

Reviews

Empedocles European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication

Volume 1 Number 1 © 2009 Intellect Ltd

Reviews. English language. doi: 10.1386/ejpc.1.1.135/4

***To Speak is Never Neutral*, Luce Irigaray (2002)**

London: Continuum, 277 pp., ISBN-0-8264-5905, paperback, £21.84

Reviewed by Laura Green, University of Liverpool

Luce Irigaray's *Parler n'est jamais neutre* was originally published in 1985, a successor to three of her most well-known texts: *Speculum de l'autre femme/Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un/This Sex which is not One* (1977), and *Éthique de la différence sexuelle/An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984). The English translation – *To Speak is Never Neutral* (2002) – marks a significant shift in both tone and style to its predecessors, owing largely to its composition from Irigaray's early career research in the area of linguistics. Roughly half of the book contains essays and other research material taken from the author's work on the language of schizophrenia, whilst the other half reveals her burgeoning concern with the language of science and scientific discourse, especially where it claims to be gender 'neutral'. These themes intertwine to create an original work that questions some of the fundamental assumptions that form the basis of scientific (as well as philosophical) thought.

Whilst in the first half of the text there is a relative absence of discussion of the impact or significance of gender, in the introduction Irigaray swiftly sets the tone in which the proceeding chapters must be read; there is a paradox underlying scientific discourse that permits sexual difference to be discussed under the guise of scientific research, yet maintains that the subject of scientific discourse is neutral (p. 3). Contesting that the form-giving subject has always been male – and that this structure has given form to both culture and the 'history of ideas' – Irigaray subsequently defines her project as 'a questioning of the language of science, and an investigation into the sexualization of language, and the relation between the two' (p. 5). Central to this investigation, furthermore, is an avowedly post-Saussurean or post-structuralist model of linguistics. Irigaray asks, 'to whom are we speaking' (p. 4)? Lacan's claim that the source of speech is the unconscious – the Other – flavours her response to this question. For it is psychoanalysis – 'the most stratified experimental theatre for the enunciation and for the pragmatics of language' (p. 5) – that provides fertile ground for an inquiry into language and linguistic structures.

The Lacanian influence is clear in the first chapter entitled 'Linguistic and Specular Communication'. For anyone familiar with *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray's first major publication, this chapter fills in

1. Defined by Irigaray as 'the primordial formation of the subject' (p. 261).
2. To be understood in its psychoanalytical context as speech analysed as an *individual act*; i.e. by a speaker at a specific location and time, etc.

some of the theoretical gaps left by her metaphorical use of specular imagery. Providing her own interpretation of Lacan's 'Mirror Stage', Irigaray analyses the role of the *phantasm*¹ and its function in the evolution of the subject. Seemingly in agreement with Lacan, she urges that the reciprocal integration of the body and language – the pre-linguistic origin of the imaginary – 'already decenters man in relation to himself' (p. 9). Psychoanalysis is conceived as the quest to return to this primordial state, before language 'pierces' the subject. It is the intervention of the 'third term' – the imaginary phallus – that finally interrupts the dyadic dialogue between the infant and the mother, establishing a 'circuit of exchange' that is founded on what is, essentially, an Oedipal structure. Irigaray asserts that 'the distortions of language can always be understood as expressions of a primordial absence [...] of the zero which underlies the structure of exchange and guarantees its functioning' (p. 18). Her term 'Specularization' can, in this sense, be understood as a symptom of the alienating passage into language via the subject's identification with the deceitful specular image.

Intended to be read in light of the previous chapter, the proceeding four or five chapters analyse various linguistic 'defects' of schizophrenics, hysterics, 'obsessives', and senile dementia patients respectively. Whilst not perhaps as engaging as the first, these essays develop Irigaray's own brand of psycholinguistics, with particular focus upon the 'enunciation'² as 'the level of the generation of messages' from the unconscious (p. 25). In 'On Phantasm and the Verb', Irigaray discusses the role of the verb in the enunciation, at the 'site' of which the verb dominates. She then goes on to analyse the various 'verb-phantasms' (p. 56) that underlie discourse, revealed during psychoanalytical procedure.

