

Beyond the Pendulum

Critical Genre Analysis of Media-Audience Relations

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There are mounting indications that the heyday of cultural studies in its prevalent audience oriented and ethnographic guise is moving towards an end. The critical voices that have been heard systematically yet sporadically since the end of eighties appear now to be getting louder and gaining strategic impetus. It has become more and more common to run into claims that cultural studies has reached an impasse or drifted into a crisis. Hearing seminar speeches and reading articles with such arguments make one feel that the time might be ripening for a new trend within cultural studies or, even, for (re)inventing a new fashion outside the field. This sense of a deadlock is not lessened by the perception that no fresh names seem to be entering the international (read: Anglo-American) podium of cultural studies nor is there theoretically innovative and ambitious empirical research being done – or at least published.

The by now well-rehearsed tenor of much of the critique, of ethnographically inspired audience studies in particular, has been that its proponents have neglected the economic, political and societal determinations of the daily use and meaning-making of media in favour of the micro processes of media consumption. This favouring, for its part, is seen to be accompanied by a faulty over-estimation of audience activity as well as a similarly mistaken confusing of the multiplicity of decoding with empowering and even resistant social action. At its extreme 'the active audience theory' is labelled as an 'indiscriminate celebration of audience pleasure' (Kellner, 1997: 116) or 'pointless populism' (Seaman, 1992) which in actual practice serve to legitimize both the unequal conditions of reception and the deepening of global commercialization of the media, as well as the neo-liberalist policies that contribute to this development (see also, for instance, Condit, 1989; O'Connor, 1989; Budd et al.,

1989; Carragee, 1990; Evans, 1990; Curran, 1990; Corner, 1991; Gripsrud, 1996; articles in Ferguson & Golding, 1997).

No wonder, then, that in the 'current revisionistic climate' a recurring appeal that one hears (besides that for an increased policy orientation) both from without and within the field of cultural studies is for 'a 'return' to a more social science approach' and with it to questions of cultural power (see Ferguson & Golding, 1997: xv). The most prominent internal critic in this vein is David Morley who has consistently over the years lamented the abstract theorizing and the too strong textualist inclination of especially most American cultural studies. He has insisted that a critical awareness of the broader social, institutional and material foundations of culture and communications should be incorporated into the starting points of cultural studies where it belongs and where it initially also used to be. Now, as 'the momentum of sociological revisionism' is well under way (ibid.: xvii), might Morley's feelings of marginality soon be over?

The call for putting society back in or, differently, for a return to the critical political project of early cultural studies, should of course be appraised in the context of publishing firms' shrewd strategies. It could even be seen as their la(te)st trick to keep the cultural studies iron hot as long as possible. Revealing in this respect is, for instance, that all the 'outstanding and original essays' – as they are so eloquently, and at the same time quite misleadingly¹ praised by the editors – in the recent critically inspired collection *Cultural Studies in Question* (Sage, 1997) happen to be written by the all too well-known Anglo-American authors.

It remains to be seen whether this 'sociological revisionism' will prove attractive and lucrative enough to replace media ethnography and become the new trend of cultural studies. Personally I doubt

this. Be that as it will, something that presents itself as ‘new’ is bound to show up soon – this is dictated already by the insatiable needs of academic publishing business.

Beyond the Pendulum’s Swing

In this article, I will not dwell upon the swing of scholarly pendulum which, for a change, seems to be taking cultural studies towards a supposedly more social and critical ‘macro’ approach after a decade’s dominance of romantic-hermeneutic ‘micro’ orientation. Rather my concern is whether it is possible to find a way round the dualistic either/ors of the pendulum itself as it, in my view, effectively prevents all efforts to rethink and tackle the power-related social and cultural dynamics of meaning – especially in reception. For instance, despite all the calls to the opposite, an antagonism between ‘structural’ and ‘interpretative’ approaches is time and again set up by the participants – be they critics or targets – in the discussion on the state and future of cultural studies. Hence, within the confines set by the pendulum’s swing, it is difficult to pose the question, for instance, of the actual political implications of people’s everyday meaning-making. At the more structural end of the pendulum’s swing, the daily processes of meaning can be rejected as unworthy of serious interest by relegating them to the private, and thereby supposedly insignificant, realm of social reality. At the other end, the issue of audience’s active involvement in and complicity with the reproduction of power relations can equally easily be dismissed as an insulting act by structuralist (political or otherwise) determinists who reduce audience members to cultural dupes.²

