

Cultural Text Studies 1:
An Introduction

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Introduction

BENT SØRENSEN

Cultural Text Studies (CTS) is a research project initiated by the Department of Languages, Culture and Aesthetics at Aalborg University. The present introductory volume launches a series of themed monographs which will be edited by researchers at the Dept., occasionally aided by friends and associates from other programmes. The purpose of the series is to be a forum for the publication of results of research in the broadly defined area of cultural text. This particular volume engages with a wide range of Anglophone texts and cultural phenomena which are read in each their particular historical framework (the synchronic dimension to the research), and which, when presented in a suite of essays, provide a chronologically structured primer in cultural text studies (the diachronic dimension to the work).

This interdisciplinary field of research springs from an emergent interest in both studying texts culturally *and* in studying culture as text. Thus it is “*cultural text studies*” in the sense that the object of study consists of all readable cultural phenomena which are regarded as texts in a much more broadly defined sense than in the traditional field of literary studies. Yet it is also “*cultural text studies*”, in the sense that, while the approach is “cultural” as opposed to, say, formalist, the work often entails an intense engagement with texts and close readings thereof¹, usually combining reading strategies inspired by literature or film studies, in tandem with application of continental cultural theory, such as the German hermeneutic tradition,

1 I am indebted to Lene Yding Pedersen for first formulating this dialectic relationship clearly in her contribution to the 2003 conference on *Complexity I* co-organized with several of the contributors to the present volume. The proceedings from this event will appear as the CTS 3 monograph later this year.

French deconstruction, or sociological approaches to aesthetic products such as Pierre Bourdieu's contribution.

This methodology by nature yields hybrid readings, and the teaching of cultural text studies in this form is unique to the English programme at Aalborg University, in the sense that while other English departments in Denmark offer cultural studies courses, they do not offer sufficient theory to support these courses, nor do they engage with such a wide array of text types. The whole idea behind the CTS project therefore springs from teaching activities in the programme, such as our long running lecture series in textual history, entitled "Fashioning Self and Identity", which came about as an idea fostered by our long time programme mentor, associate professor Torben Ditlevsen. The idea to collect the lectures in textual history into a volume and to supplement the sequence with extra essays to consolidate our research focus areas also came from him. After several years of preparation we are proud to finally present our collective efforts.

The essays in this volume are thus all authored by present and past members of the English programme's teaching staff in the fields of culture, literature, and media studies. The pieces range widely in terms of the period, genre and medium of the texts investigated. Focus areas include Victorian literature and art; high modernism, especially approached from the point of view of a centre/margin discourse; and finally postmodernist aesthetics and its embedded move from literary into cultural studies, as witnessed by essays on world music, shoes, Hollywood, the post-ironic, the de-territorialized, and the post-human condition as cultural texts.

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The collection commences with Riber Christensen's analysis of the cultural and aesthetic function of The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, at the very beginning of the 19th century. The essay shows how the paintings and prints exhibited and sold by the Gallery remediated the works of Shakespeare, and provided the growing middle class audience of art and culture with access to de-auralized versions or reproductions of high art. The works of Shakespeare therefore were transposed from a dynamic, performance oriented art form such as the theatre, into static tableaux which could be consumed in the newly defined private space of the bourgeois home. The prerequisites for this transformation of art from auratic to non-auratic are theorized via the well-known work of Walter Benjamin, whereas the dis-

inction between private and public spheres draws on the work of Habermas and Bourdieu. The close reading portions of Riber Christensen's essay illuminate the technological developments in engraving techniques that paved the way for cheap mass reproduction and distribution of the images. We are also treated to an analysis of the various genres of painting represented in the Gallery, and the point is offered that the remediation process leads to a destabilization of the traditional hierarchy of genres with history painting at the top. The Boydell images can thus be seen to pave the way towards a new paradigm in art and culture consumption, which, while it has its roots in the post-Glorious Revolution era and the 18th century struggle between an emergent but immature bourgeoisie and a moribund aristocracy, also leads forward into the Victorian era where the hegemony of the bourgeoisie becomes ever more firmly established, including that class's full sway of both private and public spaces within Britain and ultimately the whole British Empire. This analysis of a curious phenomenon of the Georgian age, thus serves as the perfect staging for the two essays to come on the making and breaking of three eminent Victorians.

