

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism

Edmond Cros 1988

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Translation by Jerome Schwartz; Foreword by Jürgen Link and Ursula Link-Heer.

In the Foreword to this book the West German academics compliment the University of Minnesota for successfully promoting, in the United States, forms of scholarship in the discipline of literary theory that have already been established in Europe (by which they mean 'continental' Europe, not Britain!) and in Latin America. They are referring not only to the series Theory and History of Literature but also to the Journal *Ideologies & Literature (I&L)*, now in its thirteenth year of publication at the University of Minnesota. *I&L*, which originally focused on sociohistorical approaches to the study of Hispanic and Lusophone literatures, has recently shifted its purview in favour of the study of cultural production and cultural discourse analysis in the Hispanic and Lusophone areas (*I&L*: 4). The Minneapolis publication of Edmond Cros's work in English is thus timely in that it coincides with this refocusing of interest. *Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism* is, in short, about what underlies the problematic of cultural production and how to analyse it in the products themselves. These 'products' include literary texts ranging from 16th and 17th century Spain – *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Mateo Alemán) and *Buscón* (Francisco de Quevedo) – to contemporary Mexico – *La región más transparente* (Carlos Fuentes) and *El laberinto de la soledad* (Octavio Paz) – and, so as not to privilege Hispanic literary discourse, a 1931 United States film – *Scarface* (Howard Hawkes).

The book was first published in 1983, in French – *Théorie et Pratique Sociocritiques* – and secondly in Spanish, in 1986. The author – Edmond Cros – is Professor of Literary Theory and Hispanic Studies at the Paul Valéry University in Montpellier, where he is also Director of the Institut International de Sociocritique. For six months of the year he is Andrew Mellon Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Professor Cros is also founder and editor-in-chief of the periodicals *Imprévue*, *Co-textes* and *Sociocriticism*.

Cros is credited for suggesting the term 'sociocriticism' to describe an analysis of cultural, discursive or subject-forming processes which is not linked to Marxist suppositions about social and economic antagonisms. It would seem, however, that this coinage has not produced the desired effect. In many surveys of literary theory the adjectival combination sociocritical and Marxist qualifies any study of the intermingling between text and society (Corredor: 105–126; Degenaar: 118–166).

The particular definition Cros gives to sociocriticism forms Part I of the

book and is entitled "Theoretical Questions". This title is important because it reveals that Cros's theoretical basis is neither singular nor original. There are a number of theoretical underpinnings to his version of sociocriticism which are the result of his working through, and significantly modifying, the theories and practices of many European 'continental' philosophers, literary theorists and critics. This means that unless the reader is at least somewhat familiar with the works of Lucien Goldmann, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Yuri Lotman, Peter Zima, et al., it makes the understanding of this first part of Cros's book very difficult and at times obfuscating reading.

Fortunately one does not have to begin at the beginning. This reviewer found it easier to first read the 'demonstrations' of sociocritical readings which form Part II of the book and then to work backwards into the theories. The readings cover texts that will be accessible principally to Hispanists, although the reading of the 1931 Howard Hawks film *Scarface* is clearly intended to interest English-speaking Americans (perhaps also English-speaking Europeans and others?) in the praxis of sociocriticism. All the readings comprise a two-pronged approach whereby a first or semiological reading is deconstructed by a second or sociocritical reading.

Cros's starting point then is the linguistic and semiotic textuality of a literary (or filmic) work. In order to understand his theory of signs one must turn to Part I, Chapter 5 – Textual Functions I: Transformational Processes and Codes – wherein he explains his version of a materialist philosophy of discourse. The literary text is a product of consciousness which arises and asserts itself as a reality through material embodiment in signs. The sign as word is essentially social: it is acquired in a situation and remains a bearer of sociality and interaction; "it keeps in its memory the dialogic space from which it arose" (61).

How an individual acquires these signs is also important to Cros's theoretical platform. "Each one of us belongs, at any given moment of our lives, to a series of collective subjects (generation, family, geographic origin, profession, etc.); we pass through them in the course of our existence, even though we may be marked more specifically by one – our social class" (60). These different collective subjects offer us their values and world views.

The individual who at a given moment of his/her existence is part of a great number of different collective subjects is called a transindividual subject, that is, s/he has both individual and collective consciousness. A creation of this transindividual subject is what Cros calls the 'nonconscious', a term and concept appropriated from Goldmann which are outlined in Chapter 1 – From Experimental Sociology to Genetic Structuralism. This nonconscious is distinctly different from the Freudian unconscious in that it is not repressed and need not overcome any resistance in order to become conscious, but has only to be brought to light by scientific, i.e. sociocritical analysis.

Cros's project is to unveil the traces of the transindividual's discursive formation, in other words the marks of the multiplicity of discourses through which s/he passes before or during the writing of the text (Chapter 3 – Discursive Practices and Formations). These traces will be ideological when

they reveal the complex of ideas, representations, etc. which infiltrate every level of social life in the evolution of a society's appropriate behavioural models (Chapter 4 – Toward a Semiology of Ideology).

Cros uses the notion of the nonconscious to deny that a text's intention or project could pose a problem for sociocritical analysis for, as he says "the writer always says more than he or she understands and more than he or she grasps" (12). A sociocritical analysis will discover the vectors of the nonconscious relations structuring experience.

