

CONTESTED MEANINGS: Audience Studies and the Concept of Cultural Identity

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RESUMO

The aim of the essay is twofold: First, through a literary exposé, André Jansson tries to come to terms with the meaning of *cultural identity*. How shall the concept be theoretically defined? And how shall it be distinguished from the general concept of identity, and from more particular (and often very recklessly used) types, such as collective identity or social identity? Second, he makes an analysis of how the concept of cultural identity is related to media use. What does the interaction look like? And how shall the concept of cultural identity be approached within audience studies?

Palavras-chave: Cultural identity. Habitus. Globalization. Audience studies. Gratifications paradigm.

1 INTRODUCTION: Why Cultural Identity?

During the last one and a half year I have been working in a research project called *Cultural Identities in Transition* — a project which has the aim of studying the relation between people's media use and their creation and re-creation of identities. One of the main reasons to focus on cultural identities is precisely the assumption that they are *in transition*. In a similar way book titles like *Questions of Cultural Identity* ([Hall and du Gay, 1996](#)) and *Cultural Identity and Global Process* ([Friedman, 1994](#)) are idiosyncratic of the current debate within the social sciences. The concept of cultural identity has been put to the fore primarily because its meaning is no longer self-evident. Due to the social and cultural changes of modernity, people's senses of belonging have in many cases become more ambivalent and, hence, put into question. Globalization, mediatization and the liberation of previously marginalized social groups are examples of processes that together have contributed to the problematization of (cultural) identity. Therefore, the growing amount of research dealing with these questions is primarily to be considered as a symptom of the increasing ambivalence of contemporary society.

In this context it is important to analyze the functions and meanings of media. The expansion and differentiation of the media system is one important feature of the post-industrial period of modernity. Since the process of social differentiation has been accompanied by a further specialization of the media output, media use has become more individualized, and hence also more group specific. It is no longer possible to nourish a unified national culture around a unified flow of media messages or mediated cultural symbols, as it was for example during the early days of broadcasting in most European countries ([Scannell, 1992](#); [Morley and Robins, 1995](#): 37-42). Instead, mass media have gained increasing importance as a symbolic energizer of smaller and spatially dispersed cultural communities. The internationally distributed and highly

commercialized media messages contribute to the creation of lifestyles that are not locally anchored — lifestyles that, nevertheless, are sources of identity and ontological security, to speak with Giddens (1991: 36ff). People of today have to navigate among a vast range of mediated lifestyle alternatives, concerning more or less important aspects of life. Consequently, media use both affects and is affected by the constitution of people's cultural identities.

It seems reasonable to argue that the concepts of lifestyle and identity together constitute one important link between the micro and the macro contexts of media consumption (Reimer, 1997). As more culturalistic approaches to the study of audiences have emerged — partly as reactions to the previously dominating uses and gratifications paradigm — this link has become further important to analyze. The intensified interest in the cultural meanings of media use and its position within the context of everyday life, most distinctly expressed within ethnographic research (Morley, 1986; Lull, 1990), must be accompanied by a corresponding interest in the overarching macro structures. However, this has far from always been the case. Studies within both media ethnography and reception analysis have often focused solely on the domestic context, without considering the conditioning links that connect the particular to the general. As for example Moores (1993: 118-24) and Reimer (1998) has pointed out, the cultural sociological works of Bourdieu (1979/1984) are perhaps still the most fruitful attempts to analytically bridge this gap, introducing the concept of *habitus* as the mediator between structural forces and individual practices. These ideas are important to consider within the further development and application of the concept of cultural identity.

This is not to say that the concept of cultural identity hasn't been discussed within audience studies. Several research projects have actually been conducted, dealing with questions that more or less explicitly are termed 'questions of cultural identity' (Liebes and Katz, 1989; Gillespie, 1996; Gonzales, 1997). What these studies have in common, though, is that no theoretical definition of cultural identity is presented — even if (or precisely because) the concept is often referred to as something problematic. Behind this lies the fact that all mentioned studies primarily have focused on particular national, ethnic or religious groups — a condition which implies that the notions of cultural identity have been based on a pre-given set of factors. On the other hand, there are also examples of studies which have concentrated on specific aspects of identity, for example 'gender identities', and hence implicitly may have contributed to a broader understanding of *cultural* identity as well (Hobson, 1982; Modleski, 1982; Ang, 1985). In order to work out a comprehensive theory of

cultural identity these ambiguities must be solved. We need a theoretical definition that is open to plurality and changes.

Put very briefly, the above mentioned situation motivates why I am writing this paper. My aim is twofold: First, through a literary exposé, I will try to come to terms with the meaning of *cultural identity*. How shall the concept be theoretically defined? And how shall it be distinguished from the general concept of identity, and from more particular (and often very recklessly used) types, such as collective identity or social identity? Second, I want to make an analysis of how the concept of cultural identity (as I define it) is related to media use. What does the interaction look like? And how shall the concept of cultural identity be approached within audience studies?

2 IDENTITY AND THE CULTURAL

Since the term *cultural identity* consists of two contested words, it is not surprising that it has been used in various ways in different contexts — and often without any explicit definition. In the preface to the book *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Hall and du Gay, 1996), which is based on the contributions to a series of seminars at the Open University, the editors state that the aim of the volume is not to provide a complete account of the concept of cultural identity: 'Rather, the collection aims to open up a wide range of significant questions and possible lines of analysis.' Consequently, concerning the definition of cultural identity, the book raises more questions than it answers. The articles are very heterogeneous depending on whether they emphasize 'culture' or 'identity', as well as depending on the very meaning of 'culture' and 'identity'. In my view, the book serves as a good reflection of the quite fragmentary state of research.

This example suggests that it may be fruitful to discuss the two semantic components 'culture', or 'the cultural', and 'identity' separately. Through a double problematization it will be easier to distinguish between cultural identity and, on the one hand, concepts like 'social identity' and 'collective identity', and, on the other hand, concepts like 'cultural community'. To start with identity, is to start at the core.

2.1 Identity: Questions of Relatedness and Separateness

Even if the nature of human identity is contested, within the extensive literature on the theme there seems to be one key idea that is pervading, almost irrespective of research tradition: The concept of identity deals with the relation between self and society or the self and the Other. This is true for most psychoanalytical theories of

individuation and integration, as well as for sociological and social psychological theories, discussing the relationship between individuals and collective communities. In the following section I will take a closer look at this shared theoretical trail.

