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Liliane Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, edited by Karen Jacobs. Farnham, Surrey, UK, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2011. 206 pp. Bibliography and index. \$99.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4094-0031-8; \$95.50 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-4094-3116-9.

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Over the past fifteen years, Liliane Louvel has become one of the most prominent scholars in the French-speaking community of critics and theorists exploring word-and-image relations. But among the quite numerous scholars who are publishing studies in English on such topics, even those whose interests come closest to Louvel's, her work has largely gone unnoticed. I myself became aware of it only as late as 2006, when I found her 1997 essay "La description 'picturale': Pour une poétique du iconotexte" published in Brazilian Portuguese along with three others in *Poéticas do visível*, organized by Márcia Arbex.[1]

That essay has suggested the title of the book under review, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, which, according to the editor, Karen Jacobs, is an English translation of a compilation of excerpts from chapters derived from two other books by Louvel, *L'œil du texte: Texte et image dans la littérature anglophone* and *Texte/image: Images à lire, textes à voir*. [2] It offers a judicious selection of Louvel's projects developed during the 1990s, which do indeed add up to a poetics. The book's rather seamless construction suggests not only that she has worked with this goal in mind almost from the start, [3] but also that she has had a hand in preparing the present volume (a note in which she refers to her latest book, *Le tiers pictural*, seems to confirm this [4]).

The foreword to part one ("Text/Image: The Infinite Dialogue") introduces the entire project. It sets forth the author's conception of "iconotext," a term already in use in English and French, as concerning "the attempt to merge text and image in a pluriform fusion" that results in saturating the (literary) text to different degrees with the "pictorial" (p. 15). Paintings, photographs, and similar artworks but also "vision-related artifacts" such as mirrors and "all kinds of reflection" (p. 15) represented or referenced by the words are thus assigned a virtual presence in the text. She explicitly excludes works in which word and image materially coexist, as in the *livre-d'artiste* or the comic strip, to which others have applied the term—a use she does not reject, but which would require a separate study. Iconotexts are, for Louvel, "textual events" involving the inscription of visual representations within texts, in differing modes and for various ends (p. 17).

To establish a basis for her idea of the persistent presence of representational images even in purely textual, but "pictorial" passages, Louvel discusses the epistemological, figural, and rhetorical range of "image," especially of the mental image, and of the idea of representation. Among the almost exclusively French sources supporting her discussion, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Le visible et l'invisible* carries the greatest weight, joined by Roland Barthes's *L'obvie et l'obtus* and writings by Jacques Derrida, Georges Didi-Huberman among others, including a reference to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. [5] The only English-language source quoted significantly is, appropriately, W. J. T. Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, whose table concerning "Image" her book reproduces, but inexactly (p. 25). [6]

The sections in chapter two (“The Infinite Dialogue Between Text and Image”) devoted to such traditional topics of word and image relations as the “sister arts,” the *paragone* or competition between poetry and painting, and *ut pictura poesis* (pp. 31-43), offer well-informed synopses based primarily on Mitchell’s *Iconology* and the much older *Ut pictura poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* by Rensselaer W. Lee, and supported by Marianna Torgovnick’s *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel*, among other works.[7] But her reading of Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art* via Mitchell’s account ends with a very misleading conclusion that somehow seems to suggest a sanction by Goodman of her thesis about hybrid forms.[8]

Her relatively brief overview over these topics leads to a discussion of *ekphrasis* which she introduces thus (in the English translation): “By giving back all its strength to Horace’s phrase, we shall try to see how poetry ‘is like’ or ‘acts like’ painting through a distortion of the phrase. The pictorial image thus appears as the return of the repressed of the ‘poetic’ text (‘poetic’ being used here in its broadest sense), in the form of a narrative or indirectly through the descriptive mode” (p. 43).

