SUMMARY

AMERICA

Revising the Visual Mythology of the United States

The book ***America. Revising the Visual Mythology of the United States*** [***Ameryka. Rewizje wizualnej mitologii Stanów Zjednoczonych***] is a critical analysis and diagnosis of the formation and the subsequent revisions of what I describe as the **American visual mythology**. My account connects 19th-century imagery, essential for the formation of the American nation and the national identity, with images and objects produced mostly from 1950 until today, when the national mythology started to be questioned by a variety of social groups, particularly as a result of the civil rights movements and later phenomena. Hence, the thematic scope of the book is broad, varied and dynamic; on the one hand, it is seemingly chronological, while on the other, it is anachronistic, due to the constant re-emergence of certain images, motifs and models of seeing (e.g. the racially prejudiced gaze and the resulting stereotypes), which **shed light on the present and the past, simultaneously opening up to the future**. The myths are embedded in **the vast field of visuality, models of vision, images, art and other objects of visual culture**, such as film. Each chapter is devoted to a specific, recurrent motif, image or visual issue (the American flag, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, landscape, American West and the figure of the cowboy, self-portraiture of Native Americans, racial stereotypes, the panorama of Lower Manhattan), which develop and undergo transformation in time under changing historical and cultural circumstances, each time generating numerous, usually critical relations and iterations that travel across media and domains of visual culture. At the same time, the chapters are interconnected through recurring artists, works and issues under discussion. *America* was written, first of all, from the perspective of an art historian, but also an Americanist, hence it offers an **interdisciplinary** scholarly proposition combining reflections based in the field of art history, visual culture studies and American studies. In most general terms, each chapter focuses on an important area of myth-making in the domain of visuality, a specific work of art, a motif, a form of representation or a model of seeing, which are an element of what I describe as an elusive sphere of **America**, different from the United States as a geopolitical body but inseparable from it, a mythic construction, which belongs to the domain of the images and discourses.

The extensive **Introduction** is devoted to an explanation of the vast sphere of notions and issues that serve as a theoretical framework for the book. The discussion opens with an analysis

of a well-known work *A Logo for America* (1987) by the Chilean artist Alfredo Jarr, which is a starting point for considering America as a concept and an entity distinct from but coexisting with the United States, a proper name which was appropriated, consolidated and then, in the 20th century, projected into the global world to designate a set of values, cultural texts and, most importantly, images. While I am mostly interested in the visual ingredient of the American mythology, I propose to think about America as an **imaginary-symbolic or visual-discursive screen**, a mythological construction woven of images, words and symbols, which started long before the formation of the United States but its role was crucial in its national and later imperial consolidation and the discourse of **American exceptionalism**. The screen, which both hides (difference, inequalities and ruptures) and protects (the majority, the dominant group, "imagined community") is a sphere of identification, which is, however, exclusive and to many turns out to be oppressive. I trace how, from the mid-20th century onwards, this screen became a contested field of struggle and the sphere of emerging, normally suppressed voices. A crucial dimension of the functioning of America is its virtual aspect: the field of immaterial but active images: imagination, fantasy and memory shaped by diverse media from literature, painting, photography or film. Following different thinkers, such as Benedict Anderson, Jean Baudrillard, Hubert Damisch, and Donald E. Pease, and when it comes to the structure of the visual myth, particularly Roland Barthes, and, with a distinctly American context, Sacvan Bercovitch and Richard Slotkin, I regard **mythology as an aspect of ideology**, which provided a basis for the expansionist idea of Manifest Destiny and later on, the American dream and American exceptionalism. America is the sphere where reality is inseparable from fiction and myth cannot be disconnected from history. Hence, I often use the notion of **mythistory**, which aptly describes the coexistence of myth and history in the formation of the American nation and cultural, global hegemony. I trace the discursive developments of the American mythology in such notions as "American exceptionalism" or "American dream" against the historical and cultural changes in the 20th century which undermined it. One of the propositions in this book is that the critique of American myths – or what I call image-myths – visible in the works of visual artists revising the mythic visual structures, revealing their coded, ideological agendas, through strategies of visual appropriation or otherwise, is indeed a symptom of the ongoing process of the crumbling structure of America as a mythological entity. At the same time, I propose, following Bercovitch, that myths do not completely disappear but are relegated to the collective unconsciousness, just to re-emerge in situations of crisis, or are flexible enough to accommodate otherness and critique. Thus, we can rather talk about a paradoxical, **open myth**, a mythology whose structural framework, even if undermined and weakened, remains functional and has the power to interiorize dissent, or at least never ceases to be a point of reference.

The theoretical framework of the book is eclectic and varied, coming from numerous relevant authors, as is its subject matter, but it is always tuned to respond to the object or problem under discussion. The **psychoanalytical** apparatus of Freudian and Lacanian provenance is employed to describe certain collective processes of identity construction and visual complexities of the gaze. **Postcolonial**, **decolonial** and **cultural studies theory,** particularly that of such authors as Homi Bhabha, serves the purpose of highlighting the mechanisms of the formation of racial stereotype and colonial subject. In terms of a methodological framework coming from the field of art history and visual culture studies, I combine inspirations form Hans Belting's anthropological reflection on the status and circulation of images and its media, Rosalind Krauss' call for attention to the **medium** as a signifying structure, and, most importantly, the general project

of **critical iconology** proposed by W.J.T. Mitchell, which responds to the variety of images I discuss, of different provenance, medium, as well as ontological and cultural status. In fact, while the chapters are ordered according to an iconographic motif or theme, the main motif travels in time across media, letting images and objects of diverse kinds come into play for signification and interpretation: painting, prints, photography, films, videos or three-dimensional sculptures and installations. A relevant example of this diversity which frames the introduction, along with the opening case of Jarr's installation, is Glenn Ligon's America neon installations series (2006–2014), aptly showing the complexity embedded in the name America and what it stands for.

