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WHY LITERATURE IS NOT ENOUGH, OR:
LITERARY STUDIES AS MEDIA STUDIES

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Zusammenfassung

Literaturwissenschaftliche Studien verschiedenster Schulen haben deutlich gemacht, daß semantische Analysen literarischer Texte ohne angemessene Berücksichtigung des Sozialsystems Literatur keine relevanten Ergebnisse bringen können. Erfolgversprechender erweist sich eine systemtheoretische Analyse des Sozialsystems Literatur einschließlich des darin eingelagerten Symbolsystems literarischer Werke. Berücksichtigt man darüber hinaus, daß das Literatursystem seit dem 18. Jahrhundert in Konkurrenz zu einem sich laufend ausdifferenzierenden Mediensystem steht, dann erscheint es plausibel, Literaturwissenschaft als eigenständige Textdisziplin einer integrativen Medienwissenschaft zu konzipieren, die empirisch die Interaktionen zwischen Aktanten, literarischen Medienangeboten und literaturbezogener Kommunikation untersucht.

Summary

Literary scholars increasingly realize that semantic analyses of literary text miss the point when they disregard the locus of literary phenomena in social contexts. A systems-theoretical approach to the social system literature including the embedded symbol systems appears to yield more rewarding results. The observation that since the 18th century the literary system has had to compete with a proliferating media system advises literary scholars to establish literary studies as a specific branch of media studies concerned with empirical analyses of interactions between actors, literary media events and literary communication.

WHY LITERATURE IS NOT ENOUGH, OR: LITERARY STUDIES AS MEDIA STUDIES

1. From literary texts to "literary life"

Since the late sixties literary scholars have increasingly realized that traditional as well as poststructuralist restrictions of literary analyses to literary texts miss the point. Reception aesthetics taught the lesson that literary texts do not simply bear their meanings in themselves and convey it to (all) readers. Instead meaning arises in the continual interplay between text-materiality and receptional efforts which are necessarily embedded in social, cultural, political and economic contexts as well as in complex biographical situations of all those dealing with literary phenomena in whatever respect.

Marxist, socio-historical as well as feminist studies in literature have clearly revealed that literary phenomena, unmoored from their genesis and from their locus in social realities, fall prey to interpretative arbitrariness. Literary phenomena are a part of "literary life" which, in turn, is integrated in social life as a whole. Accordingly, the subject domain of literary studies has to be enlarged from literary texts to text-actor-context-syndromes (for details see Schmidt, 1982).

The sequence of changes that traditional concepts of literature and literary studies underwent is marked by the following events:

- the detection of trivial literature enlarged the thematic domain of literary phenomena and, at the same time, blurred the borderline between high and trivial literature;
- the detection of literature as a social phenomenon turned histories of literature into literary histories as integral parts of social histories;
- the transformation of literary studies into text-studies together with an expansion of thematic phenomena from literary texts to other media products (films, videos, advertisement spots etc.) transformed literary studies into a specific kind of media studies, as "... literature of our century is - at least in quantitative respect - literature in electronic mass media" (W. Faulstich 1982: 509).

The crucial question arising in this context of argumentation is: What kind of contexts and how much of those contexts have to be considered in literary studies? I suppose a question of such generality cannot be answered. Instead, I think, we should look for a general theoretical framework which, on the one hand, considers the plea for respecting literary life adequately, and which, on the

other hand, allows for specific answers to integrate contexts into the respective literary studies.

As I have extensively argued elsewhere (Schmidt 1982, 1989) systems theory supplies us with interesting concepts to construe such a general theoretical framework which I try to epitomize in the next section.

2. Literature as a self – organizing social system

In what follows I shall try to look at literature as a social system. In my opinion literary activities are the basic components of a literary system. Literary activities are those activities that follow the basic conventional regulations (macro – conventions) of a literary system (see below). Literary activities focus on those types of phenomena (mostly texts) that people deem literary according to whatever aesthetic/poetic criteria and values they have acquired during their literary socialization. Literary activities are manifestations of action roles, which, since the late 18th century, have become professionalized and institutionalized:

- Literary production comprises all activities yielding a product which the producer (or the producing instance, e.g. a group or team) deems literary according to aesthetic criteria relevant for the producer at the time of production (e.g. the writing of a poem).
- Literary mediation comprises all activities which render a literary product accessible to other actors in an appropriate mediatisation (e.g. the production and distribution of a book from a handwritten manuscript).
- Literary reception comprises all activities through which recipients attribute meanings to a media product they deem literary according to their (implicit or explicit) aesthetic criteria (e.g. "understanding" a novel).
- Literary post – processing comprises all activities of actors who assign a media product to a phenomenon they deem literary, thereby establishing a perceptible relation between a target phenomenon and post – processing results (e.g. relations like analysis, description, evaluation or comment that can be established in interpretations, reviews, canonizations or transpositions of literary phenomena into a movie for instance).

