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CHANGE IN SOCIETY CAN ARISE ONLY FROM CULTURAL CHANGE

Literary Studies as Self-Will and Consensus, as Essay, Empiricism and Application

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Change in society can arise only from cultural change. Literature and Literary Studies represent subsystems within a more comprehensive cultural system in which all patterns of experience and processing of reality are generated, maintained and transformed. Cultural and social transformation result from active observation, in the sense of critical and individual actions outside conventional and consensual action-patterns: through individual, independent, self-willed, through creative actions. Literature and Literary Studies should intensify this type of observation: not only must literature itself continuously propagate new possibilities of actions, but also the discourse on literature could be intensified to an essayistic activity with constant innovation. The basis of cultural change lies in the need for goal-orientated action and in the need to continuously define these goals. Literature and Literary Studies function in the context of this goal-orientation and goal-definition. Observation leads to cultural and social change when, as a result of observation, new domains and new forms of social and cultural praxis, that is, of new consensual and conventional domains, are created. To act in consensual and conventional domains describes at the same time the mode in which science operates. Literary Studies (as a cultural science) should proceed empirically and have an orientation towards practical application.

1. Introduction

Students and graduates in Literary Studies bringing about cultural change in cities, city districts and regions – more comprehensive and quite different from the kind of image-maintenance carried out for a city by an advertising agency, or the usual work done by a city's cultural bureau: for it would not be the city's image that would be changed, but instead, step by step, the situation itself. Students and graduates in Literary Studies producing their own broadcast for the local studios of their regional radio station: university digests, programmes on culture and literature, information, discussion and advice presented in a novelly far-reaching way. Students and graduates in Literary Studies being trained not only in journalistic skills, but learning and practising modern forms of social criticism as well: familiar with mechanisms of com-

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munication as well as with strategies of argumentation and interaction. Students and graduates in Literary Studies preparing language-learning videos for foreigners in cooperation with the tourist offices in their cities. Students and graduates in Literary Studies presenting empirically based studies, not only of the production and reception of literature, but of film and television as well. All these model projects are realizable; indeed they already exist (in the initial stages). Our predominantly technology-orientated culture can be challenged to make its mechanisms and the principles of its dominance really clear (perhaps for the first time).

In an attempt to bring some clarity into an area that has become increasingly complex and obscure ('Literary Studies: Their present state and future outlook'), and in an attempt to offer some new distinctions for problem-solving, I shall be referring in this essay to the discussion around 'Radical Constructivism'. [1] Not all the basic assumptions of Radical Constructivism are unquestioningly accepted by constructivists, nor are the implications for Literary Studies which arise from them. [2] In relation to Literary Studies, a constructivist perspective would have to be taken as being in opposition to the positions taken by social theory, social history and ideology critiques.

Social change would not be that which one might call 'change in the objective social relations': in the constructivistic view, it is not society, nor the external world, nor reality which determines human behaviour, but instead constructivists prefer to observe how people in an environment together with other living systems *construct* their reality in a way that is *subject-dependent* (not to be confused with 'only subjective'). 'Subject-dependent' means, in terms of constructivist models of thought, 'that which we experience and learn, recognize and know, is necessarily built from our own building-blocks

[1] Some good introductions to the basic concepts of 'Radical Constructivism' can be found in Schmidt (1987), Gumin and Mohler (1985) and Rusch (1987). Similar 'constructivist' postulations have of course been present for a long time in the history of European thought, what is new in Radical Constructivism is, however, the synthesis of these postulates into a coherent, empirically-based concept. In the wider realms of constructivist thinking, 'new conceptions of central categories of European thought and action are developing and influencing politics, science and art as well as daily life' (Schmidt (1985: 19)).

[2] For example, the question of the extent to which life and perception, life and cognition can be equated is disputable. In this connection, Gerhard Roth (1987) opposes with (in my opinion) convincing arguments certain of Maturana's basic assumptions. I disagree with some of the conclusions with regard to Literary Studies which Siegfried J. Schmidt (1987) and Gebhard Rusch (1987b) have developed from basic constructivist assumptions. This becomes clearer in the course of my article; my objection is not to the conclusion that science, including that of literature, must proceed empirically, but I am sceptical about the rôle assigned to 'Interpretation'. Because when one connects the interpretative procedure with that of theory formation and hypothesis formation, interpretation is no longer displaced from the range of theoretical methods; on the contrary, interpretation appears as the situation at the start and at the end also of empirical work. On the assumption that neither of the writers mentioned above would seriously dispute this, it remains only to clarify which phenomena of Literary Studies could be described as 'Interpretation'.

and can only be recognized in terms of our way of building' (von Glasersfeld (1981: 35)).

The following theses will be further explained:

Thesis 1: Change in society can arise only from cultural change.

Thesis 1a: Literature and Literary Studies represent sub-systems within a more comprehensive cultural system in which all patterns of experience and processing of reality are generated, maintained and transformed.

Thesis 2: Cultural and social transformation result from active observation, in the sense of critical and individual actions outside conventional and consensual action-patterns: through individual, independent, self-willed, through creative actions.

