

# Cultural Studies

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I understand my contribution to this volume as part of a necessary ‘renewal of Cultural Studies’ (Smith, 2011). Sometimes, cultural studies has been criticized that it is not a formalized approach with a distinct set of methods (cf. Cruz, 2012: 257). Against this, I will show that there is common ground in the practice of qualitative research in cultural studies. There are a range of theories, perspectives and methods that are used and combined in order to reach a particular goal. We generate different forms of qualitative data that will be analysed to understand the particular conjuncture of the present. This is the background of putting research questions, answering them and producing useful knowledge. It is time to intensify debates on critical methodologies, qualitative methods and analysing data.

## **THE CONJUNCTURAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURE AND POWER**

The transdisciplinary approach of cultural studies that usually connects different disciplinary

perspectives from the humanities and social sciences applies itself to the analysis of lived experiences, social practices and cultural representations, which are considered in their network-like or intertextual links, from the viewpoints of power, difference and human agency. From early on cultural studies has been shaped by an interest in equality, democracy and emancipation (see Williams, 1961). It does not analyse an isolated practice or event but is driven by the attempt to radically contextualize cultural processes (Grossberg, 2010). Every practice is connected to other practices. An assemblage of practices is part of a conjuncture, an intersection of discourses, practices, technologies of power and everyday life (Grossberg, 2010: 25). Conjunctures and contexts are changing. Cultural studies is reacting to these changes. It is a committed and engaged intellectual–political practice that attempts to describe the complexity, contradictions and relational character of cultural processes. It wants to produce (politically) useful knowledge to understand the problems and questions of a conjuncture. It is hoping to help people to

struggle against and to transform power structures in order to realize radical democratic relations.

Its approach to culture regards this not as a subsystem or a field but rather it penetrates and structures every aspect of social life and of subjectivity. In this perspective culture therefore does not belong to a single individual nor does it distinguish them, rather it is the medium by which shared meanings, rituals, social communities and identities are produced. The researcher is located 'inside culture' (Couldry, 2000) and has to consider the complex, contradictory and many-layered context of reality in the global era of the twenty-first century. The knowledge produced by cultural studies ought to increase the reflexivity of those acting in everyday life, which is formed by power relationships and structured by a discursive order of representation, and reveal to them the possibility for changing restrictive and repressive living conditions.

Theories can help to explore and illuminate contexts but they are not enough. Understanding a conjuncture is only possible by a transdisciplinary approach. This orientation can lead to complex theoretical work based on different approaches that carefully describe and analyse discourses and practices (cf. Grossberg, 2005). It can also include qualitative-empirical research. Since its beginnings in Birmingham cultural studies used and developed qualitative methods (cf. Willis, 1977; 1978). The central characteristic of qualitative data analysis in the context of cultural studies is the theoretical and empirical examination of the relationship between experiences, practices and cultural texts in a specific context. The researcher has to construct or reconstruct this context.

Regarding the research in cultural studies we can differentiate between verbal and visual data. Verbal data are mainly produced by qualitative interviews (see Roulston, Chapter 20, this volume), group discussions (see Barbour, Chapter 21, this volume) or narrations (see Esin et al., Chapter 14, this volume), visual data (see Banks, Chapter 27, and Knoblauch et al., Chapter 30, this volume) and by analysing and interpreting media texts

(photographs, films, soap operas, etc.). The tripartite focus of cultural studies on experiences, practices and texts brings various methodological orientations for data analysis with it and their mutual connections have dominated the approach since its beginnings. Its singularity and creativity touches on mutual endorsement and enrichment but also on causes of friction, which result from different theoretical and methodological options and are used productively (Saukko, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004).

For example, the qualitative empirical research of media reception (see Hodgetts and Chamberlain, Chapter 26, this volume) and appropriation has a phenomenological-hermeneutical (see Eberle, Chapter 13, and Wernet, Chapter 16, this volume) focus on the one hand, because it deals with cultural experiences mainly in the form of verbal data in order to understand the 'lived realities' of experiences and practices in different social contexts. As I carried out my ethnographic study on the reception of horror movies, for example, which lasted several years, I realized that this practice was embedded in different contexts and varied considerably (Winter, 2010; 1999). Together with my research group I combined various methods: participant observation (see Marvasti, Chapter 24, this volume), narrative as well as biographical interviews (see Roulston, Chapter 20, this volume), group discussions (see Barbour, Chapter 21, this volume), analysis of films (see Mikos, Chapter 28, this volume) and newspapers (see Hodgetts and Chamberlain, Chapter 26, this volume) and the use of field notes as well as field diaries. To contextualize the different forms of reception practices it was necessary to examine the lifestyles, the social activities along with the relationships of the media audience within their own circles. A particular media culture was formed by this audience's use and appropriation of the media or of a specific genre within it. It became clear that a (international) social world of horror fans existed. This ethnographic approach in the tradition of cultural studies and symbolic interactionism filled a gap that existed in many studies in this field. The problem arose when

