

Cultural Studies and Sociology of Culture in German Speaking Countries: Relations and Interrelations

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Over the last three decades attitudes toward cultural studies in Germany have developed in contact and conflict with different disciplines like ethnology, anthropology, sociology and sociology of culture , literary studies and last but not least Kulturwissenschaft(en). On the one hand there is a strong interest in how cultural studies views and analyzes popular culture, media culture and the everyday. On the other hand borderlines between humanities and social science remain; these lead to criticism of and conflict with cultural studies and its achievements.

In my paper I will discuss some of the problems concerning the perception/reception of cultural studies among practitioners of Kulturwissenschaft(en) and sociology and I will draw on the role of cultural studies in thematizing cultural change and conflicts, and its ability to do so in a way that points out that culture and politics matter.

PINPOINTING CULTURAL STUDIES IN THE GERMAN SPEAKING REGION

Over the last three decades we saw different phases within the reception of cultural studies in the German speaking region as well as in Germany itself.¹ The reception first started in the 1970s and took great interest in questions of ideology and youth culture analysis with a focus on forms of resistance and style, that developed in the 1980s (cf. Göttlich/Winter 1999).

Within the 1990s the focus switched more and more on popular culture as well as on media and television studies. Television, texts and audiences became a side of struggle with mainstream media and communication studies, especially in the implementation of the decoding/encoding model as well as in analysing the active audience and media reception.

Another scope lies on the culture of the everyday and questions of identity in different research projects within European Ethnographie and Kulturwissenschaften. But although in media studies questions of identity and power in a global mediasphere became a central topic at the turn to the new century. Beside this main areas of interest that show a strong relation with media and communication studies and Kulturwissenschaften we also find particular interest in gender studies and the record of qualitative methods within cultural studies.

Taking this short sketch of cultural studies reception in the German speaking region as a starting point for my discussion on the current relationship with Kulturwissenschaften and/or Kultursoziologie (sociology of culture) one can say that attitudes toward cultural studies have developed in contact and conflict with different disciplines like ethnology, anthropology, sociology and sociology of culture, literary studies and last but not least Kulturwissenschaft(en).²

In general the broad reception of cultural studies within thirty years shows a strong interest in how cultural studies views and analyzes popular culture, media culture and the everyday. Against this background cultural studies in Germany as well as the German speaking region is not a newcomer. But in Germany we don't have any university institute, chair or professorship that is exclusively dedicated to cultural studies. What we can find instead are university institutes, where people work within different research projects - mostly within media studies - on or within cultural studies with an interdisciplinary understanding. To put it short: Whereas cultural studies in the UK, Australia and the US has achieved an identity of its own, even if it is no discipline, culture studies in the Germany as well the German speaking region have not reached that state.

Despite of this broad reception, what remains are borderlines between humanities and social science; these still lead to criticism of and conflict with cultural studies and its achievements. Even when most of the conflicts seemed to be resolved, what remains are not only theoretical and methodological problems. Especially when we focus on the relation of Kultursoziologie with cultural studies within German sociology we also meet different traditions of cultural critics. But behind this differences, when reflecting this relation, it comes

¹ Speaking of cultural studies in Germany or the German speaking region is not at random. Already the reception in Austria, Switzerland and Germany has different occasions and takes part in different university systems, the perspective on culture often has the same roots within the Geisteswissenschaften. So it cannot be avoided to speak for the "region" as one, even when the problems referred to are treated and considered different in accordance to the nation and its academic institutions, where cultural studies is done. When discussing the relation of cultural studies and the sociology of culture the text mostly refers to the situation in Germany.

² This is partly true for the reception in the GDR that took part in the 1970s and early 1980s with a special interest in youth culture analysis and the writings of Raymond Williams. After the fall of the wall this special Marxist perspective on cultural studies was not continued.

true what Inglis already highlighted for British Cultural Studies, that "of all sociology's 'strange others', cultural studies is perhaps the least unfamiliar" (2007: 99).

The reason for the ongoing existence of struggle with this differences in cultural criticism is interesting because it was the cultural studies way of dealing with questions of culture that generate a new interest in the sociology of culture at the beginning of the late 1980s. For many students of sociology a new perspective on culture was opened, whereas the Kultursoziologie in the tradition of Weber, Simmel or Mannheim and also the Frankfurt critiques seemed to be a too special stuff even for academic teaching at many universitys at this moment. The problems that grew out of this special situation lead to different questions of possible combinations, as well as at the existence of opposition, between cultural studies and the sociology of culture as well as Kulturwissenschaft(en), and are not easy to handle.³

It turns out that the main question of all still is, if the opposition cultural studies is faced with has to do with the recognition that they are still emergent in different ways but not a project or a special German-formation by its own, or do we simply have different traditions of looking at culture and communication that cannot easily be combined. Different concepts of culture are still helpfull when they are used to theorize cultural developments or problems. They hinder scientific research and development, when entrance requirements are made up of them. My aim with this paper is to show, that there is a sociology of culture within cultural studies that all sides in this game can benefit from.

