

About Cultural Production: A Book Review Article of New Work by Crowther and Grigorian, Baldwin, and Rigaud-Drayton

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Kathleen WALLER

**About Cultural Production: A Book Review Article of New Work
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In the continuing dialogue about the definition and the future of comparative literature, there is a danger of maintaining a heteroglossia of broad concepts — disciplines, theoretical frameworks, historical movements — without allowing its application to specific examples of cultural production. Robert Lethbridge explains in his "Introduction to *Text and Image in Modern European Culture*" that "throughout the book, comparative analysis is grounded in recent theory, but also crosses boundaries both geographical and generic" (1) and contributors to the volume tackle specific crossroads of art, culture, history, society, and philosophy. Following his 2010 *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)*, Paul Crowther's *The Phenomenology of Modern Art: Exploding Deleuze, Illuminating Style* is grounded more concretely in his approach as a philosopher and art historian, but his detailed discussions of particular paintings from a certain framework ask for even more detailed comparisons to gain stronger truths. He concludes that "It is hoped that these levels of significance can be explored by other scholars, on the basis of more detailed studies of the artists or tendencies in question" (250).

Although authors in/of the works reviewed here — Paul Crowther's *The Phenomenology of Modern Art: Exploding Deleuze, Illuminating Style* (Stanford UP, 2010) and *Text and Image in Modern Europe Culture* (Ed. Natasha Grigorian, Thomas Baldwin, and Margaret Rigaud-Drayton, Purdue UP, 2012) utilize interdisciplinary approaches, as well as a variety of philosophical and historical perspectives, their focus on analyzing specific works of art and isolating particular perspectives for this purpose. The volumes provide an invigorating approach to some of the bigger questions about the greater discipline today. The texts I am reviewing are not only active themselves in illustrating methods of investigation and taking us to many forms of cultural production connected to many national identities, they also suggest active participation by readers and reaching out to professionals with similar interests from different perspectives to further knowledge. Although some may feel disappointed at a lack of conclusion about the ever-widening doors toward pluralistic truths — as, for example, Jacques Derrida points us toward in "Before the Law" and other works, his reflections are felt — the questions open ellipses for making sense of human culture in the overwhelming state of globalization and pluralization on the internet. Crowther's *The Phenomenology of Modern Art* explodes from philosophical phenomenology: perhaps the experiential focus is a way to re-ground us in our everyday sensory perceptions while also utilizing the references as a high level of philosophical investigation. The focus on paintings within the realm of modern art gives an especially present and tactile medium in comparison with digital media. The lens is discussed historically in the introduction suggesting the key phenomenologist theorists he utilizes: Gilles Deleuze, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (6). Following the introduction, nine chapters move us historically through movements within modern art connecting the subsets of style with particular theorists.

The first two chapters further orient us before taking off into more adventurous investigations. In "Releasing Style from Sensation: Deleuze, Francis Bacon and Modern Painting" Crowther takes us through Deleuze's *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation* and its connection within the phenomenological framework. He provides interpretations of Deleuze's engagement with, for example, color and figure in Bacon's paintings. The essence is that "Painting is an analogical language based on the handling of colour" and that its task is "to capture the effects of invisible forces on visible bodies" (30, 31). Crowther makes use of insightful passages in Deleuze's text such as his discussion of Bacon's *Three Studies of the Male Back* (1970) for which he includes both an in-text image and color plate in the middle of the book, although interestingly a different choice than Deleuze's own color plates: "The chromatic treatment of the body, which is very different from the treatment of the fields of color: the chronochromatism of the body is opposed to the monochromaticism of the flat fields. To put time inside the Figure — this is the force of bodies in Bacon" (21). Bacon's uniqueness is in the way he is able to push color, Figure (capitalized by Deleuze as a representation of identity), space, and time to new limits. When I first saw Bacon's work in person at the Palazzo Reale in Milano in 2008, I too was struck by a strangeness of sensation. Filled with psychological turmoil, the paintings beg to be examined while one is repulsed simultaneously through seemingly grotesque representations of the body. These monstrous images give the effect of "push and pull" that Crowther later develops in connection with Hans Hoffman

and linking it also to the concurrent destruction and creation of space. In the first chapter's continuance of ideas related to Deleuze's text there are further interesting reflections on rhythm's link with sensation, individuality of the painter, and "the body without organs" in connection with painting. In his second chapter Crowther investigates "the rise of modernism on an alternative basis to that of Deleuze" and links this with the avant-garde (57). Crowther takes us back to artistic roots in the Enlightenment, continuing the discussion on color and figure in the works of Ingres and Delacroix. He connects earlier artists with Manet and Picasso to engage with the avant-garde discussing the "new relation to experience" that holds "ontological reciprocity" at the center (68). The overlaps between ontology and phenomenology run through Crowther's work as the essential new and purposeful connection he is making in his utilization of Deleuze's observations.

