

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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**The Text Between the Visual and the Written – From a Cultural Criticism Perspective**

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**Abstract:**

Through this study, we seek to clarify the features of the shift from the written text to the visual text from a cultural criticism perspective. This shift has established the foundations of the image and reinforced its status as a complete semantic system. The study clarifies the nature of this transgressive shift, as the transition from the written to the visual is not a rupture but rather a transcendence and overcoming. This is because the foundation of human knowledge is based on the principle of accumulation and transcendence.

**Keywords:** Visual text; Written text; Cultural criticism; Image culture; Transcendence.

**Introduction:**

With the advent of semiotics, the field of literature witnessed an opening between the sciences and their mutual benefit. A number of forgotten and marginalized discourses entered the realm of literature, including the image, which became a subject of semiotic research when the American scholar Charles Sanders Peirce called for the study of everything except as a semiotic study. Semiotics thus became a fertile field and an effective strategic approach to reading that deals with both the linguistic and the non-linguistic. It is the science that examines systems of signs, whether linguistic, iconic, or kinetic. Therefore, while linguistics studies linguistic systems, semiotics explores non-linguistic signs that arise within society (1). Hence, the focus shifted to the non-linguistic after the previous dominance was over the linguistic. The semiotic researcher's pen extended to the study of the image in all its forms.

Research that supports and elevates the visual did not stop with semiotics alone. With technological development, a broad activity called "cultural criticism" emerged in the literary arena. This activity gave significant prominence to the field of the image and worked to draw attention to and promote it. Its prominence is evident in numerous seminars and critical works, in calls for attention to be drawn to forgotten and marginalized discourses that possess a formidable power to influence the recipient. It has become "the greatest popular art of our time, the cradle of modern mythologies, a daily cultural sphere, and an eternal reference point for certain patterns of popular culture" (2). It is the mirror capable of portraying the culture of the age and presenting it to the public in the shortest possible time.

The great attention and meticulous care given to the visual discourse have made it a cultural system for its creator's environment. This is what we will attempt to present in this article, entitled "The Text Between the Visual and the Written – From the Perspective of Cultural Criticism," with the aim of clarifying the shift and its circumstances.

To explore this topic, we will attempt to answer a number of questions, most notably the following:

- 1 To what extent can the image displace the written text?
- 2 Is there a difference between the recipient of the text and the recipient of the image? Are they on the same level? 3- How did the transition from the written to the visual occur?

At the end of the twentieth century, cultural criticism emerged in the literary scene. This discourse attempted to interpret the changes of the era and map the dominant intellectual shift at the end of the 1980s. After a series of preparatory steps and developments, its features were formed, and it became an established discourse with its own terminology and conceptual framework. It carries within it a set of principles, which we summarize in the following two axes:

- 1 Moving beyond the aesthetic towards the cultural.
- 2 The decline of the written and the rise of the visual.

This is the equation upon which the trajectory of cultural criticism is founded. However, what concerns us in this study is the second axis, namely, examining the process of transition from the written to the visual.

After a long period of development in the cultural sphere, a number of achievements were established, such as cultural studies, new historicism, cultural criticism, the technological novel, and the urban reader. These early attempts revealed a new way of thinking and created a different awareness, paving the way

for the establishment of cultural criticism. Cultural criticism emerged with the renowned American critic Vincent Leitch, who coined the term "cultural criticism" for his project, specifically naming it as a synonym for postmodernism and post-structuralism (3). This was followed by a set of propositions and principles that heralded a new era and a different consciousness, one that elevates the visual above the written word. This shift hints at the end of the era of written language, whose presence was limited to a specific segment of society.

The image is a vast field, concerned with both the linguistic and the non-linguistic, engaging with the intellectual and the ordinary citizen, competing with and even surpassing the written word. So, how did the focus shift from the written word to the visual? From the written to the visual:

