

# Introduction to Cultural Studies

## Lecture 4:

### Changing Media Changing Cultures / Culture as Text – Textual Culture

#### 1) Basic Assumptions and Definitions

#### 2) Coming to Terms

#### 3) Culture as Text / Textual Culture

#### 4) Reading Textures

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#### 1) Basic Assumptions and Definitions

(for an overview cf. Assmann 2012)

[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)

► 'The Medium Is the Message' / 'The Medium Is the Massage'

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered.

(McLuhan/Fiore 1967, 26)

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 ... *how* is it possible to accept information about the world and about society as information about reality when one knows *how* it is produced?

(Luhmann 2000 [1996], 1/122)

### 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)

### 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)

### Layers of Mediality (Luhmann):

- (1) meaning
- (2) language
- (3) storage and distribution: writing, print, electronic media
- (4) symbolically generalized media of communication ('success media')

(cf. Reinfandt 2012)

### Phases of Media History:

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

(cf. Faulstich 2004)

### 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)

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## A History of the Real (and the Physical!) in Terms of Changing 'Ontological Holds' on the Real Depending on New Forms of Media Technology

(cf. Siskin 2007):

Before 1800:	a metaphysical real	+	a virtual physical
		↙	
After 1800:	a physical real	+	a virtual representation
		↙	
Tomorrow?	a virtual real?	+	a metaphysics of text?

► “the older *form* of reality becomes the *content* of the new one” (125f.)

(cf. Wordsworth’s metaphysical charging of physical nature or today’s physical charging of virtual reality)

## 2) 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:**

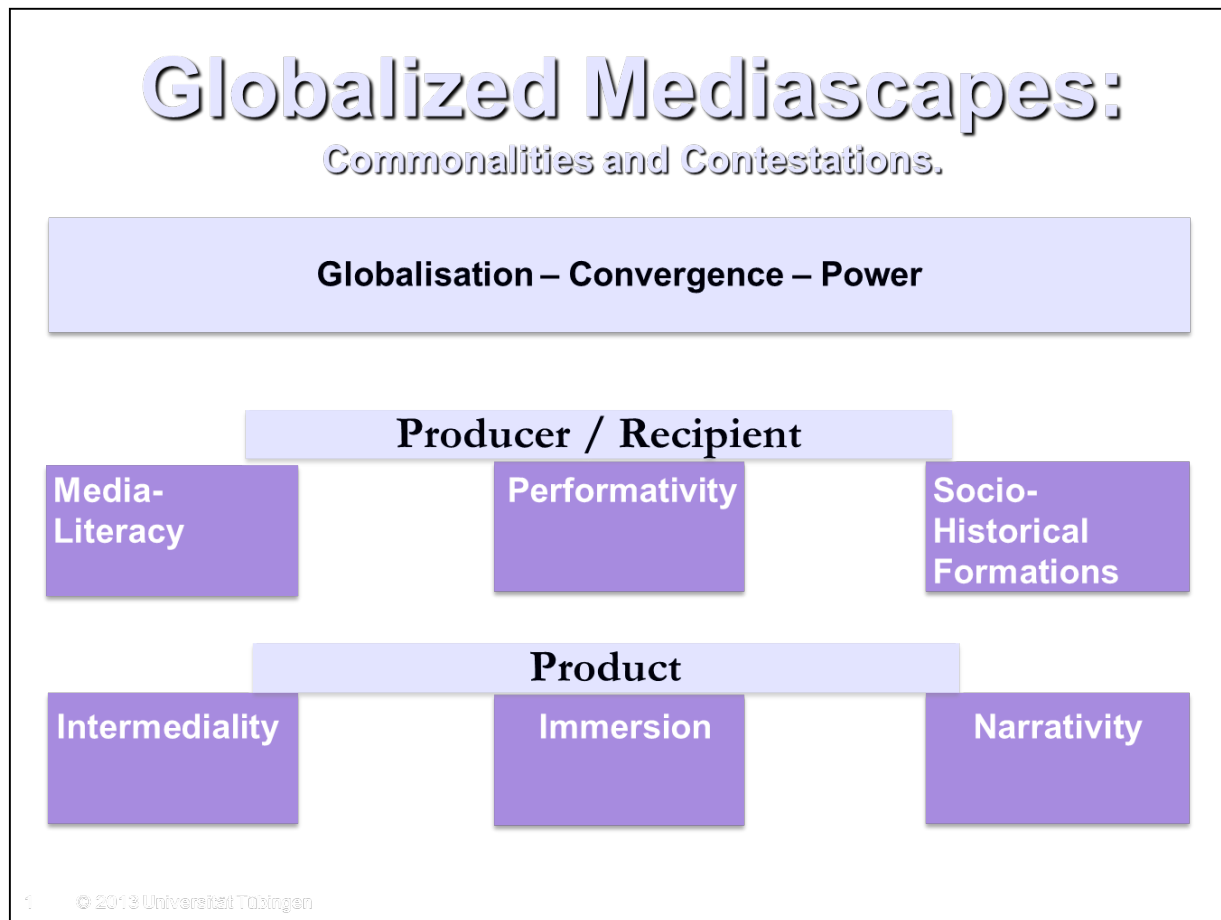
Technology is necessary to produce, transmit, and receive semiotic materials in the form of media products. Any specific media technology is put to use within a socio-political situation, while it also embodies a specific bias of constructing and perceiving reality in one way or another.

