Reciprocal Exegesis of Texts and Visual Material Culture:
Exploring the Texture of All “Things”
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(Essay in Progress to Begin Discussion at RRA Meeting, Union Theological Seminary, June 21-22, 2013)

_Exploring the Texture of Texts_ (Robbins 1996/2012) uses the metaphor of texture to develop a taxonomy for socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI) of texts in relation to data outside of texts. The focus on texts was prompted by the remarkable fruitfulness during the two previous centuries of “higher-critical exegesis,” namely highly disciplined strategies of interpretation designed to “bring meanings out of” texts in contrast to “eisegesis” that “reads into” texts almost any meaning the interpreter wishes to ascribe to them. The metaphor of texture emerged from the Latin texere, which means “to weave” (Robbins 1996, 18), and the primary interest was to explore the way texts participate in the interwoven fabrics of discourse that are the means by which humans communicate with one another (Gowler et al 2003).

By 1995 I had generated a visualized model for SRI that was a merger of a horizontal (rhetorical) model of communication from a “real author/speaker” to a “real reader/audience” and a vertical (mimetic) model of representation (Robbins 1995, 278).
Recently I have become convinced that my model unwittingly emerged from the way our heads, eyes, hands, and arms move as we read books. From our regularized activity of reading books, magazines, newspapers, letters, etc. from our childhood, our bodies have a vertical-horizontal neuronal memory of movement and visualization (Barselou et al 2003). We are taught to begin at the top of a page. Depending on what language we are reading, we begin either at the upper left or upper right of the page and read horizontally back and forth down the page. When we reach the bottom of the page we turn the page horizontally left or right to advance to the next page. We automatically move our eyes to the top of the page and read horizontally back and forth down the page.

Our bodies and minds have learned that this vertical-horizontal movement leads from a beginning to an end. There is strong emphasis on both the beginning and the end. Where a story begins and where it ends establishes a cognitive frame for what happens in the middle. Aristotle knew this importance of beginning, middle, and end, and he asserted that all stories have these three basic parts. After teaching SRI in classrooms for a decade (1996-2006), I became convinced that opening-middle-closing texture (Robbins 1996, 50-53, 70-72; 1996/2012, 19-21) is the most important beginning place for students and other interpreters to start with any text, no matter how long or short the text may be. The top is the beginning, the middle is vertically down-up-down and horizontally forward (right or left) to the end, which is present at the furthest extent of the horizontally forward movement to a final downward place at the end of the down-up-down movement from the beginning.

The SRI model first published in 1995 “visualizes” socio-rhetorical interpretation from the bodily activity of reading texts. The reader moves horizontally forward (from left to the right) from the “real author” to the “real reader/audience” in a down-up-down movement that begins from inner texture through intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture. Since all the boundary lines are broken, there is “seepage” in all directions from the language and information in the world of the interpreter and the Mediterranean world through the real author and the read reader/audience into and out of the verbal signs and represented world in the text. The “textual” world itself emphasizes the horizontal line from the implied author to the implied reader through the inner texture, narrator and characters, and ideological texture. This horizontal line is programmatically grounded in and supported by intertexture and verbal signs (visualized below) and programmatically generating social and cultural texture with its represented world(s) (visualized above). “Valuing” has a double valence, since the horizontal movement (left to right) has an “end goal” in a real reader/audience and the vertical movement visualizes “intertexture” as the ground and support for “social and cultural
Emergence of Visual Material Culture beyond Texts

It is important to be aware at the outset that texts are items of “visual material culture.” Texts are material objects onto which humans write “signs” that signify meanings and meaning effects that create and are present in “networks of meanings and meaning effects” that human perpetuate through body-mind actions that produce historical, social, cultural, ideological, religious, and artistic phenomena and their effects. Certainly in the field of biblical studies, texts were given “dominant” status within visual material culture during the 19th and 20th centuries for the production of “truth” about both the past history of humankind and the present “importance” of humans in the world. The gradual “movement” of the social sciences (including “ideology”) into biblical studies that began in the 1970s and the sudden “invasion” of the cognitive sciences (including conceptual integration/blending theory) into biblical studies during the first decade of the 2000s has given more and more prominence to “visualization” in interpretation. Social science interpretation regularly “visualizes” its activities through diagrams and tables that are called “models,” and often photographs of people and items from unusual places accompany the models. The cognitive sciences have not only extended those models to “visualizing” activities in people’s bodies and minds, but they emphasize the centrality of “visualization” itself for the way the mind thinks, the way people understand, and the particular things people believe. Since biblical interpreters robustly go about their work in the context of the rise to prominence of the social and cognitive sciences especially since the 1970s, an emphasis on visual material culture both in the context of the production of biblical writings and in interpretation of biblical writings through the centuries has gradually become stronger during the last two decades. What are some of the effects these emphases on visual material culture are producing in biblical interpretation?

Since the late 1980s the use of visual material culture complementarily with texts has become more and more prominent in broad regions of scholarly activity on the Mediterranean world (e.g., Zanker 1988; Squire 2009; Eming et al 2012). This activity has also become more and more present in interpretation of biblical texts. This paper will focus on its presence in the field of NT scholarship. I will begin with publications by David Balch (2003), Annette Weisenreider and colleagues (2005), Brigitte Kahl (2010) and Davina Lopez (2008). All of these scholars focus on interpreting NT Texts in the context of Mediterranean visual material culture. Then I will move to the sequence of
Roy R. Jeal (2005) and Rosemary Canavan (2012), who explicitly use socio-rhetorical interpretation to establish a disciplined program for interpreting texts in the context of visual material culture. Both Jeal and Canavan interpreted “being clothed with Christ” in Pauline letters, which reaches its highpoint in the letter to the Colossians. After this, I include a few notations of books both published and forthcoming.

