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A Critical Hermeneutics of Agency: Cultural Studies as Critical Social Theory

Abstract: This chapter reconstructs the project of cultural studies as the productive continuation of the epistemic interests pursued by the early Frankfurt School. Both critical theory and cultural studies are interested in culture as a medium in which power and subjectivity intersect. For the two social-scientific paradigms, the central question is the relation between power and agency, i.e., how social practices of power influence the hermeneutic self-understanding of subjects, and how those subjects in turn are capable of influencing their respective cultural and social practices. The reconstruction of the methodological paths of both perspectives leads to a critical-hermeneutic position able to provide a methodological framework for empirical social research with normative intent.

My contribution to the research logic of cultural criticism attempts to clarify the extent to which the early Frankfurt School and the currently flourishing cultural studies differently conceive an agent's cultural self-understanding as determined by social power. To be sure, both paradigms assume that objective social processes and practices have a structuring impact on subjective self-understanding, without, however, reducing the self-consciousness of the subjects to an epi-phenomenon of power or economy. Yet the conceptualization of the realm of mediation, which is supposed to both allow for an analysis of effects of power on consciousness (say as 'ideologically distorted consciousness') and still retain the relative autonomy of selves, is utterly different in both. Critical theory explains ideological schemes through recourse to depth psychology, and then grounds the force of criticism in the theorist's capacity to make conscious such implicit and hidden schemes for the agents. In contrast, cultural studies, or so I will argue, conceive of mediation in terms of the *symbolic dimension of language*, on the basis of which subjects make sense and interpret themselves. The power for critical reflexivity as well as the capacity for creative social action emerges as a potential built into the interpretive cultural practices as such.

My thesis is that the symbolic paradigm of cultural studies constitutes a substantial progress in comparison to the grounding of cultural criticism in a depth psychology of consciousness, yet I argue that a complete and satisfying theory of symbolic mediation still requires social-psychological elements. The quasi-ar-

chaeological reconstruction of the epistemic frameworks of critical theory and cultural studies will reveal that, for one, the move from a depth psychology of understanding to a symbolic theory of cultural meaning can free us from the aporias of the early Frankfurt School. We are going to show that an adequate conceptualization of symbolic mediation—that is, one that can both detect power effects in self-understanding and yet ascertain the potential for creativity and reflexivity—asks for a critical hermeneutics of agency that can fuse symbolic forms and psychic aspects of meaning.

The analysis will proceed along the following path: to begin, I will introduce Horkheimer's early project of a critical social theory, according to which depth-psychological mechanisms explain the (power-determined) integration of selves into (a highly stratified and unjust) society. The need for social recognition and integration illuminates how ideological distortions of experience can gain hold of subjective consciousness, while the existence of the psychic mediation entails the possibility that agents become reflexive and critical with regard to internalized ideological schemes. However, by the time of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the earlier hope for resistance and critique has disappeared. Now convinced that in late capitalism individuals have become unable to build up the psychic autonomy necessary for reflexive thought, the ground for resistance and critique is lost. Yet with that result, the original project of a critical theory of society aiming at a reflexive understanding of power by the agents themselves becomes aporetic; the 'end of the subject' thesis thus drives critical theory into deep and devastating contradictions (I). In order to point to a way out of this pessimistic impasse, I claim that the aporias resulting from the conceptual elimination of the psychic dimension can be overcome if we turn to a *hermeneutically inspired theory of symbolic mediation*. Such a conception, as we will see, can *both* integrate the argument concerning a power-shaped schematism of experience *and* do justice to the specific utopian and ethical intuitions of openness to otherness and subjective critical reflexivity which early critical theory introduced into the discussion (II). In a final step, I will show that the project of cultural studies, as conceived and practiced by Stuart Hall and many others, can be understood as the institutional realization of precisely that perspective. The core problem of cultural studies consists in a non-reductive mediation of agency and power, while its methodological imperatives are based on the most advanced tools concerning symbolic forms and social practices. In order to ground this perspective methodologically, I present the sketch of a hermeneutic theory of linguistically mediated agency which allows for the methodological reconciliation of a power-shaped meaning with reflexive and creative modes of interpretation. The basic idea behind this perspective consists in the claim that the socio-psychic need for social recognition leads to the power-influenced pre-schematiza-

tion of a potentially infinite and open symbolic meaning; yet, due to the inherent openness and indeterminacy of symbolic world-disclosure, schemes of understanding can always be challenged and overcome by reflexive and creative practices (III).

I Horkheimer's Early Program and the Dilemma of Critical Theory

According to Horkheimer's opening address at the Institute for Social Research, critical social theory should attempt to bring social philosophy and social research in fruitful contact with one another.[1] The aim is to reconstruct the constitution of subjective experience in the general societal context without abandoning the self to social forces. Philosophical questions—such as the relation between individual and society, the significance of culture, the formation of social solidarity, and the structure of social life in general—are to be renewed in an empirical research context. While Kantian and Mannheimian social philosophies are divorced from social reality, empirical research is fragmented into too many positivistic endeavors. A renewal of social philosophy has to reunite philosophical questions and social research in a way "that philosophy—as a theoretical understanding oriented to the general, the 'essential'—is capable of giving particular studies animating impulses, and at the same time remains open enough to let itself be influenced and changed by the concrete studies."[2]

Horkheimer's claim for such an integration is motivated by the concern for a non-reductive yet socially-situated theory of experience. In order to define the methodological premises of that project, which needs to be laid out pragmatically rather than in a priori fashion, we need to distinguish three levels: (1) the economic dimension of society, (2) the psychic dimension of individual experience, and (3) the dimension of culture. According to Horkheimer, the essential question for critical social theory consists in the analysis and determination of the relations between those dimensions. At stake is "the question of the connection between the economic life of society, the psychical development of individuals, and the changes in the realm of culture in the narrower sense (to which belong not only the so-called intellectual elements, such as science, art, and religion,

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1 See Horkheimer 1995a, pp. 1 ff.
2 Horkheimer 1995a, p. 9.

but also law, customs, fashion, public opinion, sports, leisure activities, lifestyle, etc.)."[3]

However sketchy this might appear, we can detect three essential claims. First, in contrast to orthodox Marxist positions, economy, while an important factor, is not granted a fully determining force. Horkheimer equally rejects a 'bad Spinozism' that explains the social in terms of its spiritual expressions and a 'misunderstood Marxism' that would deduce the psychic and cultural dimensions directly from economic life. Second, culture is not to be identified with 'high culture.' Horkheimer accepts the late Dilthey's fusion of Hegel's absolute with the objective spirit, thus acknowledging the equal importance of all cultural practices. Finally, and this will turn out to be crucial for our discussion, a distinction between individual psyche and culture is introduced. The emphasis on a psychic dimension that mediates culture and economy indeed defines the major (yet controversial) contribution of the Frankfurt School to social criticism.

