhouse,” Wallace’s portrayal of the exhaustion of literature (Barth), “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way,” leads to a different impetus. Wallace’s project does not consist in the establishment of an entirely new form, such as post-postmodernism or meta-metafiction. Rather, “Westward” pleads for a less self-indulgent kind of metafiction, thematizing the hierarchical narrator–reader relationship with the awareness that it cannot be fully abandoned. Repeating the metafictional mode and simultaneously distancing itself from *Lost in the Funhouse*, “Westward” issues a statement on the state of fiction, criticism, and contemporary consumer culture, while showing the impossibility of a more reader-oriented metafiction.

Reader-orientated metafiction relates to the New Sincerity insofar as both highlight the relationship between narrator and reader. While the New Sincerity, however, relies on the reader’s intake of the narrator’s ‘confessions,’ a reader-oriented metafiction would change the reader’s role from “consumer or silent addressee” to “partner in an active, twodirectional and unhierarchical communicative process” (Hirt 121). As Wallace contends, it means “to prohibit [the reader] from forgetting that she’s receiving heavily mediated data, that this process is a relationship between the writer’s consciousness and her own, and that in order for it to be anything like a real full human relationship, she’s going to have to put in her share of the linguistic work” (“Conversation” 137-138). Although “Westward” vouches for fiction as communication between equal partners, it ultimately shows that metafiction inevitably leaves the reader wandering around in a Funhouse.

While telling the reader about the hope for a “nonnaïve, noncynicist metafiction” (Konstantinou 91), “Westward” argues that not it is not just a failure of the particular narrator that this cannot be achieved. It is not just this particular narrator who is “still ‘locked into’ [. . .] the kind of practice he is criticizing” (Timmer 104), but rather any narrator in metafiction will be when criticizing metafiction, because this is inscribed in the metafictional mode. Wallace’s novella de-stabilizes the authoritative metafictional voice of Barth’s “Funhouse” but also shows that any counter-voice within metafiction will be weakened by its recursive loop. The view of postmodern literature inherent in this argument resembles what Linda Hutcheon describes as deconstruction without reconstruction (Hutcheon, “Theorizing”).

By entering into a dialogue with theories and practical examples of metafiction, “Westward” exhibits that it itself belongs to academic discourse. It shows that metafiction, rather than bringing the reader to believe “you are loved” (373), predominantly showcases a writer’s technical abilities. The text thus shows through its use of metafiction that metafiction is not a suitable device for achieving this feeling of being loved in the reader. What remains is a rhetorically well-constructed treatise on the purpose of fiction that is inseparable from a generational-cultural critique. The pledge to the reader that there can be empathic, truthful ‘metafiction of responsibility’ must remain just that: a pledge.

It remains to be investigated whether “Westward” may in this regard be seen as a foreshadowing of David Foster Wallace’s later style. Many critics have claimed that Wallace’s later works are characterized by a more sincere attitude of the narrator toward the reader that levels the hierarchical relationship (e.g. Hirt, Max, Kelly), while his earlier works, to which “Westward” belongs, fail to demonstrate the same subtlety. Overall my analysis proposes that the differences between earlier and later style are less pronounced than D.T. Max for example suggests when he writes that Wallace went from an “infatuation with postmodernism” to a “conversion to single-entendre principles” (*Ghost Story* 159), or Adam Kelly when he claims that “from *Infinite Jest* onwards it [Wallace’s work] became primarily about returning to literary narrative a concern with sincerity” (133). My assessment of “Westward” leads to the question what an alternative to such a linear narrative of Wallace’s stylistic development might look like.

Appendix



Figure 1. Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*.

Verses on the Prospect of Planting Art and Learning in America

The muse, disgusted at an age and clime
Barren of every glorious theme,
In distant lands now waits a better time,
Producing subjects worthy fame.

In happy climes, where from the genial sun
And virgin earth such scenes ensue,
The force of art by nature seems outdone,
And fancied beauties by the true;

In happy climes, the seat of innocence,
Where nature guides and virtue rules,
Where men shall not impose for truth and sense
The pedantry of courts and schools:

There shall be sung another golden age,
The rise of empire and of arts,
The good and great inspiring epic rage,
The wisest heads and noblest hearts.