researchers began with a particular text and, therefore, concentrated principally on the text–audience–interaction specific to the text or genre in question. During my ethnographic field study I tried to reach a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of this fan culture. This ethnography of the horror fans’ social world mainly based on the analysis of verbal data has made it clear how different and varied the experiences and practices of fans could be. Therefore, they develop in a distinct social world in whose construction they are actively involved, relating techniques of emotion management to the context of the social world. Their experiences, emotional involvement as well as their operation network (e.g. fan clubs) were clear signs that there existed a ‘neo-tribe’, which is an aesthetic and affective community, as Michel Maffesoli (1995) suggested. This theory set out that the everyday routine of postmodern life (‘conjuncture’) could be distinguished through the expression of a multitude of local rationalism and contrasting values.

The analysis of social and political contexts in which texts are received and appropriated has to have a realistic character, for example in the description of the situational settings in which media reception is carried out or in the grasping of the increasingly global network of media flows. The analysis of media texts (visual data) is often based on structural or post-structural approaches. The logic of a film or a TV series can be deduced by revealing the cultural values which are hidden in the binary logic of texts, by examining discursive frameworks which structure media realities or by disclosing the intertextual relationships which are between media texts and which emphasize the mediatized character of our knowledge and of our experience of reality.

Cultural studies is characterized by focusing its analysis on tensions, contradictions and conflicts that arise in the process of production and analysis of data and by generating at times surprising insights on the connection between different perspectives. The ‘bricolage’ of the research process, the triangulation of various methods and theories depending on the question being researched, demonstrates that this

research tradition has broken with the positivistic agenda. The aim of this research is apparently to produce hypotheses or theories about what ‘really’ takes place in the world and then to find out through methodically produced and controlled analysis of (hard) data if this is ‘real’. Cultural studies shows that research questions, methods and interests are characterized by social, political and historical contexts. In the research, reality cannot be analysed ‘objectively’ but rather research is part of the reality that it (co-)generates and (co-)constructs socially. Because the researcher’s methodologies and writing styles do not reflect reality it is reasonable that different methods will produce and present different data and perspectives on reality as well. Therefore the particularity of perspectives becomes clear and their different constructions of reality are taken into account. The knowledge gained is always localized socially and politically so the researcher is also required to question critically the discourses and positions that characterize his or her own thinking. Nevertheless, the aim is to understand the complexity of contextual relations.

Considered epistemologically, cultural studies champions an anti-objectivistic view of knowledge like pragmatism or social constructionism. It is always directed at particular contexts, which are shaped locally and historically (Grossberg, 2010). Its knowledge objects do not exist independently from the research but rather they are (co-)created by it and are considered as contingent, theoretical object constructions. The confession of ‘partiality’ is defined by Donna Haraway (2004), who describes thus the limits of research through temporal, physical and social factors, as well as the motivation caused by ideologies, interests and desires and also the positioning within power structures. This concession distinguishes this approach, which does not strive for ‘objectivity’ in the classic sense but rather for dialogue, reflexivity and self-understanding. Thus, since the beginnings of cultural studies in adult education in the UK, students were inspired to reflect on their own living conditions, their social background and their

personal development, and to bring these reflections to their research in order to explain in this way their own social position and their relationship to the research object (Winter, 2004).

The confession of the approach's positionality, of the situation and localization of knowledge does not mean, however, that cultural studies proceeds in a reductionist way, nor that it gives up on demands for rigorous research and systematic knowledge. On the contrary, according to the research questions, theoretical approaches and methods of various disciplines are combined in order to construct research objects in multifaceted and sophisticated ways: 'the task for cultural studies, from the beginning, was precisely to develop methods to do things that have never been done before' (Turner, 2012: 53). In the ideal case cultural practices and representations are then analysed from multiple perspectives in the dialogue of different approaches and methods (Kellner, 2009). This reveals and bypasses the necessary limit of single methodological or disciplinary approaches. Cultural studies demands that there is joint reflection on the design of research and in the presentation of research results and that other methods or even a combination of them are possible, but also that transgressions are desired (Johnson et al., 2004: 42) in order to attain different perspectives on generating and analysing data. But there is no 'how to do?' list of separate steps or any other strictly formalized procedure available in the field of cultural studies. The radical contextuality of the approach demands a careful (re)construction of the particular context by using suitable methods that generate qualitative data to understand it.

In the process of research, the realization of reflexivity (see May and Perry, Chapter 8, this volume) is essential. In this way, for example, it can be made clear how the researcher's spatial and temporal localization plays a part in the research. Even the dialogue with the others intensifies the desired reflexivity. Thus cultural studies' newer approaches have performed a 'performance turn' (Denzin, 2003). They recognize that culture is 'performed' in contradictions

and conflicts when they research and write about it. 'Reflexive performance' and (auto) ethnography are the focus of the latest qualitative research.

