

Christophe Dony

The rewriting ethos of the Vertigo imprint: critical perspectives on memory-making and canon formation in the American comics field

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The rewriting ethos of the Vertigo imprint: critical perspectives on memory-making and canon formation in the American comics field

- 1 Vertigo, DC's adult-oriented¹ imprint, is generally thought to have contributed to the transformation and new perception of the comics medium in the US in the 1990s (DANIELS, 1995; LOPES, 2009; RHOADS, 2008; ROUND, 2010). It is often noted that this transformation followed the renewed interest in comics after the publication of *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, and *Maus I* in 1986, which coincided with the attendant embracing of the elegant albeit problematic term "graphic novel" by the critical community and publishers alike. In fact, Vertigo is often praised for having "fully joined the fight for adult readers" in the early 1990s (WEINER, 2010, p. 10). So far, however, little attention has been devoted to the implications of how and why this "fight" was played out by and within the Vertigo imprint.
- 2 One exception is Julia Round's analysis of some of the editorial and marketing strategies employed by the label in the 1990s. In her essay, Round maintains that Vertigo redefined the comics medium in bringing it "closer to the notion of literary text" (ROUND, 2010, p. 22), notably in observing that the imprint adopted the concept of the star-creator "whose name sells the book" (*Idem*, p. 21), "the graphic novel format", and "a new self-awareness and literary style" (*Idem*, p. 22). In further maintaining that Vertigo initiated marketing strategies as well as experimented with industrial practices and techniques, Round points to the (un)conscious label's agenda of self-canonization, that is, its possibly deliberate efforts to install a new set of norms within the American comics landscape, and thereby a new canon.²
- 3 Needless to say, the idea of canonicity is based on key notions such as selection and hierarchy (BLOOM, 1973; MORGAN, 2011), but these notions need not only be articulated by communities of readers and/or viewers. Publishers, producers, and artists certainly participate in the creation of a canon as well, especially when they recurrently refer to and/or draw connections with specific movements, traditions and/or artists whose themes, works and/or aesthetics they either glorify and celebrate or, on the contrary, subvert and challenge. Following this line of reasoning, one might argue that the sector actors of any cultural domain can propose new historical and canonical matrixes of an art form as they engage with the philosophy of intertextuality and its many implications. More specifically perhaps, publishers and artists alike can attempt to redefine and hence rewrite a canon in terms of socio-cultural and patrimonial issues. And I believe that this is precisely what Round fails to see in her analysis of the Vertigo imprint. Round does not take the poetics animating the editorial project of the label into consideration as further evidence of Vertigo's endeavor to "redefine" the medium and its canon(s). In fact, she downplays the importance of the underlying discourse of postmodernist reprise that has been part and parcel of Vertigo's programme and cultural identity. In short, Round fails to note that the label's rewriting ethos is yoked to a politics of commemoration that calls into question the structuring forces of the industry.
- 4 There is no denying that strategies of rewriting pervade the Vertigo catalogue. The core titles that launched the label in the early 1990s (*The Sandman*, *Animal Man*, *Swamp Thing*, *Hellblazer*, *Shade: The Changing Man* and *Doom Patrol*), for example, are critical transformations of characters from the DC universe. These titles offer new versions of previously existing characters that are dislocated from their original contexts and re-articulated in new ones that explore horror and the occult as well as mix self-reflexive elements that one can associate with generic subversion. The revisiting of (popular) genres is in fact one of the most recurrent means through which Vertigo deploys its rewriting ethos. *Preacher* (1995-2000), for example, revisits the Western and its attendant American frontier mythology.

The ongoing series *Fables* (2002-present) recasts traditional folk and fairytale characters in present-day New York as a result of their forced exile from their magical lands and, in so doing, challenges many of the codes of the conventional fairytale. In his series *Northlanders* (2008-2012), Brian Wood engages in a redefinition of the Norse sagas and the Viking Age in blending historical details and mythology with modern storytelling techniques and narrative genres. Other shorter Vertigo series and original graphic novels also rewrite and reinvent existing icons, stories, and cultural artefacts. *Uncle Sam* (1997), for example, is a narrative corporealization of the personified allegory of the US that radically differs from the eponymous superhero of the DC universe; *The Nobody* (2009) is a modern take on H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897); *Greendale* (2010) is a graphic adaptation of Neil Young's eponymous concept album released in 2003, and the recent *Prince of Cats* (2012) is a modern hip-hop retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* that focuses on Tybalt and mixes samurai action with Shakespearian theatre.

5 This non-exhaustive list clearly illustrates that the concept of rewriting has been one of the foundational pillars on which Vertigo has relied on for over 20 years in order to build its editorial project and develop a specific poetics. Implicitly, it also hints at the critical approach and framework under which I intend to study the politics of commemoration deployed by the label as a whole. The different comics mentioned above indeed point to my understanding of rewriting as a primarily literary, social, and cultural phenomenon. More specifically, I believe that a wide array of Vertigo titles such as the ones mentioned above not only engage with rewriting strategies that range from mere quotation to the recasting (and mixing) of various genres, works, and themes, but also with the rewriting of old discursive systems, categories, and patterns, including the mainstream/alternative dialectic. In other words, it is my contention that Vertigo's archival impulse reflects a broad range of implications which entail the transformations of texts as well as the rewriting of some of the structuring forces of the American comics field.

6 I do not deny the fact that applying the term "rewriting" to a medium which generally mixes images with text has its limits. Potential detractors may claim that this non-visual approach results from a problematic methodology and/or terminology which aims at implicitly defining comics *as* literature for ideological purposes. This could not be further from the truth. I do not wish to try and "elevate" the art form in engaging in a discussion whose purpose is to define comics along the lines of such or such allegedly high-profiled art or discipline. Nor should my use of the term "rewriting" be conflated with a particular kind of "status marker" discourse. The reason I am using the term "rewriting" is because I am primarily interested in the literary and narrative ramifications as well as the *intertextual*, cultural and historical influences pervading the poetics and politics of the imprint. Moreover, it should be pointed out that a majority of Vertigo titles are scriptwriter-driven and/or are often borne from a writer pitching a story to the editorial staff of Vertigo – the artwork thus being often relegated in second position in the industrial process. I therefore saw it fit to stick to the term "rewriting" rather than come up with an equally problematic buzz-neologism such as "re-aestheticizing" or "re-imaging". This being said, by no means do I contend that Vertigo titles do not allude to, refer to, or quote other works visually. In fact, I would encourage scholars to carry out research examining the "aesthetic kinship" or "iconographic genealogy" permeating the visual styles of Vertigo artists. In *Vertigo Visions: Artwork from the Cutting Edge of Comics* (2000), former Vertigo editor and writer Alisa Kwitney paved the way for such a research, notably in connecting the works of various cover illustrators with artistic traditions and techniques as varied as collage, hyperrealism, expressionism, surrealism, as well as retro and "art deco" aesthetics.

7 Undoubtedly, my decision to focus on the rewriting impulse of the imprint clearly connects the poetics of Vertigo with postmodernist aesthetics and culture which, as Linda Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson have maintained, are inherently quotational and reiterative (HUTCHEON, 1985, 1988, 1989; JAMESON, 1991).³ However, it should be specified that although I am indebted to both scholars in claiming that Vertigo is characterized by the postmodernist mode of quotation (and therefore intertextuality), this study falls more in accordance

with Hutcheon's perception of postmodernism than with Jameson's. While the latter's interpretation of postmodernism is a ludic and playful one that amounts to nothing else than pastiche whose effect, he laments, is "the disappearance of the historical referent" (JAMESON, 1991, p. 25), Hutcheon advances a model of postmodern appropriation that aims at problematizing, social, cultural, and political norms inspired from traditional generic forms and material. In contrast to Jameson, Hutcheon suggests in her exploration of the genre of parody (1985) that the strategies of rewriting deployed in postmodernist works challenge, or at least call into question, the making of history by and for social institutions.

8 Following Hutcheon's logic, this study shows how the rewriting ethos of Vertigo goes hand in hand with the label's development of a self-reflexive and critical discourse on the history of the medium, its search for legitimacy, and the power relations inherent to its industry. More precisely perhaps, this paper aims at exploring the specificities and implications of Vertigo's intro- and retrospective discourse on the form and how this metadiscourse participates in a logic of unorthodox commemoration that is connected to issues of canon formation, memory-making, and commodification. Drawing notably on the works of various comics historians as well as on Harold Bloom's concept of poetic misprision (BLOOM, 1973) and his later conceptualization of canon-making in *The Western Canon* (BLOOM, 1994), I hope to demonstrate that Vertigo has used strategies of rewriting to support a distinctive agenda in the field of comics historiography. It should be clear by now that I am by no means attempting to connect Vertigo to a specific literary or comics canon and thereby resurrect the unproductive politics of domination and exclusion that animate such debates. Rather, I am interested in seeing how Vertigo has relied on strategies of rewriting to acquire what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital", that is honor and prestige (BOURDIEU, 1991 [1982]). In so doing, I argue that Vertigo has adopted a poetics of demarcation that, on the one hand, undermines the dynamics of power relations and canon-making strategies structuring the field of comics and, on the other, calls into question Thierry Groensteen's (in)famous claim that comics is an "art without memory", an art that "gladly cultivates amnesia" (GROENSTEEN, 2006, p. 67, my translation).⁴

9 In this analysis of the imprint under the postmodern aegis, I will identify three categories of rewriting that animate the label's poetics and editorial project and will discuss how each of these categories engages in a critical relationship with both the history of the medium and its perception. The first of these categories explores the ties between Vertigo and its parent company DC Comics. The second section highlights Vertigo's deep and abiding love with the American pulp tradition. Finally, the third category investigates why a plethora of Vertigo titles are inspired by the Gothic.