**Basic Theses about Use of Visual Material Culture in Interpretation**

As I begin, I will introduce some basic theses about the use of visual material culture in disciplinary contexts that focus on detailed interpretation of texts. The goal is to introduce theses that may be revised and refined to furnish guidelines especially for interpreters who aspire to use objects of visual material culture informatively in contexts of disciplined, programmatic interpretation of texts. In the end, the guidelines also might be informative, or even instructive, for interpreters who prefer simply to point to texts or to analyze a few words and phrases in them, rather than to perform detailed interpretation of them as they foreground semiotic, historical, social, cultural, ideological, or religious/theological prose.

(1) Strong interpretations of the dialogical relation of texts to items of visual material culture start with a well-formulated thesis grounded in semiotic, historical, social, cultural, ideological, or sacred/theological texture. Here are some examples:

a. Paul’s portrait of Christ crucified in Galatians 3:1 has a deep intertextural social-cultural relation to artistic depictions of the suffering and death in Greek and Roman households and temples contemporary with the composition and circulation of Paul’s letters (David Balch 2003a, 2003b).

b. Paul’s rhetorical argumentation does not simply present an “imperial” view of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the Roman emperor; it presents an alternative, deeply structured, semiotic view of Reconciling Self and Other (Brigitte Kahl 2010).

c. Paul’s conceptual view does not simply perpetuate a counteractive masculine approach to the Roman imperial view of the world; rather, in his writings Paul embodies a feminine-gendered worldview of subordinate/defeated nations (Davina Lopez 2008).

d. Being “Clothed with Christ” in Pauline conceptuality is closely intertwined with social-cultural, ideological, and religious identity in
antiquity and the modern world (Roy Jeal 2005; Rosemary Canavan 2012).

(2) The beginning place for an interpretation that uses visual material culture leads to a focus on a major *topos* and its network of meanings and meaning effects.

(3) The interpreter does extensive research to place visual material culture related to the *topos* in the context of its own semiotic, historical, social, cultural, ideological, and perhaps sacred/theological world.

(4) The interpreter performs some kind of exegesis on the items of visual material culture the interpreter has chosen and interweaves this exegesis with quotation and citation of multiple Mediterranean writings.

(5) The interpreter performs some kind of exegesis on one or more focus texts and their relation to the items of visual material culture the interpreter has chosen.

a. A major question is how detailed and programmatic the exegesis is of both the texts and the items of visual material culture.

b. Another major question is what interpretive mode(s) drive the exegesis of both the texts and the items of visual material culture.

David Balch, “Paul’s Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal. 3:1) in Light of Paintings and Sculptures of Suffering and Death in Pompeian and Roman Houses”

This essay, appearing in 2003, represents one of the earliest analyses of the relation of a NT text to an extended number of items of visual material culture in the Mediterranean world. Balch’s essay is primarily guided by social-cultural intertexture, namely visual representations in the social and cultural context of the Mediterranean world that had the potential to encourage or evoke a particular range of meanings and meaning effects for participants in emerging Christianity.

Balch begins with the thesis that “Greco-Roman domestic, tragic art emphasizing pathos would have provided a meaningful cultural context for understanding Paul’s gospel of Christ’s passion” (Balch 2003a, 85). After quoting Galatians 3:1: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited (προεγράφη) as crucified!” (NRSV; Balch 2003a, 87), Balch presents extensive quotation and interpretation of Mediterranean texts in the context of description and display of visual objects that present the stories and images of Iphigenia, Laocoon, the *Dying Galatians*, and the crucifix on the Palatine to support the conclusion “that contemporary, domestic tragic art emphasizing pathos would have provided a meaningful
cultural context, whether consciously or unconsciously assimilated, for understanding Paul’s gospel of Christ’s suffering and his saving death” (105). Balch asserts that while the art itself “reinforces ethnic divisions” (107), “[n]either ethnic nor gender roles are to determine status in the Christian assembly. Christ did not die for Greece, or Rome, or North America, or for straight men, but according to Paul’s polemical thesis, for the ‘ungodly’ (Rom. 1:18 with 4:5), in that cultural context, for Laocoon, Cassandra, and the Galatians— for whom Paul portrayed Christ crucified (Gal. 3:1). Paul’s polemical gospel was disturbing because he embodied, proclaimed, and challenged key Roman ideological values” (108).

In a complementary essay in 2003 emphasizing the suffering of Isis/Io in Mediterranean literature and visual material culture, Balch begins with two important assumptions: (1) Greco-Roman houses, unlike many modern ones, were filled with art, including paintings, mosaics, and sculptures; and (2) Greeks and Romans were “the most right-brained, artistic peoples on earth” (Balch 2003b, 25). Balch describes his approach as “a novice art historian” who has “viewed these pictures asking whether they portray themes in common with Paul’s gospel” (26). He argues that the pervasive art depicting scenes of suffering and death provide “one meaningful cultural context for understanding Paul’s gospel of Christ’s passion” (26). Again this essay features extensive presentation of Mediterranean texts and art to show the pervasiveness of depictions of suffering and death. The text of Galatians 3:1 is a substantive touch point for his argumentation, but there is no goal of programmatic exegesis of this text in the letter of Galatians itself, or in relation to other letters, though he cites a range of verses in which Paul emphasizes suffering and death in relation to Christ. His overall goal is not to establish any special program of exegesis but to present a viable cultural context of visual material culture that supports meanings and meaning effects in relation to Paul’s central emphasis on Christ’s suffering and death.

Annette Weissenrieder, Frederike Wendt, and Petra von Gemünden, eds., Picturing the New Testament

This collection of essays, appearing in 2005, issues a clarion call for scholars to include visual material culture in interpretation of NT writings. Its preface opens with a quotation that asserts in part: “The relationship between ‘religion and art’ has no secured place within th[e] memory system of academic theology; it does not have its own discipline; thus it lacks an institutionalized memory, a place where themes and questions and names can be held together in their historical course” (Weissenrieder et al, v, quoting
As the preface continues, it introduces four major approaches to images for understanding Christian systems of communication featured in the volume (viii).

