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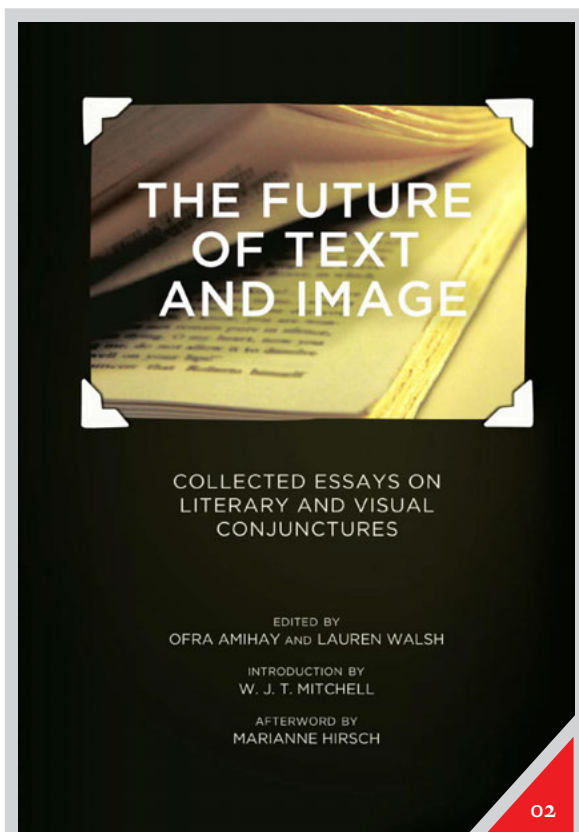
## Book review

### *The future of text and image: collected essays on literary and visual conjunctures.*

Ofra Amihay and Lauren Walsh. Editors. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. ISBN (10): 1-4438-3640-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3640-1. The book can be ordered from the publisher.

Review by Jenni Lauwrens

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**Figure 1:** Cover of *The future of text and image*.

*Collected essays on literary and visual conjunctures* 1998. (Amihay & Walsh 2012:167).

The publication of Ofra Amihay and Lauren Walsh's edited volume, *The future of text and image*, is a sure indication that the study of the relationship between the textual and the visual has grown into an independent academic discipline. With a foreword by WJT Mitchell and an afterword by Marianne Hirsch, whose contributions to the founding discourse in this field are well-known, this timely book brings together essays from scholars who investigate literary and visual conjunctures in diverse forms and contexts. The editors explain that the book aims to 'shed light not only on the *future* of text and image as an independent discipline' but also to present ideas about the destiny of the 'role and place' of that discipline in various scholarly fields, informed by the ways in which new technological forms and practices have and may influence this relationship in the future (p. viii). In line with this aim, the contributors represent a diversity of intellectual fields including literary studies, cultural studies, art history, media studies, graphic design/communication design and digital studies, amongst others.

Although complex arguments are posed in each chapter, reading the book is certainly not an arduous task.

Perhaps this is because the editors have organised their volume into four sections, with the essays in each linking appropriately to each other. In fact it was hard to put the book down, or to attempt a speedy 'light' read, as the visual and written texts examined in each chapter stimulated my curiosity, sending me in search of the original text/work or phenomenon discussed. The inclusion of four pages of colour prints tucked away in the centre of the volume no doubt added to its pleasurable reading.

Investigating the 'intermedial conjunctures' (p. viii) that play with and against the traditional roles of the visual and verbal, the essays in the book present 'explorations of the incorporation of visual elements into different literary forms, of visual writing modes, and of textuality and literariness of images' (p. viii). Topics under discussion include an interesting selection of memories, novels, poetry, collage books, the PostSecret phenomenon, blogs, digital poetry, photography, painting, typography and comics.

Mitchell, whose seminal text dealing with the relationship between text and image, *Picture theory* (1994) is referred to by many of the contributors, sets the stage for the subsequent essays by fleshing out the complex matter of the rupture, relation and synthesis of the textual and the visual in the foreword. By using the letter 'X' to visually explain this relationship, Mitchell negotiates the possible ways in which the two concepts differ, suggesting two fundamental ingredients in this relationship. On the one hand images and texts can be distinguished from each other on the basis of the senses (seeing versus hearing), whilst on the other, their difference is also seated in the complicated 'nature of signs and meaning' (p. 2). This is because whilst words are 'arbitrary, conventional symbols', images are repre-

sentations 'by virtue of likeness and similitude' (p. 2, original emphasis). Thus, an examination of the relation of image to text must also deal with the relationship between signs and the senses which comes down to an investigation of semiotics – the theory of signs – and aesthetics – the theory of the senses.

Each of the chapters in the volume deals with this complex relationship. Permeated with the difficulties inherent in articulating trauma in both visual and verbal modes, Part I: *Text and image in autobiography*, brings together three essays which deal with trauma, memory and secrets in diverse literary forms.