Thesis 2a: Literature and Literary Studies should intensify this type of observation: not only must literature itself continuously propagate new possibilities of actions, but also the discourse on literature could be intensified to an essayistic activity with constant innovation.

Thesis 3: The basis of cultural change lies in the need for goal-orientated action and in the need to continuously define these goals.

Thesis 3a: Literature and Literary Studies function in the context of this goal-orientation and goal-definition.

Thesis 4: Observation leads to cultural and social change when, as a result of observation, new domains and new forms of social and cultural praxis, that is, of new consensual and conventional domains, are created. To act in consensual and conventional domains describes at the same time the mode in which science operates.

Thesis 4a: Literary Studies (as a cultural science) should proceed empirically and have an orientation towards practical application.

2. On Thesis 1

Change in society can arise only from cultural change. In the constructivist view, social relations are those relations which are, as a result of similar cognitive processes, produced and maintained by the individual participants in the social system. It is not perception adequate to reality which is important, but instead the rules of construction themselves become central: the cognitive processes of the construction of reality. 'There is no distinction between perception and interpretation. The act of perception is the act of interpretation' (von Glasersfeld and Richards (1984: 18)). [3] All cognitions are, in this perspective, determined by the nature of the body's biological self-organization ('Autopoiesis') and through the self-referential organization of the human

[3] The quotations in this article are not identical with the English originals (with the exception of Maturana (1980) and Williams (1961)).

brain, but not by the conditions of an objectively given and independent reality. Reality appears as the result of the respective model of reality: *reality, including technical reality, appears as a cultural phenomenon*, and in this sense each change can be understood as a cultural change.

One often hears that the importance of culture and cultural studies is being drastically reduced in the 'technological era': but this means that the opportunity is being lost to understand the present faith in technology and technological praxis as cultural phenomena as well: there is nothing to say that technology *must* expand. Technological change only arises in a cognitive climate, in a cultural situation, in which precisely such a change is especially favoured. This favourable predisposition is by no means coincidental, but it is – and this is the crucial point – also not inevitable. Social change is under no circumstances change which occurs by a better-adapted processing of a changed objective reality. Social change does not follow the 'imperatives', the 'own dynamic', of technological developments; on the contrary, its 'imperatives' and its 'own dynamic' are manifestations resulting from precisely this favourable predisposition. The thesis that social change can arise only from cultural change thus no longer has the character of an aggressive reaction resulting from feelings of inferiority, it appears instead profane and self-evident and this alone is what is unusual about the central thesis. 'Wars do not simply happen, we make them; poverty is no historical coincidence, it is our own work, because we want a world with all its anti-social advantages, as it results from the ideological justification of competition; (...)' (Maturana (1985: 14)). Thought does not begin only with loss, nor need loss necessarily lead to an alteration in thought: no catastrophe, no downfall of a regime inevitably produces a cognitive change. For many old party members the old ideologies can remain completely functional and fully integrated until their deaths. There is, in short, no objective situation which necessarily enforces a cognitive change, *whereas the opposite is, on the other hand, continuously present*. 'A system can only be destroyed by destroying the relations which constitute it, and conversely a system can only be brought into being by the production of those relations of which it is composed. There is no other possibility. If mankind is to set up a new society, it must produce new interpersonal relations, and to do this, it must alter its cognitive domain' (Maturana (1982: 313)).

Early constructivist reflections by English drama- and cultural theorist, Raymond Williams (based in turn on the theses of the English biologist Y.Z. Young) already determine the closest of connections between the experience of reality on the one hand and culture on the other, that is between social change and cultural change:

> '(...) but there can be little doubt that henceforth we must start from the position that reality *as we experience it* is in this sense a human creation; that all our experience is a human version of the world we inhabit. (...) But, further, there is not only variation between cultures, but the individuals who bear these particular cultural rules are capable of altering and extending them, bringing in new or modified rules by which an extended or different reality can be experienced. Thus, new areas of reality can be "revealed" or "created", and these need not be limited to any one individual, but can, in certain interesting ways, be communicated, thus adding to the set of rules carried by the particular culture.' (1961: 18)

The opposition between art and reality that is to be observed throughout the entire corpus of culture theory, in Williams' eyes, then falls away:

> 'The contrast between art and reality can be seen, finally, as a false meaning.' (1961: 19)

> 'Art is ratified, in the end, by the fact of creativity in all our living. Everything we see and do, the whole structure of our relationships and institutions, depends, finally, on an effort of learning, description and communication. We create our human world as we have thought of art being created. Art is a major means of precisely this creation. (...) If all reality must be learned by the effort to describe successfully, we cannot isolate "reality" and set art in opposition to it, for dignity or indignity. If all activity depends on responses learned by the sharing of descriptions, we cannot set "art" on one side of a line and "work" on the other; we cannot submit to be divided into "Aesthetic Man" and "Economic Man".' (1961: 37, 38)