1. Iconological analysis examines a visual source against the background of that knowledge in the human sciences which was typical for the period.

2. Motif-oriented analysis investigates a thematic constellation in its differing expressions.

3. Semiotic analysis aims at uncovering deep logical structures.

4. Constructivist analysis asks about the meaning of the visual process itself in its relation to the visual source.

In the opening pages of the initial essay in the volume entitled “Images as Communication: The Methods of Iconography” (Weissenrieder et al 2005, 3-49), Annette Weissenrieder and Friederike Wendt’s discussion of the precise analytical approach of Erwin Panofsky to visual objects reveals a number of close relationships to interpretive analytical strategies in SRI. First, “Panofsky developed a precise method which uses each interpreter’s practical experience, culturally acquired knowledge and intuition in order to open up the possible meaning of a depiction” (5). This leads, second, to “a heuristic model for the interpretation of images which is anchored in a comprehensive theory of the interpretation of reality, without itself raising claims to a universal, aesthetic interpretation of reality” (5). Third, Panofsky began with a focus on visual objects that is closely related to the focus on “inner texture” in SRI. Panofsky’s “primary starting point in any interpretation of an image is formed … by that which one directly sees” (7). He considers this to be a pre-iconographic phase of the interpretation in which the interpreter attempts “to name as precisely as possible those motifs which are visible in the image” (7). This is closely related to the strategies of analysis of “inner texture” in SRI where the interpreter focuses on words as tools for communication with a mode “prior to analysis of ‘meanings’, that is, prior to ‘real interpretation’ of the text.” The goal of this activity is “to gain an intimate knowledge of words, word patterns, voices, structures, devices, and modes in the text, which are the context for meanings and meaning-effects that an interpreter analyzes with the other readings of the text” (Robbins 1996/2012, 7). Instead of focusing on words and their patterns, Panofsky focuses on “motifs which are visible.” Again this is an intentionally pre-interpretive,” analytical phase where the object of the observation is “simply everything which is transferred across the senses and which can be inferred with the help of that ‘vital experience of being’” (Weissenrieder et al 2005, 7). This is meant “in a very elementary way, namely the manner in which lines
and colours are set in relation with each other and how the materials used in concrete objects have been shaped” (7, citing Panofsky “Problem” and “Ikonographie”).

As Weissenrieder and Wendt continue their description of Panofsky’s approach, clear relationships emerge with the concept of “rhetorolects” in SRI. Panofsky explains how “it is necessary to order the motifs and their attributes into the context of their ordinary usage, and in this way to understand their meaning” (Weissenrieder et al, 7). Who is represented? What is it about? Since “the same theme may be portrayed in completely differing ways depending on the differing particularities of the times and places in which the discussion finds itself,” the interpreter uses and gathers as much “pre-knowledge,” and especially as much “literary knowledge,” as possible to start the process of what he calls “iconological interpretation” (ibid., 7-8).

As the discussion of the iconological approach of Erwin Panofsky unfolds, it becomes clear that the major challenge for the integration of programmatic analysis and interpretation of visual material culture into SRI lies in the strategies for analysis and interpretation of the inner texture of texts in relation to the inner texture of visual material culture. In contrast, the strategies for analysis and interpretation of intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture are very similar, including the use and quotation of literary texts, and the use of various disciplines for understanding society, culture, ideology, and issues pertaining to the “sacred” (religion and theology).

To aid in the process of analysis of the inner texture, I present the following diagram of inner texture for discussion and modification.

**Inner Texture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Painting/Frieze/Altar</th>
<th>Coins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening-middle-closing</td>
<td>Vertical-horizontal-depth</td>
<td>Vertical-horizontal-obverse-reverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/Sounds: Repetitive-progressive patterns</td>
<td>Motifs: Personages, buildings, items, symbols, letters, numbers</td>
<td>Motifs: Personages, buildings, items, symbols, letters, numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory-aesthetic: body zones</td>
<td>Sensory-aesthetic: Visual-tactile</td>
<td>Sensory-aesthetic: Visual-tactile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode: Argumentative, narrational, poetic, proverbial</td>
<td>Mode: Concrete-figurative-abstract</td>
<td>Mode: numismatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Meanings: Blended and Emergent Rhetorolects</td>
<td>Contextual Meanings: Artistic Programs and Ideologies</td>
<td>Contextual Meanings: Political Programs and Ideologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are many essays in the Weissenrieder et al volume that it could be beneficial to discuss here. Instead of discussing them, I will simply cite them with a short description. Their content and the approach of the interpreter are important contributions to the goal of analysis and interpretation of NT texts in a context that includes Mediterranean visual material culture as a major resource for understanding communication in early Christianity. Here are excerpts from the descriptions of the essays as they appear in the preface of the volume:

(1) Rita Amedick: The crown of thorns was probably an imitation of the radiate crown worn by divine rulers. As the radiate crown was not a part of the actual insignia of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors, the soldiers must have been drawing upon known portraits of rulers when mocking Jesus in this way. (ix)

(2) David L. Balch: Uses what art historian H.G. Beyen labels “amphitheatre art” both in Pompeii and in Roman Africa. Such domestic art illuminates the cultural context of the persecution in Mark, Hebrews, 1 Peter, Revelation, and Ignatius. 1 Clement actually refers to Christian women “persecuted as Dircae.” (ix)

(3) Weissenrieder and Wendt: “Why do the disciples sleep while Jesus struggles with death”? Lukan passion narrative: iconographic depictions; philosophical and medical literature. Luke 22: sleep is a physiological result of the last supper with Jesus. … Sleep as inactivity affords the sleeper the opportunity to reflect upon the reality. A sleeper’s understanding changes. In Luke 22 the sleep of the disciples makes an emphatic, proleptic encounter with the death of Jesus possible. … It is the loss of Jesus rather than the sleep of the disciples which provides the actual anguish of this pericope. (ix-x)

