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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/13798>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.13798

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Astrid Böger and Nicole Maruo-Schröder, "Introduction. Envisioning Justice: Mediating the Question of Rights in American Visual Culture", *European journal of American studies* [Online], 13-4 | 2018, Online since 30 December 2018, connection on 08 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/13798> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.13798>

This text was automatically generated on 8 July 2021.

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- 1 When the scandal of U.S. American soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib broke after pictures began to circulate on the media in the spring of 2004, the public was shocked and outraged to find out that such atrocities had in fact been committed. However, as Susan Sontag pointed out, written reports about these incidents had circulated for over a year but went ignored by politicians. Unlike such reports, which can easily be suppressed, “[t]he pictures will not go away” but “continue to ‘assault’ us,” as Sontag wrote in “Regarding the Torture of Others” (42). The adage that pictures speak louder than words seems to hold particularly true for photographic evidence of atrocities but can certainly be extended to other visual media and other subject matter, as well. The eye, after all, is frequently taken to be an “organ” of enlightenment, and looking—*autopsía*—as a guarantee for truth and authenticity, at least in the Western world. In times of Instagram and “immediate” global circulation of news via the internet, the visual plays an even more important role in the dissemination of important events and discourses: Whatever is not visible (visualized) on the news (or the web) is—for all practical purposes—non-existent. After all, visual evidence is not just more immediately visible but also much more difficult to deny than, for instance, oral testimony. Still, as we all know, images can be manipulated in a variety of ways and are precisely not a guarantee for “the truth.” What is more, even if they are authentic, their implications can still be denied and ignored.
- 2 The visual, in other words, plays a central role in Western cultures, and this Special Issue explores the manifold ways in which American visual culture intersects with the notoriously elusive concept of justice and related aspects such as morality, law, and legality, among others. For instance, documentary photography and, similarly, photojournalism are important areas in which the connection between visual culture and justice becomes pertinent, as one of the overarching aims of this type of socially-

committed photography is to attract attention to conditions that are deemed unacceptable and therefore in need of change. Likewise, more straightforwardly fictional approaches to questions of justice and the law as used, for instance, in graphic novels, films, and computer games, also frequently depict, expose, and negotiate questions of (in)justice, often by involving their audience in the discussion, by eliciting emotional responses or even more dynamically as part of the narrative in interactive computer games. Precisely because pictures often make a stronger impression than words, they tend to have a powerful and far-reaching impact, as the example of the scandalous Abu Ghraib images above indicates. Yet visualization and dissemination alone do not guarantee that justice is actually served. As the public, political, and legal responses to that scandal have also shown, images and their meaning inevitably depend on framing, contextualization, and interpretation. Moreover, despite the fact that “images speak louder than words,” it is easy to overlook the seminal role that visual texts, particularly those considered as popular culture, have in the circulation of ideas, norms, and values as well as the discourses concerning “justice.” Therefore, we take this Special Issue as an opportunity to focus more closely on the intersections of (popular) visual culture and justice.

- 3 While in the area of literature, for instance, the aspects of law and morality have been discussed for some time (e.g., Crane; Schneck; Smith), the intersections between visual culture and the law have only recently and much more slowly become the focus of more systematic and extended academic attention (e.g., Asimow and Mader; Giddens; Romero and Dahlman; Sarat). This is even more surprising considering the power and the allure that images have. This Special Issue seeks to contribute to the growing and important field of visual culture studies and the law by looking more closely at select examples of “visual justice,” in other words, at the ways in which questions of justice can be represented and negotiated visually, ranging from early-20th-century photography to recent popular culture texts such as graphic novels, TV series, film, and computer games. Hence, the intersection of words and images and, more generally, the aspects of intermediality and multimodality are further angles explored in this Special Issue.
- 4 The issue opens with Klara Stephanie Szlezák’s discussion of selected press photographs and their role in the representation of labor rights activism in the context of New York May Day Parades in the early 20th century. At that time, the negotiation of labor rights was not simply part of a class-based struggle in which the often-conflicting interests of workers and the entrepreneurial class were negotiated: Regarding immigrant workers, the question of labor rights was also invariably caught up with discourses of nationalism and citizenship. Thus, Szlezák shows how the photographs, distributed by the Bain News Service, can be read as part of a rhetoric that seeks to represent immigrant workers as proud and confident but peaceful agents, a depiction that goes against media representations that visualized immigrant workers as either helpless or aggressive “other.” In this sense, images of May Day Parades in New York City can be seen as a subtle but important part of the discourse concerned with both class and racial justice.
- 5 The next contribution, by Johannes Schmid, discusses the potential of graphic literature when it comes to the representation of core questions of justice in the context of the civil rights movement. Schmid analyzes the specific ways in which justice and injustice are framed in the graphic memoir trilogy *March* (2013-2016),