These definitions have to be formulated rather formally because each action role may empirically be implemented by rather divergent activities. The concepts 'literary product' or 'literary phenomenon' have been used as today not only books but also radio plays, television films, video clips, xerographies, teletext etc. may equally be regarded as literary phenomena.

The formula "which actors deem literary" is meant to indicate that there is no such gauge as a compulsive canon of aesthetic criteria: who deems what for which reason to be literary is a matter of differentiated literary socialization, no longer a consensus of all well educated members of a bourgeois élite. (On the other hand evaluation, though being highly diversified and seemingly idiosyncratic, is not at all

arbitrary; whoever applies whatsoever aesthetic criteria has good reasons to do so, reasons which are anchored in his literary socialisation, his experience gathered in literary reception, and his value system which of course comprises more than but aesthetic values.) The interrelationships between the four action roles define the structure of a literary system (Schmidt 1989, 1990a).

In order to define the type of system that literary systems are theoretically subsumed under, the relations between the components of literary systems have to be specified. For this purpose I refer to G. Roth's definition of two notions that undoubtedly belong to the most crucial concepts of both biological and sociological systems theory: self-reference and self-organization. Roth (1986) has offered the following definitions: "Self-referentiality: Self-referential systems are systems the states of which cyclically interact with each other such that any state of the system contributes to its next state in a substantial way. Therefore, self-referential systems are internally state-determined systems." (p. 157) (...) "Self-organization: Self-organizing processes are such physico-chemical processes that reach a specific ordered state (...) under a (more or less extensive) domain of initial conditions and constraints. (...) Arriving at a given state of order is not (or at least not essentially) imposed on the process from outside, but is the result of the specific characteristics of the components involved in the process. The state of order is achieved 'spontaneously'." (p. 153)

It is evident that literary activities are necessarily related to each other (e.g. literary reception is related to literary production, literary post-processing is related to literary reception, and literary production is related to literary production) thus constituting literary processes. Moreover, literary activities are exclusively related to each other as a result of the efficiency of macro-conventions (see the definitions below, p. 8). Thus, the literary system shows a closed organization. Literary activities as well as literary processes result from the respective state of the literary system and contribute to its next state in a substantial way. This is certainly not true of any single action, but it applies to the instantiations of the action roles seen from a social point of view, i.e. from the level of communication.

The history of modern literary systems in democratic societies clearly reveals that other social systems (e.g. the political, religious, scientific, and economic system) never succeeded in exercising a long-term external control over the literary system. Like all self-referential systems, the literary system cannot be managed, intentionally and causally, from the outside (unless physical power is applied). Internal evaluations of literary activities are always provisional and have to stay their ground in literary discourses.

The order arising in self-referential literary systems can be called self-organizing in Roth's sense: it is achieved spontaneously and results from the specific features of the components involved in the process of the production of

order. A short glance at the emergence of modern literary systems in the 18th century as well as at present literary systems shows that internal differentiation seems to be an important factor of self-organization. This differentiation in question has to do with the action roles, the formation of literary discourse (e.g. the genre system), or the self-reflection of literary systems in terms of (ever changing) aesthetics and poetics (see Jäger, 1986). Producers of literary products e.g. specialize on certain genres or levels of literature (experimental or trivial literature etc.) or they concentrate on special target groups of readers; literary genres proliferate, and the reflection of literary systems on the constitutive aspects of their social functions, legitimations and dynamics have become a well-established basso continuo of discourses in literary systems until today.

Characterizing literary systems as self-referential and self-organizing systems, we must take into account some additional aspects of systems. Not any differentiation of a system is self-organizing (e.g. the deliberate foundation of a literary fan club). Nor are all processes in social systems self-referential and self-organizing. To grasp the difference, we must take into account institutions of control and hierarchization (e.g. the hierarchies in a publishing house). In a self-organizing social system, the "central" function is no longer attributed to one specific subsystem, but can in principle be exercised by every subsystem. Thus a self-organized social system is characterized by a heterarchical form of regulation or "control" which nevertheless allows for the establishment of temporary hierarchical institutions requested by needs of regulations (e.g. discussion leaders in conferences, administrations in Western democracies, team chefs in football teams). Although no single subsystem exercises control over the other, the self-regulation of the system as a whole is nonetheless maintained.