(4) Weissenrieder: “He is a God!” Acts 28:1-9 in the Light of Iconographical and Textual Sources Related to Medicine.” Island of Malta. Divinity attributed to Paul and doctors. A number of divine portraits of doctors occur on statues, reliefs, coins, and gems. (x)


(6) Art-historian Gabrielle Elsen-Novak and Assyriologist Mirko Novak: The Johannine metaphor of Christ as the vine. Vineyard is part of an artificial “garden of paradise,” which are attributes of legitimate rulership. Vine =
paradise garden = fertility = power/civilization/order. Jesus = Mesopotamian and Levantine fertility god, who underwent a yearly cycle of death and rebirth. (x-xi)

(7) Petra von Gemünden: The palm branch in John 12:13. Not victory and celebration with political-national connotations. View of Jesus’ resurrection as symbolizing Jesus’ victory as a victory over death. (xi)

(8) Hanna Roose: Fall of the great harlot in Rev 18. Roman society scoffed at the fate of “typical” aging prostitutes. The prostitute loses everything in old age, ending up a drunken woman. Rev alludes to this stereotype. Re-interprets the concept of old age with that of divine judgment. (xi)

(9) Reinhard von Bendemann: “Ezekiel 37 at Dura Europos and Revelation of John.” Relation between visual narration or “narrative art” and a narrative text which implies and generates images. Dura Europos = Ez. 37:1-14. Reception of Ex. 37 in Revelation. Neither is superior. “Both artefacts are organized, albeit in different ways, on the basis of their special and complex medial conditions and their distinct symbolic language.” (xii)

(10) C. Kavin Rowe: “All of Paul’s eikōn-references.” The Pauline dialectic, i.e. both rejection and acceptance of images, corresponds rather well to the absence and subsequent advent of distinctively Christian materials. (xii)


(12) Sigrid Brandt: The reconstruction of cultural codes – as represented through visual sources, and in their relation to the NT tradition – is aimed at a new, transformed and more complex formulation of theological ideas. Imago Dei and “two natures” doctrine. (xiii)

(13) Philip Esler: “Pauline Athletic Motif.” “Crown Games” such as the Olympics played a central role in how ancient Greeks constructed their sense of self in an agōn-ridden culture that maintained honour as a central value. Analysis of visual representation of athletics is essential. (xiii)

(14) Harry O. Maier: Political implication of the Pauline corpus against the background of ancient iconography. Colossians in the light of imperial politics
and especially imperial iconography. In the tradition of E. Panofsky. Construction of meaning and social identity in early Christianity. Enthronement language of Colossians, its relation to military language of triumph which it develops, and its celebration of an ethnic unity of peoples. (xiii)

Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined*

Brigitte Kahl’s book, appearing in 2010, has a goal of interpreting all of Paul’s letter to the Galatians with reference to the Great Altar of Pergamon. In Chapter 1 she constructs a Greimasian semiotic square to display binary hierarchical thinking in the Roman imperial world and supplements it with circular movement around and away from the square to a figure eight diagram that displays Paul’s reconfiguration of the relation of Self and Other (“one-an(d)-other”) in the context of the Roman imperial world (7-24). After this, she presents extensive historical, cultural, social, and visual material interpreting dying Galatians and Gauls in the Roman world (31-243). After this detailed work, Kahl turns to specific interpretation of the text of Galatians. She titles her exegesis chapter “Amēn and Anathēma: Galatians at the Great Altar of Pergamon” (245-289). She begins with detailed interpretation of Gal 1:1-9 under the title “Paul’s (S)word: Theology of Combat Dismantled” (246-265). After this, she presents an interpretation of Gal 5—6 under the title “Love and the New Order of Noncombat” (265-273). Then she ends with a discussion of “Deconstructing and Reconciling Self and Other” (273-285), which contains interpretation of selected verses and sections in Galatians 1—4.

An initial key to Kahl’s mode of interpretation is her generation of a series of semiotic squares that depict the hierarchical (high/low) and horizontal (in/out) dimensions of the Great Altar of Pergamon (89), the combat semiotics of Self and Victory versus Other and Defeat in the Great Frieze (104), the semiotics of rule/ruled and Gods/mortal in the Telephos Room (110), and subject formation as submission to the Law in the Great Staircase (115). This means that Kahl generates each semiotic square out of Roman imperial visual material culture extant during the first century CE. In other words, she does not simply “create” vertical hierarchies and horizontal movements through imaginary hierarchies and activities in her own mind. She “generates” the semiotic squares cognitively out of the vertical and horizontal features of Roman imperial visual material culture. This means that the semiotic squares are “grounded” in Roman imperial visual material culture that existed during the time Paul generated the undisputed letters attributed to him. This leads to the next observation.
The second key to Kahl’s mode of interpretation is her generation of a model of Paul’s rhetoric containing centrifugal movement around and away from the Roman imperial semiotic square to a figure eight diagram containing arrows that indicate continual movement. This overall diagram depicts Kahl’s cognitive visualization of Paul’s movement beyond binary thinking into interaction designed to orient the Self continually toward the Other. Kahl’s non-binary, continually moving model depicts her experience of the rhetorical movement in the argumentation in Paul’s undisputed letters. In other words, out of Paul’s language about willingly being a slave and willingly suffering as a way of embodying a “foolish gospel of love” Kahl creates a non-binary circulating diagram that deconstructs and reconciles Self to Other. This means that Kahl’s diagram depicting centrifugal movement around and away from the semiotic squares into the figure eight Self and Other diagram is grounded in the rhetoric of Paul’s undisputed letters.

