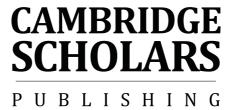# Projecting Words, Writing Images

Projecting Words, Writing Images: Intersections of the Textual and the Visual in American Cultural Practices

Edited by

John R. Leo and Marek Paryz

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part Three. Fiction, History, Visibility

Part Four. Visualizing and Discursivizing Race

Part Five. Film Adaptations

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

JOHN R. LEO AND MAREK PARYZ

INTRODUCTION

This gathering of essays by 20 scholars trained in comparative literatures, art history, critical theory, and American cultural studies further explores and expands the spirited and energetic field of visual cultural studies and its cognate or supplemental projects of "visual practices" and "visual literacy."[1] Their topics and perspectives engage contemporary re-theorizations of "text," of "word" and "image," while their alignments, ruptures, slippages and aporias fall across a range of media practices and institutions. These include photography and exhibition, film, television, entertainment, journalism, poetry and literature as visual and spectacular performances, and graphic narratives, but also their discursive intersections with "race" and ethnicity, their conjugations of gender, their tense and constitutive relations within multiple public spheres and (post)modernities. By regarding specific works situated in their critical, historical and social contexts, the *work* of the essays extends our literacies and competencies to *re*situate experiences either subjugated, elided, lost, misrecognized, or never quite at hand.

Part One, "How Pictures Think," groups five essays *fore*grounding the perceptual experiences of specific works whose spatial, temporal, representational and even psychological "emanations" occur as discontinuities, mergers and blurs. These are solicitous presentations which require us to rethink their material formalities conventionally conceived of as "settings" (especially in film), but now as blurring present and past, times and spaces, the haunted interiority and its porous "outside," and even the overdetermined shorthand of "fantasy" and "actuality." Postmodern "thinking" is, as Lenin might have put it in a rare "light" moment, an art-force effecting synaptical syntheses within the art event. Or Deleuze might posit something like

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[1] Elkins' *Visual Literacy* tries "to get a provisional idea of the sum total of theories, practices, 'competencies,' and literacies of the visual" (viii), and on the way to engage the "unavoidable contradiction involved in saying that we 'read' images" (1). Dikovitskaya's *Visual Culture* gives a useful introduction, via refreshing interviews with artists and scholars, to "the history, theoretical frameworks, methodology, and pedagogy of visual culture in the United States [built on] the study of the cultural construction of the visual in arts, media, and everyday life" (1).

"transcendence within immanence." We encounter with these essays the transformations of known literacies and encodings of visio-verbal genres ("landscape," "fantasy"), the compatibilities and also incommensurability of "normative ontologies" (and thus of "identities," whether "ready made" or a gender masquerade, parodies of poor Oedipus). In other words, the enterprise is one of *finding* by being *open to* usable legibilities (e.g. "markings") by inverting granular hegemonic aesthetic conventions and proprieties. In any *event*, responding to the declarative of seeing what is or may have already emerged. In ways that ricochet, each essay raises questions addressed from tweaks in the admittedly anamorphic potentials of the ensemble, e.g. the materiality of angular "surfaces" as always already the forms, the *impresses* and *expresses* of "thinking," of the reciprocity of perception. Thus questions arise or lurk regarding the image as *skin*, as haptic and "touching the eye," as implicating *bodies* as sensorial, as embodied subjects and historical agents. The essays are in their own ways responses to *What is (my) "inside" and (my) "outside," how does a "surface"(skin, "film") become a registering "interface" and site for the "writing" and the "projecting" of fantasies, discourses, "histories" and "pictures"?*

John Leo revaluates several controversial intersections and their discursive spreadings with several "takes" on Quentin Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) amidst a range of receptions it inspired. Working with key concepts such as *history, representation, parody, caricature, tasteless, illusion, fantasy, identity, pulp, entertainment* among others, and as these have transformed the postwar genre of the "war / combat film" as a genre and the "memory" of World War 2 as "event," Leo argues that *Basterds*' strength and originality reside in its deconstructive transformation of the vastly baggy war film genre with postmodernist representational strategies (after Hayden White), putting the range of oppositions between "history" and "fiction," "actuality" and "fantasy" into entirely different *places*. Given the allegations (and the *frappe*) of "Holocaust denial" levied against the film by some reviewers, Leo makes his case by engaging and disproving the aesthetic or ethical claims grounding—constituting—the main controversies attached to *Basterds*, but by showing how the film's *cinematic* elements enable the tools to moot and make irrelevant these negative judgments. Taking the position that the film is not "about" the War and the European Holocaust, rather a "meditation on the power of film" and thus a metafictional practice throughout, Leo demonstrates that Tarantino's experiments with time- and space-images, interstitial moments giving a "double occupancy" of "unhinged" parataxis coming into our *now*, paradoxically allow fabrications to show "truths" about the actual past. He concludes with a critical examination of how the film-within-the-film—*Stolz*

der Nation, a "fake" Goebbels' production of a propaganda-documentary-bio pic—within the film's diegesis of course would have come out under Ufa's auspices and be consistent with Nazi fascist filmmaking aesthetics and "the war effort."

