

Book and article reviews

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BOOK AND ARTICLE REVIEWS

Matthias F. Steinmann (ed.). *Sophies zweite Welt. Berner Texte zur Medienwissenschaft* 9, 2004: 358 pages.

Altered Realities

"Whenever Sophie sits in front of the television, she completely forgets the world around her." Sophie is the daughter of Matthias F. Steinmann, professor of Communications Research at the University of Berne and editor of the anthology, *Sophies zweite Welt* (Sophie's other world). Sophie's reaction to television is indeed typical of the behavior of many recipients during media use: they immerse themselves in a fictional virtual reality created by the media - or, put differently, they escape to "another world". The authors contributing to *Sophies zweite Welt* not only try to describe this process from different theoretical angles, but also to search for a deeper understanding of it. At the centre of the theoretical debate contained in Steinmann's book lies the concept of "reality transfer", the drifting off into a secondary, media-created reality during the communicative phase, i.e. during media use.

The book is the result of a seminar on reality transfer held at the University of Berne, and all the papers contained in it were written exclusively by students and seminar participants. They were encouraged to approach the rather complex topic creatively and "without bothering too much about scientific standards," as Steinmann points out in the introduction. This collection of papers, therefore, contains a variety of personal musings and observations which show no lack of inventiveness and may well indicate the road for future research.

Media use not only entails a function-oriented choice of specific (mass)

media, but also cognitive and emotional aspects. However, the processes involved in the reception phase in particular, such as the processing of information and the deliberate focusing on specific media content, are still not well understood. Accordingly, Steinmann, who has been researching media use for many years, claims in his own contribution (*Das Publikum im Wirklichkeitstransfer - Reality transfer and the audience*) that substantial parts of the processes involved in the use of New Media are not properly explained by communications research. His conclusion: inadequate theoretical approaches in media research, in particular within the uses and gratification framework, prevent a full understanding of media use, especially of electronic media.

Using seven different working hypotheses, the various authors analyze the elements involved in the process of reality transfer, i.e. the sender, the message, the medium and the recipient, and take a closer look at the preconditions necessary for reality transfer to occur at all. For this purpose, different approaches from a wide range of (social) sciences are used - e.g. epistemology, radical constructivism, but also brain research and action theory - the results of which support as well as contradict each other.

Naturally, the recipient, being the primary agent in the process of reality transfer, takes centre stage in Steinmann's anthology. Accordingly, the different papers mainly focus on psychological and social factors that are likely to influence the reception of media as well as the perception of reality as such. Predispositional factors, such as the social environment, the level of psychological development and media competence, all affect the recipient's media use, as do their specific needs and expectations (this has been amply shown by studies based on the uses and gratifications approach). Using developmental psychology, one paper adopts an educa-

tional approach and shows that younger children are particularly prone to reality transfer. It is only at school age that children become aware that the people they watch on television are not "real" people, but actors. Normally, however, children do not deliberately search for reality transfer, since they are not yet able to distinguish clearly between media reality and reality proper, especially when it comes to the actions, persons and motives depicted on-screen.

The hypothesis that reality transfer is a basic motive of human behavior, and therefore is actively sought by media users, is assessed quite differently by the authors. Although some of the papers collected point towards a confirmation of that hypothesis, no answer can be given as to whether humans indeed feel an intrinsic urge to enter alternative realities, or whether they just use media to satisfy certain needs. When discussing the different aspects of media interaction, i.e. the relationship between the medium and the recipient during the communicative phase, two concepts keep emerging: identification and escapism.

Identification is a concept taken from psychoanalysis and was originally used to describe the emotional bond between two people. When applied to media reception, the concept designates the recipient's need to imitate the person watched on-screen. The recipients identify with the film's "hero" because of their wish to be just as strong and powerful - they think, feel and act as if they had adopted the film protagonist's personal characteristics. This adoption of a secondary personality can be studied best when people play computer games, as studies of media violence indicate. The players don't just watch passively, but actively control what is happening on-screen. Even though there are effects of identification that linger on after the actual me-

dia interaction, the authors claim that reality transfer mainly takes place during the reception phase.

Escapism, on the other hand, is a concept which is related to identification, but is mostly used to describe the negative effects of media use: escape from everyday life, social isolation and the avoidance of real-life problems are among the symptoms of escapist behavior. Using real-life examples, one paper based on the uses and gratification approach offers particularly interesting insights into this specific type of (mass) media use.

While it is true that the two concepts of identification and escapism, as well as the others used in the book, represent promising theoretical approaches, they also point to the basic problem with the concept of reality transfer: its fuzziness. It often remains unclear where the process of reality transfer actually begins or ends. Accordingly, it also remains unclear how to operationalize the process. "Reality transfer designates a process involved in people's media use, especially of the media that contain fictional content. During media interaction the recipient enters a secondary, media-based reality, which may have, depending on the person and situation, different effects on the recipient's primary reality." This is the definition of reality transfer given at the end of the book. However, the book may arouse some criticism: it tends rather to raise questions than to give (definite) answers. But then again, the wide range of issues dealt with in *Sophies zweite Welt* could well act as a wake-up call for researchers in media and related fields, prompting them to finally tackle the complicated topic of reality transfer in a more systematic way.

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Ivan Zassoursky. *Media and Power in post-soviet Russia*. Armoni, N.Y.: M.E. Scarpe Inc., 2004: 269 pages.