In 'Portrait of a secret: J.R. Ackerley and Alison Bechdel', Molly Pulda initiates the discussion on the dialectical relation between text and image by interrogating what the graphic memoir (autobiography in the medium of comics) in particular contributes to narrative studies. Drawing throughout on Barthean analyses of photographs, the author asks: what dynamic meanings are evoked through the combination of text and image in this context? In order to negotiate these questions, Pulda compares two memoirs of similar subject – a father's sexual secrets revealed and related by the respective queer authors. Both narratives are infused with 'the themes of death, secrecy and heredity' (p. 20) as the authors, through a process of 'postmemorial imagination' (p. 17) document their 'effort[s] to identify' (p. 33) with their deceased homosexual fathers through both word and image.

Continuing the theme of secrets, in the essay entitled, the next essay, by Tanya Rodrigue, proposes that the PostSecret art project, begun in 2004 by Frank Warren and which has subsequently grown into a cultural phenomenon, is a means by which trauma can be

represented by individuals in ways that challenge and resist normative epistemological frameworks that 'perpetuate master narratives' (p. 41). Rodrigue convincingly argues that since literary genres such as autobiography and memoir are shaped by their predetermined structures which force 'the writer to mold his/her experience into these identity scripts', such narratives tend to 'embody a false, generic identity that is socially accepted and expected' (p. 46). Thus, imagetext, defined by Mitchell (p. 43) as 'the inextricable connection of non-discursive language to discursive language', of which PostSecret in its digital form is an example, is shown to be a productive way in which to '(re)construct' (p. 39) and 'engage in dialogue for the purposes of understanding trauma' (p. 40).

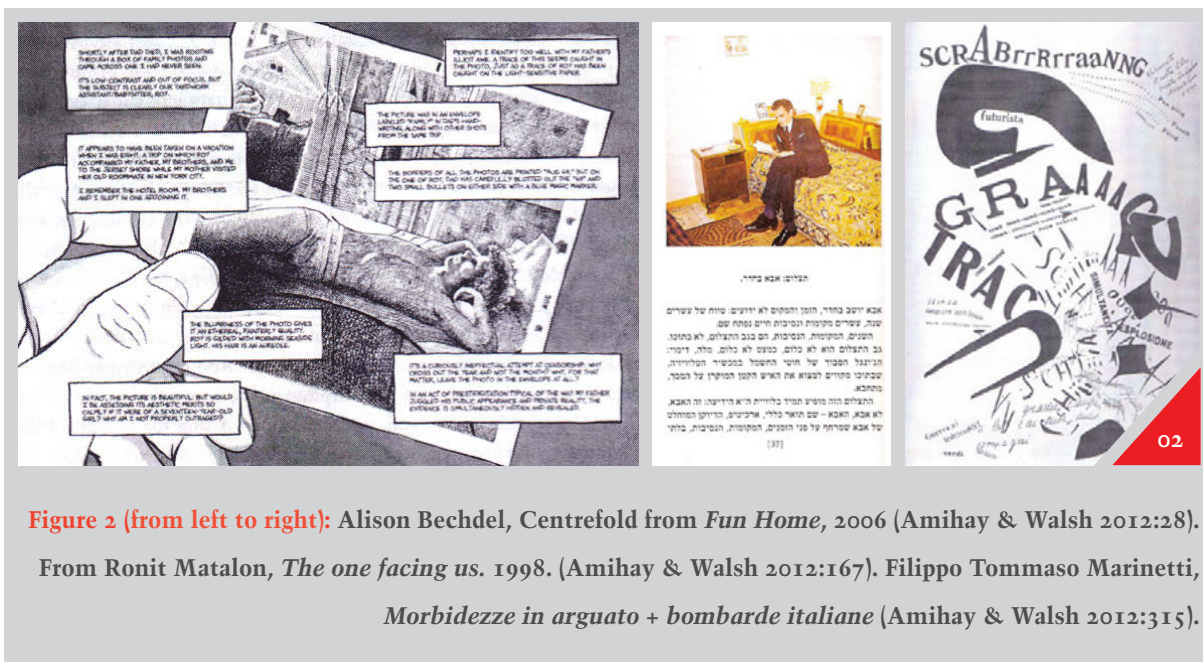
In their contribution entitled, 'Difficult articulations: comic autobiography, trauma, and disability', Dale Jacobs and Jay Dolmage examine how comics, which draw on linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, audio and multimodal systems of signs, work to represent and recount traumatic experiences which are at the same time 'ineffable and individuated, yet also over-determined' (p.70). As a graphic memoir of medical trauma, their discussion is focussed particularly on the ways in which David Smalls Stitches (2009) subverts normative resolutions to the representation of disabled bodies.

In Part II, two essays are brought together under the theme, *Text and image in the novel*. Lauren Walsh, author of 'The *Madeleine* revisualised: Proustian memory and Sebaldian visuality', analyses the status of memory in 'an image-oriented, post-Holocaust world' (p. 94) by examining Sebald's textual sketching, rather than photographic representation of the involuntary memories of his protagonist in *Austerlitz* (2001). In her analysis of 'photo-textual memories' (p. 94) Walsh

seeks to explore 'the tension between visual recollection and verbal representation' and ultimately to question whether or not 'imagination is allowable in the remembering of the Holocaust' (p.95).