The greatest effect that culture (and therein ultimately also literature) can ever achieve in the process of social change, its greatest prospect, would be given in a model of a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', that is, in a model of an 'assumption or prediction which purely from the fact that it was made at all, causes the assumed, expected or predicted event to become reality (...)' (Watzlawick (1981: 91)). That which initially sounds like an ugly or all too delightful rumour becomes reality in the course of its spreading; cultural change ultimately produces a reality which would, without this change, never have been produced; it is criticism that indeed allows crises to exist at all. Did the rumour of certain experiences of love which was spread in works of fiction in the course of the 18th century in fact make these very experiences possible? 'From poem and novel, love came forth; it arose from the stages (...)' (Manès Sperber (1964)). [4] Did the anti-fiction of the horror and impossibility of love disseminated in works of fiction in the course of the 20th century not reinforce precisely this horror and impossibility, if not indeed produce them? Where do the ideologies of happiness, the anti-social grandiosity, the collective narcissism, the normative ego-aesthetic 'Well, *I* like it!' come from? Has contem-

[4] More complete quotation: 'From literature, young people began, with held breath, with faltering heart-beat, to learn to love, i.e., how to use the words and the silences and the gestures, how, from near or far, to declare their feelings so as to awake passion in the opposite sex. From poem and novel, love came forth; it arose from the stages, as a word and style event, if one can put it like that, it empowered an ever-growing number of people who learned on the one hand how to enchant and on the other how to speak, to write, to glance up adoringly, to lower their eyes, sigh and smile understandingly when enchanted.'

porary literature merely simulated the usefulness of autobiographical self-experience, this possibly hopeless and somewhat arbitrary making available by request of an actual mental past? Is childhood (in the emphatic sense) originally a time-span and place of poetry? Does the *rumour* of loss of experience, of loss of the 'I' in fact produce the experience of loss as such, is it a question of some placebo-effect, of a toned-down, mild form of Voodoo-death, so to speak? (Voodoo-death: the conviction of the victim that the prophecy of his imminent horrible death will inescapably be fulfilled produces the reaction of extreme fear which then in fact does lead to death.) Is an anticipatory thought, a 'presicience of death' so rare in our culture too for the reason that our literature, with very few exceptions (e.g. in the poetry of Ernst Meister), does not occupy itself with this theme? [5] Patterns of experience and formation of reality stem, indisputably, from literature. 'Concrete Poetry' has been perpetuated in advertising (and elsewhere); Eugen Gomringer's prophecy of 'poetry as a means of organizing one's environment' (1969) has been, partly at least, fulfilled. On the other hand, one must naturally be aware of the fact that the number of these examples of literary self-fulfilling prophecies is quite finite: the inevitability of the organization of reality through literature says nothing at all about how meaningful, how representative, how exclusive the particular change at a given time is. Not everything that is furnished with new names, with new concepts and models is then also believed in the course of its distribution. Unmistakable though literary acts may be, they are not however irreplaceable, so long as novel, unconventional, critical speech acts (in the sense of changed descriptions of reality) are being offered somewhere. One would underestimate the importance of television if one did not see it as a massive educational instrument and naturally cultural acts with speech take place therein (the flood of pictures would be wholly unattractive without speech). [6] It would appear as if there were no further secrets for literature to discover: the continuing psychoanalysis in fiction lies behind us. [7] On which

[5] 'Prescience of death' ('Vorausgehendes Denken des Todes') is a phrase formulated by Gregor Laschen for the poems of Ernst Meister. In: *Text + Kritik* 96 (Ernst Meister), October 1987 (cf. ibid. the author's essay: 'Etwas für Ernst Meister tun. Skizze eines Manipulationsversuches').

[6] Seen in this way one can also be somewhat sceptical towards the popular theses of the end not only of written but also of spoken culture, as proposed for instance by Jack Goody and Joshua Meyrowitz – especially when one takes into account more recent considerations to the effect that visual perception is also encoded in language. cf. also B.S.: 'Lebensentwürfe im Fernsehen. Die Herrschaft der Fiktion unter dem Schein des Authentischen' (Life-goals in Television. The Domination of Fiction in the Guise of Authenticity'). In: Norbert Oellers (ed.), 1988. *Germanistik und Deutschunterricht im Zeitalter der Technologie*. Vorträge des Germanistentages Berlin 1987. Vol. 4: Neue Technologie und Medien in Germanistik und Deutschunterricht, 147–157. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.

[7] 'That shadow-world, where barely thirty years ago we believed we saw treasure glimmering, has given us but little. (...) And the boldest and most impatient amongst the novelists did not hesitate to declare that the prize had not been worth the trouble, and that they preferred to concentrate their efforts on something else' (Nathalie Sarrautes (1956)).

important paradigms would it still be possible to work? Nevertheless: the culture industry is expanding. What rôle do Literature and Literary Studies play in it?

3. On Thesis 1a

Literature and Literary Studies represent subsystems within a more comprehensive cultural system in which all patterns of experience and processing of reality are generated, maintained and transformed. Each legitimization of literature (and of culture) naturally contains at least the implicit hope or conviction that social change could *also* come about through cultural change. The view, however, that social change could come about through cultural change *only* is a rare one, and is apparently to be encountered mainly when the need for legitimization chooses the path of aggression as a means of defense: the more Literature and Literary Studies (and culture and cultural studies) threaten to become meaningless, the more energetic become the claims of their own 'unavoidability' [8] – one sees oneself in the rôle of repairer, comforter, compensator, and one then makes this claim as the exclusive and grandiose claim. Above all, precisely because of the exclusivity and grandiosity of the claim (which of course against all ideas of solidarity demand the recognition of one's own superiority), prophecies of this nature can hardly have a hope of being fulfilled in the course of their dissemination. As long as literature (art, culture) are seen in opposition to society (as, for instance, in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory), and not as a 'specific function', as a 'fulfilment of society' (Luhmann (1984)), the thesis that social change can only come about through cultural change can hardly lose its grandiose or its defensive character.

