that it can be chronicled only a decade at a time. We find, perhaps, a clue both to Tolstoy's relentless productivity and to Eikhenbaum's biographical method in a formula that the novelist developed in 1860: "In all worldly affairs, wisdom consists not in understanding what one must do, but rather...in understanding what one must do first." [WV]

THE TIME OF THE SIGN: A SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF MODERN CULTURE
by Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell
(Indiana University Press; 224 pp.; $18.50)

THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE
by Raymond Williams
(Schocken Books; 248 pp.; $7.95 [paper])

Edith Kurzweil

Both of these books promise an overall revolutionary theory of culture, both rely on literary and sociological theories, and both consider language central to culture. The MacCannells argue that the fragmentation of knowledge has led us to suspect the truth of language but that a radical reading à la Derrida, which "pulls out Marx's semiotic," can restore it. Consequently, they proclaim themselves in the vanguard of a semiotic revolution. This revolution, encompassing phenomenology, semiotics, and the less naive structuralist theories, is alleged to overcome the divisions among the disciplines. Surely no other revolutionaries have expected to bring about radical change by advocating a good liberal arts education, by reading texts, or by finding a common intellectual base among such diverse thinkers as Charles S. Peirce, Ferdinande de Saussure, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Jacques Derrida—the Marxes and Engleses of the semioticians.

Given the disarray in departments of literature, the lack of agreement on anthropological or sociological method, and the reduction of humanistic study to the activities of literature professors, deconstructionist criticism has become a means to shake up entrenched professional support systems. But it appears unlikely that we will move on to social action from a textual criticism that speaks of political strategies, violent and bloody acts, Maoism, and the fascism of language. Aware of these problems, the MacCannells state that they are studying "the means of production of meaning." That they are not only against rationalism and positivism but against all nonmethodological literary, cultural, and Marxist criticism, and against every semiotics not their own, becomes clear long before the conclusion. Proffering their own brand of semiotics, the MacCannells remain blind to their own ideology and "false consciousness." When they list the many challenges of modern society, it is not clear how the coming of the second semiotics will move from text to street, even if we were to agree that textual analysis offers better debunking tools than does ordinary criticism.

Raymond Williams, the distinguished Marxist, already in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) saw language as socially shared and reciprocal, embedded in active relationships. So we are not surprised now that he incorporates the study of sign-systems into his increasingly sophisticated social criticism insofar as he examines culture as a whole way of life, involved in *all* forms of social activity, including language, art, philosophy, the media, and a great deal more. Unlike the MacCannells, Williams forgets about the reading of texts. He looks at the social processes of cultural production, including texts, and how they, and their ideology, are reproduced. He is careful to go beyond the vulgar Marxist distinctions that directly relate the artist to his public or the cultural superstructure to its economic base. He shows how changes in history, institutions, and organizations influence internal rules of art by increasing or decreasing formalization and rigidity in art forms. He finds, for example, that in the fourteenth century, when contact with European culture grew, the rules of the new Welsh "national" poetry became more flexible, though still clear and internal; that the rise of guilds, of exhibitions, and of academies and professional societies had its impact on artistic movements and their creation—even though individual artists felt more independent; or that cultural formation developed in response to changes in class structure such as the rise of the bourgeoisie.

Williams is particularly interesting when he points to emerging paradoxes in society, paradoxes the MacCannells find in texts. But whether we read that the subjectivism of Virginia Woolf's novels belongs with the economic interventionism of Keynes, that avant-garde movements have a metropolitan base, or that twentieth-century formations are less provincial than former ones, we know where we are going. History is progressing in its Marxist path, and Williams is filling in its relevant details by enumerating both human and nonhuman resources—their development, reproduction, asymmetries, technologies, and their new forms. Rehashing old distinctions between beauty, harmony, proportion, and form, Williams takes a look at the social processes of art—whether good, bad, or indifferent, or in transition from aristocratic to folk art—in radically different social orders. And art, now said to be a differentiated and broad cultural signal system, is credited with a complex sociology. This leads Williams to analyze institutional