The sociocritical reading, however, follows the first or semiological reading of any text. The objective of this systems approach is to isolate "microsemiotic" units (29–30), a term Cros uses to refer to combinations of semes and ideosemes. (A "seme" is a minimal set of integral components which could be topoi, collective symbols, and the categories, beliefs, etc. that are generally accepted throughout the culture of the text in question (xiii). Semes which bear the clear mark of class-specific discursive formations are ideological and are called "ideosemes" (xiii & 49)). This composite of microsemiotic units – the "genotext", borrowing from Kristeva (76–77) – can then be deconstructed to reveal how the socioideological traces actualize or produce other meanings supplemental, overlapping or contrary to those suggested by the first reading. This then constitutes the second or sociocritical reading which transcribes the interactions of the various elements of the genotext – the integrating semes and the juncturing ideosemes – into what are called "phenotexts", also after Kristeva (77).

At this point one must turn to the demonstrations to see how Cros has applied the two readings and what new light has been shed as a consequence of his sociocritical approach. His first, semiological, readings are based on a series of conceptual opposites, signs which exist in a coreferential relation, for example interior/exterior, night/day, etc. in *Scarface* and the Self/the Nonself, Life/Death, etc. in Fuentes's *La región más transparente* (Where the Air Is Clear). These groups are then further reduced into microsemiotic units in order to mark out new fields of coincidence and polarities. This regrouping is subjected to a sociocritical, namely deconstructive reading which differs from the first in that it is a seemingly unstructured delving into the hidden problematics of the particular society, e.g. the USA in 1931 or Mexico circa 1958, etc. Here Cros shows he is not primarily concerned with the message – the primary context – of the texts themselves, but rather with the interpretation of the ideological traces of social antagonisms they carry. In order to achieve this convincingly, he refers to a number of extraliterary sources, including sociological studies, legal case studies, as well as literary and philosophical works.

Whereas it is evident that each of the sociocritical readings has brought a fresh insight about the perhaps unintentional meanings of the texts examined, it is left for the reader to question whether this owes more to the impressive scholarship of Professor Cros, his profound interpretative capacity and analytical skills than to the application of a sociocritical methodology. Whatever the answer, it is clear that he has made a significant contribution to the now growing number of literary critical practices which include the social

dimension of a work as an important and legitimate area of enquiry (Schwartz Lerner: 2). This reviewer would hope to see Cros's version of sociocriticism further and more simply elucidated by those privileged to be his colleagues and students.

References

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Donker weerlig: Literêre opstelle oor die werk van André P. Brink

Jan Senekal (red.) 1988
Kenwyn: Jutalit

Donker weerlig bevat dertien opstelle oor 'n verskeidenheid aspekte van die werk van André P. Brink, gesien uit 'n verskeidenheid oogpunte. Ook wat die gehalte van die bydraes betref, is daar groot verskille.

Twee van die beste opstelle is myns insiens dié van Hein Viljoen en Henriette Roos. Viljoen se studie, die enigste wat op die dramas van Brink toegespits is, analiseer *Elders mooiweer en warm* as voorbeeld uit die skrywer se "absurd-eksperimentele fase", en *Die verhoor* as voorbeeld uit die "betrokke fase". Viljoen kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat "hierdie twee fases twee reaksies van Brink op die moderne betekenisloosheid uitmaak, maar dat albei pogings misluk . . . En dit lê waarskynlik ook aan die wortel van die gevoel van herhaling en selfepigonisme wat elke nuwe werk van Brink by mens wek"(107).

Roos sluit aan by Viljoen se bespreking van *Die verhoor*. Vir albei gaan dit om die skynbaar onvermydelike paradoks in baie van die werke van Brink: die verlange om na "die werklikheid" heen te wys, om die "skraal, kaal onontkombare is van alles onder die heel laaste Salomesluis" bloot te lê teenoor die feit dat die skrywer aangewese is op die skyn, die spel, die teatrale. As aanduiding van 'n gebrek aan werklikheidsbewussyn in *Die ambassadeur* noem sy die volgende: "(Dit bly) opmerklik dat in 'n era net na Sharpeville en die enkele jare van intense politieke onrus wat uitloop op die Rivonia-verhoor, 'n verhaal wat draai om die handeling in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse ambassade so onaangeraak deur die tydgenootlike gebeure bly" (104). Maar geld hierdie gebrek aan politieke bewustheid nie vir feitlik alle Afrikaanse prosa uit die tyd nie?

'n Ander uitstekende studie is dié van G.A. Jooste, wat 'n vergelyking tref tussen die vertellersruimtes in *Gerugte van reën* en 'n *Droë wit seisoen*. Sy

bevinding is dat die twee romans deur twee teenoorgestelde vertellerstipes dieselfde idee uitspreek, naamlik die vernietigende aard van die apartheidstelsel, waarin daar geen wenners kan wees nie. “Ben en Martin (die onderskeie hoofkarakters uit die twee romans) is albei verloorders. Martin verloor, al kan hy die stelsel manipuleer en al is dit aan sy kant; Ben verloor teen die stelsel” (73). Hier kan ’n mens wel die vraag stel of Martin en Ben verloorders van dieselfde orde is. Ben kom ooreen met Bart Nel, wat die wêreld verloor, maar sy “siel” behou het; Martin weer, het alles gewen maar homself verloor. Ben sou as die “ware” wenner (hoewel skynbare verloorder) beskou kan word, en Martin as die ware verloorder.

