Reinfandt, Christoph. "'Texture' as a Key Term in Literary and Cultural Studies." In: Rüdiger Kunow, Stephan Mussil, eds. *Text or Context: Reflections on Literary and Cultural Criticism.* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013: 7-21.

CHRISTOPH REINFANDT

'Texture' as a Key Term
in Literary and Cultural Studies

While the cultural turn of literary studies has certainly made the time-honoured problem of how to methodologically situate texts in contexts even more pressing, it seems that the heavy emphasis on 'theory' in the 1980s and '90s did not provide a generally accepted blueprint for dealing with this challenge. The cultural turn itself has certainly contributed to a massive validation of 'text,' even to the point of conceiving of culture as a mainly textual phenomenon. But one cannot help feeling that this concern for the textual dimension of culture was largely theoretical, while actual texts as self-contained units of analysis vanished from sight partly as a result of cultural studies' deconstruction of literary studies' traditional fixation on the text as a work of art with all its ideological baggage. After the storms of 'theory' and turning literary studies into cultural studies have blown over, however, there is a sense that not all achievements of literary studies are ideologically charged, and that a balanced synthesis of literary studies, cultural studies and media studies provides one of the more promising scenarios for the future of the humanities. Ideally, then, literary studies should be practiced *as* cultural studies with an awareness of media-historical conditioning, while conversely cultural and media studies could profit from literary studies' long-standing expertise in analysing texts. In this essay, I will introduce the term 'texture' as a key concept for this re-fashioning.

As these introductory remarks will have indicated, I suggest that the contribution of literary studies to what in Germany has been called *Medienkulturwissenschaft* (i.e. literary studies as media/cultural studies, cf. Schönert 1996) should be marked by an insistence on the discipline's core competence in textual analysis with its rich tradition of highly sophisticated theoretical reflection—from philology through close reading to the more recent varieties of literary theory. It was, in fact, under the auspices of the latter's sophistication that literary studies re-opened itself for social, political and historical concerns. Absorbing the influence of various disciplines such as philosophy (e.g. Derrida), psychoanalysis (Lacan), anthropology (Geertz), and sociology (Luhmann), to mention only prominent examples, literary theory became 'Theory,' a mode of thinking which could address everything in terms of semiotic processes of representation and

meaning production. Theory in this all-encompassing sense in turn underwrote the assimilation of literary studies into cultural studies and has since found the 'postmodern' spirit of the age increasingly in tune with its assumptions: many people, not only in the humanities, would agree that we are living in a thoroughly mediatised world. What the recent history of Theory adds to this assessment, however, is the insight that Niklas Luhmann's notorious observation that "Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media" (Luhmann 2000, 1) is perhaps too tame. After all, it is not only the mass media, but also the historical sedimentations of an accumulative media evolution which make the world we live in as thoroughly mediatised as it is. While Derrida surely got it right when he pinpointed writing as the crucial factor contributing to this fall into virtuality, it is also clear, and more recent work in the wake of the cultural and medial turns has repeatedly insisted on this, that writing-induced virtuality could only gain comprehensive efficacy through print technology. Only after this decisive step did mass media become possible, before digitalization and the internet introduced yet another qualitative and quantitative leap. Mediatisation, then, is by no means a 'postmodern' phenomenon which can be addressed without historical 'depth'—and it is in this latter respect that the tradition(s) of literary studies offer valuable insights culminating in Fredric Jameson's maxim 'Always historicize!' (Jameson 1981), which has come to be widely accepted and even internalized in the discipline these days.

In the following pages I intend to historicize this maxim. I will begin with an assessment of the evolution of (literary) theory which brought this maxim to the fore. In a second step, I will then introduce the concept of 'texture' and discuss its implications for a fully historicized methodology in literary and cultural studies.

1. The Historicity of (Literary) Theory

As early as 1995, Peter Barry opened his eminently useful primer *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* with the following observation:

> The 1980s probably saw the high-water mark of literary theory. That decade was the 'moment' of theory, when the topic was fashionable and controversial. [...] [A]fter the moment of theory there comes, inevitably, the 'hour' of theory, when it ceases to be the exclusive concern of a dedicated minority and enters the intellectual bloodstream as a taken-for-granted aspect of the curriculum. (Barry 1995, 1)

