

# Introduction: Media of Culture and the Culture of the Media

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NATASCHA GENTZ, STEFAN KRAMER

This volume presents a range of explorations in the field of transcultural media studies, which aim to open up new paths for understanding the role of media in the construction of cultural identities. This collection highlights new methodological approaches to the field of transcultural media studies and engages in a transdisciplinary discourse, which is not harmonized, but, in its function as an intriguing dispute, may be characterized as dynamic and hybrid—a discourse that acknowledges differences and examines different cultural systems by disrupting and questioning the normative character and universalist pretensions of one's own view. Therefore, this volume does not privilege a specific culture or media genre, nor a specific academic discipline or methodological approach. Instead, it presents a wide range of topics from different geographical areas, historical periods, and media genres, such as the internet, film, TV, music, and the print industry, and combines historical, textual, and anthropological methodologies. By this, it tests the possibilities of a transcultural and transdisciplinary dialogue in order to map out new territories, borders, and limits for negotiating cultural identities. Two parallel approaches that engage in a dialogue with each other provide the starting point. On the one hand, the focus of the individual essays is on the role of the media in the process of identity construction. Here, the issue is how modern and late modern or postmodern communication media design collective identities and the cultural self-perception of individuals and impart them as, to use Benedict Anderson's term, "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991). On the other hand, the focus is on representations of identities in the media with regard to their sources of authorization, wherever these may come from. The notion of identity, which is omnipresent in cultural studies, is thus not perceived as a monolithic entity; rather, the participants' interests lie in the various forms of production of cultural knowledge and in the process of constructing cultural identities through discursive formations and cultural symbols.

Emerging from various disciplinary and cultural perspectives, the use of concepts such as interculturalism and transculturation in academic discourse attempts to provide universalist explanations for current developments and, thus, to clarify its own scientific position. Since the 1970s, the phenomena and processes of media societies have increasingly gained significance, both as domains of cultural appropriation and as communication parameters of knowledge and meaning. In this way, they have conformed to the post-Fordist developments in the culture industry. Subsequently, the traditional disciplines have begun to deal with the problems arising from such processes—starting with the studies of the Frankfurt School, followed by the research conducted at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and resulting in the now numerous institutes for media studies, intercultural communication, gender, queer, and native studies. This process has been attended by an increasing receptivity to such empirical sciences as economics and empirical sociology.

Numerous studies on intercultural media appropriation or forms of communication have demonstrated that the disciplines have entered into a lively, sometimes controversial, dialogue. But in the process, they have only rarely been able to diminish or dissolve the conventional methodological and epistemological limits of their own fields of research. Increasing disciplinary disputes over authority make the question of a possible transdisciplinary method (proclaimed by every participant in these discourses) ever more salient. Such an approach would have to position itself in relation to the methods of the numerous individual disciplines and would constantly have to take recourse in them.

The concentration on the question of localizing the observer of cultures, on the other hand, has opened the way for a transculturation, or, at least, an intercultural orientation of the sciences—emerging parallel to transdisciplinarity and practically inseparable from it (if one wishes to avoid the trap of an academic colonialism). The issue is even more salient when dealing with “foreign” or “alien” cultural systems, as anyone doing research on ostensibly alien cultures or cultural constructs has to confront the problem that one’s own practices of perceiving and recording data become a subject of discourse. His or her rigid cultural ascriptions always also result in a lack of insight, as recent events and developments in world politics seem to tragically confirm. The mediation and representation of this standpoint constantly signify a further cultural ascription that has more to do with the claim to one’s own authority than with that of the self-conception of the object observed. The concept of “travelling cultures” described by James Clifford (Clifford 1997) thus not only refers to the cultures being studied, but also to the observer’s own standpoint and his or her methodological premises.

Accordingly, a focus on culture or corresponding phenomena is more the product of the culturally specific perspective of the observer than of some scientifically comprehensible “truth” about the object observed, which, in reality,

largely defies any definition imposed on it from the outside. This not only brings into question the ontological status of “culture,” but also of the subject of culture, if this is subjected to a permanent process of contested constructions. Thus, if the subject and the object of cultural analysis are indissolubly intertwined with one another, then universalist definitions of the cultural system must be replaced by a consideration of specific cultural systems. Current processes of global and local cultural circulation may thus be best described as the sum of the various cultural systems and meanings produced from their communicative processes, a sum going far beyond the simple addition of its components. What is needed, then, is a situated analysis of specific transcultural configurations, which takes into account both the complex interplay of social experience and the discursive construction of its reception as well as the observer’s specific point of view in interpreting these data.

