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Surface Disturbances

A Reading of Raymond Federman's Surfictions as Historiographic Radical Metafictions

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Postmodern Identity-work and Historiography: The 'Facts' in the Strange Case of Monsieur Federman

French born writer and critic Raymond Federman is best known as a practitioner and theorist of experimental fiction and as the inventor of terms such as 'surfiction' and 'critifiction', both denoting a type of literature where literary theory and practice meet in an acutely self-aware form of metafiction. The thesis introduced here is an innovative and theoretically acute reading of Federman's two early novels *Double or Nothing: A Real Fictitious Discourse* (1971) and *Take It or Leave It: An Exaggerated Second-Hand Tale To Be Read Aloud Either Standing or Sitting* (1976) which both conventionally are seen as radical experiments in fictional and narrative practices, but which rarely are seen as having a strong representational, let alone historiographic content. There are at least three difficulties which must be overcome before one can speak sensibly about what type of literature these novels are, and more generally the genres Federman's oeuvre inscribes itself in. Lisbeth R. Pedersen's contribution to solving these difficulties is substantial and welcome in a field of study where there is both too little work done overall (Federman is only the topic of approximately 60 entries in the MLA database, despite the fact that he has written fiction and theory for 35 years) and where there has been a recent draught in new contributions (most Federman criticism and all book-length work on him dates back to the 1990s).

The first problem of interpreting and labelling Federman's work stems from his own apparently self-contradictory practice of labelling and categorising his own works – a practice which simultaneously underscores and undermines the role of history and autobiography in his fiction. "History is bankrupt", Raymond Federman declares in his novel *The Twofold Vibration*, suggesting that history, like money, is a liability in the hands of investors who can lose it, regain it, invest in it, sell it, buy it, conceal it, reveal it, make it available. Not only is history a fluctuating currency in Federman's hands, but history is the key that opens a whole world of narrative potentiality. As a subject in a historical context, one

relates to history's potential by exhibiting what Federman calls a "sense of historical possibilities". All Federman's works are saturated with making history, and particularly personal history, an active part of memory which never settles with 'solid' or 'simple' facts, but rather develops possibilities and potentialities around factual certainties. The tension between individual and collective memory is highly operative in Federman's work. In all memory work he advocates for the place of invention as an empowering tool for both the aesthetic practice of the novelist and the ethical project of the historian. Yet he is acutely aware of the impossibility and necessity of trying to tell stories of history. "I am often asked", Federman writes, "as a survivor of the Holocaust and as a writer: 'Federman tell us the story of your survival'. And I can only answer: 'There is no story. My life is the story. Or rather, the story is my life.'"

Federman's fictional work is concerned with construing variations on statements such as these, which mark a demand for distinguishing history from story, reality from fiction. Yet it is paradigmatic within Federman's understanding of writing that it is always "real fictitious" as witnessed by the use of this phrase as the subtitle of his novel *Double or Nothing*. Federman's capacity to think historically is enforced in the idea of remembrance as narrative strategy: one writes in order to remember, and one remembers in order to be able to reveal. "It is necessary to speak", he furthermore says, "to write, and keep on speaking and writing (lest we forget) about the Jewish Holocaust during the Nazi period even if words cannot express this monstrous event. It is impossible to speak or write about the Holocaust because words cannot express this monstrous event." For Federman therefore, history is a dialectical bind, which involves a both necessary and impossible transmission of these haunting memories. Federman's notion of history is not defined by a rejection of it as an ideology but by creating a mode of discourse in which history is open to possibilities.

The second problem with categorising Federman as more than just an abstract practitioner of revisionist and relativist postmodern fiction without an ethical edge pertains to the state of the available theories on the varieties of metafiction.

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Standard works such as Patricia Waugh's book *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), and Linda Hutcheon's extremely influential theorising of the role of historiography in a postmodern fiction poetics (in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, 1988) help furnish categories one can test out on Federman's slippery texts, but ultimately one is left with corrective and supplemental work to do in order to find/create a suitable category. Even taking into account more recent work on metafiction, such as Mark Currie's selection of and introduction to seminal pieces in the field (*Metafiction*, 1995) which at least takes into account the status of surfiction á la Federman as performing the movement typical of metafiction in situating itself between fiction and theory, one is left wanting both a more specific mark or spectrum of metafiction, and yet also a more spacious field for metafictional practices to play in.

The third and final 'problem' with Federman is exactly that: a problem only in the sense of misguided academic scare-quoting of hard-to-deal-with phenomena: Federman is just too funny for his own good. A writer who speaks the unspeakable in a humoristic way and openly commits himself to a celebration of pla(y)giarism is simply asking for trouble, asking to be bracketed off in some obscure category or other. As a playful master of the tragicomic, Federman juggles his 4 Xs, his lampshades and the other signifiers he operates with to represent the family he lost in the Holocaust with virtuoso performances, using calculated effects to strike a balance in the reader's emotional response between laughter, grief, guilt, remorse and relief – stylistically rivalling the degree of control desired by an earlier practitioner of the horror of the mundane, Edgar Allan Poe, whose short story of a man vocalising from beyond his death I am evoking in the title of this introduction. Federman in a sense also speaks as such a surplus entity from beyond the pale, blue event horizon the Holocaust forms in Western thought, yet he is in no way, shape or form for the heavy of heart and mind, as also more recently witnessed by his delightful intervention into the currently most explosive genre of life writing, the blog, where one of Federman's alter egos, Moinous, is currently setting new standards of excellence almost every

day (http://raymondfederman.blogspot.com). This blog, by the way, is also a site where one can meet the author of the present thesis, Lisbeth R. Pedersen in some of her more informal guises…

What, then, is it exactly this new study of Federman offers that we have not had access to before? First of all we are gifted with an extremely thorough and sober account of the dominant theories concerning the aesthetic and political aspects of literary postmodernism with a special view to charting the development of the American postmodern novel. These theories are critiqued, supplemented and corrected in many ways in the course of the work, none more so than Waugh's spectrum of metafictional practices which is extended and reshaped to properly accommodate Federman's work. Thus the thesis has realised its dual aim: Both to revise the work done in the 1980s and 90s on the poetics of postmodern narrative fiction (long overdue, as also witnessed by the revision currently being done by Patricia Waugh herself to her original book) and in the process resituate Federman as a crucial contributor to the subgenre of historiographic metafiction, and to seriously subject Federman's novels to a close reading of, among other things, his innovative use of concrete prose and prose iconography to enrich his semiotic and significatory practice.

This thesis has found its inception in conference papers and other works Lisbeth R. Pedersen has produced in the course of her studies at Aalborg University's English programme (notably her contribution to a workshop run by Dr. Camelia Elias and myself at the Karlstad conference on Memory, Haunting and Discourse, entitled "Memory and potentiality as narrative strategies in the work of Raymond Federman"). Lisbeth R. Pedersen's paper on that occasion, "Frame-breaking and concrete prose in the works of Raymond Federman**"** pioneered some of the ideas she presents in more fully developed form in the thesis at hand.

The obvious strengths of this thesis do not only pertain to the scope and originality of the work, but also to the clarity of the style employed. The reader always feels in the presence of a competent guide and language user as we are

taken through the jungle of poststructuralist theories and poetics. Lisbeth R. Pedersen's charting of Federman as a hybrid figure in more ways than one (fiction writer and academic, gambler and control freak, French and American, playful and serious, Jewish and profane: 'Moinous', 'Namredef', 'The old man' and 'Federman' all rolled into one – 'double or nothing', indeed) is as convincing as any work on Federman done internationally, and on top we get a much needed supplement to the incipient insights within progressive literary scholarship that postmodern literature need not be stigmatised as a-political or lacking in ethical impact just because it appears in the guise of experimental prose. This thesis urges us to look again, and to look deeper.

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Bent Sørensen

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1.0 Introduction to thesis

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (1988) Linda Hutcheon's aim is to formulate a poetics of postmodern literature. Her main focus is that of defining *the* postmodern novel, which she does through the concept of historiographic metafiction. In brief, this particular type of novel is best described as the problematic encounter between historiography and metafiction. That is, a type of fiction that is both acutely self-aware and concerned with the (re)writing of history. To Hutcheon, this means that *the* postmodern novel is paradoxical since it is both aware of its own status as a self-governing linguistic construct while, at the same time, it is grounded in the social, historical and political discursive context that we refer to as 'reality'. It is, in other words, a type of novel that simultaneously points in two directions: inward and outward. What I find particularly interesting, but also difficult to accept, is the fact that Hutcheon throughout her book in an explicit manner completely excludes from her definition the very extreme metafictional works by French-American surfictionist Raymond Federman. Hutcheon classifies Federman's novels as unequivocally 'late modernist' and claims that they are anti-referential and autotelic and therefore not anchored in 'reality'.

The works by Federman that I will be discussing in this thesis are his two typographically challenging novels *Double or Nothing: A Real Fictitious Discourse* (1971) and *Take It or Leave It: An Exaggerated Second-Hand Tale To Be Read Aloud Either Standing or Sitting* (1976). With these novels, Federman presents us with two somewhat thinly disguised versions of his autobiography while, at the same time, he explores the problematic concept of representation and the limitations of language through the use of radical metafictional techniques. Both novels hinge on the (im)possibility of finding an appropriate linguistic representation of Federman's autobiographical experiences, that is, of incorporating (both personal and collective) history into metafiction. In my view, Federman's two aforementioned novels can both be seen as examples of how even

some radical metafictions may *also* be said to fall within the parameters put forward by Hutcheon. Federman's two novels are undoubtedly very experimental and unconventional in their form, but I believe that there is more to these two novels than their conspicuous formal features, playfulness and high degree of self-reflexiveness – that beneath the surface of the textual maze that Federman creates through his many voices, typographical endeavours and countless digressions, we may indeed be able to glimpse fragments of the 'real' (hi)story too. If only we look hard enough.

But before we embark upon our investigation, I want to stress that in criticising Hutcheon's absolute dismissal of Federman's books as historiographic metafictions, I realise, of course, that any attempt of situating literature within a given classifying framework or context is always subject to individual interpretation, and that such evaluation does not exactly follow any fixed or pre-established laws. Indeed, I am fully aware of the two-fold nature that any attempt at classification cannot escape: inclusion and exclusion. However, this thesis is not meant as a complete and general dismissal of Hutcheon's excellent and very comprehensive study of the postmodern enterprise. Certainly, this thesis owes much to her extensive work on postmodernism and some sections rely heavily on her poetics, as will be evident. But one might tentatively suggest that Hutcheon in her firm conviction that Federman's works are always *only* about themselves neglects the inherent doubleness of Federman's fiction which is central to her own definition of historiographic metafiction: that Federman's novels are both aware of their own fictionality *and* their grounding in historical facts. That they hinge on an irresolvable paradox: the constant and reciprocal interplay between fact and fiction, history and story, memory and imagination.

In her aforementioned book, Hutcheon is quick to point out that,

> *no* narrative can be a natural "master" narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct. It is this kind of self-implicating questioning that should allow postmodernist theorizing to challenge narratives that do presume to "master" status, without

necessarily assuming that status for itself (emphasis original, Hutcheon 1992:13).

The forthcoming discussion will be yet another narrative construct that deals with postmodern critical and literary practices. It will be a challenge to Hutcheon's own narrative on these subject matters. Through my discussion and analysis this thesis will, of course, both structure and define the theoretical framework presented henceforth as well as Federman's works. Hence, this thesis should not be seen as *the* reading of Federman, but instead it should be perceived as *one* way of understanding his surfictional novels, namely as historiographic *radical* metafictions.

The main aim of this thesis therefore will be an analysis of Federman's *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It* focused on historiographic metafiction. In other words, I want to classify these works in relation to Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction, thus illustrating that although these novels may be extreme in their degree of self-reflexivity, they nevertheless remain deeply anchored in a historical 'reality', and can be seen as textual manifestations of the postmodern paradox in that they point both inward and outward at the same time.

Such undertaking inevitably involves a thorough investigation of the concepts of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and metafiction, particularly the more radical kind, and the various narrative techniques pertaining to such practice. In addition, we will need to define the concept of historiographic metafiction and some of its main concerns. The first part of this thesis, therefore, will be devoted to establishing a theoretical framework that will provide us with a set of analytical tools for the actual analysis. In chapter 2.0, I will be using the works of various critics, such as Brian McHale, Larry McCaffery, Linda Hutcheon and others, in order for me to define some general tendencies within postmodern practices, theoretical as well as literary. Furthermore, I will place postmodernism in a socio-historical context, which allows us to investigate and understand some of the more adversarial tendencies discernable in postmodern practices. The third chapter of

this thesis will focus on poststructuralism, particularly the works of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Derrida's perception of language as slippery and its relationship to 'reality' will be investigated, as well as Barthes' (radical) reworking of concepts such as the text, our approach to it, and also the author. In chapter 4.0, I will investigate in detail the concept of metafiction, more specifically the metafictional novel, and some of the narrative strategies often employed in such writing. The main focus will be on the more radical types of metafiction, and I will draw primarily (though not exclusively) on the works of McHale and Patricia Waugh. Finally, chapter 5.0 will deal specifically with the concept of historiographic metafiction. In this relation, I shall first look into some of Hayden White's observations that have played a crucial role in terms of exposing the mechanisms entailed in the production of historical narratives. These, as we shall see, are relevant in terms of Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, which I shall then attempt to define and investigate.

The second part of this thesis will be analytical. Here, I shall first briefly introduce Raymond Federman and, then, I will move on to the actual analysis of *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It*. These novels will be analysed on the basis of the analytical tools established in the preceding part of this thesis. I will offer a very close reading of *Double or Nothing* in particular, while less space will be devoted to *Take It or Leave It*. The reason for this is that there are in fact many similarities between the narrative techniques and aims of the two fictions, as will be evident. I shall then offer some conclusive remarks to the analysis and, in chapter 7.0, conclude this thesis by situating Federman's surfictional writing within Hutcheon's paradigm of postmodernism and investigate some of the subversive qualities discernable in his literature.

2.0 Postmodernism

2.1 Introducing postmodernism

Much has been said and written about the term 'postmodernism' since it became a particularly noticeable concept within American literature during the 1960s at a time when America experienced a number of social revolutions. The label was initially associated with anarchistic and thought provoking ideas as its practitioners were engaged in a rethinking of traditional values in Western society such as reasoning, rationality and objectivity. These ideas were radically undermined and instead a tendency to celebrate and promote ideas of eclecticism, complexity, and playfulness could be discerned. Conventional narrative techniques and the concept of representation were being redefined through artistic creativity that explored the function of fiction and challenged the barriers between art and life. Today, however, the term is often notoriously perceived as a highly confusing and problematic concept, which is hardly surprising considering the various different contexts in which the term has been applied to designate an equally high number of different objects and trends. Since the 1960s, the term has appeared with increased frequency in the many discourses constituting our contemporary culture: architecture, history, music, philosophy, and fashion to name but a few.

What I will attempt to do in this chapter is to establish a brief and general overview of some of postmodernism's most prevailing tendencies and concerns. I will, in other words, not attempt to give an exhaustive account of this vast and complex cultural phenomenon. Instead, I propose to outline some qualities that are generally considered distinctively postmodern, which inevitably means that I will be constructing only a very limited picture of postmodernism. Also, I want to suggest that the concept of postmodernism be placed in an historical context, more specifically the anti-foundational 1960s and 1970s since these two decades are of significance to the formation and the development of this aesthetic phenomenon and the ideologies held by its practitioners. As our starting point, however, I want to address the very nature of postmodernism by attempting to determine its referent.

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2.2 Towards a textual construction of postmodernism

In his introduction to *Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide* (1986), Larry McCaffery warns us that we must "beware of labels, lest [we] be tempted into a fruitless search for something that in reality exists in language only" (McCaffery (ed.), 1986:xi). Brian McHale, in his influential book *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), starts off in a similar way by claiming that the referent of postmodernism "does not exist" (McHale 1999:4). McHale adds that "[t]here is no postmodernism "out there" in the world any more than there ever was a Renaissance or a romanticism "out there." These are all literary-historical fictions" (4). Thus, we are dealing with a human made construct that exists *only* on the level of discourse, that is, not *per se*[1]. Postmodernism is an artifact that comes into existence only *when* and *because* we actually talk, write, or think about it, i.e., when and because we use the term as a means of classification. However, the notion of a non-given classification makes the category itself liable to change which is why, as McHale points out, there are numerous ways in which postmodernism can be put together (4). The fact that all versions of postmodernism, including McHale's own, are fictional artifacts rather than physical objects inevitably means that all constructions of postmodernism are subject to the same level of fictionality. Therefore, none can be deemed any more or less 'true' than any other. There is no single correct interpretation of this label which is why postmodernism, as McCaffery points out, is "a term that serves most usefully as a general signifier rather than as a sign with a stable meaning" (McCaffery (ed.) 1986:xi).

The emphasis on the fictional reality of postmodernism obviously has some implications in terms of the truth-value traditionally assigned to the discipline of literary criticism; something that McHale makes explicit (we will investigate this in more detail in chapter 3.0 on 'poststructuralism'). In doing so, he questions the status and the veracity of his own discourse and challenges the very nature and

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[1] The idea that postmodernism exists only on a discursive level is something that many critics agree on. Others who share this belief are, for example, Bran Nicol (Nicol (ed.) 2002:2), and Matei Calinescu (Calinescu 1988:297).

function of literary criticism and its concern with conceptualisation. That is, McHale is studying the existence of the (textual) categories that we fabricate in order for us to attempt to make sense of the world around us. In McHale's 1984 conference paper that formed the basis for *Postmodernist Fiction*, he makes even more explicit his disbelief that theoretical discourses can ever be viewed as objective. He proposes instead that such discourses are always tactical and plotted with a specific goal in mind; "all definitions in the field of literary history, all acts of categorization or boundary-drawing, are *strategic*" (emphasis original, McHale in Nicol (ed.) 2002:278). These are interesting and, to some, bold postulations that highlight a sense of contemporary distrust towards any claims about reliable 'truths' or ideologies that are universally applicable or naturally given. Instead, postmodernism is marked by a strong tendency to emphasise and deliberately flaunt the idea of constructedness that we project onto the world in our attempt to grasp it, rather than the idea of discovery or perception. Postmodernism is concerned with interrogating the way(s) in which concepts and systems are linguistically fabricated and thus both generate and constitute 'reality'. Bran Nicol, too, in his definition of postmodernism stresses issues concerning both the nature and the function of such cultural artifacts. He claims that postmodernism can be viewed as "a mode of cultural awareness informed by the conviction that everything *is*, in fact, *cultural*", i.e., "everything is constructed, mediated, put there *by* someone *for* a particular reason" (emphasis original, Nicol (ed.) 2002:3-4). Postmodernism, in other words, is an artifact that critics construct strategically: a type of classification that is aware that it, as well as the practices it is used to denote, lacks a sense of 'innocence' and objectivity.

2.3 Ontological questioning as the dominant

In *Postmodernist Fiction* McHale embarks upon an extensive study informed by one single idea, namely that postmodern fiction foregrounds one particular kind of questioning that is acutely concerned with ontology. McHale's approach is formalistic and in order for him to pursue his thesis, he makes use of Roman

Jakobson's concept of 'the dominant'[2]. McHale argues that "postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues" (McHale 1999:xii)[3]. That is, postmodern writing can be seen as privileging ontological questioning over epistemological, which is often manifested in postmodern texts through experimentation with, for instance, the text's formal features, frame structure(s), and themes.

McHale argues that epistemological questioning is the dominant kind in modern fiction and that it involves a quest for knowledge. Inherent in epistemological questioning is the conviction that there is reliable knowledge to be found and that someone actually holds the key to the answers (9). Epistemology is informed by the strong belief that it is in fact possible to know and explain the world and our position in it through logical thinking and a rational approach. It is concerned with the circulation of knowledge; how we know what we know without ever doubting that there is a transcendent 'truth' to be known. Epistemology thus hinges on the assumed presence of 'grand narratives' which serve as a valid framework to which one can turn for answers and explanations. In postmodernism, McHale argues, these "various stories (Enlightenment, Marxist, Hegelian) about human emancipation and progress that once served to ground and legitimate knowledge, are no longer credible" (McHale 2002:5). Whence, the opposing postmodern idea of ontology prevails[4].

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[2] Any given dominant depends upon the kind of questions we ask of the text in question as well as the constructed platform from which we choose to examine this text (McHale 1999:6). It is, in other words, an analytical tool that is both strategic and changeable.

[3] In *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh makes a similar distinction between the tendency in modern fiction to favour epistemology and the emphasis on ontology in postmodern fiction (Waugh 2001:102).

[4] In texts that favour the notion of ontology, epistemology is not completely expelled from the picture. Rather, and this is something McHale stresses, in postmodern literature, "epistemology is *backgrounded*, as the price for foregrounding ontology" (emphasis original, McHale 1999:11). Thus the dominant is a flexible entity that indicates a specific hierarchy in terms of how a given text should be interrogated. Any postmodern text, McHale argues, can of course be examined in terms of epistemology, however, "it is much more *urgent* to interrogate it about its ontological implications" (emphasis original, 11).

Ontology is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of being or existence, that is, it focuses on *modes of being* rather than *knowing*. It studies different ranges of categories of existence (above, McHale was studying the existence of postmodernism as a discursive construct), of which two are particularly relevant to this study, namely those concerning 'reality' and fiction. Typical ontological questions would be: What is a world? Do we actually know that it is there at all? Of what and how is a world constituted? How does the 'real' world relate to the projected world(s) of a text? Are we talking world*s* rather than world? What happens when worlds clash, overlap, or co-exist? Such ontological questions in postmodernism function as generators of instability and uncertainty. Being, in postmodernism, is scattered across multiple worlds that often exist simultaneously, thus blurring or emphasising the ontological boundaries between such worlds. The epistemological idea of fixed knowledge is undermined and challenged in the postmodern text, which in a self-conscious manner exposes its own status as artifact, often creating a state of doubt about even its own projected 'reality' and its relationship to the empirical world. In many cases, postmodern writers employ metafictional strategies that fall under the heading of frame-breaking (see section 4.6) in order for them to interrogate the dichotomous relationship between the world of fiction and the empirical world.

