



# Furor Scribendi: A Passion for Writing

Arthur Asa Berger



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**Arthur Asa Berger**

Professor Emeritus, Broadcast and Electronic Communication  
Arts, San Francisco State University



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## Introduction

This book is about the creative process and also offers readers insights into what it is like to be a writer. When I was young, I never could have imagined the career I would have, but it turns out, I was afflicted by the *Furor Scribendi* and was to spend much of my life writing books and articles as well as writing 106 journals (which I started writing in 1954).

In this book, I discuss my experiences with editors and publishers and also offer excerpts from the books I discuss so you can see what I write about and how I express myself.

Not all my books were well received. My favorite review of my books was written about my book *The TV Guided America*, published in the mid-seventies. The reviewer, who did not like my psychoanalytic and semiotic perspectives, wrote:

**Berger is to the study of television what Idi Amin is to tourism in Uganda.**

At that time, Amin was killing thousands of people in Uganda who were against his regime.

Another book was reviewed by someone who wrote:

**How do you review a book that never should have been published?**

A colleague of mine at San Francisco State University once told me that my books were all unpublishable and that I only got them published because my editors were naïve. When I asked him why he had never published a book, he explained, “My books would be too good to be published.”

Fortunately, I found any number of naïve editors who published my books. My experiences as an author as reflected in my books are the subject of this book. I don’t deal with all my books but discuss enough of them for you to see what it is like dealing with editors and publishers.

After reading it, you will have a better idea of what is like to write a book and be an author.



The Secret Agent  
A Micro Bio

Fifty years ago, I was at a party given by a literary agent in San Francisco, when a young woman, noticed that I was standing by myself, came over and asked me:

“Are you literary?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Have you published?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“Fiction or non-fiction?” she asked.

“Non-fiction,” I answered, “But most of my colleagues at San Francisco State University, where I teach, think my books are fiction.



### Images of the Author and Seal

The seal, in which I describe myself as a writer, artist and secret agent, was useful when I could stamp paper with it, but in the computer age, an image of the seal has to do the job. I call myself a “secret agent,” because that is the title of an article I wrote for George Gerbner, who was the editor of *The Journal of Communication*. I wrote a long essay which had three sections. He deleted the first two sections and kept the last one, “The Secret Agent,” in which I explained I try to reveal the hidden significance of many aspects of everyday life and popular culture that most people don’t recognize or pay any attention to. I did a drawing for the article of myself as a secret agent and even took a photo of myself, with a plastic gun, and wearing dark glasses, as a secret agent.

I should add that when I was writing about popular culture, some of my colleagues thought it was a trivial and unimportant topic. Things have changed in recent years and now many scholars in different disciplines are interested in it and its impact of society and the socialization of our children.

I know when I first thought about writing what can be described as a “literary memoir,” but I don’t know why I decided to write it. In the middle of the night, on St. Patrick’s Day, 2023, the idea of writing the book suddenly popped into my head.

I had just finished polishing a draft of a book I wrote on choices and decided to find an image of a labyrinth, an image involving choices, and I wrote a note in journal number 106 on page 160, about doing another memoir.



## *Secret Agent*

by Arthur Asa Berger

*In which the author, illustrator, and collector of a  
"monumentality of trivia" tells what is right (and wrong)  
with the study of popular culture.*

A friend once told me something that has been instrumental in my thinking. "When we are young," he said, "we have some larger purpose, some great thing we hope to do. But what happens is that we find a number of things that interrupt our pursuit of this goal. Before we know it we are old and we find that our life has been the interruptions and not the grand design we had originally set out to execute."

In my own case this is quite evident. I have been keeping a journal since 1954, and have written nearly thirty 300-page volumes of notes, impressions, and trivia. I do a great deal of my thinking "in" the journal: I list things I have to do, write people's names and addresses, draw pictures of things I've bought or hope to buy, draw cartoons.

If you were to look at the journals you would probably say, "My God, the guy has hardly had an idea in his life! All he does is write about trivial things. What junk!" Of course! That's what life is, for the most part. My life is a series of groceries bought at the supermarket, movies I've been to, minor repairs around the house, departmental meetings, with an occasional aside to wonder about something that has struck my attention.

Thus I "am" popular culture—and so are you! That is the base upon which any superstructure is built, and my life, like anybody's life, is an admixture of bits and pieces of popular culture and an occasional refinement.

### *What do I do with all that junk?*

Years ago I had an embosser made for myself which reads: Arthur Asa Berger, Writer, Artist, Secret Agent. I stamp it on most of the letters I send to friends and everyone finds it amusing. Somehow the notion that

Arthur Asa Berger is Professor of Social Science at the California State University, San Francisco, and author and illustrator of books on popular culture. "The archetypal critical review of my stuff," he writes, "goes as follows: 'While the subject is an interesting one, Berger is over his head in this book. . . . The perceptions, when not stolen from others, are thin and watery. . . . With the current paper shortage, should this kind of person be encouraged? Etc.'" For a test of this observation, see the review of his *Pop Culture* in the last (Winter 1974) issue, or the review of his *Comic Stripped American* in the next (Summer 1974) issue of the *Journal*.

Saturday, March 18, 2023 (week Sun) 64

I slept ~~from 11:25 PM to 4:50 AM~~ from 11:25 PM to 4:50 AM, but was up in the middle of the night. I may have slept more until 6:30 AM and then I slept from 8:30 PM until 11:30 AM.

In the middle of the night an idea popped into my head for a new book: Berger on Berger, similar in nature to R. Barthes by Barthes. I also decided to look for a photo of a maze or labyrinth for Choice...

I found a good labyrinth image and a quote from Jean-Luc Berger in "The Game of French Paths" and added it to Choice... which is now 29,000 words. I will add Berger and labyrinth to my "Takeaway" and that should be it!! I hope.

I also did a little work for dog by dog... when do I go for

#### Journal Note on Writing Memoir

What I wrote was:

In the middle of the night an idea popped into my head for a new book, *Berger on Berger*, similar in nature to *R. Barthes by R. Barthes*. I also decided to look for a photo of a labyrinth for *Choice*.

Why I got that idea is a mystery. I had been listing the images I am using in *Choice* and was thinking about future projects.

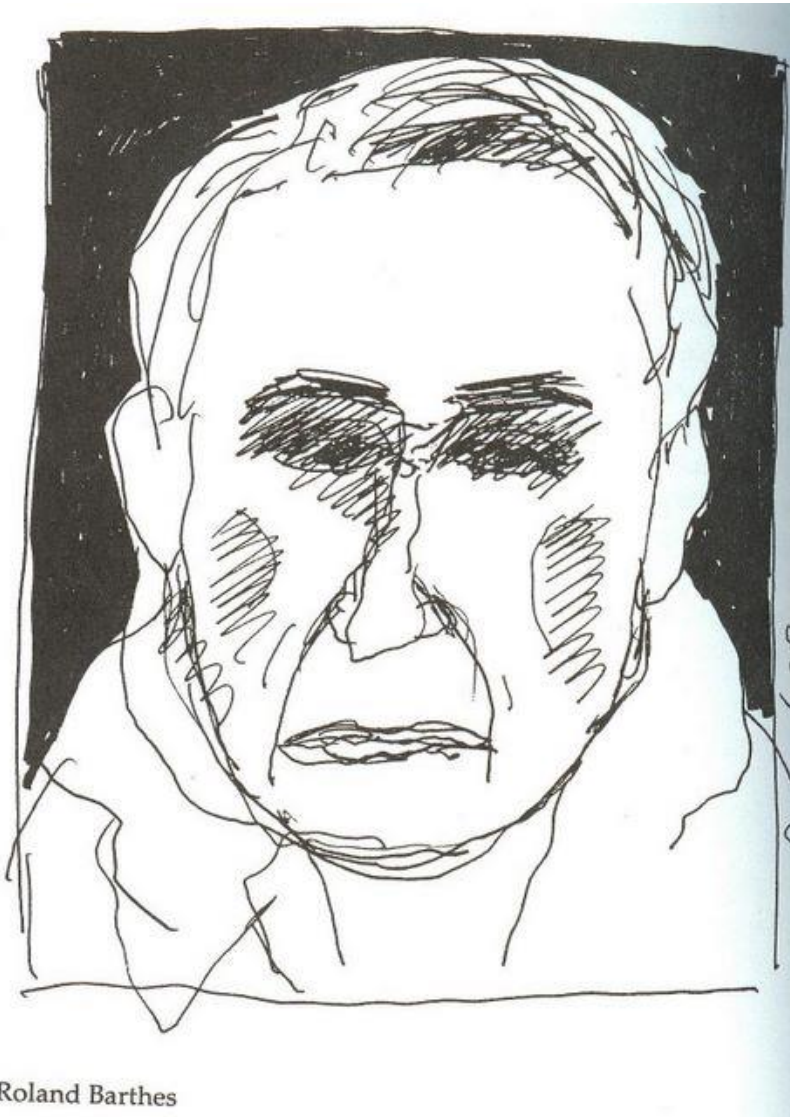
In 1954, I made an important choice: I was admitted to the University of Iowa in two schools: to get an MFA in art or to get an MA in journalism. My brother Jason was an artist and I wasn't that interested in being one, so I chose to enroll in the School of Journalism and got an MA there in 1956. While there, I took courses in Iowa's writer's workshop and studied with a writer named Marguerite Young.

I can recall thinking to myself and complaining to my wife Phyllis at breakfast the day before that I was out of ideas as far as future books might be concerned. And then, in the middle of the night on St. Patrick's Day, somehow Roland Barthes came to mind and his book made me think about doing a similar one, myself.

I had made a St. Patrick's day dinner of corned beef and cabbage, had not slept well that night, and somehow something bubbling away in my unconscious came to light.

It is possible that I used an image of him that I drew in *Choices* or in another book of mine that was recently published, *Taste*, to illustrate the book. My drawing of Barthes is one of my better drawings of literary figures, theorists, and writers. I illustrate my books with all kind of images, such as the labyrinth I used in *choices*.

I have quoted Barthes many times in my books—mostly from his book *Mythologies*. But I've read many of his books.



Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes

I have been keeping journals since 1954 and am almost finished with journal number 106. I give them all names. This one is called “Differential Diagnoses and Sleep Journal.” I also give them covers.

I do a lot of brainstorming in my journals and sometimes devote an entire page, divided into four columns, for my thinking about what might be in a book.

Below, I offer a typical four column brainstorming page from my journals—in this case, my thinking about topics I might want to deal with in Choices. Most of the pages in my journals are a combination of written material and images, but every once in a while, I devote an entire page to brainstorming.

I come back to that page when I have new ideas and I also sometimes use just a part of a page of making four column brainstorming sites.

So, when I write a book, I speculate in my journal about topics to cover and I more or less talk to myself about how the book is progressing. So I write and I also write about my writing at the same time.

Because I am immunocompromised (I’ve had a very slow acting form of Lymphoma for thirty years) and elderly (I just turned 90) I have had to isolate myself and avoid people, so I’ve been stuck in the house for three years and have done a great deal of writing during those years.

Before Covid-19 appeared, my wife and I went to gym three mornings a week, belonged to two theater companies and saw a dozen plays a year, and took three long trips a year. On some trips, we would take a cruise and on others, find somewhere interesting and spend three weeks wandering around.

I kept travel journals as well as my regular journals and wrote some tourism books about the cultures of the countries we visited.

Since Covid, and my confinement (imprisonment?) to our house, I’ve devoted much of my time to writing and am now writing a book on choices we make in life. My brainstorming page in my journal, shown below, is an example of some of the work I do in my journals when I’m working on a book.



# ★ CHOICES ★

<p><u>Most important</u>  <u>Choice:</u>          Gen - Gen and          Lifestyles</p>	<p>choice vs. fate          get vs. like          Consider</p> <p>choice and everyday          life: many decisions</p>	<p>choice vs. fate  <u>Fate</u></p> <p>Gen - Gen          The choice that          stops you other          choices</p>	<p><u>Solving A choice</u>  <u>Sanity + choice</u>  <u>Psychologists</u>          on choice</p> <p><u>Maximizing choice</u>  <u>Advantages + choice</u>          class + choice          influencing          Fats</p> <p><u>Gender + choice</u>  <u>National character</u>          Age          Gender          Socioeconomic status          Race          Education          Place of birth /          Religion / Region</p>
<p><u>Important</u>  <u>Choices:</u>          Spouse + Spouse          House + Location          Political (Country)          Brand + kind of Car          Jobs          Schools / Unives          Religions</p>	<p>OBJECTS          POSSESSIONS          Smart phone          Television Set          String shoes</p>	<p>Ranking of choice          by importance</p>	<p><u>Advantages + choice</u>          class + choice          influencing          Fats</p>
<p><u>Daily choice</u> Food</p>	<p>Unpleasant          shoes          Ties (man)          Pants  <u>Shoes (Kenny)</u>          Formed</p>	<p>Partner          Auto no. b. 1.0          House          Jobs          Education          Diet / nutrients          Food preferences</p>	<p><u>Advantages + choice</u>          class + choice          influencing          Fats</p>
<p><u>Restaurants</u>  <u>Dishes in</u>  <u>Restaurants</u>  <u>clothes +</u>  <u>what to wear</u>  <u>Things A Restaurant</u>  <u>Have Everything</u>  <u>Coffee</u>  <u>Kinds of machines</u>  <u>Espresso machines</u></p>	<p>Assaults / Asks          Blue Jean          Appellations  <u>TAKEAWAYS</u></p>	<p>The Great          Design          3 million people          left with food</p>	<p><u>Advantages + choice</u>          class + choice          influencing          Fats</p>
<p><u>Typical of choice</u>  <u>"Choice Life"</u>  <u>Decision making</u></p>	<p>HOUSES          sit at desks in          houses in USA          poss. of signal of          choosing a house          at quarter          Handers / authors          school desks          Bits of a farm          River London          and water 217          - Cakes          Fresh for water          Family water</p>	<p>Auto          models          DOGS          COLLEGES          Food          Prepares r          tastes          Blue Jean          Appellations          Mathematics?          Dining at Home          at in Restaurants          Gender          LGBTQIT          Cisgender          gender, rapidly          watched          for assigned          at birth</p>	<p><u>Advantages + choice</u>          class + choice          influencing          Fats</p>
<p><u>People only</u>  <u>Value of Sign + choice</u>  <u>id / exp / sign of</u>  <u>choice</u>  <u>Deliver Machines</u>  <u>How's good thing and</u>  <u>Love...</u>  <u>Can study: How</u>  <u>Future choices?</u>  <u>People who can't</u>  <u>make a choice</u>  <u>Can't choose?</u>  <u>Regrets after</u>  <u>packing</u>  <u>Boys' romance</u></p>	<p>JOHN PETERSON          Love Hate          Relationship          Choice</p>		

I have finished writing the book, which will be published by the Vernon Press. I sent my editor the final version of the book on May 18th.

When my wife and I were traveling, I always thought that it was good that we were traveling now because one never knows what will happen and one of us could have an accident or become disabled and never travel again. I never thought a virus would put an end to our travels.

Our last cruise was from Dubai, and we visited half a dozen “exotic” countries in the Mideast. Our last land vacation was in Andalucia and we spent time in three cities: Malaga, Cordova and Granada.



Mosque at a Stop on Dubai Cruise

It's rather curious but, for one reason or another, I only have fragmentary memories of my life until 1954, when I started keeping a journal and documenting my daily activities, thoughts, obsessions—what you will—in considerable detail.

A friend of mine recently said to me, “my life has sort of disappeared.” He was lamenting his inability to remember much about his life. I feel the same way about my earliest years, until I started keeping my journal in 1954, when I was a graduate student at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, the “Athens of the Midwest,” as it calls itself.

I doubt that there are many days when I didn't write in my journal since 1954 and all of my books have come out of my journals. I usually get an idea for a book while writing in my journals and I do a lot of writing and brainstorming about my book ideas in my journals.

Eleven days after I received my MA from the University of Iowa, I was drafted and spent two years as a writer in the Military District of Washington's Public Information Office. I also wrote high school sports weekend nights for The Washington Post, and with the money I made from being in the Army and from the Post, I had enough money to go to Europe and spend a year wandering around there.

I enrolled in the University of Paris and stayed in the Fondation Etats Unis for few months, but I only enrolled because it was cheap housing. While in Paris, I started writing novel but didn't get very far. At the Fondation, I made friends with Stanley Milgram, who was to go on to be one of most important social psychologists of recent years.

When I returned to New York, I got a job writing for a union newspaper—*The Seafarers Log*, but it was only temporary for I had decided to get a Ph.D. and become an academic. I wanted time to pursue my intellectual interests and the rewards of an academic life.

I was accepted in the American Studies program of the University of Minnesota and went to study there. I found it intellectually stimulating and was impressed by the quality of the professors there. One of them, David Noble, became a friend of mine and we corresponded for thirty years after I graduated. My dissertation advisor, Mulford Q. Sibley, turned me on to popular culture. When I went to see him, I had ideas about doing something “serious,” on utopian thought or something like that. He had other ideas.

“You wrote an excellent paper on *Li'l Abner* in my American political thought course,” he said. “Just expand on that for your dissertation.” So, I walked in with utopian thought and left with *Li'l Abner*. That decision changed my career, and I was to write about popular culture from that time, in 1963, until the present time.

In 1963-64, I was awarded a Fulbright and taught at the University of Milan. In Milan I met Umberto Eco. We were both interested in popular culture and I socialized with him, and his colleagues, off and on, that year.

I met my wife Phyllis in Minnesota. She had graduated from Barnard College and went to Minnesota to get an MA in philosophy. We got married in 1961 and had a daughter in 1962.

We returned to Minnesota, where I taught Freshman English and later technical writing. I wrote my dissertation on *Li'l Abner* and got a job teaching at San Francisco State University.

### **Li'l Abner**

I submitted my dissertation to a publisher in New York, where it rested on an editor's bookcase for two years. I happened to be in New York for a conference, went to see the editor.

"*Li'l Abner*?" he said, when I was ushered into his office. "Let's see what we are going to do with it." He reached for the manuscript, opened it up, and said, "Yes, we're going to publish it," and that was my first book.

At the time, I had no idea that I'd ever write another book, though I was busy writing papers for academic journals and even wrote short pieces for *San Francisco Examiner*.

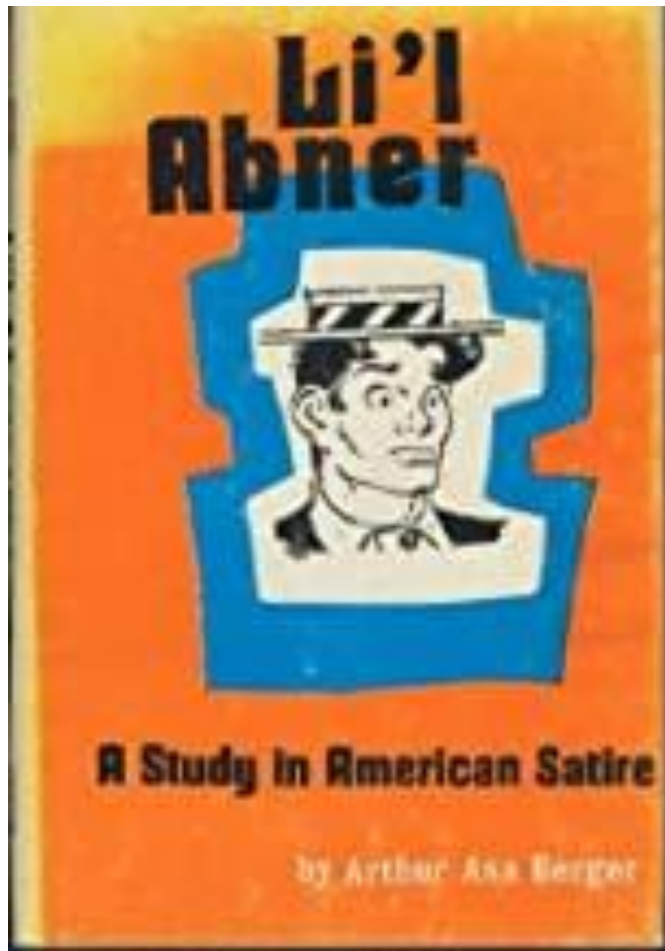
My dissertation on *Li'l Abner* was, I believe, the first Ph.D. dissertation written about a comic strip. When I graduated and was called up on the stage to receive my degree, the president of the University of Minnesota announced my topic and everyone in the audience laughed.

It is, as I think about my career as a writer, very difficult to get any sense of what the future will hold. I could never have anticipated that I would write ninety books over the past fifty-five years or that I would write about the topics I would deal with.

When I write, I write quickly and make many mistakes. My theory is: get it down and then you can make corrections.

I also don't have detailed outlines of what will be in each chapter, so each book is an investigation in which I find answers to questions I have about a topic, which means, in many respects, my books are all surprises for me.





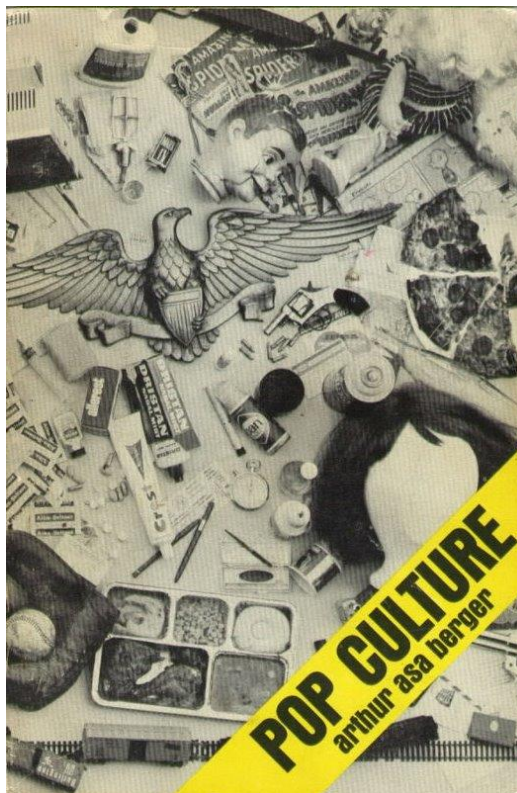
Li'l Abner.

### Pop Culture

A colleague of mine told me about an interesting publisher at lunch, one day....a publisher in Dayton, Ohio named Pflaum. This conversation must have taken place in 1973. I got in touch with the editor and asked him whether he'd be interested in publishing a book of articles I'd been working on dealing with pop culture. He asked me to send some of my articles. A few weeks after I sent them I got a letter from him. "I like your articles and I think a book of them will sell," he wrote.

I sent him my articles and his staff produced a visually interesting book of my essays, which was titled "Pop Culture." There are very few pages in the book that do not have

One of the curious things about pop culture is that, though most almost everyone spends his life in it, nobody seems to be able to agree about what it is. We glance at the comics daily. That's popular culture. We watch television a great deal. (Statistics reveal the average family television set is on five hours a day.) That's a heavy dose of popular culture. We go to the movies, buy rock and roll records, eat snacks, and dress in certain ways. All of this is popular culture, as I think of it.



