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ABSTRACT

Noting that one of the greatest criticisms of television is the lack of television criticism itself, this paper proposes a multidimensional approach to the subject, based on current forms of criticism and theory. The 10 forms of criticism or theory discussed in the paper are (1) rhetorical criticism, (2) dramatic criticism, (3) literary criticism, (4) cinematic criticism, (5) content analysis, (6) myth, (7) linguistics, (8) semiotics, (9) phenomenalism, and (10) phenomenology. Each discussion reviews the background of the criticism or theory form and its specific applications to television. (FL)

Television Criticism: A Deca-Approach

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Running head: Television Criticism

Dedication

In memory of Brian L. Lindberg, whose sense of humor, courage, and humility inspired us all.

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Abstract

In recent years much has been written about the need for an approach to television criticism. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide the reader with a varied and multi-dimensional approach to television criticism. To accomplish this goal this paper presents a deca-approach to television criticism. The approaches are: rhetorical criticism, dramatic criticism, literary criticism, cinematic criticism, content analysis as criticism, myth as criticism, linguistics as criticism, semiotics as criticism, phenomenalism as criticism, and phenomenology as criticism. These approaches are not intended to be inclusive but, instead, to mark an important beginning. Each of the critical methods can be viewed as vertical or horizontal, depending on whether or not the scholar applies these forms to criticism or methodology.

Television Criticism: A Deca-Approach

Introduction

Perhaps one of the greatest criticisms of television is the lack of television criticism itself. A few contemporary scholars have conducted research concerning the theory of the application of criticism to television, namely, Horace Newcomb, Bruce Gronbeck, and James W. Chesebro. Ironically, none of these scholars hails from the discipline of mass communication, yet each of them presents a viable critical approach in the analysis and synthesis of television aestheticism. Modern scholars suggest a multiple approach to television criticism. This idea, however, is not new. Richard Dyer MacCann, in his book A Montage of Theories, views film from many different vantage points: art, sculpture, literature, architecture, poetry, novel, theatre, etc. (1966). Therefore, I feel that my idea of a deca-approach to television criticism is really based on the past work of scholars and their unique approaches to television criticism.

The deca-approach to television criticism differs both quantitatively and qualitatively. First, more approaches are entertained; secondly, some newer forms of criticism are introduced; thus, the scholar is armed with a varied and multi-dimensional critical methodology that can be vertical

or horizontal, depending on whether or not (s)he applies these forms to criticism or methodology. The suggested approaches to television criticism are: rhetorical criticism, dramatic criticism, literary criticism, cinematic criticism, content analysis as criticism, myth as criticism, linguistics as criticism, semiotics as criticism, phenomenalism as criticism, and phenomenology as criticism.

The Deca-Approach

Rhetorical Criticism

Scholars in English and Speech Communication continue the age-old argument of which came first, English or Speech. Where television is concerned it matters not, because television is an eclectic art form. Students of rhetoric can point to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other earlier and later Greek scholars who set the first criteria for effective speaking and for the man speaking well. Rhetoricians since the Renaissance Period rediscovered the classics and added new ideas about public speaking as it related to their society. Of course, rhetoric during the Middle Ages differed considerably from rhetoric as we know it today. To begin with, rhetoric embodied good writing, as well as good speaking. In the succeeding centuries, rhetoric split into two camps as they remain today: written

rhetoric versus spoken rhetoric. Although the focus of each rhetoric has become specialized, many parallels can be drawn between the unique manner in which both English and speech communication interpret and apply rhetoric. For instance, whether we are speaking of an essay or a speech, we advise our students to tell us what they are going to tell us, tell us, and then tell us what they told us: introduction, body, and conclusion.

The emphasis in general English and Speech is to teach correct writing and speaking skills. A myriad of books have been written over grammar, syntax, and principles of speech, and most school curricula require that these courses be offered in one or more disciplines. Television, a Twentieth Century phenomenon, utilizes concepts of organization in much the same way they are found in English and Speech. Practically every television program, be it news, documentary, motion picture for televison, situation comedy, children's program, game show, talk show, variety show, sport's event, and other genres, has a beginning, body, and a conclusion. Other television program types exist that require a sequel, i. e., soap operas, novels for television (Roots), and serials.

(Application)

It becomes the task of the television critic to recognize rhetorical elements that exist simultaneously in the "new" art form of televison. Perhaps two of the most important terms associated with rhetoric that can be applied to television are "extrinsic" and "intrinsic". According to Plato, "extrinsic" refers to those elements that cause an observer to appreciate a work of art because of its utility; conversely, according to Aristotle, "intrinsic" refers to those elements that cause an observer to appreciate a work of art on its own merit. That television subscribes to both philosophies is apparent. Television becomes extrinsic when it teaches or informs; it becomes intrinsic when it entertains; and it becomes extrinsic and intrinsic when it persuades. Television, however, has a spill-over effect, content-wise, that transcends organization and genre, and can initially be viewed as extrinsic and/or intrinsic, but rhetoric by itself is insufficient to comment on the vast panaorama of this audio-visual media; therefore, additional forms of criticism in conjunction with rhetoric must be utilized if the latter is to become meaningful.

