The Look of Speech

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Abstract

This paper examines the visual representation of speech, and of the act of speaking, in early modern Europe. It analyses the use of speech-scrolls (rather than modern speech balloons) in theatrical frontispieces and religious paintings as an instance of the transition from oral to literate culture, focusing in particular on conceptual paradoxes arising out of that transition which are largely neglected in standard accounts such as Walter Ong's. As the essay argues, instead of understanding these images in terms of the shift "from sound to visual space", they should rather be read as signifying in multiple, and multiply contradictory ways: in the sixteenth century, writing could stand for spoken words, and the written was still frequently figured as a form of speech—in fact, the images discussed in this essay show that the more the visual representation of utterances was made to resemble an actual document (a carefully rendered scroll), the more effectively it could represent vocal utterance. The depiction of speaking as the production of a document does not simply register a complex cultural practice (reading aloud, say), as Ong might argue, but rather constitutes a mimetic strategy arising out of a culture in which "reading continued to be conceived in terms of hearing rather than seeing".

When modern comic book artists need to depict verbal exchanges, they have their characters blow bubbles; exhaled in flat, two-dimensional representations of air, words float onto the surface of innumerable cartoons, comics, and graphic novels. The disavowal of any kind of visual realism, no matter how detailed and photorealistic the style in the rest of the panel, points both to the conventional, in a sense invisible nature of speech balloons (they are simply what spoken words look like in these media) and to the recognition that voices—human soundwaves—are not visual phenomena.[1] To the extent that bubbles are mimetic at all, however, they suggest

This paper has its origins in a talk delivered originally at a symposium on "Negotiations between Oral and Written Traditions, 1450–1650" at the University of Toronto, and subsequently, in a longer version, to the Early Modern Studies Group at Miami University (Ohio). I am grateful to Maureen Epp, Stephanie Treloar, and Laura Mandell for their invitations, and to Laurence de Looze and Brit Harwood for their comments. My thinking about scrolls has been shaped by many conversations; in particular, I would like to record

Figure 1: Grant Morrison and Jon J Muth, *The Mystery Play*, New York: Vertigo / DC Comics, 1994. Reprinted by permission.

breath. They gesture, if anywhere, away from the written characters inside them towards the mouths of the figures, and the living voices emanating, imaginatively, from them.

Things were very different in early modern England. When called upon to represent the speeches of actors, for instance, Elizabethan and Jacobean printmakers chose not a visual approximation of airy exhalations, but instead carved or engraved scrolls of paper or parchment known to art historians as "banderoles". As conventional as these objects are, they do not share their modern counterparts' lack of features, nor are they as clearly distinguishable from the mode of pictorial representation that governs the surrounding image. Artists expended serious efforts on making banderoles appear as three-dimensional, material shapes *within* the physical worlds they

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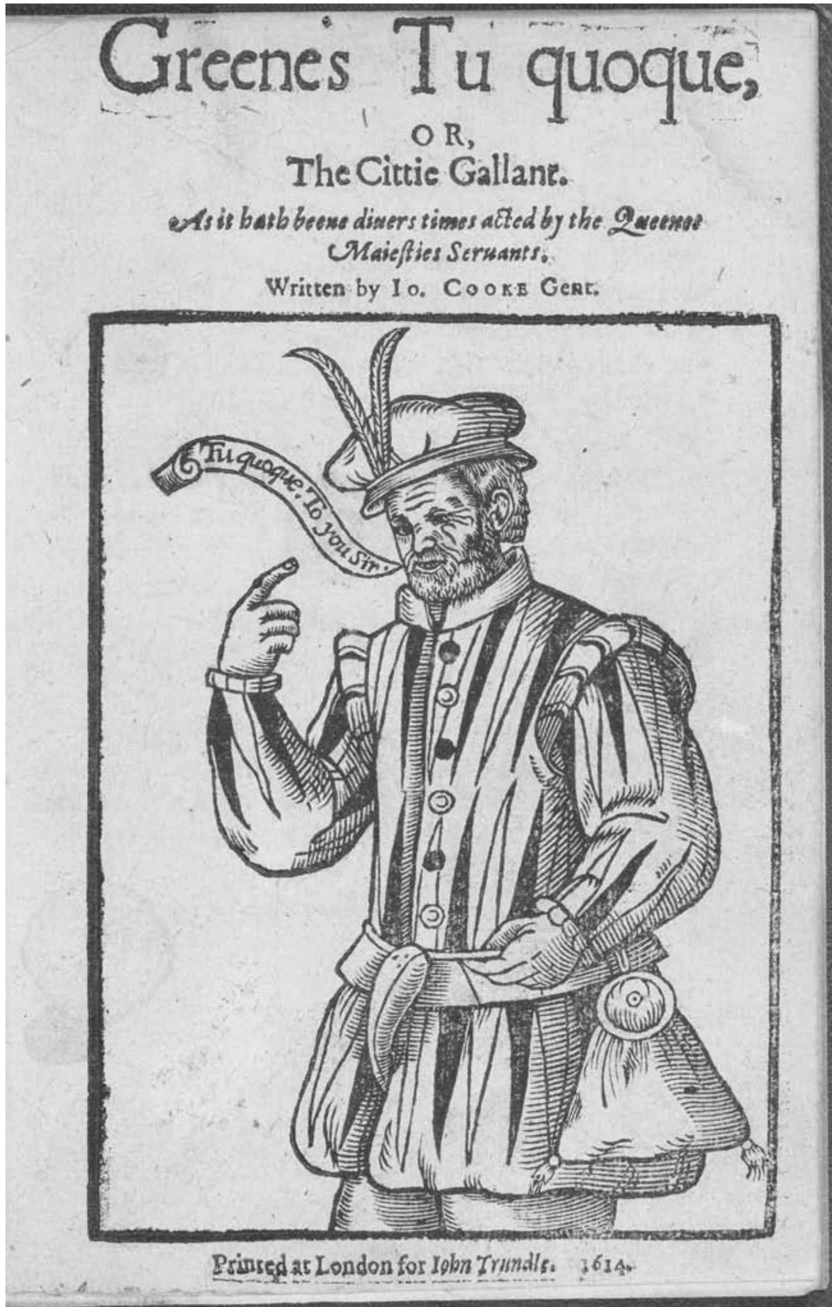
1. Even in the works of artists such as David McKean, Jon Muth, or Alex Ross, who often incorporate photos into their frames and achieve highly textured, three-dimensional images, speech is generally represented in flat bubbles which obviously adhere to a very different visual register (see Fig. 1). Speech balloons can do *some* graphic work, of course. But while they can suggest a tremor, or mark characters in other ways (sometimes they are coloured, for instance; font sizes can indicate emphasis or, as in Fig. 1, loudness), they never function on the same pictorial level as the rest of the frame.



