

**Random Fury and the Tyranny of Inscription:  
Hegemony, Political Initiation, and the Violence of Textual Performativity  
in Scott Kolbo and Lance Sinnema's *Escalation*.<sup>1</sup>**

*A review by*

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Two men enter the dim room, white men in white suits, embodying all that represents. One, team blue, tall with shorn locks, opposes the other, team red, though lesser in stature, similar in appearance. The two are about to engage in a battle of random fury unleashed against the tyranny of political absurdity. They will be inscribed in a silent cacophony of terms and political judgements, those that surface like a torrent of poor taste in the deluge of strife associated with any two-point political battle: the “right” versus the “left.” Red faces blue; blue affronts red. Each primes himself waiting to engage, their white suits soon to be imprinted with the derogatory terms of hate usually constrained only by vocal release, not willingly imprinted, boldly and in a violent action of textual performativity. Normally reserved to the oral sphere, here the hegemony of political initiation and indoctrination will be turned on its head. The linguistic construction of history as such furnishes a provisional lens for the analysis of the escalation of political rhetoric as manifest in print culture.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the culture of consumption is always already participating in the politics of print culture.<sup>3</sup> As these two willing victims of the terrorizing of the political mainstream upon the working masses begin to stamp each other with their opposing gloves, it becomes evident that they are both “stamping,” not unlike the impression made as a mark, and, more

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<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the artists’ commentary on the ridiculous generation (pun intended) of politics, the title of this paper was generated automatically and then altered using “The Amazing and Incredible, Only-Slightly-Laughable, Politically Unassailable, PoMo English Title Generator”. <<http://www.brysons.net/generator/>> Accessed 21 April 2012.

<sup>2</sup> This sentence automatically generated and then altered using the “Write Your Own Academic Sentence” generator power by the University of Chicago Writing Program. <<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/toys/randomsentence/write-sentence.htm>> Accessed 21 April 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

significantly, they are “stamped” under the heavy foot of political behavior. In this way the artists dilate on the reification of normative value(s) as recapitulated in the politics of the image.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, each word, each slanderous term, is boldly stamped in the opposing suit. They are branded with the “color” of the Other. “Hipster!” “Reactionary!” Gradually, however, we are blinded by our terms, our hate fueled beyond even that which we can decipher, the words muddy, blend, and merge, yet never congeal, never agree. As their bodies are blurred with slurs, the viewer is reminded that the emergence of praxis functions as the conceptual frame for the politics of the image.<sup>5</sup> “Rightwing!” “Hippie!” The textual discordance is raised to fever pitch as their bodies -- suits, faces, and hands -- are consumed and concealed by the skewed perspicacity they seek to smother the other with. In this way, the reification of pop culture replays (in parodic form) the politics of print culture.<sup>6</sup>

The viewer’s own role in this physical dialectic is engaged on the margins of the encounter. In their final grudge match the two artists were supported and/or derided by those present. Each member of this people’s court internally fought the intellectual battle that was being physically enacted before them. Jeering was met by laughter; children and “adults” alike sweat and screamed as their represented icon struck and was struck. Rules were violated as faces were recast in a purple hew, both resulting from the hybridity of the blue and red ink as well as pride and imprudence discolored their complexions. Thus, the illusion of consumption clarifies the position of the legitimation of print culture.<sup>7</sup> *Escalation*, transcendent in both its meaning and media, displaces the viewer from a place of political certainty to one of satirical verity. If, as it may be said, the (re)formation of civil society is homologous with the politics of the image,<sup>8</sup> then Kolbo and Sinnema have succeeded in displacing our prejudice and (re)placing it with the written word. When shouting is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

relegated to bodily imprint, we, as the social viewer, are shamed and startled; our assurance is replaced by vulgar rooting -- we are transformed.

*Escalation* begs for onerous transferal. The work of Kolbo and Sinnema's work is a cinema of passing images before the eyes of the observer, the social representative of the proletariat; theirs is an unfolding of screen stills in the rapid acceleration of our political trajectories. In sum, this brave work demonstrates that the culture of post-capitalist hegemony functions as the conceptual frame for the politics of the public sphere.<sup>9</sup>

*Escalation* by Scott Kolbo and Lance Sinnema

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<sup>9</sup> This concluding sentence automatically generated (and then amended) using the "Write Your Own Academic Sentence" generator power by the University of Chicago Writing Program. <<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/toys/randomsentence/write-sentence.htm>> Accessed 21 April 2012.