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Die Kontextualität des Textes
(Abstract)

Why do texts have contexts at all? Why can contexts be assigned to texts? What property of the text makes it possible to set text and context in relation to each other? With the help of heuristic questions such as these, this article aims to question productively some common paradigms for conceptualizing text-context relationships that can be identified on the basis of prominent attempted definitions, such as the relevant influential entries in handbooks and reference works (e. g. those by Lutz Danneberg and Moritz Baßler). Where Danneberg seeks to extend the scope of the extratextual context while at the same time characterizing it in terms of its function for the interpretation of texts (the use and construction of contexts), Baßler moves in precisely the other direction: he develops, following in the footsteps of the ideas of New Historicism, a concept of culture whose textual dimension makes it a possible context for literature. Both positions attempt, albeit in opposing ways, to make the concept of context at once narrower and wider: either an all-encompassing context (which includes reader, author, and culture) is characterized as a component of interpretation (Danneberg), or conversely the concept of culture is textualized through-and-through in such a way that archives and discourses govern the relations between text and context(s).

These positions are themselves, in turn, heuristically interesting for two reasons. First, they show that the concept of context becomes interesting for literary studies, for the concept of literature, and for the understanding of textual interpretation when recent approaches reach out in the direction of cultural media studies (Schönert). Second, they are heuristically interesting when they concurrently, implicitly or explicitly, set themselves the aim of finding new, flexible accounts of the relation between text and context. In this respect, the applications of systems theory in literary studies can be considered; they go through models for determining this relation and seek, for instance, to understand a text in terms of its difference from context. Here, in essence, there emerges a logic of text and context that is reminiscent of the hermeneutic logic of question and answer (Gadamer). In this way, texts become able to be understood as contexts of texts.

In the process, the problem of how to distinguish culture from literature while still relating it to it becomes inescapable. The present article outlines an answer to this quandary by making the following suggestion: if we turn our attention away from the problem of the textuality of the context and instead focus on the contextuality of the text, we can see that text and context are not be distinguished from each other aesthetically or epistemologically, or analytically or ontologically, but instead mutually condition each other. The text is always already a text in a context and the context is always already a textual structure. Thus, by the contextuality of the text we mean a textual disposition in which the text is always already positioned in a context or, seen from the opposite angle, is even treated as secondary to the context and understood as a segment extracted retrospectively from one context or many contexts. The focus is on a textual structure that is an essential part of text-context relationships and also, where literary theory is concerned, of a concept of the text that has been extended accordingly. Such a concept of the text would be the foundation for a concept of context that could serve as a fundamental concept for literary studies. First, it could make clear that context and interpretation go hand in hand

insofar as it is solely the contextuality of the text that guarantees its interpretability. Second, it could contribute to a reconstruction of the history of the subject's methods by making clear how and which contexts can be identified for literature in a particular school of thought.

At the same time, it thereby becomes apparent that the problem of determining the relation between text and context gives rise to new forms of reconceptualization of the text: think, for instance, of the concept of ›texture‹ as a ›key term‹ of literary studies (Reinfandt) or the idea of conceiving of literature as a medium (Reinfandt, Jahraus). The literary text would then be a medium because it always already mediates between text and context, that is, for instance, between consciousness and communication, imagination and writing, the individual and society, the specific and the general, and so on.

At the end of the article, two examples of a context-sensitive literary studies are presented in order to demonstrate the possibilities and limits, the achievement and the problems of such models with reference to existing schools of thought: the technological media history and poetics of knowledge that Friedrich Kittler and Joseph Vogl respectively have sought to put forward. Almost all of Kittler's scholarly output can be reconstructed against this background as an attempt to allow literary studies to access technological media history as a context for literature that does not remain external to literature but acts intrinsically as an essential part of literature, correctly formatting its production and its reception in equal measure. Vogl's interest concerns the problem of how a new context, namely bodies of knowledge at the time, can be made productive enough for the text itself to be read in two directions: as a document of knowledge and as a contribution to knowledge. To deal with this, a mediating function is installed in this model, namely aestheticization, which acts as a relay station between literature and knowledge and, so to speak, gives knowledge a literary potential and literature an epistemological awareness.

On this basis, finally, a tool is presented for evaluating, in terms of methodology and literary theory, contemporary and recent attempts to lay claim to new contexts for literature. It is shown that it is not enough simply to place literature in new contexts. New contexts must, instead, give voice to the contextuality of the text. This does not just mean being superficially useful in interpretation but rather contributing to literary theory in the true sense of the word. Such contextualizations must also lead to a concept of the literary text that is richer in terms of literary theory by making clear, from the perspective of literary studies, what such contextualizations can tell us about literature itself.

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