

Belting, Hans. 2014. *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press. 216 pp. Pb.: £19.95. ISBN: 9780691160962.

An Anthropology of Images is a wonderful insightful account of a new anthropological theory for interpreting human picture-making. In this book, Hans Belting presents the inspirational and revolutionary but also controversial look at pictures that are linked with our mental images and bodies. He offers to look at a body as a “living medium” from a new research perspective. Above all, the author provides us with a critical presentation of contemporary media studies. Therefore, it gives a stimulating discussion of “embodied” images and the domain of images.

The book has been diligently translated by Thomas Dunlap. It has a well-considered composition and consists of six chapters and an introductory chapter entitled *A New Introduction for the English Reader*. The first one, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* reviews specialist literature on image and picture to show the confusion of words and meanings. This is important, Belting openly criticises those points of view that do not capture distinctive features of image and picture. It reveals a shortage of image research that has to be complemented by a new concept of media. However, the problem is a lack of systematic reflection on the types of definitions and their vices. The presented examples of theoretical perspectives’ drawbacks are not exhaustive. However, the author formulates cogently new and remarkable definitions of title image, picture, medium, and body to present interplays between them. They are free from imperfection, chosen and mentioned by him. Simultaneously, he pays particular attention to understanding differences between the ways of thinking about their essences. It is worth emphasising that the author presents the entirely new Pictorial Theory and Media Theory. Nonetheless, Belting’s theories are not coherent with other theories in the field of media studies and anthropology because they are extended to ‘missing links’ (p. 11) between the refreshed theoretical categories. Therefore, the presentation of the author’s theories and their inherent components against a background of the other theories with their typical advantages and disadvantages seem to be so crucial, but it remains as the challenge for Belting and other researchers.

The second chapter, *The Locus of Images: The Living Body* continues the idea of the human body understood as a “living medium” for images. The previous one is necessary to understand that study, so they need to be read in sequence. The author concentrates on body’s capacity for imaginations, supernatural “visions”, dreams, and memory to show its functions. He presents the models of explanation that one useful for analysing the visual type of sources. Many diverse examples show possible ways of for the usage of Belting’s devices. However, there are also theoretical assumptions of the research.

Therefore, the following four chapters contain separate case studies that may be acknowledged merely as the introduction into large-scale research. Nevertheless, they are important for readers because they show the ways of the theoretical approach application. Thus, a central concern of the author is to prove the usefulness of his theories. The third chapter, *The Coat of Arms and the Portrait: Two Media of the Body* traces stages of

portraits' analysis. There, Belting gives the examples to interpret them in accordance with his Pictorial Theory and Media Theory. Moreover, he depicts the history of the modern human portrait to prove that both images of the body, and images of the person are artists' conscious acts and express themselves in ways that are characteristic of their times (p. 62). The author makes the readers aware of the contexts' niceties analysis.

The next chapter entitled *Image and Death: Embodiment in Early Cultures. With an Epilogue on Photography* shows roots of human picture-making (p. 84). It offers a new look at well-known visual sources in order to notice their far unnoticed features. Belting devotes much attention to relations between the presence and absence of the dead in various cultures, which makes the contribution to the development of art history.

The fifth chapter, *Media and Bodies: Dante's Shadow and Greenaway's TV* reveals the interplay between media and bodies the most thoroughly. The author chose to review only one aspect of the image, the relation of the image to the shadow. Belting uses Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* as the vehicle for testing his conceptions (p. 125). Moreover, he frames appearances of the nature of original as well as electronic pictures and ways of stimulating and also simulating our mental images. Passing other theoretical categories in empirical research over is not a mistake but it narrows the analysis's perspective.

The last chapter, *The Transparency of the Medium: The Photographic Image* contains an examination of the ways of photography's social using and private meanings. It presents the connection between photographs as the 'archives of images' (p. 148) and the beholder, especially his life experiences. Undoubtedly, the author makes good use of demonstration of photographs from all over the world and different times to show properties of the long prehistory of picture-making.

Despite the disadvantages mentioned, the book constitutes a highly inspiring work to new research in the field of art history, media studies, and anthropology. Belting succeeds in showing his original and fascinating Pictorial Theory and Media Theory. In addition, he clearly demonstrates how to use them. It overcomes common ways of analysing visual sources and presents astonishing results. Its reading can thus be recommended to all those interested in images research.

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