



Leonardo

Travels in Hyperreality by Umberto Eco
Review by: Sharon Lebell
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of his travels through Turkey, Greece and Italy, of visits to all the major European capitals after the First World War, and of the exposure of the developing architect to all the avant-garde indulgences, particularly in the arts. Later developments in his style and thinking till his death in 1965 are the concerns of the other two parts. There are over 240 illustrations, 31 of which are in colour. These illustrations have been chosen with care; as an integral part of the text they do much to enhance pleasure and understanding. Of particular interest are the seminal sketches for many of Le Corbusier's projects.

This book is immensely impressive in its clarity and depth of thought. The writing is of high quality, and Curtis's sympathetic understanding of the subject makes it a worthy addition to the outstanding work *Modern Architecture since 1900* by the same author. Le Corbusier was a great synthesising genius who left a valuable and vast legacy of forms, ideas, images and plans for cities of the future. He altered the basis of architectural discourse and, as Walter Gropius suggests, Le Corbusier created "a new scale of values sufficiently profound to enrich generations to come". Le Corbusier is part of historical tradition and the universality of his art is of more importance than the modernity of his concepts. To read *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*, to echo Gropius, is an enriching experience.

MUSIC, FILM, AND ART

by Haig Khatchadourian. Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, New York, 1985. 222 pp. Paper, \$12.00; Cloth, \$50.00. ISBN: 0275-5866; ISBN 2-88124-024-0.

Reviewed by **Elmer H. Duncan**, Department of Philosophy, Baylor University, Waco, TX 76798, U.S.A.

This book is made up of 13 essays on topics in aesthetics, the essays having been published previously in various journals from 1966 to 1980. The essays are wide ranging. Some have technical subjects, e.g. "The Identity of a Work of Music" and "Movement and Action in Film". Others, e.g. "The Need for Art in the Modern World", clearly are intended for more general audiences.

One of the more interesting essays is also the earliest, "About Imaginary Objects", first published in *Ratio* in 1966. In a symposium held in 1933, three major philosophers—Ryle, Moore and

Braithwaite—had discussed the logical puzzles involved in our talk about, say, Mr. Pickwick. How can our talk be about Mr. Pickwick, when there does not—and never did—exist any such person as Pickwick for it to be about? Khatchadourian's response is technical, but the essential point is that the sentences that occur in a work of fiction are not simply fictitious, i.e. simply false; they have a special logic.

Many of the essays are devoted to the sorts of topics aestheticians have discussed over the past 20–30 years, and the author seems to owe much to such writers as Frank Sibley and Morris Weitz. One such topic is simply, "What is art?" How do we know something is art? Apparently, some recent aestheticians (George Dickie?) would say that anything is art if anyone says it is. But, more in the spirit of Weitz, Khatchadourian refuses to be so permissive. Like Weitz, he suggests that an object should be considered art if it has a sufficient number of characteristics in common with recognized paradigm cases of artworks. But there are problems. How many characteristics are enough, and which of the work's many qualities are relevant? More important, perhaps, if tradition is thus followed, is there no place for originality? Aye, there's the rub . . . : "there is no general rule for resolving the essential tension between the demands of tradition and the demands of creativity . . ." (p. 183).

Finally, Khatchadourian is at his best arguing that "all persons have a right to self-actualization . . . this includes the artist's right freely to create . . ." (p. 188), and is setting forth the values of artistic creation (ch. 13, "The Need for Art in the Modern World").

The interested reader will find many of these same topics discussed in greater detail in Khatchadourian's earlier work, *The Concept of Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

TRAVELS IN HYPERREALITY

Umberto Eco. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, CA, 1986. 307 pp. Cloth, \$15.95. ISBN: 0-15-191079-0.

Reviewed by **Sharon Lebell**, 118 Francis Avenue, San Anselmo, CA 94960, U.S.A.