In W.F. Jonckheere se artikel oor “Die gepolariseerde ruimtestruktuur van *Houd-den-Bek*” is daar ’n knap verbinding van die siening van Venter en Roos oor die verskillende soorte ruimtes in die roman met die teorie van Lotman oor binêre opposisies en dié van Bakhtin oor chronotope. Jonckheere gaan in op die topologiese opposisies in *Houd-den-Bek* en wys daarop hoedat dit ’n wêreld van totale polarisasie openbaar. Die “dogmatiese verslawing” van karakters soos Barend en Nicolaas lei “tot ’n kategorisering . . . van mense in blank en swart, Christen en heiden, vry en slaaf, vrou en byslaaf” (87). Hier sou ’n mens wel die vraag kon opper of iets van dieselfde simplistiese kategorisering wat in die roman veroordeel word, nie ook in die roman tot uiting kom nie – naamlik in die duidelike teenoor mekaar stel van die “goeies” en die “slegtes”.

Verder bevat *Donker weerlig* ’n insiggewende opstel van Laura Milton oor die neerslag van die opvattinge van Cleaver oor erotiek in ’n *Oomblik in die wind*; ’n interessante vergelyking deur H.P. van Coller van die oorspronklike klagstaat en vonnis met die klagstaat en vonnis in *Houd-den-Bek*; ’n betroubare maar nie juis verrassende, oorsigtelike beskouing van Brink se politieke romans nie deur Luc Renders; en ’n vergelyking deur H. Ohlhoff van die lesersmanipulasie in S.J. du Toit se *Die koningin van Skeba* en Brink se *Die muur van die pes* (waar die vraag opkom of daar genoegsame verbande tussen die bogenoemde twee werke is om ’n vergelykende studie te regverdig).

As ek dan, soos Jonckheere en Brink, met binêre opposisies mag werk, sou ek die bogenoemde artikels as die goeie artikels wil kategoriseer. Die volgende groep is, in die woorde van Vondel, “nochte heel vroom, nocte onvroom”.

In ’n ambisieuse en omvangryke studie skryf Ia van Zyl oor die “fenomeen” Brink: die teoretikus, skrywer en kritikus. In haar opstel maak sy ’n aantal raak kritiese opmerkinge oor die werk van Brink. Sy noem dat hy in sy literêre analyses dekonstruktief “doen” maar in wese strukturalis is. Hy ondersteun die ideale van die “littérature engagée” maar sluit ook by die postmodernisme en die dekonstruksie aan, hoewel die opvattinge van die laasgenoemde twee in baie opsigte teenoor die eersgenoemde staan. Die gevolg daarvan is dat Brink as kritikus die indruk wek van iemand wat lippediens aan verskeie moderne denkstrominge lewer sonder dat hy die (skynbare) teenstrydighede insien en met mekaar probeer versoen.

Die sterkste aanklag wat Van Zyl teen Brink maak, en soms met regte, is

dat sy ideologiese betrokkenheid sy waardeoordele skeeftrek. Sy kritiseer die reaksie van Brink op Ronel Johl se *Kritiek in krisis*, waar Brink nie die betrokke werk bespreek nie, maar een sin daaruit aanhaal en dan subjektief-neerhalende kommentaar daarop lewer. Die feit dat Brink in hierdie boek bygekom word, maak hierdie tipe reaksie uiters agterdogwekkend.

Maar die ontstellendste voorbeelde van Brink se skewe evaluasies om ideologiese redes bied sy resensies van Karel Schoeman se boeke – dit toon Van Zyl oortuigend aan. In resensies oor *Die noorderlig*, *Die somerpaleis* en veral oor 'n *Ander land* word Brink se waardering klaarblyklik deur die aard van die betrokkenheid bepaal, ondanks sy eie versekering dat “geen literatuur . . . òf goed òf swak (is) vanweë sy graad van betrokkenheid of die aard van sy idee nie”.

Naas die geregverdigde kritiek van Van Zyl is daar ook myns insiens voorbeelde van onregverdige kritiek op Brink. Sy beweer (22) dat Brink homself nie 'n Christen noem nie, dat hy egter die basiese Christelike waardes onderskryf en meen dat hierdie waardes nie in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing tot hul reg kom nie. Hierdie idees is dan vir haar 'n aanduiding dat Brink “in die rigting van die radikale beweging”. Daar is waarskynlik nie baie mense wat Van Zyl se betekenis aan die woord “radikaal” sal heg nie.

Ook haar siening (30), waar sy die apokaliptiese visie verbind met 'n denkrigting wat die bestaan van God verwerp, is onaanvaarbaar. Wat dan van die ou Testamentiese “dies irae” en die apokalips van Openbaring – die idee van 'n apokalips is hier tog nie deur “godeloses” uitgespreek nie?! Dus, nog 'n voorbeeld waar Van Zyl onnodiglik 'n etiket om Brink wil hang.

Haar mening dat Brink se negatiewe resensies van die werk van Anna M. Louw aan Louw se deelname aan sensuur toe te skryf is, is blote spekulاسie en kon liewers agterweë gebly het.

Sy gee (30 e.v.) 'n oorsig van “uiteenlopende menings” oor Brink as kritikus. Maar die menings is glad nie so “uiteenlopend” nie – sy konsentreer op dié wat negatief teenoor Brink staan, en voeg dan nog haar eie negatiewe kommentaar by. Wat veronderstel is om 'n neutrale, feitlike weergawe te wees, word 'n subjektiewe aanval. Dit blyk al hoe meer: Van Zyl besondig haar aan dieselfde ding waarvan sy Brink beskuldig – 'n skeefgetrekte evaluasie om ideologiese redes.

Sy verwys (16 en 22) na dieselfde woorde van Brink (nl. oor die “aanwending” van literatuur “ten einde 'n verandering te help teweegbring in die sosio-politieke status quo”). In die een geval sê sy dat Brink in die betrokke opstel “'n sterk pleidooi” vir so 'n aanwending lewer, in die ander geval sê sy dat Brink hier teen so 'n soort literatuur praat. Die aanhaling word dus net so gebruik soos wat dit in die argument pas. En die waarheid is dat Brink juis tussen die twee uiterste pole probeer beweeg waarvan Van Zyl hom alternatiewelik beskuldig.

