Döllinger, Pastor, and many others. He has grouped these men by their various commitments and associations as, for example, Catholics, Protestants, liberals, and romantics. Twin chapters, for example, sketch nineteenth-century Catholic and nineteenth-century Protestant views of Erasmus's relation to Catholic orthodoxy, tradition, and scholasticism on the one hand, and of his relation to the Reformation on the other. On the assumption that there is a connection between the lives and historical situations of the individual authors and their responses to Erasmus, Mansfield presents the reader with a brief biographical sketch of the principal interpreters of Erasmus's many-faceted writings in each of the ages covered, as well as with an indication of the principal features of their interpretation and evaluation of Erasmus. The result is not one portrait of the "real" Desiderius Erasmus, but multiple vignettes; these are so varied in the way they view and assess Erasmus that the result at times verges on a complete relativism.

This fault is mitigated only by clear scholarly advances in such things as the dating and publication of Erasmus's letters. The cumulative effect of this meticulous study does, nonetheless, gradually bring the reader, though quite indirectly, to a better knowledge of this great Renaissance scholar, humanist, and reformer. For the earlier, confessionally polarized assessments, often unquestioned and repeated by succeeding generations, gradually neutralize one another, and more modern studies reveal different facets of the personality, historical background, friendships, interests, and work of Erasmus. The reader is thereby led to see a greater complexity in the object of the volume's study that prevents one from categorizing Erasmus as merely fitting one or more stereotypes. Rather, the many studies converge to disclose an Erasmus who was not simply Catholic or Protestant, not simply reformer or humanist, not simply skeptic or liberal, but "a man on his own," as the subtitle of this volume claims—a subtitle which is itself drawn from Erasmus's own words: *homo pro se.*

Mansfield's study concludes with seventy-four pages of endnotes, thirty pages of bibliography, and a twenty-seven-page index. The bibliography includes not merely the primary sources for the period studied, but also secondary, more modern works on Erasmus. There are also twelve pages of portraits or photographs, mainly of some of the principal interpreters of Erasmus, but also of title pages of a few of the more important studies on him.—Roland J. Teske, *Marquette University.*

MERRELL, Floyd. *Signs Becoming Signs: Our Perfusive, Pervasive Universe.* Advances in Semiotics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. xii + 249 pp. $39.95—Merrell's task in this work is to transform the Peircean tradition of semiotics in the light of more recent work in such research areas as chaos physics, topological theory, and the newer quantum theories. Relying on the theories of David Bohm, among others, Merrell develops a conventionalist conception of semiotics that stresses

the constructive power of signs to shape space, time, and the basic contours of the human process. The approach is an evolutionary one, but it is not confined to the neo-Darwinian biological framework. Evolution is seen in terms of the movement from a primal state of pure firstness (Peirce's concept of potentiality and pure feeling) to the determinate world of interaction.

Merrell contrasts the "semiotically real" with the "actually real," denying that we have access to the latter, and reworks the former concept in terms of species-specific *Umwelten* that function as meaning horizons for living systems. Each organism will have its own semiotic environment that shapes its encounters with the world and with it, its own "internal" structures, however minimal. The organism cannot escape from its web of signification and remains trapped within a semiotic universe that is continuous with its complete internal reference.

On the topological side, using the concepts of boundary and neighborhood, Merrell refers to a kind of "quantum interconnectedness" that holds the world together. Quantum events are also semiotic events, insofar as they participate in Peirce's sign-object-interpretant triad. Behind all quantum events is the n-dimensional monad that is atemporal. This monad is akin to Peircean firstness, but points to an even deeper layer that Merrell, following Peirce, calls the domain of absolute nothingness. He makes some interesting comparisons between topological notions (and the mathematics of infinite series) and the Lacanian psychoanalytic model of the "line of desire." The correlation of psychoanalysis and mathematics, when rethought from the standpoint of topology, represents a striking advance for semiotic theory.

Following Hartshorne, Merrell privileges asymmetry over symmetry, arguing that symmetry is a special case within the much more ubiquitous domain of the asymmetrical. Time and space, emergent from Peirce's absolute nothingness, are asymmetrical and yet internally self-referential. In Bohm's terms, the manifest orders are unfolded and explicate, emerging from the primal realm (the monad) that is enfolded and implicate. Mind is pervasive throughout the universe (Merrell accepting Peirce's panpsychism) and part of the explicate orders, living as a tissue of connectedness.

Chaos is thus more basic than order. Natural human languages are deceptive in that they live in a kind of idealized realm of signification that shapes impressions of sense in arbitrary ways. Peirce's commitment to the dynamic object and to sheer secondness is downplayed, while his sense of developmental thirdness is transformed within a conventionalist context. The later Wittgenstein is read not as a regional ontologist of independent forms of life but as a kind of postmodern semiotician for whom each language game is arbitrary.

Merrell's book is thoroughly committed to a kind of antirealist position. Many will find his reading of Peirce to be far too tilted toward a subjective idealism (not toward the objective idealism that Peirce affirmed in his later cosmology). The use of chaos physics in semiotics reinforces the notion that signs are not so much correlated to objects as they are part of an infinite web of signification in which signs link with

each other alone. Merrell's work is rich and evocative, but represents a form of pansemioticism that ironically denies the independence of the very nature that is sought.—Robert S. Corrington, *Drew University.*

NORTON, Robert E. *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991. xi + 257 pp. $39.95—This study of Herder's aesthetics is a welcome addition to the continued scholarly rehabilitation of Herder. Norton limits his study to the first fifteen years of Herder's intellectual activity, which he finds preoccupied with questions of aesthetics. Norton takes issue with much of what has been said and written about Herder's aesthetics.

Throughout his work Norton makes clear his central objective: to bring out Herder's rational and analytical approach to the subject, which "gathered its conceptual support and critical authority from the psychological theories of the 'philosophes', and perhaps most directly from his famous teacher, Kant" (p. 165). Norton feels obliged to stress this side of Herder's approach "because of the tendency in the research to see Herder as a so-called philosopher of feeling (*Gefühlsphilosoph*) who both advocated and practiced a subjectivistic or irrational approach to art based alone on intuition and 'empathy' " (p. 165 n. 11).

Norton's volume thus constitutes a forceful effort to correct long-held misperceptions and to place Herder firmly into the aesthetic paradigm of the European Enlightenment. Norton considers the six chapters of the book as "actually constituting successive layers of one continuous argument" (p. 9). The argument sees Herder "consistently applying the methodological procedure of analysis, which we have seen was one of the distinctive possessions of the European Enlightenment," and seeking "to establish an aesthetic theory that was in every respect a truly philosophical science" (p. 48).

With impressive rigor and reference to many works in the relevant Enlightenment literature, Norton sketches the philosophical background to which he finds Herder beholden. The first three chapters present a careful exposition of the problems that underlie Herder's philosophy of aesthetics by reference to his early *Versuch über das Sein* (1764), the two editions of the *Fragments* (1767) (though Norton does not make sufficiently clear that the second edition of the *Fragments* so amply cited by him was not published until after his death), the prize-winning *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), and the "Shakespeare Essay" (in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* [1773]).

The core of Norton's study, chapters 4–6, is devoted to Herder's philosophy of aesthetics proper, which is found in the first and fourth "groves" (*Wäldchen*) of Herder's *Kritische Wälder* (1769), and in the *Plastik* (1778). It should be noted that the "Fourth Grove" of Herder's *Kritische Wälder*, like the second edition of Herder's *Fragmente*, was not published until after his death; in this case, unlike the case of the second edition of the *Fragmente*, Norton takes due notice of this equally