A media-oriented cultural anthropology that defines itself as an ethnography of communication, regards culture as a process of mediating and staging the nature of man or of that which human beings in their particular socially-influenced discourses consider to be such. This entails taking into account both the specific everyday processes of the people and communities involved and the material and *dispositif* aspects of their communication in specific situated analysis. The price for this procedure may be the acknowledgment that no system of culture exists at all and that the search for human (or technological) universals, and thus for a unified “nature of human culture,” still the aim of much research in this field (and in any case underlying the strategies of the transcultural culture industry), must yield to an inquiry into the specific constructions and representations of cultural identities. An interculturally oriented examination of specific cultural phenomena focuses not only on dichotomies, but primarily on what Homi K. Bhabha termed the “in-between” (Bhabha 1994), exploring the inherent power structures and political economies at work within this third space.

A fundamental problem lies in the mere perception of cultural units, construed by the agents in their cultural environments themselves or from an external perspective. In this respect, the general issue articulated in Bhabha’s expression of “the location of culture” arises again (Bhabha 1994). Moreover, regarding its cultural origin and use, even the concept of culture is ideological and presumes a certain epistemological conception, which it also helps put into effect. In numerous societies and language communities there was no equivalent expression for culture until this term inscribed itself medially as a cultural project in most of the cultures of the world. Mass media communication and the transnational flux of knowledge and meaning, with its apparatus-oriented, technological, and *dispositif* conditions, infused all of its cultural and ideological characteristics into the self-concept of most of the people and societies in the world (e.g. one-point perspective in perception and representation, the formation of differences necessary for constructing the identities of individuals and communities, or implicit ideas of linear development). Yet, if the

terminological statement of discourse parameters tends to disband or to absorb in advance any alternative conceptions, both the object and the method of conventional inquiry in the field of cultural studies largely exclude any capacity for insights transcending one's own particular cultural horizon.

This dilemma has been solved by the attempt to approach "the other" in a "hermeneutical dialogue." Interculturalism, within this context, cannot simply be defined as an attempt at communication between two otherwise hermetic societies and most certainly not solely as a dialogue between a colonial subject and a colonial object. On the contrary, it expresses itself primarily within the conflict of every society with itself and of every individual with himself or herself and with the multiple internal and external influences from which identity or identities, but also the terminology and the apprehension of the concept of identity, are construed.

On the epistemological level, as German systems theorist Dirk Baecker maintains, the consciousness constitutive of culture always includes an encounter with the imagined Other (Baecker 2000, 16ff). At the same time experience of the Other always determines the perception of self, which is derived from its differentiation from its Other. At the moment of this experience, then, the Other has become an inherent component of the self. At this moment of contact, it has inscribed itself into the latter's internal processes and changed these in an irreversible way. Thus, the Other cannot really be alien, and the unfamiliar media of representation, whether they are based on systems of writing, performances, audio or audiovisual apparatuses, with their respective culturally specific *dispositifs*, inevitably become an appropriated part of the self from the instant of their perception and utilization. This also means that the Other, by means of which the self is defined as self, is no longer alien, but has become a part of the self. The product and the source of cultural self-determination become, again according to Baecker, inextricably intertwined with one another in the *dispositifs* of real or virtual, immediate or mediated perception. Cultural processes do not become an inescapable part of a confrontation with culture, and thus, with some inherently colonialist other. On the contrary, these processes become a dialogue, above all, with the self, whose view of the Other is equally motivated and informed by colonialism.

