GABRIELE LINKE (Ed.)

Teaching Cultural Studies

Methods – Matters – Models

A&C

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg

ANGLISTIK UND ENGLISCHUNTERRICHT

Herausgegeben von
Gabriele Linke
Holger Rossow
Merle Tönnies

Band 76

GABRIELE LINKE (Ed.)

Teaching Cultural Studies

Methods – Matters – Models

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg

Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über *http://dnb.d-nb.de* abrufbar.

Herausgeber:
Prof. Dr. Gabriele Linke
PD Dr. Holger Rossow
Prof. Dr. Merle Tönnies

ISBN 978-3-8253-5893-8
ISSN 0344-8266

Imprimé en Allemagne · Printed in Germany
Druck: Memminger MedienCentrum, 87700 Memmingen

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlorfrei gebleichtem
und alterungsbeständigem Papier

Den Verlag erreichen Sie im Internet unter:
www.winter-verlag-hd.de

Contents

Gabriele Linke (Rostock)

Introduction: Towards a Methodology for Teaching Cultural Studies

Theories, Methods, Models, Case Studies, Activities – More than a 'Toolbox'

In the past decade, various introductions to cultural studies have been published in Germany.[1] All of them pay tribute to the interdisciplinary character of the field and abound with sample texts and model interpretations, but none of them foregrounds aspects of course structure and teaching methods. Although some of them have a textbook structure and provide questions for review and lists of relevant readings, authors have rarely asked the question of how much systematic and methodological thinking has fed and should feed into individual courses in British and American cultural studies in German tertiary education. This volume poses an attempt to fill this gap and address this question.[2]

The volume *Teaching Cultural Studies* is not intended to give another systematic introduction to the wide interdisciplinary field of cultural studies but rather to provide ideas for individual courses, models for the design of specific types of courses and learning techniques as well as selected secondary and primary sources suitable for the cultural studies classroom. Therefore, the teaching ideas offered in the contributions can only represent a small selection out of many possible approaches and methods, but they have been rendered accessible to the novice to the field and are transferable and adaptable to other materials, themes and teaching situations.

The contributions in the first section (except Starck's) focus less on the teaching of particular cultural issues and more on concepts, methods and skills that are applicable in many cultural studies classes. The concept of the stereotype is important because its

various psycho-social and semiotic aspects permeate many representations of social groups as well as their interpretations. Laurenz VOLKMANN's reflections on the nature and functions of stereotypes remind the reader that, in the limited time and scope of cultural studies classes, there is a danger of enforcing stereotypes. Therefore, an awareness of the omnipresence of stereotypes and a critical scrutiny of stereotypical images should continually be developed through our teaching both implicitly, as part of any interpretive work, and explicitly, that is, in specific thematic units. Ellen GRÜNKEMEIER and Martina KREBS have assembled a "tool box" of teaching and learning techniques, and procedures for the development of practical academic and communicative skills and their assessment. Any instructor teaching culture, literature and related subjects will profit from this treasure of well-tried methods. Since one of the aims of cultural studies is to encourage critical and creative thinking, Grünkemeier and Krebs's emphasis on broadening students' productive skills appears more than apt.

An area that has only begun to be considered in, and used for, teaching cultural studies is Web 2.0. Eckart VOIGTS-VIRCHOW does not only outline the history of social media, but he weighs up criticism and praise, opportunities and limitations of their use in class. Furthermore, he lists the social media and student activities that have proven adaptable to cultural studies classes and demonstrates with the help of examples from his own classes the potential social media have for active and productive student participation. He also presents excerpts from student postings to a Moodle forum and classifies as well as interprets them in terms of collaborative learning, encouraging cultural studies instructors to employ learning platforms and social networks to develop new strategies of learning and to widen the range of cultural expressions that call for critical analysis.

The last contribution in this section, Kathleen STARCK's essay on teaching gender, marks the transition to the more content-centred and analytical approaches of the next section because she combines an introduction to gender studies with reflections on teaching and learning methods. Starck gives a state-of-the-art overview of current debates on gender and adds a wealth of classroom experiences, starting with the difficulty of choosing the 'right' theoretical texts and limiting the scope of readings, and finishing with a variety of

creative student activities such as role play, interview and conference paper.

Contributions in the section "Matters" focus on the connections between cultural studies and well-established disciplines such as sociology, history, political science and literary studies. Each article provides reflections on the relationship between cultural studies and the respective field, and exemplary analyses of primary sources from a cultural studies perspective, applying concepts, theories and methods from the respective field. This approach results in highly readable model analyses of Victorian advertising (sociology/ SCHNEIDER), political agency in the 17th century (history/ SCHWARZKOPF and STINSHOFF), programmes and philosophies of social movements in the UK and the USA since 1945 (political science/BERG) and novels by John Braine and Alan Silitoe (literary studies/OCHSNER). In all papers, recommendations for course structures, suitable readings and classroom activities complement the exemplary analyses.