The next two chapters, however, take a more clinical approach to their subject matter. 'Linguistic Structures of Kinship and Their Perturbations in Schizophrenia' documents the errors made by schizophrenics when asked to name particular familial relationships. Irigaray concludes that the problem for schizophrenics lies in the ego-father relation (p. 70). The meaning of this revelation becomes clearer in 'Sentence Production among Schizophrenia and Senile Dementia Patients'. Whilst senile dementia patients, in the extreme case, are no longer the active subjects of enunciation (p. 93) – and are instead 'spoken by language' (p. 93) – the schizophrenic, conversely, manipulates the 'code' to the extent that language becomes a 'language-object' (p. 94). In other words – and here we are duly reminded of Freud's description of the pathology of schizophrenia – the schizophrenic falls foul of the delusion that he/she can master his/her own discourse.

Two of the book's most important (but also opaque) essays are 'The Rape of the Letter' and 'Sex as Sign'. The former essay is a complex critique of Derrida's early work on language, particularly his scrutiny of the philosophical genealogy of linguistics (in *Of Grammatology* (1967), for example). Irigaray's conceit is that Derrida consigns the feminine to the status of writing – the letter becomes the inscriptional space for phallogocentrism; an interesting revelation, perhaps, if one considers the extent to which Irigaray's thought has been compared

with Derrida's. 'Sex as Sign', on the other hand, deals with the Saussurean/Lacanian role of the metaphor and the sign, and their functions in the enunciation. Here, Irigaray contends that as signifiers always signify other signifiers, language is never free from metaphoricity; this 'metaphorizing' should be understood as 'the play of sex in language' (p. 143).

In the chapters 'Does Schizophrenic Discourse Exist?' and 'The Refusal of Schiz', Irigaray continues to dissect the nature of schizophrenic discourse, assessing both its possibility and its nature. This time concurring with Derrida, she argues that – contra Saussure – schizophrenics 'fracture' discourse by multiplying its 'blanks' (p. 189); thus there exists neither the linearity nor the arbitrariness of the sign as Saussure theorized. In this sense, schizophrenia could be understood as a 'certain type of language-functioning, unrecognized by its locutors, and for that reason attributed to the [...] language of the mother' (p. 191), inasmuch as the schizophrenic's language should be understood as a specific set of relations to this 'language'. Schizophrenic language is precisely a refusal of 'schiz' or 'split' because it denies the passage into the symbolic; hence the difficulty in naming the ego-father relation described above.

'The Setting in Psychoanalysis' hails the return of a more familiar 'Irigarayan' style of writing. Complete with humorous 'alternative' titles as suggested in a footnote, this essay questions the very 'scene' of psychoanalysis: its vantage point as well as its unchallenged hierarchy of values. 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis', however, shows Irigaray at her most subversive. A caustic and bitter attack on the Lacanian school's inwardness and refusal to listen to its critics (whose attacks it treats as a 'symptom'); Irigaray paints a picture of an institution unknowingly and unwittingly trapped in a cycle of ignorance and denial by its own destructive imaginary. Similarly, in 'The Limits of Transference', Irigaray argues that the 'transference' is irresolvable when between two women, as no symbolic process exists to account for it. Because women have no 'language' of their own (no 'imaginary' or 'symbolic'), they become in competition with one another: only a 'quantitative' relationship is possible (as objects of exchange within the masculine symbolic order). For a 'qualitative' relationship to become possible, the analyst must create for the analysand her own 'space-time' (a 'container' or 'skin') within which she can breathe. This marks one of Irigaray's earliest attempts to construct what is essentially a new 'language' and identity for women – one that has at its centre the motif of the 'two lips' that is intended as an alternative to the phallus as the dominant signifier (p. 242).

To Speak is Never Neutral might prove difficult for those unfamiliar with some of the dense technical terminology that dominates the text. For Irigaray scholars however – or for those better versed in the continental tradition's recent indebtedness to both structural linguistics and psychoanalysis – this book helps to fill in some of the blanks left by some of Irigaray's more 'popular' works, particularly where she has been appropriated under the banner *écriture féminine*. The comparisons between the language of schizophrenics and that of women usher in

