

**CULTURE, MEDIA, THEORY, PRACTICE**  
*Perspectives*

**Edited by Ben Dorfman**

**Series editor Jens F. Jensen**

CULTURE, MEDIA, THEORY, PRACTICE  
Perspectives  
Media & Cultural Studies 3

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# CULTURE, MEDIA, THEORY, PRACTICE - PERSPECTIVES

## *Introduction*

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The questions of cultural and media theory and analysis are always self-reflective. That is to say that if we accept the relatively common sense assertion theory and analysis are the central tasks of culture and media studies, one is never exempted from the questions of what one is attempting to do and why. To offer an example from my own intellectual background, the opening of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927/1962) expresses the situation well: the question of being, asserts Heidegger, "has been forgotten" (21). In other words, the most obvious questions elude us. Nonetheless, we are never able to completely escape their presence. In speaking theoretically and analytically, then, the conditions under which one speaks and the goals driving those articulations in the first place are always present: what are cultural and media theory and analysis, and what are they intended to do? Indeed, we might articulate these questions along a four-fold division: what does it mean to theorize culture, what does it mean to theorize media, what does it mean to practice cultural analysis and what does it mean to practice media analysis?

Now, as a point of qualification, the keen reader will notice that these questions are organized around two essential axioms: (1) that there is a distinction between cultural theory and analysis and media theory and analysis and (2) that there is a distinction between theory and analysis in a general sense - i.e., that, regardless of the topic, the questions of theory and analysis should be posed separately. These axioms are in fact heuristic. As Gilles Deleuze (1972/1977) pointed out, theory and practice are both "relays" to one another, with each exposing the other's limits (206). Similarly, a row of scholars, from Marshall McLuhan (1964/2002) to Manuel Castells (1996-98), have identified culture and media as intrinsically bound to one another. Indeed, these specific scholars tell us that, especially in the age of globalization, both are essential for the various boundary crossings necessary to create visions of the self that extend beyond the traditional identity categories of nation, class, race or gender. What we are saying, then, is that there

is no natural distinction between media and culture, nor one between theory and analysis. Rather the very paring of those concepts - culture and media on one hand and theory and analysis on the other - reflects those concepts' involvement in a circuit or continuum that rejoins them as bound problematics. Simply put, to discuss culture in the absence of media is impossible, as is to discuss theory in the absence of analysis, and vice versa.

These qualifications and complications, however, do not prevent the fact that cultural and media theory and analysis represent locales of general concern in the contemporary humanistic environment, and locales that are and perhaps *must be* accessed by the student of culture and media on heuristically separate bases. The reasons for this are multiple: the increasing presence of media in our everyday lives - especially on a mass scales and in electronic forms - the increasing subtlety of media's presence on such an "everyday" level and the need for flexible analytical categories such as the "cultural" to explain experiences in contemporary "global contexts" all provide us with reasons to break down the totalities of the culture-media and theory-practice continuums into smaller and potentially more comprehensible units. Indeed, in the environment of the early twenty-first century, the demand for this move is perhaps stronger than ever. Our view of the pressing and important changing dynamics of geo-political power, for example, comes via the channels of media, new and old - from the print media to television ("old media") to the internet ( "new media") and, perhaps quintessentially, the print media *on* the internet (e.g., *The New York Times on the Web* - a blending of new and old media) and then again reviewed by television (e.g., Aaron Brown's "look at the headlines" on CNN's "Newsnight" - a conglomeration of many media styles). Nonetheless, we increasingly hear that changing geo-political dynamics have less to do with nations or even "societies" than "culture" - entities that surely coincide to no small extent with nations and societies, but also have the potential to break nations apart (e.g., the 1991-95 Yugoslav War) and bring together societies that exist on opposite sides of national borderlines (e.g., conceptions of "the West," or an "international" community of Islam).<sup>1</sup> Therein, our four heuristic questions of "what does it mean to theorize media," "what does it mean to theorize culture," "what does it mean to practice media analysis" and "what does it mean to practice cultural analysis" are designed to provide lines of access into the cul-

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1 Perhaps the most famous (and troubling) of these proclamations was Samuel Huntington's (1996) assertion of a "clash of civilizations."

ture-media and theory-practice continuums in ways that are comprehensible. And, indeed, these are the four questions around which this volume was organized. Researchers associated with the Culture and Media Studies program (CMS) at Aalborg University were posed these questions, and asked to answer them as directly as possible out of their own fields of expertise. Thus, the driving concern behind this volume is, within the context of a functioning research environment organized around problematics in culture and media, what are the differing views of cultural and media theory and analysis that environment presents, what are the views of the *objects* with which cultural and media theory and analysis concern themselves - namely, culture and media - and what thus becomes the nature of that research environment, or its orientation within a more globalized view of culture and media studies?

