

part of the unit, structuralism as the origin of modern and postmodern semiotics is examined.

The second unit is a theoretically dense section, but as it deals with the nature of meaning, it forms the central tenet around which the book is built. The departure point is the sign as the smallest element of meaning. Attention is paid to the component of a sign, the types of signs, and the functions of signs. Codes and their characteristics form the next part of the discussion. In an interesting application of semiotic analysis, we are asked to explore the semiotic meanings of codes such as styles of dress, architecture, media, food and furniture. The different kinds of meaning (denotation, connotation and ideological), and a discussion of the different forms of media criticism conclude the section.

In unit three, the attention shifts to language as text and discourse. The structure and functions of language form the basis of the initial discussion. Discourse as a particular form of social activity which involves the decoding and interpretation of texts, and the role of texts in a social context is examined. The unit concludes with an example of discourse analysis based on a media article.

The use of South African photographs to illustrate nonverbal communication in unit four adds considerably to the understanding of the various codes used in pictorial communication. The unit begins with a description of the codes used in interpersonal communication such as kinesics, proxemics, and artefacts. The discussion is then extended to the analysis of codes used in photographs. Lighting, colour, field forces and depth and volume are discussed as codes of content while area orientation, angles, camera shots and camera viewpoint are discussed as codes of form. Movement and auditory codes as specific to television and film are then explored, and the unit ends with a consideration of the link between cultural values and the meanings ascribed to nonverbal communication.

In unit five the media as symbolic form and text is discussed and a good guided tour through structuralist and post-structuralist theory is provided. The theoretical contributions

of writers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard are reviewed and the value of concepts such as binary oppositions, social myths and stereotypes in media text analysis assessed.

Postmodernism is an overused phrase for the 'anything goes' syndrome and it is refreshing to read a well-written and understandable overview of what the term refers to. The subsequent discussion of public communication is particularly relevant and includes an exploration of the role of television as the dominant form of communication and producer of meaning in the late twentieth century.

The last unit analyses forms of social and cultural expression such as religion, architecture, sport, theatre and fashion as representations of culture and carriers of meaning. An examination of the concepts of culture and ideology and the cultural studies approach to communication concludes this section.

This is a valuable book for all artists and designers involved in the use of signs and codes because of the lucid way in which difficult theoretical concepts are explained and applied. Each theoretical discussion is followed by a list of activities which ensures the interactive involvement of the reader. The lack of visual illustrations in some of the units may seem a bit unfriendly to anyone used to other books on communication and meaning, but the structured lay-out and clear typography make the book easy to read.

The interaction between signs, symbols and meaning is fascinating and this book provides both students and the general reader with a solid theoretical background to further explore his/her own contribution to the production of meaning. Highly recommended.

AS LONG AS IT'S PINK.

The Sexual Politics of Taste

by Penny Sparke

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Reviewed by Jeanne van Eeden

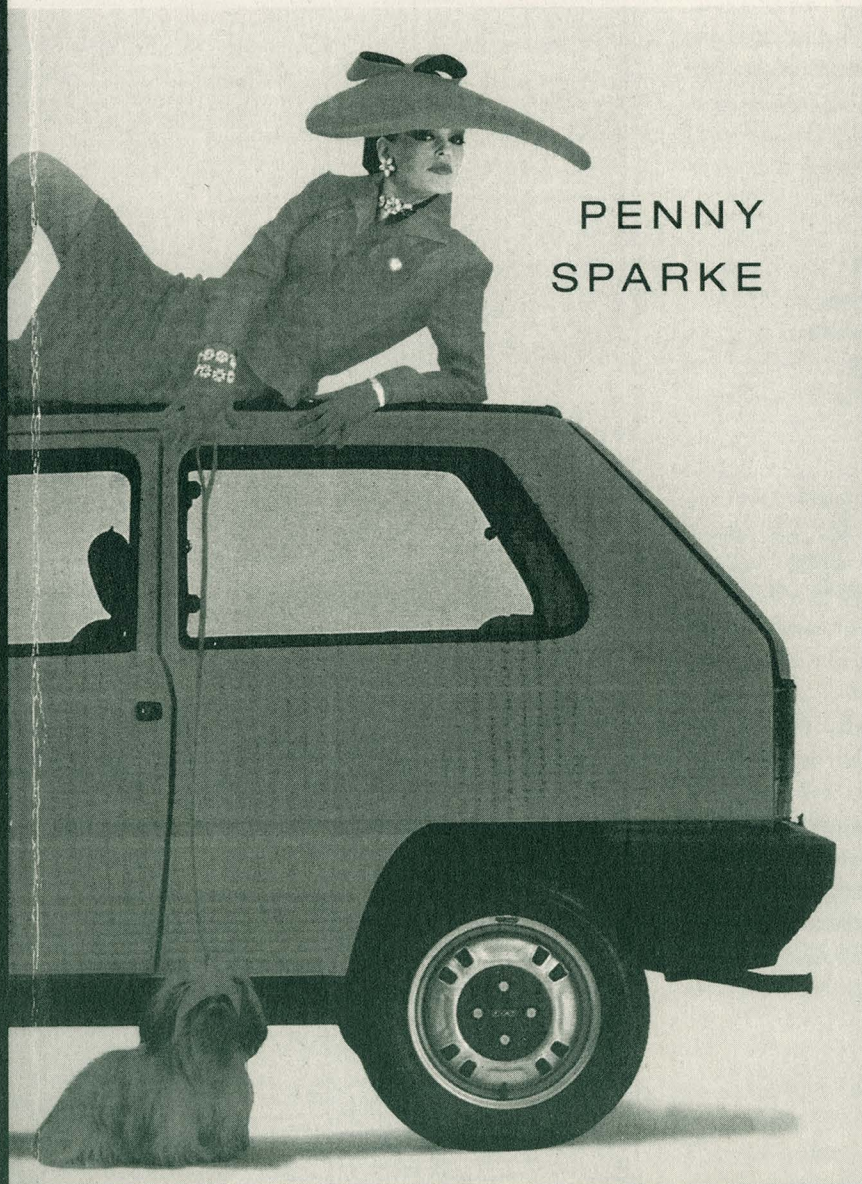
Design historian Penny Sparke joins the ranks of those authors exploring the influence of gender role formation on culture in *As Long as it's Pink. The Sexual Politics of Taste*. Sparke's approach is an ideological deconstruction of 'feminine' taste and its antithetical relationship with 'masculine' Modernism from Victorian times to the present. She demonstrates that feminine taste has customarily been associated with conservatism, domesticity and consumption in the private sphere, whereas male taste has been equated with progress, mainstream culture and mass production in the public sphere. According to Sparke the history of taste and objects reveals that a tension ensued between gendered values, and influenced the ways in which men and women used and related to everyday objects.

