

Literary Theory: A Historical Survey

Part 4: The Cultural Turn

Lecture 13: Cultural Studies and Media Studies

1) Cultural Studies

2) Media Studies

3) Coming to Terms

1) Cultural Studies

The Field in Germany:

‘Landeskunde’ – ‘Cultural Studies’ – ‘Kulturwissenschaften’

↓

‘Culture Studies’? – ‘The Study of Culture’? – ‘The Study of Cultures’?

a) ‘Landeskunde’:

- factual/historical/cultural knowledge taught as necessary ‘background’ for the philological study of modern (i.e. national) literatures

b) ‘Cultural Studies’:

- ‘(British) Cultural Studies’:
integrative analysis of culture as institutionalised in Great Britain after WW II on Marxist foundations; the focus is on problems of race, class, and gender in contemporary popular culture (Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson; Stuart Hall, CCCS Birmingham; cf. Huck 2012)

- 'American (Cultural) Studies':
interdisciplinary approach to analysing American culture and society as
established and developed in US since 1940s; strong historical focus
(cf. Fluck 2012)

c) 'Kulturwissenschaft':

- term used to designate the new orientation in the humanities (esp. 'Volkskunde'/
anthropology/ethnology) emerging in Germany since the 1980s; focus is on
analysis and interpretation of cultural sign systems and on intercultural
competence

- ▶ current discussion is drawing on all four traditions, but tends to neglect their
different cultural functions:

'Landeskunde': positivistic accumulation of factual knowledge

'British Cultural Studies': critical intervention in cultural affairs in GB

'American Studies': original affirmative function supporting emergence
of American identity according to the melting pot
ideal only recently replaced by critical focus on
gender/race/class

- ▶ '**Kulturwissenschaften**' are the most explicitly theoretical enterprise; they
attempt to make the most recent stages of theoretical reflection (structuralism,
poststructuralism/deconstruction, semiotics, media theory) viable in cultural
analysis (→ culture as semiotic/textual/medial 'web' which constitutes reality)
and to widen traditional perspectives by establishing new interdisciplinary
contacts between the philologies and historiography on the one hand and
disciplines which have a longer tradition of cultural analysis such as
anthropology, ethnology, sociology on the other.

- ▶ 'The Study of Culture' as a favoured new term
(cf. Ansgar Nünning, "Transnational Approaches to the Study of Culture," in:
Middeke 2012, 261-270; Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Travelling
Concepts for the Study of Culture*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2012)

- ▶ 'Culture Studies' seems to be another viable alternative for the specifically
German mixture of Landeskunde/Regional Studies, Cultural Studies and
Kulturwissenschaft

but:

I find myself frequently troubled by the word *culture* as a noun but centrally attached to the adjectival form of the word, that is, *cultural*. When I reflect on why this is so, I realize that much of the problem with the noun form has to do with the implication that culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical. This substantialization seems to bring culture back into the discursive space of race, the very idea which it was originally designed to combat. Implying a mental substance, the noun *culture* appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing and bonding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated. Viewed as a physical substance, culture begins to smack of any variety of biologisms, including race, which we have recently outgrown as scientific categories [...]

If *culture* as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is helpful. This adjectival sense of culture, which builds on the context-sensitive, contrast-centered heart of Saussurean linguistics, seems to me one of the virtues of structuralism that we have tended to forget in our haste to attack it for its ahistorical, formal, binary, mentalist, and textualist associations.

The most valuable feature of the concept of culture is the concept of difference, a contrastive rather than substantive property of certain things. [...] [I]ts main virtue is that it is a useful heuristic that can highlight points of similarity and contrast between all sorts of categories, classes, genders, roles, groups, and nations. When we therefore point to a practice, a distinction, a conception, an object, or an ideology as having a cultural dimension (notice the adjectival use), we stress the idea of situated difference, that is, difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant. This point can be summarized in the following form: culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodies difference. Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality permits our thinking of culture less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference.