Chapter 1, ***Flag As a Matrix-Image*****,** concerning the familiar subject of the American flag and its reception in visual arts functions as a thematic cross-section of a spectrum of issues which will be developed in other parts of the book. I propose to think about the Stars and Stripes as a **matrix-image**, a visual platform which since the mid-1950s has become a litmus paper of socio-cultural and political changes in the United States. The flag itself is a synecdoche and a symbol of American mythology; its transformations and different applications in artistic and sociocultural practices revealed what this unifying structure was supposed to cover: inequality, racism, controversial political US policies etc. Hence, the flag serves both a symbol of (mythologized) unity and a field of socio-cultural, political difference. While the use of the flag in arts was the subject of a number of many texts and exhibitions, it has never been given a proper consideration in terms of the American mythology and the structure of visual myths. Referring to a variety of texts on the subject by such authors as Martin Kemp, Albert Boime or Sidra Stich, I start the article with a historical and theoretical discussion of the different meanings the flag stands for: from the "sacred" blood and body of America, a fetish, an object of love and hate, a symbol and national identification and power to an abstract but meaningful structural framework for the agency of difference. Next, I consider the semantic field of the matrix as a productive way to specify the workings of the flag as an image. The chapter, instead of a chronological narrative, is divided into sections focusing on different artistic strategies, which reveal its differential potential residing "underneath" the clear pattern of the banner. First, I discuss in detail the well-known, foundational case of Jasper Johns' *Flag* (1954): among other things, I perceive the transparency onto a layer of a collage made of newspaper clippings as an indication of opening the national symbol to the field of discursive difference that is suppressed in modernity, opening artistic practice up to social and cultural tensions that have always been dormant under the dominant, mythical structure of the Stars and Stripes. The next section is devoted to more literal inscriptions that appear within the field of the flag, opening it up to the voices of the Other – disadvantaged groups and discourses critical of official policies. Here I consider works by such artists as Faith Ringgold, William C. Copley, George Maciunas or Barbara Kruger. Then, in a section on the flag as a screen and frame, I discuss works by David Hammons, Benny Andrews, Wayne Eagleboy and Yoan Capote, presenting the tension between the flag which both protects and threatens or oppresses; the flag is not only a screen of projection and the object of gaze but a screen mediating, in the Lacanian sense, the controlling, institutional gaze as a source of power. The third part of the chapter regards the difficult relation between the flag and the body/object. The Stars and Stripes is used to cover the coffins of deceased soldiers: it neutralizes the traumatic Real of the dead body and, by extension, the trauma of war, covering it with the symbolic layer of patriotism. Sam Weiner's and Marc Morell's works regard exactly that, particularly in the context of the Vietnam war. Also, I look at the cases of a "vestiary body", of "wearing" a flag, historically

by the Lakota Indians, and in the 20th century in the works of such artists as Yvonne Rainer or Fritz Scholder. The bodily, haptic relationship between the flag and the African-American body is also addressed in several works by David Hammons and the problem of the desecration of the flag by the body becomes a crucial aspect of Dread Scott's famous installation, which also embraces many of the aforementioned issues and offers the most comprehensive experience of the deconstruction of the mythological power of the American flag. Finally, the section titled "Ripped/faded flag" draws the reader's attention to works by Hans Haacke exhibited at the State of the Union show (2008) and a number of other projects by artists such as Mary Carlson, which translate the uncertain material status of the flag into a meaningful statement. An analysis of Robert Frank's iconic *4th of July, Jay, New York* (1955) becomes a coda taking us back to the moment when Johns' *Flag* was made and the civil rights movement started to form.

Chapter 2, ***Crossing the Delaware, Crossing History,*** is a detailed analysis of the life and afterlife of the famous work by Emmanuel Leutze entitled *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851). An account of its historical and contemporary reception proves its pivotal and exemplary role in the construction of the American **mythistory** and the formation of an American national hero – George Washington. Tracking the shifting fortunes of the painting, I diagnose not only the changing aesthetic taste but also diverse attitudes towards the meanings it carried and its role as a symptom of the formation of American mythology. I propose to see the painting as an **event-image**: an image which constructs a complex **historical memory**, combining the historical event, the image of the event and its meaning related to Manifest Destiny at the time of its making. It never stopped being revisited and actualized in numerous 20th- and 21st-century remediations and adaptations, serving as a point of reference of historical change. I use the psychoanalytic, Freudian categories of **primal scene** and **primal fantasy** to describe the role of the painting in the formation of collective, national memory; the primal scene refers to a potentially traumatic event that cannot be remembered and is often represented by means of a primal fantasy – an idealized image of the event. A detailed analysis of the painting reveals a tension between its iconic, monumental, almost sculptural character and the dynamic action, a narrative which extends well beyond the event of crossing the river, reaching towards much more a distant future than the victory at Trenton. The event-image embraces different dimensions of history, turning it into mythistory with ongoing aftermath in later revisions of the image. The constructedness of the painting, mythologizing the event, and its status, deeply ingrained in the American cultural memory, became a platform for telling commentaries on the social tensions in the United States. In 1913 it was used in a newspaper cartoon *Gen. Jones Crossing the Delaware*, showing a known suffragette in Washington's place as a commentary on women's struggle for voting rights. Later, a reproduction of the painting appeared in Grant Woods's *The Daughters of the Revolution* (1932), tellingly signifying the satirized values of the eponymous society. All these, and more, cases are the subject of careful readings which confront the original painting with its new contexts. The painting enjoyed renewed interest in 1950s, when artists of the young generation, such as Roy Lichtenstein or Larry Rivers, grappled with the legacy of abstract expressionism; it was also addressed in Jacob Lawrence's *Struggle* series, which I see as a very telling reduction of the heroic visual narrative. Rivers' version of the motif (1953) in particular reveals a new, ironic and subversive approach to both the academic decorum of the piece and the mythologized subject: it demythologizes the primal fantasy of the historical event and the way Washington was idealized. A detailed reading of the painting is confirmed, or by another account of its careful viewing: the ekphrastic poem *On Seeing Larry Rivers' Washington*

Crossing the Delaware at the Museum of Modern Art (1955) by Frank O'Hara. Next, I look at Alex Katz's cut-out scenography for Kenneth Koch's short play concerning the crossing, which takes me to postmodern pastiches of the painting by Robert Colescott and Roger Shimomura. In both cases, **the strategy of substitution** reveals social elisions in the original work but, more importantly, the continued issue of racial prejudice and the urgency of crossing the line of color. Shimomura's take on Leutze's work is particularly revealing as a commentary on the difficult history and status of Asian Americans, especially of Japanese origin in the context of World War 2 and the detentions of the Japanese in the USA. Finally, I offer an extended account of two most recent works which quote Leutze's painting: Kara Walker's large watercolor titled *The Crossing* (2017) and Kent Monkman's *Resurgence of the People* (2019). The multifaceted reading of the first work, including numerous pictorial intertexts, reveals a very ominous diagnosis of the United States under Donald Trump's presidency. One of many aspects of the piece is the problem of immigration and American imperialism in crisis: Washington's boat is **no longer a synecdoche of the American myth as an object of desire but a threat**. Monkman's take not only confronts the myth of the revolution with the native Americans' issues but also reverses the colonial narratives of the relationship between the white Americans and the indigenous people. The painting performs a primal fantasy of the "landing theme" but from the perspective of the native peoples.