Louvel’s discussion of *ekphrasis* derives primarily from Murray Krieger’s *Ekphrasis* and James A. W. Heffernan’s *Museum of Words*. [9] Subscribing to Heffernan’s understanding of *ekphrasis* as the verbal representation of visual representation, she sees it as “show[ing] itself through this distance as a theoretical act of self-reflexivity from an art form which discloses another art form” (p. 45). Moreover, granting the verbalized object full presence in the verbal text, she claims that “[t]he insertion or inclusion within the flux of the narration of a spatial object—shield, urn, painting—spatializes narrative, which is a temporal art” (p. 45). She adds three pages about hypotyposis, the trope that creates vivid visual mental images.

Ekphrasis and hypotyposis are two of the stages of the “typology of the phenomenon of iconotextuality” which she constructs, with great subtlety, in part two of her book (p. 55). This is the most original contribution she has made to this area of word-and-image studies, with the examples drawn almost exclusively from English-language narrative fiction. In chapter three, she analyzes “Modes of Insertion of Pictorial Images in Literary Texts” (the chapter’s title) and, inspired by Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsestes*, she creates such terms as “transpictoriality,” “interpictoriality,” “archpictoriality,” “hypopictoriality,” and “parapictoriality.” [10]

Chapter four, “From Text to Iconotext: Degrees of Pictorial Saturation,” begins with a definition of what Louvel considers the term “pictorial” to signify: “the inclusion of a reference to the visual arts in a literary text, a reference which can be more or less explicit, and whose citational value produces an effect of textual metapictoriality” (p. 73). In a note she explicitly restricts visual arts to the two-dimensional and excludes sculpture and architecture. She compares her view with other definitions that to her are more subjective and vague and launches into an extensive discussion of the perils of establishing assumed parallels and analogies between texts and images for various ends—a conventional topic in interarts discourse.

Against such “misuses” Louvel attempts to establish a typology in pages that are largely identical to her essay “Nuances du pictural” [11] which delineates seven stages of increasing pictoriality in narrative texts, based on the presence of certain markers that “may either be explicit and present in the text as such, producing a direct citational effect; may be clearly acknowledged and asserted by the author in his or her correspondence, critical essays, etc.; or may be indirectly, and yet undeniably, encoded in the text” (pp. 89-90). Using these markers, she establishes seven categories (pp. 90-100), providing literary examples for most of them. First, there is the painting-effect—establishing an “illusion” without a “direct reference to painting in general or to a particular painting” (p. 90). The second category is the picturesque view, where the verbal description appears “susceptible to being painted” (p. 92). Third is the hypotyposis, the “convertibility of saying into seeing,” according to Louis Marin, often introduced by “Picture the scene.” It suggests *enargeia* in its vivid description (p. 94). The fourth category is the

tableau vivant--in narrative, "codified gestures" or grouping of figures suggestive of paintings (pp. 94-95). Fifth is the aesthetic arrangement, e.g., the evocation of a still life in Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" (p. 96). Sixth is the pictorial description which, without direct reference to a specific work, may offer "an invasion of pictorial words," direct references to painting, and such effects as "framing" (her example is a description in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, p. 97). Finally, the seventh category is the *ekphrasis*, "the highest degree of pictorialization of the text" (p. 98), for which she refers again to Krieger's classification without adding significantly to the discussion of a topic that was generating considerable interest at the time she wrote.

Since all of these seven categories are forms of iconotexts, she focuses in chapter five on "Functions of the Image," aiming to construct "A Pragmatics of the Iconotext." These functions include "the construction of reference" (pp. 102-106), the generation of narratives (pp. 106-118), a "revelatory" and an "ethical function" (pp. 118-124), and a "poetic function" where the "decorative" becomes metapictorial (pp. 125-130), all of these illustrated by interpretations of descriptive passages in narrative fictions. The chapter concludes with observations on the transgressive nature of the image in the text: "The image always works 'against' the flow of the narrative; it disrupts it and sometimes refuses to be generated by it, or even included in it. It then functions as an agent of transgression of the codes--narrative codes and literary genres..." (p. 130).

