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The Global and the Singular.

The Intermediate Layers of Cultural Studies

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Abstract

Which consequences do the digital humanities have for cultural studies? While the community of practice mainly focuses on technical development and questions of methods, a further need of reflection becomes apparent in the context of this debate. Abstract and specific interests of cultural theory and analysis diverge increasingly, which on the one hand aim for global questions and on the other hand for singular objects. As a result, cultural studies work in expanding intermediary spaces without their flexible epistemology having forced fundamental debates on methodological coherence so far. The essay argues that the methodological reflections of digital humanities are to be located in this broader context. They thereby stimulate cultural studies to put their flexible epistemology to the test once more.

Welche Folgen haben die ‚digital humanities' für die Kulturwissenschaften? Während sich das Augenmerk in der Praxis häufig auf Entwicklungs- und Verfahrensfragen richtet, zeichnet sich im Umkreis der Debatte ein weitergehender Reflexionsbedarf ab: Allgemein laufen in den Kulturwissenschaften höchst abstrakte und spezifische Erkenntnisinteressen zunehmend auseinander, die einerseits auf globale Fragen, andererseits auf singuläre Gegenstände zielen. Die Kulturwissenschaften arbeiten in wachsenden Zwischenlagen, ohne dass ihre flexible Epistemologie jedoch grundsätzliche Debatten über methodische Kohärenz erzwungen hätte. Der Essay argumentiert, dass die Methodenreflexionen der ‚digital humanities' in diesem weiteren Kontext zu verorten sind. Sie liefern damit Motive für die Kulturwissenschaften, ihre flexible Epistemologie neu auf den Prüfstand zu stellen.

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I.

When one investigates the innovative or – depending on one's perspective – the provocative challenges posed by the digital humanities, one is typically confronted with answers to procedural questions in which quantitative statistical methods are contrasted with interpretive hermeneutics. Measuring and describing, calculating and reading are often viewed in this context as operative contrasting pairs of "communities of practice," "which today are deeply foreign in their epistemological habitus."[1] But as Marcus Twellmann has recently shown, the prehistory of such practices reaches far back, predating the information-technological resources of digital computing. A cultural studies archaeologist could trace the roots of these pairings at least to the 'proto-digital' humanities of the nineteenth century: characterized by surveying procedures and statistical representations which distinguished itself from a description-oriented cultural studies. Such findings shine light onto the wider context of a debate which far exceeds the possibilities and limitations of quantitative literary analysis. The thesis of the following investigation is not only that the digital humanities[2] inspire in this way a self-reflection in cultural studies applicable to its historical genesis, but also that they recall alternative epistemological resources and long forgotten differentiation processes present in earlier formations of cultural studies. Rather than provide an archaeology, I instead attempt to capture a snapshot which makes visible the latent discontent within cultural studies today. In this sense, the debate about the digital world fulfills symptomatic functions, insofar as the practice of digital analysis demands a more open discussion concerning the divergent paths of knowledge which increasingly allow for a gulf between interest in 'global' and 'singular' objects within cultural studies. Franco Moretti characterizes the object range of the digital humanities as "micromegas," a discontinuum of large and small quantities of data. Such a positioning of the spotlight illuminates not only their much-debated methodological range, but also the epistemological place of cultural studies itself. In previous decades, the role of cultural studies

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[1] Marcus Twellmann: Gedankenstatistik. Vorschlag zur Archäologie der Digital Humanities, in: Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken 69 (2015), p. 19-30, here p. 21.

[2] I am consciously accentuating the external perception of 'digital humanities' which is significantly different from its own internal self-perception. For whereas within the 'community' ques-tions about development and application of technical procedures of analysis are primarily in the foreground, epistemological and transdisciplinary repurcussions are instead dealt with in the outer orbit of the 'digital humanities' or through an external gaze at them.

was hardly examined with comparable attention to detail, although it was expanding with similar discontinuity. While cultural studies research practices have (often implicitly) always treated these divergences with flexibility, the methodological discussions of the digital humanities have explicitly addressed them as a topic for debate. Their innovative and provocative potential has not limited itself to the epistemology of calculation, but rather has engendered the need for cultural studies to reflect on the global and the singular – a potentially fruitful future endeavor.

II.