In the recent history of the study of culture, scholars have observed a 'visual turn' as well as a 'spatial turn', and these refocalisations are reflected in the second part of the section "Matters", where articles deal with the application of the relatively new field of visual culture studies and the current relevance of central analytical concepts such as identity and place. Renate BROSCH's essay offers a comprehensive overview of the theories and methods of visual culture studies and highlights both its problematic areas and its explanatory force. Furthermore, she illustrates how visual studies can help understand the cultural function of images and open up new paths to understanding certain forms of poetry. Frauke HOFMEISTER explores the connections between human geography and cultural studies, gives a systematic overview of key concepts, categories and texts, outlines a course on nation and regions in the UK, and recounts her teaching experiences. Holger ROSSOW, in his article, turns to the concept of identity, which has been a central category in cultural studies from its beginnings but has also been criticised and re-defined time and again. The article provides an overview of the debates that offers itself as an introductory reading for any cultural studies class that focuses on ethnic, religious, sexual and other identity constructions.

In the final part of this volume, "Materials", contributions are very much determined by the primary sources that are analysed and

the strongly interdisciplinary approaches they require. Again, they offer well-tried course structures and teaching ideas as well as theories and methods. Museums have only rarely featured prominently in cultural studies classes, but offer great potential, as Andrea ZITTLAU demonstrates convincingly in her article. She gives an introduction to this field and adds a detailed description of a course, which she enriches by historical aspects, model interpretations of museum exhibits, suitable literature and classroom activities. Claus-Ulrich VIOL presents the analysis and teaching of reggae culture(s) as a case of interdisciplinarity, in which he employs theoretical concepts and analytical methods from postcolonial studies, popular culture studies, musicology, history, linguistics and other disciplines. The critical area he discusses with regard to reggae can be delineated by the concepts of diaspora, transculturality, hybridity and the tension between ideas of authenticity and anti-essentialism. All of these concepts and approaches are constituents of core debates of cultural as well as postcolonial studies. In her article on the application of aspects postcolonial theory in film classes, Gabriele LINKE outlines a well-tried model for courses in which selected British and American films on diasporic and/or Orientalist themes are analysed as manifestations of, in a broad sense, Orientalist world views and particularly as representations of kinds and structures of ('western') knowledge about the post/colonial Other and their essentialising tendencies. Nevertheless, it turns out that the ideological implications are historically specific, changeable, and often contradictory and ambiguous. Due to these characteristics, they allow various readings, attract diverse audiences and affirm the status quo.

This brief outline of the thematic structure of the volume shows that the contributions will not only appeal to instructors in the field of cultural studies and provide them with new ideas for courses and teaching and learning techniques but also offer concise introductory readings on various disciplines and areas for the student of cultural studies as well as models for the application of theories and methods in cultural analysis, that is, for research papers and projects in cultural studies.

Although a great variety of disciplines and approaches are discussed in this volume, some crucial ones have not been covered. Ethnographic methods, for example, have frequently been applied by cultural studies researchers but play hardly any role in the

contributions to this volume. Nevertheless, there are previous publications in which ethnographic methods are presented as tools of intercultural learning.[3] Musicology is another field that has been drawn upon in the articles on, for example, popular music and film, but a systematic and comprehensive account of its potential for cultural studies must be left to other publications.

Towards a Methodology for Teaching Cultural Studies

In the second part of my introduction, I want to summarise recurrent themes, problems and observations, thus defining some key principles of teaching cultural studies and offering them as stimuli for reflection as well as sources of inspiration.

1. Very often, cultural studies courses are characterised by a combination of different types of sessions in one course. Berg mentions reconstructionist sessions, in which a basis of 'factual' and theoretical knowledge is (re)constructed, and interpretive ones, in which texts and other sources are analysed. The combination of these two components, which may be linked by a third one, the selection and practice of appropriate analytical procedures, seems to be indispensable for teaching cultural studies in Germany. Beside recognising and considering different kinds of sessions, instructors should give time and attention to the development of basic academic skills, particularly when teaching first- and second-year students.
2. A wide-spread and well-known difficulty of teaching arises when theories are to be applied to particular materials. It is necessary to clarify theories and demonstrate their usefulness, but it is almost impossible to do so without banalising central ideas. In this volume, Brosch, Viol, Linke and others have reflected on this problem. There is no simple solution to it, but it may help to store, or have students store, key terms, quotations and theses in forms which allow easy access and quick reference in the course of the term. In the process, a certain simplification appears unavoidable and should be accepted while at the same time, complexities and contradictions must repeatedly be addressed in class. It is the responsibility of the instructor to refocus interpretive activities time and again.

3. A similarly problematic area is the cultural studies concern with the de-essentialisation of culture and identity. This issue surfaces in the contributions on gender, Caribbean culture and music, and others, and it ties in with Volkmann's reflection on stereotypes. For example, at the beginning of my class on representations of Africa in film, the concept of authenticity and the demand for authentic representations of African culture were critiqued from a postcolonial studies perspective, but students kept bringing up authenticity as a criterion of evaluation in almost every class. A certain resistance to the deconstruction of common terms has been observed by many instructors, not only those in this volume. An awareness of this problem, patience and acknowledgement of the necessity to repeat and revise are preconditions for any improvement in this area.
4. A more specific strategy for questioning essentialist notions makes use of history as a key to understanding the hybrid and dynamic character of cultural expressions. When students explore the often complicated routes of a cultural form such as reggae (cf. Viol), its hybrid character will often become evident. Thus the inclusion of historical perspectives is a major ingredient of cultural studies projects that problematise essentialism. Tracing back the complicated routes of a cultural form rather than looking for its roots can also reveal the impact of the market aspect, that is, the entertainment or culture industry which stands behind the popularity of certain forms.
5. In publications on intercultural learning, there has often been an emphasis on cultural comparisons, especially comparisons between the students' native and the 'target' culture, or between several other cultures.[4] This aspect of intercultural learning has been acknowledged as a principle at all levels of education because the extension of knowledge and competences is facilitated through the integration of what is unfamiliar into what is familiar. Several contributions to this volume (e.g. Viol, Berg, Zittlau) pay tribute to this principle. Although it is possible to teach a (national or other group's) culture as a relatively closed system, the impression of a monolithic culture should rather be avoided, and in the 21st century, multi-, inter- and trans-cultural perspectives have gained wide currency for teaching culture.[5]
6. Furthermore, the combination of theories and methods from various disciplines such as literature, sociology and history is