Dramatic Criticism

Drama is distinct from rhetoric insofar as it accentuates dialogue over prose. Like rhetoric, drama owes its antecedent to the Greeks; Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes have laid in part the foundations for comedy and tragedy as dramatic forms. Critical approaches to rhetoric and drama differ considerably. In rhetoric the speaker, the audience, and the occasion are paramount, but drama is more representational as it substitutes actor for speaker, while it maintains audience and occasion. Perhaps the single, most important element that separates classical drama from classical rhetoric is "plot". Drama appears to be more longitudinal as it seeks to capture life. Rhetoric seems to be more concerned with the moment, the here and now. Each can be historically researched. Both are concerned with man as communicative beings. Thus, rhetoric and drama view man communicating as (s)he passes through a certain time-frame or life. Drama is, after all, "life" and life is "conflict"; life does not exist without conflict and drama does not exist without life: they are interrelated. Although, for convenience sake, we discuss "plot" and "conflict" as separate entities, they really cannot be separated. They are one and the same. In order

for something to happen, a cause and effect relationship must exist. An enzyme or catalyst must effectuate change. This change becomes plot. Change, in turn, is instigated by conflict.

Traditional dramatic criticism can be enumerated as: (1)inciting incident, (2)point of attack, (3)exposition, (4)rising and falling action, (5)major conflict, (6)minor or sub-conflicts, (7)climax, (8) anti-climax, (9)resolution, and (10)denouement, or conclusion. Variations to the aforementioned and more elaborate forms are in vogue today (Note 1, Chesebro).

(Application)

Drama's relationship to television is evident. The many dramatic programs viewed on television can benefit from dramatic criticism, e. g., films for television, soap operas, documentaries, and, of course, theatre for television. When viewing a soap opera, the dramatic critic must ask what is the inciting incident; in soap operas, however, it is more appropriate to say inciting incidents because of the simultaneous dramatic conflicts manifested in previous episodes. The point of attack signifies where the drama actually begins, what the viewer sees first as the drama unfolds. The exposition is the preliminary information

necessary for the viewer to comprehend the story line. The rising and falling action refers to the events or actions that become the substance of dramatic conflict. This tugging and pulling by protagonist and antagonist eventuates in success by the forces of good, triumphant over evil, or vice versa. The major conflict is the most salient, unresolved problem that demands resolution. Minor or sub-conflicts exist as secondary and tertiary external features and off-shoots of the major conflicts. The climax occurs when one force gains domination over the other. In tragedies, quite often the hero suffers a purgation before he ultimately triumphs over his flaw, e. g., Samson and Delilah.[1] In comedies, the main character usually does not possess a flaw and consequently is allowed to triumph without purgation, e. g., I Love Lucy.[2] The anti-climax is not necessary for every drama; nevertheless, when it occurs it can be as powerful as the climax itself. Like the climax, the anti-climax happens as a consequence to the major conflict, but frequently independent of it as one force seeks to dominate the other. The resolution is the solution to all the problems up to that point. The denouement is sometimes seen as the resolution. When no resolution exists, the denouement simply concludes the drama. As mentioned earlier,

new forms of dramatic criticism have emerged that may act as more precise instruments in critiquing drama. But classical dramatic criticism is still a viable manner by which the scholar can critique television.

Literary Criticism

Literary criticism differs significantly from dramatic criticism. In many respects the dramatic critic has a decided advantage over the literary critic because the forms, e. g., exposition, plot, conflict, are more salient. Two of the major elements found in literature are prose and poetry. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to discern where prose ends and poetry begins. Prose is the eloquent weaving of statements that collectively comprise a greater statement. Not all language and statements loosely fitted together can be defined as prose. The works of Balzac, Cervantes, Milton, Dryden, and Hemingway exemplify extended refinement. Poetry differs from prose in its rhythmic nature. Tribes in antiquity celebrated the hunt, wars, narvest and other social events in dance and poetic song. Evidence of this exists in the dance and songs of contemporary primitive man.

Prose and poetry merge when the story line is introduced. Nearly everyone is familiar with the Chancon de

Roland and Cancion de mio Cid; both are examples of the earliest French and Spanish ballads. According to Thrall, Hibbard and Holman (1960: 42), a ballad is "a form of verse adapted for singing or recitation and primarily characterized by its presentation in a simple narrative form of a dramatic or exciting episode." An episode, dramatic or ordinary, is a story--usually concerning someone significant. A story has point of view. Thus, the television critic might consider the intertwining of prose, poetry, ballad, story, and point of view in critiquing television programming that lends itself to this type of scrutiny.