Within psychoanalysis the definitions of identity have very often been derived from analyses of personal development among small children and adolescents — the processes of individuation and integration — or of personality disturbances, such as narcissism. These two areas of research are likewise connected to each other, since an individual's sense of well being depends on the relation between individuation and integration. In order to establish a balanced self, the individual has to experience both a sense of autonomous existence (through individuation), and a sense of belonging in the social world (through integration). Especially during early childhood and adolescence the conditions of these processes are of crucial concern. The infant has to be accepted and recognized by its caretakers in order to gradually conceive of itself as an autonomous being. During adolescence (or the period of secondary individuation) the individual must find new personal models and abandon those internalized during childhood. To be able to become independent of the parents and create a new self-image, hence, the young person has to be confirmed and respected within a broader social group ([Erikson](#), 1959; [Blos](#), 1962; [Jacobson](#), 1964).

Even if the interplay between individuation and integration is most apparent, or even critical, during early childhood and adolescence, the same process is also important later in life. During all stages of life the individual has to balance between separateness and relatedness ([Lichtenstein](#), 1977), or between the development of a personal and a social aspect of identity. The establishment of a coherent sense of identity depends on whether there exists a correspondence between the individual's perception of herself as, on the one hand, an autonomous and consistent human being, and, on the other hand, an incorporated part of social life. In this way all people, theoretically, live under the threat of losing their identity; either through a return to a kind of symbiotic phase (total integration), or through social isolation (total separation) (*ibid.* 184).

Additionally, the intricate balancing between separateness and relatedness leads to a paradoxical state of incompleteness. Identity is never a finished project — an issue that [Simmel](#) discussed from a sociological standpoint already in 1908 (1968: 21-30). In Simmel's words we are all fragments of, or attempts to, our own identity. Since our personal character is not only individually experienced, but to a certain extent exists in the eyes of the Other, we can never *be* our identity. This means that identity always remains an imaginative construction; an absolute convergence between the

individual experience and the external views of the self is impossible. A corresponding point was made within the social interactionism of Mead a few decades later. In the book *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead discusses the importance of 'generalized Others' within the process of individual self-development. To become a social being, the individual has to reflect upon how his or her existence is perceived in the eyes of the social group, which he or she belongs to. The assumed attitudes and values of the social context — either a group or an integral society — are, hence, representations of the 'generalized Other'. Without the ability to make this self-reflection, distinguishing between 'I' and 'me', the individual will not be able to adapt to the social world.

Mead's discussion tells us that although identity may always be an unfinished project, or an idealization, the individual can all the same maintain a *sense of identity*, based on self-reflection; that is, an act of interpretation through which the subject tries to adjust the personal and the social aspects of identity into a coherent form (Holzner, 1973/1978: 298-302). Consequently, self-reflection is something that all people are involved in continuously in everyday life, trying to adapt to the various social situations they encounter. Goffman (1974: 124) considers this process of social adaptation a performance:

The performance, in the restricted sense in which I shall now use the term, is that arrangement which transforms an individual into a stage performer, the latter, in turn, being an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offence, and looked to for engaging behavior, by persons in an 'audience' role.

Goffman's example illuminates the crucial role of self-reflection within the intricate balance between separateness and relatedness. The social actor must always try to interpret and foresee the reactions of his or her 'audience' — reactions that are due to performance. Additionally, in order to remain an actor, the individual cannot be without neither the 'audience' nor their response to his or her behaviour. In such a case, he would reach the point of total separation.

It is in this context we find the reasons for why identity has become an increasingly problematized concept; the Western processes of modernization have made it a more difficult task for the individual to adapt to the surrounding society. Since society has become more differentiated and dynamic, the relation between separateness and relatedness must be more frequently reflected upon than before. 'Who am I?' and 'Where do I belong?' are significant questions of modern identities. As Stephen Mennell (1994: 179-180) stresses, the traditional interactionist theories have to be reworked to better suit the complexities of contemporary social life. 'The

generalized other' is far from unitary, and is to a greater extent existing beyond the face-to-face group or the locally fixed community. I will return to these complexities in sections below.

3 THE CULTURAL: Questions of Signification and Interpretation

In an article called *The Cultural Formations of Modern Societies*, [Robert Bocoock](#) (1992) discerns at least five different meanings of the word culture: It may refer to (1) the cultivation of land and cattle; hence leading to the word agriculture; (2) the cultivation of the human mind, expressed through art or civilization; (3) a general process of social development, connected to the Enlightenment; (4) the meanings, values and life forms which are shared by for example a certain nation, a group or a social class; and (5) the social practices through which meanings are produced and exchanged among people. Bocoock's five definitions are derived from various kinds of literature, illuminating that the concept of culture points at different dimensions of society and therefore is relevant within different areas of research. However, the last definition seems to be the one that is best suited to describe what 'the cultural' in cultural identity is. This definition has emerged through the development of cultural studies and the interest in the everyday life of ordinary people, and is thus connected to the discourse that most intensely has come to focus on the questions of contemporary identities.

The advantages of tracing culture to people's meaningful practices have also been clearly articulated within recent anthropological literature – contrasting this conceptualization from the notion of culture as a shared set of meanings among a delimited group of people (definition 4). In the latter form the concept of culture converges with the concept of community. In a study of the cultural communities of Southall, London, [Gerd Baumann](#) (1996: 191) came to the following conclusion:

[...] the variety of *community* definitions [among the inhabitants of Southall] would appear to offer strong evidence that *communities* are processually constructed, rather than found as the ready-made social correlates of consistent and bounded *cultures*.

To equate culture and community, thus, is a way of reifying culture, turning it into a stable entity instead of a contested process of meaning creation. We may then, for example, speak of 'our culture' as opposed to 'their culture', falsely implicating a sharp borderline and an internal cultural homogeneity that rarely exists ([Marcus](#), 1992: 315-316; [Keesing](#), 1994; [Featherstone](#), 1995: 102-108). As Keesing (1994: 302-303)

argues, notions of symbolic meaning cannot simply be assumed to be shared within a certain group of people, since there will always be cultural encounters, leading to internal and external tensions and thereby to a successive transformation of cultural patterns. It is no longer useful to perceive of culture as a rigid structure, manifested through public ceremonies and rituals, as was the case in the early, essentialist anthropological investigations of foreign tribes and communities. The focus has, for good reasons, shifted to the creation and negotiation of meaning within people's day-to-day activities. Accordingly, Keesing is avoiding the word 'culture', as a noun, in favour of 'the cultural'.

