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A Critical Theory of Culture

Paper presented at the "XXVII. Deutscher Romanistentag" in Munich (October 10, 2001)
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0. Preliminary methodological remarks

The title of this essay "A Critical Theory of Culture" connects a critical theory of culture in which culture is the object of a theoretical examination, with a cultural theory, which becomes the subject of critique. First of all, the notion of critique itself requires some explication. The titles of chapters one and two heuristically-circularly presume a certain notion of critique, which however will only be developed in chapter one.

What I have in mind here, is the Kantian notion of critique as a methodical procedure, which quite generally aims at the examination of the range and limits of human cognitive faculties, and of scientific methods and notions. Now, this first notion of critique promises to criticize independently of any value judgements whatsoever and from a vantage point above history. However, the objects of this critique – the notions of critique and culture – had a rather lively history, have been heavily charged with normative concepts and partly still are. The question is, whether or not a methodological application like this can be successful in a scientifically valid way. After all, the possibility of humanities at large depends on the possibility of a value-free examination of value judgements.

I have already dealt with the subject of the first chapter "Critique of the notion of critique" elsewhere (Geyer 2001). I shall therefore sum up the results of this text briefly, focusing on the new subject: the critical examination of the notion of culture. It will become apparent, that the notion of critique and the notion of culture are semantically interrelated in their historical development, and that it is actually impossible to examine them independently of each other.

1. Critique of the notion of critique

1.1. The pre-modern, pre-autonomous notion of critique

In antiquity the term *kritiké téchne* described the art of differentiating, rating and judging. It all began with 'simple' acts of differentiation in the sensual perception in order to orient oneself in the natural environment. Further on, there are acts of evaluative orientation in the social and cultural world, judicial verdicts and even reflections on the validity of cultural norms themselves. To subject norms to such close scrutiny, however, does not necessarily imply that doubts are raised about the general possibility of universal norms for human practice. Socrates, the elder Cato, Jesus or Luther (in some ways even Marx) didn't conceptualise of their critique of culture as a destruction of norms or as revolutionary innovation, but rather claimed merely to fulfil the intentions of the old norms better than their contemporaries. Claus von Bormann characterises this pre-modern, pre-autonomous notion of critique as follows:

Auch wenn Normen selbst kritisiert werden, geben immer wieder höhere Normen die Kriterien ab. Insofern ist Kritik immer nur funktional und instrumental verstanden. [...] eine solche Kritik kann nie das Ganze der Praxis in den Blick bekommen. Der ethisch Handelnde kann nie ganz aus seiner eigenen Praxis heraustreten, um sie in die Prüfung der Reflexion einzuholen.
(Claus von Bormann, *Kritik*, 1973, p. 810/813)

Even if norms themselves are subjected to critique, it is always higher norms which provide the criteria for that critique. Critique thus is only ever understood functionally and

instrumentally. (...) such a critique is ill suited to cover the whole of practice. The ethical agent is unable to fully step out of her own practice in order to include it within the examination of reflection.

This pre-modern notion of critique thus never questions the existence of a final criterion of critique, of a top level in the hierarchy of values, even if it does concede the possibility of having fundamental differences about the interpretation of this criterion. It therefore appears to be possible to bring critique to a closure in a final judgement – independently of whether the objects of this business of critique are texts, works of art or moral standards.

In the modern age, the pre-autonomous structure of this notion of critique and its orientation at a given highest criterion do not initially appear to undergo fundamental changes. Indeed, the highest criterion for moral and aesthetic critique gradually travels from heaven to earth: instead of the heaven of ideas, the divine "nous" or the christian god, it is now within the nature of man himself, that it resides. But even the natural law theories initially keep deriving rights and duties of man from his timeless rational nature. The belief in the universal validity of the rational nature of man is the basis for the self-confidence of classical enlightenment, whose critical theory eventually turns into political-revolutionary practice.

1.2. The emergence of the modern, autonomous notion of critique

As early as 1750, at the height of classical enlightenment, the pre-autonomous, naive notion of critique and its anthropological foundation in natural law begin to crumble. For the first time, the emergence of a modern, autonomous notion of critique can be observed in Rousseau's two Discourses, the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) and the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755). (See Geyer 1997a, chapters 8 and 9). Rousseau is rightfully considered to be the first modern cultural critic; erroneously, however, this sweeping statement is usually derived from his *First Discours*. In reality, the Rousseau of the *First Discours* is a wholly traditional, pre-modern cultural critic and moralist. He still believes himself to be in possession of dependable criteria for his critique of the alleged over-civilization of his age and the resulting cultural decay. Resembling the elder Cato, Rousseau asks for a return to an original *Eigentlichkeit*, which he characterizes repeatedly with the following notions:

amour de la patrie; religion; obéissance aux loix; désintéressement; simplicité; innocence; heureuse ignorance, facilité de se pénétrer réciproquement (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, 1750, passim)
patriotism, religion, law-abiding, disinterestedness, simplicity, innocence, blissful ignorance, reciprocal transparency

The cultural criticism of Rousseau's *Second Discours*, the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, leans initially towards the pre-modern spirit of the *First Discours* also. Based on natural law, Rousseau aims at a critique of the inequality among man. However, in so doing, Rousseau takes a methodological decision unheard of in those days, which eventually ended up undermining these very natural law theories themselves. In order to avoid both the contradictions between different theories of natural law and their respective inherent contradictions, Rousseau places the original nature of man at such a low level, that he actually arrives at the ape. Taking his starting point there, he then tries to speculatively trace the development up until his own age. At the end of this "grand récit" he finds himself forced, as the first thinker ever, to state the disintegration of the notion of the universal and timeless nature of man:

Le Genre-humain d'un âge n'est pas le Genre-humain d'un autre âge ; [...] l'ame et les passions humaines changent pour ainsi dire de Nature (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, 1755, p. 264).
Mankind in one age is unlike mankind in another age;...soul and emotionality of man, change, so to speak, their nature.