A similar historicizing impulse can also be detected in the so far latest attempt at a large-scale history of literary theory in English, M.A.R. Habib's *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*, published in 2008. Habib prominently places the following hint under the heading 'Methodology': "A fourth principle of the present volume is the need to correct an imbalanced perception, prevalent through many graduate schools, of the originality and status of modern literary theory, an imbalance reflected in certain anthologies of theory and criticism" (Habib 2008, 4). This is clearly not about reinforcing those

old-school conservatives who have been traditionally hostile to theory within literary studies, but rather about historicizing recent developments with an eye to their limits and potentials. What this methodological principle calls for, then, is an inquiry into the historicity of literary theory itself, and there is always the danger that this interest is ultimately overrun by the sheer mass of influential and not so influential texts and positions and schools of theoretical thought which will have to be included in a comprehensive historical account like Habib's. While I have tried to give a systematic account of the historicity of modern literary theory elsewhere (cf. Reinfandt 2009a), I will here take my cue for an approach to the notion of 'texture' from a recent high-profile critical intervention by Jerome McGann, whose claim to fame in Anglophone literary study rests partly on his 1983 monograph *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. This influential study paved the way for the emergence of the historicist revisionism that has been a hallmark of Anglophone Romantic Studies ever since, and it alerted critics to the persistence of a Romantic ideology in literary studies. McGann has also been a keen observer of both the foundations of the discipline of literary studies (cf. McGann 1983b/1985) and, more recently, of media change and its implications for the discipline (cf. McGann 1991/2001). Drawing on this background, McGann published a full-blown attack on what he considers literary studies' inadequate response to the current sea change in the mediascape of our world with its very practical consequences in the *Times Literary Supplement* on November 20, 2009. Under the headline "Our Textual History: Digital Copying of Poetry and Prose Raises Questions Beyond Accuracy Alone," McGann begins with an outline of what he considers to be problematic developments in literary studies in the last hundred years or so. This is the opening of his article:

> Why does textual scholarship matter? Most twentieth-century students of literature and culture would have thought that a highly specialized question, and many still do. But a hundred years ago the question would hardly have been posed at all.
> Until the early decades of the twentieth century, what we now call 'Literary and Cultural Studies' was called philology, and all its interpretive procedures were clearly understood to be grounded in textual scholarship. But in the twentieth century, textual studies shifted their centre from philology to hermeneutics, that subset of philological inquiry focused on the specifically literary interpretation of culture. From the vantage of the nineteenth-century philologist, this 'turn to language' would have been seen as a highly specialized approach to the study of literature.
> What is philology? Literally, it means the love of the word (or articulated thought). The term (and the discipline) grew to eminence in the nineteenth century. The great German philologist August Boeckh famously defined it as 'Die Erkenntnis des Erkannten'—The Knowledge of What is Known. It is a brilliant formulation. We study and pass on the human record that others have studied and passed on to us. Essential to the study of that record are the socio-historical conditions of its creation and emergence.
> Distinguishing two critical procedures—the Higher and the Lower criticism—philology studies the documentary record on the assumption [...] that the documents carry the evidence of 'the history of their own making' (D.F. McKenzie). To the philologist, all possible meanings are a function of their historical emergence as material artefacts. The Lower Criticism devotes itself to the study of the documents per se; the

Higher Criticism considers the documents as they are the product of human endeavour under specific historical circumstances.

This comprehensive historical method was gradually displaced in the twentieth century, and the very term 'philology' fell into disuse. In the era of Modernism, scholars turned to hermeneutics of many kinds, and thence, after the Second World War, to the meta-interpretive interests that played themselves out, in diverse ways, under the general banner of Theory. (McGann 2009, 13)

Even the tone of these introductory passages makes it very clear that Jerome McGann is arguing for a return to philology, or perhaps a 'new philology.' At any rate, he wants to get away from capital-T Theory under the influence of linguistic, cultural and medial turns. For him, 'textual scholarship' should be the centrepiece of a 'comprehensive historical method' because "the emergence of digital media in the late twentieth century is forcing a shift back to the view of traditional philology, where textual scholarship was understood as the foundation of every aspect of literary and cultural studies" (*ibid.*). Thus, the standards of the emerging digital archive should be modelled on the inclusive standards of the best critical editions, which McGann describes as "a summary representation of the entire production and reception histories" against the backdrop of the "social and institutional networks that made those histories possible" (*ibid.*, 14). From these premises, McGann draws the following programmatic conclusion: "We are now called to design and build digital equivalents of such a machinery" (*ibid.*, 15).

