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The Relevance of Culture-Specific Elements of TV-Series for the Process of Cross-Cultural Understanding. General Considerations, Some Proposals and Preliminary Results

1. Are there "media effects" at all?

Whenever the question about the significance of mass media for processes of cross-cultural understanding is raised, one assumption is taken to be self-evident: that mass media have some effect on people. It is precisely this assumption that is questioned again and again, only quite recently by McGuire (1986) in a new edition of his former article of 1969. In Germany these considerations were popularized and widely distributed by Rolf Degen (1988). For these authors there is no need to explain under what circumstances mass media lead to which kinds of influence in their audiences – this question has already been answered by McGuire (1986) by a cautious and by Degen by a decisive "No;" Degen asserts that "media effects are nothing but a bluff." An explanation is only needed for laymen or scientists, who – despite overwhelming, negative, empirical evidence – insist on media effects. And an answer is immediately given, laymen as well as scientists need simple explanations for complex realities; looking for media effects fulfills the function of scapegoating. In addition, scientists want to be seen as important people, and it would be painful having to confess that six decades of empirical media research have not produced any conclusive results. From this point of view the use of mass media is just for amusement with no consequences at all (except that it is time consuming).

If this position was taken seriously, it would be consequent to stop further research into the effects of the media and to stop all research into areas of almost classical paradigms, e.g. about "the media and aggressiveness," "the effects of pornography," "the media and prosocial behavior," "the induction of anxiety by media," "the media and advertising," "the media and intercultural learning" and so on. Only the mental states of people who want to make other people believe that the media possess any potential effect would still be worth examining. Of course the legitimacy of this question cannot be doubted – science can ask all types of questions, given some kind of prob-

lem (Bunge, 1967). But the radical change of the paradigm seems a little bit premature, as will be demonstrated later by some examples.

But before we continue, another argument should be considered. The need to research into the effects of the media and of television can be questioned for other reasons. As is well-known, the situation of television reception does not correspond to an explicit teaching and learning situation. Even a lesson which is optimally planned with the help of different taxonomies of educational objectives cannot secure teaching success (fig. 1). Mass media and particularly television, can only approximate effective teaching situations, and television dramatization rarely uses instrumental teaching techniques, such as structuring, organizing in advance, repetitions or summaries.

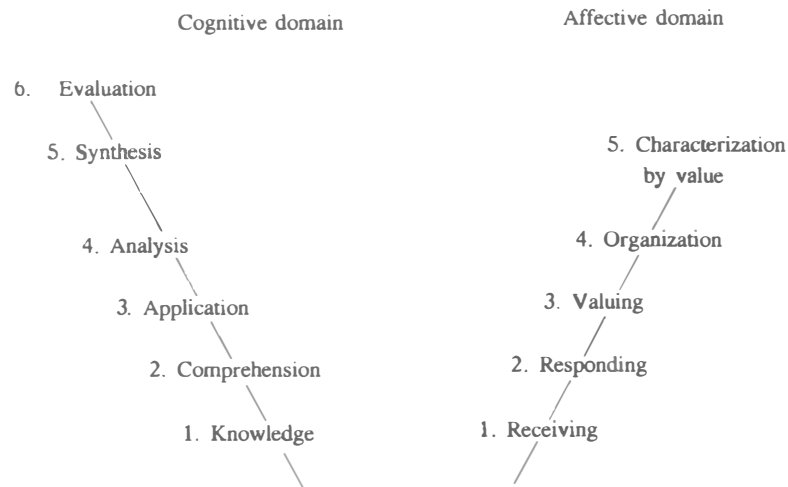


Figure 1: Taxonomies of educational objectives in the cognitive (Bloom et al., 1956) and the affective domain (Krathwohl et al., 1964)

Furthermore, in everyday life television is not primarily used as a learning device, and certainly not to learn intentionally something about foreign cultures. In the tradition of the so-called “uses and gratification approach,” television viewing is motivated primarily by the need for recreation, it is merely an unpretentious pastime. Although there may be exceptions, the situation of television viewing is characterized by a low “amount of invested mental effort” (Salomon, 1984), by a less-than-optimal level of attention for

learning purposes and a high amount of relaxation (Czikszentmihalyi/ Kubey, 1981). An additional obstacle to using television for teaching purposes results from the fact that watching television is often a secondary or even a tertiary occupation, it is done simultaneously with other activities, like talking, eating, house work, playing, and so on (Dahms, 1983).

Nevertheless there are effects resulting from the mere existence of television, referred to by media theorists like McLuhan (1964), Postman (1985) or Meyrowitz (1985) and also by researchers using the classical effect-paradigm. According to them, as leisure time cannot be increased indefinitely, television viewing possesses displacement qualities, as in the case of older people who reduce their social activities when a television set is offered as a new gadget in the household (Williams, 1986). For other people watching television is a kind of relaxation and recreation, but one can certainly ask whether it makes any difference, if during their leisure time they are engaged in day-dreaming or in watching television. And here the question is again that of media effects.

In order to illustrate the potentials of television often denied, two examples taken from everyday life shall be mentioned. After Christmas 1987 a German TV network (ZDF) televised a serial story about a girl, named Anna, on consecutive days. The plot was about a bodily impaired girl who was not driven to despair by her illness, but who trained very hard and made a career as a primaballerina. It was found that – at least on a local level – applications for ballet courses rose dramatically and until Easter 1988 it was impossible for newcomers to get a place in a ballet-school.