recommended wherever it can help to account for the complexity and dynamics of cultural forms and practices and to avoid the construction of culture as static and monolithic.

7. Many contributors have argued for the importance of allowing contradictions to persist rather than trying to construct images of conflict-free, homogeneous cultures and societies. Similarly, contradictory readings of texts, dominant readings and readings against the grain should not only be permitted but encouraged in order to highlight the ambiguity of many texts and the constructive character of 'decoding'.
8. Instructors in cultural studies classes should encourage students to practise a variety of skills, not only critical and analytical skills but also creative and productive skills in particular (e.g. Voigts-Virchow, Starck). The results of such productive classroom activities may require new forms and standards of evaluation but have proven very gratifying for students.
9. A recurring critical theme is the difficulty of selecting material and restricting its scope. Starck describes how she reduced the quantity of the reading material for her course every time she taught this course. The reduction of course material is as much imperative[6] as it is exacting because the amount of sources that are accessible has grown rapidly in the past decades and decisions about the most relevant or useful sources are rarely easy. A clear focus on the central issue of the course and the acceptance of the exemplary character of interpretive work in class are indispensable.
10. Lastly, cultural studies classes call for the use of a variety of media, from Web 2.0 through the Internet as a provider of historical sources (e.g. historical documents, Victorian culture) to traditional media such as film, music and literary texts. Although print and traditional electronic media have not lost any of their relevance, it is necessary to include digital media and the Internet not only as providers of academic texts and as tools for student activities but also as new subjects of cultural analysis. This is an area of teaching cultural studies that will receive more attention in future publications on teaching cultural studies.

Notes

1 Such introductions are, for example, Doris Teske: *Cultural Studies. GB*, Berlin, 2002; Roy Sommer: *Grundkurs Cultural Studies*, Stuttgart, 2003; Merle Tönnies & Claus-Ulrich Viol: *Introduction to the Study of British Culture*, Tübingen, 2007, and Jody Skinner: *Anglo-American Cultural Studies*, Tübingen, 2009.

2 The idea for a publication on teaching cultural studies was born at the semiannual meetings of the "Arbeitskreis Cultural Studies", where most of the contributors to this volume have held workshops on their teaching experiences.

3 Michael Byram: *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches through Drama and Ethnography*, CUP, 1998, and John Corbett: *An Intercultural Approach to English Language Teaching*, Clevedon, 2003, pp. 94-138.

4 See, for example, Jürgen Einhoff: "Multi-Culti", Sonderheft *PRAXIS/fsu* 2003, 6-9, and Ansgar & Vera Nünning: "British Cultural Studies Konkret. 10 Leitkonzepte für einen innovativen Kulturunterricht", *Der fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch*, 34:43 (2000), 4-10.

5 Einhoff outlines four distinctive approaches to the teaching of culture. The cultural approach presents the target culture as a relatively closed system; the multi-cultural approach emphasises the inner diversity of the target culture; the intercultural approach values comparisons and relations between native and target culture, and the trans-cultural approach foregrounds the interconnectedness of cultures (*Ibid*.).

6 Publications such as Bettina Ritter-Mamczek: *Stoff reduzieren*, Leverkusen, 2011, show that the problem has been recognised.

Laurenz Volkmann (Jena)

On the Nature and Function of Stereotypes in Intercultural Learning

1. National Identities/Culture Standards: Old Wine in New Bottles?

The present paper argues that national stereotypes remain one of the most significant problems as well as challenges of intercultural understanding. They need to be dealt with explicitly and need to be included as a topic in courses aimed at fostering intercultural understanding and/or at preparing students for intercultural encounters. It is argued that national stereotypes have resurfaced in the guise of new theories of "cultural dimensions" and recent related approaches in intercultural learning/teaching. The prevalent, in some cases almost orthodox notion of different national identities or "culture standards" inherently creates a danger of fostering stereotypical thinking and of establishing fossilized preconceptions about other cultures. This becomes obvious in the ready-to-use lists of cultural Do's and Don'ts which are currently being perpetuated and which are basically informed by concepts of different cultural norms and values. In this contribution, this recent, rather oblique and indirect revival of what used to be described as "national character traits" is juxtaposed with a long tradition of academic studies on the origins, nature and functions of stereotypes. Mainly, the German tradition in literary and cultural studies, psychology, pedagogy, foreign language teaching and related subjects and academic fields is delineated here. Originating after World War II, this school of thought has traditionally interpreted stereotypes, clichés and prejudices as detrimental to intercultural understanding; such preconceived mental concepts are deemed to foster misunderstanding and even culture clash. Following these critical stances, the article will propose a number of pedagogical concepts and teaching methods geared towards countering such negative

thinking. Rather than reviling stereotypes *in toto*, however, the suggestions aim at creating awareness of how stereotypes function. Their tenacious endurance is described as well as their functions of providing instant patterns and order, while simultaneously bearing the danger of an oversimplified reduction of reality, thus causing negative effects on cross-cultural encounters.