In sy studie oor die Suid-Afrikaanse sensuurbestel maak I.F.W. Steyn 'n hele aantal behartigenswaardige opmerkings. Hy wys daarop dat die goed ingeligte leser van die literatuur ter wille van die “minder opgevoede” nie-leser die reg ontsê word om sommige boeke van literêre waarde te lees. Verally kommerwekkend is die feit dat fiksie skerper beoordeel word as feitlike

lektuur. Hy kla daaroor dat “die hele Afrikaanse literatuur verskraal en van (sic) sy multivlakkige polisistemiese karakter ontnem” word (281).

Wanneer hy op die wesensaard van die ernstige literatuur ingaan en aantoon hoe dit van ontspanningslektuur verskil, is baie van sy opvattinge aanvaarbaar, maar hy gaan myns insiens te ver in sy kategorisering. Volgens Steyn is die ernstige literatuur altyd vir ’n klein groepie lesers bedoel. Beteken dit dan dat die werk van Brink in Suid-Afrika literatuur is, maar oorsee, waar dit uitstekend verkoop, nie? Steyn meen dat die literatuur altyd teen die gevestigde waardes van die gemeenskap ingaan en daarom die groot massa vervreem. Dit is egter ’n baie beperkte siening van die literatuur. ’n Groot deel van die Middelnederlandse letterkunde was byvoorbeeld daarop ingestel om die Christelike waardes van die gemeenskap te bevestig. Verder meen Steyn dat die resensente bepaal of ’n werk tot die literatuur behoort (280). Maar wat nou as daar meningsverskille onder resensente bestaan, soos wat dikwels gebeur? Dit word glad nie in ag geneem nie.

’n Opvallende teenstrydigheid in die argumentasie van Steyn is dat hy uitvoerig verduidelik hoedat die literatuur daarop uit is om die status quo te verander, en toegelaat moet word om getrou aan hierdie wesenlike aard daarvan te wees, maar dan sy hele argument kanselleer deur te sê dat die literêre meriete, dus blykbaar die estetiese waarde, voorop moet staan (283) in literêre waardebepalings en besluite oor sensuur. Reeds vroeër (279) het hy genoem dat gesprekke oor ernstige literatuur altyd oor waardes, skynbaar estetiese waardes, gevoer word. Maar op die aard van hierdie waardes, en die verhouding tussen die estetiese waarde en die waarde van die sosiale kritiek, word nie ingegaan nie.

Steyn beweer (283) dat die sensuurstelsel “die kommentariërende, verwagtingshorisondeurbrekeende intensie negeer”. Dit is egter nie die probleem nie – eerder die teenoorgestelde: dat die gevestigde orde die “deurbreking” van die algemeen aanvaarde agterkom en daardeur bedreig voel.

Dit is waarskynlik ’n onbedoelde glip dat Brink (op bladsy 274) die skrywer van *Donderdag of Woensdag* gemaak word, maar dit is darem die soort fout wat iemand êrens moes opgemerk het.

Erika Pienaar bring in haar bydrae ’n aantal nuwe insigte oor *Orgie*, hoewel dit ’n taamlik tradisionele ontleding is, “opgejazz” met moderne terme uit die semantiek van Greimas. Soms word daar dinge kwytgeraak wat vir my totaal onsinnig is, soos die volgende:

“In ’n gedig is daar byvoorbeeld ’n opeenvolging van versreëls – elkeen is min of meer gekoppel aan die voorafgaande, sodat die illusie van tydloosheid geskep word. Die verskyningstyd in ’n gedig is so kort dat die wonder van die moment amper volledig is. Poësie werk dus teen die tyd in” (218).

’n Voorbeeld van swak formulering is die volgende: “Ook later word hierdie chaos (in *Orgie*) voorgestel, maar soos die Heilige Gees in Handeling 1 op die apostels neergedaal het en hulle in verskeie tale begin praat het, is hierdie ‘kabaal’ weer ’n sinlose verwarring”. Bedoel sy dat daar ’n “sinlose verwarring” was by die uitstorting van die Heilige Gees in Handeling 2? Waarskynlik nie; sy bedoel seker dat daar ’n teenstelling is tussen Brink se weergawe en die gebeure in Handeling 2, maar dit is nie wat sy sê nie.

Nog meer onbevredigend is die formulering in Senekal se artikel oor “Geïntendeerde lesers en ’n Oomblik in die wind”. Die swak formulering gaan dikwels gepaard met ’n gebrekkige logika. Ek gee ’n aantal voorbeelde:

Senekal vra (138): “Skryf die outeur vir ’n ‘ideale’ leser? . . . Soek hy sy welwillendheid en toegeneentheid, of wil hy hom omkrap en irriteer?” Ek het nog van geen skrywer gehoor wat ’n ideale leser wil irriteer nie – sy strategieë is eerder daarop gemik om die reële leser tot ideale leser te omvorm.

Senekal verklaar (139): “Hierdie siening wat die leser het ten opsigte van God, mens, lewe en dood rus veral op twee pilare: die sisteemteorie en die aktiewe rol van die leser . . .” Dit lyk my of die sisteemteorie hier darem bietjie hoog aangeslaan word!

Herhaaldelik onderskei Senekal “hoë (E-)” literatuur van onder meer godsdienstige literatuur en vroueliteratuur (wat dit ook al is). Sou dit beteken dat “hoë” literatuur nie ’n godsdienstige of feministiese inslag kan hê nie?