In the first of these essays Jens Kirk analyzes the relationship between the construction of self and identity and the writing of autobiographies and other books. He takes as his specific object of interest the life and works of John Stuart Mill, an uncommonly well-educated person by the standards of any historical period. Kirk's essay draws on the twin disciplines of book history and the history of reading to situate Mill's efforts of self-fashioning within a social-constructivist paradigm. His reading is inspired by the insights generated by New Historicist approaches to textual studies, as exemplified by the work of Stephen Greenblatt, and the essay shows how the issues of authority/power and authorship are irrevocably intertwined. Kirk further uses Roman Jakobsen's notion of the conative function of language (and by extension books) to discuss the impact of texts and books on readers. Mill's particular construction of self is read closely in the case of his relationship with his father and with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, whose contribution to Mill's book *On Liberty* receives particular attention in Mill's *Autobiography*. Kirk argues that Mill attempted to create a unified self, and to communicate this self image, through the revisions of his life and life's work performed by the writing of and in the *Autobiography*, and that the acknowledgement of his by then deceased wife's contribution functions as a prerequisite for internal unification within Mill's understanding of his identity as author.

Riber Christensen returns with a comparative essay discussing two of the most widely read Victorian authors, Dickens and Kipling. His essay commences with the postulate that the Victorian period in fact should be read as an era of thoroughgoing modernization and innovation, which he documents with a number of graphs and maps showing internal and external, imperial expansion and technological growth. The textual engagement with the two authors picks lesser known texts by the two authors, so that the famous novelist Dickens is represented via a short story, and so that Kipling's best known longer prose works and poems take the back seat to far more obscure short fictions. Dickens is shown to have deep-seated anxieties vis-à-vis technological progress, partly due to personal traumas incurred because of his unfortunate involvement in the train accident known as the "Staplehurst Railway Accident". This event not only jeopardized his life but also his reputation, as he was traveling with his mistress, and a leakage between his private and public personae could have occurred with potentially career damaging consequences. The short narrative "The Signal-Man" is analyzed by Riber Christensen with the use of Todorov's theory of hesitation in the reading of texts within the fantastic paradigm. Dickens uses the hesitation between a fantastic and a pseudo-ghost story reading protocol to establish a critique of the consequences for man's spirit and faith of too rapid and pervasive technological development. In contrast, Kipling is shown – via an analysis of some of his fictions thematizing whites passing for natives in India (particularly the short story "Lispeth") – to not be as uniformly jingoist in his ideology of empire and racial hierarchies as has popularly been assumed by faulty, decontextualized and dehistoricized analyses of poems such as "The White Man's Burden". Rather Kipling must be regarded as in favour of colonialism in the public sphere, but thoroughly against it in the private sphere of love and marital relations. Both authors are thus shown to be good Victorians, yet ultimately they have become undone by their own ideologies for a more contemporary reading public by their attempts to parcel out a waterproof distinction between the two spheres.

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The focus of the collection then shifts to the modernist period, and the next three essays read canonical as well as marginal modernist authors in various contexts that all highlight these authors' questionable belongings to nations, groups and – ultimately – periods.

Jesper Trier frames his essay on T.S. Eliot and Yeats with a discussion of the problematics of period definition, but still offers to synthesize a common poetics for these two very different poets, via an analysis of the use of reader manifestations and inscribed reader positions in some of the best known poems by the two authors. The essay offers a description of the construct of modernism and modernist aesthetics as a cultural text, with a number of poets organizing themselves loosely around the figure of Ezra Pound and his declared aesthetic programme. Through Poggioli and others' ideas of avant-garde versus more integrated artistic expressions and 'schools' Trier conceptualizes both Eliot and Yeats's positions as critical of the alienation associated with life in the modern world, especially post-WWI. Their differences are, however, also emphasized, as Eliot is shown to rapidly develop into a more conservative figure lamenting the fragmentation of life and thinking in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", where he suggests the objective and catalytic role as ideal for the poet. Eliot's own poetic practice is discussed through an analysis of the poem "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", where the reader is inscribed as a drab non-participant figure clad in brown. In contrast Yeats is shown, through an analysis of some of the paratext surrounding *A Vision*, to be an advocate for the poet to exert active influence and work for a change to the better. This desire is seen as more of a moral or religious/philosophical endeavour than an aesthetic one, and this insight is evolved in an analysis of one of Yeats's most apocalyptic texts, the poem "The Second Coming". Ultimately the shared project between Eliot and Yeats is shown to consist in a desire or moral obligation ascribed to the poet to educate his readers in how to navigate modern life with its lack of moral and social guidelines.

Lene Yding Pedersen also reads Yeats, but she engages with him as one of several writers engaged in a project of (re)imagining Ireland in the years leading up to and immediately after the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Her theoretical framework draws on Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, which entails reading the construction of nations and national identity as a mainly textual project. Belonging and non-belonging is in Anderson and Yding's optics a matter of construction of unified selves and groups bound together by shared narratives of origin, development and common *telos*. Yeats's participation in this project as regards the so-called Celtic Renaissance is analyzed through a number of essays and other non-fiction writings by Yeats as well as through a reading of his poem "The Fisherman". While Yding admits that an Andersonian reading of this or any poem is necessarily highly reductive, she still docu-