Kahl begins her exegetical interpretation by focusing on the opening nine verses of the first chapter of Galatians (246-265). She starts by displaying fifteen lines of Peter Weiss’s description of the Great Altar of Pergamon in his *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (246). This creates the context for her display of the first nine verses of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, after which she turns to “amēn” in 1:5 and “anathēma” in 1:9 as two words “splitting the world down the middle – good and bad, condemnation and salvation, blessing and curse” (247). Beginning with the polarization and anger in Paul’s discourse in these verses, Kahl argues that this rhetoric “puts us right back at the foot of the Great Altar in Pergamon,” which Weiss describes with the terms “warlike gestures,” “gigantic wrestling,” “relentless rivalry,” and clashes with one another in the Great Battle Frieze (247).

Kahl’s commentary continues with “A battlefield, it seems, unfolds before our eyes in the first nine verses of Paul’s Galatian letter…” (247). Then she describes how Paul’s *anathēma* in 1:9 functions as a weapon “no less efficient than the deadly spears, arrows, and snake-pots that we see in action on the Pergamene Frieze. In Paul’s world, a curse effectively engages the power to destroy someone and expel them from the community” (247). After explaining how Paul’s discourse moves beyond earthly battles to evoke “the whole cosmos,” she turns to Paul’s “amēn” in 1:5, which like the curse “is also a speech-act” (248). The rhetorical effect of this speech act is to convert the epistolary prescript of the letter “into a moment of liturgical performance” (249). Thus, in the context of both earthly and cosmic battle, Paul creates a liturgical moment related to prayers, creeds, hymns, and sermons. With this commentary, Kahl proposes, “we have entered into Galatians by simultaneously entering the Great Altar of Pergamon” (250).
Asserting that her approach is “both a method of contextual and intertextual interpretation,” she explains that intertextuality in this mode is a designation for a text’s “participation in the discursive space of a culture” (151, quoting Culler, 103). In SRI terms, then, her special focus is on “cultural intertexture” (Robbins 2012: 58-62).

A key turn in Kahl’s interpretation emerges at the opening of her section titled “Imperial versus Messianic Gospel: Exile or Exodus” (255). After a section titled “The Other Gospel: Apostasy and Golden Calf” (253), where she discusses aspects of Deuteronomy, Judges, and Exodus, she starts the next section with: “The competing gospel message, the “other good news” referred to no fewer than five times in 1:6-9, is thus much more likely the gospel of imperial salvation than any “Jewish gospel” (255). After discussing various intertexts, she asks if indeed “the whole of the following letter needs to be read in an empire-critical key” (257). She answers this question in a section titled “The Pergamene Code: Confusing the Battle Order,” which begins with another lengthy quotation from Peter Weiss’s The Aesthetics of Resistance, followed immediately by a quotation of selected portions of Gal. 1:1, 4: “… who raised him out from the dead … who gave himself for our sins so that he might liberate us out of this present evil age …” (258). Again, then, the mode is selection of phrases and clauses from specific portions of text for the purpose of interpreting particular topoi. The topos in this instance is “raising him out of the dead” and its related concept of “liberating us out of this present evil age.” This leads to an exhibit of The Grand Camée de France, with divine Tiberius sitting enthroned in the center and deified Augustus being welcomed into heaven above him (260). This means that “Jesus’ resurrection ‘from the dead’ (Gal 1:1) thus is a spoken mockery of Olympic and Roman law enforcement; it clashes with the most sacred images of the cosmic order. Though the Hellenistic and Roman world had no difficulty imagining how Caesars, divine sons, or victorious demi-gods like Heracles could be raised from the dead to heavenly glory and power, as for example on the Grand Camée de France (see fig. 43), neither could ever contemplate a crucified man representing the vanquished nations being raided to life – and to lordship – as kyrios ek nekrôn” (260).

When Kahl’s interpretation comes to “Love and the New Order of Noncombat (Galatians 5—6), again she starts with a lengthy quotation from Peter Weiss’s The Aesthetics of Resistance followed by a full quotation of Gal 5:13-15 (265). In other words, her basic strategy is to interpret the NT texts “intertexturally” with a modern interpreter of the Great Alter of Pergamon followed by commentary sprinkled with quotations of phrases and clauses in other places in Galatians (266-273). In the last part of her commentary (264-285), intermittent display of portions or all of her semiotic square with circular movement around and out to Paul’s Self and Other appear, rather
than any more displays of visual material Mediterranean culture. Her own diagrams, which were generated out of Mediterranean visual culture and Paul’s rhetoric, become the primary “intertext” for her commentary.

**Davina Lopez, The Apostle To The Conquered**

Davina Lopez uses visual material culture to interpret Paul as *The Apostle To The Conquered* (Lopez 2008). Even though her book was published two years earlier than Kahl’s book, Lopez’s insights were developed out of Kahl’s semiotic squares and figure eight diagram depicting Paul’s view of the Self and Other, which she presents as follows. Lopez, 21:

**Figure 2. Semiotic Diagram: Structural Oppositions Constructing Reality.** This Semiotic diagram maps power relationships as hierarchy. The A and B positions signify the dominant position. A and B, however, define and are defined by non-A and non-B, which represent not only the “opposite” of A and B but also a subordinate position. Spatially, Claudius overwhelming Britannia is a succinct expression of hierarchical relationships.