Shelley Armitage's ranging but astutely focused essay on landscape and accompanying linguistic alignments (representation, verbal illustration or "translation" or "adaptation," "skin," indexical realism and "verisimilitude," among others) goes to the heart of contemporary visual culture debates and their engagements with the aesthetics of the sublime, the ontology of the image, and with visual literacy predicated in and by its postmodernity. Armitage's point of departure is that conventional conceptualizations of *landscape* as fact, symbol, form, and concept are inevitably problematized by postmodern critique. Arguing that *word as image* shifts the conventional oppositional notions ("zones") of word vs. image, she takes from W.J. T. Mitchell a template for the continual reinvention and renegotiation of this relationship, namely what Mitchell characterizes as a sliding between "the seeable and the sayable." In so doing, she brilliantly remaps literally the "territory" and its *place*.

In her interview with photographer and American Studies scholar Jurek Durczak, Andrea O'Reilly Herrera asks the artist to share his thoughts on a range of subjects including the nature of photography and its relationship to history, memory and reality. What emerges is art doubled, an inventive example of conversation as heuristic conduit to *photography*. Herrera and Durczak open the hide-and-seek spaces of photographic metonyms to the "skins" of impression and "meaning"—on the one hand of *insider* knowledge, artistic intention (disregarded) and disclaimers (any meaning is accidental), and yet a nagging sense of memory—and on the other hand these cropped and partial image-stories open indeed to history and its *outsider*, scattered archival sense of "reality." Durczak declined the "ostentatiously documentary" label but "rendered those pictures more Polish by adding appropriate titles." Visual and verbal do "render," otherwise, tongue-in-cheek. Durczak captures so many stories of things unnoticed within the *glimpse*, extracted from historical titular *minima* ("Majdanek," "Leaving it all behind"), detritus ("Outdoor pool"), the struggle of Poland 1947-1989 globalized, writ large and "skinned" with sheet plastic insulation ("Autumn decay"). But this collaboration opens onto an "intermedial" space crucial to the productivity of visual cultures, namely that of curating and giving history and memory exemplary concreteness of access, of *exhibition* in *places*. Thus we have art trebled as the very means of its social enunciation: Herrera's construction of a *mise-en-scène* for intercultural interactions.

Rebecca Fine Romanow focuses on Ghobadi's 2004 film, *Turtles Can Fly*, and the depiction of the crisis in the imminent arrival of American troops crossing the borders of Iraq in 2003. Her exposition of "time" as a genealogical *saturation* of everydayness—that is, its ratios of differential movements *in all directions*—puts the "concreteness" of everydayness into significant comparative cultural perception. Understanding film "literacy" as globally adaptive, she takes the established US film tradition of "teen flick" as the much inflected "youth film" *genre* whose Western similarities and differences (e.g. USA, East Germany) still model and pattern "the acceptance of normative adulthood" as the appropriate goal of youth. The "Western normative timeline" is thus that of a "linear road." Fine deftly explores how "youth films" from West Asia (Middle East) do more than "disrupt" or "rupture" this genre, their "very different modes of normalizing and disciplining" "grounds" youth in fluidities "of time and space, of doubling and remembering, of a normative ontology" enunciating a "far different cinematic language" than Western counterparts. Fine lucidly works with Deleuze's cinematic concepts of the "time-image" and the "crystal-image" as examples "of a visual syntax that emerges from outside of the narrative," but adapted to a "world" where the disruption of military and geographic frontiers is seen as less traumatic than the economic, cultural, and technological borders broached and subsumed by the West. The military action in Iraq is depicted cinematically and visually as a point in a circuit of continuous war and invasion, perpetual border crossings, and an omnipresent American incursion into other cultures: the adult life world at youth's coming of age.

Justyna Wierzchowska follows a different procedure in order to "see" and "read" "youth" and the youth film in her Freudian-Lacanian treatment of Bruce Wayne / Batman's identity formation. But this identity is figured and deformed by the distorting conversational (of sorts) relationship between the son and his (dead) father, and thus the scene of nonstop misreadings, misunderstood dialogs (of sorts), and misrecognitions making up our hero. She offers a doubled "saying and viewing" that registers the superhero's double-identity at once as reflective and constitutive, i.e. of Wayne's internalized representation of his dead father, who was supposedly omnipotent yet in fact vulnerable, and his *acting on* this split. By defining himself solely in relation to his dead parents, in his Batman persona, Wayne becomes their symbolic and *heroic* (proto-fascist?) guardian whose refusal to mourn secures this persona's heroic agency. Indeed, Wierzchowska gives us the outlines of a *parodic* masquerade of trauma. In this youth film and world the only path to adulthood ("maturation") is regression. Because of this psychological split which is also an entrapment, he cannot form

a coherent (that is single) identity, perpetually acting out "the adolescent fantasy of omnipotence." Wierzchowska's essay is richly suggestive of other interpretations for brooding superheros, the aging once-gods with possible erectile dysfunction. She implicitly shows the uselessness of categories she seems to support, i.e. "meaningful" or "serious" (straight) relationships in this *world* where "Wayne" announces that "I am born again"—and "Batman" puts on a bat cape and with it a contested iconography. Her comments also suggests, in her probing of this cinematic *fantasy* inhabiting and repeating itself in a "present" with mundane and "normative ontological" questions, other cinematic filiations with the psychomachia she engages, e.g. the (Lacanian) oedipal apparatus as a posthuman refiguring or *retooling* of itself as psychic "pods" (cf. Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*).