ments that the relations between history and myth and past and present become particularly poignant when viewed through a social-constructive lens. Yding proceeds to treat the particular case of the role of the Gaelic language in the Irish revival, and here she focuses on some of the oppositional voices ironizing over the elevation of the Gaelic tongue to a key to the Irish Ur-identity. Joyce is mentioned in passing, but the particular, representative voice analyzed in depth is that of Flann O'Brien's novel, *The Poor Mouth*, which contains hilarious passages satirizing among other things the academic *faible* for all things Gaelic, including the squeals of a particular piglet which sound especially authentic to the scholars of Gaelic. Yding concludes with a perspective on the other not so Irish Irish writers, Shaw and Beckett who both spoke out against the (self) censorship practiced by the Irish Free State on key issues related to sexuality, public morals and the Catholic Church. Yding concludes that even these oppositional voices were engaged in an imagining of Ireland as a cultural (free) space in the inter-war years and post-WWII period.

Free spaces are also among the main topics of Bent Sørensen's essay on the Harlem renaissance and one of its lesser known writers, Nella Larsen, whose connection to Denmark is currently being re-mapped and re-interpreted. His essay participates in this unearthing of Larsen as a forgotten literary figure whose life is very illustrative when read as a social and cultural text, exemplifying exclusion form and a quest for sanctuary and belonging in groups, classes and ethnicities. Sørensen's theoretical point of departure is in his attempt to develop a trans-generic tool for the reading of cultural texts, which combines semiotics as a general philosophy of sign and meaning with a historicist credo, leading to the claim that all texts can be read as expressive of a few central difference discourses (of say, gender, race, age, class, nation/region and belief), but these texts cannot be fully understood unless read in a cultural specificity. New Historicism here also serves as a significant source of inspiration, but departing from the generic New Historicist circulation perspective Sørensen also insists upon the necessity of further specificity which calls for close reading techniques to supplement the reception and circulation analysis. Here Bourdieu's notions of the field of cultural production and the Habermasian distinction between private and public life and text play a role as influences on his methodology. To open the case of Nella Larsen as a culturally significant text, Sørensen situates her in three concentric circles of contextualizations: The modernist period in the USA and its specific manifestation in African-American and diasporic literature and art of the 1920s, i.e. The Harlem Renaissance; the

pressures of negotiating double minority differences within that group, e.g. female and black identities, with its attendant numerous victim positions, both as regards the author's life and the life of her literary characters; and finally the individual biography of Larsen and its reflections in her works. Larsen is particularly interesting in the latter respect because many layers of obscurity still persist and competing biographical narratives produced by herself and, belatedly, by academics do little to shed light on the lacunae in our understanding of her life and works. Sørensen's strategy is here to apply the difference discourse theory to all three circles of engagement with Nella Larsen and her texts, her peer group, and the socio-economic reality she had to operate within. This analysis shows her as a victim of discrimination, silencing and character assassination from a variety of agencies, including some of her closest peers. Her own works are read as containing sophisticated oppositional discourses signaling these silencing attempts and offering us as contemporary academics a cultural text that can be read as quite sophisticated in its feminist and interracial critiques.

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The final and largest cluster of essays in the volume treats postmodern and even more recent texts. That this is the largest area in terms of contributions also reflects the predominant teaching and research focus of the English department which squarely engages with postmodern poetics, aesthetics and textual practices across media and genres, and the potential labeling of that which is to come, or has come, after postmodernism. The six essays in this latter half of the volume stake out several of the posts in this field of study, starting with English poetry of the 1970s and 80s, 1980s global texts and world music, and Hollywood (historically, as well as in the contemporary period) viewed as a cultural text, before moving into the 1990s and the early 21st century in the choice of object texts, focusing on trends that surpass post-modern concerns and venture into analyses of the new literary sincerity (or the post-ironic), of shoes as cultural texts (or post-constructivist identity issues), and finally of transtextuality in post-cyberpunk literature (or post-human identities).

The first of these essays is Jens Kirk's analysis of the socio-literary production of the so-called 'Martian School' in English poetry in the 1970s and 80s. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, Kirk meticulously traces the construction by certain critics of a group of poets as both a unified school and a trend representing literary value in the shape

of a neo-Eliotian sensibility. This consecration of, especially, the poets Craig Raine and Christopher Reid is shown to have its specific origin in a one-page article appearing in the *New Statesman* in 1978, wherein critic James Fenton performs a dual operation of appraisal of the above-mentioned poets and desecration of several critics of a previous generation, thereby in effect also auto-consecrating himself as a taste-maker and gate-keeper in the field of cultural production. While it appears that Fenton's actions are motivated by a desire for renewal of the canon of consecrated poetry in England, Kirk further shows that the actual values praised by Fenton and later critics that participate in the production of the Martians are considerably more conventional and all hinge on the reading of emotionality into the works of Raine in particular. Thus the new consecration of Martian poets cannot be said to be subversive in itself, but rather constitutes a struggle for the power to consecrate. Kirk ends by reminding us that we all as cultural analysts are implicated in this struggle and cannot ultimately take a stand outside the field of cultural production.

