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Stories as “Weapons of Mass Destruction”: George W. Bush’s Narratives of Crisis as Paradigm Examples of Ways of World- and Conflict-Making (and Conflict-Solving?)

1 Narratives of crisis and other weapons of mass destruction, or: the worldmaking power of stories and storytelling¹

Although the former American President George W. Bush is unlikely ever to be ranked among, or remembered as, one of America’s or the world’s greatest storytellers, one cannot help admitting that he and his comrades-in-arms displayed a certain degree of creativity, ingenuity, and success in conjuring up and disseminating a number of stories that turned out to be conflict- and worldmaking in a very literal sense despite being largely fictions. Anyone who doubts that narratives can indeed have performative power and worldmaking potential only needs to recall the ideologically charged story that the Bush administration couched in the form of what has come to be called a mini-narration, i.e. the story, or indeed stories, encapsulated in the metaphorically loaded concept of

1 In this article we have attempted to adapt and apply theoretical frameworks and analytical concepts that we outlined in a number of earlier publications on narrative worldmaking (A. Nünning 2010; V. Nünning 2010; A. & V. Nünning 2010) and on a narratology of crisis (Nünning 2009, 2012), from which we have also used a number of ideas and formulations. All the translations from German publications are by us. We should like to thank Alexander Scherr and Rose Lawson for their careful proofreading and help with adapting the article to the correct format and style-sheet, and Isabell Dinies for checking the quotations and references. We are also very grateful to Elizabeth Kovach for pointing out a number of important publications (Badiou 2003; Hogan 2009) which we might otherwise have overlooked. Unfortunately, we only came across Adam Hodges’s (2011) and Richard Jackson’s (2005) excellent books and Michael Frank’s (2014) faculty dissertation after completing the first version of the paper upon which this article is based, but we have tried to make amends by incorporating quotations from, and references to, their many valuable insights while revising the text for publication (in the case of Jackson’s and Frank’s pioneering studies only in the final stages of copy-editing), though not as many as their incisive analyses of Bush’s presidential speeches and the language used in “writing the war on terrorism” (Jackson 2005) would have deserved.

“weapons of mass destruction”. As we will try to show in this article, though the weapons of mass destruction which Bush and Colin Powell claimed to be in Iraq’s possession were never found, the stories generated by the Bush administration turned out to be not just propagandistic mass deception, but weapons of mass destruction themselves in that they provided the rhetorical justification for wars in which many soldiers and civilians lost their lives.

By looking more closely at the narrative and rhetorical strategies deployed by the political storytellers in office, we hope to shed some light on the forms and functions of narrative world- and conflict-making, demonstrating that narrative can indeed be, as Wolfgang Müller-Funk recently put it so aptly, “a very powerful – maybe even the most powerful – symbolic ‘weapon’ in structuring a world that is always, in the end, a cultural one” (Müller-Funk 2012: viii). Numerous accounts and detailed analyses of what has variously been dubbed “America’s War on Terrorism” (Christie 2008; Mahajan 2002), “America’s War on Terror” (Croft 2006; Ralph 2013), “The Ideological War on Terror” (Aldis and Herd 2007), “Bush’s War” (Kuypers 2006), or simply (with or without scare quotes or a question mark) “the War on Terror” (Birkenstein 2010; Brady 2012; Evangelista 2008; Hill 2009; Hodges 2011; Holloway 2008; Jarvis 2009; Naftali 2010; Roger 2013; Schopp and Hill 2009; Shafir 2013; Wade 2010; Welsh 2006) or the “War on Terrorism” (Jackson 2005), to give but a random selection of preferred designations that have also been used as titles of seminal books on the topic at hand, have already been published, mainly from the vantage point of media studies, focusing on media bias (Kuypers 2006) or media technologies (cf. Roger 2013), and the political sciences (for example, MacDonald et al. 2012). Focussing less on the official political discourse itself, Croft (2006) provides an excellent account of the roles that U.S. media and popular culture played in the construction, or “co-production”, and dissemination of the powerful discourse that has come to be known under the shorthand of “America’s War on Terror”. By contrast, there have been only few attempts to explore the rhetoric, metaphors, and narratives that served to legitimate the so-called “war against terror” from the point of view of literary and cultural studies, and even fewer attempts at exploring the central role that metaphors and narrative strategies have played in what Adam Hodges, in arguably the best book on the topic at hand, aptly calls “the construction of the textual product that is the Bush ‘War on Terror’ Narrative” (Hodges 2011: 10). There are, however, two excellent exceptions to this rule, namely Hodges’s *The “War on Terror” Narrative: Discourse and Intertextuality in the Construction and Contestation of Sociopolitical Reality* and Patrick Colm Hogan’s *Understanding Nationalism: On Narrative, Cognitive Science, and Identity*, which features an insightful chapter on “Heroic Nationalism and the Necessity of War from King David to George W. Bush” (Hogan 2009, Ch. 5). Hodges provides

a perspicacious examination of “the relationship between microlevel discursive action – in the form of presidential speeches and public discourse – and the shared cultural understanding bound up in the macrolevel Bush ‘War on Terror’ Narrative” (Hodges 2011: 7–8). While the conceptual and methodological framework that Hodges develops is mainly informed by the approach known as “Critical Discourse Analysis” (Hodges 2011: 7) and the terminology of intertextuality, Hogan draws on the insights and tools of cognitive science in order to shed new light on the “Techniques of Nationalization” (Hogan 2009: 66) and the “Narrative Structure of Patriotism” (Hogan 2009: 167).

Attempting to complement these seminal monographs, the focus of this article will be on a metaphorological and narratological analysis of selected speeches of former President George W. Bush because they can illuminate the central question raised by the editors of this volume, i.e. the question of the relation between narratives and their performative quality, on the one hand, and cultural conflicts on the other. We will go even further and argue that Bush's speeches provide a paradigmatic example of the ways in which narrative constructions and processes can be endowed with performative power, actively moulding, constructing or even creating the cultural and ideological conflicts that they purport merely to reflect or represent. Instead of merely referring to actual conflicts, metaphors and narratives arguably play an active role in generating them and in producing a hegemonic discourse that serves to interpret events in a propagandistic way and to shape a shared cultural understanding of the world as projected in the official narrative. Although Bush's speeches do not exactly make for very entertaining or edifying reading, they arguably provide an excellent case study in the role of narratives as ways of conflict- and worldmaking.

But let us first turn our attention to one of the great contemporary American storytellers, Paul Auster, and briefly look at the scenario that he conjured up in his sombre post 9/11-novel *Man in the Dark* (2008). When sleep refuses to come to the eponymous seventy-two-year-old August Brill, the narrator-protagonist tells himself stories in order to try to keep at bay recent traumatic events, including his wife's death, the murder of his granddaughter's boyfriend as well as 9/11 and the war in Iraq. In the embedded narrative that he is inventing while insomniac, the protagonist finds himself in an alternative world, an America not fighting a war in Iraq, but rather an America ravaged by a terrible civil war that has been going on for four years. Very mysterious men tell him that he has been picked “for the big job” (Auster 2008: 9) of becoming an assassin, the assignment being to kill someone who is said to deserve to die because he purportedly invented a war by writing down a particular story. The dialogue between the mysterious men and the highly reluctant assassin-to-be deserves to be quoted at some length because of the light it can shed on the topic at hand:

‘Because he owns the war. He invented it, and everything that happens or is about to happen is in his head. Eliminate that head, and the war stops. It’s that simple.’

‘Simple? You make him sound like God.’

‘Not God, Corporal, just a man. He sits in a room all day writing it down, and whatever he writes comes true.’ (Auster 2008: 10)

The implications of this peculiar dialogue, which, in the context of a novel, is of course highly self-referential and metafictional, are that it is stories that can invent conflicts, crises, and even wars, and what is needed is a different kind of story in order to change the course of events, end a war, and turn a narrative of conflict and crisis into quite another kind of narrative: “The story would end, and the war would be over” (Auster 2008: 72). Although the political undertones and implicit references to the actual crises that occurred in the aftermath of 9/11 are already quite clear at this stage, the references to the war in Iraq, which is mentioned in this dialogue (Auster 2008: 8), become even more explicit in the course of the novel when, showing that “this America, this other America, which hasn’t lived through September 11 or the war in Iraq, nonetheless has strong historical links to the America he knows” (Auster 2008: 50; see 62–63 for other reality-references). Though the inconclusive dialogues and reflections about “multiple realities and multiple worlds” (Auster 2008: 90) that we find in Auster’s novel may confuse many readers almost as much as the characters, these metafictional devices can throw additional light on the ways in which stories can actually generate conflicts and events, reconfigure spaces, and even lead to wars.

As both Auster’s novel and the stories disseminated by the Bush administration serve to show, narratives can indeed be one of the most powerful ways of conflict- and worldmaking as well as weapons of mass deception designed to foster crises and provide the mental preparation for a war. The main reason for this is that storytelling not only generates possible worlds, narratives also exert performative power. In her groundbreaking monograph *Shakespeare’s Storytellers*, Barbara Hardy pins it down with great precision in talking about “the theatrical power of narrative, its capacity to change events, its control and compounding, its passion and its immediacy” (Hardy 1997: 60). This performative force or even theatrical power of storytelling stems from the reality-constituting, identity-, sense-, space- and indeed worldmaking qualities that characterize narration and narratives.

What do these random examples tell us about ways of narrative conflict- and worldmaking and the performative power of narratives, then? Perceiving imaginary weapons of mass destruction seems to consist in producing not only weapons in the mind, but also stories that can change reality, having far-reaching con-

sequences for a potentially great number of people. Conjuring up an epic conflict or a crisis in Iraq, or any other country, for that matter, can be very much a matter of inventing it: once the diagnosis that there “is” a conflict or a crisis comes to be regarded as a political or economic reality, culturally available crises-plots are activated, assigning not only roles to the participants involved, but also a particular meaning to the events thus designated (see A. Nünning 2010, 2012). The activity of narrative conflict- or worldmaking, including the choice of a particular kind of metaphor and story, is not so much a matter of recognizing actual crises or historical changes “out there”, but of imposing order and meaning on a sequence of happenings that could also be emplotted in quite different ways. All of this should give anyone interested in narrative reason to pause, and to take a fresh look at the ways in which events, conflicts and stories are created or made through the complex processes involved in narrative worldmaking.