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF RESISTANCE

From its beginnings in the context of the New Left in the UK, cultural studies has examined the power structures of society and the possibilities of their transformation. Resistance has become a basic concept in cultural studies which is defined following Antonio Gramsci's analysis of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), his reflections on popular culture and, above all, by Michel Foucault's analytics of modern power (Foucault, 1977; 1979). Despite massive criticism, resistance still occupies a very important role in the analysis of lived experiences and practices. That it is still of such significance demonstrates that cultural studies considers cultural and media processes in the context of social and cultural inequality as well as considering it part of the structures of power. Also, its perspective is always that of the underclass, subjugated or marginalized, which registers and analyses suffering from society and grief in the world but at the same time would also like to reveal the possibility of utopia and social transformation (Kellner, 1995).

Thus it is no surprise that resistance became the central category of this critically interventionist theory and research practice in the 1980s and 1990s. It was precisely in the everyday use of cultural and media texts, in their reception and in their (productive) appropriation that the characteristics and traces of rebellious practices and creative '*Eigensinn*' (ability to create your own sense) were found. Media texts were read differently from how they were intended and used for the articulation of their own perspective by the readers (Winter, 2001). Therefore the question came to the fore as to how far reaching this resistance against power could be and what significance it should be given in the context of the present. Did the resistance (only) have a symbolic nature or did

it also have a 'real' effect? Methodologically, of course, it proved difficult to grasp the creative and resistive elements of everyday experience because these were already always informed and structured by discourses of the ruling elites. Often, the analysis of the polyphonic character of media texts could give insight into possible subversive readings that opposed the readings in accordance with the dominant ideologies.

In early research into resistance, which does not really show a uniform tradition ensuing from a programme, a central aspect of cultural studies already became clear: its (radical) contextualism (Grossberg, 2009; 2010). Resistant practices could only be understood when the context in which they happened and which they (jointly) set up, was (re)constructed. Thus, Paul Willis could show in his, now classic, ethnographic study *Learning to Labour* (1977) how the 'lads', working-class boys, created a living and rebellious counter culture, which disapproved of the middle-class norms of school and subversively circumvented it. Their creative practices rejected the boredom and alienation of educational socialization, but did not lead to a transformation of 'real' power structures, because, of course, nothing else was left for the badly educated 'lads' than to accept manual jobs after school. Thus their protest, which they subjectively experienced as freedom, was actively involved in the reproduction of social inequality. Willis came to this conclusion by doing ethnographic work on a local school (participant observation) and analysing interviews and discussions with the 'lads'. He studied their point of view and how they resisted. As a second step, he developed a sociological theory of the social reproduction of inequality and applied it to his own ethnographic findings.

In her now equally famous study, *Reading the Romance* (1984), which was arranged multi-dimensionally by using a combination of methods and which links historical reflection to narrative analysis of novels and to empirical research of the reader's perspective (verbal data), Janice Radway concluded that the reception of romance novels, at first independent of

their content, could have an essentially positive significance for women. She felt that the regular and enthusiastic reading, the losing of oneself in reading, helped women in particular to distance themselves from social obligations and everyday relationships and created a space for themselves among the domestic noise of everyday life where otherwise they were expected to be exclusively for the family to which they were expected to link their self-realization. Furthermore, Radway could show by text analysis how in romance novels female sensitivities could be upgraded and played off against those of the patriarchal order. The apparently harmless practice of the reading of relatively standardized romances proved to be unruly and led to the formation of a vibrant, resistant subculture. Admittedly, Radway concluded that the real patriarchal structures, which penetrated family and social relationships, were not transformed. Resistance could even help strengthen them.

The analysis of resistance within cultural studies is concerned with the practices of subordinate groups and everyday experiences, which are at first sight trivial and insignificant. These are examined in their unique character, particularly for how they resist the real structures of power. Even if, in cultural studies' interpretation, ideologies and the hegemonic culture convey the subjects' relationship with the world, they know these structures most closely by means of their practical knowledge that is the necessary prerequisite for their resistance. As a rule, however, this resistance remains in the imagination and is in vain.

Methodologically the everyday experiences and practices are taken seriously. For example, qualitative interviews and group discussions are conducted and analysed. Admittedly, the researcher contextualizes the verbal data and therefore actually determines their meaning by applying the analytics of power in the work of Foucault, Gramsci's theory of hegemony or other approaches, which deal with the relationship of culture and power. In this context the criticism has often been expressed that the researchers' theoretically based views stand in the way of their self-reflexivity. Therefore,

they cannot recognize, for example, how the 'real' power structures, which they analyse, only gain a notional shape because of their own theoretical presuppositions (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 81ff.). Both Willis and Radway were criticized for allowing their theoretical presuppositions to lead to the development of blind spots, though admittedly this could be said of all empirical research. In more recent ethnographic discussion, there are sometimes slightly exaggerated critiques that the researchers learn more about their own theoretical perspective than about the people being examined. Above all, this criticism was aimed at John Fiske (1989), considered the most important representative of the resistance paradigm. For many, his analysis exploring the possibilities of agency in the 'Lebenswelt' ('lifeworld') had too optimistic conclusions.