10 It is necessary to point out that this structure is meant for the sake of clarity and organization. This tripartite division, however, should not impede the dialogues between the different parts of this essay. In fact, thematic overlaps as well as structural and cultural parallels inevitably surface in these various sections, which illustrates that the various streams of ideas that irrigate these sections are a natural consequence of the thick intertwining between the issues of canon-making, (comics) history and memory, as well as the medium's search for cultural legitimacy.

11 In order to better understand how Vertigo writes back to and beyond the specific mnemonic discourses adopted by the mainstream and alternative poles of the industry, how the label deploys a poetics and politics of demarcation in regard to the concerns for lineage and affiliation that comics artists and publishers from both ends of the spectrum have focused on, it is first necessary to probe how the notion of rewriting in the field of comics, as in any other cultural domain, is connected to issues of memory and canonization as well as to explore more specifically why these issues are of crucial importance in comics studies.

The cultivation of amnesia?

12 Thierry Groensteen has claimed that comics is an art that "does not show significant concern for its heritage" (GROENSTEEN, 2006, p. 67, my translation). Behind the apparent pessimistic tone of this claim, several arguments supporting the comics historian's position can be outlined. First, much of the comics production worldwide, especially in the United

States to which we will restrict our expertise, embraces the logic of the commodity: it is rapidly forgotten and even literally disposed of, notably because of the industry's adoption of the so-called "floppy" format (cf. MORGAN, 2011, §8). Overlapping with this logic of cultural industry is the idea that most comics are ephemeral precisely because they are replaced and made redundant by the new stories or issues of existing series that publishers release on a monthly basis in an environment that is characterized by fierce competition. Second, as Harry Morgan has argued (*Idem*, §7), the low-brow and infantile perception of the medium as well as its allegedly attendant lack of cultural legitimacy have undoubtedly contributed to the cultivation of amnesia that Groensteen has pointed out (GROENSTEEN, 2006). Additionally, most likely taking his cue from Bradford Wright's assertion that "comics books are ultimately a generational experience" (WRIGHT, 2003, p. xiii), Morgan claims that every generation has its own "classics" (cf. MORGAN, 2011, §53-68). This may explain why, according to Charles Hatfield, very few comics "achieve [the] status" of "timeless classics" (HATFIELD, 2012, n. pag., my emphasis). To put it differently, the works of comics creators, however innovative and original they might be, primarily appeal to and resonate with the memory of a particular generational audience. It is notably for these reasons that Morgan regretfully notes that a canon of comics is non-existent or, at best, always oriented towards a specific genre such as science-fiction or towards a distinct period in comics historiography (cf. MORGAN, 2011, §53-68).

13 Although insightful, the discourse supporting both the cultivation of amnesia and lack of canon formation respectively invoked by Groensteen and Morgan can nevertheless be complicated when one considers how comics creators and publishers themselves engage in an intertextual exploration of the medium. Their ability to quote other comics, genres, and styles may indeed offer a new perspective on the issues of memory- and canon-making in comics. As Henry Jenkins reminds us in a recent essay exploring the archival, the residual, and the ephemeral in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2002-2004): "collections and stories are both ways of managing memory" (JENKINS, 2013, p. 303). Therefore, according to Jenkins, processes "(re)performing this memory work" should not and "cannot be separated from [...] the formation of canons of comics" (*Idem*, p. 302). Paradoxically enough, this seems to be the argument running throughout Groensteen's *Parodies: La Bande Dessinée au Second Degré* (GROENSTEEN, 2010), which explores parody in comics. Although not specifying it, Groensteen nevertheless implies in this book that comics artists have played an important role in the construction of a specific history of the comics medium. As the title of the book reveals, Groensteen takes his cue from Gérard Genette's classic narratological study, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au Second Degré* (GENETTE, 1982), and deals with how a wide array of cartoonists have recurrently drawn on various strips, characters, and narrative genres to engage in a critical relationship with them, including the influential, inspiring, and successful comics that left a mark on the history of the medium. Parody, however, is obviously not the only means by which artists have engaged with the history of the medium. In fact, editors and comics artists from the mainstream industry and the alternative press alike have recurrently reflected on the issues of memory and canonization, albeit in very distinctive ways.

14 Since the late 1980s, for example, Marvel and DC have "become more engaged with the histories of their publishing lines and more fully aware of the impact of past stories upon the present" (FRIEDENTHAL, 2011, §2), notably in realizing that "they could utilize the continuity established by decades-worth of stories to weave together a cohesive, metatextual tapestry" (*Idem*, § 1). In a similar line of reasoning, Geoffrey Klock has maintained that "reinterpretation" has become a "survival code" (KLOCK, 2002, p. 13) for artists taking up superhero stories since, he argues, "any given superhero narrative stands in relation to its conflicted, chaotic tradition, and continuity" (*Idem*, p. 5). In fact, taking his cue from Harold Bloom, Klock focuses on what he calls the revisionary titles of the 1980s, which include *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *The Killing Joke* (1988) as well as later titles such as *Promethea* (1999-2005) and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-2007, 2009-present) precisely because they call into question some of the codes and staples of the superhero genre.⁵ These titles, Klock argues, display self-consciousness because they are, as Bloom would have it, "shadowed by the anxiety of influence" (BLOOM, 1973, p. 10).

According to Klock, these titles illustrate how “the building density of tradition becomes anxiety” and how “the superhero narrative becomes literature” (KLOCK, 2002, p. 3). In light of this scholarship, it is thus possible to argue that the mainstream industry has used the history of its most enduring genre – the superhero – to develop a particular mnemonic and institutional discourse.

15 Alternative artists have, in contrast, taken up the issues of memory and canonization in invoking, generally, the works of a few innovative and experimental comics artists. Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware, for example, have recurrently evoked narratively or otherwise the works of cartoonists from the past, usually newspaper strips of the early 20th century such as *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Little Nemo*, and *Krazy Kat*. In so doing, these artists “recast [...] the history of comics to highlight work that is similar to [their] own” (HEER, 2010, p. 5). Alternative artists therefore aim at giving their works, as Heer puts it in discussing Chris Ware’s works, “a pedigree and lineage” that is rooted in formal experimentation and aesthetic innovation (*Idem*, p. 4). It is worth noting here that both Spiegelman and Ware also recurrently draw attention to the construction of the comics page as an important structuring unit of the medium and how its architecture, similarly to memory, can be fragmentary, re-membered and re-constructed. This is most visible in Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* and *Breakdowns* (1977) and in Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000) and, quite unequivocally, in his more recent *Building Stories* (2012).⁶

16 Alternative comics artists have also recurrently promoted real-life (inspired) narratives and satire to avoid the perception of infantilism that is generally associated with the mainstream industry and/or more commercial and genre-based comics. Charles Hatfield has indeed noted that alternative comics’ “dominant narrative modes” are “tragedy, farce, and picaresque” (HATFIELD, 2005, p. 111). Thus, at the risk of generalizing, alternative comics artists such as Spiegelman and Ware as well as publishers such as Fantagraphics and Drawn & Quarterly have generally been concerned with a project of canon formation in “making an aesthetic case for the medium through showing how it has been hospitable to a larger tradition of creative experimentation and innovation, [...] and how it has often met the standards imposed on other works accepted into museums or university curriculum” (JENKINS, 2012, p. 4). In specifically focusing on certain narrative modes and sometimes bordering on what one could characterize as hyperrealism in comics, however, alternative comics have also, as Marc Singer points out in discussing the works of Chris Ware, “sustain[ed] some of the hierarchies of literary and artistic value that have long marginalized comics” (SINGER, 2010, p. 29). Singer even claims that Ware’s “fastidious avoidance of popular genres and his privileging of conventionally ‘literary’ modes of writing perpetuate traditional, arbitrary divisions between high and low culture” (*Ibid.*). He therefore maintains that even though Ware’s comics and anthologies “are key participants in the construction of comics’ increasing cultural legitimacy, [...] they consistently reinforce many of the same assumptions and values – favoring the literary, the textual, the realistic – that denied comics such legitimacy in the first place” (*Ibid.*). Paul Lopes has pointed out the paradox behind the alternative comics’ scene endeavor to define itself exclusively in opposition and in reaction to the mainstream, its fantasy elements, and its allegedly low-brow character. In his social history of the comic book in North-America, Lopes maintains: “Alternative rebels also faced the contradiction of reproducing the type of status hierarchy that had stigmatized comic books for so long. Those committed particularly to the alt-strategy of framing comic books as legitimate as any other high art simply reproduced the popular art versus high art dichotomy that in many ways comic book culture worked hard to escape” (LOPES, 2009, p. 148-149).