Greenes Tu quoque,

OR,

The Cittie Gallant.

As it hath beene diuers times acted by the Queenes Maiesties Seruants.

Written by Io. COOKE Gent.

Tu quoque. To you Sir.

Printed at London for *Iohn Trundle*. 1614.

Figure 2: Title page of John Cooke, *Greenes Tu Quoque*, London: Nicholas Oakes for John Trundle, 1614. (STC 5673). Reproduced with the permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D. C.

Figure 3: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993, 25. Reprinted with the permission of Harper Collins.

depicted: edges are carefully shadowed, curls cross-hatched, folds rendered convincingly, to give the scroll an actual extension and weight, and enough density to cast shadows (Fig. 2).[2] Banderoles can be pointed at and, more often than not, can be handled, held, and moved in space by the characters with whom they are associated. As we will see, they interact with other notionally three-dimensional objects, interweaving with folds of cloth or draping over the edges of tables and chests. Far from reducing the scroll to a merely conventional stand-in for spoken words, these images insist on the particularity of writing and its material form precisely and paradoxically in order to represent the human voice. In bringing together in a single object three forms of language—speech, script, and print—these woodcuts bear out Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham's recent argument that in late medieval and early modern England, "the relationship between [these three states of language] was one of mutual infusion and reciprocal interaction, symbiosis and dynamic continuum".[3]

The move from realistically rendered speech scrolls to flat speech balloons marks a fundamental cultural shift. The modern convention dissociates writing from its "written-ness": it necessarily needs to use letters in order to convey

2. Scrolls could display either handwritten or typeset text. Frequently they were used in factotum printing, where a hole in the wood-block could accommodate metal type; see Driver 2004, especially 13–16 and 49. The title page illustration of the 1630 quarto of Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (STC 12268) used typeset banderoles. The *Short Title Catalogue* numbers for early English printed texts, abbreviated as *STC*, refer to Pollard and Redgrave 1976–1991.

3. Crick and Walsham. 2004, 17. On the relationship between speech, writing, and print in the period, see also Bouza 2004 and McKenzie 2002, 237–59.

Figure 4: Alan Moore et al. *Watchmen*. 1987. New York: DC Comics, 2005. Chapter V, 8.

the words it asks us to imagine as spoken, but in figuring forth those words as contained within breath (if in a highly conventionalized form), the modern comic book foregrounds an oral/aural essence necessarily absent from its own visual medium.[4] In line with this displacement of writing *as* writing when speech is being pictured, the genre offers various visual markers for properly *written* language—letters, diary entries, newspaper articles are frequently represented, often in forms strikingly similar to early modern scrolls. In offering a special pictorial form for script or print, however, these modern images implicitly draw a sharp distinction between written and spoken words (Fig. 4). The presence of quasi-documentary objects in the panels of a graphic novel reaffirms that what is contained in the speech balloons only incidentally looks like writing, and ought to be read, so to speak, as voice.

No such clear binary obtains in early modern prints. Take, for instance, the frontispiece to the first edition of George Ruggle's academic play *Ignoramus* of 1615 (1630; STC 21445 [Fig. 5]). It depicts the eponymous anti-hero, a hapless English lawyer, in his study, dressed in gown and hat. Behind him on a shelf are his books, generic law texts with their spines against the wall,

4. As Will Eisner, and following him, Scott McCloud have argued, the word balloon is a "desperation device", a largely inadequate "attemp[t] to depict *sound* in a strictly *visual medium*" (McCloud 1993, 134), a point succinctly made in Fig. 3.

IGNORAMVS.
Comœdia coram Regia Maiestate
Iacobi Regis Angliæ, &c.

Secunda editio auctior & emendatior.

Vna cum Argumentis vnicuique Scænæ præpositis, vt melius totius fabulæ scopus, qui aliter obscurior est, intelligatur.

LONDINI:
¶ Typis T. H. Sumptibus G. E. & I. S. 1630.

Figure 5: Frontispiece engraving from George Ruggle, *Ignoramus. Comoedia coram Regia Maiestate Iacobi Regis Angliae*. London: Thomas Purfoot for I. Spencer, 1630 (STC 21445). Reprinted with the kind permission of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

their titles inscribed on the edge of the paper facing outward: “Proclamations”, we read; “Presidents”, “Statutes”. A jumble of scrolls fills the right half of the shelf, one of which unfurls to display a reference to a suit featuring in the play, *Buzzard vs. Goose*; another unfolds from the lawyer’s right hand, showing his name;[5] a third emanates from his mouth, proclaiming “Currat Lex”: “let the law run its course”.