A second example is given by Herzog (1986). From *Dallas* it is clear that the layman cannot copy the lifestyle of the Ewings. But at least some elements of the outfit of this soap opera became relevant on a behavioral level. An interviewed textile merchant reported that after one episode of *Dallas* it was not possible to buy a certain kind of yellow curtain tissue used as a prop in the *Dallas* series.

These potentials for influencing people are recognized by the industry, and underhand advertising, more nobly called product placement, is sold for a lot of money by the producers of day-time series. Even fashion collections are designed in connection with some serials (e.g. *Miami Vice*, *Dallas*, *Dynasty*). Of course, everyday experiences do not provide solid proof, nor do the decisions of the advertising industry to invest in product placement. But –

contrary to McGuire (1986) — there is also a bulk of systematic empirical evidence about media effects, for instance about

- the stimulation of aggression by media exposure (Lukesch, 1988; Williams, 1986);
- delinquency and media (Scheungrab, 1988; Philipps, 1986);
- attitude change by exposition to pornography (Zillman/Bryant, 1984);
- stimulation of pro-social behavior in children by the use of media (Friedrich/Stein, 1983).

This does not imply dealing with media research again in behavioristic terms and restricting it to the stimulus-response scheme. Even in the Payn-Fund-Studies of the thirties (Blumer/Hauser, 1933) complex actions in the movies were considered. But since the middle of the fifties there has been a tendency to give up the effect concept and to replace it with new labels without knowing exactly the range of validity of the new and perhaps old marks. This modernistic attitude carries the danger of impairing the objects of interest, which comprise the question about the media realities in changing societies, the impact of media on societies, on the institutions of different societies and on groups and on individual members of societies.

2. Cultural imports to the FRG from the USA

If it is accepted that people can be influenced by the media, then it is worthwhile to examine the media imports from the US and the cultural exchange of media between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In 1984 51,733 books were published in Germany. 12.5 percent of these were translations from other languages. The majority of these foreign books (63.3 % or 4,086 titles) came from Anglo-American writers. In comparison to this kind of cultural import the export from Germany to English-speaking countries was much more modest. In 1984 only 2,100 licences were given for translations, out of these, 12.8 percent (that is 278 titles) were translations into English. According to these figures the cultural import from English speaking countries to Germany is fifteen times higher than the export to these countries.

It is also worthwhile to consider the current television market. We shall try to trace the origin of the programs of the ZDF, which is the biggest television company in Germany as well as in Central Europe. If only feature-length films are taken into account (see table 1), it becomes obvious that the greatest part comes from the United States. Although there has been a certain decrease during the past years, comparing the number of movies produced in the States and in Germany shows that twice as many were produced in the States.

Table 1: Origin of feature-length films shown by ZDF

Year	Number of telecast movies	Origin		
		USA	FRG	France
1983	197	90 (45.7 %)	24 (12.2 %)	16 (8.1 %)
1984	262	95 (37.0 %)	48 (18.3 %)	25 (9.5 %)
1985	292	97 (33.2 %)	45 (15.4 %)	27 (9.3 %)

Within the ZDF there are two editor's offices, one is in charge of entertainment oriented programs (culture, films, day-time series, theater, music, documentary films), the other one, the main editorial office, is concerned with information oriented programs (national politics, foreign affairs, educational and cultural politics, news, commentaries, sports). It is remarkable that the percentage of foreign programs in the first department amounts to about 43–44 percent and to about 0.3–8.3 percent in the second, when the years 1983 to 1985 are taken into consideration.

This means that the (cultural) import of entertainment is high and relatively low where information is involved. This difference may be due to the different concepts of the role of television, which — in Germany — is predominantly a public and not a private institution. In addition it shows that news and related programs are taken very seriously; news shows or soft news — as produced by American television companies — do not fit into this picture of serious journalism.

The separation between news programs on the one hand and entertainment on the other has been on the decline since 1985, because private TV- and broadcasting companies are now allowed in Germany, too. Private companies are

beginning to mix entertainment and news in order to attract larger audiences, which of course is necessary to attract money from the advertisement industry. Another consequence of this change in the media scene is that private television companies have raised the percentage of bought programs, because producing their own programs is too expensive. Therefore, these channels offer more foreign, especially US entertainment products.

As part of this change in the media scene it is also necessary to mention TV-reception by TV-satellites, sometimes combined with cable-TV. At present it is possible in Germany to receive the Sky-Channel of the Australo-Anglo-American editor Murdoch and the English Music Box Program. These developments will soon lead to a diffusion of the TV-programs all over the continent and to an increase in the number of international products. It can be expected that in the near future a gradual loss of cultural identity will take place as a result of this development.

Together with TV we have to consider the video market. Video has been a new and widespread distribution medium for movies since about 1980. In Germany one third of all households already possess video equipment and the market is certainly not saturated yet. There is a specific aspect of videos. By law, video films can be placed on an index list in Germany, if they show scenes of open violence, explicit pornography, racial cruelties and so on. The aim of this decision is to protect young people from films which do not comply with German ethic standards; adults, however, can see whatever they want. In December 1984 683 films were on this list. Out of these at least 144 (21.1 %) were produced in the United States and only 44 (6.4 %) in Germany (BPS-Report, 1984/86). This means that the cultural import includes also a substantial amount of violence and pornography.

