

example, when the narrator is faced with an unwanted response from a listener or when they desire to preserve a particular form of identity. On the other hand, as Gergen points out, some stories achieve such a settled form that the tellers can no longer revise them. Chandler *et al.*, however, tackle the intriguing question of whether a sense of core personal identity can be retained in the face of evidence for apparent change.

The book fulfils its purpose admirably. A variety of forms of narrative analysis are presented and their utility demonstrated. Many readers will be stimulated to experiment with narrative analysis themselves. However, the detail of the case studies tends to be overwhelming, unless one is interested in a particular psychological or sociological field. Skipping is advised, using the introduction and the admirable summaries at the beginning of each section. I would have welcomed a typology of forms of narrative analysis near the beginning of the book, instead of discovering it towards the end in the contribution by Chandler *et al.* Something like Solis's guidelines for the novice analyst could also have been provided earlier, perhaps in an identified sub-section. The general sections of these two chapters are perhaps the place to start for those who think narrative analysis might be useful to their research but have no experience with it.

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NOT WHOLLY SUCCESSFUL IN DEALING WITH THE AESTHETIC

The sociology of art: a reader. Jeremy Tanner, editor, 2003. London: Routledge: ISBN 0415308836, pbk, 265 pp., £20.99.

This book starts with an introduction that outlines the emergence, in the early nineteenth century, of sociology and of art history as specialized fields of study. The common roots in western modernity of the two disciplines are examined, and then their divergence, and even mutual hostility, in the twentieth century. Then come sections, each with author's introduction, followed by three or four readings. Part 1 is on 'Classical sociological theories and the sociology of art', Part 2 on 'The social production of art', Part 3 on the 'Sociology of the artist', Part 4 on 'Museums and the construction of high culture' and Part 5 on 'Sociology, aesthetic form and the specificity of art'.

The classical theories section has the usual triumvirate, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and adds to this an extract from Simmel. Simmel's piece argues that symmetry is an important element of beauty in art, and regularities in art are connected to regularity in a society – to regular

and rational relations between a large number of social elements and the subordination of the many to a unified centre (i.e., a monarch or autocrat). Asymmetry (which we infer means modernism, but it is not specified) in art is connected to the emergence of individualism. There's an element of truth in this, but it is so broad a perspective as not to be very illuminating. Marx is the only one of the classical theorists whose ideas (as seen at any rate in the extracts here) have more than historical interest. His insight about the role of ideology in art production and reception continues to have resonance for the present-day sociologist.

In 'For a sociology of art and artists' the Italian sociologists Bertasio and Marchetti (2004) reflect on Bourdieu's 1984 comment that 'La sociologie et l'art ne font pas bon ménage' (sociology and art don't get along well together), and that the uncomfortable relationship may have some connection with the paucity of writing on the sociology of art. They cite Strassoldo, who noted in 1998 that only 0.5% of sociological writing could be categorized as sociology of art. The reasons Bourdieu gave for the uneasy relationship are that the art world does not like sociology's (alleged) reductionism of art to 'only' social relations and historical forces. Conversely, sociologists have difficulty in dealing with the purely aesthetic and with the specificity of art. Marx (in a piece included in one of the extracts in Tanner's book) acknowledged the issue of the aesthetic when he mused on the fact that Greek art has retained its super high status and meaningfulness to present-day observers, even though the society that produced it is long gone, and its social and political relationships (in so far as we know what they were at all) were not as ours. But while noticing this interesting point, Marx did not develop it. Tanner begins his 'Introduction' with Bourdieu's 1984 comment about art and sociology not sitting well together and sets himself to explore it, but he gets somewhat diverted from this important question in his exploration of the divergence (and recent rapprochement) of art history and the sociology of art.

Bertasio and Marchetti (2004) claim that sociologists are fearful of 'the analysis of art elements, methods and intellectual attitudes typical of the humanistic disciplines' because of their desire to study objective facts. This is an odd comment about sociology to make now, in view of the current interest in so-called subjective analysis, such as narrative and auto/biography, and the use of methods more often associated with history or literary criticism. Clearly, sociologists interested in these crossover methods have missed an opening in relation to the sociology of art. In passing it is interesting to note that cultural studies is a flourishing sociological field. Here much of the subject matter is about visual culture, culture that might well be called 'art' except the term is normally reserved for the fine arts. The virtual exclusion of fine art from cultural studies

may be a strategy (probably unintended) to avoid a field of study where it is hard to avoid the need for judgements about the aesthetic. Confine yourself to advertisements and pop music and aesthetic questions may be conveniently shelved.