'Changer de Nature'/'Change ones nature' is a nonsensical statement in classical thought. Rousseau further emphasizes this scandalous confusion of ideas by adding a 'pour ainsi dire'/'so to speak'. If, however, the nature of man is dissolved in a process, at the beginning of which we find the non-human, the animal, then the end of course must surely also be open.

Instead of dissolving the historicity of man in his nature, as the classical teachers of modern age natural law did, Rousseau dissolves the nature of man in the historical process. For the first time, human nature discloses its cultural time kernel and its radical contingency. There is no such thing as human nature – all that exists are human cultures. Since then, this realization has been regularly rediscovered by cultural anthropologist:

There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture. (Clifford Geertz, *Kulturbegriff und Menschenbild*, 1973b, p. 75)

But how – to return to the primary concern of our text – does this dissolution of the substantialist image of man effect the notion of critique?

In Rousseau, human nature is re-interpreted as an open process, which began *ex nihilo*, namely with the non-human, then branched out in a wide number of different cultural directions, and has an entirely open future. From a contingent process, however, one can neither derive timeless norms for human behaviour and interaction, nor, as a consequence, criteria for a critique of culture. Rousseau becomes the first cultural critic in the modern sense precisely because the alleged criteria of his critique collapse in the very course of their application. He intended his treatise on inequality and its origins as a harsh critique on social inequality in the absolutist corporative state. He surely must have been surprised by the actual conclusion of his very own *Second Discourse*:

Il suit de cet exposé que l'inégalité étant presque nulle dans l'état de Nature, tire sa force et son accroissement du développement de nos facultés et des progrès de l'Esprit humain, et devient enfin stable et légitime par l'établissement de la propriété et des Loix. (Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 270)

It follows, that inequality, which is nil in the natural state, derives its power and its growth from the development of our faculties and from the progress of human spirit. As a result of the establishment of property and laws it eventually becomes stable and legitimate.

Just like the nature of man itself, in the future the notion of legitimacy has to be conceptualized as an open process. Each form of human culture produces its own legitimacies; critique is forced to put forward its criteria in a conscious decisionist move.

With the loss of its timelessly-binding value criteria, critique becomes both bottomless and autonomous. Reinhart Koselleck noted (See *Kritik und Krise*, 1959, 98-103), that critique in the modern age turns into *hypo-critique* or *hypo-crisis*, because it is forced to either veil or suppress its bottomlessness in order to remain effective. If, on the other hand, scientific critique in the modern age faces up to the loss of a priori value criteria, it then becomes transcendental and self-reflexive. This, however, does not necessarily imply a complete retreat from practice. Transcendental critique is more than mere epistemology. Transcendental critique becomes practical, when it examines the conditions under which value criteria are produced, analyses their functions, and discloses dogmatic propositions and inherent contradictions between implicit and explicit judgements. This type of transcendental critique heightens the awareness of alternatives and opens up choices and options for decision making.

2. Critique of the notion of culture

2.1. The emergence of the modern, autonomous notion of culture

Quite like the notion of critique, the notion of culture possesses a long history, or perhaps one should say: latency period, during which the notion itself had not yet become problematic and therefore had not yet moved to the center of theoretical attention. When Cicero writes:

cultura autem animi philosophia est (Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 45 a.C., II.13; See Perpeet 1976, p. 42, Bollenbeck 1994, p. 38),
but philosophy is care/culture of soul

then the culture of self still has its points of reference in the philosophical contemplation of human nature. The metaphoric relation between the words 'cultura' and 'agri-cultura' hints at the conviction, that philosophical-cultural points of reference for human self care are as reliable as the natural conditions of farming, provided one strives towards knowledge about physical and metaphysical norms and laws. Cultures, which are metaphysically stabilized in such a way, do not yet even require their own notion of culture, because any such notion would always already contain the suspicion of a lack of substance. However, the etymological continuity from 'cultura' to 'culture' covered up deep conceptual and epistemological ruptures, which became more and more apparent only in the course of the 18th century:

Kultur [als Begriff] wird erst in der modernen Gesellschaft möglich, die sich erstmals als strukturell kontingent und zugleich nur noch so reflektieren kann. (Niklas Luhmann, *Kultur als historischer Begriff*, 1995, p. 51)

Culture [as a notion] becomes possible only in modern society, which, being able for the first time to reflect upon itself as structurally contingent, ceases to be able to reflect upon itself in any other way.

Interdependent with the notion of critique, the notion of culture becomes autonomous and thus becomes for the first time a real notion of cultural self-reflection, when its value criteria are being questioned, and when the processual character and the radical contingency of human cultural achievements are being discovered. Every culture is a reaction to 'Sinn-Not' (lack or need of meaning):

Kultur also ist, weil in Lagen der Not aus An-sich-Seiendem als einem substrathaften ‚Stoff‘ ein verstehbarer öffentlicher Lebensstil erformt werden kann und muß. Not ist hier Sinn-Not.

