

# Johan Fornäs: *Rethinking Culture*

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Cultural research today surprisingly often builds on contradictory concepts of culture, meaning and interpretation that are rarely specified, while critiques have sought to undermine such concepts. There is therefore a need for providing a comprehensive and sustainable theoretical foundation for interdisciplinary cultural studies. The aim of my new book to systematically summarise and further develop my previous work on cultural theory, clinch current theoretical challenges and update the communicative concept of culture as signifying practice. This has been questioned by post-humanistic, anti-hermeneutic and neo-cybernetic positions that must be taken seriously. The book will clarify the development and dimensions of the concept of culture, entering critical dialogues with its contesters. Among other things, this involves linking communication, creativity and critique: defining culture as communicative action where meaning and materiality dialectically intersect, exploring the conditions for creative imagination and emergence, and investigating the critical moments in the work of interpretation. A visit to Amsterdam is to be used for dialogues with relevant scholars. The purpose is thus to reconsider and update a communicative concept of culture; to work through the anti-hermeneutic challenges to that concept; and to theorise the dialectics between communication, creativity and critique.

I have initiated this work in a series of contexts. The books *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity* (1995) and *Consuming Media* (2007) presented a wide range of theories in the field. *Kultur* (2012) was a short pedagogical overview in Swedish. An article (“Bridging Gaps: Ten Crosscurrents in Media Studies”, 2008) listed some gaps and tensions in the field, and other texts hinted upon measures needed to overcome them (“The Crucial In Between: The Centrality of Mediation in Cultural Studies”, 2000; “Post-Anti-Hermeneutics: Reclaiming Culture, Meaning and Interpretation”, 2012; “The Dialectics of Communicative and Immanent Critique in Cultural Studies”, 2013). Insights from the field of mediatisation theory will be integrated in this process, as they strongly affect cultural theory, since media are technologies of communicative and signifying practice, and thus of culture. In the planned volume, these efforts will be synthesised into one coherent text and expanded on a larger scale, in an effort to respond to key objections to traditional hermeneutics and interpretive cultural studies, and thus propose a new theoretical foundation for critical and cultural studies.