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Resisting Extinction:
The Pictorial in Contemporary American Literature

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Resisting Extinction: The Pictorial in Contemporary American Literature

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Pronouncements of the death of the novel have been voiced with some regularity ever since the novel's birth. Judging by the titles, such obituaries seem to have been particularly frequent in the twentieth century. At this point few may remember José Ortega y Gasset's *Decline of the Novel* (1925) or Louis Rubin's *Curious Death of the Novel: Essays in American Literature* (1967); John Barth's landmark essay 'The Literature of Exhaustion' (1967) or Alvin Kernan's *Death of Literature* (1990) are more likely to be recognized, albeit for different reasons.¹ Since the early 1990s, worries about the demise of the novel have been augmented by fears that the print book is promptly becoming an endangered species, that it is threatened by a proliferation of what is collectively referred to as 'new media', that the Internet is its prime enemy. Robert Coover's article, 'The End of the Books', set off major tremors in 1992 when readers interpreted the essay as an unconditional hailing of the hypertext that was to replace the physical book.² Apocalyptic moods have spread through a number of attention-grabbing titles, such as *The Gutenberg Elegies* or 'The Last Book'.³

Even if anxieties about the death of the novel, the fate of the book and the future of print technology continue to be revived every time a new digital gadget is launched (think of Kindle or iPad), the print and the digital are likely to coexist for a long time to come. This coexistence is not necessarily without tensions; the strategies of remediation, appropriation, and 'poaching' characterize the contact zones between the two. What concerns me here is the strategy of appropriation of the most salient feature of the web—mixing words and images—in contemporary print novel. By weaving the visual into the verbal, I argue, the print novel not only resists its own death but also secures artistic renewal. In this, I align myself with N. Katherine Hayles who has indefatigably argued that the print novel as a literary form asserts the robustness of its medium by incorporating the strategies enabled by the digital technologies.⁴ I propose that the interweaving of the verbal and

the visual in print novel be seen as symptomatic of the new literary and cultural paradigm of the post-postmodernism, or of the 'post-Web 2.0' era.⁵

The number of novels in which word and image work together to produce meaning has been growing steadily. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) is likely the most well known, not least because it is one of the 9/11 narratives. Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), although perhaps less known to general audiences, has reached a cult status and can boast an active group of aficionados. Salvador Plascencia's novel *The People of Paper* (2005) and Steve Tomasula's *VAS: An Opera in Flatland* (2002) are further examples of verbal-visual or 'hybrid' texts.⁶

I hasten to emphasize that I do *not* claim an absolute novelty for the use of images in fictional narratives; to forward such a claim would be sheer foolishness in light of the long tradition of, say, illustrations in children's books. But I do claim novelty as regards the variety, type, intensity, and tonality with which images are woven into verbal narratives today. The interweaving of words and images in contemporary novels is very different from the tradition of using images for decoration of the text, decoration that has no semantic function (cf. ornamentation of initials in medieval illuminated manuscripts). It also differs from the tradition of illustration, in which the pictorial is meant to 'mirror' what is expressed in words (a practice common in children's book). Nor is the combination of words and images in verbal-visual novels similar to that which is central to the graphic novel. While the graphic novel does simultaneously mobilize the visual and linguistic codes that constitute it, it is, as Thierry Groensteen argues, a '*predominantly visual narrative form*'.⁷ The novels that interest me are predominantly *verbal* narratives; images, however extensive their use may be, never exceed the space allocated to the verbal.

Two caveats are in place. First, my use of the 'pictorial' or, interchangeably, 'image', corresponds roughly to what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the 'graphic image' in *Iconology*, that is, it refers to any recognizable figures and likenesses, pictograms, geometrical shapes, drawings, photographs, musical notations, or doodles.⁸ It also covers those graphic devices and layouts that address (sometimes even assault) the eye through alternation or disruption of the conventional look of the page. Second, while the extensive presence of the pictorial is

not limited to American literature, at this point it is particularly noticeable in novels written and published in the USA.