Senekal stel die volgende vrae (149): “Wil die skrywer die leser se oordeelsvermoë aktiveer? Wil hy dit buite werking stel?” As die laasgenoemde waar is, sou ek van so ’n ondermynende skrywer wegbly.

En daar word gesê (153) dat die leser van ’n *Oomblik in die wind*, indien hy nie die historiese dokument ken waarop die roman gebaseer is en waarna verwys word nie, ’n minderwaardigheidsgevoel opdoen. So ’n leser het darem ’n grondige gebrek aan sekuriteit!

So sou ’n mens met die “bloemlesing” kon voortgaan. Ek gee nog net een aanhaling, ’n skreiende voorbeeld van banaliteit: “Skrywers doen sekere dinge, en lesers voer sekere handeling uit. Skrywers skryf, en lesers lees” (134).

Wat uiters onoortuigend in hierdie artikel is, is die voorstelling van die skrywersaktiwiteit. Die voorstelling wat Senekal gee, is dat die skrywer vooraf besluit watter lesersgroep hy in gedagte het, en dan besluit watter soort werk hy gaan skep – asof skrywers in staat is om enige tema te benut en enige genre te beoefen, en na die nodige marknavorsing sy keuse doen. Word skrywers nie deur ’n tema aangegryp nie, en bepaal die tema nie die aard van die struktuur nie, eerder as dat die skrywer in die skeppingsproses die hele tyd aan die effek op sy “geïntendeerde lesers” dink? Dit is eerder die skrywer van ontspanningslektuur wat op die laasgenoemde wyse te werk gaan. In elk geval is dit onwetenskaplik om met die intensie van die skrywer te werk – by die skrywer wat dood is, kan dit nie vasgestel word nie, en die skrywer wat nog leef, kan lieg. Veel verstandiger is dit om met die bedoeling wat uit die teks na vore kom, te werk.

Die artikel van Senekal berus op die siening dat die “locus of meaning” meer in die leser geleë is as in die teks. Myns insiens gaan dit in die literatuurkritiek nooit om of die leser of die teks alleen nie, maar altyd om die interaksie tussen die twee.

Dat Senekal ’n skewe voorstelling van die skeppingsaktiwiteit van die skrywer gee, blyk uit die artikel van Marietjie Smith oor die produksie van die teks *Kennis van die aand*. Uit Brink se getuienis is daar geen sprake dat hy ’n geïntendeerde lesersgroep in gedagte gehad het nie – dit is nie hy wat die tema kies nie, maar die tema wat hóm kies; en in die skryfproses word hy gelei deur

“funksionaliteit en verbande, ter wille van die groot, samehangende geheel” (211).

Ongelukkig bevat Smith se artikel ’n klomp onbenullige inligting. Maak dit werklik saak dat Brink ’n verhouding met ’n Engelse meisie gehad het wat as “model” vir Jessica Thompson gedien het? En watter bydrae tot ons kennis lewer die volgende twee beskouings:

“Met die skeppingsproses en vernameklik uit die skryfdaad ontwikkel die teks as artefak. Hierdie tekswaardigheid geskied dus deur ’n aktiewe daad, ’n aktief-kreatiewe uiting en formulering” (206).

“Die vrystelling van ’n gedrukte teks, die verskyning van die roman, *Kennis van die aand*, op straat was ’n tasbare bewys van die kreatiewe skryfdaad en die oorweldigende reaksie van literatore, resensente, lesers (uit elke denkbare vlak van die samelewing) het aangetoon dat ’n kommunikasieproses plaasvind” (211).

En ook by hierdie artikel is dit nodig om op die formulering kritiek te lewer. Daar word vertel (204) dat Brink verslae en feitemateriaal geraadpleeg het om die omstandighede en wesenstrekke van bepaalde karakters “gemoetiveerd te kon uitsonder”. Die Shakespeare-sonnette aangehaal in *Kennis van die aand* word as oertekste beskou “omdat die sonnette uit die sestiende eeu dateer”; maar, word bygevoeg, ook gedeeltes uit die Bybel “maak indruk as oertekste” (209).

Die laasgenoemde twee artikels is werklik nie op standaard nie.

Uit die voorafgaande behoort dit voldoende duidelik te wees dat die leser in *Donker weerlig* ’n gemengde dis het: ’n verbinding van die soete met die sure.

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Rethinking Culture

Keyan Tomaselli (ed.) 1988
Bellville: Anthropos Publishers

The year 1988 saw the publication of another Tomaselli & Tomaselli production. *Rethinking Culture* combines articles on the Lineage of Contemporary Cultural Studies and its application in British and South African contexts, with studies on Education, the Media, Performance and Sociobiological Explanations of Culture. Contributors are N. Masilela, K. Tomaselli (4), J. Muller (3), R. Tomaselli, J. Frederikse, M. Anderson, I. Steadman and D. Basckin.

The book has its own multiple built-in, largely congratulatory and self-congratulatory appreciations and appraisals (40 “cultural workers” and scholars from all over Africa, Britain and Sweden in the Acknowledgements: chapter 1 which introduces the CCSU as born from the womb of political crisis and exile cultural activism; the course descriptions – along with their authors – of the CCSU printed in highlighted boxes throughout the book; the work of the CCSU in the lofty tradition of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in ch. 3; and the brief

appraisals on the inside back cover, linking the book with “students and community workers”, “popular social movements”, “culture and struggle”, “resistance to [apartheid] on the terrain of culture”). This makes the task of a critical review a particularly daunting one. For with so much said and written “for the people” and “about the people”, one wonders what peculiar species of animal one becomes if one ventures to take a critical distance from it and its supposed link to “the people”.