Niklas Luhmann expresses the somber prognosis that cultural studies has known no theoretical advancements, only cycles of stimulation and fatigue.[3] Indeed, the many potentials for irritation have vanished: After three decades of research, cultural studies has left its formative struggles with normative disciplinary understandings so far behind that such provocations today appear more tiring than stimulating – the passion for theoretical discussions has itself become a thing of the past.[4] Recent interest has shifted from the development of new objects of scholarly interest to zones of stimulus along the boundaries of what had previously separated the humanities from the natural sciences, technologies, and engineering. This is true, in particular, for literary studies, as exemplified in current publications and initiatives. And so a science like biology has long since ceased to deliver key words only for ecocriticism or animal studies, but now provides as well for post-humanist histories of knowledge.[5] Advanced approaches to philology depend on biological evolutionary theories in order to shake off the residues

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[3] Niklas Luhmann: Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft, 2 Vols., Frankfurt a.M. 1998 (stw 1360), Vol. 1, p. 399: "The specific problems of self-relations and reflexive operations are removed from analysis through this ambivalence of the concept of culture. They are not revealed but covered up; and therefore there seems to be no theoretical progress in that which is offered as 'cultural studies,' only phases of stimulation, fatigue, and the new edition of the appeal to culture." [„Die spezifischen Probleme von Selbstverhältnissen und reflexiven Operationen werden durch diese Ambivalenz des Kulturbegriffs der Analyse entzogen. Sie werden nicht aufgedeckt, sondern zugedeckt; und deshalb scheint es in dem, was als ‚Kulturwissenschaft' angeboten wird, auch keinen theoretischen Fortschritt zu geben, sondern nur Phasen der Stimulierung, der Ermattung und der Neuauflage des Appells an Kultur".]

[4] And with melancholic tones: cf. Ulrich Raulff: Wiedersehen mit den Siebzigern. Die wilden Jahre des Lesens, 2nd Ed., Stuttgart 2014; Philipp Felsch: Der lange Sommer der Theorie. Geschichte einer Revolte. 1960-1990, München 2015.

[5] Cf. currently, for instance.: Tiere. Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch, ed. by Roland Borgards, Stuttgart 2016. Also Benjamin Bühler and Stefan Rieger: Vom Übertier. Ein Bestiarium des Wissens, Frankfurt a.M. 2006 (Edition Suhrkamp 2459); ibid.: Das Wuchern der Pflanzen. Ein Florilegium des Wissens, Berlin 2009 (Edition Suhrkamp 2547); Benjamin Bühler: Bunte Steine. Ein Lapidarium des Wissens, Berlin 2014 (Edition Suhrkamp 2655).

of intellectual history,[6] but also to revise those overused vocabularies within cultural studies.[7] Mathematics and information technology provide the guiding principles for cultural theories of the mind, algorithmic cultural analysis, and not least for the methodological repertoire of digital humanities.

These excitation zones reveal the current orientation of cultural studies because rather than expanding and enriching its observational capacity, they allow discrepancies to develop between the most divergent types of evidence and their claims to generalizing or particular knowledge. No research report is necessary: 'culture' is no longer described – as Giambattista Vico prototypically suggested in the eighteenth century – as social practices and artifacts before a universal background of "communa natura della nazioni."[8] Nor, however, does the hermeneutical imperative of cultural anthropology remain compulsory: that symbols – here one thinks of Clifford Geertz' infamous analysis of Balinese cock fights – are to be interpreted as closely as possible to their local contexts and situational references.[9] Cultural studies today explores both the tight weaves of interpretive networks as well as the macrocosms of culture. It is no longer limited to reading practices and the "writing of culture" à la James Clifford. Instead, it is precisely out of more recent approaches such as 'global history,' and 'transcultural' perspectives[10] that classical questions of the cognitive value of "individual regional studies" and "exemplary cases" arise with new brisance.[11]

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[6] An exemplar from the field of Old High German is the Parzival edition project by Michael Stolz, Jens Haustein and Sonja Glauch, who attempt to correct the author-centered principle of textual production in the tradition of Karl Lachmann (among others) by adopting the concept of 'phylogenesis' and electronic procedures of representation. See the project description in Michael Stolz: New Philology and New Phylogeny. Aspects of a critical electronic edition of Wolfram's Parzival, in: Literary and linguistic computing 18 (2003), p. 139-150 and recently Michael Stolz: Von der Überlieferungsgeschichte zur Textgenese. Spuren des Entstehungsprozesses von Wolframs Parzival in den Handschriften, in: Grundlagen. Forschungen, Editionen und Materialien zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, ed. by Rudolf Bentzinger, Ulrich-Dieter Oppitz und Jürgen Wolf, Stuttgart 2013 (ZfdA. Beiheft 18), p. 37-61.

