What is Wrong with Concepts of Cultural Trauma and How to Fix it by Engaging in Psychologically Informed Qualitative Media and Culture Studies.
(Kansteiner/ Weilnböck)

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Contents:

1. Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma or How I Learned to Love the Suffering of Others without the Help of Psychotherapy

Handbooks celebrate the success stories of academic life. Handbook entries are supposed to be constructive and uplifting affairs which impart on future generations the academic insights of current generations, inform their readers in succinct fashion about important conceptual frameworks and methodologies, and demonstrate in what contexts and for what research agendas these intellectual tools can be applied most successfully. We will accomplish none of these objectives in the following text. Instead, we will inform you about a spectacular failure, the failure of scholars in the humanities and social sciences to develop a truly interdisciplinary trauma concept despite their many claims to the contrary. We will also present you with a culprit for this unfortunate development by blaming our colleagues for applying

poststructuralist theory in rather unimaginative ways and, as a result, developing a strangely narrow and aestheticized concept of trauma.

After this announcement a short note may be in order. We hope very much that the following is not perceived as just another exercise in postmodern theory bashing. We are ourselves firmly committed to the venerable deconstructive project of questioning master narratives, exposing the ideological prejudices and blind spots of the discursive status quo, and pursuing cultural analysis in a radical self-reflexive fashion. In fact, we object to the postmodern trauma discourse, which is currently so popular in the humanities, precisely because it lacks self-reflexivity and has elevated the concept of cultural trauma into the status of a new master narrative. These negative effects are particularly pronounced in literature departments where trauma studies have contributed to the reestablishment of conventional procedures of textual exegesis as the be all and end all of the philological enterprise (Weilnböck). As a result, the very concepts that were originally developed in the context of a radical critique of traditional literary and cultural studies have been retooled and redeployed to serve these traditions. In the process, the trauma metaphor, initially adopted in a spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration, has helped reestablish literary and cultural studies as exclusive and anti-interdisciplinary academic fields.

Cathy Caruth's 1996 *Unclaimed Experience* represents the most influential, perhaps the foundational text of deconstructive trauma studies (see also Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*). All the key elements of the new trauma discourse are for the first time fully developed in this volume. Like many other scholars, Caruth defines trauma as an experience consisting of two components that the trauma victim never manages to reconcile with each other. A severe mental and maybe also physical injury which the victim seems to overcome remarkably well is followed by a belated onset of symptoms that sometimes appear to bear no causal relationship to the original injury. At first sight, Caruth thus appears to define trauma in ways that are quite compatible with psychological research on trauma and post-traumatic stress. However, unlike most of her contemporaries who study the vicissitudes of mental suffering in a clinical context, Caruth goes on to celebrate the experience and the concept of trauma as providing unprecedented insight into the human condition. Applying an interpretive strategy borrowed from Paul de Man, Caruth emphasizes that the failure of the trauma victim to come to terms with the origins and symptoms of his/her mental illness represents a rare and valuable moment of authenticity because human beings only get a chance to perceive reality directly whenever our cultural systems of signification temporarily disintegrate under their own weight. In this way, trauma is conceived as a revelation that teaches us about the limits

and possibilities of human culture. Unfortunately, however, at that moment of cultural disintegration and exceptional wisdom we are unable to fully understand, let alone successfully represent our insights. Or, as Caruth states in rather apocalyptic terms, "history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (*Unclaimed Experience* 18). For Caruth, this principal failure of representation constitutes "the truth and force of reality that trauma survivors face and quite often try to transmit to us" (*Trauma* vii).

Caruth's compact model loses a lot of its appeal if one disagrees with its de Manian premise and believes that the limits of representation can be explored and overcome in some contexts and by way of a number of different representational strategies. But even if one shares Caruth's deconstructive ethos, her model still constitutes a formidable moral conundrum that its author has neither acknowledged nor solved. From the perspective of the trauma victim whose very survival might depend on his/her ability to repair his/her trust in human systems of signification as quickly as possible, Caruth's exuberant aesthetization and valorization of trauma appears ruthless, perhaps even cynical. This problem is exacerbated by Caruth's disinterest in the therapeutic process. As other proponents of the deconstructive trauma paradigm, Caruth includes in her book extensive references to psychological studies of trauma, but this interdisciplinary gesture is immediately undermined by a very selective and often de-contextualized appropriation of the empirical literature. Caruth believes, for example, that the trauma experience will and should remain inaccessible to representation. These conclusions nicely confirm Caruth's deconstructive axioms but they are not born out in the clinical literature. Many psychologists and therapists agree that traumatic experiences may be truthfully represented in everyday narrative language, for instance as the result of successful therapy (Leys).

Intellectual suspicions about the negative, self-destructive effects of Western culture and the Enlightenment, which are reflected in Caruth's interventions, have a long and impressive tradition reaching back at least to the end of the nineteenth century. The suspicions appeared even more credible after World War II because Nazi society and its experiments in social and genetic engineering represent particularly frightful examples of human self-destruction. But the intellectual project of thinking against the grain of Western culture which still presented itself as an arduous and radically self-critical process in the writings of Adorno, Lyotard, and others has in the meantime turned into a self-important and convenient academic pursuit, especially but not exclusively in the trendy celebrations of trauma (Kansteiner). Caruth is most certainly not responsible for this development but her model has been emphatically and apodictically embraced in a wide range of academic settings, uniting

poststructuralist-inclined sociologists, political scientists, educators, and many cultural and literary studies experts under the sign of trauma.

In Germany, the deconstructive trauma paradigm has a particularly enthusiastic advocate in Manfred Weinberg, a literary anthropologist at the University of Konstanz. Like Caruth, Weinberg believes that trauma is "always already inscribed in memory" and has particular epistemological value, although, again following Caruth, he quickly adds that any conscious representation of trauma remains by definition "inadequate" (205) because "trauma is the inaccessible truth of remembering" (204). Weinberg regrets that many scholars have not properly understood or fail to respect the peculiar, contradictory logic of trauma according to which truth exists but cannot and may not be spelled out. In his assessment, academic writings on philosophy and history have the purpose to "make us forget about the traumatic flipside of all memory" and in this respect differ from literary texts which are capable of exploring the interdependency between trauma and memory in more honest and productive fashion (206).

Weinberg is refreshingly honest about his disinterest, even antagonism towards psychology and psychotherapy. He does not want to improve his knowledge about the suffering and clinical treatment of trauma victims and in this way help reduce the extent of traumatic injury occurring in the world. Weinberg states explicitly that "the clinical aspect is precisely what does not interest me—or only in a marginal way—about trauma" (173). Instead, he welcomes trauma as an indispensable conceptual tool and subscribes to a poststructuralist code of ethics by promising "to do anything he can to prove trauma's incurability" and fend off any improper "abolition of trauma" (173). Weinberg's confession highlights one of the most puzzling characteristics of deconstructive trauma theory. The proponents of the deconstructive trauma paradigm draw some of their key terms and concepts from psychoanalysis and psychology but they assume a radical anti-analytical and anti-empirical posture. Caruth, Weinberg, and their many intellectual fellow travelers like to speculate in an abstract manner about the philosophical meaning of trauma and apply these concepts in their study of culture and history, but they are not interested in the empirical phenomenon of trauma and the traumatic experiences of actual people. The advocates of the concept of cultural trauma do not simply emphasize that it is extremely difficult to access and understand trauma—an assessment shared by most clinicians—; they insist categorically that for conceptual reasons trauma "must remain inaccessible to memory" and cultural representation (Weinberg 204).

Weinberg is hardly the only representative of German cultural and literary studies who embraces the deconstructive trauma concept with quasi-religious fervor. There are many other scholars in the field ready to denounce any "sacrilege" that might be committed against what they perceive as the "integrity of trauma" (Baer 27). In the face of such threats, deconstructive trauma advocates issue stern warnings about "committing a betrayal that breaches the faithfulness towards the dead" although they tend to be rather vague about the precise meaning of these terms and their criteria of judgment (Sebald 121). But let's leave the terrain of German cultural and literary studies and move to a different discipline and a different continent and see how the concept of trauma is used as a didactic tool at the University of Toronto. Roger Simon, the director of the Testimony and Historical Memory Project, has studied extensively how human rights abuses and other crisis are best represented in museum exhibits. He has looked in particular at cultural memories of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, the AIDS epidemic, racially motivated lynching in the U.S., and the forced resettlement of indigenous populations in Canada. Simon seems to have approached these topics with a deep suspicion of all narrative forms of remembrance because narratives are often used to justify extreme violence, both before and after the fact. He would like to preserve the culturally disruptive effect of trauma and advocates with great pathos the creation of memorial spaces which avoid the normalizing, sedative power of narrative and call into question "the frames of certitude that ground our understandings of existence" (186). For this purpose, he reads survivor testimony looking for traces of the "absent presence" and encourages students and museum visitors to respond to representations of trauma in non-narrative formats—all the while taking considerable pride in his "risk-laden" search for new "forms of non-indifference" (187).

For somebody who is convinced about the destructive, normalizing effects of narrative the representational strategies promoted by Simon might appear very reasonable. But if one is willing to keep an open mind about narrative, as a potential tool of repression and misinformation as well as enlightenment and therapy, the didactic status quo in Toronto appears rather doctrinaire. The metaphorical fireworks of Simon's text, an excellent example of deconstructive trauma philosophy, appear to be a rather obvious attempt to advance a very specific aesthetic program by tapping into the cultural-political capital of Holocaust memory.

The disdain for narrative and the fear of attempts to sublate trauma are a stock-in-trade of deconstructive trauma studies. Caruth herself warns that any efforts to verbalize and integrate traumatic experiences will inevitably destroy the valuable precision of trauma. Even the intellectual historian Michael Roth who has shown himself to be critical of what he calls

"poststructuralist trauma ontology" encourages us not to give in to "narrative lust" and, in the process, normalize and trivialize trauma (168). These statements of caution are certainly important and worth considering. Our culture produces indeed many dubious representations of trauma that might have unwelcome or even negative effects on their audiences. But the indiscriminate rejection of narrative renders the deconstructive trauma paradigm incompatible with the results of clinical research which has shown consistently that integrating traumatic experiences within narrative frameworks is an indispensable tool of psychotherapy and that narrative forms of representation help groups and collective entities to come to terms with events of violence and its mental and social consequences. In fact, anybody who encourages people to access the more troubled areas of their personal memory while at the same time preventing narrative processes from taking place potentially retraumatizes them and risks inducing a state of psychic dependency (Fischer 205).