2.4 Parody: simultaneous inscription and subversion

Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* claims that the most important and central function of postmodernism is its attempt at rendering problematic the commonsensical and 'natural'. Her particular focus is on history and the knowability of the past (this will be specifically addressed in the chapter 5.0 on 'historiographic metafiction'). Like McHale, Hutcheon bases her project on one main thesis: that postmodernism is always inherently double and self-contradictory and, therefore, she considers parody the perfect postmodern form. However, parody in Hutcheon's study has undergone a reworking that adds to it an important critical dimension. Hence, her notion of parody "is *not* the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit" (emphasis original, Hutcheon 1992:26).

Instead, Hutcheon suggests that parody be redefined "as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (26). Thus, Hutcheon's concept of parody is characterised by a double process: it *both* incorporates *and* subverts that which it parodies at the same time. Its mode of operation is in other words paradoxical and hinges on the notion of undecidablity. By its continuous and simultaneous installation and subversion, postmodernism can never offer any "answers that are anything but provisional and contextually determined (and limited)" (xi). This is also evident from Patricia Waugh's understanding of 'paradox', which she sees as "a form of contradiction. It makes an assertion at the moment that it denies that assertion (and vice versa). It offers a finite statement which only infinity can resolve" (Waugh 2001:141). In doing so, the paradoxical mode of operation opens up to the prospect of endless repetition. In offering no fixed answers – no stable knowledge - such paradoxical discourses inevitably make explicit the irresolvable contradictions that they set up. Thus, postmodernism strives towards and delights in a proliferation of doubt and multiplicity – towards asking questions rather than providing answers.

The use of parody therefore makes it possible for postmodern writers to seriously challenge and rethink some of the traditional beliefs and conventions that have shaped our culture since, roughly speaking, the Enlightenment. Making use of this form thus works as a critique from within that destabilises, interrogates, and renders problematic notions such as "[h]istory, the individual self, the relation of language to its referents and of texts to other texts" (Hutcheon 1992:xiii). These concepts, Hutcheon stresses, are questioned and challenged in postmodern practices (theoretical as well as fictional) but never downright rejected. The concept of parody always involves a sense of retrospection because it incorporates elements from an already existing, and therefore historical, text. That is, postmodern parody always "uses its historical memory" (35) and in doing so, it always engages in a dialogue with art forms and discourses that chronologically precede it. Postmodernism is thus clearly aware of its own position within the (constructed) history of literature and other art practices.

Postmodernism not only criticises that which it parodies but falls prey to its own scrutiny in the process. It undermines not only discourses that have traditionally been granted a status as master narratives, but also its own status as a new master narrative about the incredibility of such authorial discourses. Hence, postmodernism is evidently a paradoxical concept that is critical of any notion of structures and foundations that we have come to take for granted. At the same time, it is also carefully self-reflexive of what it does; of its own mode of operation and its functions. This tendency to question everything, it is often argued, adds to postmodernism a political dimension: it challenges the ideological concepts and institutions that have shaped our understanding of literature and 'reality' for centuries and urges us to rethink them. Postmodernism points to such notions (including itself) as strategic and discursive inventions and constantly attempts to render them problematic from a position that it knows can never be anything but internal and provisional.

2.5 The postmodern period: non-conformity through innovation

It is generally agreed that social and aesthetic revolutions go hand in hand and often result in what can be called a paradigm shift[5]. Certain historical events and philosophical tendencies inevitably have major effects on how we think, experience and understand our being in the world. Such pervasive shifts have comprehensive effects and are generally reflected in the aesthetic practices of a given moment in time. Postmodernism, I want to argue, should be viewed as such very reflections on, and aesthetic responses to, a perception of 'reality' that can still be considered fairly contemporary. It is necessary to situate this concept within the chronologically constructed narrative that we refer to as our (literary) history (even if this means granting such narrative a sense of master status in what would seem a very unpostmodern manner) if we are to gain a proper understanding of postmodernism's critical properties; of its refusal to wholly conform. We will therefore place postmodernism in the historical context of the anti-foundational and innovative 1960s and 1970s and narrow down our scope of investigation to encompass only American postmodern metafiction produced

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[5] See, for instance, McCaffery 1986:xv, and Calinescu 1988:266-7.

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within these two politically turbulent decades. It should therefore be evident that I am not in agreement with those who propose that postmodernism be studied as an ahistorical method or 'mood', as, for instance, the Italian writer and critic Umberto Eco has suggested. Eco maintains that postmodernism "is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category—or, better still, a *Kunstwollen*, a way of operating" (emphasis original, Eco 1995:66). In my view, such study of postmodernism means reducing the concept to a set of formal features that does not take into account the oppositional function of such aesthetic devices. By defining postmodernism in an historical context, we can relate it to the commonly agreed perception of 'reality' that characterised America during the 1960s and 1970s, which is crucial if we are to understand the refusal of many postmodern writers to simply conform to this perception. Instead, most postmodern writers at the time explicitly confronted "the unreality of reality", as Federman puts it, with the aim of getting "closer to the truth of the world today" (Federman 1993:34).

2.6 Tracing postmodernism

Postmodernism obviously did not emerge overnight but remains deeply rooted in (literary) history, and many links have often been made to its preceding movement of modernism; particularly one of modernism's many avatars: the historical avant-garde. While a thorough examination of the avant-garde is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is however necessary to briefly investigate its insistence on innovation and extreme experimentation as well as its aim to initiate social reform, which are both detectable in postmodern practices[6].

Peter Bürger, in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), defines the aim of the avant-garde "as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society [...] as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men" (1996:49). The bourgeoisie's

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[6] This brief discussion of the avant-garde is greatly oversimplified and merely serves as an introduction to some of the movement's general tendencies in order for us to establish a sense of historical background for postmodernism. When I refer to the historical avant-garde in the singular, it is for the sake of simplicity. The historical avant-garde consisted of numerous different schools.

perception of art as autonomous and independent from any social and historical context is thus negated by the avant-gardist who takes the opposite course by attempting to reintegrate art into social life through provocation and shock (46-7, 52). Artistically, the avant-garde thus works as an alternative and rebellious direction to that of the cultural establishment. By the 1960s, however, the avant-garde movement could go no further as its insistence on deliberately operating in a radically new and controversial manner had itself become accepted as art by the very bourgeoisie whose perception of art the movement initially set out to criticise (53). Once shock becomes the norm, the element of surprise – the intended effect - naturally diminishes, or remains totally absent. Even if the historical avant-garde has somewhat been silenced today, its distinctive tendency to advocate social and political progress through innovation has greatly influenced the early American postmodernist movement. As Andreas Huyssen notes,

> [I]t was this specific radicalism of the avantgarde, directed against the institutionalization of high art as discourse of hegemony and a machinery of meaning, that recommended itself as a source of energy and inspiration to the American postmodernists of the 1960s (Huyssen 1986:192-3).

Although the historical avant-garde's influence on early postmodernism is crucial, the two movements differ greatly in terms of their conception of time and the past. Whereas the avant-garde is often defined by its "rejection of the past and by the cult of the new" even if this is achieved "in the sheer process of the destruction of tradition" (Calinescu 1988:117), postmodernism instead engages in an ironic dialogue with the past and artistic practices of earlier periods (cf. section 2.4). Postmodernism looks to the past and to tradition with an ironic awareness of its own position in a contemporary context. From this position postmodernism does not seek to destroy but instead destabilise and reinterpret the past (and our knowledge of it) by exposing it as discursive manifestations of Western ideology and reasoning. Thus, postmodern practices tend to operate "in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first" (Huyssen 1986:216-7). Hence, traditional Western notions of history,

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identity, meaning, literature, and 'reality' are deliberately suspended, not demolished, within a (textual) realm in which discordant indeterminacies are at constant play.

2.7 The rise of postmodernism

As we have seen above, the influence of the historical avant-garde is crucial in terms of the formation of American postmodernism. However, we need also address other factors such as certain socio-historical issues in order for us to understand sufficiently why this particular type of writing became noticeable in America during the 1960s and 1970s. McCaffery is one critic who deals specifically with postmodernism in this context, and he tentatively links the emergence of American postmodernism to the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. McCaffery suggest that on this day,

> postmodernism was officially ushered in—at least in the United States—
> since that was the day that symbolically signaled the end of a certain kind of
> optimism and naivete in our collective consciousness, the end of certain
> verities and assurances that had helped shape our notion of what fiction
> should be (McCaffery (ed.) 1986:xii).

This historical event and the conspiracy theories that followed abruptly brought to an end the optimistic, rational and trusting perception of America and its official institutions that the majority of its inhabitants held in the post-World War II years. In addition, other factors such as the constant threat of nuclear war, the civil rights movement, and the controversial Vietnam War caused political turbulence, social unrest in the country and a proliferation of counter cultures. Something had clearly happened to the collective perception of what constituted the formally agreed 'reality' of America and this lead certain writers at the time to question and reassess the possible functions of their works in a contemporary context. This was expressed through a radical attack on traditional realism with its well-made plot, its predictable and stable characters, and its aim of projecting a coherent and 'credible' fictional universe. These notions were subject to much experimentation

as conventional narrative techniques were subverted and imbued with explicit self-reflexiveness in the attempt to redefine the customs of fiction and thus make literature more pertinent and contemporarily relevant.

The extreme methods often employed by postmodern writers at the time had great consequences for the more conventional novel; a novel that critics were busy declaring 'dead', while postmodern writers such as John Barth instead stressed "the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" and added that this should not be seen as "a cause for despair" (Barth 1997:64). These writers, Federman argues, aimed at "creating a rupture in order to revive an "exhausted" genre—a genre that could no longer accommodate and express the extravagant notions of time and space of modern reality" (Federman 1993:21). This resulted in a new type of writing in which a strong sense of distrust and doubt towards the discourses that officially constituted America was clearly discernable by its deliberate attempt to no longer express "a firm belief in a commonly experienced, objectively existing world of history" (Waugh 2001:6). Instead, the more traditional modes of thinking, ideologies, and orthodoxies were exposed as mere linguistic constructs dominated and controlled by the political and economic system. Indeed, numerous postmodern texts, as McCaffery points out, "for all their experimentalism, metafictional impulses, self-reflexiveness, playfulness, and game-playing, have much more to say about history, social issues, and politics than is generally realized" (McCaffery 1986:xvii).

Paul Maltby too is particularly concerned with the political dimensions of postmodern writing. In his *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon* (1991), Maltby distinguishes between two currents within postmodern texts: 'introverted' ones and 'dissident' ones; the major difference being "one of degree: the dissident tendency may be distinguished from the introverted by its *heightened perception* of the politics of language" (emphasis original, Maltby 1991:37). Maltby argues that introverted postmodern works generally have little interest in the external world, but focus instead on what can be done with language by exploring "the individual ego's experience of entrapment in webs of

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narrative fiction […], mediating from within an enclosed, monadic environment"
(39). Dissident postmodern writing, on the other hand, explores the word in the
world and the political issues connected with language and cultural discourses. It
is concerned with how systems and control are diffused through the power of
language. As Maltby states, dissident postmodern "writers are acutely conscious
of meaning as "narrative." But they are *also* conscious of meaning as imbued with
the tensions of power-relations and conflicting value-systems" (my emphasis, 39).
Like the introverted postmodernists, the dissident postmodernist then clearly
acknowledges any notion of meaning as purely fictional. However, looking
outward too, the dissident postmodernist adds an adversarial dimension to his
work due to his explicit concern with disputing and unmasking the strategic
linguistic mechanisms inherent in hegemonic discourse(s). Through his praxis,
Federman deconstructs Maltby's distinctions, which I shall return to later.

Hence, I will argue throughout this thesis, that the non-conforming and explicitly
self-reflexive writing that proliferated in America during the 1960s and 1970s
should not only be viewed as personal aesthetic statements. It is equally important
to examine carefully such postmodern works in terms of their oppositional
qualities and their function as social and political acts of subversion in a
postmodern age. Nevertheless, it is absolutely crucial to point out that although
the 1960s and 1970s did give rise to a hitherto unseen high number of radical
metafictional American discourses, in which a strong emphasis on their own
coming into being and status as linguistic constructs can be discerned, not all
American prose published within this period can be considered postmodern. It
would therefore be fraudulent to simply use postmodernism as a synonym for that
which is (still fairly) contemporary.

In sum, we have defined postmodernism as a discursive construct used as a means
of classifying certain aesthetic practices that are marked by a deliberate attempt to
question and render unstable any notions of ideology and reliable 'truths' that we
have hitherto taken for granted. Postmodernism points to such orthodoxies, that
have helped shape our notion of 'reality' for centuries, as human fabrications

rather than natural givens. This tendency to generate doubt is often discernable predominantly through ontological questions and the double and self-contradictory mode of parody, thus adding a critical and political dimension to postmodern practices. Placing postmodernism in the historical context of the anti-foundational 1960-70s' America, we traced its formation to these turbulent decades in which certain writers refused to wholly conform to Western ideology and reasoning by attacking and redefining more conventional modes of literature, thus rendering these outdated.

3.0 Poststructuralism

3.1 Poststructuralism: practising auto-critique

When dealing with the concept of postmodernism, it is crucial also to investigate ideas formulated by the many discourses that constitute poststructuralism, which interestingly enough also emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. Although the two cannot be used synonymously, there are certain significant areas of overlap that are important to this study. One could perhaps tentatively suggest that most postmodern metafictional practices often employ methods proposed by poststructuralism. Particularly poststructuralism's overt concern with undermining and rethinking traditional notions of rigid structures and referentiality by flaunting and destabilising the linguistic systems through which such notions become meaningful to us. Like postmodernism, poststructuralism is anti-foundational and paradoxically self-reflexive. Gaining momentum in France around 1966-7, poststructuralism did not influence Anglo-American critical theory until around the mid-70s, when some of its key texts were translated from French into English (Rice & Waugh (eds.), 1996:114-5). Offering a radical attack on particularly the ideas proposed by the structuralist movement, poststructuralism's relationship to its predecessor is nevertheless ambiguous. On the one hand, poststructuralism can be seen as a further development of some of structuralism's most basic assumptions such as the idea of binary oppositions and the self-referentiality of language. On the other hand, poststructuralism also works as a critique of its forerunner which is most pronounced by the former's explicit self-reflexiveness and demolition of scientificity. I will not give a lengthy account here of structuralist thought, but instead offer brief summaries of its main ideas at places where these will help us gain a sufficient understanding of poststructuralism. The emergence of poststructuralism is of course a collective effort, however, I want to focus primarily on two key figures whose influences on the field of literary criticism have been tremendous: French philosopher Jacques Derrida and French critic and theorist Roland Barthes.

3.2 Derrida's deconstruction

Derrida is most famous for the word 'deconstruction', which is both complex and somewhat impossible to define in absolute terms because it always re-doubles upon itself. Deconstruction can only ever be approximated definition-wise because it "is not a regression toward a *simple element*, toward an *indissoluble origin*" (emphasis original, Derrida in Kamuf, 1991: 273). Deconstruction therefore cannot be described satisfactorily within the framework of traditional Western thought in which notions such as "simple element" and "indissoluble origin" are valued and desired (270). It is these conventionally favoured notions of Western reasoning that Derrida radically challenges in a playful and self-reflexive manner.

In this section, I want to pay particular attention to Derrida's view on the relationship between the signifier (written or acoustic image) and the signified (mental concept or meaning), which together constitute the sign. As we shall see, this relationship has important consequences both in terms of the conventional notion of stable meaning as well as the relationship between the text and the world – factors that are crucial in terms of postmodern metafiction.

In *Of Grammatology*[7], Derrida offers a thorough examination of the history of Western metaphysics, which he argues has always been marked by a tendency to favour speech over writing. This inclination towards hierarchising, Derrida extends to encompass a whole system of beliefs that has constituted Western thought since the days of Plato. Derrida refers to this as 'logocentrism' and describes it as a "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida 1997:49). The metaphysics of presence is based on the assumption that there is such a thing as a "transcendental signified" (49); an absolute presence of ideal meaning and consciousness that exceeds any signifier. Thus, presence is paramount to logocentrism and becomes that which is always valued highest. According to Derrida, logocentrism strives towards subordinating and excluding that which it considers absent, different, chaotic, uncertain, supplementary, or non-ideal – the other – in order to sustain

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[7] First published in French in 1967, and translated into English in 1976.

the, to Derrida, illusion of a "full presence summed up in the logos" (71). Repressing the notion of absence is the only way in which such metaphysics can uphold its ideological view of an absolute presence of meaning, being, and truth. Derrida attacks this traditional idea by undoing its founding order of binary oppositions that are based upon ascribed notions of superiority and inferiority. Derrida is not concerned with simply reversing this hierarchy. Instead he attempts to show that the difference between the two constituting elements of a given binary opposition is never rigid or absolute. Rather, any given element is always already marked by a sense of otherness since "each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element" (Derrida, 1982:13). Thus, Derrida shifts the orthodox emphasis on stable and definite orders and systems to that of the process of signification. As an example, he uses the notion of how logocentric thought privileges speech as the signifier (representation) of man's thoughts by opposing it to writing which is simply reduced to a status of the signifier of speech (Derrida 1997:11), hence its secondary status as a "signifier of the signifier" (7) (representation of representation). According to Derrida, the primacy assigned to speech is invalid since,

> "Signifier of the signifier" describes […] the movement of language: in its origin, to be sure, but one can already suspect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as "signifier of the signifier" conceals and erases itself in its own production. There the signified always already functions as a signifier. The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they *enter the game*. There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language (emphasis original, 7).

In Derrida's view, both written and oral language – or *any* type of sign for that matter - is thus always already subject to the same endless process of signification – it participates in a "play of signifying references" which means that the signified is forever on the move; it can never be brought to a definitive halt and thus

become "transcendental", or reach its origin as a full presence. In order to describe this constant movement and the mechanisms at work (or 'play', to use a more appropriate terminology) in the process, Derrida came up with the term 'differance' which he refers to as "an economic concept designating the production of differing / deferring" (23). The concept of differance thus denotes a double quality inherent in all signs from which we derive and construct meaning.

Firstly, meaning is generated by way of difference (that which it is not) which Derrida bases on an idea initially proposed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure[8] whose influence on the structuralist movement is paramount. Saussure claimed that language should be viewed as self-referential because it, as a signifying structure, works according to an underlying and synchronic system in which stable meaning is generated by way of difference. That is, a given sign always defines its meaning negatively in relation to its binary opposition: that which it is not ("differing") (Saussure 1974:117). It is thus differences between signifying units *within* a given system of signification that are seen as generators of stable meaning – outside of this structure, the relations between signs have no meaning. The underlying binary oppositions within a given text thus become explanatory devices to the structuralist, which means that everything – including our 'reality'- can only ever be understood through linguistic structures whose meaning is determined in accordance with cultural conventions rather than empirical factuality (113).

Secondly, and contrary to Saussure's notion, Derrida does not view the signifier and the signified "simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf" (Derrida 1997:11). To Derrida, they are never easily united. Instead, the movement of signification opens up to a state of endless deferral ("deferring") in which meaning is always marked by a sense of undecidability because it is continuously deferred; it is never fully present but contains within itself a trace or mark of

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[8] Although Ferdinand de Saussure died in 1913, his influential *Course in General Linguistics* was published in 1916; a text based on the notes of his students. In this book, Saussure perceives only the acoustic image as being a signifier, not the written word, which is why Derrida considers Saussure a logocentrist.

absence; otherness. We can never reach a sense of stable and absolute meaning because there is no such thing as a final signified (absolute presence of meaning). From the moment that a given sign 'enters the game' or 'movement' of signification, its signifier is transformed into a signified, this signified in turn is modified into yet another signifier, which again becomes a new signified, and so on. Hence, the sign is always slippery which means that if we accept Derrida's claim that "[f]rom the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs" (50)[9], this assumption inevitably has some serious consequences as regards the traditional logocentric concept of meaning. If meaning can somewhat be equalled with signs, then meaning too remains forever unstable and on the move, never fully present in itself.

3.2.1 Textual 'reality': foregrounding the signifier

Since the arrival of the signified is endlessly postponed, the signifier itself becomes foregrounded. With Derrida's concept of differance, there is thus a very strong notion of textuality. Everything is subsumed by language which leads us to another famous, and equally notorious, claim by Derrida, namely "there is nothing outside the text" (163)[10]. This statement has often been misinterpreted and, consequently, Derrida has been accused of denying the existence of an empirical world. Derrida does not dispute that there is such thing as a solid world but he does undermine the conventional assumption that a distinction between 'the world' and 'the text' can actually be made. To Derrida, we cannot speak of anything that precedes language, be it solid objects, human constructs, events, etc. Nothing makes sense to us outside of sign systems; outside of text. In such view, everything is essentially conceived as text and, as a result, we only have access to 'reality' in its mediated form. However, the discourses we produce do not reflect the world, but instead they construct, and even contaminate, our 'reality'. Hence, Derrida rejects the traditional notion of mimesis: that language is capable of describing and representing accurately a pre-existing world or meaning that makes

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[9] This clearly echoes Saussure's notion that "Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula" (Saussure 1974:112).

[10] Others, such as Mark Currie, have translated Derrida's "'*Il n'y a pas de-hors texte*'" into English in the following way, "'There is no outside-text'" (Currie 1998:45).

sense to us externally to a given sign system. Rather, mimesis in Derrida's view foregrounds the textuality of 'reality' as it hinges on a given text's mimetic relationship to other texts, i.e., intertextual references. In the light of the above, it would seem somewhat impossible to actually determine what *really* constitutes the solid world since Derrida's theory seems to imply a conflation of 'reality' and its (attempted) representation. Put differently, the 'reality' we perceive through our senses is never the thing itself, but always only a representation of that very thing, always mediated and never void of interpretation. It would therefore be absolutely pertinent to consider ontological issues such as, *how* or even *if* we can ever know 'reality'.

3.3 Barthes' textual practice

Roland Barthes has himself been a key figure in terms of articulating the basic principles of structuralism, but later on in his career, he grew increasingly more (self-)critical of the structuralist orthodox. This transition is reflected in the later writings of Barthes which are of particular interest to us here. Because of the development that is traceable in Barthes' proposed ideas, he is often considered crucial in terms of the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. One of the main points of Barthes' later texts, in which we find a general agreement with many of Derrida's points (established above), is the collapse of the traditionally distinct labours of criticism and literature, which is often manifested in postmodern metafiction by its tendency to incorporate its own analysis. In the following, I want to examine Barthes' reconceptualisation of the text, our approach to it, as well as the author, which are all crucial to this thesis.

