ough study which offers both the traditional viewpoint and alternative perspectives on a “still rather young” (227) discipline.

REFERENCES


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This volume is a collection of eight essays, all of which have appeared in various journals and anthologies over the last ten years. The intellectual unity of the collection – evident despite a great diversity of subject matter – is fashioned by Parmentier’s reliance on a single unified framework for the study of cultural phenomena. This “semiotic” approach to the study of culture, which Parmentier pursues and develops across all eight essays, is based in large part on the intellectual legacy of Charles Sanders Peirce. It is a legacy which has of late found a large number of claimants and advocates – although, as with other belated (re-)discoveries of intellectual roots, there is some divergence of opinion in the current literature as to how Peirce’s work may best be applied to the study of cultural phenomena. Parmentier’s own contributions to this debate are characterized by a judicious balance between interpretive innovation and renovation with regard to Peirce’s basic proposals, and by a consistent, often tenacious effort to apply these ideas to a varied sample of empirically observable cultural phenomena.

The volume is divided into four parts, each consisting of two chapters. The chapters in Part I are both detailed studies of Peirce’s semiotic theory. It is well known, and hardly surprising, that Peirce’s own thinking developed and matured over the course of his lifetime. Parmentier’s goal in Chap. 1 is to offer an explication of the most systematically fleshed-out theories associated with Peirce’s middle period, roughly 1895–1903. Chap. 2 is a useful
complement to Chap. 1, since it takes a historical perspective on the development of Peirce's thinking, particularly with regard to the concept of semiotic mediation. These two chapters offer a thorough and elegant introduction to Peirce's mature semiotic theory, the most fundamental concerns of which may be described in a few sentences.

Peirce proposed a set of semiotic distinctions designed to describe the process whereby a finite mind could acquire knowledge of the world—a process, in Peirce's terms, of sequential adequation between sign and object. Peirce argued that the process of acquiring knowledge or grasping reality, while constrained by these semiotic dimensions, was nonetheless open-ended within experience (i.e., it would continue as a process as long as human experience continued). Since the adequation between object and sign is part of an ongoing process, any given stage of adequation between object and sign is subsequently evaluable in a further mental or behavioral outcome, namely its "interpreter"; and since the interpretant has as its object the earlier sign-object relation, it has itself the structure of a sign. Thus, with respect to any nth sign-object relation isolable in such a process, the interpretant is an (n + 1)th sign whose object is that nth relation. Peirce argued that, for any given relational triad of object—sign—interpretant, the "sign" at issue is only an intermediate term: its role is to mediate the transition between object and interpretant, not to specify once and for all the significance of the object.

Parmentier argues that Peircean semiotics provides, in all these respects, a framework for thinking about language, as well as other aspects of culture, which is considerably richer than the static, atemporal, and idealizing perspective found in Saussurean theories of sign phenomena. Within the single theoretical vocabulary of the Peircean framework, the dynamic and processual quality of acts of representing reality is reconciled with the apparently static character of representations; the latter are viewed as nothing more than isolable, sometimes reified moments within the former. The theoretical vocabulary is equally applicable to linguistic and non-linguistic signs, and it is inherently user-friendly to those concerned with the role of metalanguage, reflexivity, consciousness, and dialogic process within discursive (or other) forms of meaningful human interaction. It is in the context of these fundamental issues that we must understand the Peircean concern for "indexicality," which has of late swept across both linguistics and anthropology—as well as the question of the varieties of indexicality, and of the relationship of indexicality to "iconic" and "symbolic" realms of semiotic value.

In Chap. 3, Parmentier documents the interplay of symbolism and indexicality in an instance of non-linguistic semiosis, the case of transactional exchange in Belauan mortuary rites. In this western Micronesian society, the death of a married person sets in motion a complex series of transactions between individuals arrayed in different relationships to the deceased. Tra-
ditionally, the exchanged objects are of rather particular types – certain types of food, ceramic and glass beads, hammered turtleshell trays, funeral mats, etc. – each symbolically valued in specific ways. Parmentier argues that no static inventory of symbolic value suffices to explain the significance of such transactions. Equally important are the actual enacted “paths” traversed through social space by such transactions in fully contextualized acts of exchange. There is, for example, the “chiasmic” pattern observed upon a woman’s death: her children, now her husband’s children, present funeral mats to the deceased woman; these are then passed onto her brother’s children; the maternal cousins reciprocate by giving mats to the deceased woman as well; and these mats are then received by her widower husband’s children, who began the cycle in the first place. In crossing both affinal and generational lines, such chiasmic patterns of exchange traverse a path through the deceased woman; in doing so, they reinforce “the sentiment that consanguineal links to the deceased transcend, at least momentarily, the more fractious reality of the affinal division” (63).

Chap. 4, “The political function of reported speech,” is an analysis of the use of reported speech in Belauan political oratory. By incorporating the speech of others into their own orations, politicians characteristically represent and re-enact the pragmatic effects of other discourses in a way consistent with their own rhetorical ends. Such acts of re-presenting other speech events re-shape (while seeming only to re-enact) the “original” pragmatics of these events, thus pressing a version of contemporary history into the service of current and future political ends. Parmentier offers a perspicuous analysis of several types of metapragmatic devices which serve such pragmatic ends in Belauan political oratory; these include reports of one’s own or others’ words (whether “real” or imputed), the ascription of self-or-other’s utterances to culturally valued (or disvalued) genres, and performances which putatively gloss the “meaning” of words, whether one’s own or others’. Equally interesting is a discussion of the global architecture of speeches, i.e. their metrical and episodic organization, which imposes a higher-order metapragmatic shape on the pragmatic effects of the oration.