As it happens, I very much share the critique by Ferguson and Golding of cultural studies’ drift towards depoliticised textualism, for instance their argument that during this development ‘cultural activities became texts to be read rather than institutions or acts to be analysed’ or that ‘social structure, political force, economic dynamics all appeared to have evaporated by the intense heat of textual ‘interrogation’ (ibid.: xxi). In my view, this critical account quite aptly summarizes the current state of cultural studies in Finland as well. However, I’m not going to rehearse here yet another version of the grand critical narrative of what was done wrong, for what reasons, by whom and how it all should have been done. As I see it, this strategy of accusations does not lead us anywhere but reproduces time and again precisely the dichotomy of structural and interpretative perspectives that fore-

close at the outset the possibility to explore fruitfully the interpenetration of human sense-making activities and social institutions.

In what follows I will advance a view that a socially based and semiotically inspired conception of genre may offer one way beyond the pendulum. It may even help in moving on from merely repeatedly stressing that ‘macro structures can only be reproduced through micro-processes’ and that we should try to integrate the analysis of micro and macro levels (Morley, 1997: 126, 127).

With this specific social semiotic conception of genre I counter-argue the claim, implicit in much of cultural studies’ critique, that culturally oriented audience studies, in particular, does by definition ‘echo the logic of capitalism’ (Gitlin, 1997: 32) or that it is, somehow inescapably, naive and impotent in terms of critical research.³ My contention is that it is important to study audiences’ meaning-making also at a more ‘micro’ level of media reception and use and that this is possible to do in ways that are not necessarily politically affirmative and sociologically irrelevant. However, in order to achieve this, we should not focus on the structural conditions of reception – such as economic inequalities or the ‘realpolitik’ of government and market policies – as somehow having direct and external impact on people’s behaviour (see Ferguson & Golding, *ibid.*: xxiii). Rather, we should pose the question from a more ‘internal’ perspective to concern the ways these ‘mediating factors’ (*ibid.*) actualise and work as integrated and dynamic elements of the daily activities of social actors. Thus we can avoid the mechanistic idea of ‘macro’ determination of human ‘micro’ action as well as the notorious structure-agent dualism thereby invoked, and instead assume a more action-oriented (‘structurationist’) approach.

In short, without in any way denying the importance of the larger social, economic and political settings of audiences’ meaning making, the genre approach proposed here wishes to concentrate on the ways people themselves, in using and interpreting the media, actively partake in reproducing the social power relations and thereby contribute to their own cultural subordination (cf. Grossberg, 1995: 75-76). One point in proceeding from such a starting point is that it might generate insights for not always only talking about, at a general and abstract theoretical level, the determinations and conditions of meaning in reception, but also for opening up opportunities for challenging them in more concrete and particular ways.

From Encoding/Decoding to Cultural (in)Competences

Despite the remarkable popularity the concept of genre has lately gained within cultural media studies, the more theoretical and critical potential of the concept has not so far aroused too much interest. However, in some Nordic scholars' work, one can find gestures towards also a broader and more ambitious conceptualization where attention is paid to the role of genre in mediating between texts and the contexts of their production and/or use. To take a few examples, Jensen (1995: 72) has recently pointed out that genre 'offers a strategic medium level of analysis... integrating social and discursive aspects of communication and implying how particular media texts may be approached by audiences'. Hence, in Jensen's view, 'genres offer a promising avenue for studying mass communication as a cultural practice' (ibid.: 65). Also Hagen (1992: 111), in her study of TV news reception, takes up genre's contextual and mediating role, among other things, in ordering 'the relationship between the producing institution and its audience'. Helland (1995), for his part, presents a culturally inspired, contextual definition of genre and employs it also empirically in his recent study of TV news production.