Ben Dorfman, in his essay on global text reading, takes an intellectual historian's approach to what he wishes to consecrate as a new genre or label for a field of analysis. Commencing with a reminder that we live in an age of globalization, he proposes that we examine what that implies for our engagement with texts that themselves are global in the sense that they embody the dual move of time-space compression and deterritorialization. Dorfman sees globalization itself as a process that first connects and then integrates units into global wholes. He proposes that certain texts can be seen to be ruled by this logic, and proposes the term 'global texts' for this trans-generic body of works. While globalization in itself is not a new phenomenon, as Dorfman's excursus on the Roman Empire illustrates, he nevertheless argues that compression and de-territorialization as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari are more common phenomena in postmodernity than ever before. As an example of a trans-national, indeed global, cultural product, which is both conceived, produced, disseminated and consumed globally, Dorfman selects Paul Simon's album *Graceland*, which features a fusion of several musical influences or roots, a collaboration between musicians across spatial distances, and global consumer appeal. Dorfman illustrates how this text evinces a time-space compression and 'transports' its listeners effortlessly from American blues/country roots to contemporary *mbaqanga* style South African music, and metaphorically allows us to simultaneously be in Tennessee and Soweto, while we are in Simon's land of grace. This imagined suspension of distance in time/space echoes Yding's

analysis of the imagined cultural spaces in Ireland and Sørensen's observations on constructed concentric circles of sanctuary in the case of Nella Larsen. Dorfman concludes his essay with a three-step reading programme for global, cultural text studies, which strongly echoes the engagement with text that New Historicism and social constructivism teach us: global texts must be read in awareness of global history, i.e. they produce meaning fully only when situated historically and globally; texts co-produce the history they partake in, and finally, we become involved in globalization ourselves when performing readings and analyses of such texts. The latter point, of course, echoes Kirk's conclusions in the Martians' article.

The first of Steen Christiansen's essays proposes that the whole of Hollywood's production, dissemination and reception system can be read as a cultural text, or a set of specific global texts, to use Dorfman's terminology. His point of departure is in a critique of film studies agendas that focus narrowly on auteur films (seen as film's version of high art) or on genre studies which either are naively quantitative in scope or else purely formalist and therefore prone to bizarre miscategorizations. Instead Christiansen proposes to read film in general and the Hollywood system in particular from a reception oriented perspective. He claims that films have in them reader positions (to revitalize Trier's point about modernist poetry), and that these reader positions are historically specific and often ideologically expressive of certain expectations on behalf of the filmmakers. The historical situatedness is dealt with in the portion of the essay that discusses the technological innovations within filmmaking from the introduction of sound onwards, where the point is that Hollywood has used innovation and globalization techniques in combination to ensure a continuing role as the dominant force in film, while remaining a national film industry. Hollywood film thus remains steadily American in its view of the world it impacts on and attempts to teach. While Christiansen does not disregard psychoanalytic film theory as important for a reception oriented approach he prefers reader-response ideas that allow the audience more agency in filling out the blanks in the interpretative process of film viewing. Brief analysis of films such as *Deep Blue Sea*, *Boyz N the Hood*, and *Se7en* show that the reader positions are partly engendered within the film, but that reader competence and playfulness as a dialogic (i.e. two-way producer-reader constructed) process cannot be ignored especially in the work of interpreting postmodern meta-films. Christiansen concludes by proposing that we adopt John Fiske's idea of an extension of Roland Barthes's distinction between 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts to also encompass the position of 'producerly'

texts. This position affords us a middle ground between hermeneutics and empty formalist categorization where we can speak of a cultural text reading of Hollywood itself and its products.

Tore R. Andersen, in his essay on post-ironic positions within or beyond postmodern literature, focuses in particular on David Foster Wallace's constructions of sincerity in his 1996 novel, *Infinite Jest*. Andersen, however, identifies a whole generation of American novelists who both are the inheritors of and rebels against what has become postmodern conformity and hegemony within the American literary establishment. The first generation of ironic postmodernists, spearheaded by John Barth, Thomas Pynchon and Don de Lillo have reached levels of consecration that are quite astounding considering the contents of their paranoid quasi-nihilistic works often written in a hard-to-engage-with, alienating style. The new 'wannabe' patricidal generation of Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Rick Moody and others offer a return to teleological narratives and a new sincere belief in the function of story-telling. This is seen by Andersen as a generational move towards the post-ironic, both within the literary texts themselves and in the construction of author personae, which differs considerably from the strategies chosen by the older ironists. While the post-ironists are not always successful in avoiding the trap of repeating old ironies inherent in the writing styles and favourite subject matters of their predecessors, the essay argues that *Infinite Jest* is a fully successful post-ironic text, while still remaining a vibrant social satire of contemporary USA. This novel is seen as an example of 'radical realism' as much in the tradition of Raymond Carver as that of political, dissident postmodernists such as those identified by Paul Maltby in his seminal work of that title from 1991. Andersen in sum offers an update of Maltby's distinction between introverted and extroverted postmodernists, an endeavour complicated by the return of some of the ironical patriarchs (such as de Lillo and Pynchon) to the joys of storytelling. This tentative poetics of the post-ironical includes a renewed focus on the personal and on the family as the quintessential identity unit. It is therefore ironic in itself (!) that this tendency towards the post-ironic can potentially be seen as a return to an avant-garde aesthetics, as Andersen proposes in his concluding perspectives which also comment on Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier as a post-ironist.