Chapter 3, titled ***Landscape – an Image of the Country / the Country of the Image,*** the longest part of the book, does not concern a specific motif or an individual work but representations of the American landscape as broader domain of visual culture, consisting of specific, constitutive images and discourses. In most general terms, the starting point for my discussion is **the dialectic tension between reality and pictorial construction** inherent in the landscape. I begin with a discussion of a series of works by the contemporary artist Valerie Hegarty, who quotes famous American landscape paintings but transforms them so that they look as if were destroyed by the powers of nature: a picture which undergoes natural erosion collapses the difference between nature and culture. Moreover, she questions the status of meaning that stood behind the 19th-century American painting, often interpreted as expressing the dilemma between nature as specifically American legacy, an Edenic Garden, a source of transcendental experience and nature as a resource for transformation, an incentive for territorial expansion and an ingredient of the formation of the America dream. Then I move to a comprehensive discussion of the role of American landscape painting and photography in the creation of the visual mythology of the United States, revisiting both historical and contemporary discourses, which indicated the different ways landscape representations were constructed and ideologically motivated. Of particular importance here is Angela Miller's claim that landscape painting was an "**arena of symbolic action**", which I reinterpret as a field of dynamic movement of images circulating between the actual and the virtual. Other theoretical propositions which frame the analysis of specific works are, for instance, W.J.T. Mitchell's discussion of the **landscape as a medium** and as **a cultural text**, as well as Maurizia Natali's proposal, inspired by Aby Warburg's idea of cultural memory and expression, to regard landscape images as layered "theaters of memory" that get activated and investigated particularly effectively in the movies.

Referring to specific works of 19th-century American landscape painting, or paintings where landscape is a prominent element, such as Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* (1836) and *Oxbow* (1836), Asher B. Durand's *Progress* (1853), Emmanuel Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* (1861), I point to a number of crucial issues related to the con-

struction of **Manifest Destiny**, imagining and conceptualizing the frontier but also the formation of visual myths and attendant issues which would re-emerge 100 years later in modern and contemporary art. Careful, interpictorial (intertextual) readings of these works allow me to bring up a number of points that have not been raised hitherto. For instance, *Oxbow* thematizes the engagement of the viewer into what it represents, reveals the function of landscape painting as an element of a larger tendency of thinking about nature, ambivalent borderlines, progress and expansion, not only through depiction but also the phenomenological experience of the observer, **oscillating between the picture and imagined reality**. *Oxbow* reemerges in the 20th century in Alfred Leslie's and the photographer Joel Meyerowitz's takes on the image/the site, revealing historical change and offering a perspective to revisit the older work. Further, explaining the *modus operandi* of two other crucial 19th-century painters Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran, I discuss how the fantasy that they constructed for the Americans to visualize the American West was institutionalized and officially acknowledged by exhibitions and governmental commissions. The paintings affected the creation of the first national parks but also became official but idealized representations of the West for those who had never been there. They participated in Americans' fantasy about America. A similar function was assigned to photography, which, following Alan Trachtenberg's argument, I see as a way of "taking" not only photographs but also the sites: grasping a view of a place meant mapping and naming it, taking its possession and control over it.

The next subchapter, "Multiplying the Frame: an Exhibition", is a case study of the art exhibition at the **1864 Metropolitan Fair** in New York, where a prominent place was given to landscape painting (and, for instance, Leutze's *Washington* painting). Through the analysis of the spatial distribution of two major paintings (*Heart of the Andes* by Frederick Edwin Church and Bierstadt's *Lander's Peak*) in relation to Leutze's historical work, I explain their role in the constitution of American mythology. While the exhibition constitutes one major contextual framework, I also offer an account of the way Church's painting was additionally framed by three portraits of American presidents, evidence of explicit politicization of landscape painting, on the one hand securing its status, and on the other, doing away with the "natural", mythologizing alibi of the genre.

The framing of landscape painting by presidential portraits takes me a few decades forward to an analogical imprint of national identity on natural formation: Mount Rushmore and the Gutzon Borglum's sculptures of four presidents carved in the rock. An extensive discussion of the historical context of this monument demonstrates the **conflictual layering of memory** and the resulting, mythologizing erasures making it a *lieu de memoire* in Pierre Nora's sense of the term. Natural rock, which had become a sacred place for Native Americans, was later taken from them, returned to them (Laramie Treaty), next illegally reappropriated for economic gain and finally "reframed" and "stamped" by the sculptural images of the presidents. I see this as a colonizing and imperial gesture *par excellence,* which no longer needs the mythic power of naturalization (I oppose Simon Schama's view that it is a "landscape myth") of what is constructed and political; it is the myth that gets 'demythified' by the powerful, self-confident myth-maker. Furthermore, I discuss the function of the monument as the site of political speeches and, as depicted by Lee Friedlander in one of his photographs, incorporating viewers into a complex structure of dominant, political gaze. As a result, I propose that Mount Rushmore is a culmination of the long constitution of landscape as a myth and a turning point, leading in the later 20th-century reformulations of landscape in art and cinema to critical revisions and reconsiderations of its meaning.

The next section jumps to another iconic image/sign which, in my view, has much to do with Mount Rushmore – **the Hollywood sign** – a sign which also frames and inscribes the landscape of the Hollywood Hills and marks a gradual transition from painting and the American, usually western, landscape as a site of historical events to the screen of movie theaters. Hollywood as a "dream factory" interiorized, mediated and continued the American mythistory of the first half of the 20th century, became its virtual extension, only to gradually question it (albeit not too often) in the late 1960s. The Hollywood sign signified the coded nature of America, and landscape in particular, as an imaginary-symbolic extension of the United States, **a screen of projection and a screen *for* protection**. This metonomy of the coded world of cinema was used in art on many occasions by Ed Ruscha, and much later by Maurizio Cattelan. My discussion of their works further investigates the semiotics of the sign and what it stands for; for the former artist, landscape is a background for the drama of words; the latter artist's installation in Sicily, Italy, also exemplifies, among other things, the global extension of America as a domain of images and signs, both visual, material and virtual, in the form of fantasies and memories. That combination of landscape and film, which is also discussed in Jean Baudrillard's *America*, takes me to reconsider two road movies – *Sunchaser* (1997) and *Thelma and Louise* (1991) – in terms proposed by Maurizia Natali in her respective interpretations. For Natali, Hollywood surreptitiously keeps on using the **images of landscape and their mythistories ingrained in the collective memory**. I expand on her analysis, point to traces of specific pictorial quotes and discuss how both films blur the differences between landscape as natural reality, as an image and a figment of one's imagination. A special role in the second example is played by the Grand Canyon, whose meaning I also discuss at length and refer to its different interpretations, for instance, Elisabeth Childs' idea of it being a **stratified sphere of textuality and temporality**, and representations, including a very telling painting by Mark Tansey *Constructing the Grand Canyon* (1990), as a natural site made of signs, and indeed, a textual entity.