(Appadurai [1996] 2010, 12-13)

► **'The Study of Cultures'!**

What Is Culture?

a) culture as a historical term:

emphatic/rhetorical usage since the 18th century focused on marking social hierarchies and distinctions such as

18th C ...	Western/European culture vs. other cultures (= 'gebildet' vs. 'ungebildet')
19th C ...	bourgeois culture vs. working-class culture
20th C ...	multiplication/dissolution of hierarchies marked by 'culture'; individualisation of 'frames'

Seit dem 18. Jahrhundert führt der Kulturbegriff eine reflexive Komponente mit. Er besagt in jeder Anwendung, daß es auch andere Kulturen geben könnte. [...] Der Begriff konnte Einteilungen begründen und zugleich durch eine Gegenbegriffsvielfalt offen lassen, was er eigentlich meinte. Seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts kommt es zu einer zweiten Welle bemerkenswerter Ausdehnungen, und zwar nach unten. [...] Von Eingeborenenkulturen hatte man schon länger gesprochen. Das Interesse an Arbeiterkulturen kommt hinzu. [...] Heute gibt es auch Drogenkultur und Ähnliches. [...] Dennoch ist dem Begriff, und das scheint den Hang nach unten zu motivieren, die Blickrichtung nach oben geblieben. Er verspricht etwas „Besseres“ [...]. Er leistet [...] die Legitimation von Unterscheidungen. Er ist oder war jedenfalls bis vor kurzem ein Mittelstandsbegriff. Auch diese immanente Beschränkung durch hierarchische Konnotationen könnte sich jedoch in Auflösung befinden. Sie setzt nämlich Standardisierungen, etwa des typischen Lebenslaufs oder von begrenzten Milieus voraus, die mehr und mehr entfallen [...] der Trend scheint in Richtung auf Individualisierung der „frames“ zu gehen, die man an sich selbst für sich selbst annimmt.

(Niklas Luhmann, *Beobachtungen der Moderne*.
Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992: 197-199;
Observations on Modernity. Stanford UP, 1998)

b) culture as a systematic/analytic/functional term:

culture as 'collectively structured meaning' (cf. Schmidt 1994, 203), i.e. the totality of meaning constructions and symbolic orders in a given society

→ standardisations of

- feeling
- thought
- communication
- behaviour/action

- three dimensions:
 - the material dimension (artefacts)
 - the social dimension (society and its institutions)
 - the mental dimension (norms and values, structures of feeling and thinking, collective memory, knowledge)

→ MEDIA – COMMUNICATION – COGNITION

- ▶ between 'cognitive autonomy' and 'social orientation' culture emerges as an 'order of symbolic orders' (Schmidt 1994)

Die gesellschaftliche Reproduktion von Kommunikation muß danach über die Reproduktion von Themen laufen, die ihre Beiträge dann gewissermaßen selbst organisieren. Die Themen werden nicht fallweise neu erschaffen, sind aber andererseits auch nicht durch die Sprache, etwa als Wortschatz, in ausreichender Prägnanz vorgegeben [...] Es wird demnach ein dazwischenliegendes, Interaktion und Sprache vermittelndes Erfordernis geben - eine Art Vorrat möglicher Themen, die für rasche und rasch verständliche Aufnahme in konkreten kommunikativen Prozessen bereitstehen. Wir nennen diesen Themenvorrat *Kultur* und, wenn er eigens für Kommunikationszwecke aufbewahrt wird, *Semantik*.

(Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1984: 224; *Social Systems*, Stanford UP, 1995)

The combined effect of all communication media – language, dissemination media, and the symbolically generalized media – is to condense what we might overall call 'culture'. Condensation in this context means that the meaning used remains the same through reuse in various situations (otherwise there would be no reuse), but is also confirmed and enriched with implications that can no longer be reduced to a simple formula. This suggests that the overflow of meaning is itself the result of the condensation and confirmation of meaning, and that communication is the operation that thus creates its own medium.

(Luhmann 2012, 248)

Culture is not

“the sum of all values [...] that furnish a society”,

but

“a continuous description which makes available possible counter-values to all values.”

Culture is

“generating, processing and reducing ambiguity.”

“Cultural objections to social structures are social structures themselves,”

but culture provides the

“possibility of observing society from within society as if one were observing it from the outside.”

(cf. Baecker 2000: 9/81/83, my trans.)