In his analysis of the popular in the present (Fiske, 1989), he drew closely on Foucault's (1977) distinction between power and resistance. 'Resistance' can arise in specific historic situations in the relationship of discursive structures, cultural practices and subjective experiences. Following Michel de Certeau (1984), Fiske conceived the postmodern everyday life as a continuous battle between the strategies of the 'strong' and the guerrilla tactics of the 'weak'. In the use of resources, which makes the system available in, for example, the form of media texts and other consumer objects, the everyday agents try to define their living conditions and express their interests by themselves. Therefore, he was interested not only in the process of appropriation, which contributed to social reproduction, but in the secret and hidden consumption, which according to de Certeau (1984) is a fabrication, a production of meanings and enjoyment. These are used by the consumers to make their own issues clearer and can (perhaps) contribute to gradual cultural and social transformation (Winter, 2001).

In his work, Fiske critically deconstructed popular texts from the video performances of Madonna via *Die Hard* (1992) to *Married... With Children* (1987–97) with the aim of revealing their potential for plural meanings,

which was differently realized by the viewers appropriate to their particular social and historical situation. He revealed the inconsistencies, the incompleteness, the contradictory structure or the polyphony of media texts by structuralist (e.g. structural analysis of narrative codes) and post-structuralist methods (e.g. the analysis of style), and he worked out how closely popular texts were related to the particular reality of the postmodern conjuncture and how they articulated social difference by articulating different ideologies. As my own studies showed (Winter, 2010; 1999), the reception and appropriation of texts examined by participant observation and analysing of interviews became social practices, which were contextually anchored and in which the texts were not predefined as objects with determined meanings but rather were only produced on the basis of social experiences. In combining different methods and forms of data analysis Fiske (1994a) successfully revealed the situational uniqueness and significance of cultural practices, which took place in a particular place at a particular time. Especially, his later work (Fiske, 1993; 1994b) is a good example of radical contextualism and the attempt to determine the conjuncture of the United States in the 1990s.

As with Radway and Willis, the question was asked of Fiske what significance beyond the immediate context these symbolic battles could have. An obvious criticism stated that resistive media consumption, as Fiske (1992) revealed in his famous and strongly disputed study of Madonna, remains ineffective because it does not change the patriarchal power structure. To argue in this way means, however, ignoring that on the one hand Fiske did not claim this. On the other hand, for him it was more about taking seriously the significance of being a Madonna fan, the subjective perspective of the fans, and – particularly in his later work – about working out the uniqueness of cultural experiences and practices in specific contexts, without at all claiming generalizations or immediate transformations of power structures. Admittedly, Fiske too did not escape the criticism that as a researcher he pretended

to understand the significance of the practices of the examined better than the examined themselves.

Later works have tried to escape this dilemma, by considering phenomena from different viewpoints, by analysing different forms of data, and in this way the methodological tools ought to become more sensitive to the experience of the other (Saukko, 2003: 55ff.). For example, biographical interviews and narrations are used to understand the cultural situation of research partners (see Winter, 2010). Popular cultural phenomena are analysed from as many points of view as possible (Morris, 1998) in order to be able to reveal the different forms of symbolic struggle with dominant meaning structures and also to reveal discrepancies and conflicts resulting from those struggles. Many doubt that these unruly or resistant practices have wider reaching systemic consequences. Thus, it has to examine whatever specific effects a particular local resistance can have and how this influences other experiences, events and practices in different areas of social life (Winter, 2001). Furthermore, experiences, practices and discourses are analysed in multiple local contexts with the result that different forms of subordination and resistance can be revealed (Saukko, 2003: 40ff.). Within cultural studies the analysis of subversive media consumption plays a further role even when the optimistic hopes linked to it are no longer at the centre of the reflection.

In the current discussions of cultural studies, a variety of topics are considered, from media spectacles (Kellner, 2012) and cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) via sport (Giardina and Newman, 2011) to indigenous voices (Denzin et al., 2008). As a rule, questions develop in local contexts; particular 'objects' are chosen for analysis that produce knowledge of a particular situation from a particular perspective. Nevertheless, the central aim is to construct the different contexts and to understand the particular conjuncture and its problems and conflicts (Grossberg, 2010). Due to historical and geographical contingencies, which influence cultural practices and contexts across the world, there is a variety of

cultural studies traditions formed nationally or regionally, in which, however, culture is not on a level with language, nor is it treated as the 'essence' of a nation or a region but rather it is understood as an open, frequently embattled, polyphonic and relational process (Frow and Morris, 2003: 498).