A profane, a self-evident variant of the thesis that social change is only possible through cultural change, is given by the producers of literature, by the poets themselves (two examples only are given here): in the text 'Eine Geburtstagsrede und die Folgen' (1931) Gottfried Benn defends himself against the charge that his speech in honour of Heinrich Mann paid tribute only to the latter's artistic and not his political significance: 'Today I can, at most, add that I hold Art to be far more radical than politics. In *one* form ("Gestalt") alone, it brings a social class to its end, with *one* single sentence it gives a century its next goal; it is literature alone, and not politics, which reaches into those regions of the mind ("seelische Schichten") in which the true changes in human society take place, the change of style and of feelings and attitudes.' Next or oblique to the assessment of 'Forward Flight', next to

[8] You are referred for example to Odo Marquardt's Bamberg Lecture on the 'Unvermeidlichkeit der Geisteswissenschaften' ('Unavoidability of Human Studies').

or oblique to an exact critical and historical judgment, one finds an almost profane and unpretentious version of the theory that social change can only come about through cultural change. Benn does not claim that Art has any clearly visible, evidently superior effects; he merely maintains that Art is more radical, that it – 'cognitively' – reaches further forward and into deeper regions than politics. From this perspective, there is neither anything grandiose nor anything aggressive/defensive in Benn's claim that Art is the domain of 'the true change of human society', that is, of 'the change of style and of feelings and attitudes'. And amongst Benn's *Marginalien*, one finds, after all, the sentence: 'It is not wars that form history, but Art.' [9] The impression that this is a very risky statement should be countered with the impression that the statement is self-evident: not factual events form history, but rather the narrative constructions which give rise to them.

In Helmut Heißenbüttel's correspondence with Heinrich Vormweg, one finds the following consideration: 'That which I can imagine in words (that which I can hallucinate out of language) is capable of giving reality. My work, as such, even if there were no one to read it, could effect more change than all reactionary wars and all progressive protests' (1969: 65). Notwithstanding the fact that this consideration of Heißenbüttel's is debatable in the overall theoretical context of his work, [10] there would also seem to be a variant of the selfevident, or at least of the acceptable here: namely then when one regards not facts, not events, as forming reality, but instead the narrative constructions of language as doing so. And facts and events can only be perceived because such constructions of language make them possible at all.

What does Thesis 1 mean for Literature and Literary Studies? The profane, self-evident constructivist variant of the thesis undoubtedly speaks for the importance of literature, but only to a limited degree for its aesthetic characteristics. For when as a result of a newspaper article or an essay or even of a conversation – by daydreaming – one brings about changed cognitions or descriptions different form the conventional cognitions, then the aesthetic characteristics become somewhat peripheral. A society in which no one any

[9] In its entirety, Benn's note reads as follows: '*The Eras.* The Eras are determined by Art, the Eras are reckoned from the periods of styles. The era before the World Wars was determined by D'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco*, Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, Heinrich Mann's *Die Göttinnen*, Hofmannsthal's early verses, the pictures of the French impressionists, the music of Salome, Rodin's sculptures. From here, the problems entered the era, from here the problems submitted to the era – they were in no way an expression of the era, but its creator. It is not wars that form history, but Art. A war ends after unspeakable destruction at regimental dinners and in the old-fashioned phrases of formal speeches; after destruction, which leads to nothing. Art too is renunciation, but a renunciation in which all is conceived.'

[10] cf. B.S.: 'Moderne Literatur läßt sich nicht länger sprachtheoretisch begründen. Helmut Heißenbüttels Theorie als Beispiel' ('Modern Literature can no longer be justified in terms of language theory. The example of Helmut Heißenbüttel's theory'). In: *Merkur* 40, July 1986, 565–577.

longer reads literature would undoubtedly be considerably different; but on the other hand, cultural change can take place without literature as well, but it cannot take place without a change in descriptions, without change in language. Literature can be seen as a dominating force in cultural competition for such 'descriptions'. Any further attempts to put literature 'beyond competition' would be unproductive. The use of literature should be specifically integrated in the overall context of the use of culture. Seen in this light, *Literary Studies must be Media Studies.* [11]