How to Observe Culture/Locations of culture?

a) practice paradigm

- analysing routines of action as symptoms of implicit formations of knowledge in a given culture (e.g. rituals, customs, organisations, institutions etc.)
- influenced by phenomenology/hermeneutics with regard to relationships between subjectivity/intersubjectivity and practice, by structuralism with regard to the existence of structures of meaning beyond (inter-)subjectivity (plus philosophical influences: Wittgenstein, pragmatism)

b) text paradigm

- analysing discursive and semiotic processes and structures in a given culture (texts, discourses, media)
- influence of theory developments outlined under the heading ‘The Linguistic Turn’, i.e. from de Saussure to Derrida/Foucault

c) autopoiesis paradigm

- analysing mental constructions in cognitive systems
- influence of neuro-physiology, cybernetics, cognitive psychology

(cf. Reckwitz 1999)

Current fields of culture-oriented theory and practice:

(for introductions/surveys cf. Fauser 2003, Sommer 2003, Tonn 2004, Assmann 2012)

- Gender studies, postcolonial theory, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Historical Discourse Analysis, systems-theoretical approaches
- literary anthropology (e.g. history of mentalities, functions of fictionality)
- cultural performance (art and other instances of symbolic practice, narrativity, the visual turn)
- memory and identity (the dialectics of identity and alterity, the poetics and politics of cultural memory) (cf. Nünning 1998)
- intertextuality/intermediality
- new forms of cultural history and/or culturally informed literary history
(cf. Reinfandt 2001, V. Nünning 2005)

2) Media Studies

We live in a thoroughly 'mediatized' world, a social and cultural environment which is permeated by the media, and, more specifically, electronic media.

(Voigts-Virchow 2005, 5)

Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media. [...] [*H*]ow is it possible to accept information about the world and about society when one knows *how* it is produced?

(Luhmann 2000, 1/122)

The Medium Is the Message:

[I]t is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. In fact, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.

(McLuhan 1994 [1964], 9)

Some Definitions:

(lat. *medius*: middle, intermediate, average, middling)



medium

OED: 'something that is intermediate between two degrees, amounts, qualities, or classes; a middle state'

biology/

chemistry: enveloping substance

sociology: environment, social setting

[...]

'what transforms experience into knowledge'

'the signs which give *meaning* to the events of everyday life'

(Inglis 1990, 3; see also Guillory 2010)

Some Terminological Distinctions:

- input/output media (typewriter, keyboard, camera, microphone, scanner)
- reproduction and dissemination media (printing, photography, film)
- storage media (book, photography, disk, hard disk, film)
- transmission media (mail, telegraphy, telephone, radio, TV, cable, satellite)
- 'push media' offer programmes (TV, newspapers),
'pull media' depend on user activity (www)
- mass media = 'one to many'
(vs. 'one to one'
'many to many')
- unidirectional vs. multidirectional
- static vs. dynamic

Levels of Inquiry:

- technological approach: focus on 'channels', interpreting media contents (genres, narratives, ideas, roles)
- humanities approach: focus on 'languages', understanding media grammar and intermediality (sound and vision, media design, etc.)
- social and cultural studies approach: focus on 'environments', mapping the media context (media usage, interactivity, dissemination)

Media History:

media history as

- annals
- social history
- history of media systems
- history of technology
- history of products/works
- history of institutions
- history of important persons
- history of media successes
- history of media functions
- history of producers/audiences
- political history

(cf. Faulstich 1994, 27f.)

Phases of Media History:

A	- 1500	'human' media (small groups) theatre, oral trad., manuscripts
B	- 1900	print media (individual ► mass media) letters, pamphlets, books, newspapers etc. photography, phonography
C	- 2000	electronic media (mass media) telegraph/telephone, film, radio, television, audio/video
D	?	substitution media computer (digitalization, multimedia), internet

Principles of Media History:

- 1) accumulation of media > changes of function
 - 2) increasing dynamics (Phase A: 30000 – 40000 years,
Phase B: 400 years,
Phase C: 100 years,
Phase D: ?)
 - 3) mediation between human beings and reality becomes ever more inclusive and complete
- media convergence, intermediality, media systems comprising language, technology, institutions and products/offerings
 - mediality (the specific cultural conditions of various media at a given historical stage)

Orality: face to face communication (interaction)
fluid information based on memory
beacon fires, torches, smoke signals, drum beating, couriers
ritualistic performance
structural amnesia

Literacy: writing facilitates impersonal communication
fixed information based on storage and codification in manuscripts



'The Great Divide'/Into the 'Gutenberg Galaxy' (McLuhan 1962)

→ printing supplements storage with distribution

→ democratization, the rise of European vernaculars/national cultures,
the split between private and public spheres...