In what follows, I focus on just one example of the novels that re-fashion the print novel by interweaving the visual with the verbal in complex: Reif Larsen's *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* (2009). In this first-person narrative, the reader follows the actions and thoughts of the titular T.S. Spivet (T standing for Tecumseh and S for Sparrow), a twelve-year-old boy living with his family on the Coppertop Ranch in Montana.⁹ His father is represented by T.S. as a silent cowboy; his mother (whom the boy always refers to as Dr. Claire) is a scientist who for the last twenty years has been looking for a mythical species of beetle; T.S.'s sister, Gracie, is a rebellious teenager. His younger brother, Layton, died just a few months before the time of narration. A precocious child, T.S. is an avid map-maker and illustrator. Through drawings he compulsively documents small and big events and things he sees, for instance, his father's facial expressions; the flight paths of bats around his house; the dynamics of his sister shucking corn cobs; the menu of the Smithsonian Institution's automated telephone system; the association between length of shorts and leadership status among young urban boys; the decline of Indian nations on the High Plains over the past two centuries; the layout of leaf cutter ant colonies; and the spread of McDonald's in northern Montana.

The story begins with a telephone call from the Smithsonian Institution to T.S.: he is informed that he has won the prestigious Baird Award for the popular advancement of science for his illustration of the bombardier beetle. (It is only toward the end of the novel that T.S.—and the reader—learn that his mentor, Dr. Terence Yorn, an entomology professor and family friend, has secretly submitted a portfolio of the boy's scientific drawings to the Smithsonian.) Asked to accept the award and fellowship at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., T.S., without saying anything to his parents, leaves his home and embarks on a train-hopping, cross-country journey to the East Coast to claim the prize. As the reader follows T.S. on his adventures across the country, he/she also reads with him his mother's manuscript (stolen by the boy when preparing for his trip), which tells the story of his great-great-grandmother Emma, one of America's first female geologists.

This short summary of the novel signals a number of themes and issues. For instance, it is clear that Larsen's novel is a variation on 'Roughing It' literature, a reversal of the Wild West story. T.S. thinks of himself as

reversing the trek of Lewis and Clark, who are his model cartographers. He describes the American West as a 'land of myths, drinking, and silence' and the east as a 'land of ideas'.¹⁰ It is not difficult, either, to see that Larsen draws upon the tradition of precocious children in American fiction; the main character resonates with Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, Henry James's Maisie, J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield or, more recently, Jonathan Safran Foer's Oskar Schell. Borders and boundaries also constitute one of the important themes in the novel; the physical placement of the farm on the Continental Divide that separated the East and the West finds its resonances in the borders between genders, family members, children and adults, fact and fiction, history and fantasy. Another central concern is American masculinity, with the cowboy and the hobo as two distinct character-types.

Yet what captures the reader's attention at first sight, what is the most striking—not to say mesmerizing—feature of the book, is its lavish production and the overwhelming presence of images. The book's non-standard format (its size is 8 x 9.5 inches); the broad outer, top, and bottom margins; the double-spacing of its main text that creates the feel of a typed manuscript; the sepia coloring that gives the images an 'antique' look.¹¹ Most importantly, one's attention is immediately visually re-routed from the physical center and the verbal narrative to the margins dense with images. Virtually all the margins of the book are filled with graphs, charts, maps, drawings, doodles, and other pictorial material as well as with chunks of text. These marginal chunks of text are printed in a variety of typefaces, in sizes different from the one used for the main story. In addition, the marginal notes are often surrounded by frames which set them visually apart. Most often—but far from always—dotted lines link the main text and the marginalia. Thus, on the one hand, the reader is asked to assume what Sven Birkerts has famously called the missionary position of reading—to read linearly, to start reading on page one and turn page after page until the end of the book is reached.¹² On the other hand, however, the dotted lines, images, and marginal inscriptions encourage the eye to wander off to the margins, and thus to engage in other stories. This is particularly pronounced when the conventional physical navigation of the book is disrupted and, in order to follow some of the marginalia, the reader is required to reposition the book, to turn it around and sideways.¹³ In other words, the book engineers a non-conventional narrative experience for the reader, who is asked to maneuver between the main text and the margins, to shift attention from the verbal to the visual, and to notice the physical shape of words.