The lawyer’s line—and it is a line, or part of one, from the play[6]—appears in the format I have been describing as typical of early modern depictions of

5. Or a grand jury’s dismissive verdict, “ignoramus” being the formula by which an indictment was turned down as insufficiently substantiated, and unworthy of trial.

6. Ruggle 1630, 10: “At ego veniam [sic] in chlamyde vocatus [sic] a *Cloak*, potius quam non currat lex”.

speech. The scroll's right edge curls backward, picking up the similar curl on the "actual" scroll on the shelf above it, and mirroring the shape of the parchment unrolled from the figure's right hand. Except for what we might describe as the paper's final flourish, a somewhat more extravagant curl than that on the legal document, Ignoramus' speech is graphically indistinguishable from the print's representations of non-vocalized writing. Although the engraving ostensibly captures the protagonist in the act of speaking his text, it does so by picturing the moment of live speech, the evanescent, fleeting sound of the actor's voice in the visibly present, solid form of a document, reminiscent, moreover, of the player's part, one of the little strips of paper or parchment onto which the acting company's bookkeeper would copy an actor's lines.[7]

Early modern prints do not, then, bespeak the same categorical distinction between the written and the spoken word we find in modern comics. In this, these images are products of a period in the slow process of England's transformation into a literate culture during which the relative authority of writing and speech, even their identity as distinct modes of language, underwent a crisis. This moment has been largely neglected in histories of orality and literacy; Walter Ong (2002, 115) describes the shift as one "from sound to visual space", and theorizes the abiding presence of oral elements in literacy as merely a consequence of practices such as reading aloud, oration, or memorization. In a sense, one might understand images such as the *Ignoramus* frontispiece as examples of the process that Ong (2002, 117) characterizes as the "erod[ing] away" of aural elements—print, or printed script entirely displaces speech in these pictures, leaving only paper trails in its stead. But that would be missing the mimetic point of those prints. As Bruce Smith has argued, early modern writing everywhere points back to the oral and its corporeal point of origin. "Graphemes mediate between sound-in-the-body and sound-on-the-page. The common denominator in this transaction is *body*: paper and ink as material entities stand in for muscles and air as material entities. The paper functions as a kind of *membrane*, or skin, [. . .] as visual evidence of an acoustic event" (1999, 121). If we comprehend the scrolls, then, as "visual evidence" of a speech act, the effect, especially in conjunction with the other documents in the *Ignoramus* frontispiece, is an unsettling of any stable distinction between written and spoken language, a distinction that becomes in this moment contextual rather than essential: a scroll can represent live voice as well as documentary record, both equally material presences in a representational system that is simultaneously multimedial (in that it contains both speech and writing) and troped on the single medium of paper to convey *both* states of lan-

7. On players' parts, see Greg 1931; Stern 2004; and Stern and Palfrey 2007, forthcoming.

guage. Written and spoken words lose their conceptual particularity to such an extent that either can stand for the other, and signify in multiple, and multiply contradictory ways. Consequently, the representation of speaking as the production of a document in these images does not exactly register a complex cultural *practice* (reading aloud, say), as Ong might argue, but rather constitutes a mimetic strategy arising out of a culture in which "reading continued to be *conceived* in terms of hearing rather than seeing".[8]

Words, Words, Words

The pictorial slippage between writing and speech has many lexical analogues—appropriately, since the activities of scribe and painter were seen as analogous in the sixteenth century. Thomas Smith thought that "writing may be truly described as a picture of the voice",[9] and John Hart's 1569 *Orthographie* aimed to show "howe to write or paint thimage of a mannes voice, most like to the life or nature",[10] figuring transcription as realist portraiture. Smith pursued the analogy between picture and text even further, arguing that "a sound is recognized by its sign as well as a body is by its picture" (Shrank 2004, 296). The inky mark on the page directly points back to an aural reality, just as the traces of paint record a physiological reality. The distinction is as important as the analogy for my discussion of painted scrolls: if writing functions *like* paint but uses a distinct visual register, it makes sense that the painting of speech required the pictorial inclusion of the proper signs for sounds, of texts as a second-level representation of the spoken word (second-level because the signs in turn, in their material actuality, were merely represented by printer's ink or paint).

As a consequence of the belief that "writing is just silent speech", as Erasmus put it (1985, 397), words that describe verbal acts frequently failed to establish clear distinctions between different states of language. One famous example occurs in John Heminge and Henry Condell's preface to the first folio of Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623: "His mind and hand went together", they write of the playwright's style of composition; "and what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee haue scarse receiued from

8. Clanchy 1993, 268 (my italics). At the same time, *hearing* could also be figured as an act of visual perception; see, for example, Exton in Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "Didst thou not mark the king, what words he spake" (Greenblatt et al. 1999, 5.4.1).
9. Quoted from Shrank 2004, 296.
10. From the title page (Hart 1569 [STC 12890]).