It was the pioneering work of the Dutch manager – and later academic author – Geert Hofstede, for example published in *Cultures and Organizations* (1991), which initiated a recent paradigm in intercultural learning. What features in now overused terms such as "culture standards", "culture differences" and "national identities" are the concepts, developed largely by Hofstede, of allegedly inherent and empirically testable differences between certain cultures and, thus, nations which are seen as synonymous or representative of the culture in question. Before delineating and critiquing such concepts of cultural differences, a general proviso seems to be necessary here. That is, the whole concept of cultural differences appears to be a product of the 19th century and gained its pervasive and catastrophic significance in the early and mid 20th century. The idea of cultural differences is deeply steeped in the rapid and problematic evolvement of the idea of the nation state and the cultural entities as contained in these nation states. The precarious nature of such historically grounded concepts was convincingly revealed in Benedict Anderson's seminal study on the invention of nation states as "imagined political communities".[1] Rather than being natural, God-given communities, nations and cultures are constructed according to political, social and similar agendas. National identity is thus fashioned as a "common space of experience, expectation and (inter-)action".[2] As an "interconnecting structure",[3] the concept of a shared national or cultural community is held by a community's members. Among themselves, they create a sense of unity, of taking part in one "reality".[4] The discourses shared by all members are, according to Aleida Assmann, to be regarded as "cultural constructs and ideas, which are never a 'given' but are created in each community by means of its symbolic order and its values and norms".[5] A "national community" thus constitutes a "super-group"[6] whose members, in spite of internal diversity and differences, are held together by the framework of shared understanding that this group's coherence is a normal and natural state of existence.

In the age of rapid globalization such concepts of cultural coherence and unity have come under enormous pressure. As a counter-reaction, as Ulrich Beck (2007) and Lutz Niethammer (2000) have explained, there has on the one hand been a revival of the nation state as a concept for finding psychological safety-nets and reassurance. This explains the recent surge in fundamentalism or nationalism worldwide. There has even evolved what Niethammer has dubbed a "new identity craze", a longing for a collective identity which finds its safe haven in traditional us-versus-them dichotomies. On the other hand, these counter-reactions to modernity clash with what some theoreticians of globalization have described as the dissolution of nation states. Nation states increasingly appear as obsolete, as anachronisms undermined by the forces of internationalization, with globalization functioning as a gigantic apparatus of "*de*-nationalization".[7] By leaps and bounds, a new "postnational constellation" is evolving, as Jürgen Habermas (1998) calls it. There is a tendency in the area of globalization studies to prematurely declare the demise of nation states, which are hollowed out and utterly transformed through the transnational forces of the new media and multinational companies and political bodies. What remains is a sort of party patriotism, or feel-good national identity. Beck even goes as far as to state that in the age of globalization one would need "a magnifying lens to identify a state and its influence".[8]

In spite of this recent debunking of concepts such as "national character" or "nation", the influence of studies in cultural norms and differences remains extremely influential. The mainstream of books and seminars on the issue of intercultural understanding are aligned to the paradigm of cultural identities and culture standards. Bearing in mind the above-discussed aspects of the "constructedness of collective identities" and the transforming impact of globalization, I will focus in the following paragraphs on the typical arguments and models used in such studies of intercultural learning, not without pointing out possible pitfalls of such approaches. Even before Hofstede was instrumental in popularizing concepts of intercultural learning based on national differences, US-American anthropologist Edward T. Hall published ground-breaking studies of cultural differences in the 1950s.[9] It was Hall who established the prevalent model of defining cultural standards according to certain categories. One of the basic categories used by Hall was the opposition of

"low-context cultures" and "high-context cultures", which was rooted in traditional anthropological definitions of "hot" and "cold" cultures or media (as used, for instance by the Canadian Marshall McLuhan or the Frenchman Claude Lévi-Strauss). According to Hall, "low-context cultures" are defined by short-term, superficial relationships, explicit communication in shifting social networks, in which social groups are not set apart by strong or permanent demarcation lines. "High-context cultures" entail long and traditional relationships and social structures, strong group identification and habitualized forms of human interaction, which follow well-established sets of rules and regulations. While the formerly mentioned societies are prone to swift changes and transformations, the latter are marked by social inertia and change only slowly. It does not seem difficult to apply the first term to industrialized, modern states such as the United States, while the latter term seems to describe traditional, feudal societies. Although Hall himself did not ascribe these characteristics to certain nations or regions, this labelling practice became well established in the wake of Hofstede's categorizations of cultures. The pioneer of intercultural psychology, Hofstede started his research in the late 1960s as an attempt to describe cultural differences in the business world and to facilitate intercultural understanding. Hofstede, who was a manager for the international business company IBM, used his position within the company to have thousands of IBM employees respond to questionnaires which he devised and interpreted. The cultural standards set down by Hofstede and his colleagues have later been much modified, re-defined and subcategorized. The overall concept has remained, though, which is that there exist certain clearly definable national or cultural norms and values (standards, concepts, etc.) which are reflected in reality and can be described in terms of differences.