The section titled "Modern Landscape" considers a few relatively rare cases of landscape in modernist art from the first half of the 20th century. I argue that while it may be true that landscape painting became "an exhausted genre", as W.J.T. Mitchell wrote, its mythical role of marking progress was passed onto American cityscapes. Nonetheless, I talk about the continuation of landscape painting in the photographs by Ansel Adams and discuss an alternative proposed in *American Landscape* (1930) by Charles Sheeler – an image signaling a transfer of the site of American mythology from the West and its ideology of territorial expansion to the sphere of **industrialization and the development of the urban metropolis**. *Hudson River Landscape* (1950), a sculpture by David Smith, exhibited at the new Whitney Museum's building against the background of the actual Hudson River, corroborates this transfer of the myth onto American modernity, a question that will be explored in Chapter 7 of the book. Next, I pass on to a necessarily selective discussion of **land-art** as a phenomenon that both rejected the pictorial aspect of landscape but maintained some of the characteristics of the American landscape, drawing on the mythical wilderness, the escape from civilization and the transformation of nature. An overview of discussions on the relationship between representations of landscape and land art takes me to a more detailed discussion of Robert Smithson's selected writings and his artistic practice, which sheds some light on the above-mentioned contradictions. I propose not to reject the context of the American landscape tradition in the consideration of land-art, but instead employ it as a productive, conceptual frame of reference and demonstrate that those practices, while incorporating certain ingredients of the 19th-century experience and discourse on landscape, do not succumb to mythological reduction.

The final section concerns further developments in the treatment of landscape in photography. I discuss "the most unseen" and, at the same time, most seminal 1975 exhibition ***New Topographics***, which featured such artists as Robert Adams, Stephen Shore or Joe Deal. I see their work as both a return of the interest in American landscape and its radical revision, devoid of the heroic and romanticized mythology, documenting the ambiguous results of the modern, 20th-century settlement of the West. Then I move on to another, quite different, project which revisited the photographic myths of the 19th-century: ***The Rephotographic Survey Project*** conducted by Mark Klett in the 1970s. The idea was to create photographs of sites as close as possible to those taken by 19th-century photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan or William Henry Jackson; it resulted in 120 re-photographs. Scouting for the exact locations and weather conditions, adjusting the equipment etc. was a way to both re-experience and re-represent American landscapes, re-animate the images in the present. The difference visible in the juxtapositions on the pages of the resulting publication are the marks not only of visual but temporal difference. The new photographs both re-animate the older images and create, through repetition, a productive tension, sometimes revealing their constructedness, sometime the reverse of what could be expected and what was the most common, instead of infrastructural development, the progressing wilderness. The chapter is concluded by close readings of three photographs – Robert Adams' *Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs, Colorado* (1969), Stephen Shore's *Merced River* (1979) and Joel Sternfeld's *After Flash Flood, Rancho Mirage* (1979) – that highlight a number of issues mentioned in the chapter: the question of the survival and virtual, elusive nature of the frontier, the dialectic of nature and "contemporary settlement" ruled by the capitalist system (Adams), a subtle return to the pastoral myth by the representation of the coexistence of the mythic landscape of the Yosemite Valley in the 20th-century reality in dialogue with Bierstadt's painting and Watkins' photograph, as well as through authorial self-revision in the form of narrative extension in a photobook project (Shore), but also the entropic (and dystopic) opening of landscape, the Garden of Eden in crisis, and the figuration of different layers of "naturalized" mythistory, which may stand for different levels of collective (un)consciousness (Sternfeld).

Chapter 4, ***West as America***, is also a title of a famous, revisionist exhibition which I refer to. While connected with the previous chapter on landscape and the following parts on Native Americans, this chapter offers a more focused look at the definition, function and **representation of the American West and the cowboy and western scenarios** in particular. I draw on Neil Campbell's theorization of the West, which questions the idea of a specified region or a boundary that defines it but becomes **a rhizomatic sphere of negotiation and conflict** that abolishes the binary opposition of the inside and the outside. The main subject of the chapter, however, is the cowboy: his historical, 19th-century formation as a profession, then a national, imaginary hero and the deconstruction of its role in the 20th and 21st century. The area of visuality which became the platform for vicarious life of the cowboy and the narratives of the American west was, of course, Hollywood film, particularly the genre of the western. A crucial figure who anticipated the screen life of the cowboy was William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, whose experience of the American frontier was later mediated, transformed and circulated in the form of his Wild West Show, which served as a protocinematic version of the western genre. Cody functioned between the American West as a sphere of reality and history (always already mythical) and its mythologized representations, later visualized and popularized in the cinema. Following Tom Gunning's argument, I argue that the dynamic of the historical West was **protocinematic**, combining a dramat-

ic narrative with constant movement in time. That was also the case about which scholars such as Baudrillard wrote, when fiction preceded and became a model for reality. Next, I describe the development of the film genre of the western, an American genre *par excellence*, as André Bazin claimed, from its classical form to anti-western, the symptomatic of the 1960s social unrest, and its later postmodern adaptations, particularly in the work of Quentin Tarantino. I also point to the very prominent presence of the western in his most recent film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019), which both thematizes the crisis of the western genre and emphasizes the productive tension between the 1960s and the realities of the 19th century that the western embodied.

In the subchapter "Destruction of the Screen" I discuss Raphael Montañez Ortiz' *Cowboy and 'Indian' Film* (1957–58), which is a random collage of a chopped Hollywood western tape – an example of his **destructionist artistic strategy** and, at the same time, a deconstruction of the myth that western films epitomize and propagate. Next, I discuss in detail Richard Prince's famous series of photographs of Marlboro advertisements, which is symptomatic of the fantasy of the West that, while appealing to many men, turned out to be very effective and confirmed the robust condition of American mythology, especially with reference to the model of masculinity it promoted, an issue I elaborate on. That takes me to the account of two westerns by Andy Warhol – *Horse* (1965) and *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968), which disrupt the genre from the inside by **queering it**, **subverting the heroic, masculinist narrative** by camp, overtly homosexual content, revealing the **gender politics** behind the seemingly "natural" vision of the American West. Another sphere of western iconography that destabilizes the mythical unity is the **vision of California** – a veritable American Garden of Eden – with Disneyland as a site of (dis)simulation, as discussed by Baudrillard. It is the main theme of Llyn Foulkes' complex paintings and assemblages, which combine references to the genre of the western, Disneyland, Hollywood and American popular culture and present California as a site of dystopian visions, which **turn the American dream into an American nightmare**. A slightly more ambivalent approach to the American west can be seen in the "western" works by Ed Ruscha, such as *America's Future* (1979) or *Uncertain Frontier* (1987), which I perceive as images that return both from the present and the future to haunt the present.