Films may be labeled prosaic or poetic. Point of view, however, "describes the way in which the reader is presented with materials of the story, or viewed from another angle, the vantage point from which the author presents the actions of the story" (p. 371). In this sense, point of view can be found in drama as well as prose and poetry: (1)a story (2)told in action (3)by actors who impersonate the characters of the story (p. 150). Terms incorporated by point of view are: omniscient, first-person narrator, naive or disingenuous narrator, third person, interior monologue, panoramic, scenic, and self-

effacing author (p. 371).

(Application)

The literary critic critiquing the novel for television can use point of view to define the author's/writer's presentation of the story. Orson Welles' Citizen Kane (Johnson, 1974: 123) utilizes omniscient camera. The camera becomes an all-knowing Maker transcending time, place, and character as it moves freely in order to comment at will (Thrall et al, 1960: 371). However, when a character within the story discusses the story as (s)he experienced it, then (s)he is called a first-person narrator; if the character does not comprehend what (s)he says, then (s)he is called a naive or disingenuous narrator; third person refers to a single character who tells the story; the author/writer may restrict the materials presented to the interior responses of the character relating the story: this point of view is called the interior monologue; when the author/writer presents the story as a series of episodes in summary form, (s)he is using a panoramic point of view; when no authorial comment is evident and where the actions and conversations are presented in detail and with objectivity, the point of view is scenic; and, if the author does not speak in his/her own person and is absent from

the scenes (s)he presents, (s)he is a self-effacing author (p. 371).

In contemporary television many novels and similar programming that utilizes prose and poetry can be viewed and scrutinized by applying point of view. Again, literary criticism juxtaposed to television, as with previously metioned critical forms/methods, can benefit by allying itself with additional critical forms/methods.

Cinematic Criticism

Two of the foremost film aestheticians are Sergei M. Eisenstein and Andre Bazin. The Russian, Eisenstein, lays his theoretical framework in two books: Film Sense and Film Form. The Frenchman, Bazin, sets his theoretical principles in two books: What is Cinema? Vol. I and What is Cinema? Vol II.

Eisenstein, drama director turned filmmaker, says montage is the basis of all filmmaking. Montage can be enumerated as: (1)metric, (2)rhythmic, (3)tonal, (4)over-tonal, and (5)intellectual (Eisenstein, 1949: 72-83). Eisenstein relates that metric consists of the absolute length of the pieces that comprise the entire film. It should be noted immediately that Eisenstein draws an almost exact corollary with music. Music utilizes metric as a

form of measurement. Music analysis, then, becomes a convenient way by which the reader can understand Eisenteinian conceptualization of film. Rhythmic, as in music, becomes the action within the frame--all the variations of rhythm a piece may suggest. In music, rhythm can be determined as timing: e.g., 2/4, 3/8, 3/4, 6/8, 4/4, 9/8; in dance, rhythm may be identified as being waltz, foxtrot, rhumba, tango, samba, etc. Thus, time in a film has two values for Eisenstein: its metric value and its rhythmic value. Or, stated another way, "real" time versus "perceived-psychological" time. Tonal refers to the dominant-chord that strikes the viewer as (s)he interacts with the film. The dominant-chord impinges on our emotional sensibility and this emotional chord moves us toward a fuller realization of the filmmaker's intentions. Overtonal is closely related to tonal. All of the subtle nuances suggested in the piece evoke a realization of the full impact of the dominant chord. In Louis Buñuel's Los Olvidados, juvenile delinquents physically mistreat senior citizens and the rest of society seems unable to deal effectively with this teenage problem (Johnson, 1974: 112). The problem is the dominant-chord and society's inertia is the nuance: tonal and over-tonal. Intellectual

montage is the most difficult of Eisensteinian thought to comprehend. For this writer, intellectual montage equates abstraction, the highest level of man's creative ability. Eisenstein's montage process is sequential, beginning with metric and culminating with intellectual. Intellectual montage, moreover, is iconic; iconicism has a visual relationship to the referent because it very closely resembles the "thing" it stands for. Icons, unlike symbols, are not arbitrary or capricious. Icons and symbols, as well as signals, are signs (See section on semiotics). In 2001: A Space Odyssey a huge bone whirling though space becomes a spaceship. For primitive man, the bone can be viewed as an instrument and weapon; for modern man, the spaceship can be viewed in the same manner: intellectual montage.

