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Visual Imagery, Metadata, and Multimodal Literacies Across the Curriculum



Anita August

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Visual Imagery, Metadata, and Multimodal Literacies Across the Curriculum

A student's learning experience can be enhanced through a multitude of pedagogical strategies. This can be accomplished by visually engaging students in classroom activities.

Visual Imagery, Metadata, and Multimodal Literacies Across the Curriculum

is a pivotal reference source that examines the role of visual-based stimuli to create meaningful learning in contemporary classroom settings. Highlighting a range of relevant topics such as writing composition, data visualization, and literature studies, this book is ideally designed for educators, researchers, professionals, and academics interested in the application of visual imagery in learning environments.

Topics Covered:

- Data Visualization
- Eye Tracking
- Higher Education
- History Studies
- Literature Studies
- Professional Development
- Secondary Education
- Writing Composition



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A volume in the Advances in Educational Technologies
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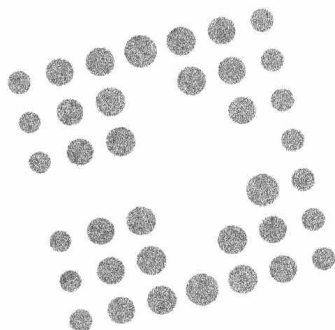
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Foreword

As one of those educated to consider the primacy of the word – written and spoken – as the vehicle for creating and transferring knowledge, I am often surprised by the evidence around me that we live in a world in which technological devices of various shapes and sizes have blunted the reliance on the layerings of words to define and engage in favor of various shortcuts to knowledge. Complexity of expression in the textures of language has given way, because of those devices and their applications, to abbreviations, neologisms, emojis, deliberate misspellings, instagrams, tweets, and other avenues of expression that focus both the sender and the recipient on a screen rather than on a page, on immediacy of connection and information (even about emotions, now presented through various forms of round faces) rather than on the subtleties and nuances of words. Of course, those new forms are a language as well, and they are helping to reshape the dimensions of how those of us in traditional academic roles might consider language as object, as visual form, and not necessarily, as I learned it, a system of sounds and signs.

I have been thinking about such a prospect for several years. As a poet, my goal is to gather sounds and meanings together onto a page as I write a poem. I have long understood that poems have forms, even those poems which are perhaps fundamentally formless, and was taught that both traditional and nontraditional forms often tend to behave in certain ways, carry certain kinds of messages, make use of internal melodies and rhythms and linguistic musics as they engage the reader. The emphasis in that understanding is on content, even as we consider form, and on how those contextual parts all work together to create meaning in and through the aesthetic whole we call a poem.

These elements are essential in conversations with students. But the slipping in of elements that are outside the contextual significances and traditional meanings of words, shaped by those screens and the characters that cross them, have lately added a new consideration in my teaching of literature and imaginative writing. This is nothing new, of course, since we have for centuries been aware that poetic texts can look like something and we have seen experiments with “concrete poems” – poems written and printed in the shapes of the objects they describe – that provide us with an awareness that a poem can be considered to be a text as well as a visual image, a representation of the object discussed. But this is not fully what I have in mind in this new consideration. A “concrete poem,” I would argue, still places emphasis on words first and then on how those words are molded into a picture of some sort. That picture attracts the reader’s eye as a clever presentation of the words he or she is reading. I also do not enfold my sense of form, in all its technical beauty, fully into this consideration.

I have of late, rather, been thinking of poem as a framework of precisely the sort of aspect of “meta-data” that the essays in this volume consider. That is, I have been talking with my students and with colleagues in this country and in others, about the fact of poem as object in itself, as a sculpture of shadings and spaces, a visual image in its own right that contains and carries other visual images. This may be especially so for the lyric poem, which is committed to the moment and therefore is an object of space, and perhaps less so the narrative, which is marked more by a linearity and chronology which mark it as an object of time. Both, though, in fact, do have a similar visual impact on the page as two-dimensional sculptures. My students understand that. They are used to seeing such two-dimensional objects on the various screens they scroll through, and when we talk about a poem as a visual object – long before we talk about its content – they understand with a kind of innate sensibility born from the shaping of the eye by ever-present screens what I am talking about. They trust the eye more than they trust the ear; they understand what they see in front of them without needing to reflect on undercurrents or strategies for unraveling contextual baggage. That is precisely the use of the visual to frame and decipher information.

