

Sydney Studies in Society and Culture, No. 3

Semiotics

Ideology

Language

Edited by Terry Threadgold, E.A. Grosz, Gunther Kress
and M.A.K. Halliday

SYDNEY ASSOCIATION FOR STUDIES IN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The aim of our Association is to bring together concerned scholars from Australia and overseas to discuss and publish on themes which transcend the usual academic disciplines and establish links between subject areas. Our Association hopes to provide a forum for those who feel strongly about academic freedom and intellectual achievement to air alternative views on society and culture.

This is the third volume of our series and is based on a Conference held in August 1984. We hope to publish a fourth volume on the "Cultural Construction of Race" soon.

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Ruqaiya Hasan started the Nuffield Child Language Survey at Leeds University in 1964, and later joined Bernstein's Sociolinguistics Research Unit at the University of London Institute of Education. She is currently Associate Professor in Linguistics at Macquarie University. She has published widely in the field of systematic linguistics. Her most recent books are *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of language in a Social Semiotic Perspective* with M.A.K. Halliday (Deakin U.P. 1985) and *Linguistics, Language and Verbal Art* (Deakin U.P., 1985).

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Terry Threadgold teaches courses on general semiotics, language as social semiotic and the Semiotics of Literature in the Department of Early English Literature and Language at Sydney University. She has published on theoretical issues in semiotics, on the semiotics of seventeenth century poetry and contemporary prose texts, and with others, two introductory textbooks on grammar and language. Her current research interests focus on the need to extend the reading/writing of "linguistic" to include issues raised by general semiotics.

PREFACE

This is a selection of papers given at a Semiotics Conference sponsored by the Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture and held in July 1984 at The Women's College, University of Sydney. The theme of the conference was "Semiotics: Language and Ideology". As editors, we have tried to ensure that this selection is representative of the conference as a whole and that it contains those papers which addressed most directly and productively the questions raised by the Conference theme.¹

As only the second conference to be held in Australia which has focussed specifically on Semiotics,² this Conference is of particular interest and requires some contextualisation.

Many of those who contributed papers would not normally call themselves "semioticians": that on this occasion they were prepared to speak/write under that rubric is indicative of the extent to which the many enterprises which currently go by the name "Semiotics" have influenced and become implicated in the research practice of scholars of widely divergent interests and backgrounds. In this respect there was an important sense in which at this Conference Semiotics in/of Australia had come of age. Gone was the "otherness" of a semiotics linguistically realised (in the language of the 1981 Conference²) as "foreign bodies" or "import rhetoric", a semiotics derived largely from French theory. In its place is a semiotics which is peculiarly Australian, a semiotics which brings together European theory, cultural analysis, social theory and a theory of language as social semiotic.

The work being done within this general framework certainly does not involve any one unified mode of approach or theory, and the papers from this conference are no exception; but they do represent, from different or multiple disciplinary perspectives, what Gunther Kress, called, with hindsight, "a productive conjunction" of these different approaches which attempted to focus on the related problems of semiotics and language and ideology in a number of different contexts.

The texts that are analysed here by linguists, historians, anthropologists, literary theorists and medievalists (dare we say semioticians — for many wear more than one of these hats) are both spoken and written, and include work on the everyday talk of mothers and children, literature, television and media, the Old English literary canon, and texts from thirteenth century Iceland and the twentieth century New Guinea Highlands.

The sense in which this work is specifically Australian in location and unusual in its focus on the specificity of linguistic structures has to do with the presence of scholars like Michael Halliday and Gunther Kress in this context. Kress's early work (1979) in East Anglia on language and ideology and Halliday's increasing involvement with semiotics have been important influences on research being done in Australia in general and at this conference in particular.

However, as is always the case, the success of a conference, or of a publication such as this, depends on the support and participation of many more people than actually contribute papers or even attend the conference. The active research and teaching traditions and projects which are the context for this collection of papers, and the people who were encouraging and supportive, derive from many sources and places within Australia. Michael Halliday's work and that of Jim Martin and the language and register group in the Department of linguistics at Sydney University is central in many ways to the work of contributors to this volume from other departments at Sydney University. Closely related is the work of Ruqaiya Hasan, Theo van Leeuwen and many others in the Department of English and Linguistics at Macquarie University. The work on language and ideology of Gunther Kress, and Anne-Cranny Francis in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the New South Wales Institute of Technology provides links with these and with the work, for instance, of Michael O'Toole, Robert Hodge and John Frow in the School of Human Communication, at Murdoch University in Western Australia. The production, through Murdoch and the Western Australian Institute of Technology of the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* has done much to promote semiotic research and work on language and ideology. So has Frances Christie in her work in Language and Education at Deakin University. The work of Elizabeth Gross in General Philosophy at Sydney University which has been concerned with language, ideology and semiotics in relation to feminist theory, makes a whole series of connections with women's studies in Australia which are not unrelated to questions raised at this conference. The work of Ian Reid at Deakin University and Anne Freadman at the University of Queensland belongs within these same schools of research but moves in some ways beyond them.

Finally there is the work of the people who are the Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture itself, without whose support and encouragement, and plain hard work, interdisciplinary projects of this kind would be much more difficult to undertake.

As editors, we have deliberately refrained from imposing any kind of arrangement on the papers which might have suggested some kind of orthodoxy or unified approach. We have preferred to allow the shifts of direction, the mutual questioning of positions, the different theoretical stances and the disciplinary differences to remain obvious and productive. But precisely because there is no unified approach here — a difficulty with any truly interdisciplinary enterprise — and because the papers refer to work from an extraordinary variety of different contexts, some discussion of the major issues involved seemed necessary. Terry Threadgold therefore agreed to write an introduction.

Footnotes to the Preface

¹ The following papers, which were first delivered at the conference have been published elsewhere since then:

Gunther Kress (1985) 'Discourses, Texts, readers and the pro-nuclear arguments', in *Language and the Nuclear Arms Debate: Nukespeak Today* ed. Paul Chilton. London: Frances Pinter.

Ivor Indyk (1986) 'Reading men like Signboards': *The Egalitarian Semiotic of Such is Life*, *Australian Literary Studies*, May 1986, forthcoming.

² The proceedings of the first were published as *The Foreign Bodies Papers*, eds., Peter Botsman, Chris Burns and Peter Hutchings (Sydney, 1981).

