

***Eloquent Images: Word and Image in the Age of New Media.* Ed. Mary E. Hocks and Michelle R. Kendrick. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.**

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The idea that visual information has always accompanied, and in some instances superseded, the written and spoken word is a strong theme throughout Mary E. Hocks and Michelle R. Kendrick's collection, *Eloquent Images: Word and Image in the Age of New Media*. In our initial discussions of the collection, we agreed that

the title *Eloquent Images* was quite telling and very appropriate. Kendrick and Hocks could have steered the collection toward what is often deemed the visual turn and thus might have called their collection something like radical images. However, they did not frame this project in terms of “binaries that have been created to describe the new media” (4)—binaries that are, of course, set up with the word *print* (i.e., literature) as the half against which the word *visual* (i.e., the stuff of common folks) is reflected. What the title conveys instead is what Hocks and Kendrick refer to as hybrids (4) and in turn leads them to eloquence: qualities of images far more subtle and informative than polarized notions about visual turns. In particular, the notion of hybrids reflects two qualities of images: their timelessness (as an ancient cave paintings) and their inherently rhetorical quality (as the persuasive power of a stop sign). Eloquence, after all, is most closely associated with the Roman orator Cicero, for whom eloquence was a hybrid: “The real power of eloquence is such, that it embraces the origin, the influence, the changes of *all things in the world*, all virtues, duties, and all nature” (213, emphasis added). Thus, we feel that the collection’s title could not be more aptly chosen.

This is a fine new collection. It is divided into four sections: Visual and Verbal Practices in New Media; Historical Relationships between Word and Image; Perception and Knowledge in Visual and Verbal Texts; and Identities and Cultures in Digital Designs. The overall focus of the essays is on visual communication in relation to English studies and the teaching of writing. The essays as a whole provide both theoretical as well as case- and example-based analyses that illustrate the authors’ claims.

Section 1, Visual and Verbal Practices in New Media, opens with Jay David Bolter’s “Critical Theory and the Challenge of New Media.” First noting that “it is a commonplace to observe that we are living in an age dominated by visual representation” (19), Bolter states that new media challenge both “the form of the book” and also “the representational power of the printed word” (21). Specifically, he suggests that with academic discourse, digital media challenges the status of critical theory because critical theory is grounded in the print world. Bolter feels that critical theorists are often “conservative and predictable” regarding new media. How, Bolter asks, can media theory better engage the actual practices of digital communication? With a turn toward practice, he notes that those academics in the lower status realms (*rhetoric, composition, and technical writing*) are actually using digital technologies and thus have begun to combine practical, experience-based perspectives with the abstractions of critical theory. In “Design in Context,” a section of his essay “Critical Theory and the Challenge of New Media,” Bolter describes his work with Georgia Tech colleague Richard Grusin, summarizing the larger argument they make in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* and noting both the practical and interdisciplinary approaches therein (28). He ends by calling for a new critical theory that provides critique as well as guidance. It is no surprise that this theory would

arise from those in rhetoric, where theory has always been used as both a critical tool and a heuristic device.

Chapter 2, Anne Frances Wysocki's essay "Seriously Visible," also begins with the idea that it is "old and not uncriticized news" that textual information is for the enlightened, but picture books are for children or the illiterate (37). She describes characteristics of hypertext, noting two themes in the literature on hypertext: First, that digital writing gives responsibility to readers, and "[implies] that the practices people acquire in our classrooms have direct effects on their contributions to our civil society" (40), and second, summarizing Habermas and Virilio, that "visual texts make easy reading" (56). Quickly dispensing with any concerns about technological determinism, Wysocki offers short case analyses of two pieces of what she calls multimedia to counter these two arguments. In the final analysis, she challenges the two major arguments noted earlier in her essay, using these cases as evidence that neither general claim is always or usually true. We would add that, in fact, what Wysocki is challenging here is the ability to generalize at all about anything digital. Wysocki's essay helps answer Bolter's request for "new critical theory" by suggesting that case analyses and grounded theory are probably our best bet from now on.

Chapter 3, "The Dialogics of New Media: Video, Visualization, and Narrative in *Red Planet: Scientific and Cultural Encounters with Mars*," by Helen Burgess, Jeanne Hamming, and Robert Markley, is an engaging retrospective narrative with a refreshing view on hypertext theory. The chapter chronicles the production of *Red Planet* by Markley et al., the first "scholarly-educational DVD-ROM authored from the ground up to be published by a major university press" (61). In their chapter, Burgess et al. set their retrospective within the context of the Web's impact on hypertext documents and CD-ROM production in the late 1990s. To them, the retrospective account of the production of *Red Planet* "serve[s] as a case study in the ways in which 'text' and 'visual images' interact dialogically with the changing technologies—sound, video, and dynamic animation—that are always in the process of redefining the conceptual frameworks and practices of multimedia" (62). As with the Wysocki chapter, here we see a grounded analysis of a specific case. This engaging documentary describes how the making of *Red Planet* refashioned definitions of "'authors' and 'designers,'" notions of "content and form" (68), and negotiated new forms of digital media for multiple audiences.