The modifications resulting from basic constructivistic assumptions about Literary Studies are modifications of method and content. The problems of legitimization, of responsibility, of tolerance in the work of Literary Studies become more acute when one takes the basic assumptions of constructivism as starting-point. The legitimization of work in the field of Literary Studies can hardly now be delegated to 'objective social conditions', nor to 'requirements of the discipline', nor to a 'the author wants...', nor to a 'the text shows...', 'the text proves...', 'the text requires...'. If one wants to describe how a text is constituted, one must be clear on the fact that what we observe and what we say about the observed is dependent upon what we have learned to observe and to say – in other words, the subjective creativity, the conventionality of the observer making Literary Studies, move into the centre of interpretative processes. Interpretations appear now as a kind of attempt at manipulation within the process of cultural convention and cultural change. The text no longer appears to be autonomous. Each reading merely reflects only that which happens in the mind of the individual recipient or of many recipients. The stimulus of cognitive operations (die Kommunikatbasis 'Text') in no way determines the overall result that each reading produces. One must admit that furthermore no stable central meaning endures through all times and for all groups of readers; that would be, in terms of hermeneutics, remains of a theological exegesis, which could rely upon a God-given central meaning of the text. Texts have no meanings, but meanings are attributed to them: this may indeed be individual, but nevertheless, also in the main conventional and consensual. And a standard observer would only guarantee the trivial building-blocks of a text, a substrate for the purpose, that one could call the 'basis of communication' ('Kommunikatbasis', cf. S.J. Schmidt). At best 'the text itself' says only what one cannot do to it.

This does not mean, naturally, that either Literary Studies nor their subject should be rejected; however, the respective predecisions should become clear,

[11] The prominently supported view expressed several times at the 1987 Germanistics Conference in Berlin that the subject/object of Literatury Studies is the (literary) text (and nothing else), to be analyzed with the traditional methods, with the traditional pinch of integrity, with determination not to look aside, not to steal a glance at the media, to ignore Empirical Literary Studies – because it excludes any change itself, this conception contradicts the aims considered here, as will be shown yet more clearly in the further course of this exposition.

as should the respective mechanisms by which a subject is generated and the results for the further processing. Literary Studies first create their subject, and the demands of the discipline are nothing other than the interests which unite the people who participate in these studies. The subject of a discipline and the methods of its creation and description can be changed in the course of cultural change.

It seems to me that one is faced with an intensified radical reception aesthetics, with a category of the 'external' opposed to the 'internal', opposed to the Rest-Werkimmanenz, opposed to the object-assumptions of contemporary reception-research. Naturally, this is not a plea for subjectivist Literary Studies, but rather for a well-grounded understanding of its 'subject-dependence' (see p. 94). The recipients or as I would prefer to say, the observers, cannot be prevented from asking what the text means. The accurate examination of a text should make its construction mechanisms clear to its readers. What we experience and observe when we read is our own, socialized, conventionalized, consensual but also individual reading behaviour and not an independent text, which would force a standardized, intersubjective (and therefore also a predictable) reading behaviour upon us. When we read, we find a specific new variant of our own experience, but not any independent message, nor any independent information. [12] Literary Studies should be concerned with the patterns of reality-construction and reality-organization, with cognition, with rules of construction, with descriptions – together with the understanding that these descriptions and their own meta-descriptions underlie the usual consumption of culture (with all its implications of using up): the reference to traditions and traditional behaviour is not only a means of elucidation, of clarification, but simultaneously a means of hiding alternatives.

4. On Thesis 2

Cultural and social transformation result from active observation, in the sense of critical and individual actions outside conventional and consensual action-patterns: through individual, independent, self-willed, through creative actions. This kind of observation cannot, per se, be an act which at the very beginning takes place in consensual, collective, conventional and communicative domains. With such a conception of the absolutely necessary isolated,

[12] Further details in B.S.: 'Die Welt und die Literatur im Kopf. Die endlos autobiographische Tätigkeit der Wahrnehmung ('World and Literature in the Head. The Infinite Autobiographical Act of Perception') (Postdoctoral thesis, to appear 1990 at Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft). Cf. Marcel Proust: 'In actual fact, every reader is, when he reads, a reader of himself. The novelist's work is thus merely a kind of optical instrument which the author hands to the reader so that he may recognize that in himself which he might perhaps otherwise never have beheld' (*A la recherche du temps perdu*).

self-willed, creative, subjective observer, the problem falls away, how elitist, how arrogant authors, readers and literary theorists can or must be; for the duration of an observation at least, the observer's rôle is necessarily a distinct one; for others do not observe at the same time nor from this perspective; anyone who doesn't distance himself cannot observe anything either; anyone who only takes the popular view sees nothing at all; anyone who offers only the conventional, the conformist, can never have observed before. Creative action is, at least in the beginning, a 'non-communicative interaction' (Maturana (1982: 294)). Or to express it another way: individuality is essentially for observation; individuality is socially indispensable. Observations are prophecies (either to warn or to pacify). 'Observation' in the sense suggested here has little to do with mere observing, with registering or representing: 'Observation' means a striving for alternative observations, with changed constructions of reality; 'observation' refers to the basic impulse of cultural and social change. The at first fundamentally individual observation takes place under two conditions: through experiences outside the dynamic of one's own conventional social system (experiences with other cultures, experiences in other countries) and through reflections using language. Reflections using language are a form of observation: they reflect the conventional reality-constructing description. 'All we can do is to produce explanations through language – which reveal the mechanism by which a world is brought forth' (Maturana and Varela (1987: 260)). Reflections using language enable us 'to observe our own world, to describe our own position and the position of the other elements of our medium [our environment; B.S.]. (...) Reflections using language allow us to see the world in which we live and to consciously accept or reject it' (Maturana (1985: 12)).