In Part Two, "Spectacles of Poetry," three essays cusp in a momentous global decade of "spectacles" within seemingly regressive and productive spectacles: the early-mid 1950s to the early-mid 1960s. This momentous and yet arbitrary slice of spatiotemporality forcibly concentrates and conflates poetry and visual media with experimental innovations charting new directions for representational categories as well as with the impress of events. Key concepts are at once the present heuristic openings into and the subtexts—*subliteracies*—of the art-events these essays diligently and smartly discern, e.g. the cold war, photography and Abstract Expressionism, the percolating of the Vietnam war, the Kennedy assassination and emerging civil rights' movement, pop art and the "reinscription of mass culture" as art in *mass dialogues*, the explosion of television as a supreme "technology of perception" and its re-establishment of visual culture.[2] This grouping also engages surfaces and *skins*, screens and the dilatory *folds* of just-visually-limning *figures*. But fields of immanence range from concrete-like "monumentality" captured in the iconography (and iconoclasm) wars of photography, to the "slippery, moving mass" rendered by Pop and whole cultural mass montages where everything is metamorphosing into everything else.

Grzegorz Kosc describes in detail what many intuitively suspected—that Robert Frost's public image was held captive to the visual regime of

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[2] All these subjects are covered by leading scholars in informed, researched and inter-disciplinary essays found in Holloway and Beck's invaluable collection (2005); see Part Two: 1929-1963 (82-157) and Part Three: 1963-1980 (161-223). An invaluable reference work on the Euro-American modernist-postmodernist turn toward the inversion (subtraction) of "high" from the increasingly "low" of representational techniques and contents, and for the equivalent "class wars" among critical and aesthetic hierarchies, see Crow's benchmark study (1996) and Fluck's seminal essay (1999).

a liberal-consensus and decidedly, wholly cold war *engaged* America. He analyzes several major imaging conventions employed to attribute to the poet's body a set of idealized (and frequently stereotypical) and finally imaginary national "visualized" traits, e.g. New England patrician, folksy flinty ("granite") "rustic bard." Kosc looks for tensions between Frost as the iconic cliché and the tough existentialist of an alienated avant-garde even as he is the *consummate portrait* product caught amidst the competing visual face or head image formats and aesthetics of public relations, the emerging world of Pop, fashion conventions and poses (lighting, "patina," monumentalism), his neo-imperial "elevation to whiteness" portrait for *Life* by Gordon Parks, and finally the "national bard" scourged and reviled, with the refiguring of the noble, the iconic father-bard-national "voice" into the grousing, scapegoat of rejection. Frost's iconoclastic degradation—the degradation of the idol—turns the very *public* backlash and loss of "confidence in corporeal legibility" into the photographic negative of the new emergent "neoliberal" consensus.

Tadeusz Pióro examines a particular aspect of Frank O'Hara poetic writing that consists in the use of rhetorical excess when the emotions he wants to present are too painful to be attractively represented in an orderly and logical manner, or recuperated by critical methods Pióro examines and finds wanting (e.g. "anagogic coherence" or other ways to account for things distributed, hidden, unseen). Lapses in logic and causality are apparent also in poems which ostensibly deal with other things than the poet's misery, hence the excess that accompanies or causes such lapses can be seen as a form of camouflage, a code for readers to break. Supple readings of several poems at different times in the poet's career help readers to respatialize and re-see, reshape and refigure their structures by O'Hara's changing uses of devices such as the *chronotype* or *hysterion proteron*, and his concealings and congealings of past, present, and imitation "conglomerated 'selves.'" Pióro's critique assists readers to grasp "incandescence" as a hermeneutic principle illuming O'Hara's late textual-tunnels in the poet's "excessive" or "Protean … self-fashioning," and reformulating his late "campiness" as a strategic gay self-affirmation. From its Dionysian origins to the consumerism of 1950s America, excess served as a method to reveal (however fleeting or conditional) the truths hidden to representation, and to "live as variously as possible" an *ars poetica* as "sublime" life.