him a blot in his papers" ([1623] 1997, 3350). Leah Marcus (1996) has argued that this alludes to Shakespeare's speaking "the speeches aloud to himself or to others as he wrote them down". She speculates that Heminge and Condell might have been "recording a writing practice that was still strongly immersed in the orality of the playhouse. If a speech was sounding vividly in the playwright's mind as he set it down, he might well have 'uttered' it before or during the writing of it, as Shakespeare's fellows suggest he did" (Marus 1996, 162). Marcus's flight of fancy, reconstructing—à la Ong—a practice of dramatic composition on the basis of a single verb ("utter"), insists on the split between writing and speaking, imagining Shakespeare saying his words out loud as he penned them, "before or during the writing" of a speech. The acts of inscription and of recitation remain distinct, contemporaneous but conceptually distinguishable. I would argue, conversely, that the logic behind Heminge and Condell's phrase precedes that split: they figure the process of poetic creation as taking place between thinking, writing, speaking, and the production of a material object (a page of script can be "uttered" the same way that coins or wares are "uttered": both can be issued or put forth).[11] The word does not merely describe a compositorial habit lost to us. It registers a moment in which writing and speech were inseparable to such a degree that the same verb could denote both: to "utter" a thought could mean *both* to speak it and to write it down, to lend it sound or material shape, at the same moment, in one act. Indeed, the sixteenth-century printer Richard Pynson described a well-made, marketable book as giving the text "good vtteraunce" (Gillespie 2007, 63–64), a phrase redeployed a few decades later by George Puttenham with reference to poetry, which can be given "good utterance be it by mouth or by writing".[12]

If uttering could be both a vocal and a material act, so could recording. When William Smith had his sonneteering shepherd wander "in yon wood / Where woeful Philomela doth record", he did not imagine the nightingale engaged in writing. While it is hard now to imagine legal records as anything other than permanent texts, as Peter Goodrich points out, "as late as the thirteenth century, a legal record (*recordationem*) was still a form of oral witness".[13] Etymologically, recording something and knowing something by heart are

11. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "utter", *v*[1], 1a, 2a, c, 3a, c.

12. Puttenham 1589 (STC 20519.5), signature Siii[r]. See also Siemon 2002, 40.

13. Goodrich 1987, 429. See also Clanchy 1993, 77–78, for a brief history of how the dominant meaning of "record" shifted from oral performance to written document in the course of the thirteenth century. Despite this medieval development, however, both senses of the word remained available into the seventeenth century.

identical acts: the root of the former is the Latin *cor*, "heart". The key is presence—in memory, in song, in recitation, or in the archive—not the medium through which that presence is achieved.

That writing was not understood as a marker of absence is not all that surprising in a culture that conceived of texts as alive and breathing. Edward Coke was typical in figuring quotations as the entry of a new voice into the echo chamber of his book: "But it is best to heare the ancient Translator himselfe"; "I will keepe silence, and let the Booke it selfe speake".[14] And his fellow lawyer Edmund Plowden reports an opinion of Chief Justice Saunders regarding the principles of statutory interpretation:

> Car parols, que nesont auter q*ue* le verberation del ayer, ne sont lestatut, mes solement le Image del estatute, & le vye del estatute rest en les ments del expositors del parols, queur sont les feasors del estatutes.
>
> [Because words, which are nothing other than the verberation of the air, are not the statute, but only the image of the statute, and the life of the statute resides in the minds of the expositors of words, that is, the makers of the statutes.][15]

The argument itself—that laws exist in the minds of their framers, and need to be interpreted according to their intentions rather than according to the strict letter of the law—is familiar. Many scholars of jurisprudence still maintain this position today.[16] Saunders' choice of words, however, should give us pause: "parols [. . .] nesont auter que le verberation del ayer [. . .] [parols] sont [. . .] solement le Image del estatute". He manages to hold two apparently incongruous metaphors in parallel: words are both a hum and an image, a tremor of the air and a visual trace. These are not distinguished as alternative modes of language in his account: spoken words and written words are equated without a reiteration of the hierarchical structure we would usually expect. The notion of words as a "verberation of the air" is particularly confusing given the

14. Coke 1615 (STC 5516), signature c1^{v}–c2^{r}. Marcus has described Milton's understanding of writing in similar terms, arguing that he "thought of the perusal of printed volumes [as] a conversation with kindred spirits who were long dead or at a great distance. [. . .] Through printed books, other people speak to Milton and also harangue, rumble, bellow and murmur at him" (2000, 25).
15. Plowden 1578 (STC 20041), signature Xii^{r}. I owe this reference to Lorna Hutson; the translation is mine, although I have consulted hers; see Hutson 2001. Explanations of abbreviations are in italics.
16. For an account of this, see, for instance, Dworkin 1986.

context—Saunders is speaking of printed texts whose authors are absent, which is why there is a need for interpretation in the first place (there *is* a hierarchy here of minds and words; but it cannot be mapped onto the normally corresponding structure of live breath and dead letters). We might expect him to describe such legal texts as desiccated, devoid of the spirit of the framers, as dead in some sense; instead he offers an image of striking vibrancy, an image, perhaps, that foregrounds how easy it is to be fooled into thinking that the scripturally manifested statute is the real thing, but only at the cost of losing the distinction between speech and written words with their respective associations of the presence and absence of the living voice. Saunders' formulation shows that printed images were not the only place where "breath" could be a feature of the written word in the sixteenth century.[17]

My final example bridges the poetic and legal worlds in a word. Poets endited, judges indicted, but the spelling of the two words was interchangeable. Thus George Herbert could ask, in the poem *Sepulcher*, "What euer sinne did this pure rock commit, / Which holds thee now? Who hath endited it / of murder?" (Di Cesare 1995, 58 [vv. 10–11]). In the posthumously printed 1633 edition of *The Temple*, the spelling might suggest a nascent distinction between the two verbs ("Who hath indited it / Of murder?" [Herbert 1633, signature B4r]), but in *The Table of the Heart*, a poetic cycle by Herbert's contemporary Christopher Harvey, God promises to use a heart as the surface on which he will "write / A new law, which I newly will indite": and affirms "What I indite / 'Tis I alone can write".[18] John Davies of Hereford offers perhaps the most acute play on the word in his 1605 *Wittes Pilgrimage* (STC 6344; signature B3v [Sonnet 8], vv. 1–4):

> Some say they wonder how so well I write,
> (Although my lines to no greate wonders stretch)
> Sith Art, my skill, of Theft cannot indite;
> Yet, I endite with skill aboue my reache!