The responses in this volume are as diverse as the intellectual lineages informing them. That is to say that, using a slightly "older" vocabulary, the "schools of thought" at work in CMS at Aalborg are varied: Bourdieuan sociology, Derridian deconstruction, Jakobsonian linguistics, Labovian sociolinguistics, Faircloughian discourse analysis, Zygmunt Baumann's critical sociology, hermeneutic existentialism and even problematics in historiography and cognitive science. Here, I would simply make an editorial remark and state that such a diversity of influences is the bread and butter of research; the assertion of multiple, received historical perspectives on culture and media that might be assessed, brought into conversation with one another and developed in "conversation" leaves those perspectives as locales providing reasoned choices for the student of culture and media. This gives this volume one of its primary characteristics: the assertion that the best pedagogy in culture and media provides more questions than answers, and that an engagement with basic theoretical and analytical propositions is perhaps the strongest tool in opening such questions.

Nonetheless, such openness becomes problematic to the extent that we are left to wonder what, in the face of such open-endedness, becomes the *program* of Culture and Media Studies in the research environment of Aalborg University? In other words, in the face of open questioning - and, despite the postmodern questioning of intellectual rigidity - what becomes the "training" one receives in a culture and media studies "discipline?" As editor of this volume, I would assert that the answers to these questions come on two levels. First, the "discipline" one receives in CMS at Aalborg is an exposure to essential theoretical and analytical questioning itself. By bringing together multiple intellectual lineages and engaging them in conversation with one another, the faculty associated with the CMS program de facto assert that

such critical and open-ended dialogues are essential to engaging culture and media both as academic discourses as well as social and historical "realities." And, in fact, this becomes a major epistemological claim: an understanding of culture and media means an understanding of its discourses, or the range of theoretical and analytical possibilities associated with the ideas of culture and media. In such an understanding, goes this claim, one gains insight into the cognitive options available for the student of culture, or the modes by which one might begin to *think* culture and media as problems.

Such an understanding, however, means that the "discipline" of CMS at Aalborg is self-generating. This stands as the second level of response to the problem of the "training" one receives in the program. That is to say that, in bringing the multiple options involved in thinking culture and media into relief and then bringing them into conversation with one another, the precise dynamics of CMS at Aalborg emerge under their own momentum. Again, from my position as editor, I would define that momentum to this point in two ways:

### **1. A questioning of the "postmodern paradigm"**

By a "questioning of the postmodern paradigm," I mean not postmodernism as something that questions "reality," prevents the making of "statements" or that radically relativizes "truth," but rather as an ontological position. In other words, the effect of many texts classified as "postmodern" is to posit reality as always in its own erasure, or providing conditions that destabilize themselves.<sup>2</sup> Such a position suggests an ultimate transitoriness to analysis. Within the selection of texts presented in this book, culture and media objects are generally portrayed as having greater durability. The tools of analysis are not imagined as somehow undermining the objects of analysis, or leading to their dissolution or negation.

### **2. The assertion of theoretical and analytical possibilities**

By the "assertion of theoretical and analytical possibilities," we are making an assertion that is related to the questioning of the postmodern paradigm. In general terms, the assertion is that not only do we analyze objects with some permanence, and that analysis is not an essentially invasive task, but that methodological deployments should be subject to critique because

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2 Major texts in this regard would be, for example, Derrida (1967/1995), Foucault (1969/1977) and Lyotard (1983/1988).

methodology should produce results. In other words, analysis has objects, and while maintaining validity as a question in itself, it maintains that validity in order to produce utilizable knowledge.