The most formidable critic after Sergei M. Eisenstein is Andre Bazin. Although he himself never made any films, he became the spokesman for the Italian neo-realism school that is the progenitor of today's cinema verite. Bazin is the complete antithesis to Eisenstein--diametrically opposed. Where Eisenstein views film as a "plastic" art form, Bazin views film as "reality". In his now famous essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", Bazin says

that Picasso is now the mythical central figure who freed art from the "resemblance complex": the modern painter abandons traditional art so that today the masses identify resemblance with photography and the kind of painting that is related to photography. Bazin has a great deal to say on how the cinematographer shoots a scene. Bazin believes that the filmmaker actually "records", rather than "shoots", a film, i.e., "The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind" (Bazin, 1971: 13). Bazin says "In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction" (pp. 13-14). Bazin succinctly states ". . . for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption" (p. 14). He summarizes by saying "Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image. Hence photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality

of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact" (pp. 15-16). From what has been said, the filmmaker has been presented with a dichotomy.

(Application)

What appears to be a dichotomy is, in reality, two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the filmmaker may choose Eisenstein, Bazin, or both to accomplish his/her filmmaking goals. Depending on the filmmaker's philosophy (s)he may view film as being more "plastic" than "reality", or vice versa. The critic realizing the dichotomous nature of film makes allowances for the myriad possibilities that lie between these respective polarities. Generally speaking, we have experienced in our lifetime the Hollywood film and the documentary film as made for television. It might be noted that the film may not be a film, at all, but a videotape. In this case, the viewer experiences a different visual sensitivity because of the unique properties germane to film and videotape, respectively. Finally, the critic, armed with Eisensteinian and Bazinian theoretical principles of filmmaking, can approach a film or videotape program that bears a strong resemblance to the Hollywood/documentary tradition and not doubt his/her criticism.

Content Analysis as Criticism

When researchers speak of content analysis, they usually are referring to quantitative and qualitative factors. By quantitative they mean enumeration of anything capable of being enumerated. Quite often statistics are employed, particularly if the design is complex or sophisticated. Besides quantitative factors the analysts must consider qualitative factors. By qualitative they mean kind or type, genre or classification. Biologists, for example, use a hierarchy that enables them to compare and contrast similarities and differences from a single "thing": a rose, to larger "things", flowers. Anthropologists can compare a tribe to a race, or they may wish to contrast the two. After comparing and contrasting any two "things", a relationship can be drawn; rules can be stated; hypotheses/predictions can be made; experiments can be conducted; and, ultimately, models can be created (Boston, 1972). But first, the "thing" must be identified in much the same way environmentalists tag migratory animals to make certain they have not confused the subject. Throughout all of the aforementioned, the analyst must be sure the sample has not been contaminated so that inter-coder reliability is not compromised. Reliability is critical--without it, the

entire study fails.

As human beings, today, we are subjected to a variety of government identifications for purposes of taxation (social security number), traveling abroad (passport numbers), voting (voter registration numbers), etc. (If we each examine our driver's license, we find that the most important number on the license is not the license number at all, but the government number that identifies us as a number!) Just as numbers are employed by government statisticians, we too can utilize the quantitative side of content analysis to critique television. Statistics need not be used. Simple data can be just as effective, if what we seek is contained and does not overwhelm.

(Application)

Before the television program begins, the analyst should research the program to determine what (s)he is specifically seeking, what questions need to be answered, and what parameters will be used to maintain limits. (One cannot hope to do everything, even in an elaborate study.) Content analysis as applied to television criticism may require several people to observe specific actions, e. g., the number of times a character appears on the screen. If time or duration is being recorded, then a stopwatch is

needed. With regard to qualitative factors, we may wish to denote who is viewed as the most prestigious character by listing what we consider more important: money, position, career, ability, appearance, etc. Although we are attempting to be objective, we cannot escape subjectivity; the fact that we select "this" over "that" and emphasize "this" over "that" indicates we are being subjective. Documentary film/video suffers the same consequences. What matters is that the analyst tell the reader-viewer exactly what (s)he did and why (s)he did it. In this fashion, the reader-viewer can draw his/her own conclusions.

Myth as Criticism

Until a few years ago, myth was considered as something false. Many psychologists today, however, find that the study of myth as an investigative tool is extremely helpful in predicting human behavior. Joseph Campbell, borrowing from psychologist Carl Jung, has written extensively concerning myth's relationship to man and his historical development (Note 2).

