

ologikritikken for at være formynderisk. Bondebjerg svarer igen med følgende spiddene salut: "Receptionsforskeren er tekstanalytiker, når han skal tolke interviewet, og det er også forskeren, der afgør både de oplevelsesmæssige kvalitetskriterier og konstaterer om de er tilstede" (s. 198).

Kim Schrøder redegør for sin tilgang til receptionsanalysen, for metoden og resultaterne. Schrøder har raffineret redegørelsen for sine nybrydende synspunkter om den kulturelle kvalitets relative karakter. Teorien fremstår her med et uomtvisteligt præg. Schrøder opstiller endvidere nogle kriterier hvorefter man kan afgøre om et medieprodukt har kvalitet for bestemte seergrupper, og i dette synspunkt er Bondebjerg enig med Schrøder. Bondebjerg opfatter dog ikke publikummets lagdeling som statisk, men som et udfald af 'kampen om betydning' på 'fortolkningens homeriske slagmark'.

Bondebjerg forsøger i sin artikel at begrunde tekstanalysens berettigelse og at kritisere den ensidige prioritering af den empiriske receptionsforskning. Bondebjerg henviser til Bennett og Woolcott der viser hvorledes det er den bredere kulturelle kontekst der skaber rammerne for såvel medieproduktionen som receptionen. Det er Bondebjergs synspunkt at den empiriske receptionsforskning ved at reducere receptionen til en individuel akt, i virkeligheden overlader massepublikummet til markedsmekanismernes skalten og valten, mens den kritiske medieforskningens mål er "at medvirke til, at folk ved bedre" (s. 207).

Henrik Dahl diskuterer voldsmaet i debatten om mediernes påvirkning af børn og unge. Han påpeger hvorledes voldsdebatten præges af uklare begrebsdefinitioner, og med sin sociologiske tilgang tilfører han debatten nogle relevante begreber vedrørende ungdomsgruppens funktion. Det lykkedes derimod ikke Dahl at overbevise om voldsmaets almindelige irrelevans. Vel mest fordi han på forhånd har indtaget det standpunkt at det er progressivt at afvise påstanden om at seerne bliver voldeliggjorte af at se vold i tv. Hvor ville det være befriende hvis der var nogle der ville frigøre sig fra den forplumrede amerikanske debat, kas-

te skællene fra øjnene og give sig til at lave lidt retrospektiv empirisk analyse.

Tove Rasmussen præsenterer sin analyse af en gruppe pubertetsdrenge kollektive reception af actionfilm. På en måde den mest spændende artikel, fordi den giver størst indblik i den bagvedliggende undersøgelse. Tove Rasmussen har i denne artikel bevæget sig ud over den situationsspecifikke analyse, idet hun trækker forskellige aspekter af de unges livsbetingelser (den fallerede skole og betonforstadens nærvedkriminelle miljø) ind som forklaringsbaggrund for analysen. Hvis Tove Rasmussen fortsætter med at inddrage kontekstuelle elementer i sin analyse, dvs. at analysere de unges mediebrug og -reception i lyset af deres livssituation (kammerater, fritid, skole og familie), så vil hun kunne vise at receptionsforskningen også kan bruges uden for medieforskningens egen verden.

Klaus Bruhn Jensen afslutter bindet med en beskrivelse af sin receptionsanalyse af TV-Avisen for Danmarks Radio. Artiklen bidrager ikke med noget nyt i forhold til hvad der tidligere er offentliggjort. Omvendt er den forbilledlig velskrevet og fokuserer på et af de centrale aspekter i Jensens receptionsanalyse: at seerne i deres reception udskiller et sæt af supertemaer som de konkrete indslag hægtes op på.

Bogens opdeling vil nok støde adskillige læsere, herunder anmelderen, der nok svagt erindrer at distinktionen teoriempiri engang var meget diskuteret, men nok undrer sig over at nogen kan finde på at dyrke en empiriløs teori og tillægge andre prædikatet teoriløs empiri. Jeg kender ikke det oplæg bogens forfattere har fået, men det forekommer mig at en mere klar instruktion til forfatterne i tredje afdeling kunne have gjort artiklerne mere spændende. Således er det påfaldende at ingen af de implicerede forfattere diskuterer de metodiske problemer i forbindelse med dataindsamling og analyse af de indsamlede data (dybdeinterviewene). Undertiden redegøres der for metoden, og i enkelte tilfælde begrundes den. Evalueret bliver den imidlertid aldrig, hvilket er problematisk da validitetsproblemet

jo er et afgørende problem når vi taler om empiriske analyser.