Although the stories and narratives disseminated by George W. Bush in his remarkably repetitive presidential speeches are neither as complex nor as theatrical as those told by either Auster's narrators or Shakespeare's characters, they certainly demonstrate the performative power of narrative and its unsurpassed capacity to change events and generate ideological conflicts. With regard to the topic of this volume, i.e. the role of narrative constructions and processes in cultural conflicts, Auster's novel and the stories generated by the Bush administration raise a number of interesting research questions. What are the main narratological and rhetorical features of narratives of conflict and crisis like the mini-narration encapsulated in the ominous phrase “weapons of mass destruction”? What are the cultural and political functions that such narratives of crisis can fulfil? What can the study of literature and culture contribute to a better understanding of narratives of conflict and crisis and the cultural work that they do? The main goal of this article is not only to address these questions, but also to make a modest attempt to come up with some preliminary answers.

By drawing on recent work on the cultural life of crises and catastrophes (Meiner and Veel 2012) as well as on concepts from metaphorology and narratology (including, among others, event, configuration, emplotment, cultural plots and perspectives), this article pursues three main aims: first, to analyze George W. Bush's speeches as a paradigm example of narratives of conflict and crisis and to try to illuminate the main metaphorological, narratological and rhetorical features of these stories in particular and narratives of conflict in general. Second, it tries to tease out, and comment on, some of the processes and discourse strategies that go into Bush's narrative conflict- and worldmaking. Third, the essay attempts to explore the cultural and political functions that the story of weapons of mass destruction and other narratives of crisis are designed to serve. Though we cannot provide a comprehensive account of Bush's rhetoric

and “politics of fear” (Gore 2008, Ch. 1), we will attempt to demonstrate that a narratological analysis of Bush’s speeches can yield valuable insights into the topic at hand, i.e. the many ways in which narratives do not merely reflect or represent cultural, political or military conflicts, but rather serve to create or generate conflicts, crises, events, wars and even worlds. In order to do so, let us begin by examining some narrative ways of worldmaking and the performative power of narrative in greater detail.

2 “Weapons of Mass Destruction” as a metaphorical concept and mini-narration: main features of narratives of conflict and crisis from a conceptual and metaphorological point of view

Anyone who wants to get to grips with such a rich topic as the relation between narratives and conflicts might as well begin with the seemingly simple question of what conflicts and crises actually are. One of the many possible answers would be to argue that conflicts and crises are by no means always simply givens that exist ‘out there’, i.e. in the real world. On the contrary, they can rather be conceptualized as resulting from signifying practices, from the use of symbolic forms, indeed from particular cultural ‘ways of worldmaking’, to adopt Nelson Goodman’s felicitous term: when people designate a particular kind of occurrence, constellation or event as a ‘conflict’ or a “crisis” they typically resort to metaphors (see Nünning 2009, 2012). Putting it like this, however, means that we are back to square one, though the question now is ‘what is a metaphor?’

In the preface to his seminal encyclopaedia of philosophical metaphors, the editor Ralf Konersmann answers the question of what metaphors are by providing a somewhat unusual definition: “Metaphors are narratives that mask themselves as a single word” (Konersmann 2008: 17; our translation). The subtitle (“Figuratives Wissen”) of the preface, which is actually a highly interesting essay on the nature and functions of metaphors, sheds light on another key aspect of metaphors: the phrase “figurative knowledge” emphasizes that metaphors do indeed generate knowledge, albeit of a figurative kind. Konersmann is, of course, neither the only nor the first scholar to draw attention to the fact that metaphors and metaphorical concepts can be conceived of as condensed narratives (Koschorke 2012: 274) and that they produce a special kind of knowledge. Philip Eubanks, for instance, has argued that metaphors project “mininarrations” (Eubanks

1999: 437), and other theorists have also acknowledged the cognitive and knowledge-creating potential of metaphors.

Understanding metaphors and concepts as condensed narratives provides a heuristically fruitful starting point for coming to terms with the topic at hand, i. e. the question of the relation between narrative constructions and processes, and their performative power with particular regard to cultural conflicts. If there is one rhetorical leitmotif that runs through most of the presidential speeches given by George W. Bush, it is arguably the ominous phrase of “weapons of mass destruction”, which provides a case in point for how metaphorical concepts can project condensed narratives or mini-narrations. The same holds true for the somewhat peculiar phrase “war on terror”, with which Bush designated the rhetorical and military campaign which he himself launched and started as a result of the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001.

Although one might assume that the phrase “weapons of mass destruction” only entered the somewhat limited and highly repetitive presidential rhetoric and vocabulary after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it is worth noting that the former American President used it right from the very beginning of his first term. Without providing any kind of context, coherence, exposition or at least pretext, Bush suddenly announced in his inaugural address: “We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors” (Bush 2001a: 3). Although this threatening remark was neither motivated historically at that stage nor rhetorically within the texture of the inaugural address, with the benefit of hindsight it is fairly obvious that this sentence is not just the first official reference to Bush’s pet project that would soon turn into an obsession, but also something like the narrative kernel from which the main features of the stories that the Bush administration preferred to tell after 9/11 can be deduced or derived.

The phrase so obsessively used by President Bush, “weapons of mass destruction”, is a case in point in that it can be conceived of as both a highly charged metaphorical concept and a condensed ideological narrative of conflict. Though this metaphor is a narrative that masks itself as four words, it entails a narrative kernel with at least two antagonistic roles and a potential plot. Like other metaphors and concepts, the term “weapons of mass destruction” contains a particular narrative that is entailed in the very logic of the term and that is virtually waiting to be spelled out (Koschorke 2012: 270).

This is exactly what Bush began to do in the months after his inauguration, for example in his Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress in Washington in February 2001. Delineating his idiosyncratic views on how “to extend and secure our present peace by promoting a distinctly American internationalism” as well as “our values” (Bush 2001b: 32), Bush suddenly turned the audi-

ence's attention to what he called the need for "a clear strategy to confront the threats of the twenty-first century – threats that are more widespread and less certain. They range from terrorists who threaten with bombs to tyrants in rogue nations intent upon developing weapons of mass destruction" (32). Bush thus began to forge a link between terrorists, threats, and tyrants as early as seven months before the attacks of 9/11.

As these quotations already indicate, "weapons of mass destruction" can be seen as an abbreviated or condensed narrative of conflict in that weapons are always developed and owned by some party in order to be potentially deployed against an enemy. Using the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" is thus a way of introducing or creating a conflict because the very phrase implies or defines a line of conflict and a potential battle-line between friends and foes. It also served to provide the central motivation and legitimation of the future course of events, especially of Bush's "war on terror", in that it stands to reason that any nation would be well-advised to defend itself against a yet to be defined enemy who might possess such weapons, thus naturalizing and seemingly justifying an aggressive policy that would eventually lead to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The recurrent reference to "weapons of mass destruction" is a way of launching a condensed narrative of conflict that can be further elaborated or fleshed out in a number of ways. The close link between Bush's obsession with the notion of "weapons of mass destruction" and the narrative of conflict that it encapsulates can be seen in the way in which it generates binary oppositions, conveniently dividing up the world in us vs. them, i.e. the American nation and its enemies, also known as the "evil men" (Bush 2001g: 93), to quote another one of Bush's pet phrases. Although there is a host of examples of his use of binarisms in just about every speech that Bush gave during the eight years of his presidency, his fateful penchant for manichaeisms like "lawful change" vs. "chaotic violence" (93) and either-or-alternatives was probably never more bluntly expressed than in the famous, or rather infamous, speech he gave nine days after 9/11: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." (Bush 2001e: 69) The first two sentences illustrate how the metaphorical concept of "weapons of mass destruction" provides the cognitive and affective rationale for dividing up the world into two antagonistic camps: us vs. the terrorists. Jackson (2005, Ch. 3) has meticulously shown how the discourse of counter-terrorism constructed the enemy in terms of evil, alien, dehumanised and demonised terrorists, pitting them against the equally ideological construct of innocent and heroic "good Americans". The often-quoted second sentence is not just an infamous example of Bush's penchant for bi-

narisms and for defining the protagonists of the unfolding narrative as “us” and, or rather, versus, “them” (Hodges 2011: 47), it also serves to show “that a rigidly binary model is so conducive to displays of intolerance and destructive social emotions. Expressed with classic completeness in the formula ‘If you’re not with us, you’re against us,’ this model historically comes to the surface whenever creativity is pushed aside by destruction” (Lotman 2013: 79–80). With the benefit of hindsight, Lotman’s observation made many years before 9/11 assumes an uncanny prophetic quality in that Bush’s binaristic thinking and rhetoric did indeed forestall creativity and fostered destruction on many levels.

The third sentence in the quotation above provides the kernel of the new national security strategy that has come to be known as “Bush Doctrine” and that has since served to map out and expand the narrative of conflict entailed in the metaphorical concept of “weapons of mass destruction”. Already in his Address to the Nation on the September 11 attacks, Bush announced: “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.” (Bush 2001c: 58) In his later speeches, Bush never left anyone in any doubt that he believed that the United States had the right to secure itself against any countries that harbour, shelter, or support terrorist groups, giving aid to them or even supplying them with weapons of mass destruction, as his remarks about the Taliban in his Address to the United Nations General Assembly in November 2001, for example, illustrate (see Bush 2001f: 86, 88).

Although the condensed narrative of conflict implied in the concept of “weapons of mass destruction” provided a highly convenient way of ideological worldmaking that divided up the nations and people into two groups, the definitions of who was to be regarded as friend or foe, good or evil, belonging to “us” or to the “terrorists”, turned out to be somewhat arbitrary and subject to historical change. Looking at Bush’s speeches in chronological order, one cannot fail to notice how the slot of the enemy, or enemies, is filled differently in the months and years following 9/11. While the former American President tended to be pretty vague about this matter in his early speeches, using general phrases like “those who are behind these evil acts” (Bush 2001c: 58), “our enemies” (Bush 2001d: 61; Bush 2002a: 110) or “enemies of human freedom” (Bush 2001d: 61), he began to be more specific in the weeks and months after 9/11, mentioning both the names of “al Qaeda” (Bush 2001e: 66, 68) and Osama bin Laden (cf. Bush 2001e: 67), while also repeatedly referring to loosely or ill-defined entities like “the terrorists” (Bush 2001f: 84), “a few evil men” (Bush 2001g: 93), “a few dozen evil and deluded men” (Bush 2002c: 127) or “the enemies of the twenty-first century” (Bush 2001g: 98). It was only when, largely for political and strategic reasons, Bush needed a new selling point, that he began to zoom in onto

Saddam Hussein and Iraq, claiming that the United States was “acting to end the state sponsorship of terror” (Bush 2001g: 93).