Let's visit another outpost of trauma studies at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth where Jenny Edkins teaches in the department of international politics. Her publications on trauma and politics, especially on the legacy of 9/11, provide a great case study for the way in which deconstructive trauma advocates move quickly from an understanding of trauma as injury to specific people to the abstract, metaphorical notion of trauma as a welcome disruption of existing frameworks of social and institutional incorporation without differentiating between these two levels of analysis in any meaningful way. At the beginning of one of her texts, Edkins emphasizes appropriately that "it is people, in their physicality and their vulnerability, that [sic] experience the trauma, both bodily and psychic [sic], and it should be to them that the memories belong" (100). Edkins then embarks on an impressive theoretical excursion. First, she teaches us by ways of Lacanian psychoanalysis that all perceptions of the subject and society are social fantasies based on master signifiers which cover up the existential lack at the core of human perceptions of self and other. Then, she invokes Derrida to remind us that all truly political decisions involve a radical moment of undecidability because they require the inventions of new criteria of judgment that cannot be derived from the previous political status quo. By way of a number of additional theoretical stops, including Caruth, Agamben, and Foucault, we finally arrive at the predictable conclusion that trauma calls into question the perceptions of the world that give us a sense of security, for instance, by undermining the conventional distinctions between subject and object upon which these perceptions are based. Or, as Edkins puts it rather bluntly, events like September 11 reveal, among other things, the "indistinguishability of flesh and metal" (110).

With little deconstructive finesse, Edkins spells out the upbeat political lesson of her intervention. Since "trauma is clearly disruptive of settled stories" it threatens centralized political authority based on such stories and opens up venues for political resistance (107). Therefore, Edkins denounces president Bush's insistence on conventional narratives of heroism and sacrifice and applauds artistic attempts that undermine such narratives and insist on the interpretive void created by trauma. After all this theoretical excess and political partisanship we have conveniently lost track of the victims and their physicality and mental vulnerability. What if the survivors, to whom the memories allegedly belong, would like to embrace stories of heroism and sacrifice and renew their belief in the fictitious, yet very helpful distinction between flesh and metal? What sense does it make to advocate extending the moment of trauma simply because on an abstract metaphorical level the experience of trauma aligns very nicely with the philosophical insights of Lacan, Derrida, and others? Can we responsibly ask people after events like 9/11 to embrace their mental injury and vulnerability and question linear notions of time and temporality despite the possibility that such recommendations, if actually implemented, might constitute severe psychological risks for some individuals and collectives?

We certainly do not want to imply that Edkins intends to do harm or has actually caused harm to anybody (nor do we assume this of Caruth, Weinberg, Simon, or the other authors whose texts we refer to in this essay). We are simply puzzled that academics who display considerable interdisciplinary ambition and dexterity—after all, Lacan's and Derrida's writings are not standard components of the graduate curriculum in international relations— do not feel comfortable with or compelled to tap into the empirical literature on trauma when they study the aftermath of concrete traumatic events such as 9/11. Finally, if one is really convinced that social crises are an opportune moment to question social fictions, one might want to begin closer to home and reflect self-critically about the academic fiction of cultural trauma which poststructuralist theorists might not have invented but certainly advocate vigorously.

The last stop on our international tour brings us back to U.S. academia, the heartland of cultural trauma studies, and, more specifically, to Yale University where deconstruction has a particularly long history. But we are not visiting the French or Comparative Literature departments where de Man taught in the 1970s and 1980s, and instead look up Ron Eyerman, a sociologist who has studied the collective memory of American slavery and was part of a international group of scholars who convened at Yale in 1998/99 to study cultural trauma and collective identity (Alexander et al). Eyerman has compiled an impressive array of data about

the representation of slavery in U.S. culture. But he has also committed a conceptual error that calls into question his interpretation of the data. According to Eyerman, cultural traumata—in this case the cultural trauma of slavery—are produced and reproduced through media representations which cause "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric of a relatively coherent group," for instance a nation or the African-American community in the U.S. (3). This definition of cultural or collective trauma reflects very nicely the common understanding of trauma as a serious form of injury but Eyerman does not present any empirical evidence for this allegedly destructive effect of films, TV shows, novels, and other cultural products which deal with the topic of slavery. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that such evidence exists. As best as we know, media texts may have a wide range of effects on its audiences but traumatic effects appear to occur extremely rarely. Finally and most important, many media representations of traumatic historical events, for instance the TV series *Roots* and *Holocaust*, have shaped group identities in ways that helped social minorities gain public recognition for past suffering. One might object to such developments for political reasons but it is misleading to describe the reconstitution of African-American and Jewish-American identity that occurred in the aftermath of these media events as cultural traumata even if the term is only applied in a metaphorical sense. Unfortunately, Eyerman's error is hardly unique; many scholars in cultural trauma studies conceptualize the relationship between trauma, media, and collective identity in similarly simplistic terms and confuse representations of violence with the presence and reproduction of trauma. The work of Eyerman and others would profit tremendously from the development of sophisticated and variegated psychological tools that could replace the blunt concept of trauma and help us design much needed empirical studies of the effects of representations of war, genocide, and violence in contemporary media societies (Weilnböck and Kansteiner in this volume).

At the end of our short tour we do not want to allege a global conspiracy of trauma studies but we would like to emphasize that the many parallel paths taken during the institutionalization of postmodern thought in Western academia have produced remarkably similar results in different settings. It seems to be a general characteristic of this process of institutionalization, for example, that academics over a wide range of disciplines adamantly repeat a limited set of beliefs and stop asking, let alone try to answer, the really difficult theoretical and empirical questions about the ways in which human beings individually and collectively experience trauma and respond to the traumatic experiences of others. Obviously, there are important exceptions in the field of trauma studies and in this context we would like to highlight the work of Dominick LaCapra, who has very successfully applied psychological

and psychoanalytical concepts in his analyses of Holocaust memory. LaCapra has also identified one of the fundamental conceptual errors at the core of the deconstructive trauma discourse. Many advocates of the concept of cultural trauma conflate the psychological challenges that all human beings face in their everyday life, especially in the process of maturation, with the extraordinary psychological ordeal encountered, for example, by victims of extreme violence (LaCapra). As a result of this mistake, they assume that in one way or another all people partake in the experience of trauma, for instance, when they grapple with the inexpungeable relativism of all forms of human culture and communication.

Empirically speaking, however, in most societies and under most historical circumstances only a small part of the population suffers from what clinical criteria define as post-traumatic stress. Empirical studies have shown that survivors of extreme violence are particularly likely to belong to this part of the population and experience severe symptoms of mental distress. At the same time, it is also true that post-traumatic symptoms of various sorts can be caused by many different factors, including seemingly ordinary and pedestrian experiences, but that fact makes it all the more important to differentiate empirically and conceptually between different forms of violence and their social and psychological consequences.

In our assessment, the deconstructive trauma paradigm suffers from five fundamental, interrelated problems that we have tried to illustrate in this text:

- A vague, metaphorical concept of trauma which equates the concrete suffering of victims of violence with ontological questions concerning the fundamental ambivalence of human existence and communication, obliterates the important empirical differences between the various ways that people are affected by violence, and thus constitutes a grave insult toward people who actually suffer from post-traumatic stress.
- A surprising lack of interdisciplinary curiosity; the advocates of the deconstructive trauma paradigm selectively apply psychological and psychoanalytical terminology but they do that in a curiously anti-psychological manner and almost never systematically consult recent clinical literature which reports about the theory and practice of trauma therapy and raises serious questions about the concept of cultural trauma.
- A similarly disturbing disinterest in the empirical research on media effects; advocates of the deconstructive trauma paradigm assert that cultural traumata are produced and

reproduced through the media but they have not tapped into the vast scholarly literature on media effects which contradicts such simplistic assumptions.

- An almost paranoid fear of narrative based on the axiom that all narration has distorting and normalizing effects and thus destroys the fundamental pre-narrative insights revealed by trauma. This anti-narrative reflex contradicts the consensus in psychotherapy studies that narration is an indispensable tool for healing.
- A valorization and aesthetization of trauma, high art, and philosophy as sites of intangible, ethereal authenticity; this stance fosters traditional perceptions of the humanities and academia, is inherently anti-empirical, and explains the ease with which scientific resources are ignored.

In conclusion, we would like to take you on a little metaphorical excursion of our own. In our assessment, the deconstructive trauma discourse seems to be compatible with the mindset and vantage point of a certain type of bystander who was not personally involved in any event of exceptional violence yet feels compelled to contemplate the meaning of such events in abstract philosophical terms. In fact, creating distance between oneself and moments of extreme human suffering might be the whole point of the exercise because the bystander apparently wants to mentally eliminate the empirical experience of trauma by way of ontological speculation.

We think that the only plausible way to account for such intellectual ambition is to assume that the bystander is actually evading or denying some significant area of personal memory which half-consciously resonates with the historical trauma issues at hand. These mental associations, which accompany the work of the trauma theoretician, might encompass past experiences of limited mental injury or memories of committing or condoning minor violations and may appear irrelevant with hindsight. But unless the fleeting moments of violence are recognized as formative experiences, they will continue to trigger psychological defense mechanisms and curb the subject's intellectual curiosity. These speculations explain how our bystander could be troubled by an inscrutable mix of unconscious anxiety, latent guilt feelings, numbing of cognitive differentiation, and aggressive theoretical ambition. As a result, s/he begins to see theoretical trauma everywhere while refraining from talking about violence and suffering in any concrete fashion.