The penultimate essay in the volume at hand offers a reading of the various cultural metamorphoses surrounding the career and works of Rebecca Miller. Camelia Elias reads Miller's career as a navigation of the field of cultural production, as theorized in Bourdieu's volume of that title.

Miller is a multi-talented woman whose varied heritage from gifted and consecrated parents (Arthur Miller and Inge Morath) has stood her in good stead in her career—shifts between acting, art, writing and filmmaking. Elias's point is also that Miller in some of her latest works, both entitled *Personal Velocity* (one is a collection of short stories and the other an episodic film), overtly thematizes the position a number of gifted young women find themselves in when attempting to negotiate new careers and new identity positions for themselves. While the stories and film episodes are not autobiographical in a conventional sense, Elias argues that they all thematize the desire for being interesting—a desire Miller herself has ample biographical reasons for being fuelled by. Elias's most controversial point is that the symbol of choice in Miller's work, as in the work of many other authors and purveyors of cultural artifacts throughout the history of cultural text production (from at least Chaucer onwards), is shoes. Elias shows how shoes pervade not only Miller's own texts but also references in the reception of her career. Culturally speaking, shoes are therefore among the most well-worn artifacts, also when academics subject them to analysis when walking through the field of cultural production.

The volume closes with Steen Christiansen's second contribution, which tackles a very recent text by William Gibson, who pioneered the sub-genre of cyberpunk within the field of science fiction. Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* questions what defines us as human, particularly in a fragmented, paranoid, amnesiac or apophenic culture. Christiansen's approach to these issues is again reader and reception oriented, this time utilizing the charting of transtextual phenomena carried out by French theorist Gerard Genette in a number of volumes of textual history and criticism from the 1980s and 90s. Transtextuality is a common term for all that creates links between texts and their readers and between texts and other texts. Christiansen shows how Genette's detailed catalogue of phenomena of intertextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality (and to a lesser degree meta- and paratextuality) can help us read even a text such as Gibson's which endeavours to play games with its readers that go beyond the standard catalogue of postmodern poetics. Christiansen shows first that apparently innocent intertextual games such as quoting and misquoting canonical works can have radically different aesthetic functions according to reader competence and reading protocol applied to such phenomena. *Pattern Recognition* turns out to relate transtextually to other texts as diverse as Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Gibson's own *Neuromancer* and Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. Different readers will of course recognize these patterns of transtextuality to different

degrees. Christiansen utilizes Umberto Eco's notion of the open and the closed text to conceptualize these reading protocols, and concludes radically that Gibson's version of problematizing the postmodern notion of paranoia over the connectedness of everything is by questioning and leaving open the very notion of any purpose or intentionality behind these trans-textual connections. Interpretation may therefore ultimately be redundant, and Gibson may therefore fall in the trap the post-ironists seek to avoid: that of dying of his own textual exhaustion.

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This collection thus ends on an open question applied to an open text. This spirit of openness to approaches is of course no coincidence. The credo of cultural text studies is that any object text can be situated in an interesting context and be given an interesting reading. The wide range of theoretical approaches from New Historicism and literary sociology, over reception aesthetics to close readings shows the interdisciplinary and eclectic method cultural text studies must embrace to make texts relevant in a contemporary research and teaching environment. Sometimes Shakespeare must be stippled and stroked, Ireland imagined as Gaelic piglets, Martians produced out of thin air, silk shoes donned in muddy fields, and patterns recognized where none exist, all in order to make fresh research done and the communication of its findings to reluctant students possible. Should we succeed, as I am confident we will, that would be no small accomplishment.

Remediating Shakespeare: The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery

JØRGEN RIBER CHRISTENSEN

The birth of a new cultural publicness in the 18th century in Britain meant a changed relationship between audience and text, between text and its form of distribution and also of the media and form of the text itself. The place of consumption of the text itself developed from a public place, e.g. the theatre, with collective reception through a public place with individual reception, e.g. the gallery to a private place with individual reception, i.e. the home. This narrowing of the world of the text has its paradoxical counterpart in a widening relationship between the author or textual producer and his or her audience. By and large the artistic producer moved from a well-defined connection to a patron to an obscure and impersonal relationship to an anonymous mass market.