To do this we have to look briefly at the specifics of how cultural studies is recognized in Kulturwissenschaften and German sociology when we want to understand some of the ongoing oppositions before we can consider in a next step how to handle the different positions and which role the sociology of cultural studies can play nowadays.⁴

WHAT IS CULTURE ANYWAY?

Up to now, as many of you know, the term culture has not been an easy word, especially in Germany and german language, where it falls under the influence of the humanities, e.g., Geisteswissenschaft, which claims to hold definitory power in cultural questions. So culture has the status of a theoretical concept; it is no simple word; in some ways it is a sort of "Weltanschauung". And this defines the first borderline between cultural studies and Kulturwissenschaften as well as Kultursoziologie in a classical understanding:

According to Geisteswissenschaft – whose offspring is Kulturwissenschaften, and which has designated this youngster as its legitimate heir - cultural studies are interested only in the "everyday", as well as in social practices, rather than in questions of "Sinn" [i.e., "Meaning"]. But can this be the main reason for the opposition or is this only the surface, which conceals the main reasons when dealing with culture in the way cultural studies stands for?

In an introductory book on Kulturwissenschaft by Hartmut Böhme and others (2000), intended to orient students to Kulturwissenschaften, we find at least only three pages on cultural studies, in the form of opening remarks that function not only as signifier for the still existing borderline. Viewed closely, these pages revitalise stereotypes on cultural studies as positioned in opposition to culture – that is, to culture in the sense in which Geisteswissenschaften normally uses the term - that -in my opinion - do not supply no further understanding of cultural studies.

³ We worked on this topic in different academic circles and on different occassions in conferences and workshops within the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie as well as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft since the 1990s.

⁴ We can not look in detail at all aspects of the reception over the last thirty years.

The main arguments in this text highlight that in Cultural Studies "is [after all the years of academic success in the UK and USA] no theoretical concept or theory that is solid and that stands against the backdrop of a consensus. Terms like "contextualization" signal, with respect to method, that only heterogenous elements are combined. "Othering" is just another term for the alliance of ethnography and cultural anthropology. "Mapping" tends to give cognitive maps of cultural phenomena and the discourse on minorities works as an instrument to differentiate and to particularise the [Kollektivsingular] collectivised individual culture."

For the authors "the risks of this development are evident" because "within the sphere of influence of ethnic and minority groups, the term culture tends to lose its analytical and synthetic function within ideological critique. The place of the traditional canon is taken by a poorly considered new canon of particularities combined in an additive way." (Böhme et al. 2000: 13)

I think this passage gives a good impression of how cultural studies are viewed and how in a certain way the problem of the term culture remains unresolved. Apart from this opposition with Kulturwissenschaft things are a little bit different in relation with sociology. Again Inglis can be cited here with his hint that cultural studies and sociology of culture are warring twins. For him, "(t)hey 'agree to have a battle', because the battle brings certain gains in identity for them both. But beyond rhetorical displays of dissimilarity between them, once one examines their shared epistemological assumptions, one sees that it is actually their very likeness that compels them to engage in the ritualized conflicts they embark upon." (Inglis 2007: 118)

In this paper I will not further discuss the reasons for this likeness. Instead of this I will give some hints on how to overcome the opposite both sides stick to when the term culture is mentioned even when there is a likeness. And this is done by showing, that there is a special sociology of culture within cultural studies from which we can start to build a cultural studies formation in Germany as well as an transdisciplinary setting for the study of culture.

A GERMAN FORMATION OF CULTURAL STUDIES?

Generally spoken the reception of cultural studies stands for the opening up of new horizons in the Kulturdebatte (cultural debate and criticism) over the last thirty years within the German speaking academia. This can be seen as a good starting point to discuss not only the specificities of sociology of culture within cultural studies. It must also become clear, if cultural studies deals with questions of culture, why the critical view on cultural studies starts with the assumption that it is about culture and that Kultursoziologie has to say more about it than cultural studies.

The problem has to do with the term culture itself and the understanding that is associated with this term. To prevent a misunderstanding, we can refer to Grossberg in his latest book, where he denies that cultural studies is about culture (Grossberg 2010: 8). But when we do so, I doubt that things become clearer in the German speaking region, because in a certain way, many people think that when cultural studies is not about culture than it must be that it is about power, because this is the second feature that is highlighted when speaking about cultural studies in many discussions. And many people doing cultural studies highlight this aspect too. As one result, power and culture are often dealt with in an essential or substantial understanding, whereas the question of culture and cultural theory can help to sociologize instead of essentialize the understanding of power as well as culture.

One solution to sociologize the term culture in a cultural studies way is, when we go back to Williams understanding of culture Hall strongly refers to that provides an understanding of culture as ongoing processes as practice. In this perspective cultural studies' methodological value derives from Williams' basic principle of avoiding language which massifies others (Williams 1958: 306). Williams suggestive formulation relates 'culture' to the sum of the available descriptions through which societies make sense of and reflect their common expe-

riences. To put it short it is here where cultural studies deals with questions of cultural practices in a sociological way of understanding and thematizing the production and reproduction of social life and the everyday. And this prospective comes along with questions or problems of power and hegemony starting with the early work of Thompson and Williams. In reference with this argument, we can follow Grossberg's arguments a little bit further.