### **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.



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### 3) Culture as Text – Textual Culture

**Ethnography/Anthropology**



**Literary Studies**

Culture as *Text* (→)

(←) *Culture as Text*

Clifford Geertz:  
an interpretive theory of  
culture / 'thick description'

Doris Bachmann-Medick:  
the 'anthropological turn'  
of literary studies

(Geertz 1973; Schneider 1987;  
Hofman 2009)

(Bachmann-Medick 1996/2004, 2012;  
Lenk 1996)

→ the problem of interpretation / social sciences vs. humanities

## **Problem:**

The 'Culture as Text'-Paradigm does not fully take into account the 'medial turn' outlined in Lecture 3 (or at least it did not do so initially).

- signs/texts never allow us to access 'real reality' 'through' them, they are never transparent, but they generate their own version of reality (which we construct and accept as reality, cf. Lecture 2)
- 'behind' them there is no world as a 'transcendental signified' (Jacques Derrida), but only the 'transcendence' (Kenneth Burke) of their very own dynamics
- the 'Writing Culture'-debate (Clifford Geertz vs. James Clifford)
- the mediatized world around us is established by a textual culture which should be analysed in terms of its materiality and mediality and not interpreted along hermeneutic lines
- a new mode of making sense is necessary

## **Traditional Modes of Making Sense: Hermeneutics (cf. Berensmeyer 2010)**

[C 18: from Greek *hermeneutikos* expert in interpretation, from *hermeneuein* to interpret, from *hermeneus* interpreter, of uncertain origin]

1. the science of interpretation, esp. of Scripture
2. the branch of theology that deals with the principles and methods of exegesis

[cf. Hermes, the messenger of the Gods and guardian of roads, and herms (hermae), square stone pillars with Hermes' head and frequently phallus marking crossroads in ancient Greece (cf. image)]

## **Historical Background:**

### **1) Reformation:**

Protestantism in need of principles for interpreting the Bible

### **2) 18<sup>th</sup> Century:**

Principles for interpreting secular Greek and Latin Texts  
(Friedrich Ast, 1778-1841)

### **3) Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century:**

Romantic Hermeneutics (Friedrich Schleiermacher, 1768-1834)

> modes of inquiry: grammatical/philological (comparison)  
psychological (divination)

("vergleichende Erhellung und kongenialer Nachvollzug")

### **4) Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century:**

Emergence of the 'human sciences' (Geisteswissenschaften)  
(Wilhelm Dilthey, 1859-1928)

> understanding vs. explanation

### **5) 20<sup>th</sup> Century:**

Hermeneutics as a philosophically grounded method  
(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1900-2002)

> *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960)