Finally some data concerning the movies should be given. In 1982 311 movies were shown in Germany for the first time. The majority of these was produced in the United States (39.2 % or 122 films), only 22.5 percent (70) originated from Germany (SPIO-Statistik, 1982). Because of a clever and sometimes very aggressive marketing strategy, some US-produced films are known all over the world (at least over the western world). This can be illustrated by an interview study undertaken in Munich with children from 9 to 12. Only 19 percent of all the interviewed children did not know *E.T.* (Winklhofer, 1986). This influence of movie figures is reinforced by merchandising the films, by showing them on video and finally on television. In addition outstanding film figures are sold in the form of toys, stickers and so

on. Some of these figures became part of a (western) world-wide youth culture, they became communicative symbols for children (e.g. *Star Wars*, *Masters of the Universe*, *Barbie*). It would certainly be incorrect to characterize the situation by the term "American cultural imperialism" – as it is done occasionally – although such a slogan can be used for the relations between the first and the third world. Rather, it is probably correct to talk about permeable borders between the USA and the FRG, and this means at least that there is no equal exchange of cultural media products.

3. Media research between content analysis and audience research

There are two complementary ways of doing research into the effects of cultural imports. First, you can use content analytical methods, whereby – in analogy to everyday reasoning and also to aesthetic evaluation – a one-to-one relation between the content of the film and its impact on the audience is established. Because this kind of research may lead to faulty results, additional research into the audience is needed. This last kind of research, however, is in danger of producing another kind of error. In carrying out research with individuals certain characteristics can in fact be demonstrated, but the conclusions drawn with regard to the effects of media stimuli may be wrong because effects can be moderated by the reception situation, by former media experience or personality traits of the recipients.

Considering *content analysis*, there are three possibilities for using this approach within the framework of media research (DFG, 1986):

(a) Content analysis can be seen as a description of stimuli. In this case one has to accept the fact that a plot can be described on different levels of decomposition. The simplest kind consists in counting all behavioral units which belong to certain categories of behavior; the amount of aggressive acts in movies for instance is counted in this way (Gerbner and Gross, 1974). This method, however, was criticized, because equivalent functions of the single acts could not be established. It can thus be shown that the effects of a slap-stick-comedy cannot be compared to the effects of a movie in which the same amount of aggressive acts is shown in a realistic manner among close family relations (Belson, 1978).

There is, furthermore, no algorithm which would lead to an optimal description. It is left to the intuition of the researcher to decide which characteristics he will find in the course of actions and how he will turn these into operationally defined attributes. Williams (1986) found out that the length of building up an aggressive act is more decisive for the stimulation of aggression in the audience than the amount of such actions.

Ideally, one aims at a quantitative statement concerning the relevant aspects of a communication situation, the meaning of which has to be explored by further research.

(b) Secondly, content analysis may be used to investigate the effects of multi-step communication processes. Hypotheses about the “gate-keeper-concept” of Kurt Lewin (1948) or the “two-step-flow of communication” by Paul Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) – we would now say “multi-step-flow” – can be proved by the methods of content analysis. This use of content analysis shows at least the thinking habits of the media producers. By content analytical methods the sense of responsibility of the media producers in the context of the international merchandizing of movies could also be investigated.

In this connection it should be emphasized that media show a distinct reality, and media production is not primarily oriented towards serving the aims of cultural exchange or fostering cross-cultural understanding. Media products are not supposed to mirror a given culture in a realistic way. They obey their own laws, they are necessarily fragmentary, selective and exaggerating; they are produced, sold and bought for other, mainly commercial purposes. When – on the other hand – they try to portray everyday life (e.g. in a ZDF documentary about the sexuality of lay persons) opposition arises from the program editors as well as from certain pressure groups among the audience.

(c) The weakest use made of content analysis is to use it as a substitute for effect-studies. If one aims at drawing conclusions from contents to effects in the recipients, then this wide gap can only be bridged if the categories of the content analysis are established indicators within the framework of a consistent psychological theory about effects. The meaning and the effects of these categories have to be shown elsewhere. It is not a legitimate way of drawing conclusions from contents to effects, when the gap is bridged only by lay-psychological reasoning. Although this type of arguing is often found in the field of media research, it is by no means a serious procedure. This kind

of reasoning is only acceptable in explorative stages, when one tries to find possible categories for further causal analyses.

Research with recipients of media exposure can also be found differently related to content analyses within the framework of effect studies.

(a) The simplest form is the so-called user-study, in which the audience of certain media products are described by social and demographic variables. In soap operas, for instance, we can find a dominance of women, persons with low income and with large families (Katzman, 1972). In Germany these products are predominantly watched by older people (Horn and Eckhard, 1986), and by persons with lower income. Such a kind of analysis may be useful for the program staff who want to find out potential target groups and who want to adapt television programs to everyday life routines.

The results of these studies, e.g. the yearly published data of the Nielsen Company in the USA or the GfK in Germany, are comparatively insignificant. Well-founded statements about effects of program usage cannot be achieved by this kind of evidence. From these studies we only know that the people who watch a lot of TV do not know how else to spend their time. Even if the data were interpreted within the framework of the “uses-and-gratification approach,” the conclusions would remain hypothetical and subjective.

(b) Another method used to investigate recipients is to interview people about the way they process the information or the contents of some programs, e.g. soap operas. With this kind of study the different processes of selection and inference people make when being confronted with the same material can be assessed. This approach can apparently show how the same items are interpreted by the recipients in many different ways (Herzog, 1986). Again some problems arise. What can be grasped with this method are laymen categories, perhaps of a very idiosyncratic nature. It has to be shown whether these categories correspond to theoretically founded ones which would be used within the framework of a content analysis. Finally, there remains the open question of whether the subjective mirroring of media mediated actions is a necessary or sufficient condition for analyzing media effects on recipients.