Now, it should be said that these are not necessarily unusual positions. Many research institutions, if not fields in the humanities in general, are by hook or by crook casting themselves beyond the postmodern paradigm. The titles of the modes of thought "beyond postmodernism" are various: critical realism, cognitive science, ethnomethodology, various stripes of discourse analysis, reflexive sociology and concepts of "new cultural history."<sup>3</sup> However, what gives CMS a great power amidst the larger shifts within the humanities is a deep and abiding respect for the postmodern challenge. Fashioned in the tradition of the best features of Aalborg University as an at-large institution, the essays in *Culture, Media, Theory, Practice: Perspectives* pulsate with a desire to make culture and media theory and analysis matter and do justice, both on intellectual and social scales. This demands a serious encounter with the ontological - which postmodernism provides - and a continued proximity to its questioning.

Clearly, the precise modes and style of the "encounters with the ontological" presented here are multiple. We have, for example, several essays that betray their origins in the Aalborg commitment to knowledge that "matters": direct, informational and no-nonsense in terms of their attempt to generate knowledge that produces positive results. These essays, of which we might especially point to Peter Allingham's, Anders Horsbøl's and Lene Yding Pedersen's, all give us a distinct view of the culture and media researcher making the theoretical deployment. Horsbøl does this by outlining the distinct theoretical options available in his own research area of critical discourse analysis. Foucauldian or Faircloughian, asserts Horsbøl, discourse analysis is charged to maintain a critique of social power at the same time that it is bound to *learn* from that critique, or put it to use in concrete, utilizable social analysis. Allingham and Pedersen make distinct applications of approaches in their own fields - Pedersen critical and cultural studies and Allingham semiotics and cognitive studies. These applications are made to distinct cultural and media objects - Pedersen's to Yann Martell's popular novel *Life of Pi* and Allingham to advertisements such as those for Elizabeth

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3 See, for example, Lopez and Potter (2001), Ross (2004), Button (2001), Jørgensen and Phillips (2001), Bourdieu (1992) and Hunt and Biersack (1989).

Arden make-ups. Pedersen's concern is with the connection between the money and cultural economies in a Bourdieuan fashion - is the field of literary production in contemporary culture, she asks, pushing us closer to the aesthetic of a "dream society?" Allingham's concern is that while contemporary advertising exudes a semiotic order, we recognize that order only functions in relation to pre-linguistic cognitive processes. This gives us a matrix that helps us to understand the instantaneity and deception of contemporary aesthetics.

Within this volume, however, Ove Christensen, Christian Jantzen, Steen Christiansen and Ben Dorfman take different tacts in relation to the problematics of culture and media, choosing to make more distinctly methodological statements - i.e., they make theory "as such" their point of entry into the theory-analysis continuum. Ove Christensen advocates a pragmatic encounter with semiotics, cognitive science and, perhaps primarily, Jakobsonian paradigms of communicative "senders" and "receivers." The importance of this is the diversity of demands in specific media and textual-analytical situations - what analytical tools do we need, and what produces explanations of the textual and communicative situations in which we find ourselves? Jantzen (perhaps along with Allingham) is the clearest advocate for cognitive science in this volume. In a stylistically adventurous piece, he makes us aware that in the context of the humanities, it is the great traditions of social theory that cognitive science competes against. Moreover, he asserts that the event of culture is related to biologically-based cognitive evolution and not the development of "Spirit", "context" or "consciousness" in a philosophical or speculative sense. Steen Christiansen reveals the complexities of the theory/analysis connection, taking the classic stance that the two must always be thought at the same time. Finally, Dorfman advocates the development of a "historical approach" to cultural theory and the development of what he calls a "historical phenomenology" of the idea of culture - the assertion that the historical past of a concept provides the dimensions of the possibility of their thought in the present.

Indeed, it is worth pointing out that the "historical approach" to cultural studies reveals a unique set of influences in the CMS program: questions of historiography and the relationship of philosophy of history to cultural studies. To this extent, we are honored to include Benjamin C. Sax's article on the essential approaches to the subject of "cultural history" - a topic which, by way of the historians Jakob Burkhardt and Johann Huizinga, represents one of the oldest traditions with the pale of cultural research. Indeed, the historicity of cultural studies is important for Sax as, in his view, it itself reflects not only its own evolution but also that of related concepts such as