Lopez, 126
Lopez, 127:

Figure 15. Spatial Semiotics (of the Great Altar of Pergamon)

Figure 16. Roman Imperial World Order: Over All the Nations
Lopez, 128:

After chapters on the fate of the nations under the campaigns and practices of Roman emperors from Augustus through Nero (1-118), Lopez turns to a dialogue between visual material culture and verses in Paul’s letter to the Galatians in chapter 4 (119-163). In a sequence she interprets:

1. “Conversion,” “Call,” and “Consciousness” in Gal 1:13-17 (119-137);
2. The Politics of the New Creation in Gal 4:12, 19; 3:26-29; 5:9—6:2 (137-153);
(3) The Fate of the Nations in Pauline Imagination in Gal 4:21—5:1 (153-163). Lopez includes an English translation of verses with transliteration of certain Greek words in parentheses at certain points in her discussion. When she interprets a text, she focuses on specific words, regularly telling the reader in notes how many times the word occurs in the NT and its basic meanings according to BAGD. In the process of interpretation of Paul’s conversion, call, and consciousness (Lopez, 119-137), Lopez adapts Brigitte Kahl’s use of a semiotic square with reference to the Great Altar of Pergamon, adding a focus on “the gendered and sexual texture of visual and literary representation concerning the fate of the nations according to the Roman sources” (Lopez, 127).
Lopez, 127; Kahl’s semiotic square:
Lopez, 128; Lopez’s semiotic square showing gendered and sexual texture:

![Figure 17. Roman Rule Over All the Nations as Patriarchal Power Relationships](image1)

Lopez, 128, Lopez’s semiotic square overmapped onto Claudius Conquers Britannia:

![Figure 18. Mapping Roman Patriarchal Relationships with Visual Representation](image2)

To interpret the politics of the new creation in Paul’s material conceptual world (Lopez, 137-153), Lopez adds to Kahl’s semiotic square Kahl’s diagram of circular movement around and away from a semiotic square to a figure eight that shows a “one-an(d)-other”
pattern in Paul’s material conceptuality (Lopez, 145, 148-151). Lopez concludes with interpretation of the fate of the nations in Pauline imagination in Gal 4:21—5:1 that again correlates the use of the semiotic square with its centrifugal movement out to Paul’s one-an(d)-other figure eight pattern (Lopez, 153-163). Lopez presents her goal in the book as an exercise in “visualizing” both a “Roman reading” of Paul’s Gentiles and a “Pauline reading” of Roman imperial ideology. While the Romans have their eye on “vanquished others,” Paul has his eye on vanguished others as “significant others” (Lopez, 170-173).

Throughout her analysis of texts, Lopez’s approach foregrounds a gender critical ideological lens of interpretation. Her first text of interest is Gal 1:13-17, where Paul recalls his earlier manner of living in “Jewishness/Judeanism” (1:13-14) and God’s revealing of his son to him so he might proclaim his son among the nations (1:15-16). To introduce her approach to these four verses of text, Lopez recalls the interpretation of Roman imperial ideology she exhibited in visual representation and visual narratives in the first chapters of her book (125). This sets the stage for structural analysis of the Romans/nations hierarchy through a series of semiotic square diagrams (125-128) and leads to a display in English translation of the first two verses of her focus text (Gal 1:13-14) that contains transliterated Greek words in parentheses for certain English words (129). Once the text is present before the reader, Lopez interprets key words in the inner texture of the text, telling the reader the repetitive texture of the word in the NT and its frequency or rarity outside the NT (129). This leads to the display of an intertext in English translation that contains a constellation of words related to “the semantic field” (130) of a term of particular importance for her interpretation. At this point, she displays Brigitte Kahl’s “Pre-Damascus Paul” semiotic square for the purpose of adding “a gender-conscious level” to the terminology in the four corners of the square (131-132).

From a socio-rhetorical perspective, Lopez moves through five steps:

(1) Ideological texture (gender-critical interpretation) as a beginning point, which moves through masculine Roman imperial ideology in visual material culture and visual narrative toward its gender-critical goal of interpretation of Paul’s writings (119-125).

(2) Display and interpretation of a semiotic square model constructed by Brigitte Kahl that shows structural “bi-polar oppositions,” followed by a series of modifications and/or additions of terminology in the model to introduce gender-critical terms at the four corners of the square (126-128).

(3) Display of the inner texture of the first two verses of the focus text (129).
Interpretation of meanings of key words in the inner texture of her focus text with the aid of a display of an intertext that contains a constellation of terms exhibiting a “sematic field” of importance for interpreting the focus text (129-130).

Display and interpretation of three more semiotic squares for the purpose of adding gender-critical terminology to Brigitte Kahl’s “Pre-Damascus Paul” semiotic square (131-133).

These five steps reveal, first, that a fully articulated, explicit, and complex ideological location drives Lopez’s analysis and interpretation. Second, they show that the primary agency of the interpretation lies in a semiotic square model that displays bi-polar oppositions, which Lopez sequentially modifies to introduce gender-critical terminology. Third, the specific strategy for interpretation of the text is to display the entire wording of the text in English translation with transliterated Greek words in parentheses for some of the words, followed by semantic field interpretation of certain words with the aid of a display of a substantive number of lines of a key intertext.

In other words, from an SRI perspective the primary focus is on a structural cognitive frame that displays bi-polar oppositions. Lopez uses carefully selected words and phrases in the inner texture of her focus text to create a transition to an intertext that helps her exhibit and interpret a semantic field she can interpret in the context of the semiotic square. These activities in dialogue create the catalyst for elaboration of gender-critical prose commentary. In this context, display and interpretation of the text itself occupies only one and a half pages of interpretive prose (129-130) in an overall section of fourteen pages (119-134).

At this point, Lopez turns to the last two verses of her focus text, Gal 1:15-16. After a display of an English translation of these verses (134), she presents traditional commentary on these verses that modulates into gender-critical interpretive commentary. This prose sets the stage for a display of a semiotic square that exhibits “Paul’s Shift in World Consciousness” (136). Once again, the primary agency of the interpretation is a semiotic square. A focus on modification of terminology in the semiotic square using aspects of inner texture and intertexture makes the semiotic square function as a catalyst for gender-critical interpretive commentary.