Regarding the type of closure of the social system of literature, we must take note of J. Klüver's (1990) suggestion that social systems cannot be closed in the same way other closed systems, e.g. biological systems, are but exhibit certain degrees of openness. In my view, this problem can be solved by including actors (= living systems) in the systems-theoretical framework and by making use of P. Hejl's (1987) concept of synreferentiality. According to Hejl, living systems constitute a social system by establishing a common model of reality and, together with that, a domain of meaningful action and communication. As long as the agents mutually interact with regard to this domain, they "belong to", or "act within", the social system in question.

In functionally differentiated societies, actors adopt various roles at different times, thereby acting in various social systems. In addition to this role-playing, they act in a non-specialized or private sphere (the "mundane world"). By virtue of this multiple "membership" in various social systems, they contribute, on the one hand, to the integration of the set of social systems into a unity called "society", while on the other hand they import relations, ideas, and acting

potentials from their mundane world into the respective social systems in which they take part.

This proposal entails a distinction between two different levels of observation: a macro-level (that of the literary system) and a micro-level (that of the literary activities and processes). On the micro-level literary systems may be conceptualized as relatively open because actors "enter and leave" the literary system (i.e. act in the literary system or in other social systems at different times) in a usually unpredictable way. On the macro-level, however, literary systems have to be regarded as closed; because whenever an actor "enters" the system he or she must be able to apply the basic operative distinction "literary vs non-literary". It is but the (implicit or explicit) application of this distinction which puts to work the two macro-conventions which then orient all activities focussing literary phenomena in a systems-specific way. As Klüver puts it, the system as a whole tends towards a permanent restitution of its self-referentiality by compensating and thereby closing the microstructural openness on the macrostructural level.

Accordingly, literary systems can be conceptualized as systems whose behaviour is determined by their internal states, i.e. by the mutual interaction of the four basic types of action roles in terms of literary processes. This is the case because any change of the potential activities belonging to one role causes a shift in those of the other basic roles in the literary system.

The boundary of the literary system, i.e. the difference between the system and its environment, is established by the two macro-conventions I already mentioned above. These macro-conventions select from all the activities of the actors in the social system of literature all and only those activities that are deemed adequate in literary discourses (= components of system-internal communication). These macro-conventions, which have held a sway since the late 18th century (at least in Germany), can be specified as follows:

- (a) Aesthetic Convention. It is common knowledge in our society that all actors in literary systems must be willing and able
- to extend their action potential (or the action potential of other participants in the literary system) beyond the usual criteria of true/false or useful/useless, and to orient themselves towards expectations, norms, and criteria which are deemed aesthetically relevant in the respective literary system or subsystem;
 - to designate communicative actions intended as literary by appropriate signals during production, and to follow such signals during reception;
 - to select as a frame of reference for assertions in literary texts not just the socially-established world model he/she is accustomed to in his/her respective social group but virtually all constructible frames of reference, and
 - to de-emphasize the fact convention which reads: It is common knowledge in our society that communicative objects, especially texts, should permit

reference to the world model accepted in that society, such that people can decide if the assertions conveyed by the text are true and what their practical relevance is.

(b) Polyvalence Convention. It is common knowledge among all actors in literary systems in our society that:

- text producers are not bound by the monovalence convention, which comprises a common knowledge in our society that: (a) text producers are expected to shape their texts in such a way that different people at different times can assign to them one and the same reading, and (b) text receivers are expected to strive for the assignment of a single reading to the texts,
- text receivers have the freedom to produce different readings from the same text at different times and in different situations (= the weak version of the polyvalence convention hypothesis; see Groeben, 1983) or during a single reading process (= the strong version of the polyvalence convention hypothesis; see Schmidt, 1982)), and they expect others to do likewise,
- text receivers evaluate the different cognitive, emotive, and moral reading results obtained at different levels of reception in terms of their needs, abilities, intentions, and motivations, although the reasons behind these evaluations may differ with the participants and situations, and
- text – mediators and text – processors should not overtly counteract these regulations.

These macro – conventions establish the most basic distinguishing feature (or communication code) of the literary system in terms of a basic dichotomy between literary and non – literary activities.