## PERSPECTIVES OF TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Cultural studies strives to analyse cultural processes from as many perspectives as possible in order to reveal frames and discourses which structure these, our research strategies and also our understanding of everyday life. 'Mapping the field' (Johnson et al., 2004: 31) is an important step in all cultural studies research. The researchers have to become familiar with the particular theoretical frameworks or approaches relevant to their research topic. Their orientation is transdisciplinary. They appropriate theories and methods from different disciplines to construct the particular context and its problems. Over the course of this process the researchers must figure out their commitments, interests and concepts that are shaped historically, politically and socially.

A central methodological characteristic of data analysis in cultural studies is that it examines cultural texts not as discrete entities but in their contextual setting. It is interested in how texts and discourse are articulated with social, historical or political contexts. From the beginning, it has rejected the traditionally Marxist view that culture can be understood primarily in the framework of a dominant ideology. Above all, Stuart Hall's famous 'Encoding and decoding' model (Hall, 1980) emphasizes in the production and reception of news programmes that there is a struggle for the meaning of the presented events. Media texts become the place of debate between different social groups who wish to assert their own interpretations and views of the world.

Thus, semiotic and structural analysis of qualitative data played an important role. Signs were defined as polysemous with a range of

different foci; the link between signifier and signified was primarily, in the perspective of cultural studies, politically motivated. Media texts, as shown for example in the well-known study of James Bond (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987), were analysed in their intertextual setting in order to overcome the often formalistic character of semiotic and narrative analysis, which is aimed at primary texts. Instead the authors analyse 'the social organization of the relations between texts within specific conditions of reading' (1987: 45). The social contexts of reading frame the meaning of texts. By considering textual and social contexts, the analysis of popular texts gained depth and complexity because their social meaning is analysed in the context of complex social and cultural powers. For example, Douglas Kellner examines in *Cinema Wars* (2010) how popular Hollywood movies articulate the right-wing discourses of the Bush–Cheney era, its militarism and racism. He can also show that there are movies criticizing this system. In addition, Henry Giroux (2002) deconstructs the politics of representation in Hollywood movies by critically analysing the discourses and images of race, gender, class and sexuality.

The studies on visual media data illustrate that, on the one hand, close reading techniques are transferred from the field of literary criticism to TV series and shows. In contrast to research on the effect of the media, the analysis of the cultural meaning of media texts was considered centrally. From the start, however, these were not regarded as isolated, discrete entities, but rather in their inter- and contextual relations. The *radical contextualism* of cultural studies (Grossberg, 2009) assumes that the meaning of texts and practices can only be determined in relation to more complex social and cultural power relationships.

Therefore the focus becomes the semiotic 'surroundings' of research objects and the relationships between media and other spatial and temporal contexts of social life (Frow and Morris, 2003: 501). This is because, for example, media texts on the coverage of scandals are placed in the context of the contemporary US media culture of spectacles (Kellner, 2012).

Cultural texts are linked in a type of network to cultural and social practices, which they have initiated or modified.

One essential insight coming from research in cultural studies is that interpretations always vary and that there are always several possible uses for each text. As John Frow and Meaghan Morris (2003: 506) write: 'Structures are always structures-in-use and that uses cannot be contained in advance.' Therefore there is no 'right' or 'true' reading of media texts from the perspective of cultural studies. Media texts are not monologic, they are not completed entities, but rather they are a complex constellation of signs and meanings with the result that they are interpreted and understood differently, even contradictorily in each social context. Their social (further) existence is an open and incomplete process. Against this background, the readings by researchers must also be qualified and they must be considered in their contextual bonds.

Thus Janice Radway in her already mentioned *Reading the Romance* (1984) contrasted the interpretations of readers trained in literary criticism with those of fans of the genre. Her aim was to research as comprehensively as possible the experiences and practices of women who deal with this popular genre. Therefore, she combined the analysis of literary texts with the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (generated by surveys, group discussions, interviews). In addition she introduced psychoanalytical and feminist theoretical positions to the discussion. The deliberate dialogue between theories and methods helped her to overcome the limits of a purely textual analysis and tellingly to show how texts can be construed and experienced differently in interpretative communities.

As far as the analysis of media texts has been concerned, at first structuralist interpretative strategies dominated within cultural studies. Above all Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972), and the narratological analysis by Vladimir Propp, Umberto Eco and Gérard Genette, supplied the methodical basis for the analysis of popular texts. Thus the structural analysis of social ideologies and contexts are



placed in context. Genre analysis as a contextualizing research strategy (Johnson et al., 2004: 163ff.) is directed at intertextuality because it examines how films, for example, repeat, vary or introduce new elements to the conventions of the genre. In addition, the cultural and political dimensions of a genre are examined by relating textual forms and reception practices to each other in context. The popularity of film genres is created together with the viewers, who delight in the predictable order of events and in the surprising variations that are incorporated in it. Popularity is bound to a time and a place as well as being situated in social and cultural contexts to which media texts refer and which they supply with stories. In everyday contexts, these stories can lead to personal narrations. An important question of research is by what means a genre remains interesting as it successfully keeps, changes or regains an audience.