Another artistic strategy of demystifying the West with its covert narratives were references to "playing cowboys and Indians", the seemingly innocent role-playing game so popular among children of the older generations, both in the USA and abroad, especially behind the Iron Curtain, which performatively **neutralized and romanticized the violent historical scenarios** and xenophobic attitudes that stood behind the idealized heroism of the West. I analyze a series of photographs by Laurie Simmons, who uses stock toy figurines and, setting them in real environment, collapses reality and the stereotyped fiction. Next, I discuss David Levinthal's photographs, which, as he said, are about a West that will always be but has never existed. His photos, in which he arranges toy soldiers, cowboys and Indians, present fictional narratives that are inconclusive, blurred or highlight a seemingly unimportant elements, hence revealing **the work of the memory** and the suppression of history behind it. I frame it with Ernst van Alphen's argument about the educational use of toys for (re)playing traumatic events, which seems appropriate for the scenarios suggested in Levinthal's photos that combine play, entertainment, innocence and violent history.

The next section is devoted to **desublimatory strategies** targeting the American West in the work of Paul McCarthy. I discuss a series of his works produced in the 1990s, such as *Saloon, F-Fort* and selected "western" sculptures, in which, through excess, chaos, obscenity, abjection, he successfully opens the **fallocentric mythology of western narratives** and the male subject. Finally, the chapter is concluded by a short analysis of *Summer Love* (2007), a contemporary Pol-

ish western by Piotr Uklański, and an elaborate, close reading of *American Night* (2009) by the German artist Julian Rosefeldt, a 5-channel video-installation that not only dismantles western cliches and narratives but also masterfully demonstrates their connection with contemporary times and American politics. The motif of a lonesome cowboy is contradicted by his black skin and the fact that he reaches an ultimate borderline of the frontier, the ocean shore (never depicted in the western genre); the woman waiting in front of a log house for her man (possibly the same cowboy) turns out to be standing in front of a film set; a bunch of cowboys chatting at a fire somewhere in the wilderness gradually start to quote contemporary texts from popular culture and ultimately improvise a rap; a military chopper carrying American soldiers lands in a ghost town, blending 19th-century conflicts with contemporary ones in the Middle East; a saloon scene features two pioneers resembling George W. Bush and Barack Obama. *American Night* best exemplifies the key argument of the book about **the spectral return of the old myths in the present**, their revision but constant actuality as an inalienable frame of reference.

Chapter 5 – ***Differencing Colonial Fantasy*** – focuses on the artistic **deconstructions of the colonial fantasy about Native Americans / the First Nations** people (I also refer to Canadian examples) in projects limited here to their self-representation. Referring to a number of historical accounts and postcolonial/decolonial theorists, I present the mechanisms that produced visual and discursive stereotypes about the Native people, such as **"museification", "objectification" and "ethnicization",** denying their equal status as contemporary American citizens. The chapter starts with an analysis of the iconic work *Artifact Piece* (1987) by James Luna, along with other projects which expanded the question of the native identity, gender and objectification by Erica Lord and Rebecca Belmore. A particularly useful term – and artistic strategy – for describing both the colonial condition of indigenous people and a way to counter it is **mimicry** (Bhabha). It is a mechanism of imperfect emulation, on the one hand marking colonial hierarchy, while on the other, showing its ineffectiveness. Mimicry produces **"authorized versions of otherness"** that, ultimately, turn against the colonizer. The colonizer's stake was to create American "Indianness", shaped and controlled by the white man; by performing or re-representing this construction, mimicking the effects of mimicry, native artists successfully subvert this model, or simply lay bare its weaknesses. In the section titled "White Man's Indian", I sketch the history of the changing attitudes towards the native Americans in the 19th century, particularly focusing on the creation of "Indian galleries" by Charles Bird King and George Catlin and later, in the early 20th century, on Edward C. Curtis' monumental photographic project. All of these were a response to a prospective and, in fact, retrospective idea of a "vanishing race", an issue which visually ossified into the way the living native people were, and still are, perceived. These histories are well researched and are presented here as a background and the formative element of the racial stereotype which, as I claim with regard to African Americans in the following chapter, is one of the constitutive elements of the mythology of the United States, neutralizing difference, and maintaining the social status quo.

I start a discussion of the 20th-century revisions of this model by way of an analysis of the work of Fritz Scholder and T.C. Cannon. In the former case, I look at the way he pioneered breaking with the canonical representations of Native Americans, both in terms of form and content; for the latter, I'm particularly interested in his self-portraits, especially *Collector No. 2* (1970) and *Self-Portrait in the Studio* (1975). In both works, I look at the way he countered not only the traditional ways of native self-portraiture but also at the complex ruptures in the im-

plied, traditional model of the gaze and roles ascribed to it. There he **regains agency and subjectivity**. I pay attention to details such as the pictures represented on the wall which, not only point to European tradition, as in the case of *Collector No. 2*, but also open up the contentious issues of "primitivism" and ethnicity. In the next section, I highlight a few cases of native artists who **"textualize" and "historicize" native bodies**. Edgar Heap of Birds plays with language to disrupt the hegemony of English language; Wendy Red Star infuses photographic representations of her ancestors with textual information, at the same time making them more difficult to be appropriated by the mythologizing discourse of ethnicity. Finally, Jimmie Durham, constructs his self-portrait, which is both grotesque and ominous, where "his" flattened body "talks", **revealing and countering the racial, colonial discourse**. The next section is devoted to Wendy Red Star's *Four Seasons* (2006) series where, by the use of a convention of diorama, she offers a critique of museification and stereotypes about native-people's attachment to nature. Finally, the longest section is devoted to "performing gender", with extensive analysis of Rebecca Belmore's *Fringe* (2008), Erica Lord's *Tanning Project* (2005) and several works by Kent Monkman. These artists not only work with the issue of native stereotypes but extend it to the question of gender. I point to Belmore's representation of a scarred body as a complex figure of a hurtful history and the discourse of victimization but also of a stereotype as a tool of scarring and disfiguring native, particularly female, subjectivity. I compare her photo to *The Rokeby Venus* by Diego Velázquez, which amplifies the **feminist message** of that work. Lord's photographs and hackneyed, "tanned" inscriptions reveal the interconnection between visuality, the body and colonizer's discourse. Finally, I elaborate on several of Ken Monkman's projects (performative, photographic, filmic and painting-based) in which, through his transgender alter ego, he successfully **"queers", performs and problematizes the coordinates of gender** in native culture. His works also dig deep into the history of both 19th-century and 20th-century visual culture, asking valid questions of the construction of native stereotypes and the gender roles in it. The final work, the painting *Trappers of Man* (2006), based on Bierstadt's *Among the Sierra Nevada*, bridges the above-discussed issues of landscape, gender and queering the stereotype with a number of issues that will be dealt with in the chapters to come: modernity and the formation of modern artist-hero.