The encounter with a poem, at first glance in the sense I am considering, is an encounter with a visible and tangible structure. That structure is a container, I tell my students, that holds other images, many of them formed through visual and other sensual encounters with the world, that generate internal visual images through the denotative and connotative power of the words within that frame. Though the words form that external structure – the exoskeleton of the poem – they do so only through their combinations of ink and white space. Their “meaning” is separate from the visual frame they constitute and yet they carry meanings – often visual in nature in their own right – because words are also signs and symbols with agreed upon significances, the products of something often seen and often imagined. I also focus, in those discussions, on something that may help to make all this more accessible: I tell my students that a poem is like a painting and that it must be experienced as an aesthetic object, as something first seen and explored visually, a gathering of empty places and the lines that divide them, just as a painting is experienced as a gathering of brushstrokes and textures of light.

In this way, the poem-as-visual-object provides readers, as they encounter it at first with their visual senses, with two kinds of meaning. First, of course, is the kind of meaning that we learn about in preparatory school when our teachers first ask us “what does the poet mean?” and we flounder about the flood of words whose meanings seem so out of reach. The second, and perhaps a more important defined or revealed meaning, is a moment of epiphany, of a sudden and deeply powerful realization of significance, of the thing seen and of the effect felt or understood. This is so because a poem is a tangible structure, composed of words and containing revelations of the pinpoint of experience, often free of narrative progression but not necessarily free of the concentric circles of the presented moment. Those moments have to do with the layering of the world and with the act of unfolding those layers, not to define progression to some conclusion that reveals “what the poet means” but to encourage immediacy of connection. That connection begins with the poem as a visual object in and of itself. There is simplicity in the sculptural textures of that visual object and, in like fashion, complexity in the simple resonances of its words and lines.

My sense of the poem-as-visual-object, as a two-dimensional sculpture on a page, is predicated on the firm belief that it is the eye that draws us into the resonant aesthetic moment, into the very heart of human truth as it lives in a world of insight and revelation that poetry as object and poetry as contained message makes possible. The conversation in these pages highlights a variety of considerations that

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concern the significance and process of the learning experience; how meaning across many horizons has evolved as new screens drive students to new understandings, often unconventional and unfamiliar to many of us who teach them; and how our commitment to shaping our engagements with the materials and subjects we teach will require us to look at the world differently, looking at new angles and reflections on screens of many sizes in our students' hands. These essays will help all of us widen our essential understanding of how the irreversible wizardry of new technologies defines the ways in which our students now create the world.

Jonas Zdanys

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Preface

Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes? -Alexis Smith

In Aristotle's classical hierarchy of the five human senses, "*visus* (sight), *auditus* (hearing), *odoratus* (smell), *gustus* (taste), and *tactus* (touch)," (Jutte, 2005, p. 61) he privileges the visual sense over the non-visual senses for meaning-making. Although Western cultures still rank the distance senses of sight and hearing as the nobler senses over the lower senses of smell, taste, and touch, when contrasting the higher senses where Aristotle believed objective and rational thought occurs, sight remains the dominant sense. With Western cultures still privileging sight in the Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses, it should come as no surprise that modern visual theorists ponder "If images are life-forms, and objects are the bodies they animate, then media are the habitats or ecosystems in which pictures come alive" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 198). Therefore, Western Visual Culture is a dynamic and dramatic space to explore, and with critical rigor how images are animated by a visual epistemology in multimodal learning settings, which for Gunther Kress (2010) is "the normal state of human communication" (p. 1).

