

1 Shifts toward Image-Centricity in Contemporary Multimodal Practices

An Introduction

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1 Introduction

This volume explores image-centric practices in the contemporary media sphere, a space that images now dominate. It does this through the application of functional-linguistic, social semiotic, text/genre-linguistic and inter-/transtextual approaches to multimodality, and by drawing on both the established and the emerging research expertise of multimodality scholars from Europe and Australia. These scholars were invited to refine and broaden the general idea of image-centricity and put it to the test in a number of different mass/social media contexts, where language, text structure, and text-image relations are dominated and led by images. These include magazines, advertising, news, and social media platforms. We use the term *image* as a cover term to include a range of visuals: photographs, illustrations, visualizations, and new writing/typography. The resulting volume is a rich investigation of a range of contemporary multimodal practices, examining the relative status of image and language, visual aesthetics, multimodal cohesion/coherence, and the values and ideologies underpinning image selection and presentation.

In this chapter, we chart the path toward image-centricity and review the foundational research that has brought us to our current understanding of the role of images in the contemporary media sphere.

2 Shifts toward Image-Centricity in the Contemporary Media Sphere

What is perceivable as an *image-centric* contemporary media sphere is the result of a *shift* toward image-centricity that has taken place, most notably, since the 19th century. Spurred by the Industrial Revolution, but not solely contingent on technological advancements, visual modes have gradually moved toward the center of the semiosphere.

Conditions for image-centricity were initially set through the tremendous material-technological advances of the 20th century, both in the capture and reproduction of images. This has been further enhanced by the advent of computer technology and desktop publishing software that has inspired innovations in type-setting and page composition. A broad range of typefaces, typographical settings, scalable and movable text boxes, vector-based drawing and coloring tools, and now digitally processed photographs are used to create increasingly image-centric page spaces, often on the basis of standardized templates (Johnson & Prijatelj, 1999; see also Pflaeging, 2017a).

Sociocultural changes in the values associated with images have also contributed to the shift toward image-centricity. The affective value of the single still photograph, its ability to move public to action, emerged with the documentary photographers of the late 1800s to 1900s. The photography of PH Emerson and Ansel Adams, for example, became instrumental in advocating for improvements in urban living conditions and in the preservation of nature through the national parks system in the United States. Research by Perlmutter (1998) attributes the iconic status of certain news photographs to a range of editorial factors. These include institutional factors such as the photograph's place on the news agenda, repetition of use, and its transposability to other contexts. Coupled with this are image-internal factors such as the ability of a single photograph to sum up an issue (its metonymic function), its potential for cultural resonance, and its often striking composition. Such factors, along with the ability of an image to project the offer of the ideal, of perfection, have also contributed to the shift in advertising materials toward the visual.

The implications of advancements in technological innovation and in the sociocultural conditions facilitating shifts in the semiotic landscape toward the visual have long been noted by the contributors to this volume. In relation to journalism, Caple and Knox (2015, p. 292) have argued that “we have witnessed a fundamental shift towards visual story-telling”, and Bednarek and Caple (2012, p. 111) are convinced that “story structure has shifted and images now tend to dominate the verbal text”. Acknowledgment of the aesthetic function of photographs has also led to the rise of image-dominated news story genres in print news (Caple, 2013), while the templated structure of online news portals has facilitated an even wider range of roles for photographs in news story structure (see e.g., Knox, 2009a, 2009b; Caple & Knox, 2017). Similarly, contemporary magazines and advertising materials have taken advantage of both technical and cultural shifts to become more image-centric.

The case of the popular science magazine *National Geographic* vividly illustrates the ‘rise of the image’ afforded by socio-cultural and material-technological developments. In a small-scale study on the development

of *National Geographic* feature articles, Pflaeging (2017a, 2017b) shows that, even though the image-per-page ratio has decreased from 0.91 in 1915 to 0.53 images per page in 2015, the layout space taken up by images increased significantly between 1915 and 2015. In particular, the pattern of covering a double-page solely with an image-caption-cluster has emerged from an insignificant 2.4 percent of the compositional designs in use to a prominent 57.8 percent by 2015.