(c) Finally, the conventional methods used to prove the effects of the media should be mentioned. These investigations try to cover both sides, from media use to personality aspects. Every researcher is free to increase

the complexity of these designs and the methods of analysis (e.g. by the synchronic or diachronic measurement of variables, with simple correlational methods, or by causal analytic procedures like two-stage-least-square-, partial-least-square-, LISREL- or EQS-methodology). The aim is to demonstrate recursive or non-recursive processes between media exposition and some kind of personality change. Examples of such designs in the area of cross-cultural exchange by media have not been put forward so far.

By combining methods of content analysis, research with media consumers and different ways of controlling media exposition, many different media research designs are possible (fig. 2). Some of them seem to be more promising than others.

4. Form and content of US-American and German TV serials: a pilot study

Because of the temporal expansion and the multiplication of TV programs, the production of movies for the cinema could not keep up with the demands for filling innumerable TV minutes. And since there are different groups of audiences, TV time could not simply be filled with sports programs, which are, of course, the cheapest products. The demand for cheap programs led to the emergence of the soap operas. From 1946 to 1978 no less than 218 family-series were produced in the USA, (e.g. *I remember Maria*, *Father knows best*, *The Waltons*, *The Jeffersons*), "which became part of (the US) collective history and culture." (Glennon and Butsch, 1982, p. 264) This development culminated in the quasi-cult serials *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Falcon Crest*, *Miami Vice* or *Hotel*, to name just a few of the top-series in US-programs, which have also been exported to the FRG. The idea of filling TV time with these series was accepted in the FRG, too. Very successful series at home, such as *Derrick*, *Black Forest Clinic* or *Lime-Tree-Street*, became export hits of German TV culture.

Our explorative analyses of American and German series are by no means a complete and optimal design. They only concern content analysis as a description of stimuli, and were developed in several courses on media research. Brandl (1986) analyzed three programs of *Dallas*, Brandl and Stadler (1987) examined five programs of *Lime-Tree-Street* and Wurdak (1986) investigated two series of the *Black Forest Clinic* (B.F.C.).

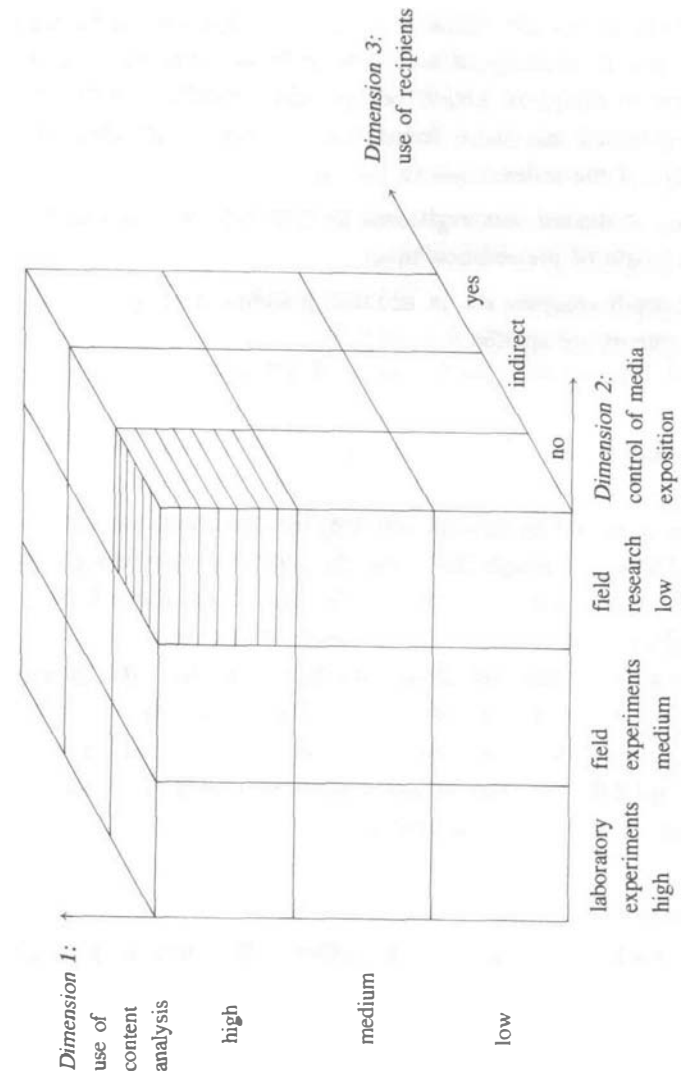


Figure 2: Structure of media research designs (hatched cube: content analysis in framework of field research without including audiences)

After the first performances the applicability of the following procedure was tested.

- (a) Every program is considered to be a fusion of several distinguishable stories (or subplots) which are exhibited in a mixed fashion during the serials. These stories can be analyzed according to formal aspects (e.g. distribution of number of tracks of action per program, length of time of the scenes). It was assumed that these formal aspects can reveal characteristic narrative structures of the series.
- (b) The content of themes was registered in a separate run and quantified according to the length of presentation time.
- (c) Further in-depth analyses are in addition possible if more theoretically based category systems are applied.

4.1 Formal aspects

A first glance at these serials reveals that they are produced according to a simple pattern. There is a rough frame for the plot (e.g. the Ewing family, the clinic in the Black Forest or the inhabitants of the Lime-Tree-Street house), which allows for several lines of action. These lines of action are more specific (e.g. for *Lime-Tree-Street*: In family X the wife leaves her husband, he begins to drink, one of the daughters suffers from the breakdown of this marriage, the other takes up a triangular affair with her mother's lover); alternatively they can be categorized according to superordinate themes (e.g. family problems, social problems).