Like alphabetic text, visual images mediate reality and increasingly in multimodal settings across the curriculum the visual helps to facilitate "a consciousness we are just coming into," (Rich, 1972, p. 19). Yet, despite the cultural saturation in visual images, "Teachers continue to privilege alphabetic literacy over visual literacy," according to Cynthia L. Selfe (2004), "because they have already invested so heavily in writing, writing instruction and writing programs" (p. 71). A visual epistemology, then, not only provides a rhetorical critique of visual imagery as a theory and basis for meaning-making in screen-based technologies, it also challenges the supremacy of alphabetic literacy and the alleged neutrality of visual imagery as a meaning-making form of discourse in screen-based technologies. In short, images are not silent although they may function silently which is why their rhetorical force is often unassuming and misunderstood.

As digital communities continue to thrive in the new media age (Kress, 2003), new literacies become increasingly powerful epistemic spaces where multimodal composing operate in dynamic social semiotic spaces across the curriculum. For example, Networked Knowledge Communities (NKC)s are social semiotic spaces given meaning-making in these visually rich sensory environments are "oriented to observation and analysis" (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Therefore, given the semiotic properties of visual imagery to narratively constitute and represent visual stories in screen-based technologies, it seems pertinent to explore how visual imagery informs and enriches as metadata. Visual imagery, I argue, is a misunderstood variant to Western culture's obsession with alphabetic text to communicate. Visual imagery as "metadata" subsidizes our representations and interpretations of the world(s) we inhabit in our modern culture of technology given. Metadata, then, is "data about data" (Buckland, 2017). Employing

the rhizome theory of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in their monograph *A Thousand Plateaus*, one can argue that visual imagery in screen-based technologies are digital rhizomes because they enable students to explore and capture the social and cognitive epistemology of visual images.

GOALS OF THIS BOOK

The primary task of this book is to propose the need for new rhetorical, social, theoretical, and cognitive strategies to which visual imagery could contribute as a meaning-making system to new literacies in screen-based technologies. Furthermore, this book does not wish to sever the ties of visual imagery with the other multimodal literacies such as alphabetic text, video, sound, etc. The key aim of this book is to illuminate the discursive and rhetorical power of visual imagery as an epistemology. In short, this book will demonstrate that visual imagery provides a rhetorical and parallel telling of any story, act, or action.

Ultimately, then, this book will underline the fundamental value in developing visual imagery as metadata in the writing classroom and as a central and active component of student learning. As a social and cognitive meaning-making semiotic system, visual imagery as metadata traffics as an epistemology across multiple semiotic domains in screen-based technologies. While many students see the visible role of visual imagery in screen-based technologies, they often are unaware of the invisible social, cognitive, and epistemological function of visual imagery as a constituting force in their lives. This book, then, I argue, will help instructors learning about the role of visual imagery as metadata and as a meaning-making system.

Using imagery rather than traditional print-based text as visual persuasion is increasingly the form of communication in the digital age. Technology and interactive media in mainstream culture and in secondary and post-secondary instruction often use images to codify knowledge with intentionality to affect the ways in which we interact with the world and with others. Visual imagery, then, is widely used as metadata (data about data) to support learning with little instructional principles and guidelines to effectively support how to navigate the coercive and non-coercive interaction with visual imagery in multimodal, screen-based technologies, and emerging technologies. This book will illuminate the way(s) visual imagery as metadata facilitates how meaning-making is in multimodal settings across the curriculum. Furthermore, this book suggests that facility and judgment when encountering visual imagery and when using visual imagery in multimodal contexts need instructional development in the same way that proficiency for using print-based text was used to assess written communication skills.