17 It is not my contention that the legitimacy of a mode of expression requires above all the valorization of its past. Nevertheless, it is clear that the evocation of past works, genres, narrative and/or aesthetic modes that mainstream and alternative artists draw upon aims at highlighting the (dis)continuities that one creator wishes to establish with his/her predecessors in relation to his/her own aesthetic practice. This should not be solely understood as a sign of nostalgia but as a poetic concern for lineage, originality, and perhaps self-canonization since fans and the critical community alike, as I will develop later on, have praised this type of

mnemonic discourse and historical retrospective that is often accompanied by subtle or not so subtle types of aesthetic and/or authorial (af)filiaions

18 In this light, Vertigo's rewriting ethos may be considered a structuring strategy in the American comics field. Similarly to the evocation of past works by mainstream and alternative artists, the rewriting impulse of Vertigo indeed invokes what Bloom identified as one of the markers of canon-making: "[c]anon is primarily manifested as the anxiety of influence that forms and malforms each new writing that aspires to permanence" (BLOOM, 1994, p. 12). In other words, according to Bloom, "[g]reat writing is always *rewriting or revisionism* and is founded upon a reading that clears space for the self, or that so works as to reopen old works to our fresh sufferings" (*Idem*, p. 11, my emphasis).

19 However reactionary and prejudiced one might find Bloom's theory of canon-making notably because it focuses on the psychology of authors and constantly displays affective fallacy in recurrently lamenting people's lack of love for reading, it is hard to deny the relevance of his argument in analyzing the comics medium and, more specifically, Vertigo's poetics of rewriting and politics of demarcation as well as its attendant "other" search for respectability. Historically speaking, comics have traditionally been denigrated⁷ and have often, "following the logic of high modernism", accordingly "fail[ed] to rise to the level of Art because they [have] not attend[ed] to the properties of the form in an informed and reflexive manner" (BEATY, 2012, p. 21). It should therefore come as no surprise that some of the most acclaimed works in comics history such as *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *Maus I*⁸ have been celebrated and critically praised precisely for their revisionary, re-envisioning, and rewriting efforts as well as their attendant (postmodern) self-reflexivity. It is worth pointing out, however, that in singling out these works for these reasons, fans and the critical community may have perpetuated, perhaps paradoxically, what Beaty calls the "logic of high modernism" since their canonization falls in accordance with his suggestion that "[m]emory, allegiance, and judgment have been key factors in the ongoing symbolic exclusion of comics from the domain of consecrated art, a modernist legacy that persists even in these postmodern times" (*Idem*, p. 7).

20 Obviously, it seems dubious to claim that Vertigo attempts to (re)claim legitimacy and/or deploys self-canonizing strategies in primarily embracing "popular" adaptation, intertextuality and reprise – a trend exemplified by the label's tendency to put out much material directly inspired from DC's back catalogue, and by its publishing of comics and graphic novels such as *Django Unchained* (2012-2013), *The Fountain* (2005), and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2012-present). It is after all well recorded that the legitimacy of the adaptation and/or rewriting of popular texts is often frowned upon, especially as far as "mainstream" films or comics versions of fictional works are concerned. Nevertheless, one may perhaps interpret Vertigo's particular memorious discourse as an ironic and indeed postmodern move as the label not only adapts and rewrites allegedly "popular" texts, but also constantly refers to and/or engages with more "classical" or "canonical" stories and myths – works of fictions which, needless to say, are generally considered to be part of a so-called "higher" culture. Brian K. Vaughan et al. *Y: The Last Man* (2002-2008), for example, is clearly woven around Mary Shelley's 1826 apocalyptic novel *The Last Man*. Comics such as *The Unwritten* (2009-present) and *The Sandman* both heavily rely on classical Western mythology – albeit in varying degrees. Both series, for instance, have reinterpreted many of the elements of the major stories centered on the legendary Greek poet and musician Orpheus. Relatedly, the series *Air* (2008-2010) combines recurrent allusions to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Jules Verne's oeuvre, and Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (1943).

21 Thus, in cherishing inter- and hypertextual relations with various texts that straddle the arbitrary "high" and "low" divide, one might argue that Vertigo has tried to create its own very subjective canon in order to poetically distance itself from, on the one hand, conventional canon formation strategies that often rest upon status markers and/or consecrated works and, on the other, from the mnemonic discourses adopted by both the mainstream and alternative poles of the industry. More interestingly perhaps, it is possible to argue that Vertigo's particular and wide-ranging archival impulse may (un)consciously draw our attention to the idea that any

canon generally operates as a conservative and reactionary selection system whose nature is, in fact, very similar to that of what Jean-François Lyotard called grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984 [1979]). To put it differently, Vertigo may be said to ambiguously reject the old-fashioned idea of the canon altogether in favor of a plurality of cultural and historiographic mappings which include, but are certainly not limited to, the DC heritage, pulp fiction, and the Gothic tradition.

The DC heritage

- 22 Vertigo's rewriting ethos has certainly been influenced by the critical success of the three major works mentioned above and published barely a few years before the launch of the label. It is worth noting that two of these works were published by DC (*The Dark Knight* and *Watchmen*). Undoubtedly, Karen Berger, the editor behind the birth of the Vertigo project, sensed that the rewriting strategies that both of these texts deployed was a poetics worth developing, a trend for which a specific audience had emerged, and ultimately that a specific industrial niche could be created to follow the trend that offered both commercial and critical success. In other words, the creation of the Vertigo label in 1993 is arguably indebted to what Klock has called the category of "revisionary superhero narrative" (KLOCK, 2002).⁹ Vertigo series such as Grant Morrison's *Flex Mentallo* (1996) and *Animal Man* (1988-1990) clearly share similarities with the deconstructionist approach and self-reflexive twist that are characteristic of this superhero revisionary movement. So too does *Preacher*, although more indirectly and certainly to a lesser degree. The series indeed mostly revises some aspects of American cultural history including the Western and the idea of Manifest Destiny¹⁰ (LABARRE, 2012; MURRAY, 2010).
- 23 However, especially in the early and mid 1990s, Vertigo differed from the revisionary current of the 1980s and the so-called grim and gritty era of superheroes in that it did not solely focus on rewriting aspects of the superhero genre. In fact, many proto- and early Vertigo titles not only revolved around "dark fantasy and sophisticated suspense", but also implicitly and/or explicitly revised the dominant themes and tropes of their hypotexts (ROUND, 2010, p. 16). More specifically, the titles that launched the imprint – *The Sandman*, *Swamp Thing*, *Hellblazer*, *Animal Man*, *Shade: The Changing Man* and *Doom Patrol* – were conceived as critical transformations of old DC material that offered "mythological, surreal, religious" insights as well "metafictional commentaries upon the comics medium and industry" (*Ibid.*). Following Round's logic, it can be argued that Vertigo's poetics and catalogue are as indebted to the rewriting strategies permeating two of the most important proto-Vertigo titles – *Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman* – as they have been influenced by the revisionary superhero movement conceptualized by Klock. Both *Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman* indeed share similar concerns with superhero revisionary titles, including a penchant for deconstruction and a thematization of metafiction.
- 24 At first sight, both *Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman* could be subsumed under Klock's model of the superhero revisionary movement. His insightful reading of revisionary superhero texts is indebted to Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence which the latter explores via the discussion of six "revisionary ratios": *clinamen*, *tessera*, *kenosis*, *daemonization*, *askesis*, and *apophrades* (BLOOM, 1973, p. 14-15). Klock does not seem to distinguish these revisionary ratios in his analysis of superhero texts, however. Rather, he primarily concentrates on the first one: *clinamen* – that is, according to Bloom, a "swerv[ing] away from [the] precursor" (*Idem*, p. 14) – which leads the superhero genre in a new direction. This swerving away from the precursor, or from hypotexts, certainly applies to *Swamp Thing*, *The Sandman* and other proto-Vertigo titles that function as reinventions of older DC material. I believe, however, that Vertigo's rewritings offer revisions that are more akin to what Bloom, in discussing intra-poetic relations, identified as *kenosis* – that is a "movement towards discontinuity" which "is a breaking-device similar to the defense mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition compulsions" (*Ibid.*). Bloom argues that *kenosis* involves a process of "emptying" in contrast to *clinamen* which is concerned with misprision and can, as Klock has noted in relation to *The Dark Knight Returns*, entail intense "reorganization" (KLOCK, 2002, p. 29) and "synthesis" (*Idem*, p. 32).

