

Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* analyses the phenomenon of fan culture. Fans, Jenkins notes, "rewrite" their favorite shows through a panoply of techniques: recontextualization, expansion of timeline, refocalization, moral realignment, genre shifting, crossovers, character dislocation, personalization, emotional intensification, and eroticization. Fandom, then, has an element of empowerment: "Fans are poachers who get to keep what they take and use their plundered goods as the foundations for the construction of an alternative cultural community" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 223).

But if 1970s theory was unduly pessimistic and defeatist, current theory has perhaps swung a bit too far in the opposite direction. Media theorists have stressed spectatorial agency and freedom, ironically, just as media production and ownership have become ever more centralized. Resistant readings, moreover, depend on a certain cultural or political preparation that "primes" the spectator to read critically. In this sense one might question the more euphoric claims of theorists such as John Fiske, who see TV viewers as mischievously working out "subversive" readings based on their own popular memory. Fiske rightly rejects the hypodermic-needle model of media influence that sees TV viewers, for example, as passive drugged patients getting their nightly fix, reduced to "couch potatoes" and "cultural dupes." He rightly suggests that minorities, for example, "see through" the racism of the dominant media. But if disempowered communities can decode dominant programming through a resistant perspective, they can do so only to the extent that their collective life and historical memory have provided an alternative framework of understanding. In the case of the Gulf War, for example, the majority of American viewers lacked any alternative grid to help them interpret events, specifically a view rooted in an understanding of the legacy of colonialism and its particular complexities in the Middle East. Primed by the sheer inertia of orientalist discourse, they gave credence to whatever views the Administration chose to present.

## Cognitive and Analytic Theory

Much of the 1980s and 1990s were devoted to revising, if not dismantling, the premises of 1970s screen theory. During this period theorists like Noël Carroll and David Bordwell attacked with iconoclastic glee and "the-emperor-has-no-clothes" irreverence virtually all its major tenets. (The targets of these provocations reacted with olympian hauteur, rarely deigning to respond.) Representing the "postanalytic" tradition, meanwhile, Richard Allen and Murray Smith criticized the philosophical overreaching of screen theory:

*What is striking about the Continental philosophy that has been taken to the cinema is the way in which extraordinarily sweeping claims that pertain to the end of epistemology, the construction of the subject, or theses concerning the ultimate constituents of reality, are all rooted in one aspect of the cinema – the causal or indexical nature of the photographic image – as if within this feature of cinematic representation somehow lies an answer to every question we might seek to ask about the cinema (and even modernity or knowledge in general!). (Allen and Smith, 1997, p. 22)*

The postanalytic thinkers accused screen theory of a number of dubious argumentative strategies: deferential appeals to authoritative figures; the misleading use of examples and analogies; the refusal to submit arguments to empirical test: the strategic use of willful obscurity (ibid., p. 6). The "Continental," in turn, saw analytic philosophy and its cinematic offshoots as arid, trivial, apolitical, and narrowly technical, a professionalist evasion of social and intellectual responsibility.

The "cognitive theory" movement, which loosely includes such diverse figures as Gregory Currie, Torben Grodal, Edward Branigan, Trevor Ponech, Murray Smith, Noël Carroll, and David Bordwell, began – if one sets aside "proto-cognitivists" like Münsterberg and the filmolinguists – gains force in the 1980s. Cognitivism looks for more precise alternative answers to questions raised differently about film reception by semiotics and psychoanalytic theory. Cognitivism has been a continuing thread, although by no means the *only* thread,

in the work of David Bordwell. It surfaces in "The Viewer's Activity" section of *Narration in the Fiction Film*, in the polemics against psychoanalysis in *Making Meaning*, in the 1989 essay "A Case for Cognitivism," and in *Post-Theory*, where Bordwell and Carroll characterize cognitivism not as a theory but as a stance which "seeks to understand human thought, emotion, and action by appeal to processes of mental representation, naturalistic processes, and (some sense of) rational agency" (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996, p. xvi). Cognitivism stresses the physiological and cognitive systems "hard-wired" into all human beings, what Bordwell calls the "contingent universals" prior to particularities of history, culture, and identity; the assumption of a three-dimensional environment, the assumption that natural light falls from above, and so forth. These contingent universals make possible artistic conventions which seem natural because they accord with the norms of human perception.