It is important to properly understand the role of the psychic dimension in Horkheimer's early project. The psychic level gets introduced as the *mediation* between the economic 'base' and the cultural 'superstructure.' According to Horkheimer, culture cannot be connected directly with economy because "such dogmatic convictions ... presuppose a complete correspondence between ideal and material processes, and neglect or even ignore the complicating role of the *psychic links* connecting them."[4] Yet culture is nonetheless not to be idealized as a purely autonomous realm of subjective self-expression. True, the reference of thought is the concrete individual: "Thought, and thus concepts and ideas, are modes of functioning of human beings, and not independent forces,"[5] which forces us to take into account the psychological perspective. However, since the self is itself socially situated, "economic (rather) than psychological categories are historically fundamental."[6] The rejection of an abstract isomorphism between economic life and cultural forms leads to the concrete, thinking and speaking individual, and thus to psychology. Yet because the individual is situated in the context of economic social forces and its historical expressions, economic categories still take precedence over the psychological level.

At first, it might seem that Horkheimer is entangled in a problematic circle here. On the one hand, economic reductionism is rejected by referring to the irreducibly subjective acts of understanding which originate in the individual. Thus the necessity of the psychological perspective. Yet on the other hand an ab-

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3 Horkheimer 1995a, p. 11.
4 Horkheimer 1995a, p. 12.
5 Horkheimer 1995b, p. 116.
6 Horkheimer 1995b, p. 118.

stract universalistic psychology is equally rejected, because the individual is unavoidably situated in a concrete economic-historical constellation, and thus subject to economic forces. The way out of this circle is provided by the *dialectical function* that depth psychology plays for Horkheimer. Psychological explanations of cultural beliefs and practices are necessary because only they can account for how agents accept otherwise intolerable and overtly absurd social conditions. The individual act of thought has to be seen as mediated by a psychic apparatus in order to 'make sense' of the smooth adjustment of individuals: "That human beings sustain economic relationships which their powers and needs have made obsolete, instead of replacing them with a higher and more rational form of organization, is only possible because the action of numerically significant social strata is determined not by knowledge but by a drive structure that leads to false consciousness."[7]

The reference to a "drive structure" should not be construed as a unsophisticated biological essentialism, but rather as the indication of co-determining emotive and affective factors in experience. Horkheimer's model of how socially situated experience takes shape involves the following steps. To begin with, we have to see that accounting for ideological distortions of reality and experience requires the explanatory help of a depth-psychological perspective. Obvious contradictions, counter-evidence and false generalizations remain unexperienced and undiscovered by the situated selves—thus forcing us to assume that a particular mode of experiencing reality *systematically overlooking those distortions* is involved.[8] In order to account for this phenomenon, we have, in a second step, to introduce the idea of an *implicit pre-structuration of thought and perception*. Obviously, reality must be *constructed* in a certain manner of disclosure so as to adjust agents to otherwise problematic social conditions. Naming Kant's concept of schematism, Horkheimer claims that capitalist society pre-constructs experience differently for differently situated social individuals: "On the basis of their psychical apparatus, human beings tend to account of the world in such a way that their action can accord with their knowledge ... Psychology must explain that particular preformation, however, which has as its consequence the harmony of worldviews with the action demanded by economy."[9] And he adds: "it is even possible that something of the 'schematism' referred to by Kant might be discerned in the process." The deeper source of acceptance of

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7 Horkheimer 1995b, p. 120.
8 These early assumptions have later been supported by analyses with regard to American anti-semitism. See Adorno 1982 [1950], esp. pp. 297 ff.
9 Horkheimer 1995b, p. 122, 123.

such partial interpretive schemes is, finally, taken to be located in a *basic need for social recognition and acceptance*. The concept of need is not, again, to be reduced to mere bio-sexual functions, but includes instead truly social wants like security in the group and social recognition.[10] Basic survival or self-preservation, then, becomes the question of one's social integration in the collective which requires the adjustment to the symbolic as well as practical structures that define one's concrete environment.

I want to emphasize the dialectical tension with which that model attempts to capture how social power gets internalized and reproduced on the subjective-experiential level. The depth-psychological analysis gives us a tool for understanding how subjects can adapt to objectively challenging and problematic situations. However, the mediating dimension of the psyche equally entails the possibility of a reversal and displacement of the objective socio-economic structure. Horkheimer's theory, which looks at times like an anticipation of Bourdieu's conception of social habitus, precisely foregrounds the psychic in order to avoid and reject a complete isomorphism between *subjective agency and social fields*.[11] Such an isomorphism would deliver the individual entirely to social formations; in contrast to this, the existence of a *psychic mediation* entails the seeds for a political subversion, the potential for the expanded establishment of subjective and rational autonomy: "The disclosure of psychical mediations between economic and cultural development … may lead not merely to a critique of the conception of the functional relations between the two, but instead to a strengthening of the suspicion that the sequence may be changed or reversed in the future."[12]

Indeed, the very distinction between "traditional" and "critical" theory is modelled on the promise that the (ideologically necessary) construction of culture through psychic adjustments also entails the hope for a critical reversal, for a resistance and 'dis-entanglement' from existing economic and social conditions.[13] The possibility, as we have seen, for such a critique and resistance is

grounded socio-ontologically in the *psychic mediation of experience*, yet precisely this psychological grounding is later abandoned due to the experience of fascism and mass culture changed by the Frankfurt School theorists. Instead of a social-philosophical synthesis undertaken in revolutionary spirit, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/47) now projects a skeptically-distanced, somewhat withdrawn theory of a quasi-total reification. Instead of the empirical analysis of relations between economic power, psychic attitudes, and symbolic forms, we now encounter an analysis of the master concept of "instrumental reason." A pre-classifying thought itself is now supposed to exercise the functions of social power and the organization of subjective experience, while we still also find the idea of a correlation between socially schematized experience and the need for social recognition acknowledged at the very core of social existence: "The dutiful child of modern civilization is possessed by a fear of departing from the facts which, in the very act of perception, the dominant conventions of science, commerce, and politics—cliché-like—have already molded; his anxiety in none other than the fear of social deviation."[14]

Yet the very suggestion of the identity of cognitive and social conformism now indicates that the social-psychological perspective has given way to the historical-philosophical meta-narrative of "identifying thought." Confronted with the explanation of the pervasive standardization of culture (as well as with the lack to any substantive resistance to fascism), Horkheimer and Adorno propose the hypothesis of the 'end of psychic mediation of experience.'[15] We are witnessing here a clear theoretical break from the earlier conception. Drawing on Freud's triad of ego, super-ego, and id, the amazing lack of resistance is explained with the elimination of the level of the super-ego. Accordingly, internalization has come to an end in late capitalism,[16] as the macro-structural constellations of late-capitalism have effectively undermined the micro-structural conditions necessary for the (familial) development of ego-strength. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the family once provided a socializing threshold, a life-worldly buffer-zone against an all-too-pervasive influence of social power on self-constitution. Through identification with a strong father and a loving mother, the constitution of internalized authority, which could oppose external authority and influence, had been possible: "There was a force in the life of the child which allowed her to develop, inasmuch as she adjusted to the external world, her unique individuality as well."[17] The internalized institution of self-

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10 Horkheimer 1995b, pp. 120 ff.