- 25 This difference is important. In contrast to most revisionary superhero narratives, the Vertigo rewritings of previous DC material do not attempt to reconcile the potential contradictions that surfaced from the long-running existence of a certain character and/or to converge the “weaker” versions or histories that stemmed from a long tradition or mythology into a “stronger” version. Rather, these Vertigo rewritings tend to start anew, often showing little concern for the old titles they invoke and/or even suggesting that some of the characters and or themes that established the success of the hypotext (cf. GENETTE, 1982) are now outdated, obsolete, or even laughable – thereby emphasizing the idea that even though facing a past, any rewriting ultimately overrides imitation or repetition.
- 26 Moore’s run on *Swamp Thing*¹¹ illustrates this trope of “emptying out” particularly well. Originally, *Swamp Thing* was imagined as a horror comic in the early 1970s. The plot revolved around the scientist Alec Holland who, after being transformed into a horrid creature because terrorists blew up his laboratory, sought to exact revenge on its killers. When Moore resurrected the character in the 1980s, however, he left “behind the obsolete pattern of the bloodthirsty monster so typical of horror comics” to focus on the exploration of its vegetable nature (DI LIDDO, 2009, p. 50). This resulted in the development of the Swamp Thing’s increased “awareness of its ability to enter a state of communion with the environment” (*Idem*, p. 51). In short, the Swamp Thing became a sort of “green superhero” (*Ibid.*) whose privileged relationship with nature made him willing to fight against “man’s violent invasion of natural spaces” (*Idem*, p. 52). As such, Moore’s rewriting of the *Swamp Thing* provided the reader with an eco-critical reflection and resurrected the character in connecting him to “the folkloric motif of the Green Man” (BEINEKE, 2011, § 1).
- 27 A friend of Moore and avid admirer of his works, British writer Neil Gaiman can be argued to be a re-reader and therefore a rewriter¹² of Moore’s *Swamp Thing*. In fact, in his acclaimed series *The Sandman*, Gaiman has taken up some of the rewriting and intertextual strategies that Moore developed in *Swamp Thing* while further complicating the revisionary ratio of *kenosis* animating Moore’s work. As Thomas G. Carpenter argues: “[f]rom the beginning, Gaiman develops a rich mythology for *The Sandman*, based on a combination of DC’s other comics, classical mythology, folklore, and his own invention” (CARPENTER, 2012, p. 529). In that respect, although loosely based on an old character developed in the DC universe, Gaiman’s *The Sandman* “[s]har[es] little more than a name with Jack Kirby’s earlier series” (ROUND, 2010, p. 16). Rather, Gaiman’s *The Sandman* is a metaphorical exploration of how the human psyche is driven by dreams, nightmares, and anxieties. In revolving around Morpheus (The Sandman) and his siblings – who are personified allegories of abstract concepts such as Desire, Death, Destiny, Destruction, Despair and Delirium – Neil Gaiman et al. series constantly intertwines fantastic perspectives from Morpheus’s Dreamworld with human lives and actions.
- 28 In so doing, Gaiman’s series flirts with the Gothic and (re)asserts the importance of dark and repressed fantasies, the irrational, and the inconceivable – possibly in a similar, albeit different fashion to the ways in which Moore et al. engaged with the “unreal” and sometimes oppressive character of trauma in their run on *Swamp Thing*, not only in constantly thematizing the other but also in tackling the “United States[’] southern history and its landscapes of horrors, including storylines that grapple with the region’s legacy of slavery” (WHITTED, 2012, p. 188). Thus, similarly to Moore, Gaiman et al. *The Sandman* strips bare of the DC legacy to develop a highly self-reflexive mythological epic while complicating the revisionary ratio of *kenosis* in telling a (hi)story about “tales and their telling: like dreaming itself, a vehicle for serious fantasy stories” (ROUND, 2008, p. 18).
- 29 As I have previously suggested, both of these works, Alan Moore’s run on *Swamp Thing* as well as Neil Gaiman et al. first 46 issues of *The Sandman* (1989-1992), were not initially published by Vertigo but by DC. The fact that these titles later migrated to the Vertigo catalogue should not be underestimated. Both works had indeed developed what would become the characteristic poetics of dark, fantastical, and self-reflexive rewriting strategies of Vertigo before the actual creation of the label. Additionally, Karen Berger, who launched the imprint, had worked as an editorial advisor with both authors on the aforementioned series. There is little doubt that Berger admired both *Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman* precisely

because they adopted new ideas that differed from the revisionary strategies of superhero comics. It should thus come as no surprise that with other titles such as *Animal Man* and *Hellblazer* developing a similar poetics of rewriting and demarcation, a specific label was created to gather this new breed of self-reflexive and experimental mainstream comics. These were the cornerstone works that brought coherence and credibility to the editorial project: they formed the basis for the creation of the imprint whose aim was, in Berger's own words, "to do something different in comics and help the medium grow up" (CONTINO, 2003, n.pag.). To reassert the argument, the fact that the Vertigo label was retroactively applied to later reprints of these series corroborates the idea that the very concept of (postmodern) rewriting as I have defined it has been at the center of the editorial project and poetics of the label.

30 It is difficult to distinguish how the poetics of rewriting adopted by Moore, Gaiman and others influenced the editorial project of the imprint from the overlapping idea that artists working for the Vertigo banner have been avid re-readers and sometimes rewriters of each others' works. There existed a close connection between the authors of the early or proto-Vertigo titles and the ways they (re-)envisioned each others' works. Jamie Delano, the author behind the first issues of *Hellblazer*, for example, was a close friend of Alan Moore who invented the John Constantine character in his run on *Swamp Thing*. Grant Morrison, author of *Animal Man*, later took up the *Hellblazer* title before Garth Ennis, the author of *Preacher*. Similarly, Jamie Delano had a run on *Animal Man* after Grant Morrison and later on Peter Milligan – the author behind one of the other titles that launched the label: *Shade: The Changing Man*. Nevertheless, what is clear is that many Vertigo titles that find their roots in the DC universe function as critical transformations of their hypotexts. The examples are abundant. Additionally to the previously mentioned titles, numerous other comics (series) such as *The Haunted Tank* (2008), *Sgt. Rock: Between Hell and a Hard Place* (2004), *Unknown Soldier* (1997 and 2008-2010), *House of Mystery* (2008-2011) and *House of Secrets* (1996-1998), *Human Target* (1999, 2002, and 2003-2005), *Enigma* (1993), and *Army@Love* (2007-2008) are also directly inspired from older DC material, which they both adapt and transform notably in rewriting the narrative codes and generic formulas in which those older versions were grounded. The whole "Vertigo Visions" line, which counts six titles (*The Geek* [1993], *The Phantom Stranger* [1993], *Doctor Occult* [1994], *Prez* [1995], *Tomahawk* and *Doctor Thirteen* both published in 1998), also illustrates the strong DC heritage of the imprint. Narratively, those titles have little in common except that they are inspired from earlier DC material. And yet, this goes beyond the simple homage. The digging up and reinventing of these old titles draws our attention to the fact that the memory, and therefore history, of the comics medium has been overshadowed by the mainstream industry's insistent and persistent cherishing of the superhero tradition.

31 Sometimes, the revisionary ratio of *kenosis* or "emptying out" that animates a wide array of Vertigo titles even leads to some kind of tension, perhaps even struggle, between the old and newer versions of characters and/or series. This is notably the case in the Vertigo version of the *House of Mystery*. In the older DC version, Cain appeared as the owner and caretaker of the House of Mystery. He was usually shown as the host introducing the horror tales played out in the house, as was his brother Abel in the *House of Secrets* anthologies. In the Vertigo version of *House of Mystery*, however, the protagonist, Fig Keele, is shown to be responsible for dreaming and imagining everything that is related to the house – here again, note the metafictional twist. In fact, Fig Keele realizes that she is the protagonist of her own story. Cain is trying, by all means necessary, to take over the house and by extension the series or narrative which he believes to be only his. When he finally manages to enter the house again, however, Fig Keele is in command and does not approve of Cain's aggressive and amoral ways. The two characters are constantly bickering about the rules that should be applied for the management of the house as is evidenced in the story-arc "Under New Management" and the "grand re-opening" of the house of mystery. Undoubtedly, this struggle is a metaphorical one that can be understood as the struggle between two competing forces which, in this case, may refer to the heritage of DC and its new, more self-reflexive Vertigo variation.

32 The implications of these Vertigo revisions of older DC material are at least twofold. First, they draw attention to the heritage of comics beyond the superhero genre while problematizing

and complicating the homage to the DC universe. This tradition of *kenosis*, of “emptying out”, indeed suggests that those Vertigo rewritings may be read as self-contained material, although readers could of course miss some of the reflexive processes that resonate with the “archeological excavation” of the DC cultural archive. In other words, these Vertigo hypertexts epitomize the Janus-headed concept of rewriting which implies “the appropriation of a text that it simultaneously authorizes and critiques for its own ideological uses” (ZABUS, 2002, p. 3). As Didier Coste has argued, “[a]s repetition and recycling”, rewriting “has a transmissive, traditional, *conservative* and stabilising function, it builds up a canon and confirms it; [...] it is on the side of ritual, commemoration” (COSTE, 2004, p.9, emphasis in the original). On the other hand, “[a]s recontextualisation and defamiliarisation, as reshaping, distortion, deconstruction and mutation”, the phenomenon of rewriting “is iconoclastic and subversive more than adaptive and accommodating, it is on the side of defacement and revolution, new starts (whether by uniting or dividing the extant) and closure of an era” (*Ibid.*).

33 Second, it seems that, historically at least, Vertigo’ rewriting ethos is indebted to the revisionary movement of the superhero genre and to the alternative artists’ obsession with the works of particular past cartoonists. Both ends of the comics spectrum have been acclaimed by the critics and fans alike for grappling with and evoking past works. And this has resulted in the elevation of the medium, read its increasing respectability. Over the years and quite unsurprisingly, the Vertigo label seems to have played with the paradox inherent to the concept of rewriting and, in so doing, has provided links between older and newer versions of comics and established connections between audiences of different generations, thereby challenging the assumption that a comics canon is always oriented towards a specific audience or a certain era of comics historiography.

34 Finally, the digging up of the DC archive differs from the “traditional” types of mnemonic and canonical discourses adopted by the mainstream press and its alternative counterpart. In going beyond the superhero genre and the evocation of innovative artists, Vertigo’s specific rewriting ethos functions as a structuring strategy in the field of American comics, one through which the label (re)claims symbolic capital and therefore cultural legitimacy.

Pulp sensations

35 It should be clear that if Vertigo’s structural positioning in the field of comics is clearly connected to its rewriting ethos, the digging up of old DC material is certainly not the only way in which the label seeks to deploy its politics of demarcation, create a “new history” of comics, and thereby possibly establish a “new canon”.