When *Media and power in post-soviet Russia* was published in 2004, Russian President Putin's popularity had only been marginally affected by what was to become a storm of criticism at the beginning of 2005. Russia's severe financial crisis in the wake of post-soviet reforms, the way the conflict in Chechnya was conducted, and the inevitable estrangement from the former soviet satellite states all contributed to making the Kremlin the target of fierce criticism - both on national and international levels. Russia's president stands accused of transforming his country once again into an illiberal oligarchy, re-imposing hierarchic, centralized rule and governing Russia with an iron hand. While some people may think that he has restored Russia to her former glory, others question whether some of the most fundamental human rights have been severely compromised in the process.

It is against this complex backdrop that Ivan Zassoursky's book becomes highly relevant to understanding the underlying causes of what plagues the Russian giant. The author, an influential journalist working for two large, independent, nationwide daily newspapers and a media researcher at Moscow University, provides a detailed account of how the Russian media have gradually evolved from their humble beginnings. The first chapter describes what has happened since the late 1980s, pointing out the highs and lows of Russia's nascent free press and its attempts, thwarted several times, to become more independent. This is followed by a case study of *Nazavisimaya Gazeta*, which exemplifies both the great expectations and inconsistencies prevalent throughout the Moscow press. The crucial third chapter examines two different aspects of the issue.

Firstly, it illustrates what has been achieved in terms of modernising the relationship between the media and the country's ruling circles, as government media advisers have become more influential and the importance of having effective communication strategies in place has been recognised. Secondly, Zassoursky looks at post-soviet Russia's media environment from a geographical point of view, an approach also used in the fourth chapter to analyse the presidential campaign of 2000. The fifth chapter, meanwhile, is concerned with the diffusion of the internet in Russia, which the government is alleged to have intentionally tried to slow down. The final chapter provides a comprehensive look at the corporate structures of Russia's most influential media companies.

It is worth taking a closer look at some other aspects discussed in the book - not only because they show the author's ability to write clearly and succinctly, but also because they are highly relevant to the overall topic.

It is interesting to read about the decisive role television played, in the author's view, during the difficult transformation period Russia experienced as it evolved from the "closed" Soviet society to an "open" post-communist society. Mikhail Gorbachev was the first Russian politician to recognise the potential of television as a strategic tool. He used his positive media image against leading members of the Soviet party apparatus to press forward a number of structural reforms called *uskorenienie* or "acceleration", which were to have a profound impact on the country's future. In a system that was in large measure accustomed to print and radio, television opened up an entirely new world to the Russian people, disclosing the party's decision-making process and showing the public both the Soviet Union's flaws and its backwardness. Things that had seemed distant and abstract suddenly

became the centre of public debate. According to Zassoursky, television emerged as the single most important factor in the "mediatisation" of politics, and substantially changed the way politics is conducted in Russia.

The author's chronology of the transitional period makes a particularly rewarding read. It not only tracks the internal changes that took place in the mass media sector, but also examines in great detail the different stages in the development of Russian society at large, from the late 1980s until the re-election of president Putin. A recurring theme throughout is the struggle for independence and freedom of information. In a first phase around 1990, the press evolved as the "fourth" power in the country amid growing criticism of the war in Afghanistan, as reporters started asking tough questions about some of the decisions made by Moscow. The author calls the second period, which ended in 1992, the "golden age" of the Russian media. An initial privatisation phase started and new media outlets were established, which seemed to work profitably. Where this was not the case, the government provided substantial subsidies. During this time, journalists and Boris Yeltsin enjoyed a honeymoon period. Yeltsin used the myth of a "democratic press" as a weapon against the conservatives within his own ranks.

Between 1992 and 1996 the media system became more firmly established. According to Zassoursky, these four years are key to understanding the current situation. If the brief period preceding these four years was characterised by a sense of euphoria and freedom, news coverage thereafter became ever more politically influenced. On the one hand, this was due to the financial constraints faced by many newspapers which were then snatched up by "interested capitalists", and, on the other hand, because of the upcoming presidential campaign. As a consequence, most papers toed the

line of the outgoing president and largely ignored the opposition parties. The two following years are what the author calls "years of paradoxical crisis" - where problems similar to those experienced by many Western countries were encountered: the media became the *sine qua non* of political discourse while at the same time slowly losing their freedom and independence. This leads up to the last phase, which is still ongoing. Enter Vladimir Putin - and all the nifty, well-targeted communication strategies. At the time of Putin's election and during his first term, a complex and open press gained a firm foothold in Russia, but was kept in check by careful presidential image building and a state which still owns significant stakes in many of the country's newspapers.

Following his analysis of the forces behind the delicate relationship between the media and the ruling circles, and how it evolved, Zassoursky reaches some disturbing conclusions: in terms of an independent press and journalistic freedom, the situation has not improved greatly over the past 15 years, despite the radical changes that have taken place in Russia. Totalitarian Soviet domination has been replaced by a ruler who appears less autocratic only on the surface. The laws of the market and government influence continue to exercise control over the press, and this prevents journalists from changing their mindset and working more for the public interest and less for the interests of the party or the publisher. In addition to this sobering conclusion, Zassoursky provides a wealth of data, tables and suggestions, which will doubtless be an extremely useful basis from which to start any serious analysis of the media system in post-Soviet Russia.