To state that culture fundamentally is about meaning production is not a controversial move, however. Rather, it could be seen as an identification of the smallest common denominator among the definitions of culture presented by Bocock – excluding the one connected to agriculture. In a similar manner [Clifford Geertz](#) in his classical essay *Thick Description* (1973/1993: 5) gives an essentially semiotic oriented description of culture, considering culture as the 'webs of significance' spun between people through their own social actions. To study cultural phenomena anthropologically is to search for the complexities of meaning underlying these social actions and the various artefacts that accompany them. Hence, the web metaphor is very fruitful, since it doesn't leave us with the illusion that there can exist unitary and clearly demarcated cultures.

To illustrate the task of ethnography, Geertz (1973/1993: 5-10) uses an example from Gilbert Ryle about the many possible meanings of a wink. What in one situation could be nothing but a quick, involuntary twitch with the eye, could in another situation be a very deliberate signal to a special person, *meaning* something more than the mere physical movement. Depending on whether the two persons are aware of the same cultural code system or not, the intended gesture will be understood or misunderstood. And, the other way around, a simple twitch may be ascribed a meaning that was not at all intended. In the cultural life of ordinary people, webs of significance are continuously worked upon, or negotiated, giving rise to sophisticated expressions like irony, parody or understatements. Ethnography, through interpretation and thick description, has the aim of understanding these webs and sorting them out. What is behind the wink? And behind that?

In this context there are obvious connections between Geertz' interpretative anthropology and the hermeneutics of, for example, [Gadamer](#). In Gadamer's (1976: 100-102) words, there can never be a final interpretation, since the interpretation is always 'on its way' (*unterwegs*). This is true both for the hermeneutic praxis of

people's everyday life — in their striving to make sense of the world — and for hermeneutics as scientific task. If one equates every cultural phenomenon with a verbal sentence, which could be seen as the archetype of meaning production, the insights of hermeneutics tell us that every such sentence must be seen as an answer to a question. And the only way to understand this sentence is to search for the question which it is an answer to. This is how people's everyday practices become cultural; through the continuous and never completed interplay between signification and interpretation. This is also why all cultural research in itself must be interpretative; the dynamic character of culture makes any search for absolute laws pointless. Since the aim is to understand the meanings of social practices, the researcher has to ground his analytical work in people's lived experience. Both in ethnography and hermeneutics the difficult task becomes to transpose oneself into the situation of the other — making one's own interpretative horizon converge with the other's (Gadamer, 1960/1989: 300-307). Consequently, cultural analyses will always remain unfinished interpretations of interpretations.

However, neither cultural praxis (referring to both signification and interpretation), nor cultural research can be described as without any kind of structure. Since 'the cultural' emanates from people's wishes to understand each other, it cannot arise in a social vacuum, but only through the symbolic exchange between people. This implies that culture is never an individual matter (however it may seem so). Instead, the continuous cultural praxis creates more or less structured interpretative communities — or webs of significance, to use the words of Geertz. The existence of such communities is the very foundation of people's ability to attain a certain degree of intersubjective understanding. Even if it perhaps would be too much to say that a person is never alone in making a certain interpretation of a certain expression, since every individual has a unique biography and thereby unique cultural experiences, it is clear that the social interaction within a society always leads to the development of shared schemes of basic cultural interpretation. It is a required condition if a fake-wink shall be understood as a fake-wink.

To stress the importance of interpretative communities is, nevertheless, very different from speaking of 'cultures'. As I stated above, it is an act of simplification to outline sharp borderlines, even between groups, which are very distinct concerning their cultural frames of references. This way of reasoning emanates often from a reductionist, as well as traditional, view of what constitutes culture. For example, it is a very widespread notion that culture primarily is about language, religion, race, and ethnicity — while the above discussion tells us something else. Culture is about

meaning, and what becomes meaningful is determined from the relation between signification and interpretation. Factors like the above mentioned shall in this matter be seen as conditioning factors, and nothing else.

4 CULTURAL IDENTITY AS HERMENEUTIC RELATEDNESS

The meaning of cultural identity is more intricate than the above heading may indicate. However, after having described what I consider to be the key features of identity on the one hand and the cultural on the other, the formulation of 'hermeneutic relatedness' seems to be a reasonable, although not very beautiful, association. Cultural identity, in my view, is the subjective experience of being part of what I in the previous section called interpretative communities or cultural communities. If the creation of the personal and social aspects of identity is about balancing relatedness (integration) and separateness (individuation), and thus establishes a sense of personal coherence, then the creation of cultural identity is about making the integrative aspect hermeneutically meaningful. If the development of personal and social identity is about being recognized as a human being, then cultural identity is about being recognized as a hermeneutic being ([Taylor](#), 1994). Hence, cultural identity can never — although situated in the individual — be the correlate of separateness, since people's hermeneutic praxis is always connected to, or emanating from, social interaction. This idea corresponds essentially to Charles Taylor's (1994) view of human identity as dialogic in character, based on internalized symbolic skills.

What is important to stress, and what makes cultural identity complex, is that people never experience an entirely homogeneous and stable cultural identity. This is due to two interconnected conditions: First, it is clear that cultural communities, perceived as networks, are rarely unitary in themselves. As explained above, there are both internal and external contradictions. Second, every individual is to some extent involved in more than one single interpretative community. For example, it is possible — in ideal terms — to speak about a Swedish cultural community, based on a certain language, certain codes of behaviour and so on. But a person cannot only be a Swede. He or she may also be involved in the Christian church, the trade union and the supporter club of IFK Göteborg — all examples of established communities that condition certain cultural code systems. Like all other individuals, consequently, the 'Christian working class football fan', is experiencing a plural and dynamic cultural identity.

Since cultural communities are established through the interplay between signification and interpretation, the same must be true also for cultural identity. That is, the individual's sense of belonging to a cultural community demands a situation in which he is able to understand the intersubjectively established sign system, as well as making himself understood as a member of the community. The latter circumstance is especially interesting from a scientific point of view, because it suggests that *expressions of cultural identity* may be observed — as is the case within for example ethnography. In this matter I agree with Kirsten [Drotner](#) (1996: 12), who suggests that cultural identity may be 'analyzed as socially located articulations of meaning, articulations that are produced via various sign systems so as to form interpretative repertoires of "who I am"'.

However, it would be naive to assume that all components of cultural identity are expressed or signified in a similar manner or with the same strength, and that the researcher therefore could be able to grasp the truth of a person's cultural identity through mere observation of signifying practices. Some aspects of cultural identity may be continuously repressed. Other aspects may be expressed only within a certain spatial, temporal or social context. This means that although a person has the cultural skill to understand (through adequate interpretation) and to be understood (through adequate expression) within a cultural community, there most often exists an opportunity to choose whether to express or not to express. To express a component of cultural identity — for example by wearing an IFK Göteborg scarf — is to make it interpretable in the eyes of other people.