Finally, Anna Warso offers an overview of perspectives to re-sight the blackface of John Berryman's *The Dream Songs* and the controversies attending their publication as a witnessing itself to a postmodern performance of subjectivity. Part of the importance of Warso's essay is her

astute historical coverage of the importance of "dialect" and its critical and flashpoint nature in cultural work at the color line, and of how easily mimicry or vocal "dubbing" could give rise to charges of "minstrelsy." Warso looks critically at a deeply layered cultural period in which contemporary poets (e.g. O'Hara, the Beats) question "identity" or self "authenticity" through multiple counterfeit voices, (im)postures, and masquerades. Warso is fully aware that the African American civil rights movement (and the Black Arts Movement) questions "identity" through complex strategies of recovered past voices, recreations of lost knowledge and heritages, and the invention of new "authenticity." Warso, citing Ralph Ellison and other culture shapers, aligns Berryman's "pre-postmodernist" self-multiplying with the many legacies of aesthetic and cultural experimentation with minstrelsy, the "theatrical" as excess, counterfeit, imposture. The tenuous culture bridging of racial tensions at this juncture Warso astutely describes as "the yearning for the idealized past which forever remains out of reach covered by layers of misattribution and misrepresentation, one of the constitutive elements of blackface minstrelsy, also perpetrates and informs the complex system of cross-identification that constitutes being American." Her close readings of Berryman's Dream Songs as the "spectacular spectacular" exemplify the problematic relationship between the hero of the Songs and their author by emphasizing the artifice inherent in Confessional poetics, steeped in the traditions of performance and theatricality and debunking the myth of the "authentic self."

The three essays in Part Three, "Fiction, History, Visibility," problematize the relations between fiction, history and ideology by referring to visibility as a major category of signification. Each of the essays takes "visualization" into the domain of provocative cultural critique at once by putting *bodies* and the *body politic* (and by degrees *biopolitics*) at the many cross hairs where media practices and embodied subjects meet haptic "skins." What is striking about these distinctive projects is their close explications of highly specific examples from print, fictional and documentary film (and journalism), and television's displacement as "televisual poetics," all with important implications for historiography as records of how perception is "historicized," that is, how perception has *specific histories* as Fredric Jameson and others have established.

Agata Preis-Smith proposes to look at Gertrude Stein's experimental short novel "Brim Beauvais" through its coded reflections of Euro-American modernist culture and its influence on individual human life. She opens her essay with a valuable, condensed and contrary reading to the usual critical approaches to Stein's avant-garde obscurity, approaches relying on either formidable (neo)formalist concentrations on her apparently non-referential

surfaces (and thus foreclosing "possible historicized, 'extrinsic' meanings encoded in the writer's work"), or on close readings of "biographically grounded correspondences between her life and art" (including gender critique, class awareness), or more recently on various (post Foucault, Deleuze, neo-Marxist) cultural studies methods. By *ex-scribing* Stein from many modernist assumptions and platitudes (e.g. one critic describes her as "the quintessential hermetic modernist, a high priestess of art"), Preis-Smith persuasively establishes Stein as an international "true modernist nomad" who has something to say about history and ideology. She demonstrates decisively how Stein's non-mimetic techniques in "Brim Beauvis" (paratactic or successive scenes "suggesting non sequiturs," non-chronological plotting, proper names and "semantic guideposts" broken by intensifications or slow downs of actions) make *visible* Stein's radical adequation of style with social signification. Her "chopped-up sentences" create the effect of "violent disjunction of the habitual," their materiality measures the "damage done to both language and human individuality." The "ruthlessness" attending American expatriates is "the power of money," the very template of Capital working "inside" / "outside" permeability.

Andrew S. Gross and Michael J. Hoffman explore the surprisingly widespread use of obscene images in early representations of the Holocaust. Taking Claude Lanzmann, George Steiner and other key cultural makers and commentators as points of departure, they view "trauma" as a representational "mode" which "functions analogously" to "act out" formally what is excised or prohibited in content. They then argue scrupulously, chronologically and genealogically—the range of their scholarship and close, comparative interpretation is impressive—to deploy the category of "obscenity" to better "figure" how it constitutes its "*corporeal* link" (their emphasis). They argue that the early fascination with the bodies of victims meant characterizing mass murder as a crime of passion. Although this is a mischaracterization, it did restore some individuality to the victims. It also put contemporary (earlier) audiences in the position of responding, in an affective or corporeal register, to their *own* suffering as an effect of viewing suffering. The obscene images appealed to voyeurism but also encouraged a kind of empathy. Thus they can be understood as precursors to the way suffering is represented in trauma theory, which assumes that atrocity is beyond the limits of representation and advocates feeling above understanding. Hoffman and Gross' arguments about more recent residues of the work and operations of the pornographic and the obscene on desire and feelings, while "elegiac rather than exploitative," still "dramatize the vulnerability of the body," its receptiveness to "psychic dislocation" among other *perceptual* (phenomenological) possibilities of media "experience"

(including film reception).[3] While the authors conclude by citing Arendt's gloomy take on the "unnaturalness" of "man," another remarkable implication of "vulnerability" is its extendability and basis for regrasping "body" and "bodies" as *disponibilité*, as "empty" and "available," as the slouching and aborning "post-" or "anti-humanist" subject in the impossible spectrum "animal-human-animality."