According to Campbell, myth has four functions: metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological (Keen, 1971: 35). Metaphysical is divided into two categories, ontology and cosmology. The former corresponds to

the reality behind existence and the latter pertains to the universe as an orderly system. The sociological and psychological components refer to the group and the individual within the group. In discussing the metaphysical function, Campbell relates that myths have helped man find his/ner way in the dark by giving him/her something to believe in, e. g., "The Apostles' Creed" (p. 35). We speak of "Father Sky" and "Mother Earth" and this, in part, explains the cosmological function. The union of sky and earth. Myths have aided society by providing man with "rites of passage". Girls grow up to become women and boys grow up to become men. This sociological function is demonstrated today in a variety of ways, e. g., a college degree, a debutante ball, a bar mitzvah, an Eagle Scout award, a Miss America title, etc. Man strives for recognition, especially if the society in which he lives is competitive. Myth rewards man by bestowing a degree, title or some outward manifestation suggesting achievement. Without this recognition, we lack the proper armor to defend ourselves against the hostile forces of man and nature. Recognition tells us that we can succeed because we have succeeded.

The last function and possibly the most important is

the psychological function. This function provides us with a "marked pathway." Traditionally, the Arthurian Knights met at a round table to discuss their past, present, amd future exploits. Campbell states that to be a knight one had to enter the deepest and darkest part of the forest; he had to go where no man had gone before (p. 89). By accomplishing this feat, the knight created a "marked pathway" for others to follow. Today, astronauts and cosmonauts and a host of men and women in various professions risk their lives because they are dedicated to the highest principles of life: they are providing us with a "marked pathway". Again, Campbell borrows heavily from Jungian psychology. Jung's Mandala Theory can be traced to Oriental metaphysics. Whether or not we subscribe to Jungian metaphysics and his idea concerning a "collective unconscious", we can relate to the "known" and the "unknown". When we become the first member of our family to travel to a foreign place, we venture into the dark side of the forest. When we return from our quest, we emerge triumphant because we have survived,.

(Application)

Television provides us with many examples that directly illustrate the metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and

psychological functions. Programs like Fantasy Island and Loveboat present us with images of nature. Nature, in turn, creates a union of divergent, natural elements. For example, colorful birds, lagoons, wildflowers, waterfalls, and other elements combine with palm trees and exotic plants to create a tropical island. In the same fashion, a ship, boarded by passengers, unites with water to make a pleasure cruise possible.

Televison also provides us with many examples of "rites of passage". Any time we see a character receiving some type of recognition, we can analyze this activity as a sociological function. A war film may show a young officer being decorated for his valor. During the Olympic Games a young girl receives the Gold Medal for her performance on the high dive.

Television, finally, demonstrates the psychological function when television's heroes, through their actions, teach us how to be better than we are and how to survive our own human frailties. Captain Kirk, the commander of the Enterprise in Star Trek, subjects himself to pain and punishment at the hands of aliens to protect his crew. His crew members admire him because of his noble character and they are only too willing to protect their captain.

Many examples of lesser heroism are found in a variety of television programs that demonstrate a genuine caring of one human being for another.

Linguistics as Criticism

Linguistics is now more than a century old. As an academic area it has been the domain of English and foreign language, speech communication, speech pathology and audiology, and theatre arts. One of the greatest contributions of linguistics is the identification of a one-to-one relationship between a sound and its symbol. To demonstrate this point, linguistics at its foundation uses phonemes, e. g., "i" equals "e" (i=e) so that the word "he" is spelled h-i; phonemes come together to formulate morphemes (as a unit); morphemes combine to formulate syllables; syllables unite to formulate words; and words are placed in a systematic order to formulate phrases. At this level we can examine the syntax or structure of any language.

Although some linguists place syntax and grammar at the same level, in actuality grammar is one step above syntax, because the grammar of a particular language represents the totality of the language. At this level it becomes meaningful to speak of sentences as complete

ideas that express the will of individuals, or of people. From grammar a lexical develops. The lexical is the vocabulary, words, and morphemes of a language. In speech communication the student is taught that there is no meaning in words; people have meaning. However, for convenience sake, we say that the meaning of "such-and-such" is "this". In brief, words are symbols that point to a referent that stand in place of the "thing" itself.

Beyond the lexical are the psycho-sociological and the philosophical levels. Each of us over time and space has developed our own psychology of speech; i. e., no one can speak exactly the same way we speak. In a real sense, our language cannot be separated from who we are. Even when an artist "cuts a record", we are faced with the examination of a hallucination, in much the same way a photograph is a hallucination of the object photographed. Phenomena and hallucinations exist and therefore can be considered part of reality. A hologram is another example of a hallucination that is observable and, therefore, can be considered part of reality. We can examine, however, a person's language in his/her absence. Many of the statements made about the psychology of language can be made of the sociology of language. People who have lived in

Boston and can trace their ancestry to its founding fathers, as a collective, will use and make the English language uniquely their own. In this sense, linguists are apt to use the word "isogloss". An isogloss, more specifically, might be the Amish, the Mennonites, or Quakers who have retained the traditional language of their forefathers, with little or no change.