In *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), Bordwell offers a cognitive alternative to semiotics to explain how spectators make sense of films. For Bordwell, narration is a process whereby films furnish cues to spectators who use interpretative schemata to construct ordered, intelligible stories in their minds. From the point of view of reception, spectators entertain, elaborate, and sometimes suspend and modify their hypotheses about the images and sounds on the screen. From the point of view of the film, it operates on two levels: (1) what the Russian Formalists called *syuzhet*, i.e. the actual form, however fragmented and out-of-sequence, in which events are recounted; and (2) the *fabula*, i.e. the ideal (logically and chronologically ordered) story which the film suggests and which the spectator reconstructs on the basis of the film's cues. The first instance, *syuzhet*, guides the narrative activity of the spectator by offering various forms of pertinent information having to do with causality and with spatiotemporal relations. The second is a purely formal construct characterized by unity and coherence.

Cognitivism has been critical of what they regard as the hermetic, inflated, and tautological discourse of film theory and especially psychoanalytic film theory. (For the cognitivists, to put it somewhat crudely, a cigar really is sometimes just a cigar.) These theorists there-

fore bypass psychoanalytic film theory, drawing instead on the most cogent theories of perception, reasoning, and information-processing to understand how films are received and followed in terms of cause-effect narrative, space-time relations, and so forth. The cognitivist research program by now has generated studies of classical Hollywood cinema (Bordwell, Thompson, Currie, Smith), the avant-garde (Carroll, Peterson), the documentary (Carroll, Plantinga), and horror (Carroll, Freeland). A symposium on Cognitivism in Copenhagen (May 1999) featured papers on a wide spectrum of issues: nonfiction film and emotion (Carl Plantinga); the social psychology of the horror film (Dolf Zillman); a cognitive approach to film acting (Johannes Riis); cinema's psychology of perception (Revor Ponech); film history and the cognitive revolution (Casper Tybjerg); lighting styles in Lubitsch (Kristin Thompson); and *Caligari* and cognition (Wayne Munson). As Noel Carroll (1996, pp. 321-2) points out, cognitivism is difficult to define because it is not a unified theory. First, it is not a single theory but rather a constellation of small-scale theories. Second, these various small-scale theories conceptualize the issues differently. Third, the theories, taken together, do not form a single framework. Gregory Currie (in Miller and Stam, 1999) also points out that there are few specific doctrines to which all cognitivists subscribe. Cognitivism tends to be eclectic, wary of systematic thinking, with cognitivists tending to "cut 'n' mix" their cognitivism with other theories. Richard Allen combines cognitivism with both psychoanalysis and postanalytic philosophy; David Bordwell melds cognitivism with Prague School Formalism. Cognitivists also disagree with one another, for example, Carroll versus Currie on empathy and simulation, Allen versus Carroll on "illusion" and so forth. Most cognitivists, however, would agree that (1) the processes of film spectatorship are best understood as rationally motivated attempts to make visual or narrative sense out of the textual materials, and (2) that these processes of making sense are not dissimilar to those we deploy in our everyday life-experience.

Cognitivism recapitulates – in a non-linguistic register – first-phase film semiology's attempt to understand "how films are understood." Cognitivism bypasses the linguistic model and focuses instead on

Formal elements of film which "match" the norms of human perception. In fact, ~~cognitivist tend to reject the notion of film language.~~ Thus Noël Carroll asserts that "cinema is not a language," while he acknowledges that language does play "an intimate role in several of the symbolic structures used in cinema" (Carroll, 1996, p. 187). Virginia Brooks (1984) finds film semiology untestable and unverifiable and therefore unscientific; she describes Christian Metz's filmolinguistic work as "devoid of any experimental content or even any suggestion as to how decisions might be reached as to the rightness or wrongness of its assertions" (ibid., p. 11). Gregory Currie (1995) rejects the suggestion that linguistics can help us explain how we use, interpret, or appreciate the cinema. Film, he argues, lacks the salient features of natural language: it lacks productivity (the capacity to utter and comprehend an infinity of sentences) and conventionality, i.e. no set of conventions operates to confer meaning on cinematic images in anything like the way in which conventions confer literal meaning on language. Film syntax, furthermore, cannot be compared to language. "While a few kinds of shot-combinations have acquired the status of recurrent and familiar patterns (e.g. point-of-view editing), these in no sense constitute or even approach the status of meaning-determining rules" (Currie, in Miller and Stam, 1999).

