

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS

A Quarterly Information Service from the
Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture Vol 11 (1991) No.3

Popularising Semiotics (continued)

In the previous issue of *Communication Research Trends* (Vol. 11, No. 2), Keyan Tomaselli and Arnold Shepperson from the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, surveyed the tangled vines of the field of semiotics and explained how, following one of the many paths through this 'forest of symbols', they are trying to develop semiotics into an instrument of social and cultural criticism and reform.

In the present number (11/3) of *Communication Research Trends* the same discussion is continued through a series of individual book reviews contributed by both senior and junior members of the same Centre. Again, the editors feel you may find these reviews more judgemental than what you usually read in these pages. This reflects the Critical-Cultural Studies approach to research adopted by the authors, and the reviewers say what they wish to say in the way they wish to say it. They are, however, the opinions of the authors not necessarily those of the editors.

The views of the latter are reserved for the section 'Perspective', following the several long reviews in this issue. There we try to suggest how semiotics can be of use to the practical communicator -- especially the religious communicator.

The discussion of semiotics is closed by an annotated bibliography of some of the most important books in semiotics and related fields published in recent years.

Finally, we turn from semiotics to our regular 'book notes' where some of the recent publications in other areas of communication studies are described.

SEMIOTICS REVIEWS

Rotman: Unpacking the Body Language of Zero

Brian Rotman. *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*. 1987. London: Macmillan, 1987. 110pp. ISBN 0-333-45551-7 (pb); ISBN 0-333-43920-1 (hb).

In reviewing this book one is struck by the richly textured semiotic composition of the author's presentation. Using a carefully-judged combination of text and image, he sets about tracing the fallacy of the 'anteriority of things to signs' inherent in latter-day conceptions of number, representational art, and money. An important aspect of the text, and also a disadvantage for his ultimate project, is the attempt to locate his argument within an historical framework: he starts by following the context within which Hindu/Arabic decimal notation, with its symbolic positional system of signification, was introduced into Renaissance Europe. As the essay proceeds, one is presented with a sort of Derridean description of a struggle between the nascent order of symbolic value-systems (that is to say, Capitalism) and the Hegemonic order of iconic representational practice (or Feudalism).

The symbol '0', if used iconically, triggers a disruption of the traditional Philosophical/Religious assumption that for anything to possess truth-value, it must have or relate to one or other ontological/eschatological referent. Classic ontological debates, Rotman tells us, shied away from the notion of vacuum and void, the idea of eternal, changeless reality being fleshed-out with metaphysical existences that made the void/vacuum a logical/dialectical impossibility. The Universal Entelechy of Aristotle, for example, was invented as a logical *and* ontological existent that, quite literally, ensured that the Gods had indeed filled the universe with *something*. Colie's *Paradoxica Epidemica* is quoted on page 63, suggesting that for the Greeks (and, consequently, for the philosopher-priests of the feudal period) the very concept of nothingness 'inspired a form of terror'. Later, the Christian Church Fathers and the scholastic philosophers had considerable difficulty with reconciling the Classical tradition they had inherited from the

Greeks (also via the Arabs), with the Judaic tradition of creation *ex nihilo*. Consequently they developed the Eschatological doctrine of the Holy Spirit that fills all of Creation: following Augustine, the void/vacuum/nothingness was identified with the Devil.

Thus, in accommodating a sign referring both to something and to nothing, there arose a new kind of signifying subject - a 'meta-subject' - who used a meta-symbol (zero) that signalled the promise of making possible the creation of infinitely many other symbols. Similarly, Rotman goes on to trace the emergence of a *visual* meta-subject who is brought to life through the introduction of the Vanishing Point in perspectival drawing: a viewer who is invited, even challenged, by the artist to identify the objective 'reality' of what has become paintings *about* paintings. For example, Rotman offers his reader reproductions of Vermeer's *De Schilderkonst* and Velasquez' *Las Meninas*, paintings that both depict artists at work, as indicative of the kind of shift that took place in visual representation. The point being made here is that the simple, almost mechanical, style of representation characteristic of earlier 'realist' drawing evolved over a period into a style that quite self-consciously *re-presented itself* as a construct of the *act* of viewing and not of any anterior objective thing-in-the-world.

Historically, Rotman sees something similar taking place in respect of money. Initially money as a form of specie, be it gold or silver coin, signified value iconically. Use of it and possession of it more or less coincided: one could say that the act of purchase using a coin more or less was an extended or delayed act of barter. The introduction of paper money in England and Scotland set in motion a whole conceptual revolution centred about the explicitly contractual form of the banknote, which involved *named* parties (that is to say, identifiable anteriorly existent agents) as

distinct from the implicitly general recipient (that is to say the unnamed 'bearer'), that called into question the concept of ownership of goods and the right to dispose thereof. The monetary 'meta-subject' engendered by this form of exchange, it is suggested, has become so detached from the original activity of commodity trading that the only good now worth investing in is *the future value of whatever currency one possesses*. This commodity, this 'xenomoney' as Rotman labels it, can be seen as a sort of deconstructed capitalism in which the one who buys and sells has become wholly alienated from any possible real commodity, but who nevertheless buys and sells as if just such an anterior reality did obtain.

In the examples chosen above, Rotman emphasises the 'deferment' that has evolved between signifiers and signifieds in the spheres he has investigated. Starting from the inadequacies of Saussure's 'structuralist' linguistics, and exploiting the symbolic gaps he has identified in the concepts so investigated, he sets about contemporary post-structuralism in an attempt to show it as the literary/philosophical descendent of the very same alienated signification engendered by the European reception of zero. The conclusion Rotman ultimately reaches is that Post-Structuralism in its Derridean guise is the textual equivalent of the electronic money meta-sign: it has, so to speak, reduced reading to the interpretation of a 'xeno-text' the meaning of which is permanently located in some unattainable future. For example, Derrida's metaphors in respect of language ('bankrupt' meanings would be a case in point here) are invoked to show how his own text deconstructs to reveal its own alienated status.

In its own chosen terms, Rotman's text works well enough. There is a wealth of historical evidence that he provides in order to bolster what are really not very controversial premises for his final project. It is when one interrogates his reading of Derrida that a few loose ends begin to show. Was Derrida's project *ever* able to read as showing *all* reading to be interpretable against itself in as infinitely-deferred a way as Rotman has claimed? Surely Derrida was aiming his barb

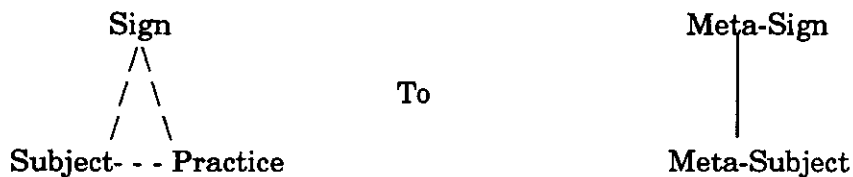
at the claims of European Philosophers who as a matter of Practice use text to denigrate itself? This reviewer seems to remember that Derrida's *On Grammatology* quite specifically approaches its topic by returning to the same Eleatic context of debate used by Rotman so that it can *philosophically* read Husserl's philosophy *as text*. By applying the techniques of textual criticism to the claims made by *philosophical texts* Derrida showed them to be dependent on what they had claimed specifically not to be. Certainly Derrida *seems* to be making vast claims for his 'Text', but his choice of metaphor indicates an awareness of the inflationary proliferation of publications so very characteristic of the practice of philosophy in the so-called First World.

What Rotman seems to have overlooked is that, for Derrida, what is anterior to the signs of philosophy is the *practice* of philosophy. While the text under review does begin by taking into account the relationship between sign, signifying subject, and practice when discussing the historical introduction of Hindu/Arab numerals into Europe, the practice gets lost by the time paper money comes into the picture. We get treated to a treatise on meta-signs and meta-subjects without an accompanying meta-practice. This is not intended as a kind of flip derogation of a perfectly serious attempt to address a perfectly valid intellectual problem; there are, we want to suggest, reasonable theoretical grounds to believe that Rotman may have caught the wrong bus. If we consider Rotman's opening discussion, then we find that a triadic relationship between sign, subject and practice during the Renaissance forms the context for the debate. At the state when 'xenomoney' is being examined, the discussion is about an essentially *dyadic* relationship between meta-sign and meta-subject in which any notion of practice is, so to speak, formally an illusion. Put differently, Rotman has shifted his frame of reference from the Peircean to the Saussurean, from Semiotics to Semiology, and we are quite unaware of where or how the transition has taken place. Graphically, the shift can be shown as in Fig. 1, where the left-hand figure indicates the kind of relationship Rotman first examined, while the right-hand

one shows how we read him as having ended up.
It is, of course, possible to point out that the

kind of sign in question here excludes by its very nature any relationship other than the purely binary, but this response is, as we see

Fig.1



see it, inadequate: first, if the shift is of a logical nature we are not shown that logical operation in which logical system validates the shift; and second, if the shift has been observed as an historical phenomenon the text does precious little to show when, where, how, or by whom the move was introduced. To be sure, Rotman does discuss in some detail (on pages 46 to 53) the historical *debate* around the introduction of the original manifestation of what was to become 'xenomoney', but by not discussing the justifications that may have been cited for having *mooted* this introduction in the first place, he fails to show us quite what it is that has been taken from us by subsequent developments.

What Rotman does, though, is bemoan the 'loss of anteriority' inherent in the explicitly freewheeling possibilities opened up by the concepts of deconstructive reading and foreign currency futures trading. Unfortunately, if we are to have something other than signs anterior to signs, Rotman gives no hint as to what this 'other' is or ought to be. If, however, we are to avoid returning to the psychological, physiological and philosophical nightmare that surrounds the anteriority-of-things-to-signs debate that Richard Rorty (1980), for example, has so roundly shown to have been a non-debate throughout its history, then we certainly have to find some other 'objective ground' for the signs that so obviously are central to our intellectual and other endeavours. It is disappointing, in reading Rotman, to find that the obvious choice for a real anteriority for signs *in his own work* was ignored: practice.

