



The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels (Leonardo (MIT Press))

By Sean Cubitt

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Light is the condition of all vision, and the visual media are our most important explorations of this condition. The history of visual technologies reveals a centuries-long project aimed at controlling light. In this book, Sean Cubitt traces a genealogy of the dominant visual media of the twenty-first century -- digital video, film, and photography -- through a history of materials and practices that begins with the inventions of intaglio printing and oil painting. Attending to the specificities of inks and pigments, cathode ray tubes, color film, lenses, screens, and chips, Cubitt argues that we have moved from a hierarchical visual culture focused on semantic values to a more democratic but value-free numerical commodity.

Cubitt begins with the invisibility of black, then builds from line to surface to volume and space. He describes Rembrandt's attempts to achieve pure black by tricking the viewer and the rise of geometry as a governing principle in visual technology, seen in Dürer, Hogarth, and Disney, among others. He finds the origins of central features of digital imaging in nineteenth-century printmaking; examines the clash between the physics and psychology of color; explores the representation of space in shadows, layers, and projection; discusses modes of temporal order in still photography, cinema, television, and digital video; and considers the implications of a political aesthetics of visual technology.

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- Sales Rank: #917786 in Books
- Published on: 2014-09-05
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .81" w x 7.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 368 pages



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Editorial Review

Review

Glorious! Cubitt takes us back to basics in the most profound sense of the phrase. A tour-de-force of erudition, *The Practice of Light* offers not only a brilliant cultural history of the elements of mediation, but also an eclectic media-centric history of culture. Essential reading!

(William Uricchio, Professor of Comparative Media Studies, MIT; Principal Investigator, MIT Open Documentary Lab and MIT Game Lab)

Sean Cubitt's new book is a milestone in film and media theory, and it will make a long-lasting impact across the wide field of visual culture studies. A genealogist of media, an analyst of light, Cubitt combines media historical insights with a strong understanding of political economy, aesthetics, and importantly, ethics. *The Practice of Light* is a shining piece of scholarship.

(Jussi Parikka, University of Southampton, author of *What is Media Archaeology?*)

Sean Cubitt's genealogy of the technologies of light is a marvelous exposition of the intricate crafts of making and reproducing images through the deployment of shadow and light, of line, texture, and mass, of projection, reflection, and time. With its wide-ranging scholarship, this is a richly informative account of the work of light in the forming and control of the visible.

(John Frow, University of Sydney)

Cubitt's *The Practice of Light* provides us with a significantly different and highly critical history of digital imaging. Drawing from a plethora of resources in arts and humanities, philosophy and sciences, this well-researched investigation into the practices and devices of visualization of light, shadow, and color is eye-opening in giving evidence of how aesthetic and technical inventions, such as printmaking, photography, and cinema, screens, and data projection, are becoming instruments of order and control that govern today's mediascapes. Written with enthusiasm, passion, and curiosity, Cubitt's new book shares far-reaching insights into the dominance of Western technologies that have shaped the global scale. It adds a new and much needed discourse to the emerging fields of digital humanities.

(Yvonne Spielmann, Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore; author of *Video: The Reflexive Medium* and *Hybrid Culture: Japanese Media Arts in Dialogue with the West*)

" *The Practice of Light* is erudite, lively, and, I'll just say it, illuminating. Sean Cubitt is at the top of his game here, offering up a genealogy of technologies of vision that is at once expansive and specific, formalist and political, historical and utopian. Even as he attends to forces of order and control, Cubitt writes a hopeful book, reminding us that mediation might always matter differently. He foregrounds the dialectical power of making in order to move us elsewhere. This is an important and timely book.

(Tara McPherson, Associate Professor of Critical Studies, USC School of Cinematic Arts; editor of *Vectors*)

The Practice of Light is an amazing tour de force. Exceptionally well researched, brilliantly written and the result of the dream of a very talented individual. Cubitt dreamed he held a book such as this in his hand and dearly wanted to read it. No such book existed in reality, so he set about the monumental task of writing it himself. I say monumental because as you will appreciate as you read the book the level of detailed research and scholarship is vast; from the genesis of "Let there be light" through to the images we see on giant LED screens in our contemporary cities... Cubitt introduces, explains, and then explores highly complex theories in such a way that is easy to understand and without getting a stress headache. Highly readable... (L)ight will never appear the same again after digesting Cubitt's smorgasbord of tantalising morsels from history, science, art, philosophy, and technology.

(Leonardo)

About the Author

Sean Cubitt is Professor of Film and Television at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is the author of *The Cinema Effect* and the coeditor of *Relive: Media Art Histories*, both published by the MIT Press.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Teddy Hathorn:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite book and reading a publication. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the reserve entitled The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels (Leonardo (MIT Press)). Try to make book The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels (Leonardo (MIT Press)) as your pal. It means that it can to get your friend when you sense alone and beside those of course make you smarter than ever. Yeah, it is very fortuned in your case. The book makes you much more confidence because you can know every little thing by the book. So , we should make new experience as well as knowledge with this book.

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Michael Watkins:

Exactly why? Because this The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels (Leonardo (MIT Press)) is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will zap you with the secret the idea inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who all write the book in such amazing way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of advantages than the other book get such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking way. So , still want to delay having that book? If I were you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

Rana Jensen:

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