

Writing and Sound as Image

How can writing, sound, and the realms of sensory perception associated with them be translated into images? Transformations between different media lead—not only in picture book art—to new forms of artistic creativity.

Whereas in everyday life writing as a medium is, as it were, disappearing as the visual counterpart to spoken language, picture books often draw attention to the pictorial qualities of writing. Of especial charm are artistic compositions in which the boundaries between image and writing are deliberately blurred. Analogous to reversible images, the forms presented can be read either as letters or as representations of objects (as in the two alphabet books *Dessine-moi une lettre* and *Alphabetville*). But writing—and thus language as visual material—can also be used to create figurative worlds: a billowing sea constructed of texts and letters (*A Child of Books*), or the architecture of buildings and streets (*Bruits*).

But what about acoustic phenomena? Here too the possibilities of transposing these into visual representations are many and varied: “sound words” graphically process sounds into visual material and express them through colors combined with a range of materials (*Quelle couleur a le vent?*) or captured in abstract forms (*L’orage*). The two examples of a vocal composition by Cathy Berberian (*Stripsody*) demonstrate the broad spectrum of “graphic notations.”

Books that move between different media offer a range of receptive modalities: they can be enjoyed as picture books, read as books composed of symbols, or interpreted tonally—imaginatively or performatively—as musical scores.