Obviously, the simile of the intellectual trauma theorist qua contemplative Holocaust bystander is meant as a metaphorical expression, although we consider it a more accurate and helpful metaphor than the cultural trauma metaphor itself. A lot of deconstructive trauma

theory appears to represent an unsuccessful attempt to come to terms with events like the "Final Solution" and, more specifically, to work through the failure of the bystanders to prevent man-made disasters and deal with their legacies in productive ways. Our metaphor illustrates that there is no such thing as neutral by-standing—politically, personally, or scientifically—and this insight should be reflected in our scholarly work. We need to overcome the unfortunate epistemological impasse caused by contemplative trauma attachment and theoretical acting-out and develop new qualitative-empirical research tools to study the psychological effects of violence and its cultural representation with precision and theoretical dexterity (Weilnböck and Kansteiner, in this volume).

xxx 2. Remembering Violence: In Favour of Qualitative Text and Media Interaction Studies!

Given the enormous epistemological problems which surface when looking at the current usage of trauma memory concepts in philosophical and philological contexts we will now attempt to give an outlook on how socio-cultural research might proceed in studying the doubtlessly pertinent societal issues of violence, psycho-trauma, its societal and cultural consequences, and narrative representations in a scientifically productive manner which also lends itself to social application in fields of pedagogical and cultural interaction.

First of all, one unavoidable conclusion needs to be drawn: The concept of *the trauma* as has been used so far by some factions in the humanities must be relinquished and, indeed, renounced. It clearly has proven counter-productive in several respects of interdisciplinary socio-cultural studies. However, starting from here anew, some general recommendations can, we think, safely be given: Instead of referring to an ontological concept of trauma as key notion of philological exegesis of a text's meaning (and maybe even of the philosophically reasoned essence of human life and humanism), it seems more promising to conceptualize a differentiated model of *violence* and of *dealing with the experience of violence and its aftermath.* This of course also includes all acts of representing and thus culturally memorizing violence (and stress) in aesthetic and/or mediated texts which aught to be viewed as cultural narratives with respect to their interactive functions rather than their meaning. The task of such model is to better grasp and facilitate interdisciplinary empirical study of patterns of violent, harmful, and/or stressful interaction and its consequences as they occur among individuals, within groups, and societies, and also facilitate empirical study of the ways in

which individuals, groups, and societies deal with (also maybe represent, aesthetisize etc.) such interaction.

In order to avoid getting into similar problems/ aporias as were encountered with concepts of *the trauma*, i.e. avoiding to feel compelled to principally decide what is a violent occurrence and what not (and what may pass as an adequate cultural representation of it), this novel approach would be based on a heuristic working-definition of subjective *experience of violence* which is placed in a conceptual framework of a somewhat broader – and dialectical (Fischer?xx) – notion of mental stress and/or personal challenge. This working-definition focuses on the interactional and mental processes in and after a particular occurrence, which by any of its participants, including observers, is subjectively perceived of as being violent/harmful, stressful, and/or personally challenging.

Hence, this broader conceptual approach of violence/stress/challenge does not only focus on the outside, descriptive perspective of an *occurrence* (nor does it mainly focus on the outside perspective of the textual form in which the occurrence is culturally represented). Rather it places high value on the inside subjective *experience* and on the psychic and interactional processing of it, which the involved individuals perform via direct, mediated and/or aesthetic communication. This mental processing, thus, is viewed in the perspective of psycho-dynamic models of perception and (inter-) action and is thus greatly reliant on the individual's biography, her/is psycho-dynamic disposition, and micro-social position at the time of and immediately after an occurrence/experience of violence and/or challenge. And here, the focus is not only on the cognitive but also and above all on the affective, psycho-dynamic aspects which is why violence/stress/challenge always at the same time is conceived of as possibly also occurring within an individual on the level of her/is psycho-dynamic interaction with her/himself, i.e. with her/is experience and memories, thus heeding the wide array of self-destructive behaviour in human beings. Moreover, since in the processing of personal experience, especially if it affects highly challenging and/or conflict-laden issues, the mental and socially interactional procedures appear to be indistinguishably intertwined, this approach implies to also pay attention to the interactive, group-dynamic and societal context in which the subjective processing of a stressing/challenging experience unfolds.

This than is where the so-called outside perspective comes in again, albeit in a fashion which is particularly modified in theoretical and methodological respects in that it is strictly put on a basis of a psychologically and linguistically informed (inter-) action theory. This constitutive outside perspective of an occurrence, which possibly could but does not necessarily have to be harmful and traumatising for any of the involved individuals, can only

be given by immediate or indirect observers/witnesses – bystanders if you whish. Strictly speaking, the so-called outside perspective thus consists of a negotiated common denominator of theses – (semi-) involved and subjective – observers' perceptions. Even the subject positions most intensely involved, the alleged victim and perpetrator, in this more elaborate epistemological perspective would constitute one particular type of such a witness/observer since s/he, too, comes in after the fact and thus holds an albeit privileged position of being a retrospective observer of the occurrence they were involved in.

Hence, at this point of the epistemological deliberation it becomes more evident that occurrences of violence, stress, and/or trauma/challenge need to be empirically researched applying systematic procedures of investigation, thus going beyond just philosophically or intuitively speculating upon them in the abstract. Here scientific inquiry may unfold its function as the epitome and quintessence of the witness and/or bystander in an empirical sense. The claim stated in the first part of this essay, "that there is no such thing as neutral by-standing – politically, personally, or scientifically", put in methodological terms means to systematically triangulate and relativize the different subject positions which are involved in an occurrence and put them into the epistemological framework of qualitative-empirical research and reconstructive methods. Only later on, after methodical procedures of data analysis have been completed may we attempt to advance some more far-reaching – possibly also philosophical – considerations. Moreover, claiming that the issue – of violence, challenge, trauma – should be approached more from the (qualitative) empirical research side of things also, of course, pertains to the field of cultural representations which constitute an important aspect of mentally and interactionally dealing with and possibly coming to terms with just any issue of personal and societal significance.

Notwithstanding the eventual form and ultimate gestalt of such an empirical psycho- and group-dynamical approach, taking violence from this angle, i.e. focussing on psychologically informed – and dialectical – concepts of the experience/occurrence of violence and mental challenge instead of trauma, puts us into a better position to raise and empirically study the very kind of research questions which seem most important and promising in terms of doing interdisciplinary historical and socio-cultural studies: In which ways and to which effects do individuals and groups deal with and possibly even – psycho-socially – integrate experiences of violence, mental stress and/or challenge? And, to proceed even one step further to the perspective of the possible uses and applications of culture studies in respect to public discourse, teaching, pedagogy and/or therapy: How may these mental and socio-cultural processes of dealing with occurrences/ experiences of violence best be assisted

and organised, to the effect that the repetition dynamic of the psycho-social circles, which fuel the re-generation of ever new recurrences of violent and destructive interaction may be interrupted and moderated? This, of course, always implies the question how cultural and media representations come in with this processes of dealing with and coming to terms with the experiences. Even with the questions of media representations, however, the epistemological anchor of the inquiry has to be the phenomenology of human violence rather than a meta-theory of media and/or art. For, it does not seem conducive to immediately narrow in on cultural representations of the issue and take what then must appears to be a 'philological object matter' as an epistemological excuse to skip the empirical basis, sidestep reconstructive methodology and psychological perspective, stick to textual interpretation only – and/or embark onto philosophical speculation of a more general sort.

Hence, focussing on *violence* instead of *trauma*, which means focusing on the more comprehensive of two closely related concepts, automatically broadens the scope of investigation. Plus, it encompasses both the aspect of victimisation and of perpetration thus including also those factors and effects of an occurrence of violent, stressful and/or challenging inter-action, which are not adequately covered by clinical psycho-traumatology's concepts. Talking about trauma and victims always seemed to make it difficult to raise questions of whether and how occurrences/ experiences of violence, mental stress and challenge are dealt with by perpetrators – personally, group-dynamically, and culturally; and in what sense it might or might not make sense to speak of a traumatised perpetrator. Thus, focusing on violence instead closes a significant lacuna of research and safely puts to rest one of the major spectres of the current trauma discourse – perpetrator related issues.

Also, violence more unequivocally is viewed upon as an interactive phenomenon which is embedded in a complex network of systemic ramifications, whereas trauma, while it by no means is an inner-psychic phenomenon only, may more easily be and certainly has often been dealt with as such in the aforementioned humanities discourses. And viewing an issue in its interactional and systemic dimension also means to view it historically in the most rigorous sense of the word, i.e. to look upon the genealogy of its causal relations with past events and its prospective dynamic of possible future ramifications. Therefore, following the historian Alfred KROVOZA's assertion that history should be "a cultural practice of de-traumatization" in essence means looking for "practices" of doing history, which allow to grasp the logic of the socio-cultural patterns in which violence occurs and is perpetuated, and from there point out alternative modes of (inter-) action which – on a theoretically sound basis – may be called "pro-social behaviour", as film historian Ann KAPLAN owing to

psychologist Martin L. HOFFMAN has it – putting it into context with concepts of "vicarious trauma" experienced by therapists but also by readers/viewers of trauma narratives (p.40).

Moreover, approaching the issue from the angle of violence rather than trauma frees the researcher from the narrow confines of first and foremost being called upon to decide who may raise certain claims of status, like being a victim and/or traumatised, which doubtlessly is a political and legal question of great importance but more often than not gets in conflict with issues of great scientific importance as for instance the aforementioned issues of perpetration. The shift of focus also unburdens us from the charge to pass judgement of aesthetic quality and be answerable to quarrels about what kinds of cultural and media representation of the issue may be morally acceptable (or else which kind might "normalize" or constitute a "sacrilege against trauma"). aaa Plus, banking on solid basis of qualitative empirical social and culture research saves us some other related methodological quandaries like pondering about how *the trauma*, or else "a feeling" may "get into the text" (xx) and where it might be found there. For, this is an in essence nonsensical question as long as code-descriptive textual analysis is the only research module applied. Since feelings, strictly speaking, are not and do not get into a text. It is textual codes of feelings only which we find when we look at texts as long as we do not also engage in reader response research and systematically draw on psychological resources about feelings. The feelings themselves are to be found in persons; they are (self-)induced in authors and readers by engaging in textual interaction. Thus, texts do not contain feelings – traumatic or not – but are medial vehicles of processing them between individuals who partake in aesthetic communication.