Moreover, the different stories do not run separately, but are connected by formal and thematic aspects, e.g. in *Lime-Tree-Street*:

- (a) Time-level: Each part of the series corresponds to a daily routine, i.e. it begins in the morning and ends in the evening of the same day.
- (b) Space-level: All persons live in the same house. This provides many opportunities for social encounters (doctor's practice, hairdresser's shop, Greek restaurant). All the places offer opportunities for the meetings of the protagonists.
- (c) Nesting of tracks of actions: The same people appear in different subplots.

(d) Interlocking by other persons: This means that the people involved describe and comment the actions of the protagonists.

To understand the tracks of action minimal cognitive efforts of the recipients are required. But in order to bring suspense into the series the subplots are cut into small scenes and inserted one after another, so that the development of the plot becomes clear only after watching the entire program.

By dividing the programs into subplots, their sequences and the length of these scenes reveal specific patterns, examples of which are given in figure 3. This subdivision shows that despite thematic divergencies the formal patterns of the series are quite similar in the USA and the FRG.

At first there is a short overview of all the tracks of the previous action, which is repeated for a second time in a shortened version. This technique enables the viewer to enter the series, even if he has not seen the previous programs.

A great similarity of the other formal criteria (see table 2) can also be shown. Whereas in the first programs of *Lime-Tree-Street* there was a tendency of the serial to be "faster paced" than the American ones, this was reduced in later productions because of the audience's reactions.

Table 2: Comparison of three series of *Dallas* with five series of *Lime-Tree-Street* by formal criteria

characteristics	<i>Dallas</i> (45 min)			<i>Lime-Tree-Street</i> (30 min)				
	D1	D2	D3	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5
number of plots	5	5	7	4	5	4	4	3
number of scenes	21	23	24	18	23	19	12	14
average time of scenes	115s	105s	100s	90s	70s	85s	130s	116s
number of shifts								
between plots	18	16	21	14	12	16	9	12

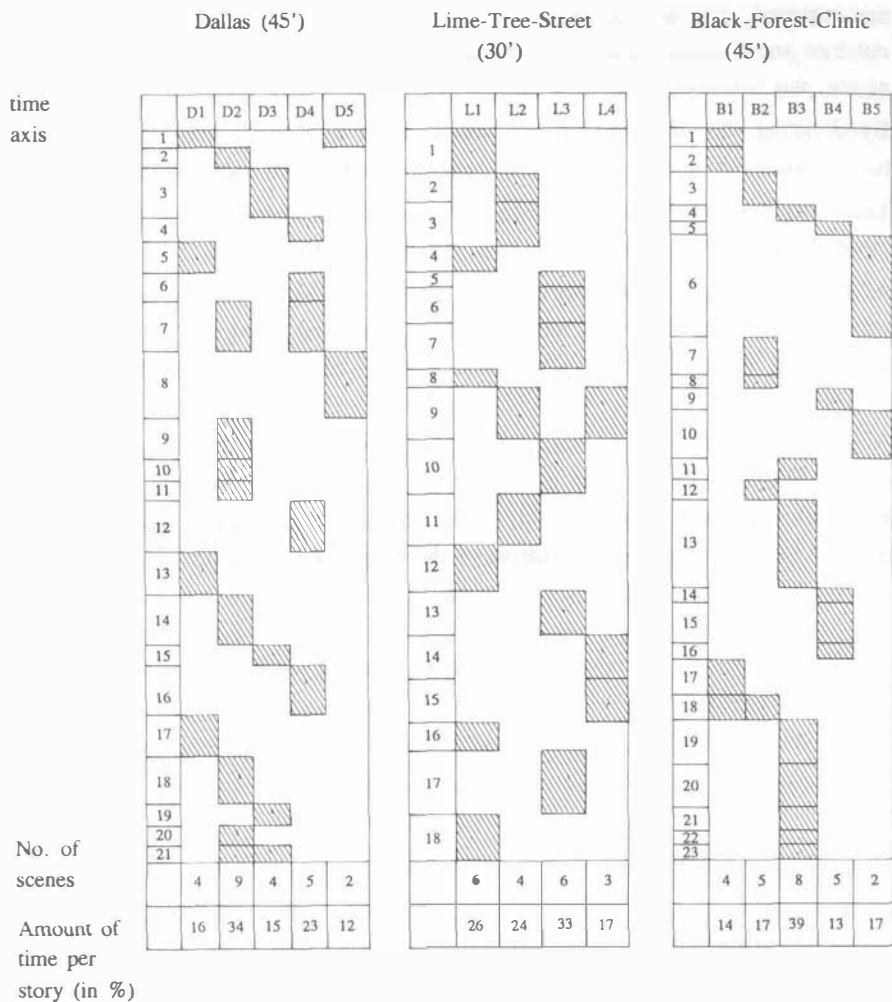


Figure 3: Comparison of US- and FRG produced day-time serials by formal criteria

This formal similarity is surprising, because in the US series the changes of tracks of action are usually needed for fading in advertisements, whereas in the FRG public programs are not interrupted by commercials. From what is known about the production of *Lime-Tree-Street*, this series was not conceived for exporting purposes. The reason for the similarity in pattern of the series seems to lie in the technical conditions of production which favor such a design. For instance, only a certain number of the actors are needed per shooting-day, parts can be shot at the same time on the same day, parts of the script can be written by different authors, unexpected incidents (e.g. the illness of an actor) can quickly be taken into account. All this warrants a low-priced and quick production of the series, which need not even be produced "in stock."