Whereas both Jensen, Helland and Hagen take as their point of departure Williams' (1977) in itself fruitful conception of genre, I will in the following return to a one-time proposal by David Morley of translating the encoding/decoding model into the framework of genre theory, and suggest that it deserves a closer look. The idea of genre as a part of an overall model for studying mass communication from a cultural perspective disappeared from Morley's own work after his turn to ethnography and the concept has figured in his later writings only in passing and theoretically in a much more modest role. However, Morley's tentative suggestion for a 'genre model' in his critical *Post-script to the Nationwide Audience* study (Morley, 1981) seems to me to have unrealised potential when wanting to get hold of the ways the media-related processes of meaning in reception are implicated in and contribute to the reproduction of social structures and power relations. In the following I will use Morley's proposal as a springboard to sketch a socially based notion of genre for the purposes of critical media analysis.

Two particular points of Hall's (1980) original essay need to be taken up in this connection. First of all, the idea that the encoding/decoding model

would synthesize different perspectives and provide 'an overall model of the communication circuit as it operates in its social context' (Morley, 1980: 9 and 1989: 17) still offers a valid starting point for situating and investigating audience sense-making activities in their broader material and societal settings. Of special pertinence is the view that the processes of mass mediated meaning, as a circuit of interrelated though separate and differently positioned elements of production, textuality and reception, are structured in dominance, that is, under conditions of unequal power relations. As Hall has later put it, somebody always controls the means to signify and represent the world and this control of the 'apparatus of signifying' – by owning the media or writing their texts – puts one in a different position of power over discourse from those who depend on the world's being signified to them (see Angus et al., 1994: 261-63). Or, as the view of symbolic subordination has in several occasions been formulated by Morley, the audience may have power over a text, but it does not have power over the agenda, set by the centralised media institutions, within which that text is constructed and presented. (see, for instance, Morley, 1992: 31).

Also the concept of preferred reading – or, rather, preferred meaning⁴ – that lies at the heart of the encoding/decoding model is important here. The concept points to the ways media texts are structured by signifying mechanisms that promote certain – dominant – meanings and suppress and marginalize others. In other words, the texts are not entirely open-ended but encoded in ways that attempt to 'hegemonize the audience reading' (Angus et al., ibid.: 262). Hence, according to Hall, in preferred meanings we talk about points where 'power intersects with discourse' (ibid.), its workings thereby being recognizable and researchable at the level of textual properties.

As a third pertinent point of the encoding/decoding model one could mention a later specifying addition by Hall, namely that the model was not meant to refer to 'signification in general' but to specific discursive practices, such as that of making television programmes (see Angus et al., ibid.: 259).

As regards Morley's appropriation of the encoding/decoding model, two specifications made by him are of relevance in this connection. Firstly, he formulated the idea of preferred meaning in terms of addressivity, thus stressing the concept's – and, by implication, the whole model's – rhetorical nature. In other words, the text cannot determine actual interpretations but always only invite audience

members to accept the meanings foregrounded in the text. As Morley (1989: 21) puts it, the text may offer the audience ‘specific positions of intelligibility, it may operate to prefer certain readings above others; what it cannot do is to guarantee them’. However, when successful, the rhetorical strategies of the text can be seen to guide audience perceptions and interpretations in quite forceful ways, as the ‘modes of address’ construct our relation to the content of the programme, requiring us to take up different positions in relation to them’ (Morley, 1992: 84). As I shall take up soon, the addressivity of media texts has also powerful social implications.

Secondly, Morley alludes to the textual mode of address as a genre-related issue (see Morley, 1981: 12). Hence, the presentational strategies the encoder employs in order to ‘establish a relationship of complicity with the audience’ (Morley, 1992: 108) and to promote specific meanings in the text, are conditioned by genre conventions.