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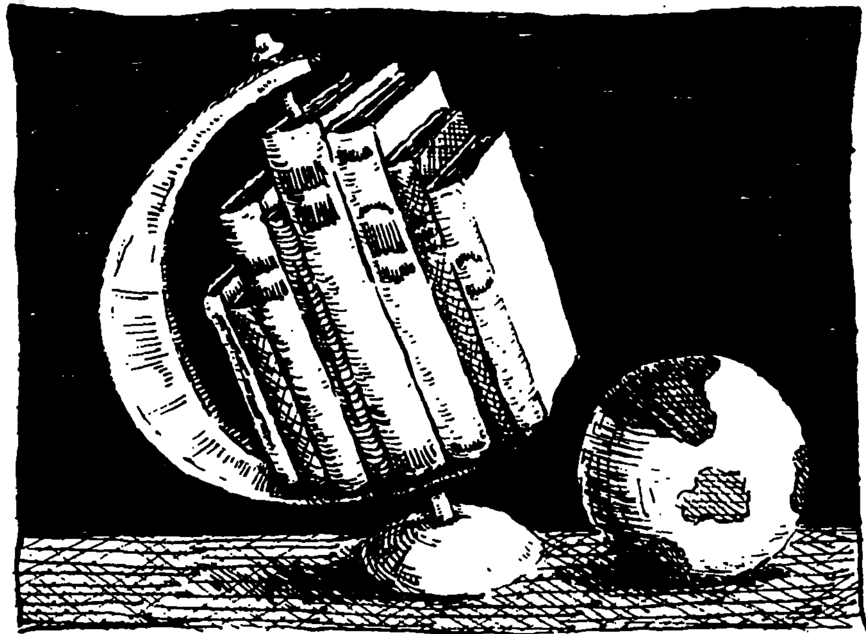
art systems such as the theatre, the art gallery, and the concert hall, to examine the organization of art, and to explain how internal signal systems are expressed through art forms and conventions that, however, are part of social relationships allowing for "conditions of practice." We can only infer that changes in signals will lead to changed practices.

Williams's revolutionary sociology, though full of historic insights, seems like an old story, while the MacCannells' semiotic revolution is an old patch quilt of theories. Both are intellectual "emperors" in need of new clothes. [WV]



AMERICA AND THE PATTERNS OF CHIVALRY
by John Fraser
(Cambridge University Press; x+301 pp.; $19.95)

Edward J. Curtin, Jr.

The history of boredom as a motivating force in human affairs has yet to be written, and probably never will. Certain truths must be concealed under lofty labels. Like the fear of death, however, and its concomitant thirst for immortality, boredom, so staid and stolid in itself, has had an enormous impact on history. Though quite difficult to document, it is hard to escape the fact that it has led many a man, especially among the affluent, to throw himself against his life as if it were his enemy and to inject into a sluggish social milieu doses of danger and play, romance and violence. Especially in the last two hundred years, as industrialization and scientific reason have narrowed the range of human possibilities, has the need for a more romantic approach to life intensified, if only to be acted out in the imagination.

One such nostalgic banner under which many men have marched—and it usually has been men—is the banner of chivalry. Once knights and fair ladies, castles and kings ceased to be living realities and were replaced by factories and constitutions, the cult of chivalry was revived to inspire a dispirited elite. In England the writings of Sir Walter Scott and Tennyson, among others, restored the code of chivalry to a place of honor and emulation. Then, surprisingly, the sentiment invaded the United States, a country ostensibly rational, republican, and egalitarian and therefore assumed to be immune to this romantic nostalgia.

Ostensibly, but not actually so, says John Fraser in this interesting study of the paradoxical and persistent influence of chivalry on American life. "But if the signposts of reason all pointed in one direction, where people actually went in their cultural preferences was another matter," he writes. For despite Mark Twain's attack on what he called the "absurd chivalry business," the chivalric mythos gained a strong foothold in the United States, especially on Southern plantations and in the ranching West, where it found fertile soil in socioeconomic structures similar to those of upper-class England.

It was precisely its artificial theatricality that made chivalry appealing, resistant to ironic debunking and able to spread its influence into the North as well. For "the chivalric was the magical kingdom of castles and greensward, and twisting cobbled streets at midnight, and sunbaked islands and jostling wharves, and graceful Southern plantations, and velvet tropical skies, and the majestic spaces of the Western landscape, an enchanted composite realm of the imagination in which picturesquely garbed figures coped with the ever-changing configuration of warfare, or cattle drive, or the intricate rituals and plottings of aristocratic society."

Fraser documents this chivalric influence in great detail, first as it permeated the agricultural South in the mid-1800s, culminating in the Civil War ("America, rationalistic America, progressive America, had given the world the greatest of all chivalrous wars."), then as chivalry's seemingly fanciful and anachronistic patterns were made relevant to an increasingly urban, industrial, and competitive society. Prep schools and Ivy League colleges served a mediating function between a business society and chivalric ideals by romanticizing the idea of success and competition. A new power elite was trained, with the assistance of football and its military associations, to accept "the agonistic as natural, pleasurable, and desirable." In this way the gap between business and gentility was bridged; henceforth, the chivalric-martial ideology, hidden behind fine clothes, advanced degrees, and good manners, would play an increasingly violent role in American history.

Teddy Roosevelt, however, was the great transformer. "It was through Roosevelt," Fraser maintains, "that certain chivalric patterns reentered American politics with lasting consequences." His pugnaciousness, high energy, flamboyant role-playing, and chivalric moral outlook appealed to both business and the young. Reformism took on a chivalric tone; heretofore a feminine activity, it was now manly, macho in fact. Furthermore, under this Rough Rider, whose administration was more Camelot-like than Kennedy's, "the idea of imperial expansion became intertwined ideologically with