3. A pun on the French 'derrière' meaning 'backside' or 'behind'.

Irigaray's pseudo-Derridean concern with identity and meaning, and the self-effacing logic of presence that assigns the feminine to the underside of discourse, or to the 'backside' of the scene of representation.³ Her contempt for the psychoanalytical profession, however, is outweighed by the extent to which her work is saturated by psychoanalysis. Lacan, his stature and his notoriety, are never far away from the scene in which Irigaray carries out her psycholinguistic experiments. The book's final chapter, 'Is the Subject of Science Sexed?' rounds the affair off by (re-)questioning the validity (or indeed *possibility*) of gender-neutral scientific discourse – psychoanalysis included – something that seems ridiculous having read up to this point. The essay completes Irigaray's project in a decisive and provocative manner. And even if the reader has not been convinced by her rallying cries for a new (gendered) approach to scientific discourse, this book still marks a crucial contribution to the way we think about language, especially in relation to gender.

Adorno's Concept of Life, Alastair Morgan (2007)

London: Continuum, 9780826496133, Hardback, £70.00

Reviewed by Mark Olssen, University of Surrey

In this book, Alastair Morgan presents a clear and detailed examination of the senses in which a philosophy of life informs Adorno's philosophy and the important role it plays in regards to it: a role not frequently commenting upon, and indeed, not rendered formally significant, even by Adorno himself. In seeking to outline the philosophy of life informing Adorno's work, this book does a great service to the scope and possibilities in the recent revival of life philosophies, as well as to how to interpret Adorno's materialism in the changed context of post-quantum philosophies of science and complexity approaches in the human sciences. As Morgan points out, Adorno's adherence to the life concept is not in the strong tradition of *lebensphilosophie* of the sort that informed Bergson's *élan vital*, where life was theorized as an ahistorical metaphysical postulate, characteristic of a deep inner animating psychic principle; neither was it seen in the way used by Klages, who postulated a collective unconscious prior to history; nor even in the sense of Dilthey Simmel, or Lukács, who theorized life philosophy as pre-reflective experience in some sense prior to discursive mediation, which posited life as prior to the conceptual, enabling direct veridical access through either intuition (Bergson), or reduction (phenomenology, positivism), to explaining the noumenal world. In the sense that Morgan sees Adorno as incorporating a life concept, it is neither metaphysical in the strong senses here suggested, nor does it speak to an ahistorical, invariant, life force, played out, as in Oswald Spengler, or even in a different sense, as in Hegel, through a philosophy of history, which portrays the unfolding of living forms within history, the rise and fall of civilisations, or the progress of historical cultures, or forms

of life. The sense in which Morgan detects a life philosophy in Adorno is closest to the way Nietzsche utilized the concept, which Herbert Schnädelbach (1984) defines as an ethical life philosophy, and which Morgan (p. 9) defines as 'a philosophy which identifies a normativity in the contrast between all that is living and all that is dead'. In this sense, says Morgan (p. 9) 'Life ... becomes the grounding for all values and norms'. Although Schnädelbach sees Nietzsche as pivotal in promoting this idea of life philosophy as a general normative concept of life and living, Morgan claims that Adorno differs in significant senses in his own appropriation, and it is indeed central to his own use of the life concept, that his critique of Nietzsche proceeds.

What is noteworthy here is the nuanced and detailed treatment of life philosophy, and the life concept in Morgan's treatment in relation to Adorno. The function of a philosophy of life for Adorno, in short, is to classify his variant of speculative materialism as a conception of material experience itself lived always within the mediated and reflexive particularities of historical time and space. In Adorno's sense, this was a materialism which within the orbit of the neo-Kantianism that dominated Adorno's work, was always mediated through culture and conceptuality, and where the 'fast routes' to hard realist objectivity and veridical access to the noumenal were not seen by him as tenable, involving claims to truth which went beyond the bounds of what was legitimately warranted. Although generally within the neo-Kantian theatre, Adorno parted company with Kant's own method of attaining objectivity, rejecting the possibilities that such objectivity of the world could be achieved through the application of universally valid laws of reason. For Adorno, this move simply constituted a form of domination. Similarly, he rejected Bergson's 'intuitionism', Husserl's 'phenomenological reduction' via the concept of 'intentionality', or the 'protocol sentences' of positivism, in their claims to know the real without mediation and reflexiveness. Ultimately, what grounded a limited, that is, a mediated objectivity, was life itself, or rather, the 'experience' of life, which was, for Adorno, inscribed through suffering, torture and various myriad forms of debasement. This was characteristic of what he referred to as 'damaged life' and yet always potentially reconciled or redeemed through new and different possibilities that life could be other; could be different; could be better; or at least – phrased negatively – where such suffering could be avoided and where life could be lived in an infinite variety of other ways. It is to this concept of 'experience' as a 'pre-predictive mode of humans relating to the world' (Morgan 2007: 2) that the ontological concept of life has relevance. Hence, it was the impossibility of escaping conceptual mediation that characterizes Adorno's solution to Kant's paradox in reinstating life experience as the indirect route by which the real is apprehended and understood. As Morgan shows, such a concept of life enables Adorno to construct a normative theory which permits him to delineate the contours of a 'damaged life,' as exemplified by Auschwitz, and to postulate more fundamentally enriched modes of living, without – hopefully – presuming an essential, ahistorical way of life that in some sense constitutes a 'natural way of living'. In this,