In the attempts of the Bush administration to fix a designated enemy, the words “terrorists”, “terror” and “terrorism” fulfilled several crucial functions. In his brilliant and meticulous philosophical examination of the implications and functions of “the name ‘terrorism’”, the French philosopher Alain Badiou argues that “the word ‘terrorism’ has a triple function” (Badiou 2003: 142): It not only determines “the subject who is targeted by the terrorist act” (Badiou 2003: 142), and the subject who commits the act, one might add, and “supports predicates” (Badiou 2003: 143), it also “determines a sequence – the entire current sequence is from now on considered as ‘the war against terrorism’” (Badiou 2003: 143). Identifying, designating and naming the purported enemy is thus anything but an innocent or self-evident act in that these ways of worldmaking exert performative power. As Juri Lotman aptly observes in a different context, “the peculiar nature of cultural processes manifests itself when different phenomena are given names and acquire their own reality. This reality in turn invades the original object and transforms it into its own image and likeness” (Lotman 2013: 70). This is exactly what happened in the wake of 9/11 when the former American President’s speeches conjured up a particular narrative of conflict, which not just determined the future sequence of events, but also invaded reality as well as Iraq.

In addition to launching a narrative of conflict, the metaphorical concept of “weapons of mass destruction” can also be seen as a condensed narrative of crisis in that it already emphasizes what Bush himself called a “sense of urgency” (Bush 2001g: 95) and a necessity to act before it might be too late. Time and again Bush conjured up the great potential dangers that could result from regimes that possessed weapons of mass destruction and that might pass them on to terrorists, thereby trying to bolster up his claim that “the threat is imminent” (Bush 2003a: 163). The performative power of narratives is underscored by the fact that when Bush himself began using the phrase “our nation in crisis” (Bush 2002a: 111) in his State of the Union Address in January 2002, he did not present an objective diagnosis of the actual state of affairs, but rather stirred up an atmosphere of anxiety and fear associated with the notion of crisis. In the infamous speech he gave in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, Bush not only outlined what he called “a great threat to peace”, he also expressed “America’s determination to lead the world in confronting that threat” (Bush 2002f). What is particularly interesting in the present context is the way in which Bush attempted to explain and justify what he called “the urgency of action” by delineating in great detail not only the great dangers and threats that, according to him, come “from Iraq”, also referred to as “the threat gathering against us”, but

also the crisis or moment of decision brought about by this threat. One section of the Cincinnati speech deserves to be quoted at some length because it illustrates the amazing ways in which Bush entirely dispenses with factual evidence, logic, and reason, resorting instead to verbal repetition, counter-factual claims, association and the emotional implications of the crisis scenario that he himself generated through his narrative of conflict and crisis and that also served to underscore the sense of urgency that Bush was so anxious to create:

Some citizens wonder, after 11 years of living with this problem [i.e. the threat posed by the regime in Iraq], why do we need to confront it now? And there's a reason. We've experienced the horror of September the 11th. We have seen that those who hate America are willing to crash airplanes into buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies would be no less willing, in fact, they would be eager to use biological or chemical, or a nuclear weapon.

Knowing these realities, America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud. (Bush 2002f)

This daunting and devious narrative scenario serves to show once more that the metaphorical concepts of “weapons of mass destruction” and “crisis” evoke a number of culturally determined connotations, associations and affective implications, the main ones being, besides disease, illness, and a search for remedies, danger and threat, anxiety and alarm, fear and concern (Nünning 2012: 74). Already two months after 9/11, for instance, Bush claimed that “terrorists are searching for weapons of mass destruction, the tools to turn their hatred into holocaust” (Bush 2001f: 84), thus creating an atmosphere of anxiety and fear by linking the threat of terrorism up with the atrocities committed by the Nazis. In his highly manipulative and propagandistic 2002 speech in Cincinnati, Bush evoked the devastating potential consequences that Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction might have for the American people, not even refraining from encouraging his compatriots to imagine a terrorist attack with nuclear weapons and the apocalyptic and catastrophic scenarios that might result from the use of such weapons of mass destruction. The rationale behind the Bush administration's preference for focussing on what Al Gore has aptly called “convenient untruths” (Gore 2008: 104) is perfectly obvious with the benefit of hindsight, since the idea “that a ‘mushroom cloud’ might threaten American cities unless we invaded Iraq to prevent Saddam Hussein from giving a nuclear weapon to the same terrorist group that had already attacked us with deadly consequences” was part of a “highly orchestrated” campaign, as Gore (2008: 104–105) poignantly observed. Bush's frequent use of counterfactual statements or “convenient untruths” also confirm one of the observations made by Martin Amis in a candid review of Bob Woodward's book *State of Denial: Bush at*

War, Part III (Woodward 2006): “Students of history are aware that illusion – or, if you prefer, psychopathology – plays a part in shaping world events” (Amis 2008: 151).

These brief quotes from Bush’s “mushroom cloud” speech as well as many other examples serve to show that both the choice of his pet phrases and the condensed narratives of conflict and crisis that they entail and generate are anything but neutral representations of the actual state of affairs. On the contrary, these highly suggestive rhetorical and narrative choices are affectively and ideologically charged strategies that imply that a critical moment or even a turning-point has been reached, that decisions have to be made and that what is needed is immediate action to ward off the dangers and threats associated with the ill-defined enemies and their purported weapons of mass destruction. It may be noted in passing that the identification, or rather diagnosis, of a crisis, however, very much depends on the perspective of the observer or narrator, but being the incarnation of the apodictic politician, Bush always suggested that his way of diagnosing and delineating the state of affairs was the only possible interpretation.

Once a certain situation is metaphorically characterized as a crisis, this kind of definition or diagnosis of a situation automatically implies and immediately activates certain affective implications, cognitive frames and narrative schemata (Nünning 2009, 2012). To start with, “crisis” implies great danger, a threat and general insecurity. In the case of a crisis, the climax and turning point of a dangerous development is reached, or imminent. What Bush managed to achieve with the condensed narratives in his speeches is nicely summed up in the English saying, “We must bring things to a crisis”: by conjuring up a crisis through narrative conflict- and worldmaking, he managed to blur the boundary between “illusory threats and legitimate ones” (Gore 2008: 25), to convince more than seventy percent of all Americans that Saddam Hussein was responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Gore 2008: 26), and to suggest that a moment of decision-making had been reached.

Who and what is sought after in a situation designated as a “crisis” is apparent according to the respective culturally available crisis plots because, when talking about a “crisis”, specific actions and developmental patterns are invoked at the same time. Depending on the social realm of action, there are different crises, but the fundamental scheme remains the same, both from a narratological perspective and from the point of view of metaphor theory: what is in demand in a crisis are competent and determined crisis managers, crisis management plans, and purposeful actions. Speaking about a crisis always evokes conventionalized schemata and plot patterns which sketch out the future course of action, while also reinterpreting the recent past in a particular way. For this reason, a crisis diagnosis is always already more than a specific definition of the respective sit-

uation and, in retrospect, often appears as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as we will try to show in the next section, which is devoted to a narratological analysis of Bush's rhetorical conflict- and worldmaking.

3 “Weapons of Mass Destruction”, “Axis of Evil” and other narratives of conflict and crisis: main features from a narratological and rhetorical point of view

First of all, Bush's speeches, especially those that he gave in the aftermath of 9/11, show that labelling a dangerous situation as a “crisis” or as a “war” is anything but a neutral way of representing what actually happened. On the contrary, the choice of a particular concept or metaphor that serves as a designation for the event(s) in question not only provides a specific definition of the respective situations, determining what kind of event it purportedly is, but also evokes certain narrative schemata, development patterns, and plots. On the one hand, these schemata interpret the events that have preceded the current situation in a highly specific way. Thus, designating dangerous and ominous developments as a “crisis” or a “war” not only implies that something has happened before, it is also a way of interpreting the past in a very particular way. On the other hand, describing a situation as a “crisis” or a “war” is also always a diagnosis from which certain therapeutic perspectives and action scenarios for future developments, can be derived. As soon as we speak about “crisis”, a course-of-disease scheme is invoked: “There is an identifiable beginning which is to be understood as a cause and which starts a development which leads to a reasonable ending; disturbances of this structure provoke an extensive awareness of danger” (Bullivant and Spies 2001: 17; our translation).

Consequently, Bush's speaking about or diagnosing an alleged crisis in the aftermath of 9/11 includes not only defining certain action-roles but, as a result of the systematic logic of these metaphorical concepts, also linking past, present and future in a comprehensive plot. With regard to the past, the diagnosis of a crisis implies a negative, more or less teleological development towards a crisis. By contrast, the present in a crisis-diagnosis is perceived and interpreted as a grave danger, a decisive moment and a realm of possibilities. With regard to the possible future developments this results in a spectrum of different potential scenarios, which range from the extremes of death and destruction on the one hand to recovery and the overcoming of the crisis on the other. Before we take

a closer look at how George W. Bush managed to project a narrative of conflict and crisis, including a storyworld in which antagonistic forces, ideologies and values are pitted against each other, let us briefly outline what is involved in narrative worldmaking (A. Nünning 2010; V. Nünning 2010).

From a narratological point of view, narrative worldmaking can be examined on a number of different axes: the paradigmatic axis of selection, the syntagmatic axis of combination, and the discursive axis of narrative mediation and perspectivization. Firstly, the selection and emphasis of the chosen events and plot elements leads to a “hierarchization of meanings” (Gutenberg 2000: 118) on the paradigmatic axis, representing one of the procedures of “weighting” (Goodman 1992 [1978]: 10). Secondly, the methods of plot configuration on the syntagmatic axis, i.e. the arrangement, combination, and causal and logical interconnections, are crucial for the processes of narrative meaning- and world-making. Depending on the selected principles of the interrelatedness of plot elements and the favoured macro-structural configuration-types, an occurrence can be transformed into a variety of different stories and narratives. Thirdly, the discursive axis plays a pivotal role in narrative worldmaking because the explicit and implicit constitution of meaning also greatly depends on the narrative mediation and perspectivization. Perspective or point of view deserves special attention as yet another act or procedure of narrative worldmaking in its own right, because it influences all of the processes involved in the making of events, plots, and storyworlds mentioned above.

To begin with, narratives of conflict and crises, just like other stories and types of events, are the result of selection, abstraction and distinction (A. Nünning 2010). Tying in with the colloquial meaning of “significant occurrence” or “significant event”, narratology first of all distinguishes between the chaotic and the contingent totality of all occurrences and the event as a particularly relevant and significant part thereof (Stierle 1975). Both the emphatic event-concept of narratology (Schmid 2005: 20–26) and the metaphoric concept of crisis are not concerned with everyday occurrences, but with incidents or changes which are collectively thought to be of great relevance and importance. Thus, the configuration of the kind of significant events that is commonly designated as a crisis or a conflict is based on singling them out from the continuous flow of occurrences and qualifying them as something special or surprising; thus, any conflict and crisis is based on construction, selection, and distinction by an observer.