Most people in literary studies would certainly agree with McGann that critical editions produce and provide a wealth of information. However, it is also clear that this information is always and necessarily oriented towards the textual case at hand and thus very particular. To put it differently: critical editions are first and foremost media of what McGann, following D.M. McKenzie, calls the 'Lower criticism' devoted to "the study of the documents per se" (*ibid.*, 13). There can be no doubt whatsoever that they cater excellently "to the needs of scholars and educators" (*ibid.*, 15) and that this particular function can be greatly enhanced by digitalization—in this respect McGann has certainly identified a worthwhile project. With regard to the potential of such a critical digital archive in terms of 'Higher criticism,' on the other hand, it seems disingenuous to suggest that any assessment of the 'history of [the documents'] own making [...] under specific historical circumstances' can proceed without taking into account the current state of affairs in literary and cultural studies and the degree of theoretical sophistication reached in recent years. In contrast to McGann, I would suggest that the ideal combination of 'the Higher and the Lower criticism' he envisions can only be achieved in an up-to-date fashion if the theoretical insights of the last 100 years are integrated into the project, albeit in a strictly historicized way. What exactly are McGann's objections? In the course of his argument he first points out that

[t]he twentieth century's retreat from philology involved a specialized view of the interpretation of texts. Instead of taking a broadly based socio-historical orientation, scholars and literary critics worked out various ways for treating social and historical

factors as interpretive constants rather than complex variables. The model for the act of interpretation was an individual reader engaged with a particular 'text,' with the 'text' being understood not as a document with variable histories, but as a linguistic construct per se. But our literary works—informational as well as imaginative—are not simply alphanumeric entities waiting to be engaged by a particular reader. (*ibid.*, 13)

Against this, McGann argues for a return to philology's broader perspective:

The historical record is composed of a [...] set of specific material objects that have been created and passed along through a [...] network of agents and agencies. The meanings of the record—the interpretation of those objects—are a function of the operations taking place in that dynamic network. Only a sociology of the textual condition can offer an interpretive method adequate to the study of this field and its materials. (*ibid.*)

The problem with this juxtaposition is that the development of literary theory in the course of the last 100 years has moved well beyond the position marked in the first quotation. In fact, there have been, in the last 30 years or so and particularly under the banner of the cultural turn, various attempts at providing the theoretical outlines of just the 'sociology of the textual condition' that McGann calls for in the second quotation. This overall development will be sketched in the remainder of this section (for a more detailed account cf. Reinfandt 2009a).

The guiding assumption of the following sketch is that both modern literature and modern literary theory try to come to terms with a fundamental cultural change which puts traditional Western ideas about art and literature's mimetic, representative and ultimately normative functions to the test: the emergence of subjectivity and the individual as key aspects of all cultural practices. Epistemologically, this fundamental cultural change entails a shift from ontology to constructivism which is most prominently and symptomatically registered in the complete inversion of meaning that afflicted the adjective 'objective' in the eighteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, lists the following as its first, albeit obsolete definition: "Existing as an object of thought or consciousness *as opposed to having a real existence.*" Today's accepted meaning, on the other hand, is presented with the addition "derived from Kant": "That is or belongs to what is presented to consciousness, as opposed to consciousness itself; that is the object of perception or thought, as distinct from the subject; (hence) (more widely) *external to or independent of the mind*" (my emphases). This seems to indicate that objectivity is a specifically modern concept that should be described in critical and theoretical discourse as *not* being precedent to subjectivity, but rather as a reaction to the latter's emergence. As the cultural function of objectivity relies on just the opposite assumption, this is one of the instances where the questioning of common sense which has been so characteristic of recent literary theory becomes indispensible to its critical function.[1]

---

[1] In further support of this fundamental terminological shift cf. the following definitions: a) Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopedia, or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1728): "Hence a thing is said to exist OBJECTIVELY [...] when it exists no otherwise than in being known; or in being an Object of the Mind" (qtd. in Daston/Galison 2007, 29). b)

Against this background, the beginnings of modern literary theory can be located in the emancipation of hermeneutics from its theological origins in the course of the 18th century. Building on work by Friedrich Ast, Friedrich Schleiermacher established hermeneutics as a romantically framed universal theory of how to read texts and the world and how to frame subjectivity objectively, as it were. These aspirations were then transformed into an academic programme for the emerging field of science in the 19th century by Wilhelm Dilthey, who established the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*) with their subjective foundations and universal aspirations as a kind of institutionalized margin of a modern conception of science which increasingly defined its foundations in terms of the idea and ideal of objectivity.