When turning to Morley’s (1981: 10) actual proposal of ‘translating our concerns from the framework of the decoding model into that of genre theory’, then, one of its prime ideas was the substitution of the model’s three codes by ‘a more developed notion of the complex repertoire of generic forms and cultural competences in play in the social formation’ (ibid.: 10-11). Thus instead of accepting, negotiating or rejecting the dominant propositions (preferred meanings) of the text more or less directly according to their social (class) position, audience members are seen to employ a set of genre-based conventions and rules to make meaning of similarly genre-specific media products (ibid.: 12).

What is important to emphasise here is that competence in a genre can be socially and politically disabling. Namely, the way genre conventions ‘constitute the ground or framework within/on which particular propositions can be made’ (ibid.) is often a very restricted one. To take an example, news genre requires its audience to be competent, most notably, in the codes of elitistically understood public sphere as well as to be familiar with a similarly narrow understanding of specific cultural categories, such as that of gender. (cf. Morley, ibid.: 12-13)⁵

In sum, then, reformulating the encoding/decoding model into a genre model focuses attention on the culturally mediated dynamics of meaning – both in reception and more generally. Crucially, the model connects this genre-based dynamics with the ways mass communication is organized and oper-

ates as an institutionalised social, economic and cultural complex. Furthermore, the question of cultural power is approached in terms of the differentiated cultural conventions, codes and rules that audience members have internalised and use routinely when encountering different kinds of media texts. The core of the critique based on this genre model is that while making it possible for people to interpret the media in culturally appropriate ways, generic competences may at the same time set constraints on their action as social subjects. This means that in employing competently and actively in their meaning-making the conventions of a given genre, people simultaneously partake in sustaining the broader conditions of meaning in reception. Thus problematizing genre conventions would be a step towards – and, in fact, a pre-requisite for – questioning those conditions.

At the level of media texts, the power of genre can be approached as a rhetorical question of addressivity. As mentioned, we are here talking about those presentational strategies that the encoder employs in order to foster audience alignment and identification and to recommend certain meanings instead of some others. It is important to note that in the case of news texts, for instance, the addressivity is established and operates at two analytically distinct levels. First of all, there are the mediating operations of the encoding journalists to which Morley (1992: 84) refers as ‘the framing and linking discourse of the programme’ and which can be fruitfully tackled also by discourse narratological tools (see, for instance, V. Pietilä, 1992; Kunelius, 1996). It is through these genre-conditioned narrating activities that also the ‘newsness’ of news is established and reproduced in the text. On the other hand, the accessed news actors also address the audience in their specific ways. But as the journalists, due to their controlling of the narrator’s discourse, are in the position of organizing and operating the news actors’ voices in the text, the latter’s modes of address are secondary in relation to the actual audience.⁶

Genre and/as Social Action

The genre model outlined above is characteristic of a ‘semiotic’ model as its primary focus is upon the textual, symbolic or representational aspects of meaning, the more mundane aspects remaining outside its scope. The model’s conception of mass mediated processes of meaning as an analytic whole can be described with a metaphor of ‘communicative contract’ where the producers and receivers of,

for instance, the news are seen to share the same conventions concerning the textual characteristics and, by implication, the established cultural status of news. This generic 'news contract' is constantly reinforced also at the level of textual features, most notably in the repetitiveness of strategies of presentation.

Thus within the model, the relation between the media and audiences is approached in terms of textual encounters where symbolic meanings are (re)produced through the employment of genre conventions. Correspondingly, a genre critique in this vein focuses on the representational *differentia specifica* of news, examining, among other things, what kind of positions of intelligibility the news text constructs for the audience to adopt in its meaning-making. The main point of the critique is to make visible that the 'objective mode of address' of the news, based, most notably, on the discursive strategies of immediacy and authentication, is far from socially and politically neutral and innocent. For instance, Connell (1980) points out that the 'transparency-to-reality' effect, created in TV news through different verbal and verbal-visual forms of presentation, fundamentally and effectively relegates the audience to the role of a passive on-looker.