One lonely exception to the mass of appraisals is the Preface by Ntongela Masilela which criticises the project of the book for making use of sources emanating from “European intellectual climates”. A critique levelled at the book from this angle, in my opinion, is misplaced because it is not historically specific, it yields many unresolved contradictions, and it does not contribute to a focused political analysis. Structuralism, for instance, which is described here as part of a “European intellectual climate”, received an impetus precisely from a move to rid cultural studies of nationalisms, ethnocentrism and moralisms. Some of its early protagonists in the field of linguistics emerged from the Moscow Circle and the Petrograd Opojaz, and emigrated to Prague (where they became members of the Prague Linguistic Circle), and from there to the United States. To apply the reasoning of the Preface, it is then not clear how Marx – developing and exemplifying his Critique with reference to European feudalism, the French Revolution and its aftermath, the Paris Commune, classical political economy, the British working class, Hegelian dialectics, etc. – can find his way into an “African Marxism”, whereas other influences labelled “European” are programmatically discarded in favour of “nativisation”. In the age of internationalism – heralded by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* – a programme of “de-Europeanisation”, “nativisation”, “Africanisation” appears as an anachronism, except if one views it in the function it frequently is endowed with: as a nationalist investment which leaves existing class divisions intact. One of the ways in which the programme of “de-Europeanisation”, “Africanisation” is specified is through the suggestion that South African cultural studies should “search for [its] own vernacular voice” which, as it stands, does not constitute a significant difference from the nationalism by which the ruling party came to power and sustained its power.

The work of Cabral is celebrated as an exemplification of “the African genius”. Substituting the “African” component by, for instance, “White”, “Afrikaans”, “European”, would arouse immediate and outspoken suspicion and criticism. This illustrates that the *form* of these claims is similar, and that the adjectives and attributes characterising this “genius” are a matter of contending nationalist claims.

It is postulated that “the sacred documents (. . .) of cultural studies in South Africa ought to be, and in fact should be [sic], the great cultural texts of the African Revolution” (p. 3). Some of the writers mentioned in the context of what is here called “the African Revolution”, witnessing continued imperialist exploitation (this time through a national bourgeoisie), have had to reflect on the preconditions of their writing, since the nationalism which they espoused in the pre-“independence” period, does not serve them in the

neo-colonial post-“independence” situation. This sense of déjà-vu surfaces in the writings of Ngugi, Armah, Marechera, and others. To Masilela’s recommendation of reading Fanon’s “On National Culture” (p. 3) I would like to add Fanon’s “On the Pitfalls of National Consciousness” (also from *The Wretched of the Earth*), which denounces the nationalist myths, created in the name of “union of the nation against colonialism”, and serving the interests of the national bourgeoisie.

For these reasons, I cannot add my voice to Masilela’s critique, and will pursue it into a different direction, focussing mainly on the agenda for cultural studies in South Africa, outlined in the first three chapters (“Introduction”; “The Lineage of Contemporary Cultural Studies”; and “Contemporary Cultural Studies in South Africa”).

As stated in the Introduction, the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit at the University of Natal (Durban) locates itself outside of and in opposition to institutionalisation processes of which, by its very nature as a research and teaching unit based at a University, it must inevitably be a part. Instead, it glosses over its own position in order to align itself directly with all those “counter-hegemonic” forces that have been persecuted by the government. The type of oppression that is outlined here is seen to pertain mainly to “the ideological struggle” (p. 9) in the spheres of the media, popular culture, cultural festivals, films and academia, in so far as they have promulgated an anti-apartheid stance (p. 8).

This book, according to the Introduction of the editor, inserts itself into the popular front of the “broad anti-apartheid alliance”, with its broadly and vaguely stated aim of “attempting” to popularise cultural studies as one means to tackle the vast task of cultural reconstruction that must occur if South Africa is to survive its [sic] future (p. 9).

The conclusion of the Introduction hails the papers collected in the book as “the beginnings of ‘practice’ – the merging of theory and practice through concrete action” (p. 9). It arrogates to itself the role of the facilitator and source of that ‘practice’, omitting its own institutionalisation, the politics of publishing, the mileage gained from previously publishing chapters of the book as individual papers (and the Brownie points accumulated thereby on the very SAPSE scale that is rejected as part of the Government’s pressure on the universities), and the blessings from the HSRC that such like projects are likely to attract.

The graphics and pictures in the book, it is claimed, illustrate the “discourse of resistance” (p. 9). This claim offers me an opportunity to state a reader’s impression. Many of the graphics strike the reader as inappropriate, and inappropriately placed, for in many cases they bear little or no relation to the text, stuck up apparently randomly, in the margin spaces of the pages, sometimes spilling into the line spaces, sometimes arranged at an angle, often unrecognisable because of their multiple reduction. Individual pages are dominated by thick black letraling, giving them the appearance of obituaries. I will spare myself the effort of counting the number of raised fists (sometimes chained, sometimes behind bars), symbols of burning tyres, the black masses on the march (sometimes with arms, sometimes equipped with

tools designed to characterise them as workers); on the other hand hippos, dumb white females, the degenerate white rich at play and, not to forget, self-advertisement in the form of the CCSU course programme and *Critical Arts* covers. Such stereotyping, I think, can at best serve to illustrate the effort of asserting the book's own moral high ground, never mind espousing the "discourse of resistance".