One aim of cultural studies is to consider how texts are designed, for example for the context of production and the economic relationships linked to it. This is done in the context of broader cultural contexts and social power relationships. Therefore the tensions between text and context take centre stage. Media texts become moments of greater cultural formations.

Thus, in post-structuralist approaches, the polysemous potential contradictions and the possibility of diverse readings are worked out in social contexts. For this reason, Yvonne Tasker (1993) shows how action films (see Mikos, Chapter 28, this volume) do not simply reproduce dominant ideas of masculinity but also play with these categories and can even encourage a critical reading. In the framework of cultural studies texts are therefore contextualized and conventional divisions between text, experience and practice are discussed and often abolished.

To examine processes of political hegemony, approaches focus, for example, on 'close reading' of political speeches in order to reveal the connections between the popular and the dominant. Thus the analysis of small cultural units (as in the speeches of Bush and Blair on

the war against terror) can give insights into complex strategic power relationships (Johnson et al., 2004: 170–86). A close reading of their speeches shows that both politicians use strong moral distinctions between good and evil. They make their Islamic enemies aliens and demons by rhetorical means. Media texts are read here in their contribution to the stabilization of power and the justification of military strategy.

However, this is only one of many approaches. A feature of cultural studies is its revelation of the 'partiality' of its approaches, which allows a dialogue with others about their construction of objects and readings to begin. As Donna Haraway writes: 'Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: Only partial perspective promises objective view' (2004: 87). Therefore detailed analysis of data can show singular situational moments in the cultural production, circulation and reception of a popular genre in which complex cultural and also social debates are hidden and which contain the possibility of (transgressive) pleasure and of the construction of meaning. For example, Fiske (1994a) showed how the reception of *Married...With Children* enabled teenage viewers who attended a Catholic university to reflect on the relations with their absent parents. But this was only a particular small part of the cultural circulation of meanings and pleasures around the production and reception of this postmodern sitcom.

Very early on, the characteristics of post-modern media texts were also defined, borrowing from the archive of available media texts and understood primarily in the context of these circular references – and not as a reference to a 'primary reality' which is not structured by the media (Denzin, 1991). Thus a controversial film like *Natural Born Killers* (1994) deals self-reflexively and critically with media images as well as with our knowledge of serial killers presented by the media. However, not everyone has formed a post-modern sensibility and can understand the film as a

parody of media violence. Cultural studies emphasizes therefore that every reading is contextually bound and has political character. The knowledge of texts and practices whose spatial and temporal characteristics have to be defined is always knowledge of a particular context. As research into popular culture shows, texts and practices exist in particular locations at particular times for particular people (Jenkins et al., 2002). Thus the significance of a media text can never be determined definitively. In the field of popular culture meanings multiply when consumers and researchers understand the texts in the context of their own social life and their cultural identity. In the framework of cultural studies, personal experiences of dealing with media texts are often the starting point for critical analysis (Johnson et al., 2004). Therefore it goes on to be about defining in a self-reflexive way the social basis of our interpretations and at the same time of the limits of these interpretations.

In cultural studies works, which are orientated in a post-structuralist way, genealogical and deconstructive analyses are also carried out (cf. Saukko, 2003: chs 6 and 7). Following Foucault (1977; 1979), genealogy can reveal how our perceptions, our ideas, our description of problems or our scientific truths have developed from historic contexts and specific social and political processes. Therefore the images we make of ourselves, our society and our history are never complete or independent. They remain linked to the social practices from which they have arisen. A genealogist tries to understand the media practices of our culture that we share with others and which have also made us what we are today.

Deconstruction makes a critical analysis of the logic of media texts possible (cf. Bowman, 2008). Therefore, for example, dichotomous oppositions are revealed and discussed. Behind these hide values, ideological presuppositions and cultural hierarchies. Furthermore, deconstructive readings reveal the essential uncertainty of the meaning of media texts, which are constituted by an unlimited play of differences and are receptive to diverse readings in different contexts. Therefore, deconstructive

cultural studies also has an interventional character. Thus it deals with 'exposing the underlying "structural" preconceptions that organize texts and to reveal the conditions of freedom that they suppress' (Denzin, 1994: 196).

## **AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND NEW FORMS OF ETHNOGRAPHY**

In the analysis of reception and appropriation processes the ethnographic perspective is at the fore of cultural studies. However, at the same time, as a rule, this is not meant to be an extensive ethnographic piece of fieldwork in order to generate qualitative data as in sociology and anthropology, but rather (short-time) participant observation of cultural practices in modern and postmodern life. This should make an approach to the circulation of meaning possible and therefore access to cultural circulation (Johnson et al., 2004). Furthermore, the ethnographic perspective is often linked to autobiographical elements.