The example of the football supporter can also be extended in order to illustrate the multi-layered character of cultural identities. If we presume that the young Swedish supporter is walking down the street of Glasgow, on his way to a football match between Glasgow Rangers and IFK Göteborg, it is likely that only a few people that he meets would recognize him as a supporter of that very team. Many people would perhaps categorize him as a 'football supporter from somewhere else than Glasgow', while others might think of him as 'a person who like a particular sports team'. And perhaps — just to take this example to its end point — in the eyes of persons without any interest in sports he might in some cases be considered a 'crazy youngster who is wearing a scarf in the midst of summer'. The example shows how the expressions of cultural identity may be ascribed different meanings depending on the cultural context in which the hermeneutic process takes place. It also shows how hard it is to identify any sharp borderlines between cultural communities: Exactly how interested in football are you?

One distinction that I, nevertheless, think is fruitful to make — at least on a theoretical level — is to distinguish cultural communities and cultural identities from *expressive communities* and *expressive identities*. If the former concerns the *ability* to make meaningful interpretations and expressions among other people, the latter concerns whether any group specific expressions *are really made*. If we study the expressions of football supporters at a football arena — including gestures, verbal behavior, clothes and so on — we may conclude that most of them, at least in that very moment, are part of an expressive community, experiencing a shared expressive identity. However, just as in the case of cultural communities, we may also discern more narrow expressive communities. To notice the difference between the supporters of Glasgow Rangers and IFK Göteborg is an easy task in this context.

It seems reasonable to argue that the concept of expressive identity is related to cultural identity as the written or spoken word is related to language. As cultural beings all people have the opportunity to use or not to use learned code systems for expressive purposes. To express or not to express certain aspects of cultural identity is a decision of whether to participate in the game of difference or not. The idea that people's manifestations of identity often is more about being *unlike* the Others than being *like* one's cultural compatriots, has been discussed in several articles and books ([Rapoport](#), 1981: 14-19; [Schlesinger](#), 1987: 235; Morley, 1992: 76-69; [Calhoun](#), 1994: 20-26; Mennell, 1994; Featherstone, 1995: 110; Hall, 1996: 3-4). These texts particularly deal with how 'we-images' and senses of 'collective identity' are maintained and reproduced within pre-established social communities, for example nations — sometimes with the dubious aim of creating a united or unitary 'culture'. A corresponding theme is also prevailing in Bourdieu's (1984) extensive works on how sociocultural distinctions are established through people's more or less calculated judgements of taste. In this case it is the class structures that are reproduced through cultural practices. However, according to leading theorists, during the period of late modernity many of these previously clearly demarcated communities have lost some of their significance. In addition, new cultural and expressive communities have arisen, making the creation of identities an increasingly ambiguous and contested project.

5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LATE MODERNITY

As I pointed out in the introduction, the reasons for why cultural identity has become increasingly problematized during the last few decades, may be traced to the extended processes of modernization. In the Western world the relation between individual and

society is today more ambivalent than ever before, since the power of macro-structures has weakened and the individual has become more mobile — in social and cultural, as well as spatial terms. In this chapter I will present the main patterns of these social and cultural changes, primarily based on the analyses of [Berger](#) et al (1973) and Giddens (1991). Connecting these theories to my above discussion of the nature of cultural identity, I will argue that contemporary cultural theory must become more open to the multi-layered character of cultural identity.

6 THE PLURALIZED SOCIETY AND THE PLURALIZED SELF

When approaching the problem of identity creation in late modernity, it is fruitful to take the following statements, quoted from [Kluckhohn and Murray](#) (1948: 35), as a point of departure:

Every man is in certain respects

- a. like all other men
- b. like some other men
- c. like no other man

This is of course a truism. Hardly no one would deny that every individual to a certain extent is unique, but all the same has something in common with all other human beings — more with some people than with others. As I have explained above, the interplay between separateness and relatedness, between individualism and collectivism, is an essential ingredient within all theories of identity. But Kluckhohn and Murray's three statements can also be interpreted as three stages of social development. Even if all three statements to some degree have been true in all times, the theoretical discourse of modernization and post-modernization suggests that society have become more individualized. Thus, men and women of today are said to be more like no other man or woman than was common in earlier days. Structural forces like kinship, religion and traditions have lost their determining potential concerning people's identities, and locally anchored communities have lost their stability, due to industrialization and urbanization. Altogether, the societal transformations of modernity have come to mean that people's identities are no longer pre-given, but more often problematized (Giddens, 1991; [Beck](#), 1992).

The process of individualization is intrinsically connected to what Berger et al (1973: 63-82) have called the *pluralization of life-worlds*. The assertion of this concept is that modern people increasingly are alternating between various social arenas. Compared to pre-modern society, in which people lived in more stable and integrated

communities, the features of modernity are social plurality and mobility. People have got more specialized jobs, they live and work in separate places, they travel in their free time, they attend public events and so on. Consequently, the typical modern, urbanized individual may during one single day pass through a range of situations and contexts, which all demand of him certain interpretations and certain modes of behaviour, or 'presentations of self' (to use Goffman's phrase). This implies that contemporary people have to be culturally very dynamic, in order to cope with their complex life environment. There is no longer a single scheme of interpretation that transcends the culturally diverse segments of everyday life (Berger et al, 1973: 64):

[...] compared with modern societies, most earlier ones evinced a high degree of integration. Whatever the differences of various sectors of social life, these would 'hang together in an order of integrating meaning that included them all. This integrating order was typically religious. For the individual this meant quite simply that the same integrative symbols permeated the various sectors of his everyday life. Whether with his family or at work or engaged in political processes or participating in festivity and ceremonial, the individual was always in the same 'world'.

As indicated in this quote, the pluralization of life-worlds is not an entirely social transition; it is a cultural transition as well. Since people's everyday lives have become socially segmented, the necessity of continuous cultural alteration has increased — leading to a corresponding dispersion and pluralization of cultural identity (Marcus, 1992: 315-316). In a manner similar to how Berger et al (1973) speak about the 'homeless mind', it seems therefore reasonable to speak about an emerging homelessness also concerning cultural identity.