Despotic régimes attempt to destroy the conditions of change in that they suppress observation. This is least successful in the domain of reflections using language (and incidentally, indicates at the same time the really dangerous rôle of literature in repressive systems as well). On the other hand, despotic régimes have to fight for cognition (and recognition): political systems justify themselves continuously in the media. Coup leaders occupy the press, radio and television, they bring the culture industry under their control (die 'Bewußtseins-Industrie' cf. Enzensberger (1962); in contrast, factories engaged in heavy industry are not occupied.

5. On Thesis 2a

Literature and Literary Studies should intensify this type of observation: not only must literature itself continuously propagate new possibilities of actions, but also the discourse on literature could be intensified to an essayistic activity with constant innovation. If it seems right (as a result of biological theories of

cognition) *to link the development of a society not only to confirmation, but also to irritation, innovation, creativity, complexity, intellectual risk*, if in other words irritation represents a necessary component of realistic action, then the importance of irritating literature and irritating essays on literature is also strengthened. Literary Studies are indispensable insofar as they succeed in claiming an observer-rôle and an irritator-rôle: to carefully build up a rumour with texts about texts and above all, about constructions of reality, and to realize this rumour in the course of its distribution; *this would be a literature-model and a reception-model, and a model for science and essay as well, in terms of which Literary Studies would appear to be indispensable*. People engaged in Literary Studies would have to resolutely push through their rôle as observers and as essayists. So far, people engaged in Literary Studies usually wait until a literary expression of social problems and dangers has appeared and until, with the passing of a further decade, they can be entered as common-places without danger. In this respect at least, *the crisis in Literary Studies is by no means a problem of method, but instead a problem of criticism and of courage* (why otherwise are novelists' and poets' essays and lectures on literature usually so much more attractive than our own work?). Cognition, rules of construction, descriptions of reality – these should be discussed, and in such a way as to both provoke and promote. Texts should be interpreted outside the conventional agreements usually offered. Only in talking about literature does literature start to have a presence; literary texts cannot speak for themselves.

To define more exactly what is meant here referred to 'essay' and 'essayistic', one can this time rely on traditional conceptions of the essay: *the over-hasty, the experimental character, the involvement in contradictions, even in untruths*, is propagated everywhere; preference is given to *forms of personal thought, irony and scepticism and also to emotion* – as the 'genesis of a theory' (Bense), as the precondition of changed concepts of cognition. [13]

The rôle of observer is always contradictory (and these contradictions can – as the fate of the German essayists of the 20s shows – reach the proportions of a desperate dilemma): on the one hand, only one who withdraws and isolates himself can become observer, but on the other, the observer can only bring about cultural change if he succeeds in building up *new consensual* domains. Theses 4 and 4a deal with these contradictions.

6. On Thesis 3

The basis of cultural change lies in the need for goal-orientated action and in the need to continuously define these goals. People are by no means

[13] An overview of older conceptions of the essay is to be found in the introductory articles by Hermann Grimm, Georg Lukacs, Max Bense and Theodor W. Adorno in the collection of German essays edited by Ludwig Rohner (Munich 1972).

reaction-machines, incapable of resistance. The effects of culture (and of the media) cannot be predicted solely on the basis of ideology-critical product analyses, as left-wing media criticism would have had us believe (only some ten years ago). *People live theories of life, live particular self-conceptions, modify or reject them*. Otherwise no capacity for control or self-control could ever be operationalized. In almost all of the newer psychological theories of personality, from George Kelly or Carl Rogers through to self-concept research, the basic assumption of goal-orientated cognitive behaviour is more or less explicitly taken as the starting-point. The central concept of Radical Constructivism is the concept of self-organization (Maturana's 'Autopoiesis'), behind which, in various modifications, lies the assumption that living systems are fundamentally and consistently goal-orientated (cf. for example von Glasersfeld (1987: 406)) and that cultural demands which arise in the domain of cognition can no longer be attributed solely to the deficiencies of the respective ruling social and political system – just as little as the resignation of someone who is seriously ill could be blamed solely on the hospital atmosphere (cf. Oswald Wiener (1983: 39)). The trend to goal-directed behaviour implies a need for orientation: people are searching for designs of life; the intellectually hopeless question as to the meaning of life is unavoidably posed (and practised); the question as to one's own proper life would be the starting and the finishing point not only of culture-reception, but of perception as such; would 'Utopia' be such a normal thing that the concept of 'Utopia' would lose its emphatic meaning? Which books achieve massive popularity: are they the instructions for proper living, for being happy, for the art of loving, the conquest of happiness, fairy-tale princes? Besides, adults have established their decisive designs of life and change them very little; cultural change takes place mostly in the younger generation.