(Wilhelm Perpeet, Kulturphilosophie, 1976, p. 98)

Culture therefore is, because in situations of need, 'An-sich-Seiendes' (that, which just is) as substrate-like 'matter' has to and can be moulded into an understandable public way of life. Need here is need of meaning.

The notion of culture becomes autonomous and reflexive then only, when the realization gains ground, that human existence suffers from an incurable 'Sinn-Not'. The notion of culture emerges, when the cultural certainties of man vanish. The autonomous status of the notion of culture first becomes apparent in its newly acquired syntactical sovereignty, even if this is not reflected upon immediately. Until well after 1700, the latin word 'cultura' and its vernacular variations are predominantly used in genitive constructions like 'animi cultura' or 'agri cultura'. In Samuel Pufendorf's (1632-1694; see Welsch 1992, p. 6) work the term 'cultura' is used for the first time as an absolute noun and in emphasized opposition to the term 'nature'. Pufendorf was one of the most important theorists of natural law in the modern age. If it was Pufendorf, of all people, who provided us with the first trace of an autonomous notion of culture, then this can be interpreted as support for the assumption, that even the natural law theories of the modern age implicitly reacted to a growing suspicion that human nature and culture lacked in substance. This suspicion first arose during the age of discoveries and schisms.

2.2. The German Sonderweg: Culture vs. Civilization

Of course, it was still a long way to go from Pufendorf to a general acceptance of an autonomous notion of culture. Georg Bollenbeck has demonstrated in all detail, how, in the course of the 18th century, the notion of culture rose to become a notion of critical reflection firstly in Germany. (Bollenbeck, p.61-96) Closely linked to the notion of history, the notion of culture becomes a collective singular during the so-called Sattelzeit (Koselleck 1975) of the last third of the 18th century. Contrary to what Norbert Elias believed, the German notion of culture did not immediately come into opposition with the French notion of civilization. Right up to the period of late enlightenment, both terms were almost identical in meaning. (Bollenbeck 1994, p. 93-96). Rather like before in Pufendorf's work, both encompass human achievements in culture or civilization in the widest sense: the realms of technology and craftsmanship as well as the economical-political, the ethical as well as the realms of art and science. The collective singulars of 'culture'/'civilization' and 'history' are connected by the realization of their momentum and of the acceleration of their development, which are viewed from either an optimistic-enlightenment or a conservative-critical position. At the same time, the collective singulars of 'history', 'culture' and 'civilization' block out Rousseau's discovery, that this development is contingent, heterogenous and unpredictable. A first indication for the growing resistance against this discovery is the Sonderweg, which the notion of culture embarks upon in German idealism after the French revolution. At this point, the German notion of culture steps toward partial and progressive opposition to the notion of civilization. In Wilhelm von Humboldt's words it still sounds relatively disinterested:

Die Civilisation ist die Vermenschlichung der Völker in ihren äußeren Einrichtungen und Gebräuchen und der darauf Bezug habenden inneren Gesinnung. Die Cultur fügt dieser Veredlung des gesellschaftlichen Zustandes Wissenschaft und Kunst hinzu. Wenn wir aber in unserer Sprache Bildung sagen, so meinen wir damit etwas zugleich Höheres und mehr Innerliches, nämlich die Sinnesart, die sich aus der Erkenntnis und dem Gefühle des gesamten geistigen und sittlichen Strebens harmonisch auf die Empfindung und den Charakter ergießt. (Wilhelm von Humboldt, Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts, 1836, p. 30)

Civilization is the humanization of people in their external facilities and customs as well as in their related inner mentality. Culture adds science and art to this refinement of the state of society. However, if we say Bildung (education, erudition) in our language, then we have something in mind, which is at the same time more elevated and more introspective, namely the disposition, which from the cognition and sensation of the whole intellectual and moral striving harmoniously pours into feeling and character.

With the splitting of the comprehensive enlightenment notion of culture into a notion of civilization, oriented at practical matters of life, and a 'lofty' notion of culture and education, which emphatically transcends the realms of practical reproduction of life, it becomes explicit, that the unquestioned certainty of identity characteristic for classical enlightenment is lost. On the one hand, the emphasis indicates the bad conscience of someone, who in reality can no longer be sure about the binding force of the values and criteria of his critique. On the other hand, this does not necessarily mean, that the break up of the unified notion of culture into the opposition culture vs. civilization cannot serve as a source of identification and cognition. Since the times of the Querelle des anciens et des modernes at the end of the 17th century it had become obvious, that different parts of one culture or civilization can be subject to different logics of development:

si nous avons un avantage visible dans les Arts dont les secrets se peuvent calculer & mesurer, il n'y a que la seule impossibilité de convaincre les gens dans les choses de goût &

de fantaisie, comme sont les beautés de la Poésie & de l'Eloquence qui empesche que nous ne soyons reconnus les Maîtres dans ces deux Arts comme dans tous les autres (Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences*, 1688-97, p. 98).

If we have a visible advantage [compared with our predecessors] in the arts, the secrets of which can be calculated and measured, the recognition of our pre-eminence in the realm of poetic and rhetorical beauty is solely hampered by the fact, that it seems to be impossible to convince people in matters of taste and imagination in the same way as in all the other arts.