4.2 Possibilities for content analysis

In order to analyze the thematic content of the series, a category system similar to that of Katzman (1972) was developed. Verbal as well as scenic information units were scored. For the comparison of *Dallas* and *Black Forest Clinic* seven categories of content analysis were set up and quantified according to their length of time:

- (1) Family: Only explicit references to this theme were counted, e.g. parent-child relationships, family property and so on. This category was not codified for the interaction of married couples which referred only to both or one of them as an individual.
- (2) Relationships: Mainly male-female relations were codified, and social role-behavior of the individuals was not particularly focussed upon.
- (3) Power/money/business/career: Although these items appear to be rather heterogeneous, they are, after all, interconnected and a further splitting would reduce the potential evidence.
- (4) Social problems: This includes references to general social problems (e.g. unemployment, social position) as well as to the consequences for the individual.
- (5) Sexuality: This category was used only for explicit appearances and not for subliminal indications. Double-codifications with category (2) may result.

(6) Individual fatal blows: The condition for the codification was that the performed content was generally looked upon as a fatal blow and the persons reacted accordingly in a manner which showed that they were affected.

(7) Intrigues: All kinds of actions with which one person tries to follow his own interests to the disadvantage of others or through which others somehow come to harm. No further subdivision according to motives (e.g. power, personal hatred) was made.

Table 3: Comparison of problems in *Dallas* and *Black Forest Clinic*

problems	<i>Dallas</i>	<i>Black Forest Clinic</i>
family relations	19.7 %	35.5 %
power/money/ business/career	29.0 %	15.5 %
social problems	23.3 %	9.0 %
sexuality	—	36.0 %
strokes of fate	9.0 %	4.0 %
intrigues	12.0 %	—
	7.0 %	—

When this classification into categories is applied, it becomes clear that there are important differences of content between the two series. The fields of conflict which are prevailing in *Dallas* refer to power, those of *B.F.C.* to social problems. The treatment of the same content is also carried out on different levels. This can well be demonstrated by the example of alcoholism: While it is a fatal blow to Sue Ellen in *Dallas* and therefore treated as an individual problem, the same subject is handled as a social problem in *B.F.C.* (change between the death of an alcoholic and the hilarious party in honour of the medical superintendent). One could say that in *Dallas* the social-political implications of acting are faded out in favor of an image of individualized self-determination.

In *Dallas* sex roles are shown as approximately equal. Women are as much intriguants as men, they are well integrated into social life and are presented as self-confident. But we have to be careful. This may also be the result of the German synchronization, by which the stereotype “stupid-beautiful-blond”

was radically eliminated. The *B.F.C.* contains substantially more traditional sex role stereotypes (Dr. Brinkmann displays a friendly-authoritarian father image, his wife plays the classical mother role). Strong differences of problem-solving and acting strategies appear between men and women in *B.F.C.*, e.g. concerning helplessness (m: 16 %, f: 50%), emotional-unreflected actions (m: 0 %, f: 37 %) or intellectual-rational actions (m: 83 %, f: 25 %).

In *Dallas* the categories left either serve to flavor the series (sexuality) or they concern elements of the plot which push the flow of events (intrigues, individual fatal blows). In *B.F.C.* sexuality is hardly mentioned or if at all only in a decent way. Nevertheless there was one program in which a rape scene was explicitly shown.

Another difference lies in the modelling of the characters as “good” and “evil.” J.R. is the prototype of a rascal (also recognizable by the Mercedes he drives), whose exact opposites are Bobby or Mother Ewing. Such simple black-white contrasts cannot be found in the *B.F.C.*. No villain as such appears, each character shows also positive aspects, which finally determine his actions. The series *Dallas* is generally in accordance with the high level of aggression found in American TV entertainment. According to Huesmann and Eron (1986, p. 21) 16.8 percent of the TV time in the USA is filled with aggressive acts, so that the USA hold the top rank among the countries compared.

The possibilities of a content analysis are not exhausted by categorizing the content the way we did. From a psychological point of view some other proposals can be made, which can be used for labelling single protagonists and also the complete serial. In one of our first exploratory analyses, in addition to the kind and frequency of problem constellations, the following aspects were codified:

(a) Foundation of actions

Strategies of actions can be classified in compliance with their foundation according to the six-step model of moral development by Kohlberg (1958). As is well-known, Kohlberg proposed a developmental sequence of three levels of morality with two steps each (see table 4). Moral stages are defined independently of moral content, like conscience, truth, sex and sexual love, justice (Kohlberg, 1958).

Table 4: Stages of moral development (Boyce/Jensen, 1978, p. 101)

I. Preconventional level

The child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these in terms of either the physical or hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors), or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules.

II. Conventional level

Maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of consequences. This attitude is not only one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty, of actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying it, of identifying oneself with the people or group involved in it.

III. Postconventional, autonomous, or principled level

The person makes a clear effort to define moral values and principles which have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles, and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups.

This model also allows for a common theoretical foundation of impact studies. The connection between movie content and movie effects can be seen in processes of associative, reinforcement, model and structural learning.

A first approach to fit the strategies of actions of the *B.F.C.* characters into this scheme shows that 50 percent of the decision for actions can be placed on the preconventional level of moral reasoning, 30 percent on the conventional level and 20 percent on the postconventional level. As a matter of fact no woman acts on this highest level, but only men. Perhaps this mirrors reality, because it was found that women exhibit a different quality of moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982), based more on responsibility than on justice.

(b) The importance of problems

According to the consequences of a problem for different persons, classification can be made in a person-related way.

This procedure is based on the consideration that the same problem may have completely different meanings for the persons affected by it (e.g. the decision of the right to the custody of a child is an everyday problem for the involved social worker, but for the affected parents it is probably an existential problem).