Chapter 6 – *The Veils of Vision* is devoted to the **racial stereotype imposed on African Americans** and the ways it is visualized and deconstructed by contemporary artists. At the beginning, I sketch the theoretical framework concerning the issue of **(in)visibility**, relating to well-known fragments of texts by Ralph Ellison, Franz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois's idea of **the veil** (of prejudice etc.) is particularly relevant as an aspect of constructed visibility of America – a screen which determines the visibility, and also objectifies and oppresses African-American subjects. It is also one of the paragons of the status quo in the distribution of power across the line of color. However, his notion of the blacks' **second-sight** offers an emancipatory aspect that opens the possibility of an advantage African Americans have over the white man. Hence, I coin the term **veil of vision**, which designates the changing status of representation (and self-representation) of African Americans in the context of their specifically American (colonial and postcolonial) situation. An aspect of this is what I call a **stereotype-image**: a socially and physically mobile image, a symptom of racial prejudice and a platform for artistic critical actions. The stereotype, for the dominant group of white Americans, served as a **protective screen against otherness**, against what was regarded as a threat and an (impossible) object of desire, and hence needed to be repressed. I also discuss recurrent theoretical frameworks and

debates concerning the issue of race, such as the idea of post-black and its critique, for instance, in W.J.T. Mitchell's discussion of race as a medium, or publications by Michele Wallace. A vital source for my text is also Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of stereotype as a fetish in his *The Location of Culture*.

My analysis starts with a historical sketch of the formation of stereotype in the 19th-century images and discourses, the problem of visual exclusions of African Americans, either their literal invisibility in historical images or **visual stereotyping as a defensive strategy, solidifying the mythological construction of social cohesion and unity**. Referring to specific images, such as the 19th-century photos of the scarred Gordon, Joseph T. Zealy's photos of African Americans or the figure of Aunt Jemima, I reconceptualize and demonstrate their participation in the grand American mythological narrative. As in the preceding chapters, my aim is to offer an account of the way this "veil of vision", naturalized (mythologized) by the era of slavery and segregation, started to become porous and manifest the real premises of its construction. While in historical terms, the emancipatory moment for Blacks is the 1960s' Civil Rights era, I discuss it in more general terms, including an analysis of works by Romare Bearden and Melvin Edwards (his *Curtain*, 1969–70, as a figure of the veil of vision) and concentrate on the art of **the post-civil rights era from the 1980s** onwards, which most effectively and critically revised, reused and reconceptualized stereotype-images.

I analyze Carrie Mae Weems' *American Icons* (1987–88) and Fred Wilson's *Mine / Yours* (1995) in terms of an **uncanny resurgence of a "domesticated" object**, revealing the haunting nature of the racial stereotype. Weems' series *Ain't Joking* (1987–88) and *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995) are also the subject of a subchapter titled "Specimens of Racial Difference". Through a close reading of one work from the former series, I point to the way the form of Weems' photos both signify racial stereotype and resists it; the latter series is a carefully **designed appropriation of photographic representations of racial reduction**, a figure of Du Bois second-sight, which juxtaposes the prejudiced, oppressive perspective of the white man with a more conscious and informed **"Black gaze"**, which lays bare the mechanisms that are supposed to naturalize the mythical structure of racially biased stereotype. Moreover, their layered structure encourages me to read them as exemplifications of another dictum by Du Bois' about the "thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass".

The next section is devoted to an interracial duet of artists – Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry. Their project *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (2008) is another materialization of the racial veil: painterly copies of mugshots of the bus boycott protesters (including Rosa Parks) in Montgomery, Alabama, are additionally doubled and differentially marked on a superimposed silkscreen print. I propose to look at their other projects, performative videos, as a way of **performing the veil of racial vision**: in *Topsy Turvy* (2006) they create a bodily hybrid emulating topsy-turvy dolls which, as I argue, eludes the racial binary these toys suggest; *Exchange* (2007) is a trenchant visual, performative reflection on the one-drop rule; eventually *Evenly Yoked* (2010) functions as a representation of burdened history of racially mixed relationships they privately exemplify. A sequence of anachronistic scenes reflects the complex, layered structure of racial prejudice and segregation governing social relations, the veil of race, which the artists both successfully perform and perforate.

The next section is devoted to Kara Walker, whose already classic silhouette works I read as **black-and-white landscapes of fantasy** – an extremely successful **archaeology of the suppressed content of the trauma of slavery and racism**. While revisiting Walker's well-researched

art and the critical discussions around it, I emphasize how she manages to demythologize the American South through the figuration of the censored (on both sides of the color line) material and reveal **the tensions between desire and repulsion**, in which the structure of fantasy provides a model productively collapsing subject-object, me-other binaries. The section is concluded by a multi-faceted reading of *Slavery! Slavery!* (1997) which includes the analysis of its interpictorial dialogue with Eastman Johnson's *Old Kentucky Home* (1859)

The final section of the chapter is devoted to Lorraine O'Grady's *Art Is…* (1983), an action which I see as an emancipatory gesture empowering the African-American community and individuals, and the more recent photographic work of Paul Mpagi Sepuya. The latter's photography provides an excellent example of how the racial veil / screen is employed in both a more affirmative, subtle and private way, strongly connected with the **medium of photography** and his studio practice. Sepuya's complex photographic portraits and self--portraits address a number of issues discussed earlier, such as visibility and invisibility, bodily fragmentation and multiple stratification of African-American subjects – but in a unique form of a meta-narrative focused on the photographic practice.

Chapter 7 titled ***Traces of Modernism*** concerns what I call **the last grand myth of the United States** – the emergence and role of **abstract expressionism** in the mid-20th century. The movement complemented the imperial rhetoric of the United States with the aspect of unique artistic, avant-garde achievement. Following such authors as Michael Leja, Ellen Landau and others, I see both the formal aspects of that movement and critical discourse related to it as typical of the formation of visual mythology, both used internally and externally, as an object of a global, particularly related to the Cold War era, American imperialism – **America as a global extension of the United States**. However, from the mid-1950s onwards, this myth also became the object of critique, gradual, if incomplete, dissolution in the field of artistic experimentation. The chapter concentrates on two strains of these practices: **the myth of indexical trace of an artist's gesture** and **the emergence of discourse**, specifically exemplified by the use of verbal signs in paintings in the decades following abstract expressionism. I see both of these practices as symptoms, parallel with cultural and artistic phenomena discussed in the preceding chapters, of the introduction of differential aspect into the mythical, monolithic narrative of America. I also revisit the well-known arguments by Max Kozloff, Eva Cockroft, Serge Guilbaut and others on the ideological, national appropriation of abstract expressionism, and propose to see this myth in the terms proposed by Chantal Mouffe as withholding **the political** (as a sphere of conflict and difference) in favor of politics (ideological agendas) and the aforementioned practices as **an emergence of the political**.