Some of these critiques seem rather ungenerous. Metz himself had already implicitly made them when he said that cinema was not a *langue* (language system), and acknowledged that "meaning-determining rules" like the Grand Syntagmatique were historically time-bound (just a codification of editing in a certain period). Metz always stressed the disanalogies as well as the analogies between film and language, never equating analogy with identity. It is therefore somewhat gratuitous to inventory all the ways in which film is *not* a language system when Metz had already said as much. ~~The cognitivist rejection of filmolinguistics partially derives from the sensitivity, typical of analytic and ordinary language philosophy, to the possible abuses of metaphor, here the metaphor of film as language (or later dream).~~ For cognitivists, metaphor is not necessarily a cognitive, exploratory instrument, but rather a kind of category mistake (al-

though one might perform a cognitive study of metaphor itself). Cognitivists tend to be suspicious of the playful, punning, metaphorical, and analogical modes of some screen theory; they react to it as Samuel Johnson reacted to Shakespeare's puns, as a "fatal Cleopatra" to be shunned. (Nonetheless, writers like Noël Carroll are themselves fond of using witty analogies, a kind of metaphor, as a strategy in argument.) However, metaphors are not wrong or right; they are suggestive and illuminating, or they are not. It is one thing to say that a metaphor such as "film language" has given us all it can give us and that we should move on or change tack; it is a very different thing to say that it is simply "wrong."

Cognitivists do not completely deny the usefulness of psychoanalysis, but they see that usefulness as limited to the emotive and irrational aspects of film. Cognitivism, Carroll writes, looks for "alternative answers to many of the questions addressed by or raised by psychoanalytic film theories, especially with respect to film reception, in terms of cognitive and rational processes rather than irrational or unconscious ones" (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996, p. 62). Bordwell, similarly, acknowledges that psychoanalytic theories are better equipped than cognitivism for issues of sexuality and fantasy (Bordwell, 1985, p. 336). But there is "no reason," as Bordwell puts it, "to claim for the unconscious any activities which can be explained on other grounds" (ibid., p. 30).

Using a cognitive/analytic approach, Allen (1995) tried to recuperate psychoanalytic theory through a critical reassessment that would cleanse it of "ambiguity and equivocation." Distinguishing between mere "sensory deception" and "epistemic deception," ~~Allen argued that psychoanalysis can help us understand the ways that the spectator actively contributes to "projective illusion."~~ We know that what we are seeing is only a film, yet we experience that film as a "fully realized world." ~~Allen proposes a tripartite division for the question of belief in the cinema. Using George Romero's horror film *Night of the Living Dead* as an example, he distinguishes between a first level realist reading, a second level of "reproductive" illusion, and a third level of "projective illusion" (Allen, 1993).~~

Cognitivism, in sum, explicitly rejects some of the first principles of screen theory. It rejects, first of all, the axiomatic base of film linguistics, that film is a "language-like" entity that can be apprehended through a linguistic-semiological approach. Second, it rejects the founding abstraction of psychoanalytic film theory—the Unconscious—in favor of conscious and preconscious operations. Third, unlike the semiotic and Althusserian tradition, it tends to be supportive rather than suspicious of "common sense"—the aggregate of common opinion derisively labeled "doxa" by Roland Barthes—and in some versions offers a populist endorsement of what Currie calls "folk psychology" or "folk theoretic wisdom." Fourth, cognitivism disdains grand theoretical claims—the author is dead! the spectator is born! the apparatus lures!—in favor of the time-tested pragmatism of "problem solving." Fifth, it tends to reject the political claims made for Brechtian-modernist reflexivity. Sixth, it rejects, if only implicitly, the postmodern notion of the end of meta-narratives, specifically the rejection of the meta-narrative of scientific progress. For cognitivism, film theory should approximate the condition of science by progressing through empirical investigation and rational debate. Seventh, despite the very diverse political affiliations of its practitioners, cognitivism prefers what it sees as a stance of objective, apolitical neutrality to what it sees as the "agenda-driven" politicizing of theory. In this sense, it distances itself from political and cultural radicalism. In the background is the ideal of a peaceful combat of competing hypotheses in a kind of free market-place of ideas, where the "best theories" will win out through the processes of meritocratic competition.