Now, it seems to me that we can get a more nuanced view of the ways the processes of meaning in reception contribute to the sustenance of social and power relations, if we theorise also the more concrete, practical aspects of actual media-audience encounters. By incorporating this understanding as a part of the presented semiotic genre model, it is, in my view, possible to open up a larger analytical framework than the one suggested by Morley in his *Postscript*. In this way, we can also strengthen the genre model's critical edge.

What needs to be paid special attention to here are not, however, the immediate contexts and situations of everyday media use and reception as such, but rather the way they are organized into and largely take place as fixed and self-evident habits. For instance, viewing the news on TV or hearing them on radio forms for many people a specific 'genre routine' which is performed more or less automatically, by taking only a scant notice of the news text, not to mention the taken-for-grantedness of the activity of following the news. This doesn't, however, mean that the daily media-related behaviour would be somehow insignificant either in terms of individual experience or from a broader social perspective. Quite the contrary, it can be argued that watching the TV news, for instance, is pre-

cisely in all its triviality both a personally meaningful and culturally and socially significant act.

The significance of media and genre routines, more generally, lies in the fact that they offer collectively based and culturally established lines of action according to which it is possible for individual actors to experience, in a very concrete way, order and stability in a constantly changing universe (cf. Schoening & Anderson, *ibid.*: 99). Thus media-related routines are central in the processes of 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1984). Especially pertinent in contemporary societies is the role of news routines as they provide actors with a sense of being connected to a common world of ongoing real events, or, as Giddens (*ibid.*: 50) formulates it, of 'the continuity of the object world'.

What is of key importance here is that media and genre routines are intimately interrelated with the ways media industry operates in organizing its output. For instance, broadcast schedules provide actors with a daily clock and a weekly and yearly calendar to which they can adapt the rhythm of their particular activities (see, for instance, Scannell, 1988, 1989). The relation, of course, is not one of direct causality or determination but of mutual accommodation and interdependence. As Morley (1989: 36) puts it, at the same time as 'the broadcasting institutions construct their schedules in ways which are designed to complement the basic modes of domestic organization' they inevitably 'come to play an active and constitutive role in the organization of domestic time'. Seriality is another 'ready-made' basis that the mode of production provides for daily media-related routines. As Scannell (1995: 8) points out, seriality gives the audience 'a sense of the overall structure or flow of programs as a regular, patterned kind of thing through the hours of each day and from one day to the next, and the next and the next'.

From a critical perspective, the social significance of media and genre routines is grounded in the fact that in performing these routines people, at the same time as they make subjectively and culturally sensible meanings, also affirm and reproduce, in their very concrete practical action, the structural determinations and conditions of meaning in reception.

To summarize, then, there are especially two points here that the semiotic conception of genre needs to be complemented with. Firstly, there is the view that the significance of media-audience encounters is not restricted to textual and representational aspects only, but also the routinised activities of using and receiving the media and their texts are

saturated with significance. Hence, these routines are in themselves constitutive of the social and cultural dynamics of audiences' meaning-making. Secondly, it should be emphasised that in the case of journalistic genres, in particular, and most notably of the news, the significance is intimately linked with the sense of membership in 'imagined communities'. For instance, as pointed out by Morley (1991: 14),

the regular viewing of the nightly television news (or of a long-running soap opera) can be seen ... as discourses which constitute collectivities through a sense of 'participation' and through the production of both a simultaneity of experience and a sense of a 'past in common'.

And, one could add, as regards especially the news on TV, the viewing offers most vividly also a sense of 'present in common'. Here the direct broadcasting of news programmes creates a heightened sense of simultaneous 'engaging in a joint ritual with millions of others' (1992: 268).