Similarly, Durrani (2017, p. 163) observes a considerable shift in the size of images in the magazine *Time Asia*. In the 1980s, less than one percent of images took up a full page to two pages. In the 2000s, this figure increased to 7.5 percent, and overall, 26 percent of the images were used at half a page or larger (7 percent in the 1980s). This shift in image size has been accompanied by the aestheticization of image composition (making use of more axially composed images) and by evolving page design strategies in which images, headlines, stand-first text, and negative space interact much more meaningfully with each other, to create an evaluative stance on the story.

Print advertising is another example of a genre whose history reflects a clear shift toward image-centricity (cf. Stöckl, 2014b, pp. 94–98). Long and descriptive-argumentative copy containing simple illustrations of products or their use gave way to graphic spaces that are dominated by artfully designed images and minimal text, which must directly engage with visual image elements to produce a rhetorically complex, multimodal, pictorial argumentation (Kjeldsen, 2012). When in the past it was semantically subordinated to the text, now the image leads in an anchoring or complementary text-image relation, often appropriating and re-contextualizing images that, at first sight, do not seem to be commercially relevant. Molnar (2018, n.p.) calls this modern multimodal format ‘minimalistic reminder’ to highlight its reduced semiotic form and functionality. Stöckl (2017b, p. 74) emphasizes the visually rich, semantically ambiguous, pragmatically underdetermined, and rhetorically complex nature of modern ads when he calls them ‘enigmatic’ or ‘en-riddled’.

Finally, while increasingly affordable digital cameras have inspired non-professional photographers and text producers since the 1990s, it was the more widespread use of camera phones since the 2010s that has made capturing the everyday in images a common daily routine. The advent of social media platforms, that have, to an increasing extent, afforded the *share-ability* or *curate-ability* (Pflaeging, 2015, in press) of online content, and the emergence of online audiences who take quick scrolls through their Facebook timelines, Instagram and Twitter feeds have made image-centric updates a preferred choice for social online interaction (Adami & Jewitt, 2016).

Possibly the most effective way of summing up the shift toward image-centricity is to demonstrate this through a visualization. Figure 1.1 presents a diachronic snapshot of the shift toward image-centricity