The rationale for the big margin space, which is then cluttered with all manner of graphics, is probably to be found in the advice given on "How to Organise a Community Newspaper": "Your eyes get tired if they must read a long line" (p. 106). In my opinion, blank spaces would have been more appropriate. Instead, more emphasis could have been placed on providing this book with a stronger spine (both literally and figuratively speaking); when you open it, it falls apart (both literally and figuratively speaking).

Speaking of style, it seems that editorial policy was not uniformly applied in this book, which might be a result of the wide definition of its target readership, namely "academics, students, teachers, community, church organisations and others" (p. 9). The article by Johan Muller on "Culture, Society and Education in South Africa", for instance, applies itself to the dictates of "simple English": similes (some of them simplistic and self-defeating, like the following one: "... we live our lives by means of culture, just as a fish always swims in the sea" – p. 51), definitions, explanations, talking in the all-inclusive "we"-form, avoidance of big words (even though this principle is broken several times). Compare this with the dictum of Ian Steadman's "Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa" in the following nondescript, semi-tautological statement:

The very process of [Manaka's] theatre alters the relationship between signifiers and signified: his methods, his actors, and his mise-en-scène are all part of the very meaning he is trying to communicate. (p. 127)

Or, for another comparison, let me quote from David Basckin's "Critique of Sociology": "... the mechanistic reductionism of Sociobiology results inevitably in the fallacious adoption of an idealist dualism." (p. 144)

The second chapter, "The Lineage of Contemporary Cultural Studies – A Brief Historical Examination", sets itself the task of explicating the central notions of the current mould of cultural studies: "ideology", "culture" and "hegemony". Althusser's concept of ideology emerges as the prominent one in this article, based mainly on "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", with its emphasis on the joint functioning of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses, and on subject interpellation, in reproducing social relations.

Although Tomaselli mentions, in very broad terms, some of the critiques which Althusser's notions of "Ideological State Apparatuses" and "subject interpellation" have been subjected to, he does not integrate these critiques as constitutive limits to the field of cultural studies as he examines it; the critiques function merely as disclaimers. Tomaselli points to the objection that Althusser's notion of "subject interpellation" is too deterministic; yet he still upholds the contention that "the very terms of our lived world are constructed by virtue of a specific "I" (mother, worker, patriot, etc.) in accordance with

the dominant ideology, and called into being – or interpellated – by the various mechanisms of the ISA’s” (p. 17). Thus, in Althusser’s subject interpellation individuals can play the role of agents by virtue of the positions which they are assigned through the mechanisms *reproducing* the social formation. It is Ideology which is seen to play the pivotal part in this process (see L. Althusser: Reply to John Lewis). Conditions of production and social relations of production are thereby subsumed under the process of *reproduction* (facilitated by repressive and ideological state apparatuses and the mechanisms of subject interpellation). Through ideology in Althusser’s sense, social subjects are constituted and subjected to the State, and other controlling instances. In this assertion, the capitalist mode of production and the bourgeois state are being eternalised; the Ideological State Apparatuses, even though defined as “material” in their workings, become omnipresent and transhistorical.

To account for “strategies of resistance”, Tomaselli resorts to explanations aimed at breaking the deterministic claims of Althusserian scholars, while at the same time upholding the overall framework of Althusser’s theory, by extracting the notion of “culture” from the grip of the Althusserian notion of “ideology”:

Where ideology defines the imaginary social relations by which people make sense of their lives deriving out of the relations of production – taking for granted the way things are and will be – culture provides the mechanism through which encounter, resistance, and counter-meanings are articulated. By stressing the moment of self-creation and active appropriation – through the generation of sensemaking practices – it offers a space within the previously all-encompassing notion of ideology which can account for a spectrum of behaviour within a concrete social formation. Taking the capitalist social formation as an example, ideology accounts for the way class structures are legitimised and subjects participating within particular social practices within their respective classes are inclined to think and act out their social, economic, and political lives. Culture accounts for the different meanings which groups evolve to enable them to cope with, modify or oppose the dominant “imaginary” understanding and their relations which lubricate the mode of production. (p. 42)

Through the subsequently cited examples it becomes clear that “culture” is seen to assert itself against “ideology” when the hegemonic class fails to exercise its hegemony, i.e. when it has not fully established itself as the dominant class in all respects. As such, a culture of resistance is doomed, running as it does (as Tomaselli sees it) “against the logic of history” (p. 42), which swallows it up. In Tomaselli’s own words, the “logic of history” is essentially the alliance between capital and the state (p. 42), which lends the latter a status of universality and eternity. The reason for this lapse into determinism, however, I would suggest, is not only to be found in the “logic of history”, but rather in the analytical framework adopted here, which abstracts social relations from the sphere of production, from the extraction of surplus value, and from commodity fetishism, and maps them onto the generalised ideology and ideological state apparatuses within which the mass media are seen to play an increasingly important role:

As societies become technologically sophisticated, the media become centrally implicated in this job of ideological regulation, and it falls increasingly to them to repeatedly signify, and thereby naturalise, the social relations embedded in ideology. (p. 17)

In this statement, a further level of abstraction is reached: social relations are mapped onto a transhistorical sphere of ideology, and the media incorporate the functions of ideology, therefore social relations are played out on the level of the media. The media, in turn, can then be analysed in terms of a formal generality, in their capacity of creating an undifferentiated sphere of “the public”. This kind of focus – whether Tomaselli implies it or not is not clear – could be one of the factors responsible for replacing, as Tomaselli does, the notion of “class struggle” by the notion of “ideological struggle”. (p. 18)

