

What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images / W. J. T. Mitchell--Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, July 2005.—408 p.: ill.--ISBN: 0-226-53245-3: \$35.00 (cl., alk. paper).



W. J. T. Mitchell is an internationally known theorist on iconography and visual culture. He is also a William Blake scholar, editor of *Critical Inquiry* journal, professor of art history at the University of Chicago, and author of several books including *Iconography: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) and *Picture Theory: Essays on Verba, and Visual Representation* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). *What Do Pictures Want?* is a scholarly and philosophical treatment of visual culture through an innovative exploration of historical images, objects and mass media. In an interview in *Iconic Turn* (<http://www.iconic-turn.de>) Mitchell answers the book's title question: "Pictures want to be kissed. But then the question is: What is a kiss? A kiss is a gesture of affection, but it is also something which is beyond affection: the desire to incorporate.... I think one of the constitutive desires that make pictures what they are is that they are designed to be taken in."

Mitchell promotes the emerging academic discipline of visual culture or the study of how humans interact with visual media of all formats. His analysis—provocative and theoretical—is expansive and incorporates his world view. His arguments reference known image theorists, as well as an unlikely assortment of well known figures in literature, the arts, and entertainment and include Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche, Barthes, Chaucer, Marx, Blake, Dante, and Andre Agassi. That images are important and affect our cultures is obvious, as evidenced by the recent and shocking photographs of abuse at Abu Grab prison. However, Mitchell pushes images before us as living, active, primitive, erotic, aggressive, entities that demand our attention. He asks the reader to consider if images have a consciousness or life of their own.

The book is divided into three sections: Images, Objects, and Media. Mitchell begins by discussing pictures, moves on to discussing things, and concludes with a discussion of habitats and, in so doing, addresses the three fundamental elements of pictures. Because much of the book is derived from conference writings or other of the author's writings, this reviewer feels that the transition from one section to the next is not completely comfortable. The book has an index, extensive footnotes, and photographs and illustrations, both black-and-white and color.

W J.T. Mitchell is an important theorist, and this book is a valuable addition to the literature of iconology and visual culture. The book is recommended for research level collections at academic institutions with visual arts or visual communication programs.

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