Another important reason to the problematization of cultural identity, connected to the cultural pluralization of everyday life, is the pluralization of choice (Giddens, 1991: 80-88). People's life careers are today relatively open, due to the weakening power of traditions and historically derived patterns of life. This is true in connection to work and family as well as leisure time. Young people have a greater freedom to make life plans that diverge from their parents' experiences and from the prevalent choices of the local community. The opportunities of attending higher education or taking jobs abroad are typical modern phenomena that most Western people are aware of and might consider. However, this kind of individual choices are also the cause of conflicts and frustration (Holzner, 1978: 293; Beger et al, 1973: 69-70). Many people have to choose priorities within their own lives, for example between a job career and family life, perhaps leading to a feeling of regret or guilt. In other

cases, on the contrary, the possibility to fulfil one's internalized dreams and plans may show up as nothing but an illusion, since the opportunities of choice are still unevenly distributed between social groups. For example, the norms and values of the educational system usually suit students from the middle classes better than students from the working class, imposing a kind of self-legitimizing system of classification that contributes to the reproduction of pre-established social and cultural hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

In general, however, late modern society offers the individual a broadened range of choices. But while the individual, in Giddens' (1991: 81) words, has 'no choice but to choose', it is at the same time obvious that society offers very limited guidance as to which options should be selected. In order to cope with this complex and somehow confusing situation, the individual has to work out a sort of strategy of life; to establish a certain degree of routinization of practices. This is what Giddens put into the concept of *lifestyle*. Concerning both smaller decisions of everyday life and more consequential ones, the late modern individual is forced to uphold a meaningful coherence and continuity of existence. Otherwise, his or her sense of ontological security (a concept similar to personal identity) will get damaged.

Relating Giddens' discussion of lifestyles to my previous definition of cultural identity, I contend that the emerging significance of lifestyles can be seen as a way of coping with a plural and contested cultural identity (though Giddens himself never mentions the latter concept). Through the development of a coherent lifestyle, i.e. making different kinds of practices and attributes fit together, even the ultimate post-traditional being can manage to experience ontological security. However, within highly pluralized and dynamic life contexts, significantly within metropolitan spaces, this development calls for a sophisticated kind of self-reflection. People's endeavour of being recognized as hermeneutic beings, members of certain cultural communities, becomes an intricate reflexive task. The lifestyle creation is therefore essentially a matter of being like some people and unlike others – a cultural strategy in the game of difference. The lifestyle is to be considered as the structuring principle that governs which aspects of cultural identity shall be accentuated and expressed.

7 A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

According to the above discussions, there seems to be strong arguments that cultural identity has become something increasingly problematic, as well as something increasingly important to study. Then, from a scientific point of view, the following

question emerges: How to approach and comprehend this precarious phenomenon? So far, I have outlined a theoretical definition of cultural identity – a definition that has the strength of being open to both cultural and social changes. But in order to gain substantial knowledge of how cultural identities really are created and re-created, we also require a strategy of *how to think* of the concept in the time being.

The main point I would like to make in this connection is that any notion of cultural identity must be multi-dimensional in nature. In the anthropological literature there has traditionally been a general tendency of discussing the concept of cultural identity only when it is a problematic feature of 'the Other', i.e. when studying people or groups that in Western eyes are considered as 'foreign cultures' (Keesing, 1994). In a similar manner, within media studies cultural identity has been a convenient term to use when discussing the influence of Western culture in the developing world ([Mattelart et al](#), 1984; [Canclini](#), 1997) or when studying the culture of immigrant groups in Western countries (Gillespie, 1995; Baumann, 1996). My aim is not to make any theoretical attack on these studies, since they have contributed to a broader understanding of the nature of contemporary multiculturalism. Rather, I would suggest that this kind of clearly demarcated analysis must be complemented with an inquiry of crosswise character, trying to grasp the multi-layered character of cultural identity. The doors should be left open for the influence of other aspects of cultural identity than ethnicity, nationality, language and religion.

To achieve this open-mindedness, the study of cultural identities has to consider the concept from two different angles (though not necessarily simultaneously): First, there has to prevail a dynamic interpretation of the cultural-contextual *situatedness* of cultural identity; that is, to analyze the plural constitution of cultural identities at a special moment in time. Second, there has to be a focus on the *narrativity* of cultural identity, illuminating its processual development. Since cultural identity is evolving through the cultural experiences people make during their life, the foundations of its character may be found in people's memories.

As an example of how to approach the cultural-contextual dimension, I will refer to the concept of *cultural referents*, introduced by [Renato Ortiz](#) (1997) in the article *World Modernity and Identities*. This concept is explicitly supporting the idea of cultural multi-dimensionality (ibid. 38):

Thus, I can propose a preliminary definition of identity: it is a symbolic construction made in relation to a referent. The types of referent can clearly vary: they are multiple – a culture, the nation, an ethnic group, a colour or a gender. But in any case, identity is the result of a symbolic construction that has these as reference points. Strictly

speaking, it makes little sense to look for the existence of 'one' identity; it would be more correct to think of it in terms of its interaction with other identities, constructed according to other points of view.

Although Ortiz speaks about 'identity' in general, rather than cultural identity, and uses the word 'culture' in a traditional, reifying way, the essential argument is very applicable to the condition of late modernity. To me, the idea of cultural referents seems to be a good way to understand how cultural identities are created in a pluralized social context. Referring to Giddens' notion of 'disembeddedness', Ortiz states that social relations are no longer limited to local interaction, primarily due to the development of communication technology. This new situation implies that the significance of the nation as a cultural referent has become contested by other, locally unfixed communities. Particularly the globalization of culture has engendered new referents of identity; for example internationally distributed and consumed youth cultures. Hence, the creation of cultural identities are increasingly 'deterritorialized' – negotiated not only in relation to the physically present social context, but also in relation to mediated cultural products (Berger et al, 1973: 66; Giddens, 1991: 23-27; Kellner, 1992, 1995: 231-262; Featherstone, 1995: 114-118; Gillespie, 1995: 175-204; Canclini, 1997: 28).

The usefulness of studying the narrativity of identities has been proposed by for example Somers and Gibson (1994) and Finnegan (1997). In congruence with the ideas of Ortiz, Somers and Gibson (1994: 40) state that 'we must reject the temptation to conflate identities with what can often slide into fixed "essentialist" (pre-political) singular categories, such as those of race, or gender'. In order to avoid this reductionism the narrative approach uses 'relationality' as an important analytic variable, focusing on the various and fluctuating sociocultural relations that an individual upholds during different life-episodes. This view of identity formation is much more dynamic than to conceive of people as associated with specific and stable communities, connected to certain cultural interests and characteristics. Which factors, or referents, that are important within different stages of life, are rarely similar to those that are imputed to people from an academic point of view. Rather, the meanings of identities are embedded in the stories and relationships that people themselves consider as essential (ibid. 67). Empirically this means that the analysis of biographies is a convenient way to gain deeper knowledge of the fragmented processes of identity creation. As Marcus (1992: 316) emphasizes, the past that is present in individual and collective memory is 'the crucible for the local self-recognition of an identity'.