Consequently, this approach on issues of violence, victimisation, memory and cultural communication thereupon does not any longer follow a black and white – i.e. latently dissociative – logic of binary conceptual oppositions as 'traumatised or not', 'perpetrator or not', 'pathological or therapeutic' – or else feel compelled to categorically refrain from any procedures of estimation and evaluation, which in turn would inappropriately reduce the productive potential of culture studies for contributing to the search for endurable solutions to societal problems. In other words: focussing on violence instead of trauma seems to make it easier to keep up the indispensable differentiation between science and politics. Here, one profits from the fact that the focus on *violence*, including both victimisation and perpetration, seems less prone to cause personal identifications – conscious or unconscious – which in any event hamper the quality of scientific inquiry and public discourse. For, any researcher or public discourse participant naturally will be less inclined to personally identify (or

empathize) with the position of being violent and destructive. Identifying with the perpetrator is just not very attractive – at least not as attractive as identifying with the traumatized victim.

This might in particular hold true for cultural studies institutions: There the focus on trauma and the traumatized victim must from the beginning have exerted a particularly tempting appeal, because people who are engaged in the arts and cultural studies have – at least half-consciously – always tended to view themselves as victims of the other of their professional sphere, i.e. the world the business, administration and natural sciences. This then seemed to have had the particular consequence, that narrowing in on victim/ trauma for humanities and cultural studies always meant first of all worrying about how the victims (and maybe even the philological self identified with the victim) might react when being confronted with media representations of what has been suffered (for example the films on the Holocaust). Even if methodologically taken seriously, this question is only one aspect of a highly complex societal issue of research which must also adopt a more differentiated contextual view and look at the perpetrators and various types of bystanders.

The more empathic and moral than empirical concern about the victims, we think, is at the very heart of the current philologies' paradoxical intent to safeguard "the integrity of the trauma" and forestall any "sacrilege" against it which in turn constitutes a scientifically insufficient approach, or else isn't even properly understood to be a scientific approach in the first place. For, questions focusing on categories like "integrity" or "sacrilege" can hardly be transformed into an empirical research design; they constitute elements of a moral debate rather than investigative questions, referring to an – never to be sufficiently explicated – ethics of media production. In fact, there seems to be a tacit but strong mutual affinity of philological text exegesis and moral concern, which does not easily lend itself to methodologically rigorous, interdisciplinary, and psycho-dynamic inquiry. Therefore, philologically and morally focussing on *trauma* and victimisation in many instances came down to issuing more or less implicit moral and aesthetic verdicts – sometimes even giving way to suggestions of censorship – and, in any event, tended to deflect from the possibility of undertaking empirical research. The most pertinent option of such research would be the indeed highly worthwhile question of how victims actually do interact with aesthetic and media representations of what they suffered, which philological text interpretation of course is not really in the position to approach– to point out just one among other important questions in this area of inquiry, which would – as was already underlined above – also request paying equal attention to perpetrator and bystander issues.

What also speaks in favour of opening up the object domain: doing methodologically sound empirical research on the experience of violence/ challenge and how it is dealt with or even 'worked through' by the individuals and groups involved is much more favourable to doing culture studies. For, this perspective encompasses a wider range of aesthetic and media representations including both media narratives of victimization and of perpetration thus also encompassing the broad issue of media representations of violence proper. The whole array of these representations, as well as the respective mental and socio-cultural interaction with them, constitute a powerful societal vehicle of – for the better or the worse – 'dealing with' or possibly even 'working through' experiences of violence and/or personal stress/challenge on an individual and collective level alike (including those experiences which are traditionally not comprehensively accounted for by the clinical perspective of psycho-trauma, for example experiences of perpetration). Also, aesthetic artefacts and media productions – fictional, non-fictional, and 'semi-fictional' – today represent an ever more important and influential means to inform, confront, and educate the generations to come, i.e. to do history in its most basic sense of socialising the younger members of society which means forging their modes of coping.

Moreover, the personally and politically less charged focus on the socio-cultural processes in the context of *violence* seems to lend itself to better understand the complex phenomenon that what might subjectively be felt to be violent, harmful or traumatising, being looked at more closely, may also be grasped in a more differentiated and multi-dimensional manner. It might, for example, be viewed in the distinct dimensions: (1) of having suffered an interpersonal transgression which caused symptomatic reactions and put a severe burden onto once future life; (2) or possibly also: of having been confronted with an valuable impulse of personal growth; (3) of having since developed particular ways of dealing with the experience and its aftermath and by inference of having developed ways of alertly perceiving and dealing with issues of violence in general, be it in the position of the victim, perpetrator or bystander – which again opens up two further dimensions: (3a) having established psycho-social methods in ones direct and media interaction which allow for a mental working-through and moderation of such experiences in the above mentioned sense versus (3b) having been restrained to repetitiously acting out and perpetuating counter-productive patterns of interaction. These different dimensions are grouped around the focal question whether and in what sense an occurrence and its long-term ramifications have been handled by the individuals and groups involved in ways which contribute to the moderation and resolution of violence or rather fuel the cycles of re-perpetration. Reconstructive case studies of the precise

mechanisms of such instances of (media) interaction are likely to reveal different combinations of various factors rather then clear cut evaluations and thus provide insight in the complex workings of coming to terms with violence. xxx

Achieving a more complex reconstructive view on the issue also seems to be what SMELSER must have had in mind when he, still dealing with an all too vague concept of trauma, proposes to conceive of it not so much "as a discrete causal event" but "a part of a process-in-system" (2004, 35). Unfortunately, however, SMELSER's approach – in an exemplary way – remains unsuccessful in this respect. For, if the focus is on trauma and if *cultural trauma* is simply defined as an "invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole" (38), as SMELSER recently did, several fundamental problems arise. Not only is this definition circular in the sense that it takes cultural trauma for what people subjectively and/or collectively claim as being culturally traumatic, thus retreating to a merely descriptive approach which is in and of itself valuable in terms of descriptive discourse analysis but cannot be of any help if one aims at doing reconstructive, analytic, let alone psycho-dynamically informed research on events and patterns of violent/stressing/challenging experience. Moreover, SMELSER's definition is not operational at all since it requests to first determine what is an "essential ingredient of a culture" and then what constitutes an "invasive and overwhelming event" with regard to such an "ingredient"; this, however, can hardly be achieved with any degree of validity. Finally, it seems questionable, what is actually gained from such endeavours of formal definition? (SMELSER in different contexts alludes to macro-historical events as different the American Revolution, the Reformation, the Holocaust; plus, the latter instance he seems to exclusively view in the perspective of being traumatic for contemporary Germans.)

Above all, however, any such defining, categorising and rubricising approach will inadvertently fall prey to the fallacies of the above described anti-psychologism, even if – and this makes SMELSER article so interesting – it actively advocates the importance of psychological perspectives. In his article on psychological and cultural trauma, SMELSER draws up a system of psychological mechanisms of defence and coping. Thereby, he basically sticks to what was the psychoanalytic main stream of the 1980s, thus focusing on individual "repression", "suppression", "displacement" of "drive representation" and "drive tension" and attempting to "classify" "basic modes" thereof (45pp.). Hence, SMELSER in his 2005 book contribution does not include what object-relation theories have since added to the model of psychic defence mechanism, namely the concepts of interactional, institutional and group-

dynamic defence (Mentzos xx Tschuschke xx) which, evidently, are highly relevant for any questions of cultural and societal interaction.

The main problem, however, is that, after having widely explicated the – supposedly individual – defence mechanisms of the human psyche, SMELSER draws an unnecessarily strict line against seeking "sociocultural analog[ies] for the psychological repression of trauma (experience)" (p.51). SMELSER thus emphasizes that "a cultural trauma differs greatly from a psychological trauma in terms of the mechanisms that establish and sustain it" (pp.38f.). For, while the "mechanisms of psychological trauma" SMELSER – inadequately – holds to only encompass "the intrapychic dynamics of defence, adaptation, coping, and working through", the "mechanisms at the cultural level" are suggested to somehow be entirely different because they "are mainly those of social agents and contending groups". On this statement the chapter ends without any specification as to what actually constitutes this difference, in what respects it may claim to be a categorical difference, and what the categories might be which apply to "social agents" and "groups".

Hence, one may observe once again what FARISL owing to KÜHNER in her aptly careful article has said about concepts of collective and cultural trauma: that they generally are most extensively used while being least sufficiently explicated theoretically (FARISL P.35). Also one wonders why SMELSER, while displaying such a remarkable interdisciplinary openness by considering psychological, even psycho-dynamic mechanisms, did not take use of more recent psychoanalysis and group-analysis and in particular of its concepts of defence/coping on a group and national level, all the more so, since the internationally widely noticed psychotherapist and governmental advisor Volkan VAMINK (xx) has already lucidly applied these concepts to theorizing international conflicts like those of the ex-Yugoslavian countries, thus, touching upon macro-historic issues which SMELSER and others are likely to consider cultural traumas. What becomes rather evident, though, is that SMELSER – following the philologies' pattern described in part I (also WEILNBÖCK xx Mittel and Eurozine) – basically speaks of trauma psychologically *in order to de-psychologize trauma on the cultural level*, as if human psyches were irrelevant on this level of interaction.

KAPLAN touched upon a similar issue when she refers to the fact that "critical theory had, indeed, through the influence of LACAN and poststructuralism more generally, become very abstract" so that "high theory" lost touch of "specific material events" as well as issues of "emotion", "the body and the social", which were "both personal and which implicated history, memory, and culture generally" (p.35) and – one might add, as argued above –

thereby also lost touch of, and in fact *de-psychologized* the individual psyche, dissolving it into a trans-subjective symbolic order. Here KAPLAN quotes from a provocative talk by Michael ROTH who stated that deconstruction's "continued insistence on unmasking truth claims […] [was] merely a screen to conceal its own inability to engage the world" and "to connect a critique of representation and subjectivity with things that happen in the world" (p.34, p.152).