life does not figure as a substantive demand to live in one particular way, but as a more general ontological conception of the possibility of living differently. A major recurring theme throughout the book is concerned with how Adorno can maintain such a normative conception of life as something which can be fulfilled, and yet avoid essentialist presumptions of life as a 'natural entity' or 'state', that is prior to history or society; or as linked to a productive utopia of human perfection, in the sense of those bad and dangerous readings of Hegel or Marx.

In terms of outlining Adorno's uses of life philosophy as the core characteristic of his materialism, Morgan gives a wonderfully clear and nuanced account, relating Adorno's insights to Freud, Husserl, Nietzsche, Henry, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Bergson, Deleuze and others as well. It is the engagement with Nietzsche, and with Deleuze, that I find most intriguing, and possibly – even – most suspect. By tracing the contours of these engagements one can see, I think, the real depth that Morgan achieves in considering Adorno's oeuvre, as well as some of the unresolved issues of his materialist philosophy. Possibly, also, we can find one or two unresolved or unclearly understood issues, in relation to Morgan's own understanding, especially, in relation to Deleuze's appropriation of life philosophy and its relevance for the revival of complexity theories in recent years.

Although, as Morgan recounts, Adorno takes his account of life from Nietzsche, for Adorno life refers to 'human life' whereas for Nietzsche it refers to 'life itself'. While such a difference can be seen as important, the overall similarities between Adorno and Nietzsche in relation to the concept of life they invoke are both striking and significant. For both develop a concept of life as a force that is fundamentally concerned to survive and prosper, and which involves dominating and mastering the external world. This is what, as is well noted, makes Adorno's anthropology similar to Nietzsche's, premised upon notions of power and domination. It is also the reason why both eschewed naturalistic views of knowledge and opposed correspondence theories of truth, or understandings of truth as emerging under the burdens of rigorous enquiry, for both saw knowledge as emerging in the cut and thrust of history, and as warped and affected in relation to interest and ideology. Both were also neo-Kantian in the same way, seeing the objective world as accessible through mediation and reflexivity. Although Morgan sees Adorno and Nietzsche as diverging 'quite sharply' (p. 18), it is largely related to the particular way that the life concept is utilized, rather than its general function or scope within their theories. For Adorno, like Nietzsche, life emerges in the quest for survival, defined as self-preservation, in the sense of the necessity of battling the objective 'facticity' of the world and rendering it to one's purpose. But whereas Adorno represents the struggle for existence in terms of self-preservation, and sees such self-preservation as confined to humanity, for Nietzsche, the life concept 'was not dependent on human self-preservation' (p. 19). In addition, Nietzsche argues forcefully that there is more to life than self-preservation, or rather, that the concept of self-preservation is inadequate. To illustrate this point, Morgan usefully cites Nietzsche from the *Will to Power* (p. 345).

One cannot ascribe the most basic and primeval activities of protoplasm to a will to self-preservation, for it takes unto itself absurdly more than would be required to preserve it: and above all, it does not thereby 'preserve itself', it falls apart – the drive that rules here has to explain precisely this absence of desire for self-preservation.