The four main concepts or "dimensions" of culture, as defined by Hofstede,[10] are the following:

- Power distance: This relates to the use of power and authority, acceptance of power, rejection of power;
- Individualism vs. collectivism;
- Uncertainty avoidance, which means the attitude towards taking risks or accepting uncertainty;
- Femininity vs. masculinity: this concerns concepts of man vs. woman, femininity vs. masculinity, and role ascriptions.

Hofstede and other researchers in the field of intercultural psychology[11] have devised highly detailed and complex indexes in which they position nations and areas vis-à-vis each other. They are often arranged in an ascending or descending sequence, thus implying certain hierarchies. One example is Hofstede's Individualism Index (IDV), describing values for fifty nations and three regions, all of which are listed according to a score list ranging from 1 to 100.[12] A high ranking in this list expresses that the nation or society in question (it may be quite telling that Hofstede does not differentiate between the two) has a high opinion of individualism and stresses self-realization. Problems are discussed openly, communication takes place on an informal level, the relationship between employer and employee is based on a set of formal agreements; people are employed on the basis of their qualifications. Hard work is considered more important than social networking, etc. All in all, in individualist cultures people look after themselves. A low rank, in contrast, expresses a "collectivist mentality", where people look after a wider group in exchange for loyalty. This mentality can best be described by the saying "don't stick out your head" or the Japanese proverb "The nail that stands out must be hammered down". Here is an excerpt from the IDV list:

Rank	Land or region	IDV-score
1	USA	91
6	New Zealand	80
15	(FR) Germany	67
30	Greece	35
44	Taiwan	17
53	Guatemala	6

Table 1: Excerpt from Hofstede's IDV index

The tradition of academic research in the area of national differences is immensely influential. It has arguably even gained ground in the age of globalization with its demand for easy cultural guidelines and conduct books. Highly visible recent studies include those by Fons Trompenaars (1997) or Alexander Thomas (1996). However, the discipline of intercultural psychology with its models of culture dimensions and differences has not remained without criticism from other disciplines. Objections have been mainly voiced from the perspective of cultural studies, whose

representatives have called into question the exemplary status or objectivity of such studies. Hofstede's research, for example, has been called a study in "IBM's dimensions" in reference to the privileged, non-representative social status of Hofstede's interviewees. The implicit determinism inherent in such dimensions, values and norms of culture has been pointed out, but also the fact that they are entrenched in one-dimensional, reductionist concepts of cultures as monolithic entities. American studies specialist Klaus P. Hansen has derisively labelled the simplistic approach of intercultural psychology as "catastrophic" since it has permeated the mainstay of intercultural studies in the humanities.[13] Attacking its easy applicability and its often one-dimensional concept of culture or nation, Claus Altmayer states the following:

> Hofstede's and Thomas's approaches of intercultural psychology or cultural dimensions are based on the implicit assumption that 'cultures' are synonymous with 'national cultures'. They appear as fixed, closed and inherently homogeneous entities. Following these assumptions, general statements can be made such as 'Americans consider it as their duty …' or 'Germans are usually …'. The experience shared by many that not all Americans or Germans are the same is countered with the remark that the reference is to a certain 'majority' (which is, however, not defined) or that there is a certain 'tendency' or something like that. Learning what Hofstede and Thomas have defined as cultural 'knowledge' in fact only reinforces stereotypical modes of perception and thinking. Therefore, for any sort of serious 'intercultural learning' it is not only absolutely useless, it is even counter-productive.[14]

As much as one would like to agree with such criticism, it remains obvious that in intercultural learning there is a great demand for instruction in easily applicable rules and regulations. Much of the user-oriented literature in intercultural understanding is about offering such arguably all-too-facile guidelines. As a first step towards initiating and maintaining cross-cultural contact, though, such publications remain useful sources of learning about cultural etiquette. To counterbalance their inherent tendency towards fostering national or cultural stereotypes, courses on intercultural learning would, in addition, have to tackle the issue of stereotypes as one of the pertinent stumbling blocks in the field. When dealing with cultural dimensions as devised by Hofstede *et al.*, it can be pointed out that such simplifications reveal the dual function of stereotypes: On the one hand, they allow us to structure the often confusing,

unstructured reality, providing us with first hints about how to react or act. On the other, their effect of possibly distorting reality, of even undermining or thwarting intercultural encounters, should be countered with awareness-creating activities, where learners engage with stereotypical representations in playful and ironic ways. As Harald Husemann explains, stereotypes should not be ignored; they should rather be made the subject of discussion so as to learn how to come to grips with them.[15]

