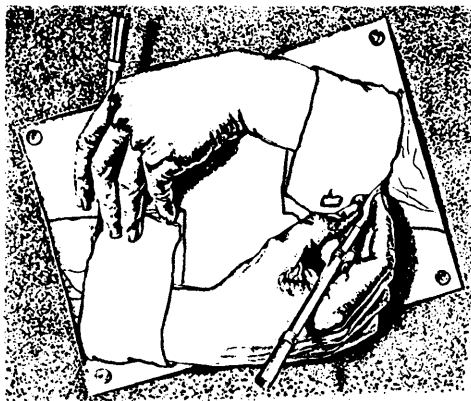


EDITORIAL



In this, the 51st issue of *Radical Philosophy*, we are publishing a couple of articles that survey a range of material. Following Martin Barker's study (*RP* 46) of the way in which the media transmits its message, David Buckingham examines a profusion of material on TV literacy. Val Plumwood pursues the arguments of her previous article 'Women, Humanity and Nature' (*RP* 48) in her piece on the Sex/Gender distinction.

David Buckingham begins by arguing, with reference to a variety of texts, that the so-called 'decline' in literacy may in fact not be this at all but may rather indicate an alteration in the standards used to measure the notion. He then picks out three assumptions which, he says, underlie many perspectives on TV literacy, but which particularly ground the argument of a representative tome on the subject: H. Foster, *The Language of Film and TV*. These are firstly, that children are the 'passive recipients' of TV presentations; secondly that there is a contrast between the 'rational' teacher and the irrational child; and thirdly that TV language is defined in terms of images taken out of context plus dictionary meanings. The remainder of the article focusses mainly on a critique of this third assumption.

In Section II: Is TV a language?, Buckingham considers a number of texts that draw analogies between language and TV. These basically fall into two types: poststructuralist and psychoanalytic. His fundamental criticism of both models is that they abstract TV literacy from the social and historical context of its production, and they therefore have no means of accounting for the social and historical diversity of language use. By contrast, he comments favourably on the work of Volosinov and Bakhtin.

The third section of the article: What is literacy?, points, once more, to the asocial, ahistorical nature of much of the work on the question. And in the final section Buckingham develops a social notion of TV literacy from accounts of language literacy, e.g. that of Bourdieu, that argue that even grammaticality, for example, is socially defined. This approach, he argues, suggests a different model of teaching and research on TV literacy: e.g. research on the social distribution of viewing competencies.

Plumwood provides a defence of the sex/gender distinction against recent attacks by cultural feminists or theorists of sexual 'difference'. In a wide-ranging survey of the arguments against the distinction, she claims that while certain uses of it have rightly been criticised, some form of it is not only defensible but necessary. In particular she argues that it is necessary for the conceptualisation of the possibilities for the emancipatory trans-

formation of relations between the sexes. Distinguishing between two quite different senses of 'degendering' ('degendering'₁ – relative to the gender structure of any particular, actually existing society, and 'degendering'₂ – the removal of *all* structures of social difference attached to sexual difference) she defends the former but not the latter. Degendering₁, she suggests, is perhaps better thought of as *regendering*. 'The problem', she concludes, 'is gender, and regendering is its solution'.

We are also publishing two further articles, one by Ruth Levitas and the other by Peter Dews. Levitas, in her examination and comparison of two thinkers who can be represented as challenging the Second International critics of Utopian thinking – Bloch and William Morris – claims that there are 'real problems in how to think about the future' and that thinking about it requires a Marxism that is supplemented with the romantic strands of Utopianism. She avers that Bloch does not uncritically present one Utopia as the zenith of historical progression; rather he argues that several are possible. One distinguishes amongst them by appeal to Marxism and Praxis. And Morris, she reminds us, argued not for a reduction in labour, but for a reduction in the pain associated with it, and for a transcendence of alienation. Both thinkers, she suggests (and this, she argues, is vitally important for Marxists) emphasise the role of visionary daydreaming in the process of social transformation.

Finally Peter Dews expands on one of the arguments of his book *The Logics of Disintegration* that, although Foucault lacks a theory of desire, he has an account of power. Dews argues here that there are some problems in Foucault's relativism vis-à-vis power and the dominated other. Foucault believes, along with other poststructuralists, that the promise of an undivided reason has totalitarian implications. Yet, Dews claims, the plurality of 'forms of rationality' deprives the concept of any determinate content. For example, Foucault wants to see power and knowledge as internally related, but he cannot – instead knowledge is seen as arising in certain institutional contexts. But in that case the relation between knowledge and power becomes non-intrinsic. In his article, Dews points to other aspects of the problem in Foucault's thought. He suggests instead, and this will come as no surprise to those who are familiar with Dews' work, that the Frankfurt school problematised these aspects in a more complex manner.

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