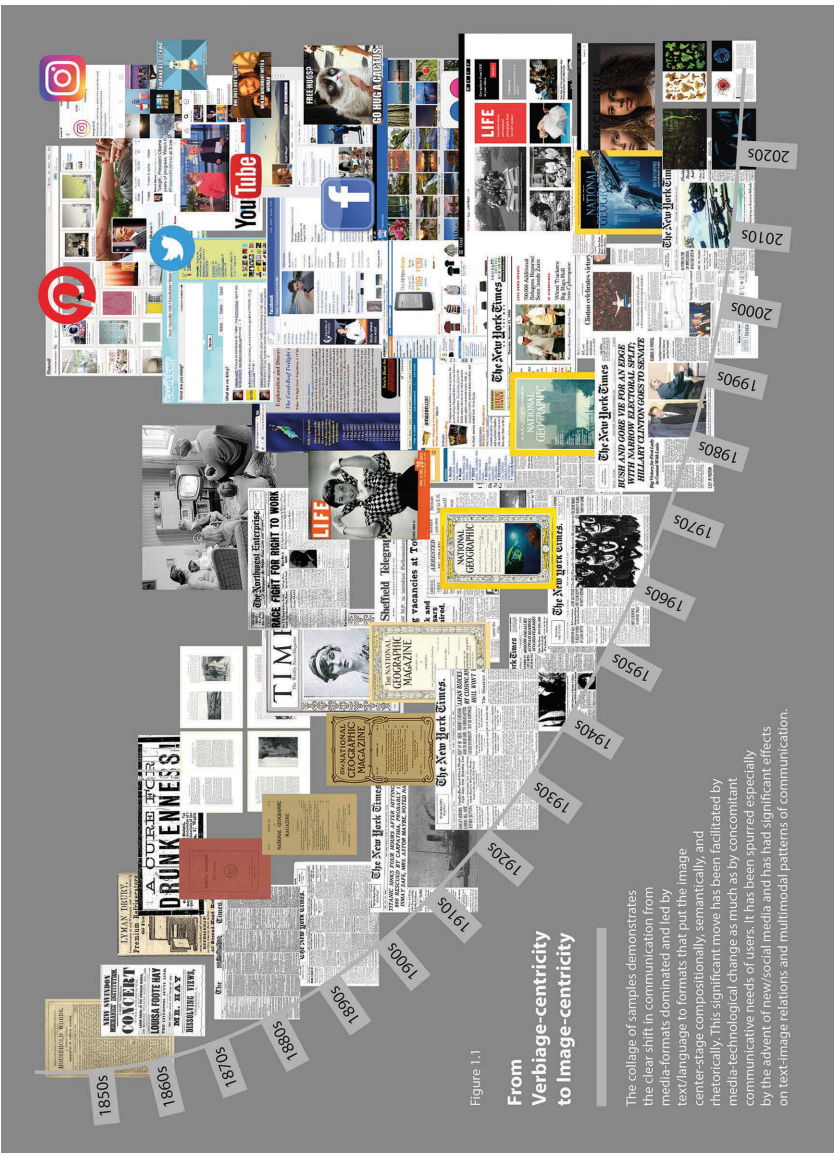


Figure 1.1 From verbiage-centricity to image-centricity.

among the data studied for this volume. Alongside this sits the emergence of new visually-dominated digital media at the turn of the 21st century. Such richly varied and complex modal ensembles in former and contemporary media spheres offer fertile ground for the exploration of image-centric practices, and the contributions to this volume take on this task. In doing so, they build upon the foundational research into multimodality and image-centric practices that precedes this volume.

3 Researching Image-Centric Multimodal Practices

3.1 *From Image Nuclearity to Image-Centricity*

As Stöckl (2015b, pp. 51–52) notes, the concepts and methods deployed in research on multimodality generally emanate from text linguistics and semiotics and have been mapped onto multimodal phenomena. One such approach stemming from the study of the functional structure of verbiage-centric news reporting (Feez, Iedema, & White, 2008) is Caple's (2008, 2013) works on the functional structure of image-nuclear news stories. The prominent position of image and headline in such texts has been posited to build a propositional nucleus and provide a perceptual and cognitive anchor (in) to the text, which also affects the evaluative stance taken and the (news) values a media story will encode. Accompanying text is dependent on this image-headline nucleus, as it functions to elaborate and extend pictorial content and to disambiguate the visual-verbal play that such stories tend to foreground (Caple, 2013).

While Caple's notion of *image nuclearity* relates to the functional structure of a particular type of news story, it is inextricably linked to a broader communicative trend in popular forms of mass media. In this volume, we broaden the scope of this term and redefine it as *image-centricity* in order to account for its potential as a large-scale multimodal design strategy with far-reaching effects on text structure and perception.

3.2 *What Exactly is Image-Centricity?*

An explanation of image-centricity works best by exploring the concept in relation to some of the mainstream thinking on text-image relations (cf. Bateman, 2014). *Text-image relations* are understood here as discourse, where "the two modes appear separate yet integrated in both semantics and form" (Martinec & Salway, 2005, p. 338) and "act as a single unit of composition" (Bateman, 2014, p. 28) that constitutes a functional communicative act intentionally designed by a text-maker and consciously attended to by a recipient. Most importantly, arguing that images become dominant and central in a multimodal text implies a shift in the general balance of modes, which is the default assumption in