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R.G. Lee & T. Garvin. Moving from information transfer to information exchange in health and health care. *Social Science and Medicine* 56, 2003: 449-464.

This contribution focuses on the problem of doctor-patient communication in the perspective of the improvement of health literacy in patients. This is a widely discussed topic within various fields, ranging from social sciences, medicine, health communication and dialogue analysis. The discussion is triggered by the need to improve patients' behaviour especially with regard to the assumption of therapies. The starting point is usually agreed upon and it is that an increased and improved amount of medical information to patients will necessarily change their behaviour.

The Authors of this article argue that this assumption is correct in principle but not perfectly working in practice because of the way the transmission of information is accomplished. They present data recovered from three fields of studies to show that patients' behaviours cannot and will not be modified by a simple one-way transfer of information from general practitioner (GP) to patient based on a one-sided relationship. Moreover they critique two other points regarding health information transfer: (1) the focus on the individual, and (2) the privileging of expert over lay perspectives.

These three points are observed and discussed through the presentation of data reporting cases of consultations, interviews with the patients and materials used in public health campaigns.

With regard to the focus on the individual, the Authors discuss the individualistic ethic, meaning an attitude which suggests that health conditions are widely determined by the individual's characteristics, behaviours and choices. According to the Authors, such an attitude, if not controlled, can lead to over-

look broader social and environmental influences on behaviour regarding health. This approach to health problems is seen as perfectly coherent with the idea of increasing health by increasing health literacy. Two side-problems arise from this conception of the individual's responsibility in his own well being: the first is that all the blame for poor health conditions is put on the patient; the second, that physicians end up considering the patient just as a body to be fixed. In this passage, in particular, the Authors seem to suggest that GPs are strongly influenced by societal norms and expectations when taking into consideration what treatments to suggest to the patient.

In arguing the fact that there is a large privileging of expert over lay perspectives, the Authors suggest that physicians tend to keep the relationship with the patient on an uneven level by the use of expert language, mostly incomprehensible to patients, and that they do this in order to construct and maintain a hierarchy that will guarantee them undisputed power over the patient.

Coming to the problem of information transfer, it is observed that across various health settings (such as research, promotion, clinical practice, policy, etc.) information flows in only one direction. Thus the communicative event is not seen quite as a dialogue, but rather as a monologue of the physician who merely transfers information from himself to the patient.

The article then develops each point by presenting real life cases by which it shows how the individualistic ethic, the privileging of expert knowledge and the information transfer are widespread attitudes in empirical health settings.

From the discussion of the cases presented, some points emerge which are worth considering. First of all, the Authors argue that the practice of considering patients as set apart from their social environment is rooted in physi-

cians, an attitude which doesn't help because the patient may have needs or constraints that do not depend entirely on his own will.

Another point is made regarding who the "good" patient is: especially in public health, the "good" citizen seems to be the one who adheres to proper lifestyle choices that lower the risk of health threats. This is seen as problematic by the Authors, who argue that such an expectation again does not consider social demands on citizens (the case that had been presented on this point regarded the risks connected to excessive sun tanning). Starting from these considerations, it could be interesting to further analyse the notion of responsibility regarding choices made even when aware of risks, and the possibility (if it exists) to retain a margin of autonomous critical judgment, independent of the system's demands, constraints and impositions.

The last point regards the kind of relationship established between physicians and patients. The Authors see it as a relationship based on power, namely on the power that the GP maintains towards the patient. The notion of power is further developed in the sense that physicians don't allow patients to express themselves and to give their personal contribution to the process of decision making.

The Authors conclude by suggesting that traditional health communication based on the model of information transfer should move on to a model of information exchange. This is proposed also as a way to ensure that health information is not simply received but also acted upon by patients. After discussing a number of studies which all point in this direction, though, the Authors do not put forward a suggestion on how this step towards information exchange could be accomplished.

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E. Pomerantz & S. Rintel. Practices for reporting and responding to test results during medical consultations: enacting the roles of paternalism and independent expertise. *Discourse Studies* 6, 2004: 9-26

The medical consultation and the relationship between physicians and patients is once again at issue in this article. This time the starting point is to consider the medical consultation as a communicative event in which an information exchange takes place, between two (or more) participants playing certain predefined roles. It is in this sense a pragmatic perspective, that looks primarily at the interaction between physician and patient focusing on how this interaction develops.

In the first part of the article the medical consultation is described as an interaction in which the aim is to arrive at a diagnosis and/or a treatment suggestion for the patient. The relationship between physician and patient is asymmetrical and the Authors report various studies showing that both participants are aware of this and they somehow expect it to be so. This expectation stands in both directions: the patient is aware of the scientific expertise of the physician, and the physician knows that only the patient will be able to give him his own perceptions of his health condition. With regard to this last point, it is argued that in recent years there has been a significant change in the way people conceive of the medical consultation and the relationship to medical experts in general.

The Authors outline in particular two attitudes, or set of practices, related to distinct views of the rights and responsibilities of patients to obtain and understand medical information. The first one is associated to the traditional way of considering the medical consultation and is called paternalistic. In this perspective three sets of expecta-

tions and practices are outlined: (1) the physician will provide only the necessary medical information to the patient who, in turn, will rely on the physician's advice and judgement; (2) the physician will make the decisions he considers to be the more adequate and the patient will comply with them; (3) during the consultation, the physician will lead the discussion and the patient simply follow.