Davies' detractors cannot indict his art of stealing, but his art also seems to be incapable of writing (enditing) *about* ("of") theft; still, he writes (endites) with greater skill than he ought to be able to, and thus appears as a poet justly accused (indicted) of some sort of transgression. Finally the lines also pun on the sense of "inscribing", since Davies was as well-known for his excellence as a writing-master as for his poetry: his "art" is both the creation of

17. See also Donawerth 1984, 16–17, on the early modern etymology of *verbum*.

18. Grosart 1874, 176, vv. 1–2 (Epigram 26); 177, vv. 9–10 (Ode 26). Harvey's metaphor literalized the etymology of "record" I traced earlier.

physical marks on the page *and* the manipulation of the semantic and aural contents those marks transport.[19]

The spelling of the two words remained entirely indistinguishable from the fifteenth to the late seventeenth century. Etymologically, they are the same word, too, both deriving from the Old French verb *enditer*, which ranges in meaning from "make known" to "dictate", "instruct", and "write". The *Oxford English Dictionary* can only express puzzlement at the origins of the legal meaning (which developed in Anglo-French), though the combination of writing, speech, and public declaration captures the process of indictment remarkably comprehensively: a public accusation of an individual which was performed through reading aloud a previously composed document. Just as "utterance" was situated right on the dividing line between written and spoken words, "indicting", in all senses of the word, occurred both as a documentary and a vocal action.[20]

Back to the Roots

These examples of early modern lexical ambiguity ultimately derive from medieval conceptual shifts that were still in progress in the sixteenth century, and bridge traditional period divisions. If "indict" and "endite" oscillate between orality and literacy, that is partly because their common Latin ancestor, *dictare*, in the thirteenth century could mean both speaking aloud to a scribe or writing with one's own hand. As Roger Chartier has argued,

> the composition of poems is always described by the words *componere*, *cantare*, or *dictare*. This does not necessarily mean that the text was dictated aloud nor that it was composed on tablets. [. . .] Composition can [. . .] take place in the mind and be stored in the memory, but in Baudri it most often takes the form of writing in wax, which allows for erasures and revisions.[21]

The slow evolution of a literate culture was perhaps particularly long coming in England, where the kinds of conceptual slippages analyzed in M. T. Clanchy's study (1993) of twelfth- and thirteenth-century bureaucratic practices survived into the age of Elizabeth I and beyond. The Reformation, with its concomitant emphases on private reading of the scripture and the

19. On Davies as a writing master, see Finkelpearl 2004.

20. *OED*, s.v. "indict," *v*[1], *v*[2], "indite."

21. Chartier undated, 4.

power of the preacher's spoken word hardly helped to establish a clear distinction between writing and speech (Cummings 2002; and Wabuda 2003). The assumption that "the written word can be viewed not merely as an analogue of conversation but an instance of speech" continued to exert its influence even in Hobbes's time, as Quentin Skinner has shown.[22]

Given the thirteenth-century origins of the notion that the oral and the written, the aural and the visual are equivalent, we should be able to trace the genealogy of the speech scroll to a pre-modern origin as well. Banderoles and lines of writing do indeed feature prominently in the visual arts of medieval and early Renaissance Europe, from sculpture, enamels, and tapestries to painting, drawings, and woodcuts. Their place in art came under attack fairly early—by the mid-sixteenth century Vasari considered the practice uncouth and a sign of painterly limitations, and ascribed the same view to the early fourteenth-century painter Buffalmacco (Tarr 1997, 232–36). In part, the turn away from the inclusion of written speech-acts in images distinguishes southern from northern Renaissance art: particularly in German paintings, scrolls survived over a hundred years later than in Italy, and in woodcuts they remained a central pictorial convention well into the early seventeenth century.

The Annunciation, perhaps the most important utterance in the New Testament, provided a subject ideally suited for the development of a visual strategy for the depiction of spoken words.[23] Written words in their material presence in these images have been said to symbolize the "manifestation of the [divine] logos in the temporal world",[24] but while such a reading certainly is tenable, they also ought to be seen as following (and establishing) conventions of representing speech more generally. There were two possible ways of including the words of the annunciation in the image: on the one hand, the archangel Gabriel's address to Mary ("Ave Maria gratia plena dominus tecum") and her response ("Ecce ancilla domini") could be painted, usually in gold, directly onto the surface of the scene, floating freely in space; on the other hand, and more commonly, the words could unfold on scrolls, either held by the two figures or attached to their mouths.[25] Neither method reduced the material pres-

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22. Skinner 1996, 109. This is a necessarily highly compressed account; for more nuanced treatments, see Fox 2002; Fox and Woolf 2003; and Schott 2004 (especially introduction and chapter five).

23. On the history of annunciation images, see Liebrich 1997; and Lüken 2000.

24. Liebrich 1997, 51: "in der Materialisierung des göttlichen Wortes im Bild spiegelt sich das Erscheinen des Logos in der irdischen Welt". See also Ward 1975, 205.