Next, I move on to a detailed discussion of the myth of the painter's gesture by looking at arguments made by both critics contemporaneous with the movement and more recent commentaries. I argue that both Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg contributed to the mythological narrative of the movement. I refer to their different texts, while offering essentially antagonistic accounts of modernism and abstract expressionism. A more up-to-date account is embodied by Richard Shiff's elaboration of indexicality in abstract expressionism. Paradoxically, while the myth neutralizes the "texture" and complications of history, in abstract expressionism it was exactly the textural, seemingly chaotic and complicated form of the canvases that became the object of mythological appropriation. An important aspect of this strain of discourse is the issue of the status of an artist, his bodily and mental connection with his work – the epitome of which was Jackson Pollock. The **creation of an avant-garde, national hero** *par excellence* was a constitutive element

of the formation of the myth, especially that it connects with the well-known narratives (discussed earlier in the book) of the American West, and the figure of the cowboy as the paradigmatic type of a white, male, creative but rough American individual. A *Life* magazine article, photographs and film by Hans Namuth produced and reinforced the mythical status of Pollock and even more strongly connected the artist with his artistic agency, whose traces were left on the canvas. The index of his gesture and body can be read as an avant-garde synecdoche of diverse aspects of American mythology, but also, as I argue, it gradually reveals its being disconnected from the body, a sign of a sign, a logo which was declared as such in the work of the artists from the younger generation. Following up on Shiff's argument about the **iconization of the indexical sign** in abstract expressionism, in the analyses of works from Pollock to pop-art, I trace the development of the process which I call **deindexation** of the painterly trace in favor of its iconization (as an autonomous sign – a logo). This is an important aspect of the complex phenomenon of demythologization of the movement, starting in the 1950s, which was particularly visible, as Achim Hochdörfer argued, between 1958 and 1965. That was the period when what he calls "a hidden reserve" of abstract painting revealed itself, consisting in the use of painterly gesture as a sign beyond abstraction and the semiotization of the sign itself. Abstract expressionism, which Barbara Rose claimed in 1967 was an academicized movement, in the work of such artists as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein or Lynda Benglis functioned as a durable source of reference and platform of critical artistic practices.

Referring to Leo Steinberg's argument about the flatbed picture plane as marking a change in artistic coordinates and the role of painterly support, I discuss Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955) as a new combination of an object with residual elements of abstract expressionism in its upper part as a figure of a lasting and still relevant legacy of gestural painting. It recalibrates and subverts the acknowledged coordinates of modernism by introducing an ambivalence between a painting (a representation) and an object, between verticality and horizontality, never giving up on either of them but holding them in a productive tension. The traces of pencil on the pillow in this early combine are associated here with another work – *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953) – itself a figure of an Oedipal scenario in the American art of the 1950s but also an emancipatory, demythifying gesture of appropriation. I argue that the drawing and the combine did not signify radical ruptures but rather signs of a gradual process of maturation, revision and working through the burden of "fatherly" heritage of the New York School, which opened its "hidden reserve". Next, in the section titled "Image of the Trace", I look at the iconization and autonomization of the painterly trace in the work of Roy Lichtenstein, especially his famous *Brushstroke* series. The all-too-familiar motif and its meaning is given a new dimension when discussed in the context of his earlier attempts at gestural painting. Lichtenstein's work is emblematic of the process under discussion **– the passage from an image-trace as an index of abstract expressionism to the image of a trace**, exemplifying Greenberg's words about a need in the 1960s to make the painting *look* spontaneous but not necessarily be so anymore and hence marking an unbridgeable rupture between an image and its mythologized source in the body of the artist. This was further developed by Andy Warhol in his "piss paintings" or oxidation paintings, which Amelia Jones analyzed as an example of the **"Pollockian performative"**, that testified to the aforementioned bodily, phallogocentric provenance of the painterly trace and successfully desublimated its status. This performative and bodily potential of Pollock's legacy was marked as early as 1958 by Alan Kaprow and, as was discussed both by Jones and Rosalind Krauss, served as a frame of critical artistic practices in the 1960s: it was no longer Pollock and his painting

that was a frame of reference but the "Pollockian performative". The fetishistic, phallogocentric nature of abstract expressionism, which corresponded with the myth of the masculine America, became the object of further revisions by female artists. I am particularly interested in Lynda Benglis' *Adhesive Products* installation (1971), in which she gave the gestural trace three- dimensionality and revealed **the fetishistic nature of a brushstroke**.

The next subchapter highlights the problem raised by Craig Owens of **the repression of discourse in modernism and its re-emergence** in the practice of artists after abstract expressionism. I think of the emergence of **discourse as an emancipatory, potentially political and counter-mythological aspect** of art, and painting in particular: my analysis is limited to textual traces and inscriptions in painting. Contrary to the modernist medium specificity posited by Greenberg, there is no way to detach even the most abstract paintings from discursive elements such as signatures or titles, let alone critical discourse. However, the avoidance of figuration, not to mention the linguistic sign as a prominent element of pictorial structure, was symptomatic of the phenomenon of self-reflexive nature of painting and artists' and critics' conviction of inexpressible quality inherent in modernist works. I discuss Pollock's all-overs not so much as the climax of discursive suppression but a transition point at which the still non-symbolic linear forms can be read as what Roland Barthes called **"receivable text"**. I bring into this discussion Anna C. Chave's argument about Pollock's painting as a **masculinist script**, a form of painting which I see as anticipating the emergence of language in the work of younger artists. One of these is Cy Twombly, whose paintings involved scribbles and "childlike" script against an abstract background. I see these as another stage in the process under discussion. Another iteration of the linguistic sign on canvas are Jasper Johns' "alphabets", in which he presents **language as a system** – parole rather than langue – ready to be used, something he made more specific in his *Flag* (1954) by means of newspaper clippings.

The reappearance of language in paintings was also a signal of **breaking with the modernist silence in favor of otherness**. While female, and, in this case, also gay artists such as Louise Fishman and Joan Snyder did not completely give up abstraction, they combined it with textual inscriptions that made their message more legible. In this vein, I discuss *Angry Woman* series (1973) by Fishman and Snyder's work *Double Symphony* (1976). In the former, textual elements (names of different women) draw on the expressive power of painterly gesture, and in the latter, the subtlety of personalized "lists" and short expressions reveals private issues behind the creative impulses. Another case of marking otherness by using painted words and, at the same time, keeping in touch with the legacy of modernist painting – "differencing" its myth, to use Griselda Pollock's term – are the African-American artist Glenn Ligon's vertical, large canvases that include quotations referring to race and other issues from such authors as James Baldwin or Jean Genet. Sequentially repeated, they reveal the tension between legibility and visibility, printed and painted word, whiteness and blackness – colonial discourse of modernity and opposing strategies by African-American authors. The conclusion of the chapter is an analysis of Mark Tansey's *Reader* (1990), a canvas which represents a runner disappearing in a dark abyss of barely legible, printed text, a page from Paul de Man's seminal poststructuralist book *Blindness and Insight* (1971). The page includes a divagation on Nietzsches's discussion of modernity and forgetfulness, blindness required of a new experience. But, as I point out, a few pages later (not a part of the canvas), this German philosopher acknowledges the impossibility of forgetting, even in modernity, the same way one cannot forget or eradicate mythic structures which keep on framing even the most radical, differential actions. Tansey's painting is, in a way, emblematic for my analysis of different mythological layers in artistic, painting-based practices of modernity and postmodernity.