- hermeneutics as a universal aspect of philosophy which reaches beyond scientific aspirations
- aesthetic model of realizing truth
- the hermeneutic circle is not a method but an ontological structural feature and thus the form of understanding (Heidegger: "Existenzial" = "ursprüngliche Vollzugsform des Daseins")
- three dimensions:   prejudgements   ↔   text  
                          part                   ↔   whole  
                          subject               ↔   object
- understanding as conversation ('Gespräch'):  
openness as prerequisite, unity in the process of understanding, the text as a 'partner' in conversation, albeit of different make-up

**A New Understanding of Interpretation:**

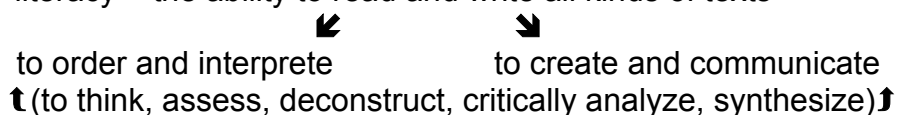
Now interpretation is part of a general practice of putting into practice. [...] This new, expanded form of interpretation does not say what things say, but shows how they work, which is to say, how they might be worked out. [...] The purpose of playing the game is not to show what the game means [...], but to explore what it makes possible. [...] Interpretation has been drawn into a general performativity, in which informing interacts with performing [...]. Interpretation is no longer to be thought of as the solving of a riddle, or the cracking of a code [...], but rather as the playing out of a game, the running of a program, the perfecting of a routine, the exploiting of a potential. [...] [The question is no longer] what does an object mean, but what are the implications of what it might mean – what does what it means *mean*?

(Connor 2014, 184-186)

**Literacy:**

- the 'autonomous' vs. the 'ideological' model (cf. Street 1984)
- Literacy in a New Media Age (cf. Kress 2003):

literacy = the ability to read and write all kinds of texts



multimedial literacy = literacy + visual literacy

↑ media literacy ↓  
↑ cultural literacy ↓



### Main points in Kress's argument:

▪ writing	>	image
▪ book	>	screen
▪ telling	>	showing
▪ logic of time (linearity, causality)	>	logic of space (simultaneity, co-presence)
▪ fixed reading path	>	flexible reading path
▪ 'empty' meaning	>	'filled' meaning
▪ imagination focused on 'meaning'	>	imagination focused on 'order'

### Reading according to Kress 2003:

- "[T]he shape of what there is to read has its effects on 'reading'. Reading practices, and the understanding of what reading is, develop in constant interaction between the shape of what there is to read and the socially located reader[s] and their human nature." (140)
- **makers of meaning:**  
telling the world                      ►                      showing the world  
▼                      **remakers of meaning:**                      ▼  
interpreting the world                      ►                      ordering the world (140)
- **Old and New Reading Paths:**  

"But here lies an absolute and I think profound difference between the traditional page and its reading path and the new page – derived from the principles of the organization of the screen – and its reading path. The former coded a clear path, which had to be followed. The task of reading lay in interpretation and transformation of that which was clearly there and clearly organized. The new task is that of applying principles of relevance to a page which is (relatively) open in its organization, and consequently offers a range of possible reading paths, perhaps infinitely many." (162)
- **Changes:**  

orientation towards 'completed texts'  
vs.  
orientation towards 'information as it is supplied' (163)

## 4) Reading Textures

### a) Reading Textures (cf. Reinfandt 2016, 320-326)

#### John Crowe Ransom:

- “the prose core to which a reader or critic can violently reduce the total object”  
vs.  
“the differentia, residue, or tissue, which keeps the object poetical or entire”

(*The World's Body*. New York/London: Scribner's, 1938: 349)

- “A poem is a *logical structure* having a *local texture* [...] The paint, the paper, the tapestry on the wall are texture. It is logically unrelated to structure.”

(“Criticism as Pure Speculation” (1941).  
M.D. Zabel, ed., *Literary Opinion in America*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Harper, 1962: 639-54, 648)

### b) Reading Textures (cf. Reinfandt 2016, 327-332)

#### Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham/London: Duke UP, 2003:

Texture [...] comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure. [...] If texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together [...] [w]hat they have in common is that [...] both are irreducibly phenomenological. To describe them primarily in terms of structure is always a qualitative misrepresentation. (16/21)

#### Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009:

The focus is on texture – the experiential quality of textuality – but the discussion ranges into the aesthetic senses of value, attractiveness, utility and their opposites as well. These are all part of the textural experience of reading literature. (14f.)