This general movement is reflected in the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, which opened in London in 1789 and exhibited a large number of specially commissioned oil paintings with scenes from Shakespeare's plays, until it closed in 1805. Engraved prints were made from the paintings, and they were sold to the general public at reasonable prices in very large quantities. This migration of Shakespeare's plays from the theatres over oil painting to prints can be regarded as remediation. This remediation not only changed the reception of Shakespeare's texts and their form. Also the media changed. The remediation or reproduction of oil painting with its soft tones, colors and gradients was improved by a new delicate engraving technique, the stipple process, which was promoted in England and used by one of the Shakespeare Gallery engravers, Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815) at the close of the eighteenth century.

The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery and its publication of Shakespeare prints, but also its subsequent financial failure in 1805, reflect a new paradigm of the production and consumption of culture. This change of paradigms is basically one from aristocratic feudal publicness with a system of patrons to a market system with the new mercantile middle classes as consumers of culture. Already before Boydell poets such as Dryden (1631–1700) and Pope (1688–1744) were gradually starting to look for less dependence on the patronage of the aristocracy. They used a system of subscribed editions, where buyers of their books subscribed to paying in advance. The first seven pages of James Thomson's (1700–1748) *The Seasons* from 1730 consist of a list of both noble and bourgeois subscribers (Thomson 1979). For instance The Right Hon. George Dodington Esq. had ordered no less than twenty books, it appears. Public subscription is a bridge between aristocratic patronage and the free culture market of the general public.

The new commercial system of artistic distribution and consumption meant the rise of new forms of mass publication and new technologies. It also meant new themes, genres and subjects of art. In the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery there was a preference for a certain content of the Shakespearean scenes reproduced that bore witness to a new kind of sensibility, and which had its own melodramatic style.

The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery and its History

A gallery with an exhibition of paintings with scenes from the plays of Shakespeare opened in London in June 1789 at 52 Pall Mall. The large building had a façade in copper; over the entrance there was a relief of Shakespeare with the Dramatic Muse to his right and the Genius of Painting to his left. The first year 34 paintings were displayed; this number grew each year so that when the gallery closed in 1805 there were 167 paintings by 33 different artists.

The initiator and owner of the gallery was "Alderman" John Boydell (1719–1804). He became the Mayor of London in 1790. The idea for the gallery arose at a dinner in November 1786. Boydell and his nephew Josiah were printers and publishers of engraved prints. John Boydell had grown rich as a publisher of books and prints that were sold in Britain and in France. Boydell and his nephew hit upon the idea of publishing a fine illustrated edition of Shakespeare like the ones the French had published with their most celebrated authors. This idea grew into not only publishing such an edition, but also opening a Shakespeare gallery where the most

famous artists of the time would be commissioned into painting scenes and characters from Shakespeare's plays. First the paintings were to be exhibited at the gallery with an entrance fee, and then prints were to be engraved based on the paintings. The painters employed were among others: Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Romney, James Barry, Thomas Stothard, James Northcote, Benjamin West, Johann Heinrich Füssli (Henry Fuseli) and Angelika Kauffmann. Two sets of engravings were produced: a large one for a picture-only edition, and a smaller one for an illustrated text edition. The editions, which were based on public subscriptions, appeared between 1791 and 1805, when a large or folio edition was published with 100 prints. However, there were no profits, as the war with France in 1793 put a stop to export for the lucrative European market. In comparison it may be mentioned that in 1786 exports of Boydell's English prints to France valued 200,000 pounds annually. The expenditure of the Shakespeare paintings and print production was too large, over £100,000, as Boydell was magnanimous with his contracts with painters and engravers. He may seem more to be a patron of the arts or a Maecenas than an acute businessman in this respect. Sale of individual prints and proofs was at a price of one guinea each.

When the firm had lost almost its whole capital the Boydells managed to get permission from the House of Commons to dispose of the gallery through a national lottery. The Boydell firm issued 22,000 three-guinea tickets. The holder of a ticket received a Shakespeare print from the enormous stores of the gallery. At John Boydell's death in December 1804 all the tickets had been sold. The winner of the lottery, who turned out to be a Mr. Tassie, won the entire gallery and its contents. The still enterprising nephew, Josiah Boydell, offered Mr. Tassie £10,000 for the gallery; but Tassie refused and auctioned the 167 oil paintings at Christy's where they only fetched around £6,000. The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery ceased to exist in 1805, and around 40 of the paintings still exist today.