multimodality research. That all modes contribute in their own way and in this sense ‘equally’ to the overall textual meaning has been expressed in a number of terms, such as ‘mutual elaboration’ of modes (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O’Halloran, 2016, p. 91), ‘dialogicity’ of signs (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 111), ‘co-determination’ of meaning (Spillner, 1982, qtd. in Bateman, 2014, p. 37), ‘complementarity’ or ‘synergy’ (Royce, 1998), and ‘meaning multiplication’ (Bateman, 2014, pp. 5–7). In contrast, image-centricity clearly implies that images become the superordinate mode in a multimodal text, that the directionality of mode elaboration is from image to text/language, and that the modes have different ‘modal intensity’ or ‘weight’ (Norris, 2014, p. 90).

Such mode differences and their varying relative importance have been conceptualized in the term ‘status relations’ (cf. Martinec & Salway, 2005, pp. 343–349). Clearly, any image-centric text or genre primarily entails ‘unequal status’, and revisiting Barthes’ (1964/1977) original terminology, we can classify image-centricity as a text-image relation of ‘anchorage’. Here, mutual mode elaboration is led by a superordinate image, whereas the reverse case, verbiage- or text-centricity corresponds to Barthes’ (1964/1977) ‘illustration’ that implies a direction of mode elaboration from a text to a subordinate image. Martinec and Salway (2005, p. 344) point to the fact that when a text has the leading superordinate status, the image relates to only part of the text, whereas when the image has the leading superordinate status, the text may relate to the whole image or parts of it only. The more strongly image-centric genres, it seems, would be relating a text to an image in its semantic and functional entirety, whereas in weaker forms of image-centricity text may only involve relations to individual image elements.

In addition to an interpretation of image-centricity as *unequal status relations*, with the superordinate image leading mutual mode elaboration, image-centric discourse can also be seen as a special case of *equal status relations*. Martinec and Salway (2005, p. 343) say that “when an image and a text are joined equally and modify one another, their status is considered complementary”. This ‘equal/complementary’ status relation is realized by a whole text and a whole image “combining to form part of a larger syntagm” (Martinec & Salway, 2005, p. 344). Equal and complementary status relation echoes Barthes’ (1964/1977, p. 41) classic ideas of *relay* in that “the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story [...]”. It is interesting to see that while Barthes (1964/1977, p. 41) clearly distinguishes relay from *anchorage* (and illustration), he also understood that “the two functions [...] can co-exist”. Finally, a wider view of image-centricity as set out and endorsed here must rule out only equal and independent status relations, where “there are no signs of one [mode] modifying the other” (Martinec & Salway, 2005, p. 343).

In our conceptualization of image-centric genres, the most vital element appears to be what Martinec and Salway (2005, p. 345) have called ‘text subordination’. In other words, image-centric text-image relations construct a compositional unity of the two modes that is characterized either by an elaboration of the image through text or by a mutual co-elaboration of image and text in a complementary fashion. Consequently, text subordination to us may mean both a semantic centrality of the image that allows it to lead the interpretation of the multimodal text, and a perceptual dominance or salience given to the image that makes it the textual ‘entry point’ for reading paths and meaning construal. In any case, for an effective elaboration or complementary modification of the superordinate image-meaning to be achieved by the text, linguistic elements are paramount that directly relate to the image and can perhaps only be understood in relation to it. This means that, in image-centric texts, we need to look primarily at deictic elements pointing to the image and at any further expressions that construe intersemiotic cohesion between text and image. How rich and strong are such cohesive chains or networks? What types of ties are there, and which semantic function do they perform? These and other questions need to be raised about image-centricity.