It may be a bit redundant to say that the dotted lines allude to hypertextual links or, to be more precise, that they appear to translate digital links into their paper equivalents.¹⁴ At the same time, however, the dotted lines (cum-hypertext-links) expose—and explore—the striking difference between the printed page and what the reader experiences in the digital environment. In a digital hypertext, clicking on the hyperlink leads to a replacement of one portion of the text by another that pops up on the computer screen; the physical disconnection of textual segments is the organizing principle. In Larsen's novel the main text and the marginal text/images physically and visually co-exist. The dotted lines simultaneously reinforce the visual differentiation between the center (the main story) and the margins, and create links between the stories told in the two different spaces. The question is: What is the function of this design? I would like to point to some of its meaning-making potential.

As I have already indicated, the very size of the margins and the placement of most of the images in those margins make the reader aware of what is usually left empty: the blank space that surrounds the narrative. In this case, this space is used to visualize what T.S. draws and thus to remind the reader of his talents as cartographer and of his compulsion to document the life around him. But this illustrative function of marginal images is less important than their narrative role. Larsen puts key elements of the story in the physical space of his book's margins: these serve as a repository of stories triggered by—or barred from—the main narrative. The margins function as a kind of stage on which T.S. can play out his fears, secrets, desires, anxieties, and memories; they are places of comic relief from the story of T.S.'s loneliness; they accommodate clues about what is to happen. In other words, called back, so to speak, both literally and metaphorically into visibility, the margins are transformed into a semantically meaningful site, a site teeming with signs asking to be interpreted.¹⁵

It is in the margins of the book that the reader is given an indication of what spurs the narratives, what constitutes its 'heart of darkness'. Of all the images and notes that figure in the margins of Larsen's novel (and in the marginal annotations of T.S.'s tale), those that refer to T.S.'s dead brother Layton are strikingly numerous. For instance, the reader can see an image of Layton's rocking horse,¹⁶ of his fake tattoo 'Very Dangerous Man Lives Here',¹⁷ and a reproduction of a page from his coloring book.¹⁸ There are two images of Layton, one an eerily blurred

photograph of him 'in midair jumping onto a squirrel',¹⁹ the other a drawing of the boy's 'Extended Fist Pump'.²⁰ There is also a diagram of two rifle shots and images of three rifles (one of which fired these shots) and the autopsy report as well as two drawings visualizing 'Patterns of Cross-Talk Before and After'.²¹ Even the cryptic image on page 118 in which a bathroom is linked by an equation mark to safety turns out to be related to the death of Layton, although this connection can only be made some 176 pages later, when T.S. tells in the margin that immediately after the deadly accident he hid in the family bathroom and stayed there for many hours.

The very first mention of the lethal accident that haunts T.S. and changes his and his family's life appears as a marginal note linked to an image. In the main text, T.S. speaks of his sister Gracie, 'a miraculous woman in general', of his mother, 'a misguided coleopterist', and of his father, 'a quiet and brooding bronc-buster' who 'was born perhaps one hundred years too late'.²² At this point a dotted line leads the reader's eye from the bottom of the page to the top of the right-hand-margin. The text reads: 'And then there was my younger brother, Layton Housling Spivet, the only Spivet boy born without the birthname Tecumseh in five generations. But Layton died this past February during an accident with a gun in the barn that no one ever talked about. I was there too, measuring gunshots. I don't know what went wrong'. Then follows a vertically placed drawing of the sound-wave of a gunshot with an accompanying caption 'Gunshot # 21 from Notebook B345'. The text continues: 'After that, I hid his name in the topography of every one of my maps'.²³ Thus, the drawing of the gunshot visualizes the disruption that the death of the youngest child in the Spivet family has caused long before the verbal narrative allows the reader to understand the seismic changes in the family dynamics. This marginal comment alerts the reader to several threads in Larsen's novel, such as the theme of death, naturally, but also the haunting presence of Layton in whatever T.S. does, his uncertainty about his own role in the death of his brother, the family's traumatized silence about the accident, the all-American obsession with guns, and the transposition of sound/language into image.

The tragedy of Layton's death is interlaced in complex ways with T.S.'s uncertainty about the family's emotional bonds. I would like to take a closer look at the drawing with the caption 'Patterns of Cross-Talk Before and After'.²⁴ We are given two drawings of a rectangular table with the names of the Spivet family members placed at its four sides.