Som helhed bliver bogen derfor temmelig diffus. De teoretiske artikler kommer kun for en enkelts vedkommende i nærheden af at placere sig i forhold til den empiriske reception og den metodiske diskussion glimrer ved sit fravær.

Kirsten Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines, 1751-1945*, Yale University Press 1988, pp. 272, ISBN 0-300-04010-5.

Anmeldt af: Martin Barker, Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies, Bristol Polytechnic, England.

There is not a lot written on the history of children's magazines. What there is, tends to be the slightly flatulent writings of fans and devotees: nostalgia writing about the lives of authors, publication runs, histories of characters' appearances. Useful, if used carefully; but positively dangerous for a critical social understanding. Very often the first serious book in such a field turns out to be troublesome. There are so few markers, a shortage of previous work to draw on and react to. As a result, such books quickly go under the hammer: "innovative, provocative, but problematic". That is so definitely *not* the case with Kirsten Drotner's book, that the point needs to be made forcefully.

It really ought to be so. Drotner has trawled so widely that it is just astonishing how well her study holds up. The book unfolds a history of English children's magazines, from the earliest days in the mid-eighteenth century, as an evolving interrelationship with the emergent definitions of 'childhood'. To do this, she had to command not just 200 years of the magazines and comics themselves - and that itself would be no mean task - but also all of these: demography and patterns of population growth and movement, the evolution

of children's working lives within shifting class structures, the social history of parenting practices and theories, the stages of emergence of state schooling, patterns of marriage and domesticity, the production processes and histories of the magazines, and the lives of their editors and authors.

I won't attempt to capture the full richness of her discussions. Encapsulated, her argument runs as follows. A tentative start was made in the 1750s, with magazines like the *Lilliputian*, but which all spoke 'backwards' to a declining gentry, stressing moderation and manners. The breakthrough to the modern children's magazine came, paradoxically, with the Sunday School preachies of the early nineteenth century. The *Child's Companion* (which ran from 1824-1932) and *Children's Friend* (1824-1930) combined stern moralism with death-bed tales. Very much a *sponsored* intrusion into children's lives, nonetheless they chimed with problems being experienced by some lower middle class groups (and she uses (auto)biographies to evidence some of these links). But as important, once created, they began to generate a market, and competition for new segments of readers. This led to a search for formulae which would link with those segments. And each subsequent wave of magazines found new ways of connecting with the typified social experience of groups of children: lower middle class boys, working class girls, etc. A gradual commercialisation within the constraints of 'moral publishing' made them link more and more directly with their readers, but always from within the "paradox of childhood": "the separation of learning and doing, between preparation for and participation in social functions" (p.192).

An example can best illuminate both the substance and the method. Writing of the phenomenal rise of the *Girl's Own Paper* (1880-1908), Drotner considers the basis for its popularity with middle class girls. She points to its use of 'information': not the random 'astonishing facts' offered to the boys, but geared, she argues, around the new possibilities opening up for girls. Jobs they could think of

doing, activities for their pleasure and health (untouched by the then eugenicist fashion that demanded girls preserve their bodies for mothering), places they could go, and clothes to make to suit their multiple ambitions. The stories, by contrast, ranged from hymns of optimistic domesticity ("She Couldn't Boil A Potato" - but she soon learnt, out of her own skills), to the 'madcap' Pixie O'Shaughnessy, a model of good-natured high-spirits as she charms all London with her exploits - and thus in the end splendidly wins a husband. The splendid feature of Drotner's discussion is the *specificity* of the connections she suggests. At this time, middle class girls were finding new employment niches, for example in secretarial/clerical work. With these came the possibility of new earning and spending power; and school began to take on more than a moral/domestic meaning. "Even if most middle- and lower-middle-class women lives for hearth and home, the naturalness of a domestic destiny had been broken as a prospect for their daughters" (p.120). And so a need for those spirited dreams, and that information. Drotner's conclusion is interesting just because it is so tentative:

*The contents as the Girl's Own Paper were as contradictory of the lives of its adolescent readership. But since the fictional and the nonfictional sections of the magazine treated the girl's contradictory experiences so differently, it is hard to evaluate how the paper as a whole operated in the lives of these readers. However, it can be surmised that the lower-middle-class girl, needing personal and vocational information yet often lacking social connections to secure her future, would be a keen reader of the advisory articles and could thus spot their authors' differences of opinion. Rather than adding to her self-assertion, however, these differences probably exacerbated her confusion about how to balance on the social tightrope of her class. She would therefore have enjoyed the serials more despite their narrower range of feminine ideals. Conversely, the middle-class girl, already familiar with such fiction through contemporary novels, would have spent more time learning the*