In Perrault's words we already find the implicit basis for a conceptual difference between technical civilization and meaningful culture. And while there appears to be no shortage of standards for measuring civil progress, it seems to be far harder, if not impossible, to find criteria for cultural comparisons. However, a hundred years after Perrault, the hitherto implicit difference between culture and civilization becomes explicit with the Sonderweg of German idealism. With the triumphant advance of capitalist technical civilization it becomes apparent, that the ideals of bourgeois culture and education, which were originally amalgamated with this very civilization, can now move into a position of critical distance. German idealism is the first reflexive reaction to this situation – perhaps at its most intense in Schiller's aesthetics, in the German Bildungsroman, and in Kantian ethics:

Im Reiche der Zwecke hat alles entweder einen Preis, oder eine Würde. Was einen Preis hat, an dessen Stelle kann auch etwas anderes als Äquivalent gesetzt werden; was dagegen über allen Preis erhaben ist, mithin kein Äquivalent verstatet, das hat eine Würde. (Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785, p. 87)

In the realm of utility everything has either a price or dignity. What has a price, can be replaced with an equivalent; but what is beyond all prices and therefore without an equivalent, has dignity.

Here Kant paves the way for the ever growing distance in the 19th century German notion of culture between, on one hand, the free, self-determined, unmistakable person as both an end in itself and the final end of culture, and, on the other hand, her very own basis in civilization. In retrospect, of course, the Kantian notion of the individual appears to be as idealistically overdrawn as the very rift it helped to construct between the individual and his actual living conditions. Nevertheless, imaginary patterns of cultural self interpretation may well have strong effects on practical life:

Initially, the German notion of culture and education is critically directed against sober-minded utilitarianism and processes of social diversification, which alienate the individual from the whole, and reduce his personal dignity to a price-equivalent – to use Kantian terminology. Then, this idealistic pattern of self-interpretation is also directed against French revolution, whose doubtful outcome is countered with an imaginary compensation in the shape of a revolution of Denkungsart (mentality). This critical compensatory function finally lays the ground for the transition to a third function of the German notion of culture, namely the function of indirect affirmation of its own basis in civilization: In the course of the 19th century the rift between the notions of culture and civilization steadily increases until the notion of culture eventually takes on an air of timeless transcendence beyond all civilization. This process reaches its apogee during World War I, as the following quote from Thomas Mann may demonstrate:

Der Unterschied von Geist und Politik enthält den von Kultur und Zivilisation, von Seele und Gesellschaft, von Freiheit und Stimmrecht, von Kunst und Literatur; und Deutschtum, das ist Kultur, Seele, Freiheit, Kunst und nicht Zivilisation, Gesellschaft, Stimmrecht, Literatur.

(Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, "Vorrede", 1918, p. XXXV.)

The difference between mind and politics encompasses the differences between culture and civilization, soul and society, freedom and suffrage, art and literature; Deutschtum (German-ness) – that is culture, soul, freedom, art, it is not civilization, society, suffrage, literature.

The polemical orientation of the German notion of culture against French 'Civilisation' now tends to replace the critical orientation towards its own basis in civilization. In the French tradition, the opposition culture-civilization doesn't manifest itself in two words. And yet the cultural top-asset of 'Civilisation française' seems to fulfil its compensatory and affirmative functions even more effectively than the German notion of culture, precisely on account of its lack of discrimination. The German notion of culture always contained an element of critique of civilization, even if it was not always easy to distinguish the latter from the affirmative and compensatory functions. This is especially true for the periods after World Wars I and II, when first the conservative cultural criticism of Spengler and Jaspers, and then the no less conservative criticism of ideology of neo- and post-marxists like Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse blossomed. Both critical strategies tried to take the elated bourgeois notion of culture and the idealistic notion of individuality by their word and to re-connect them with the existing civilization. When this notion of individuality eventually became outdated, this type of cultural criticism lost both its criteria and its relevance for the existing social reality.

2.3. The Crumbling of the Culture–Civilization opposition in contemporary cultural studies

Following the much read introduction to cultural studies by Böhme, Matussek and Müller, the notion of culture, in Germany as well as in the anglo-saxon world, has both regained the wide meaning it had in late enlightenment and, as it were, absorbed the notion of civilization:

Kultur [...] bezeichnet das Gesamt der Einrichtungen, Handlungen, Prozesse und symbolischen Formen, welche mit Hilfe von planmäßigen Techniken die ‚vorfindliche Natur‘ in einen sozialen Lebensraum transformieren, diesen erhalten und verbessern, die dazu erforderlichen Fertigkeiten (Kulturtechniken, Wissen) pflegen und entwickeln, die leitenden Werte in besonderen Riten befestigen (‚cultus‘) und insofern soziale Ordnungen und kommunikative Symbolwelten stiften, welche kommunitären Gebilden Dauer verschaffen. (Böhme/Matussek/Müller, Orientierung Kulturwissenschaft, 2000, p. 104)

Culture [...] designates the whole of institutions, actions, processes and symbolic forms, which, aided by planned techniques, transform 'existent nature' into a space of social living, maintain and improve this space, preserve and develop the required skills (cultural techniques, knowledge), consolidate leading values through special rites ('cultus') and, thus, create social orders and communicative symbolic worlds, which sustain community formations.