Elaborating the notion of culture, Tomaselli contrasts and evaluates two theoretical orientations, namely structuralism and culturalism. He arbitrates between the two by pointing to the important role of leadership and political co-ordination in deciding the “outcome of the cultural struggle”, an insight which he attributes to a reading of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. The concept of “hegemony” is paraphrased by Tomaselli as follows:

Ideology and culture were for Gramsci the decisive factor for the victory of fascism. For that very reason they could also be the decisive factor for the victory of socialism. Gramsci was therefore the first Western socialist after Lenin to approach ideology from a positive and strategic point of view. (p. 23)

What is at stake is the hegemony over the people. . . .: the “people” must be re-constituted in a new field of meaning, and to this they must consent. Consent is, according to Gramsci, the key to governance, and hegemony is the total process of winning consent – from the imposition of force to the most subtle seduction of meaning. (p. 24)

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, in my opinion, represents the attempt to explain some of the *mechanisms* of bourgeois class rule, rather than asserting the unalterable fact of such class rule. According to Tomaselli’s formulation, socialism could be achieved through attaining hegemony (i.e. control over the institutions of civil society) without a change in the relations of production. It is not clear how this particular version of the concept of hegemony, incorrectly attributed to Gramsci, is to be applied to South African society, where the predominant relations of production were historically dependent, and still are to some extent dependent on denying the majority of the population access to the institutions of “civil society” or to the “ideological state apparatuses”, which supposedly generate consent to governance.

The third chapter, “Contemporary Cultural Studies in South Africa”, places the work of the CCSU in Durban in line with that of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, whose theoretical and political developments are outlined. The innovation which the CCSU (or maybe rather its director) claims over the cultural studies approaches of the CCCS in Birmingham, is what is here called an “on the ground application” (p. 40, p. 45), or an “action-oriented discipline” (p. 45), aiming “to intervene and offer cultural strategies for democracy” (p. 46). This

jargon of authenticity manifests a recourse to an immediacy which British cultural studies supposedly fall foul of. The Unit thereby portrays itself as being, as it were, at the heart of the struggle, with its finger on the pulse of the people. The Unit in Durban was established, according to Tomaselli, "at the time of economic turmoil, ideological fragmentation, a racial capitalist hegemony cracking at the seams, and oppositional movements organising nationally through culture" (p. 46). This is supposedly what distinguishes it from its emasculated British counterpart, which can only study various processes of mediation: "In Britain, the emphasis was on media-state relations and the struggle for hegemonic ideas through the media." (p. 46) Having first asserted the primacy of the "ideological struggle" (in a generalised and abstract form), this injection of that "struggle" with a sense of immediacy comes close to a blood and soil ideology, enacting anew the process of transforming history/culture/social relations into nature, which Marx views as the hallmark of ideology.

This sense of immediacy informs the fourth chapter, "Culture, Society and Education in South Africa" in two ways: Firstly, this article constructs a linear history extending from unity and cohesion to alienation, divisiveness, loss of ownership and control, and from there to active, creative responses, forging of new identities, struggle and transformation. Secondly, it explains "The Fall" from a golden age to an alienated existence in terms of the division between mental and manual labour, which in turn is interpreted as a fall from the state of man, because the evolution of man depended upon the interconnection of hand and brain. Social divisions are almost exclusively explained in terms of "the split of the hand from the head", of manual labour (workers) from mental labour (bourgeoisie). This, in my opinion, represents an essentialisation and naturalisation of class relations.

The fifth chapter, "Culture and the Media: How we are made to see", addresses issues of media control, entertainment industry, advertising, the appeal to "the masses" or "the public at large" and strategies for winning hearts and minds. All these aspects are analysed in detail, and some illuminating examples and comparisons are chosen to make the reader see the ways of making him/her see, while at the same time steering away from mechanistic explanations of media manipulation. Useful hints are given on "How to Organise a Community Newspaper".

One aspect, however, remains unclear. If it is acknowledged that mass media are part of an international communications network controlled by international capital (p. 89), how is the process of "de-colonizing our minds" (p. 86) to be envisaged? How can it be assumed that "indigenous communications outlets" can pose as "alternatives to the West's Big Four news agencies?" (p. 86). Considering the existence of neo-colonial national bourgeoisies, how can these "indigenous communications outlets" be seen to be "free from the Western-oriented assumptions and capitalist values"? (I might add that capitalism does not only exist as "values".) Conceiving of alternatives, in my opinion, requires specifications different to those mentioned here ("indigenous", non-"Western-oriented").

The article on "Popular Culture and Performance" (chapter 6) starts out by

offering a move away from the bipolarism of Manichean and populist aesthetics, by pointing out that

It is fruitless to attempt a study of popular culture on the assumption that there is a discernible thing called popular culture located on some terrain outside the dominant culture. There is no pure culture which is separable from the surrounding terrain of cultural relations. (Quoted on p. 114.)

This point, however, is largely lost in the enthusiastic descriptions of Manaka's plays, which Steadman uses to counter Kelwyn Sole's charge of "populism" in the case of organicist renderings of "traditional culture".

Chapter 7, "A Critique of Sociobiology", takes issue with radical sociobiologists who see culture in biological terms; it concludes, in contrast to the sociobiologists, that the nature of human labour is unique amongst all species. The rationale for including this article is not clear; if it is designed, as the graphics illustrate, to state the case of evolution without simultaneously endorsing Social Darwinism, this line of argument is not followed in the article. This *non sequitur* pertains also to the style (as mentioned above) and the reference to debates assumed as known, both of which make it suitable to a very specific audience or readership (sociology students).

The impression which this book and especially the first three-and-a-half chapters leave on a reader who is provoked to read the book against its grain, can be described in terms of what this book poses as: an exercise in legitimation.

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