While cognitivism claims to be the "latest thing," it can be viewed as a nostalgic move backward to a world prior to Saussurean differentialism, prior to the Frankfurt School indictment of "instrumental reason," prior to Lacan's destabilized ego, prior to Marxist and Freudian critiques of "common sense," prior to Foucault's power-knowledge nexus and the mutually constitutive relation between reason and madness. Cognitivism shows a touching faith in reason (after Auschwitz) and science (after Hiroshima). It keeps its faith with science, even though "science" had not so recently

"proved" black, Jewish, and Native American inferiority. The question, of course, is to what end is science being used, and who gets to decide.

Currie's concept of "folk theoretic wisdom," meanwhile, ignores the question of heteroglossic contradictions both within and between "folks." In the contemporary era, is there any unalloyed "folk" consensus that joins rich and poor, black and white, male and female? Most black folk in the United States seem to feel that whites have been collectively racist toward them; many whites are reluctant to agree. Does the notion of common folk wisdom help us in such situations? While a white suburbanite moviegoer who has never been victimized by the police and an inner-city resident who has been brutalized by the police might share a common recognition that what they are seeing on screen is a white policeman, their affective response, the historical associations, the socio-ideological "intonation" they bring to that figure, might well be different. For German anti-semites in the 1930s, anti-semitic films like *The Jew Suss* resonated with their "common sense," but not for Jews or their sympathizers.

Cognitive theory allows little room for the politics of location, or for the socially shaped investments, ideologies, narcissisms, and desires of the spectator, all of which seem too irrational and messy for the theory to deal with. Why do some spectators love, and others hate, the same films? There is little room in cognitive theory for the potential homophobic reaction of the spectator of *Cruising*, or the potential anti-Arab/Muslim reaction of the spectator of *The Siege*, or the potential misogynistic reaction of the spectator of *Fatal Attraction*. In cognitive theory a raceless, genderless, classless understander/interpreter encounters abstract schemata. But why do we go to films? Is it to make inferences and test hypotheses? While that is admittedly part of the process, we also go to films for other reasons: to confirm (or question) our prejudices, to identify with characters, to feel intense emotions and "subject-effects," to imagine another life, to enjoy kinaesthetic pleasure, to taste glamor, eroticism, charisma, passion.

The critique I deploy here does not imply cultural relativism, as



some imagine, but rather the historical study of multifaceted relations between cultural formations. A focus on cognitive commonalities across all cultures exists below the threshold of cultural and social difference, and therefore discourages analysis of tensions rooted in history and culture. What is missing in cognitive theory's notion of the spectator is a sense of social and ideological contradiction, a notion of the heteroglossia, the stratified and conflictual "many-languagedness" within and between social formations. Even single individuals are conflicted, torn between their charitable and selfish impulses, their progressive and regressive tendencies. The social formation as a whole is even more riven. And why does cognitivism insist that our responses to film are largely rationally motivated? Couldn't spectatorial response intertwine the rational and the irrational? Is our response to TV commercials, or to political "attack-ads," rational? Were pro-Nazi responses to *Triumph of the Will* rational? Were white responses to *Birth of a Nation* rational? Can spectatorship be reduced to a matter of making inferences from the cues provided by a text? Why do we enjoy certain films, such as *Rear Window*, long after we have mastered their inferential cues? What about the contradictory desires engaged by film — for eroticism, for beauty, for aggression, for community, for law and order, for rebellion?

The cognitive approach downsizes, as it were, the ambitions of theory, concentrating instead on manageable research problems. In reaction against subject-positioning and apparatus theory, which made grand claims about the cinema's alienating role in general, Noël Carroll proposes a more modest and local project: not the operations of all discourse, but rather "the rhetorical organization of some discourse" (Carroll, 1998, p. 391). Within this project cognitivists have done substantial and productive work on issues of spectatorial engagement not with the apparatus in general, not with narrative in general, but with characters in film, a subject long rendered off-limits by theoretical anti-humanism. A number of theorists, for example Murray Smith (1995), Ed Tan (1996), and contributors to *Passionate Views: Thinking about Film and Emotions* (1999), have explored the contribution of cognitivism in accounting for emotional responses to film. In *Moving Pictures: A*

*New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings and Cognition*, Torben Kragh Grodal pays attention to the very physiology of film reception, that aspect of the cinematic experience which makes us say that a film "sent chills up our spine" or made our "heart sink." As Grodal puts it:

*The film experience is made up of many activities: our eyes and ears pick up and analyze image and sound, our minds apprehend the story, which resonates in our memory; furthermore, our stomach, heart, and skin are activated in empathy with the story situations and the protagonists' ability to cope.* (Grodal, 1997, p. 1)