11 Indeed, Horkheimer even refers to the concept of 'l'habitude' in (contemporary) French sociology. However, Horkheimer discussion remains extremely sketchy at this point, and will need to be specified. In particular, there is no clear distinction between (a) the need to identify with one's social situation so as to accept one's objective social chances by being socialized into a specifically constrained social identity (as woman, as Jew, as worker) as defined by the whole society; and (b) the need to be accepted and recognized as a member within one's concrete social environment, and thus to have to adjust to the specific norms, values, practices, rules of conduct that are essential for one's social group.

12 Horkheimer 1995b, p. 120.

13 See Horkheimer 1987b.

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14 Horkheimer and Adorno 1996, p. xiv.

15 Horkheimer 1987c, pp. 377 ff.

16 See Benjamin 1977, pp. 42 ff.

17 Horkheimer 1987c, p. 386.

control via the super-ego provided ego-strength, because it allowed the self to control its desires and thus to conduct herself autonomously, to practice self-control. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the destruction of (male) economic independence in late-capitalism, in the course of which the familial autonomy of the father gets dissolved, leads equally to the deconstruction of the micro-constellation necessary for successful socialization: self-governed ego-identity—and thus resistance against power—have now become impossible.

For our discussion, it is important to see how this reinterpretation of the schematism of experience leads to the dialectical dilemma, or even self-dissolution, of critical theory. Yet in contrast to a widespread assumption, holding that critical theory's aporias stem from its radical break with the early model, the problem rather derives from an underlying continuity. Indeed, the contradiction results from the assumption that *resistance needs to be grounded in the psychic autonomy of subjects*. Since the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* holds that the exclusive source of resistance, the autonomous individual, has been eradicated by late capitalism, any foothold of critical theory in the agents' lifeworld appears to have been evaporated. Thus by clinging to the idea of a "psychic center" as basis for resistance, Horkheimer and Adorno lead their early project into a deadly impasse.[18]

There are two versions of this end-of-mediation theory. In the stronger account, the 'end of internalization' suggests the end of psychic mediation as such. Fascist propaganda as well as *"Kulturindustrie"* are now taken to have a direct and unmediated access to the desires, emotions, and dispositions so as to employ the individual for their strategic and functional purposes. In the less radical version, the development of an internalized super-ego is still assumed, but a weakened ego is now taken to be fully determined by an overpowering and strong super-ego; ideals of leadership and star-cult are seen as hooking onto the internalized authority-schemes of a weak ego, which the child—because of the lack of strong parental identification—internalized at an early age.[19] To be sure, while only the first version presents a full break with the

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18 I am aware that at several points in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, usually at the end of the chapters, the hopeful resources of human reason are invoked. However, the unmediated and abrupt nature of those pleas, which are as desperate as they are unreconciled with the rest of the text, rather support the impression of a utterly pessimistic work. See also Horkheimer (1996 [1947]).

19 See Benjamin 1977 and 1978; Cook 1996, esp. p. 13–22 and 53–56. Since our analysis will unearth the importance of implicit schemes of understanding, the second thesis would make more sense. Also, it is compatible with the earlier version that presumes the psychic mediation between economy and culture. According to that move, we can preserve the theoretical continu-

early conceptual framework of psychic mediation, both theories lead to the factual elimination of a socially-constructed ego-strength, and thus to the denial of any socially-situated potential for critique and resistance. Thus, the two versions lead to the following two aporetic implications:

Assuming that the analysis of the breakdown of the family-based constitution of ego-strength is true—which has been challenged empirically[20]—resistance and critical reflexivity have now lost any identifiable location in sociopolitical reality. Due to the fact that the psychic dimension was introduced as the essential source of resistance, the negative assessment with regard to autonomous subjectivity must effect the project of a critical theory as a whole. Critical theorists cannot address themselves any longer to really existing subjects who can understand and take up the subversive messages delivered by critical theory.

However, even if the internalization of paternal authority (and the conjoined constitution of self-control) would still be possible, there would arise a contradiction between the related ideal of ego-strength (which is based on the construction of internalized power) and the use of that model for resistance. After all, the 'dialectic of enlightenment' consists precisely in the repression of one's own inner nature through the processes of the domination of outer nature, which were initially supposed to set the human being free. Accordingly, 'inner repression' gets employed as the necessary condition for resisting power, even though it is itself a form of domination. Critical theory has indeed arrived at its own, devastating dialectic, since the source of resistance is dependent on the power against which one attempts to resist.

That double dilemma of critical theory, which consists in seeing the psyche as both eliminated (which leaves the theory without addressees) and as a normative ideal (which contradicts its own analysis of subjugated subjectivity) forces us to take up the basic question of social criticism again: how can we reconstruct the internalization of power in subjective experience without eliminating conceptually the possibility of critical reflexivity and transformative resistance?[21]

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ity with Horkheimer's earlier social ontology, while the capacity to reflexively thematize and challenge existing social structures is now empirically questioned. The super-ego and the individual ego thus merge into one interpretive schematism, and thus lack any reflexive break or distanciation between the two levels.

20 Benjamin 1978.

21 Faced with such aporias, it occurred to the critical theorists themselves that an alternative framework for theorizing resistance is needed. Marcuse attempts to place hope in an emphatically interpreted libido, while Adorno and Horkheimer replace their vision of 'innerworldly transcendence' with either aesthetic or negative-theological reflections (Marcuse 1964; Adorno (1990). However, in these perspectives the utopian dimension of social criticism remains largely

II. Language and Symbolic Mediation in Early Critical Theory

I suggest that in order to point a way out of this impasse, it is helpful to turn to the productively ambiguous function that pertains to the linguistic mediation of reality. The basic idea here is that language, as the master-medium of cultural experience, entails traces and trajectories of power without ever becoming merely its instrument or expression. Openness toward new experience, reflexivity with regard to our experience, and the dialogic dimension of intersubjectivity are all inherent in our linguistic practices; I will argue that these aspects, in conjunction with a theory of symbolic power, can serve as a guiding thread for a normatively oriented social critique.

At first, it seems clear why such an alternative might never have seriously been considered by Horkheimer and Adorno: experience and culture appear to them as fully determined by "identifying thought." In light of an almost desperate reversal of Hegel's claim concerning the absolute mediation of the particular by the universal, no escape from totalizing thought seems possible. Thought as well as language are taken to be fully dominated by a will to total subsumption, according to which the individual exists only as the case of the universal law: "*Die Sprache stempelt ab.*"[22] The refusal or even incapacity to see more than a late-capitalist will to power *in our linguistic practices* is even more startling since, as Habermas has shown, the identification of symbolic thought with power creates a unique impasse for early critical theory, since it takes itself to be the *reflexive* analysis of power in light of its practical overcoming. If, however, thought as such becomes identical with power, and if thus no distinction is possible between reified meaning and critical modes of discursive understanding, then the project of a reflexive transformation loses any normative ground. The (abstract) utopian referral to a pre-symbolic mimesis, or to a trans-symbolic aesthetic or theological dimension (all of which resist conceptual explication) re-

unmediated with social reality, which itself is understood in terms of a totalizing framework of an all-pervasive power-system.