The collection's second section, "Historical Relationships between Word and Image," begins with Carol Lipson's "Recovering the Multimedia History of Writing in the Public Texts of Ancient Egypt" (chapter 4). Lipson analyzes the writing systems of ancient Egypt, and in doing so furthers the claim pervasive throughout this collection that the interaction of language with other forms of media is not a recent type of interaction, but rather has been integral to ways of knowing across cultures and throughout time. She rightly suggests that if we ex-

amine the relationships between “text and visuals” in western culture, then it is in our best interest to look first at “the historical development of such multimodal representations” (90). To do this, she looks specifically at ancient Egyptian public monuments spanning “approximately fifteen hundred years,” from 3100 B.C.E. to 1450 B.C.E. (90). Her theoretical framework builds on the approach of Robert Horn, who in *Visual Language* “suggests the existence of a new visual language, incorporating both images and texts, which is analyzable in terms of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics” (91). As a whole, Lipson’s chapter is not only a thorough and convincing analysis in its own right, but also resonates with the broader themes of this collection.

Chapter 5, “Digital Images and Classical Persuasion” by Kevin LaGrandeur, in the author’s words, “focuses on using classical rhetoric as a way to evaluate the persuasive power of computer-based images” (118). Specifically, he looks to the three Aristotelian modes of persuasion—ethos, pathos, and logos—as a means for analyzing such images. LaGrandeur rightly concedes to the potentially problematic implications of using classical rhetoric as a framework for analyzing the persuasive power of visuals, but maintains that “Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric is broad enough to encourage” the discussion of “the image as a persuasive tool” (119). He proposes a method of analysis for digital images that uses the three appeals to assess an image’s persuasive capacity (125) and then applies this method to three test cases. He suggests that an understanding of “the rhetorical context of digital images” can be furthered by way of “a redeployment of classical notions,” and that this redeployment can help programmers “build better contexts, ones in which images work in conjunction with rational thought” (134). This provocative suggestion also opens the door to many questions regarding how and where we can implement such contexts practically.

Ending this section is Chapter 6, “The Word as Image in an Age of Digital Reproduction” Author Matthew Kirschenbaum begins by invoking a quote from Stuart Moulthrop’s website: “The word is an image after all” (136). Referring to the “broadband cultural shift” from verbal to visual starting in the early twentieth century through today, the author describes a fundamental difference, however, between words and images. Although visual images are a significant aspect of electronic documents, they are not searchable in the same way as is textual material; images are treated more as decorations than data (138–39). He then “attempt[s] to play devil’s advocate in the face of widespread testimonials to the eloquence of the image” by offering a “field report” about computing in the humanities (139). He points out that visuals occupy more space and bandwidth than ASCII text, with longer times to load into memory and slower results for users with dial-up modems. “The practical consequences of this situation are enormous and cannot be put aside merely by asserting that words are always already images” (143). His point is well taken, and it reminds us that often those who theorize about digital text really don’t understand what happens beneath the surface layer of the com-

puter. Reminding us of the power of SGML and, later, XML, Kirschenbaum injects a welcome level of technicality into this collection. He uses the William Blake Archive to illustrate the use of SGML tags with an image to provide powerful search capabilities for users. The screen samples and final discussion of VRML, along with chunks of code, will give readers some grounded examples of the important case the author is making here. Finally, we did wonder how much might have changed since the time of Kirschenbaum's essay. The use of XML is on the rise, and search engines such as Google appear to do a pretty good job searching for images based on key words.

The third section in the collection, "Perception and Knowledge in Visual and Verbal Texts," begins with an essay by Nancy Barta-Smith and Danette DiMarco, titled "Same Difference: Evolving Conclusions about Textuality and New Media." We agree with the authors, who suggest that explorations of writing, new media, and visual technologies should not "suppress continuities" in the name of identifying huge shifts and epistemological revolutions. Rather, the authors "argue that the claim for huge cognitive shifts from oral to print and visual literacy are overstated" (161). Pointing out that Western thought tends to rely on "contraries to sharpen our analyses," they suggest that in the face of "the fast-paced proliferation of communication technologies," we must not "forget continuities" (160). The authors build on the idea of evolutionary continuity and "'punctuated equilibria,' in which the bulk of most species' histories are marked by stability," which should be viewed as a pattern. The authors suggest that this pattern can be applied to "our histories and discussions of new media" as well (161). This essay refreshingly circumvents the pitfall of the visual turn, suggesting instead that "the best innovations in writing and new media will value existing forms, coordinating them into new arrangements, rather than celebrating their demise" (176).