*advise on good health and the hints on perfect housekeeping. In general, she also had more opportunities to act upon the ideals of independence and self-support set up in some of these articles. Their contradictions would therefore have become catalysts to her self-realisation, more so than to her impecunious sisters" (p. 162).*

This apparently speculative tentativeness is no weakness. Its strength is that Drotner is *taking risks* on the basis of an emergent theorisation. That theory is not completely present but, as it shows, it is so much better than anything previous, it is worth drawing out. Scattered through the book are passing criticisms of other approaches (Orwell's dismissal of *Gem* and *Magnet*, theories that favour 'high culture' over 'popular', etc.). In place of all these, she proposes to look for "interfaces" (p. 10). Just about every chapter offers exemplifications of what these might look like, but the idea is never stated as a general theory. But I take her to mean that we can only understand mass magazines of these kinds by examining the way they connect with, and give embodied responses to, typified social tensions and problems arising from the ways in which 'childhood' is experienced. This is a striking and powerful explanatory proposal, and worthy of close consideration. It also sits dreadfully with Mary Cadogan's review of the book in the *Sunday Times*. Cadogan, whose own work stand at the divide between fan-writing and critical study, praises Drotner for "interspersing her study of the periodicals with illuminating chunks of social history, so we constantly note the reinforcement, in the fiction, of class and gender differences". That is precisely what Drotner is *not* doing. If she were, the book would hardly be original at all. It is precisely because she is not 'interspersing', but binding together the typified social experience of kinds of 'childhood' with the reading experiences offered, that the magazines never do anything as simple as 'reinforce' - as though 'class' and 'gender' were, in Drotner's view, single categories there to be reinforced.

This theory takes seriously mass magazines' differences from literary materials. They are repetitive and

'formulaic', the stories are largely 'un-authored', and the whole productions relate very directly to their committed readers. There is little of the self-conscious distancing of books, for example. These qualities, suggests Drotner, enable them to converse unmediatedly to sore spots in readers' lives. It is only if this theory of 'typified social experiences' and the magazines' engagement with those is drawn out, that we can see both the tremendous strengths of this book, but also its weaknesses. I have some worries about her particular accounts which need at least brief statement.

For all the great suggestiveness of her "interfaces", they lack a crucial dimension. In her writing about class, gender and childhood, it often feels as if these were only things which her readers *suffered from*. They were not ever the basis of *struggles*. Class, for example, only seems to have produced problems and tensions, not collective activity. This produces several problems. First, I cannot think of a point in her argument when she considers how individually or collectively children read their magazines (although some of the biographical quotations hint at their use in, for example, playground culture). It is as though class, gender and childhood are socially produced, but individually experienced and responded to. Second, this connects with the way she has been misled about the Penny Dreadfuls, the melodramatic Victorian street literature against whose 'influence' many of her magazines were pitted. She accepts too willingly the standard view of them as 'exotic violence plus identification with a hero'. They were more complicated by far; and the most notorious, *Wild Boys of London*, turns out on examination to have dealt with explicitly *political* themes of slavery and Fenianism - just at the time when the police smashed its printing plates on the excuse of preventing 'corruption of the young'. In other words, there is reason to think that working class youngsters read the Dreadfuls in part as an act of *collective resistance*, and that their content could match that. At the very least, they would have been read in rebellion against middle class taste. And that points to a third related

lack: missing is the middle-class moralising against 'popular literature' as a whole (of which Matthew Arnold was a clear exemplar) which provided another marker for the Religious Tract Society, for example, and their attempts to provide 'clean' literature like the *Boys' Own* and *Girls' Own Paper*.

At the same time, I feel at times that some of her interfaces are too neat, and don't leave space for the kinds of compromise, hesitation and sheer guesswork of publishers and writers. For example, she distinguishes the late-nineteenth century mill girls' papers from their middle class counterparts. In that period, she says, working class girls were increasingly caught in a combination of required schooling, domestic work, manual labour and delayed marriages. Her 'interface' is via these papers' "astute heroines" repeated subversions and disruption of authority". That's fine, but it does leave untouched why they also contained detailed advice on fashion, bodily remedies, etc. There is a danger of explaining too much, or too little.