22 "Die Sprache läßt das Neue als Altes erscheinen, sie beweist, das alles im Rahmen des je Bestehenden sich begibt. Die Sprache stempelt ab ... Sobald man spricht, wird ein Besonderes als ein Allgemeines bezeichnet," Horkheimer 1987d, p. 70, 71. With regard to Hegel, it is explicitly stated that "even Hegel's Logic is subservient to the philosophy of identification," p. 72. For a subtle defense of Hegel's conception of normative critique, in particular in comparison to Adorno's criticism, see Buchwalter 1987.

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main mere gestures—and are thus insufficient to guide critical reflection of social controversies.[23]

Why, then, have Horkheimer and Adorno never really pondered the alternative of a symbolically grounded theory of resistance? That question is, I need to emphasize, not arbitrarily posed. Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno have, while working on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* intensively reflected upon the possibility of a new philosophy of language. The goal in mind was to develop a theory of experience that can both capture and transcend the effects of totalizing power. According to that perspective, we have to acknowledge the force of schematism that denigrates and instrumentalizes language as an expression of identifying thought, but nevertheless consider that language constitutes a mode of transcending power, a mode, remarkably, that is even independent from the psychic constitution of the speaking individual. As Horkheimer put it: "Independent from the psychological intention of the speaker, language points toward a universality that we have usually attributed to reason. The interpretation of that universality leads to the idea of the just society."[24]

According to Horkheimer—yet emphatically supported by Adorno—'language' is by no means identical with identifying thought. Linguistic practices are rather characterized by an in-built tension which shows itself by indicating, through the filters of encrusted and crystallized meanings, alternative forms of existence. On the one hand, to speak means to give expression to existing power relations, and thus to reproduce that power by conforming to the available schemes and expectations regarding correct and comprehensible self-expression: "There is a tendency that all sentences, whatever they might say, just express the very same meaning. That tendency comes right along with, and is actually the same, as schematization."[25] Yet in another dimension language also points, and here it is equally independent from the individual intentions, to a trans-empirical and more utopian form of meaning: "To address someone in speech really implies that we recognize him as a possible member of a future association of free human beings. Speech presupposes a common relationship to truth, and thus entails the deepest assertion of the alien existence to whom one speaks, indeed of all existences as possibilities."[26] Language thus is to be understood *dialectically,* inasmuch as it is always embedded in forms of

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23 The utopian or normative dimension, which aims at reconciliation in spite of a reified and alienated experience, thus becomes ineffable. (See Habermas 1983).

24 Max Horkheimer, "Letter to Th. W. Adorno, Sept. 14th 1941," in: "Horkheimer 1987f, vol. 17 p. 171.

25 "Horkheimer 1987f, vol. 17", p. 172.

26 "Horkheimer 1987f, vol. 17", p. 172

power, and yet, as relating to 'truth,' indicates a transcending move beyond such power-saturated crystallizations: "The contradiction would always be the one between the service (of language) to the existing praxis and its necessary intention toward a just universality."[27]

Now, especially given Adorno's participation, it seems clear that we are not asked to think of 'truth' in an ahistorical or transcendentalist manner, say in the recognition of universal validity claims, or of general rational features of speech or language as such.[28] Rather, a true community of speakers would have to entail the quasi-mimetic openness toward concrete otherness as well as the critical reflexivity of situated subjects. As we shall presently see, both aspects, in combination with the power-structuration of meaning, define the linguistic conception of cultural studies. The undeniable fact, however, that Horkheimer and Adorno never developed their project of a 'dialectics of linguistic world disclosure' (they never wrote the planned successor to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*), indicates ultimately a clinging to the paradigm of psychic autonomy: speech acts are, after all, expressions of the individual subject, who, since the end of internalization, lacks the resources to achieve true autonomy. The reduction of speech to deprived subjectivity appears to us as a methodological blindness with regard to the creative and reflexive potentials inherent in everyday linguistic practices, which would have allowed to break free from the pessimism of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Central to the theory of experience, as developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is the necessary *pre-schematization of any subject-object relation*. The pessimistic radicalization of such "projections" consists in the anti-mimetic closure of any subjective experience with regard to new or challenging encounters: the ossification or 'crystallization' of *experiential schemes* can then be understood as the loss of any reflexivity of one's own participation in this process, which amounts to the unconscious fixation of the subject to its own yet unacknowledged interpretation. Horkheimer and Adorno assume that every perception is pre-constructed, since the basic will to survival will necessarily project its needs onto the environment so as to discern the relevant features for self-preservation: "In a certain sense all perception is projection ... In human beings projection has been automatized, like other attack or defense behaviors which have

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27 "Horkheimer 1987 f, vol. 17", p. 171.
28 At this point, we can clarify a major point of difference between a hermeneutic foundation of cultural criticism and the theory of communication by Habermas, who reconstructs the "linguistically intended universality" in a Neo-Kantian manner in terms of universal validity claims, while cultural studies and its conception of meaning emphasize the intersection of schematizing power and subjective self-understandings; in such a power-embedded hermeneutics, the situated and intertwined relations between universal and particular are the focus of attention.

become reflexes."[29] In order to criticize distortions and pathologies which exist in form of rigid schematizations of reality, we can thus not simply invoke an 'undistorted' or objective point of view; rather, what is required is the *reflexive consciousness of the conceptual contributions to world disclosure* so as to make a more adequate understanding of reality possible: "In order to reflect the thing as it is, the subject must return to it more than he receives from it."[30] Since the object is formed only as the subject is distinguished from it, the denial of the constructive dimension of world disclosure constitutes a pathological distortion; in contrast, its acknowledgment allows for a self-reflexive relation to the world.

While *reflexive consciousness* can differentiate itself from the object, and is thus capable to see its own disclosing perspective as what it is, *pathic consciousness* remains imprisoned within its 'self'-constructed schemata, which are accordingly experienced as 'reality-in-itself.' The subject has thus become incapable toward a reflexive openness vis-a-vis experience: "True madness lies primarily in immutability, in the inability of thought to participate in the negativity in which thought—in contradistinction to fixed judgment—comes to its own."[31] This attractive model, including a critically-reflexive and a pathically-fixated consciousness, becomes aporetic only because it is not placed in the context of a theory of symbolic mediation. Because the capacity to reflexivity as such is seen as anchored in psychic autonomy, which in turn is taken to be eradicated by late capitalism, transcendence can only be posited in (aesthetic or theological) spheres beyond the mundane capabilities of situated and potentially reflexive selves. If we, however, relocate the critique of ideology within a theory of symbolic mediation, according to which the critical reflexivity and creative potential inheres in linguistic world disclosure, and not in the subject, the potential for a reflexive awareness of the 'subjective contribution' is ontologically entailed within all social and cultural practices.[32] Instead of identifying "linguistic world disclosure" *in toto* with the identifying logic of subsumption, we can now understand that the very experience of something as something, and thus as something concrete and different, is a process *made possible* by linguistic means. "Mimesis" must then not be pre-symbolic, or even be distorted by symbolic mediation, but a 'hermeneutic mimesis' rather exemplifies a superbly articulated and expressed experience of the phenomenon, in the stylistically ade-