Not such as Europe breeds in her decay;
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heavenly flame did animate her clay,
By future poets shall be sung.

Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The first four acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time's noblest offspring is the last.

Figure 2. George Berkeley, "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Art and Learning in America"

Works Cited

- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. 269–422. Print.
- Barth, John. "About Minimalism." *New York Times*. New York Times 28 Dec. 1986: sec. 7: 1. Web. 13 Feb. 2014.
- . "The Literature of Exhaustion." *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1984. 62–76. Print.
- . "The Literature of Replenishment." *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1984. 193–206. Print.
- . "Lost in the Funhouse." *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice*. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 92–97. Print.
- . "Title." *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice*. New York: Anchor Books, 1988: 105–113. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." *Image–Music–Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 155–164. Print.
- . "From Work to Text." *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. London: Edward Arnold, 1989. 166–171. Print.
- . "The Death of the Author." *Image–Music–Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 313–16. Print.
- . *S/Z*. New York: Hill and Wang 1974. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. Print.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978. Print.
- Berkeley, George. "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Art and Learning in America." *Poems of Places: An Anthology in 31 Volumes*. Ed. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Vols. XXV–XXIX. 1876–79. Web. 4 July 2013.
- Berkeley Historical Society. "Why is Berkeley Called Berkeley?" Berkeley Historical Society, 2012. Web. 4 Sep. 2013
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature As a Way of Life*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011. Print.
- . *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.
- Boswell, Marshall. *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003. Print.

- Boddy, Kasia. "A Fiction of Response. *Girl With Curious Hair* in Context." *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. Ed. Marshall Boswell and Stephen J. Burn. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. Print.
- Cohen, Samuel S, and Lee Konstantinou. "Introduction: Zoologists, Elephants, and Editors." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. xi–2. Print.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *Ferdinand De Saussure*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986. Print.
- . "Literary Competence." *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*. Ed. Jane P. Tompkins. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980. 101–17. Print.
- . "Presupposition and Intertextuality." *Comparative Literature* 91.6 (1976): 1380–96. Print.
- . *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Fitzgerald, Jonathan. "Sincerity, Not Irony, Is Our Age's Ethos." *The Atlantic.com*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, 20 Nov. 2012. Web. 27 Feb. 2013.
- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2006. Print.
- . "Infinite Summer: Reading, Empathy, and the Social Network." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 182–208. Print.
- Franzen, Jonathan. "Farther Away: *Robinson Crusoe*, David Foster Wallace, and the Island of Solitude." *The New Yorker* 18 Apr. 2011: n. pag. *NewYorker.com*. Web. 2 Jan. 2014.
- Frow, John. "Intertextuality and Ontology." *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*. Ed. Michael Worton and Judith Still. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990. 45–55. Print.
- Frye, Carrie. "46 Things to Read and See for David Foster Wallace's 50th Birthday." *The Awl* 21 Feb. 2012. *The Awl Mag*. Web. 15 Jan. 2014.
- Gamble, Richard M. "'The Last and Brightest Empire of Time,' 1771–1787." *Humanitas* 20.1–2 (2007): 13–35. Print.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. Print.

- Giles, Paul. "Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 327–44. Print.
- Gorer, Geoffrey. *The American People: A Study in National Character*. W. W. Norton, 1948. Print.
- "Hierophant." *Oxford Dictionaries Online*. Oxford UP, 2013. Web. 8 Jan 2014.
- Hirt, Stefan. *The Iron Bars of Freedom: David Foster Wallace and the Postmodern Self*. Magister's thesis U Tübingen, 2008. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2008. Print.
- Hollander, John. Rev. of *The Anxiety of Influence*, by Harold Bloom. *New York Times* 4 Mar 1973. *New York Times*. Web. 1 Nov. 2013.
- Hungerford, Amy. "Lecture 11 – John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*." *Open Yale Courses*, n.d. *Yale University*. Web. 1 July 2013.
- Hutcheon, Linda. "Literary Borrowing . . . and Stealing: Plagiarism, Sources, Influences, and Intertexts." *English Studies in Canada* 12.2 (1986): 229–39. Print.
- . *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- . *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- . "Theorizing—Feminism and Postmodernity: A Conversation With Linda Hutcheon." Interview by Kathleen O'Grady. *Rampike* 9.2 (1998): 20–22. Print.
- . *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2000. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972. Print.
- . "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." Whitney Museum Lecture, Fall 1982. Web. 25 June 2013.
- . "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. 1–54. Print.
- Juvan, Marko. *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2008. Print.
- Kelly, Adam. "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction." *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Ed. David Hering. Los Angeles: Sideshow Media Group, 2010. 131–46. Print.
- Kirsch, Adam. "The Importance of Being Ernest." *New Republic* 10 Feb. 2013: n. pag. Web. 2 Oct. 2013.