The stability of the literary system is dynamic and capable of integrating within itself all sorts of conflicts. An aspect of this dynamic stability is manifested in the fact that the system's basic distinguishing feature is itself open to historical as well as social interpretations: "literary" means whatever actors make it mean according to their norms, values, needs, and knowledge. Yet as soon as this dichotomy is established and operates as a selection mechanism (working via a negative definition according to which $A = \text{non } B$) the system can maintain its identity on the macro – structural level in spite of the controversies that may occur at the micro – level.

What actually is deemed literary emerges from the innersystemic interactions between the four action roles. Accordingly, the identity or autonomy of the literary system results from the self – referentiality of literary activities and literary processes through which all states of order in the system arise.

The theoretically postulated autonomy (= organizational closure) of the social system literature does, of course, neither imply a lack of function nor a lack of interrelation with other social systems in the network of systems (= society). On the contrary: systems theory explicitly claims that systems can only be defined as such in relation to environments which they inevitably interact with, and that a

social system's boundaries are extremely flexible serving both functions of separating and connecting. As a result the systems' boundaries serve the main purposes of reducing complexity and of stabilizing the identity of the system. Apart from internal differentiation and self-reflection, systems can only develop further on occasion of intersystemic interactions; but – and that is what self-organization and self-referentiality mean – this development happens exclusively according to the system's internal organization.

3. Literature in environment

It follows from the preceding considerations that literary studies are oriented towards two main problem domains: viz. "literature" as a social system and "literature" as a semiotic system. The correlation between both systems is as yet not sufficiently clear, to say the least.

Since the early 19th century in Europe, literature as a social system has been located in an environment which has been substantially influenced by the rise and spreading of the mass media: first the print media, then film, broadcasting, television, video, computer, and the so-called new media. As a consequence literary socialization is embedded in the more complex process of media socialization and cannot be separated from it without distortion.

According to the systems theoretical approach adopted in this article mass media, too, have to be theoretically modelled in terms of social systems. One of the main reasons behind this proposal is that mass media in modern, functionally differentiated societies are characterized by a specific integration of material instruments of communication (e.g. texts), technical devices (e.g. cameras, screens, recorders), social interrelations (e.g. the organization of a television company), economic, juridical and political constraints. Complex combines of that size, as it were, lend themselves to a systemic conceptualization.

The set of media systems in a society constitutes what may be called the "global media system" of that society where the respective media systems "act" as subsystems.

Media systems in Western societies seem to obey some rather general principles.

- (a) Media subsystems in a global media system self-referentially define their respective functions or competences; i.e. the function of each media system is determined by the number of media subsystems available in a society, by their respective state of (technical, organizational, economic etc.) development, by the accessibility of media to the public, by their extent, by established modes of integration of media systems (multimedia systems), etc.

Each media system is part of the environment of each other media system as well as of all other social systems.¹

Accordingly, literature as a social system is one necessary component in the environment of all other media systems and vice versa. Consequently, the literary actors' use of media in the literary system is never determined in the literary system alone. Instead it is shaped by the various interactions between the literary system and other social systems on the one hand, by the interaction of media systems and other social systems on the other.

- (b) The internal dynamics of each media system substantially relies on the mutual interactions of all media systems available in a society. Hence the dynamics of the literary system cannot simply be tackled without any care for the respective developments in the contemporary global media system of society. As a result, histories of literature e.g. should be written as a part of media histories.
- (c) The emergence of new instruments of communication or of new media systems in a society does not simply replace the other already established media subsystems. It necessarily transforms subsystems as well as the general media system by generating a new kind of environment for the other systems to which all of them inevitably have to react. (And a refusal to react is a reaction as well!). As can be observed in the history of our media system (see e.g. Faulstich, 1982; Zielinski, 1989) media systems in their infancy tend to accommodate to already existing media systems. The early film, for example, imitated public spectacles like Vaudeville and Music Hall; since 1900 it borrowed staging as well as aesthetic strategies from bourgeois theatre before it developed its own media-specific style. Since film has become an autonomous media system the interaction between film and literature has been intensified. Writers (think of Dos Passos or Döblin) have adopted and transformed film techniques, film subjects and vice versa. Genres in both systems have modified each other; new modes of narration have emerged from this interaction. When television and video were established in the modern media system this interaction became even more complex and creative. Contrary to all pessimist voices who predicted a Darwinist jungle in which literature was doomed to extinction, all media stood their ground although they, of course, underwent permanent self-modifications. In the eighties, for example, the television spot turned out to be extremely productive, such that some media researchers even claim that the television commercial has to be deemed the most influential and the most revolutionary genre in our media system (for details see Schmidt, Sinofzik and Spieß, 1991). Others regard music videos with their new techniques of connecting visual and acoustic elements into a fascinating "chaos" to be the most breath-taking achievement of the last decade.