Grodal rejects Bordwell's contention that comprehension of film is theoretically separable from emotional response, arguing that "feelings and emotions are just as much 'objective' aspects of the internal constructions of the fabula as cognitions are" (ibid., p. 40). Grodal also disputes the idea that cognitive film theory is only suited to rational processes, while psychoanalytic methods are better suited to explaining non-rational responses such as emotions. Emotions, he rightly points out, "are not irrational forces" but rather "motivators for cognition and possible resulting actions." Grodal discriminates an ascending hierarchy of responses, each with emotion-producing potential: (1) visual perception of lines and figures; (2) memory matching within the cerebral archives; (3) the construction of a diegesis; and (4) identification with characters, resulting in diverse possible reactions. (a) voluntary telic (goal-oriented) responses; (b) paratelic (semi-voluntary responses); and (c) autonomic involuntary responses (laughing, crying).

Cognitive theory's turn to scientific methods was motivated by its fatigue with high-flying theoretical speculation, with bold assertions unsupported by evidence, and with the relentless politicization of Screen theory. As part of this scientific turn, Cognitive theory favors a distinct vocabulary featuring words like "schemata," "visual data," "neuropsychological coordinates," "image-processing," "evolutionary perspectives," "physiology of response," and the "cognitive-hedonic relabeling of arousal" (Grodal, 1997, p. 102). But in its

revolt against intellectual inflation, cognitivism sometimes runs the opposite risk of reductivism, of suggesting that the film experience is "nothing but" physiological response and cognitive processing.

Murray Smith (1995) replaces the psychoanalytic concept of identification (developed by Metz, Mulvey, Heath, and many others) with the concept of engagement. Smith usefully distinguishes three levels of engagement. Building on Richard Wollheim's distinction in *The Thread of Life* (1984) between "central" and "acentral" imagining, and rejecting what he sees as the false dichotomy of the cognitive and the emotive, he argues for three levels of imaginative engagement which together form a "structure of sympathy." (1) recognition (the spectatorial construction of characters as individualized and continuous agents); (2) alignment (the process by which spectators are placed in congruent relation in terms of access to a character's actions, knowledge, and feelings); and (3) allegiance (the cognitive and affective adherence to a character's values and moral point of view). Theorists have often conflated (2) and (3), Smith argues, under broad terms like "identification" and "point of view."

By focusing on emotion, Smith corrects the more rationalist and constructivist Bordwellian emphasis on "hypothesis-testing" and "inferential cues," but his main target is the Brechtian emphasis on rational and ideological distanciation and screen theory's emphasis on the subjected and positioned spectator. Smith reasserts spectatorial agency but without making larger Fiskean claims of subversion and resistance: "Spectators, I will argue, are neither deceived with respect to the status of representations, nor entirely caught within the cultural assumptions of those representations" (Smith, 1995, p. 41). Smith rejects what he calls the "incarceration" of the spectator, seen as benighted, spellbound in ideological darkness, and in this sense his move parallels that of others. But he goes too far in depoliticizing the cinema when he argues that schema theory can substitute for "ideology." The spectator, I would argue, both is constructed and him or herself constructs, within a kind of constrained or situated freedom. In a Bakhtinian perspective the reader/spectator exercises agency, but always within the force-fields of contradiction charac-

teristic both of the social field and of the individual psyche. Cognitive theory, by focusing on mental processes, must work in complementarity with more socially and historically minded methods, otherwise it runs the risk of its own form of incarceration, i.e. of driving complex historical processes into the monadic perceptual prison of the individual psyche. Smith's disastrous substitution of the word "moral" for the word "ideological," for example, throws out the collective achievements of the Frankfurt School, screen theory, and cultural studies, leaving a social void which the word "moral," with its Victorian associations, cannot possibly fill.