2. The Significance of National Stereotypes

The affinity of the concept of cultural dimensions to the whole field of national stereotypes, clichés and prejudices appears quite obvious. However, describing the complete academic discipline of intercultural psychology as a mechanism devised for perpetuating national stereotypes would go too far. It is mainly in popular or popularized publications that the tendency towards stereotypes becomes most evident. Here, irony and humour are often used to describe alleged national character traits, and the tongue-in-cheek manner of some publications such as the series *The Xenophobe's Guide to […]* provides evidence of the overlap that exists between national characteristics and national caricatures. In hyperbolic presentations of wide-spread stereotypes, such publications ridicule facile cultural attributions; however, they also indicate to their readers that these may be linked to reality if taken with a pinch of salt, so to speak. The Internet presents an abundance of such humorous representations. The following excerpt is from a tourist website which presents three 'typical' travellers who are instantly recognizable through regard to some of their features:

> The German:
> Smartly dressed, well kept and wearing small glasses, the German traveller is usually quiet and reserved. They often speak more than two languages and their English is excellent. At resorts, they are the first ones out to put their towels by the pool to ensure a good spot. This really infuriates the Pom since he does not usually get to bed until 7 am and the towels are already out there. The German male by the pool will always wear Speedos, commonly referred to as 'shark shockers' or 'meat safes'.[16]

As a first step towards a definition of 'national stereotypes' in this context a short glance at the website's Disclaimer is useful: "We understand that stereotypes are oversimplified opinions of patterns within a particular group, lacking any individuality." It pre-empts harsh responses, which were actually posted by some offended members of the nationalities lampooned here. Just how is this typical, even if in the context humorous, definition of stereotypes as a generalization useful for ordering and making sense of the unstructured reality? Let us take a closer look at the 'typical' German tourist caricatured here. From an Anglo-Saxon perspective, an alleged German obsession is referred to – getting up early in order to stake out one's claim poolside via towels before the 'Brits' are even awake. In addition, another, seemingly minor detail is focused as if through a magnifying glass. It is the preference of German men for tight and skimpy swimming trunks. It projects a different concept of the body and exposing it in public, which seems to be opposed to the 'Puritan' one of the Anglo-Saxons. What happens here is that the Anglo perspective focuses on a detail and amplifies it to extremes, almost to the grotesque. Here the close proximity of stereotypes to caricatures is highlighted. Caricatures are about exaggerating existing idiosyncrasies or significant parts of the body, etc., as happened, for instance, with Maggie Thatcher's nose, which became elongated in some unflattering caricatures as a symbolic expression of her uppity manner. When aligning stereotypes to caricatures, one of the problems of defining stereotypes can be addressed more clearly. In essence, it is the question of how stereotypes are grounded in reality. Is there some truth in them? Aren't they based on reality, after all? If we regard them as caricature-like, satirical renderings of reality, we do not neglect their very foundation in reality. However, it also becomes clear that (1) they only choose one aspect of reality, (2) they focus on this and make it appear more important than it is in reality, and (3) in doing so they privilege one particular perspective. This may be the perspective of an outsider (as in this example), which is called a hetero-stereotype, or the perspective of an insider of a group, which would be called an auto-stereotype. There is a fourth aspect to stereotypes. As the example of the German's swimming trunks demonstrates, stereotypes are subject to change, remain in flux and can be proven wrong by reality. Here we are dealing with an interesting effect of globalization. As German newspapers reported

in summer 2009, there has been a recent shift towards long-leg, 'boxer-shorts' swimwear among German men. What used to be popular first among American surfers has now become a world-wide fashion trend, and this has taken German men by storm.

As this short discussion of different views on bathing apparel has shown, stereotypes are to be considered as generalizations in the process of meaning creation. Importantly, they shape perceptions and establish preconceived notions in the areas of gender, ethnicity and nationality. It is arguably especially in these fields that they can create severe misunderstandings, misconceptions, social friction and communicative break-down. Here they are in constant danger of proving to be merely emotionally charged preconceptions, diverging from reality and at odds with things as they are.

3. Stereotypes as Cultural Schemata

For many decades, stereotypes have been a much-regarded field of interest in numerous academic disciplines. In Germany, after World War II the exposure and deconstruction of national stereotypes has been high on the agenda of both academic research and education programmes. The challenge to create awareness of stereotypes and to diminish their role in processes of understanding has been seen as of paramount importance in various fields such as philology, colonial and postcolonial studies, feminism, social and intercultural psychology, foreign language teaching and 'Imagologie', the study of stereotypes as (false) images of oneself and/or the other in literature and mass culture.[17] In literary studies, for instance, a number of influential studies on national stereotypes were published in the 1980s and 1990s, partly in the area of Comparative Literature, partly in French, English or American Studies as part of the project of 'Imagologie', which gained some academic influence during those decades.[18] All the studies offered insights into the construction of national auto- and hetero-stereotypes in various texts such as fiction, films, pamphlets, caricatures, commercials, etc. Often they are dedicated to an emancipatory agenda, i.e. the intention to enlighten the reader or the public about the detrimental effects of national stereotypes and to foster cross-cultural understanding through liberation from the mental restrictions caused by stereotypes and prejudices. The following statement by

Günther Blaicher, who was one of the most influential scholars in the field, may be indicative here: "Notions of national clichés are an invitation to mental laziness and inertia. It is the goal of any philological approach to counteract these forces."[19] Imagological studies succeeded in exposing how national stereotypes evolved over the centuries in various media, often dating back to the Renaissance.