All that has been said so far can now be summarized in a social-semiotic notion of genre that conceptualizes the dynamics of mass-mediated meaning in reception in terms of three analytically distinct but interrelated and simultaneous levels or aspects – those of textuality, representation and routines. The notion can be presented as the following model:

What is noteworthy in the model is that media-audience relations are approached at all levels from a rhetorical perspective. In other words, different

media genres are seen to construct for the audience specific interpretative positions in relation to media texts and their representational contents. At the same time audience members become interpellated as social subjects with particular kind of cultural characteristics as well as invited to participate in specific 'imagined communities'. A core problematic of critical genre analysis, then, is formulated around the issue of media-related construction and reconstruction of social subjectivities and collectivities. This leads to a double-focus for the empirical analysis where attention should be paid, on the one hand, to the ways the audience is addressed textually and contextually. On the other hand, focus is on the actual reception and appropriation of these modes of address by audience members.

In employing the model as the analytic framework in the empirical study of news, for instance, attention is paid, first of all, to those discursive or presentational strategies that are employed in the text both to establish a relationship of complicity with the audience and to promote specific meanings for the audience to accept. Put another way, the focus is on the discursively constructed positions of intelligibility that the audience is invited to adopt in its meaning-making both of the textual genre characteristics and of the meanings preferred in the text. Second, as regards the representational aspect, the concern is, most notably, with the images of collectivities or communities that media texts construct and invite the audience to identify themselves with. An 'imagined community' constantly and prominently evoked in the news is that

Figure 1.

aspects of news genre

	<i>focus 1 (text)</i>		<i>focus 2 (reception)</i>
<i>presentational</i>	(re)production of textual positions of intelligibility both in relation to the genre of news and the meanings preferred in the text	A D D R E S S I V E	recognition and interpretation of textual genre characteristics and the (preferred) meanings of the text
<i>representational</i>	representations of cultural identities and 'imagined communities'	I V E	recognition and interpretation of represented identities and communities
<i>practical</i>	the organization of news output	I T Y	established practical activities of using and interpreting the news

of the 'nation', as the news, indeed, is a genre which diffuses 'emblems of nationhood' (Schlesinger, 1991: 165) on a daily basis. Third, the ways news producers organize their output are also approached in terms of addressivity. The regular daily appearance of morning papers, for instance, signals in itself that 'the breakfast-time world is still in order' (Bausinger, 1984: 344) and that by receiving and reading the paper readers become part of this world. Similarly, broadcast schedules offer the audience a membership in a common cultural (at present predominantly national) world which is unified and synchronized by shared and often simultaneous genre routines.

Thus one point to be made here is that addressivity is in itself a powerful social and cultural force. In fact, it is a key category in the social-semiotic genre conception through which the actual social and political implications of mass-mediated processes of meaning can be fruitfully grasped.⁷

Without going into details here, the second major question to be studied empirically concerns, as mentioned, the ways audience members, in their actual meaning-making, receive and appropriate the 'social persuasion' of media genres.⁸

Concluding Remarks

By way of concluding, it needs to be stressed that the genre model outlined above does not want to deny the intertextuality and interdiscursivity – and thereby the multifarious meaning potential – of media texts, even of such a highly standardized product as the news. Nor does the model deny the interpretative capacities of audience members.

The point rather is to argue that, in actual practice, the meaning potential of media texts is structured according to genre conventions and that also their use and reception operate along quite conven-

ventionalized lines. Moreover, the argument continues, these conventionalized aspects of meaning play a central part in the structuration and sustenance of the social world at large as well as the power relations that underpin it. In addition, of special interest in this respect are those media genres that have established themselves a widely-spread and/or unquestioned cultural position. Thus the news, for instance, is a case in point for the social-semiotic genre study as it is among the main providers of 'a sense of commonality and normality' in society (Schoening & Anderson, *ibid.*: 105). Within the critical social-semiotic framework, then, one point is to examine and expose precisely the mechanisms that serve to guarantee the largely naturalized cultural status of news as a transparent reality discourse for anybody and all. Another point is to politicise the genre-specific conventions and strategies of fixing and normalizing meaning in news discourse, most notably through the professional strategies of immediacy and authenticity. Namely, as Hall (1985: 46) points out, "normalization' does not appear out of thin air' but is always a result of an ongoing struggle over meaning.