Opposite to this way of conceiving the relationship between patients and physicians are two attitudes: consumerism and mutuality. In the case of consumerism, the patient expects to make his own decisions, considering the physician merely as a "technical consultant"; in the case of mutuality, instead, patients expect the decision making to be achieved together with the physician. Both these attitudes imply a different idea of responsibility and of who should bear the burden of it. In both cases patients are expected to have at least some basic knowledge of medical matters and to apply it in order to understand their state of health or to interpret results of medical tests.

The Authors argue that when patients make the effort to learn medical information about their health status and how to cope with it, they enact the role of gaining independent expertise. Similarly, when physicians encourage such an effort by instructing the patients and involving them in the process of decision making, they enact the role of promoting patients' independent expertise.

At this point a consideration is made on the way the notion of role is considered throughout the article. Roles are not considered here as rigid or completely determining the behaviour of the participants in the interaction. The Authors distinguish between the expectations and assumptions patients may have before entering a medical consultation, and their actual behaviour dur-

ing the consultation itself, which cannot be assumed to be automatically coherent with those initial assumptions and expectations.

Looking at the practices participants in the interaction use, the Authors put them in relation to sets of expectations related to information exchange in medical consultations considering them as "role enactments inasmuch as the practices are consistent with expectations associated with a role". The Authors' intention is to show that the roles themselves are negotiated on a turn-by-turn basis.

The cases analysed in the article regard the situation in which the physician reports test results to patients. According to the kind and amount of information communicated, physicians can be said to enact either a paternalistic or independent expertise role. The Authors show how the patients' responding practices either ratify or contest the physicians' reporting practices.

The cases presented consist in a number of transcriptions of medical consultations and are analysed according to the methods of Conversation Analysis. The analysis contains four sections: (1) physicians' reporting practices that reflect/propose paternalistic roles; (2) reporting practices that reflect/propose independent expertise roles; (3) reporting practices that reflect/propose roles that are not clearly paternalistic or independent expertise; and (4) an instance of when a physician's report is problematic and subsequently remedied by the patient.

The ways in which the different roles are enacted by physicians and patients are taken into consideration and analysed from the point of view of their wording and content.

In the conclusion the Authors stress the strong connection between roles and relationships, showing that patients must not and actually do not always ratify the roles cast on them by physicians.

Moreover the changing from paternalistic to independent expertise roles seems to be relevant according to recent studies that have shown how more active patients have better outcomes than passive ones.

From this point of view this article presents an interesting perspective on the problem of improving patients' behaviours. Stress is often put on the amount of information given to patients, in other cases on the kind of it. In this case an attitude change is suggested which does not aim at eliminating the asymmetry in the relationship between physicians and patients: expert knowledge and lay perceptions cannot be levelled and sometimes constitute almost a polar opposition. Somehow this article could be read as suggesting a way through which the participants can "meet" somewhere in the middle between these two poles, putting the burden of responsibility for the felicity of this encounter on both parts.

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Jean-Pierre Meunier & Daniel Peraya. Introduction aux théories de la communication: analyse sémio-pragmatique de la communication médiatique. Bruxelles: De Boeck & Larcier, 2004: 459 pages.

Dans leur deuxième édition de l'Introduction aux théories de la communication, Jean-Pierre Meunier et Daniel Peraya proposent un cadre théorique pour l'analyse des messages audio-scripto-visuels dans une approche sémio-pragmatique et sémio-cognitive. C'est dans cette approche pluridisciplinaire que réside la plus grande richesse de cet ouvrage, qui est destiné aux enseignants, pédagogues et autres chercheurs dans le domaine des sciences de l'information et de la communication

en général, mais aussi de la pragmatique, de la sémiologique et de l'éducation en particulier. Le lecteur appréciera également la façon dont les diverses théories sont présentées, discutées et intégrées. Dans la deuxième partie du livre, où les messages audio-scripto-visuels sont analysés, les auteurs réfèrent systématiquement aux théories de la première partie. La matière dont traite l'ouvrage est complexe, Meunier et Peraya le démontrent à plusieurs reprises. Toutefois, en ouvrant régulièrement des parenthèses certes intéressantes, les auteurs n'ont pas toujours simplifié la lecture de l'ouvrage volumineux. Par contre, les études de cas et le guide pour l'analyse des messages médiatiques, donné en annexe, sont très informatifs.

Avant de présenter les quatre sections dont se compose l'ouvrage, une question s'impose: que sont les messages audio-scripto-visuels? Ce sont des messages qui combinent plusieurs sortes d'éléments signifiants (des images, des mots et des sons), tel que le message publicitaire dans un magazine où figure une image d'un produit accompagné d'un slogan. Comme ces éléments interagissent dans la construction de sens, il est essentiel de comprendre comment fonctionne chaque élément et comment, ensemble, ils construisent un sens. Afin de pouvoir analyser ces messages, il est tout d'abord important de réfléchir sur le processus de communication. Dans la première section donc, les auteurs présentent un panorama qui se veut représentatif des théories de la communication. Du premier modèle de la communication aux modèles les plus récents inspirés par la linguistique pragmatique, les auteurs présentent un cadre qui sert de référence pour le reste de l'ouvrage. Les chapitres de cette section démontrent bien la complexité de la compréhension d'un message. Plusieurs notions passent en revue, comme la distinction entre les signes digitaux et

les signes analogiques, les règles conversationnelles, les schémas, le principe de la pertinence et les modèles mentaux. La complémentarité des points de vue théoriques dans cette section permet d'avoir de bonnes bases pour commencer à s'intéresser aux significations des messages audio-scripto-visuels, le thème de la deuxième section.