The narratives conjured up by the Bush administration provide an interesting case in point in that they serve to illustrate how certain occurrences are first of all singled out and then turned into key events and into a story of a particular kind, i.e. a narrative of conflict or crisis. Narrative worldmaking typically begins with selection, which also involves “deletion” and “supplementation” (cf. Good-

man 1992 [1978]). As we have already seen, the focus of many of Bush's speeches on 9/11 and the metaphorical concept of weapons of mass destruction is a largely arbitrary way of selecting a particular narrative kernel that implies an antagonism and that lends itself well to elaborating narratives of conflict and crisis.

Moreover, a certain temporal section must be singled out and – not least through such ways of worldmaking as selection, ordering, and weighting – be given meaning, and it is thereby already interpreted in a contingent, but very particular way. Accordingly, the respective story told is the result of a selection of certain moments and qualities from the happening, whose amorphous endlessness is thereby transferred into a limited, structured form which is enriched with meaning. The story contains the selected moments of action in their chronological order, however, without already transferring them into a plot. The latter does not happen until the story is transformed into a particular narrative, or plot, which is the result of arrangement and shaping that occurs on the syntagmatic axis of combination and emplotment.

As far as the processes that go into narrative worldmaking are concerned, it is not just the selection of certain things that happen and the deletion of others, which is important for the analysis of how events, stories, and worlds are constructed, but the narrative arrangement of the selected material into certain narratives plays an equally important role. The significance of what Goodman calls “ordering” (Goodman 1992 [1978]: 12), i. e. the structuring of events through narrative procedures, lies in the fact that processes of configuration must first establish a relationship between the selected elements to turn them into an orderly, meaningful whole: “First, the configurational arrangement transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole [...]. Second, the configuration of the plot imposes the ‘sense of an ending’ [...] on the indefinite succession of incidents” (Ricoeur 1984: 65). In Bush's speeches, the configuration of the selected events, persons, and situations, which consists in establishing connections, interrelations, and patterns between them, turns them into a particular kind of story, namely a narrative of conflict, generating a particular storyworld.

As far as the emplotment strategies are concerned, it is first of all interesting to note how Bush marks the beginning of what he relentlessly referred to as the “war on terror”. Reading his speeches, one is reminded of the first sentence of Ian McEwan's mesmerizing novel *Enduring Love* (1997), in which the seemingly unreliable narrator apodictically observes: “The beginning is simple to mark” (McEwan 1998 [1997]: 1). In all of his speeches relating to what Bush kept calling “the war on terror”, the former American President also pretends that the beginning of the ideological conflict is simple to mark: it was the morning of September 11, conjured up by Bush time and again, when terrorists attacked America by turning airplanes into missiles and flying them into the World Trade Center as

well as the Pentagon. In many of his speeches Bush emphasized this by using the terrorist attacks as his narrative point of departure or by referring to the temporal distance between 9/11 and the respective present, using such phrases as “September 11th, 2001 – three months and a long time ago” (Bush 2001g: 92), “In the last seven months” (Bush 2002b: 123), “Since September the 11th” (Bush 2002b: 123), or “We’re now approaching the fifth anniversary of the day this war reached our shores” (Bush 2006: 380). Leaving aside for the moment that the last quote is one of the countless examples of counterfactual statements to be found in Bush’s speeches, it is interesting to note that Bush not only dated everything back to “the horror of that morning” (Bush 2006: 380), but that he also insisted that “the nightmare of September the 11th, 2001” (Bush 2006: 381) constituted the outbreak of “this war” (Bush 2006: 380). According to the official narrative disseminated by the Bush administration, 9/11 constituted the “precipitating event” (Hodges 2011: 43, 49) that served as “the starting point” (Hodges 2011: 43) of the story which Bush kept telling his compatriots and which became “a crucial reference point in the Narrative. It acts as the pivot around which the Narrative is organized” (Hodges 2011: 43). Hammering home the same propagandistic message time and again, Bush kept reminding his audience where the story that he was forging and telling began: “As we fight this war, we will remember where it began – here, in our country”, Bush (2003a: 157) maintained in January 2003.

What Bush failed to acknowledge, or even accept as a possibility, however, is that the beginning of any narrative is always dependent on both more or less random decisions and one’s point of view, and is thus anything but simple to mark. What is more, even if we accepted the premise that 9/11 marked the beginning of what was turned into a military and ideological conflict through the President’s ways of narrative worldmaking, both the nature of what actually happened on 9/11 and the appropriate way to designate the ensuing reactions and events would still have to be defined and negotiated.

In the first couple of days and weeks after the day usually referred to as 9/11, the American President, just like many commentators around the world, was somewhat less sure as to what kind of event the occurrences of 11 September 2001 actually constituted. While he began by referring to what had happened on that fateful day quite accurately as “terrorist attacks” (Bush 2001c: 57), the American President and his advisors soon decided to designate the terrorist attacks as a “war”, in fact using the phrase “war against terrorism” (Bush 2001c: 58) already on the eve of what has come to be known as 9/11. Only three days after 9/11, in the speech that Bush gave on what was christened the “National Day of Prayer and Remembrance”, Bush introduced the ominous term that would serve to prefigure the future course of events: “War has been waged

against us by stealth and deceit and danger” (Bush 2001d: 59). As we all know with the benefit of hindsight, this has turned out to be a fateful choice that had far-reaching consequences because of the legal and ideological implications as well as the narrative schemata that it entailed. Bush already began to sketch out the rough plot of the narrative of conflict and revenge that he generated and fostered with his rhetoric and storytelling in the same speech:

Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance to history. But our responsibility is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.

War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and danger. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing. (Bush 2001d: 59–60)

As these sweeping statements show, Bush assumed the role of an omniscient narrator who defines the beginning and ending of the story that he is in the process of making up, claiming the sole right to explain and interpret the events that his idiosyncratic narrative of conflict purports merely to reflect, but actually serves to generate. Almost ten days after 9/11, the former American President had officially reframed the terrorist attacks in terms of war: “On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country” (Bush 2001e: 66). Bush also inserted this “act of war” into history by referring to “wars on foreign soil” and “one Sunday in 1941”, i. e. Pearl Harbor. As Jackson (2005) and Hodges (2011, Ch. 2) have shown, the choice of the concept of war as the official frame of reference and symbolic register had far-reaching consequences, both for the further elaboration of Bush’s narratives and for then moulding the actual future course of events and developments. In his perspicacious analysis of the implications of the symbolic register of war, Alain Badiou (2003: 154) even goes so far as to argue that “the American imperial power, in the formal representation it makes of itself, has war as the privileged, indeed unique, form of the attestation of its existence”. The choice of the symbolic register of war, rather than that of crime and policing (Hodges 2011: 25), or the complex framework of international law (Duffy 2005), for that matter, not only fostered national unity and American collective identity, it also served to provide some kind of pseudo-legitimation for attacking whatever country or adversary that was designated as a terrorist and an enemy of the United States. It may be noted in passing that Bush was at least wise enough to change a significant detail of the story that he kept telling his compatriots when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly on November 10, 2001, suddenly claiming that the terrorist attacks actually constituted “attacks on the world” (Bush 2001f: 85) rather than just “an act of war against our country”.

In his double role as President and omniscient storyteller, Bush also claimed the right to decide what the appropriate reaction to the “war” that the terrorist attacks allegedly constituted was, eventually settling on the curious phrase “war on terror”. The fateful choice of the metaphor and symbolic register of war not only entailed framing the events in military terms, it also served to provide a pseudo-legitimation for claiming that a military response was called for (Hodges 2011: 159). In his brilliant examination of the generic and ideological implications of the war metaphor, Adam Hodges (2011: 19) has convincingly shown that the “generic framework of a nation at war provides a highly recognizable template for narrating the ‘war on terror’” as well as “a ready-made cultural framework to aid in both telling and interpreting the Narrative” (Hodges 2011: 20). After having identified “a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them” (Bush 2001e: 68) as “[o]ur enemy”, Bush roughly delineated his notion of the plot that the “war on terror” narrative would have, already ominously indicating that it might well be a long affair without closure: “Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” In the same speech, Bush also told the Congress and the American nation that “[t]his war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago”: “Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen” (Bush 2001e: 69). Though Bush acknowledged that this was an “unconventional conflict” (Bush 2001g: 94), it was his choice of the metaphorical mini-narrative of “war on terror” that served to determine what kind of conflict and story it would be.

By the time Bush addressed the United Nations General Assembly in November 2001, he used the terms “this war on terror” (or “war against terror”) and “this new conflict” (Bush 2001f: 87) interchangeably, thus establishing his narrative of conflict and defining the nature of the conflict as a war. As Jarvis (2009: 3) has shown, first there was a “war against terrorism” and then there was a “discourse shift in its framing. That shift [...] related to the linguistic contraction of terrorism to terror.” One does not have to be a novelist to realize that the very peculiar term “war on terror” is actually an infelicitous misnomer at best, or even, like the phrase “war on terrorism”, a “conceptual contradiction” or “a contradiction in terms” (Jackson 2005: 123, 147), but most people will probably be inclined to agree with one of the main characters in Graham Swift’s recent novel *Wish You Were Here* (2011), who not only ponders about this phrase, but also about the story that it projects: “There was a war going on, that was the story. [...] A war on terror, that was the general story. Jack knew that terror was a thing you felt inside, so what could a war on terror be, in the end but a war against yourself?” (Swift 2011: 60) The protagonist Jack also realizes that such a phrase is anything but an innocent choice and that it does make a big

difference what a conflict, event, or war is called because the choice of the phrase can have far-reaching implications: “What they meant, of course, was a war against *terrorism*. But then it became a matter of who and where, of geography” (Swift 2011: 61). By contrast, waging a war on terror, i.e. against a word or a feeling, is a whole lot more ambiguous and ominous, open to interpretation and reframings.

In his self-appointed role as omniscient narrator, the former American President also provided clear-cut, but apodictic and highly questionable answers to some of the questions that, according to him, “Americans are asking” (Bush 2001e: 68, 69), for example concerning causality and motivation, including the question of “why do they hate us?” (Bush 2001e: 68). Bush even pretended to know all the answers to the questions that he imputed to his compatriots, but which he actually raised himself in order to assert his supreme narrative and performative power to interpret the recent traumatic events. According to Bush the storyteller, the terrorists not only “hate our freedoms”, they also kill “to disrupt and end a way of life”, which is the American way of life, of course. Although there is almost as little evidence for these pseudo-explanations of the terrorists’ alleged motivations as for the weapons of mass destruction that provided the pretext for the preemptive war against Iraq, Bush hammered home the same points, apodictically claiming that “the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows” (Bush 2001e: 70).