In the ensuing two chapters, "Nietzsche and the Varieties of Expressionism" and "Merleau-Ponty's Cézanne," Crowther presents deeper analyses of particular paintings while building on the philosophical framework with the addition of the philosopher named in each section. Some of the sections are nearly narrative explanations changing the tone to one of the "professor at fireside," but this is a positive aspect. Crowther picks up especially on Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* and Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind." Nietzsche privileged art in the human experience connected with individual power, most significantly in Pollock's works of abstract expressionism. Merleau-Ponty's theory is such that it asks us to engage with art on many levels: "As he explained in his seminal *Phenomenology of Perception* of 1945, perception is not a question of deliberately taking up a position or engaging in a particular act, but a holistic and integrated pre-reflective experience" (Chaplin <<http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=291>>). The connections between ontology and metaphysics in Cézanne's style are used as a basis for exploring a variety of questions about painterly space and our finite existence. Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty privilege painting for its power of observation and truth through a sensory experience and Merleau-Ponty argues that in contrast to writers and philosophers, from whom we want "opinions and advice" or musicians, who are too far removed from the physical world: "Only the painter is entitled to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what he sees" (2).

The three chapters following focus on Kant's angle while bringing us stylistically through cubism, "ready-mades," and the flatness of modern painting. Crowther finds Kant's "transcendental idealism" problematic in understanding the root of the cubist exploration of the dimensions of space as well as the consideration of the artistic production as a separate entity than the artist himself (133, 139). His response to Kant comes back to Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty moving toward new possibilities in their theories. What stems from Deleuze's theory is especially interesting since it is not usually expanded upon in the realm of phenomenology. For example, Crowther explains the "fusion phenomenon" as "a heightened case of the Deleuzian relation between Figure and material structure" (148). What results is a new framework for considering cubism. The final two chapters discuss abstraction. In "Deleuze and the Interpretation of Abstract Art" Crowther engages in a discussion of Deleuzian ontological considerations in abstract art. Although a connection back to Pollock would be helpful — although it is picked up again in the final chapter — the discussion of Bridget Riley's *Fall* (1963), also printed as image, is helpful in recognizing Crowther's related idea of "vision as sensation" (211). In the final chapter, "Plane Truths: Hans Hofmann, Modern Art and the Meaning of Abstraction," Crowther returns again to the focus on space. The cyclical treatment of this theme and others allows a building of his argument that cleverly provides access to deeper questions in progression. The use of Hofmann's work to understand the creation of depth in abstract art as "conceptual completeness" is convincing in its relation to phenomenology (225). This leads to his cumulative idea about "transperceptual space" which, with its five visual levels, relates directly to cognition in the observer (242).

Crowther concludes his analyses in their relation to Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, but leaves his work open for scholars to pursue in more detail and his extensive notes make a useful tool for doing such. However, with the focus on a unique interpretation of Deleuze's connection to phenomenology it may be helpful to include such texts as Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* which are alluded to at a few brief moments. There are implicit references to Deleuzian difference which may be better understood with further illumination and references to key concepts discussed by Crowther such as Deleuze's example of *chiaroscuro* in his definition of difference. The rebuttal of those who claim that "According to Deleuze, phenomenology does not meet the challenge of difference" (Lawlor 16) would help also in solidifying Crowther's fusion of the philosopher with theory. However, the treatment of a variety of scholars' works is thorough and engaging. One instance includes a strong defense of his 1997 book

entitled *The Language of Twentieth-century Art*, criticized previously by Mark A. Cheetham in *Kant, Art, and Art History*. The continuation of debate is helpful, although at times this part reads too personal. Overall, the book's analysis of many pieces of art and with the engagement of many theorists in addition to Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Merleau-Ponty is effective and lively. One can continue these investigations through trips to view the art in museums — as is suggested by Crowther's theoretical framework — or by reading from the extensive bibliography of the book.

The second volume I review here is also rooted in modern art, but as a compilation of articles takes us in many fascinating directions. The intersections of a variety of literary genres with photography, painting, sculpture, fashion, and digital media are explored in *Text and Image in Modern European Culture*. Contributors to the volume take into account the ten principles of comparative cultural studies postulated by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek according to which comparisons should not create hierarchies nor should they limit themselves from interdisciplinary investigations: "The first principle of comparative cultural studies is the postulate that in and of the study, pedagogy, and research of culture — culture is defined as all human activity resulting in artistic production — it is not the "what" but rather the "how" that is of importance"

