

Budi Hermawan

Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design, by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, second edition, 2006. Routledge, ISBN 0-415-31915-3.

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Reviewed by:

Budi Hermawan¹

Indonesia University of Education

Pictures, or image texts as a more scientifically term we can now use, are often thought of being worth a thousand words. They can be interpreted in many different ways by different people. As there are too many possible interpretation for a single picture then how can we come to justified and grounded meaning(s) of the picture? How can we understand the basic structure of an image text? There should be this underlying structure that people can rely on in their efforts to make meaningful and justified meaning(s) of image texts for there seems to be nothing, even in what people find abstract or absurd, which is without pattern, hence, structure.

Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual design offers “a usable description of major compositional structures which have become established in the course of the history of Western visual semiotics, and to analyse how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers” (p.1). Kress and van Leeuwen negotiate Barthes’ idea that images are open to too many varieties of possible meanings. They refute Barthes’ idea that the meanings of an image are always related to and *dependent* (my italic) on verbal text. For Kress and van Leeuwen, visual component of a text (image) is an independently organized and structured message, connected with verbal text but not dependent on it.

There are nine chapters in the book and the journey of Reading Images is started with the hesitation of the writers on the use of their subtitle ‘the grammar of visual design’. They later, however, claim that despite the fact that there have been many publications on image analysis, they are “the first to deal with the meanings of the regularities in the way the image elements are used”.

Taking Hallidayan social semiotic approach to language as a model, Reading Images offers a model of three accounts for images; ideational, interpersonal, textual. Kress and van Leeuwen consider the model of three accounts works well not only for language but also for thinking about all modes of representation, hence images (p.20). For people with linguistics background likes me these accounts help break down images into a more accessible, interpretable object to analysis.

In relation to analyzing images, various methods of analysis images have readily been available to use. For example content analysis, a method of analysis which is frequently used to investigate how social issues are represented in the mass media. Another method is visual anthropology which is concerned with the use of visual records for the description of the present and past ways of life of specific communities and last but not least psychoanalytical image analysis which can be used to see among others, how drawings produced by children can be used to reveal their representation of dreams (see van Leuwen and Jewitt (eds), 2001).

¹ Budi Hermawan teaches English at English Education Department, Faculty and Language and Arts Education, Indonesia University of Education. His main interest is visual semiotics.

In addition to how we can analyse images, *Reading Images* serves, however, as insightful notions and detailed information on how to understand the visuals.

Chapter 2 tackles the issue of narrative representation. The chapter labels those involved in the messages exchange between what/who are in the visuals, and between what/who are in the visuals and the audiences as *represented participants*, and *interactive participants*. To me these labels are similar to *the doer* and to *the done*, the one/s to whom the action is done, though, the effect of what is done is different for the *interactive participant* than for *the done*. Processes or actions which are realized in configuration of words class, mostly verbs and nouns in verbal text, are materialized by vectorial relation between volumes in images and diagrams.

Completing the informative discussion on narrative representations, *Reading Images* moves to elaborating conceptual representation in chapter 3. Here Kress and van Leeuwen went to a great detail of explaining process into classificational, analytical, symbolic, and embedding. The chapter closes with the elaboration of the meeting point between the way conceptual structures are realized in language and images.

As images are made, spoken about, viewed and read by their audience, Kress and van Leeuwen explicate how images place the audience into a given position. Audiences are either invited or demanded by the represented participants in the images. The direction of the look, the gaze of represented participant, plays an important role in the relation between the represented participants and the interactive participants.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to answer the question of how reliable the images and thus the messages presented by the images. Here, Kress and van Leeuwen propose two basics ideas that people can use to weigh the reliability of the images; modality of the markers in the messages, and textual cues for what can be regarded as credible and what should be treated with caution and vigilance. They propose that colours; their modulation, differentiation, and modulation, serve as a marker of naturalistic modality. Other markers are contextualization, representation, depth, illumination, and brightness.

Chapter 6 and 7 are devoted to the discussion of meanings; meaning of composition, and materiality, in specific. Here the writers discuss the role of technology and further elaborate the function of colours. Chapter 8 presents their view on the possibility of using the ideas discussed in the previous chapters on three dimensional objects. A courageous effort they make. The journey of *Reading Images* closes with the postscript of the writers, which is rather like a contemplation of the effort they made by writing the book.

W.J.T Michell (cited in Rose, 2001) believes that “we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them”. If you believe in this then *Reading Images* is a courageous and contributing effort to understand an object that is very challenging, elusive, if not possible, to make meaning of, as it is to me.

REFERENCES

- Rose, Gillian. (2001). *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. London: SAGE Publications.
- van Leeuwen, Theo and Jewitt, Carey. (2001). *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.