One can begin by rereading

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, in which the concept of Meaning as Use is made central to the study of language. From this central insight Wittgenstein goes on to make, among others, two further crucial points: firstly, that to understand something is demonstrably to be able to go on doing that thing *in the same way*, and, second, that an absolutely private language is impossible to understand. In all of these cases the common aspect has to do with *doing* something: the idea is that some or other practice is intimately involved during or prior to the activities of signification. So, for example, one may say that for another to have understood an instruction, say, means the institution, habit, custom or tradition of giving instructions is prior to the persons who so give and receive them, and also that the signs constituting that instruction generally get used in a consistently similar way by both such persons. For our purposes, the significant point here is that not only is it important that a concrete act of one kind or other be involved in this interchange, but that the language (that is to say, the signifying system) should be common, and familiarly so, to all participants in the transaction.

Our point in all this is to emphasise that the anteriority of signs to other signs is nothing new to our thinking, and that others have already shown in fairly convincing fashion that the ways in which we *act* with the material reality around us are such that it is the *activity that is prior to the sign, and not the thing acted upon*. Had Rotman recognised this, and a philosopher with Wittgenstein's prominence in English academic circles should

be one with whom Rotman is familiar, then perhaps this little book might have been as fruitful to read as it has been fascinating; as it is, however, we find with some regret that very little more is concluded than that John Locke must have been right and that the only right way for us to explain how it is that we Know Truth is to describe the obviously Causal Connection between the thing we sense and

that with which we understand it.

Too bad.....

Arnold Shepperson, 1991.

Reference:

Rorty, R. 1980. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Sless: Digging for the Roots

David Sless. *In Search of Semiotics*. London: Croom Helm, 1986. 170pp. Index.

In Search of Semiotics interprets some of the more impenetrable forms of semiotics which terrify students and academics alike. A semio-biography, Sless charts his own discovery of the field, how he came to terms with it, tamed it and made it accessible to the uninitiated.

Sless re-examines the basic concepts of semiotics. This, he feels, is a necessary activity; a return to roots. However, unlike so many other theories in a variety of disciplines which have long forgotten their derivations, and which fall like a pack of cards on re-examination, Sless reaffirms a form of semiotics which continues its original intention to free analysis from a textual hegemony.

Numerous sacred theoretical cows are tumbled one after the other: the *transmission model of communication* because it naively assumes 'exchange'; *structuralism* because it ignores projected readers who interpret texts from outside the assumed hermeneutic; *Roland Barthes* because he takes 'sharing' and homogenous readers for granted; *discourse analysis* and 'imperialist' semiotics eliminate authors and distance the reader from the object of study; others, like art historian Herbert Read, overemphasize the author. Among the luminaries challenged are Pierre Giraud, Judith Williamson, Umberto Eco, Michael Foucault, Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morely, Jacques Derrida and Frederick Jameson, Terrence Hawkes, John Fiske and Stuart Hall. Few of these approaches, says

Sless, account for lying or misunderstanding or even the process of communication itself.

Where de Saussure foregrounds the code, and C. S. Peirce the sign, Sless privileges *semiosis* - the process of signification. The other foundation he uses is the 'stand for' relation. Sless implies a triadic relationship connected by 'the user'. He introduces the question of 'authority' and queries the assumption that 'the authority which controls the use of the sign controls the referent' (p.8). This corresponds to Volosinov's argument that the sign becomes the arena of class struggle, a point not developed by Sless.

Sless debunks once and for all models of communication derived from Shannon and Weaver (1948) as suitable metaphors for the study of human communication. He replaces the scientific perspective of the observer being outside the diagramme with a researcher who is *in* the diagramme (i.e. the system of relations being studied). He argues that the idea of 'sharing' information in the concept of communication belies the evidence and that a proper theory of communication must encompass both lies and truth.

Barthes is attacked for assuming the transmission model in his analysis of myth. Barthes is argued to position himself *outside* the people and processes he is studying. Sless thus accuses Barthes amongst others, of authoritarianism by imposing interpretation of texts in a speculative manner.

Four kinds of projected authors are

identified: individual, social, collective and authors constituted by culture. Sless demolishes both structuralist and post-structuralist conceptions of an entirely decentred author. His example of *Screen's* contradictions of providing a decentred discourse while simultaneously privileging its own authors is masterful. In this way Sless shows up the 'imperialism' and contradictions of certain strands of semiological enquiry, particularly when used by radical dissenters.

The theory of quantum mechanics facilitates Sless's critique of semiotics as a science and shows how meaning changes in terms of participation, arguing that no-one can be an observer, outside of the object of study. This brings into question the 'stand for' relation -- participation in the production of meaning results in different meanings. This notion of 'open readings' is the basis of Fiske's *Television Culture* (1987).

Sless is doubtful of the appropriateness of the classic Marxist notions of class or class consciousness to contemporary capitalist societies. He argues that the Birmingham Contemporary Cultural Studies Centre, although positioning the researcher within class and ideology, nevertheless tends to adopt positions as outsiders to the texts under scrutiny. This occurs because they do not locate themselves or account for their own positions. More to the point, feminism, argues Sless, 'is first and foremost, by definition, a recognition of *position* from which struggle can be engaged' (p.110).

Sless' two key concepts -- 'stand for' and 'semiosis' -- are crucial, but he, like most media theorists, undervalues the potential of 'semiosis'. Semiosis is a finely tuned Peircian concept which has had rather a crude ride by communication semioticians through their ignorance of Peirce's nine sub-categories of interpretant (see Tomaselli, 1981: Fitzgerald, 1966).

The basic New Accents work of John Fiske attacked by Sless is working at a different level to the later Fiske. Likewise, Barthes also offers more sophisticated arguments in his later writing. The brief attack by Sless on Marxist class analysis ignores second and third generation work done

by Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Antonio Gramsci and Carchedi, who are not unaware of the problems identified by Sless.

The bibliography lists most of Sless' own work on semiotics. His major emphasis is on practical application in the use of signs and graphics in industrial, office and road situations. Sless's frustration at the abstraction of semiotics which removed it from a wider public currency is clear. One revels in his boldness: Sless is 'not given to trembling caution' (Preface). But, at the same time, the broad and sweeping scythe with which he perfunctorily decapitates the pre-eminent scholars in the field leaves a sense of unfinished task. *In Search of Semiotics* is only the first salvo. Paradoxically, the counter-attack thus far has failed to occur. When it does, Sless will, I think, find himself having to respond in terms of the complexity and history of the theories he critiques. This will inevitably lift the debate out of the realm of the introductory and into the 'tortured prose' he is trying to escape. The ensuing debate will hopefully have a positive and sobering effect on the more obscure forms of semiotic application.

In Search of Semiotics is informatively repetitive, reinforcing concepts from chapter to chapter. The concepts are developed at a reasonable pace, but the book will be mainly of value to those with a basic knowledge of semiology, semiotics and communication theory. Gone are the days at the turn of the decade when lecturers had to intervene directly on behalf of undergraduate students to make the primary writings of Peirce (extremely difficult) and de Saussure (not so difficult) accessible. Sless offers a discursive analysis which should be read in conjunction with the flurry of introductory texts, such as the Methuen 'New Accents' Series, that have flooded the bookshelves since the late '70s.

Keyan G. Tomaselli.

Adapted from a review 'A Slessian "In Search of Semiotics": David Sless', in *Critical Arts*, Vol.5 No. 3, 1991. pp.100-103.

References:

Fiske, John. 1987. *Television Culture*. London: Methuen, 353pp.

Fitzgerald, J. L. 1966. *Peirce's Theory of Signs as Foundation of Pragmatism*. The Hague: Mouton.

Shannon, C., and W. Weaver. 1948. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Tomaselli, Keyan. 1981. 'Semiotics, Semiology and Film'. *Comunicare*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp.42-61.

Fiske and Allen: The Signs of Television

John Fiske. *Television Culture*. London: Methuen, 1987. 353pp.

Robert Allen, (Ed.). *Channels of Discourse*. Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press/Methuen, 1987. 310pp.

Certain 'regimes of signification' were dominant in cinema theory during the '80s. Amongst these were post-Freudian psychoanalysis developed from Jacques Lacan, semiology and Althusser's superstructural Marxism. Apart from counter-attacks from *Cineaste* and *Film Quarterly*, Third Cinema Theory, for example, rejected Screen Theory's assumption that language is a homogeneous, self-sufficient system. It also queried the First World assumption that Lacanian psychoanalysis accounts for socialisation in the Third World and, especially, of nomads.

Semiotics, drawing on Volosinov's theory of the sign as a dialectical process where subject and object interpenetrate each other, offers another challenge to Screen Theory. In this schema, the sign becomes the arena of class struggle, permitting open readings, subversive interpretations and reformulations, no matter what the 'dominant regime of signification' found in the film.

This approach is based on the relations between signification and the social, not just within the text. John Fiske, for example, has returned to Peirce in his definition of text as the interpretant, the idea elicited in the mental interaction between a viewer and a film or television programme. Such theory liberates the viewer from an inexorable 'positioning' by the 'text' from which he/she cannot escape, an imprisonment ensured by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

Others have asserted the centrality of the reader in the process of making meaning.

Robert Allen, drawing on the work of Hans Robert Jauss, has proposed an explanation of television viewing which explicitly counters the passive conception of the spectator/viewer held by conventional studies and supported by the transmission model of communication. Allen's book provides a series of excellent readings on the various approaches to media study including reader-oriented criticism with respect to TV, genre study, ideological analysis, psycho-analysis, feminist criticism and the contribution of British Cultural Studies. David Morley's (1980) ethnographic research on audience and Ien Ang's (1985) work with Dallas watchers have revealed the enormous variety of negotiated readings possible in addition to the 'preferred' spectatorial reading. Such a broad range of possible meanings permits the possibility of emancipatory discourses arising out of material conditions, which is denied by Screen Theory. Subversive readings can occur even in texts which seem to very explicitly position their readers. The three women in *Charlie's Angels*, for instance, are sometimes read by female viewers as empowering women, even though the programme as a whole seeps of patriarchy.