Dans la deuxième section, les points communs et les différences entre les mots et les images sont traités (les signes sonores ne seront pas discutés). L'un des points de départ est la distinction en trois catégories de signes : le signe indiciel, où l'écart entre le signifiant d'un signe et son signifié est plus réduit, le signe iconique et le signe arbitraire-digital, où l'écart est plus grand. Tandis que les images (les signes iconiques ou analogiques) présentent les choses dont la présence s'impose elle-même, les mots (les signes digitaux) sont détachés des choses qu'ils représentent. Les rapports entre les signes digitaux et analogiques qui se trouvent dans les messages audio-scripto-visuels sont toutefois beaucoup plus complexes. La polysémie, les métaphores et les métonymies montrent, par exemple, que même au niveau des mots, il peut être question d'une associativité. Une image même est fondamentalement polysémique, car elle évoque d'autres images. Comme ce processus est une activité cognitive, il en résulte que l'intérêt de la cognition dans l'analyse des images est considérable.

La troisième section de l'ouvrage est consacrée à la pragmatique des communications audio-scripto-visuelles et propose des analyses concrètes de messages, tels que les publicités et les affiches politiques. Les messages sont tout d'abord mis dans un cadre plus général de communication où sont discutés entre autres la gestualité et le style vocal. Ensuite, comme tout acte de communication s'inscrit dans une interaction avec son environnement

social, les auteurs se penchent sur les rapports des messages audio-scripto-visuels avec le destinataire. Meunier et Peraya proposent ensuite de situer chaque message par rapport à deux axes bipolaires : l'axe ouvert – fermé et l'axe iconique – verbal. Les messages publicitaires sont un exemple d'un message plutôt iconique et plutôt fermé, car ils orientent vers une interprétation précise du message. Ainsi est constitué un schéma qui n'est pas considéré comme mode de classement, mais comme outil d'analyse des messages audio-scripto-visuels.

Dans la quatrième et dernière section, les auteurs ont pour objectif d'étendre leur approche des médias classiques aux nouveaux médias et de présenter un modèle du dispositif médiatique. Ce dernier chapitre s'inscrit bien dans l'approche de Meunier et Peraya qui se caractérise par l'étude de la pragmatique d'un point de vue psychologique, psychosociologique et cognitif. Ce regard pluridisciplinaire sur les messages audio-scripto-visuels permet de stimuler les chercheurs en pragmatique, sémiologie et autres sciences de l'information pour qui cet ouvrage sera une riche source d'inspiration.

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M.M. Bergman & T. S. Eberle (eds.). *Qualitative Inquiry: Research, Archiving, and Re-use*. Bern: Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2004: 170 pages.

This book is a collection of articles on research methods and techniques with a qualitative focus. Following the introduction by the two editors, the book is divided into two parts: the first part titled, "The why and how of qualitative methods", which consists

of four articles and the second part, titled, "The why and how of archiving qualitative data", which consists of seven articles while the book ends with short biographical notes of the twelve contributors.

As a social scientist who has extensively used and taught qualitative methods I find this concise text a valuable guide for students and researchers offering ample direction in the use of methods and research techniques in qualitative approaches. At the same time the book systematically reflects on the very quality of qualitative standards as well as the choice of qualitative research techniques in social science research. More specifically, starting with the introduction, we are first informed that this endeavor covers in part the absence of significance of qualitative inquiry in social science research in Switzerland, and hence, is the end product of an initiative to promote qualitative research. The Social Science Policy Council, a committee of the Swiss Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences, launched the effort. This materialized in the form of a workshop co-organized by the Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences that took place in Neuchâtel on 26-27 April 2002 and aimed to inform of the experiences of researchers from other European countries. The revised extended versions of most of the conference presentations are included in the book.

The first chapter by Eberle primarily presents the reasons why as well as the means by which the Social Science Policy Council, a committee of the Swiss Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences has undertaken the task of promoting qualitative research in Switzerland. The article sketches a portrait of the Council itself by providing a brief historical review of its function, mission and accomplishments. The author also highlights issues of the foundational debate concerning quali-

tative and quantitative methodologies while emphasizing the problematic aspects of such juxtaposition. This chapter sets the context of the project and offers key elements in the benefits of mixed-method approaches and transdisciplinary research networks.

The chapter that follows, by Fielding, focuses on the "legitimation and institutionalization" of qualitative methods. In that light, it begins with a historical account of qualitative methods in the academic curricula, their resurgence in the 60's and the comparative debate of qualitative versus quantitative methodologies while framing the discussion in the development of American sociology. This chapter provides guidance on transformative development of qualitative methodologies with examples from the US and the UK.