Few people besides Umberto Eco could legitimately and with a straight face hand you a business card that says 'Professional Semiotician' on it. Of course, the polymath Eco could hand you any number of business cards variously embossed with 'Historian', 'Philosopher', 'Aesthetician',

or 'Literary Critic'. Now that his bestselling novel, *The Name of the Rose*, has been made into a film, mentioning the field of semiotics is less apt to elicit blank looks. Eco has pulled off something of a miracle: his personal and scholarly renown have brought semiotics into the public eye and have made the field increasingly respectable.

In his recently released book of essays, translated from the Italian by William Weaver, *Travels in Hyperreality*, Eco manages to rescue semiotics from academe by stripping off its veils of abstruseness. Eco has an enviable knack for transforming recondite matters into sport, which is perhaps one of the earmarks of a deep thinker. So what is Eco thinking about in this plain-talk semiotics book? Anything and everything: the essays, which were originally written for daily papers and weekly magazines, range in topic from sport to politics to culture. In all of the essays he views his topics with the eyes of a semiologist, meaning he interprets signs, be they words, images, social behavior, political acts or artificial landscapes.

Eco sees his doing semiotics as a moral act. He is following an impulse of political duty. Says Eco:

My way of being involved in politics consists of telling others how I see daily life, political events, the language of the mass media, sometimes the way I look at a movie. I believe it is my job as a scholar and a citizen to show how we are surrounded by 'messages,' products of political power, of economic power, of the entertainment industry, and to say that we must know how to analyze and criticize them.

The essays are grouped into eight thematic sections with the lead essay, "Travels in Hyperreality", constituting its own section. In this first piece, Eco documents his personal sojourn through America and his encounters with hyperreality. Hyperreality is Eco's name for what he believes to be a distinctive feature of the American imagination, the love of and pursuit of the absolute fake. Eco believes that there is a strong strain in American culture that prefers the ultimate imitation of something over the real thing itself. And Eco isn't such a snob as to suggest that he himself is immune to the spell of hyperreality. He confesses to his own disappointment when, invited to view *real* artwork at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu after having traveled to any number of kitschy tourist spots, he finds himself bored by the original works of Georges de la Tour and Poussin. He's just seen too many imitation Last Suppers. Eco's trip through hyperreality takes him

to a holography gallery, wax museums, the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, the Museum of the City of New York, California's flamboyant Hearst Castle and Madonna Inn, the Wall Street area of New York, Forest Lawn Cemeteries, Disneyland and Disney World, and California and Florida's marine cities and artificial jungles. He emerges from his travels with his senses numbed and with a critical European smugness that gives rise to ironic explanations of what he has seen.

Eco definitely has his finger on a not too flattering feature of American culture, though we should remember that his journey did preselect for some of America's most garish monuments and institutions. I bristled at his hinting at the existence of a unified American Character, of which these cultural shrines were supposed to be emblematic. Umberto Eco is a confident (perhaps overconfident) tour guide through a culture that is not his own. Perhaps hyperreality is an appealingly academic epithet or a euphemism for saying Americans just are not as subtle, understated and sophisticated as Europeans. I'm not going to defend wax museums, the Madonna Inn or Disneyland on aesthetic or intellectual grounds, but surely Eco's journey through the Absolute Fake is perhaps a linkage of artifacts that were selected because they fit a particular scheme. Most of the readers of this book will be intellectuals who will be dazzled by Eco's artful language, his unremitting cleverness and his Europeanism to which Americans humbly defer because we are supposedly bereft of history and therefore of true depth. America is rife with banality, with kitsch and with all kinds of grotesqueries, but there is subtlety here too.

Other essays include a fine study of the People's Temple suicides. He demonstrates his skills at historical interpretation by showing that what seems to be an utterly incomprehensible event actually has a historical link with the millenarian movements that emerged throughout Western history from the first centuries of Christianity down to the present.

We accompany this master of signs to Afro-Brazilian Candomblé rites in a *terreiro* in São Paulo where he vividly evokes spiritual frenzy while concluding that "[these rites] are one of the many ways the disinherited masses are kept on their reservation, while at their expense the generals industrialize the country, offering it to the exploitation of foreign capital".