"world", "truth," "text" and even "history" itself. Sax's historical approach is accompanied by related thematizations in articles by Tadeusz Rachwal, Jørgen Riber Christensen and Mikael Vetner. Rachwal - who, like Sax, is another friend of CMS whose work we are pleased to be able to include- suggests that repeated and differing engagements with the idea of culture give us its historical "echo," or a way in which we never stop hearing older configurations of the idea. This historicity, however, has a classically post-structural form: "rootless," signficatory and producing its own being through the play of language. Not dissimilarly, J.R. Christensen tells us that "grand narratives", or great stories, maintain an essential relationship with historical consciousness and form a second level of view in our intake of electronic visual media - a "pastiche" of texts and signification giving us senses of historically derived meaning. Finally, Vetner makes an invocation of the Foucauldian concept of "episteme," or historical arrangements of knowledge, in an attempt to arrange historically formed fields of meaning in relation to technical objects on a semiotic basis. This becomes another contribution to the idea that culture and media are not simply present events, but have pasts and discourses whose present is informed by that past, as well as subtle - potentially even subliminal - senses of the past at work.

At this point, however, we might identify a departure in the CMS "style." This is on two scales. First, Bent Sørensen provides us with the only true *essay* of the book in the classic sense of the term. Written in elegant, autobiographical style, Sørensen relates the psychic travails of the cultural worker in the literary style - *observateur* in the style of Montaigne, yet haunted by uncanniness, a la Kerouac or Salinger. Interestingly, Torben Vestergaard's style is also not without its wry smile. Coming out of socio-linguistics, Vestergaard's analysis of journalistic media as concerned with two noticeable recent news events betrays the power of language games - languages games whose functioning is central to media communication, and which we must comprehend by way of a reconception of critique in a manner that brings it closer to description. Indeed, Sørensen and Vestergaard's contributions are highly differentiated essays in terms of both their form and content. However, both encourage a gentle humor in relation to cultural and linguistic observation, and significant, if perhaps opposing, views on the role and position of the culture and media observer.

Indeed, we might further the theme that departures in style among the contributions to this volume are accompanied by departures in content. That is to say that it is important to note that, even among thematically linked articles, approaches to given topics can be diverse. Rachwal and Jørgen Riber Christensen present historical knowledge as a matter of reading

"underneath" the surfaces we give it. Sax, however, presents historical knowledge as a more of a question of typologies of approaches taken to the cultural past within the humanities, and a hermeneutical self-reflexivity that might offer grounds to accord history pride of place among humanistic approaches to cultural investigation. Presenting another example of "linked" yet "differentiated" thematics, Jantzen posits knowledge as generated in specific situations played out in the present; the cognitive mind, he argues, goes to work in semiotic contexts in the now out of its specifically biologically developed capacities. Dorfman, however, posits that the knowledges of the past have something of a continuing life of their own - this by way of the present's reliance on ideas of the past, or "intellectual history" in a more or less traditional ("canonical") sense. And, cutting across different groupings of articles, we see that Pedersen, Vetner, Vestergaard and Allingham present noticeably different perspectives on how one relates to cultural and media objects -sociologically (Pedersen), semiotically (Vetner), through a semiotics enmeshed with the cognitive (Allingham) and by way of syntax and semantics (Vestergaard). Horsbøl, Ove Christensen and Steen Christensen provide us with similar questions concerning methodology - is methodology a question of disciplinary practices, as posed by Horsbøl, the institutional situatedness of theory, as posed by Steen Christensen or the pragmatic demands of analytical situations, as posed by Ove Christensen? Finally, we have to recognize Sørensen's posing of the question of style: in the end, are not cultural studies always a personal affair, demanding their expression as such?

In the final analysis, then, it may be that CMS, or at least *Culture, Media, Theory, Practice: Perspectives*, is "rhizomatic" - a term connected to the intellectual milieu (postmodernism) many CMS associates are attempting to move beyond, but with respect. The rhizome is "diverse forms" from "ramified surface extension in all directions" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/1987, 5). As I think is the case with the chapters of this book, we have presentations of unity and diversity that, in accordance with the diverse nature of these ideas, give Culture and Media Studies at Aalborg the dimension of what it is, and give *us* a sense of its uniqueness and its value. By their very nature, cultural and media theory and analysis provide a milieu of folding and unfolding relevances: the "human" and its environment, expression and "thought", form and "content," text and "context." These are relevances that, in fact, make cultural and media theory and analysis more than discourses - they rather make cultural and media theory and analysis discourses that must be engaged in terms of their content such that we might think those things that come under the headings of "the cultural" or related to "media." Therein, the

problem of surveying the fields of cultural and media theory and analysis is to present their "ramifications" and "extensions" - the dimensions of their "rhizome." This book represents such an attempt in the context of CMS at Aalborg.