In fact, this is the context for August Boeckh's description of philology as 'Die Erkenntnis des Erkannten' / 'The Knowledge of What is Known,' which Jerome McGann singles out as "brilliant" (*ibid.*, 13). In contrast to McGann, however, I would tend to read this formula rather as a symptom of the emerging competition between the humanities and the positivistic and empirical sciences. Whoever has read a little bit of Schleiermacher or Dilthey will immediately recognize that 'The Knowledge of What is Known' is much too static with regard to their hermeneutic acknowledgement of the dynamics and process-oriented nature of knowledge. The positivistic touch of 'What is Known' is probably motivated by the pressure of legitimizing philology in the emerging context of a by and large positivistic science system, and it clearly plays down the hermeneutics/humanities part of its heritage. In terms of theory, this formula remains completely bound to what Jerome McGann calls 'Lower criticism,' and what Schleiermacher describes as the method of grammatical and philological comparison. 'Higher criticism,' on the other hand, remains excluded from Boeckh's formula, in spite of the fact that McGann himself understands the formula much more inclusively: "We study and pass on the human record that others have studies and passed on to us. Essential to the study of that record are the sociohistorical conditions of its creation and emergence" (*ibid.*). In order to actually include this dimension and do justice to the complexity of the hermeneutic tradition, one would have to modify Boeckh's formula into 'Die Erkenntnis des Erkennens' / 'The Knowledge of Knowing.' Both Schleiermacher, who pairs philology's 'comparative illumination' (*vergleichende Erhellung*) with the higher faculty of 'divination' as 'congenial re-enactment' (*kongenialer Nachvollzug*, cf. Schleiermacher 1979 [1829]), and Dilthey, who pits ('deeper') understanding in the humanities against mere ('superficial') explanation in the natural sciences and addresses the historicity of the knowing subject programmatically (cf. Dilthey

---

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817): "Now the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE, we will henceforth call NATURE, confining the term to its passive and material sense, as comprising all phenomena by which its existence is made known to us. On the other hand the sum of all that is SUBJECTIVE, we may comprehend in the name of the SELF or INTELLIGENCE. Both conceptions are in necessary antithesis" (Coleridge 1983 Vol. I, 254–5).

1979 [1910]), emphasise this elided aspect of Boeckh's formula, and Jerome McGann is surely correct in implying that this became the dominant strand of theoretical reflection in twentieth-century literary studies, establishing a continuity between "hermeneutics of many kinds" on the one hand and the "meta-interpretive interests that played themselves out, in diverse ways, under the general banner of Theory" on the other (McGann 2009, 13).

Interestingly, McGann's notion of 'meta-interpretive interests playing themselves out in diverse ways' provides a suitable key for a systematic account of the development of literary theory in the twentieth century. And even more interestingly, the opening move for institutionalizing the academic discipline of literary studies in the early twentieth century was also marked by an 'objectifying' tendency – just like August Boeckh's transfiguration of the hermeneutic 'The Knowledge of Knowing' into the positivistic 'The Knowledge of What Is Known': taking its cue from modern linguistics, which was establishing itself as an academic discipline in these very years, early varieties of literary studies such as the so-called Practical Criticism in England and the so-called New Criticism in the United States focused on textual form, which was conceptualised as a special case of language use which lent itself to objectification and treatment as a given fact. While these Anglophone varieties of formalism managed to camouflage their hermeneutic foundations quite successfully until they were subjected to serious critique in the 1980s in terms of their complicity with what has come to be called the Romantic ideology (cf. McGann 1983a) or the ideology of liberal humanism (cf. Barry 1995, 11–32), a more precise tradition of theory was inaugurated by the Russian formalists. In this line of thought, which spans nearly the entire twentieth century, the emphasis of the 'meta-interpretive interests' of theory shifts from formalism's focus on language and form to structuralism's widening of perspective in terms of semiotics and culture and on to post-structuralism's and deconstruction's interest in writing, textuality and intertextuality. In the course of this development, the cultural reach of what used to be literary theory becomes increasingly inclusive, moving as it does from a focus on literature as a special but limited case of language use (which was nevertheless emphatically validated in the context of the Romantic ideology) through literature as a paradigmatic and condensed forum for semiotic processes prevalent in culture at large and finally on to Derrida's notorious dictum "There is nothing outside of the text." (Derrida 1976 [1967], 158; for a detailed version of this story cf. Habib 2008, 602–66)

Jerome McGann is certainly correct to diagnose a 'turn to language' as a keynote of this development,[2] and he is also right to criticise the increasing abstraction of the notions of 'textuality' emerging from this discourse and the decreas-

---

[2]   As are historians, who tend to subsume the influence of this line of thinking on their discipline under the rubric 'the linguistic turn' (cf. Toews 2001, Clark 2004, Spiegel 2005) when they are not speaking of 'postmodernism' in a pejorative sense (cf. Brown 2005, 33–48). The concept of 'the linguistic turn' was actually coined by Richard Rorty with regard to philosophical developments in the early twentieth century (cf. Rorty 1967).