¹All media systems are conceptualized as social systems, whereas not all social systems are regarded to be media systems, for example politics, sports or education.

The early television, too, to quote another example, was at first closely related to literature, for example by borrowing stories and subjects. In the fifties, West German television, for example, produced no less than 459 screen adaptations of well-known literary works. The more the video market expanded the more world-literature became a quarry for stories. Thus, through the internal needs of the video system, literature got an unpredictable field of potential efficiency in the world-wide video market (M. Wössner, 1990).

- (d) The emergence of each new medium transforms the acting possibilities in the four basic action roles (see chapter 2) in each other media system (more or less drastically, of course). Let us consider some examples.

When – due to the rise of the capitalist book market in 18th century in Germany – books became a commodity available to larger parts of the population, and when the books' format allowed to carry them in one's pocket, reading became possible at any time and at any place. As a rule books could then be read privately, in individual isolation, outdoors or in "a room of one's own" instead of being collectively read and discussed in the family, in salons, or in public places. As a portable and "digestible" medium books called for privacy and in turn called forth the isolation of the reading subject. In that respect books can be regarded as predecessors of Walkmen, Discmen, and Watchmen which nowadays isolate recipients even in a crowded tram or plane, whereas television events, as a rule were collectively received in family, at least in the fifties.

Another revealing example is mentioned by Zielinski (1989): namely the (re)literarization of audiovision through the technical facilities of video. Whereas film and television present transitory media-events – at least from the onlooker's point of view – video recorders allow for all kinds of interruption, repeated use and manipulation. Recipients can now leaf through a movie like through a book. They can de-localize and de-temporalize live reports, etc. The traditional argument that audiovisual material has to adapt to the limited visual and cognitive capacities of recipients in the speedy process of reception is thereby led to absurdity. If, from a technical point of view, videos can be treated like books, then there is no reason left – except political and/or ideological ones – why video-films should not become as complex, cognitively and emotionally demanding and rewarding as literary books. To meet this new standard the production situation will, of course, have to be altered in several respects.

Today it is at least foreseeable that after an eventual introduction of a new High Definition Television (H.D.T.V.) the reception situation will change again as it will demand high concentration of a recipient sitting in a predetermined place, a situation which much more resembles the reception situation in a movie cinema than that of distracted television consumption

while being engaged in a lot of other things and possibly moving around in the room where the television is running.

If – as is generally agreed upon – literary reception demands contemplation, the change in the mode of reception towards higher concentration presumably to be brought about by H.D.T.V., may also become profitable for literary texts and their reception.

Many other observations of that kind could be added. They all point to a problem that in order to be solved requests an appropriate theoretical framework. Let me mention but some considerations about that respect.

To come to grip with the enormously complex "media reality" (or "mediality", as Zielinski, 1989: p. 270 has coined it) we have to take into account three interrelated systems: cognitive, social (or communicative), and media systems. As has been argued explicitly elsewhere (see for example the contributions in Schmidt, 1987) it is reasonable to conceive of cognitive and social systems in terms of self-referentiality and self-organization similar to the literary system that has been modelled in section 2. The interrelation between cognitive systems (= sphere of individual consciousness) and communication (= social sphere) is primarily achieved via media systems which couple the two other (operationally closed!) systems. The more extensive media systems serve as "information"-suppliers, the less cognitive and social systems operate via unmediated (= seemingly immediate) experience. Media systems provide reports on events which none of us can or has ever experienced (men on moon, wars in jungles and deserts, strange animals on exotic islands etc.) and whose reliability none of us can ever check. Opinions are spread, life-styles are advertised, (hi)stories are constructed, values are debated which do dwell in our personal lives but, simply by being communicated in mass media, become ingredients of our lives and creep into our cognitive processing. The individual as well as the social construction of reality is increasingly put to work through the perception and processing of media-events. – This observation provides a cue for some considerations about literary studies designed as a (branch of) media studies.