[7] See most recently the conference proceedings Nach der Hybridität. Zukünfte der Kulturtheorie, ed. by Ottmar Ette and Uwe Wirth, Berlin 2014 (Potsdamer inter- und transkulturelle Texte 11)

[8] Cf. Giambattista Vico: Principi di scienza nuova, ed. by Fausto Nicolini, 3 Vols., Turin 1976.

[9] Cf. Clifford Geertz: Thick description. Toward an interpretive theory of culture, in: The interpretation of cultures. Selected essays, New York 2000, p. 3-30

[10] Vis-à-vis the motto of 'intercultural' perspectives, 'transcultural' comparative positions are not only striving for more capacious references but also at the same time often sharpen the need for reflection regarding the relationship between individual local studies and globality. Their discrepencies and need for methodological resolution define the programs of more recent scholarly journals: see, for instance, the E-Journal "Transcultural Studies" (since 2010) of the Cluster of Excellence in Heidelberg "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: The Dynamics of Transculturality"; from the historical perspective of research on the premodern era, the "Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies (since 2014), for instance, takes up the challenge of a "globalizing world."

[11] Wolfram Drews and Jenny Rahel Oesterle: Vormoderne Globalgeschichten. Eine Einführung, in: Transkulturelle Komparatistik. Beiträge zu einer Globalgeschichte der Vormoderne, ed. by Wolfram Drews and Jenny Rahel Oesterle, Leipzig 2008, p. 8-14, here p. 9f. Yet there seem to be more questions than answers: "Is the practice of history that deals with premodern epochs thus compelled to be content with individual regional studies that can no longer be meaningfully classified according to a comprehensive theoretical concept?" (Ibid., p. 9). ["Ist die Geschichtswissenschaft, die sich mit vormodernen Epochen befasst, daher gezwungen, sich mit regionalen Einzelstudien zu begnügen, die sich nicht mehr sinnvoll in übergreifendes theoretisches

This concerns not only the practices of cultural studies' case studies, but also its theories and methodological reflection. Current model proposals address the 'difficulties' bluntly, proposing a combination of the "phenomenological vividness" of culture "with functional analysis." As Dirk Baecker concludes:

> It concerns the overt historical world of humanity, but this historical world is only comprehendible when one places each of its phenomena in a functional relationship with other phenomena and formalizes this relationship as one of reciprocal potential negation. Es geht um die offen zutage liegende historische Welt der Menschen, doch diese historische Welt der Menschen ist nur zu verstehen, wenn man jedes ihrer Phänomene in einen funktionalen Zusammenhang mit anderen Phänomenen setzt und diesen Zusammenhang als einen der wechselseitigen potentiellen Negation formalisiert.[12]

Cultural studies is concerned on the one hand with describing the tangible phenomena of the "historical world."[13] On the other hand, to understand them requires refraining from merely looking at data within its unique historical context by turning instead to its formal features. Of course both presuppositions necessitate explication and demand further discussion: Whether these phenomena can be exclusively organized in regards to their relational negation would have to be justified as much as would the methodological postulate that understanding itself necessitates formal analysis. Many cultural-hermeneutical approaches which focus specifically on questions of historical knowledge would not share these presuppositions unconditionally; and a large portion of the interpretive practice of cultural studies proceeds without any formal argumentation. It seems to me to depend on the methodological juxtaposition with which Baecker expresses those paradigmatic tensions in the current field of research. One might emphasize that both cultural studies as well as cultural theory face growing tensions between hermeneutics and formalization. Significantly, such tensions determine the potential of cultural research both to explore its objects historically, as well as to de-historicize them.[14]

Konzept einordnen lassen?"]

[12] Dirk Baecker: Kulturkalkül, Berlin 2014, p. 7f.