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29 Horkheimer and Adorno 1996, p. 187, 188.
30 Horkheimer and Adorno 1996, p. 188.
31 Horkheimer and Adorno 1996, p. 194.
32 This move thus allows for the reconstruction of a non-totalizing experience of the other which does not have to resort to a pre-symbolic myth of mimesis.

quate use of formulations, in the openness and adequacy of choosing the right word. The idea of the hermeneutic circle, which lies at the heart of any symbolic understanding of the world, entails that language 'reads' and discloses the particular being which shows itself in the to-and-fro movement between its subject-matter and the projected interpretive frame. It thus encompasses a permanent relationship as well as the differentiation between the subjective and the objective side of meaning.[33]

We would thus be able to reconstruct the empirical loss of reflexivity in situated agents without having to abandon the potential for critical reflexivity ontologically. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the essential aspect of modern power is the *coupling of interpretive schemes with power mechanisms,* which in late capitalism is taken to destroy the psychic links that 'fraction' the connection between symbolic meaning and social power: "In the world of mass series production, stereotypes replace individual categories. Judgments are no longer based on a genuine synthesis but on *blind subsumption* ... The perceiver is no longer present in the process of perception."[34] Yet even for Kant the schematism (with which he attempts to mediate forms of intuition and categories with sense perception) is no conscious achievement. Horkheimer himself points out that by discerning the 'schematism of experience' we are dealing with a "hidden art in the depth of the human soul."[35] Accordingly, *any* mode of conscious experience —reflexive or pathic—is dependent on some implicit background schematism. It is thus misleading to oppose harshly the real or conscious process of synthesis with "blind subsumption." Rather, the reflexivity of situated agents is generally *mediated by a cultural preunderstanding,* with regard to which agents conduct in a more or less reflexive attitude. The hermeneutic model of a preunderstanding necessary for explicit conscious acts can provide the context for a less rigid mediation of power-saturated schemes and reflexive agency.[36]

III. Towards a Critical-Hermeneutic Grounding of Cultural Studies

The dialectic of conscious speech and implicit social power mediated by a cultural preunderstanding leads directly into cultural studies and its basic questions, which we may now pose and answer without entering into an aporetic situation: How do symbolic schemes structure the conscious experience of subjects? To what extent are the relevant forms of meaning shaped by power relations, and what is their function in the economy of reproducing symbolic and material domination? Finally, to what extent are subjects aware of the existence of power-influenced schemes of meaning, and to what extent are they capable of critical examination and practical transformation with regard to them?[37]

In order to set the stage for our critical-hermeneutic grounding of cultural studies, we propose to define the paradigm of cultural studies in the four following ways:

1. The methodological orientation of cultural studies has to be focused on *the symbolic construction of reality.* This is what prompts for instance Stuart Hall to integrate aspects of structuralism and semiotics into cultural studies, and this is what paved the way for the central place that Foucauldian discourse analysis today occupies in cultural criticism.[38] The symbolic perspective provides a common frame, since power relations 'articulate' themselves always through interpretive schemes; at the same time, this vision provides a truly inter-disciplinary orientation inasmuch as the theme of power-shaped meaning can be dealt with according to the methods and concepts of the respective particular disciplines.[39]

33 See Gadamer 1990; especially the third (and often neglected) part, in which the structural openness of linguistic concept formation with regard to experience is emphasized. See also Kögler 1999.

34 Horkheimer and Adorno 1996, p. 201, 202, my emphasis.

35 Horkheimer and Adorno 1996, p. 188; the same passage is quoted in Horkheimer 1995b, p. 122, where it reads "Kant spoke of a hidden art in the depths of the human soul 'whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze.'" See Kant, CPR B 180f.

36 I have developed such an account of a power-saturated yet non-reductive preunderstanding in *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (Kögler 1996), Part One: "The Preunderstanding of the Interpreter." As shown by numerous cultural studies, conscious acts are embedded in power-shaped frames of meaning, without, however, disempowering the agents fully or disarming them of any possible reflexive attitude. In other words, the turn

to a theory of symbolic mediation allows us to detect and analyze the pervasive features of power by preserving a level on which to locate the potential for critical reflexivity and political transformation

37 Due to the fact that cultural studies represent a highly heterogeneous and complex field of research, ranging from the effects of globalization to audience reception of mass media, from social power struggles to 'race, class and gender' studies, the following analysis of methodological premises of cultural criticism must abstract from many particular issues. The emphasis I place on the *symbolic* mediation is by no means intended to downplay the importance of bodily practices, as defined, say, by Foucault or Bourdieu; however, the possibility of reflexive criticism and informed resistance, as much as the full cultural meaning of social practices, are based upon the linguistic dimension of our experience.

38 See Hall 1981; 1996a.

39 In this context, the dialogic conceptions of language and communication by Bahktin and Voloshinov, the conception of cultural practices by de Certeau, and the Marxist philosophy of

2. In order to prevent any academic ossification into a sterile semiotic discourse cut-off from social praxis, research has to be tied immediately to the ongoing political life. Especially Larry Grossberg supports such a pragmatist self-understanding of cultural studies.[40] The 'research logic' of cultural studies should never become autonomous or automatic; it always needs to be linked to political issues such as Aids, xenophobia, sexual and gender identities, globalization, etc. The symbolic perspective thus 'networks' the specific disciplinary orientations (art-historical, sociological, communicational, anthropological) with concrete problems.[41]

3. The envisioned connection of symbolic theory to political praxis is undertaken in a spirit indebted to the situated self-understanding of the subjects. According to the Gramscian version of Marxism, we have to reject any elitist conception of culture. Culture is, in the words of Raymond Williams, 'ordinary'—and as such needs to be defended against any denigration from above. At the same time, however, we should also avoid a naïve leftist populism that celebrates any existing cultural practices and identities as *de facto* legitimate and self-chosen. Precisely the adoption of the concept of ideology commits us to a position equally beyond an 'elitism of high culture' or a 'populism of low culture.' At stake is rather the reconstruction of reflexive and creative potentials in the discursively and socially limited contexts of experience.[42]

4. Such a symbolically mediated, politically motivated, and culturally situated model finds its final fulfillment in the analysis of the *cultural construction of subjective identity*. Implied already in the discourse analysis of media experience, and yet even more pronounced in studies concerning race, class, and

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language by Gramsci, have been used to infuse into Foucault (and recently into Bourdieu as well) more open and flexible conceptions of meaning and agency in various disciplines.

40 See Grossberg 1997.

41 Especially the 'politics of representation,' in which the symbolic self-understanding with regard to basic interpretive concepts is at stake, has thus become highly relevant for cultural studies. Indeed, 'meaning' and 'sense' are now seen as controversial and contested political goods, the 'definition' or even 'conquest' of which presents one of the most important aims of any critical intervention into politics. Stuart Hall himself has intervened in such a way into the politics of Great Britain in the 80s with his book *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (Hall 1988).

42 These dialectic formulations are intended to indicate a position *beyond* the elitist criticism of Adorno *and* any unreflected populism. While the Frankfurt School frequently overlooked the traces of subversion in the reception of mass culture, in cultural studies we find tendencies toward an uncritical acceptance of consumerist hedonism. The following discussion tries to overcome those bad alternatives.