4. Literature in competition with media

Caused by an increasing perfection in the production of visual surfaces the audiovisual media systems have successfully managed to hide the constructivity of the media reality presented on the screen. Especially the new H.D.T.V.-technique blurs the distinction between "natural" visual perception and the staging of images on the screen. Television and video make most of us forget that when visual events finally appear on the screen they are the visible results of a long chain of selections and constructions shaped by journalist, economic, political, juridical, institutional and, of course, also by very personal needs, interests, and power structures. The more perfect television images become from a technical

point of view, the nearer we seem to be drawn to events all over the world and even in outer space, the more we obviously neglect or even forget the constructive impact of the material (or hard ware) aspects of communication and media. Especially modern television has apparently begun to make us forget that it is not we who visually perceive a riot in the West Bank or a demonstration in Santiago de Chile, but a television system producing and staging pictures. And apart from that we should not forget that cameras are not eyes and that screens are not windows to the world – just as little as our eyes are windows to the environment.

The blue box technique which allows for astounding optical delusions, computer simulations which create the impression of a representation of visual events where there is nothing but technically constructed visual surfaces, and hardware developments like H.D.T.V. collaborate in creating images which can no longer be traced back to their "real" reference. The consequences with regard to an application of our traditional referential mechanisms (based on the dichotomy reality vs fiction) to such media events are far-reaching (see Schmidt, 1990). As we normally have no personal access to the events which mediated images bewitchingly claim to represent in an objective way we can only rely on the credibility of the media system by applying corroborated criteria for authenticity and reliability we have developed in the course of our media socialization. Such criteria combine semiotic indicators such as genre, program place, trustworthiness of agents in the media (for example news speakers or moderators), corresponding presentations of "the same" event in other media systems etc. Normally, this evaluation of the degree of "reality" of audiovisual events is carried out automatically. But, as reports on video-kids in Europe as well as in the USA show, cases heap up where recipients no longer apply such criteria, be it consciously or unconsciously. They take (and appreciate) media-events as such, as sounds and images, suspending any application of reality criteria. This leads me to two conclusions: (1) The task to decide upon the referential status of media offers has become even more difficult since traditional media-genres are – involuntarily or strategically – mixed up or blurred: commercials come along as works of art; news are presented as shows and do no longer refrain from simulating pictures they would have liked to present but failed to get (cf. the ABC-report on the US-diplomat Felix S. Bloch in August 1989); movies imitate the knitting pattern of commercial spots; political campaigns are more or less completely stripped of political issues and are going to be replaced by a new kind of Vaudeville etc. (2) For those living in "media societies" and having passed an extensive media socialization the traditional compulsion to apply the dichotomy "reality vs fiction" has obviously been replaced by a more flexible strategy that operates on enlarged frames of reference. The new frames contain at least three values: real, fictive, zero (= left in suspense), but other values can easily be included, for example "that's great" (doesn't matter what its referential status might be), "whow!" or "moving".

This argument does not advocate the idea of an implosion of all distinctions between reality and fiction in modern mass media as, e.g., J. Baudrillard (1985) has claimed. Of course, we still need such a distinction – as cognizing individuals and on a social scale, too; but it has become obvious that the (constructive!) application of this distinction does not (and need not) rely on ontological grounds, but that it is based on consensual social praxis instead. This social context of empraxis (i.e. the self-regulating and self-affirming combine of actions, interactions, and communications in social contexts) supplies us with an operative (instead of an ontological) device to decide upon the referential status of media offers in contexts – be this in a bivalent or in a plurivalent frame of reference – because it is empraxis (or synreferentiality, see section 2), too, which decides what format of reference frame a society needs, wishes, or can stand.

Considering the interaction between the literary system and modern media systems, these developments bear significantly on the scholarly discourse on fictionality as well as on the practice of literary producers and recipients. Fictive literary worlds now have to compete with each other, not only with other fictive worlds designed in audiovisual media, but with "free floating" world images created in movies, advertising spots, music videos etc. which – unmoored as it were from time and space – do only exist on the "screen in the head" of cognizing subjects.

According to bourgeois poetics, literary works of art are supposed to provide their readers with moral orientation and examples to cultivate their emotions, i.e. to design blueprints of life (*Lebensentwürfe*). If that is the case literature has to compete with television events, and here especially with the advertising system. Of course, investigations into media-effects have revealed that media offers may have completely different effects on recipients depending on how they construe sense in their respective idiosyncratic contexts and situations. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to forecast what specific effect a media offer will have on the receiver. On the other hand, it is evident that each media offer perceived by a recipient, inevitably has some effect, as it now belongs to the environment in which an individual has to orient. A few years ago, for example, when the advertising system had successfully launched the "yuppie"-image, everybody who ever came across this phenomenon had automatically changed. Since the environment now contained yuppies, individuals – voluntarily or unvoluntarily – suddenly became either a non-yuppie or a would-be-yuppie. The less the advertising industry restricts its activities to a naïve glorification and propagation of consumer goods but propagates life styles instead – often without even mentioning a specific product –; and the more advertising campaigns are thoroughly prepared by detailed research into the life styles, value systems and priority-setting of target groups, the more it happens that the consumer's world and his or her cognitive orientation in the new environment is imperceptibly modified (see Schmidt 1990b).