Marketing Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Gallery is an example of what happened to the societal reception of culture and art in the historical movement from a largely feudal and aristocratic societal formation towards a bourgeois one. Painters were beginning to be loosened from patronage and had to function in a mass market. Here the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery is a curious example of a transitory stage, where paintings were exhibited publicly, but the pub-

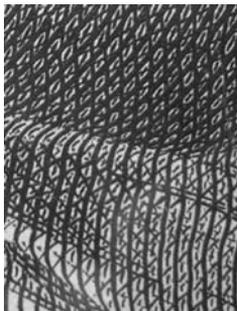
lic had to pay a fee in order to enter this part of the cultural sphere. An art gallery with an entrance fee may be considered part market and part exhibition; but a more obvious consequence of art being produced for a mass market is to turn the production of art into mass production, and here Boydell's trade as a printer is very apt. John Boydell combined the Shakespeare dramas and original and unique oil paintings in a gallery with mass-produced prints of the oil paintings. This complex transaction and remediation may be viewed as an early step in the process that liberated art and the artist from the ties of patronage, but this freedom meant an insecure position in an anonymous mass market, which was still immature at Boydell's time. The subsequent bankruptcy of Boydell's firm is a consequence of a market that was not quite ready for this kind of artistic production, just as Boydell's innovative project may seem understandably unfocused.

A consequence of the development of a mass market for pictorial art was the development of engraving and printing techniques. In the case of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery especially two techniques were used. Francesco Bartolozzi developed the stipple or 'dotted' process which could give gradients, soft tones and shades and which was relatively fast to execute for the trained engraver. The gradients and soft look of stipple engravings were a translation of the colors and chiaroscuro of oil paintings into the grayscale shades of engravings. Furthermore, copper plates engraved with the stipple technique could stand for thousands of prints before the plates were worn out. It was not until around 1820 that steel plates were used for engraving. More impressions can be made from steel plates than from copper plates, but copper produces finer results. When working with the stipple technique the engraver hammers fine dots into the copper plate, so that dots or flecks create the shapes in the image instead of lines doing it. By varying the size and proximity of the dots of the stipple technique it was possible for the engraver to accomplish the most delicate gradations of tone. As recorded in Joseph Farrington's diary he and another of the Boydell-engravers, Robert Smirke, had discussed the relative merits of the two engraving techniques, stipple and line. Smirke had remarked that that "the excellence of stroke [or line] engraving consisted of the difficulty of execution and... dotted [or stipple] engraving produced a better imitation of color and effect" (Joseph Farrington's diary (1793–1831). Typescript deposited in the print room of the British Museum. Quoted by Frederick Burwick, in Pape and Burwick, 1996: 19).

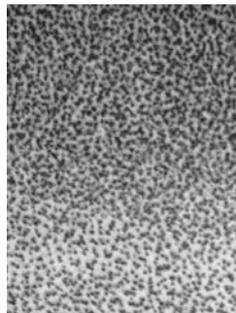
Usually, however, a mixture of stipple engraving and line engraving was used in the Shakespeare prints, just as they had some initial etching. Where the ink in stipple engraving is deposited in the small holes or specks in the copperplate, in line engraving the ink is deposited in long lines or furrows incised into the copperplate. In contrast to stipple engraving line engraving is precise and has sharp outlines of the shapes of the design. Where line engraving has an identity of its own, stipple engraving approaches other techniques such as etching or as mentioned above oil painting, though stipple engraving usually is monochrome. If the precise and well-defined outlines are to be softened or if large areas are to be filled in line engraving they are filled with a minute pattern of dot- and especially lozenge-shapes.

Line engraving uses a technique that has the narrative and aesthetic qualities of precision, sharpness and economy of its expressions. Sharp outlines may be the effect that is desirable. As such line engraving is a first-class technique of its own, and stipple engraving may lose these qualities in its attempt to emulate the characteristics of oil painting. So there is no intrinsic reason that stipple engraving should supplant line engraving, unless it is oil painting that is remediated and that it is the remediation itself that is decisive in the choice of engraving technique.

When the whole image has been cut into the metal plate, the plate is inked and then wiped clean on its surface. The ink fills the channel or holes cut by the engraver and the plate is then passed through a printing press having a damp sheet of paper pressed into the cut lines, so that the ink is absorbed from the furrows or holes in the plate into paper. Printing processes where the ink is not deposited on the surface of the plates but in incisions in the plates is called intaglio printing.



Line engraving with contours of dot-and-lozenge



Stipple engraving with soft tones and atmosphere

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" from 1934 Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) wrote about how mechanical reproduction technologies had made it possible to distribute works of art in large numbers. Before such technologies as printing and photography works of art such as oil paintings had been made manually, and they were unique and original. Some works of art such as frescoes were even tied physically to a specific location, and their production was tied to a specific time and age. This had the consequence that art was the domain of relatively few people, i.e. the upper classes, but it also meant that the act of reception of a work of art could produce what Benjamin calls aura. Aura is the ability of a unique work of art to contain its history in itself including its time and place, so that the beholder may experience the history of the authentic and unique work of art during the process of reception. This history may be seen in the many tiny traces of patina and age, and perhaps one may experience its provenance. Aura is a form of transhistoricity, and it has an emotional effect on the beholder.