7. On Thesis 3a

Literature and Literary Studies function in the context of this goal-orientation and goal-definition. Perception in general and thereby naturally the reception of literature (or of film and television as well) is basically subject-dependent and relates to the respective recipient's own life. Reception by way of identification is not just one of many possible forms of reception, but rather is the only possible one, initially at least. Later, through self-observation, through meta-cognition, perhaps through practising the difference between fiction and non-fiction, techniques of distancing and critique may follow. [14] But basically, perception (reading or watching television) can be understood as a kind of

[14] Cf. the article mentioned in fn. 5.

nonwritten autobiographical occupation, [15] or, as Gerd Henniger has written in connection with something else, 'of all (hi-)stories, there is only one, which actually exists; each one writes it, in that she or he lives, through all that she or he does or leaves undone. This is the real, the concrete novel'. [16] The reader or viewer thus tells her or himself the phenomena which she or he seems merely to register. The *emotional constituent*, ignored to some extent in Literary Studies, comes into play. Readers always meet, to some extent, only themselves; television viewers always see, to some extent, only themselves.

One should not see this as simply meaning that one rides alongside as the eighth man of the 'Magnificent Seven' – or perhaps one actually does? Perhaps this is in fact where the thrill of reading or watching TV actually lies? One's pulse quickens when the TV quiz participant makes a fool of himself; such reactions are, in the heat of the moment, difficult to control. The end of a film in a cinema is like waking from one reality into another (especially after the 'riding alongside').

8. On Thesis 4

Observation leads to cultural and social change when, as a result of observation, new domains and new forms of social and cultural praxis, that is, of new consensual and conventional domains, are created. To act in consensual and conventional domains describes at the same time the mode in which science operates. Observation is initially uncommunicative (see above, p. 102), but observation can, in the long run, only bring about cultural and social change when new consensual and conventional domains are created in communicative interaction; and at the same time one would have to concede that rational discourse is not the only (and often not even the most helpful) means of producing new consensual domains: cultural change can result from 'aesthetic' temptation (unfortunately, it can be a mean, 'kitschy' temptation as well). Successful criticism must not only be rational, it must also be emotionally or even 'erotically' attractive. The success of Günter Wallraff's book *Ganz unten* rests largely upon its being an account of personal suffering, with which many readers identify on an emotional level; a purely factual account of worker-exploitation, particularly since the occurrence as such could hardly be suprising, would have achieved correspondingly little. 'Reason explains, but like and dislike command. (...) This is why our problems as social human beings are not technological, they are ethical' (Maturana (1980: 23)). On the basis of their postulate that the human nervous system is a closed one, constructivists reason that there is, strictly speaking, also no transfer of information through language; no instructive information is transferred, but merely impulses which generate information in the respective recipient's cognitive system. In this model, 'communication in no way comprises a transfer of products or knowledge from one system to another, but is based on the reorientation of a system's processes – in the domain of cognition or of the mind – by the self-presentation of another system and its own processes. (...) Communication is not giving, it is a presentation of the self, one's own life, which evokes corresponding life-processes in another. This is the way in which entities, living systems, communicate with each other' (Jantsch (1982: 280)).

[15] For more detail see B.S.; cf. fn. 11.

[16] Gerd Henniger writes in his foreword to Phillippe Sollers' novel *Drama*: 'Of all (hi-)stories, there is only one which actually exists; everyone writes it, in that she or he lives, through all that she or he does or leaves undone; this is the real, the concrete novel. Man, that lucid animal, dwells in a (hi-)story which he continually generates himself; but he is also lived by his (hi-)story, is its inevitable product. Whilst he, as if from within and like that writing which inscribes itself upon the cinema screen develops his admirable or banal text (who writes, who traces on this white page which one could call the background of life?) he reflects the text from the outside, so to speak, in his thinking' (1968: 5).

Empirical science means acting in consensual domains. Empirical science is never validated through facts, but instead science is validated through strict and binding rules of method. 'Science is not an area of objective knowledge and reason, it is an area of subject-dependent knowledge and reason, defined through a method which lays down the characteristics of the one who has this knowledge and reason. In other words, the validity of scientific knowledge depends on its methodology, which determines the cultural uniformity of the observer, and not on the reflection of an objective reality' (Maturana (1982: 309)). The observer's characteristics determine the nature of the observations possible for him. 'Besides, since only those statements which we as observers generate with the help of scientific method are scientific statements, it usually escapes us that science is necessarily a domain of socially accepted operational statements, a domain which is validated by a process defined by that very standard observer who can carry out the operations necessary for the generation of these statements. (...) As observers, we usually tacitly presuppose the existence of the observer, and since we thus simultaneously impute his universality, we ascribe many of the invariant characteristics of our own descriptions to a reality as if this reality were ontologically objective and independent of us; but these descriptions must be strictly related to the standard observer. The power of science however depends upon its subject dependence, for it is precisely this which enables us to master the domain of action in which we exist' (Maturana (1982: 237)). There is no science which has a subject/object independent of its own operations.

9. On Thesis 4a

Literary Studies (as a cultural science) should proceed empirically and have an orientation towards practical application. Essayistic observations and em-

pirical modes of procedure in Literary Studies are attempts at manipulation (see above, p. 104); the point is to supply a public with old and new interpretations of literature. However, Literary Studies are prevented from playing an effective rôle at present by the fact that they seldom operate empirically. Science undoubtedly has an influence on social and cultural change, and accordingly, the results of empirical research have a relatively great power of persuasion in the present dominant cultural situation as a whole (persuasion, that is, with regard to public recognition, research financing, jobs, promotion of culture); admittedly there are also better reasons to be given for empirical Literary Studies than tactical reasons: production and reception of literature can only be completely explained insofar as one sees them as a consensus problem, as a (limited) group matter, as a (limited) community experience. The aims of the production and reception of literature are to find allies for specific prophecies, for changed constructions of reality.