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gender, this perspective questions the symbolic (and social) constructions implicit in subjective experiences. We come here full circle with regard to the methodological program of cultural studies, since the general thesis of the symbolic mediation of reality is now concretely applied to the lived experience of situated selves. The problem consists in showing how we can, within the framework of our methodological perspective, reconstruct the impact of social power on self-understanding without, however, eliminating conceptually the capability of subjects for critical reflexivity and resistance.[43]

We can now pursue the methodological grounding of cultural studies by integrating Horkheimer's concept of social recognition into a hermeneutic theory of symbolic self-construction. According to such a perspective, the developing self slowly takes on social schemes of identification since it has to assure itself of the recognition and solidarity of its social environment. The will to recognition, consisting in a deep-seated longing to be accepted and supported, can be satisfied only by more or less conscious acts of adjustment to the symbolically structured world. The encounter of the self with the other, in the course of which one's identity takes shape, crystallizes in the adaptation of typical self-images; those schemes are projections of the other onto my being, and they become, inasmuch I adopt the other's stance toward myself, my own modes of self-understanding. This process already begins in the pre-symbolic phase of the mother or parent relation, and continues in the later, symbolically mediated phases of life. However, since neither the attachment of one's deepest fantasies to discursive structures nor the symbolic self itself are fixated, as Hall has shown,[44] any self-identification in the context of socially established schemes of interpretation essentially remains an open and criticizable project.

While we thus require the concept of *recognition* as an explanatory mechanism for the power-induced adjustment to discursive schemes, we equally need to emphasize the idea of reflexive self-realization. The task is now to do so without succumbing to a Kantian model of self-ruling, since it led, as we saw, early critical theory into one of its aporias by introducing an authoritarian model of subjectivity as grounds for resisting power and authority. The normative intuition

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43 Precisely this problematic has recently become a new central focus of discussion in cultural studies. Stuart Hall himself reflects on this issue in the context of the neo-existentialist writings of late Foucault, and considers, following Lacan and Butler, the reintegration of psycho-analytic models into discourse analysis. My contribution relates directly to that discussion. See Hall 1996b.

44 See Hall 1996a, 1996b.

of a self-governed existence is indeed crucial for any life opposed to power; nonetheless, such an intuition cannot be explicated by reference to the heterogeneity of pre-symbolic drives, nor is it to be derived from interpretive openness of meaning alone. With regard to pre-discursive desires, Judith Butler has rightly emphasized that the cleavage between desire and discourse is not sufficient to ground a socially progressive resistance. This is because such a 'resistance from below' seems to be capable only of destabilizing and shaking-up established meanings, while its rootedness in pre-symbolic drives do not allow for a discursive reformulation of our cultural self-understanding.[45] Similarly, the Derridean play of differences entails no valid model for reflexive self-determination, since in this model, interpretation traverses the symbolically disclosed realm of meaning without any limits and constraint; yet such a never-ending, never consummated process of understanding might even work in support of existing social and institutional divisions, since their impact on schemes and content of subjective self-understanding gets denied in its course.[46] If we can ground critical reflexivity neither in the desire/discourse gap nor derive it from interpretive indeterminacy, the question remains: How are we going to reconstruct the conditions of possibility of critical self-reflexivity without losing sight of the empirical structuration of meaning through power?

We can conceive of a solution to this issue if we replace, as consistently argued in this chapter, the thesis of a psychic mediation of experience with a theory emphasizing the symbolic nature of understanding. In contrast to the early Frankfurt School, this approach rejects any conceptual relation between the capability to creative interpretation or reflexive self-determination and the independent development of a certain psychic structure; instead, creativity and reflexivity are seen as structural aspects of symbolic world disclosure itself. Such reflexivity is exemplified through the manifold interpretive practices in everyday life, without, however, already presenting us with a fully developed reflexive understanding. In a critical hermeneutics of language, the symbolic (that is, non-causal) relation of speech acts to their meaning is rather seen as a resource which can be unfolded in terms of a both socially situated and yet theoretically informed self-reflection. Linguistic world disclosure encompasses

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45 "What do we make of a resistance that can only undermine, but which appears to have no power to rearticulate the terms, the symbolic terms—to use Lacanian parlance—by which the subjects are constituted, by which subjection is installed in the very formation of the subject?" Butler 1997, p. 88.

46 For a similar criticism of a merely interpretive or symbolic multiculturalism that ignores the social and economic factors operative within and behind cultural forms of meaning, see Matustik 1998.

the possibility of a reflexive self-relation, and thus can be developed into a conscious explication of the underlying symbolic forms of meaning. This is because language not only discloses entities within the world, but equally allows to represent such a representation itself. The reflexive structure of symbolic relations vis-à-vis the world is independent from the intra-psychic control of drives.

This move allows for the reconstruction of the normative-practical orientation of critical theory since agents, as the addressees of the reflexive messages, are now *eo ipso* equipped with the tools necessary for such criticism. The problem of the 'loss of situated agents' capable of being addressed by cultural criticism, which emerged from the thesis of the end of the autonomous individual, thus dissolves. Similarly, we can now do away with the aporetic justification of the source of resistance against authoritarianism in a psychic structure which is itself authoritarian. If reflexivity is an in-built feature of symbolic understanding, then there is no need for an additional theory of psychic self-domestication, that is, for a conception of authoritarian self-discipline in one's psychic economy.[47] Moreover, reflexive self-determination now need not be conceived in opposition to sensuous experience: the subject qua speaker can draw on the reflexive resources of language without having had formerly to subject one's desires and wishes to repressive control. Indeed, the conceptual separation between reflexive acts, enabled by symbolic means, and psychic autonomy, grounded in the repression of drives, might open up a perspective of a reflexive yet non-repressive relation between understanding and sensuality.[48] Finally, insofar as symbolic understanding takes place in the context of a dialogic interaction between self and other, this model further captures the normative intuition of *openness and recognition with regard to the radical other*. As indicated above, hermeneutic experience thrives through the open dialectic between the general and the particular; accordingly, the other or the 'non-identical' (Adorno) is never to be subjected to the subsumption under a pre-established general concept, but always taken to present a challenge to one's taken-for-granted beliefs

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47 The fact that reflexivity is entailed in our linguistic practices as a normative orientation can be seen by our attitude to ask agents for reasons for strange or unusual actions or for acts that run counter to established norms or habits of behavior. We thus assume the potential of a reflexive self-relation to be built into our shared practices by holding people accountable to give reasons for their actions. Reflexivity can be considered a meta-value of our communicative practices since we would consider a person that refuses to give any reason for their action 'irrational' in a more basic way than a person that would give an unconvincing or insufficient one.