Culture, here, is quite simply, what T.S.Eliot in 1948 defined as 'way of life':

By culture I mean first of all what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. (T.S.Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, London 1948, p. 120)

However, if one takes a glance at definitions of culture as proposed by American cultural anthropology, which recently came to represent something like a methodological Leitwissenschaft (leading science) for many German cultural critics, there emerges a picture slightly different from the one we just saw in the definitions of Böhme, Matussek and Müller or T.S.Eliot respectively. First of all, those definitions would seem to make the very notion of cultural anthropology itself a tautology. Adam Kuper sums up a notion of culture, that contemporary American cultural anthropology would probably agree upon:

Culture is here essentially a matter of ideas and values, a collective cast of mind. The ideas and values, the cosmology, morality, and aesthetics, are expressed in symbols, and so [...] culture could be described as a symbolic system. (Adam Kuper, Culture. The Anthropologists' Account, 1999, p. 227)

One might think, at first glance, that such a notion of culture would allow for the contradictory relations between a value-oriented, symbolically structured notion of culture and an utilitarian notion of civilization to become an issue, or even for this double notion to be made fruitful in a new way and beyond the old German emphasis. But this opportunity has not been taken advantage of. For Kuper, the reason lies in the implicit idealism and cerebralism of the current notion of culture in cultural anthropology:

Talcott Parsons, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Alfred Kroeber tried to foster an objective science of culture in the 1950s, and in the next generation Clifford Geertz pressed the claims for a detached cerebral hermeneutics of culture.

Mainstream American cultural anthropology, in short, is still in the grip of a pervasive idealism. (Ibid, p. 228, p. 19)

For mid 20th century cultural anthropologists like Parsons, Kluckhohn or Kroeber it went without saying, that culture was a subsystem within an all encompassing notion of history. They then analysed the functional interactions between different subsystems like culture and civilization. (See Habermas 1981). Influenced by Ernst Cassirer's notion of symbol, cultural anthropology progressively eliminated these dialectics in the 2nd half of the 20th century. Cassirer's definition of the human being as 'animal symbolicum' is quite generally focused on the realm of cultural projections of meaning in myth, religion, art, science and language:

Therefore we should define the human being not as animal rationale, but as animal symbolicum. (Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture, 1944, p. 51)

Defining the human being as 'animal symbolicum' and making this definition the basis of cultural anthropology, on the one hand, retains the more narrow notion of culture as developed by the German tradition, while cutting off, on the other hand, its many-faceted relationship with the notion of civilization. The notion of civilization appears to be of no relevance to the reflections of cultural anthropology. A number of reasons allowed for this epistemological model to appear plausible in the 2nd half of the 20th century. One good reason had to do with the critique of ideology: The emphatic notion of culture held by the cultural critics of the 19th and 20th centuries was not merely directed against its own capitalist,

technical civilization, but also against the other cultures of the world. Thus they couldn't avoid implicitly supporting the interests of the very western civilization which they officially had intended to criticize. For some, it now appeared to be possible to escape the traps of ideological contamination by stripping the notion of culture of all relations to its basis in civilization – this, of course, proved to be an illusion. Another, perhaps less convincing argument for the removal of the notion of civilization from the theoretical thinking of cultural studies was not critical of ideology, but rather was ideological in itself: While in the reality of our globalizing world, western civilization increasingly tends to claim the status of a world culture, our current notion of culture obscures this very tendency by blocking out culture's basis in civilization.

The third and most important argument for making the notion of culture a symbolic absolute is a straightforward logical fallacy, which may also be ideologically motivated. Initially, cultural anthropologists for the most part analysed so-called 'primitive cultures'. In these cultures it is indeed impossible to clearly distinguish culture and civilization conceptually, because the spheres of utilitarian social organisation and reproduction of human community are heavily charged with transcendental ('cultural') projections of meaning and value:

Die mythische Welt ist 'konkret' [...] dadurch, daß in ihr die beiden Momente, das Dingmoment und das Bedeutungsmoment, unterschiedslos ineinander aufgehen, daß sie hier in eine unmittelbare Einheit zusammengewachsen, 'konkresziert' sind. (Ernst Cassirer, Philosophie der symbolischen Formen II: Das mythische Denken, 1924, p. 32)
The mythical world is 'concrete' [...], because in it the two moments, the thing-moment and the meaning-moment, assimilate each other indiscriminately, because they have merged to form an immediate unity, they have 'concretized'.

Turning this specifically ethnological notion of culture into the notion of culture 'an sich', one loses track of the characteristic features of more complex forms of culture and civilization, and reduces the notion of culture to its affirmative and compensatory functions.

2.4. Towards a critical reconstruction of the Culture–Civilization opposition

This side of the theoretical efforts of cultural critics, and indeed not only in Germany, there seems to persist - or, judging by most recent developments, to even grow – a certain demand for preserving or reviving a conceptual tension between the notions of culture and civilization. In 1927, Sigmund Freud was one of the first in Germany to declare:

...ich verschmähe es, Kultur und Zivilisation zu trennen. (Sigmund Freud, Die Zukunft einer Illusion, 1927, p. 110)
...I disdain separating culture and civilization.

