



Reimagining Textuality: Textual Studies in the Late Age of Print

Current Issue

Loiseaux, Elizabeth Bergmann, and Neil Fraistat, Eds.
[The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.](#)

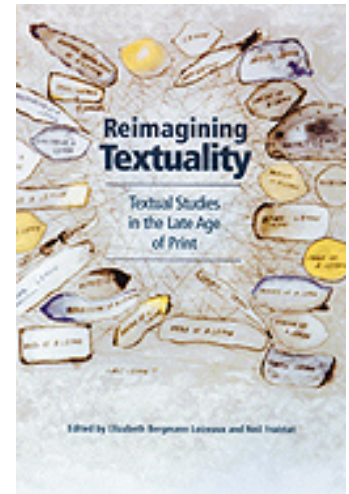
270 pages
Paper: \$24.95 US

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In this age marked by postmodernism and proliferation of technology, there are numerous challenges to the "idea of text as words on a printed page" (Loiseaux and Fraistat 5). *Reimagining Textuality* gives voice to some of those challenges. While the authors are affiliated with English departments and specialize in textual editing, verbal-visual studies, and cultural studies, their explorations of the impact of technology, theory, and graphics on textual practices are likely to be of some interest to critical cultural theorists and rhetoricians.

Composed of three sections, each with three essays and a response, *Reimagining Textuality* suggests a conversation about the nature of text and textual studies in the contemporary information environment. This conversation, though, is a free-flowing one, and in the end, the authors do not find themselves on the same page. Rather, their views are divergent in tone, style, content, and conclusion.

In a prologue, Jerome McGann discusses the ways technology both transforms and fails to transform use of language. At the same time that he notes the ease of using the Web for transmitting information, he observes the problems associated with this venue, namely its lack of recognition as an outlet for scholarly communication and its vast audience. Despite these drawbacks, McGann describes communicative technologies as having heuristic force that makes new perspectives on texts possible.

Likewise, David Greetham, Daniel Ferrer, and Joseph Grigely address the ways technology alters the production of texts and meaning. Greetham argues that the textual practices often seen as an impact of postmodernism are in part a return to premodern conditions, resulting in "critical indeterminacies" (42). Ferrer also discusses the nature of texts by considering the record presented by drafts and editions of publications. He argues that hypermedia addresses the problems of producing a definitive or edition by offering "the best chance to do justices to the diversity of the material and the multiplicity of relationships" (56). Grigely takes on the matter of the body as a signifier, examined with the same critical lens used to scrutinize conventional texts; he is interested in textual mutation, which raises questions about identity. In response, while acknowledging the creative questioning of these essays, Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues the need to create works for study and to give voice to authors and speakers. She also raises the issue of

material resources, of time and energy, which are still required for the kinds of textual scrutiny suggested by this section's authors. In this grounding, DuPlessis introduces critical questions relevant to communication scholars, many of whom study works subject to these same critical concerns and processes.

Morris Eaves, Mary Ann Cawes, and Johanna Drucker take up the problematics of integrating and interpreting visual signs as well as linguistic ones. Eaves notes that technology does not provide a simple resolution to the costs and other challenges of integrating words and graphics that alter the interpretation of the resulting text. Cawes argues that time is also a concern requiring additional attention and new critical stances when texts integrate the visual and the verbal. Drucker's "philosophical speculations" (153) center on the ways that the graphical nature of symbols contributes to overall meaning. While these essays and the response by Charles Bernstein present nontraditional perspectives on text, they offer insight into what it might mean to do criticism of visual images, an area of communication studies being explored by Robert Hariman and others.

Tim Hunt, Henry, Schwarz, and Stuart Moulthrop provide theoretical perspectives on the relationships between orality and text. Hunt, analyzing the differences between live and taped musical performance, generates a theory of the interactions of text and performance. Importantly for communication critics, he also addresses the matter of audience directly, which distinguishes his essay from many of the others in this volume. Schwarz delves into deep theoretical waters, discussing the implications of postmodern and postcolonial theories on the nature of text. Moulthrop directs his attention to technologies of "decentered networks" (238). Gregory L. Ulmer's concluding essay pulls these concerns together and puts them in the context of graduate education, with a perspective relevant to critical communication and rhetorical studies.

In the end, then, *Reimagining Textuality* offers multiple viewpoints on communication practices as they are affected by technologies. Rather than offering a definitive read on the state of texts in a changing communication environment, many of these essays are, as the book's title suggests, speculative and creative. Despite this indeterminacy and the different disciplinary training of the volume's authors, the topics of this text are germane to certain specialties of communication studies.

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