For example, Ien Ang (1985) in her study of *Dallas* (1978–91) has linked the analysis of female viewers' reactions to her own assessment of the series. Personal affinity to an object of research and sometimes even the very fact of being a fan as well as self-reflexion are important resources in the research process of cultural studies:

My existence as a fan, my experiences, along with whatever other responses are available for describing the field of popular practices and their articulation to social and political positions are the raw material, the starting point of critical research. (Grossberg, 1988: 68)

As has already been mentioned, the criticism of the overly theoretical nature of research (into resistance), which indicates the theoretical view of the researchers more than the researched lived reality, leads within cultural studies to the discussion and development of new research strategies being more suitable for the examination of lived experience and reality. Important significance is given

therefore to dialogue between the self of the researcher and the perspective of the other, the object of study (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003). The latter's world should not be described from outside but an interaction or meeting between different worlds should be performed, in which the perspective of the other should, as far as possible, be understood 'authentically' with their active contribution. Therefore the researchers must first figure out what is preventing them from understanding the world of the other, who, for example, watches horror films or listens to Gangsta rap. To be aware of one's own restricted frames of understanding demands sensitivity towards strange and radically different worlds of experience. For this reason researchers in cultural studies highlight the ethical duty as far as possible, to do justice to the world of the others. Dialogues between researchers and subjects should be possible. These should reduce prejudices and should overcome the limits of personal understanding. This should be a more just approach for the texture of the lived experience from the point of view of the participants.

Against this backdrop self-reflexivity is an important feature of this new form of ethnography. The researchers should reflect intensively about their own situation, their social and political obligations, as well as their theoretical presuppositions, in order to find easier access to the world of the subjects. However, self-reflexivity does not imply that a 'true' knowledge of the world is possible (Haraway, 2004). Rather it shows the limits of our worldview and even shows that different interpretations of our own world and that of the others are possible. In the forms of critical autoethnography, self-reflexivity contributes to researchers who examine which events and social discourses have defined their experiences (Bochner and Ellis, 2002). This process of reflection becomes complete by new forms of writing (Richardson, 2000). In a personal, literal and experimental way they show the aspects of the researcher's experience, which are not rational and which concern the (media) worlds of others.

Therefore, ethnographic practices in the framework of cultural studies also prove in the global media world of the twenty-first century to be a moral discourse (Denzin, 2010), which makes (problematic) life and media experiences available and can give insight into (new) forms of social and cultural inequality. In a further step, even existing power relationships in the everyday life should be questioned: 'Research that is more fully participatory will aim to use the research process itself to empower those who are being researched' (Johnson et al., 2004: 215).

Besides, it is important to capture the polyvocality of the field in ethnographic research. Lived experiences should be rendered by different voices in order to avoid a single voice standing for the 'truth' of an experience and in order to grasp appropriately the peculiarity of individual experiences (Saukko, 2003: 64ff.). Even in the presentation of research results it comes to an interaction between the voices of the others and the voices of the researchers. The consideration of autobiographical experiences also leads to experiments in the presentations of research results, which can even become a 'performance' of experiences and practices (Denzin, 2003; 2010). For example, in qualitative media research, this methodological reorientation is given important significance. On the one hand, dialogic relationships call on the researchers to challenge their own media experiences and practices, their preferences and aversions. On the other hand, informants who, for example, report on forms of problematic media consumption are taken seriously as subjects who have developed their own view. Furthermore, they are called to bring this to the presentation. The researchers do not take on the role of independent observers. They are more a supporting team mate. Like their research partners, their subjectivity is marked by media practices in modern societies, in particular by popular culture, and they should be clear about this in the research process:

Popular culture matters ... precisely because its meanings, effects, consequences, and ideologies can't be nailed down. As consumers and as critics,

we struggle with this proliferation of meanings as we make sense of our own social lives and cultural identities. (Jenkins et al., 2002: 11)

As I have already shown, I have combined different methods in my own research on the reception and appropriation of horror movies in order to analyse the differential processes of the reception and appropriation, as well as to identify the meanings that the audiences ascribe to their own practices. Hereby, the viewers, in particular the fans of horror movies, could describe their lived realities as authentic as possible and be taken seriously as subjects in the research process. In journalistic or academic discourse, a negative representation of horror movie fans was predominant. They were usually depicted as obsessive lone wolves, or as psychologically disturbed and vulnerable. Due to this reason, the aim of the survey was to describe their cultural practices from their very own perspective. I soon noticed that it was necessary to get oneself involved in horror movies to be able to do this research, in particular into the splatter film genre, where academic studies were widely non-existent. I wrote a diary about the primarily scaring and negative experiences I had watching these movies. I managed to watch the most important movies in this genre, which was not a pleasurable thing for me at all. But only after I had this basis of my own personal subjective experience could I start to understand the practices of the fans.

The first stage of the problem-centred interviews and group discussions was disappointing. I realized that the fans did not want to talk about intimate and tabooed experiences, because they perceived themselves as pure objects of the academic research. Furthermore, they believed that they would not gain insight into the study, and, moreover, that the study would be used against them, as had been the case in other surveys. It was tedious to gain their confidence and to build up a dialogical relation to them. Only when I started to talk about my own personal experiences with horror movies and discussed my attitude towards them did they open up to me. When this happened, some personal and even amicable

relations were established between us in the course of time. I was now able to understand their cultural practices in the context of their own personal situation and biography.

