The texts published in volume 24 of Interfaces present a selection of the proceedings of the International Word and Image Conference held in Paris in June 2003 and jointly organized by the College of the Holy Cross, the Université Paris 7 – Denis Diderot, the Collège Franco-Britannique and the Fondation des États-Unis, which hosted the conference, at the Cité internationale universitaire.

The general theme of the conference, Text and Architecture, brought together specialists not only from the fields of architecture and literature, but also from history and art history, and served to break down the barriers that generally separate these disciplines. Such interdisciplinary approaches reveal the extent to which textual and architectural practices have constantly borrowed from each other’s domain to shed new light on each discipline. While, for instance, writers frequently use architectural imagery as textual tropes, architecture commonly resorts to text to theorize its own praxis. At the same time, architecture engages with textuality in more metaphoric ways when it conceives of itself as a form of spatialization of text. These, however, are only some of the issues discussed during the conference and in the following essays. Of interest is the wide temporal ground these works cover from the Middle Ages to the late twentieth century, though the vast majority of contributions are concerned with the Renaissance or the twentieth century.

Interfaces would first like to thank William Gass for granting permission to open this collection with his essay, “The Architecture of the Sentence,” in which he examines the representational spaces that the mind constructs to give language form, a continuing exploration of the “habitations of the word” that has been at the heart of his work over the last forty years, both in his fiction, such as Omensetter’s Luck, In the Heart of the Heart of the Country, The Tunnel, Cartesian Sonata, and in his essays, Fiction and the Figures of Life, Habitations of the Word, The World Within the Word, Finding a Form.
The next two contributions explore the dynamic relationships between text and architecture in sixteenth and seventeenth-century illustrated books (Ralph Deconinck and Agnès Guiderdoni), whereas Virginia Raguin interprets text in a broader sense with reference to the construction of visual narrative through architectural perspective in Renaissance stained-glass windows. In her study of medieval religious drama, Laurence Belingard charts the development of theatrical genres in relation to the architectural spaces of performance. Muriel Cunin then goes on to investigate the significance of the leitmotifs of destruction and edification in Renaissance poetry, architectural treatises and funeral architecture, motifs that also feature prominently in Edward Gibbon’s architectural idiom in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and which Robert Mankin interprets as a nexus of the historian’s vision of Empire. Moving on to the nineteenth century, Victoria Coulson analyses the analogous ways in which subjectivity is articulated in Victorian Gothic architecture and literature.

Interestingly, all the contributions made by specialists of architecture are concerned with the twentieth century. A reading of the essays by a non-specialist might therefore lead to the conclusion that (twentieth century) architecture is a surprisingly logocentric practice. This is particularly evidenced in David Samson’s paper on Philip Johnson, whose polemical writings on modernist architecture have both preceded and taken precedence over his architectural achievements. Such speculation is also supported by the links that can be established between linguistic theory and the writings and buildings of modernist Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck (Nathaniel Coleman), as well as by the work carried out in Chile by the amareida group as their buildings are conceived as poetic inhabitations, that is to say, spatializations of poetry (Patricio del Real). Robert Smithson’s architectural projects can be seen as similarly text bound as they demand to be apprehended in the light of his apocalyptic fantasies and his reinterpretation of the Scriptures and religious tradition (Serge Paul). In the last two essays of this collection, Deborah Barnstone and Donna Cohen examine buildings that articulate text and architecture concretely, either by actually incorporating text within a building’s design (Barnstone) or by designing the building so as to make it a spatial embodiment of (sacred) text (Cohen).
Though the conference was only a brief encounter, the essays gathered here will hopefully illustrate the ongoing dialogue between different disciplinary areas.

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