[13] See also Dirk Baecker: Beobachter unter sich. Eine Kulturtheorie, Berlin 2013, p. 296: "Games in general and intrigues in particular can only be analyzed from case-to-case, in each concrete example." [„Spiele im Allgemeinen und Intrigen im Besonderen können nur fallweise, nur am konkreten Beispiel analysiert werden".]

[14] A similar diagnosis was developed already in 1990 by the medieval historian Gabriell Spiegel as a result of the "semiotic challenge" of poststructuralist theories: see Gabrielle Spiegel: Geschichte, Historizität und die soziale Logik von mittelalterlichen Texten, in: Geschichte schreiben in der Postmoderne. Beiträge zur aktuellen Diskussion, ed. by Christoph Conrad and Martina Kessel, Stuttgart 1994, p. 161-202, especially p. 178-181. Yet even after Deconstruction and its semiotic paradigms themselves became objects of the history of knowledge, or were toned down to regional theoretical options, the diagnosed tension within historical textual studies between historicization and de-historicization (ibid., p. 179) persists. The following remarks

Methodological challenges grow in this way, as their discrepancies are rarely made transparent by, not to mention integrated with, the use of traditional research logic. Rarely do close-readings allow for aggregative mergings into larger units, integrate concrete and abstract descriptions, or develop relational evidence between model and case, universal and particular. The way in which "empirical approaches, historical concretizations, or cultural exempla" negotiate with "the path of greatest possible abstraction"[15] is as open a question for historians as which methodologically demonstrable steps negotiate between close and distant readings is for literary scholars.[16]

It is becoming ever more apparent that such discrepancies will not be resolved through a 'simple' re-scaling of existing methods,[17] but rather that a reflection on current procedures is necessary – and that the apparent technical incompatibility of these procedures is due to their rootedness in divergent patterns of thinking and "epistemological habitus."[18] Agreement exists almost exclusively in the discomfort engendered by the current situation: In regards to methodology, the ever-greater divide between cultural studies' desire for generalization and its interest in specificity is further cause for increasing tension.

In particular, these gaps are appearing in the excitation zones developing beyond classical alliances between the humanities and social sciences. These new developments result in an underhanded return not only of older scientific paradigms reactivating the demarcations between calculative and interpretive disciplines,[19] but also in their wake, the alleged victory over oppositions between generalization and empiricism, analysis and interpretation, systemics and historicization. This results in the observable rise in discontent between innovative methodological bridge-building and traditional questions of theory. Those who would today inquire into the future possibilities of cultural studies are confronted more

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are much more occasioned by the impression that the discourse of cultural theory (under the sign of a transformed theory) presently intensifies it even more.

[15] So the review of Baecker (2013) by Achim Landwehr: Argumentationshelix zur Kulturtheorie, in: Neue Politische Literatur 58 (2013), p. 253-255, here p. 254, who welcomed Baecker's model as an "invitation to the discipline of history" [„Einladung an die Geschichtswissenschaft"] (p. 255).

[16] The work of Matthew Jockers attests symptomatically to this open problem: Macroanalysis. Digital methods and literary history, Urbana 2013. Because precise individual readings have to be contextualized by the statistical analysis of larger text quantities (eg. through stylometrics) (p. 171), Jockers calls for a "blended approach" that combines micro and macro analyses: "The two scales of analysis work in tandem and inform each other" (p. 26). How such a cooperative transition ('blending') with mutually informative effects ("inform each other") might be methodologically carried out, cannot be ascertained in Jocker's depiction.

[17] According to the – nontheless methodologically non-concretized – postulate by Jochers (2013), p. 91. That literary analysis requires a more detailed discussion and explanation in terms of 'mixed methods' and that in the process much different analytic premises and treatments of the object emerge, has been underscored by Thomas Weitin [et al]: Auslegen und Ausrechnen. Zum Verhältnis hermeneutischer und quantitativer Verfahren in den Literaturwissenschaften, in: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik (in press).

[18] See Twellmann (2015), p. 21.

[19] See, polemically, Franco Moretti: Graphs, maps, trees. Abstract models for a literary history, London 2007; equally polemical is the riposte by Twellmann (2015), p. 27. Assessing in a more balanced manner the synergies of interpretation and calculation on the other hand: Weitin [et al] (in press).

than ever before with the legacy of its past.[20]

III.

