

News, Notes & Comment

Stephenson's Play Theory Reissued

William Stephenson's *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (University of Chicago Press, 1967) has recently been reissued in paperback by Transaction Books (1988). The volume carries a new 12-page introduction by Brian Sutton-Smith, professor of education at the University of Pennsylvania, who begins with an assertion with which all readers of this newsletter can agree, that...

Stephenson's view that "at its best mass communication allows people to become absorbed in subjective play," has to be one of the most ignored of this century's scholarly comments on the nature of play and of mass media. (p. ix)

Sutton-Smith then takes the role of protagonist, examining *Play Theory's* neglect under three headings: *Play as subjective* in an age in which only objectivity counts; *self-enhancement and communication pleasure*, both of which, he says, "appear too embedded in individualistic connotations"; and *the media as entertainment*, to which current conventions and traditions of mass media thinking are impervious.

In puzzlement, Sutton-Smith postscripts with the observation that "Stephenson's particular technique of the Q-sort...has not, however, become quite the *sine qua non* of subjective play that he presaged -- the reasons are uncertain" (p. xix). He speculates that play may not be amendable to statistical treatment, and that the blend of objective and subjective may not be acceptable to the conventional scientific spirit; however, he gives no indication that he is aware of the vast body of literature which Q has sponsored in the 20 years since the original publication of *Play Theory*.

In his review of this republication in *Journalism Quarterly* (1988, 65, 801-802), William J. Ingenthron praises Sutton-Smith "for observing that the play theory has been too long ignored" and for placing partial blame on a recalcitrant sci-

ence, but he also suggests that the author of the new introduction may have missed the mark somewhat to the extent he implicates a latent motivation for play, which would of course remove it from the ludenic realm of communication pleasure and place it under social control and self abnegation. Ingenthron's own summary of play catches some of the cultural and moral implications of Stephenson's position:

Our minds can be their own programmers by way of our thoughts and feelings. Thus we may seize on periods of respite to choose new paths of fancy for no motives whatsoever. Our choices often pertain to the media. By varied rituals, we may convert their so-called "information" to our private ends. The conversion is deeply absorbing fun, and often gives us an enhanced awareness of ourselves. To like ourselves is to like others, and may lead us to more pleasure as we gossip with old or new friends about matters of "human interest" that the media have given us. In time the gossip may unite with what is good in human nature to change culture for the better. (p. 801)

The Transaction edition of *Play Theory* can be ordered by forwarding a check for \$18.70 (\$16.95 plus P&H), to Transaction Books, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903 (phone 201/932-2280).

Recent and Forthcoming Scholarship

Donald R. Cooper (Political Science, Florida Atlantic U) and Marilyn K. Dantico, "Priority-Setting Techniques for the Budgetary Process," *Experimental Study of Politics*, 1990, 9(1), 94-117. Four decision-making techniques are compared for their relative effectiveness in prioritizing 20 programs for budgetary consideration: The *single standard* technique, a rational-actor procedure requiring those in charge of budgeting to determine a single evaluative criterion and then to rank the various program packages in terms of that criterion; the *multiple criteria weighting* procedure, in which a set of criteria, rather than just one, is established, followed by program prioritizing; the *Q sort*, in which the group as a whole decides on the evaluative criteria and then, as a group, ranks the 20 programs; and the *nominal group technique* (modified), in which individual rankings are rendered and then summed to obtain

a ranking of programs for the group as a whole. The nominal group technique was the least constraining of the four techniques, hence considered more compatible with incremental decision-making. Four groups of six municipal finance directors were each assigned one of the decision-making techniques and instructed to provide a ranking of the same 20 program packages in terms of budgetary priority. Assessments were then made of how long it took groups to complete their prioritizing task; other participant evaluations were also obtained. The nominal group technique proved the most efficient (useful, acceptable), with Q technique a close second, thereby indicating the superiority of incremental over rational-comprehensive techniques. It is worth noting that Q was disadvantaged vis-a-vis the nominal group technique in that the Q group had to produce a single ranking as a group product (thereby necessitating much discussion and compromise) whereas the NGT group's ranking was merely obtained by arithmetically summing the individuals' private rankings, consequently obviating the need for discussion and leading to a saving in decision-making time.