Tracing the theory of text-image relations from its early semiotic beginnings (Barthes, 1964/1977) through systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 1985/1994) to multimodality research (Bateman, 2014; Bateman, Wildfeuer, & Hiippala, 2017) also brings up inherent connections between *status* and the *logico-semantic relations of modes*. It was Martinec and Salway (2005, p. 341) who point out that Barthes’ classic unequal status relations of anchorage and illustration can be seen as cases of *elaboration*, where information in one mode is restated or specified/generalized in the other. They differ in the directionality of the elaboration – from text to image (illustration), from image to text (anchorage). The equal status relation of complementary *relay*, on the other hand, exemplifies both *extension*, that is, one mode adding semantically unrelated information to the other, and *enhancement*, that is, one mode qualifying circumstantial info for the other mode. Caple (2013, pp. 130–137), for instance, has shown that in image-centric news stories text accompanying a leading, superordinate image may engage in all three logico-semantic relations. Alongside the specifics of cohesive ties, the logical-semantic functionality of text in image-centric genres should form a major trajectory of research into image-centricity.

Two final points are important to note in relation to a concept of image-centricity. Both raise a critical awareness of the value and reliability of taxonomic approaches to text-image relations, as outlined earlier. The first concerns the ways in which “layout affect[ed] the relationship between image and writing” (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 80). Bateman (2014, p. 28) touches on the same issue when he points to “the single unit”

or “joint composition” of image and text that are “intentionally co-present”. Apart from acknowledging the decisive influence of the organization of the multimodal graphic space on semantic construal, he also cautions that “recipients will take from the material on offer what they need in order to get some interpretative task done” (Bateman, 2014, p. 20). This means status and logico-semantics in text-image relation are relative to the text-recipient and are ultimately “task-driven” (Bateman, 2014, p. 20). The second point abstracts from the first and has far-reaching implications. In many ways it would seem justified to distinguish structural text-image relations as deployed in the multimodal text from reconstructed or inferred ones as instantiated by the recipient in a concrete situation (cf. Bateman, 2014, p. 45). If this duality is adequate, the consequence in analysis would be to “not only address [...] text-image relationships as a taxonomic exercise, setting out catalogues of possible connections, but also consider what these relationships are intended to do” (Bateman, 2014, p. 47).

4 Overview of the Book

Our edited volume seeks to explore the notion of *image-centricity* both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective while employing synchronic and diachronic approaches to analysis. We look at all kinds of genres across different media where language, text structure, and text-image relations are dominated and led by images. As noted earlier, we also aim to move beyond the traditional understanding of *image* as ‘photograph’ to include a range of visuals (photographs, illustrations, visualizations, new writing/typography, among others) that dominate text, although we retain the term *image* as a cover term.

The volume comprises 11 chapters contributed by established and emerging multimodality scholars from Australia, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The case studies they present draw on the contributors’ wide experience in researching magazine genres, advertising discourse, news discourse, social media discourse, multimedia storytelling, and new writing. The chapters are organized around four key objectives: an exploration of advances in theory and methodology (Part 1 of this book), historical developments in image-centric practices (Part 2), the relative status of image and language (Part 3), and image-centric practices as a design strategy (Part 4).

4.1 Part 1: Advances in Theory

Designating current media practices as image-centric presupposes a theory to describe and explain this multimodal trend. First, the concept itself must be fleshed out in detail: What are its defining criteria? How does image-centricity affect semantics and the form of text-image relations?

What are the genre variations in different media? Second, we must ask in which ways the typography, layout, and materiality of the textual artifacts drive and shape image-centricity in the age of new writing (cf. van Leeuwen, 2008; Stöckl, 2014a). Third, image-centric multimodal texts also raise inter- and transtextual questions (cf. Klug, 2016): How do dominant images become frequent points of reference in intertextual relations? How do such images form the fabric of entire discourses? In how far are they instrumental in developing arguments or conveying viewpoints and evaluations? Such questions are explored in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Hartmut Stöckl revisits the notion of *image nuclearity* and provides both theoretical argument and empirical evidence for renegotiating the concept's position in relation to a distinctly broader idea of image-centricity. His corpus study of 103 illustrated news stories (sampled from 33 issues of several German- and English-language print newspapers) enables him to identify *Preview*, *Story Intro*, *Editorial*, *Explainer*, and *Gallery* as genres that, just as the image-nuclear news story, employ an image as central element. Noticeable differences in the communicative work accomplished by the image components, however, justify their status as distinct members of an *image-centric genre family*. Drawing on the results of his own and previous related work, Stöckl concludes his chapter by presenting a comprehensive overview of criteria (grouped under the headings of *news type*, *thematic structure*, *layout*, *image type*, *text-image relations*), which can be applied to map out in further detail the broad terrain of an image-centric genre space.