48 The harmonious relation between understanding and the senses is also normatively relevant since repressed characters might be more inclined to (racist, sexist, nationalist) project others as beings that can realize what they themselves are forbidden to do, and that are 'therefore' to be hated (without consciousness of that deep-psychic structure, of course).

and prejudgments. Such a methodology therefore entails the normative respect for the culturally, sexually, and socially other.[49]

Crucial in the context of a critical hermeneutics of agency is, however, that the symbolic emergence of the reflexive self takes place against the background of power-influenced structures of meaning. We are thus dealing with the twofold thesis that the need for social recognition explains the internalization of power-saturated schemes, yet that linguistic meaning entails the potential for transgression and the critique of power. In contrast to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I argue that linguistic world disclosure, by its very nature of being a symbolic (that is, non-causal) relation to the world, contains the seeds for a creative and reflexive thematization. This potential, however, is 'domesticated' by numerous and pervasive social practices of normalization, standardization, and stereo-typification of the experiencing self.[50] The basic idea of fusing a theory of symbolic mediation with a social psychology of recognition states that the potential infinity of experience and expression is constrained by the need for social recognition (and yet is never fully controlled by it). Subjects thus adjust themselves, by means of the habitualized pre-schematizations of their symbolic competence, to the thought, perception and action-schemata of their group. This process provides agents with recognition and self-esteem as group members, which they require for their social-symbolic survival; at the same time, the acceptance as a member of 'general society' [*Gesamtgesellschaft*] is granted solely on the subject's conforming attitude toward the expected, usually gender, class and ethno-specific schemes.[51]

The dialectic of symbolic power thus ties the self, through its recognition needs, to socially normed patterns of self-understanding which form the horizons of self-evaluation and self-esteem. Studies ranging from feminine body culture, the self-experience of ethnic minorities, or the cultural hegemony of social classes have shown the extent to which subjects experience themselves through such prescribed standards and schemata.[52] Tied to such schemes by fear of social exclusion or even 'social death,' the subjects adopt those modes as their own.[53] Especially members of non-integrated groups are forced to a permanent reflection on the symbolic violence inherent in language, if labeled as "foreigner," "negro," "prostitute," etc. They are, we may say, dialectically integrated by being both part of the general symbolic order—which amounts to the sense of shame and self-denigration, and through their ties to particular social lifeworlds, which makes them outcasts. While such a situation may put these agents in a more 'natural' position to question and reject the existing modes of evaluation, it may also lead to over-adjustment or self-denial, and even to self-destructive practices. The alienated attitude, however, has a unique potential to reveal the (constructivist) truth about all of our symbolically constituted identities, which express themselves in seemingly 'natural' expressions like "woman," "worker," "intellectual" in respective schemes of identity.

The concept of a 'schematism of experience,' which constitutes the deep-psychological or deep-symbolical relays between the need for social recognition and social power relations, can be explicated through the hermeneutic model of understanding. The idea that subjective speakers necessarily rely on a meaning-constitutive background is of crucial importance here.[54] As speech act theory as

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49 See Kögler, "Ethical and Methodological Recognition of the Other," in: Kögler 1996a, p. 141–157. The basic point is that the normative recognition of the other as a dialogic self is derived from within the interpretive encounter itself, and thus can be justified by means of an explication of the normative dimension that is already implicitly present in our interpretive practices.
50 Foucault, 1976; 1978. I have argued elsewhere that Foucault's thesis concerning the power-based construction of selfhood makes sense only in the context of a hermeneutic theory of experience that can treat the internalization of power in a non-behavioristic manner. See Kögler 1996b. Here I shall further develop the concept of internalization.
51 We thus employ Horkheimer's early conception of a *need for social recognition* in order to explain how subjective acceptance and internalization of power-saturated schemes becomes possible. We thus preserve the social-psychological dimension, which gets productively combined with discourse analysis, insofar as it illuminates the constitution of socially constructed subjective experience. Similarly, we replace the idea of subjective autonomy as the source of resistance with a theory of linguistic meaning that entails the potential for reflexive criticism and creative meaning. *Subjectivity, then, is rather the goal than the unavoidable starting point.* This argument applies also to poststructuralist discussions of subjectivity, insofar as we should not see those analyses as destroying the possibility of autonomy, but rather as showing how non-autonomous forms of subjectivity are socially created, and how we can, without relying al-

ready on the autonomous self, nonetheless develop and create new forms of self-understanding and self-realization. This move of theorizing is crucial, because it could show how oppressed selves can in fact overcome and re-create themselves from their oppressed position (see Fanon on colonized selves), without having to be 'autonomous' already.
52 See Diamond and Quincy 1988; Fanon 1967; Bourdieu 1991. For black youth, it may be the sports career, as suggested in the documentary movie *Hoop Dreams*. Bourdieu's analysis of habitus provides overwhelming evidence how agents define themselves in terms of their social position.
53 I have analyzed the relationship between female identity and the need for social recognition with regard to practices such as female excision and abortion in Kögler 2014.
54 Both Heidegger with regard to a 'circumspective understanding' of Being-in-the-World, and Wittgenstein in his crucial reflections "On Certainty,' have shown that our explicit understanding of something as something is based upon an implicit preunderstanding. That preunderstanding defines the meaning of explicit expressions while not being thematically present as such. The language-hermeneutic reflections of Gadamer and Searle have extended those insights directly to the realm of linguistic meaning. Methodical control in the human sciences is never complete, as Gadamer argues, since the interpreters comprehension is subject to a historical horizon

well as semiotics have shown, speaker and hearer can communicate about some-
thing only insofar as they employ shared symbolic means, as they follow shared
conventions that regulate the common use of signs.[55] In order to be grasped by B
as y, the communicative intention of A to communicate y to B has to rely on
shared assumptions followed by both communicators. Whether something can
count as a question, a statement, an order or an emotional expression depends
on the communicative or 'illocutionary' force, the sense of which is learned by
being socialized into language games. Now, for our context it is crucial that
the shared understanding between speakers is not fully determined by the
'rules' of the game. Indeed, the mutual understanding of communicators is
only given if the 'hermeneutic background' sufficiently overlaps in order to es-
tablish shared conceptual and practical understanding. The 'background' is
not fully explicable in terms of rules; it is acquired through socialization, and
as such tied to the particular cultural and social context.[56] In other words, social
differences and distinctions that prevail in the respective contexts leave their im-
pression on preunderstanding. Subjective intentions in communication are thus
not only shaped by explicit communicative needs, but also by a 'horizon of in-
telligibility' which defines a socially situated scope of understanding; insofar
as the social context is pervaded by power relations, they will appear indirectly
on the level of meaning.[57]

This process leads, on the one hand, to the internalization of the power
structures, because the objective opportunities for self-realization are unevenly
distributed among different social groups. The pre-schematization of experience
adjusts the reflexive and creative potential to the socially accepted schemes, and

thus helps to reproduce, symbolically as well as practically, existing structures of
domination.[58] Yet on the other hand, the fact that those experiences are *symboli-
cally mediated* implies that subjects—as speakers—are never totally determined
by objective power structures. The medium of language entails the possibility
of infinitely many expressions and interpretations, which thus can only be con-
strained empirically, and never absolutely.