Charles E. Cottle (Political Science, U Wisconsin, White-water WI 53190), Patricia Searles, Ronald J. Berger, and Beth Ann Pierce, "Conflicting Ideologies and the Politics of Pornography," *Gender & Society*, 1989, 3, 303-333. *Abstract:* This article analyzes positions on pornography using Q-methodology. Eighty-five respondents sorted a sample of 86 opinion statements on definitions of pornography, personal reactions to it, its causes and effects, and social policy recommendations. Factor analysis was used to identify clusters of individuals in the United States who share common subjectively defined points of view on pornography. The three patterns of responses that emerged from the analysis were labeled Religious-Conservative, Liberal, and Antipornography Feminist. Using the empirical data, we examine the logical and ethical structures of these points of view and their political and legal implications. We conclude that the viewpoints are too incompatible to sustain stable and effective political alignments among the adherents. [A version of this paper was presented at the 1987 Q Conference; a portion of the Q sample employed

was reported in "Research in Progress," *Operant Subjectivity*, April 1987, pp. 100-104.]

Two Q studies were presented at the 1990 meeting of the Western Political Science Association (March 22-24, Newport Beach, CA). In "The Appeals of Political Thinking: The Psychological Substructure of Political Thought (A First Approximation)," Bruce F. McKeown (Political Science, Westmont College, Santa Barbara CA 93108) first administered a political theory Q sort to a class of undergraduates who divided into four factors, one of which was bipolar. The first factor was a combination of neo-Augustinian religious politics and democratic principles, as indicated in acceptance of the view that "the source of all political authority and...of all true sovereignty must always lie with the people as a whole" (+ 3) as well as the view that "human goodness is achieved in obedience to God's commands..." (+ 3). The second factor displays a tension between acceptance of man's political nature on the one hand, and the existential alienation which offsets it on the other. The third factor is bipolar, pessimistic subjects at one end agreeing that "...all men are wicked and always bend to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers" (+ 3) while those at the other pole disagree. For the fourth factor, human nature is viewed positively, and politics is accepted as a means to the good. The majority of the paper is given over to intensive analyses of subjects selected from each of the factors.

The second 1990 WPSA conference paper was by Susan Hunter (Political Science, West Virginia U, Morgantown WV 26506) and Richard A. Brisbin, Jr., "Q Sorts, Records, and Interviews: A Multi-Method Approach to Implementation Research." *Abstract:* During the past 20 years, studies have offered different models and empirical explanations of the implementation process. In the explanation of the events and outcomes of the process of implementation found in these studies, the objectives of participants in the implementation process have been a critical but often unmeasured variable. In this article, we critique current methods used in implementation research. Then, using data derived from the study of three state agencies, we illustrate the potential of Q methodology for the measurement of the perceptions of the objectives

and related values of policy implementation participants. We conclude that this methodology will contribute to better empirical tests of the analysis of linkages between the perceptions of participants and the events occurring during policy implementation or the outcomes of implementation processes.

Thomas R. Lindlof (Telecommunications, U Kentucky, Lexington KY 40506-0042) and Milton J. Shatzer, "Subjective Differences in Spousal Perceptions of Family Video," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 1989, 33, 375-395. *Abstract*: Responding to the increased presence of the videocassette recorder in American households, this study examined the dimensions by which VCR use is subjectively ordered by spouses in families with children. Q-data analysis revealed three types of participants, whose perceptions may be associated with their family roles, media ownership and usage, and family cohesion and adaptability. Particular elements of the VCR-family domain were used by the participants to prioritize perceptions, with greater perceptual similarities existing between spouses when the referent was family video usage, rather than individual usage. [A related paper, "Operant Subjectivity in the Perception and Use of the Home Videocassette Recorder," was presented at the April 1989 British Q conference, University of Reading.]

Writing in *The Psychologist*, the official journal of the British Psychological Society, Sean Hammond (Psychology, U Surrey) refers to McKeown and Thomas' *Q Methodology* (Sage, 1988) as "a well-written account of an often overlooked technique. The writing style is direct and simple and the text would be understood by interested undergraduates through to postgraduates and researchers." Hammond goes on to say that "the book is well-organised and easy to follow," and although he has some reservations concerning some statistical aspects, he concludes that "I would certainly recommend this book to interested students...." The volume sells for £5.50 through the London office of Sage.

Specificities

Leonard J. Barchak (Communication & Theatre, McNeese State U, Lake Charles LA 70609) has received a grant from the Humanities Council of Louisiana for a Q-based public re-

lations and market segmentation study on behalf of the Lake Charles Symphony Orchestra. The purpose of the study is to assist in developing understanding of various regional audiences so as to be able to create programs to meet particular needs. The project is scheduled to be completed by autumn.

Irvin Goldman (Communication Studies, U Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4, Canada) and Steven R. Brown (Political Science, Kent State U, Kent, OH 44242) have been invited to edit the premier issue of a new bilingual quarterly, *Electronic Journal of Communication/Revue Electronique de Communication*, which will be devoted to the theme "Q Methodology and Communication: Theory and Applications." *EJC/REC* will not appear in traditional journal form, but will be available only through electronic networks such as Bitnet, Netnorth, Janet, and European Academic and Research Network. The journal can be received free of charge by forwarding a request to the general editor, Jim Winter, at the e-mail address B13@Windsor1.