Die Echtheit einer Sache ist der Inbegriff alles von Ursprung her an ihr Tradierbaren, von ihrer materiellen Dauer bis zu ihrer geschichtlichen Zeugenschaft. Da die letztere auf der ersteren fundiert ist, so gerät in der Reproduktion, wo die erstere sich dem Menschen entzogen hat, auch die letztere: die geschichtliche Zeugenschaft der Sache ins Wanken. Freilich nur diese; was aber dergestalt ins Wanken gerät, das ist die Autorität der Sache.

Man kann, was hier ausfällt, im Begriff der Aura zusammenfassen und sagen: was im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit des Kunstwerks verkümmert, das ist seine Aura. Der Vorgang ist symptomatisch; seine Bedeutung weist über den Bereich der Kunst hinaus. Die Reproduktionstechnik, so ließe sich allgemein formulieren, löst das Reproduzierte aus dem Bereich der Tradition ab. Indem sie die Reproduktion vervielfältigt, setzt sie an die Stelle seines einmaligen Vorkommens sein massenweises.¹ (Benjamin, 1974: 477)

¹ The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence (English translation by Harry Zohn).

Negatively seen mechanically reproduced works of art negate history and tradition, but positively seen mechanical reproduction is a reformulation of the reception of works of art in a popular and democratic direction as it to some extent is the history of the elitist upper-class culture and its history that are leveled by the reproduction techniques, which literally reduce the number of codes of its sources and cultural products during the process of reproduction so that originality and authenticity are translated with accessibility for many. But as Benjamin points out, this translation is not direct and complete. Mechanical reproduction always reduces the number of codes so that the work of art is simplified.

There are two versions of a scene from *King Lear*. One is an original oil painting hanging in a museum in London (James Barry, (1741–1806): *King Lear Weeping over the Dead Body of Cordelia*, 1786–8, oil on canvas, 269,2 x 367 cm, Tate Gallery, London), where an alarm will go off if a visitor gets too close to the painting. The painting may be seen in a digital reproduction at *Tate Online* (see references list). The other version is a print made after the painting and printed in thousands of copies (James Barry, *King Lear Weeping over the Dead Body of Cordelia*, 1792, copperplate engraved by Francis Legat, 49,5 x 62,5 cm).



James Barry, *King Lear Weeping over the Dead Body of Cordelia*, 1792, copperplate engraved by Francis Legat, 49,5 x 62,5 cm.

This print could be bought cheaply (at one guinea) and put on the wall at home with four pins. However, not only authenticity and aura are lost. The

most obvious loss of codes is colors, but also details are lost, and the size of the image has been reduced considerably. Strangely enough no contemporary critics complained about the loss of color-coding, but then again the translation of the image into grayscale may not actually be a loss, but rather a coding that is concentrated and economic.

The predominance of stipple engraving in the Boydell Gallery is an indication that an attempt was made to partially overcome some of the consequences of mechanical reproduction, as the stipple engravings sought to imitate the oil painting originals or sources. At the same time the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery sought to keep the better of two worlds. It exhibited original oil paintings, which drew on the rich Shakespearian history and tradition, and it made these oil paintings available to the public both in their original form at the gallery and in the cheap and popular form of prints. The fact that the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery catered for both the auratic and non-auratic taste may be explained by the gallery's own historical position when a societal paradigm was shifting in Europe from an aristocratic world towards a society dominated by the middle classes.

Genres

In 1768 The Royal Academy of Arts was founded, and its first president was Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was one of the artists of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. Academism within art history may be seen as an aspect of the strict neo-classicist normative view of culture. A hierarchy of genres goes back to Aristotle, but through the 17th-century French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture with its Chancellor Le Brun and The Royal Academy of Arts in London sought to establish a set of rules, which also defined genre and placed them in a hierarchy. History painting was at the top. Reynolds writes about this genre in his *Discourses on Art* (1769–91), of which he gave one each year to the students of the Academy:

[A] painter of history shows the man by showing his actions. A painter must compensate the natural deficiencies of his art. He has but one sentence to utter, but one moment to exhibit. He cannot, like the poet or historian, expatiate, and impress the mind with great veneration for the character of the hero or saint he represents, though he lets us know at the same time that the saint was deformed, or the hero lame. The painter has no other means of giving an idea of the dignity of the mind, but by that external appearance which grandeur of thought does generally, though not always, impress on the countenance, and by that correspondence of figure to sentiment and