Chapter 8 of this section is Jan Baetens's "Illustrations, Images, and Anti-Illustrations" addresses the "difficulty of using images as illustrations in written non-fiction texts" (179). Baetens suggests that we need to reconsider our understanding of "what a written verbal utterance is" and acknowledges the lack of a "solid theoretical background" for doing so (192). He sees promise in Christin's theory of screen thinking, whereby "the opposition of text and image is a superficial one," because the verbal should be viewed as a "variant of the image" (193). In screen thinking, the viewer understands the screen not as a passive receiver of the sign, but as a context imbued with agency and as a site that requires deciphering and interpretation by its viewer (193). The sign and the screen are thus inextricably linked, which seems to undo the dichotomy between verbal and visual. Baeten is right to point out, through Christin, that the practice of screen thinking is not conducive to a Western, alphabetic tradition; rather, examples of screen thinking are more prominent in "Egyptian hieroglyphics, Chinese and Japanese ideograms, [and] Sumerian cuneiforms" (194). We saw this acknowledgement as one of the essay's greatest contributions. Similar to Lipson, Baetens's acknowledgment is a call for

awareness that asks us to step outside of our Western assumptions when contemplating the inclusion of images in written texts.

Chapter 9, the last chapter in this section, is titled “Cognitive and Education Implications of Visually Rich Media: Images and Imagination” by Jennifer Wiley. The author asks how the shift to more visual communication, made easy with today’s tools, might “change the transmission of knowledge” (202). Working from the domain of cognitive science, Wiley explores “the educational implications of visual adjuncts and how they may affect the processing of conceptual information and therefore, the transmittal of knowledge within particular subject matter areas” (201–02). We were happy to see a chapter that worked from a domain other than English studies; like Kirschenbaum’s essay, Wiley’s chapter reviews work from journals and researchers with a more empirical bent. As Wiley notes, many studies suggest that we process images differently than we do texts. Reading texts takes a long time and requires translation from a higher-level abstraction (e.g., the word dog does not look like a dog). But, as Wiley notes, “Processing of images is much more ‘holistic,’ as people generally assume that a cursory scan across an image is sufficient for them to process the content of that image” and “[t]hus, there is some support for the idea that image-related processing is less effortful” (203). Wiley also suggests that, although the scanning of an image may take less time, the reader or user may not process the idea at a very deep level. So at times visuals make more sense, and at other times pure text might be better. Like other essays in this collection, the contextual nature of Wiley’s suggestions are good ones, and overall, this article offers a nice review of the literature on mental models and cognitive processing. It ends with a short heuristic section on when and how to use visuals.

Section 4, “Identities and Cultures in Digital Design,” begins with Gail E. Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan’s essay “Feminist Cyborgs Live on the World Wide Web: International and Not So International Contexts.” In this chapter, the authors not only draw upon studies they have conducted that examine how women in the United States depict themselves on the Web, but also they extend their work to offer an international perspective (220). Drawing on feminist technology theory and cultural geography, Hawisher and Sullivan, noting the gendered connotation of the word home, as in *home pages*, ask whether the “complex geography of identity [in the international women’s pages] is clearly displayed through the home pages [they] studied earlier in American settings” (220). First, the authors review their earlier studies (home pages of women in the United States), noting that on many of the later websites, women used visuals to “blur the boundaries between physical selves and virtual selves” (224). Particularly in younger women, the authors found sites that “defied feminine and ‘girlie’ traditions” (224). Next, the authors focus on a study of women from countries other than the United States and discover that identity becomes “cyberhybridity,” with women who use the visual power of the Web to blur boundaries related to culture, ethnicity, and location (225). They offer several examples to illustrate their argument, including the website Russian Girls

Web with its “Babushka Gallery” (227) and a German site for women entrepreneurs called WyberNetz (229). Both sites make use of the power and the playfulness of the visual image on the Web, providing a space not only for cyberhybridity but also for feminist discussions. The authors conclude that we are witnessing the weaving of “an international feminist cyberquilt that can be a transformative force in...global settings” (234).