Ultimately, we arrive at the philosophical level. Philosophy is the highest level to which man can aspire. At this level a philosophy of an individual, tribe, nation, race, or corporation is formulated. Sometimes nations will follow the philosophy of a specific writer; e. g., China and the Soviet Union are considered Marxists because they endorse the philosophy of Karl Marx. The purpose of philosophy is to make available knowledge to the uninitiated.

(Application)

As we interact with televison, we are deluged with a plethora of language. Cable Television has made many channels available to people throughout the world, particularly in the U. S. Today, we receive programming via satellite from remote areas. Sometimes the language is not English and the customs of the speakers differ considerably from

our own. Television teaches. Teachers are foolish when they negate the influence and real power of television. Television speaks. Linguistics, as applied to television criticism, must be used to analyze the language of television. The critic, who chooses a linguistic approach to television criticism, has both a formidable challenge and a tremendous responsibility. To understand language we must be able to "decode" the "encoded" messages. Our task becomes difficult, if not impossible, due to our limited perspective. Just as a person cannot see everything in the room no matter where (s)he stands, so, too, we as Americans cannot perceive the entire world from our uniquely American position. The critic is advised to work at all levels of linguistics vís-a-vís television so that his/her audience can be apprised of the multi-faceted linguistic dimensions of this panoramic medium--television.

Semiotics as Criticism

Practically speaking, the science of semiotics is less than a hundred years old. Some names associated with the evolution of this science are: Charles Morris, Jean Mitry, Christian Metz, Pier Paulo Pasolini, Gianfranco Bettetini, et al. Semiology is the study of the sciencc of signs and their meanings. Moreover, semiotics

(semiology) is to the visual sense what linguistics is to the aural sense. Where linguistics has been able to codify a hierarchy from phoneme to the sentence and beyond, the replication of this codification for semiotics has become a much slower process. In fact, many film aestheticians would argue that there can never be a film language of the conventional sort, because of the multifarious nature of film; the implications of a single "shot" seem infinite. Nevertheless, semioticians have attempted to formulate a codification and hierarchy for the visual sense; they are also concerned with a second semiological dimension in which significant objects are opposed by virtue of conjunctive and disjunctive relations: these two dimensions are described as syntagmatic and paradigmatic, respectively. Not all semioticians are in accord with the possibility of these two dimensions as totally encompassing filmic language, if it indeed exists at all. Bettetini maintains, "On the level of the fundamental codifications and on the level of narrative structures, it is perhaps possible to risk establishing analogical relationships (with all the dangers that this involves) which are more effective and useful than they would be in the ambit of elementary signs" (1973: 71). Or, stated simply, a need exists to

continue the study of semiotics, because of what it promises.

In discussing syntagms, Umberto Eco speaks of tertiary articulation of cinematographic language due to the fact that the technical instrument reproduces a reality that is a movement. He elaborates, "In the code that would lie behind every film one could thus single out the figurae (a restricted number of units) which would combine to form signs (without being a part of their signified), the signs which would combine to form syntagms, and finally elements X which would arise from the combination of signs that would not form a part of their signified" (Bettetini, 1973: 66-67). Here, the signifier is that which signifies or points to a particular idea, concept, or thing. The signified is the thing itself, that which is signified, or in linguistic terminology, the referent. A referent, or the signified, is critical in the study of linguistics and semiotics, respectively: they both lock symbol and sign to reality. For example, at the phoneme level of linguistics no lockage exists: they "do not have an independent signified of their own" (p. 39). The same might be said of the elements that make up the image, e. g., shot, angle, lighting, etc. Bettetini does not expound on conjunctive

and disjunctive vís-a-vís semiotics, except to say the concern is with objects in opposition. This writer is confident that semiotics will continue to evolve as a science and, like linguistics, contribute significantly to the understanding of the visual arts as they relate to life.

(Application)

Initially, the critic who employs semiotics as a tool to critique television must take into account the differences between television and film. Just as many similarities exist, so, too, do many differences exist. There is a similarity of aspect ratio and a two-dimensional surface. Also, there is a similarity in the striking manner in which reality is reproduced for both media. The content for both, of course, can be the same, although different artistic direction may be utilized for each. Unless we are concerned about a film made especially for television, the substance might vary considerably; e. g., it is unlikely that we will view a game show made for film. In other words, television carries programming that is unique to television. Films, conversely, are apt to be more involved and of longer duration from a technical and production point of view.

Differences between television and film are varied

and include such elements as film (silver nitrate base) versus videotape (electro-magnetic base). Because film contains frames that can be seen naturally, without a machine, whereas videotape requires a monitor, each differs in the way its projected image reproduction impinges on the retina via the optic nerve to the brain. Normally speaking, film is projected onto a much larger screen. Film is usually viewed by a much larger audience in a darkened theatre or similar public setting. Most movies normally run ninety minutes; television video programs are of varying lengths. For this writer the temporal relationship between film and videotape are distinctly non-aligned; i. e., film is past tense while videotape is present tense. Furthermore, television is easier to see on-the-run: the entire videotape recorder revolution has made television viewing very convenient.