ing awareness of the historical specificity, contingency and materiality of histori-cal practices 'behind' textuality in this fairly abstract sense. Ultimately, however, the criteria for truth shifted from objectivity and reference on the one hand and subjectivity and experience on the other to language and then on to form, struc-ture and textuality, but it did not stop there. All recent theoretical develop-ments, whether under the banner of the cultural turn, the medial turn, or some other more or less plausible turn (cf. Bachmann-Medick 2006), be it in feminism, gender studies, postcolonial studies, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, or historical discourse analysis à la Foucault, in systems theory with its pro-grammatic switch of focus from text to communication, in mediology, in de-bates about performativity, you name it: all these approaches and theories are programmatically trying to reformulate modes of access to historical specificity, particularly with regard to matters of material and political conditioning. The world, one could say with Milton, is all before these approaches, but they ac-knowledge that it is a partly virtual world transmuted into culture through repre-sentation and mediatisation.

2. Textures of Modernity

In order to acknowledge this fundamental contingency I would like to introduce the concept of 'texture,'³ which accommodates some of Jerome McGann's pos-tulates (marked by quotes from his manifesto in the following) but does not do so at the cost of neglecting the insights of recent literary theory. The main thesis is that the texture of a text bears traces of the "sociohistorical conditions of its creation and emergence" and can thus be analyzed with regard to "evidence of 'the history of [its] making'" (McGann 2009, 13). Contrary to McGann, how-ever, I have no qualms about drawing on methodologies of reading which have been developed in the context of a "specifically literary interpretation of culture" (ibid.) because I view these as an advantage for teasing out the multi-layered ambiguities and implications of specific (and not necessarily 'literary') textures. What is more, McGann's objection that the "specifically literary interpretation of culture" treats "social and historical factors as interpretive constants rather than complex variables" (ibid.) has long been refuted by theoretical positions which incorporate medial and institutional dimensions as complex variables and view a 'text' not as "a linguistic construct per se" but certainly as "a document with variable histories" (ibid.) just as McGann stipulates. Nevertheless, and in contrast to emphatic ideological validations, the semantic authority over the text has long shifted from author to reader in the (modern) age of distribution me-dia, so that critical readings should by no means be exclusively focused on the

---

³   The following remarks draw upon the discussions of an interdisciplinary project group at Tübingen University. I would like to thank Ingrid Hotz-Davies (English Studies), Horst Tonn (American Studies), Stefanie Gropper (Scandinavian Studies/Medieval Studies) and Reinhart Johler (Empirical Cultural Studies) for their inspiring contributions and Lisa Peter (English Studies) for her extensive preparatory bibliographical research.

history of a text's making—the history of a text's reception and of the mean-ing(s) construed and constructed through acts of reception is at least as if not more important to cultural analysis. And finally one should perhaps not forget that "an individual reader engaged with a particular 'text'" (ibid.) is still one of the main components of the paradigmatic research situation in literary and cul-tural studies, and this should be accounted for on the level of theory.

If one accepts the preceding argument, modern culture has to be theorized as a texture which hides the cumulative sedimentations of media evolution in which it is grounded. Given this, literary and cultural studies need to develop a non- or even anti-hermeneutic methodology of reading which does not assume that there is an ontologically embedded true meaning 'behind' the text that needs to be uncovered. If there is anything 'behind' the text or its 'origin,' it is certainly not its meaning in the sense of what Derrida called a 'transcendental signified' (Derrida 1976 [1967], 49), but rather this media evolution from language—this is the focus of the linguistic turn—through writing, print and other (electronic) distribution media and on to discourses with their specific symbolically general-ized media of communication and conventions—which have been addressed by the cultural turn and the medial turn. This fundamental intransparency of textu-ality and mediality only became noticeable with the increasing prominence of seemingly impenetrable 'texts' in the art and literature of high modernism, and it is around this time that the term 'texture' finds its first theoretical formulation: John Crowe Ransom, one of the most famous proponents of the New Criticism, distinguishes the "prose core" of a text "to which a reader or critic can violently reduce the total object" on the one hand from "the differentia, residue, or tissue, which keeps the object poetical or entire" on the other (Ransom 1938, 349). In a later publication, Ransom illustrates this important distinction with the help of an architectural metaphor: "A poem is a *logical structure* having a *local texture* [...]. The paint, the paper, the tapestry on a wall are texture. It is logically unre-lated to structure" (Ransom 1962 [1941], 648, original emphases). In the light of the argument introduced in this essay, it is clear that Ransom's modern(ist) de-scription of a poem makes obvious what in principle applies to all texts but is systematically elided in hermeneutical readings: a text 'is' only texture, once you paraphrase it, a new text evolves. If a text resists 'normal' hermeneutical readings which are directed 'through' the text at a transcendental signified 'behind' the text, as modernist poems in particular, with their notorious difficulty, tend to do, the reader's attention will automatically be directed towards the texture at hand. Moritz Baßler has described this momentous *Discovery of Texture* for German literature, focussing on the short and hermetic experimental prose of high modernism (1910–1916, cf. Baßler 1994), and he has discussed the broader implications of this approach in later publications (cf. Baßler 1996/2007). Once texture has thus become visible, a number of highly pertinent questions emerge: how can the relation between texture and structure be adequately described? Is it possible that the surface generates the core? Is it possible to conceptualize tex-ture as process instead of, as is usually the case if at all, product?