Chapter 11, Alice Crawford’s “Unheimlich Maneuver: Self-Image and Identificatory Practice in Virtual Reality Environments,” is at its core a call to action aimed at the creators and users of virtual reality (VR) technologies. Acknowledging that “immersive medium[s]” like VR are often critiqued for their tendency to promote “overidentification with the idealized images of the dominant and dominating culture of standardized media representations,” Crawford asks that VR technology place greater value and emphasis on the experience of cultural diversity in virtual environments (239). She thus suggests that undoing this tendency entails an effort on the part of both users and developers of these technologies. She not only calls for “an ethic of spectatorship” that values “destabilizing aesthetic experiences,” but she also calls for an expansion of “currently existing virtual environments,” which, at present, are too commercially oriented and do not provide enough “meaningful variety of subject positions” (251). Crawford suggests that making VR authoring tools more available to users is one way to “allow for visual practices that may better serve as a heuristic for progressive political practice” (252).

Chapter 12, “Eloquent Interfaces: Humanities-Based Analysis in the Age of Hypermedia,” by Ellen Strain and Gregory VanHoosier-Carey, begins by arguing that “the first instance of humanities thinking as it related to textuality” was in fact “a moment otherwise known as the beginning of hypertext,” because this was the first time that “humanities researchers and teachers could model effectively the postmodern theoretical concepts of textual contingency and instability” (258). Strain and VanHoosier-Carey seem to feel that “this ur-moment of the hyperlink’s emergence” will provide a basis for humanities researchers and teachers to review the state of humanities-based computing (258). The next section on hypermedia as a design practice reminds readers that (1) it is media, not text, and (2) hypermedia is an architected space that can in fact play a powerful role in demonstrating humanities methodologies (259). By humanities methodologies the authors mean theories, more than methods, such as those of Barthes, Landow, and others who propose compelling concepts that can then actually be investigated using the new media. The next section draws on Donald Norman’s work to remind us that it is the interface that provides readers with clues regarding how they can and should interact with the screen. The authors conclude with an analysis of “Griffith in Context,” an application designed for use by film studies students outside the classroom. Students can click on individual screens from an overall filmstrip and learn more about that screen. By working with the primary material, students are learning

about scholarly work and argumentation in the humanities (270–71). And, teachers must become designers to teach with this tool.

Chapter 13, Josephine Anstey's "Writing a Story in Virtual Reality," completes the collection. The author describes her "experiences writing *The Thing Growing*, an interactive fiction for immersive VR" (283). *The Thing Growing* seeks to place the user in a protagonist position that involves a relationship with the Thing, which users refer to as "she or it" (286). Anstey's account focuses not only on the VR system itself used to develop *The Thing Growing*, but also on the "writing methods" required when "writing for VR" (284). These methods require a consideration of "visual design in the authoring process, how writing computer code is and is not like writing prose, and issues of user control in creating interactive fiction in VR" (284). Anstey calls for increased user involvement and feedback at the development and design levels of VR technologies and also feels that creative teams need to include "people with multiple skill sets," in addition to "artists, writers, programmers, and artificial intelligence programmers" (303). Similar to Burgess et al., Anstey draws from her own research and experience to share lessons and guidelines, specifically for future work in VR. Similar to Crawford's chapter, this essay seems to issue a much-needed call for participatory design in the VR community.

We like this collection and learned a lot by reviewing it. We have just one small overall criticism: We wish some of the authors might have pressed more quickly past the English literature-as-high-culture/visual-as-low-culture polarity. Editors Hocks and Kendrick themselves in fact do a nice job making this move quite clearly in the collection's introduction, invoking the concept of hybrid and moving past the old discussions into what they (and we) believe should be the real focus of scholarship on visual rhetoric and literacy. But several essays in the collection fall back into the old polarity debate. Remember the saying "What if there was a war but no one came?" We began to wonder what would happen if no one mentioned the polarity issue any longer. Maybe no one would come, as it were, and the debate would fizzle up and go away. Perhaps the next generation of "writing" scholars, having grown up with the Web and having been raised with digital media studies as a given, will not feel compelled to take up the debate. However, we also recognize that for many academics working as the lone one or two digital types in the midst of a traditional English department, our small criticism may not hold. We appreciate that this is the case.

This small point of opinion aside, *Eloquent Images* is a fine collection for use in many upper-division undergraduate courses and in graduate programs in new media, rhetoric, technical communication, English, composition, and related fields. It is also a good read for its own sake, a thoughtful set of essays that challenge us not just by criticism alone but by way of practical examples, interesting writing, and theory that is cohesive. The collection invites us to move past the hyper-text-as-a-revolution rhetoric and consider the cases that we now see, appearing as

they do on a daily basis before our eyes on the Web. Finally, we wish to note that the book itself, in keeping with its theme and title, is lovely to look at. The cover design, pages, and size of the book are very pleasing. Indeed, the book is, overall, quite eloquent.

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