36 Vertigo’s rewriting ethos is indeed also deeply connected to the American pulp tradition. With their strong focus on genre fiction – including horror, the Western, science fiction, crime stories and detective fiction – as well as their sometimes deliberate old-fashioned aesthetics, Vertigo comics clearly reclaim the cultural heritage of the pulps. In fact, serial narratives such as *The Sandman*, *100 Bullets* (1999-2009), and *Scalped* (2007-2012), the whole “Vertigo Crime” series,¹³ as well as the collections of short graphic stories *Strange Adventures* (2011) and *Time Warp*¹⁴ (2013) further attest to this. These Vertigo titles, and countless others, clearly resonate, narratively or otherwise, with many successful pulp magazines (*Amazing Stories*, *Marvel Tales*, *Spicy Detective*, etc.) and heroes (*The Shadow*, *Phantom Detective*, etc.). More specifically perhaps, Vertigo comics’ intertextual engaging with the pulp tradition revolves around the exploring of genre boundaries, “cheap thrills”, and provocative as well as exploitative storytelling techniques. Series such as *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002), *Doom Patrol* (1987-1995), and *Hellblazer* (1988-2013), for example, epitomize the imprint’s taste for eccentric and mysterious characters who often react or fight against the establishment in occult ways. Additionally, these series also reflect Vertigo’s cherishing of “edgy”, occult, sci-fi and hard-boiled themes and storylines – all of which can be considered to be characteristics that 20th century pulp fiction embraced. Relatedly, other titles such as *Bite Club* (2004), *American Vampire* (2010-present), *The New Deadwardians* (2012), or *Preacher* reveal the label’s pulp-oriented fascination for sometimes lurid artwork, (extreme) violence, and what one could describe as “spicy hemo-nostalgia”.¹⁵

- 37 Paul Lopes has identified the 1980s and early 1990s revival of pulp traditions in the American comic book industry as a strategy of “rebellion against the strictures of the Comics Code and the narrative and graphic limitations found in traditional mainstream comic books” (LOPES, 2009, p. 111). Taking his cue from Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of French literature of the mid and late 19th century in *The Rules of Art* (BOURDIEU, 1996 [1992]), Lopes maintains that American comics from the 1980s to the present can be encompassed in what he calls the “Heroic Age” of comics because “artists, fans, critics, and publishers developed their own set of criteria to judge and appreciate comic books and comic books artists” (LOPES, 2009, p. xiv). He further argues that new “principles of autonomy” emerged from this “subculture” (*Ibid.*) and helped “assert [...] an independence from the old rules of art practiced by Marvel and DC, which included an autonomy expressed in creating comic books as expressions of [one’s] own personal talents and visions” (*Idem*, p. 118). In short, Lopes notes that “comic book fandom” and assertive artists such as Alan Moore, Frank Miller, and Grant Morrison as well smaller publishers or imprints such as First Comics, Dark Horse, Eclipse, Vertigo and others “brought their own set of principles of autonomy and criteria of judgment to the *mainstream* of the field” during the 1980s and 1990s (*Idem*, p.91, emphasis in the original). He observes, however, that this “rebellion of artists [...] remained wedded to a pulp fiction strategy that reflected the tastes, affections, and dispositions of the core comic book culture” (*Idem*, p. 118).
- 38 Lopes’ remarks in regard to this pulp strategy of rebellion are undeniably insightful but nonetheless generalizing and incomplete. For one thing, any “age model” in comics studies, as in any other discipline or field of expertise, is bound to be totalizing and essentializing. Benjamin Woo, for example, has critiqued the historiographical “Age System” of American comics, inherited from the fan tradition and at times recuperated by the critical community (WOO, 2008). Moreover, Lopes claims that this pulp rebellion is merely a reaction to the old rules of art practiced by the mainstream industry during what he calls the “Industrial Age”. He maintains that the pulp rebellion diversified the mainstream of the field and arguably saved the industry from collapsing and disappearing (LOPES, 2009, p. 91-120). However, because he paints with very broad strokes, Lopes does not take into account the fact that this pulp revival was articulated in perhaps as many fashions as it was deployed by various publishers. Finally, Lopes’ argument also fails to see how this pulp rebellion can also be understood as a reaction to the rising alternative comics movement of the time and its most common “rebellious” strategies, including a strong penchant for real-life narratives and the establishing of connections and (af)filialties with innovative comics artists and traditions, especially the works of early twentieth-century artists and/or cartoonists of the Underground Comix scene.
- 39 Although Lopes observes that “[d]uring the nineties Vertigo was the principal mainstream publishing lines [opting] for the pulp strategy with such titles as *The Last One*, *The Invisibles*, and *Transmetropolitan*” (*Idem*, p. 113), he fails to see how these texts and countless other pulp-oriented Vertigo titles are self-reflexive, not only in the ways they destabilize the conventions usually associated with the genres they explore but also in how they propose a mnemonic discourse on the DC archive, the history of the American comics medium and its search for both legitimacy and respectability. What the thematic, narrative, and sometimes iconographic echoes to the pulp tradition visible in multifarious Vertigo titles point to, for example, is the fact that the Vertigo label acknowledges the populist origins of the medium in the US and recognizes that comics is in a way the offspring of the pulp tradition. As Jean Paul Gabilliet has demonstrated at length in *Des Comics et des Hommes* (2005), the very birth of the comic book industry in the US was inspired and influenced by the pulp tradition, which it also helped reconfigure. American comic books of the early 20th century, Gabilliet maintains, adopted the pulps’ tone, themes, and formats but adapted their plots as well as added a visual component in order to target younger readers (GABILLIET, 2005). Of course, this transformation of the pulp tradition went hand in hand with the copying of popular classical genre stories including crime and detective fiction, adventure and romance stories, which arguably coincided with the re-evaluation of the attendant motifs and atmospheres of these genres and also with the development of the medium’s own genre – that of the superhero – which, as already mentioned, has itself been the subject of countless revisions.

40 Thus, rather than imitating *and* transforming either the superhero genre or the works of innovative and alternative artists, the Vertigo imprint has chosen to challenge the mnemonic discourses and patronage of both ends of the American comics spectrum in specifically paying homage to the pulp tradition. In so doing, Vertigo has not only adopted a set of rules that is in contra-distinction to the sometimes elitist, avant-garde, and difficult tone and aesthetics of the alternative press or its embracing of realist modes including auto-biography, the label also implicitly mocks the denigrating discourse held against pulp fiction and comics. It has indeed been well recorded that the pulps of the early 20th century, as well as the dime novels of the late 19th century from which they developed, were “banned from public libraries, scorned by respectable periodicals, and widely held to feature stories that were commodities rather than works of art” (SMITH, 2012, p. 145). Unsurprisingly, similar charges have been pressed against the comics medium during most of the 20th century: comics have been criticized for their lack of cultural relevance and aesthetic creativity.

41 The Vertigo imprint, however, has managed to take advantage of these attacks and to challenge the denigrating discourse that has usually been associated with them, notably in heavily deploying intertextual references and metafictional elements. In fact, because the imprint deliberately targets an adult audience and adopts a subversive and deconstructionist attitude towards the codes of genre fiction it is concerned with, it proposes a self-reflexive commentary on past genres and eras, as well as on the history of the medium. In developing numerous intertextual references and metafictional commentaries (including recurrent examples of metalepsis), titles such as *Animal Man*, *The Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, or *Jack of Fables* (2006-2011), for example, complicate the relationship between reality and fiction as well as the ties that the label (re)claims in regard to the pulp tradition. More specifically, these Vertigo titles and countless others rewrite the pulp tradition in generally deploying processes of reflexivity whose function is “to call attention to the text as an artificial construct” (JONES, 2005, p. 270); they articulate dominant features of postmodernist fiction that rely on temporal disorder and the distortion of history, the fragmentation and/or disintegration of characters sometimes lurking on paranoia – characteristics that I will come back to later on in my discussion of how Vertigo has regularly established connections with the Gothic tradition.

42 In short, Vertigo illustrates continuities and *discontinuities* with the pulp tradition and how the first comic books historically copied and transformed this tradition. Vertigo rewrites what was, at the time, already an industrial strategy of rewriting. Vertigo’s poetics of demarcation thus bears a clear postmodern inflexion that is concomitant with a revisionary perception and understanding of the medium. This new and allegedly postmodern look at the historical origins of comic books has the merit to not only leave aside the superhero (albeit perhaps in ambiguous fashions at times), but also to radically differ from the ways in which alternative comics artists have recurrently alluded to innovative artists and comics of the early 20th century or how, more generally, the alternative pole of the industry has sought to establish connections with the fine arts. Needless to say, this specific Vertigo pulp strategy, then, finds resonance with the politics of canon-making which, according to Bloom, imply “strangeness [and] uncanny startlement rather than a fulfillment of expectations” (BLOOM, 1994, p. 3).