What is at stake, then, in this turning away from McGann's focus on the history of a text's making and towards the cultural productivity of its texture, is nothing less than the modalities of the textual and medial constitution of the modern world. And it is very clear that the basic instability and dynamics of this world are routinely glossed over by regular feats of construction, many of which rely on just the hermeneutic process of reading deconstructed by much of recent theory as well as the concept of texture proposed in this essay. Tracing these feats of construction will have to address their heterogeneous foundations, and in its most radical form texture can be traced to the phenomenological level (cf., for example, Bora 1997). As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out:

> Texture [...] comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure. [...] If texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together [...] [w]hat they have in common is that [...] both are irreducibly phenomenological. To describe them primarily in terms of structure is always a qualitative misrepresentation. (Sedgwick 2003, 16/21)

On a slightly less foundational level, Peter Stockwell has recently presented a cognitive aesthetics of reading literary texts under the title *Texture* (Stockwell 2009), while an edited volume in German has collected similar approaches to art, architecture, photography, film, theatre and speeches as cultural events which are analysed in terms of their surface texture (von Arburg et al. 2008). And finally this direction of inquiry provides an opening for an understanding of texture beyond the textual in our discipline's sense, such as the ones outlined by Gerald D. Suttles and, more recently, Rolf Lindner in urban studies (cf. Suttles 1984, Lindner 2008a/b).

Conversely, the focus of textural studies could be directed at the media conditions and cultural frames which facilitate hermeneutic constructions of meaning and world in the first place. In his blueprint for what he calls a 'mediology' of the 18th century, Albrecht Koschorke sums up neatly where the various positions of recent literary and cultural theory converge and where they move beyond the 'turn to language' and the subsequent tradition of theoretical reflection whose end-point is marked by Jacques Derrida:

> The perspective of deconstruction fails (or partially fails) to acknowledge the specific productivity of writing: its active capability to transform exteriority, lack and culture into interiority, depth and nature. [...] A mediology [...] does not address the problem of having to prove that all metaphysical identities cancel themselves through never being able to fully control the semiotic sphere from which they derive. [Mediology] is not particularly interested in doubting all claims of origin, totality, identity and truth from an immanently philosophical point of view, albeit by stepping out on the logical margins of philosophy. Instead, [mediology] wants to address the question how such phantasms—and it accepts the premise that these claims are phantasms, though not in a psychological or plainly ideological sense—*positively function* and how they can acquire the power of a social and technical reality principle. (Koschorke 1999, 344–5, my translation⁴)

---

⁴ "Aus der Perspektive der Dekonstruktion kommt die spezifische Produktivität der Schrift, ihr aktives Vermögen, Äußerlichkeit, Mangel und Kultur in Innerlichkeit, Fülle

Given these highly reflexive premises, one can indeed re-assess traditional philological approaches such as Vernon K. Robbins's model of how to explore the texture of texts, which introduces a method of 'socio-rhetorical interpretation' in a theological context (cf. Robbins 1996). Robbins distinguishes five dimensions of textu(r)al inquiry:

1. INNER TEXTURE: Getting Inside a Text
2. INTERTEXTURE: Entering the Interactive World of a Text
3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTURE: Living with a Text in the World
4. IDEOLOGICAL TEXTURE: Sharing Interests in Commentary and Text
5. SACRED TEXTURE: Seeking the Divine in a Text (*ibid.*, vii-viii)