## Pop Culture Cover

The back cover of the book is also visually exciting and from the book I became convinced that books should have lots of images in them.

Statistics reveal that we spend something like a dozen hours a day involved with media, of one kind or another. I see media as part of popular culture, as well as the gizmos that bring up the media and also enable us to participate in social media.



Back Cover of *Pop Culture*

This is the back page of my book, which is a pastiche made by my book editors and designers, that deals with some of the topics I write about in the book.

In my chapter “What is Popular Culture, and Why is it Important for to Understand it?” I write:

Regardless of whether or not you like popular culture, the fact that millions of people do, and spend a great amount of time and money on it, means that it is significant. It offers us a useful way of understanding one’s society, and, indirectly, oneself. In addition, studying popular culture (That is... looking at it critically) in an attempt to interpret it,

evaluate it, and understand its impact on society) is fun. Whatever else you may wish to say about popular culture, it has an intoxicating dynamism to it; it is vital, and it is immediate. We've all been affected by it, whether we recognize this or not.

Although I wrote these words more than fifty years ago, I believe my argument about the need to study popular culture is still valid and I still write about it and media.

I contrast popular culture with elite culture. Elite culture requires a certain amount of sophistication to enjoy. I am talking about serious novels, poetry, classical music, ballet, opera, works of "serious" art, and so on.

There is reason to argue that elite culture often has an effect on popular culture and vice versa, that popular culture often affects elite culture.

## **Mikhail Bakhtin**

Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian communications theorist, argued that all conversations are affected by previous conversations and shape future conversations and we can say the same thing about all the arts.

He writes, in a book of his essays (Michael Holquist, ed. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. 1981:279-281. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press).

The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder with it; the world is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way...The world in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering world. Such is the case in any living dialogue....

Bakhtin (1875-1975) was an influential theorist of communication from Russia, elaborated a theory of language called "dialogism," wrote important works on Dostoevsky and is probably most famous for his book *Rabelais and His World*.



Mikhail Bakhtin

Dialogism focuses on the two-way aspects of communication—taking dialogue as its main metaphor for the communication process.

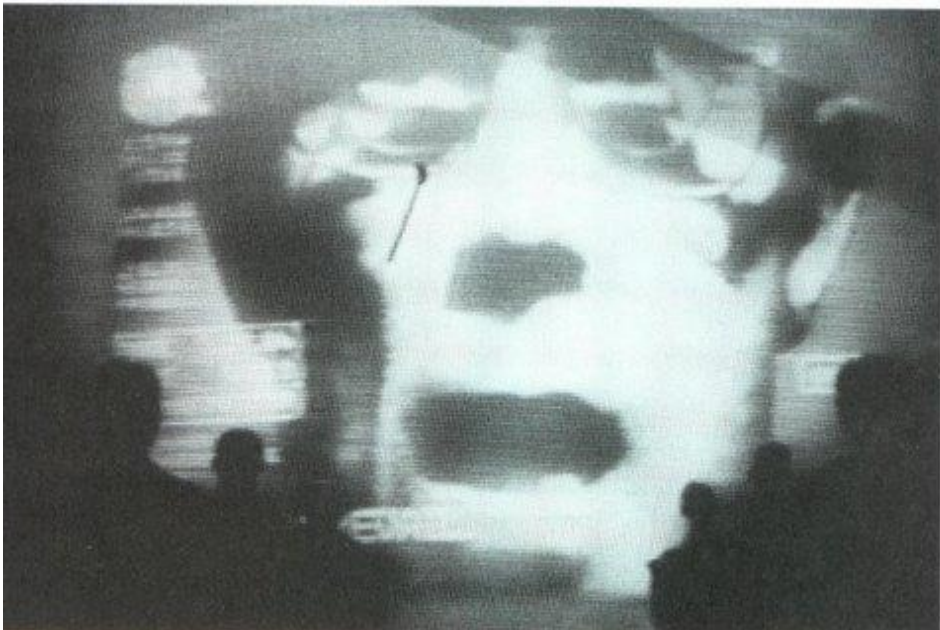
While it is an oversimplification to say that communication is dialogue, the statement is not too far from the truth. Dialogue, we must recognize, is basic to understanding communication, not monologue—in which we are talking to ourselves, so to speak. When we speak with others, we must keep in mind what has already been said and anticipate what will be said. And this property is true of all discourse, of all kinds of communication

in all media. That is, communication must take into account cultural norms and beliefs and use them, just as it must consider future responses to that communication.

This dialogic perspective, which takes into account previous utterances and texts in all media, implies another of Bakhtin's theories, one known as intertextuality. What this says, in brief, is that there are strong relationships between texts being produced at any moment in time and other texts that were previously produced. In some cases, as in parody, we are conscious of these earlier texts, but in many other cases, artists in all media who are creating texts (movies, television shows, novels, songs, and so on) are not always conscious of the way these previously produced texts influence them—either stylistically or in terms of their content.

### **Intertextuality**

Thus, the famous television commercial for Macintosh, “1984,” broadcast during a Superbowl, is intertextual in that it is based on George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984. And many films and novels are intertextual and use themes and other material from other texts for various purposes. Sometimes this borrowing is conscious, as in parodies, but in other cases it is not consciously done by creative personalities who make films and write novels with intertextual elements.



Scene from Ridley Scott's “Macintosh 1984” Commercial



This image, at the conclusion of the commercial, shows a sledgehammer thrown at a giant screen which destroys the ability of the brainwasher, shown on the screen, to control his victims in the 1984 commercial. The scene in which a beautiful blonde woman throws the sledgehammer at the giant image recalls David and Goliath and is also intertextual in nature.

I was a visiting professor for a year at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California for a year and had someone from the advertising agency that made the commercial come in to talk to my class—of 200 students about the success of the commercial.

It was directed by Ridley Scott, a well-known film director and it was only by a miracle that it was broadcast during the super bowl since the people at Apple didn't like it.

I might add that intertextuality applies to my use of ideas and material from my books to various articles and books I wrote. It is not unusual for authors to “borrow” from themselves, though I always rewrite/revise any material I am borrowing..

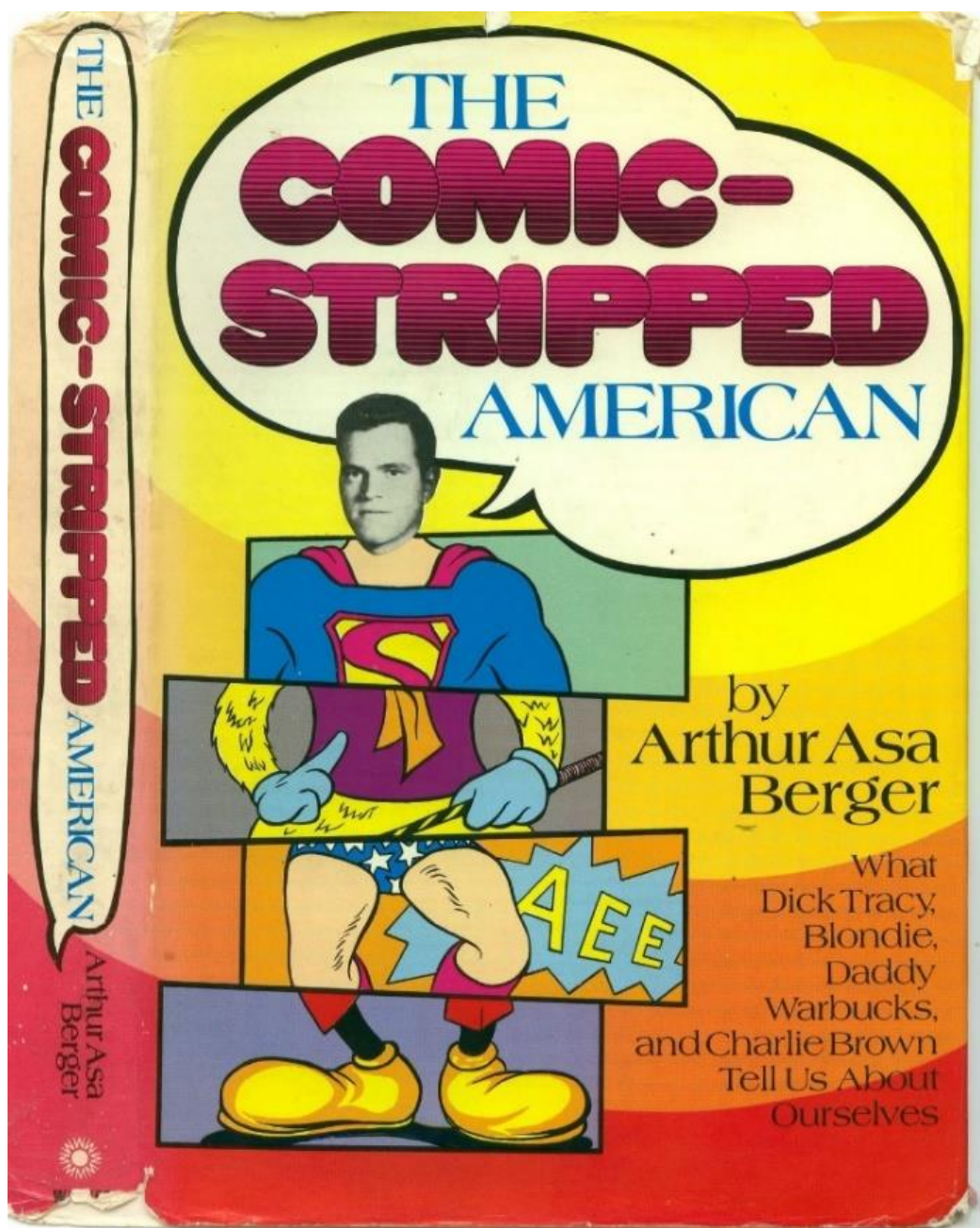
### **The Comic-Stripped American**

In 1974, I returned to the comics and published a book, *The Comic-Stripped American*. The cover is remarkable because the president of Walker Publishers chose to put his photograph on the cover. Its subtitle, “Wht Dick Tracy, Blondie, Daddy Warbucks and Charlie Brown Tell Us About Ourselves,” suggests that I used some of our more important comic strips to suggest what they revealed about American character and culture.

It came out during my “purpose” prose period and its text focuses on the values and beliefs of the characters in our most important comic strips of the seventies.

The titles of the chapters reveal my perspectives on the comics and their relation to the American psyche and American culture.

One thing that is interesting about the cover of the book is that the face on the cover is that of the publisher of the book who inserted himself into the book. I have published many books but this is the first time a publisher put his face on the cover of one of my books.



Cover of *The Comic Stripped American*

It came out during my “purpose prose” period and its text focuses on the values and beliefs of the characters in our most important comic strips of the seventies.



The titles of the chapters reveal my perspectives on the comics and their relation to the American psyche and American culture. Here are some of them:

THE YELLOW KID: Urban Poverty in the Good Old Days

THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS: Infantile Disorders of the Left and Right and Center

MUTT AND JEFF: The Politics of Failure

KRAZY KAT: The Social Dimensions of Fantasy

DISSOCIATION IN THE HERO: Superman and the Divided Self

PEANUTS: The Americanization of Augustine

MARVEL COMICS: Machines, Monsters and the Myth of America

I used the different comic strips to discuss important themes. For example, consider my discussion of *The Yellow Kid* (1973:33):

The kids in *The Yellow Kid* are abandoned—left to their own devices by their parents, presumably too busy, or too tired, to look after them. This theme, that of the “abandoned child,” is a recurrent theme in the comics. We find many heroes and heroines in the comics who are abandoned for one reason or another. Superman, Batman and Little Orphan Annie are orphans; Robin is Batman’s ward; the characters in *The Yellow Kid* are left out in the alley to play. This sense of having been abandoned is intimately related, I believe, to the American historical experience of abandoning the old world, our “fatherland,” and coming to a new world where there were opportunities for improvement.

Let me offer another example in which I expose/reveal the psychoanalytic significance of an important comic strip character, *Dick Tracy* (1973:123):

*Dick Tracy* reflects the world as a sinful, corrupt, degrading place. This stems directly from our evangelical Protestant tradition. Tracy is our superego, developed almost to the point of pathology: he tell us there is no escape from judgment, even if you ‘seem’ to be getting away with something. Thus, he stems from a long line of conscience-ridden Protestants who have people this country and worked mightily to vanquish evil—in both thought and deed. This explains the rather oppressive ambience of the strip, for it reflects a pathological preoccupation with the evil and corruption that permeates the world...for the power of evil to corrupt the good and to destroy man and his democratic institutions in a central tenet of this view.

You can see from these two examples how I find important themes and concerns reflected in comic strips. Some might argue that I am “reading in” ideas, in my head, about the

significance of comics, and that they are just harmless, trivial entertainments not worth giving serious thought to, but I disagree with that perspective.

### **The TV-Guided American**

I took a similar perspective with my next book, also published by Walker in 1976, *The TV-Guided American*. This book has a foreword by Marshall McLuhan, who writes (1976:

Professor Berger shows us some of the main problems and patterns of Western man in the electric age in the course of studying TV programs from *All in the Family* to Monty Python's *Flying Circus*. One of his persistent themes is radically changing problems of identity, both private and public.

Some of the chapters in the book are:

THE FAMILY OF MAN: the ethnic joke as a situation comedy (About "*All in the Family*").

BRAINWASHING THROUGH THE BOOB TUBE: the cultural significance of two commercials

STAR TREK: a romance of inner space

UPSTAIRS-DOWNSTAIRS: or the law of the excluded middle

HUMOR ON THE "TELLY:" or what makes Englishmen laugh

What I wrote about "*All in the Family*" seems even more relevant today, in a radically divided country, where the values of someone like Archie Bunker now play an important role in our politics. As I explained (1976:12);

*All in the Family* is really a case study in the demythologizing of the American working class. In the popular mind, the working-class blue collar worker is seen as a clean-living, honest, hard-working person who is tolerant of his fellowman, God-fearing, perhaps a bit materialistic, but generally speaking a fine figure. This heroic figure, the so-called common man, has traditionally been seen as a reservoir of good sense and an upholder of our democratic values. This is the way the common man is presented in the media, at least....We believe that the common man will save us because he is closer to nature and to life. This notion is connected to our egalitarianism and our anti-intellectualism, our fear of institutions and our defining ourselves as "natural" a contrasted to "civilize," a subject I will discuss in greater detail later. In any case, Archie Bunker does not seem to be very noble, and his description of his fellow American seems far removed from what we might

expect from the natural democrat.... There seems to be an endless number of people whom Archie hates, and American audiences seem to derive a great deal of pleasure from seeing and hearing Archie vent his wrath on various scapegoats.

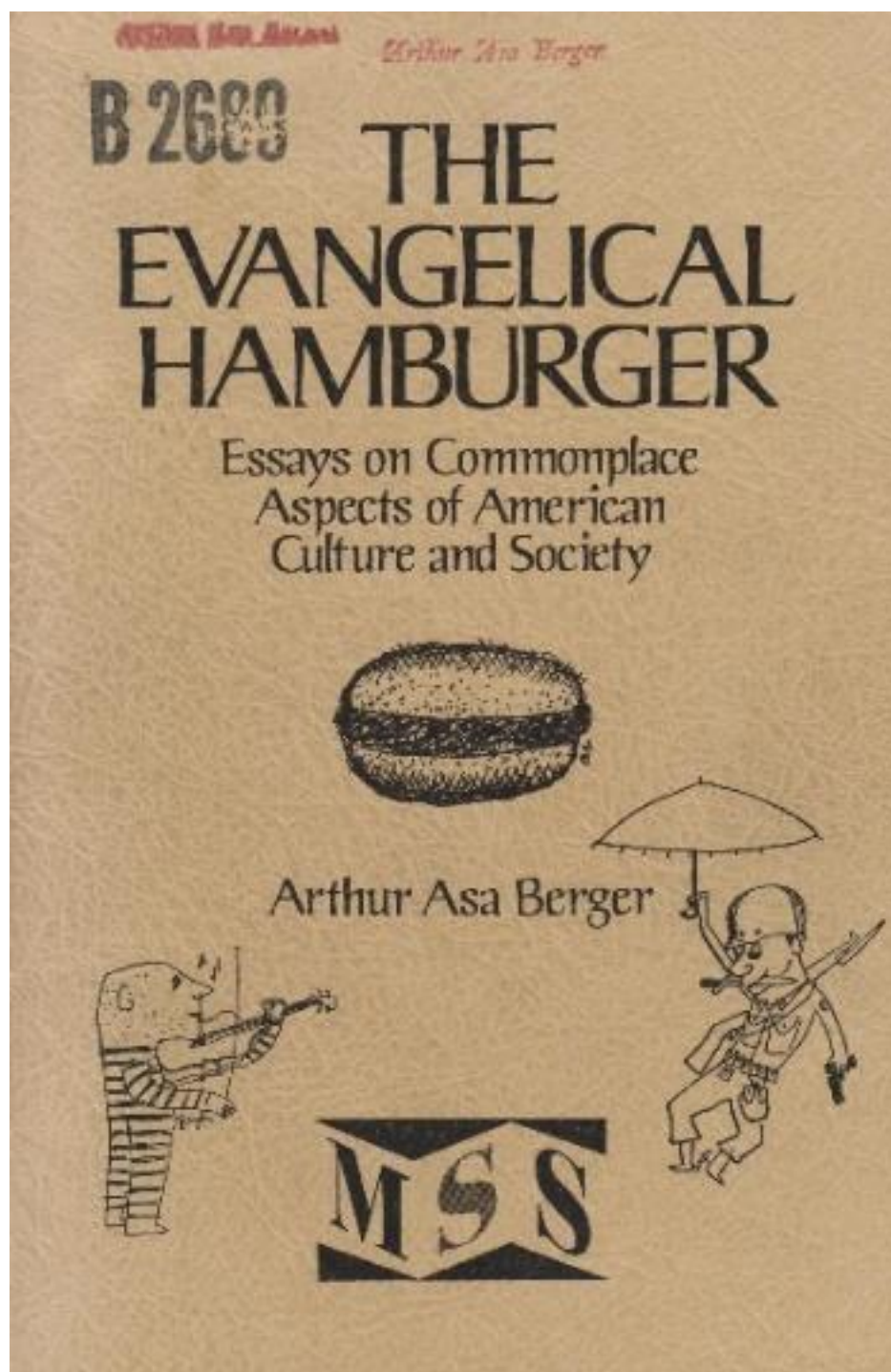
In the chapter I quote a Newsweek article (Nov. 29, 1971) which lists some of kinds of people Archie hates:

He seems himself menaced by a rising tides of spades, spooks, schwartzes, coons, coloreds, Chinks, Commies and their Commie crapola, jungle bunnies, jigs, pinkos, pansies, hebes, yids, black beauties, bleeding hearts, tamale eaters, yentas, atheists, weirdos, dumb Polacks, dingbats, meatheads, fairies, fruits, fags and four-eyes.

I argue that this list suggests that Archie suffers from a kind of diffuse paranoia, which also describes former president Donald Trump and his MAGA admirers. If there were a real Archie Bunker, is there any doubt that he would be a Trump follower and trump followers may be seen, in main part, as thinking about their fellow Americans the way Archie thought about Americans. He is then a paradigmatic figure and many Trump followers are similar in their belief structure and resentments/grievances to Archie Bunker.

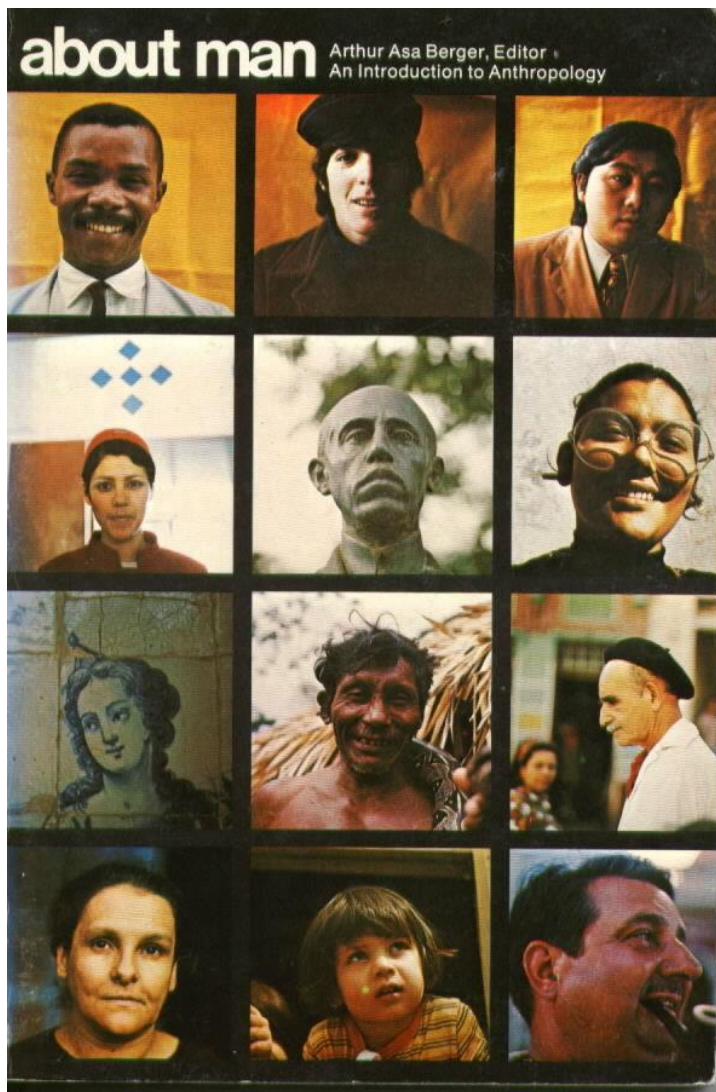
### **The Evangelical Hamburger**

I had also published a short book of my writings for my students in 1970 called *The Evangelical Hamburger: Essays on Commonplce Aspects of American Culture and Society*. I had written an article in 1963 for the Minnesota Daily college newspaper called "The Evangelical Hamburger" in which I argued that McDonald's was like an Evangelical religion and would spread rapidly.



Cover of *The Evangelical Hamburger*

In addition, I edited a book of essays by anthropologists for high school students in 1974 (with Pflaum), *About Man: An Introduction to Anthropology*. It was designed for high school students taking courses in anthropology or the social sciences. What is interesting about the cover is that everyone on the cover is from Brazil. This shows the remarkable diversity of races found in Brazil and increasingly in many countries now, including the United States of America. America used to be known as a “melting pot” but now, with the rise of white nationalism, people seeking asylum in the United States are finding it more difficult.



Cover of *About Man*

I also collaborated with S.I. Hayakawa on his book *Language in Thought in Action*, which was published in 1974 and edited a book of articles from *Society magazines* called *Film in Society* in 1978.

As you can see, I was very busy for a few years with all my writing and publishing efforts. That same year I published a book of essays on media and popular culture, *Television as an Instrument of Terror*.

## Media Analysis Techniques

In 1982, I published one of my most important books (from my perspective), *Media Analysis Techniques* in Sage Publication's CommText series.

