

respect for American folklore. Moreover, the poor reader must endure some disconcerting editorializing and non-productive flag-waving, and the crowning injustice of it all is the price of the book. Fifteen dollars may be what books cost nowadays, but it seems likely that many "average readers" will be discouraged by the prospect of laying out that kind of money for what is essentially a coffee-table book with too few pictures.

Kinesics and Context, by Ray L. Birdwhistell.

xiv - 338 pp. Appendices, bibliography.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970. \$3.95.

by Richard P. Sugg.

Ray L. Birdwhistell's book is a collection of essays and excerpts on what is popularly known as "body language." As the title suggests, Birdwhistell insists that kinesics cannot be understood apart from the cultural contexts in which the kines ("isolable elements of body motion") occur. "Insofar as we know, there is no body motion or gesture that can be regarded as a universal symbol." Further, within a given culture one gesture may communicate varying messages according to the idiosyncrasies of the person making the gesture. This is obviously a far cry from such simplistic observations as "Women with crossed legs are signalling their unavailability" which titillated the readers of Fast's Body Language, the book which claims a kinship with Birdwhistell's book.

Indeed, the methodology used by the founder of the science of kinesics is guaranteed to dismay the person in search of tips on how to turn his body into a pulsating message of social and sexual bounty. Birdwhistell specializes in micro-kinesics, which means that he films or otherwise records and analyzes examples of human communication, preferably mundane ones, usually lasting no more than 10 seconds. At 24 frames per second such films provide 240 possible examples of body motion, none of which will be very exciting to any but the scientist. Could Ray L. Birdwhistell be a pseudonym for Andy Warhol? This may be the meaning of the cryptic recommendation from Marshall McLuhan on the book's cover: "Ray Birdwhistell...is the first to have built a bridge between anthropology and the world of contemporary arts."

There is little evidence of such an accomplishment in this book. Birdwhistell contends that artists, like everybody else, are caught within a "conventional telecommunicative structure" which they are relatively powerless to change unless they understand it consciously. This necessitates rigorous observation and measurement and the general discarding of insights that are not testable. The scientist is the man for this job, and Birdwhistell provides an appendix from his earlier book The Introduction to Kinesics which consists of a notational system based on the division of the body into eight different sections, with symbols for various movements within the sections. These are to be used to analyze body movement without regard to the psychological or sociological interpretations of such movement, and Birdwhistell demonstrates their use in recording a communication on a bus between a mother and her child, who wants to go to the bathroom. But his example belies his method of pure analysis; for not only does he evince a number of culture-bound attitudes in his gloss

on the notations, but he also ignores what seems a crucial point, whether or not the child really had to go to the bathroom. Surely there's a difference in body movement between the child who has to go and the child who's only pretending, a difference based on motive in the psychological sense. That there is such a difference is demonstrated by the fact that mothers are constantly gauging their children on such a basis, getting on or off buses accordingly. But Birdwhistell's transcription of this scene makes no attempt to render the "why" of the movement, and hence could represent equally well the false or the real kinesics of bladder control.

Ray L. Birdwhistell no doubt deserves credit for being the founder of kinesics and for directing our attention to the importance of the body in communication. But Kinesics and Context, while containing some interesting ideas, is not as good a book as could be written on the subject, and certainly not suitable for the novice in kinesics. For one thing, it sorely needs editing. In the Introduction Birdwhistell tells us that "Jones, a linguistics graduate student, dredged my writings and gleaned what he felt to be significant." There is scarcely one complete essay, in the sense in which we usually think of that genre, in the book. There is plenty of redundancy (which, ironically, Birdwhistell considers a significant aspect of communication), and the excerpts from papers and articles are not in chronological order, which results in minor inconsistencies and a lack of a sense of development. Not only the arrangement of the excerpts but also the writing itself make reading this book as tedious a task as analyzing 240 frames of an 18 second film for minute and, hopefully, significant changes. By my rough count Birdwhistell uses four metaphors in the book, two of which are combined and "mixed" in the sentence about Jones above. These minor jewels are scattered in a wasteland of jargon, needless abstraction and downright inanity. Consider this bit of advice: "Two devices have been tried for timing specific kines of kinemorphs by a single observer or team of observers. A stop watch may be used if its presence is not a significantly interfering artifact. For more covert timing, the observer can train himself to beat time with his toe hidden by his shoe. Some practice may be required before the full beat per second is mastered, but one can learn to record one quarter, one half, single, and multiple seconds with considerable accuracy." This and similar applications of officialese to mundane facts make Birdwhistell's style seem like an attempt of Stephen Potter and Kingsley Amis to consciously parody the scientific manner. It would be one thing if Birdwhistell presented evidence that his science was producing striking insights into human behavior, but because of the nature of this book, excerpts and essays, the reader remains unconvinced that Birdwhistell's writing is anything more than what Vonnegut calls "granfalloonery" attempting to legitimize itself.

A Singer and Her Songs. Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads, edited by Roger D. Abrahams. Music editor, George Foss.

ix - 191 pp. Appendices.

Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970. \$8.50.

by W. K. McNeil

For many years one of Almeda Riddle's dreams was to have all of her songs preserved either on tape or in book form. Therefore she was more than eager to collaborate with folklorist Roger D. Abrahams on the present volume, although if the decision had been left entirely to her we would have