Zuzanna Ladyga, in her paper, focuses on the uses and abuses of American pastoralist poetics in selected stories by David Foster Wallace. The writer, she argues (after Paul Giles), has ties to his nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progenitors and the "pastoral imagination" (e.g. Whitman, James, Hemingway). But Wallace does more "than simply reflect the late-capitalist technologized reality or play with ways of mediating its simulacral structure," she argues, his writing more importantly "focuses on articulating the ways in which this reality impinges itself on consciousness, thus refiguring the pastoral subject." Drawing on Wallace's aesthetic manifesto essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" the writer addressed to his specific generation of writers, Ladyga organizes her trenchant remarks on Wallace's project as grounded in the *mediascape*. (Quoting Wallace: television's "weird pretty hand has his generation by the throat.") Ladyga succinctly states the problem she then explores with precise elaboration of Wallace's "televisual" literary stories: the "logic of late-capitalist TV-culture" registers "the real" as "lost along with control over the spectacle and identity" inasmuch as all processes of production, distribution and consumption "become reified"; and this relentless reification "redefines the problems of artistic agency, literary representation, and affect[ive] construction[s]." Wallace's stories mimic TV-derived "recursive" loopings with their "subject-less" faces, cartoonish pastoralist motifs, animals with "empty stares," scenes "set" in actual TV studios; they combine the effects of mixing TV styles and any "real" the *mise-en-abyme* of "outside" and "inside." While making the stories simulate television image sequences, Wallace reifies the pastoralist mode as well as creates room for its radical transgression by travestying all of its elements, from the figure of the shepherd and his liminal function to the sentimentally solipsistic landscapes and their idealizations of hierarchical relations between individuals and communities. The question Ladyga poses is whether this subversion translates into real political dissent or whether the nature of simulation reduces subversive gestures into illusions of radical critique.

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[3] See the important and indeed "foundational" critiques on perception and media by Bell, Corrigan and White, Elsaesser and Hagener, and Smith, whose approaches redefine "the flesh' of the photographic," post-humanism and bases for ethics.

Part Four, "Visualizing and Discursivizing Race," introduces three essays which deal with the complex combinations of discourse and the making visual in constructions of race. Anna Pochmara explores the ways in which Richard Wright's text interacts with Farm Security Administration-sponsored photography in *12 Million Black Voices*, a book published in cooperation with photo editor and FSA employee Edwin Rosskam. The book's title makes a claim to represent the diversity of African American communities. Pochmara's methodology is, in a word, outstanding in its use and cross referential interpretation of different orders of supporting evidence and its mining of the archive. She considers the "pictorial layer and the text" from "several angles," she examines the "interplays" of "illustrations" and the "narrative," and proceeds to examine the rhetorical and factuality implications of the book's title. In order to examine the representativeness of this depiction, Wright's narrative is juxtaposed with the contemporary sociological data and Rosskam's selection of photographs is analyzed against the larger FSA African American file. Such comparisons enable analyses of generalizations and exclusions of the book's "centripetal narrative voice" and of its choice of photographs. The result is a comprehensive and persuasive analysis of several "functions" of "visual evidence" (statistical, thematic, "documentary veracity," and "the combination of the vernacular and the statistical" in the "construction of a collective black subject").

Ewa Luczak's essay does double, even triple duty, and very well. She begins her commentary by noting significant biographical details. An African American writer, Frank Yerby "wrenched away from the all white publishing industry of the 1940s the dream of American success," although his "heredity" status was kept secret for years from an admiring and oblivious public. Thus "his writing is a testament not only to his unique ability to function in the American market economy but also to his desire to critique the same discourse which nurtured the American dream of the achievability of material perfection." Luczak then traces the ways the discourse of eugenics functions in Yerby's best-seller *Foxes of Harrow*, a classic and even formulaic instance of the popular "plantation romance" genre. But she adroitly splices Andrew Ross' argument about "the logic of subservience and defiance" demonstrated by the discourse on *hegemonic* popular culture as a point of reference to clarify these two seemingly mutually exclusive impulses made *visible* in Yerby's novel. The novel erects the eugenic skeleton, thus assuring the author a financial success, and simultaneously dismantles the eugenic logic, in this way saving itself from propagandistic banality. Working on his *Foxes of Harrow*, Yerby joined the ranks of other writers of the 1940s who were torn between the appealing cultural discourse of roots, ancestry and heredity and the

simultaneous realization of the limits of "hereditatrian" rhetoric. The novel's publication date—1946—falls well within the emerging enormity of the Nazi eugenic genocide. Thus the struggle between the two modes of perception of "Americanness" had its implications for the "visual" deeply and complexly embedded in overt and yet subtextual dimensions of what was negotiated in the public sphere. Whiteness was exposed to be a mere construct in the service of the few, whereas hybridity and mixtures were celebrated as closer to the real human condition.

Jennifer Ryan discusses the tensions among diverse racial identities and social experiences that Kyle Baker (as author or collaborator) explores in three graphic novels: *Truth: Red, White, and Black*, *Birth of a Nation*, and *Nat Turner*. Baker sets these three books respectively against the backdrops of World War 2, the 2000 American presidential election, and the 1831 Virginia slave rebellion led by Nat Turner. Baker's overall intentions in these works is to create with graphics + text an experimental form of *literacy* giving *access* to key moments or crises the better to mobilize African Americans opposed the cultural strictures (and outright crimes: the infamous research of the "Tuskegee study") imposed by the dominant American white social order. *Truth*'s representations include images of gas chambers and emaciated white persons to generate resonances deliberately among the Nazi genocide against European Jewry and other "degenerates" and the American eradication of First Peoples, the Middle Passage and African slavery. A wide array of visual strategies (croppings, close ups, the embedding of "natural" imagery such as sunset or moon rise to mark time passing, iconographic and genealogical emblems of African "ancestry" at the "top" of a page's panels organizing the "present" depicted vertically "below"), are some of Baker's techniques to create fabulations of modern histories of black resistance, at least up to the publication of *Nat Turner*. There Baker switches to a historically saturated style imitating nineteenth-century black and white woodcuts, effectively linking historical periods, fiction and actuality, by recuperating an older form of graphic literacy and communication.