I had written an article on semiotic analysis for a professor who was editing a book on media, but it didn't work out. I decided to write chapters on psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, and sociological theory and add articles on blue jeans showing how these four techniques/disciplines could be used to analyze a topic.

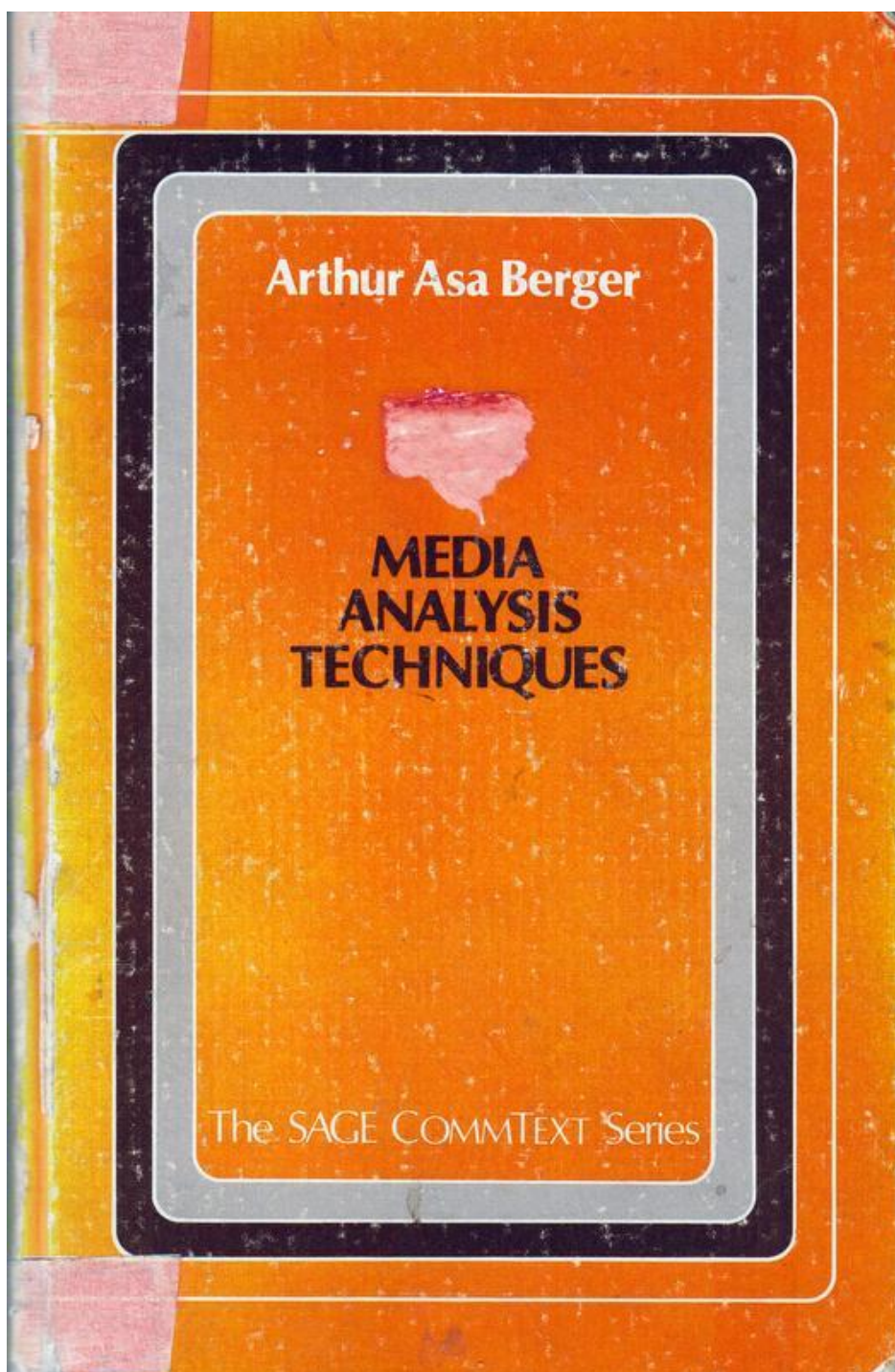
I sent the manuscript to Sage and it was rejected. I told friend of mine, a prominent political scientist about the matter and he said he would send it to someone else at Sage, which he did, and it was accepted. But my editors there suggested I substitute chapters on media for my chapters on blue jeans, so I wrote chapters on the film *Murder on the Orient Express*, on Football, on Sex and Symbol in Fashion Advertising and All News Radio.

The book is 5.5 by 9 inches in size and has very large print and is 160 pages long. It represents a different way to teach courses on media and popular culture.

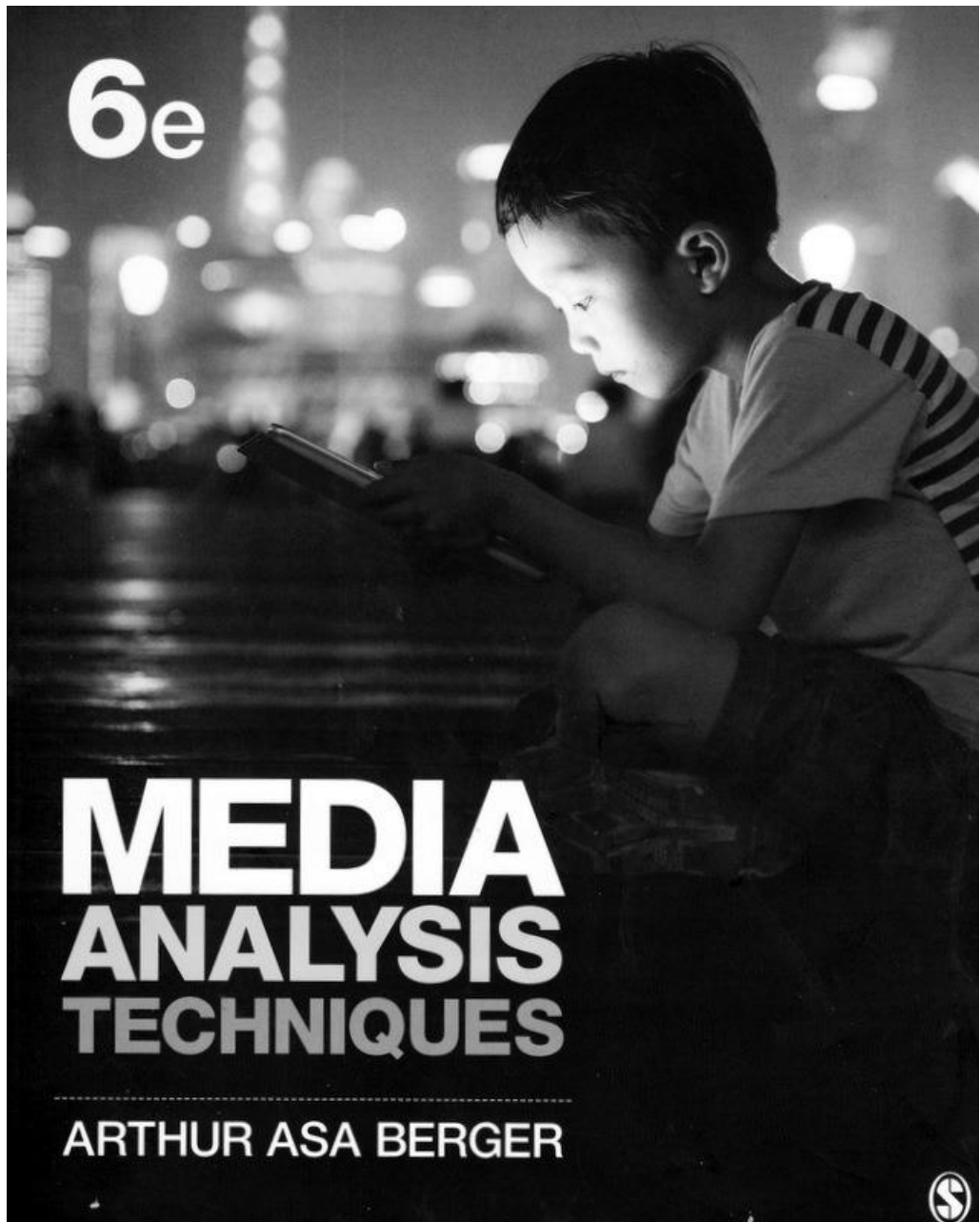
What *Media Analysis Techniques* does is teach students four methodologies that they can use to make their own analyses of texts instead of having them read essays on media and pop culture by scholars and writers that the students are asked to write about in examinations.

The sixth edition of the book is much different. It has a larger format (about 7.5 x 9 inches) and smaller type. It is also "data free" as Peter Clarke, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California described it. He invited me to be a visiting professor at the school in 1984.





*Cover of Media Analysis Techniques First Edition*



*Media Analysis Techniques 6th Edition*

I argue that the methodologies will stick with students and that they would use them in their everyday lives and I've had comments, over the years, about the effect of learning these methodologies on their lives.



The book is written in an accessible and reader friendly style, and is full of quotations from high-level thinkers such as Umberto Eco, Sigmund Freud, Elihu Katz, Vladimir Propp, Ferdinand de Saussure and Karl Marx. It was an instant success and as one of my editors put it, “The books are flying off the shelves.”

I also developed a series of learning games to use with the book, so the students could learn how to use the concepts in the various disciplines.

## CHAPTER 1

### SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

I face this assignment—explaining semiotics, the science of signs (also known as semiology) and showing how it can be applied to television and popular culture to those who know little or nothing about the subject—with a certain amount of apprehension. I'm not sure whether semiotics is a subject, a movement, a philosophy, or a cultlike religion. I do know that there is a large and rapidly expanding literature on the subject and that many of the writings of semioticians are difficult to understand and highly technical. You might be interested to know that as of December 21, 2016, there are more than 12,000 books on semiotics, 8,187 books on semiology listed on Amazon.com books, and on Google, 4,487,000 websites on semiotics and 543,000 on semiology. We find, then, that there is a great deal of interest in this subject.

So my mission, if not impossible, is quite challenging: Not only am I to explain the fundamental notions or elements of semiotics, but I am also to apply them to television and television productions as well as to popular culture in general. It is a large undertaking, but I think it can be done. The price I must pay involves a certain amount of simplification and narrowness of focus. I am going to explain the basic principles of semiotics and discuss some sample applications. I hope that after reading this chapter and the annotated bibliography provided, those interested in semiotics will probe more deeply into it at their own convenience.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SUBJECT

Although interest in signs and the way they communicate has a long history (medieval philosophers, including John Locke and others, have shown interest), modern semiotic analysis can be said to have begun with two men: Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). (Peirce called his system *semiotics*, and that has become the dominant term used for the science of signs. Saussure's *semiology* differs from Peirce's semiotics in some respects, but as both are concerned with signs, I will treat the two as more or less the same in this chapter.)

You can see there is much more content on a page in the 5th Edition than in the first, which used a smaller format, a large typeface and more spacing between the lines.

I used the book in my media criticism courses and showed various episodes of *The Prisoner*, a cult TV show from the Sixties, for my students to analyze.

TEACHING MEDIA ANALYSIS TECH.																									
SEMIOLOGY	MARXISM																								
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## GAMES

1. Signifier / Signified
2. Time Capsule
3. Western Short-Short (Famula)
4. Fairy Tale (very analytical)
5. Paper Bag + Art + Post

## MEDIA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

6. Depth / Form
7. Text - Film - Image
8. Text - Film - Image
9. Propaganda Analysis
10. World War II Cartoons
11. Cartoons: Digital Media
12. Text - Image: Postmodern
13. Text - Image: Postmodern
14. Text - Image: Postmodern

## Media Analysis Techniques Topics and Games

On a couple of blank pages at the beginning of the book, I listed some topics I would discuss for each techniques chapter; and some learning games to play with them. Years later, I developed this list of games into a book of learning games for media and communication students.

In the sixth edition of the book, I have a long analysis of the Fidji advertisement of a woman with a snake and a chapter on cell phones, social media and the problem of identity and I updated the other chapters.

*Media Analysis Techniques* was my best-selling book for a number of years and until it was eclipsed by a different book of mine, *Media and Communication Research Methods* which was published many years later.

It became, to my surprise and delight, one of Sage Publication's best-selling books on communication.

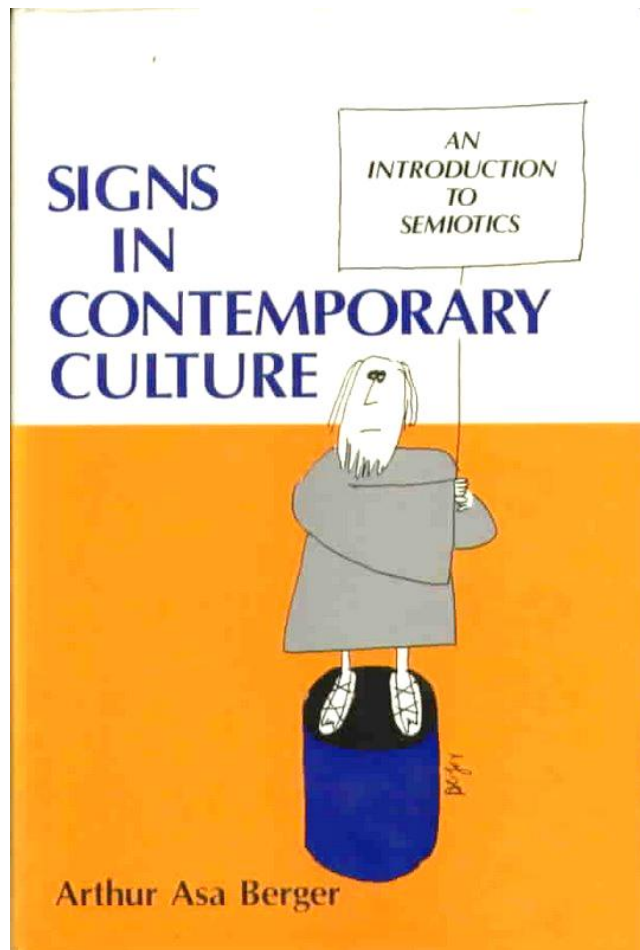


Fidji Advertisement

I had many books to write before I wrote that book. The next book, published in 1984 by Longman, was my introduction to semiotics, *Signs in Contemporary Culture*.

### Signs in Contemporary Culture

I did the drawing used on the cover and did drawings for each of its 27 chapters. I also added photographs and other images when possible. This book is, I believe, one of the most readable and accessible books on semiotics in the English language. It has chapters on topics such as Definition (Honor in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1*), How Signs Work (Sherlock Holmes), Signs, Symbols and Signals (*Empire of Signs*), the Syntagmatic Analysis of Texts (*Star Wars*), Codes (baseball) and Signs and Identity (teeth as signs).



*Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics*

I did a second edition of the book for Sheffield books and a third edition of it for a book, *Signs in Society and Culture*, published in China devoted to my work in its series "Select Works of Eminent Contemporary Semioticians."

Codes 203



*From the semiological point of view, baseball is not just a simple game but, rather, a complicated and semiologically interesting activity. And I'm speaking about more than the "signs" that coaches flash runners or catchers give pitchers.*

### BASEBALL: THREES, FOURS, AND EXCLUSIONS

Baseball, the so-called national pastime of Americans, has (relatively speaking) declined in popularity in recent years, but it is still a game of considerable importance in American society. It is a significant socializing agent here for young boys, who around the age of eight or nine tend to develop what can only be called a mad "passion" for the game. There are, it seems, an almost limitless number of books on great games, great players, great plays, and great teams; for the young devotee, there is a whole history of the game and an ever-growing mountain of statistics to be learned. Furthermore, at any given moment, the statistics all change. Baseball's dynamism is, for many, more statistical than anything else.

Structurally speaking, baseball is organized around the number three, though there are several instances in which the number four is important. There are three strikes to an out, three outs to an inning, three bases, three basemen, three outfielders and three "units"—the battery, the infield, and the outfield. The number four is important in that four balls mean a batter walks, a homerun means he can "take" three bases and go home, and the shortstop can be seen as the fourth man in the infield, the only one not assigned to a base. Batting averages are also computed on the basis of thousands—that is, to the fourth digit—though the averages are given in terms of three figures.

This image, for my chapter on codes, is a typical page in the book.



Each chapter deals with a concept or theory and an application relative to that concept or theory that students might be familiar with or could understand.

I also added some CONS (as in convicts) cartoons, here and there, to give it more visual appeal.



Condom



Corn on the Cob



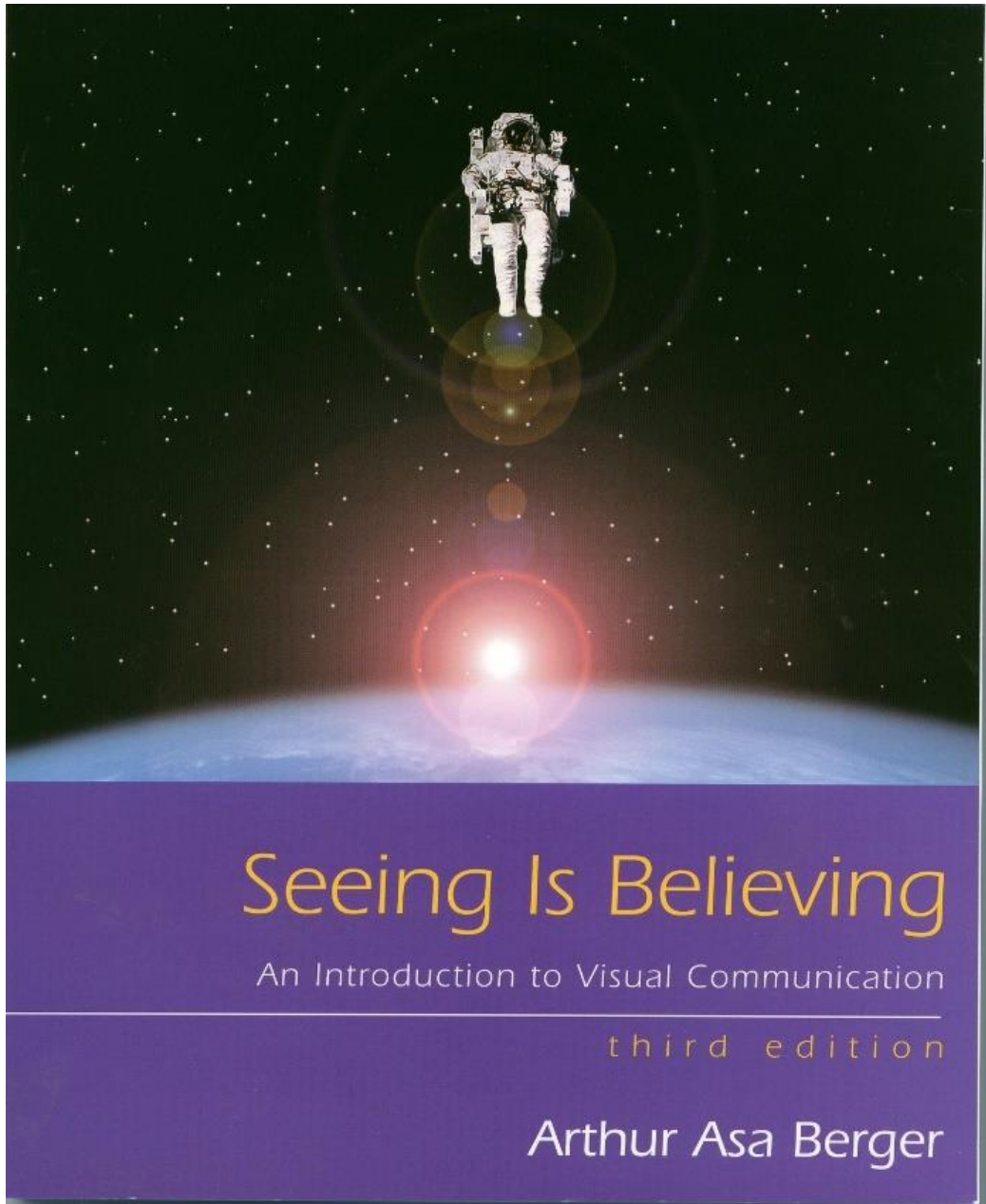
Vatican

Since the publication of this book, I've focused a great deal of attention on the images I can use to give my books visual appeal and make them more entertaining (with the humor) and seem less foreboding and ominous.

*Signs in Contemporary Culture* was later published in a second edition by Sheffield Publishing Company. It marks a turn in my career from identifying myself as a “pop culturist” to a semiotician interested in popular culture, media, communication, and many other topics.

### ***Seeing is Believing. 3rd Edition.***

After my semiotics introduction was published, I published three books that I edited, on television, advertising and media, but it was the next book that I wrote, on visual communication, that I consider one of my most important contributions to the study of media and communication—*Seeing is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication*. It appeared in four editions but I like the cover of the second edition best.



*Seeing is Believing.* Second edition.

The book was originally published in 1989 by Mayfield who sold the rights to McGraw-Hill. In the preface to the fourth edition, I discuss some of the topics I've added to the book:

Visual culture, tattoos, facial expression, typographic theory, iconic buildings, photography and narcissism, postmodernism, Freud on dreams, animation, communication models, and the power of models of all kinds.

The second edition is 267 pages long and there are relatively few pages in the book that do not have one or more images on them. If you are writing a book on visual communication, you have to provide images and in this book I function as both the author and as the graphics editor/graphics designer, since I provided almost every image and decided where the images went.

If you look at the index of the book, you will notice that semiotics is the topic with the most subtopics, which indicates that the book is informed by semiotics and written from a semiotics perspective. I also have an “experiment” in which I reproduce fourteen interesting images for readers of the book to examine and think about, and I offer a list of questions to deal with relating to the experiment.

*Seeing is Believing* was, for many years, one of my most popular books but my publisher, McGraw-Hill, wasn’t interested in publishing the book in color and since it was published in 2012, it has more or less faded into the background.

I recently received a royalties letter from one of my publishers, Rowland & Littlefield, and it revealed that many of my books, published ten or twenty years ago, had no sales and no readers. So, although I have published many books since 1974, many of them don’t have any readers anymore.

On the other hand, some of my books, such as *Media Analysis Techniques*, now in its sixth edition and published in 2019, are still being read, and one of my books, *Media and Communication Research Methods*, to be discussed later, is my most popular book now. But this happened because I published a new, fifth edition of the book, in 2020.

These two books are textbooks and were written to be used in courses in universities. Academic books, which are of primary interest to scholars, sell relatively few copies unless they are adopted as textbooks in courses.

In 1992 I published a book, *Reading Matter: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Material Culture*, which uses semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, anthropological perspectives and sociological theory to analyze material culture.



## Reading Matter

These methodologies are described and applied to material culture in the first part of the book. The second part of the book applied these methodologies to fashion

Material culture can be understood to cover relatively simple objects showing human workmanship, such as foods, vehicles, tools, furniture, gadgets, health aids, weapons, clothing and appliances.