Doom and gloom: Gothic inclinations

43 The vocabulary that Bloom employs in his reflection on the creation of a canon – notably “strangeness” and “uncanny startlement” (*Ibid.*) – cannot but invoke the Gothic. While certainly a constantly evolving literary genre but also an open-ended narrative, aesthetic, and cultural mode which spans different art forms, the dominant features of the Gothic indeed typically include: the presence of ghosts and doppelgangers – motifs which often overlap and tie in with issues of (identity) fragmentation and/or the blurring of the orders between fiction and reality –, the interplay between the supernatural and the metafictional, the use of ruined, cryptic, and/or haunted settings or locales and, finally, a fascination with the monstrous, the abject, death, and the issue of pestilence – tropes and themes which, needless to say, often bespeak and/or (metaphorically) engage with wider social, psychological, historical, as well as political concerns and anxieties (cf. GORDON, 2008 [1997]; PUNTER, 2012). There is

no denying that the revisiting of some of these key Gothic motifs and traditions is visible in many Vertigo titles. As previously suggested, one of Vertigo's editorial endeavor has been to re-explore the horror genre in comics. Numerous titles such as *The Sandman*, *Destiny: A Chronicle of Death Foretold* (1997), *Death: The High Cost of Living* (1993), *Death: The Time of Your Life* (1996), *In the Shadow of Edgar Allan Poe* (2002), *Industrial Gothic* (1995-1996), and *The House on the Borderland* (2003), which is adapted from William Hope Hodgson's 1908 eponymous supernatural horror novel, reveal the imprint's fascination for terror and horror stories. Undoubtedly, the Gothic premise on which a wide array of Vertigo narratives is based complicates the rewriting ethos of the imprint and its attendant politics of self-canonization.

44 Julia Round maintains, for example, that "the spectral trope of haunting" so characteristic of the Gothic (ROUND, 2012, p. 336) is reminiscent of the strategy of "retconning" at work in titles such as *The Sandman* and *Swamp Thing* (*Idem*, p. 338). She defines retconning as "retroactive continuity, whereby past events are expunged or characters parameters reformulated" (*Ibid.*). Round maintains that in relying on retconning, then, the Vertigo versions of *Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman*, while "eclips[ing]" the previous incarnations of the series' "golden- and silver-age versions" as well as the characters on which they were based, also signal intertextuality by "weaving a story whose events surrounded and provided direct/indirect motivation for the original series" (*Ibid.*).

45 Round's logic is not so different from my previous discussion of Bloom's revisionary ratio of *kenosis* but, more importantly, her argument also bespeaks how countless Vertigo titles are haunted by "ghostly visitations", be they inspired from older DC material or the pulp tradition. In other words, many Vertigo comics operate as "counterfictions" that oddly transform the idea of Gothic enclosure, i.e. the haunted house. Moreover, the multi-path and branching plots narrative strategies that Vertigo series such as *Animal Man*, *Jack of Fables*, *The Unwritten*, and *Air* articulate find echo with the recurrent use of sinuous and cryptic settings such as labyrinths, catacombs and castles in Gothic fiction. Relatedly, the sometimes complex and multi-layered rewriting strategies that these series and other Vertigo comics activate can be said to function as "(inter)textual ruins" that metaphorically resonate with the Gothic's cherishing of maze-like, decaying, and/or devastated settings and locales. Following that logic, it should come as no surprise that the protagonists of the series mentioned above find themselves lost or trapped in unknown countries and/or forgotten territories, "other" narrative dimensions, and/or alternate (literary) realities. Thus, the logic of possible worlds that characterizes these and countless other Vertigo comics is reminiscent of the ways in which Gothic texts metaphorically explore the boundaries between the real and the fantastic on the one hand, and of how the Gothic generally evokes the transgression of a unique, coherent, and self-contained reality on the other. In short, these and many other Vertigo comics epitomize a form of postmodernist ontological instability that presents itself, as Brian McHale would have it, as "an anarchic landscape of [fictional and textual] worlds in the plural" (McHALE, 1987, p. 37).

46 Needless to say, this Gothic trope of haunting in its many guises draws our attention to Vertigo texts as artificial constructs which engage in a dialogue with past traditions and/or characters as well as participate to the imprint's unique and specific mnemonic discourse. And as it transpires from the above, I believe that these texts' Gothic inclinations should not be dissociated from the label's postmodernist inflexions. Maria Beville has perceptively explored the connections between the Gothic and postmodernism (BEVILLE, 2009). She argues, for example, that "while postmodernist aspects operate to establish ontological and epistemological standpoints that query accepted ethical and moral 'realities'", so too does the Gothic with its focus on "subversion" (*Idem*, p. 16), most notably through its exploration of "excesses, abjections and monsters" (*Idem*, p. 50). In fact, she contends that the "postmodernist imagination, that which values fiction and fantasy over a quantified, limited concept of reality, is quite possibly inspired by the Gothic" (*Idem*, p. 53). Beville maintains that the primary concerns of Gothic literature are, after all, the "lack of access to reality, formally evident in the presence of the supernatural and the surreal and in the function of ghosts, specters, and fantastic "others" who offer the reader an alternative reality to that accepted by science and reason" (*Ibid.*). Also directly related to the Gothic are the ideas of terror, anxiety, and

violence and how they “articulate [...] fears to do with the power of science, godlessness, social anarchy and privation” (*Idem*, p. 23). Beville argues that these issues “re-emerged with vigour at the dawn of ‘postmodernity’” (*Ibid.*) which Jean Baudrillard describes as the “culture of death” (BAUDRILLARD, 1993 [1976], p. 27).

47 Beville’s insights apply to countless Vertigo narratives, including *The Sandman*, *Enigma* (1993), *Preacher*, *I Papparazzi* (2001) and *DMZ* (2005-2012). These titles’ obsession with death, abjection, masks, monstrous excesses and the sublime as experienced through terror, as well as dreams and nightmares, finds great resonance with the lack of access to the real that is, in Beville’s words, “the engine propelling postmodernist narrative” (BEVILLE, 2009, p. 54). These titles, in fact, constantly blur the boundaries between history and fiction, reality and the sublime, and in so doing “draw our attention to the role of seeing; itself a very Gothic trope [...] as sight is etymologically tied to [the] notions of apparitions and specters”, historical or fictive ones (ROUND, 2012, p. 336).

48 It is here useful to remember Robert Kiely’s claim that “the source of much Gothic fiction was boredom” (KIELY, 1972, p. 41) and that in light of this, Vertigo’s (postmodern) Gothic impulse may be said to have stemmed from the dull and unexciting character of the mainstream industry and the alternative press – both of which have tended to rely sometimes exclusively on a particular genre: the superhero in the mainstream sphere and autobiography in the alternative press. Additionally, Vertigo seems to have chosen this (postmodern) Gothic path precisely, again, to counter the attacks often held against the Gothic, notably by postmodern scholars such as Fredric Jameson who dismissed it as a “boring and exhausted paradigm” (JAMESON, 1991, p. 289) because its (recent) manifestations have often been viewed as antithetical to artistic aims. In short, in exploring the Gothic and tying it in with postmodernist aspects, many Vertigo narratives draw attention to their uncanny character and, in so doing, engage in poetic misprision and canon-making. This pervasiveness of (postmodern) Gothic themes in Vertigo titles allows artists (and the imprint) to position themselves, it seems, against the compulsion of repetition that has animated both Victorian and “classic” Gothic traditions on the one hand, as well as the (re)writing strategies adopted by the mainstream sphere and its alternative counterpart on the other.

49 Historically, Vertigo’s redeployment of Gothic tropes also seems to directly echo the ill-fated company of the 1950s: EC Comics. Primarily publishing horror comics, EC was one of the “victims” of the Comics Code Authority whose aim was to regulate the contents of the comic book industry and therefore banned, notably, the depiction of monsters.¹⁶ Vertigo’s strong penchant for horror and fantasy comics seems to criticize the censorship initiated by the Comics Code, to pay homage to EC and to call attention to how this company has influenced its own agenda. Vertigo, in fact, may well have revived this tradition in comics to highlight how the Gothic, according to David Punter (PUNTER, 1996), develops itself in response to social trauma.

50 I believe that in juxtaposing Vertigo’s politics of demarcation with its Gothic ethos, this social trauma may be read in at least two ways. First, the label’s strong penchant for the Gothic may reflect the troubled cultural, societal, and political issues of the 1990s and 2000s. Similarly to many EC comics whose focus on horror including zombies and decomposing bodies may be understood as a secular response to the Holocaust (SPIEGELMAN, 2012a, n. pag.) and possibly as a visual metaphor for victims of atomic bomb blasts (CHUTE, 2013), the focus on decadence and degeneration visible in 1990 Vertigo series such as the first issues of *Hellblazer*, *The Invisibles* (1994-2000), and *Uncle Sam*, for example, might be said to epitomize a *fin de siècle* attitude. In the same line of reasoning, 21st century comics such as *DMZ*, *Ex-Machina* (2004-2010), and *Cant’ Get No* (2006) have vigorously commented on the state of post-9/11 politics and fear of the other, as well as on how “terror shook the definition of the self [...] leaving behind not only grief and incomprehension but a range of other complex feelings as well such as fear, depression, and alienation from family and community” (BRAGARD et al., 2011, p.4).

51 The second interpretation that one could propose in relation to the connection between the label’s Gothic ethos and social trauma finds resonance with the long-held denigration of the

comics medium. By no means do I wish to equate the Holocaust or the victims and aftermath of the atomic bomb blasts with the “symbolic handicaps” that the comics form has suffered from. Nevertheless, I wish to point out that a social trauma may also involve aspects of cultural stigma, which may help us understand the consequences of the alleged lack of cultural legitimacy that the comics form has endured in most of the 20th century. As Paul Lopes has noted, “[c]omic books have been stigmatized since their introduction in the mid-1930s, and this stigma has affected comic books as well as artists, readers, and fans of comics” (LOPES, 2006, p. 388). Lopes maintains, for example, that comics fans, as other fans of popular culture, often “have their social identities discredited and behaviors characterized as pathological” (*Ibid.*). Quite unsurprisingly, Lopes argues that “stigma played a role in the obstacles faced by more ‘adult-oriented’ and ‘serious’ comic books” (*Idem*, p. 411). Vertigo’s insistence and even cherishing of Gothic tropes may therefore be read as a kind of testimonial literature, one that makes use of ghosts and monsters to ironically expurgate the demons haunting the past considerations of the form, that is, the possibly traumatic “‘symbolic handicaps’ that have contributed to the devaluation of comics as a cultural form” (BEATY, 2012, p. 19).