Joanna Ziarkowska addresses the question posed in Eric Gansworth's novel *Mending Skins* about the possibility of constructing an alternative visual discourse which would effectively challenge stereotypical and clichéd images of Native Americans so widely distributed in popular culture. Her choice of a complexly structured novel built around stories within stories, with interspersed multiple voices and points of view, of flashbacks and memories, critiques comparatively the accumulation of "indian" (lower case) mass cultural stereotypes and "icons" mediated primarily by film. Ziarkowska carefully explores the novel's contouring of each protagonist's

failed career as the devastating shaping power itself of commodification over against all attempts to resist and to "reclaim." Whether the careers attempt to replace the cinematic romanticized "primitive" Native image by a progressive "iconoclasm" of "new" images, the Native injunction "to be in harmony with…" is finally, and even fatally, incapable of being a product. Native American "agency" is "trapped in the oppressive mechanism of stereotype production" as a couple of generations of Indians become the "caricatures of the Indian characters they once wished to represent on the screen." *Mending Skins* shows the Hollywood dream dump in the all pervasive consumption circuit of kitsch Indian dolls, pots, an "Indian" bottle opener for sale in a tax-free cigarette store on a dead end reservation. Ziarkowska's exposition of the novel's representational strategy to display the failures by multiple visual cultures to produce a counter visual discourse, something more *authentic* to indigenous people's self-definitions, is definitive.

Part Five, "Film Adaptations," makes room for the intersections of the visual and the textual where they would appear to be self-evident, in adapting literature for the screen. With equal parts of design and serendipity, these three pieces raise problems and questions implicated by the collected essays in this book and introduce new ones. We have, for example, the morphing of always already self-destabilizing film genres as these *adapt* to changing aesthetic, economic, or historical circumstances and are *adapted* by no less morphing forms of writing, fiction and its "others." Furthermore, cinematic adaptations pose issues regarding "gazes" and "looks" complicated by gender as well as critiques mindful of the limits of "ocularcentrism" as a privileged point of film's pluralized "literacies," including "gender-bending," sound, haptic evocations of other senses, and the like. Moreover, "film adaptations" raises the "subject" of intelligibility, not only of the gains and losses of "transposition" or "translation" from one medium to another but of the "subject" as polysemic "topic," of the "subject" of making (constructing) a "subjectivity."[4]

Marek Paryz analyzes Sam Peckinpah's war / combat film *Cross of Iron* with respect to its incorporation of topoi and archetypes characteristic of Western films. In particular, Paryz discusses the symbolic depiction of the "borderland" and the presentation of selected characters in Peckinpah's film. Drawing from Richard Slotkin's concept of "exhausted frontiers" in the 1970s following the US defeat in Vietnam, and the collapse of "liberal progressivism" narrativized as a "national consensus" by the "Frontier

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[4] Several "cross over" works raise these various questions concerning "adaptation" in stimulating and genuinely thoughtful ways. See Armstrong, Burnett, and Elkins.

Myth," Paryz takes another cue to consider the collapsed popularity of the Western genre not so much as meaning its disappearance but rather the redistribution of its fundamental characteristics among new, "post-Western" genres (e.g. urban crime dramas, the Vietnam war, gangster movies, others). He examines Peckinpah's adaptation (*Cross of Iron* 1976) of a bestselling German novel by Willi Heinrich, *Das Geduldige Fleisch* (1955; The Willing Flesh), and assesses its fit with "the symbolic narrative paradigm of the post-Western." He builds his arguments around comparative film studies, with attention to Peckinpah's oeuvre, German and American narrative traditions and character development, the concept of "mindscape," and the effective reassertion of the Western's American values through their displacement into non-American settings.

Justyna Wlodarczyk's essay also investigates the Western genre as a "motivated viewer," that is, she highlights the intersections of genre and gender by tracing how Ang Lee's adaptation of Annie Proulx's short story "Brokeback Mountain" positions the implied audience as female. Lee's movie incorporates elements of the romance and the melodrama, genres with a traditionally female audience. Additionally, his visualization of nature and the protagonists' interactions with their idyllic surroundings reveal their caring attitude (a version of "the ethics of care" after Carol Gilligan) while Proulx's story, in contrast, presents nature more as a site of struggle and danger. Wlodarczyk claims that this "prioritizing of nature… strengthens the film's antihomophobic message." If there is any ambiguity on this point Wlodarczyk demonstrates precisely how it resides in the activity of *adaptation* if only because aesthetics, conventions and effects are so deeply layered, intertextual, and even unruly. The Western's adaptabilities, intersections and (dis)affiliations with naturalism, realism, and gender performances are realized differently, inevitably. While Lee has been accused by some critics and filmgoers of "unqueering" Proulx's story, Wlodarczyk argues that he is in fact critical of mainstream American masculinity and promotes a broader "ethics of care" as an alternative. That said, the essay establishes the basis for how *audiences, readers,* or *spectators* self-constitute or emerge, and how any concepts of *literacy* or of *visuality* are always already in process.