- Konstantinou, Lee. "No Bull: David Foster Wallace and Postironic Belief." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 83–113. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 34–37. Print.
- Lennon, Paul. "Theories of Indirect Language Comprehension." *Allusions in the Press: An Applied Linguistic Study*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004. 23–60. Print.
- Leutze, Emanuel Gottlieb. *Westward the Course of Empires Takes Its Way*. 1861. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Web. 15 June 2013.
- Makaryk, Irene Rima. "Jonathan Culler and the Structuralist Approach." Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Paul Perron. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993. 171. Print.
- Max, D T. *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*. New York: Viking, 2012. Print.
- . "The Unfinished: David Foster Wallace's Struggle to Surpass *Infinite Jest*." *The New Yorker* 9 Mar. 2009: n. pag. *NewYorker.com*. Web. 9 Dec. 2013.
- McLaughlin, Robert. "Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World." *Symploke* 12.1–2 (2004): 53–66. Web. 25 June 2013.
- Miller, Laura. "The War for the Soul of Literature." *Salon.com*. Salon Publishing, 15 July 2004. Web. 13 Feb. 2014.
- Moi, Toril, ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. Print.
- Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, and Michael Irmischer. *Translating Literatures, Translating Cultures: New Vistas and Approaches in Literary Studies*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. 42. Print.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959. Print.
- Schaffner, Ingrid. *Salvador Dali's Dream of Venus: The Surrealist Funhouse from the 1939 World's Fair*. Princeton Architectural P, 2002. Print.
- Schmid, Wolf. "Skaz." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn et al. Hamburg: Hamburg UP, 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
- Scott, Anthony O. "The Panic of Influence." *New York Review of Books* 10 Feb. 2000: n. pag. Web. 27 June 2013.
- Shepherd, David. "Dialogism." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn et al. Hamburg UP, 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2013.

- Smith, Russell. Rev. of *Beckett's Dantes: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism*, by Daniela Caselli. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006. *Journal of Beckett Studies* 17 (2008): 221–25. Print.
- Smithsonian American Art Museum. "Research Notes for *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*." Smithsonian Institution, n. d. Web. 4 Sep. 2013.
- Timmer, Nicole. *Do You Feel It Too?: The Post-Postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. Print.
- Tjupa, Valerij. "Heteroglossia." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn et al. Hamburg UP, 2011. Web. 12 Nov. 2013.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Harvard UP, 2009. Print.
- Wallace, David Foster. "My Appearance." *Girl with Curious Hair*. London: Abacus Books, 2012. 173–201. Print.
- . "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace." Interview by Larry McCaffery. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 127–50. Print.
- . "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 151–94. Print.
- . "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 8.1 (1998): n. pag. Web. 3 Jan. 2014.
- . "This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion About Living a Compassionate Life." New York: Little, Brown, 2009. Print.
- . "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way." *Girl with Curious Hair*. London: Abacus Books, 2012. 231–373. Print.
- Wimsatt, William K, and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *On Literary Intention: Essays*. Ed. David Newton de Molina. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1976. Print.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction*. London: Routledge, 1984. Print.
- Wood, James. "Human, All too Inhuman." Rev. of *White Teeth*, by Zadie Smith. *New Republic* 30 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.
- Woolley, Deborah. "Empty 'Text,' Fecund Voice. Self-Reflexivity in John Barth's 'Lost in the Funhouse.'" *Contemporary Literature* 26.4 (1984): 460–81. Print.
- Worton, Michael, and Judith Still. *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990. Print.