However, these 'active' readings may not be truly subversive. Just because a reader thinks subversive thoughts as s/he sits in his/her armchair watching television does not mean that this 'activity' translates into concrete political action. Reader-orientated theorists acknowledge this but simply assert the disclaimer that any subversive action must

be preceded by subversive thought. Though we agree with this point, we question whether this view of subversion is politically adequate. Television and cinema audiences have been taught that physical activity is not an appropriate response to what they see on the screen. Early cinema audiences learned that they didn't have to run if they saw a train coming at them on screen, and today's audiences understand that emotional and mental but not physical responses are appropriate when watching a film. No matter how audience members respond internally to a film, they remain paralysed externally by the conventions of the viewing situation. Discussion on the 'active' vs. 'passive' reader hides the fact that this activity is purely internal, not external. Such 'subversive, active readers', do not make a movement of democrats.

Though Allen acknowledges influences beyond the text, both his and Fiske's remain what he calls 'contemporary criticism'. This form of analysis examines intersections of meaning, relationships between texts and textual practices, contexts and the forces which circumscribe authorship, and so on. Aesthetic questions form only one element of this kind of analysis. However, Allen's genuflection to 'contexts' remains underdeveloped. In other words, Allen's method, and those of his

authors, while open to examination of forces beyond the text, do not, in fact, adequately address the relationships between texts and their contexts of production, distribution and consumption/reading. The system of relations in studying the text and how it may be read has not been adequately paralleled by the study of the relations that govern media production and distribution, though they are implied.

These books, then, provide a way into a more praxis-oriented study of TV, but don't themselves provide the route to active strategies for social change or a critique of contexts, or the relations of production which produce media.

Modified from: Tomaselli, K. G. & Smith, G. 'Sign Wars: The Battlegrounds of Semiotics of Cinema in Anglo-Saxonia', in *Degrés*, No. 64, 1990, pp. C1-C26, 1991.

References:

Ang, Ien, 1985. *Watching Dallas*. London: Methuen.

Morley, David, 1980. *The 'Nationwide' Audiences: Structure and Decoding*. London: British Film Institute.

Hebdige: Subcultures and Hegemonies

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen, 1979.

Subculture is defined in the expressive manifestations and rituals of subordinate groups. The signs that such groups adopt are the outward manifestations of the groups' self-imposed exile from dominant culture. Hebdige explains the dialectic between action and reaction which gives these signs meaning. It is therefore in examining different subcultural styles constituted by ordinary objects that have acquired denotative meaning that the tensions between dominant and subordinate groups can be found.

The challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather, it is expressed obliquely in

style. The struggle between different meanings within ideology is simultaneously a struggle within signification. The essential carrier of signification in subculture is style. Hebdige unpacks meanings encoded in style and exposes the battlegrounds of signification. It is here that subcultures initially subvert the ordinary meanings of object as shaped by the dominant ideology. Subcultural meanings are also invoked to ward off the imperialist objectives of hegemony as it attempts to contain and thus neutralise these 'deviant' interpretations.

Hebdige's examination of spectacular youth subcultures focuses mainly on punk, but

as his appraisal is historically located, it also includes a relational look at Rastafarians, skinheads, and teddy-boys. The meanings embodied in style are reactions not only to the contradictions in parental and hegemonic culture, but to the mass of layered ideologies that pervade our experiences. Hebdige combines various cultural and semiotic approaches to create a methodology which is useful because it *works meaningfully* in its practical application.

The foundations laid by Althusser and Barthes are used to explain the media's interaction with subcultures. The media, Hebdige says, provides us with the most available categories for classifying the social world. It is through the media that experience is organised, interpreted and made to cohere within some kind of broader social experience. This coherence can only be maintained if hegemonic culture appropriates and redefines resisting subcultures. This is achieved by the fetishisation of the objects of significance to the subculture (by mass producing these objects as commodities) and redefining deviant behaviour in terms of hegemonic ideology. Both processes are effected through the media which popularises the commodities and circulates the new definitions. Hebdige thus employs a semiotic version of hegemony in order to explain the dialectic of style. While Antonio Gramsci employed hegemony to explain his notion of dominant culture and its conflict with resisting groups, Hebdige uses it to explain the co-option of the signs of resistance of subcultures by capital. This conception not only alters the use of hegemony, it transforms conventional semiotics into radical semiotics.

Hebdige thus avoids the problems of orthodox semiotics which explains the creation of meaning in terms of fixed signifieds while largely ignoring social dynamics. Hebdige employs a semiotics which has polysemy as its goal, whereby each text is seen to generate a potentially infinite range of meanings. This method examines how meaning is constructed as a process, rather than being concerned with any final closed product. This departure from a stimulus-response (or transmission) model of communication rejects static signifieds and determinate meaning. Radical semiotics retains the structuralist understandings of ideology, while still allowing people the ability to contest meanings. Hebdige thus continues the Birmingham goal of unifying structuralism and culturalism.

Subculture is accessible to students of culture and media studies. Hebdige's proposed methodology for a semiotic sociology is clearly illustrated through practical application. It is in mapping out the specific symbolic meaning that objects held for punks and describing hegemony's reaction to them that his method is illustrated.

Brief explanations of, amongst others, Althusser's notions of ideology, Roland Barthe's ideas on myths and Stuart Hall's views on culture, provide insight into the text at hand as well as being useful introductions to the purely theoretical works of these writers. *Subculture* is significant in that it constitutes both a sociological explanation and a theoretical model, thus fulfilling Cultural Studies' pragmatism while achieving the academic rigour it requires.

Russell Baker

Williamson: The Structures of Advertising

Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements*. London: Marion Boyars, 1978. ISBN 07145-2615 0 (pb)
0-7145-2614-2 (hb)

Decoding Advertisements remains one of the most thoroughgoing attempts to apply structuralism to the study of advertisements. Williamson draws on semiology, Lacan's

psychoanalysis, Althusser's Marxism and Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropology to explain the ideological processes whereby products are given meaning in advertisements, and how

advertising transforms the practical 'use value' of products into the symbolic 'exchange value' of commodities.

Like Barthes, Williamson argues that the signifiers in an advertisement are arranged so that they call upon (or 'appellate') readers to supply the necessary cultural knowledge from which meaning is drawn, the signified. Advertisements constitute us as 'active receivers', but only because they call us (the 'subject') into places they have already prepared for us. This is achieved through the way advertisements address receivers (appellation), and through the 'absences' in their structure which viewers/readers are required to fill.

Appellation works at both the individual and collective levels. At the individual level, Williamson applies Lacan's theory of how the subject ('us') is formed by language to explain how advertisements operate psychologically by offering us a coherent, unified self which receivers desire but can never attain. In buying products with certain 'images' we create ourselves, our personality, our qualities, even our past and future. At the collective level, Lévi-Strauss' theory of totemism serves to explain the process of 'recognition' from which we identify ourselves by the use of certain product brands.

In Williamson one also can detect the influence (either directly or through other writers, such as John Berger, 1972) of Raymond Williams's seminal essay 'Advertising: The Magic System', 1980 (first published in *New Left Review*, 1960). Williamson, however, avoids committing herself to any judgement of the human propensity for evaluating goods for their meaning as signs rather than purely for their efficacy as implements. Later works of advertising criticism, Sut Jhally (1987) and Leiss, Kline & Jhally (1986), have referred to social anthropological evidence to challenge the wisdom of Raymond Williams's praxis-oriented attempt to mobilise advertising criticism against the consumption-driven mode of monopoly capitalist production.

Williamson provides a coherent though somewhat complex use of structuralist theory and shows the relevance of its application to explaining how advertising enables 'use-value'

to become exchange value. At the same time she recognises the limitations of structural and semiological approaches. She warns that analysis of internal structures of signs within advertisements and of the ideological referent systems or discourses within culture can become an end in itself if we lose sight of how advertising fits into the structures of production and communication. Unlike the post-structuralists who believe meaning is only to be found in the structures of signs in a text and its relation to other texts, Williamson argues that meaning depends on the exchange between signs and 'specific, concrete receivers, people for whom and in whose systems of belief, they have meaning' (see John Sinclair, 1987: 51)

A shortcoming of *Decoding Advertisements* derives from the fact that the sample of magazine advertisements analysed was collected unsystematically over several years. Probably the strongest systematising influence on the sample of study is its relationship to Williamson's own theoretical development. Thus certain types of advertisements and advertising techniques may be overlooked. Also, when we look at the 'decodings' which Williamson provides, it is apparent that her method systematically favours the meanings inscribed in the advertisements themselves and ignores their contexts in the cultivation of consumer markets and the external reality of the society at any given time. Though 'we' supply the 'currency' of meaning, we do not all carry the same currency any more than we respond to the same appellation (see John Sinclair, 1987: 51-52; Sless, 1986).

Williamson nevertheless acknowledges in her conclusion that abstraction is a weakness of the structuralist method: real 'subjects' have real needs, she admits, including the desire to share the meaning with others, but advertising exploits these with its promises of false fulfillment. We are conscious that these promises are false and regard advertising with scepticism: so advertising is not 'ideological brainwashing forced on us from above'. (One recalls here Eco and Sless's comments that one definition of semiotics incorporates lying and deceit). It is the

capacity of advertising to constantly exchange one meaning for another which kept it a step ahead of consciousness, transforming the challenge of social movements and even criticism of advertising to its own terms. Thus Williamson, to some extent, avoids the shortcoming of structuralist approaches which are unable to account for so-called 'aberrant decoding' or to allow for the possibility of praxis. As John Sinclair (1987) has pointed out, Williamson finally moves some distance towards the Culturalist conception of hegemony, the continuing struggle over meaning between the dominant capitalist forces and the subordinate social groupings: 'ideologies cannot be known and undone, so much as engaged with -- in a sort of running battle, almost a race since the rate at which all their forms, especially advertising, reabsorbs all cultural material is alarmingly fast' (Williamson, p.178). *Decoding Advertisements* is not only recommendable as a major work of advertising criticism, it also contributes to cultural studies theory as well as to significant works in the application of semiology.

Alex Holt

Sebeok: Mapping the Forest of Symbols

Sebeok, Thomas A. (Ed.) *Misleading Meanings: The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Semiotics*. 3 vols. Mouton de Gruyter, 1986.

Given the explosion of popular expositions on 'body language' and similar TV babbling, one would have hoped to find in a dictionary of semiotics a publication sufficiently accessible for Jane Soap to understand -- at least in the way each entry is introduced. As it is, this mammoth publication turns out to be perfectly adequate in perpetuating the myth that Semiotics is esoteric enough to be maintained as the exclusive preserve of readers with at least half-a-dozen academic abbreviations behind their names. People cannot exist as people without signs: the person who coined the term 'semiotics', Charles S. Peirce, considered 'man' (this *was* in the 19th Century) to be 'born into a universe of signs' and that this was sufficient to make an understanding of them central to the way we act in the world.