Full and dotted lines, some of them straight, some slightly curved, link the various seats/names. The image of the table marked with number 1 (the 'before' table) gives a 'messy' and 'crowded' impression, while the second image (marked as number 2 and placed below the first drawing) has an orderly look, the number of lines reduced from nine to five. It should be noted, too, that some of the lines have arrows at both ends, while others end with one arrow only. The caption's reference to time signals a narrative that asks to be deciphered. It is not difficult to see that the 'before' and 'after' refer, in an elliptical way, to Layton's death. Before the accident, the pattern of talks among the Spivet family members, as the first image shows, is rich and complex, both the dotted and the full lines pointing to Layton as the focus of attention at the dinner table. Conversations take place *around* as much as *across* the table. The diagram of communication *after* the accident is much more orderly, the 'across' coming closer to a cross. At the same time the second drawing makes the pattern of communication of the first much more visible: as the full line indicates, the father of the family communicated only with Layton. Layton now gone, the father does not communicate with anybody, although he continues to be addressed by his wife and his daughter. The previous two-way communication between the mother and the daughter is now, the arrows indicate, a one-way exchange between Dr. Claire and Gracie, while T.S. continues two-way conversations with his mother and his sister Gracie. What is most striking, however, is that neither before nor after the accident is there any communication whatsoever between the father and T.S., as no lines link the two, irrespective of where at the table T.S. is seated. (We will observe that T.S. takes Layton's place to the left of the father in the second diagram.)

The two drawings not only visualize the changes in the family dynamics indicated by the 'before' and 'after' of the caption, but also its constant: a steady alignment of T.S. with the women in the family and his equally steady lack of contact with the father. This alignment is signaled—but not made much of—in a casual way in the following comment fairly early in the narrative: 'Layton, like Father', T.S. tells us, 'wasn't interested in anything that had to do with beauty or hygiene and thus never joined us. [Note: The "us" refers to the mother, Gracie, and T.S.] He belonged with Father in the fields, punching cows and breaking broncs'.²⁵ It is only gradually that the verbal narrative reveals what the drawings visualize: the lack of bond between the father and the son. A yearning to bridge this gap turns out to be as much an undercurrent of T.S.'s story as is his sense of guilt and responsibility for Layton's death. The

journey to Washington, D.C. to collect the prize turns out to also be a quest for absolution and for the father's love and recognition. Absolution is achieved as T.S., in a confession-like manner, tells the audience gathered to witness the prize-handing ceremony the story of what happened in the barn, admitting his guilt by saying at the end 'I didn't mean to do it. I didn't, I didn't'.²⁶ A short while later he meets his father who has come to the capital to fetch his son and, upon seeing him, T.S. experiences an epiphany of sorts: 'A thousand diagrams of Dr. Ekman's facial units could not capture the relief, the tenderness, the deep, deep love, bound in my father's face. And not just that: I realized that these emotions had *always* been there, they had just been hidden behind the curtains of his silent akimbo'.²⁷ When the father, in a gesture that resonates with a scene in the 1953 Western movie *Shane*, takes off his cowboy hat and puts it on T.S.'s head,²⁸ the father-son bonding with all its Western overlays is completed and the novel ends.²⁹ In retrospect, the lack of communication lines between himself and his father in the 'Patterns of Cross-Talk' turns out to visualize T.S.'s emotional insecurity, his misreading of family dynamics, and a sense of alienation rather than a lack of fatherly affection.

I hope that my discussion of two instances of the employment of images in the margins of Larsen's novel indicates that the book's graphic layout and the presence of pictorial material are neither incidental nor trivial. Rather than merely illustrating (that is, decorating) the verbal narrative, they interact with the main story in complex and intricate ways, sometimes in a counterpoint-like manner, sometimes creating disjunctions, excess, or assonance. Meaning, in other words, is produced concurrently at the center and at the margins of the verbal narrative and the physical book.

Those familiar with experimental postmodern fiction will undoubtedly observe that the layout and the use of pictorial material in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* resembles the strategies of early postmodern fiction. Indeed, such texts as William Gass's *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968), Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971), Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) or Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978) all experiment with layout, switch fonts, and include drawings. Like these experimental postmodern novels, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* can be seen as what Brian McHale has called a dual-medium text.³⁰ Larsen's novel, in foregrounding the materiality of the printed page and the physicality of the book, conforms to a continuity of literary praxis since the late 1960s/early 1970s.