The answers that Bush gave to his own questions are, however, little more than projections, revealing more about the unreliable rather than omniscient narrator that Bush gradually turned out to be than about the actual causes of the events or the terrorists’ motivations and reasons. His insistent claim that terrorism was mainly directed against the core American values and constituted “a threat to our way of life” (Bush 2001e: 70) is mainly self-serving in that it provided the pseudo-justification of what the Bush administration claimed it was doing, i.e. defending American liberty, promoting the values of America and advancing freedom worldwide. When Bush claimed that Al Qaeda’s ultimate goal was “remaking the world” (Bush 2001e: 66), he was apparently blissfully unaware of the fact that this was actually what he himself and his narratives of conflict and crises were doing and trying to achieve, i.e. “remaking the world” in America’s image.

Reframing the 9/11 terrorist attacks in terms of the concept and metaphor of war not only allowed Bush to develop his own narrative of a “war on terror”, but also opened up the possibility of embedding the latter in an overarching master narrative in which America’s mission was clearly defined. Ominously wondering “if America’s future is one of fear” (Bush 2001e: 72) and even insinuating that

some “speak of an age of terror”, while broaching this idea himself and thus fostering his policy of fear, the former American President resolutely announced: “As long as the United States is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror” (72). He went on to explain that “in our grief and anger we have found our mission and moment” (72), delineating what he regarded as the mission and future role that America would have to play as well as the antagonistic forces:

Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of freedom [...] now depends on us. Our nation – this generation – will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, we will not fail. (72)

This ominous mini-narration, which is actually a thinly veiled clarion-call and rallying-cry, provides another paradigmatic example of the ways in which narratives do not merely reflect or represent conflicts and crises, but rather serve to create, foster, and mould them by embedding and framing them in an overarching master narrative. The same holds true for the hazy predictions that Bush often made about the future course of developments, which also show the self-righteousness that was another one of the many unfortunate features of his deeply moralistic discourse: “The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them” (Bush 2001e: 73). While Bush kept insisting apodictically on what he called “the rightness of our cause” (73), he just as sweepingly condemned the enemies of the United States, claiming that they “were as wrong as they are evil” (Bush 2002a: 110).

Couching the narrative of conflict that he was creating in terms of an epic battle between the forces of good and evil, or freedom and war, Bush boldly proclaimed that “[w]e know that evil is real, but good will prevail against it” (Bush 2001f: 89). Resorting to what he called “the language of right and wrong” (Bush 2002c: 129), Bush described his view of the nature of the narrative of conflict that he himself was telling time and again in no uncertain terms, while also using his story as a weapon of mass deception and worldmaking: “We are in a conflict of good and evil, and America will call evil by its name” (129). As Spielvogel (2005: 552) has shown, by framing “the war as part of an ongoing struggle between ‘good and evil,’” Bush’s speeches helped to naturalize that frame and make it commonly acceptable and even hegemonic. Moreover, this manner of emplotting the narrative suggests that the “characters in Bush’s ‘war on terror’ narrative are motivated almost exclusively by moral action” (Spielvogel 2005: 560). The former American President was apparently quite aware of the fact that it was a con-

scious effort at worldmaking that his narratives and policy-makers were engaged in, projecting a storyworld in which the forces of good and evil are at war. As Badiou (2003: 159) trenchantly and pithily observes, “[w]ith Bush, one has God at one’s side, along with the Good, Democracy, and also America (it’s the same thing) for tracking down evil”.

According to Bush, the mission of the United States in this epic battle of good against evil was ethically defined “to make our world safer” (Bush 2003a: 155) and “to make this world better”. Since 9/11, the role of the United States was clearly cut out for Bush: “America will lead the world to peace” (Bush 2001g: 99). It did not take Bush very long to make his promise “I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people” (Bush 2001e: 73) come true, though he quickly began to substitute the more idiomatic word “war” for “struggle” in order to describe what he was in fact waging. Occasionally Bush used euphemistic expressions like “to wage a relentless and systematic campaign against global terror” (Bush 2002b: 116) when he was in fact describing “our military operation” or simply “the war” (Bush 2002b: 117). Though Bush was again a bit more cautious in his wording when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly, whose support he was trying to gather, he apodictically and hypocritically delineated what he regarded as the task and mission of the United States, outlining the script of history that he intended to write with his narratives of conflict, crisis, and war:

It is our task – the task of this generation – to provide the response to aggression and terror. We have no other choice, because there is no other peace.

We did not ask for this mission, yet there is honor in history’s call. We have a chance to write the story of our times, a story of courage defeating cruelty and light overcoming darkness. (Bush 2001f: 89–90)

What writing “the story of our times” or “a hopeful chapter in human history” (Bush 2001g: 92) actually meant was turning Bush’s narrative of conflict and crisis, the epic battle of good against evil that he never tired of delineating, into reality by aggressively executing this so-called mission and waging a “war on terror” against amorphous, “shadowy, entrenched enemies” (Bush 2001g: 94) that had yet to be more clearly defined and located. Many of Bush’s speeches contain references to his notion of the American master narrative according to whose script he intended to mould the course of history. Bush claimed that America had “a greater objective than eliminating threats” (Bush 2002a: 113), i.e. “to foster the momentum of freedom” (113) and “to seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror” (113): “In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we have been called to a unique role in human events.” (113) Despite their somewhat limited narrative and rhetorical

means, Bush's narratives thus exemplify the performative power of storytelling, its capacity to change events, to create conflicts, and project possible futures.

Although we cannot discuss or delineate either all the emplotment strategies deployed by Bush or the various stages in which his peculiar narrative and rhetorical worldmaking, and indeed the political campaigning at large and the day-to-day decision- and policy-making, were gradually developed, we would like to single out three aspects related to modes of emplotment that can throw additional light on the performative power of narratives and their active role in creating, rather than merely reflecting, conflicts.

Adopting the concept and metaphor of "war on terror" as his particular frame of reference, Bush's stories illustrate that emplotment strategies serve the purpose of overcoming the contingency of historical occurrences, narratively structuring the selected events and shaping them into a certain story: "Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind" (White 1973: 7). The contextual meaning is not inherent in the historical occurrence or the event as such, but is primarily created through the choice of a concept or metaphor that serves as the main frame of reference. Through processes of narrativization, the events are given not only a certain structural and narrative pattern, but also a meaning and a sense.

Second, emplotment and storytelling in general always involve explanation and interpretation as well, with the the meaning of narratives depending on both explicit discussions of causes and the modes of emplotment chosen by the narrator or author of the story. Only three days after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Bush already pretended to know what the causes of the events and the motivations of the terrorists were: "They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender" (Bush 2001d: 61). In the speeches that Bush gave between 9/11 and the beginning of the war against Iraq, he generated a plethora of similar self-serving explanations and interpretations, which tell us more about the unreliable narrator himself than about the actual causal connections.

Thirdly, emplotment always involves both relating the parts of the story to the whole and the story as a whole to broader cultural assumptions, models, and master narratives. This can be seen by looking at the ways in which Bush tried to embed his mini-narrations within an overarching master narrative inextricably intertwined with core American values. Like many American presidents before him, Bush began sketching out his particular version of what he called "the American story" (Bush 2001a: 1), the "grand and enduring ideals" and an "unfolding American promise" (1) as early as in his first inaugural address. Unlike most of his predecessors, however, he also right away began to pit this American story against what he called "the enemies of liberty and our country" (Bush

2001a: 3), announcing what the mission of the American nation was, while couching it in terms that sounded more than just like a veiled threat: “America remains engaged in the world by history and by choice, shaping a balance of power that favors freedom” (3). Time and again, Bush reminded his audience that “America has committed its influence in the world to advancing freedom and democracy as the great alternatives to repression and radicalism” (Bush 2006: 382).

The former American President seems to have been much less certain when or how the narrative projected by his mini-narrations of weapons of mass destruction and the war on terror might end. In December 2001, for example, Bush vaguely and ominously announced that “preventing mass terror” would “be the responsibilities of Presidents far into the future” (Bush 2001g: 94). In the same speech, he admitted that the war against terror “may continue for many years” (Bush 2001g: 99), while in the speech tellingly entitled “The World Will Always Remember September 11” he merely predicted: “In time, this war will end.” (Bush 2001h: 101) When he started to redirect the public’s attention from Afghanistan to Iraq, he gave his story about the war on terror not just a new twist, but also a new momentum by vaguely observing that “[o]ur war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun” (Bush 2002a: 106; cf. Bush 2002c: 127), and by ominously announcing: “What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning” (Bush 2002a: 104). Though he was drafting himself the script of the plot that the United States was enacting, Bush grudgingly had to admit that even his omniscience was somehow limited: “The war will take many turns we cannot predict” (Bush 2002c: 127).

Although Bush was wise enough to use vague and rather meaningless generalizations whenever he talked about the estimated duration of the military campaign or made predictions about the future course of events, he never left his audience in any doubt about who would eventually win the war: “But the outcome of this conflict is certain: There is a current in history and it runs toward freedom. Our enemies resent and dismiss it, but the dreams of mankind are re-defined by liberty” (Bush 2001f: 89). Even before the United States military forces had begun to attack Iraq, Bush already provided glimpses of what he chose to call “the possibilities of a world beyond the war on terror” (Bush 2001g: 92). Many of Bush’s announcements, however, later turned out to be premature, and five years after the terrorist attacks he had to grudgingly admit: “This war will be difficult; this war will be long; and this war will end in the defeat of the terrorists and totalitarians, and a victory for the cause of freedom and liberty” (Bush 2006: 380). What Bush and his comrades in arms failed to acknowledge, or perhaps even to realize, however, is that their apodictic claims about winning the “war on terror” were actually absurd and untenable, because “there is no possi-

ble way to win the ‘war on terrorism’; it is simply the wrong metaphor”, as Jackson wryly observes: “Conceptually, winning a war against terrorism would be akin to winning a war against insurgent warfare; this is because terrorism is a strategy of political violence which will always appeal to certain actors” (2005: 138).

When the Bush administration began to redirect the public’s attention from the terrorists in Afghanistan to Iraq and Saddam Hussein’s regime and its alleged arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, Bush first used the ominous phrase “axis of evil” that David Frum, one of his former speech writers, had coined. After briefly referring to North Korea and Iran as countries that either have or aggressively pursue weapons of mass destruction, Bush then singled out Iraq for special accusation and abuse. Bush not only claimed and complained that “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and support terror” (Bush 2002a: 106), he also maintained that it was “a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world” (106), summing up his accusations in the infamous metaphor that would go down into history as one of the key phrases of the Bush era and that succinctly expresses Bush’s obsessions and paranoia:

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. (106)

By coming up with this infamous spatial metaphor, Bush provides a highly peculiar diagnosis of the state of the world, conveniently dividing up the countries and nations according to his not so subtle distinction between good and evil forces that are allegedly at war. Though the scenarios that Bush projects are expressed in the subjunctive mode, the combination of the metaphorical concept of weapons of mass destruction with the suggestive and ideologically charged metaphor of the axis of evil serves to conjure up a crisis that seems to be so dangerous and urgent that its outcome might well be “catastrophic”. In the speeches he gave in spring and summer 2002, Bush kept harping on the same theme, vaguely outlining narrative scenarios in which “the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons” (Bush 2002c: 127) could get into the hands of terrorist groups which might use “ballistic missile technology” (127): “when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations” (127–128). In other words, Bush outlined a plot in which the metaphorical concept of weapons of mass destruction did not only conjure up a state

of crisis, but also served to project a narrative that might well end in an apocalyptic scenario.