In light of migration and the globalization of economic, political, and cultural processes, and the transnational character of media representation, no community can now effectively protect itself from coming into contact with alien influences. Yet, this globalization process perceived as a diffuse human experience of the present, needs to be clarified in relation to its specific effects on forms of local agency. Under the conditions of media culture as described by Douglas Kellner (Kellner 1995), every observer is also an object of observation for the observed. Moreover, if, according to Jacques Lacan, the media themselves always return the gaze of the observer, the media apparatuses and *dispositifs* and the intermedia aspects of the representation of culture have to become the center of attention. Culture that mediates itself and communicates

itself through media to a public is also inevitably intercultural and an object, if not even in the first place, a product of comparative analysis. Even someone academically trained to interpret culture and cultures must present himself or herself as colonialist in order to maintain one's own claim to culture, from which the authority of the academic inquiry is derived. Yet, in the final analysis, self and Other do actually resist any sort of cultural colonization if these discourses on the respective Other emerge in the same media and are thus possibly able to appropriate the Other in some way and integrate it into the discourses of the self.

It is common sense that the overall presence of media in media societies change and shape individual experiences in a number of ways in terms of cognitive processes of perception, aesthetic representations, narrative strategies, institutional and social networks, and collective or private memory and authorization, aspects which are dealt with in special areas of media studies such as Media Epistemology, Media Semiotics, Media History, Media Anthropology, and so on. The contributions of this volume address these phenomena and methodological problems from divergent perspectives focusing on different geographical areas and media genres, in order to reveal, as a whole, the complexity and connectedness of all these issues. On the other hand, the detailed case study approach of each contribution allows for a deeper insight into the complexity of each single cultural subsystem as part of a—perhaps also imagined—whole media culture system.

Aleida Assmann opens this volume with her essay "The Printing Press and the Internet: From a Culture of Memory to a Culture of Attention," addressing the question of different perceptions of changes in communication cultures through new media in a historical perspective. Juxtaposing discourses reflecting upon the possibilities of new media from the distant past of the Gutenberg era with those from the present, Assmann's specific focus is on the nature of the transformation of the written culture in the new digital era. After comparing the remote discourses on the effects of the invention of printing with those contemporary discourses on the internet and establishing their common assumption of a possible restoration of an oral culture of the past, she identifies a major difference in their ideological frames: the former one being based in a "culture of memory," the latter in a "culture of attention." The different utopian visions behind these ideological frames aimed at different objects, transcending time in the material writing culture, transcending space in the electronic age. A historical perspective on these utopian visions reveals how the formerly religious concept of transcendence was displaced by the concept of secular intellectual transcendence of time, which, according to Aleida Assmann, is now displaced by a cybernetic transcendence of space.

In his essay "Globalization and the Experience of Culture: The Resilience of Nationhood," Wimal Dissanyake continues these reflections upon the individual experience of transcending space in a globalized, digitalized world by

focusing on the complex interplay between localism and globalism. Globalism, understood in Raymond Williams's term as a new structure of feeling produced by intersecting narratives on the global and the local, offers an approach to new sensibilities in the experience of culture. As globalism cannot be understood in isolation from localism and also nationhood, Dissanayakee argues against a hasty abandonment of the idea of the nation, which is still so powerfully present in the formulations and constructions of cultural identities, albeit produced in a globalized context. Against this backdrop he discusses modern world cinema as a media which most powerfully articulates how cultural experiences and nations define and shape each other. The Indian and Hong Kong cinemas reveal how different resources of cultural authority are actualized within specific genres. His examples show that cultures cannot be contained within bounded spaces, on the one hand, and that forces of culture are no longer unidirectional, but multidirectional and disconnected, on the other.

How the Other is integrated into one's own culture is the topic of Stefan Kramer's contribution "Transcultural Narrations of the Local: Taiwanese Cinema Between Utopia and Heterotopia" on the cinematic narrations in contemporary Taiwanese cinema. Kramer discusses discourses of "Taiwanese identity" or "Chinese culture" as represented in contemporary Taiwanese cinema by elaborating on the concept of "heterotopia." In Taiwan, the societies must define their own cultural positions especially in relation to local traditionalism, Chinese hegemony, European and Japanese colonial traditions, the protectionism of the U.S., and, not least, the globalism that inevitably invaded the Southeast Chinese island republic in the midst of the "economic miracle," and in relation to the numerous relocalizations following in its wake. Taking Stan Lai's film *The Peach Blossom Land* (*Anlian Taohuayuan*) as an example, Kramer identifies numerous referential levels to major cultural discourses in Taiwan and shows how the heterotopias of the Taiwanese self-concept are results equally of cultural translation and intermedia transmission.

