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Imag(in)ing the Word: Visual Literacy of Latin American Digital Poetics

This paper aims to examine how visual literacy can be understood through the study of the image as literary form, specifically the poetic. The image (still and moving) is poetic. I propose a visual literacy of a digital poetics of artistic, cinematic, and acoustic imagery, for example. Their poetry is a byproduct of the lexicon of their medium where the visual, sound, and movement patterns are all expressive of the message without the necessity of the written word. The word has not been replaced by the image; rather, this new generation of poets speaks with the language of their technological medium. Digital poetic works call for a dialectical interpretation specifically considering how the specific syntax, created by the symbolic meta-language of the digital medium, produces the same type of symbolic processes of the literary poetic form. The medium in which the digital poetics is articulated gives priority to its own vocabulary and structure, thereby communicating its message without the necessity of the written (or in some cases, spoken) word.

These set of artists/poets belong to a generation where the word is not only imagined visually but imaged digitally. This paper will examine the work of Latin American poets of the Millenium generation to show how visual literacy must take into account the image's relations to the collective imagination. Examples of digital poetic works will demonstrate how visual literacy must acknowledge how images are adopted, adapted, and translated in a variety of media, across borders, and among cultures. I propose that to be visually literate, critical analysis and its much needed deconstruction of these images should begin to question: Whose ideals are being presented? Whose images are represented? How are these images creating an understanding of the society which they represent? Who do they create insight that provokes a cognitive dissonance between the reader and the embodied cultural concept? How do images and texts interact to present coherent poetics? What attitudes desires, and/or ideologies do these images codify? My approach to these inquiries will include the visual rhetorical, semiotic, iconological, and literary analyses to specific digital poetics by Fernando Llanos (Mexico), Brian Mackern (Uruguay) and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez (Cuba).