The task of cultural studies is thus to make explicit the hidden contexts that
implicitly shape our conscious understanding, and thereby to push reflexivity
and self-understanding onto a higher plane. Despite the fact that the hermeneu-
tic background is permeated by power, it nonetheless remains 'hermeneutic;' as
such, it is in principle accessible to the agents themselves, and remains always a
negotiable part of the agents' own self-understanding. Interpretive schemes are
not as fixed and static as the classical structuralist or discourse-analytical mod-
els assume; especially in struggles concerning the cultural, political, social and
'gendered' identity of groups, the meanings of basic terms are up for grasp and
targets of ongoing re-negotiation.[59] With regard to the power-induced socializa-
tion into symbolic forms, we are thus fortunately dealing with an *ambiguous
process*. True, the symbolic schemes often demarcate relatively rigid boundaries
for individual self-expression; and yet the situated self-understanding is still
never fully delineated by the socio-symbolic logic of identification. This is not,
as Hall and others have argued, because of the desire/discourse gap or the inde-
terminacy of the signifier. If we want to relate symbolic identification to reflexive
agency, we should rather emphasize that the *self-reference of the first person* can
never be fully inscribed into a definite description: this act—as an act of *self-
identification*—is dependent on the spontaneous agency of the subject itself,

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the scope of which lies beyond individual consciousness. In everyday communication, as Searle
argues, any clearly defined sentence is intersubjectively understood only because the communi-
cators possess a shared practical horizon of understanding the situation.

55 Searle 1969; Habermas 1987. This position is contested by Davidson 19 where Davidson ar-
gues that contextually invented 'passing theories' can account for intersubjective understanding.
However, the communication breakdown between speakers who speak the same language yet
coming from radically different social or cultural milieus suggests something like a hermeneutic
background as a source of shared meaning.

56 Searle 1983, pp. 141 ff.

57 Pierre Bourdieu's sociolinguistics of the symbolic habitus, which is grounded in the social
habitus and thus points back to the social status based on recognition, can serve such a critical
reconstruction as a guiding thread. However, as I have shown in the target essay of a discussion
of Bourdieu, we have to integrate Bourdieu's conception in a more refined hermeneutics includ-
ing reflexivity and innovative self-interpretation. See Bourdieu 1991, and for critical readings of
Bourdieu, the special issue "New Directions in the Sociology of Knowledge," *Social Epistemolo-
gy*, Spring 1997.

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58 The 'domestication' or 'reduction' of our reflexive and creative powers, which we as speaking
beings always possess as potentials, is brought about by a will to social recognition; the need to
be integrated makes us constrain, usually unconsciously, *the open horizon of interpretive possi-
bilities in order be allow us to participate in the acceptable and socially established rules of mean-
ing*. Foucault defends a similar conception of discourse, albeit more inspired by Bergsonian and
surrealist themes, in "The Discourse on Language," in: Foucault 1972.

59 Such 're-negotiations' are well described by Fiske 1996. To be sure, we have to ask further
what aspects of the social background can be immediately expressed in the language and
'world view' of the situated selves, and what features require an objectifying theoretical frame-
work. In any event, the interpretive schemes that agents themselves have access to and that they
can understand as their meaning have to be kept in mind by every objective analysis. It has to be
shown how these schemes derive from or are related to objective functional mechanisms or
structures. To show this, I think, might also help situated agents to understand the meaning
and the relevance of abstract theoretical languages.

and can thus never by ossified by a general classification or typification.[60] Similarly, every interpretive self-image, just as much as it is defined by linguistic meaning, remains embedded in complex practical contexts and thus dependent on a host of implicit background assumptions. Since that background understanding is complex and diversified, and thus cannot be circumscribed in a definite set of rules, the very 'identity' of the 'identified' self must equally remain open. Self-reference and background dependency thus imply that self-understanding withstands a rigid fixation in definite interpretations.

Finally, with our proposed hermeneutic conception of symbolic mediation we can also avoid the complementary mistake consisting in an excessive over-estimation of the reflexive and creative powers of situated selves. While we need to emphasize the transcending potential inherent in interpretive practices, we need not overlook the actual power-shaped and constraining contexts of meaning constitution. From its inception, being socialized into practices of speech and communication is associated with practices of evaluation, normalization, and adjustment, which agents obey for the sake of social recognition. The deep-seated need for social acceptance moves subjects to internalize the expected patterns of behavior and expression, which crystallize into the agent's second nature. Our model thus rejects that agents stand as free and reflexive subjects 'before' a host of social possibilities. Rather, the *situated* subject is always already embedded in its social positions which in turn shape the outlook of its interpretive endeavors. It is because of such a situatedness of experience that a more radical reflexive break—by means of semiotic and discourse-theoretic tools—with the agent's self-understanding is necessary.

Accordingly, the reflexivity and creativity that is entailed in our linguistic practices can provide the situated springboard for a critical interpretation. Cultural Studies should be understood as the theoretically-informed continuation of our everyday potential for reflexivity, by means of a reflexive reconstruction of power-laden interpretive schemes, and as such as the legitimate heir to the Frankfurt School. The task is to enhance our understanding of the implicit mechanisms of power, and thereby to lead to a less constrained unfolding of our creative capabilities.

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60 Here, the relation between an internalized social 'me' and a transcending, reflexive and creative 'I' as suggested by George Herbert Mead helps for theorizing internalized power and reflexive criticism. See Mead 1934. See also Kögler 2012.

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Overcoming Naturalism from Within: Dilthey, Nature, and the Human Sciences

Abstract: Dilthey's middle works offer alternative strategies for interpreting the debate between naturalism and anti-naturalism. These works traced the limits of natural scientific methods in the face of the felt reflexivity of the subject, the singular nexus of the individual's life, and the epistemic inability to comprehend life as a universally valid whole. Dilthey naturalistically critiques claims appealing to an uninterpreted immediate givenness and the direct self-access and self-evidence of uninterpreted "inner experience," while minimalistically confronting naturalism with the reflexively felt, interpretively processed, and reflectively conceptualized and mediated character of the given. Lived-experiences are complex relational wholes, involving purposiveness, which cannot be reduced to discrete "natural" elements abstracted from the life-nexus. Naturalism is the primary orientation of modern science; yet the contents of life and the objects themselves call us to methodological differentiation and the articulation of reality in more complex and multifaceted ways.

I Introduction

Wilhelm Dilthey's epistemic project is to a certain extent "naturalizing," as his Neo-Kantian, phenomenological, and later hermeneutical critics have noted. At the same time, it is "anti-naturalistic" according to the positivistic and scientistic reception of his works. It is ironic that a holistic thinker of the self-generative interconnected "life-nexus" [*Lebenszusamenhang*] has been identified in this reception with a dualistically (mis-)construed reification of the distinction between nature [*Natur*] and spirit [*Geist*], and explanation [*Erklärung*] and understanding [*Verstehen*].

In this essay, I suggest a more complex and nuanced approach to Dilthey's thinking of nature and spirit that reveals his current relevance to ongoing debates between proponents of naturalism and anti-naturalism by reconsidering the mediated nexus of nature and history articulated in Dilthey's works, particularly the writings of the 1890s that are closer to a naturalistic and positivistic perspective without embracing it. I argue that Dilthey's project is more coherent than his naturalistic and anti-naturalistic critics have proposed. Such a reconsideration of Dilthey's project offers a significant alternative strategy for responding