Coexistence:
An examination of the symbiotic relationship between Image and Text.

It has been said that you either choose to become the poet or the painter. This particular quote (which I heard in high school as a creative writing major) has stuck with me, despite the fact that until recently, I didn't truly understand what was meant. Through the practice and researching of art, I have come across many ideas within texts that attempt to draw a defining line between poetry and painting. It is a struggle has been prominent since the time of Plato and Aristotle. Plato was the first philosopher to bring into question the power of a perfect representation, or mimetic representation, which is a copy so well made that the audience is unable to determine the difference between which is real and which is the copy. Parallel to mimetic representation is ekphrasis, which translates to 'word-picture'. Word pictures generally refer to poetry (for Plato, this was epic poetry) in the sense of mental imagery. Much later a philosopher by the name of Lessing made a claim that text and image are separated by the medium. The sculpture of *Laocoön* was defining in his argument because not only was it a physical image, it was also a poem. For Lessing, the medium dictates the "time" in which one experiences the image; the narrative events of the poem play out over an expanse of time and as a statue, he states we encounter it with a synoptic gaze that allows us to see all the events of the narrative at once. Years pass and more philosophers try to draw a divide between the two art forms. In the 18th and 19th century we learn that the line between mimesis and ekphrasis becomes blurrier in the eyes of the great thinkers. Based on this understanding I would argue that image and text cannot exist without the other. Their metaphorical relationship can be described with the mystic create Oroboro. The serpent that consumes itself in an endless cycle. Text and image are foils of one another that have infinite similarities between them. It is those similarities that create a deep vein through which I solidify this argument. At best, those who have attempted to divide them have only observed the art forms from surface critique point of view- superficial to the true nature of text and image. If someone truly wanted to divide them with a definite line the evidence would have to run much deeper than "one is a picture and the other is a word". For me, Lessing was closest to a proper division, but he didn't (and couldn't because of his time) take into account the semiotics theories that surround language and image. Briefly, semiotics is the study of how humans make associations between objects (in this case, words and images) through sensory stimulation. In short, language is arbitrary. As an example, lets examine the word cat. Through our cultural upbringing and education we glean a mental image of a cat (some more detailed than others. The power of imagination.) In other Spanish, 'gato' means cat, and to people of that language and cultural upbringing they would get a mental image of a cat. If you didn't know Spanish, and you heard the word 'gato' it would mean nothing to you and produce no (or at least an incorrect) mental image of the word. These concepts have influenced my artistic and academic career, and perfectly mirror my internal struggle between the elegance of language and the immediacy of words. There are other artists who seem to share my conundrum, and they blur the line between the art forms even more. I would like to examine the works of Jenny Holzer and Cy Twombly to further my argument that image and text coexist. I would like to implement a theory from W.J.T Mitchell that categorizes a hybrid text/image relationship that gives context to the idea of 'textual picture' (which I relate to Holzer) and 'pictorial text' (which I relate to Twombly) and how, though they have separate elements they always relate back to one another. I will also add my own theory into the mix of the arts being inseparable in the context of contemporary society.