PROSPECTIVE READERS OF THIS WORK

The intended audience for this proposed book includes scholars, researchers, secondary educators, undergraduate and graduate students from multiple disciplines that use visual signs and symbols to communicate meaning. These disciplines also include but are not limited to media arts, visual studies, film and video production, visual rhetoric, cinema studies, digital media studies, and rhetoric and composition. More specifically, this book will be pedagogically crucial for those who use imagery as metadata and an aid to visual persuasion and clarity in traditional print-based literacy, but also multimodally (e.g., television, the computer screen, and electronic games); in screen based technologies (e.g., computers,

tablets, e-books, mobile devices, handheld gaming devices, digital cameras and video camcorders); and in emerging technologies (e.g., cloud technologies, social media, collective intelligence and Web 2.0). Finally, this book will appeal to many lay audiences who want more than just a generic understanding of how visual imagery as metadata is not only an incubator of knowledge, but also how visual imagery is a producer of knowledge.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is divided into four sections. A brief description of each of the sections and the chapters follows.

Section 1: Contextualizing Visual Imagery and Literacy

This section will contextualize the term visual literacy. The chapters will argue that visual imagery requires just as much literacy learning as alphabetic text across the curriculum and particularly in the composition classroom. This section will also argue that using visual imagery as metadata can serve as a rhetorical gateway to meaning-making regardless of a student's socio-linguistic circumstances.

In Chapter 1, "Visual Rhetoric: A Multi-Disciplinary Review of Recent Literature," Kate Kramer provides an overview of visual literacy and its impact across the curriculum. Kramer places emphasis on visual rhetoric and its use of images to influence action and thought.

In Chapter 2, "'Show Me What You Are Saying': Visual Literacy in the Composition Classroom," Kristina Wright establishes a strong argument for the implementation of visual literacy as a core learning concept in the composition classroom. Wright argues that visual references facilitate learning for students irrespective of their socio-linguistic background.

Section 2: Using Imagery as Metadata for Agency and Power

This section will provide analytical, interpretive, and evaluative perspectives that authors have made about their work. This section encourages the reader to employ their own critical thinking skills to visual imagery from their disciplinary area to show how visual imagery can be narratively applied to any assignment in any disciplinary terrain. For example, this section will help teachers to use the knowledge they already know and to apply visual imagery as metadata to inspire engagement with a visual image and to help facilitate the interpretation of a visual image. This section will demonstrate how visual imagery as metadata both tacit and explicit signals and scaffolds the interconnectedness between cultural, social, and political visualizing practices for agency and power.

In Chapter 3, "The Other Stares Back: Why 'Visual Rupture' Is Essential to Gendered and Raced Bodies in Networked Knowledge Communities (NKC's)," Anita August argues that the stare of the gendered and raced Other is a powerful tool for self-authorization. August references popular images to illustrate their discursive power as metadata to forge meaning-making for the racialized and gendered Other.

In Chapter 4, "I See Therefore I Think: A Cognitive Perspective on Learning How to Write Through Visual Media," J. T. Torres asks teachers to reflect on their current aural and text-based learning pedagogy. Torres demonstrates that visual learning is both scientific and cultural with each shaping students' perspective.

In Chapter 5, “Self-Mapping: The Power of Self-Produced ‘Self’ Images as a Stimulus to Action and Empowerment,” Nicole Anae posits that self-mapping is a critical methodology for creating a visual ideology of the self. Anae provides a clever and engaging presentation on how self-mapping generates new forms of knowledge making using visual expression.

Section 3: Visualizing Across the Curriculum – Literature, History, Food Studies, and Medical Humanities

This section will demonstrate that visual imagery as metadata is neither a competing method nor a divergent pedagogy to the more canonized alphabetic text essay. The chapters in this section explore how visual imagery as metadata can provide students with new encounters with other literacies such as alphabetic text, video, sound, etc. It will offer practical processes for an integrated view of visual imagery to other multimodal literacies. The assignments will come from a variety of disciplines, historical periods, and cultural, social, and political locations.

In Chapter 6, “A Terrible Beauty is Born! Cultivating Critical Consciousness Using Trauma as Visual Metadata in Yeats’s Poetry of Resistance, ‘Easter, 1916,’” Anita August analyzes one of Yeats’s most popular political poems to demonstrate how trauma is used as visual metadata. August provides a close reading of “Easter, 1916” arguing that Yeats’s ideas are visually imbued with consciousness raising rhetoric.