1. Consequences for the person are not clear, either because of missing information or because of his/her neutral and indifferent reactions.
2. Insignificant consequences or consequences which are reversible with little effort (e.g. a child complains because lunch is not ready).
3. Problems of medium importance whose handling is possible with the appropriate effort (e.g. a decision about a school career).
4. Problems with existential consequences where the person concerned is in a crisis or stress situation whose handling demands a lot of him.

(c) Performed emotionality

Based on mimic, gestic, verbal and paralingual signs, the intensity of emotions can be registered (possibly divisible into positive and negative emotions).

1. No emotions are registered.
2. The action of a person is accompanied by a single emotional signal whose level of intensity is low (e.g. warm intonation, sporadic smile).
3. Strong emotional participation and concern; this will also be codified if the disposition for still stronger emotions exists but cannot be acted out.
4. Emotions of highest intensity which are acted out in full (e.g. crying, eruption of anger).

(d) Problem-solving

As is known from the research of life-events (Filipp, 1981; Thomae, 1968) there are different patterns of dealing with problems.

1. Repression of the problem, evasion, avoidance, escape (e.g. the delay of a clearing conversation of a pregnant woman with her boy friend).
2. Irrational reactions which result from a confrontation with the problem, but which do not represent a well-reflected, realistic solving behavior (possible solutions are casual).
3. The problem is approached rationally and systematically. The person remains restricted to his/her own interests (ego-centered behavior).
4. Rational solution of problems, which takes other peoples' interests into account in a sensible and well-reflected way.

(e) Mutual social positive and negative appraisal

Everybody who makes a positive or negative appraisal is codified as well as the way in which the person is appraised. Conversations about others can be considered, too.

These possibilities are not exhaustive in any way. One could also think about using schemes for the reproduction of interpersonal behavior (e.g. Interaction-Process-Analyses according to Bales, 1982), which have already been established elsewhere. It depends on the fields of interest which system is chosen for analysis. An additional suggestion would be to use the model of Schwartz and Howard (1981) for analyzing pro-social potentials in TV serials. But it has to be stressed that in any case the approach is only fruitful if theoretically based concepts are used.

4.3 Research into recipients

Herzog (1986) tried to make the subjective reactions to *Dallas* in the FRG and in the USA accessible by means of fifty interviews with Germans and Americans, respectively.

Basically, this opens a direction of questioning which was once illustrated by Salomon (1985) in a simple diagram (see fig. 4).

Herzog (1986) stated that for German recipients *Dallas* is a mixture of fiction and reality, whereby younger individuals see the fictional part more clearly than older ones. The information taken from the serial can be characterized by the slogan “Wonderland USA” (illustrated by the wideness of the country, huge proportions, e.g. regarding cities, skyscrapers, traffic, motorways and the lifestyles of the very rich). Younger individuals tend to point out missing elements of American reality (leaving out problems like slums, black people, no middle class). For German recipients the series offers some opportunities of projecting personal problems onto the protagonists which can thus be lived out in day-dreams. These projections are very subjective, which induced Herzog’s statement: “*Dallas* allows ... an open reading.” (1986, p. 352)

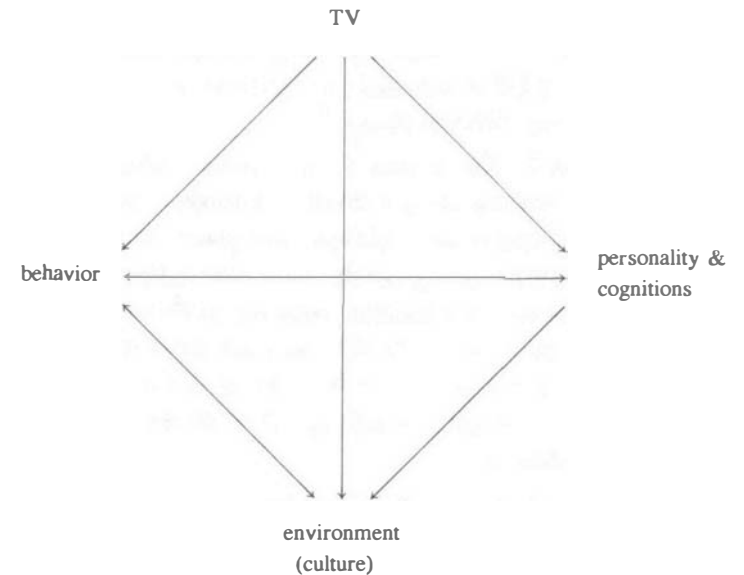


Figure 4: Unidirectional view of television to individuals in cultural contexts (Salomon, 1985, p. 389)

Recipients from the USA regard *Dallas* quite clearly as fiction, as soap opera, to which hardly a personal relation can be established even by the vehicle of day-dreaming. In substance, *Dallas* is categorized as “big business after the Dollar” and as “juicy stuff” about sex and murder, with fewer possibilities for identification than for German recipients. It may be that Americans possess a higher TV literacy, so that they are immunized against the content of *Dallas*. But there is a second explanation as well. America is a matter of primary experience for Americans. Thus the TV pictures have little chance of overcoming the hard facts of everyday life.

Herzog (1986, p. 352) summarizes, “the answers ... show that not only the performed contents determines the meaning (as the traditional aesthetic proposed) and that the audience does not function as a passive recipient of given meanings (as assumed in the deterministic model of communication). The

interpretation of such a serial is rather a many-sided process between screen-action and recipient.” Or we can say, using another metaphor, the “world outside,” be it only a TV world, and the “pictures in our head” (Lippmann, 1922) may be two very different things.