In "Theory of The Text" (1973), Barthes disputes the conventional perception of the text as "an object, submitted to the distant inspection of a knowing subject" (Barthes in Young, 1981: 35) who can derive from it a single and stable meaning; a view held dear by structuralism. Instead, Barthes urges us to rethink the text as "productivity" (36); a locus for the ongoing production of significance. Undoubtedly, the signifiers of a written text remain fixed (the printed words on the page cannot be altered), however, the multiple and potential meanings – or

readings - of the text are not rigid or definite. These come into existence at the moment that "the scriptor and/or the reader begin to play with the signifier" (37). Thus, Barthes suggests that the text be viewed as "the very theatre of a production where the producer and reader of the text meet: the text 'works', at each moment and from whatever side one takes it" (36). The kind of textual interaction that Barthes proposes always emphasises notions of play, pleasure, imagination, and seduction: the sense of plunging into (or giving into) the text and letting oneself be lost in the indefinite and unpredictable play of language. Barthes refers to this as "the concept of 'signifiance'" (38) through which a state of erotic bliss can be reached, "whence its identification with 'jouissance'" (38).

This very notion of signifiance - the constant movement and openness of the text - that Barthes proposes has serious implications for two of structuralism's most basic and closely related assumptions: the concept of a transparent metalanguage and the idea of an objective stance from where a given object-text can be scientifically explained and arrested. Barthes argues that,

> The language we decide to use to define the text is not a matter of indifference, for it is part of the theory of the text to plunge any enunciation, including its own, into crisis. The theory of the text is directly critical of any metalanguage: revising the discourse of scientificity, it demands a mutation in science itself, since the human sciences have hitherto never called into question their own language, which they have considered as a mere instrument or as purely transparent. The text is a fragment of language, itself placed in a perspective of languages. To communicate some knowledge or some theoretical reflection about the text pre-supposes, then, that one is oneself in some way or other engaging in textual practice (35).

What Barthes is effectively doing, is declaring the end of traditional literary criticism "as a discourse held 'on' a work" (44) by implying that the language of the critic is no different from that of the text he is attempting to describe. Put differently, the language of fiction (the object) and the language of criticism (the instrument) work according to the same principles and operate in similar ways, and the latter does not ensure the presence of a final signified. The referentiality

of metalanguage cannot be considered any different from that of the literary text. From the moment that the critic tries to make sense of a text, he is in fact dependent upon and unable to step outside the very language system that he is attempting to describe from an assumed external position. What Barthes proposes is a self-reflexive method of approaching the text which he refers to as "textual analysis" (43). Textual analysis delights in the idea of pluralism and "impugns the idea of a final signified […by] entering into the play of signifiers" (43); knowing fully well that any other assumption would be deceptive. Barthes' notion of textual analysis radically dissociates itself from the doctrine of structuralism which "seeks in general to discover *the* meaning of the work" (my emphasis, 43) by revealing its assumed underlying and universal structures, and thus bring to the text a sense of closeness. Contrary to this notion, textual analysis upholds the idea of pluralism (although, paradoxically, such view is itself monistic) and is careful not to transmute or in other ways 'shape' a given text by imposing structures onto it. Instead, Barthes claims in "From Work to Text" (1971),

> [T]he discourse on the Text should itself be nothing other than text, research, textual activity, since the Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder. The theory of the Text can coincide only with a practice of writing (emphasis original, Barthes 1977:164).

Any commentary 'on' a given text becomes itself a textual practice; it cannot be anything but a text - in the Barthesian sense, of course, as established above: it is productivity. Hence, it corresponds to what Barthes calls "a practice of writing" which strongly implies the ongoing process of meaning-making that the play of language inevitably entails: text is being produced or written as soon as one engages in textual practice which in turn amounts to a text itself. The text is practice and practice is the text! Or put differently, the narrative is its own critical reading and its critical reading is the narrative. This inevitably means that the border between literary and critical writing somewhat ceases to exist; the two

labours can no longer be considered overtly distinct. This is clearly manifested in metafictional practices, as we shall see.

3.3.1 "The Death of the Author"

Barthes' thorough reworking does not stop at the text and our approach to it. The author as we have conceived him thus far is also subject to Barthes' reconceptualisation. In Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" (1968), we find what is generally considered one of his most notorious assertions, as he here boldly declares the author dead. To Barthes, "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (142) which means that as soon as there is writing, "the author enters into his own death" (142). What Barthes is declaring dead - or outdated – is not the actual human being made out of flesh and blood who has put pen to paper and written a text. Instead, Barthes is concerned with the *concept* of the author as a subject with a particular function that is socially and historically constructed, and the importance generally assigned to this subject in terms of how we understand his work (142-3). That is, Barthes disputes the more conventional critical approach in which,

> The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us (emphasis original, 143).

We cannot look to the author in order to make sense of, or bring closure to, the text since the author does not possess any special powers that enable him to control or arrest the movement of language (hence the traditional perception of the author as God-like). Rather, "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality […], to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (143). What Barthes seems to imply is the notion that it is actually language, or writing, that creates the author and not the other way around; the author does not pre-exist his work. Nor is he capable of transmitting through language a pre-existing meaning (or origin), because this meaning too exists to the author himself only in language as "a ready-formed

dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely" (146). Thus, in Barthes' work, as with Derrida, we find a strong emphasis on textuality: all that a writer can ever hope to do is "to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them" (146). Writing to Barthes then does not mirror anything external to it but rather it becomes an activity that always occurs at the very moment that the act of reading takes place. Hence, "there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*" (emphasis original, 145). Barthes, in other words, shifts the traditional focus on the author to that of the reader who is now perceived as an active and crucial (co-)producer or writer of the text,

> Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination (148).

The unity of the text is no longer to be sought in the author as its originator or centre, but instead in its reception: the reader – as a *concept* upon whom writing is inscribed. The possible intentions of the author are irrelevant in terms of how the text is perceived by its reader who is now overtly recognised as an active producer of the text he is reading, and who is held responsible for the text's 'decoding'. Writing and reading are therefore seen as somewhat parallel processes to Barthes. The text is not a 'finished product' that functions as a transparent glass through which some meaning can easily be recognised and passively consumed by the reader[11]. Hence, Barthes urges us "to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148).

Thus, poststructuralism, as we have seen, is explicitly preoccupied with interrogating and undermining conventional notions of fixed structures and

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[11] Cf. Federman's term "pre-text", which he uses to designate the process of writing since the text is never completed until the active involvement of the reader has begun (Federman 1993:50).

referentiality by exposing and destabilising the very linguistic systems that render such notions significant to us. Most importantly we established Derrida's view on the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which he perceives as unstable and forever on the move. The endless process of signification, generated through difference and continuous deferral, is thus brought to the fore, resulting in the inability of the signified to ever become stable, or transcendental. To Derrida, nothing makes sense to us outside of text, hence signs make up the world we have access to through our senses. Consequently, 'reality' is always already imbued with interpretation, always already a discursive representation. Investigating Barthes' work, we established his revolutionary approach to the text, which delights in pluralism and the slippery nature of language. Exposing the idea of scientificity as delusory, Barthes' declares the end of traditional literary criticism, emphasising instead the critic's inability to ever occupy an extra-linguistic position – critical and literary writing can therefore no longer be considered distinct labours. Stressing the nature of language as performative and opaque, the traditional God-like role of the author is subverted and instead the reader is now acknowledged as an active participant in the production of text and significance.

4.0 The metafictional novel

4.1 Towards a definition of metafiction

Having established a general idea of what the term postmodernism denotes, its socio-historical context, and also the self-reflexive mode of poststructuralist criticism, we will now turn our attention to the metafictional novel. In this section, I will first of all attempt to reach a general definition of the concept of metafiction. Secondly, I want to establish some of the narrative techniques employed in such writing, and for this purpose I will be drawing extensively on the works of Waugh and McHale.

In *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh defines the concept of 'metafiction' in its most basic form as,

> [F]ictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality (Waugh 2001:2).

We are, in other words, dealing with a type of fiction that is acutely aware of its own status as a fictional construct while, at the same time, it also deliberately flaunts the fact that it *knows* it exists as an artefact. By calling attention to its own nature as a linguistic construct, metafiction does not attempt to create the illusion that it is 'real life' (as, for instance, traditional realism does). Instead, metafiction reveals itself as art by flaunting its own status as a representation of the representable. Metafiction often deliberately attempts to blur and break down the traditional distinction between the extra-linguistic world and the textual realm of the novel and, in doing so, it both highlights and renders problematic issues concerning representation and construction. This type of writing therefore displays a critical attitude towards the conventions and assumptions of fiction that we have somewhat come to take for granted and, frequently, metafictional writers set out to explore the world-text relationship by subverting and experimenting with literary conventions that are familiar to us. Metafiction thus examines its own relationship (as a piece of fiction) to the empirical world and, consequently,

it reminds us that fiction as well as 'reality' exist to us only as textual and illusory constructs. 'Reality' is, in other words, turned into a highly questionable and relative concept. Indeed, 'the world of fiction' versus 'the solid world' is a problematic relationship that metafictional writing often takes as its subject-matter.

If we accept that metafiction is conscious of its own identity as fiction (and even flaunts this awareness), this type of writing must also, effectively and to some extent, be considered theoretical. Metafiction is thus a borderline discourse - a hybrid of literature and criticism, which clearly concurs with the ideas proposed by Barthes in section 3.3. In Mark Currie's view, metafictional writing "is a way of giving the novel a critical function, the ability to explore the logic and the philosophy of narrative without recourse to metalanguage" (Currie 1998:52). Waugh too emphasises the theoretical aspect of metafiction which, to her, is manifested in its attempt to "explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (emphasis original, Waugh 2001:2). Finally, Hutcheon refers to metafiction as "fiction about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (Hutcheon 1991:1). All the above definitions hinge on a paradox that points to the twofold function of metafictional writing. On the one hand, the metafictional novel continues to fulfil the criteria of the traditional novel by presenting us with a story; i.e., by projecting a fictional world. On the other hand, and at the same time, it also makes a statement about its own status as fiction and, consequently, undermines the fictional illusion it has just created. Metafiction therefore is also about 'aboutness' – about its nature as fiction and the literary conventions employed in its making. It incorporates critical discourse(s) into its fictional frame(s) and can therefore be considered a locus for theoretical and artistic imbrications.

Defining metafiction as writing that is 'self-conscious', however, seems to indicate a type of writing that is entirely introverted and (seemingly) always only about itself as fiction; *not* writing that also includes within itself a dimension concerning its own 'aboutness'. This problematic issue, Currie addresses

specifically in his introduction to *Metafiction* (1995). Although Currie too considers metafiction a borderline discourse, he argues that if metafictional writing is conscious of its own nature as fiction, it is simply not enough for it to know that it is fiction – it must also be conscious of its own existence as *meta*fiction "if its self-knowledge is adequate, and so on in an infinite logical regress" (Currie 2001:1). Hence, Currie prefers to use the term "'theoretical fiction'" (Currie 1998:52) rather than 'self-conscious fiction'[12]. It is remarkable that Waugh does not pick up on this particular aspect of 'self-consciousness' in her comprehensive study of metafiction; especially in light of her comment below regarding 'consciousness' in relation to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Here, Waugh argues that,

> acts of consciousness have to be conscious of themselves, so that even when consciousness is focused on something else – when writing, for example - it must remain aware of itself on the edges of consciousness or the subject cannot continue to write (Waugh 2001:27).

It would thus seem evident that if a piece of fiction is defined in terms of its self-consciousness, it must also be (self-)conscious of its own self-consciousness, and so forth. Put differently, it is not sufficient for metafictional writing to know that it exists as fiction; it must also know that it is fiction that knows it is fiction, etc.

4.2 Postmodern metafiction

Although the use of metafictional devices in prose fiction is generally considered a distinctive feature of postmodernism, this does not mean that all contemporary fiction falls under the heading of metafiction. Nor does it mean that earlier works cannot be seen as displaying a number of metafictional elements[13]. In fact, metafiction is by no means a new phenomenon but rather, as Hutcheon argues, it is "part of a long novelistic tradition", and the one thing that makes it particularly pertinent today "is only its degree of internalized self-consciousness about what

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[12] For the sake of simplicity, however, I shall continue to employ the term 'metafiction' throughout this thesis – even if such term does carry with it certain implications.

[13] An often cited example in this context is Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* which was first published in the years 1759-67.

are, in fact, realities of reading *all* literature" (emphasis original, Hutcheon 1991:xvii). Waugh too argues that metafictionality is the essence of all fiction, and adds that it has become especially noticeable in literary practices since the 1960s due to a general inclination amongst writers to display a high(er) awareness "of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fictions" (Waugh 2001:2). Metafictionality thus remains an inherent and constitutive part of all literature. Today, however, there seems to be a greater awareness of the procedures and techniques involved in the act of fiction-making, which contemporary writers are making a conscious effort to make explicit. As we have already established in chapter 2.0, postmodernism is predominantly concerned with destabilising and rendering fictional orthodoxies and verities that have conventionally served as groundings for our modes of understanding the world. Nevertheless, we cannot simply use metafictionality as synonymous with postmodernism. Instead we might tentatively propose that it is a question of *degree*, and I will argue that within the postmodern context, a very high degree of overt metafictionality is indeed discernable. Thus, postmodern metafictional writing is generally characterised or, perhaps rather, dominated by an explicit and deliberate attempt to flaunt the very methods, strategies and conventions entailed in any construction of fiction. It strives towards calling attention to its own existence as fiction, as well as its place within literary history, which adds to it a highly intertextual dimension. In this relation, Currie once again finds the term 'self-conscious' inappropriate since "[n]ovels which reflect upon themselves in the postmodern age act in a sense as commentaries on their antecedents" (Currie 2001:1). This type of fiction, in other words, is not meaningfully 'self' conscious because it "refers to fictions other than itself, in its own history" (1). Postmodern metafiction is both aware of and (re-)uses conventions characteristic of previous and well-established modes of literature. Literary realism and the assumptions upon which this mode relies are often consciously subverted and mocked by postmodern metafictionists, and Federman is no exception as his writing challenges and openly breaks with this tradition. In many cases, the familiar conventions of realism constitute a background against which metafictional practices can be

recognised and comprehended by the reader. This is a point that both Waugh and Hutcheon make and it is something to which I shall return below.

4.3 The ontological status of fiction and the role of the reader

Hutcheon claims that "in all fiction, language is representational, but of a fictional "other" world, a complete and coherent "heterocosm" created by the fictive referents of the signs" (Hutcheon 1991:7). If the above assertion applies to all fiction, and is particularly foregrounded in metafiction, it will be necessary for us to investigate this aspect of literature in some detail. It will therefore be essential for us to establish exactly how a "heterocosm" is created and sustained. McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* is highly relevant for this purpose since we will be dealing with ontology and the idea of 'possible worlds'. Although we have already touched upon the concept of ontology in the section on postmodernism, we need to investigate this specifically in relation to (all) literature to which it is central. Establishing what these terms denominate will not only teach us something about the nature of all literature. In addition, they are paramount in order for us to fully understand the way in which metafictional techniques work as a means of exposing the linguistic basis for fiction-making. Indeed, both ontology and possible worlds are concepts with which numerous metafictional writers experiment, particularly Federman as we shall see.

In McHale's view, ontology is the practice of giving

> a description of *a* universe, not of *the* universe; that is, it may describe *any* universe, potentially a *plurality* of universes. In other words, to "do" ontology in this perspective is not necessarily to seek some grounding for *our* universe; it might just as appropriately involve describing *other* universes, including "possible" or even "impossible" universes – not least of all the other universe, or heterocosm, of fiction (emphasis original, McHale 1999:27).

From this it is clear that ontology denotes the practice of giving an account of a(ny) universe, or world, whether this world is considered "possible" or

"impossible" in terms of what we are able to conclude from our everyday logic. That is, the kind of ontology that McHale proposes is not based on whether its truth-value can be verified according to some factual statement in the empirical world. Thus, the logic and plausibility of a given fictional heterocosm should not be determined in accordance with anything external to it. An alternative world is made out of statements and as such its truth-value must be considered only within the textual realm that these statements constitute[14]. McHale's definition also makes explicit that the existence of more than one world is indeed possible, which is important in relation to metafiction since such writing often experiments with and flaunts this idea. But it is not enough to simply describe imaginative universes. In order for these worlds to be plausible, "they must be believed in, imagined, wished for etc., by some human agent" (34). Hence, their existence depends upon the reader's attitude and it is the reader who concretises – or makes possible – these (im)possible worlds during the act of reading. It would seem, then, that it is in fact possible even for an 'impossible' world to exist within that other realm we refer to as fiction. In a manner of speaking, then, *anything* is possible within the aesthetic realm as long as the reader is capable of and willing to suspend his disbelief at all times during the reading process. The fictional world thus comes into being in the reader's consciousness, and the only limitations in terms of how broad and abstract this universe may be are the reader's imagination and attitude.

4.4 The creation/description paradox: to describe is to create is to describe

From the above we are able to conclude that fictional worlds exist to us only in our consciousness and are triggered off by the printed words on the page. Indeed, the materiality of the words of the page is something that we cannot ignore when studying the more radical types of metafiction as this aspect is often deliberately emphasised in such texts (this I shall return to later on). Together these two aspects of literature amount to a particular paradox, which Waugh refers to as "the

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[14] Hutcheon seemingly agrees when she claims that the words that make up a narrative "take on a unity of reference and create a self-contained universe that is its own validity (and "truth")" (Hutcheon, 1991:88).

creation/description paradox" (emphasis original, Waugh 2001:88). Although this paradox is in fact a defining feature of *all* literature, it is often overtly foregrounded in metafiction. The creation/description paradox is closely related to the concept of ontology as examined above, but it also has to do with the twofold manner in which novelistic language generally works. According to Waugh,

> *Descriptions* of objects in fiction are simultaneously *creations* of that object. […] Thus the ontological status of fictional objects is determined by the fact that they exist by virtue of, whilst also forming, the fictional context which is finally the words on the page (emphasis original, 88).

Put differently, this means that to produce a statement in literary writing is to produce fictional existents, be it characters, objects, or settings. Yet no matter how equivalent to, or interchangeable with, the empirical world such narrative fabrication may appear to be in our view, its presented world with its existents remains a verbal construction. Such fictional creations have no existence in the real solid world but are only 'present' within the sphere of language at the moment when their existence is furnished by the active involvement of the reader. In other words, these objects have only fictive referents and it is crucial that they be read as such; *not* as solid objects. They may of course be anchored in the 'real' world, but they do not exist as tangible entities in such phenomenal world. Using the terminology of the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden, McHale makes a similar point when he claims that the status of fictional objects has to do with 'indeterminacies'. McHale states that "[r]eal-world objects have no indeterminate points, ontologically speaking [...], while presented objects in fiction have ontological *gaps*" (emphasis original, McHale 1999:31), of which only *some* can be filled in by the reader. From this it follows that unlike extra-textual objects in the solid world, imaginative objects/worlds exist to us only on the level of language and as such they are "always uncertainly awaiting completion" (Waugh 2001:105). In addition, they may potentially be constructed in an indefinite number of ways since no reader is the same. Each individual reader brings something different to the text; or to the imaginative world he is concretising.

4.5 Narrative techniques in metafictional writing

Having established a general idea of what the term metafiction denotes, we need to turn our attention to some of the narrative strategies often employed in such writing. In the following, therefore, I want to examine some of the techniques that metafictional writers make use of. This section will primarily be based on ideas proposed by Waugh and McHale, as I feel that a combination of the two will allow me to establish a set of analytical tools highly suitable for analysing Federman's novels. While the poetics of Waugh and McHale at times overlap, a combination of the two is nevertheless useful for elaborating and adding perspective to many of the points they make. Both critics argue that the idea of frame-breaking is particularly characteristic of metafictional practices, and Federman is one writer who pushes frame-breaking strategies to their extreme, as we shall see later on. When we move onto examining the concept of 'historiographic metafiction' in the forthcoming section, it will also be evident that the concept of frame-breaking is central, particularly as regards the traditional demarcation between the realm of fact and the realm of fiction. The concept of frame-breaking is thus the common denominator for the metafictional techniques below.

It is also worth mentioning that in *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Waugh proposes a spectrum consisting of four degrees of metafictionality in which texts gradually move further and further away from an everyday context and, consequently, become increasingly self-referential. The first two types of metafiction can somewhat be referred to as 'non-radical', however, our focus will be on the latter end of her sliding scale where we find much more radical forms of metafictional writing. These more extreme forms, Waugh reluctantly argues, are primarily an American phenomenon (115). Furthermore, it should be added that a clear-cut distinction between the four proposed categories cannot easily be made. Although Waugh refrains from making this explicit, her categories do overlap at times and should perhaps therefore be seen only as guidelines for determining and dealing with different

degrees of metafictionality, rather than a rigid system of classification[15]. Thus, as a rule of thumb, it can be said that the strategies established below pertain to Waugh's spectrum at a point where texts generally tend to "slip further and further away from the construction of worlds whose 'meaning' is finally dependent on reference to everyday contexts" (130). Moving gradually away from an interpretive framework that relies on the common-sensical, stronger demands are made on the reader's ability and willingness to suspend his disbelief when reading such text.

4.6 Breaking the frame: a metafictional strategy

It goes almost without saying that in order for any frame-breaking activities to take place, there must be some sort of 'frame' that can be broken or undermined. Frame-breaking thus presupposes that a sense of frame – a structure supporting or containing something – has already been established. The use of frames, Waugh argues, is extensive because it is something that we all make use of on a daily basis, even if we do not give it much thought. "Everything is framed", she maintains, "whether in life or in novels" (28), and in 'reality', frames work as a way for us to try to structure and make sense of our experiences (30). As regards fiction, the idea of frames "involves [the] analysis of formal conventional organization of novels" (30). Frames are thus essential in terms of how we understand and organise our own everyday life, or 'reality', as well as the imaginary worlds of literature. The idea of frames is paramount for the existence of possible worlds since each of these ontological levels is based on the principle of being built around, or constructed upon, a framework that sets it apart from other possible realms. Metafictional novels not only call attention to the way in which we generally make use of frames. In addition, such novels often overtly problematise the usage of this concept by questioning what constitutes a frame and also how, or even if, any frame is capable of separating the world of fiction from 'reality' (28).

