

Cognitivism and constructivism

- Epistemological divides and perspectives in contemporary humanistic studies

The central claim of this talk is that current developments within the humanities can be analyzed and understood as a struggle as well as reciprocity between the paradigms of *cognitivism* and *constructivism*. The notions of cognitivism and constructivism is to be understood in the broadest sense possible, and of course there exist many very different and sometimes even strongly opposed theories within these paradigms, but still on a principal level it is possible to isolate certain common characteristics: Thus on an epistemological level cognitivism can be defined as constituted by varying degrees of essentialism, universalism, abstraction, and individualism with a shared focus on the biological vantage point of humans. On the other hand constructivism generally speaking is a paradigm defined by contingency (anti-essentialism), contextualism, criticism of normativity and with a prevalent focus on the historical and social conditions of knowledge. This basic schism can very clearly be witnessed in for instance theories dealing with sex and gender such as queer theory and evolutionary psychology, but on the other hand new tendencies especially within the cognitive paradigm – often coined ‘the social turn’ or ‘third generation cognitive science’ – challenge this division in fundamental ways. In this talk I will first lay out the principal differences mentioned above and secondly describe how they are now challenged by contemporary theories such as *cognitive cultural studies* and *distributed cognition/interactivity* pointing to new directions for humanistic studies.