Tensions between global and singular interests are often articulated – secondarily – in the form of formal and historical lines of argumentation as they traverse current inventories of cultural sociology. Despite conspicuous gaps in many areas of the Early Modern, the historical trajectory of the culture concept and its redeployment have been well documented since at least the eighteenth century.[21] Classical practical designations of 'cultivated order' or of 'order in need of cultivation' ('colere,' 'cultura') were expanded in the Early Modern to 'normative' and 'totality-oriented' comparative frameworks for lifestyles and communities prior to the specific identification of 'culture' with specific spheres as cultural areas. In the wake of ethnography and philosophy, the concept of culture in modernity became unbounded through its orientation towards meaning, and expanded to symbolic orders in diverse coexistence. One important result of this conceptual history was the unfolding of specifically restricted and extensionally expanded variations of the culture concept, as well as their simultaneous accumulation as repertoire. Accordingly, cultural studies has recourse over diverse semantics of what defines a culture and which cultural perspectives can be investigated.

Following Reinhart Koselleck, Niklas Luhmann has observed a story of bereavement: the "recognition of cultural diversity [...] necessitates the duty of [...] a cosmic concept" with which society is led

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[20] Cf. Twellmann (2015), p. 22: "In the hesitation of many literary scholars [vis-à-vis numerical foundations of the humanities, B.G.] we find the return of a defensive stance that was already displayed by their predecessors in the nineteenth century." [„In den Vorbehalten vieler Literaturwissenschaftler [gegenüber numerischen Grundlagen der Humanities, B.G.] kehrt eine Abwehrhaltung wieder, die ihre Vorgänger im 19. Jahrhundert bereits an den Tag legten."] The situation becomes more demanding – and ambivalent – however, when current research programs in literary studies explicitly attempt to incorporate both of these possible orientations. For instance, the DFG graduate research program 1886/1 "Literary Form. History and Culture of Aesthetic Modelling" sets itself the goal of returning on the one hand to "questions of form," which "have always constituted a core part of literary studies, and on the other hand raising these questions "on the basis of a new literary epistemology": see the short version of the research program at https://www.wwu.de/GRKLitForm/ (last visited on 18 February 2016). Studies in digitial literary analysis display the same retrotheoretical discrepency whose search for innovative modes of processing large data sets reactivate old questions and apories of research on style. See the critical discussion by Weitin [et al] (in press).

[21] I can only summarize here using keywords distinctive versions of the concept of culture that have been worked out in greater detail: see, for instance, the survey by Andreas Reckwitz: Die Transformation der Kulturtheorien. Zur Entwicklung eines Theorieprogramms, 2nd ed., Weilerswist 2008 and Andreas Reckwitz: Die Kontingenzperspektive der ‚Kultur'. Kulturbegriffe, Kulturtheorien und das kulturwissenschaftliche Forschungsprogramm, in: Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kultursoziologie, 2nd ed., Bielefeld 2010, p. 15-45; Dirk Baecker: Wozu Kultur?, 3rd ed., Berlin 2012;) on the genesis of the comparative concept of culture specifically, see Reinhart Koselleck: "Neuzeit". Zur Semantik moderner Bewegungsbegriffe, in: Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten, Frankfurt a.M. 1989 (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 757), p. 300-348 and Niklas Luhmann: Kultur als historischer Begriff, in: Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft, Vol. 4, Frankfurt a.M. 1999 (stw 1438), p. 31-54.

astray "by the potential of compulsory global representation."[22] Or in the words of Andreas Reckwitz: The "potential to stimulate comparison disappears," giving way to a 'perspective of contingency'[23] in which everything can be treated as a cultural phenomenon, but in which the justification of their relevance is disregarded, thereby formally devaluing such phenomena.[24] The result is that frameworks of value lose their vividness – not only for modern cultural sociology, but also for the writing of cultural history and historical cultural studies.[25]