Part three, "Poetics of the Iconotext," proves to be the most stimulating and, in part, the most unexpected. It offers "Variations on the Pictorial" (the title of chapter six), consisting of the representation and function of mirrors and reflections created by optical instruments in texts (pp. 137-147) and the iconotextual status of photography and cartography (pp. 147-169), again with numerous and illuminating examples. The final chapter, "Beyond the *Paragone*: Towards a Poetics of Pictorial Rhythm," addresses some of the most discussed topics in the light of an array of recent French writings by such authors as Louis Marin, Eliane Escoubas, Jacqueline Lichtenstein, and Georges Didi-Huberman, as well as by others, including Mieke Bal and Jonathan Rée, while building its own argument. Such section titles as "A Question of Rhythm: The Movement of Seeing" and "Color--Body--Voice: The Triumph of Synaesthesia--Iconorhythm" indicate the direction in which Louvel's understanding of the iconotext and its effects points in the effort to overcome the rivalry between word and image.

There has not been a comprehensive monograph about the *ut pictura poesis* topic since Krieger's *Ekphrasis*, to which Louvel is heavily indebted, while her explorations of the iconotext and the pictorial, which is her way of dealing with *ekphrasis*, lead in a different direction. The wide range of her references makes the English-reading student of word-and-image relations acquainted with the important French sources of the 1980s and 1990s. But the discussion about that general topic and in particular about representation has continued unabated (and has included considerable revisions to the understanding of Lessing's theses and their implications as it has been rather superficially summarized by Louvel). Much of the unending dispute about *ekphrasis* has been integrated in the international discourse about intermediality and in particular about intermedial reference and medial transposition. Both Krieger's and Heffernan's restrictions of the concept of *ekphrasis* have been challenged since the mid-nineties. [12] Louvel does not offer theoretical reflections on the relations of her key terms to this concept. But her restrictions of the objects of her investigation go much further. She does not state whether, for her, the concept of the iconotext extends beyond literary texts (as the concept of *ekphrasis* does for Heffernan and others), or whether the pictorial (which presumably includes verbal descriptions in poetry and other literary genres) always refers only to two-dimensional visual representations--which would create a separate category of *ekphrasis* for descriptions or evocations of sculptures and architecture, now usually included in the general concept.

As indicated, the second part of her book offers stimulating analyses and reflections. What is missing, however, is a reflection on the usefulness of her typology, which should extend beyond the ability to recognize and classify pictorial moments in verbal texts. One of her key metaphors, that of the eye of/in

the text (see her index), reflects such titles as Mary Ann Caws's *The Eye in the Text*, Claude Gandelman's *Le regard dans le texte*, and Georges Didi-Huberman's *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*.^[13] The sense that there is a presence of the image in the iconotext conflicts with the insistence, in much contemporary intermedial discourse, on considering *ekphrasis* a case of intermedial reference where a text firmly grounded in the verbal medium uses all kinds of strategies to refer to a configuration materially grounded in another without overcoming the boundary between them. Louvel's book may even now invite a reconsideration of that position.

The book has an index which on closer inspection proves to be flawed. Thus, Matisse (p. 14), Groensten (p. 15), Hollander (p. 61), Hagstrum (p. 73), Knoche (p. 102), and probably others, are not included. And while it correctly lists "Wolf, Werner," the name appears as "Wolf Werner" in the text (p. 14) and consequently in the bibliography as "Werner, Wolf" (p. 198). The bibliography (pp. 189-202) nonetheless is extensive and very rewarding. There are other studies by authors writing in English who might have been dealt with in the text and should have been listed here, such as essays by Tamar Yacobi (whose work comes closest to Louvel's), as well as Hans Lund's *Text as Picture* and the essay collection *Pictures into Words*, edited by Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel.^[14] The bibliography contains many names and titles not listed in the index and not cited in the text, and a number of items, such as almost all PhD dissertations (p. 198), are dated after 2001. But curiously, a number of texts that were originally published in English (e.g., texts by Jakobson, Rensselaer Lee, Panofsky, C. S. Peirce, Meyer Schapiro) are listed in their French translation, and so are texts by Greek or German authors (Aristotle, Benjamin, Wölfflin), all of which are still available in English. What is more troublesome, passages quoted from such texts, and also from texts listed with their English source but obviously translated into French by Louvel, have been retranslated from the French, which inevitably distorts them and can lead to misrepresentation, especially with the translator's habit of rendering "*traité*" as "treaty," rather than "treatise" (*passim*). There are other obvious errors in the translation, although on the whole the text is quite readable. But these errors mean that at times it is hard to decide whether we are dealing with peculiarities in the author's thinking or flaws in the English rendition.