In a, at the time, rather provocative yet logical move, Freud made a number of problems the issue of his treatise *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), which Norbert Elias in 1936 dealt with under the title *The Process of Civilization*. The English title of Freud's treatise, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, shows, that in the English language also there is a certain sensitivity toward the conceptual tension between culture and civilization. Adam Kuper (See Kuper 1999, p. 23-46) has pointed out, that the so-called German *Sonderweg* in terminology initially had clear parallels within Anglo-American parlance. Changing the perspective, one notices, that Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* from 1996 is called *Der Kampf der Kulturen* in German – a translation, which clearly fits Huntington's intentions regarding the conceptual separation of culture and civilization. Huntington himself seems to use the two terms synonymously, usually preferring 'civilization' as a noun and 'cultural' as an adjective. On the 18th of September 2001, however, Gerhard Schröder was obviously talking about a certain standard of western civilization, when he said with regard to the attacks on New York and Washington:

Es geht nicht um einen Kampf der Kulturen, sondern um einen Kampf um Kultur. (Gerhard Schröder, opening speech at the Internationalen Car Exhibition in Berlin on September the 18th, 2001)
This is not about a clash of cultures, it's about a fight for culture.

Since then Schröder has repeated this phrase several times. Silvio Berlusconi, too, might benefit from a higher conceptual sophistication:

...noi dobbiamo essere consapevoli della superiorità della nostra civiltà che costituisce un sistema di valori e di principi che ha dato luogo al benessere e che garantisce il rispetto dei diritti umani e religiosi. Cosa che non c'è nei paesi islamici. [...] non dobbiamo mettere le due civiltà sullo stesso piano: la libertà non è patrimonio della civiltà islamica [che] è rimasto indietro di 1400 anni. (Silvio Berlusconi, Interview in Berlin, 25.09.2001)

...we have to be aware of the superiority of our civilization, which founded a system of values and principles, that brought about our prosperity and guarantees human rights and freedom of religion. This does not exist in islamic countries. [...] We mustn't view the two civilizations as equally good: freedom is not a heirloom of islamic civilization, which has fallen behind by 1.400 years.

Perhaps unwittingly, Berlusconi here reiterates a position of Max Weber, albeit in a vulgarized and one-dimensional way. In his study on the history of culture, religion and society *Protestant Ethics and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* (1904/05), Weber attributes the historically singular progressive momentum of modern western civilization to the dissociation and specialization of the originally amalgamated spheres of utilitarian civil and value-oriented cultural rationalities. The notion of spirit in the title of his treatise (in inverted commas!) is the very dialectical mediator between christian-protestant culture and capitalist civilization. Contrary to Berlusconi, however, Weber does not derive a sense of western superiority from the raging technical civilization of capitalism. Instead he points out, that the sphere of civilization and the sphere of culture become progressively alienated from one another in the course of the development, until the dialectics eventually ossify and capitalism, as it were, loses its "spirit", i.e. becomes autonomous:

Heute ist ihr Geist [die kulturellen Werte des asketischen Protestantismus] aus diesem Gehäuse [der modernen Wirtschaftsordnung] entwichen. Der siegreiche Kapitalismus jedenfalls bedarf [...] dieser Stütze nicht mehr. Auch die rosige Stimmung ihrer lachenden Erbin: der Aufklärung, scheint endgültig im Verbleichen (Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der „Geist“ des Kapitalismus*, 1904/05, p. 153.)

Today their spirit [of the cultural values of ascetic protestantism] has escaped the case [of the modern economic system]. At any rate, victorious capitalism doesn't require [...] this support any more. The rosy mood of their smiling heir: enlightenment, seems to grow pale once and for all too.

If Berlusconi had studied Max Weber a little more intensely, he would have been careful not to blend civil progress and cultural values into one mush of notions. He could have said, perhaps, that the superiority of capitalist technical civilization in the creation of material wealth and opportunities for human self-realization is obvious, and that he and his colleagues assert the right (it's another question whether they actually have that right) to preserve and even increase this wealth, if possible. At the same time, however, he should have emphasized the self-destructive and totalitarian risks of this progressive civilization, which tends to reduce ethical and aesthetical values to economic ones and is perhaps on the verge of creating a new type of consciousness, which will no longer have anything in common with the humanistic enlightenment ideals, that Berlusconi mentioned. But maybe Berlusconi himself already embodies this new type of consciousness.

Perhaps all this makes it seem plausible for a newly valorized, dialectically mediated conceptual opposition culture-civilization, to become a desideratum of research. For the definition of culture I'd like to come back to a suggestion Max Weber made:

"Kultur" ist ein vom Standpunkt des Menschen aus mit Sinn und Bedeutung bedachter endlicher Ausschnitt aus der sinnlosen Unendlichkeit des Weltgeschehens. (Max Weber, *Die „Objektivität“ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*, 1904, p. 180)

"Culture" is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance.

For this definition, of course, we have to take into account both the insights Weber gained in his studies in the history of culture, and Cassirer's treatises on mythical thinking: Different types of societies show different grades of systemic differentiation. Thus, in some societies almost everything is culturally significant, because nature and all human activities are charged with transcending projections of meaning. Elsewhere, for instance in our own society, quite a few areas of utilitarian technical reproduction have been freed of such projections of meaning and have thus "lost their magic" (See Weber 1920, p. 564). This notion of culture is wide enough to be applicable to all cultures of the world, and is precise enough to analyze, how each individual society develops its own, specific type of culture. It would perhaps be possible to identify this notion of culture with the ideal image of man, which is produced by every society.

On the other hand, a given type of culture can only be defined precisely, if one examines the way its notion of culture relates to its notion of civilization. We shall define civilization here as the technical-utilitarian means for the organisation of the mastering of nature, material reproduction and the practical improvement of human life. In highly differentiated societies there are of course spheres like politics, law and consumption, within which a separation of the notions of culture and civilization is difficult and has yet to prove its heuristic suitability. The same is true for the development and impact of power structures, which can but do not have to be culturally rooted, and which I'd therefore provisionally assign to the realm of civilization.