25. Tarr (1997) attempts to distinguish between the two types, claiming that only the floating letters actually represent speech ("here they are shown actually speak-

ence of the written word: in Simone Martini's fourteenth-century *Annunciation*, for instance, the letters might appear to float, but are raised above the painting's surface as actual metal letters, their noticeable heaviness (and opacity—they obscure Gabriel's olive branch and Mary's lily where they pass over them) counteracting their ostensible reference to "verberations of the air".[26] That neither letters nor scrolls stood in a more direct relationship to speech is evident from the fact that the same artist might choose to resort to either means of representation: van Eyck, for instance, used letters in the *Annunciation* from the Ghent altarpiece, but a scroll in the Dresden triptych;[27] Rogier van der Weyden varied widely, from the linear, directed letters of Gabriel's message in the *Columba* altarpiece to the angel presenting a scroll to Mary in the *Bladelin* altarpiece to the scroll-like, but air-born snaking words of Christ in the *Last Judgment* polyptych (which also features, in its closed state, a Gabriel with a scroll, albeit without an inscription on it).[28] By the mid-sixteenth century, Italian and Netherlandish artists had largely abandoned the presence of the word altogether, relying on the familiar constellation of figures and gestures to convey the scene, but before that the words took on an almost limitless range of material manifestations. In Stephan Lochner's version of the theme (1440–1445), the archangel hands Mary a sealed document, complete with the red seal of a king;[29] in Konrad Witz's depiction (c. 1444), Gabriel holds the scroll in such a way that he appears to be reading the message out loud, an obviously scripted speech act; an anonymous *Annunciation* from Bruges (ca. 1520)—now in the Clark Institute—has a scroll unfold from the angel's staff that loses its materiality as it reaches out towards Mary and becomes transparent, holding

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ing the words [. . .] rather than carrying them on a scroll", 236). Of course neither method shows anyone "actually speaking" anything (see Fig. 3); my entire argument here is designed to establish that holding a scroll and speaking were conceptually and pictorially indistinguishable actions in late medieval and early modern European art.

26. See Tarr 1997, 225; Ellis 1984; and Wenzel 1995, 285.
27. For additional analysis of van Eyck's use of scrolls and inscriptions, see Harbison 1991, 129–43.
28. It might be possible to view the scroll as northern, the letters as southern in origin. Purtle (1982, 23) has argued that the Ghent Annunciation draws on Italian traditions, and van der Weyden might have taken his inspiration from van Eyck's—in turn Italianate—practice. On van Eyck's influence on van der Weyden, see De Vos 1999, 93–99. Robert Campin, van der Weyden's teacher, used scrolls, as we shall see below. Jos Amman is another example of a northern painter using gold letters under Italian influence; see Borchert 2002, 33–45; and Parma 2002, 95–103.
29. See Wenzel 1995, 290; Warnke 1999, 111, 129–33.

breath and parchment in the balance. Occasionally, the scrolls take on a life of their own, as in Ulrich Mair of Kempten's portrayal (in the Schweizerische Landesmuseum in Zürich), where Gabriel's banderole is almost marginalized in a web of streamers, made up of Mary's answer (in German, to the angel's Latin) and the words of a choir of angels tucked away in a corner.

Whether inscribed on paper or directly onto the surface of the image, divine words and virginal response form an integral part of the composition: they stand for speech to the same extent and in the same way as the human figures stand for the Biblical characters.[30] Such a reading somewhat qualifies Joseph Koerner's recent argument that scriptural quotations such as those painted into Lucas Cranach the Elder's 1538 *Crucifixion with the Converted Centurion* "deade[n] his pictures"; that they "collapse pictorial space", and help to "announc[e] [. . .] that what we see is only a visual quotation, an image of an image rather than the thing itself" (Koerner 2004, 226). Koerner's contention (2004, 227–28) that "speech stands represented as inscription *over* painting", and does not become a part of the depicted scene, serves his broader interpretation of Cranach's Reformation painting as an art in which "speech as well as painting aspires to the condition of writing", pointing back, constantly, at scripture as its origin. The referential nature of the Biblical quotations in Cranach's panel, as well as of those in the Annunciation images discussed above, is obviously beyond dispute, but their visual representation adds an important performative element that goes beyond mere citation.[31] Gabriel's words and Mary's response, like the centurion's astonished exclamation can be found in the Bible, but they can only be *heard* in paintings or other artistic versions of the scene. The material presence of words in these pictures thus gestures simultaneously backwards to the scriptural origins *and* to the newly present speech act of the annunciation itself, rendered contemporaneous through the artist's craft and the viewer's eyes as an actual, spoken exchange between angel and human.

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30. My reading corresponds to Harbison's suggestion that although "to modern eyes [banderoles] do not seem to agree with the increasing demands for visual realism, for specific recognizable genre details" in early Netherlandish painting, they remained available as compositional elements well into the sixteenth century, and did not seem to affect a work's claims to pictorial naturalism (1991, 141–42).

31. I intend "performative" here to carry its full range of meanings. On the one hand, the scene is quite literally a performance, or an instantiation, of the Biblical moment; on the other hand, Gabriel's words are also performative in a more technical, Augustinian sense in that their pronunciation constitutes the act itself. The two senses are interlinked, however, since one could argue that the painting's power to render the moment present (its performative force in the first sense) makes the performative nature of the exchange (in the second sense) palpable.