In my opinion, however, analyses of both the situatedness and the narrativity of identities must be accompanied by a *critical* account. Because the opportunities to make individual choices are not equally distributed in society, people are not completely free to construct their own private narratives. Rather, the choices that are available, the cultural referents that an individual can relate to, are socially structured. Which kinds of cultural narratives that will predominate within which social groups is a contested matter, related to the formations of cultural power. To understand these mechanisms, it is reasonable to adopt Bourdieu's (1979/1984) theories of economic and cultural capital, including the intricate concept of *habitus*. In relation to the narrativity of cultural identities, *habitus* is to be seen as the set of dispositions that guide people at certain social positions to the making of certain cultural choices. These choices are in their turn leading to new ones, likewise socially structured. In general, people tend to organize their cultural identity in a way that reinforces such cultural skills that are prevailing within their social class, and thus reproducing the hierarchies of cultural identities. But in an individualized and pluralized society there also exist opportunities of negotiation or mere cultural rupture.

Hence, the formation of cultural identities is not a politically unproblematic matter. Both the production and the consumption of cultural goods, as well as the distribution of legitimated cultural tastes (or cultural capital), is linked to power and interest (Keesing, 1994: 309-310; Canclini, 1997: 28-29). This is no less true in relation to mass media. What kinds of media people use and how they use it, is intrinsically connected to the possession of economic and cultural capital, and thus also to cultural identity.

8 THE MEDIAZATION OF CULTURE

The development of mass media and new information technologies is to be seen as one of the most significant forces behind the pluralization of contemporary society. As I have already mentioned, the expansion and diversification of media products have created opportunities for people to negotiate their cultural identities in new ways. An increasing share of people's cultural frames of reference is derived through the uses of media. This is especially obvious in relation to youth culture and new expressive lifestyles, primarily grounded in the arena of popular culture. When speaking of the 'mediation of culture' I am referring to the process through which mediated cultural products have gained importance as cultural referents, and thereby contribute to the

development of new cultural communities. In the following two sections I will present the most important features of this process.

8.1 New Senses of Community

Mass media's potential to create and nourish cultural communities has often been discussed in relation to already demarcated social groups, for example 'the British people' (Scannell, 1992), or 'the European people' (Morley and Robins, 1995). Through the use of mass media, these kinds of groups have been given the adequate cultural material to reinforce a sense of shared cultural identity. The typical example in this context is the former function of national broadcasting. As the range of programming for a long time was very limited in most European countries, both radio and television could gather vast national audiences to listen to or watch the same content. To use [Benedict Anderson's](#) (1983) term; people became part of an 'imagined community'. Although they did not interact socially, they could share a common, national frame of reference.

But since the mass media system have turned more international and commercial, the patterns have started to change. For example, in Sweden most people in the late 1980's could still watch only two public service television channels, and only listen to three public service radio channels. Today the situation is considerably different: Commercial television stations have been introduced, and most households can watch several internationally distributed channels via cable or a satellite dish. Moreover, many local and regional radio stations have been launched, most of them commercial. This situation is not a specifically Swedish phenomenon, but an indication of a general process of internationalization and commercialization. All over the world people's cultural environments are changing quite rapidly.

Hence, mass media of today do not only nourish the cultural patterns of pre-existing communities; they also contribute to the establishment of new, deterritorialized ones. While it becomes more difficult to maintain a national cultural community — since the differentiated media output rather sustains a polarization between specialized audience segments (Reimer, 1998) — people can experience new senses of community through the sharing of a lifestyle and a certain cultural taste. Such communities are significantly trans-national and developed in relation to popular culture, including advertising. In this regard the media function as an 'image bank' from which individuals may adopt specific cultural attributes according to lifestyle (Kellner, 1995: 257):

My analyses thus suggest that in a postmodern image culture, the images, scenes, stories, and cultural texts of media culture offer a wealth of subject positions which in turn help structure individual identity. These images project role and gender models, appropriate and inappropriate forms of behavior, style and fashion, and subtle enticements to emulate and identify with certain identities while avoiding others.

Kellner's analysis corresponds to my previous discussion of the lifestyle as a strategy in the game of difference. In relation to media, the lifestyle functions as a kind of 'cultural filter', deciding which images to look for and which images to incorporate as identity defining features. Hence, while media in general support the development of *cultural communities*, there is no doubt that visual media in particular, like magazines and television, have come to play a crucial role for the development of *expressive communities* (Featherstone, 1991: 66-72; Gibbins and Reimer, 1995). In this context I would even argue that the reflexive media culture (intrinsically connected to consumer culture) has lead to the development of a range of *peripheral* interpretative communities, which are hermeneutically accessible only to limited groups of people. As the mediated experiences of distant, even fictive, realities have increased, there has also emerged a larger symbolic battery for cultural distinction. The number of expressive communities, which all try to create specific cultural codes and thereby distinguish themselves from other communities, has increased — a situation which implies that more cultural products are produced and distributed only to make sense within specialized groups. As [Lash and Urry](#) (1994: 111-123) point out, a new reflexivity within the culture industries resembles the cultural reflexivity of late modern individuals.

What becomes paradoxical within this development, however, is that the more mediated experiences people potentially can use to create their cultural identity, and the larger the intersubjectively shared life-world becomes — the more cultural symbols will remain beyond the horizon of interpretation. This is, for example, obvious in advertising: the advertiser presumes that the target group has the adequate cultural competence, the adequate hermeneutic skills, to make the 'right' interpretation of the message. This balance between encoding and decoding has become especially intricate since the advent of lifestyle advertising, in which informative arguments have been replaced by an image based game of connotations ([Leiss et al](#), 1997: 225-284). Additionally, very often the meanings of the inscribed messages depend upon the audiences' competence in discovering intertextual relations ([Fowles](#), 1996: 90-93). Thus, if the advertisement reaches the wrong target group, or if the characteristics of

the target group diverge from the presumption — then the message will perhaps make no sense at all.