But what are the effects of all this for a critical theory of culture? First of all, one mustn't confuse a critical theory of culture with cultural criticism. A critical theory of culture examines the conditions of the possibility of a critique of culture and civilization. Such a theory describes and compares types of culture according to the dialectical relationship between culture and civilization which they contain. Following Max Weber's studies in the history of culture and Ernst Cassirer's notion of myth, we must distinguish between four fundamental types of culture, which at the same time of course designate four types of consciousness:

1) Mythical Cultures, in which culture and civilization have not yet or have only just begun to drift apart. In these cultures, the cultural sphere cannot be critically directed against the sphere of civilization, but does fulfill affirmative and compensatory functions.

2) Traditional Cultures, in which different stages of differentiation between culture and civilization can be observed. The sphere of culture has become critical, but not yet autonomous. This means, that the critique of culture and civilization has not yet been infested by the suspicion of its own lack of substance. Therefore a self-reflexive notion of culture has not yet developed. The critique of culture is fundamental only with regard to other cultures and civilizations. With regard to its own culture it remains selective.

3) Modern Cultures, in which the spheres of culture and civilization have been sufficiently differentiated to allow for the dialectics of culture and civilization and, by implication, for the radical contingency of human cultural achievements to become perceptible. The critique of culture becomes either fundamentally self-reflexive or it disguises its bottomless nature hypo-critically. This type of culture is represented by European modernism, which develops several strategies to overcome the increasing disintegration of the contradictory relationship between culture and civilization, which is perceived of as a crisis of identity:

3a) the utopia of a re-dissolution of civilization in Culture, as in Schiller's aesthetics or in Marcuse's critique of culture

3b) the attempt to make the notion of culture an Absolute and the compensatory blocking out of the sphere of civilization in bourgeois ideology, which is still perceptible in the notions of culture in current cultural studies

3c) the dissolution of culture(s) in civilization in postmodern Kulturindustrie.

The dissolution of culture and of cultures in civilization within the scope of the irreversible triumphant advance of western civilization could be viewed as a fourth type of culture, which we shall call

4) postmodern Civilization

Here we have come full circle: The transition from type 1) to type 2) had started a process of dissociation of culture and civilization. Now this process has come to a closure, with a culture turned total civilization affirmatively resting in itself rather like the mythical cultures of type 1).

Of course, the future will not correspond ideally to the model type described under 4). It remains to be seen, how the remaining cultures of types 1), 2), and 3) will react to the irreversible triumph of global 'civilization'. Today, even traditional cultures, which have not yet developed an autonomous notion of culture, seem to be forced to engage in intercultural self-reflection. The future will be marked by processes of friction and hybridization between the irreversible triumph of western civilization and the regional and global cultures of types 1), 2), and 3) (See Hagenbüchle 2001).

A transcendental critique of culture refrains from judging these processes, yet its analyses open up possibilities of comparison and present alternatives as described by the notion of anti-anti-relativism, which was introduced by Clifford Geertz in 1984, but hasn't yet been sufficiently explicated. Geertz holds, that rejecting substantialist value criteria is by no means tantamount to engaging in free floating postmodern cultural relativism. Aided by a transcendental critique of culture we are now able to specify this: A transcendental critique becomes practical, when open or veiled contradictions between the spheres of culture and civilization become apparent. Open contradictions concern dysfunctionalities, which endanger social cohabitation and survival. As for the veiled contradictions – it was Max Weber himself who proclaimed their disclosure to be a task of value-free cultural criticism:

...die wissenschaftliche Behandlung der Werturteile möchte nun die gewollten Zwecke und die ihnen zugrunde liegenden Ideale nicht nur verstehen und nacherleben lassen, sondern vor allem auch kritisch beurteilen lehren. Diese Kritik [...] kann verhelfen zur Selbstbesinnung auf die letzten Wertmaßstäbe, von denen der Wollende unbewußt ausgeht oder - um konsequent zu sein - ausgehen müßte. (Max Weber, Die ‚Objektivität‘ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis, 1904, p. 151)

...the scientific treatment of value-judgments may not only understand and empathically analyze the desired ends and the ideals which underlie them; it can also "judge" them critically. This criticism can...aid the acting willing person ...in becoming aware of the ultimate standards of value which he does not make explicit to himself or, which he must presuppose in order to be logical.

Transcendental cultural critique becomes critique of ideology, when it examines the functions of explicit cultural values and ideals of a given society, and compares them with the implicit cultural values (e.g. the veiled exploitation of cultural values for economic and governmental ends). Also, transcendental critique becomes practical, when it helps to avoid naturalistic fallacies, which assert the normativity of facts. In both cases, a transcendental critique of culture doesn't criticize the interests informing these logical subreptions, but merely the subreptions themselves, thereby laying the very foundation for concrete value discussions. If a theory of culture goes beyond this type of critique, it lays down specific values and must make this explicit. In their standard work *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986, chapter 5, p. 111-136), George Marcus and Michael Fischer have described veiled, non-explicit judgements as the basic pattern of cultural-anthropological argumentation. Likewise, many a scientist engaged in the field of Postcolonial or Gender Studies tends to take implicit value judgements for granted, which in reality originate from a diffuse understanding of western liberalism. A cultural theory can propose freedom from power and ruling or emancipation as supreme values. It can demand, that man should develop cultural ideas, which somehow transcend the mere functioning in and of civilization. But it should emphasize, that both demands are propositions derived from a certain image of man.

