

Preface

Envisioning Collaboration traces key composing processes of some outstanding writers and artists involved in an advertising agency's successful struggle to prepare technical marketing communication—lawn mower ad campaigns—and present them in a “pitch” to retain the business of a vital national account. Artist-writer teams using aesthetics, humor, and rhetorical moxie to prepare numerous verbal-visual pieces are described and analyzed in the context of this real, successful, integrated technical marketing campaign. The advertising agency site is explained as a system of creativity or community of practice.

Our time demands this research because technology has made verbal-visual composing widespread; collaboration is typically entailed in professional verbal-visual composing, and much money is being invested in verbal-visual communication: print advertisement revenues for magazines alone brought the advertising industry well over \$23 billion in 2008 (Publishers' Information Bureau, 2009).

No other book to date presents an ethnographic thick description of verbal-visual composing processes. *Envisioning Collaboration* is qualitative research based upon 460 hours of participant observations and over 7,000 hours of subsequent research. The meticulous depiction of composing processes in their social contexts of production and reception allows much more accurate and informed teaching, training, and practice of verbal-visual collaboration, useful for teachers, researchers, students, and practitioners from a number of disciplines involved with verbal-visual composing. Disciplines particularly involved include technical and business communication, rhetoric and composition, advertising (strategic communication), psychology (collective mind, psychological types, situated cognition), communication (large group and dyadic research, media theory, verbal and visual imagery), graphic design and education (computers [desktop publishing] in education). Technical writers and artists; advertising creatives; and other corporate editors, writers, and artists, trainers, and writing consultants can learn many useful approaches from such a study of verbal-visual composing to fulfill rhetorical strategy.

Although applicable to all subjects of verbal-visual composing, *Envisioning Collaboration* focuses specifically on the marketing of technology. Scientific and technical companies are two of the fastest-growing clients of advertising. For example, between 1997 and 2007, pharmaceutical advertising increased by 330%, spending \$5 billion in 2005 alone (Cameron, 2008).

My findings contradict or offer corrections to existing models of verbal-visual collaboration. Furthermore, an extensive literature review found no other study that documents the function of verbal and visual rhetorical elements of arrangement, emphasis, clarity, conciseness, tone, and ethos (Kostelnick & Roberts, 1998) in real composing processes in their actual settings. *Envisioning Collaboration* also investigates the nature of verbal-visual coherence, closure, and completion, and addresses several ethical issues that arose during the composing processes. Based on the findings, a pedagogical unit is proposed that describes and incorporates “gateway activities” (Hillocks, 1995) for verbal-visual composition and collaboration. Students model collaborative moves and verbal-visual invention approaches, and they learn a metalanguage to describe and critique their processes. Student writers and artists are encouraged to collaborate in the “shared territory” (Bakhtin, 1981; Himley, 1991) of the layout grid, where words and images may coalesce.

I hesitated momentarily in selecting the book title because of the World War II negative connotations of the word “collaborate.” As someone who had read many books on World War II by age 10, I cringed when I first heard the term *collaborative writing* used to denote group writing, a reaction others (e.g., Stewart, 1988) have expressed in print. Yet we must beat our spears into pruning hooks and swords into plough shares. One of the last weapons to go is words. “Nip, Jerry, kraut,” these words lose the kind of edge put on them by life-or-death conflict and become known more for the celebration of life rather than the advancement of death. It is in this spirit that I call this new study of writer-artist collaboration *Envisioning Collaboration*.

I consistently strove to do the most balanced reporting possible during my three months at Heric Advertising and during the six-and-a-half years that followed. However, this research is one version of what happened, reported as carefully as possible from a limited, rather than omniscient, point of view: “We know but in part.” This research is not Heric’s official history of the process—there is none of which I am aware. Those interested in learning more about the process of envisioning before considering this representation and analysis of collaboration should read first the methods section that concludes this book.

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