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[15] Through her analysis of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, for example, Waugh implicitly illustrates how one text may be seen to display elements that pertain to more than one of the categories she presents (Waugh 2001:127-9 and 131).

4.6.1 Mingling with the characters: the author as a fictional construct

There are numerous ways in which the idea of frames can be questioned and undermined in fiction. Each works as a way of foregrounding the way in which a fictional heterocosm is structured and, consequently, exposes what can probably be considered one of the most basic principles of all fiction-making. One way of doing this is by introducing the author into the fictional sphere he has just created. "The author", McHale claims, "occupies an ontological level superior to his [fictional] world; [and] by breaking the frame around [t]his world, the author foregrounds his own superior reality" (McHale 1999:197). In other words, by writing himself into the fictional universe, the author calls attention to the fact that the 'reality' of his very own fiction is an illusion created by him. This strategy therefore functions as a clear admission on behalf of the author that he is telling a story, which naturally emphasises his authority and power as creator of a given textual universe. In addition, and rather than "abolishing the frame, this gesture merely *widens* it to include the author as a fictional character" (emphasis original, 198). Hence, this frame-breaking technique not only affects the status of the projected 'reality' within the fiction, but it also carries with it some serious implications as regards the identity of the author himself. As soon as an author penetrates his own narrative, he too becomes a fictional construct. That is, he too exists within the textual realm, thus making his existence equal to that of his fictional characters. Waugh maintains that such instances present the reader with a paradox: "The more the author appears, the less he or she exists. The more the author flaunts his or her *presence* in the novel, the more noticeable is his or her *absence* outside it" (emphasis original, Waugh 2001:134). McHale refers to this as a "short-circuit of the ontological structure" (McHale 1999:213) and asserts that such strategy is in fact only ever hypothetically possible. It does not *really* take place but the text merely pretends that it does (thus we have an instance of 'trompe-l'oeil', cf. section 4.6.4). To Waugh, however, this evidently means that once the author "is recognized as itself a construction produced through textual relationships, then worlds, texts and authors are subsumed by language" (Waugh 2001:130). This idea not only applies to the 'Real Author' but certainly also to

any given narrator or author regardless of his position(s) within the narrative hierarchy.

4.6.2 Intrusive commentary: multiple and competing voices

The use of intrusive commentary is another device that foregrounds the different ontological levels of a text. However, Waugh warns us that this strategy is fully dependent on its intended effect. For example, the usage of intrusive commentary in 19th century realist fiction cannot be considered a metafictional strategy simply because it does not attempt to purposely uncover the frame between two ontologically distinct levels. Rather, it aims at the complete opposite by proposing "that one is a continuation of the other" (32). In light of the above definition of the metafictional novel, it is evident that in order for this technique to work in favour of self-conscious literature, it must emphasise and flaunt the idea that fictional characters and their author pertain to different realities. Thus, in "metafictional texts such intrusions *expose* the ontological distinctness of the real and the fictional world, *expose* the literary conventions that disguise this distinctness" (emphasis original, 32). An instance of intrusive commentary that works in a self-reflexive manner could be the author's discussion of the literary conventions employed, or perhaps a direct comment on how we should interpret a previous segment of text. While such techniques may not exactly break the frame, they certainly foreground the fact that the teller is situated on a plane that differs ontologically from the 'reality' (within the fiction) that he both comments on and creates. Much more extreme instances of intrusive commentary are discernable in what Waugh calls "third-person/first-person intrusion narratives [...in which] an apparently autonomous world is suddenly broken into by a narrator, often 'The Author', who comes explicitly from an ontologically differentiated world" (133). Such violation of the narrative order and its consequences for the author's identity, we have already dealt with above. However, it is worth mentioning here that such an act of intruding mostly generates a sense of dialogue, or even competition, between the discourses (or levels) of the story and that of the intrusive narrator. This brings us on to one of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas, namely

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that the novel always consists of numerous different discourses, or voices, that are competing for power and dominance. Or, as Waugh puts it,

> The novel assimilates a variety of discourses (representations of speech, forms of narrative) – discourses that *always* to some extent question and relativize each other's authority. Realism [...] paradoxically functions by suppressing this dialogue. The conflict of languages and voices is apparently resolved in realist fiction through their subordination to the dominant 'voice' of the omniscient, godlike author. Novels which Bakhtin refers to as 'dialogic' resist such resolution (emphasis original, 6).

In Bakhtinian terms then, the metafictional novel can be considered 'dialogic' because, unlike realism, it deliberately refrains from offering any sense of resolution to the conflicting discourses that constitute it. On the contrary, metafiction flaunts and delights in the fact that such resolution, or closure, is not possible and, consequently, it reminds us that it is constructed by multiple and diverse forms of communication and ontologically differentiated levels.

In the midst of all these frame-breaking strategies, it is of course relevant to ask: where does one draw the line? Can we ever be sure that there is not always a 'reality' (or frame) superior to the one we have just been presented with? Waugh claims that "[t]here is ultimately no distinction between 'framed' and 'unframed'. There are only levels of form" (31). Many metafictional novels play with this idea by deliberately generating a sense of limitless descent, or ascent, through layers of stories. Naturally, such radical frame-breaking activities often have disturbing and unsettling effects on the reader because it becomes increasingly harder for him to conclude anything for sure, let alone make use of his everyday sense of logic in terms of interpreting the text at hand. In the following, I want to examine metafictional techniques that seriously challenge and destabilise our notion of frames.

4.6.3 Stories within stories

'Stories within stories' is a technique that falls under the heading of what McHale calls "Chinese-box worlds" and is based on the formula of a "recursive structure" (McHale 1999:112). A recursive structure can be said to occur whenever the same operation is repeated, however, "each time operating on the product of the previous operation" (112). Take for example a novel that projects its own world within which we find a character who writes a novel that also projects a fictional world in which yet another character writes a novel, etc. Hence, a recursive structure is characterised by nested or embedded narratives: gradually a hierarchical system of narratives is created, and each time we are presented with yet another fictional world, it involves an ontological level incompatible with the 'world' from which the fictional world in question is projected. The structures of Chinese-box worlds, Waugh argues, "contest the reality of each individual 'box' through a nesting of narrators" (Waugh 2001:30). Evidently, such verbal constructions can take on very complex and illogical forms. Therefore, it will be fruitful for us to establish a systematic overview that will enable us (to try) to keep track of and also deal with the (often numerous) different narrative levels that may occur within a metafictional text. Borrowing from Gérard Genette, McHale proposes the following terminology to this practice,

Diegesis: designates the "primary world" projected by a given text

Hypodiegetic world: designates a projected world within (and thus one level down from) the primary world, or diegesis.

Hypo-hypodiegetic world: designates a projected world within the hypodiegetic world, etc. Each additional prefixed 'hypo' indicates that we move one level further down the system of embedded narratives
(McHale 1999:113).

There are, nevertheless, a few pertinent issues that we need to address. Firstly, at what point can the accumulation of nested stories be said to generate the feeling of infinite regress? Secondly, is it possible to take this idea to a point where it (intentionally) becomes too intricate and, consequently, causes the whole structure

to collapse? McHale maintains that the notion of infinite regress is not necessarily linked to the quantity of nested narratives within the text, but rather "the vigor and explicitness of its foregrounding" (114). He adds that in "postmodernist multilevel texts" we often encounter "complexity increasing to the point where levels collapse, as if of their own weight, into a single level of diegesis" (115). From this we can conclude that a text need not necessarily consist of a vast number of embedded stories in order for it to invoke the notion of infinite regress. Instead, the effect achieved depends upon the way in which the recursive structure is brought to the fore. Furthermore, by establishing a hierarchy of ontological levels that is too complex, the system caves in and, in doing so, calls attention to the many possible (albeit fictional) dimensions of a given fictional heterocosm.

4.6.4 Trompe-l'oeil: appearances can deceive

The above techniques imply an explicit attempt to foreground and expose the idea of a recursive structure. Metafictional texts do not always do this overtly. For example, the technique referred to as "[t]rompe-l'oeil"[16] (115) is based on the principle of deliberately misleading the reader into thinking that a given presented object or world is actually 'real' within the fictional context. For example, the text may deliberately blur the borders between different imaginary worlds and, thus, disorient the reader who in a state of confusion often ends up perceiving "an embedded, secondary world as the primary, diegetic world" (115). The sense of a logical and hierarchical ordering of ontological levels within the text is thus intentionally presented as unclear and hazy; an effect that is only achieved if the reader realises that he has been deceived. Ironically, such an attempt at fusing narrative levels by disguising the fact that they pertain to planes that differ ontologically, actually foregrounds the ontological structure of the text. Though such a technique tries to mask the act of frame-breaking, it nevertheless both calls attention to and breaks the frame(s). As we saw above, it also includes the idea of the author penetrating his own fictional world by writing himself into this world.

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[16] In English this means 'eye-deceiving'.

Effectively, we could of course argue that as soon as a given text offers us more than one world within its projected textual realm, we are in fact presented only with an illusion. That is, no matter how convincingly a text may project levels that (seemingly) differ ontologically, such levels are, in reality, always confined to the same kind of space: a verbal space. Similarly, they are always constructed out of the same material: words.   There is not *really* anything that makes a given fictional 'reality' any more or less fictional (or 'real') than other possible 'realities' within that very same text; they all exists only in the consciousness of the reader during his reading activities.

4.6.5 Concrete prose: the discursive realm versus the material realm

Certain frame-breaking activities are so radical that they not only emphasise or break boundaries that (pretend to) exist to us on a discursive level. In addition, such techniques call attention to, probably, the deepest ontological division of them all: the real solid existence of the book versus its projected world(s). By deliberately disturbing the flow of the reading process, the radical frame-breaking techniques that I want to investigate below, somewhat force the reader to acknowledge the physical reality of the book he is holding in his hand. Such strategies all exploit the physical space of the page through layout and innovative typography.

Most readers of prose fiction have become accustomed to the traditional neat and static arrangement of horizontal lines on the page. We rarely pay attention to the way in which the words have been organised on the page - unless, of course, this is done in an unconventional and conspicuous manner. McHale argues that "the spacing-out of the text, along whatever axis or combination of axes, induces an ontological hesitation or oscillation between the fictional world and the real-world object – the material book" (184). There are inevitably countless ways in which the typography and the design of the page can be arranged: different geometrical shapes, blank spaces, juxtaposed segments of text, coloured pages, different type fonts and sizes, margins that have been meddled with, discourses arranged diagonally, vertically, or upside-down on the page, etc. (180-4).

Fictional writing in which printed matter has been given a particular form, McHale refers to as ""concrete prose" or "concrete fiction"" (184). "Like concrete poetry," he continues, "many pieces of concrete prose are literally "verbal icons," imitating through their shapes the shapes of objects or processes in the real world" (184). Thus, while such typographical icons may emphasise the materiality of the book on one level, they may also be said to serve a mimetic purpose on another level. Even if such ideograms are shaped into more abstract forms, they may still be perceived as "conceptual icons [that] lend a kind of concreteness and palpability to complex or diffuse or highly abstract ideas" (186). Hence, typographical icons may prove more appropriate for capturing and conveying certain ideas and concepts than more conventional formats. The deliberate shaping of textual segments thus somewhat function as an alternative way of articulating a story because it impedes the traditional "referential reading procedures", as Jerome McGann observes (McGann 1993:74)[17]. In doing so, McGann continues, the reader cannot help but pay attention to the text's "immediate and iconic condition, as if the words were images or objects in themselves, as if they were *values* in themselves (rather than vehicles for delivering some further value or meaning)" (emphasis original, 75). Hence, the text makes the reader shift between two different kinds of word processing: a referential (and arbitrary) one in which the words serve a symbolic function, and an iconic one in which the words are themselves turned into a concrete form that generates a visual resemblance between form and content.

Common to these narrative strategies is that they all function as eye-catching devices which deliberately divert the reader's attention away from the imaginary universe – the story - he is in the process of creating in his mind. He may even have to physically manoeuvre the book around in order for him to be able to read, for example, passages that are written upside-down. Such severe disturbances in the reading process inevitably pull the reader out of the discursive world and force

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[17] Although McGann's comments are made in relation to his investigation of concrete poetry, I find that his observations prove useful in this context too. As already stated above, McHale claims that there are certain similarities between concrete poetry and concrete prose.

him to acknowledge the book as a physical object. In other words, these narrative techniques break the frame between the 'reality' of the fiction and the material world. By insisting on making its presence known, such 'concrete' fiction explicitly subverts the aim of the realist tradition in which "[n]othing must interfere with fiction's representation of reality, [and] so the physical dimensions of the book must be rendered functionally invisible" (McHale 1999:181). Postmodern metafictions that call attention to their own 'bookiness' leave the reader subject to a two-way pull: he is constantly pulled back and forth between the book's projected world(s) and the physical existence of the 'real' object in his hand: the book which is part of the reader's own material world.

In other words, when writers explore the physical space of the page in different manners as investigated above, the reader inevitably begins focussing on the actual arrangement of the words and the ways in which he makes sense of a given text through its use of signs. Consequently, the reader is unable to become fully absorbed in the projection of a fictional heterocosm as the text boldly and continuously declares its own status as an artefact by constantly disrupting the reading activities and making its physical dimensions visible. As a result, a sense of competition between the discursive realm and the material realm is generated, thus foregrounding the fact that these worlds are ontologically incompatible.

Above, I have established theories primarily proposed by Waugh and McHale in order to reach a general definition of the metafictional novel, as well as some of the narrative strategies often employed in the more radical instances of such writing. We saw how the term metafiction in its most basic form can be considered a hybrid of theoretical and fictional writing: a borderline discourse that is aware of its own status as a linguistic construct and even flaunts this knowledge. In doing so, metafictional writing has a critical dimension to it in that it poses questions about the text-world relationship. Common to all the techniques investigated was the concept of frame-breaking: the deliberate attempt to foreground and render problematic the notion of frames and our usage of these both in fictional writing and in our everyday life. Setting up numerous fictional

worlds and, subsequently, destabilising or overtly tearing these down in various different manners, metafictional texts lay bare the conventions entailed in fiction-making and, in addition, expose the ontological distinctness between the fictional world(s) and 'reality'. We will now move on to Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic metafiction' in which we find an overt concern with and problematisation of the very frame that, supposedly, separates fiction from historiography.

5.0 Historiographic metafiction

Postmodernism, as we have seen, is concerned with questioning and rendering problematic concepts, domains, and institutions that have traditionally served as grounds for our perceptions of who we are and the world around us. The field of history, with its aim of recapturing and explaining the past to us, has traditionally been considered veracious. However, within the last three decades the traditional domain of history has become subject to a postmodern scrutinisation. In a postmodern context, the representation of past events – the writing of history – is considered a highly problematic task and it is precisely this crisis of representation that Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic metafiction' embodies and investigates. In the following, I will attempt to define this particular concept of self-reflexive writing and examine some of its main concerns. Furthermore, I want to look at the very explicit distinction that Hutcheon draws between 'historiographic metafiction' and the more radical cases of metafictional writing, such as Federman's surfictional novels. However, first of all it will be advantageous for us to briefly examine some of the theories put forward by Hayden White as they will prove essential to the topic at hand.

5.1 Hayden White: metahistory

White has been a central figure in the literary discussion about historiography that began in the 1970s. His theories on the methods, functions and nature of historical discourse seriously challenge the assumptions upon which the field of history has traditionally been based. As such, his work has caused much agitation amongst historians and many similarities between his work and that of both Derrida and Barthes are discernable (see chapter 3.0). White argues that there is a distinctive lack of self-reflexivity within the field of history and it is this view that has led him to an investigation of what he refers to as "metahistory" (White in Leitch (eds.), 2001:1712). In "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact" (1978), White argues that 'metahistory' is the practice of attempting "to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of [historical] inquiry" (1712). White boldly postulates that,

> [I]n general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences (emphasis original, 1713).

White thus explicitly destabilises the distinction that is generally drawn between literary and historical writing; a distinction that hinges on the assumption that the former is concerned with representing the possible/imagined (fiction), whereas the latter takes as its object of representation the actual/'real' (fact). While somewhat conflating these two fields of writing, White nevertheless clearly acknowledges that it is in fact only possible to "know the *actual* by contrasting it with or likening it to the *imaginable* (emphasis original, 1727-8). White, in other words, does not do away with the 'old' binary opposition but instead he deconstructs this dichotomy and questions the concept of mimesis in historical narratives as well as its ontological status. History is generally perceived "as a kind of archetype of the "realistic" pole of representation" (1719), which rests on the assumption that such narrative has the ability to represent things the way they *really* are (or were). White points out, however, that ontologically speaking, historical discourses are no different from literary discourses: both exist as discursive constructs. In addition, White argues that the very mechanisms and 'tools' used in the act of fiction-making are no different from the ones used by the historian; novelists and historians are both producers of text. The historian cannot claim to have any access to 'reality' – past or present – outside of language, thus his description of any given event will always already in itself be an interpretation; never the 'original' thing itself. "As a symbolic structure," White maintains,

> the historical narrative does not *reproduce* the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences (emphasis original, 1721).

Thus, the form and structure that the historian chooses for his historical account affect and shape our interpretation of the events and therefore also the meanings

we assign to them. What White is effectively arguing is that there is no such thing as (scientific) objectivity within the field of history; historical narratives are always imbued with certain values that characterise a given culture. Thus, historical narratives are always biased (1916). In emphasising the poetic nature of historical accounts, certain implications regarding referentiality and 'truth' emerge because "we cannot go and look at them [the original events] in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative" (1718). There is no definitive materiality against which we can verify the historian's claims. There are only texts; an increasing layer of (inter)textuality that makes the past even more impenetrable to us,

> Each new historical work only adds to the number of possible texts that have to be interpreted if a full and accurate picture of a given historical milieu is to be faithfully drawn. The relationship between the past to be analyzed and historical works produced by analysis of the documents is paradoxical; the *more* we know about the past, the more difficult it is to generalize about it (emphasis original, 1719).

Despite this paradox, history inevitably continues to be written, and it is important to bear in mind that White does not dismiss the quest for historical knowledge as such. Rather, he points to the fact that one cannot make assertions about 'what really happened' without using representation. Everyone, including the historian, is involved in representation games all the time, thus historical narratives do not provide us with an unrestricted and unproblematic access to a historical 'reality', or 'truth'. This is exactly what White urges historians to acknowledge, and it is something that is highly problematised and emphasised in historiographic metafiction, as we shall see below.

5.2 Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction

In her seminal work *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon's aim is to define what she refers to as *the* postmodern novel, that is, 'historiographic metafiction'. As we have already established in the preceding section, metafiction is a type of writing that overtly incorporates theoretical discourse(s) into its fictional frame(s).

It thus deliberately undermines the factuality normally associated with criticism (and 'reality') and foregrounds its own status as a linguistic construct. Hutcheon argues that 'historiographic metafiction' is a particular form of the novel in which the domains of history, theory and literature are all incorporated. Historiographic metafiction, then, is not only concerned with the fields of criticism and literature, but also – and *specifically* - with interrogating the traditional concept of historiography. Hutcheon claims that historiographic metafiction's "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (emphasis original, Hutcheon 1992:5). We are, in other words, dealing with a particular type of self-conscious writing that is specifically concerned with rendering problematic and unstable our notion of history and our knowability of the past, both in terms of form and contents. Thus, historiographic metafiction attempts to revise the contents of the (official) historical record, which is considered a non-given artefact. At the same time, it is also overtly concerned with examining the very conventions and forms that have governed texts of the past.

As we have already seen in section 2.4, Hutcheon maintains that postmodern practices are generally characterised by a double and self-contradictory operation, which is manifested in (her reworking of) the concept of parody: a mode that simultaneously installs and subverts that which it parodies and, as a result, generates a sense of undecidability. In parodying past conventions or past events (or both), historiographic metafiction affords a critical stance: it makes unfamiliar the familiar – it destabilises that which is conventionally perceived as stable and permanent – by working *within* that which it ironically abuses. Historiographic metafiction engages in a dialogue with and a re-evaluation of the past by, literally, placing the past (as text) in the present (also as text). In Hutcheon's view, it is the very use of parody that allows for historiographic metafictional practices to simultaneously point in two contradictory directions: inward and outward. She maintains that historiographic metafiction is "marked paradoxically by both history and an internalized, self-reflexive investigation of the nature, the limits,

and the possibilities of the discourse of art" (22). She argues that while such writing may *appear* to be exclusively introverted by its interrogation of itself, it is nevertheless the very use of parody,

> that paradoxically brings about a direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself, to a discursive world of socially defined meaning systems (past and present) – in other words, to the political and the historical (22).

Hence, the use of parody in historiographic metafiction does not have as its main aim that of looking inward merely for the sake of doing so. Rather, this introspection becomes a means of examining and commenting on that which is exterior: the social *discourses* that constitute the political and historical world. Aesthetic introversion thus paradoxically becomes a way of moving beyond self-reflexivity – of adding another (critical) level - and hence reaching the opposite pole, namely, extroversion.

5.2.1 History in historiographic metafiction

Hutcheon argues that in historiographic metafiction,

> History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought – as a human construct. And in urging that *history* does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and "gleefully" deny that the *past* existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality (emphasis original, 16).

The existence of the past is never contested in historiographic metafictional writing. Rather, such writing makes explicit that any access to the past is always only available to us through language. Representation thus always conditions what we (think we) know of the past, and our knowledge of the past can therefore never be reduced to a simple operation of "objective recording" (Hutcheon 2002:70). In other words, our knowledge and understanding of the past always involve subjective acts, such as, selection, composition and evaluation of certain past events. It is in this relation, that the metafictional element of historiographic

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metafiction serves one of its major functions. By adding a level of self-reflexivity to such writing, the interpretive aspects that govern any historiographic representation are brought to the fore, for example, by overt references to "the choice of narrative strategy, explanatory paradigm, or ideological encoding" (70-1) employed in a given text. In explicitly foregrounding the very process of producing a historical narrative, the actual meaning-making operation is brought to the reader's attention. In doing so, historiographic metafiction shows us that the mechanisms involved in historical accounts will always affect the objectivity and truth-value that we normally associate with the field of history. Historiographic metafictional writing teaches us that "the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past "events" into present historical "facts"" (Hutcheon 1992:89) by laying bare the (ideological) systems in our culture through which events become significant to us; rather than pretending to represent such events to us with transparency. While historiographic metafiction never negates the existence of the past, it does however render history somewhat fictional and non-permanent: it revises the historical record and proposes alternative versions of history that do not necessarily comply with the officially accepted orthodoxies of the past.