The circulation of cultural capital in a globalized music economy is situated in a broader perspective by Michael Stone's contribution "Garifuna Song, Groove Locale and 'World-Music' Mediation," which deals with the history and international travel routes of the originally African, Armenian, and later Caribbean "Garifuna Music." Discussing the ideological and normative statements behind the label "world music," and its positive and negative evaluations, Stone sets out to situate this music genre in its relation to local authenticity and global marketability in a historical perspective. As he observes, Garifuna expressive traditions enact a dynamic performance strategy long versed in the cultural artistry of subaltern endurance, which can be described as an act of "strategic antiessentialism." Characterizing the operations involved in this process as "groove locale," he argues that the interactive field of commodified popular reception creates the intangible cultural allure (and thus the commercial viability) of sonic otherness, which can be described as a dialectical process wherein dominant and subordinate subjects, influences, forms, and

forces converge and act upon one another to create a covariable (and accordingly unstable) field of musical dialogue. Thus, world music encompasses multiple subject positions, aesthetic perspectives, and political dispositions with far richer political potential than a crude mass culture critique is capable of rendering.

In "The Thousand Faces of Xena: Transculturality through Multi-Identity," Miriam Butt and Kyle Wohlmuth approach the topic of globalizing images of model identities by analyzing the TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess*, which began its run in 1995 and became an extremely popular TV program. Taking the specific features of the construction of a multi-identity of the figure Xena (transcending heroism, sexuality, and geography) as a role model for identity construction detached from space and historical time, the authors discuss the different components that cater to an enthusiastic fan community in the U.S. Moreover, they draw attention to the intermedia relations in the process of the creation of this heroine figure in magazines and the internet in order to show the public participation in the process of construction of a figure that, in their view, transcends essentialist constructions of identity.

With Arif Dirlik's explorations into the field of narrative strategies for identity construction in "transnational literatures" in his essay "Literature/Identity: Transnationalism, Narrative and Representation," the topic of the close relationship between the global and the local is taken up again. Dirlik poses fundamental questions about the nature of ethnic literature versus historical writing, of which the latter has been placed at the service of exploring ethnic and transnational identities by both the recipients of this literature and their writers. As Dirlik shows in his analysis of contemporary critiques of Asian diaspora literature, national claims on literature have not disappeared with the emergence of transnational writers. Instead the racialization and culturalization of these ethnic writers derived additional force through the emergence of multiculturalism as a response to ethnic self-assertion. Moreover, he observes a curious ethnic complicity in cultural reification in order to sustain a sense of national belonging. Drawing attention to the lack of substantial meanings behind descriptive terms such as "Asian American" or "Chinese American," Dirlik emphasizes the importance of contextualizing such terms, or other terms like "ethnicity," "diaspora," or "culture," in a historical perspective, and draws attention to the historicity of the concept of "nation" itself.

Natascha Gentz, in her study "How to Get Rid of China: Ethnicity, Memory and Trauma in Gao Xingjian's Novel *One Man's Bible*," presents a textual analysis of the autobiographical novel of the first Chinese nobel laureate Gao Xingjian, and discusses his presentation of a Chinese's life in the Cultural Revolution in the context of the reconstruction of a fractured identity, individual and collective memory, and trauma. Gao's self-reflective novel presents a unique attempt at escaping the dilemma of the ethnic writer, as described by Arif Dirlik, through narrative techniques and explicit theoretical reflections upon this dilemma, which are inserted into the story of the novel. Analyzing the

underlying narrative structure of the novel, as well as contextualizing his description as part of a transcultural discourse on the Cultural Revolution, Gentz shows how Gao's presentation is no longer restricted by narrowly defined narrative strategies chosen by most of the exile writers dealing with this period in the history of the People's Republic of China. Gao's construction of a multilayered, partly seemingly authentic, partly fictional identity for his main protagonist is an attempt to overcome essentialist categories, while at the same time revealing the sheer impossibility of such an approach—when oscillating between the attempt to escape orientalism and ethnic ascription and the simultaneous establishment of occidentalist stereotypes.

How strongly nationalist sentiments dominate the creation of film music is demonstrated by Roger Hillman in his essay "Film and Music, or Instabilities of National Identity." Hillman explores the cultural mediation of classical music in the cinema. Juxtaposing the usage of classical music in Australian, European, and American films, he differentiates specific modes and levels of referentiality to nationalist sentiments and their underlying cultural identity constructions. Hillman argues that the mix of national identity, cultural memory, and classical music is a potent, yet largely neglected, combination in film which forms an integral part of the narrative.

