

BOOK REVIEWS

STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION

Communication and Culture

Readings in the Codes of Human Interaction. By Alfred G. Smith. Pp. xi + 626. (New York and London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.) 64s.

ONE criterion for the inclusion of a passage in this large collection of edited readings was that it should be fully understandable by non-specialist American undergraduates, including those majoring in social psychology or journalism. Although it so frankly rolls off the assembly lines of the college book industry, no undue concessions have been made and much of the book is tough reading. For general readers it provides a useful conspectus of studies made during the past fifteen or twenty years in many different disciplines that converge on communication: cybernetics, information theory and the mathematics of communication, of course, but also linguistics, the experimental psychology of small groups, investigations by anthropological and sociological methods, some psychiatry, and semantics. The precision of the contributions and the weight of scientific evidence behind them vary enormously, from mathematical statements of the amount of information per signal from a specified source, through anecdotal accounts of the difference between Americans and Latin-Americans in the distance apart at which they feel comfortable in conversation, to speculative neurology that might explain human memory. The overriding impression, however, is of indefatigable effort directed to intellectual dissection and analysis. The success of analysis in communications engineering proper has been a light—perhaps a will o' the wisp—for many workers in allied fields. Despite the editor's efforts it is difficult to believe that the abstract conceptual analyses which lend the book its high intellectual tone have been at all necessary for the more practical studies, for instance that "On Social Communication and the Metropolis", or the account of class differences in modes of communication in America, or Goffman's discussion of varieties of failure in face to face communication, or the experimental studies designed to test Whorfian views on language and perception.

In some areas the analysis has been mainly descriptive but extraordinarily minute, notably in the account given by the linguists of voice patterns, and the corresponding (though less advanced) analysis of gesture offered under the heading of kinesics. In spite of inflated jargon (for example, "the kinesiologically analysable stream concurrent with vocalic behavior"), there is evidence here of highly trained and subtle observation of the non-verbal elements in speech.

Elsewhere the effort has been to find quasi-mathematical statements of a complex system of social interactions. The attempt by Bavelas to geometrize the possible patterns of communication in a small group led to a succession of laboratory studies of artificially created networks of communication and the demonstration of various effects other than those that Bavelas predicted. Successive refinements of this kind are undoubtedly of interest, but it is not unreasonable to ask what relevance they have outside the laboratory. One contributor does make a gesture of applying the results to management techniques, but the conclusion that it is not most efficient to have completely free communication, with all channels equal and no key men, seems rather a mouse after these mountainous travails.

It is noticeable that where new methods or lines of enquiry have been really illuminating (for example, Osgood's studies with the semantic differential technique, and Davitz's related studies of emotional expression) the constructing of generalized models and abstract conceptual frameworks is at a minimum. Where investigators have achieved something they are content to report their methods and findings intelligibly and unpretentiously. This is not to suggest that the makers of theoretical systems are deliberately covering their nakedness, but there is a danger that the new armchair psychology may divert too much effort from the potentially rewarding exploration of more concrete problems.

D. W. HARDING

UNLOVABLE CHILD OR AFFECTIONLESS MOTHER?

Studies of Troublesome Children

By D. H. Stott. Pp. ix + 208. (London: Tavistock Publications; New York: Humanities Press, 1966.) 32s.

DR. STOTT is a clinical psychologist and original thinker. This book contains reports on two research projects and in the third part the author discusses the wider implications of his research findings and gives a brief account of his own theory of human behaviour and motivation.

Part 1 is based on a study of thirty-three delinquent children. The chief finding is that some delinquents come from apparently emotionally stable families. The author describes some of the remedies that might help such children—in particular, an enlarged school welfare service with the officers attached to individual schools rather than working from a central department. Improved schooling and supervision of leisure hours would play their part, but the important thing is "playing for time until the processes of maturation have in a measure caught up", removing every source of stress, and "having someone at hand to deal with crises when they occur so that other people can be persuaded to exercise forbearance".

The second part is a report on a research into truancy carried out at the invitation of Unesco with the co-operation of the Education Welfare Officers National Association. 305 truants were identified each with two controls, one a child from the same school with a birth date as near as possible to the delinquent, the second a neighbourhood control of the same sex and year group preferably living in the same street. Truants are found to be "a vulnerable group and their behaviour cannot be explained simply on the grounds that they come from a delinquent area but are otherwise stable"—many diverse factors play a part.

The first project was carried out by twelve qualified social workers who met the author frequently in case conferences; the second by 168 welfare officers, one of whom told me it was really quite simple, "you chose your child, you found the two controls, then did a special visit, filled in the questionnaires and sent them off". Research by means of such questionnaires implies that parents will be accurate and consistent in the accounts given. Dr. Stott admits that a parent may be biased against a particular child, but points out that it is unscientific to attribute a problem to maternal deprivation if, in fact, there is no clear indication of this in the history. On the other hand, he finds as the most frequent factor "stress in pregnancy", and includes such diverse possibilities as illegitimacy, bad housing, death in the family, anaemia, excessive sickness, and toxæmia of pregnancy. This stress is said to lead to "neural impairment or neural dysfunction". Such neural dysfunction would seem to be almost as difficult to prove objectively as maternal deprivation. Dr. Stott seems to prefer the unlovable child rather than