Celia Kitlinger's *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (Newbury Park, CA, Sage, 1988, 230 pp.) has received the 1989 Distinguished Publication Award from the Association of Women in Psychology. This application of Q methodology has gone into a second printing and is available for \$39.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper. A review by Charles Cottle appears in the July 1988 issue of *OS*.

Dennis Kinsey (Decision Research Corp., 1414 Statler Office Tower, Cleveland OH 44115) has been accepted into Stanford University's doctoral program in communication where he will be one of six accepted into the fall 1990 group that will be fully-funded for four years.

Quantum and Klein for Social Science

During the 1980s, William Stephenson wrote prolifically on the connection between Q and quantum theory, and political scientists, for whom these ideas may be novel but who may be interested in pursuing them within their own field, are invited to examine Erik Rasmussen's *Complementarity and Political Science: An Essay on Fundamentals of Political Science Theory and Research Strategy* (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1987, 134 pp.). Rasmussen, emeritus professor

at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, writes skillfully and clearly about Niels Bohr's concept of complementarity and how it relates to continuing problems in political science, especially as regards the matter of values in research.

Also tailor-made for social scientists is C. Fred Alford's *Melanie Klein and Critical Social Theory: An Account of Politics, Art, and Reason Based on Her Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, 232 pp.), in which the author shows how Klein's psychoanalytic theory parallels the Frankfurt School's project, which, he says, languished due to its reliance on Freud's ideas. Stephenson's tie to Klein has been documented previously (see *OS*, July 1988, pp. 127-128), and a paper of his about her, which he submitted to the journal *Melanie Klein and Object Relations* prior to his death, is currently undergoing editorial evaluation.

Coffee, Scrap Paper, and Factor Rotation

In the November 1989 issue of *Discover* (in Shawna Vogel's "Strange Matter," pp. 62-67), MIT's Robert Jaffe is quoted as saying that what theoretical physicists do primarily is "drink coffee and write on paper and throw it in the wastebasket" (p. 63). Mainly, they come up with theories and then begin chasing down the mathematical implications. But if, as Vogel says, the theory demands that the moon be made of quicksand, the formulas are committed to the circular file along with the theory that led to them. Then it's back for more coffee.

How similar this is to factor rotation in Q methodology, but unlike the case in conventional factor analysis. In the latter, the data are submitted to the computer center -- like leaving undeveloped film at a photo shop -- and the researcher later returns to find out how factor analysis has recorded that the world looks. Whatever mathematical models and assumptions are built into the computer program, they are assumed to apply universally to any and all problems, sites, and situations.

In Q, on the other hand, at least in its abductive form, rotation often begins with curiosity about plausible connections of one kind or another, and with the assistance of newly developed software packages it is now possible to probe for these

connections judgmentally and in a relatively brief period of time. The phenomenon, we may be reasonably sure, already has a structure of its own which we wish to see as clearly as possible, and judgmental rotation offers this clarity as a possibility, guided by theory in the way that a piano guides the singing of hymns. If the end-product of the rotation leads down a blind alley -- similar to the implication that the moon is made of quicksand -- we can always toss it away, return for more coffee and fresh look at the original unrotated factors, and try a different rotation tomorrow.

Cambridge University's Stephen W. Hawking recently remarked that "I was...fortunate in that I chose theoretical physics, because that is all in the mind" (*A Brief History of Time*, New York, Bantam Books, 1988, p. vii). So also is there the *theoretical* side of a science of subjectivity which, if not solely resident in the mind, is at least in the position of being able to take advantage of the knowledge stored there while in the process of examining the factor space at issue.

There's another Q-related lesson to be learned from Vogel's article. Strange matter, about which the physicists were theorizing over coffee and scrap paper, has never been seen, although it may be a more stable form of matter than that with which we are familiar. There is good reason why strange matter has not been seen: whereas a particle of it the size of a water molecule might remain on the earth's surface, its density is such that a lump of it the size of a BB would zip through the the earth and keep right on going. Yet some scientists are optimistic that they may be able to create strange matter in a lab, and all that will be required will be one small lump to settle the question of its existence.

Similarly in Q: often it is not a question of *how many* of a factor exist, but *that* it exists. *That* gold or lead or strange matter exist and have such-and-such qualities is every bit as much a scientific question as that of where they are to be found and in what quantities, and the same can be said of Q factors: demonstrating their existence, investigating their interrelations, and showing how they function dynamically (e.g., in single-case studies) is at least as important from a scientific standpoint as determining the numerosity of each.