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**"WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THEORIZE CULTURE?"**



# THEORY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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## INTRODUCTION: THE POVERTY OF CULTURAL THEORY

In his novel *Bouvard et Pecuchet* (1881), Gustave Flaubert tells the story about two clerks who, in a typical nineteenth century fashion, attempt to compile an inventory of all the world's nonsense after having become prosperous. Unfortunately, the author died in 1880 before his two heroes could carry out their deed, so the novel ended up being published posthumously and unfinished. I cannot help thinking that cultural analysis would have benefited greatly from Bouvard and Pecuchet's endeavors. It would have been a work of titanic dimensions; the two gentlemen would have produced a grand *oeuvre* of *idées reçues* that should be extinct, but have nevertheless been passed down and handed over as the safe haven of lazy thought.

In fact, I see cultural analysis as founded on nonsense. A set of curious and antiquated ideas about human being and society makes it difficult to pinpoint the domain of cultural studies. Indeed, the subject matter of cultural studies is hardly ever precisely defined, and the methods that the discipline uses are often borrowed randomly from other disciplines. As a domain, culture is "everything"- "the whole way of life" (Benedict 1961), or "that complex whole" (Tylor 1903), as put in the tradition of cultural anthropology. For that reason, it apparently goes without saying that the subject matter under investigation ("a cultural product") should somehow be related to that whole. *How* to justify this relation seems less important. Instead, the cultural scientist eagerly engages with the *meanings* supposedly generated by the cultural product in relation to "that complex whole." Especially in its diluted versions of poststructuralism, the method mostly looks like a blend of free association and the Kula exchanges, which Malinowski (1922) found among the Trobrianders in his own time - except that the mussel shells have been exchanged for French "post"-thinkers or Franco-American cultivators of "theory."

If one challenges the culturalist and asks him or her how the meaning of the cultural phenomenon is embedded in reality, he or she will typically point to a broader "socio-cultural framework" in which the phenomenon

and its meaning(s) are entrenched, have emerged from, and/or refer to. However, it is exactly the terms "socio-cultural" (or "social and cultural") and "frame" (or "context") which, perhaps, make the word compound the haziest term within humanities today. What does "frame" mean? And what does "the social" stand for? Exactly at what level do we find "the cultural?" Which connection or relation does the dash in "the socio-cultural" or the nexus "and" in "the social and cultural" imply? The fact that these questions are left unanswered does not seem detrimental to the popularity of the term. In my opinion, this indicates that we are not really dealing with an analytical concept, but rather with a metaphysical *Letztbegründung*. So why, one might mockingly ask, are we not talking about the "culto-social" instead?

The poverty of cultural theory consists precisely in the fact that it abstains from systematic investigations into the causal or dialectical relation between phenomenon and reality, and instead hypostatizes the fact that such a relation exists. Thus, cultural analyses take it for granted that human acts, human artifacts and the meanings that we invest in them somehow reflect a deeper meaning. Such analyses, whose purpose is to inform us about that 'deeper meaning' are, in short, based on the implicit theoretical assumption that there is a system of shared presumptions, which supposedly structure everyday-life and its discourses. This assumption, originating from sociology and anthropology, functions as an implicit cultural theory in the humanities: i.e., as a widespread, mainstream conception that is taken for granted in many actual analyses. Its popularity is not least due to the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, whose concepts of culture stress the shared social meanings and collective ways of making sense of the world.<sup>1</sup>

In the following I argue that this "implicit cultural theory" is wrong. I will suggest that one cannot presume that there are shared presumptions, which structure actions and their meanings. Furthermore, culture should be clearly distinguished from "the social" as well as from "society." "The social" and

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1 The founding father of Cultural Studies, Raymond Williams, explicitly defined culture in a culturalist manner, e.g. "as a constitutive social process, creating specific and different 'ways of life'" (Williams 1977: 19). Stuart Hall, who blended Williams' ideas with French (post)structuralism defines culture in close relationship to society: as "the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society" (1996: 439). For a further critique of these modern culturalist positions, see also my reading (Jantzen 2004) of Jensen (1988), which is perhaps the most eloquent and balanced defense of culturalism in the Danish humanities.