However, it seems unsatisfactory to conclude, as KAPLAN did, that it was the adoption of concepts of *the trauma* which was able to bring about the return of some of the "material" world, the "social", and the psyche into the theory. It may much rather have been *violence* and its long-term repercussions which eventually did so in this case – after it had caused the level of abstraction to be so immensely high and intangible in the first place. For, deconstruction's interest in trauma was probably not just caused by the fact that CARUTH and FELMAN were at Yale when Jeffrey HARTMAN and Dori LAUB were beginning to "interview Holocaust victims", as KAPLAN suggests. It rather might be due to CARUTH and FELMAN having been students of Paul DE MAN, the founding father of deconstruction, because, what KAPLAN did not mention but is well known to the critical theory communities, some years after DE MAN's death in 1983 (??) it surfaced that he had written anti-Semitic texts before the war. This scandalized many and caused a major intellectual debate (which, seen from the point of view of interdisciplinary culture studies, wasn't all too productive in terms of its intellectual findings xx??).

Looking upon it from this angle, the immensely "abstract" and intangible theory discourse of deconstruction itself, and the above described trauma discourse which sprang from it, become discernible as part of a wider context – and of a process-in-system – of occurrences of violence and their decade long silencing. Therefore, deconstruction's rigorous abstraction, its eventual adoption of trauma concepts, as well as its often somewhat charismatic and unyielding manner of discourse, thus, may rather be conceived of as symptom and factor of DE MAN's defensive endeavour to deal with violence which he in his personal history partook in on the level of verbal perpetration before the Holocaust. And what Michael Roth had quite tentatively labelled desconstruction's "inability" vis-à-vis the "things that happen in the world" might more specifically be described as the inability to appropriately "engage" the wider context of World War II violence.

In light of this – and having concepts of trauma in mind, one might feel inclined to wonder whether or not CARUTH, FELMAN and others were victimized and/or traumatised by DE MAN's cover-up and the breach of confidence which is implicit to it. One even might

feel inclined to wonder whether it could be assumed that the intellectual perpetrator, DE MAN himself, was in some way traumatised by not having been able to share, reflect upon and, with the help of others, work through this part of his earlier biography; or else whether he was victimized even long before the war, maybe in his childhood (as, indeed, perpetrators generally prove to be in various respects), thus having build up enough reactive anger, envy, and/or obedient identification with aggressive positions to engage in intellectual acts of denigration and defamation. Moreover, one might be tempted to ask whether or not it could be assumed that, as a result of this, the practices of deconstruction's discourse themselves were not only "abstract" (and sometimes maybe even enigmatic and self-serving) but also, as it were, intellectually victimizing and violent in the sense that they strengthened rather than dissolved intellectual defence mechanisms which forestall other modes of speech and thought. (And one might be tempted to assume that this intellectual defensiveness is in effect up to the present days, if one, for instance, were to wonder why ROTH's provocative talk about deconstruction's "inability to engage the world", which was delivered in 1998, apparently has not yet been published by 2005.)

All the more lucky we should, indeed, count ourselves that we are relieved of having to entertain such binary questions, also that we may steer free of being bogged down by the quest of meta-theoretical definition and formal categorisation of what is trauma and what is not trauma. We may instead simply acknowledge: all these questions and hypotheses have their place in attempting to empirically study the complex processes of dealing with occurrences/ experiences of (historical) violence – psycho-affectively, aesthetically, intellectually, also scientifically and in reference both to individuals and "groups"/ "social agents". And we may proceed to venture into methodically reconstructing the interactional and psychic dynamic of these processes.

At this point it also becomes evident that the shift of perspective from trauma to violence does not at all mean to deny trauma or else renounce clinical psycho-trauma studies. On the contrary, issues of trauma are more comprehensively looked at. Also our recommendation to focus both on the 'actual occurrence' of violence and/or challenge and on the affected person's subjective experience, thus also looking at her/is disposition in view of biographical, psycho-dynamic, and micro-social preconditions, is in full correspondence with the classical psycho-dynamic definition of a psycho-traumatic experience: Clinical psychologist Gottfried FISCHER takes trauma to be "a critical discrepancy between the threatening factors of an actual situation and the individual's coping capacities" (xx) thus focussing on the nature of the event and at the same time on the subjective experience and the

individual capacities of the person. And another psycho-dynamically oriented clinician, Mathias HIRSCH xx, ventured to integrate the positions of perpetration and victimisation not only theoretically but also practically in that he – in most careful arrangements – brings together victims and perpetrators in settings of group-therapy. Nele REULAEUX has recently presented a convincing thesis, which describes the psychic patterns of most notorious Nazi-criminals in terms of Otto KERNBERG's concept of malicious narcissisms which resembles the borderline syndrome (of the type less lower psychic integration) (Handbook xx), thus theorizing a severe form of acted-out family memories of extremely abuse and/or abandon (xx)

xxx 3. How to Research Cultural Modes of Coping with Experiences of Violence and Stress.

Evidently, what is taking on shape in these preliminary deliberations about a particular potential of socio-cultural studies around questions of psychic trauma is a novel research program centred around the question of how occurrences/ experiences of violence and the mental, interactional, and societal processes of dealing with them work. As with any novel approach one needs to specify: what the underlying assumptions are, which theoretical concepts are to be formulated, which scientific resources one will have to turn to, which methodological consequences are to be drawn and in which kinds of research designs the studies should be pursued.

xxx 3.1 Assumptions and theoretical concepts

As to the basic underlying assumptions and theoretical concepts: Psychologically informed socio-cultural studies on how violence is dealt with rests upon a concept of "biographical/ narrative work" and identity work which is core to both narratological psycho-therapy studies and biography studies. Here, the key assumption is that people constantly and unwittingly perform mental work of psychically integrating lived-though experiences into narratives, thus entertaining a permanent process of personal development and the building of "narrative identity" (xx Lucius-Hoene, Bamberg xx, Dixon xx, psychonarrative, HW in Meister xx und Luif). This mental and/or narrative work is driven by a dialectic move between "the experienced and the narrated life history" (Rosenthal). This dialectic process creates ever new mental associations among the countless macro- and micro-logical interactions which an

individual experiences as well as with the narratives s/he entertains in the different phases and sectors of her/is personal life – also in her/is experiences of media interaction. The overall goal of these processes of mental, narrative work is coming to terms with ones biographical experiences and/or finding solutions for conflicts in ones actual life circumstances.

A follow-up assumption to this is that these constructive mental processes of retrospective narrative identity formation are to be conceived of not only as verbal discourse or textual phenomena but first and foremost as psycho-dynamic processes. This means that these processes unfolds in a gradual and cumulative manner in a person's life-time development and that they are key to her/is individual well-being, stability and the development of personal capacities. This also means that the processes of narrative identity formation take place on various levels of mental activity which are different in their status of (un-)consciousness and in their position on the spectrum between cognition and affection. Put in a more recent psychological terminology: they are different in terms of their degree of mentalisation/ symbolization ranging from pre-symbolical corporeal and possibly psycho-somatic experience (and body memory) to fully mentalized and narratively accessible experience (Hirsch xx). Here, it seems to hold true as a general principle that the more a person's lived-through experiences is symbolically and narratively accessible that better her/is mental well-being and resilience is protected and strengthened – which also means that her/is capacity is high to deal with occurrences which are or are felt to be of a disturbing and violent nature.

Remarkably, developmental psychologists and psycho-trauma clinicians measure this crucial parameter of mental stability and protection by the relative number of RIGs, meaning Representations of Interactions that have been mentally generalized by an individual and thus is psychically accessible as a narrative (Geißlers 2002, S. 51 in reference to Stern xx HW xx). These RIGs basically encompass all those lived-though interactions which the person has experienced in a not stressful and/or traumatizing way or which s/he at least was able to retroactively perceive and memorize in significantly less stressing and/or traumatizing modes than they were experienced in the actual moment of firsthand occurrence, so that they may come to function as valuable impulse of personal growth in the above explained sense. Put simply, the quantity of RIGs depends on the number of self-experienced events which the person is able to recount as a story; or put reversely it depends on the quantity and richness of stories which a person is able to recount about what s/he lived through – in contrast to the number of issues of her/is "experienced life-history" which the person is unable to narrate

because s/he is not aware of them at all or which the person for what ever reasons may not tell in a coherent and sufficiently complete manner.

The fact that developmental psychologists and psycho-therapy researchers see the number and coherence of narratives and integrated "representations" as essential criterion for estimating a person's or a group's mental resilience and psycho-social capacities – not only but also in terms of working through and thus avoiding stress and violence – is evidently of high importance for any kind of cultural and historical studies, in that the main object domains of these fields are after all: "representations" of lived-though events. Hence, if we accept as a basic assumption what has been concluded in the empirical research of these fields, we have reason to newly consider the societal and pedagogical potential of cultural and historical studies and ask which consequences are necessary in terms of interdisciplinary theory and methodology in order to bring this potential to fruition. In more concrete terms: If the quantity and quality of an individual's personal treasure of narrative representations of mentally integrated experiences is so important for her/is capacity to contribute to the sociocultural processes of working-through experiences of destructive interaction, than this means that we need to better understand cultural "representations" and the modes of reading them in terms of their actual and potential impact on personal development and societal formation. The key of this line of research then would be to evaluate particular case studies pursuing the question inasmuch some of the observed patterns of coping may be estimated to be more sustainable and beneficial for 'working through' such experiences and strengthen the persons resilience and inasmuch others may be understood as less sustainable, while they are instantly effective and necessary measures of unconscious 'acting out' – which, however, tend to destabilize the person's well-being in the long run and, in the societal context, fuel the re-generation of modes of harmful interaction.

Two further theoretical concepts which are particularly pivotal for a narrative-biographical and psycho-dynamic approach to studying patterns of sociocultural coping with experiences of violence is the psychoanalytic notion of *transference* and its special occurrence in the context of inner-family *trans-generational transmission*. Transference refers to largely involuntary and/or unconscious micro-processes which inadvertently and persistently recur in more or less fixed or flexible patterns in an individual's interaction with other persons (and also with texts/narratives) and in which feelings, fantasies, and even thoughts and patterns of behaviour are not only projected onto the other but actually induced in and transferred to her/im. Hence, the interactional concept of transference means not only that the individual

subjectively anticipates and perceives her/is counterpart to have certain feelings or show certain behaviour but also that the other actually does get involved in that s/he ends up having the feelings and acting out the behaviour, because they have been induced in her/im. Thus, the person and her/is counterpart is conceived of as unwittingly getting involved in a co-constructed interactional scene in which certain experiences from these persons' respective life and family history re-appear (xx KLÜWER STERNE WALDVOGEL STEINER [Klü]).