Consequently, mass media's role in the creation of cultural identities is getting increasingly complex the more comprehensive and diverse the output is, and the more media use becomes a natural element of people's everyday lives. The cultural influence of mass media is not as direct and as uniform as was for example argued by the early media imperialist thinkers of the 1960's and 1970's ([Schiller](#), 1969, 1974; Mattelart, 1974/1980, 1976/1979). Their main thesis — that the global distribution of mass produced American popular culture erodes the authentic cultural patterns of other countries, hence leading to a gigantic process of Americanization — is clearly diverging from the hermeneutic notion of culture which I have presented above. It totally neglects the interactive and negotiated character of the cultural. It, paradoxically, denies the existence of those cultural patterns that American culture is assumed to wipe out. Several empirical studies have later demonstrated how media use is embedded in a complex web of social and cultural relations, which makes its consequences difficult to interpret, and more so to predict: [Martín-Barbero](#) (1988) has through studies in South America found how a range of conditions in people's everyday lives influence their uses of mass media; Katz and Liebes (1990) have in group interviews analysed how the American TV serial *Dallas* was interpreted within different ethnic/national communities in Israel, USA and Japan; Miller (1992) has described the highly localized appropriation of the American soap opera *The Young and the Restless* in Trinidad. From these and other studies one may conclude, as [Thompson](#) (1995: 174) argues, that people are making sense of the media according to their culturally derived frames of references:

While communication and information are increasingly diffused on a global scale, these symbolic materials are always received by individuals who are situated in specific spatial-temporal locales. The appropriation of media products is always a localized phenomenon, in the sense that it always involves specific individuals who are situated in particular social-historical contexts, and who draw on the resources available to them in order to make sense of media messages and incorporate them into their life. And messages are often transformed in the process of appropriation as individuals adapt them to the practical contexts of everyday life.

However, this is not to say that the text is without any significance in itself. For example it would be naive to suppose that the US domination of popular culture didn't mean anything to the creation of cultural identities. But since the cultural arises from

the relation between signification and interpretation, it seems logical to emphasize *both* texts *and* contexts.

9 MEDIA INTERACTIONISM

This section has the aim of weaving together the essence of my previous discussions, in order to introduce a theory of *media interactionism*. While it was possible to create a general theory of cultural identity from the mixture of psychoanalytic, interactionist, anthropological and hermeneutic theories, there are still some dark spots left to illuminate concerning the significance of media use in the construction and expression of cultural identities. As I have just demonstrated, the expansion of the media sector has led to the emergence of communities that are not specifically considered within a traditional interactionist approach. These shortcomings can be overcome through a closer examination of the specific features of mass media as an aggregate of cultural referents.

To start with, I would like to state that mass media can hardly be termed 'one cultural referent among others'. Clearly the differentiation of the media system implies that people's interactions with the media are far from one and the same thing, having a general cultural significance. Therefore it seems more reasonable to speak of *mediated cultural referents* as a type, distinct from socially experienced referents. The diversity among mediated cultural referents is primarily found along two dimensions. First, it relates to the question of whether the referents support *change or reproduction* of cultural identities. Typical examples of the former are youth lifestyles connected to popular music and fashion, exposed in such media as MTV, trend magazines and advertising. In these cases media's connection to the consumption industry is a driving force behind the frequent alterations between different styles and fashions. The emergence of reflexive production of consumer goods, demarcating the shift from 'Fordism' to 'post-Fordism', demands the continuous creation of new concepts to be offered on the symbolic market (Lash and Urry, 1994: 60-65; Slater, 1997: 189-193). Typical examples of reproductive mediated cultural referents are those who converge with already established referents. Much of the contents of national broadcasting and local radio stations and newspapers support the reproduction of localized cultural communities. Magazines and journals oriented towards specific professions or interest groups are also mainly reproductive — if consumed by the intended target group.

Second, mediated cultural referents may support either *heterogenization* or *homogenization* of cultural identities. In this matter a corresponding distinction prevails between specialized media and popularized media. While the former are directed towards smaller target groups, such as niche markets or minority groups, the latter appeal to mass audiences. As a good illustration of this relationship serves the archetypical public broadcasting schedule, in which culturally homogenizing television shows are aired at prime time, while more narrow programmes appear at less convenient times. Hence, the logic of the market — which is increasingly diffused to the public service sector — is also reproductive; programmes which have the potentially largest audiences, programmes that appeal to the smallest common cultural denominator, are scheduled in order to fulfil this supposition ([Hoskins and Mirus, 1988](#)).

Despite the differentiation of mass media, there are at least four main features that mark all interaction between individuals and mediated cultural referents — features which provide a deeper understanding of how the mediatization process influences the creation of cultural identities. First, the interaction with mediated cultural referents is *space-time compressing*. This means that people who use media can relate to events, places and persons which are both spatially and temporally distant. As Thompson (1995: 94) puts it, media users ‘must to some extent suspend the space-time frameworks of their everyday lives and temporarily orient themselves towards different set of space-time coordinates; they become space-time travellers

who are involved in negotiating between different space-time frameworks and relating their mediated experience of other times and places back to the context of their own lives’. This phenomenon is called space-time compression ([Harvey, 1989](#)). Hence, the use of mass media contributes to the broadening of people’s cultural frameworks, or the broadening of their minds (Berger et al, 1973: 67). The expansion of mediated experiences is an important foundation of the development of locally unfixed cultural and expressive communities.

Second, the interaction with mediated cultural referents can be *phantasmagorical*. Through the use of media, people are not only spanning the limits of time and space; they may also step into more or less fictive realities — a liminal realm from which they may get new perspectives on their own everyday existences ([Newcomb and Hirsh, 1984](#)). If tales and literature in pre-modern societies were the prime sources of cultural imagination, the explosion of mediated popular culture is significant for the modern period. Motion pictures, soap operas and advertising are all examples of media contents which generate phantasms among its audiences — phantasms which to a

various degree are used as resources within the creation of cultural identities. For example, studies of female soap opera audiences have showed how this kind of viewing often contributes to the solving of relational issues within people's everyday lives and thus supports their sense of gendered identity (Hobson, 1982; Modleski, 1982; Ang, 1995: 85-97). Another example is consumer culture. According to Campbell (1987: 77-96), the spirit of modern consumerism is about 'the construction of imaginatively mediated illusions' (ibid. 81) which are projected on to everyday life. The transformation of phantasms into actual consumption is a process of identity creation, as well as the pursued consequence of all advertising.

Third, the interaction with mediated cultural referents is *responses*. While the social interaction from which the cultural emanates normally is a mutual and continuous process of signification and interpretation, people's interaction with mass media is monological. One may say that media interaction, or what Thompson (1995: 82-87) calls 'mediated quasi-interaction', gives rise to an imagined cultural relatedness. By consuming mediated images and symbols, for example an advertisement, the individual may experience a sense of belonging to an expressive community – but he is never recognized personally as a hermeneutic being. If a person develops a certain clothing style in relation to a mediated cultural referent, the media icons will nevertheless remain silent and impersonal. This phenomenon has also been advanced by Douglas Kellner (1992, 1995: 231-262). In his discussion of the construction of 'postmodern' identities, Kellner argues that the significance of popular culture has increased. The other-directedness of modern individuals, seeking recognition from a complex social environment, is contested by a postmodern orientation towards media images, exposing highly fragmentary and flexible identities.