Mottier's contribution centers on the interpretive turn. After presenting general historical features of the paradigm the discussion shifts to the conceptual theoretical fragmentation and disagreements amongst qualitative researchers. Mottier concentrates on three major conceptual breaks within qualitative research as a heuristic device to unravel the implications this has had for the notions of 'history' and 'memory' and moreover the practical issues of data collection, storage and analysis, a component which connects with the subsequent joint article by Bergman and Coxon that looks further into the "quality" in qualitative methods. This is an important topic and an even more important concern for the data archive of a national resource center. A key issue discussed relates to two interconnected elements in the research process, the "contextualized research phenomenon" and the "contextualized researcher". That is, social science data is a product within a particular setting and context with various political, historical, social and cultural elements, gathered by particular researchers from various theoretical

and cultural backgrounds. These points are clearly illustrated in the article with the use of examples that exemplify notions of subjectivity in the research process. The article which concludes the first part of the book, substantially contributes to the understanding of quality concerns in the research process and offers insight into the proper steps in making methodological decisions and data judgments.

The second part of the book focuses on the "why and how of archiving qualitative data". Cribier introduces the discussion by the use of a case study, namely France and the current situation of qualitative data archival attempts, arguing for the value of the preservation of such data. On the same level, Backhouse in the next chapter presents from personal experience the history and impact of the Qualitative Data Archival Resource Center (Qualidata) at the University of Essex, established in 1994 and with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in Great Britain. Backhouse offers a wealth of statistical information on this and develops in comparative perspective with those of US national qualitative data archive resource center, evaluative criteria for archiving as well as ethical issues in archiving data. Finally, the chapter ends with a succinct list of essential points for a successful qualitative data acquisition strategy. Moving on to the seventh chapter, the focus is on the German case. Opitz and Witzel report on the situation in Germany and describe the conceptual and logistical structure of the Bremen Life Course Archive and present methodic and methodological advantages of the use of archived qualitative data. The authors present examples from actual archived studies and projects while developing ethical issues in the research process as well as strategies of anonymization.

The issue of provision and use of electronic services and resources is developed in Mruck's chapter. The Internet is perceived not only as a medium of exchange and networking amongst qualitative researchers that overrides national, academic and disciplinary boundaries but more importantly, it is a medium of planning, development and implementation on an international level of resources and services. The author then, ranks and describes the most essential of those resources and services while looking closely at the challenges and changes involved in the coordination of efforts globally.

Joye in the chapter that follows develops a threefold complementary relationship between quantitative and qualitative approaches on an archival, educational and research level. Two of the major challenges identified for both methodological approaches are that of being global and local at the same time, and the importance of documentation as requirement and condition of the research process.

Coxon in the chapter titled, "What does the user need?", argues for an integrative perspective, a meso-level approach and refers to personal experience from his own research to illustrate that integrated qualitative and quantitative data require appropriate considerations for both software and data storage.

The last chapter is that of Corti based on personal experience on user support of Qualidata and UKDA in Great Britain, thus going beyond archival storage to service. Corti identifies six particular categories of users and then goes on to present the main needs of those and the kind of support required meeting them, thus developing distinct user support strategies.

Overall, *Qualitative Inquiry* provides a critical introduction to qualitative methodologies with clarity and precision while presenting insight into research experiences of using qualita-

tive methods in specific projects. It is written in an engaging style by a team of experts with international experience in research techniques. I warmly recommend this text as an essential guide for students and researchers embarking on research projects using qualitative methods as it covers in a complementary way both theoretical and practical aspects of research methods.

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Giovanni Bechelloni. *Diventare Italiani. Coltivare e comunicare la memoria collettiva*. Napoli: Ipermedium, 2003: 264 pages.

The underlying argument of Giovanni Bechelloni's book is that Italian identity is a compound of different historic and social elements. It is a complex reality, which is produced through processes of representations of collective history and memories.

Italians have "a mobile nature, made up of memory and desires... defined in an unfinished way by the logos (the word) and the emotions (passions and desires)". It is possible to "become" Italian and at the same time to be "citizen of the world", because national identities are not static and monolithic; they are open and multiple and in a process of becoming. What is it then that characterises being Italian, what are the meanings of Italianness and Italian nationalism? Bechelloni's answer to this question is disseminated through all the chapters.

On the one hand, Bechelloni claims, there is a crisis of Italian nationalism, because of the historic delay in the national unification process, the elitist limits of the Italian Risorgimento, and the negative influence of the Catholic Church.

Based on Shils' work, Bechelloni argues however that the nation can exist

independently of the State, on condition that there are other three elements: the visibility of a territory perceived as common and original, a common language, and a common memory. Thus, on the other hand, Bechelloni also conceptualises the notion of a parallel, popular Italianness of ordinary people (*gente comune*), which exists out of common collective memories and the long history of Italian civilization (one of the oldest of the world, as Bechelloni asserts).

Based on this, Bechelloni criticises the historic claim that "Italians had still to be done" after the Italian State was born. He sees this view as the product of the incapacity of the Italian ruling class (*classe dirigente*) to understand that Italians already existed, that their true nature lied in the same internal diversity that they tried to eliminate.

Political parties tried to overcome the problems of diversity, by encouraging the access to the state institutions of subaltern classes and women through reforming public education system. Bechelloni considers the role of systems of education through the reflexive analysis of its own involvement in the school of sociology "Cesare Alfieri" in Florence, from the 1960s onwards.

The years 1943-1945 have been very influential in the process of nationalization of Italianness. These years saw a "fatal attraction" by Italians for Italians and for Italian territory. The sense of common belonging was moulded vis-à-vis the presence of foreigners in the military troops occupying Italy. It was a learning process where differences were put aside in the name of a common cause of liberation. Recollecting his personal and touching memories of the war, Bechelloni shows how nationalistic feelings emerged as a strategy to protect the territory, the families and the vulnerable people (especially children and women). In the recent years, the sense of Italianness (*noità-ourselves-*

ness, as Bechelloni puts it) is shaped around the elements of a common market, of an increased internal mobility, and of the presence of media.