written by U.S. Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis together with Andrew Aydin and artist Nate Powell. Harking back to the civil rights movement, when a variety of frames (ranging from the concept of individual rights to freedom and justice) were used to accentuate the demands of the protesters, *March* uses the multimodal characteristics of the comic genre to frame certain (non-violent) practices of social protest as “good trouble.” Thus, Lewis’ graphic memoir is not just a document that visualizes Lewis’ memories of the fight for civil rights, but also strives to become a model for present-day protest movements, representing, as Schmid writes, “a clear set of values that are represented as the path to salvation without an alternative.”

- 6 Andreas Beer’s contribution also looks at the genre of the graphic novel, yet shifts its focus to questions of intermediality and adaptation, not just between graphic novel and film but also between textual representation and real-world protest movements. Thus, Beer reads Alan Moore’s *V for Vendetta* (1982-1985) alongside its eponymous film adaptation from 2002, asking how the use of the mask in these two texts links up to how activists used, appropriated, and adapted it in real-life protests such as the Occupy Wall Street movement. More specifically, Beer shows that the complex meanings of the Guy Fawkes-mask in both film and comic as well as in its use in real-world contexts shifts according to the contexts of protest and the notion of justice that accompany its use.
- 7 Tobias Steiner’s contribution focuses on narratives of justice in post-9/11 TV dramas such as *24* (2001-2010), *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), *Person of Interest* (2011-2016), and *Homeland* (2011-2019). Analyzing the different representations of justice and their implications in the series, he identifies three distinct clusters that serve to visualize the ongoing process of dealing with the (national) trauma of 9/11 and its aftermath, from an early, simple revenge-based understanding of justice to a more multifaceted and complex one. Being part of what Newcomb and Hirsch have called a “cultural forum,” the clusters according to Steiner have provided a much-needed discursive space in which questions of justice and revenge, terror and trauma can be negotiated.
- 8 The following contribution by Nicole Maruo-Schröder also deals with ideas of justice in the context of 9/11 but shifts the focus to the genre of the superhero film and how it negotiates questions of justice and the law. She argues that the extraordinariness of the superhero—his standing outside the law—attains a new significance in the context of an ongoing state of exception as it has become visible in many states in the 21st century. By analyzing *Suicide Squad* (2016), *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), Maruo-Schröder shows the complex and also contradictory ways in which the superhero’s transgression of “the law” is both a necessary and a problematic moment in the narrative. This is particularly salient in light of the fact that, in recent years, superhero characters have become increasingly ambiguous, thereby blurring the line between good and bad.
- 9 Staying with the same genre, Ralph Poole’s contribution looks at a much neglected aspect of the representation of (in)justice, namely, the representation of sexualized violence against queer people in film. Analyzing both mainstream Hollywood productions and independent cinema, with a focus on New Queer Cinema, Poole shows how the ways in which violence is framed is decisive for a reading of the films and the ways they negotiate justice for queers. This is particularly important considering the history of representing LGBTIQ* persons on screen, which has overwhelmingly suffered from a highly problematic correlation of queerness, sexuality, and violence. Newer

productions, as Poole argues, succeed in conveying a less stereotypical and problematic picture, by depicting the problem of sexualized violence against queers while, in the best cases, also implying a future that goes beyond the traumatized experience of the victims.

- 10 Finally, a critical look at computer games, another, more interactive visual medium, and the ways in which it can serve as a popular site of the representation and negotiation of (in)justice rounds off this Special Issue. Thus, Stefan Schubert analyzes *BioShock Infinite* (2013) and argues that it is not just the game's narrative and ludic elements but also its visuality that help to engage the viewer/player in questions of (in)justice. Moving around in the game's storyworld, players are confronted with a fantastic and dystopian setting that nevertheless draws heavily on historical contexts of 19th-century America. Such parallels between the fictional setting and "real" history, Schubert concludes, invite players to critically experience the world as represented in the game and more particularly its manifold racial and class injustices which, in consequence, also serve as a comment on present-day questions of justice and morality.

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