The political agenda of 'Imagologie' is reflected in many related publications on foreign language teaching. Here the study of stereotypes, their exposure and suggestions to remedy their harmful influence can be found in many content-focused textbook analyses. Publications in the field usually focus on how stereotypes are used and disseminated in textbooks. Here, too, national stereotypes were for a long time considered to be perilous influences, keeping students from developing independent thinking. To expose them, as Lütgens and Karbe argued paradigmatically, would comprise "a contribution to psychological and educational aspects of European unification".[20] What was aimed at was the seemingly utopian goal of "creating attitudes without any prejudices vis-à-vis other nations".[21] Accordingly, the principal goal of foreign language teaching was to create a positive image of the target culture in the mind of students.

Without a doubt, such critical attitudes towards stereotypes and the demand for positive identification with the target culture remain important, if not vital goals of foreign language teaching. However, most researchers in the fields of literary and cultural studies or FLT have taken a more sceptical, less utopian stance when it comes to the function of stereotypes. The ideal of "encountering the target culture without prejudices" seems to be unrealistic, far removed from reality, considering more recent insights into the nature and function of stereotypes.[22] The belief in prejudice-free encounters appears almost quixotic, for studies in social psychology have proved convincingly that stereotypes are inherent to human perception and are part of the human make-up.[23] Their existence cannot be ignored or disregarded; most importantly, they cannot be made to disappear. Rather, the question arises of how to deal with them, how to come to terms with the human predilection for stereotypical thinking. Before we discuss some of the approaches suggested in the literature on stereotypes, it seems to be necessary to become aware of the existence of stereotypes in one's own

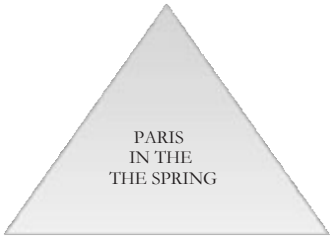
thinking. This can be achieved via two little experiments, which can also be conducted in the classroom.

(1) To become aware of the fact that our perception is pre-conditioned the following task can be put to an audience (or to oneself):

Take 30 seconds. Look at the room. Try to memorize as many blue objects as you can see.

After this period of observation the question is asked: "How many *green* objects do you remember?" The result of this change of perspective reveals how we concentrate on what we want to perceive, how we are conditioned according to the mental frames we use in certain situations.

(2) This becomes clear in the second example. Here we are asked to briefly look at the following graph:



Most people who look at this triangle will later state that they read "Paris in the spring", disregarding the second "the". The second "the" remains unobserved because it does not fit into the well-established patterns which are activated when we read.

The two experiments introduced above reveal how we choose certain facets of reality and create a harmonious whole. We choose those aspects that fit best into our pre-established mind frames. This is exactly the function of stereotypes. The examples used above reveal that stereotypes function as mental filters, allowing us in the first place to select the most important bits of information from the endless ocean of data surrounding us all the time. For instance, our eyes need to reduce a three-dimensional reality to a two-dimensional one on our retina, a process in which much information gets lost. Still, our visual organs take in the information load of about one gigabyte per second, the equivalent of half a million letters. It is only by means of selection and reduction to a limited amount of

data that the brain can process its sensory information, i.e. reality. This can be illustrated by another example, which shows that the human brain's capacity for intake is limited and that it needs to structure the information it processes. The number 2893040 is difficult to memorize and would need a lot of concentration. The more digits we add to it, the more difficult it becomes. 2893040234 needs enormous concentration; if, however, as with telephone numbers, the number is split into units such as 289 304 023 4, it can be remembered more easily. This is exactly how stereotypes work: they structure, simplify, order a seemingly chaotic reality for us – they function as "ways of worldmaking".[24]

The essential function of stereotypes as providing assistance in an otherwise confusing reality was already stressed in the first, famous definition by the American journalist Walter Lippmann, in his study *Public Opinion* from 1922:

> In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.[25]

Stereotypes are therefore schematic ways of interpreting reality. They shape and govern human perception and as such diminish the pressure of unexpected and unknown situations and events. To put it differently, humans are prone to look for the known, the familiar when encountering foreigners, and they will recognize what can be perceived and described according to the patterns provided by one's own culture. Psychological studies point out how this process of identity construction works by means of attributing group characteristics:

> At the individual level, stereotypes help organize and simplify the social environment and they represent and preserve social values. At the group level, stereotypes explain large-scale social events, justify various forms of collective action and create positive intergroup distinctiveness.[26]

Stereotypes facilitate processes of assimilation, of finding and asserting one's position through membership of a collective group. This process of self-identification of man/woman as a "pattern-building animal"[27] has been seen as essential by social psychology, but also by different branches of philosophy. For instance, the

influential American pragmatist Richard Rorty stresses the inevitability of mental constructs in the process of identity formation, and the founding father of philosophical hermeneutics,[28] Hans-Georg Gadamer, provides a defence of preconceived notions as cultural horizons or horizons of expectation which form an integral part of meaning construction in the process of the "melting of horizons" or meaning negotiation in encounters with the Other.[29] As has been pointed out, Gadamer's ideal of a "melting of horizons" appears as a problematic act of homogenization of differences that should continue to exist in a dialogical exchange of ideas.[30] In a similar vein, several schools of psychology, anthropology and linguistics have developed theories of mental schemata, frames and scripts,[31] all supporting the notion that we cannot avoid using culturally formed preconceived notions. If, according to these theories, we are always already preconditioned in our thinking and acting, there arises the question not only of what remains of individual agency, but also in general what exactly differentiates a 'stereotype' from general cultural schemata, frames and scripts. After all, such phenomena could be considered close to what dictionary definitions describe in negative phrases when referring to a cliché as "an idea or phrase that has been used so much that it is not effective or does not have any meaning any longer".[32] Without entering into a debate on terminology,[33] cliché, stereotype and prejudice would need to be considered as simplified, fossilized and potentially falsifying and counterproductive patterns of meaning creation.