In more general terms, the objective of critical genre analysis is to scrutinize the unifying tendencies and dynamics of especially dominant cultural forms and, in this way, make visible their actual social and political implications. And here, in fact, intertextually oriented study and genre analysis can complement each other usefully. Namely, by exploring the polysemous qualities of media texts and their reception, the former can reveal the cracks, fissures and inner tensions of the seemingly unitary, unambiguous and as if uncontested processes of genre-conditioned meaning.⁹ Thus both approaches contribute, from different directions, to challenging dominant significations and opening up opportunities for producing alternative social realities.

Notes

1. As regards originality, the articles by Carey and Garnham, for instance, are modified versions of the texts published in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1/1995. Also Morley repeats in his article partly the same points he has made in several earlier connections.
2. One central thrust in the swing of the pendulum has been the deep aversion felt by many proponents of cultural studies for political economy – and vice versa. A constructive dialogue can hardly be expected if the for-

mer accuse the latter of crude determinism while the latter claim the former to be tinkering uselessly with popular trivialities. See, for instance, Kellner (1997: 120) who refers to the series of futile debates which only have continued 'a long legacy of animosity between the schools'. Kellner, for one, suggests that the divide is artificial and should be overcome. For an illuminating example of this unproductive hostility, see the articles by Garnham and Grossberg as well as Garnham's comment on Grossberg and Carey in *CSMC*, 1/1995.

3. Perhaps more than direct accusations this impression is due to the lack of any constructive alternatives from the critics' side. For instance, Gripsrud (1996: 8, 10) who acidly attacks cultural audience studies, among other things, for 'impoverished grasp on the social determinations of televisual communication', is careful to make the reservation that he is 'not at all totally against audience studies' and that, in fact, 'much cultural studies work in this area has certainly been of great value'.
4. In my view, referring with 'preferred reading' to the properties of text causes unnecessary analytical confusion. I suggest that we make a terminological distinction and use 'preferred meaning' when talking about the properties of texts. 'Preferred reading', then, could be used when speculating whether the audience might interpret the given text along the lines of its 'preferred meaning(s)'. Cf. Hall (Angus et al., *ibid.*: 261) who notes that there is a slippage between preferred meaning and preferred reading in his encoding/decoding article and that 'preferred meaning is on the encoding side, not the decoding side'.
5. Cf. Billig (1997: 209) who in writing about the utility of constructionist social psychology to cultural studies, takes up the expressive and repressive functions of routine uses of language and patterns of speech. According to him, discursive habits 'enable certain things to be said, and others to be left unsaid'.
6. In narratological news analysis, the news text is conceived of as a composition of two kinds of discourse, that of the narrator and those of news actors. Moreover, the former is seen to occupy a higher and privileged position in the textual hierarchy thereby having also the primary discursive power. A parallel distinction is made by Hartley (1982: 109-15) when he talks about institutional and accessed voices in the news. It should be noted, however, that despite their 'technical subordination' the news actors' viewpoints can dominate the news text.
7. In fact, within recent rhetorical study of genre, addressivity is seen to have major sociological relevance in a 'Giddensian' sense. Most notably, of the American rhetorical scholars Miller (1994: 72) argues that it is precisely addressivity that provides 'a specific mechanism by which individual communicative action and social system structure each other'.
Let it be noted, moreover, that within the field of rhetorical studies, there has lately been a lively process of rethinking genre in terms of social action (for an overview see, for instance, Freedman & Medway, 1994). As part of this rethinking there have also been attempts to politicise the category of genre itself. For instance, within the Australian genre school, Threadgold (1989: 107) argues that genre is 'among the very processes by which dominant ideologies are reproduced, transmitted and potentially changed'.
8. In my Ph.D. dissertation (to be published in Finnish spring 1998) I employ the social-semiotic conception of genre to study empirically the reception of TV news.
9. In a Bakhtinian terminology, one could talk about a combined study of the centripetal (consolidating) and centrifugal (dispersive) social and cultural forces of meaning (see Bakhtin, 1981).

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