

Iconology

Image, Text, Ideology

W.J.T. Mitchell



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"[Mitchell] undertakes to explore the nature of images by comparing them with words, or, more precisely, by looking at them from the viewpoint of verbal language. . . . The most lucid exposition of the subject I have ever read."—Rudolf Arnheim, *Times Literary Supplement*

Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology Details

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Noah says

Other than the last chapter-- a somewhat tedious (but in-depth) section concerned with the role of iconoclasm and ideology in Marxist thought-- this was a lucid work on images. Manages to clearly demonstrate the subtleties of iconological thought and its often-close association with language and other non-image forms.

Gordon Hilgers says

A little technically advanced for general readers, W. J. T. Mitchell's now-classic discussion of the image moves from early distinctions between the verbal and visual image, looks at how philosophers since Wittgenstein have tried to break through that classic distinction and then moves to how iconology is related to ideology. Unless you have a familiarity with Wittgenstein and Heidegger and Marx, this book is going to be a cipher.

Jessica Zu says

This book led me to Hans Belting's books and articles on similar subjects that are more useful, a new Iconography that draw a link between image and media and reintroduce the body by asking how images work on us.

Charlie says

look, who has written the review, Rudolf Arnheim, that might suggest how important it is to read the book as a film scholar.

Carl says

I've had a couple of chapters from this and Mitchell's -Picture Theory- as some of the primary theoretical texts for my dissertation for a while now, but I've been totally lame and haven't read through any significant amount of his work since then-- until lately, now that I've picked up this book and Pic Theory and have been working my way through every bit. I may have to leave some parts of Pic Theory out, b/c I really need to get to writing rather than reading, and Mitchell doesn't do anything with medieval texts like I'm working with-- but Mitchell has definitely gotten me on track with some productive angles on the skaldic ekphrases.

Mitchell engages primarily in ideology-critique of interart discourse from Romanticism on through contemporary criticism and philosophy (with some brief glances back at the Greeks, since they started

everything anyway). Through close readings of texts on the relationships of the arts he demonstrates that the authors in question are often less concerned with understanding the nature and relationship of the various arts than with policing the boundaries between the arts and, by extension, the other oppositions with which the "visual vs verbal" is conflated (male vs female, voiced vs silent, seen-er vs seen, even England vs France!!). The way in which he exposes and deconstructs the oppositions set up in Lessing's *Laocoön* in this book, and in works like Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* in *-Picture Theory-*, are what initially got me interested in applying this approach to the Norse mythological poems I'm working on, since binary oppositions are a staple of myth-criticism. Of course, we have no theoretical discourse from the time on the relationships between the arts (though I'm keeping my eye open for medieval theory on that sort of thing which might have been available in medieval Iceland! Let me know if you have anything), so I'm having to be cautious so I don't go overboard (it can be easy to see a concern for Interart discourse which isn't really there)-- but I think it's worked out very well into an investigation of the cultural semantics of the ekphrastic performance. But that's just the first half of the dissertation.

In one of the first chapters Mitchell discusses Nelson Goodman's work on the difference between verbal signs and visual icons. Although Mitchell does put Goodman through some of the ideological critique that he will subject the others to, he seems very optimistic about Goodman's distinction between verbal signs as articulate and differentiated (what we expect since Saussure) and visual "signs" as undifferentiated and "dense"-- of course, this was written in 1985, and Mitchell has written on Goodman since then, so I'm interested to hear whether he still likes this division. It's the best I've run across, and leaves room for "leakage" across the ideological boundary between the two. I tend to lump verbal and visual together as all part of a Lacanian Symbolic Order, though I'm still enough of a baby in lacanian thought that I might have it totally wrong. In my field paper, where I develop the ekphrastic performance idea which I mentioned above, I tried describing the line itself (ie, the sort of line you draw with) as a manifestation of the Real, or of the Gap which is the "difference", the boundary between semiotic units. The Symbolic order is the intersubjective order (ie, the world of other individuals who have competing desires) where we have language (b/c without intersubjectivity there is no need for language)-- and I tend to think that part of the symbolic order, and part of having a (ie, belonging to a) language, is having the world divided up into significant, meaningful semiotic units. Though I think at some point I need to fall back and admit that embodied experience does some of the work as well... need to get back to my roots in existential/hermeneutic phenomenology. I've ignored that a bit lately as I've tried to get a grasp on the linguistic turn, but now that we seem to be going through a "pictorial turn" (as Mitchell suggests in *Pic Theory*), I should probably get back to Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger and Dreyfus.

Janin says

A good resource into the study of icons and iconography.