For Nietzsche, says Morgan (p. 19) 'human subjectivity is an epiphenomenon of the process of life which is ruled fundamentally by a will to power'. Yet, Morgan misunderstands Nietzsche when he sees such life as a ground comprising 'competing suprahuman drives and instincts'. The better way to understand Nietzsche here is simply to see the application of the life concept to *all* of life, rather than to merely *human* life, and to see struggles for existence as not simply involving self-preservation, but also other motives, variable depending upon context, sometimes involving competition over material resources; sometimes not. Nietzsche's real point is that particular forms of subjectivity, and particular forms of morality, have emerged as the historical outcome of certain social forces of historical evolution. If this is so, then the widespread view of Nietzsche as an individualist, that is, as someone who sees the individual as constituted by a bundle of instincts and drives, and who constitutes the foundational assumption of his thinking, is mistaken, and needs revision. In this sense, too, it is stretching things to describe Nietzsche as representing the subject as the epiphenomenon of struggle, or as representing life as some 'suprahuman' drive over and above human life, of which human life is but the passive plaything. It seems to me, indeed, that Nietzsche is more materialist here than Adorno. There is a sense in which Adorno, in sharply differentiating human life from life itself, is guilty of anthropomorphizing life. Perhaps Nietzsche, also, avoids the accusation sometimes identified with Adorno (of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, for instance) that there is an original 'inner' nature that has been the victim of a fundamental repression. It is in this sense, that Adorno has been accused, as Morgan notes (p. 21), citing Joel Whitebrook (1995) of 'bad utopianism'. For, in the extract cited by Morgan, as Whitebrook (1995: 151) notes, '...it would follow from the argument that nothing short of remaining in or recapturing the original state and fulfilling "the instinct for complete, universal and undivided happiness" could prevent the dialectic of enlightenment from unfolding. *This is the tacit omnipotent requirement that constitutes the psychoanalytically formulated bad utopianism on which the entire construction rests*'.

In *Minima Moralia*, also, as Morgan notes, Adorno accuses Nietzsche of confusing 'hope for truth' alluding in part to a relativism which is often claimed, and which I think Morgan shares, in Nietzsche's writing on politics and the future. Again, while this is a typical reading of Nietzsche within Anglo-America representations, it is surprising to see someone like Morgan share such a view. The confusion of hope and truth represents only Nietzsche's normative quest for a moral order that will need to be constructed in a future of unchartered waters. What Nietzsche was aware of was that in all such moral creeds, there is a confusion of hope and truth. Although purely descriptive claims might retain a distinction between hope and truth, in relation to the normative

construction of a world without foundations, how could they possibly be kept apart. For Nietzsche, the future will need to be contingently configured according to a constellation of precepts and concepts that, I think he realized full well, could not be predicted or commented upon in advance. Thus, while his account of the past is merely genealogical, the challenge to the Superman – possibly – is both metaphysical and moral.

By suggesting here that Morgan misinterprets Nietzsche, and that the issues he identifies are possibly contentious, and therefore correctable, then possibly a more positive turn toward Nietzsche could be seen as assisting in correcting the problems in Adorno's own account as briefly alluded to above. Perhaps, if one other potential area for debate is alluded to, in Morgan's at all times very scholarly and fine-grained account, it might be in the way he treats Deleuze, and the contemporary interest in complexity theories. While his account of Deleuze as a virtual space-traveller is by now familiar, a tendency to compare Deleuze unfavourably with Aristoteleanism, and the claimed implications or consequences of a turn to Deleuze, might be seen as just a trifle far-fetched. The assertion of an ontological 'relationism', drawing on Spinoza, Bergson, and Nietzsche, over a substantialism, based on Aristotle, and retained in a modified form in the mechanistic philosophies of the Enlightenment, is interpreted by Morgan as leading to a peculiar abandonment of history and society, and some confused thinking over substance and its significance to philosophies of history and change. As Morgan notes, Adorno's reliance on the classical notion of substance sharply separates him from Deleuze, and also ties him to an enlightenment mode of thinking, which fundamentally ties his conception of life to an essentialist metaphysics. Substance represents, as Aristotle clearly intended, and as Galileo and Newton also understood, an ahistorical foundation which grounds identity and constitutes the basis for an individualistic reduction and grounding within all historical approaches characteristic of enlightenment thinking. Morgan understands that there is an issue around this, for he states (p. 134) that it is 'the oscillation between life as process, and objects as substance, that is insufficiently elaborated [in Adorno's work]'. This is ultimately, for him, what keeps Adorno within the tradition of speculative rather than metaphysical materialism, 'for it does not enable a full theorisation of the non-conceptual,' and what differentiates his approach from Deleuze, and from complexity theories. He points out that Harman (2005) has sought to integrate a materialist metaphysics which considers objects as both 'substances' and 'relations', thus not 'dissolving' individuals, or objects, within a process of inorganic life represented a pure becoming, which is seen as the 'error' of Deleuze. The error here in my view is that in abolishing substance, Deleuze would have readily conceded that he wasn't denying the reality of objects independent of relations. But, crucially, here, Deleuze would not agree with Harman's (2005: 85) claim, supported by Morgan (p. 134), that '[a]n object is a "substance", not because it is ultimate and indestructible, but simply because it can never be identified with any (or even all) of its relations with other entities'. What characterizes a substance is not the mere existence of an object which is necessarily irreducible to its relations at any particular