5.2.2 Departing from the norm: deliberate anomalies

In order for us to fully understand how historiographic metafiction challenges the forms and conventions of past literary periods it will be fruitful for us to briefly investigate another particularly type of the novel to which history is also essential: the historical novel[18]. The historical novel arose in the 19th century and, according to M. H. Abrams, it "not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history, but makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative" (Abrams 1993: 133). The historical record thus clearly functions both as a motivating and shaping force in such writing, which also relies heavily on the conventions of traditional realism. In fact, McHale maintains that historical fiction *has to* rely on the realist mode of representation in order for it

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[18] McHale argues that "the conventions and norms of historical fiction" are being revised and transformed in the postmodern version of the classic historical novel (McHale 1999: 90).

not to be considered "an anomaly" (McHale 1999:88). Hence, the mix of the fictional and the historical in the classic historical novel is never foregrounded but rather these two ontologically distinct spheres are represented as natural and unproblematic extensions of one another. Thus, the conventional border between the two realms is rendered somewhat invisible (or non-existent). The assumptions that lie behind historiography and literary writing are hence never questioned or violated in the historical novel. Instead, historical events or characters are incorporated into the fictional frame in order to lend to the novel a sense of authenticity and verifiability.

Historiographic metafiction, which McHale refers to as the "postmodernist revisionist historical novel" (90), sets out to challenge and destabilise the relationship between historical material and fictional invention. It aims at being "an anomaly" in order for it not to conform to the traditional paradigm and hence achieve its critical stance. According to Hutcheon, there is a strong tendency in postmodern writing to employ narrative strategies that explicitly challenge the assumptions of realist writing, which posits the existence of a "direct and natural link between sign and referent or between word and world" (Hutcheon 2002:32). Hence, the realist medium itself is perceived as having an inherent ability to reflect the empirical world and historical events in a faithful and true manner. In historiographic metafiction, on the other hand, the postmodern view of history as first and foremost *discourse* seems to prevail, thus insisting that any historical document always already constitutes an act of interpretation. That is, historiographic metafiction does not pretend, nor does it attempt to generate the effect, that it is capable of rendering historical reality as it really was. I.e., history is viewed as "a text, a discursive construct upon which fiction draws as easily as it does upon other texts of literature" (Hutcheon 1992:142). As a result, we somewhat enter an intertextual realm since "reference in literature is never anything but one of text to text and that, therefore, history as used in historiographic metafiction, for instance, could never refer to any actual empirical world, but merely to another text" (143).

But if both history and fiction are conflated into text, how then can these two fields differ? As discursive acts, both historical and literary narratives inevitably do exist to us only as "verbal fictions", as pointed out by White above. The conventional (and presumed) difference lies in what Hutcheon refers to as "the common-sense distinction between two kinds of reference: what history refers to is the actual, real world; what fiction refers to is a fictive universe" (142). It is from this very traditional distinction that historiographic metafiction derives its force – its ability to render reference in historiography problematic and unstable. McHale makes a similar distinction between two types of reference: "an internal (fictional) field of reference and an external (real-world) field" (McHale 1999:86). A tension between these two different fields will always exist, however, this tension is highlighted and deliberately exacerbated within historiographic metafiction; primarily through the use of frame-breaking techniques (established in sections 4.6.1-5). Generating a border between what we generally accept as the factual[19] and the imagined only to subsequently blur it produces a sense of undecidability. History in historiographic metafiction is always placed within an explicitly fictional framework. As a result, historiographic metafiction seriously questions the validity and truthfulness of the historical record by making explicit its discursive nature and its process of enunciation. Such writing ultimately suggests that our knowledge of the past (individual and collective) may, potentially, be constructed in an indefinite number of ways; truth always operates in plurality. Historiographic metafiction thus sets out to explore new modes of articulating the past and does so through an ironic examination and revision of conventional modes of articulation and official codes of representation. Historiographic metafictional writing is, in other words, "fictionalized history with a parodic twist" (Hutcheon 2002:50).

5.3 Hutcheon's model of postmodernism

Before we move on to the actual analysis of Federman's surfictional writing, it will be worthwhile to briefly look at Hutcheon's perception of American

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[19] This amounts to what Hutcheon elsewhere calls "extra-literary narrative discourses" which encompass "history, biography, [and] autobiography" (Hutcheon 1992:224).

surfiction in relation to the paradigm of postmodernism that she sets forth. As already mentioned in the introduction, Hutcheon explicitly excludes from her model of postmodernism American surfictional writing. Hutcheon sees surfictions "as extensions of modernist notions of autonomy and auto-referentiality and thus as 'late modernist.' These formalist extremes are precisely what are called into question by the historical and social grounding of postmodern fiction" (27). Thus, in Hutcheon's view, American surfiction is not characterised by the paradoxical double mode of operation that enables a text to move *beyond* self-referentially, which her own definition of postmodernism hinges on. Instead, she maintains that American surfictions are "non-mimetic, ultra-autonomous, [and] anti-referential" (Hutcheon 1992:52). Hence, Hutcheon is of the opinion that reference in American surfiction is simply bracketed or denied; whereas in historiographic metafiction reference is always problematised and at the same time, paradoxically, invoked in the very act of rendering it problematic. There is no ironic subversion or problematisation of reference in surfiction, she argues, only rejection (xii). Unfortunately, however, Hutcheon does not offer any analytical examples to support her argument and thus illustrate the points she makes about American surfiction. It would have been helpful if Hutcheon had included at least one, albeit brief, example of a specific American surfictional text in order to demonstrate through textual analysis just how it differs from historiographic metafiction in her view.

Contrary to Hutcheon, I want to argue that Federman's radical metafictions *can* also be read as historiographic metafictions; that his works do fit the definition of the postmodern novel as put forward by Hutcheon. Federman's novels, as will be evident in the forthcoming analysis, certainly both confront and render problematic the historical in a very explicit manner. The obsession with knowing and (re-)constructing the past can be discerned in Federman's novels both on a thematic and a formal level. Rather than denying reference, as Hutcheon argues, I propose that Federman instead is preoccupied with the instability of representation and the limitations that language imposes on him as he is desperately trying to narrate a past of unspeakable events.

In light of the above dismissal of surfiction from her paradigm of postmodern fiction, the following assertion by Hutcheon appears almost paradoxical given that her approach provides the fulcrum for my reading of Federman's *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It*,

> Fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel (40).

Above, we have seen how the postmodern scrutinisation of the field of history, as manifested in White's concept of metahistory, may be tentatively linked to the concept of historiographic metafiction. Pointing to the nature of historical accounts as literary artefacts and a distinctive lack of self-reflexivity within historiography, White emphasises certain shared features of historical and literary writing. Arguing that, similarly to the novelist, the historian makes use of representation, White disputes the conventional perception that historical discourses provide us with an unrestricted and objective access to a historical 'reality'. Subsequently, we defined historiographic metafiction as a self-contradictory practice that highlights its own status as fiction while, simultaneously, laying claims to historical events. Obsessed with the knowability of the past, this type of writing attempts to revise the official historical record by presenting itself as an oppositional counter story to such hegemonic discourse. Pointing to the discursive nature of history, historiographic metafiction deliberately unmasks the realist assumptions that govern historical accounts by rendering problematic and unstable the concept of referentiality.

Having established a comprehensive theoretical framework and numerous analytical tools, we shall now proceed with the second, and analytical, part of this thesis where I shall offer close readings of Federman's *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It* in light of the above theories.

6.0 Analysis

6.1 Introducing Raymond Federman

Raymond Federman has been a practitioner of innovative writing over the last four decades, and his work has played a crucial role in terms of challenging, questioning and radically subverting the more traditionally accepted forms of literature. Federman's writing is highly inventive, dynamic and thought provoking and he has published numerous novels, poems, articles, and critical essays. Federman is bilingual and he writes fluently in both French and English, often combining the two. He is the inventor of terms such as 'surfiction' and 'critifiction' that both refer to self-reflexive borderline discourses in which theoretical and literary writing overlap. Federman's fiction is usually fiction that explores fiction and the problematic concept of representation – the relationship between 'reality' and text. However, there is also another central and very urgent element that continuously haunts Federman's writing: he has an unusual story to tell, a story that requires a linguistic representation yet continuously defies such rendition. According to Federman himself,

> It is necessary to speak, to write, and keep on speaking and writing (lest we forget) about the Jewish Holocaust during the Nazi period even if words cannot express this monstrous event.

> It is impossible to speak or write about the Holocaust because words cannot express this monstrous event (Federman, http 1).

This is the dilemma inherent in all Federman's writing; and he has spent the majority of his career as a writer trying to narrate a past of unspeakable events; a past made up of horrific and absurd experiences that Federman desperately and stubbornly attempts to put into writing in order for him to grasp it and obtain a sense of personal enlightenment – but also for posterity. Federman, who is of Jewish descent, was born on May 15, 1928, in Paris, France. During World War II, when he was still only a boy, his parents and two sisters were deported to Auschwitz where they were exterminated. Federman only miraculously escaped death because his mother pushed him into a closet on the landing as the Gestapo

were on their way up the stairs to the family's third floor apartment in Paris. This happened on July 16, 1942, and ever since his symbolic rebirth in that closet, Federman has been writing and re-writing the (hi)story of his eventful life – an ongoing project that is still in the making. Having escaped the Holocaust – at least physically – Federman's books can be seen as his attempt to also survive mentally. His literary works are clearly marked by a chaotic and traumatic past of having been brutally robbed of his immediate family at a young age; of having lost his identity and childhood; of living in exile and being forced to establish a new life and identity as a displaced person in another country (America). While the Nazi genocide always looms somewhere in the background of Federman's writing, his fictions never deal directly with this incomprehensible event. Rather, the central subject matter is always concerned with what it means to be a Jewish writer in the post-Holocaust epoch, and of the inadequacy of language to possibly ever express and represent this historical event, which demands to be told and re-told - even if it cannot be.

In the following, I want to analyse Federman's two surfictional novels, *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It*, employing the analytical tools established in the first part of this thesis. Through my analysis, I will examine some of the narrative techniques and instances of, predominantly radical, frame-breaking discernable in these texts. Moreover, I will attempt to situate the two novels within a historiographic metafictional paradigm and, thus, illustrate that although these novels may be extreme in their degree of metafictionality, they nevertheless remain deeply rooted in a historical 'reality'. Hence, they remain paradoxical by simultaneously pointing in two directions: inward and outward.

6.2 Double or Nothing

Federman's debut novel *Double or Nothing* is complex, self-reflexive and highly unconventional and is comprised of numerous different ontological levels. In addition, it is an extraordinary visual experience as each page has been uniquely designed and shaped by Federman's innovative use of typography. *Double or Nothing* is a self-contradictory and self-cancelling text in which the main subject

matter is the painstaking attempt at writing the story of a young Jewish man who survived the Holocaust. While this text both explores and reflects upon the possibilities of the novel as a medium, it is also an overt dramatisation of the difficult process of uncovering a traumatic and unspeakable past. In the following, I want to examine the use of metafictional narrative techniques employed in this novel, which are discernable both on a thematic and formal level. In addition, I want to look at how the historical past is approached and represented within an explicitly fictional framework, thus moving this analysis into the realm of historiographic metafiction.

"You start just like that"

To most people, it seems logical to start at the beginning. But 'logic' is perhaps a mere construct – a guiding principle that we have come to take for granted; and not a natural given - just like beginnings. Federman certainly seems to imply this and, in a sense, this is a discourse that somewhat defies logic and order, and delights instead in irrationality and disorder. This is clear from the very onset of *Double or Nothing* as we are told that in fact "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING" (Federman, 1971:0). The text that follows immediately after this puzzling and paradoxical heading is no less contradictory: "Once upon a time (two or three weeks ago)" (0). Deliberately mocking this somewhat conventional fairytale opening and employing it at the very beginning of a text that, apparently, does not really start here anyway (so we are told), most certainly suggests that something peculiar and playful is going on. As it turns out, "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING" (together with "SUMMARY OF THE DISCOURSE" at the end of the book) constitutes a meta-narrative that somewhat frames what we may tentatively refer to as the story-proper – another ontological world that exists within the story and whose real "BEGINNING" is not explicitly indicated until we reach page 1. The 'non-beginning' status assigned to this meta-discourse is further emphasised by its unusual page numbers, which run from 0 to 000000000.0, thus implying the existence of a potentially endless textual space that exists in-between the numbers 0 and 1. It is simply a matter of adding zeros in order for this extra-diegetic realm to expand and thus postpone *the* beginning (of

the nested narrative). The overt claims that this section should not really be considered part of the story-proper certainly raise some interesting and central questions in terms of how and when a text begins (and, by extension, ends) which are continually alluded to throughout the text. Thus, Federman deliberately mocks our expectations and opens up to a potential endless circularity, which I shall return to later. Page 0 may, in other words, not be *the* beginning – but it is nevertheless *a* beginning: *our* threshold into this multi-layered textual universe created by Federman.

We soon discover that this meta-narrative does in fact serve a number of functions. First of all, it introduces the story that has not yet begun: the (embedded) story-proper. While somewhat forming the story behind the story within the story, this meta-discourse is also quite literally placed in front of the nested narrative in a double sense. That is, the meta-section is situated in front of the story within the story in terms of the succession of page numbers, while it also generates a textual layer in front of the embedded story: it constitutes yet another ontological realm or frame that we need to penetrate in order for us to 'reach' the embedded story. Furthermore, the meta-section offers us a thorough and careful explanation of the four-level narrative hierarchy that makes up the text. In doing so, this section clearly lays bare before our very eyes the conventions employed in constructing a fictional heterocosm; it exposes itself as fiction and the conventions entailed in its own making. Ironically, the idea of overtly establishing this neatly structured framework is done only for it to be playfully broken down during the course of the novel. Thus, it is essential to examine closely the "intramural setup" (00000) as it introduces us to a number of different authorial voices that are all present within Federman's discourse. As will be evident, these four different voices form the basis for dialogue and create a tension between the ontological levels established; most importantly between fact and fiction which ultimately leads to a confrontation with the (fictional) past. Finally, this section also allows for a partial pre-empting of the novel itself. That is, the main elements that constitute the majority of the story to come are somewhat already contained

within and revealed to us during the novel's first pages; albeit in a condensed and summarised version.

The setup

If the "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING" section frames the story-proper, we may also refer to this discourse as the text's primary world, or diegesis. However, while positing itself as the highest level within the narrative structure of the novel *as a whole*, this section does not constitute the primary world of the embedded story, hence its function as a *meta*-narrative. The meta-section can be attributed to someone who makes his presence known by claiming in a footnote that he, ironically, is "hidden somewhere in the background omnipresent omnipotent and omniscient to control direct dictate a behaviour to the three other unfortunate beings" (000000000.0). Presumably this fourth voice represents the implied author of the text: Federman-the-paper-author, who inhabits the supernal position of the narrative hierarchy. In this footnote, the fourth person reflects upon his own position within the novel's setup and explicitly admits to having composed the preceding pages (the meta-narrative). Ultimately, it is he who pulls the strings. Paradoxically, however, this admission of authority only raises the question of who, in turn, pulls the strings of the one pulling the strings. By overtly writing himself into the discourse, thus turning himself into a textual construct, the fourth person's attempt at asserting his own authority nevertheless proves ineffective. Instead, this gesture implies that indeed there may be someone else situated even further above the fourth person within the narrative hierarchy, and so on. Already at this point, before *the* beginning, Federman generates a sense of infinity that makes us wonder just how far we need to ascent through layers of text before we reach 'reality'[20].

Gradually descending within this recursive structure, we find "a rather stubborn and determined middle-aged man" (0) whose task it is to record to his best abilities and as accurately as possible the activities of yet another man, namely the

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[20] This is even further emphasised and complicated by the fact that the footnote itself somewhat constitutes a realm that exists outside, yet also forms part of, the meta-narrative.

teller or inventor. We learn that the inventor, who is also described as an "irresponsible paranoiac fellow" and "inveterate gambler" (00), intends to seclude himself for 365 days in a room in New York in order for him to produce a novel about the protagonist of the story (within the story within the story): a young French Jewish man who is about to start a new life in America after his immediate family has been killed during the Holocaust - a background, we may note, that is conspicuously similar to that of Federman. Hence, we have four different voices within this discourse whose relations and positions may be summarised as follows (for the time being): the first person (the recorder/hypodiegetic world), who records the activities of the second person (the inventor/hypo-hypodiegetic world), who invents the story of the third person (the protagonist/hypo-hypo-hypodiegetic world), who awaits his existence. Finally, all of these beings and their actions are being monitored and controlled by the fourth person (the implied author/diegesis). In other words, we have a setup that consists of many different voices and levels, however, it appears to be well planned and straightforward. But of course there is a playful twist to this setup – as it turns out, it is in fact the reader, more than anyone, who is being 'set up'. While the meta-discourse does reveal that certain frame-breaking acts will occur in the story to come – the teller and his tale will eventually blend together (0000) – we are not warned of the degree to which the frame-breaking activities in this discourse are *really* going to extend. This, I shall return to later, but first I want to examine closely the embedded narrative, the inventor, and some of the narrative techniques he employs in order for us to establish how the historical past is both approached and represented in this novel.

The story-proper: a possible world

Following the meta-narrative, we find the story-proper as it is, ostensibly, recorded by the first person. This is a strictly hypothetical realm based solely on the assumption that "the room costs 8 dollars" (1) on a weekly basis. In other words, this is the underlying condition for this ontological sphere that thus comes to exist in possibility only. This overtly plausible world makes up the majority of *Double or Nothing*, and within it, the realms of particularly the inventor and the

protagonist are repeatedly played off against one another, resulting in some interesting instances of frame-breaking and an overt dramatisation of the struggling teller as he attempts to produce a narrative (fiction) about the past ('truth').

The teller has been given an unusual dual task: he needs to organise and calculate the essential items he will require for his one year seclusion that is to commence the following day, on October the 1st. At the same time, he is also responsible for inventing and structuring the protagonist's story and decides to try out various narrative techniques so as to be better prepared for his writing activities the next day. However, if the teller is to succeed in this difficult undertaking, he must "avoid (at all cost) talking about his own life, or better yet to forget about himself completely (at least until he and his invention converge and merge), so as to better concentrate on the life of the young man who, certainly, has had a much more interesting life than the second person" (0000). As we follow the mental activities and projections of the teller, who apparently is now "on his own" (000000000), it becomes evident that this is not an easy task, especially when it comes to refraining from talking about his own life, and interestingly enough, the possibility of an autobiographical source is introduced at a very early point of this discourse, as we shall see. The fact that this is not a conventional representation of the protagonist's story (a single unproblematic diegesis), but rather a representation of the diligent act of composing such a story is crucial. Having two distinct worlds co-existing and interacting in various ways allows for a metafictional dimension and calls attention to the meaning-making operations entailed in the inventor's project. This is an undertaking that involves numerous subjective aspects such as the problematic selection of material ('real' or invented), narrative strategies, composition, etcetera, which are being carefully evaluated and tested by the inventor as the story unfolds, cancels, and re-unfolds in his mind.

A possible autobiographical source

Attempting to compose the protagonist's story, the inventor is quick to consider the prospect of basing it on autobiographical experiences. After all, he claims, "there is enough to tell without inventing" (7), and therefore, our inventor

```
                    Could have him do the same eventually locks himself in a room
            for 365 days or if you prefer 52 weeks (but days are better) locks himself UP
            with his life -
                            it's
                                the
                                    only
                                        way
                                            to
                                                do
                                                    it -
```

(3)[21]

Later on, the teller again informs us that as for the events of the protagonist,

```
        I suppose I'll have him do muchthesamething I did.  Travel:  LOS ANGELES or
        LAS VEGAS and all the other stinking places I've been too and eventually he
        ends up in NEW YORK (it's quite obvious in order that we may converge or me
        rge).  And little by little we'll coincide.  We'll overlap.  HE & I.    TO
                                                                                GE
                                                                                TH
                                                                                ER
```

(31)

These are important segments as they introduce a crucial element of Federman's text: the (possible) autobiographical aspect, eventually culminating in the merging of the teller and his invention, which the teller himself, apparently, knows is inevitable. In this connection, it will be relevant to just briefly establish the most basic defining features of autobiographical writing, which according to Jerome Bruner amount to,

> A narrator, in the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring that protagonist

---

[21] Due to Federman's unique use of typography, I have chosen to utilise facsimile copies of certain textual segments from his novels, which will be presented as direct quotations within the body of this study.

from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness (Bruner in Brockmeier, 2001:33).

This type of writing, in other words, sets up a textual space in which a present-being may examine and investigate a past-being, eventually bringing that past-being into the present, fusing the two beings. Inevitably, such text must always be comprised of at least two levels, a world of the past and a world of the present, that remain distinct up until the very point where they eventually meet. I want to argue that it is this very process that is being dramatised on a thematic level and performed on a formal level within Federman's discourse. Though, of course, this is not done in a simplistic and straightforward way, as for example, traditional realism would have it. Rather, *Double or Nothing* may be seen as an example of postmodern autobiographical writing, which is imbued with strong metafictional impulses, undecidability and ontological implications.

While the above excerpts from *Double or Nothing* imply that the teller to *some extent* bases the protagonist's story on events similar to those that comprise his own personal history, we can obviously not accept this statement at face value. Seemingly unable to make up his mind, his intentions of using material from his own life are constantly asserted only to be counterbalanced a moment later, "doesn't matter if its not auto=biographical one can always invent a little it's normal" (Federman, 1971:104). This is clearly a self-contradicting narrator who deprives us of any fixed demarcation between fact and fiction, as he explicitly alternates freely between remembering and inventing, thus rendering any given element "*exactly* how the whole thing happened *approximately*" (my emphasis, 26). We are therefore completely deprived of any stable framework upon which factual notions may be verified. In addition, another possible source is introduced, as the inventor occasionally maintains that the story of the French Jewish immigrant has in fact been told to him first-hand: "I remember (he [the protagonist] said to me once)" (74). Consequently, such claims make it even more difficult for us to conclude anything for certain other than the fact that everything

the inventor tells us could, potentially, be fictional. After all, this is "a real fictitious discourse" as the novel's subtitle suggests.