What does this mean for the process of intercultural understanding? Obviously, elements in the movies are perceived and categorized as typical of the other culture. Such a classification always takes place when more reliable and better pieces of information, cognitively more thoroughly encoded, are missing. Furthermore, when identification with the performed characters takes place, a multiple connection with the recipient must be given. In other words, a certain kind of reality must be ascribed to the characters, and patterns of behavior must be given which appeal to desirable but not realizable behavior of the spectators.

If we accept this point of view, it follows that the effects of TV may not be seen as simple results of certain products, but as reciprocal relations between the fields in question (see fig. 5).

5. Summary

- (1) To summarize, it has been shown that television can have an impact on people; this impact, however, is seldom direct and more often influenced by many background factors.
- (2) There is a great cultural exchange by media (TV programs, books, movies, symbol figures) with a much higher import from the US to the FRG than in the other direction.
- (3) There are differences between the TV products from the US and the FRG, as could be demonstrated with selected day-time serials. The differences do not concern formal aspects, but rather content. Future research within a theoretically refined framework is necessary in order to achieve more detailed descriptions of the substance of these serials or movies in general.

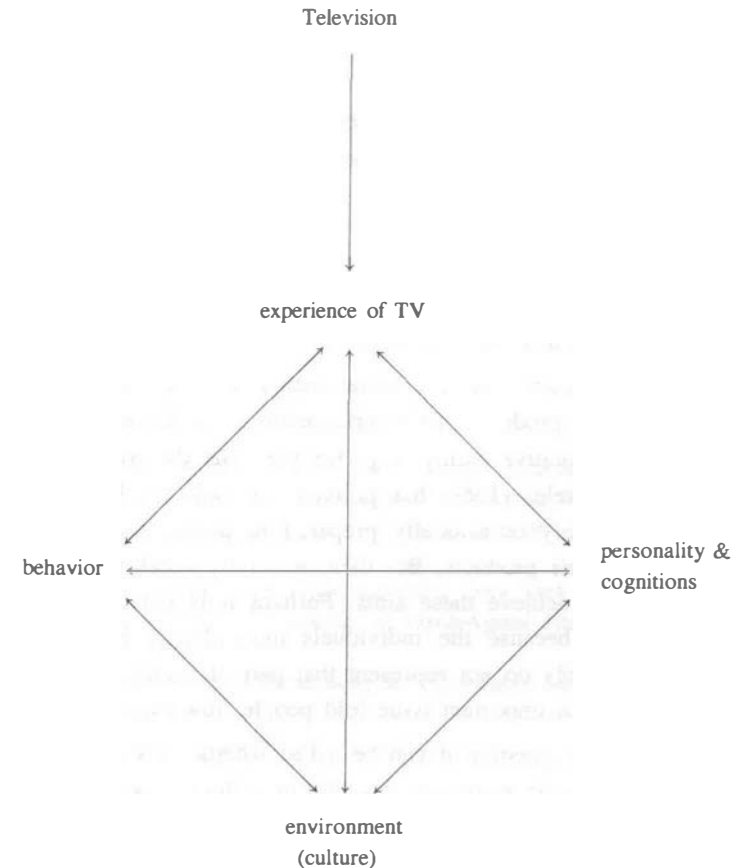


Figure 5: Reciprocal view of television interaction in cultural contexts (Salomon, 1985, p. 312)

- (4) Similarity of form and differences of contents do not guarantee similar receptions of the serials. Different experiences based on the cultural setting, from which the media product stems, and different experiences with one's own culture can lead to disparate perceptions of what actually happens in the story, and this partially determines whether it is perceived realistically or not.

Although McLuhan (1964) once stated in his famous metaphor that "electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village" this statement is misleading. Of course, news travels faster around the world than gossip in a small town. But this does not mean that we are necessarily on the road to a world-wide, unified culture. The same content (of news as well as of entertainment programs) may be quite differently understood in different countries.

- (5) Soap operas neither mirror social reality nor are they supposed to. To appeal to the producers of entertainment to model a more natural or a more representative reality, e.g. for the USA the American paragon of virtue, as Inkeles (1984) has pointed out, will not be successful. Producers are only occasionally prepared to pursue moral or educational aims with their products. But then, generally speaking, it is not realistic to try to achieve these aims. Perhaps it is not important or necessary either, because the individuals most deeply influenced by soap operas probably do not represent that part of society for which cultural exchange is an important issue (old people, low-income groups etc.).
- (6) As a separate question it can be asked whether TV products should be used for didactic purposes, e.g. for introducing people to some other culture. Within this context the TV products can be useful, useful in the sense of offering a counterworld which is related to the real world only fragmentarily (see figure 1). It would be wrong to expect socialization by having people look at the screen. What is necessary is to contrast consciously the images of the cultures, as presented by entertainment programs, with the modes and the varieties of behavior found in these societies by the methods of social science or by analysis with the help of primary experience.
- (7) Finally, there are many investigations within the framework of television research about the socialization potentials of TV, e.g. regarding the rise of sex role stereotypes, job stereotypes or the image of social reality in general. A similar diversity of research is lacking with regard

to the mutual knowledge about and the appraisal of content from different cultures, as presented by the media.

Compared with the little knowledge about the effects of cultural imports, the lively discussion about the consequences of these imports is surprising. So Salomon (1973, p. 8) once used the term "coca colonization" to stress the impact of US-produced programs for other nations in a negative way. In contrast, the claim has to be made again "that more research is needed," even though someone will certainly argue that this may serve only science and scientists, as McGuire (1986) already criticized.

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