"the cultural" work at different levels, which, at least in a scientific context, should be held out from one another. My own argument is based on three assumptions, or axioms, if you will, which I present in the following.

#### FIRST AXIOM: TEXT AS THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

As a result of the parceling out of universal science into main fields and, later, increasingly specialized subfields that has taken place since the seventeenth century, it has become a common feature of the human sciences that they examine "text" and "textuality." The research tradition that I am a part of - semiotics - defines "text" as a finite structure of signification. A text depends on the coherence of its elements, which, exactly *qua* structural coherence, distinguish this text from other texts and other objects. Each text has a border against other objects, i.e., it has a limited extension of the text. The elements may consist of the same or of different types of signs: they can be linguistic, visual, auditive, tactile, etc... Since the 1970s, there has been discussion about "the extended text concept" in order to encapsulate artifacts, which are characterized by non-linguistic signs or are composed of elements from different types of signs. Thus, the extended text concept, at least in principle, embraces all artifacts, if they are viewed in the light of signification.

Inasmuch as signs constitute texts, Morris' (1938) heuristic model of the three semiotic levels is right at hand for understanding the nature of a text. Morris thinks that signs are characterized by syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects. While syntax ensures the coherence of the text and marks its outer limits, semantics ensures the systematic relation between form and content that guarantees the text's reference to a text-external reality. Pragmatics is essentially the text's effect on its users.

The "implicit cultural theory" as described in the introduction has some obvious problems with textuality. "Culture" is perceived as the text's structure (syntax), the text's meaning (semantics) or the context in which the text emerges or to which it refers, respectively. The confusion is carried even further when the limited artifact (the text's syntax), its broader meaning (the text's semantic) and its context are all referred to as "culture." When "culture" is "everything" it is, logically speaking, nothing at all - or just a big mish-mash. In relation to my second axiom, I therefore limit culture to the *effect* of the text (not its meaning). This means that culture is neither an innate quality of the text nor a determining factor prior to the text. It is neither text nor context. Culture is a specific consequence in and of the text. Culture is not something that exists out there independent of our acts and thoughts. Instead it is something that we do or bring about while engaging in social life.

SECOND AXIOM: THE SUBJECT MATTER OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS IS SITUATIONS

Since the term "cultural analysis" found its way into Danish universities in the beginning of the 1980s as a consequence of the emerging interest in "popular culture," all sorts of artifacts, ideas and habits have been subjected to cultural analysis. This has led to some times sensational conclusions (or statements), nonetheless, the methods and purposes of the analyses have been remarkably lacking in stringency and reliability - i.e., repetition and control. It has simply been very difficult to find out what exactly the individual analysis actually analyzes (for example, a small detail is taken to be symptomatic of the whole *Zeitgeist*), how the analysis is justified empirically (data), which considerations the choice of methods is based up on, and by which paths the analyst reaches her conclusions and if and how these conclusions might be generalized.

Of course, we all need to find our own academic spaces, and each person probably remains blessed in his or her own beliefs. For my part, I think that it is crucial for cultural analysis in the humanities to ground its practice in the textual sciences. This is to say that cultural analysis must find a "text" to analyze, as opposed to ethnographic and other social science types of cultural studies, who epistemologically are grounded in a "context" based approach. The point of departure for a text based cultural analysis is, thus, a limited and cohesive structure of signification. The kind of cultural analysis that I am interested in takes its point of departure in *interactions* (cf. Jantzen & Frimann Trads 2004). Interactions have the following features:

- They have a beginning and an end - i.e., they are limited and defined
- They have a course or a succession of actions from a beginning to an end, and this course typically shows a certain regularity - a i.e. they are cohesive
- They begin, evolve and end with reference to an external intention: that is, they have meaning

Interactions have syntax - i.e., consistency and coherence. They also have semantics because they refer to situations. By its special way of evolving, the interaction invests the *situation* with a specific meaning. Furthermore, the interaction has an effect: in its course it creates, maintains and changes the *relation* between the inter-actors. The inter-actors can be two or more people, two or more artifacts or people and artifacts. Thus, we can add the following features to the list:

- Interactions are always social: they depend upon the interplay between two or more actors and they affect the actors' future relation to one another;
- Interactions are always situated: they begin because one or more actors have specific intentions; they end when a specific goal (which is not necessarily identical with the initial intention) is achieved by one or more of the actors, and the actual course is dependent on the actors' sensitivities to the situation.