"Remembering is always a confusing process"
The mind of the inventor is perhaps best described as haphazard. While we are already aware of his paranoia and passion for gambling and taking risks, we also find our inventor in a situation where he is clearly pushed for time and unable to stay focussed. His incoherent cognitive state is repeatedly manifested through his constant digressions and sidetracking ventures as he ponders various subjects, such as alarm clocks on a global scale, the benefits of giving up smoking, and the lifespan of chewing gum and toothbrushes. And, of course, he is not *really* on his own after all but rather one voice amongst many, situated within a system of narratives. Everything he does is accessible to us only through the recorder's representation of the teller's activities, which in turn is carefully monitored and controlled by the fourth person.

In any case, basing a story on (ostensive) autobiographical material inevitably involves the process of recalling what actually happened, or what one *thinks* happened, which is not an unproblematic activity for our narrator. As he points out, "remembering is always a confusing process", which does not take place in a "in a straight line" (44). "C-H-R-O-N-O-L-O-G-I-C-A-L-O-R-D-E-R" (44), in other words, is always an illusion generated (or imposed) by the linguistic representation of such memories. Traditional realism and historical accounts in particular purport to such chronological rendition, thus implying the notion of telos. While such memories can only be grasped and gain meaning through sign systems, Federman does not conform to the realist mode of representation. Rather, he makes explicit the notion that any representation of the past ('real' or invented) will always be an invention (an artefact) as opposed to a natural phenomenon; always already imbued with interpretation and never stable. We are thus left with little (if any) indication of where memory stops and imagination starts – of where imagination takes over and fills in the gaps in our mind that we are unable to recall – of where the linguistic structures shape and contaminate these memories

in order for them to gain meaning. Presenting us with an inventor that oscillates endlessly between the realms of memory and imagination, Federman points to the frail and slippery qualities of memory and celebrates instead the imagination - "One can always invent a little. Particularly if it's not possible to remember" (144). This is further demonstrated by the fact that Federman has situated the 'real' story at the very core of the novel; deep down a vast and self-reflexive textual hierarchy. Whenever we are presented with fragments of the protagonist's story, these have always already passed through several other voices, i.e., numerous interpretative acts have always already been conducted. This is, of course, no coincidence but rather it serves to illustrate the impossibility of ever bringing to a halt or seizing the original event (or signified) in a pure and 'true' state.

In addition, the tricky process of remembering is also brought to the fore as the teller concerns himself with the essential items required for his one-year isolation,

```
                                              Did I finish the coffee?
                                              Can't remember
                                              CAN'T REMEMBER EVERYTHING

        (that's the problem):                 The toilet paper

                                              I didn't think of that

        DEFINITELY without a list
        it won't work  DEFINITELY

        (66)
```

Frantically trying to keep track of everything, the teller resorts to the making of various lists, and therefore we frequently encounter sudden exclamations such as, "Should make a list (quick) before I forget" (5), and "Make a list QUICK" (37). These lists become the inventor's desperate attempts at remembering everything down to the smallest detail, knowing very well that without such systematic approach, the whole project is likely to fail. Constructing lists therefore becomes an obsessive act (of survival) for our inventor, which is made playfully obvious when he offers us "examples […] of possible lists" (32), naturally in the shape of yet another list. But while lists, on the one hand, may lend a feeling of security

76

and orderliness to a paranoid and, seemingly, forgetful mind, they also serve another purpose: they enable him to "keep above the surface" (31), he hopes. In other words, the inventor's lists and infinitesimal calculations also function as a mechanism that allows for evasions at appropriate moments. These are most noticeable at times when we encounter elements of the past that, seemingly, are too painful for the narrator to go into. Knowing fully well that "THINGS HAVE TO MOVE SOMEWHERE - - - - - - - - - - - - - YOU'VE GOT TO GO SOMEPLACE" (56), the excessive degree to which the teller focuses on the provisions for his seclusion results in a continuous postponement of the moment when he has to face the 'real' story. That is, his calculations enable him to keep moving by adding more words to his discourse; even if this means moving away from the 'real' story to such an extent that it actually never really gets told. Hence, the course along which the diversions allow the discourse to move is best described as circular, as the inventor constantly manages to swerve the unthinkable elements that presumably make up the protagonist's (or his own) story. Instead, he ends up circling around these, always only approximating these facts but never actually reaching them.

There are numerous instances in the text where we find the teller desperately intruding upon his own discourse over and over. Ironically, the continuous effort he makes to evade certain issues only makes them more conspicuous to us. Contemplating the difficult situation the protagonist will be in on his arrival in America, for example, the inventor suddenly realises that he may be on the verge of revealing more than he intended to, "A guy's got to be careful. No sentimentality either Got to tell it straight" (21). However, this assertion is immediately followed by an abrupt intrusion that takes us back (yet again) to his financial estimations and away from the story he is trying to compose, "--------------- $ 3.45 for toothpaste ---------- Right!

AND-WHAT-ABOUT-THE-TOOTHBRUSH-DO-I-GET-ONE-OR-DO-I-NOT-GET-ONE-AND-WHAT" (21). There is clearly 'something' rather serious looming below the surface, which the teller is desperately trying to circumvent; something that he does not want to, or cannot, go into. While the teller attempts to

make the whole project pass for a mere game by deliberately downplaying the significance of any grave issues that may surface, we get the feeling that someone above him may possibly be intervening with his discourse,

```
It's a game of course
that's what you keep telling yourself....... BULLSHIT!

It's more than that...... it's quite serious......yes!
```

    (57)

This segment, I would argue, works as a mise-en-abyme as it very accurately captures the essence of what is going on in Federman's discourse. That is, while the teller playfully "noodle[s] around" (00), digressing and obsessing, there are some serious aspects to this narrative, which he is reluctant, or unable, to fully reveal.

Circling the past

This is dramatised on various occasions as the inventor intrudingly comments on the story he is in the process of articulating by way of cancelling it out right before our very eyes. While he insists that "this is not […] a Jewish story" (40), his intrusive remarks nevertheless imply something else. For instance, when the inventor decides to name his protagonist Dominique, only to change his mind (again) a moment later,

```
And Dominique!      (I don't like Dominique.  I've never liked Dominique)

Too effeminate    not Jewish enough       (you can't avoid the facts)  But

we must forget about that about the Jews the Camps and about the L A M P S
                                                                        H
                                                                        A
                                                                        D
                                                                        E
                                                                        S
                                                        (never again)

It's a rare thing.
```

    (181)

The Jewish issues are made clear in the above segment as the necessity of having a name that somewhat conveys Jewishness is central, yet at the same time in conflict with the inventor's urgent wish to also move on and forget about these (unavoidable) historical facts. Such double and self-contradictory strategy of affirmation followed by negation occurs over and over in Federman's novel. This approach is particularly noticeable as the teller considers where to start the protagonist's story. The teller is adamant that there will be "nothing before New York", which means,

```
No past
The Statue of Liberty
Nothing before the boat
All that crap about the War the Farm the Camp the Lampshades excluded
You start just like that on the boat
```

(42)

This is emphasised again later on,

> After all these were important years yes very important years he [the protagonist] was leaving behind THE TRAIN THE CAMP THE FARM we are not going to discuss. Yes nothing of the past. A clear break. Symbolically that is (69).

Calling attention to these traumatic past events only as a means of explicitly stating that they will *not* form part of the narrative - that they "won't come into this story" (135) - paradoxically has the opposite effect. The strenuous and persistent efforts to take back or annul any narrated segments that presumably make up the 'real' story of the young Jew's past merely foreground their present absence. Remaining forever strangely discernable "there in the background" (39), these unspeakable elements of the past are always presented to us as being under erasure, which generates an ontological tension between presence and absence. While they continue to haunt the inventor's discourse, the few glimpses we do get of the past are always only carefully alluded to in Federman's novel through the teller's incessant and somewhat compulsive reciting of 'the war the camp the Jews', etcetera. He can neither avoid nor drop the subject entirely. In other words,

this traumatic historical occurrence is turned into something that requires yet simultaneously refuses representation, implying that there is more to this story than meets the eye, so to speak, but that it can never be successfully seized or recovered.

Rendering insignificant any aspects pertaining to his Jewish background this is, nevertheless, a side of the story that continuously re-emerges despite the teller's efforts at concealment. While he maintains that any atrocious element of the past may simply be skipped by "jump[ing] ahead" (42) in the narrative, it would seem that certain constraints of history do present a real problem to the teller's discourse. Subjecting the protagonist to numerous "practical questions"[22] (151), the teller suddenly finds himself confronted with the problematic element of 'real' historical time,

> However if he is born the same year as I was born – 1928 – then the story must take place in the past – unless it's a coincidence – in order that the two of us may not be the same person. If however we decide to make the story more contemporary then we will have to change his birthdate. He could be born in 1948 for instance. But that means that we have to skip the War the Jews the Farm the Camps entirely because he would not yet have been born when it all happened. That fucks up the whole story (152).

This presents us with a major paradox inherent in Federman's novel: while being overtly self-reflexive and never denying its own status as a fictional construct, this is a discourse that nevertheless lays claim to important historical events. It is almost as if this monstrous event imposes its (absent) presence onto this explicitly fictional realm; generating a tension between 'reality' and fiction. Realising this dilemma, the inventor decides that "it's better to […] throw the whole story […] into a fictitious past" (152). And that, of course, is exactly what Federman has done with this discourse by situating it deep inside an overtly fictional and multilayered framework.

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[22] This two-way interaction between the inventor and the protagonist clearly destabilises the frames between the two as the protagonist himself, apparently, answers the questions posed by his inventor.

The room

Let us backtrack for a moment and go back to the so-called "BEGINNING" (1) of the embedded story. Here, one of the most essential elements of the novel is introduced; an element that we have not yet dealt with: the room. "[T]he room", we are told, "is important / extremely IMPORTANT" (1). Indeed, references to the room keep recurring on several occasions during the course of the novel, and the importance of the room to the whole project cannot be ignored, as the teller repeatedly returns to the subject and explains that "It all boils down to the ROOM / the ROOM is at the core of the whole thing / without the ROOM nothing can be done" (101). Isolating himself for 365 days in the claustrophobic enclave of a single room with the intension of having "Nothing to do with the outside world" (37) seems a bit extreme to most people. Nevertheless, these are the exceptional conditions under which the inventor plans to write his story. Refraining from explaining in elaborate terms why such conditions are essential to his writing process, the teller does drop a few hints. Inferring that solitude is required in order for him to achieve a state of "Complete concentration" (67) to compose his story, it is, however, the teller's subsequent comment that produces a striking effect. Adding that, "I begin to understand now what they mean by CONCENTRATION (concentration camps)" (67), a process of (subconscious?) association appears to have been triggered. Once more, a fragment of the 'real' story emerges to the surface of the discourse – literally made present to us only in its absence, which is signalled by the use of parentheses. But there is an even more conspicuous instance in the text where a possible link between the room and the unspeakable past is implied. Evaluating the possible storage facilities and interior arrangement of his (potential) room, the teller concludes that,

```
most rooms have closets.  Particularly in my case (and his case too)  closets
have a very special (symbolic) meaning:

        REMEMBER ---------------------?  "My life began in a closet
                                          Among empty skins and dusty hats
                                          While sucking pieces of stolen sugar"

                                         (PARMI LES MONSTRES, Paris, 1966-67)
```

(35)

In my view, it is no coincidence that Federman's text presents us with a quotation from his own poem "Escape"[23] (Federman 1992:10), thus invoking his symbolic rebirth as a survivor of the Holocaust. Only because of the closet did he manage to escape death. Closets and rooms, of course, are remarkably similar in their physical dimensions, and as Thomas Hartl suggests, the inventor's seclusion in the room may very well be an attempt to re-enact "the "closet experience," but this time extended in time so that there will be enough time to try hard at solving the riddle, at deciphering the meaning of the darkness in the closet" (Hartl, 1995: 58). The inventor's ongoing effort to re-create conditions similar to those under which the original experience took place implies both a strong desire and an urgent need to comprehend (through re-enactment) once and for all this incomprehensible episode; to find the answers to all the unanswered questions that this event actuated. It is, of course, noteworthy that the only overt reference to the "closet experience" in *Double or Nothing* is actually to another *text* (i.e., signifier). That is, the experience is presented to us in an already mediated form; available to us as one of Federman's previous attempts to render into words his unthinkable past. This clearly suggests the impossibility of ever seizing the original event; the signified, and emphasises instead its status as a representation of a representation, and so on.

So far we have been examining how Federman creates a fictional realm consisting of two (fairly) distinct levels that co-exist, thus allowing for an extra-diegetic position in which we find the inventor. Consequently, the focus is primarily on conveying the act involved in producing a narrative ('how') rather than the finished product itself ('what'). In this way, *Double or Nothing* not only dramatises but also clearly foregrounds the existential aspect of the imaginative process of production: the idea of reinterpreting and coming to terms with the traumatic experiences of his past through the act of 'storyfication'. This is manifested in the interactions between the two tiers, i.e., the dialogue between the writer and his discourse as the former goes through the painstaking process of approaching the historical 'truth' by turning it into a story. Here, the importance

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[23] First published in 1958.

of the (symbolic) location for the inventor's undertaking, the room, also remains crucial to the project, since it is "when you're alone in a room […] you have to face the facts and solve your own problems it's a matter of survival" (Federman 1971:178). Never seeking to hide the fact that these autobiographical elements are always introduced within a fictional context, the notion of the teller as the authorial creator of his text remains possible for us to believe in. However, this idea cannot be maintained throughout *Double or Nothing*, which I will examine below.

Transitioning: from possible to impossible worlds

The fictional universes that Federman creates are by no means simple. They might appear simple at first, but as I want to illustrate in the following, Federman soon deprives us of any stable centre of orientation, leaving us with worlds that are most suitably described as 'impossible'. *Double or Nothing* is a text that lays no claim to any rules or conventions, but frequently informs us that in fact, "anything can happen in this type of discourse" (127) – and it does. The only rules that seemingly apply to the contradictory and highly illogical universe(s) of this novel are the 'rules' of fiction. As we are nearing the end of the novel, all notions of logic are simply no longer sufficient as a means of making sense of this text. At this point, the frame-breaking activities become so radical that we can no longer rely on a conventional reading protocol. For the reader, this is a challenging text that encourages (and demands) active reader participation in order for it to 'mean'.

Towards the end of the story, the initial framework consisting of four distinguishable voices (established above) is radically undermined, starting with the two lowest levels of the discourse. As the teller claims how "eventually he [the protagonist] too would lock himself in a room with noodles to crap out his existence on paper" (124), it becomes evident that the two of them are overlapping. This is no surprise as it has been stated repeatedly throughout the embedded story as well as the framing meta-narrative. We already sense this gradual merging in statements such as, "Like that suit I bought at Klein's. His first

American suit. $48.98. With the 50 bucks I had he didn't even have enough for a tie" (18). While such assertion may indicate the commencement of the fusing of the teller and the protagonist, we can never really be sure. It may just as well be a narrator who, for a moment, is unable to maintain an aesthetic distance. Adding to this uncertainty is also the fact that this is a teller with a strong inclination towards employing an unstable point of view. Contemplating whether to use first or third person singular, for instance, the inventor decides to try out both techniques and concludes that it "comes out the same" (99). Hence, he alternates freely between the two points of view, making it somewhat impossible for us to determine whose story we are being presented with. We are left in a state of undecidablity, since we cannot really distinguish the two ontological realms that each of these beings supposedly inhabits.

Moving the merging of these two different realms from a thematic to a formal level, we really begin to sense the collapse of the initial setup. Preoccupied once again with making a list, we find the inventor speaking in first person singular, "But before I forget make a list of all the people he meets during his first five years in America" (161). A list of names follows and then, without further ado, the activity of listing these people suddenly takes place one level below the plane on which the inventor supposedly is situated, "And just as he was thinking of possible names for all the people he would eventually meet during his first few years in America the girl with the legs gets up from her seat to get off the subway" (161). We are thus literally descending down (one level) into the subway where both the telling of the protagonist's story and the story itself now seem to take place. A little later on, we encounter yet another strange instance of merging levels as the protagonist (or the inventor) watches the woman who is about to get off the subway train, "She is still standing there. Just a few seconds as if she were deciding whether or not she's going to get off or stay. No kidding. She is looking straight at him now. No time to fuck around with lists of names themes and all those basic elements" (162). Short-circuiting the ontological hierarchy this way, is highly unsettling for the reader and thoroughly destabilises any notion of frames. The 'impossible' idea that the telling and the told are now, seemingly, taking

place within the same ontological realm is in fact happening before our very eyes, though such performance defies any concept of logic. Before this instance of trompe-l'oeil, we were able to maintain the idea of the inventor in an extra-diegetic position from where we followed the difficult composition of the story. Now, on the other hand, the extra-diegetic 'reality' and the 'reality' of the story are severely confounded, having merged into one single 'reality'.

However, Federman's frame-breaking activities do not stop here but are stretched even further to include all four diegetic levels,

```
And here we are (the two of us ** the three of us *** the four of us ****)
a year later (let us say) exactly a year after the boat landed in New York
and all of us (I * HE * WE * US) got all excited in the subway because the
girl with the legs spread apart smiled at US and now 365 days later here I
* HE * WE * go again getting all exicted with another female (a much bigge
r one this time) having converged into one another (the protagonist and th
e inventor -- and of course by extension the recorder too) it's unavoidabl
e it had to be
```

  (173)

As the four voices are fused into one single diegetic level (or consciousness), the foundation upon which we rely in order for us to make sense of this discourse is demolished. The temporal and spatial dimensions within the novel simply cease to exist, thus the notion of 'depth' in fiction that we rely on in order for us to make sense of a given text is exposed as being illusory (hence Federman's own classification of this novel as 'surfiction'). It is not only the protagonist whose subway scene is (now) being repeated 365 days later. Having penetrated the world of the protagonist's story, the three other fictional beings are also caught in this strange loop of time; a time span that corresponds exactly with the period of time that the inventor originally estimated would be sufficient for him to write his novel. At this point, the discourse clearly manifests itself as "a circular story" (121), which falls back onto itself, suggesting the prospect of endless repetition.

Every single time the circular story reaches a certain point of its course, it is time "to start all over / Right from the beginning" in order to "Get the fucking thing going again" (189). 'Getting the thing going' yet again is exactly, and paradoxically, how this novel ends, forever destined towards infinite regress,

```
but
originally we said 8 bucks a week for the room (that's what we said in the B
                                                                          E
            REMEMBER:  just think for instance if ... etc. ... etc.       G
                                                                          I
and it came out to 416 dollars for the room.                              N
                                                                          N
However suppose the room does not cost 8 dollars a week                   I
        suppose the room costs only    7 dollars a week                   N
                                       7 dollars for a room it's possible  G
                          then 7 times 52 makes only 364
                                              364 for the room
IMAGINE THAT!
that means that you now have 52 dollars (416 less 364 leaves 52) more to work
with ..... and therefore we have to start all over again  It's quite obvious:

JUST THINK . . . FOR INSTANCE . . . IF THE ROOM COSTS ONLY 7 BUCKS A WEEK . .
7 times 52 makes 364 . . . . . . . .
                     then it does not necessarily have to be N O O D L E S !
THE END
```

(191)

Leaving the discourse open-ended like this emphasises Federman's ongoing struggle to grasp his incomprehensible past, a past that remains forever in the second degree – always existing only in a displaced manner. Federman fully acknowledges that his ongoing and stubborn attempt to make the past (and those who perished) present again is always in vain. Ironically, this very effort to comprehend his past remains

```
the story of life.      h  l      m  l      o  l      L I F E
                        i  i      y  i      u  i      in
                        s  f         f      r  f      general
                           e         e         e
```

(139)

There is no hermeneutic discovery at the 'end' of this story – our desire, along with Federman's, to know what really happened remains unfulfilled.

Concrete prose: an attempt at 'visualising' the unspeakable past

As the above analysis has illustrated, everything within Federman's irrational universe is eventually subsumed by language. As a result, the traditional demarcation between historical 'fact' and fiction, memory and imagination, ceases to exist. *Double or Nothing* repeatedly points to and insists on its own existence as a *discursive construct*, deliberately and explicitly manifesting itself as being ontologically distinct from the non-discursive and solid world. Therefore, we are left with the feeling that the only thing which undoubtedly does remain 'real' about *Double or Nothing* is, in fact, its physical existence as the book we are holding in our hands.

The physical existence of the novel is something that is foregrounded to a very high degree in *Double or Nothing*. Due to Federman's highly innovative typographical outlay on each individual page, reading *Double or Nothing* almost equals a visual cinematic experience. We are literally forced to manoeuvre this book around as we encounter numerous textual segments that are printed diagonally across the page, upside-down or sideways, and instances of shaped typography that through their shape simulate the shape of real-life objects and processes. In other words, Federman clearly subverts the traditional use of typography and, consequently, the extreme physicality of his typographical designs continually disrupts the projected world(s) of his text. Although the use of concrete prose emphasises the 'bookiness' of Federman's novels and therefore serves as an ironic self-representation, I would argue that employing such a strategy should not *merely* be seen as a playful jest. In fact, there is an inherent sense of doubleness in this novel; a constant vibration between seriousness and playfulness, articulation and disruption, and Federman's use of concrete prose is no exception. This technique, too, becomes a way of insinuating the serious elements of his past that lie in wait beneath the ludic surface of his discourses.

Page 7.1 of *Double or Nothing* (see plate 1), for instance, is referred to as "Digression on potatoes" in the "SUMMARY OF THE DISCOURSE" (192) at the very end of the book. This page appears at a moment when the inventor

considers whether potatoes or noodles would be the most appropriate food for his one-year seclusion. Having settled on noodles, this page could of course quite literally be seen as a "digression on potatoes". But this is an understatement; a deliberate attempt at disparaging, yet again, the haunting presence of Federman's unspeakable past. Also, the page number, with its ".1", certainly suggests the intentional attempt of turning something highly significant into something insignificant. On this page, we find the sequence of the four Xs - "(X * X * X * X)" - that carefully inscribes the loss of Federman's family as a visible sign. In placing the sign that marks the erasure of his family above a swastika so conspicuously large that our eyes are automatically drawn to it, Federman produces a short segment charged with emotion and painful loss. We find also a reference to one of Federman's first attempts at putting into prose writing his personal experiences, the unpublished *And I Followed My Shadow*, as well as isolated clauses (glimpses) that indicate the contents of this story: "The train / The rats / The old man / The farm"[24]. "This story", Hartl argues, "is thus told by being untold in a fragmentary and displaced manner as it forms the palimpsestic background of the novel, functioning as a kind of *pre*text" (emphasis original, Hartl 1995:55). Again, we are reminded that the story of Federman's life is not only a past of unspeakable events; but also the ongoing attempt at rendering these experiences into words. The "…Next time" (Federman 1971:7.1) certainly implies Federman's awareness that the novel in progress will not be exhaustive – it will not make available or render in its totality the historical 'truth' of his past.

