

- **Critical Thinking in an Image World: Alfred Korzybski's Theoretical Principles Extended to Critical Television Evaluation.** Geraldine E. Forsberg. NY: University Press of America, 1993. 208 pages; \$46.50 cloth, \$18.50 paper.

The growing interest in critical thinking, especially in college-level journalism and media courses, demands attempts like this one to guide the critical evaluation of the media themselves. *Critical Thinking in an Image World* raises some provocative points but provides little concrete guidance for classroom practice. In this published version of her doctoral dissertation at New York University, Geraldine Forsberg, now an assistant professor of communication at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, credits Neil Postman among others for introducing her to authors such as McLuhan and Jacques Ellul. In this tradition, the book sketches out conceptual ways of thinking about television without introducing any original empirical research.

The author makes a good case for rejecting previous critical viewing approaches in the schools. These have included "intervention," countering television's presumed negative lessons; "goal attainment," raising student awareness of their uses and gratifications; and "visual literacy," teaching the creative techniques of television production. None of these are considered adequate to help critically evaluate the peculiar biases of the television medium. The critical thinking movement has focused on rhetorical analysis and the informal logic of facts, inferences, and syllogisms – an approach grounded in the linear world of language. Forsberg argues that the visual symbol system of television – with its seeming reality – does not require nor encourage these kinds of critical thinking skills, making it all the more important to consciously develop and apply them. In a language-based education system, however, students have fewer readily available tools to critically evaluate image-based analogic media like television.

The central premise of the book is that people can be taught to think critically about television and its effects if they are made more conscious of the structure of television and how it yields its symbolic mapping of reality. This, she presumes, will lead to better decisions and more accurate thinking. Much of the book,

however, is devoted to establishing what I take to be basic self-evident premises: a picture is not the same as the object it represents, television omits and distorts the reality it seeks to depict, and others. Most communication scholars would accept many of this book's other assertions as givens – that television has its biases, assumptions, and world-view (e.g., pro-business, pro-entertainment, superficiality, immediacy). More attention is needed to how, given these assumptions, television can be critically analyzed in practice.

Forsberg advocates Postman's "media ecology" approach, treating television as a part of the information environment, which shapes the thoughts and behaviors of those who live in it. This media-determinism perspective places the emphasis on the symbolic structure of television. Control of that system and its effects are assumed or speculated in such a model, but not tested empirically. The media-structure and how it maps onto reality takes center-stage. Based on the work of Alfred Korzybski, a number of principles are set out. For example, "Correct symbolism follows a natural order or a correct order." Symbolic structure must reflect the structure of objective reality, or else be "unnatural" and lead to insanity and disaster. These principles must be accepted on faith, with little further guidance as to how they are measured or supported.

My reading reminded me of the curious parallel paths of the communication field, with the media studies perspective of McLuhan-Postman-Ellul-Meyrowitz pursuing similar questions, but with little overlap or cross-fertilization with the more empirically based tradition grounded in sociology and psychology, or even the critical, Marxist perspective. A well-rounded critical thinking approach would benefit from selections from each of these paths.

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- **The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts.** Richard A. Lanham. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993. 285 pages; \$22.50 cloth.

In a stimulating and instructive set of ten

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