

As well as studying individuals for the light that they might throw upon their own times, they can also be researched to discover how their lives illuminate their ideas, especially where significant shifts in their thinking are apparent. Robert J. Richards explores this theme through the life of Friedrich Schelling, a former room-mate of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and a founder of the natural philosophy movement of the late eighteenth century, which was such an influence on the scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, and the poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Most research in historical biography tends to privilege texts as source material. Although Cooper and Schoppa mention the value of oral evidence, it was left to Nell Irvin Painter to urge the use of pictures. Seemingly natural representations of reality, visual images are actually carefully contrived and require careful analysis. They are particularly valuable as sources of biographical information in the study of what Painter calls 'subaltern subjects', that is 'individuals who are oppressed on account of their group identity' but who have the possibility of exercising power over others. Painter includes white women, as well as 'members of stigmatised minorities'. She argues that the careful analysis of images allows the biographer to portray the subject more thoroughly as a person and to unpack cultural meaning, especially when compared with stereotypical images. The existence of stereotypes is often overlooked. Painter exemplifies the value of images through studies of the portraits of prominent African Americans. Both Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass, for example, used their portraits to project images of the respectable American bourgeois in stark contrast to the stereotypes of the typological 'black' of their time, whether the ex-slave or the 'darky' of minstrelsy or 'cook-mammy'.

In sum, there is great diversity in this book. But the authors share concerns for methodological rigour, as well as an imaginative selection and use of sources. Their reflections on the nature and approach of historical biography are interesting, useful and stimulating.

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## ONLY CONNECT

*Communicating: the multiple modes of human interconnection.* Ruth Finnegan, 2002. London and New York: Routledge; ISBN: 0415241189, paper, 306 pp., £20.00.

This book is based on long reflection by Ruth Finnegan on how we communicate with others and her own research experience in widely separated places – witnessing the richness of story-telling performances in West

Africa, the evocative sounds, colours and scents of a Fijian market, and the musical and social activities of musicians in England. It draws not only on retrospection of her past 'academic' anthropological endeavours but also on the contemplation of her own 'ordinary' experiences of 'everyday living and of contacts across distance through telephones, letters, presents' and 'those variegated family heirlooms, material contacts with earlier generations' (p. xv). She also uses a formidable array of reading and knowledge of the literary, visual and musical arts.

Finnegan's 'quest' is to show the diversity and complexity of how 'human beings interconnect with each other' through 'modes of communicating', since 'many accounts seem not to taken on this full multisensory range', being limited to words or to more recent developments in visual technologies and their effects (p. xv). She says:

Looking back at my own experiences, I felt the need for a wider view of communication. There seemed a place for a book which could draw together something of the many current insights into the importance of all the sense in our human interconnecting, of material objects, contacts across space and time, and the significance of experiential dimensions of human life, not just the cognitive. Too many of our assumptions and analyses have been logocentric or unidimensional, cutting out the dynamic processes of gesture, dance, often even sound itself.

(p. xv)

The two chapters in Part I 'Foundations' are concerned with various perspectives on communication and the basic resources that humans and other animals have for communication. The approach may be said to be open and inclusive: 'communication is here taken to be a dynamic interactive process made up of organised, purposive, mutually-influential and mutually-recognisable actions and experiences that are created in a variety of modes by and between active participants as they interconnect with each other' (pp. 28–29). Communication, thus conceived, is a 'relative process with multiple features' – a 'multidimensional spectrum of acting and experiencing', with humans using a 'variety of modes' to interconnect with each other (pp. 29, 31).

Part II 'Channels of communication' describes the variety of forms of communication with others that we possess – 'The sounding world and its creation', 'Shaping the sights: vision and the communicating body', 'Creating and sharing sights: human arts and artefacts', 'Sensing the odour' and 'Communicating touch'. Finally, in Part III two chapters address 'A mix of arts' (or the 'interweaving' of the above 'channels') and communication 'Through space and time'. Throughout the text there are over 40 illustrations – including maps, diagrams, photographs, musical scores and pictures – that admirably support the attempt to show the

variety and sophistication of human communication. For example, there is a diagram of 'Australian aboriginal hand signals', photographs of 'The Laughing Buddha' and 'The painted rickshaw', and a diagram of the 'Meanings of touch among American students at a Western university'.

It is the mark of a stimulating text that the reader responds to discussion by following his or her own imagination; for instance, on reading the account of gestures and signals, I remembered the Celtic 'finger alphabet' as outlined by Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*. The more 'rounded' view of communicative channels has made me more aware of the limitations both methodologically and theoretically of much of the work we undertake in the biographical field in considering how individuals construct and 'compose' their lives. Ruth Finnegan's book deserves to become a 'classic' account of human communication but I fear that because of its cross-disciplinary range and depth it may not get the attention it richly deserves.

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#### **FOOD, LIVES AND THE ORIGIN OF CIVILIZATION**

*Food: a history*. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, 2002. London: Pan Books; ISBN: 033049144X paper, 252 pp., £7.99.

This book is about 'the world's most important subject' – food (p. xiii). The author takes a fascinating historic journey, beginning with the invention of cooking – the 'foundation of civilization' – up to the present time where the microwave is the 'last enemy' of cooking (p. 250). A uniquely human trait, from its very origins around a fire, cooking was synonymous with the emergence of culture and the organization of society around food-related behaviours. While present day, technology-driven eating habits are 'uncivilized', food is becoming 'dissocialized' (p. 22) and the microwave is suited to 'solitary' eating patterns (p. 250). In light of recent scientific advances, the fact that cooking was the first scientific revolution is quite humbling. As a dietitian and public health nutritionist constantly trying to understand and explore the question 'why we eat what we eat', this book is mind, imagination and food-appreciation expanding. Although, as a dietitian I did not appreciate the author's perception that we (dietitians) 'like to cultivate a "scientific" self-image, stripped of any cultural context' (p. 62) – a perception somewhat shattered by a dietitian's interest in his book! The historic context of self-made nutritionists and self-styled experts (p. 52) is actually closely and worryingly mirrored in the present day.