How does all this relate to critiquing television using semiotics? Whether film or videotape, the "language of cinema" is the same. Bettetini, in schema form, has drawn a relationship between linguistics (verbal) and semiotics (non-verbal) systems. As stated previously, he lists technical elements that make up the image: shot, lighting, angle, etc. He continues by defining cinemes (or iconemes)

as having a unitary and almost independent signified of their own and expressing an intention. At this level, cinemes correspond to phrases in a sentence whereas the former correspond to phonemes. The camera, he elaborates, "breaks down the cinemorphs into a large number of discrete units that cannot yet signify anything by themselves, and that have a differential value with respect to other discrete units" (p. 67). The reference here is the indiviudal cinematic frame or icon. The code is as follows: the figurae or frames (a restricted number of units) combine to form signs (without being a part of their signified), the signs produce in combination syntagms that continue to add up ad infinitum.

How does a critic employ an unfinished science, like semiotics, to cinematic and television art? Bettetini writes that we should begin at the technical-grammatical elements of the film.[3] One, however, need not be a film theorist before jumping into the waters. When the critic begins by analyzing all of the properties and elements within the figurae (frames), (s)he understands that a second and tertiary level is evident in all films. Just concentrating on the lighting alone of a specific film can tell us a great deal about the film and its director;

an analysis of camera angles eventuates as directorial style; an examination of clothing in a western film may suggest whether or not the protagonist is good or evil; a determination of the style of furniture presented within the frame may lead to signs that later point to a signification, or signified. Third World cultures and developing nations, it seems, are more concerned with the second and tertiary levels of film. Certain American films, e. g., Poltergeist, E. T., Ordinary People, convey an opulence more than story line or plot. Perhaps these serious considerations should move us to examine what our film and videotape is really communicating to the rest of the world.

Phenomenalism and Phenomenology as Criticism

Phenomenalism and phenomenology may both be characterized as naturalistic inquiry. Conceptualization of phenomenalism and phenomenology varies greatly as a method of research. Important names associated with phenomenalism and phenomenology are Michael Q. Patton, Egon G. Guba, Paul F. Colaizzi, and Rolf von Eckartsberg. Phenomenal study is associated with Patton and Guba and phenomenological study is associated with Colaizzi and Von Eckartsberg. Phenomenal study, stated simply, is descriptive, includes

many objects as subjects of observation, and uses empirical data but without the researcher's reflection (Colaizzi, 1973: 29-30). Phenomenological study is similar to phenomenal study with the exception that phenomenological study utilizes the investigator's reflection, but it may involve individual reflection without empirical data.

In phenomenal study, the researcher becomes an instrument for an observational inquiry, while at the same time bracketing, guarding against biases. Guba calls for a neutrality of inquiry, putting objectivity or subjectivity aside (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 128-52). Patton, however, says the researcher is a qualitative factor when (s)he moves closer to the object of observation, as opposed to a quantitative factor when the researcher is detached (Patton, 1980: 131-2); in this sense, "closer" means subjective or internal, and "detached" means objective or external. Moreover, bracketing, the removal of biases, assists the researcher in his/her attempt to discover the essence of experience.

In phenomenological study, a co-constituted world exists where no split between the subject and the object is possible; phenomenal study, conversely, splits the

interactive world by placing subject and object in separate hemispheres. Von Eckartsberg says "we know from personal experience and from studies in the social psychology of the experiment that we have a much more complicated inter-human situation in a psychological laboratory experiment than hitherto described or acknowledged" (1971: 70). From this we may deduce that naturalistic inquiry maintains objectivity that goes beyond the type associated with traditional scientific laboratory experimentation and is, therefore, appropriate for existential-experiential investigation.

Phenomenal and phenomenological studies gather data by (1)listing detailed descriptions of situations, people and their behavior; (2)direct quotations from people about their experiences and attitudes; and (3)excerpts from recorded histories (Patton, 1980: 28).

In phenomenal study the researcher collects descriptive data from many subjects (does not include self as subject); whereas, the individual phenomenological reflection (IPR) researcher acquires data from him/herself: data is purely reflective. Empirical phenomenological reflection (EPR) involves the researcher's reflection on "implicit" dimensions of organized data or "explicit" empirical data

(Colaizzi, 1973: 33). (Phenomenal study organizes empirical data with no definitive results.) Also, phenomenological reflection uses two types of subject matter descriptions; they are: fundamental descriptions (FD) or the essence of a phenomenon as it is experienced and fundamental structure (FS) as the essence of an experiential phenomenon as it is revealed by explication (p. 33).