Nina-Maria Klug raises our awareness of prominent news images that have come to constitute the anchor points of entire discourses. She thereby uncovers a transtextual dimension of the concept of *image-centricity*. From a detailed discussion of discursive moves related to the international reception of Nilüfer Demir's photograph of the dead refugee boy Aylan Kurdi, which has appeared on social media, TV, newspaper front pages, but also on graffiti walls, Klug derives a typology of direct intertextual reference to images that have emerged as discursive focal points. In particular, covering both intra- and intermodal constellations, Klug elaborates on cases of *image quotation*, *transcription*, *resemiotization*, *indexing*, *meta-textualization*, and *transformation*. Based on this typology and the analysis that informed it, Klug not only provides a solid framework with which the transtextual dimension of image-centricity can be studied systematically, but also makes a strong case for seeing established notions such as *inter-* and *transtextuality* in a new – *image-centric* – light.

Theo van Leeuwen's contribution is based on the observation that 'new' forms of writing are on the rise whose meaning making relies heavily on contributions from inherently *visual semiotic resources*, such as shape, color, texture of letter forms, or the configuration of textual components on a page. This phenomenon, he argues, could be seen

as yet another dimension of image-centricity. After discussing several digital and non-digital examples of *new writing*, he turns to diagrammatic templates, which, due to their conventionalized navigation devices and structural composition, can encourage narrative or conceptual readings. Van Leeuwen interprets his findings against the backdrop of wider socio-cultural contexts. In particular, he assumes functionality/standardization and identity/uniqueness to be two somewhat opposed driving forces of semiotic change. He also considers a striving for aesthetic appeal, a shift from naturalistic representation to modeling, and a declining importance of ‘the interpersonal’ as further impacting factors. All of these phenomena are regarded as defining characteristics of new writing, which, at the same time, play a crucial role in an ongoing ‘marketization’ of discourse.

4.2 Part 2: Historical Developments in Image-Centric Practices

The current move toward image-centricity represents a shift in the semiotic landscape of media communication. This implies diachronic change, which is also worth addressing in any theoretical and empirical investigation of multimodal genres. Such research (cf. Pflaeging, 2017a, 2017b; Stöckl, 2017a) needs to show how media and their genres developed from being mainly writing/print and displaying verbiage-nuclear (Caple, 2013, pp. 142–174) multimodality to using image-centric practices. This angle can shed light on changes both in the types and visual composition of images and on shifts in pictorial functionality. Such historical work also promotes our understanding of those factors that have possibly driven the trend toward image-centricity.

Jana Pflaeging investigates the popular science monthly *National Geographic*, a magazine known for its ‘image-heavy’ journalism, with a focus on the development of the illustrated journalistic short-form genre *Visions* and the communicative circumstances of its emergence in 2004. Configuring nothing but a large, rhetorically central image and a caption on a double-page spread, it lends itself to an exploration of the applicability of *image nuclearity* beyond the realms of hard news reportage. Moving from an analysis of *Visions* in 2015 to a diachronic study of its 2005-predecessor *Visions of Earth*, and from there to an investigation of *Feature Articles* (1985, 1995, 2005, 2015), Pflaeging seeks to shed light on the defining characteristics of *image nuclearity* as construed in other media and genres, and with a view to various developmental stages. Her findings suggest, among other things, the importance of an image’s compositional dominance, leading to the conclusion that a theory of image nuclearity can be fruitfully broadened under the heading of image-centricity.