Unfortunately, the editors of these three

References

Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC/Penguin.

Jhally, Sut. 1987. *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*. London: Frances Pinter.

Leiss, William, et al. 1986. *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products, & Images of Well-Being*. Toronto: Methuen.

Sinclair, John. 1987. *Images Incorporated: Advertising as Industry and Ideology*. London: Croom Helm.

Sless, David. 1986. *In Search of Semiotics*. London: Croom Helm.

Williams, Raymond. 1986. 'Advertising: The Magic System' in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London: Verso, 1980.

volumes (they had the sense to have classified them as 'Tomes' 1, 2, and 3) did not see fit to ask for the entries to be opened with readily accessible introductions. This might have made their work into a worthwhile acquisition for public libraries and possibly have reduced the price somewhat. The contributors, and there is a veritable constellation of them, plunge straight ahead into their topics as if the discourse is as common as that of popular music lyrics. One suspects that the Academic Sphere want to remain as far removed as possible from everyday life in its language; one also wants to ask 'why?'

On the one hand, the work does draw relevant technical distinctions between the different traditions in 'The Science of Signs', but only as a function of individual topics. However, although the difference is

acknowledged, no attention is drawn to the incommensurability of Peirce's essentially *ethical* approach with respect to the rather more limited *linguistic* foundations of the European 'structuralist' tradition. Simply put, the curious reader is going to find out that the former is based on the relation between signs and human action while the latter derives purely from theories of speech and language, but the effective difference in terms of possible application is not readily accessible at all. 'Semiotics' as a field of study in the late 20th Century derives from a decision taken in the 1960s to use this term rather than the linguists' word 'semiology'; this has tended to be misleading, since the uninitiated will have to bring to the topic a quite extensive academic background in order to sort out these different but internally coherent strands.

On the other hand, though, it is possible to get a good idea of the long prehistory of the fascination for the sign. Entries on Plato and Aristotle are to be found, as well as on mediaeval scholars like William of Ockham (of Razor fame), Enlightenment schools such as the Port Royalists, and the more familiar names like Kant and Hegel. There is a caveat, however, since it is easy, reading through such a history of Western thinking, to conclude that all that is on record from the past of our present is 'nothing but' semiotics but nobody knew it. Richard Rorty has suggested that there is a kind of agenda that attaches to an approach that encourages such a reading. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* he takes to task the Anglo-Saxon tradition of analytical

philosophy for misrepresenting its historical relationship with Classical thought. To be sure, this is not the place to judge whether Rorty makes the point satisfactorily, but there are African writers, for example V. Y. Mudimbe, who come to the similar conclusion that there is a kind of cultural tendency for Anglo-Saxons to claim for themselves as property any achievements of non-white others.

This need not be seen as a drawback, since very few academic works acknowledge their specificities. However, this almost always obscures the possibility that there could be (and indeed there are) readers who, while being able to *read* an entry on Aesthetics, will find the concept culturally alien in terms of their own social practice. Put differently, the editors make little allowance if any for the fact that not all who want to find out about semiotics are from the same cultural milieu as they are. This is paradoxical in a way, since this reviewer has found Peirce's Semiotics to have a potential for extremely relevant application in the study of intercultural clashes as a function of Africa's experience as the colonial subject of Europe. For such a project this dictionary is useful for background, but its Eurocentrism is probably going to turn out to be detrimental to semiotics in the long term.

Arnold Shepperson

Reference:

Mudimbe, V. Y. 1988: *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and The Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Berger: A Springboard to the Signs

Arthur Asa Berger: *Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics*. New York and London: Longman, 1984.

'Never judge a book by its cover' goes the old cliché, but just how many of us are guilty of this crime? Students and other academics are somewhat excused, since we are often forced to read some of the most laboured texts ever written: academic circles tend to regard the quality of texts as being a function of complexity. Arthur Asa Berger says that *Signs*

in Contemporary Culture is aimed at the general reader who has no background in semiotics. Berger believes that 'semiotics' is just as important to the 'man in the street' as it is to the academic. With all these premises in mind, accessibility will be one of the criteria I will be using to critique this text.

The cover of a book, frivolous as it may

seem, plays a role in attracting (or scaring off) potential readers. Looking at the cover of *Signs in Contemporary Culture*, one's attention is immediately captured by red print and graphics on a white background. The sketch on the cover has a comic-like quality, and this in itself makes the text seem more accessible. There is even a pun on the notion of the sign itself: the little character on the cover is holding up a sign telling us that 'Signs in Contemporary Culture' is an introduction to semiotics. Some of the other elements that contribute to the accessibility of *Signs in Contemporary Culture* are:

1. the language is relatively straightforward
2. the arguments are not too dense
3. the print is not too small
4. pictures and graphics assist in heightening the reader's curiosity.

All these elements create a certain superficial level of accessibility not often found in semiotic texts. What we do find worthwhile in Berger is his combining of theory with practice in a didactic format: besides teaching us about a new subject in theory. Berger also shows us how this theory is operative in everyday life. By allowing theory and practice to complement each other in this way, he makes for easier assimilation on the part of the uninitiated reader.

Another important aspect of accessibility is how the topic itself is dealt with. In an introductory text one expects an author to present all the different strands of thought, so the reader is aware from the beginning of the circulation of theories. Most of the texts I have read on semiotics are rather complex, even for those of us who have had some experience of the field (let alone undergraduates, media workers, and novice semioticians). This arises from the way many semioticians see 'semiotics' and their role as theorists of it: the conceptualization of semiotics as a science, earning for the subject - as well as the theorist -- a sense of objectivity and omnipotence. David Sless makes a salient point concerning this issue: 'The imperialism of semiotic ambitions, the vision of a theory

embracing the entire universe of semiosis, has led to delusions of grandeur, a sense of scholarly omnipotence' (Sless 1986: 38).

Berger's definitions assume the readers' ignorance of semiotic theory, and are therefore very useful to the uninitiated reader. This is an approach not often used by academics, who always seem to assume prior knowledge. His opening definition is that originally used by Charles Sanders Peirce: 'this sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity'. An important distinction that Berger draws is that between semiotics and semiology, which most academics take to be synonymous. Another important point made by Berger is that not all signs are benevolent, that is to say, words can be used to lie. Related to this is the assumption that all communication necessarily entails sharing. But the fact that lying is an important aspect of communication (not even necessarily aberrant) implies a will contrary to sharing. This would suggest that for any theory of communication to be adequate, it should deal with lies as well as truth. As Sless (1986: 28) said 'Lying is the repressed taboo of our intellectual life as sex is sometimes the repressed taboo of our social life'.

Berger moves away from the 'C-M-R' model of Shannon and Weaver, where the ultimate emphasis is on the communicator. They tend to look at communication as a unilinear flow of information, passively absorbed by the receiver. These theorists believe that the message can be received exactly as the communicator intended. Berger looks at the 'medium' as well as the 'receiver', and suggests that '...the sender of a message can be operating at one level, but the receiver of a message at another' (p.158). It is our impression, however, that even though Berger has mentioned the importance of lying in this theory, his implicit assumption throughout the book is that sharing defines communication sufficiently. He has a middle class, white American approach which is explicit in the examples he uses. Berger assumes that this 'monolithic' American culture is accessible to all: this is especially evident when he refers to 'his' observations in the plural 'we'.

Berger examines 'imaginary signs' such

as dreams, which tend to get overlooked by theorists with a specifically linguistic outlook. It is evident here that he relies on the work of Peirce, using the notion of the phaneron: the collective total of all that is in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not. Whenever one talks of dreams it is almost inevitable that the name of Sigmund Freud comes to mind. This has both positive and negative consequences for Berger's approach. It is positive, in that it establishes the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics and indeed, on a broader scale, cultural studies. The negative consequence, however, is that the so-called general reader is not so general, after all: how many everyday people are familiar with the main thrust of Freud?

There are certain issues which *Signs in Contemporary Culture* does not cover adequately. These are ideology and class struggle as related to the sign found in the work of V. N. Volosinov, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and the material linguists. As Volosinov states: 'whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too'. The reason for Berger's oversight is because he lacks an explicit theoretical perspective within which to analyse semiotics and semiology. This is over-simplification and a failure to locate himself in terms of his own position in his relationship to readers and authors. Semiology represents a dyadic relationship between the signifier and signified and holds no place in its structure for the interpretant. The importance of context, whether historical or otherwise, is ignored. Semiotics, because it has a triadic structure which makes special reference through habit to the role of the interpretant, makes allowance for context both in the circumstances of a text's generation *and* of its consumption.

The only way Berger touches on the issue of class is when he writes about cultural codes. However, he sees cultural codes as innate structures, rather than as an overall result of historical socio-economic circumstances. An example is when he states that '...people tend to become locked into the world that their language codes enable them to perceive and deal with, and people with a

restricted language code tend to move in a narrow and rather constricted world' (Berger, 1989: 161). Berger gives the impression that the working class has the same freedom of choice as the middle class, but that they unconsciously (in a Freudian sort of sense) opt for a narrow existence. No comment is made about the history and politics of these restricted codes in the first place. Consequently, Berger's commentary is unaware of questions of social conflict. This ignorance pervades his text: something not taken into consideration is the fact that working class people may consciously opt for certain cultural codes as counters to being co-opted by the dominant culture (see review of Hebdige). The positive aspect of *Signs and Contemporary Culture* is its relative level of accessibility. The negative aspects derive from certain assumptions that the author himself makes, a key one being that semiotics is a science: a more thorough reading of Peirce would have revealed that semiotics evolved as a *methodology* quite apart from Science but intended to improve it along with many other intellectual activities. Berger should also not fall into the trap in believing that he shares the same understanding as other readers: in essence he should not take for granted that communication necessarily equals sharing. This is something he derived from the homogeneous picture he has of American society.