3. Literature und Culture

In conclusion, I shall now address the question of what the cultural functions of literature may be, or to ask more specifically within my own field, the cultural functions of the study of Romance literature, within a Critical Science of Culture.

The thousand-year-old history of Romance literatures knows examples of all four aforementioned types of culture. Starting out with the the Song of Roland, which models the beginning of the end of the mythical type, proceeding on to the traditional type with its different degrees of dissociation and specialisation of culture and civilization in the middle ages, in renaissance humanism and in the different national classical periods, finally arriving at modern culture, which begins with the Romantic movement, when for instance Chateaubriand's *René* or Leopardi's *Canti* express the realization of the radical contingency of human culture and subjectivity. The modern utopia of a re-dissolution of civilization in culture is exemplified by the aestheticisms of the 19th and 20th century, while movements like Italian futurism strove towards a dissolution of culture in civilization. The emergence of hybrid forms of culture is mirrored by contemporary literature as well as by cinema and certain types of music, which, at the same time, try to escape the levelling tendencies of Kulturindustrie. While this appears to be obvious, there is however no timeless value criterion, that would justify an indictment of Kulturindustrie as mass deception following Horkheimer's and Adorno's 1944 condemnation. Kulturindustrie appears to be mass deception only within the framework of culture types 3a) and 3b).

One could now argue, that literature's representational function for the four types of culture was a near tautology and that this function could be fulfilled by other types of texts also, or perhaps only by a combination of literature with other types of texts. There are however two arguments supporting a privileged position for literature within a Critical Science of Culture: Firstly, it is possible to show, that literature is able to detect and promote changes in culture and consciousness before other types of texts react to them. Literature registers early traces of processes of dissociation and specification of culture and civilization as well as their effects on the individual consciousness. In some sort of an ex-post-teleology, we can reconstruct the way in which Romance literatures since their beginnings demonstrate a growing number of symptoms concerning the dissolution of mythical and traditional cultures. This is how literature becomes the prime medium of the transcendental critique of culture sketched above: A certain type of literature, which one might call high literature, discusses values and images of man, opens up possibilities for comparison, refutes the normativity of the factual, develops alternatives, makes the implicit explicit, discloses morally veiled interests (See Geyer 1997b). It remains to be seen, however, whether or not literature (and the other arts) will still be able to fulfil these functions in number 4) types of culture and civilization.

The second argument supporting a privileged position for high literature within a Critical Science of Culture concerns its unique perspective, which one could describe as a "history of consciousness from within". Maurice Agulhon, a historian associated with George Duby's school of history of mentality, typically concluded his failed attempts at a description of the mentality of 1848's revolutionaries, counter-revolutionaries and fellow-travellers with the remark:

Au reste, Flaubert a tout fait revivre de l'esprit de ce temps dans son admirable Education Sentimentale. (Maurice Agulhon, La Seconde République, 1848-1852, 1970, p. 403)
Besides, Flaubert perfectly revived the spirit of this time in his admirable Education Sentimentale.

The individual subject is the most important relay station for the dissemination of social energies and for the process of dissociation and specialisation in culture types 2) and 3). Its fate in future type 4) is uncertain. And yet the concrete, human subject can only ever be discursively circumscribed by philosophy and science, moral tracts, penitentials and verdicts – none of these types of texts is capable of actually grasping it. This empty centre of theory is filled by literature. Not by all literature of course, but by high literature:

Great authors are [...] specialists in cultural exchange. Their works are structures for accumulation, transformation, representation and communication of social energies and practices. (Stephen Greenblatt, Culture, 1990, p. 55)

In retrospect, Greenblatt's studies in English Renaissance can be interpreted as a large-scale examination of the relevance of canonical literary texts in the context of other types of texts. As a result, they indirectly confirmed the privileged position of high literature. Now this of course does not mean, that the canonical texts of high literature are definitive. Médiévistes and Dix-septiémistes have always been engaged in synchronous intertextual negotiations for a critical examination of the relevance of the literary canon (See Jauß 1994). Equally legitimate is the diachronous approach, which determines the literary canon depending on the relevance of certain texts for a particular time. It is of course conceivable, that the future one-dimensional cultural type 4) will no longer be able to understand the highly differentiated and elaborate cultural achievements of types 2) and 3).

In order to release the culturally constitutive and critical potential of literature, the most eminent task, apart from that of contextual studies, is the study of literature's very own and incomparable language. In this field, however, literary critics can learn fairly little from the cultural-anthropological allegoresis of balinese cockfights. (See Geertz 1973a). It's impossible to treat literary documents from cultures of type 2) and 3) as narrations of real life events typical of cultures of type 1). Literature itself is condensed cultural anthropology (See Haug 1999 against v.Graevenitz 1999). Its most important methodical instruments are the reconstruction and critical deconstruction of cultural value oppositions and ideal images of man. Discursive condensation, forms of emotionalism, imagery, allegory, caricature, parody, paradox, irony as well as, in modernism, interior monologue and lively metaphor are the creative means which it uses to this end. This is the wide enough field, on which literary studies can prove its relevance for the science of culture, as long as it feels some or any obligation to the cultural achievements of 2) and 3). This is the contribution which literary studies can make to the open process of the development of a future world civilization.

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