Scrolls and golden letters in these images function therefore in an irreducibly double way, simultaneously as textual and as aural, as citation and as performance; and their ability to stand for both the written and the spoken word at the same time derives from the very conceptual equivalence of writing and speech I have analyzed above. Another way of putting this might be to say that banderoles both underwrite *and* represent Gabriel's and Mary's speech acts, and thus are deeply theatrical objects, inscribing the twin conditions of dramatic speech—scriptedness and vocal presence—in the same moment.[32]

Taking Parts: Scrolling through Liturgical Drama

The Annunciation also provided a rich subject matter for dramatic representation. Van Eyck's Washington Annunciation, for instance, has been linked to the liturgical drama of the *Missa Aurea*, which featured choirboys disguised as Gabriel and Mary.[33] But perhaps no painting on a Biblical subject exploits its relationship to religious theatre more fully than Robert Campin's Dijon *Nativity* (1420–25, Fig. 6).[34] The panel portrays the apocryphal episode of the two midwives, Salome and Zebel. Salome refuses to believe in the divinity of the child, announcing, on her scroll, "Nullum credo quin probavero", "I believe nothing until I have put it to the test". As a punishment for her skepticism, her right hand has withered, and will only heal, as the central angel's scroll informs her, if she touches the boy ("Tange puerum et sanabaris"). The faithful midwife, called Azel in the picture, proclaims her belief in a line that echoes (but does not quite cite) Isaiah: "virgo peperit filium" ("a virgin gave birth to a son").[35]

Writing structures the image, in which a complex tangle of curling and weaving banderoles frames the nativity group in the center. The extensive representation of speech does not contravene but forms a key element of

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32. See Garner 1994, 39–40 for a discussion of how performance generates the effect of presence. On the concept of theatrical liveness, see Auslander 1999.
33. Purtle 1982, 47–48. Otto Pächt (1989, 168) has similarly read the Ghent Annunciation as influenced by spiritual drama.
34. Detailed readings of this painting are offered in Thürlemann 2002, 37–49; and Kieser 1968, 155–78.
35. The reference is to Isaiah 7:14 ("virgo concipiet et pariet filium"). The scroll held by the group of angels at the top of the stable similarly holds out the promise of Biblical citation in its proximity to Luke 2:14 ("gloria in altissimus Deo / et in terra pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis"), but in fact corresponds more closely to the homiletic tradition and the later *Missale Romanum* ("Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bone voluntatis").

Figure 6: Robert Campin, *The Nativity* (1420–1425), oil on wood (oak). Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts; Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York. Reprinted with the kind permission of the Musée des Beaux-Arts and Art Resource.

what Panofsky has described as the "spirit of materialism rather than of mere naturalism" in Campin's art, where "every detail seems to be not only real but tangible" ([1953] 1971, 1: 163). The irreducibly material quality of objects and figures in his and his followers' paintings informs the shape of their banderoles as well; Panofsky's description of cloth applies equally to the folds and waves of the streamers in the *Nativity* ([1953] 1971, 1: 162):

> Displacing space like blocks of granite immersed in water, their draperies now simplified into quasi-stereometric prisms and rhomboids, now billowing in large curvilinear folds, now crumpled into complicated mazes, now angularly bent and spread where they are intercepted by the ground, they give the impression of Sluterian sculpture come to life.

The "almost scientific objectivity" of the picture (Pächt 1989, 74)—evident particularly in the brutally naturalistic, scrawny, vulnerable, and entirely human Christ child—also finds expression in its depiction of speech. The banderoles have a visible heft and density, they are subject to the pull of gravity, need to be held up by hands (they do not float freely), and cast shadows; in their drooping and furling motions they pick up and echo the folds of the cloaks and headscarves. Salome's scroll seems to be contiguous with her turban (it appears to emerge from it above her left shoulder), and that of the central angel almost blends into the white creases of his gown. The second midwife's speech-band is trailing on the ground, crumpled where it touches the earth, finely creased elsewhere, and in both texture and coloration mirrors Mary's white-and-gold cloak, itself inscribed with the beginning lines of the "Salve Regina".[36]

All this materialist insistence on the scrolls *as objects*, however, does not serve to increase the distance between speech and document, but instead collapses the distinction altogether. Thus the scrolls, in all their physical, material presence, not only stand for speech, but also displace actual vocal performances: as Emil Kieser has pointed out, none of the figures in the painting, with the possible exception of Salome, open their mouths, not even the ostensibly chanting angels (1968, 166–67). The written has taken over the place of the oral to such a degree that speech has been rendered disembodied, occurring in the spaces between bodies, but no longer a somatic phenomenon. The closed mouths paradoxically reinforce the reading of the banderoles as spoken words, as becomes clear when we juxtapose Campin's painting with a different nativity scene, from Hans Multscher's Wurzach altarpiece of 1437 (Fig. 7). There, a group of angels is shown holding a sheet of music, complete with notes and rubrication, but their mouths are wide open—the performance we are encouraged to imagine takes place through the vocalization of the marks on the parchment, it is not represented by the sheet itself. On the other hand, the angel in the background

36. Thürlemann has argued (2002, 49) that the scroll is positioned so that the words "virgo" and "filium" point at Mary and her son; the gold colour of its verso contrasts with the skeptical midwife's grey scroll (but it is worth noting that the central angel's scroll also has a grey back).

Figure 7: Detail from Hans Multscher (1400–1467), *Birth of Christ* (1437), panel from the outer wing of the Wurzach altar, canvas on pine panel. Berlin, Gemaeldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo by Joerg P. Anders. Reprinted with the kind permission of the Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz and Art Resource, New York.

of Multscher's panel, who holds out a sealed letter to the shepherds and points at the stable, has his mouth closed; in this instance, the document *is* the speech act.

Campin's Scrolls

A closer look at Campin's scrolls reveals a curious and significant feature. Both midwives are identified by name on their bands, which thus read as lines of dramatic dialogue, with character tags highlighted in red (Fig. 8).

Figure 8: Detail from Robert Campin, *The Nativity* (1420–25), oil on wood (oak). Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Reprinted with the kind permission of Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.

