The Future of Text and Image: Collected Essays on Literary and Visual Conjunctures

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In one of the pivotal moments of his book *The Future of the Image* (2007), Jacques Rancière writes:

The mixing of materialities is conceptual before it is real. Doubtless we had to wait until the Cubist and Dadaist age for the appearance of words from newspapers, poems or bus tickets on the canvases of painters […]. But as early as 1830 Balzac could populate his novels with Dutch paintings.¹

In other words, before the crossing over between the visual and the textual became an established artistic practice, literature—and more specifically, the novel—was able to bring together the verbal and the visual in a way that challenged the traditional dichotomy between the two, and conceptually heralded, as Rancière notes, the “real” attempts at such crossover to follow.

This potential to “[redistribute] the relations between the visible and the sayable,”² and the cultural challenges it presents, are becoming more and more manifested in the literary realm today, as the visual, once primarily conceptual in scope, frequently occupies equally actualized (“real”) and essential roles alongside the textual, in the novel as in many other forms. As a result, the relation between the visual and the textual in literature is at the heart of an increasing number of scholarly projects and is becoming an independent discipline. Inspired by Rancière’s insightful survey, this volume is an attempt to explore these profound literary shifts through the work of twelve talented, and in some cases emerging, scholars who study text and image relations in diverse forms and contexts.

In a talk he gave at New York University (on April 22, 2008) after the publication of the English edition of his book, Rancière pointed out that the translation of the original title—*Le destin des images* (2003) as *The Future of the Image*—is somewhat lacking since it does not convey the manifold meanings that the term *destin* carries. Aware of such limitations, we nevertheless wanted to preserve the sense of homage to that book as it is known in English, hence our own title *The Future of Text and Image*.

¹ Rancière 2007, 42.
² Rancière 2007, 12.
Yet we hope that by exploring different examples of text and image encounters in the past and in the present, this volume will shed light not only on the future of text and image as an independent discipline. We hope that it will also elucidate this discipline’s role and place—indeed, its destiny—among the many scholarly fields from which it draws, such as art history, literary criticism, culture studies, critical theory, and media studies, to mention just a few.

When discussing text and image relations, Rancière coins the term “sentence-image” (phrase-image), which represents not merely the merger of a verbal sequence and a visual form, but rather “the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically—that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image.” It is this complex understanding of text and image relations that our subtitle “Literary and Visual Conjunctures” aims to convey. The intermedial conjunctures investigated in this book play with and against the traditional roles of the visual and the verbal. In the spirit of such perception, The Future of Text and Image presents explorations of the incorporation of visual elements into different literary forms, of visual writing modes, and of textuality and literariness of images. Yet while Rancière’s discussion expands into other media such as music and cinema, The Future of Text and Image focuses on the special potential literature offers for the combination of these two functions. Alongside examinations of major forms and genres such as memoirs, novels, and poetry, this volume expands the discussion of text and image relations into more marginal forms of literature, for instance, collage books, the PostSecret collections of anonymous postcards, and digital poetry. Considering the special role that cyberspace plays in the formation and expression of endeavors such as the PostSecret project or digital poetry, these last two examples also mark the particular effort to engage with the most recent text and image conjunctures becoming available in the digital age. In other words, while exploring the destiny of text and image as an independent discipline, this volume simultaneously looks at the very literal future of text and image forms in an ever-changing technological reality.

We would like to conclude by acknowledging the many people whose efforts helped this volume to take shape. First and foremost, we thank all those who contributed to this volume their original work, academic and artistic, thus making it the culturally and intellectually diverse mosaic we envisioned when we began this project. We would also like to thank every artist and institute that allowed us to reproduce the many visual elements.

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1 Rancière 2007, 46; cf. idem 2003, 56.
illustrating the discussions in the book, without which a volume on text and image relations would not have been complete. We are extremely grateful to both W. J. T. Mitchell and Marianne Hirsch for their willingness to contribute their insights and experience to this volume. As two of the major scholars to lay down the founding bricks for the text and image discipline, their presence was truly inspiring. A special thanks goes to the staff at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, and particularly Carol Koulikourdi, for recognizing the potential of the project from its earliest stages and for patiently and meticulously escorting us through this journey. Last but certainly not least, our personal thanks to those dearest to us, Aryeh, Alex, and Isabelle, for being there beside us with good advice or a reassuring smile.

—Ofra Amihay and Lauren Walsh
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Works Cited