The first chapter of the book, on the “Semiotic Analysis of Material Culture,” discusses some basic concepts in semiotic theory and then lists some polarities we encounter when thinking about how material culture generates meaning:

Electronic	Mechanical
Bright	Dull
Stylish	Common
Modern	Classical
Expensive	Cheap
Hand crafted	Mass produced
Functional	Useless
Digital	Analog

As I write in my discussion of these polarities (1982:19):

When we analyze artifacts we do a number of things at the same time: we evaluate them according to various canons of taste and propriety, we connect them to important values and belief systems and we relate them to the stage of technology and the economy and political institutions of the society creating them.

Objects and artifacts have, it turns out, a great deal to tell us if we learn how to analyze them. I used Freud’s typology of sexual development (Oral, Anal, Phallic and Genital) in my psychoanalysis and material culture, to suggest their significance for many commonly used objects:

ORAL	ANAL	PHALLIC	GENITAL
baby bottle	potty	joystick	
milk	chocolate bar	champagne bottle	aphrodisiac
toothbrush	enema	condom	vibrator

You can get the idea from these examples. I concluded that everyday objects, artifacts, etc. were also part of everyday life and in many cases popular culture, and wrote to the book to suggest of material culture can be mined for what it reveals about society and culture.

I eventually returned to the subject years later with books on brands and on shopping.

## Brands



Brands and Cultural Analysis

In the book I write about branding and personal identity and the role that selective universities play in enabling people to brand themselves:

Branding claims distinctiveness—relative to other brands, that is. If three men or three thousand men wear the same brand of sunglasses, they cannot claim to be distinctive, except in relation to other brands. It is advertising, more than anything else, which brands use to establish their identities and to portray the kind of people who use, or should use, that brand. Some brands use celebrities in their advertising. In other cases, a celebrity or prominent person wears a product which becomes popular.

What's important about brand-name products is that when we see a person wearing a certain brand or collection of brands, we get, we believe, a sense of what the person using the brands is like—if, that is, we have seen advertisements for the brand and know something about it. Branded luxury objects are status symbols and help confer high status upon those who use them. If a self is a kind of conversation we have with ourselves, what happens when we get tired of certain brands and switch to others? Is there a kind of dissociation that occurs as we take on a new self, based on new brands that we now find attractive?

Perhaps the most important branding a young person can do is attend a high-ranking college. People who go to Ivy League colleges and other similarly high-ranking schools, such as M.I.T. and California Institute of Technology, are branding themselves, at an early age and this element of branding lasts for the rest of their lives. People also make a distinction between attending an elite college as an undergraduate and as a graduate student. It is getting into an elite college as an undergraduate that is critical in branding oneself. Somehow, everyone I know who has gone to an elite college, finds a way to mention having been a student at Cornell or Yale or Harvard in conversations, even though they have been away from their school for fifty or sixty years.

We can consider universities and colleges as brands that play a role in branding their students. For those who do not attend an elite school, and may not have wanted to attend one, being a college graduate is also a brand. At one time only a relatively small proportion of Americans attended college. Now, attending college is much more widespread. Now, thirty percent of Americans have a college degree and around eleven percent of Americans have a graduate degree. So attending college brands a person but it is not an elite brand such as attending one of the fifty “best” or most selective colleges and universities.

There was an amusing discussion of brands and the self in Vanessa Friedman’s “Need to Help” column in the August 29, 2018 edition of The New York Times. She received a question from someone who wrote to her and asked how he could come up with a personal

dressing style. He concluded by writing “I’d love something that helps brand me at work and leisure.” She responded (page A3):

The single fastest way to a personal brand is to choose one piece of clothing or aspect of appearance or color that makes you feel most like yourself...and stick to it relentlessly: think Anna Wintour with her sharp bob and shaded glasses; Justin Trudeau and his cheeky symbolic socks; Steve Jobs and his Issey Miyake black mock polos....I’d take a wander into a Thom Browne store....

What interested me about this piece was the way the questioner was searching for a way to brand himself and Friedman’s suggestions about using clothes and props like dark glasses to brand oneself successfully. Branding oneself is more complicated than one might imagine. It can be expensive, as well. An Issey Miyake mock polo costs around two hundred dollars.

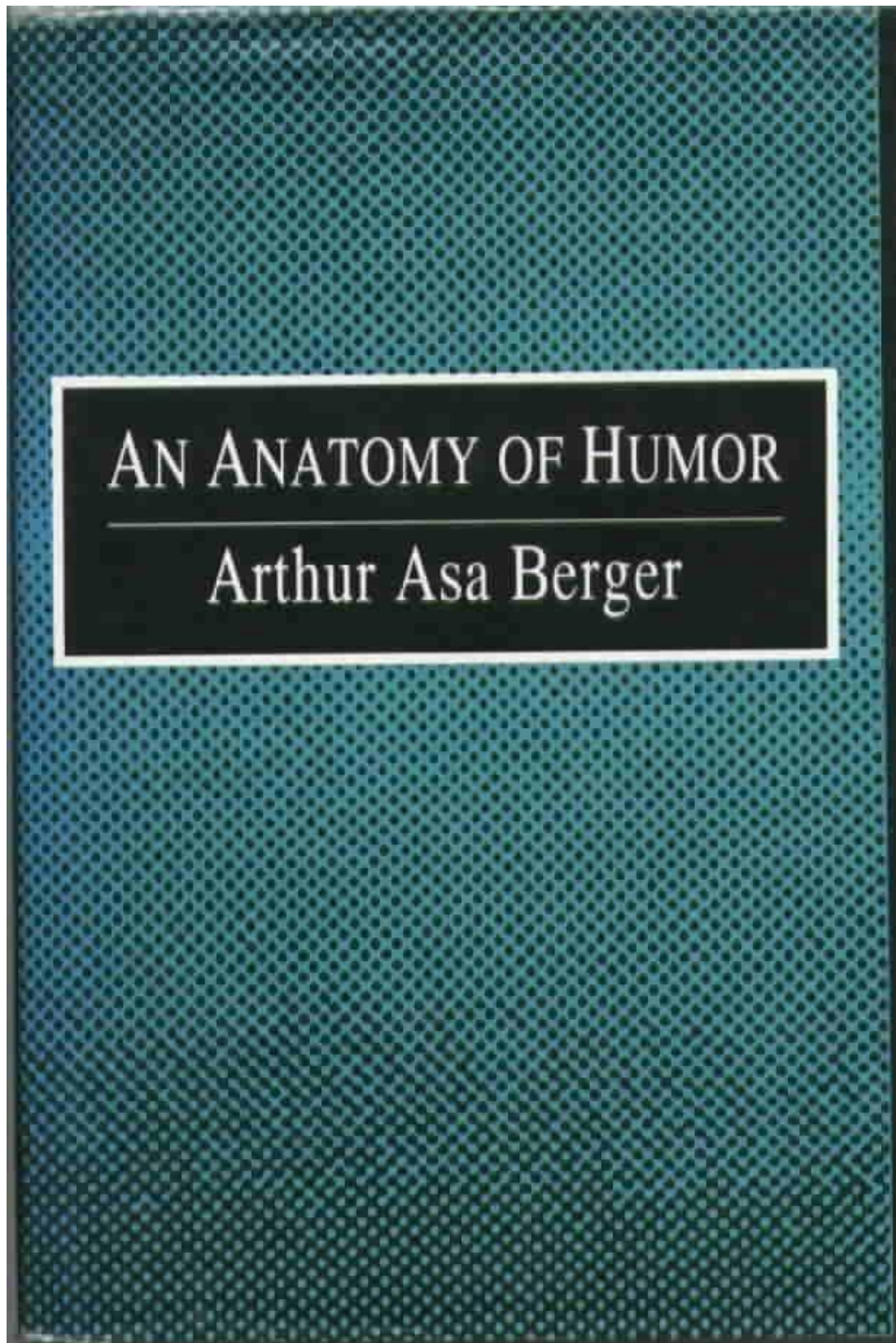
As is the case in many books I write, I never know how they will turn out. I have a set of methodologies (“round up the usual suspects”) and know that I want to apply them to whatever topic I’m investigating, but I’m never able to determine how a given book will end up.

And that is because each book is an investigation in which I write about a topic because it interests me but I don’t know, when I begin a book, whether I’ll be able to finish it or what I’ll find when I’ve finished it.

### **An Anatomy of Humor**

A year after writing my book on material culture, I published another of the many books I was to write on humor—*An Anatomy of Humor*-- and these books contain what I believe to be a useful and original contribution to the study of humor.

My Ph.D. dissertation was on humor and offered a sociological and psychoanalytic perspective on the comic strip, *Li'l Abner*. *An Anatomy of Humor* is much different in that it offers a typology of the basic Techniques of Humor that I suggest helps us understand the basic techniques that show how humor/laughter is generated.



An Anatomy of Humor

In this book I offer a typology of the techniques of humor that I developed after doing research on the techniques authors used to create humor in a variety of texts I had in my library: joke books, books of cartoons, short stories, novels, plays, etc.

I then decided that the 45 techniques fit into four categories: language, logic, identity and action. What is important about this typology is that it allows to examine a humorous text and see how it generates humor.

1	Absurdity	16	Embarrassment	31	Parody
2	Accident	17	Exaggeration	32	Puns
3	Allusion	18	Exposure	33	Repartee
4	Analogy	19	Facetiousness	34	Repetition
5	Before/After	20	Grotesque	35	Reversal
6	Bombast	21	Ignorance	36	Ridicule
7	Burlesque	22	Imitation	37	Rigidity
8	Caricature	23	Impersonation	38	Sarcasm
9	Catalogue	24	Infantilism	39	Satire
10	Chase Scene	25	Insults	40	Scale, Size
11	Coincidence	26	Irony	41	Slapstick
12	Comparison	27	Literalness	42	Speed
13	Definition	28	Mimicry	43	Stereotypes
14	Disappointment	29	Mistakes	44	Theme/Var
15	Eccentricity	30	Misunderstand	45	Unmasking
					Techniques of Humor in Alphabetical Order

The book has chapters on ethnic and racial jokes, Jewish fools, Mickey Mouse, Krazy Kat, *A Cool Million*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and humor and health.

To see how I use these techniques to analyze a joke, consider the following analysis of a joke, “The Tan.” I define a joke as a short narrative with a punch line meant to evoke mirthful laughter:

1. A man goes to Miami for a vacation.
2. After a few days there he looks in a mirror and notices he has a beautiful tan all over his body, with the exception of his penis.



3. He decides to remedy the situation so the next morning he goes to a deserted section of the beach, undresses completely, lies in the sand and covers himself with it, leaving only his penis exposed to the sun.
4. A couple of old ladies walk by.
5. One notices the penis sticking out of the sand and points it out to her friend.
6. "When I was twenty, I was scared to death of them."
7. "When I was forty, I couldn't get enough of them."
8. "When I was sixty, I couldn't get one to come near me."
9. [PUNCH LINE] "And now they're growing wild on the beach."

It is at Jokeme (a part of a joke) 9 that the punch line occurs.

The joke is linear up until Jokeme 8, and then, with Jokeme 9, some kind of resolution is established--a resolution that many people find amusing and which often generates mirthful laughter. The statement about penises growing wild on the beach established a humorous relationship between itself and the first eight statements and also was surprising.

The techniques used in the this joke are:

- 15 Eccentricity
- 29 Mistake
- 21 Revelation of Ignorance
- 18 Exposure
- 34 Repetition and Pattern

I suggest that the joke sets up an opposition between nature and culture and that critics with different perspectives on things can interpret the joke in differing ways, depending upon their interests and the frame of reference (disciplines, concepts, etc.) they bring to the joke.

What codes are violated? Let me suggest a few.

Private	Public
Hidden	Revealed (Sexual Desire)
Dormant	Alive (Sexual Appetites)
Narcissism	Self-Effacement
Perfectionism	Adequacy
Correctness	Being Mistaken

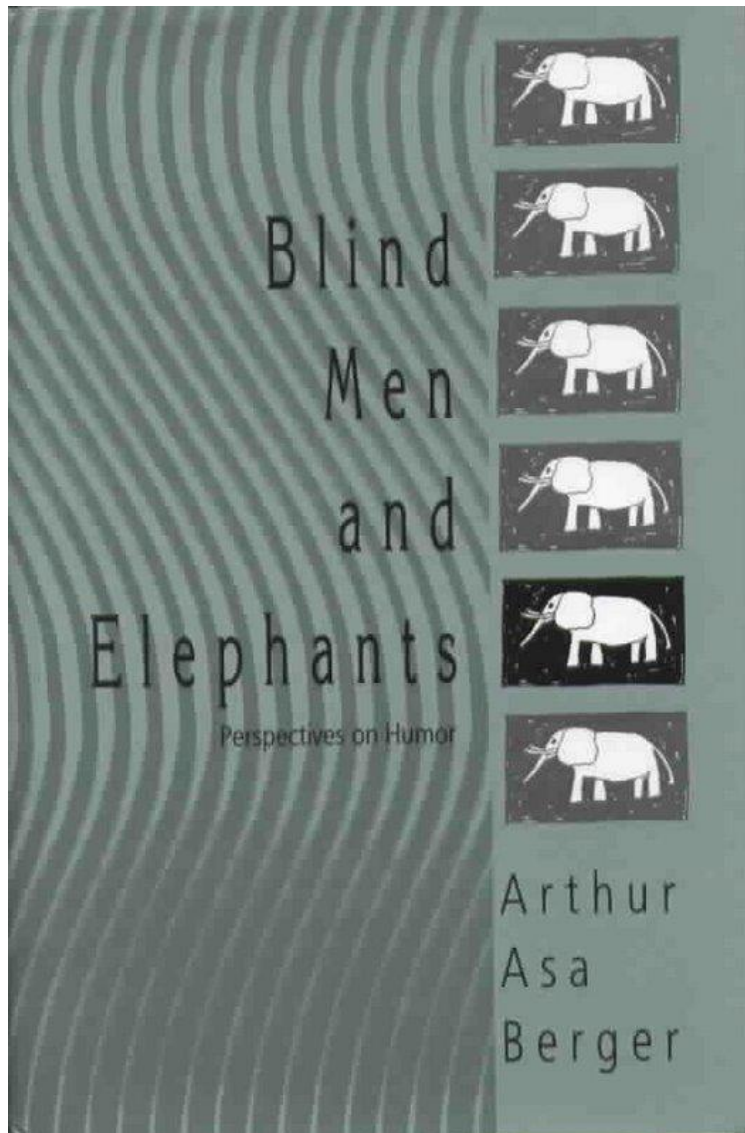
First, the code of privacy. One is not supposed to show one's private parts in public, so we have the opposition: private/public. Secondly, there is the matter of sexual desire which is supposed to be kept hidden, so we have the opposition: hidden/revealed. And we have the matter of the sexual appetites of elderly women, appetites which we generally tend to assume, in our conventional wisdom, are dormant. This leads to the opposition: dormant/alive. The man who desires the perfect tan violates a code that says trying to be perfect in every way can be defeating. This violation might be described as: perfectionism/good enough-ism or narcissism/self-effacement. Finally, we have the mistake made by the woman, who assumes that penises are growing wild on the beach, which leads to the opposition: correct/mistaken.

### Blind Men and Elephants

I followed up this book with another book on humor, in 1997, *Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humor*, which looked at humor from the perspective of many disciplines, such as philosophy, rhetoric, semiotics, sociology, literary theory and psychoanalytic theory.

Like my *Anatomy* book, I included a number of jokes and other humorous texts in it, with around 50 of them. In my three Transaction Publishers books on humor, I provide a list of jokes and humorous texts after the indexes, so readers can easily find the jokes discussed in the books.

I would argue that a book on humor should have many humorous texts in it so readers can see how the 45 techniques can be applied

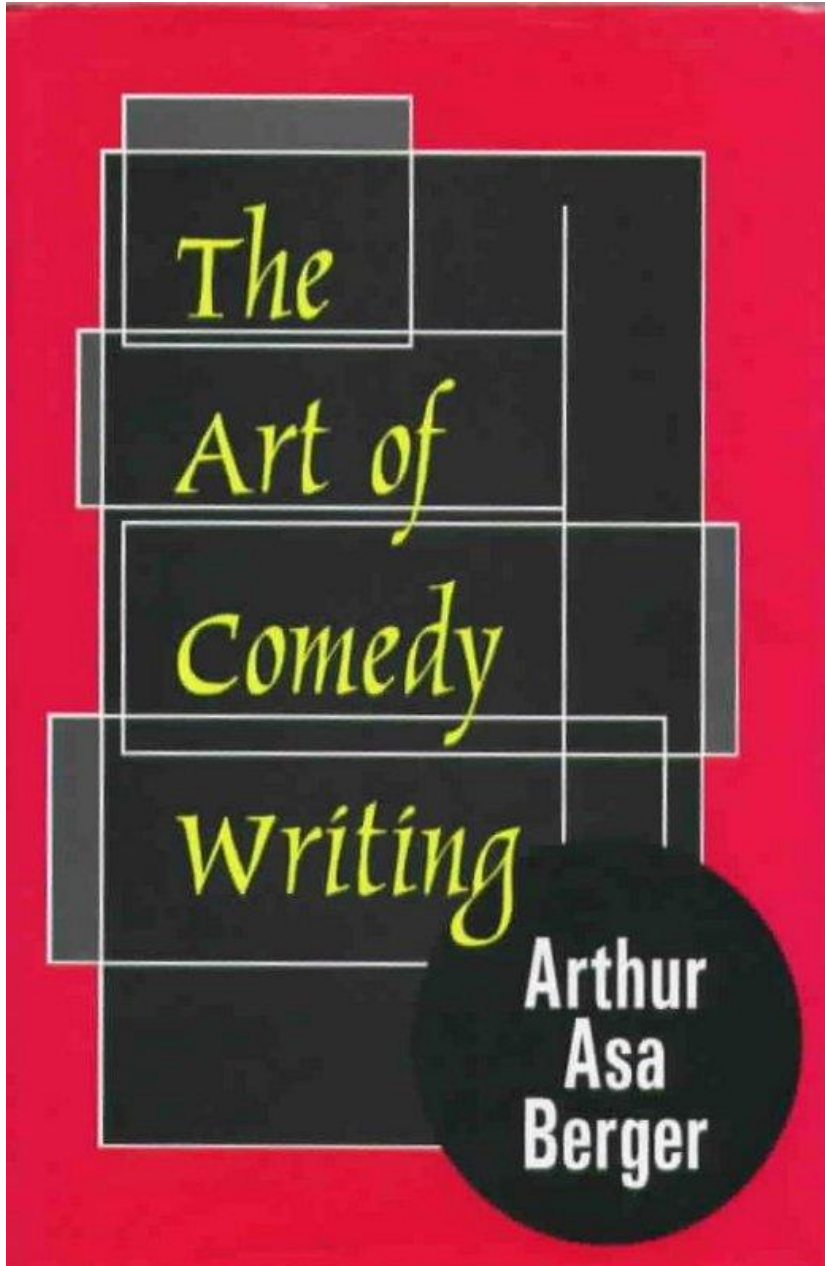


### Blind Men and Elephants

Two years later, I applied my 45 techniques to dramatic comedies in my book *The Art of Comedy Writing*. In this book I analyzed *Miles Gloriosus*, *Twelfth Night*, *The School for Scandal*, and *the Bald Soprano*, covering comedies from the Roman times to contemporary theatre.

## The Art of Comedy Writing

Each chapter analyzes the play from various points of view and applied my 45 techniques to important scenes in the play.



The Art of Comedy Writing

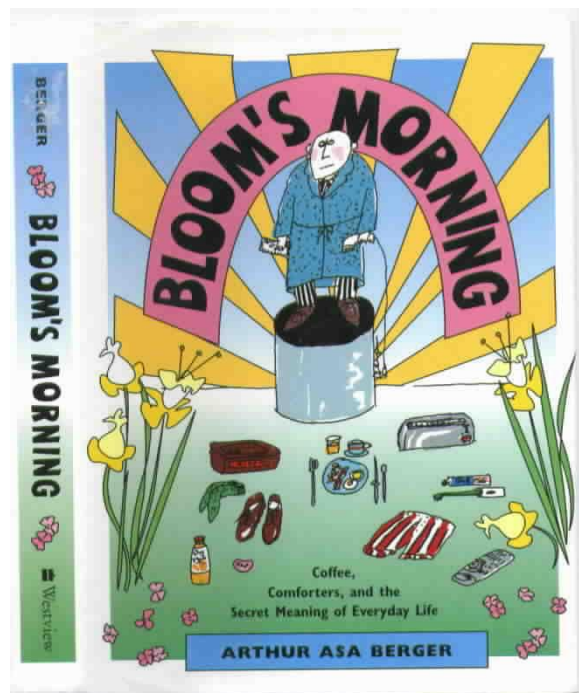
I was to write other books on humor that I will discuss shortly. In 1997, I published one of my best books and one which had humorous overtones, *Bloom's Morning*.

## *Bloom's Morning*

It has an interesting history. I decided to write a sociological study of one day in the life of an American everyman, Bloom, taking my cue from James Joyce's *Ulysses* whose hero was named Leopold Bloom. My original title was *Ulysses Sociologica America* but it was too difficult to do a whole day so I only wrote about *Bloom's morning*.

I sent the manuscript to many publishers. Often, an editor liked the book but could not get a marketing director to also accept the book, so it took many years before I got an acceptance. And that, I believe, was because I sent an editor who like the manuscript, copies of drawings I had made for each chapter.

*Bloom's Morning* has an introduction on the theory of everyday life and conclusion on myth, culture and everyday life. The heart of the book is 36 short chapters on everything from digital clock radios and king sized beds toasters, garbage disposals, dishwashers, trash compactors and mail. I drew the drawing used for the cover.

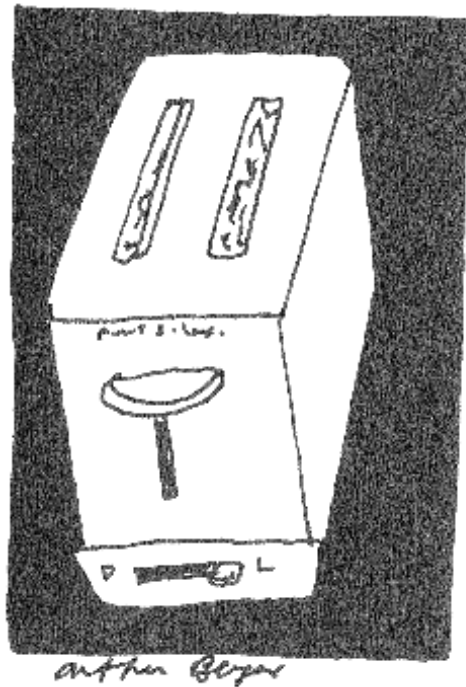


### *Bloom's Morning*

Here is my chapter on toasters.

## T H I R T Y - T W O

# The Toaster



### THE TOASTER

The existence of the toaster implies the existence of sliced bread. For that is what one uses in a toaster. And sliced bread, itself, implies a certain kind of bread: bread that has a particular form or shape most practical for slicing. Bread has been mechanized and standardized and is no longer a product with an irregular shape; it no longer need be touched by human hands.