In spite of all disciplinary differences (especially the fifth dimension would have to be modified—but then, is not 'the aesthetic' a dimension of literary studies comparable to 'the sacred' in theology?), this scheme indicates an inclusiveness which is very much in line with Jerome McGann's stipulations, and at the same time it could be re-fashioned in the light of recent theory. My own systematic unfolding of the dimensions of the notion of texture for the limited application of modern literary texts, which evolved from my work on the culture of modernity from a systems-theoretical perspective and which I have introduced at length elsewhere (cf. Reinfandt 2009b/2011), is nevertheless marked by a similar inclusiveness and shall here provide a suitable conclusion:
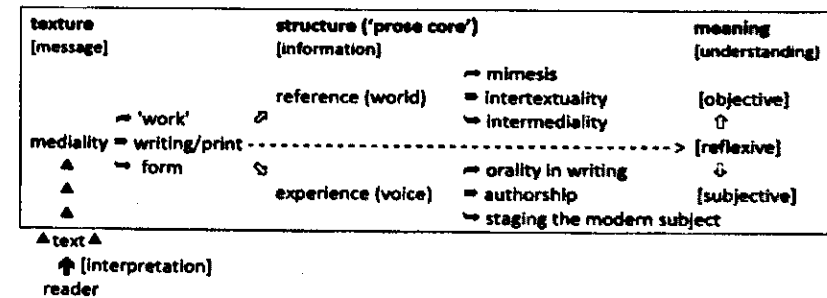

Fig.1: The Texture of Modern Texts (for earlier versions cf. Reinfandt 2009, 175 and 2011, 75)

---

und Natur umzuwandeln, nicht oder nur partiell in den Blick. [...] Eine Mediologie [...] hat nicht das Problem, den Nachweis zu führen, daß alle metaphysischen Identitäten sich selbst durchkreuzen, weil es ihnen niemals gelingt, den semiotischen Verweisraum unter Kontrolle zu halten, aus dem sie begrifflich hervorgehen. Sie ist nicht vorrangig daran interessiert, Ursprungs-, Ganzheits-, Einheits- und Wahrheitsansprüche immanent philosophisch, wenn auch durch Abschreitung der logischen Ränder der Philosophie, in Zweifel zu ziehen. Ihr ist vielmehr an der Frage gelegen, wie solche Phantasmata — immer unter zugestandenen Prämisse, daß es Phantasmata sind, wenn auch nicht in einem psychologischen oder schlechthin ideologischen Sinn – positiv funktionieren und sich die Macht eines sozialen und technischen Realitätsprinzips aneignen können."

The tripartite layout of this scheme is actually governed by Niklas Luhmann's re-conceptualisation of communication as a threefold process of selection comprising message (*Mitteilung*), information (*Information*) and understanding (*Verstehen*). However, the counterintuitive complexity of this theoretical frame which conceives of communication as a dynamic process autonomous from human action need not concern us here (cf. Luhmann 1992/1994). Suffice it to say that the *texture* of the text is the point of access for the reader and that texture operates on the Luhmannian level of *message*, i.e. as a form whose selectivity actually creates the (shape of) information which is then processed as having been there first. That the message is actually perceived as a message is also an effect of its texture, or, more specifically, of its *mediality*, i.e. the fact that the text has been fixed in *writing* and/or *print*, and the stability facilitated by these actually induces an unprecedented degree of *reflexivity* through making the texts available for repeated actualisation in communication, as it were. What is more, within the confines of writing and print, language itself assumes a fixed *form*, while on the other hand certain messages will be conventionally associated with certain communicative contexts so that certain modes of constructing/construing information are predetermined. This applies especially to literary texts, whose status as a potential *work* of art may trigger particularly elaborate reading techniques. Any given texture is, as a potential message, loaded with various registers of mediality which may in turn point to different potentialities of the texture as a message. This becomes fairly obvious in the case of modern literature, which, as a rule, tends to be suggestive of a doubled transcendental signified: on the level of *information* (What is the text about? What is its 'prose core,' its logical structure?), modern literary texts seem to indicate both on the one hand a potentially objective *reference* to the *world (mimesis)* as well as to other texts and media *(intertextuality, intermediality)* and, on the other hand, the dimension of subjective *experience* embodied in *voice* through the characteristically literary mediality of (feigned) *orality in writing*, which can in turn evoke modern conceptions of *authorship* and authority or stage all kind of variations on the forms modern *subjectivity* and individuality can take. With all this, the reader can generate *meaning* more or less individually or originally, but these constructions will always be framed by those constitutive *dimensions of meaning in modern culture* which can be heuristically identified as *objective, subjective and reflexive* in spite of their overall dynamic amalgamation in all cultural processes. In the light of all this, it should be clear that *understanding* can no longer be conceived of in terms of a hermeneutic recovering of a transcendental signified. It is rather a negotiation of emphases with their respective potential constructions of transcendental signifieds. In terms of modern culture, however, there is nothing beyond texture and—this is where Luhmann's understanding of understanding without human agency comes in—communicative connectivity.