Hanna Boguta-Marchel discusses the complications of adaptations of selected books by Cormac McCarthy for the screen, texts renowned for their (often unsettling) ambiguities and invitations for contradictory readings. Focusing on the recent film adaptations of *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, Boguta-Marchel attempts to demonstrate how a movie necessarily diverges from its literary counterpart, and how it inevitably fails to account for all of the novel's potentialities (in part enhanced by leisurely and multiple re-readings). In staking out this claim, Boguta-Marchel relies

on and clarifies the widely held assumptions that films (and visuality) and novels (textuality) are different media and modes of signification with their own registers for the production of meanings and for making them "stick," i.e. be "affective." Her arguments finally rest on what can be termed "humanist" values grounded in processes of reflection and of the aesthetic attention giving rise to them.

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PART ONE

HOW PICTURES THINK

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Mod High Low Sub Cultural *Basterds:* Tarantino's Wars, Sideways

> Employing pulp and propaganda in equal measure, Quentin Tarantino's INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS weaves together the infamous, oppressed, real, and larger-than-life stories of WW2.
>
> – "Synopsis" at the film's official website

> I am chairman of the department of Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill. I invented Hitler studies in North America in March of 1968. It was a cold bright day with the intermittent winds out of the east. When I suggested to the chancellor that we might build a whole department around Hitler's life and work he was quick to see the possibilities. It was an immediate and electrifying success. The chancellor went on to serve as advisers to Nixon, Ford and Carter before his death on a ski lift in Austria….
>
> I understand the music, I understand the movies, I even see how comic books can tell us things. But there are full professors in this place who read nothing but cereal boxes.
>
> It's the only avant-garde we've got.
>
> – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

A *succès de scandale*: The Postmodern Pleasures of How We Got This Way

My epigraphs invite a critical if somewhat playful recognition that it isn't easy being the *brand* "Quentin Tarantino," not with either the acclaim nor the controversies surrounding the release of his hit film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), arguably his most accomplished achievement. In what follows I want

to explore—probe, poke around—the bipolar (to say the least) receptions this film elicits, circulating among key issues as the connections among them rebound and thicken (the very essence of this film). For example, key concepts such as *history, representation, parody, caricature, tasteless, illusion, fantasy, identity* among others are used discursively and across fields and with different purposes to praise *Basterds* or to savage it in ways I've rarely encountered in the world of film criticism and journalism (which do have excitable moments). The occasioning of what one commentator calls a "firestorm in the blogosphere" was the accusation (by association or indirect charge or smear) that this film "denies" the European Holocaust.[1] *Inglourious Basterds* does no such thing.

My overall project treats *Inglourious Basterds* as an extraordinary example of popular film art whose strength and originality reside in its deconstructive transformation of the vastly baggy "war / combat" film genre with postmodernist representational strategies, putting the range of oppositions between "history" and "fiction," "actuality" and "fantasy" into entirely different *places*. Given the allegations (and the *frappe*) of "denial" levied against the film by some reviewers, I decided to make my case by engaging and disproving the aesthetic or ethical claims grounding—constituting—the main controversies attached to *Basterds*, but by showing how the film's *cinematic* elements enable the tools to moot and make irrelevant these negative judgments. Thus my arguments do not seek to further annul the pathological

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[1] I follow a number of historians and scholars, e.g. Hayden White, who specifies *holocaust* as a "*genus*" comprising "'holocaustal' events" ("Modernist Event" 20-21), and I locate the WW2 European Holocaust accordingly but mindful of its European Enlightenment origins and fully "modern," industrialized horror (see Nancy 27-50). This move neither diminishes nor denies the enormity of this "event" (and this is the case more indirectly or "sideways" with *Basterds*). This turn opens this Holocaust to *greater legibility* (meeting the problems of illegibility and inaccessibility, issues frequently raised by historians as the World War era recedes); see Eaglestone's important works on this topic (*Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial* and *The Holocaust and Postmodernism*). Describing the overwhelmingly documented "genocide" of indigenous peoples in the Western Hemisphere as the "American Holocaust" is consistent with giving these facts a greater *historical function* (after White) and bearing, and a significant metaphorical and thematic *function* in *Basterds*; see Stannard, *American Holocaust*. (White's "modernist" means mainly twentieth-century, and I am deliberately extrapolating a social "magnitude" into a close chronological continuum.) While Strom's summary of a list of conditions and behaviors (including "relativism" and potentials in "entertainment") contributing to or abetting "denial" still has its adherents (470-522; especially 490-497 on Holocaust Denial), a couple are out of sync if not neutralized by much scholarship since the late 1990s. "Cultural relativism" and experiments with "postmodern narrative" and story-telling as historical as well as fictional techniques are just two examples.

