1981

Briefly Noted

Recommended Citation

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol7/iss4/8
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.
In the first area, the work process, Golding and Elliott conclude that broadcast journalism in all three systems is becoming a highly routinized activity.

Whether the broadcast journalist is a professional or not, his occupational values and ambitions are far from autonomous. The bureaucratic and work routines and exigencies that surround him severely compromise the free exercise of ideals or professional intent, and in turn such values come to incorporate and reflect such limitations. The triumph of routine over professional ideology results from the technical complexities and scale of broadcast journalism, which make it a segmented and passive craft, often removed from the newspaper practices in which its ideology was formed. [p. 192]

But is it merely the complexity and scale of broadcast journalism that make for segmented, passive, even degraded work? The research of Braverman (1974) and others (Zimbalist 1979) suggests that computer scientists, engineers, and other so-called professionals, including print journalists, are experiencing the same routinization. According to this labor process focus, routinization and de-skilling result more from the drive to reduce labor costs and extend managerial control over potential sources of workplace opposition than from complexity of work. Political economy extends beyond the labor process or the point of production. Time and resource shortages certainly lead to dependency on international and regional film services such as Eurovision and Visnews. But why are these the only available alternatives? What is about the political economy of broadcast news production that makes Visnews dominant in Sweden, Nigeria, and Ireland? Wallerstein (1979) and Villarmi (1979) have offered dependency models that would illuminate this question and overcome weaknesses in the policy recommendations that Golding and Elliott offer. These models would expand their focus of change beyond the need to reform the internal structure of broadcast news production by explicitly challenging the concentration of power in the hands of a few dominant broadcast news production sources.

These concerns are not meant to diminish the significance of their work. Indeed, it is the detailed empirical evidence that the authors present that makes concern about the labor process and the global political economy of broadcast journalism all the more pressing. Guided by a sharper theoretical focus, more work on making the news in different societies with different political and cultural traditions is necessary before it is too late to do anything about the issues Making the News raises.

References

Briefly Noted


This is a companion volume to The Visual Arts, both of which originated from formal sessions on the topic of art and anthropology convened during the Ninth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in 1973. The focus here is on music and dance, represented in twenty-four papers by researchers from Austria, India, Ireland, Japan, Nigeria, Romania, South Africa, the United States, U.S.S.R., Vietnam, and Yugoslavia. The contributions run the gamut from purely descriptive folkloric research to more general theoretical issues, but with the exception of a set of topics on musical perception they do not have any consistent themes or challenges. As in many other volumes in the World Anthropology series, the quality of the papers varies greatly. Some papers (Blacking, Hanna) repeat perspectives which their authors have developed in detail elsewhere, but a few are fresh and quite stimulating (Kealiinohomoku on continuity and change in Balinese and Hawaiian dance, Kubik’s summary of research on pattern perception in African music) and others report data that are rarely discussed in English-language publications (Sikharulidze on Georgian poetic folklore, Comisel on the Romanian folklore calendar). While this collection is hardly an accurate barometer of world research in the performing arts, it nevertheless contains some captivating essays and descriptive materials valuable for cross-cultural research on performance.

In the past century and a half, roughly, since the appearance of photography in its various guises, the words about it have piled up almost as high as the images. Nearly everyone had—and many still have—something to say about this magical invention and what it means. What photography is and what it isn’t are questions still posed and never resolved. Is photography art? Is there art after photography? Are photographs “real”? What is reality in the age of photographs? No anthology can do justice to the varieties of photographic analysis and criticism, but the present volume is an impressive achievement. Goldberg has brought together pioneers and opponents, eyewitnesses and historians, artists and critics, to provide a rich and varied, if necessarily incomplete, introduction to the ways photography has been represented in print. She has done a thorough and admirable job. One can applaud the inclusion—or lament the exclusion—of particular favorites; on the whole the collection is comprehensive and valuable. It is unfortunate that the publisher (to choose the likely villain) did not permit the inclusion of more photographs: pictures discussed in the volume should have been reproduced. It is ironic that, in a book of writings on photography, one often cannot see the images which the authors are discussing.


Sol Worth (1922-1977) was the founding editor of Studies. In this volume are collected eight of his most important papers from the period 1969-1977 which, along with his path-blazing Navajo Filmmakers Project (recounted in his book with John Adair, Through Navajo Eyes), constitute a major contribution to the field of Communication. The papers trace the development of Worth’s thinking and research, beginning with the question of how films communicate and expanding into problems and concerns that draw upon—and illuminate—the disciplines of anthropology, education, linguistics, psychology, and semiotics.


Magicians were among the creators of the cinema, and they were also among its earliest casualties. In this brief (but generously illustrated) book, written with his usual clarity and economy, Erik Barnouw illuminates a little-known and fascinating portion of motion picture history. For decades stage magicians had worked to perfect a variety of illusions using new scientific and technological inventions; many of these contributed directly to the invention of the cinema as "the next logical step." Magicians were among the first to recognize the potential of film, and they literally carried the new marvel within months, around the world. Many of the earliest filmmakers were magicians; in particular they pioneered special effects and animation. But the cinema became a "powerful robot outng its former master." The transfer to the screen of the magician's specialty: the sensational illusion—proved to be their undoing: "anyone with a camera and a splicer could produce the same miracles, and did."

Barnouw details the role played by magicians in the development and diffusion of film technology, the intermixture of magic and movies in the early years (Houdini, for example, made five feature films between 1919 and 1923 in which "the extraordinary feats for which he was celebrated became climaxes in fictional melodrama"), and the eventual displacement of the former by the latter.

"Today the magic performer has metamorphosed into an industry which proclaims—as he did—that its purpose is entertainment, wholesome and instructive in effect. It says it is not exercising power, not trying to manipulate." But, as Barnouw and his readers know, the new magic is indeed powerful. And, as Barnouw pointedly concludes his account of how media magic replaced stage magic:

It may well be that a central element in the power [of media] is the astonishing fact that media images are no longer seen by the public as optical illusions offered by magicians, but as something real. The unawareness is equivalent to defenselessness. The new industrialized magic may be closer to "black magic" than to "natural magic."