

Leena Eilittä

## Typologies of the Iconotext

- Liliane Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext*. Edited by Karen Jacobs, translated by Laurence Petit. Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2011. 206 p. [Price: EUR 73,99]. ISBN: 978-1409400318.

This volume of word and image studies brings together Liliane Louvel's key theoretical writings, previously published in French in her *L'œil du texte: Texte et image dans la littérature anglophone* (1998), *Texte/Image: Images à lire, textes à voir* (2002), and in several articles. In her introduction to the volume, editor Karen Jacobs points out that Louvel's scope is different from the majority of recent word and image studies, particularly those in the English-language academy. Her study, which provides several typologies of text and image relations, contributes to research on formalist approaches, which have received less attention in the field so far. In addition to defining typologies for word and image studies, Louvel seeks to expand the field in the direction of phenomenological philosophy, the physiology of vision, and the psychology of perception.

In the first part of the book, entitled »Text/Image: The Infinite Dialogue«, Louvel critically assesses past theoretical discussions as having failed to understand that the interaction between word and image is based on two fundamentally heterogeneous semiotic systems. She particularly distances her work from studies of art history. Thus in this first section of the book, Louvel provides a critical reading of the history of word and image studies, starting from antiquity and continuing with brief accounts via such philosophers as Burke and Lessing up to more recent theoreticians such as Ernst Gombrich, Nelson Goodman, Murray Krieger, and James Heffernan.

In the main section of the volume, entitled »Modes of Insertion of the Pictorial: A Text/Image Typology«, Louvel introduces the genealogies of her text-image typology. Drawing upon Genette's theory of transtextuality, she introduces *transpictoriality* as the overarching term for the modes of insertion of pictorial images in literary texts that include, for example, *interpictoriality* (»when the pictorial image is present in the text as an explicit quotation, a form of plagiarism, an allusion, or even in its iconic form«), *parapictoriality* (»when the pictorial image [...] functions in a parapictorial relationship with the text«) and *metapictoriality* (»when one system comments upon the other system«). Louvel's notion of *hypopictoriality* is an analogy for »hypotextuality« (»when a text A transforms or imitates a text B«) and functions somewhat similarly to the »repressed« of the text, which returns in the hypertext (all quotations 56).

Louvel's critical readings of past conceptualizations of text and image relations prepare the ground for her contention that more strongly formalist positions are needed, noting that critics have pointed to references external to the text, such as biographical and psychological evidence or the *Zeitgeist*, or that critics have taken analogical relations for actual ones – finding, for example, the Madonna and Child in every depiction of a mother and child. Louvel's reflections grow more constructive in the part of her study where she provides a list of textual markers concerning the pictorial in text. Apart from the vocabulary which often accompanies iconotextual descriptions and is related to colors and visibility, these markers include references to pictorial genres, the use of framing effects, the staging of the opening and closing operators of pictorial descriptions, the staging of focalization, the use of explicit comparisons

to the visual arts, and the suspension of time. These pictorial markers point to several ways that allow the text to be opened up to the image.

Based upon increasing degrees of pictorial saturation, Louvel introduces a further typology for iconotexts which entails seven forms. The *painting-effect* »produces an illusionistic effect so powerful that painting seems to haunt the text despite the absence of any direct reference to painting in general or to a particular painting« (90). The *picturesque view* – which was also a genre of painting – points to textual descriptions which suggest their pictorial homologues such as certain evocative places, streets, or mountains (92). *Hypotyposis* – which is linked to historical painting more than to any other genre – »paints things so vividly [...] that it [...] turns a narrative [...] into an image, a painting, or even a living scene« (94). *Tableaux vivants* »provide narrative elements combining description and plot, and generating an action whose origin and consequences [...] have to be imagined« (95). In contrast, *aesthetic or artistic arrangement* »pertains to the gaze of the subject, the character and/or narrator whose intention to produce an artistic effect it thus reveals« (96). *Pictorial description* makes increasing use of pictorial markers in descriptions that draw upon several genres of art history. And finally, *ekphrasis* »provides the highest degree of pictorialization of the text« in the typology (98). While summarizing her idea of iconotext as emerging in these typologies, Louvel pays particular attention to the role of the image in relation to time:

Unlike hypotyposis, which narrativizes the somewhat diluted pictorial reference and remains inscribed in movement, the *tableau vivant*, the *aesthetic arrangement*, the *pictorial description*, and the *ekphrasis* slow down the pace of the text to a higher or lesser degree either in terms of the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the text or in terms of speed [...].  
(99)

Louvel's typology certainly helps in the recognition of certain forms of iconotexts, although it is not exhaustive and one might doubt that, e.g., aesthetic arrangement deserves a class of its own. Also, this typology may be confusing for a reader who is expecting a clearer classification of iconotexts. In the typology, the same type of iconotext may emerge in different categories and remains dependent on, e.g., the reader's capacity to recognize the description, its background, and contexts. In the subsequent part of her book, Louvel draws attention to the fact that the iconotext may take on various narrative functions and structurally be either integral or incidental, emblematic or decorative. In addition, Louvel also differentiates between the functioning of images according to models which she – somewhat surprisingly – derives from biological discourse: referring to ›paternal‹ and ›maternal‹ models (and their transitions). In Louvel's paternal model, the text is generated by the image, which is often referential and has a documentary character. In contrast, an image in the maternal model contains, but is not governed by, the image, which may contribute to plot or characterization or may serve as a gateway to the imaginary and the artistic. The process of generating narratives may give the image different roles: an actantial role when the image is the action and a reflexive or a revelatory role when the image is the driving force behind the action.

In the final section of the volume, entitled »Poetics of the Iconotext«, Louvel discusses a variety of vision-related artifacts such as mirrors, maps, optical instruments, screens, tableaux vivants, and tapestries. She maintains that such substitutions of the visual may also act as ›semiotic mediators‹ able to expand the scope of the text to both the referential and the imaginary. Arguing against the spatio-temporal division of word and image relations initiated by Lessing, Louvel eventually turns to an exploration of the poetics of pictorial rhythm. First, she examines images and visibility in relation to time, then in relation to rhythm and, ultimately, as the flesh and voice of the text that synaesthetically blend sight and hearing, giving the text its colors and opening it to rhyming effects. She introduces the notion of speed as an in-

between field of dynamic desire in which the collapse of the conventionally understood time-space dichotomy may be figured as a supplement of textual energy that provokes emotional movement and in which the acceptance of the Other represented in the image becomes possible.

Louvel's study provides far-reaching reflections upon visibility as well as insightful readings of images in texts, particularly vis-à-vis photography; furthermore, the typologies she introduces in the second part of the book could certainly be quite useful for the teaching of iconotextual relations. This volume, which has been derived from a much larger corpus of texts, presents, however, some problems for readers. Instead of a clearly proceeding argumentation, Louvel's discussion often resembles a mapping of the problem which does not hesitate to repeat, to question, to leave the problem unresolved, or even to provoke. Although the book does not always provide easy access to the ideas of these originally French-language texts, it is ultimately rewarding for those who are looking for different reflections upon word and image relations than found in studies so far.

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