"discourse of denial" but to argue against those who use the charge of "Holocaust denial... as a 'knockdown' argument against postmodernism" (Eaglestone, *Postmodernism* 6), in this case those critics who badly *misrecognize* both a heinous allegation and Tarantino's postmodernist strategies and their effects. But my critique of Tarantino's film as a *fiction* and *fantasy* on the power of film offers some ironic and telling insights into the "actual" role of cinema under Nazism—hardly a "denial" of the European Holocaust. My epigraphs are points of departure for phasing in different "takes" on *Basterds*, on post-1945 perspectives of genres and their mutations (including war satires), on "technologies of perception," postmodern fabrication and "literacy," and culture as "mediascape." I also offer some close readings of specific scenes or montages to demonstrate *Basterds*' embodied "literacies" at work. My footnotes are *fugato* passages to the text's main melodies.

    Inglourious Basterds is and "should be met as a meditation on artifice, cinema and power" (Kuerston), and thus solidly metacritical or metacinematic. How Tarantino's film *works* (and how its working incorporates *entertainment*, a cinematic dimension some of his critics have difficulty recognizing or allowing [Rutsky and Wyatt passim]) conjoins the gaining of knowledge and the practices of pleasure: to teach and delight. The film most obviously does this by re-scripting the end of World War 2 as fantasy and farce and by playing off genre variants and changes since 1945 against each other. Tarantino accomplishes this reclamation of genre with seemingly non-realist (anti-historical) "post-modernist, para-historical representation[s]" and techniques (White 17-20), that is, by an iconoclastic breaking and exiting from the rules, the logics and expectations of genres in order that other things, becomings and potentials for embodied historical subjects be limned or imagined.

    Tarantino's fantastical ("coincidental and unintentional") rewrite of the War lands, so to speak, in a minefield. Its postmodernist generic space-time experiments demonstrate and extend Gunning's notions of a "cinema of attractions" into a "transformation of [the explosive shocks of modernity]" further transformed "into flow" or "duration, continuous forward motion"— in this instance of a fantastical rewrite of World War 2 and its conclusion (Gunning 310, 312).[2] I make use of film and genre history and theory to locate Tarantino's "iconoclasm" and yet his *rapprochement* with history through "fictions," his postmodern alignments as it were of invented "scenes" with multiple vectors to actual "events." What I intend is a more comprehensive view of how film (multimedial, digital) *literacy*—broadly grasped as visible representational strategies and technologies creating disjunctive spaces,

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[2] See Rajagopal "Introduction" 1-6; Gunning 297-315.

times and signification across multiple genres—grants access to historical understanding of the past (Sobchack "History Happens"; White "Modernist Event," "Postmodernism and Historiography"; Elsaesser and Hagener 171-187; Burnett passim; Virilio chap. 2).

This may seem old hat and indeed a broadly established method for historical interpretation and an indispensable pedagogical condition for knowledge production in just about any context. While post-1945 *globalizations* occur (and some are regarded and experienced as geocultural or economic catastrophic events, whether as "market" or "cultural" "delocalizations," others as emancipatory events and possibilities with new social relations, political subjectivities, mobile identities), these changes have been accompanied by accelerations of the growth and effects of "*technologies of perception*" understood as the "new communications" of television, Internet, and now "social media" (Facebook, Tweet), and their "unprecedented reach" to "mediate the effects of globalization" (Rajagopal 2). Moreover, these expanding "media reorder our perceptions and precipitate new ways of seeing and thinking" with the corollary that new "ideas of belonging or inclusion lead to novel ways of exercising citizenship rights and of conceiving politics" (Rajagopal 4). These alignments (and accelerating disjunctions) have extended "postmodern" representational strategies for reading, seeing, hearing—perceiving—historical and past "event" (White "Modernist Event" and "Postmodernism and Historiography"; Rosenstone "The Future of the Past"; Eaglestone *Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial* and *The Holocaust and Postmodernism*).

One can begin to sense the political and cultural anxieties aroused among some social formations when a popular cultural form or field (i.e. film, entertainment) is perceived as threatening, as an obliterating or mocking force erasing from cultural memory a *crucial* past. Or more specifically, of offending intentionally or not survivors of lethal hate campaigns, or altering, distorting, or trivializing the communal memory of the *historical reality* of genocide, especially when these anxieties are associated or linked however indirectly with the thoroughly discredited discourse of "Holocaust denial" (Strom 470-522; Viano; Elsaesser "Subject Positions"; Lanzoni; Rubenstein). Thus a film such as *Inglourious Basterds* occurs within an intersection at once problematic, ironic, paradoxical, undecidable, postmodern, paratactical: *it embodies a literacy accessing the very event it is accused by some of denying: Holocaust.* A possible (and impossibly melancholic for some) implication to my project here is that postmodern representations will be increasingly necessary to connect a "historical past" with a "practical past," in other words, to make history a "practical" part of the "conversation" that includes it in the "present" (White "In Retrospect"; cf. Eaglestone *Postmodernism and*