Her use of (auto)biographical materials is daring. These accompany and seem to evidence her ideas on how the magazines might have been used. The trouble is, they don't always seem to match the imputed 'readings' she is suggesting - and nowhere more glaringly than when she wants to say, of *Schoolfriend* (1919-40) that there was a concealing absence of social power (see p. 210) which subverts an apparent heroic independence. If she's right, then her quotations from readers would hardly be likely to evidence this, because they wouldn't easily be able to articulate that concealment. And indeed they don't, in my view. It is a pity that Drotner says nothing on the status she wants this biographical evidence to have.

There are other minor points: for example, an out-of-keeping suggestion of a rather timeless "persistent silence on sexuality" (p. 238) which hints towards a quite different and in my view less interesting framework for understanding. But I want to end on a celebration of what I see as a quite superb book. The weaknesses I have suggested are, to me, challenges

to do better within the same conceptual framework. This book has mapped a way of understanding such magazines that is more productive than anything I have come across. To go further than Drotner on any of her particular magazines, we will need to find answers to questions posed by her theory: what mental modellings makes it possible for authors from quite outside the childhoods they write for, to embody in these magazines resolutions to typified experiences inside those childhoods? Where should we go for the evidence to support the imputation of such typified experiences to groups? We can't only use the magazines, or it will be logically impossible ever to demarcate succesful from unsuccessful attempts. At the same time, what theory of narrative is subtle enough to reveal the stories' transformations and resolutions which Drotner is hinting at?

None of these important questions could even arise without this groundbreaking book. It is truly marvellous.

Peter Larsen. *Tidens tegn*, Akademisk Forlag, København 1989. 148 s., kr. 148,-.

Anmeldt af: Palle Schantz Lauridsen, adjunkt ved Institut for Film, TV og Kommunikation, Københavns Universitet.

På forsiden af paperbackudgaven af Roland Barthes' "Mythologies" er der et billede af en Citroën. En af de nu klassiske, strømlinede modeller med den hydrauliske affjedring. Billedet er der fordi én af Barthes' samtidskulturanalyser, en af mytologierne, handler om den nye Citroën årgang 1956. Altså om et af de dagligdags objekter der var karakteristisk for sin tid, ligesom mange af de andre fænomener Barthes i øvrigt analyserede. Med sympati, sætsende humor eller nærmest militant moraliseren alt efter objektet. Sympatien gjaldt folkelige manifestationer der som fribrydningen rummede en kropslig substans. Den sætsende humor ramte forskellige ideologiske konstruktioner der som reklamen havde deres ud-

spring i borgerskabets økonomiske og politiske interesser, men som mytologisk udbredtes til de øvrige klasser. Den militante moraliseren dukkede frem, når Barthes fx. brokkede sig over at unge, talentfulde teater- og filmfolk ikke kunne deres Brecht.

Mytologierne og Barthes' teoretiske efterskrift, "Myten i dag", fik kolosal gennemslagskraft. Ingen tvivl om at semiologien, ideologikritikken, pragmatikken og danskundervisningen ville have set anderledes ud, havde det ikke været for Barthes' lille bog. Peter Larsens lille essaysamling "Tidens tegn" vil næppe få samme udbredelse som Barthes' bog havde. Dertil er nyhedsværdien i ideen med at skrive små knivskarpe essays om tidstypiske fænomener for ringe. Og det er synd, for Peter Larsens overfladesensitivitet, kulturanalytiske skarpsind og formelle stilbeherskelse kommer fuldt på højde med forbilledets. Men at det har været Larsens hensigt at føre "Mytologier" ajour er klart, alene fordi bogens første illustration er et fotografi af en bil. Ikke af en 50'er Citroën, men af en 80'er-firhjulstruktet Range Rover der tages op til behandling i en af teksterne. Den handler ikke om hvordan kraften overføres fra motoren til de fire hjul eller hvad motorskribenter ellers fylder spalterne med, men om den betydning de firhjulstrukne afgiver i firserkulturens univers.

Peter Larsen der nu er professor i humanistisk medievidenskab ved Institutt for Massekommunikasjon i Bergen, kan ikke være ukendt for MedieKulturs læsere. De mange artikler han har skrevet i de sidste små tyve år har - sammen med de antologier han har (med-)redigeret - placeret ham som landets vel fremmeste formidler af en historisk orienteret semiotisk teori af den art, der aldrig er til for sin egen skyld. Kombinationen af analyse, teori og kritik har altid sammen med hensynet til læseren stået centralt i Peter Larsens produktion. Således også i "Tidens tegn" der er hans første bog under helt eget navn.

