



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



A Picture is Still Worth a Thousand Words

Eric D. Barreto, *Princeton Theological Seminary (formerly at Luther Seminary)*

Blog Series: Stories from the Front

February 10, 2015

Tags: teaching with media | teaching with the arts | student learning

I teach texts. I read texts. I write texts. Every once in a great while, I even text texts. But I've noticed recently that many more of the texts I receive have fewer and fewer actual words. I'm talking acronyms certainly (LOL and lots more I haven't figured out yet) but also emoticons and pictures and videos. More and more, we are communicating with images as much as we are with written language.[1]

The explosion of social media services like Instagram, which eschew text and embraces images, is



"Perspective" by Gabriela Pinto, <https://flic.kr/p/e731E2>

changing our communication patterns. When words, status updates, and tweets previously proved sufficient, images and pictures now take pride of place. Surely, we are in the middle of a revolution in how we communicate.

As one blogger pointed out in 2011, "Every 2 minutes today we snap as many photos as the whole of humanity took in the 1800s. In fact, ten percent of all the photos we have were taken in the past 12 months."^[2]

Let that sink in for a moment.

We are taking more pictures today than ever. And the scale of growth is exponential.



"Death by Powerpoint" by Robert-Jan Geerts
<https://flic.kr/p/1StiH5>

What are the pedagogical implications of this easy access to cameras and photos? What does it mean that more and more of us express our sense of identity, self, and relationships with the pictures that we post rather than the statuses we write? A culture that is as comfortable behind a viewfinder (or at the end of a selfie stick) as it is behind a keyboard will draw us to important questions about identity, teaching, and learning.

So, what might attention to visual learning look like in our classrooms? The first instinct of many a teacher might be to turn to Powerpoint. And yet we have all experienced—and dare I

say, inflicted—death by Powerpoint, that strange situation in which the slides are more interesting than the speaker or the slides lack any sense of design and aesthetic or the slides reproduce every word the teacher will speak. But we can do better, much better, I hope.^[3]

But these questions go beyond the medium of instruction or the latest ways we can project images in our classrooms. There may be a more crucial shift happening in learning styles that cannot be addressed simply via the use of projection technologies.

Instead, what if we wonder about how visual media and textual cultures intersect in our classrooms and in our teaching? What if course design strives toward aesthetics as a pedagogical value? What will visual modes of communication look like in the future? What skills, habits, and wisdom are most needed when we “speak” with the pictures we share?

[1] See
<http://www.npr.org/2015/02/07/384108640/alphabetical-tells-the-story-behind-every-letter-a-to-z>.

^[2] <http://blog.1000memories.com/94-number-of-photos-ever-taken-digital-and-analog-in-shoebox>

^[3] See e.g. Nancy Duarte, *slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2008) and Garr Reynolds, *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2011).

<https://wabash.center/2015/02/a-picture-is-still-worth-a-thousand-words/>