The most recent developments in cultural theory have reacted to this loss, seeking to produce such sententiousness through formal means. Dirk Baecker's suggestion to define concepts of culture formally as modes of observation which reflect upon themselves "from the perspective of the contingency of their position"[26] has been particularly far-reaching in this regard. He relates this to the symbolic notation developed within the framework of formal calculations of a logic of difference by the mathematician George Spencer-Brown at the end of the 1960s – a prime example of a retro theory applied to advanced questions of cultural reflection.[27] Baecker reduces the 'perspective of contingency' for culture to the following minimum formula:[28]

$$a = \overline{a\,\rceil}$$

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[22]Luhmann (1998), Vol. 1, p. 58. Above all, Luhmann's late notes assess cultural gains as loss of world: With the concept of culture, modernity forces observational relations which "place the observer in a 'transcendental' status, thus removing him from the world" ["den Beobachter in einen ‚transzendentalen' Status versetzt, ihn also aus der Welt herausnimmt"]; Niklas Luhmann: Die Religion der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt a.M. 2002 (stw 1581), p. 319.

[23]Reckwitz (2010), p. 25.

[24]Cultural otherness is then less disturbing as it is "interesting" – according to Baecker (2012). Even cultural studies' selection of objects no longer provokes questions about value under this sign of contingency in the way that early modern concepts of culture had: "No longer is there a semantics of value based on the structural asymmetry of the dual between 'self and other', but only the formal observational concept of 'culture'" ["Auf der Strukturasymmetrie des Duals von ‚Eigenem und Fremdem' ruht keine Wertsemantik mehr auf, sondern allein noch der formale Beobachtungsbegriff ‚Kultur'"] – according to, with reference to Baecker, the conclusion by Peter Strohschneider: Fremde in der Vormoderne. Über Negierbarkeitsverluste und Unbekanntheitsgewinne, in: Alterität als Leitkonzept historischen Interpretierens, ed. by Anja Becker and Jan Mohr, Berlin/New York 2012, p. 287-416, here p. 414, who thus himself embarks on this intersection of formal cultural theory and historical cultural studies.

[25]On "contingency", that is, "openness and uncertainty of human experiences of life" as a consequence of a "historical gaze at cultural objects", see for instance Achim Landwehr: Kulturgeschichte, Stuttgart 2009 (UTB 3037), p. 14.

[26]Such is the axiomatic version of Baecker's culture concept (2013), p. 17.

[27]George Spencer-Brown: Laws of form, London 1969. For an introduction and explication of the notation and its foundations, see Baecker (2013) p. 17-75; Tatjana Schönwälder-Kuntze: George Spencer-Brown. Eine Einführung in die ‚Laws of Form', 2nd ed., Wiesbaden 2009 and Felix Lau: Die Form der Paradoxie. Eine Einführung in die Mathematik und Philosophie der ‚Laws of Form' von George Spencer Brown, 4th ed., Heidelberg 2012. – Not only Baecker uses Specner-Brown's symbols for abstraction in cultural theory; so too does the narratology expanded by cultural theory: cf. for instance Albrecht Koschorke: Wahrheit und Erfindung. Grundzüge einer Allgemeinen Erzähltheorie, Frankfurt a.M. 2012, p. 361f.

[28]Cf. Baecker (2013), p. 156, 191 and 302. Baecker's most recently proposed formalization continues a series of studies of form theory that I will not list here.

The equation symbolizes the invitation to locate "the designation 'a' within the framework of differentiation" (symbolized by the inner hook or so-called 'cross'), "which implies an undetermined exterior."[29] It is undetermined insofar as it leaves open what precisely distinguishes the context from which the designation is contrasted – whether through one or various observers, their perspectives, or evaluations. Accordingly, every observation of something is readable as an "invitation to the observer" to apply distinctions encompassed by uncertainty. They indicate an exteriority "which is neither reducible nor unambiguously determinable, nor predictable in its allocation of value."[30] Those who would designate something (variable 'a' in the above equation) indicate or are made aware that their observation can be variously framed without advance determination or a limitation of potential contexts.

These are not completely open, in the sense that the outer limitations of the formula mandate that designations always remain within a context and are framed by this contextualization. The observation becomes contingent in that these contexts also influence that which is designated through perspective (the outer hook with elongated orbit or 're-entry-loop' symbolizes the re-entry of the framing margin in the space of its determination and thereby within the inner space of the "designation 'a'"). They provide for different versions of what is designated independent of the context of its designation, existing as both parallel and cohabitative possibilities. In short, the cultural perspective of contingency draws our attention to a realm of possibility for observation allowing for differing perspectives, and so we are directed back to the contingency of the position of observation itself.