But such family resemblances between the early postmodern novels and Larsen's book should not obscure important differences between them. *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* and other contemporary novels that include extensive visual material are published under different cultural, technological, and socio-economic conditions than those that organized life in early postmodernism. Digital modes of production make the insertion of a variety of images both easier and economically viable; unlike in early postmodernism, pictorial material makes it into mass publications, not only into exclusive and avant-garde ones. For instance, while one of the classics of postmodern literature, William Gass's *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*, had only four-hundred copies printed in 1968, Reif Larsen had ten publishers vying for *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* (incidentally, his debut novel) and is rumored to have received an advance of just under a million dollars from Penguin Press.³¹ More importantly, there are considerable differences in the intensity with which the images are used today and in their function in the reading process. While the novels written in early postmodernism tended to employ experimental typography in the service of fragmentation and displacement, aiming to impede and even block sense-making processes, in twenty first-century fiction narrative is hardly ever made illegible. In early postmodernism, formal manipulation was often, as Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish observe, 'antifunctional, deliberately chaotic, and averse to message-driven, information-delivery approaches to communication'.³² The novels to which *The Selected Works* belongs mark a strong return to traditional, mimetic, modes of storytelling. Similarly, while illustration in postmodern literature, as McHale argues, 'is typically anti-illustration'³³ that is, it functions as a parody of the conventions of illustration, visual images in contemporary novels interact with the verbal narrative to co-create meaning through strategies of augmentation, supplementation, contradiction or disjunction.

The intricacies of the verbal-visual intersections, of course, emerge only in the process of careful reading. At first sight images in novels such as Larsen's *The Selected Works* or Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* may be—and have been—seen as 'gimmickry' and regarded as yet more proof of what Johanna Drucker has called 'the current condition [...] of image glut and visual overstimulation'.³⁴ For instance, in her review of Larsen's novel, Ginia Bellafante notes that it is 'burdened by device', the extensive use of images blocking, according to her, 'the reader's own instinct for visualization'.³⁵ Images in a narrative, such

comments seem to imply, signal a failure of linguistic artistry, a betrayal of the word. Common in 'lower' types of literature, such as books for children or comics, images tend to be associated with 'simple' entertainment and pleasure, with mindless escapism and passive consumption, with superficiality and intellectual passivity.³⁶ Little wonder, then, that some critics see the pictorial as one more morbid symptom of the end of literature. By extensively using the pictorial, their argument goes, the novel aligns itself with mass cultural values and contributes to the loss of its cultural authority.³⁷

However, it could also be argued that the 'visual overstimulation' (*pace* Drucker) in many contemporary novels is primarily a strategy of resistance: by incorporating the pictorial, the print novels fight against being relegated to the margin of our image-dominated culture. More than that: print, such novels seem to assert, can successfully compete with digital media by appropriating their distinct feature, a braiding together of words and images. This seeming complicity with the digital media that threaten to engulf the print novel may indeed be 'the most subversive act that fine art can currently perform'.³⁸ Read within the technological contexts that has enabled their very existence, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* and other verbal-visual narratives should be seen not as 'burdened by device' but as *depending* on it, their adventurous use of images making them both intellectually more challenging and artistically novel.

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Notes

- 1 It must be noted that while the titles often signal the decline if not downright death of the novel, the authors more often than not argue that literature is still going strong. Writing in the mid-1960s, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. proposes that literary energies have been rearranged and replenished rather than exhausted. It may be good to heed his observation that 'the response of novelists to difficult and demanding times will doubtless continue to be what the response of writers to difficult and demanding times always has been: namely, difficult and demanding works of literature'; see *The Curious Death of the Novel: Essays in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 7-8. When Ronald Sukenick published his collection of short stories under the title *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (1985), he simultaneously and paradoxically both drew upon the death discourse and made it invalid.
- 2 Robert Coover, 'The End of Books', *New York Times Book Review* 21 June 1992: 1, 23-25.
- 3 Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994). In 1998, *The New York Times* used the rubric 'The Last Book' to report on the project at the Media Laboratory at MIT called 'The Last Book'. In 2001 in Sweden, one of the pioneers of the sociology of literature studies, Johan Svedjedal, published a collection of essays entitled *Den sista boken* (Eng.: *The Last Book*; Stockholm: Wahlström och Widstrand, 2001).
- 4 See in particular N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002) and *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Of course today it is very rare to find books that do not have an imprint of the digital since, as Hayles suggests, 'given present modes of book production, it is more accurate to view print as a particular form of output for electronic text than it is to regard print as a realm separate from digital media' (*My Mother Was a Computer*, p.117). The point I want to stress is that the type of innovative typography and the inclusion of images in commercially published books would not be feasible without a computer. Digital technology secures a new type of creative freedom that is economically viable.
- 5 For an interesting if brief discussion of art 'after' Web 2.0, see Manovich, 'The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?' in *Critical Inquiry* 35:2 (2009), 319-21.