point in space and time, but the *independent* ontological existence of an object in space and time; hence, its essence (*ousia*), or that which really is, as something prior to its relations. Because Deleuze was concerned to write philosophy, and not history, although objects for him, like his friend Foucault, were understood to come into being historically, an understanding of their ontological origination and maintenance was through their relations. In this view, everything is historical, and maintains being because of its relations, or, in a somewhat more casual terminology, in relation to the *niche* that it occupies. Building on Spinoza and Nietzsche and Bergson, this was the key point of the ‘theory of affects’, or ‘combinations’, whereby it is the configurative context or constellation which is the crucial ontological dimension, and not the ahistorical being of an invariant substance or atom, which is ontologically independent of its surroundings in its fundamental essence. While actuality and potentiality are denied in relation to essence, neither Deleuze, Foucault nor Nietzsche need deny that things and objects maintain a historically constituted being which is constituted through ‘emergence’ and is irreducible to its parts, just as it is irreversible in time. This is entailed, in fact, in thermodynamical representations like those of Ilya Prigogine and those complexity theorists who model their work on post-quantum formulations of physics and chemistry. Such a representation explains why the object can be unique and irreducible but also historical, and yet without essence or substance.¹ While a historian, like Foucault, would understand that in practice, objects, or subjects each have (in their own way) their readiness, their being, their state and stage of development, and their potentiality, in a pure philosophical sense, there is no state of ‘actuality’ which constitutes part of their essence, prior to history, and therefore, no ‘potentiality’ which parallels that actuality. While actuality and potentiality must alter their meanings in relation to an historical ontology, they can no longer be theorised in the sense entailed by Aristotle. It is in this sense that chance and immanence take on a different sense, and can contribute to the enrichment of a materialist theory of history.

Although, on specifics like this, in relation to Deleuze and complexity theories, I believe a different conclusion could have been arrived at, none of my quibbles detract from the thoroughly scholarly and impressive way Morgan argues his thesis, and the richer understanding of Adorno we have as a result. It is a study which not only relates him impressively to contemporary movements in ideas, but one which outlines, in an original and subtle way, the intricacies of Adorno’s philosophy, with chapters covering all of the core concepts of ‘damaged life’, of ‘suffering’, of ‘exhaustion’, ‘dialectics’, and of ‘the possibility of living today’. This is a book that all those interested in Adorno, life philosophy, or materialism, should read.

References

- Hallward, Peter (2006), *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London and New York: Verso.
- Harman, Graham (2005), *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, Chicago and La Salle: Illinois: Open Court.

1. In this sense, this view contradicts Peter Hallward (2006: 162) when he claims that ‘there is no place for him [Deleuze] to account for cumulative transformation or novelty in terms of actual materials or tendencies, precisely because there is no concept of actuality within Deleuze’s philosophy’. Although correct about Deleuze in relation to the Aristotelian conception of ‘actuality’, it is not clear that a conception is not present within his work that can be explained in relation to the historical ontology he develops. As for ‘cumulative transformation’ and ‘novelty’, a quick course on Prigoginian thermodynamics would explain the error in this statement and the different ways that transformation and novelty can be theorized within complexity approaches (see Kondepudi and Prigogine 1998).

- Kondepudi Dilip, K. and Prigogine, Ilya (1998), *Modern Thermodynamics: From Heat Engines to Dissipative Structures*, New York: Wiley.
- Schnädelbach, Herbert (1984), *Philosophy in Germany – 1831 – 1933*, (Eric Matthews trans.), Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitebrook, Joel (1995), *Perversion and Utopia – A Study of Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, Cambridge, MA. and London: MIT Press.