Secondary

Orality? post-literate mediatized oral culture rooted in forms of literacy
(cf. Ong 1982)

>>> Literacy in the New Media Age? (Kress 2003)

3) Coming to Terms

Dimensions of Mediality (cf. S.J. Schmidt/G. Zurstiege 2000):

A) Semiotic Materials:

The basic components of all media are semiotic materials fit for communicative use. Those semiotic materials may be speech, gestures, sounds, images as well as fashion or even the human body when it is included in rituals, dance or theatre.

B) Media Technologies:

Technology is necessary to produce, transmit, and receive semiotic materials in the form of media products. Any specific media technology is put to use within a socio-political situation, while it also embodies a specific bias of constructing and perceiving reality in one way or another.

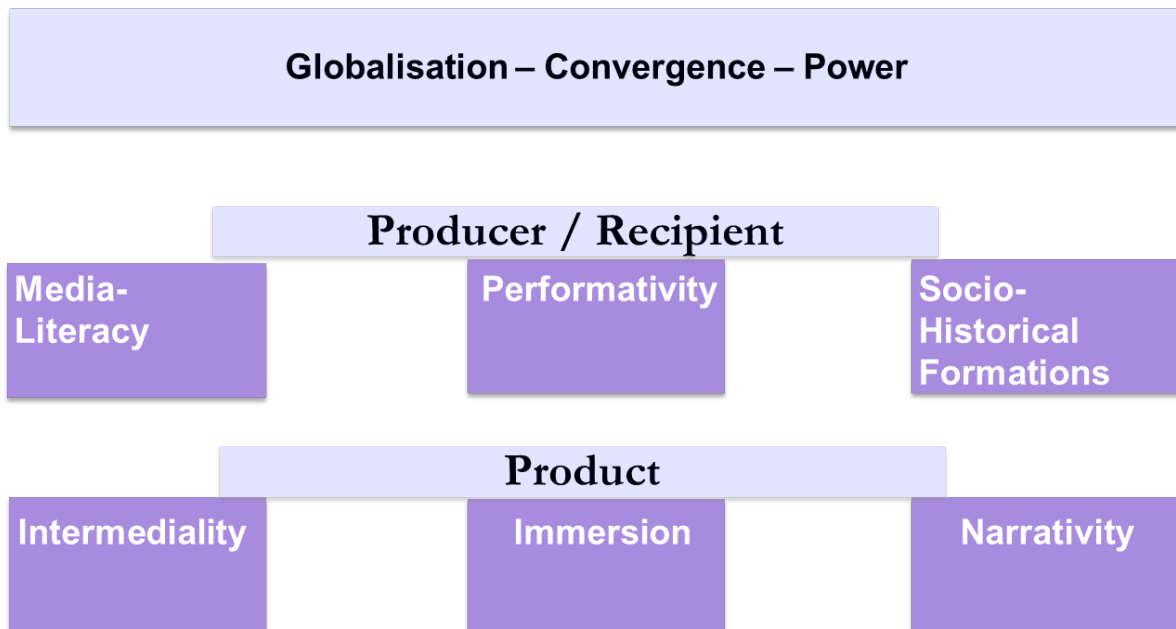
C) Social Systemic Organizations:

The planning, production, distribution, and subsequent processing of media products is performed by actors who act on their own behalf or on behalf of others. Those actors are linked to specific social systemic contexts, which can be distinguished on three levels: Macro (society), Meso (functional systems) and Micro (systems of organization and interaction).

D) Media Products:

Media products (genres, formats) such as books, newspapers, TV-shows, advertising, computer-games, film, or dance and theater performances emerge from the interaction of semiotic materials, media technologies and social systemic organizations and have to be analyzed with reference to all three dimensions.

Globalized Mediascapes: Commonalities and Contestations.



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