From Rosie Lavan

Reading:


Johann Gottfried Herder, ed. and trans. Jason Gaiger, part one of Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion’s Creative Dream (1778; Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002)

Main discussion points:

- Mitchell seems conflicted about the idea of ‘comparison’: does he need to entirely dispense with it as a method of criticism?
- Notion of ‘pure art’ (which emerges in Mitchell) is problematic: all art is composite—e.g. what about poetry that derives from music?
- Interesting to think about where the interrelation of text and image takes place—cf Mitchell’s discussion of Blake. Does it take place in our own psychology? Mitchell seems to locate it very much in the text.
- NB the specific moment in which Mitchell was writing: it’s very mid-1990s
- Mitchell’s point about the word ‘figurative’ raises further questions about the vocabulary available to us to describe different kinds of art and their effects. E.g. what a painting says. But Mitchell might hang on more to differences and conflicts and tensions in these kind of linguistic encounters/articulations.
- Another problem is that he conflates written and spoken language rather unthinkingly, and also that the auditory experience of a text is hardly accounted for.
- Aren’t we completely obsessed with the visual? And aren’t we bound to it in metaphors for understanding, e.g. “I see what you mean…”?
- Whole import of Mitchell’s article might be found in his footnote ref to the different terms—imagetext, image/text, image-text.
- Wittgenstein seems relevant: each time we look at something don’t we look at it through our language? Is Mitchell trying to break through our tendency to perceive the world through language? But again problematically there’s a slippage between things that are textual, verbal, and linguistic.
- Paul Klee, Deleuze, Barthes (‘Rhetoric of the Image’), Magritte, and the rather more obscure 1930s geographer Vaughan Cornish who wrote of the eye as an “organ possessed of personality” were all cited.
- Herder belongs to the moment at which the concept of aesthetics is in a modern sense emerging. NB also that his essay is directed against Baumgarten who had established aesthetics as a science.
- Much discussion of the perceptive/sensory aspects of Herder’s text and also of his broader understanding of the way we perceive and experience works of art. NB the haptic language. Cf. his use of the word begriff (concept) and Jason Gaiger’s note on translating it.
- Is the point of connection between Herder and Mitchell the idea that the visual is not yet real—that it has to have either sound or words or touch to bring it alive? Returns us to Mitchell’s argument against the idea of “pure art”.

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- How much of a challenge is this for critical writing? How physical is critical writing? There’s that crucial moment in Herder where he describes moving around the statue…to what extent is the reader invited to respond physically? Cf. this to Mitchell’s *Sunset Boulevard* reading: there’s a failure of description here because Mitchell’s working in a flat medium of critical prose which wants to create concepts compared to what Herder’s doing, which is seeking to evoke rather than to conceptualise. There’s a discrepancy between the theoretical and analytical parts of Mitchell’s article.

- Cf. this to Clive Scott on translation as not only interlinguistic but also intersemiotic—so his translations feature diagrams, shapes, etc.

- Cf. this to the translation of visual texts into text—e.g. the Annunciation.

- Might think also about Joyce’s remarks to Frank Budgen when he was writing *Ulysses*, that Odysseus/Bloom is the complete man because he is like a sculpture seen from all sides. Link maybe also to Cubist ambition.

- NB 360-degree sculpture relatively recent phenomenon.

- What about Herder’s conclusion, that sculpture is real while painting is a dream? Account for via kinds of sculpture Herder was experiencing and radical new 360-degree perspective, and scale of paintings vs lifesize sculptures? Also NB temporality of 360-sculptures.