Just as acts of reporting speech provide a local metapragmatic framework for re-shaping the pragmatics of reported contents, large-scale institutionalized traditions for interpreting specific cultural practices also have a regimenting effect, often quite global and widespread across society. Chaps. 5–6 take up the same questions of the relationship between lower and higher orders of semiotic regimentation – the relationship, in other words, between an nth and an (n + 1)th position in the process of semiosis – for the case of more complex semiotic processes of cultural understanding. I focus here on a single example (142–55), which involves the relationship of “puffery” in advertising to its interpretation in the legal tradition of Anglo-American juris-
prudence. Puffery, traditionally recognized as consisting of “statements of personal opinion or exaggerations of product qualities” in advertising talk, has long been considered an unfortunate concomitant of more “factual representations of commercial products” (143). What has changed in modern times, Parmentier argues, is the legal understanding of the role that puffery plays in advertising talk, as well as the semiotic criteria within the legal tradition for recognizing and differentiating puffery from the rest of such talk. In the 19th century, puffery was believed to be entirely commonplace and natural in advertising talk; as one Massachusetts court ruled in 1853, “it always [had] been understood, the world over, that such statements are to be distrusted” (quoted on p. 143). The judiciary as cultural semiotician maintained that commercial speech was to be taken as puffery by the consumer, unless certain contrary signals were present in the advertisement. In the modern period, American courts and regulatory agencies have reversed this ranking: rather than regarding puffery as the socially expected norm, puffs are now “considered a small, forgivable remnant from an earlier irrational tradition” (146). Advertising talk in general is now presumed by the juridical tradition to involve the rational transmission of referentially transparent information, “useful to citizens in that quintessentially rational forum, the marketplace” (150); it is puffery which is now viewed as the exception, legally liable when identified. This change in valence, shaped by modern ideologies of the referential transparency of language and of the rationality of the marketplace, and no less so by the increasing power of corporations in advanced capitalism, has resulted in the institutionalization of new ethnometapragmatic norms, and the ensuing manipulation of the consciousness of consumers in hitherto unimaginined ways. Parmentier documents these changes in exacting, meticulous detail.

In the last two chapters, Parmentier’s interest in the contextualized and hence indexical uses of symbolism turns, in true reflexive fashion, toward academic discourse. Chap. 7, “Comparison, pragmatics and interpretation,” discusses the pragmatic ends and metapragmatic means by which the activity of “cultural comparison” is conducted within the academy. Chap. 8, “Naturalization of convention,” discusses the socially positioned processes by which cultural conventions are re-fashioned and re-interpreted – not only by ordinary participants of a culture, but also by analysts and theoreticians when they behave as participants by seeking to ground different aspects of cultural convention in “naturalizing” theories. Although I must forego a more detailed discussion of these issues, it is necessary to mention that one of the most satisfying aspects of these chapters, particularly the last, is the way in which these issues, once re-animated, are framed in a fashion theoretically consistent with the earlier studies. Thus the note of discomfort and distress that too often issues from ethnographers when they return from their
exertions abroad and find an awkward absence of semiotic order at home, is altogether lacking. This ethnographer did not tread homeward on foot; apparently, he uses a sign-vehicle.

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Thirteen of the 16 papers in this collection were originally presented at the Sixth International Tromsø Symposium on Language in November 1990. The overall focus is on three issues – language contact, language conflict, and language planning – but with an emphasis on the second of these. There is no internal ordering to the collection; papers stand in alphabetical order by author’s name. With neither geographical region nor type of language held constant, the volume suffers somewhat from a lack of thematic cohesion, but many papers hold considerable interest.

I found it helpful to approach the papers via the best represented group of languages, namely those of northern Europe. Four papers deal with Norway in particular. One discusses the position of Sami in a Norwegian-dominated state, while three deal with the rival Norwegian standard languages; each paper highlights somewhat different features of the competition. Tove Bull, “Conflicting ideologies in contemporary Norwegian language planning,” emphasizes the degree to which language planning (including attempts to determine orthographic and morphological norms) became a political undertaking in Norway after the Norwegian Parliament began debating language matters at the beginning of the 1860s; she also links an increasing preference for Bokmål, long favored by the urban bourgeoisie, to the change from a rural to a more nearly industrial and urbanized society after World War II. Kjell Venås, “On the choice between two written standards in Norway,” agrees strongly with this linkage, and he details the post-war weaknesses of Nynorsk in the prestige competition: Nynorsk was not favored in towns, nor (despite supposedly equal footing) was it used to an equal degree administratively; it was not adopted in the press, and “practically none of the well-dressed men of private industry and commerce spoke or wrote this standard” (268). Ernst Håkon Jahr & Peter Trudgill, “Parallels and differences in the linguistic development of modern Greece and modern Norway,” note also that, prior to WWII, the more distinctively Norwegian character of Nynorsk permitted its supporters a claim to superior patriotism. Once the years of German occupation had offered more compel...