This does not mean that we do not have other kinds of bread. We do, but generally they cost more than the standard loaf of white or whole grain bread. These "touched by human hands" breads tend to be ethnic--French, Italian, Jewish, Russian--and are generally slightly irregular in shape, often having a crust.



The toaster is part of a system and only has significance relative to the wrapped, pan made, thin crusted bread that can be used in it. One problem with this bread is that it is very soft and spongy. This is the result of the mechanization of bread, described by Sigfried Giedion in *Mechanization Takes Command* as follows:

(1969, 193)

The bread of full mechanization has the resiliency of a rubber sponge. When squeezed it returns to its former shape. The loaf becomes constantly whiter, more elastic, and frothier.... Since mechanization, it has often been pointed out, white bread has become much richer in fats, milk, and sugar. But these are added largely to stimulate sales by heightening the loaf's eye appeal. The shortenings used in bread, a leading authority states, are "primarily for the purpose of imparting desirable tender eating or chewing qualities to the finished product." They produce the "soft velvet crumb," a cake-like structure, so that the bread is half masticated, as it were, before reaching the mouth (p. 193).

Giedion has also described this bread as neither bread nor cake but something halfway between the two. This kind of bread is a highly rationalized product designed to maximize profit for the baker. The consumers had to be "taught" to like this kind of bread, and it was, no doubt, part of the process of "Americanization" that many ethnic groups underwent, a way of repudiating one's ethnic identity and non American ness. (There are, of course, new developments taking place. In large cities one can get "handbaked" breads that are more substantial and more interesting. And even packaged bread seems to be changing, so that more whole grain breads are available as alternatives to the standard loaf of white bread.) One thing the toaster does is change the nature of this bread, giving it a color, making it firmer and easier to handle.

An interesting philosophical problem is raised by the toaster. What is toast- the product of a process or the process itself? That is, does bread become toast (and change its identity somehow) or do we toast bread and thereby only modify its character slightly? Is toast bread that has been processed (toasted) or changed (made into toast)?

Obviously, we start off with a piece of bread--and for our purposes, let us assume that we have the standard loaf of sliced pan bread with its thin crust. The question is whether we end up with a variation of the piece of sliced bread or something that is different. In terms of the dynamics of American culture, I would suggest that we would like to think that toast is something different from bread, per se. That is, the process involves a major transformation (in the same way that grinding a steak turns it into hamburger). We believe in the power of change and in our ability to change our circumstance and status.

This kind of white bread may be the perfect product for the middle classes, standing midway, as they do, between the upper classes and the working classes. Their bread, if Giedion is right, is midway between traditional bread and cake (neither one nor the other). Toast may suggest, unconsciously, a transformation to a higher status. The working classes eat their crusts of bread; the elites "take toast and tea."

The toaster has also led to the development of new products, the most pernicious of which is probably the "pop tart," meant to be "baked" in the toaster as a mechanized kind of sweet roll. The pop tart is a new food product and a relatively successful one, though its sweetness makes it appealing mostly to young children. Toasters themselves have undergone transformations. Older versions required the person making the toast to flip the toast over when one side was done. The toast had to be watched. Then came the "pop" toaster, which toasts bread to whatever degree of lightness or darkness one wants, then pops it up. In the earlier versions of the pop toaster one had to depress the bread using some kind of knob or lever, but the most advanced form of toaster now has a mechanism that takes care of that. One merely inserts the bread in the opening in the toaster and it sinks slowly out of sight, to reemerge, almost magically, when it has become toast.

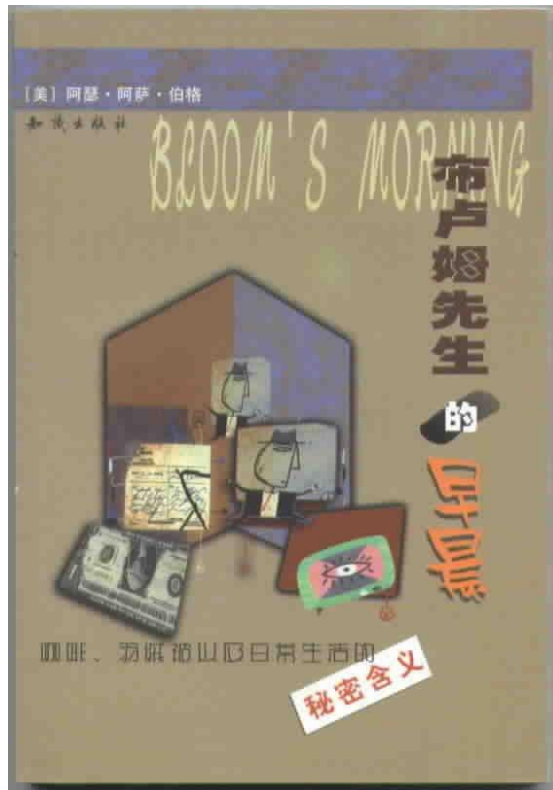
For large families there are toasters that can toast four slices of bread at a time to different degrees of darkness. Thus a toaster can be spewing out light, medium, and dark toast more or less at the same time. Heat sensors in the toaster measure the temperature and the moisture content of the bread and pop it up at the proper moment. (Making toast on the basis of timers is old fashioned and low tech.)

Ultimately the toaster is an apology for the quality of our bread. It attempts, heroically, to transform the semisweet, characterless, "plastic" packaged bread that we have learned to love into something more palatable and more manageable. Perhaps our handling this bread and warming it up gives us a sense that the bread now has a human touch to it, is not an abstract, almost unreal product. The toaster represents a heroic attempt to redeem our packaged bread, to redeem the unredeemable. But the toaster, despite its high-tech functions, is doomed to the continual repetition of (symbolically speaking) Adam and Eve's Fall, for an unregenerate bread cannot be saved.

Every piece of toast is a tragedy.

Whatever else it might be, *Bloom's Morning* is a study of material culture and American rituals and everyday life.

It was translated into Chinese and German and may have been translated into other languages because publishers in many countries, such as Iran, do not get permissions to translate and publish books.



Chinese translation of *Bloom's Morning*

The book is about everyday life and American material culture but it is also a critique of American consumer culture.

In 1997 I had an extraordinary year as far as publishing books was concerned and published five books:

*Narratives in Popular Culture* (Sage)

*The Genius of the Jewish Joke* (Jason Aronson)

*Bloom's Morning* (Westview/Harper Collins)

*The Art of Comedy Writing* (Transaction)

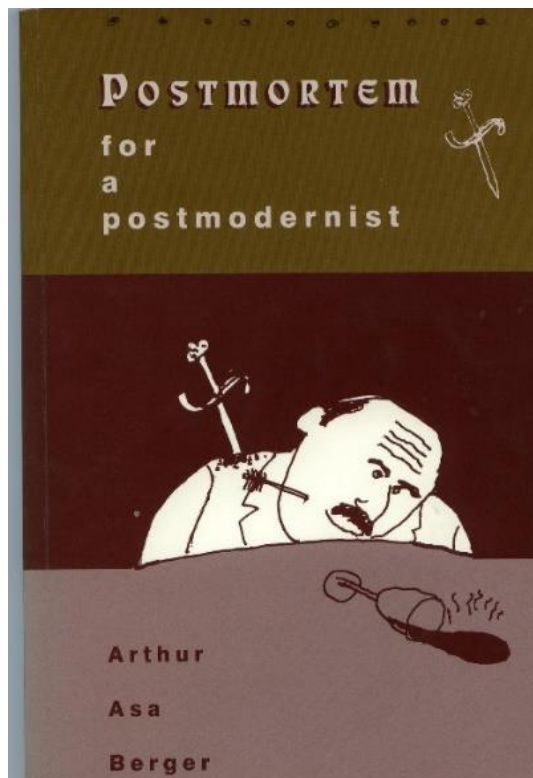
*Postmortem for a Postmodernist* (Alta Mira)

This is, you can imagine, very unusual. But I was to have other years when I published more than one books, just as I had some years when I didn't publish any books at all. It wasn't unusual for me to spend a year or so looking for a publisher for one of my books.

### Postmortem for a Postmodernist

The last book on the list, *Postmortem for a Postmodernist*, is an academic mystery which uses the mystery format to teach readers about postmodernism.

The publisher of the book, Mitch Allen, who ran the AltaMira Press, asked me to do a comic book on postmodernism but I found it too daunting and so I wrote a dark comedic novel with many illustrations.



Postmortem for a Postmodernist

writing about the idea of doing a mystery on postmodernis and I wrote it in my journal. It reads as follows:

## Chapter 1

# When the lights went on again

Arthur Asa Berger

*Department, Professor Emeritus, Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts, San Francisco  
State University  
[arthurasaberger@gmail.com](mailto:arthurasaberger@gmail.com)*

When the lights went on again, the head of Professor Ettore Gnocchi was laying on the table. There was a small red hole, from which a thin trickle of blood was flowing, in the middle of his forehead. The handle of a silver stiletto protruded from his back, and around this stiletto the material on Gnocchi's sports jacket was stained a dark red. A long wooden dart, with yellow feathers, was lodged in his right cheek, several inches from his mouth. The glass of wine, which he had just started drinking, had spilled onto the tablecloth, from which a slightly sulfuric smelling mist was rising.

There was, curiously, something that resembled a smile frozen on his face.

This chapter explains the cover: Ettore Gnocchi was killed many different ways: shot in the head, stabbed with knife, killed with a poisoned dart and poisoned wine. I did the drawing used in the cover and forgot to put in the bullet hole in Gnocchi's forehead.

Before each chapter, I had a quotation from some article or book about postmodernism, which is how I was able to pump more content about postmodernism into the book.

In the second chapter, I introduce the characters in the book and the detective, Solomon Hunter.

## Chapter 2

# My God--what happened?

Arthur Asa Berger

*Department, Professor Emeritus, Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts, San Francisco  
State University  
[arthurasaberger@gmail.com](mailto:arthurasaberger@gmail.com)*

“My God--what happened?” screamed his wife Shoshana TelAviv. She started howling, hysterically.

“He’s....he’s dead!” replied Slavomir Propp, a large fat man with a bushy beard. He was a Russian professor of linguistics, who was a visiting professor at Berkeley that year...and who, the minute before, had been stroking Shoshana’s right knee under the table. He was wearing a wrinkled blue gabardine suit that was two sizes too big for him.

“But this is absurd!” said Alain Fess, in a whiny nasal voice. He was a thin little man with a pointy nose and a scraggly beard. He was wearing a blue denim work shirt, a striped necktie, and blue jeans. “It is totally absurd.” He was sitting between Propp and Myra Prail. “I think I’m going to throw up....” Fess got up and ran off to a bathroom down the hallway.

“Well,” said Basil Constant, the British novelist, in a calm and reasoned voice, “we’d better do something.” He was sitting on the right of Myra Prail, between her and Miyako Fuji. Constant had gray, curly hair and was wearing a fashionably cut double-breasted Navy blue sportcoat and gray slacks. Myra Prail, Gnocchi’s research assistant, said nothing. She had collapsed in grief, her head tilted back. Her long blonde tresses hung down over the chair behind her. Her face had turned splotchy pink and her breasts, well displayed in the flimsy yellow boile dress she was wearing, were heaving.

And Miyako Fuji, seated to the immediate left of Gnocchi, stared blankly ahead, as if in a trance. Her glossy long black hair hung down to her waist. Her lips were covered with a pearly, translucent green lipstick and she was wearing green eye makeup. She was dressed in a tight fitting green turtleneck and a short green skirt.

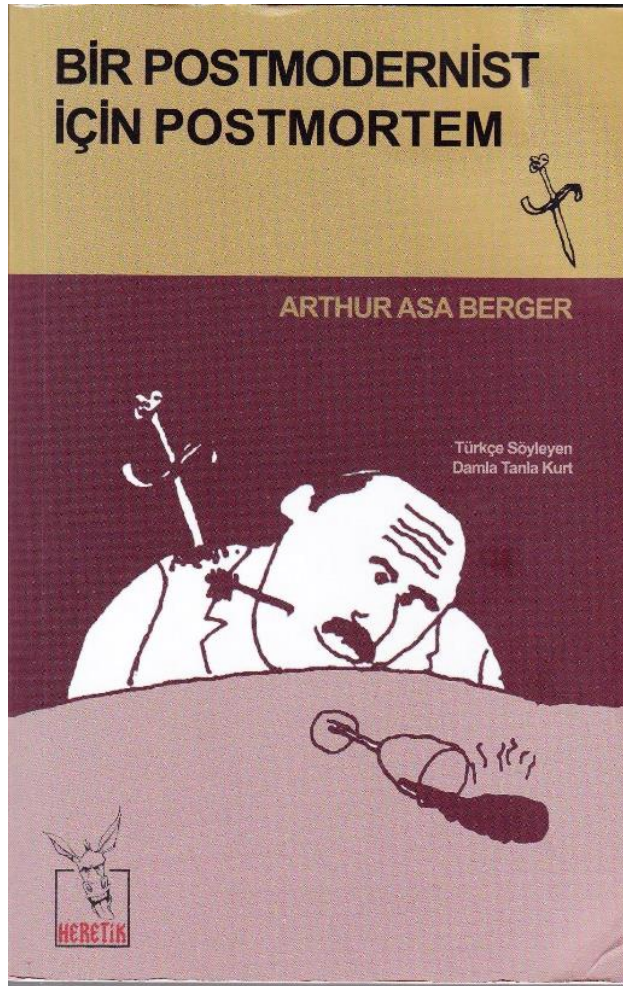
This macabre scene took place in the dining room at the Gnocchis San Francisco home, a good-sized square room dominated by a large circular table. Two passages led to it--one to the kitchen and the other to the living room.



I introduced my detective, Solomon Hunter and his assistant as follows:

A short, paunchy man, in a dark Harris tweed suit and a graying beard, strode into the room. He wore round tortoise shell eyeglasses that were tinted a very light gray. His nose was fleshy, his eyes were bright blue and had a brilliant sparkle to them. They were eyes that were full of life, eyes that saw everything but revealed nothing. He was accompanied by a tall, slender man with a thin mustache. He had a sullen, rather pained look on his face. Behind them there were several policemen. The short man with the beard opened a leather wallet and showed everyone his badge.

“Police inspector Solomon Hunter,” he said. “And this is my assistant, Sergeant Talcott Weems.



Turkish translation of Postmortem for a Postmodernist

This book is also popular in China, where it is used in courses on postmodernism and was the subject of a lecture by a prominent television personality in Iran. When I gave a lecture on media criticism in China in 2019, a student asked me a question about the book. There may be other translations of the book of which I am unaware.

I have published other didactic academic mystery novels over the years, such as:

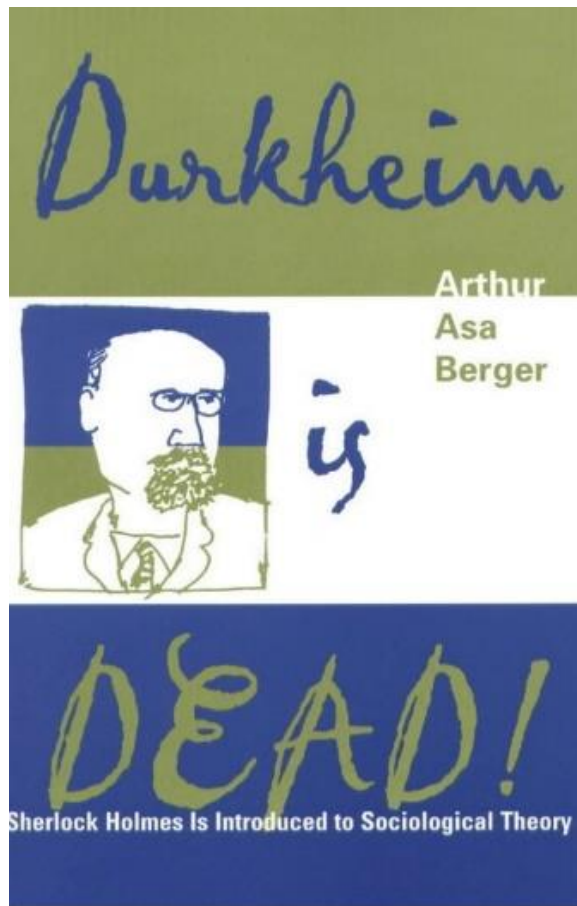
*Durkheim is Dead: Sherlock Holmes is Introduced to Social Theory*

*Mistake in Identity: A Cultural Studies Murder Mystery*

*The Mass Comm Murders: Five Media Theorists Self-Destruct*

*Freud is Fixated: Sherlock Holmes and Psychoanalytic Theory*

### **Durkheim is Dead**



*Durkheim is Dead*

All of these books use the mystery format to deal with scholarly subjects. You can describe these mysteries as a way of sugar-coating the didactic pill. That is, offering a textbook hidden in a mystery novel. Here is an example taken from *Durkheim is Dead*:

“It may be true, Dr. Watson” said Durkheim, “that individuals have their own, distinctive medical problems, but think about the fact that there are occasional outbreaks of illnesses, such as the plague or smallpox, that have killed millions of people and there are other times where large numbers of people are affected by the outbreak of some disease. So some illnesses are transmitted by contagion...and others are caused by social factors such as malnutrition.”

“In my view, society—or, more precisely, the collective consciousness created in a given society—is always present in the individual and my research has suggested to me that it is religion that plays the major role in creating in individuals the beliefs that makes them adhere to society’s requirements. I have suggested that we can divide the world into two realms—the sacred and the profane. The sacred is the world of religion, the profane is the everyday world—of work and family life--where religions considerations do not seem to play a role. A religion, as I define it, is a system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them. Where you have religion, you must have some kind of church.”

“I have found that suicide rates tend to be low in Catholic countries, where people are held together by religious beliefs, and high in Protestant countries, where people are more or less left to their own devices and religion is a much more individualistic matter. Religion, I have come to believe, is not only a social creation but should also be seen as a transcendental or ideational representation of society. The sacred is the realm of religion, and where you have religion you always have a church. The profane, on the other hand, is the realm of society—the realm of work and play and our everyday activities. But what is important to recognize here, is that the realm of the sacred affects the realm of the profane. Most people, of course, are unaware that such is the case.”

“That is because, I suggest, the fundamental categories of thought are also of religious origin. It may be said that nearly all of the great social institutions have been born in religion. If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of religion is the soul of religion. Religious forces are therefore human forces, moral forces.”

“Then, Professor Durkheim, is there no place for freedom?” I asked. “That would seem to be the logical import of your theories. If religion plays the dominant role in giving

man his moral sensibilities and desire to adhere to society's strictures, how do you account for freedom?"

"No, Dr. Watson," Durkheim replied. "That is not the case. Men are free but they are not absolutely free—nor can they be. People must respect the rules of society. Otherwise you have anarchy, in which case people end up being less free than when obeying society's rules. For example, our freedom to drive about is based on accepting certain rules for driving, one of which deals with which side of the street we will drive on. If people drove on whichever side of the street they chose, nobody would be able to drive anywhere. There would be chaos. That's what you get with anarchy."

"Man's characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral; this is, social. He is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject to that of society."

"Those who do not accept society's norms, as I have explained earlier, I term anomic or normless. Not all anomic people commit suicide, however. Some become criminals. We simply cannot be free of every restraint. What is unique about men are the checks to which they are subjected are not physical but moral, that is social. When, as a result of calamities or great social dislocations, the restraints that ordinarily hold people in check are not adequate, we find anomie and with it, phenomena such as suicide and deviance."

It is through conversations like the one between Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson and Durkheim, that I was able to deal with some important aspects of Durkheim's thinking.

In 2000 I published a book, *Media and Communication Research Methods* which evolved, over the years, from a slender volume for the first edition to a 461 page book in the fifth edition, published in 2020.

## **Media and Communication Research Methods**

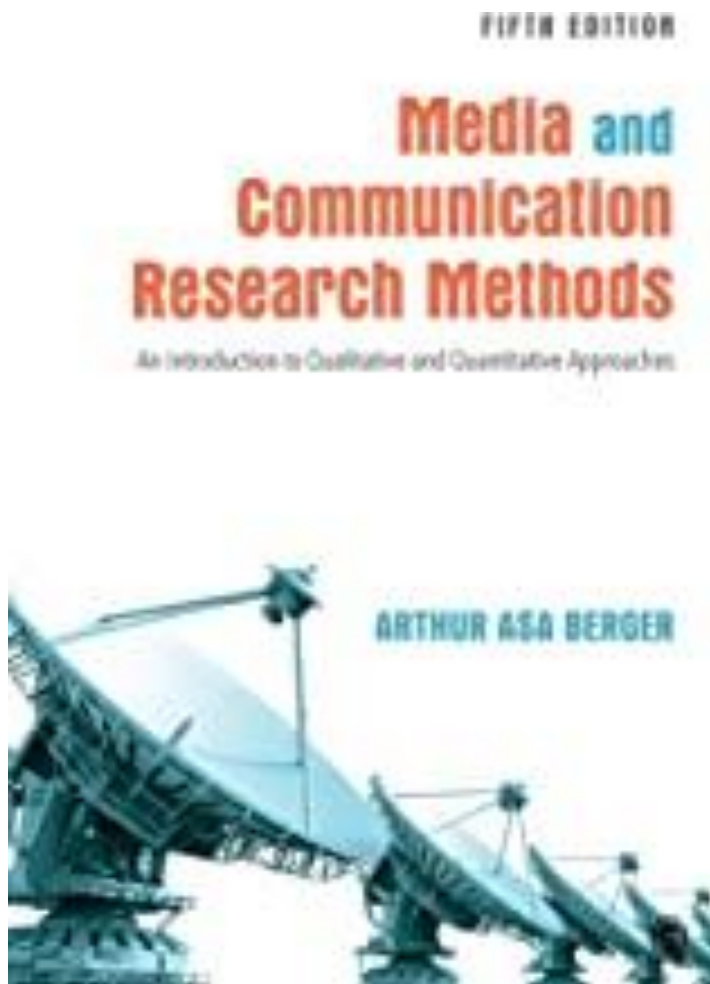
I never taught a course on research methods and my colleagues all thought it strange that I would write a book on the subject. It turns out that the communication editor for Sage publications asked me to write it.

I was at a conference in Boston and the Sage editor, who was located there, took me out for lunch. In the middle of lunch she pulled out a media research book that Sage had recently published.

“It isn’t selling very well,” she said. “Why don’t you write one for us,” she added.

She gave me the book and said, “Look it over and see what the author deals with and write your version of a book on research methods.”

I took the book and read it over on the flight from Boston to San Francisco. Then, when I was home, I looked at the books I had in my library on the subject. I also obtained the syllabi used by my colleagues who taught the course in my department, and when I had gathered the information I needed, and purchased a few media and communication research textbooks, I started writing my book, which was to be called *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.



Media and Communication Methods 5th Edition

It is now my most popular book. Each chapter contains a “short theatrical piece” meant to inject some humor into the book. These pieces feature a conversation I have with a Grand Inquisitor figure.

I also illustrated the book with my drawings and photographs to give the book a bit of visual interest, and I wrote it in an easy-to-read conversational style.

Here is my comedic insert/short theatrical piece that I used in my chapter on Marxism and communication research.