Italianness is imperfect and incomplete (as the political ruling class denounced), but Bechelloni claims, this is a resource and a richness. This is what makes of Italy a modern country par excellence. Italy is modern because the institutions of modernity (the market and the agora) are originally Italian places. It is also modern because its social structures are inherently complex and hybrid. This complexity has favoured certain forms of social communication, which are typical of a "mobile, inclined to smile and sociable Italian character, which is mirrored in the same faces of Italians". Italy is defined in this way as "Italian and modern" and also as "Christian and American". This argument is developed in different chapters. Bechelloni claims that Christianity is inseparable from Italy, because the Catholic Church is in Rome; it is in fact a product of the history and the culture of Italy. The Italians are also American because of their original internal heterogeneity, which resembles the American melting pot.

Bechelloni affirms that we still have to learn to cultivate and communicate the collective memory of this "modern, Christian, and American Italianness". The main failure is imputable to the Italian ruling class, formed both by politicians and intellectuals, which "was laic, masonic, cosmopolitan and excessively loving of foreign things": they did not manage to understand the true nature of this Italianness (especially in the second and third phases of Italian history, during the monarchic-fascist, and the republican-democratic regimes); they have not been able to communicate with Italians well and to produce the right images of Italy; they have sought to transform Italians into intellectuals, thus depriving them of their cultural identity.

Of the many Italies composing Italy, there is one, which is formed by the "far brothers" (sic), the emigrants in America. These Italians helped from the distance to shape a sense of unity (*noità*) and of common belonging. Following the work of Regina Soria on 350 artists of Italian descent (Fratelli Lontani, 1997), Bechelloni explores the influence of Italian migrants in north American identity and its constitutive hybridity, which had an impact on the Italians who became American in USA and on the same Italians who remained in Italy.

The second part of book, which results more articulated and more original, analyses how the modern techniques of communication and the media, have influenced the formation of a the Italian sense of *noità*. Television has had a major role in the universalization of a feeling of common Italian belonging.

Bechelloni asserts that globalisation has rendered questions of nationality more complex. On the one hand, there is a de-territorialization of human experience, which on the other hand, has enhanced a need of security and belonging. This sense of belonging is sought in a common collective memory, which is made of different kind of narratives and discourses, among which biographies, autobiographies, narratives of national heroes are very relevant.

In the recent years, new and more numerous discourses about Italians have appeared (new books have been published, new art exhibitions and new political and cultural initiatives have been promoted). This led to a growing visibility of Italianness and to a process of redefinition of its meanings, in relation especially to the borders of its classes, genders and generations. In a sense, the process of historic repression of Italian history is now inverted.

With the emergence of an open society, characterized by diversity and mobility, there is also a need for a new

improved form of communication of the state with its people. Bechelloni claims that the culture of communication is a complex intellectual resource to support communitarianism. The ruling class has to learn the art of communication. The danger is that in the society of communication, there might be a new form of communicative failure, due to the overproduction of texts and images.

The last chapters of the book are dedicated to explore how TV Italian fiction and series are an important focus of analysis to understand social worlds, especially the world of "ordinary people", the "people that are not on the stage of history, because they have nothing to say and they don't know what to think". The analysis focuses in particular on the TV series of the years 1988-89 and 1989-90 and on the "programme of the year", *Ladri si nasce* (1996-97) *Commesse* (1998-99), *Padre Pio* (1999-00), *Padre Pio*, *Tra cielo e terra* (2000-01) and *Perlasca. Un eroe italiano* (2001-02). These TV series portray a new kind of hero, who is fighting and winning the small-scale, daily battles to affirm the "new values of health and justice". These series portray a negative image of the rest of Italy, as too urbanized or too archaic (especially its *Mezzogiorno*).

Bechelloni's analysis reveals a "dysphoric world, whose fears tell us of an Italian society which is not yet stable, and doesn't feel secure about what is becoming". As he says, there is a polarized image of Italy emerging from the TV series: one, most elitist and traditionalist of RAI production and the other one, neo-popular, neo-middle class, youthful of the Fininvest.

This book represents a positive contribution towards the deconstruction of an essentialist notion of Italianness. It sheds new light on the many complexities of Italian identitarian discourses and especially the primary importance of collective memories (and

their televised reproduction) in the formation of a sense of national belonging. The main achievement of the book is possibly in the capacity of creating a conceptual space for thinking Italian identity as a narrative and discursive production.

Each chapter starts with a long and dense series of quotes, which creates a multivocal writing. There is also something quite poetic and flowing in Bechelloni's writing, because he includes his own biography in his analyses. He considers reflexively his own position as an intellectual and as a 'hybrid Italian', in the process of production of discourses about identity (for example, while recollecting his personal and touching memories of the war). However, it seems that the links between his personal history and his criticisms could be further explored and could better reveal their meaningful connection. Some concepts would also deserve further analysis, as they seem to remain scattered through the various chapters.

The book also shows a need to rethink identities starting from the same language with which we talk of them. In fact, sometimes the question of Italian national identity seems still fixed into an essentialist and primordialist approach, for example when Bechelloni talks of "the spirit of a long Italian tradition", and his "disparate trust in Italy and in the Italians", and in the same use he does of the pronoun 'we' and the noun 'Italian'. These terms are heuristically limited, because they are too generic and seem to echo too closely the celebratory and popular tone of certain nationalistic discourses.