The semiotician must come to terms with his/her subjective self; there is always a projected reader, and at the same time a projected author (depending on how we view our fellow beings, that is to say as below us, above us). As an academic I believe that Berger should try to broaden the terrain of academia, and one way of doing this is to make 'academic' texts more accessible to non-academics. But one should beware of collapsing semiotics and semiology into one. The academic should also never forget that he belongs to a broader society, for this is where her or his ultimate responsibility lies.

Lara Nursoo.

Reference:

Sless, David. 1986. *In Search of Semiotics*. London: Croom Helm.

PERSPECTIVE

Marxism, anthropology, psychology/psychiatry and semiotics/semiology all have been moving us, during the past century and more, towards an increasing sense of the relativity present in human relationships and points of view. The evidence had been around and had been recognized for a long time--at least as far back as Plato. Only recently, however, have whole disciplines come to be based on the study of ambiguity and dedicated--or so it sometimes seems--to arguing that the whole possibility of argument is merely a figment of the imagination.

Semiotics grew out of the philosophical soil of American Pragmatism and found its chief exponent in the businessman and part-time philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Semiology, its European cousin, had a more academic origin in the mind of Ferdinand de Saussure, Professor of Sanskrit and Indo-European languages at the University of Geneva. After some years in the shadows, the works of these two men became the 'bibles' of the renewed interest in the study of signs and meanings which blossomed forth in the 1960s and 70s and is still with us.

Keyan Tomaselli and his associates have given us, in Vol. 11 No. 2 of *Trends* and in the reviews which began this issue, an overview of the present 'state-of-the-art' in semiotics/semiology and of many of its problems and promises.

What remains to be done is to ask, 'What does all this mean for the practical conduct of communication work--whether in the press, TV, radio, or cinema?' That is a valid, even an essential question, but one which is not easy to answer.

One place to begin is by drawing a parallel with the study of philosophy. Because it focused on the hard questions, and the most fundamental ones of life, philosophy was long regarded as a necessary element in the education of anyone who wished to lay claim to being 'fully educated'. Seminarians were required to study it because the matters with which it dealt challenged the contents of their core discipline, theology. On the other hand,

philosophy could be mobilized to serve theology; and, in fact, much of theology continues to be phrased in philosophical terms.

Semiotics has taken over one area of philosophy and has expanded upon it--namely the matter involved in the sub-fields variously labelled 'critica', 'epistemology', 'theory of knowledge', and 'logic'. The questions posed remain important for all communication--in that they deal with what makes communication possible. It follows that they are potentially of at least general interest to all communicators.

Events and publications of recent years have pushed the importance of semiotics far beyond that of general erudition, however, to influence the ways people live, communicate and think about the meaning of their lives. 'Pop Semiotics' is everywhere, and everyone is conscious of concepts like 'ideology'--which calls into question the possibility of people from different social classes or categories sharing the same outlook--or 'cultural relativism'--extreme forms of which would render impossible communication between people of different ethnic groups.

The scholarly world moved through a preoccupation with 'structuralism', which tried to find something akin to Kant's *a priori* structures of mind and knowledge, into 'post-structuralism'. As Tomaselli and Shepperson point out (*CRT* 11/2, p. 5) the leading post-structuralist, Roland Barthes found himself imprisoned by the logic of his own theories, in which meanings changed continuously and unpredictably, making a mockery of consistent and meaningful thought. As pop existentialism descended quickly from Sartre and Camus to the hippies in the 1950s and 60s, so 'post structuralism' and 'deconstructionism' have brought us down from the peaks occupied by Peirce and de Saussure to the teeming valleys of popular expression. Popular cultural studies are beginning to reveal the effects of this movement in novels, music and cinema--not to mention homes, schools and churches. Is Madonna's performance style a post-modern effect of Saussurian semiology? Was *Twin*

Peaks the first 'self-deconstructing' soap opera? These may be silly questions, and only the yet-to-be written history of contemporary criticism can presume to answer them, but the pattern for such influences seems to be present.

The practical challenge for the serious communicator is to acknowledge the relativity and ambiguity in our lives while recognizing that the requisites for restoring some rationality and shared meaning still exist. Semioticians may seem to focus on the problems of meaning--and some, like Barthes, have been unable to escape their traps--but most, like the rest of us, are searching for secure grounds for rationality and communication amid the shifting sands. The point is not to run away from the evidences of ambiguity, but to recognize that ambiguity is not the whole story of human communication. Despite all, much communication in fact takes place!

Our authors have shown that the realistic semiotics of Peirce, reinforced by an appreciation of *praxis*--one of many useful items to be salvaged from the sinking ship of radical Marxism--can help to found a semiotics which will help us discover signs which have reliably communicable meanings and which also will serve as an instrument for social and political liberation. Properly developed, this semiotic should contribute to solving, at least for some of us, the solipsistic dilemmas posed by modern philosophy since Descartes, Hume, Kant, and others, but never sufficiently unravelled by them or by subsequent philosophers who tried to work from their starting point.

As an aside, it might be noted that an integration of the insights of Peirce with those

of Joseph Marechal and Bernard Lonergan could lay the groundwork for the reconstruction of a credible realist philosophy in the twenty-first century.

Problems of communication and miscommunication in the mass media as well as the ways the media affect our perceptions of the world and of other people are fully within the scope of the semiotician's interest. One could, in fact, say that every serious student of the media is, in some sense, a semiotician--looking for the meanings of signs and for the ways those meanings are produced and vary, how they are communicated and how they are distorted. This manifests the current poor definition of the boundaries (or more accurately, the lack of boundaries) of the new 'science' of semiotics, which, as the authors point out, has found its way into almost everything, from business management through poetry, to geography and biochemistry.

In all these fields the semiotic task has a negative phase followed--if the process is to be complete and constructive--by a positive phase. In the first, the ambiguities of signs are catalogued and their sources investigated. In the second, the common ground of shared meaning should be sought--one shared by all the participants in a given communicative situation. The search for miscommunication and its sources, alone, is not enough unless remedies are sought. The destruction of false certitudes must be accompanied by a search for new and truer certitudes. On the other hand, the barriers to communication must be faced squarely and honestly before meaningful efforts can be mounted to overcome them.

Additional Bibliography: Books

Max Atkinson. *Our Master's Voices: The Language and Body Language of Politics*. London: Routledge/Methuen, 1984. ISBN 0-416-37690-8 hb. pp.203 ISBN 0-416-37700-9 pb.

This book is not about semiotics as such, but rather the far older discipline of oratory and, more specifically, the way in which politicians set out 'to win our hearts and minds and votes' through their televisual debates and appear-

ances. Based on an extensive and innovatively schematised set of audio- and video-tapes, Atkinson uncovers the qualities which make for charismatic political speakers. He analyses the forms of words, the balances of sentences, rhythms of speech, and shows how these 'technical' attributes are able to elicit audience response and applause. It is Atkinson's thesis

that there are far fewer mechanisms of eliciting an immediate audience response than previously thought. In a particularly intriguing chapter, he gives special attention to the 'claptraps' or devices to catch applause: 'projecting' ('dropping') names; 'lists of three'; 'contrastive pairs' ('us/them'); and the devices of generality and simplicity. Atkinson examines material covering Tony Benn, J. F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and others. The book is valuable as a detailed observational analysis of language as a technique for decoding political communication.

Ruth Tomaselli

Edna Aphek and Yishai Tobin. *The Semiotics of Fortune-Telling*. Philadelphia/Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishers, 1989. pp.216. ISBN 90 272 3294 6.(hb). Published in the 'Foundations of Semiotics' Series.

A semiotic analysis of the linguistic and extra-linguistic elements of fortune-telling as part of a larger pragmatic-oriented theory of human communication.

John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Pelican, 1972. pp.165. ISBN 0-14-021631-6 (pb).

A social rather than a semiotic critique of latter-day uses of imagery in the reproduction of the fallacies of freedom within capitalist societies. Useful as a window onto the pre-critical era of immediate post-liberalism that followed the disappointment of the collapse of the 1960s. A good example of the kind of predecessor work in English thought that prepared the way for the reception of semiology into media studies. Very well illustrated with photographs.

Andrew Crissell. *Understanding Radio*. London: Methuen 'New Accents' Series, 1986. pp.236. ISBN 0-416-38340-8 (pb).

Chronicles the history of radio in the UK. Using basic Peircean semiotics, Crissell offers a theory of signs, language and conventions by which the medium conveys its messages. He shows how radio 'processes' genres like news,

drama and comedy. Attention is given to educational radio, phone-ins and outside broadcasts. Critical analyses of radio discourses are very rare, making this book an important contribution to both students and practitioners.

Gillian Dyer. *Advertising as Communication*. London: Methuen 'New Accents' Series, 1982. pp.230. ISBN 0-416-74530-X (pb).

As with its companion volumes in the 'New Accents' Series, the intention of *Advertising as Communication* is to introduce theoretically informed textual analysis to more general audiences. Having gone beyond this task it is noteworthy of mention alongside other works, such as Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* (see long review) and Erwin Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), which have contributed to the development of critical approaches to the study of advertising (William Leiss et al, *Social Communication in Advertising*. Toronto, Methuen, 1986. pp.5-7). Nevertheless, rather than advancement in theoretical insight, the value of Dyer's work lies more in its contribution towards the development of a systematic approach to the study of advertising through the interpretation of existing works.

The first three chapters which trace the historical development of modern advertising seem to rely heavily on Williams 'Advertising: The Magic System' (*Problems in Materialism and Culture*. Verso, 1980), itself informed by E. Turner's *The Shocking History of Advertising* (London: Joseph, 1952). However, Dyer's elaboration and extension of Williams in these pages tends to dilute rather than recapture the incisiveness of his thought.

As with the companion books, Dyer offers an introduction to the application of semiotics largely based on Peirce/Barthes (not Saussure, as she claims). Dyer does not distinguish between semiotics and semiology. However, her systematic explication of some of the key concepts of sign analysis by applying them to various samples of advertising can be commended as one which is lucid and readily

accessible to the novice. She also provides a very useful annotated bibliography of advertising criticism.

Alex Holt

John Fiske. *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London: Methuen 'New Accents' Series, 1981. pp.174. ISBN 0-416-74570-9 (pb).

An introduction to the main approaches to the study of communication. A basic and accessible introduction, the book provides an uncritical discussion of communication theory and transmission models, as well as a concise and clear introduction to semiotics which functionally marries the complementary elements of semiotics and semiology. The main semiotic emphases are drawn from C. S. Peirce and Roland Barthes.