Uncovering Hidden Rhetorics: Social Issues in Disguise,
Barry Brummett (2008)

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, ISBN 978-1-4129-5692-5,

Paperback, £29.45

Reviewed by Nick Turnbull, University of Manchester

Barry Brummett's new edited volume is a collection of rhetorical analyses that explore hidden rhetorics within the discourse of popular culture. Contributors provide students with a methodological approach to uncovering hidden meanings within cultural works. The authors lead readers on a search for rhetorical forms which occur consistently across otherwise dissimilar discourses. The case studies are drawn primarily from popular film and television, and all are from the United States. The contributors attempt to show how these cultural artefacts rhetorically construct subjective meaning in representing social issues in particular ways. Some chapters also argue that homologies, similar rhetorical forms, can be identified in disparate works, thus contributing towards the broader propagation and normalization of these subjective meanings.

The collection is successful in drawing together a diverse selection of empirical material from which dominant themes are consistently developed throughout the book. Brummett's introductory chapter outlines the theme of hidden rhetorics and discusses the main analytical tools employed: metaphor and homology. The remaining chapters are organized around four themes: race in disguise; morality in disguise; gender and sexuality in disguise, and politics in disguise. Most of the authors are new scholars to the field, a very positive sign and one which ensures a fresh and creative approach.

The book is theoretically informed by the rhetorical devices of metaphor and form, in particular drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke and Brummett's writing on rhetorical homology. Brummett expands upon Burke to claim that in the form of discourses we can identify recurrent patterns. Form is 'a kind of metaphor on steroids' which underlies and links together many different texts (p. 8). Through the formal connection, discourse connects with, and addresses, social issues. This connection is established through a particular device, the homology, defined by Brummett as 'a formal resemblance underlying many texts and experiences' (p. 9), which is especially useful in comparing what are otherwise apparently very different texts. When one is unaware of the homology, each text serves as a disguise for the other.

The task of analysis is to uncover formal and other rhetorical resemblances in order to see the patterns underneath.

Of the eleven chapters, four deal with the hidden rhetorics of race in film and television. Hoerl considers the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*, rejecting criticism of the film as neglecting the role of black activists. Instead, Hoerl argues that the film can be seen as a rhetorical homology which is consistent with the themes and political trajectory of the Black Power movement. She explains how themes of institutional discrimination and reaction are represented through the main characters of the film, the two white FBI agents. Perks, Winslow and Avital find a homological correspondence in the depiction of 'little people' and African Americans in film and television. Borrowing the concept of 'othering' from Edward Said, they discuss how both these groups are marginalized through being characterized as fantastic or magical, as angry and violent, and as comic. Brummett argues that the film *The Horse Whisperer* contains a homology which expresses a myth of mainstream, white, liberal America, in which social injury to non-white groups is acknowledged but not frankly encountered. For Brummett, key white characters in the story figuratively occupy the place of non-whites, to whom redemption is offered by a benevolent white patriarch and which must be taken up by the non-whites. This formal mechanism expresses how the white population absolves itself of blame for racial injustice. The final chapter in this section, by Perks, uses Burke to present the cinematic presentation of extreme whites ('the evil albino') as a case of 'scapegoating'.

Chapters five and six deal with 'morality in disguise'. The first, by Olson, is the strongest chapter of the collection. She conducts a detailed empirical analysis of the interpretive framework employed by individuals engaged in acts of violence. She finds a consistent homology present across three disparate cases: people taking part in sport hunting; the perpetrators of hate crimes; and stranger rape. She presents both Burke's and Brummett's positions on homology most clearly, as well as undertaking a rigorous analysis which identifies four points of correspondence across the texts. Following Olson, Winslow's chapter identifies a strong class rhetoric in the discourse of popular evangelist, Joel Osteen. Winslow finds that the form of Osteen's discourse links class and morality through three key traits: marriage and family; hard work; and health.