#### A Short Theatrical Piece on Ideological Criticism

Grand Inquisitor: Are you a Marxist?

Arthur: I'm a double Marxist! The two philosophers who have shaped my thinking most are Karl Marx and Groucho Marx!

Grand Inquisitor: Karl Marx wrote about alienation and the heartlessness of bourgeois (boo-jwah) capitalist consumer societies. He argued that we needed a revolution to liberate the proletariat from oppression. How was Groucho Marx political?

Arthur: Groucho was a poet of anarchy. With his brothers, he waged war on WASPish snobbishness as personified by the long-suffering Margaret Dumont, who starred in many of his films. His famous line, "either you're dead or my watch has stopped" is, when you think about it, as devastating an attack on the bourgeoisie (boo-jwah-zee) as anything Karl Marx wrote.

Grand Inquisitor: I don't know why I pay any attention to you. Sometimes I think I'm my own worst enemy

Arthur: Not as long as I'm alive! (Stolen from Groucho Marx)

When I told my colleagues in the Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts department that I was writing a book on research methods the common response was “What do you know about research methods?”

Although my book is very popular, Sage has not been interested in any of the other books I've written, perhaps because they were not foundational textbooks on subjects taught in communications department. I've had the same experience with other publishers.

I published five books with Palgrave when I had an editor who liked my books and encouraged me to write books for Palgrave. He was eventually promoted and the editor who replaced them didn't like any of my manuscripts and I eventually gave up on Palgrave and found other editors and publishers.



I've always been interested in consumer culture and wrote several books on the subject:

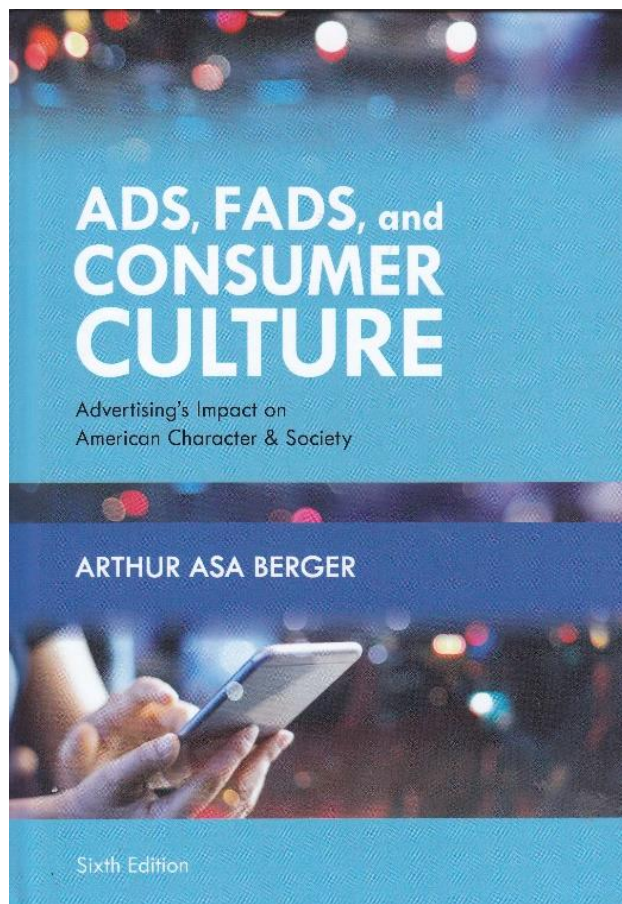
Shop 'Til You Drop

Brands and Cultural Analysis

Luxury and American Consumer Culture: A Socio-Semiotic Analysis

I also had trouble with editors at Rowman & Littlefield. When the media editor there left, her replacement wasn't interested in anything I sent her, even though a book on advertising I wrote for Rowman & Littlefield, *Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture* was successful.

### **Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture**



Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture

After I wrote *Media and Communication Research Methods*, I decided to write a book on advertising. My title was “Run It Up a Flagpole,” a phrase often used by people in the advertising industry. But when the book was accepted, the title was changed to *Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture: Advertising’s Impact on American Character and Society*. The sixth edition came out as a large format book, 288 pages long, with many images of advertisements in it.

The heart of the book, as I see things, is in three chapters devoted to analyzing print advertisement (a Fidji perfume advertisement), analyzing television commercials (the Macintosh “1984” commercial, directed by Ridley Scott, and offering a discourse analysis of a Cream Hydracel print advertisement..

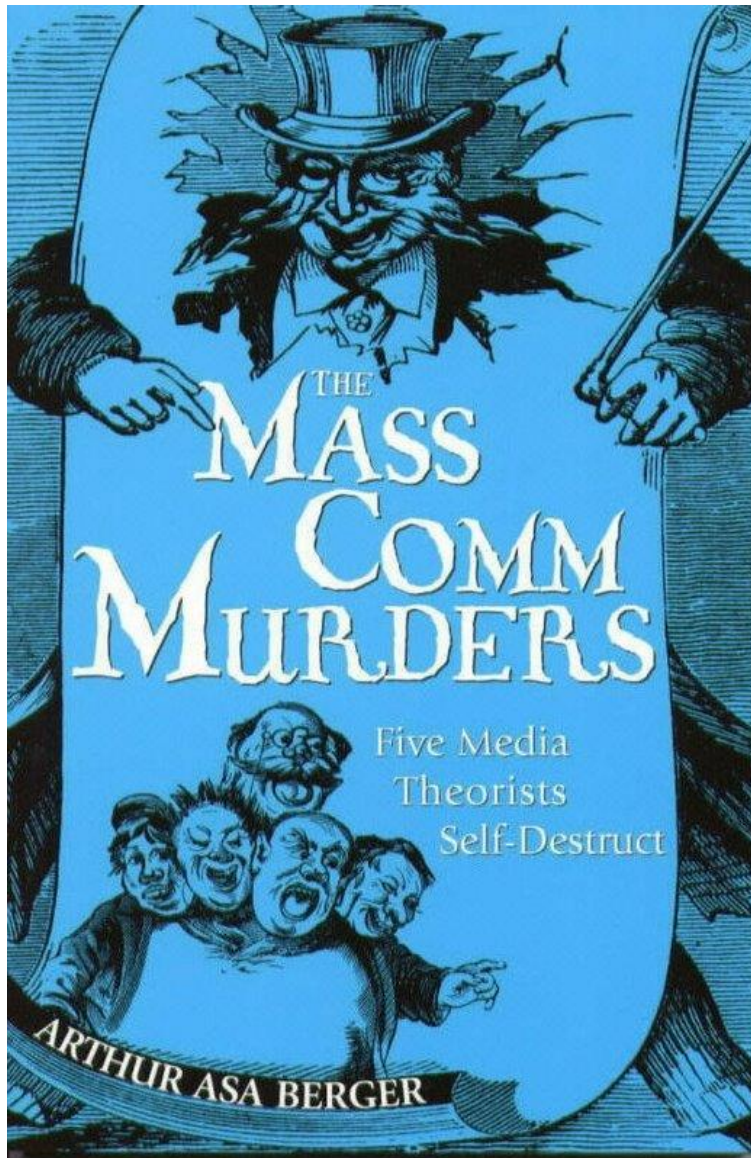
The image from the “1984” Macintosh commercial shown below marks the destruction of a brainwashing session run by the people who control the dystopian society shown in the commercial (representing IBM and standard computers) and is the point where the Macintosh is introduced as a liberating agent, freeing people from domination by standard computers.



Sledgehammer hits screen and stops indoctrination session and domination by personal computers.

## The Mass Comm Murders

My next book, *The Mass Comm Murders: Five Media Theorists Self-Destruct* has five media theorists killing one another. I had the idea of doing such a book for a long time. In the book A is killed by B. B is killed by C. C is killed by D. and D. is killed by A. And E is killed by A but I couldn't figure out how to do the last killing until I got the idea of a bomb that A has sent to E before A was killed.



Mass Comm Murders

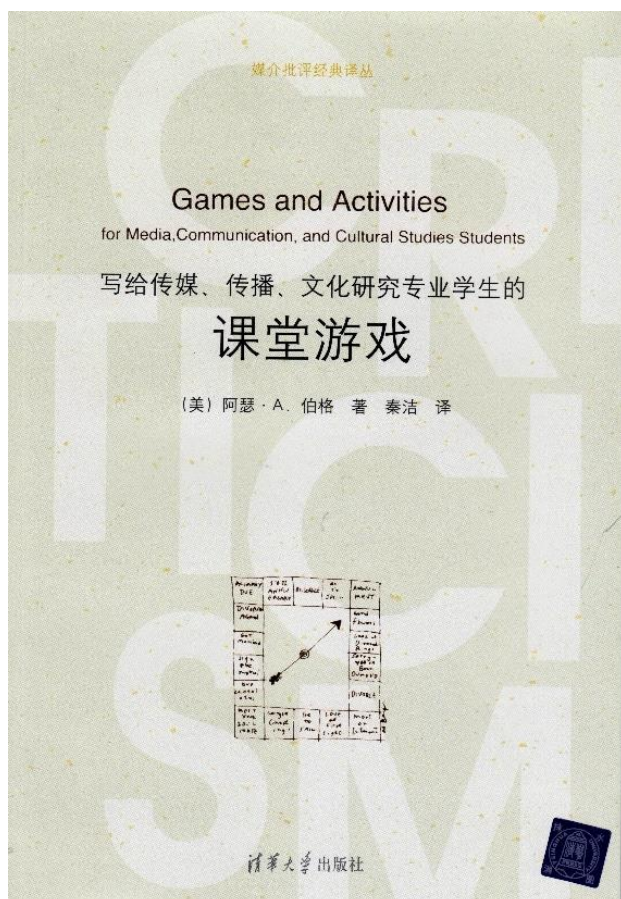


In the book, I deal with theories by five famous media theorists but I switch the theories around so A is identified with B's theories and C with B's theories and so on. The theorists are given different names but ones that readers can easily identify with a particular theorist.

I wrote the book to teach readers (presumably students) five important media theories, so it is a textbook in the form of a mystery novel.

When I taught my course on analyzing the public arts, I developed many teaching games for courses on media studies and they were published in 2004 as Games and Activities for Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Students.

## Games and Activities



Chinese Translation of Games and Activities book.

I found it was important to have the students play learning games in order to be able to use semiotic, Marxist, psychoanalytic and sociological concepts. So I would set up groups of three students to play a game and give them twenty minutes to come up with answers.

When I was dealing with semiotics, the students played a semiotic game. In one game, their task was to find ten images to suggest “France.” When we were doing psychoanalytic theory, the game was to write a traditional fairy tale in which they were to have characters afflicted with the Oedipus complex, sibling rivalry, paranoia, etc. What the students learned was how to apply concepts from my four techniques to various tasks that I gave them.

When I was teaching my course, I would show the class an episode of *The Prisoner* and ask them to write a semiotic, Marxist, psychoanalytic or sociological analysis of that episode. I found certain episodes of the program lent themselves to one of my four methodologies.

*The Prisoner* was a cult series that was popular in the last sixties. It featured a spy who resigned, was gassed at his apartment, and taken to an island full of former spies who were imprisoned there. He spent seventeen episodes trying to escape and escaped on the last episode.



*The Prisoner*

This book was published in 2004, a year in which I was very productive or, if you look at things a different way, really lucky:

*Games and Activities* (Rowman & Littlefield)

*Ocean Travel and Cruising* (Haworth)

*Making Sense of Media* (Blackwell)

*Shop Til You Drop* (Rowman and Littlefield)

*The Kabbalah Killings* (PulpLit)

It is most unusual for an author to publish five books in one year, but somehow I was lucky and found publishers for books I had written. Many years I had trouble finding a publisher for one of my books and some of these lucky years were books I had written earlier than 2004 and couldn't find a publisher. It is very chancy being a writer who operates the way I do—writing a book on a subject that interests me and hoping I will find a publisher.

Most authors of academic books submit a proposal about the book they intend to write and one or two sample chapters. Then they have to wait until they find a publisher for their projected book. This process can take many months, or even years. I think it makes more sense to write a book rather than waiting for publishers to make up their minds, especially since it is so easy to self-publish a book.

Sometimes, I've not found a publisher for a book or didn't try to find one, and self-published the book using Amazon.com's publishing arm, which used to be called "Create Space" and now "Kindle Direct."

Because of the risky nature of publishing, I write all my books on a six inch by nine inch format, which is what "Kindle Direct" specifies, so if I can't find a publisher for a manuscript I can easily publish the book with them.

It only costs around \$2.50 or \$3.00 per book, print-on-demand, depending on how long it is, so it is very convenient.

This book is being written on a six inch by nine-inch page so it can be published using Kindle Direct. Because of the personal nature of this book, I have doubts about whether I can find a publisher for it so I'm writing it using Kindle Direct's specifications and can publish it with them if I can't find a conventional house.

### **Mitch Allen, The “Great Rejector”**

For many years, I published books for Mitch Allen, who was the head of AltaMira books and then, of his own press, Left Coast Press. We would meet for lunch at a Dim Sum restaurant on Clement Street in San Francisco and would talk about books I might write for him.

Over the years, I published many books for him, though he also often rejected many of my manuscripts, which is why I call him “The Great Rejector.” Often, the manuscripts he rejected were published by a different publisher.



Mitch Allen



He sold his press to a British publisher, Taylor and Francis, which owns Routledge, and now all the books I published with him are found on Routledge, a publisher that has never been interested in my books. Routledge now publishes all the books I wrote for Transaction books and Haworth books, so I probably now have more Routledge books than any other author. One of the curious ironies of the publishing industry.

My book *Ocean Travel and Cruising* was my first book on tourism and travel, written from a cultural studies perspective. My wife and I took a ten-day cruise from San Francisco to Alaska and I found it a very curious and interesting experience.

### **Ocean Travel and Cruising**

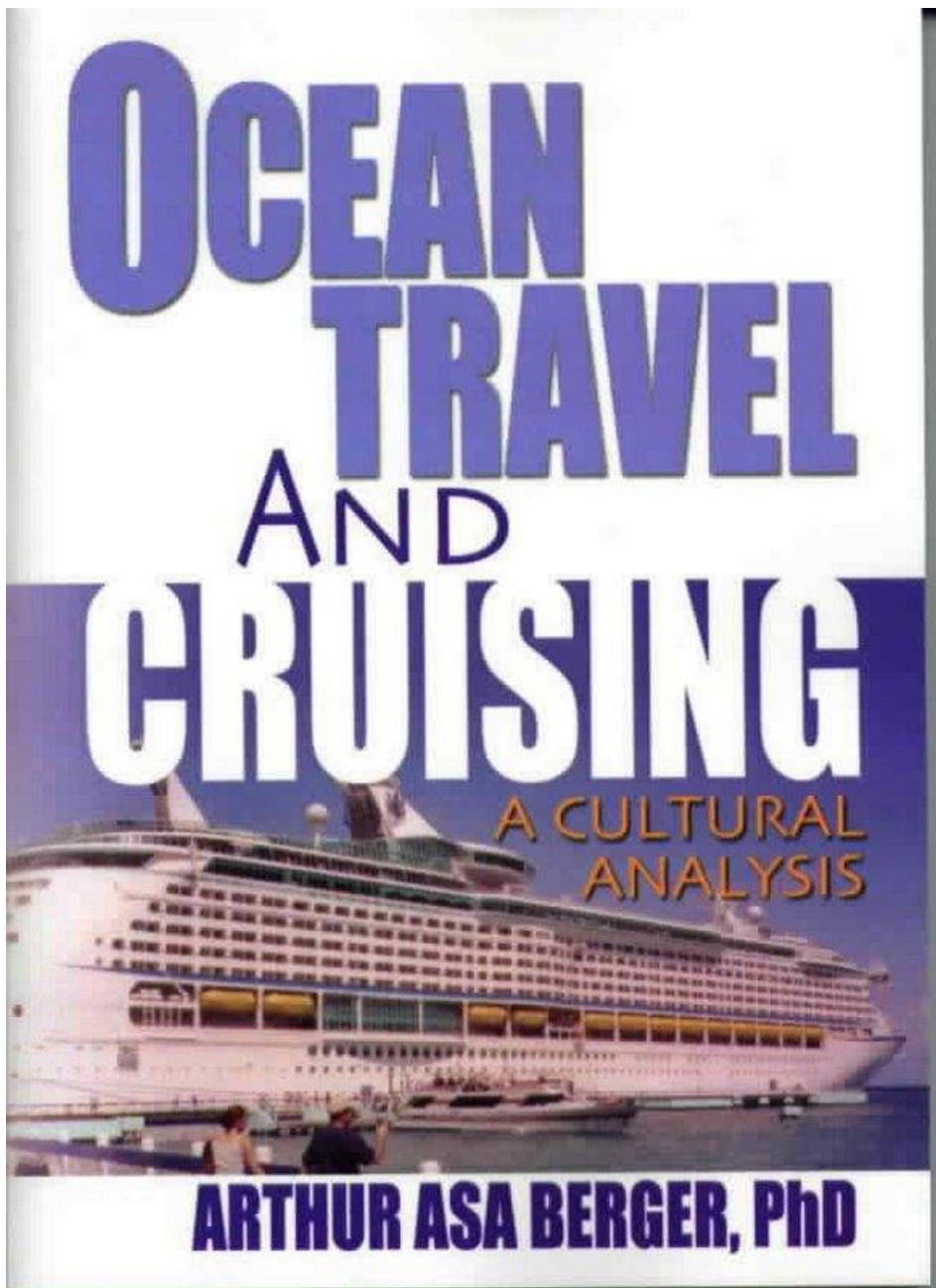
I kept notes in my journal about things that interested me and when we returned home, I wrote articles about different aspects of the cruise. I wrote a chapter on how a Marxist would analyze ocean cruising, what a psychoanalytic critic would find interesting, the way a sociologist would deal with ocean cruising, and how a semiotician would analyze the cruise.

When I had written these articles, I decided to see if I could find publishers who were interested in one of them and I went to Google and searched for tourism journals. I was astonished at the number of them that existed. I sent emails off to various editors and wondered what kind of response I might get.

I didn't get many responses, but one turned out to be very important. It was from someone named Kaye Chon, who turned out to be a very important figure in academic tourism studies. He was the director of the Hong Kong Polytechnic school of hotel and tourism studies.

"Is this a book?" he asked. I replied "it can be if I add a bit more material."

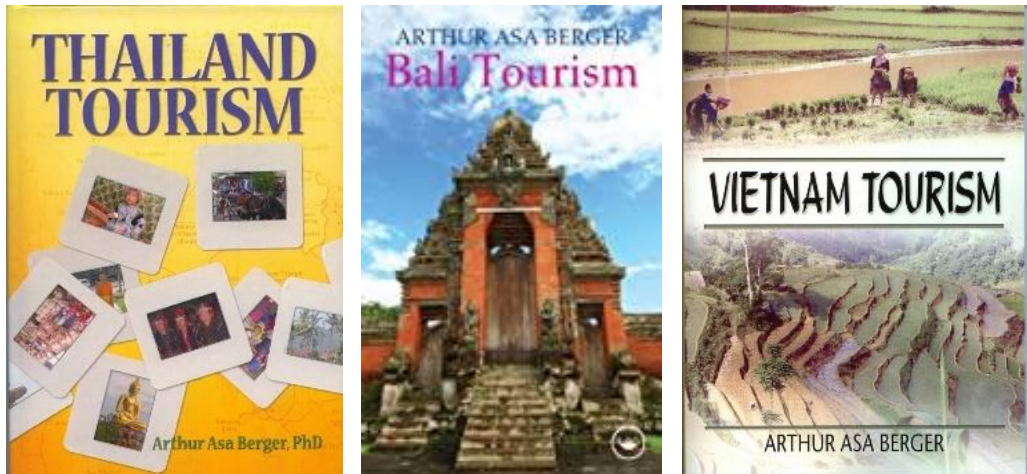
One thing led to another. I added some more material to the articles I had written and sent him the file. He liked it and arranged for Haworth Press to put it out. At the time, I didn't realize how important tourism was to the world economy and didn't know that tourism studies was a very important academic field of study. I was to spend two months at the Hong Kong Polytechnic school of tourism as a visiting professor—a truly fascinating experience.



### Ocean Travel and Cruising

When I asked him if there are any other topics I might consider, he suggested I write books on Asia-Pacific countries, when led to books I wrote on Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, India and Bali.

They are all written from a cultural studies perspective and are not travel guides, per se. They are all based on visits my wife and I paid to the countries. Sometimes more than once.



Covers of selected tourism books

I became interested in tourism as a subject of study and wrote a book, *Theorizing Tourism*, in 2012.

### **A Year Amongst the UK**

I had a sabbatical in 1973 and spent it in London, doing research on English pop culture. While I was there, I wrote a book, *A Year Amongst the UK: Notes on Character and Culture in England 1973-1974*. It is about my adventures in England and is full of purple prose and far-fetched (?) commentaries and generalizations on various aspects of life and culture in London and England.

It was typed by a woman who lived in house next to the one we were renting in Golder's Green. I didn't do anything with it for many years. When I discovered optical character recognition on my scanner, I scanned it and published it.

What is interesting is that many academic English friends say that what I wrote about England in 1973-1974 is still correct.



# A YEAR AMONGST THE UK

ARTHUR ASA BERGER, PhD



A Year Amongst the UK

## Preface

This book was written in 1973-1974, during a yearlong sabbatical in England. My family and I lived in London but I did a good deal of lecturing and managed to visit many other cities and universities during the year. I've also traveled a good deal in England and Scotland in 1958 before I got married. It is an interpretation of English character and culture as I observed it during the year I was there. I never thought I'd be able to publish it because it was typed by one of our neighbors, who was a professional typist. I more or forgot about it, but one day while looking through my files I found it. Thanks to the magic of Optical Character Recognition, I could turn the manuscript into a Word file and, thanks to Word 2013, I was able to format it so I could publish it.

We must keep in mind that the book was written fifty years ago and does not describe contemporary England or London, now also known as Londonistan. It is also, you will discover, highly opinionated and probably full of absurd notions. That is the kind of books I write. Now, considering my interests, this book might best be described as an ethno-semiotic analysis. I've taken certain signifiers of English culture and character and tried to figure out what they signified. I did the drawings in this book. Some of them come from a journal I kept during our year in London.

We got our house in London thanks to a friend, Pauline Todd, who I've known since 1958. She also was extremely kind to me and my family when we there and it is to her memory that this book is dedicated.

This book is a rather perverse one (maybe even polymorphous, perverse). It is really a pop anthropological field study of English culture and, in particular, everyday life in London- though the format is often that of a travel story with opinionated "speculations" on this and that. I came to England to study the people there—much the same way an anthropologist might study savages inhabiting some remote island in the South Seas.

After all, there is no reason why we must limit ourselves to headhunters in New Guinea or Brazil or cavemen in the Philippines.