The written/visual dichotomy has generated much discussion under various names: linguistic/semiotic, written/visual, linear/visual. These dualistic poles converge in a single field, highlighting the presence and dominance of the image after the written word held sway in previous eras. Indeed, "if the twentieth century was the century of linguistics, then the twenty-first century is the age of the image par excellence" (4). Umberto Eco draws the dividing lines, openly acknowledging the end of the written era and welcoming a better and more powerful discourse capable of keeping pace with the developments of the age. Studies have unanimously agreed that the mechanism of human communication has undergone numerous stages. "The expressive forms in human culture have passed through four radical forms representing four different stages in human conception: the oral stage, then the written stage, followed by the stage of writing, and finally the stage of visual culture" (5). Here, the era witnessed a visual culture, the most sophisticated form of expression the age has reached. However, this form—the visual invasion—has shaped a contemporary consciousness that expresses On capitalism and freedom of expression, he discarded the concept of the elite and replaced it with the concept of the simple, popular people. One of the most important changes was the entry of broad segments of humanity into the world of cultural reception—those groups that were previously marginalized, either for cultural reasons related to their inability to purchase books and newspapers. This was evident in cultural circles when knowledge was confined to specific groups, and many were marginalized. This led to the emergence of cultural elites, on the fringes of which lay broad margins of illiterate people who were unaware of what was happening in the world of culture, which had been monopolized by writing styles (6). Expanding the circle of knowledge, which was previously limited to the elite class, is a demand of cultural criticism, and this was embodied with the advent of the image. Here, we observe the close relationship and significant support that cultural criticism provides for the advancement and elevation of the discourse of the image. It broke the boundaries of knowledge, making it accessible to everyone after having been limited to the upper classes of society. The common people were not fortunate enough to be among the recipients of expressive forms,

meaning that knowledge was confined to the elite. As Al-Ghadhami mentioned, this was due to a number of reasons, including the inability to access it. To remove this obstacle The star of visual discourse shone to remove the boundaries between classes and open the field to everyone. “The image came to break that cultural barrier and cultural distinction between groups, so it expanded the circles of reception and included all people, because receiving the image does not require proficiency in reading and it mostly does not require words at all. Here, groups that were not counted on the lists of cultural reception entered” (7). Everyone became one class when the different classes entered the sphere of communication, as the image is a discourse that attracts everyone and carries within its folds an image of societies with all their rituals, ideas and customs.

The intellectual and aesthetic aspects, and this is what the image broke and changed its conditions, as one can view any image without needing any language and does not need cultural or intellectual contexts to understand the image. This unleashed the possibilities of free interpretation, just as it expanded the circles of reception and made people equal in this regard, and the elite declined.”(13) This is the difference between written and visual culture. Each culture has its own audience and tools. The first is an elite audience whose material is language and is specialized, and the second is a broad audience that includes all segments of society and whose material is the image, the This style of imagery obscures an Arab culture that glorifies modesty. Here, we reveal the magical power of images to influence privacy, altering it and obscuring the characteristics of the other side, which in turn promotes a culture of modesty by publishing images of veiled women. Images of veiled women are increasingly prevalent in the public cultural sphere, in universities, markets, workplaces, and on television, where

some female presenters appear. cultural sign

other cultural symbols, has two sides: one aesthetically positive and the other ugly. We have seen that visual discourse has two functions:

**\*The first is positive:**

When communication patterns have been facilitated and cultures have become closer, the world has become a single village where each party showcases its unique characteristics and transmits its culture to others, leading to exchange and coexistence. And the interaction between different civilizations increases the sense of pride and boasting about each culture's heritage.

**\*The second is negative:**

When the powerful impose their culture indirectly on the weak, using images as a medium for intellectual invasion without the weak being aware of this control, they find themselves in a state of imitation and mimicry, which can lead to the loss of their original identity.

## **Conclusion:**

The twentieth century witnessed a wave of changes resulting from tremendous technological development, the effects of which extended to the field of literature, as critical discourse is an integral part of the human knowledge system.

Visual discourse emerged as a discourse of the age with its own lexicon. Its presence was amplified, and it was incorporated into the realm of semiotics, which established its themes and elevated its status.

The shift from the written to the visual embodied the pattern of consciousness and thought that characterized the twentieth century. It eliminated the intellectual, unified readers, and made the recipient a single entity, thus removing the boundaries between readers that existed with written discourse.

The relationship between the written and the visual is a relationship. It is integration, transcendence, and overcoming, not negation, severance, and amputation. Visual discourse emerged from the efforts of linguists and what they achieved. It took from the linguistic system a mediator for the success of the communication process. Thus, we saw the two functions performed by the linguistic system and the value it adds to visual discourse.

## **Research Notes:**

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14- Abdullah al-Ghadhami: Cultural Criticism: A Reading of Arab Cultural Patterns, p. 61.

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