Bogen falder i fire afsnit, "Flader", "Fiktions", "Fragmenter" og "Museer" hvortil kommer et afsluttende kapitel, "Spor", der handler om den semiologiske eller blot: kritiske for-

nuffs betimelighed i en tid hvor "Marketing and Semiotics er blevet et højt prioriteret emne på handels-højskolernes læseplaner verden over" (p. 144), i en tid hvor kritiske videnskabelige indsigter med stor hast indarbejdes i fx. reklamefolkernes tegnproduktioner.

Det er 80'erne der i en sine steder melankolsk og lettere moralsk optik, kommer under Larsens Lup. "Flader" handler om hvordan forretningsverdenen - eller "Businessland" som Larsen kalder den - og dens diskurser dukker frem overalt: i sproget, i den offentlige administration, i bil-valget, i reklamen. "Fiktioner" analyserer, ofte med hybridgenrebegrebet som ledestjerne, TV-avisen, ugebladenes fortællinger, paranoiafilm og den multinationale reklames svaghed for det stereotyp nationale og det fremmede. "Fragmenter" analyserer reklamebilleder og musikvideoer og "Museer" består af en række stikordsagtige London-billeder og af en analyse af en Cindy Lauper-video.

Jeg hverken kan eller vil modsige Peter Larsens analyser og deres hvasse pointer. Tværimod må jeg anbefale "Tidens tegn" til enhver der har undret sig over hvorfor vi "i disse år taler (...) som bankrådgivere, der lige er kommet hjem fra et week-endkursus i gestaltterapi" (p.13); til enhver som véd at udtrykket *kulturpersonlighed* dækker over et væsen der "fejrede sine største triumfer ved de store middagselskaber i mellemkrigstiden" (p. 63) og til enhver, som er af den opfattelse af "den største erogene zone sidder (...) mellem ørerne (p. 103)!

Forordet sætter bogen ind i dén universitære diskurs, de øvrige tekster ellers kun bærer præg af i de let bitre analyser af forbrødringen mellem humanisterne og erhvervslivet og i de im og eksplicitte teoretiske referencer: det er fortrinsvis semiologien, Habermas, mentalitetshistorien og Sloterdijk der trækker det tunge læs, mens Baudrillard spørger i kulissen (uden at Larsen af den grund bruger ordet "postmoderne") og *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog* jævnlige dukker op når Larsen med etymologiske henvisninger laver mentalitetshistoriske analyser af ordenes semantik. I forordet træder Peter Larsen ud af sproget og efterlader sin signatur i

et stykke tekst hvor han kun lader sig omtale i tredje person (*han, forfatteren*). Det er hans tekster der er aktive. De *tolker, lytter, læser og beskæftiger sig med* men overlader i øvrigt initiativet til objekterne, til fænomenerne. Det er dem der har *givet anledning til, dem der taler*. Vi får således billedet af en myldrende fænomenverden der aktivt forfører den skribent der dog er så forsigtig, at han lægger ansvaret for analyserne over på sine tekster. Peter Larsen bliver den hund i modernitetens keglespil der giver halen skylden når der vælter en kegle. Derfor optræder analytikerens i de tolkende tekster kun personificeret i det kollektive *vi*, der uafvendeligt må lægge øren til tidens talende tegn.

Helt forsvinder Larsen dog ikke. I "Spor" stikker han snuden frem og spørger i rollen som kritiker hvad man skal gøre, når man hverken vil være marketingsmedarbejder eller opgave kritikken og tale om noget andet (sådan som Barthes sandt nok gjorde da han så mytologiens og semiotikkens kritiske pointer blive indhentet af "de samfundsmæssige institutioner" som Peter Larsen formulerer det)? Larsen svarer med at fremmane modellen af en illusionsløs kritiker der véd at "afstanden (mellem kritikeren og objektet) bliver mindre og mindre" (p. 147), men som samtidig insisterer på at selv den mindste afstand er kritikkens mulighedsbetingelse (hvis eller dét er et ord der er gangbart i dag!). Teksterne - og dermed deres forfatter - er måske nok illusionsløse men de er også svagt melankolske. Det fremgår fx. af de kun let skjulte begrædelser over humanisternes forbrødring med "businessland", hvis symptomatisk omfangsrige behandling i bogen kunne pege i samme retning. Og når Larsen i vignetten til kapitlet "Metropolis" med T.S. Eliot kalder London en "Unreal city" og fremmaner et forvirret, baudrillardsk rodsammen af et storbyunivers spørger man uvilkårligt sig selv, hvad det er for en "real city" der ligger oversvømmet på bunden af det larsenske forestillingshav. Det forekommer mig derfor at Peter Larsen alle sine besværgelser til trods taler fra et udsigtspunkt i et svundet Atlantis, når han afslutningsvis manende skriver: "Det kan