The Englishman has a culture, too (though he is not, as a rule, a "cultured" individual), and his culture is susceptible to the same kind of analysis as is that of some non-literate tribe or primitive culture in the jungle. The title of this book, *The Uk*, is a play on a famous study of a tribe known as *The Ik*, who live in Uganda

Thus, I have been concerned with the general structure of

English character and with such things as Wimpy burgers, milk (in bottles), advertisements, comics, sports, and various other aspects of English everyday life. I am

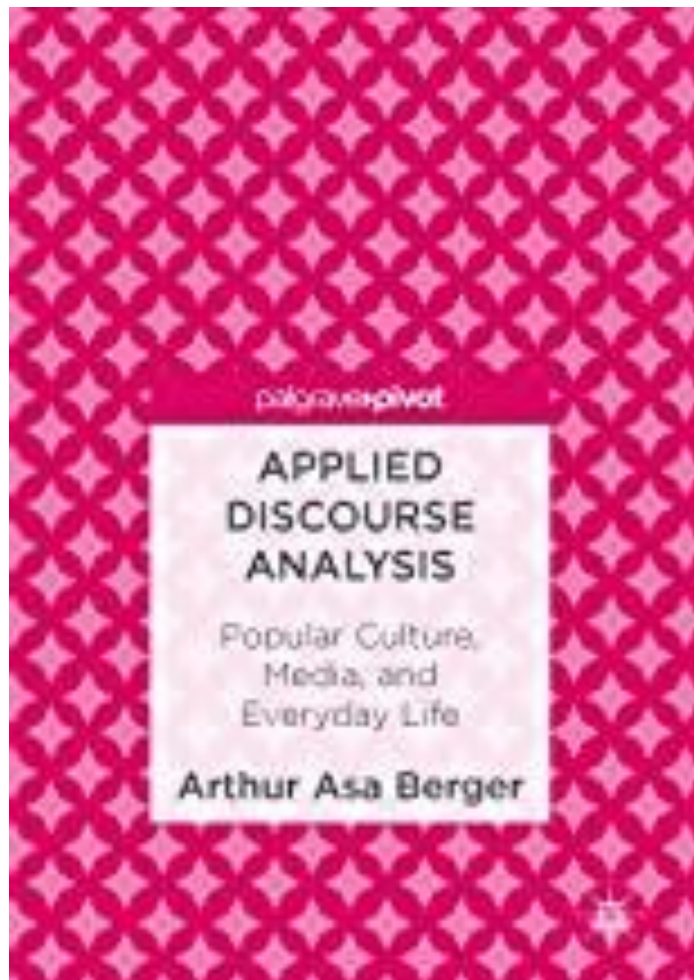


by profession a professor and my subject is popular culture--an umbrella term that covers a multitude of interests, and subjects.

You can get an idea of what the book is about and the fact that I didn't publish it for fifty years is, I would like to think, not important since, at the very least, it offers my analysis of English culture in 1974.

I published a few books before I wrote the next book I would like to discuss, *Applied Discourse Analysis*, in 2016. This book is often cited by scholars in different disciplines.

### Applied Discourse Analysis



Applied Discourse Analysis

This book has chapters on discourse theory and topics such as Speed Dating, advertising images, fashion, fairy tales, Hamlet, myths (and my myth model), department stores and cathedral, *The Prisoner*, and *The Maltese Falcon*. In each chapter, a concept from discourse theory is discussed, followed by an application—the topic of the chapter which involves something from media, popular culture and everyday life.

Here is brief overview, taken from the book, that describes the evolution of discourse theory from its roots in linguistics.

As I show in this book, discourse deals not only with words but also in newer versions of discourse analysis, with images. So this book will not only deal with theories and concepts related to discourse analysis but also will show you discourse in action in the real world. As I suggested earlier, discourse analysis represents an effort by linguists to move beyond the sentence, which is where linguists traditionally have focused their attention. Discourse analysts worked on speech and conversation—spoken discourse—before moving on to written discourse and then, in our brave new world of Internet, to what they call multimodal discourse analysis. This kind of discourse analysis deals with images and videos-what is found on Facebook, Pinterest and other social media sites. A number of discourse analysts write from what they call a “critical” perspective, meaning an approach that deals with ideology and politics and is, generally speaking, critical of the political arrangements found in bourgeois capitalist societies. Since these scholars are interested in what is going on in contemporary societies they describe themselves as “Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysts.”

I think it is accurate to describe myself as a Critical Multimodal Discourse Analyst as well as a semiotician interested in media, popular culture, and everyday life.

### **Making Sense of Media: Key Texts in Media and Cultural Studies**

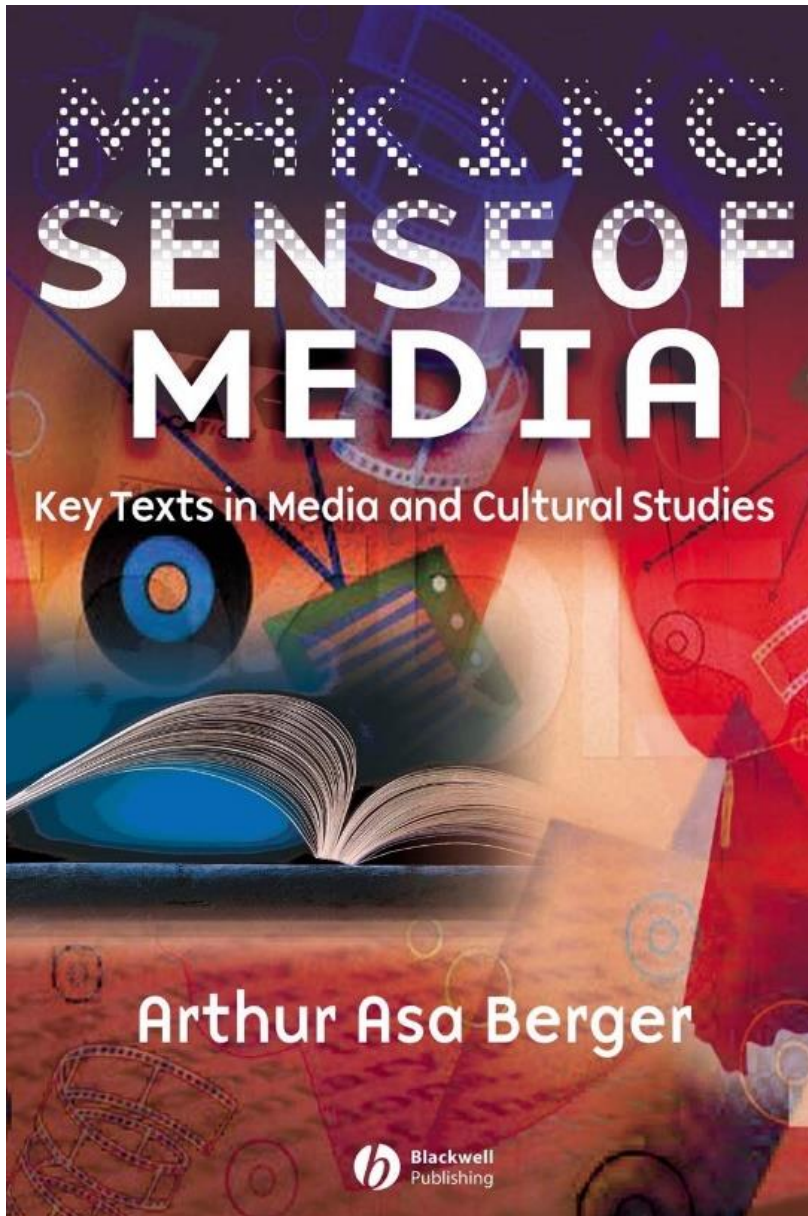
I published this book in 2004. I was asked to submit a book by an editor at Blackwell, who told me my books was exactly what she was looking for. Unfortunately, I could not produce another book she liked so my experience with Blackwell was sweet and short.

The book deals with the ideas of twenty of our most important media theorists, such as M.M. Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, bell hooks, and Marshall McLuhan.

What follows is material taken from the introduction that kills two birds with one stone: I explain what is in the book and discuss my teaching methods, exemplified by the material in the introduction.



This book explains, in an accessible manner, a number of ideas and concepts that will help readers make sense of the mass media and the texts they carry. These ideas are taken from what I (and many others who write about the media) consider to be seminal, canonical, classic or “key” texts that critics and scholars of all persuasions use in analyzing media and contemporary culture.



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I have, so to speak, rounded up a number of “the usual suspects” (such as Roland Barthes, Marshall McLuhan, and Mikhail Bakhtin, ) and will discuss one of their books that I feel has material of interest and utility to readers. Many of these books are not on media, per se, but they all contain ideas and theories that can be, and frequently have been, applied to media by scholars in various disciplines.

In each case, I selected books that contain material—ideas and insights—I consider to be important for readers interested in understanding and interpreting what is often called mass-mediated culture. The purpose of Key Texts is to provide readers with a repertoire of ideas and concepts that they can call upon when dealing with media and mass mediated texts. Since the media transmit texts, my focus will be on texts that media carry rather than just talking about the media in general. I will use the term “text” as it is traditionally used in scholarly discourse—to stand for films, television shows, songs, advertisements and other works found in the mass media. Scholars use the term “text” for two reasons: to serve as a shorthand device that enables them to avoid having to keep repeating whatever work or works they are dealing with and also to suggest that these works, like textbooks, need to be “read,” that is, to be studied carefully.

## **My Theory of Teaching**

There are an enormous number of books that deal with the media from every perspective one might think of. There are edited readers full of articles on the media. There are dictionaries of key concepts. There are books with analyses made from different disciplinary and ideological points of view. But there are few books that I know of that do what this book does: discuss the “key texts” that form the foundation for most the media criticism and analysis and, in addition, apply insights from these texts to various aspects of popular culture and the mass media. My goal, then, is to do two things:

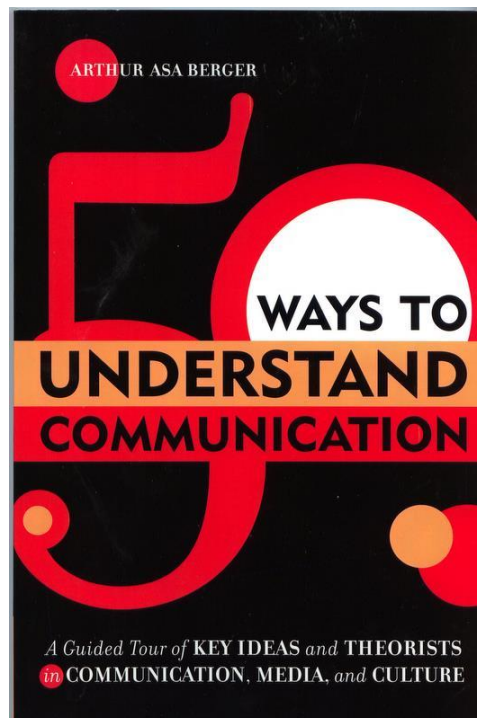
1. to provide you, my readers, with a familiarity with some seminal or foundational works and some of the most important concepts in these works that you can use in making sense of the media, popular culture and everyday life.

2. to show how these concepts and ideas can be used or applied to a variety of texts and topics related to the media.

Thus, after I have discussed some ideas in an important book, I have a section in which I apply insights in that book to something of interest. You will find that I cover a lot of different topics in these applications—everything from romantic ballads (“It’s all in the game”) and singers (Madonna, Tina Turner) to comics strips (Krazy Kat), jokes (about Radio Erevan), video games (Pac-Man and Space Invaders), films (Rashomon) and the “1984” Macintosh commercial.

Two years later, in 2006, I published another book on media theorists, *Fifty Ways To Understand Communication* with Roman & Littlefield.

### **Fifty Ways to Understand Communication.**



50 Ways to Understand Communication

In this book, I discuss the ideas of fifty scholars whose ideas about communication, media, popular culture are important. My cast of characters is considerably different from those in my book *Making Sense of Media*.

Here is material from the first chapter in the book, on words.

## 1. Words and Communication

*Peter Farb. Word Play: What Happens When People Talk.*

New York: Bantam. 1974: 6, 9, 294, 10.

The language game is similar to other games in that it is structured by rules, which speakers unconsciously learn simply by belonging to a particular speech community...By the age of four or so they have mastered most of the exceedingly complex and abstract structures of their native tongues. In only a few more years children possess the entire linguistic system that allows them to utter and to understand sentences they have not previously heard...

Language is both a system of grammar and a human behavior which can be analyzed according to theories of interaction, play, and games. It can also be viewed as a shared system of rules and conventions, mutually intelligible to all members of a particular community, yet a system which nevertheless offers freedom and creativity in its use...

A language is like a game played with a fixed number of pieces—phonemes—each one easily recognized by native speakers. This is true of every language, except that the pieces change from one language game to another. Linguists...generally agree that the language game is played with the following 45 phoneme “pieces”:

- 21 consonants
- 9 vowels
- 4 semivowels (y, w, r)
- 4 stresses
- 4 pitches
- 1 juncture (pause between words)
- 3 terminal contours (to end sentences)

These 45 phonemes used in English today represent the total sound resources by which speakers can create an infinity of utterances....For the rest of his life the child will speak sentences he has never before heard, and when he thinks or reads, he will still literally talk to himself. He can never escape from speech. And from speech flow all the other

hallmarks of our humanity: those arts, sciences, laws, morals, customs, political and economic systems, and religious faiths that collectively are known as “culture.”

When we speak, Farb explains, though we may not be aware of what we are doing, we always are following rules, the way people do when they play games. Learning a language involves being able to follow a number of complicated rules that we acquire unconsciously and internalize. We may not be aware of all these rules, but the fact that we are guided by these rules is demonstrated when we recognize when someone has not used the rules correctly.

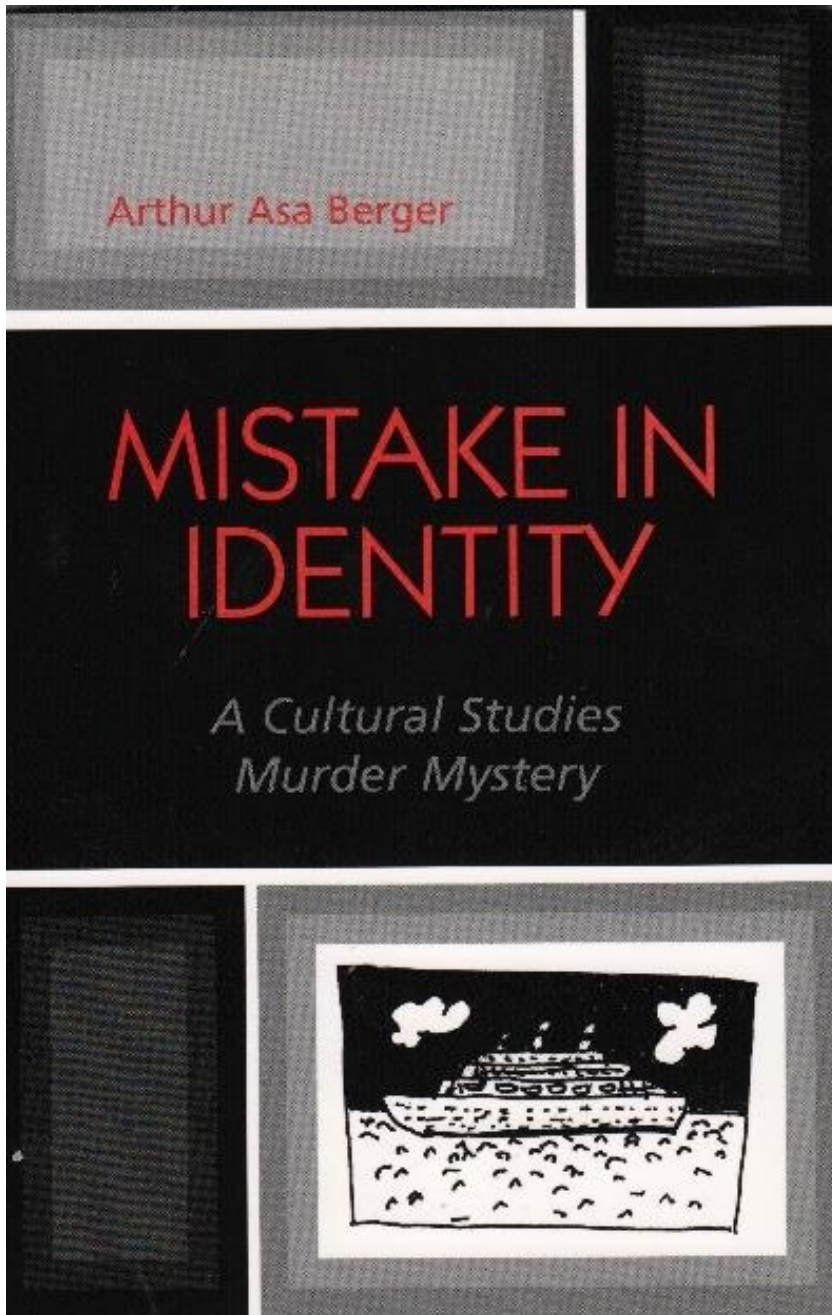
We learn our languages when we are children, Farb says, and by around one year of age, children generally can speak recognizable words. This is quite a remarkable accomplishment, as anyone who has tried to learn a new language, as an adult, can recognize. Words are made up of phonemes, a Greek term (which literally means “sound unit”) for the smallest significant unit of sound. According to *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, phonemes are “the basic units of sounds by which morphemes, words and sentences are represented.”

The English language has several hundred thousand words, but all of these words are created, Farb says, out of just three dozen sounds—which are selected from the many different sounds of which the human voice is capable. Our languages enable us to speak to one another—using words--and convey information, feelings, and all kinds of other things. Falk discusses the importance of language and speech both to individuals and to society. He points out that once children master language, they can speak and sentences they’ve never heard or seen. It is language that is the cornerstone of culture and it is words and the rules that tell us how to use them that shape, in varying degrees, our sense of ourselves and of our place in the universe.

It is with words, then, that our adventure in understanding human communication, in all its complexities, begins. Peter Farb has pointed out the importance of language to humans and the role that words play in communication, which is of central importance in the development of culture and society. Whatever else we are, above all else we are communicating animals and one of the most important ways we communicated with one another is through language and words. When we are children, we pick up the rules of language from our parents and the linguistic community in which we find ourselves. In some countries, where a number of different languages are spoken, it is not unusual for children to learn several different languages.

As you can see from this material, my book has a broader focus than *Making Sense of Media* in that it deals with communication in the broadest sense of the term.

## Mistake in Identity



Mistake in Identity

This book, published in 2005 by AltaMira Press, deals with a topic that has interested me for many years, how we achieve our identities. It also allows me to introduce a collection of professors from a variety of disciplines who offer their perspectives on the topic.

A professor, who very much resembles Marshall McLuhan, is murdered on a cruise ship just before it is set to sail. On board are a number of academics interested in identity who had hoped to use the cruise to come to some conclusions about identity and write a book about it. Inspector Solomon Hunter and his assistant, Talcott Weems, board the ship as it sails to search for the murderer.

What follows is material from the third chapter of the book.



## Chapter 3

# The identity problem

Arthur Asa Berger

*Department, Professor Emeritus, Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts, San Francisco State University*[arthurasaberger@gmail.com](mailto:arthurasaberger@gmail.com)

“So tell me,” Hunter asked, as they were eating their shrimp cocktails, “what are you going to write about in this book on identity? How come it’s of interest to you? I’m not an academic, so I don’t know what the latest hot topics are in universities. I know there was a postmodernism boom that lasted for a while, but I take it that it has faded away.”

“Not entirely,” said Jean-Marie Benetton. He was a man of about forty, with light brown hair. He projected a sense of assurance and self-confidence. “There is still a great deal of interest in postmodernism, which you can tell by looking at the number of books that are being published on the subject. There are some, of course, who argue that we are now in a post-postmodern era, whatever it might be called. We at the CNRS—that’s the National Center for Research in the Social Sciences in France—are doing a great deal of work on the matter of postmodernism. My particular interest is in how it relates to identity.”

“Identity,” said Katarina Mittag, “is a site for contestation in the academy. Is it essentially tied to psychological matters, as our colleague Sigfried would argue, or gender, as Antonia believes, or race, as Symphonie’s work suggests, or class and occupation, as I’ve argued, or the media and popular culture, as poor Marshall claimed. You see, there’s no agreement about what is fundamental in determining identity. That’s why it is such an important topic and one best dealt with from a cultural studies approach.”

“There not even any agreement on what identity is,” said Antonia. “What do you think it is, Solomon? With a name like yours, we expect you have some very wise insights to offer us!”

“Do you expect me to answer that question, after what you’ve just told me about the difficulties in dealing with the subject from your different perspectives?” said Solomon.

“But a layman’s view may be of interest,” said Anastasia. She had a slight Russian accent. “You need not be afraid of us. We won’t bite you, not when there’s so much wonderful food to eat on this ship.”

“I must confess,” Hunter replied, “that I never thought about it much, but I would say that for most people identity means who you are, where you live, what you do, and what you’re like. That kind of thing. I know that answer’s rather vague.”

“Yes,” said Sigfried, “but how do people become who they are? And what does ‘who you are’ mean? Is it your race, your religion, your occupation, your social class, your personality, your gender, your culture, your politics, or some combination of all of these, and if so, which of these matters is most important? That’s what we’re investigating. How does a person become whoever or whatever he or she becomes? How do we arrive at ourselves? And how long does it last?”

Sigfried had only the slightest touch of a German accent.

“I suggest we let poor Solomon eat his dinner in peace and stop pestering him,” said Symphonie. “He’s on this cruise to relax and not to be caught up in a dinner table seminar on conflicting approaches to identity.”

“Marshall was, despite his problems, a lovely man,” said Symphonie. “But I found him simply impossible to live with. Maybe I had unrealistic notions about what marriage would be like. He would have said I was a victim of our pop culture delusions, that I had a mass-mediated mentality and believe in all kinds of silly things that advertising agencies had put into my head. He had been a philosopher but he became interested in the mass media and popular culture. He believed that we all have mass-mediated minds, that our beliefs and values have been shaped, in important ways, by the mass media and pop culture. That’s why he brought us all together, to see how people arrived at their identities. We still don’t know how people become themselves. It remains a mystery.”

“I love mysteries,” said Solomon. “More than you can possibly imagine. Not only the kind written by Agatha Christie but the kind you’re talking about. That is, I’m very curious about why people behave the way they do, and about how they get their identities or hide them. Now that you mention it, I can see that I’ve always been extremely interested in identity, though I never realized it, or would have put it the way all of you do.”

“You have the makings of a good cultural studies scholar,” said Sigfried. “I’m a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, and have some ideas about what motivates people and how they become who and what they are. In a sense you could say that Marshall didn’t take human consciousness into account. He thought that people, of all ages, mind you,

were shaped by their experiences, and that since the average person spends a great deal of time watching television and listening to the radio and now playing video games, I could go on and on...he thought that these mass-mediated experiences led to their formation. You could say that he believed that information, from peers and parents, but mostly from pop culture, led to a person's formation—his or her belief structure, as well as values and personality. He thought that the media educated people, but that the education was primarily shaped by advertising, both directly, in terms of creating consumer lust, but also that advertising profoundly affected the content of television and other media as well. I think he was right, but Marshall discounted the fact that human beings have an unconscious, that they are profoundly affected by certain powerful drives and unconscious psychological imperatives.”