Irmbert Schenk's essay "The Cinematic Support to National(istic) Mythology: The Italian Peplum 1910–1930" shows, in a historical perspective, how a specific film genre fosters the construction of a national image of superiority in times of actual political and social crisis. Reconstructing the success story of the Italian monumental-historical films, the "colossal" or the "peplum," which occurred in the 1910s and became a very powerful genre in Hollywood decades later, Schenk ponders the question of how this popular genre could fall into oblivion in its home country and yet have such a successful career in different regions, gaining the strong attention of audiences all over the world for decades. Analyzing the aesthetic contribution that these Italian films have made to cinematography worldwide and to the language of cinema in this period of important changes in cinema history after 1911, he argues that the new visual aspect of the cinema in these films gained its own autonomous status for the first time, whereas their reference to a mythical past catered to the specific psychological needs of the audience of the time. Stressing the importance of a contextual reading of the viewing habits and the integration of cinema into the daily lives of the spectators, Schenk makes a strong case for new methodological approaches for analyzing the relationship between media and identity construction.

The specific political context of media presentation and reception in the construction of national identities is the focus of Tamar Liebes's essay "Their Master's Voice? The Coverage of Intifada II on Israeli Television," in which she offers an analysis of different modes of news coverage on Palestinian and Israeli TV and the U.S. presentation of war news in these areas. Whereas the Western news media coverage of this war has been the topic of many discussions, her

approach to the modes and methods of coverage of “the other side” is a unique exploration into the complex psychological and political factors in the media negotiations between the Israeli and Palaestonian television. Moreover, in her historically comparative discussion of the dramatic changes undergone by global media between the Intifada I and II periods, she links her observations to the global context of simultaneous war reports on the Gulf War and the Anti-Terror War by the U.S. TV channels. This global horizon of war news coverage enables her to identify a current contradiction between the abandonment of the idea of a committed national media and the presence of war patriotism in contemporary U.S. news coverage.

Ratiba Hadj-Moussa’s contribution “Drifted Liberties and Diffracted Identities? Algerian Audiences and the ‘Parabola,’” on the function and uses of new media in a specific cultural environment, takes a media anthropological approach to the interplay of media and politics in the formulation of cultural identities. Separating three principle contenders in the Algerian public sphere, the state TV monopoly, the semiofficial Islamic Video and print publications and the new formation of satellite TV users, “le parabole,” Hadj-Moussa discusses the transformation of social configurations through the usage of different media. These transformations, engendered by the incorporation the Algerian local communities into a global media, had a profound impact on the self-perception of the dish users, their cultural habits, and gender relations, even if it did not lead to the emergence of a politicized action-oriented public sphere. In her view, these findings challenge the common knowledge about dichotomies between the public and the private in respect to the political context of emerging civil societies.

The last contribution, by Peter Braun, is entitled “The Right to Be Different: Photographic Discourse and Cultural Identity in Hungary.” It deals with the effects of visual material on scientific anthropological research. Braun illuminates how political change and innovative methodological usage of new media converge in the establishment of a new discipline of cultural anthropology in postsocialist Hungary. Identifying the major new features of this discipline established by Ernő Kunt and highlighting his special focus on cultural research through representations via film and photography, Braun shows how this technological device created novel representations and visions of local traditions.

The new technologically oriented media dealt with in this volume, from film to television up to the computer and the internet, seem to be eventually displacing the communication systems predating the widespread use of technical apparatuses, as both media critics and fetishists have depicted in apocalyptic or enthusiastic scenarios. But, on the other hand, they have also provoked a boom in the print market, which, at the same time, also strongly influences the aesthetics and the reception of these new electronic communications. In the digital age, this inherent intermedia character of postmodern media apparatuses might

soon lead to a fundamental multimedia technology on the basis of a metamachine combining all of the traditional media apparatuses. Such developments would bring up totally new questions concerning the formation of local and global identity between still extant political nation-states, on the one hand and, on the other, a globalization long since attained by the media. The authors in this book present new explorations into the field of these increasingly important complex interplays.

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