In 'Immigwriting: photographs as migratory aesthetics in the Modern Hebrew novel', Ofra Amihay delves into the 'imagetext turn' in the Hebrew novel, by analysing the ways in which the visual is re-embraced in the imaginative construction of the 'New Jew'. Rorit Matalon's *Zeh im hapanim eleynu* 1998 (published in English as *The one facing us* 1998) serves as basis for an exploration of the pivotal role played by the photograph in constructing 'the postcolonial cultural idea of the beyond' (p. 134) and which also links more generally with 'issues of memory and immigration in the twentieth century' (p. 134) particularly in terms of perceptions of such concepts as 'home' and 'roots' as portable, and bounded up with the 'juxtaposition between necessity and nostalgia' (p.139).

Part III deals not only with the relationship between image and text but also the understanding of the text as an image in poetry. The three chapters in this part deal with the photo-text, the multisensory nature of text, and experimental poetry in the historical avant-garde as well as in the digital age. In 'Out of site: photography, writing and displacement in Leslie Scalapino's "The Tango"', Marcus Bremmer, drawing on Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, examines not only the connections between the photographs and the phrases in the artist/poet's work but also the relationship between the photo-text and the reader/viewer through the category of 'hetero-positionality' (p. 195). In Chapter 8, Eduardo Ledesma, once again brings subjectivity into greater focus in his analysis of the fusion of 'verbal and visual meaning in experimental poetry' (p. 231).



**Figure 2 (from left to right):** Alison Bechdel, Centrefold from *Fun Home*, 2006 (Amihay & Walsh 2012:28). From Ronit Matalon, *The one facing us*. 1998. (Amihay & Walsh 2012:167). Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Morbidezze in arguato + bombarde italiane* (Amihay & Walsh 2012:315).

Focussing particularly on Spanish and Catalan texts, the author argues that affective responses are triggered in the reader/viewer who is an active and co-operative subject. In the same way, in 'Orientation, encounter and synaesthesia in Paul Celan and Yoko Tawada', Gizen Arslan contends that orthographic symbols – 'individual character[s] or punctuation' (p. 200) used in writing systems – are multisensory elements which evoke affective responses in the reader/viewer. In all three chapters, the materiality and multisensory nature of words and images in relation to the subject are fore-grounded.

In Part IV, three essays that deal with the relationship between text and image in works of art are tied together. In Elise Takehana's contribution, William Burroughs' experimental writing – also known as 'cut-up' – is examined alongside Robert Rauschenberg's silk-screens and inoperable machines. 'Avoiding categorization, order, and conclusions' (p. 296), through their media both artists exposed the unstable nature of selfhood in the context of the modern urban state of distraction, thereby bringing the subject to inquisi-

tiveness and an attitude of constant questioning, rather than seeking to produce answers. In this way, argues Takehana, both artists are forerunners of the critical investigation of the influence of digital media on literature, art and subjectivity.

In the second chapter in this section, Cara Takajian shows that although Futurism (with its celebration of chaotic modern urban life) is mostly regarded as a movement intent on destruction and rupture, particularly in terms of the relationship between the artist, the artwork and the public, it also paradoxically created 'a sense of cohesion and participation' (p. 310) in the reader/viewer's response to these works. Focussing specifically on Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's approach to art, made evident in his *parole in libertà* – words in freedom – and his manifestos, Takajian argues that, although the artist constantly attempted to eliminate the subject through his art, the audience is at the same time a necessary component of the fulfilment of these works which are directed at the sensorially embodied reader/viewer.

In the final chapter, 'Heterochronic visions: imag(in)ing the present', Heike Polster once more draws the subject into the conversation. She examines the ways in which temporality is visualised in the still, singular images of Canadian photographic artist, Scott McFarland and German painter Jan Peter Tripp, through the lens of heterochronicity, a representational mode employed by writers and visual artists in an attempt to represent temporality. In heterochronic forms of visual expression, in which time is the main topic and of which Tripp's paintings are an excellent example, subjects are made aware of the present moment. Once again, as is the case throughout the entire book, the written text and visual image are seamlessly brought in close proximity to each other as each author unravels his/her arguments.

Overall the editors have successfully compiled a fascinating anthology of perspectives dealing with the slippery categories of text and image in literary and visual forms of expression. The book would no doubt appeal to readers of this journal, *Image & Text*, according to whose title the relation between text and image is evidently inverted. Stimulating dialogue between text and image, the book calls into question not only which term precedes the other, but also what Mitchell refers to as the 'unrepresentable space' (p. 1) between one concept and the other. What meanings are assigned to the following (some perhaps appropriately unpronounceable) configurations of terms and signs which appear throughout the volume: text and image, image and text, image-text, image/text, imagetext, image & text, image X text? In her afterword, Marianne Hirsch suggests that the awkward and uncertain relationship between these terms is symptomatic of the unpredictable future of the relation between the two. What may be needed at this uncertain time, Hirsch argues, is 'a method of combined looking/reading that

produces a close encounter, of the third kind' that is 'inherently both hybrid and divided' (p. 346) and also relational, connecting and contrapuntal (p.347). Clearly, the relationship between text and image is far from settled and will no doubt provide the ground for much interesting debate in the future.