As you can see from this material, it really is a lecture of the way the mass media and popular culture shape our identities. But it is hidden in the dialogue as a means of “seducing” students who, in recent years, seem to have shown a reluctance to reading textbooks.

In addition to my Postmortem for a Postmodernist, *The Mass Comm Murders and Mistake in Identity*, I also wrote and self-published *Freud is Fixated: Sherlock Holmes and Psychoanalytic Theory*, *Saussure Suspects*, *Marx Est Mort: Sherlock Holmes is Introduced to Modern Marxism*, and *My Name is Sherlock Holmes: Sherlock Holmes is Introduced to Cultural Theory: a Didactic Mystery/Textbook*, a first-person Sherlock Holmes mystery.

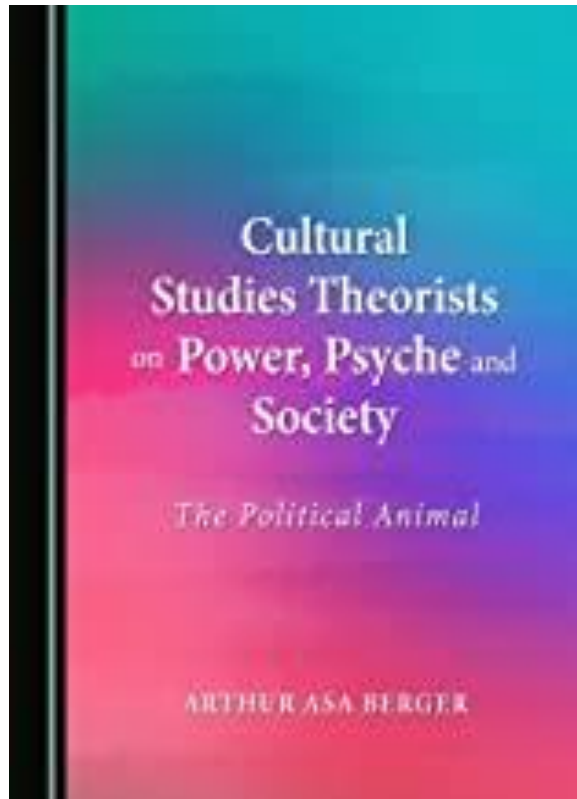
All of these books are textbooks disguised as mystery novels.

### **Cultural Studies Theorists on Power**

My cultural studies book has an usual format, drawn from a novel by a Brazilian novelist, Machado de Assis, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* and a book by a French Marxist, Guy Debord. The books do not have chapters but numbered passages of various lengths.

Below I offer a list of some of the theorists discussed in the book. The book has 43 discussions of the ideas of theorists who have had interesting things to say about power in a very broad sense. It deals with power in every aspect of our lives, from our births to our deaths. The format is unusual, with all the discussions, of any size, from a sentence to a couple of pages, numbered... Like Debord's book, I will use many illustrations and images of one kind or another. I will also reprint quoted material in boldface type. The focus is upon the ideas of seminal thinkers and theorists on power as it manifests itself in

countless areas of society and culture, from aspects of everyday life to political parties. In recent years everything has become politicized—wearing face masks, getting vaccines, and so on. We live in an age of hyper-politicization in which every aspect of our lives, now more than ever before, so it seems, is tied to our political preferences and to overt or covert power relationships in which we are involved.



### The Political Animal

Aristotle, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Joan Riviere, Melanie Klein, Geoffrey Gorer, Clotaire Rapaille, Ernest Jones, Otto Rank, Alexis de Tocqueville, Sigmund Freud, Gustave LeBon, Frederick J. Turner, John Calvin, Max Weber, Erik Erikson, Mary Douglas, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Umberto Eco, Yuri Lotman, Judith Butler, Guy Debord, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard.

Here is some material from the introduction:

This book deals with power in every aspect of our lives, from our births to our deaths. The format is unusual, with all the discussions, of any size, from a sentence to a couple of pages, numbered. The format was inspired by a novel by Machado de Assis, author of

*The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, a classic of Brazilian literature. This design was also used in a book, *The Society of The Spectacle* by Guy Debord. Like Debord's book, I will use many illustrations and images of one kind or another. I will also reprint quoted material in boldface type. The focus is upon the ideas of seminal thinkers and theorists on power as it manifests itself in countless areas of society and culture, from aspects of everyday life to political parties. In recent years everything has become politicized—wearing face masks, getting vaccines, and so on. We live in an age of hyper-politicization in which every aspect of our lives, now more than ever before, so it seems, is tied to our political preferences and to overt or covert power relationships in which we are involved.

In the discussion of Aristotle's ideas, I quote from his discussion of man being a political animal. In my book, quotations from theorists are shown in bold face to separate what the theorists had to say and what I wrote about the theorists. Aristotle writes:

It is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it (like the "clanless, lawless, hearthless" man reviled by Homer, for one by nature unsocial is also 'a lover of war') inasmuch as he is solitary, like an isolated piece at draughts. And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another), but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is

In my book, I have taken this notion and expanded it to many areas which we ordinarily do not usually think as being "political" in nature. This point is made in the selection that follows:

An article by Valeri Modebadze, a professor from Georgian University in Tbilisi, Georgia, "The Term Politics Reconsidered in the Light of Recent Theoretical Developments," offers some insights into a broader perspective than we are use to thinking about on politics:

But politics is not only confined to a particular sphere, but also takes place in every corner of human existence. According to the sociologists, Dowse & Hughes (1972) politics is about power. They say: politics occurs when there are differentials in power. This suggests that: Any social relationship which involves power differentials is political.

Political relationships would extend from parents assigning domestic chores to their children to teachers enforcing discipline in the classroom, from a manager organizing a workforce to a general ordering troop into battle. Power is the ability to make other people do whatever you want, either by threat, sanctions, or through manipulation. Politics is, in essence, power: the ability to achieve a desired outcome, through whatever means. Leftwich argues that politics exists at every level and in every sphere of human societies. Politics is the defining characteristic of all human groups. Politics takes place not only within the institutions of the state, but also occurs in the private sphere of life. Thus, all people are somehow involved in politics. It influences the lives of all of us, whether or not we participate in politics. Politics is at the heart of all collective social activity, formal and informal.

<https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/54647>

I share this broad understanding of politics, not as something confined to governmental policies, but as an important part of our everyday lives. I begin with Aristotle's famous statement that man is a "political animal." I interpret this to mean that all human relationships are, in the final analysis, when you scratch beneath the surface, political in nature. But the political involves more than human relationships. We can also consider such matters as: ideas people have about raising children, "imprinting" children with culture-specific beliefs, the importance of place, and many other matters.

### Arthur's Apotheosis

Because I am immunocompromised and elderly, I was forced to abandon the life that my wife and I had before Covid-19 appeared on the scene. We used to go to the gym three days a week (for over twenty years), attend many plays, and take three-week trips to foreign countries. We also took cruises from time to time.

Since I was now confined to my house, I had more time to write and, curiously, I had many ideas for books during my forced confinement or imprisonment. In addition, I had an oncologist who scared me into accepting my confinement.

All of my ideas for books come from my journals and I seldom write at the computer for more than a few hours. But when I write, I do so constantly. I also spend a good deal of time writing in my journal about what I am writing at the computer.

And so, I did a great deal more writing these three years than I usually do. I was fortunate, after six or eight months of rejections, to find publishers for the books I wrote. During the 2021-2023 period, I published:

*Searching for a Self.* 2022. Vernon.  
*Smooth Sailing.* 2022. Brill!  
*Everyday Life in The Postmodern World.* 2022. Springer.  
“*Shakespeare: The Comedy of Errors.* 2022. Anthem.  
“Cultural Studies Theorists on Power, Psyche and Society:  
*The Political Animal.* 2022. Cambridge Scholars Press.  
“*The Art of the Journal:* 2022. Marin Arts Press.  
*The Royal Princess: An Introduction to Ocean Cruising.* 2022. Marin Arts Press.

*Semiotics of Sport.* 2023. Brill.

*The Social, Psychological and Cultural Significance of Westerns.* 2023. Cambridge Scholars.  
*Taste: Why You Like What You Like.* 2023. Version.  
*Choices.* 2023. Vernon  
*Crowds in American Culture, Society and Politics.* 2023. Anthem.

Two of these books deal with politics, very broadly. I had written a book on Trump, *Three Tropes on Trump*, and another one on his followers, *Trump’s Followers*, in 2019 and 2020. They were focused on American politics but in my later books I dealt with politics in a more general way.

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As I write this, in May of 2023, *Choices* is in press and I have no idea about what my next book will be. This is often a problem I face. What should I write about next?

A list of my answers to that question, over the decades, follows.



## My Books

1. *Li'l Abner*, 1970 (Twayne), 1994 (Univ. of Mississippi Press)
2. *The Evangelical Hamburger*, 1970 (MSS Publications)
3. *Pop Culture*, 1973 (Pflaum)
4. *About Man*, 1974 (Pflaum)
5. *The Comic Stripped American*, 1974 (Walker & Co., Penguin, Milano Libri)
6. *The TV-Guided American*, 1975 (Walker & Co.)
7. *Language in Thought and Action* (in collaboration with S.I.Hayakawa, 1974, 1978) (HBJ)
8. *Film in SOCIETY*, 1978 (Transaction)
9. *Television as an Instrument of Terror*, 1978 (Transaction)
10. *Media Analysis Techniques*, 1982, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1998 (SAGE) (in Chinese, Korean, & Italian.) 5th Edition. 2014.
11. *Signs in Contemporary Culture*, 1984 (Longman); 2nd edition, Sheffield, 1998. (Indonesian edition, 2003)
12. *Television in SOCIETY*, 1986 (Transaction)
13. *Semiotics of Advertising*, 1987 (Herodot)
14. *Media USA*, 1988, (Longman 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1991
15. *Seeing is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication*, 1989, 3rd edition 2008 (McGraw-Hill).
16. *Political Culture and Public Opinion*, 1989 (Transaction)
17. *Agitpop: Political Culture and Communication Theory*, 1989 (Transaction)
18. *Scripts: Writing for Radio and Television*, 1990 (SAGE)
19. *Media Research Techniques*, 1991, 2nd edition 1998 (SAGE)
20. *Reading Matter*, 1992 (Transaction)
21. *Popular Culture Genres*, 1992 (SAGE)
22. *An Anatomy of Humor*, 1993. (Transaction)
23. *Improving Writing Skills*, 1993 (SAGE)
24. *Blind Men & Elephants: Perspectives on Humor*, 1995 (Transaction)
25. *Cultural Criticism: A Primer of Key Concepts*, 1995 (SAGE) (Swedish edition, 1998)
26. *Essentials of Mass Communication Theory*, 1995 (SAGE)
27. *Manufacturing Desire: Media, Popular Culture & Everyday Life*, 1996 (Transaction)
28. *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media & Everyday Life*, 1997 (SAGE) Chinese edition (2000)

29. *The Genius of the Jewish Joke*, 1997 (Jason Aronson)
30. *Bloom's Morning*, 1997 (Westview/HarperCollins) (German edition, 1998) (Chinese edition, 2001)
31. *The Art of Comedy Writing*, 1997 (Transaction)
32. *Postmortem for a Postmodernist*, 1997 (AltaMira).
33. *The Postmodern Presence*, 1998. (AltaMira)
34. *Media & Communication Research Methods*, 2000. (SAGE)
35. *Ads, Fads & Consumer Culture*, 2000. (Rowman & Littlefield)
36. *Jewish Jesters*, 2001. (Hampton Press)
37. *The Mass Comm Murders: Five Media Theorists Self-Destruct*. 2002 (Rowman & Littlefield).
38. *The Agent in the Agency*. 2003 (Hampton Press)
39. *The Portable Postmodernist*, 2003 (AltaMira Press)
40. *Durkheim is Dead: Sherlock Holmes is Introduced to Social Theory*, 2003 (AltaMira Press)
41. *Media and Society*, 2003 (Rowman & Littlefield)
- 42.** *Games and Activities for Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Students*. 2004. (Rowman & Littlefield)
43. *Ocean Travel and Cruising*, 2004 (Haworth)
44. *Deconstructing Travel: A Cultural Perspective*, 2004 (AltaMira Press)
- 45.** *Making Sense of Media: Key Texts in Media and Cultural Studies*, 2004 (Blackwell)
46. *Shop Till You Drop: Perspectives on American Consumer Culture*. 2004. (Rowman & Littlefield)
47. *The Kabbalah Killings*. 2004. (PulpLit)
48. *Vietnam Tourism*. 2005. (Haworth)
49. *Mistake in Identity: A Cultural Studies Murder Mystery*. 2005. (AltaMira)
50. *50 Ways to Understand Communication*. 2006. Rowman & Littlefield.
- 51.** *Thailand Tourism*. 2008. (Haworth Hospitality and Tourism Press)
52. *The Golden Triangle*. 2008. (Transaction Books).
53. *The Academic Writer's Toolkit: A User's Manual*. 2008. (Left Coast Press)
54. *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture* 2009. (Left Coast Press)
55. *Tourism in Japan: An Ethno-Semiotic Analysis*. 2010 (Channel View Publications)
56. *The Cultural Theorist's Book of Quotations*. 2010. (Left Coast Press)
57. *The Objects of Affection: Semiotics and Consumer Culture*. 2010. (Palgrave)
58. *Understanding American Icons: An Introduction to Semiotics*. 2012. (Left Coast Press).

59. *Media, Myth and Society*. 2012. (Palgrave Pivot)
60. *Theorizing Tourism*. 2012. (Left Coast Press).
61. *Bali Tourism*. 2013. (Haworth).
62. *A Year Amongst the UK: Notes on Character and Culture in England 1973-1974*. Marin Arts Press.
63. *Dictionary of Advertising and Marketing Concepts*. 2013 (Left Coast Press)
64. *Messages: An Introduction to Communication*. 2015. (Left Coast Press)
65. *Gizmos, or The Electronic Imperative*. 2015. (Palgrave)
66. *Writing Myself Into Existence*. 2016. (NeoPoeiseis Press).
67. *Applied Discourse Analysis*. 2016. (Palgrave)
68. *Marketing and American Consumer Culture*. 2016 (Palgrave)
69. *Cultural Perspectives on Millennials* 2018 (Palgrave)
70. *Three Tropes on Trump*. 2019 (Peter Lang)
71. *Shopper's Paradise: Retail and American Consumer Culture*. 2019 (Brill)
72. *Brands: A Cultural Analysis*. 2019 (Palgrave)
73. *Humor, Psyche, and Society*. 2020. (Vernon)
74. *Searching for a Self: Identity in Popular Culture, Media and Society*. (2022). (Vernon)
75. *Smooth Sailing: An Ethnographic and Socio-semiotic Analysis of Tourism and Ocean Cruising*. 2022. (Brill)
76. *Everyday Life in the Postmodern World*. (2022). (Springer)
77. *Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors*. (2022). (Anthem Press)
78. *Cultural Theorists on Power, Psyche and Society*. 2022. (Cambridge Scholars Press)
79. *Crowds in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. 2023. (Anthem Press)
80. *The Social, Psychological and Cultural Significance of Westerns*. 2023. (Cambridge Scholars Press)
81. *Taste: Why You Like What You Like*. 2023. (Vernon)
82. *Choices*. 2023. Vernon (in press)

## **Translations of my Books into Foreign Languages**

*Media Analysis Techniques:*

*Italian, Chinese, Korean, Turkish, Persian, Spanish*

*Media Research Techniques:*

*Chinese, Spanish*

*The Comic-Stripped American  
Italian*

*Seeing is Believing:  
Korean, Russian, Chinese*

*Bloom's Morning:  
German, Chinese*

*Cultural Criticism:  
Swedish, Arabic, Persian*

*Narratives :*  
*Chinese*

*Postmortem for a Postmodernist  
Chinese, Indonesian*

*Media and Communication Research Methods  
Chinese, Korean*

*Essentials of Mass Communication Theory:  
Chinese*

*Signs in Contemporary Culture :*  
*Indonesian*

*The Hamlet Case:  
Chinese*

*The Mass Comm Murders:  
Chinese*

*Durkheim is Dead :*  
*Chinese, Persian*

*Games and Exercises :*  
*Chinese*

*Making Sense of Media*  
*Chinese*

*Understanding American Icons:*  
*Italian*

*Media and Society*  
*Arabic*

### **Coda: How I Wrote This Book**

Because I keep a journal, I can locate the date when the idea of writing this book, which I saw as a kind of memoir, came to me. In journal 106 on page 160 on Saturday, March 18, I wrote:

In the middle of the night an idea popped into my head for a new book: Berger on Berger...similar in nature to R. Barthes by R. Barthes....I also did a title page for AAB by AAB.

On Monday, March 20, page 161 I wrote:

I started working on AAB by AAB. I'm going to do it free form and can add stuff and change the order of things as I progress.

On page 162 I wrote:

I started AAB by AAB...don't know where I'll go with it. But it is something to work on while I wait to get my Westerns page proofs.

I should add that I often work on several projects at the same time and start new books while I have books being considered for publication.

On page 163, Tuesday March 21, I wrote:

Now I'm working on my memoir. It turns out that I have 20,000 images on my external hard drive...I have a lot of photos that I can use in my memoir. I may move my family photos to an appendix in the back of the book to focus more on my writings...So I have to decide what to write about now...Maybe my first book and then other works I've been involved in. As I progress, I keep seeing how the book might look.

Underneath that passage I devote the rest of the the page to four columns in which I list some books to write about and other matters I might discuss in the memoir. I also write Furor Scribendi, which I was to adopt as the title of my memoir.

On page 164, I think about a different title for the book and write:

As I progress with my memoir, I can see where it is going. Maybe a different title:

A WRITER'S LIFE  
Arthur Asa Berger by Arthur Asa Berger  
Illustrated with drawings and photos by the author

The next day, on March 22nd, I had a new title. I wrote:

I have a new idea for a title of my book  
FUROR SCRIBENDI  
(A Passion for Writing)

I'll see how that looks...with a subtitle on the literary life and the creative process.

I worked on a retooled version of my memoir...gave it a new title, added some images, etc. Now I'm dealing with my books and have to figure out which ones to write about. I also separated family images into an appendix. It is not complete and needs many more images.

On various pages in the journal, I wrote about things I might change in the book. I considered a different title:

FUROR  
SCRIBENDI  
A Writer's Odyssey

I kept playing around with ideas for the book, but once I started writing about my first book, my plan for the book fell into place. I should add, that while I writing my memoir, I was also finishing my book, Choices, which was due at the publisher on June 1st.

All through my journal, I discuss changes I might make to it, such as reordering the chapters or adding material from a book being discussed to the memoir, until it finally took the form it has now.

I added this discussion to the book to show how writing a book involved all kinds of speculations about various aspects of the book, from its title to the ordering of topics discussed. I would like to think this chapter offers readers an idea of how much thinking and tinkering goes on with writing a book and, by extension, everything involving the creative process.

I intend to self-publish this book since it probably is too offbeat or its subject—my books and contributions to the study of media and popular culture—too specialized for a traditional publisher to be interested in it. But, of course, one never knows. What it is that an editor likes (and maybe more importantly a publisher's marketing director) had been an enigma for me for fifty years.



Author at (approximately) 20, 60 and 90

### About the Author

Arthur Asa Berger is Professor Emeritus of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University, where he taught between 1965 and 2003. He graduated in 1954 from the University of Massachusetts, where he majored in literature and philosophy. He received an MA degree in journalism and creative writing from the University of Iowa in 1956. He was drafted shortly after graduating from Iowa and served in the US Army in the Military District of Washington in Washington DC, where he was a feature writer and speechwriter in the District's Public Information Office. He



also wrote about high school sports for *The Washington Post* on weekend evenings while in the army.

Berger spent a year touring Europe after he got out of the Army and then went to the University of Minnesota, where he received a Ph.D. in American Studies in 1965. He wrote his dissertation on the comic strip Li'l Abner. In 1963-64, he had a Fulbright to Italy and taught at the University of Milan. He spent a year as a visiting professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at The University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1984 and two months in the fall of 2007 as a visiting professor at the School of Hotel and Tourism at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He spent a month lecturing at Jinan University in Guangzhou and ten days lecturing at Tsinghua University in Beijing in Spring, 2009. He has lectured in more than thirty universities in Europe, Asia, South America and North Africa.

He is the author of more than one hundred articles published in the United States and abroad, numerous book reviews, and more than 90 books on the mass media, popular culture, humor, tourism, semiotics, and everyday life

His books have been translated into German, Italian, Russian, Arabic, Swedish, Korean, Turkish and Chinese, and he has lectured in more than a dozen countries in the course of his career.

Berger is married to Phyllis Wolfson (and has been married to her since 1961), has two children, Nina and Gabriel, and four grandchildren. He lives in Mill Valley, California. He enjoys travel and classical music.

He can be reached by e-mail at [arthurasaberger@gmail.com](mailto:arthurasaberger@gmail.com)

## For Further Reading

Berger, Arthur Asa. (1976).

*The TV-Guided American.*

New York: Walker.

Berger, Arthur Asa. (1989).

*Seeing is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication*

Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Berger, Artur Asa. (1990).

*Agitpop: Political Culture and Communication Theory.*

New Brunswick,NJ: Transaction

Berger, Arthur Asa. (1992).

*Popular Culture Genres: Theories and Texts.*

Newbury Park: Sage.

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*Making Sense of Media: KeyTexts in Media and Cultural Studies.*

Malden, MA: Blackwell.

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*Media, Myth and Society.*

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Berger, Arthur Asa. (2016)

*Applied Discourse Analysis: Popular Culture, Media and Everyday Life.*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Berger, Arthur Asa. (2022)

*Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors: A Psycho-Semiotic Analysis.*

London: Anthem.

Berger, Arthur Asa. (2023).

*Taste: Why You Like What You Like.*  
Wilmington, Delaware: 2023.

# Furor Scribendi: A Passion for Writing

Arthur Asa Berger

This book is about the creative process and also offers readers insights into what it is like to be a writer. When I was young, I never could have imagined the career I would have, but it turns out, I was afflicted by the Furor Scribendi and was to spend much of my life writing books and articles as well as writing 106 journals (which I started writing in 1954). In this book, I discuss my experiences with editors and publishers and also offer excerpts from the books I discuss so you can see what I write about and how I express myself. Not all my books were well received. My favorite review of my books was written about my book *The TV Guided America*, published in the mid-seventies. The reviewer, who did not like my psychoanalytic and semiotic perspectives, wrote:

Berger is to the study of television what Idi Amin is to tourism in Uganda.

At that time, Amin was killing thousands of people in Uganda who were against his regime.

Another book was reviewed by someone who wrote:

How do you review a book that never should have been published?

A colleague of mine at San Francisco State University once told me that my books were all unpublishable and that I only got them published because my editors were naïve. When I asked him why he had never published a book, he explained, "My books would be too good to be published."

Fortunately, I found any number of naïve editors who published my books. My experiences as an author as reflected in my books are the subject of this book. I don't deal with all my books but discuss enough of them for you to see what it is like dealing with editors and publishers. After reading it, you will have a better idea of what is like to write a book and be an author.