Lopez entitles her second section “The Politics of the New Creation” (137-153). This section only displays the wording of five verses of text (1 Cor 11:23-27, p. 138) in sixteen pages of interpretation. Titles of subsections list four portions of Paul’s letter to the Galatians (4:12, 19; 3:26-29; 5:9—6:2) as the focus of the commentary. The section foregrounds gender-critical commentary and titles that create touch points with portions
of Paul’s letter to the Galatians for the purpose of showing a “gender-critical reimagina­tion of Paul as apostle to the defeated nations” (137). The titles of the subsections nicely show the movement of the section:

1. Paul Adopts the Subordinate Position among the Other Defeated Nations (137)
2. The Defeated Paul among the Nations: “Become Like Me” (Gal 4:12) (140)
3. The Defeated Paul as a Suffering Mother (Gal 4:19) (141)
4. Bear One Another’s Burdens: A Movement of International Solidarity (146)
5. The Politics of the New Creation (147)
6. The Uniform of International Solidarity (Gal 3:26-29) (149)
7. Performing International Solidarity (Gal 5:9—6:2) (152)

The interpretation in the section moves forward through five displays that modify the semiotic squares in the previous section with circular movement around the square that spins out into Paul’s figure Self and Other (“one-an(d)-other”) figure eight pattern of movement. It also contains a display of the Grande Camée de France, where divine Augustus watches from above over Livia with her son Tiberius and other family members in the middle, and with barbarian families sitting below in a lower tier (144). As Lopez’s gender-critical prose commentary introduces modifications of the semiotic square, the circular and figure eight diagrams show Paul’s embodiment of a (female) subordinate/defeated nation status as a means of communicating his message of solidarity with defeated others. This, Lopez argues, is Paul’s “gospel for the [defeated] nations.” The displays of the semiotic square encircled and supplemented by the figure eight diagrams provide the catalyst for the gender-critical prose commentary. The only portions of the inner texture of the text important for Lopez’s commentary are selected words and phrases interpreted through intertextual phenomena that evoke semantic fields of meaning she interprets culturally and ideologically.

Lopez’s final section is entitled “The Fate of the Nations in Pauline Imagination (Gal 4:21—5:1)” (153). There are three displays of continuous text in this section (Gal 4:24-26 [156-7]; Gal 4:27/Isa 54:1 [161]; Isa 65-21-23 LXX [161]) in a context of three displays of semiotic square, circular, and figure eight diagrams (157, 159, 160). The three titles of the subsections show the movement of the argumentation:

1. Abraham as the Father of the Nations (154)
2. Paul as a Mother among the Defeated Nations (156)
3. Two Covenants: with Caesar and with God (162)

Again, the displays of the semiotic square, circular, and figure eight diagrams function as the agency and catalyst for the gender-critical prose commentary, with the aid of key
intertexts. Only carefully selected words and phrases in the inner texture of Gal 4:21—5:1 appear in the gender-critical commentary. The overall goal is to present a gender-critical view of Paul’s writings with the aid of the structural and circular displays, and with contemporary visual material culture from the Mediterranean world.

**How Do We Generate Programmatic Exegetical Commentary that Incorporates the Insights of the Dialogical Relation between Texts and Visual Material Culture?**

For some of us, the expansive, inclusive nature of SRI as an interpretive analytic creates the possibility of creating rich exegetical commentary that incorporates insights attained through interactive interpretation of texts and visual material culture that were generated contemporaneously with one another. Roy R. Jeal, Rosemary Canavan, Frederick J. Long and Harry O. Maier have led the way with this enterprise. I will not include the work of Frederick J. Long at this time in this essay in progress, since Fred will be presenting key portions of his work with visual material culture at our meeting in New York City. Also, he has works forthcoming I am not able to properly cite at this moment.

**Roy R. Jeal, “Clothes Make the (Wo)Man”**

Roy R. Jeal published an essay in 2005 using SRI to interpret the concept of being “clothed with Christ” in Galatians 3:27, Romans 13:14, Colossians 3:10, and Ephesians 4:22-24 (the page numbers below refer to a pre-publication .pdf). As has been the custom in scholarly essays on the NT, the essay contains no photographs of any item of visual material culture. It would have been a natural thing to do, however, and only seven years later Rosemary Canavan published a book on the verses in Colossians containing photographs of items of visual material culture. Here are a few notes and quotations from Jeal’s essay:

Jeal begins with a section on “A Rhetoric of Clothing” (3).

Jeal presents programmatic socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation of Gal 3:27; Rom 13:14; Col 3:10 and Eph 4:22-24 in their contexts.

3: Among all creatures, only humans intentionally use garments in nearly countless colours, styles and fashions and with as many implications. The purpose is to provide non-verbal communication. Socio-historical studies of Chen show the intentional use of clothing and body as a communicative device in Maoist China, namely “a discourse of proletarian dress and body” supportive of the aims and politics of the regime in China.
4: The physical human body of some populations was symbolically reformed by changes from what was customarily worn in the pre-1949 period to what was worn subsequently. … A change of garments produced refashioned bodies that had new social roles and minds with a new social consciousness. … A rhetoric of clothing can bring about changes of appearance, identity, behavior and social meaning that function to bring about intellectual and social change. Body and clothing together become a symbolic system by means of which life becomes reconfigured and culture becomes altered. The goal of this rhetoric … to bring about change that leads, eventually, to conformity to a particular ideology and way of life.

5: What is new to the topos in Paul’s writings is the rhetoric of being clothed with a person. To this image there appears to be no clear parallel in ancient literature. … Putting on the new person suggests the production of a refashioned body that has new religious, social and political roles in the world. Refashioned bodies become agents of social change.

10: In Gal 3:27-28 an old clothing is implicitly deconstructed or removed and the new clothing is worn now in a new ideological situation that has observable results. … This counters the ideology of the false teachers in Galatia who tried to shape Gentile believers to an identity (or clothing) of law.