In an essay, it is highly desirable to construct a creative, a largely 'uncommunicative', a super-reader above consensus, an illusion – precisely in order to set observations, prophecies in motion, to bring about cultural change. In empirical studies it is, however, clear that the effects claimed to take place in essayistic reception of this kind – like for instance knowledge and reason, self-awareness, giving meaning to life, imaginative exercise, irritation and will to change – differ considerably from empirically demonstrable effects of the general use of literature; as a result of empirical studies, everything seems much less dramatic and important, and it becomes apparent that reading literature is not at all dissimilar to any normal hobby. [17] The application of empirical methods suggests (in full agreement with the basic assumptions of constructivism) that the difference between fiction and non-fiction (between art and reality) in reception-behaviour is by no means of major significance for reception; rather, one gains the impression that something must be wrong with the theory of fiction itself. [18] 'We need a conception of Empirical Literary Studies which represents a non-positivist empirical concept; one which changes over from the objectifying of the literary text to a processual literature system, and which allows itself to be led by non-scientistical notions of the scientific

[17] Of course, such indications of 'modest' effects of this kind could also be caused by the type of empirical proof itself, but on the other hand, Empirical Literary Studies share this 'shortcoming' with all other domains of empirical science. I am, moreover, also sceptical about certain thoughts of Viehoff's (1987) in connection with Empirical Literary Studies, in which he claims that in dealing with literature imaginative power is essential, not only accidental. Although I also believe that the meaning of literature can, briefly, be summed up in the formula 'One who hasn't the power to dream, hasn't the courage to fight', nevertheless I believe that this kind of dreaming can also be practised in any more or less successful piece of journalistic reporting and the differentiation between the accidental and the essential would thus be hardly less slight. Empirical studies on reception would have to examine precisely such assumptions as these.

[18] Cf. the article mentioned in fn. 5.

action: one which, in a word, tries to think in a more complex and variable way than other variants of Literary Studies, and which thus accepts meaningful standards of rational argument' (S.J. Schmidt (1985: 119)). From this position, Schmidt also dismisses the 'New Irrationality' of Deconstructivism, Post-Modernism, Post-Histoire and similar contemporary phenomena.

The relationship between essayistic observation and empirical mode of procedure is thus presented as follows: the essayistic observation stands in complementary and preparatory relation to the rational procedure of empirical science. Where this type of essay is lacking, there is the danger that one gets nothing more than a mass of data out of the empirical procedure. *Essayistic observation is essential for theory-formulation and hypothesis-formulation*; we need the essayistic, the over-hasty, the exaggerating, the risky, the self-willed, the intelligent, the creative, the non-intersubjective thinking – complementary to the respective empirical knowledge. We cannot expect that empirical majorities immediately observe all important things at once. Anyone who disagrees with this would destroy the inevitable, subjective and risky start, the situation from which science and criticism begin: with *Interpretation*. Considering *new forms of Interpretation* I equate Interpretation with initial observation and hypothesis-formulation, with theory construction. *In this form Interpretation is a necessary condition even for Empirical Studies of Literature*. The indispensability of a discipline is dependent on competence and on recognised expert-rôles. On what are literary theorists experts, in which areas of responsibility are literary theorists competent and can they be considered indispensable? We promote Literature? Do we? We administrate Literature? This is more likely. I cannot assemble the current arguments and counter-arguments connected with the problem of application here. [19] Therefore, I restrict myself to this remark: the problem of application, the marketability of Literature and Literary Studies is hardly to be solved by trying to further represent the significance of Literature and Literary Studies in terms of proclamations of their indispensable uselessness. Media Paedagogics has, for example, already partly found answers to questions of critical media praxis which Literary Studies – hardly less responsible – have not yet so much as asked. A discipline will be able to claim competent planning insomuch as it can produce empirically substantiated results, which call for a change in praxis. In many areas products which had not until then been needed have more or less created a market for themselves – they have made themselves indispensable in the course of a self-fulfilling prophecy's being fulfilled. The principle division between the natural and human sciences and the corresponding claim that two cultures exist are (at least in the constructivist view) little other than dogmas.

[19] The discussion which most closely corresponds to my own conception of an 'Applied Literary Studies' is to be found in the 1986 NIKOL publication.

On the basis of constructivist assumptions it follows: with preferences for essayistic or empirical or hermeneutic works, preferences for particular forms of working and living are also implied. The respective decisions either for the Empirical Study of Literature or for Essayistic Study cannot be completely placed in the categories of rationality. (One likes cats, because they are difficult to domesticate, and another likes dogs, for the very reason that they are easy to domesticate.) The specific type of scientific action is a result of the decision about that which one wants to favour as cultural and social change. Literary theorists threatened with unemployment have, due to such threats, changed towards an application-orientation anyway. It would presumably be possible to show empirically that other, older opinions correlate to a large extent with the certainty of life-long tenure.

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