Noël Carroll (1998) takes a more nuanced position on ideology, proposing an expanded definition which allows not only for class domination but for any system of oppression. Carroll rejects what he sees as an overly broad definition of ideology which would equate it with perception (Althusser), language (Volosinov), or discourse (Foucault). Picking up on decades of work on gender, race, and sexuality, Carroll proposes dropping exclusive references to class oppression, instead defining ideology as epistemically defective propositions with "contextually grounded implications favorable to some practice of social domination" (ibid., p. 378). Such a definition has the advantage of emphasizing the effects of ideology in the world, but has the disadvantage of grounding the operations of ideology in "propositions" rather than in the asymmetrical power arrangements that structure everyday life and consciousness. What is missing in Smith, as opposed to Carroll, is a notion of a social vantage point, of spectatorial investments in representation, notions of ideological grids and cultural narcissisms that reflect the social channeling of emotional engagement. British spectators at the height of imperialism felt flattered by representations of their empire spreading order and progress around the world; the imperialized, meanwhile, protested such representations. Many American spectators, similarly, enjoy *Indiana Jones*-style images which flatter their sense of America's mission in the world. It is not an accident that Hollywood returns incessantly to World War II, the "good war" where Americans were liberating heroes. Many Americans are quite accepting of stereotypical representations of Muslim Arabs in films like *The Sheik*, *Ishtar*,

*Aladdin*, and *The Siege* because they are not personally invested in positive representations; their ox is not being gored. Arab and Muslim spectators, on the other hand, react with hurt and outrage to incendiary stereotypes of all Arabs and Muslims (the two terms are usually confused) as terrorists. An innocuous notion of folk beliefs lacks the strength to account for *differential* reactions, rooted in distinct histories. There is thus a kind of complacency in one strand of cognitive theory that assumes we live in a well-ordered cosmos, where good spectators align with good characters in a common-sense world where everyone agrees about the nature of good and evil. But what happens when the cinema idealizes certain figures who might have historically played a fairly sinister role – for example, FBI agents during the Civil Rights movement in *Mississippi Burning* – and presents them as heroes? What happens when action blockbusters encourage adolescents to indulge in dreams of “infantile omnipotence” by identifying with the sadistic violence of law-and-order figures fighting diabolical evil, even if, indeed *especially* if, those characters are presented as exercising violence in a putatively “good” cause?

A simplistic view of cognitive theory as simply the antithesis of screen theory also obscures shared terrain. The work of Murray Smith, like that of Edward Branigan, activates a dialogue between cognitive theory and the narratology of theorists like Gérard Genette and François Jost. Smith’s “alignment,” for example, is in some ways akin to Genette’s notion of “focalization.” Filmolinguistics and cognitive theory also share a common appeal to scientific standards, even if the master-sciences and jargons in question (linguistics versus cognitive psychology) are not identical. Eco and Metz, after all, also talked about codes of perception and cognition. Both cognitivism and semiology downplay issues of evaluation and ranking, moreover, in favor of probing the ways texts are understood. Both movements refuse a normative, belletristic approach; they share a democratizing impulse uninterested in lauding individual filmmakers as geniuses or specific films as masterpieces. For Carroll (1998) as for Metz, all mass art is art. In any intellectual movement questions are more important than answers, and cognitivism shares many

of its questions with screen theory: What is the nature of cinematic illusion? How are films understood? What is the nature of narrative comprehension? What are the schemata and semantic fields (Bordwell), the extra-cinematic codes (Metz), the disciplinary paradigms of knowledge (Foucault), the bodies of (largely unarticulated) knowledge and belief, that we bring to bear on our understanding of film? How does the viewer locate him or herself in the space of the action? How do audiences construct meaning? What accounts for emotional, empathic responses to films?

The polemics between the cognitivists and the semioticians, then, mask substantial commonalities: the appeal to scientificity, the search for rigor, the refusal of impressionism in favor of painstaking work on precise theoretical problems. Ironically, both Metz and Carroll deploy the same metaphor of the sausage-machine to mock the kind of sterile, epigonic film analysis they dislike. The two movements also share certain blindspots. Both cognitivism and Metzian semiotics have been critiqued for their lack of attention to race, gender, class, and sexuality, their quiet presumption of a white, middle-class, heterosexual spectator. The two schools differ, of course, in the master disciplines to which they appeal – linguistics and psychoanalysis in the case of semiotics; cognitive psychology, Prague School aesthetics, and more generally an appeal to the protocols of scientific rationalism (inference, proof, demonstration, induction, deduction, abduction, verifiability) in the case of cognitivism. The two movements also differ in style and rhetoric. While a certain strand of Barthesian semiotics has been playful, at best ludically experimental and at worst pretentiously vapid in its fondness for punning and word play, the cognitive school, and its distant cousin the “postanalytic school,” show a certain squeamishness about unconstrained association and the free play of interpretation. But a search-and-destroy mission against all ambiguities of meaning can be just as silly as the willful inflation of “undecidabilities.” If one side can be accused of willful inflation, the other can be accused of shortsighted reductionism.