Chapter 8, the last in the book, titled ***New York As an Image***, concerns the view of Lower Manhattan from the perspective of New York Harbor. I look at the city landscape and skyline as a temporally and formally changing image, which became **"the face" of America**, a screen for projecting an **immigrant gaze** and later on simply those who fantasize about New York City, vicariously partaking in this dream via different media and images. Those gazes coalesced into an iconic, mythic view of Lower Manhattan which, nonetheless, is susceptible to change and transformation. New York became another kind of frontier, revealing the global effectiveness of America as an imaginary construction. This chapter both theorizes and historicizes the meaning of the Lower Manhattan panorama, as well as the gaze structured it as an image. A useful theoretical reference is Michel de Certeau's idea of **texturology**, a distanced look at the city which, in his view, is superficial because it "overlooks" social and cultural practices of everyday life. I argue that if we let the virtual layers of memory actively partake in the process of viewing, this dichotomy between texturology and social practice can be invalidated. Another important framework for my discussion is Rem Koolhaas' book *Delirious New York* (1978), which sets perimeters for the discussion of the tension between **horizontal (gridded) and vertical New York**, as well as the role of imagination, fantasy and the city as a project. I also provide my readers with a historical account of the formation of New York as a city and as a myth, connecting it with previous chapters, where I analyze such works as *The Landing of Henry Hudson* (1838) by Robert Weir, prints by John Bachmann or the meaning of the Statue of Liberty. The next subchapter is devoted to the formation of the "immigrant" gaze and the aforementioned perspective from the New York Harbor, which sets Lower Manhattan as a projective screen of hope and fantasy. I analyze a number of historical photographs and prints depicting immigrants from ships approaching New York, viewing the Statue of Liberty and Lower Manhattan, as well as immigrants looking towards the city from Ellis Island. Different aspects of those photographs figure and signify various stages of being in the **contact zone between imagination and fantasy** (America as a dream) and its both **promising and oftentimes traumatic, disappointing reality**. Two 1910 images by Alfred Stieglitz (*City of Ambition* and *Lower Manhattan*) are closely analyzed as evidence of a different, "local" kind of gaze, which both treats Manhattan as an image and something easily accessible. Finally, referring to several images and discourses on New York, I look at the changes in the "cliffs" of Lower Manhattan, especially before and after 1930, until the dramatic and contentious intervention in the iconic skyline which was the **construction of Twin Towers**.

The following few subchapters revolve around these iconic buildings, the history of their creation and their reception as, in specific terms, interventions in **New York as an image of the imperial power of the United State**s. I argue that while the skyscraper boom of the 1930s was the result of entrepreneurial ambition and evidence of the hegemonic status of the US, the myth was somehow neutralized by its architectural organicity. The Twin Towers, in turn, were a brazen statement which foregrounded this hegemony with no attempt at pretense or neutrality – a naked manifestation of imperial power of global capitalism – the economic aspect of America. It was also a figure of what Terry Smith called **"iconomy"** – iconicity combined with economic power. While the Twin Towers were at first severely criticized, especially on aesthetic and architectural grounds, it quickly became a crucial and accepted element of the Manhattan skyline, which I demonstrate by analyzing the opening sequence of Mike Nichols' film *Working Girl* (1988). The following sections are devoted to the tragic destruction of World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 and its consequences. I offer an overview of responses to the disappearance of the Towers, which, apart from the human loss, was a traumatic experience in terms of vision, a serious **frac-**

ture of the protective screen and the outward "face of America". I bring into play discussions but such thinkers as Slavoj Žižek, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Bill Bryson or Jürgen Habermas who, especially the first two philosophers, ruminated on the clash between image and reality, with the primacy of the former, which became painfully real; **the collapse of the imaginary with the real was also a collapse of temporalities**, and as Derrida noted, a specter of destruction which came from the future. This terrifying event became a tragically effective litmus paper for the condition of America as a mythological construction, which, as I argue, was the direct target of the attack. The next sections are devoted to a discussion of selected visual responses to the hauntological status of the Towers, as in Hans Haacke's 2002 project for commemorating 9/11. I also look at the 2011 P.S. 1 exhibition *September 11*, which anachronistically showed works retrospectively marked by the event, such as Christo's 1964–66 project for wrapping two office buildings in Lower Manhattan. Finally, my account focuses on the issue of Ground Zero and the debate around rebuilding the World Trade Center. Next, I trace the main premises of the winning project presented by Daniel Libeskind, whose idea was based on a regenerative idea dwelling in the mythologized, immigrant's gaze, and describe further transformations of the masterplan leading to the present state. I also analyze several projects presented by such architects as Peter Eisenman that, rather than "covering" the fracture and weakness of the imaginary-symbolic screen of America, wished to address it and work through the traumatic event. In the meantime, WTC, especially One WTC indicate the will to reconstruct the myth of imperial power rather than acknowledge the loss and necessity of finding another way. Against all odds, the myth survives.

The Conclusion of the book refers to the most recent **attack on the Capitol** in Washington, D.C. I see the attack of the followers of the former president Donald Trump, who plundered the seat of the US government, as a follow-up to what happened on 9/11. The crucial difference, apart from the obvious one of scale, number of casualties etc., is that what happened in Washington was an unexpected blow that did not come from the outside but from the inside – an implosion of America – delivered by the traditional upholders of the patriotic myth, predominantly white, male Americans, who invaded the seat of what they purportedly strongly believed in. According to Žižek, it took a form of a carnival, which was symptomatic of a long process of (my phrase) mythical thinking, rearing its ugly head during Trump's presidency, but cultivated by most governments, including Joe Biden's, which consists in the relentless belief in the power of unity and community and constant falling back on the familiar ideologies, which I call here "mythologies". Instead, Žižek seems to suggest that the solution resides in letting these ineffective ideals go and starting to **work through conflicted spheres**, open up an agonistic discussion, which would make the nation face its opposing voices, rather than charm them under the myth of unity. The perfect exemplification of this idea is the most recent project by Krzysztof Wodiczko called *House Divided…,* which was exhibited in New York in 2020. It consisted of two smaller-size copies of the Abraham Lincoln statue (originally from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., facing the Capitol), facing each other, which were animated by projections of Staten Island inhabitants, of different racial, economic, gender status, taking about the things that divide the nation: firearms, abortion, immigrants etc. Wodiczko responds to this **call for conflictual, revisionist sphere of difference, of real heteroglossia**, here using the face of one of the most venerated leaders of the country as a projective screen which, paradoxically, may be much more effective than constant attempts to regenerate the myth.