Sparke sets out to illustrate that in the last 150 years feminine taste, which she defines as stereotypical 'aesthetic preferences that we all associate with frills and furbelows, "unnecessary" display and ornamentation, and an "excess" of gilt and glitter' (p 15), has been marginalised in favour of masculine taste. To substantiate her argument Sparke highlights the constant criticism and denigration of feminine taste by influential (male) critics. Hence, according to Sparke:

AS LONG AS IT'S PINK

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF TASTE

PENNY
SPARKE



Standing outside the dominant masculine experience of modernity ... feminine culture, linked with the everyday, the commercial and the aesthetically 'impure', has been relegated to the margins. (p ix)

In her explanation of the origins of the gendered ideology of taste, Sparke concentrates on the Victorian context and its contribution to the creation of a feminine taste. She traces the influence of industrialisation on the fostering of a stereotypically masculine aesthetic, which was concerned with ridding objects of their perceived feminine (that is: trivial, sentimental, inferior, kitsch) content. She points out that the consistently dominant masculine values were often resisted by women, but that the conflation of woman with domesticity, consumption, beauty and social respectability was paramount throughout the nineteenth century.

The first concerted attack by the Victorian design reform movements was strengthened by Modernism's 'call to order'. Modernism's emphasis on progress, functionalism and rationality led to the 'total redefinition of the nature and significance of the interior' (p 108), and made stereotypical feminine taste virtually redundant.

In subsequent chapters Sparke traces the notion of feminine taste and its alignment to the domain of consumption instead of (male) production. She notes that women acted as a modifying force on high Modernism in supporting Art Nouveau and Art Deco as 'feminine versions of the modern' (p 125) and indicates the seminal role performed by advertising in perpetuating a feminine taste.

In her review of the period 1940 - 1970 Sparke considers the renewed idealisation of domesticity coupled with the gendering of products and the sexual division of labour in the home. According to Sparke 'pink was the most obviously feminine colour of all those that appeared in the 1950s domestic interior' (p 196), and rooms such as the kitchen and bathroom were fully 'feminised'. The media's emphasis of frilly femininity in

the post-war years gave added impetus to the Women's Movement of the 1960s; Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (Penguin 1963) highlighted the home as the site of female angst.

The overturning of feminine taste was in many respects accomplished in the 1960s by youth culture, which caused a radical rethinking of taste. Sparke points out that despite the democratisation of culture that followed in the wake of youth culture, feminine taste nonetheless continued to be equated with mass culture and popular taste, and was therefore scorned by high-brow critics.

Sparke ends her book with the hopeful view that feminine taste will be accommodated by Postmodernism's support of eclecticism, choice, difference and diversity. She points out that Postmodernism has overturned Modernism's proscriptive, monolithic stance and judgmental connotations. In addition, the separation of the spheres into specific female or male domains is not longer necessarily valid today, and gender stereotypes are being questioned and nullified by the changing needs of society.

Sparke has made a readable and interesting contribution to a field that has as yet received scant attention. Adrian Forty's *Objects of Desire: Design and Society 1750 - 1980* (Thames and Hudson 1986) implicitly touched on some of the issues raised by Sparke. A short review, such as this one, cannot do full justice to the extent of her arguments. This book is recommended for design historians and those interested in the gendering of culture. One of the few negative aspects of the publication is the paucity of illustrations which could have lent a concrete dimension to the arguments.