Moreover, the narrative that he was developing, the binary distinction between “us” and “them” along the axis of evil, and the Bush doctrine allowed the Bush administration not only to gradually redirect people’s attention from the terrorist group actually responsible for the 9/11 attacks to what he vaguely called “unbalanced dictators” (Bush 2002c: 128), “mad terrorists and tyrants” (Bush 2002c: 129) and “other countries” (Bush 2002b: 117), but also to practise ruthless worldmaking and world-threatening on a global scale: “Across the world, governments have heard this message: You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists” (117). Such linguistic devices as verbal repetition and parallelism serve to broaden the scope of Bush’s narrative to a truly global scale: “We will not allow the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten America or our friends and allies with the world’s most destructive weapons” (117). The moral to be drawn from 9/11 and Iraq’s recalcitrance to cooperate with the arms’ inspectors is that America should never again be foolish enough to believe anything that Saddam Hussein agrees to or promises. In his State of the Union Address to the 108th Congress, for instance, Bush sketched out a future narrative scenario in which Saddam Hussein “could provide one of his weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own” (Bush 2003a: 162). Encouraging his listeners to “imagine” what the fatal consequences of such an as-if-scenario might look like, Bush was actually once again trying to insinuate that there were links between the events of 9/11, international terrorism, and the regime in Iraq despite the lack of any factual evidence for his largely counterfactual claims:

Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans – this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none that we have ever known. We have to make sure that that day never comes. (162)

The combination of his earlier claim that “nations are either with us or against us in the war on terror” (Bush 2002d: 135) and the metaphor of the axis of evil provided the rough outlines of both the world that the Bush administration was in the process of making and the script for, and the roadmap towards, the war in Iraq. Though these fairly general narrative schemata gave the former American President a lot of leeway when it came to elaborating and fleshing out the script that he was writing, it provided a convenient yardstick for gradually making the story and world that Bush envisioned more concrete. “To be

counted on the side of peace, nations must act”, Bush (135) demanded in June 2002, delineating what “every nation actually committed to peace” (135) would have to do to belong to the right camp, including, of course, to “oppose regimes that promote terror, like Iraq” (Bush 2002d: 136). Bush told every nation that they should “choose the right side in the war on terror” (136) and to “be included in the peace process” (136), which was actually a careful preparation of a preemptive war. In his infamous Cincinnati speech, Bush still maintained that “the Iraqi regime has an opportunity to avoid conflict” (Bush 2002f), hypocritically adding “I hope this will not require military action, but it may” (136), despite the fact that his narratives of conflict and crisis had been providing both the pretext and the ideological justification for his pet project, i.e. the “war on terror” that he intended to extend to Iraq. In February 2003, while rhetorically preparing the ideological grounds and paving the way for the war against Iraq, Bush boldly made the counterfactual claim that the United States and other nations were “working on a road map for peace” (Bush 2003b: 171), a white lie that sounds as though it was straight out of George Orwell’s sinister dystopian novel *1984*. The same holds true for the President’s Address to the Nation on Military Operations in Iraq, in which Bush told “all the men and women of the United States Armed Forces” (Bush 2003c: 175), who had just started to wage war against Iraq, euphemistically described by Bush as “the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq” (175), that “the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you” (175).

When Bush announced that America had “entered the next phase of the war” (Bush 2003c: 175), he again made sure that the conflict plot that he was in the process of outlining and turning into reality at the same time was not only embedded within the American master narrative; he was also anxious to garner whatever support he could muster from history, once again boldly and apodictically repeating his highly questionable claims: “History has called us to these responsibilities, and we accept them. America has always had a special mission to defend justice and advance freedom around the world.” (Bush 2002b: 117) This idealized myth of the reluctant soldier called upon to defend core values not only sounds like a version of the “White Man’s Burden”, with all of its empty imperialistic overtones, it is also explicitly linked up with the claim that “[i]n a time of war, we reassert the essential values and beliefs of our country” (117). By referring to the examples of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, Bush tried to further legitimate his performative narrative of conflict and to reduce the obvious paradox that leading “America into global war” (117) is a somewhat peculiar way of seeking “a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror” (Bush 2002a: 113; Bush 2002c: 132). The same holds true for his less than logical claim that leading a war is a means for de-

fending and even promoting peace: “We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace – a peace that favors human liberty” (Bush 2002c: 127). And in his State of the Union Address to the 108th Congress in January 2003, Bush even maintained that war was, or had been, forced upon the United States, once again bending logic and reason to the utmost: “If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause and by just means” (Bush 2003a: 163). Even after the military operations had actually started, Bush continued to repeat his half-hearted claim “our nation enters this conflict reluctantly” (Bush 2003c: 176), after having spent almost a year carefully using narratives and lies as weapons of mass deception.

One should note, however, that Bush, like many other political propagandists who have purported to look mainly at the past or at the present, in fact does so with an eye to the future. The brief and peculiar ways in which he selected and referred to key events in American history like Pearl Harbor or the “Cold War” show that he was less interested in providing an accurate view of the historical record than in unabashedly exploiting what Evgeny Morozov in his eye-opening and sobering examination of the digital age aptly calls “usable pasts, myth-like stories that draw on historical events, not in order to remember the past but, rather, to make sense of the present and the future” (Morozov 2013: 51). Rewriting history in terms of his favoured master narrative of the United States advancing and promoting democracy, freedom, and liberty is one of the narrative means of trying to influence the future course of events by pitting diametrically opposed possible futures against each other. As we will see, Bush was actually narrating futures when he purported to delineate historical events or to assess the present state-of-affairs, thus creating strongly teleological narrative logics.

The President’s penchant for projecting threatening narrative scenarios and binary oppositions noted above is especially obvious in the way in which he delineates possible narrative futures, typically pitting two diametrically opposed narrative scenarios against each other. Boldly maintaining that his policy was allegedly designed to “deliver our children from a future of fear” (Bush 2001f: 85; Bush 2001g: 92), which he actually kept conjuring up himself, Bush somewhat randomly claimed that “[w]e choose the dignity of life over a culture of death” (Bush 2001f: 85), as though these were the main or only options. In his infamous Address to the United Nations General Assembly, Bush provided the most comprehensive juxtaposition of two future developments of events and narrative scenarios, pretending that the UN as well as each and every nation would have to make a choice between them:

Events can turn out in one of two ways: If we fail to act in the face of danger, the people of Iraq will continue to live in brutal submission. [...] With every step the Iraqi regime takes

toward gaining and deploying the most terrible weapons, our own options to confront that regime will narrow. And if an emboldened regime were to supply these weapons to terrorist allies, the attacks of September the 11th would be a prelude to far greater horrors.

If we meet our responsibilities, if we overcome this danger, we can arrive at a very different future. (Bush 2002e: 146)

What Bush chose to ignore is that there were myriads of other options and perspectives, options which he preferred not even to consider. The main reason for this was that they did not fit into the dichotomous storyworld and the alternative that he was projecting, which he summed up like this: “We must choose between a world of fear and a world of progress” (Bush 2002e: 146). In other speeches, Bush spoke about “a world at peace” and “a world of chaos and constant alarm” (Bush 2003a: 158), apparently without realizing that his narratives, rhetoric, and politics of fear just created such a world of alarm and constant low-level anxiety. Pitting two different worlds or narrative futures against each other underscores our central hypothesis that the stories that Bush disseminated not only exerted performative power, but were also a way of conflict- and world-making in a very literal sense. Time and again Bush not only presented his peculiar version of what he regarded as America’s history, mission, and values; his teleological storytelling also extended to projecting future scenarios and worlds.

The same structural patterns can also be observed in the ways in which the use of point of view privileges a particular perspective and world-model. Not only does the observer’s spatial and temporal perspective of perception already play a decisive role in the choice of certain elements of the event, but his ideological perspective, i.e. his values and norms, is important as well. The same is also true for the processes of composition through which a story becomes a narrative of a particular kind, as well as for the verbalization which creates the text or the representation of the story. Working within the binary rhetoric of us vs. them, Bush always adopts an American point of view, apparently taking it for granted that there was no other way of conceptualizing or framing the events in question.

Over and beyond the structural and narrative features discussed so far, Bush’s kind of conflict- and worldmaking is also characterized by a number of other rhetorical characteristics that throw light on how he dispenses with traditional notions of logical reasoning and any kind of storytelling that shows an interest in factuality and causality. In the president’s speeches, causality, reason, and logic are largely substituted by alliteration, analogies, apodictic claims, and counterfactual statements. The way in which Bush tried to forge a link between the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and Iraq is a particularly interesting case in point. In-

stead of providing either empirical, factual evidence of the alleged connection between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein or a convincing causal or narrative explanation, Bush resorted to other means to insinuate that such connections existed. He, or rather his speech-writers, showed a particular penchant for such poetic devices as alliteration, assonance, and consonance, which serve to provide or suggest links between words through the repetition of the same sounds. Typical examples include the incredibly repetitive use of such semantic combinations as “the Taliban and the terrorists” (Bush 2001g: 92), “terrorists and tyrants”, “tyranny and terror”, or “terrorists and totalitarians” (Bush 2006: 379). Instead of providing evidence or logical reasoning, Bush preferred to resort to “analogical comparisons” (Hodges 2011: 34), alliteration, and syntactic parallelisms: “When we fight terror, we fight tyranny” (Bush 2001h: 101). For want of any real evidence, Bush’s speeches used such rhetorical devices in order to give the “convenient untruths” (Gore 2008: 104) that his counter-factual narratives promoted at least the semblance of plausibility, creating connections where none existed in the real world by way of alliteration, as countless examples testify: “We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants” (Bush 2002c: 127).

It is thus through the linguistic and rhetorical texture of his speeches rather than through actual causality, empirical evidence or at least coherent narrative strategies that the Bush administration via the President’s voice managed to forge links between the terrorist attacks and a tyrant like Saddam Hussein. Though Bush failed to provide any convincing evidence for the actual existence of Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction, he managed to redirect people’s attention from the terrorist network that had actually been responsible for the attacks of 9/11 to a regime in Iraq that had nothing to do with them.