Such a formalization seems to demand significant endeavors in comprehension, not only in hermeneutic cultural studies, but also in the context of an abstracting cultural theory. Their basic symbols condense around a logic of differentiation, the premises of which would require full explication and an evaluation of their epistemological consequences prior to providing heuristic insight as methodologically stable instruments for case studies. Nevertheless, Baecker's suggestion (even in its abbreviated form) can be read as paradigmatic for the kind of cultural zone of stimulation in which historical and formal interests intersect. Spencer-Brown's calculation provides an excellent example of the aforementioned discussions of our theoretical past –debates on difference as a starting point for (social) structure formation,[31] on techniques of theory as a distorted image of social theory – currently being reevaluated in cultural studies, albeit in altered guise.

In regards to cultural theory between formalization and historicization, it suffices to maintain

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[29]Baecker (2013), p. 156.
[30]Baecker (2013), p. 191.
[31]This is where the systematic interest of Luhmann's systems theory takes up Spencer-Brown – alongside poststructuralist philosophies of difference.

one simple point. Conceptual histories and formal reconstructions both agree that modern cultural perspectives are characterized by their contingent nature. Yet nowhere is this as obvious as it is in the previous formalization (as represented in the equation). Many cultural practices aim to "render this contingency invisible," or at the very least to limit the realm of possibility for alternative contexts.[32] Uncovering such strategies of making invisible or of the (self)-limitation of cultures are among the goals of a historical cultural analysis.

Baecker's cultural theory also investigates such vestiges in its attempt to derive the formalization of observational relations historically out of the history of the philosophy of the subject and theory of the soul, concepts of consciousness and contention from Aristotle and Plato, Montaigne and Descartes, Kant and Hegel up to Heidegger. In this way, Baecker derives his thesis that it is particularly the dynamics of antagonism which initiate modern perspectives on the contingency of culture. Antagonism directs the power of its potential for negation not necessarily to destruction, but rather to provoking reflective intersections which in the best case indicate only indefinite ("empty") exteriority – shifting agents, their varying perspectives and value frameworks. Contradictory patterns increase the probability that those in opposition not only antagonize one another and silence deviation, but also that they recognize one another as observers and acknowledge their contingencies.[33] Thus joining the formal reconstruction of cultural theory is a philosophical and historical account that seeks social and ethical consequences.

A glance at the research history reveals that both sociology[34] as well as historical cultural studies[35] could describe the enculturating as well as the deculturating effects of conflict without the need to indicate formal intensifications. Currently, however, the intersection in which both converge appears

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[32] Reckwitz (2010), p. 17. Classical ordering semantics of cultural comparison refer to nature and naturalness, universality and tradition, or genetic 'master narratives' of the philosophy of history (p. 28f.). See the summary by Landwehr (2009), p. 14.

[33] Cf. Baecker (2013), p. 66: "One is cultivated, if one recognizes the difference of observers as a difference of their position, their perspective, and their distinctions." [„Kultiviert ist man dann, wenn man die Differenz der Beobachter als Differenz ihrer Position, ihrer Perspektive und ihrer Unterscheidungen anerkennt."]

[34] Fundamental for the sociology of conflict were the probings of Georg Simmel: Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung, in: Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 11, ed. by Otthein Rammstedt, Frankfurt a.M. 2006 and their revision by Lewis Coser: The functions of social conflict, New York 1964; for the state of recent research see Youssef Dennaoui and Daniel Witte: Streit und Kultur. Vorüberlegungen zu einer Soziologie des Streits, in: StreitKulturen. Polemische und antagonistische Konstellationen in Geschichte und Gegenwart, ed. by Gunther Gebhard, Bielefeld 2008 (Kultur- und Medientheorie), p. 209-230; for an overview: Sozialwissenschaftliche Konflikttheorien. Eine Einführung, ed. by Thorsten Bonacker, Wiesbaden 2008 (Friedens- und Konfliktforschung 5).