To hold a reflexive attitude made it possible for me to reflect my presumptions and conceptions as well as to have an open mind about new experiences. A deeper understanding of the lived realities of the fans would not have been achievable without this. I even discussed the results of my survey in depth with them. They recognized their own point of view in the survey and were grateful for not having been exploited. During this ethnographic research, I realized that autoethnography is an essential component of empiric research. The engagement with one's own experiences can become a basis to the understanding of differentiated experiences and practices. Only the willingness to hold a dialogue can give access to the point of view of the other. Qualitative research involves subjects and therefore comprises moral commitment. Above all, the texture of lived realities has to do justice to the viewpoint of the people who are investigated.

Even in the new forms of ethnography, the critical analysis of social forms of injustice is central (Denzin, 2009; Niederer and Winter, 2010). These should be revealed, analysed from different perspectives and inspected for the possibility for change and for the increase of agency among those researched. Above all it is the aim of critical pedagogy in the field of cultural studies to contribute knowledge to this struggle and to improve the life of those affected by social injustice (cf. Kincheloe et al, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

For a long time, there had been no explicit discussion of methodology and data analysis in cultural studies. Its practitioners rejected disciplinary boundaries and used and combined theories, perspectives and methods of different knowledge fields in order to enable transdisciplinary dialogues and collaborations between the humanities and the social sciences. In my contribution to this volume I have considered

different methodological considerations and approaches. During the last decade a discussion on qualitative methods and methodologies has begun. This may be linked to the fact that the transdisciplinary direction of research is now itself formed as a type of discipline by some scholars (Couldry, 2000). However, cultural studies still remains true to its origins and seeks to link criticism of power to opportunities for intervention and democratic change. Cultural studies is always directed at the analysis and understanding of contexts. Therefore, it does not develop a general theory and the methods it applies depend on the respective questioning. The analysis of an individual cultural element contains its complex relationships to other cultural elements and social powers.

Cultural studies conducts qualitative research in the framework of comprehensive cultural and social analysis. Its theories and models are developed as an answer to the social problems and questions of specific contexts and conjunctures. Cultural studies is orientated both constructivistically, for example in the production of contexts, and critically in the analysis of the relationships with power. Stuart Hall defines its aim 'to enable people to understand what [was] going on, and especially to provide ways of thinking, strategies for survival, and resources for resistance' (Hall, 1990: 22).

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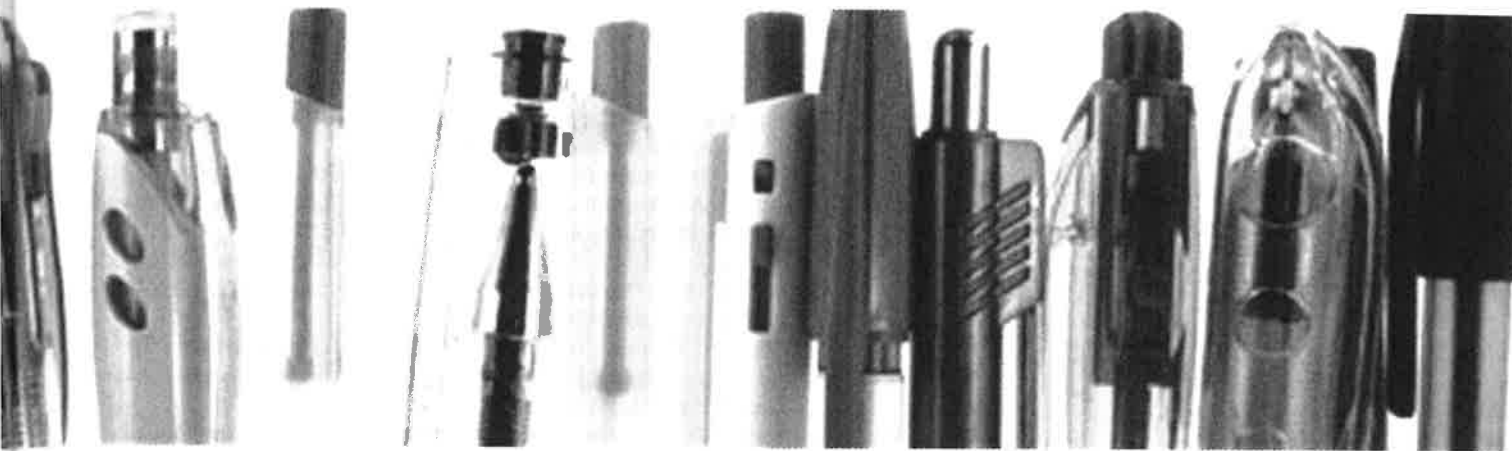
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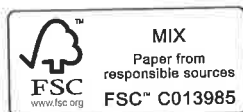
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