Cultural studies [...] is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways cultural practices are produced within, inserted into, and operate in the everyday life of human beings and social formations, so as to reproduce, struggle against, and perhaps transform the existing structure of power. (2010: 8)

And according to this task cultural studies itself is a certain practice. Taking this argument, we have to discuss a way that allows to deal with the problem of power within cultural theory as one problem amongst a bundle of sometimes more important questions than power. I think of questions how practice reproduces culture and society. Here we are at the core of all thinking within Kultursoziologie or Kulturwissenschaften in "opposite" to cultural studies, so that within the reception many people don't get this point right that cultural studies is not about culture or power but about its different practices.

To achieve a first turn in our perspective we can rearticulate this special understanding, like (again) Grossberg puts it in Cultural Studies in the Future Tense. "Culture" is the deepest and most solid rock of our common sense.

Instead, too often, the concept of culture - and other related categories - is assumed, appropriated, generalized and even universalized. (Grossberg 2010: 169)

And I will add that we can say this for power too.

If we take this argument, we can imagine how the struggle for the term culture leads to nothing more than to erect oppositions. The main difference between cultural studies and sociology as well as Kulturwissenschaften lies not in the term culture or power as such or in a special way of cultural criticism but in the two/three disciplines' outlooks on cultural processes and everyday practices.

When we compare the agenda for sociology of culture with that for cultural studies from this point, we can start to consider if it is worth while to search for an agenda of compromise and interdisciplinary or if it is better to go one's own way than to attempt such a perspective.

When "[...] cultural studies is not about interpreting or judging texts or peoples, but about describing how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with culture" than "(c)ultural studies is about the historical possibilities of transforming people's lived realities and the relations of power within which those realities are constructed and lived, and it is about the absolutely vital contribution of intellectual work to the imagination and realization of such possibilities." (Grossberg 1999: 24)

From this point of view only cultural studies can be defined as political in the strict sense of the term; as proactive. That means that cultural studies don't work in a sense, Meaghan Morris criticized when telling us "that cultural studies, in spite of its self-conception as inclusive, was at best a sieve that sorted the fragments of everyday experience into those it could collect into a particular narrative of celebration/resistance and those it could not." (Couldry 2007: 14)

When this development was true, then the outcome is not far away from the idea, the opposition represents. But we can argue the Kultursoziologie as well as Kulturwissenschaft is more above the battle and abstracted from the everyday. Given this description, one has to ask if the need exists to bring together cultural studies and Kulturwissenschaften in the German speaking region to reach the aim of building an own formation. Perhaps cross-fertilization within intellectual questions is beneficial; if so, the question can be addressed only if we define how

intellectual work matters. The position held by Kulturwissenschaften is deeply rooted in the history of the German university system, and, hence, in the role in which many scholars see themselves. From this point of view cultural studies in German speaking countries faces the problem that Kulturwissenschaften in some ways tries to substitute itself for cultural studies in order to evade, to efface, the political implications of the newer discipline.

RÉSUMÉ

At least, there can be no simple answer to my questions and the problems discussed if there is a chance for a cultural studies formation in Germany. The idea of cross-fertilization with Kulturosoziologie or Kulturwissenschaft puts more questions onto the agenda than it can clear away. And the way to discuss the sociology of cultural studies is faced with the assumption that sociologies strange others are not sociology (cf. Göttlich 2007).

Whilst the question how the positions of sociology or Kulturwissenschaften and cultural studies can cross-fertilize one another seems to be a logical one, I doubt if bringing together such different intentions helps to overcome the borderlines that individuals can cross, or even for themselves abolish – but that still are maintained directly behind the backs of people who decide to meet with open minds.

Through such combinations, cultural studies runs the risk of becoming one element in the "garbage can" as which Kulturwissenschaften was described by Dirk Baecker (1996). And - even if there is a good reason to combine the positions of sociology and cultural studies - we have to face the further question of how this may help academic circles in the German speaking region to overcome their fear of the popular (culture), especially when cultural studies is seen as the popular's strongest agent.

It such a situation is better, I think, to do cultural studies as a constant demonstration of what we can contribute from this sociologically concerned and active position, than to search for a cross-fertilization that will not help to overcome the borderlines between both traditions. Cultural studies cannot provide another discipline with an excuse for losing touch with the the everyday and its politics. It is, like Nick Couldry pointed out, a concern to hear the range of voices that characterise the social terrain, and not reduce their complexity. But this concern overlaps with cultural studies' 'politics': its aim of responsibly accounting for others in its account of the social world (cf. Couldry 2000: 126-130).

It was not my intention to erect borders where no borders are. But coming a long way in this reception of cultural studies one can be astounded when arguments in this confrontation go around in a circuit and don't reach the next step that lies in the challenge of transdisciplinarity.

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