

Burnett, Ron: *How Images Think*. MIT Press. 2004. 253 pages.

Review by: Teralyn Iscrupe

Ron Burnett aptly ties together the world of images in this book entitled, *How Images Think*. With over 200 pages of small type in Gothic font and an extensive bibliography to back him his work, Burnett manages to delve into virtually every visual experience through machines, instead of limiting it to just media. For communication experts it may have been better to subjugate the most important factors and judge accordingly.

Burnett takes the work of Francis Bacon, Diana Forsythe, and even some pieces from his own works to weave a web of correlations between images and the human brain. One of the most interesting concepts of Burnett's work is the thought that the very essence of human identity when altered through images becomes reality. He correctly cites as one ominous example the use of nineteenth century photography as our current guide to that time period. Burnett takes this thought one step further when he question whether this applies to video games as well and if this is a reflection of what western society looks like in reality. "Could it be that the Smithsonian will quickly move to preserve the simulated games...because [they mark] the needs and desires of contemporary humans in Western societies?"

We have indeed become an image-dependent society. Advertisements advise us on what we should and should not purchase, ultrasounds can tell us the sex of a fetus, and photographs have become their own studious entity. However, what Burnett's book suggests is that we were never independent of images going as far as to say that "real no longer exists without some reference to imagescapes."

Computer games, television, websites, even MRI's are discussed in the book, making it a little too large of a chunk to digest in any short length of time. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the book is the book itself. One questions how any book dealing with images could be done using poor and underused graphics. Most frustrating were the sidebars, containing no color variance to separate it from the text and even worse, continued from one page to the next, sometimes mid-sentence. Whole columns are in bold and tiny fonts make for challenging focus at best. If the intent was to make the reader realize the importance of images, it worked, but at the cost of the reader's amiability.

While his theories are rather rudimentary in their design, this makes an excellent beginners book to make the student think about how images affect their life. However, it may be better suited to the philosophy or science major than one concentrating on communications. This book is more about the process of vision than vision's process on us. The introduction mentions a website that is meant to be updated "constantly" but has not received any updates since May.

As a theoretical guide to vision in all its shapes and sizes, this guide is applicable. However, the rendition of these theories makes it one less likely for practical means. This

does not mean that the book lacks value. Informative details regarding how the human brain perceives things are abundant, but the book lacks the procedure to apply these fundamentals to any form of style or congruency.