- 6 Among non-American fictional narratives I would like to mention W.G. Sebald's *Vertigo* (1990; Eng. 2000), Mark Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005) and Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), as well as Walter Moers's *The 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear* (2000).
- 7 Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty & Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 12, original italics. Groensteen argues against a common assumption that the text and image are two equal components of comics and, by extension, the graphic novel. The most known advocate of the equality of the two codes is Scott McCloud; see *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).
- 8 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 10. Mental or verbal images (*ekphrasis*) are not of interest to me in this paper.
- 9 Tecumseh, as is well known, was a late-eighteenth-century Native American leader of the Shawnee tribe that opposed the United States during the so-called Tecumseh's war. Larsen's novel alludes to a broad variety of historical material, most of which can be linked to heroic and/or traumatic events.
- 10 Reif Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* (New York: Penguin, 2009) p. 177.
- 11 It needs to be noted that there is a difference in this respect between the American Penguin edition and the British Harvill Secker. While in the British edition the sepia coloring is sustained throughout the book, in the American edition the images in the text are in black ink, the sepia coloring used only on the pages that frame the text.
- 12 Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies*, p.163.
- 13 Ben Gibson is named as responsible for the book's design and typography, but illustrations were created together with Reif Larsen. Larsen used Adobe Illustrator.
- 14 Larsen himself has likened his book to 'exploded hyper-text' (qtd. in Irene Sege, 'The Story Told in the Margin', review of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* by Reif Larsen, *The Boston Globe* 5 May 2009. Available online at http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2009/05/05/the_story_told_in_the_margins/ [accessed 25 January 2010].
- 15 Commenting on his novel, Larsen stresses the significance of the margins: 'Some of the most important, juicy reveals that T.S. makes are the last line of a sidebar' (qtd. in Sege).
- 16 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 87.
- 17 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 108.

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- 18 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 154.
 - 19 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 124.
 - 20 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 208.
 - 21 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, pp. 11, 65, 67.
 - 22 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 11.
 - 23 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 11.
 - 24 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 67.
 - 25 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 9. This quotation needs little commentary in its employment of the cliché of the West that links the feminine to the domestic and cultural and the masculine to the physical and natural. The 'Cowboy Code' and his own place in it is, in fact, one of T.S.'s major concerns.
 - 26 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 314.
 - 27 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 370. This is a reference to the so-called Facial Action Coding System (FACS), developed by Paul Ekman in the 1970s and widely used in psychology.
 - 28 Larsen, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, p. 374.
 - 29 The troubled ideology of this ritualistic recognition of the son's masculinity is, I believe, quite obvious.
 - 30 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 190.
 - 31 For information about the original and subsequent editions of William Gass's novella see <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/book/?fa=customcontent&GCOI=15647100601620&extrasfile=A585060F-B0D0-B086-B652A43804C19DA3.html> [accessed 1 March 2010].
 - 32 Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish, *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, 2009), p. 350.
 - 33 McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 189.
 - 34 Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 193.
 - 35 Ginia Bellafante, 'Map Quest', review of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* by Reif Larsen (*New York Times* 14 September 2009), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/21/books/review/Bellafante-t.html> [accessed 20 December 2009].
 - 36 The arguments about the inferiority of the image in comparison to the word have a long history. Equally long is the history of privileging the image over the word. For interesting discussions of

this point see, for instance, J.Hillis Miller, *Illustration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) or Mitchell Stephens, *The Rise of the Image and the Fall of the Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

37 I draw here on Drucker's argument focusing on fine art; see Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, p. 3.

38 Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, p. 195.