(<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2>>). Thirteen articles about French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and German texts and artworks take us into not only spaces of crossroads, but also new ways of thinking about the reciprocal relationships between genres and nationalities. These vignettes give us a window into a way of thinking with detailed, specific examples such as a set of three poems (as in the case of "How to Read a Poetic Photo-Text) or a particular novel, such as Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* in two distinct chapters. The written texts are juxtaposed in some way with the aforementioned art forms. The introduction by Lethbridge prepares us for this journey by making suggestions of comparison between the historical and theoretical frameworks. He is fascinated by the topography of this volume, but also notes that "France, and Paris in particular, retain an unsurprising centrality, given its magnetism for exiles and the avant-garde" (3). This may also be because two of the editors, Baldwin and Rigaud-Drayton, are scholars of French-language literature. The focus on Paris is not a fault of the volume not only because the city was indeed central to the rise of modern artistry, but also as a way of providing a centralized vantage point from which we may embark.

In Part One — "Cross-Cultural Network" — Giuliana Pieri's "The Myth of Psyche in the Work of D'Annunzio and Burne-Jones" takes us into a cross-section of Italian poetry and painting. Much of the text is historical focusing on the pre-Raphaelite and neo-Renaissance periods in connection with the authors' works. Pieri focuses on "a case of double *ekphrasis*" (16), which later becomes the theme of "Part Two: Ekphrasis and Beyond." Although defined in Greek simply as "description," the term now extends as a description of a scene or a work of art through which narration and reflection meaning is amplified. As in Crowther's book, there seems to be an undertone that in the age of digital media, we may turn to modernity's art forms for an individual engagement with sensory reality. The other two articles in this first section take us in completely different directions, disorienting us pleasantly in any one national or theoretical motivation. In "The Symbolist Context of the Siren Motif in Moreau's Painting and Bryusov's Poetry" Gregorian discusses painting, poetry, France, Russia, Symbolism, and Parnassianism. Her discussion of myth is especially poignant: "the inner symbolic essence of myth, or at least some of its many potential elements, can indeed travel from painting to verse, virtually undeterred by the differences between the two media" (45). In "Images of Paris in the Work of Brassai and Miller" Caroline Blinder discusses an oft-repeated theme of the *flâneur* and his relationship with Parisian photography and urbanity. However, the angle from a US-American expatriate's point of view — Henry Miller's — combined with an intriguing biographical approach gives this article freshness: "If 'The Eye of Paris' exemplifies the expatriate's desire to convey a distinctly Parisian image of the quintessential city, it is also in more complex terms a conflation of writing and photography in search of a new aesthetics, a new taxonomy of the urban" (49).

In Part Two, "Ekphrasis and Beyond," William Waters presents a formalist analysis in "The Reciprocation of the Image in Two Poems by Rilke." Waters brings up intertextual references briefly for additional personal discovery with mentions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Madame Bovary*, Cézanne, and Monet. The other two articles in this section focus on Proust: in "Photography and Painting in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*" Thomas Baldwin looks at Proust's writing as photography while also discussing key passages in the book which address the media of painting and photography thus showing the novelist's fascination and deep understanding of these art forms. An observation that may be connected with other articles in the book concludes "Proust's

work offers some resistance for [the] desire for closeness [to art], returning a little of the aura to the work of art" (85). Áine Larkin's similarly titled "Photography in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*" is about photography and the novel as lived experiences in an individual's memory. Quoting Vilém Flusser, Larkin suggests that "'Imagination has turned into hallucination'" where people forget they are creating images to "orient themselves in the world" (97) and she draws on work by Sontag, Barthes, and Dubois to associate photography with desire, power, and emotion thereby adding depth to Proust's masterpiece.

Articles in Part Three — "Text and Design" — add the media of fashion and architecture to the dialogue between art and literary text. Kate Nelson Best's "Text and Image in Fashion Periodicals of the Second French Empire" is based on Roland Barthes's *The Fashion System*, but writes from the framework of feminist theory while utilizing Walter Benjamin's and Michel Foucault's thought to discuss fashion illustrations' commodification of feminine identity in the mid-nineteenth century. The matrix of power creates normative identity production, as Best explains through Foucault: "a Foucauldian 'speculative ideal' or regulatory cultural norm underpins the production and limitation of the meaning that the sartorial discourse ascribes to the visual tableau" (111). The four selected prints included in this chapter add depth to an art form that is not likely to be readily present in the imagination of the reader and the effect is that we look more closely as Best takes us through visual analysis. In "Architecture and Utopia in Scheerbart's *Rakkóx der Billionär*" Christine Angela Knoop focuses likewise on constructions of identity by the utilization of architecture in Paul Scheerbart's novel whereby her discussion of the literary motif of a glass house is linked with the "denial of individuality" (116). This — alongside the interesting connections to famous Parisian architecture — provide a framework of reading space in a reciprocal connection with identity and society: "Scheerbart's *Rakkóx* presents architecture as an ideological and social value" (118). The suggestion that the novel has influenced architecture suggests the power of the text and puts emphasis back on literature's ability to cause change in society, here literally as something that can be seen in our physical environment.