Federman, in other words, will be back in his room 'next time' – the room which, as previously stated, remains central to this novel. While the room's importance is continuously brought to our attention on a thematic level, its significance also prevails on the level of the page itself. Page 1 (see plate 2), for instance, contains the text comprising the story which is literally framed by another discourse in which this text is repeated. Framing one discourse within another discourse, the

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[24] Interestingly, *The Farm* was the working title of Federman's forthcoming novel, which has recently been renamed *Return to Manure*. This novel features an overt dramatisation of a mature Federman as he returns to France in search of the farm where he spent 3 years working for an old man during the war.

latter a verbatim repetition of the former, generates a sense of re-doubling which is further manifested in the form of the framing discourse. The typography has the shape of a rectangle, thus imitating the shape of a (potential) room and emphasising also on an iconic level its importance. Contents and form thus somewhat overlap and mirror one another. Rather than rendering invisible the words on the page and the book's material dimensions, Federman foregrounds these by explicitly utilising them as a means of signifying and rendering concrete the contents of the story. Furthermore, page 101 (see plate 3) exemplifies how the arrangement of the printed matter functions as a visual manifestation of the centrality of the room. It is the repetition of "the ROOM", literally in the middle of this page, that creates a sense of orderliness, or coherence, to the surrounding words – but also to the incoherent and fragmented structure of the novel as a whole. While Federman's typographical endeavours may disrupt the imaginary universe we are in the process of projecting, they also, paradoxically, add something else to that universe by rendering its (discursive) contents concrete. *Double or Nothing* thus constantly flickers between the two realms that ultimately comprise the book in its totality and, in doing so, manifests its own ability to generate a discursive 'reality' while simultaneously pointing to its own materiality.

6.3 Take It or Leave It

Much like *Double or Nothing*, the 'real' story in *Take It or Leave It* remains untold due to radical frame-breaking techniques that constantly divert the direction of the narrative away from the 'original' story. Allegedly, this is the story of Frenchy (presumably the same protagonist as in *Double or Nothing*[25]), a French-Jewish Holocaust-orphan and immigrant who, before being shipped off to fight in the Korean War, embarks upon a great crossing of the American continent funded by money that the American army owes him. Eager to pursue this exploratory journey of his new country, Frenchy's trip is nevertheless postponed due to a bureaucratic error. Hence, Frenchy needs to pick up the money himself

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[25] "(I suppose I'll have to send him to the army—eventually—and then describe that period […] they'll call him FRENCHY for sure)" (Federman 1971:98).

from Camp Drum in Upper New York State before his great crossing can commence. Convinced that this will only be a small delay in his itinerary, Frenchy soon realises that things are much more complex than he first presumed. While Frenchy's adventures take him in all kinds of unforeseen directions, this unfortunate journey is cleverly mirrored in the actual telling of the story, delivered by a second-hand teller. This is not an ordinary storyteller but a second-hand teller who repeatedly and severely disrupts and comments on his own recitation. Consequently, the second-hand teller leads the story astray through various digressions, detours, and intense discussions with his listeners and, as a result, the immediate story remains a mere projection of Frenchy's journey. Distributing the authorial voices on competing ontological levels, Federman not only creates a dialogic multi-voiced discourse and a dispersal of authority but, also, he sets up a narrative hierarchy so complex that eventually "all the rules and regulations are going down the drain" (Federman 1976:261)[26], as we shall see.

While *Take It or Leave It* also centres on ostensible autobiographical elements, this text, interestingly enough, starts with a (mock) disclaimer in which Federman (the paper-author, naturally) warns his (potential) readers that, "All the characters and places in this book are real, they are made of words, therefore any resemblance with anything written (published or unpublished) is purely coincidental" (7). There is no pretence in this text of being able to give us anything but real *words*. It does not purport to make itself pass for the 'real' and solid world but boldly affirms what it is: a discursive construct. In other words, real signifiers, and not signifieds, are strongly foregrounded in the story to come. Therefore, like *Double or Nothing*, this novel is clearly going to be 'a real fictitious discourse'.

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[26] There is no pagination in this text. Therefore, all page references to *Take It or Leave It* in this thesis will be based on my own pagination.

Preliminaries

The second-hand teller, whom we initially encounter on his platform in front of an audience, clearly lays no claim to any authenticity or progression of the story to come,

> If you guys keep talking all the time / and at the same time / we'll never get it straight! We'll never get there! Do you think it's easy to tell a story? Any story? HEY! Particularly when it's not YOUR story – a second-hand story! […] To retell a story which was already told from the start in a rather dubious manner. Do you think it's easy to set it up so it looks coherent? Or even readable? Not to mention credible? I tell you it's not easy. A life story (or even parts of it)! […] And also with the passing of time, the failings of memory, the deterioration and the closing of the mind, the changing of times, and of course my own subjective interpretation of his story […] all of these interfere, to a great extent, with those particular elements of the original story. And yet, I must tell you to the best of my knowledge what he told me (square brackets mine, 25).

This is a second-hand teller who in explicit terms advises us that this is not going to be a simple and conventional story(telling), but clearly a postmodern metafictional story (within the story) that explores and unveils the act of producing a narrative (more specifically a life story) through the act of (dis)articulating that very narrative. Our second-hand teller emphasises, in particular, issues that concern the process of remembering and (in)accuracy, both in terms of the source of the story and his own (in)ability to re-tell it. Federman, in disclosing the problematic coming into being of the narrative to come, as well as the subjective aspects involved in such representation, suggests a deliberate attempt to break with the realist tradition. He intentionally highlights the narrative mechanisms and ontological boundaries - i.e., the storytelling process - that the realist text sets out to render invisible in order to generate the feeling that it represents only the story told.

Ontological positions (and implications)

Placing the second-hand teller on a platform in the so-called present of the narrative, literally situated above Frenchy, who exists down below in the past, concurs with the conventional notion of an ontological hierarchy in which the teller inhabits a world superior to that of the told. In a similar fashion, this setup allows for a (fictional) temporal space between these two realms; a present position from which the narrating subject can look to (and rewrite) the past. With Federman, however, there is no certainty as regards whose voice we are hearing or which temporal plane a given voice may occupy. While the two voices are distributed by the use of different pronouns between which numerous shifts occur, we encounter many instances of trompe-l'oeil where we momentarily mistake one voice, and one 'reality', for another. For example, as the second-hand teller is in the midst of a digression in which the 'I' (seemingly) refers to himself, a frame-breaking act appears to have taken place, since we suddenly realise that we are back to the level of the story: "so it's agreed, I stop in New York for a few hours" (176). There is no indication of this transition, and we remain oblivious of it until the second-hand teller adds in parentheses, "(it's the other guy talking now, keep alert!)" (176). Additionally, Federman refrains from using quotation marks to indicate direct speech and thus separate the two voices. Instead, the text continues to flicker between these two levels, often misleading us into mistaking one voice for another. While the second-hand teller does explain that, "Of necessity I must rearrange his tale, substitute my own voice for his voice, my person for his person, and even, at times, my self for his self!" (26), he leaves us little idea of when these substitutions take place. Foreseeing the possible difficulties that this may cause his listeners, the second-hand teller wonders if perhaps he should

> simply tell the tale of the I directly and forget about the I and the HE and the HE and the I and the HE / HE told me, etc. etc. bullshit? Why this fake distanciation, etc., and that double-talk in the midst of an overwise [sic] half-way decent recitation? (50).

The second-teller provides an answer to his own question later on by claiming that "it is by a system of double-talk that the story rises from its banality to what can be called a level of surfiction" (187). In other words, only by employing a mode of "double-talk", does literature succeed in generating a (fictional) level of self-reflexivity, thus encompassing two fictional realms that enable a given text to assert its own status as an artefact. Only by generating such "fake distanciation" does Federman carefully avoid the pitfalls of traditional realism, which would amount to "just a simple banal story" (186). As Jerzy Kutnik maintains, "[b]y showing little respect for the conventions of rational discourse—narrative authority, characterization, causation, or verisimilitude—double talk saves this story from falsehood, from being mistaken for what this story (a fiction) is not (reality)" (Kutnik 1986: 198).

Moreover, the second-hand teller suddenly exits the narrative temporarily, claiming on his return that he was needed elsewhere to assist his "[b]uddy" Ronald Sukenick[27] who "was having problems with his story" (Federman 1976:300). Meanwhile, Frenchy is (involuntarily) left in charge of the recitation, wondering (like us), "Where the hell is the second-hand teller at this time when I need him the most?" (261). As Frenchy is seemingly on his own, and not quite in control of the story, we share his astonishment when he is joined by "a free auditor" (260) from the group of potential listeners situated *above* Frenchy, ontologically speaking. Taken aback by this sudden and unexpected intrusion, a bewildered Frenchy asks the visitor,

> how the hell did you manage to by-pass the second-hand teller to come directly here . . . I mean . . . directly to the source? […] It's not logical . . . fucks up the whole system! Imagine what will happen . . . what the POTENTIALS will say when they hear about this! (my square brackets, 260).

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[27] The American writer Ronald Sukenick (1932-2004) was a close friend of Federman for decades. Sukenick published several innovative and disruptive books, such as, *Up* (1968), *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (1969), and *Out* (1973). In addition, he wrote several theoretical essays and was also the co-founder of Fiction Collective.

This downward movement by the "free auditor", who both crosses the frame and enters a narrative plane where he does not really 'belong', has unsettling effects on us and our interpretation of the story thus far, as this completely illogical gesture does not correspond with our notion of the common-sensical. How is this transition possible? Does not Frenchy exist *in the past* and as an explicitly fictional being, and the listener, on the other hand, *in the present* as an inhabitant of an extra-diegetic world (within the fiction)? And what about the second-hand teller; where is this realm in which he exists alongside the 'Real Author' Sukenick? Federman's discourse offers us no closure as the text continuously refuses to privilege any one part of the (conventional) dichotomies: past/present, told/telling, and fictional/'real'. Rather, *Take It or Leave It* continues towards asserting itself as an increasingly self-contradictory novel.

Having worked up the courage to narrate his own story, Frenchy, now on his way to Camp Drum (and the second-hand teller back on his platform), all of a sudden addresses his creator, to ask permission for the authorial voice,

> Hey listen! Would you mind if I told this part of the story myself? I mean directly. Because you see we are now coming to the climax, I mean the real juicy part, and it would be better, and also much more suspenseful if I were to speak directly – first-hand!
>
> I don't mind (I told him, when the time comes). But can you pull it off? Can you handle it by yourself? I mean, remember, I am the one who is supposed to recite this tale second-hand. And besides, it is not legal, you know! What will our listeners say when they discover I've handed you the narrative voice?
>
> Please let me try! Just for a while. For this one part. It really means a lot to me! You'll see, I'll do it right!
>
> Okay! (377)

As the second-hand teller passes over the authorial voice, he does in effect recognise himself as a fictional construct and we are therefore no longer able to maintain the notion that he and Frenchy exist on different planes. Leaving

Frenchy in charge of the recitation has serious consequences for the novel's framework as the telling and the told become somewhat indistinguishable. As we follow Frenchy's struggle to keep his Buick Special on the road, this struggle is mirrored in the narration, which is equally difficult for Frenchy to keep on the right track – or is it the other way round? We are offered no stable frame of reference and are, therefore, unable to determine whether this is to be read metaphorically or literally. Both readings seemingly apply, though our logic dictates that we cannot have it both ways. In the end, both journey and narration swerve off course and into a ditch. The form, in other words, both mirrors and affirms the contents of the story, and vice versa. *Take It or Leave It* is clearly an example of a very radical metafictional novel in which logic gradually gives way to chaos. We can no longer use our notion of rationality as a means of interpreting this text.

Contradictions and leap-frogging

As with most of Federman's dramatised story-tellers, our second-hand teller is also a fictitious being with a strong tendency to contradict his own assertions, thus leaving us in an endless state of doubt and uncertainty. Arguing first that the story was told to him first-hand by Frenchy, as the two of them "were sitting under a tree" (41), this is undermined later on in the discourse as the second-hand teller angrily exclaims, "[Ah that damn tree is getting on my nerves]" (174). Consequently, he asserts his creative powers and simply alters the location of the story's oral delivery, so that it apparently (now) took place "on the edge of a precipice, leaning against the wind" (176). The act of undermining any certainty as regards the point of origin of Frenchy's story is further problematised as the second-hand teller suddenly claims that, "For all I know he may be imagining the whole thing. Dreaming it up! […] Maybe it was someone else told me the story as told to him (and so on) and I am getting the whole thing confused" (my square brackets, 175). The second-hand teller is, in other words, implying the possibility of endless descent as there is, seemingly, no guarantee that we can ever reach the original (source of the) story. Federman thus evokes a sense of infinite regress, leaving us wondering just how many layers of interpretation and acts of re-telling

the original narrative has actually passed through before it has been made accessible to us. As with *Double or Nothing*, this text brings to the fore the impossibility of a stable (let alone possible) demarcation between the realms of memory and imagination. We have no way of knowing or verifying anything for certain and so, it quite literally becomes a matter of taking it, or leaving it.

Realising that his audience may no longer be willing to take it, the second-hand teller reassures them (and us) that it was only "a false start" (126). Concluding that he should now be able to fulfil his promise of finally reciting the 'real' story, the second-hand teller maintains that what we have been told thus far has been "mere padding, the launching pad for the real story!" (218). Getting the story going is never an easy task for Federman's narrators. Instead, their constant failure to produce a narrative anywhere beyond its "launching pad" is always foregrounded. In this discourse we find no progression in the traditional sense through 'stages' that resemble what we commonly refer to as a stable beginning, middle, and end. The second-hand teller is unable to move his story forward and resorts instead to a particular narrative (and radical metafictional) strategy that allows him to skip any elements of the story that he wants to,

> Lucky for you that the leaping system of reading (and writing) of this RECI-(tation) permits you so to speak to leap (jump over if you prefer) this type of sordid passages (or for that matter any other passages in this story!) That, in fact, is the KEY to this RECI-(tation) :   THE LEAPFROG technique! [and you'll never know what you've missed!] which allows you any time anywhere here and there, freely and at random, to HOP / HOP / HOP / over all the details! (all emphasis original, 236)

This technique becomes one of the guiding principles of *Take It or Leave It*, which subverts practically all principles and assumptions characteristic of more conventional literature. The leapfrog technique, as explained above, concerns both the production and the reception of the novel at hand, which is further emphasised by the omission of page numbers. Pagination, we are told in the "SUMMARY OF THE RECITATION" (6) at the onset of the novel, is "useless" since "all sections

in this tale are interchangeable" (6). Hence, any given section may be "inserted anywhere in the text" (9) at the reader's own discretion. There is no pretence of an already given chronological order or plot in this discourse, but rather the notion of arbitrariness and fragmentariness is what we are offered. As such, the reader as an essential (co-)producer of the text is something that is strongly foregrounded. We not only witness the process of composing a narrative about someone's past, but also experience this difficult process ourselves as we, much like the second-hand teller and his potential listeners, are forced to engage actively in the meaning-making process.

Towards the horizon

While *Take It or Leave It* contains numerous playful subversions of narrative mechanisms and intensely flaunts its own status as fiction, we get a feeling that something else is discernable within this paradoxical discourse. Perhaps an earnest attempt to move away from and break with the past? After all, we are cautioned that "the interesting part of this story lies in the journey west" (218), and not in the destination itself. What the second-hand teller is calling attention to, in other words, is the process (how), and not the product (what). He exasperatedly adds, "Hell with the past! I'm fed up with the past, fed up with his past, my past, our past!" (218). While the great crossing of America functions as the story's main vehicle, it may also be seen as an analogy of Federman's impetuous flight from death. What characterises "Federman's autobiographical heroes", McHale asserts, is that they "are refugees from death; leaving Europe behind, with its associations of war and holocaust, they flee to the New World, then continue fleeing across the continent (or they try to, at least)" (McHale 1999:229). The persistent wish (and need) to keep moving is one of the motivating forces behind many of Federman's tellers, and *Take It or Leave It* is no exception. The big crossing of America is naturally directed towards that 'mythical' and luring sunset in the west with its promise of a prosperous and wonderful (albeit hypothetical) future in which "we'll be winners all of us" (Federman 1976:218). Similarly to the inventor in *Double or Nothing*, the second-hand teller is obsessed with producing an excessive amount of words and to keep the discourse moving, at least

symbolically, "out of sight, and over the damn horizon!" (194), even if this can only be achieved through "thousands and thousands of repeats and circumvolutions" (218). The crux of the matter is that Frenchy never reaches his destination but ends up in bandages after hours of surgery. In other words, the attempt to embrace the American dream, and break with the unspeakable past once and for all, does not become an actuality within the novel, but instead exists as a mere projection. By analogy, the second-hand teller never succeeds in getting his story anywhere beyond its "launching pad", and realises to his disappointment that his audience has walked out on him, "Where the hell did you guys go? Dammit! Don't you want to hear the rest of the story?" (426). Federman's novel does not give us "the rest of the story" (despite the narrator's many promises), but leaves us instead with the story of the story that could not be told. Our interest is naturally aroused. What is it that has triggered this obsessive flight towards the horizon; both on a thematic and a formal level? Why all the leap-frogging and countless detours? What is it that the second-hand teller is *not* telling us?

Federman, we know, fortunately did manage to escape death, the Holocaust, and the war as he crossed the Atlantic as a young man and eventually became an American citizen. Nevertheless, the traumatic memories of his past remain with him, demanding to be put to rest and resolved once and for all – but they never can be as words simply do not suffice as a means of conveying these painful personal experiences. While I do agree with McHale's idea that the endless and, often delirious, streams of words coming from Federman's narrator-characters may be seen as symbolic parallels of Federman's escape, I also believe that they function as analogies of Federman's ongoing attempt to put his unspeakable past into writing. That there is a central event which language always fails to make present again; something that Federman both realises and accepts, and it is this very acceptance that is apparent through his self-conscious employment of "a system of double-talk" (as established above). It is by using double-talk that the second-hand teller, for example, reveals to us in fragments what he, ironically, tries not to reveal. This we observe in *Take It or Leave It* through the second-hand teller's use of a narrative mechanism similar to that of the inventor in *Double or*

Nothing: the re-articulation of the historical past as something that remains under erasure. Hence, these fragments are always paradoxically represented in the discourse as that which is *not* going to be represented.

On what then do I base the assumption that there is more to this discourse than its ludic surface? In my view, we get a very clear indication at an early point in the narrative (see plate 4). Here, we are presented with a most alerting statement, "THE EASIEST OF COURSE WOULD BE TO BLOW my BRAINS OUT" (22), the capitalised typeface emphasising the urgency and extremity of the situation in which we find this speaking subject. Once again, Federman points to the impossibility of saying what he, nevertheless, must say, and explicitly moves this account into his somewhat habitual tense: the conditional. At this point, however, we remain puzzled as regards the extreme condition that seemingly lies behind the coming into being of this recitation. A little later on, the second-hand teller drops us a hint when he states the reason why he must tell us the story the way he does. In this connection, he argues that "there are many things which I have forgotten, many things which cannot be told, many things which are not tellable, many things of unspeakable nature!" (26). There are, in other words, certain "things" that inevitably are going to have great repercussions regarding the (re)presentation of his recitation. Despite the significance that these events have, this is a narrator who nevertheless makes a conscious effort to play down their significance. For instance, by claiming that, "[I don't want to insist too much on the Jewish side of this story but one cannot avoid it altogether I just hope you guys don't make too much out of it]" (223). We note that this statement is even literally bracketed off from the rest of the discourse by Federman's own square brackets.

Another noticeable example of Federman playing down his Jewish origin yet again can be found on page 40 (see plate 5). Here, the symbol of Jewishness, the Star of David, stands remarkably out on the page, yet its importance is deliberately denied and mocked by the text that forms one of the two triangles constituting the symbol itself, "of course I'm Jewish You guys didn't know Look at my nose But that doesn't mean that I'm some sort of fanatic about all that crap

about religion tradition deportation extermination etcetera et". As we have already established, the act of retracting the sudden and reoccurring allusions to "the Jewish side of this story" (223) has the opposite effect.

On other occasions, the second-hand teller does bring certain "things of unspeakable nature" into the story (and thus to our attention) by stating his own intention not to include them,

> I'm not going to make you weep / o-o / with all the sad stories he told me and yet if I wanted to tell you all the crap he told me (the trains the camps) if I wanted to describe in details and realistically all the misery and suffering he endured (the lampshades the farms the noodles) we would never get out of here / o-o / ah yes his entire family remade into lampshades (father mother sisters ah yes uncles aunts cousins too) you wouldn't believe it (wiped out)! (184).

By letting these painful elements surface within the discourse, we are reminded time and again that Federman's writing is deeply anchored in the historical 'reality' of the Holocaust. Only gradually are we able to piece together the few glimpses we get of this effaced past and, thus, begin to grasp the exceptional circumstances that govern and inform this story. This we also observe through Federman's unique use of typography, which points to the fact that he can neither escape nor completely evade his traumatic past as it haunts and manifests itself on the many different levels within the discourse. The most striking example in *Take It or Leave It*, I would argue, is the conceptual icon we encounter on page 253 (see plate 6). Here, Federman's shaped typography conveys the story of the erasure of his immediate family on an iconic, rather than a symbolic, level. This segment is, probably, the closest we get to the historical 'truth' in Federman's discourse: the unspeakable "systematic extermination" of his family. Again, the four Xs (here literally introduced only within square brackets) signify the present absence of his obliterated family. The lack of any syntactical continuity and the many gaps between the scattered fragments of words convey a deeply moving visual image of Federman's great loss. The inefficiency of language to ever

express the void in Federman's life is made apparent by the fact that the majority of the words are incomplete and presented to us as a combination of both English and French. Neither of Federman's two languages apparently suffices as a means of speaking the unspeakable. This is a most conspicuous image that stays with the reader, remaining visible as an afterimage implanted in the reader's mind long after the book has been read.