Conclusion

- 52 Undoubtedly, the critical acclaim that accompanied the revisionary current of the 1980s as well as the two flagship proto-Vertigo titles (*Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman*) triggered the rewriting impulse of Vertigo. In concert with other competing and successful trends of the early 1990s reflected by bestseller titles such as *The Death of Superman*, *Spawn*, and *X-Force*, this coincided with a changing market and hence, the sophistication of the mainstream industry towards a more adult-oriented audience. The boom of the graphic novel approach as well as the development and stylization of new formats are often quoted as the primary consequences of this change (LOPES, 2009; ROUND, 2010; WEINER, 2010). What is often overlooked in the midst of these debates, however, is that these revisionary narratives and the new adult audience that read them possibly led to the industry’s more acute awareness of two interrelated phenomena, namely self-consciousness and reader familiarity.
- 53 The idea of self-consciousness concords with Klock’s reading of revisionary superhero texts and his suggestion that “the superhero narrative becomes literature” (KLOCK, 2002, p. 3) as well as with Round’s observation that Vertigo redefined the comics medium in “bringing it closer to the notion of literary text” (ROUND, 2010, p. 22). But perhaps more importantly and in continuity with this scholarship, Vertigo’s self-consciousness and literary-driven works can be connected to what Marshall McLuhan has identified as a “newer medium” which, McLuhan suggests, stimulates both a dialogue with its predecessors and engages in a retrospective perspective (McLUHAN, 1994 [1964]). As I hope to have demonstrated, whether they revisit old DC material, the pulp tradition, or Gothic elements, a wide array of Vertigo titles have participated in the label’s long-running meta- and intertextual meditation on the medium, its status and history. In other words, in analyzing the editorial poetics of the imprint, one should not underestimate the fact that the idea of self-consciousness that McLuhan identified as a characteristic of any “newer medium” is intrinsically yoked to politics of self-canonization (Mc LUHAN 1994 [1964]).
- 54 The second cultural and industrial phenomenon that overlaps with this new self-consciousness is that of reader familiarity which, as Peter Coogan contends, “emerges from repeated, sometimes almost ritualistic, encounters with [one] genre through regular consumption” and is “signaled by a reference to some common genre event, as if it is an inside joke” (COOGAN, 2012, p. 205). Coogan maintains that the effect of reader familiarity is that “fans get [...] a sense of insider knowledge and feel [...] rewarded for it” (*Ibid.*). In combining strategies of rewriting with intertextual references and metafictional elements, numerous Vertigo titles deliberately play with this concept of reader familiarity in order to not only tease out the reader’s expectations and surprise him/her up to a degree where s/he can become alienated from the storytelling experience, but also raise questions about the permeability of (literary) genres and the problematic relationship between fiction and reality.

- 55 What these interrelated phenomena ultimately point to is that Vertigo's rewriting ethos as well as its attendant mnemonic discourse has coincided with the imprint's willingness to propose an alternative comics history, one that is neither overshadowed by the most enduring genre of the industry, nor by the sometimes elitist and chauvinistic systematic rejection of genre-driven contents and aesthetics by the alternative press in favor of more innovative and challenging historical echoes. In fact, Vertigo's specific engagement with the often frowned upon genres and populist origins of the medium as well as its self-reflexive grappling with rewriting strategies destabilizes the mnemonic and (self-)canonizing efforts adopted by both the mainstream and alternative poles of the American comics spectrum. And in so doing, Vertigo adopts a particular position in the American comics landscape, one that further complicates the categories of reception and production "mainstream" and "alternative" with which scholars continue to (mis)judge many comics and graphic novels, especially in the US and in Europe.
- 56 Moreover, Vertigo's editorial project and strong poetics of rewriting challenge Thierry Groensteen's claim that comics is an art without memory. In fact, as much as Groensteen suggests that parody may be consubstantial to the comics medium (GROENSTEEN, 2010), the Vertigo imprint has made it clear that comics artists and editors can engage in a certain logic of memory- and canon-making that problematizes the widespread idea that "[c]omics cannot be legitimated in the absence of canonical works" (BEATY, 2012, p. 9).
- 57 Agreeing with Bart Beaty's observation that "comics are better understood through the collective activities that constitute their production and circulation, not simply as discrete end products defined by the relation of juxtaposed images" (*Idem*, p. 37), I would argue that Vertigo's strong editorial project invites us to reconsider the system of (American) comics. In his seminal formalist study of the medium tellingly entitled *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen develops the concepts of restrained and general arthrology to explore how the language of comics is inherently connected to the intrapaginal (linear, restrained) and interpaginal (distant, general) relations that artists establish between panels (GROENSTEEN, 2007 [1999]). Following Groensteen's line of reasoning, one could suggest that Vertigo develops similar arthrological relations, not between panels, but rather, between various narrative traditions, eras, and certain (comics) works that have marked the American comics industry, thereby implying that the revisiting of specific narrative, thematic, and artistic conventions is inherently connected the ontology of comics, and more specifically Vertigo comics.
- 58 Against the background of these observations, it is interesting to note that Vertigo's rewriting ethos seems to perfectly embrace Spiegelman's archive-minded understanding, practicing, and editing of comics. The alternative artist and editor has indeed claimed, when asked in Angoulême last year to provide his short history of the comics form, "the future of comics is in the past" (SPIEGELMAN, 2012b). Vertigo's poetics of rewriting finds resonance with this archivist undertaking but it does not refer to any past. Rather, in recurrently paying homage to the DC archive beyond the superhero, the pulp tradition, as well as Gothic fiction, Vertigo has refashioned a certain historical and canonical matrix of comics which self-reflexively engages with the shifts in the meanings of cultural hierarchies both within and outside what Bart Beaty, drawing on the work of Howard S. Becker, has called "a comics world" (BEATY, 2012, p. 8). In so doing, Vertigo may well have established a new era in the American comics landscape. And as the common adage stipulates, with every new age, a new canon is required.
- 59 One should not forget, however, that "canons are rooted in a societal 'ideal', in a collective project, much the same way that 'imagined communities' are born" (PAPADIMA, 2011, p. 11). Although Vertigo's rewriting ethos deploys specific trends which distance themselves from the historiographic politics of the mainstream and alternative poles of the industry, the label has nevertheless developed an endogenous-spirited mind. The label's logic of commemoration has indeed been closing in on itself, as is exemplified in the recent cover of the latest imprint's anthology *Vertigo Essentials* (2013). The cover of this "memorious-oriented" collection portrays several popular characters from well-known Vertigo series gathered in a library – the archival space *par excellence* – who are reading either the works they feature

in or other famous works published under the Vertigo banner. Symbolically, this illustration clearly conveys the idea that, by definition, even new poetics install new canons which, in turn, impose new boundaries and frontiers, erect new walls and new categories. Thus, although the label may have attempted to “redefine” the medium (cf. ROUND, 2010) in constructing its own subjective canon, it seems to have contained its subversive memorious discourse within a set of prescribed paradigms. In fact, in having focused on the idea of rewriting for over 20 years, one might wonder if Vertigo has not commodified strategies of rewriting and self-canonization, or at least, the alleged authority that comics scholars and cultural critics have lent to comics works revisiting narrative and aesthetic traditions or re-envisioning history. Whether or not this commodification should be perceived as yet another postmodern phenomenon of re-appropriation that the label cherishes in order to destabilize pre-formatted identity patterns and historical discourses is, of course, open to debate.

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Notes

1 Although Vertigo does not publish erotic comics, this "adult-oriented" adjective is often employed to describe the imprint. Generally speaking, this phrase is favored by both the industry itself and the legitimizing institutional arbiters of the comics form – including the sector actors, journalists, fans, and the critical community – to refer to more "mature" works for allegedly "mature" readers. The term is undoubtedly problematic, however. Roger Sabin has exposed that the term is intrinsically connected to the widespread idea that comics suddenly "grew up" and became "respectable reading matter for post-adolescents" because of the changes that surfaced in the American and British comics industries in the mid to late 1980s (SABIN, 1993, p. 1). Sabin refers to this as "a seductive interpretation" from the press, a story, in fact, which "has become one of the recurring clichés of arts journalism" and comics studies (*Idem*). Sabin further maintains that "the history of comics for older readers stretches back a long way before the mid-1980s, to the nineteenth century in fact" (*Idem*). Arguably, the validity of this statement may be called into question according to one's definition of comics. Moreover, although the terminology inevitably raises "the issue of precise age-groups", the phrase has stuck to describe comics "in contradistinction to titles in the traditional preadolescent and adolescent categories" (*Ibid.*, p. 3).

2 According to Dick Tomasovic, Walt Disney relied on similar innovative techniques as well as on narrative and aesthetic experimentation in his early and foundational works precisely to adopt a strategy of self-canonization, thereby attempting to install a new set of norms in the field of animated cartoons (TOMASOVIC, 2011).