Articles in Part Four — "Hybrid Texts" — is the ripest with unique methods of analysis which reveal fascinating directions. The first, Rigaud-Drayton's "Word and Image in Apollinaire's 'Lettre-Océan'," is a creative look at the nuances of language and space, and their intersection. As seen with analyses in the last section, Rigaud-Drayton is also interested in identity, citing "Apollinaire's writings as a synecdoche for the self" (134) and she discusses elliptical gaps as "insights into what cannot be put into words: the forbidden fruit of knowledge which is the self" (141). Not only is the space created between the details of space and language, but it is also created through a "silent haunting of immigrant texts," which Rigaud-Drayton connects to Julia Kristeva's thought (133). In "Text-Image Relations in French and Spanish Surrealist Literary Reviews from the 1920s and 1930s" Alicia Kent puts space into the text by looking at the Surrealist literary review as an alternative to a physical museum. Highlighting a need for space, culture, and a movement that was found in the text itself, Kent posits that "*L'Amic de les Arts*'s failed attempt at building a 'concrete' cultural location only serves to highlight the success of their 'paper' space" (147). With an interesting discussion of cultural products and *bricolage* in the reviews, Kent's angle is simultaneously far-reaching and detailed in her treatment of a medium between literature and art. In "How to Read a Poetic Photo-Text" Joanna Madloch also works in this space by regarding carefully poetry's and photography's connections to each other. Madloch's success in convincing us of such through the discussion of only three poems — chosen for their titles containing the word "photograph" — is through her structured focus on the themes of time, "I," and death. The added naming of her method as "phototextuality ... to describe works which juxtapose literature and photography" and the use of "titology" give a creative and carefully constructed frame of reference (157). As in Derrida's "Before the Law," the titles in the selected poems are privileged as essential pieces of information which re-shape the way readers approach the text. The strength in this section overall is the structured approach that allows for illuminations within the few pages of each chapter.

Perhaps this structure is most needed in discussion of multimedia and digital texts, as are discussed in the final set of articles in this volume. In Part Five — "Multimedia Encounters"— Svetlana Nikitina's "Constructivist and Futurist Multimedia Experiments in Russian Poetry" and Emile Fromet de Rosnay's "Science and Symptom from Mallarmé to the Digital Poet" introduce several new frameworks into the dialogue: the former begins with a brief historical discussion of Russian futurism and constructivism to then talk about hypertext, fiction, and poetry together. What follows is an interesting look at these texts in relation to language, time, and space. Several

subheadings break down the way the text may be an image, texture, tone, talk, toy, database, or tool thus directing the reader for a few moments into that analytical realm. Fromet de Rosnay's article bridges the humanities and sciences in a look at, for example, language, the uncanny, and the biological in hypertexts and leads us toward what he sees as our current need to use scientific approaches as we interpret digital texts: "the challenge when analyzing electronic media or digitally produced texts is to find approaches that avoid the lure of objectivism while remaining anchored in the materiality of its production" (194). His ensuing discussion of utilizing an interdisciplinary approach can be read as a conclusion to the entire book.

As a whole, the organization of *Text and Image in Modern Europe Culture* into five thematic sections plus a thematic bibliography at the end of the volume allow for intertextual reading within the work itself, as well as through further exploration in the suggested texts. Further, the insertion of author profiles for each contributor provides access for continuing communication and reflects the diverse range of scholars in dialogue, including the disciplines: comparative literature, cultural studies, comparative cultural studies, German literature, French literature, fashion theory, classics, and US-American studies. One may critique that the book takes us in too many directions where even the one specific component of the title, "modern," is stretched in its reference. However, the careful selection of historical references, images, and often the full text of selected poetry allow access into the authors' argumentation, as well as room for further scholarly work with the starting point of these allusions and the bibliography.

In conclusion, the two works reviewed here provide welcomed additions to the interdisciplinary approach in comparative humanities. Scholars within the discipline, as well as those who may find ties through various fields of scholarship will find both interesting reflections and possible ways to enter this approach of many crossroads. The books ask us to move toward new cultural contexts, and even new media while still grounding our understanding in historical frameworks. Each trace histories of particular philosophies, seemingly in the hope that those who have abandoned theory will go back to some of the theorists they use to allow us to look more closely and understand more about individuals (including ourselves) through a paradoxically close relationship with the artistic medium. These books remind us that theory can help us to see and appreciate context and to find new meaning in works from the past, new connections between media, and continue toward new knowledge.

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