Competition is not only called for with respect to referential mechanisms and blueprints of life, but also with regard to attention and time budget. An increasing number of media cry for the attention of the public. And though leisure time steadily increases and people tend to consume various media at the same time (listening to music while reading a newspaper and watching television, for example) selection among competing possibilities is unavoidable.

A few years ago, the advocates of the so-called "new media" cultivated the hope that an enhanced supply of media would entail an increase in education and information for everybody. Recent investigations reveal that the proliferation of media has instead yielded an ever increasing knowledge gap. As a multifarious supply of media-events necessitates selection and decision, time, and the acquisition of special (technical and cognitive) competences in successfully handling a medium (for example computers or video machines), those people endowed with curiosity, cognitive flexibility and technical skills (plus money, of course) are able to make a productive use of various media in different manners, whereas people more restricted in all these respects tend to stick to one or two media and to their processing in an unflexible way. Regarding the competition among media systems, the literary system – for more than a century – has had to find appropriate niches. Examples show that this must not be done in a defensive or reactionary way at all. The triumphant advance of audiovisuality testifies that people, especially in modern media societies, need alternative worlds, contemplation, intensive self-experience and self-experimentation. The literarization of audiovision via video-techniques, as well as the fact that the technically most advanced film directors treacherously (and successfully) favour as their topic archetypes (see e.g. the Star Wars-syndrome), myths and fairy tales, as well as the everlasting human questions (love, death, hate, pain ...), reveals that literature has not at all lost its fortune. On the contrary, literature will prosper even in the face of new media if actors in the literary system are able to develop a specific creativity for construing literary media offers that exploit the possibilities opened up in the literary system by deliberately responding to developments in (virtually) all other media systems.

Let me briefly touch upon some examples.

First attempts at producing poems by computers (so-called computerpoems, see Schmidt, 1989a) have turned out to be rather naïve, both in theoretical and in technical respects. Today scripts for soap operas or trivial booklets are quite easily produced via computers. Writers progressively make use of electronic facilities in various respects. They use them as data or expert systems, for the production of stylistic variants or for montage and collage purposes etc. Thus, step by step, the function as well as the concept of 'literary author' has undergone crucial change. In the television system, for example, there is normally not one author, but a team of collaborating authorial instances, which produce an audiovision. In the literary system authors more and more realize that emphatical concepts of the author as a creator have become spurious (or simply ridiculous).

Literature is made by and through literature and other media offers altogether. The author's position (and function) increasingly resembles that of a film director or story designer. There is no creatio ex nihilo, but a creatio ex mediis.

As already mentioned, modes of narration which have been developed in comic-strips and video-clips and which operate on modes of coherence relying rather on emotional, associative and imaginative than on logical and psychological connectivities, might be specifically adopted in the literary system, though perhaps performed with greater "depth" and complexity, as the mode of literary reception demands and allows for more thoroughly elaborated modes of meaning construction.²

Multimediality is another key word.

Many years visual poets, for example, have tried to transgress text boundaries by including verbal and visual semiotic material in their products. Theatre used to be, and progressively tends to become, a multimedia spectacle (see for example Wilson's performances); and video experts like Peter Weibel strive for a media poetry which integrates a couple of media, from language to laser. His aim is not to perpetuate outdated ideas of "Gesamtkunstwerk" but to create temporalized and ad-hoc relations between divergent media, materials and methods (see Weibel, 1987).

Perhaps in the very near future we shall experience a sort of media switch from written to spoken literature by the help of computers which can be orally addressed. This would offer literary possibilities also to those who are brilliant narrators but lousy writers. Written and spoken literature might then merge, orality could acquire a completely new position in the literary system and elsewhere. This development might be seen as an equivalent to what happened after the video technique had become easily affordable. The video camera provided easy ways to record personal histories and to conserve happenings people deemed relevant. Combined with orally addressable computers, new kinds of audiovisual "literatures" might emerge which bridge the gap between high and trivial literature and afford new modes of expression.