Showing a similar interest in increasingly illustrated print magazine spreads, Sameera Durrani reports on key findings from her longitudinal study of *Time Asia*, in particular, 840 photographs featured in its news coverage of Pakistan and Iran. Through a re-application and expansion of frameworks originally put forth for a social-semiotic analysis of image content and composition, Durrani draws out six distinct configurations of central images (single or several) and related verbal units (e.g., headlines, captions, stand-firsts) that have evolved over 30 years of the magazine's publishing history. In all cases, certain representational choices are coupled with compositional ones, for example, when two horizontally aligned images of politicians facing each other convey a sense of confrontation and dispute. Due to their general prevalence in the data set, Durrani assumes that such image-centric configurations function as perceptually salient previews to the content of an adjacent news story and proposes to term them *compositional narrative devices*.

4.3 Part 3: The Relative Status of Image and Language

This book shares Caple's (2013, pp. 130–137) view that determining both *experiential orientation* and *contextual extension* in the captions and specifying their nature is a fruitful way of looking at text functions in relation to the image. This can be refined and adapted to suit the needs of different genres by adding various text linguistic or rhetorical angles of analysis. How exactly the two text functions of describing the central image(s) and extending its/their context are realized linguistically is a prime objective here. The three contributions in this section also afford some insight into how types of media and genres shape and constrain text-image relations.

In her chapter, Helen Caple investigates communicative practices on *Instagram*, a social media platform that is inherently image-centric, with a view to the realization of speaker roles and point of view as construed in the visual and verbal components of the posts. Her analysis of 92 posts made in relation to the 2016 Australian federal elections sheds light on the *logico-semantic relations* between the image and verbiage, the overall functions they serve, and the similarities they bear to captioning practices in news discourse, comic book writing, and photo-album sharing. Given the particularity of her data, that is, posts by dog owners and/or their dogs collected under *#dogsatpollingstations*, Caple is able to draw out subtle shifts in the conflation and separation of speaker roles between pets and their owners that put different demands on the work of image and verbiage in meaning making.

Like Caple's contribution to this section, Christina Siever and Torsten Siever's chapter enriches our understanding of image-centric practices on the social media platform *Instagram*. Their particular focus, however,

is on *emoji-text relations* in the captions of *Instagram* posts. Scrutinizing a corpus of 6,142 posts, they discover that emojis frequently replace parts of an otherwise verbally expressed proposition. When standing in for nouns, verbs, adjectives, or prepositional phrases, and, in some cases, even complex propositions, emojis take over functions usually performed by writing. The authors posit, however, that emojis cannot be equated with writing either, but rather preserve a potential for iconic and symbolic meaning making and thereby blur the usual distinction between writing and image, a phenomenon the authors capture with the term *iconographic communication*.

Michele Zappavigna turns to *image macros* as image-centric Internet memes designed to traverse various communicative contexts and to proliferate across social media platforms and beyond. Her particular interest lies in the visual-verbal co-construction of intersubjectivity and the quoted voice. Using the example of *and then he said*-image macros, Zappavigna raises awareness of the complexity of multimodal projection induced through practices of user-based content curation. Expanding previous work in systemic functional linguistics and social semiotics, she presents methodological tools to tease apart the diverse *intermodal ties* between the obligatory and central image, its superimposed caption, the posts into which the meme may be embedded, and further tags and responses. In this context, she probes particular cases of reference resolution which show that a strict alignment of coherence and cohesion measures can be easily dispensed with in social media communication – on platforms that prioritize intersubjectivity to encourage participation and even contribution to what Zappavigna calls an *unfolding social stream*.