Moreover, the thorough assault on logic and reason (cf. Gore 2008) characteristic of Bush’s narrative conflict- and worldmaking can be seen in the amazingly apodictic terms in which his narratives are couched and in the many counterfactual statements that many of his speeches contain. Almost every speech that Bush gave about the topics at hand contains apodictic and unwarranted claims like “our cause is just” (Bush 2002a: 104). As far as counterfactual statements are concerned, a case in point is Bush’s peculiar claim that “America and Afghanistan are now allies against terror” (Bush 2002a: 103), which is arguably as untrue today as it was when Bush gave the State of the Union Address to the 107th Congress in January 2002. In the same speech, he surprisingly proclaimed that “we are winning the war on terror” (103), which has turned out to be a somewhat premature announcement. In his State of the Union Address to the 108th Congress, Bush continued in the same vein, once again making one of his many unfounded claims despite plenty of proof to the contrary: “The war goes on, and we are winning” (Bush 2003a: 156).

As this brief analysis of some of the main narrative and rhetorical features of Bush's speeches shows, this kind of narrative worldmaking constitutes not just a remarkable "assault on reason", as the felicitous title of Al Gore's book has it, but also a mind-boggling assault on logic and causality. The analysis has also served to confirm a number of other insights of the book, in which Gore provides a comprehensive and devastating analysis of Bush's "Politics of Fear" (Gore 2008: 23), not just corroborating Gore's eponymous assessment, but also illuminating how Bush managed to plant "the seeds of war" (Gore 2008: 175) by harping on the same line of the alleged weapons of mass destruction and then gradually fleshing out the condensed narrative of conflict encapsulated in that phrase through his narrative ways of worldmaking. Although we now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was no evidence whatsoever for those weapons, the stories disseminated by Bush, his administration, and his followers served to create the impression that Saddam Hussein was indeed responsible for the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

4 Creating narrative ontologies and patriotic xenophobia: on the community-, conflict-, space-, and worldmaking functions of narratives of conflict and crisis

Although most of the narratives of the Bush administration about weapons of mass destruction, the axis of evil, and the war on terror have antagonism and conflicts as two of their salient semantic implications, one might wonder to what extent these were antagonisms, conflict and ideological struggles "of the mind", or of the imagination, rather than factual ones, before the performative power of storytelling turned them into reality. The urgency and insistence with which Bush and his followers tended to harp on the same conceptual, metaphorical, and narrative themes indicates that great efforts were made to represent the state of affairs in terms of conflict and crisis. Elizabeth Ermarth's shrewd observation about the representation of social order in nineteenth-century narratives applies equally well to the language of fear and religion and the narratives of conflict and crisis used by the Bush administration. The conflicts and crises in question were "not a reality to be reflected but a problem to be solved" (Ermarth 1997: 125). Rather than just taking the dominant legitimizing and patriotic rhetoric of Bush's narratives of conflict and crisis at face value or even mistaking such narratives and tropes for a simple reflection of political relations, one

might look more closely at the functions that the narratives analyzed above served to fulfil. There are at least six such functions that can be identified, although many of them are syncretized in specific texts.

In the first place, by reducing the complexity and elusiveness of the actual state of affairs and events, Bush's narratives served to impose form upon a chaotic reality. Their most obvious function is thus to impart some sort of structure to an amorphous geographical and political entity, and thus to serve as unifying devices. Despite their inevitably reductive character, such narratives as those analyzed above could fulfil heuristic or cognitive functions in that they purport to reflect and represent recent events, while actually emplotting and framing them in an ideologically charged way. As conceptual tools, metaphors and narratives resemble models. Imposing form upon an untidy reality, they serve as models for thought, as conceptual fictions people live by (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980). To identify the functions of such narratives and metaphors entirely with those of models, however, is to miss the significant cultural, ideological, and political functions they can also perform. Equating them with models ignores the creative uses of metaphors and narratives in the representation of events, objects, and situations. In contrast to models, which *represent* structural relations, metaphors *impose* structures; they "often do creative work" (Turner 1987: 19), and this holds true for narratives as well. Like metaphors, narratives can largely determine the way in which a given domain is perceived and understood in the first place, with the symbolic register of war examined above being a perfect case in point. The second reason why metaphors and narratives are more than just conceptual or cognitive models is that the evoking of emotion is an important aspect of metaphorical and narrative processes. Of far greater interest for the cultural historian are those functions that shed light on the "representational politics" (Ermarth 1997: 125) that metaphors and narratives can fulfil in specific contexts.

In addition to their power to impose structure, a second function of the stories of the Bush administration consisted in providing contemporaries with simplified, but more or less coherent narrative explanations and normative frameworks for reinterpreting recent events and political developments. As mental models, narrative fictions provide powerful tools for making sense of the traumatic experience of 9/11 and the events that happened in its aftermath. By actually commenting upon the events and relations they purported merely to reflect or to represent, Bush's stories served as a means for explaining complex historical processes and political constellations. As we have tried to show above, the structure and logic inherent in the stories in question reduces the complexity of the actual political relations and transforms a chaotic series of events into simple patriotic and propagandistic stories, projecting a very euphemistic and highly simplified master narrative of American and world history in an abbreviated form.

Some of the most important aspects of narratives are thus the explanatory functions and teleological projections they serve to fulfil. Both narratives and explanations, and narratives and conflicts are mutually interdependent in that the ways in which people narrate, or narrativize, a conflict depends upon how they explain it, and vice versa, as Albrecht Koschorke (2012: 244) rightly observes. By rewriting history and turning current conflicts into readily intelligible stories, such narratives as those told by Bush and his followers not only helped to explain and make sense of the past; the pseudo-explanations proffered by the reductionist “war on terror” narrative also served to license the military project against Iraq by couching it in terms of a master narrative of a fight for freedom and other American values.

Thirdly, the narratives of the Bush administration therefore also fulfilled important normative, legitimizing, and licensing functions because they not only authorized and propagated ideologically charged views of the relations between America and its enemies, but also provided rationalizations and justifications of the “war on terror”. In doing so, the narratives, just like metaphors, implicitly project what Eubanks (1999: 424, 426) aptly calls “licensing stories”: “for us to regard any mapping as apt, it must comport with our licensing stories – our repertoire of ideologically inflected narratives, short and long, individual and cultural, that organize our sense of how the world works and how the world should work” (Eubanks 1999: 426).

Fourth, the narratives and their rhetoric of American values and national character, with its juxtaposition of freedom-loving Americans and various groups of highly stereotyped enemies, were an important propagandistic and ideological means of nurturing the culture’s dominant fictions, creating not only cultural conflicts, but even “[t]he Ideological Struggle of the twenty-first Century”, to quote the subtitle of Bush’s address to the American Legion National Convention that he gave in Salt Lake City on 31 August 2006. Even if we are prepared to assume, for the sake of the argument as well as for simplicity, that neither the President nor his speech-writers were as stupid as one may often be inclined to think, it is still absolutely amazing that Bush would refer to the war in Iraq, or the war on terror, as “the first war of the 21st century” (Bush 2006: 379). The functions discussed so far can be seen in the way in which Bush claimed the sole right to define and interpret both the nature of the conflict and the two parties which are at war, once again confirming the insight that his narratives created and shaped the conflicts that they purport merely to delineate or represent. This results in a strong ‘manichean’ outlook on world politics, as the following passage reveals:

The war we fight today is more than a military conflict; it is the decisive ideological struggle of the twenty-first century. On one side are those who believe in the values of freedom and moderation – the right of people to speak, and worship, and live in liberty. And on the other side are those driven by the values of tyranny and extremism – the right of a self-appointed few to impose their fanatical views on all the rest. (Bush 2006: 380)

Anyone reading Bush's speeches and analyzing their functions with the benefit of hindsight may be forgiven if he or she gets the impression that his rhetoric itself can be seen as an example of a sustained attempt of "a self-appointed few to impose their fanatical views on all the rest" (Bush 2006: 380).

Fifth, Bush's narratives also serve as an important means of fostering and maintaining loyalty, creating narrative communities by emplotting the American nation in a propagandistic and patriotic way. This emotional and patriotic function is particularly obvious in the case of Bush's narratives because they imply a feeling of fellowship, a sense of togetherness and unity. The stories told and disseminated by the Bush administration serve to show that there are always certain culturally available plots and nationally specific ways in which narratives represent and shape events, tell stories, and make worlds. In one of the best narrative or narrativist theories of culture to date, Wolfgang Müller-Funk has argued that cultures differ not only with regard to the subjects and themes they are particularly interested in, but also with regard to their favoured modes of storytelling, their forms of constructing narratives (Müller-Funk 2008 [2002]: 53). From this point of view, cultures are not so much "imagined communities" (sensu Anderson), but "narrative communities", i. e. communities forged and held together by the stories the members tell about themselves and their culture as well as by conventionalized forms of storytelling and cultural plots. Müller-Funk has therefore made the valuable suggestion to conceptualize cultures as "narrative and memorial communities":

Without any doubt it is narratives that form the basis of collective, national memories and that constitute politics of identity and difference. Cultures should always also be conceived of as narrative communities which are distinguished from each other by their reservoir of narratives. (Müller-Funk 2008: 14; our translation)

Lastly, and arguably most importantly, the stories of the Bush administration were thus central to the formation and maintenance of collective identities. The images, metaphors, and stories projected were instrumental in what one might call the imaginative forging of the mental infrastructure, because not only a nation, but "any imagined community, is held together in part by the stories it generates about itself" (Arata 1996: 1; Anderson 2008 [1983]). Heavily drawing on cherished "stories Americans live by" (McAdams 2013 [2006]), Bush's stories

served as an important means of maintaining an advantageous American self-image and of forging American national identity, something which is neither natural nor stable, but discursively constructed: “In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations [...] but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions” (Said 1993: 60). Though proceeding from a different starting point and focus (language and writing rather than narratives, metaphors, and ways of worldmaking), working within a different disciplinary context (political science rather than literary and cultural studies), and using a different methodology (critical discourse analysis rather than narratology), the political scientist Richard Jackson comes to similar conclusions about the functions that the discourse of counter-terrorism and the language of the “war on terrorism” fulfilled. In his highly perspicacious monograph *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter Terrorism*, Jackson very convincingly demonstrates that the language of the so-called “war on terrorism”, far from being “an objective or neutral reflection of reality”, should be conceived of as

a deliberately and meticulously composed set of words, assumptions, metaphors, grammatical forms, myths and forms of knowledge – it is a carefully constructed *discourse* – that is designed to achieve a number of key political goals: to normalise and legitimise the current counter-terrorist approach; to empower the authorities and shield them from criticism; to discipline domestic society by marginalising dissent or protest; and to enforce national unity by reifying a narrow conception of national identity. (Jackson 2005: 2)