Tanner's book seems to bear out Bertasio and Marchetti's claim that there is not very much sociology of art. One feels that Tanner had difficulty locating suitable readings. In section 2 on art production, only Becker's 'Art as collective action' is specifically on the visual arts as the extracts from Raymond Williams and Bourdieu are on the arts generally. The Williams extract is from his *Marxism and literature*, and is (I think) from the introduction – anyway it is too much about Marxism and not enough about the arts. But had Tanner selected some analysis of literature from the work that would have been even less relevant since it would have parted wholly from the visual arts. Of the 18 readings in the collection only half are primarily about the visual arts – of course there could be argument about the classification of the extracts, but one could not get a total focused on the visual arts to much more than half however one tried.

There is some interesting material in Tanner's reader, notably Natalie Heinich on 'The Van Gogh effect', Robert Witkin on Van Eyck's painting *The Arnolfini marriage* and Bourdieu's 'Outline of a sociological theory of art perception'. Witkin shares a section with Mannheim on 'The dynamics of spiritual realities' and Parsons on art as expressive symbolism, just in case students had got too interested in Van Eyck. Bourdieu is difficult for an introductory reader, but he is worth struggling with, while I do not think the same can be said of Mannheim and Parsons in the context of this reader.

A reproduction of *The Arnolfini marriage* is the only illustration in the book, which seems odd in a work on the sociology of art. Perhaps publisher meanness accounts for the lack of pictures. Penny pinching may also account for the absence of extracts from two works that have interesting observations on the sociology of art (even though not written by sociologists), John Berger's *Ways of seeing* (1972) and Parker and Pollock's *Old mistresses: women, art and ideology* (1981). Extracts from these works would be pointless without the illustrations. Parker and Pollock remind us that Tanner's book has nothing on feminist analysis, perhaps, in 2003, an even odder omission than illustrations.

REFERENCES

- Berger, J. 1972: *Ways of seeing*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
 Bertasio, D. and Marchetti, G. 2004: 'For a sociology of art and artists' <<http://uniurb.it/imes/essad/essad2.html>>.

Parker, R. and Pollock, G. 1981: *Old mistresses: women art and ideology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

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SOME METAMORPHOSIS

Autobiographical writing across the disciplines: a reader. Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey, editors, 2003. London: Duke University Press; ISBN 0822332632, pbk, 424 pp., £18.50.

Even at the initial stage of glancing at the table of contents, I have to admit that this book took me slightly by surprise. It seems to me that in the current climate of auto/biography studies, a title featuring the words 'across the disciplines' offers the promise of an interdisciplinary or maybe even a radically transdisciplinary approach to the genre. But, as I say, a quick perusal of the table of contents put paid to any suggestion of that, as each contribution is categorized according to the author's 'home' academic discipline, from history and medicine to Africana Studies to mathematics, psychology and science. Such an immediate capitulation to the structures of the subject disciplines did seem a bit out of place as an organizing principle for a collection of autobiographical writings by people who are – almost to a person – in the act of bemoaning the straightjacketed self-discipline with which they are obliged to fall in line in the confines of the academy. In light of Paul de Man's notorious tirade against autobiography because of its innately undisciplined character (and glossing over for the moment what might have been his real motivation for doing down autobiography), such an endorsement of the structuring presence of the academic disciplines was a bit odd, to say the least.

However, other more welcome surprises were awaiting, first in the form of the editors' introduction, an uncommonly incisive and scholarly account of autobiographical *writing*, and one of the best I have come across during years as a reader and researcher in this field. The influence of subjectivity and life narrative as a platform for modern scientific inductive method was convincingly and concisely recounted, as was the eventual incursion of sexist language and social practices into the rhetorics of scientivism and normative (male) subjectivity. My only criticism here would be the wholesale condemnation the editors visit on Descartes as the one who intentionally and virtually single-handedly kick-started the oppression of women and non-privileged men in the first place in the manner of a favoured pet project, but then this unfair depiction of Cartesian autobiographical/philosophical writing is practically *de rigueur*