12-13: In Romans 13:14 the rhetoric of bodies clothed with Christ is a strong communicative device that elicits a “reconstitution of the mind,” creating a world that displays what believers can imagine Christ himself displaying, bringing about, in turn, reconfigured views of how people can and should live. This ideological rhetoric of clothing bodies flows out of the hortatory rhetoric that began in Rom 12:1-2, where believers are called to present their bodies as living sacrifices, where their minds are to be transformed in order to discern the will of God. This is an ideology and political presentation of what Paul perceives to be Christian identity. The clothing has the power to encourage humans who are conscious of the various desires of the flesh to “walk respectably” in their lives.

13-15: The most obvious difference of language in Col 3:8-10 (and Eph 4:22-24) is that the person who is put on as clothing is not explicitly Christ as it is in Gal 3:27 and Rom 13:14. Here the explicit term is anthropos, person … the new person is the clothing that the believers have put on. The new person is what one wears. … the new person/garment displays the good practices. … wearing the new person represents a way of behaving and living in life. In other words, what is important is not merely what the clothing is, what is important is what the clothing does, what it brings about and how it brings about ideas and action. The new garment identifies one’s new belief, thereby
identifying who a believer now is, and the new garment also displays, sets forward, conveys to the believer and to all observers a new appearance in the world. The clothing itself brings about an altered religious, social and behavioral situation among the redressed people. This is an ideological effect with significant persuasive and political implications. The “visible,” “sensory,” marker is not the replacement of vices with virtues, but the replacement of old clothing with new that displays a new reality. The clothes make the (wo)man.

17: In Ephesians 4:22-14 the old garment, the old person, is intended to evoke sensory-aesthetic notions of something that was very unattractive, that was an identifier and classifier of the “Gentile” mindset and behavior that displays futility, darkness and alienation (4:17-18). … The repetitive texture suggests to audiences that the new person is one whom Christ has made out of separate, disparate things or persons. By contrast, the old person may be expected to be divided, separated, experiencing disunity in the world and “alienated from the life of God” … as Eph 4:18 indicates. … the fabric of the garment is woven by Christ out of formerly separated and hostile materials that now, in its unity, displays a new reality. … Ideological texture is of special interest here. Believers are not displaying what they are on their own in their bodies or by their own merits, but, in their new clothing they are displaying what Christ has made in order to bring about change in the world.

18: Clothes make the (wo)man and the wearing of them is a political act that provides the wearer with a refashioned ideological identity and tends to bring about in wearers’ and observers’ bodies the same refashioning of identity, ideology and behavior. Believers portray through their new clothing “the demeanour of the community – its public persona,” the public fact that has the power to influence how people think and behave.

19: A change of clothing draws attention to a new politic where there is peace, community and genuine care for people, thus developing a new aesthetic. The redressed body indicates a reshaped human person. Putting on a person, so clothing the body, is fundamentally a political act.

**Rosemary Canavan, Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae**

Rosemary Canavan has published the most extensive SRI interpretation of a text in relation to visual material culture in *Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae* (Canavan 2012).

(1) Starts with a topos: Clothing with meaning (1-5).
(2) Context of the Christ Community at Colossae (11-23).
(3) Engaging Images and Texts (32-38).
(4) Art History (39-40).
(5) Identity Construction (41-47).
(7) Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation (50-51).

a. Situating the text in the framework of the letter

b. Arenas of texture (Inner; Inter; Social and Cultural; Ideological; Sacred): “Taking one arena of texture at a time I build an aggregation of images into a network of meaning. The result of this exegesis provides a basis for the dialogue with the visual imagery of clothing and body identified in Part II (Chapters 3-4)” (Canavan, 134).

“I concentrate specifically on how the metaphorical use of clothing and body in Col 3:1-17 operates to construct the identity of the members of the Christ community as the body of Christ. I maintain that the imagery in the text is informed by the idealized and representative images of clothing and body apparent in the cities of Lycus Valley and their regional partners in the first century CE. I engage options within the five arenas of texture of the socio-rhetorical approach to highlight what I see as the key elements of this visual construction of identity in Colossians: the focus of the identity, that is, Christ (Χριστός); clothing imagery; and body as individual and representative of group” (134).

“At the beginning of each section, as I address a new arena of texture, I offer a brief reminder of that arena. I also name which specific perspectives I have chosen from those suggested by Robbins as useful for the investigation. There are multiple strands in each section. Each of the strands is addressed in relation to the key elements of the visual construction of identity. Due to the intricacy of this I map a way through the process with a series of headings and summaries. Although complex, the benefit is the richness and depth of meaning afforded by such expansive interpretation” (135).

“The focus text for this exegesis is Col 3:1-17 where the clothing imagery describes how the Christ communities at Colossae and Laodikeia, and conceivably at Hierapolis, are recognizably identified in the body of Christ. Within this text is a list of distinguishable identities noted as “Greek and Judean, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free” that are encompassed within the identity of the body of Christ (Col 3:11). Overarching these is the context of a
community subject to the reign of the Roman emperors, who since Augustus, were actively involved in constructing an identity centred on their own persona” (135). “Before entering the heart of the process I provide an outline to the whole letter along with my own translation of the focus text” (135).


A Few Special Notations:

Bruehler, Bart B. 2011. A Public and Political Christ
Contains multiple visual depictions of city arrangements, building arrangements, and a model for interpretation of spatial spheres on pp. 69-130.

Elliott, Neil and Mark Reasoner, Documents and Images for the Study of Paul
Adds items from visual material culture in the context of literary sources for interpretation of NT texts. Part 3. The Gospel of Augustus (119-173) is useful for all writings in the NT.

A programmatic study using a well-developed methodology.

Presents programmatic comments for how David Balch could have used even more archaeological items in his commentary on Luke in the Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible (2003).

A programmatic socio-rhetorical interpretation using conceptual integration/blending theory to show the rhetorical force of Paul’s visualizing of the union of the body with a prostitute versus the body as a temple containing the spirit of Christ.

Bibliography