4.4 Part 4: Image-Centric Practices as Global Design Strategies

Finally, if we posit and describe a trend toward *multimodal image nuclearization* in current media practices, that is, an ever effective combination of headlines/captions and large, central, and dominant images, we must ask what general design strategies and multimodal techniques are at work in image-centricity and also what forces drive such processes of genre development. Likely candidates to be considered here are a desire for an increased perceptual salience and faster traversal of genres, a greater selectivity of reading, an atomization of text items in a medium, as well as the de-linearization of pages and the creation of visual tableaux (cf. Knox, 2007 and Pflaeging, 2017b for some of these issues). Such choices may also be motivated by the values and ideological positioning the media products share with their audiences.

The contribution of John S. Knox investigates *news apps* on tablet devices, which have, in recent years, gained currency as outlets for news institutions to reach audiences. In particular, he draws attention to the

unique design possibilities offered by their comparatively larger screens and further technological affordances. Rooted in the tradition of previous social-semiotic work on news design, Knox examines 12 English-language news apps from Australia, the UK, and the USA, with a view to the overall *visual design of the page*, and the use of images as functional components of a news story. On the basis of these distinctions and his findings, Knox proposes to reserve the term *image-nuclear* for cases in which an image is an obligatory element of a (news story) genre, and to establish *image-centric* as a superordinate term for cases in which images are essential design elements of texts – regardless of their status as a genre component.

Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, Kay L. O'Halloran, Rebecca Lange, Kevin Chai, and Michael Wiebrands explore image-centric design strategies pursued by the violent-extremist organization of ISIS in the production of their online propaganda magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. Their analysis, firmly couched in the tradition of systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis, reveals that images central to propaganda purposes are not only textually prominent layout elements but are charged with interpersonal meanings. Through processes of iconization, pictorial elements such as heroes, relics, scripture, or enacted creeds evolve into *bonding icons* that convey values inextricably linked to an extremist world view. Due to their reduced ideational meaning, such images are open to multiple interpretations and lend themselves to a *re-contextualization* across mainstream and social media platforms. Here, they distribute swiftly and widely as image-centric anchor points of entire discourses – findings that, in some respects, also echo Klug's research. The authors conclude by suggesting innovative ways of utilizing automated image analysis to, ultimately, also support actions against a continuing legitimization of extremist mind-sets and an incitement of further violence.

Martin Engebretsen's chapter acknowledges the central role that image-centric, *stand-alone data visualizations* have come to play in contemporary data-driven news media discourse. In his analysis of two sample graphics taken from a Norwegian tabloid news site, he combines concepts from several strands of research (social semiotics, but also cross-disciplinary work on data visualization). In particular, he teases apart the complex – and in some respect idiosyncratic – workings of multimodal meaning making on an ideational, interpersonal, and compositional level. Evolving from this discussion, he raises awareness of the new forms of media literacy that the comprehension of such image-centric visualizations require. Tying his argument to even broader questions of the development of journalistic practice, Engebretsen discusses *datafication*, *visualization*, and *digitization* as possible driving forces behind the rise of stand-alone data visualizations, and the repercussions their growing prevalence may have on other journalistic genres.

The volume also features short commentaries by John A. Bateman, Martin Luginbühl, Carey Jewitt, and Teal Triggs.

5 Concluding Remarks

In sum, the principle aim of this volume is to explore image-centric practices in the contemporary media sphere. It argues that a greater reliance of text producers on visuals has repercussions on the *genre space* (Bateman, 2014, p. 70) of a medium and leads to new multimodal genres (and *genre repertoires*, cf. Stöckl, 2017a) with novel and specific *text-image relations* (Stöckl, 2015a, pp. 239–241). We also take into consideration the social context in which contemporary media genres are produced, acknowledging a number of driving forces that shape this trend toward image-centricity, for example, a concern with visual aesthetics, an increase in perceptual and cognitive salience, the values and ideologies underpinning image selection, a de-linearization and atomization of media content, and the creation of visual tableaux. We hope that it inspires future scholars to continue to research the vital role that images play in the shaping of our cultural conscience.

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