Fourth, the interaction with mediated cultural referents is *classifying*. As is illuminated by Bourdieu's (1979/1984) sociology of taste, all cultural practices reveal something about the social actor himself. When an individual consumes a cultural product, the product gets classified according to the cultural status of the consumer. At the same time the classified product is also classifying the classifier, or the consumer. Due to this logic of taste, cultural practices can be used as a means of socio-cultural distinction. Through the maintenance of an exclusive cultural taste, people on higher social positions are distinguishing themselves from people of lower cultural rank, and are hence reproducing the socio-cultural power structures of society. Several studies have shown that this is also true in relation to media. People with large amounts of cultural and economic capital tend to prefer high culture and cognitively oriented media genres, rather than popular culture and affective media genres (

Reimer, 1994, 1998; Andersson and Jansson, forthcoming). Similar results are presented by Brunsdon (1992) and Moores (1996), regarding the low prestige of satellite television among wealthier people. Additionally, there are also distinctions concerning the styles of media use; while people on higher social positions use mass media in a concentrated manner, people on lower positions are more fragmentary or distracted (Andersson and Jansson, forthcoming). Taken together, the combination of media preferences and styles of use contributes to the definition of people's cultural identities. The mediated cultural referent people relate to, and the way they do it, is both influencing and expressing cultural identity.

The classifying function of mass media use presents a good illustration of how the analysis of cultural identities can serve as a link between micro- and macro-structural contexts. Although the appropriation of mediated cultural symbols is primarily situated within people's day-to-day contexts, one must also consider the structural mechanisms that condition how cultural skills are distributed within society. As I have emphasized previously, and which is made very clear in the works of Bourdieu (1979/1984; see also Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), people's cultural preferences and competences do not pop up randomly inside their heads. The symbolic resources which are used in the construction of identities are obviously socially structured. Therefore, media interactionism cannot be a micro social theory. Nor can the empirical examination of media use and cultural identity remain on the micro level, but must be related to and positioned within a macro context.

10 ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUDIENCE STUDIES

The last question I posed in the introduction of this paper was the following: *How shall the concept of cultural identity be approached within audience studies?* The answer to this question is definitely plural; there are indeed several alternative ways to go. This plurality of choices emanates primarily from the fact that there is no one-way relationship between *media use* and *cultural identity*. Instead, the relationship is characterized by a complex interplay, which makes both media use and cultural identity cause and consequence at the same time. In order to understand these complexities I have in this paper discussed three further concepts (at least), which are of crucial importance: *expressive identity*, *lifestyle* and *cultural referent*. These five together constitute a web of relations which has different features from individual to individual and which is continuously negotiated within the personal narrative of cultural identity. Consequently, depending on which relationships are focused, and whether the

aim is to study particular individuals or the constitution of cultural communities, analyses may have different design. I argue that a range of methods is available and suitable for the study of media use and cultural identity, as long as these methods do not implicate an either-or-polarization. To study *only* media use as an expression of cultural identity or *only* the influence of media use on cultural identity will doubtless lead to reductionism.

As an epistemological medicine for reductionism I would like to suggest four keywords, defining the approach of future audience studies focusing on cultural identities. First, it should be *situated*. This suggests that both media use and the creation of identities must be studied as embedded processes, related to both micro- and macro-structural factors. Within audience studies, so far, the latter concern has been emphasized in a minor way. Second, this kind of studies should be *methodologically dynamic*. Both qualitative and quantitative methods ought to be applied. This idea has recently gained further acceptance within audience studies (Moore, 1993; Gillespie, 1995), while it previously was a topic of conflict. The culturalistic orientation of audience studies has implied a valid reaction against the functionalistic uses and gratifications paradigm, but has at the same time exposed a problematic empirical bias towards micro contexts and non-generalizable methods.

In my view, the linkage of micro and macro perspectives and the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods – which is not the same thing – is the only way to get a fully-fledged and cumulative understanding of how cultural identities are constructed in relation to mediated, as well as other, cultural referents. But, all the same, it is a way with alternatives. On the one hand, there is a need for qualitative studies which combine an interpretative cultural analysis with a concern with macro structures. One good example is biographical interviews, trying to grasp the narrative of cultural identities and the memories connected to mass media. This kind of analysis could, although based on only a few interviews, illuminate how structural forces such as social class, gender and ethnicity condition cultural practices, such as media use within different stages of life. Of special interest would be to investigate whether media use in late modernity can function as a means to alter the disposition of *habitus*, and thereby open up new alternatives for the creation of cultural identity. On the other hand, there is also a need for quantitative surveys, lifting for example essential ethnographically derived results to a statistically generalizable level. This could be analyses of which meanings domestic media technologies are ascribed and how these cultural judgements are related to other cultural judgements, to lifestyle practices and

to macro structural factors. Such results are to be considered as articulations of cultural identity.

Third, this kind of research should be *hermeneutically reflexive*. As I have mentioned before, all inquiry focusing on cultural phenomena must be interpretative, since it is dealing with issues which are in themselves interpretations. The basic question in this regard is, as formulated by Marcus (1992: 320), 'whether an identity can ever be explained by a reference discourse when several discourses are in play'. The answer to this question is negative; since cultural identity, as I have defined it, is the experience of being part of an interpretative community, the researcher can never fully grasp it. Analyses of identities can never result in anything else than interpretations of people's own interpretations or expressions – regardless of whether these articulations are gathered through ethnography, reception analysis, biographical interviews, quantitative surveys or something else. But this condition is not an advice to give up cultural inquiry; it is an advice to be even more reflexive.

Fourth, studies of media use and cultural identity should be *critical*. As Keesing (1994: 309) suggests, the production and reproduction of culture must be considered as problematic, since symbolic production is always linked to power and interest. The most extensive analyses of these relationships are so far presented by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1979/1984), demonstrating that the development of lifestyles and cultural tastes is clearly a contested terrain. Consequently, the same has proved to be true in relation to media use, which is at the same time classifying and classified by cultural identity. Thus, to be critical is also a way to contextualize the processes of identity formation – connecting them both to the interests of social groups and to the interests of cultural producers. On a national level there are empirical evidence that the extended and pluralized media landscape implicates a process of cultural polarization, conditioned by social structures (Reimer, 1998). But in times of commercialization and internationalization, when deterritorialized expressive communities are emerging and changing at high speed, critical questions must also be posed on a global level. Are there any losers on the media driven market of contested meanings? And if so, who are they?

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