In spite of the everyday functions of stereotypes as expounded above, they remain highly problematic for human understanding, specifically in intercultural exchanges. Of course, they contain certain "information units" that can be easily understood and processed by the mind.[34] Yet they lead to automatic, standardized modes of information processing, and therefore invite us to forego reflection and reasoning. Their "trigger function" causes people "to act and re-act in a semi-instinctive manner".[35] They are conducive to static thinking, mental inertia and clinging to time-honoured belief systems. These regressive tendencies support mental processes which cling to the "lifeless, the obsolete, to entrenched modes of thinking".[36] What is worse, there is the constant danger that the real life experience, the true encounter with the Other is shaped, superseded and even eclipsed by pre-fabricated, worn-out

conceptions. The intercultural encounter is in danger of being restricted or even completely thwarted by such stifling preconceptions. Even more devastating can be the effect of binary structures which are inherent in stereotypical thinking, for such thinking works with us vs. them, ingroup vs. outgroup hierarchies. On the surface, this creates a sense of belonging and security. However, all too often this rests on assumptions that the Other, the out-group, is less privileged and less valuable. Practices of exclusion, marginalization and scapegoating are the norm here rather than the exception. The dangers of stereotypical thinking are especially high in the field of intercultural exchanges, for "what on the individual level appears to be harmless, even facilitating orientation and providing structure can have the opposite, disadvantageous effect in interpersonal communication".[37]

It seems a difficult task to draw a clear-cut line between stereotype and prejudice. Conceptual similarities have led to definitions of prejudice as a conglomeration of stereotypes.[38] For practical purposes, a more applicable and fruitful definition would be one which characterizes prejudices as extended, enlarged and particularly pointed forms of stereotypes. "Prejudice goes farther than stereotypes."[39] It has the additional component of an affective dimension such as rejection, fear, anger, distaste and even hatred.[40]

A prejudice comprises a conditioned predisposition to react in an unfavourable and disdainful manner towards those people who belong to a different group, specifically a different ethnic or national group. Its "negative, hateful quality"[41] cannot always be grasped at first sight. Statements such as "Chinese people cannot speak English", "Blacks are poor" or "Eskimos eat raw fish" appear as purely descriptive utterances, even if they are overgeneralizations and therefore stereotypes. A statement like "Blacks are poor" becomes the expression of a prejudice and attains a negative quality through its context, intonation, paralinguistic elements, etc., which give testimony of a negative attitude.

4. Dealing with Stereotypes in Pedagogical Contexts

Studies in psychology categorize different types of prejudice and stereotypical thinking and offer explanations for a better understanding of how such preconceived notions evolve and how they

can be changed.[42] Theoretical explanations for the existence of stereotypes are: (1) Socio-cultural theories focus on social inequality in societies and point out the discrepancies between power relations and personal interest, which leads to stereotypical thinking vis-à-vis social, ethnic or gender groups. (2) Psycho-dynamic approaches describe a general ethnocentric tendency in thinking, fuelled by political, economic and social attitudes and constellations in a person's social environment. (3) Cognitive explanations develop theories about individual group patterns such as implied personal theories, for example that children tend towards prejudices due to their limited cognitive capabilities. For the field of culture teaching this implies that the tendency toward stereotypical thinking is rooted in childhood and thus is deeply embedded in the process of socialization. This makes the task of changing stereotypical thinking all the more difficult and demanding.[43]

Indeed, a short survey of the research on stereotypes and prejudices appears rather sobering and dispiriting: They evolve in early childhood and can even petrify after an exchange period abroad, which was originally intended to diminish stereotypes.[44] Teaching students to become aware of their preconceived notions often proves to be a futile undertaking. And what is even more discouraging: studies have shown that the tendency towards stereotypical thinking does not decrease with higher educational qualifications. Yet, culture and language teaching should not resemble programmes aimed at "brainwashing and political indoctrination".[45] Rather, the following broad palette of suggestions concerning a reflexive approach to dealing with stereotypes and prejudices in class could be a first step in the process of lifelong grappling with these phenomena:[46]

(1) *Presenting individuals and scenarios aimed at creating empathy concerning the target culture:* Here instruction aims at presenting authentic, individual people from another culture. The other culture is presented as a heterogeneous entity and individual members are singled out for presentation. This often happens with the help of 'textbook families' or with authentic, three-dimensional and amiable characters, not just in textbooks but also in literary texts, films or short autobiographical texts. In addition, virtual or real contact with people from the target culture can be initiated, where the focus is on a person's internal rather than external attributes and where empathy is created. Emotional texts or