NOTES

[1] Liliane Louvel, "La description 'picturale': Pour une poétique du iconotexte," *Poétique* 112(1997):475-490, and in Márcia Arbex, ed., *Poéticas do visível: ensaios sobre a escrita e a imagem* (Belo Horizonte: Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, Faculdade de Letras, UFMG, 2006), pp. 191-220. The other essays were by Anne-Marie Christin, Leo Hoek, and myself.

[2] Liliane Louvel, *L'œil du texte: Texte et image dans la littérature anglophone* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1998); and L. Louvel, *Texte/image: images à lire, textes à voir* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2002).

[3] Beginning with her essay "*Portrait of a Lady, le double visage de l'art*," in Claudine Verley, ed., *Portrait of a Lady: Lecture d'une œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

[4] Liliane Louvel, *Le tiers pictural, pour une critique intermédiaire* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010). See reference in the book under review, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, p. 55, n. 2.

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); Roland Barthes, *L'obvie et l'obtus* (Paris: Seuil, 1982); Jacques Derrida, *La vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Minuit, 1992); Edmund Husserl, *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie* (1913), trans. Paul Ricoeur (Thesis, Université de Paris, 1950).

[6] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 10. This is one of the many examples where retranslation into English from the French has distorting effects. Thus, where the column headings of “Graphic [images]” should be “pictures / statues / designs,” Louvel’s quotation uses the terms “images / statues / drawings.”

[7] Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut pictura poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967 [originally published in 1940]); Marianna Torgovnick, *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence and Woolf* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[8] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1976). She also erroneously suggests that Goodman accepts Charles S. Peirce’s tripartite typology (p. 40). Twice in that paragraph we read “Gombrich” instead of “Goodman”; Peirce is always “Pierce” in her book.

[9] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) and James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[10] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).

[11] Liliane Louvel, “Nuances du pictural,” *Poétique* 126(2001):175-189.

[12] See, for example, Claus Clüver, “Ekphrasis Reconsidered: On Verbal Representations of Non-Verbal Texts,” in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling, eds., *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations Between the Arts and Media* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 19-33.

[13] Mary Ann Caws, *The Eye in the Text: Essays on Perception, Mannerist to Modern* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Claude Gandelman, *Le regard dans le texte: Image et écriture du quattrocento au XXe siècle* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1986); and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Minuit, 1992).

[14] See essays by Tamar Yacobi, 1995-2000: “Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis,” *Poetics Today* 16(1995): 599-649; “Verbal Frames and Ekphrastic Figuration,” in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund and Erik Hedling, eds., *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelation of the Arts and Media* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 35-46; “The Ekphrastic Model: Forms and Functions,” in Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel, eds., *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998), pp. 21-34; “The Ekphrastic Figure of Speech,” in Martin Heusser et al., eds., *Text and Visuality: Word & Image Interactions 3* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Ga.: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 93-101; “Interart Narrative: (Un)Reliability and Ekphrasis,” *Poetics Today* 21(2000): 711-749. See also Hans Lund, *Text as Picture: Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*, trans. Kacke Götrick (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel, eds., *Pictures Into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1999).

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