[35] Cf. instead of a detailed survey of the scholarship, more exemplarily Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann: Kultur und Konflikt. Aspekte einer Theorie des unkommunikativen Handelns, in: Kultur und Konflikt, ed. by Jan Assmann and Dietrich Harth, Frankfurt a.M. 1990 (edition suhrkamp 1612), p. 11-48; StreitKulturen. Polemische und antagonistische Konstellationen in Geschichte und Gegenwart, ed. by Gunther Gebhard, Bielefeld 2008 (Kultur- und Medientheorie ; Aemulatio. Kulturen des Wettstreits in Text und Bild (1450-1620), ed. by Jan-Dirk Müller, Ulrich Pfisterer, Anna Kathrin Bleuler and Fabian Jonietz, Berlin/New York 2011 (Pluralisierung und Autorität 27).

particularly volatile: What potential knowledge is enabled by approaches which on the one hand reflect culture as a historical concept and on the other employ it as formal argumentation?

Currently, this intersection is evaluated with ambivalence. Andreas Reckwitz indicates the manner in which the "research program of cultural studies" on the one hand aims to elaborate the "dependency of practices on historical and locally-specific orders of knowledge" and thereby their "historicity." On the other hand, he points to the need for "modern cultural theories" to bring to light the "implications of the contingency of human life-forms" which have "been inherent in the concept of culture from its very inception."[36] As impossible as it is to hoodwink the historical transformation of cultural perspectives, it seems just as tempting to be seduced into making a permanent form out of it ("inherent [...] from its very inception"). Baecker argues along similar lines, augmenting a formal determination by the use of historical sampling: this concerns not only the "history of philosophy," but also the "motive" leading to the "development of the concept of form" out of historical subject philosophies.[37] Current voices in cultural theory demonstrate here dual complications: historical and formal cultural analysis appear – in their relationship to one another – not only difficult to render transparent, but also to mediate methodologically in a way that does not secretly privilege one perspective over another.

IV.

A snapshot of research interests in cultural studies and cultural theory could thus reveal that the presumption of globality, which might ensue from the digital analysis of large corpora for the interest in reading individual texts, exists itself within the larger contexts of the exciting intersections between global and singular, formal and historical, interests. Questions of methodology intensified by interactions with texts for the digital humanities thus apply in principle to the entire field: What is established or altered through the entanglement of cultural theory's formal and historical lines of argumentation? Or, with regards to practices of cultural inquiry, do historical case studies of singular objects (from thick descriptions to historical-discourse analyses) provide indispensable and adequate bases to investigate cultural forms and trace global epistemological interests? Or is the opposite advisable for cultural inquiries: Is it possible for cases to be sought out which explore possible relations and properties through formal procedures independent of concrete explorations and individual case studies? It is striking that such questions are seldom raised in daily practice, and even less frequently pursued satisfactorily – indeed, their necessity appears to be of little urgency within the auspices of the

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[36] Reckwitz (2010), p. 17 esp. p. 27.
[37] Baecker (2013), quote on p. 101.

traditionally soft epistemology of cultural studies. For this reason, cultural research programs would rather attempt to find intermediaries and mediation than to intensify discontinuities great or small. In this context, the discussion of research interests and methodology within the digital humanities reveals the urgent and wide-reaching impulse to put precisely these intermediate epistemologies to the test.

Responses such as Marcus Twellmann's reconstructive attempt therefore reveal the manner in which the 'digital provocation' is cultivated not only within the community of practice, but also further how it initiates fruitful self-reflection on cultural studies' methodology and the genealogy of its points of tension. It is also helpful to remember that not only the tensions between measuring and descriptive practices, but also between singular and global research interests, have influenced the formation of cultural studies since the second half of the nineteenth century. Further benefit lies in the recognition that these tensions cannot be abandoned in a historical prehistory of cultural studies' formative academic struggles, but rather that they influence cultural studies and cultural theory more than ever before, even if they remain, as yet, unmapped. If these explicitly reflective steps are not limited to the peripheral fields of the digital humanities, but are incorporated within the wider circles of cultural studies' agenda,[38] their impulses would provide a less polemical and more innovative effect.

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[38]Discussion initiatives that inquire into transdisciplinary consequences and procedures point in this direction; for the program of the DFG symposium series "Digitality in the Humanities" see http://digitalitaet-geisteswissenschaften.de/ (13 March 2016).