In the book there are some other theoretical questions, which are successfully thought-provoking, but remain quite controversial. For example, Bechelloni's use of popular notions, such as "ordinary people" (the Italians he affirms to take into consideration, when he analyses the people who watch TV series) and "complex soci-

ety" (the Italian society being highly complex) to explain Italian society, seem on a strict sociological point of view, tautological. The same is true for the argument that "Italianness is self made" (in the sense that it is not the product of a pedagogical project), which contradicts many scholars' view that identities are always the product of agentic identification processes responding to structural categorization practices (Brubaker & Cooper 2000). Other questions would have deserved more space of consideration. For example, Bechelloni affirms, that "new-fundamentalisms of identitarian kind are strong in the Islamic tradition, although they contaminate also other, ideological, religious and ethnic worlds"; or he is critical of the view of Italian intellectuals on the decadence of Italian public spirit ("when you read the recent analysis on the decadence of the public sphere you can understand that behind the lines there is a model of an Italian citizen well informed and educated who resembles more a saint, than a human being in bones and flesh"). Arguments such these are problematic and would merit further analyses.

Ultimately, Giovanni Bechelloni's book ironically resonates, and at distance responds to a famous quip of Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Do you know what Italy looks like? Like a hovel, whose owners have managed to buy for themselves a television!" (Galli della Loggia 1998).

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Lorenzo Cantoni, Nicoletta Di Blas & Davide Bolchini. *Comunicazione, Qualità, Usabilità*. Milano: Apogeo, 2003.

The problem of quality of electronic communication has always led researchers, institutions and – especially in the last years – corporations to spend efforts and money in better understanding the communication dynamics in all the different and emerging contexts.

New ways, new tools and, consequently, new contexts of communication bring new theories and models for answering to the question: "How can the quality of electronic communication be improved?". This book wants to provide the reader with a set of tools for answering to the question in a particular and growing sector of electronic communication: the Web.

The book gathers results of a joint research activity in the field of web requirements analysis, web design and web usability with two main aims: on the one hand, it wants to make the reader aware of the need to consider these different research fields as parts of the same framework, that is, the creation of a specific electronic communication artefact; on the other hand, it presents a framework methodology for designing websites for and towards user satisfaction.

The first chapter introduces the concept of "website" as a communication tool. Starting from the metaphor of a "bar", the chapter outlines the importance of considering all the actors and their goals for designing an effective and efficient interaction between bar clients (web users) and bar owners (web designers). The metaphor creates the background for introducing communication theories - from past to present - and the meaning of "quality of communication", with the aim to contextualise the term "usability" in a communicative perspective.

The second chapter presents an answer to the question: how can the com-

munication between a website – or rather, indirectly, the people who created and gave shape to it – and its users be successful? In other terms, how should the website be structured in order to make the users happy and, consequently, achieve its creators' goals?

Starting from the assumption that the usability of a website is the key factor for the “happiness” of communication, the authors present their own methodology for designing a usable website. First of all, the chapter explains concepts and processes for eliciting the needs and goals of “potential” receivers of the messages within the website, that is, the users. It is outlined the importance of defining user profiles – that is, the kind of person the website is addressed to, the role s/he has while interacting with the website – and possible goals the user wishes to achieve while interacting with the application. Secondly, the chapter outlines the importance of considering also the needs of all the other possible stakeholders involved in the creation of the website (decision makers, domain experts, opinion makers) and outlines how their goals can be in contrast with the one depicted from the user profiles. Finally, it is shown how contradictory goals of different actors can be considered and solved during the usability design phase.

The third and last chapter considers usability not from the design perspective but from the evaluation perspective. The current main techniques and practices for evaluating the quality of a website are described in short and the method MiLE (Milano Lugano Evaluation method), a research method developed by the authors, is presented. MiLE allows evaluating a website considering different points of view, in terms of quality of the content, of the navigational/interactive features, of the interface and of the layout. For each level of analysis, the methodology presents some criteria and guidelines for evaluating the application through case studies and examples.

“Comunicazione, qualità e usabilità” (142 pages and edited by Apogeo, Milano) is addressed mainly to web design and web usability experts, it is not firstly dedicated to readers approaching for the first time to web design and web evaluation issues.

As a comment to the book, the added value – with respect to current literature in the field – is the explanation of a unique methodological approach to requirements analysis and usability evaluation. Existing approaches and methods help designers in answering to some crucial questions, such as: “How can we evaluate the usability of a web application?” “How can designers interpret evaluation results in terms of cues for re-design?” “How can designers predict user needs and user actions before starting in design the application?” “How can the results of a team involved in requirements analysis (in which the main features of the application are to be envisioned) be communicated in a comprehensible and intuitive way to the usability evaluation team (often using different competences and managing different concepts)?”. However, current theories are usually focused on answering to only one of these questions. The book has the ambitious goal of collecting all these questions and provide a unique answer, i.e., a unique approach able to find a bridge among methodologies different in the scopes but that should “speak” the same language and use the same concepts for improving the overall website design and development. As a critic, the book lacks of “facts and figures”, that is, of a set of case studies and samples (in few cases they are presented) showing how the methodology could be applied to a concrete website.

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