Works Cited

von Arburg, Hans-Georg, et al., eds. (2008): *Mehr als Schein: Ästhetik der Oberfläche in Film, Kunst, Literatur und Theater.* Zürich/Berlin: diaphanes.

Bachmann-Medick, Doris (2006). *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften.* Reinbek: Rohwohlt.

Barry, Peter (1995). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Baßler, Moritz (1994). *Die Entdeckung der Textur: Unverständlichkeit in der Kurzprosa der emphatischen Moderne 1910–1916.* Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Baßler, Moritz, et al. (1996). *Historismus und literarische Moderne.* Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Baßler, Moritz (2007). "Textur." *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft.* 3. Aufl. Berlin: de Gruyter, 618–9.

Bora, Renu (1997). "Outing Texture." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed. *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction.* Durham/London: Duke University Press, 94–127.

Brown, Callum G. (2005). *Postmodernism for Historians.* Harlow: Pearson.

Clark, Elizabeth A. (2004). *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1983 [1817]). *Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions.* Ed. James Engell und W. Jackson Bate. 3 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison (2007). *Objectivity.* New York: Zone Books.

Derrida, Jacques (1976 [1967]). *Of Grammatology.* Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dilthey, Wilhelm (1979 [1910]). "Entwürfe zur Kritik der historischen Vernunft." Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gottfried Boehm, eds. *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik.* 2nd ed. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 189–220.

Habib, M.A.R. (2008). *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present.* Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell.

Jameson, Fredric (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Koschorke, Albrecht (1999). *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr: Mediologie des 18. Jahrhunderts.* München: Fink.

Lindner, Rolf (2008a). "Die kulturelle Textur der Stadt." *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 104, 137–47.

Lindner, Rolf (2008b). "Textur, *imaginaire*, Habitus." Helmuth Berking, Martina Loew, eds. *Die Eigenlogik der Städte: Neue Wege für die Stadtforschung.* Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 83–94.

Luhmann, Niklas (1992). "What Is Communication?" *Communication Theory* 2, 251–9.

— (1994). "How Can the Mind Participate in Communication?" Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, eds. *Materialities of Communication*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 371–87.

— (2000). *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

McGann, Jerome (1983a). *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

— (1983b). *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

— (1985). *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

— (1991). *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

— (2001). *Radiant Textuality: Literature Since the World Wide Web*. London: Palgrave.

— (2009). "Our Textual History: Digital Copying of Poetry and Prose Raises Questions Beyond Accuracy Alone." *Times Literary Supplement* Nov 20, 13–5.

Ransom, John Crowe (1938). *The World's Body*. New York/London: Scribner's.

— (1962 [1941]). "Criticism as Pure Speculation." Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., *Literary Opinion in America: Essays Illustrating the Status, Methods and Problems of Criticism in the United States in the Twentieth Century*. 3rd ed. New York: Harper, 639–54.

Reinfandt, Christoph (2009a). "Reading Texts after the Linguistic Turn: Approaches from Literary Studies and Their Implications." Miriam Dobson, Benjamin Ziemann, eds. *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History*. London/New York: Routledge, 37–54.

— (2009b). "Literatur als Medium." Simone Winko, Fotis Jannidis, Gerhard Lauer, eds. *Grenzen der Literatur: Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 161–87.

— (2011). "Reading the Waste Land: Textuality, Mediality, Modernity." Hannes Bergthaller, Carsten Schinko, eds. *Addressing Modernity: Social Systems Theory and U.S. Cultures*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 63–84.

Robbins, Vernon K. (1996). *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

Rorty, Richard, ed. (1967). *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich (1979 [1829]). "Über den Begriff der Hermeneutik mit Bezug auf F.A. Wolfs Andeutungen und Asts Lehrbuch." Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gottfried Boehm, eds. *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik*. 2nd ed. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1979, 131–65.

Schönert, Jörg (1996). "Literaturwissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft – Medienkulturwissenschaft: Probleme der Wissenschaftsentwicklung." Renate Glaser, Matthias Luserke, eds. *Literaturwissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft: Positionen, Themen, Perspektiven*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 192–208.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Spiegel, Gabrielle M., ed. (2005). *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*. New York/London: Routledge.

Stockwell, Peter (2009). *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Suttles, Gerald D. (1984). "The Cumulative Texture of Local Urban Culture." *American Journal of Sociology* 90.2, 283–304.

Toews, John E. (2001). "Linguistic Turn and Discourse Analysis in History." *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Amsterdam: Elsevier. Vol. 13: 8916–22.