John Fiske and John Hartley. *Reading Television*. London: Methuen 'New Accents' Series. 1978. pp.223. ISBN 0-416-85560-1 (pb).

First published in 1978, this book develops a fairly sophisticated, if formalist, theory of semiotics within a neo-Marxist paradigm in relation to understanding television. The second chapter on Content Analysis seems a little out of place as it discusses American cultural indicators research which is not directly based on semiotics. This is an intermediate reader which needs to be complemented by a more critical use of semiotics concepts and applications, particularly with regard to linking television texts to their contexts.

John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner. *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*. Unwin Hyman, 1988. pp. 204. ISBN 0-04-306005-6 (pb)

Using Australian popular culture as its foundation, through semiotic analysis, everyday features -- bars, shopping malls, houses, beaches -- are shown to be as deeply imbued with meaning as novels, films and other texts. The interrelation between these texts, advertisements, magazine articles and

TV is examined. A good example of the meta-applications permitted by semiotic analysis.

Neil Forsyth. *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987. pp. 480. ISBN 06712-0

The author restores Satan to the myths in which he originated and puts those ancient myths back into the original histories they both reveal and conceal. The book examines the devil's narrative function and sees the developing systems of Jewish and Christian belief from that point of view. Traditional scholarly approaches to Satan -- whether as monster, rebellious angel, or indwelling presence -- have neglected the narrative aspect in favour of abstract discussions of Satan as the embodiment of evil. Here, Satan is considered as a character in a tale, from the first recorded appearance of an enemy figure in the epic poetry of Sumer through his transformation in Biblical contexts and in early Christian literature.

Peter Fuller. *Seeing Berger. Writers and Readers* Publishing Co-op, 1980. pp. 37.

A short and densely argued reevaluation of John Berger's impact on the Art World of the 70s and beyond through works such as *Ways of Seeing*. (London: BBC/Penguin, 1972). Significantly, the author has worked up the lack in Berger's account of any rigorous examination of the practice of painting relative to the symbolic systems of this Art World. Unfortunately, those outside of the European cultural/historical fold, and who none-the-less *paint* things, will still be in the dark as to why some paintings are 'Art' and not others.

Ian Hacking. *Representing and Intervening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. ISBN 0-521-28246-2 (pb).

An accessible introduction to the debate between realism and anti-realism in the philosophy of science. The author argues for a commitment to realism, as against the tendency among positivists to rely on a

phenomenological strategy in dealing with the unobservable entities of, for example, nuclear physics and microbiology. A useful base from which to begin the critique of naive materialism, but the book does read much easier to those with a background in philosophy.

Judith Lynne Hanna. *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. pp.352. ISBN 0-226-31549-5 (pb).

Explores dance from rural African villages to the Lincoln Center, from the meanings of the private solo dance as interior dialogue or soliloquy to the urban ecosystem of dance. Discussion includes dance in religion, dance rites in politics and action, warrior dances, and directions for the future.

Judith Lynne Hanna. *Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. pp.363. ISBN 0-226-31551-7.

Through the inherently sexual art form that is Dance, men and women express, articulate, and question their sexual identity and roles, thereby confirming or challenging social and cultural constructions of gender. More of an empirical retailing of American audience response to unfamiliar dance forms than an explicitly theoretical reading, the book does provide a stimulus for further research in a number of directions.

John Hartley. *Understanding News*. London: Methuen 'New Accents' Series, 1982. pp.203, ISBN 0-416-74550-4 (pb).

The way individuals decode news is the subject of this book. Hartley concentrates on text, showing how news is constructed, and how this connects to our understanding of the world-at-large. While the book is an excellent introduction to the way news works as Sign, it does not relate the way in which news

organisations operate to the way in which the power relations of society are organised. Like all the 'New Accents' series books, though, this text is accessible to a wide range of readers.

Dick Hebdige. *Hiding in the Light*. Routledge, 1988. pp.277. ISBN 0-415-00737-2 (pb).

The author explores two stereotypical images - the youth-at-fun and the youth-as-trouble -- a conflicting image exploited by various interest groups in terms of their social agendas. To the interest groups the youth is a symbol of social ills, and of a decadent future. The book also gives a necessary historical background within English literature to orientate the reader new to English attitudes and problems as to how this dichotomy came about. Nineteenth Century literature is used to explain youth-as-trouble: a common-sense notion contested by Hebdige. The attitude is shown to have been reversed by the perceptions of post-war advertising and market research, which has developed the corporate image of youth-as-fun in response to the massive expansion of commodity production during the 1950s (and the concomitant need for expanded markets).

Zithulele Mahaye

Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress. *Social Semiotics*. Cornell, 1988. ISBN 0-8014-9515-6 (pb).

An extension of semiotics to account for the social analysis of power and ideology, gender and class. As with the introductory essay in this volume, they assume that signs and messages must always be situated within the context of social relations and processes. The authors' primary interest is in the construction of language: the choice of words, their linguistic arrangement, tenses and voices. Unlike traditional linguistics, however, all the studies in the book underline the importance of power relations in society, and the studies emphasise the way in which language both mirrors and creates unequal communications between speakers/writers and their audiences.

Ruth Tomaselli

Geoffrey Hughes. *Words in Time: A Social History of the English Vocabulary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988. pp.267. ISBN 0-631-15832-4 (hb).

This work complements Raymond Williams' *Keywords* but imposes no thematic limits. It traces the impact of journalism, as well as the 'linguistic capitalism' of advertising, and analyses the techniques whereby words are made the vehicles of political propaganda. Hughes reveals the dual aspect of language. Words (signs) are simultaneously fossils in which the culture and experiences of the past are stored, as well as vital organisms responsive to the pressures of the present. Hughes argues that words do not change their meanings in an entirely arbitrary fashion, but form a revealing segment of social evidence. While this book does not deal with semiotics per se, it is a very useful history of origination and change in meanings of words.

Yoshihiko Ikegami (Ed.). *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Themes and Japanese Viewpoints*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989, xi, 337 pp. ISBN 90-272-3278-4 (hb). (Vol.8 in the 'Foundations of Semiotics' series. General Editor: Achim Eschbach).

Japanese viewpoints on both Japanese and non-Japanese themes dealing with language, painting, folktales, architecture, poetry, religion, drama, etc. All the authors are Japanese university teachers representing a wide range of disciplines. The title is a bow to Roland Barthes' book of the same title, first published in 1970, giving the French semiotician's impressions of Japanese culture.

Robert Kevelson. *Charles S. Peirce's Method of Methods*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1987. pp.180. ISBN 90-272-3289-X (hb).

Develops Peirce's method of the discovery of methods -- the methodology of semiotics -- with special reference to the theory and practice of US jurisprudence.

Jerome Klinkowitz. *Rosenberg/Barthes/Hassan: The Postmodern Habit of Thought*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988. ISBN 0-8203-0997-4.

With the demise of modernism, a major period

in art and thought has come to an end. But in its finite dimensions now appear boundless new possibilities for human expression and thought. The author reveals this transformation in the emergence of a postmodern aesthetic in which the act of creation replaces modernism's cult of the object; surface replaces modernism's belief in depth; and inventive play replaces modernism's relentless significance.

Barry McMahon and Robyn Quin. *Real Images*. Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986.

The authors examine film and TV images within the broader context of mass media operating within the Australian social context. Exercises in each chapter involve the intended readers -- school pupils -- in problem-solving situations, and then guide them through various aspects of the media. Two chapters are devoted to semiotics. The method, however, is not introduced as a formal topic -- the term is not mentioned -- so younger readers will not be intimidated by strange terminology. One of the best books available on a critical introductory (implicit) semiotics of media.

Jane Ballot

Jorge Larrain. *The Concept of Ideology*. Hutchinson University Press, 1979. pp.256. ISBN 0-09-138951-8 (pb).

A critical examination of this much-abused term, in which the author rejects the 'neutral' definitions that have evolved in the post-Lenin literature on the topic. The argument is for a critical understanding of the concept as applying to those social actions that have to do with the maintenance of systems of political subordination.

Tim O'Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders and John Fiske. *Key Concepts in Communication*. Methuen 'New Accents' Series, 1983. pp.270. ISBN 0-416-34260 (pb).

Consisting of 280 entries, each offers a brief introductory definition, followed by a more detailed discussion which covers origins, usage and controversies. The commentaries and interpretations offered, however, remain at a

basic level, illustrating the range of introductory semiotic and communication concepts popularised by the 'New Accents' Series. An indispensable reference complementing other books in this series. The book, however, lacks the historical cotextualisation offered in Raymond Williams' *Keywords* or Geoff Hughes' *Words in Time*.

Morse Peckham. *Explanation and Power: The Control of Human Behaviour*. University of Minnesota Press. 1979. pp.290. ISBN 9-8166-1657-4 (pb).

Meaning is not inherent in word or sign, only in response. Human behaviour itself must depend on interaction. This in turn relies on the stability of verbal and non-verbal signs. Meaning can only be stabilised by explanation, and when explanation fails, by force. The author works 'philosophically' making his abstract discourse concrete with examples from everyday life.

Richard Rorty. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980. ISBN 0-631-12839-7 (pb).

An iconoclastic criticism of the Great Tradition of philosophy-as-epistemology in the Anglo-Saxon world. The author looks critically at the history of the idea that we can understand the world *only* if we know how or via which logic we can know it. He argues for a 'hermeneutic' rather than an 'epistemological' approach so that the conversational character of society can be preserved.

C. W. Spinks. *Semiosis, Marginal Signs and Trickster*. London: Macmillan, 1991, xviii, 232 pp. ISBN 0-333-52604X (hb) £35.00.

Spinks writes about semiotics/semiosis from the perspective of a teacher of English literature specializing in William Blake, science fiction and semiotics. Despite the title, he explicitly follows Charles Sanders Peirce not Ferdinand de Saussure, regarding Peirce's triadic models of semiotics as especially useful for understanding signs.

Spinks is interested in 'marginal' signs because, while signs centrally located in a sign

system cause little trouble, it is the marginal signs -- the things that dreams are made of -- which are troubling, often to the level of sheer terror. He therefore wishes 'to examine how those marginal signs function either as a dysfunction or as something else which exists in the process of semiosis' (p. 7).