His jeremiad against spectator sports in the pieces "Sports Chatter" and "The World Cup and Its Poms" are especially

endearing. In "The World Cup and Its Poms", Eco recalls attending a soccer game with his father when he was 13 and coming away from the experience doubting the existence of God for the first time and further deciding that the world is a pointless fiction.

... As far back as I can remember, soccer for me has been linked with the absence of purpose and the vanity of all things, and with the fact that the Supreme Being may be (or may not be) simply a hole.

He then proceeds in his discussion of the World Cup to demonstrate that sports banter is the easiest substitute for political debate.

No semiotician worthy of the title is going to overlook the structure of power and its expressions. In "Falsification and Consensus", Eco provides a modern model of power relations that might obtain among individuals, corporations or countries. He views power as a function of a network of consensus, rather than as the aggregate arbitrary decisions of top-level people (kings, presidents or corporations, etc.) that the rest of us have to live with. So, the current form of guerrilla protest is not the killing or deposing of a king but instead a protest aimed at disinformation, the use of technology for the purpose of disruptive falsification.

Nothing escapes Eco's scrutiny. He takes us to a seemingly innocent event, the Milan Trade Fair, in his piece, "Two Families of Objects". Two types of objects make up the exposition: 'beautiful' objects such as sausages, motorboats, easy chairs and ashtrays (consumer goods), and 'ugly' objects, consisting of heavy machinery (the means of production). The fair is saying to the ordinary citizen: Be true to your ordinariness: you don't need a lathe or a cement mixer. Society's members are reminded of their place in this hall of entertainment. Workers will leave the fair seeking to acquire the *beautiful* objects with their wages, having been successfully steered away from coveting the *ugly* objects, the means of production, which could buy their freedom.

Semioticians do not attend just to visual signs; aural signs are also their province. In "Lady Barbara", Eco meticulously analyzes the structure of Italian pop festival songs and summer hits, paying particular attention to the role of background applause. He reveals that this applause is part of the song itself. It is not a response of approval but one of the means by which the show tries to produce an overwhelming effect on the

listener and achieve an enthusiastic reception. However, in order to highlight the one beautiful climactic moment which is preceded and underlined by the applause, the rest of the song must be ugly or dull by contrast. Within this scheme, then, the most beautiful song is the one that has the highest percentage of ugliness which provides the framework within which the small moment of musical beauty is embedded.

The wonderful thing about semiotics is that its unabashed practitioners can seriously ponder the details of daily life. In view of this permissiveness inherent in the field, Eco engages in deep thinking about blue jeans in "Lumbar Thought". Clothes are after all semiotic devices, media for communicating which could and should be analyzed in parallel with the syntactic structures of language. Aside from the heavier theoretical semiotic implications of clothes, the interesting thing Eco observes is that his jeans impose a demeanor on him. By walking around in a pair of jeans that are a wee bit too tight, he glimpses the daily experience of women who are forced by their clothes constantly to *live* a demeanor.

You have been given the tip of the iceberg. There are still cult movies, St. Thomas, World Expos... and much more in this thoughtful book. *Travels in Hyperreality* proves that erudition can be fun.

FOUNDATION GRANTS TO INDIVIDUALS

by Loren Renz, ed. 5th Ed. The Foundation Center, 79 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10003, U.S.A., 1986. 288 pp. Paper, \$18.00. ISBN: 0-87954-158-X.

Reviewed by Roger F. Malina, 95 Hiller Drive, Oakland, CA 94618, U.S.A.

Foundation Grants to Individuals is the most comprehensive listing available of private U.S. foundations which provide financial assistance to individuals. Many of the grants, however, are for seniors or recent high school graduates. The 5th edition lists 1041 foundations which award at least \$2000 a year. Sections of the book list foundations giving funds primarily in the area of educational support, general welfare, arts and cultural support, grants to individuals, and awards/prizes/grants to company employees. Other chapters also list services of the Foundation Center and where to find additional information concerning funds available. This book is a primary resource for anyone seeking grants; it is