To that extent, I am interested in how people are able to buy bread and gasoline, go to restaurants, watch TV, get married, mate in brothels and many other things. Throughout these interactions, we talk and do various things in relation to other people and the artifacts at hand (utensils, TV-apparatuses, engagement rings, "toys"). All of it is, in one way or another, social in the Weberian sense: intentional actions oriented towards other intentionalities (Weber 1922: 1). The relations that are instigated or maintained are also social: formations of power and dominance, families, friendships, generation gaps and respect for trade conditions take place in such relations. In line with micro-sociology, it is my assumption that interactions and relations create society rather than vice-versa. Interaction leads, with Simmel's words, to *Vergesellschaftung* (1983). Or, to push the point even further, society is a routinized way of having relations to many other actors. On the one hand, society is highly complex because numerous interactions are aggregated at this higher level of abstraction. On the other hand, society is, in line with Tarde (1962), relatively simple because concrete situations at this level are boiled down - are anonymized and objectified - to almost binary oppositions between class, gender, generation, ethnicity, and other groups.

The point of departure for cultural analysis is interactions, which we can analyze as "text." Like relations, interactions are social. They constitute *and* affirm the social bond - but they are *not* culture. But what about situations? Situations can be understood abstractly as metatextual interpretations of interactions, which, in the same abstract manner, can be regarded as a bunch of chitchat and other biophysical processes. The metatextual interpretation frames these processes in such a way that they seem defined, coherent and goal-oriented. As Bateson (1972a) suggests, we might conceive of this frame as a higher level of abstraction than interaction: the frame is a message (it defines the situation) about the message (the interaction).

To offer a sleazy example: from a superficial point of view, the words that the customer and the prostitute exchange in a brothel and the acts in which they engage are not necessarily any different than the bio-physical processes

or the interactions that take place in the conjugal bed. However, the mere fact that both actors are conscious of the specific situation of the interaction (the brothel), enables the customer to demand certain favors which he would never dream of asking from his spouse. Also, he does not need to concern himself with the question "was it really good for her too?" In return, the customer is expected "to get the job done" - and, of course, to pay in advance for the favors. If we look at the text's syntax, the actors' sensitivities to the situation ensure that the interaction runs smoothly, that is, in a way defined by the situation. Beginning and end are adapted to the situation (for example, shorter foreplay, no intimacy afterwards), certain elements are lacking (for example, kissing) whereas other elements are added (for example "exotic cocktails"). As a metatextual frame, the definition of the situation answers the question: "what's going on?" This answer is a hypothesis. As long as the interaction runs smoothly, there is no reason to adjust this hypothesis. In that case, the expectations - of the event as well as of its course and its possible outcomes - are contained in the frame. Thus, the frame can be seen as a mental model containing information about:

- The overall theme, meaning and intention of the interaction (semantics)
- The regular course of the interaction with a beginning and an end (syntax)
- The relation's distribution of roles between the actors (the pragmatics of the interaction)

Throughout the interaction this information is continuously tested in the form of hypotheses. These are, if necessary, adjusted along the way in order to match the events of the interaction or to open up other reasons for being together. Consequently, the individual actor modifies his or her behavior in order to test a new hypothesis. If the customer in the brothel begins to see the prostitute as a girlfriend, the original hypothesis is adjusted (for example, the distribution of roles). Such a situation would probably limit the realm of interaction in bed and lead to other, often mistaken, expectations towards the emotional engagement of the prostitute.

The point is that actual interactions emerge as "text" out of mental models of the text's structure (syntax), theme (semantics) and distribution of roles (pragmatics). These models or metatextual frames are not culture either - they are in line with my third axiom, cognitive frames or scripts based on universal ways of information processing and on individually based experiences. In that sense, they outline the potentiality of the interac-