- from feeling to meaning
- literary impact  
(resonance and intensity, sensation and empathy, voice and mind, identification and resistance)

**Richard H. R. Harper, *Texture: Human Expression in the Age of Communications Overload*. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 2010:**

Communicative practices create a texture – a complex weave of bonds that tie together those who are communicating. This texture has various forms and strengths: some bonds ... are instant and others slow, some ephemeral and others more permanent. These bonds vary according the type of act in question and in terms of the technologies that are used to enable acts. (196f.)

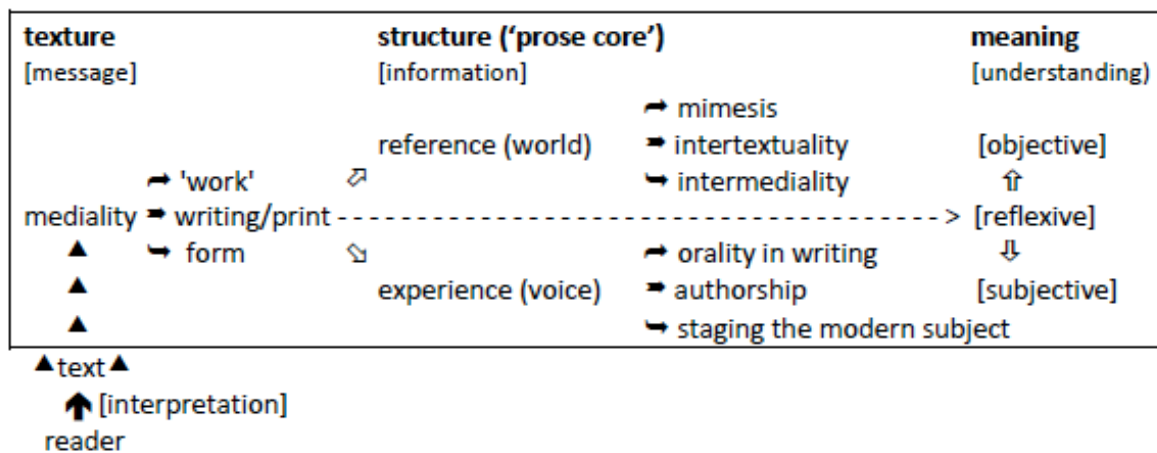


Fig. 1: The Texture of Modern Literary Texts

(cf. Reinfandt 2011/2013)

**An Example for the Workings of Texture: Sixto Rodriguez, “Sugar Man”**

*Searching for Sugar Man* (Sweden/UK 2012, dir. Malik Bendjelloul).  
Styrdom, Craig Bartholomew, and Stephen ‘Sugar’ Segerman, *Sugar Man: The Life, Death and Resurrection of Sixto Rodriguez*. London: Bantam Press, 2015.

**Rodriguez**

*Cold Fact* (1970)  
*Coming from Reality* (1971)

[1977 *At His Best*; 1981 *Rodriguez Alive* (Australia)]  
[1982 *The Best of Rodriguez*; 1998 *Live Fact* (South Africa)]

*Searching for Sugar Man* (OST, 2012)

## Rodriguez, "Sugar Man" (on *Cold Fact*, 1970)

Sugar man, won't you hurry  
'Cos I'm tired of these scenes  
For a blue coin won't you bring back  
All those colors to my dreams.

Silver magic ships you carry  
Jumpers, coke, sweet Mary Jane

Sugar man met a false friend  
On a lonely dusty road  
Lost my heart when I found it  
It had turned to dead black coal.

Silver magic ships you carry  
Jumpers, coke, sweet Mary Jane

Sugar man you're the answer  
That makes my questions disappear  
Sugar man 'cos I'm weary  
Of those double games I hear

Sugar man  
Sugar man  
Sugar man  
Sugar man  
Sugar man  
Sugar man  
Sugar man

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