What at first sight might look like an occult phenomenon or a theoretical artefact, can indeed be traced empirically on the microscopic level of non-verbal, paralinguistic, suggestive interaction which mostly goes unnoticed or else in certain instances might be subjectively felt to be manipulative, while transference, in any event, is to be regarded an indispensable prerequisite of human mental development and interpersonal interaction as well as of psychotherapy. In fact, co-constructively creating variable forms of a transferencial interplay with ones dialogic other seems to be the essence of human life (xx). Therefore, transference also is a prominent vehicle of empathy and those kinds of integrative interaction, in which humans may assist each other in coming to terms with their experiences, especially with the violent and/or traumatic instances which were too stressful and conflict-laden to be easily processed by oneself. Precisely in these cases, however, transference may also overburden the involved individuals and sometimes cause what has recently been termed 'vicarious trauma' with those who are in the position of the empathetic listener (xx).

Moreover, transference dynamics may get out of hand entirely and fuel interactional scenes of escalating re-traumatisation and unwitting repetition, which reach up almost to the same level of stress, anxiety and counter-phobic aggression which was in effect in the original experiences of stress/violence. In such less helpful instances transference ends up becoming a highly costly emergency mode of coping. Individuals with fitting dispositions take specific use of each other and get into a communal interplay in order to act out and by the same token fend off certain experiences of their biographical history and/or aspects of their present mental reality. Here, engaging in unconscious (inter-)actions of repetition is used to avoid any more acute awareness and memory of the original experience of stress which is at the heart of the interactional dynamic. In other instances in which the other person is less fitting with regard to her/is inclination to act out and rather disposes of empathic capacities, the memory of the experiences – as it were – are split off and handed over to the other person. This leaves her/im less affected by the repetition dynamic but implies a high risk to become over-burdened by this kind of interaction. In both instances, transference is bound to fail its

principal function and remains unable to contribute to moderating and working-through the original experience.

What is referred to as trans-generational transmission of trauma is a particularly intense, far-reaching and challenging occurrence of transference, which arises in families in which significant experiences of mental stress and violence had been incurred by the parents and could not be processed, spoken about, and sufficiently moderated mentally since, so that the parents unwittingly turn to involving their children in the insurmountable task of working through and/or fending off the unspeakable experience of what had been suffered (GRUBRICH-SIMITIS 1979; KOGAN 1990, BERGMAN/BERGMANN 1995, BOHLEBER, BOCHHOLZ, LEUZINGER/BOHLEBER, ROSENTHAL Hg). Whether such experience is directly linked to a historical event like the Holocaust, where trans-generational transmission has been most comprehensively researched thus far, or to differently situated contexts of violence, as for instance histories of child abuse, subsequently insulated sets of affective states, fixed interactive behaviour, and entire sectors of identity are unconsciously transmitted to and "implanted" in the children (HIRSCH 2004, 61) in what could be called a pre-narrative, acted-out form of family memory. Trans-generational transmissions of this kind generally leave the children severely overburdened in psycho-affective respects. They pose considerable challenge to the children's personal development so that they themselves may unwittingly resort to over-burdening their environment which, in any event, will hamper their capacity to contribute to moderating and working-through past occurrences of violence and/or conflict.

While observations and analytic conclusions referring to phenomena of (counter-)transference and trans-generational transmission have often been notoriously vague and in need of establishing more stable methodological foundations, the theoretical relevance of these concepts has become ever more incontestable, since it became increasingly undeniable that human (media) interaction is not just the exchange of information but includes much more complex psycho-affective and interpersonal processes which at times even blur the borders of individual identity. Interestingly, it is trauma-therapy research which leaves no doubt that transference is an empirical phenomenon because, there it has become entirely indisputable that therapists are often overburdened not only by the horrible stories which traumatized people tell but by the very ways in which they communicate them; for these ways entail that transferences of affects of pain, anxiety and rage suffered during and after the violent incidents are immediately transferred to and induced in the therapist leaving her/im, as

it were, secondarily traumatized (FISCHER PEARLMANN xx). This phenomenon which also is termed *vicarious trauma* has since in view instances been adopted by social and cultural studies to theorize the processes of socio-cultural (media) interaction beyond the realm of professional psycho-therapy, in which readers/viewers or interlocutors become vicariously traumatized by the processes of sharing and, for this very reason, may assist in the communal, societal effort to work through and integrate occurrences of violence (KAPLAN 2005, 87pp. SMELSER 2004, 40).

Hence, the individual and micro-social level of inner-family transgenerational transference will always be interlaced with the level of society and public discourse – and, by the same token, it will always be entwined with the level of media interaction. Therefore another basic assumption of this research program is largely implicit in what has been said so far: If people in their every day life and interpersonal interaction constantly and unwittingly do mental work to integrate their experiences psycho-dynamically and build a "narrative identity", and if they do this both intra-psychically and inter-subjectively by continuously exchanging and negotiating interpersonal transference, than they in principle entertain similar mental processes when interacting with cultural and media narratives. Possibly, there, they even do this in a particularly effectual fashion since in the realm of literary and media interaction with fiction narratives one is relieved of having to deal with the restraints and pressures of real world interaction – which in turn, however, is the one and only first-degree reality we have at our disposal when we attempt to understand and interact with media narratives. In any event, while reading literature and watching movies individuals – however consciously or unconsciously – create mental associations, transferences, and para-social interactions with the media narrative and its characters, interweaving themes and issues of the narrative with experiences and memories from their own personal lives, thus building mental dialogues and co-narratives vis-à-vis the media narrative (PIETZCKER 1993, RAGUSE, HW Habil Lanzm) (xx).[1]

The ways and mechanisms in which these associations, transferences, and dialogues are formed, their cognitive content and emotional colouring, and the extent to which they assist in working through and/or acting out specific experiences of their personal life-history, once again, just like with the real-life experience, is dependent on the individual's biographical pre-history and psycho-dynamic dispositions at the present moment. Media interaction, of course, also depends on the structure, form, and content of the media narrative itself as it has been produced by an author. The systematic reconstruction of media narratives is subject to a

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[1] For conceptualization purposes, I have elsewhere proposed the theoretical concept of *mental trauma correspondences* (TC) and *mental empathy resonance* (ER) (Weil. 2003e, 2004a/ d).

methodically different and independent procedure but, in any event, would have to still be based on a model of mental and psycho-dynamic interaction (see below). This, at any rate reminds us, that narratology, the academic field of studying (literary) narrations, today may not any longer stick to the realm of fiction texts only but rather will have to broaden its perspective to include all other instances of human story-telling (Handbook BERGMAN, McLOAD XX)

Moreover, we are reminded of the fact that the structural correspondence and mental interface which inevitably and involuntarily build up between experiences of (narrative) media interaction and memories of real-life interaction ought not be claimed in any short circuited ways, which has sometimes been done particularly with regard to issues of violence and psycho-trauma: For, contrary to the general belief, the key observation here is not that "individuals who are passively watching or reading thrilling, gripping or frightening movies or books can be temporarily 'traumatised' by them even though they are completely fictional", or in other words: that "trauma can be experienced by attaching appropriate affects to imagined situations" (SMELSER p.40). Such conceptualization obviously is insufficient because it does not differentiate at all between the immediate experience of real-life violence and the encounter with media representations of violent occurrences; plus, there is no differentiated account of coping with and/or working-through traumatic experiences. This is why KAPLAN aptly reserves the concept of 'vicarious trauma' for media interaction (p.40) implying a considerably lesser amount of affective charge and clearly presupposing what is rather evident also in clinical perspective: that actual trauma does not occur in media interaction (except maybe with children).

Moreover, in the realm of an individual's psycho-dynamic activity of media interaction there is no such thing as "passively watching", "appropriate affects", or "completely fictional" narratives. Empirical media research has shown that viewers watch quite actively and may attach quite inappropriate, even idiosyncratic affects to media narratives which thy subjectively perceive to be rather semi-fictional in the sense that they touch upon many associations of the viewers own non-fictional life experience. Already the above mentioned concept of transference and co-constructive narrative implies that while there undoubtedly is a modal difference between fiction and non-fiction nothing in the realm of subjective media interaction is "completely fictional" in the strict sense of the word. Especially in circumstances of emotional stress SMELSER's implicit theoretical boundaries of binary distinction between fiction/non-fiction, appropriate/inappropriate etc. may become quite permeable. Rather, the question is what precisely it is that an individual – or a group –

associates with events and scenes represented in a fictional world; in other words, what her/is non-fictional biographical attachments are, especially regarding experiences both of victimization and perpetration. Also the question is which were the psycho-dynamic mechanisms by which the individual was dealing with such attachments and experiences in the course of her/is life history up to the moment of encountering the media representation. Once again, more helpful than determining whether a person is traumatised (in this case by a "fictional" narrative) it is to ask and reconstruct how precisely the person deals with what s/he experiences/reads/views as violent on the basis of her/is personal dispositions.

From this psycho-dynamically informed approach to socio-cultural interaction studies numerous further inter-theoretical bridges can be built: For example, biography studies' concept of "co-presence", stating that two or more memories can be amalgamated and simultaneously present in an interviewees mind while s/he, in fact, recounts only one of these issues, comes quite close to the above formulated notion of a multi-layered associative process (xx). To add a – rare – example of psychologically oriented qualitative media studies, Michael CHARLTON's model of *dialogic* media usage represents a theoretical correspondence, too. (xx). CHARLTON refers to British language philosophy's concept of *dialogism* which states that a person's mental identity consists of various levels of mental and factual dialog. These levels have different degrees of consciousness and are situated in different areas of mental and actual interaction which, however, do overlap and interconnect with each another mentally: First, there is the level of every day dialogues in which an individual interacts with persons from her/is micro-social sphere. Then, there are the intra-psychic dialogues which we constantly have with mental representations of the interactional counterparts who populate our micro- and macro-social world. And, at last, there are the intra-psychic dialogues which we more or less consciously may have with media characters which we have become acquainted with in situations of media interaction. This last form of dialogue is sometimes referred to as *parasocial* interaction owing to George H. MEAD's model of symbolic interactionism (xx Zft.MedPsych, Nikos xx). Thus, in the dialogic model of human (media) interaction real-life interactions are interlaced with the intra-psychic, fictional dialogues which an individual involuntarily has with mental representations of real-life people as well as with fictional protagonists of media narratives.