3 Of course, rewriting is far from merely being a fashionable postmodern contemporary phenomenon. One needs only to think of rewriting as imitation auctorum practiced as an "apprentice's routine" in various periods of history, including perhaps most famously the Antiquity and the Renaissance (MORARU, 2001, p. 6). As Georges Letissier contends in discussing rewriting as literary reprise, "the imitation and emulation of the great prose and poet writers" has often been "advocated as part of rhetorical training" (LETISSIER, 2009, p. 4). In our postmodern times, however, the phenomenon of rewriting has accelerated (*cf.* JAMESON, 1991; HUTCHEON, 1985, 1988, 1989). Adaptation, references, and allusions are now massively employed as narrative, aesthetic, and/or marketing/commercial strategies in all cultural domains, including advertising and television series. For more on the ubiquitous character of this topic, see Linda Hutcheon's recent wide-ranging understanding and discussion of adaptation as both process and product (HUTCHEON, 2012 [2006]).

4 Groensteen's argument is insightful insofar as it is based on the observation that publishers lack clear (and coherent) editorial policies concerning their publishing lines, especially when it comes to the publishing history of works that have been released and/or reprinted in various formats (deluxe, prestige, anthologies, etc.). This is the main reason why the critic maintains that publishers show little concern for the cultural heritage of the art form. However, in a similar fashion to Julia Round, Groensteen fails to take into consideration how publishers and/or particular imprints *poetically* engage with issues of lineage and heritage to manage memory, albeit perhaps still in a somewhat chaotic fashion.

5 Some recurrent themes and motifs of these revisionary strategies include the calling into question of the benevolent and pro-social character of the costumed heroes, the developing and problematizing of the characters' dual identity, and the "bringing out [of] their dark side" sometimes "pushing them to the verge of psychosis", aspects which all allow "for critical reflection on the figure of the superhero, on the ideologies conveyed through the filter of fiction, and most of all on the legitimation of the ethics of vigilantism" (DI LIDDO 2009, p. 47-48). Klock argues that these works are revisionary because they deconstruct the generic conventions of the superhero narrative, sometimes to the point of affecting the series' continuity.

6 For more insights on the parallels between the breakdown of the comics page and the fragmented structure of (traumatic) memory, notably in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, see : DONY and VAN LINTHOUT, 2010.

7 For an insightful discussion of comics' lack of cultural legitimacy, see Thierry Groensteen's *Un objet culturel non identifié: la bande dessinée* (GROENSTEEN, 2006) and, more recently, Bart Beaty's *Comics vs. Art* (BEATY, 2012) in which Beaty notably problematizes and comments on the symbolic handicaps of the form identified by Groensteen.

8 In *Adult Comics*, Roger Sabin refers to these works as the "Big 3" (SABIN, 1993, p. 91) and claims that they strongly participated in the media hype surrounding the "process of rediscovery for comics" (DI LIDDO, 2009, p.16).

9 As Di Liddo argues, this "current [...] was later rejoined by several other authors" (DI LIDDO, 2009, p. 47). Contemporary examples of works pertaining to this "revisionary" movement that are worth mentioning include Warren Ellis and Juan Jose Ryp's *Black Summer* (2007-2008), Mark Millar's *Red Son* (2003) and his collaboration with John Romita Jr. *Kick-Ass* (2008-2010), Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson's ongoing series *The Boys* (2006-), and Grant Morrison's and Frank Quitely's *All-Star Superman* (2006-2008). For an insightful analysis of the latter that focuses on the reconstruction of the superhero in terms of genre criticism, see (COOGAN, 2012).

10 In a nutshell, the idea of Manifest Destiny is connected to the imagination of various generations of Puritan immigrants who, because they believed to be God's chosen people, thought they were destined to settle in new and allegedly unexplored territories. While the trope of Manifest Destiny might in part explain the pioneering spirit of the so-called American experience and the settlers' westward expansion, the idea was also employed as a rhetorical strategy by religious ministers and politicians alike to both justify and legitimize colonization and imperialism.

11 It should be pointed out that much of Moore's run on *Swamp Thing*, published between 1984 and 1987, actually predated the so-called movement of revisionary superhero texts.

12 Implied here is the idea that the activities of reading and writing are inevitably intertwined. Many scholars have commented on this reading-writing dynamic, including, perhaps most famously, Roland Barthes with his distinction of readerly vs. writerly texts. Although Barthes' distinction may now be regarded trivial and outdated, my line of reasoning is similar to that of Christian Moraru who, in discussing the work of Barthes, claims that "the rewriter is a critical reader in the deepest sense" (MORARU, 2001, p. 4).

13 The "Vertigo Crimes Series" is a short-lived sub-imprint of Vertigo that started in 2009 and ended in 2011. It consists in a series of hardcover graphic novels that share similar thematic concerns and black and white aesthetics. Moreover, all of the books share a similar tagline on their cover reading: "A Graphic Mystery". Some of the works that were published under this sub-imprint include *Filthy Rich* (2009), *The Bronx Kill* (2010), *A Sickness in the Family* (2010), *The Chill* (2010) and *Cowboys* (2011).

14 Besides clearly echoing pulp-oriented themes and tropes, the titles of these collections of graphic short stories interestingly also engage with DC's back catalogue, thereby deploying rewriting strategies in at least two distinct yet overlapping ways. *Strange Adventures* was indeed the title of a DC science-fiction series which started in the 1950s. Likewise, *Time Warp* was a short-lived mini-series published by DC between 1979 and 1980.

15 Although I have explained the reasons why this essay is rooted in a non-visual approach, it is here worth noting that the artwork of certain Vertigo titles such as *Sandman Mystery Theatre* (1993-1999), *The Unwritten* and *The Nobody* may be said to adopt a pulp and/or Golden- and Silver-age aesthetics. Relatedly, in his discussion of another successful and critically acclaimed Vertigo narrative – Dean Motter's *Terminal City* – in terms of retro-futurism, Henry Jenkins claims that "Motter's vision of the city is built from images half remembered from old popular science and science fiction magazines" (JENKINS, 2010, p. 76).

16 For an overview of the history and consequences of the code on the comics industry, see Amy K. Nyberg's *Seal of Approval. The History of the Comics Code* (NYBERG, 1998) which, though dated, remains extremely significant.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

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Droits d'auteur

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Résumés

Cet article explore comment et pourquoi les stratégies de réécriture constituent depuis plus de vingt ans un des fondements de la poétique et du projet éditorial du label Vertigo (DC Comics). En s'appuyant notamment sur les travaux d'Harold Bloom, de Thierry Groensteen, et de Geoffrey Klock, le volet théorique et méthodologique de l'article établit l'utilité du concept de réécriture tel qu'il peut s'appliquer à la bande dessinée et à son étude. Les relations inter- et hypertextuelles ainsi que les problématiques de nostalgie, de mémoire et de lignée qui en découlent y seront notamment abordées. Plus particulièrement, les nombreuses implications qui animent ces débats mèneront sur des réflexions ayant trait aux processus de canonisation et aux discours de légitimité culturelle. L'article identifie ensuite certaines tendances de réécriture au sein du label et analyse comment celles-ci proposent des réflexions intro- et rétrospective sur le médium, son histoire, ainsi que le renouvellement de son image dans le contexte du marché américain. Plus précisément, en rendant hommage aux archives de DC, à l'héritage des *pulps*, ainsi qu'à la tradition Gothique, il est possible de soutenir que Vertigo a développé une logique de commémoration critique qui se distancie fortement des discours mnémoniques chers aux pôles *mainstream* et alternatif de l'industrie du comic book. Le label de DC a ce faisant tenté d'établir son propre canon tout en contestant l'argument de Thierry Groensteen selon lequel la bande dessinée serait « un art sans mémoire ». De manière plus importante cependant, l'ethos de réécriture dont le label est adepte a permis à celui-ci d'adopter une politique de démarcation par rapport aux forces structurantes du champ de la bande dessinée américaine. L'article conclut que cette démarche subversive ne réécrit pas seulement les lignes de forces de ce champ mais invite aussi à repenser les pratiques de domination et d'exclusion qui animent celui-ci.

This essay investigates how and why strategies of rewriting have been central to Vertigo's poetics and editorial project for over twenty years. Drawing notably on the works of Harold Bloom, Thierry Groensteen, and Geoffrey Klock, it first proceeds to establish the relevance of the concept of rewriting as it can be applied to comics (studies), particularly in showing how inter- and hypertextual relations are inherently connected to issues of nostalgia, memory as well as lineage, and therefore to processes of (self-)canonization and discourses of cultural legitimacy. It then moves on to identify some of the label's rewriting trends and discusses how they engage both intro- and retrospectively with the comics form, its history, and its (renewed) perception in the American context. More specifically, in recurrently paying homage to the DC archive, the pulp heritage, as well as to the Gothic tradition, it is my contention that Vertigo has participated in a critical logic of commemoration that distances itself from the mnemonic discourses championed by both the mainstream and alternative poles of the comics industry. In

so doing, Vertigo may have attempted to create a canon of its own while certainly challenging Groensteen's claim that comics is an "art without memory". But perhaps more importantly, the essay concludes that Vertigo's cherishing of specific rewriting strategies has helped it adopt a politics of demarcation in regards to the structuring forces of the American comics field, a politics that not only subverts the field's power relations dynamics but also "writes back" to its practices of domination and exclusion.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : canon, champ, gothique, historiographie, mémoire, nostalgie, patrimoine culturel, poétique, postmodernité, réécriture, subversion

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