The 'Trickster' figure present in the folklore of many cultures around the world is loaded with semiotic significance and is particularly important for the study of marginal signs. He is, for example, a ludic figure, who plays at the borders of self, symbol and culture, crossing boundaries and breaking taboos in ways ordinary persons would not dare to follow. In his ambiguities he is an excellent case study of the ways marginal signs affect our perceptions and communications.

Willie Van Peer. *The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language Literature and Culture*. Routledge, 1989. pp.344. ISBN 0-415-01309-7.

An advanced anthology examining the use of language in the analysis of prose, travelogues, dialogues, newspaper columns, recipes, poetry and drama.

Lev S. Vygotsky. *Thought and Language*. MIT Press, 1986. ISBN 0-262-72010-8.

A recent translation of the text that never made it into Stalin's schools of psychology. In part a debate between the author and Piaget, this book lays out a social theory of language, mental and practical skills development in the context of a psychology of cognitive development. Very profitably read through spectacles focused by Peirce and tinted by Wittgenstein.

Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Flamingo, 1983. pp.341. ISBN 0-00-654021-X (pb).

Williams selected certain words which he felt comprised a shared vocabulary -- a 'body of words and meanings concerned with the practices and institutions described as "culture" and "society"', according to the publisher's description on the cover. He traces the words

through history, recording the ways they have changed through the years and finally concentrating on their varied meanings in contemporary social science, linguistics, semiotics and philosophy.

The book crosses many disciplinary boundaries. Words are included because, at some time, they forced themselves on Williams' attention as having meanings 'inextricably bound up' with the social and cultural problems they were being used to discuss. He describes the work as 'the record of an inquiry into a *vocabulary*: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions, in English, of the practices and institutions which we group as *culture* and *society*' (p.15).

Raymond Williams. *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*. 2nd edition. Edited by Ederyn Williams. London: Routledge, 1990, 164 pp. ISBN 0-415-03047-1 (paperback). £7.99.

This communication studies classic first appeared in 1974, and has now been reissued in paperback with updating notes by the author's son, Ederyn Williams. Many of Williams' predictions have come true, and many of his analyses of possibly the most significant cultural force of our time continue to yield insights into its human impact.

Sol Worth. *Studying Visual Communication*. Edited by Larry Gross. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981. pp.216. ISBN 0-8122-116-2 (pb).

This book traces the development of Worth's theory of visual communication. He offers, within an anthropological agenda, a semiotic of ethnographic film. Worth's approach included questions of intention, uses, audience responses, and relationships between viewers and films. Though a seminal scholar during the 60s and 70s, his semiotic method was edged out by the scramble towards psychoanalytic semiotics and Saussurean-

derived structuralist semiology. However, there is much in this book which remains to be developed in terms of a semiotics of ethnography.

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Acknowledgement:

The Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture would like to extend special thanks to Professor Tomaselli, Mr. Shepperson, and their colleagues at the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, who made possible this issue of *Communication Research Trends*. They have been labouring under difficult conditions. Although their efforts are resolutely devoted to the establishment of a just and democratic society in South Africa, they have had to work with shrinking resources and in a degree of isolation from a world academic community which often fails to recognize their special and positive role in that society.

BOOK NOTES

James A. Brown. *Television 'Critical Viewing Skills' Education: Major Media Literacy Projects in the United States and Selected Countries*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991, xviii, 371 pp. ISBN 0-8058-0786-1 (hb \$69.95); ISBN 0-8058-0974-0 (pb \$29.95).

Although there have been many published studies of mass media 'literacy' education projects, the author notes that 'none offered a broad perspective of the wide range of projects from far-flung, varying geographic, social and educational contexts' (p. ix) which he provides in this work.

The historical and theoretical background of television and media literacy programmes are first surveyed to establish criteria for what is better termed 'critical viewing skills' education.

The main findings of the project are reported in Part II, which not only describes selected projects in detail but also delineates dominant patterns in specific regions and worldwide. Materials for this section were gathered by collaborating researchers in many countries and with assistance from both UNESCO and UNDA, the international association of Catholic broadcasters, in the early 1980s. Goals, content, structure, format, printed and audio-visual materials, and effects of experimental projects were analyzed in programmes funded or carried out by governments, both nonprofit and commercial corporations and organizations, and by individuals.

In Part III, criteria for evaluating critical viewing skills programmes from Part I are identified and their presence or absence in major programmes selected from Part II is inventoried.

Programmes for education in critical

viewing skills have been marked as much by their erratic application and lack of consistent follow-up and continuity as much as they have by the evident good intentions of their apostles. The key to successful programmes is the endorsement and support of administrators at all educational levels, not leaving their success to the efforts of isolated teachers who are unsupported by their institutions. Not only must teachers be trained in how to teach critical viewing, but holistic and integrated curricula must be developed and put into operation. Sophisticated, valid research into the effectiveness of programmes is essential, as is the factor of 'individualized discovery', so that students themselves can internalize a critical attitude towards their experience of television by reflecting upon and judging it.

Television is such an overwhelming fact of modern life that haphazard approaches to preparing people to confront it can no longer be accepted. What is called for is not indoctrination but the stimulation of individualized assessments that will be pluralistic and foster critical thinking. Only through the development of an informed, reflective and active television audience can the television environment be influenced in a constructive and democratic way.

Dr. Brown acknowledges the important early roles of Robert White, S.J., and the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture in the inspiration and early support of his project.

BBC Broadcasting Research Department. *BBC Broadcasting Research Annual Review Number XVI, 1990*. London/Paris/Rome: John Libbey, 1990, 122pp. ISBN 0-86196-265-6 ISSN 0956-9065. £15.00, US\$29.00, FF150, L.34,000.

The annual reviews of the British Broadcasting Corporation's research activities are intended to make available to the public a selection of what are regarded as the Research Department's 'more significant or generally interesting studies' (p.1).

Chapter 1 discusses trends in viewing and listening, not only for 1989 but also for the period 1985 to 1989, in order to discern longer term patterns. Other chapters report on research projects during the year. Titles include, 'Television and Children', 'TV and

Drama', 'How Segmented is the Radio Audience?', 'Observed Use of Wavebands', 'Public Attitudes Towards Satellite Television', 'The House of Commons Experiment', 'Can Animals Speak for Themselves?' and 'One World'. The last-mentioned describes a co-operative broadcasting venture among European public service broadcasters to produce special programmes on the environment and development issues for pan-European broadcast during one week in May 1990. The accompanying research suggested

that future programmes of the type should employ varied means of presentation, not emphasize 'gloom and doom', be simple, straightforward and not abstract, be urgent but not frightening, be entertaining, and above all should employ presenters who are involved with the issues, manifest integrity, and are credible and able to challenge the audience.

A bibliography of special project reports issued by the Department during 1989 is appended.

Greg Philo. *Seeing and Believing: The Influence of Television*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, viii, 244 pp. ISBN 0-415-03620-8 (Hb £30.00); ISBN 0-415-03621-6 (Pb £10.99).

Greg Philo, a founding member of the Glasgow University Media Group, and currently Director of the Glasgow University Media Unit, continues in this book the critical analysis of television news in the tradition of the Group's earlier books, *Bad News* (1976), *More Bad News* (1980), *Really Bad News* (1982) and *War and Peace News* (1985).

The present book is based on research with varied groups of people who were asked to write news stories about a miners' strike in 1984-85, based on photographs taken from television reports of the strike. It was suggested that they write different stories, from differing perspectives, such as that of the miners' support group, the BBC, or the police. The stories the groups constructed were then analyzed in terms of the backgrounds of group members. People who sympathized with the miners, for example, tended to disassociate

them from a shotgun shown in one of the photos, while those opposed to the miners were more likely to connect them with the gun, some even saying that shots had been fired at the police by the miners (p.28).

Since the research took place about a year after the strike, some parallels could be drawn between the stories the groups wrote and their memories of actual news coverage of the strike.

In the last half of the book the findings of this research are integrated with the findings of other research about news bias and the ways it is manifested. The research is regarded as supporting a view that television has a strong and discernible effect on audiences. This is opposed to the position of scholars who say that social context mediates the effects of viewing so much that the effect of television alone cannot be meaningfully evaluated.

Peter J. S. Dunnnett. *The World Television Industry: An Economic Analysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, xiii, 246 pp. ISBN 0-415-00162-5, £40.00.

This analysis of the economic forces which shape changes in the television industry has a worldwide scope, with chapters on the United Kingdom, Europe, Japan and Australia, the Communist countries (as of 1989), and the developing world. The Canadian author nevertheless pays most attention to the United States, which originates most of the changes

which ultimately influence television in the rest of the world.

After initial technical analysis of such factors as industry structure, national policies and changes in supply and demand factors, some non-technical case studies are introduced to flesh out the discussion.

The conclusion deals with some of the

social and ethical dimensions of television as they relate to economic factors. Positive and negative aspects of both the worldwide industry and its commercial aspects are acknowledged. The author feels that a variety of private and public services will best and

most realistically meet audiences' needs, rather than either government monopolies or total commercialization. In any event, the spread of the VCR has made monopolies of TV consumption virtually impossible.

Tony Bennett (Ed.). *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990, xix, 486 pp. ISBN 0-415-02517-6 (Hardback) £35.00, ISBN 0-415-02518-4 (Paperback) £10.99

This is a collection of some of the major essays dealing with the serious study of popular fiction. They include Raymond Williams' 'The Technology and the Society', first published in 1975, and David Morley's 'Television and Gender', which appeared in 1986. Interests of the authors range from Peter Pan to James Bond. Although some attention is paid to detective books, including those of Poe and Conan Doyle, selections tend to favour cinema and television as the most important locus of contemporary popular fiction.

As the editors note, the study of popular fiction is important because it so saturates and shapes our perceptions and our understanding

of ourselves. But something different is happening among consumers of popular fiction than literary scholars claim to see in 'literature'. The authors note that Pierre Bourdieu defines it as a greater emotional and moral participation or involvement among the 'popular' audience, while 'a more abstracted and disinterested appreciation of its formal qualities' typifies the audience for high art and literature (p.397). Given the great social significance of the 'popular', the tendency in some circles to derogate the serious study of popular fiction and other aspects of popular culture would seem to be seriously misguided.