These *dialogic* assumptions also tie in with more recent approaches of narratology as they were advanced by qualitative social sciences and more specifically by psycho-therapy studies and developmental psychology presupposing that narration – in a wide sense of the term – is not only one among other linguistic phenomena but, in fact, the most basic

functional entity of human cognition in the first place (xx HW LUIF GEIßLER STERN Roy SCHAFER). Thus, the model of various levels of dialogic activity corresponding and intersecting with each other as proposed by Michael CHARLTON, is pretty similar to psychological narratology's notion of the human psyche as organism of intersecting narratives; all the more so since narration as defined by developmental psychology and biography research is an interactive, co-constructive process which always implies the addressee as co-active counterpart of narration.

xxx 3.2 Methodological consequences and research designs

 Having recognized the degree of complexity which characterizes the object matter of socio-cultural (media) interaction studies and having also recognized the relevance of psycho-dynamic, interactional, and narratological concepts, especially of transference as well as of psycho-dynamic defence and coping mechanisms, it will, by necessity, be a main target of future theoretical and methodological development in this field to sharpen the tools of scientific inquiry to the point that they become capable of observing the psychological factors in human (media) interaction. This challenging task can only be approached by joint efforts of interdisciplinary collaboration in which culture studies draw from different scientific fields and resources mostly in clinical and qualitative psychology and social research as well as in psychotherapy studies.

As to the methodological consequences and concrete research designs this implies that interdisciplinary socio-cultural (media) interaction studies will have to proceed in multi-methodical ways. Therefore, the most important prerequisite is to place equal weight on qualitative-empirical research about mental and interactional phenomena pertaining to the research question, and not just focus on text analysis of historical and cultural media narratives about it. Thus, one will have to go beyond hermeneutical text exegesis and data analysis in the traditional sense, which has been the almost exclusive preoccupation of centuries of philological humanities and historiography up to the present days. Especially in the humanities this means avoiding to follow the philological impulse to immediately narrow in on the textual artefacts, cultural documents, and aesthetic representations of a socio-cultural issue while at the same time sidestepping the first-degree empirical data from the object domain, as may be obtained from research done on human individuals and psycho-social phenomena pertaining to the issue of inquiry. Instantly focussing on textual representations of an interactional issue and taking what then must appear to be a textual, 'philological' object

matter as epistemological excuse to turn to philosophical text exegesis and evade highly relevant resources from empirical research, constitutes an epistemological fallacy of literary and culture studies which needs to be transcended by using a multi-methodical approach on the conceptual basis of (inter) action theory. Culture or media, thus, may not in the first instance be taken to consist of *texts*, in whatever contextual or metaphoric sense of the word, but as an interactional as well as psycho-social process in individuals and groups, a process which of course also implies textual materialisations and mediations.

In the case of our research interest, for example, it is the mental and interactional processes of dealing with occurrences/experiences of violence, stress and/or challenge which are the main object domain. The multi-methodological approach of qualitative-empirical research will thus first focus on or at least refer to research on these phenomena. Only then it will turn both to qualitative social research on reader's/viewer's media interaction and to text analysis of media narratives regarding this topic.[2]

The common denominator of all different sections of this multi-methodical research program in socio-cultural (media) interaction research will be its theoretical and methodological foundation in (inter-) action theory and in narratology. xxx and here , , ,

It applies both to qualitative interactional research of individuals and to reconstructive text analysis of media narratives. In terms of studying reader response (and author response) this means to engage in methods of qualitative social research, specifically in media biography studies, albeit in a psychologically informed fashion which significantly goes beyond what is currently understood to be media biography studies (HW xx). The guiding questions are: How do individuals (and groups) both intellectually and psycho-affectively interact with media narrations about issues which are personally challenging to them or may even have had psycho-traumatic implications in the past, thus impairing the individual's future life quality and options of further personal development? How does an individual's life history and psychodynamic disposition comes into play with her/is media interaction and how mental interaction with media narrations affects and maybe assists the individuals' dealing with the challenges presented by her/is biography and by her present position as part of a quickly changing and increasingly conflict-laden society.

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[2] This approach constitutes a research program which was partly already advocated by so-called reception aesthetics in the 1960s and 70s while the proponents – Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauß (xx) and others – paradoxically, did not pursue any empirical studies of this sort but stuck to text exegesis themselves.

The specific research tools to be applied here are methods of narrative-biographical and/or qualitative interviewing and group interviewing. However, these methods of qualitative social research still have to be specifically adapted to be more applicable to grasping the mental processes of subjective media experience (HW Mikos xx). Above all the currently practised technique of sequence analysis and hypothesis formation have to be augmented by procedures of psycho-dynamically informed transcript analysis which while determining the structural patterns of biographical development also progresses to reconstructing the psycho-dynamic mechanisms of the person's interactional patterns. In order for this to be achieved it will be necessary to consult resources from recent psychology as for instance psycho-dynamic and developmental psychology, psycho-trauma studies, attachment theory, narratological psychology, object-relation psychoanalysis, group analysis, and qualitative psycho-therapy studies. For, these research areas are able to provide pertinent observations and findings on human socio-cultural interaction and, strangely enough, even the more recent qualitative media studies, maybe owing to its roots in the humanities or else in quantitative media studies, do not refer to them and thus do not yet include psycho-dynamically informed criteria in their procedures of data analysis. (HW xx Mikos).

The aim of qualitative media interaction research may – in simple words – be defined as attempting to reconstruct what different individuals actually do in terms of mental activity when interacting with a media narrative, and how they relate to it, while reading and viewing, in terms of the psychic processes which fuel their biographical work of forming narrative identity and mentally integrating lived-through experience. The equally promising reverse question, however, is: What is it that a media narrative, given its content and form, might potentially do with their readers/viewers and in what manners and functions might it interact with them. And this refers to what is generally perceived to be culture studies' main business (and certainly should be one essential sector of it), the interpretation of texts and media narratives. All the more important it is to emphasize that this question, too, follows a logic which is based on narratological socio- and psychological (inter-) action theory – and this calls for methodological consequences: For, a research module of text-analysis which constitutes an integral sector of a multi-methodical research program on socio-cultural interactions studies, has to surpass the methodical limitations of main-stream philological text exegesis. Not the purported "meaning" or the poetic and iconographic motives of a literary text, nor its inter-textual references to other texts is the main target of analysis here, rather it aims at reconstructing interactional and/or psychodynamic processes – be it in the plot, i.e. in the interaction between the characters of a narrative, or be it in the interaction of text and

reader (or author/ producer), thus asking questions about the text's interactional dynamic as a means of cultural and societal communication between empirical individuals and among empirical groups and societies.

Since this take on text analysis of fictional narratives implies embracing a truly (inter-) action theoretical approach, the guiding questions here are not so different from those being asked in the empirical research on interactional phenomena and/or on media interaction (reader response). These questions are: What are the interactional structures of the textual, filmic, or otherwise mediated narrative? Which are, in accordance to these structures, the specific interactional impulses it gives and psycho-dynamic influences it exerts on the process of reading – which may already in semi-conscious and involuntary ways be anticipated by the author and which, in any event, are implicit to any process of narrative story telling? What then are the particular vectors of potential impact, especially in terms of transference dynamic, which a text, given its particular content and form, may have on its empirical readers with regard to the above defined personal use any reader takes from reading the text? In other words: What are the likely variants of psycho-dynamical and biographical usage with respect to the readers' ongoing mental processes of biographic and/or narrative identity formation? A psycho-dynamically informed procedure of sequence analysis and hypothesis formation along these kinds of questions will provide conclusions about how a particular literary or media narrative might come in as a factor to entertain its readers' processes of working-through and/or denying biographical experiences, and how a narrative thus might contribute to moulding its readers' patterns of interaction and identity formation in the course of their (media-) biographical development.

These are questions which are traditionally not raised by philological text exegesis or, even more, which are, if touched upon, more often than not declared to be beyond reach for any culture studies research – principally "unreserarchable" as it were – and therefore aught not to be pursued by literary research institutions. This, of course, is incorrect if one approaches the object matter from the perspective of reconstructive research' methodology as it is practiced by qualitative social and psychological studies. In this perspective in becomes more visible that reconstructive analysis of empirical interview narratives from social research (and more specifically from reader response and/or media interaction research) is by no means entirely dissimilar from analysing literary or media narratives, as the traditional philosophical notion of the "autonomy of art" suggests, since even fictional and/or aesthetic texts have to be considered to be empirical narratives of a certain kind.

Hence, if one really acknowledges the hardly disputable assumption, that there is a close relationship between an individual's subjective interaction with media and cultural narratives and her/is particular biographical challenges for personal development (which, of course, pertains to authors alike), if one also assumes that this may even include psycho-traumatological issues s/he faces as a result of her/is specific life history and the history of her/is family, and if one then pursues the question of how the individual mentally interacts with media and literary narrations about issues pertaining to these personal challenges, – this then will entail a more complex, innovative research program. The research design needed here will have to provide a combination of methods ranging from of narrative-biographical interviewing and narratological interview data analysis, also expert interviews (with clinicians for example), media-experience interviewing with individuals (and groups) and other tools of qualitative media studies as well as the interaction-theoretically based analysis of media narratives which are implicated in the reader (and author) response research (HW xx). The research within each of these particular sections of this multi-methodical design has to be conducted independently from one another, each using its own method – so that text analysis is not confounded with reader response studies and the two different sectors are not prematurely brought together. Only when each research module has been completed can one begin to draw conclusions and build new questions from looking at the findings synoptically.

As a result of its multi-methodical design this approach of text and media interaction research will always entertain a close relationship to questions regarding the possible uses and applications of culture media studies in respect to public discourse, teaching, pedagogy and/or therapy: For, the ultimate target of any kind of research based on an interaction-theoretical basis is the question of how one may best assist and organise the mental and socio-cultural processes of dealing with challenges of personal development or societal governance by engaging cultural and/or media artefacts. This focus not only includes the pivotal question of how occurrences/ experiences of violence are dealt with but also in a more comprehensive perspective of how teaching, education and training may best assist in the generation of those kinds of personal skills which are referred to as emotional and inter-actional intelligence, soft skills, or communicational skills.