As this quote, in which he summarizes part of the overall argument of his book, already indicates, Jackson not only does an excellent job at teasing out the political goals and functions (113–120) that this ideological discourse has so successfully served to fulfil since the attacks of September 11, 2001; he also sheds new light on the ways in which the language of the “war on terrorism” paved the way for the military and political practices of the “war on terrorism”. Though not working within a Goodmanian, worldmaking or narratological framework, Jackson also emphasizes the fact that language and discourse are neither innocent nor neutral, but should rather be seen as powerful ways of creating “a whole new world” (Jackson 2005: 96), i.e. “a world of unimaginable dangers and unspeakable threats” (120). The performative, reality-constituting power of narratives, however, does not only reside in such ways of worldmaking as selection, deletion, ordering, supplementation, weighting and framing, but also in the fact that language and practice mutually reinforce each other, i.e. that “writing the threat of terrorism is co-constitutive of the practice of counter-terrorism” (119): “practice reinforces meaning and vice versa; the language and institutions

soon become co-constitutive of the reality of the war against terrorism” (162; also 119). In short, Jackson’s much more comprehensive examination of the forms and functions of the public language of the “war on terrorism” confirms, from the point of view of a renowned political scientist, what we have tried to show from a narratological and metaphorological angle: that the generative and poietic power of narratives consists not just in emplotting events in a particular way and in disseminating propagandistic and patriotic stories, but also, and even more so, in discursively constructing an atmosphere of anxiety, danger, threat and “supreme emergency” (98f.; also Ch. 4), moulding conflicts, forging collective identities, and making cultural and even geopolitical worlds.

5 Narratives as weapons of mass deception and mass destruction: the performative power of narrative worldmaking revisited

As shown through our analysis of their metaphors, rhetoric, and narrative strategies, Bush’s speeches provide a paradigmatic example of the ways in which narrative constructions and processes can be endowed with performative power, actively creating or constructing the cultural and ideological conflicts that they purport merely to reflect or represent. The stories that Bush never tired of telling about weapons of mass destruction, the “axis of evil”, and the “war on terror” serve to show how narratives can function as cultural ways of conflict- and worldmaking, not just in a metaphorical, but also in a very literal sense. The ideologically charged narratives told by the Bush administration did not only serve to disseminate concepts, metaphors, and narratives that Americans and many other people have become accustomed to live by, but they have also shaped the actual geopolitical realities or worlds we live in today.

Narrative ways of worldmaking do not merely reflect, but also partake in and shape, the narrative communities and the hierarchies of norms and values that distinguish cultures from one another and can create cultural conflicts. Conceptualizing narrative fictions as both cognitive forces in their own right and as cultural ways of worldmaking, a yet to be fully developed cultural narratology should explore the ways in which the formal procedures of narrative worldmaking outlined above reflect, and influence, the unspoken mental assumptions and cultural issues of a given period. Cultural narratology recognizes that, since “ideology is located in narrative structures themselves” (Helms 2003: 14), analyses of the semanticization of narrative forms can shed light on unspoken assumptions, attitudes, ideologies, as well as values and norms prevalent in any

given text, genre, and period. Once narrative forms are understood as socially constructed cognitive forces, narratives become valuable sources for cultural history and studies of conflicts because analyses of “their narrative forms provide information about ideological concepts and world views” (Helms 2003: 14). Such an approach promises to shed new light on the performative power of narratives to make worlds, to disseminate worldviews, and to shape conflicts, three key aspects and functions of narratives about which we know only too little and which narrative theory has up to now largely ignored.

Although it is still unclear how the historical developments ushered in by the rhetorical “war on terror” and the concomitant real wars against Afghanistan, Iraq and international terrorist networks will continue, with the benefit of hindsight we can conclude that the metaphors and stories conjured up and popularized by the Bush administration about weapons of mass destruction and the axis of evil have not only been worldmaking in a metaphorical sense, but have really had performative, worldmaking power in a very literal sense. Rather than just mirroring or representing real conflicts, Bush’s metaphors and narratives of conflict moulded and sequenced events in such a way that they created and fomented the conflicts and crises that they purported merely to represent, thus shaping actual conditions of today’s real world. A year after the President’s notorious State of the Union address given on 29 January 2002, Julian Borger in an article in *The Guardian* observed that the phrase “axis of evil” “has not only defined the battle-lines of the twenty-first century, it has helped shape the world we now inhabit” (Borger 2003).

From the point of view of a critical cultural narratology, one might add that the metaphors and narratives of conflict disseminated by the Bush administration have not only served to foment cultural conflicts and shape prevalent interpretations of the past, present and future, they have also had performative and worldmaking effects in that their hegemonic status has largely blocked or shaded alternative accounts, interpretations, and narratives. As Hodges succinctly puts it, “instead of being seen as one among several possible interpretations, the ‘war on terror’ discourse becomes naturalized as a widely accepted, ‘common sense’ way for viewing and talking about 9/11 and America’s response to terrorism” (Hodges 2011: 7). Many of the critical and sobering observations that Evgeny Morozov recently made about the reductionist accounts proffered by what he dubs “internet-centrism” apply equally well to the detrimental effects that Bush’s rhetorical narratives of conflict and of the “war on terror”, and their ideological implications, have had. They have not only “mangled how we think about the past, the present, and the future”, but have also “erroneously convinced us that there are no other ways to talk about these issues without downplaying their importance” (Morozov 2013: 62). Moreover, what has been gained in ideo-

logical and political efficacy “has been lost in analytical clarity and precision” (Morozov 2013: 62).

Furthermore, the reductionism of both Bush's binaristic rhetoric and worldview, and of the narratives of conflict that the metaphorical concepts of “weapons of mass destruction” and “war on terror” have projected, has prevented a more nuanced analysis and critical debate about the complex issues that the volume at hand explores, masking rather than highlighting the active and generative role that narrative constructions and processes have played, and continue to play, in cultural and political conflicts. Alain Badiou's comments about the word “terrorist” as an “intrinsically propagandistic term” (Badiou 2003: 145) also pertain to the no less propagandistic phrases that provide the core of Bush's highly limited semantic and ideological universe. The concept of “weapons of mass destruction”, or “war on terror”, for that matter, too, “has no neutral readability. It dispenses with all reasoned examination of political situations, of their causes and consequences” (145). Though these propagandistic phrases are largely “devoid of all content” (153), this apparent semantic lack does not diminish their ideological and political efficacy in any way. On the contrary, it rather increases their malleability and usefulness, which mainly consists in “designating the ‘terrorist’ enemies of the United States” (151), shaping as well as allegedly justifying cultural, political and military conflicts, and defining the battle-lines for years to come. Even though Badiou (158) has convincingly shown in his critical philosophical analysis of the key words of the phrase “the war against terrorism” that “more or less nothing intelligible remains”, it would thus be a serious mistake to underestimate the performative and worldmaking power that Bush's propagandistic rhetoric and his favourite metaphors and narratives have had. What Hodges rightly points out about the consequences of the war metaphor also holds true for Bush's narrative of the war on terror as a whole: “In the case of the Bush administration's response to terrorism, the implications of the war metaphor for characterizing 9/11 have produced very real consequences” (Hodges 2011: 30).

On a much larger and politically much more important scale than fictional worldmaking, many of the stories generated and disseminated by the Bush administration since 9/11, especially those about the alleged production of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, thus underline the fact that narratives can be a very powerful, and potentially dangerous, way of conflict- and worldmaking. Though we now know that these narratives failed to correspond to either reality or truth, they even had the capacity to emplot events and shape interpretations of what purportedly happened in such a way as to construct conflicts and to change the course of history. The reality-changing potential of these stories also depended on their correspondence to the culturally available schemata,

metaphors and plots that contemporary American society lives by (McAdams 2013 [2006]), i.e. whether they appear sufficiently plausible to the majority of people. This example also serves to show that powerful narratives can themselves be both weapons of mass deception and weapons of mass destruction. The same holds true for other stories generated by the Bush administration, the “War against Terror(ism)” being the most powerful and destructive case in point. When ideologically charged stories or metaphors come to be regarded as a factual account of the actual course of events or as a political argument, what an irresistible argument it always seems!

This also holds true, however, for less aggressive and ominous stories than those disseminated by the Bush administration, e.g. for Barack Obama’s “Yes, we can” version of the “American Dream” narrative. Though reading Bush’s speeches seems to suggest the contrary, narratives can arguably also be ways of conflict-solving. In order to solve a conflict and change the story, however, you need a new storyteller or narrator. And yet, as we have seen since October 2008, it is arguably not quite as easy to stop a war as Paul Auster’s novel *Man in the Dark* quoted in the first section of the article suggests. This idea remains fascinating, though, and the journalist Jason Horowitz gave one of his articles in *The Washington Post*, from January 2010, the hopeful title: “Obama speech-writer Ben Rhodes is penning a different script for the world stage” (Horowitz 2010).

Even though this hopeful announcement turned out to be somewhat premature, since Barack Obama neither managed to end the war in Iraq nor to live up to the reputation of someone who has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, he has certainly managed to show how new narratives, or alterations of well-established narratives, can perhaps contribute to reframing, and potentially even solving, conflicts. As Dan McAdams (2013 [2006], Ch. 10) has shown, Bush and Obama offer “competing stories of redemption”, but with regard to the “war on terror” narrative, the uncanny similarities between their respective versions arguably outweigh their differences. The degree to which President Obama has been caught in, and constrained by, the “war on terror” narrative so carefully crafted by his propagandistic predecessor serves to underline the performative power that narratives can exert and to show how difficult it can be to end a war that, according to hegemonic narrative worldmaking, has been defined as open-ended. The most prominent case in point in this regard is perhaps the hotly debated speech that President Obama gave on the future of the war on terror at the National Defense University on 23 May 2013, in which he attempted to make significant alterations to the infamous “war on terror” narrative launched and popularized by the Bush Administration. President Obama’s important speech is, however, also a case in point of the worldmaking power of narratives

in that it serves to show how politicians and a nation at large can be caught in a story that it has been told to live by and how difficult it is to reframe a hegemonic narrative, let alone step out of it or turn over a new page. Emphasizing that “America is at a crossroads”, President Obama rightly observes: “We must define the nature and scope of this struggle, or else it will define us. [...] Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a ‘global war on terror’ – but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America” (Obama 2013). Reframing “the nature and scope of the struggle” in this way, pointing out that “this war, like all wars, must end”, and wisely adding that “the next element of our strategy involves addressing the underlying grievances and conflicts that feed extremism”, Obama provided some contours and parameters of a new story that may, perhaps, serve to show that narratives might also be a way of solving conflicts and problems. But that would be an entirely new story and require another article.

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