'Politics in disguise' is the theme of chapters seven, eight and nine. Aguayo's chapter considers the controversy around the popular wildlife documentary, *March of the Penguins*. She notes how, at the time the film was released, public commentators praised the film as a model for human family values. Aguayo points out the extent to which the narrative advocates the ideal of the stable, nuclear family through an entirely subjective anthropomorphism. Hartelius's chapter unveils the film *Pirates of the Caribbean* as a homology for transnational corporatism. She identifies three key themes which are said to apply to contemporary society: 'the construction and confusion of identity, the pursuit of empowering objects, and the manipulation of unstable space' (p. 173). Gatchet presents an analysis of how the city of Salem, Massachusetts,

rhetorically constructs interpretations of witch-hunting through tourism sites and commemoration. He reveals how this rhetoric shifts responsibility for the witch-hunts away from social and institutional factors in favour of a general hysteria considered to be the normal result of social transition. He concludes by considering how tourism might be improved by opening it up to alternative interpretations of historical events.

The hidden rhetorics of gender and sexuality are cinematically exposed in the final two chapters. Inspired by post-structuralist work on gender and masculinity, Garza finds the film *Brokeback Mountain* to be replete with disguised social issues; 'The film is thus much more than a movie about gay cowboys; it is really about the constraints of masculinity, socioeconomic status, and cultural hegemony on our individual and collective being' (p. 198). The final chapter, by Earnest, argues that gay and lesbian issues are disguised in the *X-Men* films. He presents an in-depth analysis of the films, using metaphor in interesting ways to identify how the film deals with sexuality and prejudice.

The key organizing concept of the book, homology, is certainly an interesting idea. It could serve as a powerful analytical tool for conducting systematic rhetorical research. However, one might ask to what extent do the chapters in this book deliver on the promise of homological analysis. In most cases, they offer analogies rather than identifying extensive formal resemblances between texts. In only one case – the chapter by Olson – is the homological analysis fully developed. Olson points the way forward for how a homological approach might be useful in uncovering the deployment of similar forms across otherwise unrelated texts. This chapter stands out for its comparison across several discourses, for its extensive empirical analysis, and for its precise identification of the homological structures. Apart from this chapter, the utility of a homological analysis would be strengthened with the application of a more rigorous methodology.

A final question is to ask how hidden are the rhetorics the book discusses? In many cases, the themes of the films under analysis are not difficult to recognize, even if they are not literally stated. For example, the chapter on *Brokeback Mountain* argues that issues of class and masculinity are hidden in the film, when these issues seem to be transparently under question from the outset. Similarly, the class dimension of Joel Osteen's rhetoric is easily found in the examples given. For students who have had no exposure at all to such ideas, the approach of this book would be new. But we would expect a knowledgeable audience to move well beyond the scope of the analyses here. The chapters might have benefited from engaging more with the scholarly criticism of film and literature. Much of what is provided here is also discussed in other fields, for example cultural studies, which uses sociological concepts to reflect upon the construction of norms in popular culture.

The book would serve well as an introductory level textbook for undergraduate students. Its treatment of how cultural artefacts figuratively encode social issues illustrates how to begin uncovering and

criticising them. It is very clearly written and pitched at an appropriate level for undergraduate readers. The collection avoids complex theoretical discussions in favour of in-depth textual analysis and case studies. The case studies successfully highlight particular analytical themes but fall short of offering any substantial scholarly debate. Nonetheless, students who have not been exposed to cultural studies or film and literary criticism will find that the book shows the way to reading behind literal meanings to uncover figurative representations of social issues. In sum, the book is a good introductory text for students of the rhetoric of culture, and an engaging entry point to the concept of rhetorical homology.

Cultural & Media Studies

publishers of original thinking | www.intellectbooks.com

Have an original idea?

We are here to support your ideas and get them published. To send us your new book or journal proposal, please download a questionnaire from www.intellectbooks.com.



Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture

Principal Editor

Anthony McNicholas
University of Westminster
mcnichc@wmin.ac.uk

Associate Editor

Tarik Sabry
University of Westminster
sabryt@wmin.ac.uk

ISSN: 17572681
First published in 2009
3 issues per volume

Engaging readers and contributors from different parts of the world in critical debate, *Interactions* encourages discussions on the myriad interconnections and interactions between communication, culture and society in the twenty-first century.



To view our catalogue or order our books and journals visit www.intellectbooks.com

Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road,
Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG.

Tel: +44 (0) 117 9589910
Fax: +44 (0) 117 9589911