

# Communications and Culture

*Communications* has been defined as the conveying or exchanging of information and ideas. This wide definition is taken as the starting-point for this series of books, which are not bound by conventional academic divisions. The series aims to document or analyse a broad range of cultural forms and ideas.

It encompasses works from areas as esoteric as linguistics and as exoteric as television. The language of communication may be the written word or the moving picture, the static icon or the living gesture. These means of communicating can at their best blossom into and form an essential part of the other mysterious concept, *culture*.

There is no sharp or intended split in the series between communication and culture. On one definition, culture refers to the organisation of experience shared by members of a community, a process which includes the standards and values for judging or perceiving, for predicting and acting. In this sense, creative communication can make for a better and livelier culture.

The series reaches towards the widest possible audience. Some of the works concern themselves with activities as general as play and games; others offer a narrower focus, such as the ways of understanding the visual image. It is hoped that some moves in the transformation of the artful and the scientific can be achieved, and that both can begin to be understood by a wider and more comprehending community. Some of these books are written by practitioners – broadcasters, journalists, and artists; others come from critics, scholars, scientists and historians.

The series has an ancient and laudable, though perhaps untenable, aim – an aim as old as the Greeks and as new as holography: it aspires to help heal the split between cultures, between the practitioners and the thinkers, between science and art, between the academy and life.

PAUL WALTON

# Communications and Culture

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# Questions of Cinema

Stephen Heath

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# Preface

In 1973 I began an association with the journal *Screen* which led, amongst other things, to my participating in its work by writing a number of essays towards the development of a critical and theoretical account of cinema and film able to engage cultural and political issues. This book is a result of that writing, a selection from those essays and from others written with the same purpose and over the same period of the last six or seven years for other magazines or occasions.

Selection means omissions, some of which – early pieces on the semiology elaborated by Christian Metz, discussions of Brecht and cinema, a long analysis of Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* – are to be retrieved elsewhere. In fact, the present volume comprises only two essays originally published in *Screen*, the majority coming from those other magazines or appearing here for the first time (details of publication are given at the head of the 'Notes' section for each essay). Apart from minor stylistic changes or small corrections of detail and unless otherwise specified, the previously published pieces are printed in their original form. Repetitions have generally been allowed to stand: from one piece to the next, an idea or theme is taken up and set out in a new context, a different discussion, in a way that will perhaps, hopefully, have something of a cumulative explanatory effect. Each essay exists as a separate entity but joins with the others in what is, the intended unity of the book, a series of questions of cinema. Some of those questions are raised from the consideration of particular films, some from the consideration of particular issues or of particular theoretical concepts that have been important in film theory; all of them spill out of

any narrowly defined field of cinema and its study, involve – in differing ways and in respect of the development of the critical and theoretical account mentioned above – Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiology. Leaving aside the desire to choose from and bring together some of the more scattered pieces, the selection was made too, finally, in the interests of providing a perspective on that development: the questions of cinema and a little history of the terms of their debate.

There are many people I should acknowledge and thank for help of every kind in connection with the writing of these essays; too many for a list not to be an inadequate means of acknowledging and thanking any one of them. Thus I should simply like this book, for those people, they who knew and who miss him, to be in memory of Martin Walsh.

*January 1980*

STEPHEN HEATH

## NOTE

Details of references are given in full in the ‘Notes’ section at the end of each essay. In the case of references to works in languages other than English, details are also given of translations when these exist, are known to me and are readily available. The translation of any quotation here, however, will often be my own or a modified version of the available published translation and will thus not necessarily correspond to the latter.