Viv Edwards and Thomas J. Sienkewicz. *Oral Cultures Past and Present: Rappin' and Homer*. Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990. xii, 244 pp., ISBN 0-631-16569-X (Hb £30.00)

This book is the result of collaborative research between a British sociolinguist and an American classicist searching for common denominators in ancient and modern oral 'literature'. 'The common bonds between Homer and the Afro-American rapper -- the building blocks from which their performance is crafted, their relationship with the audience, their importance within the community -- are, in the final analysis, more meaningful than the vast distances in time and space which otherwise separate them' (p.1).

The authors agree with Walter Ong (*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London and New York: Methuen, 1982) that 'oral literature' is a contradiction and that 'the literate observer's understanding of oral performance is inevitably a limited one', but that there is no alternative if we are to study it at all.

Part I sketches in broad perspective the world of oral performance: the character and attributes of the oral artist, the process of composition as the resourceful use of traditional tools rather than rote memorization, and the interaction between performer and audience. Part II focuses on the social factors which mould performance, stressing that these often are very different in an oral society from what they would be in a literate society. Part III discusses various narrative strategies' which are part of the shared expectations of oral communities and which run through performances of many kinds' (p. 140), and how various components of oral performances fill similar social functions in a wide range of different cultures. Finally, in Part IV, the authors review their findings and try to correct some misconceptions of oral performance which have arisen from efforts to

describe it in terms of the cultural expectations of literate society. The persistence of oral traditions within literate societies is empha-

sized; and this parallel existence lends urgency to understanding and adjusting to the differing perspectives of both.

James Naremore. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley/New York/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988, ox, 307 pp., ISBN 0-520-06228-0 (Pb, \$12.95).

This is a book for cinema audiences, not for actors, to help viewers achieve a critical understanding of the actor's art and the 'ideological' significance of acting techniques. 'Ideological', here, has the not-necessarily-political meaning of making that seem 'natural' which is not necessarily natural.

American cinema acting is dominated by the technique of Konstantin Stanislavsky, who emphasized an expressive-realist approach wherein the best acting is that which does not seem to be acting. This was in opposition to the antirealistic approach favoured by Bertolt Brecht.

After an introductory discussion of theoretical aspects, such as rhetorical and ex-

pressive techniques and the use of accessories as means of expression (costume, make-up, props, lighting, etc.), Naremore goes on to analyze examples of specific actors in selected roles. Starting with Lilian Gish in *True Heart Susie*, he gives similar treatment to Charles Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, James Cagney, Katharine Hepburn, Marlon Brando and Cary Grant. Changing focus a bit, he discusses Hitchcock's *Rear Window* and Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* as 'performance texts', showing how the skills and techniques of all the actors - and the other participants in the production as well, but he is chiefly concerned with how the actors co-ordinate and mesh together to create the whole production.

Robert J. Chapuis and Amos E. Joel, Jr. *Electronics, Computers and Telephone Switching: A Book of Technological History as Volume 2: 1960-1985 of '100 Years of Telephone Switching'*, North Holland Studies in Telecommunication, Vol. 13. Amsterdam/New York/Oxford: North Holland, 1990. xvi, 595 pp. ISBN 0-444-88042-9 (Hb US\$90.00, Dfl. 175.00).

This book describes a little-known but revolutionary event: the complete transformation of the telephone switching industry in the short space of two decades. It focuses on switching for 'the public network', not for specialized private systems, cellular mobile services, data switching, etc. It is worldwide in scope, with acknowledgements made to colleagues in Austria, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States and U.S.S.R. who provided information to the French and American authors.

Although the authors' main interest is in the 1960-1985 period, ample space is devoted to reviewing the whole history of electronic switching from 1935 onwards, including the development of the computer industry, semiconductor and microelectronic

research and other technologies which provide essential components for modern switching technology.

Many of the contents are technical, but the authors have kept the non-technical reader in mind by providing boxes summarizing significant points and by inserting lighter anecdotes. 'Their inclusion in an arid highly technical text serves to provide, as it were, oases like those stumbled across by caravans on their weary travels over the desert' (p. 7).

Other authorities have suggested that a country's national economic and social development depends far more on the prior development of its telecommunications network than upon early development of advanced mass media. If that is true, the history related in this book should be of interest to every serious student of development communications.

Raymond Durnat and Scott Simon. *King Vidor, American*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988, xiii, 382 pp., illus. ISBN 0-520-05798-8 (pb \$12.95)

This is a filmography, rather than a biography. The two authors, one British the other American and both professional film critics, trace the development of Vidor's film art from his first efforts at documentaries in Galveston, Texas, in 1913, by analyzing thoroughly and in detail as many of Vidor's films as have survived. An image of the man comes through, but chiefly of his professional and positive side. King Vidor was one of the giants of the Hollywood film industry, although many of his efforts have been panned by critics less friendly to him than the authors. Most notable among these was *Solomon and Sheba* (1959), which 'has the reputation of being the disaster that killed King Vidor's career' (p.315).

Vidor had a reputation for making epics, such as *Northwest Passage* (1940), *Duel in the Sun* (1946), and *War and Peace* (1956), but more significant, perhaps, were his personal social commentaries, both pre-World War II

(*The Big Parade*, *The Crowd*, *Hallelujah*, and *Our Daily Bread* and *The Citadel*) and post-War (*Japanese War Bride*, *Ruby Gentry*). He was, however, a thoroughgoing promoter of 'The American Dream', and the pre-war films in particular 'imply that the individual's relationship with the social system is a dialectic of acquiescence and resistance to its routines' (p.206). A lifelong interest in Christian Science found expression in *The Citadel* (1938), which attacked the medical establishment, even though American audience resistance dictated that the film have a British setting. Despite having to adapt to audience tastes and other commercial imperatives, Vidor in his best films was nevertheless an effective social critic, since 'when an artist *means* his film, the very discrepancies can bring out the contradictions that turn entertainment, or conformist art, into something subversive' (p.323).

David Docherty. *Violence in Television Fiction, Broadcasting Standards Council Annual Review 1990: Public Opinion and Broadcasting Standards: 1*. London: John Libbey, 1990, 39 pp. ISBN 0-86196-284-2 (Pb £7.50, US\$15.00, FF75, L.17,000); ISSN 0960-3999.

The Broadcasting Standards Council was established by the British Government in 1988 to study portrayals of violence, sex and other 'matters of taste and decency' on the broadcast media and to make recommendations concerning them.

The 1988-89 Annual Report was a general survey of the issues. The 1990 Report is the first in a three-year cycle of research and focuses on violence. The 1991 Report will deal with 'matters of taste and decency', and the topic for 1992 will be sex and sexuality.

The 1990 publication is based on two surveys, one covering the whole of the United Kingdom and the other concentrating on Northern Ireland -- carried out by independent research companies. The author notes that 'it is easy to fall into two related but separate traps when reflecting on televised images of

violence. The first is that television generates inconsequential symbols which glide along the surface of consciousness...; the second hazard is to regard images of fictional violence as if they were parasites which burrow deep into the consciousness and await time and circumstances to create havoc' (p. 3). It is to avoid these extremes that the research has been undertaken.

Audience expectations and preferences regarding the broadcasting of violent sequences in varying degrees and under different circumstances are reported. The findings are not presented as conclusive, but as a basis for further questioning. The author, however, feels that 'it is hard to resist the argument that television will never have its own way in shaping a culture' (p.34).

This reader consists of essays from the perspective of Critical Media Theory, by writers such as Stuart Hall, Sut Jhally, Mark Crispin Miller, Robert Stam, Kevin Robins, Helen Wilson and Brian Winston, to name only a few of the thirty contributors. Most are associated with British, American or Australian universities or polytechnics, although some are journal editors or free-lance writers. Germany, India and Brazil also are represented. Although most first appeared in journals, such as *Screen*, or *Media, Culture and Society*, a number were drawn from earlier books. All are from the period 1980 to 1988, with a preponderance nearer the later date. Each selection is introduced by an abstract written by the editors.

The selections are divided into three parts: 'Cultural Identity', 'Politics, Economics and Advertising', and 'Pleasures and Expectations'.

Many of the topics of these essays are familiar from other works in the Critical Studies tradition, but some move into areas which are not often treated, as in Michael Nielsen's 'Towards a Workers' History of the US Film Industry', which discusses the history and some of the major issues of labour union organization in the film studios. Written in 1983, the chapter foresaw technological changes as an increasingly unsettling factor in cinema labour relations -- particularly the development of high definition television (HDTV).

Stuart Hall's offering, a paper first delivered in 1980, argues that racism in the media is a structural problem, and its eradication would require reorganizing a complex and often contradictory set of social relationships.

Valerie Walkerdine's article, 'Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy', is an introspective attempt 'to come to terms with the voyeuristic social scientist' -- specifically her own role in watching a London family watching a video of the film *Rocky II* in their living room. In the family's viewing situation, 'What is important...is the engagement, the linking of the fantasy space of the film and the

viewer' -- affecting the differing responses of the family members to the film and their interactions with each other during the viewing. A similar 'fantasy space' encompasses the social scientist observing the process, despite the effort to intellectualise the 'objective' study of audiences.

W. E. Biernatzki, S.J.
Editor,
Communication Research Trends

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS -

Published four times a year by the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture ISSN 0144-4646

Publisher: Kevin F. Kersten, S.J.

Editor: William E. Biernatzki, S.J.

Associate Editor for Latin America, Spain & Portugal: José Martínez Terrero, S.J.

Assistant Editor: Maria Way

Subscription:

Annual Subscription US\$23.00 (UK£13.00)

Student US\$16.00 (UK£ 9.50)

Complete set of back issues and Vol.11 US\$36.00 (UK£20.00)

Payment in US\$, UK£, International Money Order or Giro Transfer 52 596 0805

Address all correspondence to:

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS

221 Goldhurst Terrace, FAX NO: 071-372-1193

London NW6 3EP, England. TEL NO: 071-328-2868

Printing by Roebuck Press, Mitcham, Surrey.

The CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE is an international service for communication research established by the Jesuits in 1977.

Director: Kevin F. Kersten, S.J. **Documentalist:** Simone Donnelly, O.P.

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