6.4 A conclusion of sorts

As we have seen, the historical act of the Holocaust plays an absolutely crucial role in Federman's two surfictional novels. In both novels, Federman presents us with numerous key autobiographical elements around which his narrators constantly weave layer upon layer of digressions and interrogations in their attempt to understand and recover the historical 'truth'. The past, in other words, both informs and motivates *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It*, as each novel overtly dramatises the struggling narrator-character in his desperate attempt at rearticulating a past of unspeakable events. Ironically, each narrator interferes with the story he is in the process of articulating to such extent that it never actually gets told. Continuously intruding upon the story in progress, the various instances of frame-breaking inevitably foreground the process of production, the telling of the story – or, in Federman's case, the impossibility of telling the story.

Both tellers, as was evident, continuously manage to swerve and direct their discourse away from any elements that seemingly make up the 'real' (hi)story. *Double or Nothing*, we noted, ends up circling its own minimal story, as the inventor's calculations and lists simply get the better of him. This story therefore remains destined towards an endless spiralling descent as it manifests itself as a circular story towards the end, both on a thematic and formal level, reminding us of Federman's never-ending struggle to rearticulate his unthinkable past. In *Take It or Leave It*, the second-hand teller is unable to get the 'original' story going and ends up leading his narrative astray into all kinds of unforeseen directions, thus never moving beyond the story's launching pad and reaching the symbolic horizon. Remaining in a state of in-betweenness, this text functions as an analogy

of Federman's physical flight from the Holocaust while, at the same time, it implies the impossibility of ever escaping that past mentally, no matter how many words he produces. It can never be arrested or seized; only *approximated* in a mediated form.

While both texts are marked by a strong wish to break with the past (symbolically) and move on, the historical 'reality' of the Nazi genocide turns out to be something that cannot be escaped. Both narrators cannot drop the subject entirely as it is repeatedly, almost compulsively, alluded to throughout the discourses. In most cases, the sordid history of World War II manifests itself on the surface of the discourse only to be subsequently negated which, paradoxically, foregrounds its present absence. Consequently, the past is always represented as that which requires yet defies representation, as we saw. It is only present within the two novels in its absence; remaining forever under erasure, signalling the huge void in Federman's life that continues to haunt his work and his fictional authors.

Despite the present absence of the historical 'reality', the past has great repercussions for the manner in which these narrators tell their story. We find both of them in somewhat extreme situations and these circumstances govern their (in)abilities to say what they must, yet cannot, say. Federman, in other words, does not present us with a single and unproblematic diegesis that amounts to a story in the traditional sense. Instead, his novels comprise both the telling and the story, which means that the focus is on the actual *process* of producing a story (within the story, etcetera), rather than the story as a finished product. The crux of the matter is that the story of the past never gets told, leaving us with a representation of the painstaking attempt of turning the past into a narrative. It is the failure – the impossibility – of producing an account of the historical past that is foregrounded.

We also established that due to the many instances of (often radical) frame-breaking strategies the problematic process of transforming elements of the past into stories is brought to the fore. Situating his narrator-characters in an extra-

diegetic position, trying to compose an account of the past, Federman's novels also clearly point to the existential aspect of writing. That is, the quest for meaning and personal enlightenment through the act of storyfication remains crucial to these texts. Yet, we are deprived of such hermeneutic discovery since it is always the *effort* to come to terms with the traumatic past - the struggle of grasping and translating into something meaningful these horrific experiences - that is represented in Federman's novels; never the past itself. Thus, Federman brings to our attention not so much the events themselves as the subjective processes and efforts inevitably entailed in (re-)interpreting such events as a means of making sense of them. The linguistic systems and the act of rewriting history are foregrounded, rather than the (hi)story itself.

In constantly subverting the fictional framework, Federman leaves us with only allusions to a historical 'truth' that lurks beneath the textual surface. Yet, at the same time, he repeatedly reminds us that these novels are linguistic constructs. The serious issues that haunt Federman's discourses on numerous levels can therefore never be validated as 'solid' historical facts. The overt fictionality of his autobiographical accounts, however, does not mean that he denies the existence of his past. Rather, as both novels show, he clearly acknowledges the past as discursive, thus it can only ever be accessed by means of textuality – always in the second degree.

Finally, we observed how the use of concrete prose as a narrative strategy, both in *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It*, enables Federman to not only foreground the materiality of his books, but also clearly point to the fact that words and the traditionally static arrangement of these simply do not suffice in capturing the unspeakable historical act of the Nazi genocide. By literally shaping the linguistic material in numerous ways, Federman creates various instances of 'concrete sayings' that work in a twofold manner: we can look at them like pictures *and* we can read them as prose. But no matter how we choose to read the many competing discourses that constitute each of his novels, the fact remains that Federman never tries to deceive us: his pronounced use of frame-breaking

strategies always points to the fictionality of the few glimpses we get of his traumatic past.

The past (and by extension, the present and the future) may, therefore, be endlessly re- and de-constructed which Federman shows us by continuously undermining any notions of certainty. The realms of fact and fiction, memory and imagination, and past and present, are constantly interacting with one another, as Federman's novels refuse to privilege any one of these conventional dichotomies. We are left with an ongoing and playful oscillation between these realms, which ultimately assert themselves as fictional constructs and eventually merge into one single diegesis. In doing so, Federman intentionally deprives us of any temporal and spatial stability within his universes, exposing instead such conventional notions as illusory. The renditions of the past that Federman offers us are, in other words, never exhaustive or final.

7.0 Conclusion to thesis: historiographic radical metafiction

In the introduction, I challenged Hutcheon's reading of Federman's surfictional novels, which according to her, should be classified as late modernist and autotelic works with no grounding in 'reality' at all. This led her to dismiss Federman's writing as historiographic metafiction – Hutcheon's own definition of *the* postmodern novel. Disagreeing with Hutcheon's understanding of Federman's work, I proposed that his *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It* be read as historiographic metafiction, though clearly a more *radical* variant of this particular type of novel. That is, the main aim of this thesis was to illustrate through close readings of Federman's texts that these can be classified as historiographic *radical* metafiction. In order for me to offer the said reading of Federman's fiction, a comprehensive theoretical framework was called for, which would enable us to investigate and define related, though not synonymous, concepts such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, (radical) metafiction, and historiographic metafiction. The first part of this thesis, therefore, comprised the theoretical framework that formed the basis for the actual analysis in part two.

Having analysed Federman's two novels, we have established that these texts are marked by numerous general postmodern features, such as extreme degrees of self-reflexivity, conspicuous formal features, ontological implications that severely disrupt the narrative logic, and strong inclinations towards playfulness and undecidability. These features are generally brought about by Federman's pronounced use of radical frame-breaking techniques, which undermines any notion of certainty within his texts and emphasises their status as artefacts.

Federman's texts are highly innovative and unconventional, and clearly signal a deliberate break with the realist tradition, which hinges on the assumption that language has an inherent ability to represent in an unrestricted manner the past/'reality' as it 'really' was/is. It goes without saying that 'reality' is not the same thing as realism. Hence, if a given text is anchored in 'reality' that does not necessarily mean that it is also grounded in literary realism. Federman's texts are clearly a case in point and they challenge the ideological concepts and traditional

values of Western society often implied by the realist mode. Federman's texts, as we have seen, are deeply anchored in, and clearly marked by, the tragic events of World War II. While Federman's novels never purport to offer us exhaustive and final accounts of these events, which would comply with the assumptions of traditional realism, they are nevertheless explicitly motivated and governed by historical facts that continue to haunt these texts by virtue of their present absence. Yet, at the same time, these novels *also* constantly assert themselves as texts that are clearly aware of their own fictionality. Federman's discourses thus point inward and outward simultaneously, which, as we recall, is a central defining feature of Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction.

I have shown how both *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It* are characterised by this inherent doubleness, which is repeatedly manifested in these novels' persistent and reciprocal interplay between memory and imagination, teller and told, fact and fiction, as well as history and story. Federman's novels set up demarcations between such traditionally distinct ontologies only to subsequently undermine these, leaving us flickering between internal and external fields of reference of which both seemingly apply. In my view, this is not a complete rejection of reference. Rather it can be seen as a severe problematisation and rethinking of this very concept, which is generated by Federman's mode of 'double-talk'; the fictional distance that his novels establish, thus allowing them to move *beyond* self-reflexivity. I would argue, that Federman emphasises and investigates the problem of reference even further by his use of concrete prose, which brings to our attention the explicit attempt at articulating the (hi)story in an alternative manner. As a result, these books make us think about how language functions by laying bare the very ideological meaning-making mechanisms at work in Western discourses. Federman shows us that there are different ways in which any given historical event may be imbued with meaning through linguistic systems, and that no one version offers us an unproblematic and unrestricted access to a single historical 'truth'. In doing so, he suggests that the official historical record is nothing but a construct and, therefore, it may be revised and rewritten in various ways that may not necessarily comply with the hegemonic

discourses of Western society. The Holocaust and the extermination of Federman's immediate family do not make sense and this is reflected in his novels which, similarly, refuse to make sense by not conforming to any notion of Western reasoning.

These novels, in other words, cannot merely be considered personal aesthetic statements, as Hutcheon suggests. There is an intention behind Federman's usage of innovative and playful techniques and the chaotic nature of his accounts, and this intention, I would argue, is *not* autotelic. Rather, these unconventional narrative strategies are strongly imbued with adversarial qualities that are brought about by Federman's deliberate refusal to conform to the realist mode of writing. His texts overtly and consistently depart from the norm and, by doing so, they insinuate that the realist mode – predominant within historical accounts - is outdated and no longer pertinent. Linearity, coherence, objectivity, presence, and logic are all unmasked as illusory and culturally determined constructs, projected onto the world in our attempt to make sense of it. We find none of these traditionally valued concepts (or constructs) in Federman's surfictions, as these experimental texts show us instead that the past is only available to us in a fragmented and nonsensical form. Therefore, I would argue that his novels function as social and political acts of subversion by virtue of their constant refusal of rationality and coherence, thus reflecting the absurdity and irrationality of the Holocaust and providing alternative narratives that act in opposition to official history.

Federman may also be situated within both of the two postmodern currents that Maltby distinguishes between (see section 2.7). Being acutely concerned with the individual's inability to ever escape language as a meaning-making apparatus, Federman's novels generally explore the possibilities of language. This is particularly noticeable in the obsessive attempt at recovering a personal past of horrific events that can only be approached through (unreliable) sign systems, particularly noticeable in *Double or Nothing* with its claustrophobic environment and emphasis on introspection. Yet, at the same time, we have also seen how his

discourses refuse to conform to ideological notions of Western hegemony, which is brought about by Federman's disruption of traditionally valued concepts and official discourses, most noticeably historical accounts, which also makes him a dissident postmodern writer. In true Federman-style, then, both labels seemingly apply simultaneously.

Despite the radical metafictional impulses and persistent subversion of the commonsensical discernable in Federman's writing, *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It* both leave us in a state of undecidablity that hinges on the constant and reciprocal interplay between fact and fiction. So when one of Federman's many voices in *Double or Nothing* claims that "you're getting everything confused […] his story and my story" (Federman 1971:65), the striking pun on "history" most certainly suggests that his surfictions can be considered fictionalised versions of history that are explicitly characterised by a parodic twist. They are, in other words, historiographic *radical* metafictions.

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Summary of thesis

This thesis disagrees with Linda Hutcheon's conviction that Raymond Federman's surfictional novels cannot be considered historiographic metafictions. Postulating that Federman's writing is completely void of any grounding in the social and historical discourses we refer to as our 'reality', Hutcheon argues that his novels are autotelic and anti-referential. I, on the other hand, argue throughout this thesis that Federman's *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It* are marked by an inherent doubleness that corresponds to Hutcheon's very defining feature of historiographic metafiction. Therefore, I propose that these novels be read as historiographic *radical* metafictions, and that Federman's writing is strongly imbued with oppositional impulses characteristic of postmodern practices.

Considering Federman's novels postmodern and subversive, I argue that postmodernism be defined as a period concept characterised by a contemporary distrust of and opposition towards traditional Western verities and ideologies, which is reflected in postmodern aesthetic practices. 'Reality' is no longer considered a natural given to be discovered, but rather it exists to us only as a discursive construct. Metafictional writing, I suggest, manifests this contemporary view by deliberately pointing to its own status as a linguistic construct, posing ontological questions about its relationship to the empirical world. This concern is also noticeable in Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, which focuses specifically on questioning our absolute knowability of the past. The existence of the past in such discourses is not negated. Rather, they suggest that our accessibility to the historical past is always only through texts.

In the light of these theoretical concepts, I analyse Federman's two novels with specific focus on how the past is represented and approached in his postmodern autobiographical accounts. I show how Federman's consistent use of radical frame-breaking techniques enables him to create numerous different ontological levels within his texts that all engage in dialogues, ultimately leading to a confrontation with a (fictional) past of unspeakable events. These novels, I conclude, are clearly marked and governed by the tragic events of World War II,

which become particularly noticeable through the narrator-characters' constant intrusions into their stories in progress. While these fictional tellers never succeed in articulating the 'real' (hi)story of the past, there is a strong urgency within these texts of a desperate need to rediscover the past in the attempt to grasp it. This, however, proves impossible, as Federman shows us how language simply does not suffice as a means of rendering meaningful the horrific 'reality' of the Holocaust and the extermination of his family. Allowing only a few glimpses of the 'real' (hi)story to surface now and again within these chaotic and irrational universes, Federman's oppositional qualities are exposed. I conclude that by refusing to make sense and adhere to the realist mode, Federman's surfictional writing clearly distances itself from the rational and objective world-view implied by this tradition. To Federman the Holocaust does not make any sense, which is clearly manifested in his self-cancelling discourses that refuse to comply with conventional Western ideology and its official history. Federman's story of his unthinkable past cannot be told, but that too, in my view, is a way of telling.

My ultimate conclusion is that despite their extreme self-reflexivity and deliberate break with literary realism, Federman's two novels nevertheless remain deeply anchored in historical facts that continue to haunt his discourses by virtue of their present absence. Thus, these novels may be classified as historiographic *radical* metafictions.

PLATE 1

7.1

```
Yes but the POTATOES    the raw
            POTATOES on the train (remember?)   what a story:  A
                     on the way to the CAMP                    N
                                 the CAMP (X * X * X * X)      D

                                                              I

                                                              F
                                                              O
                                                              L
                                                              L
                                                              O
                                                              W
                                                              E
                                                              D

                                                              M
                                                              Y

                                                              S
                                                              H
                                                              A
                                                              D
                                                              O
                                                              W
```
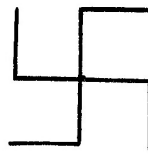
Can't come into this one...Nothing before the boat...

(Damn good story!) Could sneak the potatoes in...Next time.

The train
The rats
The old man
The farm
The camps
The potatoes... Wow!

A TIME OF POTATOES

could have a whole series   like that 20 or 30 volumes
could have a whole series   a kind of Balzacian comedy

THE VEGETABLE COMEDY

no even better than that

THE HUNGER COMEDY

no even worse than that

THE STARVATION COMEDY

20 or 30 volumes in folio.

PLATE 2

1

JUST THINK FOR INSTANCE IF THE ROOM COST 8 DOLLARS 8 DOLLARS A WEEK THEN

Just think

for instance

        if the room costs 8 dollars
                8 dollars a week

        then it'll have to be noodles
                noodles then it is

Imagine that!

In matters such as these there's much food for thought
                        undoubtedly

Another guy would say there's little food............

That's his business!

        If the room costs 8 bucks   it'll have to be

        (for 6 bucks   could eat better
              7 even   survive

                      on the edge of the white p
                                            r
                                          e
                                          c
                                          i
                                          p
                                          i
                                          c
                                          e

        feet first).

Just think

        a little piece of meat PERHAPS here and there
        - canned meat -- it's better than NOTHING.
        So many guys starving in the world!

        But 8 dollars a week   that's 52 times 8
                             52 times 8 makes 416

Imagine that   416
               dollars just for a room
                    but the room is important
                       extremely IMPORTANT

(Left margin, vertical:) IS HIS BUSINESS BUT IF THE ROOM COSTS 8 DOLLARS THEN UNDOUBTEDLY IT WILL HAVE TO BE NOODLES NOODLES

(Right margin, vertical:) IT WILL HAVE TO BE NOODLES NOODLES THEN IT IS IMAGINE THAT IN MATTERS SUCH AS THESE THERE IS MUCH FOOD

(Bottom margin, inverted:) FOR THOUGHT UNDOUBTEDLY ANOTHER GUY WOULD SAY THERE IS LITTLE FOOD THAT

PLATE 3

```
------>  V              S Q U A R E L Y           SSSQQQUUUAAARRREEELLLYYY
         E              Q           L             Q                     L
         R              U           E             U                     E
         T              A           R             A                     R
         I    or------- R           A    or-------not  R                A
         C              E           U             E                     U
         A              L           Q             L                     Q
         L              Y L E R A U Q S           YYYLLLEEERRRAAAUUUQQQSSS
         L
         Y
```

<u>for finally:</u>

```
It all boils down to the ROOM
                      the ROOM is at the core of the whole thing
              without the ROOM nothing can be done
                      the ROOM is crucial
                      the ROOM is the starting point
                  and the ROOM is also the finishing point
whatever the cost of the ROOM nothing can be done
              without the ROOM                                    so
                                                                 here
                                                                   we
                                                                   go
```

416 dollars just for the ROOM (imagine that) that's a lot of dough
And besides

how the hell do I get all the stuff into the ROOM without attracting
                                              attention (?)

Unless I work all night (tonight!) 37 trips (UP & DOWN) for the noodles
                                                         alone

and more trips yet for the coffee sugar toothpaste salt toilet paper (52 rolls)

and all the other crap (?) I need to survive on the edge of the precipice feet
                                                                          first

Let's say approximately 10 or 15 trips (UP & DOWN) more should do it

They'll think I'm crazy nuts mad irrational lunatic irresponsible cracked dumb

          For indeed beyond the ROOM (one should say before) there are all kinds
          of problems: for instance: the toilet paper -- two rolls for 27 cents--
          Of course you get better quality for 29 cents And even better for 32 cents
          But you can't go overboard particularly for stuff like that since it gets
          flushed away anyway.
                         You could of course do it the easy way
                                                 or the hard way

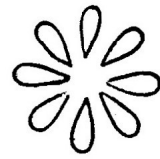   the easy way is half of 52 or 26 (comes out even)
          the hard way is half of 27 or 13.5 (comes out uneven)

          either way comes out the same: 52 times 13.5
                                                 or   makes $7.02
                                          26 times 27

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PLATE 4

THE EASIEST OF COURSE WOULD BE TO BLOW my BRAINS
OUT ——————— bang!

THIS WAY we WOULDN'T HAVE TO BEGIN

BUT SUPPOSE ——————

PLATE 5

ME!   at least I had some education [at the time] <u>Le Certificat</u>
<u>d'Etudes!</u> (In France — *OUI* — Lycée Henry IV) at the beginning
of the war . . . . But after that — *OUI* — a big hole :
ooooooooooooooo
o   o
o   o
ooooooooooooooo   Yes a big H O L E —
        the debacle the occupation
        the Germans the French
        the   J E W S   the

o
f cou
rse I'm J
ewish You guy
s didn't know Loo
k at my nose But that
doesn't mean that I'm som
e sort of fanatic about all t
hat crap about religion tradition
deportation extermination etcetera et

the yellow star & then the great roun-
dup in 42 (le 14 juillet) the entire fam-
ily mother father sisters uncles aunts
cousins everybody picked up every-
body remade into lampshades (after
the showers)yes   at AUSCHWITZ!

Ah!   the camps
      the trains
      the farms (in the South)
      the raw potatoes (and diarrhea all night)
     AND   I   FOLLOWED   MY   SHADOW   [remember
that's what he called it]
Well let's skip all that --
No need to whine about it   That's for sure!
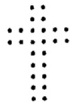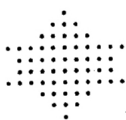And then AMERICA — that FAT bitch — in 47! in 1947 — in
August!

PLATE 6

<> :><><OH DO TELL US THAT STORY AGAIN DO TELL US ><><><>

Ah what a man he was my father (obviously he is reinventing him somewhat) I was thirteen when they picked him up and the rest of the family on that sinister 14 juillet or thereabout with their yellow stars and their cries and their little bundles   my mother was howling down the staircase tears rolling down from her eyes   huge tears   and my two sisters too   and on top of that at thirty my father (Damn did he have a rough life! I wonder why he didn't commit suicide?) he became tuberculous yes twice a week had to have stuff pumped into his pneumothorax   saloperie! sometimes during the night he would start choking and spitting blood   my mother knew what to do but she would panic anyway (at this point Benny and Marilyn started weeping like two kids)   he had eyes gray like a stormy sky my father but my father ∿∿∿∿∿∿∿∿∿∿∿∿ my father

[X – X – X – X]   SYSTEMATIC EXTERMINATION   [X – X – X – X]

Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ de ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ camps ~~~~~~~~~~~ jui ~~~~~~~~

~~~~~~~ mè ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ cre ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ lam ~~~~~~~~~~~~~

~~~~~~~~~~~~~ savo ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ uillet ~~~~~~~~~~~ Ausch ~~~~

~~~~ tra ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ferme ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ pè ~~~~~~~~~~~

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ bilité ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ rat ~~~~~ ap ~~~~~~ ap ~~~~~~

~~~~~~~~~~ rès ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ si ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ vac ~~~~~~~~~

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ mer ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ de ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

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Blurb

This MA thesis presents close readings of two of Raymond Federman's surfictional novels, with specific focus on how the past is approached and represented in his postmodern autobiographical accounts.

Disagreeing with Linda Hutcheon, the thesis proposes that Federman's surfictions be read as historiographic metafictions, though clearly a more *radical* variant of this type of novel. Through numerous textual examples, Federman's writing is shown to be strongly imbued with oppositional impulses characteristic of postmodern practices.

Moreover, the thesis comprises a vast theoretical framework with chapters on concepts such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, (radical) metafiction, and historiographic metafiction.