In the context of such developments handwriting has acquired a completely new status. Not by chance, I think, more and more authors practice and thematize handwriting as a significant artistic alternative to the hightech outputs of personal computers and laser printers (see for example the work of V. Accame, C. Claus, H. Darboven, R. Opalka, G. Rühm, E. Jandl, and – with respect – S.J. Schmidt; see C. Weiss, 1984; U. Carrega, 1980). Handwriting documents one part of the genesis of a text, the speed of writing, the emotions, the corrections etc., it does not conceal the production process by displaying well-done results only. In a way the process becomes what matters, not so much the result that can be demonstrated.

²An excellent example can be found in the writings of authors like Pynchon or Mayröcker. (See Schmidt 1989b)

With regard to publication and distribution procedures new ways have already been tested, for example desktop publishing, print-on-demand systems, electronic journals and bitnet systems – tools which will essentially transform the traditional literary book market.

Innovative ways of interaction between producer and receiver might be developed for example by utilizing teletext-networks as dialogue systems. Authors might, for instance, operate like spiders in a teletext-net into which everybody may enter who is interested in contributing to a literary dialogue or polylogue. This procedure might result in a kind of responsive and at the same time fugitive literature which is not doomed to be published, Gutenberg-Galaxies remote from the literary concepts of libraries and archives.

Literary works, in order to become noticed and evaluated in modern societies, need advertising, they need presence in the mass media. In this respect media systems attain an important role in the promotion as well as in the canonization of literary texts, especially with regard to contemporary writing. Today, literary communication is predominantly mediated by mass media techniques and institutions (or industries).

These examples, which might be easily continued, draw our attention to the fact that each move in one media system affects the selection conditions in all other media systems. Modes of production, distributing, receiving and postprocessing of media offers change, interactions become realizable, combinations, compilations, confusions – it's all up to creativity. The way media are used in turn affects hardware developments which in turn influence possible modes of use etc. In addition, hardware and software interact with modes of perception and production of media offers which, in turn, bear on social relations and vice versa.³

5. Literary studies as empirical media studies: some perspectives

What are the consequences of such considerations, developments and examples?

I hope it has become evident that literary studies have to be transformed into media studies (cf. Faulstich 1982, Kreuzer 1990). Perhaps some literary scholars still regard this plea to be something like a lèse-majesté of belles lettres (Dichtung). But I think my plea is not a matter of abandoning or dethroning literature. Instead, it aims at adjusting our concept of the problem domain of literary studies to our daily experience. Media offers in the literary system, as for example printed literary texts, are just one type of media-events competing with a number of others in the literary system and outside. Media literature is produced in various domains: as radio and film literature, as television and video

³A brilliant description of this network of interrelation can be found in Zielinski 1989.

literature, as cartoon, lyrics or slogans in/of advertisements (cf. Faulstich 1982). Accordingly, in order to elucidate the specific nature of literary phenomena and the peculiarities of literature as a social system, literary studies have to work contrastively, describing and explaining the literary system in its environment which provides the folia in front of which the literary system becomes perceptible as an autonomized system.

Another consequence has to be accepted. Literary studies as media studies have to be transformed into an empirically working enterprise, as one cannot predict from the media offer as such what people in distinctive contexts and situations are going to do with it. We actually have to go and see what people really do. As meaning results from cognizing and communication and is not contained in texts or pictures themselves, it is impossible to skip one element of the text – context – actor – syndrome without losing the whole. What on earth should a literary text be without an observer who attributes meanings to it? Of course, also the reverse aspect holds true: without a literary text an observer would lack a specific incentive to construe meaning in exactly that way he feels prompted to do by a specific text in a specific situation.

The fact that literary scholars are such observers seduces many of them to neglect the constitutive function of the text – observer – context – interaction for any kind of sense production. But even in cases where scholars realize and admit this systemic interrelation, they should continue and concede, too, that they are but one observer; and that it is cultural homogeneity among scholars, based on equivalent socialization and professionalization, and not the message contained in the literary text itself which creates rather equivalent readings of observers in academic schools, while infinite other readings are around.

Literary studies performed as empirical studies in the social and the semiotic system of literature in the context of the global media system of a society would not at all lose their independence. On the contrary. The same way the literary system has not lost its identity until now, notwithstanding the emergence of so many competing other media systems, literary studies as empirical media studies will keep their genuine domain of problems. What they might lose is the alleged kind of peculiar (or odd?) scientific format. Instead, literary studies will be (or might gradually turn into) a research domain where some problems can be solved in a scientific way (which is actually the same for all sciences) while others cannot – like in any other science.

In my view this is a reasonable perspective.

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