Phenomenological study utilizes a three-step process of description, reduction (definition), and interpretation to explicate the data. Phenomenal study may or may not employ the three-step process. Phenomenalism (phenomenal), as a process, moves from a generalized-universal to a particular; conversely, phenomenology (phenomenological) yields a higher order abstraction as a universal (Parcells, 1983: 16).

(Application)

Televison criticism lends itself extremely well to both phenomenalism and phenomenology. In phenomenalism, the television critic may observe a group watching television. After the viewing, the critic may write a detailed description of the group's experience of watching television; in addition, (s)he may interview the various viewers to

determine their specific reactions to the television program. Ultimately, the three-step process may be used.

The critic may choose phenomenology over phenomenalism, not because it is superior, but, rather, because it presents a different perspective. In phenomenology, the critic steps out of the world to view him/herself as an instrument and/or observer: in this circumstance (s)he is schematically interlocked with the object (s)he is observing insofar as they become a co-constituted world. From this elevated perspective, (s)he becomes acutely aware of his/her own awareness. Moreover, (s)he is concerned with his/her own reactions to the world of events (s)he experiences. Here the critic comes to realize the validity of using him/herself as an instrument of observation. The reflective process assists the critic in coming to terms with the event (s)he has experienced.

In conclusion, the phenomenal critic must take care to bracket (remove his biases) so that his impartiality yields correct information. The phenomenological critic depends equally on his/her powers of concentration but from a different vantage point; (s)he employs reflection concentrating on his/her own experience in a co-constituted world. Phenomenalism and phenomenology are closely

associated with the social science of psychology. Many parallels can be drawn between the two seemingly different methodologies just as psychology has been able to contribute significantly to our understanding of human behavior; so, too, will phenomenalism and phenomenology, as applied to television criticism, contribute significantly to our understanding of human behavior via television.

Summation

This paper has presented a deca-approach to television criticism. The suggested approaches to television criticism are: rhetorical criticism, dramatic criticism, literary criticism, cinematic criticism, content analysis as criticism, myth as criticism, linguistics as criticism, semiotics as criticism, phenomenalism as criticism, and phenomenology as criticism. An attempt has been made to demonstrate how each of these forms of criticism and/or theories and/or methodologies might be used to critiquing television art. Rhetorical criticism provides us with "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" elements; dramatic criticism renders a schema beginning with inciting incident and culminating with denouement; literary criticism conveys point of view; cinematic criticism offers Eisensteinian and Bazinian theories as represented in fiction and non-fiction films;

content analysis as criticism can be quantitative or qualitative; myth as criticism is metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological; linguistics as criticism, begins with a phoneme and moves to the sentence and beyond; semiotics as criticism begins with the figurae and ends with the syntagm; phenomenalism as criticism affords subject to object relationships with bracketing; and phenomenology as criticism provides subject to subject-object relationships with reflection; as such, each of the aforementioned is uniquely suited to television criticism. The potential for combining two or more of the above forms of criticism also exists. Finally, the television critic will find that when working with a combination of critical applications, as presented in this paper, the possibilities seem infinite.

Conclusion

Before a television critic begins to work (s)he must ask him/herself "What is it that I wish to accomplish?" The ten approaches to television criticism presented in this paper are not intended to be inclusive, but incorporate the more popular and most recent forms of criticism and theory. Obviously, a critic, like a farmer or a craftsman, must be familiar with the tools of his/her trade. The more

the critic-scholar familiarizes him/herself with the style(s) of criticism, the more ept (s)he will be at applying his/her skills. That the need for better and more extensive television criticism exists and has been too long in coming is a moot point. My advice is to begin. Let the information presented in this paper signal a beginning. To borrow a popular cliche: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

Reference Notes

1. Chesebro, J. W. Television: The Criticial View. (H. Newcomb, Ed.) New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. In types of communication dramas, Chesebro lists five kinds of communication systems: Ironic, Mimetic, Leader-centered, Romantic, and Mythical.
2. Keen, S. Man and myth: A conversation with Joseph Campbell. Psychology Today, July 1971, PP. 36-39 & 86-95. In the interview, the notion of myth is treated very specifically, however, Campbell does not discuss the ontological side of metaphysics.

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Endnotes

[1]As depicted in the Holy Bible, the story of Samson provides us with an excellent example of tragedy. Because he is unable to keep secret the source of his strength, he suffers the consequences of his sin. God permits him to regain his strength and he, ultimately, triumphs over his enemies.

[2]The character of Lucy Ricardo was not created in the classical sense: she possesses no great flaw and consequently is able to forego serious punishment. This factor is the most important element that separates comedy from tragedy.

[3]Bettetini prefers we continue to work on the linguistic or symbolic elements that, in part, comprise film language, as opposed to icon elements that create a different code or language of film.

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