In Chapter 7, “A Place for Imagery in Composing Whole Histories: Available Means of Memory at the Gettysburg Museum,” Megan Brenneman focuses on visual imagery as meaning-making within the Gettysburg Museum of the American Civil War at the Gettysburg National Military Park and Visitor Center. Brenneman suggests that visual histories for museumgoers are curated and argues for museumgoers to use the visual imagery from the Gettysburg Museum of the American Civil War to construct their own Civil War narratives.

In Chapter 8, “Unlikely Dinner Guests: Inviting ‘Everyday’ People to the Table of Visual Imagery,” Consuelo Carr Salas analyzes food packaging as a form of visual rhetoric. Salas demonstrates that visuals and food products are meaning-making contributors to knowledge about cultural groups.

In Chapter 9, “I See What You Mean: Using Data Visualization to Inspire Action Across Diverse Curricula,” Georgeanna Sellers and Allison Walker argue the infographic is a dynamic mishmash of visual imagery and big data. The authors, Sellers and Walker, further contend that the infographic as a multimodal genre is ideal for educational settings across the curriculum.

Section 4: Multimodal Literacies in Secondary, Post-Secondary, and Graduate Curriculums

This section will consider the theoretical foundations of visual imagery and visualizing that inform classroom practices in secondary, post-secondary, and graduate curriculums. Teachers from a variety of disciplines will share their classroom practices and discuss how multimodal texts positively impact their methodology. This section is critical because it is inquiry based from a teacher’s perspective on how multimodal theory informs and shapes their classroom practice. For example, teachers will reflect on and explore questions like: “Why I am using this particular method? Why is this method the most effective for this occasion? What are the results and how did I revise my concepts, strategies, and ideas of practice because of the theory?” In short, this section will provide an intensive and extensive meta-cognitive path from the theoretical to practice.

In Chapter 10, “The Relation Between an English Language Textbook and a Teacher’s Practice in a Brazilian Public School: A Multimodal Literacy Analysis,” Maria Zenaide Valdivino da Silva and Antonia Dilamar Araújo considers the intersectionality of an English language textbook and a teacher’s practice in their ethnographic study. Chapter authors, Valdivino da Silva and Dilamar Araújo posits critical visual literacy enables students to comprehend the tacit meanings imbued in text books.

In Chapter 11, “Visual Literacy, Rhetoric, and Design at the Graduate Level: Preparing Graduate Teaching Assistants to Teach Visual Literacy,” Rachel Copley, Jeffrey Galin, Marianna Gleyzer, Nicholas Marino, and Haley Swartz argue for a course dedicated to visual pedagogy and provides a compelling claim for why and how graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) benefit from such a course. The authors in this chapter, Copley, Galin, Gleyzer, Marino, and Swartz also provide 10 strategies for dynamic multimodal, project-based teaching using both graduate and undergraduate project examples.

Chapter 12, “From Page to Screen: Creating a Multi-Modal Framework for Transformational Learning in a New Semiotic Domain,” Claire Goodman and Lynn Hassan examine the practices and teaching philosophies in a graduate class which culminates with a final “product” that is visual and performed. Goodman and Hassan argues communication and its representation occur in different modes—linguistic, actional, and visual—and have different structural and meaning-making systems.

In Chapter 13, “Using Eye Tracking to Study Adolescents’ Comprehension of Multimodal Texts,” Paula Wolfe shares her research findings on adolescents and how they decode and comprehend visual texts. Wolfe also provides instructions for teachers regarding effective methods for visual reading in the classroom.

In Chapter 14, “Picturing Writing: The Transduction of Meaning Through Multimodal Literacy,” Marilyn Buono explores the positive pedagogical outcomes when the visual becomes a significant and essential learning unit of the composition class. Buono maintains when visual images become the center of classroom focus, student learning expands and disrupts traditional and stable methods of literacy practices.

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