The chances that such an interdisciplinary research program of socio-cultural (media) interaction studies may be successfully implemented have grown more promising than one might assume in recent years. Due to the increasing popularity and further methodological development of qualitative research in social and psychological research, the two main areas of scientific inquiry which are concerned here – qualitative reconstruction of interaction and

philological text interpretation – have developed some degree of theoretical and methodological similarity. Today, both fields are analytic, interpretive or hermeneutical by nature which wasn't the case in times of a more exclusively quantitative approach to social research; and this pivotal correspondence should, indeed, encourage and not deter the humanities to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations, or even more so: to pursue multi-methodical research settings on their own combining qualitative media-interaction research with text analysis.

However, embarking on a path towards an interdisciplinarity which will be truly befitting to the specific needs of socio-cultural interaction studies will require to overcome traditional mono-disciplinary limitations as well as the respective institutional defence mechanisms – also the more recent and complicated ones. To give but one example, sometimes literary and media studies seem open to the temptation to emphatically engage in a cooperation with high-tech neurological brain studies while at the same time disregarding or simply overlooking the potential of qualitative and psycho-dynamic studies. This, at least, seems to be a recurring epistemological pattern lately among more progressively oriented voices in the humanities which seem to miss the rather evident fact that brain studies, while doubtlessly constituting a most interesting field of scientific research, is not really very conducive to doing culture studies of any relevance in societal and socio-psychological terms.

To quote from a passage of philological trauma discourses: The above mentioned and widely read film historian Ann KAPLAN in her most recent book *Trauma Culture* in parenthesis wonders whether not all media related questions of trauma "are perhaps impossible to answer without an intensive interview study of viewer-response to different kinds of trauma cinema" (91), a method of qualitative-empirical research which KAPLAN seems to have encountered in reading up on psychotherapy studies. In a different context KAPLAN presumes that "perhaps literary and film scholars were distracted from studying the reader or viewer position by focusing on events within a fictional and documentary text" and on the "representation of trauma in terms of protagonists" (41). And in an even more pointed context KAPLAN's presumption about a deformation professionelle of the text-oriented philologies also seems to inspire her quoting Michael ROTH's above mentioned unpublished paper suggesting that deconstruction's "continued insistence on unmasking truth claims […] [was] merely a screen to conceal its own inability to engage the world" (34, 152).

KAPLANs observations and comments seem to converge in the suggestion that it is recommendable to go beyond the text world and engage the world of empirical (reader) interaction. KAPLAN herself does not at all follow her methodological intuition and

continues to pursue hermeneutical film interpretation, which is maybe quite understandable since such a far-reaching extension of the methodological approach does take a certain amount of extra effort (– which should not be overrated either). On top of this, however, KAPLAN instead seems to reroute her interdisciplinary impulse into a theoretical engagement in neurological brain studies. There, Kaplan quotes from a clinical source and discusses the possibility of not just one but various different "kinds of brain function in trauma", firstly defining plain dissociation as process in which "a powerful unconditioned stimulus bombards the brain's amygdala with electrical and chemical signals" thus eventually creating a "stimulus-Thalamus-Amygdala circuit […] bypass[ing] the cortex and tak[ing] a quick rout through the thalamus". From this Kaplan distinguishes a more complex procedure which partially "also includes the cortex" thus "involv[ing] both dissociation and cognition" (35p.) As insightful as this might be on the level of physiological meta-theory, and as aptly Kaplan's model attempts to reconcile some feuding fractions of trauma theoreticians, such kinds of neuro-scientific modelling wont help us much in understanding how media narratives and various subjective readings work – culturally, and/or individually – in terms of dealing with violent and/or challenging experience and how teaching media narratives might turn out most conducive in this respect. Playing on KAPLAN's own words, here it rather seems that a 'text-brain-function-circuit' has been created, taking a "quick rout through neurological brain research […] bypass[ing]" the person as such and the "interview studies of viewer-response" which Kaplan in a different chapter rightly presumes to be of methodological value.

Not entirely dissimilar is the statement given by WELZER who emphatically admonishes the German speaking philological humanities ("Geisteswissenschaften") to "stop being useless" and eventually surpass the position of pure philosophical contemplation (xx). WELZER rightly claims that the humanities more often than not took an aloof position far from any considerations of practical application and from there even tended to blame anybody who reminded them of the societal accountability of scholarship as being "neoconservative applicability fetishists". Also he rightly stresses the potential which the philological humanities, indeed, do have with respect to any concerns of generating creativity and problem solving capacities in people and societies so that they may contribute to shaping new forms of social governance in rapidly changing globalized knowledge societies.

However, the remedy WELZER suggest most vehemently in order to properly expand the humanities' perspective is not socio- or psychological (inter-) action theory and methodology which is so bitterly missing there and which is indispensable for adequately approaching any issue of applied culture studies. Rather social psychologist WELZER

somehow seems to tacitly assume that all this is already in place in the "Geisteswissenschaften", and, in any event, proceeds to vigorously advertise the natural sciences and in particular neurological brains studies as means to "enable the humanities to more adequately describe society" and, for instance, comprehend "why human beings are more properly described as parts of networks rather than individuals". As proof for the humanities' high potential and societal relevance WELZER then enthusiastically points towards research areas as different as geronto-psychiatry, genocide studies, adolescent violence biographies, philosophically based business ethics, studies on art-business, global ecology and other issues – as if these areas represented in any way typical preoccupations of main stream humanities.

What is overlooked and/or smoothed over by WELZER impressive list of interdisciplinary research areas is the quite evident fact that philological humanities do not have and generally do not want to have much to do with such issues. Above all WELZER's kind enthusiasm aptly covers up the fact that the humanities are not only generally unenthusiastic but also not at all equipped methodologically and theoretically to engage in any such empirical, interactional, and psychological research questions – and that turning to neurological brain studies will not help this situation at all (nor will the energetic and somewhat old-fashioned appeal that the humanities should become "more politically defiant" and "produce more relentlessly critical and analytical views of the world"). The epistemological challenges which the humanities are presently facing lie less in the deeply entrenched, politically and morally embattled cleavage between natural sciences and hermeneutical philologies. Therefore, the conclusion WELZER draws seems unsatisfactory, that the humanities simply lack "a proper self image" which if adequately refurbished will instantly empower them to live up to its unbound potential. The problem rather seems to be the humanities' hesitance to adopt an epistemological stance which includes empirical, psychological, and interactional perspectives on the subject matter of cultural studies, and that this hesitance seems to increasingly turn into an unfortunate ability to hush up and camouflage this methodological reticence by all sorts of rhetorical maneuvers and recurrent lip-service of interdisciplinarity – reaching out, for instance, even to the neuro-sciences.

Therefore, the way to go for interdisciplinary socio-cultural (media) interaction studies is, as KAPLAN in her above quoted fleeting comment rightly presumed: to engage in qualitative-empirical research on psycho-social phenomena and on media interaction. And such research will not only study what people contend about certain media products or various "kinds of trauma cinema" (KAPLAN xx) but reconstruct the psychological dynamic

of these persons' actual media interaction. Thus, new dimensions and much work lie ahead in qualitative socio-cultural (media) interaction studies.

And while the hesitance of the Geisteswissenschaften to adopt these target is, as stated above, still quite high, some albeit mostly marginalized voices of culture studies have always raised and still raise such questions at least up to the point of text analysis. To mention a view exemplary publications from recent years, Malte STEIN has succinctly shown how the short stories of German 19th century author Theodor STORM have thus far been largely underrated by German Studies in what they may tell us about the subtle indications and mechanisms of inner-family relational destructiveness along the lines of gender and generational differences, and about how these are played out in psycho-dynamic and (inter-)actional respects, and may in the end result in the perpetuation of relational violations and also in impulses of euphoria about issues of national war fare. Martina KOPF recently analysed novels by African women authors Assia DJEBAR and Yvonne VERA as bearing witness of the intricacies of the transgenerational transmission of mental suffering being caused by the history of colonialist warfare, ethnic strive and violence against women, raises the question of how literature may assist in mitigating the horrendous social and psychological consequences of such historical events.

In a similar approach Bettina RABELHOFER looked at texts from turn of the century authors KAFKA, HOFMANNSTHAL, and SCHNITZLER, and what the characters' interactions and self-expressions convey about the psycho-dynamics of relational violence and neglect as ingredients of contemporary patterns of family interaction. So did clinical psychologist Marius NEUKOM by his methodical reading of a text of Robert WALSER (xx HW) and Harald WEILNBÖCK on a novel of Japanese author Haruki MURAKAMI discussing how it reflects the second-generational psychological effects of World War II (xx). Astrid LANGE-KIRCHHEIM, representing the *Freiburger Jahrbuch für Literatur und Psychoanalyse* demonstrated how decades of intense literary studies and also psychoanalytic readings of E.T.A. HOFFMANN's *Der Sandmann* failed to adequately grasp the dynamics of violence and traumatization which is impressively depicted in this short narrative. Other authors from the *Jahrbuch* as Gottfried FISCHER and Carl PIETZCKER presented work of similarly significant implications for socio-cultural (media) interaction studies (xx Trauma Freib und Fischer 2005 xx) . Hannes FRICKE gave insightful comments on the psycho-traumatological implications of various international best-selling novels from recent years (HW xx) and xx DÖRING is presently editing a comprehensive volume presenting films

sujets according to psychic phenomena as they are listed in diagnostic manuals; a comparable selection has been edited by KRONBERG-GOEDDE xx)

What still needs to be achieved, however, is to consolidate an interdisciplinary research approach which consolidates the various methodological elements brings this interdisciplinary research from the fringes of the institution to the center thus avoiding the occational reducing occurring when media narratives are depicted as psycho-diagnostic case studies. Linking up text analysis with psycho-dynamically informed qualitative-empirical research on reader response and media interaction will be essential to achieve this goal.

Completing this qualitative-empirical research design of interdisciplinary culture studies entails combining both reader response and text analysis and putting the results in mutual perspective while not confounding the two areas of investigation which are methodically different but equally rest on (inter-) action theoretical foundations.