While the episode has various sources, among them the *Legenda Aurea* and the gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, it also was a staple of religious drama at least until the mid-fifteenth century, and art historians have frequently suggested that the painter drew his inspiration from contemporary mystery plays.[37] Although no direct source for the midwives' lines has been identified, their chirographic features encourage the viewer to interpret them as actual theatrical parts—the strips of paper or parchment actors were given to memorize their roles. From that perspective, Campin's *Nativity* might aptly be

37. See Kieser 1968, 156–57, 170; Thürlemann 2002, 39; Pächt 1989, 73. The latter considers the scrolls as a pithy summary of the "dialogue dramatically performed in the contemporary liturgical theatre, the Christmas plays". On the function of the midwives as mediators between divine story and human spectators in the early liturgical drama, see Diller 1992, 21.

The Spanish Tragedie:
OR,
Hieronimo is mad againe.

Containing the lamentable end of *Don Horatio*, and *Belimperia*; with the pittifull death of *Hieronimo*.

Newly corrected, amended, and enlarged with new Additions of the *Painters* part, and others, as it hath of late been diuers times acted.

LONDON,
Printed by W. White, for I. White and T. Langley, and are to be ſold at their Shop ouer againſt the Sarazens head without New-gate. 1615.

Figure 9: Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedie*, London: William White for I. White & T. Langley, 1615 (STC 15091a), titlepage. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.

defined, in Koerner's words, as "an image of an image rather than the thing itself", as approximating the representation not of a Biblical or pseudo-scriptural event, but of its dramatic recreation. But even as performance-record, the painting still relies on the conventional double significance of the scroll: paper here does not simply read as playtext, as in the sheet of music in Multscher's altarpiece, but stands simultaneously for the actors' voices *and* the script they perform (which in turn refers back to Biblical precedent, even if it never actually inscribes scriptural quotations). Campin's panel thus literalizes what I have earlier analyzed as the theatrical nature of the balancing act between script and speech characteristic of early modern banderoles.

The Theatrical Print

Read thus, Campin's panel provides a close analogue to the early modern woodcuts and engravings of theatrical scenes with which I began this discussion, and it is to one of these that I will now in closing return. The famous print that accompanied editions of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* from 1615 on is an emblematic example of its kind (Fig. 9). It captures pictorially both stage action (the discovery of the murdered Horatio and the abduction of Bel-Imperia) and language, in flowing scrolls attached to the closed mouths of the three living characters it depicts: Hieronimo, Bel-Imperia, and Lorenzo.[38] The text corresponds closely, if not verbatim, to Kyd's play. Lorenzo's "stop her mouth"[39] is a direct quotation, as is Bel-Imperia's "Murder, helpe[,] Hieronimo" (Kyd 1998, 2.4.63); and Hieronimo's "Alas it is my son Horatio" just deviates from the script's "Alas, it is Horatio my sweet sonne" (Kyd 1998, 2.5.14). Combining two distinct but contiguous moments from the play, the woodcut captures the midnight chaos of the aftermath of Horatio's murder, with a jumble of bodies, alive and dead, filling the frame, their voices graphically battling for airtime. As in Campin's panel and else-

38. See Foakes 1985, 104–6 for commentary on the illustration. My reading of this woodcut could equally be applied to other theatrical illustrations that feature scrolls, such as those accompanying the 1630 quarto of Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (STC 12268), the two prints cited at the beginning of this essay, the engraving of two characters in Edward Forsett's 1631 *Pedantius* (STC 19524), or the title page illustrations of Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1625a) = Q1 (STC 17882); a different version (1625b) appears as Q3 (STC 17884).

39. Kyd 1998, 2.4.64. I should note that the print follows Kyd's text much more closely than Bruce Smith (1999, 121–23) has suggested in his brief but illuminating reading of the image.

where in religious art, the banderoles here stand both for an originary text (in this instance, Kyd's), which they render faithfully, or as faithfully as an actor might, and for the performers' voices. But in this doubleness, the scrolls themselves take on a dramatic quality: broken up into parts, freed from the constraints of the orderly progression of the printed page, the characters' lines intermingle, demand space, and mirror the struggle between Bel-Imperia and her brother (who wants to silence her) in their competition for the viewer's and reader's attention.

Writing in the *Spanish Tragedy* woodcut represents speech *and* silence, the presence of performance as well as the unembodied script. Its appearance on the title page of a published play is precisely fitting to the extent that the image captures the same tantalizing—always unfulfilled, always rekindled—hope of a return to the stage that printed plays routinely sought to generate in their readers. Just above the illustration, William White's book of Kyd's play announces that it contains "The Spanish Tragedie [. . .] as it hath of late been diuers times acted".[40] That gesture towards theatrical presence, the suggestion that reading the text will resurrect the play "as" performed, is replicated in the woodcut's multiply signifying banderoles. Bringing the dramatic event back to life in early modern England, however, did not imply the suppression of the textuality of *both* performance and play. On the contrary, it is precisely through visualizing the scripted nature of actors' speech that the print achieves a convincing representation of stage action. In order to suggest the performative potential of the playtext itself, the image foregrounds the intimate, irresolvable connection between what is written and acted. As in Campin's *Nativity* or the Annunciation images, the return of the vocal is predicated on the material presence of the textual.

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40. Kyd 1615 (STC 15091a), title page. As Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser have shown, in the course of the seventeenth century titlepages of published plays began to list authors' names as frequently as playhouses or companies, but the rise of the author did not coincide with the demise of the theatrical origins narrative. Rather, titlepages most frequently gave both author's and company's names, which thus increasingly came to serve as distinct but related sources of authority. (Farmer and Lesser 2000). In a sense, our theatrical woodcuts rehearse that very same structure, holding (authorial) script and (actorly) speech in the balance.

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